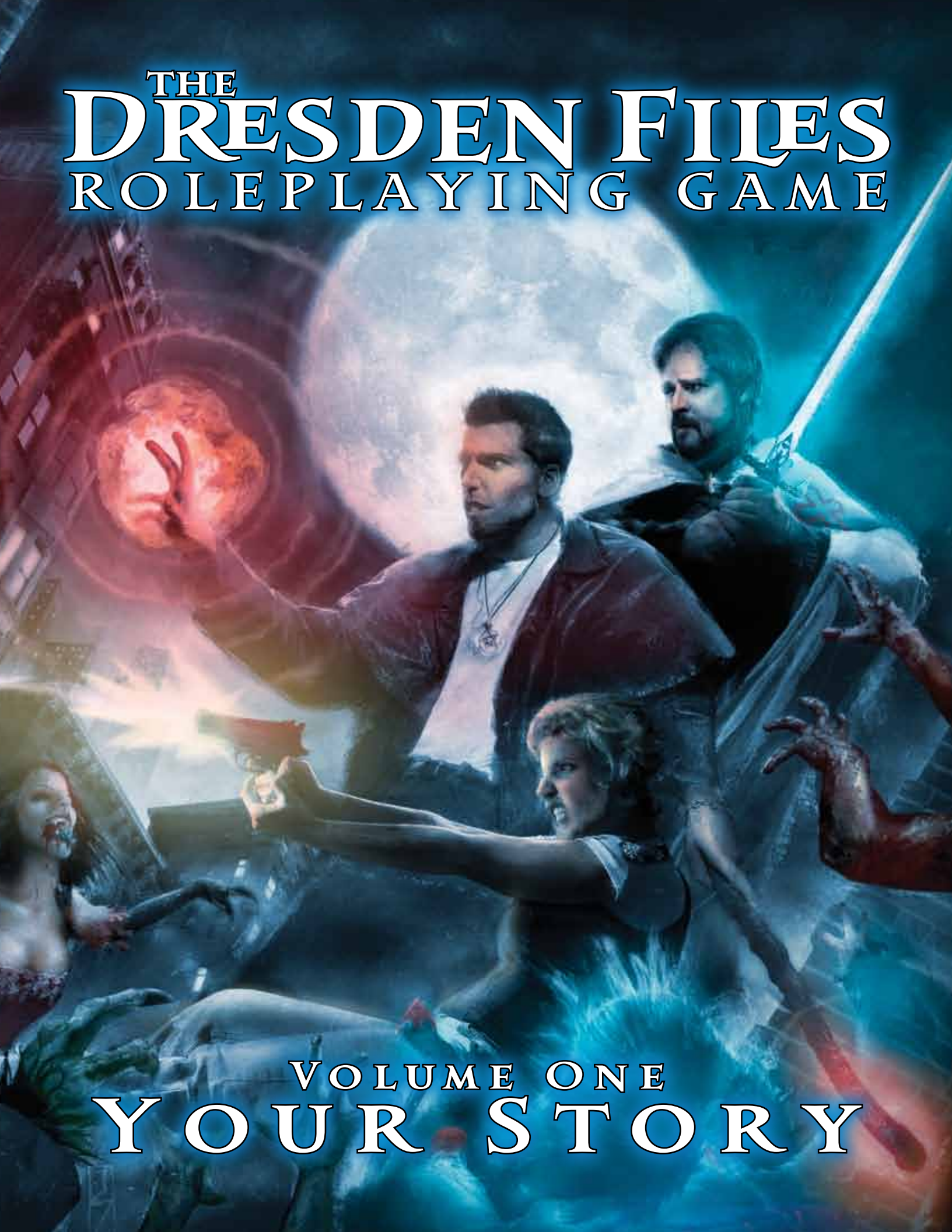
THE DRESDEN FILES ROLEPLAYING GAME



VOLUME ONE
YOUR STORY

Tell Us
Your Story

Beneath the "normal" surface of the world are things and people which most of us don't want to know about, and will do our best to forget about if we ever come near them. People won't see what they don't want to see.

But that's most of us. And you—you're not most of us.

What's Your Story?

Whether you're a champion of God, changeling, vampire, werewolf, wizard, or plain "vanilla" mortal human being, this volume of *The Dresden Files RPG* gives you all the rules you need to build characters and tell your own stories in the Dresdenverse. Inside, you'll uncover the secrets of spellcasting, the extents of mortal and supernatural power, and the hidden occult reality of the unfamiliar city you call home.

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The Dresden Files RPG continues with *Our World!*

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FATE

The Dresden Files
Roleplaying Game



Volume One: Your Story

Hell's Bells, Billy — this printout looks like you dropped it in the mud.

I sorta did. It was in my backpack, but wolves don't wear those too well.

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Hmm... Not as bad as the Accords themselves, but still pretty heady stuff, William.

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It's His Fault
Matthew Gandy

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Any page references that talk about material in **VOLUME 2: OUR WORLD** will be noted with the prefix "OW". So if you see "OW123", that means page 123 of our World.

Introduction

AUGUST

Hey, Boss –

You remember that idea I got last year, when I was organizing your casefiles—the one about how an RPG could be a version of DRACULA for the Twenty-First Century? (Cause really, what better way to inform about and quantify supernatural threats than with RPG stats?) Well, we (the Alphas) are going to give it a go!

Since I've already partially organized the files, I just collected relevant data on the various critters and creeps you've encountered and threw that into the database of notes I keep on Alpha-activities. I've been using all that info to generate the text. Still lots more to do—rules and such, mostly.

As we write this, can you just fact-check it to make sure we're not saying anything way off-base? Thanks!

– Will

I'M NOT SURE THAT AN RPG WILL HAVE QUITE THE SAME IMPACT OF STOKER'S WORK (ALTHOUGH YOU'LL HAVE SOME REALLY WELL-INFORMED GEEKS!), BUT I'LL GIVE THIS STUFF A READ. IT CERTAINLY LOOKS LIKE YOU'VE PUT A LOT OF WORK INTO IT.

AT THE LEAST, THIS MIGHT MAKE FOR A GOOD TRAINING TEXT FOR YOUR PACK (AND MAYBE MY APPRENTICE). YOU ALL NEED TO STAY INFORMED. KNOWLEDGE IS POWER, ETC...

– HARRY

Hey, I've been carting the manuscript around in a backpack (sometimes in wolf form), and we've passed it back and forth a couple times, so it's gotten a little beaten up – after you get it back to me next time, I'll incorporate your notes and print off a new bound copy at Printastic.

EWWW, IS THAT WOLF DROOL?

DECEMBER

Hey, Boss –

Spellcasting rules are done. Can you vet them?

– Will

RULES LOOK GOOD (SEE COMMENTS), BUT WHEN I STOPPED BY THE OTHER NIGHT, UM... LOOK, BUDDY, WHEN YOU FIND YOURSELF IN YOUR UNDERWEAR, SURROUNDED BY NOTE CARDS AND EMPTY BEER BOTTLES, YOU MIGHT BE WORKING TOO HARD. I'M JUST SAYIN'.

– HARRY

MAY

Hey, Boss –

All right, I think we nearly have a final product here. Just need to finalize some of the art and to search & replace the names. Can you do a final read-through?

– Will

SURE THING, BILLY. I'LL GET BOB TO LOOK IT OVER, TOO.

– HARRY

How is Bob going to f—

I'll find a way, William.

OH HOLY CRAP that's weird. It's like some sort of magical ink jet!

Just leave the manuscript on the table and I'll make some comments.

I Want to Learn...

...about the Dresdenverse: see Chapter 1 and maybe Chapter 12 in Your Story and, well, all of Our World.

...about specific people and critters in the Dresdenverse: see Chapter 3 in Our World.

...about the ~~Manual of Monsters~~: see Chapter 2 in Our World. *What Goes Bump*

...about the game rules (like character creation, how to play, how to run a game): well, that's pretty much the point of most of the chapters in Your Story.

...the meaning of those words you keep using: lucky for you, there's a glossary at the end of Your Story.

REMINDER: *Replace all real names in publication draft.*

The Dresden Files

Here are the casefiles, in chronological order:

- "Restoration of Faith"
- "Welcome to the Jungle"
- Storm Front
- Fool Moon
- Grave Peril
- Summer Knight
- Death Masks
- Blood Rites
- Dead Beat
- "Something Borrowed"
- Proven Guilty
- White Night
- "It's My Birthday, Too"
- "Heorot"
- Small Favor

Harry, you had this all out of order. You had "Wtty" filed **AFTER** *Small Favor!*

need to add "AAAA Wizardry" to this list—see the OUR WORLD book for more.

Even though the word "game" often implies a winner and a loser, RPGs are different—the goal is to work together to tell a great story. As clichéd as this sounds, if you're all having fun, then you all win—even if things didn't go the way you'd planned.

What Is a Roleplaying Game?

In a roleplaying game (or RPG), you and the rest of the group imagine fictional scenarios and events, and then play them out. Because this is the Dresdenverse, these scenarios will involve solving or resolving supernaturally-related crimes or problems in a city of your choice—it could be your home town, it could be some place you've never been.

Each player except for one controls a single player character (or PC). You can think of the PCs as the protagonists in a movie or novel—their actions and decisions are primarily what drive events forward, and you spend most of the time focusing on their reactions to the things that happen during the game. As a player, you get to say what your character says, describe what your character does, and make decisions for that character.

One player fulfills a different responsibility than the others and is called the gamemaster, or GM for short. As the GM, you have a variety of duties during the game. You control all the characters the other players don't control (called, boringly enough, non-player characters or NPCs)—basically, everyone else in the game world. Most importantly, you're responsible for controlling the opposition to the PCs—those individuals who create the crimes or problems the other players are trying to resolve. You also act as a referee of sorts, calling for and judging the use of the game rules when appropriate. Finally, you're responsible for creating the initial situations that the PCs will respond to during the game.

What makes this imagining fun is that you don't decide on the outcomes of these scenarios beforehand—there's no script like there would be if you were performing a play. Instead, the GM presents a situation to the players, and the players react in the moment by saying how the characters respond. You use the game's rules to help you decide how a particular event turns out, whether that's the outcome of a fight or the effects of a wizard's spell. You roll dice to bring an element of chance and unpredictability into the game—sometimes, despite your best efforts, things head in unexpected directions. The actions that the players take change the initial situation, forcing the opposition to react or creating new problems for the players to deal with. This chain of action and reaction continues until everything is resolved to the group's satisfaction. Some scenarios can be resolved in a single night; some may take multiple sessions.

In that sense, you can look at this activity as a kind of collaborative storytelling; by the time you're done, the events of the game will look like a plot or storyline, with the PCs as its stars.

That's pretty much all you need to know! It's fun.


- CHAPTER ONE -
Harry's World
JR '07

You have got to be kidding me. Billy, nobody but you and Kirby call the world "the Dresdenverse."

Harry's World

For most people, Chicago is Chicago, America is America, and Earth is Earth—but there's more to the world than that.

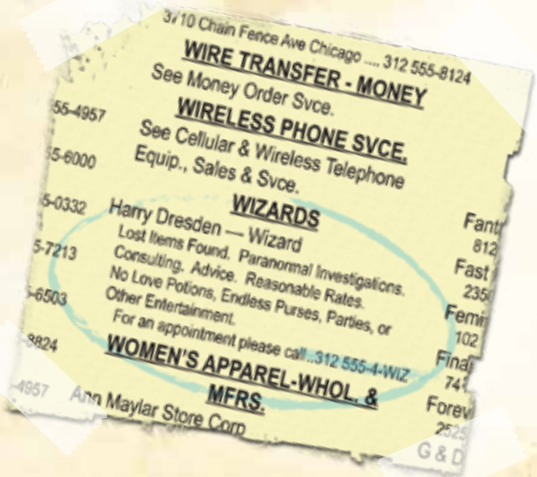
Beneath the "normal" surface of the world are things and people which most humans don't know about, don't want to know about, and will do their best to forget about if they ever come anywhere near them. That dead body with the odd toothmarks? *Attacked by stray dogs.* The traces of thirty different infectious diseases on this corpse? *Statistical anomaly.* The Tyrannosaurus Rex skeleton from the museum scattered in a thousand pieces on the college lawn? *Student prank.*

People won't see things they don't want to see. Most of the citizens of Chicago would laugh at the idea of magic, even though Harry Dresden has his number and occupation right in the phone book. It's always possible for everyone, from heroes to bystanders, to turn away and not get involved. It's often the easiest thing in the world to do. You can choose between good and evil, light and darkness, possibility and necessity, taking action and going home to curl up with a good book.

The world is weirder, more wonderful, and more deadly than it seems. Some people know this. There are people who know that magic exists and know who to call when they run into it. There are humans who have been divinely blessed or diabolically cursed. There are faeries—small, big, hugely ancient and terrifying. There are dragons, although these days it's said they consider bearer bonds as well as gold for their hoards.

It's not as though the Archangel Michael came down in person and gave you a Sword made from one of the nails that pinned Christ to the Cross and charged you with a sacred mission, after all.

(By the way, if anyone out there HAS had the Archangel Michael come down to charge them with a holy mission, give me a call. I'm in the book.)



The Nevernever—the world of fae and ghosts—is just on the other side of a veil from normal life; courts of vampires divide the night among them; the White Council of wizards tries to protect the innocent and stop the misuse of magic.

All of this is going on, right under our noses.

However, this is also a world where a single person, in the right place, at the right time, can do the right thing and save the people he cares about.

Here in what we often like to call "the Dresdenverse," we can choose to be people who see, who make our own paths, who do the right thing, and take the responsibility for doing it. Seen clearly, this world is full of light and darkness, with all the shades of grey between.

Join us, if only in play. Because it's only a book, a game, a roleplaying entertainment of magic and monsters.

Isn't it?

You be the judge.

Maxims of the Dresdenverse

There are certain themes that hold true in this world which are noticeable enough that you should take them under consideration. They can be roughly summarized as follows.

Monsters have Nature, Mortals have Choice

Almost all beings that could be considered "monsters" are, one on one, far more powerful than the average mortal. They have great strength, implausible toughness, blinding speed, and unnatural powers. What they don't have is *choice*.

A monster's nature is oriented towards fulfilling its hungers. Vampires need emotion or blood or death, loup-garoux need the hunt and the kill, fae literally cannot step outside their natures or break oaths. These entities have power, but they don't have the option of saying no. They are what they're made to be—and some things are simply made cruel, bloodthirsty, or just plain evil.

On the other hand, mortals have options: choice. That's their great strength and their great responsibility. Only animals and monsters can truthfully say that they can't do anything else, or that they can't be other than what they are.

Mortals—humans—also have the advantage of numbers. Up until very recently, calling mortal authorities into a supernatural situation was like radioing in an airstrike. Unfortunately, in the course of the Vampire War, some of the supernatural "nations" seem to have gotten hold of the mystical equivalents of nukes.

Every human being can make a decision about what to do or not do, what to accept and what to refuse, whether to kill or not kill.

That said, the situation is often grey and not clear-cut. There are those few who are part mortal and part monster: vampires who struggle to fight their hungers and do the right thing; werewolves who chose lycanthropy to get the strength to defend their community; wizards who accept help from dark sources, but hope to restrain the urges that threaten to engulf them. Choice is the overwhelming theme of these individuals' lives. Will they retain their humanity or will they become monsters? And is there any way that those who are now monsters can perhaps regain some degree of humanity, some capacity for choice?

For Thomas' sake, I hope so.

Things Fall Apart

The world is growing darker. Humans are choosing the worse over the better, and the monsters are cheering them on. There are trolls under the bridges, vampires running businesses behind the velvet curtains, and ghosts sucking the life from babies in maternity wards. Organized crime is strong and getting stronger; gunshots echo in the night; some policemen take payoffs. Drug use is spreading; alcohol is an answer rather than a stopgap; people lose themselves in their searches for pleasure, power, or escape.

But there are those who stand against the rising tide of shadow. Whether they are ordinary humans, secretive wizards, individuals chosen by supernatural powers, or people empowered by some other means, they will *not* let the darkness win. Perhaps all the more obvious against the shabbiness of the world around them, perhaps stained or marked by their own errors and problems, they nevertheless hold their ground and work to protect, to support, to rebuild. They choose to use their power for others as well as for themselves. These people exist, and they haven't given in yet.

Science Fails

The comforting rules of science and technology, the certainty that a better computer or a bigger gun will settle the problem—sorry, they don't work 'round here. Wizards and some other ~~monsters~~ cause nearby technology to malfunction simply by their presence.

Monsters aren't reliably affected by the laws of physics. They seem to treat them as "vague guidelines" more than laws. They can fly, walk through walls, tear apart steel doors, and deflect bullets (or ignore them entirely). All the carefully acquired handguns, sniper rifles, flamethrowers, computer security, and mobile phones in the world may ultimately be useless if pitted against the wrong sort of adversary.

Not only does technology not work around the wizardly-inclined, nobody can really explain why post-WWII technology doesn't work. There aren't any convenient rules. No wizard has yet attempted to catalogue his effects on technology.

Last time Butters and I spoke, he was on about something about Harry's electromagnetic field (I call it an aura) interfering with electron spin and/or phase jumps in transistors and other solid state electronics. (I think that's what he said. Technology is just another flavor of faith to me.)

Furthermore, no monster is going to publish a list of ways that it can be hurt. However, *others* can. The most recent example of such a tome, Bram Stoker's Dracula, detailed most of the significant ways in which a Black Court vampire can be damaged or killed. The Black Court still hasn't recovered.

Also, Billy, have I ever mentioned that sometimes you speak like a freaking superhero in a comic book? (That's not an insult, but I'm not sure it's a compliment.)

Please change "some other monsters" to "some other supernatural entities"? We're not all that bad.

Well, mostly.

Okay.

Just freaking change it, Billy.

"Publish a list" (like this game). Heh. By the way, there's some circumstantial evidence that indicates Stoker was manipulated into writing Dracula by the White Court. So while no monster is gonna come up with a "Top Ten Ways to Whack Me" list, another monster might do so.



This dovetails remarkably well with the note above about people choosing not to see what's going on around them. The scientists who might be able to analyze data on monsters don't want to know in the first place; then their instruments go nuts, so they dismiss the cases of spontaneous combustion or bouncing bullets as statistical anomalies. With regard to the supernatural, science can't tell you what just happened, can't explain why it happened, and can't stop it from happening again.

Sure, Mr. or Ms. Sciencey-Science, your lab is spotless, filled with the tools and gear of analysis, and you have spent years filling your head with logic, knowledge, methods—but the specimen before you *refuses* to make sense according to everything you've been taught. Meanwhile, it's very dark outside, something large is moving around in the gloom, and your electric light has started flickering. The monster is getting closer, and you can't do thing one about it—or even understand what's going on.

However, this *doesn't* mean that technology can't be useful, if properly applied (and kept away from wizards who can make it go *pfft!*). Different creatures have different vulnerabilities—a flamethrower or a water balloon filled with holy water might be just the thing to even the odds against a Black Court vampire. Even if a bullet in the brainpan fails to take a monster down, extreme applications of kinetic force (such as a car at ramming speed or a crash-landing satellite) tend to have some sort of effect. Other tools of technology can be used to pass information, archive data, set up perimeters, or collect evidence. Some technology may be functional in particular ways against particular types of monster.

Assuming that a wizard doesn't accidentally fuse them, of course.

Belief is Power

Faith in itself is a form of power and a kind of magic. Strong faith in good (or evil) can act as a defense, an offense, a shield, or a guide, providing many effects which people would normally consider "magic." This could include things like a glimmer of light from a crucifix in the darkness, burning a vampire's hands as it grabs you, or a sudden burst of more-than-mortal strength.

The exact details of the faith can vary. Religious beliefs are the mainstay here: a staggering number of people have faith in God (or gods). Some people have strong faith in more philosophical beliefs—for example, the fundamental purity and goodness of magic, Tibetan mysticism, or even Communism.

The important thing is that if the person has faith in something—true, sincere, pure faith—then miracles can happen.

> Effective word here being "can"—while Michael, Charity, and Father Forthill have that kind of belief in the goodness of God and that everything will work out to some ineffable plan...I just can't buy it. Not with what I've seen happen.
>
> For my part, I know that faith has power. However, I am **not allowed** to understand anything further than that, by nature and by...other issues.

Magic Is What You Are

You can't make magic do something that goes against your fundamental nature. This works on both the deliberate and the emotional levels. An utterly kind, sincere person will not be able to muster malicious hate and bitterness of a level that would allow him to summon demons or blast with hellfire—or, at least, not without very significant provocation. Likewise, a vicious and corrupt thanatologist practicing human sacrifice isn't going to have healing magic at his command—or, if he does, it may require blood and pain to make it work and will probably be more corrupting than simply leaving the open wound to fester.

At least, that's the theory. Practice has, once again, shown things to be a lot fuzzier than the clear-cut examples above. Again, it all comes back to choice and to the complexity of the mortal mind and soul. Even a kindly old grandmother has the seeds of hatred within her, and even a cold-blooded gangster has moments of tenderness and kindness.

Magic is an expression of the person who brings it forth. It comes from their beliefs, their morality, their feelings, their emotional connections, their way of seeing the world: in a word, their soul.

See, boss, William gets it a lot more than you do.

Shut up, Bob.

There's a reason why the **soulgaze** is the ultimate proof of sincerity between many wizards. A soulgaze happens when two people (at least one of them a wizard) make eye contact long enough to look into each other's souls and see what they truly are. In that moment, a wizard not only sees what a person is, but he also sees what their magic is—it's one and the same. For instance, if you choose to practice black magic, you dredge up the corrupt parts of yourself and make them stronger. You are what you *choose* to become, what you make yourself into. (Luckily, if you're mortal, you also always have the power to choose redemption after a slip.)

Whether it's faith or magic, all power comes from the basic nature of the mortal or monster who is using it. Evil brings forth evil, and good brings forth good. We are what we do, and we do what we are.

What's Out There?

Here's a quick and dirty breakdown of the mortals, "semi-mortals," and monsters running around out in the Dresdenverse. Keep your eyes peeled, and you might recognize them.

(For further details on the political factions and recent history of these groups, see *Old World Order*, OW14. For more information on the nature of each of these types of beings, see *What Goes Bump*, OW28. For discussions of specific individuals, see *Who's Who*, OW98.)

Mortals

First, you have true **mundane mortals**. They are unaware of the supernatural goings-on all around them.

Then you have the **clued-in**, who have experienced the weirdness up-close and personal, and may know a bit about the various people and critters involved in occult stuff. Clued-in groups include some people of faith, law enforcement officers who specialize in "black cat investigations," researchers who come across anomalous (read: supernatural) evidence, and even some members of organized crime.

Next are the **minor talents**. These are folks who have a (usually limited) supernatural ability of their own. Maybe they can cast a spell or two, know some effective rituals, speak to the dead, see the future, that sort of thing.

Sorcerers are more powerful magic-workers, often tapping the power of cults surrounding them to empower spells or rituals or to summon demons. Sorcerers usually don't have the training, power, knowledge, or ethics of **White Council** wizards. White Council members have the tools and the talent, but they must abide by certain Laws of Magic. Those who break the Laws are known as **warlocks**. (Usually, the White Council sends its Wardens to enforce the Laws, but due to the current Vampire War, their hands are a bit full.)

Lastly, there are **necromancers** who use the power of death to do magic, like raising ghosts and zombies and all other sorts of creepy business. (Playing with death magic is a big no-no to the White Council, by the way.)

You could consider necromancers to be bigtime warlocks.

By this breakdown, I'm almost tempted to put the Knights of the Cross under "semi-mortal." It seems like Michael often does not have the freedom to choose not to follow his belief structure and mission. Does choice count if you choose to always follow your nature?

Hey, boss: Pot. Kettle. **Black.**

Tangentially... William, I'd consider a "classic werewolf" like yourself and your compatriots to be minor talents, based on free will.

"Semi-Mortals"

"Semi-mortals" are people who have a foot in the mortal world and a foot in the supernatural world. They retain some aspects of choice, balanced against their nature (see above, page 10).

These include some types of **werewolf**, **scions** of mortal-monster matings (such as **changelings**, which are part-human and part-faerie), and the poor folks who have been half-turned—or **infected**—by a vampire. (A large percentage of the membership of the **Fellowship of St. Giles** is composed of people infected and turned halfway into a Red Court vampire.)

Monsters

The world is full of *monsters*. There are other types of **werewolves** than those mentioned above (four or five in total), and at least four types of **vampire** (White Court, Red Court, Black Court, and Jade Court), all with different powers, hungers, and weaknesses. Then there are **ghouls**, the hard-to-dispatch killer thugs of the supernatural set.

Add to this the inhabitants of the Nevernever who can by various means cross from there into the mortal realm; these include a multitude of **faerie** species, **spirits**, **ghosts**, and **demons**.

A couple **dragons** and **gods** are still kicking around, but we don't know much about them other than they usually don't seem to get involved in stuff and they are extremely powerful.

The Order of the Blackened Denarius is composed of **Fallen angels** bound to thirty silver coins, permitting them to possess mortal hosts; they are extremely bad news. Apparently, **angels** support the people of faith who wage war against the Denarians.

Then there are **Outsiders** and **Old Ones**. They want to consume reality. (We think.) We don't have much information on them because knowing anything about them is against the White Council's Laws of Magic.

Actually, I know there's a whole lot more going on at the moment, but what with getting married and the day job, I'm not as up to speed as I could be (we should talk about that). But for the purpose of an intro chapter, I figured that keeping it simple was the way to go. We'll get into the more complicated stuff in other places.

Current Situation

The White Council and its allies (the Fellowship of St. Giles, the **Venatori Umbrorum**, and some mystical monasteries in the Far East) are fighting the Vampire War against the Red Court. For its part, the Red Court is using ghouls (and Outsiders in the Nevernever) against the White Council. It is also trying to bring the White and Black—and possibly the Jade—Courts in to help fight. The White Court is neutral (due to infighting and a recent major setback), the Black Court is very small, and the Jade Court is very mysterious, so they haven't joined the Reds quite yet.

The Summer Court and the Winter Court of Faerie are locked in their traditional enmity, though the violence has ramped up due to the Vampire War. The Summer Court has offered mild assistance to the White Council in the course of the Vampire War, but both are only indirectly involved.

A bunch of necromancers made a play for godlike power a few years ago. Luckily, some of the White Council's Wardens stopped it.

The Denarians continue their millennia-long rampage of evil and destruction, checked by the Knights of the Cross. While the Denarians aren't directly participating in the Vampire War, they are taking advantage of it. The Knights have aided the White Council on more than a few occasions—and have taken heavy losses.

The first "pure vanilla" mortal has signed onto the **Unseelie Accords** (see OW14), becoming the first non-supernatural Freeholding Lord. It is likely he will assist the White Council versus the Red Court.

Then, there's a mysterious faction out there—alternately called the **Black Council** or the **Circle**—that is apparently stirring up trouble behind the scenes.

Most recently, a huge dust-up happened in Chicago between the Knights of the Cross, the Archive, representatives of the White Council, and the Denarians. (There's also evidence that the Summer Court and Winter Court of Faerie were involved.) Suffice to say, it wasn't pretty.

And that's what's going on at the moment.


MADIS
- CHAPTER TWO -
The Basics
POLICE

Here's the Deal

So, this game is built on a free core system called Fate (*www.faterpg.com*). It seems a good choice—flexible, dramatic, fairly popular, FREE.

Rather than reinvent the wheel, we figured we'd just modify the hell out of it for our purposes.

Anyway, it's an RPG, and if you're reading this, you probably already have at least a vague idea of what that means. (If you don't, make sure you read the introduction to this book.)

Onward!

Things You Should Have

In addition to these rules, you'll need a few supplies to play the game. Here's a list of mandatory items, as well as some recommended ones.

I have to buy special dice for this game? Stars and stones, Billy – I already have a Crown Royal bag full of "special dice."

Oh, come on, Harry. What gamer doesn't want an excuse to buy new dice?

You'll *need*:

- Four Fudge dice for each player and the **game master** (GM). If you don't have Fudge dice, see the retailer page at Grey Ghost Games (*www.fudgerpg.com*) or your local or online RPG dice supplier for a pack. (Or see "What Are Fudge Dice?" on this page.)
- Some copies of the character and city worksheets (found in the back of this book or downloaded from our site at *www.dresdenfilesrpg.com*) or at least blank paper for taking notes during city and character creation.
- Things to write with.
- Between two to six friends (the **players**).

You'll find *useful*:

- A set of poker chips or glass beads (to use as fate points).
- Index cards to pass along information during character creation, to make notes on things that come up in play, and to use in myriad other ways.
- Snacks.

Index cards are just crazy useful at the game table. We end up using them for all kinds of stuff.

Dealing With the Dice

In this game, you use the dice quite a bit to figure out what happens as you play. Whenever there's uncertainty regarding an outcome, you don't just make up what happens—you use the dice to bring that element of chance to how things are going to turn out. The dice allow for unexpected successes and interesting failures.

What Are Fudge Dice?

Fudge dice are six-sided dice that have different markings from normal dice—instead of numbers or dots, they have two sides marked with a ⊞, two sides marked with a ⊟, and two sides that are blank (■). If you find yourself without Fudge dice or don't want to purchase them, you can roll 4 normal six-sided dice. Any die showing a 1 or 2 is treated as ⊟, any die showing a 3 or 4 is treated as a ■, and any die showing a 5 or 6 is treated as ⊞.

I can use dice I already have? Well, good then.

The Ladder

Most things in the system are rated according to the following **ladder** (when we say "the ladder" throughout this book, this is what we mean):

The Ladder	
+8	Legendary
+7	Epic
+6	Fantastic
+5	Superb
+4	Great
+3	Good
+2	Fair
+1	Average
0	Mediocre
–1	Poor
–2	Terrible

Usually, the adjectives are used to describe things—someone might be a Good Driver or Average Scholar. The adjectives and numbers are interchangeable, so if you're more comfortable with numbers, it is equally valid to say Drive: +3 or Scholarship: +1. For clarity, it might be

best to use both, as in Good (+3) Drive or Average (+1) Scholarship.

On this scale, Average represents the minimum level of capability for someone who does something regularly, but not exceptionally. Most people are between Average and Good at the things they do for a living—like Investigation for a private eye—and are Mediocre at most other things. It is only when they are driven to excel that they surpass those limits.

Player characters (PCs) push the boundaries of what "normal" people are capable of and, as such, they tend to be Great or Superb at whatever their central passion is. Each PC is, in a sense, the protagonist in his own story; this means that the heroes of The Dresden Files RPG are genuinely exceptional individuals and may well be recognized as such.

Aww, thanks Billy. It's nice to know I am exceptional!

Rolling the Dice

You will roll four Fudge dice (abbreviated as 4dF) to generate a result between –4 and 4. When reading the dice, a ⊞ equals +1, a ⊟ equals –1 and a ■ (the blank side) equals 0. Some example dice totals:

⊟⊞⊟⊟ –2
⊞■■■ +1
■⊞■⊟ 0

The total of the dice is then added to an appropriate skill to get a result. This result can be referred to as the **effort** made, but sometimes it's just "the result."

> **Example:** *Harry Dresden is a Fair (+2) athlete. He rolls the dice to jump over a low wall and he rolls* ⊟⊟■⊞ *(–1) for a total result of +1. Checking the ladder, that's an Average (+1) effort.*

Rolling Beyond the Ladder

On occasion, you'll end up rolling for a high or low skill, and getting a result that puts you past the ladder—higher than Legendary (+8) or lower than Terrible (–2). When that happens, just use the number that you came up with. (If you're feeling creative, come up with your own adjective for this dramatic roll!) This happens a little more often when you get bonuses due to **aspects**, which you'll learn about on page 18.

Difficulty

When you roll for a result, you are trying to meet or exceed a target value, which is the **difficulty** for the roll. The difficulty indicates how hard it is to do something. Difficulties are measured on the same ladder as everything else. For instance, it might be a Mediocre (+0) difficulty to jumpstart a car, but a Good (+3) difficulty to repair that same car after a serious breakdown. Guidelines for setting difficulties are found in *Running the Game*, page 310.

The difference between the difficulty and the **effort** (the result of the roll) is the magnitude of the **effect**, which is measured in **shifts**. Shifts are used to determine the potency of a character's efforts and to govern the resolution of complex actions. There's no such thing as a negative shift—any roll that does not reach the difficulty is simply considered a failure (although failing the roll by a great deal might influence how the group describes the result).

> **Example:** *If Harry is rolling to jump over that wall against a difficulty of Fair (+2) and he rolls a Great (+4) result, he succeeds by two, so he generates two shifts. If he rolls Mediocre (+0), then he fails—he missed the target of Fair by two (but he doesn't generate negative shifts). If he rolls exactly Fair (+2), then he succeeds as well, but with no shifts.*

Think of a shift as something you use to "shift" the outcome in your favor.

Sort of like moving energy from one place to another with magic, then. Geekomancy!

What's On Your Character Sheet

A character sheet is composed of four basic elements—your **skills**, your **aspects**, your **stunts**, and your **supernatural powers**. These represent your character's resources for solving problems, winning conflicts, and impacting the story during the game.

Skills are a basic measure of what your character can do, covering things like perceptiveness, physical prowess, social and mental capacity, and professional training. Aspects are a set of descriptive phrases that help you out (or make things complicated!) when something that happens in the story is particularly relevant to your character. Stunts expand the function of skills to cover a more specialized niche or allow you to do better in a specific circumstance. Powers cover a wide range of abilities outside the reach of normal mortals and have numerous benefits.

If you're really anti-Fudge dice, you can roll 2 different color six-sided dice and subtract one from the other. That gets you a range of –5 to +5 and a wilder, more random curve – but it's just as valid so long as everyone does it.

Don't cross the streams!



Skills

Characters have **skills**, like Drive and Guns, which are rated on the ladder (page 16). When you roll the dice, you are usually rolling based on your character's skill.

For instance, in the earlier examples, Harry – you were using your Athletics skill to jump the wall.

Nearly every action that your character might undertake is covered by his skills. If he doesn't have a skill on his sheet, assume that it defaults to Mediocre (+0).

Skills are covered in greater detail in their own chapter, beginning on page 120.

Aspects

Characters also have a set of traits called **aspects**. Aspects cover a wide range of elements and should collectively paint a picture of who the character is, what he's connected to, and what's important to him (in contrast to the "what he can do" of skills). Aspects can be relationships, beliefs, catchphrases, descriptors, items, or pretty much anything else that paints a picture of the character.

Some possible aspects include:

- To Serve and Protect
- Sucker for a Pretty Face
- My Grandpa's Trusty Six-Shooter
- Money-Colored Eyes
- White Council Wizard
- Stubborn as a Mule
- Trained by Tera West

When one of your aspects applies to a situation, you can **invoke the aspect** to get a bonus by spending a fate point (see below). In this capacity, the aspect makes the character *better* at whatever he's doing, because the aspect in some way applies to the situation (such as invoking To Serve and Protect when acting in the interests of the Law).

An aspect can also gain you more fate points, by bringing complications and troubling circumstances into your character's life. Whenever your character ends up in a situation where one of his aspects could cause him trouble (such as Stubborn when he's trying to be diplomatic), you can mention it to the GM in the same way you mention an aspect that might help you. Alternately, the GM may initiate this event if one of your aspects seems particularly apt. Either way, this is **compelling an aspect**, and it limits your character's choices in some way. If the GM initiates or agrees to compel the aspect, you may get one or more fate points, depending on how it plays out.

Aspects are a much bigger topic than we can get into in this overview. For a lot of groups, aspects make up the core of the game. We go into more detail on invoking and compelling, along with what makes a good aspect, in *Aspects*, starting on page 98.

As for fate points, we'll talk more about those shortly.

Mortal Stunts

Stunts are the special tricks your character has up his sleeves which allow him to stretch or break the skill rules. Typically, they either give a bonus to a specific use of a skill or broaden a skill to encompass some other way of using it. Some help you take a hit in a fight or other things like that.

Stunts have very specific uses and rules, which are detailed more fully in *Mortal Stunts*, starting on page 146. Though not all characters will have stunts, many will.

Example: *John Marcone has the Trick Shot Artist stunt. This means that when he's taking a trick shot at something (not a person), like shooting the rope holding a chandelier, he receives a +2 bonus on his roll.*

Supernatural Powers

Powers are a lot like stunts, in that they help characters stretch or break the rules. But they go beyond how to use a skill and into using your supernatural nature. Anything a mortal can't just *do*, even with a lot of training—wield magic, lift with inhuman strength or run with inhuman speed, recover from damage that would cripple a mortal, etc.—is due to a power.

Like stunts, powers have very specific uses and rules, which are detailed more fully in *Supernatural Powers*, starting on page 158. All supernatural characters have powers—that's what makes them supernatural.

Example: *Thomas Raith gains many powers as a White Court vampire, such as Incite Emotion. This allows Thomas to rouse strong feelings of lust in a target, even from a distance.*

Fate Points

The other, and potentially most important, resource that you have during a game is a currency called **fate points** (FP). Fate points are central to the function of the game system; they are basically a measure of how much power you have to influence the story in favor of your character. When you spend fate points, you take a little bit of control over the game, either by giving your character bonuses when you feel he needs them, or by taking over a small part of the story. To earn fate points, you allow your character's aspects to create complications for him.

Each player begins the first session of the game with a number of fate points equal to his character's refresh level (page 68). You'll refill your total number of fate points back to that level each time a refresh occurs (page 20). Fate points are best represented by some non-edible token, such as glass beads or poker chips. (Previous experiments with small edible candies have left players strapped for points!)

LOOK, I'M SORRY, OKAY? NO ONE TOLD ME THAT'S WHAT THE JELLYBEANS WERE FOR!

You may, at any point, spend a fate point to gain a bonus, invoke an aspect, make a declaration, or fuel a stunt.

Gain a Bonus: A fate point can be spent to add 1 to any roll of the dice or to improve any effort (such as an attack or defense) by 1. In practice, this is the *least* potent way to use a fate point—you're usually much better off using one of the other applications discussed below.

Invoke an Aspect: Aspects are those things that *really* describe a character and his place in the story. When you have an aspect that's applicable to a situation, it can be invoked to grant a bonus. After you roll the dice, you may pick one of your aspects and describe how it applies to this situation. If the GM agrees that it's appropriate, you may spend a fate point and do one of the following:

- Reroll *all* the dice, using the new result, *or*
- Add two (+2) to the final die roll (after any rerolls have been done).

You may do this multiple times for a single situation, so long as you have multiple aspects that are applicable. You cannot use the same aspect more than once on the same skill use, though you may use the same aspect on several different rolls throughout a scene, at the cost of one fate point per use.

Example: *Maya McKenzie has the aspects* Quiet as a Mouse, I Remember Where I Came From, *and* Uncommon Sense. *She's just grabbed a forbidden book and is trying to sprint out of a sorcerer's lair before the dark spellcaster's imminent return.*

Maya has Good Stealth, but she rolls terribly [−][−][−][−] (–3) for a result of Mediocre (Good – 3), which is far from good enough. Her player, Amanda, points out that Maya's trying to be Quiet as a Mouse. *The GM thinks that's fine, so Amanda spends a fate point to reroll the dice. She does a little better: [−][−][+][−] (–1) for a result of Fair (Good – 1).*

Still, she's worried it's not quite good enough, so she suggests that, since Maya Remembers Where She Came From, *she's been in similar scrapes before… The GM thinks that Maya's street experience is not going to be much use when trying to evade a sorcerer. But she might be able to change her description of what she's doing to make the aspect fit better. Is that what she'd like to do?*

Amanda decides to stick with the original plan and notes that with Maya's Uncommon Sense *she can identify the best moment to scurry over and grab the book. The GM likes the creative application of the aspect, so Amanda spends another fate point to get an additional +2 on the roll, bringing it up from Fair to Great, which is enough to let her quietly escape the sorcerer's lair with only seconds to spare!*

Scenes, other characters, locations, and other things of dramatic importance can have aspects. Sometimes they're obvious, and sometimes they're less so. You can spend a fate point to invoke an aspect which is not on your own character sheet, if you know what the aspect is. This is covered in greater detail in *Aspects* on page 105.

As a rule of thumb, invoking someone or something else's aspects requires a little more justification than invoking one of your own aspects. For scene aspects, it should be some way to really bring in the visual image or the dramatic theme that the aspect suggests. For aspects on opponents, you need to *know* about the aspect in the first place, and then play to it.

Example: *Biff Abernathy is fighting some thugs in an old warehouse. The scene has the aspects* Dark, Cramped, *and* Warehouse. *What's more, Biff has fought these guys before and knows that they're pretty cocky, so his player, Fred, figures that they have an aspect like* Overconfident. *When Biff jumps the first one, he spends 2 FP to invoke the* Dark *aspect of the warehouse and the* Overconfident *aspect of the thug. Fred describes the thugs as being so sure of themselves that they're not being as cautious as they could be, so when Biff drops out of the shadows to cold cock one of them, it comes as a complete surprise. The GM likes the visual, and while the thugs technically have* Cocky *rather than* Overconfident *on their sheets, she thinks that's close enough, so she approves. One of the fate points is spent normally and one goes to the thug, though Biff may be hitting him hard enough that he'll never get the chance to use it.*

Totally Batman.

Use certain Stunts and Powers: Some stunts and powers have particularly potent effects and require spending a fate point when used; this will be made clear in the description. See *Mortal Stunts*, page 146, and *Supernatural Powers*, page 158, for more.

Make a Declaration: Declarations are usually handled with a skill roll (page 116), but in some cases you may simply lay down a fate point and declare something. If the GM accepts the fate point, it will be *true*. This gives you the ability to create things in a story that would usually be under the GM's purview. Typically, these things can't be used to drastically change the plot or win a scene.

Declaring "Doctor Keiser drops dead of a heart attack" is not only likely to be rejected by the GM, it wouldn't even be that much fun to begin with. Declarations are better suited to creating *convenient coincidences*. Does your character need a lighter (but doesn't smoke)? Spend a fate point and you've got one! Is there an interesting scene happening over there that your character might miss? Spend a fate point to declare you arrive at a dramatically appropriate moment!

Your GM has veto power over this use, but it has one dirty little secret. If you use it to do something to make the game cooler for *everyone*, the GM will usually grant far more leeway than she will for something boring or, worse, selfish.

As a general rule, you'll get a lot more lenience from the GM if you make a declaration that is in keeping with one or more of your aspects. For example, the GM will usually balk at letting a character spend a fate point to have a weapon after he's been searched for them. However, if you can point out that you're Always Armed or describe how your Distracting Beauty kept the guard's attention on inappropriate areas, the GM is more likely to give you some leeway. (This is much like invoking an aspect, but without a die roll.)

Refreshing Fate Points

Players usually regain fate points between sessions when a **refresh** occurs. The number of fate points you get at a refresh is called your **refresh level**, and it will vary depending on the game (see *Character Creation*, page 53, for more details). Your refresh level will be reduced by the stunts and powers your character possesses.

PCs are not allowed to let their refresh level drop below one; when a character's refresh hits zero or less, he crosses over that crucial, invisible line that separates a mortal's free will from a monster's compulsion of nature.

If the GM left things with a cliffhanger, she is entitled to say that no refresh has occurred between sessions. By the same token, if the GM feels that a substantial (i.e., dramatically appropriate) amount of downtime and rest occurs in play, the GM may allow a refresh to occur mid-session. (Check out the optional Partial Refresh rule in *Running the Game*, page 317.)

When a refresh occurs, bring your current number of fate points *up to* your refresh level. If the number of fate points you have when you refresh is higher than your refresh level, your current total does not change.

Example: *Evan Montrose and Maya McKenzie have just won a hard fought victory against a dark sorcerer, and they end the session with 4 FP each. The GM feels that was a suitable climax and they refresh at the beginning of the next session. Maya has a refresh level of 8, so Maya gets 4 FP, enough to bring her up to 8. Evan's refresh is only 1 (wizarding is costly), so he gets nothing, but he does get to stay at 4.*

Earning New Fate Points During Play

You earn fate points when your aspects create problems for your character. When this occurs, it's said that the aspect is **compelled**. When your character ends up in a situation where his compelled aspect suggests a problematic course of action, the GM should offer you a choice: *spend* a fate point to ignore the problem, or acknowledge the problem and *earn* a fate point. Sometimes, the GM may also simply award a fate point to you without explanation, indicating that one of your aspects is going to complicate an upcoming situation. You can refuse that point and spend one of your own to avoid the complication, but it's not a good idea to do that too often, because you will probably need the fate point in the future. And let's face it—that's a pretty boring way to play anyway. Drama is a good thing.



Example: *Biff has the aspect* Dumb Luck, *which his player, Fred, has explained to the GM means that Biff has a tendency to have things go his way when he's at his most dense or foolish, but it also means that he can stumble across very bad or strange things without meaning to. Biff is on his way to pick up his girlfriend Maya when an ambush drops on him. Normally, Fred would roll Biff's Alertness to try to avoid surprise, but the GM pushes forward a fate point and says, "Wouldn't it just be Biff's* Dumb Luck *if he got jumped and hauled away, leaving Maya thinking she got stood up again?"*

Fred can now choose whether to take the fate point—in which case Biff doesn't roll Alertness; he automatically fails the roll and skips right to getting kidnapped, since he's the only PC in this scene—or spend a fate point, evading the downside of his Dumb Luck *and getting a chance to avoid surprise with an Alertness roll.*

Heh. Cute picture. Looks like Murph could go for some boring, too.

I make her do that way too much.

No. Drama sucks.

Give me boring.

I long for boring.

This isn't just the GM's show; you can trigger compels as well—on yourself or on others—either by explicitly indicating that an aspect may be complicating things or by playing to your aspects from the get-go and reminding the GM after the fact that your character already behaved as if compelled. The GM isn't always obligated to agree that a compel is appropriate, but it's important that players participate here. See *Aspects* on page 100 for a more detailed treatment of compels.

Part of why we decided to base the game on the Fate system is that it sits right at the midpoint between soft, lightweight, story-focused games and the harder, "crunchier," more simulation-oriented games out there. In Fate, what a character believes in and what's important to his personal story can matter just as much as the fact he can sling around spellfire or change into a wolf.

...And Off You Go

So that's a quick overview of the basic elements of the game. Don't worry if it seems like a lot to take in! The following chapters will help you better understand each piece of the whole, and a lot of it is easily picked up by diving in and playing. Before you move on to *City Creation* and *Character Creation*, though, you may find it helpful to read over at least the chapter on *Aspects*.

August 19, Ms. Jennifer J.

* Lost engagement ring, "just gone!"
* Put on dresser at night; woke up = adios!
* Mistaken? Stolen? BF/Hubby resetting it? Check locks. Talk to BF/Hubby.
* She's superstitious. And worried.
* We have a picture of it! Bonus!
* Try [illegible] with a [illegible]?
* Go out to Archer Heights, talk to her next Wednesday.

Uh... Harry? Why's this in here?

Whups! Sorry, man. I grabbed the paper I had on hand. Self-employment is a harsh mistress!

I'll tell you who's a harsh mistress!

Shut up, Bob.


JR '09
- CHAPTER THREE -
City Creation

The Living City

When you sit down to play The Dresden Files RPG, you'll want to know the setting—which is to say, you'll want to come up with and flesh out the city in which your game takes place. Since The Dresden Files RPG mostly takes place in today's urban jungles, this doesn't have to take a long time, as you're already pretty familiar with the way our world works.

(For crazy stuff like games taking place in the Nevernever or the like, read on—we've got you covered, too. We have a loose definition of "city.")

There's *a lot* of stuff in this chapter. Our purpose is to give you lots of ideas and options. If you don't really want to immerse yourself in the process we lay out here, it's no big deal. While we still encourage you to read through the chapter so you see what we're going for, toward the tail end we provide an on-the-fly city creation technique that highlights the really critical parts, letting you get to the gaming faster. (If you do the full city creation process a few times, your own process will probably move toward that anyway as you learn which parts are the most useful for your group.) You should feel free to pick and choose the parts that look fun as you go along.

We have two examples of city creation to present, in two different stages of development. In *Occult Chicago* (OW244), we've done the research for you, leaving themes, troubles, locations, and characters for you to define. If you don't want to bother with that and want to get to rolling dice NOW, we've written up Baltimore as a sample setting using this city creation procedure (see *Nevermore/Baltimore*, page 358); you can use this to start gaming right away. But we've really had a lot of fun at our table when the whole group has made a city together. That way, everyone has something at stake. We encourage you to give it a shot.

A city is much more than just a collection of streets and buildings—it's a world filled with people, including the players' characters and all the characters they might encounter. Creating your city includes mapping out both some of the physical locations and the relationships the people who live and work there have with the places and with each other. Once you're done with city creation, you should be ready to sit down and play.

So What Do We Do?

Below is an overview of the process (which, aside from whatever time you decide to spend on research, will take around an hour or so for an experienced group, but probably most of your first session if this is your first time).

First, you'll choose your city (page 26). Everyone'll agree on some basic facts about it, the sorts of problems (which we call **themes** and **threats**) the city is facing, and how the supernatural intersects with the city.

Second, you'll come up with the various **locations** within the city (page 37). Everyone will get to make at least one, where individual problems are fleshed out and the **faces** for those locations—the people who represent them—are noted down.

Third, you'll make the player characters (page 45).

Finally, you'll finish up the city, where you'll turn those themes and some of your threats into aspects (page 46).

Remember: if this seems like too much, and you want to get to playing sooner, we have some tips for you at the end of the chapter in "*On-The-Fly City Creation*," page 49.

Ummm, Billy, I've glanced ahead and it's the NEXT chapter that's called "Character Creation."

Yeah, that's where you'll find the detailed rules for the process, but it actually **HAPPENS** during the stuff in this chapter. We consider character creation to be a part—a big part—of city creation. Your city won't be much fun to play in if you don't have people to play in it!

The Golden Rule of City Creation

When you're stumped, skip that part and let the GM figure it out later.

Really, it's as simple as that. Maybe when the GM comes back to it, you'll all join in and collaborate. Maybe the GM will use whatever you've skipped as a mystery during play. In any case, the point of city creation is to get your game going and going strong, not to make you sit around for hours as you try to figure out a specific piece of the setting.

What if I want to create the city on my own?

That's a pretty fair question for any GM to ask. Maybe you have a really neat idea, or you have players who aren't interested in any sort of setting creation. But you might want to at least think about our collaborative approach.

GMs can certainly take all of this work on themselves. Heck, in many roleplaying games, the job of building the setting is *exclusively* the GM's responsibility. So if that's the way you want to play it, go for it. Still, even if you do most of the work, consider making it something that everyone contributes to—say, with each player writing up a neighborhood or a particular point of interest. It'll give them a sense of ownership and—here's the clincher—it'll be one less thing you have to do as a GM. Laziness can be a virtue if you apply it the right way.

Working collaboratively to build a city allows all the players to get their agendas into the mix. If one guy really wants to tangle with some Red Court vampires, this will be a chance for him to bake it into the setting right from the get-go. Not to mention that, due to the collective effort, everyone will have a chance to feel like they have a little bit of expertise and ownership. That's a powerful tool for the GM in terms of building interest (and investment) in the upcoming story, and we can't encourage its use enough.

So, while you might still create the city on your own, at least consider gathering some input from your players.

Getting Ready to Make Your City

As you're getting started, you'll need some copies of the city sheets, found in the back of this book or downloadable from our website at *www.dresdenfilesrpg.com*. There are three sheets to help organize your ideas as you come up with your city: a high-level sheet, a locations sheet, and a faces sheet. We'll talk more about these as we encounter them in the process. (Of course, you can also do all this with a few blank sheets of paper, if you don't have copies of the city sheets available.)

If your group prefers to have one person write down ideas as everyone talks, the sheets are set up for you. We recommend this method for most people, as it helps get everyone on the same page by talking about ideas before they get written down on separate sheets.

On the other hand, if your group prefers to write ideas down first and present them all together, like writers in a bull pen, then you'll either need to print up multiple copies of the location and faces sheets, or cut them up and hand parts out. They're also ready-made for that use. At the end of the process, be sure to consolidate all the ideas onto one copy.

No matter how you do it, make sure everyone who wants a copy of your city has one. These aren't just notes for the GM—the players have quite a bit at stake in this city as well!

What about inventing a city?

You could go the "Metropolis" or "Gotham" route and just make up a city, but you might run into more problems than you anticipated. You'll have to work hard to come up with every detail—where the seedy neighborhood is compared to the ritzy downtown center, which neighbors have easy access to the riverfront, etc. Furthermore, you'll have to take copious notes to be consistent—not a problem for some people, but if it is for you, you might want to pick a real city. Plus, you may have a sense of disconnection as you come up with facts about locations and people that don't make much "sense" (even though, if you look at it, cities rarely do make a strict, logical sense).

In short, it's easier and often more fun to use real cities; someone else has written copious notes on them and they've been "playtested."

Choose Your City

The first step is an easy one, but it may be the most important: choose the city. There are a few different directions you can go when choosing a city:

Your city: This is obvious, but well worth stating. You probably know your city well, if you've been living there for a bit. Even if you don't, it's easy to be inspired by walking or driving around your city until you see some sights that just scream to you "Hey, I might be a little bit magical! Add me to your game!" Seriously, once you start incorporating your city into your game, you won't be able to help but notice places or people around town that would make for something fun.

A city everyone is personally familiar with: Think about nearby cities, places you all have visited, or hometowns. This familiarity will give your game traction, something to build your game around. Of course, you don't have to restrict yourself to nearby cities if everyone is familiar with some more distant locale, like a common hometown or place everyone went to school.

A city that everyone is used to seeing on TV: Here, your familiarity will go into more of a caricature of a city than the real nature of it, but that's not necessarily a bad starting point—even a caricature is a little right. Plus, this process isn't about making a travel guide. Your group's conception of the city is more important than the reality.

The "out of the box" option: Baltimore (page 358) is ready to play. (We recommend checking out Baltimore even if you use another city, as it's our working example for how to build your city.) Chicago (OW244) is more "some assembly required," but it gets you well on your way.

Billy, are you explaining a roleplaying game, or assigning homework?

Hey, some people love the research. The trick is to stop when it's not fun anymore; if that means not even starting, that's when to stop.

Example: Baltimore

Throughout this chapter we've included discussion about how we applied this procedure to come up with Baltimore. You'll also find some ideas about how it would apply to Chicago—we figured having both couldn't hurt.

We looked around a bit for a city to use as an example. We wanted something besides Chicago—whose version of Chicago would we write up anyway?—so we decided to do a different city. Then I thought, "Hmm...Hey, Davian—one of the Alphas and a regular in our Arcanos game—is from Baltimore. I'll guilt him into helping me write it up."

Familiarize and Discuss

Picking a city is one thing, but making the leap from an interesting city to the ideas that will propel your game forward is not always easy. Once you know where you're going to set your scene, the next step is to take the location you've chosen and use it to create concrete, practical ideas which you can use in your game.

Researching Your City

If the people in your group feel like they don't have enough information in their heads to make the city feel alive or feel like something more than a quickly hashed-out caricature, we recommend doing some research. If your group would have fun doing this, turn it into a group activity. Everyone, or at least the players with enough spare time, can take a method and have at it.

Don't feel pressure to do this if research doesn't interest you (see "*The Vancouver Method*," below). We want you to have fun with this game. For some people, that means talking about your city and surfing Wikipedia for a few minutes; for others, that means an afternoon at the library or even a day trip to the city, if it's nearby or if you need a good excuse for a little vacation.

Hitting the Books

Modern research tools being what they are, lots of people tend to forget how useful the humble book can be. Some people love that musty smell of paper and binder's glue with a hint of mildew—if that's you, here's your excuse for a day in the stacks of your local library.

Musty smells? Paper, binder's glue, and mildew? William, have you been in Harry's basement recently or something?

Talk to the librarian, explain that you're trying to assemble a guide to your city with an emphasis on the weird. Librarians are mighty, and spending just ten minutes with one can yield

amazing results. Don't forget that they wield the awesome power of Interlibrary Loans—if there's an obscure title out there, chances are your friendly neighborhood librarian can conjure it up for you.

Don't discount the usefulness of a bookstore, either, especially if you find a title that you really fall in love with. Travel and tourism guidebooks are *extremely* useful—we'd almost call a good travel guide on your city an essential buy for the GM. If there are novels written about your city, it might be worth reading one or two.

Travel

If your city is close by, consider finding a day when most of the group is available and doing a day trip. Stop by a visitor's center, grab a bunch of the pamphlets they always have at those places. Pair off, split up, and see what grabs peoples' attention—self-guided walking tours are great for this.

If there's a college in your city, spend an hour on campus. See where the important buildings are—athletic facilities, labs, libraries, dorms, the student union, student bars and hangouts, that sort of thing. Pick up a copy of the college paper.

Drop in a coffee shop or diner (a mom & pop joint, not a chain) and listen to the way the locals talk. Is there a unique local accent? Local idioms and figures of speech? Grab an armload of the free weekly newspapers that are published in every town—coffee shops are usually littered with these.

Electronic Media

For many people, the Internet is the first destination for research. There's a good reason for that—it gets you a boatload of good information right the heck now. It's definitely something you should do for your city. We highly recommend starting with Wikipedia. It's about the best brief overview you're going to find anywhere, especially if you're not overly concerned with consistent truthfulness—you're looking for story-fuel here more than rock-solid, verified facts.

Most locally published periodicals—i.e. newspapers and magazines—have a free web presence these days. Local news broadcasts, both radio and TV, frequently stream to the web—these are a gold mine of local flavor.

Gah. The internet. I'm so out of touch.

Of course, your best tool might simply be your favorite search engine. Here are a few search terms you might find fruitful:

Use your city's name, plus:

- neighborhood map (having the names of neighborhoods is important)
- folklore, magic, ghost stories
- humor, jokes
- [urban] legends
- historical maps
- politics
- crime
- dialect

Cherry pick the stuff that strikes you as interesting. You're also going to want to get a feel for how your city looks, which services like Flickr, Google Images, and Google Earth will help you with. Also check out *http://del.icio.us/* for entries that use your city's name as a tag.

William, you may think you're kidding, but this stuff about librarians is on the money. If knowledge is power—and it is—they are its gatekeepers.

Don't. Mess. With. Librarians.

You just think the glasses are sexy.

Finding Out About the Seedier Side of Your City

Your group may want to have a sense of what the crime is like in your chosen city, since bad guys—both mortal and supernatural—are often behind such things. With that in mind, we have a few specific tips for you. If crime isn't something you want to play with in your city, or is something you want to completely make up, feel free to ignore this sidebar.

Some local TV news producers *love* crime stories—the more sensationalized, the better. And that's exactly what you're looking for. These stories are frequently available via streaming video on the web, and they're fantastic sources of local information (and inspiration!). Most are only a few minutes long, and they're well worth the time spent.

After your Internet search for jokes and stories, try a grittier approach. Plug the term "prostitution" plus the name of your city into a search engine, and you should immediately locate the red light district. Every city has one. You don't need to go there, but you definitely want to be able to name it. Similarly, try "homicide" or "drug bust" or "robbery" or pretty much any other specific crime, plus your city's name.

Don't be afraid to make stuff up (see "*Intentional Inaccuracies*" and "*The Vancouver Method*," below). It's not going to strain anyone's suspension of disbelief if your group decides that a neighborhood called "The Waterfront" is a dangerous place after dark.

Billy, you're getting close to telling people how to profit from the misfortune of others here.

I'm trying not to—it's legitimate research! Law & Order shouldn't get a monopoly on "ripped from the headlines" stories, even if their reruns are on 24/7.

Example: Baltimore

I talked with Davian a lot about what cool stuff we could put into the city. I bought a couple of tourist guides to Baltimore and a collection called Real Ghost Stories of the Chesapeake. This stuff is great location fodder, especially for someone like me who's never been there. For instance, it turns out there's a legend of underground tunnels between Federal Hill Park and Fort McHenry—that's *awesome* story fuel.

I spent time looking at maps. The Fall Line (the geologic dividing line between the Piedmont and the coastal plain) was a particularly juicy find—I was looking at a map of Baltimore and noticed that the Fall Line runs straight through the middle of the city. I showed it to Davian and said, "You don't get that kind of structure without magic getting attached to it. That's gotta be important." He rolled his eyes and said, "Brilliant deduction, Sherlock." I also brought up Edgar Allan Poe and his connection to the city, and the Inner Harbor as a possible important location.

Davian tossed in some great old ghost stories and legends from when he was a kid—Black Aggie, ghosts at Fort McHenry, that sort of thing. He brought up some features of the city that we'd really need to include: Fort McHenry, Johns Hopkins, vampires, ghouls, and the Francis Scott Key Bridge. When I asked him why the bridge, his response was "I always wanted to do a fight scene there. And the toll collector's a trip."

The Vancouver Method

I don't buy it. They couldn't do a TV show based around Chicago in Vancouver.

You'd be surprised.

This is your alternative to doing research, and it's pretty simple: just *make stuff up*. Really. We talk quite a bit about research, partly because research can be fun in its own right—the weird stuff you discover is amazing. (Keep in mind the old saying, "Truth is stranger than fiction.") But, you can have a lot of fun by just working with a few base ideas and not worrying if you get the details wrong.

The name we've given this method, "Vancouver," comes from an element of television production—it's expensive to shoot television shows in New York or Los Angeles, so most television programs just take skyline shots of the city they're supposed to be in, then do the actual filming in someplace less expensive, like Vancouver or Toronto. It's a handy trick, and for the bulk of scenes it's hardly a real problem. Similarly, if you aren't that interested in the backdrop of your city, just pick a handful of landmarks and signatures and leave it at that—you have everything you need.

Coming to a Consensus

Regardless of how you do (or choose not to do) your research, this next part is vitally important: talk about the city you've chosen and come to a consensus about what you actually want to play with. Every city in the world is a vast sandbox of ideas, and your game will be much more successful if it only tries to focus in on one or two at a time. That means making sure everyone at the table talks about what toys they want to play with in the sandbox.

Start with asking everyone, including the GM, the things they want to play with in this city. It might be a reputation the city has (such as organized crime in Chicago), a public figure (such as a governor or wealthy businessman), a prominent building (such as the Empire State Building in New York City), geographical feature (Alcatraz in San Francisco), neighborhood (such as London's East End), subculture (such as the music scene in Seattle), recurring event (such as Mardi Gras in New Orleans) or whatever springs to mind. It's perfectly fine to have the same or different answers—the same answer means that more of you definitely want to see something in the game, and different answers give you a bit of variety to build off of. Talk a bit about each suggestion. (Someone might want to take a few notes during this discussion—the cool idea now is the idea you'll be struggling to remember later.)

Here are some discussion prompts to get the conversation rolling:

- Why are you interested in that feature of the city?
- Does anyone else find that interesting for other reasons?
- Does anyone find that *uninteresting* for some reason?
- What role would you envision it fulfilling in a campaign?

Don't overthink this stuff or spend too long on it; just get a feel for what people might want to do with this bit of the city (if anything).

Come up with a handful of ideas—the sweet spot is a dozen or so for a group of four or five, but you can get away with fewer. You probably won't incorporate all of those features into your game initially, but it gives you a wide variety of toys to play with.

What if our ideas don't mesh?

If you just can't come to some sort of consensus on where this is going, consider that you might have a play style disconnect. Is one player looking for a kick-in-the-door action game while another wants to explore characterization and intrigue? Does one player want to delve into what it means to be human and demi-human characters struggling to avoid becoming monsters, while another wants to play with the notion of mortal humans struggling to survive among much stronger predators?

If it turns out that there's an incompatibility in assumptions about play style, keep in mind that the game may run for several story arcs, and that the focus of each one can be very different. Maybe try to agree to start with one style, then move toward the other for the second story arc.

If your issue isn't related to incompatible play styles, perhaps a change of scenery would help. If you decided to go with a different city, would that help resolve the disagreement?

Example: Baltimore

We decided that important parts of the city we'd explore are: vampires, ghouls, the Fall Line and its ley line, and Edgar Allan Poe. Davian said he had some interesting information about Poe that he'd bring up in a later step.

We also made up a list of neighborhoods we'd want to revisit later, trying to get a mix of inner city and suburb-like, rich and poor. Fell's Point, the Middle East (and Johns Hopkins), and Druid Ridge Cemetery are examples of locations we want to explore.

Davian assures me that a lot of the final product here is *true fact*. He's not telling me what's true and what's fiction; I have my suspicions, but I'll leave that for the reader.



Intentional Inaccuracies

Oh, very funny. Twist that knife.

Hey, it was just an example...

One thing you might want to play with as a group is the idea of changing a piece of your city, making an intentional inaccuracy. This could be as simple as tossing in a convenient feature to make the city more manageable or make a location work out better (for example, perhaps your city's baseball park suddenly acquires a huge parking lot where in reality it doesn't have one), or it could be as far-reaching as working with a version of the city that lives in an alternate history (perhaps the Golden Gate Bridge was destroyed in a war between vampire factions that occurred prior to the start of your campaign).

A City Full Of Problems

Themes & Threats

Once you've picked out your city and you have some idea of what looks like fun, you get to fill it with all sorts of problems that the PCs will have to contend with.

We've broken down those issues into two types: **themes** and **threats**. Themes are problems that have been around for a long time, long enough that people almost take them for granted. Threats, on the other hand, are problems new to the city—sometimes so new that hardly anyone knows about them.

At this stage, you're going to come up with about three of these problems for the city overall. You'll also do this a bit more with each location (see page 37) in the city.

While working on your city, we recommend using some scrap paper for your initial ideas, or maybe even a set of index cards so the information can be passed around the table while everyone works on it.

Themes of a City

A city's **theme** is a statement about something that recurs in the stories we tell about a city. It could be something that the mortal population tells about themselves and their city, or it might be something that the supernatural denizens talk about behind the scenes.

- Some themes are **general**, things everyone talks about (even if not everyone is directly affected). A city known for corrupt politicians might have a theme like "If he's a politician, he's mobbed up."
- Some themes are more **specific to a group in the city**. A college town with a notorious fraternity of wealthy troublemakers might have "If the Beta Alpha Chis want it, they get it."
- Some themes are about **cautionary tales** people tell each other. Imagine the city where "If a pretty girl wanders alone at night, don't expect to see her again" is a theme.

You'll probably notice that each of these themes is a little dark, a little troublesome. There are two reasons for this: first, your heroes need something to struggle against. Mobbed-up



politicians and cruel dilettantes are the sort of stories that happen, but people don't want to have happen. Perfect for your heroes. Second, there's a real sense of accomplishment that happens when, at the end of a story, one of these themes gets turned into something positive (which we'll talk about more in *Advancement*, page 93).

Themes should feel firm and hard to get rid of. If a single person is the mastermind behind some theme, and defeating that person would change the city overnight, it's probably not strong enough to be a theme. Someone else should always be around to fill a vacuum of power left by the PCs—thus, dealing with a theme is about something bigger than any single conflict.

Threats to a City

On the other hand, a city's **threat** is a person, monster, group, or even a condition or circumstance that makes (or wants to make) life in the city worse for the mortal occupants. Sometimes this threat comes from outside, like a monster from the Nevernever. Sometimes it comes from inside, like a vengeful father who has decided to dabble in magic.

- **Some threats are people or other beings that have no clear agenda** (at least, not right away), but make their presence known through their collateral damage or other horrible calling cards. Perhaps "A new warlock is breaking the Laws of Magic."
- **Some threats give you an idea of their agenda**, such as "The Red Court is expanding their territory into this city."
- **Some threats are bizarre and more metaphysical than real**, though they don't threaten mortals any less, such as "The Summer and Winter Courts are using this city in their machinations."

Threats should feel like someone is behind them that the PCs can get to, either right away or over time. Maybe the way they deal with the problem is to talk and use diplomacy, or fight and use force, but in any case there should be someone or some group of people responsible. That said, you don't need to flesh out every little bit about them or their motivation right now. Stick with a single sentence, like we did above, and the GM will come back to this later to fill in the rest of the details.

Making Themes and Threats for Your City

Aim to come up with one to three themes and threats (total, so don't go over three). Don't take too long to brainstorm these—you'll be revising these ideas as you progress through city creation. You just want an idea of what the PCs will have to deal with. If you're starting to talk about different ways in which the theme or threat will come into the story and how different people might work against it, stop there. You have a juicy problem, but don't start obsessing about those details before you've even started playing.

It's important to keep in mind the intended play style, at least of the first story arc. If your group wants a relatively straightforward monster stomp, or even a mystery-oriented game, strongly consider keeping your themes, and especially threats, immediate and highly endangering. Once you start creating locations and faces, it should be obvious how they link in with the city's themes and threats—more on this later. On the other hand, if the group is more interested in a game involving lots of politics and intrigue, some subtlety and ambiguity in how the locations and faces tie into threats and themes is more useful.

Once you have a set of themes and threats, write a sentence or two for each one on the High Level City Sheet. "The Idea" is the place for this—we'll get to the aspect and faces later.

Example: Baltimore

This was possibly the easiest step. I really wanted to have the city be right on the edge of complete chaos; Davian assured me we'd have to try hard to avoid this with Baltimore. He added his thoughts on Baltimore straddling two worlds—the cosmopolitan North and the "charming" South—as well as the urban blight and corruption that it seems to attract more than its fair share of. So our themes are "The tourist veneer masks the blight," and "This town doesn't know what it wants to be." Our threat is "We're looking into the Abyss, it's looking back, and things are about to get interesting." We'll be referring to these themes and threats in examples throughout this chapter—just note that we may abbreviate them somewhat when we do.

"Locations" I get, but what are "faces"?

They're characters that represent a city's theme or threat, or a location. They're a handy way for the PCs to interact with those facets of the city.

Are they always NPCs?

No, PCs can be faces too. Patience, boss, we'll talk more about this later in the chapter.

The Dresden Files Role-Playing Game
City Sheet (High Level)

City Name: Baltimore

Campaign Title: Nevermore

City-Wide Themes and Threats

Theme (or) Threat

The Idea

The tourist veneer masks the blight

The Aspect

DECAY AND CORRUPTION

The Faces

Name	Concept
Vasiliki Lagios	WCV Head
Russell Carson	Rebel Sorcerer

Theme (or) Threat

The Idea

This town doesn't know what it wants to be.

The Aspect

CONFLICTING IDENTITIES

The Faces

Name	Concept
David Gerard	Corrupt Clubowner

Theme (or) Threat

The Idea

We're looking into the Abyss, and it's looking back.

The Aspect

ON THE BRINK

The Faces

Name	Concept
Alexandra Lagios	WCV Rival
Damocles Ravenborn	RCV Poser
Vastolo & Mirabal	Cops
John Vastolo	Dupin Guy

The Balance of Power

The Status Quo

What is the **Supernatural** status quo?

The Summer Court dances around the edges, while the entrenched White Court and other vampire sets feed upon the despair and decay.

What is the **Mundane** status quo?

Corruption, crime, tourism, and dirty politics. Business as usual.

Movers and Shakers

The Current Order

	Who wants to **maintain the status quo**?	Who wants to **rock the boat**?
The Supernatural Who is **in the dark**?	Corrupt nightlife, politicians, etc The Criminals The Cops	The Dupin Society
The Supernatural Who is **in the know**?	Vasikili Lagios Religious Groups The Summer Court presence Alexandra Lagios Neutral Grounds	Carson's Renegades Gilgamesh, the Ghouls

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Getting the High-Level View

Before you go much further, it's a good idea to take a moment to get a handle on who's in the city, in terms of supernatural critters, factions, and mundane organizations.

This is fairly simple for games centered around mystery or action, and a lot of this section's advice can be skimmed—although it's still important that the city's important characters and factions, especially the opposition, map to the themes and threats.

Games with lots of intrigue tend to require a bit more forethought about who and what is present in the city. In order to create a good web of influence, dependence, rivalry, and such, the GM and players need to think hard about who's in town, why, and what it is they want, from a bird's eye view.

In either case, here are some ideas for coming up with those ideas and tying them into the city's established tone and flavor through its themes and threats. Don't worry about detailing specific individuals or locations yet; that will come later.

Someone Cares About the City

The first thing to think about is what supernatural creatures or factions care about your city. Taking a look at your city's themes and threats ought to give you some strong hints about what sort of supernatural population would be attracted to the place. Who cares about your city enough to have a presence there?

Some are really straightforward—themes dealing with corruption lead to mercenary ghouls, decay leads to Black Court vampires, desperation suggests magical lawbreakers in hiding from the Wardens.

The trick here is combining your themes and threats with any previously stated preferences for things people want to examine in the city, even where they might not obviously match up. This requires a little creative thinking, but it's not that hard to apply a theme in a way that wasn't expected ahead of time.

When you populate the city, think about what each organization or faction wants. Try not to fall back on simple survival, unless that organization or faction is up against the wall for some reason. Think about something more short-term—what are they trying to get when the game comes out of the gate?

Someone Cares About the Status Quo

Consider what the status quo looks like, and who benefits from it (and hence would want to protect it). The mortal cops might, powerful supernatural factions might, criminal organizations might. This could involve attempting to keep the peace—the police, the White Council, or a band of plucky werewolves might fit this bill. Or, it might involve maintaining an existing arrangement providing a ready supply of easy prey to the city's predators—any vampires might be interested in the status quo for that.

Think about how to apply parts of the city that were mentioned in your city sketch. Did anyone mention supernatural entities? Organizations like the police or the city government? See if any of those would work here. Again, think about how each organization, faction, or powerful individual your group introduces to the city fits in with its existing themes and threats. Everything should tie to a theme or threat somehow, even if tangentially.

Looking Forward: What We're Going to Do with Themes and Threats

The themes and threats aren't just notes for the GM on what to bring in. Themes (and some threats) will become setting aspects. We're going to talk a lot more about this idea when you're making characters, and even more in the *Aspects* chapter starting on page 105, so don't worry about it too much right now. After you've made characters, you'll come back to all of these and develop the aspects for your city (see "*Finalize Your City*," page 46).

Alongside that, threats (and some themes) will also generate some faces—NPCs that the PCs will have to deal with. That will also be addressed in the "*Finalize Your City*" section.

If you've played this or another Fate game before, you may have already made these into aspects. That's great! But if not, don't worry. Later we'll tell you how to turn these ideas you have into juicy aspects and faces.

The distinction here is a little too tidy. Some factions will want to do both, as their membership isn't monolithic.

You're absolutely right, boss—that's especially true if a city theme suggests conflicting identities. It's part of why we present the "status quo" vs. "boat rocker" axis as a continuum rather than an either/or thing on the high level sheet.

Someone Wants to Rock the Boat

On the other hand, there are entities, organizations, and factions that want to upset the apple cart. Maybe they're on the outs in the current state of things, maybe they want more power, maybe they're just out for revenge or simply want to cause mayhem. In any event, it's these people (or things!) who are going to initiate conflicts.

Who are these boat rockers? A ghoul clan looking for hunting ground? A Red Court clan looking to strike a decisive blow in the Vampire War? The cops, trying to solve a series of grisly murders? The White Council's Wardens, attempting to take down a powerful sorcerer who keeps the city's supernatural community in fear?

Like those protecting the status quo, think about how to tie in parts of the city from your city sketch.

Getting Ideas

If you're having trouble coming up with interesting and flavorful supernatural denizens of your city, take a look at the research you did early in the process.

Hang on—I thought you said research was optional?

I did, and it is. But if people are having trouble with ideas at this point, it might be worth doing some reading.

OK, makes sense.

The most obvious place to start is with ghost stories and urban legends. There's no need to make them all true, but they provide useful inspirations for things that are overtly magical. Local hauntings are probably real, witches and warlocks of folklore existed (and may still be around), and the man dressed in a bunny suit killing people with an axe in the woods of Virginia? More real than you know.

A bunny suit? Seriously?

There are lots of stories of Bunny Man in the Washington, DC area.

This magical significance can be subtle or overt. A given haunting might be a powerful, named ghost which would be fairly overt. A neighborhood, however, might have more hauntings than most of the rest of the city, and that's just part of its character.

Once you get beyond the obvious plug-ins, there may also be some places to insert some magical history. If your city has a historical hero or boogeyman, consider keeping him in the past rather than having him still be around today. This opens questions about how he died and what sort of legacy he left behind. A legacy can be incredibly powerful in helping your group sink roots into the setting, as it allows them to tie their own history into it.

One last subtle but potent vector is knowledge. The world of magic is mostly secret and what *is* known tends to be in broken pieces. Putting some small amount of knowledge in the hands of the most mundane people or groups can put a spin on them that can get very interesting indeed. Police departments are a great example of this, but even something as simple as a bar or bookshop with some awareness of the magical world is going to feel different than one without.

Your group may come up with a lot of ideas, perhaps resulting in extensive notes. You can summarize those ideas on the High Level City Sheet. Write a couple of sentences in each of the Status Quo boxes, describing who the big players are and how they relate to one another. A summary is fine—your notes should contain the rest.

In the Movers and Shakers section, list the major players you've come up with so far. That section is split between two axes—those looking to hold the line vs. rock the boat, and those in the know about the supernatural vs. those not. You could use that as four boxes to write in. Or you could use that as a chart, placing little dots to show how much people or organizations want to change the status quo and how much they know about the supernatural.

Sometimes you'll come up with an idea that straddles that line—in the earlier casefiles, Chicago's Special Investigations, for instance, is partly in the know, partly not. Write those in the middle.

Example: Chicago

You could not have a game in Chicago without "Organized Crime" somewhere in its themes. It's just too much a part of the legend of the city. It would be easy to get ham-fisted about this and have everything run by, say, an undead Al Capone. More subtly however, you could insert a little knowledge into this aspect, perhaps in the form of a mob boss who understands and appreciates magic enough to know that the only wizard in the Chicago yellow pages needs to be handled very carefully indeed.

Example: Baltimore

Davian and I decided to try to get a variety of supernatural players in town. White Council representatives who don't quite know what to do—that's "doesn't know what to be." A clan of ghouls itching for a fight—that's both "looking into the Abyss" and "masking the blight." The Fae and White Court vampires are around to provide the potential for scheming and plotting—they represent "doesn't know what to be" as well as "masking the blight." Maybe there's a power play going on in the White Court...Oh! And the cops, who would otherwise be trying to keep the peace, are being infiltrated by that White Court clan. Lots of tie-in with themes and threats here.

Davian won't tell me which of these ideas are really true. I think I'm glad I don't know.

Mortal Response to the Supernatural

It's entirely possible the mortal population of your city is almost completely in the dark—easy pickings, save for the handful who know enough of the old ways that they stay out of the way. On the other hand, some communities (especially small ones) may follow certain protective habits or traditions—possibly muddled or disguised as anything from local variations of religious practice to homeowner's association rules; others may be knowingly clued in or even have some sort of organized response. Of course, organized groups are pretty rare: they tend to fall to the extremes of either failure (wiped out by bad guys) or irrelevant success (getting ignored or encouraging the bad guys to pick up shop and move elsewhere, making the group unnecessary).

A lot of cities will have something like Karrin Murphy's unit, a particular part of the police force which gets handed the oddball cases. You're never going to have a "magical" unit on the books. They're usually hidden behind euphemisms like "Special Crime," "Special Unit," "At-Large Issues," or the like or may even be entirely informal. The effectiveness of these groups runs the gamut—some work hard to make a difference but others just look for ways to hide the statistics.

Crime, especially organized crime, has a more nuanced relationship with the supernatural. Most petty criminals are no different from any other mortal when experiencing the supernatural. However, a few insightful criminals have learned to turn magic to their advantage, by learning a bit of magic themselves, employing a practitioner as an "advisor," or forming an alliance with a supernatural entity or faction.



It's a good thing these notes won't be in the final version. You know Marcone's going to pick up a copy of this book when it's out.

In smaller towns and isolated communities, the folks in the know are as likely to be the wise/crazy old geezers with their "superstitions" as any true practitioners or talents.

Churches may also have some window into the supernatural, but how much varies from church to church. Most churches are already more than busy enough with temporal matters, and even those who are aware of the dangers tend to be very reactive and defensive, acting only for the immediate protection of their flock's souls (which is not an insignificant task.)

Consider the mundane mortals that deal with the supernatural in your city. Cops? Religious? Nobody?

Example: Chicago

Father Forthill at Saint Mary's of the Angels offers protection from the supernatural. The Special Investigations division of the Chicago PD is an important part of the picture, as are criminal organizations like Marcone's. Especially as Marcone becomes more aware of Harry's world, the role of mortals in maintaining Chicago's safety is great indeed.

Example: Baltimore

It's possible that the cops have an SI-like unit; but we're not trying to recreate Harry's casefiles line by line. During our research phase, Davian told me that Baltimore has a lot of churches. Maybe there's a strong church stand against the supernatural predators? Baltimore has one of the oldest Catholic cathedrals in the U.S., right? Let's use that—the Basilica of the Assumption. While we're at it, let's spread the wealth around a little—we realized that the Roman Catholic Church was getting a ton of the credit when it comes to faith magic. You needn't be a Catholic to be as awesome as Father Forthill, so we decided to make sure we represent some religious diversity in the Baltimore setting.

Secondly, we thought about the whole Edgar Allan Poe angle—was he in the know? We decided there's a society of mortals devoted to a secret body of Poe's work cataloguing the world of the weird, and they strive to continue it. They cope by being armed with information. Davian even came up with a great name for it—the Dupin Society, after Poe's detective hero.

From a game standpoint, the Dupin Society is a great place to start if you're having trouble deciding where a non-supernatural character would fit into this sort of game. It's also a convenient way to have characters from wildly different backgrounds cross paths without resorting to suspension-of-disbelief-breaking contrivance.

Local Supernatural Community

In every town, there are people in the know—people who bridge the gap between the mundane world of mortals and the supernatural. A lot of the time, especially in bigger towns and cities, the core of the community is practitioners and talents, people genuinely touched by the supernatural to some degree. Around them are family, believers, poseurs, people who've seen too much, hangers-on, and the like. It's an eclectic mix, and not everyone is necessarily on the same page. Differences in belief or education abound, but they share one piece of common ground. They understand that there is something more to the world than most people accept.

Like any other community, they have places where they can go and perhaps feel safe—bars, shops, clubs, and the like. These places and the people found there are usually highly reflective of the city's themes, which is something to consider as you think about your city's community of people in the know. Locations and potential characters will probably come to mind at this point—make sure you note these down; you'll detail them soon.

Example: Chicago

Chicago has plenty of examples. MacAnally's, Bock Ordered Books, and St. Mary of the Angels are all locations tied to the supernatural community. For groups, it's easy to point to the Ordo Lebes and the Alphas, to say nothing of the Red and White Courts and the fae.

Example: Baltimore

This stage went really quickly. We decided to have a café in town near Johns Hopkins, one that doubled as an occult bookstore. Maybe we'd have it be Accorded Neutral Ground, but we'd figure that out later. This café would be a hangout for the city's supernatural-aware community.

We also brought up the idea of a band of renegade sorcerers, a strong clan of White Court vampires (complete with power struggle going on within), weak and disorganized bands of Red and Black Court vamps, and—Davian kept insisting on this—a strong ghoul clan.

Locations in Your City

At this point, you should have a pretty good high-level view of the supernatural—and supernaturally aware—population of your city, and how it ties together with the city's themes and threats. But a city is a lot more than a high concept and a few threats. No one is just "in Chicago;" they're "in Hyde Park" or "on the observation deck of Sears Tower" or a thousand other places. While a city is more than just the sum of its parts, we still have to think about those parts—that's where the stories *really* take place.

There are two general types of locations: **neighborhoods** and **points of interest**. Neighborhoods are where people live or work, and points of interest are where people go to do or experience something specific. When coming up with these locations, here are some bits of advice to keep in mind:

- Pick locations that seem to have their own story or character. People might talk about the seedy happenings down at the Waterfront, making that a prime location.
- Pick locations that have a little action or conflict built in, so that something's always going on even when the PCs aren't there. The Strip in Las Vegas is a prime example.
- Pick locations that tie in with city themes and threats. Not all of them need a direct link, but most of them should have an arguable connection to at least one.
- Pick locations emblematic of the factions and organizations you enumerated in the previous section.

That said, don't try to catalog every single neighborhood or point of interest. Doing one or two per player (including the GM) is a good ballpark. If you find the story goes to a new neighborhood or point of interest in the middle of play, and seems to return there fairly often, then flesh out that location some more.

As you kick around location ideas, use the Locations City Sheet to record your work.

Getting Ideas

There are all sorts of fun ways to come up with ideas for locations, even if you're not familiar with the city. The Internet is your friend. Google Earth rocks—zoom in and look for cool-looking buildings, streets or other structures that all meet at a nexus, or other eye-catching artifacts of the town. It has attached street-perspective photos of a lot of interesting-looking places, so at the very least it should give you an idea of places to think about. Wikipedia is another great resource, as are social networking websites and web forums where you can talk to people who live in your chosen city. Of course, maybe you prefer dead trees, or maybe your aura fries computers. In that case, hit the library or a bookstore and check out encyclopedias and travel books—these are great ways to get location ideas.

And of course, the research you did earlier in the city creation process probably turned up a wealth of potentially flavorful locations.

Once you have your list of locations, you'll come up with two pieces of information for each: the location's theme or threat (only one, not both) and its face.

Conceptual Locations

In some cases, there might be a concept for your city that needs representation—it's probable that such a concept was called out in your city sketch. For Hollywood, California, for example, the entertainment industry is a strong concept that should be reflected in the city. Take a moment to look at your city's themes and locations; if none of them can be said to represent your city's important concepts, decide on a physical location that will work as an anchor in your game for that concept—a place where it's on display and where the characters can interact with it. In the Hollywood example, you might create a film studio location to represent the entertainment industry's presence.

This is another cool thing I miss out on because I fry electronic gear, isn't it?

You can call down actual fire from the sky to flame your enemies, Harry. We computer geeks just have to settle for doing it metaphorically. I think you got the better end of that deal.

The Dresden Files Role-Playing Game
City Sheet (Locations)

City Name: Baltimore

Campaign Title: Nevermore

Name
THE FALL LINE
Description
Border between the coastal plain & the east coast of North America.
Theme (or) **Threat**
The Idea
Corridor of magic energy along it.
The Aspect
ON THE LEY LINE
The Face
Name: Frank Walker — Concept: Hydromancer/ Civil Engineer

Name
FEDERAL HILL PARK
Description
Park on the south shore of the inner harbor.
Theme (or) **Threat**
The Idea
Tunnels beneath hide the ghouls.
The Aspect
GATEWAY TO HELL
The Face
Name: Gilgamesh — Concept: Ghoul Tyrant

Name
FRANCIS SCOTT KEY BRIDGE
Description
Sweet merciful gods this is a tall bridge.
Theme (or) **Threat**
The Idea
Air and water cancel out magic.
The Aspect
MAGICALLY GROUNDED
The Face
Name: Ellsworth Dillman — Concept: Troll Blooded Toll Collector

Name
NEUTRAL GROUNDS
Description
A coffee shop where the minor talents congregate.
Theme (or) **Threat**
The Idea
Granted A.N.G. status.
The Aspect
ACCORDED NEUTRAL GROUND
The Face
Name: Diane Basset — Concept: Kitchen Witch/ Caffienomancer

Name
EDGAR ALLEN POE MUSEUM
Description
House & museum is also meeting place for Dupin society.
Theme (or) **Threat**
The Idea
History and magic abound
The Aspect
IF THESE WALLS COULD TALK
The Face
Name: Paul Mackey — Concept: Director of the Dupin Society

Name
THE MONTROSE ESTATE
Description
Wooded estate of the Montrose (formerly Montressor) family.
Theme (or) **Threat**
The Idea
Wizardly family has secrets.
The Aspect
SKELETONS IN THE CLOSET. . . AND THE BASEMENT
The Face
Name: Wellington — Concept: Summer Court Ogre, Estate Guardian, Butler.

Name
THE WASHINGTON MONUMENT
Description
Baltimore's version—northwest of harbor, 178ft tall, museum.
Theme (or) **Threat**
The Idea
The nexus of the city ley lines
The Aspect
WELLSPRING OF MAGIC
The Face
Name: Joe Nowakowski — Concept: Homeless Vet

Name
THE "EAST GREEN"
Description
Housing project, complex of 2-story apartments, run down.
Theme (or) **Threat**
The Idea
Drug dealers and despair-eaters
The Aspect
POVERTY BREEDS DESPERATION
The Face
Name: Wallace "Lizard" Gibbs — Concept: Clued-in Drug Dealer

Name
FELLS POINT/CANTON
Description
The center of Baltimore's club scene in two neighborhoods.
Theme (or) **Threat**
The Idea
Nightlife provides cover for WCVs
The Aspect
NIGHTLIFE ON THE HARBOR
The Face
Name: Curt Gazo — Concept: White Court Doorman

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Recurring Locations

Recurring locations are a great feature of TV shows and novels. In a lot of stories, they're a vitally important component because they provide a sense of predictability that helps control the story's pacing—they can do the same thing in your game. These locations tend to come in two very broad flavors, categorized based on what the location does to the player characters' (and players') sense of comfort.

The characters need a place to call home, someplace where they can drop their wards, get comfortable, and crack open a beer. The players know what to expect here. Of course, once established, the GM can play with this expectation by threatening these zones of safety and comfort. Handled well, this can introduce an intense sense of danger, outrage, or horror in the players. Be careful, though; do it too much or too early and it can get pretty old, or even lead to players feeling like their trust has been violated.

The other type is the place that's predictably uncomfortable—the bastion of a Winter Court faerie lord the PCs visit frequently, a particular section of the Nevernever, or a loud and pulsing dance club run by White Court vamps. The players know what to expect here, too, and it's never good. They have to be on their guard all the time, never accept a gift, never dance with the beautiful succubus no matter how seductive she is… As with the comforting locations, once these expectations have been established a GM can play with the expectations a bit to keep the players on their toes.

Recurring locations are extremely useful—strongly consider having a few. They may end up being strongly connected to your characters, though, so you might want to come back to this when you're making characters and sketch out a new location based on what you make up there.

Don't Constrain Yourself!

We're spending a lot of time talking about making the city for your game, but don't be afraid to branch out on occasion. There's a whole wide world out there—sometimes Harry's cases take him to the outskirts of Chicago and further (even outside of our plane of existence!) in order to deal with problems.

Locations and the Supernatural

Making the Connection

Whatever locations you choose, make certain that some have potential for entanglement with the supernatural, one way or another.

Imagine how your city looks, purely from the perspective of magical beings with no real interest in the workings of mankind. An ancient being—wizard, vampire, fae, demon, or other—is not going to take any real interest in the politics and economics of the day, and one pile of humanity is much like any other. From their perspective, things need to last a certain amount of time before they're worth noticing, so the things that they find interesting in a city are more likely to be places of power, powerful residents, and other Big Matters. So when such beings look at your city, what do they think of?

To that end, think about things that may be unique to your city. If you have some geography on hand that can obviously be made significant, then that's easy. Having the Empire State Building as the focusing point for New York City's ley lines is a good, obvious use of this sort of thing. Perhaps the St. Louis Arch is a gateway to something deep in the Nevernever. Maybe the Pyramids at Giza are [redacted] Maybe the top of the Eiffel Tower is a portal to Hell, or something. You get the idea. Tombs, graveyards, mountains, battlefields, and monuments of almost any kind may be of use for this. If you can find some sort of signature landmark, at least consider making it magical.

Billy, you can't reveal that sort of thing here. Pick a different example.

What, did I guess right?

If you don't have specific geography to work with, then no problem; it's easy enough to make something up. Gateways and potential gateways are a great hook. One or more doors to the Nevernever provide plots aplenty, depending on where they go and who might want to go through them. Ley lines—lines of mystical force that crisscross the earth like an invisible highway of magic—are another great excuse. Wherever they cross is a place of power, and if a bunch of them cross in one place, like your city, that can easily be of interest.

It's also worth considering types of places that you might find in more than one city. Some cities might have an equivalent of Chicago's Undertown—a neighborhood that's built in existing underground tunnels but is a bit closer

to the Nevernever, so the veil can be thin enough to pass through accidentally. Mortals seldom visit such places, but they're the first stop for magical beings, often because they double as the points of entry.

Any place can be of interest, magically. It might have power to draw on, the veil between our world and the Nevernever might be thin in that spot at particular times of the year, it might be sacred or profane, skewed to some flavor of magic, or important to some manner of creature. All that means is that if a place is interesting to you and your group, making it significant is not hard to do.

Themes and Threats of Locations

Now, for each location, make either a theme or threat. A location's theme or threat is much like a city's overall theme or threat, but specific to this one part of the city. A lot of the same considerations you used to create your city's themes and threats hold true here, too: What's going to make for a great story? Why is this location interesting? What's going to happen there? A location that will serve as a hotbed of intrigue, like a club that serves as a White Court hangout, might have a theme like "lies, deception, and backstabbing." A locale that you think is just begging for a fight scene, such as an abandoned building, might have a threat to make the fight more interesting, like "dry as a tinderbox." Especially for threats, don't be afraid to call out transient situations—you can change threats and themes for locations as their characteristics change. Some of these themes and threats eventually will be turned into aspects or faces—but we'll talk about that later.

Don't let Harry near there!

HEY NOW, DON'T YOU START IN ON ME!

Locations Sharing Themes and Threats

As you start making up locations, you might decide that some of them have the same or very similar themes or threats. That's excellent! You don't need to constantly invent new problems for every neighborhood or point of interest. But you'll want to make sure that each place still feels different, so consider different sides of the issue. A theme like "the bad part of town" might mean that one location is notorious for violent crime, while another's take on that is rampant prostitution. A supernatural threat may be well established and hard to uproot in one location and just beginning to take over in another.

You could even leave the feel of the theme or threat similar if the face of each of those locations has a different take on dealing with the threat. As long as there's something different about the situation, sharing problems among places is a great way to tie those places (and the people involved) together.

Bringing it Together

Write a sentence or three describing the location on the Locations City Sheet, and record its theme or threat (don't worry about the aspect yet, we'll do that in the final step of city creation). Briefly describe a major feature or two ("The lower deck of the bridge is a maze of structural steel, rivets, and concrete with a low ceiling, and the sides are open to the weather."), and maybe call out if people have to overcome any obstacles to even get there ("The basement door has been blocked off for years; you can only get in through the trap door under the desk in the office.")

This seems obvious, but it's worth mentioning: once you've chosen locations in this phase of game preparation, it might be tempting to railroad the action to end up there. *Resist that temptation*. The action will get there when it gets there, and if a location turns out to be a lot cooler in theory than in actual play conditions, don't worry about it. If the face for that location is important, the action will get there eventually. If it doesn't, then that location, and the face associated with it, isn't really as important as you thought it would be. And that's okay—file away any cool ideas associated with it for future use and let it go. New locations, ones you didn't think of during city creation, will arise during play; if they feel important, stat them out and add them to the list. And you never know—that spurned location might become important down the road.

Example: Baltimore

We went through all the ideas we had for locations—the Basilica, the Inner Harbor, etc. I went over the city on Google Earth and found some really cool-looking buildings (the Clifton Gate House and Washington Monument, among others). We decided that a dance club



in Fell's Point and the estate of the recently deceased local wizard patriarch would make for great recurring locations, and they each tie in with both "doesn't know what it wants to be" and "masking the blight." There's a fantastic legend (Davian snorts at this word) about tunnels stretching from Federal Hill Park to Fort McHenry. We want that group of Poe scholars to have a home base; maybe that's the museum they made out of the house Poe lived in. Davian brought up this really old clock tower right downtown, not far from the Inner Harbor; we ended up dropping that idea later, as we just couldn't hook it in to anything convincingly.

For a complete list of locations we came up with, look at *Nevermore/Baltimore*, page 389.

People in Your City

The Faces

Once your set pieces are up, you'll need people in them. After all, a city is nothing if no one inhabits it.

There are two ways to approach populating your city. The process presented here designs a world full of complicated situations and relationships which the PCs will be thrown into once they're created. On the other hand, you could move onto character creation first, then design the rest of the characters based on how the PCs turn out. Both ways are great; it's your choice which way you want to do it.

In this section, you'll be coming up with various characters that embody your locations and the city's themes and threats. These **faces** personify the setting and interact with the PCs. You'll need to figure out a couple of things for each character—namely, a high concept and a motivation—though it shouldn't take more than a couple minutes to come up with these few details. If it does, remember the golden rule of city creation: come up with the easy stuff and move on—you can leave the rest for the GM to figure out later, after the game's started.

As you go through each step of creating faces, summarize your ideas on the Faces sheet. Again, the GM and players might keep extra notes elsewhere, but the City Sheet is the quick reference guide.

High Concept

All characters—PCs and NPCs alike—have a high concept. We talk more about that in *Character Creation* (page 54), but in short it's a quick phrase (and aspect) that summarizes that character's role in the world, usually reflecting the character template in some way. The White Court vampire that runs a nightclub might be White Court Entrepreneur; a police detective in the know might be Monster Hunting Cop; a corrupt real estate investor might be Heartless Slumlord; and the ritual sorceress operating under the White Council's radar might be Dabbling Sorceress. High concepts are explained in a lot more detail in *Character Creation*; if you haven't looked at that chapter yet, you might want to jot down the base idea and come back to it once you've gone through the process of creating PCs.

Motivation

The faces in your city should also have some motivation—there's something each one wants that he can't easily get. What is it? The White Court vampire might want to end the police investigation of prostitution at his nightclub, while the detective is determined to end the human trafficking ring he suspects is happening there. The investor might want to quiet the spirits of the burial ground he's building on, while the sorceress might want to conjure a demon, using the nearby ley line to power her containment circle.

One of these basic formulas might help you come up with motivations:

- This face wants something from another person or group, and that person or group has a good reason not to just hand it over.
- This face wants someone else to do something for him, and that person or group has a good reason (at least to them) for not doing that.
- This face wants to stop someone else from doing something that they are currently doing or planning to do.

The basic idea here is that these motivations involve other potential characters and have some conflict built-in. Since the most interesting conflicts may very well involve the PCs, it might make sense to delay this step until after character creation.

Play Style and NPC Motivations

When creating the motivations of your faces, consider what style of game your group wants to play. Specifically, how secret should these motivations and relationships be from the players? (Note that we're saying "players" very deliberately here—this is distinct from "player characters.") There are two distinct styles that should inform this decision:

Mystery: The details of the setting around the PCs is a mystery for the players to unravel. This means that (most of) the true motivations of and relationships among NPCs should begin the game as secrets from the players (and, consequently, the PCs). In this style of game, the GM will need to invent most of these details about the important NPCs—possibly with suggestions from the players, but mostly on her own.

Intrigue/Politics: The players are aware of the relationships among the NPCs, as well as their motivations, even if the player *characters* may not be fully aware of them. This makes it much easier for the players to engineer intrigue, play NPCs (and perhaps other PCs) against one another, and engage in general skullduggery. To create this style of game, the GM and players should work together to generate the NPCs' high concepts, motivations, and other details.

Of course, many games will end up being a combination of both. Even if your game has aspects of both styles, it will probably lean more one way or the other. It's a good plan for the GM to take the pulse of the table and see what players want to do—both styles can be accommodated with a bit of creativity.

Faces of Locations

A location's face is someone who embodies a place or is somehow strongly tied to it, either in a mundane or supernatural sense. Every location needs a face—someone who cares about the location.

When you create a location's face, it's important to know the face's connection to the location. Is the location the face's hangout (a White Court vampire owns a nightclub and can be found there regularly, while a police detective is frequently at Precinct Station House 4)? Is the connection financial (the location is a construction site, and the face is the investor who owns it)? Is it supernatural (the face is a sorceress performing rituals at the location due to its proximity to a ley line)?

The face's motivation for the location is also useful to think about. Is there something about the location he wants to change? Something he wants to preserve? No one is perfectly happy with his home (or home away from home, in some cases). How does this face's motivation intersect with the city or location's themes and threats (if at all)?

Does EVERY location need a face and a theme or threat?

That's the ideal. However, let's say you come up with a neat place, but no face comes to mind. That's okay, so long as other locations are fully fleshed out. Maybe some fun action scenes will happen in that sparser location. And as you play, it might take on a life of its own and you'll discover its face or problem. So, in short, can't fill in all the info now? That's cool. Don't let it slow you down.

The Dresden Files Role-Playing Game
City Sheet (Faces)

City Name: Baltimore

Campaign Title: Nevermore

Name
Vasiliki Lagios
is the Face of...
Decay & Corruption (theme)
with the High Concept...
White Court Patriarch
and Motivation...
I will protect my family's standing at all costs.
with these Relationships...
Alexandra (niece)

Name
Russell Carson
is the Face of...
Decay & Corruption (theme)
with the High Concept...
Power-mad sorcerer
and Motivation...
Power, plain and simple.
with these Relationships...
Evan Montrose (obstacle)

Name
Alexandria Lagios
is the Face of...
On the Brink (threat)
with the High Concept...
Charismatic WCV upstart
and Motivation...
I will lead House Lagios to triumph.
with these Relationships...
Vasiklik (uncle), Dave Gerard (patsy), Curt Gazo (lieutenant)

Name
Dave Gerard
is the Face of...
Conflicting Identities
with the High Concept...
Corrupt club owner
and Motivation...
I want illicit success, but I don't want to get caught.
with these Relationships...
Alexandra (she's playing me); Dr. Ralston (my ex S.O.)

Name
Curt Gazo
is the Face of...
Fells Point (Mantis Club)
with the High Concept...
White Court doorman
and Motivation...
I'm going to help Alexandra get to the top.
with these Relationships...
Dave Gerard (ostensible employer)

Name
Diane Basset
is the Face of...
Neutral Grounds
with the High Concept...
Kitchen witch
and Motivation...
I want to educate Baltimore's supernatural folks.
with these Relationships...
various patrons

Name
Dr. Allison Ralston
is the Face of...
Johns Hopkins Hospital
with the High Concept...
Clued-in forensic pathologist
and Motivation...
I want to know, no matter who says I shouldn't.
with these Relationships...
Dave Gerard (ex), Paul Mackey (Dupin soc member), others

Name
Paul Mackey
is the Face of...
Edgar Allen Poe Museum
with the High Concept...
Director of the Dupin Society
and Motivation...
I want to preserve knowledge.
with these Relationships...
other society members

Name
Mike Robinson
is the Face of...
State Correctional Facility
with the High Concept...
Corrupt prison guard
and Motivation...
I want to ride that gravy train.
with these Relationships...
Provides "snacks" to the Lagios Clan

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So... Do all major NPCs have to be faces?

Well, you can just throw a random NPC in there if you want to. But if they aren't directly connected to something—a theme, a threat, a location, or even a face—why bother?

'Cause sometimes after a long day at the office it's nice to just bash a monster instead of saving the world?

OK, I'll give you that. Although even that monster probably ties into something going on in your city.

Faces of Themes and Threats

Themes and threats—especially threats—also need faces that embody or represent them in some way. It's boring for PCs to interact directly with disembodied forces or ideological concepts.

Some of your location faces will also work well as faces for themes or threats. Or you may end up revising a location's face based on a similar NPC you'll come up with here. Either way, this is a good point to look over your NPCs to see how they could intersect with the themes and threats you've come up with.

Like every other part of creating faces, as you figure this part out for each face, be sure to record it on the Faces City Sheet—but don't forget to record it on the High Level City Sheet as well.

Themes and Faces

To come up with faces for the city's themes, consider how each theme is exemplified in one (or more) of the NPCs. Consider the "If the Beta Alpha Chis want it, they get it" theme that we discussed before—a face could be a member of that fraternity. If that's one of your city's themes, chances are you have a member in mind as an NPC (or even a PC), so that character could be one of the theme's faces.

You can use a face to subvert a theme, too, or to call attention to it by providing the counter-example. Think about the theme "If he's a politician, he's mobbed up" from before. Sure, you could make the face a local kingpin of corruption and graft, but what if you chose the one honest, idealistic politician left in the city?

Finally, you can hold off on associating a theme with a face if you need to. Consider the theme "If a pretty girl wanders alone at night, don't expect to see her again." If nothing leaps out at you immediately, let your play reveal who is involved. This is particularly handy if you want to run this idea as a mystery. (Alternately, in this situation you could go the Twin Peaks route and make the face a murder victim—maybe have some scenes occur in flashback.)

I thought all these theme NPCs would have to be villains?

Not always. Sometimes you want to offer up someone the PCs care about as a face, so that you can have that person threatened rather than threatening the PCs directly. "Face" doesn't mean "Evil NPC."

Threats and Faces

It's fairly easy to come up with faces for city threats. Just tie a threat directly to the face's motivation, and presto. In the example "A new warlock is breaking the Laws of Magic," it's pretty simple to figure out the high concept. But for motivation, you'll have to ask why—maybe this warlock is looking for respect from a White Council Wizard in the area, or perhaps he just wants to use magic to punish people who have hurt him.

On the other hand, the face for such threats can be less direct. Maybe the face of this threat is a White Council Warden who suspects one of the PCs is responsible for the crimes the warlock is committing. If the Warden's motivation is "The suspect must confess," this provides a face to this threat that the PCs can't easily solve through judicious use of magic and firearms.

Tying Characters Together

Faces do not exist in separate vacuums. They should have some sort of connection to each other. If that connection ties into their motivation, so much the better. The sorcerer has been hired by the investor to drive out the restless spirits, but is in over her head. The White Court vamp and the detective are in direct conflict with one another.

Other connections could come in the form of rivalries, cross-purpose motivations, personal grudges or alliances, etc.

However, only note ideas down if they seem obvious at this step. By now, you've done a lot of work coming up with ideas, and are probably really eager to move on to making your own characters. If there are some characters that don't seem to be tied together, or perhaps aren't tied to anyone, that's fine at this point. During play, you'll come up with so many more amazing ideas; the things the PCs do and the way the GM reacts will inspire you in ways you couldn't come up with right now, even if they seem obvious in hindsight.

Multiple Faces

Sometimes a location, theme or threat might suggest multiple faces, like with the example threat of "The Summer and Winter Courts are using this city in their machinations." When that happens, come up with multiple faces.

That said, this is generally only appropriate if the faces are somehow at odds, either openly or covertly. If they have the same agenda, and one is really a lieutenant for another or something similar, then you really only have one face to worry about at the moment (though whether the boss or the lieutenant is the one you're focusing on is entirely up to you).

Example: Baltimore

Here's where the meat of our setting design really took place. We came up with dozens of great NPC ideas and several possible PC ideas before settling on the ones in *Nevermore/Baltimore*.

Most of this grew from two sources: fleshing out faces for our identified locations, and identifying key NPCs that would become necessary even without being the face of any particular location.

Again, Davian insisted on a strong ghoul clan with this completely gonzo leader who thinks he's a god; we turned the ghoul clan into one of the major factions in town. Same thing with the White Court vampires, although a strange thing happened there. We started creating White Court NPCs, and the most interesting one was the up-and-coming firebrand rather than the current leader, especially when matched up with locations we'd come up with. We never did invent a location for the White Court clan leader's lair, and we think that's okay—he's a face of the city theme of "masking the blight." Alexandra really grabs hold of the city's threat of "looking into the abyss," so we made her the main vampire NPC. These vampires feed on despair rather than lust; this led us to the notion of them infiltrating the corrections department rather than the police department; we went back and added the state pen—the location and its face also embody "masking the blight."

Running with the idea that the wizards are weak in town, we hit upon the most powerful White Council wizard in town being really green—Evan Montrose, returning from a few semesters abroad to take over when his father suddenly passed. This is an ideal PC, we decided, but more on that later.

Again, see *Nevermore/Baltimore* for the final results of our brainstorming. Davian assures me that ultimately very little of it is untrue. He's an accomplished storyteller, so I've no idea when he's lying to me.

The Protagonists

The Player Characters

Once you've cleaned up the location list and created faces, it's time to sit down and do character creation (if you haven't already). You have enough information about the city now that someone at the table can probably answer any questions that come up. In play, the group is sure to come up with new ideas and elements that you'll want to incorporate into the city. As the group goes through character creation, stay alert for this sort of thing and take down a new list of city details based on the players' ideas. The player characters' aspects may suggest new themes, locations, places, and people, but don't limit yourself just to those.

Picking a Power Level

Now that you've made a big chunk of your city, you'll have an idea of what sort of threats are looming and what sort of threats the PCs will have to contend with. The important thing is that everyone should be at the same power level. If you haven't chosen a power level, *now is the time to do so*. Details on the different power levels are in *Character Creation*, page 53.

Should Faces be PCs?

As you begin character creation, consider that you might have already created the basic idea of some, if not all, of your PCs—the faces. They already have hooks into the city's locations, themes, and threats. They have at least implied relationships to other characters. If some of them look like fun to play, grab 'em as PCs!

Can they can still serve as faces? Well, the answer to that is "Sometimes." Think about the other characters—both PCs and NPCs—and how they will interact with the location, theme, or threat that the face-turned-PC represents. Will those other characters still see the PC as a

face for that concept? If the concept is an extension of that character, chances are you don't need a new face. However, if the character is just a cog in the wheel of a much larger institution, you might want to create a new face.

But most of all, don't over-think this. Just make a quick judgment call and move on—99% of the time it's not earth-shatteringly vital that this decision is made one way or the other.

Arranging the Details

As a GM, look at each character's best skills and ask: Who else in the city is that good? Do they know the character? Do they have some sort of relationship? Are they rivals, friends, or both? What do they do with the skill that the character doesn't?

The same thinking applies equally well to stunts and powers. Who else can do these things? Who wants to be able to? Who knows? Who cares? Everything on the character sheet may suggest an idea for expanding the city details. So, while the players are shifting their focus over to their characters, it's time for the GM to truly take ownership of the city and make it come alive and, more importantly, shape it so it is *relevant* and *responsive* to the lives of the PCs.

When you're done, run through your new list of details and decide on how to position them in the city. If they go into existing locations or fit existing themes, then great—just write them down as details. Otherwise, create new locations and themes and so forth, turning them into aspects and characters as needed (see "*Finalize Your City*," below). At the end of this, you should have a list of thematic aspects and a cast of NPCs, as well as a list full of things which caught your interest.

Example: Baltimore

In the previous section, we identified the young wizard Evan Montrose as a great potential PC; his stats exercise the spellcasting rules thoroughly, and he's an interesting character in his own right (and has a direct, if contentious, connection to the Dupin Society). We decided then to stat up his best friends—one a minor talent and one a pure mortal—as PCs to further demonstrate the different ways to exercise the system.

Finalize Your City

You're almost there now. It's time to turn all those ideas into game mechanics.

Turn Themes and Threats into Aspects

Now that you've been through character creation and understand what aspects are and how to use them, go back to your city details and turn city and location themes and threats into proper aspects. Revisit *Aspects* (page 98) if you need some extra help. The main thing to keep in mind is that each aspect you make has to be able to affect at least one of the PCs. Remember that the aspect doesn't have to complicate the PC directly; if it complicates the life of someone he cares about, that works. If an aspect doesn't touch any of your PCs, directly or indirectly, then it's a wasted aspect.

Once you come up with aspects, make sure that everyone around the table understands the intent behind each aspect. One fun way to do this is to go around the table and have people come up with examples of how an aspect would be invoked or compelled. Of course, the GM might want to keep some aspects to herself for now; that's okay, too.

Don't be afraid to reword or rewrite a theme or threat to turn it into a good aspect, but try not to change its basic meaning or replace it with something totally new. If you absolutely have to do that, make sure that all the bits—faces, relationships, etc.—that rely on that aspect still work.

This also represents the final bit of work you'll do on your city sheets. The Locations City Sheet and the High Level City Sheet both have room for recording these aspects.

Theme Aspects

Turning themes into aspects is sometimes straightforward, but they'll usually need some rewording to focus in a particular direction. The "If he's a politician, he's mobbed up" example from earlier could become There's No Honest Politician (if the point is about the politicians themselves) or Can't Trust Anyone in City Hall (if the point is about trust)—an aspect that's punchy and to the point.

Some themes are a bit more work to turn into aspects that the GM can use to compel and drive the story, like "If the Beta Alpha Chis want it, they get it." With these, you'll have to make a decision about the role the theme has with respect to the PCs and the anticipated story you're going to play in. One way to focus the theme for an aspect would be Beta's Influence Felt Everywhere (for a more conspiratorial vibe), and another would be No One Says No to the Betas (for more of a street-level fear vibe). Both of those should suggest more ways to use that theme to influence the story than the initial idea does.

Our third example above, "If a pretty girl wanders alone at night, don't expect to see her again," is another case where the aspect is challenging to use as-is. It's hard to see how to use that aspect to compel the PCs, or how they could invoke the aspect for their benefit. If you're going for a sense of fear and defeatism, an aspect like Devoid of Hope encapsulates the right feeling. It doesn't explicitly address the theme described; but thanks to the collaborative process, everyone knows where that aspect came from and the context for it. On the other hand, if you're going for a bit more action in your game, something more in-your-face like Nowhere Is Safe When the Sun Is Down is a great aspect—and it covers the theme in a very different way.

Threat Aspects

Making aspects out of threats is a tricky exercise—aspects made out of threats are often, frankly, kind of lousy aspects. Luckily, you won't need to worry about this if you've used the threats to create great NPC adversaries ready to cause trouble for the PCs (we'll talk more about this in *Building Scenarios*, page 340). And remember that not every threat needs to be an aspect—if you're stumped, pass and move on.

Let's explore ways to turn some of the examples from earlier into things you can use in your game.

With the threat "A new warlock is breaking the Laws of Magic," you might get aspects from the motivation of that threat and how the threat is starting to impact the city's supernatural community. Everyone Is a Suspect might be a good aspect if the identity of the threat is unknown. Or maybe there's an aspect the warlock seems to constantly benefit from, like A Season of Raging Storms.

Overarching threats like "The Red Court is expanding their territory into this city" can be turned into aspects by looking at how that threat has started impacting the city or location. No One Crosses Madame Raquel would be a good aspect for either a more political or more fear-themed story. If you're looking to play up the specific impact rather than the cause, perhaps they're expanding their territory through the drug market, thus giving us Overwhelming Drug Epidemic. As an added bonus, a face suggests itself here—a Red Court vampire, like this Madame Raquel, or maybe a mortal middleman dealer.

Then we get to the really weird threats, like "The Summer and Winter Courts are using this city in their machinations." Hopefully, when you come up with a threat like this, you have a sense of how to use it. At minimum, the local supernatural community will likely help us out with Supernatural Community on Edge and Suspicious. Or an event has already happened that's heralded this threat, like a Summer-influenced heat wave that is more than the mortal inhabitants can cope with (for Sparks Fly During This Heat Wave).

But again, if a threat has a good face that will provide plenty of opposition for the PCs, you don't also need to make it an aspect.

Example: Baltimore

So, our themes are "The tourist veneer masks the blight," and "This town doesn't know what it wants to be." Those translate fairly well to Decay and Corruption, and Conflicting Identities. Davian argued that Conflicting Identities wasn't dark enough, but I convinced him that it might help to have some flexibility built into it—perhaps it could become a threat later.



The threat, "We're looking into the Abyss, it's looking back, and things are about to get interesting," is flavorful but awfully long. We decided that On The Brink conveys the same meaning with possibly even a wider scope.

For the various location themes and threats, see *Nevermore/Baltimore* on page 389.

Stat Your NPCs

It's also time to generate stat blocks for your NPCs. You can do a full stat block for them if you wish, or you can jot down some general notes and use the quick character generation rules from *Character Creation* (page 68). It's not vital that they're all detailed out to the last point of refresh, but at least have enough that when the PCs meet them the GM won't have to hold up play for five minutes while she generates stats for them. Take a look at *Who's Who* (OW98) for an example of this. Sometimes all that's needed is a couple of aspects and a few relevant skill levels.

Fill In Your City Sheets

Once you have all of this done, you can fill out the city's sheets properly, making enough copies for everyone who wants one. (We've placed examples of filled-out versions of each type of sheet throughout this chapter, so you already have an idea of what this looks like.)

Wrapping it Up

Your city might be finalized in the sense that you're about ready to play with it, but nothing is carved in stone. A static city is a city where nothing happens—the city, as well as its locations and NPCs, will advance just like the PCs do.

This is another one of those obvious things that's worth mentioning often anyway: don't be constrained by the city sheet you have right now. It's a guide to building a great story, not a straightjacket. You should not feel for one second like you need to live with a bad decision you made during city creation. If something just isn't working, *change it*. If altering a detail will create an awesome situation or plot hook, *alter it*. However, remember that details the group created collaboratively should be changed collaboratively, too—once the players feel ownership over some detail, the GM should be careful about arbitrarily altering it.

Speaking of the GM, it's a very good idea for her to keep any notes she came up with during city creation, even the stuff that didn't make it onto the sheet. It's very likely that there are some real gems in there—hold onto these for use in immediate tweaks, future plot arcs, and city advancement.

Once you have a city, a stable of NPCs and locations to house them, and an intrepid band of PCs, it's time to start telling a story. We'll talk more about creating Dresdenverse stories in *Building Scenarios* (page 340), which will crank the storytelling potential of your shiny new city up to eleven.

Example: Baltimore

The organization of the sample setting, *Nevermore/Baltimore* (page 358), doesn't bear much resemblance to the process outlined here. That's intentional; what you get by following the city creation process is good, meaty stuff, but it doesn't make for great reading. The information we generated here has been reorganized to be more readable and, we hope, easier for a GM to get her head around. If you work better from a coherent narrative rather than a stack of notes, you might consider doing the same for your city.

Non-City Games

You might have a really neat idea for a game that doesn't revolve around a city—such as a ragtag alliance of supernaturals who fix imbalances in the Nevernever, a group of friends taking a road-trip across America to help out people in need on the Paranet, or perhaps a globetrotting wizard strike force. In those cases, it might seem like this method of city creation won't help you, but fear not! We have you covered.

To make this chapter work for you, just scale it up. Start by thinking about where your game will take place—that's your "city." The Nevernever is a vast space, but if your whole game pretty much takes place there, then that's your starting point. The same thing goes for a game centered on globetrotting (where your "city" is the world) or something a bit more regional (such as "along Interstate 80" for our road-trip idea).

Once you've decided where your game will take place, briefly discuss it using the "*Vancouver Method*." Come up with three threats and themes, just like you would with a city.

Since the game doesn't entirely take place in the PC's backyards and favorite haunts, the themes and threats should focus more strongly on the PC group. A threat is either hunting the PCs or is why the PCs are traveling. Themes focus on issues like why the PCs continue this life of traveling around, when most people would prefer to settle down.

Once you have your themes and threats, look over the various sections in "*Getting a High-Level View*," (page 33) replacing "the city" with your setting concept. For some concepts, figuring out things like who cares about this place and who wants to rock the boat will make sense. But there will likely be some sections that just don't apply to your concept. Talk it over with the group; if everyone in the group feels like one doesn't work for your concept, skip that part and move on. Try not to skip more than one or two if you can help it, as those answers provide great material for the GM.

Next come locations. Just as you scaled up the idea of "city" to cover a large area, you'll want to scale the idea of "location" to something larger than just a neighborhood or point of interest. What constitutes a location will greatly depend again on your concept. Talk about where you want to set the action and intrigue in your game. A game in the Nevernever could talk about very general locations ("Winter's domain," "Summer's domain," maybe some places of your own creation, like "The Demonic Marches") or specific places (Arctis Tor comes to mind).

A road-trip game could have all sorts of stops on the way—big cities to small towns to barren landmarks—and would probably benefit from more locations than normal, since the PCs are unlikely to revisit one after leaving. Map out your trip and pick some places that look promising. It's fine to have the occasional long stretch of empty road—many an adventure has started because someone has run out of gas…

The thing to keep in mind with these locations is that, like with scaling up cities, your troubles and themes need to fit much more closely to what the PCs are doing. Themes and threats that don't directly tie into the PCs still work in a city-based game because the PCs live and work around the effects of those themes and threats—they can't avoid them forever. With a larger-scope game, the PCs can very easily just move on to a new place. So, the threats and themes you come up with for the locations should tie into some reason why the group is there and why they wouldn't just pack up and leave.

Just remember The Golden Rule of City Creation: if you get stumped, move on and let the GM deal with it later. If coming up with a theme, trouble or face for a location seems particularly difficult, skip it. The scale of your concept is much broader than a city, so don't work too hard in trying to fit all the ideas in. Just run with what works.

On-The-Fly City Creation

So, if all that above seems like a lot of work—and for some people, it will—we have another way to go about this. However, it's going to be a bit more work during play for the GM, as she'll have to make up all sorts of stuff in the moment that you would have otherwise come up with beforehand. Still, it's an option, and a pretty useful one if you want to try playing this game in one evening.

First, come up with your city. Talk about it for a few minutes, as we mention in "*Choose Your City*" on page 26. You may also want to refer to "*The Vancouver Method*" on page 28.

Second, pick a single theme or threat for the city. Just one—that'll be the focus of the first session of play. You'll need to make that an aspect, as mentioned in "*Finalize Your City*" on page 46. If you're having some difficulty here, we have a few generic examples on the following page to get you started.

Third, stop! You're done with making your city, for now. Go and make characters, if you haven't already, and get to playing!

Later, after you're done playing and if you're going to continue this campaign in the future, maybe you'll want to sit down and do the rest of city creation. If you don't feel it's necessary, don't bother! But we recommend it, because it'll give you more things to play with, more directions to take the game, and more points where the player characters (and thus the players) can feel a sense of accomplishment and change in the world.

Depending on the play environment, the GM may come completely prepared with a city and initial aspect, and just pitch that idea to the group rather than built it collaboratively. That's fine, but we hope you'll take time together as a group to build the city later.

The Demonic Marches?

This idea I had of a demilitarized zone between Faerie and Hell. It's not like I have a lot to work with here, even with all you've told me about the Nevernever.

What Harry doesn't know about the Nevernever could fill dozens of books.

Gee, Billy, thanks for using one of my most emotionally painful experiences EVER as fodder for your artists on the next page. It doesn't help that you've got Elaine looking so helpless there. Justin had really done a number on her mind.

I'm trying to stay true to the source material, Harry, and... well, honestly, you're the source material. Something about your life keeps putting the people you care about in jeopardy. I can't help that!

Sample Themes & Threats for On-the-Fly Creation

Themes

Desperation Rules All: Just about everyone you meet—the mayor at City Hall, the junkie in the alley, the vampire in the shadows—is against the wall and desperate. Who knows what they'll do?

Lies, Deceit, and Betrayal: Everyone has an agenda but nobody's admitting it; good luck finding anyone you can trust.

Picking Up the Pieces: The city is recovering from a major supernatural conflict. The usual way of doing things has been swept aside, and the supernatural community is still figuring out what happens next. This might dovetail nicely with Power Vacuum, below.

Dark Alleys but Darker Hearts: While petty crime runs rampant, some of the criminals are more than just criminals.

The Golden Rule: Whoever has the gold makes the rules. Everyone in this town has a price, and nothing is more important than money—except possibly the power it buys.

Threats

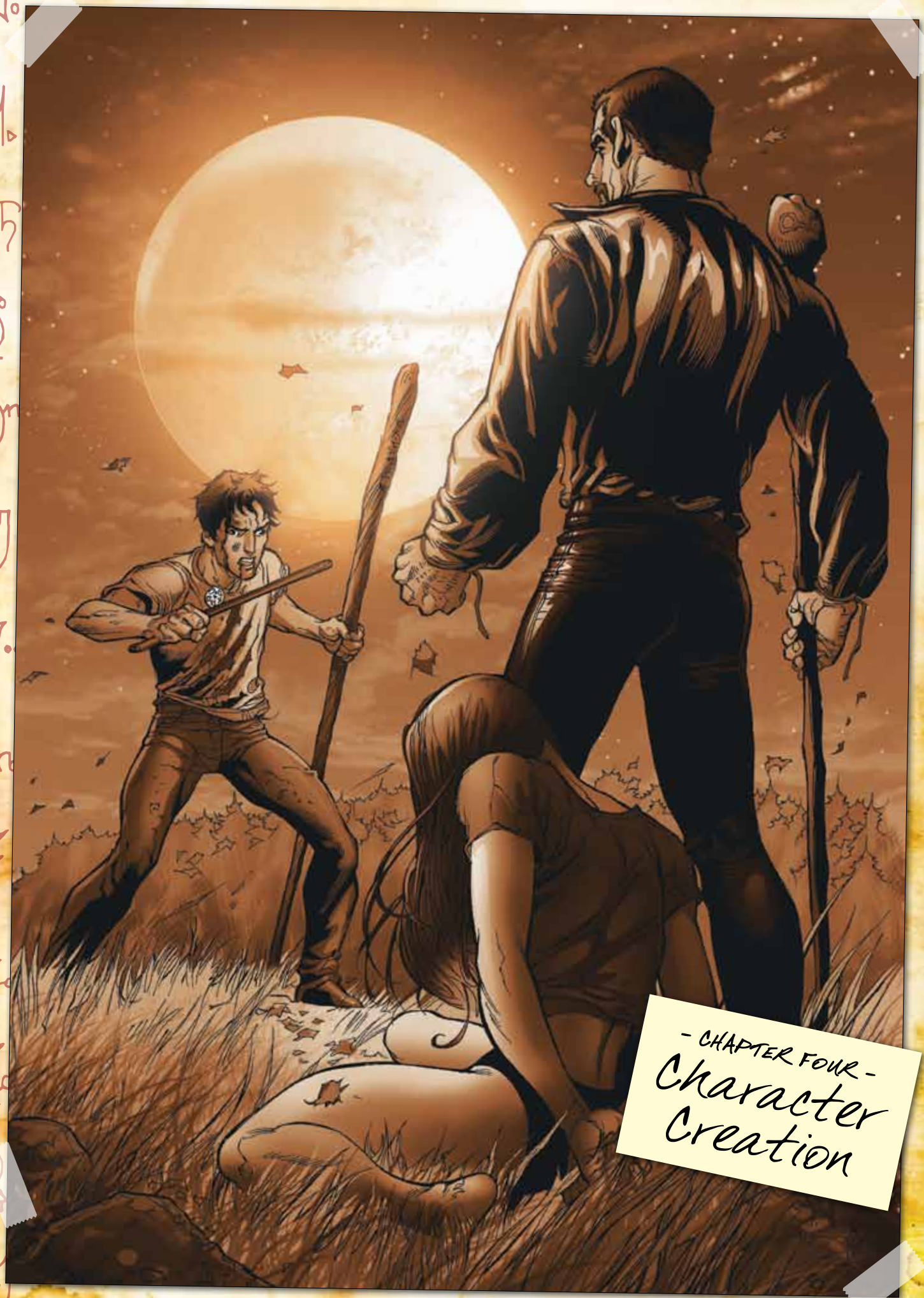
The purpose of an aspect is to provide a way for the PCs to interact with parts of the setting. Faces—the characters bringing a threat to the city—may work better than actually turning a threat into an aspect, but you can certainly have city aspects that encompass threats, just like you have theme aspects. Here are some examples that demonstrate both approaches.

Threat: Two powerful supernatural factions control parts of the city, and they're on the brink of war against one another—one false move will cause an explosion of epic proportions. An aspect representing this might be This Place is a Powder Keg. Faces representing this threat might be opposing vampire lords, one White Court and the other Red Court. Their high concepts are Lord of the Red/White Court, their motivations are "I will destroy my enemies no matter what the cost!" Just use the stats for standard Red Court and White Court vamps (*What Goes Bump*, pages OW87 and OW89) and bump a couple of the Inhuman powers up to Supernatural.

Threat: A cruel sorcerer has held the city in his thrall for decades, controlling politicians and business leaders through blackmail, threats, and outright psychic domination. He's amassed incredible money and power over the mortal and, to a large degree, the supernatural affairs of the city. However, people are beginning to find out what's been going on, and they don't like it. A revolt is brewing. An aspect representing this might be A Hard Rain's A-Gonna Fall. Faces representing this threat might include the sorcerer himself, whose high concept is Power-Mad Sorcerer and motivation is "This city is mine, and if I can't have it nobody will!" For someone this powerful, just borrow the stats of one of the Senior Council (see Ebenezar McCoy, for example, OW192). Another face might be an Idealistic Wizard, whose motivation is "People of the City, unite!" and whose stats can be derived by using the template for Wizard on page 86 of *Types & Templates*, with a couple of Refinements.

Threat: Nobody's in charge, and everyone thinks *they* should be. If you want a specific aspect, this is a Power Vacuum. Faces could be leaders of any remaining power centers (such as the Idealistic Wizard from the above example, but now not so idealistic...), a Crime Lord (motivation: "Power means money"; stats: see John Marcone, OW187), etc.

Threat: After many years of drought, this long, hot summer is the final straw—the city faces a series of water shortages culminating in a wave of fires, both accidental and not. Malevolent supernatural forces line up to take advantage of this City on Fire. Faces could be a Corrupt City Fire Marshal (motivation: "Cover Your Ass"; stats, just use Police Detective in *What Goes Bump*, OW68, and call it close enough), a mundane Heroic Firefighter (motivation: "We gotta defend those houses"; stats and info, use the First Responder EMT in *What Goes Bump*, OW68), and a summoned but uncontrolled Fire Demon (motivation: "I rejoice in the ashes"; stats: grab the stats for Kalshazzak, OW36, and replace "spits acid" with "breathes fire"). So... who summoned that fire demon?


- CHAPTER FOUR -
Character Creation

Character Creation Is Play

Many roleplaying games propose a simple idea: you create characters, then you begin play. We think it's even simpler than that. We say, "As you create the characters and the world they inhabit, you have begun play." The style of character creation we present here does three things to reinforce that.

First, **character creation tells part of the characters' stories**, just like any other game session does. Characters that really come alive have histories of their own and with each other—character creation establishes where they've been, what they've done, and why they continue to act together against the threats they face. It's like there's a game that's been going on that you're now stepping into—it's just that the most interesting parts haven't happened yet.

Second, **it sets the stage for the next part of the story**. Each arc of a roleplaying game sets up the next, so that they flow into one another in a natural evolution of the story. Character creation needs to set up the first story arc the same way any other phase of play does.

Third, **character creation in The Dresden Files RPG is highly collaborative**. As with city creation, character creation is best done as a group activity. Doing all of this together will build a stronger foundation for your characters and your game. The character creation process includes a number of built-in ways to establish connections between the characters and the setting. Combined with city creation, character creation can take a *full session* to do—this provides a good opportunity to lay out the basics of the setting and allows everyone to learn about it and about each others' characters. This sort of collaborative story building is, in a word, play.

Pack mentality, eh?

Hey, if it works. . .

During character creation, you and the other members of your group will talk about your characters, make suggestions to each other, discuss how to make your characters connect, and even establish some of the campaign background. You'll want to keep good notes on this process. You can use the character sheet and phases worksheet in the back of this book or downloadable at *www.dresdenfilesrpg.com*.

You'll start by determining your character's **high concept** (page 54) and **trouble** (page 55). Then you'll build your character's back-story, a process that takes place over five phases. Each phase outlines events in your character's life, though not necessarily in chronological order. The first phase sets up the character's general background, concept, and early history. The second covers the events that pull the character into the Dresdenverse and the setting of the specific game your group is playing. The last three phases delve into your character's past adventures—both his own and those of the other players' characters.

Your Character Idea

Character creation starts by thinking about the concept for your character. It could be modeled after a character from a favorite novel or movie, or it could be based around some specific thing that you want to be able to do (like break boards with your head, turn into a wolf, blow things up, etc.). But what really drives a character concept forward, and creates the kind of drama that leads to riveting stories, is a combination of your character's **high concept** and **trouble**.

Remember: when choosing your high concept and trouble, it's critical to determine *why* your character does what he does; his trouble should be a prime driver of that *why*. PCs in The Dresden Files RPG are exceptional. They could very easily find success in less exciting situations than those that come their way in play. You must figure out *why* your character is going to keep getting involved in these more dangerous things. If you don't, the GM is under no obligation to go out of her way to make the game work for you—she'll be too busy with other players who made characters that have a reason to participate.

Because picking a template, high concept, and trouble are all linked, they're grouped together. You'll likely have more success coming up with a compelling character idea if you think about them as one big step rather than as separate steps. Only after you have that (and a name, of course!) can you move on to the Phases part of character creation.

That said, don't worry too much—if during a later stage your character idea evolves into something new, that's great! You can always go back and tinker with any of these early decisions. (In fact, you'll see that happen in the example.)

Choose a Template

First, you'll need to choose a **template** from *Types & Templates* (page 72). There, you'll find packages that tell you what things you'll *have* to do in the rest of these steps in order to build a character that matches your concept.

Most templates (in fact, all but the Pure Mortal template) require a certain high concept (page 54) and some supernatural powers (page 158), as well as suggesting some skills to take. Thus, the initial template decision *will* impact everything else down the line.

The template is *crucial* to creating your character; even with Quick Character Creation (page 68), this step is necessary.

Power Level

Of course, you'll want to know how the **power level** affects your options regarding magic. After all, this is a game about werewolves and wizards—not boardroom meetings!

Feet in the Water (6 refresh, 20 skill points, skill cap at Great): At this level you are just getting started with your supernatural life. Highly customizable templates aren't going to be able to add much, so this is really the "enhanced mortal" game—you can do stuff that even the best of humanity cannot (but only barely).

Typical characters might include a Focused Practitioner (page 76), a Lycanthrope (page 79), a Minor Talent (page 80), a Red Court Infected (page 80), a True Believer (page 82), a weak Were-Form (page 82), or a White Court Virgin (page 85). Some base templates are technically affordable, but you'll seem pretty weak until you can afford some upgrades. These include a Champion of God (page 73), a Changeling (page 74), an Emissary of Power (page 75), or a Faerie Court Knight (page 78).

Up to Your Waist (7 refresh, 25 skill points, skill cap at Great): This level really represents "name level" for a lot of the templates—that point at which you can definitively be respected as being "that thing," whatever it is. You might not be all that experienced, but at least you start to register on the supernatural sonar.

The Sorcerer template (page 81) opens up as an option, or you can customize the first level options pretty well.

The Steps of Character Creation

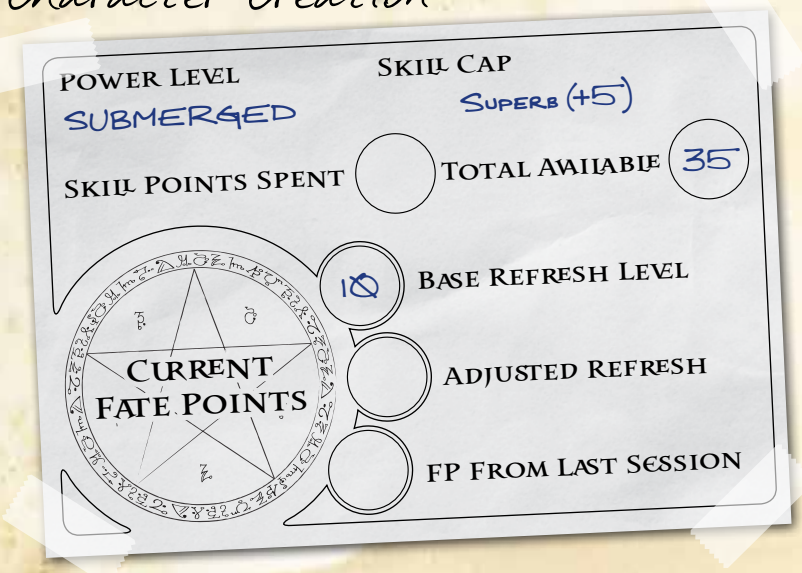
Here's a quick overview of the steps you'll go through in order to create a character.

GM Preparation:

- Review the chapters most crucial to character creation: *Types & Templates*, *Aspects*, *Skills*, *Mortal Stunts*, and *Supernatural Powers*.
- Set the **power level** (see this page) for the campaign; this will indicate which sorts of character concepts are valid and which aren't.
- Make sure each player has a copy of the character sheet and the phases worksheet.
- Have some paper or index cards handy for the Phases part of character creation.

Creating Characters:

1. Sketch out your Character Idea:
   - Pick a **template** from *Types & Templates* (page 72), making note of all of the things you *must* do in order to build a character of that type. Many templates will place restrictions on what you can do in these steps.
   - Zero in on the character's **high concept** (page 54) by picking an **aspect** that sums up the character in a phrase. Keep in mind that many templates require that the high concept indicate the template type.
   - Come up with some sort of **trouble** (page 55)—a recurring complication or issue that makes life particularly interesting and troublesome for your character. This is an **aspect** as well.
   - Make up a **name** for your character (page 58).
2. Build your Character's Background:
   - Go through the first three phases (page 59), picking one **aspect** for each phase.
   - Work with the other players by participating in their past adventures and having them participate in yours to round out the final two phases (page 61). You'll pick an **aspect** for each phase here, too.
3. Finish up your Character:
   - Assign your **skills** (page 65).
   - Select **stunts** and **supernatural powers** (page 66).
   - Determine your final **refresh level** and your **stress** and **consequences** (page 68).



Chest-Deep (8 refresh, 30 skill points, skill cap at Superb): At this point, you're playing with at least minor-league power. You'll have taken a lot of the upgrades to many of the templates at this stage.

Wizard (page 86) and White Court Vampire (page 84) are now character options.

Submerged (10 refresh, 35 skill points, skill cap at Superb): You are a major-leaguer; refined customization and combination are options for all templates—it becomes possible at this stage to be a Champion of God with a Sword of the Cross, or a Werewolf who can do earth evocations, or a Red Court Infected who becomes the Emissary of the Buddha as a way of taming his impulse control. For the stronger templates, this power level provides some tweaking; for the weaker ones, it provides the chance to make your character supernaturally one of a kind.

> **Example:** *Jim looks through Types & Templates and decides that, since the GM is planning a Submerged power level, he'll pick the Wizard template. That means he'll need a high concept that declares his character's nature as a wizard, and he'll have to take the various supernatural stunts listed.*

SEE, REDUCE MY ENTIRE LIFE TO A FEW WORDS, WHY DON'T YOU?

That's how this game works!

COULD I PLAY A GHOUL NINJA?

Uh . . . yes!

I LOVE THIS GAME ALREADY. NO, WAIT, THE OPPOSITE.

High Concept

Once you've decided on the template, you probably have a direction for your **high concept** (unless you chose the Pure Mortal template, in which case you'll need to come up with a character idea now). But there's more to this step than just saying "Oh, I'm a wizard." (After all, your template does that!) Here's where you start nailing down the core parts of your character that make him a *unique* version of that template.

In short, your high concept is a phrase that sums up what your character is about—*what* and *who* he is. It's an **aspect** (page 98), one of the first and most important ones for your character.

Think of this aspect like your job, your role in life, or your calling—it's what you're good at, but it's also a duty you have to deal with, and it's constantly filled with problems of its own. That is to say, it comes with some good and some bad. There are a few different directions you can take this:

You could take the idea of "like your job" literally, *as with Karrin Murphy's high concept:* Special Investigations Lead Detective.

You could just go with the template's requirement *without further embellishment, relying on the rest of character creation to show how you're more than just a carbon copy of that character type, as with Michael Carpenter's high concept:* Knight of the Cross.

You could throw on an adjective *or other descriptor to the template's requirement to further define your own take on the idea, like Molly Carpenter's high concept:* Wizard-In-Training.

You could mash up *the required high concept from the chosen template with a role or profession in society, as with Harry Dresden's high concept:* Wizard Private Eye.

You could combine the requirement from the template with how your character is connected to his family, *especially if his family is well-connected or well-known. This is seen with Thomas Raith's high concept:* Fallen Prince of the Raith Family *(since everyone in the Raith family is a White Court Vampire, the high concept still covers the requirement in an implied way).*

These aren't the only ways to play with your high concept, but they'll get you started. As long as it gives you a good idea about how the core of your character can be a boon *and* a hindrance, you're on your way to a satisfying, succinct high concept for your character. But don't stress out over it—the worst thing you can do is overcomplicate this by trying to make it into too big of a deal. You'll be coming up with six other aspects over the course of character creation—you don't have to get it all nailed in one.

High concepts can have overlap among the characters. As long as you have something to distinguish how your character is different from the others, you should be okay. For instance, if two wizards exist in the same game, you might have Harry's high concept as Wizard Private Eye while Carlos Ramirez's would be Hot-Shot Warden—they're both wizards, but now we're clear on how they're *different*. If a high concept *must* be similar among all the characters (such as if the GM pitches an idea for an all-Warden campaign), it's crucial that their troubles differ. Otherwise, you may have characters that feel too similar to each other.

(If you're having a problem here, read over the next section on troubles. That part might unlock some ideas for you.)

Example: *After picking the wizard template, Jim has to work his character's nature as a wizard into the high concept. He likes the idea of a down-on-his-luck detective type of character, so he mashes it together to make Wizard Private Eye.*

Trouble

In addition to a high concept, every character has some sort of **trouble** (which is also an aspect) that's a part of his life and his story. If your high concept is *what* or *who* your character is, your trouble is the answer to a simple question: *what complicates your high concept?*

Trouble has many forms, though it can generally be broken up into two types: internal conflicts/personal struggles, and external problems. Both threaten the character or are difficult to contain. Whatever form the trouble takes, it drives the character to take action, voluntarily or not. A character that does not have some sort of recurring issue is going to have a much harder time finding motivation, and that sort of character doesn't tend to have many reasons

Intro to Choosing Aspects

A lot of character creation focuses on coming up with **aspects**—some are called high concepts, some are called troubles, but they basically all work the same way. Aspects are one of the most important parts of your character, since they define who he is and they provide ways for you to generate fate points and to spend those fate points on bonuses. If you have time, you really might want to read the whole chapter we have dedicated to aspects before you go through the process of character creation.

In case you're pressed for time, here are some guidelines for choosing aspects.

Aspects which don't help you tell a good story (by giving you success when you need it and by drawing you into danger and action when the *story* needs it) aren't doing their job. Those aspects which push you into conflict—and help you excel once you're there—will be among your best and most-used.

Aspects need to be both useful and dangerous—allowing you to help shape the story and generating lots of fate points—and they should *never* be boring. The best aspect suggests both ways to use it and ways it can complicate your situation. Aspects that cannot be used for either of those are likely to be dull indeed. Bottom line: if you want to maximize the power of your aspects, *maximize their interest.*

When you're told you need to come up with an aspect, you might experience brain freeze. If you feel stumped for decent ideas for aspects, there's a big section focusing on several methods for coming up with good aspect ideas in *Aspects* (page 108).

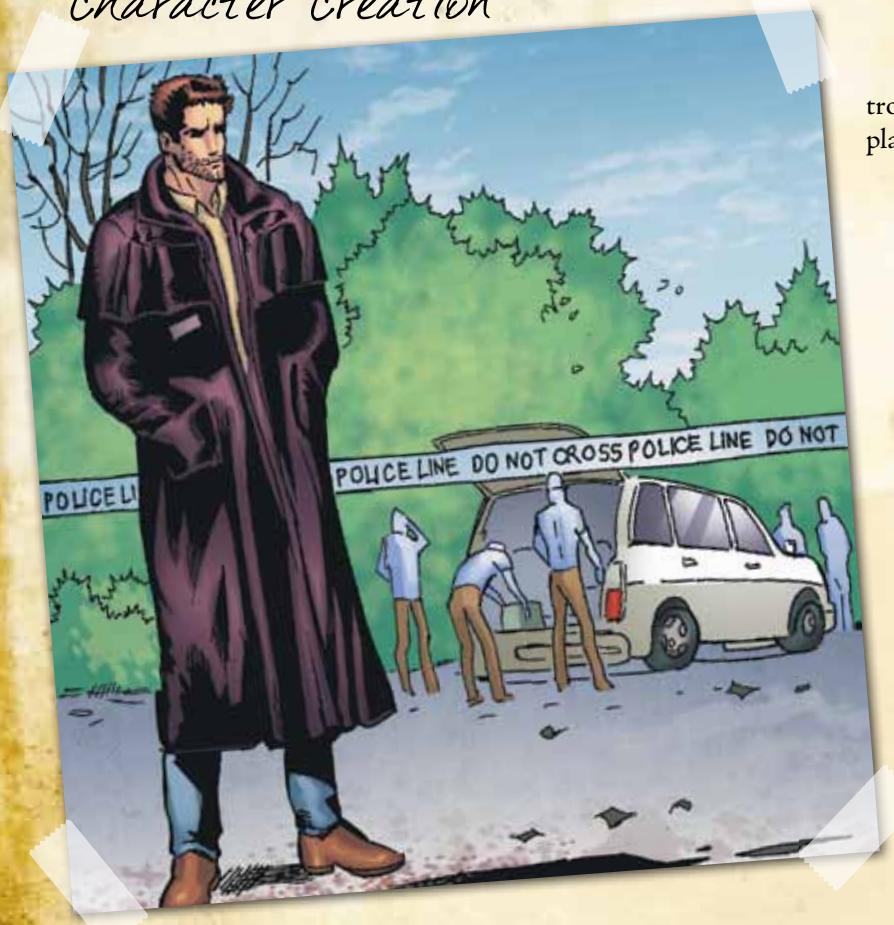
If your character doesn't have many connections to the other characters, talk with the group about aspects that might tie your character in with theirs. This is the explicit purpose of Phases Four and Five (page 61)—but that doesn't mean you can't do it elsewhere as well.

If you ultimately can't break the block by any means, don't force it—leave it completely blank. You can always come back and fill out that aspect later, or let it develop during play—as with the On-the-Fly Character Creation rules (page 69). *Ultimately, it's much better to leave an aspect slot blank than to pick one that isn't inspiring and evocative to play.* If you're picking aspects you're not invested in, they'll end up being noticeable drags on your fun.

I DO NOT LIKE WHERE THIS RUNNING EXAMPLE IS GOING. DIDN'T YOU HAVE A WHOLE BUNCH OF CHARACTERS FROM THE BALTIMORE EXAMPLE LAST CHAPTER?

Trust me, you'll laugh.

I know I will.



I could do with some boring right about now.

You get it in your love life, boss.

If I sent Christmas cards, you would not get one.

to go out and do the crazy things that make for adventure. Without adventure, things would just be boring!

Most characters have several troubles they have to deal with, often reflected by the rest of their aspects (which you'll select as you create your character), but there is usually *one core trouble* that shapes the character. This aspect will probably be the one most thoroughly exercised during play (at least in terms of compels—see page 100).

Trouble is a potent hook for the GM and players to draw on for ideas. As you think about your character, try to figure out what kinds of problems you want your character to *continually* deal with. Try to pick one that has no easy solutions—many may not have solutions at all!

Also, troubles are one of the major ways that characters get compelled, which is important for getting fate points back. So it's to your advantage to play to your character's troubles in the adventure as much as you possibly can. (Troubles are like giant red flags to the GM saying "Hey, pick me!")

Come to think of it, my Trouble is probably "Harry Dresden Is My Friend."

Ha ha. Very funny.

To get a sense of the different forms that troubles can take, consider some of the main players in the Dresdenverse:

Some external troubles are about the difficulties of being able to do your job *or your role in the first place—the sort that you have to live with rather than beat up—like Karrin Murphy's* Unbelieving Bureaucracy. *This has no easy solution, because it's not something she can just fix by kicking ass and taking names.*

Some internal troubles are about your darker side *and how that interferes with what you need to be in order to live up to your high concept, like Harry Dresden's* The Temptation of Power. *This has no easy solution, because it's about an ongoing internal and external struggle, and minor victories and defeats abound.*

Some troubles are hard to peg down between internal and external, like those that involve loved ones. *Often, they don't even seem like troubles at all, until they're threatened. Such is the case with Michael Carpenter as a* Family Man, *or Thomas Raith's* True Love in My Family's Hands. *These troubles do not have easy solutions, since neither character is going to walk away from those they love in their time of need.*

Sometimes the trouble is something you bring down upon yourself, *which also crosses the line between internal and external. Molly Carpenter's* Doom of Damocles *falls under this—it's internal because it reflects the temptation of quick power, and it's external because the White Council watches her with unforgiving scrutiny.*

Since your trouble is an aspect, it's something you should also be able to invoke, right? (What's "invoke"? See page 98.) Because we've been so focused on how this complicates your character's life, it's easy to miss how a trouble also *helps* your character.

In short, your experience with your trouble makes you a stronger person in that regard. Dealing with personal struggles leaves you vulnerable to being tempted or cajoled, but it can also give you a sense of inner strength, because you know the sort of person you want to be. External problems often cause trouble, but

people *do* learn hard lessons from the troubles they deal with. They especially learn how to maneuver around many of the smaller issues their troubles present.

Here's the "bright side" to the troubles we've mentioned:

Murphy's Unbelieving Bureaucracy *often makes her life hard when her job comes into contact with major supernatural entities, but she can also use her experiences dealing with her superiors and fellow cops to know who will give her slack, who she can trust, and who will believe her when she says something "crazy."*

Harry's The Temptation of Power *aspect represents the dark part of himself, but because he's used magic for foul purposes, he's in a good position to defend against forces wielding black magic, to resist temptations, and even to use some of the "greyer" magic he knows. (Same deal with Molly's* Doom of Damocles*, which comes from a similar origin.)*

As a Family Man*, Michael has to deal with the allies of darkness threatening his family; but his family is also a source of strength, and anyone who sees him in action knows he will fight tooth and nail for them. (The same can be said for Thomas Raith's* True Love in My Family's Hands*.)*

When you're setting up a trouble, it should be the sort of issue that's not going to paralyze the character completely. If the trouble is *constantly* interfering with the character's day-to-day life, he's going to spend all his time dealing with it rather than other matters at hand (like, perhaps, the current adventure). There has to be some wiggle room between "continually" and "constantly." You shouldn't have to deal with your inner conflict or external pressure at every turn—unless that's the core of what that particular adventure is about.

Let's again consider some of the main characters who inhabit the Dresdenverse.

Murphy could avoid her trouble entirely if she really wanted to. There's plenty of normal crime to deal with, and if the weird stuff slips between the cracks, who cares? (Besides the victims, of course. And therein lies the proverbial rub.)

If Harry's life was calm, it wouldn't be too hard to stay on the straight and narrow. He intellectually knows that the power of dark magic is not worth the price, but every now and again, things get really bad and he has to make a choice. Suddenly he has to decide what's worth more.

Similarly, Michael's life is usually pretty clear-cut. He goes out, fights the good fight, his family understands and supports this, he comes home, and all is well. That's fine until his vocation threatens his family—then the decision becomes much murkier. For Thomas' trouble, the Raiths do treat Justine well—she's a useful agent, and she's also a lever to use on Thomas. (Think "overhanging threat" here.)

While Molly is under the constant threat of capital punishment, she has friends and family (and a hell of an experienced teacher) that go the extra mile to help her stay on the right path. She is not alone in her struggle, but that doesn't mean she's immune to it during times of crisis.

Before you go any further, talk with your GM about your character's trouble. At this point, make sure you're both on the same page in terms of what it *means*. Both of you may want to look at how this aspect might be invoked or compelled (see "*Getting on the Same Page*" on page 112 in *Aspects*) as one way to make sure you're both seeing the same things—or to give each other ideas. Plus, the GM will come away from this conversation knowing what you want out of your trouble, better equipped to make it an important part of the game.

Example: *Jim has a phrase in mind for his trouble,* Doom of Damocles*. He takes a moment and talks with the GM to decide what that means—the character's on probation, as someone who once used magic to kill. If he does it again, he will be executed. The GM questions this as a trouble, because it can really only be used once and, when it is, it's pretty final. Jim offers an idea that some people are on the watch for him and treat him like he's some sort of villainous scum who's just going to give in to the black again. Grinning, the GM starts making up an NPC to fit this idea…*

HEY, I HAVE A GREAT IDEA FOR A NEW GAME! IT'S CALLED PUPPY LURVE. IT'LL BE ABOUT THE TRIALS AND TRIBULATIONS OF SOME TEENAGERS/ TWENTY-SOMETHINGS (WHO CAN SHAPESHIFT INTO WOLVES!) AND THE UPS AND DOWNS OF THEIR INTER-PERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS. PLUS THE HEARTBREAK OF ACNE.

Awesome, I'll playtest it!

Include photos of hot werewolf chicks, and I'll buy it!

SARCASM IS LOST ON YOU TWO.

William, in the examples above you're saying Harry's Trouble is The Temptation of Power — but in the last example on this page it's The Doom of Damocles...?

Yeah – it's not obvious at first, but his Trouble aspect will change over the course of character creation.

THE DRESDEN FILES ROLE-PLAYING GAME
CHARACTER PHASES WORKSHEET

CHARACTER: HARRY DRESDEN	PLAYER: JIM B.
TEMPLATE: WIZARD	HIGH CONCEPT ASPECT: WIZARD PRIVATE EYE
MUSTS: EVOCATION -3, THAUMATURGY -3, THE SIGHT -1, SOULGAZE, WIZARD'S CONSTITUTION	TROUBLE ASPECT: THE DOOM OF DAMOCLES

Names

So, this guy named Jim is playing ME, huh? I hope he gets it right!

If you haven't already, it's time to give your character a name. You can name your character whatever you want, but often character names have a certain poetry to them. Think about other characters that are similar to the high concept you have in mind, and how their names say a little something about who they are.

Example: *Jim wants to make a wizard who specializes in throwing around fire and is extra-hard on locations due to property damage. These ideas make him think of Dresden in World War II, when it got bombed to hell and gone. The character'll also be a private eye, and he has recently seen the HBO movie* CAST A DEADLY SPELL, *about a normal private eye in a world of magic. One of the characters in the movie has a distinctive way of saying, "Haaaarry wants to see you." The name "Harry" gets stuck in Jim's head, and so he runs with it, combining it with the earlier idea—and thus, Harry Dresden is born.*

A-bsolutely WRONG. It's simple: my dad's last name was "Dresden" and I'm named after of one of his heroes: "Harry" Houdini.

By the way, "Jim" – ROLL BETTER, when I'm hip-deep in crap, ok?

Jerk.

Well, if you want to pretend that Jim is real and you're a made-up character...Works for me.

Shut up, Bob.

Characters and Betrayal

Some players might be interested in high concepts or troubles that make their characters prone to acts of betrayal. If you want to make your character's story and decisions about whether or not he'll betray his friends, there needs to be some *reason* why betrayal is a valid option—and in a gaming group where the characters to be betrayed are played by your friends, that's a hard one. If betrayal is being wicked just for the sake of being wicked, that's not a compelling choice. Much more interesting is something like a trouble pulling you between two strong loyalties—say, a conflict between loyalty to the mundane mortal mafia and a responsibility to the edicts of the White Court.

I know people in the Mafia who will buy this book. They would resent the lack of capitalization.

The Phases

Important: Before moving on to this step, you need to have figured out your template, high concept, trouble, and name.

Each **phase** is a section of your character's background—the key events in his past that form who he is. There are five in total, and each gives you an opportunity to define a new aspect for your character.

The first two ("Where Did You Come From?" and "What Shaped You?") can be done in either order. It's the third ("What Was Your First Story?") that really supercharges this process, defining the initial adventure your character "starred" in and anchoring relationships with the other characters in play. The last two phases ("Whose Story Has Crossed Your Path?" and "Who Else's Path Have You Crossed?") represent your character's participation in other characters' stories, showing how his overall story collided with the events of *their* stories and got him involved.

Each phase will ask you to write down two things on the phase worksheet:

First, a summary of the general details of what happened in that phase of your character's life, known as the phase's **summary**. A paragraph should suffice, but you can write more if you're inspired. Each phase will suggest different ideas for the summary.

Second, an aspect that reflects some part of that phase. The aspect can cover the general vibe from the summary, or it can focus on some piece of it that still resonates with your character in the present day. Some phases will suggest specific directions for their aspects.

If you're stalled on developing an aspect from the summary you've written, take a look at *Aspects* (page 108). And as with aspects, if you later come up with new ideas for a summary that you've already written down, you can always come back and change it. Nothing is ever written in stone. Except headstone inscriptions.

Where Did You Come From?
(Background)

This phase covers the character's youth; if your character is older than 20 to 30 at the time the game starts, this phase expands to cover much of his young adulthood. In an abstract sense, this first phase deals with the core concept for your character as a "normal person" and is an ideal launching pad for your character's high concept (page 54). Even a supernatural character has some strong ties to the mortal idea of free will. This is why your wizard isn't just a wizard, since that concept exists solely in the supernatural world. He's also a private detective, and that's what grounds him as a normal guy.

Youth is a time of adventure and excitement, as well as the time when we are most shaped by our family and environment. This phase is a chance to talk about your character's family and upbringing.

When writing the summary of this phase, consider answers to the following questions:

- What nation is your character from? What region? What culture?
- What were his family's circumstances like? (Rich? Poor? Scholarly? Isolated? Pious? Political?) How big is the family? (Small? Average? Large? Very large?) What's your character's relationship with his family? (Loving and close? Volatile? Non-existent?)
- How was your character educated?
- What were your character's friends like? Did your character get into much trouble in his youth?
- If your character is supernatural, how early in his history did he learn this? Did this cause problems?

When coming up with this phase's aspect, consider one that's tied either to the most important or significant events of the phase or to the character's national, cultural, or familial upbringing.

Example: *Jim's background for his character has Harry growing up the son of a stage magician. His mother died before he ever got to know her, so young Harry was always traveling with his father. Eventually, his father died as well, and Harry found himself adopted by Justin DuMorne, a wizard who recognized Harry's bloodline and potential. Since* Wizard *is already covered in Harry's high concept, Jim thinks about what would ground Harry in the mundane elements of his background.*

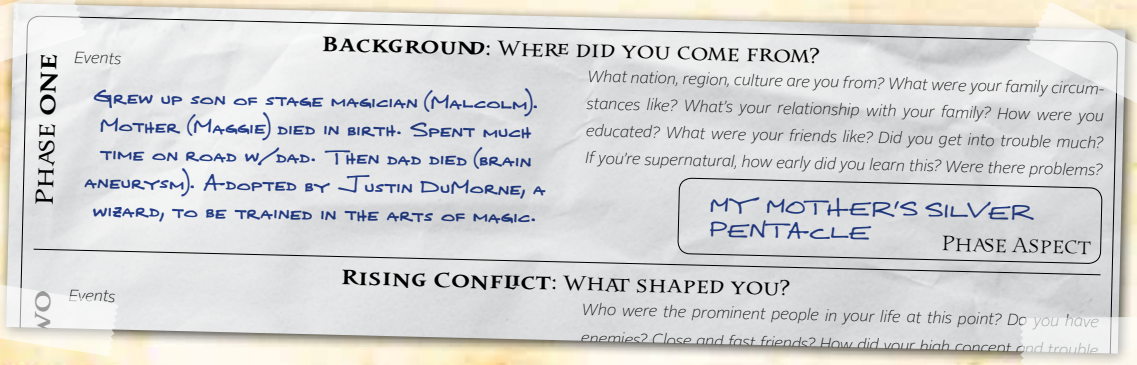
Losing his parents seems to be the most significant thing from this time, and it certainly lays the groundwork for Harry's emotional troubles down the road. Toying with aspect ideas such as Angry Orphan *and* Adopted Prodigy*, he settles on* My Mother's Silver Pentacle*, something tangible he can keep, both a memento and a reminder of his isolation and loss.*

I'M NOT LAUGHING YET, BILLY. THINK HARD ABOUT CHANGING THIS "RUNNING EXAMPLE" CHARACTER.

What Shaped You?
(Rising Conflict)

This phase represents your character's "middle history," when his high concept most strongly comes to the forefront. Think about his high concept and a situation that would call it into sharp relief, *forcing* him to make a choice or otherwise take decisive action.

This is also the time when your character starts coming into his own, beginning to realize his true potential. This may be when supernatural power awakens within your character, or simply when he is first faced with a difficult choice between right and wrong and he steps up to bat as a protagonist within the game's larger story.


PHASE ONE

Events

GREW UP SON OF STAGE MAGICIAN (MALCOLM). MOTHER (MAGGIE) DIED IN BIRTH. SPENT MUCH TIME ON ROAD W/DAD. THEN DAD DIED (BRAIN ANEURYSM). ADOPTED BY JUSTIN DUMORNE, A WIZARD, TO BE TRAINED IN THE ARTS OF MAGIC.

Background: Where did you come from?

What nation, region, culture are you from? What were your family circumstances like? What's your relationship with your family? How were you educated? What were your friends like? Did you get into trouble much? If you're supernatural, how early did you learn this? Were there problems?

MY MOTHER'S SILVER PENTACLE

Phase Aspect

Rising Conflict: What shaped you?

Events

Who were the prominent people in your life at this point? Do you have enemies? Close and fast friends? How did your high concept and trouble

Rising Conflict: What Shaped You?

PHASE TWO

Events

Met first love, Elaine Mallory, a fellow apprentice of DuMorne's. Eventually learned that DuMorne was a bad dude. Justin enthralled Elaine, I escaped, sought help of faerie godmother (Leanansidhe), returned to kill Justin. Placed under the Doom, adopted by Ebenezar.

Who were the prominent people in your life at this point? Do you have enemies? Close and fast friends? How did your high concept and trouble aspects shape you and events around you? What were the most significant choices you made? What lessons did you learn in this time?

Chivalry is not dead, dammit — Phase Aspect

Some questions to consider during this period:

- Who were the prominent people in your character's life at this point? Does he have enemies? Close and fast friends?
- How did your character's high concept and trouble aspects shape him and the events around him? (Assuming your character came into his high concept and trouble by this point.)
- What were the most significant choices your character made?
- What lessons did this time period teach your character?

Example: *The most important person in Harry's life at this time is his first love, Elaine Mallory, a fellow apprentice of DuMorne's.*



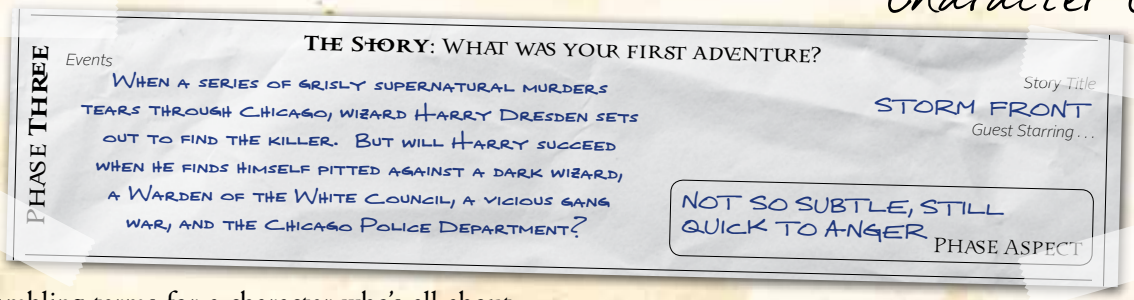
Harry eventually realizes that Justin DuMorne is a bad guy, interested in pursuing dark magic and human sacrifice. Justin enthralls Elaine and forces her to put a binding spell on Harry, intending to enthrall him as well.

Harry barely escapes with a demon at his heels and seeks the help of Leanansidhe, his honest-to-god faerie godmother. He strikes a bargain to gain enough power to face Justin, and he returns, killing his former master. Eventually he's brought before the White Council for violating the First Law, but his execution is stayed when Ebenezar McCoy offers to sponsor him, taking over his wizardly training. But Harry remains under the Doom of Damocles; one wrong step, and it's off with his head.

There's a lot of stuff going on here which is good potential aspect material. Harry's already got the Doom of Damocles as his trouble, and Jim doesn't really want to change that, so the GM asks him what else the events of the phase might say about Harry as a character. Jim decides that Harry has a really serious chivalrous streak to him, and that Justin's enthrallment of Elaine was a huge emotional catalyst in that situation. He chooses Chivalry Is Not Dead, Dammit as his aspect.

What Was Your First Adventure? (The Story)

The third phase is your character's first true adventure—his first book, episode, case, movie, whatever—starring him. You'll need to come up with a title for this adventure. (This can be a lot of fun, but don't burn too much time on it.) A quick way to do it is to pick an arbitrary rule to guide the selection of the title. The rule could be as simple as "two words, each with the same number of letters"—that gets you Storm Front, Fool Moon, Grave Peril, and so on. Or it could be thematic, like poker or



gambling terms for a character who's all about luck—Suicide King, Aces High, All In.

Check it out...William picked up on your casefile-naming pattern, boss. Should we tell him about how it's your insurance against head injuries?

You just did.

Oops!

"Oops" my eldritch, spellslinging ass.

Then, you need to think up and write down the basic details of this story for the phase's summary. The story doesn't need to have a lot of detail—in fact, a pair of sentences (see below) works pretty well, because your fellow players will add in their own details to this past adventure in the next two phases (as you will to theirs).

If you find yourself stuck, look first to your character's trouble. Find a dilemma that has a chance of throwing that idea into question or focus again. That said, you needn't *directly* address the issue there—just provide an opportunity for it to be a factor.

You can also look to a tried and true author's trick—the "story skeleton" (or "story question").

A story skeleton fits this format:

> *When [something happens], [your protagonist] [pursues a goal]. But will [your protagonist] succeed when [antagonist provides opposition]?*

Simple as that, but powerful when put into effect. Consider:

> *When a series of grisly supernatural murders tears through Chicago, wizard Harry Dresden sets out to find the killer. But will Harry succeed when he finds himself pitted against a dark wizard, a Warden of the White Council, a vicious gang war, and the Chicago Police Department?*

I am unsure whether to be impressed or offended at this description of the STORM FRONT case. Leaning toward "offended."

Many good stories can begin with a simple story question much like the one shown above. It introduces a bunch of key ideas for Harry's story—the White Council, Warden Morgan's involvement and antagonism, Murphy and the C.P.D., and Chicago as the backdrop. Great stuff—and it does it in two sentences.

> **Example:** *Jim uses the story skeleton concept (see above) as the basis of Harry's third phase and titles it* Storm Front. *Harry ends up in trouble with all sorts of authorities—wizards and cops at the least—over the course of the story and ruffles a lot of feathers, insisting on getting the job done himself, his way. He settles on* Not So Subtle, Still Quick to Anger *as his aspect, reflecting Harry's particularly bull-headed method of getting things done.*
>
> *After coming up with this idea, Jim rethinks the* Doom of Damocles *trouble, because defeating the dark sorcerer probably convinces the White Council of his good intentions—or at least leaves them with testimony suggesting he should be taken off probation. He decides to change his trouble to something else, and eventually settles on* The Temptation of Power *as a new trouble, suggesting a pattern where people offer him power he doesn't want, but often needs.*

Hating on this "Jim" guy now.

Whose Path Have You Crossed? (Guest Starring)

In this phase, you tie the group together by having each character contribute a minor, *supporting* role in another character's first adventure. For instance, imagine the role that Karrin Murphy, Michael Carpenter, or a pack of amazing young werewolves might play in a novel about Harry's exploits.

The Alphas aren't A-mazing (50) — they're more like Remarkable (30).

My ego is wounded, but I'm loving your gamer snark.

Stories and Index Cards

In phase three, you each came up with your own story. In phases four and five, you're going to trade those stories around as other players' characters get involved. Figuring out how your character fits into someone else's story can be hard to do if you've handed your character phase worksheet to another player, so we want to make a suggestion: use index cards (or whatever scraps of paper you have).

During the third phase—when you're writing your story down on your worksheet—take a card and write your character's name, story title, and story skeleton or summary on it. Then you'll pass the card around during the fourth and fifth phases so people can contribute to your story. That way, you'll still have your character worksheet when you're writing your contributions and aspects, and other people will know what stories they're supposed to hook into.

You will now give your story (which is where our index card suggestion comes in really handy) to another player. You can pass your stories to the left or right, or shuffle the stack and hand them out randomly (trading with the person to your right until you each have a title that isn't yours).

However you decide to do it, every player should now be holding someone else's adventure. Your character has a supporting role in the story you're holding, which you get to come up with right now. Briefly discuss the story with the player whose adventure it is and add a sentence or phrase to the summary or story skeleton to reflect your character's supporting role.

Next, write the title of this story and your character's contribution down on your phase worksheet. This is important, because your character gets an aspect from the supporting role he plays in the adventure. The person whose story it is should also write down the contribution, if there's room on his sheet.

Supporting roles come in three forms: they complicate a situation, solve a situation, or both.

Complicating a situation: Your character has managed to make some part of the story you're guest starring in uncertain. Of course, since that happened in the past, we know you got out of it all right (or mostly all right, as indicated by the aspect you take). When describing this, don't worry about how the situation is resolved—leave that for someone else, or leave it open. Descriptions like "Trying to save a girl, Michael starts a giant monster fight" or "Thomas gets captured by the monster" are enough to get some ideas flowing.

Solving a situation: Your character somehow solves a complication that the main character in the story has to deal with, or your character aides the main character in the central conflict. When describing this, you don't have to mention how the situation was created, just how your character takes care of it. Descriptions like "Murphy travels with Harry to the Nevernever, watching his back" or "Billy and the Alphas take on some foes to buy time for Harry" are enough to give us an idea of what happens.

Complicating and solving: Here, your character either solves one situation but creates another, or creates a situation but later solves a different one. Mash up the two ideas, using the word "later" in between them, such as: "Murphy comes to Harry, stumped by a mysterious case. Later, she helps him fight off a beast in a department store."

> **Example:** *Jim ends up with the card for Shannon's character, Karrin Murphy. They talk about what he might contribute to the story, and Jim advocates for the direct route—Harry comes in with a display of power and helps save the day. Shannon agrees.*
>
> *The card for Murphy's "Restoration of Faith" story says: "When a child is missing, beat-cop Karrin Murphy goes looking for her. But will she succeed when a troll comes into the picture?" Jim adds, "Harry Dresden gets right up in the troll's face, trades some quips with it, and unloads on it—using its* own *weapon to smash it!"*
>
> *Jim decides to take* Epic Wiseass *for Harry, as befits both the quips and the nature of his achievements.*

HEY, "RESTORATION" WAS MY CASE. WHAT GIVES?!

Who Else's Path Have You Crossed?
(Guest Starring Redux)

The fifth phase is identical to the fourth phase, with the sole caveat that no character can contribute to the same story twice. Thus, each character should have a starring role in his own story, as well as a supporting role in two others.

Example: *"Welcome to the Jungle"—When an ape called Moe stands accused of a murder he did not commit, can Willamena Rogers clear his name?—Mortal cop Karrin Murphy is assigned to the case, and doesn't buy the official story. She calls in a consultant she happens to know who needs the money...—Harry uncovers a plot cooked up by a trio of hecatean hags, and manages to defeat them with the help of Moe the Gorilla.*

Ah, OK, I think I see what you're doing here.

Fewer Than Three Players?

Phase five assumes that you'll have at least three players. If you have only two, consider the following ideas:

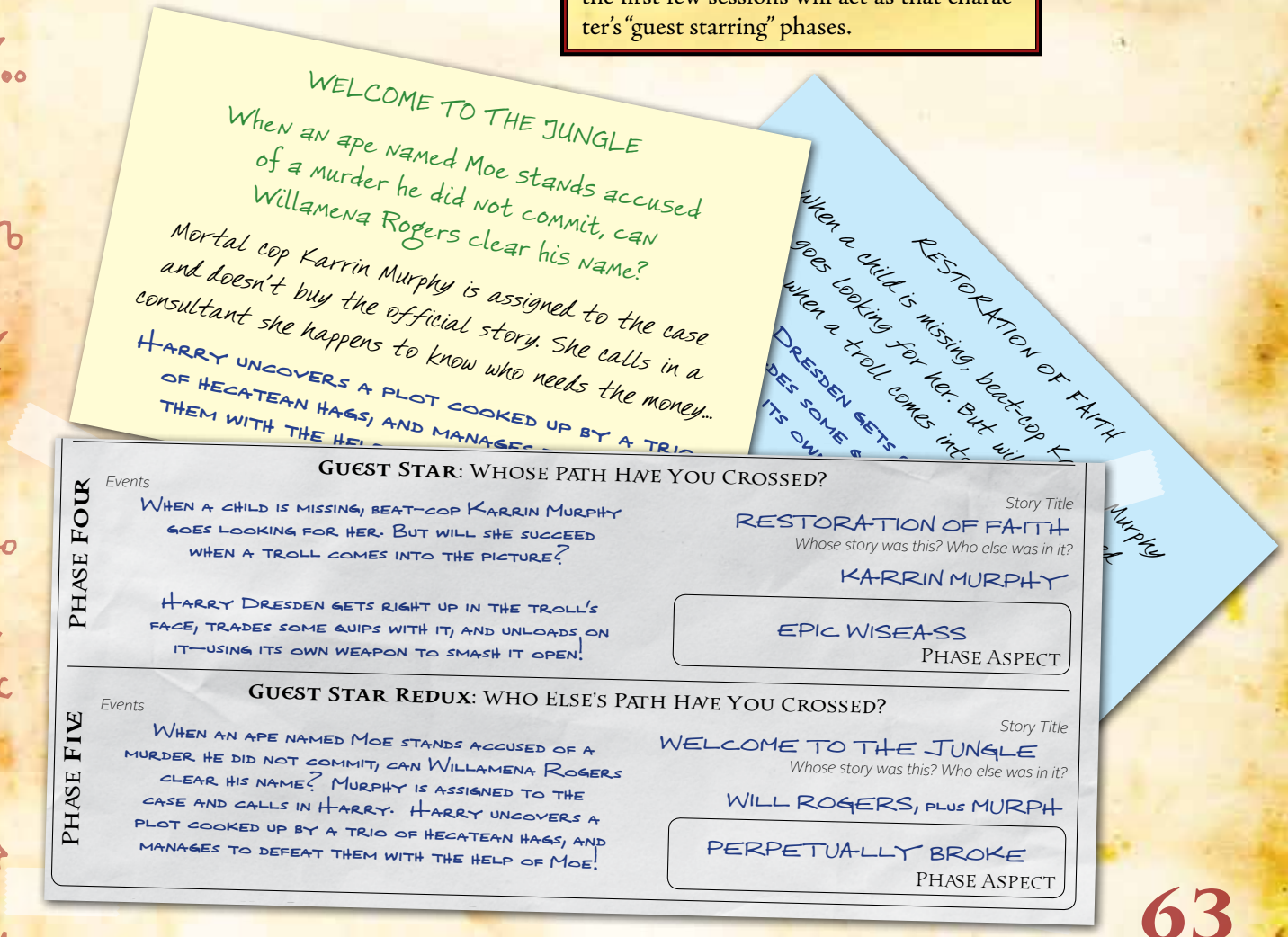
Skip Phase Five and just make up another aspect, either now or in play.

Skip Phase Five and just play with six aspects.

Come up with a third, joint-story together, and write about how you each feature in that one.

Have the GM also make a character. The GM won't actually *play* this character alongside the PCs, though—it should just be an NPC. Such an NPC can be a great vehicle for kicking off a campaign—if a friend they're tied to during character creation mysteriously disappears or even dies, that's instant fuel for drama.

If you only have one player, consider skipping phases four and five, leaving the aspects blank to be filled in during play. In a sense, the first few sessions will act as that character's "guest starring" phases.



The Dresden Files Role-Playing Game
Character Phases Worksheet

Character: HARRY DRESDEN	Player: JIM B.
Template: WIZARD	High Concept Aspect: WIZARD PRIVATE EYE
Musts: EVOCATION -3, THAUMATURGY -3, THE SIGHT -1, SOULGAZE, WIZARD'S CONSTITUTION	Trouble Aspect: THE TEMPTATION OF POWER

Phase One

Background: Where did you come from?

Events

GREW UP SON OF STAGE MAGICIAN (MALCOLM). MOTHER (MAGGIE) DIED IN BIRTH. SPENT MUCH TIME ON ROAD W/DAD. THEN DAD DIED (BRAIN ANEURYSM). ADOPTED BY JUSTIN DUMORNE, A WIZARD, TO BE TRAINED IN THE ARTS OF MAGIC.

What nation, region, culture are you from? What were your family circumstances like? What's your relationship with your family? How were you educated? What were your friends like? Did you get into trouble much? If you're supernatural, how early did you learn this? Were there problems?

Phase Aspect: MY MOTHER'S SILVER PENTACLE

Phase Two

Rising Conflict: What shaped you?

Events

MET FIRST LOVE, ELAINE MALLORY, A FELLOW APPRENTICE OF DUMORNE'S. EVENTUALLY LEARNED THAT DUMORNE WAS A BAD DUDE. JUSTIN ENTHRALLED ELAINE, I ESCAPED, SOUGHT HELP OF FAERIE GODMOTHER (LEANANSIDHE), RETURNED TO KILL JUSTIN. PLACED UNDER THE DOOM, ADOPTED BY EBENEZAR.

Who were the prominent people in your life at this point? Do you have enemies? Close and fast friends? How did your high concept and trouble aspects shape you and events around you? What were the most significant choices you made? What lessons did you learn in this time?

Phase Aspect: CHIVALRY IS NOT DEA-D, DA-MMIT

Phase Three

The Story: What was your first adventure?

Events

WHEN A SERIES OF GRISLY SUPERNATURAL MURDERS TEARS THROUGH CHICAGO, WIZARD HARRY DRESDEN SETS OUT TO FIND THE KILLER. BUT WILL HARRY SUCCEED WHEN HE FINDS HIMSELF PITTED AGAINST A DARK WIZARD, A WARDEN OF THE WHITE COUNCIL, A VICIOUS GANG WAR, AND THE CHICAGO POLICE DEPARTMENT?

Story Title: STORM FRONT

Guest Starring . . .: KARRIN MURPHY

Phase Aspect: NOT SO SUBTLE, STILL QUICK TO ANGER

Phase Four

Guest Star: Whose Path Have You Crossed?

Events

WHEN A CHILD IS MISSING, BEAT-COP KARRIN MURPHY GOES LOOKING FOR HER. BUT WILL SHE SUCCEED WHEN A TROLL COMES INTO THE PICTURE?

HARRY DRESDEN GETS RIGHT UP IN THE TROLL'S FACE, TRADES SOME QUIPS WITH IT, AND UNLOADS ON IT—USING ITS OWN WEAPON TO SMASH IT OPEN!

Story Title: RESTORATION OF FA-ITH

Whose story was this? Who else was in it?: KARRIN MURPHY

Phase Aspect: EPIC WISEA-SS

Phase Five

Guest Star Redux: Who Else's Path Have You Crossed?

Events

WHEN AN APE NAMED MOE STANDS ACCUSED OF A MURDER HE DID NOT COMMIT, CAN WILLAMENA ROGERS CLEAR HIS NAME? MURPHY IS ASSIGNED TO THE CASE AND CALLS IN HARRY. HARRY UNCOVERS A PLOT COOKED UP BY A TRIO OF HECATEAN HAGS, AND MANAGES TO DEFEAT THEM WITH THE HELP OF MOE!

Story Title: WELCOME TO THE JUNGLE

Whose story was this? Who else was in it?: WILL ROGERS, PLUS MURPH

Phase Aspect: PERPETUALLY BROKE

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Finish Up Your Character

With all this background and your aspects, you have a pretty good idea of who your character is, and you can write down your final set of aspects on your character sheet. But it'll take more than ideas to kick supernatural butt! That's where your character's skills, stunts, and powers come in.

Skills

Once you have mapped out your character's phases and chosen aspects, it's time to pick skills, which are detailed in their own chapter (page 120). Depending on the power level of your game (see page 53), a character will get between 20 and 35 skill points to spend.

Superb	5 points (if allowed)
Great	4 points
Good	3 points
Fair	2 points
Average	1 point

Mediocre is the default for any skill you do not buy. You may not buy any skills at a level higher than the skill cap (page 53 again). In addition, *you cannot have more skills at any level than you have one level down from that.* So if you buy a Fair skill for 2 points, you need to have at least one Average skill as well for 1 point.

This cascades as you go further up: in order to have one Superb skill, you'd also need to have at least one Great, one Good, one Fair, and one Average skill.

Think of skill ranks as building blocks stacked atop one another, each level representing a rank. Each block needs one below it to support it. That would look like this:



This seems weird. People aren't so structured.

It's a game abstraction; roll with it.

Skill Packages

If the skill columns seem confusing to you, don't worry—here are a few possible ways (far from all of them) to spend your points at the 20, 25, 30, and 35 points levels:

20 points could be…

- 3 Good, 3 Fair, 5 Average (11 total skills)
- 1 Great, 2 Good, 3 Fair, 4 Average (10 total skills)
- 2 Great, 2 Good, 2 Fair, 2 Average (8 total skills)
- 1 Superb, 1 Great, 1 Good, 2 Fair, 4 Average (9 total skills) *

25 points could be…

- 4 Good, 4 Fair, 5 Average (13 total skills)
- 1 Great, 2 Good, 4 Fair, 7 Average (14 total skills)
- 2 Great, 2 Good, 3 Fair, 5 Average (12 total skills)
- 1 Superb, 2 Great, 2 Good, 2 Fair, 2 Average (9 total skills) *

30 points could be…

- 5 Good, 5 Fair, 5 Average (15 total skills)
- 2 Great, 3 Good, 4 Fair, 5 Average (14 total skills)
- 3 Great, 3 Good, 3 Fair, 3 Average (12 total skills)
- 2 Superb, 2 Great, 2 Good, 2 Fair, 2 Average (10 total skills)

35 points could be…

- 5 Good, 6 Fair, 8 Average (19 total skills)
- 3 Great, 3 Good, 3 Fair, 8 Average (17 total skills)
- 1 Superb, 2 Great, 3 Good, 4 Fair, 5 Average. (15 total skills)
- 2 Superb, 2 Great, 2 Good, 3 Fair, 5 Average (14 total skills)

So, when you're arranging your skills, be careful that they all fit into this structure—you can't, for example, have this:



If you want the Average skill and the Good skill, you need to have a skill at Fair "between" them.

You might want to browse the list of skills (see page 120), write down the ones you're most interested in taking, then select one of the "packages" from above that has enough total skills to cover all of them.

Billy, I've put a * next to some of the packages above which have skill points like a lower power level game, but Superb skill caps like they're from a higher power level game.

They're there for groups who want to raise the game's cap. Good catch!

Example: *Given the power level, Jim has 35 points to spend. Since Jim picked a Wizard for Harry's type, he looks up the Important Skills in the template (page 86): Conviction, Discipline, Endurance, and Lore. Looking up how all those skills work, he knows he wants Harry to have at least one Superb skill. Since he wants Harry to not just be a good wizard, but also a decent private eye, he opts for more skills rather than two Superbs (although it does take a few minutes for him to make that decision).*

He picks Conviction as his top, or apex, skill—Superb. Endurance will be handy, both as a wizard and as someone who gets rough and tumble, so he takes that as one of his Great skills. Jim also picks up Intimidation at Great; people will think twice before crossing Harry. With his top three skills figured out, Jim noodles over the rest for a little bit, swapping around until he's happy.

Stunts and Powers

Once you have your skills, choose stunts and powers for your character. You'll be spending points off of your refresh level, so make sure you know the base level for your game; it will vary depending on what the GM decides (see page 53). Also remember that, at the beginning of the game and at every refresh, you'll get fate points up to your refresh level—refresh you spend now means fate points you'll have to earn later.

Choosing Stunts

Stunts allow you to use your skills in ways that go beyond the typical skill rules; they're discussed in full in *Mortal Stunts* (page 146). You should usually choose stunts that are associated with your character's supernatural powers or most highly-ranked skills. That said, you can take stunts tied to any skill—even ones left at default—if you want (provided you meet any other prerequisites).

Each stunt you take reduces your character's refresh level by one. In general, a character with a non-supernatural high concept should consider spending close to half of his refresh allotment on stunts. Non-supernatural characters who go beyond that point tend to have made a lot of compromises and sacrifices to be who they are—John Marcone (OW187) is an example of such a character—and those who fall short of that point may feel like they're not getting enough bang for their buck.

Choosing Powers

Supernatural powers are similar to stunts, but far more potent. Because of that, some powers cost more than one point off your refresh level. You can read all about them in *Supernatural Powers* (page 158).

You *must* take all of the powers that are mandatory for the character template you're using, so make sure you have those figured out first. After that, you may only take powers that fit your character template and the high concept selected for your character—a vampire can take powers that would give him supernatural strength and speed, but a wizard cannot.

Important: PCs may not reduce their refresh rate below one. This is the line dividing a mortal's free will from a monster's unnatural compulsions. (Even non-supernatural characters *cannot* cross this line, lest they become the kind of "human monster" that haunts the worst events of our history.)

Example: *This part is pretty straightforward for Jim, as the Wizard type forces him to spend a great deal of his 10 refresh right away. The powers he must take—Evocation, Thaumaturgy, the Sight, Soulgaze, and Wizard's Constitution—cost him seven to start. With three points of refresh left, and knowing that he cannot spend that last point and still be a valid character, Jim thinks about other stunts and powers.*

Given the background, the GM suggests Lawbreaker (First), since Harry has killed with magic. Jim takes that, bringing his cost to –8. But Jim also wants to give Harry something to better support the more mundane side of being a private investigator, so he looks through Mortal Stunts. *He stops at the Investigation stunt Listening (page 153). Since all mortal stunts cost one refresh, taking that brings his cost to –9—which means Jim is done picking stunts and powers.*

The Dresden Files Role-Playing Game
Character Sheet

Character: Harry Dresden

Player: Jim B.

Aspects

High Concept
Wizard Private Eye

Trouble
The Temptation of Power

Other Aspects
My Mother's Silver Pentacle
Chivalry is not dead, dammit
Not so subtle, still quick to anger
Epic Wiseass
Perpetually Broke

Skills

Superb (+5) Conviction
# of slots: 1

Great (+4) Endurance, Intimidation
# of slots: 2

Good (+3) Alertness, Discipline, Lore
# of slots: 3

Fair (+2) Athletics, Contacts, Investigation, Rapport
# of slots: 4

Average (+1) Fists, Presence, Scholarship, Stealth, Weapons
# of slots: 5

Stress

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Physical (Endurance)	○	○	○	○	✓	✓	✓	✓
Mental (Conviction)	○	○	○	○	✓	✓	✓	✓
Social (Presence)	○	○	○	✓	✓	✓	✓	○

Armor, etc:

Consequences

Type	P/M/S	Stress	Used?	Aspect
Mild	Any	-2	○	
Moderate	Any	-4	○	
Severe	Any	-6	○	
+1 Mild	Mental	-2	○	
			○	
			○	
Extreme	Any	-8	○	*Replace permanent*

Stunts & Powers

Cost	Ability
-1	Listening (Investigation) – +4 to hear things, but Alertness drops to Terrible while Listening.
-3	Evocation
-3	Thaumaturgy
-1	The Sight
+⊗	Soulgaze
+⊗	Wizard's Constitution
-1	Lawbreaker (First) – One strike?

Specializations

Evocation
Elements (Fire, Air, Spirit)
Power (Fire +1)

Thaumaturgy
Control (Divination +1)

Focus Items

Staff
(+1 Offense Con, Spirit)

Blasting Rod
(+1 Offense Con, Fire)

Shield Bracelet
(+1 Defense Con, Spirit)

Enchanted Items

2 slots open for potions, etc

-9 Total Refresh Adjustment

The Ladder

Legendary	+8
Epic	+7
Fantastic	+6
Superb	+5
Great	+4
Good	+3
Fair	+2
Average	+1
Mediocre	+0
Poor	-1
Terrible	-2

Power Level: Submerged

Skill Cap: Superb (+5)

Skill Points Spent: 35 Total Available: 35

Current Fate Points

10 Base Refresh Level

1 Adjusted Refresh

FP from Last Session

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Final Refresh Level, Fate Points, Stress, & Consequences

Hey, Billy, you say stress "boxes" here, but everything I've seen shows circles instead of boxes.

Boxes, circles, dots—call them whatever you like. The Fate system we're basing this on calls them boxes, so we're sticking with that in the text.

With your stunts selected, determine your final refresh level. Your starting refresh is determined by the GM (between 6 and 10—see page 53) and is reduced by each stunt or power taken. No PC should be allowed to have a refresh level below one (see above), so make sure the simple arithmetic works out!

Once you have your final refresh level, take a fate point for each point of final refresh.

Example: *Harry has a final refresh of 1—Jim gets this by applying the –9 cost to the starting Submerged power level of 10 refresh. He gets one fate point—looks like he'll be taking lots of compels later!*

Finally, you should calculate your character's stress tracks and determine how many consequence slots they start with. All characters have a physical, social, and mental stress track. (Some characters also have a hunger stress track; see Feeding Dependency on page 190.) By default, each stress track has two boxes, but this number is modified depending on your skills. The Endurance skill (page 130) adds boxes for physical stress, Presence (page 136) adds boxes for social stress, and Conviction (page 124) adds boxes for mental stress. (Discipline, page 127, is used for the hunger stress track.) Consult the individual skill descriptions to see how many boxes you should add to each track.

Each character also has one mild, moderate, and severe consequence by default. You can take these in response to any kind of attack (physical, mental, or social)—that's what "ANY" means on the sheet. Superb skills, certain stunts, and certain powers will give you additional consequence slots, but only for a specific kind of attack (physical *or* mental *or* social). If you have a skill, power, or stunt that does this, make sure you write down the type of consequence you get on your sheet under the appropriate column (see Harry's sheet on the previous page for one example).

Example: *After choosing skills, Harry has an Endurance of Great, a Presence of Average, and a Conviction of Superb. Looking at the skill descriptions, this indicates he has a physical stress track of four boxes, a social stress track of three boxes, and a mental stress track of four boxes. He does not have Feeding Dependency, so he doesn't need to calculate hunger stress. The only additional consequence slot he gets is for his Superb Conviction, giving him an extra mild consequence against mental attacks.*

Quick Reference

Mediocre: 2 boxes total

Average or Fair: 3 boxes total

Good or Great: 4 boxes total

Superb+: 4 boxes total, +1 mild consequence of appropriate type.

Conclusion

At the end of the character creation exercise, each player should now have a complete character with:

- A summary of his early history.
- A summary of his rise to power and call to action.
- His first story and two other past adventures he appeared in, establishing ties to the characters of at least two other players.
- Seven aspects (one for the high concept, one for the trouble, and one for each of the five phases).
- A number of skills (depending on the number of skill points, ranging from the upper single digits into the teens in quantity).
- His mortal stunts and/or supernatural powers.
- His base and final refresh level.
- Fate points based on his final refresh level.

Quick Character Creation

Sometimes you don't have time to do a full character creation and you just want to get started. In those situations, simply begin with a blank character sheet, and then briskly run through the highlights of the process. This method means characters will be mostly defined through the first few sessions of play.

Important: If this is your first time playing The Dresden Files RPG, we highly recommend going through full character creation. Yes, it's longer, but it's also built to help you get used to things in the game. (Plus, it's a lot of fun to collaborate.)



Minimal Preparation

There are a few short steps to do at the very beginning. Each player should choose the following:

A name and brief description of your character: "Brief" means a sentence or two.

A skill package: Choose one of the sample skill point spending patterns from page 65 of this chapter, based on the number of skill points the GM has set for the game. Each available skill slot in the package should be written down as an empty slot on your character sheet to be filled later.

A character template: Choose one of the sample packages from *Types & Templates* on page 72. Write down and rate each important skill and any required powers on the sheet. Be sure to keep track of your refresh (page 20).

The character's apex skill: Select and write down whatever skill the character has at his highest skill level. (If you want a little more detail than that, go with the character's "top three" skills.)

High concept: You at least need to have your character's high concept aspect written down—everything else can wait.

Refresh level: Your refresh level is based on the power level the GM has chosen for the game (page 53), modified by the cost of the powers required by your chosen template. This will be reduced further if you buy any more powers or any stunts.

Fate points: You get fate points equal to your refresh level.

That's it. You're free to fill in more details as you see fit, but that's all you *need* to start playing. All the other decisions that you normally make during character creation can be done during play, revealing details about the character through the emerging story.

On-the-Fly Character Creation

Once play begins using the above method, whenever the GM calls for a roll on a skill, you have three options:

1. If you already have the skill on your sheet, roll it normally.
2. If you don't have it on your sheet, you can write it down in any empty slot and roll it at the chosen level.
3. You can roll it at Mediocre.

This way, you end up filling out your character's skill slots over the course of play. Similarly, you may write in aspects, stunts, and powers at the point where you would use them.

Every time a stunt or power is taken, your character's refresh rating drops by the appropriate amount—as does his current supply of fate points. So, if your character suddenly reveals an ability that costs 3 refresh points, the refresh rating on your sheet drops by 3 *and* you must spend 3 fate points immediately. If you don't have enough fate points, you can still buy the power, but on credit—spend the fate points you have and you "owe" the GM the rest (page 91). You won't earn fate points when you're compelled until you're all paid up.

OH, NOW WE GET TO THE BALTIMORE EXAMPLE...

THANKS. THANKS FOR THAT.

REALLY.

You'll still need to come up with your character's trouble aspect and the other five aspects. As with skills, if you need an aspect and still have a slot open, you can create a new aspect on the spot. The new aspect come into play immediately—you can invoke it or the GM can compel it.

Example: *One of the players for the Baltimore group, Fred, shows up late and ends up making his character, Biff Abernathy, on the fly. To keep things simple, he decides to play a Pure Mortal. He's got his concept: an old school chum of Evan's who comes from a wealthy family but just likes to play sports and practice martial arts—phrased as the high concept* Trust Fund Jock*—and he's pretty sure he wants his apex skill to be Fists. He picks a skill package and writes Fists down in the top slot. He also knows he wants Fair Rapport (not Good or higher, even though he has some slots there) to charm the ladies, so he writes that down now in one of the Good slots. Fred has a pretty good sense of Biff's background, so he picks two aspects that reflect his history: he takes "*Sorry, Mouse,*" Said Maya's* Steady Boyfriend *as his trouble—establishing his connection to another PC—and* Krav Maga *(a brutal martial art style, he explains). With that in mind, he's ready to go, with nine fate points in hand (seven for the game's power level, plus two for the Pure Mortal bonus).*

In his first scene, Biff is "investigating" the Montrose wine cellar when he hears a noise. Suddenly, a wine rack is pushed over on him! The GM calls for an Athletics roll to get out of the way. Biff doesn't have that yet, but Fred decides that's something he wants Biff to excel at, so he writes it down in an empty Great (+4) slot and rolls. The roll comes up terribly, so Fred decides Biff needs an aspect. He decides on Dumb Luck*, reflecting how Lady Luck seems to have her way with Biff, for better and for worse. Fred describes how the rack just happens to catch on a loose brick in the wall, stopping mere inches before it hits him. He invokes the new aspect to get a reroll which ends up being far less embarrassing. Biff has dodged the rack attack and now faces his opponent.*

Later, the GM describes a scene where he's caught dodging some representatives from a research group looking for a private grant. Biff comes up with an idea for his character and suggests a new aspect the GM could immediately compel: Mortimer Louis Abernathy III*. Fred explains that this aspect means he's not just some "anonymous" trust fund jock, but he's someone people know around the city because of his family. And that complicates the situation because it's impossible for him to avoid public attention, even when he might not want it. The GM grins and agrees, giving Fred a fate point for the compel.*

Some Tips to Help With On-the-Fly Creation

Some skills are used often enough for things like combat and other conflict resolution that you may end up feeling frustrated if you don't think to pick them up until it's too late. Make sure you fill in (or at least make decisions about) Athletics, Endurance, and Alertness early on. A fighting skill like Guns, Weapons, or Fists may be important, too.

Mortal stunts and supernatural powers are a lot harder to choose on the fly than skills are. It helps if the GM keeps the character's high concept in mind and suggests a stunt or power when it might be useful—though, thanks to the character templates (page 72), some of this initial guesswork is already done. Be sure to keep track of the refresh cost of stunts and powers.

Stunts usually come out of the skills you've rated near the top of your list. Locate the skill in question in *Mortal Stunts* (page 146). Each skill has a few sets of stunts under it that may be conceptually linked and can help with quick picking. Mortal stunts have a refresh cost of one.

Supernatural powers come mainly from the options in the template. When picking powers, make sure to pay attention to the requirements and, moreover, the refresh cost; you will need to pay out a quantity of fate points equal to the refresh cost in order to select that ability on the fly. Even if you buy your power on credit (page 91), your refresh rate cannot drop below one.

Don't worry about apparent contradictions, such as situations where you pick a skill at a high level after rolling it at Mediocre several times or you choose a stunt or ability which would have made an earlier scene play out differently. *There is no contradiction.* The character was playing his cards close to the vest (Thomas Raith, anyone?) or was just "unlucky" and, like in much adventure fiction, his abilities only matter from the point where they're revealed.



- CHAPTER FIVE -
Types & Templates

Let's Get Cooking

While you and your GM can work together to devise new and strange character types for your own campaign if you wish, the actual Dresdenverse has many already-established peoples (mortal and semi-mortal) to draw from. In game terms, we refer to these "pre-packaged" character types as **templates**. Think of them as recipes for cooking up your characters quickly and easily.

In this chapter, we'll cover those templates best suited for player characters—or at least those that are less prone to turn into zero-refresh-or-below monsters without free will (a look through *What Goes Bump*, OW28, might give you some other notions, if the GM is amenable). We encourage you to look over these options before settling on a character concept for the game; be sure to make note of the **musts** portion in particular, as each template has requirements that must be fulfilled during character creation.

Some of these templates won't be viable for certain power level campaigns. For example, if your GM sets your campaign's starting refresh level at 6, full-blown Sorcerers, Wizards, and some other kinds of creatures are going to be off limits due to their "must" refresh cost of 6 or higher. A starting refresh level of 8 will accommodate *most* of the options here, if barely. Be sure to talk with your GM about the power level for the game, especially if you're interested in playing a specific type of character

It may be possible to *combine* some of these templates, if you can afford each template's musts. However, it will be rare that those costs work out. We haven't seen a Wizard-Lycanthrope-Red-Court-Infected-Changeling-potamus in Harry's casefiles, and you certainly won't see one as a playable character in this game. For good reason—bring that much mashed-up mojo to bear in one character and you're on a fast train to negative refreshville.

Regardless, while the choices listed here are hardly the only ones available in the Dresdenverse, they represent what we think are the best options for the would-be heroes of your game world. Enjoy!

I WANT A DOUGHNUT WITH WHITE FROSTING AND SPRINKLES.

Anatomy of a Template

Look at a template as a recipe. It breaks down as follows:

Description. Every template starts with this, telling you what you can make with it.

Musts. The ingredients, if you will. These are what you *need* to add to make a character of the template's type. You have to take the powers, aspects, and whatnot that are required here.

Options. Think of these as alternate ways to create a more deluxe version of that type of character—would you like a *powdered* doughnut or a *jelly* doughnut?—once you've taken care of the musts.

Important skills. These are skills you need to keep in mind in order to be a particularly effective character of the template's type. In other words, anyone could be a doughnut, but these are what you need to be a *good* doughnut. Each skill listed is affected by a must, though many supernatural powers affect a wide variety of skills beyond these.

Minimum refresh cost. This tells you what the musts total up to in terms of refresh cost, so you can figure out if you can even consider building a character based on the template. If your current available refresh is greater than this minimum, you can. If it's equal or less, it's too rich for you (but GMs should pay attention here, either in terms of setting their campaign's base refresh for PCs or for designing NPCs).

From the casefiles. A few names referenced in the casefiles that are examples of the type.

William, why have you listed Pure Mortal first, but alphabetized everything else?

That's intentional. I put the non-supernatural first, and the supernatural next. There's only one non-supernatural template, so it didn't make sense to me to make that explicit with headers.

You might want to make that reasoning more obvious in the final draft.

I'm still freaking out over this whole "ink writing itself on the page" thing, you know.

YOU'LL GET USED TO IT.



Pure Mortal

Pure mortals are ordinary (or mundanely extraordinary!) people who don't have anything supernatural going on—save perhaps for the company they keep or the things they've seen. Pure mortals can come from all walks of life—police, doctors, mobsters, actors, students, and more. People like Karrin Murphy, Waldo Butters, and John Marcone all qualify as pure mortals, at least as we first meet them in Harry's casefiles.

Pure mortals need a reason to be involved in supernatural goings-on despite a lack of supernatural mojo. This reason can be determined in advance, or it can be supplied quickly during play by dropping the character into the middle of some nasty circumstance—which happens surprisingly often in the Dresdenverse.

While they don't bring any supernatural oomph to the table, pure mortals can still pack quite a wallop in terms of their mundane abilities and "civilized world" influence, connections, and resources. Karrin Murphy has the resources of the Chicago P.D.'s Special Investigations unit available to her, while Marcone has been investing his blood money in expanding his power base—both in mortal and supernatural affairs.

Musts: Pure mortals may not take *any* supernatural powers. In exchange for this restriction, pure mortal characters get a +2 bonus to their starting refresh. If this character ever takes a supernatural power, this refresh bonus goes away immediately (which may be mitigated by dropping one or two mortal stunts).

Options: Pure mortals may take as many mortal stunts as they can afford without putting them at or over the zero refresh cut-off. That said, some NPC mortals do exactly that. (It doesn't always take supernatural power to corrupt someone beyond the capacity for free will…)

Important Skills: None! (Or, to put it another way, *any*!) No supernatural powers means no specific skills to focus on. The sky's the limit.

Minimum Refresh Cost: –0. Instead, *increase* your starting refresh by 2 before taking any mortal stunts.

From the Casefiles: No better example exists than Karrin Murphy (OW199), though the men and women of Special Investigations (OW202) all deserve mention, as do folks like John Marcone (OW187) and Waldo Butters (OW118).

Champion of God

Champions of God are among the rarest of mortal humans, actively called to service by the Almighty (in one of many possible guises) to stand against the darkness and beat it back with the strength and light of their faith. They are *very* few in number, usually limited to the three Knights of the Cross. (Luckily for this game, there are quite a few more faithful, in the form of True Believers, page 82.)

In *your* campaign world there may be more folks than just the Knights of the Cross who can rightly be called Champions of God. Talk to the GM about any ideas you have along these lines.

Would that there were more Michael Carpenters in the world.



Meryl's story was a tragic one, and she made the ultimate sacrifice in order to save her friend. Even though I only got to spend a few minutes around her, I'll always remember her as one of the bravest women I've known.

Musts: Champions of God must have a high concept that is in line with their nature as a true holy warrior—such an aspect (e.g., Knight of the Cross) will be the source of many opportunities for invocation, but it also carries the weight of the responsibilities and codes of behavior expected from such men and women of faith.

Champions of God must have a fairly high Conviction score (Good or higher recommended). In addition, Champions of God must take the following supernatural powers:

- Bless This House [–1] (page 187)
- Guide My Hand [–1] (page 187)
- Holy Touch [–1] (page 188)
- Righteousness [–2] (page 188)

Options: Knights of the Cross carry one of the Swords of the Cross in addition to the above:

- Sword of the Cross [–3] (Item of Power already baked in.) (page 168)

Important Skills: Conviction (page 124), not to mention some combat skills.

Minimum Refresh Cost: –5

From the Casefiles: Michael (OW125), Shiro (OW242), Sanya (OW223).

Changeling

Changelings are half-human, half-faerie people who—at least for the moment—are still living life as mortals. But before each changeling, every day, stands *the Choice*, a razor's edge dividing their mortal nature from their faerie nature. When they call upon the abilities of their faerie blood, they—bit by bit—push themselves closer to becoming full faerie.

In play, this means that any time a changeling purchases new powers, it comes with a clear alteration of the changeling's body, moving him towards a more fae appearance in line with that of his faerie parent (like suddenly growing horns or hooves and so on). Eventually, too much transformation will lead to an inability to retain a grip on mortality, and the character slips into faerie (often becoming an NPC as his power costs rise to exceed his refresh).

Short of that final decision, the character has the option—using his remaining free will—to make the *other* Choice to become purely mortal. Doing so means setting aside all of his faerie abilities—in essence, swapping the changeling template for the pure mortal one. When such a Choice is made, it's permanent—there's no going back.

Musts: A changeling must have a high concept indicating his or her faerie parentage (e.g., Ogre-Blooded Changeling or Half-Pixie Heritage). This aspect brings with it some of the baggage of the fae—a vulnerability to cold iron, supernaturally binding gift-exchanges and other such pacts, etc.—making this ripe for compels. Some compels, if accepted, might even mandate that your character take on another of his faerie abilities.

Note, faerie vulnerabilities mean that—even if your character takes some manner of paranormal toughness or healing abilities—those abilities will *not* protect him against attacks and implements that take advantage of those vulnerabilities.

Options: During character creation, you and your GM must work out a set of supernatural powers that the character *could* inherit from his faerie parent (usually by looking at the list of musts and options for the appropriate faerie template in *What Goes Bump*). If you wish for that to be a mystery, your GM may determine this list in secret and reveal it incrementally

during play as your character draws closer to making his Choice.

Regardless, any ability from this list may be added to your character's sheet at any time during play, reducing current fate points and refresh as indicated by the ability's cost. There are no "take-backs" once this is done, save for the Choice to become fully mortal (see above). If taking on another ability reduces your character's refresh to zero or otherwise fulfills all the "musts" of a faerie of the appropriate type, the changeling's Choice is made and he becomes a full faerie, never mortal again, and now fully subject to the will of the Faerie Courts.

Abilities a changeling might take include, but are not necessarily limited to:

- Inhuman, Supernatural, or Mythic Speed [varies] (page 178), Strength [varies] (page 183), Toughness [varies] (page 185), or Recovery [varies] (page 185)
- Physical Immunity [varies] (page 186)
- Glamours [–2] (page 166)
- Seelie Magic [–4] (page 166) or Unseelie Magic [–4] (page 167)
- Physical traits such as Wings [–1] (page 165), Claws [–1] (page 162), Diminutive Size [–1] (page 163), or Hulking Size [–2] (page 164)

Important Skills: None from musts. Varies depending on options taken.

Minimum Refresh Cost: –0. The total cost for changelings depends entirely on how deeply your character has made the Choice at the start of play, and this will change over the course of the game—that's the point.

From the Casefiles: The changelings in the Summer Knight casefile, though all of them have now either disappeared, died, or made their Choice: Ace (OW99), Fix (OW145), Lily (OW173), and Meryl (OW194).

Scions

Not all scions are changelings and therefore won't fit the Changeling template. Certain kinds of scions—half human, half *something else*—might fall under the Emissary of Power model, as far as templates go. The problem with offering a solid scion template is one of variety. Since there are so many possibilities out there, it doesn't make a lot of sense to offer a formal template for the type (the Nevernever *really* wants to breed with us, it seems). So scions are a classic "grow your own" kind of character.

To get an idea of what you might do to grow your own, start with the Emissary of Power, but also look at the Changeling template—since changelings are the most common type of scion out there.

Technically, Mouse is a scion.

Emissary of Power

Emissaries are mortals who've been saddled with a burden of great power—and great responsibility—by one of the big dogs in the supernatural community: vast powers from Faerie or the outer reaches of the Nevernever, one of the true dragons, or something stranger. Emissaries of Power are often the bearers of items of great potency, able to tap into the power of their patron and bring it to bear on their—and their patron's—behalf. Such champions are usually more *victim* than anything, though—powers such as theirs come at the price of dark bargains, be it a lifetime of thankless servitude and sacrifice, their eternal soul, or other such "petty" things.

Knights of the Faerie Courts are an example of this, as are—by certain lights—Champions of God such as the Knights of the Cross. (Both have their own templates found elsewhere in this chapter.) This template, then, is for the outliers, the cases that aren't covered by the more common, more easily identified Emissary templates. Perhaps there was once an Autumn Court of Faerie that got crushed by Winter and Summer—and some hapless mortal is its champion. Perhaps the dragon Ferrovax has need of a functionary that can handle all of that insignificant mortal nonsense on his behalf. Perhaps something else is afoot.

If you are looking to play *something* supernatural, but unsure what, this template offers plenty of build-your-own options. GMs are, however, encouraged to make the demands of the emissary's patron a regular (if not *constant*) pain in the ass.

Musts: An Emissary of Power must have a high concept that speaks to the bargain or pact they have made with a patron (e.g., Last Champion

Billy, do me a favor and stop inventing problems I don't already have.

Actually, there's some merit—

That goes double for you, Bob!

of Autumn or Ferrovax's Toadie). This aspect brings with it all of the strictures and responsibilities the patron places on your character—this can sometimes be a moving target, since all the implications of "the fine print" in the agreement may not be obvious at first. It may also mean that the patron can occasionally exercise near-total power over the PC (think of Harry's predicament when Mab decides to force him to do something—like stab himself in the hand). You and your GM should discuss the terms of this agreement, to the extent that they're known by your character.

Thanks for that reminder.

In addition, the emissary must take Marked by Power [–1] (page 169), though exceptions may be made if it there's a concept-based reason to do so.

Options: No two emissaries are alike. Many of the abilities in *Supernatural Powers* (page 158) are *negotiably* available, assuming you can afford the refresh cost and match the theme and nature of the emissary's supernatural patron (if the patron is in some way a mystery to the character, the powers taken may offer a hint). Often some of these powers are essentially contained within an Item of Power (page 167). You might also want to take a look at Sponsored Magic as an option (page 183). If you pick up some kind of spellcasting ability, make sure to investigate "*Building a Practitioner*" on page 77.

Important Skills: Varies, depending on supernatural powers and options taken.

Minimum Refresh Cost: –1

From the Casefiles: It's hard to pin down a specific example that isn't represented by another template-type here (the Champions of God and Knights of the Faerie Courts are specific types). But the fact remains that these types of individuals *must* exist in the supernatural landscape.

Billy, wouldn't Vittorio Malvora qualify as an Emissary of Power in the White Night casefile?

Probably, but he would already have the White Court Vampire template, so I thought that might be confusing as an example.

Real life doesn't always fit into neat little boxes.

Focused Practitioner

Focused practitioners are the minor-league of the spell-slinging set. They have one rather narrowly defined aptitude at spellcraft which they practice to the exclusion of all else—usually because they just don't "get" things outside of their focus. Sometimes this is due to the practitioner having an *intuitive* understanding of what they do rather than a *trained* understanding; sometimes it's simply the result of a mystical blind spot. Depending on the causes of the focus, some focused practitioners might be able to train into broader spellcasting capabilities, but few do.

Don't make these guys sound like they're featherweights, Billy. They're specialists rather than generalists, and their power levels can be all over the map. Mortimer Lindquist, an ectomancer I know, is INCREDIBLY capable at what he does. Some of his tricks are stuff I'm not sure I could easily figure out myself. However, I don't think I've ever heard folks like Mort called by this term.

Yeah, but this is a judgment-neutral way to do it. Most other broad terms I've heard—"hedge wizard", "kitchen witch", etc.—can come off as insulting or dismissive.

Point. If there's one thing the White Council isn't a wizard at (heh), it's P.R.

Right. So it's that, and the fact that "prefixmancer" doesn't exactly roll off the tongue.

Each focused practitioner is different, with spellcasting abilities centered on a single theme. *Kinetomancers* have access to spell abilities that focus on the use of force (and, untrained, can lead to reports of poltergeists due to their subconscious mind flinging power around accidentally). *Pyromancers* are the fiery version of the same. *Ectomancers* can summon and speak with spirits and ghosts, sometimes getting those spirits to do their bidding. *Alchemists* brew potions subtle and strange. Open up your handy Latin dictionary and peruse the prefixes—there are tons of *–mancers* out there, and if you can come up with something by playing "prefix mash-up," it's likely that one actually exists somewhere. (Apparently there's a caffeinomancer who runs a coffee shop in Baltimore.)

Of course, focused practitioners are subject to the White Council's enforcement of the Laws of Magic, like any other spellcaster (see page 232). Their narrow focus doesn't necessarily prevent them from breaking Laws like violating someone's mind or swimming against the currents of time.

(Players should beware the appeal of something like an *enchantress* or *chronomancer* since it can quickly lead to the Wardens deciding your neck has an appointment with a sword.)

If chronomancers exist, I have not heard of them.

You **wouldn't** have.

Building a Practitioner

The ingredients for most practitioners are very similar, but the results can be quite varied. Here's a quick guide.

Powers

Wizards and sorcerers tend to have the full boat of true magic: Evocation, Thaumaturgy, the Sight—and in some cases Wizard's Constitution and Soulgaze. Wizards often go beyond this and pick up a few Refinements.

Focused practitioners hone in on one particular application, and thus will often end up with one or both of Channeling and Ritual instead. It's a cost break and results in much narrower spellcraft, but they can still be quite the contenders.

When you're building a spellcaster, the powers are often similar regardless of the type of caster—the configuration of them is where the variety comes in. Your main focus will be on configuring these powers to give your caster his specific identity. Along with these powers comes the opportunity to choose various specializations and to create items and rotes.

Skills

How an arcane practitioner's skills are set is a big part of the caster's flavor and identity as well. It's very difficult, if not impossible, to build a caster that is very highly rated in all three of the "spellcaster trinity": Conviction, Discipline, and Lore (though you could choose to build a spellcaster that's merely medium-rated in all three—a true generalist).

The "imbalanced" composition of these three skills, combined with the configuration of arcane powers, is what makes your wizard, sorcerer, or focused practitioner truly unique. Figure out your caster's approach to magic, and you should be able to use these guidelines as a quick indicator of how to rank his three core skills. Here's how a high or low rating (relative to the other skills at least) will affect the kind of caster the character is:

High Conviction: Your caster brings a lot of power to the party. Regardless of his ability to control it, he can really pour out a ton of punishment via evocations.

Low Conviction: Your caster is lower on the power scale, usually meaning he's more about finesse and subtlety than standing firm and fighting.

High Discipline: Your caster has tons of self-control, which he can use to master the arcane energies he brings to bear and steer effects where he wants them to go.

Low Discipline: Your caster has less self-control. His spells tend to set the environment on fire or blow it apart, and he has to be careful that his spells don't whip back into his face.

High Lore: Your caster has highly tuned mystical senses. Through his studies, he knows a *lot* of info about the supernatural world, and can bring that to bear when it comes time to compose a good ritual.

Low Lore: Your caster is more distracted by the mundane, leaving him with blunted senses. He tends to make up for shortcomings in his lore with long research sessions or other sources of help—such as Harry's friend Bob.

For the record, **I** can pronounce "prefixmancer" just **dandy**.

You don't have a tongue for it to roll off of.

Ah, a tongue. A skull can dream!

Musts: A focused practitioner must have a high concept that names or implies his spellcasting abilities and focus (e.g., Haunted Ectomancer or Kinetomancer for Hire). Additionally, a focused practitioner must take one or both of:

- Channeling [–2] (page 181)
- Ritual [–2] (page 181)

The appropriate focus for each ability must be defined at the time the ability is taken. (Please see the power descriptions for more details.) Players of spellcasting characters should take some time to work out their most often used, most practiced spells before play—see page 257 for the particulars.

Options: Focused practitioners may take the Sight [–1], but if they do, its use will be colored, narrowed, and limited by the focus of their abilities. For example, an *ectomancer* with the Sight might see the world in terms of its ghostly spiritual presences and may find himself seeing dead people all the time; a *pyromancer* might perceive supernatural power and presences in the form of flames of various colors and intensity. See "*Building a Practitioner*" on page 77 for more information.

Important Skills: Conviction (page 124), Discipline (page 127), Lore (page 134).

Minimum Refresh Cost: –2

From the Casefiles: Mortimer Lindquist (OW174) has gotten the most coverage.

I've found some notes that mention some guy named "Binder", but they're sketchy at best. Sounds like a focused practitioner to me, though.

Oh, yeah, that guy. Yeah, if I never run into him that'll be fine.

Knight of a Faerie Court

As far as we know, both Courts of Faerie—Winter and Summer—each have only one Knight, a mortal granted some measure of the power of his or her patron Court and charged with making certain the Court's interests are well-represented in the world of mortals and beyond. For the Winter Court, the position doesn't tend to be a long-term one. Employment is terminated only in the case of death.

Those chosen to be the Winter Knight and the Summer Knight are no lightweights, usually catching the attention of the Queens of the Courts because of their already well-developed supernatural capacity. But each is bound, body and soul, by a deep compulsion to adhere to the word of the Mother, Queen, and Lady of his Court.

Still, the reason these Knights exist at all is that they alone possess something unique among the members of the Faerie Courts: they have mortal free will—in this, they are able to take action that is flatly *impossible* for faeriekind, for the fae cannot act in any way other than in accordance with their natures. As such, the Knights are regarded with much more importance than might seem apropos to their (admittedly still potent) supernatural powers.

Musts: A Knight of the Faerie Court must have a high concept that names the title and mantle he has assumed (e.g., Winter Knight or Summer Knight). *No other character in the game may hold this same title at the same time as this character.* The aspect brings with it all of the strictures and responsibilities the Mother, Queen, and Lady of that Court might place upon your character. It may also mean that the queens can occasionally exercise near-total power over your character—but them's the breaks. It's highly likely they know your character's True Name.

In addition, your character must take the following supernatural powers:

- Seelie Magic [–4] (page 166) or Unseelie Magic [–4] (page 167)
- Marked by Power [–1] (page 169)

Options: Other options abound, such as mixing in elements of a Focused Practitioner, Sorcerer, or Wizard (take note of the potential discount on Seelie or Unseelie Magic in such a case). Your character may carry an Item of Power and may be able to draw upon the power of the Courts to exercise Inhuman Strength, Speed, Toughness, or Recovery. Glamours may also be possible. You should discuss any such options with your GM before your character takes them (and watch those refresh costs!).

Important Skills: Conviction (page 124), Discipline (page 127).

Minimum Refresh Cost: –5

From the Casefiles: The late Ronald Reuel (OW219) and the wishes-he-were-late Lloyd Slate (OW229). The current Summer Knight is a guy named Fix (OW145).

Lycanthrope

Let's get this clear up front: lycanthropes are *not* werewolves—though they share some traits in common. But where werewolves change their bodies, lycanthropes change only their minds, aligning their thoughts and senses with those of a beast. While this isn't as scary as a man turning into a wolf right in front of you (at least at first), they can still mess you up all nasty. Add to this the fact that a pack of lycanthropes in close proximity to one another have a sort of group-mind advantage, and you're looking at some serious badasses here.

Some think that lycanthropy explains the tales of Viking berserkers.

So, what keeps lycanthropes from taking over the world? Well, to start, they've got a bit of a temper problem. Beasts don't run governments very well. Beyond that, most of their powers aren't fully in effect except for about five days out of every month—starting two days before the full moon and ending two days after.

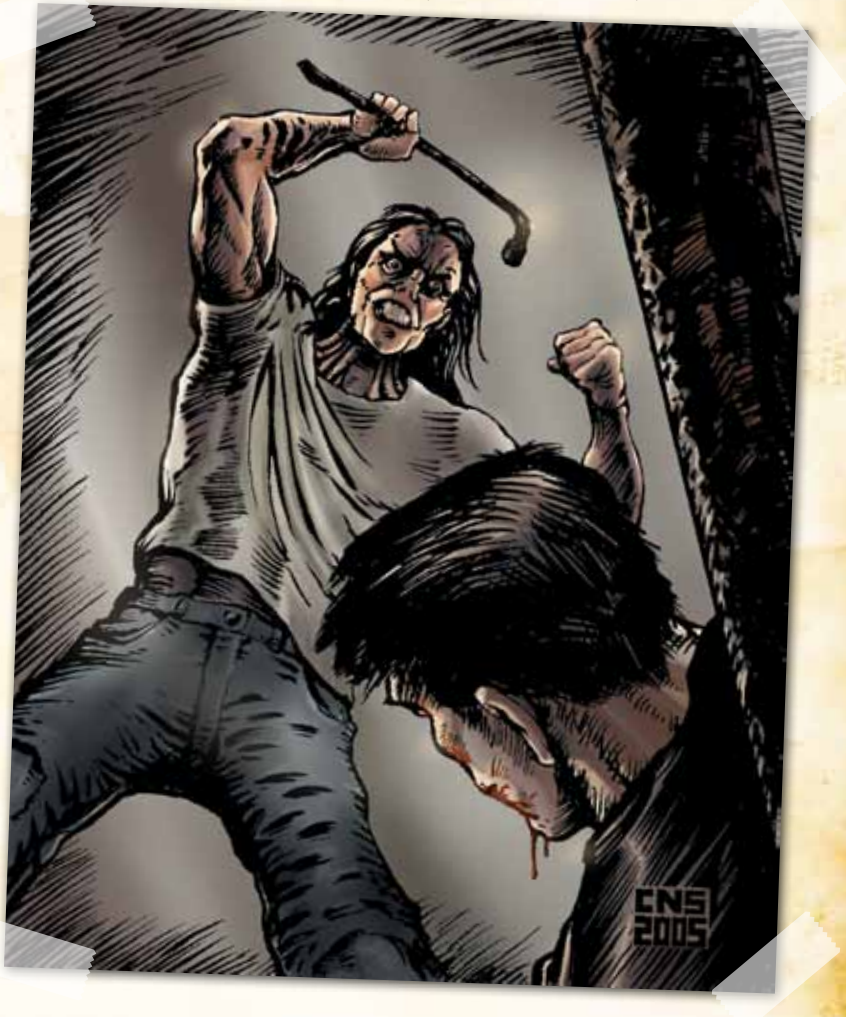
As such, players may find playing a lycanthrope pretty frustrating—having access to the bulk of your power only 5 days out of every 28 may not be a lot of fun for some. When faced with a lycanthrope PC, a GM will have to consider how often she's willing to stage stories near the time of the full moon—and, if she is willing, how much of a restriction the Human Form (Involuntary Change) really represents. (However, deciding that the full moon is *not* forthcoming may be worth a compel every time it's relevant.)

Musts: A lycanthrope must have a high concept that references his nature as a mind-shifting beast-dude (e.g., Lycanthrope Biker). In addition, the lycanthrope must take the following supernatural powers; these are always available to the lycanthrope, even when not near the full moon:

- Pack Instincts [–1] (page 165)
- Echoes of the Beast [–1] (page 163)
- Human Form (Involuntary Change) [+2] (page 176)

The lycanthrope must also take:

- Inhuman Strength [–2] (page 183)
- Inhuman Recovery [–2] (page 185)



This set of abilities is affected by the change from the Human Form and is only available near the full moon. Some lycanthrope concepts (particularly non-wolf-derived ones) may not require all of these abilities, or may provide a different set of abilities during a particular time period or under particular circumstances. If you are interested in any such possibilities, discuss them with your GM.

Options: None.

Important Skills: Alertness (page 121), Endurance (page 130), Investigation (page 133), Might (page 135), Survival (page 143).

Minimum Refresh Cost: –4

From the Casefiles: Parker (OW205) and his gang of Streetwolves.

*Technically, the term "lycanthrope" only applies to those who draw a **wolf**-like spirit into them near the time of the full moon. You'll need to further torture some helpless ancient language to describe another kind of –anthrope.*

You're a real word-nerd, Bob.

Minor Talent

The Dresdenverse is filled with mortals who have small, limited powers, whether due to long-forgotten traces of inhuman bloodlines, exposure to the supernatural, or simply the right combination of willpower and belief. These mortals can be referred to as minor talents: people with "one-trick" powers that might not have a lot of mojo—but which can be very effective in the hands of a creative and driven individual.

This template is a good option for someone who wants a little supernatural trickery up his sleeve—a mortal but with a little extra flavor, the kind you might rub shoulders with at McAnally's.

Musts: A minor talent must have a high concept that mentions the talent in some capacity (e.g., Demi-Semi-Hemigod, Weeps Cassandra's Tears, or Son of Shadows). The character may then take a single, one refresh cost (or, with approval, two refresh cost) ability from *Supernatural Powers* (page 158). Specifically, the Minor Ability and Psychic Ability categories should be considered, but the GM may allow the player to look further afield.

Options: None.

Minimum Refresh Cost: –1. The total cost rarely rises as high as –2.

From the Casefiles: Lydia, Harry's client in the Grave Peril case (OW178); many of the members of Ordo Lebes (OW105); patrons of McAnally's.

Red Court Infected

Red Court vampires—nasty bat-things that live inside an apparently human (and typically gorgeous) flesh-mask, drool addictive narcotic venom, and feed on blood—are able to infect humans, putting them on a potentially inevitable path towards becoming a full-on Red Court vampire. These infected individuals possess some of the same capabilities as the monsters that bit them—at least at a "junior varsity" level.

When the victim is someone you love, it rips your heart right out.

But these victims haven't turned—they haven't given up their humanity—yet. Not until they kill, though that often comes fast, as an almost uncontrollable hunger for blood grips them. Still, it's only *almost* uncontrollable—with the right amount of discipline and careful choices about what sorts of situations they get into, these victims can hold out, at least for a time.

If they're particularly lucky, they may find their way to the Fellowship of St. Giles (OW89)—a secret organization bent on destroying the Red Court. The Fellowship has devised an extra means of controlling vampiric urges through the use of magical tattoos which are normally invisible but flare red when the hunger begins to take hold. They can help keep control, a little.

It's worth noting that, without the Tattoos of St. Giles, an infected character using his supernatural abilities will be more quickly exhausted, finding himself without his infection-derived powers—and on the cusp of turning once and for all—in very short order. On the other hand, the Fellowship can be very demanding of its members; it doesn't tattoo someone lightly.

Musts: A Red Court Infected must have a high concept that addresses the character's infected status (e.g., Once Bitten, Twice Red or Infected Insurgent). This aspect may be compelled to inflict watered-down versions of the Red Court's weaknesses on the character—he will experience aversion to holy objects and sunlight and, when exercising his powers, he may even be damaged by them. On the other hand, these can also help him resist his vampiric urges when he isn't using his powers. Further, the infected character must take the following:

- Addictive Saliva [–1] (page 162)
- Blood Drinker [–1] (page 188)
- Feeding Dependency [+1] (page 190), which will affect all abilities listed below:
- At least one of: Inhuman Recovery [–2] (page 185), Inhuman Speed [–2] (page 178), Inhuman Strength [–2] (page 183), Inhuman Toughness [–2] (page 185).
- If at any point the character kills another human and drinks its blood, he must immediately "upgrade" to a full Red Court Vampire (OW87). This invariably results in turning the character into an NPC, and an evil one at that.

For the Recovery and Toughness abilities, it's unclear how far the Catch (page 185) goes. It *often* involves holy stuff, and may include sunlight in some cases. This produces a Catch value from zero to +2 depending on the extent of the abilities and the breadth of the Catch.

"Holy stuff"? It's a technical term.

Options: Optional abilities beyond those noted above include:

- Tattoos of St. Giles [–2] (page 190)
- Cloak of Shadows [–1] (page 169)

Important Skills: Fists (page 130), Deceit (page 126), Discipline (page 127).

Minimum Refresh Cost: –3

From the Casefiles: Susan Rodriguez (OW219) and her ally Martin (OW190).

Sorcerer

"Sorcerer" is a near-pejorative term that many on the White Council use to describe "full spectrum" spell practitioners who don't have the bloodline, access, resources, and training that a Wizard of the White Council has. The sneer has perhaps a *little* merit, as these versatile spell-slingers are often self-taught or—let's face it—at least dabbling in some grey, if not outright black, areas of magic in order to get a leg up. This fairly common moral flexibility turns into a slippery slope in short order. Victor Sells from the Storm Front casefile is one such example of a sorcerer gone too far into the nasty to make it back out with his soul intact.

Based on what I know, the term is used flexibly. It usually implies someone with some magic talent who uses it solely for destructive purposes, but each person has his own idea of what it means when he uses it.

As such, sorcerers are either known to the White Council and walking the straight and narrow, or they tend to be in hiding from them (or at least hiding their talents) in the interests of avoiding the pointy proclivities of the Wardens. PCs may be of either type—but regardless, the Wardens, even when stretched thin, cannot be ignored.

Nor, really, can one ignore sorcerers themselves. While not wizards, they can still be subtle, quick to anger, all that jazz. They have incredible flexibility in their capacity for spellcraft; while it is very rare to find one as broadly expert as a wizard, they can still specialize in a few areas and, in a pinch, draw from the full range of evocation and thaumaturgical castings. And while they are watched over by the White Council in part, they are not a part of that club; that lack of proximity means they can occasionally get away with doing something that the Council wouldn't be too happy about.

For many sorcerers, lack of access to the White Council's resources is just fine by them in exchange for freedom. And so long as they keep their heads down (and their noses clean), sorcerers are numbered among the bigger players on the mortal side of supernatural affairs.

Musts: A sorcerer must have a high concept that declares his nature as a free-agent spellcaster (e.g., Sorcerer Cop or Spell-Slinging Troubadour). In addition, the character must take the following supernatural powers:

- Evocation [–3] (page 180)
- Thaumaturgy [–3] (page 181)

See the power descriptions for more details. Players of spellcasting characters should take some time to work out their most often used, practiced spells before play—see page 257 for the particulars.

Options: Nearly every sorcerer also takes the Sight [–1] (and would be considered "flying blind" without it). Sorcerers with a dark past (but hopefully on the path to reform) may need to take a Lawbreaker stunt or two (page 182). Sorcerers may take Refinement [–1] once per spell-ability (once for Thaumaturgy, once for Evocation), but may not take it multiple times per ability—there's only so far they can develop without being full-on wizards. See "*Building a Practitioner*" on page 77 for more information.

Important Skills: Conviction (page 124), Discipline (page 127), Lore (page 134).

Minimum Refresh Cost: –6

From the Casefiles: Victor Sells (OW225) may be our best example. Mostly self-taught, completely dangerous.

"Mostly" is right. Not "totally."

Technically it's correct that known sorcerers walk the "straight and narrow" or end up dead— but most well-behaved practitioners usually get called "minor talents" while those who have started to slide get dubbed "sorcerers."

In this game, a "minor talent" has a single power, a "focused practitioner" has limited magical ability, and a "sorcerer" has more flexible magical ability.

You're talking about the game, I'm talking about real life.

True Believer

Faith has power in the Dresdenverse, where the strength of your belief can—when focused properly—turn back the tide of darkness. There are special mortals among us whose beliefs are so strong that they cross into the territory of true supernatural power. These mortals are called *true believers*, for lack of a better term.

At their most extreme, true believers are among those actually called upon by a higher power to take action (and are better represented by the Champion of God template on page 73). But short of that, these men and women of faith can still give pause to the creatures of the Nevernever, for the strength of their convictions is a palpable supernatural force.

Musts: A true believer must have a high concept that speaks to the strength of his or her abiding faith in a higher power or other similar construct (e.g., Man of God or Zen Nun)—in short, a belief in something powerful and life-affirming beyond oneself. A high Conviction skill (Good or better) is highly recommended.

Additionally, true believers must take the following supernatural powers:

- Bless This House [–1] (page 187)
- Guide My Hand [–1] (page 187)

Options: True believers may also have Righteousness [–2] (page 188), and a select few might even carry some holy relic, warranting a custom-designed Item of Power (page 167) agreed upon with the GM.

Important Skills: Conviction (page 124).

Minimum Refresh Cost: –2

From the Casefiles: Father Forthill (OW147).

I put Father Forthill here because, while he might not be a sword-swinging Knight of the Cross, he's still someone you'd want at your back when the demons come pounding on the door.

Folks with the power of true faith are few and far between, and their faith is always rooted in a higher power that's in some ways unknowable. Murphy might have a deep and abiding faith in the power of the law, but law is a knowable thing—it doesn't have any kind of magic to it in that sense. The various manifestations of God are a different matter. I suppose in a way it's a specialized kind of sponsored magic—more specific and limited in many ways, but incredibly powerful in times of great need.

Were-Form

The Dresdenverse is rife with shapeshifters of all stripes (many nonhuman). Some humans have learned (or were simply born with the capability) to take on the form of a beast; when that beast is a wolf, we call them *werewolves*, but there are many other were-forms out there. The animal in question isn't supercharged or innately magical (other than the fact that it has a human intellect kicking around in its noggin), but with some practice, the shapeshifter can use it as easily as his human form, within the limits of what that animal can do. Unlike lycanthropes, loup-garoux, and some other types of shapechangers, most were-form shifters are entirely in control of their change. There's no full moon business going on with us.

William, just as a note, there are some were-forms that ***are*** *supercharged or innately magical.*

Musts: A were-form shapeshifter must take a high concept indicating that—whether hereditarily or by choice— he is a shapeshifter, able to take on a single animal form (e.g., Crime-Fighting Werewolf or Weregoat Wiseass). The type of animal must be specified at the time the character is created.

It's true! Weregoats exist! Though truth be known, Harry's more of a wiseass than most of them.

Hey, now!

In addition, the following supernatural powers must be taken:

- Beast Change [–1] (page 174)
- Echoes of the Beast [–1] (page 163)
- Human Form [+1] (page 176)
- At least two refresh points' worth of abilities from the options list below.

The Beast Change ability allows the player to restructure his skills when in animal form. This second skill configuration should be worked out before play begins. See page 174 for details.

Options: The character may take up to two of these abilities—Inhuman Recovery [–2] (page 185), Inhuman Speed [–2] (page 178), Inhuman Strength [–2] (page 183), or Inhuman Toughness [–2] (page 185)—so long as those abilities are in sync with the animal form he assumes. Similarly, abilities may be taken from



the Creature Feature category (page 162) or the Minor Ability category (page 169) if they can be shown to be a part of the creature's natural advantages.

Thus, a werewolf might have:

- Inhuman Speed [–2] (page 178)
- Inhuman Strength [–2] (page 183)
- Claws [–1] (page 162)
- Pack Instincts [–1] (page 165)

A wereraven (were there such a thing) might have:

- Diminutive Size [–1] (page 163)
- Inhuman Speed [–2] (page 178)
- Wings [–1] (page 165)

Shouldn't you add in "Unkindness Instincts [–1]" here, William?

Huh?

BOB'S BEING A WORD-NERD AGAIN: THE COLLECTIVE NOUN IS "AN UNKINDNESS OF RAVENS."

You and your GM should work together to determine what advantages the chosen animal form has. Note, some advantages will be expressed already due to the Beast Change reshuffling of skills; if an animal is more resilient or deadly, that might simply be reflected by boosting the character's Endurance or Fists skill as a part of the Beast Change, rather than going to the full extent of Inhuman Toughness, etc. Similarly, the improved senses the creature might enjoy are covered by Echoes of the Beast (and carry over to the human form). In a pinch, if these don't seem like enough, toss in one or two mortal stunts (page 146) that tie into the random side-effects and benefits of the chosen beast.

Important Skills: Varies, since Beast Change allows retooling of skills.

Minimum Refresh Cost: –3, though it's often a few points more; as shown, werewolves are –6 or –7.

From the Casefiles: Will (OW114) and Georgia Borden (OW114) of the Alphas (OW116), among others.

The wereraven example reminds me, William—shapeshifters of the sort that can change their mass are a very rare breed. If they shift into something smaller, they have to store part of their intellect and mass in the Nevernever, so they can retrieve it when they change back. If they shift into something bigger, they can get the extra mass by way of ectoplasm, so in that respect growing is easier than shrinking.

Yeah, I thought I remembered seeing something about that. Still, we figured it'd be more fun if we just allowed folks to go for bigger or smaller forms if they could find the points for it. And the whole thing about storing parts of themselves in the Nevernever is rife with story hooks.

Take it From a Werewolf

The supernatural mechanism whereby a werewolf-form shapeshifter takes on the shape of an animal varies. Harry Dresden looks at the thing my friends and I do when we turn into wolves as the casting of a specialized single spell, but honestly I think that's more a case of everything looking like spellcasting to a spellcaster. I've watched Harry do magic, and it just doesn't feel the same to me—not really.

For me, these days, it's like a switch in the back of my brain. When I flip it, my body gets optimized. My mind is still there—I still know who I am and all that—but my priorities flip around a bit. My senses and body align for the hunt. That's why (and how) the Alphas are taking back our corner of Chicago from the night.

White Court Vampire

It seems the Malvora feed on fear, and the Skavis feed on despair. Nasty lot, all of them.

Could a WCV feed on a positive emotion, Bob?

Eating some part of another person is an act of violence, William. Positive emotions don't go together with that.

Of all the known vampire courts, the White Court vampires appear to be the weakest—but they are no less deadly. They are also the *closest* to mortals in behaviors and predilections. They might best be seen as a separate race, able to interbreed with humans (White Court vampires are *born*, not made—it's hereditary). They feed on the strong emotions of their victims—sometimes, though not always, to the point of death—and they can excite these emotions in their victims as well. Adept at manipulation, White Court vampires rarely take action directly, preferring to act through catspaws and patsies.

The truism "you are what you eat" is rarely more accurate than with the White Court. It's easy to see them as simply "sex vampires," but that's only because the majority of those encountered in the casefiles have chosen lust as their primary food-source. As such, the Raiths are masters of seduction, and it's no mistake that a few of their number have established a presence in adult films. But this is just a matter of preference—other dark, intense emotions are viable as food. Fear, despair, and wrath are at the root of the practices of other Houses. Harry's encounters with White Court vampires with other feeding habits have been rare, but indications are that their approach to life is just a bit different from that of the lust-seeking Raiths.

Some few of their kind choose to and are able to resist the demonic hunger that lives within them. To do so is to live a life of near-starvation. A few manage to find ways around this, feeding off a much larger "herd" in dribs and drabs rather than a single victim in quantity. These are the ones most likely to be viable as PCs, as they grip onto the last vestiges of their free will—making the important choice *not* to kill, every day.

Musts: White Court vampires must take a high concept indicating their heritage (e.g., Black Sheep of House Raith or White Court Dancer). This aspect may be compelled to represent some of the White Court's classic weaknesses—True Love can burn them (leaving scars that don't fade), and holy objects and displays of faith at least make them uncomfortable.

Hey, Bob, is it only True Love that works here, or are there other...uh, Truths?

One could easily posit that True, and most importantly, **selfless** Hope or Courage would act as dire counters to despair and fear. But we have a decided lack of, shall we say, **experimental data** on that front.

For game purposes, it makes sense if other True emotions work, so I'm going to go with that.

Unless it's not known for some reason, the player should determine and at least sketchily detail the character's House—family is *terribly* important to the White Court, if only in a "know thy enemy" sort of way.

In addition, a White Court vampire must take the following abilities:

- Emotional Vampire [–1] (page 189)
- Human Guise [+0] (page 176)
- Incite Emotion (Touch Only) [–1] (page 172)
- Feeding Dependency [+1] (page 190), which affects the rest of the abilities listed
- Inhuman Recovery [–2] (page 185); the Catch is True Love [+0]
- Inhuman Speed [–2] (page 178)
- Inhuman Strength [–2] (page 183)

NOTE -
Add "Hope" & "Courage" to the Catch.

Options: White Court vampires may upgrade some of their listed abilities. They may take the more expensive versions of Incite Emotion (page 172), allowing it to operate at range or through a broader range of emotions, and can upgrade their Inhuman Recovery to Supernatural Recovery.

Important Skills: Athletics (page 121), Alertness (page 121), Deceit (page 126), Endurance (page 130), Discipline (page 127), Intimidation (page 132), Might (page 135), other physical skills.

Minimum Refresh Cost: –7

From the Casefiles: Thomas Raith (OW212) is the most PC-like vampire of his clan.

White Court Virgin

White Court vampirism is a hereditary condition, passed along when interbreeding with humans, always breeding true. But the condition doesn't truly take hold until the "virgin" White Court vampire has killed for the first time with his emotion-feeding abilities. Unblooded White Court virgins do not have the weaknesses of full White Court vampires, making them difficult to detect.

Some vestiges of ability—enough to excite emotion and feed on it—exist prior to that point, and a White Court virgin fully aware of his condition might be able to finesse making use of it in a mostly "safe" way. Sadly, many pre-adolescent White Court scions are kept in the dark about the true nature of their family—it makes it easier for them to stumble into that first kill, and thus harder for them to fight the reality of their genes. Once the kill is made, this character template is swapped out for the full White Court Vampire template.

There is an escape clause, however; if he experiences true, deep, reciprocated love with another, the curse of heritage is broken, and he may live life as a normal, regular human (thus setting aside his modest powers, swapping this template for the pure mortal, page 73). But after his first kill, there is no remedy, even if he should fall in love, however real and true.

Musts: White Court virgins must take a high concept indicating their heritage and predicament (e.g., White Court Family Secret or I Was a Teenage White Court Virgin). This aspect may be compelled to bring the character's heritage to the fore, triggering a sudden buried urge to feed, etc.

Unless it's not known for some reason, the player should determine and at least sketchily detail the character's House—it's bound to be important.

- Emotional Vampire [–1] (page 189)
- Incite Emotion (Touch Only) [–1] (page 172)

Options: If your GM agrees, you can slowly slide your way down the path to your heritage, taking on one or two abilities from the White Court Vampire list—but using them will leave you *ravenous* and in some pretty dire straits in short order. If you do this, you must take Feeding Dependency (page 190) as well.

Important Skills: Deceit (page 126), Intimidation (page 132).

Minimum Refresh Cost: –2. Pray you don't go further.

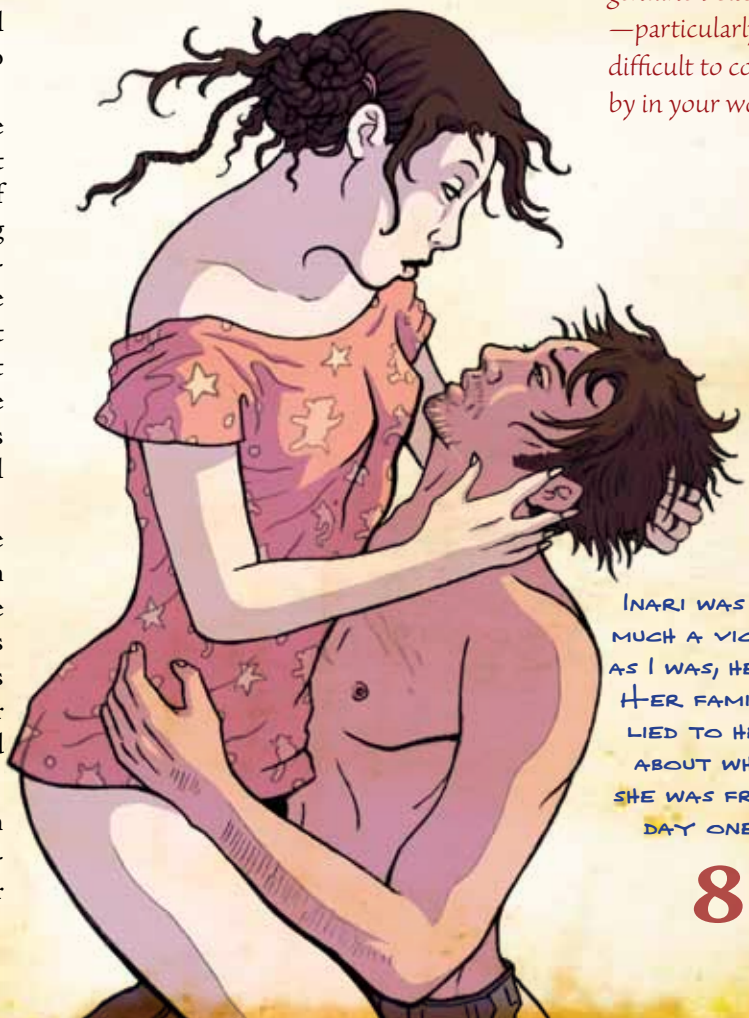
From the Casefiles: Thomas' little sister Inari Raith (OW207).

What's the escape clause for Malvora and Skavis "virgins"?

Some act of True Hope or True Courage, I'd say, but again we have little data.

Are there White Court types who feed on wrath?

I haven't encountered any of that description, but it would make sense. I imagine their counter would be True, genuine **Peace** *—particularly difficult to come by in your world.*



Inari was as much a victim as I was, here. Her family lied to her about who she was from day one.

Wizard

The full wizard in action is a terror to behold. His is an ancient bloodline, heir to the magics of old and able to command their full array; given enough time and preparation, there is very little to limit what a wizard can accomplish beyond the fetters of his own belief in what he can do.

In short, a Wizard of the White Council is a lean, mean, arcane ass-kicking machine.

The power comes at a price. Wizards are practically walking contraband, the way their own White Council watches over them. The Council's policemen, the Wardens, are particularly vigilant (or at least *were* until things got… interesting) about making sure that all known wizards walk the straight and narrow. The Laws of Magic were laid down for a reason, and it's the capabilities of the mortal wizard that made them necessary.

Plus there's that little problem of a raging, ongoing war between the vampires and the wizards, ~~brought on by one of the White Council's own members.~~ Players of wizard characters who are not active in their support of the White Council's war efforts will need a damn fine reason for why they aren't off fighting the good fight. That's not to say that there aren't plenty of such reasons—but the war is so big, so far-reaching, it simply can't be ignored.

Billy, I've got enough problems with this without you calling me out here.

It's not exactly a state secret, but we can leave it out.

What About Playing An Apprentice?

An "apprentice" in this case may simply be a wizard without a lot of confidence and skill yet; you can use the Wizard template and just start the character's skills lower than would usually be optimal.

Or maybe you have a lot of potential, so your skills are high, but you have that word "apprentice" in your high concept or your trouble that's going to get you a bunch of compels, limiting your ability to be effective.

If you really want to play up the "hasn't quite come into her powers yet" angle, you could buy less than the full package of abilities, ending up with something more like the Sorcerer or Focused Practitioner templates. Keep in mind that latter template in particular—you could start out with Channeling or Ritual instead of the full-blown versions, later upgrading those to Evocation and Thaumaturgy when your training completes.

Every wizard is different, with his own special aptitudes and approach to magic, but all of them are powerful individuals with a common core set of abilities. They stand with a foot in each world—the mundane and the magical—and are the object of *deep* interest by a variety of organizations, from the White Council of Wizards, to the Courts of the Faerie and the Vampires, to the mortal police and the Mafia, and more.

Musts: A wizard must have a high concept that declares his nature (e.g., Wizard For Hire or Favorite Son of the White Council). In addition, the character must take the following supernatural powers:

- Evocation [–3] (page 180)
- Thaumaturgy [–3] (page 181)
- The Sight [–1] (page 174)
- Soulgaze [–0] (page 174); discounted due to the Sight.
- Wizard's Constitution [–0] (page 170)

See the power descriptions for more details. Players of spellcasting characters should take some time to work out their most often used, practiced spells before play—see page 257 for the particulars.

Options: Wizards may (and in fact, *should* at least once) take the Refinement ability (page 182) as many times as they can afford—even multiple times for one particular mode of spellcasting (Thaumaturgy or Evocation). See *"Building a Practitioner"* on page 77 for more information.

Important Skills: Conviction (page 124), Discipline (page 127), Endurance (page 130), Lore (page 134).

Minimum Refresh Cost: –7

From the Casefiles: Harry Dresden (OW134), but also Warden Donald Morgan (OW196), Warden Carlos Ramirez (OW215), Elaine (OW183), and, oh yeah, all of the White Council (OW17).

Move Elaine somewhere else before publication, like to minor talent. She flubbed the White Council tests Carlos gave her on purpose, gave her on purpose, we probably shouldn't spill the beans here.


- CHAPTER SIX -
Advancement

Change Happens

Characters are not static objects—they grow and develop over time, evolving in response to the conflicts they face during the game and the choices they make. Cities are similar—but they grow and develop in response to the successes and failures of the various characters. The rate at which both characters and cities grow and change is measured in **milestones**.

Milestones & Characters

Milestones are moments in the game where something has happened to justify some kind of advancement. Milestones largely occur according to the GM's discretion, and the frequency of their occurrence will do a lot to establish the overall tone and feel of a campaign—frequent milestones allow the characters to grow rapidly and give a sort of "epic" feel to the campaign as the opposition scales in response; infrequent milestones make things feel more grounded and established.

Milestones fall into three categories—minor, significant, and major. There are some guidelines for when each happens, along with what characters can do during each type of milestone.

Billy, at the beginning of our Arcanos campaign we were allowed to switch our characters around a lot more than the minor milestone rules would indicate. Why didn't you use that idea in this game?

The key word there is "beginning." A GM could certainly house-rule in something like that. I do think it's a good idea to give players more leeway to change **NEW** characters, a "try before you buy" sort of deal. This is especially helpful for players new to the system.

I'd recommend following the minor milestone rules more strictly once a new character has two or three sessions under his belt.

Minor Milestone

Minor milestones usually occur at the end of a session of play, or whenever one significant piece of a story is resolved. A minor milestone allows the characters to evolve in response to the story that's been unfolding before them.

When a minor milestone occurs, you may choose *one* of the following:

- Switch the rank values of any two skills, or replace one Average skill with one that isn't on your sheet.
- Change any single stunt for another stunt.
- Purchase stunts or powers, provided you have the refresh to do so.
- Rename one aspect.

Minor milestones are ideal when you want to switch the focus of your character's existing abilities or change something on the character sheet, like a skill or the wording of an aspect. Maybe something happens in the story that makes part of your character's sheet seem inappropriate, or you've simply discovered that your choice of skills, aspects, and stunts don't match your expectations in play.

Obviously, these changes should be justified as much as possible, either within the story ("Hey, my character's contact died, so I think I want to make his Joe the Reliable Contact aspect into Vengeance for Joe, okay?") or as a result of play ("So I thought I wanted this guy to have a Good (+3) Presence, but I'm not really using it much—it'd be more fitting if he had a lower Presence and a higher Rapport, so I'm going to switch it out with my Fair (+2) Rapport."). If the skill you're switching out is at Average (+1), you may change it for a skill that isn't on your sheet. Be careful when switching a character's peak skills (his highest ones), though—this can significantly change the character, which is not the purpose of a minor milestone. Keep it in character, so to speak.

Example: *The GM announces that a minor milestone has been reached. Fred, who plays Biff Abernathy, decides that he's not been portraying the character as* Playing The Dumb Jock, *and he'd rather change that to* In The Scrum, *relating his tendency to face problems head-on with his skill at rugby.*

Changing High Concepts and Troubles

High concepts are pretty sacrosanct and won't change with just a minor milestone. If they change at all, it will happen with a major milestone, which you'll read about later on.

On the other hand, maybe you've taken care of your trouble. Or maybe your trouble doesn't mean much to your character anymore. Great! Just make sure that you replace it with a new trouble, and not just any random aspect.

Significant Milestone

A **significant milestone** usually occurs at the conclusion of a scenario or a major plotline (or once every two or three sessions). Significant milestones are about advances of experience, as the characters have learned new things in dealing with problems and challenges.

When a significant milestone occurs, your character gets *all* of the following:

- One additional skill rank.
- One of the benefits of a minor milestone.
- Spellcasters may reconfigure their focus and enchanted items and slots.

Of particular note here is getting one additional skill rank to spend on a new skill slot, because it can be a little confusing. The costs are the same as in *Character Creation* (page 65), so one skill rank buys an Average slot, which you can then fill with any skill you want. If you want a bigger slot, you have to bank a few significant milestones' worth of advancement first.

When you're upgrading an existing skill, you need only pay the difference in cost—if you have an Average slot, you can upgrade it to a Fair slot by paying one rank.

Important: Remember the rule from *Character Creation* that says you can't have more skills at a given rank than you have at any lesser rank (page 65)? *That still applies here.* As an example, suppose you have a skill layout of one Great, two Good, three Fair, and four Average. Imagine that these are represented as building blocks stacked atop one another, each level representing a rank. Each block needs one below it to support it. That would look like this:



During a significant milestone, you decide you want to upgrade one of your Fair slots to a Good slot:



But this gap (shown as a dashed circle above) means that you *can't* make that purchase at this time—you'd need an extra Fair skill in place to "hold up" the Good skill you want. You can buy a slot at Average now and upgrade it over the course of the next two milestones, or simply bank the points to buy a new Good slot directly when you get there.

Example: *The PCs have wrapped up a scenario, and the GM declares a significant milestone.*

Rob, playing Evan Montrose, decides he would like a bit more oomph in Evan's spellcasting, so he wants to spend his skill point on raising Evan's Conviction from Good (+3) to Great (+4). He can't, though—it would violate the skill columns (see above).

Rob could bank the skill point with an eye toward buying another Good (+3) skill to allow adding another at Great (+4), but instead he decides to add a brand new skill, Athletics, at Average (+1), explaining that Biff has been helping Evan rehabilitate his injured arm through playing basketball.

He has the option of taking the benefit of a minor milestone: switch two skill levels, or swap one stunt for another (he has no stunts). He declines to do so.



Major Milestone

A **major milestone** should only occur when something has happened in the campaign that shakes it up *a lot*—either when a few scenarios have concluded, or a long, large-scale plotline wraps up. When these happen, the characters jump up a scale of power.

When a major milestone occurs, your character gets all of the following:

- You can "clear out" an extreme consequence slot, allowing it to be used again.
- An additional point of refresh.
- New stunts and/or powers.
- All the benefits of a significant milestone.

These milestones signify a *major change* in the power structure of your campaign—your characters are going to be dealing with a whole new tier of obstacles from here on out. Consider how even basic character options are affected by one jump in refresh—7 refresh isn't enough for a PC to be a full wizard, but 8 is. Two refresh covers the cost of buying off the initial decision to play a Pure Mortal (see page 73), allowing the character to take on supernatural powers. Even just the bump to a skill that a stunt provides can radically alter the nature of a character's effectiveness.

This is a *really* big deal; it means that the PCs are directly able to take on more powerful threats *and* have a wider variety of resources to draw on to face those threats. (To use a boxing analogy, an advancement of power is like stepping up to the next weight class—you might be the most skilled boxer in the world, but if you're a featherweight, there's still only so much you can do against a less-skilled heavyweight.)

Another option the GM has for a major milestone is to *increase the skill cap by one rank*. This allows the characters to raise their skills up into larger-than-life levels, transcending all previous expectations of human (or inhuman) capability. This can be combined with the normal refresh award as often as the GM wishes. By default, one skill cap increase should probably come every two or three major milestones, happening a few times per campaign at most. A campaign where the skill cap increases with every new major milestone gain will get to Epic (literally) levels *very* quickly.

Example: *The PCs have finished a major story arc, and the city will be forever different. The GM declares a major milestone.*

All characters receive a point of refresh—the previous base refresh was 10, now it's 11. Maya McKenzie's player Amanda has decided that she wants to improve Maya's investigative abilities. She takes the supernatural power Supernatural Sense (page 165), at the cost of –1 refresh. She also takes a stunt called Corner of My Eye (page 149). Maya's refresh was 6. It went to 7 with the increase, back to 6 with the purchase of Strange Senses, and to 5 with Corner of my Eye.

She also gains the benefits of significant and minor milestones.

Changing the Defaults

The setup in this section is the default, based on what Harry Dresden has experienced throughout the course of his casefiles—if every one of Harry's biggest casefiles (like the Storm Front case or the Dead Beat case) is the equivalent of a scenario, then every two or three of those would warrant a major milestone.

Depending on the tone of the game, the GM might want to change the rate at which milestones occur, or even eliminate some types of advancements *entirely*.

At the very least, minor milestones should always be made available to the PCs. Characters that remain "static" can get boring pretty fast; with enough minor milestones, a player could have a totally different character sheet than the one he started with after the end of a few scenarios.

Taking away or slowing down the rate of significant milestones means that, on a basic level, the characters are not going to get more capable of dealing with problems. This can be used to firmly set the dial on a campaign in regard to the scope and breadth of challenges—a small-scale campaign that deals with solving the personal problems of minor practitioners might *never* require the characters to amass much more experience than they have, so as to keep conflicts satisfying. However, this has the potential issue of getting old after a while—eventually the group will more than likely either end the campaign or expand its scope.

Completely Revising Characters

If there's enough downtime in your story between a major milestone and the next adventure, you might also consider re-creating your characters as a group—adjusting aspects, reconfiguring skills, buying stunts and powers, etc. While you don't need to go through the phases part of character creation again, it's a chance to rethink or replace your character's high concept.

As long as there's some commonality to the character for a sense of continuity, this isn't a problem.

~~For example, let's say a certain police officer decided to take up a Sword of the Cross...~~

Don't go there.

okay, okay!

Not using major milestones means that there are certain levels of supernatural opposition the characters simply won't be able to contend with—they're stuck in their particular weight class, and there's no moving up. Again, this can be used to tightly rein in the aesthetic of a particular campaign—if the campaign focuses on a long conflict between the inhabitants of a city and the White Court vampires in it, the characters won't ever need the kind of power it would take to wipe out a Denarian. Again, though, this has the potential to reduce the "life expectancy" of your campaign.

Do we want to let them know about the stuff that's out of Harry's league, like Cowl...?

The defaults above allow for the longest-running potential campaigns, where the characters could even start at the point where they've just been introduced to the supernatural and move up in power and experience until they're contending with the kinds of epic enemies Harry Dresden commonly fights...and even beyond.

Stop. Writing. Now.

Mid-Session Power Upgrades

It's surprisingly easy to take on additional supernatural power at a moment's notice—stressful situations can force potential abilities to rise to the fore; demonic bargains can provide you with magic at the snap of a finger; letting your inhuman nature take a bit more control can change your available resources significantly. Sometimes it doesn't make sense to wait for a milestone to receive these abilities—you and

your friends are cornered, everything seems hopeless, and you reach out to some eldritch being for aid to save your butt. Simple desperation has made many a supernatural heavyweight.

When these moments occur, it's appropriate for the GM to allow you to make these changes—but at a cost.

The first, of course, is appropriate justification; you shouldn't be able to just willy-nilly change things on your sheet. The group should agree that the story justifies the change, or you should provide a clear rationale for it. The rationale could involve your character's high concept (such as "My changeling is sliding more toward his Winter nature") or come about due to the current circumstances (such as "I volunteer my service to the demon for this magic").

The second is that you must permanently and immediately drop your refresh rating *and* trade in fate points equal to the cost of the power, just like the rules for "*Creation On-the-Fly*" on page 69. Remember that your refresh cannot drop below one (except for truly exceptional circumstances—see "*Going Off the Deep End*" below). If you don't currently have enough fate points to pay for the upgrade, you can accrue a "debt" with the GM for the difference. This functions almost precisely like debt from supernatural sponsorship (see "*Sponsored Magic*" on page 287), except it doesn't have to be tied to a particular entity—you owe the GM a number of compels that *don't* get you fate points. These compels should usually be against your character's high concept and be related to the circumstances under which the new powers were taken. Once you're out of debt, compels accrue fate points as normal.

So, the GM is kinda like an Outsider? Bad juju, Billy.

Going Off the Deep End

The most extreme version of a mid-session power upgrade is to take your character to zero (or less!) refresh *on purpose*. This gives your character access to incredible power in a hurry at the ultimate price—your character no longer retains enough humanity to act against his supernatural nature and will become an NPC. There is no way around the final choice—once you make it, you're effectively giving up control of your character, just as surely as if he'd died. Red Court Infected and Changelings are probably the most likely characters to face this choice.

Keep in mind that, just because you're volunteering to take your refresh to zero or beyond, it doesn't mean that all of *Supernatural Powers* becomes a shopping list. The restrictions of your high concept still apply, as well as the nature of any entities who might be offering you power for this last hurrah.

This should never be treated as a frivolous event—it'd be lame if you set your character up to go out in a blaze of glory and didn't get the chance for dramatic payoff. So, if you volunteer to upgrade your character's powers to the point where your refresh drops to zero or below, you get to retain control of the character for as long as it takes to resolve the immediate consequences of your choice. Usually this means playing out the rest of the scene or the very next scene; after that, your character is an NPC. You can use this to set up the circumstances of your character's departure and put a nice (or not so nice) capstone on his story.

Temporary Powers

In rare circumstances, it might be appropriate for a character to temporarily take on supernatural powers. Usually, this happens when a supernatural entity imbues someone with power for a short time in order to take on a threat or fulfill some part of its agendas. (Murphy taking up a Sword of the Cross temporarily in the Small Favor case might be a good example of this.)

Regardless of the circumstances, temporary powers should be dealt with in a similar fashion to mid-session upgrades, but with less cost—the player has to spend fate points equal to the power's usual cost, but not permanent refresh. As with normal mid-session upgrades, the player can "owe" the GM some compels if there aren't enough fate points to pay for it.

Once again, this should only happen under rare circumstances, and the benefits shouldn't last longer than a scene—most things that can bestow power only do so temporarily, when the situation is extremely dire, and when there isn't really another option.

Makes me think of Meryl.

Poor kid.

Advancing Cities

If you did quick city creation and are happy playing with that, this part might not interest you much. But if you're playing with a fully developed city, then you'll want to have some idea about what happens as the PCs interact with it. The good news is that not only will this make your city feel more alive, but having a fully fleshed out city can give you some more concrete guidelines for when to make certain types of milestones happen for the characters.

We aren't necessarily suggesting that the city should change every time the characters do—places are more static than people. The next few sections show you all the various things you *can* change, rather than dictating *when* you should change them. As with milestones, it's largely at the GM's discretion as to when a city element is able to change. Usually, this process will be intuitive as you examine the events in your scenarios.

There are two main types of changes: *changes to theme and threat aspects* (based on what the characters have done) and *changes to locations and faces* (based on where the characters have decided to go).

Themes

Theme aspects can change if the players have made a city-based or location-based theme aspect irrelevant in the story. This sort of change is the biggest change in scale, because themes are so ingrained in how people see the city or location—usually because whatever's inspiring that theme has been around for years and people have grown used to it.

Since they're so entrenched, it should take a considerable amount of effort to change the aspect. These changes are the ones that should happen slowest in the city, compared to dealing with threats. Along with that, themes are never completely removed—they're changed, either for good or ill. Changes come in three flavors: *lessening* a theme, *inverting* a theme, and *worsening* a theme.

Lessening a Theme

If the PCs strike a huge blow against the forces that are supporting the theme, but don't eradicate it altogether, the theme could be "lessened." When this happens, the GM rewords the theme aspect to sound less imposing. It's still there, but not as severe.

> **Example:** *The Baltimore crew (page 362) has managed to deal a blow to the* Decay and Corruption *theme aspect. Depending on how they went about it, the theme could be changed to something slightly less bad, like* On The Take, *or maybe even outright positive, like* Aspire to Past Glory.

Inverting a Theme

Here's where big change really happens. When the PCs undercut the power base of what makes the theme possible, then they're able to change the city itself. Such changes are reflected in removing the old aspect and replacing it with a totally contrasting one based on what the characters did.

> **Example:** *If Evan and company manage to score very large victories against sources of corruption in the city, that* Decay and Corruption *aspect would need to be inverted. A contrasting aspect might be something like* Honest at Heart, *representing an underlying core of purity in the population.*

You don't need to lessen a theme before inverting it. Some themes will end up being more like light switches—they're either on or off, all the way. Use your judgment to decide when lessening before inverting makes sense.

Worsening a Theme

Not everything is sunshine and puppy dogs—themes can also get *worse*. If the PCs manage to let a situation escalate, the GM is within her rights to reword the theme to be more imposing.

> **Example:** *Of course, if they just let things go to hell, then the gang would have to deal with a worse aspect—the GM changes* Decay and Corruption *to* Cesspool of Devilry!

WHY NOT?

Threats

Threats are a little more straightforward. If you used the threat as an aspect in city creation, remove it when the PCs successfully take care of it. Unlike themes, dealing with threats means erasing the aspect rather than changing it. Of course, resolving a threat isn't the only option—threats can get worsened, too.

Resolving a Threat

Depending on the scale of the threat, it should take anywhere between one and several sessions to resolve and remove. A small-time location threat might only take one, whereas a major city-based threat would take many. (This is the GM's decision.)

Once a city-based threat is removed, the GM should come up with a new threat within the next couple of sessions—the supernasties rarely leave a city alone for long. A location-based threat should only be replaced if the location is particularly interesting to the players and there's still ongoing story around that area of town. Even then, waiting a few sessions before filling it in allows the PCs to look into other problems.

A-IN'T THAT THE TRUTH!

Example: *Miracle of miracles, the Baltimore PCs manage to defuse the powder keg that is Baltimore and establish some semblance of stability. The GM removes* On the Brink *as a threat and considers what to add next.*

Promoting a Threat

On the other hand, failing to defeat a threat could mean it gets a real foothold. This takes some time, though less for a location than for an entire city. If the threat gets what it wants *and* incorporates itself into the city, the threat can be promoted into a new theme aspect. Some threats are happy with getting what they want and then leaving (usually with a trail of bodies behind them).

JOHN MARCONE, WHITE COURTESY PHONE!

Example: *The various factions of Baltimore remain* On the Brink *after the first major milestone. The GM declares that they've settled into a sort of Cold War mentality, and the tension becomes routine.* On the Brink *becomes a city theme, and a dark feeling of inevitable doom begins to pervade everything.*

Linking Milestones & City Aspects

If you're looking to play a city-heavy game—where cleaning up the city and making it better for the mortal denizens is a top priority—consider linking the PCs' advancement to how well they are encouraging the city's advancement:

- Lessening a City Theme… *Significant Milestone*
- Lessening a Location Theme… *Minor Milestone*
- Inverting a City Theme… *Major Milestone*
- Inverting a Location Theme… *Significant Milestone*
- Removing a City Threat… *Significant Milestone*
- Removing a Location Threat… *Minor Milestone*

Of course, this should be adjusted for the amount of effort needed. If it takes several sessions to remove a location's threat, then it was a bigger menace than it seemed at first and should probably be bumped up a category or two. Likewise, taking a single session to invert a city theme hardly warrants a full major milestone.

Locations

When you hit significant and major milestones, you might want to consider adding and removing locations, since those are good times to re-think where you want to play in your city.

Adding a Location

There are two reasons you might want to add a location: an interesting place keeps coming up in your game and you want to stat it out with its own theme, threat, and face; or you want to change your game up.

The first is fairly easy; if someone notices such a location, ask the group during the next milestone if it's worth statting up. If, as a group, you can quickly come up with its theme, threat, and face, then it's a good candidate for adding.

Adding locations to change up the game is a little more involved. You'll want to ask what that location offers that others don't—maybe you're looking for a bit more intrigue in the rural outskirts of town, and you don't have a location

like that. Depending on how close you stuck to real-world facts during city creation, this may involve more research on your part, or it might mean just making something up and being sure that everyone else can buy into this change.

Coming up with new locations otherwise works the same as when you were creating the city (page 37).

New Location, Old Face

One trick you can use when coming up with a new location is to promote an existing NPC—either friendly or hostile to the PCs—as the face of this new location. This way, there's some level of familiarity to this location built in already. In addition, if this is a drastic surprise to the characters (or even the players!), it could be the core of a new mystery.

"Removing" a Location

When you're adding locations, you may realize that an established location doesn't seem to be important anymore. If so, note that down next to its entry on the city sheet. Don't "erase" it—that location might serve as a cameo or even take the spotlight once again.

Unless, of course, it was "erased" by a wizard who is hard on buildings...

Hey!

Faces and Other NPCs

Unlike locations, faces are fairly easy to change. They're like any other character the GM feels the need to change up for story progression.

Replacing or Adding a Location's Face

In most cases, it's pretty obvious when to replace a location's face—when you need a new one. If an existing face has moved on (or was moved along), the GM will need to create a new one. Additionally, if one of the faces has proven to be...well, boring, the GM could consider replacing the face with a more interesting NPC. You can also move an existing face to a new location, as described above.

Missives from Captain Obvious!



Adding a new face can also happen when you add a new location. See *City Creation* (page 41) for all the details on creating faces.

Changing or Adding a Face for a City Theme or Threat

Sometimes beginning a new story arc demands that the GM introduce a new face for a city theme or threat. Alternately, a face who fills a vital role in your story (head of a faction, etc.) might die or otherwise be written out of the story and need to be replaced. When these sorts of things happen, the GM should create this new NPC just like it's done in *City Creation* (page 41), including tying him in with a city theme or threat.

If the city's aspects—its themes or threats—have changed, the GM should consider revising the NPCs tied to those changed aspects. Would altering one or two of the NPC's aspects help the NPC remain closely tied to the new theme or threat? In extreme cases, the NPC might need to be replaced completely.

Changing Existing NPCs

The GM needs to exercise the most discretion when changing existing NPCs. These changes largely depend on what kind of relationship you want them to have with the PCs over time. Consider the following general categories:

Static NPCs: These are NPCs (or monsters) that the GM doesn't plan to advance, per se. Perhaps they're meant for the PCs to eventually grow strong enough to overcome after a long story arc. In this case, they shouldn't grow more powerful (or, at least, grow at a much slower rate than the PCs).

If only I could have a nemesis who wasn't any more powerful than I am.

Who is your nemesis, anyway? So many people want you dead...

Thanks. Really. You sure know how to make a guy feel good.

Rivals and Nemeses: A great technique for maintaining a good long-term rival or nemesis NPC (or peer NPC ally, for that matter) is for the GM to advance that NPC using exactly the same process the PCs go through—when the PCs hit a minor, significant, or major milestone, the GM should advance the NPC the same way. This helps the NPC stay approximately as powerful as the PCs.

Other NPCs: There are no hard and fast rules here—when the GM thinks an NPC needs to get a bit more powerful or change in some way, the GM should make those changes.

Aspects and Changed NPCs: The GM should adjust NPCs' aspects as required to keep pace with in-game events. Add new ones that become important (don't forget conflict consequences!), remove existing ones that are no longer relevant, and resolve troubles where appropriate.

New Face, Same as the Old Face...

When replacing a face for a location or a city theme or trouble, think about the old NPC's high concept and motivation. You don't want the new character to seem so much like the last face that it feels like there's no change. Remember, this character was probably written out of the story *for a reason*.

If the high concept is similar, make sure the motivation is different. Or, if you need the motivation to be the same or similar, twist the high concept into something new. Consider how the old NPC was removed from the story and if this new NPC would be a friend or foe of the old one.

Oh, look, the next page has me getting my ass kicked by yet another half-naked villainess. My life is messed up.

Sexy. Deadly. Honestly, I have no idea why they flock to you as much as they do, boss. Well, the former set, at least.

Now that you bring it up, that is something I've been struggling with while getting the art together for these books.

See, Georgia has me thinking a lot about how women get portrayed in game art—and I'm trying to stay aware of that—but I'm also trying to stick close to the source material of your cases.

Fidelity to the casefiles is important to me, Harry; it's the best source of information I have. But this also means that 90% of the time I'm just going to be showing stuff that you're doing. And that includes getting your ass kicked by half-naked villainesses. I mean, the Red and White Court vampires and the Fae seem to be somewhat clothing averse, and they're not alone, so it does seem like a lot of your adversaries are running around half naked.

There are a lot of strong women in your life, but often that strength comes out in conversation, not action—but action is what makes it into the art. So we've got Murphy kicking ass here and there, the Archive completely going to town on the Denarians...but it's not as extensive as I'd like. We may have to live with that, though.


- CHAPTER SEVEN -
Aspects

What Are Aspects?

The central character attributes in The Dresden Files RPG are called **aspects**. Aspects cover a wide range of elements and define what makes your character unique—basically, they describe the core of your character's identity. (By contrast, skills, stunts, and supernatural abilities could be said to paint a similar picture of what your character can *do*, rather than who he *is*.)

Aspects can be:

- Relationships (Mama's Boy, Apprentice to Ancient Mai)
- Beliefs (The Lord Is My Shepherd, Nothing Is Forever)
- Catchphrases (Can't Keep My Mouth Shut, "It's Not My Fault!")
- Descriptors (Wiseass Wizard, Rugged as the Road)
- Items (Sword of the Cross, My Mother's Pentacle)
- Pretty much anything else that paints a vivid picture of the character (Big Man On Campus, Anger Is My Constant Companion)

A BROKEN NOSE DOESN'T FEEL "MOMENTARY."

It's an abstraction. A broken nose doesn't really redefine who you are (in most cases) — that's what we mean by momentary.

In terms of game rules, aspects are the main avenue by which you gain or spend **fate points** (page 19) for your character. Fate points are a kind of currency that can be spent for bonuses, and they are earned when aspects cause problems and complications for the character.

Here's a summary of all the ways that aspects are used in the game:

Invocation: Spend a fate point, describe how one of your character's aspects is beneficial to him, and get either a +2 bonus or a reroll to a skill roll.

Invocation for effect: Spend a fate point and describe how one of your character's aspects allows you to make a **declaration** (page 116) of fact about something in the game.

Compel: Either receive a fate point when one of your character's aspects works to his disadvantage, or spend a fate point to avoid that disadvantage.

Tag: On any aspect you create or discover in a scene, get the first invocation for free (as in, without spending any fate points).

YOU CAN INVOKE & COMPEL ASPECTS THAT AREN'T YOURS, RIGHT? LIKE ASPECTS ON OTHER CHARACTERS AND SCENES?

Yeah, we discuss that in detail a little later in the chapter.

At the start of a game, you'll place aspects on your character as part of the process of character creation (page 52). Starting player characters (PCs) have seven aspects, including one aspect each for their **high concept** (page 54) and their **trouble** (page 55). These aspects are effectively permanent, though they can change over the course of time.

In addition, during the city creation process (page 24) you will also place aspects on the setting in which the game takes place—these work just like character aspects do, defining the most important features and elements that make the city unique.

You will also encounter temporary aspects during the course of play. These aspects might be placed on your character to describe momentary changes of condition or circumstance (Off-Balance, Broken Nose), or they might be placed on an environment to highlight elements that might come into play during a scene (Gas Main, On Fire, Uneven Terrain). Typically, you will use your skills to create or discover these aspects during play (see page 113 for more information).

Using Aspects

The process of using an aspect begins by proposing that one is relevant. Either a player or the GM may make this proposal. Next, determine if the aspect's relevance is working *for* or *against* the character that has the aspect.

As a general rule, if it's *for*, it is considered an invocation and the character will probably be spending a fate point; if it's *against*, it's considered a compel and the character will probably be receiving a fate point. Each type of aspect use has specific rules governing how it functions, but if you ever find yourself confused about the basics of using aspects, come back to this fundamental idea.

Invoking Aspects

When you can apply an aspect to the situation your character is in, it can be used to give you a bonus. Doing this requires **spending a fate point** (see below) and is called **invoking the aspect**. In this context, the aspect makes your character better at whatever he's doing, because the aspect in some way applies to the situation.

Invoking an aspect can be used to either:

- Pick up all the dice you rolled and re-roll them; *or*
- Leave the dice alone and add 2 to the result.

It is possible to use more than one aspect on a single roll, but you can't use the *same* aspect more than once on the same roll or action (even if you've re-rolled the dice, that's still the same roll or action). Re-rolls are riskier than just taking the +2 bonus—you can always end up worsening things or not making much improvement—but when the dice just didn't roll your way, a re-roll can be a much cheaper way to recover. The +2 option is the surest way of improving a roll that's good, but not *quite* good enough.

The GM is the final arbiter of when an aspect is or is not appropriate (to minimize disagreements between players and GM, see *"Getting on the Same Page,"* page 112). Usually this means you must invoke an aspect that is appropriate to the situation at hand. If you want to invoke an inappropriate-seeming aspect, be prepared to describe how the action actually *is* appropriate to the aspect. The GM's priority here should not be to strictly limit the use of aspects, but rather to ensure appropriate use by encouraging players to make decisions that keep their aspects interesting.

Example: *Maya McKenzie is hiding nearby as Biff is about to get pounced on by a rampaging werecat. She rushes to try to push him out of the way using her Athletics as a block action (see page 210), but rolls terribly on the dice, getting [−][−][ ][ ]. Thankfully, she has an aspect called* Biff's Steady Girlfriend *and the GM has previously agreed that this is the sort of thing she can invoke to help Biff out. Maya's player, Amanda, spends a fate point, invokes* Biff's Steady Girlfriend*, and re-rolls the dice.*

Her subsequent roll of [+][ ][−][+] is better, but she's worried she needs more than a +1 to her Athletics skill to get both herself and Biff out of the werecat's way. She can't use Biff's Steady Girlfriend *again on the same action, so Amanda spends a fate point and suggests that Maya could use her* Quiet as a Mouse *aspect, what with cats and mice being mortal enemies. The GM looks skeptical, however, so Amanda looks for another aspect that fits. Luckily, Maya also has* Uncommon Sense *as an aspect and suggests that it makes a better fit—essentially changing her approach from "push Biff out of the way" to "I know cats, so I had an inkling it was going to pounce—let's* both *get out of the way!" and using that for a little extra motivation to achieve success.*

The GM agrees, and Amanda spends another fate point, this time invoking Uncommon Sense *for a +2 to the result. With an Athletics roll at +3, she's much more confident that she'll be able to get herself and Biff clear of the werecat's rampage—at least long enough for their wizard pal Evan Montrose to whip up something to slow it down.*

You aren't limited to the aspects on your character's sheet when you make an invocation—any aspect that your character is aware of or has access to can potentially be invoked. This includes aspects on other characters, on the scene (see page 105 for more on scene aspects), or on the city. For details on doing this, see *"Interacting with Other Aspects"* on page 105.

Invoking for Effect

You can also **invoke an aspect for effect**, using it to declare a fact or circumstance that would be of benefit to your character. This costs a fate point like any other invocation does. For example, you could invoke your character's Warden Connections aspect to declare that there's a Warden actually in town.

Good luck. Wardens are a little light on the ground these days due to the Vampire War.

Different groups will have different tastes regarding the potential scope of invoking for effect, and your group should talk this over to see where each player stands. GMs are encouraged to be fairly liberal in this regard, provided that the player's desired effect is consistent with the aspect and the overall sensibilities of the game.

For example, if the GM is hemming and hawing over whether or not your character can spend a fate point to declare that he arrives at exactly the right moment, invoking your character's Perfect Timing or Grand Entrance aspect for that same effect should remove any of her doubts. That said, this is not a method for the players to get away with absolutely anything—when in doubt, talk it through with the group.

As with regular invocations, you can also spend fate points to invoke aspects on the scene or on other characters for effect. See page 105 for more details on that.



Compelling Aspects

An aspect can also allow you to gain more fate points by bringing complications and troubling circumstances into your character's life. When this occurs, it is referred to as **compelling the aspect**. Usually, a compel focuses on only one aspect, but, in certain rare situations, more than one might be compelled for a larger payout.

The GM often initiates compels. When she compels one of your aspects, she's indicating that your character is in a position where the aspect could create a problem or a difficult choice. However, you can also cause the GM to compel another character's aspects with a similar rationale and results (see "*Compelling Other Aspects*," page 107). Sometimes, compels even happen by "accident" when a player plays his character's aspects to the hilt and gets into complicated circumstances without any nudging.

When you are the target of a compel, you may negotiate the terms of the compel a bit, just to make sure that the outcome doesn't violate your character concept or create a similarly undesirable effect. Once the terms are set, you have a choice: spend a fate point and ignore the aspect, or accept the complications and limitations on your character's choices and receive a fate point. When you accept the fate point, the aspect is officially **compelled**.

GMs take note! Keeping the compels lively is your explicit responsibility during play. Staying on top of your compels and leaning in hard on them whenever the opportunity's there will keep the game exciting. Don't be shy!

Players take note! If you "self-compel," bring it to the GM's attention to get your fate point!

There are a few ways an aspect can complicate a character's life via compels: it limits the responses available to a character in a certain situation, it introduces unintended complications into a scene, or it provides the inspiration for a plot development or a scene hook for that character.

Limitations

An aspect may limit actions and choices. If your character would normally have a number of choices in a particular situation and acting in accordance with his aspect is going to make more trouble for the character and limit those choices, that's grounds to compel the aspect.

It's important to note that an aspect may dictate the *type* of action when compelled this way, but it usually won't dictate the *precise* action, which is always the player's decision. In this way, compelling the aspect highlights the difficulty of the choices at hand by placing limits on those choices, using the idea of the aspect to define (or at least suggest) those limits.

> **Example:** *Murphy has an aspect indicating her* Quick Temper. *The FBI's just blown into town and is demanding to take over her case. Murphy could shoot her mouth off here, making things pretty uncomfortable for her, so the GM compels her* Quick Temper *aspect, saying, "These guys are really ticking you off. Maybe you should tell them what you think of the FBI's usual quality of work…" and sliding forward a fate point.*
>
> *If Murphy accepts the fate point, she's accepting that her* Quick Temper *aspect should limit her choices of how to respond here. Maybe she'll tell the FBI off to their faces, or maybe she'll simply storm out—that's her choice—but however you slice it, her* Quick Temper *should come to the fore immediately. Then again, she's been having enough trouble as it is at work, and she knows her superiors on the force would be very upset if she got into it with an FBI agent; that could result in negative repercussions, so maybe it's time to suck it up and spend a fate point to keep that temper in check…*

Complications

An aspect may also complicate a situation, rather than directly limiting your character's choices. If everything would be going along normally and the aspect makes things more difficult or introduces an unexpected twist, that's grounds for a compel. In some cases, complications may suggest that certain consequences are mandated, such as failing at a particular action without a skill roll—perhaps your character would succeed at a defense roll against a Deceit action, but his Gullible aspect is compelled, forcing a failure if you accept.

> **Example:** *Harry Dresden has the aspect* The Building Was on Fire and It Wasn't My Fault. *He's trying to rescue a girl from a pair of White Court baddies when he gets into a fight with them. Slinging his blasting rod and shooting off a gout of flame, he aims to burn one of them to ash when the GM slaps down a fate point. "How about you miss and that flame of yours ends up being another* Building Was on Fire *situation?"*
>
> *Harry's player, Jim, considers: he's pretty light on fate points due to his low refresh, and the warehouse is otherwise empty of people—no worries about killing anyone. It's early in the session, so there's plenty more story to come, and he knows he'll need those fate points when it does. Plus, the vampires haven't killed this girl yet, so he's betting they're keeping her alive for a reason.*
>
> *On the other hand, he's wasting an action in the conflict by failing this attack, and he knows that the more he lets this happen, the more of a reputation it gives him as a spreader of destruction, which could come back to haunt him later. And he has to live with the fact that some poor uninvolved mortal's warehouse just got burned down, and this time, it totally is his fault.*
>
> *Jim weighs his options, takes the fate point, and agrees to miss (this time, at least). The warehouse begins to burn.*

Not funny.

OK, maybe a little funny.

GM-Driven Compels

Some compels are used to directly drive the story in one way or another and, as such, are really the province of the GM. A good GM will want to use the aspects of the PCs to create adventures and provide the basis for scenes.

This means that sometimes an aspect may add a complication "offscreen," such as when the GM decides to use a character's personal nemesis as the villain for a session or to give the character an unpleasant responsibility or assignment. She might also use a character's aspect to justify a particular "hook" for a future scene. When this happens, it counts as a compel.

GMs should not rely on a player's *particular* response to this kind of compel to drive a plot—remember, *the purpose of a compel is to create drama, not force people into things*. Keep in mind that a player can always negotiate the terms of a compel—he might have an even better idea for a dramatic way to start a scene or move the story along.

Say Yes, Roll the Dice, or Compel

You may have gathered this already, but just to be clear, there's a chance that a compel could happen any time you might otherwise pick up the dice. Usually, when you as a player want to try to do something, the GM will have you roll dice if she has an interesting idea of what might happen if you fail. If she doesn't, there's really no reason to roll at all.

But, if there's a good opportunity for your action to complicate things, she might "trade in" the dice roll in favor of making up something that's interesting and engaging. This is great stuff to make dramatic moments with, and it's definitely something *you* can use as well—as long as you're willing to deal with the potential complications, you might be able to succeed at an immediate task in exchange for future problems.

For example, Harry's aspect of The Building Was on Fire and It Wasn't My Fault is something he could point at and say "How about I blast through this wall and escape my attackers, but the place catches on fire and starts to collapse?" The GM might say, "Okay, but you're going to get picked up by the cops because someone spots you leaving the scene," and accept that as a worthy compel, handing Harry a fate point without the dice ever getting involved. There's no need to roll and see how the spellcasting went since its success and nasty fallout has already been stipulated as a consequence of the compel.

Situations like this can really help inspire players to get involved in the evolving story.

A Note for GMs: "Accidental" Compels

It's worth remembering that sometimes players simply play to their aspects without thinking to ask for a compel. When that happens, the GM should make a note of it (sometimes—even often—with the player reminding her) and, if possible, award the player with a fate point retroactively. If it's too late for that, the GM should make a note to give that player one extra fate point next session, after the refresh.

It's important that the GM keep in mind what sorts of things would normally constitute a compel. Compels happen in order to make certain choices or situations more difficult or more dramatic for the compelled character. Certainly, staying in character and playing in a way that's appropriate to a character's aspects should be praised; but it should be *rewarded* only when the player's aspect-consistent play has actively made his character's choices more difficult.

I demand 23 retroactive fate points.

Example: *Thomas has an aspect for his family: Fallen Prince of the Raith Family. This means he's a liability for his house and his father is continually trying to find ways for other people to kill Thomas for him. The Red Court is going to be throwing a lavish ball at the Velvet Room, and Lord Raith has sent Thomas a "note" letting him know that Thomas is expected to attend. The GM suggests that this is a compel based on Thomas' Fallen Prince aspect, because his status in the family doesn't leave him many choices. Thomas' player, Clark, accepts and the GM gives him a fate point.*

There are at least two ways Clark can fulfill the terms of this compel. Thomas can take the easier but possibly deadly choice of attending the Red Court ball, or he can defy Lord Raith, which would take the story in a very different direction—in that case, Lord Raith would come after him with intensity and fury. If he was taken by Lord Raith's servants, he would have to answer dearly for his defiance...

Sometimes, it may seem as though there is no practical way to buy out of a "scene-starter" compel. Suppose you have the aspect My Dear Brother, and the GM proposes a compel with, "Hey, so you find your brother beaten to a pulp and left on your doorstep, with a note that says 'Now we know where you live' on it." It would be pretty lame to spend a fate point and suggest that it doesn't even happen.

Keep in mind, though, that when you buy out of a compel, what you're really buying out of is the *potential complication* that could arise from what's proposed. You're giving yourself the option of a response that's not as dramatic. So you don't have to say, "No, my brother doesn't show up on my doorstep." You might say, "Man, I've got a lot going on right now in this story...look, here's a fate point, and let's say I call an ambulance and just get him to the hospital."

(What about just delaying the arrival of the wounded brother for a scene or two? Either you buy out of the complication or you don't. If the complication's going to happen and you want to do another scene first, that's a thing for the group to negotiate over—see below—but it doesn't get into the actual mechanics of refusing a compel.)

Negotiating a Compel

In play, players and the GM can both initiate compels. When the GM initiates a compel, the process is very simple. The GM remarks that the aspect might be appropriate here and offers you a fate point. Of course, in a perfect world, the GM would always be aware of all aspects and always know when they should be compelled and rewarded. In practice, the GM is keeping track of a *lot* of stuff and may not realize that you have an aspect that is appropriate to the situation.

When this happens, you should feel free to capture the GM's attention and point to the appropriate aspect, holding up a fate point and raising your eyebrows or giving some other signal to indicate you thinks it's time for a compel.

When you call attention to one of your character's aspects, it may be as formal as "I think my Green Eyes of Jealousy aspect applies here," or it may be conversational, like, "Boy, that guy talking to my girl is pretty suave, as I watch them with my Green Eyes of Jealousy" (brandishing a fate point). There's no one way to do it and groups are encouraged to fall into whatever pattern is most comfortable for them.

After a player or the GM suggests a compel, the immediate next step is to negotiate over the terms. Usually, the person who suggests the compel has an idea in mind already, but that doesn't mean things are set in stone. Remember: compels are supposed to make things more dramatic and interesting, not force people into boxes. So, you should feel free to offer a suitably dramatic counter-proposal if you feel it'd be more in keeping with your character, suggest alternate details, and so on. Likewise, GMs should feel free to turn up the heat on a player who's proposing a weak compel.

> ***Example:*** *Harry and Billy are in the park investigating a sudden rain of frogs and have gotten into an argument. Due to some recent developments in the* Grave Peril *case, Jim, Harry's player, has changed one of his aspects to I Work Alone. As the argument gets more heated, Jim suddenly turns to the GM and brandishes a fate point menacingly, insisting, "I Work Alone!"*
>
> *The GM blinks for a few moments before remembering the recent addition to Harry's sheet. She smiles and slides forward a fate point. "You do work alone, as it so happens."*



Jeez, Billy, try not to rub that one in or anything.

Hey, you weren't the one who had to get naked in a public park in order to put a hurtin' on a ghoul. I'm just glad that I was going commando in sweatpants that day...if I had a nickel for every pair of boxers I've destroyed...

I really didn't need to know that, okay?

she says. "And it's left you tired, cranky, and inattentive as you work yourself into an early grave. Which is why you've totally failed to notice the ghoul with the shotgun in the shopping cart, right?"

Jim groans. "Yeah. I guess I'm so focused on getting Billy to stop trying to play in the big leagues, I just end up missing it." He pauses, and adds, "Can we at least make this compel about me losing face to Billy and having to admit he's right, rather than being about me getting my ass blown away in the first scene?"

The GM grins and says, "Tell you what. I'll say that the ghoul doesn't actually get to take advantage of the fact that you're defenseless, but maybe this hit is a little bigger than I originally thought. Oh, and Billy will get initiative for the conflict. Deal?"

Jim groans again and agrees. The GM hands over a fate point and also describes a black pickup truck pulling up, bringing more assailants with guns. A pitched firefight ensues, and things in Harry's life have just gotten a whole lot more interesting.

What's a Weak Compel?

When judging whether or not a compel is "worthy," the primary thing to look for is whether the outcome provides a palpable sense of consequence to the character and/or the story. If the outcome isn't going to create something that's going to matter much in the grand scheme of things, then it probably isn't enough to work as a compel. Making a compel more worthy might mean that the GM changes the circumstances of a conflict to be less advantageous to a character; it might mean that the session suddenly takes a stunning new direction plotwise; or it might mean that the character has an additional problem to deal with that he didn't before. As long as it's an effect you can feel in play, it's probably good enough.

Compelling Multiple Aspects

Occasionally, a situation will come up in play that seems to be relevant to more than one of your character's aspects. This should not be seen as a problem—rather, it's an opportunity for high drama.

When a situation is complicated enough to involve more than one aspect, then all the aspects are subject to a compel. You must decide how to deal with this—after negotiating, you can take every compel for a large payout, or take only a certain number and then buy out of the rest. This might mean that you ultimately break even on fate point gain, but that's okay—it still shows your character's priorities in a dramatic moment, which is a successful compel.

Keep in mind that there should be a clear complication or limitation offered by each aspect; one complication that references two aspects shouldn't give you two fate points unless it's a really, really big deal. And if that's the case, you might want to consider the optional escalation rule instead.

Example: *Michael Carpenter is on a mission from God, seeking out a diabolist. After a period of investigation, he discovers the location of his quarry and that the diabolist is planning Imminent Demon-Summoning Badness ™.*

Michael is a Knight of the Cross *and it's his job to stop the nefarious bastard (which Michael would never call him, of course), no matter what the cost. To get there in time, he has to drop everything and go right now.*

However, he's also a Family Man*, and some of the diabolist's minions have captured his family and are holding them hostage at a location across town from the diabolist's ritual site. He cannot be in both places at once.*

The GM looks at Michael's player, Ryan, and says plainly, "This is a compel of your Knight of the Cross *aspect and your* Family Man *aspect. You must choose which way you're going to go."*

Ryan grits his teeth, thinks about it, and says, "I must do the Lord's work—faith is what I'm all about, right? I have to go take out the diabolist and put my family in God's hands for now. But you can bet that as soon as the summoner's defeated, I'm going to rescue them with all haste."

The GM decides that both aspects are certainly complicating Michael's life—he's following his obligation as a Knight, which will have as yet untold consequences for his family. She slides over two fate points—he's going to need them.

Escalation (Optional Rule)

Rarely, in moments of high tension or drama, the GM can choose to **escalate** a compel. This optional rule should only be used when your character is having a **defining moment** in his story. As a result, some GMs may wish to require that your character's high concept (page 54) be in play when this optional rule is used.

Escalation can only occur when you have bought out of a compel. To escalate, the GM slides forward a second fate point and prompts with something like, "Are you *sure…?*"

If you accept, you'll get two fate points instead of one, in addition to getting back any you've spent to buy out of the compel in the first place; if you refuse, it's going to cost you another fate point (for a total of two). In the rarest of cases, when the story is at its highest tension, the GM may escalate a final time, making the reward and cost to buy out three fate points. If you are willing to spend three to refuse this truly epic compulsion, the book is closed.

You can also prompt the GM to start an escalation. When sliding forward your first fate point to buy off a compel, say something like, "I won't go along for *one* fate point…" Most GMs will look at the situation at that point and decide whether or not it's a moment of high drama. If it isn't, they'll accept the proffered point; but if it is, the escalation's on!

GMs may also want to consider turning the crank each time a player chooses to escalate. Each step of the back-and-forth between player and GM should add some detail to the story that shows the stakes are escalating—it's not a simple game of chicken via sliding tokens around on a table. For example, if the aspect compelled is Greedy and escalation is in effect, things should be spiraling rapidly from a simple moment of avarice to an urge so powerful that kleptomaniacs would blush and give pause.

Whatever the case, escalation should be done sparingly. Compels will bring enough heat on their own most of the time—you don't always need to be dropping nuclear bombs.

Interacting With Other Aspects

The aspects on your character are not the only aspects that you can use. Your fellow players' characters have aspects, of course, as do some NPCs. Sometimes even the scene itself may have aspects (called, shockingly, **scene aspects**), like Dark or Cluttered; see page 198 in *Playing the Game* for more details. Additionally, the city where your campaign takes place will have aspects on it that your group will make up during city creation (see page 24), which can be considered scene aspects on nearly every scene.

To interact with an aspect other than your own, your character needs to directly interact with the object, location, or person that has the aspect you want to invoke, in a way that is appropriate to the action in progress. This means that if a scene has an aspect of Ill Met by Candlelight, not only can characters be described as emerging from the shadows with eerily under-lit faces, but those characters may also invoke the aspect to aid their Stealth rolls (thanks to the low lighting implied). They might later invoke it to knock the candles over and set the room ablaze, or to trigger encounters that are inopportune to one or more parties ("Ill Met" indeed!).

Your character also needs to have reasonable access to the aspect in question. With scene aspects, this is easy—your character usually just needs to be present in the scene to interact with the aspect. There are several ways you can gain access to an aspect that is on another character or scene:

- Discover it via assessment (page 115)
- Create it with a declaration (page 116)
- Establish it with a maneuver (page 207)
- Inflict a consequence (page 203)

If your character can interact directly with the owner of the aspect in an appropriate manner and has reasonable access to the aspect in question, you may use that aspect in a number of different ways.

Invoking Other Aspects

Billy, is the "you" here meant for players or does it include GMs too?

GMs that invoke an aspect on a PC to gain an advantage over that PC definitely owe a fate point. Good catch!

The procedure to invoke an aspect that isn't on your character is precisely the same as a regular invocation: just declare how that aspect is relevant, spend a fate point, and take a +2 or a reroll. The only thing to keep in mind is that, if you're invoking an aspect on another PC or on a NPC to gain an advantage over them, that character will *receive the fate point you spent*, either at the end of the exchange (in conflict, see page 197) or at the end of the scene (outside of conflict).

> ***Example:*** *Biff's player, Fred, knows that Maya has the aspect* Biff's Steady Girlfriend. *It's something both players set up during character creation to highlight how Biff somehow always ends up needing Maya to help him out of a jam. It's Biff's turn to act, and since Maya has shown up, he thinks it's a great time to use some teamwork to get the heck away from the rampaging werecat. Fred describes Biff grabbing Maya in his arms and making a dive to get behind the wind-wall that Evan has whipped up, saying he's going to invoke Maya's* Biff's Steady Girlfriend *aspect to do so. Just as when he invokes his own aspects, Fred spends a fate point and decides to use it as a +2 on his Athletics roll.*
>
> *This particular invocation was to Maya's advantage as well as Biff's, so she does not get the fate point that Biff spent.*
>
> *Later in the game, Biff is talking to someone in a bar who's been spying on him, and he knows from a previous assessment that the guy has a* Bad Temper *aspect. He decides to invoke the guy's aspect with his Intimidation roll to get the guy to lose his cool and slip up. Because that invocation creates a disadvantage for the spy, the GM gives that character a fate point at the end of the scene, to save for a future meeting.*

Kincaid made ample use of "In My Sights" at the Shedd Aquarium. Most of the nickelheads didn't know what hit them.

Invocations on other aspects can also be done for effect, allowing you to use someone else's aspect or a scene aspect to make a declaration. All the guidelines for invoking for effect (page 99) apply here.

Have I mentioned recently Sells was a real jerk?

He was a real jerk.

Tagging

A **tag** is a special move that you may be able to do when you're invoking aspects other than your own. Whenever you make a roll to gain access to or create an aspect, as per the list on page 105, *you may invoke it one time, and one time only, for free*—as in, you don't spend from your pool of fate points to take advantage of the aspect.

A tag is subject to one key limitation: it must occur *almost immediately* after the aspect has been brought into play. Some minor delay is acceptable, but should be avoided when possible. At worst, a tag should happen sometime during the scene in which it was established. Some assessments are an exception to this time limit; see page 115.

If you wish, you can allow another character to use the tag for an aspect you've discovered or introduced. This allows for some great set-up maneuvers in a fight; you can maneuver to place an aspect on a target, then pass the tag to an ally who attacks, using the advantage on his own roll. This can only be done, however, if it is reasonable that the advantage could be passed off. A sniper who uses a maneuver (page 207) to aim his rifle at a target, putting an In My Sights aspect on it, can't pass the advantage to someone else—the aspect placed is specific to him. But if Harry uses a maneuver to put a Spritzed With Holy Water aspect on a vampire, he could reasonably pass the advantage to Billy, who moves in for the knockout blow.

Tags, even if they are to a character's detriment, do not award a fate point like a normal invocation would. If no fate point was spent, there's no fate point to pass around.

> ***Example:*** *Harry Dresden has just used his wizard's senses to discover that the Shadowman, a dark sorcerer who sent a toad demon to eat him and his date, is observing events from nearby using a sorcerous scrying spell. This knowledge is the result of a skill roll that revealed that the aspect* Shadowman Watching *was (secretly) on the scene. Harry decides to send a spell back up the link by way of saying hello, and since he just discovered ("assessed," page 115) the aspect, he is due a tag. When he casts the spell, he uses the tag to add 2 to his roll. This is clearly to the Shadowman's detriment, but since the tag was free for Harry, the Shadowman doesn't get a fate point.*

Later, Harry sends another spell up the link to shut it down. This time, Harry has to spend a fate point for his +2. Because the invocation here is to Shadowman's detriment and this time Harry has spent a fate point, Shadowman will receive a fate point at the end of the scene. The GM makes a note of that, and saves that point up for Shadowman to use in the big confrontation a few scenes later.

Tagging often involves temporary aspects that result from maneuvers. Make sure you have a grasp on how temporary aspects behave, which you can find in the "*Conflicts*" section of *Playing the Game*, page 207.

Compelling Other Aspects

Being able to interact with the aspects of others creates a powerful opportunity for the clever player to set up another character to be compelled. If you are aware of and can access an aspect on another character or NPC, you may spend a fate point to try to trigger the circumstances of a compel (see page 100) on the target. If the GM decides this is a compel-worthy circumstance, then she takes the offered fate point and proceeds with a compel, running it as if she had initiated the compel herself.

This is a chain reaction—the first player calls for the compel, and if the GM accepts it as valid, she negotiates it with the player of the target character, who either decides to accept (gaining a fate point) or avoid (spending a fate point). Once the initiating player spends the fate point, he *does not get it back even if the target buys out of the compel.*

Game Aspects?

Some GMs may wish to step out to an even more "meta-" level and allow for a game session or even the entire campaign to have aspects on it (**game aspects**), like It's Always Darkest Before the Dawn or The Vampire War. Such aspects should be used sparingly, since their omnipresence will strongly shape the face of the game. When adding a game aspect to your campaign, ask yourself: am I okay with this showing up in nearly every scene or session (or at least the majority of them)?

As with a normal compel, the final result can be negotiated as much as is necessary.

Example: *During the course of an investigation, Harry Dresden has encountered a fetch, a creature that feeds on fear. The fetch has the aspect Fear-Eater on it, which Harry has recently discovered thanks to a Lore roll to figure out how to attack the fetch.*

Harry wants to draw the fetch to him instead of another innocent victim, so he decides to focus on his own fears, visualizing them and reliving them to draw the fetch in. Harry's player, Jim, wonders if, rather than going to the dice, he can short-cut all that and go straight to getting the effect that he wants by compelling the fetch's Fear-Eater aspect.

The GM agrees that Jim can do this if he spends a fate point (understanding that this means the fetch then gets to consider and potentially refuse a compel). Jim agrees, and thus uses Fear-Eater to trigger a compel of "this fetch is drawn to me as its primary target." The GM, acting as the fetch, then needs to decide if the fetch is willing to spend a fate point to avoid this compel or gain a fate point and come bee-lining for the wizard. If the fetch buys out of it, at least Harry has cost it a fate point; if it doesn't, he's drawn the creature to him. It's a win/win situation, of a sort…

Scene Compels

Scene aspects may imply some circumstances that will befall any (or many) of the characters in the scene—Everything Is Burning! is a classic example and a frequent aspect in any scene involving Harry Dresden. In such a case, it's entirely apropos to act as if that aspect is on each character's sheet and compel (see page 100) the aspect for each of them, dishing fate points all around and nicely covering the effects the aspect has on the characters in the scene.

Technically speaking, a player could try to use a scene aspect to initiate a mass compel, but it'd be a pretty expensive proposition—he'd have to spend a fate point for every character he wants to be affected by the compel.

Why's the GM asking for a fate point here? Shouldn't I... uh, Jim... be getting a "tag" here?

Well, three things. One, a tag is an invoke, not a compel, though your GM might be fine with it as a "tag for effect" thing. Two, we figured on the example being clearer if we didn't bring tags into it. Three, maybe the tag was already used or expired.

Low blow, Billy. Low blow.

But so true!

You're helping. Stop helping.

Creating Character Aspects

More than anything else, aspects are your most explicit way of telling the GM, "This is the stuff I want to see in the game." If you pick an aspect like Thorn in the Red Court's Side, then you should be able to expect that the GM will put you at odds with vampires of the Red Court pretty regularly. GMs should *want* players to use their aspects and should design the story of the game such that it is based on and around the aspects the players have chosen for their characters (we'll talk more about this in *Building Scenarios*, see page 340). Players should pick the aspects they want to use, and GMs should encourage them to choose aspects that will be both interesting and useful.

Once you decide on an idea for an aspect, you need to figure out a name that best describes what you intend. There are usually many possible names for a desired aspect, which can make this choice somewhat difficult. However, most of the time an aspect is going to be a **phrase**, a **person**, or a **prop**. These categories of aspects aren't hard and fast, and there can be some overlap among them—they're just intended to give you an evocative way to think about aspects and help break mental blocks.



Believe me, some of those Council problems can be real whoppers.

A **phrase** can be anything from a simple detail (Strong), to a short description (Troll's Blood Gives Strength), or even a literal quote ("No One Is Stronger Than Throgbal!"). Phrase aspects come into play based on how often the character's current situation matches or suggests the phrase. A colorful phrase adds a lot of flavor and innately suggests several different ways to use it. This potentially makes phrase aspects some of the most flexible aspects in the game.

A **person** can be anyone important to your character. A friend, an enemy, a family member, a sidekick, a mentor—as long as someone matters to your character, that someone makes an appropriate aspect. A person aspect is most easily used when that person is in the scene with your character, but the aspect can come up in other ways, depending upon the person's history and relationship with your character (ideally, the relationship should be stated in the wording of the aspect).

For example, a character might take My Old Teacher Finn as an aspect. Beyond the obvious applications of having Finn show up, a player might also invoke this for a bonus and justify it by talking about "hours spent in Old Finn's knife throwing classes" or something similar.

Keep in mind that an organization can be used in the same way, representing both the ability to call on that organization's resources for aid and the obligation to work for that organization's best interests, even when they conflict with your own. So, Wizard of the White Council is technically a "person" aspect in that sense; it gives a character the ability to call on the Council for aid, but also requires that character to deal with whatever problems the association might bring.

Props are things, places, or even ideas—anything external to your character that isn't a person. A prop can be useful if it's something your character has with him or if it's the crux of a conflict, but it may also imply things *about* your character or even be significant in its absence (Ah, if only I had my Trusty Toolbox!) and thus earn you fate points (see "*Compelling Aspects*," page 100).

Again, keep in mind that these categories are allowed to blur if need be—an aspect like "Time to Call the Mayor!" has elements of both a phrase and a person, and that's just fine.

Powered Props

A player may want to take a prop aspect for an item that has supernatural power attached to it, to signify a "trademark" item (think King Arthur and Excalibur). This is a great idea, but keep in mind that your character may need to invest other resources (such as stunts, or time and effort) to possess props of particular power.

In other words, it's not enough to give yourself an aspect saying you have a Sword of the Cross—you'll also have to buy the sword as a facet of your supernatural abilities. Or to look at it a different way, the prop aspect is more about the *relationship* you have with the prop than it is about the prop itself and what it does. For more on supernatural items for your character, see *Supernatural Powers* (page 158) and *Spellcasting* (page 248).

"Positive" Vs. "Negative" Aspects

Strictly speaking, the most beneficial aspects for your character are the ones that are most interesting; in this case, "interesting" specifically means that they are double-edged—useable to both the character's benefit and detriment in different situations.

You may have noticed that a number of the aspects throughout this book appear to be "bad" aspects—they indicate a downside for a character or a directly negative connotation. Aspects like Often Drunker Than a Skunk, A Born Sucker, Stubborn as Hell, and I Can Never Tell a Lie all suggest situations where the character will have to act a certain way—making an ass of himself at an important social function, falling for a line of bull, failing to back down when it's important to do so, or speaking truthfully when truth is the path to greatest harm.

So why put such aspects on your sheet if they're only going to make trouble for you? Simple: you *want* that kind of trouble.

On a basic game-rules footing, these are a direct line to getting you more fate points, and fate points are the electricity that powers some of the more potent *positive* uses of your aspects.

Outside of just the rules, a "negative" aspect adds interest and story hooks for a character in a way that purely positive aspects can't. This sort of interest means time in the limelight. If someone's trying to take advantage of the fact that your character's a Sucker for a Pretty Face, that's an important point in the story and the camera is going to focus on it. They also immediately suggest story ideas to your GM, providing her with ways to hook your character in.

However, an aspect that has *only* negative connotations could be limiting to your character in certain ways, because you also need to have an avenue to *spend* the fate points you're taking in. Aspects that are more "positive" are the channels for what makes your character special and awesome, allowing him to excel in situations where others might not.

Likewise, you also don't want an aspect that has only positive connotations. Not only do they prevent your character from routinely getting fate points but, dramatically speaking, they're kind of boring. Stories about characters who are always competent and always succeed are lacking in conflict and surprise. If your character starts to become predictable and boring, he's probably going to stop being a focus of the story.

So, you definitely want to have hints of both.

The Rule of Three

As a rule of thumb when picking an aspect, think of three situations where you can see the aspect in play. If you have one reasonably positive situation and one reasonably negative situation out of that set, you're golden! If the aspect's uses are all negative or all positive, you may want to reconsider how you've worded your aspect—try to put in a little of what's missing. Ultimately, though, one aspect that's "all good" or "all bad" isn't much of a problem, so long as you have a good mix throughout your whole set.

As an example, something like Genius-Level Intelligence might seem like it doesn't provide very much in the way of negative output. So you might change the context of it a little and reword that to Nerdier Than a College Professor. You could still justify getting the same advantages as the original aspect, and you could pick up some potential negative uses in the social arena—maybe the character's attempts at social interaction are plagued by people perceiving him as just too nerdy, or no one ever takes him seriously when he's trying to intimidate or impress.

Billy, your ability to take someone's life and reframe it so it fits in this game... well, it kind of disturbs me. I just want you to know that.

Hey, it's not ALL a teaching text. People have to play it, too!

You hear that, Harry? You'd make a great character in a novel!

That may be one of the scariest ideas I've ever heard.

Keep in mind that it is possible to find positive ways to use negative-seeming aspects. Someone who is Stubborn as Hell may be more determined to achieve his goals. Watchful eyes might dismiss the guy who's Often Drunker Than a Skunk as "just a drunk" when he's using his Stealth skill.

Situation Vs. Story

Aspects also tend to divide into two camps—**situation** and **story**—and it's a good idea to make sure you have aspects of each type.

The distinction between these is better illustrated with examples, but here's a general definition: situation aspects describe circumstances and events that routinely happen to the character, while story aspects describe the *reasons* why those things tend to happen.

Situation aspects are often phrase aspects, descriptors like Nick of Time, Last Man Standing, and Always the Butt of a Joke. They provide a set of expectations for the kind of stuff you're going to see happening whenever that character is around. A good example from Harry's list is The Building Was On Fire, And It Wasn't My Fault—there is a pattern of examples in the casefiles where Harry's presence contributes to or results in massive property damage of one kind or another. Characters in novels, comic books, and other fictional media often have these kinds of reliable, schtick-like qualities as a way to make them more vivid and interesting. Over time, they create a sense of familiarity that helps people become more invested in and sympathetic to the character.

By themselves, though, situation aspects only do half the job. Harry doesn't just willy-nilly decide to go around setting buildings on fire—it happens because he gets drawn into those bad situations somehow. There are things in his life that drive him toward the events where those situation aspects are going to come into play. This is the role of story aspects.

Story aspects are most often people and prop aspects, representing those elements of the game world that your character is tied to. They provide a set of the likeliest candidates to bring trouble to your character's door and provide a reason for him to go out into the night. A good example from Michael Carpenter's list is the way his high concept, Knight of the Cross, sometimes conflicts with his trouble, Family Man.

Michael is wholly devoted to the service of God, his own wife, and his children. As a result, a lot of trouble comes to his door—the Almighty often compels (no pun intended) Michael to leave home for what can only be described as holy quests, and there are a few examples where his family has played a part in Harry's casefiles, whether as victims, targets, or active participants.

These things serve as an inherent imperative for Michael to do what he does, providing essential context for understanding his actions. For your character, they will also do something else—provide a ready source of material that is guaranteed to get your character into a story. Story aspects help the GM come up with material for the game that will involve your character personally from the get-go, which helps make a more satisfying game for all those involved.

The real mojo happens when story aspects and situation aspects work together. Imagine your character has both Stubborn as a Mule and Samantha, My Long-Lost Sister as aspects. During the game, the GM is definitely going to provide clues as to the whereabouts of your sister, bring in adversaries who try to use the knowledge that she's missing as leverage over your character, or even just introduce the potential to get more information.

Because these things are happening, your character is going to have a lot of opportunities to demonstrate that stubbornness in scenes and conflicts, pushing against all odds in the hopes that he can track his sister down. He'll make enemies, get into trouble because he's too stubborn for his own good, conquer foes, and generally shake up the world around him.

That's why it's important to make sure you have aspects like these. And again, keep in mind that these are not hard and fast categories—some aspects might straddle the line a bit. Consider a hitman character with an aspect of I Hate the Person I've Become—this might be both a story and a situation aspect in some sense, even though it doesn't imply a connection. Personal issues can be a very strong source of motivation for some characters, and it's easy to imagine this hitman getting drawn into a story in an effort to redeem himself in his own eyes. Likewise, the aspect also suggests a number of behaviors that might become trademark for him, like having an uncharacteristic merciful streak, or engaging in wild, destructive behavior out of self-loathing.

Heating Things Up

Aspects are one of the major sources for igniting ideas and story hooks for your character. They're the first thing a GM will look at on your sheet when trying to work out what sorts of stories to throw your way. *This is powerful juju*, and the best part is that you are in total control of it with the words you choose for your aspect. If one character has the aspect Quick and another has the aspect Sworn Enemy of the Secret Brotherhood of the Flame, which one do you think suggests more ideas for the GM? Your aspects give you a "vote" in what sort of game you're going to be playing in. Don't let it go to waste. (If nothing else, you have just established that the Secret Brotherhood of the Flame exists in the setting, and the GM will probably turn to you for further details.)

At first glance, the most powerful aspects would seem to be things that are broadly useful with no real downside—things like Quick, Lucky, or Strong—and you may be tempted to go with those. Resist that temptation!

See, there are three large problems with broad aspects like these: they're boring, they don't generate fate points, and they surrender your ability to help shape the story.

Boring is pretty obvious. Consider a character who is Lucky and one who has Strange Luck. Both aspects can be used for many good things, but the latter allows for a much wider range of possibilities—and more compels (see page 100 for more on compels). Remember, every time an aspect makes trouble for you, you'll receive a fate point. Strange Luck means that the GM can throw bizarre—even unfortunate—coincidences at your character, but *you get paid for it*. (If this doesn't seem tempting enough yet, remember that the GM is probably going to do something bizarre to you anyway—shouldn't you benefit from it and have some say in how it happens?)

The most powerful aspects are easy to spot: they're the most *interesting* ones. An aspect you can use to your advantage, but which can also be a disadvantage, has the most mechanical potency. What's more, aspects that tie into the setting (connecting your character to a group or a person) help you fill in the cast of characters in a way that is most appealing to you.

Whenever you're writing down the name of an aspect, ask yourself, "How hot is this aspect?" If it seems kind of lukewarm, then you might be missing the mark, and it's time to turn up the heat. You certainly don't have to do this with every aspect you take, but it's a great way to stay involved in the overall story.

Here are a few "good—better—best" examples:

- **Tepid:** Wizard.
  Toasty: Wizard Private Eye.
  Fuego!: The Only Listing Under "Wizard" in Chicago's Yellow Pages.
- **Tepid:** Strong.
  Toasty: Troll-Blood Strong.
  Fuego!: Strong-Man of the Winter Court.
- **Tepid:** Dark Past.
  Toasty: Reformed Evil Cultist.
  Fuego!: The Ebon Shroud Cult Wants Me Dead.

In each of these cases, the "tepid" option certainly suggests its uses, but it doesn't really jump off the page as something that suggests story. The "toasty" option is better since it's more specific; both GM and player can see some potential story hooks in these, and they serve to differentiate themselves from their lukewarm predecessors. But in terms of rocking the house and suggesting story left and right, "Fuego!" is what you want.

The Only Listing Under "Wizard" in Chicago's Yellow Pages could well be a prime driver for why dark and complicated stories tend to take a full-tilt run at Harry Dresden's head. Strong-Man of the Winter Court not only suggests that the character is very strong and faerie-blooded, but it also states a relationship with the Winter Court itself. That's three sides to the aspect right there. The Ebon Shroud Cult Wants Me Dead both references the character's dark past and complicates his present circumstances, with there always being a chance that some heavies from his former cult will come knocking and go *snicker-snack* with his head.

So when you pick an aspect, ask yourself: is this tepid, is this toasty, or is this "Fuego!"?

See, boss? I told you that ad was a bad idea.

Everyone's a critic.

Getting on the Same Page

Aspects are probably the clearest message you can send to the GM about what you want from the game, short of walking right up to her and saying so (which is also a great plan). Furthermore, in all likelihood, the GM is going to have copies of your character sheets when you're not around, so the aspects you've picked are going to represent you *in absentia*. Once you've picked all the aspects for your character, take a step back and look at them. Do they represent your character the way you want them to? If not, change them!

By themselves, aspects can't say it all. Short of making each aspect a paragraph or essay, you're dealing with a few short, catchy phrases and names here. You want them reasonably short, because you want to be able to talk about them casually without running out of breath.

But the brevity of an aspect's name means some things are left unspoken. It's beneficial to take the time with the GM at some point to speak these unspoken things. When you're picking aspects, one of the best ways to determine that you and the GM are on the same page is to discuss where you feel the aspect would be a help or a hindrance. Both you and the GM should look at an aspect not as the end of an idea, but as the beginning of one. You're both going to bring your own ideas of what the aspect means to the table and, at least to some extent, you're both right.

Usually this works out fine—the combined perspectives make the whole greater than the sum—but sometimes you and your GM might have a radically different idea of what the aspect entails. So be clear with one another and figure out how to iron out any differences of perspective—ideally before the fate points start flying, since taking fifteen minutes to get into an intense discussion about what you meant when you gave yourself the aspect "Look Out Behind You!" can be a real momentum-killer for the game.

Example: *In the Baltimore example, Rob is creating a wizard named Evan Montrose. He decides to take the aspect* Meticulous *since he figures it's nicely reflective of the character. The GM asks what sort of things it'll be useful for, and Rob suggests that it's useful for him when he needs to pay attention to the details and get things precisely right. He figures this will come into play most often when Evan is carefully putting together a thaumaturgical spell.*

The GM likes it, but she asks if there's any way this might end up causing trouble for Evan. After thinking about it, Rob offers that the aspect probably means that Evan responds poorly when things aren't done by the book. The GM asks if By the Book *wouldn't be better than* Meticulous*, but Rob doesn't like the sound of that—he wants something that feels like it has a broader reach, but does agree that* Precision is Everything *is a bit spicier. The GM offers the idea that Evan might have trouble improvising and dealing with chaos.*

Rob thinks about this and realizes that Evan also has an In Over My Head *aspect on his sheet—the idea definitely plays well with* Precision is Everything*, suggesting that Evan's need to do things in specific, particular ways probably means he's often making the choice to do things the hard (but right!) way. The GM agrees and makes a few notes in her notebook about Evan's meticulous nature. With a little back and forth, both the player and GM now have a much better sense of how the aspect will work in play.*

After you've gotten a couple sessions under your belt, you might feel like you've picked one or more aspects that don't "feel right." If an aspect doesn't seem to be working out well for you, you should feel free to change it—just make sure the GM is in tune with what you're doing and that you keep her in the loop. (She might give you a cool reason to keep the one you have after all.)



uh... what?

Just working something out.

Boss, you dropped the & from the

Thanks!

Creating and Discovering Aspects in Play

There are several ways previously unknown or nonexistent aspects can show up in play. Here, we'll discuss the methods.

Guessing Aspects

Sometimes, you might want to use an aspect that's on a scene or character without actually knowing if the target has the aspect in question. In other words, you're making a *guess*—maybe, just maybe, an aspect fitting a particular description is there—and, while guesses are allowed, they're subject to some special rules.

One way to make a guess is to roll it as an assessment action (see page 115); if it's successful, the GM can reveal whether or not the target has a similar aspect. The good part about this option is that, even if your guess is wrong, you'll still get an aspect from the target if the action succeeds. The bad part is that a target will usually get a roll to defend himself from being assessed, and therefore the attempt might fail.

Another route is to spend a fate point and try to guess the aspect, explaining how you intend to use the aspect if it exists. This is basically "gambling" with an invocation or compel—you're committing your fate points on the possibility that your hunch about the target's aspects is correct. You won't get another aspect from the target if you're wrong, but because you're spending the fate point, the target will not get the option to defend against you.

If, conceptually speaking, the guess hits reasonably close to the mark—even if it doesn't match the aspect's exact name—the GM should exercise some flexibility and allow it.

> ***Example:*** *Harry is sneaking up on a gang or a cult—he isn't sure which yet—in a shadowed warehouse. His player, Jim, might "guess" that a scene has a* Darkness *aspect on it and spend a fate point, asking if he can invoke it for his Stealth roll to get near the cult undetected. The scene has the aspect* Shadowed Corners *instead; but Jim's guess is reasonably close to the mark, so the GM reveals that the aspect is* Shadowed Corners *and allows the invocation.*



If the guess just plain misses the mark, and the fact that the mark was missed doesn't amount to a significant and potentially secret piece of information, you should get the chance to reconsider your guess and take back the fate point you spent.

> ***Example:*** *Same as before, but this time, the GM's idea of the warehouse is that it's actually pretty well-lit—big fluorescent lights hanging on the ceiling, etc. When Jim spends the fate point and explains his intent, the GM holds up her hand: "It's actually pretty well lit in here. There are fluorescent lights everywhere, many of them turned on." Jim takes back his fate point, since this wasn't a particularly secret bit of information—it just hadn't been brought up yet.*

If the guess misses the mark, but missing the mark tells you something significant and potentially secret, the fate point is still spent. This sort of circumstance almost never comes up with scene aspects, but it *can* come up when guessing at aspects on another character, and may even amount to a "reveal" (see "*Assessment*," page 115) of the target's true aspect.

Example: *Harry's trying to reason with his lycanthrope captor and spends a fate point, guessing at an aspect on the guy—something along the lines of* Reasonable Man. *The GM smiles darkly and shakes her head. "No; the more you talk to this guy, the more you realize he's a bundle of rage under the skin. Reasoning with him won't work." The fate point stays spent—Harry has learned some valuable information about his captor and may even be able to guess at the existence of an* Easily Angered *aspect that he could invoke later on. He could also try to sweet-talk the GM nicely enough that she'll consider this to be a reveal of such an aspect, allowing for a tag (page 106).*

In the worst case scenario, your guess misses the mark because you've been duped. This will most often happen as the result of a Deceit action (see page 126), although it might arise from other circumstances. In such a case, the deceiver can either return the spent fate point to you or leave it spent.

If he leaves it spent, you just learned you were duped—you don't get the benefit of tagging the aspect, but you've learned something significant about your target. The deceiver does not get this spent fate point for himself, either—it's simply gone.

If the deceiver returns the fate point to you, things may actually be a bit worse for you—the deceiver gets to place a temporary aspect on you (and tag it), representing how he managed to snooker you.

Example: *Harry is in a limousine with John Marcone. Unbeknownst to Harry, Marcone succeeded in an earlier Deceit roll that let him appear to be* Well-Informed and Wary About Wizards. *Like all good lies, this has a grain of truth in it: Marcone is indeed well-informed, but he's not cautious in the way Harry's been led to believe. When Harry goes for an Intimidation ploy to try to get Marcone to back off, he meets Marcone's eyes and spends a fate point, saying he'll invoke Marcone's* Wary About Wizards *aspect to improve his roll, with the intent of getting Marcone to back down and break the eye contact before the soulgaze (page 226) hits.*

But this is exactly what Marcone wanted. He opts to give back Harry's fate point and turns the tables, putting a temporary aspect of Trapped by the Tiger's Soul *on Harry, and taking the tag to give* him *a free +2 on his roll as the two enter into a sudden, deep soulgaze. Harry's doesn't get the benefit of invoking an aspect that isn't actually there and has gotten suckered into a soulgaze he didn't want—with Marcone in the superior position!*

Regardless, guesses can't, and shouldn't, be made willy-nilly. There must always be a justification for making the guess. If the guess seems unjustified—if the player is "shotgunning" guesses to randomly try to figure out another character's aspects—the GM is completely justified in shutting that player down cold.

> **Read Now or Read Later?**
> These next three sections (*"Temporary Aspects"*, *"Assessments"* and *"Declarations"*) rely a lot on later parts of the book. If you don't understand all of it right now, don't worry! Come back and reread these bits later.

Temporary Aspects

Unlike the "permanent" aspects built into a character's sheet, **temporary aspects** are introduced to (or inflicted upon) a character or scene by the actions of a character in the game, but fade from that recipient over time. Temporary aspects may differ in terms of the duration and tenacity with which they stay on their recipient.

Most commonly, a temporary aspect results from a successful maneuver (page 207). If you get no shifts on a maneuver roll, the maneuver is considered successful, but the aspect is considered **fragile**—that is, it can only be tagged once and then it goes away. Fragile aspects are usually described as very momentary changes of circumstance—if you use Guns as a maneuver to aim at a target and you don't get any shifts, you might call that aspect A Quick Bead. When you attack the target, you can tag it; but then you lose your bead on him for some reason, like he shifts position or slips behind cover or something else.

If you get shifts on a maneuver roll, the resulting aspect is said to be **sticky**—in other words, it "sticks" to the target until something can be done about it. Sticky aspects don't go away after they're tagged, allowing people to spend fate points to continue to invoke them. These are usually described in more severe terms than fragile aspects, to represent that they're a tangible problem or advantage for a character. If you get shifts on a Guns maneuver to aim, you might call that aspect Right in My Sights—essentially, you can hold a steady aim on your target until he does something drastic to throw your aim off.

Sticky aspects may be easier to place on a location or scene rather than on another character, because the scene can't roll to "defend" against your maneuver. This is especially true when they potentially offer complications to everyone present, on both sides, as with a maneuver to add a The Building's on Fire! aspect to a scene.

Getting rid of a sticky aspect requires making a successful maneuver roll to cancel the effects of the maneuver. If a character is in a position to stop you from getting rid of the maneuver, he can try to make an appropriate "defense roll" to oppose you. If he succeeds, the aspect remains. If you succeed, it goes away. If no one is in a position to stop you from getting rid of the maneuver, it's very easy—you just have to make a roll against a difficulty of Mediocre (+0). Temporary aspects that result from maneuvers will always go away at the end of a conflict or scene.

Some temporary aspects have real staying power and have the ability to outlast a scene; they may even stay affixed to the target for as long as a session (or more) of play. Those kinds of temporary aspects are called **consequences**, and each character has a certain limit on how many he can take, based on his skills. They represent lasting effects such as physical wounds, psychological problems, and so forth. These aspects usually can't be removed by normal means—they require appropriate justification to remove, as well as the expenditure of a certain amount of recovery time. For more details on consequences and recovering from them, see page 203 in *Playing the Game*.

Assessments

Sometimes you may choose to use your skills to make a careful **assessment** well in advance of taking action—maybe as part of putting together a plan, or simply observing the target long enough to learn something that would be a critical advantage. This approach is most often used with skills that have an element of perception—such as Investigation and Empathy—but knowledge skills could also be applied to discover "knowable things." Here, the skill is not used to place a temporary aspect on the target (as with a maneuver, page 207) so much as to discover an *existing* aspect on the target that may have been hidden or secret.

Because this aspect is freshly introduced into play by your action, you should be able to tag this aspect. However, you're often going to use assessment as a way to prepare for a future encounter, which may not happen for several scenes. So, if you've discovered an aspect this way, *you don't have to worry about the usual time limit* (page 106) *for tagging until the first scene where you encounter the target of your assessment.* Aspects discovered in this fashion are still present after these time limits expire, so they can still be invoked later.

All assessment efforts require the use of a significant chunk of time, usually indicated in the skill write-up. However, this time invested in preparation allows these skills to come to bear in more time pressured environments (like a fight) where they would not typically be useful.

Example: *Harry consults with Bob about werewolves, trying to learn all that he can about them. He's particularly concerned about the loup-garou he thinks he's going to be tangling with, so he focuses his efforts there—using his Lore skill, with Bob's help. The GM sets a difficulty for the Lore roll to discover (assess) an aspect of the loup-garou that might help Harry in an altercation with it. Thanks to Bob's help, it's a success, and Harry now knows that the loup-garou is* Vulnerable to Inherited Silver.

William, how does the sort of assessed aspect shown in the loup garou example interact with the notion of "The Catch" (page 185) when dealing with the supernatural toughness abilities?

Think of it as a complementary add-on. The Catch is the vulnerability, but the aspect represents part of the advantage the character gains from knowing about it (and is a source of fate points for the creature with the vulnerability).

So, declarations can make up anything?

Within reason. If it's fun and entertaining, it should be easier than if it's boring. Check out the guidelines for setting the difficulties in **Running the Game**, page 310.

Declarations

Traditionally, perception and knowledge skills usually focus on the discovery of what already exists ("knowable truths"). But in The Dresden Files RPG, these skills also allow for **declarations**. That is to say, using these skills successfully can allow you to introduce entirely new facts into play and then use those facts to your advantage. These new facts might also take the form of an aspect. (For example, if your character has a strong Alertness or Investigation skill, you might use a declaration to add features to a scene for you to use to your advantage—when the fire starts, your character just "happens" to notice that the janitor left a bucket of water in the hallway.)

As with maneuvering (page 207) and assessment (above), the resulting aspect can be tagged. Unlike assessment, declaration doesn't take any actual in-game time at all—just successful use of a knowledge skill at the right moment.

> ***Example:*** *Evan Montrose finds himself facing a pack of Black Court vampires that he's trying to ditch, but he doesn't have any of their usual weaknesses on hand. He doesn't have time to research things—he's in the middle of a chase—so his player, Rob, decides to invent some details about the environment Evan's in so he can take advantage of them. He uses his Alertness skill to declare that the scene has an aspect of Pipes Full of Running Water—the GM thinks this is a reasonable, possible, and fun way for Evan to evade his pursuers, so she sets a low-ish difficulty for the roll. If Rob's roll succeeds, he'll will find the pipes and should be able to use the scene aspect on a subsequent roll (tagging the aspect, since he introduced it) by opening a main valve and halting their pursuit—running water and Black Court vampires tend not to mix.*

Many skills have a **trapping** (page 120) allowing some kind of knowledge—for example, someone might use his Guns skill to make some declarations about the firepower an opponent is carrying.

So how are these different from the declarations you can make when you spend a fate point like you have on page 20?

They ARE similar. The fate point version is more limited but also more certain. Here, you're saving the fate point but getting the uncertainty of a skill roll and the traction of a temporary aspect.

GM Advice: Why Do Declarations Seem Easier than Assessments?

A close reading of the rules here may suggest that declarations are easier than assessments. Declarations take less time and may have lower difficulties than assessments. This perception is mostly correct.

The thing is, declarations done by the players take some of the "work" off of the GM. Assessments are largely a case of the players asking a GM to provide them with detail. By contrast, a player driving a declaration is supplying some of his own content for the game, which makes the GM's job much easier and, better still, increases the player's buy-in.

As with assessments, aspects created with declarations don't go away after being tagged, so long as circumstances make it reasonable that they hang around. This does mean that occasionally assessments and declarations can backfire on the character establishing them (other characters might use the same aspect, or the GM might bring that aspect back around to complicate the character's endeavors).

> **Example:** *Rob has declared Pipes Full of Running Water on the scene and used that to help Evan evade his pursuers. Rob tells the GM that Evan will do a tracking spell to help him get a bead on the missing person he was tracking through here. She grins and says, "Makes sense, but you know, now there are all these pipes full of running water everywhere… you know running water grounds out magical energy, so those pipes are going to create a natural threshold in this area." Rob sighs and realizes the spell's going to be a bit harder than he anticipated.*

I wish I could just declare something like "Red Court vampires are deathly allergic to cheese."

Bad form, boss. That's not a fate I'd wish on anyone.

Sample Aspects

To get a sense of how aspects might be used in play, consider the examples below. Not all of these are "Fuego!" aspects (see page 111) and that's intentional; "Fuego!" really works best when an aspect is *personalized* for a particular character. For many, many more examples of aspects, take a look at the sample characters found in Volume 2: Our World, as well as those in *Nevermore/Baltimore* in this book (page 358).

Exiled to the Special Investigations Division

The character is a Chicago police officer in the Special Investigations unit; this is where they send all the problem cops so they can work all the weirdest cases.

A player might invoke this to: Get a bonus when working with other Special Investigations folks, know things about the stranger happenings in a city, exercise the authority of the Chicago P.D.

A GM might compel this to: Complicate the character's life with his lack of real standing in the police department, drop the weirdest cases on his desk, give him a warrant for a werewolf, that sort of thing.

Faerie Bargain

The character has made a bargain with one of the Fae, usually for power or some other benefit. Such bargains have a high price.

A player might invoke this to: Enjoy the benefits of his bargain, make contact with the Faerie realms, know things about the Fae.

A GM might compel this to: Trap the character in the terms of his bargain, place the character in the middle of a power struggle between the Faerie Courts, complicate his life with Fae meddling.

A Mighty Fortress Is My God

The character's faith in God is central and important to him. It guides him and shapes him, forming a foundation for his actions as a moral being. (This likely goes hand-in-hand with a strong rating in the Conviction skill—page 124—representing the character's strength of faith.)

A player might invoke this to: Bolster his prayers, ward off evil, seek guidance from above.

A GM might compel this to: Temper the character's reasons for fury with forgiveness and mercy, force him into moral conundrums, complicate his life with the "will of God."

My Apprentice

The character has an apprentice with "lesser" (or at least less-trained) abilities than his own. Naturally, this apprentice is bound to get into troubles of his own and remains a constant responsibility to the character, but he has the potential to grow into a powerful ally.

A player might invoke this to: Do a little teamwork with his apprentice or ensure his apprentice is available to send on an errand.

A GM might compel this to: Get his apprentice in trouble, set up the mentoring responsibilities such that they run counter to the goals of the mentor, engineer a situation where his apprentice must go on trial before the White Council…

Old World Order

Due to a long life or strange upbringing, the character is steeped in "Old World" values and rules from another time and place.

A player might invoke this to: Navigate the political climate of the Red Court or the White Council, negotiate with ancient creatures, enforce an archaic code of conduct in a duel.

A GM might compel this to: Cause the character to behave anachronistically in the modern world or otherwise have difficulties adapting to the current age.

This Is Not a Shopping List!

Hey, you!

Yes, you, the guy who's looking over this list like he should start taking aspects from it and putting them on his sheet.

Stop it!

These are examples to get you to imagine *much cooler stuff of your own*. None of these are as awesome as your own ideas. So don't treat this as a shopping list—treat it as inspiration to say "I can do better than that!"

I'm going to start blaming you for everything bad that happens to me, Billy. You are clearly talking to my GM.

Just close your eyes and think of the fate points...

Poor Impulse Control

The character has a penchant for acting from his gut, and quickly at that. Hesitation isn't a problem for him, but he doesn't have a tendency to exercise caution, either.

A player might invoke this to: Respond quickly, attack suddenly, anger or scare someone.

The GM might compel this to: Cause the character to lose his temper, shoot his mouth off, or otherwise leap before looking.

Walking Under the Doom of Damocles

The character has broken one of the Laws of Magic, but there were mitigating circumstances that stayed his execution at the hands of the White Council. As a result, he's on probation—under constant surveillance by the Wardens, due to lose his head at a moment's notice if he missteps even once.

AND THAT IS SO FUN TO LIVE THROUGH.

A player might invoke this to: Draw the White Council's attention (if they've been ignoring something they shouldn't), establish a "name" or "reputation" in the supernatural community, run a "con" on some supernatural bad guys to convince them he's one of them.

A GM might compel this to: Draw the White Council's attention (if they've been missing something the character hopes they'll keep missing), add complications to the plot (like having a Warden show up every third scene to threaten the character), remove potential allies because they can't handle the risk of being seen with the character.

White Court Virgin

Perhaps unaware of his true heritage, the character is from the bloodline of the White Court vampires, but he hasn't yet consummated his power by feeding upon (and killing) a victim. He is caught between the promise of power and the dark price of it and may find himself drawn to feed in times of stress.

A player might invoke this to: Attempt to control his abilities, gain insight on interactions with others of the White Court.

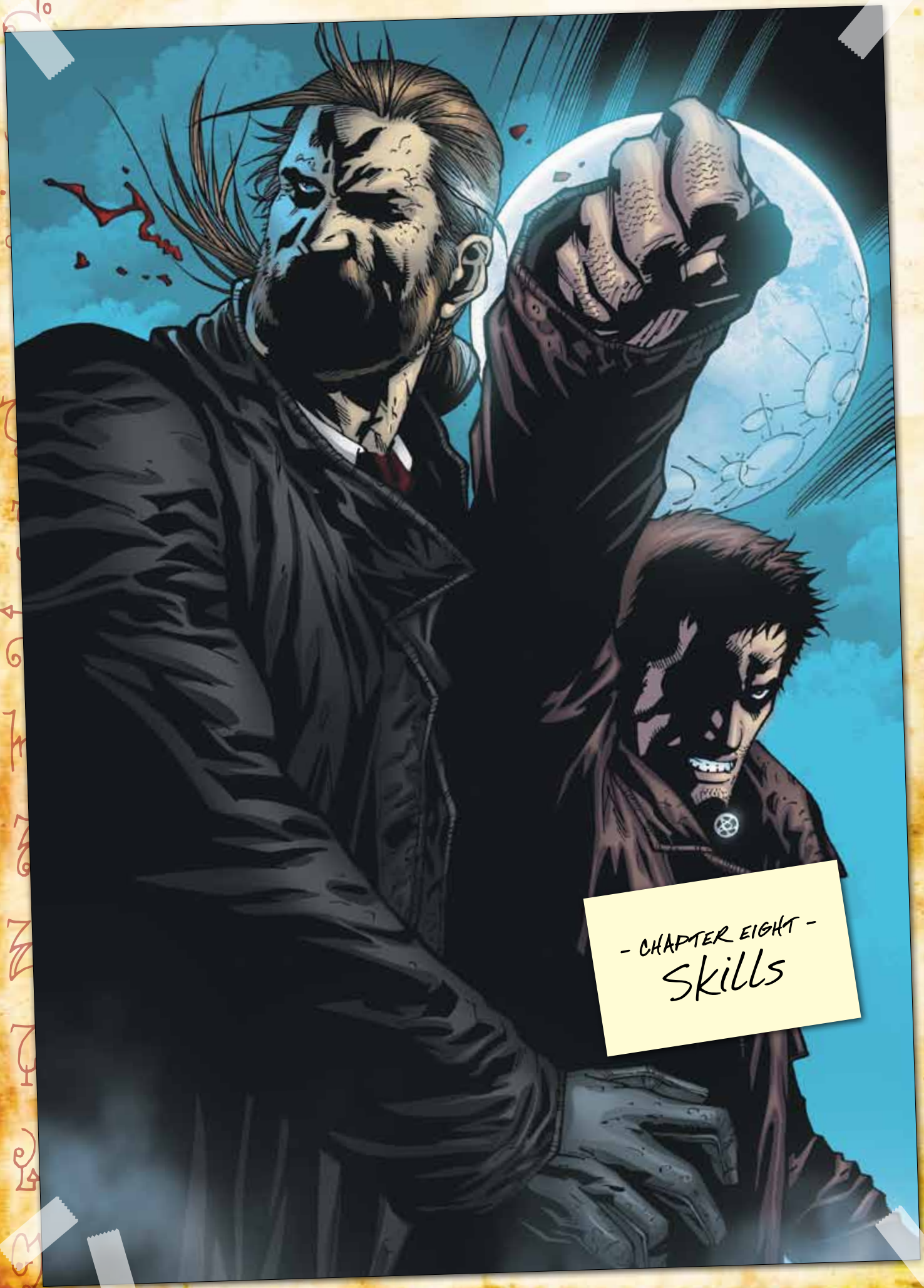
A GM might compel this to: Place a tempting "meal" before the character, entangle him in his family's machinations to get him "initiated," tempt him to give into his bestial urges.

Wizard of the White Council

The character is a full wizard of the White Council, an heir to a bloodline of power, able to exercise vast and strange powers of magic.

A player might invoke this to: Maneuver in White Council politics, aid in the casting of spells and the knowing of occult lore.

A GM might compel this to: Come under White Council scrutiny or obligation, be a target of the White Council's many enemies.


- CHAPTER EIGHT -
Skills

What Are Skills?

If aspects define who a person is, **skills** define what he can do and how he defends himself. Some skills are straightforward, like Michael Carpenter's conviction and his capability with a sword. Others are more open, like John Marcone's ability to get what he needs through his resources and charisma. And Harry Dresden's own inner strength and discipline are skills he uses to wield magic.

Almost every time you need to do or react to something, you'll be rolling one of your character's skills and adding that skill's rating, based on the ladder on page 16. Any skills your character doesn't have listed default to Mediocre (+0).

Each skill has a number of **trappings**, which are the rules for the skill in various circumstances. Each trapping has a name, so it's easier to reference; whenever you encounter a trapping, you'll see a ⅄ next to it.

Rules and advice for setting difficulties for various skills and their trappings are covered in *Running the Game* (starting on page 310) and cross-referenced in this chapter on a per-skill basis.

Skills are enhanced—either through bonuses to rating or though additional trappings—by **mortal stunts** and **supernatural powers**, which are covered by their own chapters (page 146 and page 158).

Here is the list of skills, their trappings, and the page where you can find the rules for them.

Page	Skill	Trappings
121	Alertness	Avoiding Surprise, Combat Initiative, Passive Awareness
121	Athletics	Climbing, Dodging, Falling, Jumping, Sprinting, Other Physical Actions
123	Burglary	Casing, Infiltration, Lockpicking
123	Contacts	Gathering Information, Getting the Tip-Off, Knowing People, Rumors
124	Conviction*	Acts of Faith, Mental Fortitude
125	Craftsmanship	Breaking, Building, Fixing
126	Deceit	Cat and Mouse, Disguise, Distraction and Misdirection, False Face Forward, Falsehood and Deception
127	Discipline*	Concentration, Emotional Control, Mental Defense
128	Driving	Chases, One Hand on the Wheel, Other Vehicles, Street Knowledge and Navigation
129	Empathy	Reading People, A Shoulder to Cry On, Social Defense, Social Initiative
130	Endurance*	Long-Term Action, Physical Fortitude
130	Fists	Brawling, Close-Combat Defense
131	Guns	Aiming, Gun Knowledge, Gunplay, Other Projectile Weapons
132	Intimidation	The Brush-Off, Interrogation, Provocation, Social Attacks, Threats
133	Investigation	Eavesdropping, Examination, Surveillance
134	Lore	Arcane Research, Common Ritual, Mystic Perception
135	Might	Breaking Things, Exerting Force, Lifting Things, Wrestling
135	Performance	Art Appreciation, Composition, Creative Communication, Playing to an Audience
136	Presence*	Charisma, Command, Reputation, Social Fortitude
138	Rapport	Chit-Chat, Closing Down, First Impressions, Opening Up, Social Defense
139	Resources	Buying Things, Equipment, Lifestyle, Money Talks, Workspaces
140	Scholarship	Answers, Computer Use, Declaring Minor Details, Exposition and Knowledge Dumping, Languages, Medical Attention, Research and Lab Work
142	Stealth	Ambush, Hiding, Shadowing, Skulking
143	Survival	Animal Handling, Camouflage, Riding, Scavenging, Tracking
144	Weapons	Distance Weaponry, Melee Combat, Melee Defense, Weapon Knowledge

** These skills affect stress tracks. See page 201 for more on stress tracks.*

Alertness

(Stunts, page 149)

Alertness is a measure of your character's passive awareness—his ability to stay on his toes and react to sudden changes in his environment. In short, it is the perception skill to notice things that you are *not* looking for. High Alertness characters strike early in a fight, tend to pick up on details of a scene simply by entering it, and are rarely surprised. They include bodyguards, outdoorsmen, and sneaky criminals.

Billy, I better have a decent score in this.

Well, you aren't a bodyguard or really an outdoorsman...does that make you a sneaky criminal?

Shut up, Bob.

Avoiding Surprise

Alertness

Whenever the trap is sprung in an ambush (see Stealth, page 142), you can make one final Alertness check against the Stealth of your attacker in order to see if you are surprised. If you fail this check, roll all your defenses as if they were Mediocre for the first exchange. If you succeed, you may defend normally at your full skill levels.

Combat Initiative

Alertness

Alertness determines **initiative** (order of action) in any physical conflict. To minimize the die-rolling, your group can use the listed value for everyone's Alertness to determine the order of everyone's actions.

Passive Awareness

Alertness

You will rarely *ask* to roll Alertness—if you are actively looking for something, Investigation (page 133) is usually more appropriate. Alertness is reactive perception. That is, Alertness is more appropriate for things that you do not expect or are not looking for—such as the spiked pit trap in the hallway you're casually walking through. It's a skill that, typically, the GM calls for you to roll.

Athletics

(Stunts, page 149)

Athletics measures your general physical capability—except for raw power (which is Might, page 135) and stamina (which is Endurance, page 130).

Athletics covers running, jumping, climbing, and other broadly physical activities you might find in a track and field event. Characters with high Athletics move further and faster than the rest of us, making it difficult to catch or hit them in a fight—think of athletes, soldiers, and outdoorsmen.

Climbing

Athletics

Athletics is the skill used for climbing. The GM sets the difficulty for how hard it is to climb a given obstacle. (For advice on setting difficulties and designing climbing challenges, see page 318.) At the GM's option, you may use shifts to speed the process if you succeed (see page 193).

Dodging

Athletics

You can use Athletics as a defensive skill to respond to physical attacks. This works very well in conjunction with taking a full defense action (yielding a +2 to the roll; see page 199). The one important thing to note is that taking a full defense action means that you can't use Athletics for other things, like sprinting—though as with *all* skills, you can move one zone as a supplemental action (page 213) by taking –1 to the roll for your main action.

Falling

Athletics

When you fall, you may roll Athletics to try to limit the severity of the result. For guidelines on the severity of falls, see page 319.

Jumping

Athletics

This is not the Olympics—jumping is something you do to leap obstacles or span bottomless chasms, and in those situations the GM sets a fixed difficulty for characters to meet or exceed. (For advice on setting difficulties and designing jumping challenges, see page 319.) Generally, that difficulty is the bare minimum that clears the



distance, so beating that by a few shifts is a good idea. Outside of that, jumping is often considered an extension of normal movement.

Sprinting
Athletics

You can use Athletics to move faster by taking a **sprint** action. Normally, you can only move one zone as a supplemental action (page 213) by taking –1 to the roll for your main action. If you spend your entire action moving, you are sprinting; rolling Athletics against a target difficulty of Mediocre, you can cross a number of zones and borders equal to or less than the total shifts of effect. If you get no shifts on your roll, you can still move one zone as long as there are no borders. See page 212 for additional details.

Other Physical Actions
Athletics

Athletics is often the "when in doubt" physical skill, and it can get a lot of use. Sometimes there's confusion about when to use Athletics and when to use Might. As a rule of thumb, Athletics is used to move *yourself*, while Might is used to move *other things and people*. When an action calls for both, they might modify one another (page 214). If there is no clear indication which should be primary, default to Athletics as primary and Might as the modifying skill.

Myself, I practice sprinting regularly. Seconds count when you're up against a monster.

Burglary

(Stunts, page 149)

The ability to overcome security systems, from alarms to locks, falls under the auspices of Burglary. This also includes knowledge of those systems and the ability to assess them. Without a lucky break, a criminal with only Stealth and Deceit will find himself limited to small-time thievery, while one who adds Burglary to his repertoire will soon be pursuing bigger targets. Characters with a high Burglary skill include burglars, private eyes, and even some cops.

William, Harry should have a decent score in this.

Shut up, Bob.

Casing

Burglary

You can use Burglary as a very specialized perception skill, specifically to assess the weaknesses and strengths of a potential target. Here, you try to determine the existence of unobvious or hidden aspects using assessment (page 115). Declaration may occur as well if you come up with an entertaining new aspect to place on the target of your future burglary (like Security Camera "Blind Zone"). Thus, either the GM can indicate you've discovered some flaw, or you can make a declaration about a flaw in the security that you intend to exploit or defeat. When you make a declaration, Casing follows the same guidelines as the Declaring Minor Details trapping for Scholarship (page 141) but is limited to security facts (including potential escape routes).

Infiltration

Burglary

Given an opportunity to case an intended target (above), you are much more prepared to infiltrate that location. You can invoke known aspects on the scene. In addition, you can use your Burglary skill to complement (page 214) any skills you use on targets you've had a chance to study and prepare for. Thus, Burglary may complement your Stealth and even, in certain circumstances, your social skills such as Contacts or Deceit.

Lockpicking

Burglary

You have a talent for defeating security systems, from simple locks to complex electronics. Naturally, these offer a sliding scale of difficulty, and the tougher targets are often the focus of the aspects you choose to reveal or declare when you case the place. Further, your Craftsmanship or Scholarship skills might modify (page 214) Burglary when dealing with particularly intricate mechanical or computerized security targets.

Contacts

(Stunts, page 150)

The Contacts skill represents who you know and how good you are at finding things out from them. You may know a guy, or know a guy who knows a guy, or maybe you just know the right questions to ask in the right places. Whatever your methods, you can find things out just by asking around. Characters with a high Contacts skill are connected, always with an ear to the ground, their fingers on the pulse of the city. They include reporters, private eyes, and spies.

The Contacts skill doesn't work in a vacuum—you need to be able to get out and talk to people for it to be useful; when that isn't possible, neither is the skill. Contacts are also limited by familiarity. Finding yourself in an entirely unfamiliar environment means drastically increased difficulties (+4 or more) on your Contacts rolls. For every week you stay in the area and expand your social networks, the familiarity penalty is reduced by one.

Gathering Information

Contacts

As with the answers and research trappings from Scholarship (page 140), gathering information begins with a question. The difference here is that you're posing the question to your contacts—you go out and talk to people, trying to learn the answer to a question like, "Who's trying to kill me?"

Describe where you are going to talk to folks (usually "the street"), and the GM sets the difficulty. Roll normally, and then the GM explains what you discovered. If the roll fails, then you may take extra time to try to succeed (page 316). This is much like scholarly research, but instead of needing a library, you need to talk to people.

A-H, yes. I ask this question often.

These people must have the right level of access to answer the question (this corresponds to the "quality" of the library). If you are being shut out for one reason or another, no amount of dogged persistence through time investment is going to help. When that happens, it usually means there's another problem you need to solve first.

One important warning about authenticity—being the most informed guy and knowing all the latest gossip aren't necessarily the same thing. The Contacts skill discovers what people know, and people always have their own biases. Information is only as good as its source.

Your use of Contacts rarely tests the truth of the information provided, save by the discovery—through *several* sources—that contradictory answers are coming in. If you want to determine the truthfulness of the information you're uncovering, that means more in-depth conversation with individuals...and it may involve using Empathy, Rapport, Deceit, Intimidation, and more.

Finally, consider that it is difficult to use the Contacts skill secretly. Rolling the Contacts skill usually indicates that you are going out and talking to people. If you're asking some particularly sensitive questions, word is going to get back to the people who have the real, deeper answers—people who might see shutting you up as the best way to keep their secrets.

Getting the Tip-Off
Contacts

Contacts also keep you apprised of the general state of things, sometimes *without* you going out and making an active effort. In this way, the Contacts skill acts as a sort of social Alertness, keeping you abreast of things that might be coming your way. It's far from foolproof and, like Alertness, the GM is usually the one to call for a roll—you can't go out looking for a tip-off, though you *can* tell the GM that you're going out and talking to your contacts just to check on what's up, which is a good hint that you'd *like* a tip-off.

Hm, faith as a basis for power? I don't see it.

Well, you've said you're not hip to faith jazz. Trust me, this ain't a bad way to model mortal spellcasting.

If you say so.

Knowing People
Contacts

If you have a strong Contacts skill, you know a wide variety of people and have at least a cursory connection with virtually any organization in the places you live and work (sometimes even those where you don't). Deeper connections may come about through concerted effort or the application of stunts. You can roll Contacts as a declaration in any scene to establish that you have a contact at hand, whether in a certain location or in a certain group of people. The more aspects (or other prior established context) that you have relevant to the location or group, the easier the declaration will be. For further guidelines on setting difficulties for Contacts rolls, see page 319.

Rumors
Contacts

Contacts are also useful for planting rumors, not just for ferreting them out. At its simplest, you can use Contacts to just "get the word out" effectively and quickly, but you can also use it to change some of the public's perspective about someone or something over time.

Tell the GM what rumor you want to plant, and she assigns bonuses or penalties based on how preposterous or reasonable the rumor is. The GM uses the final roll to determine the result of the rumor.

It's worth noting: your roll is also the target for *someone else's* Contacts roll to find out who has been spreading rumors—so be careful!

The most common effect of a successful Contacts roll to plant a rumor is a "sticky" temporary aspect (page 115). This might even be treated as a social attack (page 215) in some circumstances.

Conviction
(Stunts, page 150)

Conviction represents your strength of belief. This could represent your quiet confidence in yourself, your family, and your friends, or the certitude of your faith in a higher (or, for nasty sorts, infernal) power such as magic or God. No spellcaster ever gets much power without believing in his ability to do magic, and no holy man gives the forces of darkness much pause without Conviction. Characters with a high

Conviction are powerful, grounded individuals, whose beliefs make them able to weather any storm. They include holy people, patriots, and wizards.

Conviction is one of the three cornerstone skills for effective spellcasting, along with Discipline and Lore.

The Mental Fortitude trapping also adds to your mental stress track (see page 201 for more on stress tracks).

Acts of Faith
Conviction

Roll Conviction whenever you're called upon to test the strength of your beliefs. When you are under a specific mental or social attack designed to undermine your faith (whether that's in God, your magic, your friends, or whatever you might believe), you can use Conviction instead of Discipline to defend.

Mental Fortitude
Conviction

Whether facing torture or confronting something scary, Conviction is how you draw your strength to survive fear and other psychological distress—combined with strong Discipline, your Conviction strengthens the walls of the fortress of your mind.

Used this way, Conviction is a passive ability, representing your mental "toughness" under such circumstances. As such, a higher-than-default rating in Conviction improves your ability to handle mental stress, giving you more than the default number of stress boxes (2) if you take this skill:

Conviction	Total # of Mental Stress Boxes
Mediocre	2
Average, Fair	3
Good, Great	4
Superb+	4 *plus* one additional mild mental consequence for each two full levels above Good

So, most wizards are mentally tougher than other people?

Yup. Rock on!

Craftsmanship
(Stunts, page 150)

Craftsmanship is the understanding of how stuff works, reflecting your practical know-how when it comes to using tools effectively. While Craftsmanship can be complemented (page 214) by Scholarship, it can just as easily be the result of a lot of hours of getting your hands dirty and having a natural feel for how things work. Characters with high Craftsmanship are handy around the house and under the hood of a car; they are always helpful when a moody wizard shorts out your GPS. They include inventors, mechanics, and carpenters.

Let it go, Billy. I said I was sorry.

Breaking
Craftsmanship

Craftsmanship is also the skill for *un*making things (in a mundane, practical sense). Given time and tools, a craftsman can topple virtually any building, structure, or device. In those circumstances, you can use Craftsmanship to attack these things directly and deal stress or consequences to them (see page 320). In addition, you may use Craftsmanship to set up attacks and maneuvers against another target using the sabotaged building, structure, or device—such as setting up a bridge to collapse when someone's walking across it.

Building
Craftsmanship

You can use Craftsmanship to build something—provided you have a decent understanding of how to build it, as well as plenty of needed tools, materials, and time. The less you have of any of these things, the higher the difficulty to get it done. Craftsmanship is primarily used with declarations; see the guidelines for building things on page 320.

Fixing
Craftsmanship

Craftsmanship can be used to repair devices—again, if you have the time, materials, and the right tools. Details on setting difficulties for repair can be found on page 320.

Harry should have a low score in this.

Shut up, Bob.

Deceit

(Stunts, page 150)

Deceit is the ability to lie. Be it through word or deed, it's the ability to convey falsehoods convincingly. Characters with a high Deceit can easily seem much different than they actually are. They are masters of misdirection and they paint a sheen of seeming truth over the darkest lies. High Deceit characters include grifters, spies, and politicians.

Cat and Mouse

Deceit

You can use the Deceit skill for more than just dodging attention—use it to riposte a social query with a web of deception. When someone else initiates a social conflict, you may use your Deceit as a social attack skill, representing particularly convincing lies as consequences on your target. For example, if the social conflict is a tense business negotiation, you might inflict Thinks I Have Honest Intentions as a consequence, potentially allowing you to exert influence over your target in the future.

This is a dangerous game. You are opting *not* to put your False Face Forward (see below), which would keep things on a safer, defensive footing. Instead, you're going on the attack, making an active, aggressive attempt to turn the tables on your opponent—missteps are quite possible. If your opponent ultimately defeats you in this conflict, the truth will be revealed in some way. However, if you outclass your opponent significantly, this can be a powerful technique.

Disguise

Deceit

Deceit covers disguises, using your Deceit skill against anyone's attempts to penetrate your disguise. Such disguises are dependent upon what props are available, and they don't hold up to intense scrutiny (specifically, an Investigation roll) without the use of stunts (representing your deep expertise at disguise), but they're fine for casual inspection (i.e., Alertness rolls). You may use the Performance skill to modify (page 214) Deceit when attempting to pull off the disguised identity.

Distraction and Misdirection

Deceit

You may use Deceit to try to hide small objects and activities in plain sight and to oppose any perception check for something that you could try to hide, misplace, or distract attention from. When you use this skill to hide something, your skill roll indicates the difficulty of any Alertness or Investigation rolls to discover it.

This trapping is at the core of stunts that extend the Deceit skill to do things like stage magic or pick-pocketing. Without such stunts, you may attempt those sorts of things but only in the simplest fashion possible and against markedly increased difficulties (typically at least two or more steps harder).

False Face Forward

Deceit

You may opt to use Deceit instead of Rapport as a defense in social conflicts—such as when defending against someone using Empathy to get a "read" on you, or facing down an insult—to lull an opponent into underestimating you. This defense roll is modified (page 214) by the Rapport skill.

If you lose this defense roll, then your opponent may proceed as usual—in attempting to hide yourself, you have blundered and revealed a truth, shown an unintentional reaction, or something similar.

If you win the defense, however, you may make your successful defense look like a failure. When you do this, you can provide false information to the would-be "victor" (such as, "Wow! That insult really struck home!" when it didn't).

In the case of an Empathy read attempt, you may provide a false aspect to the reader, sending him off with an utterly fabricated notion of you. When he later tries to take advantage of an aspect that he falsely thinks is there, it can end up being a waste of a fate point or worse! (See "*Guessing Aspects*," page 113.)

Falsehood & Deception

Deceit

For simple deceptions, all that's necessary is a contest between Deceit and an appropriate skill (usually Empathy, Alertness, or Investigation, depending on the circumstance). For deeper deceptions—like convincing someone of a lie

or selling someone the Brooklyn Bridge—a social conflict (page 215) is appropriate, complete with Deceit attacks and dealing social stress. Sometimes, Deceit is the undercurrent rather than the forefront of an action; as such, the skill may modify, restrict, or complement (page 214) another (usually social) skill's use.

Discipline

(Stunts, page 151)

Discipline represents your ability to stay focused on your goals and actions despite distractions, as well as the ability to protect yourself from the psychological fallout of awful or scary events. It's what makes you able to conquer fear, resist torture, and recite boring math equations with such dedication that a psychic demon can't bore into your mind. Characters with strong Discipline rarely let fear get the best of them and can perform a wide variety of stressful tasks without breaking their concentration. They include chess grandmasters, air traffic control operators, and wizards.

Discipline is one of the three cornerstone skills for effective spellcasting, along with Conviction and Lore.

See Feeding Dependency (page 190) for how this skill affects a hunger stress track (see page 201 for more on stress tracks).

Concentration

Discipline

Many other skills may be used in circumstances where unusual concentration is necessary—such as using Burglary to pick a lock while you're getting shot at. In such circumstances, the GM may ask that Discipline be used to restrict (page 214) the skill being used, representing a small penalty if you are not skilled at keeping your focus. Other circumstances may arise where Discipline would be rolled to represent how well you remain focused on a particular task or idea.

Emotional Control

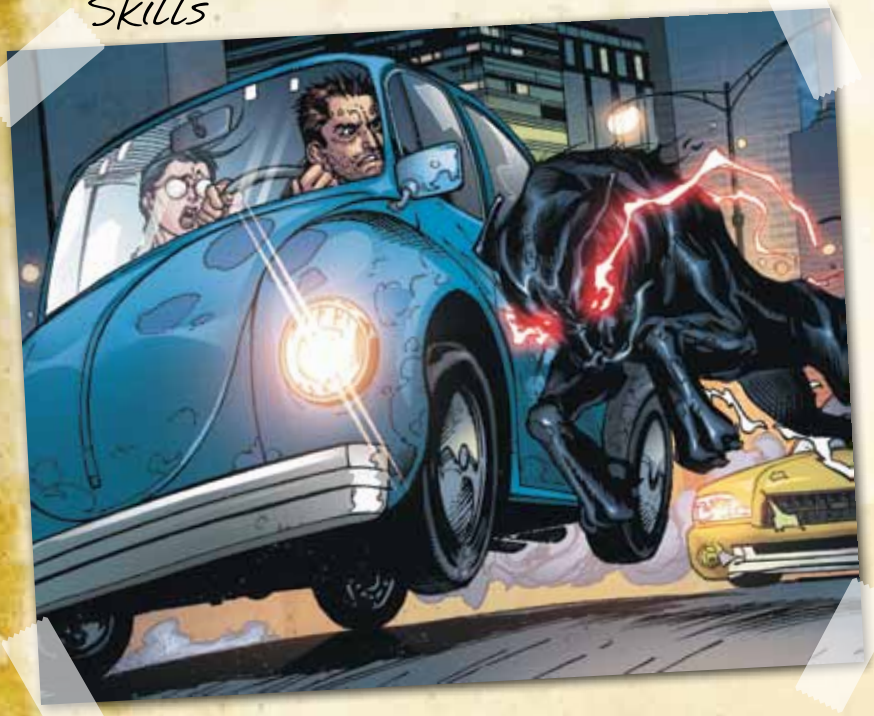
Discipline

Whenever you are trying to master your own emotions, Discipline is the skill you'll use to do it. This could be as simple as rolling Discipline as a defense against an Intimidation attack or keeping your terror in check in order to avoid feeding the fear-eating monster next door.



I thought the Conviction trapping Mental Fortitude handled this. What's the diff?

Partially, it's an active/passive thing. Check out "Mental Defense" later in this section.



Some of these pictures show my not-blue BLUE BEETLE as blue. What the hell?

Chalk it up to the newbie art director, here. When you give an artist a name like "Blue Beetle"...

Sometimes this trapping may be impaired by a particular aspect on a character—if you have the Prone to Violent Outbursts aspect, for example, and accept a compel on it, then there's no need to roll Discipline to control the outburst; assume you already failed any such roll.

Mental Defense
Discipline

Discipline is the default skill for defense whenever something tries to deal mental stress to you or tries to mentally or psychologically assault you. At minimum, roll Discipline as the defense against certain Intimidation attacks, as well as against invasive mind magic.

This means that Discipline and Conviction partner together to represent your overall "fortress of the mind." With both rated highly, you are rarely affected by emotional and psychic attacks (thanks to strong defense rolls from Discipline) and, when affected, you can take more psychological distress before you start to break down (thanks to the extra mental stress boxes from Conviction). When your Discipline and Conviction skills are not in line with each other, you may be easily affected by distress but have the kind of faith and confidence necessary to persevere despite that (low Discipline, high Conviction), or you may be very good at "compartmentalizing" your response to things but actually pretty fragile inside (high Discipline, low Conviction).

Ah, I see!

Driving
(Stunts, page 151)

Driving is your ability to operate a car (and potentially other vehicles). Day to day, it's pretty easy and shouldn't be rolled unless circumstances call for it (such as driving fast through busy streets, or in the rainy dark without headlights). With a high skill, you can pull off stunts you usually only see in the movies. Stunt men, mafia chauffeurs, and cops have a high Driving skill.

Chases
Driving

Driving inevitably leads to car chases—one of the major trappings of this skill. In a chase, your Driving skill is used to close the distance between you and the car you're chasing (or increase the distance if you're the one being chased). It's also used to bring quick resolution to the issues brought up by terrain and other obstacles. Car chases are usually handled using one of the extended contest options (page 193).

One Hand on the Wheel
Driving

Trying to do something in a car? Roll Driving, simple as that. If you are trying to do something fancy, like driving and shooting at the same time, Driving will restrict (page 214) the skill being used. Note that this trapping generally applies to physical actions that you can conceivably do while driving. Since Driving only restricts your other skill, there's no way you could become *better* at doing something while you're also driving a car—your aim won't suddenly improve because you happen to be driving while you shoot at your target!

Other Vehicles
Driving

If your background reasonably suggests experience operating a vehicle other than a car, then Driving may be used to operate those vehicles as well, making this the skill for piloting boats, aircraft, and other motorized vehicles.

True! Thomas' WATER BEETLE handles much like a car.

Street Knowledge and Navigation
Driving

The modern city can be a confusing maze of streets and alley-ways, and being adept at Driving means you know your way around cities you're familiar with (both behind the wheel and on foot). Under pressure, Driving is the skill for getting from point A to point B as fast as or faster than you need and for figuring out the best course. If you're not familiar with a place, Driving is treated as Mediocre for the purpose of navigation.

> **These Boots Are Made For Walkin'**
> If your character doesn't take the Driving skill for some reason, that doesn't necessarily mean that he don't know his way around the city—he might just have to get at the information some other way, by using Contacts, Investigation, or Scholarship. All we're suggesting with the above is that if you drive around a city long enough, you get some knowledge of how to get around it by default, and that knowledge would also apply when you're not in the car.

Empathy
(Stunts, page 152)

Empathy is the ability to understand and guess what other people are thinking and feeling. This can be handy if you are trying to spot a liar or you want to tell someone what that person wants to hear. It's also useful for keeping up your guard during a social conflict. Characters adept at Empathy are very perceptive about people and their motives and often end up as quiet masters of a social scene. They can include reporters, gamblers, and psychologists.

Reading People
Empathy

You can use Empathy to figure out what makes another character tick. After at least ten minutes of intense, personal interaction, you may make an Empathy roll against the target's Rapport roll (see Closing Down under Rapport, page 138; the target might also choose to defend with Deceit).

This is an assessment (page 115) action and, as such, if you gain one or more shifts on your roll, you discover one of the target's aspects that you weren't already aware of. It may not reveal the name of the aspect in precise detail, but it should paint a good general picture. For instance, it might not give the name of someone's brother, but it will reveal that he *has* a brother. You can repeat this process, taking longer each time, and ultimately reveal a number of aspects equal to your Empathy skill value (minimum of one)—so, a Fair skill (value 2) would allow you to reveal two aspects through at least two different rolls.

A Shoulder to Cry On
Empathy

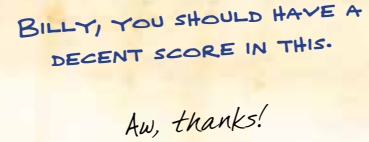
Characters with Empathy are familiar with the emotional responses of other people and are able to effectively provide comfort and reassurance to those who are emotionally wounded. With the Empathy skill, you can create an environment for another character to justify recovery from mild social or mental consequences. See page 220 in *Playing the Game* for a discussion about recovering from consequences. Stunts are required to bring this trapping to the level that professional therapists have.

Social Defense
Empathy

Use Empathy as a defense in a social conflict (though it isn't the only skill that can be used this way). In particular, you must use Empathy to defend against Deceit as you try to sort out truth from fiction in what you're hearing.

Social Initiative
Empathy

Use Empathy to determine initiative (order of action) in any social conflict. To minimize on die-rolling, Empathy is usually taken simply at its listed value and used to determine the order of actions you and other characters take.



Endurance

(Stunts, page 152)

Endurance is the ability to keep performing physical activity despite fatigue or injury. It's a measure of your body's resistance to shock and effort. In addition to addressing fatigue, Endurance is rolled as a defense when fending off poisons and disease. High Endurance characters can take more punishment than others and can keep going long after the competition has tuckered out. They include thugs, athletes, and rough-and-tumble private eyes.

The Physical Fortitude trapping also adds to your physical stress track (see page 201 for more on stress tracks).

I DO GET HIT IN THE HEAD A LOT.

TAKES A LICKIN' BUT KEEPS ON TICKIN'!

Long-Term Action

Endurance

Endurance is a passive skill. You will very rarely need to ask to roll Endurance; instead, when strenuous activities have gone on for a while, the GM will call for rolls when appropriate. Particularly, Endurance can come into play in long-term actions as a restricting (page 214) skill, where your ability to keep performing at peak is limited by how well you can overcome fatigue and pain. This is why the Endurance skill of top athletes is on par with (or better than) their Athletics skill. Without a solid Endurance skill, you may be a good sprinter but you will find yourself winded and falling behind in a marathon.



Physical Fortitude

Endurance

Endurance determines your ability to handle physical stress.

Used this way, Endurance is again a passive ability, representing your "toughness." As such, a higher than default rating in Endurance improves your ability to take physical stress by giving you more than the default number of physical stress boxes (2):

Endurance	Total # of Physical Stress Boxes
Mediocre	2
Average, Fair	3
Good, Great	4
Superb+	4 *plus* one additional mild physical consequence for each two full levels above Good

Fists

(Stunts, page 152)

The Fists skill is your ability to hold your own in a fistfight, with no weapons available but your bare hands (with a few exceptions). With specialized training (represented by taking stunts), this may include the practice of a more disciplined kind of fisticuffs, such as martial arts. Characters with a high Fists skill are a blur of fists and feet in a fight—delivering sudden uppercuts and body-blows—and are pretty adept at not getting hit themselves. They include bouncers, thugs, and martial artists.

Many of the restrictions on the uses of Fists (such as using certain close-combat weapons, or the sorts of things Fists can be used to defend against) can be set aside with the right kind of martial arts training. Invariably, this level of training is reflected with a few martial-arts-oriented stunts such as those found on page 152. Without those stunts, you might still have some basic self-defense style training, but you haven't yet attained the level of "art."

ALSO A SKILL SHARED BY TINY, SCARY POLICE OFFICERS.

Brawling
Fists

As a combat skill, Fists is rolled to make attacks and maneuvers when you are using nothing other than your body to get the job done. Brass knuckles and the like allow you to use Fists, but in general, attacks that use a tool—be it a staff, knife, sword, or broken bottle—use the Weapons skill instead.

Bare hands have the advantage that they're always with you, but the disadvantage that they almost *never* offer a damage boost on a successful hit.

Close-Combat Defense
Fists

Fists may be rolled as a defense against other Fists attacks and against short-reach, close-quarters weapons such as knives and short clubs, representing the ability to block or dodge an opponent's attacks. It can't be used as a defense when the weapon arguably has a significant reach advantage (swords, staves, and guns), unless you can justify it as an unusual circumstance—e.g., "My skin is bulletproof, so I should be able to block a sword if I do it right" or "I'm right next to the guy, so I'm going to try to push his arm aside as he makes the shot with the gun." As a rule, Fists can usually be justified as a defense against attacks that come from the same zone as you and rarely against attacks from outside that zone.

Guns
(Stunts, page 153)

Sometimes you just need to shoot things. Thankfully, there's a skill for that. With a gun, you can shoot up to two zones (page 197) away—possibly three or more, if it's a rifle (borders, page 212, may or may not count, depending on their nature). Unfortunately, without a gun at hand, the skill isn't much use. Characters with a high Guns skill are masters of death; as a result, it's rare to encounter one who doesn't have a healthy respect for the dangers inherent in bringing out the weapons. Such characters include policemen, soldiers, assassins, and hunters.

If someone is devoted to using Guns as a strong component of his fighting style, it can safely be assumed that he possesses at least one or two guns, regardless of Resources rating (though whether or not he will be allowed to carry such things wherever he goes is another matter entirely), so long as it fits the concept.

Aiming
Guns

One popular maneuver among Guns users is aiming. This is done like nearly any other maneuver (page 207), with the idea that you take an action to place a temporary aspect on your target—e.g., In My Sights. On the subsequent exchange, you tag that temporary aspect to get a +2 on the roll, assuming the target hasn't done something to rid himself of the aspect.

Gun Knowledge
Guns

Guns users are also well-versed in a variety of small arms, large arms, and ammunitions, as well as the care and maintenance of firearms. You may use this skill as a limited sort of knowledge and repair skill covering those areas.

Gun-nuts love to get together to talk about guns. Could there be a "social" use here?

Gunplay
Guns

Guns is an attack skill, by and large, though a creative player will undoubtedly come up with some maneuvers to attempt when shooting. As far as mundane, mortal weapons are concerned, guns are at the top of the heap in a fight. They're deadly—getting large stress bonuses on successful hits, forcing consequences, concessions, and taken out results faster than other means of attack. Better yet, they operate at range, forcing unarmed opponents to take cover or close with you in order to be effective.

As an attack, a gun also limits the defensive options available to a target. Targets are generally only able to roll Athletics as a defense, representing their ability to dodge and get out of the way of the gun—or otherwise present a difficult-to-hit target, like taking cover—before the shot's taken. And guns are often the weapon of choice for an ambush (page 142) which, when done right, leaves the victim's defense skills locked down at Mediocre—easy to deliver a *devastating* shot.

There are two downsides. First, a gun can be taken away from you, rendering this skill useless. Second, you can't ever use the Guns skill as a defense, which means you need a strong Athletics skill to cover you, just in case. As a

You can't use Guns for defense without a stunt, at the least!

Is there a rule where you get a bonus for throwing your empty gun at Superman, after all those bullets bounced off him? There must be. Hundreds of TV criminals can't be wrong!

result, Guns ends up being a bit of a one-note wonder—and while that's one hell of a note, it can be pretty limiting at times, especially in neighborhoods where you're likely to get the cops responding to reports of gunfire.

Remember: when a gun is drawn, it's a statement of intent to kill people. Even a great many supernatural creatures will take pause at the sight of a gun barrel pointed their way.

Other Projectile Weapons
Guns

You can also use Guns to cover non-gun weapons that shoot at a distance, such as bows and other such artifacts, though usually with a penalty (–2) if you aren't trained in their use. If, at the time you take the Guns skill, you decide your character is focused on using a method of shooting other than a gun, you may rename this skill to something more appropriate (e.g., Bows) and face the familiarity penalty when using actual guns instead. Under such an option, most Guns related stunts are still available with the unusual weapon.

Intimidation
(Stunts, page 153)

Also a skill for creepy PI wizards.

Bob! Shut up!

Intimidation is the skill you use for producing a sudden, strong, negative emotion in a target—usually fear. With high Intimidation, you exude menace, choose exactly the right words to chill others to the bone, and get people to lose their cool in an instant. Bodyguards, mob enforcers, and "bad" cops have high Intimidation.

The Brush-Off
Intimidation

This one doesn't work so well when the target can literally tear your head off.

If things get to the point of a face-off, there are a lot of other actions an opponent can do other than stand there and be intimidated—such as disengage or pull out a weapon. However, one of the real strengths of Intimidation is that first flash of contact, when people instinctively get out of the way of someone intimidating. Used in this fashion, Intimidation can establish a powerful, menacing first impression. If you are actively doing something intimidating, you may roll a quick contest of Intimidation against the opponent's Discipline or Presence. If successful, the target is taken aback for a moment, generally long enough for you to brush past them, though the target will usually have plenty of time to call for help if appropriate. This can't be done in a fight or against any target who is already ready for a fight; but in those "first contact" situations, Intimidation is gold for control.

Interrogation
Intimidation

Intimidation is the "bad cop" skill for interrogation situations—a special kind of application of the above trappings. It's not a soft touch; it's all about getting in the face of the perp and convincing him that you are the harbinger of his personal doom. Other social skills, such as Deceit and Rapport, are necessary to make it an interview rather than an interrogation and belong firmly in the "good cop" camp.

Provocation
Intimidation

When you don't control the situation well enough to make your target afraid, you can still use Intimidation—just not for the usual "be scary" purpose. Instead, psychological or social attacks may be made to provoke the target—usually by enraging them or otherwise getting them to lose their cool. Harry Dresden is particularly fond of this trapping and uses it to turn the tables on his captors whenever possible.

Works for Spider-Man, works for me.

Social Attacks
Intimidation

There are more graceful social skills for convincing people to do what you want, but few skills offer the pure efficiency of communicating that failure to comply may well result in some manner of *harm*. Nothing personal.

You can use Intimidation as an attack to deal social stress, cutting through the usual niceties by making things blunt, ugly, and expedient. This can force someone to get to the point, make him spill the truth, or cause him to flinch and show weakness when surrounded by sharks. The target usually gets his choice of social skill to defend against such an attack—for whatever help that might offer him—so long as it's appropriate to the attack. He might try Rapport to attempt to laugh it off, Presence to keep a poker face, Discipline to keep his cool.



Threats
Intimidation

At its core, Intimidation is about putting the fear of *you* into someone. To manage this, you must be in a position to make a reasonable case that you actually can deliver some kind of harm or unpleasant circumstance to your target. You can achieve this with reputation, appearance, weaponry, or even with a good, scary speech. Ultimately, this is about power—defined here as your demonstrable ability to control the situation, rather than the victim's control over it. Without this context, the victim may be at an advantage (+2) when defending, or may simply be untouchable by this method of psychological attack.

Under certain conditions, Intimidation is one of the few skills able to deal direct mental stress (see "*Mental Conflicts*," page 217) to a target as an attack, and you can use it both in physical and social conflict situations.

Investigation
(Stunts, page 153)

Investigation is the ability to look for things and, hopefully, find them. This is the skill you use to *actively* look for something—like searching a crime scene or trying to spot a hidden enemy that you know is somewhere near. Characters with a high Investigation discover the most hidden clues; when they focus their attention on something, they can perceive details more fully and deeply than others. These people include private investigators, reporters, and cops.

Eavesdropping
Investigation

You can use Investigation to focus attention on a target in order to perceive details that you might normally miss. For example, when trying to hear something that might be difficult to pick up on casually, roll Investigation. This makes a strong Investigation skill paramount for eavesdroppers and gossip hounds. All it requires is the investment of time and attention.

Examination
Investigation

Deliberately using an assessment action to look for clues, deep patterns, or hidden flaws in something most commonly calls for the Investigation skill. This makes Investigation the flip-side of Alertness: it is mindful, deliberate perception, in contrast to the passive perception of Alertness. An equivalent Investigation effort is nearly always going to yield better, more in-depth information than an Alertness effort would. The downside is that Investigation is far more time-consuming—"minutes to hours," as opposed to "seconds to minutes."

Also, this is the trapping used to verify the truth of information, whether it's checking up on a rumor you got via Contacts or spotting a forged document in a pile of paperwork.

Surveillance
Investigation

Surveillance is the art of using Investigation to keep track of a target over an extended period of time, whether by watching a fixed location or

by following the target on foot through busy city streets.

If the investigator is looking to keep an eye on his target without being seen, a second roll is necessary (using Stealth), per the Shadowing trapping on page 143.

Long-term Surveillance may call for Endurance rolls as you begin to find it difficult to stay awake or keep from running off to a nearby bathroom. Equipment can aid the roll or remove the need for it entirely; a thermos of coffee and an empty bottle are practically "musts" in the professional surveillance business. Having a second person help out so you can take a break is a plus as well.

So true.

Lore

(Stunts, page 154)

Lore represents your occult knowledge. Looking at the world at large, most people don't have this skill or even know it exists. But for those who've studied the *real* teachings of the occult, Lore allows them to gain useful insight into the arcane elements of the mortal world. With a high Lore skill, you can pick up on mystical happenings that are nigh invisible to others, know and discover magical particulars when it comes to assembling the materials for spellcraft, and (in some cases) even perform basic rituals—given the right text. Mystics, monsters, and wizards have high Lore skills.

Lore is one of the three cornerstone skills for effective spellcasting, along with Conviction and Discipline.

Arcane Research

Lore

Above all, Lore is the skill used to research things related to arcane and occult principles. If you're looking for the right way to fight a monster, the recipe for a potion, or a new protective incantation, Lore's the skill to roll. Other than the subject matter, Lore behaves exactly like the Scholarship skill when it comes to the functions and methods of research, allowing most of Scholarship's trappings (page 140) to be used, with the focus changed to arcane and occult matters.

When a library is needed, it must be rated for providing rare occult texts. Such libraries are few and far between, and thus true practitioners often must contact the spirit world for the needed information, be it in the form of a bound spirit, a demonic summoning, or some other ritual.

Or you could drop a load of dough at a reputable occult bookstore, like Bock Ordered Books.

Common Ritual

Lore

Anyone who can light a match can use it to set off a stick of dynamite—whether or not they can do it *safely* is another matter entirely. The same is true of the practice of "common" rituals—sometimes all you need is the untrained use of Lore plus a rare, arcane ritual text to contact and interact with mystic and dark powers from beyond.

Common rituals that actually work are very rare. Most common rituals have been rendered powerless thanks to their distribution to the public. (Think of it this way: each common ritual out there represents a conduit to a specific supernatural power, but that entity has only a fixed amount of power it can send down that particular channel. The more people that are aware of a ritual, the more they pull power from that channel. Get too many trying to tap into the same power source, and soon there isn't enough left for any person to grab power of any consequence. Thus, one of the White Council's most effective ways to rob common rituals of their power is through wide publication and distribution in various "new age" texts and other books of the type.)

When given an actual, usable common ritual, Lore is the skill of lighting the wick on the dynamite of that supernatural entity's power. But unlike a stick of dynamite, that entity is a thinking being, usually with thousands of years of experience in outsmarting humans like you who come knocking and asking for power. More often than not, a common ritual blows up in your face.

For more on spellcasting with common ritual, see page 290.

Mystic Perception
Lore

Exposure to arcane lore leads to a heightened awareness of the supernatural. In certain circumstances, you can substitute Lore for Alertness to pick up on supernatural details about a scene. These details should be *extremely* vague, limited to statements such as "You're getting a bad feeling about this" or "Something about this place is just…wrong." Used this way, Lore is more an indicator that there's something weird happening rather than a lens through which to see the weird.

Might
(Stunts, page 154)

HULK SMASH!

Might is a measure of pure physical power, be it raw strength or simply the knowledge of how best to use the strength you have. Might is for lifting, moving, or breaking things. You can use the skill to add a measure of physical power to the efforts of another skill. Characters with a high Might are not supernaturally strong, but they can still bend, break, and lift things that are normally beyond the capabilities of everyday people. They include thugs, furniture movers, and wrestlers.

Breaking Things
Might

Might is the skill of choice for applying brute force to snap something into smaller pieces; it includes breaking boards, knocking down doors, and the like. Using Might, you can damage an item over time or break it with a single dramatic blow. For guidelines on breaking things, see page 321.

Exerting Force
Might

You can use Might indirectly to modify, complement, or restrict (page 214) some skill uses. This represents the secondary influence of physical strength on the primary use of another skill. For example, climbing while carrying someone on your back might restrict a normal Athletics roll, whereas getting into a shoving contest with someone might let you roll Fists modified by Might.

Lifting Things
Might

Might controls how much you can lift, shift, or move. The weight of the thing you're moving determines the difficulty for the roll, though this might be modified by things like leverage and other factors. For a discussion of weight and the lifting of heavy things, see page 321.

Wrestling
Might

In combat, Might can help you with particular applications of Fists and Weapons: if physical force is a very significant element at play, Might will modify (page 214) the primary skill.

Furthermore, if you successfully engage an opponent in a one-on-one exchange, you can potentially switch from Fists to Might as the primary combat skill by executing a hold or other wrestling move where it's less about hitting than about overwhelming with physical force. See the grappling section on page 211 in *Playing the Game* for details.

Performance
(Stunts, page 154)

Performance represents your overall artistic ability, covering the gamut of endeavors that involve putting creative works before an audience (painting, dance, music, writing, and some elements of acting). This includes knowledge of composition as well as the performance itself. Characters with a high Performance are incredibly creative individuals, able to create poetry extemporaneously, dance well enough to make one's heart soar, or put on an acting performance that will bring a crowd to standing ovation. They include actors, artists, and those with faerie blood.

WHAT ABOUT STAGE MAGICIANS? DIDN'T YOU SAY THEY USE DECEIT?

See below.

Art Appreciation
Performance

As a knowledge skill, Performance is identical to Scholarship, though the fields it applies to are more limited and more focused. Thanks to this narrowed focus on the fields of art and performance, a few shifts of success on a Performance roll may pay out more information when compared to the same number of shifts from a Scholarship roll.

Billy, I don't get it — what's the actual in-system benefit of the Composition trapping here?

It's a lot like Craftsmanship when building something, only you're making art instead of a functioning widget. There are a lot of possible applications there, many of which will manifest as declarations.

Composition
Performance

As a composition skill, Performance is fairly straightforward—you can make art of virtually any type, so long as you are familiar with and practiced in the medium, producing works of a quality equal to your skill. Without stunts, it's probable that none of them will be masterpieces, but any art that's Average or better can be displayed without any real embarrassment.

All Art Is Not the Same
Normally, common sense should dictate whether or not a character is practiced in a particular medium—if the character is a journalist, he probably doesn't do ballet. Some groups may want to nail this down more specifically, for this skill and for others (like Scholarship). A good guideline is to allow the player to choose areas of specialty equal to the rating of the skill. So, a character with Good (+3) Performance is practiced in three mediums of art.

If you're going to do this, keep in mind that some characters might be locked out of using the Play to an Audience or Composition trappings, depending on context.

Creative Communication
Performance

While Scholarship covers the technical building blocks of communication—language, grammar, and the like—Performance covers the creative expression of ideas and, as such, covers most means of broad communication like writing. These are not "pure" performances, however, and your other skills play a role in their application, so your writing is usually modified by your Scholarship. There are exceptions, such as dry, academic documents (which use pure Scholarship) and poetry (which uses just Performance).

Public speaking is a similar creature, but it is more beholden to the charisma and presence of the speaker. In those cases, Performance modifies (page 214) whatever skill (Rapport, Intimidation, Presence, or Deceit) you are using, so long as the communication has a creative component.

Playing to an Audience
Performance

First and foremost, Performance is the skill of playing to an audience—producing a reaction in a crowd with creative expression, whether that's acting or another art form. As such, you can use Performance to declare (page 116) aspects on a scene when those aspects might arise from a moving performance, affecting everyone in a room at once. Usually, aspects declared by this method must be broad, indicating the mood of the crowd, rather than specific and targeted at individuals present.

For example, if Malcolm Dresden is at a children's party pulling rabbits out of hats and doing other assorted tricks, he might put the aspect Giggles and Delight on the scene, reflecting the general, joyous mood.

A+ classic!

Presence
(Stunts, page 154)

Presence is a multi-faceted skill, representing attributes of leadership, reputation, and charisma. While Conviction represents your overall mental and psychological toughness, Presence is a measure of social toughness—whether or not you'll flinch and lose face in front of others, and how your image stands up to scrutiny and/or attack. Characters with a high Presence carry themselves with a quiet confidence no matter the situation, and when they speak, others stop and listen. They include military officers, mob bosses, politicians, and lawyers.

The Social Fortitude trapping also adds to your social stress track (see page 201 for more on stress tracks).

Charisma
Presence

Presence is used passively whenever someone is trying to size you up socially. While the Rapport skill also covers your ability to reach out to others and make an impression, it is a deliberate, active skill in comparison to Presence. Much like the split between Investigation and Alertness, Rapport and Presence represent the active and passive sides of making an impression, respectively. As a rule of thumb, the GM may ask you to roll Presence to gauge impressions when you



are not actively focusing your efforts on making one. Further, when you use Rapport to make a deliberate impression, you can call in Presence to complement the skill (page 214).

Command
Presence

Use Presence to direct troops, workers, or any other group attempting a task. Any time you are in a position to give orders to a group of followers or functionaries, you may apply your Presence skill to help coordinate their efforts. This will allow you to make a Well-Coordinated or similar aspect available to whoever is rolling for the combined task, via a maneuver (see *Playing the Game*, page 207, for more details).

You can also use the skill to get a largely undifferentiated mob of people to behave in a particular way, such as convincing a group of people to evacuate a building or to charge a line of police. If your action has a theatrical element to it, you can use Performance to modify (page 214) the roll.

Reputation
Presence

Presence can represent the strength of your reputation, in that it insulates you from the social maneuvers and attacks of others. This is not the same as fame or notoriety; it's more a measure of how well you're able to use your reputation to help you achieve social goals. To this end, there may be reputation-specific circumstances where you will roll Presence to defend against social attacks and maneuvers.

Social Fortitude
Presence

When facing a direct attack like a smear campaign or simply the latest gossip on the streets, Presence is how well you comport yourself in an outward, social fashion. Combined with a strong showing in other social skills such as Rapport and Deceit, your Presence makes you particularly difficult to assail in a social scene.

Used this way, Presence is a passive ability, representing your social "toughness" under such circumstances. A higher-than-default rating in Presence improves the ability to take social stress, giving you more than the default number of stress boxes (2) if you take this skill:

Presence	Total # of Social Stress Boxes
Mediocre	2
Average, Fair	3
Good, Great	4
Superb+	4 *plus* one additional mild social consequence for each two full levels above Good

Rapport

(Stunts, page 155)

The flipside of Intimidation, Rapport is your ability to talk with people in a friendly fashion, make a good impression, and perhaps convince them to see your side of things. Any time you want to communicate without an implicit threat or attempted deception, this is the skill to use, making it appropriate for interviewing or making friends. Characters with a high Rapport can make strong first impressions and they make easy, friendly conversation in any social scene. They include politicians, reporters, and "good cops."

Father Forthill must have a really high Rapport skill. That man can get anyone to talk!

Chit-Chat

Rapport

A character skilled in Rapport is a master of small talk and, through casual, friendly conversation, can get folks to give up information without quite realizing they've done it. In a social conflict, you may roll Rapport for maneuvers and "attacks" with this goal in mind. You can also use the skill creatively to grab someone's attention and keep him distracted by conversation while something else is happening in the room.

Billy, why would someone use "opening up" if it means no matter what he ends up revealing an aspect to his opponent?

Closing Down

Rapport

Rapport controls the face you show to the world—and that includes what you choose *not* to show. As such, when you try to use Empathy to get a read on someone, your attempt is opposed by Rapport as the default. If you simply wish to reveal nothing, you may use Rapport and take the equivalent of a full defensive action (page 199), gaining a +2 on the roll.

Well, you could ask a marketer that question—she'd tell you that controlling the message is everything. If you open up and show your opponent your TIGER-SOULED aspect, you have created a very distinct impression. That's power.

This is over and above the default of a Rapport defense because it's obvious you're doing it: you're closing down, wiping all emotions off your face. This means that closing down is a fairly obvious strategy—your opponent will know you're doing it. It also requires that you be consciously aware that someone's trying to read you. If you are trying not to look like you're actively warding off the read, or if you aren't really aware that you're being read, then you aren't taking a full defensive action and you don't get the +2.

First Impressions

Rapport

The first time you meet someone, the GM may call for a quick Rapport roll to determine the impression you make (assuming you're trying to make a good one). This may interact with the Presence skill, depending on the situation. Usually, succeeding at this roll can give you a beneficial temporary aspect such as I Look Good, which you might tag or invoke on socially related rolls in that scene. Be careful, though—failing significantly at such a roll could also change the situation for the worse, putting an I Look Bad aspect on you which could be used by someone else.

Opening Up

Rapport

Your skill in Rapport includes the ability to control which side of your personality you show to others by seeming to open up while actually guarding deeper secrets. Since you reveal only true things about yourself, this is not an inherently deceptive action involving the use of the Deceit skill.

When you open up, you defend as usual against an Empathy "read" (page 129) with Rapport. If your opponent succeeds and generates at least one shift, he finds something out, as usual (a failed defense roll is a failed defense roll after all). If you succeed, your opponent still discovers an aspect—but it's one of your choosing.

Used this way, you can effectively stonewall someone without the obvious (and unfriendly) poker face of Closing Down. In addition, you can always choose to reveal something that the other character already knows.

Social Defense

Rapport

Control of outward reactions and a general ease at conversation are both within the realm of Rapport, and both are useful in mounting a defense against social maneuvers and attacks (page 215). Only the rarest of social conflicts prevents you from using Rapport as your defense skill. Rapport is the go-to skill for rolling to defend in social conflicts, much like Athletics is the go-to skill for physical conflicts.

Resources

(Stunts, page 155)

Usually Resources is a measure of your available wealth, but the specific form this takes—from a secret family silver mine to a well-invested portfolio—can vary from character to character (and may be indicated and enhanced by your aspects). Characters with high Resources can buy their way into or out of most situations and can easily afford the finest luxuries of life. They include aristocrats, successful criminals, and businessmen.

It's important to note that Resources represents your personal resources, including your regular forms of income, whether your job is "steady" or not. You may have access to an organization's resources under certain circumstances; this allows you to roll a different rating than your personal Resources skill. Rolling that way means you're expending that organization's resources, not your own.

For example, a consultant for Monoc Securities might decide to acquire a private jet for corporate use. The consultant's Resources might only be Fair (+2), but in this case the consultant rolls using Monoc's expense account, rated at Fantastic (+6).

Buying Things

Resources

Usually, this skill passively informs the GM what your available resources are, but you may still actively roll Resources for large expenditures or expenses outside of the daily cost of living—like purchases and bribes.

For an idea of the "cost" of things, see page 322. The cost of items is measured on the adjective ladder; you can buy reasonable quantities of anything that's two steps or more lower than your Resources without worrying about it (i.e., not rolling). With justification, you can probably also get things one step below your Resources. For items greater than or equal to your Resources, roll against the cost of the thing. If successful, you can afford the item; if not, you can't. You can only make one Resources roll per scene.

Some large-scale conflicts may be all about trying to outspend the other guy. Here, Resources might act as an attack or defense skill.

Equipment

Resources

You are generally assumed to have all the tools you normally need to do your job, whether that job is fixing engines or shooting people. Still, sometimes a situation arises where you need to buy something, either because you didn't anticipate needing it or because the item is unusual, rare, or illegal. When that happens, measure the price in terms of how much Resources it requires to access and purchase the item.

Lifestyle

Resources

You are assumed to live in accordance with your means. If you're rich, you may not even need to go shopping (you have people who do that). Generally speaking, if something costs two steps less than your Resources skill, you probably have one already, assuming it's something that would make sense for you to have obtained previously.

Money Talks

Resources

Wealth puts pressure on social interaction, either subtly or overtly.

On the subtle level, whenever knowledge of your wealth affects a situation, the Resources skill may be used to modify (page 214) the actual skill being used (usually a social one). If being less wealthy is actually seen as a positive in the situation (perhaps to gain some "street cred" or what-have-you), then the rules for modifying may be turned around, creating a –1 to the roll if Resources is *above* a particular level.

More overtly, you may use Resources as the primary skill in a social interaction where an offer of money is the primary factor. Bribery is the clearest of such cases here, though negotiations to get a cash-strapped wizard-for-hire to sign on to a case may involve a Resources roll, as well.

Workspaces

Resources

Part of the passive measure of Resources is the personal tools and spaces you have access to. Workspaces are environments where you can perform a certain type of work, and owning and maintaining a world-class workshop, library, or arcane laboratory requires a certain amount of Resources.

I WOULDN'T KNOW ANYTHING ABOUT THAT. I'D NEVER DO ANYTHING JUST FOR THE MONEY.



You use your Resources to set up the tools you need for your job. Your home may have, for free, a single library, lab, workshop, or arcane library or sanctum of a quality equal to two steps lower than your Resources. As described in Scholarship (see page 142), the quality of a workplace determines the highest possible difficulty of a "question" or project that you can pursue there.

The breakdown of the various types of skills that need workspaces is shown in the following table. See the respective skills for more details.

Skill	Work	Workspace
Scholarship	Academic Research	Library
Scholarship	Scientific Lab Work	Lab
Craftsmanship	Construction & Fabrication	Workshop
Lore	Arcane Research	Arcane Library
Lore	Arcane Spellwork & Ritual	Arcane Sanctum

If you wish to have a specialized workspace, such as a workshop that can only work on guns, you may have it at a quality equal to one step lower than your Resources instead. Higher quality workspaces may be constructed, but they require a Resources roll with a difficulty equal to the quality+2 (or +1 in the case of a specialized space) and are not immediately available at the time of purchase (though additional shifts may be spent to reduce the timeframe, as usual).

Keep in mind that a library doesn't have to be an actual, literal library full of books—any kind of archived, searchable information can be considered a library for game purposes. So, if you want to have something like a computer mainframe or set of hard drives that holds scanned documents on various topics, you could also consider that a library. Many actual libraries even have large computerized databases now, as opposed to older archival technologies like microfiche.

By default, the Internet is a Mediocre library—extremely detailed information on a specialized topic is usually access-restricted or buried among useless and speculative information. If you want to, however, you can say that your library consists of access to specialized online databases (like Lexis-Nexis for lawyers) that would allow a higher quality rating.

Scholarship

(Stunts, page 155)

In the Dresdenverse, knowledge breaks down into two camps: *mundane* and *supernatural*. Lore covers the latter and Scholarship covers the former. Scholarship operates as a catch-all skill for most kinds of regular, everyday, "book" knowledge with a few practical applications out in the field as well. Characters with high Scholarship may be adept at technology and research, well-versed in the sciences and liberal arts, and good at performing first aid (provided they have experience with it). They include star students, professors, and game show contestants.

Answers

Scholarship

The main use of Scholarship is to answer a question. Questions covered by Scholarship include those of history, literature, and the sciences both "soft" and "hard." You can ask the GM, "What do I know about this subject?" or "What does this mean?" Often, there will be no need to roll, especially if the subject is within your specialty (as indicated by your background and aspects). But if the GM feels the information is something that should be hard to attain (such as a clue), then she may call for a roll against a difficulty she sets. If you succeed, you receive the

information. If you fail, you may still attempt to *research* the topic (see the trapping by that name, below). In some cases (basically, whenever it might be entertaining), you may stumble onto a false lead that gets you deeper into trouble, or you may discover that the information you seek only uncovers deeper, unanswered questions.

Computer Use
Scholarship

Assuming that you aren't the sort of person to, say, cause technology to short out when you get near it, the Scholarship skill includes the ability to use and operate complex computerized or electronic systems. This doesn't really include any competence at hacking, per se—Burglary is still used to actually defeat security measures and systems. However, Scholarship should modify (page 214) Burglary whenever computers are involved.

Declaring Minor Details
Scholarship

You may use your knowledge to declare facts, filling in minor details that the GM has not mentioned. These facts must be within the field of your Scholarship, and the GM has the right to veto them. If all's well, the GM sets a difficulty for the truth of the assertion, and if you succeed at your Scholarship roll, the assertion is true. If not, you are mistaken.

In most cases, this is treated as a straight-up declaration action, as described on page 116. If your assertion is correct (i.e., successful), the aspect is placed; it can be tagged once and then invoked as usual (page 106). If your assertion turns out to be wrong, there is no penalty, but there may be complications—at her option, the GM could place a temporary Mistaken! aspect on you, compelling it to represent the fallout (and netting you a fate point).

For GM advice on setting difficulties for declarations, see page 313.

I think coroners count here for the whole "Medical Attention" thing.

Make that I SURE HOPE they count...

Exposition and Knowledge Dumping
Scholarship

Sometimes the GM just needs to give the group a lot of information, and the character with a high Scholarship skill tends to be the conduit of that. When the GM needs to knowledge dump, if you have the highest Scholarship skill, the GM may ask you if she can use you as a mouthpiece. Assuming you agree, the GM can share all appropriate background and is encouraged to give you a fate point for having your character temporarily commandeered for the purposes of the story.

I see Exposition & Knowledge Dumping addresses the "A-s you know, Bob..." issue.

What?

Nevermind.

Languages
Scholarship

Languages are part of a good classical education. You may speak a number of additional languages based on your Scholarship score (you don't have to, if it doesn't suit your concept). Each step of Scholarship above Mediocre gives you knowledge of one additional language (so one additional at Average, two at Fair, and so on). You don't need to choose the languages when the character is created; you can instead choose languages in the course of play, as is convenient.

Medical Attention
Scholarship

Scholarship covers the scientific and practical knowledge necessary to administer basic First Aid. This allows you to declare that your care is sufficient justification for recovery from mild consequences, because you can create an environment that makes this recovery possible. See page 220 in *Playing the Game* for a discussion of justifying recovery from consequences. Stunts are necessary to take this to the level of true doctors and surgeons.

Research and Lab Work
Scholarship

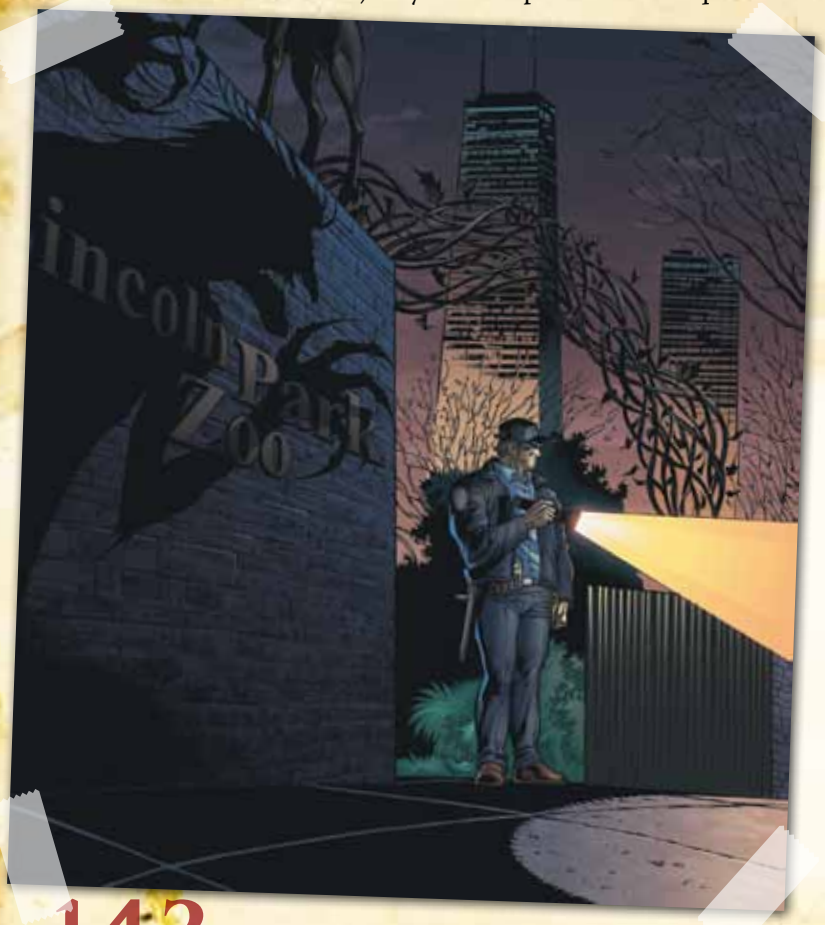
Researching a topic is frequently a time-consuming and arduous task and exactly the sort of thing worth skimming over with a few quick dice rolls. Treat research as an extension of the knowledge the character has—you know the answers to some questions off the top of your head and can answer other questions because you know what book to look in.

As such, deeper, dedicated research is something that might happen when you fail a Scholarship check. Provided you are willing to spend time researching (and that the answer *can* be found), the only questions are *how long* it will take you and *how good* a workspace you have access to (usually a library for book things, a laboratory for experimental research, etc.) to discover the answer.

One important note: because the GM is not always obligated to reveal the difficulty of a given roll, you may not know how much you failed it by, which means you don't know how long you'll need to research. Usually you'll just research until you find the answer, but sometimes, when time is tight, you might find yourself behind the eight-ball. GMs are encouraged to read "*Setting Difficulties*" (page 310) before making any decision about how to deal with a failed roll.

Academic research requires a library (page 140), while research through experimentation requires a laboratory. The quality of these workspaces determines the hardest possible question you can answer within them (so a question of Good difficulty requires a Good library or better). If you attempt to answer a question in a library that's not equipped to answer it, the GM is encouraged to be up-front about its shortcomings.

Most high schools and private individuals have Mediocre, Average, or Fair libraries. Small colleges often have Good libraries and laboratory facilities; larger institutions may have Great ones. Superb and better libraries are few and far between. Many workspaces also have a specialty or two where they are considered to be one step higher—for example, Georgetown's library specializes in law, so it has a Great library which is treated as Superb for legal questions. Characters may own libraries, laboratories, and other workspaces of their own; see the Resources skill (page 139) for more.



Stealth

(Stunts, page 156)

Stealth is the ability to remain unseen and unheard. Directly opposed by Alertness or Investigation, Stealth covers everything from skulking in the shadows to hiding under the bed. Characters with a high Stealth are like ghosts, passing through the shadows with only the barest whisper of sound. They include burglars, assassins, and sneaky kids.

Ambush

Stealth

With the Stealth skill, you can set up an ambush by rolling to hide as per the Hiding trapping, below. Given time to prepare, you might even create aspects on the scene to set up the ambush. When you decide to strike, the victim gets one last Alertness roll to see if he notices something at the last moment. You have the option of keeping your hiding roll or rerolling your Stealth in response to this last Alertness roll. If the victim succeeds, he can defend normally (but not take a normal action in the first exchange). If the victim's roll fails, he can only defend at an effective skill level of Mediocre.

Hiding

Stealth

When you're hiding, you're remaining perfectly still and (hopefully) out of sight. Lighting, obstacles, and other environmental factors can modify the difficulty (page 311), and the result of your Stealth roll is the basis for any contest with a searcher's Alertness or Investigation.

Shadowing
Stealth

Something of a variant on Skulking (see below), Shadowing is the art of following someone without them noticing that you're doing it. When following someone on foot, the full Stealth skill can be used to pull this off; if you're following a target by car, Stealth remains primary but is modified (page 214) by your Driving skill. The target usually gets an Alertness check to see if he can pick up on the fact that he's being followed.

This Stealth check is often made complementarily to an Investigation check required to keep the target in sight, as per the Surveillance trapping for that skill (page 133).

Skulking
Stealth

Skulking is the art of moving while trying to remain unnoticed. It uses many of the same rules as Hiding, above, but it adds in difficulty factors based on how fast you are moving and the terrain. A slow crawl isn't much harder, but running is tough. Bare concrete isn't much of an issue, but a scattering of dried leaves and twigs makes it much more difficult to move quietly.

Survival
(Stunts, page 156)

Survival is the skill of outdoorsmen, covering hunting, trapping, tracking, fire building, and a lot of other wilderness skills. Characters with a high Survival skill are adept at riding horses, can survive nearly indefinitely by living off the land, and can track a man in the wilderness for days. They include hunters, scouts, and soldiers.

While the Dresdenverse is centered squarely on the urban landscape, Survival still has its place, either by venturing out into the countryside (say, to visit a crotchety old wizard who lives on a farm), stepping into a particularly large urban park, or making it through the night in the wilds of the Nevernever.

I recommend everyone study a wilderness survival manual. The Boy Scouts one is good; the US Army one is better.

Animal Handling
Survival

Survival covers the breadth of your interaction with animals—natural ones for certain, and even some supernatural types. This interaction ranges from calming them to training them to getting a rough kind of "communication" going. This includes handling beasts of burden and carriage animals as well as common pets.

As such, Survival serves as a stand-in for all social skills when dealing with animals and other beasts. Which is not to say that animals are great conversationalists; but when you're trying to soothe or stare down an animal, Survival is the skill to roll.

Cats don't fit these rules. Trust me. Mister is a handful, at the best of times.

Camouflage
Survival

Survival can be used to construct "blinds" and other ways to help remain hidden outdoors. On a Mediocre or better roll, you can construct a decent, disguised place to hide, which lets Survival complement (page 214) your Stealth rolls.

Riding
Survival

Riding horses (or camels, elephants, or more exotic creatures) uses Survival, with the skill operating much like Driving does when it comes to chases and most maneuvers. Further, Survival simply covers the basics of riding, from taking care of your mount to getting it to remain calm through a stressful situation.

Oo! Do zombie T-Rexes count here?

I swear you're sweet on that girl.

I like big bones, and I cannot lie.

Scavenging
Survival

If you need to scrounge up something from the wilderness—sticks, bones, sharp rocks, vines that can serve as rope, and so on—you can roll Survival to find these things.

Can you use any of these Survival trappings in a city?

Some yes, some not without taking a stunt. The animal-related ones are a yes; they don't depend on the environment.

Tracking
Survival

Tracking is the art of looking for recognizable signs of passage and the ability to draw conclusions that help you stay on the trail of your quarry. As this is partly an application of deliberate perception, the Investigation skill modifies (page 214) Survival when you use the skill this way.

Once you get close enough to your prey to be seen or heard by it, the Shadowing rules for Stealth (page 143) come into play.

Weapons

(Stunts, page 156)

Weapons is the skill of fighting with tools: swords, knives, axes, clubs, whips, etc. (except guns—that's a whole section of its own; see page 131). The exact weapon is more a choice of style than anything else, as this covers everything from fencing to a brawl using broken bottles and chair legs. Characters with a high Weapons skill are familiar with a variety of "old school" weapons and wield them with deadly accuracy. They include swordsmen, circus performers, and Special Forces soldiers.

Distance Weaponry

Weapons

The Weapons skill also covers the ability to use weapons with an unusually long reach (like a whip or long spear) to attack targets in adjacent zones or to throw small handheld weapons up to one zone away. Use this skill to be good at throwing knives as well as fighting with them. If you are Weapons-focused, you have a leg up on folks who fight with their Fists; on the other hand, a Weapons user needs to have a weapon in order to make use of the skill.

Melee Combat

Weapons

Weapons is a combat skill that is used to make attacks and maneuvers (page 207) that incorporate the use of a physical weapon—such as knives, swords, clubs, and so on—but not bare hands (which uses the Fists skill; see page 130) and not guns (which uses the Guns skill; see page 131). When used to attack, melee weapons always deal physical stress.

Weapons allow the character to maintain some reach and attack advantage over a bare-handed opponent. On a successful attack, a handheld weapon often causes more physical stress than would a bare-fisted attack at the same level, making this a more wounding and lethal method of combat. The downside, of course, is that someone can take your weapon away from you, rendering this skill entirely unavailable.

Melee Defense

Weapons

As a combat skill, Weapons inherently carries the ability to defend yourself in a fight against other Weapons and Fists attacks, so long as you have a weapon in hand. (You still need Athletics to make yourself a difficult target against ranged fire from Guns.)

Weapon Knowledge

Weapons

You are well-versed in a variety of fighting styles and weapons and you may use this skill as a knowledge skill covering those areas, such as "This sword is from Solingen; I can tell from the hallmark."


- CHAPTER NINE -
Mortal Stunts

What Are Stunts?

Just enumerating a person's skills doesn't quite give you the full picture of what he's capable of. Most people have little tricks, advantages, or knacks that they pull out when they need a bit of something extra. Ramirez finds new and exciting ways to get wounded without going down. Marcone can shake a man twice his size to his core just by saying "Good morning." Harry can do more than just eavesdrop—he can Listen. We call these little knacks **stunts**.

What Stunts Do

Stunts exist to provide *guaranteed situational benefits*. These benefits might be the result of special training, unique (but non-supernatural) abilities, or something that's just innately cool about your character. A stunt may grant a character the ability to use a skill under unusual circumstances, using it in a broader array of situations than normal, substituting it for another skill, or using it in a complementary fashion to another skill. A stunt might allow a character to gain an effect roughly equal to two shifts used in a specific way or to otherwise grant other small effects. Put more simply, stunts allow the usual rules about skills to be bent—or even broken. We'll get into how to build your own stunts shortly.

Some stunts may have prerequisites (other stunts or even aspects). Particularly potent stunts may also require the use of a fate point to be activated. In general, a character should not take a stunt tied to a skill he does not have at least at Average level.

Mortal Stunts vs. Supernatural Powers

The stunts in this chapter are called **mortal stunts** because they're available to everyone—supernatural and mundane characters alike—and have both feet firmly planted in the realm of what's possible for a normal (mortal) human to do. Each mortal stunt that a character takes reduces his refresh by 1. (What's refresh? See page 20.)

Supernatural powers are very much the same as stunts, although they tend to pack more of a wallop. However, they often have more requirements before they can be taken—usually, at the very least, a high concept aspect (page 54) indicating that the abilities represented by the supernatural powers are appropriate to the character.

The Philosophy of Limits

This whole thing with limiting PCs to no more stunts and powers than their refresh allows may seem a bit odd. There are a few reasons it's here.

The most obvious reason is that it's a "game balance" issue—a flexible spending limit that keeps PCs all within a certain power level. But if that's the goal here, why all that yap about the mortal gift of free will? Let's look at this from two perspectives.

First, system-wise, a character with a low refresh is going to be very light on fate points during play. But fate points are a key currency, the big engine that drives the ability to use aspects—and aspects are an important feature for enabling characters to exercise their "story power." So a character without many fate points at the beginning of a session is going to be "hungry"—compelled (very literally; see page 100) to act in keeping with his aspects in order to get his fate point total up. Ever wonder why Harry Dresden—a low refresh character due to all of his supernatural power—tends to get so beat up and into sticky situations all the time? We know it's mostly his stellar personality, but *in game terms*, it's because he's getting compelled left and right by circumstance, filling up on much-needed fate points.

The effect this has on play produces something very much like what we were talking about on page 10—monsters have nature, mortals have choice. So there's our second perspective: the more power someone has, the more he risks becoming a monster, a creature totally beholden to its nature. Even a mundane mortal can become a monster once his abilities begin to dictate his actions. The mortal gift of free will is a preventative measure against complete monsterhood. And that brings us full circle.

So, that explains it! Wonderful.

So now I don't just have trouble paying my rent, I also have some sort of wacked out metaphysical debt I'm constantly under. I want a new GM!

To remain a PC, no character may take a combination of stunts and/or powers that would reduce his refresh to zero or below. Characters that have gone beyond this limit have, for all practical purposes, lost their freedom of action, thus becoming tools of the game's story (i.e., NPCs) rather than protagonists (i.e., PCs). In the case of mortal stunts, the character is constrained by what he's made of himself; for supernatural powers, he's lost access to the mortal gift of free will. In general, it's recommended that non-supernatural characters spend about half their refresh on stunts, but this is just a recommendation.

Building Mortal Stunts

What follows later in this chapter is not a comprehensive list of stunts. You, along with your GM, are encouraged to create your own to fit your game. The important thing to keep in mind is that "entry level" stunts—without prerequisites, which mortal stunts usually are—are the baseline. If the effect of the stunt is really unusual or particularly potent, it may be somewhere down the line in a chain of stunts.

Since a stunt is tied to a particular skill, it's useful to think about the abilities offered by a stunt as an extension of its skill's **trappings** (page 120). So at a very high level, we can say a stunt does one of two things: it either *adds a new trapping* to a skill or *extends an existing trapping* of that skill by applying about two shifts (page 192) of effect in a particular way.

Both of these things are often constrained to happen under somewhat specific circumstances (aim for something between almost-never-happens narrow and covers-all-situations broad). If there's any hard and fast rule of building stunts, it's this one: a stunt should never be allowed to act, essentially, as a flat +2 to the skill it affects under all (or even the majority) of that skill's uses.

Furthermore, when used in combination, stunts should avoid overlapping such that their bonuses "stack"—both adding in the same way to the outcome. If such stacking is possible, then the stunts, taken individually, should each be less effective than the norm.

With those ideas in mind, let's get into the specifics of building mortal stunts. (To learn more about supernatural powers and get some ideas about how to build those, see page 158.)

Adding New Trappings

The first possible use for a stunt is to broaden a skill by giving it a new trapping. Often this is a trapping that's "transplanted" from one skill to another. Sometimes this trapping may need to be modified, or made more circumstantial, in order to fit its new skill.

> **Example:** *Lenny's character never fights a monster without two guns in hand. He has a strong Guns skill rating, but his Athletics is only so-so. Lenny decides to build a new stunt called Shot on the Run, transplanting Athletics' "Dodging" trapping to Guns—now Lenny can roll Guns instead of Athletics in order to dodge physical attacks. His GM considers putting the restriction "…so long as he has a gun close at hand" on Lenny's stunt idea to help rationalize the use of this stunt—after all, it's still the Guns stunt, and Lenny's ability to dodge using Guns suggests that it's tied to his ability to, say, lay down some gunfire to make himself a less attractive target in a fight. Alternately, it might be done as a "Dodge, only vs. ranged attacks" with the idea that Lenny's character is using his knowledge of sight-lines and so forth to make himself a difficult target. Both work, offering the same kind of mechanical benefit, but under different circumstances—it's up to Lenny and the GM to work out what fits best.*

Other times an entirely new trapping is warranted. The default set of trappings for a skill certainly doesn't cover every conceivable application—it just defines what the skill can do for everyone. Skills are pretty broad in application; specialization happens with stunts.

> **Example:** *Lydia has created a huntswoman—someone used to tracking beasts in the wild—who's been drawn to the city by strange supernatural prey. Her character has a pretty high Survival skill, covering most of her outdoor-oriented capabilities. But she wants something more, so she takes an Herbalist stunt, adding a trapping to the Survival skill that allows her to use it as a knowledge skill when dealing with plants, maybe even allowing for a little herbal first aid.*

Taken all together, this variety of stunt is an easy one to come by. There's no strange math, no specific application of shifts to consider, just a broadening of scope for the affected skill. These stunts often show up for a character's highest-rated skills, allowing the character to operate at peak effectiveness in more situations.

Extending Existing Trappings

The other possible use for a stunt is to improve the use of a skill (usually a single trapping of that skill) under specific circumstances. Generally, this means that the stunt offers an effect equal to about two shifts applied in a specific way (such as reducing the amount of time or difficulty to do something by two steps, or adding 2 to the skill when used in a particular way). Those shifts may be split up, with one stunt offering two different one shift effects (e.g., reducing the time to do a task by one step and granting a +1 to the skill roll when the circumstances are right). Certain applications of skills may be considered to be more potent than others (attacks are a good example of this), and as such these may be better done at the one shift mark rather than two. On the other hand, instead of lowering the number of shifts gained, you could require that the character spend a fate point to activate a more potent stunt.

As noted above (page 147), *when applying multiple stunts like this to the same skill, the bonuses should not overlap or "stack."* If stacking is allowed, the amount of effect each stunt has individually should be reduced. To oversimplify this a bit, two stunts might offer +2 each in two different ways, but if they're set up to both add to the same thing, the result should be more like +3 than +4. But this is just a guideline, subject to the GM's sense of charity.

What about me? I'd definitely be faster than "two time increments"! How does eidetic recall fit into your rules, William?

I'M PRETTY SURE YOU DON'T COUNT AS A MORTAL CHARACTER, BOB. HA, YOU'RE AN NPC! OR AN ITEM OF POWER?

What?!

Given these considerations, here's a quick list of mortal stunt effects that could be used to build your own. (If the same bonus is achievable multiple times through multiple stunts, reduce the effectiveness of any "stacking" stunts by one.)

Give a +2 to a specific application of a non-attack trapping (note that a maneuver, page 207, is not an attack, as it doesn't inflict stress). This may be reduced to +1 for a broader application, or increased to +3 or even +4 for very, very narrowly defined situations.

> **Example: Vampirologist** – *Gain a +1 to Lore rolls whenever researching vampires and their kin. Specify a deeper sub-field of knowledge (Red Court), and you gain an additional +1 when the research is relevant to the sub-field.*

Give a +1 to an attack, improving its accuracy under a specific circumstance.

> **Example: Target-Rich Environment** – *Gain a +1 to attacks with Guns whenever personally outnumbered in a firefight.*

Give a +2 to an attack's result, applied only if the attack was successful, under particular conditions. May have a lesser benefit in a secondary circumstance.

> **Example: Lethal Weapon** – *Your hands are lethal weapons. When using Fists to strike an unarmored opponent, you are considered to have Weapon:2; Weapon:1 vs. Armor:1.*

Give one or two expendable 2-shift effects (e.g., additional mild consequences) **or a persistent 1-shift effect** (e.g., Armor:1 against certain types of things). Lean towards one expendable effect if the application is broad (e.g., vs. all mental stress), two expendable effects if it's narrow.

> **Example: Resilient Self-Image** – *Your sense of self is strong, enabling you to endure more psychological punishment than most. When facing torture or other extreme interrogation techniques, you may take two additional mild mental consequences (page 203).*

Reduce the amount of time necessary to complete a particular task by two steps.

> **Example: Capable Researcher** – *Some say you were born in a library. Any scholarly research you do is completed two time increments (page 315) faster than usual.*

Reduce the difficulties faced by a skill under a particular "sub-set" of circumstances by two.

> **Example: Hairpin Maestro** – *Poor tools are no trouble when picking locks. Any increase to difficulty due to poor tools (such as having only a hairpin and a business card) is reduced by up to two.*

Combine any two of the 2-shift effects from above at half value.

> **Example: Scene of the Crime** – *You have a practiced eye when combing over a crime scene. In such a circumstance, you gain +1 to your Investigation roll and arrive at your findings one step faster than usual on the time table (page 315).*

Get a more powerful effect, but only when you spend a fate point. Usually only allowed once per scene.

> **Example: Killer Blow** – *Add 3 to the damage of a Fists attack on a successful hit, once per scene, for a fate point. This stacks with any other damage-increasing stunts for Fists.*

Yes, Names Matter!

Stunts are more than just their game-rule effects. This is why it's important to give your stunts a catchy name. This is *not* optional!

A name is evocative, getting across the gist of the stunt and giving another bit of flavor to define your character. Also, practically speaking, giving it a specific name gives you a shorthand for talking about the stunt with the GM and other players.

Examples of Mortal Stunts

The stunts provided here are examples. We're giving just a few for each skill but, as indicated above, this is absolutely not intended to be a comprehensive list. When you don't find something here that suits you, use the guidelines above (page 147) to grow your own.

Hacker's not so useful if you're a wizard and computers go FOOF! when you touch 'em.

Alertness

(Skill & Trappings, page 121)

Corner of My Eye: When successfully rolling Alertness passively to pick up on details, gain an additional 2 shifts. This reflects the ability to pick up on more pieces of information, but it does not improve the *depth* of that information (which would take things into the realm of Investigation).

On My Toes: Gain +2 to Alertness when using it to determine initiative.

Paranoid? Probably.: Gain +2 to Alertness when rolling against surprise.

Athletics

(Skill & Trappings, page 121)

Acrobat: Gain +1 on Athletics when using it to survive a fall. Also, gain +1 to attempts to dodge ranged attacks (throwing and guns), so long as you describe it colorfully.

Fleet of Foot: When sprinting (page 212), gain a +2 to Athletics.

Human Spider: Difficult surfaces aren't much trouble to scale; reduce all climbing difficulties by up to 2.

Mighty Leap: Any borders (page 212) that your character chooses to clear by jumping are reduced by up to 2.

Too Fast to Hit: When making a full defense (page 199), gain an additional +1 to the roll (for a total of +3) if you also take a supplemental action to move one zone. You do not take the usual –1 penalty for the supplemental action.

Burglary

(Skill & Trappings, page 123)

The Big Picture: When casing a target with Burglary (page 123), you gain the ability to define an additional aspect about the target (such as Broken Window Latch) when you succeed on the roll, for a total of two aspects.

Cat-Burglar: You're a thief with catlike tread; you may use Burglary instead of Stealth for Hiding or Skulking (page 142).

Hacker: You may use your Burglary skill (instead of Scholarship) to do research with computers as per Scholarship's Computer Use trapping (page 141).

Hairpin Maestro: Poor tools are no trouble when picking locks. Any increase to difficulty due to poor tools (such as having only a hairpin and a business card) is reduced by up to two.

Safecracker: Any lockpicking effort takes place two steps faster than usual on the time table (page 315).

Contacts

(Skill & Trappings, page 123)

Ear to the Ground: You have your fingers on the pulse of things, with plenty of friends who can give you a heads up. The difficulty of any Getting the Tip-Off (page 124) roll is reduced by two.

I Know Just the Guy: When you're looking to gather some information from your network of contacts, you have unerring instincts for finding the right person, fast. When using the Gathering Information trapping (page 123), your efforts are at a +1 and are 1 time increment (page 315) faster.

Rumormonger: You know exactly how to get the word out, gaining a +2 on your efforts to spread rumors.

Conviction

(Skill & Trappings, page 124)

There's also a "Blessed Words" stunt—built around a maneuver concept—that we've given several faith-based characters in Baltimore, toward the end of this book.

Devout Words: The strength of your faith alone allows you to give others pause. You may use your Conviction skill to perform a block in physical conflict, potentially preventing someone from making a conflict action against you.

Person of Conviction: Your social presence is tightly rooted in your identity as a person of deep faith. You may use Conviction instead of Presence to determine your social stress capacity (page 137).

Resilient Self-Image: Your sense of self is strong, enabling you to endure more psychological punishment than most. When facing torture or other extreme interrogation techniques, You may take two additional mild mental consequences (page 203).

Tower of Faith: Strongly held beliefs enable you to protect your mind from the aggression of others. Provided you get a chance to pray or otherwise call upon your faith, gain Armor:1 against any social or mental stress in a scene.

Craftsmanship

(Skill & Trappings, page 125)

Car Mechanic: You know the ins and outs of cars like nobody's business. Gain a +2 on Craftsmanship whenever dealing with a car or truck and a +1 on other personal vehicles (boats, motorcycles, small aircraft).

Demolitions Training: You are trained in the effective use of explosives (this is a new skill trapping; most people can't handle explosives without training). You may use your Craftsmanship skill to place and set explosives appropriately. This allows you to do attacks and maneuvers against structures (see "*Challenges*," page 324), and your skill roll also sets the difficulty for any characters attempting to avoid damage from an explosive that you've placed. Note that to hide an explosive you will still need to use the Deceit skill.

Junkyard Artiste: You create art by working with your hands and a workman's tools—works of sculpture, perhaps, or other kinds of modern, "industrial" art. You may use Craftsmanship instead of Performance to create these works of art (see the Composition trapping, page 136).

Jury-Rigger: You have a talent for improvising with available materials. When jury-rigging (page 320), your repairs last two scenes longer than usual.

Monkey with a Wrench: Sure, building and fixing is nice, but taking things apart is more satisfying. When using Craftsmanship to take something apart, gain a +1 on the effort and get it disassembled one time increment (page 315) faster.

Deceit

(Skill & Trappings, page 126)

Document Forging: You are trained in the forging of official documents (such as ID, birth records, and the like) or letters. You can roll Deceit to create these documents, but using them or planting them where they will be of use (like in a library or government office) might require the use of other skills, such as Burglary or Stealth. Anyone exposed to these documents gets an Alertness or Scholarship roll to spot the deception; the difficulty is equal to your roll to make the document. Likewise, your roll is also the difficulty for any Investigation rolls to suss out your forgery.

Honest Lies: Whenever incorporating a real, valuable piece of the truth (however marginally valuable it may be) into a lie, you gain a +2 on your efforts to pass off the untrue parts.

Make-Up Artist: Given enough time, you can create very convincing disguises, ones that will hold up to deeper inspection (although not to careful scrutiny and magic). Any attempt using Investigation or Alertness to see through your disguise is at an additional +2 difficulty.

Pick-Pocket: Whether it's a simple bump-and-grab or something more complicated, you're adept at getting people to pay attention to other things while you or an accomplice liberates their pockets of their contents. You may use the Deceit skill to perform pick-pocketing with no increases in difficulty. This includes the filching of small items from a desk or someplace similar. Targets of this action usually oppose with Alertness.

Stage Magician: You may attempt complicated stage magic tricks without penalty and gain a +1 on any attempts with Deceit to create quick distractions. This gives a +1 stacking bonus to attempts to pick-pocket (regardless of whether or not you have the Pick-Pocket stunt).

Takes One to Know One: You may use Deceit instead of Empathy to catch someone in a lie.

Discipline

(Skill & Trappings, page 127)

Calm Blue Ocean: You are skilled at keeping your emotions in check. Gain +2 to Discipline when rolling to keep emotions under control.

Supreme Concentration: Your Discipline is considered to be Fantastic whenever Discipline would restrict, complement, or otherwise modify (page 214) another skill. This has no effect on your actual Discipline rating when the skill itself is being rolled.

Unshakeable: When defending against social or mental attacks with Discipline, any of *your* aspects (such as consequences or other temporary or permanent aspects) that get tagged provide only a +1. If the attacker chooses to tag for a reroll, you may "lock down" one of his dice, leaving him only the other three to re-roll.

Driving

(Skill & Trappings, page 128)

Been There: Your Driving is never treated as Mediocre for purposes of navigation, even if a place is unfamiliar (page 129); use it at the full value instead.

Like the Back of My Hand: Your knack for shortcuts gives you a +2 to Driving when using it for street knowledge and shortest-path navigation.

Pilot: Your focus is on aircraft, not cars. Gain +1 to your Driving when piloting an aircraft; choose a specific kind that you're best with (helicopters, jet airliners, personal aircraft) for an additional +1 when steering that type.

Shake the Tail: When you are the one being followed in a car-chase, you have a real talent for sudden turns and daring maneuvers to shake off your pursuers. Gain a +2 to Driving in such a case.



Empathy

(Skill & Trappings, page 129)

Counselor: You have some formal education in professional counseling or psychotherapy. Your skill can be used to justify another character's recovery from moderate or severe social or mental consequences, provided you have the time and opportunity to provide them with the full extent of your services as a counselor.

Part of me wants Killer Blow to be called "It's Clobberin' Time!"

That's actually better as an aspect. (But think of what you'd get when you combined that aspect with this stunt!)

Read the Surface: You can get a sense of someone quickly when trying to "read" them (page 129). Your first attempt to read someone takes less than a minute of interaction, instead of the usual ten. Any subsequent efforts with the same person do not enjoy this benefit.

The Social Graces: Keen awareness of the ebb and flow of social situations makes you the master of your circumstances. When determining initiative in a social conflict, gain +2 to Empathy.

Won't Get Fooled Again: It only takes once for someone to lie to you before you start to wise up to it. Once you've discovered a particular person's lie for what it is, you gain a +2 on any future Empathy rolls when dealing with that liar. (This requires a small amount of book-keeping, but the benefits are worth it!)

Endurance

(Skill & Trappings, page 130)

No Pain, No Gain: You can take a bunch of punishment before it starts to add up. You may take one additional mild physical consequence (page 203).

Tireless: Your Endurance is considered Fantastic whenever Endurance might restrict, complement, or otherwise modify another skill (page 214). This has no effect when Endurance is rolled directly, however.

Tough Stuff: The stuff of blunt trauma—fists, sticks, and stones—pose little trouble for you. Against such things, you have a natural Armor:1 (which stacks with other forms of protection). This does not apply to things like blades, bullets, and burns, but it makes you a beast in a burly brawl.

Nice alliteration, Billy. Have you considered a career in poetry?

Fists

(Skill & Trappings, page 130)

Footwork: You're fast on your feet and have been in enough fistfights to know how to make yourself a hard target. You may use Fists to dodge attacks instead of Athletics, in all the circumstances where Athletics might apply (page 121).

Killer Blow: Add 3 to the damage of a Fists attack on a successful hit, once per scene, *for a fate point*. This stacks with any other damage-increasing stunts for Fists.

Martial Artist: As a result of advanced training, you are able to recognize many styles of martial arts, using Fists as a knowledge and perception skill focused on unarmed fighting. This enables you to make assessments and declarations related to fighting styles and fighting culture using your Fists skill. Such rolls are made at +1.

Armed Arts: You are practiced with a small number of weapons as part of your martial arts training. Pick two weapons which logically fit in with your training (nightstick and knife with cop training, for example). You may use the Fists skill instead of Weapons when wielding these implements.

Lethal Weapon: Your hands are lethal weapons. When using Fists to strike an unarmored opponent, you are considered to have Weapon:2. Against opponents with Armor:1, your Fists attacks are Weapon:1. There is no benefit against more heavily armored opponents.

Redirected Force: You're an expert at turning close-combat attacks (swung fists, thrust knives) against themselves. On a successful defense roll using Fists against such an attack, you may sacrifice your next action (giving this an effective limit of one per exchange) to treat the defense as a successful maneuver on your part (requiring no additional rolling), placing a maneuver aspect like Thrown to the Ground or Taken Off Balance on your attacker.

Step Into the Blow: When you use Fists to defend against a close-quarters attack and *fail* that defense, you may sacrifice your next action to counterattack immediately (with Fists) at +1. You may only sacrifice one action per exchange in this way; when you've sacrificed your next action once, you don't have a "next action" to sacrifice if you're attacked a second time.

Ah, the Kincaid list of stunts.

Guns

(Skill & Trappings, page 131)

Fast Reload: Provided that you have a supply of ammunition, reloads are rarely an issue. You take no penalty when reloading as a supplemental action (page 213); if you're in a race to see who reloads first, or anything else having to do with your speed or ability to reload, gain a +1 on the roll.

Gun Nut: Guns. Man, you know everything about them. You've seen them all, even the ones that nobody knows about. When rolling Guns as a knowledge skill (page 131), gain +2 on the roll.

Hand-Eye Coordination: Shooting and throwing aren't all that different, once you get familiar with 'em. You may use the Guns skill instead of Weapons to throw manual projectiles (rocks, grenades, boomerangs).

Pin Them Down: When Aiming (page 131), the aspect you place on the target *cannot be removed* so long as they do not move out of the zone, and any attempts to leave the zone face an increased border (page 212) of 1 as long as you continue to make Guns attacks against that target.

Target-Rich Environment: Gain a +1 to attacks with Guns whenever personally outnumbered in a firefight.

Way of the Bow: To heck with guns; you're more of a bow and arrow type. You may use Guns instead of Craftsmanship to build and repair such items, and your skill with them gives you an extra +1 damage on a successful hit.

Intimidation

(Skill & Trappings, page 132)

Infuriate: Scaring people isn't your forte; seriously *pissing them off*, on the other hand, is right up your alley. Gain +2 to any roll when deliberately trying to get someone angry with you (a social or mental attack or a maneuver with such a goal). Any consequences (such as grudges) or temporary aspects that result must name *you* as the source and target of the anger.

Interrogator: You use Intimidation to scare a "perp" or at least provoke strong reactions out of him. Those reactions should tell you something, even if you don't get a confession out of your target. Once per scene, whenever you make a successful Intimidation attack while questioning someone, you can set aside the stress you'd inflict and instead treat the attack as a successful Empathy attempt to "read" that person (page 129).

Rule with Fear: Taking this stunt establishes that your reputation is based on how scared people are of you, far more than anything else. Use Intimidation instead of Presence whenever rolling to represent your reputation.

Subtle Menace: You don't need the upper hand or to be in a position of power in order to be scary to someone. When the context of power is absent, or your victim is actually in a superior position, your victim does not get any advantage bonus (see Threats, page 133).

You Don't Want Any of This: People stay out of your way—they know better. When performing a Brush-Off (page 132), gain a +2 on your roll.

Investigation

(Skill & Trappings, page 133)

Listening: You can tune out your other senses and simply focus on your hearing, making you able to pick up faint sounds with astonishing clarity. Gain a +4 on your Investigation roll when Listening; however, your Alertness drops to Terrible while doing so, due to the exclusion of your other senses. If a conflict begins while you are Listening, it will take a full exchange for your Alertness to return to normal once you stop.

Pin the Tail: You're a tough person to shake once you get on someone's trail. Gain +2 to your Investigation rolls when trying to keep track of a target during Surveillance (page 133). When Shadowing someone using Stealth, you may use Investigation to complement (page 214) your Stealth skill.

Quick Eye: When examining a location for clues, your eye is quick to pick out the visual details. Your first Investigation roll to determine deeper details about a scene is two time increments (page 315) faster than usual.

Scene of the Crime: You have a practiced eye when combing over a crime scene. In such a circumstance, you gain +1 to your Investigation roll and arrive at your findings one step faster than usual on the time table (page 315).

And the Harry list of stunts.

Made this whole section just for him. Especially "Infuriate".

I hate you both. I am a warm and fuzzy guy, really.

Uh, if you say so, boss.

I AM TOTALLY TAKING MIGHTY THEWS FOR MY GHOUL NINJA CHARACTER.

I thought you were joking earlier! If we're playing an 7 refresh game it's just barely possible. Playing a ghoul is -6 refresh to start. In a 7 refresh game, you take that stunt and blammo: NPC.

Plus the general squick factor: your ghoul would have to eat his body weight in meat each day. (It's an actual Feeding Dependency!)

. . .

I WANNA PLAY SOMETHING ELSE NOW. MAYBE AN EX-COP PI?

Much more doable.

Lore

(Skill & Trappings, page 134)

Occultist (Specify): You're an expert on a particular sub-section of arcane lore. This must be limited, but it can still cover a fair number of things, such as "Vampires" (see the "Vampirologist" example on page 148) or "Demons." Gain a +1 to Lore when researching things covered by such a topic. You must also define a deeper specialty within that category, such as "Red Court Vampires" or "Hunter-Killer Demons," to gain an additional +1 (for a total of +2) whenever the research focuses on that narrower area. This stunt may be taken multiple times, as long as a different sub-section is defined. Multiple areas of expertise may overlap, however, and in such a case, the bonuses of multiple relevant stunts *may* stack.

Finely Tuned Third Eye: Your "sixth sense" that can perceive the presence of a supernatural "ick" factor (see page 135) is unusually sensitive for a pure mortal. Gain +2 to your Lore whenever using it as an Alertness substitute to pick up on the presence of the supernatural.

Might

(Skill & Trappings, page 135)

Bend and Break: When successfully breaking an object using your Might, increase the effect (stress, usually) by two steps.

Mighty Thews: When determining approximate lifting capacity (page 321), consider your Might to be 2 steps higher than its actual rating.

Wrestler: Gain +1 to your Might when maintaining a grapple (page 211).

Performance

(Skill & Trappings, page 135)

Art Historian: You not only create art, you've studied it deeply. Gain a +1 whenever using Performance as a knowledge or perception skill to research or study a work of art. Gain an additional +1 in a specific, broad area of art (e.g., music, painting, sculpture), and another +1 in a yet narrower area (e.g., pop music, Renaissance paintings, the Dada movement) for a total +3 whenever dealing with your area of greatest expertise.

WHAT ABOUT SOMEONE WHO'S JUST A CRITIC? I'd use Scholarship, then.

Impersonator: Given a few hours to study someone's behavior and modes of speech, you may imitate their mannerisms and voice, using Performance instead of Deceit to convince someone you *are* that person. Without strongly controlling the circumstances (e.g., impersonating someone over the phone), such impersonations won't last very long. If combined with the Makeup Artist stunt (page 151) and plenty of preparation, you may use either Performance or Deceit to pull off a full impersonation, using the better skill for all relevant rolls and getting a +1 against Investigation rolls trying to penetrate the disguise.

Poet: You have an affinity for beauty in written and spoken language. Your Performance is at +2 when composing something with words and is considered to be two higher when used to modify (page 214) a social skill.

Pointed Performance: When performing for an audience, normally you can only create aspects on the scene that are broad, focused on general moods (Creepy as Hell, Let's Party!, Uninhibited). With this stunt, you may make performances that target something more specific, perhaps directing that mood at a particular person or group. For instance, a satirist with this stunt could attempt to use his performance either to elicit a response from one person in the audience (The Jig Is Up) or to cause the audience to direct their mood toward that person (Check Out the Emperor's New Clothes).

Presence

(Skill & Trappings, page 136)

Leadership: When you talk, people listen. When using Presence to command a group (page 137), gain +1 on the effort. Further, your efforts to coordinate a group are efficient, moving one time increment (page 315) faster than normal.

Personal Magnetism: You have a calm confidence that others find appealing. When rolling Presence to establish a "passive" reaction to you (Charisma, page 136), make the roll at +2.

Teflon Persona: It's difficult to make you look bad in social conflicts. Provided that the people present are aware of who you are, you gain Armor:1 against any social attacks.

The Weight of Reputation: Your reputation is such that it puts you in an easy position of power. People in power are good at scaring folks who aren't. You may use your Presence instead of Intimidation to scare someone, provided the target knows of you and your "rep."

Rapport

(Skill & Trappings, page 138)

Best Foot Forward: People just like you, especially when you're deliberately trying to make a good first impression (page 138). You gain a +1 on your roll to make a good first impression, and failing that roll cannot give you a negative temporary aspect or make the situation worse.

Let Me Tell You a Story...: You have the gift of gab, able to draw the attention of others with colorful words and stories. This tends to leave your audience distracted. You may use Rapport instead of Deceit in order to mount a distraction (page 126), so long as you are able to talk to your targets.

Sex Appeal: Folks attracted to people of your gender cannot help but notice you. You've got "it." Receive a +2 to the roll on any seduction attempts you make with Rapport, provided that the target is someone who could be receptive to your advances.

Resources

(Skill & Trappings, page 139)

Filthy Lucre: If it involves using money and other gifts in illegal or corrupt ways—bribery, mainly—you have a talent for making it work. Your dirty money travels farther, made frictionless by the greasy stain of it all. Gain a +2 to Resources whenever using it for illicit purposes.

Lush Lifestyle: Your wealth is well-established and robust, making you the man or woman who has everything. Normally, someone may be assumed to have an item that costs two steps less than his Resources without having to seek it out and buy it, assuming that it makes sense for him to have attained it previously. In your case, it's any item equal to or less than your Resources.

High Quality Workspace: Instead of Resources–2, your "automatic" personal workspace (page 139) is of a quality equal to your Resources. Alternately, it's still Resources–2, but it's able to fulfill two workspace functions (such as Academic as well as Arcane Research). This stunt may be taken multiple times to broaden the number of workspace functions available to you, but it may never be used to improve the quality above the level of your Resources skill.

Windfall: You're occasionally able to tap into more Resources than usual, such as cashing out stocks or receiving a periodic disbursement from a trust fund. Once per adventure, you may spend a fate point to make a single Resources roll at +4.

Scholarship

(Skill & Trappings, page 140)

Capable Researcher: Some say you were born in a library. Any scholarly research you do is completed two time increments (page 315) faster than usual—due in large part to the fact that you've probably read something about it before. (This ability does not extend to Lore research, which somehow never seems to go any faster no matter how good you are at the mundane stuff.)

Doctor (Specify): You have a medical degree or the equivalent of such an education. You may use your Scholarship skill to declare appropriate justification for the recovery of moderate physical consequences when outside a medical facility, and for the recovery of severe physical consequences within a medical facility. For research purposes, gain +1 on Scholarship for any medical research and an additional +1 in a specific area of medicine. This stunt may be taken twice, with the bonuses on research stacking to indicate particularly deep or excellent medical knowledge (such as with a heart surgeon, etc.).

Forgery Expert: You are trained to distinguish forged documents from real ones. You gain a +2 on any roll to spot forgeries or falsified documentation.

Linguist: You may speak (and read) additional languages as if your Scholarship score was 4 higher than it is. You may take this stunt multiple times, adding four more each time. Up to half of the languages you speak may be obscure, rare, or dead, provided you can establish an opportunity to study them.

The Butters list, now. What, no Über-Geek stunt?

People can grow their own for that one, I think.

Scientist (Specify): When using Scholarship to do scientific research, gain +1 in a particular area of focus (e.g., Biology, Chemistry, Physics). Gain an additional +1 in an even more specific area of specialization (e.g., Marine Biology, Organic Chemistry, Quantum Physics). A "Scholar" version of this stunt may be taken instead for something outside of the realm of science (e.g., Literature/19th Century Literature or History/Chinese History).

Stealth

(Skill & Trappings, page 142)

Blend In: You blend into a crowd easily. If there's a crowd to hide in, you gain +2 to your Stealth rolls. This is particularly useful when Shadowing (page 143) someone on foot.

Stay Close and Keep Quiet!: When sneaking around with a group, you are able to use your Stealth skill to complement (page 214) everyone else's Stealth skill as they roll to stay hidden and quiet, provided they stay nearby and follow your instructions. Failure on either of these points means they lose the benefits. If you have any aspects specific to your ability to sneak around, your companions may invoke those aspects for their benefit as well.

Swift and Silent: When Skulking (page 143), any difficulty increases due to fast movement are reduced by up to two.

Survival

(Skill & Trappings, page 143)

Hey, Billy, does this also apply to a zombie T-Rex?

Ultimately, I think "zombie" might trump "animal."

Animal Handler (Specify): Roll Survival at +1 when using it for Animal Handling or, where relevant, Riding (page 143). Gain an additional +1 when dealing with a particular broad type of animal (birds, dogs, cats, horses) specified at the time you take this stunt.

Go Native: You're able to survive nearly indefinitely outdoors, living off the land. Scavenging rolls (page 143) are made at +1, and the time between multiple rolls for a prolonged stay is increased by one increment (page 315).

Hunter: As an experienced hunter, you know how to track game in the outdoors. Gain +2 on any efforts to use Survival to track something in the wilderness or other outdoor area.

Oooh! Juggler + Riposte = It's All In the Reflexes!

Weapons

Indeed!

(Skill & Trappings, page 144)

Good Arm: Thrown weapons normally have a range of only one zone. With this stunt that range extends to two zones.

Juggler: Throwing deadly items around is just par for the course for you. Catching them is, too. Even bare-handed, you may use your Weapons skill to defend against a thrown attack, allowing you to catch the item if you succeed on the defense. In addition, you may use your Weapons skill instead of Performance in order to entertain an audience with your juggling.

Off-Hand Weapon Training: You know how to fight more effectively with two weapons in hand. Normally, you may only take the damage bonus from one weapon on a successful hit; with this stunt, you may add half of the second weapon's bonus as well (round up).

Riposte: On a successful defense with Weapons, you may sacrifice your next action to turn that defense into an immediate and *automatically successful* attack. Your attacker must be within range of your weapon, and if you're mounting a full defense (page 199) you do not get the benefit of the +2 bonus when your defense roll converts to an attack roll.

Wall of Death: Your skill with your weapon is such that you can attack several opponents at once, creating a veritable "wall of death" around you. This allows you to use the Weapons skill to make spray attacks (page 326) with your melee weapon of choice against opponents that are in your zone. You may not combine the benefits of any other stunt with the effects of Wall of Death.

The Weapons stunts seem a little more potent or more generally applicable than the Fists stunts. Is there a reason for that?

Well, Weapons as a skill has a built-in limited circumstance – no weapon, no ability to use the skill. That's not the case with Fists, which gets to be always available. So that played into it.



- CHAPTER TEN -

Supernatural Powers

Billy, this seems a bit stacked against vanilla mortals to me. Don't underestimate the abilities of a well trained mortal, or Murph will kick your ass!

Yeah, I can see how it looks that way. But vanilla mortals get an extra 2 points of refresh just for being mortal—they can spend these on a couple extra stunts or they can just have a boatload of fate points to fling around. In the hands of a creative player, I think it all works out in the end. Losing that vanilla bonus is an additional price supernatural characters pay for their powers.

What are Powers?

Supernatural abilities in The Dresden Files RPG are also represented by stunts, just like the specialties and talents of "mundane" mortals (see *Mortal Stunts*, starting on page 146). These stunts are called **supernatural powers** and share many similarities with mortal stunts—but there are a few key differences.

As with a mortal stunt, taking a supernatural power will reduce your character's refresh level (page 20). But here's the big difference: unlike the mortal version, a supernatural power usually costs more than one point of refresh, in large part because the benefits provided are more than just two shifts or so of effects (page 147). Remember, no *player character* may take a combination of mortal stunts and supernatural abilities that reduces refresh to zero or lower. Characters with zero or lower refresh have lost the mortal gift of free will and as such become tools of the story—also known as *non-player characters*. See page 146 for more on the philosophy of free will and PCs.

Story Power Alchemy: Supernatural Powers and the High Concept

By drawing straight lines from a character's high concept to his supernatural powers, you gain all of the benefits of having an aspect riding shotgun whenever the character's supernatural abilities are in use.

Whenever, say, a wizard goes to town with arcane spell-slinging, he can invoke his high concept (Master Evocationist) to help make it work.

If a PC shoots a charging loup-garou with inherited silver, that's a chance for him to invoke or compel its high concept (Curse of the Loup-Garou).

However you look at this, having the high concept involved is a good thing; it ties the core idea of a character together with his special abilities and lets you milk it for all of the "story power" you can.

Not sure what we're talking about here? Then it's probably a good time to go back to *Aspects* and review the bedrock ideas of what aspects are about.

Supernatural powers also come at a greater price beyond the simple math of your character's refresh rate. No supernatural ability may exist in a vacuum—it must come about due to specific reasons rooted in your character's concept. At the very least, this usually means that the supernatural abilities must clearly derive from your character's **high concept** (page 54), but other requirements may exist as well—see the *Types & Templates* chapter starting on page 72 for the particulars for each character type. The end effect is that all supernatural abilities have requirements that must be fulfilled before they can be added to your character; these are usually outlined in the template you have chosen for your character.

You can think of powers as super-stunts, since they cost multiple refresh points and often offer many shifts of effect (page 192) for more than one skill. And because they're based on certain prerequisites (via character templates), they're allowed to be a little more potent per refresh point than their mortal stunt cousins.

Supernatural powers have effects that can be further reaching, adding trappings to skills that cover strange supernatural territory. Moreover, the trappings that supernatural powers add can cover actions and abilities that would otherwise be flatly *impossible*. In addition, they're generally allowed to ignore the restrictions that mortal stunts have when it comes to stacking effects (page 147).

But other than that, they're built much like several mortal stunts all smashed together, getting two shifts (and maybe a little extra) of effect for every one refresh point they cost. As such, new powers may be built using much of the same logic as mortal stunts provided on page 147—so long as they're appropriately enabled by the character's high concept and chosen character template. When constructing new supernatural abilities, simply use the stunt construction rules from page 147. For each stunt's worth of function (whether in shifts, added trappings or scope, etc.) that the new power provides, price that power at a cost of –1 refresh. Since taking a power means you get no Pure Mortal refresh bonus (page 73), a –1 refresh power is allowed to be a little more effective than an otherwise equivalent stunt.

So, if vanilla mortals have no supernatural powers ... am I a chocolate mortal?

Understanding the Rest of This Chapter

The following sections group supernatural powers into broad categories. The refresh cost of a power will be listed in its name, like so: **Strange Power [–2]**. This indicates a power named "Strange Power" that costs two refresh points if you want to add it to your character.

Other requirements, if they exist, will be listed as **musts**. True to their name, musts aren't optional.

Any other configuration options (skills at certain levels, aspects, etc.) that you may (and perhaps should) take but don't *have* to take will be listed as **options**.

Skills affected by powers will be listed separately from the **description** of the power.

Finally, the **effects** provided by each power will be laid out. As with mortal stunts, it's usually helpful to copy at least the basics of each power's effects to the character sheet for easy reference during play.

Some of a power's effects may be **upgrades** and will be noted with their own cost, which should be applied to the base cost of the power if the upgrade is taken. For example, the Spirit Form [–3] power has Poltergeist [–2] listed as one of its effects. This is an upgrade; if you take Spirit Form together with the Poltergeist upgrade, the total cost to your refresh will be –5.

Look But Don't Touch?

A number of the powers presented in this chapter aren't really player character focused. It's unlikely you'll see any PC show up with the powers of a ghost, or able to eat someone's soul and impersonate them and their powers, or living inside a dead body like a zombie or Black Court vampire.

At least, that's our take on it. But we could be wrong! At the least, the GM will be looking at this chapter when building creatures and foes to oppose the PCs—and in some games, she might even see a few "typically NPC" powers she'd be entirely happy to let the players get access to.

Everyone's game is different, so we decided it would be best to put all the powers in one place.



Supernatural Powers

Page	Category	Cost	Power	Effects & Upgrades
162	Creature Features	–1	Addictive Saliva	Narcotic Saliva
162	Creature Features	–1	Aquatic	Can't Drown; Easy Swimming
174	Shapeshifting	–1	Beast Change	Beast Form; Skill Shuffle
187	True Faith	–1	Bless This House	Bless This House
188	Vampirism	–1	Blood Drinker	Drink Blood; The Taste of Death; Blood Frenzy
162	Creature Features	–2	Breath Weapon	Breath Weapon
172	Psychic Abilities	0	Cassandra's Tears	Unbelievable Predictions
185	Toughness	*	The Catch	The Catch
181	Spellcraft	–2	Channeling	Channeling; Item Slots
162	Creature Features	–1	Claws	Natural Weapons; Venomous [–2]
169	Minor Abilities	–1	Cloak of Shadows	See in the Dark; Melt into the Shadows
170	Nevernever Powers	–1	Demesne	Home Turf
175	Shapeshifting	–1	Demonic Co–Pilot	Demon's Agenda
163	Creature Features	–1	Diminutive Size	Hard to Detect; Small is Big; Wee
172	Psychic Abilities	–2	Domination	Psychic Domination; Create Renfield; Master Dominator [–2]; Possession [–3]
163	Creature Features	–1	Echoes of the Beast	Beast Senses; Beast Trappings; Beast Friend
189	Vampirism	–1	Emotional Vampire	Feeding Touch; The Taste of Death; Feeding Frenzy
180	Spellcraft	–3	Evocation	Evocation; You Know What You Know; Specialization; Item Slots
190	Vampirism	+1	Feeding Dependency	Hunger is Stressful; Limited Reserves; Failure Recovery
175	Shapeshifting	–1	Flesh Mask	Flesh Mask; Idealized Appearance; What Lies Beneath
175	Shapeshifting	–3	Gaseous Form	Gaseous Transformation
169	Minor Abilities	–1	Ghost Speaker	See the Dead; Seen by the Dead; Speak to the Dead; Seek the Dead
166	Faerie Magic	–2	Glamours	Minor Veils; Seemings
166	Faerie Magic	–4	Greater Glamours	Veils; Seemings; True Seemings
187	True Faith	–1	Guide My Hand	Guide My Hand
188	True Faith	–1	Holy Touch	Holy Touch
164	Creature Features	–2	Hulking Size	Easy to Hit, Hard to Hurt; Everything is Small; Big is Scary; Easy to Detect
176	Shapeshifting	+1*	Human Form	Regular Joe/Regular Jane; Rare or Involuntary Change [+1]
176	Shapeshifting	0	Human Guise	Normal Appearance
172	Psychic Abilities	–1	Incite Emotion	Emotion–Touch; Additional Emotion [–1 per]; At Range [–1]; Lasting Emotion [–1]; Potent Emotion [–1]
185	Toughness	–2	Inhuman Recovery	Total Recovery; Fast Recovery; Vigorous; Shrug It Off
178	Speed	–2	Inhuman Speed	Improved Initiative; Athletic Ability; Casual Movement; Almost Too Fast To See
183	Strength	–2	Inhuman Strength	Improved Lifting; Bruising Strength; Superior Strength; Hammer Blows
185	Toughness	–2	Inhuman Toughness	Hard to Hurt; Hard to Kill
167	Items of Power	*	Item of Power	One–Time Discount [+1 or +2]; It Is What It Is; Unbreakable; Imparted Abilities
182	Spellcraft	*	Lawbreaker	Slippery Slope; Trouble Comes In Threes
164	Creature Features	–1	Living Dead	Corpse Body; Death is a Nuisance; Dude! You're Dead!

* This cost may vary. See the individual power description for details.

Page	Category	Cost	Power	Effects & Upgrades
169	Minor Abilities	–1	Mana Static	Hexing
169	Minor Abilities	–1	Marked by Power	Aegis of Respect
176	Shapeshifting	*	Mimic Abilities	Eat Power; Mimic Stunt; Mimic Skill
177	Shapeshifting	–2	Mimic Form	Take Form
177	Shapeshifting	*	Modular Abilities	Function Follows Form
186	Toughness	–6	Mythic Recovery	Total Recovery; Really Amazingly Fast Recovery; Indefatigable; Ha! You Call That a Hit?
178	Speed	–6	Mythic Speed	Super Supreme Initiative; Extra Superior Athletic Ability; Instant Movement; Like the Wind
184	Strength	–6	Mythic Strength	Supreme Lifting; Unstoppable Strength; Supreme Strength; Devastating Blows
186	Toughness	–6	Mythic Toughness	Nearly Impossible to Hurt; Nearly Impossible to Kill
165	Creature Features	–1	Pack Instincts	Pack Communication
186	Toughness	–8	Physical Immunity	Physical Immunity; Stacked Catch [+varies]
173	Psychic Abilities	–1	Psychometry	Echoes of the Past
182	Spellcraft	–1	Refinement	Refined Spellcraft
188	True Faith	–2	Righteousness	Potent Prayer; Desperate Hour
181	Spellcraft	–2	Ritual	Ritual; Item Slots
166	Faerie Magic	–4*	Seelie Magic	Summer Spellcasting
174	Psychic Abilities	–1	The Sight	Arcane Senses; Wizard's Touch; Opening the Third Eye
174	Psychic Abilities	–1	Soulgaze	Soulgaze; Application of the Sight [+1]
165	Creature Features	–1	Spider Walk	Like a Spider
170	Nevernever Powers	–3	Spirit Form	Insubstantial; Variable Manifestation; Variable Visage; Poltergeist [–2]
183	Spellcraft	*	Sponsored Magic	(Depends!)
186	Toughness	–4	Supernatural Recovery	Total Recovery; Faster Recovery; Unfaltering; It's Nothing
165	Creature Features	–1	Supernatural Sense	Strange Sense; Strange Senses [–1]; Broad Senses [–2]
178	Speed	–4	Supernatural Speed	Supreme Initiative; Superior Athletic Ability; Effortless Movement; Faster Than the Eye
183	Strength	–4	Supernatural Strength	Superior Lifting; Bludgeoning Strength; Superlative Strength; Lethal Blows
186	Toughness	–4	Supernatural Toughness	Harder to Hurt; Harder to Kill
171	Nevernever Powers	–2	Swift Transition	Everywhere Is A Portal; No Mortal Home [+1]
168	Items of Power	–3	Sword of the Cross	All Creatures Are Equal Before God; Divine Purpose; Holy; It's a Sword; True Aim; Unbreakable; Discount Already Applied
190	Vampirism	–2	Tattoos of St. Giles	A Warning to Others; Biofeedback; Deeper Reserves; Supernatural Player; Fellowship Training
181	Spellcraft	–3	Thaumaturgy	Thaumaturgy; Specialization; Item Slots
177	Shapeshifting	–4	True Shapeshifting	Multi–Form; Skill Shuffle
167	Faerie Magic	–4*	Unseelie Magic	Winter Spellcasting
165	Creature Features	–1	Wings	Flight
170	Minor Abilities	0	Wizard's Constitution	Total Recovery; Long Life
171	Nevernever Powers	–2	Worldwalker	Rift Sense; Rift Maker; Strange Worlds

* This cost may vary. See the individual power description for details.

Creature Features

The abilities listed here are all about the basic nastiness found in a number of beastly and monstrous creatures in the Dresdenverse.

Addictive Saliva [–1]

Description: Your saliva is a powerful narcotic, leaving a victim insensate in the short term. With just a little more exposure, your victim goes straight from senseless to senselessly addicted. For those poor saps, detoxing is a bitch—it's easier, and more pleasant, just to play along with whatever you demand of them.

Skills Affected: Fists, Deceit.

Effects:

Narcotic Saliva. You may use your narcotic saliva in a number of ways. The most common way in a fight is to spit it at your target or get close enough to lick him. This is handled with the Fists skill in either case and may only be done to someone in the same zone as you—preferably in very close physical proximity—and it is rolled as a maneuver (page 207). If successful, you place a temporary aspect on the target representing the momentary effects of your venom.

Alternatively, you may make a Fists attack—setting aside any damage bonus you might have—to inflict mental stress instead of physical stress. Any consequences resulting from such an attack represent the more lasting effects of the venom—if you score a moderate consequence or worse, or if you take your target out, you've really gotten your hooks into him (see below).

Typically, however, this saliva is administered out of combat—usually with an act of intimacy (kissing) or unintentional ingestion (spiking the punch). Roll Deceit with a +2 bonus against the victim's Discipline. This is considered a "consequential contest" (see page 193); if you win, you inflict a relevant consequence (usually Addicted) on the victim, severity determined by the contest.

Addicts are in pretty bad shape when dealing with you—you don't even need to spend fate points to take advantage of this. You get to tag (see page 106) their addiction aspect every time you enter a new scene with your new victim/pal, making it very easy to gain—and keep—the upper hand.

That's disgusting, Billy.

They did it during the masquerade in your GRAVE PERIL casefile!

Still disgusting!

Aquatic [–1]

Description: You're an underwater creature, with the benefits that come from that.

Skills Affected: Athletics.

Effects:

Can't Drown. You never take stress or consequences from drowning (this is not the same as an immunity to choking or other means of suffocation).

Easy Swimming. You may ignore all water-based borders while swimming, making your underwater "sprints" all the more effective.

Breath Weapon [–2]

Description: You're able to spit or otherwise throw some sort of self-generated projectile over a short distance.

Note: You'll need to lock down this breath weapon to a single type of effect—e.g., acid, fire, lightning, etc.—when you take this ability.

Skills Affected: Weapons (this is treated as a thrown weapon).

Effects:

Breath Weapon. You can attack targets up to one zone away from you with your breath weapon. Roll Weapons; if you hit, you deal +2 physical stress (essentially, this is a thrown Weapon:2 that you can self-generate). As with any weapon, you might be able to use your breath to perform combat maneuvers if you can justify it, setting temporary aspects on the scene or on your opponent.

Claws [–1]

Description: You have claws, fangs, or other natural weapons that let you add damage when attacking with your "bare" hands.

Note: Unless you have the ability to conceal your nature or change your shape (whether through Flesh Mask, shapeshifting powers, or the application of a Glamour), your claws are always visible.

Skills Affected: Fists.

Effects:

Natural Weapons. You have claws (or something similar) which act as Weapon:2 for your Fists attacks. This bonus stacks with stress increases due to Strength abilities (page 183), but won't stack with other Weapon:[X] effects per the usual weapon stacking guidelines (page 202).

Could you take Claws multiple times so you have, say, claws AND fangs?

you can't take **ANY** power multiple times unless it says so; the power covers both anyway.

Venomous [–2]. Your claws are venomous. Make a Fists maneuver; if successful, the target gains a Poisoned aspect.

In each subsequent exchange, the target must roll Endurance to defend against an attack from the poison equal to your Fists score. Once the target concedes or is taken out (falling unconscious), the attacks stop (see page 203 for guidelines on being taken out). However, the damage is already done; without proper medical attention, a taken out victim will die soon (within a few hours, perhaps less), though not immediately.

Proper medical attention will remove the aspect and end the effect. This is an opposed roll—you can roll Fists (since that was the skill for the original attack) to set the difficulty to mitigate the poison.

Diminutive Size [–1]

Description: You're very small, or able to become very small at will if you're a shapeshifter—at the very largest, you're dwarfed by even a small human child.

Note: This ability is always in effect unless you have the ability to shapeshift.

Skills Affected: Alertness, Endurance, Investigation, Might, Stealth, combat skills.

Effects:

Hard to Detect. You gain +4 to Stealth attempts to remain hidden.

Small is Big. Being small, you're much better at picking up on very small details, gaining a +2 to any perception (Alertness, Investigation) rolls needed to spot them.

Wee. While small, your Endurance skill is taken to be no greater than Mediocre for the purpose of determining your health stress capacity. Your ability to manipulate objects and other uses of the Might skill are considered relative to creatures of your small size, rather than human sized. (Since most difficulties are determined for humans, this will usually impose a penalty between –2 and –4, or in some cases, forbid the use of Might at all.)

When your size is a factor in combat, you can only inflict 1 physical stress per attack (but this could be improved by damage bonuses from weapons and the like). Your ability to cross distances (using Athletics) is unaffected, but you gain a +1 to Athletics for dodging.



Echoes of the Beast [–1]

Description: Some part of you is a beast, an animal—often due to shapechanging abilities or something similar. This brings along the benefits of that animal's senses.

Musts: Define the type of beast you share a kinship with at the time you take this ability.

Skills Affected: Varies, but usually Alertness, Investigation, and Survival.

Effects:

Beast Senses. Whether in human form or otherwise, your senses are strongly tuned in a fashion fitting a particular type of beast (you must specify the senses when you take the ability, based on what the beast is known to have). Whenever it seems reasonable that you'd have some sort of beast-born advantage of the senses (for example, a keen sense of smell while making an Alertness or Investigation roll), you get a +1 on the roll.

Beast Trappings. You are able to do one minor thing that normal people can't do, related to the abilities of your beast-kin. This might be tracking by scent (for a wolf or other predator), finding your way around while blind or in total darkness (like a bat), or hiding in plain sight (like a chameleon). This ability works like an extra skill trapping (see page 120) for the skill of your choice.

Alternately, you can choose a skill trapping that already exists and create a circumstance under which you gain a +1 on the roll that fits your beast kinship. For example, you might say that, because you're kin to leopards, you gain a +1 to Stealth when barefoot.

Beast Friend. You may achieve at least an instinctual understanding (if not actual communication) with beasts of a similar type. This can allow you to make assessment actions (see page 115) to suss out a particular animal's motives.

BILLY, ARE YOU SAYING YOU CAN TALK TO DOGS?

Woof.

IS THAT WOOF-YES, OR WOOF-NO?



Hulking Size [–2]

Description: You're very large, or able to become very large at will if you're a shapeshifter—at the very largest, as tall as a house.

Note: This ability is always in effect unless you can shapeshift.

Skills Affected: Fists, Weapons, Stealth, others.

Effects:

Easy to Hit, Hard to Hurt. You're a pretty big target, giving any attacker a +1 to hit you when target size is a factor. But that increase in body mass means you can soak up more punishment, adding two boxes to the length of your physical stress track.

Everything is Small. You cannot meaningfully interact with any man-sized objects using skills like Burglary and Craftsmanship (but knowledge-related rolls are unaffected), and you'll have trouble fitting through normal doorways and into rooms (this will confer an automatic border value of 1 when changing zones as appropriate). But it also means you get a +2 to your Might rolls to lift or break things—on top of any supernatural Strength bonuses you might have—and a +1 on Athletics rolls to cover distance with your gigantic stride.

Big is Scary. You get +2 on any Intimidation attempt against a target likely to consider your size an advantage.

Easy to Detect. Your Stealth is automatically considered to be Mediocre, and you may never gain more than one shift on a Stealth roll.

Living Dead [–1]

Description: You're dead, but you keep walking around. It's kind of gross.

Musts: You've got to be dead.

Effects:

Corpse Body. Your body is a corpse. This means that you cannot recover from consequences with time, because your body does not regenerate. Any physical consequences you suffer are permanent until you take some kind of effort to remove them (know any good taxidermists?) or seek supernatural assistance to reconstruct your body.

Death is a Nuisance. Unless wholly destroyed or killed by special means, you're already dead, and that doesn't seem to have fazed you much. No "death" result is ever permanent unless special means are used (usually as determined by your creature type).

Dude! You're Dead! And that's pretty scary to a lot of people. When dealing with folks unaccustomed to the walking dead (and that's most "regular" people), gain a +1 on Intimidation. The downside? Take a −1 penalty on nearly every other social skill (except Deceit). For every level of physical consequence you've sustained, increase the penalty/bonus by −1/+1. That said, the effect is short-lived with any one target—as they become accustomed to a reality where the dead walk, they eventually become inured to it as an *additional* reason to be terrified.

Pack Instincts [−1]

Description: You are part of a pack and share a certain kind of unspoken, animal communication with one another.

Musts: You must define who is in your pack, and they all must share this ability.

Skills Affected: Alertness, Investigation, others.

Effects:

Pack Communion. When near another member of your pack, gain +1 to your Alertness. When in the same zone as others of your pack, you may communicate with one another wordlessly. Only single words and simple concepts may be communicated: *attack, protect, follow, distract.* By focusing your senses, you may make an Investigation roll to pick out the approximate location of others of your pack. When ambushed, if any one of your pack spots the ambush (by succeeding at an Alertness roll), all packmates are considered to have won the Alertness roll as well.

Spider Walk [−1]

Description: You can climb on things the way a spider would.

Skills Affected: Athletics.

Effects:

Like a Spider. While climbing, you may treat any surface, no matter the angle, as no more difficult than climbing up a vertical surface with plenty of handholds. Ceilings? No problem.

Supernatural Sense [−1]

Description: You have a supernatural sense of some sort, enabling you to detect something no one could normally detect (e.g., smell hope), or to perceive something normally in situations where you otherwise couldn't (see in complete darkness).

Musts: With each supernatural sense, you must identify whether this is a purely mystical sense (using Lore) or a more physical sense (using Investigation and Alertness as appropriate).

Note: The sense you define can't be a "game-breaker" without the GM's approval—no "hear someone's True Name in their heartbeat," probably no "see through walls." Alternatively, such things might be possible, but they should probably cost an extra one or two refresh at least.

A number of abilities already encompass some portion of supernatural sensory ability. Don't purchase this ability unless it's clearly something extra, above and beyond what you already enjoy from your other abilities.

BY THE WAY, THERE IS A GUY IN PENNSYLVANIA WHO CAN SEE THROUGH DRYWALL. JUST DRYWALL.

Skills Affected: Alertness, Lore, Investigation.

Effects:

Strange Sense. In situations where you might be penalized or otherwise told that it's impossible to sense something, you can nevertheless attempt to sense the thing you've defined, without penalty.

Strange Senses [−1]. You may instead define a small set of up to three thematically related supernatural senses.

Broad Senses [−2]. Take this instead of Strange Senses. You have a wide array of supernatural senses, easily up to a dozen.

Wings [−1]

Description: You have wings of some sort—gossamer as a faerie, leathery and batlike as a demon—enabling you to fly.

Musts: Your wings are always present and visible unless you have an ability (Flesh Mask, shapeshifting powers, or the application of a Glamour) allowing you to hide them. You should define the appearance of the wings when you take this ability.

Skills Affected: Athletics.

Effects:

Flight. You can fly, eliminating or reducing certain kinds of borders (page 212) and enabling travel upwards into zones (page 197) that can't normally be reached. Winged flight is governed by the Athletics skill, just as running is.

Faerie Magic

The abilities of the faerie focus heavily on the *appearance* of things. Glamours—faerie illusions—are the mode of the day, leading to the truism: *if it looks too good to be true, it probably is, and it's probably fae.*

Glamours [–2]

Description: You are able to create the basic glamours of the fae—minor veils and "seemings" that make something look like what it *isn't*.

Skills Affected: Discipline, Deceit.

Effects:

Minor Veils. With a moment of concentration, you may draw a veil over something (not particularly large—maybe the size of a small, tight group of people), hiding it from sight and other means of detection. Use your Discipline or Deceit to oppose efforts to discover the veil. If the veil is discovered, it isn't necessary *pierced*—but the discoverer can tell that it's *there* and that it's *wrong*.

Or perhaps the size of a VW Beetle...

Seemings. You are able to cause someone or something to appear to be other than what it is—usually this is personal, but it may be used on other objects and people if they belong to you or have entered a pact with you. You may use your Discipline or Deceit skill to oppose any efforts to discover that the seeming is something other than real.

Greater Glamours [–4]

Description: As a pure fae of considerable power, you are able to create ***true seemings***—actual objects, or near enough as to make no difference in the moment (i.e., ectoplasmic constructs). Your veils are potent and your lesser seemings are flawless.

Musts: Character must be a pure fae. This *replaces* Glamours, if the character previously had it.

Skills Affected: Discipline, Deceit.

Effects:

Veils. With a moment of concentration, you may draw a veil over something (not particularly large—maybe the size of a small, tight group of people), hiding it from sight and other means of detection, as with the Minor Veils effect of Glamours. Use your Discipline or Deceit at +2 to oppose any efforts to discover the veil. You may set aside this +2 bonus to draw a veil over a whole zone.

Seemings. As with the Glamours effect of the same name (above). You may use your Discipline or Deceit skill at +2 to oppose any efforts to discover the seeming.

True Seemings. You may create an object—and with some difficulty, even ephemeral creatures—out of ectoplasm, the stuff of the Nevernever. These are not casually detectable as "unreal," per se, save through magical means of perception, so they are immune to most efforts to discover the seeming. As far as the effects of the object are concerned, simply give it the same attributes a fully real object of its type would have. You may only have one object at a time via seeming—the act of creating another dismisses the first.

Seelie Magic [–4]

Description: Drawing on the power of the Summer Court, you're able to cast spells that fit its essential nature: wildness, birth, growth, renewal, fire. These magics are under the sway and watch of the Queens of Summer (Lady, Queen, and Mother), and inevitably making use of them will catch their notice. While some might think the Summer Court is all warmth and light, they should pause to consider that unbridled growth favors an ebola virus just as much as it does a pear tree.

Note: The cost is –4 refresh unless you already practice another kind of true magic (e.g., Evocation, page 180, or Thaumaturgy, page 181), in which case the cost is reduced by 1 for each ability you already possess.

Skills Affected: Discipline, Conviction.

Effects:

Summer Spellcasting. You are able to cast spells of a deep and true nature, drawing upon the magics of the Summer Court. Due to the faerie nature of this power source, it is less flexible in some areas than mortal spellcasting and is therefore subject to the limitations described in its entry under "*Sponsored Magic*" in *Spellcasting*, page 287.

Unseelie Magic [–4]

Description: Drawing on the power of the Winter Court, you're able to cast spells that fit its essential nature: wildness, death, decay, slumber, ice. These magics are under the sway and watch of the Queens of Winter (Lady, Queen, and Mother), and inevitably making use of them will catch their notice. While some might think the Winter Court is all frozen cruelty, they should remember that without their balance to Summer, the world of man would end, choked off by unbridled nature.

Notes: The cost is –4 refresh unless you already practice another kind of true magic (e.g., Evocation, page 180, or Thaumaturgy, page 181), in which case the cost is reduced by 1 for each ability you already possess.

Skills Affected: Discipline, Conviction.

Effects:

Winter Spellcasting. You are able to cast spells of a deep and true nature, drawing upon the magics of the Winter Court. Due to the faerie nature of this power source, it is less flexible in some areas than mortal spellcasting and is therefore subject to the limitations described in its entry under "*Sponsored Magic*" in *Spellcasting*, page 287.

Items of Power

"Items of Power" is a catch-all category for abilities that are derived not from the person himself, but from the magical equipment he brings to the table. Champions of the supernatural heavyweights (OW28), including the Champions of God (page 73), Knights of the Faerie Courts (page 78), and other Emissaries of Power (page 75), might carry such artifacts to battle, as protection or weaponry.

Item of Power [-Varies]

Description: You have an item of great power—an artifact that goes beyond the ephemeral items created by spellcasters and alchemists. This is an artifact with an ancient story, often drawing its power from some vast supernatural entity of old.

Musts: An aspect directly referencing the Item of Power is required. The Item of Power ability may *not* be taken multiple times—even if the character has multiple items of power. A single instance of the Item of Power ability covers all such items that the character carries.

Options: Plenty! An Item of Power is a way to take Minor Abilities, Strength, Toughness, Speed, or some other abilities (subject to approval) at a small discount, gaining back a point or two of refresh based on the nature of the item (see below).

Skills Affected: Varies.

Effects:

One-Time Discount [+1 or +2]. You regain two points of refresh for "externalizing" some of your abilities in the form of the Item of Power. This assumes that the Item of Power is reasonably obvious and easy to detect, like a sword. If the item is difficult to detect, allowing concealment, you only regain one point of refresh. This discount only happens once, even if you have multiple separate Items of Power.

The refresh cost of the any abilities "attached" in this way must be at least –3 in the case of the +2 option, or at least –2 in the case of the +1 option. In effect, this says that the net result of taking the Item of Power ability should still decrease your refresh—just less so.

It Is What It Is. The item is often based on a mundane template—a sword, a shield, a suit of armor—and as such may have some armor or damage values completely independent of its supernatural nature. Swords will have damage bonuses like swords, armor will protect like armor. All the same, the item should be obvious as something unusual.

Unbreakable. As an Item of Power, it cannot be broken, save through dedicated magical ritual predicated upon perverting its purpose. How this manifests may vary; the item may be breakable but able to repair itself, or it may simply refuse to be fractured.

Imparted Abilities. Choose a set of abilities that are imbued within and imparted by the Item of Power. Take these abilities normally, recording their refresh cost and noting that they're part of the Item. Abilities outside of the Minor Abilities, Strength, Toughness, and Speed categories must be examined closely by the GM and may be disallowed. Simply possessing the Item of Power is not enough to use the abilities. Rules must be followed, bargains must be made. Work out the particulars with the GM.

While the item may be "loaned" once in a while for a specific single task, it is not an easy

What the hell is that athame that Lea got her hands on? Still need to figure that out...



So the guy getting the loaned Item of Power doesn't have to spend any Refresh or Fate Points?

That's right, so long as the possessor of the item is living and able to spend. Otherwise you'll have to use the Temporary Powers rules (page 92) to handle the situation.

(If Murphy picked up Shiro's sword for a short time, there's no Shiro to foot the bill.)

thing to do: the owner of the item must pay a fate point for every scene in which he allows another to enjoy its benefits, or the item fails to work for the recipient. The recipient must still obey the rules associated with the Item of Power.

Sword of the Cross [–3]

Description: You possess one of the three Swords of the Cross, their hilts reportedly forged from the nails that fixed Christ to the Cross. Those bearing the Swords are called the Knights of the Cross.

Musts: You must have a destiny or calling to inherit the Sword, represented as a high concept or template.

Skills Affected: Weapons, others.

Effects:

All Creatures Are Equal Before God. This is the truest purpose of the Swords of the Cross, the ability that makes even ancient dragons take pause when facing a Knight. When facing an opponent, the Knight may spend a fate point to ignore that opponent's defensive abilities (Toughness based ones, primarily), as well as any mundane armor the foe has, for the duration of the scene. In essence, a Sword of the Cross may take the place of whatever it is that a creature has a weakness to (whatever "the Catch" is on their Toughness powers, see page 185), on demand, so long as the Knight can spend that fate point—particularly handy when facing ultra-tough Denarians or true dragons. Whatever abilities a creature may have, the job of a Sword of the Cross is creating a mostly even playing field—or something very much like it—between mortal and monster.

The fate point isn't needed when a Knight is fighting something that's already vulnerable to Holy objects.

Divine Purpose. A Sword of the Cross may only be swung with true selfless purpose in mind and heart; if this is not the case, the bond between the Knight and the Sword is broken and may only be restored by undergoing some sort of trial of faith. When swung without such purpose in mind and heart, the blow does not land (any attack roll automatically fails), the bond is immediately broken, and the sword falls from the wielder's hand.

Basically, the GM and player should look at the description above as a guideline for how to compel the high concept attached to the sword—your character might be tempted to use the sword for selfish reasons, and could either receive a fate point to stay his hand or succumb to the temptation and lose the sword temporarily. If another takes up the sword and swings it selfishly, your Knight is still responsible for how the sword is used, with similar repercussions.

Holy. This weapon is a powerful holy symbol in its own right. Its very touch is like holy water or that of a cross or other symbol of faith backed by the belief of the possessor.

It's a Sword. A Sword of the Cross always takes the form of a sword, though the precise type of sword may change through the ages. There are only three in existence (OW74). As a sword, it possesses the damage and other attributes of any sword (page 202).

True Aim. When swung in keeping with its purpose, a Sword of the Cross grants a +1 to the wielder's Weapons skill.

Unbreakable. As an Item of Power, it cannot be broken, save through dedicated magical ritual predicated upon perverting its purpose.

Discount Already Applied. As an Item of Power, the sword already includes the one-time discount (page 167). This means that if the character possesses more than one Item of Power, the one-time discount will *not* apply on that second item. If the Sword of the Cross *is* the second or subsequent artifact the character gains, the refresh cost is –5.

Minor Abilities

The minor supernatural abilities that exist in the world are too numerous to be categorized easily. All the same, you'll find some in the *"Psychic Abilities"* section starting on page 172, and a few more are listed here. Usually these abilities offer some small advantage, but in many cases they also come with a disadvantage or a price.

Cloak of Shadows [–1]

Description: You and the shadows are as one. You're able to melt into the shadows with ease; the cover of night offers easy concealment.

Skills Affected: Stealth, perception skills.

Effects:

See in the Dark. Perception skill rolls are not penalized by darkness.

Melt into the Shadows. You're more effective than most at hiding in a reasonably sized area of darkness or shadow. Under the cover of darkness, you get a +2 bonus to your Stealth rolls.

Ghost Speaker [–1]

Description: You see dead people. All the time. Some people mistakenly refer to you as an *ectomancer* (a kind of Focused Practitioner—see page 76), but your ability is more instinctual and you are not technically a spellcaster (although this ability can be added on top of an existing spellcaster if the character template allows for it).

Skills Affected: Social and perception skills.

Effects:

See the Dead. You have no problems perceiving the presence of spirits and ghosts, unless they are deliberately trying to conceal themselves—in which case it's Investigation (or Alertness) vs. Stealth.

Seen by the Dead. Spirits and ghosts have no problem perceiving *you* as well, regardless of how tenuous their manifestation is (page 170)—they recognize you as a conduit to the mortal world and will readily come forward to contact you. This means such creatures will see and find you more easily than other people, when all other factors are equal. Spirits get a +2 when trying to perceive or locate you.

Speak to the Dead. You can speak and otherwise communicate directly with ghosts and other invisible or incorporeal spirits, without any need to perform thaumaturgy.

Seek the Dead. The dead seek you out, and it goes the other way as well—enough so that you may use Contacts to seek out information and specific individuals among the dead.

Mana Static [–1]

Description: Despite not being a mortal practitioner of magic, you have a tendency to cause technology to short out the way a wizard or other mortal spellcaster does.

Musts: If the character ever takes a spellcasting ability, it replaces this one.

Skills Affected: Varies.

Note: While we don't have documentation of this sort of ability in our casefiles, it's pretty well supported by theory. There are plenty of folks out there with undeveloped magical talent, and it's easy to see how they might first—and perhaps only—manifest the hexing aspect of their abilities.

WHOSE THEORY?

Bob's.

At your suggestion!

My mom seems to hex every bit of technology she comes in contact with and as far as I know she doesn't have any spellcasting abilities, so it makes sense to me.

Effects:

Hexing. You can hex technology deliberately, as described on page 228. You may need to roll your Discipline skill occasionally to keep your emotions in check and avoid *accidentally* hexing technology, but you make these rolls at +2 due to the relative weakness of your "talent."

Marked by Power [–1]

Description: You've been marked by something powerful, in a way recognizable to those with a magical affinity. Such people and creatures will think twice about acting against you, but they'll also see you as a representative of the thing that's marked you.

Musts: Your high concept must reflect the creature or person who has marked you.

Skills Affected: Varies.

Effects:

Aegis of Respect. A magical mark is upon you, placed by a creature or person of significant power. It's not that the mark provides any *actual* protection, but magically aware people and creatures can perceive this mark upon you and word tends to get around that you've been "claimed." Whenever dealing with someone in the magical community, *all* of your social skill rolls operate at a +1 bonus. The downside, of course, is that people tend to see you as a representative of the thing that marked you, which can lead to some

uncomfortable entanglements and assumptions. If you absolutely must conceal this mark, you can, but it takes some concentration—use any appropriate skill (Stealth or Deceit, usually) restricted by Discipline to do so, but you can't do anything stressful (like combat) without dropping the concealment.

Being able to keep my left hand isn't "minor."

Yeah, in real life, that's huge. But in game terms, the amount of time required for your hand to heal makes it less of an advantage.

Same thing goes for an abnormally long lifespan—that's awesome for people, but has little day to day impact in terms of game mechanics.

Wizard's Constitution [–0]

Description: You are a wizard, or are like a wizard—incredibly long lived for a human, able to recover from injuries just a little better than the next guy.

Note: This ability is replaced by any Inhuman or better Recovery or Toughness ability, if any such abilities are taken. In terms of game effects, the uses of this ability are so minor that they're really almost cosmetic; hence the zero cost.

Skills Affected: Endurance.

Effects:

Total Recovery. You're able to recover from physical harm that would leave a normal person permanently damaged. You can recover totally from any consequence—excluding extreme physical ones—with no other excuse besides time; simply waiting long enough will eventually heal you completely. (Many wizards use this ability to avoid hospitals, where their tendency to disrupt technology can put others in serious danger.)

Long Life. As a side-effect of your improved ability to recover from injury, your lifespan is significantly extended. In game terms this will rarely have relevance, but it's why the Senior Council of the White Council of wizards can talk at length about the events of the American Civil War (many of them were *there*) and several can go back even further than that.

Nevernever Powers

This category of powers is for those creatures other than Faeries that are strongly rooted in the Nevernever—like spirits and ghosts—as well as the ability to affect or reach the Nevernever easily.

Demesne [–1]

Description: As a spirit that has been linked to the mortal world, you naturally create a space within the Nevernever tied to that place or concept. This space reflects the landscape of your "mind."

Skills Affected: Discipline.

Effects:

Home Turf. You have an immense amount of control over the features of your demesne; the "local reality" bends to your will. You automatically succeed at any declarations about the physical form of your demesne, and in combat you can roll Discipline to place scene aspects in the demesne. You can even roll your Discipline as a physical attack against intruders, using the nature of the Nevernever to harm opponents.

Spirit Form [–3]

Description: You are an incorporeal spirit form, able to pass through walls and other barriers in the mortal world (thresholds still have an almost physical reality to you, however).

Skills Affected: Many.

Effects:

Insubstantial. You are incorporeal, able to pass through walls, reducing most borders (page 212) to zero. Thresholds (page 230), however, will act as physical barriers to you. Without also taking Physical Immunity (page 186) to a broad range of effects, you can still be harmed by physical attacks.

Variable Manifestation. You must manifest *visibly* to truly perceive anything "useful" about the world around you. Even when largely separated from the world, your presence may be felt by those with a high Lore or other means of magical sensitivity.

Variable Visage. As a spirit, your form may change somewhat in response to your mood or idea of self, causing you to appear more fearsome or beautiful, granting a +2 to appropriate social actions based on appearance (Intimidation for a fearsome appearance, Rapport or Deceit for a beautiful one). Usually this is as an exaggeration of your "normal" appearance in some way.

Poltergeist [–2]. If you take this upgrade, your manifestation is reinforced with solid ectoplasm and able to manipulate objects in the mortal world. When doing so, you may use your Conviction instead of your Might to move heavy things. You may use physical combat skills to affect the world as well.

Swift Transition [–2]

Description: Most supernatural creatures may cross over into the Nevernever naturally, so long as they are in a place that particularly resonates with their nature (White Court vampires, for example, tend to disappear mysteriously in the backs of strip clubs). With this ability, a spirit or other creature may cross over into the Nevernever from nearly anywhere at all.

Skills Affected: Many.

Effects:

Everywhere is a Portal. You may transition to the Nevernever from nearly any location in the mortal world, so long as you are not forcibly restrained by some magical or ritual means.

No Mortal Home [+1]. If it suits your concept—such as with ghosts—you are so native to the Nevernever that you are pulled to it if given no strong reason to remain in the mortal realm. If you make this choice, then under high stress or magical assault, you may need to make Discipline rolls (against a difficulty in line with the strength of an attack, etc.) in order to remain in the mortal world. If knocked unconscious or otherwise wholly incapacitated, you immediately transition to the Nevernever, for better or for worse.

Worldwalker [–2]

Description: You have a natural ability to cross into and out of the Nevernever by opening a gateway. Others in close proximity to you may pass through this opening as well—and things within the Nevernever may use it to get out. You're also adept at finding places where the barrier between this world and the Nevernever is weak and permeable, bypassing the need to open a rift yourself.

Skills Affected: Investigation, Lore, and Survival.

Notes: This is another "extrapolated" ability, not documented in Harry's casefiles, but pretty well supported by theory. It's already true that many supernatural creatures can cross over into the Nevernever in places that share an affinity with their kind (such as the White Court ability to step into and out of the Nevernever at strip clubs and brothels), so it seems reasonable that someone with a little bit of latent magic ability would be able to manifest a similar kind of affinity.



It's also worth observing that spellcasters usually needn't worry about this ability—their spellcraft abilities already provide the ability to detect and open rifts between the mortal realm and the Nevernever.

Effects:

Rift Sense. You're able to sense places where the fabric of reality is weak, allowing easy passage into or out of the Nevernever. You may use Investigation or Lore to find such places.

Rift Maker. You are able to tear a temporary hole between this world and the next, allowing people and things to pass into or out of the Nevernever for a few seconds (it takes a true spellcaster to hold a rift open for longer). You may only do this once per scene (or per hour, if more appropriate). Some supernatural power-players will get a bit agitated or excited about this, however, since this inevitably weakens the fabric between the Nevernever and our own world in a given location.

Strange Worlds. By dint of using this ability and not, y'know, dying or getting enslaved in Faerie or the like, you've had enough exposure to the Nevernever to have a degree of familiarity with it. All Lore and Survival checks regarding the geography of the Nevernever and other trivia involving it are made at +2, and you may use Lore instead of Survival while there.

Do various creatures need to take Worldwalker in order to cross over into the Nevernever?

Not really, so long as they stick to crossing over only where the have an "affinity". Lust-vampires can cross over in brothels, Fetches can pass through mirrors, etc, without Worldwalker.

Psychic Abilities

Psychic abilities seem to divide into two types—ones which are more trouble than they're worth (using the Sight can drive you mad; Cassandra's Tears is more a source of sorrow than solace), and those which break the hell out of the Laws of Magic (Domination being a good example).

How does this ability reconcile with the precognition of Abby?

I'M NOT SURE.

For the benefit of foresight without epileptic seizures, those with Cassandra's Tears suffer an infuriating social consequence.

Hmm. I'll have to see what I can cook up for Abby on her sheet... maybe it's a different ability, or the same one with different conditions for penalty.

Cassandra's Tears [–0]

Description: You are afflicted by the condition known as Cassandra's Tears—you have a limited ability to see the future and predict the shape of things to come. But there's a big downside: most people simply ignore or won't believe your warnings.

Musts: You must take Cassandra's Tears or some similar variant as an aspect (because it's going to get compelled—lots).

Skills Affected: Social skills.

Effects:

Unbelievable Predictions. You are able to make precognitive predictions or receive them from the GM. This places an aspect on the "world" related to the prediction that remains until it comes true or is otherwise resolved. See the guidelines on page 324 for more details about predictions. Whenever trying to warn people about what you foresee, you are at a –2 to any attempts to convince them that what you're saying is correct.

Domination [–2]

Description: This ability is most commonly seen among a segment of Black Court vampires. Given a captive victim, a skilled Black Court vampire or other creature with this ability can break down the target's will through direct psychic assault. It's not subtle, and it's not pretty, and it usually leaves a wreck of a mind in its wake.

Skills Affected: Discipline.

Effects:

Psychic Domination. Given a helpless captive, you may use your Discipline skill as an overt psychic attack, dealing mental stress and consequences until the victim's mind is entirely under your sway. While the victim may defend with his own Discipline, he usually can't counter-attack, and eventually he'll just be whittled down—especially if you get creative with the "preparation" of your victim.

Create Renfield. If you manage to take out a victim using this method, you have the option of turning the character into a "Renfield" (OW86): a horribly broken individual, with nothing left to do except foam at the mouth and fanatically execute on your instructions. It takes a day to create a Renfield in this fashion.

Master Dominator [–2]. If you take this upgrade, increase your psychic attacks to +2 stress on a successful hit and you can create enhanced Renfields with Inhuman Strength (page 183), Inhuman Recovery (page 185), and lifespans of no longer than a month. It takes three days to create an enhanced Renfield.

Possession [–3]. This variant is seen most commonly among demons; with this upgrade, you may fully possess your victim once you've taken him out with your domination attack. Your domination attacks inflict +2 stress on successful hits. This upgrade is possible only when combining this power with another that allows you to become insubstantial. Gaseous Form (page 175) could allow you to possess a victim by way of inhalation, while Spirit Form (page 170) would allow you to simply "step into" the victim's body. Once you've taken possession, you may control your victim completely—without any easy telltales of mind control—and gain access to all of their physical abilities and many of their mental ones. Once someone has a reason to be suspicious, you must use your Deceit to defend against discovery.

Incite Emotion [–1]

Description: You are able to incite certain strong emotions in a target—usually emotions of passion or pain. Dark or morally "corrupt" emotions (lust, wrath, despair, and others) are the usual ones available. Emotions created by this ability are real, but not True, so True Love, Courage, Hope, and so forth are off the table.

Options: This ability costs 1 refresh to start and requires you to pick a single emotion you can incite, be it rage, lust, fear, protectiveness, or the like. More potent versions (see below) may be purchased by increasing the refresh cost. The emotion this ability incites may be changed under special circumstances, as part of character development.

Skills Affected: Deceit, Intimidation.



Effects:

Emotion-Touch. If you can touch someone, you can make him feel something. You're able to do maneuvers at +2 to your roll (using Intimidation for anger or fear and Deceit for every other emotion) that force an emotion on a target (as a temporary aspect), so long as you're in the same zone as he is and you can physically touch him. The victim defends with his Discipline. You may be able to prevent the victim from taking other actions as well if you do this as a block (page 210) *instead* of as a maneuver.

Additional Emotion [–1 or more]. For every point of refresh spent on this upgrade, you can choose another emotion to use with your Incite Emotion ability. All other upgrades apply to any emotions you can incite.

At Range [–1]. You may use this ability on targets up to one zone away without touching them.

Lasting Emotion [–1]. If you increase the refresh cost of this ability by 1, you gain the ability to do *Emotion-Touch* as a mental attack instead of a mere maneuver or block. If such an attack hits, you gain a +2 stress bonus on a successful hit (as though it were Weapon:2), increasing the chances of inflicting a mental consequence (and thus, a more lasting emotional state). The victim defends with his Discipline.

Potent Emotion [–1]. The Lasting Emotion upgrade is a prerequisite to this one. You get another +2 stress bonus on successful attacks as per Lasting Emotion, as though you had Weapon:4.

Psychometry [–1]

Description: You have a semi-magical ("psychic") talent for catching glimpses of the past when you touch objects.

Skills Affected: Investigation.

Effects:

Echoes of the Past. You can perform an assessment action on the history of a given object that you are able to touch and contemplate. This is a standard Investigation roll, but instead of searching a physical location, you are rifling through the situations that the object has been exposed to in the past, looking for glimpses of something significant. Psychometry assessments are more difficult than normal (Good or higher), so even with a high roll, you may only get one aspect or fact, and you may not receive any additional context to help you make sense of it.

For example, a knife used as a murder weapon might only give you fleeting images from the scene, not enough to make a positive ID on the killer; but you might see something like A Butterfly Necklace that you can tag later as a clue on a future roll.

The Sight [–1]

Description: Wizards and others have learned to open their third eye, perceiving the magical world in great detail. The downside here is that the often phantasmagorical images are burned into their brains—never forgotten, *always* vivid.

Musts: You must have a high concept that shows either that you are a spellcaster or that you have received training of some kind to open your third eye.

Skills Affected: Lore, Discipline.

Effects:

Arcane Senses. Even with your third eye closed you have heightened arcane senses. You may use Lore as if it were an arcane Investigation skill as well as an arcane Alertness skill. You also gain +1 to Lore when using it in this fashion.

Wizard's Touch. As another aspect of your arcane senses, when you touch another being who has some magic potential, the GM may ask you to roll Lore to catch just a hint of a "spark"—indicating their nature as something other than mundanely mortal. Even on a failed roll, you might experience some sort of sense that something is "off," without being able to pin it down.

Opening the Third Eye. You may use the Sight to fully open your third eye, with all of the risks and rewards that come with it. See page 223 for details on how the Sight works.

Soulgaze [–1]

Description: Wizards (and a rare few others) have the ability to gaze upon another's soul directly—but only the first time they make more than a moment of eye contact, and only if the one they gaze upon actually has a mortal soul. When it doesn't happen, that in and of itself is an interesting piece of information!

Skills Affected: Conviction, Discipline.

Effects:

Soulgaze. You are subject to the uses and effects of Soulgaze as described on page 226.

Application of the Sight [+1]. If you have the Sight, above, you may take Soulgaze for free if you so choose. It's not mandatory.

Wizards tend not to meet people eye-to-eye. This makes some folks think we're liars, or shifty.

Shapeshifting

Shapeshifting can happen solely in the mind, but more often it is an alteration of the body. The changed form may be greater or smaller in size than the original.

The True Shapeshifting ability (below, page 177) is rarely possible for a mortal mind to bear—the stress and strain placed on the sense of self inevitably leads to a psychotic break of some sort. (This may be why those mortals who do learn how to shapeshift rarely enjoy more than a *single*, fixed alternate form—such as werewolves of the Alpha style.)

Whatever the case, this is very much a case of (mental) function follows form—changing the body may well be the easiest part. What to do with the mind when this happens—that's *paramount*, at least as far as mortal shapeshifters are concerned. Most supernatural creatures already have it covered—or aren't particularly bothered by petty things like psychosis. Others conquer this problem with a variety of limitations, magical "cheats," or just good hard training.

Unless explicitly noted otherwise, shapeshifting may be done as a supplemental action.

Beast Change [–1]

Description: You're able to take on the form of a beast, rearranging the priorities of your skill list.

Musts: You must define the particular kind of beast that you change into.

Skills Affected: Many.

Effects:

Beast Form. You take on the shape and appearance of the beast you specified at the time you took this ability. This only covers a cosmetic change of form and does not convey additional abilities like Claws (page 162) or any supernatural Strength, Speed, or Toughness abilities—you will need to take those separately to get the appropriate benefit.

Skill Shuffle. You may shuffle around your skills for a different configuration while changed (using the same number of skill points and following the same rules as during character creation, page 65), so long as any knowledge or social skills are not given a higher value by the change. In other words, you can't suddenly know more about Shakespeare just because you're a wolf (or whatever). Physical and perception skills, however, *may* (and perhaps should) be increased in this way.

Demonic Co-Pilot [–1]

Description: Running around in a body that isn't yours is hard, so you contract out the hard work to a spirit. Usually an evil, angry one.

Musts: You should have an aspect referencing this pact in some way. The GM is going to be compelling it. The GM should think about what the co-pilot's agenda is.

Skills Affected: Ones used by the shapeshifted form.

Effects:

Demon's Agenda. You gain a +1 on *any* skill roll that's in keeping with your shapeshifted form or demonic co-pilot's agenda (often having to do with gleeful murder). When doing so, you must roll Discipline against the result, as if you were defending against an attack. Failure to defend results in mental stress as if from an attack; psychological consequences that result are set by the GM, in line with the demon's agenda.

Flesh Mask [–1]

Description: This is a variant on Human Guise (page 176) that offers a few extra benefits. Most commonly used by Red Court vampires, a Flesh Mask is a real-seeming outer layer of ectoplasmic flesh, usually embodying an idealized human form. But the creature beneath can move around inside, sometimes able to perform small actions underneath its very "skin," likely unnoticed by those around it.

Skills Affected: Social skills, Stealth.

Effects:

Flesh Mask. The flesh mask is a pliable outer shell of false flesh, made of ectoplasm. The true creature beneath can tear through this mask with ease, discarding it to take its true form. Similarly, the flesh mask may be ripped away from the creature by particularly vicious attacks—any physical attack that inflicts a consequence of any size is sure to pierce the mask, at least a little. It takes only a few minutes for a flesh mask to be restored after it has been removed, whatever the means.

Idealized Appearance. Your flesh mask has a single appearance—usually a stunningly attractive version of the human you were before you became a vampire. Any social action where appearance is a primary factor gains a +2 on the roll, so long as the target of your action is not aware of the horror that lies beneath the outer veneer.

What Lies Beneath. You may move around within your flesh mask, so long as the motions are small and subtle—such as pulling your real arm out of the mask-arm and pointing a small gun at your opponent. Keeping such an action concealed is done with a simple Deceit or Stealth roll.

Gaseous Form [–3]

Description: Certain Black Court vampires may have the ability to turn into a cloud of gas, seeping under door cracks, traveling great distances undetected, and so on. Other creatures may do this as well.

Skills Affected: Various.

Effects:

Gaseous Transformation. You may transform into a gaseous cloud. In gas form, you set aside all ability to act in exchange for the Physical Immunity ability (page 186) with a Catch of any of your normal weaknesses, if you have any, plus the vulnerabilities a cloud of gas might have; the ability to fly à la the Wings ability (page 165); and the Insubstantial effect of Spirit Form (page 170). The only real actions available to you are movement and maneuvers—you cannot attack or block while in this form. It takes a whole exchange to make the transformation.

While in this form, you're potentially vulnerable to things that can affect a gaseous cloud: someone could bottle up part of you if he got off a good enough "attack;" a strong head-wind could impede travel, adding borders to zones if you are trying to float into the face of it. However, you may be able to ignore other border values entirely by seeping through cracks under doors or windows, traveling through ventilation systems, and so forth. You'll still be stopped by something airtight and slowed down by something that's *mostly* airtight.

Why the hell would someone want a Demonic Co-Pilot in his head?

I sure don't. But it's a hexenwulf thing, so it's in here.

I repeat my question!

Did someone cut the cheese, or is Mavra in the house?

What happens if you shapeshift out of a form that has a power ability with extra stress boxes? And what if those boxes are checked off?

You lose access to those boxes, but the checkmarks don't go away. You aren't instantly taken out, but if you later bring those boxes BACK, they'll still have those check marks unless enough time has passed.

Bob, concerning the highlighted text to the right—this is because Kravos was just a sorcerer before, right?

Yes.

Human Form [+1]

Description: You're a shapeshifter, but when you haven't shapeshifted, you're just a normal person.

Skills Affected: Varies.

Effects:

Regular Joe/Regular Jane. Specify which of your supernatural abilities (usually most or all of them) are unavailable to you when you're *not* shapeshifted into your "powered" form. As long as you specify at least 2 points worth of supernatural powers, you gain back 1 point of refresh for making this choice. If you only have 1 point of supernatural powers affected by this, Human Form is not worth any refresh.

Rare or Involuntary Change [+1]. If you are only *rarely* able to take your powered form (due to involuntary change, rare times of the day or month or year, etc.), you regain two points of refresh for taking this ability, instead of one. The total cost of the abilities affected by the Human Form must be greater than the amount of refresh points paid back by this effect. So to get this version of Human Form, it must affect at least 3 refresh points' worth of powers.

Human Guise [–0]

Description: Congratulations, you pretty much look like everyone else.

Skills Affected: Discipline.

Notes: The effects of this ability are so minor that they're really considered to be almost cosmetic, at least in terms of the impact on the game mechanics; hence the zero cost. Ghouls are one example of a creature with this ability, as are White Court vampires.

Effects:

Normal Appearance. You have a number of supernatural abilities (often from "*Creature Features*" on page 162, though others may apply) that give you an appearance that's noticeably, often horrifically, different from normal folks. With this ability, you are able to take on a human guise that conceals your supernatural nature from mundane senses. Supernaturally gifted individuals may still sense your unusual nature using Investigation, Alertness, or Lore.

Your other abilities are still technically available to you while you're looking normal, unlike with Human Form (see this page). The moment you choose to use your powers, however, the human guise drops away. So long as you do not use your abilities, you don't give away your nature to mundane senses—though under times of great stress or high emotion, you may be called on to make a Discipline roll to keep the guise in place.

Mimic Abilities [-Varies]

Description: You are able to mimic the abilities of another individual, at least to an extent.

Musts: You must set aside a number of points of your refresh equal to the maximum total refresh value of any mortal stunts and supernatural abilities you wish to copy from a target. These are called your **mimic points.**

Skills Affected: Many.

Effects:

Eat Power. You may clone the supernatural powers of your target (see below) under particular circumstances. This cloning is only possible if you lay hands on a significant part of the victim—such as his brain, his heart, or a large portion of his magic power. If the victim is not dead from this, then he is at least *diminished* while you access his abilities (reflected by a consequence resulting from the attack that allowed you to steal from him, the terms arrived at when taking him out, etc.). This is what gave the Nightmare not only Harry's form but also his advanced spell-crafting abilities in the Grave Peril casefile.

The cloning may be undone if the victim is able to turn tables on you and reclaim what you've stolen from him. Usually this requires winning some sort of supernatural or magical conflict with you, though it probably goes without saying that killing you will restore the victim's power.

You can keep your mimic points configured in a certain way indefinitely. If you switch out your current set of powers for a new one, however, you can't go back to your previous "settings"—you'd have to eat those powers again to have access to them.

Mimic Stunt. You are able to clone any of your target's mortal stunts. You must clone these abilities by temporarily paying for them out of your mimic points (above).

For Mimic Abilities, can a PC mimic more than one person at a time? Or someone from before the first session?

I'd say no. It's a bit of an "evil people eater" power, so it should be treated very strictly when in PC hands.



Mimic Skill. Allocate one mimic point to copy any one of your target's skills. This replaces your actual rating with that skill while the allocation remains in place.

Mimic Form [–2]

Description: You are able to mimic the appearance of another, given the right materials to work with: ideally a piece of their flesh, some strands of hair, a patch of skin, or a vial of blood. (Mortal monster-hunters, take heed!)

Skills Affected: Deceit, others.

Effects:

Take Form. You may take on the form, voice, and other seemings of another individual, provided you have possession of something significant of theirs—the better the object, the more convincing the copy. You roll Deceit at +4 to fool others if your mimicked appearance is close to perfect; the bonus decreases significantly if you don't have the right "fuel."

You fleshy types leave so much detritus around, it's a shock that more creatures don't take advantage of it.

Modular Abilities [-Varies]

Description: You can improve your physique, taking on a variety of abilities as you change your form.

Musts: You must "pre-pay" a number of refresh points equal to the maximum total value of the abilities you want to be able to change around at will, plus a surcharge of two refresh (so a pool of 7 points would cost 9 refresh: the base of 7, plus 2). These are called your **form points.**

Options: None.

Skills Affected: Varies.

Effects:

Function Follows Form. You may shapeshift your form to take on a variety of abilities, taking a full action to change them around. When making such a change, you may reallocate some or all of your form points (see above) to purchase new abilities, focusing on those available as Creature Features (page 162), certain Minor Abilities (page 169), Speed (page 178), Strength (page 183), and Toughness (page 184).

True Shapeshifting [–4]

Description: You are able to shapeshift into a variety of human and non-human (usually animate) forms.

Options: None, but the Modular Abilities power (above) is recommended.

Skills Affected: Varies.

Effects:

Multi-Form. You may take on nearly any humanoid or beastly form as a supplemental action. Changing into something else—say, a tree, a vacuum cleaner, a water bed—takes a longer amount of time, usually several actions, or even minutes, depending on *how* different. Concealing your true nature while in these forms is casually easy, but if you do something to call it into suspicion, your attempts to evade detection are at +4 on your Deceit or Stealth rolls.

Skill Shuffle. As with the skill-shuffling effect of the same name under the Beast Change power (page 174), only with multiple different configurations to suit the form you take.

A waterbed? Waveless or free flow?

Okay, how about if you shapeshift into a form that has a Recovery power. Is that... uh, legal?

Yep. My reasoning is that really potent shapeshifters are probably able to focus their power on healing when it's not focused on doing something else. A GM can decide it's NOT legal though—it's her game to arbitrate after all. And if you want reliable access to healing, buy it separately.

Speed

When it comes right down to it in the battle between mankind and creatures of darkness, the creatures have the upper hand when it comes to physical capability. One such area is speed—simply, most of them have the ability to move faster than we can.

Which is why I practice sprinting, to narrow that edge of theirs.

Like any of the physical "building block" categories (see also Strength on page 183, and Toughness on page 184), Speed is divided first and foremost into three levels—Inhuman, Supernatural, and Mythic. You must have a high concept that fits taking one of these abilities. The Mythic level is nearly always reserved for potent NPCs.

So what are all these "difficulty factors due to moving", Billy? I've looked at skulking on page 143 and modifying difficulties for movement on page 312 and I'm still confused!

Well, the difficulty modification stuff is mostly about looking at the situation and adding +2 for each factor that works against the stealthy individual. So here, each "reduced by two" amounts to "ignore one factor".

Inhuman Speed [–2]

Description: You are very fast, just past the edge of human capability.

Skills Affected: Athletics, Alertness, and some other physical skills.

Effects:

Improved Initiative. Your Alertness is at +4 for the purpose of determining initiative.

Athletic Ability. All your Athletics checks are made at +1, including dodging. When sprinting (see page 212), this bonus is increased to +2.

Casual Movement. Whenever moving as part of another physical activity, you may move one zone without taking the –1 penalty for a supplemental action (page 213).

Almost Too Fast To See. Difficulty factors due to moving are reduced by two when rolling Stealth.

Supernatural Speed [–4]

Description: You're able to move far faster than the eye can see—or at least so fast that what's seen is only a blur. You can cross physical distances easily and quickly; acting before ordinary mortals do is trivial.

Notes: This ability replaces Inhuman Speed if taken.

Skills Affected: Athletics, Alertness, Stealth, and some other physical skills.

Effects:

Supreme Initiative. You *always* go first in initiative order in a conflict, regardless of your Alertness rating. If there are other entities present who share this ability, you must then use Alertness to resolve initiative order among yourselves. If someone has Mythic Speed (below), it trumps this ability.

Superior Athletic Ability. All your Athletics checks are made at +2, including dodging. When sprinting (see page 212), this bonus is increased to +4.

Effortless Movement. Whenever moving as part of another physical activity, you may move *two* zones without taking the –1 penalty for a supplemental action (page 213).

Faster Than the Eye. Difficulty factors due to moving are reduced by four when rolling Stealth.

Mythic Speed [–6]

Description: You are a rare supernatural creature whose very essence is tied to the notion of speed. You're like the wind itself. Hell, you may *be* the wind itself.

Musts: This ability replaces Inhuman or Supernatural Speed if taken.

Skills Affected: Athletics, Alertness, Stealth, and some other physical skills.

Effects:

Super Supreme Initiative. You *always* go first in initiative order in a conflict, regardless of your Alertness rating. If there are other entities present who share Mythic Speed, you must then use Alertness to resolve initiative order among yourselves.

Extra Superior Athletic Ability. All your Athletics checks are made at +3, including dodging. When sprinting, this bonus is increased to +6. You may set aside this bonus to simply declare that you have no problem keeping up with a moving vehicle.

Instant Movement. Whenever moving as part of another physical activity, you may move up to *three* zones without taking the –1 penalty for a supplemental action (page 213).

Like the Wind. No one ever gets a bonus to spot you when you're using Stealth, no matter how fast you're moving.

So to get into a specific example. Let's say you want to move quickly across several zones, some of which are covered in crunchy-sounding gravel. Those are two factors, each adding +2 to whatever the GM decided the basic difficulty was. Inhuman Speed ignores one of those. Supernatural ignores both.

Spellcraft

Though certainly not exclusive to mankind, spellcraft is one of the few ways that mortal man can compete with the creatures of the Nevernever. True practitioners such as wizards are few and far between (and often come out of specific human bloodlines), but there are lesser practitioners out there as well, able to deliver in less refined and more specific ways.

Regardless how you pursue it, if you're a mortal spellcaster, you can cause technology to short out around you (see the principles of hexing on page 228).

Building a Spellcaster

If you're building a spellcaster character, realize that you have a lot of flexibility to play around with here, despite it looking like you're taking one or two powers that eat most of your refresh. Once you've taken these powers, you're definitely *not* done—it's time to flip over to *Spellcasting* (page 248) and read up on building spells. It's a good idea to construct a few spells *before* you start play so you can get your handy arsenal established. And in case it's not obvious, several modes of spellcasting will let you create many effects that at least approximately duplicate some of the powers you'll find elsewhere in this chapter. That means there's no need to take those other powers. For example, there's no need to take Worldwalker (page 171) if you're already able to cast spells that open up portals into and out of the Nevernever.

If you have any questions about what powers you should be considering, make sure to check out the character template you chose from *Types & Templates* on page 72.

Blind Spots

Some spellcasters have blind spots in their magic that aren't simply a lack of specialization and practice—there are particular kinds of spells or methods of arcane practice that they just *can't do well*. By and large, this is because the only magic that you can do as a practitioner is the magic that you *believe* you can do, because *that's who you are*. Self image plays into this a lot; as such, a spellcaster's blind spots are usually an expression of the kind of person he is. And that means that aspects play a key role in determining what spells a wizard just *sucks* at.

Harry Dresden isn't much for subtlety, and his aspects (such as Not So Subtle, Still Quick To Anger) are a reflection of that. This in turn affects his magic. When it comes to spirit evocation, Harry's on good terms with using it for force effects—throwing up a shield, constructing rings that unleash telekinetic fury, that sort of thing—but he's a mess when it comes to using evocation (or thaumaturgy for that matter) to create veils. Veils are a subtle art, and Harry is not so subtle. Similarly, Molly Carpenter is a highly sensitive individual (tough exterior to the contrary), and her magic reflects this. She's a mess with most combat magic. Her issues with combat magic come from her aspects (Subtlety Is Its Own Power).

In both Harry's and Molly's case, when they *need* to use magic they're not good at, something inevitably goes wrong—no matter what the die rolls might say. Harry might cast a veil, but it'll look like a smudge rather than flawless invisibility from the outside, and from inside the veil everything looks like it's viewed from inside a glass of Mac's finest dark ale. When the gruffs attacked her house, Molly could fend them off with a blast of force or fire—if only that wasn't exactly the sort of thing she has no aptitude for.

From a character standpoint, that stinks; from a system standpoint, it's a good thing. In both cases, the failures these wizards experience are due to taking *compels* on a relevant aspect (see page 100), reflecting a blind spot in their spellcraft that has nothing to do with what they've specialized in. They might not be able to cast the spell they need, or they might cast it but only get some of the benefit they're after—in either case, they're getting some much-needed fate points for suffering from the restriction. This can create an incentive for the player to get his wizard embroiled in situations where he needs to use a kind of magic he just isn't good at, as a way to mine some fate points he'll need for later when he's doing stuff he *is* good at. In other words, being bad at some kinds of magic can make you a better wizard! Or at least give you a wildly entertaining life…

Hey, I can be subtle. Given enough time. And planning. And luck.

Quit laughing!



Evocation [–3]

Description: Evocation is the "thug" side of spellcasting, from some perspectives. It's all about pushing energy from one place to another, quickly—and subtlety isn't, truly, part of its vocabulary. Worse, it runs a real risk of spiraling out of the caster's control. Those who have mastered Evocation are among the most feared spellcasters around. It's not because they can create widespread destruction (although of course they can); it's because they're able to do potent spellcasting at a *moment's notice*. Those who haven't quite mastered evocation are usually dangerous as well—but only until they accidentally engineer their own demise. For more on Evocation, see page 249.

Options: Casters whose template allows for it should consider the Refinement ability (page 182).

Skills Affected: Discipline, Conviction, others.

Effects:

Evocation. You're able to use evocation in all of its forms, as described on page 249.

You Know What You Know. While Evocation allows the use of a broad range of elements (fire, air, water, earth, and spirit/force, classically speaking), the practitioner doesn't start out familiarized with all of them. When you take Evocation, you must specify three elements you do know. You cannot cast spells using the other elements (which should number two, if using the classical model).

Specialization. Full Evocation grants the ability to specialize in one form of Evocation magic, usually by focusing on a particular known element (such as Harry's predilection for fire). This specialization can take one of two forms—either a **power bonus**, increasing the caster's Conviction score by one for any spell of that element, or a **control bonus**, increasing the caster's Discipline roll to control the spell by one. One or the other must be chosen, though the specialization does not need to be defined at the time the ability is taken. *Additional* specializations covering *different* areas of Evocation may be taken by use of the Refinement ability (page 182).

Item Slots. Evocation comes with two free Focus Item Slots (page 278). You can design the items that fit into these slots now, or later on during play. A single Focus Item Slot may be traded in for *two* Enchanted Item Slots (page 279). You may gain more Item Slots as one of the options on the Refinement ability (page 182).

Thaumaturgy [–3]

Description: Thaumaturgy is a subtle art—and slow. It was created by mortal spellcasters due to their need to produce great power but to keep that power under control better than Evocation ever could. This is done through careful preparation and ritual: Thaumaturgy can't ever be used quickly enough to be much use in a fight. However, given enough time, preparation, materials, and the right caster, it's more than a match for supernatural forces. For more on Thaumaturgy, see page 261.

Options: Casters whose template allows for it should consider the Refinement ability (page 182).

Skills Affected: Discipline, Conviction, Lore.

Effects:

Thaumaturgy. You're able to use Thaumaturgy in all of its forms, as described on page 261.

Specialization. Full Thaumaturgy grants the ability to specialize in one form of thaumaturgical magic, usually by focusing on a particular application (such as ectomancy, crafting, or divination—see page 272). This specialization can take one of two forms—either a **complexity bonus**, increasing the level of complexity you can manage without preparation by one for spells of a particular type, or a **control bonus**, increasing your rolls to control the specified ritual by one (crafting uses different bonus types—see page 280). One or the other must be chosen, though the specialization does not need to be defined at the time the ability is taken. *Additional* specializations covering *different* areas of Thaumaturgy may be taken by use of the Refinement ability (page 182).

Item Slots. Thaumaturgy comes with two free Focus Item Slots (page 278). You can design the items that fit into these slots now, or later on during play. A single Focus Item Slot may be traded in for *two* Enchanted Item Slots (page 279). You may gain more Item Slots as one of the options on the Refinement ability (page 182).

Can someone "upgrade" Ritual to Thaumaturgy, or Channeling to Evocation?

Yep, that's the idea. The lesser abilities go away, since they become just one more specialty in what's now a broader arsenal.

Channeling [–2]

Description: "Channeling" is one of the many general names given to a lesser form of Evocation that is only able to use one particular element. But more often such abilities are referred to by names such as *pyromancy* (fire evocation) and *kinetomancy* (kinetic force evocation).

Musts: You must define the element which your spellcasting is restricted to when you take this ability.

Skills Affected: Discipline, Conviction.

Effects:

Channeling. You are able to use Evocation as described on page 249, but your use is restricted to one particular element, which you must define when you take this ability.

Item Slots. Channeling comes with two free Focus Item Slots (page 278). You can design the items that fit into these slots now, or later on during play. A single Focus Item Slot may be traded in for *two* Enchanted Item Slots (page 279). You may gain more Item Slots as one of the options on the Refinement ability (page 182)—but you may *only* buy Refinement for that purpose. All items created for those slots must be in keeping with the elemental theme you've chosen for your power.

Ritual [–2]

Description: "Ritual" covers the ability to do one particular application of thaumaturgy—such as *crafting* or *wards*—to the exclusion of any others. The application isn't always a technique so much as a subject matter: for example, some *ectomancers* have this ability, giving them a wide range of thaumaturgic abilities, but restricted only to spirits and ghosts.

Musts: You must define which single application of Thaumaturgy your spellcasting is limited to at the time you take this ability.

Skills Affected: Discipline, Conviction, Lore.

Effects:

Ritual. You are able to use Thaumaturgy as described on page 261, but your use is restricted to one particular application or thematic subject matter. You must define this limit when you take the ability. For an idea of the options, see page 272.

What about re-directing the power of a thunderstorm?

As a specialized form of channeling, you mean? Eh, I don't see it. I mean, how would you practice at lesser kinds of spell-work to get good enough not to kill yourself? It'd be like learning to be an electrician but only by working on nuclear power plants.

See, Harry? William **has** been paying attention!

So, basically, the more evil you are, the more powerful that makes you, and the more it changes you into a monster.

Yeah, that's about the size of it.

Don't you mean "been there, done that," boss?

Shut up, Bob.

Item Slots. Ritual comes with two free Focus Item Slots (page 278). You can design the items that fit into these slots now, or later on during play. A single Focus Item Slot may be traded in for *two* Enchanted Item Slots (page 279). You may gain more Item Slots as one of the options on the Refinement ability (page 182)—but you may *only* buy Refinement for that purpose. All items created for those slots must be in keeping with the single application you've chosen for your power.

Lawbreaker [-Varies]

Musts: This ability must be taken immediately upon breaking one of the Laws of Magic (page 232). You must specify the Law broken at the time you take the ability. This ability must be taken separately for each Law of Magic broken—noted like so: Lawbreaker (First), Lawbreaker (Fourth), etc.

Description: You've broken one of the Laws of Magic:

- **First:** You've taken a life with the use of magic, turning a little bit of your soul dark.
- **Second:** You've transformed someone with the use of magic, destroying your victim's original body and, quite probably, mind.
- **Third:** You've invaded someone's thoughts with the use of magic, violating the privacy of your victim's mind.
- **Fourth:** You've enthralled or otherwise laid a compulsion upon another being with magic, likely causing long-term psychological trauma to your victim.
- **Fifth:** You've reached beyond the borders of life and death with your magic, upsetting the natural order of the universe.
- **Sixth:** You've swum against the flow of time, upsetting the natural order of the universe.
- **Seventh:** You've sought knowledge from beyond the Outer Gates, or otherwise drawn power from that forbidden source, upsetting the natural order of the universe.

For more on the Laws of Magic and the consequences of breaking them, see page 232.

Effects:

Slippery Slope. Gain a +1 bonus to any spellcasting roll whenever using magic in a way which would break the specified Law of Magic. Increase this spellcasting bonus to +2 if you've broken this Law three or more times; additionally, the refresh cost of this ability increases from –1 to –2 and requires that you change one of your existing aspects into a version twisted by the violation of the Law. Every three times that you break this law past that point, another (different) aspect must be changed, though the refresh cost and spellcasting bonus do not further increase. You cannot stack bonuses if you break multiple Laws with one spell—use the highest bonus.

Trouble Comes in Threes. Increase the spellcasting bonus by one if you have three or more Lawbreaker abilities in any combination (i.e., if you've broken three or more Laws of Magic, sporting a Lawbreaker ability for each one), making the maximum possible bonus +3.

Refinement [–1]

Description: Experienced spellcasters learn in time how to refine and focus their abilities, gaining greater strength and diversity.

Skills Affected: Discipline, Conviction, Lore.

Effects:

Refined Spellcraft. Refinement is a tool for improving your spellcasting over time. Each time Refinement is taken, choose *one* option from the following:

Add a new *element* to your Evocation familiarity list. You also get one specialization for that new element.

Or, gain two additional *specialization bonuses* for Evocation and/or Thaumaturgy. You have to structure your specialization bonuses for each ability according to the same "column" limits for skills (see page 65).

For example, you can't have a +2 *power bonus* for water evocation until after you've taken +1 in something else, either a *control bonus* for water or power/control in another element. You can't have a +3 bonus until you also have a +2 and a +1. If you have two bonuses at +2, you must have two more at +1, etc.

Can you split up the Refinement benefits? Like, 1 specialization + 1 focus item for 1 point?

Sure, seems reasonable to me.

The same goes for thaumaturgic types and complexity/control bonuses, but when you're calculating, look at Evocation and Thaumaturgy *separately*—if you have a +1 complexity bonus to divinations and you want a +2, having a +1 power bonus in water evocation isn't going to help you. You need to take another thaumaturgic specialization at +1.

In addition, you cannot have any specialization bonuses higher than your Lore skill. If your Lore is only Fair (+2), you can't have a higher bonus than +2 in any specialization.

Or, gain two additional *Focus Item Slots* (or four additional *Enchanted Item Slots*). For more details on focus items and enchanted items, see page 278.

Sponsored Magic [-Varies]

Description: Some varieties of magic draw on power sources external to the practitioner. Invariably, these sources of power have some kind of agenda of their own. See *Spellcasting*, page 287, for details about the various kinds of Sponsored Magic.

Notes: The cost of Sponsored Magic changes depending on whether or not you already have Evocation or Thaumaturgy. This also affects whether or not Sponsored Magic gives you any additional focus item slots. If you're paying full price, you get four focus item slots with this ability. If you have either Evocation or Thaumaturgy, thus reducing the cost of Sponsored Magic, you only get two additional focus item slots. If you have both, reducing the cost more, you don't get any additional focus item slots.

Strength

Nothing matches supernatural strength for putting a hurt on an opponent quickly and decisively. Sadly for humanity, usually that opponent is…humanity.

Like any of the physical "building block" categories (see also Speed on page 178, and Toughness on page 184), Strength is divided first and foremost into three levels—Inhuman, Supernatural, and Mythic. You must have a high concept that fits taking one of these abilities. The Mythic level is nearly always reserved for potent NPCs, but even the Inhuman level can change the nature of the battlefield.

Inhuman Strength [–2]

Description: You are able to lift more and hit harder than the average human can, due to your supernatural heritage.

Skills Affected: Might, other physical skills.

Effects:

Improved Lifting. Whenever lifting or breaking inanimate things, you gain a +3 to your Might score.

Bruising Strength. Roll Might at +1 whenever using that skill in conjunction with grappling (page 211). This also allows you to inflict a 2-stress hit on an opponent as a supplemental action during a grapple.

Superior Strength. Whenever using your Might to modify (page 214) another skill, it always provides a +1 regardless of the actual comparison of your Might score to the skill in question.

Hammer Blows. With attacks that depend on muscular force (Fists, thrown Weapons, etc.), you are at +2 to damage, increasing the stress dealt by two on a successful hit.

Supernatural Strength [–4]

Description: You have supernatural strength—you're able to lift and break things you shouldn't be able to, and people who get in your way tend to be very, very sorry.

Musts: Supernatural Strength replaces Inhuman Strength if taken.

Skills Affected: Might, other physical skills.

Effects:

Superior Lifting. Whenever lifting or breaking inanimate things, you gain a +6 to your Might score.

Bludgeoning Strength. Roll Might at +2 whenever using that skill in conjunction with grappling (see page 211). This also allows you to inflict a 3-stress hit on an opponent as a supplemental action during a grapple.

Superlative Strength. Whenever using your Might to modify (page 214) another skill, it always provides a +2 regardless of the actual comparison of your Might score to the skill in question.

Lethal Blows. With attacks that depend on muscular force (Fists, thrown Weapons, etc.), you are at +4 to damage, increasing the stress dealt by four on a successful hit. Be careful; it's casually easy to kill someone with a simple punch at this level.

Does the strength damage bonus stack on top of "normal" muscle-powered weapons the wielder might use?

Yep. That's why they're not phrased as Weapon:X style bonuses. That said, most weapons of that sort are not made to stand up to that kind of punishment for long. Expect breakage (and maybe a fate point when that happens.)

Super-strength is no joke. In the comic books someone can get tossed around or battered by a guy who can bench press a car and not end up in traction. The truth is, if something super-naturally strong gets its hands on you — you're dead.

Mythic Strength [–6]

Description: Your strength is a thing out of legend—legends that feature *you*. This ability is usually only available to NPCs.

Musts: Mythic Strength replaces Inhuman or Supernatural Strength if taken.

Skills Affected: Might, other physical skills.

Effects:

Supreme Lifting. Whenever lifting or breaking inanimate things, you gain a +12 to your Might score.

Unstoppable Strength. Roll Might at +3 whenever using that skill in conjunction with grappling (see page 211). This also allows you to inflict a 4-stress hit on an opponent as a supplemental action during a grapple.

Supreme Strength. Whenever using your Might to modify (page 214) another skill, it always provides a +3 regardless of the actual comparison of your Might score to the skill in question.

Devastating Blows. With attacks that depend on muscular force (Fists, thrown Weapons, etc.), you are at +6 to damage, increasing the stress dealt by six on a successful hit.

Toughness

Supernatural creatures are difficult to kill. Sometimes they're just impossible to damage without a specialized means, like magic or a weapon made of inherited silver. But more often, they can simply take more punishment than a normal person can.

Like any of the physical "building block" categories (see also Speed on page 178, and Strength on page 183), Toughness is divided first and foremost into three levels—Inhuman, Supernatural, and Mythic. You must have a high concept that fits taking one of these abilities. The Mythic level is nearly always reserved for potent NPCs, as is the special Physical Immunity ability.

Toughness abilities require you to define the circumstances under which the ability is effective—this is represented by a stunt attached to your toughness abilities called the Catch, defined below.

LOTS OF DEFENSES HAVE SOME SORT OF WAY TO GET AROUND THEM. IT'S JUST A MATTER OF FIGURING OUT HOW.

Yeah. That's the point of "the Catch", below.



This is a pretty good model, Billy. Secrets have power, and the less secret your weakness is, the less powerful your defense.

The Catch [+varies]

Description: Your Toughness abilities are limited in some way.

Skills Affected: None.

Effects:

The Catch. You must specify something that bypasses your Toughness abilities. This will give you a discount on the total cost of any and all Toughness category powers that you take, based on how likely it is that the Catch will be met in play. Add all the relevant discounts from the list below:

- If your abilities only protect you against something specific, you get a +2 discount. If they protect you against everything *except* something specific, you get nothing.
- If the Catch is bypassed by something that anyone could reasonably get access to, but usually doesn't carry on them (like cold iron), you get a +2. If it is bypassed by something only a rare class of people in the world have (like True Magic), you get a +1. If it is bypassed by something only one or two people in the world have access to or could produce (like a Sword of the Cross), you get nothing. Even the mere presence of the thing that satisfies your Catch will cause you discomfort (and may be grounds for a compel or something similar).
- If almost anyone with an awareness of the supernatural knows about the Catch or could easily find out (like from the Paranet, or Bram Stoker's Dracula if you're a Black Court vampire), you get a +2. If knowledge of the Catch requires access to specific research material that could be restricted (like a wizard's library), you get a +1. If knowledge of the Catch requires knowing you personally to learn about it (like the effect of Judas' Noose on Nicodemus), you get nothing.
- Any Recovery powers you have are affected by the Catch, and so will not speed up the recovery of an injury caused by something that bypasses the Catch.

Catches cannot reduce the total cost of your Toughness powers below –1. You may specify more than one Catch if you so choose, but you can only receive the discount once; take the best one.

Are Catches a "must" for Recovery powers? I see why they're necessary for Toughness and Immunity powers, but most of Recovery's benefits work out of combat.

Inhuman Recovery [–2]

Description: You have an incredible fortitude, able to exert yourself longer and heal faster than a normal human can.

Musts: You must attach this power to a Catch (see this page).

Skills Affected: Endurance, other physical skills.

Effects:

Total Recovery. You're able to recover from physical harm that would leave a normal person permanently damaged. You can recover totally from any consequence (excluding extreme ones) with no other excuse besides time; simply waiting long enough will eventually heal you completely.

Fast Recovery. Out of combat, you may recover from physical consequences as if they were one level lower in severity. So, you recover from moderate consequences as though they were mild, etc. Consequences reduced below mild are always removed by the beginning of a subsequent scene.

Vigorous. Endurance never restricts (page 214) other skills due to a lack of rest. You may skip a night of sleep with no ill effects.

Shrug It Off. In combat, *once per scene*, you may clear away a mild physical consequence (page 203) as a supplemental action (page 213).

Yeah, you could probably skip a Catch for Recovery powers that you don't have consistent access to, like lycanthropes who need the full moon. But in general I'd consider it a "must." Just because **you** never manage it, Harry, don't underestimate the advantage of showing up to a new fight completely (or almost completely) fresh and free of many consequences!

Inhuman Toughness [–2]

Description: You're unusually tough and have incredible fortitude. You're able to take more punishment than a normal human can.

Musts: You must attach this power to a Catch (see this page).

Skills Affected: Endurance, other physical skills.

Effects:

Hard to Hurt. You naturally have Armor:1 against *all* physical stress.

Hard to Kill. You have two additional boxes of physical stress capacity (page 201).

Man, that'd be nice.

If you shapeshift a Toughness ability onto yourself, does it get the cost benefits of a Catch?

I'd say yes only if the Catch is always the same—if a shapeshifter can change its vulnerabilities on-the-fly, then the Catch isn't knowable. That's a +0 benefit.

These powers seem pretty badass. You sure that's balanced?

The Toughness abilities are one-trick ponies. They're good at making sure you don't take physical punishment, and that's about it.

The thing is, smart opponents (like wizards or Special Investigations detectives) will recognize that pretty fast. Then a little research will show them a way around it. Maybe they'll suss out your Catch, or they'll just take a non-physical route to do you in.

And besides all that, point for point, an equivalent Strength ability will still make you bleed.

Supernatural Recovery [–4]

Description: You can exert yourself constantly without issue and, given just a little downtime, you can recover from particularly nasty wounds.

Musts: This ability replaces Inhuman Recovery. You must attach this power to a Catch (see page 185).

Skills Affected: Endurance, other physical skills.

Effects:

Total Recovery. As with Inhuman Recovery.

Faster Recovery. Out of combat, you may recover from physical consequences as if they were two levels lower in severity. So, you recover from severe consequences as though they were mild, etc. Consequences reduced below mild are always removed by the beginning of a subsequent scene.

Unfaltering. Endurance never restricts (page 214) other skills due to a lack of rest. You may skip a week of sleep with no ill effects.

It's Nothing. *Twice per scene*, you may clear away a mild physical consequence (page 203) as a supplemental action (page 213).

Supernatural Toughness [–4]

Description: Your body can take punishments that would easily kill a normal man.

Musts: This ability replaces Inhuman Toughness. You must attach this power to a Catch (see page 185).

Skills Affected: Endurance, other physical skills.

Effects:

Harder to Hurt. You naturally have Armor:2 against *all* physical stress.

Harder to Kill. You have four additional boxes of physical stress capacity (page 201).

Mythic Recovery [–6]

Description: You heal faster than anyone should be able to. Prometheus' liver has fits of jealousy.

Musts: This ability replaces Inhuman or Supernatural Recovery. You must attach this power to a Catch (see page 185).

Options: None.

Skills Affected: Endurance and other physical skills.

Effects:

Total Recovery. As with Inhuman Recovery.

Really Amazingly Fast Recovery. Out of combat, you may recover from all physical consequences before the beginning of the next scene after you receive them!

Indefatigable. Endurance never restricts (page 214) other skills due to a lack of rest. You never need to sleep.

Ha! You Call That a Hit? *Three times per scene*, you may clear away a mild physical consequence (page 203) as a supplemental action (page 213).

Mythic Toughness [–6]

Description: Issues of the flesh rarely trouble you. Your body has, to a great extent, transcended the petty concerns of mortality.

Musts: This ability replaces Inhuman or Supernatural Toughness. You must attach this power to a Catch (see page 185).

Options: None.

Skills Affected: Endurance, other physical skills.

Effects:

Nearly Impossible to Hurt. You naturally have Armor:3 against *all* physical stress.

Nearly Impossible to Kill. You have six additional boxes of physical stress capacity (page 201).

Physical Immunity [–8]

Description: You simply can't take physical damage from anything normal.

Musts: You must attach this power to a Catch (see page 185).

Skills Affected: Endurance, other physical skills.

Effects:

Physical Immunity. You take no stress and no consequences from physical attacks and other harms, *unless* someone satisfies your Catch. This does not make you unusually tough to such attacks; if you want to be tough in all cases, even when your Physical Immunity is compromised, take Inhuman, Supernatural, or Mythic Toughness as well with a less susceptible Catch—or one of the Recovery abilities if you merely want to heal quickly when your invulnerability is pierced. If a character spends more than one fate point

on a successful attack only to discover you are completely immune to it, that character should be refunded all but one point.

Stacked Catch [+varies]. Normally, all your Toughness powers can only receive the refresh rebate effect of one Catch, so you line them all up and choose the best one. If you take Physical Immunity, and have other Toughness abilities already covered by a Catch, you may *also* receive the refresh rebate of a second Catch. This second Catch may only affect how the Physical Immunity works, and it's called a Stacked Catch. If you take a Stacked Catch, the first Catch covering the other Toughness powers does not include the Physical Immunity as one of the abilities covered.

For example, let's say a fire demon has Supernatural Toughness with the Catch that he's vulnerable to cold. Normally, this would give him a refresh rebate of +3: +2 because cold is easy to come by, and +1 because research would normally uncover it.

In addition, he has physical immunity to damage from any kind of fire. The Catch is that it only applies to attacks with fire. Normally, this would give a rebate of +5: +2 for protecting against only one specific thing, +2 because "not fire" is easy to come by, and +1 because research would normally uncover it.

Because you can stack these two refresh benefits, the demon gets a total of +8 toward his Toughness powers, so his total refresh cost is only –4 (–4 for Supernatural Toughness, –8 for Physical Immunity, +8 for the stacked benefit).

A character with a Stacked Catch that that inverts the conditions of the first Catch is strongly discouraged. A Physical Immunity to Fire layered on top of Supernatural Toughness that can only be pierced by Fire just never happens in reality, and if it did, one or both Catches would be rightly valued as worth zero.

True Faith

The power of belief is very real and very *palpable* in the Dresdenverse. This means that unshakeable faith in a higher power—faith that the higher power will protect and guide you—has a potent *magical* effect when focused. These abilities don't arise through training or innate talent; they're the result of a life of strong faith, elevating the act of belief into a power of its own. As such, these powers are usually seen in *seemingly* ordinary people—but their power of belief has made them extraordinary and supernatural.

Outsiders might have a Physical Immunity against magic.

More research is needed, but that smacks up against a law.

Bless This House [–1]

Description: Your faith is proof against the invasion of the supernatural, enabling you to improve the strength of a threshold in a place where you reside.

Skills Affected: Conviction.

Effects:

Bless This House. By your very presence in a place, you may increase the strength of its threshold (page 230)—assuming you have anything to work with (a place without a threshold can't get one). If your Conviction is higher than the threshold rating of a particular place, the threshold gets a +2 bonus while you are there. Multiple individuals who have this power can stack the effects, making a den of the faithful potentially very safe from supernatural incursion—unless someone's so foolish as to invite a powerful supernatural creature in.

Guide My Hand [–1]

Description: By giving yourself over to your faith, you may sense the purpose the higher powers have in mind for you, guiding your hands (and your feet) to take you to where you are most needed.

Skills Affected: Conviction, others.

Effects:

Faith Manages. Given the time to pray for guidance and provided that your goals are pure and your actions are selfless, you may spend a fate point to use your Conviction skill instead of any other skill for one roll. This effect cannot be used for any attacks or maneuvers, but it can be used to bypass other kinds of obstacles.

Spiritual Guidance. You have a semi-conscious awareness of where you are needed most. Usually, this simply means you are guided to the right place at the right time. If the GM agrees that such a circumstance is in effect, you need not spend a fate point to stage a fortuitous arrival (page 20). Sometimes this might work in reverse, allowing an ally to show up where you already are.

Holy Touch [–1]

Description: When acting with a pure heart and selfless purpose, your very touch is harmful to creatures vulnerable to such things.

Musts: You must have taken Righteousness (below) in order to take this ability.

Skills Affected: Many.

Effects:

Holy Touch. If you act in keeping with your calling, keeping a pure heart and selfless purpose, your touch can be imbued with a holy power. This could qualify your touch as satisfying a Catch (page 185) for the Toughness powers of some creatures. Even if not, creatures that would be an offense to your faith take a 1-stress hit from being touched by you. You could use this with a Fists attack, to have your hands act effectively as Weapon:1 against such creatures.

In lieu of this benefit, you may have your touch justify a compel on the high concept of any creature that would be offensive to your faith. This way, you might be able to hold them at bay temporarily or otherwise keep them from attacking you.

For example, suppose your character with this ability is attacked by a Black Court vampire—you might look at the GM and say, "Hm. I want to have this confrontation, but I don't want to fight—what if I hit it with my Holy Touch, spend a Fate point, and you compel its Black Courtier aspect to force it to deal with me a different way?"

Works great on Red Court vampires too!

The GM says, "Okay, your touch burns the vampire and it jumps back, eyeing you cautiously. You still look like dinner, you can tell, but it's listening—for now."

Righteousness [–2]

Description: Your prayers have a profound effect.

Skills Affected: Conviction, others.

Effects:

Potent Prayer. When pursuing your calling, you may make a prayer (page 324) to guide your actions righteously—spend a fate point to invoke your high concept and define a Divinely-inspired purpose you're aiming at. While in effect, use your Conviction to complement (page 214) *any* action that directly addresses your purpose. If you either achieve your purpose, take any compels that would threaten to derail you from your pursuits, or refuse any compels that are meant to keep you true to your purpose, the effect immediately ends.

Desperate Hour. In times of most desperate need, you may call out a prayer for aid from the Divine. Any time you are hit by an attack that *requires* you to take a severe or extreme consequence to avoid being taken out, you may make such a prayer. You may also call upon this prayer in any scene where a friend, ally, or innocent victim is taken out, forced to concede, or otherwise suffer a lasting, terrible fate (like being crippled, kidnapped, etc.).

Roll your Conviction as an attack against every non-allied, supernatural creature in the same zone as you, which can be resisted by their Discipline. This attack does holy, physical damage that cannot be offset by *any* supernatural abilities (it automatically satisfies the Catch on any Toughness powers). You can only make one such prayer per scene.

Vampirism

Vampirism abilities cover the need to feed, affecting creatures that feed on blood or emotions to gain their power. Not every creature with these abilities could be called a "vampire," but the mechanism is much the same.

Blood Drinker [–1]

Description: You can (and, with Feeding Dependency on page 190, *must*) drink blood. Feeding on lifeblood sustains you more fully than any other food might, and you're particularly good at it. Anything short of freshly-spilled blood is less vital and, thus, less fulfilling; a fresh kill is like a three-course meal, while a bag from the blood bank is like an *hors d'oeuvre*—small and tasty, but ultimately leaving you hungry for the main course. You have no need to eat regular food (though you might still enjoy it).

Skills Affected: Fists, others.

Effects:

Drink Blood. Any time you draw blood in close personal combat—with your claws or your teeth—you can ingest some of it to gain sustenance. Roll Fists or another appropriate skill (Weapons, etc.) to make your victim bleed. Once you've done this successfully, gain



a +1 to your attack on subsequent exchanges against the same target. In a grapple, you may inflict an extra point of stress on a target as a supplemental action.

The Taste of Death. *Once per scene*, if you inflict enough stress and consequences to kill a victim from feeding, you may take an immediate "free" recovery period equal to an extra scene. This will clear your stress track and mild physical consequences (page 220), and possibly larger consequences if you have an ability that lets you heal quickly (page 184).

Blood Frenzy. When in the presence of fresh blood, you feel a nearly uncontrollable urge to attack. The GM is within her rights to call for Discipline rolls to resist the urge. In some cases, the urge may take the form of a compel against your high concept.

Emotional Vampire [–1]

Description: You can (and, with Feeding Dependency on page 190, *must*) "eat" strong emotions—often lustful and passionate or otherwise dark ones. Purely positive emotions, such as love, are not an option. This very much follows the law of "you are what you eat": those who feed on fear and despair tend to be fearsome creatures (or at least control freaks), while those who feed on lust tend to be consummate seducers and very sexually active.

As a baseline, whenever you're near an "eligible" strong emotion, you may draw in mild sustenance from it. This just grazes the surface of the victim's life force, maybe making them just a shade less vital in the long term, but it doesn't have much of an immediate effect. Being in the presence of many people experiencing strong emotions—a mob during a panicked riot or an orgy at a "swingers" convention, for example—has a multiplicative effect; as such, emotional vampires are nearly always drawn to such events.

Musts: You must choose the emotion associated with this power when you take it.

Skills Affected: Deceit, Intimidation.

Effects:

Feeding Touch. Physical contact is where it's at for a satisfying, long-term meal. When a victim is in the throes of an eligible emotion (usually easy for a White Court vampire using his Incite Emotion ability, page 172), you may draw some of his life force out of him to sustain you. This is done as a psychological attack with an appropriate skill (usually Deceit or Intimidation). If you have the Incite Emotion ability, inciting the emotion and feeding on it may be done as a single action, based on a single roll. On subsequent exchanges, if the emotion is still in place you may continue to feed, gaining a +1 on the roll.

The Taste of Death. *Once per scene*, if you inflict enough stress and consequences to kill a victim from feeding, you may take an immediate "free" recovery period equal to an extra scene. This will clear your stress track and mild physical consequences (page 220), and possibly larger consequences if you have an ability that lets you heal quickly (page 184).

Feeding Frenzy. When in the presence of heightened emotions and willing victims, you feel a nearly uncontrollable urge to feed. The GM is within her rights to call for Discipline rolls to resist the urge. In some cases, the urge may take the form of a compel against your high concept.

Feeding Dependency [+1]

Description: You gain some of your supernatural abilities by feeding on blood (page 188), emotions (page 189), or something else (in the case of ghouls, massive quantities of meat). If you take this ability, it "attaches" to most if not all of your supernatural powers except for those from this category (at least 2 points' worth).

Skills Affected: Discipline.

Effects:

Hunger Is Stressful. You have an additional stress track called **hunger**. The length of the track works like those of other stress tracks from Endurance, Conviction, etc., only using Discipline as the base skill. Unlike other stress tracks, you may not clear this out at the end of a scene (see below).

Limited Reserves. At the end of a scene whenever you have heavily exerted your affected powers, you must check to see if you experience **feeding failure**. This manifests as an attack with a strength equal to the total refresh cost of the abilities you used; you roll Discipline to defend. For example, if you used Inhuman Strength and Inhuman Toughness in the scene, that's a total of 4 refresh, so you'd be rolling your Discipline to meet or beat a target of 4.

- If you succeed, you may clear out your hunger stress track.
- If you fail, you take hunger stress as though you'd suffered an attack. If you have physical or mental consequence slots open, you may use them to buy off the stress as per the normal rules (page 203). If you cannot or do not wish to spare consequences, then you must lose access to a number of your powers, up to a refresh cost equal to the amount of stress taken. These options can be combined however you choose.
- If you have no powers left to lose and are taken out by a feeding failure, you are *actually* taken out (resulting in complete incapacitation, extreme emaciation, and other nasty fates).

Highly stressful or emotional situations can still trigger your need to feed, even if you've already lost some or all of your abilities. In such situations (often as the result of a compel), the strength of the attack is equal to half of the refresh value of your affected abilities, rounded up.

Some GMs might allow certain abilities to "downgrade" as they absorb hunger stress, so Supernatural Toughness might become Inhuman with a 2-stress hit.

"Other nasty fates" like becoming a mindless monster driven only by hunger. It's ugly.

Failure Recovery. You can recover your lost abilities at the rate of up to one point per scene so long as you opt out of the scene, essentially because you are spending it feeding. You can regain *all* of your lost abilities in one scene if you feed so forcefully as to kill a victim outright. In either case, your hunger stress clears out completely, and any consequences that resulted from feeding failure vanish regardless of the usual recovery time.

Tattoos of St. Giles [–2]

Description: You've enlisted or allied with the Fellowship of St. Giles (OW89) to keep your Red Court vampirism in check. They've covered you in normally invisible tattoos that carry a magic potency, enabling you to better fight off the dark urges rising within you—and letting others know when you're in jeopardy of giving in to your hunger.

Musts: The tattoos are only available to someone infected, but not yet turned, by Red Court vampirism. You lose this ability immediately if you ever turn and become a full Red Court vampire.

Skills Affected: Discipline.

Effects:

A Warning to Others. Whenever you take hunger stress, your tattoos become visible, darkening into a black ink, then turning red when you're at high risk of taking consequences; this gives others a bonus to any perception checks to realize your situation. The bonus is equal to the amount of hunger stress you take from the attack (see above).

Biofeedback. The tattoos give you a boost when exercising your self-control. Whenever your tattoos are visible, you gain +1 to your Discipline when using it defensively.

Deeper Reserves. You can run longer and harder before really losing it. Add two boxes to the length of your hunger stress track.

Supernatural Player. The tattoos mark you as a member of the Fellowship when those "in the know" see them on you. If your tattoos are showing, gain a +1 to your Intimidation when dealing with such individuals.

Fellowship Training. The tattoos come with the Fellowship's training program. Gain +1 to Lore when using it to identify supernatural threats. Increase this bonus to +2 when using Lore to identify signs of the Red Court at work.



- CHAPTER ELEVEN -

Playing The Game

Taking Action

By the way, Harry, that last sentence is really important because it took awhile for it to sink in for me. Rolling dice for normal stuff is boring. Do you think it stands out enough? Should I make it a different font or something?

Um, I'm not a game designer...

The characters in your games are going to do a lot. For most things they do, there's no real need for rules. Characters can stand, walk, talk, and otherwise do normal things without needing to roll dice. They can even take actions that use their skills, like driving to work, without worrying about the dice. The dice only come out when there is an interesting challenge with meaningful consequences.

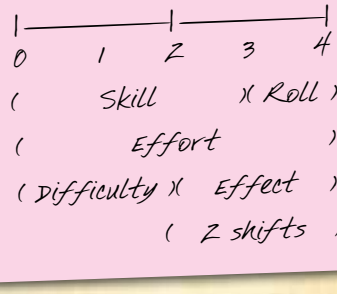
There are several different kinds of actions in the game, but on a basic level, they all work pretty much the same way—*when you roll the dice, if you match or exceed the difficulty, your character succeeds; if you don't, your character fails.* When the issue is simple, this may be all that's necessary; but sometimes you also need to know how well a character did. Clearly, if a roll is three higher than the difficulty, that's better than rolling only one higher.

The result of the roll is called the **effort**. Each point of effort over the difficulty is a **shift**. The number of shifts generated by a roll is referred to as the **effect**.

- If the effort is below the target difficulty, it's a failure and it generates no shifts. There are no "negative" shifts.
- If the effort matches the target difficulty, it's a success—but it generates no shifts.
- If the effort beats the target difficulty by one, it generates one shift; if it beats it by two, it generates two shifts, and so on.

Example

Difficulty: Fair (+2)
Skill: Good (+3)
Roll: +1 (4dF = +, −, blank, +)
Effort: Skill + Roll
= 3+1 = Great (+4)
Effect: Effort − Difficulty
= 4−2 = 2 shifts



Actions that use dice in The Dresden Files RPG fall into two main categories: non-conflict actions and conflict actions. Use non-conflict actions when your character is involved in a situation that can easily be resolved or when the group doesn't want to drag it out too far—the obstacles in your character's way are not complex, there is little conflict of interest between characters, or there isn't any real opposition for your character except for how well he performs the action. Use conflict actions when your character's situation cannot easily be resolved or when the group wants to resolve a conflict in finer detail—usually when your character's goals are diametrically opposed to the goals of another character.

Non-conflict Actions

The basic types of non-conflict actions are:

Simple Actions: Your character tries to do something basic, but challenging. Roll against a fixed difficulty.

Contests: Your character's actions are opposed by an NPC or another PC. Roll against the opponent's player and the high roll wins.

Assessments: You want to reveal a target's aspects. Roll against a fixed difficulty or roll against the opponent's player and the high roll wins.

Declarations: You want to create aspects for an NPC or another PC. Roll against a fixed difficulty or roll against the opponent's player and the high roll wins.

Simple Actions

Simple actions are rolled against a difficulty set by the GM and are used to see if your character can do something and, possibly, how well he can do it. The GM describes the situation. You choose a skill to apply to it and roll against a difficulty determined by the GM (see "*A Measure of Difficulty*" for guidelines). Some simple actions include:

- Climbing a wall into a cultist compound
- Looking up an obscure fact about Chicago history
- Searching a crime scene for fingerprints
- Shooting a target—provided it isn't a character, creature, or anything that can move intelligently

Matching the difficulty on a simple action is sufficient to succeed; beating the difficulty and getting shifts allows you to affect the outcome of the action in different ways. Basic uses for a shift include:

- Reducing the time required, either on a relative scale or according to the time increments chart (page 315)
- Increasing the subtlety of the outcome, making it harder to detect
- Increasing the quality of the action's outcome

Usually, the quality of a simple action matters when the results of that action are going to be referenced later—if you roll Great (+4) so that your character can hide something, the person who comes looking for it will have to roll Great (+4) or better to find it.

A Measure of Difficulty

Average difficulty represents an action that someone with only basic training or talents would find difficult. Fair and Good actions are typically the province of professionals, journeymen, and the very talented. Great and Superb actions are typically the province of veterans, masters, and those who combine natural talent with training. Beyond Superb, only those who surpass human capability succeed on a regular basis. Use this as a guideline for setting difficulties and judging the relative meaning of skill levels. For tons more information, see "*Setting Difficulties*" in *Running the Game* (page 310).

Contests

Contests are much like simple actions, except the action is directly opposed by someone else and is easily resolved one way or another. Rather than setting a difficulty, each party rolls the appropriate skill, and the outcome is resolved as if the high roll had beaten a difficulty equal to the low roll. This is called an **opposed roll**. A tie means both succeed, but the outcome could be a tie or it could be left up in the air, requiring another roll to resolve it. Some sample contests include:

- An arm wrestling match
- A footrace
- A game of chance

Normally, getting shifts on a contest does not impart any additional benefit besides victory—although the margin certainly gives an idea of how close or lopsided the contest was, which can help describe how it happened. In some situations, however, when the outcome of the contest influences a future roll, the GM may offer a bonus to the winning player for the second roll, or even place a temporary aspect that the winning player can tag (page 106) or invoke (page 98). In such an event, you could look at the contest as an isolated maneuver action (page 207).

Consequential Contests

Sometimes, the GM wants the result of a contest to have some real impact besides just winning and losing, but she doesn't want to extend the moment out into a full conflict—either it doesn't feel right for pacing and description, or the outcome is still simple despite the impact of the action. If this is the case, she may want to consider having the loser take a consequence (page 203) in addition to his loss, depending on how much he was beaten by in the contest: mild for a two-shift loss, moderate for a four-shift loss, and severe for a six-shift loss or greater (round down in the case of in-between values). If the group agrees, a loss of 8 shifts or more could confer an extreme consequence, but it has to be justified as per the usual rules (page 205).

Extended Contests

Sometimes, the GM (or one of the players) wants to do something that takes a bit longer than a single roll, but doesn't want to engage the detail of the conflict system (below, page 197) to do it. That's a good time to think about running an **extended contest**—a short series of rolls that add up to a final result.

Drawing out a contest like this can create some additional drama, since "what happens?" isn't answered in a single decisive stroke—a long footrace over a few hours (Athletics), a desperate car chase of a few minutes (Driving), or an investigative game of cat and mouse over a few days (Burglary and Investigation) can all fit the bill here. However you slice it, there should always be an element of time pressure to an extended contest. Whether we're talking about someone winning the marathon or the art thief getting away (or not) with the painting, an extended contest is headed somewhere and has a

winner, with interesting results proceeding from each possible outcome.

There are two ways to set your time limit with an extended contest: **The Race** and **Cat & Mouse**.

The Race

This version of an extended contest handles multiple competitors well. A base difficulty is set for everyone—often simply Mediocre (+0)—and each competitor rolls an appropriate skill against that target, keeping a running tally of the number of shifts won (or lost, in the case of a failure). If a competitor chooses to use a less appropriate skill, the difficulty should increase minimally (1 to 2 steps harder).

The time pressure here comes from how long it takes to get to the **finish line**—a number of shifts (usually somewhere between six and fifteen)—set by the GM or the group. To figure out where the finish line should be, take a look how many rolls it would take someone with Good skill, rolling the average (+0 on the dice), to hit it. Good vs. Mediocre is 3 shifts, so if you want a race that will resolve in 3 rolls or so, the finish line should be about 9 shifts. Someone might roll phenomenally and sew it up in fewer, or a run of bad luck might make it take a few rolls longer, but the feeling of time running out will be present throughout the race.

The first person whose total number of shifts hits or exceeds the finish line is the winner. We call this a race because plenty of people can get involved, and there's a way to rank the results at the end—you can look at everyone else's tally once a winner is determined to see who comes in second, third, and so forth. Sometimes a race may be more about who comes in last—since he's inevitably the one lagging behind as the monster closes in.

Because you're adding up shifts from many successive rolls, a race generally should not be combined with a consequential contest (see above) unless the finish line is close (low number of shifts). If combined, the difference between the winner's and the losers' totals would indicate the consequences inflicted. Given that it wouldn't be unheard of to see differences of six shifts or more after rolling enough times, you might end up with a consequence that seems excessive for an action that wasn't worth a full blown conflict. Keeping that in mind, if you *like* the idea of those kinds of results, by all means, have at.

Example: *Evan Montrose and a rogue practitioner he's been chasing are running away from a mutual enemy—a demon that the practitioner summoned and promptly lost control of.*

The GM tells Rob, Evan's player, that the demon's going to get to one of them…it just depends on who's in second place. This is a race, with a base difficulty of Mediocre (+0), and she says the first person to get to 6 shifts wins. The loser will have to deal with the demon.

In the first round, Evan's Athletics roll comes up a Fair, giving him two shifts, but the practitioner rolls really well and gets a Great! The GM describes the rogue spellslinger as being highly, highly motivated by fear, scurrying away at top speed.

In the second round, Evan gets another Fair, putting him at four shifts total. Fortunately for him, the practitioner rolls horrifically and gets a Mediocre, making no further progress that turn. Rob decides to invoke Evan's In Over My Head aspect, saying that he's definitely used to this kind of panicked flight, giving him the final two shifts he needs to get six. He gets away, and the rogue…well, the GM just looks at Rob and makes crunching noises. Ewww.

Cat & Mouse

Unlike a race, this version of an extended contest is best used between two competitors (or two distinct groups). One party plays the mouse (or leader), and the other plays the cat (or follower), and the results of each opposed roll are added to a running total.

A hard limit is set on the number of opposed rolls that will be made before the winner is determined—usually three to five opposed rolls. Shifts won by the leader add to the total, and shifts won by the follower subtract from the total.

Once the hard limit on opposed rolls is met, the total is examined. If the total is a zero, the contest is a draw, indicating an unsatisfying resolution for both parties. If the total is positive, the mouse won; if it's negative, the cat did. In the case of the mouse being an art thief rolling Burglary and Deceit, and the cat being a detective rolling Investigation and Empathy, a win for the mouse suggests the thief got away with the painting, a win for the cat suggests the detective caught the thief, while a draw suggests the detective prevented the theft but the thief got away.



This method of extended contest can be combined with a consequential contest (see above) so long as there aren't a great number of rolls to be made, with the winning tally indicating the severity of consequence. In some cases, the competitors may want to set arbitrary rules of engagement, such as "you can't roll the same skill twice in a row," or, if the competitors are groups rather than individuals, saying "each member of a team gets to make one roll."

Example: *Harry Dresden is engaged in a high-speed car chase with a Red Court vampire through the middle of downtown Chicago. The GM decides this is definitely a "cat & mouse" kind of situation. She sets the number of required rolls at three.*

In the first round, the vampire rolls a Great, and Harry unfortunately only gets a Good. That's one shift to the vampire, putting him in the lead. They both careen around cars and create general chaos as they go, speeding along on a chorus of honking horns.

In the second round, Harry gets a massive Fantastic! The vampire manages another Great, giving Harry two shifts. This puts the total for the chase at –1 (two shifts for the cat, one for the mouse), meaning that Harry's gained on the vampire. The GM describes the vampire getting slowed while going through an intersection, giving Harry the chance to get closer.

In the final round, Harry doesn't roll all that well—a Fair, and he's low on fate points, so he decides not to invoke any aspects. The vampire does a bit better, getting a Good, giving him a shift and tying up the score back at zero.

The chase is ultimately ruled as a draw—the GM decides that they end up getting so tangled in traffic that there's no way to avoid an accident…both of them end up in a fender bender with other cars, and the vampire is forced onto the street. Now that he's cornered, he's on the prowl for prey, and they're in a crowded, clogged street full of people. Harry tightens his grip on his staff and prepares to do battle with the creature as he steps out of his car…

I'M NOT SURE THE BLUE BEETLE COULD REALLY HANDLE A "HIGH-SPEED" CHASE.

Maybe Murph let you borrow her car.

HA! YOU'RE FUNNY.

Assessments

Assessments are a special kind of simple action used for determining a target's aspects. This target could be another character (PC or NPC), a particular scene or location, an object—basically, anything that could potentially have an aspect on it. Most of the time, you use an assessment in order to set up some kind of future advantage to exploit later, such as using Burglary to case an establishment for vulnerabilities before breaking into it, or using Empathy to figure out a good tactic to make a good impression on a dignitary at a Red Court ball. The skill descriptions mention which skills are most suited for assessment actions, but a creative player could probably think of a few more ("Oh, I have Weapons. Can I assess his fencing style and look for weaknesses in his form?").

When making an assessment, state what kind of information you want to assess, and the GM assigns a difficulty to the attempt. If the target is a character, she might decide the difficulty is equal to one of the character's skills, like using the dignitary's Presence as the difficulty for the

Empathy roll mentioned above. If the target is a location, the GM assigns whatever difficulty she feels is appropriate (page 310), with a default difficulty of Average. If the target is somehow aware of the assessment attempt, the GM might even treat the assessment like a contest and have the target roll his skill against the assessing player.

When you succeed at an assessment, the GM reveals an aspect of the target, allowing your character to interact with it as per the rules in "*Interacting with Other Aspects*" on page 105.

Guessing Aspects

Sometimes, because of the way the GM roleplays an NPC or due to some other factor, you might be able to make a specific guess as to what aspects a character might have. (You might correctly guess that a Mafia bodyguard has a Hot Temper, for example, because the GM is playing up that NPC's impulsiveness.)

The GM can skip the assessment roll if you're right—it means you're paying attention and keying in, and that's always a good thing. Also, don't worry about being too exact about phrasing—say you guessed Quick to Anger instead; that's in the ballpark, so it should work.

Of course, sometimes you'd rather save your action and spend a fate point to make a guess about a character's aspects, and that's okay too. See *Aspects*, page 113, for more details on guessing aspects.

Declarations and "Canon"

In the Dresdenverse, many details about supernatural entities are "set"—their weaknesses, habits, tactics, and so on. There are some situations where a declaration isn't appropriate, and the GM actually does have things charted out and "set in stone." You'll have to stick to assessment in those cases. Still, it's a good idea for GMs to be as flexible as possible when players want to make declarations—it gives them a sense of contributing to the game and offers a lot of options for using knowledge skills that might otherwise be sidelined.

Aspect or Detail?

Technically, assessments and declarations can be used to suss out useful details as well as aspects. Not every bit of information you might want to discover or create can be summarized as an aspect. As a rule of thumb, if the detail is something that indicates a direct benefit to a future skill roll, it should be expressed as an aspect. Otherwise, if the information is important but the benefit isn't so direct, noting the detail is just fine.

Declarations

Declarations are a special kind of assessment. What sets a declaration apart from other assessments is that, while an assessment allows you to *discover* aspects on a target that are already there, declarations allow you to *create* new aspects that a target didn't have before and then take advantage of them. Declarations allow players some serious narrative power, because you can effectively introduce new facts into play and then act on them, defining things about the setting and the characters that the GM didn't already have planned out.

At first blush, this may seem a bit strange; however, when making assessments, it's pretty common for players to suggest something that the GM either didn't plan for or doesn't have detailed. If you're casing someone's house using Burglary, maybe she doesn't have scene aspects for that house. So when you ask, "Hey, is there some kind of vent access to the outside I could easily pry open to help me get in undetected?" she might not have an immediate answer. Declarations are a way for the GM to have that answer, by having *you* come up with it.

To make a declaration, state the aspect you wish to create or take advantage of. The GM assigns an appropriate difficulty, and you roll the appropriate skill. If you succeed, the fact is true and the aspect is immediately assigned to the target so that you can use it just as if you'd succeeded on an assessment roll. Like other assessments, an aspect created by a declaration can be tagged (page 106) in the same scene.

If your roll fails, the fact is not true. This might mean the vent isn't there, but it can also mean that your character is mistaken and *believes* the declaration to be true when it isn't. It can be fun to play around with the results of failed declarations, especially when doing so will create a humorous or ironic situation. Maybe that thing that looks like a vent is actually the grille for a wall-mounted air conditioning unit… which noisily falls to the ground after you unscrew the wall mounting!

Or imagine that you use Lore to declare that the magical cult your group is seeking assistance from appreciates direct displays of strength as part of their customs. You fail the declaration roll and then say, "Yeah, they seriously won't respect us unless we walk up and punch the leader right in the face. Cults, man, you know how they are." Of course, when your group encounters that coven later, that scene has the potential to be very entertaining, indeed.

The GM has the final call on the effect of a failed declaration, but you're encouraged to propose failures you think are interesting.

Conflicts

Conflicts happen when two or more characters are in opposition in a fashion that cannot be quickly and cleanly resolved. A conflict is broken down into a number of **exchanges**—acting in turns, each party attempts to achieve their goal. Anyone affected by that attempt may be called upon to roll a response, such as defending against an attack. Each party accumulates gradual success, affecting their opponents in a momentary (resulting in **stress**) or lasting (resulting in a **consequence**) way. Eventually, one of the parties will take enough stress or suffer enough consequences to be **taken out**; alternatively, opponents may preemptively offer a **concession** to mitigate their loss.

Conflicts involve the most complex game actions, and an entire scene may revolve around a single conflict. Examples of conflicts include:

- Any kind of fight scene
- A political debate
- A long, tense stare-down
- Trying to talk your way past a bouncer as he tries to scare you off

Social, Mental, & Physical

Keep in mind that while most of the text below uses physical conflict as an example—because, frankly, it's just easiest to explain that way—the conflict system works just as well to model several kinds of social and mental conflicts, such as lengthy negotiations, resistance against mental conditioning, and interrogation. Additional guidelines for using the system for non-physical conflicts start on page 215, and there will be some discussion along the way as well.

Conflicts are complex, and they merit an entire section detailing how you should handle them.

Running Conflicts

Once a conflict begins, follow this regular pattern.

1. Frame the scene.
2. Establish the groups in the conflict.
3. Establish initiative.
4. Begin the exchange.
   a. Take actions.
   b. Resolve actions.
   c. Repeat step 4, beginning a new exchange.

Step 1: Framing the Scene

The GM first needs to set up the basic details of the scene. When and where does the conflict take place? What are the particular qualities of that "arena"? What are the primary things that could influence the conflict in that arena? You don't need an encyclopedic amount of detail—just enough to get the group on the same page about what the overall situation is when the conflict starts.

The GM's primary tools for framing the scene are **zones** and **scene aspects**. A zone is an abstract region of the space the conflict takes place in, loosely defined as an area in which two characters are close enough to interact directly (which is a nice way of saying "can talk to or punch each other in the face"). Placement in zones affects things such as whether or not characters have to use ranged weapons to attack each other. As a rule of thumb, characters in the same zone can touch each other, characters one zone away can throw things at each other, and characters two zones away can shoot at each other (some guns can shoot three or more zones away).

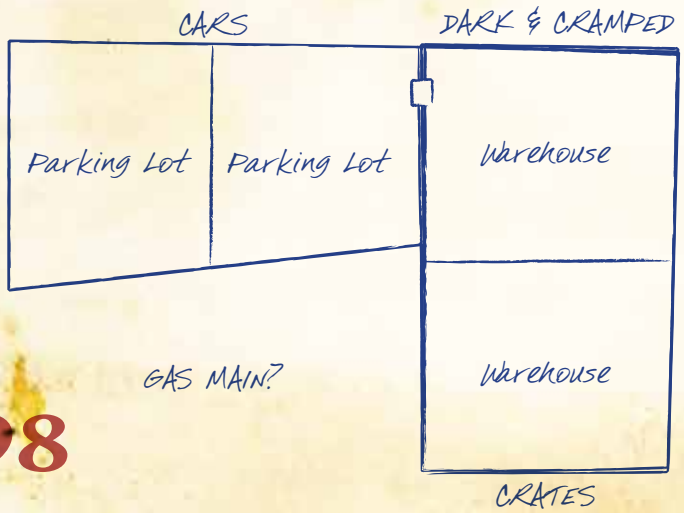
In general, any given conflict should not involve more than a handful of zones, although folks looking for a more tactical experience may want to increase that number. Considering that guns operate easily two zones away, two to four zones are sufficient for most scenes. Don't feel pressured to include more zones than the area naturally seems to support, though—if it's a small space, it's perfectly fine to say that everyone's in the same zone.

Don't ignore zones, even if they're just represented by a hastily scribbled map on a napkin. Even a little bit of a map to interact with goes a long way toward making a conflict more interesting.

> **Example:** *The GM knows that a particular conflict is going to take place in an industrial warehouse. She decides that the warehouse is big enough to be two zones and the parking lot outside is big enough to be two zones. So a character on the far side of the parking lot is three zones away from a character on the far side of the warehouse.*

The GM also needs to set aspects for the scene—basically anything about the scene that could give advantage or disadvantage in the conflict. These aspects are available for anyone in the scene to invoke. Normally, these aspects aren't available for tagging unless a player has to discover the aspect through assessment, or if he's put the aspect on the scene before the conflict starts (like in an ambush, for example; see page 142). On the other hand, some GMs may want to encourage players to interact with the scene aspects right away by treating each aspect as having one "open" tag available to those players fast enough to incorporate them.

> **Example:** *The GM thinks about what might be used for advantage and disadvantage in the conflict, and she decides the warehouse needs scene aspects of* Dark and Cramped, *as well as* Crates, *which might be used as cover or knocked over on top of someone. The parking lot is pretty barren, but she decides it has a few* Cars *out front which could get used creatively. And just to spice things up, she decides that there's a* Gas Main *nearby as well (though she might decide to keep that one a secret, to wait for a clever player's assessment).*



Generally, the more scene aspects there are, the livelier the environment is. GMs should therefore be pretty liberal about throwing scene aspects out there, giving the players a very tactile way of interacting with the environment and incorporating those details into their action descriptions. Five scene aspects, give or take a couple, is usually a good number.

Step 2: Establish Groups

It's important to have a clear idea about who is going to attempt to take on whom in a conflict, even if it's every man for himself. Normally, the standard division of groups is the PCs vs. an opposing group of NPCs run by the GM, but this isn't always the case. Maybe two PCs have vastly different goals in the conflict or even opposing ones, and maybe some of the NPCs are allied with the PCs.

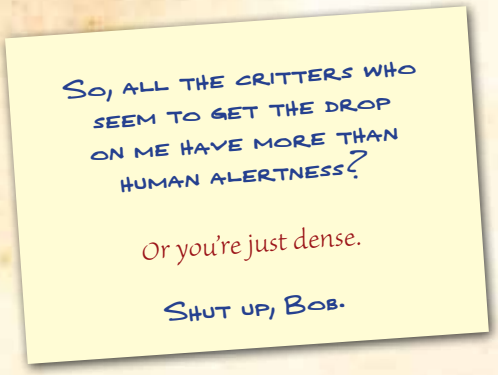
Make sure everyone agrees on the general goals of each "side," who's on which side, and where everyone is situated in the scene (like who's occupying which zone) when it begins. Once you've done that, you need to break down how those groups are going to "divvy up" to face one another—is one character going to get mobbed by the bad guy's henchmen, or is the opposition going to spread itself around equally among the PCs?

Usually this is pretty self-explanatory, but it can be an important step in more complex scenes, such as those involving three or more groups with opposing goals.

> **Example:** *The GM knows that the PCs are coming to stop a smuggling ring that's been transporting mystical stolen goods—arcane texts and rare ritual items—out of the city. She decides that there'll be a shipment in progress when they bust in. Four bad guys are on the scene—a Mafia lieutenant she introduced earlier in the session, the lieutenant's bodyguard, and two armed thugs who are handling the main labor.*
>
> *There are three PCs, so the GM decides that the bad guys will split into three groups. The lieutenant and the bodyguard will take on one PC, while each thug takes on one of the remaining PCs.*

Step 3: Establish Initiative

The next step is to decide the order in which the characters act. This is referred to as the order of **initiative** (as in, "X takes the *initiative* to do Y")—most often, people just say "initiative." The skill used for determining initiative in a physical conflict is Alertness. Whenever a conflict starts, the character with the highest Alertness gets the first turn, followed by the second highest, etc. Every character gets one turn per exchange. Some powers and stunts can modify the initiative order; otherwise, the same initiative order is used from one exchange to the next.



Empathy might determine initiative in a social conflict, whereas Discipline might work for a mental conflict.

In the case of a tie, call upon some other relevant skill to resolve things. In physical conflicts, ties would probably resolve with Athletics.

You may opt to delay your action until a future point in the exchange, allowing you to interrupt someone else's action later in the initiative order. Once this happens, your initiative is set at that point for the rest of the conflict, unless you delay again.

> **Example:** *Harry, Murphy, and Mouse are being attacked by ghouls in a parking garage. Mouse ends up with the highest initiative, but he wants to delay his action to see what the ghouls are going to do. On their turn, two of the ghouls try to knock over a car onto Harry and Murphy, and Mouse interrupts them, getting in an attack before they get to do anything. For the rest of the conflict, Mouse will take action just before the ghouls do.*

Options for Initiative

Some groups may feel like skill-based initiative is a little too technical and rigid, preferring a greater variance for turn order in conflicts. That's fine—if you want, you can do it in a more context-based fashion: simply allow the person who initiates the conflict to go first, and then have the turns go clockwise around the table. In the next exchange, let the next person go first, so that the "spotlight" of going first gets passed around during the conflict.

Keep in mind, however, that GMs may need to adjust some other rules to make skills like Alertness and abilities like Speed feel significant, as a large part of their function in the game has to do with keeping initiative. If your group is making the switch, make sure that players who have these on their character sheet aren't screwed over by it.

Why not let people roll their Alertness for initiative?

Good idea on paper, but in practice it ends up being a real time-sink. That's why I left it out.

Step 4: Take Action!

When your character's turn comes up in the exchange, describe what your character is doing in terms of one of the basic conflict actions. The basic conflict actions are:

Attack: Roll against an opponent to try to inflict stress or consequences on him directly (page 200).

Maneuver: Roll against an opponent or against a fixed difficulty to try to place an aspect on the opponent or the scene (page 207).

Block: Roll to set up a preemptive defense against a specified future action; anyone committing that named action will have to roll against the block to succeed (page 210).

Sprint: Roll to change zones, with a higher roll allowing a greater degree of movement (page 212).

Each character gets one basic action per turn, but under certain circumstances your character can take a **supplemental action** and/or a **free action** in addition to that main action (see page 213 for more details). Of course, in lieu of anything else, a character may choose to just duck and cover:

Full Defense: You can always choose to do nothing active in the exchange at all; your character is assumed to be concentrating entirely on defense. As such, any defense rolls you make to avoid attacks or maneuvers are done at +2.

If we're talking real-world, I try to maneuver (and sprint, and block) more than I try to attack. Attacking really only works if you've got a solid chance of taking the target down. But sometimes you've got to attack—there are things out there that won't understand how serious you are otherwise.

Actually, the truth of that is not much different in the game.



Attacks

An **attack** is a direct assault that causes momentary or lasting harm to an opponent in the form of stress and consequences. An attack is always rolled as a contest between the character (the attacker) and the opponent (the defender). There is no limit to the number of times someone can roll to defend against attacks in an exchange, even against multiple attackers.

The skill used for an attack depends on the attacker's agenda and preferred methods; Fists, Guns, and Weapons are most often used for physical conflicts. The skill used for an attack also determines which skills are allowed to defend against the attack—Athletics is the catch-all defense skill for physical conflicts, but Fists can be used to defend against other Fists attacks, and Weapons can be used to defend against both Weapons and Fists attacks. The skill descriptions starting on page 120 indicate which skills are usable for defense and which skills they can defend against.

If the attacker wins the roll, the shifts he acquires translate into a stress value he can inflict on the defender (see "*Resolving Attacks*" below). If the defender wins, the attack fails. If the attacker and defender tie, the attacker "connects" with the defender, but without a weapon (page 202) or some other stress-booster, the margin of zero means no stress will be inflicted.

What if the attack connects, but inflicts no stress? It seems like SOMETHING should happen when a hit connects, even if it doesn't do damage.

You could treat it as a maneuver, dropping a temporary aspect on the defender.

Look at you, getting all rulesy. It makes me proud!



Social Attacks: Keep in mind that not all attacks are necessarily physically violent—a particularly persuasive argument, lie, or distraction can be considered an attack if it directly affects the opponent. Social attacks are appropriate in situations where the action contributes directly to removing the opponent as a factor in the conflict. Social attacks usually use Deceit, Intimidation, or Rapport against the opponent's Empathy or Discipline. See "*Social Conflicts*" and "*Mental Conflicts*" starting on page 215 for further details.

Resolving Attacks

When an attack succeeds, it inflicts **stress** on the target. Stress is an abstract representation of the difficulties that threaten to take someone out of a conflict. In a physical fight, stress can be minor cuts, bruises, fatigue, and the like. In a social or mental conflict, it might be loss of willpower, composure, or emotional control—when Harry insults a Denarian and can see the anger flare up in its eyes, that's stress. Of course, when the Denarian pops Harry in the snoot for pissing him off, that's stress, too. Stress is not lasting (lasting effects are represented by consequences, which we'll cover shortly) and can usually be shaken off between scenes or whenever the character takes a moment to compose himself.

The best way to look at stress is that it's the closest of close calls. That left hook might not take your character out of the fight, but his knees wobble a bit. Your character might have parried that sword blow, but he's losing momentum and getting tired. That bullet might not have hit your character, but he's agitated, and one of these times he just isn't going to be able to hit the deck quickly enough. This outlook can help you represent stress in the face of different sources of harm.

By default, a character has three types of stress that he can take, based on the kind of attack used against him. The physical stress track is used for stress such as wounds and fatigue. The mental stress track represents psychological and emotional trauma. The social stress track represents the gradual loss of personal composure in the face of social pressure.

GAH! YOU'RE SAYING "BOXES" AGAIN WHEN THEY'RE FREAKIN' CIRCLES!

EVER SEEN A HAT BOX, HARRY?

I DON'T DO HATS.

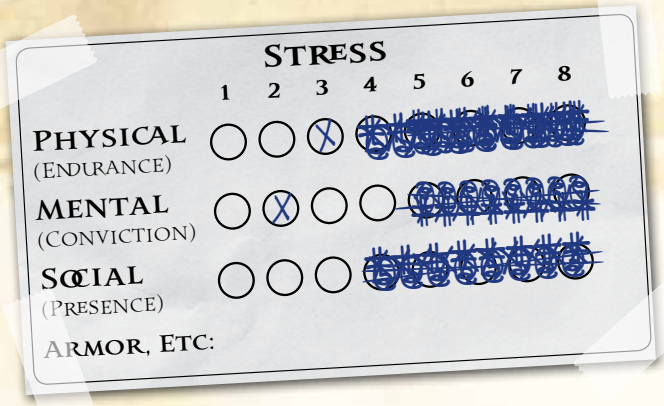
BUT YOU'D LOOK COOL IN A HAT!

When your character takes stress, mark off that box (and *only* that box) on the appropriate stress track. For instance, if your character takes a two-point physical hit, you should mark off the second box (and *only* the second box) from the left on the physical stress track. If your character takes a hit and finds that box already marked off, you should "roll up" to the next empty box on the right and check that off. If there are no empty boxes to the right (in other words, the hit would "roll off" the end of the stress track), the character is either **taken out** (page 203) or needs to take **consequences** to absorb the hit (page 203).

Each stress track defaults to 2 boxes, but certain skills can increase them: Endurance can increase the physical stress track, Conviction can increase the mental stress track, and Presence can increase the social stress track.

See the skill descriptions on page 130, 124, and 136 respectively for more details.

Example: *Evan Montrose is tussling with a demon, accidentally released by the careless actions of a rogue practitioner. The demon takes a swing at Evan, rolling a total of Fantastic (+6) with his Fists skill. Evan didn't have the opportunity to bring up a shield, so he tries to dodge, rolling his Fair (+2) Athletics and only getting a Good (+3). This means that the demon inflicts 3 points of physical stress on Evan. Evan marks off the third box on his stress track.*



Later in the fight, the demon hits him again for three stress, but because that box is already filled, the damage "rolls up" to the next available box. Unfortunately, Evan only has three stress boxes on his track, which means he has to take a consequence to absorb that hit or he'll be taken out.

DO WEAPON RATINGS STACK? HOW ABOUT ARMOR?

NO, they don't (unless a power says otherwise). You take the highest rating. That said, not all armor protects against all types of damage, so multiple forms may get you **BROADER** coverage without providing a numerically higher armor rating.

Weapons and Armor

A **weapon** can inflict additional stress on a target when you succeed on an attack and, likewise, armor can mitigate stress. Weapons and armor are given numerical ratings, usually from 1 to 4. Any successful attack adds the weapon value to the stress inflicted, but subtracts any relevant armor value. Keep in mind that a tie on an attack roll *does* connect—if you have a weapon rating, you would add the rating to the zero-shift attack for a final stress total.

The rating of a weapon is essentially based on how nasty it is under the circumstances—the degree to which is it likely to help get a character dead. Deciding nastiness is kind of a subjective measure, but the default guideline of escalating size or power isn't a bad one. That would give us something like this:

Small pocket weapons, knives, saps, and "belly guns"	**Weapon:1**
Swords, baseball bats, batons, most pistols	**Weapon:2**
Two-handed weapons, oversized pistols (Desert Eagle and company), rifles and shotguns, most fully-automatic weapons	**Weapon:3**
"Battlefield" weaponry, explosives	**Weapon:4+**

Armor essentially works the same way as weapons—the rating is based on what it's ideally supposed to be protecting the wearer from. Resist the temptation to bog down the game with creating extensive examples of armor types; the better approach is to color it appropriately to the weapon ratings. So, Armor:2 is intended to protect *completely* against most pistols—it's probably a reinforced Kevlar vest or something. That said, armor does tend to lag behind weaponry in terms of availability. Many bulletproof vests are only Armor:1—a heavy pistol round can still crack a rib if it hits you. Armor:4 is not really something you find on a personal scale, except maybe in a magical or supernatural context.

Getting Taken Out

If the damage exceeds the character's stress track, or occupied boxes "push" the stress off the right side of the stress track, the character is **taken out**, meaning the character has decisively lost the conflict. His fate is in the hands of the opponent, who may decide how the character loses. The outcome must remain within the realm of reason—very few people truly die from shame, so having someone die as a result of a duel of wits is unlikely, but having him embarrass himself and flee in disgrace is not unreasonable.

Dictating Outcomes

While the player of the attacker that takes out an opponent gets to decide the manner in which his victim loses, this does not mean that the attacker has the authority to dictate specifics that are completely out of character for the loser. The loser still controls his own character in an essential way and is allowed to modify whatever the winner states to make sure that whatever happens stays true to form.

To build on an example given here, if someone wins a duel of wits by taking out his opponent, he can say "you embarrass yourself and flee in disgrace," but he can't add in embellishments like "…and so you run out of the hall, arms flapping, screaming like a child." That sort of thing is a color detail that the loser still controls. So if the loser was, say, John Marcone, he might simply fold up his napkin and walk stiffly out of the room. That's much more in character, but still fills the spirit of the defeat described by the winner.

Note that this also means that when someone uses her taken out privilege to decide that her opponent dies, the opponent still owns his death scene and can describe his dying words however he wishes.

So, since characters always "own" their death scenes in the game, all wizards have a chance to give their death curse?

If the situation allows it, sure.

Cool.



Generally speaking, getting taken out applies only to the venue of the attack in question. For instance, getting taken out socially means a character has lost his cool and is totally flustered, but he may still be able to punch someone or run away. Getting taken out physically might mean the character is physically incapacitated, but he may still interact socially in some way (though unconsciousness and death do tend to put a small crimp in such things).

Given that a character has a maximum of 4 stress boxes, it's pretty obvious that taking someone out isn't all that difficult. There are a couple of ways to mitigate this pain, though: consequences and concessions.

Consequences

Stress is a transitory thing, but sometimes conflicts will have lasting effects on a character—serious injuries, embarrassments, phobias, and the like. These effects are collectively called **consequences**, and they are a special kind of aspect.

Any time a character takes stress, he may opt to take a consequence to reduce the amount of stress received from the attack. The exact nature of the consequence depends upon the conflict—an injury might be appropriate for a physical struggle, but an emotional state might be apt for a social one. Whatever the consequence, it is written down under the stress track.

Normally, the player taking the consequence gets to describe what it is, so long as it's compatible with the nature of the attack that inflicted the harm. The GM arbitrates the appropriateness of a consequence and there may be some

back and forth conversation before settling on one. The GM is the final authority on whether a player's suggested consequence is reasonable for the circumstances and severity.

There are four levels of consequence severity, each of which cancels out a greater amount of stress from an attack. Consequences may not be taken after the fact to cancel stress already recorded on a character's stress track. Consequences linger for varying lengths of time after appropriate justification is established to begin recovery (see page 220 for more details on that):

- **Mild** consequences cancel out **2 stress**. They last for one scene after recovery starts. Think of things that are bad enough to make you say "Walk it off/ rub some dirt in it!" (Examples: Bruised Hand, Nasty Shiner, Winded, Flustered, Distracted.)
- **Moderate** consequences cancel out **4 stress**. They last until the end of the next session after recovery starts. Think of things that are bad enough to make you say, "Man, you really should go take care of that/get some rest." (Examples: Belly Slash, Bad First Degree Burn, Twisted Ankle, Exhausted, Drunk.)
- **Severe** consequences cancel out **6 stress**. They last for the next scenario (or two to three sessions, whichever is longer) after recovery starts. Think of things that are bad enough to make you say, "Man, you really need to go to the ER/get serious help." (Examples: Broken Leg, Bad Second-Degree Burn, Crippling Shame, Trauma-Induced Phobia.)

So you can just take consequences to avoid stress?

Yeah, but consequences are a really big deal in conflicts. People should exercise a healthy fear of them. A moderate consequence, which isn't that hard to come by, is going to be with you for a **full session.** Think about that! Concessions are your friend.

Each character may take one of each severity (though some stunts and very high skills may increase the number of consequences that can be taken at a certain severity); once the consequence slot is used, it cannot be used again until the current consequence is removed. Multiple consequences can be "stacked" at a time, combining their rating for the purposes of absorbing an attack. So instead of taking a severe consequence to cancel 6 stress, a player might take a mild (2 stress) and a moderate (4 stress) which would add up to cancel 6 stress.

When your character takes a consequence, remove the appropriate amount of stress from the attack. If that reduces the stress to zero or below, you absorb the hit completely. If there is any stress left over, you need to mark it on your stress track. So, if your character gets hit for 5 stress and you decide to take a moderate consequence, you're left with a 1 stress hit. Keep in mind that the normal rules for taking stress apply for this—empty boxes get filled in, filled boxes "roll up" to the right. That means that, even if you take a consequence, the leftover stress might take you out anyway…be careful about this!

Example: *Suppose your stress track has the second and fourth boxes filled in, and you only have a track length of 4. That means that if you take a stress hit of 4 or worse, you'll be taken out.*

1 2 3 4

○ ● ○ ●

So suppose you take a 6-stress hit. That blasts right past your whole track. You could take a mild consequence to reduce that to a 4-stress hit, but the 4-stress hit would still land on your filled-in 4, and roll up off the end of your track—so you'd still be taken out.

That means you'll have to take at least a moderate consequence instead. If you did, you'd only take a 2-stress hit (which would roll up to mark off your 3, since your 2 is already filled in). If you took a severe consequence, that would reduce the 6-stress hit to zero, so it wouldn't land on your track at all.

Also keep in mind that, because a consequence is an aspect, it can be tagged, invoked, and compelled like any other aspect. Opponents with fate points will take advantage of this, because invoking a consequence to help win a fight is very easy to justify. Further, the attacker that inflicted the consequence gets one tag on it (which he may give to an ally), just like aspects placed by a maneuver.

Example: *Harry Dresden has taken the moderate consequence of Bruised Ribs in a fight with a rogue practitioner of black magic. In the next exchange, the practitioner can tag that aspect, taking advantage of the injury to gain a bonus to land another hit on Harry. As long as he has fate points left, the practitioner can continue to invoke Harry's Bruised Ribs, getting a bonus as he pounds away on Harry.*

Some skills (like Scholarship) and some supernatural powers (like Inhuman Recovery) can provide easy justification to start the recovery process (for skills) or reduce recovery times for consequences (for powers). See the appropriate skill or power descriptions for details.

Extreme Consequences: The Last Resort

If your character is in extremely dire straits, and it's really, really important to stay in the fight, there is one last-ditch option you have available. This is called an **extreme consequence**, but it's set apart from the others because it operates as more of a plot device than a normal consequence and isn't affected by any of the normal rules for recovery. You can only have one extreme consequence at a time, and the slot will only ever clear with a major milestone or every three scenarios, as you prefer (see *Advancement*, page 88).

When you use this option, you can cancel out 8 *stress* from any attack. In exchange, you must delete one of the seven aspects from your character sheet and *replace it* with an aspect that reflects the outcome of the attack. That's right—taking this level of consequence *changes who your character is* on a fundamental level. Because of this, you should reserve it for the greatest of sacrifices or the most heinous of traumas—for those times when you absolutely must push to the bitter end and have no other choice.

There are a few other limitations to extreme consequences:

Your high concept cannot be changed as a result of an extreme consequence, unless the attack in question is deliberately targeting that aspect. In other words, you can't change Wizard of the White Council unless the attack is specifically trying to permanently strip you of magical ability.

You cannot change your trouble aspect as a result of an extreme consequence.

No amount of supernatural healing or other abilities can speed up the recovery of an extreme consequence, and you cannot take another extreme consequence until after the next major milestone in the game, regardless of your powers.

The new aspect is effectively treated as one of your permanent aspects. Even when your extreme consequence slot resets, the consequence aspect remains on your sheet—it doesn't just go away or reset your old one. You might rename the aspect during a subsequent minor milestone (see *Advancement*, page 88), but you'd have to justify the renaming as something that reflects how the experience changed your character. You can't just say, "Well, it's been three scenarios, so I want my old aspect back."



Concessions

Sometimes, pursuing a goal in a conflict comes at too high a price. Heaven knows what might happen to your character if he gets taken out and has a bunch of consequences to deal with later. Losing can be a very daunting thing—possibly more than you want to deal with at the moment. If loss seems to be inevitable, you can offer a **concession** instead of continuing the conflict.

A concession is basically a special form of being taken out—you lose the conflict, but you get to decide your character's fate on your own terms instead of your opponent's. That way, your character doesn't have to take any consequences you're not willing to take and can avoid fates that might arise from being taken out by the opponent, such as getting captured, killed, humiliated, etc.

And that's why today I live in a skull rather than Faerie or the Nevernever.

What?

What?

How about them Cubs?

A concession has to pass muster with the group before it is accepted—the conditions of the loss still have to represent a clear and decisive disadvantage for your character. If the group (note that your opponent is part of the group for this!) feels like your character is getting off easy, you'll need to rework the concession until it's acceptable.

Here are some guidelines for determining what constitutes a "clear and decisive disadvantage." These may also be used to represent defeat conditions if the character is taken out:

- The character has at least one moderate or worse consequence as a result of the conflict.
- The outcome creates significant difficulty for the character in the future. The character might offer a concession to avoid getting maimed, but maybe that means an artifact he was protecting gets stolen, or something along those lines.
- The outcome creates a situation that restricts the character's behavior in some significant way, like owing a large debt to someone. This may require adding an additional, long-term, temporary aspect to the character, separate from his consequence track, so that the defeat can be enforced via compels.

STOP SAYING THAT!

Finally, a character cannot be saved from a roll that takes him out by offering a concession. You have to offer the concession *before* the roll that takes out your character. Otherwise, it's cheating the opponent out of victory.

Cashing Out: The Bright Side of Defeat

Losing a conflict, either by concession or by being taken out, grants the player *one fate point per consequence taken in the conflict*. This is called **cashing out** of the conflict. You can think of this as a compel of each aspect taken in the conflict, because the assumption is that those consequences directly contributed to the character's defeat.

Taken Out, Concession, and Character Death

So, inevitably, characters are going to get into conflicts where getting taken out means they could die. By a strict reading of the rules, a physical conflict that's severe enough and takes you out could result in your opponent going, "And you die from your wounds." This is something you're going to want to talk about as a group out-of-game, to see where everyone is on the subject…some people have a very "come what may" attitude about it and feel that if that's what happens and it's by the rules, then that's what happens. Others don't want to see the protagonists that they've invested time in get killed by something as potentially insignificant as a bad die roll, or by something as lopsided as heavy fate point spending on the opponent's part.

If your group does permit calling for character death in certain physical conflicts, expect players to use concessions a lot to avoid that final fate. This is, in fact, exactly what you want—it ensures that when a player *does* decide to fight to the end, it will be over a conflict that has a lot of meaning for the character, and if he dies, the death will resonate in the emerging story.

As a rule of thumb, when death is on the line, announce it in advance, preferably at the start of the conflict—e.g., "This guy's playing for keeps. If he can kill you, he will. You can see it in his eyes." or "Hello, my name is Inigo Montoya. You killed my father. Prepare to die." That way everyone has plenty of time to see utter defeat coming and can keep an itchy finger on the concession trigger.

Maneuvers

You can use **maneuvers** to gain momentary, situational advantages in a conflict. A maneuver can change the environment in some way or it can directly affect the opponent your character is facing. It's different from an attack in that it doesn't have a lasting effect on an opponent, but it sets up a condition that will make a future attack more effective. Here are some examples of maneuvers:

- Knocking an opponent off-balance for a moment
- Disarming an opponent
- Kicking over a table for cover
- Setting a fire as distraction
- Taking careful aim at a target

Against an opponent, a maneuver is performed much like an attack—you roll an appropriate skill against the opponent and try to beat the opponent's defense roll. In an exchange, characters can defend against as many maneuvers as they want as a free action.

Against the environment, the maneuver is performed as a simple action against a fixed difficulty set by the GM, which is usually very context-dependent. For instance, knocking over a table in a bar would probably be Average, but finding cover in a barren desert could be Great or more. Athletics and Might are used most often to perform maneuvers in physical conflicts, but nearly any skill might apply. If you can clearly demonstrate to the satisfaction of the group how the skill's use can create the advantage, then it's a legal move.

In either case, succeeding on the roll allows you to place an aspect on the target or on the scene temporarily, representing your situational advantage. You can then tag that aspect once on a subsequent roll against that target while the maneuver is in effect, saving the fate point you would normally need to spend to invoke the aspect. (If you want, and it makes sense to the group, you can pass the tag to someone else instead.)

Exact success on a maneuver (as in, one that garners no shifts) creates a one-shot temporary aspect (also called a **fragile** aspect) that fades after it is tagged. If you generate one or more shifts on the maneuver, the aspect created is **sticky** and lasts longer, allowing it to be used more than once (see "*Resolving Maneuvers*" on page 208 for more details). Of course, after you have tagged a sticky aspect, subsequent invocations require a fate point.

You can also maneuver to *remove* a temporary aspect from yourself or the scene. The aspect removed can't be a consequence; it must be a scene aspect or a temporary aspect that resulted from a maneuver. More information about this can be found in "*Resolving Maneuvers*" on page 208.

Maneuvers and the Death of Situational Modifiers

So, if you've played other roleplaying games before, you might be used to seeing some large chart in the conflict rules covering situational modifiers: target is moving faster than such-and-such, target is prone, target is flanked, target has cover over X percentage of its body, etc.

You're not going to find that here because, for all practical intents and purposes, maneuvers and temporary aspects have replaced all of those. This allows for maximum freedom in developing the scene and makes the conflict system more adaptable to social conflicts. But if you're finding it hard to decide what would make a good maneuver, crib one of those charts from other games and use it as inspiration.

THE PROBLEM WITH A FIRE IS THAT IT CAN END UP DISTRACTING YOU.

Double-edged aspects for the win!

Navel-Gazing Maneuvers

When a character acts on the environment or an opponent to change circumstances and gain an advantage, it can be a pretty exciting moment—something about the situation changes, at least for a few moments, and everyone can see it happen.

Players can also perform maneuvers on themselves, though, to create more "internal" changes. Most of the time, this is going to happen because they want to establish a situational modifier—they want to go for cover or find an ideal position in a room, take the high ground, or something else of that nature. It might also represent an attempt to make sure their efforts are optimized. Someone trying to pick a lock during a firefight might use Discipline to put a Deep in Concentration aspect on himself so he get can get it done more quickly.

This shouldn't really be an issue most of the time—an unopposed maneuver roll is pretty easy anyway, and keep in mind that another character in the scene might be in a position to "defend" against the maneuver attempt or take advantage of the aspect somehow. If you're trying to put yourself Deep in Concentration so you can pick a lock, an opponent might "defend" against that by rolling Guns to send some hot lead your way, keeping you distracted. Or, even better, an

opponent might invoke the aspect during the next exchange, claiming that you're so deep in concentration that it's easier to shoot you.

Teamwork

You can also use maneuvers (even outside of conflict) to coordinate on an action with several people. To do this, one main character is chosen to make the final action roll (usually the one with the highest skill), and everyone else makes a maneuver roll with a skill that could potentially be used to assist. The difficulty for the assisting roll should be one or two less than the difficulty for the main action. Each helper who makes the maneuver roll places an aspect on the main character, something like Assistance from X. The main character can then tag all of those aspects when he actually makes his action roll (so he can take advantage of the help without spending a bucket load of fate points). Enough people coordinating can often lead to herculean success—many hands, after all, make light work.

Resolving Maneuvers

A successful maneuver places an aspect on the target—be that a person or the environment—representing the outcome of the maneuver. Anyone who wants to remove the maneuver aspect must take a maneuver action of his own to roll against it, taking up his main action for the turn. (Obviously, if you established the maneuver aspect, you can end it whenever you want without a roll.)

When you roll to remove a maneuver, it's treated like a normal maneuver roll. You roll against either an opponent or a fixed difficulty dictated by the GM and, if your roll succeeds, the maneuver aspect is removed. If an opponent is in a position to keep you from trying to remove the maneuver, he can defend against your attempt.

Billy, you are dissing the Lone Ranger here. He can totally shoot guns out of bad guys' hands.

But it never happens!

It happens in movies all the time.

This is not a movie!

Man, I wish it was.

Example: *Karrin Murphy is in hand-to-hand combat with a perp she's cornered in an alley after a brief pursuit on foot. She wants to give her first attack some extra oomph, so she decides to do a maneuver to put the aspect* Cornered *on the target. She rolls her Fists and beats the perp's defense roll handily. The perp now has a temporary aspect called* Cornered *"stuck" to him, described as Murphy forcing him into the corner between the alley wall and a dumpster, making it harder for him to avoid attacks.*

During his turn, the perp tries to use Athletics to remove the aspect (get himself out of the corner); he makes his roll and gets a Fair (+2). Murphy doesn't want that to happen, so she rolls Fists as a defense to keep the thug there. She gets a Superb, and the aspect remains.

If an opponent places a maneuver on your character and the opponent's attention changes (to another target, or if he changes zones, etc.), the roll against the maneuver is assumed to be a Mediocre (+0) difficulty.

Maneuver Examples

This is by no means a comprehensive list, but the examples provided below should convey the general idea behind establishing and dealing with maneuvers in play.

Blinding: Your character does something that temporarily blinds the target, such as throwing sand or salt in his face, smearing a chemical across his eyes, etc. This could be done with Athletics, Fists, or Weapons, and would probably be opposed by Athletics. If successful, this puts a Blinded aspect on the target which you can tag or invoke to make attacks easier and to boost defense against the blinded character's attacks. It's possible this aspect could also be compelled to make the target accidentally attack the wrong guy or change direction or something like that, or even to stumble headlong off a cliff if the group is open to it.

Disarming: A successful maneuver knocks the target's weapon away and places it some nebulous distance away from the target, as well as putting a Disarmed aspect on the target. Any attack skill could be used to do this (except maybe Guns, because that's a bit silly). Invoking this represents the target's disadvantage for having no weapon; the GM is well within her



rights to rule that only a character with a weapon could invoke this to justify having an advantage over the unarmed target. It could be compelled (page 100) in situations where a weapon is absolutely necessary to be effective at all, like if the affected character is trying to get at someone who is in a car, for instance.

Indirect Attacks: Sometimes you might want to do something like push a bookcase down on an opponent or scatter marbles across the floor to trip him up. While this can potentially be an attack, it's usually meant as an inconvenience. If it's an attack, it's treated like any other attack—roll the appropriate skill and deal stress as appropriate. If it's an inconvenience, you have two options. The first option is to make an opposed roll (such as Might to knock over the bookcase versus Athletics to dodge) and generate at least one shift, allowing a temporary aspect (such as Pinned) to be placed on the target. The other option is to create a block (such as using Might to knock over the bookcase, with the value of the roll representing the block strength created by the scattered books, causing an opponent to have to roll Athletics in order to move through the mess).

Cover: Given the wide availability of guns to the kinds of people who are frequently unfriendly to PCs, perhaps one of the most frequent uses of maneuvers is diving for cover—a simple Athletics (or Fists, if the group allows) roll. You will be rolling against a fixed difficulty depending on the availability of cover (Average for most locales, Great or Superb in an absolutely barren place). Success allows you to put a Behind Cover aspect on your character, which you can tag or invoke to help defend against attacks. It is up to the group to decide if circumstances should allow someone to "defend" against the character's maneuver (by pinning him in place with gunfire, for instance) or not.

Aiming or Painting a Target: Sometimes, characters take the time to set a target up for a future shot that hits with greater effectiveness. This isn't always the classic "aim, then fire" thing—there are tons of ways to set someone up for serious hurt. This is a classic way for PCs to cooperate in combat: one person uses Fists to put Dazed or something like that on a target, and his friend tags it immediately for +2 to his own Fists attack. Usually, the set-up action is done with the attack skill, and the target can roll appropriately to avoid the maneuver.

Ah, goons with guns. In other words, it's a normal Tuesday.

Called Shots: Maneuvers can be used to represent the effects of special, targeted attacks made on a target. Kicking someone's knee could place a Hurt Knee aspect on them, which the attacker could tag or invoke in a subsequent round. These aspects can never be as severe as consequences which might reflect similar conditions—the target can roll Endurance in order to shake off the disadvantage. Still, it's a good option for a fighter who prefers to use pinpoint strikes to wear an opponent down, and then hit for a ton of stress in a later round when he brings all those maneuvers to bear.

Blocks

Is there any way we can make these examples a little less depressing?

Sometimes, your character might want to keep something from happening rather than make something happen—to do something more preventative than proactive. This type of action is called a **block**. Examples include:

- Shooting covering fire at an open doorway to prevent someone from escaping
- Protecting someone else from attacks
- Making sure no one gets their hands on an object your character is guarding

To perform a block, declare what *specific* type of action the block is intended to prevent and roll an appropriate skill. The total of that roll is called the **block strength**. During the exchange, any time a character wants to perform the action that's covered by the block, he must roll against the block and meet or exceed the block strength to be able to perform that action. If he fails, he cannot perform the action in question. If he meets or exceeds the block strength, the action resolves normally, with benefits for extra shifts if the roll beats the block strength by a wide margin.

Typically, a block action lasts until the player who initiated the block takes his next turn. At that point, he must choose whether he wants to take another action or if he wants to maintain the block. There are no special rules for maintaining blocks. Just roll the action again and take the new result as the block strength for the next exchange.

One advantage of a block is that it allows two players to "stack" rolls to prevent something from happening. If your character is protecting someone from attacks, that person technically gets two chances to resist an attack—their own automatic defense roll and the block strength. If either one manages to beat the attack, that person suffers no stress. If neither roll beats the attack, the higher of the two totals may mitigate the effects somewhat.

Example: *Molly Carpenter and Harry Dresden are running away from some hired goons who are intent on filling them full of bullet holes. Harry uses spirit evocation to throw a kinetic shield around Molly as she's running away, declaring it as a block against attacks. He makes his evocation roll and gets a block strength of Fantastic (+6).*

When Molly is attacked by one of the goons, she rolls her own Athletics as a defense and gets a Good (+3) dodge. The goon gets really lucky and rolls an Epic (+7) gun shot, but because she can use Harry's block for defense, she only takes a three-stress hit (1 shift for beating the block, plus 2 more for the damage value of the gun).

If Harry hadn't performed the block, she'd have taken a six-stress hit instead (4 for beating the defense roll, plus 2 for the gun). Ouch!

Grapples—a particular type of block that you might end up using a great deal—work just a little differently than other block actions. See page 211 for more.

Resolving Blocks

Sometimes blocks are a little trickier to resolve than other actions because they seek to *prevent* an effect rather than *create* one. When you create a block, the block has to be specific and clear in two ways: who it's intended to affect, and what types of action (attack, block, maneuver, move) it's trying to prevent. Generally speaking, if the block can affect more than one person, it can only prevent one type of action. If the block only affects one person, it can prevent several types of action—up to all of them—as context permits. You can't use a block to prevent someone from making a defense roll.

For example, if your character is in a gunfight against a group of goons, you could say, "I want to pepper the exit door with gunfire and make sure no one leaves." That is a block against multiple characters, so it can only prevent one type of action, which in context is any move action—no one can leave without running up against the block.

On the other hand, suppose your character is in a gunfight with a single, determined opponent. You could say, "I want to keep this guy busy while my friend gets away." The block is

focused on a single person, so nearly anything that person might do has a chance of running up against the block, except perhaps for attacks against the blocking character.

If this sounds powerful, that's because it is—you can effectively paralyze a target in place using blocks. The thing to keep in mind, though, is that a block action is your character's action for the exchange. You don't get to attack anyone, change position, perform a maneuver, or anything else. And it's never a sure thing—it's still possible for the intended target to roll higher than the block and perform an action anyway. Also, a block must be rerolled from exchange to exchange, which means its effectiveness doesn't remain consistent over time.

Keep in mind that there are some blocks that just won't work in some situations. (Trying the "keep them pinned down with gunfire" trick on a loup-garou isn't going to really help you much, given that they're immune to bullets.)

Grapples

One of the most common applications of the block is to perform a **grapple**, essentially a close combat action which involves restraining the opponent more than causing damage. Because the main intent of the grapple is to prevent the opponent from doing something, it's regarded as a block action in the game. However, there are some additional guidelines applied to grappling that help make it a more effective combat tactic in its own right.

In order to do a grapple, you have to:

- Tag or invoke an appropriate aspect on the target to justify the grapple. This can come from a maneuver to get you into position, a consequence you've inflicted, or even an aspect you've assessed. As long as it clearly communicates some combat advantage that would allow you to try a grapple, it's fine.
- Roll your Might skill (unless you have a stunt that allows you to use another skill). The result establishes the block strength of the grapple.

When you successfully grapple a target, you establish a block against *all* actions he might take in the exchange. The target is also prohibited from sprinting (page 212) or supplemental movement (page 213) until the grapple is broken.

You must reroll every exchange in order to maintain the grapple on your opponent, as per the normal rules for blocks. However, you get some additional options in every subsequent round you're still holding onto your opponent: *if you so choose, you can freely make an unopposed attack, movement, or maneuver on your opponent as a supplemental action, which has a value of 1 shift.*

In other words, whenever your turn to roll the grapple comes up again, you can automatically choose to inflict a one-shift hit to the target, drag the target with you one zone, or inflict a maneuver (like Tangled Up), and then you must roll the grapple at –1 (the other action you take is considered supplementary because it doesn't require a roll).

Finally, you can also release the grapple if you want to roll a standard action instead, like making a full attack, performing a maneuver, or throwing the opponent (basically forced movement, to a maximum of one zone). The target gets a defense roll, as usual.

In this way, an effective grappler can eventually whittle someone down to "taken out" status in a series of subsequent exchanges.

However, the target is not lacking in options when he gets grappled—he can still roll to attempt any action. If the target cannot beat the block strength of the grapple, it's assumed that the grappler is still holding onto him, giving the grappler his entire set of supplementary options next round. If the target beats the grapple strength, however, the action succeeds. Additionally, if the action is something that could reasonably break the grapple—an attack, a spell, even a threatening look—the grapple is automatically "released."

The GM might rule that someone who is grappled cannot perform any actions that require a great deal of clearance (such as swinging a sword) or complex articulation (such as lockpicking or spellcasting). She might also rule that some actions aren't blocked at all by a grapple (such as perception rolls, academic insights, and

Expanding the Grapple's Definition

So, it's possible that a lot of different situations in different types of conflict might fit the mechanical ebb and flow of the grapple procedure: laying down suppressive machine gun fire, "locking" blades with someone, etc. If you want to play around with that so that Might doesn't necessarily get all the fun, go for it. Just recognize that you're taking away some of the uniqueness of Might's combat options, especially since you still get normal blocks while using other attack skills. If you're cool with that, and your group is cool with that, then we're cool with it, too.

What about critters that are much stronger than us mortals?

Beings with Inhuman Strength can move a target two zones with grappling. Beings with Supernatural Strength can move a target three zones. Mythic Strength? Four zones.

Same thing's true with the stress that can be inflicted as a supplemental action: 2 stress for Inhuman, 3 stress for Supernatural, 4 stress for Mythic. ouch!

so on). The group should talk about its expectations here before engaging the grapple rules.

Example: *One of John Marcone's thugs, surprised by an unexpected Harry Dresden, decides to express his boss' displeasure in the old-fashioned way—by beating Harry senseless. Before Harry can get a move in edgewise, the thug is on him.*

In the first exchange, the thug uses Fists to perform a maneuver on Harry, succeeds, and places Off-Balance *on him. Harry's first counterattack meets with an unfazed wall of muscle.*

In the second exchange, the thug tags Off-Balance *so he can go for a grapple. The thug's Might is Good (+3), and he rolls a +2 on the dice for a Superb (+5) grapple. Harry is held. He decides that casting a spell while grappled is too chancy, since the Superb grapple blocks his target roll to control even a minor evocation. Harry instead opts for the straightforward approach: headbutting the thug. He rolls Fists for this attack, but the outcome is less than Superb. Harry remains held.*

In the third exchange, the thug decides to go for a Pinned *maneuver, pushing Harry down to the floor. He uses his supplemental action to give Harry* Pinned*, the thug's knee pushing down on Harry's back. The thug rolls the grapple again, at a –1 for the supplemental action, but this time he only gets a Fair (+2) result, and Harry sees his chance. He tries to use Athletics to undo the grapple and wriggle free. He makes a Great (+4) Athletics roll, giving him two shifts over the block; he cancels out the maneuver and gets free of the grapple.*

I REALLY, REALLY HATE YOU RIGHT NOW, BILLY.

SO EVEN IF I WAS TRYING TO CAST A, UH, FAIR SPELL, IT'D BE AS DIFFICULT AS TRYING TO CAST A SUPERB ONE WHEN THE BLOCK'S THAT BIG?

Exactly right.

REMINDS ME OF THAT TIME MACFINN PUT ME IN A HEADLOCK.

SO WHY WOULD THE THUG GO FOR HITTING ME WITH A PINNED MANEUVER HERE INSTEAD OF THAT ONE POINT OF STRESS YOU MENTIONED EARLIER?

Racking up a few taggable aspects can help you prolong a grapple when you roll poorly. The stress option is mainly useful when you can do it several times in a row.

Sprint

You perform a **sprint** action in order to change from zone to zone within a conflict. Normally, movement is pretty self-explanatory—there's a door to go through or simply open ground, and it's pretty easy to justify moving from one area to another. As a result, most movement rolls are pretty easy, having an effective difficulty of Mediocre (+0)—in other words, unless you roll a negative result, you can always move one zone and every shift beyond that lets you move an additional zone.

Sometimes, however, it's complicated to move directly from one zone to another. For instance, something like a fence, wall, or other difficult terrain might obstruct your path, or you might need to move up or down quickly (like getting to the roof of a locked building from the street, or vice versa). This complication is called a **border**, and the GM gives it a difficulty rating (page 310). Rough terrain is usually an Average (+1) border; fences and other such barriers are usually considered Fair (+2) borders. Extremely high walls, barbed wire, and other fortifications might be Good (+3) borders or above.

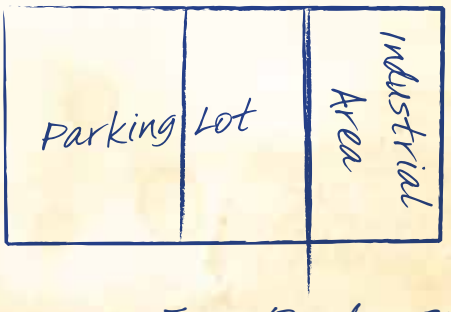
If there is a border, you must roll against the border difficulty to accomplish movement. As with a normal sprint roll, meeting the difficulty allows you to move one zone, and any shifts let you move an additional zone per shift.

Example: *Harry Dresden has been chasing a pickpocket through the streets of Chicago and tracked him to an industrial park, where he's about to hand Harry's wallet over to a mysterious, dark-robed figure.*

Harry wants to jump the pickpocket, but there's a tall fence between him and the industrial park. The GM has decided these are two different zones, separated by a border (the fence). She gives the border a rating of 2 shifts. In this exchange, Harry needs a Fair (+2) jump or better to get over the fence and into the same zone as the pickpocket. His Athletics is Good (+3), and he makes the roll handily, vaulting over the fence and getting there before the hand-off.

In the next exchange, the pickpocket decides to get as far away from Harry as possible—he drops the wallet and makes a break for it. He rolls his Athletics and gets a Good (+3) jump—enough to jump the fence again and get one more zone away, which the GM proposes is the far end of the parking lot.

Harry snatches up his wallet and decides to let the pickpocket go. Harry turns his attention to the robed figure instead…



In situations where there's no border to worry about, you can also just move one zone as a supplemental action (see below) at a –1 penalty to your main action for the exchange. Within the same zone, movement isn't considered an issue—you can always go wherever you need to within the same zone in order to perform an action.

Free and Supplemental Actions

You may be able to take a minor action in addition to your main action during a turn. Often it will be assumed that you succeed in taking the action, but some free or supplemental actions might involve a skill roll of their own, made before or after the main action, as is appropriate. Defending always requires rolling the dice.

You might want your character to do something very simple during an exchange. Some kinds of actions are **free actions**—they don't count as your character's action during an exchange, whether or not a roll of the dice is involved. Rolling for defense against an attack is a free action. So are minor actions like casting a quick glance at a doorway, flipping a switch right next to your character, starting a car, listening for voices, or shouting a short warning. It's up to the GM to approve a minor action as free. If it isn't free, it's a supplemental action.

There is no limit on the number of free actions your character may take during an exchange; the group simply has to agree that each action is free and should only impose limits if it seems like someone is taking undue advantage of this rule.

Sometimes, your character needs to do something more complicated than a single, basic action allows. Moving one zone in addition to another action is the most common example. Several others are possible, such as drawing a gun before shooting it, opening a door and then intimidating the occupants of the room beyond, using a cell phone while shooting a gun, or snatching up a nearby vase to smash over the head of a burglar. These actions are called **supplemental actions**, and they impose a –1 penalty on the roll for the main action. When you're not sure which is the primary action and which is the supplemental one, remember that the supplemental action is the one that normally requires no die roll.

Combining Skills

Sometimes your character will need to perform a task that really requires using two or more skills at once. You never know when your character is going to need to throw a knife (Weapons) while balancing on a spinning log (Athletics), when he's going to need to explain germ theory (Scholarship) to a dragon (Discipline), or when he's going to need to hold up a falling gate (Might) just long enough for his friends to escape (Endurance).

These situations come up more often than you'd think.

In situations like these, you roll based on the main skill your character is using (the primary thrust of the action), but the roll is *modified* by a second skill. If the second skill rating is of greater value than the first, it grants a +1 bonus to the roll; if the second skill rating is of a lesser value, it applies a –1 penalty to the roll. Sometimes, it'll only make sense for a skill to help or hinder another skill, but not both; in that case, ignore the value that makes no sense. In other words, the GM might decide that, while having a low Athletics could hinder a character in the Weapons/Athletics example above, having a high Athletics won't necessarily make it any easier. In that case, she just won't grant the bonus if the character's Athletics skill is higher.

Billy, I think having a kickass Athletics would make it easier.

Sure, some groups might do that.

Keep in mind that this should not be used to allow a character to complete two full actions in one turn; that should require two exchanges. When skills are used in combination, one skill is almost always going to serve a passive role, as the thing the character needs to be able to do so that he can perform the other skill. If a character is trying to throw a knife while balancing on a spinning log, Weapons is the main skill rolled, but Athletics restricts the skill, because without it the character falls off the log and his throw is moot. Similarly, if the character is too busy gibbering before an ancient horror, his knowledge simply is not going to help him.

Sometimes it can be difficult to determine when something is a supplemental action and when something calls for combined skills. The best rule of thumb is to ask whether or not a roll would be required for each "part" of a complicated action if the parts were separated. Would the character have to roll Athletics to balance on the log if he weren't also throwing the knife? If so, then combine skills. If not, then treat it like a supplemental action.

Useful Terms

To make it easy to talk about combining skills in a compact way, you can use the following lingo:

- If a secondary skill could either add to or subtract from the primary skill, say it **modifies** that skill.
- If a secondary skill could only add to the primary skill, say it **complements** that skill.
- If a secondary skill could only subtract from the primary skill, say it **restricts** that skill.

There's no rule saying you have to use these special terms in your own game, but we use them elsewhere in the book. Just a heads up, so you're not lost when you see them.

Optional Rule: Spin

Some groups may find it strange that high defense rolls don't really give you any return when every other game action does. This is because they aren't really a declared action; you can take as many of them as you want for free, regardless of your situation. However, if you're bummed that you roll these epic defense rolls all the time and nothing else comes of it, consider using the **spin** rule: any defense roll that beats the attack by three or more confers a +1 or –1 to the very next action taken in the exchange.

If you make spin, figure out who is going next and see if there's an immediate way for a +1 or –1 to apply to the roll so that it favors you. Is your friend going next, attacking the same foe you are? Give your friend the +1. Is your opponent going next, trying to rend you limb from limb? Give his attack a –1 (or a +1 to your own defense roll). If nothing obvious comes to mind, don't worry about it; the special effect is mostly just color.

This can be a way of introducing some liveliness and uncertainty into conflict scenes, but with everything else going on, it can be hard to remember and keep track of when you get spin. If you find that to be the case, don't worry about this optional rule. Your conflict scenes are probably dynamic enough as it is.

In practice, this rule mainly allows the GM to condense rolls in complicated situations in order to keep play moving at a brisk pace. It's possible to handle these situations by requiring one roll for each "part." The GM could say, "Yeah, roll your Athletics to see if you fall off the log, and then roll Weapons to see if you can hit the target." But in a complicated conflict scene, those rolls can add up and really bog down play. Sometimes it's just simpler and faster to combine skills and take care of it all in one roll.

Keep it Simple, Silly

It's pretty easy to get carried away with supplemental actions and combining skills, so you end up with a situation where a character needs to climb a wall (Athletics as primary), but is tired (Endurance hinders), but the wall's part of a building the character has been studying in order to burglarize (Burglary helps). In general, try to avoid this kind of minutia, because it can turn into a zero-sum game pretty fast, where there really isn't any significant benefit once you bring in all the attendant factors. Still, if you're fond of that kind of complexity, the system does technically allow for some of that.

Isn't that "Keep it simple, **stupid**?"

Georgia...encouraged me not to address the reader as "stupid."

Did she encourage you in the sack?

A-aaaand you're done.

Overflow
(What to Do with a Surplus)

Sometimes you will get lucky and end up with spare shifts that don't get spent on anything during an exchange—you succeed far more than anticipated and simply don't need those extra shifts to complete the action you declared. When that happens, the extra shifts are called **overflow**, and you are allowed to spend them to take an additional, after-the-roll action if you so choose. The action is resolved at the value of the overflow, so two shifts of overflow might be taken as a Fair (+2) action.

The main restriction is that this action cannot be an offensive action and must be consistent with the sort of activity that generated the overflow; movement is fine, and so is any other action that the GM allows as supplemental.

Specifically, this is a good way to fit non-conflict actions into the middle of a conflict scene.

Overflow can only legitimately happen by chance—most often by a really good roll of the dice. So if you know you need 2 shifts to accomplish something, invoking additional aspects to get 6 shifts so you can have overflow doesn't cut it. Also, no matter how many shifts you have of overflow, you can only take one additional action, and you have to commit all your shifts to that action.

Example: *Michael Carpenter cleaves through the demonic guardian of a dark god's temple at the end of a pitched battle, breaking its power once and for all. His player, Ryan, rolls an attack and gets six shifts on it, but looking at the damage Michael's already inflicted on the beast, he and the GM realize that he only needs a three-shift hit to take it out. The GM grants Ryan an overflow action worth three shifts, the difference between his actual roll and what he needed to take out the demon.*

With the three remaining shifts, he calls for a sprint of three zones (i.e., equal to the number of overflow shifts) as the temple begins to collapse around him, high-tailing it out of there without the need for a separate Athletics roll.

Social Conflicts

Not every conflict that the characters engage in is going to be about beating up or killing someone. People have conflicts all the time in a more nebulous, but often more common, realm—the facedown at the bar, the aggressive dare, the guilt-fueled suggestion; conflicts of interest are played out on the social level all the time. Words and other types of influence are used as weapons to further the agenda of one person over another person or over whole groups of people, and those who are most skilled at it can sometimes be far more damaging than a thug with a gun.

Social conflicts occur when the opposing agendas of two or more characters are resolved without physical violence, calling upon a different set of skills and trappings to resolve them. The damage done by these conflicts can be highly variable, ranging from simply instilling a false sense of security in the loser to ruining his public reputation and hurting his relationships.

The White Court and the Mafia are best at this.



The skills mainly used to attack in a social conflict are Deceit, Intimidation, and Rapport; those three and Empathy could all be used to make social maneuvers. Empathy and Rapport are most commonly used to defend. This list is not exhaustive, however, and depending on the context of the interaction, there might be situations where another skill (such as Conviction or Contacts) may seem a better fit.

The social stress track is modified by the Presence skill, representing the resilience of a character's persona to hostile influence.

Zones and Movement

In many situations, the use of zones and movement won't be very important to social conflict, given that most social conflict requires that the characters be able to interact with one another socially. Measuring that can be fairly abstract—can someone seduce someone else over a cell phone? How do you measure their "distance" in that regard? In these cases, it's okay to ignore issues of movement; just assume everyone is in the same zone for every exchange and can affect everyone else equally.

Of course, sometimes the social conflict will be taking place within the context of a physical space, such as a large party or ball, where being gathered in certain places at certain times can influence who has the ability to affect whom. In these cases, physical movement can be used normally—just keep in mind that, in a social context, different things can take on the function of barriers with just as much reality as physical ones. High society gatherings (and the supernatural gatherings that also contain their trappings) are famous for this kind of thing—you just can't walk across the room until you've politely extricated yourself from a lengthy conversation with the gossipy socialite by the punch bowl or get a word in edgewise with the lord of the manor until you've spoken with all his influential hangers-on.

Social conflicts should be fluid, with frequent skill switching. Intimidation isn't getting any traction? Change gears and go for Rapport or Deceit. Unlike physical combat, attacking over and over again with one skill isn't going to be satisfying. And while Discipline can be used to defend against some actions, minimize its use; social conflicts are more about information flow than poker faces.

Barriers or borders, Billy?

Barriers in the story sense, borders in the system sense!

Attacks, Maneuvers, and Blocks

I've never been to Club Zero. Heck, I don't even know where it is.

Social conflicts tend to vary more than physical conflicts do in terms of what constitutes the nature of an attack or maneuver, and they require that the participants be very clear about the nature of the conflict and what the conflict is intended to do. Intimidation has little place in a conflict about trashing an opponent's reputation, but a conflict about winning the favor of a particular patron might open up several avenues of attack depending on the resources of each participant. Likewise, someone trying to provoke an opponent into hostility probably won't use Rapport.

Are seduction attempts going on there often? Do they **need** to be blocked? Is Harry's sparkling personality block enough?

Hey!

Ultimately, a good guideline is that an attack is any action meant to directly take someone out of the conflict in one way or another, and a maneuver is any action meant to provide a situational advantage to make those attacks more effective. Taken together with a clear picture of what the conflict is about, this can help provide a guide for what kinds of skills can be used.

Take the simple example of a facedown in a bar between two potential combatants. Each individual is interested in forcing the other to back away from the fight. It's pretty clear, then, that Intimidation is the primary skill that's going to be used here for attacks, and either Conviction or Presence is going to be used to defend. One possible maneuver is for one of them to use Rapport to get some of the other bar patrons on his side, allowing him to place an Outnumbered aspect on his opponent—this makes future Intimidation attacks more effective, forcing the opponent to deal with the reality that, if he presses forward, it's going to be an uneven and dirty fight.

You know, I've seen Thomas "kill them with kindness" before. Could you do that in the system, or is all of this social conflict stuff aggressive and negative?

Yeah! You could conceivably use Rapport for a "soft" attack to convince someone to meet with you later, removing them from the scene. That's "taken out" too, after all.

Something more abstract, like damaging someone's reputation with a certain person or group, might involve attacks of Contacts and Deceit from all parties involved, with Presence or Rapport acting as a defensive skill to measure how well someone is still liked in the face of accusation. Maneuvers would contribute to whatever might help make the false reputation seem true—Contacts to spread rumors extra-wide, Resources to bribe people to lie, and so on.

The use of blocks may not be appropriate in all conflicts—as an action type, they're meant as a preemptive measure against certain actions and, as such, can be slightly more difficult to incorporate into a social conflict scene. It's easy to picture spraying gunfire at a door to keep someone from walking out, but what "blocks" do you put up against a seduction attempt at Club Zero?

Still, clever players might find ways of establishing an extra layer of defense via a block based on the situation, such as using Rapport when first meeting the Club Zero bartender: "Hey, I'm designated driver for my friends tonight, so don't let anyone buy me any drinks, okay?" The potential seducer is going to have to find another tactic in order to proceed there, or risk an awkward moment.

Stress and Consequences

As with parsing out the combat actions, figuring out what stress and consequences mean in a particular social conflict can take some wrangling and, as before, looking at the nature of the conflict is the best place to start. Remember that consequences are meant to represent the outcomes of a conflict that "stick" to the participants—as soon as the scene's over, anything recorded as stress is really just narrative color.

In terms of consequences, the easiest way to represent the effects of social conflict is through negative emotional fallout—aspects like Stressed Out, Crappy Mood, Nervous, Edgy, and Guilt-Ridden can all come into play later in dynamic and colorful ways. Another potential option is to let the consequences reflect changes in how other people perceive the character after the conflict shakes out. If a character's reputation is ruined, representing that with a Smeared Name aspect can lend mechanical weight to what might otherwise be just a narrated effect.

Sometimes, the most important effect of a social conflict comes from the new circumstances the event brings into the character's life—if a character has a significant other, falling for a seduction attempt could create Relationship Doubts or something similar. Play around with any and all of these types of consequences to give your social conflicts a far-reaching impact on play.

The Role of Assessment

Assessment actions have a unique place in social conflict as compared to physical conflict—they allow you to learn your opponent's aspects, which

can often mean the difference between victory and defeat in social conflict. It's one thing for a stranger to try to get your blood up with random insults, but a stranger who is able to attack the ideas that you most hold dear represents a clear and present danger. Normally speaking, you use Empathy to "read" an opponent in this way, and such attempts are commonly resisted by Rapport. See the respective skill descriptions on pages 129 and 138 for more details. Any aspects revealed by this process can be tagged and invoked in social combat actions; as such, they act sort of like "permanent" maneuvers (in that, once revealed, they can't be "un-revealed") and are very potent tools.

Keep in mind, also, that certain social conflicts will open up the potential to use other skills for assessment as well. If you are trying to woo an investor away from a potential competitor, for example, you would do well to use Investigation or Resources to uncover any financial woes the competitor might be having and to use that information at the bargaining table.

Mental Conflicts

There is another kind of interpersonal conflict that goes beyond just a social scope. Most of the time, the effects of losing a social conflict are transient, in the sense that they don't really transform a person utterly. Someone can make you lose your temper, but he can't turn you into a sociopath. Someone can damage your reputation, but he can't make you hate yourself utterly.

In some cases, however, people do inflict that kind of deep-seated harm to one another, crossing the line from mere social consequence into deep and abiding psychological trauma. When this kind of damage is accessible in a conflict, it marks a transition from social into mental territory and puts perhaps the direst stakes of all on the line—the individual's mind, soul, or sense of self. These are mental conflicts, probably the rarest (or at least most potentially profound) examples of conflict you'll see in your game.

The mental stress track is modified by the Conviction skill, representing the resistance of the character's inner self to abuse. The Discipline skill is almost always called on to defend against mental attacks, though magic can also help protect someone in this kind of conflict.

Being able to attack the mental stress track is no small feat. The kind of abuse necessary to inflict this kind of damage on another person usually takes a great deal of time and energy, the result of established relationships going horribly awry. Shortcuts exist—certain triggers in the character's history might allow access to deeper recesses of the mind. Perhaps the most terrifying example of this is the mind magic available to wizards or the mental powers of other supernatural creatures. Even as total strangers, these people can instantly strike at the heart of what makes people who they are, forcing them to be temporary thralls to the creature's will—or worse.

Between mortals, some sort of prior connection or justification must exist to inflict mental stress and consequences. An aspect that defines a relationship rife with abandonment, emotional degradation, violence, rape, or other potential triggers would qualify for this, as it's assumed that the relationship has been going on long enough to justify being vulnerable to this kind of severe effect. When this is the case, many actions that qualify as social attacks can affect the mental stress track.

Certain individuals might also have the training to accomplish this sort of thing, going beyond the usual trappings of Intimidation and into torture, represented by an appropriate stunt.

That Warning Thing

Just in case it needs saying—having mental conflicts occur routinely in your games can lead you into some pretty dark places. These places exist in Harry's casefiles and are the source of some nasty, nasty stuff. You're not required to go there if you don't want to—having most mental conflicts take place "off-camera" is a perfectly fine way to handle it, or even not going there much at all, depending on the preferences of your group.

Zones and Movement

Zones and movement are even more potentially insignificant in a mental conflict than a social one—they tend to take place entirely within the mind, especially in the cases where supernatural powers are used. The only situation where zones and movement might matter is if there's a mental conflict taking place as part of a larger, physical one. If a demon is trying to possess your friend, it might become important to know how

Your mother was a hamster and your father smelt of elderberries!

STOP! These notes are getting too silly!

On second thought, let's not go to Chicago. 'Tis a silly place.



Kravos was a jerk. I may have already mentioned that. Bears repeating.

hard it will be for you to get to him. In this case, you'd use physical movement as appropriate and just assume it doesn't matter for the mental combatants.

Attacks, Maneuvers, and Blocks

The context of a mental attack is a little more strictly defined when it comes to supernatural abilities—the rules for the powers are given in either *Supernatural Powers* (for White Court vampires and their ilk) or *Spellcraft* (for wizards and sorcerers), and the targets of those abilities can use Discipline to defend against the attacks. Strictly speaking, these kinds of encounters seldom last long enough to be considered full conflicts—failing to defend against thaumaturgy usually results in directly suffering some level of consequence, but some powers like Incite Emotion (page 172) will take more effort on the part of the attacker.

Mind magic could also result in slavery to a powerful White Court vampire.

Or a Faerie Queen.

Between mortals who have established the ability to affect each other in that way, either due to the relationship between them or thanks to training in inflicting mental anguish, most mental attacks look like social attacks. The relationship or training adds context to the narration and the outcome, rather than to the act itself—when a person who has savagely beaten you since childhood stares you down with Intimidation, it's a whole different ball game than when some guy on the other end of the bar does it. This is reflected mainly in what consequences a person stands to take from the conflict.

A mental maneuver is basically the difference between manipulation and force. Think about the inherently deceptive things someone could attempt to get another person to believe in order to do serious damage to him. Again, these are more than likely going to look a great deal like social maneuvers, but mental conflict changes the effect in the scene somewhat. Where a person might use Deceit in a social conflict to make you wonder if he's killed your friend, in a mental conflict he could make you temporarily *believe* it.

Blocks in mental conflict are also difficult to parse out—most people are wholly unable to prepare for those who can push their deepest buttons. Between mortals, without therapy or conditioning to draw on (which could also be represented by an aspect), a block probably wouldn't be possible. Against supernatural incursion, blocks are meaningless, save for those established by a threshold or other supernatural defense.

Stress and Consequences

The stress and consequences suffered by mental conflicts are the deepest of the deep—forays into suicidal thoughts, emotional dependencies, deep compulsions, and other behaviors and thoughts typically classified as dysfunctional in some way or another. Mental damage is the kind of damage that changes or erodes a person's sense of self; suffering enough of these consequences over time tends to presage a trip to the mental ward, or at least to permanent counseling. That's one of the things that makes mind magic so dangerous—even when used with good intention, it can completely scar a person's mind beyond repair.

One important thing to keep in mind about mental conflicts is that often the combatants are not equally matched in terms of their ability to affect one another. Usually, people don't engage in mental conflict unless they're operating from a

position of power; this is routine for supernaturals, where the best strong-willed mortal victims can hope for is to simply force the assailant from their minds. Even among mortals, mental combat usually springs from an unequal power dynamic.

In a mental conflict, the character in the inferior position will probably not be able to attack his opponent—he can still defend and maneuver, but unless he can come up with a really good rationale for being able to strike back, defensive options are all he has. The disadvantaged character will have to change the circumstances to put himself on more equal footing, or (more than likely) switch the conflict to the physical or social arena so that he can be effective. Someone who's being tortured, for example, usually doesn't have the means to turn the tables on his torturer unless he can get free. Fighting back against supernatural or magical mental attackers requires having mojo of your own, be that innate power or assistance from an item.

Additional Advice for Social and Mental Conflicts

Many players are more worried about the potential outcome of social and mental conflicts than physical ones, because they don't want to feel bullied into playing their character a certain way. If you imagine your character as a really courageous guardian type, for example, it can seem strange to have that character lose an Intimidation conflict with someone and be forced to back down from a fight. There are a few elements for the group to consider when you're deciding about the degree to which you want to incorporate social and mental conflicts into your games.

The first, and probably most important, is that the concession rules give you considerable leeway to interpret the outcome of a conflict. *As with a physical conflict, you should consider conceding the conflict if you see things not going your way.* If an incredibly chaste character (perhaps a Champion of God) is getting wrecked in a seduction attempt, concession allows you to offer an alternative to actually sleeping with the seductress—maybe taking on a consequence of Doubting My Own Purity for a time, while you work out the issues that the conflict engendered.

The second thing to keep in mind is that no conflict results are really permanent, with the potential exception of an extreme consequence. Almost no one has a personality that's 100% consistent all the time—the most courageous people are sometimes afraid, the most positive people get depressed, and the most determined people sometimes waver in purpose. Losing a social conflict doesn't necessarily mean that your character has suddenly, permanently changed. In fact, roleplaying through the outcomes of the conflict gives you the opportunity to develop your character as a more complex individual, even if the ultimate end result is that he doesn't change much.

Let's consider an Intimidation conflict for a second. Your character came into this bar to rescue a friend who's being held in the back room. Not wanting to just bust heads, your character goes in, gets a drink, and starts asking around. This leads to an Intimidation conflict with a thug there, which your character handily loses and gets taken out. You've taken a moderate consequence of Shaken Resolve during the conflict. The GM, controlling the thug, suggests that your character leaves the bar because he's afraid of getting into a fight with the thug and his friends.

This doesn't have to mean that your character runs screaming from the bar or anything like that. People often play off their emotional responses as being less significant than they really are. It's not out of scope to take the GM's suggestion and reply with, "Okay, well…if I leave the bar, I'm not giving them the satisfaction of knowing that my character is that scared. I'll keep eye contact with the thug and simply reply, 'Don't get comfortable and think that this is over. It's not. Not by a long shot.' I'll throw some cash on the bar and back out slowly."

See? Your character didn't turn into a screaming ninny, but still fulfilled the dictates of the conflict result. So, now what? Is your friend totally screwed?

Absolutely not. It just means your character is worried about getting into a fight with all those people, so the frontal approach is out of the question. That doesn't mean your character can't suddenly change tactics and try to sneak in the back of the bar to do the rescuing. If your character tends to solve problems with his fists and has a low Stealth, it makes the scene a little tenser and potentially challenging.

So it could be that my character is "afraid" to get into a fight with these chumps because they are TOO STUPID to realize that they'd all end up dead and the building would be on fire?

Works for me.

The consequence of Shaken Resolve also provides opportunities for roleplay. The rescued friend might ask about the change in tactics ("Dude, I expected you'd trash the place with a smile. What gives?") or there might be a scene later where your character reflects on what happened ("You know, for the first time in…hell, maybe ever…I think those guys actually got to me. Man, I must be losing my touch.").

And finally, the consequence is going to go away at some point, leaving your character ready to turn the tables on that thug if you should confront him again. At the end of it all, your character is even more the courageous badass, because he got hit with serious adversity and came out swinging on the other side. This can be especially poignant with mental conflicts, where the consequences are more deep-seated and have the potential to be transformative to the self.

Recovering from Conflicts

After the end of a conflict—whether physical, social, or mental—your character will have amassed stress and consequences, and you may have received some fate points for your trouble. But your troubles are largely just beginning—those consequences aren't going to go away immediately; while they're still attached to your character, they're available for invocations and compels just like any other aspect.

What kind of crazy person goes right into another conflict before recovering from the last one?

I mean, besides me?

Sometimes you're not given a choice in the matter, if the badguys come to you.

Any stress that your character takes during a conflict goes away immediately after the conflict—stress represents the close scrapes and glancing blows that your character can shrug off, so it doesn't last after the end of that conflict scene. In rare instances, it might be appropriate for stress to remain if your character goes immediately from one conflict to another or to some other appropriate scene (like a fight that turns into a car chase), but for the most part, once the conflict is done, the stress is gone.

Recovering from consequences is a bit more involved. It basically requires two things—some in-game circumstance that justifies that the character can start the recovery process and a certain amount of time in scenes or sessions before the consequence in question goes away. An appropriate in-game circumstance depends largely on the consequence that's been taken—most physical consequences require medical attention or rest, while mental consequences might require therapy, counseling, or extended time spent in the healing presence of a loved one. Social consequences can vary widely and are situational; a consequence like Frazzled might only need a night at the bar and a chance to unwind, while a consequence like Bad Reputation might require your character to spend time doing very public acts of charity to rebuild the good faith he's lost.

Once this circumstance is established, the recovery time can begin. As stated before, mild consequences last until the end of the next scene after recovery begins, moderate consequences last until the end of the next session after recovery begins, and severe consequences last until the end of the next scenario (or few sessions, as you prefer) after recovery begins. Extreme consequences are, of course, their own special kind of beast (page 205). In certain cases, it'd be more appropriate to measure recovery with in-game time, like days or weeks—see page 314 in *Running the Game* for more details on that.

Some powers affect either recovery time or the establishment of an appropriate circumstance (like Inhuman Recovery, Wizard's Constitution, et al.). See those individual descriptions for details.

Recovery and Skills

Some characters may have skills that lend themselves appropriately to initiating recovery; for instance, a character with Scholarship and the Doctor stunt (page 155) could start a character on the road to recovery from a moderate physical consequence. This is handled via declaration, and most of the time no roll is required—but if there's some kind of pressure on the healer character, a roll might be called for. In those cases, the difficulty is equal to the stress value of the consequence: Fair for mild, Great for moderate, Fantastic (!) for severe. Success means the recovery process can begin as normal; failure means the injured character has to wait.


- CHAPTER TWELVE -
Living With Magic
SYAF RICK

I, Spellslinger

So, you have phenomenal power at your fingertips. But being a conduit of magic isn't just about blasting architecture or finding lost dogs with a tuft of hair and a bit of string. Magic changes you, gets inside you, opens you up to seeing the world in a new way, and increases the impact you have on the world around you.

Here, we'll talk about how.

Wizard Biology

Butters has put some of me under a microscope and says it's something to do with my cells not breaking up when they divide, or something like that. I think it's easier to say "it's magic," but that's just me.

Wizards—and perhaps other types of spellcasters and magical folk—tend to have unusually long lifespans, lasting several centuries (and a few wizards are rumored to be even older than that). Why is this? Well, no one's certain—wizardry and scientific study don't often mix—but some of the Council think it's an effect of channeling magical energies through a physical body. As to whether strong magic comes from a strong life force, or a strong life force comes from strong magic, well…that's the sort of chicken and egg thing that the Council has absolutely no time for when there's a Vampire War going on.

However you slice it, magic and life force are inextricably linked within the body of a wizard. The big benefits here are that wizards heal a little faster than non-magical folks, and their bodies continue to heal until the injuries are *gone*—meaning wizards can eventually recover from injuries that would permanently cripple a mortal.

How it Works

Thanks for depressing me, Billy.

Don't worry: the way you're going, outliving your friends is probably not going to be an issue.

As far as the longevity bit goes, that's largely a case of *color* in game terms—being able to live a few centuries longer than your mundane human friends certainly means some dramatic things from a story perspective, but it doesn't need much in the way of *rules* to support it. Are you unusually long-lived? Yes? Okay, then—you are! That's all that need be said.

When it comes to healing, wizards get a minor leg up. Due to their extraordinary constitution, wizards do not need any kind of external justification besides receiving basic first aid for recovering from injury—time will do the job all on its own. Extreme consequences (like, say, a completely immolated hand) are an exception to this; there is a limit even to the hardiness of wizards. For more on recovery, see page 220.

Wizard Senses

Humans have a "third eye" which can be opened to behold the world in a different, mystical light. That ability is called the Sight, and we'll talk about it shortly—usually only wizards and other spellcasters can access it consciously. Also, wizards and other practitioners have some secondary senses that they've learned to use.

Almost everyone has some degree of awareness of the supernatural, whether or not you realize that's what is at work. Chills down your spine, a subtle feeling that something is simply *wrong* about a place, the hairs on your arm standing up for no apparent reason, something tickling at the edges of your vision—these are your primal awareness of something nasty and supernatural treading nearby.

Magical practitioners have sharpened this heightened awareness, due to their arcane studies and natural aptitudes.

While spellcrafters' secondary senses may not offer a lot of information to go on, they can make the half-second difference between a narrow escape and ending up spiked on a vampire's fangs.

How it Works

Everyone can roll the Lore skill as a substitution for Alertness (page 121) to detect the presence of the supernatural—it's just that Lore is usually Mediocre, unless someone's spent some time in dedicated study of the arcane.

Wizards and other trained spellcrafters can go a few steps further. First, they may use Lore more deliberately: they can get more detail than they might otherwise, as if it were an arcane Investigation (page 133) roll instead of "merely" Alertness.

GMs should also call for a Lore roll whenever the practitioner comes into physical contact with a supernatural entity passing as a normal human, or an environment that a potent entity has recently passed through. This roll might be opposed by any number of difficulty factors on the part of the entity—the Deceit skill, the efficacy of a concealing glamour ability, etc.—but all that a success indicates here is a hunch that the supernatural world is present and active.

Can mundane humans get this Lore roll if they're, say, touched by a Seelie? Or is it just practitioners?

GM's call, tho it's more fun if everyone can.

The Sight

For a wizard (or other practitioner), the third eye isn't merely a metaphysical concept. It's a very real thing, a part of his ability to look at the world and see what's *really* there, gliding beneath the surface. In our world, perceived by our mundane senses, the supernatural can hide in plain sight, a shadow rippling beneath the ocean of reality—unseen, perhaps felt, but rarely fully revealed. With training, people can open their third eye—using what is called **the Sight**—and dip below to see *full force* what is really there, no matter what it is.

There's just one problem: the human mind isn't all that good at handling what it sees when the third eye is open. What exactly *does* it see? Simply, the world—but at a level most of us are insulated from. When someone looks at the magical world with the Sight, the trickle of information the mind normally takes in via the other five senses suddenly becomes a great crashing wave drowning the third eye. The metaphorical and phantasmagorical become visual. Emotions and relationships shine like webs. Energy pulses. Dreams and nightmares boil into the air. The past, present, and future have a little hoedown right in front of you. It's hard to make any sense of it.

And these images get burned into the memory of the beholder—never forgotten, *always* vivid. This can be a problem (i.e., consequences; see "*Defending Against the Sight*" page 224).

Worse, it can be pretty hard to shut your third eye once you've opened it—imagine trying to close a door against an invading tidal wave, and you'll have some understanding of why this is the case.

So why use the Sight at all? Well, some things simply cannot be perceived without it. Horrors that walk the mundane world with little more than a chill down someone's spine may be seen clearly (though that's always unpleasant). Other times, it's the shortest path between mystery and truth—with a price, certainly, but if the stakes are high, it may be the only way to get a handle on what's *really* going on. The effects of spells laid upon a victim can be seen as well as visions of the past and the future, the true nature of things, lingering psychic stains, troubled shades…

Assuming, of course, that you can figure out how to make sense of what you're seeing and avoid going mad in the process.

How it Works

When you open your third eye, you perceive *everything* about the world visually. Everything, all at once. This may give you strange and twisted versions of future possibilities, hint at past evils, reveal the presence of magical and psychic wounds, all sorts of ongoing glories and horrors, beneficent and malevolent spells and enchantments, and so on. However, the price for this arcane knowledge comes from exposing your mind to the Sight's awesome force.

I consider using the Sight to be a deliberate, focused act of temporarily induced insanity.

In many respects, that perspective is exactly correct.

The game procedure to open your third eye is as follows:

1. Take an action to open the Sight and get the description of what you're Seeing.
2. Make an assessment action to try to learn about what you're Seeing.
3. Defend against the mental strain of using the Sight.
4. Close the Sight (if you can) before you suffer too much of that strain.

Opening the Sight

Opening the third eye to use the Sight takes a full action, after which you may behold the target of your arcane curiosity.

Once you begin using the Sight, you get at least some metaphorical expression of the truth of what you're beholding. Someone who committed a murder might be Seen to have blood on his hands, ever-flowing, and staining his clothes—however, the blood might be symbolic of a different kind of guilt or regret. Or it could be the result of a spell convincing him that he has done something undefined but horrible—maybe he's broken the Fourth Law (page 240) and done it "for his own good…" So while the things seen might be true, *what* truth they represent can be interpreted (or misinterpreted) in a variety of ways. Perception does not equal comprehension.

People who are trained to open their third eye are, understandably, reluctant to do it for more than a few moments. For us, it's dangerous enough. Unprepared people—such as those affected by the Threeeye drug during the Storm Front case—can't manage to hold their psyches together for very long.

Understanding What You See

In game terms, using the Sight most closely resembles a mystical assessment action (page 115)—you're looking to discover something important about the target, which could manifest as an aspect or simply as a detail. After describing the metaphorical truth, the GM determines the **intensity** of what you behold. The intensity is a difficulty described using an adjective from the ladder (page 16).

Most Sights significant enough to mention should be in the neighborhood of a Good intensity—by default, most things you focus on using the Sight are vibrantly beautiful or retchingly hideous in some way. This intensity can be mitigated or increased based on the scope of your inquiry, using the guidelines for setting difficulties in *Running the Game* (page 310). You can make things a step or two easier by keeping your eyes focused intently on something small, effectively avoiding a look at the wider picture of your location—but that also means the information you get will be more limited. You could also widen the focus, taking in something bigger than you originally intended for more information—but expect the intensity to go up a step or two in response to that.

On the other hand, something could grab your attention at an inopportune moment—or you could simply be forced to look at something you didn't intend—thus increasing the intensity.

Sounds like a great compel to me.

Once the intensity is determined, you make a Lore roll against the intensity to make sense of what you're Seeing—basically, to see if you succeed at the assessment. The more shifts you get, the more the GM can explain the metaphorical reality revealed through the Sight, providing additional aspects and/or details as per the normal guidelines for assessment (page 115). Any aspects you get will probably have a broad scope and require interpretation, rather than providing concrete specifics (for example, you'd see Hidden Guilt instead of Betrayed a Lover). If the Lore roll fails, you still get the general feel of the metaphor, but that's it—no help in interpreting it or mechanical benefit from discovered aspects.

Defending Against the Sight

After resolving your attempt to understand what you're seeing, you must also resolve how well your mind is handling the strain. Having the Sight open starts a mental conflict (page 217) against the vision, which lasts as long as you have the Sight open or until you are taken out. Each exchange you have the Sight open, the GM makes a mental attack roll (page 200) against you, using the intensity of what you're Seeing as if it were a skill. You defend with Discipline (page 127). As with any conflict, you may suffer consequences (page 203) or be taken out (where "taken out" may mean total collapse, insanity, heart attack…take your pick, as appropriate to the vision. See page 203).

Closing the Sight

After your first defense that succeeds, you may choose whether you want to close your third eye or keep it open to learn more (thus prolonging your contact—and conflict—with the vision). If you decide to keep it open, then you may make another Lore roll to understand the vision and you must continue for another exchange against it. Should your defense *not* succeed, however, your third eye will not close and you *must* continue for another exchange. Beholding something more intense than you bargained for may lock you into a deadly psychic struggle for the sanctity of your own mind with no easy escape!

Other Actions While Using the Sight

While the Sight is active, you may take actions other than perception, but these actions will all face a block (page 210) with strength equal to the intensity—unless they "cooperate" with the Sight in some way. For example, you might try to remove a nasty spell effect from a target with the Sight active, in which case the Sight acts kind of like a surgeon's camera, allowing you to focus on what you need to work on (the spell) without facing the block. For unrelated actions, such as shooting a gun, driving a car, or drawing a picture, the Sight is more of a distraction than a helpful tool.

In either case, when you take an action that is *not* just perception, you skip the Lore roll to understand what you're Seeing—you're too busy with whatever you're doing to perceive anything more than a simple description.

If I'm reading this right, the action taken when opening the Sight DOESN'T count as an exchange for defending against it, right? So, it's Open, Assess, Defend, Attempt to Close...?

Yup! Though you might have multiple assess/defend cycles depending on how long you look, and you can't attempt to close until you've successfully defended.

Example: *Harry is using the Sight to take a look at someone who's in inarticulate pain and fear—likely the result of a nasty spell. He opens his third eye. It turns out he's right. Someone seems to have wrapped glowing purple psychic barbed wire around this guy, ravaging him and leaving him psychologically brutalized and bleeding.*

That's what he sees. How do the dice play out? The GM sets the intensity at Good to start—it's pretty nasty, but Harry's seen nasty before, and he's keeping his attention focused on this one guy.

First up, Harry makes his Lore roll against a Good difficulty and hits it straight on. He's fine with that—he's pretty sure of his interpretation of what he's seeing here anyway, so there's no real need to ask questions.

Next, the GM rolls the Good intensity as a psychic attack on Harry. Looking at something like this is going to affect him. The roll comes out at +1, for a Great attack—ugh. Harry rolls his Discipline to defend and lucks out with a Superb, beating the attack—no psychic stress for now.

But Harry realizes he needs to keep the Sight up in order to get a grip on this nasty spell effect and pull it off of its victim. As he contends with the spell, he gets a little "bruised," taking a point of stress from the intensity "attack" in the following exchange.

When he eventually gets his hands around the spell fully, it turns on him and successfully attacks him. He falls to the floor, and the GM hits him with the temporary aspect: Lost Control of Where I'm Looking.

Murphy bursts in the door, and Harry looks at her, seeing her truly. The GM decides to boost the intensity here, taking it up to Great—Murphy is an emotionally intense person and central to the story, so the intensity of her appearance in the Sight should be higher than the typical Good. Harry must struggle to close his third eye against the terrible beauty of what he beholds…

This is true. Magic doesn't solve anything... It just makes things more complex.



The Sight Sucks!

So, you may be reading through this and wondering why anyone in his right mind would use the Sight, given its ability to shatter your mind into a thousand pieces if you look at the wrong thing for longer than a second. Setting aside questions of sanity, there's still plenty of reason to use the Sight.

Foremost is the idea that the Sight lets you see something it would be *impossible* to see otherwise. That's a *big deal*. Sure, you might end up finding some of the same information out via other means, over a longer period of time, but as with all elements of magic, it's less about doing something you just plain couldn't do under any circumstances eventually, and much more about getting at what you need to know *right now*.

It's a short-cut. And like many a short-cut, sometimes it takes you through a bad part of town.

Soulgazing

The *first* time (and first time only) someone with the Soulgaze ability (page 174) meets the gaze of someone else with a mortal soul for more than a few moments, they enter a state called **soulgazing**. Generally, this can't happen unless both parties want to make eye contact. However, one might trick the other into holding the gaze (see "*And Then Our Eyes Met*," page 228). All soulgazing must be done in person (no soulgazes via webcam!).

Not that a wizard could use a webcam.

When it comes right down to it, a soulgaze is a narrow, focused, specific application of the Sight—using the Sight to See one person, with the dials turned up to eleven. This is a once-in-a-lifetime chance to look past the outer surface and into the very heart of who a person is, what's going on with him, and who he might become. Unfortunately, the target of a soulgaze *also* gains this sort of insight into the gazer—even if that target is a vanilla mortal.

Of course, it's not as simple as all that. Because soulgazes are a facet of the Sight, metaphor jumbles up the results for each party. You're barking up the wrong tree if you think a soulgaze is "asking a question" about another person. The "answer" is going to make as much nonsense as it makes sense.

Beyond that, a soulgaze is tough on both parties. It's a lot like opening up your third eye without the filters in place to keep you from getting knocked flat. Because a soulgaze is so focused, and because it goes deep into the core of who each person is, it's very potent. It's not uncommon for untrained people to pass out when they're hit with a glimpse of someone else's soul—even trained wizards can walk away with a hell of a headache and a disquieted mind.

How it Works

When a soulgaze happens, the two people involved enter into an immediate, one-round psychic contest that takes no time in the "outside" world. To everyone else, the soulgaze begins and ends in an instant.

The contest has two components. The first is a *mutual psychic attack*. Each participant rolls his Conviction as an attack, defended by the other's Discipline, dealing mental stress if successful. At each player's option, the attack may serve as a maneuver instead, landing a temporary aspect on the other person if successful.

Example: *Harry Dresden and John Marcone lock eyes for the first time, and a soulgaze happens. Marcone, an NPC, is set for this encounter—he knows what a soulgaze is, he's expecting it, and he has a few fate points in hand to make sure his rolls go the way he wants. Harry's just started investigating a mystery and can't afford to spend fate points on the exchange—he knows he'll need them when things get nasty later on.*

Marcone makes his Conviction roll first and does reasonably well, getting a Great result. He's just looking to get Harry's attention, so he decides to call this a maneuver. Harry's Discipline roll is solid, leaving him with a Great result—but since Marcone went for a maneuver, that's still Marcone's success. The GM takes a few moments to think about what sort of an aspect she's going to drop on Harry's head, and she talks it out a bit with Jim, Harry's player. She and Jim agree to determine the aspect after the rest of the soulgaze is resolved.

On the other side of the soulgaze, Harry has no patience for the intrusion of a mob boss and goes for an outright attack. He rolls a Conviction attack—usually a strong suit for him—but his roll stinks, leaving him with a Fair. Marcone's Discipline roll exceeds Fair with little difficulty, leaving Harry's angry indignation sliding off him like it's nothing.

The second component is *information*; each gazer gets an involved, metaphorical glimpse of the other's soul which is described by the GM. The essential nature of each participant is made plain to the other; while some details may be hidden, it is crystal clear *who* each person *is*. This might result in a character aspect (as in, one from the sheet) being revealed to one or both participants—if you took stress or consequences in the first part, it's safe to say the other person knows an aspect of yours. (If you want to use your soulgaze roll as a maneuver, the aspect you place still has to say something about your essential nature, even if you're using it to your advantage.)

Example (Continued): *Since Harry is a PC and Marcone is an NPC, there's no strong reason for them to get into the details of what Marcone sees. The GM describes Marcone simply nodding, as if he's filing away a piece of information in some big mental Rolodex. Harry knows he's been weighed and measured.*

But then the GM gets into a description of what Marcone is like inside and it's unsettling: he's a pure predator, motivated by something dark and secret, and practically fearless. This is not someone Harry wants to piss off. With that done, the GM concludes the soulgaze with the results of Marcone's maneuver, dropping the temporary aspect Marcone Has a Tiger's Soul *on Harry, giving Gentleman Johnny a free tag in the conversation that follows.*

Once the rolls and the revelations are done, the soulgaze ends and "real time" resumes.

Who and What Can You Soulgaze?

It's not as clear-cut as "human" or "not human." We know that Harry has avoided making eye-contact with Kincaid, who's a half-man, half-*something*, apparently. Given the example of Thomas Raith, wizards should be able to enter into a soulgaze with a White Court vampire. But other vampires seem not to trigger a soul-gaze, and faeries—never having been human to begin with—aren't any kind of a problem.

The question here might simply be how close to human the target is, or how far from humanity the target of the soulgaze has turned. This doesn't have a clean, game-rule answer—but you can certainly use a character's refresh (page 20) as one indication of whether or not it's an option. Those with zero or less are more likely to have turned away from humanity—if indeed they were *ever* human—than those with a bit of free will still in the cards.

Beyond even this—since we're talking about eye contact here—there are *plenty* of bad things that could happen even if a soulgaze isn't on the table. Lock eyes with a Black Court vampire and you might find yourself under sudden psychic assault (and if you're particularly unlucky, that's merely a prelude to your new job description as a Renfield). Plenty of Nevernever nasties are happy to crawl right into your head through the open windows of your eyes—a fact that most of the knowledgeable folks in the supernatural community keep in mind at all times. Sure, it might mean they look like a bunch of antisocial, shifty-eyed skulkers, but they had that image going for them already. At least not making eye contact has the advantage of being a survival skill.



So, the word "soul" is getting thrown around a lot here. What's a soul? Mortals' concept of a singular, discrete, unchanging "soul" is pretty off the mark.

Here's the deal: the mortal soul can be in several places at the same time and is more than one thing at a time. It dwindles and it grows. It can be given, taken, shared, burned. It can glow with light or throb with darkness. It is the essence of an individual. It is the cream floating atop the milk of your fleshy existence. It partakes of nature and supernature.

William, for your "game" purposes in this chapter, whenever you say "soul," I think you should be talking about that idea as it manifests for an individual. It's a convenient (if fuzzy, vague, and limited) shorthand—much like any concept that magic touches upon. It's an imprecise effort by mortals to sum up something more vast and complicated than they can understand with a simple word.

And Then Our Eyes Met

Accidental eye contact is the stuff of good soulgazes. So how do you make it happen in *your* game? Do you, both the GM and players, want it to be a "story-driven" event or a "this could be fun, let's see what happens" event? In either case, accidental eye contact should be dirt-simple.

For story-driven soulgazes—where it just seems like it's the right moment for one to happen—GMs should consider compelling a wizard's wizardly aspects; if the PC in question isn't the wizard, compel an aspect that might drive the character to hesitate in looking away. If the player accepts the compel—bam! The soulgaze happens, and the player gets some extra fate points.

If there's no strong story reason for the eye contact to happen, but it would be fun if it did, GMs have another option (though compels are still a great, simple way to drive things even in this case): make a skill roll out of it. A number of skills are appropriate here, but Discipline is a good fallback; it represents concentration, and one certainly has to be *mindful* to avoid accidental contact. If a player makes an argument for using another skill (e.g., Alertness represents reaction time), that works just as well. The GM should set a difficulty that seems appropriate—lower if she doesn't mind it not happening, higher (but not unattainable) if it's something she'd like to see happen. In this case, failure means the character makes eye contact. As always, no fair calling for a skill roll if a compel has already come onto the table; it's one or the other, not both.

It's also possible that eye contact may not be entirely accidental, at least for one party. If someone's trying to trick a wizard (or vice-versa) into a soulgaze, that's a straight-up contest of skills—the tricker's Deceit against the trickee's Empathy, perhaps—with the trick working on a tie or better (it's a maneuver). This method works best when the PC is the one doing the trickery, but particularly sneaky NPCs (like the city's big mafia boss) may try it on occasion, too.

MY HAND GOT BETTER. YOU DON'T HAVE TO KEEP BRINGING IT UP! HONEST!

Hexing

Mortal spellcasters and technology just don't get along. When the spells start flying, the tech starts frying.

This effect is called **hexing** and it's a basic thing that nearly every practitioner of the arts must contend with when living in the modern world. Here, we'll talk about what causes hexing, and how to make it work for (and against) you in your game.

First up: *why* does hexing happen for a mortal spellcaster? Why don't the immortal creatures of the Nevernever cause city-wide blackouts whenever they go for a jog around Chicago?

When it comes down to it, magic is a powerful force that can be directed like a laser in the hands of an *unconflicted* being. Creatures from the Nevernever usually fit this bill. Their nature and their will are in unity—in other words, they don't have a "free will" or consciousness that's separate from their nature. Look at Mab, the Faerie Queen of the Winter Court: she is who she is, through and through. If Mab turns you into a newt, she's doing that because her nature dictates that she turns you into a newt, and she has no doubts about it.

I don't understand mortal "free will" all that much. Doesn't make any sense.

On the other hand, look at a mortal spellcaster—he has his nature as a human being, and he also has free will. These things are sometimes at odds. He has mixed emotions and doubts and so forth.

When he throws magic around, he has to have 99.9% of his mind in line with what he's doing—he has to *believe* that he can do it, through and through—but it's not perfect. Unlike the unconflicted beings of the Nevernever, a mortal spellcaster has pesky things like self-doubt, late rent, emotions, a twitch in that hand that got burned by a flamethrower—you know, the usual cornucopia of errant thoughts that plague normal folks. So that leaves us with a tiny fraction of his mind not entirely on the task at hand, and that means there's a smidge of magic that's not being guided by his will. Not to mention that a practitioner is always at least a little magically active, so even when spellcraft isn't at work, particularly powerful emotions can call up a modicum of magical energy without the guy realizing it—or having much control over it.

However it happens, that mote of uncontrolled magic ends up "leaking" out of the spellcaster, and somehow gets inside of advanced technology and screws it up. That's why the hexing effect happens for mortal spellcasters—they aren't perfectly unconflicted, so stuff shorts out. The more delicate the tech, the more likely a wizard's mere presence will muck up its works.

Part of what plays into the likelihood that spellcraft will short out technology accidentally is, simply, power. Consider the 0.1% concept from earlier. If we're talking about just a small amount of power going through the "conduit" of the spellcaster (say, a weak ectomancer), 0.1% of it isn't very much at all—barely enough to give a toaster a hiccup. But higher up the scale (say, a White Council wizard), the "oomph" is definitely there to give even non-electric machinery some trouble. However, this is mitigated somewhat, since higher power in a spellcaster usually dovetails with higher efficiency due to training—the mage's power is used more effectively, so less goes to waste, and thus less stray magic leaks out into the world.

Yeah, But Why?

We could theorize all day as to why "stray magic" causes technology to fry. Perhaps the magical power coursing through the cells of a wizard affects the energy state of electrons in his vicinity? (This would definitely screw up any technology that includes a transistor or silicon chip.)

Maybe the root cause is magic's bending of probability. That's certainly supported by the facts; after all it's very improbable that when some lady points at an insolent minion, fire will leap from her hand and burn his face off. That's assuming probability enters into it at all. A scientist looking at this might say quantum mechanical effects rely on probability, and magic messes up the math.

Maybe it's more a question of what's going on in the back of the caster's mind and how he was raised. If he believes something technological is complex, then maybe that's where his subconscious sends those stray bits of magic first. This would certainly explain why some wizards can get along with 1950's era technology, while others need to stay closer to the beginning of the Twentieth Century in order to get anything to work reliably.

Or maybe it's just a case of technology being too new and magic attacking the thing that's newest, most different, and least rooted in the collective mind of man. After all, a computer is a pretty new concept to someone who's been running around for several hundred years. The *idea* of computers is not as powerful as, say, the idea of a simple combustion engine and so on, because it's not as old—it hasn't had the chance to accrete "significance." So maybe the strength of the conceptual reality resists the stray magic and keeps older technology safe.

Butters certainly has a few theories. Something about electro-magnetism gone wild.

Considering that magic is a force guided by belief, there's definitely at least some of that playing into what technology a wizard or other practitioner will short out when he blows a gasket. Stray magic is very likely "spun" by a practitioner's core beliefs. For many mages, you could fairly say that, while their spells are defined by what they believe *will* happen, the side effects are what they *don't* believe will happen. So, if they don't trust cars, phones, or elevators, their stray magic tends to reinforce that mistrust.

Not that many of them would agree with you. Still, the perspective does have some merit...

In the end, nobody really knows for certain what causes hexing—just that it happens, and usually in the most inconvenient of ways.

How it Works

We know that hexing happens in two main ways: *purposefully*, by the focused application of the spellcaster's will, and *accidentally*, either as a side-effect of spellcasting or from a burst of strong emotion on the part of a practitioner. The accidental case is unique to mortal spellcasters. Most magic-capable creatures of the Nevernever don't have unintentional side-effects on technology; they can use their talent to deliberately affect technology if they want to, but it's pretty much beneath their notice.

Accidental hexing is handled as a function of compels, usually of the wizard's high concept (or any appropriately emotional aspect)—something gets hexed, it puts the wizard in a bind, and that means the wizard's player gets some fate points. Otherwise, you can just describe it as colorful special effects—the lights spark, the radio picks up static, and so on. You don't need to worry about any other fiddly bits for this, really—just keep it in mind as something that can happen whenever the wizard has a sudden emotional reaction or is distracted or under stress.

All I know is that this effect doesn't allow me to have a DVD player for very long. That ticks me off.

Remember, if the GM offers the compel and the player buys it off, she shouldn't push it. Because the player bought out of the compel, the hexing *doesn't happen*, or the fact that the hexing occurs doesn't inconvenience the wizard in the proposed way.

Purposeful (or *deliberate*) *hexing* is resolved as an evocation effect (page 249), though any practitioner can do it—even ones who don't normally have access to the Evocation power. Any "stray" mortal magic messes up technology, even if the spellcaster isn't adept at channeling other magical energy directly. For more details on how to resolve this, see "*Deliberate Hexing*" in *Spellcasting* (page 258). That section also contains guidelines on how to appropriately scale a hexing-related compel when you narrate it.

Thresholds

By this definition, magical circles could be considered thresholds, but I don't think you really need to worry about that for the purposes of the game.

Commonly, the word **threshold** is used to describe the barrier that is formed around a home by the simple act of people living in it and regarding it as a place of safety, shelter, and family. The stronger the sense of "home," the greater the threshold. (Unfortunately, inviting someone in dispels its protective benefits.)

Building a strong threshold is difficult. Spellcasters can (and often need to) build theirs up with a series of wards, but there's no real substitute for "organically" grown ones that come naturally from the ideas of shelter, privacy, family, sanctity, and so on. In short, without a strong sense of *home*, thresholds are pretty flimsy. Bachelors have a hard time making strong thresholds (it's a pity certain wizards aren't very good at long-term relationships), and public spaces—even those with private compartments, like corporate offices or hotel rooms—simply cannot naturally grow thresholds.

Seriously, Billy, how many times are we going to come back to this?

But other things serve as thresholds as well. In the broadest sense, the term "threshold" may be given to any metaphysical barrier that impedes or blocks supernatural power from passing from point A to point B. A significant source of running water is a prime example, as it "shorts out" magical energies that try to cross over or through it. Thresholds can even be conceptual: the transition from night to day has a weakening effect on magic precisely because it is a sort of threshold.

Some beings—especially those of pure spirit—cannot cross a threshold, since they're usually using their magical power to hold their material world body together. If they cross a threshold without counteracting it, they just… *melt*. Some powerful creatures (such as demons) manage to get around this with a physical manifestation that they aren't personally maintaining. Even so, when an entity crosses a threshold in a mystically manufactured body, most of the entity's power goes toward holding it all together, limiting it to what its body can physically do.

Spellcasters, by dint of having supernatural powers, are affected by thresholds to some degree. Being fleshy sorts that have a place in our reality, they lack many weaknesses of pure spirit beings (i.e., crossing a threshold doesn't make the wizard melt back into the Nevernever). All the same, a wizard crossing a threshold uninvited leaves a large amount of his supernatural power at the door—not all of it, but certainly enough to make him think twice. Even a spell that tries to cross a threshold may be diminished.

How it Works

A threshold can operate in four different modes: as a block, a target, a suppressor, or a source of harm.

As a block: In the most basic form, a threshold acts as a free-standing block (page 210) that usually doesn't need to be maintained by a character. The threshold has a **strength** level (adjective difficulty as determined below) that opposes any affected supernatural actions. As a block, it sets a minimum difficulty level for the success of those actions.

As a target: Some creatures affected by the block will be unable to do anything to bypass it or weaken it. Other more powerful creatures may be able to assail a threshold (usually only an artificially created one) or tear it down. In such a case, the threshold's strength may be treated as a stress track (one box per level, with consequences a possibility). The threshold's strength drops as it takes stress hits.

As a suppressor: Many spell effects and some supernatural abilities will erode or completely disappear if they are carried across a threshold, unless specially exempted (such as by invitation). In this case, all affected abilities and spell effects lose a number of shifts of effectiveness equal to the strength of the threshold. If the spell affected has multiple parts to it, how the

shifts are spread around may be determined (and changed) on a case-by-case basis as decided by the GM (though this should be done with plenty of input from the affected player). In the case of attack abilities, this most often manifests as a reduction of the damage bonus provided, acting as a penalty to the actual attack roll only after the damage bonus has been reduced to zero. If it isn't clear how to "reduce" an ability, then these reduction shifts might be spent on improving opposing effects and efforts.

As a source of harm: Creatures of pure spirit and other such entities are particularly vulnerable to crossing thresholds. They may actually take damage from crossing one, facing an attack from the threshold's strength during every exchange. The GM may choose either to consider the threshold's attack to be equal to its strength, or to roll and treat the strength as an attack skill. Few creatures manage to hang around long in the face of such conditions, especially when their defensive abilities offer no protection whatsoever against this attack. Depending on the nature of the vulnerability, they may end up rolling a Mediocre default in defense against the attack. While some might be allowed to use a Conviction defense, even weaker thresholds will force such a creature to retreat or dissolve, if given enough time.

Determining Strength

Most thresholds or other things that ground out magical energy (like a source of running water) have a base strength of Fair (+2). Most public places or places used primarily for the conducting of business have a strength of Mediocre (+0). Sanctified or consecrated grounds (such as places of worship) are an exception to this, carrying a base threshold strength of Good (+3) even if they are used by the public, because of the energies of faith that are directed into them.

From these guidelines, you can further modify the strength of the threshold depending on the circumstances of the location in question. *Running the Game* has suggestions about modifying difficulties (page 311); basically, every mitigating or contributing circumstance should add or subtract 2 from this base total. In the case of thresholds, the circumstances you're looking for are things that make them "more of" or "less of" what they are.

So a home where a whole family lives has a stronger threshold than one where a bachelor lives; this makes it "more" home-like, so the strength is at a base of Great (+4). A manse that houses a whole family, has been with the same family for generations, and has been happily occupied by the current residents for most of their lives has a deep sense of "lived-in" energy, so the threshold strength there would be Legendary (+8)—most Nevernever nasties would need assistance to enter under their own power.

Likewise, a home mostly occupied by transients, or one in which the residents spend almost no time, barely qualifies as a home at all; it would have a Mediocre (+0) threshold and require other supernatural protection against incursion.



That looks like Victor Sells' lakehouse, as seen through my Sight.

Yeah, it's meant to be!

Thankfully no threshold there to speak of.

Example: *Evan Montrose and company are directing a group of people they rescued from an angry spirit into a cathedral in the middle of Baltimore called Our Lady of the Blessed Lily. It was previously established in the session that this cathedral is one of the city's oldest and that it pretty much forms the bedrock for the Catholic community in Baltimore. That's two circumstances that "enhance" its status as sacred ground, so the GM decides that it has a base threshold of Epic (+7)—4 levels up from Good (+3).*

Later, those same people try to take shelter in another church after Our Lady of the Blessed Lily is bombed by the spirit's summoner (yeah, it was a really bad day for them). The only church they manage to find is very new and located in a strip mall; the GM decides that this diminishes it as sacred ground, and rules that it only has a base threshold of Average (+1).

TRUST ME. THE IMPACT OF BREAKING A LAW IS REAL. AND I FIGHT IT EVERY DAY.

The Laws of Magic

The White Council's Wardens are the main law enforcement body of the supernatural world—at least as far as mortals go. For the Wardens, the Laws of Magic are sacrosanct. The Laws of Magic are clear, concise, and offer little in the way of "wiggle room"—at least in the views of some Wardens—but are very much written to communicate the *spirit of the law*, which is the mode in which they are enforced. (This stands in contrast to the other major body of supernatural legalese, the Unseelie Accords, where there is *no* spirit of the law—only the letter of it. See OW15.)

Here, we'll discuss what it actually means to break one of the Laws of Magic and look at each Law in depth, finding the grey areas in this code that separates black magic from white.

In practice, the Accords and the Laws are polar opposites. The Laws are clearly spelled out, but there are some grey areas where flexible standards of enforcement are seen. The Accords, meanwhile, are incredibly Byzantine, but absolutely iron-clad when enforced—often to a fault.

Breaking the Laws of Magic

While the Laws of Magic may seem more like a guide for living right as a spellcaster, they exist for a very serious, very palpable reason: whenever you make use of true black magic—using your talent in spellcraft in a way that breaks one of the Laws—you *change* yourself, darkening your soul.

Whenever you choose to break one of the Laws of Magic, you're crossing a very real line. By taking such an action, you've altered your self-image and your beliefs—the very basis of you—to be the sort of person who breaks that Law. Often, once you do that, there's no turning back. (Does white magic change you back once you've gone over the line? Maybe. See "*Is Redemption Possible?*" on page 246 for more.)

Are you the kind of person who reads thoughts, twists minds, and kills with magic? There are many who believe that if you cross that line even once, *you will be*. Inevitably. Forever.

In this way, the Laws aren't a legal entity at all; they're a set of magical principles that, when broken, lead to a fundamental change in the nature of the person who broke them. The White Council *also* enforces them as laws, but that's in addition to this fundamental change. You could say that the Laws exist as two separate concepts with 99% overlap—the Wardens of the White Council enforce one concept (law), while *reality* metaphysically enforces the other (nature).

Non-People Don't Count... Or Do They?

The White Council has made clear that their Laws don't apply to entities that aren't people. The Laws of Magic are strongly oriented on protecting the lives and rights of mortals. Creatures and folks that the Council might classify as "monsters" are fair game.

With that said, this is a rule of thumb where it's easy to stumble into the grey area, with things open to interpretation by the Warden on the scene—and given that Wardens have a lot of latitude regarding the whole "judge, jury, and executioner" bit, it's a grey area that you want to avoid stepping into as a spellcaster.

When Harry captured Toot-toot, a faerie, during the Storm Front case, he had to defend his actions to Warden Morgan. This suggests that the even-more-than-usually-hard-assed Morgan was inclined to look at Toot as a person, insofar as violating the Fourth Law goes. Harry made the case that he wasn't *enthralling* Toot-toot, since no compulsion was overriding Toot's ability to choose—the little faerie still could have said "no." Luckily, Harry made it past that encounter with Morgan with his head intact.

When a victim is involved (though some of the Laws are victimless), one standard for judgment is whether or not the victim has a *soul*. Most of the Laws amount to actions which violate the sanctity of life and break the bonds that tether a soul to a mortal being, whether by destroying the body or destroying the mind. This is certainly the most straightforward way of looking at things: first and foremost, if a soul is involved, the stakes are high and the Laws are sitting up and paying attention.

Beyond that standard, there's a fuzzy border dividing people from monsters. Faeries don't have souls, but they might still be seen as *people*, at least judging by Morgan's reaction to Harry and Toot. In game terms, one way to identify whether or not a creature might count as a person is to look at his refresh level (page 20). If it's positive—allowing the creature to exercise at least something like free will through the use of fate points—then there's a decent chance this creature might be seen as a person, even without a soul. That said, when dealing with a zero-or-less refresh *human*, he (arguably) still has a soul—so the Laws still apply, however far gone he might be.

Ultimately, this decision should be made to suit your own sensibilities for your own game. The best interpretation is the one you feel will work for you instinctively, the one that will generate the kinds of stories you're looking to tell.

Enforcement

The Laws are generally understood to apply only to humans when it comes to actions taken by the Wardens; however, the Laws aren't worded that way. This is deliberate vagueness; it gives the Wardens the "spirit of the law" latitude to investigate would-be warlocks before they go over the edge.

The attitude here is based on the same thinking that recognizes that serial killers often start their careers by torturing animals (which isn't, say, as illegal as doing the same to a person) before eventually moving up to humans.

In practice, this attitude gets mixed results, including the persecution of folks who aren't actually breaking any Laws or taking that short trip to Warlocktown. Still, a Warden has never actually executed someone for any kind of "pseudo-breaking" of the Laws (that we know of)—though they are fond of calling for in-depth investigations on the wizards in question. Once the Wardens start poking around, such investigations often find that a Law actually *has* been broken.

What Happens When You Break the Laws

In game terms, whenever your character crosses the line for the first time—breaking a Law that he has *not* broken before—he must immediately take a new **Lawbreaker ability**. A Lawbreaker ability is a supernatural power (page 158) that reduces your refresh by one—you should sit up and take notice here. (Remember, if a character's refresh ever drops to zero or below, he stops being a viable PC. He loses his free will, becoming a creature subservient to his nature, always acting in accordance with what he *is* rather than who he *could be*. Break enough of the Laws of Magic, and the cost of these abilities will eat you alive.)

Every Lawbreaker ability offers the same "benefits." You gain +1 on your skill rolls when using magic to break that Law again. If you're looking to dye your wool darker, the bonus increases by one if you have three or more Lawbreaker abilities in total. Similarly, if you break the *same* Law on three or more occasions, your bonus on that ability increases by one, increasing its refresh cost to –2.

The effects of being a Lawbreaker go beyond the simple application of these abilities, however. Once a character has chosen to cross the line and break a Law of Magic, that decision is a *part of him* however you look at it. Consider replacing or rephrasing one or more of his aspects to show this. Even without such an alteration, that choice to step a little bit into the world of black magic becomes an important lens to view the character's aspects through, and the GM and player *should* start pursuing story elements that bring the issue front and center.

Wizards and sorcerers usually have a really low refresh to begin with, don't they?

Yeah. The costs on the Lawbreaker abilities will have an impact pretty quick.

With great power comes great liability.

Some changes of aspect are mandatory. Once your character breaks a particular Law three times, you *must* replace one of his aspects with a new version that is twisted by the violation of that Law of Magic (it's a lot like taking an extreme consequence—which isn't coincidental; see page 205). Keep a running tally of the violations; for every three occasions a Law is broken, replace another different aspect until all of your character's aspects have been subverted by his descent into dark magic.

The Lawbreaker ability set is found in *Supernatural Powers*, page 182.

So Who's to Judge?

Who determines that a character has crossed the line? This is something that a gaming group should decide on as a policy for their specific game. Many groups will want the GM to be the arbiter of such things, and that's fine. Others might go for a majority consensus of the people at the table.

This kind of stuff haunts me. Thanks for rubbing salt in the wound, Billy.



Regardless of who has authority, one thing you'll want to discuss in advance—unless you're okay with breaking out into a debate in the middle of play—is whether or not "grey area" violations of the Laws of Magic count just as much as the black-and-white violations do. Our default assumption is that grey area violations are just as bad, forcing the acquisition of a Lawbreaker stunt. At the same time, we are happy to recommend a "getting off with a warning" stance on such things if you find it more entertaining to have characters skirting the edge.

One thing you may want to consider when thinking about whether or not a Law of Magic has been broken is the question of *intent*. Consider the inferno Harry set off at the masquerade ball during the Grave Peril case. He set out to destroy all of the vampires there, expecting to incinerate nothing but evil in that gathering; but human bodies were found afterwards. Sure, they were *probably* already dead at the hands of the Red Court—but were they, for certain?

Whether or not the Wardens would call it a violation of the First Law, does Harry's fire break that Law for the purposes of Harry's soul (and thus, would it affect his stunts and aspects), since Harry did not *intend* to kill anyone other than a murderous bunch of Red Court vampires? The answer can, and indeed *should*, be different from game to game, from group to group. As such, we don't have an official answer to this question either way.

It comes down to this: how much intent matters is up to *you*.

Breaking Laws Prior to Play

It's certainly possible to come up with a character concept based on someone who broke a Law of Magic prior to the beginning of play. Take the appropriate Lawbreaker ability and explain why the Wardens haven't come along and done their vorpal best to snicker-snack your head from your shoulders (starting out under the Doom of Damocles is one way to do that). Any Lawbreaker ability taken during character creation will knock off its usual refresh cost, like any other stunt. Take care to avoid creating a character who cannot be played!

The Doom of Damocles

The ostentatiously-named Doom of Damocles is the White Council's idea of "going easy" on someone who has broken one of the Laws of Magic and gotten caught in the act. The Doom, once pronounced upon an errant practitioner, operates as a probationary period with no specified end date and with a "one screw-up and you're dead" policy. It can only be granted as a reprieve from a death sentence by a vote of the Senior Council, the White Council's ruling body. A similar vote is required to lift the Doom.

Even if a good case of extenuating circumstances is placed before the Senior Council, the Doom is rarely exercised as an option. This is due to the Council's attitude that a death sentence is a surer, safer, and swifter way to get to the same result that will be happening *anyway*.

But that's not the whole of it. Even if there are some sympathetic ears on the Council, no one is allowed to stand under the Doom without a sponsor—and that sponsor's fate is linked to that of the Doomed. If the Doom ends, as it often can, with the death sentence carried out, the sentence applies to the sponsor as well. Some sponsors have been able to avoid this fate by acting preemptively to stop (i.e., kill) their Doomed apprentices at the first sign of risk, but often it's just better to stand back, ditch the idea of sponsorship, and let the blade fall. In recent memory, only Ebenezar McCoy and Harry Dresden (formerly under the Doom himself) have been brave—or stupid—enough to step up to the job.

Characters under the Doom of Damocles, whether as an offender or as a sponsor, should take the Doom as an aspect. It's certainly going to have a strong (even constant) effect on the character's life, and it would be a shame not to milk that for every fate point it's worth. (For one story idea centered on the Doom, see the note on redemption at the end of the discussion of the Laws—page 246.)

I wonder why there aren't more sponsorships. Do the other wizards LIKE this status quo?

I think it has more to do with them liking their heads attached to their necks. But I quite like being just a head at times!

The First Law

Never Take a Life.

Whenever magic is used to kill, some of the positive force of life that mankind is able to bring into the universe is truly destroyed—removed from the universal equation. Kill with magic, and the darker things inside and outside of creation grow just a bit stronger. Whether you're using magic directly to rip the life out of someone, summoning up force or flame to kill, or even murdering someone without magic and then using the energy created by the death to power a spell, you are breaking the First Law of Magic.

In First Law violations, even the grey areas are pretty bad. If you summon up a gust of wind to knock someone off a building, you definitely broke the First Law, even if it's "just" the fall that killed him.

This is one of the easiest laws to break by accident, and that's why the White Council is vigilant about keeping an eye out for any dangerous magical talents in the making. They may be an elitist, stodgy, Old World artifact of an organization, but in the end, it's often the intervention of the White Council that prevents someone's burgeoning pyrokinetic ability from burning down his house (and his family with it). Accidental or not, such an incident—if people die—might plant the seeds that could grow into another murder-warlock on the loose.

Luckily for the Wardens, it's easy to root out the offenders of this Law. Bodies are hard to hide (especially to investigators gifted with the Sight), and when magic is involved, murder can be even messier than usual. If the mortal authorities don't know what to make of a bizarrely mangled body, the Council *does*, and their ear is to the ground whenever an unusual case shows up at the morgue.

All the same, it's important to realize here that *fighting* is not the same as *killing*. Magic can be used carefully, indirectly, or subtly to affect a fight. Accidental deaths can happen, and in those cases killing with magic still counts as killing when it comes to the Lawbreaker stunt. The grey area exists on the political, enforcement side: if you kill by accident, your soul is still stained, but you might keep your head—albeit under the Doom of Damocles.

The Faerie Mothers seem to disagree that magic can destroy things and remove them from the universal equation; one of them mentioned Einstein to support this!

Before the Vampire War hit, it was pretty much a standard practice for the Wardens to come poking around whenever someone died strangely or suddenly in the general vicinity of a spellcaster. These days, with the Wardens stretched thin, that can be a lot rarer.



It's also important to remember the "with magic" part of the Law. This may seem like splitting hairs—and some people believe that it is—but the First Law doesn't apply if you, say, pull out a gun and shoot someone in the back of the head. There's a reason why the Wardens carry swords. Killing is part of their job description, but, as defenders of the Laws, the Wardens must never use magic as the means to that end.

In your game: Your group should discuss how important they want the First Law to be in play. Many roleplaying games have a fairly casual attitude towards characters using their special abilities to kill others—but that should *not* usually be the case in this game.

Since the Laws apply primarily to people, not monsters, First Law issues can be bypassed by focusing on bad guys who aren't *people*. Bathe a Black Court vampire in disintegrating flame and you'll get a pat on the head, not a sword to the neck. To come at it another way, if you're playing the sort of game where you don't have any spellcasters, you're also liable to be free and clear of the Laws.

If you're looking to make the First Law a part of your game, you could spend some time playing around in the grey areas here, kicking off a kind of supernatural legal thriller. For example, consider the Knights of the Courts of Faerie. They're mortal, but bound to the Courts; are they people, or has their office taken them out of that particular equation? And what about magical murders committed by them—do the Accords protect them from, at least, the *enforcement* of the Laws by the Wardens of the Council?

Ultimately, the GM needs to be careful and conscious about putting life-and-death *human* adversaries in front of the players. We certainly think a better game is had when this is the case, but that's because we like giving the First Law a strong and palpable presence in the game. A number of players might enjoy this as well, welcoming compels directed at, say, their Wizard of the White Council aspects to remind them that the First Law is an obstacle to their actions when a life is on the line.

Technically, the Laws of Magic only apply to mortal spellcasters. I haven't seen either of the Sidhe Knights at the meetings or ice cream socials.

But I think this could be a fertile ground for stories in someone's game. Like one of the Knights whacks a Council-allied mortal, and there's a movement inside the Council to apply the Laws to the situation, but the Accords get in the way...Sort of the reverse of what happened in the **DEATH MASKS** case.

Stars and stones, Billy, my life is complicated enough here without pulling more politics into it!

The Second Law

Never Transform Another.

The image of a witch turning someone into a newt is a popular and even amusing notion, but in the eyes of the White Council, it's a deadly serious matter—emphasis on *deadly*. The Council views such transformations as tantamount to murder, and they're pretty much right on the money for one simple reason: human minds like to live in human brains. Transform someone into a newt, and you've just tried to cram a human mind into a newt's brain. Such an effort (if you're even bothering to attempt it) usually ends in near-total destruction of the target's self. Even if you *could* manage such a feat, the psychological shock the victim undergoes is bad enough that it would make no actual difference.

Not to mention a lot of transformations are pretty ham-handed by necessity. Warlocks attempting such a change usually aren't well-versed in the ins and outs of human and animal biology, so they have to "fake it" with the new body, putting it together based on an intuitive understanding of how it all fits together. As a result, the new body doesn't have much of a shelf life once the sustaining magic gives out, as improvised organs rapidly fail.

To take it a step further, let's suppose you could manage creating the physiology of a tiger, but wanted to keep your target's brain intact—transforming him into a big-brained jungle cat. So how'd that work, exactly? Know of any successful human-brain-into-tiger-body transplantations in modern science? Very simply, it *doesn't* work—as bad as a spellcaster might be at creating a *known* different body type out of someone's flesh, creating an *unknown* body is even more trouble.

Suppose, however, that you're able to pull it off—build a designer body, keep the mind intact, and keep the mind from freaking out and ripping itself apart inside its brand-new noggin. To an extent, you should be congratulated: you've managed to avoid actually destroying someone in order to accomplish your goal. But you've still stuck this hapless soul inside a new body without an operator's manual. The learning curve for basic survival tasks can be pretty steep, and, without preparation or training, these tasks might not be mastered before they become absolutely crucial. In the end, your victim is in a bad way however it shakes out—death in a variety of sudden messy ways, or at best, life imprisonment in a body that is not his own.

In your game: Unless one of the players has a seriously strong desire to turn someone into a newt, the Second Law won't make much of an appearance in the game except in the hands of a bad guy. The Second Law isn't the sort of thing you can break accidentally, unlike the First. It takes careful planning and a significant amount of supernatural mojo (not to mention ritual time investment) to pull off such a thing.

As magical murder methods go, however, a Second Law violation is pretty "clean"—the body disappears, and who knows? Maybe that stray cat your victim got turned into gets put to sleep down at the pound (assuming the body doesn't just break down in a few days as it is)—though maybe it would be more entertaining to have it end up as some character's house pet. Still, it's a great twist to put on the usual "missing persons" case…

GMs should be careful about actually targeting such a spell at the PCs. The threat can certainly hang over their heads, but this is a lot like mind control. It rips away character ownership in a way that can feel pretty un-fun to a player. It's much better to go after someone the PCs *care about* to make a palpable Second Law threat.

Fake Flesh

Those looking for grey areas and loopholes will be quick to point out that *ectoplasm*—real-seeming stuff of the Nevernever given a temporary form and reality by magic—can be used to build something that works a lot like flesh (after all, the Red Court uses it to make their outer fleshmasks, and some practitioners use nothing *but* ectoplasm to create constructs to house summoned spirits). You can certainly pull off a number of nifty effects that way, so long as you're building on top of an otherwise unmodified human chassis. There are still some "operator's manual" difficulties that can come from such a change, but there are plenty of ways to get around that. Unfortunately, several of them involve turning over part of the transformed person's body functions over to a variety of nasty spirits to take care of autopilot duties. You run the risk of subverting the individual's will however you look at it—the most you'll manage is to shift the violation to another law (such as the Fourth).

Exceptions do exist—there are at least a few spellcasters out there who are adept at changing themselves into a form that's much smaller than a human. That said, I try not to think too hard about where they store their minds during such a transformation. The Nevernever, perhaps? And if that's the case, what can prey on their mind while it's there?

It's a little more esoteric than that, but also beside the point. Wizards are free to transform themselves under the Laws; it's the transformation of ***other people*** *that is at issue here.*

Point.

Shapeshifters

So why's transforming someone else so tough, when a number of supernatural creatures transform themselves into other forms with no trouble at all? Like many things from the case-files, that question has several answers.

First, a number of the creatures that you're thinking about—ghosts, demons, faeries, and others—are straight out of the Nevernever. Shapeshifting isn't much of a problem for these guys; their physical form is sort of optional to begin with, so reconfiguration is, relatively speaking, a breeze.

By and large, that leaves us with humans who are able to take on alternate forms of some sort, and usually some nasty bit of loophole is in effect. The cursed shapeshifters called loup-garou (OW94) change their shape—involuntarily—by getting possessed by a ravenous demonic spirit, and others such as the *hexen-wulf* (OW93) form a pact (usually brokered by someone with *real* power) with a kind of hunter-spirit that knows how to keep the human mind "safe" and can drive the new body according to the host's instincts. Sadly, the hunter-spirit's nature tends to start bleeding into the human's mind, whittling away its sense of self and replacing it by inches. In most of these cases, the transformation these people undergo *is* the result of someone else making it possible through a violation of the Second Law. Sure, their minds might not be destroyed by it—initially. But the long-term effects on their minds are still pretty toxic.

That leaves us with the margin case: *natural talents* like the guys and gals in the Alphas (OW92) and the change-the-mind-not-the-body lycanthropes (OW94). These folks have a natural gift for taking on another form without wrecking their own minds in the process. It's easy to see these as learned abilities—some shapeshifters may have the aptitude, but still need training to access it.

Regardless of the origin, "natural talents" break down into two kinds. When the body actually changes (as with straight-up werewolves like the Alphas), the new form usually hews close to nature, too—actual wolves, for example, instead of some super-steroidal mega-wolf like a *hexenwulf* or loup-garou. And while there's an initial learning curve to overcome with "piloting" the new body, it's very much a case of practice making perfect. Lycanthropes (and others like them) leave the body out of the equation entirely; they connect their minds with the nature of the beast without taking its form, but still benefit from some beastly attributes.

However you slice it, such natural talents never transform someone other than themselves, so the Second Law doesn't enter into it.

Though being a mega-wolf would be kinda cool. Mega-wolf assemble!

...And I'll form the head!

Wouldn't that be Bob?

The Third Law

Never Invade the Thoughts of Another.

The Third Law, though it might seem to be about a relatively harmless act, recognizes a single, simple principle: a violation of the *mind* is as much a crime as violation of the *body*—by some lights, it's worse.

To read someone else's thoughts, you have to cross one of the most fundamental borders in all of creation: the line that divides one person from another. When you break into someone else's mind to listen to his thoughts, you're disrupting the natural order of things. Think of the mind as a locked house and think of yourself as someone lacking a key. Sure, you might need to get in there for the very best of reasons, but once you've done it there's a picked lock, broken window, or busted hinge somewhere. In short, the act is always a violent intrusion, no matter how "gentle" you are with it.

Even beyond breaking the sanctity of another's thoughts, there are problems with what you *find* when you invade someone's mind. Knowledge is power, after all, and when you get inside someone's head, you take a position of profound power over him. And in this case, we're definitely talking the kind of power that corrupts. Not to mention, it's sort of the cognitive equivalent of seeing how sausage gets made—best left as something you don't see and don't think about too much.

Furthermore, there are plenty of secrets in the world that are meant to be kept. If there's an institutional reason behind the White Council's establishment of the Third Law, it's all about the secrets. Plenty of wizards keep secrets they don't want others hearing about, and *discovered* secrets have a way of getting out. Discover enough secrets, and you end up destroying a lot of what keeps the world a civilized place—and civilization is one of those little innovations that helps keep most of mankind safe from the darkness lurking around the edges.

Finally, reading someone's thoughts means you have to open your mind up to "receive" the signal. The problem here is that you can't always be sure what else you'll pick up when you do that. Who knows what sort of nastiness could be "broadcasting," hoping you'll pick them up? And what will happen to you when you do? (In game terms, reading someone's thoughts always makes you a viable target for mental attacks from both your victim and whatever supernatural nastiness might be in the area.)

In your game: While it's hard to break the Third Law accidentally, it's very easy to *want* to break it. A "justified" violation of the Third Law can shortcut plenty of mysteries if you rummage around in the minds of the suspects and find out what they know.

If a player is particularly committed to that course of action, and he understands what it means to break the Third Law, by all means allow him to do so. But if that happens, every effort should be made to throw the book at him—in as entertaining a way as possible. The moment a player decides to break a mystery by peeking inside the heads of those involved, the story stops being about that mystery—and starts being instead about that choice and its consequences. Go nuts with it! The secret is now out, but others' reactions to it may be worse than if it had come out naturally; everything starts proceeding towards greater chaos, right on the Lawbreaker's doorstep (and as that hits a high point, the Wardens can show up).

Of course, all of this assumes that the character chose the right folks to go thought-peeking with. It's a sad, sad day to discover that you've broken the Third Law to get what you thought would be the final, incriminating piece of evidence from a suspected killer—only to discover that his worst crime is thinking you're being a jerk.

I've been tempted before, it's true. But the nightmare scenario you're laying out here is a pretty good reminder why it's such a bad idea—beyond the whole slippery slope thing.

Do Soulgazes Break the Third Law?

On the surface of it, a soulgaze might look a lot like a violation of the Third Law. You've locked eyes with someone, and suddenly you're seeing all of their darkest, deepest thoughts—right?

Well, no. A soulgaze doesn't work that way. Remember first that the eyes are the windows to the soul, not to the mind. There's a very distinct difference—someone's soul is more about *who they are* and *who they could be* and less about *what they're thinking*. Even beyond this, you can't really control what you find out when you soulgaze someone, and what you *do* get is distorted by metaphor and strange imagery. Furthermore, all of it comes at a price—they get to see *you*, however dark or uncomfortably revealing that may be. When it comes down to it, reading someone's mind and looking at his soul are vastly different experiences, each with its own perils and risks—but only one of them brings the weight of the Laws down on your head.

...and who they've been, at that precise point in time. You mortals never stay the same for long. It's why your True Names have an expiration date.

Dead Brains

Some spells exist out there which let you relive the last few experiences of the recently dead. It's pretty nasty stuff to live through—while you don't (usually) die from shock or anything by doing it, it's an experience that no one enters into lightly (even if they have a shot at living through the last few moments of a White Court vampire's recent victim).

Is this a case of violating the Third Law? Not really; the dead person doesn't have any active, present thoughts for you to invade. The soul and the mind have moved on. You're essentially reading data from a dead hard drive. Not to mention, *last experience* is at least a little different from *current thoughts*.

However, doing this sort of thing on a regular basis might bring you close to violating the Fifth Law (page 241). *Caveat magus!*

Molly used one during the **White Night** case, right?

Yes.

Inhuman Thoughts

So, if the Laws of Magic are only supposed to apply to *humans*, why not run around and peer into the minds of all the *nonhuman* problems you're facing? Well, aside from the risk you'll run afoul of a Warden troubled by your "grey area" activities, there's not much stopping you—just give us a moment to call the pleasant brawny men with the white vans and straitjackets before you give it a try.

And frankly, you fleshy types barely have the faculties for that.

Faerie minds? Ha! If you're **extremely lucky**, it'll be rainbows. EXTREMELY. LUCKY.

The real problem is this: as a human spellcaster, you only really have the faculties for understanding human thoughts. Try to tap into the mind of a faerie and you could find yourself a few minutes later rocking in the corner and laughing at how everything is made of rainbows. It only gets worse, the nastier or more powerful your target is. Try to read the thoughts of a Red Court vampire and it's even odds that you'll shatter your psyche before you learn anything useful—assuming you can even understand whatever strange language their internal monologue is using. Try to read the thoughts of something ancient, and you'll probably find yourself a mind-wiped puppet in short order.

It's kind of a disappointment, in the end, for the would-be mind-reader. All the minds he might be *allowed* to read, he can't, because he doesn't speak the language, and all the minds he *isn't* allowed to read, he could—at the peril of breaking the Third Law.



The Fourth Law

Never Enthrall Another.

A close cousin of the Third, the Fourth Law goes beyond the simple invasion of another's mind to outright mastery over it. Here, *enthralling* is any effort made to change the natural inclinations, choices, and behaviors of another person. And due to its cousin Law, it's pretty easy to see the Fourth as an extension of the concepts there—a case of *more* equals *worse*.

It's easy to see someone who uses mind magic to turn a handful of free-thinking people into his sex slaves as a bad guy, but this is definitely one of those situations where the paving stones of good intentions are particularly slick. Much like the Third Law, the Fourth is an easy one to *want* to break for all the best of reasons. Plenty of people out in the world—possibly even your friends—make bad choices. Magic could give you the power to *change* those choices. Know people who are tearing their lives apart with drugs? A simple compulsion to make them afraid of touching the stuff could set them on the straight and narrow.

Of course, the problems here are substantial. You have to hit someone with some pretty vicious psychological trauma in order to change his mind enough to force a different course of behavior. Worse, you may not even realize you're doing it at the time. It might sound relatively harmless to implant an aversion to, say, fatty foods to help someone lose weight, but the effect is a lot like wrapping someone's legs in barbed wire in order to keep him from walking to the fridge.

Why so violent? A lot of it comes down to the principles of free will. The thing that makes people fundamentally human *is* free will; when you enthrall someone, overriding his will with your own, you've robbed him of his essential ability to be and act human. You're making a monster.

Hence what happens when a Black Court vampire gets a hold of someone and turns him into a Renfield. Granted, the vampire has no compunction about pushing its victim extra-hard, but really it's just a matter of degree.

This is where another of the Fourth Law's cousins—the Second—comes into play. Changing someone's behavior is a lot like changing someone's body. In both cases, the victim you're changing is a lot more complex than your understanding of it can manage. If there's one conceptual thread that runs particularly strongly through the first four Laws, it's that the mind is more or less equivalent to the body in terms of what should and should not be done with it. Like the body, the mind is vast and intricately complex. When you decide to take on that complexity with something as crude and simple as a compulsion, psychological trauma is inevitable. It's much like trying to fix a computer's motherboard with a hammer. Even if you get it working the way you want, chances are you've messed up something else pretty bad along the way, or opened it up to some worse consequence down the line.

In your game: Like the Third Law, the Fourth works nicely as a temptation to do something bad for all the right reasons. Interestingly, though, the Fourth is more effective as a source of story. While a violation of the Third Law can "wreck" a good mystery by drilling right into the thoughts of the suspects, the Fourth doesn't run as much of a risk there. If anything, it will muddle the situation rather than magically solve it (literally).

One good way to look at the Fourth Law (and others) in action is to treat it like a wish granted by a particularly mischievous genie. Compulsions created in violation of the Fourth Law should be kept simple—remember, this sort of mind magic is brute-force and ham-handed. And any simple request is ripe for misinterpretation and other loopholes in terms of how it gets carried out.

If someone's operating under a magically induced fear-based aversion to drugs, think about what sort of irrationality that might introduce into his life, especially if he has a hard time finding somewhere away from the drugs entirely. At every turn, there's something to be wordlessly, absurdly terrified of. Even if the magic was applied with a certain amount of finesse, this victim is on a short trip to some pretty crippling post-traumatic stress disorders. What sorts of things would such a person do to deal with that constant fear? And what sorts of nasty things might catch a taste of that fear and come looking for a snack? And even if the surface problem (the drugs) is solved, how does the underlying behavior (addictive personality) surface now?

Non-Spellcasting Enthrallment

As enforced, the Laws of Magic are applied where human victims are involved, but similarly, they're primarily applied where human *spellcasters* are the ones doing the deeds. This means that a White Court vampire laying her sex mojo on a tasty little morsel is not *technically* breaking the Fourth Law. This doesn't mean that the White Council has to like it, but usually this is a case where the Accords trump the Laws, at least as far as the politics and legal maneuverings are involved.

For the purposes of game rules, such powers are already assumed to have assessed the costs for holding such sway over another's mind. No Red Court vampire is going to get slapped with a Lawbreaker stunt for addicting someone to his narcotic saliva. To be frank, with all the other abilities that come along for the ride, he's already made himself inhuman enough.

Worse, like flushing a gaggle of phobophages out of the woodwork.

The Fifth Law

Never Reach Beyond the Borders of Life.

Necromancy has all sorts of applications, from keeping someone from crossing over death's door (or pulling him back from just stepping across the threshold), to reanimating a host of corpses as your bodyguards, waking the ghosts of the Civil War for one last assault, or wrapping ectoplasmic flesh around the bones of a dinosaur and taking it for a ride to save the city. It's all bad news, and most of it clearly breaks the Fifth Law.

This is all about preserving the natural order of things. To everything there is a season, right? When magic is used to confound death, the cosmos sits up and takes notice. The things out in the world that *want* the natural order disrupted are sure to come knocking and bring all the baggage that comes along for that ride; after all, when nature is confounded, the reality mortals call home gets just a bit weaker, and what's not to love about that?

The Fifth Law marks the beginning of the section of the Laws of Magic that addresses the mortal desire to confound the conditions of mortality itself. In a word, death sucks, even if it

Sue the Dinosaur might not be a violation, thanks to the humans-only technicality of the Laws, but Captain Luccio wasn't wrong when she called such an act an abomination.

But, still—it was **REALLY** cool.

is a part of the natural order—ironically, it's only *natural* to want to do whatever you can to avoid it. While the first four Laws essentially address the rights of the victim, the Fifth Law and the ones beyond it are basic "that's just wrong" principles.

Undeniably, death itself contains an incredible amount of power thanks to the significance of the ending of a life (the bigger the life, the more power it offers—dead wizards make powerful ghosts). But ultimately it's power that *belongs* to the dead. While it's true that, in general, "you can't take it with you," the power of your own death is something you *can* take with you into the afterlife. And when some upstart necromancer like Kravos (or worse, an experienced one like Kemmler) comes along to snag some or all of that power for himself, what does that mean for you, the dead guy? No one really knows for sure, but clearly when the big nasties of the supernatural world get all excited and positive about mortal spellcasters trying such a thing, it's *probably* a phenomenally bad idea. Call it a hunch.

And like breaking any other Law of Magic, breaking the Fifth puts a stain on your soul, changing you for the worse. This could be anything from taking on an exaggerated arrogance about your power over life and death (think of it as a medical doctor's God complex with the dial turned up to ~~eleven~~) to taking on the belief that death is a better state of things than life (with the side benefit that the more death you soak in, the more power you can draw from it). Necromancers' opinions on the power and value of death energies run the gamut of possibility. Unfortunately, they have proven to be some of the White Council's most dire and tenacious adversaries.

THIRTEEN.

Why don't you just make eleven more arrogant and make eleven be the top number and make that a little more arrogant?.

...THESE GO TO THIRTEEN.

In your game: Death is serious business—even if the PCs aren't the ones dropping, that doesn't mean that they won't see loved ones fall victim to the battle with the darkness. Such moments are ripe for temptation, and if the players are game for the consequences, don't fear an effort on their part to bring someone back from the dead. Even if they don't ultimately attempt it, such a plotline can raise some meaty themes to explore. But if they do attempt it and they succeed, the consequences should come into play in full force. Necromancy is hard to hide, and there will be plenty of forces both pro- and anti-White Council that will be set in motion by such an act. Have fun with it, but be ready for the characters involved to have a more personal close encounter with death in short order.

There can be plenty of grey-area matters to explore without getting into outright violations of the Fifth Law. (A few of Harry's actions during the Dead Beat case tread close.) Staying grey can be a much safer way to touch upon the themes of life and death without calling the Wardens down. Conversations with ghosts, peering into the last moments of the life of a corpse, and trying to explore the influences of the dead upon the Nevernever are all entertaining ways to go for an "I see dead people" vibe in your game in a *relatively* safe and (more importantly) magically legal way.

Dead Brains Part Two

Earlier, we talked about reliving the last moments of someone's life in order to get an idea of how she was killed. Was that a violation of the Fifth Law?

It certainly might be argued that way. By reaching into the echoes of that final experience, lifting the sensory information out of the victim's brain and circumstance, it could certainly be *phrased* as "reaching beyond the borders of life."

But for most purposes of the application of the Fifth Law, this is not a violation. Death itself is not being undone; at the end of the day, the victim in question remains an inanimate, inert corpse. No mind, no soul. If the victim's last experience was gotten at by making her sit up and have a conversation with the spellcaster, that *is* a case of violating the Fifth Law, not to mention pretty damn likely to be no use whatsoever. While you might be able to pull out enough information about the victim's last experience in order to relive it yourself, actual reanimated dead brain meat isn't likely to be very good at the whole *remembering* thing.

The Fifth Law and Ghosts

Another area that might seem ripe for Fifth Law violations would be reaching out to talk to the ghosts of the departed. But in the end, that's just the appearance of reaching beyond the borders of life in order to contact the dead. Ghosts aren't *actually* the dead themselves—they're imperfect echoes of a life that once was, creatures of ectoplasm and random spiritual energies that coalesced at the moment of a potent personality's passing. While ghosts may be evidence of the power of death in action, they are merely

a side effect of the process; as such they only touch on matters of true death tangentially. As a result, the Fifth Law doesn't even come close to this matter—a potential source of relief for many a nervous *ectomancer*.

So as long as you're just talking and interacting with ghosts, you're probably okay. Consuming ghosts for their power—that's a grey area.

The Sixth Law

Never Swim Against the Currents of Time.

So far in the casefiles, we've seen precious little of this Law in action, in great part because if someone *is* breaking it, he's doing so in a way that fits right into Harry Dresden's non-time-traveling investigations. Time travel is hard to spot or confirm if you aren't doing it yourself.

Still, it's clear that mucking about with time is another one of those "don't mess with the natural order" things. We just don't know what the consequences are likely to be, even though we can speculate. There are the classics, straight out of science fiction: paradoxes, traveling back in time to stop someone bad from coming into power, altering the course of human history for better or worse, questions about alternate universes, the "elasticity" of time, all of that. Due to the nature of this sort of magic, it's difficult to find concrete conclusions.

Similarly, we can reasonably anticipate what breaking this Law would do to the practitioner who broke it. We know what holding power over life and death can do to a necromancer; imagine the effect it would have on the personality of a *chronomancer* (for lack of a better term), who can skip right past killing and go straight for the "cause something to wink out of existence" trump card.

It's bad news, and it's the kind of dark cloud that has an even darker lining. How do you catch someone in the act of time travel? How do you enforce the Sixth Law in a way that's meaningful? How do you *prove* the crime so you can prosecute the criminal? Are the Wardens even equipped to take on a threat like this? And how much of our present day is already formed by the meddlesome acts of a wizard who thought he knew what he was doing? We've already talked about how the body and the mind are too complex to alter successfully, without trauma—now take that up several orders of magnitude to contemplate the complexity of time itself, and what a single, blundering human agent might do if he had the power to change its flow. What sorts of cracks might form in the universe at such an unnatural strain?

When it comes down to it, only a very small number of White Council members truly have the authority to do something about the Sixth Law (many more might have the *power*, but this is explicitly a case of *authority*). The Blackstaff, a quasi-secret agent of the Council, is empowered to break all seven of the Laws should he see fit (page 246), but when it comes right down to it he's essentially just a heavy brought in to fix the largest of problems by any means necessary. The real guardian of time is the Gatekeeper (OW150), the member of the Senior Council entrusted with watching over the Outer Gates (we'll talk more about those in the Seventh Law, page 244). As far as we know, he doesn't have the blanket authority to break the Laws of Magic that the Blackstaff enjoys, but he does seem to peer deep into the flow of time, foreseeing events that are yet to come—or even receiving communications from his future self. Such communications are *always* very indirect and unspecific. The Gatekeeper can't pass much real, factual information back from the future, assumedly because doing so would introduce a paradox, or at least cause events to unfold that *shouldn't*. All he can really do is subtly *nudge* people who might be able to do something about those future circumstances in the right direction, and then let things unfold without his guiding hand upon them. In the end, we have to pray that's enough.

Heck, it might not even be *possible* to do time travel via the magical arts. Maybe even the attempts to do so lead to really bad things.

In your game: Right now, we don't have a lot to go on as far as what it means to try to swim against the flow of time. This means, for the purposes of your own game, that you and the folks sitting at your table get to decide what time travel means and what sorts of problems it introduces.

Of course, the easiest decision is to avoid time travel capers entirely. And that's a pretty good one to make; a lot of games can get completely derailed by time travel if it's not a part of the core mission of the game. And the Sixth Law at least exists to discourage the characters from attempting it themselves, so you can

Do these sorts of actions by the Gatekeeper break the Sixth Law, or merely skirt it?

Well, they're probably just fine, since he's not "swimming against" the flow of time so much as observing it and warning about what he sees ahead. Regardless, it's clear he has the authority to do it, even if the rest of us might not.

This is all very DOCTOR WHO.

I CAUGHT A FEW OF THE NEW ONES. I STILL LIKE TOM BAKER BEST.

If anyone knows how the Outer Gates came to be in the first place, they're not talking.

Hey, Bob, thanks for giving me the quick run-down on what needed to be said here.

Sure thing! Uh...boss, are we going to be in trouble for sharing even this information with the world?

I'LL LOOK INTO IT. DISCREETLY.

still bring in a time-meddling wizard from the future (or the past) as an antagonist. If this is your comfort zone, try to keep time antics pretty simple. Even one single incidence of it can be a big spider's web—difficult to escape and liable to cause everything to shake about once you start to twitch.

But for some games it might be fun to move the Sixth Law front and center. Maybe your game is all about a secret elite team of wizards who answer only to the Gatekeeper, acting as his Time Wardens, charged with the job of taking on the threats that no one else can—all while operating under a prohibition against breaking the Sixth Law themselves. How do you fight fire with fire when you don't even have a match?

If you're looking for a grey area to explore, here's one: the Sixth Law prohibits swimming *against* the flow of time. What about swimming *with* it? It might be entirely kosher to jump forward in time (assuming you can figure out how to do it). But will your local Warden see it that way? And how badly will you want to head *back* once you get there? (Some information in the Proven Guilty case suggests that it's not a violation, but how you play it in your game is up to you.)

Whenever someone in your game wants to break this Law, they should do it with the group's consensus. Time travel has the power to wreck storylines more thoroughly than even a Third Law violation does, especially if you decide to bring in notions of alternate realities that need to be invented on the fly and in the moment. If *you're* the one looking to break the Sixth Law, you should be ready to step up and shoulder some of the responsibility to make this work without wrecking anyone else's fun.

Slowing Down, Speeding Up

If a wizard uses magic to speed time up or slow time down, is he swimming against the flow? *Probably* not. Most magic that works this way is achieved by messing around with perceptions, rather than actually laying hold of time itself and pressing the fast forward or slow-mo button. Mages have gotten short bursts of speed in the past by speeding up their own perceptions and then channeling some extra juice into their body to get it to move and react faster than usual. While that isn't a violation of the Sixth Law, it's definitely tough on the spellcaster who tries it—there's plenty of risk of fried synapses or physical trauma from pushing the body and brain too hard, too fast.

Ultimately, grabbing hold of the entire space-time continuum and trying to bend it to your will is probably in that "wizardly hubris" area.

The Seventh Law

Never Seek Knowledge and Power from Beyond the Outer Gates.

The universe is infinite, and contains within it multitudes. The world. The Nevernever. Hell, and perhaps even Heaven. Every being and thing within those bounds has its place, even if that place may be horrible beyond mention. But there are Things outside of this universe. To say that they hate the world would be to assume that we can even conceptualize their attitudes. It is more accurate to say that they are *antithetical* to the world. They do not want to destroy the universe any more than a ball you drop wants to fall—it is simply the outcome.

The Outer Gates are what keeps the world safe from such things, what locks them *outside*, and thus, such things are called *Outsiders*. They are so alien, so not of this reality, that few methods of assault stand a chance of giving them more than a moment's pause. Furthermore, the Outside's intentions are so dark, so dire, that the Seventh Law is the only one on the books that isn't conditioned upon *casting a spell*. Even doing research on the Outside and its inhabitants is *verboten*, let alone actually pulling power from there.

The Gates are never fully closed. It's through the tiniest of cracks that the darkest of things enter our world (like He Who Walks Behind, OW76). And when someone *does* pull power from there—forging a bond with a malevolent Outsider—one of those cracks widens, just a touch. The human race is lucky that few have ever managed such an effort for long, thanks to the efforts of the White Council and particularly zealous enforcement of the Seventh Law.

In your game: Actually drawing down power from beyond the Outer Gates, with full intention and knowledge about what that means, is a pretty villainous thing to do. Even if you aren't fully apprised of what you're doing, this is the kind of ink-black magic that will stain your soul right quick.

This doesn't mean that the Seventh Law can't be relevant for players. The biggest villains of Harry Dresden's cases seem to be tapped into some kind of Outsider mojo. While the Gatekeeper is our cosmic First Responder for matters involving the Outside, he has been known to tap others when things are particularly bad.

Characters can also stumble across the Seventh Law, thanks to the particulars of its wording: namely, the prohibition against even *researching* the Outside. A GM looking to put a particularly nasty choice in front of her players could easily "hide" a piece of knowledge within a forbidden tome of Outsider lore. And if a life is on the line, isn't it worth the risk? (The Outsiders of your game would certainly hope so.)

The Gatekeeper's Job Description

As much as the Gatekeeper watches over the flow of time and those who would meddle with it, these actions are really a side project, related but separate from his main duties (as you might guess from his title).

The Gatekeeper is our first line of defense against the Outsiders, performing perhaps the most important job in all of Creation. At the very least, he maintains the alarm spells that shriek when the Gates budge, spends the lion's share of his time walking the Nevernever looking for signs and portents, and perhaps even acts as an "off the books" emissary for the White Council with the major realms of the Nevernever. While the Merlin leads the White Council, to many supernatural creatures it's the Gatekeeper who truly speaks on the Council's behalf and commands the greatest respect.

Does Demon Summoning Break the Seventh Law?

The answer is: *usually* not. Compared to the Outsiders, most demons a wizard might summon are "locals," though some might have notions about how it would be a grand thing to hoof it on over to the Outer Gates and kick them open with a big welcoming party.

Demons are "locals" in the sense they're natives of the Nevernever, which is a part of our reality.

It's still risky. Many times, Outsiders have masqueraded as standard spirits and demons, so the White Council tends to frown on summoning demons, unless they are quite



confident in the wizard's competence and judgment (and how often does *that* happen, really?). As a rule of thumb, the Council sees it as a privilege—a *slim* privilege—allowed to its own members, but off-limits for the rest of the supernatural practitioners out there. So, even though demon summoning isn't directly in violation of the Seventh Law (or any other), the Wardens get real antsy about amateurs messing around with it. Even non-Outsider demons are dangerous in their own right.

Think of this like licensing on explosive compounds. If you know what you're doing, have a legitimate reason for their use (construction, demolition, mining, etc.), and you know how to be cautious, you can get them and you'll have official and limited (occasionally supervised) approval to use them. If, on the other hand, you're just some guy who likes storing a few kilos of plastique in his garage, the authorities will not be at all amused to find out about your hobby.

Is Redemption Possible?

Depending on the tone of your game, you may want Lawbreaking to be a point of no return, where any who break the Laws of Magic are thoroughly—and permanently!—stained by the violation. If your players are big angst addicts, it can definitely be a fun "descent into darkness" way to go.

But for many players, this is just *not* a fun way to go. For these people, it's wise to offer the possibility of real redemption, to turn back from the pull of Lawbreaking, to set dark things aside, to get a clean slate.

Consider this: what does it *take* to recover from transgressions against the Laws of Magic? *Is* there a "point of no return" at which point any redemption that doesn't end in the character's destruction just isn't possible? You'll need to answer these questions to your satisfaction in order to make it work for your game.

Purely from a rules standpoint, two things need to happen in order to walk a path of redemption: Lawbreaker stunts need to be removed, and the character aspects twisted by violating the Laws must be restored. This can happen in any order, usually as part of a milestone (page 88), but it definitely must be rooted in real honest effort by the character and story development along redemptive lines. For example, Harry started the Storm Front case under the Doom of Damocles, and it dogged him (in the form of Morgan) for the entire case. He'd been under the Doom since his teens. It took the resolution of Storm Front and some tough-but-right choices throughout the case to finally get free of the Doom. At that point it may also have been appropriate for Harry to set aside his Lawbreaker (First) stunt—he'd certainly paid his dues on that score.

Once a Lawbreaker stunt is removed, the character's refresh should increase by the appropriate amount, as in any other case of a stunt or power's removal. Such removals should be allowed only once per major milestone. Similarly, each "twisted" aspect should be front and center and get its own screen time as the character works against it and ultimately overcomes it.

In the end, redemption is possible, but it always should be the harder road to walk. Done right, it will also be the more rewarding.

The Blackstaff

The Blackstaff is the nigh-secret office filled by an experienced member of the White Council (sometimes, but not usually, a member of the Senior Council). Alone out of all others, the Blackstaff is given leave to break *any* and *all* Laws of Magic in order to take down the Council's most dangerous enemies. No higher position of trust is accorded anyone in the White Council (though the Gatekeeper may come close). Unknown to many, the current Blackstaff is, not coincidentally, Harry Dresden's mentor and surrogate father-figure, Ebenezar McCoy.

But how the Blackstaff resists—or is protected from—becoming a Lawbreaker himself is a mystery.

Uh, Billy, it won't be nigh-secret anymore if you publish that Ebenezar's the Blackstaff. Take this out in the next draft.


- CHAPTER THIRTEEN -
Spellcasting
JR
'07

The Art of the Spell

Billy, as I read through this chapter, you don't really mention other spellcasters besides wizards.

Most of this would hold true for sorcerers and other spellcasters, you know.

Yeah, that's mainly because we have the most data on you wizardly types! But really, you could swap in the more general "spellcaster" or "practitioner" almost every time we say "wizard." Ditto "sorcerer" and so on. The point is that this lingo shouldn't imply "this stuff is **ONLY** possible for wizards."

Now, we're finally down to the nitty-gritty—you know what it's like to be a wizard, you know what basic tools are at your disposal, and you know what things you'll have to deal with in the supernatural world. Most importantly, you know what *not* to do with your magic, and the potential penalties associated with doing them.

It is time to learn about *spellcraft*.

While there are many different systems of magic in use, certain rules underlie almost all methodologies understood by the White Council. For instance, needing a token from a particular target in order to focus certain magic against it holds true in almost every school of spell-slinging, though the particular ritual or the type of token used can vary widely.

Some terms have come into general use so that practitioners of different paths can understand what others are talking about. Standardization of terminology is largely due to the White Council, who have had to develop ways of coping with problems of communication across cultural lines. If you have to compare skills and spells in order to root out a Black Court infestation, you need to explain to your allies what you can do, understand what they can do, and work out a mutual plan that will—with luck—let you all survive the assault.

How Does it Work?

Basically, magic is the focus of will to create effect, often with trappings and tools to make it easier or direct it precisely. Physical trappings, while not always strictly necessary, help to focus the thoughts of the spellcaster—until they've reached a high level of experience, concentration, and power, most mortals have problems holding all the distinct elements completely in their minds.

Spellcraft is different from innate powers, such as speaking with the dead, precognition, empathy, etc. Think of spellcraft as a toolset, rather than as a single tool. When crafting the spell you need for the job, you're accessing what you need from the toolset and giving it power from a wide variety of sources. An innate power, on the other hand, is a single tool used for only a small sub-set of tasks and it draws its power from a single source that never changes. It's the difference between a carpenter's workshop and a hammer.

There are various sources that a wizard can draw on to power his spells:

- **Himself.** Every wizard has a degree of personal strength—some more and some less—representing the strength of his belief in himself and the magic he can work. Typically, this is represented by the wizard's Conviction skill.
- **Willing creatures** such as spirits, demons, fae, or other magical creatures who can lend their power.
- **Unwilling magical creatures**; the deliberate sacrifice of humans or animals.
- **Objects that store power** that can be tapped for later use; items that are very potent in some way, like religious relics.
- **The environment**, drawn from natural sources such as the elements which make up reality (fire, air, earth, water) or actual raw power in nature (storms, earthquakes, volcanoes, etc.).
- **Outside reality.** This is invariably dark, corrupt, and likely to utterly taint and destroy the wizard using it; the White Council orders immediate execution for any wizard found tapping it.

Most spellcasters have some sort of spoken component to their magic—activating words, ritual chants, and so on. These words are always in a language that *isn't* their native one. If a wizard casts spells using words he commonly uses or hears in a context *other* than casting spells, there's too much risk of his magical power finding expression every single time he says something, potentially creating a nasty side-effect. Putting the spells in a different language acts as a form of mental insulation, making sure that he doesn't accidentally loose power at a target (or fry his own mind) every time he swears.

Harry, do you worry that your words reshape reality?

EVERY DAY.

Tools and Trappings

The tools and trappings of magic vary with the system of magic that the wizard is using. Someone who works with potions and magical items may have a lab full of strange toxins, mysterious things in jars, and mystical tomes of instructions, all propped up on shelves from Wal-Mart. A voodoo practitioner will have the usual stocks of graveyard dust, John-the-High-Conqueror root, harvested hair and nails, flour, rum, live chickens, a machete, and so on. A Native American wizard will use sage, peyote, totems, feathers, and other things appropriate to his tradition.

Generally speaking, a wizard's magic-related possessions usually include raw materials for use in rituals or for producing magical tools, items which are actually magic, and objects or clothing or furniture which the wizard uses simply because it fits his personal style. A traditional Japanese *onmyouji* will want the proper paper and ink for his *fuda* (written spells), the proper enchanted tools for exorcism, the proper silk clothing to wear, and the proper sort of house to live in. Some trappings are vital, some are helpful, and some just get the wizard in the right frame of mind.

Typically speaking, the arrangement of these trappings and tools during spellcasting is called a **construct**, a sort of "container" for holding and helping control the release of spell energies. This can refer to the physical objects and rituals incorporated into a spell, as well as simply the image that the wizard has in his mind at the time he casts the spell.

Construct can also refer to the body created from ectoplasm that entities of the Nevernever use when in the mortal world.

Wizards are not always rich. In fact, wizards are rarely rich, and those shelves from Wal-Mart can make all the difference when it comes to organizing important magical supplies. And all that money you save can be put toward other necessities, like paying off police fines.

Using Specializations

Specializations, whether the free ones that come with the spellcasting ability or the ones you get via the Refinement power (page 182), are used to increase the effective skill (Lore, Discipline, or Conviction) during casting. **Specializations can't be stacked;** if you have two "overlapping" specializations (possible with Thaumaturgy, at least) that boost the same skill for the same purpose, choose the bigger bonus of the two and use that. (If you want to stack another bonus on top of this, you need a focus item, page 278.)

Evocation

Evocation is the quick-and-dirty method of using power; it's basically the art of slinging magical energy around more-or-less directly. If the wizard has a high level of control, evocation can be efficient and deadly. If he can't control it, then it's inefficient, but still very possibly deadly—to himself and everyone around him.

...or because he thinks it's cool.

In evocation, you gather your power, then shove it into a temporary construct of will to control its direction and effect. This covers magic such as the simple point-and-blast (or, in the case of higher skill, point-and-laser). It is quicker but less certain than thaumaturgy, and it doesn't need any *physical* constructs to assist it (though certain tools—like staves, rods, and wands—can help direct the energy). If you try to draw too much power or can't focus sharply enough on your virtual construct, then the release of energy shatters the construct inside your mind (resulting in unconsciousness, if you're lucky) or breaks loose on the physical plane, expending more power and creating a much more dramatic effect than planned. This is why you don't want to use evocation to call fire inside an old house unless you're *good* at it. The arrival of a fire brigade tends to be very disruptive to arcane investigations.

A down-at-his-heels wizard may end up with a basement lab, an old bathrobe, a blasting rod, and a cool leather trenchcoat.

Not complaining.

While evocation doesn't actually require physical aids or focusing items, many evocators do use focusing tools for an added bit of assistance. This may range from a chalk line quickly drawn to help visualize a boundary, to a trusted sword used as the directing point for a stroke of lightning, to a blasting rod spelled to make fire easier to control once conjured. Wizardly purists may hold that the true evocator needs only his will, but actual practitioners in the field have a high regard for their skin and tend to err of the side of caution.

Inherent Limitations

Because of its quick and dirty nature, evocation has two practical limitations.

First, you can't use evocation to affect anything beyond your *line of sight*. It's hard enough to concentrate on holding the mental construct for the spell together; if you have to concentrate on a second spell to find your target, it's just too much. Therefore, you cannot attack a target that you see through scrying or some other effect. Also, magical energy can only travel a certain distance before you need a more permanent construct to direct it accurately, and that's the kind of thing you need thaumaturgy for.

The other limit is that anything you do with evocation has a *very short duration*, usually limited to an instant (in game terms, one round of combat). While it's possible to keep certain evocation effects working for a little while by continuing to feed them power, even this will only work for a limited time. Long-lasting magic is the province of thaumaturgy.

NOT NORMALLY, BUT COWL DID ATTACK ME IN UNDERTOWN DURING THE WHITE NIGHT CASE, AND THAT WAS – ARGUABLY – THROUGH TWO SCRYING DEVICES. BUT, HEY. THAT'S COWL FOR YOU.

How to Do It

1. Determine the effect you want to achieve (see "*What You Can Do With It*" below). This includes describing the **element** (such as one of the Classical elements of water, fire, air, earth, or spirit; see page 253 for more details) you want to use.
2. Describe the effect in terms of one of the following basic conflict actions: **attack**, **block**, **maneuver**, or **counterspell**.
3. Decide how many shifts of power you want to put into the spell. You take mental stress for calling up power—the minimum is one point of mental stress. The cost increases if you reach for power greater than your Conviction, inflicting additional mental stress equal to the difference (so a spell with power three higher than your Conviction would inflict 4 points of mental stress).
4. Make a Discipline roll to cast the spell. The difficulty is equal to the amount of power you've called on. The roll is modified by the presence of any **focus items** you may have, and whatever aspects you want to invoke.



HEY, BILLY, CAN YOU TAKE A STUNT OR CAST A SPELL OR MAKE AN ITEM OF SOME KIND THAT GIVES YOU ARMOR AGAINST THE MENTAL STRESS CAUSED BY CASTING A SPELL?

Good question! And no, you can't. Armor just doesn't help against stress you inflict on yourself.

If you meet or beat the difficulty, the spell is successful. If not, your margin of failure has to get soaked up. You can opt to take shifts of **backlash** (bad things happening to you, page 256) to get the spell to work as intended, or let it hit the environment as **fallout** (unintended consequences for your surroundings and the people and things in it, page 256) which will reduce the effectiveness of the spell.

What You Can Do With It

Evocation is the magic of conflicts. Its effects are ultimately very simple, and can only do one of a few things: attack, block, maneuver, or counterspell.

Attack

This is the most basic and straightforward use of evocation, and maybe the best known; the image of the wizard tossing around fire and lightning is deeply entrenched in popular culture.

The Discipline roll to control an attack spell *also* counts as the attack roll; to avoid the spell, the target can roll a defense roll as per the usual options from *Playing the Game* (page 200).

The shifts of power allocated to the spell may be split up as follows:

1 shift of power increases the Weapon rating by 1. So if you allocate 4 shifts of power to this, your spell is treated as a Weapon:4 attack.

> **Example:** *Harry Dresden is beset by a charging Red Court vampire intent on taking his fool head off. He's not really happy about that, so he chooses to blast it off the planet with a fire evocation.*
>
> *Harry has a Conviction of Superb (+5) and a Discipline of Good (+3). His player—Jim—decides he doesn't want to mess around with this thing too much, so he chooses to summon up 8 shifts of power for the spell. Harry has a power specialization in fire magic, so his Conviction is treated as Fantastic (+6) for the purposes of the spell. That means that casting this spell will give him a 3-stress mental hit—one stress for everything up to 6, and then two more to get to 8.*
>
> *The difficulty to cast the spell is Legendary (+8). That's high, but fortunately Harry's blasting rod gives him a +1 to control, so Jim starts by rolling his Discipline at Great (+4). He gets a +2, for a total of Fantastic (+6), and invokes Harry's* Wizard Private Eye *aspect to give him +2 more. This controls all the power necessary for the spell, and aims the spell at his target at +8.*
>
> *Harry yells "Fuego!" as he points his blasting rod, sending a column of flame at the vampire, an attack at Legendary rated at Weapon:8. The vampire rolls to defend against Harry's roll of Legendary and gets a Great (+4), which means the blast strikes home and inflicts a 12-stress hit on him (4 for the attack, 8 for the weapon value). The vampire's Inhuman Toughness reduces this to 11 stress, and the vampire takes a severe consequence of* Extra Crispy *and a 5-stress physical hit.*

Now here's an example I can get into!

2 shifts of power let you affect every target in one particular zone you can see (filling the zone with fire, for example, instead of shooting fire at one monster). You can go after more than one zone at a time by buying this effect multiple times, so four shifts of power allows you to affect all targets in two zones. You *can't* be selective when using this option; if you have friends in that zone, they're targets, too—the same is true if *you're* in that zone. Be careful not to melt your own face!

Should I include more actions, Harry?

Instead of attacking zones, you can attack individual targets by splitting up your shifts of power. So if you've controlled 5 shifts of power, you can attack one target with a power 3 attack (at Weapon:3) and one target with a power 2 attack (at Weapon:2). Since you can't make a power 0 attack, the power of the spell determines how many targets you can hit: at most, a power 3 spell can be split into three power 1 attacks.

The targeting result is also split up, and not necessarily in the same portions. If you rolled a Fantastic (+6) result to target your 5 shifts of power, you might split the power as detailed above, but make the Weapon:2 attack a Great (+4) for targeting and the Weapon:3 attack a Fair (+2).

This is essentially a **spray attack** (page 326) using magic instead of conventional weapons. "Mundane" spray attacks don't have to split up their Weapon ratings, but they're *much* less flexible than the wizardly equivalent.

Well... Yeah, you could use an evocation to push you along somehow, like a super-powerful gust of wind, but it would just push you there in a straight line since evocation is so direct. Things like walls would mess you up en route; you'd hit them at full speed. So, doable. But foolish.

Hey Billy, would you use a "block" effect to hold a target in place, sorta like Elaine did to me in the Summer Knight case?

Probably, yeah. The thing to remember with any "how would I" question is that there are probably multiple answers. You could model an entangle spell as a maneuver (the aspect used to slow you down), a block (against movement), or that special sub-type of a block, the grapple (page 211).

Intent precedes mechanics; figure out what you want to do first, then find a system concept that matches it.

Block

Shielding effects are another very common application of evocation; the next best thing to causing damage to others is avoiding it yourself. In game terms, this is a block action. Shifts of power on the spell can be allocated as follows:

1 shift of power adds 1 to the block strength of the block action. Three shifts of power create a block strength of Good (+3). Any attack that bypasses the block cancels it out.

Optionally, instead of block strength, you can opt to have the effect work as Armor or as a zone border instead. If you choose the Armor effect, the armor rating is equal to *half (rounded down) the shifts put into the spell*. The advantage to doing this is that the Armor effect only ends when the spell duration ends—the armor survives a bypassing attack.

1 shift of power adds 1 additional exchange of *persistence* (duration). Two shifts of power create a block that lasts for 3 exchanges total (allowing the shield to continue to work while you do other things—like throw fire back at the enemy). This won't prevent a block from getting cancelled by a bypassing attack.

2 shifts of power allow the effect to cover multiple allies within the same zone (typically the same zone the wizard occupies). Covering multiple zones requires 2 additional shifts per zone.

> **Example:** *Harry Dresden is fighting a spirit in the Nevernever called Agatha Hagglethorn, who is haunting the nursery at Cook County Hospital, sucking the life out of babies. During the fight, she charges at Harry, who uses spirit magic to raise a magical shield to deflect her. He wants a fairly powerful block, but he also wants to conserve his resources, so he decides on 5 shifts of power, which will give the block a Superb (+5) strength. He gets a lucky +3 on the Discipline roll—a roll of Fantastic (+6), so he easily controls the spell.*
>
> *Pointing one end of his staff at her, he chants the word, "Reflettum!" and a quarter dome of energy springs into being as she charges. Unfortunately, the spirit is quite powerful and in her native demesne (page 170); she rolls an attack at Epic (+7), beating both Harry's block and his normal defense. He takes a 2-shift hit as the shield falls apart, knocking him back to the ground.*

Molly is particularly good at this alternative approach.

Blocks are usually set up as a defense against damage—particularly if the wizard is especially focused on combat. But not all wizards are, and in such cases a blocking spell can be used as something other than a shield—an evocation-based veil, for example, is often done as a block, but what it blocks isn't damage, it's *perception* (for more, see Spirit on page 255).

A Block Is a Block Is a Block

Magic is an insanely flexible thing. Any wizard specializing in an element learns how to use it in a wide variety of defensive situations. Because of this, you shouldn't be too nitpicky when you're comparing the element used in a block to the type of attack—a water shield can block bullets just as well as a spirit shield can, just using a different methodology. Depending on how you describe a shield, other people at the table may come up with cool attacks that would be effective against it, but you should play this up for fun rather than trying to define a huge list of shield subtypes.

When you want to differentiate between shield types, assessments and declarations are your friend, typically done with Lore. For example, if you're attacking a wizard whose shield is described as deflecting objects away with kinetic force, you might use Lore to declare that it's weaker against pure forms of energy, like heat and light. This could give you a temporary aspect to tag to support a particular kind of attack or maneuver against that shield.

Maneuver

As with normal skills, evocation maneuvers cover a broad variety of potential effects, mainly geared toward creating a momentary advantage for you or removing one from your opponents. More often than not, this places a temporary aspect on a target or on the scene, or removes a temporary aspect from a target or from the scene.

Performing maneuvers is a little trickier than attacking and blocking. By default, pulling off most maneuvers requires 3 shifts of power, but if the target has an appropriate resisting skill rated higher than Good (+3), that skill total determines the required number of shifts.

Billy, about the snakes — I thought my Lore was just Good (+3)?
By this point in the casefiles, your Lore has improved. Did you even read your own advancement sidebar?

As with other effects, you can pay an additional shift to make the effect persistent at the rate of 1 shift per additional exchange.

Example: *Evan Montrose wants to make an impression on some local practitioners who are getting a bit out of hand. When he goes to meet them, he decides to whip up some special effects to make sure they know he means business.*

When he confronts them, he performs a wind evocation as a maneuver to send strong gusts of wind through the area to blow things around and keep people off balance. This is a maneuver on the scene, so the GM decides he needs the basic 3 shifts of power to pull it off. Evan decides to bring 6 shifts of power to make the winds last for an additional three exchanges, figuring he can use the distraction to his advantage if things get dicey.

He succeeds at performing the spell, and the GM places an aspect of Hideously Strong Winds *on the scene.*

Counterspell

If a wizard is in the presence of a magical effect, he can attempt to nullify it with the power of his will alone. Even though counterspells are an evocation effect, they can be used to disrupt thaumaturgy. While such an attempt may only be temporary, it can buy the wizard precious time.

Counterspelling is basically an attack against the energy of the spell itself—you summon up energy of your own to disrupt or redirect the energy holding the spell together. Mechanically, this is pretty straightforward. You need to equal or surpass the power of the effect you want to disrupt, and you roll it just like you would roll an attack spell.

The tricky part is sussing out precisely how much power the spell is using, so that you know at least how much power you need to bring. You can try to guess—but if you don't bring enough, the counterspell won't work; if you bring too much, you run the risk of not being able to control it all. Figuring this out requires an **assessment** action (which is a free action, so you can do it just before you intend to counterspell) using Lore.

Example: *Harry Dresden is battling Saluriel, a Denarian of considerable power, in the laundry room of a Marriott hotel alongside his ally and lover, Susan Rodriguez. Saluriel has unleashed a particularly wicked spell—a cloud of snakes that engulfs Susan and has her in a panic. She is tearing the biting snakes from her skin in a desperate attempt to rid herself of them. Harry knows she's going to rip herself apart if she keeps doing that, so he decides he has to try a counterspell.*

First Jim—Harry's player—must make a Lore roll to see if he can determine how much power Harry needs for the counterspell. The GM says that the difficulty of the Lore roll is Superb (+5), reasoning that it should be based on Saluriel's Discipline. Jim rolls Harry's Great (+4) Lore and succeeds, and the GM explains that he needs 5 shifts of power for the spell. His Conviction is Superb (+5), so he can safely summon that much power, and he gets the +2 he needs on his Discipline roll to control it. Poof! The snakes pop out of existence.

Billy, can you do Block evocations instead of rolling to defend? How about counter-spells?

As written, no—although your group could decide differently. But keep in mind that, when you forgo your defense roll, your attacker only has to overcome your blocking spell—no defense roll means no defense aside from that. If the block isn't broken, it persists until the end of the next exchange. And it would have to be an actual block; no use-as-armor option.

By contrast, I don't think counterspells can be done reactively, due to the assessment requirement.

Elements

One of the ways in which evocation effects are defined is by **elements**, basic aspects (no pun intended) of reality that have different affinities for certain types of effects. These associations are based on tradition and folk belief rather than on science, and exist mainly to help wizards focus their effects more clearly. If a wizard can think of a blast as "fire" rather than "the ramifications of thermonuclear force," he's more likely to pull it off successfully.

The most common elemental system within the White Council comes from medieval Europe: the "Classical" one, consisting of fire, air, earth, and water (modern wizards also include "spirit"). When a wizard casts an evocation, he chooses one of these elements to be the basis of the effect.

A Map of the World

Wizards with different ancient traditions may construct their evocations out of different elements than the traditional Western ones—Ancient Mai probably practices an evocation system that uses metal, water, wood, earth, fire, and spirit as its base elements, befitting her Chinese heritage.

If your wizard comes from a non-Classical tradition, you'll need to construct a basic idea of what each element does; look to the examples below for guidelines.

Do you REALLY want to model Ancient Mai's mind? Good luck to you. She's another tiny, scary lady in my life.



Air

Air is the element of motion and freedom, and most of its key effects are motion-based: powerful gales to knock over foes or throw objects around, the movement of objects to the wizard's hand, or shields of swirling air currents that push harm away.

On the nastier end, it's possible to make pockets of vacuum to suffocate or implode targets. It also can affect the quality of air around the wizard—keeping smoke clouds localized, purifying the air in a room, or even calling up fog to conceal an escape. Movement can involve fine manipulation, which is why air magic is often called upon to pick locks and pull apart devices. Also, air is the primary medium for the transfer of sound, allowing for the creation of distractions by throwing loud sounds around, or creating "bubbles" where sound doesn't travel for the purposes of privacy or stealth.

Maneuvers that rely on movement, like pushing and pulling stuff around, are the strong suit of air magic. Air magic is most commonly used to put aspects such as Buffeted, Dust in Eyes, and such on targets, as well as Hard to Maneuver on scenes.

I prefer "pure force" to "air" for these purposes, but that's just the way I roll.

Mommy, Where Does Lightning Come From?

So, suppose you want to make lightning or deal with lightning somehow in an evocation. Would you use air or earth? You could argue that air seems the most logical choice, but you could also argue that earth gives you access to electromagnetism, which would let you direct and divert electricity. So which is it?

The answer is both. Figuring out how to creatively apply your command of the elements is one of the most fun parts of being a spellcaster—while an earth wizard might not be able to just summon lightning from the air to strike someone down, he might be able to channel it up from the ground and out of his body. Thinking about the relationship of each element to a particular effect can often help you come up with good maneuvers and suggest what might happen with any backlash or fallout (page 256) that occurs.

Earth

Earth is the element of stability, gravity, and grounding. Ultimately, everything rests on the earth, and its practitioners take advantage of this fact by calling up protective walls of stone, shaking the ground underfoot, and keeping themselves stable regardless of the surrounding circumstances. Earth is also the element that governs magnetism; earth mages often use this to their advantage, strengthening or dampening magnetic fields to achieve various effects.

Earth's strong points are in doing damage to—or reinforcing—ordered structures like buildings. Earth can put aspects like Unsure Footing and Shaken on targets, and Weak Foundations or Tremors on scenes. It can also put strong gravitational effects on targets, flattening them directly or pinning them down with something like Three Times as Heavy.

Subtlety with fire is rare, but those who can combine the two take advantage of its purifying properties.

Fire

Fire is the element of consumption and destruction, and it is the first resort of those who wish to deal massive carnage to their foes. Besides the classic image of the fireball-throwing wizard, this element allows for a more subtle range of effects, allowing a wizard to apply or remove heat from an object or area and to melt small objects like locks or other barriers.

Fire maneuvers normally call upon the ubiquitous On Fire aspect, which can be placed on targets or scenes.

Water

Water is the element of entropy and change. Its chief power is changing the state of things, as water tends to do: eroding, dissolving, disrupting, decaying, dispersing, disintegrating. While many people wouldn't consider water to be a very damaging element, you have to think about the kind of insidious damage water does: dissolving stone, rusting metal, warping wood—even pummeling or slicing if it's a high-pressure jet of water. It can also flood, suffocate, assist in chemical reactions, and so on. Water is often lethal to many different kinds of machines, shorting them out or causing them to jam (like firearms). Plenty of dangerous substances—battery acid, quicksand, drain cleanser—have liquid properties that a water evocation might manipulate (perhaps with a little extra difficulty for using something unusual).

Wizards tend to use water maneuvers to break down matter in various ways. Water can place aspects like Drenched and Hard to Breathe (water strategically moved to suffocate) on a target, as well as Slick and Partly Dissolved on a scene.

Why don't water evocators short out their own magic? Isn't that running water?

I've often wondered that myself.

And I've tried to explain it to you, but you're the sort of wizard who just doesn't get magic that doesn't involve shoving a ton of fire or force at something.

Gets the job done. I'll have to ask Carlos one of these days.

Spirit

Spirit is the element of the soul, the purest expression of will. In a way, it's the most basic of the elements—the translation of the wizard's raw desire into energy—and its presence tends to transcend different traditions of magic, being a core element in every one. Spirit effects tend to manifest as raw kinetic force and light, allowing the wizard to create or snuff light in an area, summon shields of force, strike a foe with raw kinetic power, and even bend the energies around people and objects to make them appear invisible.

A special kind of block called a **veil** is the special province of spirit magic. Unlike a normal block, the power invested in a veil serves as the difficulty for using skills or other magic to detect anything that's concealed by the veil (see *Veils* on page 276 for a deeper treatment of the topic). Beyond that, spirit maneuvers tend to be oriented around light (Blinding Light on a scene or Lit Up for targeting someone), but kinetic strikes can also knock enemies off-balance and create physical havoc.

Depending on a wizard's temperament, he often tends to be good at the "blunt, direct" side of spirit evocations (force effects) or good at the "sensitive, subtle" side (veils and other soft effects). This is really true of *any* element, but it's particularly strongly expressed in the case of spirit—the element most closely tied to thought.

Spirit also covers mental magic, emotions, ghosts — that sort of stuff.

Most of that's beyond me, though—I'm all about the force effects end of things.

Duration with Evocation veils is largely a matter of GM judgment call. Personally I wouldn't go for "1 shift gets you one extra exchange" with a veil; I'd just let it hang around until something pierces it, or until the end of the scene. I see them simply as REALLY GOOD magical Stealth rolls.

Gathering Power

To do an evocation, your wizard must gather **power** for the spell. The stronger his belief in magic, the more powerful his magic can be; this is represented by your Conviction skill. Most of the time, this is all you'll have to go on—evocation is too quick and dirty to use other power sources the way a thaumaturgical spell can (page 267).

You can channel a number of shifts in power equal to your Conviction with a minimum of impact—just one point of mental stress.

Theoretically, you can call up as much power as you wish, but the dangers increase dramatically. Past the limit of your Conviction, that power starts to take a severe toll on your wizard's mind, forcing him to exhaustion. As stated above, if a wizard is casting a spell at all, he takes a minimum of one point of mental stress. That cost goes up if he reaches beyond his basic capacity.

Stuff like hellfire can be brought to bear pretty quickly for evocation.

We included that in Sponsored Magic. Check out the end of the chapter.

So, if you're willing to go insane, you can make a really big boom.

Every shift of power you summon past your Conviction costs one additional point of mental stress during casting; so a spell with a power rating three higher than your Conviction would inflict *four* points of mental stress when cast (one for summoning up to Conviction, plus one for each additional step on the ladder). Just like any other type of stress, this could force your wizard to take consequences in order to keep himself upright.

Of course, sometimes the wizard is willing to take the consequences up front, depending on the circumstances. However, this leaves some of the deepest parts of the wizard's psyche vulnerable; while it is definitely the key to the most powerful evocations, it will leave its mark indelibly. If someone has killed a wizard's friend, he might take an extreme consequence of Unshakable Vengeful Rage so he can make a horrifically powerful fire blast…but you can bet that rage will unbalance him in many future conflicts to come.

Gender can come into your choice of foci too. Elaine's foci are all rings and jewelry. My own have a sort of, um, "boyish" lack of subtlety.

Phallic, Harry! All of your tools are phallic! Just say it!

Keep in mind that doing this carelessly can be *dangerous*. Drawing in more power doesn't necessarily guarantee that you're going to be able to control that power (not to mention the problems the consequence itself will bring). Many an errant wizard has opened himself to his most primal feelings, only to be consumed by magic he could not control.

Controlling Power

Casting an evocation spell ultimately boils down to controlling the release of the magical power that the wizard gathers so that it takes the shape of the spell in his mind. For everything to go smoothly, his Discipline roll must match or exceed the number of power shifts that have been gathered. The Discipline roll also controls spell targeting and sets the difficulty for defending against it.

You get to make this roll only once, at the instant that the spell energy is released.

If you fail the Discipline roll, the excess shifts are released as uncontrolled power, which manifests as either backlash or fallout (see this page). Fortunately, you have a number of tools available to keep that from happening. You can invoke aspects to raise the Discipline roll and can also take backlash as mental or physical stress (and thus possibly incur consequences) to try to cover the margin of failure.

You guys, keep down the rampant sexism there. (What about your force rings, Harry? Eh? Eh?)

Focus Items

Finally, there are **focus items,** the most common tools of the evocator's trade. Most wizards rely on focus items to reduce the risks inherent to evocation. These vary widely in terms of what they can be, and they depend highly on the wizard's particular paradigm of magic. For example, Harry Dresden has a lot of the traditional, medieval English wizard thing going on, so he has a rune-carved staff and wand (blasting rod) as his primary focus items. A wizard with a Far Eastern bent might have prepared scrolls with mystical calligraphy on them. A wizard of a religious bent might brandish a symbol of his faith.

The main purpose of a focus item is to make it easier to control the release of energy in an evocation. In a way, it's a method to add extra control to the construct in the wizard's mind. If he can envision the energy traveling down his arm into a rod and the rod is an actual object, it's easier than if the construct is entirely mental.

Using a focus item may give you a +1 bonus either to Conviction (making it safer to summon one more shift of power) or Discipline (making it easier to control the spell) for a specific application. See "*Crafting*" on page 278 for more information about the types of bonuses focus item provide as well as how to build them.

Typically (and traditionally), a focus item is used only for one element. However, it is possible for a focus item to be more powerful, adding a bigger bonus or being useful for various types of evocation. A highly personal focus item may also be one of your aspects and could provide additional bonuses via invocation.

Backlash & Fallout

When your Discipline roll does not match the amount of power put into the spell, bad things happen. The excess energy goes wild, causing havoc.

There are basically two kinds of trouble: **backlash** and **fallout**. Backlash affects the wizard; fallout affects the environment or other nearby targets. Like everything else, backlash and fallout are measured in shifts—in this case, the difference between your failed Discipline roll and the gathered power. The worse the failure, the more the spell's energy goes haywire, and the worse the effects get.

You get to choose how much backlash you absorb, with the rest going to the GM as fallout.

Particularly self-sacrificing wizards may choose to take some or all the excess as backlash—especially if there are allies nearby who might bear the brunt of the fallout of the failed spell.

Any uncontrolled power taken as backlash remains a part of the spell and does not reduce its effect. Fallout is different: every shift of fallout reduces the effect of the spell.

Backlash means that the spell energies run through the wizard, causing injury or other problems. This manifests as shifts of stress, which could require the taking of consequences in the usual way. Fortunately, you can choose to take the backlash as *either* physical or mental stress (but not split between both), which means your wizard can keep his mental stress track open for more spellcasting if he needs to.

> **Example:** *Harry must cast a spell with a Superb (+5) control target without using incantations or focus items. Without these benefits, he fails the Discipline roll by 5. He doesn't want to hurt anyone around him or cause any unintended environmental effects, and he needs the spell to succeed in full, so he chooses to take a 5-stress physical backlash. He's already taken some physical stress during this scene, so he ends up having to take a moderate consequence of* Utterly Exhausted *in addition to a 1-stress physical hit. Ouch. But at least the spell is still cast at full power.*

Fallout means that the spell energies flow into the environment, causing unintended consequences. This can manifest in a number of different ways. The GM may place aspects on the environment or on targets that the wizard didn't intend to hit (like his friends and innocent bystanders), or she may assign stress and consequences directly. The GM is encouraged to think of the worst applications of Murphy's Law possible and enact them. Remember, the wizard was arrogant enough to try to control the forces of the universe—and failed. When fallout happens, it's the universe putting that wizard in his place, and it's the GM's job to take the universe's side. Greek tragedies have been written about this sort of thing.

As we hinted above, it should be noted that backlash is a kind of safety mechanism for the wizard—if he chooses to absorb it all himself, his spell should still go off as intended because he was willing to pay the extra cost. Fallout is another story entirely, because the wizard has just released the energy into the world and let it run wild. When determining the effect of the spell that caused the fallout, the GM should determine how the shifts of fallout behave.

Not Karrin. The other one. Lisa?

> **Example:** *Harry Dresden is trying to cast a spirit (force) attack of Epic (+7) difficulty, defined as a Weapon:5 attack against an entire zone containing two bad guys. But Harry mucks it up, rolling a Fair (+2) and missing the target by 5. He's drained of resources at this point—he's taken consequences, spent most of his fate points, and has both stress tracks at least partially full. Jim, his player, decides to let the five shifts go out as fallout and deal with a weaker spell.*
>
> *Because Harry lost 5 shifts to fallout, the GM rules that Harry's attack is only a single target Weapon:2 attack at Fair. The one opponent Harry is still able to target dodges that easily.*
>
> *As to the effect of the fallout, the GM rules that Harry blew out a support wall in the building, putting an aspect of* Crumbling Building *on the scene. Now, not only is he on his last legs in this fight, but he has to deal with the whole building falling down around him…*

Do you think maybe you could use that Evan Montrose guy as your example for all of the spectacular failures?

Hey, at least the building's not on fire.

Rote Spells

Over time, a wizard uses a particular evocation often enough that it settles into mental "muscle memory," and its use becomes reflexive. When this happens, the spell is considered to be a **rote spell**. Your wizard may know a number of evocation rotes equal to the numeric rating of his Lore skill. So, a wizard with Great (+4) Lore knows up to four evocation rotes.

A rote spell is defined as one specific application of evocation in a single element, such as a fire attack, a particular air maneuver, or a spirit block. It always manifests in exactly the same way each time, has the same power level, places the exact same aspect, etc. Any change in the parameters of the spell disqualifies it from being a rote.

The big benefit of knowing a rote spell is that you don't have to roll Discipline to control it. It's assumed that you can control the spell energy at a level equal to your Discipline score, allowing you to act as if you'd rolled a zero on the dice every time. You still need to make a Discipline roll to target the spell, however; there's just no chance of accidental failure. Focus items add their bonuses automatically if they are tied in to

I HATE IT WHEN YOU REDUCE MY INSECURITIES TO GAME MECHANICS.

Deliberate Hexing Table

Power Cost	Technology Potentially Affected
1	Highly sensitive, complex computerized technology—the sort that a good swift bump might break. Very new, cutting-edge technologies and prototypes.
2	Complex (or simple-but-sensitive) computerized tech. Specialized, new, and probably expensive technologies.
3	Simple electronic equipment. Desktop, laptop, other "household" computers. Most current, modern cars.
4	Conceptually complicated, more modern guns (automatic weapons, etc.). Most cars, including older cars from the last few decades. The exciting technologies 1967 had to offer.
5	Even cars without electronics under the hood start to have problems—if it was on the road starting in 1950, there may be some trouble, with a few notable exceptions. Some smaller firearms may be affected, though conceptually simple ones still work pretty well, at least for a time. Older automatic weapons may malfunction.
6	You can't wear a watch for long without killing it. Even the Model T looks a little scared when you get near it. Electricity is right out.
7	If it's from the Twentieth Century, it's probably broken. The late Nineteenth Century's tech is also prone to troubles. Simple guns may stop working at inopportune moments. Even steam-powered stuff may experience sudden failure.
8+	Nearly anything with moving parts from the Industrial Revolution (late-Eighteenth to early-Nineteenth Century) forward, and even some things further back than that. It's open season on technology.

the rote, but there's a caveat: if the wizard does the rote with the focus item, then that item is a requirement for the rote *every time* he wants to use it. (This is why Harry gets so nervous about entering combat without his staff and blasting rod—he loses the benefits of the rote spell and has to roll each spell as a normal evocation.) Aspect invocations and other such trickery may be used after the fact, just as if you had rolled a zero and then wanted to invoke something.

> **Example:** *Harry Dresden has his "Fuego!" spell as a rote. He can choose not to make a control roll when he attacks a single target with fire magic. His blasting rod is tied into the rote, giving him an effective Great (+4) Discipline controlling the spell. With his Conviction, he has no problem producing four shifts of power for the spell, so that's where he sets the power dial. Therefore, the rote spell is a Weapon:4 fire spell automatically.*

Finally, keep in mind that you can have a rote that's more powerful than you can control with a Discipline roll of zero, which would basically cause automatic fallout or backlash when used unless you can invoke some aspects to make up the difference. This is clearly not for the faint-hearted, but it might be useful as a sort of "last resort plan," making sure you can put the heavy damage out there in a moment of dire need.

Other Parameters

There are some uses of evocation and a few other considerations that don't fit into our discussions thus far. So here's "everything else."

Deliberate Hexing

While a spellcaster normally hexes technology as an accident of being a wizard (page 228), he can also do it *on purpose*, focusing his energies to disrupt electronics and other devices. This is significantly less taxing than performing other forms of evocation—you don't even need access to the Evocation power (page 180) to do it, so long as you are some sort of practitioner, because it doesn't require command of any particular element or force. In addition, the normal 1-stress cost for summoning power up to your Conviction is waived, giving you a "free shot" at most forms of technology.

Nearly any type of technological device, going all the way back to the Industrial Revolution, can be hexed if it has moving parts of some

kind. Generally speaking, the more complex the device, the easier it is to disrupt, so more modern technologies (especially computerized stuff) tend to succumb easily, while older technologies (non-electric stuff) are harder to sabotage. Use the table shown here as a guideline for the power requirements of a hexing spell.

The normal modifiers for attacking targets apply here—consider one device to be a single target. This means that if you want to disable a whole group's worth of guns, you'll have to pay extra shifts to disable all the guns in your zone, or bring enough power to split the effect among the guns, as per the rules for attacks on page 251.

Hexing cannot be used to manipulate technology—only destroy it. You cannot use hexing to do maneuvers unless destroying the device is precisely what justifies the maneuver. So if there's an advanced filtration system in a building keeping gas out of a room, you could hex the control panel to put the aspect Filled With Gas on the room, but you couldn't selectively control the gas flow in any way.

Very old wizards get a bonus to hexing simply from their age, which is why Harry can routinely drive a Volkswagon Beetle while some members of the Senior Council still have their sanctums decked out like it's 1599. This chart assumes that the wizard is around fifty years old or younger—as a guideline, set the "1 Power" category wherever the wizard would start finding the technology truly alien (so that special wizard who was actually born in 1599 could probably hex everything on the chart at 1 power).

Mundane Effects

Sometimes, you might want to produce an effect that doesn't really do anything but add color to a scene. The most common example of this is a light spell, which very seldom does anything but provide the fact that there is light to see by and then fades neatly into the background. Minor effects like these are usually assumed to be within the scope of evocation maneuvers; however, they rarely require a roll or cost any stress, especially when incorporating a focus like the wizard's pentacle or staff. You might consider them "pre-school magic"—what wizard apprentices would learn as their very first spells. Any minor effect like this can be cast without a roll and will last for a scene for free. At most, a fate point might be required if the minor effect counters a scene aspect that might be inconvenient.



Prolonging Spells

Sometimes, it behooves a wizard to maintain a spell effect for an indefinite length of time, especially when the effect is a block or maneuver. Normally, you'd assign shifts of power to make the spell persist longer than an exchange. However, this makes the lifespan of very powerful effects depressingly short.

Alternately, you can actively funnel more energy into an evocation to maintain it, but this takes up your standard action for the round. This is functionally equivalent to rolling another spell. Summon one shift of power per additional exchange you want the spell to last, and make another Discipline roll to control it. This takes up your action and deals mental stress as per the usual rules for a normal evocation; the advantage is that you don't have to sacrifice the efficacy of the original spell—it keeps the rating of the original roll. If successful, the spell effect stays active for that length of time.

Example: *Harry gets ambushed by SMG-wielding thugs and throws up his shield on short notice—neglecting to assign any shifts to duration—so he can make sure he survives the ambush in the first exchange.*

In the next exchange, Harry realizes he's going to need a long-term shield. He takes one point of mental stress and summons up a 4-shift effect, giving him four more potential rounds of shield protection he doesn't have to concentrate on. He rolls his Discipline and gets the Great he needs to prolong the spell. The shield will stay in place for this exchange and the next three exchanges after that.

So something like my "flickum bicus" spell is a "mundane effect" — it lights candles, but doesn't burn the house down.

Yep, that's about the size of it. But if you used it in a fight to gain advantage — that's when it counts as a "real" spell.

Property Damage Without Fallout

Often, a wizard will fling around spell energies that inevitably have an unintended side-effect on the surroundings, even if he's keeping the spell energies under control with solid Discipline rolls. To get specific, when you fling a gout of fire at a monster and *miss*, there's a solid chance that some part of the scenery will catch on fire. There's no fallout there as far as the system is concerned (page 256), but there *is* the real and present danger of fire on hand—you can look at the wizard's choice of element as an "ambient" scene aspect, potentially creating opportunities for compels or more easily justifying certain kinds of scene aspects.

It's the GM's job to decide whether or not this matters for a scene (and to make it cut both ways if it does). Look to the elements getting thrown around as guidelines and inspiration for what might happen, either to add an aspect to the scene or just a little extra chaos to the events as they unfold. It's probably best not to create the scene aspect right away (after all, the player did succeed on the Discipline roll), but waive the roll if someone wants to use it as justification to create a scene aspect later, such as, "He's been throwing around a lot of fire magic; can I kick this oil drum over and start a regular fire?"

Some thoughts for ways to damage property:

- Flames can catch on flammable materials and spread.
- Water can short out circuitry even when magic doesn't; ice can widen existing cracks and make surfaces slippery.
- Wind can knock loose objects around, obscure vision by kicking up clouds of dust or fog, or feed fresh oxygen into an existing fire.
- Tremors can damage the foundation of a building; magnetism can do all sorts of nasty things with metal objects and electronic systems.
- Force effects can crack supporting structures and knock things over; effects acting on the spirit world might attract the attention of minor spirits of the Nevernever, making things get a little creepier and unsettling.

William, I'm sure Harry could help you think up many more ways that magic can destroy property.

Shut up, Bob.

Redirecting Spell Energy

Sometimes, you might commit energy to an evocation, only to discover that circumstances warrant a different effect than the one you originally chose. This happens most often with blocks—you put up a shield of some sort that you're maintaining, only to find out that what you really need to do is attack or maneuver. It's true that you could simply cast another spell, but there are times when a wizard needs to economize his resources—like when a demon is about to eat his face.

In those circumstances, you have an option—you can reuse the spell energy from an effect you currently have active, spending the shifts on another evocation without having to roll another spell. This is subject to some limitations:

- The spell must have been maintained from a previous exchange into the current one.
- The spell must not have been used already for its original function in the current exchange.
- You must be able to describe how the energy could plausibly be redirected.

Presuming these things are the case, you can use the current power value of the spell to act as a different kind of spell. If the new kind of spell requires a roll for targeting (like with an attack or maneuver), you may roll Discipline. This immediately cancels out the previous effect, as the spell energy can no longer be used for that purpose.

Example: *Wardens Carlos Ramirez and Harry Dresden have been fighting with White Court vampires in an insane duel to the death gone horribly wrong. Ghouls have also crashed the party, throwing the entire fight into disarray. Carlos has had his water shield rote (page 293) up for most of the fight; its current strength is four shifts. He still has another exchange of maintenance.*

In the next exchange, the GM describes a ghoul advancing on the two of them, and it's Carlos' turn. JJ, Carlos' player, says, "Hey, so my water shield is entropic, right? It disintegrates whatever touches it? Can I just use it to intercept the nasty and chew him up, making it into an attack?"

JJ's explanation seems plausible, and Carlos hasn't used the shield to block this exchange. The GM considers this, and she says, "Okay, but obviously that's going to use the spell energy, so you'll be shieldless the rest of the exchange." JJ says he's fine with that; the GM tells him to roll his Discipline (because he's turning the block into an attack and needs a targeting roll), and allows him to attack the ghoul with a Weapon:4 water attack. He rolls incredibly well, and the GM describes the ghoul being utterly disintegrated as it smashes into the shield.



Thaumaturgy

Thaumaturgy is the safest, most reliable method of doing magic—pretty much the polar opposite of evocation. The primary differences between the two are matters of preparation, time, and mindset.

In evocation, you summon up your power, envision the result you desire, and attempt to control the energy on the fly. Because the construct is made up only from the caster's will and the elements are held solely as concepts in the caster's mind, evocation can achieve only simple effects, with a very good chance of something going wrong.

By contrast, thaumaturgy sets up the construct physically and allows the elements to act as a lens through which the wizard then focuses his power. Because the spellcaster doesn't have to concentrate to keep the construct in mind (it's right there in front of him), he creates a much stronger and more stable effect—meaning he can focus on achieving effects of much greater complexity and subtlety. He can also direct power into the spell gradually, making it far less likely that something will go awry.

Thaumaturgy also allows the wizard the luxury of drawing power from sources other than himself—such as bound spirits, forces of nature, or the assistance of others. Over time, the effects of thaumaturgy are more powerful than those of evocation. While a blast of fire may injure, a ritual curse can leave you and your offspring crippled for generations.

Most of the spells in traditional tomes, or the ones passed down through schools of sorcery, are basically thaumaturgy. They can be described in physical terms—if you follow the recipe of the spell correctly, feeding in the power that it requires, the spell/ritual will work. Particularly effective thaumaturgical rituals require elaborate physical preparations (such as rare items, multiple casters, unusual times of year, or outside influence such as storms) and may also require a minimal influx of power; this makes them usable by people who, otherwise, would never be regarded as wizards. This can be useful, or it can be very dangerous. (Sadly, it's usually both.)

Inherent Limitations

Thaumaturgy lets you make the most of time, preparation, and materials—without those, it just can't be done. Therefore, there are two primary practical limitations.

The first is a matter of *time*. Thaumaturgy is a slow art, with the fastest of spells taking a minute or more, and many taking much longer than that. Patience is necessary; speed is being traded for versatility and potency.

The second is a matter of *symbols*. In order to affect a target at great range (whether in physical distance or some other dimension), some sort of link must be established to that target via symbolic representations, the incorporation of recently-separated bits of the target (blood, hair, a family keepsake), and so on. Without these physical materials on hand to represent the target *in absentia*—as well as for anchoring the purpose of the spell to the ritual—a thaumaturgic spell simply has nowhere to go and nothing to do.

How to Do it

1. Determine the desired spell **effect**. This will determine the **complexity** of the spell in shifts.
2. If the complexity of the spell is equal to or less than your Lore, assume you have everything you need to cast the spell and you require no additional effort for *preparation*. If the complexity of the spell is greater than your Lore, your wizard must enter a preparation stage during which he researches the spell further, assembles the necessary components, acquires additional sources of power, and finishes the spell construct. You must make up the deficit between your Lore and the total complexity of the spell. There are multiple techniques for doing this at the table.
   - **Invoke aspects:** Every aspect you can invoke to narrate a part of preparation adds two shifts toward the deficit.
   - **Make declarations:** You can declare a mini-scene relevant to preparation, where you use a skill and create a temporary aspect to tag. When successful, this is worth two shifts toward the deficit. If the effort fails, the spell isn't automatically a bust, but no forward progress is made, either.
   - **Accept or inflict consequences:** For every consequence you are willing to take or inflict on others for the sake of preparation, add the value of the consequence in shifts toward the deficit: so, a mild consequence would add two shifts. (Blood sacrifice is a dark but very potent path many a black magic practitioner can take.)
   - **Skip a scene** – For every scene you can participate in during a session and choose to skip in favor of preparing the spell, you can add one shift toward the deficit.
3. When the complexity deficit is met, you can move into actually casting the ritual. The casting process is identical to the process for evocation. Choose an amount of power to funnel into the spell and roll Discipline to control that energy, with any uncontrolled shifts potentially becoming backlash or fallout. Unlike evocation, so long as you continue to make your Discipline rolls, you can continue to funnel power into the spell in successive rounds of casting. When the power in the spell equals the complexity, you've successfully cast it.

What You Can Do With it

Thaumaturgy carries an extremely broad range of effects under its banner: summoning and binding supernatural entities like spirits or demons, divination and detection, wards, curses, temporary and permanent enchantments on people and things…the list is potentially endless.

Fortunately, most of what thaumaturgy does can be broken down into some basic principles that make different spells relatively easy to parse out in game terms—namely, how to determine the complexity of the spell.

Thaumaturgy can:

- Solve improbable or impossible problems
- Create lasting changes in people and things
- Provide inaccessible knowledge
- Allow interaction with the supernatural
- Shape magical energies into physical forms

Below, we'll get into each of these in depth.

BILLY, ARE YOU REALLY SUGGESTING THE PLAYER JUST NOT PLAY FOR PART OF THE SESSION WITH THE "SKIP" OPTION ABOVE? THAT SOUNDS HORRIBLY DULL.

It's just an option, and if groups don't want to use it, they can just take it off the list. That said, it's a cool way for a player to say, "Hey, I'm gonna run out to the 'Spress and pick up some pizzas for us. Let's say I'm working on that spell while I'm gone." Or, heck, just as something to use when you need to hit the head. At any rate, this option isn't intended as a **PENALTY**—*it's meant to be an* **OPPORTUNITY**.

SO IT'S AN "OPPORTUNITY" TO MAKE ME GET THE PIZZA NEXT TIME. GOT IT.

Solve Improbable or Impossible Problems

The most general effect of thaumaturgy allows the wizard to do something that he wouldn't normally be able to do. In that sense, a ritual spell is a simple action on steroids. The wizard tries to accomplish something basic, but safely ignores any limitations that might thwart a normal person from trying to accomplish the same thing by mundane means. Prohibitions of time, distance, and personal effort mean absolutely nothing to the wizard armed with the appropriate ritual.

The best example of this principle is Harry Dresden's tracking spell. Technically speaking, it is possible to achieve what the tracking spell does by lots of investigation, figuring out the last known whereabouts of whoever he's trying to find, figuring out their normal hangouts, interviewing acquaintances—essentially, detective work that would call for an Investigation roll. Most of the time, though, Harry doesn't have the hours or days he'd need to travel around the city and do all that stuff. Either he's on a deadline or some other kind of pressure, or he just doesn't have the info to even start such a search. With magic, he doesn't have to worry about any of that.

In game terms, this type of spell is equivalent to a **simple action** when determining complexity (page 264). If a spell effect doesn't seem to fall easily into one of the other categories, go with this one.

Create Lasting Changes in People and Things

Many effects in thaumaturgy are transformative—they force a change of state in a person, entity, or object. This includes curses (which change a victim's fortunes for the worse) and mental binding (which makes a victim into the wizard's thrall). There are more subtle examples as well, such as planting a suggestion in a target's mind, making a subject ill, and so on. At its most extreme, thaumaturgy used this way can permanently cripple or kill victims, leave them insane or brain-dead, or utterly change their form from one thing to another (turning a human being into an animal). Most of these applications of thaumaturgy are considered a violation of the Laws of Magic (namely the Second, Third, and Fourth Laws) when the victim is human. However, some wizards do use it positively, specializing in healing the body and mind (sadly, they are either very rare or very secretive about their techniques).

In game terms, inflicting change on a victim is usually done with aspects; therefore, the complexity depends largely on the type of change you want to inflict and the duration of the change. At its weakest, this is the equivalent of performing a **maneuver** when determining complexity; inflicting something more like a consequence would require more shifts depending on the severity. Inflicting a permanent, transformative change on someone is perhaps the most complicated spell of this type. Essentially, it is equivalent to winning a **conflict** in one roll.

Maybe you should make it more explicit that death is a "permanent, transformative change" on someone.

Provide Inaccessible Knowledge

Sort of a subset of the first principle, thaumaturgy allows a wizard to learn things in circumstances where he normally could not. Scrying and remote viewing are classic clichés of the wizard, but there are several other applications as well. Seeing into the future, object reading (i.e., psychometry), telepathic sensing, and others can provide the wizard with a potentially intimate glance into the hearts and minds of others or into the details of a mysterious event.

In game terms, you can use thaumaturgy to perform the equivalent of an **assessment** action (page 115), using the requirements for an assessment as the guideline for determining complexity. Successfully casting such a spell allows you access to facts and aspects related to the target.

I've got a Warden looking over my shoulder. I figured the less I talk about death magic, the better.

A Warden? Where?

See what I have to put up with?

Allow Interaction with the Supernatural

Thaumaturgy is the main way that a mortal wizard makes contact and interacts with supernatural beings. Sorcerers routinely consult with demons and spirits and sometimes bind them to service with magic. But even a wizard has the occasional use for a summoned being, be it a minor faerie or the shade of a mortal enemy. Likewise, thaumaturgy allows the wizard to affect supernatural beings in ways he couldn't otherwise, such as forcing demons or spirits out of an area or person (i.e., exorcism), coercing them to calm or rage, or simply restricting their access to an area or keeping them bound in a summoning circle.

Generally, these applications of thaumaturgy require you to overcome the entity's Conviction to do anything, requiring enough shifts in complexity to beat that entity in a **contest** of wills. (See *"Summoning and Binding"* on page 272.)

Shape Magical Energies into Physical Forms

Like evocation, thaumaturgy ultimately directs and releases magical energy, but in a more structured way. It can be used for some of the same basic effects as evocation, but the results are more elaborate and lasting. For example, while a wizard might hastily raise a kinetic shield in the middle of a fight using evocation, thaumaturgy allows him to set up a ward—a lasting barrier that blocks magical and physical intrusion to his home, office, or anything else of value. A wizard could use evocation to produce a magical trap with, say, a burst of fire magic waiting to explode at the first sign of disturbance, but only thaumaturgy will allow the energies to remain contained until triggering.

Billy: this should read "short term magical trap" and "allow the energies to last and remain".

Persistence w/evocation is HARD. You need to devote at least a little bit of your concentration every moment that sort of construct stays active.

The complexity of one of these spells is similar to the shift requirements for an equivalent evocation (block for wards, attack for magical traps, etc.) with additional shifts added for duration as discussed on page 265.

Determining Complexity

Given the guidelines above, it's fairly easy to determine the specific complexity of a spell in shifts. This number represents the investment of both preparation and gathered power. You can move straight into the casting stage if the spell's complexity is equal to or less than your Lore (after it's adjusted by focus items—see page 278). This indicates that your wizard's personal collection of knowledge and accoutrements suffices for the spell. If the complexity exceeds this limit—or under other circumstances dictated by logic—additional effort is required to set up the spell and you go into the preparation stage, detailed on page 266.

Simple Actions

For a spell that's equivalent to a simple action, the complexity is the difficulty of what that action would be "normally." So, if tracking someone down would normally require a Great (+4) Investigation roll, the tracking spell to do the same would have complexity 4.

Note that some difficulty factors won't apply in this situation—in our tracking spell example, it's implicit that by "normally" we mean what the difficulty would be if it were normally possible. Thaumaturgy solves improbable and impossible problems (page 263); so, when setting the difficulty for a spell of this style, you can assume most improbable or impossible factors to be the norm—essentially removing their role in consideration. As an example, it's *practically impossible* to track someone's physical trail through the streets of Chicago an hour after their passing—but if it were "normally" possible to track a person in those circumstances, period, what would the difficulty be? That's the sort of thing we're getting at here.

One of the most common uses for a "simple action" spell is to make an assessment. The complexity simply matches the assessment difficulty or opposing skill of the target. Keep in mind that, because a target is usually unaware of the wizard's assessment action, there will be no opposed roll; hence, use the resisting skill as a base difficulty.

You might also use a spell to make a declaration, putting some sort of a mystical aspect on an environment, with the complexity matching the potential difficulty for such a declaration. *This cannot be done to put aspects onto sentient beings*—whenever you use magic on someone, you inevitably contest with their will. For that, see *"Contests and Conflicts"* below.

Maneuvers

For a spell that's meant to inflict the equivalent of a maneuver (like a short-term entropy curse or minor glamour), the complexity depends on whether or not it's affecting an environment or a sentient target. With an environment, it's much the same as a simple action—the base difficulty equals the complexity. With a target, it varies, because it's a matter of beating whichever skill the target would use to "defend" against the spell.

Technically, you can set a complexity of your choosing, with the understanding that the target is going to roll something to resist. So if the target has Good (+3) Conviction, the minimum complexity for the spell is 3—enough shifts to successfully land a maneuver against a roll of +0 on the dice. If you want a sure thing, go for a complexity of at least 8, which is one more than the target would get with a max roll of +4. Also

consider that the target may be hiding behind a ward, a threshold, or some other form of supernatural protection, so the spell might also need more shifts to get past those.

Because temporary aspects from maneuvers are transient, these sorts of spells tend to be very carefully timed or triggered so the aspect or effect manifests when it's needed (e.g., "I'll arrange it so he Can't Think Straight right at the moment he steps on stage"). For a more lasting effect, it's time to look at contests and conflicts.

If the intent is to create a temporary aspect that can be tagged more than once (remember that normally you'd only get the benefit of the tag once and have to invoke after that), simply chain two or more maneuvers together in the same spell, each inflicting the same aspect or a similar variant. In other words, if you want to take advantage of two tags against a target of Good Conviction, you'll need to set up two maneuvers, for a minimum complexity of 6 (3 for each, as per above). As wizards are usually low on fate points, this option allows you a little more mileage without having to worry about impacting your fate point budget.

Contests and Conflicts

For a spell that's equivalent to a contest, you need to put enough shifts of complexity into the spell to make sure that you come out on top against whatever resisting skill the target may use. This is like the maneuver-equivalent spells above, except that, where maneuvers place an aspect on the target, contests typically elicit some temporary concession from the target. This is the default application for summoning spells—the wizard is effectively "forcing" the demon or spirit to go somewhere temporarily against its will—but it could also apply to many forms of magical coercion.

Thaumaturgical spells that are equivalent to conflicts inflict a lasting mental or physical change to the target that *does not go away when the magic fades*. A mild curse might place an aspect on a target, but once the magic runs its course, the victim is left largely as he was. In contrast, a spell that burns out a victim's emotional capacity may also last for months, but not because there's any magic left behind. Players and GMs should keep this dividing line in mind when deciding whether to express a spell's effect as a temporary aspect (like a maneuver) versus a consequence or permanent change.

If a consequence or permanent change is appropriate, the complexity of the spell must account for the target's ability to resist, his stress track, and the level of desired consequence. This can lead to very large numbers if you want a sure thing. Inflicting a mild disease on a fairly hale target—say, Good (+3) Endurance—would be a 13 complexity spell: 7 to match the best Endurance roll possible, 4 for the target's stress track, and 2 more for the mild consequence. Spells will work their way around most kinds of mundane armor, but supernatural abilities may make the job even harder.



The most complex spells outright kill people, leave them permanently insane, or transform them forever. These require enough shifts to bypass the resisting skill and all levels of consequence, including extreme. Victor Sells' killing spell from the Storm Front casefile needs 32 shifts of complexity to do the job: enough to beat Harry's Endurance, stress track, mild, moderate, severe, and extreme consequences, and an extra shift to take him out! Usually, spells of this magnitude require a lot of preparation and help from outside sources. This is covered on page 266.

Yeah, Sells was a total rules-munchkin.

Duration and Enhanced Evocation

Some effects of thaumaturgy seem to be enhanced examples of evocation effects: wards instead of blocks, long-lasting veils to hide a sacred site, magical traps waiting to be sprung, etc. The complexity of these spells usually equals the power you would need to cast the spell as an evocation, but keep in mind that thaumaturgy allows for much greater strength in effect. It's not uncommon for a wizard to push the complexity up to get a 10-shift ward.

Another thing to consider is duration. Many of the effects of thaumaturgy are expressed in system terms that already have a set duration—maneuvers and stress don't last beyond a scene, and consequences remain until enough time has passed that recovery is possible.

It is possible to set up spells that last a great deal longer by adding complexity. You can choose to move the spell's duration up one step on the time chart (page 315) starting from an appropriate default and adding one to the complexity for every step up you want to go. So a curse that acts as a maneuver to put Bad Luck on a target might start from "15 minutes" (about the length of that particular scene), and you could make it last all day by adding five shifts of complexity to the spell. Duration can be applied to a spell in a flexible sense—how long the energies will hang around until triggered, how long a particular effect will last, and so on.

If the default duration is not clear (such as curses that are cast on a location, or a ward that doesn't express its effects in terms of aspects) use this guideline: thaumaturgic spells typically last until the next sunrise, as this cycle weakens magical energies. So increasing from there would start at "an afternoon" or "a day" on the time chart.

Again, this "until sunrise" default doesn't apply in the case of spells that inflict consequences or temporary aspects on a living target—in those cases the duration of the effect behaves normally. Also, consider that the consequences and other aspects in those situations are often the *result* of the spell, but they aren't *sustained* by the spell. Attacks of that kind don't really *have* an intrinsic duration—they just happen, and they're done.

Short-Term Spells

As an optional rule, some GMs may choose to allow a wizard to create a deliberately short-term effect with a spell, essentially reducing the complexity by one for each step down the time chart, starting from "an afternoon." This can't ever reduce a spell's complexity below 1, however. The GM should also make it clear how short is too short—if the effect is shorter than a scene, why isn't the wizard doing it with evocation? Note, this option should only be available on spells that have a duration. Attacks and maneuvers tend not to count.

If you set off an explosive fire trap, the burns you sustain remain for months because they're burns, not because you have magic in you.

Preparation (Creating a Spell Construct)

If you don't have a Lore rating high enough to cover the complexity of the spell (page 264), then you need to spend time in **preparation** before you can cast it. Preparation time is normally divided into three broad categories: researching the **ritual**, obtaining stronger **symbolic links**, or acquiring additional **power sources**. Taken as a whole, the collection of ritual elements, symbolic links, and power sources is called a *spell construct*. The construct is a physical container for the energies of the spell, and the container helps your wizard focus his power like a lens and direct it with more stability and safety. The more elaborate the construct, the more power it can hold. This allows for more complicated effects.

If your Lore covers the complexity and allows you to skip the preparation work, these three things are still happening in the spell—it's just assumed that they're done fast enough and well enough that there's no need to spend *additional* preparation time on it. In other words, small spells can be whipped up quickly—like Harry Dresden does with a few of his quick tracking spells, using some chalk, a bit of hair, and a few murmured words of power. *Regardless, the symbolic links are key here—if you don't have them, with or without the preparation phase, you just can't cast the spell.*

Ritual

A ritual includes the casting space as well as any special components the wizard uses as part of the procedure of casting the spell. Chanting, dance, inscription, certain ritual movements, sexual rites, and physical implements such as an *athame* (ceremonial knife) are all examples of ritual components. The casting space is an area set aside to contain magical energies—most wizards of the White Council begin with an unbroken circle in which the wizard can stand and arrange the other components, with the circle serving as the boundary that keeps the spell energy hemmed in until released. This can be as elaborate as a personal sanctum with a metal circle bolted into the ground or as hasty as a circle drawn in chalk on the sidewalk, but a functional casting space and some basic ritual

procedure are absolute minimum requirements for any working of thaumaturgy.

Rituals are largely a matter of research and consultation. The wizard learns the steps and tools he needs from a book, scroll, or some other source of knowledge such as a mentor or contact. Magical knowledge is often very closely guarded. Many wizards do not wish to share the secrets they have learned, so they keep their sanctums warded against intrusion. Likewise, many spirits and supernatural beings (especially demons) traffic heavily in magical lore—a powerful currency when bargaining with magical practitioners. Some rituals also simply require tools and components that are difficult to fashion or acquire, like a spike of pure diamond or the blood of a White Court vampire.

Symbolic Links

The other minimum requirement is one or more symbolic links—objects that are included in the ritual process that metaphorically represent where the spell energies are being sent. The voodoo doll is probably the most popular example from folklore, but a specific target can be represented in many different ways: a personal possession that has emotional resonance, a sculpture or model of the target, a sample of the target's writing, actual hair or blood from the target, the target's True Name, etc. Places can be represented through models, depictions of the place (like a photograph), or things taken from the site itself. Using more of these links in the construct and using links that are "close" to their source increase the connection and make it more likely that the spell energies will go where they're supposed to when they're released.

Gathering symbolic links to an individual can be a tricky prospect, as the best ones literally involve taking a piece of the target itself, whether physically or emotionally. For maximum effectiveness, you may need to break into a prospective target's house for a prized possession, or stalk the target to find a stray strand of hair. Some wizards even resort to violence or have an independent party commit violence for them. Linking to a supernatural creature is even trickier. They are much harder to "sneak up on" in every sense—you will likely be required to risk resources, work through proxies, and make bargains with other entities.

Even getting a link to a place can be difficult at times. The best links are to-scale representations, requiring certain detail. Some areas might be guarded, warded, or restricted in access somehow, requiring you to be very clever to bypass those restrictions.

Power Sources

Finally, many wizards attempt to boost their effectiveness with contributions of power outside themselves. This allows the wizard to cast very potent and complicated spells, with the external power sources doing most of the heavy lifting. This power can come from a variety of sources, listed on page 248.

Acquiring power from entities is a matter of convincing them to contribute their power willingly, or forcing them to do so via magical binding, kidnapping, bargaining, or other coercion. Taking the power from an artifact or site requires either researching a means to access the power that is in accordance with its nature, or deliberately desecrating it—which could result in its destruction. Harnessing the power from a natural event (storms, earthquakes) requires precise timing to incorporate the event into the casting, as nature can be rather fickle. And then there's dealing with plain old mortals—either they're actively willing to assist in the casting, or they aren't, and the wizard has to decide if he's willing to kidnap, torture, and sacrifice lives in the pursuit of his goals.

Compared to the other two components of spell preparation, power sources are by far the riskiest. Depending on outside assistance for a spell is perhaps the most vulnerable position a wizard can be in, prone to betrayal and the fickle nature of supernatural debt (see "*Sponsored Magic*," page 287). Anyone capable of contributing power to a wizard's spell is going to want an equal measure of assistance in return, and the kind of energy they contribute will bias some behaviors of the spell once cast. Many a wizard has found himself forced to further the agenda of a Winter Court faerie or foul demon in these (sometimes literally) Faustian bargains.

Anyone not *willing* to assist can be forced, but that requires coercive magic, the threat of harm, and the making of enemies—and supernatural creatures are almost universally slow to forget a slight. You can always find willing assistance in the form of Outsiders, but those costs are too high to contemplate. Even researching the topic breaches the Seventh Law, inviting swift retribution from the White Council.

Sharing lore is a sign of strong friendship among wizards of roughly equal age/power, but a fantastic sign of trust (or concern!) when an older wizard offers it to a youngster. I've had my share of both. Sometimes the trust is earned the old fashioned way — sometimes it comes from an exchange of magical value, such as divulging your True Name or soulgazing one another.

I'm not sure I'd call giving someone your True Name an act of trust. Maybe more an **act of stupid**.

Adjudicating Preparation

It's not the most fun thing in the world to actually catalog all the different steps a wizard might take in preparation for a spell. Hours in the sanctum poring through tomes and researching chants, consulting other practitioners, rifling through component collections, shopping for other components at Wal-Mart, waiting around for that next full moon—the potential list of steps for setting up a given spell is infinitely long and often tedious. That's why, under most circumstances, *a wizard can just go straight to casting if the complexity falls within the wizard's Lore*. In that case, assume you have all the tools you need to cast the spell on hand, or they are at least within easy reach, and don't interrupt play to deal with preparation.

JUST IMAGINE ALL THE TIME AND EFFORT I'D SAVE IF LIFE REALLY WORKED THIS WAY!



When the complexity of a spell exceeds your Lore, you must invest more time and energy to gather what your wizard needs for the casting. His own resources are not sufficient for the task. This additional investment may involve extended research in his own library or someone else's, consultation with spirits or other entities capable of providing knowledge, rare components or specially crafted tools, strong symbolic links, arrangements for contributions of power, and so on.

However, nobody wants to protract this process and drag down play. If you have to detail every step of preparation for a ritual, you'll take the majority of session time away from the other PCs. Therefore, "right-size" the pacing in order to mesh with the flow of play. Sometimes it's good to build up gradually to casting a ritual in a climactic moment, but sometimes you want to make a few quick calls and get into casting right away—without the sense that you're just hand-waving it away.

The basic idea behind running preparation is that you're making a kind of über-declaration (page 116)—namely, that the wizard is set to cast the spell. Unlike a normal declaration, it's a little more involved than just stating something and making a skill roll against a difficulty. You make the usual proposals to the GM about significant steps your wizard is taking to prepare, but you *also* need to pool enough resources to "make up" the deficit between your character's Lore and the actual complexity of the spell to justify the declaration. This can be done in a number of different ways, which can be combined however you choose.

Invoke Aspects

An easy way to ease spellcasting is to invoke aspects and describe the invocations as being tied to a part of the preparation process. This gives you two shifts toward the deficit for every aspect invoked. The wizard takes advantage of special connections and resources he has available. For example, an aspect such as Friend of the Summer Fae might get invoked to say the wizard calls in a favor for some arcane consultation, while an aspect like Black Market Ties might be used to have a rare ritual component smuggled in. If you have enough fate points and are willing to spend them to make up the entire deficit with invocation, then you can move straight to casting with a solid montage that

gives a sense of what work your wizard did to prepare.

These aspects may come from any relevant source: personal aspects the wizard already has, temporary aspects that are in place, or even previously taken consequences that the wizard might be able to use in a clever way.

Make Declarations

As part of preparation, you can use your skills to declare you have access to some resource or advantage that will help you cast the spell. This generally works like a normal declaration. You describe what kind of advantage or resource you're trying to garner, the GM sets a difficulty, and you roll the appropriate skill.

If the roll is successful, put a temporary aspect on the spell. You can tag that temporary aspect to subtract from the deficit, again at the rate of two shifts for every aspect. As above, this provides a montage of events that the wizard goes through, but they're covered quickly by skill rolls. This isn't as fast as just invoking, but it still allows some parts of preparation to clip by at a decent rate and not bog down play.

There are several ways you can use your skills in this fashion. Besides the stand-bys of Lore, Discipline, and Conviction, many other skills can be extremely useful for spell preparation. Perhaps the most important of these are social skills like Contacts, Deceit, Empathy, Intimidation, and Rapport—all useful in their own way to acquire (or coerce) information and aid from NPCs; you call upon these skills when making all those bargains mentioned above. Investigation and Scholarship have unique research applications and enable your wizard to decipher ancient texts, track a target, or obtain other information that could lead to a vital component for the spell. Stealth and Burglary help with more "direct" methods of acquisition. With Resources you can buy your way out of a problem.

Accept or Inflict Consequences

Perhaps the most potent contribution that a wizard can make to a spell comes from sacrifice. A wizard who wants a particular spell to happen badly enough, who is extremely passionate and devoted to it, will sacrifice the utmost energy to see it through, even to the point of adding his own life energy to the spell. A wizard who doesn't practice restraint can end up with serious emotional trauma and health issues, but the immense return is often considered to be worth the trouble. This sacrifice often takes other forms, as well. The power of oaths (page 274) can be a very powerful thing to contribute to a working, especially if the deal is for the wizard's soul.

Of course, truly desperate or sociopathic wizards go beyond just self-sacrifice, harnessing the power that comes from the physical and emotional sacrifice of others. The torture or murder of another sentient being is perhaps one of the most heinous acts that a wizard can commit in the pursuit of magic, even (or especially) if the victim surrenders to it willingly. As with self-sacrifice, this doesn't necessarily have to take a direct form. The Oath taken can power a spell just as surely as the Oath given.

In game terms, inflicting a consequence on a person or entity, or taking one yourself, contributes the shift value of the consequence to the preparation deficit. This does not have to be direct injury, as stated above; any consequence will work for this, as long as you can justify the steps taken to inflict the consequence as contributing to the spell's preparation. This sacrifice essentially represents that the wizard is willing to go to greater extremes. He enters that territory where, in order to get what he wants, he's willing to enter a conflict with someone, put his own emotions and health on the line, or complicate his life and the lives of others.

Actually committing murder on a sentient being as part of a spell grants the wizard all of the shifts for all levels of consequence toward the spell deficit—a total of 20 shifts, which is often more than enough to cast any spell. This is, of course, a violation of the First Law, but most wizards willing to go to this extreme probably don't care about that.

Tell the Story of the Spell

Keep in mind that the montages you create during prep don't always have to be about poring over old tomes or whatnot. Magic is life, and when Harry goes to the convenience store to find hardcore porn for Bob to get some choice incantations out of him, that's just as much preparing for the spell as anything else. Try to discover unique avenues to express what the wizard's willing to do in order to cast the spell, and make the wizard's feelings, motives, and relationships part of that.

*And here I thought he was just being a **mensch**.*

This section right here is really the key to understanding how Victor Sells was able to do what he did with so little experience. He allowed preparing for the spell to consume his life. Not only did he let himself go completely insane, but he brought additional hollowness and misery into the lives of the Beckitts, entered into a bargain with a demon, and became completely beholden to the schedule of the storm he needed to help power his magic.

NOTE TO SELF

Add some stuff to the text about "opportunity vs. penalty" based on notes from Harry on page 262

Skip Scenes

There is one final method of getting shifts, included for completeness' sake and for the rare time a group might find it useful. Most people aren't going to want to do this for obvious reasons, but the option remains for those who *want* something like this.

The most straightforward and simultaneously most boring method is a simple tradeoff. During the game session, at any time there's a scene that the wizard's player could and wants to participate in, he can choose not to participate and instead describe something else he's doing (hitting the books, practicing ritual movements).

For giving up a scene, you earn a shift toward the spell deficit, using the assumption that any spell can be cast given enough time and research. You may do this as many times per session as you wish. If you really feel like sitting around the living room while everyone else runs around and does interesting stuff the whole night, you may rack up four or five shifts toward the spell.

The benefit of this is that no additional roll is required to gain the shifts. It's assumed that the invested time allows the wizard to do everything he needs. The drawbacks should be fairly obvious. It's pretty boring to do it this way, the return isn't all that great, and you're giving up the chance to play in scenes. An immensely complex spell might require multiple sessions' worth of scenes to prepare this way, while you twiddle your thumbs. Not very fun.

When Not to Bother

There will be many occasions when you want to cast a spell under no particular sense of duress or constraint—in other words, times when it would be thoroughly undramatic to go through the mechanical process of doing a casting roll. Like any situation where the outcome would provide nothing interesting, don't bother rolling. Just assume that, after a reasonable period of time, the spell is cast. The system's basic guideline is that spellcasting should be neither too boring nor too glossed over. Use the preparation stuff to tease out the most entertaining moments and move to the casting if that is also an entertaining moment.

By the same token, look out for opportunities to make sure the casting roll itself is surrounded by interesting circumstances. It's way more fun to try to throw that ward together when the big baddie is coming right now, and it's "Holy crap! Roll your Discipline!" than it is to do it on a lazy afternoon. The presence of bystanders and the potential for backlash always provide tension, as does the knowledge that the spell will be opposed by some force when it's released.

Just don't feel obligated to stall play for casting if nothing dramatic will come of it.

Casting the Spell

Once preparation is complete, the wizard can actually cast the spell. The circle or casting space is set up, the links and other ritual elements are arranged like they're supposed to be, and the wizard's other power sources are available. All that's left is for the wizard to complete the ritual steps, contribute his own power to the spell, and send the energies on their way. If all goes well, the spell will happen as planned, and the wizard will get precisely the desired effect. If anything goes wrong, improperly controlled energies could wreak havoc on him and his surroundings.

In a low-pressure situation, you can go ahead and cast the spell without making any rolls. It'll all happen within the space of time it would take to run a single scene of conflict—often less—as it's just a matter of a few exchanges to cast a spell. (See "*When Not to Bother*" on this page for the skinny on this.)

In your game, most PC wizards won't always have that luxury, though—low-pressure situations don't exactly lend themselves to exciting game sessions. When under pressure, you have to make a few rolls to get the spell cast. Pressure might mean anything from "People are shooting guns at me!" to "My date has shown up early and is ringing the doorbell while I'm still in the middle of casting!" At that point, you have two choices—release the spell safely (which drops you back to square one; this attempt is a botch), or try to push power into the spell quickly and *hopefully* safely.

Casting a ritual spell is similar, mechanically speaking, to casting an evocation spell. (See "*For Quick Reference*" below if you need clarification.) Choose how much power you want to bring to bear and roll Discipline to control that amount of power. Eventually, you have to control a number of shifts in power equal to the complexity of the spell.

Obviously, it's pretty much impossible to control all the necessary shifts in one round of casting for all but the simplest of spells; so in thaumaturgy, you can divide the casting into small pieces, "carrying" the shifts you control from one round to the next until you have

enough. Invoking aspects can increase the power you produce or boost your control roll, and certain focus items might be able to help in either category. If you want to play it particularly safe, make sure you have a focus item or two, some lingering fate points, or unused tags available.

As with evocation, there's a limit to how much ritual energy you can safely direct at one time. Going past that limit is possible, but it's very taxing. You can produce shifts of power equal to your Conviction *per roll*; every shift past your Conviction inflicts a point of stress on your wizard, which can eventually roll up to consequences. Unlike evocation, so long as you stay equal to or below your Conviction, your wizard takes no stress from channeling this power (this is another case of speed being exchanged for less risk in casting).

Once you amass enough shifts to equal the spell's complexity, the spell is cast, and whatever effect you and GM agreed on occurs.

Example: *Harry is ready to cast a spell with a complexity of 10. With his Conviction of Superb he can produce 5 shifts of power per exchange easily, but with a Discipline of Good he'll only manage to control 3 shifts on average (on a roll of +0). Jim, Harry's player, knows he could play it particularly safe and divide this up into 10 separate rolls, each time only bringing in 1 shift of power, but that's 10 exchanges and with the thing that's hammering at the door he's just not sure Harry has that kind of time.*

Jim decides to try to wrap this up in three exchanges. If he's going to goof it up, he'd better do it early when there's less power to release. On the first exchange he'll bring in 4 shifts of power, and the next two he'll do at 3 shifts, for a total of 10.

Jim lucks out and rolls a +3 on his first exchange, getting a control roll of Fantastic (+6). 6 isn't less than 4, so he has managed to control his first, biggest chunk of power for the spell.

On the second exchange, Jim rolls a –1. Disaster! His Discipline roll is only Fair (+2), which falls under the Good (+3) roll he needed to control 3 shifts. Luckily, Harry's casting this spell inside of a metal circle in his lab, which Jim previously established as an aspect of his home. After a quick invocation of that aspect, Jim's boosted his control roll enough to keep the casting effort going... (cont'd)

For Quick Reference

Every turn you devote to casting a thaumaturgical spell, you:

Decide how much power you want to bring. You take a mental stress hit equal to the amount you go past your Conviction skill; if you don't go past your Conviction, you don't take any stress.

Roll your Discipline. If the roll equals or exceeds the amount of power you brought, you successfully channel all the shifts of power you brought into the spell.

If you've channeled enough shifts to equal the complexity of the spell, you've successfully cast it. If you haven't, repeat the process for another turn until you have.

If you fail a Discipline roll at any point, the total number of shifts channeled into the spell turn into backlash and/or fallout. You can choose to take them as backlash to keep the energies from escaping, or release them as fallout into the environment. If you release the energies, the spell fails.

Backlash and Fallout

There is a chance, however, that things can go horribly wrong. Whenever the wizard fails to control all the power that he has summoned, the excess shifts of power spill back onto the wizard or out onto the nearby environment. This works exactly as explained in the Evocation section above, with one minor (yet significant) difference: *a failed casting roll hits the wizard with* ***all*** *the shifts of power stored up for the spell to that point.* So if the wizard's been casting for a few rounds now and gets a bit overzealous in a rush to finish the spell, he could suddenly be dealing with 10 or more shifts that he either has to absorb as backlash, or let go as fallout. If *any* of it is released as fallout, the spell construct breaks open and the spell fails. If all of it is absorbed as backlash, the wizard can keep going.

Example (Continued): *On the third exchange, Jim only needs a +0 on the dice to control the last 3 shifts of power. His luck being what it is, he rolls a –2, bringing him two short of the roll he needs.*

With no aspects or tags handy, wham! He's facing a 10 shift hit. He needs the spell to go off, so he has to take all of that in backlash. He takes a mild and moderate consequence and checks off his fourth mental stress box. Ouch.

GMs are encouraged to be as nasty as possible when determining fallout consequences for thaumaturgy—this is the most powerful kind of magic, and when it goes awry, it should be impressive. That is the price of wielding that kind of power.

Fallout is a bit different here as well. In Evocation, you can take a little fallout and it just reduces the effect of the spell. Here, fallout breaks the whole thing apart. Bob, is that accurate?

It is indeed. Well done!

Consequence suggestions from my experience:

"I can hear purple"

"Seeing Double"

"Forgot How To Use Fire Magic"

Using Help

I distrust bringing the clueless into any sort of magical working, unless it's necessary. (Having Rawlins and Murph carry candles on the PROVEN GUILTY case was one of those exceptions.)

Murph hardly qualifies as clueless these days, Harry.

Point. Uh... don't tell her I said that. I like my shins.

There are a couple of main ways that people can help with a spell—they can aid preparation efforts, and they can contribute power to the casting itself. Many wizards (especially cult leaders) have a group of lackeys they keep around specifically to ease the burden of larger workings.

Technically, anyone who wants to use their skills and abilities to help a wizard with preparation can do so—carrying out an obscure bit of research, seeking out a component, even sacrificing themselves (or being sacrificed) for the sake of making the spell possible. Assuming he has the appropriate skills, a surrogate can accomplish any of the categories of preparation except for Skip Scenes—simply add the shifts he garners to the preparation deficit.

During the casting, an individual can directly contribute controlled power to the spell if he possesses Thaumaturgy or Ritual with the appropriate emphasis (page 181). The assistant caster summons power with Conviction and controls it with Discipline, just like a normal casting roll. Any shifts successfully controlled add directly to the stored power for the spell, just as if the main caster did it. The danger here is that if *any* participating caster fails a Discipline roll during the process, the spell energies are released as described above. The participants can determine how to divide backlash among them if they wish.

Finally, those without overt spellcasting gifts can contribute in yet another way besides preparation—they can absorb backlash in place of the caster to keep the spell going during the casting. Instead of taking the harm to himself, the caster can direct it to a surrogate, who would then take the full brunt of the damage. Obviously, there are potential Lawbreaking issues that come with this practice, so it should not be undertaken lightly.

Some practitioners can summon creatures without containing them, right, Bob?

I'm sorry, I think I heard you say something about crazy soon-to-be-dead people?

If you're planning on summoning something particularly powerful, AIM HIGH on those containment spells, people. Mucking up your summoning spell while succeeding on your containment spell is nowhere near as bad as mucking up your containment spell while succeeding on your summoning.

Things get out. **Bad** things.

Types of Thaumaturgy

While the breadth of effect available to thaumaturgy is really too wide to record in one place, there are several areas of ritual magic that have become commonplace over time. These form the known core of White Council magic and are the most commonly recorded material for study and practice. Wizards usually find that they have a talent or affinity for certain branches of thaumaturgy during training. Also, some areas of thaumaturgy have some unique permutations that you need to take into account—those will be explained below.

This list is not exhaustive—these are meant to serve as examples. If you play a wizard, feel free to expand on this list if you see an area of specialty that seems more appealing.

Summoning and Binding

Dealing with spirits and other supernatural entities (such as demons) from a "safe" distance is one of the hallmarks of ritual magic. The traditional sorcerer from folklore relies entirely on summoning and binding demons to accomplish his aims—and typically pays a terrible price in the process. It is wise for a budding wizard to heed these cautionary tales. Dealing with spirits and demons is no simple task.

There are three parts for summoning a spirit, each of which can (and often should) be done as its own spell—though a very ambitious wizard can always try to build a spell that incorporates two or more of these parts:

- Create a container to hold the entity.
- Summon the entity.
- Control the entity (binding).

Containing the entity requires you to create a container, much like crafting a ward (page 276) with a very specific purpose and the intent to keep things *in* rather than *out*. As with a ward, the complexity of the containment spell should depend on a combination of duration and the strength of the block. Use the rules for wards when creating a spell of this type. Focused practitioners specializing in summoning and binding can always cast containment spells for use with their work, even if they have no facility for creating wards in general.

Summoning a supernatural entity is a matter of willing it to your presence and having a place to contain the entity when it arrives—typically a casting circle. This usually requires enough shifts of complexity to beat the entity in a contest of Conviction, so you're wise to shoot for five or more shifts above the being's Conviction. Ten is about the minimum number to make safety probable, as that's sized to beat a Superb Conviction. Therefore, most summoning requires a bit of preparation beforehand. Usually, this time is spent sussing out the entity's True Name. Once your wizard successfully casts the spell, the entity appears in the designated space.

This is all well and good for entities of the Nevernever, but you're not covering the much more difficult topic of summoning corporeal entities.

Wait, that's even possible?

...Uh, forget I said anything.

There is no guarantee the summoned entity will behave how you want it to. You will have to bargain with the entity to achieve your desires. There's nothing technically magical about this part of the interaction, and a wizard who expects to do this regularly should make sure he's well-versed in Rapport, Deceit, or Intimidation.

Even when contained strongly, an entity may try to break the bonds of the summoning circle via trickery (a broken container loses all its strength, instantly) or by main force (launching attacks through the block, usually with its Conviction as the attacking skill). In the latter case, this is a direct conflict of will against will, inflicting mental stress when successful. The wizard must win in order to maintain his circle and keep the entity trapped (a victory can also be used as an opportunity to banish it). If the entity wins, it escapes the wizard's grasp, and then it's free to do as it wishes. This is usually a bad thing. Luckily, with a strong container established, the wizard usually has the upper hand and may be able to inflict some harm on the entity in return (see below).

Binding the entity is a third, optional step. You exert your will over the entity, forcing it into your service. Done as another spell, this is considered a fully transformative effect and therefore requires enough shifts to take out the demon as if it were a full conflict.

A more haphazard and dangerous approach is using the entity's True Name to assault the being directly, trying to wear it down in an actual exchange-by-exchange conflict. In such a case, you can use your Discipline as the attacking skill, inflicting mental stress on the creature, or you can step it up to genuine spellcraft and assault the creature with spirit evocations.

That True Name must be guarded carefully. Any skilled practitioner that learns a creature's True Name can make similar attacks to wrest control of the creature away from its original master. (Without the True Name, evocations directed at the creature simply work to disrupt its manifestation and send it away.) Regardless, bindings formed in this way are imperfect and decay more rapidly than those achieved by way of ritual.

Once the entity is bound, you must work to keep the bond reinforced—after the entity has recovered from the consequences it sustained in the initial conflict, it will likely attempt to escape and the spell will probably need to be recast. In time, this cycle of need can become a problem of its own. Also keep in mind that most entities really don't appreciate being controlled in such a one-sided way; a bound entity will likely do everything it can to subtly undermine your control until it can make a bid to break away.

Harry, I didn't put guidelines here for stats of summoned creatures. It seems to me that on the low end, summoning is just about using your spellcraft to make a really good Contacts roll. Up from that, it's about extending an invitation and seeing what comes knocking. And the thing that knocks could be all over the map in terms of power level.



Oaths, Bonds, and Bargains

Powerful supernatural entities—summoned, bound, or otherwise—are fond of extracting oaths from mortals who dare to wield power of their own. Inevitably these oaths include phrases like "I swear, upon my power..." That's a mighty dangerous thing to do, but it's also often the only way that the entity you're entreating will pay you any mind.

Because a wizard's power is based in his belief of what he can do and who he truly is, magically sworn oaths have serious substance. This can extend to non-wizard characters as well—a binding oath of this sort entwines itself around the very nature of those who make it. (Faeries and those who swear oaths to faeries in particular experience this binding effect, but many other creatures—perhaps all, given the right circumstances—may be susceptible to it.)

As such, breaking a binding oath is an act of utter violence against who you are. It will often be appropriate to reflect this as an extreme consequence (page 205) that actually *changes* who you are permanently; on the other hand, you may decide the broken oath is part and parcel of your current high concept. Either way, you are now open to frequent compels as the oath-holder collects its due. When you break an oath, these compels might leave you unable to use any magic against the entity, or even experience an outright disruption of your ability to cast *any* magic—after all, magic comes from what you believe you are capable of, and the broken oath has profoundly changed that self image.

Whatever form the compels take, you'll soon find yourself in the situation where you must either spend many of your fate points to wiggle out of doing things you don't want to do or bend to the will of the oath-holder. This also gives the entity ample justification for launching direct mental attacks against you, at any time, usually as a Discipline vs. Discipline attack. No special power is necessary to do this beyond the broken oath; it's the oath that gives them such an ability.

What's worse, some oaths don't even need to be broken to give an entity this sort of power over you—breaking the oath will just encourage the entity to more immediately exercise that power. So, if the terms of your magically binding compact with the entity make it clear that it owns you and your actions, then it does. Agreeing to do three favors for the Queen of Air and Darkness tends to rip away your options awfully fast—provided that the Queen herself abides by her part of the oath.

You can also look at oaths as a form of sponsor debt (page 288), rated as a certain number of compels the oathbound must accept with no fate point payout. In this case, if the oath is broken, the debt automatically resets to the original amount (triggering a "do-over," essentially)—or worse, it turns the oath into a bottomless pit of debt that the character may never be able to pay off.

The principles here are simple. Don't make promises you can't keep. Don't break promises once you make them. Binding a promise with magic takes it out of pure metaphor (which for someone like me is real enough already) and into reality.

Conjuration

Conjuration is the art of creating objects of seeming substance out of nothing. When it comes down to it, though, this is a shell game. None of the things that conjuration creates are *actually* real; they're made of ectoplasm, the nothing-stuff of the Nevernever, and once the energy that's telling that ectoplasm to *be* something leaches out, it dissolves—first into goo, then into nothing at all.

Here, the complexity of the conjuration is a matter of *detail* and *scale* (both quantity and size), as well as the *believability* of the creation.

Detail primarily addresses the intricacy of function (i.e., moving parts). A simple, one-part object such as a small coin or a piece of paper is complexity 1, with things going up from there. Typical handheld weapons and things with one or two moving parts can be conjured around a complexity of 3. Larger, more complicated things and minor animate things—such as a frog that hops around and ribbits—are a 5. (These items still look "a little off" or "unreal.")

Quantity and size add +2 for each identifiable factor. Creating a (nonfunctioning) car would be about a 7, starting at 5 and getting a +2 due to its size; creating enough faux frogs to overrun a city park could be 11 or more—5 for the basic frog, +2 several times over for quantity. Functioning objects of real technology are pretty much impossible (or more accurately, too much work to be worth it).

In terms of believability, if the wizard wants to pass the conjured object off as real, he must

commit more shifts of complexity to the spell—basic conjured objects have a Mediocre believability. You might create a swarm of frogs at complexity 11, but they're still not necessarily going to look quite right. Every additional shift adds one to the difficulty of any roll to notice that the conjured object isn't real. So a wizard only needs 1 shift of complexity to make a coin, but if he wants a coin that's detailed enough to require a Great (+4) roll to notice as fake, his total spell complexity is five shifts.

A wizard can use the Sight or other means of divination to figure out that something's made of ectoplasm, though, so the chances of avoiding supernatural detection are fairly slim.

Often, ectoplasm is used to create a body for a summoned spirit to inhabit so it can physically interact with the world. Usually this ectoplasm is generated by the summoned creature, not the summoner, but in some cases a body must be constructed deliberately in advance.

Can I Conjure a Sword?

Sure! You can conjure a sword, using thaumaturgy. But…why? It'll take you at least a few minutes to conjure the thing, since this is thaumaturgy in action, and unless you toss some extra power into it to outlast the sunrise, it'll dissolve in less than a day. That, and most fencers don't like to rely on a sword that can be dispelled mid-fight. When it comes down to it, it's a lot of work for something ephemeral, and when you need a sword, you tend to need a sword *right now*—so go out and *buy one already*.

Divination

Divination can take several forms, all basically falling under the general header of "gathering information." The most common example from Harry's casefiles is his tracking spell, but there are several other forms that fall within the scope of divination: direct scrying, forecasting and prophecy, telepathy and psychometry, and various other kinds of sensory magic.

With divination spells, the main things to consider are how much information you want and how hard it would normally be to get that information. That's why Harry's tracking spell is ultimately pretty easy to pull off—all he gets is a general sense of the target's location, but no other information. This makes it a simple action which nearly always has a low complexity.



Things become more complicated when you actively monitor the target in some way. First, if the target is behind a threshold or any other kind of supernatural protection, you have to overcome that. Second, even unaware targets have a natural defense against being "read" or seen against their will—basically a defense roll, just like targets get if you take a swing at them in a fight. This commonly defaults to Conviction or Presence, depending on the context of the scrying. So you will want to beef up the complexity fairly high to overcome these obstacles, naturally leading to some prep scenes devoted to finding good links to the target and whatnot.

Ultimately, the product of divination usually takes the form of an aspect or significant fact, just as if you had successfully performed an assessment action on the target. Particularly complex spells might reveal multiple aspects or facts by simulating a very high roll on the assessment action (say, equal to the target difficulty + 4 or + 5), or by adding the complexities of two or more divinations together in the same spell. See assessments on page 115 for guidelines on this.

Veils

Veils are spirit evocations (page 255) that bend attention, light, and energy away from prying eyes. They typically require ongoing concentration to remain in place. Evocation's veils also tend to be fairly personal in scale—covering the caster himself and maybe a few of his allies.

However, it is possible to use thaumaturgy to set up a long-term veil, concealing something for days without ongoing concentration. Large White Council convocations, if they occur in public places, usually have a large-scale thaumaturgic veil covering the entire venue to keep normal mortals from getting too curious about the proceedings.

The complexity of a large veil is equal to whatever difficulty the wizard wants others to beat in order to detect whatever's behind the veil; as usual, more is better. As with evocation, this is a block action with a base complexity equal to its strength.

Molly is particularly good at creating veils you can see through. Mine always come off like I'm immersed in a glass of soda.

Veils often block detection in both directions. Perceiving things outside a veil while you are within it faces a similar block, at half the veil's strength. Increase the complexity of a veil by 2 in order to create a veil that doesn't impede looking *out* at all. (For an evocation veil, this increases the power requirement of the spell by 2.)

In addition, bigger veils mean a higher complexity. Concealing the caster himself or a small group is within the scope of an evocation veil and requires no adjustment (think of it as limited to around the size of a Volkswagen Bug). Thaumaturgical veils are not usually mobile and are constrained by thresholds and other barriers that scatter magical energies (such as a river). Count up the number of zones a larger veil covers, and add that to the complexity of the veil.

Casting a veil as a ritual means the wizard doesn't really have to worry about maintaining it; if he wants it to last past the next sunrise, he'll need extra duration shifts as noted in "*Duration and Enhanced Evocation*" (page 265).

Wards

A ward is basically a very potent version of a block using thaumaturgy instead of evocation. It's intended to protect an area—usually a home or sanctum—from physical or magical intrusion. Wards are similar to thresholds (page 230), except they're quite a bit more potent. Most wizards need stronger protection against occupational hazards such as hostile demons, malicious magic, and hungry monsters.

A ward's basic function is reflecting energies back onto their source. Someone who collides with a ward at a brisk walk might experience something equivalent to a hard shove, while someone running full tilt into a ward would most certainly get knocked to the ground. Magical force gets the same treatment—a powerful spell cast on a good ward usually ends up being very bad for the intruder.

In addition to this basic function, wards can be rigged to contain other magic that gets triggered when the ward encounters significant force. The most common of these is a magical "landmine," where a large evocation effect (such as a fire burst) is encased in a sigil behind the ward. The ward releases its energy when the containment provided by the ward is breached. Other effects are possible, though; the enchantment known as a wardflame can be attached to a ward as an early detection system, showing the wizard when something is coming his way by causing nearby candles to burn bright blue (or some other light-show).

The base complexity of a ward is directly related to its desired strength, so you should aim for this to be pretty high: 8 shifts (Legendary) is a pretty good target to shoot for if you're moderately good. This represents the ward's capacity for reflecting attacks.

When something hits the ward, compare the shift values. If the ward prevails, hit the attacker with an effect of the appropriate type for equal shifts. So if someone rolls a Great (+4) attack against a ward, he has to try to avoid a Great (+4) attack from the rebounding force. If someone hits it with a 6-shift evocation, he has to dodge a 6-shift evocation.

If the attack surpasses the block strength of the ward, then the ward is breached; apply whatever shifts get through to the target just like bypassing a block (page 210). Alternatively, the attacker may apply those shifts directly toward getting rid of the ward itself; each shift will reduce the value of the ward by one until it's gone. While a ward is technically still around at Mediocre (+0) strength, most lack the energy to hold themselves together at that point; a ward needs to be reduced to –4 to be completely nullified.

By default, a ward lasts until the next sunrise unless you add complexity to make it last longer, which is explained in "*Duration and Enhanced Evocation*" (page 265). In addition, any spells you

As mentioned elsewhere, **bachelor** wizards tend to have pretty weak natural thresholds.

wish to include as part of the ward construct add their complexity values directly onto the ward. It must all be cast as one spell. If you want a layered defense, you'll have to spend a bit of time setting it up.

Wards don't have a "scale" concern, the way that veils do, and they cannot move. They are almost always tied to a particular place's natural thresholds—think of them as a super-boosted immune system—so they are limited by the size of that threshold. Without a threshold they can only be set up to cover a small area at most—usually a point of transition such as a doorway or intersection.

Warning systems, such as a wardflame, add 2 to the complexity of the spell and set off an alarm of some sort when someone is actively testing the ward's defense. Tying a symbolic link to some item you carry increases the complexity by another 2, but may warn you of intrusions even when far from home (though the message may get delayed or blocked by intervening thresholds).

Landmines—nasty, damaging spells that are triggered on a breach—add complexity equal to the power of the evocation spell stored within the ward. The effective targeting roll will be equal to the power of the evocation, though the spell's complexity may be increased on a one for one basis to add to the targeting roll (wizards heedful of the First Law may well want to avoid inflicting undiscriminating, lethal force). Thaumaturgic spells might be done as landmines as well—simply add their complexity to the base complexity of the ward.

Specialized practitioners focused on wards are able to embed other effects in their wards—such as wardflames or landmines—even if they cannot create those spell effects independent of a ward.

Getting Selective with Conditions

Wards (and possibly veils) normally manifest broad effects that target everything. To make a ward or veil more selective, you can add simple conditions to the spell, increasing its complexity by 2 for each simple condition added.

Make no mistake—a ward spell can't "think" for itself, but it can be taught to recognize something incorporated into its symbolic links. You might establish a condition that allows someone to pass through unaffected so long as he's wearing one of five amulets; you might add a drop of your blood to the ritual components to ensure that you can pass through. Regardless, conditions must be based on something observable, without any element of decision-making: wearing an amulet, living beings, people who say "open sesame," that sort of thing. These aren't detection systems—though a divination spell could be combined with a ward to create a more actively discerning ward.

With all of this, the ability to produce a relevant symbolic link is key for each condition. A vial of White Court vampire blood could be used to create a ward that only repels those of the sexy-deadly persuasion (or create a veil that masks one's presence from their kind alone). Without it, such selectivity just couldn't be achieved.

Good luck getting one of those, unless you have an in with the WCVs or are a complete psycho.

Winging it With Wards and Landmines

These rules are pretty intricate, giving you a lot of options for how you can set up wards and defenses. But it's a pretty safe bet that any ward-capable spellcaster worth his salt will have his base of operations protected by at least a basic ward.

If it hasn't been explicitly declared otherwise, assume a wizard's ward strength to be equal to the highest of Conviction, Discipline, or Lore. In fact, that's a reasonable assumption for any kind of "preset" magical effect if the GM or player needs to establish one in the course of play. Just assume the caster's highest magical stat is what you're dealing with, and use aspects to bolster the totals as appropriate.

So if the PCs are breaking into an NPC wizard's sanctum, and the NPC wizard has a Superb (+5) Conviction, you can safely assume that the fire trap he has set up is a 5-shift evocation. Tick a couple of fate points off that NPC, invoke a couple of aspects (say, Meticulous and Paranoid), and now it's a 9-shift evocation. And so on.

Bob, do I have it right that wards are usually immobile, so if you want a big, long-lasting spell of protection it has to be rooted to one location? So if someone wants mobile protection, it's all short term evocation and things like enchanted items?

Very good, William! Your conclusions are generally correct. With magic, there are always exceptions—but they're rare and tied to specific circumstances.

This is a good cursory breakdown, William, and it's probably good enough for the layman, but there are things that fall between the cracks. My skull, for example, is technically an enchanted item—it's just meant to store **my** *energy, instead of a spell. And then there are the Swords of the Cross, which are—conceptually speaking—just very powerful foci.*

I thought the Swords were like an artifact or something?

Well, consider what you can channel when your power source is the faith of all Christians—and possibly other faiths as well—on the face of the earth.

Uh... I think you just broke my brain.

Crafting (Items and Potions)

While crafting things like focus items and potions is considered a type of thaumaturgy, it isn't something that has a very active presence in these game mechanics. Crafting magical items is, by and large, a very boring process that quickly lends itself to bean-counting, resource management mini-games. Even the simplest focus item requires weeks or months of the wizard sitting in his study, gradually aligning the item with the proper energies through repetitive motion and thought—not really stuff you want to spend time describing or talking about.

To avoid that boring repetition, the game handles crafting through the application of stunts. Wizard characters get a number of "slots" for different kinds of items, under the assumption that there is a practical maximum of items that a wizard can make and maintain at one time. That number rises via character advancement (and the purchase of the Refinement ability—see page 182), allowing the wizard to either possess more items or create stronger ones.

There are two basic kinds of magical items: **focus items** and **enchanted items**. Focus items enhance and facilitate the magic of the user in a particular way, while enchanted items store energy and release it again in some predetermined manner, sort of like a "spell in a box." Harry Dresden's usual kit of magic items includes three focus items (staff, blasting rod, and shield bracelet) and a few enchanted items (his duster, the kinetic force rings, and the occasional potion).

Potions and their ilk are a kind of fire-and-forget enchanted item. They store energy, but once consumed, the energy is used up and the item is effectively destroyed.

Focus Items

Focus items are very straightforward. They enhance a wizard's spellcasting in a particular fashion by providing a bonus to one part of the spellcasting effort. Typically hand-crafted by the wizard, focus items are bound to the particular magic they're intended to work with through a monotonous process of ritual attunement, where the wizard sits with the item in a casting circle or similar ritual space and visualizes its use for hours on end. After a period of weeks or months, the item is ready.

A single focus item slot, as granted by various Spellcraft powers (page 179), grants a +1 bonus.

For evocation focuses, this bonus may be applied to either the wizard's offensive power (Conviction) or offensive control (Discipline) or defensive power (Conviction) or defensive control (Discipline).

For thaumaturgy focuses, this bonus may be applied to the wizard's upper bound on "no-prep" complexity (Lore) for thaumaturgy or to the wizard's control (Discipline) rolls for casting. The type of bonus must be determined and locked down at the time the item is created.

In addition, you must specify which type of evocation or thaumaturgy is enhanced by the item's bonus. An evocation focus is specified to work with a particular kind of **element** (e.g., fire, spirit). A thamaturgy focus is specified by any of the **thaumaturgic types** listed in this section, whether by function (e.g., summoning, veils, wards) or theme (e.g., biomancy, ectomancy, necromancy).

Subsequent focus item slots allow you to create new focus items. Alternatively, one or more slots may be spent to add greater capacity to an existing focus item.

The total number of slots a focus item uses is equal to the number of elements or types multiplied by the total of the bonuses. So an item that offered +1 offensive power and +1 offensive control to fire and earth evocations would take up 4 slots. All bonuses of an item always apply to all of the types on the item: you can't have +2 complexity for necromancy and +1 complexity for wards in the same focus item, because the +2 complexity should apply to both necromancy and wards. This makes for narrow, potent focus items (one element or type with a large bonus) and broad, less potent focus items (many elements or types with a small bonus). Broad, potent focus items are very rare. As a result, most wizards tend to have many small bonus items for specific jobs, like a craftsman's toolbox.

The one restriction on the bonuses provided is that they may not total to a number greater than your Lore. So if your Lore is Good (+3), you can have an evocation focus item that provides +3 to offensive control, offensive power, defensive power, or defensive control, or a focus item that provides +1 to three of those, or +2 to one and +1 to another, but you can't construct one that provides bonuses totaling 4 or more.



The number of elements or types is not restricted, so long as you have enough slots to accommodate them.

If you are willing to lock the item down to only ever being useful for one specific spell—such as an established evocation rote or a divination spell that always looks for the same thing—then you get a single free "slot upgrade" (as described below) to add an extra +1 bonus.

You can't benefit from the same type of bonus (e.g., a control bonus) from two or more items at the same time—so if you had two items, one with a +2 control bonus and another with a +1 control bonus, the total effect is a +2 to control.

> **Example:** *Evan Montrose has three focus item slots. He could make a single wand that takes up all three slots, giving him +3 offensive power for wind evocation only, or he could split the bonuses up, for +2 offensive power and +1 offensive control. He could also make it more multi-purpose, taking just a +1 offensive power bonus, but applying it to wind, water, and earth evocations.*

Enchanted Items

Enchanted items are intended to hold a single, pre-generated effect that is stored until released, after which the energy in the item must be recharged. The construction process is very similar to the process for creating a focus item, except that the wizard also imbues the item with minute amounts of spell energy as he goes through the attunement process, gradually shaping it to hold the energy it's designed for. Making an enchanted item requires one enchanted item slot, which can be acquired by trading in a focus item slot for two enchanted item slots.

When you create an enchanted item, you must specify the effect that the item performs. Nearly any effect within the range of thaumaturgy or evocation is allowed (though evocation tends to be easier because the amount of power involved is usually comparatively small), subject to two limitations: the effect has a **strength** equal to your Lore, and it may only be used once per game session. After it's used, the item requires time to recharge by some means that you determine; this is assumed to take long enough to reach into the next session.

You may increase the number of uses per session by one by reducing the base strength of the item by one. So if you have Good (+3) Lore, you could create an enchanted item with an effect strength of Good (+3) that you can use once per session, or an item with an effect strength of Average (+1) that you can use three times per session. When doing this, the base strength of the item may not go below 1.

The strength of an enchanted item may be reduced by one to make it usable by someone other than the caster, such as a magically armored coat that anyone can wear.

It's possible that using an enchanted item will require some kind of skill roll, particularly if it needs to be targeted in some way; discuss this

BILLY, I THINK YOU SHOULD BE ABLE TO "RECYCLE" YOUR ENCHANTED ITEM SLOTS INTO NEW APPLICATIONS AT CERTAIN TIMES. MAYBE AS A PART OF AN ADVANCEMENT MILESTONE?

Absolutely. Probably at Significant milestones. Crafting isn't something you can do quickly, but given enough time, swapping one thing out for another makes sense.

HEH HEH, EVAN'S "WIND" HAS A LOT OF "OFFENSIVE POWER."

Are you twelve?

Let's talk potions ingredients! One of my most favored topics.

For a well-stocked lab, or a single major entropy-curse-esque potion, make sure you have: Fillet of a fenny snake, newt's eye, frog toe, bat's wool, dog's tongue, adder's fork, blind-worm's sting, lizard's leg, mummified witch, intestines of a shark, hemlock root (night-harvested)—

THIS ENDS NOW, BOB!

I think he got that list from Shakespeare...?

OH YEAH? WELL, THAT'S BETTER, AT LEAST. IF THOSE HAVE BEEN PUBLISHED, THEY MAY HAVE BEEN ROBBED OF THEIR POWER.

Man, who did Billy Shakes know back in the day? And did Bob once play the role of Yorick?

with the GM and follow whatever course seems logical. Defensive items (ones that provide armor or a block, for example) often consume a use at the time of defense and don't require a separate action to activate. If an enchanted item runs out of uses in a session, if wielded by a practitioner, he may make additional uses anyway by taking one point of mental stress per use.

Subsequent enchanted item slots allow you to:

- Create a new enchanted item with a new effect
- Add +1 to the strength of the default effect on an existing enchanted item
- Add 2 to the uses per session for an existing enchanted item

Regardless, an item's casting strength after all bonuses are totaled should never exceed two times the crafter's Lore rating—at least not without a *very* good rationale and a ton of baggage.

Example: *Harry has three available enchanted item slots. He wants to make a ring that shoots a blast of kinetic energy (spirit evocation) at a target, which recharges by absorbing kinetic energy from the slight movements of his hand. Harry's player, Jim, puts his one additional slots beyond the first into effect strength, and his Lore is Good (+3), so Harry gets a spirit evocation attack of 4 power (a Weapon:4 attack using a skill roll) once per session without rolling. The GM and Jim decide it would make the most sense if he still has to make a roll to see if he can aim it accurately. There are a couple of skills Jim could use for this roll—such as Guns—but Harry's Discipline is higher, so Jim opts for that.*

Crafting Specializations

Crafting specializations for items and potions aren't used for control or complexity; they usually affect **frequency** or **strength** without making you spend an extra slot to do it. A frequency specialization allows you one more use per session. A strength specialization increases the effect strength of your basic enchanted items by 1 (this strength specialization bonus can't be traded in for an additional per-session use). In the case of potions, this can create stronger potions, or ones that you can get two uses out of. Alternatively, a crafting specialization may be applied to increase the limit on how many bonuses may be placed on a single focus item (a **focus** specialization).

You can create focus items which are used to provide frequency and strength bonuses for crafting when making other items and potions. That said, you *can't* create a focus item that helps you create other focus items. It's... uh, it's a magic thing. Just doesn't work.

Potions

Potions are created through a fairly complex process that involves combining ingredients into some sort of base liquid and using it as the focus of a thaumaturgical ritual to put power into the potion. Many wizards have workspaces that they use for this purpose, complete with shelves full of odd ingredients from diamond dust to eye of newt. The ingredients that go into a potion metaphorically signify its effects. In addition to the base liquid, each potion requires one ingredient for each of the five senses (touch, taste, smell, sight, and sound), one ingredient for the mind, and one for the heart. These ingredients don't have to be consumable; the magic that creates the potion makes a potable substance.

Potions are very similar to enchanted items in terms of function (and, in fact, even use enchanted item slots to make), but are both more limited and more flexible. To be able to make a potion, you must *commit* an existing open enchanted item slot to be a potion slot. When you're outfitting your wizard, consider leaving some enchanted item slots unallocated so you can create potions as you need them.

At the beginning of each session, you may declare what potions you have on hand to fill those slots, or otherwise leave them open. If you have an open slot and a successful Lore roll or a fate point to spend, you may later declare that you coincidentally have an appropriate potion. A given potion can only be used once, period, but it doesn't face a surcharge for being usable by someone else.

The effect strength of a potion, like enchanted items, is equal to the wizard's Lore. Multiple slots devoted to potions allow the wizard to either:

- Have multiple potions at one time; or,
- Add +1 to the strength of any potion

Unlike a normal enchanted item, the effect strength of the potion may be boosted on the fly or at the time it is created with the invocation of aspects. Each invocation allows the potion's strength to be increased by 2. You may choose to take a compel in order to get this bonus for

free, but that means the GM can introduce that compel at any time later without giving you the opportunity to refuse—you've already agreed to it by taking the additional strength for the potion. In general, only one such "pay-it-forward" compel should be allowed at a time.

Example: *Bob convinces Harry to create a love potion in exchange for assistance with the more useful escape potion. Harry's player, Jim, only sets one slot set aside for the love potion, so the potion strength is going to be 3 shifts for Harry's Lore of Good.*

Jim and the GM agree that it seems logical for Bob's coercion to function as a compel on Harry's Perpetually Broke *aspect—Harry needs the escape potion for the case he's working on and he can't afford to drop the case, so he has to accept Bob's terms. The GM adds the caveat that, because Bob's helping, it'll probably end up working more like a lust potion than a love potion. Jim sighs and agrees. He gets a fate point for his troubles.*

Jim decides to spend that fate point immediately for the escape potion, giving that potion a bonus of +2. This ups the strength of the potion to five shifts (3, +2 for the bonus from the compel). The thaumaturgical effect on this potion will provide 5 shifts of "sprinting" in a single exchange—including the ability to pass through normally impassible barriers, like walls.

For the love potion, the GM and Jim decide that it will plant the temporary aspect of Seized by Lust *if the target can't beat a Good (+3) Discipline roll. Of course, Susan drank the wrong potion by accident…and didn't make that roll.*

Focus Item Slots	Enchanted Item Slots	No smaller than…
1-2	1-4	Ring (ear or finger)
3-4	5-8	Fist or rod
5-6	9-12	Basketball or staff

Hidden Power

Power is hard to squirrel away without it being noticed. This is particularly true where items are concerned, both in terms of their physical and supernatural dimensions. First, the physical. Use this chart as a guideline, counting up the number of slots spent on a single item.

And so on. The size of an item will play into how hard it is to physically detect. Fortunately, even when a magic item is physically obvious, it's not always obvious what it's *for*. A beat cop might not look at a staff as much more than a funky walking-stick, even though such a thing is as lethal as a machine-gun in the hands of the right wizard.

That's where the supernatural dimension comes in. Those who are in the know (generally, those with actual occult training) can use their Lore skill to pick up on the presence of an item of magical potency, getting a +1 to the roll for every two enchantment slots or one focus slot spent in the item's construction. A staff composed of 4 focus item slots provides a whopping +4 bonus to that roll—so while it might look like a funky walking-stick, a trained pro will recognize right away that it's an object of absolutely lethal potency. This isn't the same as knowing what the staff *does*, mind you—it only identifies it as an item of supernatural power.



Hey, Billy, why does the chart stop here? What if someone wants to craft an item out of even more slots?

Well, if you go beyond the end of the chart, you're doubling or tripling the dimensions each step, so at best you're talking about something which is vehicular, if not completely stationary.

So what's shown is what you can actually carry. And it seems to me that wizards do better when they can actually bring their items to where they need to use them.

Good point. There's no Little Chicago in my pocket.

While it's "fun" to consider possible death curses, it's likely that the details of the actual casting will be mostly improv.

But your mom's was so complex...

BOB. Stop. Talking. Now. Or I bury you in a hole for several years.

You already did that, Harry.

A-GA-IN!

Hey, why aren't there more death curses messing everyone up given the Council's history of taking down rogue sorcerers?

Two things prevent that. One, the Wardens have gotten **very** good at preventing them. Two, most bad guys are too **arrogant** to assume anyone will ever manage to kill them. No foresight, no planning, no curse.

Few supernatural types take kindly to someone walking into their establishment while loaded down with big, nasty enchanted and focus items—the same as anyone wouldn't react well to someone showing up toting two assault rifles and a bandolier of grenades. This is why many wizards go for multiple small items, rather than a single, multi-functional whopper of a thing (this also helps spread out the risk of loss).

Transformation and Disruption

Thaumaturgy that fundamentally, lastingly changes the target—whether it's the target's body, mind, emotions, or even *luck*—falls into the category of transformation and disruption. Often, this is dark stuff—curses, mind control, destructive shapeshifting, and death magic.

Of all the methods available through thaumaturgy, *these* are the ones most prone to run afoul of the Laws of Magic (page 232). Regardless of what the spell changes, this is a violent act to the target: people and things are very good at being what they *are*, and this sort of magic forces them to be what they *aren't*.

As such, these forms of thaumaturgy rely on the same mechanical principle—most of them inflict consequences or temporary aspects on a target. Entropic curses inflict aspects that reflect bad luck and other kinds of misfortune. Emotion magic inflicts aspects related to emotional states (lust, anger, fear, etc.) that the victim can fall prey to. Mind control is just that—the aspect, when compelled, forces the victim to act in a certain way. In rarer cases, a curse might actually be fully transformative, changing the shape or nature of a being permanently.

Because these forms of thaumaturgy function via consequences, a wizard needs to make sure that the spell is complex enough to overcome any resistance the target might be able to raise (defense rolls, stress tracks, etc.), as well as add enough shifts for the desired level of consequence (0 for a temporary aspect, 2 for mild, 4 for moderate, 6 for severe, 8 for extreme). Anything that is fully transformative must be powerful enough to achieve a "taken out" result on the target, which can be extremely complex (see "*Contests and Conflicts*," page 265)—which isn't to say there aren't sorcerers out there practicing that kind of black magic. Sadly, there are plenty.

The Wizard's Death Curse

The wizard's death curse is actually very easy to model. It's a ritual, but with all of the preparation ready to go. The components of preparation are the circumstances of the wizard's death—all of the consequences he has can be tagged, and he can inflict more upon himself if he's got the space, since he's not going to be around afterward. He can cast it all in one round, because elements of fallout and backlash are of no concern to him, either. The wizard throws everything he has into this one spell, this one final moment of his life, and the effects of it can be incredibly devastating, whether they play out short term or, as is the preference, long term—often by transforming the very nature of the target's fate.

Transportation and Worldwalking

Transportation magics are all about getting the wizard (or someone—or something—else) from one place to another. Teleportation is rare if not completely absent—though a clever wizard can certainly make it *seem* like that's what he's done. Instead, there are spells which impart speed or other kinds of motion, and those which rip holes into or out of the Nevernever.

Spells (including potions and enchanted items) that impart speed focus on the idea of creating a simple action effect of a high Athletics roll used to sprint (page 212), allowing the wizard to cover a great amount of distance in a short amount of time. Milder, longer-term speed benefits can be imparted as maneuvers, giving a target an Unexpectedly Fast aspect that he can tag and invoke to boost needed rolls, but this sort of subtle magic is less often used—when there's a need for speed, there's a *need* for speed.

Running so fast can be hard on the body—steering isn't always easy at that speed, and some bodies aren't designed to move that fast without something giving. Mild and moderate physical consequences may be an appropriate part of using a spell or potion to boost speed, representing the body pushing past safe limits.

While it's theoretically possible to create a spell which would allow one to fly, the ability to fly (whether on a broomstick, a carpet, or some other conveyance) does not come with an instruction manual, and thus does not come with the *expertise* to control the ability once it's

available. Most wizards avoid trying, and those who do usually quickly discover what the human body was *not* meant to do.

Finally, teleportation-like effects can be achieved, but these are even trickier to guide than flight. With flying, at least you still have eyeballs to see where you're going; when you're a flowing stream of energy looking for somewhere else to be, where you end up is where you end up. For instance, Harry Dresden's quasi-teleportation escape potion from the Storm Front case worked, but it wasn't exactly what he wanted—it turned him into the wind for a few seconds, only got him to outside his apartment door, and left him a bit nauseated to boot. While the destination might be somewhat random (unless a specific destination has been symbolically linked into the spell's construction), thankfully the chances of ending up inside a solid object are fairly slim—energy likes to head toward the place of least resistance, and that's usually in an open space.

When building a teleportation spell, think small; the complexity should be based on the number of zones and borders you want to be able to cross, and you won't ever be able to cross *into* a place that has a threshold of any real strength (Good or better). Beyond the mystical barrier of a threshold, physical barriers are a problem, too—the GM should rate solid walls anywhere between 4 and 8 for their border value here. At the end of the day, the question to ask about teleportation is this: given all the effort necessary to build a good teleportation spell that only transports you a short distance, *why aren't you just walking?*

All this said, many wizards regard the above methods of transportation to be crude methods, used for short-term purposes. Real transportation is done by way of **worldwalking**—the practice of opening portals into and out of the Nevernever. Things are connected more by conceptual distance than by physical in the Nevernever, so a well-trained worldwalker can make it from New York to Shanghai much faster than any jet. The problem, of course, is that the geography of the Nevernever is fluid—not to mention chock full of *dangerous things*. Someone with a good guide or training can make it through relatively quickly and safely—use Lore as the skill of navigation in the Nevernever.

Opening a way into or out of the Nevernever depends almost entirely on the strength of the barrier between the Nevernever and our world in a given place. Opening the way is a simple action against the target strength—it must meet or exceed the strength in order to open up. Typically, the strength of the barrier between the Nevernever and our world is Superb (or better)—evidence to the contrary, things from the other side don't leak through to our world every day. At least, not in *general*, not in *most places*.

But our world (and the Nevernever) is rife with soft spots, places where the barrier is thinner and weaker. In these places, many supernatural creatures can cross into and out of the Nevernever as a casual effort—as simply as you might walk from one room to the next—so long as the place has a strong affinity for the creature in question (plenty of White Court vampires use strip clubs and the like). These places are home to such soft spots—as are places where ways have been opened frequently or recently—dropping the strength of the barrier to Great, Good, or even below. The overall barrier ebbs and flows as well; while the default strength is *typically* Superb, it can sometimes be weakened overall, as seen in the Grave Peril casefile. Some cities—such as Las Vegas—simply have a weak barrier no matter where you go.

Closing a way you've opened is a simple matter of will. *Keeping it open* is where things get interesting. Most ways will close themselves naturally within a few minutes—often much faster. Reality likes to heal those holes. If a way has been opened in the middle of a conflict (or just prior to one), the way faces an attack by the

Populating the Nevernever

A GM should feel free to stuff her own personal Nevernever to the gills with whatever strangeness suits the chunk of the Dresdenverse she has carved off and made her own. A game situated in Baltimore might populate the "local" Nevernever with all sorts of spirits of decay, for example.

Also, remember that a huge swath of the "near" Nevernever (the parts of it found closest to the mortal realm) is made up entirely of Faerie, so travelers should find plenty of faerie-kind haunting their paths. In Baltimore's case, those faeries are likely to hail from the Winter Court, given that court's affinity for decay and decline.

Billy, I'm thinking about the transforming stuff on the previous page. What does it take to transform yourself into a form with new powers? Or someone else for that matter?

The simplest answer is that transforming a target is like killing a target, with the taken out result being that they come back in a new form with different powers (that they have to pay refresh points for). Transforming yourself is either about producing a temporary, short-term, specific spell-effect with an obvious shift cost, or it's about acquiring new powers with spent refresh (or temporarily—see page 92—using fate points and tags).

barrier's strength at the end of every exchange: the GM rolls, using the barrier's strength as a skill, with a target difficulty of the spell's strength.

If the result exceeds the spell's strength, the way closes. The surest way to keep a way open for the maximum number of minutes is with a spell strength equal to the barrier's strength plus 4 or 5. Keeping a way open longer takes real effort—you can move the duration up the time chart (starting from a few minutes) one step for every additional point of complexity you add to the spell. That said, it's often better to let the natural order reassert itself as soon as possible. As with our world, there's a bad element out there that will see an open door as an invitation to go where it's not welcome.

Thematic Thaumaturgy

So what's my thaumaturgic theme?

I'd say, hmm, tracking? But you're more of a functional specialist than a thematic specialist. I'd just stat you with Divination bonuses and call it a day.

All the types of thaumaturgy listed so far are divided along functional lines. Plenty of spellcasters focus their specializations by function—you have divinators, wardsmen, crafters, summoners, and the like. But just as often, thaumaturgists specialize not along *functional* lines, but instead along *thematic* lines. A **thematic specialization** looks at the subject matter in which all the various functions of thaumaturgy are applied—an ectomancer will be particularly effective with summoning, binding, divining, veiling, warding, crafting, transforming, disrupting, and transporting ghosts and other non-demonic spirits, for example.

Following this paragraph are a few thematic specializations, but the possibilities are as varied as spellcasters themselves. If you want to introduce a new specialization for your character, that's totally fine. The main thing the GM needs to watch out for here is ensuring that the theme is both strongly expressed and limited in scope; a theme which really amounts to "everything" in application is no theme at all—it's a cheat.

Many thematic approaches to thaumaturgy run some sort of risk of skirting—if not outright violating—the Laws of Magic. Nearly all of them can be used to kill. Biomancy can be used to transform another; necromancy often reaches beyond the borders of life; psychomancy might be used to invade the thoughts of another. Tread lightly!

Biomancy

Biomancy is a term used for those who work magics upon the body. Shapeshifting is an extreme application of this art, whether in part or in full (see "*Transformation and Disruption*," page 282), but it's hardly the only application.

Healing magics fall under this specialization. The main problem with healing magic is that it can't do much more than modern science can—and it requires just as much real, mundane knowledge of biology as a surgeon to wield well. Still, biomancy can be used to lessen pain, provide first aid type treatment and other forms of physical therapy, and examine the physical conditions of someone's body (that's a biomantic divination, right there) including nifty Star Trek style tricks like "scanning for life-forms."

The main advantage of healing magic in the game is in providing justification to begin the recovery process (page 220) without any other effort. Use the shift value of the consequence (which you can stack together for multiple consequences) as the spell complexity. Remember, the recovery time can't be shortened with these kinds of magics—the target still has to go through the healing naturally.

Biomancy can also be used for short-term supercharging. Look to the early part of "*Transportation and Worldwalking*" on page 282 for some possible applications (e.g., boosted running speed, etc.). Biomantic rituals, items, and potions can be used to boost strength, speed, perception, and other functions of biology—provided that the body being boosted can withstand the stresses of such an effort. Just because muscles have been supercharged to lift a small car doesn't mean they're built to withstand the damage that would do; inflicting consequences on the beneficiary to boost spell effectiveness is not uncommon (Torn Muscle Tissue, etc.).

Diabolism

Diabolism refers to spellcraft involving a demonic component. This is usually very bad news, but a specialization in demonic thaumaturgy can also be used to effectively *combat* the influences of demons—locating demons, purging the possessed, constructing wards that are especially potent against demons, binding and banishing demons that have gotten loose.

But it's just as easy to cross the line and start using demons for your needs. Demons can be consulted for information via divination (though this invariably produces hazy, vague

results—demons would rather be summoned), or by summoning them and entering negotiation for the particulars. They can be bound into service and sent out as infernal attack dogs. While information gathering is something of a grey practice, summoning a demon and putting it into service to kill is a clear-cut case of black magic (there's a straight line of connection between the intent to kill and the summoning of the demon; cue the First Law).

Ectomancy

Ectomancy is the practice of spellcraft involving (generally non-demonic) spirits, focused especially upon ghosts. Conceptually, ectomancy has much in common with diabolism and necromancy, but it mostly stays within the safe zone in between. It manages to neatly dodge the Fifth Law thanks to the nature of ghosts themselves; ghosts aren't actual dead people—they're the supernatural "echoes" of the dead. That said, ghosts can put on quite a convincing show, often possessing some or most of the knowledge and skills of the person that cast the echo, and this makes them potentially useful to a talented ectomancer.

Ectomancers tend to get *noticed* by ghosts and often find themselves haunted by those who are looking for a way to speak to the living. Many ectomancers develop a natural ability to see—or at least acutely sense—the presence of ghosts, simply using Lore as the perception skill.

In application, ectomancy can access all of the functions of thaumaturgy as applied to (or by) ghosts and spirits. Ghosts can be summoned and bound into service, sent away or used to kill via disruption, used as a ritual component to enchant items or divine information, and so on. Ectomantic spells can be constructed that specifically target ghosts as well, whether it's a ward against spirits or a scrying attempt to divine their presence. Some ectomancers may even be able to access a skill from a ghost's skillset, in an act somewhat like voluntary possession; here, the skill acquired is limited by the level of skill the ghost possesses, and the value of the skill rating is added to the complexity for the binding spell.

Entropomancy

Entropomancy goes by a variety of names—*malocchio, maladicto, katadesmoi*—and in all cases it amounts to essentially the same thing: the refined art of inflicting curses on targets,



driving their lives toward greater disarray (and at its extreme, death). So long as the magic follows the principle of "things fall apart," entropomancy has an affinity for it.

This sort of magic doesn't have to kill its target—it can just make things *suck* for them. At its weakest, the curses inflicted by a *malocchio* are transitory: maneuver-equivalent, inflicting temporary aspects ranging from Bad Luck to Two Left Feet to Comes Off Like A Jerk. Curses might carry a little bit of deliberate hexing with them (page 258), causing technology to fail around a target even though he isn't a practitioner himself. It's entirely possible to play a low-level entropomancer in this way, focused not on death but on mischief.

The problem, of course, is that magic is tied closely to what you believe you are, what you believe you're capable of doing. Entropomancers face regular temptation to make the next curse a little worse, because they already believe in their hearts that they're the sort of people that make sure other folks *have a bad day*. Sure, you could hit someone with a curse that makes him

stumble at just the wrong moment…but why not have him stumble in front of a car?

Eventually, cursing tends to become more vicious and direct; giving someone a heart attack is entirely possible and—while it takes a lot of energy to do it—can be done in such a way as to be nearly undetectable as foul play (our example of Victor Sells set aside). The classic is the full-on entropy curse that gives entropomancy its name. This is a dark seething invisible force that follows the victim around and encourages the environment to kill him a *lot*—falling power-lines, cars full of bees, frozen turkeys plummeting from an empty sky. It's not a very precise or very quick way to do it, but dire entropy curses do tend to get the job done, often as bizarrely as circumstances will allow.

MAN, I COULD NOT HAVE DONE THAT TURKEY-REDIRECTION THING BETTER IF I'D PLANNED IT. BETTER A BLACK COURT VAMP THAN AN ALLY, OR ME.

Necromancy

Ah, necromancy. The art of death magic barely needs an introduction, and nearly all of it is in violation of the Fifth Law. Whether used with good intentions or bad, reaching beyond the borders of life is bad news, no matter if it's reanimating a dead body as a zombie, calling back a departed soul moments after death, or engaging in human sacrifice to harness the power of death.

Zombies and the like are a case of summoning and binding an animating spirit—usually a really *stupid* one that just knows how to follow instructions—into the flesh of a dead man, then convincing that flesh to get up and start walking again (this typically requires the inclusion of something to stand in for a heartbeat, like a drum or a bitchin' set of subwoofers and the latest gangsta rap on loop). Where the flesh is weak, ectoplasm suffices, conjured in sufficient quantities to give the body the musculature it needs to move.

The dark grey area here—deepest, darkest grey—involves the manipulation of ghosts (usually by doing something unspeakable with their physical remains as part of the spell) and the reanimation of dead creatures that never had a soul in the first place (say, a dinosaur). Such necromancers exist, but rarely without sanction. The Wardens of the White Council like to exercise a fairly broad interpretation of the Fifth Law, given half the chance. And with reason; those who practice necromancy inevitably seem to seek out the lost and hidden lore of the great necromancer Kemmler, engaging in Kemmlerian Necromancy (page 291), becoming even more powerful than before. *It's all bad.*

Photomancy

Photomancy is the art of manipulating light and imagery with magic. The most obvious application here is with veils, but disguise and illusion are also along for the ride. Focused light can also produce heat-based effects; on the evocation side, photomancy tends to manifest as a manipulation of fire.

Disguises and illusions created by photomancy operate much like veils, save that they're oriented on fooling someone rather than simply hiding from them. This is a block action against visual detection of the disguise, though if an illusion or disguised individual behaves in a way obviously out of character, the block isn't going to be much help.

Less obvious applications of photomancy include bending light away from an area (a maneuver, to place a Shadowed aspect on a location, for example) and divinations that seek out a particular image and/or cause something you're seeking to glow.

Focused practitioners that use photomancy exclusively seem to have no aptitude for manipulating ectoplasm—meaning their illusions never have any physical substance to back them up unless they're wrapped around an actual physical object. More broadly talented wizards often incorporate a little bit of ectoplasm into their photomantic efforts, creating illusions that can actually interact with the environment.

Psychomancy

Practitioners that read and manipulate minds are called psychomancers (or sometimes neuromancers). Given that these acts violate the Third and Fourth Laws of Magic, they may also be called *headless*, thanks to the action of the Wardens. Psychomancy is neither well documented nor condoned, though it seems every now and again some new wizard comes along with a talent for it, trained or not. The Council does its best to intercede as quickly as possible in such cases.

There are some grey areas that can be explored, mostly safely. Psychomancy might be used to draw the thoughts out of the brain of a dead man—no living person nor active mind is violated in such a case, and the borders of life are not crossed. Empathically reading the emotional state of someone isn't a violation of his thoughts so much as an application of psychomancy to boost your ability to perceive such information (done as a divination).

I REALLY NEED TO TALK TO MOLLY ABOUT SOME OF THIS STUFF.

And then there's the legal but dangerous area of wielding psychomancy against *yourself*—supercharging your brain for an all-nighter or to improve your reaction time, digging into your own memories to pull out information you didn't realize was there, removing your ability to feel fear, and so on. But synapses and minds are fragile—when you can plug right into your brain's pleasure-center and press the big red MORE button, or accidentally destroy your ability to feel inhibition, it's not long before you're indistinguishable from a meth-head. Just because you're doing it to yourself doesn't make the act any less violent. See the "supercharging" discussions about transportation (page 282) and biomancy (page 284) for guidelines on the dangers of this.

Some alternative forms of psychomancy specialize in a particular range of thought—phobomancy focuses entirely on fear, for example. These variants are encountered almost as often as psychomancy itself.

Whither Pyromancy and Kinetomancy?

There are a number of spellcasting names out there of the –mancy variety that you don't see listed in this section. There's a reason for that: not all of them have a thaumaturgic component. For instance, pyromancy and kinetomancy (command of fire and force) are usually expressions of focused evocation.

Sponsored Magic

Sponsored magic is the name we're giving to spellcasting that draws on power sources other than the caster himself (he can still draw on his own power; it's just not an exclusive arrangement). These power sources, called **sponsors**, are at least semi-aware, if not fully-aware, entities. Ancient and strange and potent, they have agendas of their own, and they view those to whom they grant a modicum of their own power as their agents throughout Creation.

Sponsored magic, then, is the result of a contract, pact, or other binding arrangement, implicit or explicit. Some part of your soul is in hock. Seelie and Unseelie Magic (see the abilities on page 290) are examples of this concept, drawing on the ancient powers of the Summer and Winter Courts of Faerie.

In practice, this is essentially equivalent to taking the Channeling and Ritual abilities priced at 2 refresh apiece, with the sponsored source of power replacing the usual specialized focus (this is why Seelie Magic is priced as a 4 refresh ability). If the character is already a practitioner of evocation and/or thaumaturgy, the source gets "tacked on" to his existing spellcasting abilities as an extra area of focus, reducing the cost by 1 refresh apiece.

This can be mix and match: if the character knows evocation but not thaumaturgy, the price would be a total of 3 refresh—1 to tack the sponsored source onto evocation, 2 to pick up "Ritual" for the sponsored magic. Some power sources may come with additional potent benefits, increasing the cost. Specific power sources may have other special rules regarding refresh cost; see the list starting on page 290.

Inherent Limitations

Sponsored magic is subject to the limitations of evocation and thaumaturgy, which it emulates (or supplements). In order to gain the benefits of sponsored magic, the spell you're casting must align with the agenda of the sponsor (page 289) and fit into the theme and scope of the sponsor's particular "flavor" of power (see the types of sponsored magic, page 290). As a result, sponsored magic is narrower in its focus and has a sort of implicit approval component, in exchange for the extra bit of potency and flexibility it offers.

When aspects result from the casting effort—whether inflicted on yourself or others as consequences or temporary aspects, or as part of the preparation phase—they're always colored, at least a touch, by the sponsor's influence and agenda. If you take a consequence from sponsored magic, whether from backlash or just because, it gives the sponsor a window to compel you in various ways. For example, hellfire is a vicious sponsored source and wants to push you towards a greater commitment to black magic and the influence of those Down Below—aspects brought on by your casting will reflect that.

Before we leave the thaumaturgy section, I've got a question for you... What makes an appropriate-sized "theme", if you're trying to come up with new ones?

Hmm. Well, there are two kinds. One is a wide theme with a narrow application in terms of the functions it can access, like biomancy—you can affect lots of things under the "bio" theme, but mainly only for divination, transformation and disruption, and transportation. The other is a narrow theme with a wide application, like ectomancy—which lets you do all the kinds of thaumaturgy, but only with ghosts.

How To Do It

Sponsored magic spells are put together exactly like evocation and thaumaturgy. Use the procedures described in those sections (starting on page 249 and page 261 respectively).

"With Evocation's Methods and Speed"

When you see this phrase in the power sources listed starting on page 290, here's what it means:

- The spell is still limited to line of sight, like evocation.
- The spell is cast like evocation: power first, control later, all done in one exchange.
- Thaumaturgy's set of effects are broader-reaching, not constricted by the straight-line force principles of evocation. With the power source, you get access to the listed set of thaumaturgic effects (often a thematic grouping of some sort) as a viable effect of an evocation spell. So you might be able to throw together a small ward quickly, summon a minor creature extra-quick, or cast a curse of decay with the flick of a wrist. In these cases, use what would have been the complexity of the thaumaturgic effect as a guideline for the power of the evocation.

This may seem like a bit of a shell game, since the sets of *mechanical* effects available to thaumaturgy and evocation are pretty similar, with only a few areas of non-overlap. You'd be mostly right, but for this point: getting a broad range of effects out of evocation is an exercise in *creative rationalization*. What the power source is offering in this specific case, then, is a broadening of what you don't have to rationalize. It's just quickly, easily available to your spellcaster. Combine this with a few mechanical benefits available with each source and it's a definite upgrade to a character's arcane options.

When you spend a fate point to resist a sponsor's debt compel, does your debt still go down?

No, it doesn't. But the sponsor can't force that same issue again, either. You get to refuse that specific compel. But another one — and granted, a different one — is headed your way later.

What You Can Do With It

Sponsored magic provides a few major benefits.

The first is the "extra oomph" the source provides in keeping with its agenda. This may provide special potency against a portion of supernaturally tough creatures, partially satisfying the Catch on their Toughness abilities; this allows you to treat them as one level less potent—only Inhumanly Tough instead of Supernaturally Tough, for example. Summer magic is especially nasty to the scions of Winter, and vice-versa.

But this isn't always about finding the weak spot in an enemy's armor. Sometimes the power source is instead more potent (or at least *faster*) when directed against certain types of problems, such as Summer's ability to do more potent healing effects (the sponsor takes care of all that pesky biological know-how) and the ability to do certain things with the effects of thaumaturgy, but at the speed of evocation.

When these benefits are particularly broad, the refresh cost of the sponsored magic may increase. These situations will be sketched out in each sponsored magic's description (starting on page 290).

In addition, if you already practice evocation, you may use a sponsored power source to "supercharge" an element you've already specialized in. So Summer magic might combine with the air element to give a "breath of life" effect; hellfire might combine with fire to produce, well, *hell-fire*; and Kemmlerian necromancy might combine with the spirit element to inflict potent visions of death upon a victim. This sort of combination allows the spellcaster to use his existing evocation specialization bonuses with the new power source.

Finally, another broader benefit offered by all types of sponsored magic is the ability of the sponsor to cover you when you can't make your expenses. Once per roll, you may invoke an aspect *without* spending a fate point. Doing so adds one to the **debt** between you and your sponsor. The sponsor may collect on this debt later, trading in compels on you for that debt on a one-for-one basis—compels that get you no fate points if you accept, and which you must accept unless you have an actual fate point to spend to refuse it. Invariably these compels run along the lines of pushing you to act in accordance with the sponsor's agenda.

The Sponsor's Agenda

Every type of sponsored magic comes with an agenda of some sort. Winter wants to see the world grow colder and decay; Summer wants to see the world overrun with warmth, wildness, and growth. Hellfire serves the agenda of Down Below, while soulfire…well, honestly, we aren't sure what soulfire's (God's?) agenda is, though Michael Carpenter might have a few choice words on the subject. Other sources of power, such as those associated with particular places or ancient creatures, align with purposes of their own—some ineffable, some…more effable.

The only thing eff-able around here is your apprentice, boss.

…did you REALLY just say that?!?

The Dark Powers Are Always Willing To Help

Sometimes the sponsored practitioner can dig deep and draw more than a single invocation from his sponsor on a single roll. This can help pay *any* cost associated with casting a spell, at the rate of 1 debt for every 2 shifts of effect. So if you need to take a 4-stress mental hit to cast a big evocation and can't (or maybe just don't want to take the consequence you'd have to), the sponsor will gladly take the hit for you, in exchange for increasing your debt by 2.

Some GMs might want to restrict the amount of times this can be done during a single scene or session, but on the other hand, the dark powers are *always* willing to help...

Bad Credit

The GM should decide what level of debt the sponsor is comfortable with before calling in a marker. If a sponsored spellcaster keeps racking up the debt but never gets compelled, the debt has no teeth. Similarly, there may be an upper bound of debt at which point the sponsor cuts him off from any more power. Every credit card has its limits; but like a credit card company, a sponsor is often willing to negotiate, if the practitioner can figure out how to make an appropriate petition.

Whenever a character comes onto the scene and practices sponsored magic, there's an agenda at work—whether the character is a willing agent of it or not, he'll be serving it eventually. The GM should know what that agenda is, whether or not she chooses to share some or all of it with the character in question. An agenda that doesn't force the character to make regular, tough choices—especially when he's accumulated some debt—is no agenda at all. Go for the throat.

For example, draw on enough soulfire and God might push you to destroy that demon at all costs, rather than taking the time to recover from consequences while you allow the demon to escape. Or maybe He'll just demand that you find it in your heart to forgive a bitter enemy. Draw on enough hellfire and you might find yourself destroying more than just monsters and the occasional architecture—those destructive tendencies could creep into your life and relationships as well, or even drive you toward murder.

Temporary Access

Sometimes what you're looking for is a temporary fling with power, rather than a committed relationship. If the sponsor is willing, and you have the ability to negotiate with it in some way (whether by ritual or through an empowered representative), you may gain use of that sponsored power and all of its benefits for a single spell. All it takes is the acquisition of one point of debt per spell. Though sometimes, the first one's free…

Our best example of this is in the Proven Guilty casefile, when Harry was able to draw on the power of Summer briefly by using a mote of Summer flame that the Summer Lady, Lily, had sent along with him as he investigated Arctis Tor. This is also a common method used with places of power (page 292), where the spellcaster temporarily draws on the ambient power of the location without making a deeper, long-term binding effort. In all such cases, the use of the spell has to fit the agenda of the source—the opportunity just isn't there otherwise.

I've only used "sponsored" Summer Magic once before, and that was on loan. It's why I got the light show in Arctis Tor when I unleashed the power in the mote of flame that Lily gave me.

Does someone get a discount on these if they have Channeling instead of Evocation, or Ritual instead of Thaumaturgy?

Nope! Evocation and Thaumaturgy grant a discount here because they are already versatile forms of magic. Channeling and Ritual are too narrowly defined to have room to take on another method.

Types of Sponsored Magic

GMs are welcome to create types of sponsored magic to suit their own game (in such a case, opening up some of the types to those playing Emissaries of Power is practically a mandate). The following are examples drawn from the sometimes-scant information in Harry's casefiles.

Seelie (Summer) Magic

Drawing on the power of the Summer Court, you're able to cast spells that fit its essential nature: wildness, birth, growth, renewal, fire. These magics are under the sway and watch of the Queens of Summer (Lady, Queen, and Mother); making use of it will inevitably catch their notice. If you think the Summer Court is all warmth and light, consider that unbridled growth favors an ebola virus just as much as it does a pear tree.

Cost: 4 refresh for the package, not to mention approval from one of the greater powers of the Summer Court, such as Queen Titania or Mother Summer. Reduce this cost by 1 if you have Evocation or Thaumaturgy; reduce the cost by 2 if you have both.

Benefits: Standard sponsored magic benefits (page 288). Summer magic is particularly effective against faeries of the Winter Court; downgrade the effectiveness of any Toughness ability the target has by one step (Mythic Toughness becomes Supernatural, Supernatural becomes Inhuman, Inhuman goes away) when using this magic against a Winter Court enemy.

In addition, Summer magic may be used as an element for evocation, allowing evocation spell effects that encourage wildness, birth, growth, renewal, and warmth. This includes the ability to produce effects along the lines of biomancy (page 284) with less of a requirement for biological expertise in the spellcaster—the powers of Summer already understand biology pretty well and will do the heavy lifting for the caster—but with an evocation spell's methods and speed. Summer evocations always include warmth and life in some way: summer flames burn hotter, summer earth carries the warmth of just-baked clay, summer spirit warms the heart, and summer spells in general cause nearby flowers to bloom and the ambient temperature to rise.

Unseelie (Winter) Magic

Drawing on the power of the Winter Court, you're able to cast spells that fit its essential nature: wildness, death, decay, slumber, ice. These magics are under the sway and watch of the Queens of Winter (Lady, Queen, and Mother); making use of it will inevitably catch their notice. If you think the Winter Court is all frozen cruelty, remember that without their balance to Summer, the world of man would end, choked off by unbridled nature.

Cost: 4 refresh for the package, not to mention approval from one of the greater powers of the Winter Court, such as Queen Mab or Mother Winter. Reduce this cost by 1 if you have Evocation or Thaumaturgy; reduce the cost by 2 if you have both.

Benefits: Standard sponsored magic benefits (page 288). Winter magic is particularly effective against faeries of the Summer Court; downgrade the effectiveness of any Toughness ability

Common Rituals

A handful of ritual spells exist out there that *anyone* can make use of—even if he isn't a spellcaster. These common rituals are powerful and usable only when they are kept secret and used by a very small number—there just isn't enough power to spread around if they become more widely available. This is why the White Council's principal weapon against such things is their publishing arm, regularly churning books full of such rituals into your local bookstore's new age shelf.

In practice, an "undiminished" ritual operates just like the temporary access scenario (see above), only without requiring the ritualist to know any kind of real magic at all. The point (or points) of debt is accumulated, and the ritual is cast. (The details of "diminished" rituals are left up to the GM's whim.)

Always, this is a single, specific spell with pretty much everything other than the target predetermined. The ritualist must still go through the steps of preparation, and skills such as Lore, Discipline, and Conviction *do* come into play. But that and the step-by-step ritual instructions are all that's needed; these rituals often bring about something pretty nasty when successful.

the target has by one step (Mythic Toughness becomes Supernatural, Supernatural becomes Inhuman, Inhuman goes away) when using this magic against a Summer Court enemy.

In addition, Winter magic may be used as an element for evocation, allowing evocation spell effects that encourage wildness, decay, slumber, death, and cold. This includes the ability to produce effects along the lines of entropomancy (page 285), but with an evocation spell's methods and speed. Winter evocations always include cold in some way: winter ice is of the bitterest cold, winter winds bring the chill of a blizzard, winter flames shed light but not heat, and winter spells in general cause plants to wither and breath to mist.

Kemmlerian Necromancy

"Kemmlerian" necromancy owes its name to the great necromancer Kemmler, who terrorized Europe during the era of the World Wars before being taken down by a concerted effort of the White Council. Kemmlerites draw on the power of death itself to fuel their dark magics—whether it's animating graveyards of corpses, calling up ghosts of the Confederate dead, or ripping souls out of their bodies. Worse, they make it all look *easy*.

Cost: Kemmlerites *must* already be wizards or sorcerers of some stripe, well-versed in Evocation and Thaumaturgy (with at least some specialization in necromancy), and have access to some portion of Kemmler's lore (or its equivalent). Therefore this is available only as an upgrade to those abilities, for a refresh cost of 2.

Benefits: Standard sponsored magic benefits (page 288). Kemmlerian necromancy comes with automatic, additional specializations in necromancy: +1 to control, +1 to complexity, stacking on top of any existing specializations. In addition, Kemmlerites have shown varying amounts of ability to exercise necromantic (page 286) and psychomantic (page 286) spell effects with evocation's speed and methods, coloring such evocations with the alien chill of death itself. A Kemmlerite may choose to use his control bonus from necromancy instead of the control bonus he would normally use with evocation, so long as the casting incorporates some element of death.

Hellfire

Hellfire draws on the infernal powers of Down Below. This is the power source that Denarians (OW22) are only too happy to provide to their "hosts," if their hosts happen to be of the spellcasting persuasion. But demons and fallen angels are a very flexible lot when it comes to offering power—it's entirely possible sorcerers exist out there that are making use of the power of hellfire simply by way of a standard sell-your-soul pact. When employed, hellfire (really, hell-anything, but "hellwater," "hellspirit," etc., don't sound as good) is especially vicious, inflicting an extra helping of pain whenever possible.

Cost: Standard costs, though hellfire is especially useful for someone using evocation.

Benefits: Standard sponsored magic benefits (page 288). Hellfire likes to inflict pain and harm, but isn't particularly concerned about being controlled; gain a +1 to the power or complexity threshold on any spell intended to inflict stress or consequences. In the hands of a focused practitioner, treat it like fire for Channeling (page 181) and like diabolism, entropomancy, or disruption for Ritual (page 181).



Depending on the nature of the practitioner's "contract" (implicit or explicit) with his particular hellfire power broker, many thaumaturgic spells may be used with evocation's speed and methods—all that's required is the broker's consent and an extra point of debt on a case by case basis.

The best concept I've gotten so far is that soulfire is "mystical rebar" — using the substance of a soul to reinforce and strengthen a magical effect.

Soulfire

Soulfire appears to involve drawing on the "fires of Creation." Brilliant and pure, it seems able to pierce otherwise unassailable defenses, causing even ancient beings of power to take notice. It appears to have an agenda in line with that of Heaven (or whatever you might choose to call it), but due to a general lack of information on the topic we aren't quite sure what that *means* yet.

Cost: Due to the extra potency of soulfire, the base cost is 1 higher (5 total, instead of 4—reduced to 3 if you have both Evocation and Thaumaturgy).

Benefits: Standard sponsored magic benefits (page 288), with a *potentially* gentler agenda (though this may come with a tighter credit limit on the matter of debt). Soulfire downgrades the Toughness ability of *any* supernatural creature by one step when employed (Mythic Toughness becomes Supernatural, Supernatural becomes Inhuman, Inhuman goes away), and it may fully satisfy the Catch (page 185) for some creatures vulnerable to "holy" sources of damage. With some creatures (even those that operate on a "plot device" level), it's still potent enough to get their attention.

The full scope of what soulfire can do is not clear to us at this time. In evocation, soulfire functions most like the element of fire (though it's possible other element equivalents may exist), and in thaumaturgic application…well, we don't know really, so for our current purposes consider it to provide the full range of thaumaturgy spells (those which are agenda-compatible, at any rate).

Places of Power

Not all kinds of sponsored power are available in a broad, always-on-everywhere sense. Some sponsored sources are available only in a particular place, or at least require that you journey *to* that place and perform a ritual there to bind a portion of its power to you (and pledge yourself to *it*, for that matter). Such a source might be called a *genius loci* ("spirit of the place"), but other times they aren't as overtly-identified—they might simply manifest as a particularly potent ley line, for example. No two places of power are the same, with each tying into some entity's agenda. These entities are often abstract, suffusing the place, but they may manifest a transient physical form when the attunement and binding rituals are performed. The geography of such places tends to be limited—a small isolated island, the five city blocks and one street wide area of a ley line, etc. There are no city-scale places of power. While places of power are rare, the idea practically calls out for use in whatever city or location you've set your game!

Cost: If the power drawn from a place is only usable while you're physically located there, the base cost is 1 lower (3 total instead of 4). The cost is standard (4) if you can take the power *with* you, away from that place, once you have attuned to it.

Benefits: Standard sponsored magic benefits (page 288). What particular flavor these benefits take depends on the nature of the place. For example, a ley-line might draw on an ancient Spirit of Decay lurking beneath the fabric of the local Nevernever, allowing entropomantic effects with evocation's speed and methods. It might offer a +1 to control and complexity for any entropomancy as well (and it'd have a pretty nasty agenda too, I'd think—always driving the spellcaster's life into a greater state of disarray if he doesn't purge the build-up by inflicting it on others through curses and the like).

In some cases, when sponsored by a strong place of power, the practitioner's senses become keenly aligned to that place while he's there. This is *intellectus*. Someone attuned to the place will know his way around instantly and easily (any navigation difficulties would be treated as Mediocre). Further, he may use his Lore skill to sort out useful information from his intimate, natural knowledge of the place, perceiving anything that happens anywhere within the bounds of that geography. This doesn't extend more than a hair's breadth away from that place, however. It's not vision or any normal sense; it's just *knowledge* of what the place itself can perceive—two clawed feet just stepped onto the road ahead; there are 247 birds in the trees on this island; and so on.

Examples of Magic

During play, the way magic will typically come up is when a player or GM says "I want to cast a spell to achieve Effect Blah. How do I do that?" You won't typically say "I think I'll cast an evocation—now what kind do I want to cast?" Problem is, knowing the effect you want to achieve before you've considered how to achieve it makes it pretty hard to look up how to do it in this chapter.

Fear not, intrepid spellcaster, this section is for you!

If you don't know how to achieve a particular effect, create a particular type of focus item, or brew a particular potion, simply look on this list for something similar—then go forth and do the same. Hopefully you can find something similar—if you can't, then you might have to read through the chapter.

Horror of horrors. Reading!

Example Evocation Spells

Carlos Ramirez's Entropy Shield

Warden Carlos Ramirez uses a heavy leather gauntlet (page 301) as a focus item to help him cast his famous water-based entropy shield, which does not attempt to stop attacks but rather disintegrate them.

Type: Water (entropy) evocation, defensive block
Power: 6 shifts
Control: Roll Discipline plus appropriate specializations and focus items
Duration: One exchange
Effect: A weird-looking hemisphere of entropy appears in front of the caster, partially disintegrating attacks. Carlos may decide whether he wishes to use the block as a standard 6-shift block, or as Armor:3.
Variations: Carlos sometimes attempts more shifts of power to extend the duration.
Notes: Carlos may occasionally figure out a clever way to use the shield as an attack, by forcing a creature to dive through the effect—see page 260 for guidelines on how to attack with a defensive spell.

Earth Stomp

Donald Morgan isn't the subtlest guy in the world—this spell has the ground itself swallow up the target and crush it.

Type: Earth evocation, offensive attack
Power: Varies; 6 shifts is typical, this example assumes 8
Control: Roll Discipline plus appropriate specializations and focus items
Target: One or more creature in a single zone; this example assumes 4 targets
Opposed by: Target's Might
Effect: Let's assume the Discipline roll is Legendary+1 (+9). Morgan splits the 8 shifts of power into four Weapon:2 attacks. On the targeting side, per the split-attack rules (page 251), he splits his targeting result into a Good (+3) attack against the guy closest to him and a Fair (+2) attack against the three others. Each target that fails to defend with Might suffers a 2-shift hit plus any increase from the attack's margin of success.
Variations: A caster could extend this to the entire zone if he found a way to protect himself from it.

Entanglement

This spell causes a band of force to entangle the target's ankles, effectively binding him in place.

Type: Spirit (force) evocation, offensive maneuver
Power: Varies; typical is 4 shifts—3 for effect plus 1 for additional duration
Control: Roll Discipline plus appropriate specializations and focus items
Duration: One scene
Opposed by: Target's Athletics
Effect: If the spell hits, the target has the sticky Bound in Place temporary aspect applied.
Variations: Power levels may of course be changed based on the target's ability to oppose the spell. This spell is non-lethal; a damaging variant—adjudicated as a magical grapple—could be created based on the Orbius spell (page 294).

Fuego!

This is Harry's standard fire attack spell—one of his favorites when he decides subtlety is inappropriate. It sends a blazingly hot beam of flame toward a single target. He usually uses his blasting rod to aid his control roll.

Type: Fire evocation, attack
Power: Variable (unless rote), usually 4 to 8 shifts
Control: Roll Discipline, plus specializations and focus items, to control and as attack roll
Target: One target in line-of-sight, inflicting physical stress
Duration: One action
Opposed by: Target's Athletics skill, magical blocks, or some other skill as determined in play
Variations: A caster could divide the shifts of effect among two or more targets, rolling to hit each separately.
Notes: Many direct attack evocations work this way (Forzare, for example)—change the power and elements to suit your needs.

Wow... the Grasping Branches spell seems like a long way to go for the result. What's the advantage?

It gives you a Weapon:7 attack by invoking the otherwise useless Nearby Tree aspect. That'll ruin your whole day. It does cost the caster a fate point, though.

The wizard could make a weaker spell without incorporating the Nearby Tree aspect though, yes?

Absolutely.

Or if the Nearby Tree aspect is freshly introduced, maybe save a fate point by "tagging" it?

Sniff. I am like the proud papa right now.

Grasping Branches

Yoshimo used this tremendously powerful evocation to destroy a zombie by animating a nearby tree.

Type: Water evocation, offensive maneuver/attack
Power: 7 shifts
Control: Roll Discipline plus 2 for an aspect invocation (see Notes)
Opposed by: Target's Athletics
Effect: Mechanically, it boils down to a straightforward Weapon:7 attack vs. target's Athletics, but one that makes use of a invocation or tag in order to work at its level of potency.
Variations: Use a similar idea to get a couple of extra shifts of power from scene details that you can't figure out what to do with.
Notes: This requires invoking a scene aspect like Nearby Tree to pull off. The caster casts the spell to briefly animate the tree, applying the temporary aspect Arboreal Servant to himself, which the caster immediately tags, adding two to his Discipline roll. This tree immediately makes an attack vs. the target using the caster's original Discipline roll (plus the two for the aspect tag.)

Hyperawareness

This spell increases the caster's awareness, allowing him to react to danger much more quickly.

Type: Spirit evocation, defensive (sort of) maneuver

Type: Spirit or Air evocation, defensive block

Power: Dependent on caster ability. For Elaine Mallory and this example, 5 shifts.

Control: Roll Discipline plus appropriate specializations and focus items

Target: A caster typically casts this spell on herself.

Duration: 3 exchanges

Effect: This is actually a defensive block, but one that works by amping up the wizard's awareness of her surroundings—subtle movements of air, surges of hostile intent, that sort of thing. Two shifts are put into duration, leaving a Good (+3) effect, effectively a persistent dodge of incoming attacks.

Variations: Longer or shorter duration yields a lesser or greater block effect. Clever wizards might redirect this spell energy to use the block as a substitute skill roll result for Alertness or Investigation. Some GMs might be okay with setting aside the block and instead using the effect strength as an indicator of initiative.

Subtle Evocations

The example above is worth calling attention to. In most cases a "subtle" evocation is a simple, reframed perspective on something evocations already do. In rarer, cleverer cases, the GM may take a few cues from thaumaturgy and allow the player to do something evocation normally just can't.

Orbius

This is the spell Madge Shelly used to suffocate Trixie Vixen in the Blood Rites casefile. It creates a mass of glop (Harry described it as looking vaguely like a cow patty) over the target's windpipe, suffocating him over the course of several exchanges.

Type: Spirit evocation, offensive block; adjudicated as a grapple
Power: 8 shifts—3 for effect, 5 for duration



Control: On the first round, roll Discipline plus applicable specializations and focus items
Target: One target in line-of-sight, inflicting physical stress
Duration: Six exchanges total
Opposed by: Target's Endurance skill. Magical blocks might be effective in the first round; armor is ineffective.
Effect: The first round establishes the grapple. Each round thereafter, the target rolls Endurance. If the roll fails to beat the spell's effect (Good +3), the target suffers one shift of physical stress as he suffocates. Armor is ineffective. This spell does not affect creatures that do not need to breathe.
Variations: The caster could change the power or duration, tailoring it to a given target's toughness. A caster could instead use the spell to bind (and damage!) a creature's legs or hands—in that case, the spell would be a block opposed by Might.

Quick Veil

Molly Carpenter is especially good at these spells; typically she uses no focus items for them.

Type: Spirit evocation, defensive block
Power: Varies; 3 shifts is typical for a simple casting
Control: Roll Discipline plus appropriate specializations and focus items
Duration: One exchange
Opposed by: An observer's Alertness skill
Effect: Renders the caster invisible
Variations: The caster could add additional shifts of power to make the veil stronger, to veil additional people or big objects, to "throw" the veil over an object from a distance, or to gain additional exchanges of duration without needing to concentrate and re-roll.

Rifflitum and Other Shield Spells

Harry uses this spell to create a magical shield, mitigating the blow of an incoming attack.

Type: Spirit evocation, defensive block
Power: 5 shifts
Control: Roll Discipline plus applicable specializations and focus items
Duration: One exchange
Effect: Deflects an incoming attack. If overcome, it vanishes.
Variations: The caster could change the power of the block (invoking aspects as necessary for additional help on power or control), or declare it as armor, which allows it to remain even if overcome (at the cost of it only providing two points of armor—half the shifts of effect, rounded down). The caster could add shifts of power to increase the duration. Another variation is to use a focus item, such as a shield bracelet, to enhance the power of the block or to gain additional exchanges of duration essentially for free. A GM might—*might*—allow the caster to make the shield selectively permeable, specifying one or more elements that can pass through the shield, at the cost of one or two additional shifts of power per element.

Molly is really good at the quick veil thing.

Whirlwind

This spell calls up a whirlwind, tossing people around like the proverbial rag dolls.

Type: Air evocation, offensive maneuver
Power: Varies; 6 shifts in this case (3 for effect, 1 for extended duration, 2 for wide effect)
Control: Roll Discipline plus appropriate specializations and focus items
Target: Every person within a single zone
Opposed by: Target's Athletics
Effect: The target has the sticky aspect Knocked Prone applied to him.
Variations: With an invocation of a scene aspect—Loose Objects or something like it—you could rebuild this as an outright attack.
Notes: This one takes a bit of oomph to pull off. Elaine Mallory did this, but she probably had to accept either some consequences or backlash to do it.

Example Thaumaturgy Spells

Dreamless Sleep (Easy Version)

This is a simple spell to protect someone from run-of-the-mill unpleasant dreams when his body just needs a decent night's sleep.

Type: Thaumaturgy, transformation
Complexity: 4-6 shifts, depending on duration
Duration: Usually, enough time to get a night's worth of rest, from 6 to 10 hours
Effect: Applies the temporary aspect Dreamless Sleep to the subject, temporarily canceling out the effects of any I Have Nightmares type of aspect.
Variations: Attempting this as an attack will be opposed by the target's Discipline.
Notes: The power level assumes the subject does not resist, and this is only truly effective against mundane dreams. Also, note that many nights in a row of dreamless sleep will start to drive people a little batty—dreams are necessary for processing memories, among other things. So don't do this too often.

So when that "Sloppy Spellcasting" consequence landed, Harry, you got a tag on it — probably after a quick assessment action. But here's the cool part - instead of using it to try to defeat the spell, you redirected it at a nearby target.

The first and last time I killed a vampire with a frozen turkey. Fun, but not repeatable.

Dreamless Sleep (Weapons-Grade Version)

This is a spell used to protect people from invasive psychic attacks made while they're asleep.

Type: Thaumaturgy, wards
Complexity: Varies, usually 6-12 shifts, depending on duration
Duration: Usually, until sunrise
Effect: Provides a block against mental attacks equal to the complexity of the spell, while the subject is asleep.
Variations: This can be applied as either armor or a straight block. For one more shift of power, it might be daisy-chained to a mild "wake up" type of alarm, assuming that being awake would aid the subject in resisting the mental attack.
Notes: This spell doesn't guarantee a night free from mundane nightmares, but it provides an extra defense against the mental attacks of supernatural Nightmares.

A generational curse is NOT mild!

Entropy Curse (Mild)

Want to give someone a case of bad luck? Here ya go. This sort of spell has been a favorite of hedge witches and traveling fortune tellers for a thousand years.

Type: Thaumaturgy, entropomancy
Complexity: Varies; 9 shifts in this case, based on conflict vs. the target's Discipline
Duration: One scene
Effect: Target has the Bad Luck temporary—but sticky—aspect applied to him.
Variations: Call up a bit more power to make the bad luck last longer. Call up a lot more power to have the bad luck extend across multiple generations…
Notes: Bad Luck is so very, very easy to invoke.

Entropy Curse (Weapons-Grade)

Entropy curses are nasty even when they're NOT designed to kill. This version is just plain evil. It also treads on both First Law and Seventh Law territory, so watch your step.

Type: Thaumaturgy, entropomancy
Complexity: Varies, but always high; 26 shifts in this case
Effect: Target gains the Deadly Luck aspect. The aspect is compelled at an appropriate time by springing an accident or other misfortune on the target—an incident that presents a challenge equal in shifts to the power of the spell. In this example, avoiding slipping in the shower requires an Athletics check of 26 shifts. Good luck with that. The damage caused will almost certainly kill the target.
Variations: More power is necessary for tougher targets.
Notes: This spell is extremely complex, but extremely deadly. In the Blood Rites casefile, the Evil Eye cult pulled it off through a combination of sponsorship and special circumstances. They had a sponsor (He Who Walks Behind, OW76) contribute shifts of power (+2); they had several cultists assist in the ritual, each invoking one or two of their own aspects (total of +8 to power); the spell is pegged at a certain time of day (+2 to power); each caster accepted moderate consequences (In Debt to Power, or something along those lines +12); and, finally, Madge—the lead caster—took on the mild consequence of Sloppy Spellcasting for an additional +2.



Extended Divination

Lots of spellcasters like to do this sort of thing. It helps to have a really strong focus item.

Type: Thaumaturgy, divination
Complexity: Varies; typically at least 8 or 9, sometimes up to 16 or more
Duration: Varies by spell complexity; default is one scene
Effect: The caster can not only observe the target, but monitor the target (audio and visual) for an extended period of time.
Variations: Casters could up defenses against counterattacks, try to make their projections more difficult to detect, or use different focus items. All these things, of course, add complexity.
Notes: The spell's base complexity needs to be the target's Conviction+4, plus any thresholds, wards, or other defenses the target is behind. Duration beyond one scene requires one additional shift of complexity for each step up the time ladder, as discussed in "*Duration and Enhanced Evocation*" (page 265). A symbolic link to the target is necessary, and a powerful focus item (like Little Chicago) really helps. Unless the caster takes great pains to avoid it, a mostly-invisible, spectral projection of the caster appears in the location of the monitoring's point of view—this can tip off an unaware but observant target, allowing him to take steps to stop it.

Or allowing him to launch a counterattack through the link that the divination is operating over. Cowl would have killed me but for the protection Little Chicago offered.

Faerie-Trapping Spell

This is a relatively straightforward containment spell—the trick is to first lure the target into your containment construct, and then convince it to help you once it's trapped.

Type: Thaumaturgy, binding
Complexity: It's hard to imagine a pixie breaking through a containment of strength 4, so aiming there is probably safe.
Duration: About one scene
Effect: The pixie is trapped in the containment circle until the spell ends or the caster dismisses the effect.
Variations: Add a shift or two of power to increase the duration. You can contain stronger creatures in a similar way, but you'll probably want to crank up the power.
Notes: Note that this spell simply contains the pixie; luring it into the containment construct to begin with might require a couple of Lore and/or Deceit checks (a good deep dish pizza is surprisingly good bait), and convincing it to do as it's asked once it's contained might require a social or mental conflict. (Note that a contained pixie might have a taggable aspect like Trapped in the Circle...)

Come to think of it, a lesser version of that sort of via-divination counterattack is what I threw at Victor Sells when he was playing peeping Tom to my supposed demise during the STORM FRONT case. Vic had no idea what I was doing.

Pizza isn't just "surprisingly good bait" — it's the only way to do it. So sayeth the Za Lord!



Harry Blinds the Loup-Garou

Harry cast this spell on the loup-garou near the end of the Fool Moon casefile.

Type: Thaumaturgy, transformation (curse)
Complexity: 9 shifts (based on conflict)
Duration: One scene, ideally
Opposed by: Target's Discipline
Effect: Applies the temporary aspect Blinded to the target. The complexity is high enough to make it highly likely that it generates at least one shift, making it sticky (page 207).
Variations: Power can vary based on the expected strength of the target's resistance. Also, other aspects might be applied.
Notes: Assumes the target has a Great (+4) Discipline. Requires a symbolic link to the target.

Harry's Tracking Spell

This spell reveals the as-the-crow-flies direction toward a particular person—and continues to do so as the caster travels toward the target. Scribe a circle, concentrate on a symbol, murmur some words of power—and bingo, you have a beacon leading you to your target. This is a very handy thing for a private investigator to be able to do.

Type: Thaumaturgy, divination
Complexity: Varies according to difficulty to perform equivalent Investigation, usually somewhere from 2 to 8
Duration: About one scene
Effect: Caster is led toward target
Variations: Add a shift or two of power to increase the duration. The required power might be increased, possibly significantly, if the target has wards or some other anti-divination block in place. On the other hand, particularly potent symbolic links can be invoked as aspects to grant the caster a bonus.
Notes: This spell requires a symbolic link to the target—a hair, a drop of blood, a signature, a True Name, a valued personal possession, etc. This is a pretty quick and basic spell for a skilled caster; for low power levels, don't bother rolling—it just works.

I hear the phone company can do this with those cell phone gizmos all you mundanes carry these days.

Illumina Magnus (or, Magically Dusting for Prints)

This spell reveals residual magical energies left over from spellcasting and other supernatural activity.

Type: Thaumaturgy, divination
Complexity: Varies; typically 3-8 (see Notes)
Duration: One scene
Effect: This spell operates much like an assessment action (page 115), but instead of aspects it reveals bits of information about magical activity that's happened recently in the immediate area. The GM sets the base complexity, usually equal to the original spellcaster's Discipline score (of course, this spell's caster won't know what that score is). If this spell's complexity matches or exceeds the base difficulty, the GM reveals some tidbit of useful information about the residual magic in the area. For every 2 that the complexity of this spell exceeds the base difficulty, the GM should reveal additional or more specific information.
Variations: The GM might decide that the original caster took steps to cover his tracks, applying an aspect like The Prints Were Wiped at the cost of an extra shift or two of complexity. This aspect could be invoked to increase the base difficulty of the divination. For a completely different (and less complex) way of constructing a spell like this, you could treat it as a simple maneuver rather than an assessment; apply an aspect to the scene like Magical Energy Made Visible that the caster can immediately tag to apply toward a Lore roll to learn something about the scene.
Notes: This is a pretty simple spell—all you really need is a ritual circle and some copper filings and you're golden. If the original caster actually intends something to be found, any successful casting of a spell like this will reveal it immediately, regardless of complexity.

The copper filings and all are just how I cast it, mind you. There are lots of ways you could do this sort of thing.

Memorium, Memoratum, Memoritus

In the Grave Peril casefile, Harry defeated Bianca by encouraging a mob of ghosts—victims of Bianca and the Red Court—to take their revenge.

Type: Thaumaturgy, transformation
Complexity: 5 shifts (+3 for a maneuver, +2 to hit all targets in a zone)
Duration: One scene
Effect: Harry applies the aspect Revenge Is Ours to the ghosts which Harry tags to indirectly attack Bianca.
Notes: The ghosts were there already, so Harry didn't need to summon them—just nudge them over the edge.

Mind Fog

This is a powerful spell used to dull a large number of people's senses simultaneously. Elaine cast this on the patrons of a large retail outlet.

Type: Thaumaturgy, psychomancy
Complexity: Varies; 12 shifts in this case (based on conflict)
Duration: One scene
Effect: People in three zones have the Mind Fog aspect applied to them
Variations: A caster could adjust the power as needed, or change the aspect placed on the targets.
Notes: This spell is pretty complex, but Elaine whipped it up fast (and she probably dropped at least three or four fate points to do it). The power assumes the targets have a Discipline of Average (+1) plus four more to guarantee effect, one shift to make the effect "sticky," and 6 shifts to affect all targets in three zones.

Nevernever Crossover Detection

This is a fairly simple ward, but it can be extremely useful. You can do it a few different ways; see Variations for an alternate method.

Type: Thaumaturgy, divination
Complexity: 8
Duration: Until the next sunrise
Effect: The spell sets up a web across multiple zones of a large building detecting the passage of an entity across the veil between the Nevernever and our world. When the ward is breached, it sends an alert to the caster via a mechanism like a wardflame.

Variations: You could also build something like this as a token zero-strength ward; this would give you the advantage of it being lower complexity, but as soon as something breaches it, it goes away. In the Proven Guilty casefile, this spell was combined with the Phobophage Redirection (below).

Notes: Harry pointed out that even a beginner could pull this spell together with some basic materials and twenty minutes. Take your time, and any ritualist should be able to get this one right.

This one didn't quite work for me. One phobophage didn't take the bait, and people died.

Um... you want me to leave this one out, boss?

No. It's a great example of thaumaturgy. It just touches a raw nerve for me.

Phobophage Redirection

Used to redirect an attack of phobophages (creatures that feed on fear) to the caster of the spell summoning them, this spell ideally follows the warning a wardflame gives from the Nevernever Crossover Detection spell above.

Type: Thaumaturgy, transformation
Complexity: 14, based on conflict
Duration: Until the ward is breached; otherwise, standard consequence duration
Effect: The spell hits the target hard with a mental attack, applying the aspect Terrified Beyond Reason to it as a consequence.
Variations: Depending on how powerful the target is, you might need to sink more power into the spell. In the casefile, Harry had to guess at how resistant the target might be (mechanically, he passed a Lore check to get an estimate of how many boxes it might have in its stress track).
Notes: The idea of this spell is to inflict a mild mental consequence on the target. In the Proven Guilty casefile, Harry accepted the moderate mental consequence Fatigued to help power the spell, as well as the mild consequence I Might Fail (which was the source of the fear that he then transferred to the spell's target). Note that a temporary aspect just wouldn't quite do it—everyone else in the hall had a temporary fear aspect, too. The target needs to get hammered pretty hard to get the phobophages to go after him above everyone else.

I remember Elaine's reiki healing spell very fondly indeed.

Reading the Dead Eyes

This spell gleans a person's final emotions from the eyes of his recently deceased body. Molly cast something like this in the morgue in the White Night casefile.

Type: Thaumaturgy, divination/psychomancy
Complexity: Varies; typically 4-10 (see Notes)
Duration: A moment
Effect: This spell operates much like an assessment action (page 115), but instead of aspects it reveals the final emotions, feelings, and sometimes thoughts of the person whose body the caster is examining—often by forcing the caster to feel those same feelings. The base complexity is 4 (assuming a Great difficulty—they're dead, for heaven's sake), plus one for every 12 hours post-mortem the spell is cast. If the caster doubles the base complexity, the GM should give additional or more detailed or specific information.
Variations: Waldo Butters says that taking the final vision from a corpse's retinas is impossible, but a GM *might* allow it at a very high complexity.
Notes: This is a simple spell, but one that requires a bit of subtlety. The information learned is almost never all that specific, but it can still be useful.

Reiki Healing Spell

This is a "Laying On Hands" ritual, where the caster gives the subject a light massage, repeated light touch, etc., moving energy around within the subject's body to promote healing. Done right, it can be very pleasant, relaxing, and even sensual for the subject.

Type: Thaumaturgy, biomancy
Complexity: Typically 8-10 (4 base complexity, plus 4 to represent the consequence reduced)
Duration: Immediate
Effect: The spell reduces a moderate physical consequence to mild for the purposes of recovery. The consequence still occupies its original slot.
Variations: It's possible a caster could sink a lot more power into this to reduce serious consequences to moderate, requiring at *least* 6 additional shifts of complexity, but that might be beyond the reach of this sort of magic. A GM might allow removal of a mild consequence, but they tend to go away quickly anyway.
Notes: Elaine Mallory cast this spell on Harry in the White Night casefile; it encourages the movement of energy to enhance the body's own healing. One moderate consequence is rewritten to a mild (but related) form—so a Twisted Ankle might become Tender Ankle, Bruised Ribs becomes Sore Ribs,

Exhausted becomes Winded, etc. The base complexity reflects the fact that healing magic is partially transformative, though not to the degree of more hostile magic.

Victor Sells' Heart-Exploding Spell

An all-too-familiar "death from afar" spell crafted by a punk of a sorcerer with too much power and too little sense.

Type: Thaumaturgy, necromancy
Complexity: 36 (based on conflict)
Opposed By: Target's Endurance, but it hardly matters—there's not much he can do to come up with that many shifts of power to oppose it.
Effect: The target dies instantly as his heart explodes from his chest, assuming that a 36-stress attack does the trick—an extreme, severe, moderate, and mild consequence for a total of 20 shifts, plus 9 shifts to overcome a best possible Endurance and a +4 roll, plus two more shifts if the target has an extra mild consequence, plus 5 shifts to ensure a "taken out" result due to a hit that lands beyond the end of a stress track of length 4.
Variations: There are all kinds of terrible things you could do with this—inflict more consequences on victims to crank up the power of the spell, cast it on multiple people simultaneously, aim for a complexity in the 40s to make sure it overcomes magical defenses…
Notes: Sells needed to do some significant preparation to cast this. He took an extreme consequence (Power Mad) for 8 shifts, took a severe consequence (Bargain With a Demon) for 6 shifts, took a moderate consequence (Trapped by the Storm) for 4 shifts, inflicted a severe consequence (Emotional Trauma) on his wife and the Beckitts for 12 more shifts, killed a rabbit with a spoon (+2 shifts for the component), and got the rest from other component sources. Nasty business.

These examples are for entertainment purposes only. Do not attempt this at home. The authors, editors, and publishers of this book, and associated spirits of knowledge and intellect, are not responsible for you getting your fool head lopped off by a Warden if you do.

Zombie Animation

Animating a zombie is a two-spell process: a summoning and a binding. First, the caster must summon a spirit to inhabit the corpse he wishes to animate, and then the caster must bind the spirit to his will.

Type: Thaumaturgy, summoning then binding
Complexity: Varies for both; the summoning is typically 6-10 (based on conflict against the spirit's Conviction), and the binding is even higher, often 10-14 (again, based on conflict against the spirit's Conviction and desired duration)
Duration: The summoning is only for a scene, but the binding is of variable duration.
Effect: One spirit is summoned and bound to one corpse, animating it and binding it to the caster's will.
Variations: Call up additional shifts of power to animate more zombies.
Notes: The caster must provide an audible "heartbeat" for the duration of the binding, most frequently a drumbeat. If the drumbeat abates, the spirit has another chance to break the binding and become unpredictable. Maybe it will simply flee to wherever it came from, or maybe the zombie will turn on its animator, or maybe something in between. Also, note that, the vast majority of the time, doing this sort of thing is utterly against the Fifth Law. Sometimes you can weasel your way around the rules, but it's wise not to push your luck.

Don't forget to have a containment circle, or something similar, ready to go before you summon the spirit. That might be bad.

Stars and stones, Billy, stop giving people ideas.

Example Focus Items

Carlos's Gauntlet

A leather glove with slender steel plates attached (Harry says the plates are covered in Aztec or Olmec glyphs), Carlos Ramirez uses this glove to enhance his entropy spells—especially the disintegration shield he used to great effect in the White Night casefile.

Bonus(es) provided: +1 defensive control, +1 defensive power for water evocations (2 focus item slots)
Variations: Gloves seem ideally suited to affecting defensive evocations, but you could imagine using a glove to enhance force-based spirit attacks as well.

Is it wrong that I have "Kill the wabbit, kill the wabbit..." stuck in my head now?

Spellcasting (Examples of Magic)

I generally hold my staff in my left hand when doing something defensive, and use my right (or both) when doing something offensive.

Carlos's Staff

Carlos uses his staff to gain extra oomph on his offensive spells.

Bonus(es) provided: +1 offensive control, +1 offensive power to water evocations (2 focus item slots)

Variations: Staves come in all varieties, a mix of offensive and defensive power, suited to the wizard's personal style. They are often held in the left hand and used to draw in power—the same property that makes the left hand well suited for defensive implements.



Harry's Blasting Rod

Rods and wands are typically used to enhance the caster's control of offensive evocations, and Harry's blasting rod is no different. This is Harry's blasting rod by the end of the Storm Front casefile.

Bonus(es) provided: +1 offensive control for fire evocation (1 focus item slot)

Variations: As Harry's power grows, this rod's power likely grows as well, going to +2 for offensive control and possibly +1 to offensive power. Most offensive rods and wands work a similar way; Elaine's wand adds to the offensive power of air evocations.

Harry's Shield Bracelet

Harry's shield bracelet is made from a chain of tiny medieval-style shields; he uses it to help focus his potent force shield. This item took some damage during one especially tough fight; until Harry replaced it, it threw off a shower of sparks when Harry threw up his shield.

Bonus(es) provided: +1 defensive control to spirit evocation (1 focus item slot)

Variations: Needn't be a bracelet; Elaine's shield ring works a very similar way (providing a defensive power bonus to air evocations).

Harry's Staff

Like his blasting rod, this is Harry's staff by the end of the Storm Front casefile.

Bonus(es) provided: +1 offensive control for spirit evocation (1 focus item slot)

Variations: Later in Harry's career, the staff is seen assisting with Hellfire-based fire evocation, likely adding it as an "element".

Madge's Ring

Madge Shelly wore a ring granting power to spells sponsored by her Outsider patron.

Bonus(es) provided: +1 offensive power to evocations cast with Sponsored Magic via He Who Walks Behind. (1 focus item slot)

Variations: Different sponsors, different bonuses.

A-H, crap. We're about to get to the potions. Look — I never actually planned to use the love potion. Check my ad. It was the price I had to pay to get the escape potion. And Bob, you can just keep your yap shut.

Did I say anything?

Example Enchanted Items

Harry's Duster

Susan Rodriguez gave Harry his leather duster. He stitched arcane patterns into the tough material, weaving defensive spells into the coat.

Spell provided: At the time he crafts this (after his first few casefiles), Harry's Lore is effectively Great (+4). He puts two slots into it, the extra one for frequency. An effect strength of 4 becomes Armor:2, with 3 uses/session.

Variations: Or maybe it's a Great (+4) spirit (force) block vs. physical attacks 3 times a session. Later, Harry might spend another slot to add 1 to the effect strength—then immediately reduce it to make the coat loanable to his friends when they're in a pinch.

Harry's Force Ring

Harry wears a silver ring that slowly collects minute amounts of power, stealing a bit of kinetic energy every time he moves his hand. Once the energy is released, the ring must be recharged over time.

Spell provided: A Weapon:4 spirit (force) attack, once per session, based on Harry's Lore of Good (+3). Harry gains +1 to the strength by devoting one additional slot to the item. Harry uses the Discipline skill to aim this ranged attack. Uses two enchanted slots total.

Warden Sword

The symbol of the authority of a Warden of the White Council, Warden Swords were enchanted by Captain Luccio to cut through both spells and matter. ***They are very limited in supply!***

A Warden Sword counts as a Weapon:3 sword at minimum in nearly all circumstances.

Spell provided: A Warden Sword uses two enchanted item slots. Built by Luccio's formerly impressive crafting, the Sword can produce one of the following magical effects 3 times per session:

- The Sword casts a counterspell of Fantastic (+6) strength, provided the effect being countered can be physically attacked or touched by a sword (ethereal chains, good; a mental binding, not so much).
- The Sword may be treated as a Weapon:6 item for one attack.

Example Potions

Bob's "Love" Potion

Okay, so it's a lust potion. It cranks the consumer's libido up to eleven.

Duration: One scene

Effect: A maneuver, three shifts for the potion strength opposed by the consumer's Discipline skill. If the consumer fails to resist, he is afflicted with the temporary aspect Seized by Lust.

Variations: A potion brewed with more delicacy might apply a less sleazy aspect.

Notes: The aspect should be immediately compelled. Stand back and watch the hilarity.

Escape

Harry brews this one in the Storm Front casefile.

Duration: A moment, less if the potion is shared

Effect: Allows the consumer to easily and effortlessly move through almost any barrier. Mechanically, the consumer may cross to a nearby zone, passing through most material barriers to do so. Only a magical barrier with more than five shifts of strength or a very well-sealed mundane barrier can prevent movement.

Variations: The effects can vary widely; some seem to slow down the passage of time, allowing the potion's consumer to simply move vastly faster than the rest of the world. Others might turn the consumer's body insubstantial. Some might work only against magical barriers, or only against material ones.

Notes: Harry brewed this one with Bob's help in the Storm Front casefile. Harry said it felt like he broke apart into a thousand pieces; he was able to see the world as a collection of energy patterns—which he could navigate around and through, finding holes and gaps that didn't exist in the world's material form. It only lasted a few seconds, though. He shared the potion with Susan, partially explaining why it lasted for such a short time.

Harry, why is the love potion not a bottled Fourth Law violation?

It does walk the line, but the one I made really couldn't make someone do something they weren't inclined to do anyway. It just lowers inhibitions. A lot.

And that makes it okay?

No, but it keeps it out of Fourth Law territory. There's a difference.

Dammit.

The Warden Sword seems a bit abusable, doesn't it? A fantastic Lore item even if your Lore is crap?

Comes with job responsibilities, though. How are those treatin' ya?

Point. And I don't even get a sword.

Just don't let the cops catch you with a bag of depleted uranium.

Where the hell do you even get... nevermind, I don't want to know.

Ghost Dust

Made from depleted uranium and other heavy particles, this is a densely, heavily "real" substance that can be used effectively against incorporeal spirits of the Nevernever.

Duration: Instantaneous
Effect: Acts as a Weapon:4 attack against incorporeal creatures such as ghosts—when it hits, it renders parts of them inert. Can be broken up into smaller doses by dividing up the Weapon bonus: at most, four Weapon:1 attacks.
Notes: It satisfies the Catch on a ghost's Physical Immunity; however, in order to work in the mortal realm, the ghost must acknowledge the wielder's presence first.

Ah, sunlight. Handy against Red Court vamps, usefulness with ancient spider-demons remains untested.

Hey, Billy, why not just write up the sunburst hankie as an enchanted item?

That would work, but you'd have to pay extra for it to be useable by other people. Works better as a "potion".

Red Court Antivenom

While this won't make you completely immune to a Red Court vampire's addictive saliva, it sure helps you resist its effects.

Duration: One scene
Effect: Grants a bonus to resisting the addictive saliva of a Red Court vampire equal to the potion's strength in shifts.
Notes: Pretty straightforward—typically the strength equals the Lore skill of the brewer.

Scent Suppression

This potion masks your scent from a predator.

Duration: Several hours, or one scene if the potion is shared among two or three people.
Effect: Applies the aspect Scentless Trail to the consumer.
Variations: Adding more shifts of strength ups the duration or allows it to be shared among more consumers.
Notes: This potion is pretty simple—relatively long duration at only four shifts of strength.

Stimulant

This is a bit like taking an entire pot of really strong coffee and pouring it into a vein all at once.

Duration: One scene
Effect: Thaumaturgical transformation, makes the consumer a little faster, a little more alert, a little more able to resist the effects of fatigue. Reduces the amount of mental stress casting an evocation does to the consumer by one (though this can't reduce it below the one-stress minimum); temporarily suppresses up to four shifts worth of fatigue-related mental and/or physical consequences (the consequence is still there; it just can't be tagged or invoked while the potion is in effect).
Variations: A stronger potion might let the consumer ignore more consequences.
Notes: The suppressed consequences assume the potion is brewed with four shifts of strength.

Sunburst in a Handkerchief

Having a sunbeam safely folded up in a napkin can be pretty handy in some situations—it is, as they say, a light when all other lights go out.

Duration: Instantaneous
Effect: A Weapon:3 attack (range of a thrown weapon, but what skill is used to aim it is up to you) using sunlight. This does no damage to most targets but satisfies the Catch for a number of supernatural creatures.
Variations: Rather than a straight attack, you could set this up as a maneuver to blind, distract, or temporarily incapacitate the targets.
Notes: It's not a potion, but it's modeled as one. This one's tricky to make—you have to be genuinely happy to craft it. That means telling the story, declaring the happy aspect, and tagging the aspect to declare and justify the capture of a genuine beam of sunlight. The effect strength is based on the Lore of the caster.

True Seeing Ointment

Rashid, the Gatekeeper, gave Harry a vial of ointment that allowed him to see through faerie glamours without resorting to using the Sight.

Duration: A few hours, shorter if shared among two people
Effect: A thaumaturgical effect granting +6 to Alertness rolls to see through faerie glamours, veils, and other illusions.
Variations: It's conceivable that a similar ointment could be made to help see through other types of illusion magic, but it should be very specific—mortal magic, Outsider-sponsored magic, etc.
Notes: This assumes the ointment's maker has a Lore of Fantastic (+6). It's possible that the Gatekeeper's Lore is even higher than this.

Billy, axe this whole entry. Rashid never gave me that ointment. Got it?



- CHAPTER FOURTEEN -

Running The Game

What the GM Does

The GM has many different responsibilities in a game of The Dresden Files RPG. In a nutshell, they are:

- Running the process of city and character creation
- Starting and ending scenes and managing the pace of a game session
- Adjudicating the use of the rules
- Creating and managing the opposition to the PCs
- Creating story material for each new session of play (covered in *Building Scenarios*, page 340)

Man, Kirby really seemed off his game when he was running last week's Arcanos session.

Yeah? I guess so – he hadn't gotten much sleep the two nights before. A well-rested GM is a better GM!

Generally speaking, the GM is "where the buck stops" for any decisions about the game that come up during play—questions of setting and tone, the appropriateness (or lack thereof) of a particular element introduced in the game, the application of mechanics, etc., etc. In many places throughout this book, the phrase "the GM decides" is often used interchangeably with "the group decides" regarding some of these issues, because it emphatically *isn't* the GM's job to run a dictatorship—every player should always be allowed the chance to have a say in those instances. The GM should act as more of a moderator, synthesizing the group's input with her own in order to reach a final decision.

Running City and Character Creation

During city and character creation, both the players and GM establish and express the foundation for the rest of the game, and it's important for the GM to keep the lines of communication going throughout the process. They're meant to be like focused brainstorming sessions, with everyone throwing ideas out as quickly as they think them up, with the rules providing some structure to the conversation.

Before getting things started, it's important to take a moment to ask the players about their general expectations for the game—what kind of content they want to see, what kinds of content they definitely want to avoid, and what they're primarily interested in pursuing during play. If you've already got some ideas for what you want to do with the campaign, now is the time to bring them up—"Hey, I was thinking that the White Court would be prominent in this game, so I want to concentrate on intrigue and political backstabbing" or "I was thinking balls-out action here, so I want to position the city as a sort of battleground in the Vampire War," and so on—and see what the players think. You don't want to find out in the middle of city creation that the players have wildly divergent ideas for the game.

If there are some severe clashes of expectation, make sure you hammer that stuff out with the players as quickly as possible. Most of the time, people will be accommodating if you just get things out in the open and talk them out. The most important thing is to make sure that everyone's on the same page as much as they can be.

Choosing Aspects

One of the most difficult problems a group of players faces during this process is the choosing of good, evocative aspects for the city and for their characters. The *Aspects* chapter (page 98) provides suggestions for what makes a good aspect—as GM, it's your job to help focus a player's thoughts regarding an aspect and help narrow it down into an ideal form that everyone understands and can use in the game. Ask probing questions, offer some of your own suggestions, and let the player articulate what he's looking for as many times as necessary.

Remember, a good aspect suggests multiple, clear uses for invocations and compels. If an aspect choice seems to lack one of these things, try to help the player reword the aspect or expand on its meaning to cover all these bases. It's all right if a few of the aspects have primarily "positive" or "negative" connotations, but you don't want the majority to be like that.

Sometimes, a player will suffer from decision paralysis when choosing an aspect. The breadth of possibilities is so wide that no option seems good enough, many options seem equally attractive, or nothing comes to mind. This is why it's good to have an idea of people's expectations beforehand—knowing what they want to see, you can sometimes help focus aspect choices according to those guidelines.

Perhaps the best way to help break this mental block is to review the aspect categories from *Aspects* (phrase, person/prop, story, and situation) and see which ones aren't being used

as much. If a player's character doesn't have many connections to other characters, suggest he develop one and choose an aspect to fit—this can be especially effective if the connection is made to another PC or to an NPC established as a face during city creation. If a character doesn't have any issues that suggest a reason for him to be involved in stories, see if you can help the player come up with a story aspect that might fit.

If you just can't break the block, don't force it—you can always come back and fill out that aspect later, or leave it blank and let it develop during play, as with the "*On-the-Fly*" rules (page 69). *Ultimately, it's much better to leave an aspect slot blank than to pick one that isn't inspiring and evocative to play*. If the player is not invested in his character's aspects, or the group is not invested in the city's aspects, it will be a noticeable drag on the game.

Starting and Ending Scenes

The basic "unit" of play in a Dresden Files game is called the **scene**. A scene in the game is similar to a scene in books, TV shows, or films. You probably already have an intuitive grasp of what one looks like—the PCs interact with each other, interact with NPCs, and/or perform a series of actions in a discrete but continuous period of time. Ideally, there is some kind of goal or interaction that the group intends to accomplish or resolve in a scene; completion of this signals a good time to transition to a new scene. Taken as a whole, a collection of scenes strung together composes most of a single session of play.

As the GM, one of the most important parts of your job is knowing when to start and when to end a scene. This is one of your primary tools for managing the pace of a session. When the pace is flagging, it's your responsibility to focus everyone on the game and move on to the next scene. The best analogy to make is that of a good film editor—you "cut" a scene and start a new one when necessary to make the story flow smoothly.

This can be a rocky road to walk sometimes—one (or all) of the players may truly enjoy going through all the minute details of their characters' shopping trips for better equipment. You're going to have to cater to those preferences if the whole group exhibits them. If they don't, however, you'll need to be proactive about transitioning between scenes. How will you know when to move things along? Here are some useful guidelines.

Starting Things Off

When you begin a scene, you're typically going to start it just before an important piece of action (not necessarily violence) is going to take place. If the PCs are going to the villain's hideout, you don't want to start describing events in the scene from the moment they leave their apartment—unless something important is going to occur then. If Harry is waiting for a contact to arrive at a rendezvous, you don't want to start the scene two hours before the contact shows up. This may seem like common sense advice, but it's something that can trip people up in play—it's easy to fall into a pattern of narrating every block of time the PCs spend in play without realizing it, chomping up game time with "Okay, so you leave the store and start heading back home, walking down Cermak Road…" stuff. Keep an eye out for it and cut when necessary to save yourself idle time.

When a Scene Isn't a Scene

How do you know when it's time to move on? Well, just about every scene you could envision has a purpose—a moment where you can definitively say that the point of the scene has happened. Usually, this happens after the resolution of some kind of conflict, but that isn't always the case. The purpose of a scene can vary widely, whether from in-game character decisions ("We want to investigate the lab and see what's hidden there") or storytelling priorities ("I want to reveal the motivation of this character now").

Going into a scene, you have to ask yourself: What's the point? Why is this scene happening? When that point occurs, whatever it is, tie up loose ends and move on.

If the PCs are shopping for arcane research materials, for example, the scene's purpose is for the characters to find out whether or not they can acquire the books and documents they want.

If they can (or can't), and they know it, the scene is over—the bickering with the shopkeeper can safely be glossed over. If the PCs are trying to figure out the meaning behind an obscure puzzle left at a crime scene, the scene is resolved when they discover (or fail to discover) that clue. If the PCs are in a fight, the scene is resolved when that fight's over and the aftermath is, at least for the moment, addressed.

Even in purely character-driven scenes—like when Billy's player wants a scene to confront Harry Dresden about how isolated he's been lately—that time eventually comes. He's said what he's needed to say, Harry's had a chance to respond, maybe they've milked some fate points out of the GM for compels, shown their true colors, and it's done.

You're never going to let me live that down, are you?

I can't help it if it's a good example for the game, man.

Making the Transitions

So, the time has come to change scenes, and you're trying not to ruffle feathers when doing it. How do you transition without abusing your power? How do you avoid harshing a player's buzz if he's enjoying some good roleplay?

The first rule of thumb: if it looks like your players are getting into whatever's at hand, let them run with it. Unless you're totally strapped for time, letting the players revel in roleplaying or in a particular aspect of the setting (no pun intended) isn't going to do your game any harm. It may not be what you planned—but if they enjoy it, your gaming session is a successful one. And if the NPC interactions are interesting enough, maybe that's a cue to have one of those NPCs initiate the next scene instead of the NPC you'd planned to use. *Your* plans are the ones that need to be flexible.

The second rule of thumb: when you're in doubt, just ask. Your players know you aren't a mind reader, and no rule in this book can substitute for honest, direct communication with them. You may be strapped for time and only have the length of one session to run your adventure. If that's the case, no one's going to begrudge you asking, "Hey, guys? Harry's got the books he wanted…can I go ahead and cut to the next scene?" (If you have a player who *would* begrudge you asking that, it might be time to Have a Little Talk™.)

The third rule of thumb: if you feel the purpose of a scene has been fulfilled but you don't know what to transition to next, turn to the players and ask them what *they* want to do. If the players have a clear goal in mind, they're likely brimming with ideas about what they want to do next. All you have to do is ask—instant wealth of scene ideas.

The fourth rule of thumb: if there's any dead air, *do something*. Are the players not talking anymore, looking at you expectantly or at random details of the room? A scene's gone off its course. Do whatever you have to—bring in a new NPC, move to a new scene, narrate two guys bursting in the door with guns. Do not, under any circumstances, let dead air dominate your game time. Your time for making stories is valuable; make it count.

Adjudicating the Rules

During most of the scenes you run, the players will probably have their characters do things that require using the game mechanics—jumping a fence, getting into a fight, casting spells, etc. Another part of your role as the GM is to act as a referee and arbiter for the use of the rules—deciding what rules to apply in a particular instance, deciding what uses of the rules are out of scope, and deciding how to interpret the rules to fit a particular set of circumstances during play. Again, while it's important to give players a chance to give input when a question of rules application comes up, remember that the buck stops with you; you don't want your game session to be bogged down by rules discussions. It's better to get some quick opinions, make a decision, and move on, rather than stall a session trying to work out the minutiae of a particular throw of the dice. You can always discuss it afterward, when you have a better opportunity to examine things critically.

The guiding principle for all uses of the rules in this game is that *intent precedes mechanics*. What this means is that you should always start off by figuring out what the player wants to accomplish, and *then* determine how to model that using the rules. This might seem like common sense, but it's easy to get caught in the trap of looking at the various game actions (like attack, block, declaration, maneuver, etc.) as a straightjacket that limits your available options, rather than as a set of tools to express whatever the player wants to try to do.

Many actions map directly to one of the mechanics already, so most of the time this isn't going to be very hard—a player says, "I want to punch that dude in the face," and you reply with, "Okay, that's an attack using Fists, and he's going to defend with Fists. Roll it."

Sometimes it isn't going to be quite so simple, and a player will say something like, "Well, I want to push the table over the landing while he's charging me, so that he'll smash into it before he hits me." You don't want to refuse the player just because that action doesn't clearly fall into one of the basic conflict action types (page 197)—especially because that's a pretty cool move.

In those cases, you'll have to tease out a more specific intent from the player, which will allow you to make a decision. If the player says, "Yeah, I want to hurt him with the table," that might be an attack with Might, and the NPC rolls defense normally. If he says, "I just don't want to get bowled over by the bull charge," the NPC could get a defense roll with Athletics and you might give the player credit for declaring the table by letting him tag it as a scene aspect. What matters is that you match the mechanics to the player's intent, not the other way around.

When to Call for a Roll

Before you call for a die roll, it is critically important that you stop and do two things:

1. **Imagine Success**
2. **Imagine Failure**

It sounds simple, but it makes a difference. Success is usually the easy part; failure can be trickier. You want to make sure that both outcomes are interesting—though "interesting" isn't the same as "good."

It's as simple as that, because there are few things more frustrating to a player than making a skill roll and getting told that it nets them no new knowledge, no suggested course of action, no new development for the story, and so on. So, whenever you call for a roll, be *absolutely certain* that this is a branching point in your story, and consider what each of the branches entails. If you cannot come up with a way to handle either outcome, you need to rethink the situation. If one or the other branch is boring, then calling for a roll is probably a bad idea.



Example: *Harry Dresden is investigating a suspect in a case and has been forced to engage in a little breaking and entering to pursue his goal. He finds a locked safe in the suspect's office, and Jim, his player, tells the GM he'd like to crack it for information on the suspect.*

The GM imagines success and failure. Because it'd be boring to have nothing incriminating in the safe, she decides that if he succeeds at breaking into the safe, he finds information on shady financial deals the suspect is involved in, allowing Harry to make important connections. To make failure exciting, she decides that Harry will set off a silent burglar alarm if he fails—which means the cops will want a word with him when he gets outside!

That said, not every roll needs to have high stakes. There should always be a consequence to failure, but there are degrees of consequence. If there is a large issue on the table, try not to have it hinge entirely on one roll—spread it out across the scene. The point of spreading out consequences is to keep players engaged. It makes rolls into something more meaningful than just being lucky. The goal is to make all rolls *satisfying*.

The idea is that it's the GM's job to work with her players to find "cool moments" for their characters. While we don't come right out and say that here, that's the idea we had in mind with this section.

Example: *Biff Abernathy is attempting to sneak into an office building for Evan Montrose, trying to find the sanctum of a practitioner that Evan believes is stirring up trouble in Baltimore. The GM informs Fred—Biff's player—that the place is* Well-Guarded; *if Biff wants to sneak in, he's looking at a difficulty of Good.*

Fred rolls his Stealth of Mediocre and gets an Average—clearly a failure. The GM ponders it a moment and decides she doesn't want to let the whole scene hinge on this roll. She says, "Okay, well, you're pacing around the building, looking for a back entrance, and you walk right into two armed guards! They point pistols at you and one of them asks, 'Hey, what the hell are you doing here, kid?'"

Fred frowns and says, "Crap. Well, I could probably kick their asses, but guns suck, and I'd probably make a lot of noise. I'll pull out a fat wad of cash and say, 'Far as you know, I'm from the gas company, checking the meters. How 'bout it?'"

The GM grins and says, "Well, okay. They're pretty professional, but given your Resources, you're definitely able to flash enough to make them pay attention. I'll say the difficulty's at Good—they don't have too much Discipline, but they probably take their Professional Obligation *seriously."*

Fred rolls and gets a Great, and the GM describes how the two guards look wide-eyed at the money, snatch it up, and leave, one of them replying, "Sure, man. Meter's around back, next to the maintenance door."

Fred says, "Whew, close one." A couple of rolls later, each one giving the opportunity for more consequences, Biff's in the sanctum, having gotten through a short but tense scene.

Failure as "Success, but..."

Sometimes, failure on a potential roll might sound boring or halt the game—however, you want to introduce tension at this particular moment. When that's the case, consider this: a skill roll can also be about something the players will succeed at no matter what, but with potential complications they want to avoid. We call this "Success, but..." because it takes the form of "You succeed, but here's a complication you have to deal with because you failed the roll."

One example would be chasing someone who hops a fence. The player says his character's going to hop it, too. The GM thinks failure in the form of "You don't make it over the fence" is boring, but she wants a bit of tension. She decides failure will take the form of "You succeed, but you wake the sleeping dog nearby." And now there's a new participant in the chase!

The flipside of this idea is that failing a roll could provide basic information while actual success on the roll provides more detail or an unexpected benefit. This is particularly useful for research oriented skill rolls, where failure can bring the game to a halt.

For instance, if the characters are using Investigation to find someone, failure could mean they find out where he's hiding, and success could mean they also find out that he's got some friends hiding with him. If the players know they failed the roll, then the fact that you're telling them information anyway is a good way to bring in some tension—they'll wonder what you *aren't* telling them.

Setting Difficulties

In addition to the above guidelines, you should also keep in mind what the skill levels mean. The adjective ladder corresponds to a certain expectation of competence when you're talking about skills and action difficulties:

- **Mediocre (+0)** indicates a lack of either talent or training.
- **Average (+1)** indicates a novice level of training, or a high degree of talent with no formal training.
- **Fair (+2)** and **Good (+3)** indicate journeyman or "professional" capacity, or a nearly inhuman degree of talent.
- **Great (+4)** and **Superb (+5)** indicate veteran or masterful capacity, or the combination of extreme talent and good training.
- **Fantastic (+6)** and above skirt the boundaries of natural human capacity.

When setting difficulties, you should try to respect the skill levels of the PCs and create appropriate tension without being

overwhelming. If a PC has a high rank in a skill, it means that the player wants the opportunity to demonstrate competence in that area. You don't want to set low difficulties constantly, because it makes the player's choice to have that high skill seem insignificant. Likewise, you don't want every roll to be made at Superb—you want the players to have a sense of accomplishment.

Also note that players will regularly invoke aspects to improve the results of bad rolls or to nudge them toward success—having to face several high difficulty actions in a row will drain their fate points away quickly. Deliberately "stacking the deck" against the players to force them into using fate points is a bad idea, because the players will eventually notice that you're doing it.

You can use the following guidelines to help you determine where to set difficulties relative to a character's skill:

- A player will *nearly always succeed against a difficulty of 2 less than his character's skill* without needing to invoke any aspects.
- A player will *usually succeed against a difficulty of 1 less than his character's skill*, but might need to invoke an aspect on occasion.
- A player has *a relatively equal chance of succeeding or needing to invoke an aspect against a difficulty equal to his character's skill.*
- A player will *usually need to invoke an aspect to succeed against a difficulty of 1 higher than his character's skill*, but has a fair chance of making the roll as well.
- A player will *almost always need to invoke an aspect to succeed against a difficulty of 2 higher than his character's skill.*

So if, for example, you have a PC in your game with a skill at Superb (+5), you know that you're going to need at least a Great (+4) difficulty or above to put him in a position where he might need aspects to succeed, and that actions of Good (+3) difficulty or below can be overcome easily. You can use both ideas to spotlight that character at appropriate times—either by creating a situation that only that character can succeed at dependably, or by creating a situation that allows that character to succeed with style (see "*Extra Shifts*" on the next page).

Difficulty as Plot Device

Sometimes, assigning an unexpectedly high or low difficulty to an action can create an interesting detail for your game. For example, if the PCs are breaking into a small company's office building, they probably expect most of the locks to be Good difficulty or lower. Finding one that's Great or Superb difficulty would be unexpected, and this will serve as a flag to indicate that not all is what it seems. Perhaps the small company is a front for something larger, or the company is dabbling in illegal activities and requires better security to hide it.

Likewise, if the same PCs are infiltrating a Mafia don's safehouse and all the locks are Average difficulty, it should be an indicator to them that something is wrong. Maybe the don has thugs lying in wait for an ambush, or has already called the cops and is just waiting for them to show up. Maybe he just wants to have a nice little chat with them…

Modifying Difficulties

You should have a good reason for justifying why a difficulty is high, beyond just a desire to sufficiently challenge a character. It wouldn't make sense if every Investigation roll a character makes is at Great (+4) or above just because he has a skill at Superb (+5)—that strains your credibility as a GM.

However, you can "turn up the volume" on some actions that would otherwise be a breeze if the situation warrants it. Almost no action happens in a vacuum, and the environment and circumstances under which an action occurs can sometimes complicate matters dramatically. Easy actions that become more complicated due to circumstance can often seem livelier than difficult actions that are otherwise straightforward.

When you're modifying difficulties, first look at whatever aspects are on your scene—either because you've already placed them there or because it suddenly seems appropriate to introduce one. Aspects like Dark or Cramped or Very Public Space can cause a host of problems and they allow you to make the situation more dynamic. ("Oh, you want to break into the tool shed? Well, that's probably an Average roll on your Burglary, but this is a Very Public Space—people everywhere, you know, it's a park…so if you want to do it and not get

And what's actually probably worse, they'll run out of points, your big finale will pwn them utterly, and the adventure will make everybody sad.

Don't make everybody sad.

"Pwn"? Is that some sort of assault on the Celtic tongue?

It's… uh, it's an internet thing.

Horrors.



spotted, you probably need a Good or better.") This is basically the equivalent of you tagging the scene aspect on behalf of the opposition, just like the players would do in order to turn a circumstance into an advantage.

Besides using scene aspects, there are some circumstances that are borderline cases—they're almost always appropriate to modify a difficulty, but they aren't often appropriate as a scene aspect. Here's a short list:

Time or Quality Pressure: Sometimes, the kinds of special effects a PC can get by getting extra shifts on a roll (see "*Extra Shifts*" below) are a *prerequisite* to succeeding at an action, requiring the character to accomplish something within a certain timeframe or produce a result of a certain quality. You can modify the difficulty by an appropriate amount to reflect this.

Movement: Trying to do almost anything while moving at a high speed is pretty difficult, whether it's shooting a gun in a highway-speed chase or using Stealth at a full run. If the PC is trying to take an action that would reasonably be hampered by fast movement, the difficulty should be increased by 2.

Ill-Prepared: If, for whatever reason, a PC doesn't have the necessary tools or know-how to accomplish something, the difficulty can be increased by 2. As an example, if a character is thrust into giving the keynote speech at a conference because the scheduled speaker fell ill minutes before, it could be reasonable to assume that the character is ill-prepared.

You might notice that these resemble the kinds of aspects you might put on a character via declaration or maneuver, except they don't come from a proactive NPC antagonist. Use that as a guideline when you're coming up with these, and encourage players to make declarations to create advantageous circumstances for their characters.

Extra Shifts

Sometimes a player will roll far greater than the difficulty and generate extra shifts on an action. Many actions during play will depend less on whether or not a character succeeds, and depend more on *how much* a character succeeds by and *what that success means*. The number of shifts a character generates on a roll can serve as a yardstick for describing how a roll turns out:

0 shifts = Minimal success:
The character pulled it off. It's neither pretty nor graceful, but it works.

1 shift = Notable success:
This is a clear success. The character's result is solid and reliable; while it may not be inspired, it is absolutely workmanlike.

3 shifts = Significant success:
The success is noticeably well done and of fine quality, very reliable, and so on. If you use the optional spin rules (page 214), this level of success and higher on a defense roll generates spin.

5+ shifts = Potent success:
Not only is the quality of the success remarkable, it may have some unexpected, secondary benefits, such as a deeper insight into a problem at hand.

You and the players can use this to color your narration of an action appropriately—a Craftsmanship roll to fix a car engine might be described with a result like, "The car still sputters erratically and emits smoke, but at least it's running again," if it barely succeeds. If the roll produces 5 shifts, however, it might be described with a result like, "You turn the key and the engine comes to life, purring as smoothly as it did when it was new."

In addition to adding narrative color, getting extra shifts on a roll can allow a player to add some special effects to the result, reflecting the benefits of his success. The most obvious of these is inflicting stress with an attack in a conflict (page 200)—the greater the margin of success, the more stress inflicted by the attack.

The next most common option for using extra shifts is to *enhance the quality* of an effort—doing something better, more stylishly, more stealthily, more just plain awesome than other people do. While this is usually reflected in narration, it can have a tangible effect on play if the effort is something that someone else will have to compete with later—the extra shifts add to the difficulty of whatever rolls are made to oppose it, +1 for each shift used in this manner.

Consider the example of a player making a Craftsmanship roll to sabotage a money-counterfeiting machine. If there are no shifts on the roll, it will probably be pretty easy (Fair or Good difficulty) for someone to come by and repair that machine later. If the roll gains 5 shifts, though, it means that the player has so thoroughly wrecked the machine that repairing it is almost like rebuilding it from scratch (Epic or Legendary difficulty).

Sometimes, a player makes a roll explicitly to set a difficulty for others trying to accomplish something. In these cases, the difficulty of the roll is assumed to be Mediocre (+0) plus the number of shifts the player achieves—Mediocre (+0) plus 3 shifts equals Good (+3).

Finally, a player can use extra shifts to decrease the default time it takes to perform an action. If a character is trying to accomplish goals by a deadline, extra shifts can be used to accomplish an objective more quickly than usual, with each shift reducing the time one step on the **time chart** (see *"Dealing with Time,"* page 315). In some situations, a player might be forced to choose between speed and quality, designating a number of extra shifts for each.

Declarations

In some situations, skills (knowledge skills like Scholarship are the most obvious, but any could apply) may allow a player to make a declaration. A declaration is typically a player-driven assertion that there is a particular aspect on a particular target (an individual character or scene). Broadly, declarations allow a player to introduce *facts* into the setting and storyline if he succeeds in his declaration roll. If the roll fails, the fact is not true—although the character might believe it is and may act accordlingly.

The difficulties for declarations should, honestly, be based on how *interesting* the proposed fact or aspect is. Ideas that would disrupt the game or are just unreasonable should simply be vetoed. These are the questions to ask yourself when determining difficulty:

1. Is the declaration interesting (or funny)?
2. Will the declaration have interesting consequences if it's acted upon, whether it's right or wrong?
3. Does the declaration propose a specific and interesting course of action?

Each "no" adds 2 to the base difficulty of Mediocre. If the proposed fact is very amusing, proposes an interesting course of action, and has interesting consequences (three "yes"-es), a Mediocre difficulty is appropriate—you want to provide a good chance that the detail is true.

"Selling" Success

One of your jobs as a GM is to make the players feel like their successes and failures matter. Usually, this isn't a problem, but at times it's easy to get caught up in the moment and move past a player's successful roll into a new conflict or moment of tension. Ideally, with every successful roll there should be a spotlight moment for the character.

We call this idea "selling," because you act a little bit like a salesman—taking a moment to highlight how great a moment is before moving on. By embellishing or explaining the positive effects of a roll, you are selling that success to the group. When someone succeeds big on an Investigation roll, don't just say, "Here's what you learn." Take a moment to explain how that character learns this information. When someone lands a hit on a foe in a fight, don't just mark down stress on your NPC's write-up—talk about how they fall back and look dazed for a moment.

Of course, you can also offer this job to your players, if they enjoy a more collaborative play style. Nothing sells a success like hearing the person who succeeded telling how it works. Maybe you won't do this every time, but on occasion try using the line: "You succeed! Tell us how."

By contrast, a boring fact with a dull course of action and no possible consequences has a difficulty of Fantastic. If your players haven't quite grasped how much they can do with declarations, you may need to lower the difficulties to suit—but you should let them know what makes a declaration more likely to succeed.

Declaration as Reward

Sometimes a player suggests a detail that is so reasonable from a common sense standpoint, or so funny/cool/whatever, that the idea of having him roll dice to make the detail true seems ludicrous. Follow your gut when this happens and don't make the player roll—just assume the declaration is true and note down the aspect. You can look at this as rewarding the player for good or clever narration—he's making your game world more dynamic; in return, he gets to tag the aspect he just brought into play.

Assessments

Assessment difficulties follow a slightly different set of guidelines than declarations because a player will usually use an assessment action to uncover an aspect that is hidden on another character. This suggests the need for an opposed roll, using whatever skills would be appropriate to the situation. If the assessment target is not a character, assume that the default difficulty is Mediocre unless there are circumstances that would modify that difficulty (see *"Modifying Difficulties"* on page 311).

For example, if there's a well-hidden air duct that would provide an entry point to a building for someone using the Burglary skill, and the building's security manager is an NPC in your game, you could make a quick roll on the manager's Stealth skill (perhaps modified by Craftsmanship) to see how well he hid the duct. This would consequently serve as the difficulty for the player's Burglary roll to case the building.

At your discretion, extra shifts on an assessment roll might reveal more than one aspect—the character does so well that he notices details beyond what he was looking for. A good rule of thumb is to give an extra aspect or fact at 3 shifts, at 5 shifts, and every +2 shifts thereafter.

Dealing with Time

There are two categories of time in this game: **story time** and **game time**.

Story time is the measure of how long something takes from the perspective of being "in the story"—in other words, it's time as far as the characters are concerned. Seconds, minutes, hours, days, weeks…everything characters do is expected to take some amount of time. Anytime you're talking about characters dealing with time, whether it's trying to speed up a research attempt or deliberately drawing out their preparations, you're talking about story time.

Game time (or real time) is altogether different—it's time as far as the *players* are concerned, who are sitting there playing the game. Game time is measured in a certain set of discrete units:

Exchange (conflict only): The amount of time it takes in a conflict for everyone to take one action and defend against any actions that are directed against them—usually not longer than a few minutes.

Scene: The amount of time it takes to resolve a conflict or accomplish some other purpose (see *"Starting and Ending Scenes"* on page 307) through the actions and interactions of PCs and NPCs. Scenes can take a hugely variable amount of time—from a couple of minutes to half an hour or more—depending on their content.

Session: The collection of scenes that comprise one "evening" of play; when you and your friends pack it up and go home, you've ended that session. A typical session of play runs for a number of hours, usually between two and four.

Scenario (or "Arc"): The collection of several sessions of play, usually centering on a few large-scale plotlines. Sometimes, the divisions between scenarios are clear-cut, sometimes not; it largely depends on how the GM structures the game (see *Building Scenarios*, page 340). Scenarios are typically composed of at least two or three sessions, but might sometimes require a few more.

Campaign: The entire collection of related scenarios played by a group. A campaign can theoretically last indefinitely, but more practically they tend to last for about four to ten scenarios. As with scenarios, a campaign can be set up to specifically resolve an overarching plot that runs the length of the campaign, or it can simply be comprised of the smaller stories that resolve within scenarios.

The relationship between story time and game time is not consistent or clear-cut—large swaths of story time might go by simply by narrating that it passes ("Okay, so you meet up three weeks later and…"). Likewise, a single exchange in a multifaceted conflict might take ten minutes to resolve in game time, but only describe what happens over thirty seconds of story time. Generally speaking, you're usually not going to have to worry about this relationship—story time is more often than not a narrative convenience, so your primary concern will be managing the flow of game time.

However, there are some instances when tracking story time becomes far more important. If you've established during play that certain events are going to take place after a certain amount of story time ("The meeting is in two days, guys."), players may be extremely interested in accomplishing certain goals before that event takes place. A deadline or time constraint is a great way to introduce tension into a session or scene, the most obvious example being the ticking clock on a bomb.

The Time Chart

You can use the following chart as a way of tracking increments of story time in the game. You can round off any in-between ranges according to your judgment; when in doubt, go a step higher.

Whenever a PC is attempting an action where time is important, choose a reasonable increment on the ladder as the starting point and inform the player of how much time the action will take. Any extra shifts the player gets on the roll can be used to "buy down" this duration, moving down one increment per shift. Keep in mind that shifts spent to reduce time *can't* be used to gauge the quality of the character's success, and be sure to help narrate the results accordingly.

As an example, suppose a character is attempting to use Investigation to find someone's hangout. You tell the player that this investigation will take the rest of the day, starting at "an afternoon" on the ladder. The character has an appointment with a client that evening, so the player decides to try to get it done faster. He rolls and gets one shift on the roll, which he spends to complete his investigation in "a few hours" instead.

That means he only barely succeeded on his Investigation roll—he'll learn where the hangout is, but not any of the extra information you might have given him if he'd used that shift for quality instead (like the fact that nearly all the regular clientele have a strange habit of carrying concealed firearms).

This chart can also work as a difficulty modifier before the roll. Continuing with the above example, you might also have said, "Well, he's a pretty public figure, so it shouldn't be too hard to find out where he hangs out—I'll say it's a Fair. However, you have somewhere to be in a few hours, and it'd normally take you all afternoon, so we'll say Good."

Time Increments
instant
a few moments
half a minute
a minute
a few minutes
15 minutes
half an hour
an hour
a few hours
an afternoon
a day
a few days
a week
a few weeks
a month
a few months
a season
half a year
a year
a few years
a decade
a generation
a mortal lifetime
several mortal lifetimes
and so on

Time & Consequence Recovery

In *Playing the Game* (page 204), durations for recovering from consequences are listed in game time. Most of the time this will be appropriate, but sometimes you'll end up in a situation where the amount of story time that passes would reasonably allow for a character to recover from a consequence. If you know you have a three-month break in story time from the end of one session to the start of the next, for example, it wouldn't make sense for someone with the Moderate consequence of Bruised Ribs to continue to suffer from it next session.

In terms of story time, recovering from a mild consequence takes about an hour. Recovering from a moderate consequence takes anywhere from a day to a week. Recovering from a severe consequence takes several weeks to a couple of months. Recovering from an extreme consequence is essentially not possible—though after a major milestone (see *Advancement*, page 88),

it might be possible to reword the new aspect into something less egregious. Remember, you should require ample justification for the recovery process to begin before you allow a PC to start marking off that time (*Playing the Game*, page 220).

If you aren't sure whether or not you should use story time for recovery from a certain consequence, consider that the primary purpose of a consequence is to be *felt*—if you haven't had the chance to bring the consequence back into play somehow, use whichever method gives you the most opportunities to do so before the PC heals. However, if the recovery process has started, don't change your mind if the PC heals before you can get around to using the consequence—there will more than likely be a next time.

Taking Extra Time

A player might mitigate the results of a failed roll by choosing to take extra time to do it. Every increment on the time chart greater than the default time it takes to complete the action allows the player a +1 to his result. This way, if it's especially important to the player that he finds a certain clue or achieves a certain goal, he can—it just takes him much longer than he planned.

Here's the important part, though: if you offer this, it has to come at the cost of some inconvenience. This isn't a "get out of failure free" card to succeed at any action. The player failed the roll, and that means there must be a complication. (For another idea of how to handle this, look at *"Failure as 'Success, but…'"* on page 310.)

Using the Investigation example from this section, if the player failed the roll by 2, he could choose to move two increments up the time chart and succeed at the roll. That puts his total time at "a few days" and introduces a complication. The GM decides that the character learns where the hangout is; however, the target of his inquiry learns about the investigation. When he shows up to his target's favorite hangout, he's going to find out that his target is surrounded by paid toughs who aren't too enthused about the PC's snooping!

In reverse, you can also use this to skip having to roll when there's no pressure of time. If a character is trying to pick a Fair difficulty lock that he could normally do in a few minutes, it's not out of bounds for a player who's not under time pressure to just say his character is taking a half hour to do it carefully and get automatic success.

Adjudicating Aspects

Aspects (page 98) has most of the guidelines you're going to need regarding the use of aspects, whether for invocation or for compel. For the most part, consult that chapter.

The primary mechanical function of aspects, from the GM's point of view, is to help funnel fate points back to the players so that they can handle larger or more important conflicts. If a player is sitting there with over half his character's *base* refresh in fate points (i.e., 5 or more for an 8-refresh game), you should probably be compelling other players more than him. Likewise, if a player is sitting there nearly devoid of fate points, you should focus your attention on coming up with compels to help fill up his stock.

Constructing a cheat sheet for yourself with all the PCs' current aspects on it is really useful. Canny players will look for their own opportunities to take compels and cash out of certain conflicts (page 206), so you don't have to worry about being 100% responsible for this, but consider that there are certain kinds of compels that are exclusively your province (page 101). You should try to use those as much as possible to help set up scenes and drive the story in unexpected directions.

Through the back-and-forth of players spending fate points, getting compelled to "recharge" their supply, and spending them again, you end up with a rhythmic cycle that sets the pace for your game—big conflicts happen when there are a lot of fate points on the table, and big twists and turns in the story happen when there aren't, which creates circumstances that drive the PCs to more big conflicts. You'll find more advice about working with that cycle in *Building Scenarios* (page 340).



Partial Refresh (Optional Rule)

You may want a more reliable and consistent method of handling fate point distribution, depending on how your group tends to handle the presence of compels. It can be difficult to think of worthy compels on the fly, and while this book tries to provide you as many options as possible, you might prefer to have something steady that you can use as a backup.

If that's the case, you have the option of including a **partial refresh** in your game—basically, allowing the players to regain a portion of the character's refresh total at certain defined points in the game session. This also allows you to fine-tune the flow of fate points between sessions depending on their length—if you had a short session, it might not seem appropriate to allow a full refresh before continuing on.

If you want to use this method, then each character has both a quarter- and half-refresh, in addition to his full refresh, which should be noted on the character sheet. Round up any .5 or higher. So, a character whose full refresh is 5 would have a half-refresh of 3 (2.5 rounded up) and a quarter-refresh of 1 (1.25 rounded down). You can then decide on a time interval after which the players receive one of their partial refreshes, adding that number of fate points to their current total.

For example, assuming a fairly normal session length of approximately 4 hours, you could give quarter-refreshes every hour, or half-refreshes every two hours. Likewise, if you know your whole game session is only going to last a couple of hours, you might suggest that the players only get a half-refresh going into the next session. This allows you to lessen some of your dependency on compels to get fate points moving around and introduces a more rigid sense of structure to the session. Be aware that this could make your sessions seem a bit more predictable, which might be a negative for some groups.

Let your players know at character creation if you're using this optional rule, so they know how taking that one last stunt or power impacts their partial refreshes.

Aspects and Narration

To quote from the *Aspects* chapter, "The process of using an aspect begins by declaring that one is relevant." Especially in a game that's been running for some time, it's easy to get into a habit of skipping over or glossing over the narration of an aspect in play. Do not, under any circumstances, allow this to occur. Aspects are the primary source for colorful and interesting narrative in a scene, and giving that part of the process short shrift will ultimately make a lot of your scenes boring and dull. Aspects shouldn't

be perceived as general-use methods of point-spending; the object is to integrate them into the scene.

With that said, you should give your players a wide latitude regarding *how* to narrate the aspect into the scene. All that matters is that the group has a clear picture of why that aspect is both relevant and important at that time. Sometimes that's as simple as a sentence that includes the aspect ("I wheel him about and shove his face into the nearby Deep Fryer!"), and sometimes it's a little more abstract, where the player narrates his character's thoughts or convictions ("There's no way I'm going to let some punk do that to Biff's Steady Girlfriend.").

Both of these approaches are fine, as long as they add something to the scene while you're playing.

Adjudicating Skills

Most of the specific cases you're going to run into regarding skills have already been covered earlier in this book, either in the *Skills* chapter itself (page 120), in *Playing the Game* (page 192), or in the guidelines given above.

Some players may try to use their skills in ways that seem counterintuitive to you. A player might ask you if he can use Fists to perform an assessment action and learn something about an opponent's fighting style, or if he can use Intimidation to defend against a physical attack by creeping the opponent out so badly that he misses. You don't want to immediately refuse these kinds of requests without some additional consideration.

First, you should ask the player to justify his request in a little more detail. Often, a player isn't trying to "cheat" when he suggests an unorthodox use for a skill—it's just something cool he thought of in the moment. If the skill use would create a funny or entertaining moment in the game, by all means, allow it to happen. That said, if such a skill use stops being funny or entertaining and becomes boring and rote, feel free to make it more difficult or disallow it altogether.

If you feel the need to restrict that particular use of a skill, keep in mind that stunts (*Mortal Stunts*, page 146) are the primary means that the game uses to add more trappings to skills. You could decide that, while you'll allow the particular action one time, taking advantage of the same action in the future requires the character to take a stunt that allows it. To punctuate that requirement, you could even have the player make his initial attempt at a difficulty of +2, reflecting the fact that the character isn't accustomed to using his skill in such an unusual way.

Some skills can present a particular challenge in determining how to deal with them in play. Those special cases are discussed below.

Athletics

Climbing

The biggest issue with climbing (and actually, with most applications of Athletics) is the temptation to overuse it even when it would be boring or a waste of time to do so. Remember that if you can't think of a way to make failure interesting, you shouldn't call for a roll at all. If there's nothing significant pressuring the character, and there are no time constraints, assume that any climb the character tries to make is eventually successful.

If there is a time constraint of some kind, use the guidelines given with the time chart above—pick a baseline amount of time it normally takes to complete the climb, and let the player roll to try to get shifts in order to get it done faster. If you want that roll to be at a difficulty higher than Mediocre, include some scene aspects that affect the climbing surface, such as Few Handholds, Slippery Surface, or Long Way Up (see the guidelines for modifying difficulties on page 311).

If there are other pressures that make it worthwhile to play out the climb, another option is to treat the climb as a **challenge** (page 324), letting the player gradually accumulate shifts toward success while whatever is creating the pressure gets the chance to act. The guidelines for modifying difficulty remain the same.

In any case, climbing should usually be binary—if the character can't do it, he typically figures that out near the bottom. So either he succeeds or he doesn't, rather than getting partway up, slipping, and falling. However, if you want to insert such a moment of tension, halfway up a climb is an excellent time to compel an aspect (environmental ones are good for this) and, if the player accepts, demand a new roll as soon as the effects of the compel have occurred.

Finally, really long climbs might require the character's Athletics skill to be restricted (page 214) by his Endurance skill—let your judgment be your guide for this.

Falling

Gravity is an implacable foe, and falls are its method of attack. The ground makes the attack on the victim—and it never misses. It's an especially nasty weapon, its blows hitting particularly hard.

The hit is equal to 5 stress for every 10 full feet a character falls, so a character falling from the top of the third floor (or around 30 feet) will face a 15-stress hit.

Most kinds of mundane protection simply don't work against stress taken from a fall. That leaves stress boxes, consequences, and supernatural powers to absorb the effects. Armor from supernatural toughness powers (page 184) applies (unless the Catch says otherwise), as does armor from shielding spells (page 252) constructed to absorb falling impact.

The player may roll Athletics to try to reduce this somewhat, but usually only for short falls. The target is Mediocre; for every two shifts gained on the roll, gain one point of armor against the falling damage. So a Great (+4) Athletics roll would take 2 stress away from the fall's stress value.

The falling rules are not an invitation for super-strong characters and spellcasters to start picking people up and tossing them to a great height, only to fall down and take egregious falling damage. That's an attack, and the stress dealt by any falling component is already included in the stress of the attack. If your force-bolt "uppercuts" a guy so he flies up and then falls back down with a crunch of bone, the damage dealt by the attack itself accounts for the "fall back down" part—essentially, in this case, falling is a special effect, a detail of color.

Additionally, knocking characters off of high places should have plenty of escape clauses. The victim should always have the opportunity to concede in an entertaining fashion so he can opt out of the otherwise merciless application of the falling rules. Short of that, the victim might have ways to simply prevent the fall from happening—an Athletics roll to grab onto a handhold right as he goes over the edge, a quick evocation to create a cushion of air that slows the fall to a gentle glide, and other such things.

When it comes right down to it, the rules for falls themselves should be applied rarely. We're supplying them for folks who like that sort of thing, but their application should only occur when all other avenues have been exhausted.

Jumping

Jumping is sort of an odd beast in games. Consider the classic situation of characters looking to jump over a bottomless pit—as GM, you want the scene to have some tension, but you don't want anyone falling to his death because of dumb luck. Aspects and fate points can mitigate this to some extent, but this means you don't want to set the difficulty too high.

If you want to introduce the possibility of failure here, consider the difficulty you set to be the point where they barely make the jump. So crossing a large pit might still only be a Fair, even if you imagine the distance as being pretty far—getting that Fair exactly might mean the character is hanging from the edge on the other end of the pit. Even that small threat of failure will cause players to respond strongly and feel the incentive to use aspects and fate points.

A-ha, shielding spells. I might know a thing or two about those.

When not looking to introduce the chance of failure, simply avoid calling for a roll to clear the pit, and instead give it a high border value (page 212) to increase the cost of crossing from one zone (the near side of the pit) to another (the far side). Another softer approach is letting a failure be a realization that the character just isn't up to the task ("You missed the roll by two? Well, it's clear to you that it's too far. You'll have to find another way around, or get someone to throw you a rope.").

This is so Indiana Jones.

That said, if it's only an *apparently* bottomless pit, and something interesting (rather than something lethal) happens to people who fail… let the dice roll!

Contacts

Setting Contact Difficulties

There are two factors to consider when you're setting the difficulty for a Contacts roll: how familiar the character is with the area, and how well-connected he is among the people he's seeking contact with. This will often be obvious from common sense and/or the presence of a relevant aspect—a character in his home city who has an aspect mentioning a certain group will not face any increased difficulties on Contacts rolls, for instance. If either of these things is missing, you should consider it a factor to increase the difficulty (+2 for being unfamiliar, +2 for lacking obvious connection).

A player can mitigate these penalties by spending extra time to overcome them according to the time chart. If he takes that route, those

penalties shouldn't plague him again—assume that he used that time to give him an inroad to future Contacts efforts. However, if he took the expedient way out and invoked some aspects to help him succeed, you should continue to levy those penalties on future attempts until he takes the time to do something about it.

Contacts rolls are also an excellent chance to use the "*Taking Extra Time*" option on page 316.

Craftsmanship

Building

Most of the time, you're not going to want to roll for building things—it's time-consuming and boring, and there aren't a lot of interesting consequences for failure. As such, most applications of building rely on declarations—the player sets up the proper circumstances and declares that he builds something, and *voilà*, he does. Those circumstances revolve mainly around three attendant factors: tools, materials, and time.

Having the proper tools and materials essentially means having a workshop that has a sufficient rating to work on the item in question. A character's workshop is dependent on his Resources skill; see the skill description on page 139 for more information. The rating of the workshop needed is based on the item's **quality rating**, which is equivalent to its place on the cost ladder for Resources (see "*Buying Things*" on page 322). If the character does not have an appropriate workshop, he must either make a Resources roll to acquire one as described on page 139, or he must rely on the workshop or Resources of someone else.

Having adequate time is another issue. Most things take a fairly long time to build from scratch—assume that, under ideal circumstances, an item takes a day to build, +1 step on the time chart for every rank of quality above Mediocre (so an item of Good quality would take a few weeks to build). If the character's Craftsmanship skill is lower than the quality of the item he is trying to build, that *also* requires a compensation of time (assuming he doesn't wish to roll): add another +1 step for every point of rank difference (so an Average craftsman working on a Good quality item needs a few months on it).

It should be the player's choice whether he wishes to roll against a difficulty equal to the quality rating in order to speed this up, or if he'd prefer to just take the extra time.

Fixing

Like building, fixing a broken item is usually more an issue of time and effort than anything else—it's not really the subject for a roll unless there's a deadline involved or the character is working under bad conditions.

If either is the case, the base difficulty to repair a broken item is also equivalent to its base quality rating. Default time is a half hour, +1 on the time chart for every step of quality above Mediocre. Trying to attempt repairs outside an appropriate workshop (see above) raises the difficulty of the repair by 2.

Jury-Rigging

If the character isn't in a workshop and the player doesn't want to deal with the problem of increased difficulty, you can have the player do a jury-rig instead—roll against the item quality as usual, but the effect of the repairs only lasts for a scene. If the player gets shifts on the roll, he can extend the duration for another scene per shift. If the player wants to do this a lot, he should consider taking Jury-Rigger stunt from page 150.

Breaking

Items can take stress like characters can; assume that an item has 2 stress boxes, modified by the item quality in the same way as the Endurance skill (page 130). An item "defends" against attempts to break it using either its quality rating or an appropriate skill used by whoever is holding the item. Most items do not suffer consequences; once their stress track is bypassed, they are considered inoperable.

Large or complex items, devices, or structures (such as buildings or safes) are more accurately treated as **challenges** and could take consequences depending on the situation. See page 324 for more information.

Might

Lifting

Use these as a difficulty guideline when someone wants to use Might to lift something:

Lifting	
Terrible (-2)	A fully loaded backpack or rucksack
Poor (-1)	A child
Mediocre (+0)	A heavy chair
Average (+1)	Most adults
Fair (+2)	Most furniture, most heavy-set adults
Good (+3)	Large furniture, like dressers or sofas
Epic (+7)	A motorcycle
Legendary (+8)	A small car
Legendary+1 (+9)	A midsized car

And so on. Rolls are not usually required unless the character is trying to exceed his usual max limit. Keep in mind that each level represents what a character can lift by expending all of his effort; he isn't really going to be able to move much more than a zone carrying something that's equal to his base Might. A character can carry something two levels below his Might for a short distance (allowing him to make a sprint roll restricted by Might, with the item's difficulty as a border value). He can carry something four levels below his Might with no real penalty or can toss it a distance of one zone. Something six levels below his Might could be used as a thrown weapon.

Inhuman, Supernatural, and Mythic Strength increase the effective Might rating for the purposes of lifting. See the individual skill descriptions for details.

Breaking Through Things

Use the difficulty guidelines shown here when someone wants to use Might to break through something.

Remember that objects can have stress tracks—in this case, use the difficulty both as their "defense" and as the "quality" to modify their stress track as per Breaking (page 320). Inhuman, Supernatural, and Mythic Strength increase a character's effective Might rating for the purposes of breaking through things.



Breaking Through	
Terrible (-2)	Window glass
Poor (-1)	Thin wood
Fair (+2)	Thick wood, like an interior door
Good (+3)	Really heavy or thick wood, like an exterior door
Fantastic (+6)	Metal door (car door, fire door), weak interior wall
Epic (+7)	Interior wall
Legendary (+8)	Thin exterior wall
Legendary+2 (+10)	Brick or weak stone
Legendary+4 (+12)	Reinforced metal, like a vault door.

Why the gaps after Good in both ladders?

Some kinds of lifting and breaking just aren't in the reach of human capability: you need a Strength power.

Buying Things		
Price	**Amount**	**Can Buy**
Terrible	Under $10	A candy bar, cigarettes, a movie ticket, a paperback novel, a cheap meal, a quick cab ride, over-the-counter drugs
Poor	Under $50	A night in a cheap hotel, a basic cellular phone, most common hand tools, basic first aid kit, common prescription medications, decent clothes, backpack, common hand weapons (knives, batons, baseball bats, etc.), alarm clock, a good flashlight, cab ride across town
Mediocre	Under $250	Nice clothes, a good cellular phone, one night in an good hotel, a very comprehensive first aid kit, 4-man tent, a digital camera, most prescription medications, most shop tools, uncommon hand weapons (swords, axes, maces), discount plane tickets
Average	Under $500	Fancy clothes, rental of an office or small apartment for a month, bicycle, basic professional toolkit (for a plumber, electrician, or the like), most handguns and shotguns, a very basic personal computer, video game console, a nice pair of binoculars, most plane tickets
Fair	Under $1,000	Most hunting rifles and carbines, nice apartment for a month, basic laptop computer, decent personal computer, decent LCD television, an ATV or dirt bike
Good	Under $5,000	Military gear (body armor, assault rifles, full-auto submachineguns), a cheap scooter or moped, a tricked-out laptop or personal computer, a large plasma television, a semester at a state college (in-state)
Great	Under $10,000	A compact car, a motorcycle, basic surgical procedures, a small motorboat, a semester at a state college (out-of-state)
Superb	Under $100,000	A small and/or rural house, a luxury car or sports car, a personal yacht, a motor home
Fantastic	Under $1 million	A private jet, a small mansion or nice urban house, a local business
Epic	Under $10 million	A small corporation, an office building
Legendary	Money is no object	A personal island, a large corporation

Resources

Buying Things

Sometimes during a session, a PC will want to buy or acquire something he doesn't already have. Generally speaking, it isn't recommended that you spend a lot of time on a scene that's explicitly for the sake of shopping for something, but if it becomes really important to deal with for some reason, you have a few options for handling it.

Items and services have a cost rating that, like everything else in the game, uses the adjective ladder. You can use the chart above as a guideline to determine what a player might need to roll to acquire a particular item. This is not a comprehensive list and prices change constantly—feel free to do Internet research or browse a current catalog to help determine the cost of items not listed or which seem under- or overpriced.

Your first option for handling the purchase of an item or good is simply to go by declaration—a player can almost always declare that his character has or can reasonably afford anything that's 2 levels or more below the character's Resources. You may want to extend that to 1 level below Resources as well, if the character has another skill that might reasonably justify possessing a certain item (for example, if the character has high Craftsmanship and Fair Resources, you can probably assume he has a professional toolkit of some kind).

For anything higher than Resources–2, or in any case where the item in question is rare, restricted in legality (like, only for military or police use), or has to be acquired within a certain timeframe, call for a skill roll. Item rarity and legal restrictions are both factors that will increase the difficulty as per the usual guidelines—this chart only covers the basic value of the item.

In other words, while a military-grade assault rifle might only be a Good on the chart, actually acquiring one if the character isn't in the military will probably require a roll of Superb—the extra money represents the palms he has to grease in order to get the permits necessary to own it (or to get someone to find it on the black market for him). A player could try to use an additional skill, such as Contacts, to remove these difficulties.

Also keep in mind that the items on the chart are listed at their *minimum* quality—a player can choose to spend more money on an item if he wishes, which would give him a correspondingly higher cost rating. So if one of your PCs is just burning to own a katana, he can certainly acquire one at Mediocre cost, but it won't be anything special—if he wants to be a cool kid, he'll try to get one valued at Fair or Good, which might make his sword an exceptionally well-made import with genuine folded steel, real rayskin on the grip, and historically accurate fittings.

In practical terms, higher quality items have more stress boxes and are more resistant to being damaged (see "*Breaking*" under the Craftsmanship section on page 320).

I SENSE THAT THERE'S SOME WISH FULFILLMENT GOING ON HERE.

You already have a really nice katana. Hush.

UM, IT'S NOT EXACTLY MINE...

Income Stability and Social Class

The Resources skill is a measure of *disposable* income, which means that it doesn't always match up with a character's overall wealth or social class. In general, Resources of Average through Good represents the range of the "middle class," but it could also represent someone who has unusual financial acumen or lives far below his means.

In addition to the Resources rating itself, a player can represent unusual facets of his character's wealth through the use of aspects—a character with an aspect of Constantly in Debt might be forced to take compels to be "tapped out" suddenly, even if he has a relatively high Resources. Likewise, a character with Jet-Setting Dilettante might only have an Average or Fair Resources, but there are other factors that afford him a high social status regardless.

This also means that, when a character is rolling his Resources skill at his level or above, he's trying to make a *significant* purchase—in other words, one he can't just make over and over again. A character at Good Resources can't go buy six scooters in six subsequent scenes; he can afford one or maybe two with financing. Obviously, you don't want to get too detailed with this kind of stuff—suffice it to say, you should limit rolls for buying stuff to one or two per session at most.

Adjudicating Powers and Stunts

Most of the guidelines that apply to skills also apply to powers and stunts, given that their main function is to enhance or expand the way that skills work. Consult individual power and stunt descriptions for further details, and refer to the guidelines for skills when in doubt.

That said, we do have a couple ideas for you consider...

Personified Powers

Several powers that PCs might gain access to tie to a thinking, potentially interactive entity in some fashion. Sponsored Magic (page 287) is the most prominent, but things like Demonic Copilot (page 175) and even Feeding Dependency (page 190) apply as well. When these powers are in effect there's an opportunity for roleplay.

This could be the negotiation with a sponsor's agenda—the Winter Knight looking to call on the Court's power to serve his own needs, only to find himself in a psychic conversation with Queen Mab herself and having to justify his request.

Or it could manifest as a White Court vampire's struggle with his inner demon as he faces down a hunger check on the dice.

Ultimately this is simply a bit of color, without weight in the rules, but giving a power a *face* is a powerful tool for (forgive us) getting inside a character's head and making what would normally be a simple use of a power into an event, a scene all of its own. You'll want to use this technique lightly (the other players around the table won't get to participate in these moments), but it can be a helpful addition to your box of GM's tools.

Predictions and Prayers

Some powers may allow the character to make a prediction or a prayer that will affect events to come. Mechanically, these are one and the same thing: they manifest as aspects that are placed on the "world"—the campaign itself—and remain in effect until the events they pertain to have played out. As the GM it's your job to take ownership of an aspect like this and see that it plays out. That means you'll need to keep an eye out for times when the aspect might be used to compel characters (PCs and NPCs alike) to guide events towards the outcome predicted or prayed for, and alert the players when a tag is available on these aspects so they can exercise their own will to guide events along as well.

Other Situations

Here are a few other situations to consider that don't simply involve difficulties, skills, or powers.

Challenges

Sometimes when a PC is trying to accomplish a complicated or involved goal, it's appropriate to track precisely how much progress he's making over time. Usually, you would do this in a conflict scene—one PC is trying to accomplish some goal in the middle of a fight while other PCs are actually doing the fighting. You might also have a scene where a PC is racing to get something done quickly before something bad happens or another character accomplishes a goal—like hotwiring a car before zombies can get across the parking lot to come eat him. Sure, you can use the time chart for this if you want, but "zooming in" the focus a bit can create a dramatic and thrilling scene.

When this happens, you want to set up the goal as a **challenge** for the PC; determine a base difficulty for rolling to overcome the challenge, the amount of time each roll takes, and a number of shifts the PC has to accumulate before the goal is completed. The PC can roll against the challenge every exchange (or unit of time), adding up the shifts he gets on each roll and counting them toward the total. Failure on any roll means losing all of the accumulated shifts to that point. When the PC has accumulated enough shifts, he accomplishes the goal.

In a way, you can look at it as giving the challenge a special kind of stress track. A character can try to do maneuvers against a challenge just like he could with an opponent, using the aspects gained to help speed his progress.

Example: *In a scene straight out of a horror movie, Will Borden is trying to get a car started before a horde of ravenous zombies reaches him and his friends on the far side of a parking lot.*

The GM decides this situation would be best framed as a challenge, with each roll being a minute as the zombies advance. The car is Great quality, and the GM decides that Chad, Will's player, needs 5 shifts total to get the car started. She also decides that the ghouls will be there in about five minutes—Chad has five rolls to get the car started if Will doesn't want a fight on his hands.

Chad's first Craftsmanship roll comes up a Fantastic—two shifts get added to his total. He's off to a good start. His second roll doesn't go so well, though—he gets a Good, and loses his two previous shifts! The GM describes smoke billowing from the car as Will works on it, while the zombies get closer and closer.

Chad decides to try to maneuver, so he makes an Alertness roll to say that Will notices an extra bottle of coolant under the seat (also establishing that the car is having radiator trouble)—he gets a Great on the roll and gets to add the aspect Bottle of Coolant *to the scene.*

In the fourth exchange, Chad rolls his Craftsmanship and gets an incredible result of Epic! He tags his declared aspect and increases that result to Legendary+1, giving him the 5 shifts he needs to fix the car. Will and his friends speed away just a minute before the zombies get there…

Billy, this seems really similar to some of your rules for spellcasting.

Yeah, this is basically a simplified version of the mechanics for casting a thaumaturgical spell, except for mundane situations.

Environmental Hazards

Sometimes a character has to contend with environmental hazards such as fire, extreme cold, exposure to corrosive or toxic substances, and other elements of that nature. By and large, the best way to handle something like this is to give the hazard a rating on the adjective ladder that suggests its intensity, and allow it to "attack" and "maneuver" against characters as though it's an actual opponent. PCs usually defend against environmental conditions with Endurance, but Athletics might apply in some cases (if the situation is more about avoidance than resistance). A failed defense inflicts stress and/or relevant consequences as normal. An environment might be able to affect a PC multiple times at a regular interval—you could call for an "attack" every half hour the PC is out walking around in a frozen tundra, for instance.

The rating for a hazard should be based on what would reasonably be required to avoid the effects: Mediocre or Average for a dangerous but easily avoided threat (the early stages of a burning building), Fair or Good for a threat that's fairly pervasive (a smoke-filled room), and Great or higher for something that would be almost impossible to avoid (being in the middle of a bonfire).

For those instances when an environmental hazard's effects are particularly direct (like a flamethrower) or are particularly potent (like exposure to radiation), you should also assign a Weapon rating. Most things that are this dangerous should be Weapon:3 or higher.

Some hazards—like sunlight or holy ground—only apply to creatures which are vulnerable to the hazard, leaving others alone.

Explosions and Whole-Zone Effects

Grenades and other explosives are a vicious, nasty business—not only are the lightest of them rated at Weapon:4, but they have the unique ability to affect everyone in an entire zone (perhaps even multiple zones). Grenades are thrown using the Weapons skill; take the thrower's roll as an attack against *every single person in that zone*, friend or foe, and let the chips fall where they may. If that seems nasty, it should—only the hardiest of supernatural creatures come close to faring well when explosives enter the picture, and that's only because they can survive the loss of most of their flesh.

What a lovely visual, Billy. Thanks for that.



If the explosive in question is stationary, like a landmine or a set charge, the difficulty to avoid it is based on how well the explosive was placed. Craftsmanship (requiring a stunt for the appropriate training) is the skill used to set this difficulty—either make a quick roll for the bomber, or simply use his skill total, whichever is more expedient.

Other hazards might also affect a whole zone or multiple zones—sonic weapons, sudden floods, and earthquakes come immediately to mind. Consider whether the effect of such hazards would be best expressed as an attack, maneuver, or simply a scene aspect, and roll according to the guidelines above under "*Environmental Hazards*" if necessary.

Wizards can turn an evocation attack into a whole-zone effect by calling up an extra 2 shifts of power (page 251).

How does sunlight work with a vampire's "Catch"?

It's an environmental hazard which does damage that satisfies the Catch condition, and counts as a compel on the vampire's High Concept aspect.

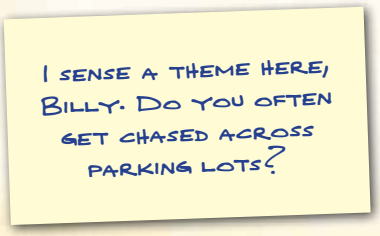
Spray Attacks

Some weapons have the ability to affect multiple targets in one attack, either because they have full-auto firing capabilities (military SMGs and assault rifles) or because there's some kind of consistency or spread in the shape of the attack (flamethrowers or shotguns). This allows a character to split his attack among multiple targets.

To do this, the player rolls the attack as usual, but then divides the attack up among the opponents before they roll a defense. Each attack must be at a minimum of Average (+1). So, if the player rolls a Great (+4), he can attack four targets at Average, two at Average and one at Fair, two at Fair, or any combination thereof. The weapon's full rating applies to each attack.

> ***Example:*** *The proverbial shit has hit the fan, and Karrin Murphy finds herself mixing it up with a group of three ghouls chasing her across a parking lot. Fortunately, she acquired a submachine gun (Weapon:2) from an overturned SWAT truck in the previous scene, and she decides to open up on the ghouls.*
>
> *Karrin's player, Shannon, rolls her Guns and comes up with a Fantastic (+6). She knows she wants to spray them, but she also knows they're damn fast, so she invokes her* Champion Marksman *aspect to bring the roll up to Legendary (+8). That allows her to split up her attack into two Great (+4) attacks.*
>
> *The GM rolls for each ghoul—one of them defends at Great and takes a 2-stress physical hit from the attack, and the other gets a horrible roll and defends at Mediocre, taking a whopping 6-stress physical hit. These are nameless NPCs, so the GM decides that one of the ghouls is taken out, and she describes the ghoul scattering back across the pavement as a hail of bullets hits it center mass.*
>
> *The other two are still coming, though. Murphy runs.*

Wizards can also do this with any evocation, though there are some additional wrinkles. See page 251 for the details.



Impact Damage

At some point, you may want to have one character try to hit another character with a car or other speeding object. This can be considered an attack using Weapon:5(!) for the car. Generally, most massive objects like that should be about Weapon:4 or Weapon:5, like explosives—only the hardiest of supernatural creatures should be able to shrug them off.

Special-Effect Attacks

Some weapons (like tazers or some poisons) are not necessarily intended to do direct damage as much as incapacitate the target. These weapons should still get ratings based on the guidelines given in *Playing the Game* (page 202), but instead of applying the Weapon rating as stress on an attack, the attacker might instead opt to impose a temporary aspect on the target (as though he'd performed a maneuver) in addition to the stress from the attack roll. Weapons used to bind or capture, like nets, can have their ratings sacrificed to enter the target in a grapple (page 211) in addition to the inflicted stress.

In either case, rolls to overcome these secondary effects are made against the weapon's rating; use the rating as the basis for rolling the opposition—i.e., Weapon:2 = Fair (+2).

Creating the Opposition

One of your most important jobs as a GM is to create and play the opposition that the PCs will face throughout the sessions of your game. Demons, vampire lords, rogue sorcerers, angry Mafia dons, and a whole host of other things that go bump in the night all stand ready to run afoul of your PCs. The conflict engendered by the PCs' and NPCs' opposing goals is what provides the meat for your story.

Right-sizing the opposition can be a tough call, because often your PCs will have a wildly diverse array and scope of abilities and talents. Let's use Harry Dresden as an example: sure, he's a wizard, but he enlists the aid of normal mortals like Karrin Murphy of the CPD and forensic examiner Waldo Butters on many of his cases. You want the opposition to provide conflict and give the PCs' struggles a tangible sense of tension, but you don't want to overwhelm and annihilate the whole group out of hand.

Types of NPCs

Overall, there are two kinds of NPCs in this world: those who are important enough to have names, and those who aren't. Of those who have names, there is another division you can make: those who are main characters in your story, and those who are supporting characters.

Nameless NPCs

Nameless NPCs are basically anyone the characters might casually encounter on the street—the lady at the streetlight, the librarian, the desk clerk, the security guard, the hired guns. These people walk in and out of the characters' lives like quicksilver, used only as a brief and fleeting part of a scene, never to be encountered again. They don't have names because their interaction with the PCs is so minimal that, even if you did give them a name, you probably wouldn't end up uttering it during the scene anyway.

You'll mainly use nameless NPCs to help add texture or verisimilitude to a scene, or to help beef up the opposition during a conflict (the angry Mafia don has to have his flunkies, right?). Don't worry about making this too conscious of a process—most of the time, you'll mention them out of reflex when you're describing a scene ("So, you're at the supermarket, and the checkout guy looks like he's bored. There's an old lady slowly flipping through her coupons, you know, the normal stuff.").

Creating nameless NPCs is similarly a non-issue—at best, all you need is whatever stats you think might come up during the scene or might be noteworthy, and assume everything else is Mediocre. Don't worry about structuring skill columns. Don't worry about giving them aspects unless something really vivid immediately springs to mind. So, if you need some hired thugs for the Mafia don, you'd just write down something like this:

> **Don's Thugs**
> Fists at Fair (+2), Guns at Fair (+2)
> Physical OO each.

And you're done. Honestly, you don't even have to write it down that way if you don't want to and you're comfortable enough winging relative skill levels based on the guidelines at the beginning of the chapter.

In general, nameless NPCs should never accept consequences—when they take stress past their stress track, they're taken out. Also, you shouldn't make a nameless NPC more competent than Good at anything—if they're at that level, they should probably be a supporting NPC instead. Same goes for stunts and supernatural powers, unless it's a zombie horde or something along those lines. If you need supernatural creatures as nameless NPCs, refer to their entry in *What Goes Bump* (OW28), but don't add anything to it—they get the template and nothing more.

Supporting NPCs

Supporting NPCs have names and some detail about them, and they play a minor but significant role in your game. Supporting NPCs are set apart from nameless ones by being special—whether it's the fact that they're very competent at a certain skill, have a certain special ability, or just tend to show up repeatedly in your stories. Contacts and acquaintances the PCs routinely see (like Mac, proprietor of McAnally's Pub) fall into this category, as well as any connections that are suggested by the PCs' aspects. Some of the face NPCs from your city sheet (page 41) will probably also fall into this category.

Supporting NPCs should be used in scenes or conflicts that are noteworthy for the story, but not necessarily central to resolving it. They provide more emotional bang for your buck than nameless NPCs, because these are the PCs' friends, family, members of their community. You can also use them for the opposition when you want an opponent to leave an impression on the PCs. Action movie buffs often refer to this character as the villain's "lieutenant"—worth paying attention to, but not quite as deadly or menacing as the actual villain.

Creating a supporting NPC requires more thought and care than creating a nameless one. Generally speaking, the same basic rule applies—create only what you need and don't worry about the rest. Only this time, you can let the character have skills at Great and Superb, one or two stunts or powers, and even a few aspects if they're appropriate. Apply all the appropriate rules for what they have (like additional physical stress boxes if they have Endurance, etc.)—these characters shouldn't be getting short shrift.

That sounds so dehumanizing. The lady at the streetlight is a person too, you know.

Then how come you don't name every single person you meet in the casefiles?

Usually they're trying to kill me and don't take the time to introduce themselves! What's your excuse?

So, suppose our theoretical Mafia don has a highly-trained sniper in his retinue, named Tim. You know that Tim needs to have pretty good combat skills in order to qualify, and you guess that he might have some stunts for his Guns skill. So you start with this:

TIM THE SNIPER

Alertness: Fair (+2), Athletics: Good (+3),
Endurance: Good (+3), Guns: Great (+4)
Stunts: Gun Nut, Pin Them Down
Physical OOOO
Often carries a Weapon:3 sniper rifle

And that covers most of the bases. But, because this is a supporting NPC, you might want to consider giving him some aspects to round out his personality and give some depth to potential interactions he might have with the PCs. When you're trying to quickly come up with aspects for a supporting NPC, try answering any (or all) of the following questions:

- What is the NPC's high concept?
- Is the NPC dealing with any personal issues right now? What might they be?
- Who or what might the NPC have a relationship with, and how would you describe that relationship?
- Does the NPC have a noticeable personality trait, shtick, or some other memorable detail?

Let the answers to these questions give you aspect ideas. So, looking at Tim, the obvious high concept is Mafia Sniper. Just to make things interesting, you say he has a slightly adversarial relationship with his boss, and call it "One Day, the Don Will Slip Up." He also has a terribly odd devotion to his rifle, which he calls Misty. So the final writeup looks like this:

TIM THE SNIPER

MAFIA SNIPER; MISTY THE RIFLE;
"ONE DAY, THE DON WILL SLIP UP"
Alertness: Fair (+2), Athletics: Good (+3),
Endurance: Good (+3), Guns: Great (+4)
Stunts: Gun Nut, Pin Them Down
Physical OOOO
Often carries "Misty",
Weapon:3 sniper rifle

Now you have a character that's more than just an ugly face in a crowd—depending on the context of the situation, there are several ways the PCs might approach this character, and there are roleplaying opportunities if they happen to find out that Tim and the Don are not on the best of terms.

For powered supporting characters, use the templates provided in *What Goes Bump* (OW28), or give them a certain amount of spent refresh in powers as per the guidelines in "*Scaling the Opposition*" (page 331). So, suppose you wanted to make Tim the Sniper a Red Court vampire…

TIM THE SNIPER

RED COURT VAMPIRE;
MAFIA SNIPER; MISTY THE RIFLE;
"ONE DAY, THE DON WILL SLIP UP"

Alertness: Fair (+2), Athletics: Good (+3),
Endurance: Good (+3), Guns: Great (+4)

Stunts: Gun Nut, Pin Them Down

Powers: Addictive Saliva [-1],
Blood Drinker [-1],
Claws [-1], Flesh Mask [-1].
Feeding Dependency [+1] affects:
Cloak of Shadows [-1],
Inhuman Strength [-2],
Inhuman Speed [-2],
Inhuman Recovery [-2],
Inhuman Toughness [-2]
The Catch [+2] for both is sunlight,
holy stuff; armor doesn't protect belly.

Physical OOOO(OO), Armor: 1
Carries "Misty", Weapon:3 sniper rifle

Supporting NPCs should not fight to the bitter, bitter end—the most determined of them should fight to a moderate consequence at most before you concede the conflict to the PCs.

Main NPCs

Main NPCs are at the top of the heap—they're essentially just like PCs, except they're played by the GM instead of the players. Having all the same breadth of options as the PCs (and sometimes a great deal more), these are the most significant people in the PCs' lives, both as allies and adversaries. They get all the same system options as PCs; they often have extensive expertise and supernatural power, and whenever the PCs are at odds with them, the throwdown is almost always large in scale. They also offer the broadest and deepest range of possibilities for interaction, because they have a full measure of aspects to draw from, and they fully participate in the same process of invoking, compelling, and being compelled.

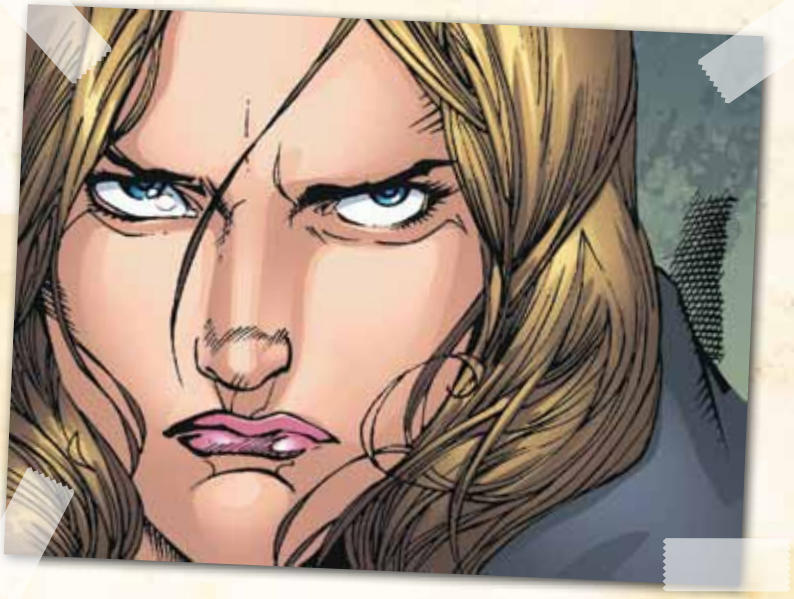
Examples of main NPCs abound through Harry Dresden's casefiles. First you have all the names that have ever caused him serious grief, all the people at the center of the dark plots he investigates—Mavra, Victor Sells, Leonid Kravos, Nicodemus…all these individuals have forced Harry to the absolute edge to combat them and foil their schemes, and some have forced him to pay heavy tolls in the good fight. That's the kind of conflict you should be thinking about when you make a main NPC.

A number of Harry's allies would also qualify as main NPCs by this standard. In fact, if you look at the casefiles as "solo games" with Harry Dresden as the only PC, nearly every one of his friends and accomplices would count as a main NPC—Will and Georgia Borden, Karrin Murphy, Thomas Raith, Molly and Michael Carpenter, and so on. It's very unlikely that an entire casefile will go by without a handful of those names popping up and playing a major role. If you have face NPCs from your city sheet that seem to fall into that category, it's a good bet they qualify as main NPCs.

Main NPCs are the only kind that will require a decent amount of preparation time to create. There are a few methods that you can choose from.

If my casefiles are solo games, then my GM is a real jerk.

Hey, you aren't dead yet. I wouldn't complain too much!



The PC Method

The most obvious way to create a main NPC is to run him through the character creation process (page 52) just like a player would. Start at the beginning, choose a high concept for the character, choose a theme, do his phases, and then stat out his skills, stunts, and powers as though he were a PC. For the final two "guest star" slots, refer back to the questions list for supporting NPCs and fill in two aspects that seem most appropriate. This gives you an incredible amount of detail you can work with right off the bat; it gives you a good insight into what kinds of scenes you want to have with that NPC, what kind of tactics he might use against the PCs, and what weaknesses the NPC has that you can potentially reveal to the PCs as the session or scenario progresses.

The main drawback of this method has already been mentioned: it takes quite a bit of time to pump out a full character, complete with a backstory and a full set of aspects. And what's more, unless you're going to use this NPC in a number of scenarios, you might not end up needing in play all the details that you've just invented. Some people like to have that, but remember, the game is not about your main NPCs—details that aren't really relevant to the PCs are often more extraneous than anything else.

If you want to make a really powerful adversary, you may need to give the NPC additional refresh and skill points, as per character advancement (page 88).

Other Guest Star Options for NPCs

If you want to create a bit of backstory with the PCs, you could use one of their adventures and guest-star your main NPC in that one. This is very appropriate if that NPC was the main foe in the PC's adventure.

Alternatively, have your main NPCs guest star in each other's adventures. You can create a web of political or social ties this way.

The "On-the-Fly" Method

This is essentially the same as using quick character creation (page 69), except you're doing it for your main NPC. You start with the items listed in that section and just play the NPC as you go, filling out the sheet until it's full.

This can be useful if you have a strong idea of what the main NPC wants and would do, but don't necessarily want to bog yourself down with too many details. It also allows you to "fine-tune" your NPC to your players, because the details you make up on the fly are going to come directly from their interaction. Even if the NPC is not present, you can still use this to your advantage.

For example, if an NPC minion refuses to buckle under the weight of interrogation because of abject fear of his employer finding out, you might fill in a Great (+4) Intimidation skill for the NPC and an aspect of Eyes and Ears Everywhere. In this way, you can turn a whole scenario into that NPC's creation, letting each new piece of information the players find help you fill in another section of the sheet.

Obviously, this isn't something you should do if you're not comfortable with quickly making things up on the fly. Some players might also find it a little too convenient that you're adjusting the bad guy as you go and might consider it a kind of cheating. If you decide to try this method, talk to your group about it.

The Supporter Upgrade Method

This is sort of the middle option between the first two—start by making the NPC like you'd make any other supporting NPC. After you're done, you can start play with the details you have, but add more skills, stunts, powers, and aspects as you see fit until the supporting NPC has the chops to be a main. This allows you to start with a firm set of details without being overwhelmed, and it allows you to refine the character idea from there without having to start almost entirely from scratch. It mitigates both the advantages and disadvantages of either method to some degree.

Take Tim the Sniper from above as an example. Suppose you actually want Tim to be a main NPC instead of a supporting one, roughly equivalent in stats to a PC (let's say you're running a "Feet in the Water" game, page 53). His writeup currently looks like:

Tim the Sniper

Mafia Sniper; Misty the Rifle; "One day, the Don will slip up"
Alertness: Fair (+2), Athletics: Good (+3), Endurance: Good (+3), Guns: Great (+4)
Stunts: Gun Nut, Pin Them Down
Physical OOOO
"Misty", Weapon:3 sniper rifle

From here, you have the following open slots on his character sheet:

- Four more aspects
- One Great, two Fair, and five Average skills (to match one of the 25-point column configurations on page 65)
- 3 refresh in stunts or powers (6 default, –2 for having two stunts, minimum of 1), plus 2 more if he stays Pure Mortal

So while you already have a strong idea of the character, as reflected in what you've created so far, you still have room to develop him in a number of directions. Keep in mind that you can do this with any level of NPC—if there's a nameless NPC that your players really end up liking, you could theoretically transition him to a main NPC over time.

This is a bit like character advancement (page 88) for NPCs. If you do upgrade an NPC, consider if any of the aspects or other features are out of date. With Tim the Sniper above, maybe "One Day, the Don Will Slip Up" doesn't apply anymore, because the Don did and that's how Tim upgraded to a main NPC. Now he changes that aspect to A New Crime Lord In Town, and people call him Tim the Boss.

The Mirror Method

In this method, you essentially take one or more of the PCs and hold up the proverbial mirror to them, constructing the NPC from either opposite traits or similar traits that are twisted.

Go through the aspects of the PC(s) in question and look for ways to reverse or twist the meaning, and give that modified aspect to your main NPC. If your PC has an aspect like Brains of the Family, consider Brutish Thug for the NPC, or a more subtle contrast like Nothing Is Ever Good Enough—whereas the PC stood out from other members of his family, the NPC was just one brain among many, developing exacting perfectionist standards and an obsessive need to prove himself because of it.

Skills are easy—make the NPC good at the same things the PC is good at, or good at everything the PC has a low rank in or didn't take. Matched sets allow for a more head-to-head kind of pairing, whereas contrasting sets will have the characters exploiting (or filling in for, in the case of a team) each other's weaknesses. Follow the same idea for powers and stunts, and whatever other elements of the character come to mind. By the time you're done, you'll have an NPC who is uniquely positioned to serve as a foil for a particular PC or set of PCs.

Let's do a quick run-through of this using a favorite example character from throughout the game—the wizard Harry Dresden.

You're looking to make an NPC antagonist for Harry Dresden. Looking at Harry's character sheet, we see a few good aspects that stand out—Epic Wiseass; Chivalry is Not Dead, Dammit; and Perpetually Broke. This suggests a foil in the upper crust of society, exceedingly polite (but underneath it all, a heartless, misogynistic bastard). You choose Sugar Tongue, People are Objects, and Rich Beyond the Dreams of Avarice as your mirror aspects, going straight for the stark contrast. I already hate this guy.

For skills, you know Harry is best at Conviction and Investigation, and his highest social skill is Intimidation at Great. The obvious contrast here for social skill is Deceit, which you put at Great. He will also take Discipline at Great, to contrast Harry's Conviction; for a practical skill, you decide to peak him at Superb Resources—not precisely a contrast to Investigation, but the idea here is he doesn't do the legwork himself; he pays people to do it for him.

Stunts and powers? The direct contrast triumphs again, and you decide that this enemy is a necromancer of some considerable skill, perhaps even a member of the dreaded Black Council. He gets the standard power set for wizards, and you're good to go. One Harry-sized villain, all ready for play.

But suppose you want to make him a little bigger than Harry-sized…

Scaling the Opposition

There are basically four levels of opposition you can send against a PC:

- **Minor opposition** is meant to provide a distraction or add some vivid color to a scene, but it won't really tax the PC too much beyond a minor expenditure of fate points or other resources. By and large, minor opposition means nameless and supporting NPCs.
- **Equal opposition** is meant to provide a significant, "it could go either way" kind of challenge—both parties have a relatively good chance of taking each other out, all other circumstances being equal. To have equal opposition, you almost always must have a main NPC.
- **Challenging opposition** is meant to stack the deck against the PC—forcing him to fight intelligently, using situational advantage to its maximum potential.
- **Overwhelming opposition** is a long-term opponent for the PC, requiring several milestones of advancement (page 88) for the PC to be able to confront it on equal terms.

Stars and stones, Billy. I'm the example again? Come on!

We aren't calling it THE BORDEN FILES RPG, you know.

This is the basic rule of thumb for scaling opposition relevant to those categories: *spent refresh is the biggest thing to think about.* Remember that, as the GM, you don't have to worry about the same limitations the PCs do for spending refresh. If you want, you can make an absolute monster that has no refresh level (and therefore no fate points) but a ton of power—that's what makes the bad guys as dangerous as they are.

You can expect any two characters who've spent the same amount *on powers* to be roughly an equal match, provided they both have the opportunity to use their abilities to the fullest potential. Seven points of refresh spent on fae abilities are fairly similar to seven points spent on wizarding or seven points spent on shape-shifting—in their particular arenas, each will be about as effective as the others.



By contrast, even a small gap in spent refresh can make a huge amount of difference power-wise. Consider that a character who has spent 6 refresh cannot be a full wizard—you need to spend 7 refresh for that. A wizard who has spent 10 refresh probably added a couple points of Refinement (page 182) to his power set, giving him additional permanent bonuses that place him at a decisive advantage against his 7-refresh counterpart.

This holds up for refresh points spent on stunts—regardless of combination, five points of stunts is five points of stunts. However, you *can't* compare points spent on stunts to points spent on powers—the grouped advantages of powers usually blow away the specific, focused advantages of stunts whenever they're compared in play. There are more guidelines below for dealing with that.

These levels of opposition assume that all other character resources are equal—if your PCs have 8 base refresh and 30 skill points, we're assuming that you're judging your NPC builds on 8 base refresh and 30 skill points as well. If you want to adjust this a bit, it'll have the effect of "nudging" that NPC between categories in one direction or the other. (This is why supporting NPCs usually qualify as minor opposition automatically—they don't typically get the same resources PCs do, which shifts them down a notch.)

If you want to give an NPC a little extra oomph, you can give him a refresh level on top of whatever else he might have. This is appropriate for any NPC that hasn't fully given into his monstrous nature, just like a PC. This gives him some fate points to spend right off the bat. While they don't quite stack up against the constant benefit provided by powers or stunts, fate points do have the advantage of flexibility—you can use them to invoke for bonuses in a wide variety of situations. Because of this, it isn't wise to underestimate a character with no powers and a bucket load of fate points.

You can also change the number of skill ranks the NPC gets or fiddle with how many aspects he has (though you can never exceed seven permanent aspects). The benefits from this are highly situational—if one character can't roll anything higher than Fair in a situation where another character can roll Great and Superb, the second has an advantage over the first. However, keep in mind that the presence of scene aspects

and the ability to tag temporary aspects can mitigate the skill advantage and open up a lot of options for even a supporting NPC to stack up bonuses.

Likewise, the more aspects an NPC has, the broader the variety of situations he can invoke in. However, if he doesn't have the fate points to spend on those aspects (because of an extremely high spent refresh or some other circumstance), the advantage of having them is mitigated.

Let's get a little more specific now and look at how to scale the levels of opposition for different character types. Again, remember that NPCs are permitted to go below a refresh level of 1.

Individual Mortals

Minor Opposition: Use a nameless or a supporting NPC with no powers.

Equal Opposition: Use the same amount of refresh, aspects, stunts, and skills as the character you want to challenge—in other words, a main NPC that's effectively the equivalent of the character. If you have a 6 refresh, 25 skill point character with two stunts, then you want to make a 6 refresh, 25 skill point character with two stunts to challenge them. Don't worry about matching up the skill sets too precisely—in fact, one good way to challenge a PC is to send him up against an NPC whose peak skills are very different from his own, forcing him into non-optimal situations.

Challenging Opposition: As per Equal, but exceed the PC's base refresh by 2-3 points, potentially spending them on additional stunts. You might also assign between 5-10 additional points in skills, if you want the NPC to come across as experienced and canny, but not existing in a wholly different "league" than the PC. You might also assign a supernatural power to the NPC at this stage, but should only spend a maximum of –2 on a power.

Overwhelming Opposition: As per Challenging, but let the NPC have 5+ points more of base refresh; don't exceed double the PC's base refresh. (You want to spend this on stuff—an NPC with 20 fate points is a logistical nightmare!) If you want to assign powers, you shouldn't go past –4 or –5 refresh worth of powers.

Multiple NPCs vs. an Individual PC

Generally speaking, groups of NPCs shouldn't be brought against a single PC unless they're scaled down—a handful of nameless or a couple of low-end supporting NPCs against a single PC is probably as far as you want to go. A team of main NPCs could make an interesting long-term opponent for a PC if you want—going by the "double refresh means a long-term opponent" guideline, you could have two characters with equivalent refresh to the PC working together and taking advantage of the freedom to pursue multiple agendas at once. Or, if you want to go for the whole "dark cabal" thing, you could even split that refresh limit up three or four ways and end up with a gang of opponents—people who would be very minor players by themselves, but can do a lot of damage when they team up.

What's the Base?

Base refresh for powered NPCs is largely irrelevant, especially when you get into Challenging and Overwhelming categories. Assume that any main NPC is going to have a base refresh equal to a PC (accounting for milestones and the like). If you spend over that, they have no fate points when they start play. If you don't, they do, just like a PC would.

Individual Supernatural Characters

Minor Opposition: Use a nameless or supporting NPC without powers, or with powers not exceeding half the PC's spent refresh.

Equal Opposition: Use a main NPC with equivalent spent refresh in powers as the PC. Again, don't worry too much about matching the context of those powers—two characters with equally powerful, but wildly different, abilities make great opponents for each other, as they have to figure out how to compensate for those areas where the other is strong.

Challenging Opposition: As per Equal, except allow the NPC to have up to one and a half times more refresh spent on powers than the PC does. You might also assign between 5-10 additional points in skills, if you want the NPC to come across as experienced and canny, but not existing in a wholly different "league" than the PC.

Overwhelming Opposition: As per Challenging, but let the NPC have *double* the PC's spent refresh on powers. A supernatural nemesis on this scale could potentially become the focus of a campaign or several scenarios, allowing the PC to amass resources and go through a few advancement cycles to gear up against the threat.

The only reason you should pit a single unpowered NPC against a powered PC is to have a scene where the point of the scene is *demonstrating or calling attention to the PC's power*. That doesn't mean that unpowered NPCs can't provide any challenge; it just means that the circumstances have to be set up just so. Consider that it's often unwise for a supernatural character to flaunt his powers in public places; you can use that to your advantage when you're setting up those scenes.

Wizards

Wizard characters are some of the most versatile of any of the supernatural characters, because their access to thaumaturgy and evocation can be used to mimic a lot of the other supernatural powers. However, they also have a few key limitations that you should keep in mind when you're designing opposition for them.

Keep in mind that thaumaturgy takes time to put into practice, whereas a lot of other supernatural powers can be used instantly. Even a low-refresh supernatural NPC could give a wizard a significant challenge if he's able to interrupt the wizard's spell preparations and put pressure on the wizard's use of ritual magic.

Second, evocation is extremely powerful, perhaps offering some of the best pure combat effectiveness among the entire spectrum of supernatural ability. However, its use is extremely taxing, resulting in stress and eventually consequences—depending on how far the wizard wants to push it. So if your opposition NPC can manage to get past those first exchanges of high-output attacks, the wizard PC might end up being a really easy target.

Keeping all this in mind, the best opposition for a wizard is another wizard. If you want to pit a different kind of character against the wizard, just make sure the NPC can't take undue advantage of all these weaknesses—if they can *always* find the wizard every time he's preparing a ritual and *always* outlast the wizard's full barrage of evocation, you're probably bringing way too much heat.

If a werewolf is in a crowded bank during a robbery, he can't just transform and go hog wild on the robber—the spectacle would bring way too much trouble and attention into his life. He has to deal with the situation as a normal mortal until he can get into a place where it's safe to use his abilities—then you can expect the scene to be over rather quickly. (Chomp chomp.)

Don't calculate any refresh the PC might have spent on mortal stunts—just take the powers and work with those. If you also want to give the NPC a mortal stunt or two, that's fine at any level—those will primarily serve to round out some detail about that NPC.

PC Groups

There are basically two ways to do opposition for a whole group of PCs working together—either have the opposition be a group of NPCs, or have one or two NPCs who are capable of taking on the whole group by themselves. For the former option, just refer to the guidelines above, going PC by PC until you have enough characters in the NPC group to match the PCs.

The latter option requires a little more work, depending on the type of characters you have in the group.

All Supernatural Groups

Minor Opposition: Use a nameless or supporting NPC with no more than half the spent refresh of the group in powers. In other words, add up how many refresh all the PCs have spent in powers and cut that number in half. There are quite a few templates in *What Goes Bump* (OW28) that can be used right off the page for NPCs that will fit this category.

Equal Opposition: Use a main NPC with powers equal to the group's total spent refresh on powers.

Challenging Opposition: As per Equal, but increase the NPC's refresh to one and a half times the group's total spent refresh on powers. You might additionally add 5-10 more skill ranks than what the PCs have.

Overwhelming Opposition: As per Challenging, but use *double* the group's total spent refresh on powers. This gets you into the realm of ancient vampire lords, crazy powerful demons, millennia-old wizards, and other creatures that skirt that line between powerful monster and demigod. Monsters with that much power will be able to battle whole groups of PCs

Boss, you think that explains Cowl?
I REALLY DON'T WANT TO THINK ABOUT THAT.



at once and hold their own. They make great opponents for the kinds of climactic battles you want to have at the end of a group of scenarios or a campaign.

Keep in mind that, at any level, you don't have to worry about going past the zero refresh limit, because the thing that makes them good adversaries in the first place is that they *have* given in to their inhuman nature!

All Pure Mortal Groups

This section is a bit more complicated, because there's a wider variety of ways to make a good single-NPC challenge for mortal groups. Whole groups of PCs without powers won't be ratcheting things up quite as epically as powered characters. Groups of NPCs usually work best as adversaries against a group of mortal PCs, but if you want to roll it all up into a "boss" NPC of some kind, you have a few options you can take:

Scale the NPC based on the whole group's total refresh level: This gives you a bad guy with a large amount of fate points—someone who manages to always get away at the last second, has fortune work in his favor a lot, and always turns up because of an incredible series of coincidences. Your group might find this kind of character extremely annoying, so you might want to let them in on your plan and see how they feel.

- **Minor Opposition:** Use a supporting NPC with a refresh level equal to one-quarter the group's total refresh level.
- **Equal Opposition:** Use a main NPC with a refresh level equal to one-half the group's total refresh level.
- **Challenging Opposition:** Use a main NPC with a refresh level equal to three-quarters of the group's total refresh level. You may add skills at this point, as per usual.
- **Overwhelming Opposition:** As per Challenging, but give the NPC the whole group's total refresh level.

Scale the NPC based on the whole group's spent refresh on stunts: This is the kind of bad guy who always seems to have a trick up his sleeve no matter the circumstance, displaying the kind of competence normally only available to specialists—but in a wide variety of fields. This NPC will probably need to rely on at least a little help to directly contend with a group of PCs, but not too much—a few paid thugs to provide distraction and whatnot.

- **Minor Opposition:** Use a supporting NPC with spent refresh equal to one-half the group's total refresh in stunts.
- **Equal Opposition:** Use a main NPC with spent refresh equal to the group's total spent refresh in stunts.
- **Challenging Opposition:** Use a main NPC with spent refresh equal to one and a half times the group's total refresh in stunts. You may add skills at this point, as per usual.
- **Overwhelming Opposition:** As per Challenging, but give the NPC double the group's spent refresh in stunts.

Yikes! Group totals get big really, really fast, Billy.

Yeah, the math here can get out of hand quickly. If you find yourself running out of powers to buy, if you're ending up with a Physically Immune, Mythically Strong-Fast-Tough-Recovering badass with 32 refresh spent... maybe you should look long and hard at dividing that single NPC into two or more. It'll be way more interesting that way.

Billy, you talk a lot in this chapter about setting up an individual encounter for the PCs, but you don't get into the dynamics of multiple successive encounters much at all.

Hmm, good point. Though that one's tough, and in my mind should be done by looking at the state of the group after each encounter.

This game CAN be pretty hard on PCs, especially if they don't carefully pick their fights. As consequences pile up, the margin available for error goes down. A single "even match" is one thing; multiple "even matches" in succession with no chance of recovery? Bad news.

Dealing with Strength, Speed, and Toughness

Of all the supernatural powers, the three basic "building block" powers are the ones that most easily push a character up into another weight class compared to other characters. This can be a problem when you're dealing with mixed groups, because mortal characters lose effectiveness against these kinds of powers more readily than other powers. You don't want to end up in too many situations where your group is fighting a supernatural baddie and there's nothing for the mortal character to do—*if your campaign has a pure mortal PC in it, consider that it obligates you to run a game that privileges a mortal's ability to act.*

Strength is probably the easiest of the three to deal with—Inhuman Strength is pretty similar to a normal character wielding a decent weapon, so it's still possible for a mortal to hold his own if he's peaked in a combat skill with stunts to back it up. Beyond that, it gets dicey.

The biggest issue with Speed is being able to land attacks. Again, most mortal characters can deal with the benefits provided by Inhuman Speed, but with Supernatural and Mythic, landing a hit can become difficult even for skilled characters. The trick is to find a way to keep the Speedy character pinned down—high Might characters might be able to do this with grappling, but the clever application of certain maneuvers or blocks to hamper movement can help out, too.

For Toughness powers, the major balancing factor there is the Catch—if the NPC's Catch is really obscure, then the cost of the Toughness powers is probably using up a good chunk of his available refresh; if it's not, it's likely that an enterprising PC will eventually discover what it is. Smart mortal characters in a mixed group should take it upon themselves to have or gain access to the Catch for any big supernatural baddies that they come across. This can turn into a large story of its own if the mortal PCs need to quest for hidden or obscure knowledge to figure out the Catch.

Give the NPC supernatural powers: Be careful with this one—it's pretty easy to make a supernatural character that can wipe out a whole group of mortal PCs.

- **Minor Opposition:** Use a supporting NPC with powers equal to one-quarter the group's total refresh in stunts.
- **Equal Opposition:** Use a main NPC with powers equal to half the group's total spent refresh in stunts.
- **Challenging Opposition:** Use a main NPC with powers equal to three-quarters of the group's total refresh in stunts. You may add skills at this point, as per usual.
- **Overwhelming Opposition:** As per Challenging, but give the NPC powers equal to the group's spent refresh in stunts.

Mixed Groups

A group that has both mortal and supernatural characters is the hardest to size for in terms of creating a single NPC—it's much easier to go with multiple NPCs instead, including mortal bad guys so that the PC mortals have someone to fight. That can get predictable, though.

To make an NPC for a mixed group, add up the total refresh the PCs spent on powers, but then *subtract the total number of refresh they spent on mortal stunts*. If you're going to double for an epic baddie, do it after the subtraction, not before.

That gives you the base number to work with when you're scaling opposition to the group—use the general guidelines for supernatural groups from there. For instance, if you have a group with a total of –12 refresh in powers and –2 in stunts, start from –10. So, a minor challenge would be –5 refresh in powers, equal would be –10, challenging would be –15, overwhelming would be –20. Doing the subtraction might not seem like much, but it can often keep the bad guy hemmed in just enough that the mortal PCs have a little more of an edge.

Adjusting Opposition on the Fly

No matter how much effort you put into it, on occasion you're going to find that either you didn't bring enough heat or you brought way more than you wanted. PCs might blow through an adversary you thought would last a while, or they might be seriously getting their asses kicked

by someone you figured they'd beat. It's not always a bad thing when this happens, because the concession rules (page 206) allow anyone to get something out of a conflict that isn't going the way they want it to go. If the PCs concede to an adversary, they can get fate points for it, and you have a new plot device you can bring in later.

Sometimes, though, you're going to want to adjust the level of opposition in the middle of the scene. If you do this, make sure that the main reason you're doing it is to keep the scene from being boring or frustrating to the players—you don't want to change things often enough to seem inconsistent as a GM or to be perceived as cheating the players.

The Role of Consequence and Concession

The main thing to keep in mind is this: *taking a consequence in a conflict is a choice, not a requirement*. One reason almost all nameless and supporting NPCs qualify as minor opposition is because they do not fight to the end—they fight until their stress tracks get bypassed and then either concede or are taken out. Even main NPCs aren't always prepared to go the distance; you have to consider how badly they want to achieve their goals and whether they're willing to risk sacrificing themselves for them.

You can use this to take the heat off of the PCs—instead of taking a consequence when the PC just barely goes over the bad guy's stress track, have the NPC get taken out or offer a concession. This lets you have some wiggle room in the refresh rules. For example, a Pure Mortal vs. a normal ghoul is a pretty depressing prospect if the ghoul goes through its whole range of consequences; but if you declare that the ghoul gets taken out when the mortal PC finally lands his big hit, the odds are suddenly not quite so daunting. The mortal will probably still have suffered stress and consequences of his own during the fight, and he still has a chance of getting taken out (because he might never land that big hit), but it allows him to go one-on-one with a high refresh character and have some hope.

If the NPC is really just murderating the PCs, *offer to let them concede* in exchange for whatever the NPC's actual goals are. Most NPCs should have a more complicated agenda than "obliterate the PCs"—it's perfectly valid to suggest that, as long as they can get what they want, they won't continue the conflict.



Making Things Easier

Scaling back the opposition is pretty easy—just start ignoring parts of the character sheet. Not everyone fights at full blast all the time. Maybe they're overconfident. Maybe they tend to favor one of their abilities (this might happen as the result of a compel, if the NPC has an appropriate aspect). Or, if there's something on an NPC's sheet that hasn't been brought up yet in the conflict, maybe you just don't bring it up at all. When you're doing this, the most important thing is to keep your motives largely transparent to the players—remember, the point is to cooperate on making cool scenes and a good story, not to get into a pissing match with one another.

If, for some reason, the baddie has brought henchmen or cohorts along, and the numbers are starting to get overwhelming, you can create a new circumstance in the scene that distracts them or causes them to back off. Maybe the baddie sends them away, maybe the cops show up, maybe the storm finally breaks. This can even help make your conflict scene a little more dynamic, since it's no longer just a straight-up battle between the PCs and NPCs.

Making Things Harder

The easiest thing to do if the PCs are overwhelming the opposition is to add more nameless NPCs as participants in the conflict. Make them on-the-fly (page 330); while they won't individually be much of a threat, they'll still force the PCs to divide their attention—and possibly take a few more hits while trying to deal with the main adversary. You shouldn't do this with anything more than nameless NPCs, though—that's just bad form.

In the same way you might ignore parts of a bad guy's sheet to make him easier, you can also upgrade the NPC mid-scene, adding things to his sheet. You might give him an aspect he can invoke or fill in a skill, stunt, or power to help keep him in the fight. The justification is the same as for on-the-fly PCs—not everyone shows the full extent of his abilities right off the bat. Make sure your players are okay with this kind of fiddling and understand why you're doing it, though—it's easy to perceive this kind of behavior as a kind of cheating.

Finally, keeping an NPC in the fight to the bitter end is often a good way to make him memorable—if you think he wants it bad enough, let him go out in a blaze of glory—taking every level of consequence before he's taken out.


- CHAPTER FIFTEEN -
Building Scenarios

The Nuts & Bolts of Storytelling

Okay, GMs, this chapter's aimed squarely at you. Players don't have to go away (reading this chapter might help them choose aspects) but the nuts and bolts of scenario creation is pretty much a GM's work. You don't have to create scenarios this way—if you have your own technique, go forth and be awesome. But the process outlined here can help you make some cool stories.

GMs should create scenarios tailored to the player characters, entangling them in the NPCs' motivations and machinations from the very start. It's about putting the PCs directly in the way of the NPCs getting what they want, then letting the PCs decide what to do about that. The process goes like this:

- Assemble Aspects
- Choose Emphasis
- Make Connections
- Scenario Ideas
- Putting It All Together
- Scene Hooks
- Create Additional NPCs

Is this the method you and Kirby use to create Arcanos scenarios?

Similar idea, yeah.

Haha! Now I know your secrets!

This method of scenario design is based on aspects. Remember: aspects are the players' way of signaling to the GM "Here's what's important! Here's why I think my character is interesting!" This is some of the most valuable information you'll ever get from the players. So—use it to design stories that really grab them.

The procedure is indeed very... uh... procedural, but don't let that worry you. It's one of those things that's easier to do than explaining it makes it seem, and once you do it a couple of times it becomes second nature.

In fact, I've done it so many times that I had a hard time quantifying it. Harry, let me know if I make too many unstated assumptions, or if anything in this chapter doesn't make sense, will you?

All Aboard the Plot

We use the term "plot" a fair bit in this chapter. What we mean by this term is the ongoing narrative of PC and NPC interactions. We do not mean to imply that the GM should have the major events of the entire scenario planned out ahead of time. Quite the contrary—this game works best when the GM presents a conflict to the PCs, then gets out of the way to let the PCs resolve it *without a preconceived notion of what that resolution ought to be.*

In other words, just because we use the term "plot" doesn't mean the GM should be railroading anyone.

Assemble Aspects

Make a list of all of the PCs' aspects, your city's themes and threats, location aspects (both themes and threats), and the motivations of faces and other key NPCs; alongside each aspect, make sure you note the name of the character or location it's associated with. (You might have this list already—compelling aspects is a lot easier if you know what aspects to compel.)

That's it. You're done with this step.

Example: Baltimore

So, I'm trying to come up with a scenario for the game I'm running set in Baltimore (see page 358). The PCs are Evan Montrose (a wizard), his best friend Biff Abernathy (a pure mortal), and Biff's girlfriend Maya McKenzie (a minor talent/shapeshifter). Here's a list of the pertinent aspects for the PCs and motivations for selected NPCs (and whatever or whoever they're associated with):

- Young White Council Wizard; In Over My Head; Heir to Montrose; Precision Is Everything; Here's the Plan; Hail Hail the Gang's All Here; I'd Rather Not be a Warden, Thanks (Evan Montrose)
- Trust Fund Jock; "Sorry, Mouse," Said Maya's Steady Boyfriend; Mortimer Louis Abernathy III; Krav Maga; Hail Hail the Gang's All Here; Dumb Luck; Plays the Dumb Jock (Biff Abernathy)
- Insatiably Curious Were-Mouse; "Biff, You Jerk!" Said Biff's Steady Girlfriend; I Remember Where I

Came From; Locked or Unlocked, It's All the Same to Me; Hail Hail the Gang's All Here; Uncommon Sense; Quiet as a Mouse (Maya McKenzie)

- The power of the ley line will fuel our clan's glorious victory! (Gilgamesh)
- I will protect the standing of the Lagios family at any cost. (Vasiliki Lagios)
- I will lead the Lagios family to triumph. (Alexandra Lagios)
- Montrose WILL take me seriously. (Damocles Ravenborn)
- I'm cleaning up the river. (Sgt. Jim Flanagan)
- Lock and load—let's get 'em. (Officers Vastolo and Mirabal)
- I don't care if you do have supernatural powers, don't mess with my business. Or the East Green. (Wallace Gibbs)
- I want my club to be a success, but I don't want to get caught doing anything illegal. (Dave Gerard)
- I'm going to help Alexandra get to the top. (Curt Gazo)
- I want to preserve knowledge. (Paul Mackey)
- I want to stop the predators. (John Vastolo)
- Decay and Corruption (Baltimore Theme)
- Conflicting Identities (Baltimore Theme)

Choose Emphasis

Next, choose which of these aspects you'd like to emphasize for this scenario.

Something to keep strongly in mind here is how big and complex you'd like this scenario to be. A scenario, in this context, is not the same as an evening's game session (see the discussion of scenarios, story arcs, etc. in *Running the Game*, page 314). A single scenario could last several game sessions—perhaps up to a half dozen or more if it's a big, complex story. To generate a shorter scenario, pick just two or three from among the PCs' aspects and one or two from the city. For really long scenarios, stretching over several game sessions, pick up to two for *each* PC and two or three from the city.

Instead of directly including the city's threats at this stage, you might want to let the faces and NPCs that embody those threats do the talking here. It's *their* aspects that should come to the fore. Use threats as backdrops for conflict between characters, rather than as the source of the conflict itself.

Look these aspects over. These are what your story, at least your initial one, is going to be based on. Make sure you know what they mean—sometimes aspects can be interpreted differently by different people, and it's a good idea to make sure that you're on the same page as your players regarding their characters' aspects. (That's not to say that you can't occasionally twist them in an unexpected direction, but don't outright subvert the player's intent.)

Example: Baltimore

We'll grab six aspects, enough to make three connections ('cause we looked ahead and know that's the next step). This is a lot of connections given the number of PCs (making for a long scenario, which is cool, but just know that's what you'll be getting into).

- Hail Hail the Gang's All Here (Evan, but all three PCs have it)
- I'd Rather not be a Warden, Thanks (Evan)
- "Sorry, Mouse," Said Maya's Steady Boyfriend (Biff)
- Mortimer Louis Abernathy III (Biff)
- Insatiably Curious Were-Mouse (Maya)
- I Remember Where I Came From (Maya)

I'm telling you, if anything majorly supernatural starts to go down in Baltimore, Montrose ain't gonna have a choice: he'll be drafted. (Happened to me!)

The aspect Hail Hail the Gang's All Here seems to sum up the relationship among the three PCs very well—to the players, it means that if one is in trouble the others will be there, either bailing him out or at least in trouble right alongside him. Evan's player, Rob, says that his character means well but feels neither confident nor motivated enough to serve as a Warden—I'd Rather not be a Warden, Thanks.

Biff is frequently putting his foot in his mouth or otherwise hurting Maya's feelings—"Sorry, Mouse," Said Maya's Steady Boyfriend. His player, Fred, made it clear that Biff isn't ever abusive or unfaithful to Maya, but he doesn't always think through how his actions might affect her, and thus spends a lot of time apologizing and making things up to her. Also, sometimes he has to stop being "Biff" and accept his

role as Mortimer Louis Abernathy III, of the fabulously wealthy and prominent Baltimore Abernathys, with all the privileges, obligations, and expectations this implies.

Maya's aspect Insatiably Curious Were-Mouse encapsulates, well, an insatiable curiosity—a driving need she has to solve puzzles and discover hidden information. Sometimes this means she sticks her nose where it doesn't belong, which can be especially problematic for her friends who have social obligations and appearances to keep up. Further, her background as a poor girl (I Remember Where I Came From) sometimes puts her at odds with Biff and his family.

Make Connections

Now that you've picked the aspects that you're going to focus on, what do you do with them?

Take aspects related to different PCs, or a PC and an NPC, and start pairing them up. Look for strong connections that leap out at you. Go for the obvious when you find it—that's what will be easiest for your players to grab hold of and run with. You'll probably find your connections line up into two broad categories (sometimes a connection falls into both, and that's okay): connections focusing on *tension*, and connections focusing on *cooperation*.

Tension-Based Connections

Tension-based connections create a struggle or complication for one, or both, characters.

One example of this is Harry Dresden's Warden of the White Council aspect, and Thomas Raith's Fallen Prince of the White Court aspect. The potential for tension is obvious—Harry is supposed to act in the interest of the White Council at all times, but his own brother is a Prince of the White Court. Given the war, that's a pretty big potential conflict of interest. It's best that information like that not get out, right?

Other examples of aspect pairs that create tension might be Fix's Geased by Titania and Harry's Faerie Debts. Harry's Warden of the White Council and Murphy's SI Lead Detective frequently put them at odds on how to deal with supernatural crimes in Chicago. Obvious though it is, Michael Carpenter's aspect of Knight of the Cross, and Nicodemus's That Soul Which Has the Greatest Punishment put them in direct tension—don't discount these obvious ones just because they're obvious.

"That Soul Which Has the Greatest Punishment" — fun fact: Dante was roaring drunk when he wrote that passage.

Cooperation-Based Connections

Cooperation-based connections connect the parties to an outside situation, usually by setting up a situation of common cause or a common opponent between the parties. Think of what kinds of situations might draw both parties in and why those might happen.

Harry provides yet another great example here. His aspect Wizard Private Eye and Murphy's SI Lead Detective put them at the same crime scene, working together to try to figure out how—and why—Jennifer Stanton died. (Notice the similarity between this one and a pair mentioned in the previous section? Yeah, a lot of these distinctions are very subtle, and categorization can go either way. The good news is there isn't a "right" answer for how to arrange them, as long as it works for you. In fact, you might use the same pair of aspects to make both kinds of connections for the same scenario, and that's awesome.)

Here's an obvious example: Harry's I Trust My Brother, and Thomas's Loyal To My Brother. Another example is Will Borden's aspect People Need to Wake Up, and Harry's Chivalry Is Not Dead, Dammit. Harry's sense of protecting the weak and Will's need to get involved in doing that could easily lead to the two of them working together.

Will Borden finds it odd to be speaking of himself in the third person.

NOW IT'S GETTING TO YOU?

So you're publishing it in this book WHY?

OK, relax, I can rewrite this for the next draft.

Example: Baltimore

We have six aspects, which is three connections. Let's create one cooperation-based, and two tension-based.

For this scenario, a tension-based connection can be drawn between I'd Rather not be a Warden, Thanks from Evan and Insatiably Curious Were-Mouse from Maya. Evan doesn't want to be Baltimore's supernatural sheriff, but there's something Maya won't let him leave well enough alone.

A second tension-based connection is obvious—Biff's Mortimer Louis Abernathy III and Maya's I Remember Where I Came From. Their relationship must be filled with moments when Biff's privileged childhood clashes with Maya's experience with poverty.

A cooperation-based connection might be found between Evan's Hail Hail the Gang's All Here matched with Biff's "Sorry, Mouse." I'm imagining a situation where Maya is in trouble—perhaps due to her curiosity mentioned in the first connection—and Evan and Biff need to dive in head first to help her out, Evan to help a friend and Biff to make up for a faux pas (real or imagined) that he committed earlier.

Create Scenario Ideas

You've made some connections that you're going to base your scenarios on. It's almost certain that you have some preliminary ideas for the scenarios you're going to generate from them; now it's time to flesh those ideas out.

Each of those connections provides an opportunity for conflict. For each connection, look at all the NPC motivations you have—who could benefit from or exploit this connection? Who could use this tension to help achieve his heart's desire?

Using Tension-Based Connections

For your tension-based connections, the basic idea is to find ways that an NPC would want to exploit the connection. Who might want to take advantage of this tension and would engineer a situation to trigger it? Once you have the answer to these questions, you can start to think about the details of how they do it.

If you don't have a face or key NPC who could really take advantage of this connection, you have two choices: you can ditch this connection and create a new one, or you can generate a new NPC to exploit it. There are advantages and disadvantages to each, but keep in mind that if you find yourself regularly creating new NPCs at this stage of the game, it's possible that you're not effectively using the ones you and your players created together during city creation. If you elect to go the New NPC route, don't stat them out yet—just start a list of new NPCs you'll need, and stat them all out at once in the end.

Building these sorts of connections tends to give the GM lots of opportunities to compel aspects. This is more than great story fuel—it's a way to funnel extra fate points to the players.

Keep in mind that an NPC doesn't necessarily have to be exploiting this connection *on purpose* every time—not every villain is going to be making a beeline for your PCs' heads every story. You can make the connection indirect as well. So if a rogue White Court vampire NPC in Chicago kills a wizard traveling through the city, that could put Harry and Thomas at odds regardless of the NPC's intentions, as each of their respective "superiors" puts pressure on them to deal with the situation a certain way.

Example: Baltimore

There are two tension-based connections that could end up working out very well with the same NPC bad guy. Damocles Ravenborn's motive of "Montrose WILL take me seriously" ties in nicely with any scenario that involves Evan. What if Ravenborn could exploit the Mortimer Louis Abernathy III—I Remember Where I Came From connection to gain an invitation to cross the threshold of the Montrose house? Also, the tension between I Don't Want to be a Warden, Thanks and Insatiably Curious Were-Mouse could serve to separate Maya from Evan, leaving Maya vulnerable to the Red Court vampires…

Do we want to bring in any aspects of Evan Montrose's estate, or any other location? Maybe, maybe not—let's design the first scene and see what comes up.

So, how do you FIX aspects that aren't getting used?

A quick and dirty fix, for me, would be changing—or adding—aspects to "Face" NPCs that directly address any PC-PC connections, whether tension-based or cooperation-based ones.

Like take the second tension-based Baltimore example—Biff vs. Maya. Maybe give Damocles Ravenborn an aspect that connects to Maya's I Remember Where I Came From (maybe they were friends before he went vamp?).

Also see the different example in the maintext re: this very same connection.



Loo-Tender! REEE PORT!

Using Cooperation-Based Connections

Cooperation-based connections are usually a little easier to work with than tension-based ones—just from looking at the connections, you know what kind of situations would necessitate both characters being involved, so you pretty much already know what the NPC is going to do. Then you just need to figure out why.

Again, if you can't find someone from among your face NPCs who would trigger such a situation, you'll have to make one up. In any case, decide what the NPC has done to involve both characters, and, if applicable, what that NPC is going to do to get over, under, around, or through the connection in order to get what he wants.

As with tension-based connections above, you can associate the NPC's plans directly or indirectly. If the association is direct, it means the NPC knows about the connection and is intentionally drawing at least one of the PCs out for some reason. If it's indirect, it means that the NPC doesn't know what kind of opposition he's going to end up facing.

Example: Baltimore

If Evan and Biff have to come riding to Maya's rescue (or, at least, if they *think* they do) using their connection of Hail Hail the Gang's All Here and "Sorry, Mouse," who would want to take advantage of that? Let's see if we can bring someone else into the mix here. Alexandra Lagios and Gilgamesh both have a reason to want Evan Montrose out of the way; let's go with the ghoul freehold, as we've already touched on vampires with the other connections.

A Web of Relationships

When you start to get more comfortable making scenarios up, keep in mind that the NPCs can have relationships with each other that are just as complicated as the ones the PCs have. NPCs don't always have to be bosom buddies—many people make alliances out of convenience or because they think it's in their best interest at the time.

You can set up a pretty rich series of interactions for your scenario by complicating NPC relationships, which could lead to them betraying each other in the future or being persuaded by the PCs in various ways. It's even better if some of these NPCs directly need or want something from the PCs in order to achieve their goals.

Putting It All Together

At this point you have several connections and how they're going to create conflict with some of your NPCs. However, a collection of unrelated conflicts will just result in confused players and a scattered, muddled plot. You'll need to pull them all together to create a coherent scenario out of them.

Look at the opposition you've set up for your PCs' connections. Does the same bad guy keep coming up in most of them? That NPC is the mastermind of most of (or all of) the problems, and all you have to do is figure out what his overall intent is. Other NPCs might be allied or somehow involved with the mastermind, as "lieutenants" of some kind, or just co-conspirators with compatible goals.

Remember that a motivation is just a motivation—it won't get anywhere without goals. Design short term goals for the NPC such that all the connections are covered. All these goals should, of course, work toward the NPC's motivation. This shouldn't be *that* hard—if it's too many to manage, go ahead and drop one or two. The key is to focus on the strongest ideas; these should be the core of your scenario. Focusing on just one or two is usually good for a few play sessions; aim for three or four for a longer scenario.

Example: Baltimore

So we have Damocles Ravenborn trying to settle a score with Evan Montrose, and Gilgamesh trying to get Montrose out of the way. Let's say that Ravenborn, who's a petty little coward, is being used by Gilgamesh to draw Evan out into the open and get him vulnerable. This fits Gilgamesh's personality as well—he's a talented schemer and sees the value of using catspaws and leveraging other people's motivation to achieve his ends for him.

Ravenborn just wants to be taken seriously, so he might be fine with "sending a message" of some sort, while he's afraid of a direct confrontation. Gilgamesh, however, won't be satisfied until Evan Montrose is permanently dealt with.

What to Do With Outlying Connections

Of course, not all conflict in a scenario needs to be part of the overarching plot. Throwing a completely tangential conflict at your PCs—one they can't ignore without some repercussions—is a useful technique to mix things up. Doing this can serve any of several purposes:

- It can serve as a useful red herring to throw annoyingly clever players off the trail in a mystery-oriented scenario.
- It can create a B-plot or provide opportunities for character development parallel to the main conflict.
- You can use it as a segue to an upcoming major plot by the next big bad.
- You can use the outlying connection to indirectly lead the PCs to the core of the scenario.

The last one on that list is my personal favorite. It's a great use for an orphan connection you don't otherwise know what to do with—use it for the "misleading" opener. Lots of TV shows work this way; in the first few minutes of the show, the heroes pursue one plot thread or source of conflict, only to uncover the real core of the scenario later in the episode. If you can time this big, cliffhanger-like reveal of the scenario's true core to happen at the end of the scenario's first game session, you've pulled off a masterpiece of scenario design.

Hell's Bells, Billy, this whole chapter is freaking me out. Stop giving the bad guys ideas.

Example: Baltimore

So, right now, we have two strong connections working here: one between Mortimer Louis Abernathy III and I Remember Where I Came From (that's Ravenborn's plan) and one between Hail Hail the Gang's All Here and "Sorry, Mouse" (that's Gilgamesh's plan).

That gives us some outliers, namely I Don't Want to be a Warden, Thanks and Insatiably Curious Were-Mouse, on Evan and Maya respectively. We talked about this being a possible connection of tension, but nothing concrete materialized like it did for the other pairs. So let's look at some possibilities for these two aspects.

We know that Evan has reluctance toward acting in an enforcement capacity as a wizard—that suggests a character development B-plot.

What can we put in front of him? How about a minor threat, a rogue practitioner who's gotten hold of some nasty magic and is doing some careless Lawbreaking in the city? I know…the guy got rejected by the Dupin Society and is capriciously terrorizing its members as payback! Unfortunately (and unbeknownst to him), his magical "pranks" are doing real, lasting psychic trauma to his victims. How will Evan deal with this little spellslinger gone out of hand?

With Maya, the most prudent thing to do is to give her something to investigate right off the bat. I'm not sure exactly what I want to do with this yet, but I'll keep it in mind as I go.

Create Opening Scene Hooks

At this point, you should have a strong idea of what the antagonists are trying to do and exactly how the PCs are getting in their way. The next step is to generate some scene hooks, especially for the first scene. And as you do this, remember that a scene hook is just a kickstart for a scene—the GM shouldn't go into any of them with any particular resolution in mind. Resolving the scene is the players' job.

Begin at the Beginning

The first scene is often the hardest one to come up with. How will you introduce the scenario and conflict to the players without boring them to tears? One of the most effective techniques in your bag of tricks is beginning things in medias res. Avoid all that pesky exposition by raising the curtain with the PCs in a burning building facing off against two Red Court vampires with Uzis. Worry about how they got there later. This technique works really well if you combine it with an orphan connection from the previous section—the PCs are there investigating something they thought might be important, but in the opening number they uncover the Really Big Problem™.

But was it their fault? Such details are important.

You could have an ordinary exposition scene, too, but those are harder to pull off in an interesting way. You need to inject a sense of urgency right off the bat. An NPC who shows up on the PCs' doorstep and asks them to be involved in the plot isn't very exciting, but a character who shows up on the PCs' doorstep bleeding from several vicious claw wounds can be. If you *have* to start the session with an information dump, make sure there's something else going on in the scene that the PCs have to deal with as well—demanding NPCs, some kind of imminent problem…anything that'll kick up the momentum and get them making decisions.

Compels are a pretty effective tool to start things off in any scenario—bringing the characters' aspects and a few interesting choices right to the forefront is almost guaranteed to get you moving in one direction or another. However, make sure that you don't have your scenario depend on a particular response to a compel—after all, the player might refuse it entirely.

Example: Baltimore

An opening scene is probably taking at least partial shape in your head about now—that's definitely where I usually am. In this case, I'm thinking that Biff has been called in by his family to go into Mortimer Louis Abernathy III mode—their charitable organization ("The Abernathy Foundation") is doing a black tie fundraiser, and Evan has volunteered his house to host it. The scenario starts at this cocktail party with everyone dressed to the nines and holding up their little fingers.

Who's there? Evan, Maya, and Biff, of course. Biff's parents. Wellington. A few hundred of Baltimore's wealthy elite. Pick a few people—wealthy donors and hopeful beneficiaries—from the NPC list that might be there: Dave Gerard, perhaps with date Dr. Alison Ralston, and Paul Mackey and John Vastolo, ostensibly representing the Edgar Allan Poe Museum, but of course representing the Dupin Society.

I have a lot of stuff I can do in this scene to get the ball rolling:

Just for fun, I want to let the characters play around a bit with the NPCs. I think Paul Mackey is going to give Evan a hard time over not giving to the Museum's general fund last year—this is basically a compel against Evan's In Over My Head aspect. Paul is trying to pressure him into making some kind of firm financial commitment to the Museum, but any situation that puts Evan in over his head would be appropriate here. I'll remind him about the tension between his family and the Society—on the one hand, he could acquiesce and hope that the Museum doesn't need too much from him. On the other hand, he could tell the

money-grubbing Poe hound exactly where he should stick it! Of course, whichever he chooses, he needs to do it while still playing the gracious host in a room full of people wondering how well young Montrose will fill his father's shoes.

I want to put the tension between Biff and Maya's upbringing center stage, so I'll have one of Biff's parents (probably Mom) display a very awkward disdain for the outfit Maya's wearing… she finds the two of them together and says to Biff, "Shame on you, allowing this sweet girl in here in thrift store fashions." Then to Maya, "A charming attempt, my girl, but seriously, shouldn't you have had something made for the occasion?" This could act as a compel depending on how it plays out—Biff and Maya could get compelled on "Sorry, Mouse" and "Biff, you Jerk!" simultaneously if Biff sides with Mom and tries to laugh it off, or Maya's I Remember Where I Came From could cause her to say exactly what she thinks about Mom's privileged comments, in flatly insulting terms. Fun for the whole family!

I want to make this Damocles' first attempt to get across the Montrose threshold. He's not going to come himself yet, so he's going to send some of his Red Court cronies to bust up the place with some submachine gun-inspired terrorism. They are going to show up in the guise of tux-clad members from the Helping Hand Mission, a homeless shelter and beneficiary of the Abernathy Foundation. They'd sure like to hobnob with the money people, they say, to lobby for additional funds for next year.

Maya or Biff (or, preferably, both) should be on hand when the Helping Hand "reps" arrive—one of the staff comes to get Biff, or Maya notices them on the front porch when she's getting some air (even more appropriate, depending on how the confrontation with Mom goes). The doorman is about to rudely turn them away, claiming that it's invite-only, but can Maya really let that go, given that she Remembers Where She Came From? Does Biff want to come across as the same kind of jerk his parents and their friends seem to be? On the other hand, Maya's Uncommon Sense might tip her off that something's really, really wrong, and that perhaps they should tread carefully. There are a lot of compels I might suggest, but I know the vampires will bust up the party anyway—albeit with their powers greatly curtailed if they have to cross the threshold.

Planning Ahead

In addition to these opening hooks, you're going to want a handful of hooks for other scenes that will happen in the beginning parts of the scenario. This is a great time to use those outliers that you couldn't pair up with a connection before. Come up with a brief situation that's relevant to that aspect; it may or may not be connected to the main plot, but it will give your session a sense of depth and texture.

So they could just serve as red herrings?

Yeah, but I'd be careful with that: too many false trails or loose hooks and gameplay can get pretty chaotic, in a not-fun way.

The scenes that come after the opening hook are usually going to revolve around two key things: the PCs finding out important information about the bad guy and his plans, or the PCs directly confronting the bad guy or his resources (minions, hired guns, etc.) as the bad guy pursues his plan.

This is a really good place to tie in aspects from the city. Find a few locations where it'd be interesting for the PCs to directly intersect the NPCs in pursuit of their motivations. If any of these NPCs are faces for city locations, those are great places to start your thinking.

In particular, look at the locations' themes and threats. Does a location have an aspect directly related to the scenario's core conflict? If so, you have an instant setting hook—look for opportunities to guide the action there. This shouldn't be hard at all, if the location's face or any of its aspects fit in well. (If it's hard, consider that the location isn't as good a fit as you first thought it was.)

Hm. Some very powerful or set-in-their ways supernatural types might be slow to respond to or dismissive about quick-thinking PCs.

That's still dynamic and reactive, but more in a characterization way.

You're probably going to want to make some hooks a little bit portable. GMs can try to anticipate where the PCs will want to go, but good luck being right more than about half the time. If some of your scene hooks can be uprooted and moved around when you need them to be, you will be a lot less stressed and will also be less subject to the temptation to railroad the PCs to particular places. In addition, you're going to want to play your NPCs as being dynamic and reactive during the scenario—once the PCs are on to them, they're going to respond to that, and you can't always guarantee when and where that response might take place.

Don't sweat this step too much. The example is long, but really it's just a matter of making a laundry list of potential scenes in your head. Your players will largely drive the progress of the scenario, once the investigation gets rolling or they make with the scheming and planning.



We included a lot of information here just for the sake of example, but you probably only need to have a few ideas. Just make sure you have a few hooks up your sleeve and roll with what the players throw at you.

Example: Baltimore

So, obviously there will be some kind of investigation into the nature of the attack at the Montrose estate. It'll be obvious that the perpetrators are Red Court vampires, so that gives a good starting point for things. The players will probably want to try to find out where the Red Court vamps are hanging out these days, what they've been up to, any clues as to why they might have made such a brazen attack on the cocktail party, etc.

I know I'm going to have some scenes where the PCs do assessments, and I know the PCs will probably hit up some contacts—maybe Dr. Ralston for a post-mortem on the vamps' bodies (if any of them get killed instead of just running away), maybe Luis Mirabal and Leslie Vastolo for word on any unusual movements on the streets, etc.

Evan might even do a tracking spell that leads them right into the heart of the matter—I'll have to remember to come up with some kind of lair for Damocles or staging ground for a large confrontation. The Inner Harbor, the Aquarium, and the Key Bridge are all good locations for a big set piece battle.

I also want to make sure I get my B-plot in, so during this investigation, I'll drop the tidbit that members of the Dupin Society are also reporting terror attacks from an unknown assailant. This seems like it could fit the M.O. of the main hook, so there's a chance that someone will go investigate directly—potential conflict here if the Insatiably Curious Maya insists that the reluctant wizard do his damned job. If no one investigates, I'll just have the PCs stumble upon the aftermath of an attack on Paul Mackey in a future scene.

If Maya goes investigating on her own—worth a compel—I definitely want her to get the chance to make the connection between Ravenborn's sudden boldness and Gilgamesh's ghouls. Maybe some of the Red Court vampires are running about town with ghoul enforcers on Gilgamesh's whim…an encounter with a group of them could be very untimely for her.

Either way, some likely confrontations are going to happen here:

- Damocles Ravenborn is going to gloat whenever Evan and company encounter him again; if things get violent, then Gilgamesh's ghouls will come out and join the battle. Damocles might not need to be fought, though; he's a coward at heart, and if he's sufficiently intimidated, he might even give up Gilgamesh's plans. This would definitely bring the ghouls out to try to silence everyone.
- Gilgamesh is going to try to use any situation where Evan is most disadvantaged to get rid of him once and for all. That may be when he's dealing with the rogue practitioner, or it may happen if Gilgamesh manages to capture Maya and ransom her for Evan.

Finally, anything from the first scene might need an additional payoff; maybe Paul continues to bug Evan about the Museum fund and applies more guilt tactics, and maybe Biff has another confrontation with his parents over his insistence on dating a lower-class girl. These kinds of scenes can help ease up the pace between big conflict scenes and offer a lot of opportunity for roleplaying.

Create Additional Details

Every step of this process might have created a new location or NPC. The last step of this process is to stat those out just enough for you to run with them during the game. As with NPCs and locations generated during city creation, it's not always necessary to stat out NPCs with full blocks; just get enough detail that you won't be stumbling around at the table during the game. An aspect or two, a couple of relevant skills, a stunt, and a basic description should suffice.

The key players in your scenario should probably be created as main NPCs, or at least as supporting NPCs with a good amount of information filled out. You want that level of detail for your "mastermind" type characters, because you want to have a good idea of what resources they can bring to bear and what they can do. Most of the time, an NPC mastermind will have hired or somehow secured the assistance of other characters in pursuit of his goal; the PCs will no doubt encounter these henchmen and accomplices in the course of their investigations or attempts to stop the mastermind.

And keep in mind that bad guys will want to learn about and stop the PCs just like the PCs will want to learn about and stop them! It's important to know what a particular mastermind's investigative abilities are, how he might go about doing assessments to suss out a PC's aspects, and how he'll fight the PCs when the confrontation inevitably comes.

Once you have done all this, you should have enough material to run your scenario. Congratulations!

Example: Baltimore

Like I observed in the last installment of this ongoing example, Ravenborn needs a lair. What sort of character is he? Well, he's a total poser, a goth who did it all wrong, a real life vampire who still acts like the poster boy for taking a LARP too seriously. Where would a dweeb like this live (heh)? An abandoned church basement, of course. Saint Cyprian's. I'll put it in some forgotten city neighborhood, give it the theme Gothic Horror, and call it a day.

Gilgamesh wouldn't give up his lair so easily, so if his scheme to capture Maya actually occurs, he'd probably put her in an abandoned warehouse somewhere. I can come up with scene aspects for that easily enough on the fly.

I already have Gilgamesh and Damocles' statblocks (page 372 and 374 respectively), so they're good to go. I need to make the rogue practitioner from my B-plot into a supporting NPC—could use Russell Carson for this. And finally, I need to have ready stats for the ghoul minions as well as Damocles' Red Court cronies.

> Just for your reference, Harry, I'm guessing one of your casefiles would lean toward the longer end if I were to look at them as scenarios. Most of your cases get pretty complicated.
>
> Occupational Hazard.

The Scenario in Play

So you have your initial hooks, you have an idea of what might happen after that, and you have a laundry list of the most likely scenes you'll have to run. So, now you can be confident that everything is going to go according to plan, right?

Wrong! Remember that nothing can force the players to deal with every hook you put out for them—sure, it's likely that a lot of the juicier hooks you throw out there are going to get bites, but some may get left by the wayside or get ignored. Players aren't going to take every compel you put in front of them, and they aren't obligated to. Remember, your scenario isn't a predefined plotline—it's a dynamic situation that won't resolve until the PCs have decided to deal with it one way or another. They're also not obligated to keep their focus where you might think it should be—maybe they're really enjoying some character interactions and don't seem too interested in getting into the plot. So how do you deal with that?

The first and foremost thing to keep in mind is that *choices have consequences*. If you've done your opener right, you'll have a bandolier of choices the PCs have made in response to your initial situation—maybe none of those choices are ones that you planned for, but the material you have prepared should give you a solid foundation for figuring out how the NPCs might react. All you have to do is take a minute or two, extrapolate some logical consequences to the PCs' actions, keep the NPCs' goals in mind, and work from there. Specifically, look at how different NPCs might form alliances or have a falling out as a result of PC actions—this can easily spur new scene ideas.

Won't that tick off the players, that something they did inadvertently helped their bad guys team-up?

Eventually, you'll either find a way to introduce the NPCs and their goals from your scenario idea, or you'll find a couple of other major situations you can center the session around. If you end up with a plot element that emerges naturally from play, that's fine—just keep thinking of logical choices and consequences until the situation's been resolved to the satisfaction of the players. Remember the guidelines about good scenes from *Running the Game* (page 307)—make sure you're not running a new scene just to stall for time.

Read the first sentence of that paragraph again.

Example: Baltimore

So, I start running the session and the first scene goes a little bit nuts—Evan has a sprawling confrontation with Paul and totally alienates the Dupin Society pretty much in one huge swoop; the argument between Biff, Maya, and Biff's mom likewise takes up center stage; and the party comes to a terrible, crashing halt before I even get the chance to introduce the vampires!

Now what? I didn't even get to present my scenario hook! I take a deep breath and think for a moment, pondering my notes. I know that the most likely consequence for Biff's stuff is that his parents are going to cut off his trust fund; he's going to find himself broke in a hurry. I'm sure that bit of information will lead to a good scene.

Evan's stuff doesn't suggest anything immediately, until I remember the rogue practitioner who is terrorizing Dupin Society members—maybe the Society decides that Evan is the one responsible. This puts them in a position where they're scared and maybe feel like they need to strike back to protect themselves. This could be where Damocles Ravenborn gets back into things. Maybe he convinces John Vastolo or someone else in the Society that he's a lawyer who can help them scare Evan off.

So now I've got a direction I can go in—I tell Biff that his trust fund's been cut off and that he's being served with papers from his charitable investments trying to figure out where the money went, and I ask him what he wants to do. He gets hopping mad and demands to go confront his parents immediately, which gives me a good next scene.

Then, I tell Evan that John Vastolo has come to the house with his "legal team" (AKA disguised Red Court vampires) in tow, to discuss proper compensation for "services rendered" in the past—in other words, payment for information the Society has previously provided his family. This sets the stage for them to try "scare tactics" on Evan to get him to leave the Society alone, which lets me bring the info about my rogue spellslinger into play.

So, I still have my major elements in place—Damocles trying to send a message to Evan, a rogue practitioner terrorizing the Dupin Society, and Gilgamesh waiting in the wings. Now, though, there's a big character-driven element in the tension between Biff and his parents, but I'm okay to run with that wherever it might take me.

Dynamic NPCs

Another thing to keep in mind when you're running the scenario is that the NPCs shouldn't just sit and wait for the PCs to figure out what's going on. They aren't videogame bosses—they have goals and desires and they act on them. Once the PCs start pushing off in a direction that puts them at odds with the NPCs, the NPCs are going to react just like a PC would—they're going to want to start doing assessments to learn the aspects of the PCs, figure out their weaknesses and vulnerabilities, and figure out how to stifle their investigation attempts.

This can lead you to a host of good scenes if you're not sure what to do next. One way to ratchet up the tension during the middle of a session is to have an NPC investigate the PCs while the PCs are investigating him. Not every encounter with an NPC has to be violent—maybe they're trying to get an advantage over the PC (by, say, stealing his hair for a spell) or suss out the PCs' intentions more clearly. If the web of relationships between NPCs is tangled, that might allow the PCs to seek different kinds of solutions to their problems, relying more on interpersonal interaction and negotiation.

To do this, it helps to have a good idea of what a particular NPC *doesn't* know about a situation. That tells you what he might be interested in finding out, which tells you what he might try and, more importantly, why.

Another way you can make NPCs dynamic is by having them concede in conflicts and get compelled, just like PCs do. An NPC isn't going to fight to the death every time—feel free to concede if it's not going his way. Likewise, make sure you let the PCs take full advantage of whatever aspects they're able to assess when they investigate an NPC—it's a fun payoff for them, and it'll make your NPCs seem more three-dimensional.

Give Yourself a Break

It's probable that you'll need frequent, small breaks to collect your thoughts and figure out what you want to introduce next. That's okay—the players shouldn't expect you to be able to spew out Shakespearean twists on a dime. You might even get the players to suggest a good followup scene to help kickstart your ideas. Most of what you do depends on their responses anyway, so this shouldn't seem unusual.

Using Player Ideas

So, sometimes, the direction that play is going in will suggest a better, different motivation for an NPC than what you originally came up with. Maybe the players, while investigating something, will make some kind of speculation that strikes you as brilliant.

It's totally okay to let them be right about it—just alter whatever information you have to in order to match up with the players' suspicions. It'll be a great payoff when they get to it, and the fact that you were on the same page and took their suggestion will give them a really satisfying sense of being able to contribute to every part of the story in progress.

NPCs and Fate Points

As a GM, there are a few different ways to handle the flow of fate points among your NPCs.

Generally speaking, all the main NPCs you have should get their own individual supply of fate points to use, because that effectively balances them against the PCs. It would be extremely lopsided if you assumed their supply was unlimited. It also allows NPCs to take compels, concede conflicts, and generally use all the strategies of the fate point economy that a PC uses.

This can help you set up a natural rhythm for scenes in your game—when the PCs triumph, the opposition gets fate points and vice versa. This can also create a kind of nebulous "plot advantage" for PCs, as truly monstrous opponents will often start the game with no fate points due to negative refresh and require "on-camera" compels before receiving them. Also, compels on allied NPCs can help add drama to an interaction with a PC, or create a difficult choice if the ally's decisions become questionable.

This means that, for main NPCs, you should be fairly transparent about the game actions you're going to take. If you want to compel an NPC or send him fate points, the players need to be made aware of what you're doing. If your NPC is doing an assessment or a declaration, you need to make that clear to the players and participate in the system just like they do.

In some ways, you might consider the players to be the check and balance for your efforts just

DOESN'T THAT HAVE THE CHANCE OF SCREWING UP CONTINUITY? LIKE IF AN NPC'S MOTIVATION CHANGES FROM "KILL THEM!" TO "CAPTURE THEM!" HALFWAY THROUGH THE SCENARIO, WHAT ABOUT ALL THE TIMES HE TRIED TO WHACK THE PCS EARLY ON?

Coming up with reasons for these sorts of changes is one of the most fun things about being a GM! All kinds of story hooks and characterization stuff in there!

YET MORE OF OUR ARCANOS GAME IS EXPLAINED...

as you are against theirs—they'll tell you if they think something is foul play, trust me. If they're smart, the players will already be looking for opportunities to compel the NPCs—putting all of that stuff out in the open will only enhance the richness of the interactions between them.

Each supporting NPC should start with no fate points and receive one per scene they're involved in. They have fewer aspects than main NPCs, so they can't be compelled as much; plus, considering their supporting roles in the story, those NPCs are just much less likely to end up being compelled. (Of course, if they are, give them those points as well.)

Nameless NPCs should only receive fate points if someone invokes an aspect to their disadvantage in a scene or uses a scene or temporary aspect to compel them. Because they normally have no aspects of their own, they have to rely on scene aspects and maneuvers if they want to invoke anything. If the nameless NPCs are minions of a bigger bad guy, you have the option of letting any fate points they'd get from conceding or cashing out of a conflict (see page 206) go to the main "boss" NPC instead.

PCs, Toughness Powers, and "The Catch"

One major concern when playing NPCs occurs when you have PCs with Toughness powers. The temptation is to let any NPC you want to be a serious threat have access to the PC's Catch, but if that happens every time, then it's sort of meaningless for that PC to have Toughness powers in the first place. Likewise, if it never happens, then it's meaningless for that PC to have a Catch.

The simple solution is to let the NPC do what a PC would do when faced with the same dilemma—make the NPC go through the process of researching the PC, to whatever level of obscurity is necessary. If you can justify the NPC's access to the Catch by a skill roll or other game action, it's far more likely to go over well with the players. There's no real reason for you to privilege your NPCs in this regard—if they can find out, then they can find out; if they can't, they can't. You might even be able to turn that into a confrontation of its own, as the NPC tries to find out about the PC's weakness, and the PCs have a chance to thwart the effort.

Isn't it just fudging on behalf of the PCs when you deliberately have a bad guy screw up?

Not really, I'm just compelling on behalf of the players.

Against yourself.

As GM versus an NPC, yes. You gotta play both sides!

Weird.

Being Lazy: The Fate Point Pool

If it's too much trouble or too complicated to keep track of individual NPC fate points, you can also collect all the fate points any of your NPCs receive in a session into a collective pool and spend them for whichever character you choose. If you're going to use this method, don't calculate NPC starting refresh—just give yourself one fate point per player, and *only* give yourself fate points from compels and PC invocations that disadvantage your NPCs.

If at any time your fate point total exceeds the total amount of fate points that the players have, stop giving them to yourself even if your NPCs would normally receive them.

Example: Baltimore

Damocles Ravenborn has a –10 refresh, so he does not receive any fate points at the beginning of the session—he's fully gone over to the monster side. If he wants to have any fate points when he faces the PCs, he's going to have to take some compels by getting in a position to have his aspects taken advantage of.

I can funnel him some fate points by letting some of his henchmen concede after a pitched battle in the opening scene. In addition, I can make his aspects "public" to the PCs pretty easily—he's a very eccentric character and his reputation is widely known, so any kind of assessment the PCs want to make about him are bound to put his aspects of Actually Red Court, but Still a Poser and Folds Under Pressure on the table. In fact, his Bone to Pick with Montrose might already be well known by the PCs if this isn't the first scenario where he's shown up.

There are a lot of ways the PCs might use these to influence Ravenborn in any kind of interaction, and I'm definitely going to take anything they offer—especially if I know there's going to be a throwdown later. If the players aren't forthcoming, I can always use Ravenborn's aspects to justify stupid or careless mistakes—in the first scene, for instance, if the Red Court vamps in the opening scene decide to cross the threshold anyway and have their powers severely penalized, I can call it a compel of Bone to Pick with Montrose…Ravenborn is just

so desperate to get at Evan that it keeps him from fighting smart.

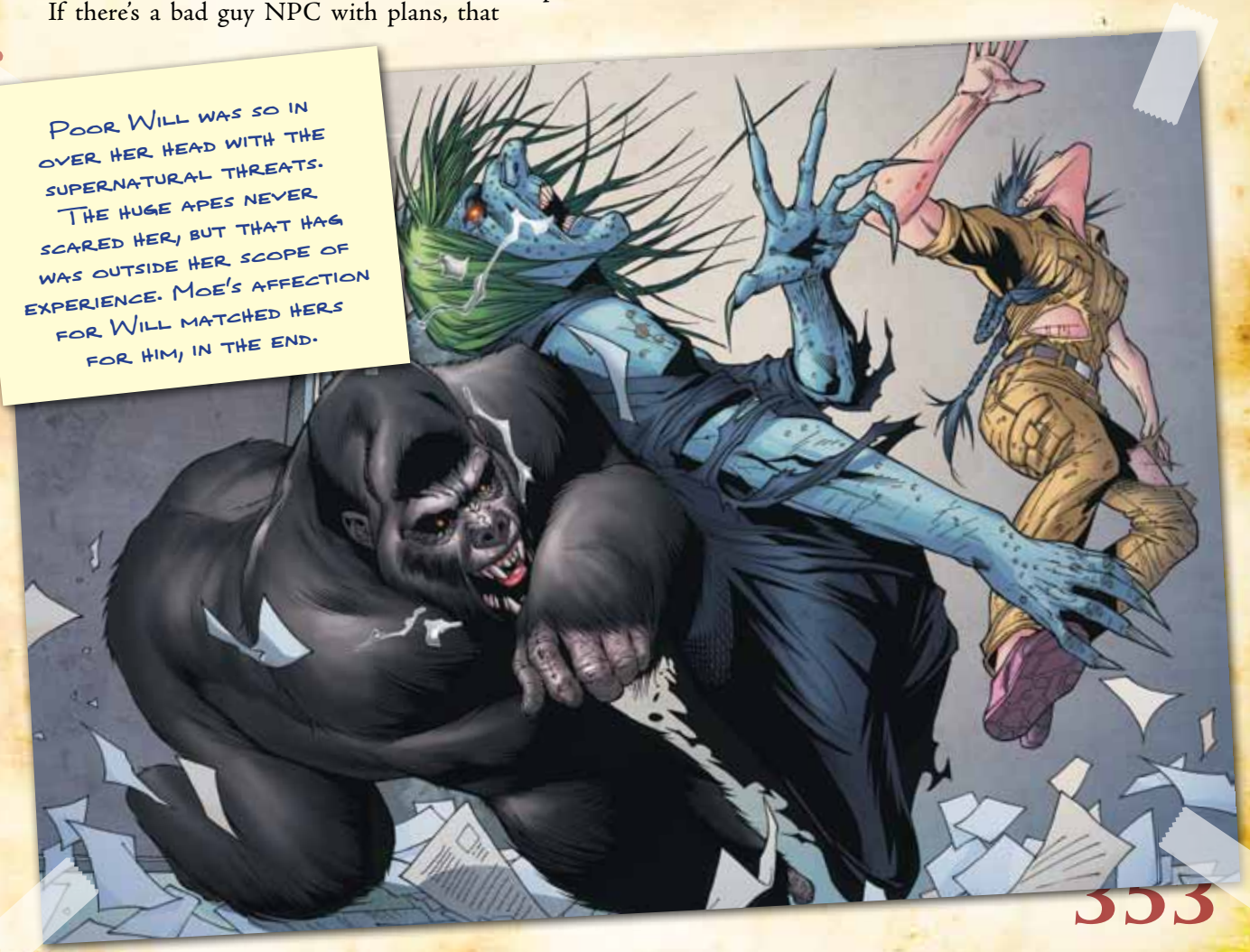
His ability to assess PC aspects and weaknesses is pretty limited—he doesn't have anything in Lore or Investigation, so a lot of what he notices is going to have to come from his Alertness; he has the best chance at learning something in direct contact. I might do some suspenseful scenes where he trails the PCs so he can try to assess some stuff.

Ending a Scenario

You know that a scenario is complete when all of the major situations that have arisen in play are concluded. Whether they came from your initial scenario idea and notes or emerged naturally from the back-and-forth interactions between you and the players, eventually the players will effectively have dealt with everything on their plate. How you define "dealing with" depends on what kind of situation it was in the first place.

If there's a bad guy NPC with plans, that situation's resolved when he's either succeeded with his plan or the PCs have rendered events such that the NPC can't possibly succeed at this time. This could mean that there was a final, epic confrontation that left that NPC crippled or dead; it could simply mean that some key part of the plan was averted. If the situation is an interpersonal issue between PCs and NPCs, it's resolved when no one can effect any more *immediate* change to the situation—in other words, even if there's more stuff that could potentially develop, it's not going to develop *right now*.

At the end of a scenario, you should take stock of what has changed in the city and between the characters as a result of the scenario's events. If your scenario is part of a larger chain of scenarios (like you have an "archvillain" you want to be secretly behind the scenes of several different scenarios), then you'll need to think about how these events will affect future ones. Those considerations might even lead you directly into the next scenario idea—it's possible to just keep extrapolating a new scenario from a previous one, like some TV shows do.



Sidekick Characters

We've all seen it. A player has a cool character concept, during character generation it seems like it's going to work great, but the game starts and...nobody knows what to do with him. He's not tied to the main conflict of the scenario, maybe he's only strongly tied to one of the other player characters, or maybe the mechanics don't work as well for modeling the character as the player thought they would.

That sort of thing might fly in a "you all meet in a tavern when a mysterious old man offers you a job" type of game, but that doesn't happen much in the Dresdenverse. There's real danger here of this character being relegated to the sidekick role, or worse—just being a plot device, serving as the kidnapee that all the other "competent" characters need to go rescue. For a player wanting to be a dynamic force in the campaign this will be really frustrating. What can you do?

The first step is to make sure it's not intentional. Once in a while a player does this on purpose ("I had a long work week. Hand me someone with mighty thews and don't make me think too hard right now.") and is just fine if the spotlight shines elsewhere for an extended period.

Assuming that's not the case, the GM should have a direct, out-of-game conversation with the player about the direction he'd like the character to go. Is there a specific conflict or story arc the player would like to see for his marginalized character? Are there relationships with other characters that could be developed that would make it easier to get the character involved? Are there mechanical changes that could be made to the character to make him more effective in situations where he's currently ineffective? Bend or break the advancement rules as needed to make this happen.

If all else fails, and the player is really not having a good time, consider just scrapping the character and starting from scratch. You'll have to figure out how to write the old character out of the story and introduce the new one (having the player take over an existing NPC is an ideal solution), but you've probably seen enough TV to be able to figure that out.

Example: Baltimore

By default, our example scenario is complete when Damocles either makes Evan take him seriously or gets cowed, and when Gilgamesh either gets Evan out of the way or is prohibited from making attempts on Evan's life for the immediate future. Evan will also have needed to make some final decision about the rogue practitioner if he ended up being a significant part of the scenario.

Other interpersonal issues might also need to be resolved before the scenario can truly end—things between Evan and the Dupin Society might either be stable or definitively better/worse. Biff might have to either repair damaged relationships or deal with the fact that permanent harm has been done (like between him and his parents, or maybe even him and Maya). The continuing conflict seems to center on Evan and Biff, and Maya's player has expressed concern that her investigative character risks becoming a sidekick (see "*Sidekick Characters*"). Maya has strong connections with the other PCs, but it's a challenge for her to find useful things to do during fights. I'll make a note to try to give Maya some spotlight time that doesn't involve getting rescued from ghouls.

Supposing that the scenario ends with Damocles and Gilgamesh both licking their wounds, I might decide that this creates a lopsided balance of power among the city's supernatural community—several factions might be interested in claiming territory that Gilgamesh once solidly controlled. It's possible that this little spat has touched off a hornet's nest of potential conflict between supernatural powers, and I write that down in my notes for next time…

Alternate Scenario Creation Methods

Sometimes, the normal process might not work for you—maybe you're having trouble seeing some of the connections, or maybe you're just having a mental block. Here are some other ways to think about scenario creation.

Starting with NPCs

The normal process has you figure out what the connections are between aspects and figure out how to make those relevant to an NPC's desires. But, what if you already have an idea for a villain, or want to base your scenario around a really strong personality or set of personalities?

You can also go into the scenario creation process by picking out or generating your NPCs first and working from there. You might take a motivation from a face NPC in your city, or you might be inspired to come up with some kind of bad guy or set of bad guys. Whatever the case, make sure you answer the following questions:

- Who is the NPC?
- What does the NPC want?
- What is the NPC willing or planning to do in order to get what he wants?
- What resources does the NPC have to pursue his goals? (This question is usually answered by simply statting out the NPC using one of the methods presented in *Running the Game*, page 326.)
- Are there any other NPCs involved? How are they involved? (And if you really want to make things complicated, you can go through the first four questions for each NPC you introduce here.)

Once you have these, it's time to figure out how to put the PCs in the middle of things. Now is when you should go and look at aspect connections—as described in this chapter—and see where you can make things fit. Once you have a good idea of how these NPCs will interact with the PCs, you can make your opening hooks and you're good to go!

Example: Baltimore

In the example above, I could easily have started by saying "Damocles Ravenborn…Let's see how the PCs react to this nitwit." *Then* I'd figure out how he could provoke conflict with the PCs (sending lackeys to the party, who con their way into the house and open fire) and see where it went from there. Start with the bad guy in mind, then find a way to put the PCs in his way.

Improvising

So, what do you do if you don't have time to prepare for a session at all? The methods described above will take a little bit of time if you actually go through all the steps, and you might not always be able to prepare a whole scenario before you have a mob of gamers knocking on your door with pizza and fistfuls of dice.

Fortunately, the PCs' aspects are a flexible tool for improvising a scenario from scratch. In this case, you're going to want to focus on creating immediate hooks based on single aspects—situations that are directly targeted at a particular PC. If you can connect more than one to the same hook, great, but don't worry about it. Just make something simple and obvious.

We know that just about any scenario with Michael Carpenter could start with him facing down an unholy terror, because of his Knight of the Cross aspect. So put one in the middle of Hyde Park and have at. Harry's a Warden of the White Council, so any strange mystical disturbance will get him out of his apartment and onto the street. You might also use a PC's relationships to start off a scenario, introducing an obligation that comes from that relationship.

Not "any." It better be really strange and really important.

Example: *Biff's aspects of Mortimer Louis Abernathy III and Trust Fund Jock suggest that family relations could come into his life demanding something from him or asking him to do things for the family. The GM decides to start the scenario by saying that Biff's parents show up in town and ask Biff to represent the family at this very stuffy, very prestigious charity ball, and give a speech on the merits of philanthropy. Oh, and to donate a significant portion of his trust fund to the cause.*

When you do this, it works best if you present the PCs with a real set of options to deal with whatever you've introduced. If Biff's family comes and asks him to attend the charity ball, for example, keep in mind that he might decide not to go. That's fine—you shouldn't worry about the outcome, because that's how you get the fuel for the rest of the scenario.

Keeping it Going

So now what? Well, remember what we said above—choices have consequences, so look at what decisions the PCs made in your opening hooks and decide on a logical set of consequences that could result from those decisions. Then come up with a new situation that takes advantage of those consequences. Somewhere along the way, you should find a way to introduce foul play (especially of the supernatural kind) if the circumstances are relatively innocent.

> ***Example:*** *Biff's player, Fred, really doesn't want to deal with a bunch of boring people in suits, so Biff refuses his parents' request in the first scene. The GM decides that his parents would then freeze his trust fund assets, but that doesn't have quite enough oomph on its own, unless Biff finds himself in a situation where he really needs money for something.*
>
> *A couple of scenes later, the GM introduces another NPC—an old school friend of Biff's who has fallen on hard times. He explains that he's being blackmailed and threatened, and that he really just wants to pay off the blackmailer and get it over with, concerned that things might escalate to physical harm as well. He asks Biff for a small loan.*

NPCs

You're naturally going to be throwing in a lot of NPCs with this method—in the above examples alone, we brought in at least four (Biff's parents, the school friend, and the blackmailer). Just look at the guidelines for On-the-Fly NPCs in *Running the Game* (page 330) and make all of them that way, filling in appropriate skills, powers, stunts, and aspects as needed.

Something you should notice in the above example is that you're not guaranteeing that Biff is going to find out about his trust fund freeze—after all, he might take a proactive approach and decide that he's going to track down the blackmailers and deal with them. That's the kind of guy Biff is, after all. But that's just fine, because you're improvising anyway—it's the nature of the beast that not every idea is going to get explored to its fullest. Just go in the direction the players take you. So if Biff decides to go get the blackmailers, that pursuit is now your plot.

If you do this enough, with all of the PCs, you'll eventually end up with a few major situations that the PCs are dealing with. Don't worry too much if you can't connect them together in an overarching plotline—that's not something that you should expect of yourself, given that you're improvising.

Once you have those major situations, you can stop introducing new hooks and work on getting those situations to a definitive conclusion—that'll be plenty of stuff to take up the rest of the evening's play, and may even leak into next session depending on how involved it gets. If you do go more than one session, it might give you the chance to make the next one that much better; now you can take a little time to flesh out some of the ideas that came out of the improvised session.

So you could have an entire session that doesn't link up to any of the usual plot? Like Biff and pals spend that session hunting down the mundane blackmailers rather than dealing with Gilgamesh or Ravenborn?

Absolutely! (Harry, even you find the odd lost dog or wedding ring, right?) Plus, if you can connect these side-stories to the City's themes, it adds to the texture of the main plot without being DIRECTLY connected to it.


- CHAPTER SIXTEEN -
~~Nevermore~~
Baltimore

Translation: I helped Davian move last August. 50 boxes of books = a favor or two.

Who Am I?

Hi. I'm Davian Campbell, a grad student at the University of Chicago and one of the Alphas. Billy asked me to write up something about Baltimore for this game he's writing. I guess he figured since I grew up there, I'd know it. I tried to tell him that I haven't lived there for years, and that between patrolling, trying to finish my thesis, and our weekly game session, I don't have time for this stuff. But Billy insisted, and he can be pretty persuasive.

Introduction

This is Baltimore as I know it.

I grew up in Baltimore, in the Middle East neighborhood, which isn't far from Johns Hopkins. If you're not from Baltimore and you know where Johns Hopkins is, you have my sympathy. I hope whoever it was made a full recovery.

Then again, maybe you know Baltimore as well as I do. Maybe you live there. Maybe you visit once in a while. Maybe you're just a Ravens fan. Whatever. What I'm describing here is *my* Baltimore; you might know it differently. Cities are a lot like people that way—different people get to know them in different ways.

Some of this stuff is true. Some of it's made up for the sake of a better game. I'm not about to tell you which is which.

We might as well get the encyclopedia stuff out of the way now. You can look this up on the Internet a lot easier than Billy could make space for a ton of details here, so I'll be brief.

Baltimore: Come for the Seafood, Stay for the Mind-Shattering Supernatural Terror

Natty Boh is a local beer, right? Probably bottled somewhere else now...

Crab cakes and Old Bay. Sailboats and Camden Yards. Natty Boh and *Pink Flamingos*. You know the stereotypes.

Economy: Baltimore used to be a big industrial town. Steel, manufactured goods—heck, even shipbuilding. Not so much any more. The city still likes to think of itself as an industrial town, but in reality that's gone. It's kind of a rust belt town that way. While it's still an important port, the economy now relies mostly on the service sector. Financial services, education, tourism, and health services are dominating. Johns Hopkins is currently the biggest employer (not to mention a huge landowner), where it used to be Bethlehem Steel. Unemployment is high. Lots of folks are unhappy.

Climate: They don't get much snow in Baltimore—two, maybe three times a year we get a couple of inches. When that happens, the entire town goes freaking loco. Stay off the roads. Even if you're from up north or from the mountains and you know how to drive in snow, Baltimoreans don't. They won't mean to, but they will kill you. In the summer, it's hot. It's Africa hot. To make it worse, it's cut-the-air-with-a-butter-knife humid. And even the summer thunderstorms don't help; they just make it wet.

Geography: East and west Baltimore have lots of poor neighborhoods and public housing (I-83 is the big psychological dividing line between east and west). The northern and southern parts of town tend to be a bit more affluent. Those are generalities, though; Baltimore is a city of neighborhoods. There are dozens of 'em. Some are just a couple of blocks; others stretch over a square mile. Some that I'll mention later are Fells Point (night life and clubs), Downtown (the Inner Harbor tourism and sports complexes), Mount Vernon (a gentrified few blocks of schools, shops, and expensive apartments), Little Italy and Greektown (not quite as ethnic as they sound, but close), Middle East (where I grew up, lots of poverty but also Johns Hopkins), and Rosemont (a former working-class, mostly African-American neighborhood that's fallen on hard times). The nice neighborhoods are pretty nice—they're well-kept, you're generally safe from petty crime, and the corner bar is cozy and inviting. The not-so-nice neighborhoods… well, yeah. It's not so nice there. There are entire websites devoted to Baltimore neighborhoods; take a look online if you don't find something that works for you here.

Neighborhoods Aplenty

There's a pretty good map of Baltimore's neighborhoods online. You can find it here:

http://www.baltimorecity.gov/Residents/Neighborhoods.aspx

Supernatural Presence: Like every city of any size, there's a supernatural presence in Baltimore. Here, the most powerful factions are White Court vampires and ghouls, but wizards and the Faerie Courts also have a presence.

I'll get into more details in the following three sections: "*What's What in Baltimore*" discusses some of the things that drive the action forward in a Baltimore-set game; "*Who's Who in Baltimore*" mentions the important factions and people in the city; finally, "*What's Where in Baltimore*" talks about locales that you'll find useful in your game.

What's What in Baltimore

Baltimore is a city going in about a dozen directions at once. I guess you can say that about a lot of modern cities, but it's especially true here.

You have the old industrial town that died along with the rest of the rust belt back in the 1970s, but it limps along in a twisted sort of unlife as if someone forgot to tell it that American heavy manufacturing was supposed to close down, pack up, and ship out for the Eastern Hemisphere.

You have the sea. The busy harbor, the rhythm of the tides in the Patapsco estuary, and the big ol' Chesapeake Bay itself dominate a lot of the city's life. We might have lost a lot of industry, but it's still a busy harbor. And it's not just rich folks who go out on the bay or travel over to the Eastern Shore; a lot of us poor city kids like to go out on the water once in a while, too.

You have the tourist renaissance. The Inner Harbor, Camden Yards, the National Aquarium, that kind of stuff. That sort of thing never rang true for me. I guess it's good that people come and spend a little money on the weekends, but it's a façade. It's masking the nastiness at the core of the city, the sort of creeping darkness—both supernatural and mundane—that only gets held in check by a few dedicated people willing to face the way things really are.

The Mundane Community

There are a bunch of different types of people born and raised in Baltimore. The old money in the old parts of town. The people who got the short economic end in the projects and inner city neighborhoods. The old ladies who call everyone "Hon" and talk like they're in a John Waters movie. The working-class longshoremen, factory workers, and railworkers (lots of Irish, Eastern Europeans, and African-Americans—in recent decades joined by new arrivals from Latin America) who are either in terrible fear of losing their jobs or have already been unemployed for years now. And, of course, the people who wear ties, have MBAs, carry Blackberries, and work in the tall buildings downtown.

A lot of the locals, especially the folks in the old neighborhoods, are friendly and open to visitors, and they'll talk your ear off given half a chance (they're also notorious tellers of tall tales, so watch out). Local pride runs deep—as friendly as some of the neighborhood folks are to visitors, newcomers moving into gentrified neighborhoods aren't easily accepted by the long timers. How long you've lived in Baltimore counts for something.

As far as people who migrate to Baltimore or visit regularly, you get a lot of history buffs, what with all the forts and the *U.S.S. Constellation* around here. Given the *Constellation*, the harbor, and the proximity to Chesapeake Bay, you get people who like to sail or are into old tall ships—everyone from Horatio Hornblower wannabes to old salt Navy retirees. You get football fans; the Ravens are half decent most of the time. Doctors, nurses, researchers, and staff at the hospitals; Johns Hopkins is freaking enormous, and you get a lot of people shuffling in and out, with the medical students there and doctors doing rotations to pad their resumes. Oh, and the Literati—bibliophiles and Poe fans love Baltimore. The Poe fans can be really insufferable. Some are actually really important (I'll get to that later), but a lot of them are just pretentious and annoying.

Hey, I resent that. We're not so bad.

The man was a hack, Harry, admit it.

Says the talking skull with a copy of NO CONTROL on his shelf. Besides, Poe was brilliant.

The Supernatural Community

But, of course, if you live in Baltimore, mundane mortals aren't the only people in your neighborhood.

In Baltimore, you have your typical collection of minor supernatural players: clued-in hippies and new-agers, devotees of nontraditional magic-aware religions, nosy academics, a few knowledgeable cleric types, some cops who have seen a bit too much to live in denial, some hedge wizards and minor practitioners, and a handful of honest-to-God creepy crawlies who do, in fact, go bump in the night.

Rising above all those are the four real heavy hitters in town; these are the seriously powerful factions that you don't want to cross unless you have plenty of friends willing to back you up. The White Council had a strong presence under the leadership of Old Man Montrose, but since he passed on, the wizards' presence in Baltimore has been significantly weakened. A clan of White Court vampires thrives here, House Lagios. The Fey Courts have a strong interest in Baltimore for reasons we'll get to soon. And, finally, there is a clan of ghouls (the Ereshkigal clan) led by the powerful ghoul lord Gilgamesh, self-proclaimed God-King of ghouls. He's a Freeholding Lord, a signatory to the Unseelie Accords.



What's at Stake: Points of Conflict

There's a lot to fight over in Baltimore. 'Course there is. It wouldn't be an interesting city to game in if there wasn't. We'll go into more detail about each of these later in the chapter.

The Ley Line

The single most important bone of contention is probably a major ley line that runs southwest to northeast across the city. This ley line follows the Fall Line, the boundary between North America's coastal plain and the Piedmont region, which passes directly through Baltimore. This ley line funnels considerable magical energy through the city, but its focus is the large, vaguely phallic-looking Washington Monument (yes, there's one in Baltimore, too, and it's older than the one in D.C.). Situated on the Fall Line, in the Mount Vernon neighborhood not far from the Inner Harbor, the Washington Monument acts as both a focus and a distributor of the energy in the ley line; three additional branches reach out from that point. One reaches southeast, through Federal Hill to Fort McHenry, then under the Patapsco River to Fort Carroll. Another reaches north, through Bolton Hill and Reservoir Hill into Druid Hill Park, where it dissipates. A third runs more or less west-northwest, through the greenway around Gwynns Falls and out of the city, eventually dissipating in the hills. Magical power is enhanced all along the ley lines, but it is particularly strong at a few points: the Washington Monument, Druid Hill Park, Heritage High School and Clifton Gate House, and Fort Carroll.

The branch reaching through Federal Hill is particularly strong and, together with the Monument itself, is the focus of a very tense stand-off among the four major supernatural players in the city. I'll talk more about this later, both in "*What's Where in Baltimore*" and "*Who's Who in Baltimore*."

Power Struggle Within the White Court

Vasiliki Lagios (page 373), a two hundred year old vampire, has led House Lagios of the White Court since soon after the U.S. Civil War. Vasiliki is a politically wily and patient schemer, excelling at using misdirection and subtlety to exert his influence. However, there's a faction

within the family that wants to be a more active presence in Baltimore; they'd like to actively oppose the White Council, more aggressively seek out prey, perhaps even make a play to claim major points along the ley line. Led by the ruthless and ambitious Alexandra Lagios (page 373), niece of Vasiliki, they may soon make their move to take control of the family.

Renegade Wizards

A small cadre of wizards and minor talents who have rejected the authority of the White Council operate in Baltimore. They're led by a wizard named Russell Carson (page 387), a capable thaumaturgist and aspiring megalomaniac. Carson hopes to turn his ragtag group into a faction strong enough to stand up to Baltimore's White Council representatives and become a Freehold under the Unseelie Accords.

It is suspected that he has violated a variety of the Laws of Magic, but Carson is a masterful opportunist; with the Vampire War raging, he knows that the White Council does not have the strength to send Wardens after him. He hopes to avoid attracting more attention until he has built the strength of his followers.

Black Aggie and the Black Court Scourge

Years ago, a statue called Grief was placed as a monument in Druid Ridge Cemetery (not to be confused with Druid Hill Park; Druid Ridge Cemetery is just outside the city limits). "Creepy as hell" is a completely insufficient description of this statue. Known as "Black Aggie," it was downright sinister—grass wouldn't grow in front of the damned thing. All kinds of urban legends grew up around it, about how it would haunt people, how people caught alone in front of it vanished, that sort of thing.

A Black Court scourge started taking advantage of the situation. From time to time, one of them would actually replace the statue, using some glamour to take on its likeness (and believe me, it wasn't a real stretch for them). Of course, whatever damn fool frat pledge or drunk teenager sat on that thing's lap was never heard from again. About forty years ago, in an uncharacteristic fit of good sense, the cemetery's caretakers removed Black Aggie; the official reason was to stop the "circus atmosphere" surrounding it. You can believe that if it helps you sleep at night. Their hunting patterns disrupted, the scourge fractured and with it the Black Court presence in Baltimore.

Currently, a scourge of at least three is attempting to re-establish itself. Hoping to draw upon the power of the ley line to enhance minor magical talents that they picked up somewhere, they have rooted themselves in a lair in the water tunnels under the Clifton Gate House (page 393), which is near the campus of Heritage High School. The students' safety is at terrible risk. See "*What's Where in Baltimore*" for more information on the Clifton Gate House and the vampires there.

To say the least! Harry, is the situation at Heritage High School something we should take on?

Don't we already have enough to worry about? Plus I'm sure Damian made this up. Right?

The Dupin Society

The Dupin Society (page 365) is a small band of Edgar Allan Poe scholars and fans, no more than two dozen, who keep alive Poe's knowledge of the supernatural. Historically, they have been observers only; as a matter of policy they never interfere or intervene in supernatural events. However, a few of the members want to get more proactive, stepping in when events allow. Unless they act with uncharacteristic finesse, doing so will paint a huge target on their backs. The White Council has warned them against this, but some members seem to insist. As kids on the Internet like to say, this will not end well. I'll go into more detail on the Dupin Society in "*Who's Who in Baltimore*."

Fae vs. Ghouls

A Freehold of several dozen ghouls lives in the tunnels under the ground between Federal Hill Park (page 389) and Fort McHenry (page 389). Because this lies along a particularly powerful branch of the ley line, the ghoul "king," Gilgamesh (a real humble guy, that one is—see page 371), has been able to open a portal to the Nevernever—in particular, to the regions where the Summer Court holds sway. Now, consider that the Summer Court is locked in an ugly little war with this band of ghouls, and you can see why this situation gets interesting on a fairly regular basis.

Let's just say that mortals want to watch their backs after dark in that part of the city. Not only is there occasionally collateral damage, but ghouls get hungry, and there are only so many fish in the Patapsco River for them to munch on.

Seez, Davian, isn't this your home town? You're not exactly dressing it up as a place I'd like to visit.

Themes and Threats

There are dozens, if not hundreds, of themes and threats that could capture the flavor of Baltimore. Here are the three that this writeup will focus on.

A City Battling Decay

Theme: Decay and Corruption

It's not generally thought of as such, but Baltimore is in many ways still one of those cities where you can get yourself killed if you're not careful. Most American cities underwent some serious cleanup since the 1970s; Baltimore tried, but didn't make it as far as most of us would have liked.

We have gangbangers and thugs ruling some of the streets. We have corruption in the city government and in the police force. We have manufacturers laying off people by the hundreds. We have abandoned buildings and streets that never rebuilt after the '68 riots. We have unemployment that's never going to go away. You've seen *The Wire*? *Homicide: Life on the Street*? Yeah. It's like that.

I'm not saying that other cities aren't as bad, or that Baltimore is an irredeemable hellhole. Some people stand up and say "No." There are some good people doing good work in the bad neighborhoods (hell, there are even some genuinely nice neighborhoods). There are some good, honest cops among the bad ones. There are some politicians whose idealism hasn't been beaten out of them yet. There are people in the supernatural know down in the trenches pushing back against the creeping darkness. They're still fighting the good fight—and Baltimore is a city worth fighting for.

A City with Multiple Personalities

Theme: Conflicting Identities

Baltimore has never been able to decide where it wants to be. Is it a cosmopolitan and sophisticated northern center of commerce, vibrant and full of optimism for a bright future, or is it a charming southern cultural gem where the summers are hot and the lemonade is cold? Does it want the hustle, bustle, and old wealth of New York or Boston, or the slow-paced lifestyle of (highly romanticized) antebellum Atlanta or Charleston? Damn Yankee, or Southern Belle?

Often, the answer is "yes."

A City at the Edge of the Abyss

Threat: On The Brink

The major supernatural players in Baltimore stand on the brink of war. Wizards, vampires, the fae, and terrible creatures of darkness stand against one another, struggling over the city's most important magical resource: a node in the powerful ley line which runs through the city. This conflict has not yet become open warfare, but it's probably only a matter of time. The storm is brewing. Even the city's minor talents can feel the tension.

While there's a lot to love about Baltimore, there's a lot of reason to be very, very afraid of it. But as I've said, Baltimore is worth fighting for.

Who's Who in Baltimore

Baltimore's conflicts, tensions, and situations are nothing without the people that drive them. There are four major supernatural factions in the city. I'll go over them first, then I'll discuss Baltimore's other supernatural factions, prominent mortals, and important organizations. Some organizations seem to represent particular themes better than others, and I'll mention that as well.

Vampires

Vampires—everyone's favorite bad guys. Baltimore's full of them. As far as I know, there are no representatives of the Jade Court, but the other three courts are all represented to some degree. In Baltimore, the White Court is by far the strongest.

Black Court

There's only a small Black Court presence, but they're still dangerous. Once upon a time they operated in the region surrounding Druid Ridge, but since Black Aggie was taken out of Druid Ridge Cemetery a few years back, they've had a harder time finding victims out there (more about this in the "*Locales*" section below).

These days, they're shadows of their former selves. They're disorganized and leaderless, each individual more or less operating on its own. Some still lurk around the Druid Ridge Cemetery just north of town, but some have

moved into the city proper. Here and there, individuals have settled near urban housing projects where they feed on the homeless, the junkies, the prostitutes, and other people that polite society won't exactly bend over backwards looking for.

A trio of Black Court monsters has formed a proper scourge, taking up residence in the water tunnels beneath the Clifton Gate House, in the northeast part of town. It's dark, dank, and secluded. It's also within spitting distance of Heritage High School. Bad things are going to happen, and soon.

The downfall of the Black Court's fortunes, and the darkness that they represent, gives some opportunity for exploring the city's theme of Decay and Corruption.

Red Court

The Red Court faction is small and weak. It's no larger than a half dozen individuals and was kept in check effectively by Old Man Montrose. That is, until he died. The leader of these Red Court vamps is called Damocles Ravenborn (yeah, I know; more about this loser on page 373). This gang is insignificant in the grand scheme of things; they may or may not get taken seriously by the larger Red Court nation now that open war is being waged in the rest of the world.

White Court

There's a clan of White Court in town: House Lagios and associated hangers-on. They came over to North America from the eastern Mediterranean in the mid 1700s. Most (but not all) of them thrive on the emotion of despair, and they're bad news, often literally.

Over the past thousand years, members of the Lagios family have been personally responsible for a number of wars and genocides in the Balkans and Eastern Mediterranean.

Lovely people. People?

Once in North America, they settled in Virginia and got into the slave trade, which is a pretty smart move for creatures who feed on despair. On a personal note, this also means that these bastards probably not only preyed on but actually owned some of my ancestors.

But I digress.

Once slavery was abolished in North America (during a conflict in which they no doubt sold arms to both sides), they settled in Baltimore (in the east of the city, in a neighborhood now called Greektown) and got into two businesses: vice and initiating economic disasters. They're amazingly proficient at arranging for companies to collapse then wallowing in the misery that results. On top of that, some of the corner bars in working-class neighborhoods are fronts for the Lagios family, where they encourage people (many newly out-of-work) to drown their sorrows in booze and cigarettes; the resulting addictions are more avenues of attack they take advantage of.

If that weren't enough, some of the Lagios are skilled in the sex trade. For those that feed on lust (and there are a few), the connection is obvious; however, they frequently specifically target patrons with families. I'm told the misery of a man who's lost his family because of sex addiction and frequenting prostitutes can keep a Lagios well-fed for weeks.

So, if you're looking for a Lagios White Court vampire, look at the bank that closes down a sure-thing deal that would have saved five hundred jobs, look at the neighborhood bars where the out-of-work drink their unemployment checks and wonder what happened to their dignity, look at the brothels where the johns weep over photos of their wives and children after being serviced.

The current head of House Lagios is Vasiliki Lagios (see page 373). Born in Richmond in 1823, he rose to leadership several years after the U.S. Civil War. He guided the family through very troubled times, establishing it in its new hunting grounds in Baltimore.

House Lagios claims that they had nothing to do with Old Man Montrose's recent demise. And they are closely monitoring the tense standoff over the ley line. They're unlikely to do anything rash; Lagios is nothing if not patient.

Alexandra Lagios (see page 373), Vasiliki's niece, has other ideas. She wants to take much more decisive action, whether it's moving against the White Council in its new weak state, aggressively seeking out prey by infiltrating the prison system and other institutions, or even making an overt play for the ley line. She's growing impatient with Vasiliki's leadership and is gathering her strength.

The city's aspect of Conflicting Identities is well defined by the different leadership styles of Vasiliki and Alexandra Lagios.

"Damocles Ravenborn?" You're kidding, right? OK, I'll read on, but I'm not buying it.

At least it's a step up from the slave trade.

Depends on who you ask.

Don't get distracted playing misery poker here; they're no less the malignant tumor in human society now than they were in 1861.

How many Little Folk would a single ghoul have to eat in a day?

THINK POPCORN. Okay, ew. Just … ew.

The Fae

Who sponsored Gilgamesh in signing the Accords?

I'M SURE MAB WOULD NEVER SHOW ANYONE THE PAPERWORK, BUT SHE'D ASSURE ANYONE WHO ASKS THAT IT'S ALL NICE AND LEGAL. I'D BET GOOD MONEY THAT MAB HERSELF SIGNED, AND THE WEAK RED COURT PRESENCE MAY HAVE BEEN LOOKING FOR AN ALLY. THE THIRD—YOUR GUESS IS AS GOOD AS MINE.

The Faerie Queens and Ladies themselves had little personal interest in Baltimore until about a year ago; Summer's border-skirmishing with the ghouls has become a war, and now both courts are paying quite close attention.

Baltimore is a city with big parks and lots of access to the water. Consequently, the Little Folk love this town. Hundreds of pixies, sprites, brownies, minor water spirits, and others reside all over the city. Once in a while, even a selkie or two will show up, but they're not crazy about the warm water.

Other than the Little Folk, there aren't many permanent fae residents of Baltimore. However, as was mentioned earlier, Summer is currently waging open, if limited, war against the Freehold of Gilgamesh (see below). The reasons the war started are unclear, but Summer claims to be acting to defend the Little Folk wyldfae the ghouls prey upon, and they (justifiably) accuse Winter of quietly supporting the ghouls.

OF COURSE, WHILE I'LL ALWAYS ROOT FOR ANYONE FIGHTING GHOULS, SUMMER'S MOTIVES ARE HARDLY PURE AND ALTRUISTIC. THEY'RE AFTER THE POWER OF THE LEY LINE, JUST LIKE EVERYONE ELSE IN TOWN, AND IT JUST HAPPENS THAT THE GHOULS SIT ON ONE OF THE IMPORTANT BRANCHES OF IT.

UH…DO YOU NEED A REASON? THEY'RE FREAKING GHOULS. KILL THEM. KILL THEM WITH FIRE.

They signed the Unseelie Accords, Harry. You don't just go around incinerating signatories to the Accords; you'll cause… Oh, wait, it's YOU. I keep forgetting.



This very low-intensity conflict went on for years, as faerie beings met ghouls in combat in lonely alleys and isolated greenways every few months. Last year, things took a turn for the more serious when two events occurred: the founding of Gilgamesh's Freehold, and the discovery of a portal to the Nevernever. These changed matters considerably.

When Gilgamesh, the ghoul king in Baltimore, signed the Unseelie Accords as a Freeholding Lord, the Summer Court had to dramatically change their stance. Now that he's a respectable citizen in the supernatural order of things, Gilgamesh is getting subtle support from Winter in his war against Summer. This has made the ghouls' raids into the Nevernever far more threatening to Summer, and the ghouls always seem to know when Summer is about to strike them.

The second game-changer was the discovery of a portal to the Nevernever in the tunnels between Federal Hill Park and Fort McHenry. Now equipped with a means of striking directly at each others' home turf, the war has picked up in intensity. The Summer Court uses the portal to launch surprise attacks into the ghouls' tunnels, hoping to end their threat once and for all; they rely mainly on companies of doughty gnomes, experienced at underground warfare.

The fae are yet another part of the city that's On the Brink.

Ghoul Clan Ereshkigal

For two hundred years, Clan Ereshkigal has lived in the tunnels running from Federal Hill to Fort McHenry. As Baltimore grew, the ghouls fed on sailors and drunks around the harbor, as well as the abundant fish and crabs available in the river and nearby Chesapeake Bay. Little Folk wyldfae became some of their favorite snacks.

Clan Ereshkigal is led by a nasty ghoul who calls himself Gilgamesh (in a display of remarkable humility, he claims the title "God-King"—see page 371). As time passed, Gilgamesh realized that their prey were thinning out. Fish and shellfish stocks were dwindling, the number of sailors and poor and homeless was dropping as commerce moved away from the harbor area, and the fae courts were pushing back against hunting the Little Folk; the battles against the Summer fae were not going well. He needed

to do something, or the ghouls under his thrall would turn on each other. He consolidated his power and his clan as much as he could (his people being ruthlessly cruel eating machines, they tend to resist leadership that isn't based on sheer might) and got himself sponsored to sign the Unseelie Accords, formalizing his rule as a Freeholding Lord. This caught the Summer Court off-guard and gave the ghouls some breathing room to regain a bit of their strength.

The other coup Gilgamesh arranged was opening the portal to the Nevernever (the fae claim he merely discovered it, rather than opened it; Gilgamesh claims to have used the power of the ley line and his immense magical talent to open it himself; nobody knows who to believe.) This portal allows the ghouls to strike directly at the Summer Court's power base—although it also allows direct assaults into the ghouls' tunnels.

I do. No ghoul could muster enough magic to open a portal to the Nevernever, ley line or no ley line.

I wouldn't be so sure about that.

Well, that's what I keep telling myself.

If Gilgamesh is truthful, and he did really open that portal himself, it would indicate that he possesses growing magical ability; combined with the power of the ley line in their tunnels and the dozens of raging ghouls he can summon to his cause, he is going to be extremely dangerous.

There are more details of Clan Ereshkigal's tunnels under the Federal Hill and Fort McHenry entries in "*What's Where in Baltimore.*"

Like the fae, Clan Ereshkigal is most strongly impacted by Baltimore's threat of On The Brink.

Ereshkigal was the Sumerian deity of the underworld.

So the clan named themselves after the lord of hell? Cute.

No, of course not. The clan named themselves after the **lady** *of hell. And I must say, she doesn't deserve her reputation; she's rather charming, really.*

The White Council

Wizardry in Baltimore is represented mostly by Evan Montrose (page 367); he holds this honor purely by virtue of his old man having kicked off very recently. He may or may not be up to the task; he's only in his mid-twenties, and he's spent the past couple of years in college in Europe and sailing around the Mediterranean. When his father died, he returned to his family's manor in northern Baltimore.

Evan is a well-trained wizard, but highly inexperienced, and he has found himself with a whole lot more responsibility than he'd planned on having at this point in his life. His father was his only surviving blood relative and, as the new head of the Montrose family, it's assumed that he will take on the role of representing the White Council in Baltimore. Evan Montrose has other plans, which may or may not involve figuring out how to arrange all his new responsibilities such that he can return to sailing around the Mediterranean and bumming around prestigious European universities.

With its sudden weakness in the city, the White Council is impacted by Baltimore's theme of Decay and Corruption.

Having the White Council be so weak in a major city could be a very serious problem. And if the Vampire War heats up again, good luck on avoiding "recruitment," Montrose.

Other Factions and Organizations

A wide variety of other groups are operating in Baltimore; these may actually have more impact on your game than the Big Four above.

The Dupin Society

In the late 19th century, Frederic Alcott—a fan of Edgar Allan Poe who lived in Baltimore—purchased a trunk at an estate auction. The trunk was full of old papers and assorted junk from an obscure literature professor from Franklin & Marshall College, a specialist in early to mid-19th century American popular literature. Alcott examined the papers and discovered that many were written by Poe himself and were as yet unknown to academia. However, they were not the fiction, essays, or literary criticism that Poe was known for; they were a catalogue of real-world supernatural events and entities around Baltimore, Philadelphia, and Richmond. Poe was clued-in, knew an awful lot, and had the good sense not to publish any of it; who would have believed him? The Dupin Society (named

These armchair Venatori Umbrorum have no idea how far in over their heads they are already. If they start gunning for anything, they're going to get their teeth kicked in, which would be a shame because they're a good resource.

Incidentally, the members of the group pronounce it "DOO-pin" rather than affect a French pronunciation; apparently they're following the old theater tradition of pronouncing names in the native language of the author.

That's kind of dumb. Philistine.

after the hero of Poe's detective stories) dedicated itself to continuing to observe the supernatural around Baltimore. If you want to know something about the supernatural community in Baltimore, chances are the Dupin Society knows it, or at least knows who you can contact to find out.

The Dupin Society learned a tough lesson right around the turn of the 20th century. They found out about a scourge of Black Court vampires in northeast Baltimore and determined to drive them out of the city. The society was nearly wiped out; Alcott was killed, as were half a dozen of his students and associates. The survivors licked their wounds and decided never to intervene actively again; they would do nothing more than observe and record. They're good at this; if a person or event in Baltimore has a supernatural angle to it, chances are the Dupin Society knows about it.

Currently, the Dupin Society consists of around two dozen Baltimoreans from all walks of life, and most—if not all—have no supernatural talents of their own. Its director is Paul Mackey (page 384), who works as a curator at the Edgar Allan Poe House and Museum. The society poses as a literary discussion group; its true nature is kept secret.

Some members are questioning the society's firm policy of nonintervention, the most vocal of which is John Vastolo. They point to the success of "Lizard" Gibbs and his cohorts (see "*Individuals*," below) in slaying a White Court vampire, and they argue for taking a more militant line against supernaturals that prey on mortals. Others argue that they are not trained or equipped to do so, and that they should simply continue to observe and record. The society clearly embodies the theme of Conflicting Identities.

The Dupin Society does not enjoy a terribly warm relationship with Evan Montrose, the Montrose family, or other Baltimore wizards. It's personal—we'll discuss this more later.

I really want to form a band called "Russell Carson and the Renegades." With a name like that, we'd cover a lot of Allman Brothers material ...

If this is true, it's serious stuff, Billy. Don't make light of it.

Russell Carson's Renegades

The White Council is not universally respected among wizarding and spellcasting circles. Most wizards who defy it outright wind up dead or repentant; Russell Carson is a talented thaumaturgist who thinks he can beat the odds.

Carson is, not to put too fine a point on it, an unrepentant and amoral megalomaniac. He wants power, but—ironically—on a small scale. He recruits followers from Baltimore's supernatural community, especially (though not exclusively) attractive young women, and teaches them spellcasting. He has quite a little following of hedge wizards, kitchen witches, and dangerously undertrained real talents around Baltimore. A classic cult leader, the attraction for him is the devotion these followers pay to him, more than any practical trouble they can make. But woe be to him, and to them all, when someone (maybe Carson himself) gets a taste for something bigger.

He's more or less stayed under the White Council's radar so far, but he's violated a couple of the Laws of Magic more than a few times; it's only a matter of time before a Warden needs to deal with him. The only question is whether this is before or after he gets any of his fellow renegades or innocent bystanders killed.

The Baltimore Police Department

The Baltimore City Police are pretty typical for a big city police department with high crime rates. Baltimore cops are smart, tough customers—people you'd definitely rather have on your side than working against you.

Unfortunately, when you're clued-in to the supernatural world and engage in activities that get exciting, you're bound to come up against them from time to time. There are a lot of reasons for this.

First, people like the Alphas and Harry Dresdens of the world tend to get into their share of scrapes against the bad guys. Keep in mind that knowing a spell or two or being able to change into a wolf doesn't mean that vigilantism is suddenly legal. If you bust some bad guy heads in a dark alley, you're a likely bad guy, too—at least according to the law.

Next, given that cops are fallible human beings, some give in to the temptation of corruption. That's not to excuse it; it's just the way it is. Some of this corrupting influence comes from Baltimore's supernatural community (although, of course, the cops on the take don't know that.) The bars that Lagios run never get audited or inspected too hard. Funny how that works.

Third, there are some cops who are either under the control of supernatural powers

outright, or are themselves supernatural entities. Over the past hundred years, more than one prison guard at the city lockup (yeah, they're not cops, but go with me here) has been a White Court vampire, feasting on the despair of the prisoners. In fact, a faction within House Lagios has recently pushed to pursue this avenue of attack much more aggressively, advocating attempting a complete takeover of entire divisions within the department and the prison system.

The vast majority of cops are completely unaware of the supernatural beyond their own religious beliefs, and they would actively scoff at the notion. A handful, however, have seen a bit too much to continue ignoring it.

Sgt. Jim Flanagan (page 376) is a patrol commander of the BPD Marine Unit. He pilots a small patrol boat (crew of three, total) on the Patapsco River. He's seen weird stuff at Fort Carroll, knows there's something out there, but has the good sense not to raise too much of a fuss about it.

Officer Leslie Vastolo and her partner Officer Luis Mirabal (page 376) have been on the beat in East Baltimore for several years and have managed to survive, and even win, a few encounters with ghouls and vampires. Officer Vastolo's uncle John is a member of the Dupin Society; he has funneled useful information to her, information which has kept her and her partner alive in the dark corners of Baltimore.

Houses of Worship

The Roman Catholic Church has been strong in Baltimore for nearly four hundred years. The Maryland colony was founded as a refuge for Catholics from the UK, so it makes sense that the oldest cathedral in the United States is in Baltimore.

The Archdiocese of Baltimore does not officially acknowledge the existence of magic or supernatural creatures beyond the Almighty, angels, and the Prince of Darkness. If you press them they might quietly say something about demons but then stumble over themselves to say, almost as if embarrassed, that most "possessions" are nothing more than the manifestation of deep psychological problems.

Which is, of course, why they have an official office called "Exorcist." Right.

However, when mortals are in need of physical protection from things that go bump in the night, the one they want to talk to is Sister Peter Ann Doran (page 377), who is one of the caretakers at the Basilica of the Assumption. There's a safe house on site, a virtually impenetrable fortress in supernatural terms. If you're in trouble with things beyond mortal jurisdiction, this is a good place to be.

Of course, the Catholics don't have a monopoly on this sort of thing, even if they have the best P.R. on the subject. In addition to Sister Ann, there are at least three other good people, representing a variety of faiths, who can help you if you find yourself on the losing end of spiritual warfare: Rabbi Ben Greenstone at Temple Beth Israel, Reverend Isaiah Smith of the St. James AME Church, and Imam Jamil al-Islam of the Islamic Center of Baltimore. The four regularly exchange notes on supernatural goings-on around the city. All four of them have personal courage way above their weight class and have spread the word that their houses of worship are available as refuge for people in trouble.

Individuals

Here's a list of important people in Baltimore; some would work out well as PCs, some will be opposition, and some could serve as allies if the PCs play their cards right.

Evan Montrose

Suggested player character!

Educated in magic by his father and in mundane matters by the finest Baltimore prep schools and European colleges, Evan Montrose's hope of spending a few post-Oxford years sailing with his best friends Maya McKenzie and "Biff" Abernathy (see below) was interrupted by his father's mysterious death. He's returned to the manor (see page 393) as a well-trained wizard of the White Council, but lacking the seasoning to go with his power. The Wardens want to recruit him, but he's managed to evade their attempts thus far. Evan is meticulous, detail-oriented, and a bit of a neat freak. Despite his tendency toward indulging his playboy side, he never does anything without a plan.

Evan's father changed his family name from Montresor after "that bastard Poe" (as Evan's grandfather wrote in his journal—and remember how long-lived wizards are) wrote

Davian only put Trouble lines into the stat blocks of the PCs and probable enemies. That's probably OK for now—if one of the other NPCs unexpectedly becomes an important antagonist the GM can add one.

Evan Montrose

High Concept: Young White Council Wizard

Trouble: In Over My Head

Other Aspects: Heir to Montrose; Precision Is Everything; Here's the Plan; Hail Hail the Gang's All Here; I'd Rather not be a Warden, Thanks

Skills

Alertness: Average (+1)
Athletics: Average (+1)
Contacts: Good (+3)
Conviction: Good (+3)
Craftsmanship: Average (+1)
Discipline: Great (+4)
Deceit: Average (+1)
Empathy: Average (+1)
Endurance: Fair (+2)
Lore: Good (+3)
Presence: Fair (+2)
Rapport: Fair (+2)
Resources: Great (+4)
Scholarship: Fair (+2)

Powers

Evocation [–3]
Thaumaturgy [–3]
The Sight [–1]
Soulgaze [+0]
Wizard's Constitution [+0]

Notes

Evan is a capable wizard, mustering 3 shifts of well-controlled effects easily, 4 shifts if we're talking the air element, and more if he pushes himself. He acts at Average initiative in a fight.

Specializations

Evocation: Elements (Air, Water, Spirit); Control (Air +1)
Thaumaturgy: Control (Wards +1)

Rote Spells

Bise (Air maneuver, four shifts): Creates a very strong wind lasting a moment; this is useful for filling a sail with wind, dispersing toxic fumes, or altering wind away from a predator. If Evan needs more power or finer control, the effect is much briefer. Evan must have his staff to cast this rote spell.

Bricolage (Air block, three shifts): Creates a three-foot-diameter wall of wind. Evan does not need his staff to cast this rote; he developed it for use in emergencies, such as the time when a palm crashed through the roof of his bungalow during a downpour on Crete...

Javelot (Force attack, four shifts): Launches a spear of force at a target. Evan requires the use of his copper rod to cast this rote.

Focus Items

Oak Staff (defensive power +1 for air)
Quartz Pendant (complexity +1 for wards)
Copper Rod (offensive power +1 for air and spirit)

Stress

Mental OOOO **Physical** OOO **Social** OOO

Total Refresh Cost: –7



Hey, Biff and Evan both have "Hail Hail the Gang's All Here" as an aspect. That's got to have some sort of special effect, yeah?

Maya has it too, and it certainly does; it's a license to print fate points, as well as to spend them. The characters can invoke it when they need to be there for each other, and the GM can compel it to send one into trouble after another. And because they all have it, it doesn't matter who's in trouble first; it just works.

"The Cask of Amontillado." It's essentially an exposé of the excesses and crimes of (at least) one member of the Montresor family. If you haven't read it, go read it. Yeah, right now. It's not long, it's free on the Web, and it'll take you about ten minutes. I'll wait.

Whether or not Montresor was a few bricks shy of a load (ha!), you can understand the family's unhappiness with Poe. Yeah, Montresor was Evan's grandfather, or maybe great-grandfather. Evan doesn't quite believe that "Amontillado" was literally true; he has no idea that he has literal skeletons cluttering his house's basement. That said, he carries on his family's resentment of Poe and, by extension, the Dupin Society.

Evan knows that he can completely trust Wellington, his personal aide. Biff Abernathy is living in the servant's quarters in his estate, and Maya McKenzie is a frequent visitor.

Biff Abernathy

Suggested player character!

Biff, or Mortimer Louis Abernathy III as he was christened, met Evan Montrose when the two were classmates at Baltimore's most prestigious preschool. Their first day, little Mortimer decked Evan in an argument over a set of building blocks. Through his tears, all Evan could do was point at his attacker and say "Biff!" Whether Evan referred to the child or the action, the name stuck and the two became fast friends.

Biff's interests were more athletic than Evan's; Biff was a jock through school and is still quite the athlete. He's an outstanding soccer and rugby player, as well as an accomplished martial artist—he's especially skilled at Krav Maga (a form devised by the Israeli Defense Forces), leading to a great deal of speculation about just how he spent that semester abroad. He has an undeserved reputation as a dumb jock. He's in a long-term but tempestuous relationship with Maya McKenzie (see below); he, she, and Evan are a more or less inseparable trio.

When Evan returned from Europe, Biff (and Maya) came with him. Despite being a trust fund kid wealthy beyond most people's wildest imagination, Biff moved into Evan's house, living rent-free in the servants' quarters.

Evan's supernatural opponents often make the mistake of underestimating Biff, who knows his way around a fight.

Biff Abernathy

High Concept: Trust Fund Jock
Trouble: "Sorry, Mouse," Said Maya's Steady Boyfriend
Other Aspects: Dumb Luck; Krav Maga; Mortimer Louis Abernathy III; Hail Hail the Gang's All Here; Plays the Dumb Jock

Skills
Alertness: Fair (+2)
Athletics: Great (+4)
Contacts: Average (+1)
Discipline: Fair (+2)
Driving: Average (+1)
Endurance: Good (+3)
Fists: Superb (+5)
Guns: Average (+1)
Might: Good (+3)
Rapport: Fair (+2)
Resources: Great (+4)
Scholarship: Average (+1)
Weapons: Average (+1)

Stunts
Martial Artist (Fists): Biff may make assessments and declarations related to fighting styles and fighting culture using his Fists skill at +1.
Lethal Weapon (Fists): Biff's Fists are Weapon:2 against an unarmored opponent; Weapon:1 vs. Armor:1.
Redirected Force (Fists): When using Fists to defend against a close-combat attack, Biff may sacrifice his next action to use that successful defense as a maneuver, placing a temporary aspect such as Thrown to the Ground or Taken off Balance on the attacker.

Stress
Mental OO **Physical** OOOO **Social** OO

Notes
Fair initiative, Superb attacks and Great to Superb defense. His fists count as **Weapon:2** against opponents without any armor, and his defensive moves often leave a surprised foe on his ass.

Total Refresh Cost: –1 (Pure Mortal)

Darian, do you know about the skeletons for true fact, or is this an embellishment for the sake of the campaign setting?

You're not going to tell me, are you.

Maya "Mouse" McKenzie

High Concept: Insatiably Curious Were-Mouse

Trouble: "Biff, you jerk!" said Biff's Steady Girlfriend

Other Aspects: Quiet as a Mouse; I Remember Where I Came From; Locked or Unlocked, it's All the Same to Me; Hail Hail the Gang's All Here; Uncommon Sense

Skills

Alertness: Good (+3)
Athletics: Fair (+2)
Burglary: Fair (+2)
Deceit: Average (+1)
Driving: Average (+1)
Empathy: Great (+4)
Endurance: Fair (+2)
Investigation: Great (+4)
Lore: Good (+3)
Presence: Average (+1)
Rapport: Average (+1)
Scholarship: Fair (+2)
Stealth: Good (+3)
Survival: Average (+1)

*Does this person actually exist? The ability to change into a mouse yet still retain her human faculties is an **incredibly** impressive feat—and not without risks.*

Stunts

Listening (Investigation): Maya gains a +4 on her Investigation roll when Listening, but her Alertness drops to Terrible while doing so, due to the exclusion of her other senses.

Powers

Beast Change [–1]
Echoes of the Beast [–1]
Diminutive Size [–1]

Stress

Mental OO **Physical** OOO **Social** OOO

Notes

Maya technically has Human Form, but since all that gets her is a 1 point power (Diminutive Size), she doesn't get the Human Form bonus. When in mouse form, her Stealth is at least Good and boosted to Epic thanks to her size; she also gets a +2 bonus to Alertness and Investigation to notice small details. She tends to "mouse out" and run away from fights; Good initiative and Fair defense. Her physical stress track drops by 1 box when in mouse form.

Total Refresh Cost: –4

Not to be confused with Harry's dog!

Maya McKenzie

Suggested player character!

Maya McKenzie met Biff and Evan as a preteen at their prep school. Maya was on scholarship at a school of very wealthy people; a trailer park kid among the trust fund crowd, she quickly learned how not to attract attention to herself. One day in ninth grade, Biff Abernathy finally noticed her, mentioning that she was "Quiet as a mouse." He's been calling her Mouse ever since. She thinks of him as her steady boyfriend, but the relationship runs hot and cold depending on how much of a jerk he seems to be in a given month, but her platonic friendship with Evan Montrose, based on their magical talents, has been more consistent.

Maya's mother was a shapeshifter of moderate talent, and when she noticed that Maya's obsession with going unnoticed was a precursor to a similar talent, she trained Maya in the art. Already a small woman, Maya quickly gained the ability to transform herself into a tiny white-footed mouse. Maya used this ability not only to avoid notice where necessary (although leaving behind her clothing prevented frequent use at school), but also to use it to gather sensitive information on others: first, her classmates, then teachers who were up to non-approved activity, then getting the dirt on outright criminals in the community. Evan has warned her that her crusading will get her into trouble someday, but now that he's the White Council representative in Baltimore he finds himself relying on Maya regularly.



Wellington

Motivation: I will serve Montrose to the best of my ability.

Face of: The Montrose Estate (page 393)

Wellington is actually an ogre in the guise of a human—a creature of Faerie, bound to serve the Montrose Family. While he is somewhat dry in his wit, his loyalty is absolute. Unfortunately, most of the Secrets of the House are things he has been bound not to reveal, so he can be frustratingly unhelpful when it comes to providing information. He currently serves as aide to Evan Montrose.

Wellington is house-bound due to an old pact; he simply can't leave the estate (if he's forced out of the estate, he's automatically compelled into uselessness). He's also a bit of a runt, lacking the Hulking Size of his ogre brethren. He's unable to talk about whether this is a natural issue or a side-effect of the ancient Montrose pact he's part of.

Gilgamesh

Motivation: The power of the ley line will fuel our clan's glorious victory!

Face of: Federal Hill Park (page 389)

Gilgamesh has been the self-styled "God-King" of the Ereshkigal ghoul clan for about two hundred years, and just a year ago became a recognized Freeholding Lord and signatory of the Unseelie Accords. Vicious and cunning, Gilgamesh leads the clan with remarkable political skill; he knows when (and how) to negotiate, and when to tear his adversary limb from limb, which he can do without a thought—he's freaking huge. His size makes it tough for him to blend in among mortal humans, so he tends to avoid being seen outside in daylight.

Gilgamesh is possibly the single most dangerous creature in Baltimore, and that includes the Black Court vamps in town. He lusts after the power of the ley line, knowing that he can use it to power his own spellcasting (assuming he has real power, that is) or can use it as a bargaining chip to gain concessions from other supernatural players.

Wellington

High Concept:
Summer Court Ogre Butler

Other Aspects:
Unable to Leave the Estate;
"I am by no Means an Expert, Sir, But...";
Bound by a Secret Pact

Skills
Alertness: Good (+3)
Conviction: Good (+3)
Discipline: Great (+4)
Empathy: Good (+3)
Endurance: Good (+3)
Fists: Fair (+2)
Might: Fair (+2)
Presence: Superb (+5)
Scholarship: Good (+3)
Weapons: Great (+4)
Most other skills default to Fair or Average.

He's like Reginald Jeeves. If Jeeves was an ogre.

Powers
Glamours [–2]
Human Guise [–0]
Inhuman Strength [–2]
Supernatural Toughness [–4]
Inhuman Recovery [–2]
The Catch [+3] is cold iron and the like.
Physical Immunity [–8]
The Catch (Stacked) [+5] is that ogres are only immune to (mortal?) magic, not mundane harm.

Stress
Mental OOOO
Social OOOO, +1 mild consequence
Physical OOOO(OOOO), **Armor:2** immune to magic

Notes
Wellington has Good initiative, **Weapon:2** strength, Great skill with a club (though he'll usually pick up a piece of furniture to do the job), Fair skill with his bare hands, and a Fair facility for Glamours. He's also utterly unflappable.

Total Refresh Cost: –10

GILGAMESH

High Concept: Ghoul Tyrant
Trouble: Wizards and Vampires and Faeries in My Way
Other Aspects: Gilgamesh the God-King; Politician Among Thugs; Too Clever By Half

Skills

Alertness: Good (+3)
Athletics: Great (+4)
Endurance: Good (+3)
Fists: Great (+4)
Intimidation: Good (+3)
Presence: Superb (+5)
Conviction: Fair (+2)
Might: Good (+3)
Weapons: Great (+4)
Discipline: Fair (+2)
Most other skills default to Mediocre, with any physical ones defaulting to Fair.

Powers

Claws [–1]
Human Guise [+0]
Hulking Size [–2]
Ritual [–2] – possibly?
Worldwalker [–2] – possibly?
Feeding Dependency (Meat) [+1], affecting:
Supernatural Strength [–4]
Inhuman Speed [–2]
Inhuman Toughness [–2]
Supernatural Recovery [–4]
The Catch [+2] is wounds from holy objects. Also, dead is dead with a ghoul; if you inflict enough massive trauma (e.g., decapitation), it's not something they come back from.

Stress

Mental OOO **Hunger** OOO
Physical OOOOOO(OO), **Armor:1**
Social OOOO, additional mild consequence

Notes

Epic initiative, Great attack, Superb defense, and **Weapon:6** strength & claws. Not someone to mess with.

Total Refresh Cost: –12, possibly as much as –16 if his claims of spellcasting and opening portals to the Nevernever are true.

Holy crap, I need to check with Darian and make sure this is accurate! Maybe we should steer clear of Baltimore with our "outreach" program...

VASILIKI LAGIOS

High Concept: White Court Patriarch
Trouble: Disloyal Subordinates
Other Aspects: Patience is Usually a Virtue; Ruthless Predator

Skills

Alertness: Fair (+2)
Athletics: Good (+3)
Contacts: Great (+4)
Conviction: Good (+3)
Deceit: Great (+4)
Discipline: Superb (+5)
Endurance: Good (+3)
Empathy: Superb (+5)
Investigation: Fair (+2)
Lore: Fair (+2)
Presence: Great (+4)
Resources: Great (+4)
Scholarship: Fair (+2)
Weapons: Good (+3)
Most other skills default to Fair or Mediocre.

Stunts

Social Graces (Empathy): When determining initiative in a social conflict, +2 to Empathy.
The Weight of Reputation (Presence): Vasiliki may use his Presence instead of Intimidation to scare someone, provided the target knows of his "rep."
Filthy Lucre (Resources): +2 to Resources whenever using it for illicit purposes.

Powers

Emotional Vampire [–1]
Human Guise [+0]
Incite Emotion (Despair; Lasting Emotion, At Range) [–3]
Feeding Dependency [+1] affecting the following powers:
Inhuman Strength [–2]
Inhuman Speed [–2]
Inhuman Recovery [–2]
The Catch [+0] is True Hope.

Stress

Mental OOOO **Physical** OOOO **Social** OOOO
Hunger OOOO, extra mild consequence

Notes

A powerful WCV in masterful control of his appetites. Fantastic initiative, and he favors using a knife in a fight, with Good skill. Great defense, **Weapon:2** strength. He can also inflict despair as a **Weapon:2** mental stress attack using Great Deceit, up to a zone away—if possible, he'll prefer to make his opponent give up the fight and lay down to die. But his real arena of choice is in a social conflict.

Total Refresh Cost: –12

Vasiliki Lagios

Motivation: I will protect the standing of the Lagios family at any cost.

Face of: city theme of Decay and Corruption (page 362)

Born in Richmond in 1823, Vasiliki rose to lead House Lagios a few years after the U.S. Civil War. He is a supreme politician and has guided the family successfully to a comfortable stability, fending off challenges from several rivals over the years. He's a conservative strategist, very risk-averse, and is content to execute plans that take decades to show fruit. He's also extremely careful and is watching the schemes and machinations of his niece Alexandra with a wary eye. Vasiliki has no regular haunts; he frequents any of two or three dozen bars and cafes across eastern Baltimore and conducts business wherever suits him at the moment.

Alexandra Lagios

Motivation: I will lead House Lagios to triumph.

Face of: city threat On the Brink (page 362)

Alexandra was born in Baltimore in 1973. She's grown impatient with her uncle Vasiliki's conservative leadership; she believes that they can improve their position by aggressively seeking new prey in new situations. It was Alexandra who recruited corrections officers at the Maryland State Correctional Facility to allow the White Court to feed there. She also established the brothel at The Mantis Club in Fell's Point, providing prey for those clan members who prefer lust to despair; this may include herself, for the despair she can inspire is mixed with a healthy amount of lust. She has made a few key alliances within the family and may make a play to take over the family leadership.

Damocles Ravenborn

Motivation: Montrose WILL take me seriously.

Face of: city threat On the Brink (page 362)

Damocles Ravenborn leads a half-dozen strong gang of Red Court vampires in Baltimore. Prior to the Vampire War, he was intimidated by Old Man Montrose into keeping a very low profile. Once the war started, they stayed out of the way (nobody believes he was capable of killing Evan's father, but you never know…). Now that the Old Man is dead, Ravenborn

Alexandra Lagios

High Concept:
Charismatic White Court Upstart

Trouble:
Vasiliki Knows I'm Moving Against Him

Other Aspects: Ambition Is My Master; Why Put Off Until Tomorrow

Skills
- **Alertness:** Good (+3)
- **Athletics:** Great (+4)
- **Burglary:** Fair (+2)
- **Contacts:** Good (+3)
- **Conviction:** Fair (+2)
- **Deceit:** Superb (+5)
- **Discipline:** Average (+1)
- **Endurance:** Average (+1)
- **Guns:** Fair (+2)
- **Intimidation:** Average (+1)
- **Investigation:** Average (+1)
- **Presence:** Good (+3)
- **Rapport:** Great (+4)
- **Resources:** Fair (+2)
- **Stealth:** Average (+1)

Stunts
- **Sex Appeal (Rapport):** She receives a +2 to the roll on any seduction attempts she makes with Rapport vs. someone who could be receptive to her advances.

Powers
- **Emotional Vampire** [–1]
- **Human Guise** [+0]
- **Incite Emotion (Despair; Lasting Emotion)**[–2]
- **Feeding Dependency** [+1] affecting the following powers:
- **Inhuman Strength** [–2]
- **Inhuman Speed** [–2]
- **Inhuman Recovery** [–2]
- **The Catch** [+0] is True Hope.

Stress

Mental OOO	**Physical** OOO
Social OOOO	**Hunger** OOO

Notes
Epic initiative, Superb defense, but not much of a fighter. She's a Fair shot with a gun, but if she can get up close and personal (the same zone), she can inflict a **Weapon:2** mental stress attack with her Superb Deceit, with consequences manifesting as despair.

Total Refresh Cost: –9

I know I'm going to regret asking this, but: **Evernight**?

It's a LARP system. Thomas can tell you about it.

Thomas plays? Do you think he could get me into a game?

Damocles Ravenborn

High Concept:
Actually Red Court, but Still a Poser

Trouble:
Bone To Pick With Montrose

Other Aspects:
Bully; Folds Under Pressure

Skills

Alertness: Fair (+2)
Athletics: Fair (+2)
Discipline: Fair (+2)
Endurance: Fair (+2)
Intimidation: Good (+3)
Performance: Good (+3)
Stealth: Average (+1)
Weapons: Average (+1)

Most other skills default to Mediocre.

Okay, someone needs to explain to this guy that if you simultaneously carry a katana & wear a trenchcoat, you're a dork. You have to pick one!

Powers

Addictive Saliva [–1]
Blood Drinker [–1]
Claws [–1]
Flesh Mask [–1]
Feeding Dependency [+1] affecting the following powers:
Cloak of Shadows [–1]
Inhuman Strength [–2]
Inhuman Speed [–2]
Inhuman Recovery [–2]
Inhuman Toughness [–2]
The Catch [+2] is sunlight, holy stuff; armor doesn't protect belly.

Stress

Mental OO **Physical** OOO(OO), **Armor:1**
Social OO **Hunger** OOO

Notes

Fantastic initiative, Mediocre to Average attacks (with a katana!), Good defense. Can do physical stress with **Weapon:4** strength & claws (or **Weapon:4** strength & katana), or set aside the weapon bonus to make it a mental stress attack with his narcotic saliva. It's said that Damocles often licks the flat of his sword blade to deliver the venom, but he's the kind of idiot who might end up cutting off his tongue by accident if he did that.

Total Refresh Cost: –10

is ready to assert his strength against Evan Montrose and the rest of Baltimore.

Baltimore needn't worry too much. Damocles Ravenborn is the ultimate goth vampire LARP poser, like he's perpetually playing *Evernight*—right down to the sunglasses, trenchcoat, and katana.

A classic bully, Damocles is quickly intimidated by anyone who stands up to him, which is how Old Man Montrose kept him in check so easily. But he does hold a grudge.

Even though he's a poser, as an actual Red Court vampire, Damocles can still be dangerous—the same way a toddler with a gun can still kill people. The trick with Damocles is to show him who's the boss early on and to make it about something other than fighting. Personally, I'm nursing a theory that someone turned him as a way of getting rid of him—folks will only let a rabid mutt run wild for so long.

Frank Walker

Motivation: I just want to do my job.

Face of: The Fall Line (page 389)

Anyone who wants to know about the Fall Line in Baltimore should talk to Frank Walker, a senior surveyor and civil engineer working for the City of Baltimore. He is the recognized local expert in matters of hydrology, land use, and structural planning for the parts of Baltimore along the Fall Line. Although well into his forties, he may be coming into some latent hydromancy talent.

With that talent, Frank is more of an engineer than anything. He plans things out carefully, then executes—and he's at best half-aware that some of what he pulls off is magic. Not the sort of guy who gets into a fight.

Walker is married to Janet Walker, a Park Ranger at Fort McHenry. His brother Scott works for the city water authority.

This sort of thing, where someone doesn't realize that their "knack" is actually a magical talent, happens more often than you'd think. If that person's lucky, it never becomes a problem.

Park Ranger Janet Walker

Motivation: My park will be a safe place.

Face of: Fort McHenry (page 389)

Ranger Walker (and yes, she's tired of the Chuck Norris jokes, so don't make them) works almost every day at Fort McHenry National Monument, showing tourists the grounds and making sure everything is maintained to exacting standards. She's seen what some other employees and visitors call the ghosts on the walls, but her rationalist sensibilities won't acknowledge them. She does not tolerate speculation of ghosts from her staff and discourages them from even mentioning it to the tourists, believing it will turn the national monument into a laughingstock.

Ranger Walker is married to Frank Walker, a Baltimore city engineer.

Frank Walker

High Concept: Budding Hydromancer/Civil Engineer

Skills

Contacts: Good (+3)
Conviction: Good (+3)
Discipline: Fair (+2)
Lore: Fair (+2)
Resources: Fair (+2)
Scholarship: Great (+4)
Most other skills default to Average or Mediocre.

Stunts

Scientist (civil engineer, Scholarship): +1 to all rolls dealing with civil engineering, local Baltimore geology, or related topics.

Powers

Ritual (Hydromancy) [–2]
The Sight [–1] (visions tend to manifest in terms of hydrodynamics: ethereal liquids, flows of power)

Stress

Mental OOOO **Physical** OO **Social** OO

Focus Items

A high-quality antique slide rule (+1 complexity and +1 power for hydromantic rituals)

Notes

Frank hasn't developed the ability to use his hydromantic talents in a fast, evocation style, but he might pick up Channeling (Water) at some point if he does.

Total Refresh Cost: –4

Janet Walker

High Concept: Skeptical Park Ranger

Skills

Alertness: Great (+4)
Athletics: Fair (+2)
Discipline: Great (+4)
Endurance: Fair (+2)
Guns: Fair (+2)
Investigation: Good (+3)
Lore: Fair (+2)
Presence: Fair (+2)
Scholarship: Good (+3)
Most other skills default to Average or Mediocre.

Stunts

Paranoid? Probably. (Alertness): Gains +2 to Alertness when rolling against surprise and ambush.

Iron-Willed Disbelief (Discipline): Rooted in her firm disbelief of the supernatural, Janet's mental stress track is determined by her Discipline skill.

Stress

Mental OOOO **Physical** OOO **Social** OOO

Notes

Great initiative, Fair defense, and a Fair shot with a gun. Her skepticism about the supernatural is both a strength and a weakness.

Total Refresh Cost: +0 (Pure Mortal)



Sergeant Jim Flanagan

Motivation: I'm cleaning up the river.

Face of: Fort Carroll (page 390)

Sgt. Jim Flanagan, a former Navy petty officer and currently a policeman in Baltimore's Marine unit, often patrols the waters of the Patapsco River near Fort Carroll (see page 390) in a three-man patrol boat. He and his crew have chased visitors from the island fort many times, often arresting trespassers. In the execution of his duties, he's interrupted more than one arcane ritual. He's been offered bribes from time to time to adjust his patrol route to avoid the fort, but he's always refused. He's seen some weird stuff and suspects that there's something real to it; if Baltimore has a potential Karrin Murphy, it's Flanagan.

Sergeant Jim Flanagan

High Concept: Clued-In Cop

Other Aspects: Untouchable; Right Place at the Right Time

Skills

Alertness: Fair (+2)
Athletics: Good (+3)
Conviction: Good (+3)
Deceit: Average (+1)
Empathy: Fair (+2)
Endurance: Great (+4)
Guns: Good (+3)
Investigation: Great (+4)
Presence: Fair (+2)
Rapport: Fair (+2)

Other skills default to Average or Mediocre.

Is there some law that says clued-in cops need Irish surnames?
Keep reading.

Stunts

Interrogator (Intimidation): Once per interrogation, Jim can ignore the stress he'd inflict with Intimidation and instead treat the attack as a successful Empathy attempt to "read" that target.

Listening (Investigation): Jim gains a +4 on his Investigation roll when Listening, but his Alertness drops to Terrible while doing so.

Quick Eye (Investigation): Jim's first Investigation roll to determine deeper details about a scene is two time increments faster than usual.

Pin Them Down (Guns): When Aiming, the aspect Jim places on the target remains sticky so long as the target does not move out of the zone. Any attempts to leave the zone face an increased border of 1 so long as Jim continues to make Guns attacks against that target.

Too Fast To Hit (Athletics): Jim takes no penalty for moving one zone and gains an additional +1 to the roll (for a total of +3) when mounting a Full Defense.

Stress

Mental OOOO **Physical** OOOO **Social** OOO

Notes

A highly skilled, capable mortal. Fair initiative, Good shot with a gun, Good defense.

Total Refresh Cost: –3 (Pure Mortal)

Patrol Officers Leslie Vastolo and Luis Mirabal

Motivation: Lock and load—let's get 'em.

Face of: city threat On the Brink (page 362)

Officer Leslie Vastolo and her partner Officer Luis Mirabal have the distinction of being the only Baltimore cops known to have killed both a ghoul and a Black Court vampire while on duty. The ghoul was their baptism-by-fire into the existence of the supernatural; the two of them each emptied three clips into one of the bastards, finally taking it down by severing its spine with a lucky shot.

Of course, the department didn't believe their story, and they were both reprimanded for excessive discharge of their sidearms. They've learned not to pass reports of "weird" stuff up the line, and their peers have learned to pass on such reports to them directly.

Vastolo's uncle John (a member of the Dupin Society) has begun to pass them useful information, which they've enthusiastically acted on; they both carry wooden nightsticks rather than the composite and plastic varieties (which allowed them to dispatch a Black Court vamp last year) and pack *really big* personal firearms (high-capacity .45 automatics and big shotguns loaded with steel-jacketed slugs) in addition to their department-issue pistols.

They're also willing to take up arms while off-duty, which gives some of the Dupins ideas about taking a more active role in the community.

Both load their personal firearms with *steel-jacketed ammo*, which has a particularly strong impact on certain supernatural creatures.

These two are going to get killed, aren't they?

LESLIE VASTOLO

High Concept: Monster Hunting Cop
Other Aspects: Gunslinger
Skills
Alertness: Good (+3)
Athletics: Good (+3)
Contacts: Good (+3)
Conviction: Fair (+2)
Guns: Great (+4)
Endurance: Fair (+2)
Investigation: Fair (+2)
Lore: Fair (+2)
Weapons: Fair (+2)
Most other skills default to Average or Mediocre.
Stunts
Fast Reload (Guns): When Vastolo must reload she takes no penalty when doing it as a supplemental action; if she's in a race to see who reloads first, or anything else having to do with her speed or ability to reload, she gains a +1 on the roll.
On My Toes (Alertness): Gains +2 to Alertness when using it for initiative.
I Know Just The Guy (Contacts): When Gathering Information, Vastolo's efforts are at a +1, and are 1 time increment faster.
My Weapon Makes Me Powerful (Discipline): Officer Vastolo gains courage when armed. When in possession of a loaded firearm, Vastolo gains a +3 to Discipline rolls for mental defense.
Stress
Mental OO **Physical** OOO **Social** OO
Notes
Fantastic initiative, Great shot, Good defense.
Total Refresh Cost: –2 (Pure Mortal)

LUIS MIRABAL

High Concept: Monster Hunting Cop
Other Aspects: Wheelman
Skills
Alertness: Good (+3)
Athletics: Fair (+2)
Burglary: Fair (+2)
Conviction: Fair (+2)
Driving: Great (+4)
Guns: Good (+3)
Investigation: Good (+3)
Endurance: Fair (+2)
Weapons: Fair (+2)
Most other skills default to Average or Mediocre.
Stunts
Corner of My Eye (Alertness): When successfully rolling Alertness passively to pick up on details, Mirabal gains an additional three shifts.
Like the Back of My Hand (Driving): Mirabal's knack for shortcuts and navigation gives him a +2 to Driving when using it for street knowledge and navigation.
Eat Chrome (Driving): Mirabal is an expert at defensive and offensive driving. He gains +1 to Driving rolls used to attack or block.
On My Toes (Alertness): Gains +2 to Alertness when using it for initiative.
Stress
Mental OOO **Physical** OOO **Social** OO
Notes
Superb initiative, Good shot with a gun, Fair defense.
Total Refresh Cost: –2 (Pure Mortal)

Sister Peter Ann Doran

Motivation: Nobody need fear the darkness.

Face of: Basilica of the Assumption (page 394)

Sister Peter Ann Doran OSB is a spry 92-year-old Benedictine nun, and the caretaker of the safe house at the Basilica of the Assumption (see page 394). She's about four foot five, eighty pounds dripping wet, and is never seen without her black habit. Don't let that fool you; I'm told Sister Ann once stopped a demon cold in its tracks with nothing but her battered old Rosary beads and the fierce glare only a nun can deliver. Those of you who went to Catholic school will understand.

So should we just call her Sister Mary Yoda?

Sister Ann has done many things in her career, but her education is in psychology. She spent many years at Johns Hopkins, working as a chaplain and counselor, ministering to terminally ill patients and their families.

Her most important assignment, however, was in prison ministry; it was in ministering to the imprisoned that she met Imam al-Islam and Reverend Smith. Their shared experience working in the Baltimore jails and Maryland prison system convinced the three of them that the supernatural world not only existed but posed a significant danger to mortal humans. And they knew they could do something about it, with God's help. Rabbi Greenstone, also performing prison ministry, joined their group just after Sister Ann's retirement.

When age forced Sister Ann to retire from prison ministry, she was assigned to the Basilica of the Assumption. In retirement on paper only, she now works as hostess for the safe house, providing what comfort and safety she can for anyone seeking sanctuary from things that go bump in the night.

Sister Peter Ann Doran

High Concept: Nun in the Know
Other Aspects: Faith That Moves Mountains; Frail of Body, Not of Heart

Skills

Conviction: Superb (+5)
Discipline: Great (+4)
Empathy: Great (+4)
Lore: Good (+3)
Rapport: Good (+3)
Scholarship: Good (+3)
Most other social and mental skills default to Fair, physical to Mediocre.

Stunts

Blessed Words (Conviction): Given a proper amount of time to pray to her God, she may lay an aspect upon a scene with a successful Conviction declaration representing the effects of that prayer.
Person of Conviction (Conviction): Sister Ann may use Conviction instead of Presence to determine her social stress capacity.
Withering Glare (Conviction): Nobody can deliver a cringe-inducing glare quite like a nun. Sister Ann can use her Conviction score to intimidate a foe, provided the foe can see her face.

Powers

Bless This House [–1]

Stress

Mental OOOO, additional mild consequence
Physical OO
Social OOOO, additional mild consequence

Notes

While she has no fight-relevant skills, she's still the sort that the supernatural steers clear of. The thresholds of the places she calls home are practically unassailable.

Total Refresh Cost: –4

Other Clued-In People of Faith

Sister Ann is far from the only holy person actively fighting against the darkness in Baltimore. Below are a few of her allies. All of them share similar motivations with Sister Ann, and each is the face of his own house of worship.

Rabbi Benjamin Greenstone

Rabbi Greenstone is the young leader of Temple Beth Israel, a synagogue in the Belvedere neighborhood just a few blocks from the Washington Monument. Rabbi Greenstone is an outstanding theologian, as well as a former U.S. Army officer. In his Army service, he saw several things that he could not explain and that frightened him to his core. In addition to his work at his synagogue, he began ministering to prisoners and quickly joined with Imam al-Islam and Reverend Smith in their work protecting mortals against the supernatural.

Imam Jamil al-Islam

Imam Jamil al-Islam runs the Islamic Center of Baltimore, which is in the west of the city in the Rosemont neighborhood, close to Gwynn Falls Park. He played football at the University of Maryland in the 1970s and was a teammate of Isaiah Smith. The two continue their friendship, their shared vocation to ministry in the prison system, and their commitment to protect the hunted. Under his leadership, the Islamic Center is known as a place where people, Muslim or not, may find refuge and safety.

Reverend Isaiah Smith

Reverend Smith is pastor of St. James AME Church near the East Green. He maintains the imposing stature he had while a defensive lineman at University of Maryland; he also maintains a close friendship with his old teammate Imam Jamil al-Islam. Reverend Smith is a gifted orator; his voice always reminded me of James Earl Jones. Full disclosure: I attended St. James AME while I was growing up, and Reverend Smith was my pastor. I knew he met regularly with an imam, a rabbi, and a nun, but I didn't know why until I got involved with the Alphas.

Rabbi Greenstone

High Concept: Loremaster Rabbi

Other Aspects: The Children of Wickedness Will Not Afflict Us; Former Army Officer

Skills

Athletics: Fair (+2)
Conviction: Good (+3)
Discipline: Fair (+2)
Investigation: Good (+3)
Endurance: Fair (+2)
Guns: Fair (+2)
Lore: Great (+4)
Presence: Fair (+2)
Scholarship: Good (+3)
Most other skills default to Average or Mediocre.

Stunts

Blessed Words (Conviction): Given a proper amount of time to pray to his God, he may lay an aspect upon a scene with a successful Conviction declaration representing the effects of that prayer.

Tower of Faith (Conviction): Provided he gets a chance to pray or otherwise call upon his faith, he gains Armor:1 against any mental stress in a scene.

Occultist (Lore – Demons): Rabbi Greenstone gains a +2 to Lore rolls when performing research related to demons.

Powers

Guide My Hand [–1]

Stress

Mental OOOO **Physical** OOO **Social** OOO

Notes

Average initiative, Fair shot with a gun, Fair defense, and some potent prayer-fu. Makes an excellent contact for demonic matters.

Total Refresh Cost: –4

Imam Jamil al-Islam

High Concept:

Imam Who Defends the Defenseless

Other Aspects: There Is No Soul But Hath a Guardian; Sanctuary!

Skills

Athletics: Good (+3)
Conviction: Great (+4)
Discipline: Fair (+2)
Empathy: Good (+3)
Fists: Fair (+2)
Investigation: Fair (+2)
Lore: Average (+1)
Presence: Fair (+2)
Rapport: Fair (+2)
Scholarship: Good (+3)
Most other skills default to Average or Mediocre.

Stunts

Blessed Words (Conviction): Given a proper amount of time to pray to his God, he may lay an aspect upon a scene with a successful Conviction declaration representing the effects of that prayer.

Tower of Faith (Conviction): Provided he gets a chance to pray or otherwise call upon his faith, he gains Armor:1 against any mental stress in a scene.

Powers

Bless This House [–1]
Righteousness [–2]

Stress

Mental OOOO **Physical** OO **Social** OOO

Notes

Average initiative, Good defense, Fair fists. His invocations of Islam make him a true threat to the supernatural in a fight; his Great Conviction coupled with Righteousness gives him a blanket +1 to his rolls when he's pursuing a divinely-inspired purpose.

Total Refresh Cost: –5



Reverend Isaiah Smith

High Concept: Monster Hunting Minister

Other Aspects: Get Thee Behind Me; Back When I Played Ball

Skills

Conviction: Good (+3)
Endurance: Good (+3)
Discipline: Fair (+2)
Investigation: Fair (+2)
Lore: Fair (+2)
Presence: Great (+4)
Scholarship: Fair (+2)
Most other skills default to Average or Mediocre.

Stunts

Blessed Words (Conviction): Given a proper amount of time to pray to his God, he may lay an aspect upon a scene with a successful Conviction declaration representing the effects of that prayer.

Fiery Oratory (Presence): Smith is an extremely powerful speaker; the force of his personality comes through like a bull in a china shop whether he's preaching from the pulpit or deep in a private conversation. The reverend gains a +2 to uses of his Presence skill to attack or block in social conflict.

Begone You Devil (Presence): Smith may substitute his Presence skill for Intimidation when attempting to intimidate creatures that he suspects to be supernatural in origin.

Powers

Bless This House [–1]
Guide My Hand [–1]

Stress

Mental OOOO **Physical** OOOO
Social OOOO

Notes

Average skills for a fight, but he's more about the social conflicts and speechifyin'.

Total Refresh Cost: –5

Joe Nowakowski

Motivation: Just tryin' to get by, one day at a time.

Face of: Washington Monument (page 391)

Joe Nowakowski is a homeless man who spends most of his days in the park around the Washington Monument in the Mount Vernon neighborhood. Typically, Mount Vernon is far too rich a place to tolerate folks like him, but Joe is crafty. He's a Vietnam vet and has learned all sorts of tricks for staying hidden when he wants to. He's also keenly observant; not much goes on, day or night, around the Monument grounds without him seeing it. If you gain his confidence (hint—he's a coffee fiend, he can't get enough of the stuff), he's only too happy to tell you about what he's seen.

Susan Mallenbaum

Motivation: Don't disturb my fish!

Face of: National Aquarium (page 391)

Susan Mallenbaum is a marine biologist working at the National Aquarium on a fellowship from the National Science Foundation. She's pursuing her Ph.D. in some obscure aspect of marine biochemistry. The important thing is that she's almost always there; she sleeps on the ancient sofa in her office as often as she goes back to her apartment. Any visitor to the Aquarium, at any time of day, is likely to encounter her. She is as protective of the chemical balance of the water in the tanks as she is of the animals living in them. When not obsessively studying biochemistry, she helps out with the dolphin show as a swimmer.

Wallace "Lizard" Gibbs

Motivation: I don't care if you do have supernatural powers, don't mess with my business. Or the East Green.

Face of: The East Green (page 392)

A successful drug dealer in the East Green, "Lizard" Gibbs is a young but worldly and driven man. While he sells drugs to whoever is willing to buy, without hesitation or remorse, he has a sense of right and wrong—though most people would find it pretty twisted. He's not out to hurt people, but he claims it's not his job to nanny people who want his drugs.

He'll be the first to say that violence is bad for business, and he tries to conduct his with a minimal body count; his organization is rather

JOE NOWAKOWSKI

High Concept: Homeless Vet
Other Aspects: Hawkeye
Skills
Alertness: Great (+4)
Contacts: Fair (+2)
Deceit: Good (+3)
Rapport: Fair (+2)
Stealth: Good (+3)
Most other skills default to Average or Mediocre.
Stunts
Corner of my Eye (Alertness): When successfully rolling Alertness passively to pick up on details, Nowakowski gains an additional three shifts.
Blend In (Stealth): If there's a crowd to hide in, Joe gains +2 to his Stealth rolls.
Stress
Mental OO **Physical** OO **Social** OO
Notes
Joe's predominately an information contact. Whether or not he's got the kind of combat experience and skills he can still use is up to the GM.
Total Refresh Cost: +0 (Pure Mortal)

SUSAN MAILENBAUM

High Concept: Dedicated Grad Student
Other Aspects: Live to Work
Skills
Alertness: Fair (+2)
Athletics: Good (+3)
Discipline: Good (+3)
Endurance: Fair (+2)
Scholarship: Great (+4)
Survival: Fair (+2)
Other skills default to Average or Mediocre.
Stunts
Capable Researcher (Scholarship): Scholarly research is completed two time increments faster than usual.
Scientist (Scholarship – Biochemistry): Mallenbaum gains a +2 to Scholarship rolls related to biochemistry.
Stress
Mental OO **Physical** OOO **Social** OO
Notes
Fair initiative, Good defense, but not much for attacks. She's not exposed to the supernatural world just yet, but that could change.
Total Refresh Cost: +0 (Pure Mortal)

LIZARD

High Concept: Clued-In Drugdealer
Trouble: I think I can Take Them
Other Aspects: This is MY House; Fair Is Fair
Skills
Alertness: Average (+1)
Athletics: Fair (+2)
Contacts: Fair (+2)
Conviction: Fair (+2)
Deceit: Good (+3)
Empathy: Average (+1)
Endurance: Fair (+2)
Fists: Average (+1)
Guns: Good (+3)
Intimidation: Great (+4)
Lore: Average (+1)
Resources: Good (+3)
Presence: Fair (+2)
Rapport: Average (+1)
Other skills default to Mediocre.
Stunts
Rule with Fear (Intimidation): Use Intimidation instead of Presence whenever rolling to represent Lizard's reputation.
Subtle Menace (Intimidation): When the context of power is absent, or Lizard's victim is actually in a superior position, the victim does not get any advantage bonus when Lizard attempts to use Intimidate against him.
You Don't Want Any of This (Intimidation): When performing a Brush-Off to move past someone, he gains a +2 on the roll.
Leadership (Presence): +1 when using Presence to command a group. Efforts to coordinate a group are efficient, moving one time increment faster than normal.
Filthy Lucre (Resources): Lizard gains a +2 to Resources whenever using it for illicit purposes.
Stress
Mental OOO **Physical** OOO **Social** OOO
Notes
Average initiative, Good shot with a gun, Fair on defense, and still one of the scariest mofos you'll ever meet. It's just how he carries himself—and the extremes he's willing to go to.
Total Refresh Cost: –3 (Pure Mortal)

This guy would make an excellent "strange bedfellow" sort of ally to the PCs if they end up with a common enemy.



successful at exercising its power without resorting to bloodshed. Strangely enough, residents of the East Green who know the rules, don't rock the boat, and don't bring in trouble (read: the cops) are actually relatively safe. This isn't to say that they're happy, of course; most residents are afraid of Lizard and his thugs, but they know not to make trouble. And he's merciless when someone challenges his authority.

About a year ago, Lizard noticed a new resident. He kept odd hours and, even stranger, he was white; all other residents of the East Green were African-American or Hispanic. Lizard suspected he was a police plant and had his people keep a close eye on the stranger. To make a long story short, after several bizarre deaths Lizard and his gang realized that the stranger was in fact some kind of monster feeding on the despair of the residents.

Lizard was enraged. This was *his* project and he'd be damned if he was going to get pushed aside. And though he didn't like to admit this to himself, maybe it just pissed him off that something was trying to eat these people's souls. It offended his weird sense of what's fair. If some junkie uses drugs, Lizard figures that's his decision; nobody decides to get eaten by a monster. Rather than flee from a supernatural terror, Lizard rallied his lieutenants, gathered some muscle and lots of guns, and launched an assault.

And damned if it didn't work. A couple of his guys died in the attack, but they killed the vampire. Of course, few people believed anyone that spoke about the battle; Lizard eventually swore everyone involved to silence.

Lizard continues to rule the East Green, but he knows that there are monsters out there more powerful than rival drug lords or vindictive cops. He hates them for their presumption of power, and he believes that he can kill them. This combination of beliefs makes him very dangerous to the supernatural community as well as very vulnerable; it would be tremendously easy for him to get in over his head.

Dave Gerard

Motivation: I want my club to be a success, but I don't want to get caught doing anything illegal.

Face of: city theme of Conflicting Identities (page 362)

Dave Gerard owns and operates the Mantis Club in Fells Point. He's handsome, well-dressed, charming, moderately wealthy, and an epically successful ladies' man. The bastard.

Additionally, he is a close associate of Alexandra Lagios, who (rumor has it) operates a brothel in the VIP rooms of his club. He gets a kickback, of course, but he often wonders how voluntary the arrangement actually is for him. He feels like he shouldn't voice this misgiving, and the padding it provides his wallet dulls the pain a bit.

Gerard once briefly dated Dr. Allison Ralston.

Curt Gazo

Motivation: I'm going to help Alexandra get to the top.

Face of: Fells Point/The Mantis Club (page 392)

Curt Gazo is the doorman (read: head bouncer) at the Mantis Club. He's an expert at working the door and always seems to create the perfect mix of clubgoers to keep it hip and relevant year after year. Similarly, he never lets things inside get out of control; heavily intoxicated or belligerent guests are quietly but firmly escorted away before they cause trouble. He speaks with a noticeable English accent, which seems to help him defuse tense situations (Americans almost universally find English accents charming and respond positively). He keeps his hair cut short, wears blazers without ties, and is solidly

DAVE GERARD

High Concept: Corrupt Club Owner
Trouble: Played by Alexandra and Knows It
Other Aspects: Smooth as Silk
Skills

Contacts: Great (+4)
Deceit: Good (+3)
Empathy: Good (+3)
Presence: Fair (+2)
Rapport: Good (+3)
Resources: Good (+3)

Other social skills default Fair or Average, other skills to Average or Mediocre.

Stunts

Ear to the Ground (Contacts): Difficulty of any Getting the Tip-Off roll is reduced by two.

Honest Lies (Deceit): Whenever incorporating a real, valuable piece of the truth (however marginally valuable it may be) into a lie, Gerard gains a +2 on his efforts to pass off the untrue parts.

Social Graces (Empathy): When determining initiative in a social conflict, he gains +2 to Empathy.

Sex Appeal (Rapport): Receives a +2 to the roll on any seduction attempts he makes with Rapport, provided that the target could be receptive to his advances.

Stress

Mental OO **Physical** OO **Social** OOO

Notes

A great contact who's more deeply connected than he realizes. It's up to the GM to decide if he's aware of the supernatural dimension to his associate, Ms. Lagios. David Gerard will have plenty of choice bits of info for the PCs—if they can afford to believe he's telling the truth. Gerard is also a good enough liar that he might just be able to pull one over on the White Court vampires who occasionally cross his path.

Total Refresh Cost: –2 (Pure Mortal)

CURT GAZO

High Concept: White Court Doorman
Trouble: Need to Keep my Cover
Other Aspects: Professional to a Fault; Loyal to Alexandra; Charming Accent
Skills

Alertness: Fair (+2)
Athletics: Good (+3)
Burglary: Fair (+2)
Conviction: Fair (+2)
Deceit: Good (+3)
Discipline: Great (+4)
Endurance: Good (+3)
Fists: Great (+4)
Intimidation: Fair (+2)
Investigation: Fair (+2)
Might: Fair (+2)
Presence: Fair (+2)
Rapport: Good (+3)

Most other skills default to Mediocre.

Stunts

Martial Artist (Fists): Curt is able to recognize many styles of martial arts, using Fists as a knowledge and perception skill focused on unarmed fighting, rolled at +1.

Redirected Force (Fists): On a successful defense roll using Fists against close-combat attacks (swung fists, thrust knives), he may sacrifice his next action to treat the defense as a successful maneuver, placing a temporary aspect such as Thrown to the Ground or Taken Off Balance on his attacker.

Powers

Emotional Vampire [–1]
Human Guise [+0]
Incite Emotion (Despair; Lasting Emotion) [–2]
Feeding Dependency [+1] affecting the following powers:
Inhuman Strength [–2]
Inhuman Speed [–2]
Inhuman Recovery [–2]
The Catch [+0] is True Hope.

Stress

Mental OOO **Physical** OOOO
Social OOO **Hunger** OOOO

Notes

Fantastic initiative, Great defense, Great fistfighting (and well trained at that), **Weapon:2** strength. He likes to touch or grapple problem patrons and hit them with a little bit of despair-mojo; takes the fight right out of them, and gives him a nice snack.

Total Refresh Cost: –10

built without being massive or overtly intimidating. Those observing closely might notice a radio earpiece (the microphone is in his left sleeve) with which he communicates with the entire security staff. He is unarmed, but he is an extremely dangerous adversary in an altercation.

Unknown to most, Curt is a White Court vampire and Alexandra Lagios' trusted lieutenant; he is loyal to her and to her alone. His assignment is to make sure that the club is run to maximize the success of, and minimize risks to, Alexandra's high-end brothel.

DR. ALLISON RALSTON

High Concept: Clued-In Forensic Pathologist
Other Aspects: Dupin Society Scholar; Ignored By My Superiors

Skills

Contacts: Fair (+2)
Deceit: Good (+3)
Discipline: Good (+3)
Empathy: Fair (+2)
Lore: Fair (+2)
Presence: Fair (+2)
Rapport: Good (+3)
Scholarship: Great (+4)
Other skills default to Fair or Average.

Dr. Ralston would be an amazingly useful NPC for the PCs to make contact with.

Stunts

Doctor (Scholarship – Forensic Pathology): +2 on rolls to administer medical attention. +1 for any medical research and an additional +1 in forensic pathology.
Capable Researcher (Scholarship): Scholarly research is completed two time increments faster than usual.
Basement Office (Deceit): Dr. Ralston is adept at begging, borrowing, and stealing to get what she needs to do her job without drawing bureaucratic attention to herself. Her workspace quality is determined by her Deceit skill, not her Resources.
Forensic Eye (Scholarship): May use Scholarship instead of Investigation to examine evidence.
Forensic Training (Scholarship): +2 with Scholarship when performing autopsies, analyzing crime scene evidence, etc.

Stress

Mental OO **Physical** OOO **Social** OOO

Notes

Not a fighter, but a hell of an information source.

Total Refresh Cost: –3 (Pure Mortal)

Dr. Allison Ralston

Motivation: I want to know, no matter who says I shouldn't.

Face of: Johns Hopkins (page 392)

Deep in the basement of the Meyer Building on the campus of Johns Hopkins Hospital, forensic pathologist Dr. Allison Ralston toils away in relative anonymity. She has little regard for formal hospital procedure, which led to her exile in the basement. Provided she publishes once or twice a year, her superiors rarely bother to check up on her.

She is also an active member of the Dupin Society and uses her position at the hospital to perform unofficial post-mortems and other medical examinations vital to their mission as recorders of supernatural events. She's not above doing other off-the-books work, such as treating injuries of heroic monster hunters who get a bit banged up in the course of their work.

She's a regular at Neutral Grounds (see page 394), and she once briefly dated Dave Gerard.

Ellsworth Dillman

Motivation: I want to preserve the peace.

Face of: The Francis Scott Key Bridge (page 393)

Ellsworth Dillman is a huge man (he carries troll blood inherited from some recent ancestor) frequently described as "jolly" by those who get to know him. He is content in his work as a toll collector (which he calls the "family business") at the Francis Scott Key Bridge, but he is also a trained and skilled mediator. He is a pacifist at heart and is proud of his role as a facilitator of discussion and negotiation among Baltimore's supernatural community. He is more than capable of enforcing the peace on the bridge, or anywhere else, if necessary.

He's sometimes seen at Neutral Grounds (see page 394) on his days off.

Paul Mackey

Motivation: I want to preserve knowledge.

Face of: Edgar Allan Poe House and Museum (page 393)

Paul Mackey is an expert in early American literature and is the curator of the Edgar Allan Poe House and Museum. As such, it's never questioned that he spends almost all his time there. He is also director of the Dupin Society. He is resisting a push among some in the society to become more active in protecting mortals from supernatural forces.

John Vastolo

Motivation: I want to stop the predators.

Face of: city threat of On the Brink (page 362)

John Vastolo is a member of the Dupin Society, and one that believes that the group should become more active in resisting the weird. He is being held in check by Paul Mackey, for now, but that doesn't stop him from passing information on to his niece, Patrol Office Leslie Vastolo of the BPD.

Scott Walker

Motivation: I'm going to find out what's going on here.

Face of: Clifton Gate House (page 393)

Scott Walker is an experienced technician for the city water authority. He and his crew maintain the facility at Clifton Gate House. Walker knows that there's something weird going on there; one of his workers vanished on the job late last year. He's tried talking with his brother Frank, a city water engineer, who just doesn't buy it.

Ellsworth Dillman

High Concept:
Trollblooded Toll Collector

Other Aspects: Enforce the Peace; Mediator; The Family Business

Skills

Alertness: Fair (+2)
Athletics: Fair (+2)
Conviction: Great (+4)
Endurance: Good (+3)
Fists: Good (+3)
Intimidation: Good (+3)
Presence: Fair (+2)
Most other physical skills default to Average, the rest to Mediocre, with a few Fair standouts.

Stunts

Territorial (Alertness): Dillman gains +2 to Alertness when acting on or near the Francis Scott Key Bridge.

Powers

Inhuman Strength [–2]
Inhuman Toughness [–2]
Supernatural Recovery [–4]
The Catch [+3] is cold iron and the like.

Stress

Mental OOOO **Social** OOO
Physical OOOO(OO), **Armor:1**

Notes

Fair initiative (Great near the Bridge), Good attack and defense, **Weapon:2** strength, and built like a brick outhouse.

Total Refresh Cost: –6

So, this is "Pay toll to the troll" taken literally, huh?

Paul Mackey

High Concept:
Director of the Dupin Society

Other Aspects: Patient Observer

Skills

Contacts: Fair (+2)
Conviction: Good (+3)
Deceit: Fair (+2)
Discipline: Fair (+2)
Investigation: Good (+3)
Lore: Great (+4)
Presence: Good (+3)
Resources: Fair (+2)
Scholarship: Great (+4)
Other skills default to Average or Mediocre.

Stunts

Finely Tuned Third Eye (Lore): Mackey gains +2 to Lore whenever using it as an Alertness substitute to pick up on the presence of the supernatural.
Capable Researcher (Scholarship): Any scholarly research Mackey does is completed two time increments faster than usual.
Quick Eye (Investigation): Mackey's first Investigation roll to determine deeper details about a scene is two time increments faster than usual.

Stress

Mental OOOO **Physical** OO
Social OOOO

Notes

Exactly the sort of non-supernatural supernatural contact the PCs should be cultivating. Plus, how can you not hang out at Poe's digs in a Baltimore game?!

Total Refresh Cost: –1 (Pure Mortal)

Diane Basset

Motivation: I want to educate Baltimore's supernatural community.

Face of: Neutral Grounds (page 394)

Diane Basset is the owner and operator of Neutral Grounds, a coffeehouse and book shop near Johns Hopkins. Raised in the supernatural community by her mother, Basset is a practicing Wiccan and possesses some degree of magical talent. Her clientele at Neutral Grounds have dubbed her a "caffeinomancer," and some customers are more than a bit serious. They say she adds the right spice and a minor effort of will to give the strong coffee she brews a bit of something extra.

Basset opened Neutral Grounds in 1988 and has been welcoming of anyone from the supernatural community in Baltimore. She petitioned Queen Mab to grant the coffeehouse Accorded Neutral Ground status, and Mab assented to the request; in thanks, Basset gives female customers a free espresso every Midwinter's Eve, assuming that one of them might be Queen Mab.

"Caffeinomancer?" Hell's Bells, how do we get one of those in Chicago?

John Vastolo

High Concept: Dupin Society Member
Other Aspects: I Can't Just Do Nothing
Skills
Burglary: Fair (+2)
Contacts: Fair (+2)
Conviction: Good (+3)
Deceit: Great (+4)
Empathy: Good (+3)
Investigation: Great (+4)
Lore: Good (+3)
Rapport: Fair (+2)
Scholarship: Fair (+2)
Other social skills default Average or Mediocre
Stunts
Finely Tuned Third Eye (Lore): Vastolo gains +2 to Lore whenever using it as an Alertness substitute to pick up on the presence of the supernatural.
Capable Researcher (Scholarship): Any scholarly research Vastolo does is completed two time increments faster than usual.
Quick Eye (Investigation): Vastolo's first Investigation roll to determine deeper details about a scene is two time increments faster than usual.
Stress
Mental OOOO **Physical** OO **Social** OO
Notes
This is the sort of contact that's just as likely to come looking for the PCs as vice-versa.
Total Refresh Cost: –1 (Pure Mortal)

Scott Walker

High Concept: Clued-In Technician
Other Aspects: I Have a Work Order
Skills
Alertness: Good (+3)
Athletics: Fair (+2)
Burglary: Fair (+2)
Conviction: Fair (+2)
Craftsmanship: Great (+4)
Endurance: Great (+4)
Fists: Good (+3)
Investigation: Fair (+2)
Lore: Average (+1)
Might: Good (+3)
Social skills default Average or Mediocre.
Stunts
Jury-Rigger (Craftsmanship): Walker has a talent for improvising with available materials. When jury-rigging, his repairs last two scenes longer than usual.
No Pain, No Gain (Endurance): Walker is a tough SOB and can take a bunch of punishment before it starts to add up. He may take one additional mild physical consequence.
Yes We Can (Craftsmanship): Walker excels at fixing things. He gains 2 extra shifts of success to any successful Craftsmanship roll to make repairs.
Stress
Mental OOO **Social** OO
Physical OOOO, +1 mild consequence
Notes
Never underestimate a talented Mr. Fix-It. Especially this one: Good initiative, Fair to Good defense, Good fistfighting.
Total Refresh Cost: –1 (Pure Mortal)

Diane Basset

High Concept: Kitchen Witch
Other Aspects: Caffeinomancer; Accorded "Neutral Grounds"

Skills

Alertness: Fair (+2)
Athletics: Fair (+2)
Contacts: Fair (+2)
Conviction: Great (+4)
Discipline: Good (+3)
Empathy: Good (+3)
Lore: Fair (+2)
Presence: Fair (+2)
Rapport: Good (+3)
Other skills default to Average or Mediocre.

Stunts

Occultist (Lore – Fae): Basset gains a +2 to Lore rolls when performing research related to fae creatures.
Occultist (Lore – Magic): Basset gains a +2 to Lore rolls when performing research related to mortal magic.

Powers

Ritual (Crafting) [–2]
Marked by Power [–1]

Stress

Mental OOOO **Physical** OO
Social OOO

Focus Items

A hazel wood wand (+1 to Crafting strength), used to stir coffee when she is brewing a spell into a cup.

Enchanted Items

Diane's Cuppas (2 potions) Diane has dedicated both of her enchanted item slots for potions. She can brew two extra potent "cuppas" (using her wand) to create a Superb (5-shift) potion effect.

Notes

Fair initiative, Fair defense, but she's not a fighter—and folks who step into her Accorded Neutral Ground coffee shop/bookstore had best be careful not to be as well.

Total Refresh Cost: –5

Corrections Officer Mike Robinson

Motivation: I want to ride that gravy train.

Face of: Maryland Men's State Correctional Facility (page 395)

Officer Mike Robinson is the director of the intake processing unit at the Maryland Men's State Correctional Facility at Baltimore. He's a loathsome man; he's completely in the pocket of Alexandra Lagios through a combination of bribes and regular access to prostitutes. Robinson and his staff look the other way as Alexandra and her cohorts have their way with incoming inmates.

Russell Carson

Motivation: Power, plain and simple.

Face of: city theme of Decay and Corruption (page 362)

Russell Carson is a renegade sorcerer who has amassed a small cult following among Baltimore's community of minor talents and dabbling practitioners. He's a madman, but he's very savvy and makes the most of the opportunities presented to him—he's laid low for years, but now that the Vampire War is distracting the majority of the White Council's Wardens, he feels freer to operate openly.

His goal is to establish himself and his followers as a Freehold under the Unseelie Accords, much like Gilgamesh did. He doesn't have a permanent home; he lives with different members of his cult, moving around every few days to keep the Wardens off his tracks—just in case they do decide to hunt him down.

His talent lies in thaumaturgy rather than evocation; he trusts in his .38 special rather than magic for immediate self defense.





MIKE ROBINSON

High Concept: Corrupt Prison Guard
Trouble: Alexandra's Lackey
Other Aspects: Phoning It In

Skills

Alertness: Fair (+2)
Athletics: Fair (+2)
Contacts: Fair (+2)
Deceit: Good (+3)
Endurance: Great (+4)
Fists: Good (+3)
Guns: Fair (+2)
Presence: Fair (+2)
Other social skills default to Average or Mediocre.

Stunts

Honest Lies (Deceit): Whenever incorporating a real, valuable piece of the truth into a lie, Robinson gains a +2 on his efforts to pass it off.

Fast Reload (Guns): Takes no penalty to reload as a supplemental action; +1 on the roll if it's contested.

Stress

Mental OO **Physical** OOOO **Social** OOO

Notes

Fair initiative, Fair shot, Good fistfighter, Fair to Good defense.

Total Refresh Cost: +0 (Pure Mortal)

RUSSELL CARSON

High Concept: Power-Mad Sorcerer
Trouble: Laws? What laws?
Other Aspects: Paranoia Strikes Deep; Wily & Savvy; Loyal Minions; Ritual Showman

Skills

Athletics: Fair (+2)
Conviction: Good (+3)
Discipline: Great (+4)
Empathy: Fair (+2)
Endurance: Fair (+2)
Guns: Fair (+2)
Intimidation: Fair (+2)
Lore: Good (+3)
Performance: Fair (+2)
Presence: Great (+4)
Rapport: Good (+3)
Most other skills default to Average or Mediocre.

Powers

Channeling [–2]
Thaumaturgy [–3]
The Sight [–1]
Soulgaze [+0]
Wizard's Constitution [+0]
Refinement [–1] x3
Lawbreaker (First) [–1] (These might all be higher)
Lawbreaker (Third) [–1]
Lawbreaker (Fourth) [–1]

Specializations

Channeling: Elements (Spirit)
Thaumaturgy: Control (Psychomancy +1, Divination +1), Complexity (Psychomancy +1, Divination +1)

Focus Items

Pocketwatch (+2 control, +1 to complexity for psychomancy)
Crystal Orb (+1 complexity for divination)

Stress

Mental OOOO **Physical** OOO **Social** OOOO

Notes

Carson is a ruthless SOB who's willing to kill anyone who gets in his way. His immediate circle of followers is loyal to the death. In terms of thaumaturgy, he's a powerhouse at psychomancy—he can easily cast Superb spells of that type with no prep, and he can safely channel seven shifts of power per casting roll. In combat, he's far more likely to rely on a minor talent minion or a gun (Fair skill, **Weapon:2**) rather than his own evocations, which are rudimentary spirit channelings.

Total Refresh Cost: –12

What's Where in Baltimore

Anyone can find a map of Baltimore easily enough. Rather than regurgitate a bunch of geographic information that you can easily find yourself on the Internet, I'll discuss a series of locations of interest. These locations are important for a variety of reasons; some are important to the magical or supernatural community in Baltimore, some are just locations where it would be cool to stage a scene in your game. Each locale has at least one aspect and at least one person (a **face**) associated with it. Many of these locations and people have been discussed earlier in this chapter; detailed descriptions of all the people can be found in "*Who's Who in Baltimore*."

The Fall Line

Theme: On the Ley Line

The Fall Line is the border between the coastal plain and the Piedmont region on the east coast of North America. The geology changes at this line; a layer of harder rock inland didn't erode as quickly as the softer rock along the coast, leading to a series of waterfalls in rivers flowing to the Atlantic. As the continent was settled, towns grew up along the Fall Line, because that was as far inland as ships from the coast could navigate. Baltimore is one of the most successful Fall Line cities in the country.

A corridor of focused magic has arisen along this fall line; whether this has to do with the towns and cities that have sprung up there or a natural result of geology is a matter of some debate among certain scholars on the White Council. In any event, the ley line runs along the Fall Line, right through the city of Baltimore.

Face: Frank Walker, city engineer (page 374)

Federal Hill Park

Threat: Gateway to Hell

Federal Hill Park is in central Baltimore, on the south shore of the Inner Harbor. The park is dominated by the hill which grants a commanding view of the Inner Harbor. The tree-dotted, grass-covered park conceals perhaps the most horrifying aspect of Baltimore's underworld—the Federal Hill tunnels. There have long been urban legends of underground tunnels leading from Federal Hill to Fort McHenry, two miles to the southeast. The legends speak of terrible things living in these tunnels. Of course, these urban legends are true.

When Fort McHenry was constructed in the early 19th century, its builders constructed the tunnels to keep the fort resupplied in the event that it was besieged, as all approaches to the fort were within gun range of ships anchored offshore. Only a year after it was constructed, the tunnels began to get a reputation among the soldiers of being haunted. People moving about in the tunnels started to vanish without a trace.

Major James Foster, commander of Fort McHenry at the time, dispatched a company of Marines to investigate. Only a few returned alive, and the survivors raved about battling vicious beasts impervious to rifle fire—ghouls, Clan Ereshkigal to be specific, although the Marines neither knew nor cared what they were called. Major Foster immediately ordered the tunnel sealed at both ends, and President Thomas Jefferson's administration quietly declared the entire affair to be a state secret.

The ghouls have been living there ever since. The once-sealed Federal Hill entrance (which empties into a rain sewer system under Federal Hill Park) has fallen into disrepair over the centuries, and now the ghouls come and go as they please.

A third of a mile from Fort McHenry, eighty feet under a warehouse, the ghouls control a portal to the Nevernever. This portal allows them to strike directly at the Summer Court, who they've been at war with for years. Periodically, a strong raid force goes through in one direction or the other, creating havoc and slaying enemies before retreating back through. The battles under Baltimore have been bloody and vicious.

The park and the tunnels both lie along a branch of the ley line radiating out from the Washington Monument.

Face: Gilgamesh, self-proclaimed "God-King of the Ghouls" (page 371)

Fort McHenry

Theme: On the Ley Line

Site of the famous 1814 battle between American gunners and a squadron of British warships that inspired *The Star-Spangled*



Banner, Fort McHenry is currently a national monument visited by hundreds of tourists daily. A handful of U.S. Park Rangers and dozens of employees operate the park. The fort is very well maintained; the walls, the fortifications, and the buildings are all in excellent condition.

Fort McHenry marks the other end of the tunnels leading from Federal Hill Park (see above). The tunnels, occupied by a Freehold of ghouls of Clan Ereshkigal, were sealed by the U.S. Marines in the early 19th century (see Federal Hill Park above); the seals on the Fort McHenry side have never been broken, so the ghouls do not have easy run of the fort. Rather, the ghouls have excavated exits from the tunnels right on the shore of the Patapsco River close by the fort. Fish and shellfish have become a staple food for the ghouls, along with the occasional homeless junkie or prostitute; taking too many humans would bring the mortal authorities in, which the ghouls' Freeholding Lord, Gilgamesh, strongly wishes to avoid.

The fort lies on the same branch of the ley line as Federal Hill Park; the star shape of the fort seems to send the ley line diving deep underground, where it reaches through the earth under the Patapsco River only to re-emerge at Fort Carroll.

A few visitors, employees, and rangers report seeing ghostly images of soldiers in early 19th century uniforms walking the walls late in the evenings.

Face: Janet Walker, park ranger (page 375)

Fort Carroll

Theme: Terminus of a Ley Line

Fort Carroll was constructed in the late 1840s, under the direction of a young Army officer by the name of Robert E. Lee. A hexagonal artificial island in the Patapsco River, it augmented Fort McHenry in defending Baltimore until 1920, when it was abandoned. It passed into private hands some time thereafter, and not much has been done with it since. At least, not from the human point of view; it has become overrun with vegetation and the many birds which nest there, safe from terrestrial predators.

Resting hundreds of yards from shore (but visible from the Francis Scott Key Bridge), the fort is, as a fort is designed to be, difficult to access from the water. Sheer concrete and stone walls rise fifteen feet from the surface of the water. A small concrete landing dock, a separate islet in its own right, lies twenty feet off the northeast wall, where a bridge once led to the

The Ley Line: Place of Power

The currents of magical power running through the earth along the eastern seaboard of the United States all seem to flow together along the Fall Line, the dividing line between the coastal plain and the higher ground of the Piedmont plateau. It's a natural border, and the ley line running along it is old and powerful.

This ley line can provide Sponsored Magic (see page 292), as per "*Places of Power*." Attuning oneself to it requires the functional equivalent of preparing an Epic (+7)-level Thaumaturgy spell—which means anyone with a Lore of at least Good (+3) can do it without trouble. Once attuned (and bearing the proper Sponsored Magic supernatural power, with associated refresh cost), the caster can use the ley line to boost his spells as per the Sponsored Magic rules. GMs should consider letting that character get a free tag on the Washington Monument's Theme if he's at that location.

Of course, there's a cost. The ley line is a border. It seeks, whether by conscious effort or some unconscious force of nature, to divide. Only spells which further the city's theme of Conflicting Identities or threat of On the Brink can be sponsored. Tap that power too much, and you may wind up finding yourself compelled to further these concepts somehow…

fort's only entrance; here, lettering painted on the wall of the fortress threatens "PRIVATE – KEEP OFF – GUARD DOG." The bridge has long since corroded away, leaving anyone attempting to gain access to the island fortress with quite a challenge ahead of him; the only way in is to somehow climb the sheer walls, with only the occasional gun port as a handhold, and most of the gun ports are closed up.

Inside the fort, the brick, stone, and concrete construction has weathered the years rather well. Trees and shrubs grow from cracks in the pavement, and birds by the hundreds nest everywhere, but the small buildings built as part of the fortress are largely intact. Steps lead up to the top of the walls, which give any visitor a wonderful view of the Patapsco River, its busy shipping traffic, and the surrounding shorelines of Baltimore City and Baltimore County. The skyline of downtown Baltimore is visible on a clear day.

The height of the walls inside the fort allows people some modicum of privacy once inside. More importantly, the radial of the ley line that is driven underground at Fort McHenry resurfaces at Fort Carroll, dispersing a large amount of magical energy at the fort, then dissipating in the river. It's a popular destination for Baltimore's spellcasting community, where casters can tap into the immense power of the ley line in the privacy afforded by Fort Carroll's remote location and high walls.

Face: Sgt. Jim Flanagan, BPD patrol boat pilot (page 376)

The Washington Monument

Theme: Wellspring of Magic

The Washington Monument lies in the Mount Vernon neighborhood, a quarter mile or so northwest of the Inner Harbor. Situated close to the Fall Line, the monument is a 178-foot-tall column atop a single-story museum. The column contains a circular staircase, and at the top is a statue of George Washington and an observation platform that provides a very nice view of the city.

The reason that this location is important is that the shape and exact location of the monument attracts the power flowing through the ley line that runs along the Fall Line. The monument gathers it in and re-broadcasts it in three smaller branches across the city; add in the northeast and southwest lines running along the Fall Line, and you get a rough five-pointed star centered on the monument.

Face: Joe Nowakowski, homeless vet (page 380)

National Aquarium

Theme: Tourist Magnet

The National Aquarium is one of the most popular tourist destinations in Baltimore. The facility is located right at the Inner Harbor. It consists of two buildings connected by an elevated walkway. All sorts of fish, shellfish, and even a few dolphins call the National Aquarium home.

Billy… That's some borderline reckless speculation you have in the sidebar. Ley lines are very powerful and a lot more complicated than that, and frankly I'm not all that comfortable with this in here.

The point is that it provides a power boost, but you pay a price. We're not providing all the details.

I think it's safe, Harry. If someone could tap the ley line with what Billy wrote here, he was going to figure it out anyway.

This whole facility screams "fight scene."

That sounds familiar.

The internal architecture of the larger building is very interesting. Gently sloping spiral floors ending at landings connected by escalators lead upward from ground level, taking the visitor past a variety of exhibits, including everything from mountain stream ecosystems to Atlantic coral reefs and sharks. Across the walkway, the smaller (but newer) building houses mammal exhibits (including a dolphinarium) and an elaborate amphibian terrarium.

The dolphinarium is open at the top and sits at the focus of a large amphitheater-like room suitable for Sea World-style shows, which is exactly what they use it for several times a day in the tourist season.

Face: Susan Mallenbaum, dedicated grad student (page 380)

The "East Green"

Theme: Poverty Breeds Desperation

A poster child for the failure of late twentieth century urban housing policy, this complex of two-story apartment buildings interspersed with lawns, playgrounds, and flower gardens is ruled by a gang of ruthless drug dealers. The actual name of the housing complex is an irrelevancy known only to bureaucrats in the Baltimore Housing Authority; to residents and the predators that prey on them, this public housing project is known only as the "East Green." Nothing occurs in the East Green without the permission of a drug gang led by Wallace "Lizard" Gibbs.

Injuries you get in my line of work aren't usually covered anyway.

Face: Wallace "Lizard" Gibbs, drug dealer (page 380)

Fells Point/Canton

Theme: Nightlife on the Harbor

It sounds like we could run an entire campaign centered on Johns Hopkins alone...

The Fells Point and Canton neighborhoods are the center of Baltimore's club scene and nightlife. Many tourists are surprised when they seem to "roll up the sidewalks" at the Inner Harbor around 8 PM; many don't realize that if they just proceed a few blocks east, they'll encounter some of the best live music, dancing, and dining on the East Coast.

Just about every major genre of popular and jazz music is represented by at least one club; rappers, bands, individual performers, and DJs lucky enough to develop a following and attract the right patrons make a good living here. It's also fertile ground for drug dealers, higher-priced escorts, and savvy White Court vampires. Some of the minority of House Lagios who prefer lust to despair spend a great deal of time in Fells Point and Canton. Some of the clubs, and the general sort of music and crowd you'll find there, are: the Key Club (eclectic dance, B'more club), the Soul Garden (R&B, soul), Monte Cristo (hip-hop), the Blue Jacket (jazz), the Mantis Club (techno), Molten (hard rock), the Dead Greenhorn (country and Southern rock). The Mantis Club is a front for Alexandra Lagios' (page 373) brothel.

Face: Curt Gazo (page 382), a doorman at the Mantis Club

Johns Hopkins Hospital

Theme: Knowledge Is Power

Johns Hopkins Hospital is not only widely regarded as the best research hospital in the United States, it's also one of the largest. The huge campus occupies many city blocks in downtown Baltimore (just northeast of the Inner Harbor)—it's slowly becoming its own miniature city within the boundaries of Baltimore. They have their own police, mail delivery, and zip code. Specialists in just about every medical discipline known to Western medicine can be found there. They have forensics facilities beyond compare. With access to the latest in medical research and technology, and home to a top-notch trauma center and ER, banged-up PCs can find respite here, provided their insurance cards are up to date.

Aside from being a world-class research hospital, Johns Hopkins is one of the largest landlords in downtown Baltimore. They practically own several downtown neighborhoods, and they're not always well thought of by their tenants.

Note that Johns Hopkins has two other major facilities in Baltimore. First, there's Johns Hopkins Bayview, on the east side of town. This is more of a traditional hospital, where average Joes go to get treatment. Second, there's Johns Hopkins University, with a traditional college campus north of downtown among the Hampden, Charles Village, and Guilford neighborhoods, not far from Druid Hill Park.

Face: Dr. Allison Ralston, forensic pathologist (page 384)

Edgar Allan Poe House and Museum

Theme: If These Walls Could Talk

The Edgar Allan Poe House and Museum is on a quiet streetcorner west of downtown. Poe lived here for several years, from 1832 or 1833 until his marriage in 1835. He shared the house with his future wife and mother-in-law, and he was living here when he first started to experience some success as a writer. The house is a tiny two-story brick structure on Amity Street. It's nearly 200 years old and has many of the quirks of an old house; the floorboards creak, the steam pipes bang and groan in the winter, and the windows are leaky.

Currently, the downstairs and upstairs are devoted to exhibiting artifacts of Poe's life. The basement is the main office of the Dupin Society; meetings are often held there after hours. It's not big enough to comfortably seat every member, so sometimes meetings of the entire group are held at Mackey's home.

Face: Paul Mackey, Director of the Dupin Society and curator of the museum (page 384)

The Montrose Estate

Threat: Skeletons in the Closet...And in the Basement

Located on the northern edge of Baltimore, the Montrose house and events that happened there in the early 1800s were the inspiration for Poe's "The Cask of Amontillado." So, you can imagine that the house is a really great place.

The estate is, on the surface, a well-managed and elegant old money mansion—and I mean really, really vast amounts of old money. Very recently, Old Man Montrose passed on (the cause of death is still mysterious; the medical examiner claimed "natural causes," but nobody in the know thinks that's right) and left the entire estate, grounds, and his fortune to his 20-something son Evan.

The estate consists of a dozen acres of partially wooded grounds along a tributary of the Patapsco. There are a few cottages used for servants' residences, a garage/maintenance building, and of course the big house itself. Imagine the classic Old Money Mansion, and you'll get it: dozens of rooms, a huge hall, a kitchen able to provide a state dinner, high ceilings, sweeping staircases in the entryway, and a vast cellar. The estate is managed by a collection of faceless accountants and maintenance personnel, but an unusual gentleman who goes by the name Wellington serves as the lord of the manor's personal aide and performer of "odd" jobs.

Face: Wellington, Ogre Butler (page 371)

Clifton Gate House (Heritage High School)

Threat: Easy Hunting

Decades after the removal of Black Aggie disrupted their hunting patterns, a trio of Black Court vampires from the original scourge in Druid Ridge Cemetery eventually discovered this wonderful place from which to base their predation. The water tunnels and maintenance access passages under the Clifton Gate House, which is an old pumping station for Baltimore's water system, would not normally be great hunting ground; the occasional maintenance technician or civil engineer does not a bounty make.

However, Clifton Gate House shares a location with Heritage High School. A lot of the gang violence and "runaways" reported among students at that school are actually caused by the vampires.

Face: Scott Walker, maintenance engineer (page 385)

Francis Scott Key Bridge

Theme: Magically Grounded

Other Aspect: Sweet Merciful Gods This Is a Tall Bridge

Known to locals as the "Key Bridge," this bridge carries Interstate 695 across the Patapsco River as part of the Baltimore Beltway. The massive flow of the Patapsco River passing 185 feet below, combined with the vast distance to solid ground on either side, tends to ground magical energy; it is extremely difficult to perform any sort of spellcasting on the bridge—the massive river acts as a Great threshold.

Darian, you had fight scenes in mind with this, didn't you?



While the bridge is not neutral ground, it often serves as a meeting place for people who want to minimize spellcasting during tense discussions. The tollbooth supervisor, Ellsworth Dillman, can arrange access to the maintenance deck of the bridge—out-of-the-way spaces just under the superstructure of each end of the main span. These places are very suitable for private discussions where magic should be suppressed.

Face: Ellsworth Dillman, toll booth employee (page 384)

Neutral Grounds

Theme: Accorded Neutral Ground

Located one block east of Johns Hopkins, Neutral Grounds is a coffehouse and independent bookstore. It has a well-stocked occult book section which, in combination with the excellent coffee, has enabled it to become a regular hangout for the minor members of Baltimore's supernatural community (although they do a brisk business with Johns Hopkins staff, too). Another reason it's attractive to supernaturally aware people is the sign located immediately below the "Fueled By Zeke's Coffee" poster: "Accorded Neutral Ground." Much like MacAnally's Pub in Chicago, the internal architecture is irregular, the tables spaced oddly, and the bookshelves are all askew of one another.

Neutral Grounds does not offer WiFi, free or otherwise. Wireless Internet does not mix well with wizards, and even cell phone reception is unreliable within the shop. The clientele seems to take this in stride (a third sign on the wall exhorts patrons to "UNPLUG."). Many patrons indicate that this is a big reason that they frequent this coffeehouse over others.

Face: Diane Basset, owner & manager (page 386)

Basilica of the National Shrine of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary

Theme: Raise Your Eyes To Heaven

The first cathedral built in North America, The Basilica of the Assumption is a big, sturdy stone cathedral. Its lines are a bit cleaner than something like Saint Patrick's in New York or Our Lady of the Angels in Chicago, but it's still a Roman Catholic cathedral—it has all the bells and whistles you'd expect. Interestingly, its main entrance suggests Greek architecture, with its Ionic columns and pediment. The color dominating everything is white. Shades of white everywhere you look. White marble, cream woodwork, white pews; it's a very bright, uplifting interior. The artwork on the arched ceiling is beautiful.

It's fairly classic cathedral design; the main altar is at the center of the cross made by the floorplan, there are side altars and a chapel in the apse behind the main altar. A balcony and choir loft overlooks the sanctuary.

The rectory houses the offices of the Basilica's staff, the residence of several priests (Monsignor O'Brien is the current pastor), and—although this is not well-known—a safe house. Authorized by the Archbishop of Baltimore in the early 1900s, the current caretaker and hostess of the safe house is Sister Peter Ann Doran. Under her protection, the safe house is a virtually impregnable fortress for those needing sanctuary from supernatural threats. Monsignor O'Brien makes sure that Sister Ann has what she needs in terms of material and staff to run the safe house, but the program is hers to run.

The safe house is actually more of an apartment; it contains two bedrooms, a common room, a kitchenette, a bathroom, and a small chapel. It is devoid of mirrors. It is connected to the Basilica by a secret hallway leading from the Basilica's apse; refugees can be quickly ushered to safety if they come into the Basilica itself because, while the Basilica is a pretty safe place, it's not nearly as strong as the wards and protection placed around the safe house. Sister Ann's threshold is like unto the Walls of Constantinople.

Rabbi Greenstone, Imam al-Islam, and Reverend Smith make occasional appearances at the safe house to coordinate with Sister Ann.

Face: Sister Peter Ann Doran OSB, Benedictine nun and caretaker of the safe house (page 377)

Problem is... Now it's Istanbul, not Constantinople, if you take my meaning.

Yeah, but it still took a while for the walls to come down.

Maryland Men's State Correctional Facility at Baltimore

Threat: Abandon All Hope

This state prison is located in the northern part of the city. Housing seven hundred mostly violent men serving long terms (but only designed to house five hundred), it's not a happy place. It's loud and overcrowded, and you can cut the tension with a knife. Abandon all hope, indeed.

Criminals are processed in by Officer Mike Robinson, who is fully bought and paid for by Alexandra Lagios. She and some of her followers occasionally "visit" the incoming prisoners on Robinson's watch; the vampires enhance and feed on the new inmates' feelings of doom and despair as they are made fully aware of the horrors they're going to face.

This isn't limited to induction. Inmates identified as depressed by the health care staff are frequently sent for "treatment" to mental health professionals who make regular visits; these psychologists are, of course, more White Court vampires.

None truly get better, but nobody notices. Mental health is not a legislative priority for the State of Maryland, and the honest psychologists working in the prison system are frankly overwhelmed.

One bright spot in this prison hell is that Rabbi Greenstone, Imam al-Islam, and Reverend Smith conduct their prison ministries here, each twice weekly. They're starting to suspect that something is wrong with the mental health services, but they haven't identified exactly what yet.

Face: Corrections Officer Mike Robinson, corrupt intake processing director (page 387)

Ugh... Billy, Davian really ends this one on a down-note. Isn't there anything more, I dunno, hopeful we could put in here?

Davian's a big fan of THE EMPIRE STRIKES BACK — I think "down endings" is where it's at for him.

Geeks. All of you, geeks.

Glossary

Action (*Playing the Game*, page 192): The use of a **skill** to accomplish something. There are many different types of actions. Taking an action almost always requires rolling the dice.

Aspect (*Aspects*, page 98): A short description that identifies the distinguishing features of characters, places, and things in the game world. Nearly anything can have aspects; they form the basis for using and gaining **fate points** in play.

Assessment (*Aspects*, page 115): An **action** taken to reveal an **aspect** that is unknown or hidden, or to discover relevant facts and details, as with an investigation.

Attack (*Playing the Game*, page 200): An **action** taken in a **conflict** to inflict **stress** and **consequences** on a target.

Backlash (*Spellcasting*, page 256): One of two results of failing to **control** magical energy in a spell. Backlash expresses itself as physical **stress** or **consequences** to the spellcaster.

Base Refresh (*Character Creation*, page 53): The amount of **refresh** given to the **PCs** to spend at character creation. It is also used as a relative measure for the creation of **opposition**.

Binding (*Spellcasting*, page 273): A **thaumaturgical** spell cast to subsume the will of a supernatural entity to the will of the spellcaster. In this way, the spellcaster can gain a supernatural servant.

Block (*Playing the Game*, page 210): An **action** taken in a **conflict** to preemptively prevent the success of another action. Setting up a block uses up your action in an **exchange**.

Border (*Playing the Game*, page 212): An obstacle (such as a wall or other barrier) that makes it difficult to move from one **zone** to another in a **conflict**, increasing the difficulty of a **sprint**.

Campaign (*Running the Game*, page 314): A unit of **game time**, the sum total of all **scenarios** played in a particular game.

Cat & Mouse (*Playing the Game*, page 194): A type of **extended contest** where the participants jockey back and forth for advantage over the course of several **opposed rolls**.

Challenge (*Running the Game*, page 324): A situation where one or more **PCs** is attempting to accomplish an involved or complex goal that requires the marking of progress over time. Analogous to an **extended contest**, but lacking **opposition**.

Character (*Character Creation*, page 52): A persona controlled by either a **player** or the **gamemaster**, consisting of a collection of **aspects**, **skills**, **stunts**, and possibly **supernatural powers**. During play, whoever controls the character describes what that character says, dictates the character's **actions**, and rolls dice for that character when appropriate. **PC** is often used to refer to a player character; **NPC** is often used to refer to a gamemaster-controlled (or non-player) character.

Combined Skills (*Playing the Game*, page 213): Any **action** that requires the use of two **skills**. When this occurs, one skill is named primary, and the other skill is named secondary and might provide a bonus or penalty to the primary skill depending on the circumstance.

Compel (*Aspects*, page 100): Bringing an **aspect** into play to introduce a complication or limit the responses available to a **character** in a particular situation. Responding appropriately to a compel gives the responding **player** a **fate point**; ignoring the compel costs the responding player a fate point.

Complement (*Playing the Game*, page 214): On any roll with **combined skills**, when the secondary **skill** can only add to the primary skill, it is said to complement that skill.

Complexity (*Spellcasting*, page 264): The general **difficulty** of performing a particular **thaumaturgical** spell. Complexity determines both how much **power** needs to be summoned for the spell and how much **preparation** must be devoted to its casting. Complexity is usually compared to the Lore **skill** of the caster.

Concession (*Playing the Game*, page 206): An alternative to being **taken out** in a conflict, wherein a **player** accepts defeat for his **character** (or the **GM**, for an **NPC**) in exchange for being able to dictate the terms of that defeat.

Conflict (*Playing the Game*, page 197): A situation where two or more **characters** have mutually exclusive interests that cannot be easily resolved; in other words, one party cannot succeed without harming the other. Typically exemplified by a fight scene, but mental and social conflict are also possible. **Game time** operates differently in a conflict, divided up into **exchanges**.

Consequence (*Aspects*, page 203): A type of **aspect** that describes the effect of lasting harm to a **character**. Consequences come in four severities: mild, moderate, severe, and extreme. A character can only have one of each type at a given time and must recover from that level of consequence before taking another at the same level.

Consequential Contest (*Playing the Game*, page 193): A **contest** that could potentially result in the inflicting of **consequences** on the loser.

Containment (*Spellcasting*, page 272): A **thaumaturgical** spell intended to hold or trap a supernatural entity for a certain period of time. Usually the prelude to a **binding** attempt.

Contest (*Playing the Game*, page 193): A **simple action** that is rolled against another **PC** or against **opposition**, rather than against a set **difficulty**. The party that rolls highest is the winner of the contest.

Control (*Spellcasting*, page 256): The general **difficulty** of safely channeling **power** for a spell. A caster rolls his Discipline **skill** to control the amount of summoned **power**. Failure to achieve this control results in either **backlash** or **fallout**.

Counterspell (*Spellcasting*, page 253): An **evocation** intended to cancel out or interfere with the energies of another spell.

Debt (*Spellcasting*, page 288): A **compel** owed to a **sponsor**. Unlike a normal compel, you do not gain a **fate point** for responding appropriately to it. You accrue debt by using a sponsor to **invoke** an aspect without paying a fate point for it.

Declaration (*Aspects*, page 116): An **action** taken in order to establish or create a new **aspect** on a target or a relevant fact that's of benefit to a **character**. Analogous to an **assessment**, except that the declaring **player** chooses the aspect or fact that's being established, rather than discovering it.

Defense (*Playing the Game*, page 200): An **action** taken to prevent an **attack** or **maneuver** from affecting a character. Unlike a **block**, which is preemptive, defense is a **free action** and can be attempted as many times as necessary during an **exchange**.

Defining Moment (*Aspects*, page 105): An event of such significant dramatic weight that it justifies **escalating a compel**. Highly subjective according to the consensus of the play group.

Difficulty (*Running the Game*, page 310): A rank on the **ladder** that indicates how challenging it is to accomplish an **action**. A **skill** roll must meet or exceed the difficulty for the action to be successful.

Effect (*Playing the Game*, page 192): The number of **shifts** generated by a **skill** roll. The higher the effect, the more potent the results of the skill roll. Also referred to as **strength**, especially in reference to the effectiveness of **blocks**.

Effort (*Playing the Game*, page 192): The base result of a **skill** roll before it's compared to anything, expressed as a rank on the **ladder**.

Element (*Spellcasting*, page 250): A basic component of an **evocation**. In the Classical tradition, the elements are air, fire, earth, water, and spirit (or force).

Enchanted Items (*Spellcasting*, page 279): An item that contains a "ready to cast" spell within it, which must be recharged after use. Spellcasters often have a number of enchanted items at their disposal.

Escalate a Compel (*Aspects*, page 105): Creating a **compel** that is of sufficient dramatic weight to be worth more than one **fate point**. Optionally offered at a **defining moment**.

Evocation (*Spellcasting*, page 249): A direct, no-prep, short-term form of magic spell, usually used in combat. Evocations can only be used for **attacks**, **blocks**, **maneuvers**, and **counterspells**.

Exchange (*Playing the Game*, page 197): A unit of **game time** used in **conflicts**, where each individual in the conflict takes turns performing and resolving a single **action**.

Extended Contest (*Playing the Game*, page 193): A **contest** that requires multiple **skill** rolls to resolve.

Oh look, it's Mister and his pet wizard!

Truer than you know. I've been inside Mister's head.



Face (*City Creation*, page 41): An **NPC** who represents or exemplifies a **theme**, **threat**, or **location** in a city.

Fallout (*Spellcasting*, page 256): One of two results of failing to **control** magical energy in a spell. Fallout expresses itself as **stress**, **consequences**, **temporary aspects**, and other unintended side effects to the environment and bystanders.

Fate Points (*The Basics*, page 19): A currency that **players** spend to take advantage of **aspects**. They are regained primarily by responding appropriately to **compels**.

Finish Line (*Playing the Game*, page 194): The limit on the number of rolls allowed in a **Race**.

Focus Items (*Spellcasting*, page 278): An item that gives a spellcaster a bonus for doing magic. Most spellcasters have several of these to help make their **evocations** and **thaumaturgy** more effective.

Fragile (*Aspects*, page 114): A **temporary aspect** that goes away after it is **tagged**.

Free Action (*Playing the Game*, page 213): An **action** that doesn't count against the normal "one action" limit in an **exchange**; the most common example is **defense**.

Frequency (*Spellcasting*, page 279): The number of times an **enchanted item** or **potion** can be used in a session. A spellcaster who **specializes** in Crafting can get bonuses to frequency.

Full Defense (*Playing the Game*, page 199): The choice, during an **exchange**, not to take an **action** in favor of concentrating on **defense**. This adds +2 to all defense rolls for that exchange.

Game Aspects (*Aspects*, page 107): An optional category of **aspect** that applies to the entire game, rather than to a specific **character** or **scene**. Usually used to represent broad thematic ideas or concepts.

Game Master (*Running the Game*, page 306): An individual responsible for overseeing the game, adjudicating the rules, creating **opposition** and the content used in **scenarios**, and controlling all **NPCs**. "GM" is often used as a shorthand to refer to the game master.

Game Time (*Running the Game*, page 314): Units of measure used to describe actual, "real world" play time as experienced by the participants. Divided into **exchanges**, **scenes**, **sessions**, **scenarios**, and **campaigns**.

Grapple (*Playing the Game*, page 211): A special type of **block** where the target must break free before attempting any other **actions**. In any **exchange** where the target is still grappled, the grappler may perform several different **supplemental actions** on the target.

Hexing (*Living With Magic*, page 228): The use of magic to interfere with or damage technology. A spellcaster might accidentally hex a piece of technology in moments of emotional duress.

High Concept (*Character Creation*, page 54): An **aspect** that defines the essential nature of a **character**. Access to **supernatural powers** is often restricted by a character's high concept.

Initiative (*Playing the Game*, page 199): The order in which all participating **characters** act in an **exchange**.

Intensity (*Living With Magic*, page 223): The mind-breaking impact of people, places, or objects seen with **the Sight**. Individuals using the Sight risk **stress** or **consequences** when viewing things with a high intensity.

Invoke (*Aspects*, page 98): Bringing an **aspect** into play to aid a character on a **skill** roll. Doing so costs a **fate point**, and allows either a +2 bonus to a skill roll or a reroll of the dice.

Invoking for Effect (*Aspects*, page 99): Bringing an **aspect** into play to make a **declaration** without the use of a **skill** roll.

Ladder (*The Basics*, page 16): A tiered set of adjectives and numbers used to describe **skill** level, **effort**, and **difficulty** in the game. It ranges from Terrible (-2) to Legendary (+8).

Lawbreaker Ability (*Supernatural Powers*, page 182): A **supernatural power** acquired by spellcasters who routinely break the Laws of Magic (page 232). These abilities have a corrupting influence and can slowly alter the caster's **aspects** over time.

Location (*City Creation*, page 37): A particular area of a city where scenes usually take place and which possesses its own **aspects** and **faces**. There are two types of locations: neighborhoods and places of interest.

Maneuver (*Playing the Game*, page 207): An **action** taken in a **conflict** to create a **situational advantage** for a **character**, represented as a **temporary aspect**.

I bet Langtry would have a fit over this American spelling of "manoeuvre".

Milestone (*Advancement*, page 88): The basic unit of advancement, allowing **PCs** to change or add details to the character sheet. They are divided into categories: minor, significant, and major.

Ooh, bonus!

Modify (*Playing the Game*, page 214): In any action with **combined skills**, when the secondary **skill** can *either* add a bonus to *or* penalize the primary skill, it is said to modify that skill.

Must (*Types & Templates*, page 72): A requirement to qualify for a particular **template**, usually in terms of specifying a particular **high concept**.

NPC (*Running the Game*, page 326): Acronym for "**non-player character**;" any character controlled by the **GM**. They are divided into types based on their significance in the game: nameless, supporting, and main.

Opposed Roll (*Playing the Game*, page 193): Any roll where a **player** rolls against another player (or the **GM**) instead of a set **difficulty**.

Opposition (*Running the Game*, page 326): **NPCs** specifically designed with a direct, abiding conflict of interest to the **PCs**. Overt antagonists. They are divided into categories based on how difficult they are to defeat: minor, equal, challenging, and overwhelming.

Overflow (*Playing the Game*, page 214): A number of **shifts** left over from resolving an **action**, which can be used for an additional action in certain circumstances.

Partial Refresh (*Running the Game*, page 317): The occurrence of a **refresh** during a particular **session**, which gives back part of a **PC**'s **refresh level** in **fate points**.

Persistence (*Spellcasting*, page 252): An **evocation** that lasts for more than a single **exchange** has persistence.

Person Aspect (*Aspects*, page 108): A type of **aspect** describing a relationship between **characters**.

Phase (*Character Creation*, page 58): A "unit" of backstory, used to help choose a **character**'s **aspects** during character creation.

Phrase Aspect (*Aspects*, page 108): A type of **aspect** describing an interesting or noteworthy fact about a **character**.

Player (*The Basics*, page 16): An individual who controls a single **character** in the game.

PC (*The Basics*, page 17): An acronym for "**player character**," a de facto protagonist of the game, controlled by a **player**.

Potion (*Spellcasting*, page 280): An **enchanted item** that can only be used a limited number of times before it is consumed.

Power (*Spellcasting*, page 255): The **effect** of a particular spell, measured in **shifts**. All the power summoned for a spell must be **controlled** for the spell to function as intended. The amount of power a spellcaster can summon safely is affected by the Conviction skill.

Power Level (*Character Creation*, page 53): The **base refresh**, upper **skill** limit, and skill points allowed to **PCs** at character creation. Divided into tiers based on amount of exposure to the supernatural world: Feet in the Water, Up to Your Waist, Chest-Deep, and Submerged.

Preparation (*Spellcasting*, page 266): Additional steps that need to be taken to successfully cast a complex **thaumaturgic** spell. Typically, preparation involves perfecting or researching the necessary ritual actions for a spell, acquiring symbolic links to the spell's target, and acquiring additional sources of contributed **power**.

Prop Aspect (*Aspects*, page 108): An **aspect** describing a significant, identity-defining object possessed by a **character**.

Race (*Playing the Game*, page 194): A type of **extended contest** where two or more participants roll several times against a set **difficulty** and attempt to acquire the highest number of accumulated **shifts**.

Refresh (*The Basics*, page 20): The awarding of **fate points** to a **PC** at the beginning of every **session**. The number of fate points received is determined by a character's **refresh level**.

Refresh Level (*The Basics*, page 20): The difference between **base refresh** and **spent refresh**. For **PCs**, this must always be 1 or higher.

Restrict (*Playing the Game*, page 214): On any roll with **combined skills**, when a secondary **skill** can only penalize the primary skill, it is said to restrict that skill.

Rote (*Spellcasting*, page 257): An **evocation** that a spellcaster can perform via "muscle memory," allowing a certain **effect** and **effort** without rolling the dice.

Scenario (*Running the Game*, page 314): A unit of **game time**, the sum total of **scenes** required to resolve a particular storyline or plot, usually taking one to three **sessions**. The end of a scenario usually triggers a significant **milestone**; the end of every few scenarios usually triggers a major milestone.

Scene (*Running the Game*, page 307): A unit of **game time**, consisting of the amount of time it takes to resolve a single **conflict** or accomplish some other significant purpose. Scenes can vary widely in length from a few minutes to a half hour or longer.

Scene Aspect (*Aspects*, page 105): A type of **aspect** that is placed on a **scene**, rather than on a particular **character**. Scene aspects usually describe noteworthy features of the environment in which the scene is set.

Session (*Running the Game*, page 314): A unit of **game time**, consisting of a number of **scenes** played across the span of a number of hours (usually two to four). A single "sitting" of the game.

Shift (*Playing the Game*, page 192): The basic unit of measure for **effect**. Shifts are applied to affect nearly every outcome of a **skill** roll in the game.

Sight, The (*Living With Magic*, page 223): A mystical capability allowing an individual to see reality in a supernatural context rather than a physical one. Use of the Sight is risky and can potentially cause harm to the viewer.

Simple Action (*Playing the Game*, page 192): An **action** taken to accomplish a single, basic task or goal, most frequently against a set **difficulty**.

Situation Aspect (*Aspects*, page 110): An **aspect** describing circumstances routinely experienced by a **character**.

Skill (*Skills*, page 120): Abilities that represent the basics of what a **character** can do in the game. They are rated according to the **ladder**.

Soulgazing (*Living With Magic*, page 226): A narrow, specific application of **the Sight** that allows an individual to gain a supernatural insight into the nature of another individual, at the cost of revealing their own soul as well. As with The Sight, soulgazing can be risky to both participants.

Specialization (*Supernatural Powers*, page 182): A particular capacity at a certain kind of magic, represented as bonuses to spellcasting rolls. Spellcasters can specialize in areas of both **evocation** and **thaumaturgy**.

Spent Refresh (*Running the Game*, page 20): The amount of **base refresh** used to attain **stunts** and **supernatural powers**.

Spin (*Playing the Game*, page 214): An optional rule allowing a bonus on a subsequent **action** if a particular defensive **effort** succeeds with a high degree of **effect**.

Sponsor (*Spellcasting*, page 287): A supernatural being that confers **supernatural powers** to an individual, usually in the form of a specialized kind of magic.

Spray Attack (*Running the Game*, page 326): An **attack** that divides the **effort** up between several targets.

Sprint (*Skills*, page 212): An **action** taken during a **conflict** to move across several **zones**.

Sticky (*Aspects*, page 115): A **temporary aspect** that remains after it is **tagged**, usually for the duration of a **scene**.

Story Aspect (*Aspects*, page 110): An **aspect** that describes a potential source of dramatic complication in a character's life, or a catalyst for that **character** to get into difficult situations.

Story Time (*Running the Game*, page 314): Time as experienced by the **characters** in the game, usually divided into seconds, hours, days, weeks, etc.

Strength (*Spellcasting*, page 279): The potency of a particular **enchanted item**. Analogous to **effect strength**.

Stress (*Playing the Game*, page 201): Minor harm suffered by **characters** in **conflicts**. Stress almost never lasts beyond the **scene** in which the conflict occurs. Divided into categories based on the source of harm: physical, mental, and social.

Stunt (*Mortal Stunts*, page 146): Special tricks that a **character** can do, expanding the function of a character's **skills** or otherwise subverting the normal game rules in a particular circumstance.

Summoning (*Spellcasting*, page 273): The act of bringing a supernatural entity into a spellcaster's immediate vicinity, usually to bargain for information or power, or attempt a **binding**.

Supernatural Power (*Supernatural Powers*, page 158): An ability that is completely impossible for mortals to achieve, flying in the face of generally accepted laws of reality. In game terms, supernatural powers can be viewed as "**stunts** on steroids," providing an immense comparative benefit at the cost of more **spent refresh**.

Supplemental Action (*Playing the Game*, page 213): A minor **action** taken as an adjunct to a character's normal action in an **exchange**, significant enough to affect the roll, but not significant enough to require its own roll. A supplemental action gives a -1 penalty to the main action for the exchange.

Tagging an Aspect (*Aspects*, page 106): **Invoking an aspect** without spending a **fate point**. A player is allowed one tag on an **aspect** that he has established or discovered with an **attack**, **maneuver**, **assessment**, or **declaration**.

Taken Out (*Playing the Game*, page 203): Defeat of a **character** in a **conflict**. Being taken out allows the opponent to determine and dictate the fate of the defeated character.

Template (*Character Creation*, page 72): A particular character "type," characterized by access to certain (or no) **supernatural powers**. Usually, a character must have a particular **high concept** to qualify for a certain template.

Temporary Aspect (*Aspects*, page 114): An **aspect** established by a **maneuver**, either on a **character** or on the **scene**. A temporary aspect lasts until removed by another maneuver or until the end of the scene, whichever comes first.

Thaumaturgic Types (*Spellcasting*, page 272): A subdivision of **thaumaturgy** analogous to **elements** in **evocation**, for the purposes of **specialization** and item bonuses.

Thaumaturgy (*Spellcasting*, page 261): Ritual or ceremonial magic used outside of combat, capable of a wide variety of functions and long-lasting effects, but often requiring significant **preparation** to perform.

Themes (*City Creation*, page 30): A short description of a key concept or idea that defines the identity of a city. May become an **aspect** during city creation.

Threats (*City Creation*, page 31): A short description of a problem that is pervasive in a city. May become an **aspect** during city creation.

Threshold (*Living With Magic*, page 230): A supernatural barrier that inhibits the operation of **supernatural powers**, usually surrounding homes, sacred sites, and other such locales.

Time Chart (*Running the Game*, page 315): A tiered set of **story time** divisions, useful for dealing with issues such as how long it takes to perform a **simple action**, **thaumaturgic** spell duration, and so on.

Trapping (*Aspects*, page 120): A discrete category of function for a **skill**, describing what **actions** can typically be performed with that skill.

Trouble (*Character Creation*, page 55): An **aspect** describing a complication for the **character**'s **high concept**.

Veil (*Spellcasting*, page 255): A type of spell which can be cast as either **evocation** or **thaumaturgy**, designed to render the caster (and potentially others) invisible to normal detection.

Worldwalking (*Spellcasting*, page 283): A type of **thaumaturgy** involving transition between the normal world and realms in the Nevernever.

Zones (*Playing the Game*, page 197): An abstract measure of space used to divide and organize the location where a **conflict** takes place. If the location is a bar, the **zones** might be the bar itself, the back room, and the parking lot.

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Evil Hat Productions

Hey, uh, Billy? I don't do hats. Evil ones especially.

Harry, hold on a sec. Keep reading.

Evil Hat Productions believes that passion makes the best games. It is this passion for gaming that raised Evil Hat to its acclaimed position in the RPG community. Our games can be used to build the best kinds of role-playing experiences—full of laughter, storytelling, and memorable moments.

Billy—
Thanks for using our system to power your game, and giving us a couple pages in the back of the book here. Much appreciated!
— Fred

We started by running games at small conventions under the Evil Hat banner, making face to face connections with some of the same people who've worked on these products. Player to player, gamer to gamer, we've passed our passion along into the gaming community that has already given us so many years of lasting entertainment.

Whoa — Billy, these guys really are your kind of people.

Damn straight.

Today we don't just run games, we don't just make them, we work with you to make your play the best it can be—the kind that upholds and gives birth to passions of your own. That's the Evil Hat mission, and we're happy to have you along on it.

You can find out more at ***www.evilhat.com***



Don't Rest Your Head

Don't Rest Your Head is a sleek, dangerous little game, where your players are all insomniac heroes with superpowers, fighting — and using — exhaustion and madness to stay alive, and awake for just one more night, in a reality gone way wrong called the Mad City. It features its own system, and is contained entirely within one book.

ISBN 978-0-9771534-2-8 • EHP1000 • $15.00

Don't Lose Your Mind (Supplement):

ISBN 978-0-9771534-3-5 • EHP1001 • $20.00

Insomniacs with superpowers? Sounds like you, boss.

Shut up, Bob.

Spirit of the Century



Spirit of the Century is a complete, stand-alone pulp role-playing game based on the award-winning Fate system. Character creation can be done as quickly as a few minutes, or expand to take up an evening; adventure design is a snap with three methods for creating relevant, flavorful, player-focused stories at a moment's notice. Spirit delivers an evening of fun—a "pick-up" game that requires little preparation, but provides hours of entertainment. All you will need to play are some friends, some dice, and this book.

ISBN 978-0-9771534-0-4 • EHP2000 • $30.00

Apes flying planes? Reminds me of that time at the Rue Morgue.

Swashbucklers of the 7 Skies



Enter the world of **Swashbucklers of the 7 Skies** (S7S), the latest game from Chad Underkoffler featuring the PDQ system! In S7S you'll find a richly detailed setting of sky-ships, piracy, intrigue, mysticism, musketeers, and more, whether you're sailing through the haunted Ghost Sky, battling pirates from the inconstant isle of Ilwuz, intriguing in the Spider Empress' court of Barathi, or chasing thieves across the rooftops of Agua Azul.

ISBN 978-0-9771534-4-2 • EHP7001 • $30.00

A Penny For My Thoughts



A Penny For My Thoughts is a stand-alone improv acting/role-playing game hybrid about memory and identity. The players are patients in a mental ward for recovering amnesia victims. Using an experimental drug, they enter into one another's minds and memories to discover who they are—and if that is indeed who they still want to be.

ISBN 978-0-9771534-6-6 • EHP7002 • $15.00

The Ladder

+8	Legendary
+7	Epic
+6	Fantastic
+5	Superb
+4	Great
+3	Good
+2	Fair
+1	Average
0	Mediocre
–1	Poor
–2	Terrible

Rolling

Effort = **Skill** + **Roll.**

Effect = **Effort** – **Difficulty**, measured in **shifts**.

Time Increments

instant
a few moments
half a minute
a minute
a few minutes
15 minutes
half an hour
an hour
a few hours
an afternoon
a day
a few days
a week
a few weeks
a month
a few months
a season
half a year
a year
a few years
a decade
a generation
a mortal lifetime
several mortal lifetimes
and so on

Skill Competence

Mediocre (+0) indicates a lack of either talent or training.

Average (+1) indicates a novice level of training, or a high degree of talent with no formal training.

Fair (+2) and **Good (+3)** indicate journeyman or "professional" capacity, or a nearly inhuman degree of talent.

Great (+4) and **Superb (+5)** indicate veteran or masterful capacity, or the combination of extreme talent and good training.

Fantastic (+6) and above skirt the boundaries of natural human capacity.

Difficulty Guidelines

A player will *nearly always succeed against a difficulty of 2 less than his character's skill* without needing to invoke any aspects.

A player will *usually succeed against a difficulty of 1 less than his character's skill*, but might need to invoke an aspect on occasion.

A player has *a relatively equal chance of succeeding or needing to invoke an aspect against a difficulty equal to his character's skill.*

A player will *usually need to invoke an aspect to succeed against a difficulty of 1 higher than his character's skill*, but has a fair chance of making the roll as well.

A player will *almost always need to invoke an aspect to succeed against a difficulty of 2 higher than his character's skill.*

Degrees of Success

0 shifts = Minimal success:
The character pulled it off. It's neither pretty nor graceful, but it works.

1 shift = Notable success:
This is a clear success. The character's result is solid and reliable; while it may not be inspired, it is absolutely workmanlike.

3 shifts = Significant success:
The success is noticeably well done and of fine quality, very reliable, and so on. If you use the optional spin rules (page 214), this level of success and higher on a defense roll generates spin.

5+ shifts = Potent success:
Not only is the quality of the success remarkable, it may have some unexpected, secondary benefits, such as a deeper insight into a problem at hand.

Skills & Trappings

Alertness: Avoiding Surprise, Combat Initiative, Passive Awareness

Athletics: Climbing, Dodging, Falling, Jumping, Sprinting, Other Physical Actions

Burglary: Casing, Infiltration, Lockpicking

Contacts: Gathering Information, Getting the Tip-Off, Knowing People, Rumors

Conviction: Acts of Faith, Mental Fortitude

Craftsmanship: Breaking, Building, Fixing

Deceit: Cat and Mouse, Disguise, Distraction and Misdirection, False Face Forward, Falsehood and Deception

Discipline: Concentration, Emotional Control, Mental Defense

Driving: Chases, One Hand on the Wheel, Other Vehicles, Street Knowledge and Navigation

Empathy: Reading People, A Shoulder to Cry On, Social Defense, Social Initiative

Endurance: Long-Term Action, Physical Fortitude

Fists: Brawling, Close-Combat Defense

Guns: Aiming, Gun Knowledge, Gunplay, Other Projectile Weapons

Intimidation: The Brush-Off, Interrogation, Provocation, Social Attacks, Threats

Investigation: Eavesdropping, Examination, Surveillance

Lore: Arcane Research, Common Ritual, Mystic Perception

Might: Breaking Things, Exerting Force, Lifting Things, Wrestling

Performance: Art Appreciation, Composition, Creative Communication, Playing to an Audience

Presence: Charisma, Command, Reputation, Social Fortitude

Rapport: Chit-Chat, Closing Down, First Impressions, Opening Up, Social Defense

Resources: Buying Things, Equipment, Lifestyle, Money Talks, Workspaces

Scholarship: Answers, Computer Use, Declaring Minor Details, Exposition and Knowledge Dumping, Languages, Medical Attention, Research and Lab Work

Stealth: Ambush, Hiding, Shadowing, Skulking

Survival: Animal Handling, Camouflage, Riding, Scavenging, Tracking

Weapons: Melee Combat, Melee Defense, Distance Weaponry, Weapon Knowledge

You want to make copies of these two pages for your personal use? Knock yourself out!

Running Conflicts (page 197)

Once a conflict begins, follow this regular pattern.

1. Frame the scene.
2. Establish the groups in the conflict.
3. Establish initiative.
4. Begin the exchange.
   a. Take actions.
   b. Resolve actions.
   c. Repeat step 4, begin new exchange.

Using Aspects (page 98)

Invoke: 1 fate point to get a +2 or reroll

Compel: GM pays 1 fate point to constrain and complicate, or player pays 1 fate point to say no thanks to that.

Tag: A free invoke for a character that has discovered or created an aspect.

Evocation (page 249)

1. Determine the effect you want to achieve, describing the element you want to use.
2. Describe the effect in terms of one of the following basic conflict actions: **attack**, **block**, **maneuver**, or **counterspell**.
3. Decide how many shifts of power you want to put into the spell. Take 1 mental stress, plus 1 for each point of power greater than your Conviction modified by any power bonuses from a focus item.
4. Roll Discipline to cast the spell, plus any control bonus from a focus item. The difficulty is equal to the power of the spell. This roll is also used for targeting if you're aiming it at a target. If you do not meet or beat the difficulty to control, the margin of failure turns into shifts of backlash (bad things happening to you) or fallout (bad things happening to everything else).

Thaumaturgy (page 261)

1. Determine the desired spell **effect** which will determine the **complexity** of the spell.
2. If complexity > Lore, prepare: make up the deficit by invoking aspects, making declarations, accepting or inflicting consequences, or skipping scenes.
3. After prep, proceed as with Evocation steps 3 and 4. Repeat each exchange until total power equals complexity.

Conflict Actions

Attack: Roll against an opponent to try to inflict stress or consequences on him directly (page 200).

Maneuver: Roll against an opponent or against a fixed difficulty to try to place an aspect on the opponent or the scene (page 207).

Block: Roll to set up a preemptive defense against a specified future action; anyone committing that named action will have to roll against the block to succeed (page 210).

Sprint: Roll to change zones, with a higher roll allowing a greater degree of movement (page 212).

Each character gets one basic action per turn, but under certain circumstances your character can take a **supplemental action** and/or a **free action** in addition to that main action (see page 213 for more details). Of course, in lieu of anything else, a character may choose to just duck and cover:

Full Defense: You can always choose to do nothing active in the exchange at all; your character is assumed to be concentrating entirely on defense. As such, any defense rolls you make to avoid attacks or maneuvers are done at +2.

Stress and Consequences (page 201)

Stress = Shifts + Weapon Rating – Armor Rating

Mild consequences cancel out **2 stress**. They last for one scene after recovery starts. (Examples: Bruised Hand, Nasty Shiner, Winded, Flustered, Distracted.)

Moderate consequences cancel out **4 stress**. They last until the end of the next session after recovery starts. Think of things that are bad enough to make you say, "Man, you really should go take care of that/get some rest." (Examples: Belly Slash, Bad First Degree Burn, Twisted Ankle, Exhausted, Drunk.)

Severe consequences cancel out **6 stress**. They last for the next scenario (or two to three sessions, whichever is longer) after recovery starts. Think of things that are bad enough to make you say, "Man, you really need to go to the ER/get serious help." (Examples: Broken Leg, Bad Second-Degree Burn, Crippling Shame, Trauma-Induced Phobia.)

Extreme consequences cancel out 8 stress. They're permanent, and they change an existing aspect on the character.

Weapon Rating Guidelines (page 202)

Small pocket weapons, knives, saps, and "belly guns"	**Weapon:1**
Swords, baseball bats, batons, most pistols	**Weapon:2**
Two-handed weapons, oversized pistols (Desert Eagle and company), rifles and shotguns, most fully-automatic weapons	**Weapon:3**
"Battlefield" weaponry, explosives	**Weapon:4+**

You want to make copies of these two pages for your personal use? Knock yourself out!

The Dresden Files Role-Playing Game

City Sheet (High Level)

City Name

Campaign Title

City-Wide Themes and Threats

◯ Theme (or) Threat ◯

The **Idea**

The **Aspect**

The **Faces**

Name | Concept

◯ Theme (or) Threat ◯

The **Idea**

The **Aspect**

The **Faces**

Name | Concept

◯ Theme (or) Threat ◯

The **Idea**

The **Aspect**

The **Faces**

Name | Concept

The Balance of Power

The Status Quo

What is the **Supernatural** status quo?

What is the **Mundane** status quo?

Movers and Shakers

The Current Order

The Supernatural	Who wants to **maintain the status quo**?	Who wants to **rock the boat**?
Who is **in the dark**?		
Who is **in the know**?		

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The Dresden Files Role-Playing Game

City Sheet (Locations)

City Name

Campaign Title

Name

Description

◯ **Theme** (or) **Threat** ◯

The **Idea**

The **Aspect**

The **Face**

Name Concept

Name

Description

◯ **Theme** (or) **Threat** ◯

The **Idea**

The **Aspect**

The **Face**

Name Concept

Name

Description

◯ **Theme** (or) **Threat** ◯

The **Idea**

The **Aspect**

The **Face**

Name Concept

Name

Description

◯ **Theme** (or) **Threat** ◯

The **Idea**

The **Aspect**

The **Face**

Name Concept

Name

Description

◯ **Theme** (or) **Threat** ◯

The **Idea**

The **Aspect**

The **Face**

Name Concept

Name

Description

◯ **Theme** (or) **Threat** ◯

The **Idea**

The **Aspect**

The **Face**

Name Concept

Name

Description

◯ **Theme** (or) **Threat** ◯

The **Idea**

The **Aspect**

The **Face**

Name Concept

Name

Description

◯ **Theme** (or) **Threat** ◯

The **Idea**

The **Aspect**

The **Face**

Name Concept

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The Dresden Files Role-Playing Game

City Sheet (Faces)

City Name

Campaign Title

Name

Is **the Face** Of...

With the **High Concept**...

And **Motivation**...

With these **Relationships**...

Name

Is **the Face** Of...

With the **High Concept**...

And **Motivation**...

With these **Relationships**...

Name

Is **the Face** Of...

With the **High Concept**...

And **Motivation**...

With these **Relationships**...

Name

Is **the Face** Of...

With the **High Concept**...

And **Motivation**...

With these **Relationships**...

Name

Is **the Face** Of...

With the **High Concept**...

And **Motivation**...

With these **Relationships**...

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Is **the Face** Of...

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And **Motivation**...

With these **Relationships**...

Name

Is **the Face** Of...

With the **High Concept**...

And **Motivation**...

With these **Relationships**...

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The Dresden Files Role-Playing Game
Character Phases Worksheet

Character | Player

Template | High Concept Aspect

Musts | Trouble Aspect

Phase One

Background: Where did you come from?

Events

What nation, region, culture are you from? What were your family circumstances like? What's your relationship with your family? How were you educated? What were your friends like? Did you get into trouble much? If you're supernatural, how early did you learn this? Were there problems?

Phase Aspect

Phase Two

Rising Conflict: What shaped you?

Events

Who were the prominent people in your life at this point? Do you have enemies? Close and fast friends? How did your high concept and trouble aspects shape you and events around you? What were the most significant choices you made? What lessons did you learn in this time?

Phase Aspect

Phase Three

The Story: What was your first adventure?

Events

Story Title

Guest Starring . . .

Phase Aspect

Phase Four

Guest Star: Whose path have you crossed?

Events

Story Title

Whose story was this? Who else was in it?

Phase Aspect

Phase Five

Guest Star Redux: Who else's path have you crossed?

Events

Story Title

Whose story was this? Who else was in it?

Phase Aspect

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The Dresden Files Role-Playing Game
Character Sheet

Character

Player

Aspects

High Concept

Trouble

Other Aspects

Skills

Superb (+5)
# of Slots:

Great (+4)
# of Slots:

Good (+3)
# of Slots:

Fair (+2)
# of Slots:

Average (+1)
# of Slots:

Stress

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Physical (Endurance)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Mental (Conviction)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Social (Presence)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

Armor, Etc:

Stunts & Powers

Cost Ability

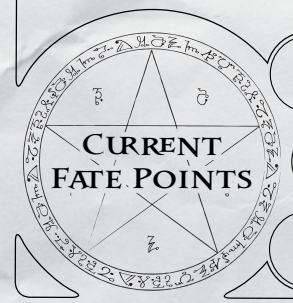
Consequences

Type	P/M/S	Stress	Used?	Aspect
Mild	Any	-2	○	
Moderate	Any	-4	○	
Severe	Any	-6	○	
			○	
			○	
			○	
Extreme	Any	-8	○	*Replace Permanent*

Power Level

Skill Cap

Skill Points Spent ○ Total Available ○



○ Base Refresh Level

○ Adjusted Refresh

○ FP From Last Session

○ Total Refresh Adjustment

The Ladder

Legendary	+8
Epic	+7
Fantastic	+6
Superb	+5
Great	+4
Good	+3
Fair	+2
Average	+1
Mediocre	+0
Poor	−1
Terrible	−2

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