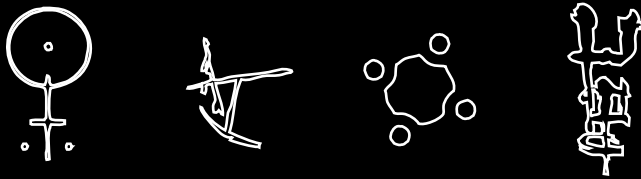


NEW AVATAR THE GAMBLER



Attributes: The Gambler walks the line between certainty and chaos, and as he passes, events are resolved into one category or the other. Risking armies, tossing dice, pitching pennies, floating IPOs . . . as long as there's a big risk for a big return, it's meat and drink for the Gambler. This archetype is also sometimes called "the daredevil."

Confidence is the essence of the Gambler. Other people are content to submit to fate and hope they can just get through life's unpredictable times. The Gambler thinks (rightly or wrongly) that he can beat fate, buck the odds, and come out ahead. Sometimes he's even right.

The Gambler accepts that there's luck and uncertainty, but believes he can overcome it with skill and nerve and moxie. The odds insist that the test pilot is asking for it, but if that pilot's a daredevil, he's betting his skills are sufficient to overcome the random factors. He's betting his life.

Lesser Gamblers bet lesser stakes, but they're always trying to come out ahead.

They're betting that they know when to put the dice down, betting that they can track the face cards in the shoe, betting that they can beat you at darts, or that they can predict the vagaries of the stock market.

Essentially, then, Gamblers place themselves in uncertain situations hoping that they can take control of them for personal gain. "Uncertain" does not mean random: A chess match is uncertain until the king is in checkmate, but there is no element of randomness to it. Similarly, "gain" does not necessarily mean money. Military men often gamble with lives and nations in hope of victory. Some daredevils are simply after the thrill.

At her best, the Gambler is daring, bold, vital and unpredictable. But the downside of the Gambler comes out when she misjudges her own capabilities, overestimates her ability to control the situation, or simply doesn't know when to fold 'em.

Taboos: The daredevil is the master of the calculated risk. Therefore, taking risks that

are wholly random is taboo unless there's no other reasonable choice. (This also means that gaining an entropomantic charge violates the Gambler taboo.)

Symbols: Dice, playing cards, slot machines, racing forms, poker chips and roulette wheels are all fairly obvious symbols. Less obvious symbols include revolvers and derringers, crash helmets, and the Mandelbrot set.

Suspected Avatars in History: Evel Knievel, Christopher Columbus, Carlos Mortenson, and a whole lot of test pilots.

Masks: Coyote (Navajo), Glooskap (Algonquian), Hermes (Greek), Maui (Oceania), Eshu (Yoruba), Loki (Norse)

Channels:

1-50%: Whenever the Gambler knowingly chooses to enter a risky situation, he can make a skill roll. If the roll succeeds, he can get a hunch about his next roll. If he's involved in a formal gambling situation, he can make this attempt before every hand in a card game, every roll of the dice, or every spin of the roulette wheel.

51-70%: The Gambler's hunches have improved to the point that she may make a hunch roll without making the skill roll. This only applies to efforts she's aware she's going to make, however. In a fight, for example, the player has to decide whether she's dodging or shooting before she rolls. However, she can roll and then decide which target she's aiming at, or whether she's going to try any kind of trick shot. Similarly, someone who enters a car race can roll her Drive skill in advance and get an idea of how her luck is tending. But if a sniper is laying in wait for a Gambler, his target can't use her Gambler skill on the Notice roll because she couldn't anticipate making it.

If you have this channel, you can never simply roll two dice and say "I'll use those for my next skill check." You have to know which skill you're using before you can hunch the roll.

71-90%: In the same way that powerful merchant avatars can facilitate the exchange of intangible qualities like health, ability or

lifespan, Gambler avatars can enable willing participants to literally bet their lives. (The Gambler does *not* have to be a player in the game: She just has to set it up.) Everyone involved in the bet must agree beforehand on the stakes, and each participant must shake hands with the Gambler. Furthermore, no one can bet anything he does not have. ("I bet the president's life on it!") Welshing on a bet of this sort — deliberately or accidentally — robs a character of its free will. Every second of that person's life must now be dedicated to making good on its debt, until he either succeeds or dies trying. (Some people have even returned from the grave as demons, but this is rather rare.) In the hypothetical case of the president's life, if that person lost he would have to try his hardest to assassinate the president. (Note to all *Unknown Armies* players. Don't try to assassinate the president.)

As GM, there's a couple stylistic ways you can handle this: The subtle and the symbolic. If you do it subtly, a given individual simply states what he's risking, or writes it down on a notecard and puts that in the pot. Not very flashy, but fairly true to the UA idea of how magick looks.

If your tastes are a little glitzier, when an individual bets something intangible, a symbolic representation of the wager emerges from her mouth and can be placed on the table, lightly coated with saliva. Someone betting a dipsomancy skill, for example, might pull a shot glass out of his mouth. Betting your General Athletics skill? Could be a miniature tennis racket. When the winner gathers the pot together, the little figurines dissolve into nothing in his hands.

91+%: Whenever someone successfully attacks the daredevil with a skill that is lower than the Gambler's avatar skill, there's a flat 50% chance that the attack fails. This protection extends only to attacks that could kill or physically harm. Psychological or social attacks don't count. Blast spells, and stuff like Warping, can be countered, but spells that confuse, inhibit or alter emotions are not affected.

DAREDEVILS AND CHAOS MAGES

It may be instructive to compare Gamblers with entropomancers. Superficially, they're quite similar. They both take risks, and they're both fascinated with the unpredictable elements of life. Entropomancy, however, is predicated on a steady state model of chance. If I accept X bad luck now (by taking a dumb risk to charge up) I can rely on X good luck in the future (when I spend the charge to change an event from random to determined). It's almost mathematical, for bodybags. Power is a positive number that must be balanced by a negative number. Good luck + bad luck = 0. Certainty + Risk = 0. It must be thus, or entropomancy falls apart.

Gambler avatars can't gain entropomancer charges without violating their Gambler taboo, because they can't take wholly random risks. At the same time, someone who was both a Gambler avatar and a chaos mage couldn't invite someone to gamble with him without violating his *entropomancy* taboo. This is because Gamblers always think they can win. They think they have an edge. It could be skill, guts, a psychological edge, the fact that they have a plan — anything. But because he believes he has an advantage, asking someone to gamble with him is tantamount to asking him to take a risk the Gambler himself wouldn't — the risk of playing against the Gambler.

This is not to say that Gamblers and body bags hate one another. Not at all. They disagree, but they have the same interests. Gamblers tend to think chaos mages are easy marks because they're willing to bet big and stupid (since they get a charge win or lose). Chaos mages tend to think Gamblers are fools for thinking they can get the better of chance. But in general, they get along like flies and shit.

STRANGE STAKES

With Gamblers, it's possible — indeed, common — for people to risk things that are not, ordinarily, transferable. What happens when someone without an appropriate obsession wins a bodybag's skill at magick? What happens to someone who achieved Avatar attunement through luck, not effort? What are the consequences of gambling away a year of life — or all of it?

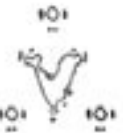
First things first: Skill that are won through magical gambling are still limited by the governing stat. If you win Weight Lifting 60% and your Body score is only 40, you're going to actually *have* Weight Lifting 40%. Sorry. It's kind of like winning ten pounds of gold and only having a five pound sack.

If you win a skill you already have, the new skill gets added to your old skill total, up to the limit of the governing stat. Two guys with Athletics 15% can get into a game, and one can emerge with Athletics 30%.

If an adept wins another school of magick, it's blown-gasket time, as described on page xx of *Unknown Armies*. If a non-adept picks up a magician's skill at entropomancy or pornomancy or whatever, s/he faces significant Unnatural and Self checks — probably equal to the tens place of the skill. (Win a 57% skill, take a pair of rank 5 challenges.) Furthermore, it's probably not the individual's obsession skill, and without that kind of consuming focus, the winner gradually loses that initial understanding of What It's All About. In game terms, the skill degrades by 1 point every couple days — so our sample 57% winner is going to be back to zilch in six months or so.

Avatar attunement is a bit better, unless the winner is already an avatar. If that's the case, the new avatar skill — the spoils of the game — supplants and supersedes her previous allegiance. Again, a Self check roughly equivalent to the tens place of one of the Avatar skills (the highest one) are appropriate.

In any case, someone who just receives an Avatar skill is unlikely to know the taboo struc-



ture and the reinforcing behaviors and motifs. The skill is, in all likelihood, not long for this world anyhow. But if the winner is crafty or a quick study, there's no natural fading effect (as there are with magick schools).

If you bet a year off your life, you get a year older, immediately. The winner gets a year younger. Not too complicated, unless one of you is close to puberty when all the massive growth spurts happen. Someone who "fast forwards" through puberty via Gambler (or Merchant) channels may wind up with stunted growth and incomplete physical development.

Finally, what happens if you bet your life and lose?

Well you die, obviously. But the guy who won now has *two* lives. Meaning, the next time he dies, he returns to life, unharmed, after about 24 hours.

Neat, huh?