



FATE CORE

OFFICIAL RULEBOOK

A flexible, narrative-first tabletop RPG built on aspects, fate points, and the four actions

3-5

PLAYERS

varies

MINUTES

13+

AGE

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FATE CORE

Fate Core is a generic, narrative-first tabletop RPG by Evil Hat Productions, built around aspects (phrases describing what's true and important about a character, place, or situation), fate points, and four core actions: overcome, create an advantage, attack, and defend. Rolls use four Fate dice (each showing +, -, or blank) added to a skill rating and read against the ladder. Characters are defined less by numbers and more by the story-relevant statements attached to them, which can be invoked for a bonus or compelled by the GM to complicate the story in exchange for a fate point.

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- ♦ [Running the Game](#) — The Golden and Silver Rules, setting difficulties, dealing with time, creating the opposition (NPC types), scenes, sessions, and scenarios
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- ♦ [Extras](#) — The Bronze Rule (Fate Fractal), creating an extra, weapon/armor ratings, superpowers, special gear, cybertech, wealth, vehicles, magic

Reference

- ♦ [Character Sheet](#) — Blank character sheet (printable) with interactive generator
- ♦ [Cheat Sheet and Veterans' Guide](#) — Quick-reference notes and what's changed for players of previous Fate games
- ♦ [Appendix I: Open Game License](#) — The full OGL 1.0a text and Fate Core's copyright notice

DATA

- ♦ [skills.json](#) – All 18 default skills with actions, descriptions, and example stunts
 - ♦ [ladder.json](#) – Adjective ladder from Terrible (-2) to Legendary (+8)
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THE BASICS

WELCOME TO FATE!

If you've never played a roleplaying game before, here's the basic idea: you and a bunch of friends get together to tell an interactive story about a group of characters you make up. You get to say what challenges and obstacles those characters face, how they respond, what they say and do, and what happens to them.

It's not all just conversation, though—sometimes you'll use dice and the rules in this book to bring uncertainty into the story and make things more exciting.

Fate doesn't come with a default setting, but it works best with any premise where the characters are proactive, capable people leading dramatic lives. We give more advice on how to bring that flavor to your games in the next chapter.

NEW TO FATE: If you're a new player, all you really need to know is in this chapter and on your character sheet—the GM will help you figure out the rest. You may want to check out the cheat sheet just to save your GM some effort, but otherwise, you should be good to go.

If you're a new GM, this is just the tip of the iceberg for you. You should read and get familiar with the whole book.

FOR VETERANS: You might be reading this because you're familiar with Fate from our other games, *Spirit of the Century* and *The Dresden Files Roleplaying Game*. Several other popular RPGs, like Galileo Games' *Bulldogs!* and Cubicle 7's *Legends of Anglerre*, also use the Fate system.

This is a new version of Fate, which we developed to update and streamline the system. You'll recognize some of what's in here, but we've also changed some rules and some terminology. You can find a guide to all the changes we've made near the end of the book.

WHAT YOU NEED TO PLAY

Getting into a game of Fate is very simple. You need:

- Between three and five people. One of you is going to be the gamemaster (or “GM” for short), and everyone else is going to be a player. We’ll explain what that means in a moment.

- A character sheet, one per player, and some extra paper for note-taking. We’ll talk about what’s on the character sheet below. (GMs, any important characters you play might have a character sheet also.)

Fate dice, at least four, preferably four per person. Fate dice are a special kind of six-sided dice that are marked on two sides with a plus symbol (+), two with a minus symbol (-), and two sides are blank (0). You can get these dice from many hobby and game stores, often under their original name, Fudge dice. (For Fate’s purposes we’ll continue to call them Fate dice, but call them whatever you like!) Evil Hat offer Fate dice for sale at www.evilhat.com.

- The Deck of Fate is an alternative to Fate dice that is available from Evil Hat. It’s a deck of cards that mimics the probability of Fate dice, and is designed to be used in the same way Fate dice are.

If you don’t want to use Fate dice, you don’t have to—any set of regular six-sided dice will work. If you’re using regular dice, you read 5 or 6 as +, 1 or 2 as -, and 3 or 4 as 0.

Tokens to represent fate points. Poker chips, glass beads, or anything similar will work. You’ll want to have at least

- thirty or more of these on hand, just to make sure you have enough for any given game. You can use pencil marks on your character sheet in lieu of tokens, but physical tokens add a little more fun.

- Index cards. These are optional, but we find they’re very handy for recording aspects during play.

PLAYERS AND GAMEMASTERS

In any game of Fate, you’re either a player or a gamemaster.

If you’re a player, your primary job is to take responsibility for portraying one of the protagonists of the game, which we call a player character (or “PC” for short). You make decisions for your character and describe to everyone else what your character says and does. You’ll also take care of the mechanical side of your character—rolling dice when it’s appropriate, choosing what abilities to use in a certain situation, and keeping track of fate points.

If you’re a gamemaster, your primary job is to take responsibility for the world the PCs inhabit. You make decisions and roll dice for every character in the game world who isn’t portrayed by a player—we call those non-player characters (or “NPCs”). You describe the environments and places the PCs go to during the game, and you create the scenarios and situations they interact with. You also act as a final arbiter of the rules, determining the outcome of the PCs’ decisions and how that impacts the story as it unfolds.

Both players and gamemasters also have a secondary job: make everyone around you look awesome. Fate is best as a collaborative endeavor, with everyone sharing ideas and looking for opportunities to make the events as entertaining as possible.

THE EXAMPLE GAME

All of our rules examples in this book refer to the same example game and setting. The name is *Hearts of Steel*, a tongue-in-cheek fantasy romp about a group of troubleshooters for hire. They traipse about the countryside and get into trouble at the behest of the various petty kings and fief lords who hire them.

The participants are Lenny, Lily, Ryan, and Amanda. Amanda is the GM. Lenny plays a thuggish swordsman named Landon. Lily plays the nimble, dashing, and dangerous Cynere, who also happens to love swords. Ryan plays Zird the Arcane, a wizard who, by contrast, has absolutely no love for swords.

Check out *Game Creation* to see how this game came about. We've included character sheets for the example PCs at the end of the book.

THE CHARACTER SHEET

Players, your character sheet contains everything you need to know about your PC—abilities, personality, significant background elements, and any other resources that character has to use in the game. Here's an example of a Fate character sheet, so we can show you all the components.

Aspects

Aspects are phrases that describe some significant detail about a character. They are the reasons why your character matters, why we're interested in seeing your character in the game. Aspects can cover a wide range of elements, such as personality or descriptive traits, beliefs, relationships, issues and problems, or anything else that helps us invest in the character as a person, rather than just a collection of stats.

Aspects come into play in conjunction with fate points. When an aspect benefits you, you can spend fate points to invoke that aspect for a bonus. When your aspects complicate your character's life, you gain fate points back—this is called accepting a compel.

Lily's character, Cynere, has the aspect *Tempted by Shiny Things* on her sheet, which describes her general tendency to overvalue material goods and make bad decisions when gems and coin are involved. This adds an interesting, fun element to the character that gets her into a great deal of trouble, bringing a lot of personality to the game. Aspects can describe things that are beneficial or detrimental—in fact, the best aspects are both.

And aspects don't just belong to characters; the environment your characters are in can have aspects attached to it as well.

Skills

Skills are what you use during the game to do complicated or interesting actions with the dice. Each character has a number of skills that represent his or her basic capabilities, including things like perceptiveness, physical prowess, professional training, education, and other measures of ability.

At the beginning of the game, the player characters have skills rated in steps from Average (+1) to Great (+4). Higher is better, meaning that the character is more capable or succeeds more often when using that skill.

If for some reason you need to make a roll using a skill your character doesn't have, you can always roll it at Mediocre (+0). There are a couple exceptions to this, like magic skills that most people don't have at all. We'll talk about skills in greater detail in their own chapter.

Zird the Arcane has the Lore skill at Great (+4), which makes him ideally suited to knowing a convenient, obscure fact and doing research. He does not have the Stealth skill, however, so when the game calls upon him to sneak up on someone (and Amanda will make sure it will), he'll have to roll that at Mediocre (+0). Bad news for him.

Stunts

Stunts are special tricks that your character knows that allow you to get an extra benefit out of a skill or alter some other game rule to work in your favor. Stunts are like special moves in a video game, letting you do something unique or distinctive compared to other characters. Two characters can have the same rating in a skill, but their stunts might give them vastly different benefits.

Landon has a stunt called *Another Round?* It gives him a bonus to get information from someone with his Rapport skill, provided that he is drinking with his target in a tavern.

Stress

Stress is one of the two options you have to avoid losing a conflict—it represents temporary fatigue, getting winded, superficial injuries, and so on. You have a number of stress levels you can burn off to help keep you in a fight, and they reset at the end of a conflict, once you've had a moment to rest and catch your breath.

Consequences

Consequences are the other option you have to stay in a conflict, but they have a more lasting impact. Every time you take a consequence, it puts a new aspect on your sheet describing your injuries. Unlike stress, you have to take time to recover from a consequence, and it's stuck on your character sheet in the meantime, which leaves your character vulnerable to complications or others wishing to take advantage of your new weakness.

Refresh

Refresh is the number of fate points you get at the start of every game session to spend for your character. Your total resets to this number unless you had more fate points at the end of the last session.

TAKING ACTION

Players, some of the things you'll do in a Fate game require you to roll dice to see if your character succeeds or not. You will always roll the dice when you're opposing another character with your efforts, or when there's a significant obstacle in the way of your effort. Otherwise, just say what your character does and assume it happens.

- ♦ To overcome an obstacle.
- ♦ To create or unlock an advantage for your character, in the form of an aspect you can use.
- ♦ To attack someone in a conflict.
- ♦ To defend yourself in a conflict.

ROLLING THE DICE

When you need to roll dice in Fate, pick up four Fate dice and roll them. When you read the dice, read every + as +1, every 0 as 0, and every - as -1. Add them all together. You'll get a result from -4 to +4, most often between -2 and +2.

Here are some sample dice totals:

- ♦ $-+0+ = +1$
- ♦ $\pm 00 = 0$
- ♦ $++\pm = +2$
- ♦ $-000 = -1$

The result on the dice isn't your final total, however. If your character has a skill that's appropriate to the action, you get to add your character's rating in that skill to whatever you rolled.

So, once you've rolled the dice, how do you determine what a particular result means? Glad you asked.

The Ladder

In Fate, we use a ladder of adjectives and numbers to rate the dice results, a character's skills and the result of a roll.

Here's the ladder:

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

It doesn't really matter which side of the ladder you use—some people remember the words better, some people remember the numbers better, and some people like using both. So you could say, "I got a Great," or "I got a +4," and it means the same thing. As long as everyone understands what you're communicating, you're fine.

Results can go below and above the ladder. We encourage you to come up with your own names for results above Legendary, such as "Zounds!" and "Ridiculously Awesome." We do.

Interpreting Results

When you roll the dice, you're trying to get a high enough roll to match or beat your opposition. That opposition is going to come in one of two forms: active opposition, from someone rolling dice against you, or passive opposition, from an obstacle that just has a set rating on the ladder for you to overcome. (GMs, you can also just decide your NPCs give passive opposition when you don't want to roll dice for them.)

Generally speaking, if you beat your opposition on the ladder, you succeed at your action. A tie creates some effect, but not to the extent your character was intending. If you win by a lot, something extra happens (like doing more harm to your opponent in a fight).

If you don't beat the opposition, either you don't succeed at your action, you succeed at a cost, or something else happens to complicate the outcome. Some game actions have special results when you fail at the roll.

When you beat a roll or a set obstacle, the difference between your opposition and your result is what we call shifts. When you roll equal to the opposition, you have zero shifts. Roll one over your opposition, and you have one shift. Two over means two shifts, and so on. Later in the book, we'll talk about different instances where getting shifts on a roll benefits you.

Landon is trying to escape an ancient mechanical death trap he accidentally set off during a "routine" exploration of the Anthari Catacombs. Dozens of tiny (and some not-so-tiny) spears are shooting out of the walls in a certain hallway, and he needs to get past them to the other side.

Amanda, the GM, says, "This is passive opposition, because it's just a trap in your way. It's opposing you at Great (+4). The Anthari really didn't want anyone getting to their temple treasure."

Lenny sighs and says, "Well, I've got Athletics at Good (+3), so I'll try dodging and weaving through them to cross the hall."

Lenny takes up the dice and rolls, getting -+++, for a result of +2. This steps up his result on the ladder by two, from Good (+3) to Superb (+5). That's enough to beat the opposition by one shift and succeed.

Amanda says, "Well, it takes equal parts acrobatics and frantic stumbling, but you manage to make it through to the other side with only some cosmetic tears in your tunic to show for it. The mechanism shows no sign of stopping, though—you'll still have to deal with it on your way out."

Lenny replies, "Just another day at the office," and Landon continues his trek through the catacombs.

FATE POINTS

You use tokens to represent how many fate points you have at any given time during play. Fate points are one of your most important resources in Fate—they're a measure of how much influence you have to make the story go in your character's favor.

You can spend fate points to invoke an aspect, to declare a story detail, or to activate certain powerful stunts.

You earn fate points by accepting a compel on one of your aspects.

A word of warning: don't use edible things as tokens, especially if the food hasn't arrived yet.

Invoking an Aspect

Whenever you're making a skill roll, and you're in a situation where an aspect might be able to help you, you can spend a fate point to invoke it in order to change the dice result. This allows you to either reroll the dice or add +2 to your roll, whichever is more helpful. (Typically, +2 is a good choice if you rolled -2 or higher, but sometimes you want to risk a reroll to get that +4.) You do this after you've rolled the dice—if you aren't happy with your total.

You also have to explain or justify how the aspect is helpful in order to get the bonus—sometimes it'll be self-evident, and sometimes it might require some creative narrating.

You can spend more than one fate point on a single roll, gaining another reroll or an additional +2, as long as each point you spend invokes a different aspect.

Cynere is trying to covertly goad a merchant into describing the security features of his personal vault by posing as a visiting dignitary. The merchant is giving her passive opposition at Good (+3), and her Deceive skill is Fair (+2).

Lily rolls. She breaks even, getting a 0. That leaves her result at Fair, not enough to get the information she wants.

She looks at her character sheet, then to Amanda, and says, "You know, long years of being *Tempted by Shiny Things* has taught me a thing or two about what's in a treasure hoard and what's not. I'm going to impress this merchant by talking about the rarest, most prized elements of his collection."

Amanda grins and nods. Lily hands over a fate point to invoke the aspect, and gets to add +2 to her standing roll. This brings her result to a Great (+4), which exceeds the opposition. The duly impressed merchant starts to brag about his vault, and Cynere listens intently...

Declaring a Story Detail

Sometimes, you want to add a detail that works to your character's advantage in a scene. For example, you might use this to narrate a convenient coincidence, like retroactively having the right supplies for a certain job ("Of course I brought that along!"), showing up at a dramatically appropriate moment, or suggesting that you and the NPC you just met have mutual clients in common.

To do this, you'll spend a fate point. You should try to justify your story details by relating them to your aspects. GMs, you have the right to veto any suggestions that seem out of scope or ask the player to revise them, especially if the rest of the group isn't buying into it.

Zird the Arcane gets captured with his friends by some tribesfolk from the Sagroth Wilds. The three heroes are unceremoniously dumped before the chieftain, and Amanda describes the chieftain addressing them in a strange, guttural tongue.

Ryan looks at his sheet and says, "Hey, I have *If I Haven't Been There, I've Read About It* on my sheet. Can I declare that I've studied this language at some point, so we can communicate?"

Amanda thinks that's perfectly reasonable to assume. Ryan tosses over a fate point and describes Zird answering in the chieftain's own speech, which turns all eyes in the village (including those of his friends) on him in a moment of surprise.

Ryan has Zird look at his friends and say, "Books. They're good for you."

Compels

Sometimes (in fact, probably often), you'll find yourself in a situation where an aspect complicates your character's life and creates unexpected drama. When that happens, the GM will suggest a potential complication that might arise. This is called a compel.

Sometimes, a compel means your character automatically fails at some goal, or your character's choices are restricted, or simply that unintended consequences cloud whatever your character does. You might negotiate back and forth on the details a little, to arrive at what would be most appropriate and dramatic in the moment.

Once you've agreed to accept the complication, you get a fate point for your troubles. If you want, you can pay a fate point to prevent the complication from happening, but we don't recommend you do that very often—you'll probably need that fate point later, and getting compelled brings drama (and hence, fun) into your game's story.

Players, you're going to call for a compel when you want there to be a complication in a decision you've just made, if it's related to one of your aspects. GMs, you're going to call for a compel when you make the world respond to the characters in a complicated or dramatic way.

Anyone at the table is free to suggest when a compel might be appropriate for any character (including their own). GMs, you have the final word on whether or not a compel is valid. And speak up if you see that a compel happened naturally as a result of play, but no fate points were awarded.

Landon has the aspect *The Manners of a Goat*. He is attending the annual Grand Ball in Ictherya with his friends, courtesy of the royal court.

Amanda tells the players, “As you’re milling about, a sharply dressed young lady catches Landon sticking out of the crowd. She observes him for a while, then goes to engage him in conversation, obviously intrigued by how different he looks among all the stuffy nobles.” She turns to Lenny. “What do you do?”

Lenny says, “Uh... well, I guess I’ll ask her to dance and play along, see what I can find out about her.”

Amanda holds up a fate point and says, “And is that going to go wrong, given Landon’s excellent command of courtly etiquette?”

Lenny chuckles and replies, “Yeah, I presume Landon will offend her pretty quickly, and that’ll get complicated. I’ll take the fate point.”

Amanda and Lenny play a bit to figure out just how Landon puts his foot in his mouth, and then Amanda describes some of the royal guard showing up. One of them says, “You might want to watch how you speak to the High Duchess of Ictherya, outlander.”

Lenny shakes his head. Amanda grins the grin of the devil.

START PLAYING!

These are the basic things you need to know to play Fate. The following chapters go into greater detail on everything we’ve covered above, and will show you how to get your game off the ground.

WHERE TO GO FROM HERE

- ♦ The *Game Creation* chapter takes you through the process of setting up your game, so that should probably be your next stop. Then *Character Creation* will show you how to make the characters you’ll play.
- ♦ Players, you’ll eventually want to read *Actions and Outcomes* and *The Long Game*, to help you get a better handle on the nuts and bolts of doing stuff and developing your character during play.
- ♦ GMs, you’re going to want to familiarize yourselves with the whole book, but *Running the Game* and *Scenes, Sessions, and Scenarios* are of particular importance to you.

GAME CREATION

WHAT MAKES A GOOD FATE GAME?

You can use Fate to tell stories in many different genres, with a variety of premises. There is no default setting; you and your group will make that up yourselves. The very best Fate games, however, have certain ideas in common with one another, which we think best showcase what the game is designed to do.

Whether you're talking about fantasy, science fiction, superheroes, or gritty cop shows, Fate works best when you use it to tell stories about people who are proactive, competent, and dramatic.

PROACTIVITY

Characters in a game of Fate should be proactive. They have a variety of abilities that lend themselves to active problem solving, and they aren't timid about using them. They don't sit around waiting for the solution to a crisis to come to them—they go out and apply their energies, taking risks and overcoming obstacles to achieve their goals.

This doesn't mean that they don't ever plan or strategize, or that they're all careless to a fault. It just means that even the most patient among them will eventually rise and take action in a tangible, demonstrable way.

Any Fate game you play should give a clear opportunity for the characters to be proactive in solving their problems, and have a variety of ways they might go about it. A game about librarians spending all their time among dusty tomes and learning things isn't Fate. A game about librarians using forgotten knowledge to save the world is.

COMPETENCE

Characters in a game of Fate are good at things. They aren't bumbling fools who routinely look ridiculous when they're trying to get things done—they're highly skilled, talented, or trained individuals who are capable of making visible change in the world they inhabit. They are the right people for the job, and they get involved in a crisis because they have a good chance of being able to resolve it for the better.

This doesn't mean they always succeed, or that their actions are without unintended consequence. It just means that when they fail, it isn't because they made dumb mistakes or weren't prepared for the risks.

Any Fate game that you play should treat the characters like competent people, worthy of the risks and challenges that come their way. A game about garbage men who are forced to fight supervillains and get their asses constantly handed to them isn't Fate. A game about garbage men who become an awesome anti-supervillain hit squad is.

DRAMA

Characters in a game of Fate lead dramatic lives. The stakes are always high for them, both in terms of what they have to deal with in their world, and what they're dealing with in the six inches of space between their ears. Like us, they have interpersonal troubles and struggle with their issues, and though the external circumstances of their lives might be a lot bigger in scope than what we go through, we can still relate to and sympathize with them.

This doesn't mean they spend all their time wallowing in misery and pain, or that everything in their lives is always a world-shaking crisis. It just means that their lives require them to make hard choices and live with the consequences—in other words, that they're essentially human.

Any Fate game that you play should provide the potential and opportunity for drama among and between the characters, and give you a chance to relate to them as people. A game about adventurers mindlessly punching increasing numbers of bigger, badder bad guys is not Fate. A game about adventurers struggling to lead normal lives despite being destined to fight ultimate evil is.

WHEN CREATING YOUR GAME:

- ♦ **Setting:** Decide what the world that surrounds the protagonists is like.
- ♦ **Scale:** Decide how epic or personal your story will be.
- ♦ **Issues:** Decide what threats and pressures inherent to the setting will spur the protagonists to action.
- ♦ **NPCs:** Decide who the important people and locations are.
- ♦ **Skills and Stunts:** Decide what sorts of things characters in the setting are likely to want to do.
- ♦ **Character Creation:** Make the PCs.

SETTING UP YOUR GAME

First, we'll start by talking about your setting. We'll handle the specifics on the protagonists later, in Character Creation.

MAKING THE SETTING WORK IN FATE

Decide what the world that surrounds the protagonists is like.

You're probably already familiar with the idea of a setting, but in short, it's everything that the characters interact with, such as people, organizations and institutions, technology, strange phenomena, and mysteries (crime, intrigue, and cosmic or historical legend). These are the sort of things that characters want to engage with, are forced to engage with, look to for help, or stand in their way.

If you're using a setting that already exists, from a movie, novel, or other game book, then many of these ideas are ready for you to use. Of course, you'll also likely add your own spin on things: new organizations or different mysteries to uncover.

Amanda, Lenny, Lily, and Ryan sit down to talk about the setting. They're all jonesing for a low fantasy game, as Lenny and Lily have recently read some of the *Fafhrd and the Gray Mouser* stories. So they pitch "two guys and a girl with swords." The world is "vaguely medieval, Earth with the serial numbers filed off."

Ryan suggests "guy and girl with swords, and guy without a sword" so that there's a difference between the two guys. Also, because he wants to play someone who is more bookish (for contrast). Everyone's on board with this, and they move on.

A GAME'S SCALE

Decide how epic or personal your story will be.

The setting might be small or it might be vast, but where your stories take place determines the scale of your game.

In a small-scale game, characters deal with problems in a city or region, they don't travel a great deal, and the problems are local. A large-scale game involves dealing with problems that affect a world, a civilization, or even a galaxy if the genre you're playing in can handle that kind of thing. (Sometimes, a small-scale game will turn into a large-scale one over time, as you've probably seen in long-running novel series or television shows.)

Amanda likes the vibe of "guy and girl with sword," and thinks it'll shine as a small-scale game, where they might travel from town to town, but the problems they have to deal with are local—like a thieves' guild or the regent's vile machinations.

THE SETTING'S BIG ISSUES

Decide what threats and pressures inherent to the setting will spur the protagonists to action.

Every setting needs to have something going on that the characters care about, often a peril they want to fight or undermine. These are the setting's issues.

You'll come up with two issues as a group and write them down on index cards or a game creation worksheet. These issues are aspects and will be available to invoke or compel throughout the entirety of the game.

The issues should reflect the scale of your game and what the characters will face. They're broad ideas; they don't just affect your characters, but many people in the world. Issues take two forms:

Current Issues: These are problems or threats that exist in the world already, possibly for a long time. Protagonists

- tackling these issues are trying to change the world, to make it a better place. Examples: a corrupt regime, organized crime, rampant poverty and disease, a generations-long war.

Impending Issues: These are things that have begun to rear their ugly heads, and threaten to make the world worse if they come to pass or achieve a goal. Protagonists tackling these issues are trying to keep the world from slipping

- into chaos or destruction. Examples: an invasion from a neighboring country, the sudden rising of a zombie horde, the imposition of martial law.

The default number of issues in a Fate game is two: Either two current issues (for a story solely about trying to make the world a better place), two impending issues (for a story about striving to save people from threats), or one of each. The latter option is common in fiction: think about the stalwart heroes who work against some impending doom while already discontent with the world around them.

CHANGING THE NUMBER OF ISSUES: you don't have to stick to two—larger casts or broader premises can support more, and a tighter, smaller-scale game can get by with just one.

The group thinks about the sort of problems they want to deal with in the world. Ryan immediately says "organized crime," and they flesh that out a little. They come up with the idea of "The Scar Triad," a group of thugs who are known for thievery, extortion, and other nasty things that the world could do without. This is clearly a current issue.

Lily wants the story to also be about something on the verge of happening, something Really Bad. They come up with an impending issue: a vile cult that seeks to summon something horrible into the world (which means they're also saying that their setting includes horrible, Lovecraft-inspired things). Lenny calls it "The Doom that Is to Come," and Ryan really likes this idea because it gives his bookish character a hook into things going on in the world.

MAKING THE ISSUES INTO ASPECTS

As we said earlier, issues are aspects. Turn the ideas you have into aspects that you could conceivably use at different times in the story (often as compels to the protagonists or as invocations for foes, but clever players will always find other uses for aspects). Write them down, and then if you need to add a little bit to remember the context or some details, write those down alongside the aspects.

If you're new to making aspects, hold off on this for now. You'll get quite a bit of practice making aspects for your characters. Once you're done with character creation, turn these issue ideas into aspects.

CHANGING ISSUES IN PLAY: *The Long Game* chapter will talk about this in detail, but issues can change as the game progresses. Sometimes, the issue evolves into something new. Sometimes, the characters will successfully fight against it, and it'll be gone. And sometimes, new issues will emerge. So the ones you make are just what you're starting off with.

DRILLING DOWN

You can also use issues to flesh out smaller, but nonetheless important pieces of your setting. An important location (a major city or nation, or even a memorable local restaurant) or organization (a knightly order, a king's court, or a corporation) can have impending and/or current issues as well.

We recommend you start by giving only one issue to each setting element, just to keep things from getting too bogged down, but you can always add more as the campaign progresses. Likewise, you don't have to do this right now—if you find a setting element becoming more important later in the game, you can give it issues then.

The Cult of Tranquility keeps popping up in pre-game discussions, so the group decides that it also needs an issue. After some discussion, the group decides it'd be interesting if there was some tension in the cult's ranks, and makes a current issue called "Two Conflicting Prophecies"—different branches of the cult have different ideas of what the doom is going to be.

FACES AND PLACES

Decide who the important people and locations are.

At this point, you've probably got your issues figured out, and you may have thought of some organizations or groups that feature prominently in your game.

Now you have to put some faces on those issues and those groups, so that your PCs have people to interact with when they're dealing with those elements. Do they have any particular people who represent them, or stand out as exemplars of what the issue's referring to? If you have any ideas at this point, write them down on an index card: a name, a relationship to the organization or issue, and an aspect detailing their significance to the story.

Do the same for any notable places in your setting. Are there any important places where things happen, either important to the world, important to an issue, or important to the protagonists? If there's a place where you envision multiple scenes taking place, then talk about that. Unlike NPCs, they don't require aspects.

The GM may flesh these characters and places out later, depending on their role in the story. Or one of these ideas might be a great inspiration for a protagonist! And, of course, new ones will unfold as the story progresses.

If there's a piece of your setting that's meant to be a mystery which the protagonists uncover, define it only in loose terms. The specifics can be detailed as they are revealed in play.

After a few minutes of discussion, the group writes down:

- ♦ *Hugo the Charitable, a lieutenant in the Scar Triad. His aspect is Everyone in Riverton Fears Me.*
- ♦ *Which brings us to a place, the city of Riverton. There are two rivers here, so it's a hub for trade.*
- ♦ *Amanda comes up with a sympathetic character, Kale Westal, who owns a shop in Riverton. She isn't cowed by Hugo's extortion, and will likely fall victim to an "accident." Her aspect is Stubborn Because I'm Right.*
- ♦ *The Primarch, the leader of the Cult of Tranquility, whose identity is a mystery. Because that part of the setting is a mystery, they aren't going to come up with an aspect or otherwise go any further, leaving those details to Amanda to figure out in secret.*

They could go on, but they know they'll have more ideas after character creation and as they play. That's just enough to paint a picture of what's going on at the very beginning of the story.

MAKE CHARACTERS

Each player makes a protagonist.

It's worth noting that the protagonists should have some connections to the faces and places you named in the previous step. If it's difficult to relate the characters to the setting, then you may want to rethink your protagonists or revise your game so it will make a better fit for the new characters.

When you're making characters, you'll also discover a bit more about the setting as people talk about who their characters know and what their characters do. If anything comes up that should be added to your game creation notes, do so before pushing forward with playing the game.

SKILLS AND YOUR SETTING: a big part of your setting is what people can do in it. The various skills in *Skills and Stunts* cover many situations, but you'll want to look over them to see if any don't apply or if there's a skill you need to add.

Adding a skill is covered in more detail in the *Extras* chapter.

CHARACTER CREATION

CHARACTER CREATION IS PLAY

The moment you sit down to make the game and characters, you're playing Fate. This style of character creation does three things to reinforce that.

First, it distributes the responsibility of making up the details of the setting to the whole group. Everyone will walk away from character creation with a personal investment in the game, because everyone helped shape it.

Second, it sets the stage for the next part of the story. Each arc of a story sets up the next, so that they flow into one another in a natural evolution. Character creation needs to set up the first story arc.

Third, character creation in Fate is collaborative. As with game creation, character creation is best done as a group activity. Doing all of this together builds a strong foundation of communication between the players and GM, and this process has a number of ways to establish connections between the characters and the setting.

Combined with game creation, character creation can take a full session to do—this allows everyone to learn about the world and each other's characters. You and the other players will talk about your characters, make suggestions to each other, discuss how they connect, and establish more of the setting.

You'll want to keep good notes on this process. You can use the character sheet and character creation worksheet in the back of this book or downloadable at FateRPG.com.

WHEN CREATING YOUR CHARACTER:

- ♦ **Aspects:** Come up with your character's high concept and trouble aspects.
- ♦ **Name:** Name your character.
- ♦ **Phase One:** Describe your character's first adventure.
- ♦ **Phases Two and Three:** Describe how you've crossed paths with two other characters.
- ♦ **Aspects:** Write down one aspect for each of these three experiences.
- ♦ **Skills:** Pick and rate your skills.
- ♦ **Stunts:** Pick or invent three to five stunts.
- ♦ **Refresh:** Determine how many fate points you start play with.
- ♦ **Stress and Consequences:** Determine how much of a beating your character can take.

YOUR CHARACTER IDEA

Come up with your character's high concept and trouble aspects.

Player characters should be exceptional and interesting. 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.

KEEP BUILDING YOUR SETTING: as you're making stuff up for your characters, you'll also make stuff up about the world around them. You'll end up talking about NPCs, organizations, places, things like that. That's fantastic!

You might also come up with a character concept that adds something fundamental to the world, like saying “I want to play a wizard” when no one talked about magic yet. When that happens, discuss with the group if that’s a part of your setting and make any necessary adjustments.

Because picking a high concept and trouble are 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 two separate steps. Only after you have that (and a name, of course!) can you move on to the rest of character creation.

That said, don’t worry too much—if your character idea evolves later on, that’s great! You can always go back and tinker with the early decisions.

DIALS, DIALS EVERYWHERE: Fate Core isn’t the be-all and end-all of Fate. It’s just a starting point—a set of default decisions that will work if you use it as-is, but almost every part of the system can be tweaked to fit your game. So, tweak away. We don’t mind.

HIGH CONCEPT

Your high concept is a phrase that sums up what your character is about—who he is and what he does. It’s an aspect, 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: *Lead Detective, Knight of the Round, Low-level Thug.*

- ♦ You could throw on an adjective or other descriptor to further define the idea: *Despicable Regent of Riverton, Reluctant Lead Detective, Ambitious Low-level Thug.*

- ♦ You could mash two jobs or roles together that most people would find odd: *Wizard Private Eye, Singing Knight of the Round Table, Monster-slaying Accountant.*

These aren’t the only ways to play with your high concept, but they’ll get you started. But don’t stress out over it—the worst thing you can do is make it into too big of a deal. You’ll come up with four other aspects after this one—you don’t have to get it all nailed right now.

IF YOU GET STUMPED ON ASPECTS: it’s okay to leave some blank. Look at Quick Character Creation for more on leaving parts of your character sheet blank.

High concepts can have overlap among the characters, as long as you have something to distinguish how your character is different from the others. If high concepts must be similar among all the characters, such as if the GM pitches an all-swordsmen story, it’s crucial that the troubles differ.

Lenny and Lily settled on the “guy and girl with sword” idea, and Ryan’s going with “guy without sword.” But those are just starting ideas. Now it’s time to turn them into proper high concepts.

Lily, on the other hand, doesn’t really know where to go from “girl with sword.” She’s not interested in the organization thing, so she’s thinking about adjectives. Eventually, she settles on *Infamous Girl with Sword*. (Keeping the “girl with sword” part makes her giggle, so she wants to say it often during the game.)

TROUBLE

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

Trouble brings chaos into a character's life and drives him into interesting situations. Trouble aspects are broken up into two types: personal struggles and problematic relationships.

Before you go any further, talk with the GM about your character's trouble. Make sure you're both on the same page in terms of what it means. Both of you may want to find one way this aspect might be invoked or compelled to make sure you're both seeing the same things—or to give each other ideas. The GM should come away from this conversation knowing what you want out of your trouble.

Lenny wants to contrast the whole "I know an ancient martial art" vibe. He's not playing an ascetic monk or anything like that. So he wants something that will get him into social trouble, something that has to do with him and not with any specific people or organizations. So he writes down *The Manners of a Goat*. His character will unconsciously make an ass of himself.

Lily likes this idea of her character being her own worst enemy, so she's also going for a personal struggle. She's had the idea for a while of playing someone who can't help but be *Tempted by Shiny Things*, so she writes that down.

THE "BRIGHT" SIDE OF TROUBLES: since your trouble is an aspect, it's something you should also be able to invoke, right? 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.

Lenny's *The Manners of a Goat* could be used to the group's benefit. Maybe he turns that up intentionally, to draw attention away from Lily's character sneaking around.

With Lily's *Tempted by Shiny Things*, we could reasonably say that Lily's character is well-acquainted with the value of various shiny things (and well-acquainted with getting caught and locked in prison, so she knows a thing or two about escaping).

Ryan's *Rivals in the Collegia Arcana* can come in handy when dealing with rivals he knows well—he knows what to expect from their tactics. He could also use this aspect to gain aid from people who share his rivals.

INTRO TO CHOOSING ASPECTS: 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. The 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 and Fate Points*.

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 Two and Three—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 Quick Character Creation rules.

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.

NAME

If you haven't already, it's time to give your character a name!

Lenny names his character "Landon," a name that's been in his head for years. He used it years ago for another roleplaying game, and decides to bring it back for nostalgia's sake.

Lily names her character "Cynere," which is Greek for "thistle." She sees Cynere as a beautiful plant, but one that'll prick you if you get too close. That fits nicely.

Ryan names his character "Zird," because it just hit his mind as an appropriately ridiculous wizardly name. Then he pauses for a moment before adding "...the Arcane," because he sees Zird as the sort of guy who would demand to be known as "Zird the Arcane."

THE PHASE TRIO

Describe your character's first adventure. Describe how you've crossed paths with two other characters. Write down one aspect for each of these three experiences.

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

The three remaining aspects on your character are made in phases, together called the phase trio. The first phase is about recent background: something you did that's interesting and adventurous. The second and third are about how the other player characters got involved in that adventure, and how you got involved in theirs.

This is an opportunity to tell a story about your characters. Each phase will ask you to write down two things. Use the character creation worksheet (at the back of this book, or at FateRPG.com) to write down those details.

- ♦ **First, write a summary of what happened in that phase.** A couple of sentences to a paragraph should suffice—you don't want to establish too much detail up front, because you might have to adjust details in later phases.
- ♦ **Second, write 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.

PHASE ONE: YOUR ADVENTURE

The first phase is your character's first true adventure—his first book, episode, case, movie, whatever—starring him.

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 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 to your character's high concept and trouble. Find a dilemma that has a chance of throwing those ideas into focus. What problem do you get roped into because of your high concept or trouble? How does the other aspect help or complicate your life?

Landon gets into a bar fight with some of the Scar Triad. He is robbed of his sword and beaten severely. His life is saved by a veteran soldier named Old Finn. Finn helps to heal Landon, clean him up, and enlist him in the town militia.

I Owe Old Finn Everything

Ask yourself the following story questions. If you have trouble answering them, talk to the other players and the GM for help.

- ◆ Something bad happened. What was it? Did it happen to you, to someone you cared about, or to someone that you were coerced into helping?
- ◆ What did you decide to do about the problem? What goal did you pursue?
- ◆ Who stood against you? Did you expect the opposition you got? Did some of it come out of nowhere?
- ◆ Did you win? Did you lose? Either way, what consequences arose from the outcome?

Once you've come up with the adventure, write an aspect that relates to some part of what happened.

Lenny goes through Phase One. He looks at the story questions to help him figure out the events of the phase, and decides on the following:

The bad thing was that Landon kept getting into scrapes at his local tavern. He grew up with no sense of discipline or demeanor and constantly picked fights with people larger and stronger than him.

One thug Landon insulted at the tavern was connected to the Scar Triad, so some of the thug's bandit buddies showed up and beat Landon to within an inch of his life. His bleeding body was then found by a veteran soldier named Finn who healed Landon's wounds and encouraged him to join the town militia where he could learn some discipline and fight with honor.

Now Lenny has to write down an aspect related to this story. He decides to take *I Owe Old Finn Everything* as his aspect, because he wants to keep the connection to Finn in his story and give Amanda a cool NPC to play.

PHASES AND INDEX CARDS: in phase one, you each came up with your own adventure. In phases two and three, 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 recommend that you use index cards (or whatever scraps of paper you have).

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

As with the high concept and trouble aspects, this (and the following phases) are further opportunities to flesh out the setting.

PHASE TWO: CROSSING PATHS

In the next two phases, you'll tie the group together by having other characters contribute a minor, supporting role in your adventure, and vice versa.

Once everyone has their adventure written down (which is where our index card suggestion comes in really handy), you're ready for phase two. You can pass 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 one 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 it with the player whose adventure it is and add a sentence or phrase to the summary to reflect your character's supporting role. Supporting roles come in three forms: they complicate the adventure, solve a situation, or both.

- ♦ **Complicating:** your character makes the situation more difficult, dangerous, or dramatic.
- ♦ **Solving:** your character contributes something that helps resolve the situation.

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:

- ♦ "Landon starts a fight with the Scar Triad while Zird is trying to lay low. Later, he helps Zird by fighting off undead while Zird's casting a spell."

The idea is to be a bit self-serving here. You want to put a little spotlight on your character in order to figure out a good aspect from it: something you're known for, something you can do, something you own or have, and someone you have a relationship with (for good or ill).

Finally, write the adventure idea and your character's contribution down on your phase worksheet. This is important, because your character gets an aspect from the supporting role he played. The person whose adventure it is should also write down the contribution, if there's room on his sheet.

Lily has Landon's starting adventure and needs to decide how she fits into it.

She decides that Cynere helped solve the situation. After Landon ends up in the militia, he still has a grudge against the Triad members who ganged up on him. In fact, they robbed him of his heirloom sword in the process. Hearing Landon's tale of woe, Cynere agrees to help steal the sword back.

She takes the aspect *A Sucker for a Sob Story*, to reflect the reason why she got involved.

PHASE THREE: CROSSING PATHS AGAIN

Once everyone's done with phase two, you'll trade adventures with whatever method you chose before, so long as everyone has an adventure that isn't theirs or the one they just contributed to. Then you're ready for phase three, where you'll contribute to this second adventure and determine your next aspect. Follow the directions from phase two.

Lily gets Zird's starting adventure, a pretty straightforward romp where Zird battles his Collegia rivals to obtain a magical artifact and return it to its rightful place.

She decides that she complicates that situation, by wanting the shiny artifact for herself. Ryan already established that Zird gets the artifact back to where it belongs, so she only holds it temporarily.

She decides to take *I've Got Zird's Back*, as a way of reflecting her willingness to stick her neck out for Zird—the group doesn't know what he did to earn such loyalty, but they figure they'll find out eventually.

And with that, you have your five aspects and a good chunk of background!

FEWER THAN THREE PLAYERS? The phase trio assumes that you'll have at least three players. If you have only two, consider the following ideas:

- ♦ **Skip phase three** and just make up another aspect, either now or in play.
- ♦ **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, skip phases two and three, leaving the aspects blank to be filled in during play.

SKILLS

Pick and rate your character's skills.

Once you have mapped out your character's phases and chosen aspects, it's time to pick skills. You'll find descriptions and details for each skill in the *Skills and Stunts* chapter.

Your skills form a pyramid, with a single skill rated at Great (+4)—which we'll usually refer to as the peak skill—and more skills at each lower rating on the ladder going down to Average (+1):

- ♦ One Great (+4) skill
- ♦ Two Good (+3) skills
- ♦ Three Fair (+2) skills
- ♦ Four Average (+1) skills

FOR VETERANS: WHY THE PYRAMID? If you've played *The Dresden Files RPG*, you know that we use skill columns for that instead of the pyramid.

In this build of Fate, we wanted character creation to be as quick and accessible as possible, so we went with the pyramid as standard. If you want to use the columns, go ahead—you get 20 skill points.

Skill columns didn't completely go away. It's just reserved for advancement.

THE SKILL CAP: by default, we make Great (+4) the highest rated skill PCs start with. As characters advance, they can improve beyond this cap, but it's more difficult than improving skills rated below the cap (see Major Milestones).

If you're making a game about superheroes, pandimensional creatures, mythic gods or other beyond-human characters, feel free to set the tip of the skill pyramid—and thus the cap—at Superb (+5) or Fantastic (+6).

Mediocre (+0) is the default for any skill you do not take. Sometimes, a skill will state that it's unavailable if a character didn't take it; in those cases, it's not even at Mediocre.

Ryan knows that Zird's not like the other PCs in terms of skills, so he looks to distance Zird from them as much as possible. The group has decided that Zird's magic is going to work off his Lore skill, so he's naturally going to focus on that.

Note: a few skills have special benefits, notably those skills that affect the number of stress boxes and consequences you have available. If you know you want a certain number of those, put those skills on the pyramid first.

STUNTS AND REFRESH

Pick or invent three to five stunts. Determine how many fate points you start play with.

Stunts change how skills work for your character. Picking and inventing stunts are covered in the *Skills and Stunts* chapter.

Every character gets three free stunts during character creation. You may take up to two more, but each one you take beyond the third lowers your starting refresh by one.

Lily decides to take the Warmaster stunt as one of her freebies: +2 to Fight rolls made to create an advantage against an opponent, provided the opponent has a fighting style or weakness she can exploit.

For her remaining free stunts, she picks Second-Story Girl and Danger Sense. You can see the write-ups for these on her character sheet.

ADJUSTING REFRESH

A player character in Fate starts with a refresh of 3. That means he'll start each session off with at least 3 fate points.

If you pick four stunts, your refresh is 2. If you pick five stunts, your refresh is 1.

Note: some Fate games will change this setup. Regardless of how stunts work in your game, you can never have a refresh lower than 1.

You can adjust these defaults if you want to, and give out more free stunts if you want the PCs to have a lot of cool tricks and special bonuses. You can also change the default refresh rate—higher refresh means that the PCs won't need to take compels as often (think 4-color superhero comics), and lower refresh means they'll need to take several early in every session in order to have a decent supply (think *Die Hard*). Also, the higher your refresh, the more likely it is that players will buy stunts.

STRESS AND CONSEQUENCES

Determine how much of a beating your character can take.

When Fate characters find themselves in harm's way—a fairly common occurrence when you're highly competent, proactive, and facing drama at every turn—they have two ways to stand their ground and stay on their feet: stress and consequences.

Every character starts with two boxes of physical stress and two boxes of mental stress by default. Physique and Will can add more stress boxes to these tracks respectively, as detailed in the Skills and Stunts chapter.

Every character also starts with three consequence slots: one mild, one moderate, and one severe. Consequences are aspects representing lasting harm your character has taken, and they stick around until healed.

Certain skills and some stunts can add to these defaults. See the *Skills and Stunts* chapter for more on that. For the sake of quick reference, these are the skills in *Hearts of Steel* that alter stress and consequences: Physique (physical stress) and Will (mental stress).

Note: if you're playing in a setting with different skills, the skills that affect stress boxes and consequences may change. Take a note of those skill benefits when you're making your character.

Landon has Good (+3) Physique, which nets him two more physical stress boxes. His Will, however, is only Average (+1), but that's still good enough for one more mental stress box.

Cynere's Physique is Fair (+2), so she gets a third physical stress box. But her mental stress track remains at two boxes, thanks to her Mediocre (+0) Will.

Zird the Arcane, being a rather bookish type, has Mediocre (+0) Physique, so he has only the default physical stress track of two boxes. His Fair (+2) Will, though, is good for one bonus mental stress box.

Because none of these characters has Physique or Will rated at Superb (+5) or above, each has the default number of consequences: one mild, one moderate, and one severe.

YOU'RE ALL SET!

At the end of this process, you should have a character with:

- ♦ A name
- ♦ Five aspects, along with some backstory
- ♦ One Great, two Good, three Fair, and four Average skills
- ♦ Between three and five stunts
- ♦ A mental and physical stress track of 2–4 boxes each
- ♦ A refresh rate of 1–3 fate points

Now you're ready to play!

GMs, see the *Scenes, Sessions, and Scenarios* chapter for advice on how to take the aspects from the PCs' sheets and from game creation and turn those into thrilling scenarios for the players to experience.

Players, check out the next chapter for more on how to use your aspects, or jump straight to *Actions and Outcomes* to learn more about how to use your skills to do stuff.

QUICK CHARACTER CREATION

If you want to skip making a detailed character and just want to play, you can leave most of the character blank and fill in as you play.

At minimum, you need to have the following filled out to start:

- ♦ High concept aspect
- ♦ Best skill
- ♦ Name

When it comes to your high concept, you can start off vague and refine the aspect later. *Guy with Sword* is an okay high concept for this method, and later you might discover something about your character that puts a spin on it. When that happens, rewrite the aspect to reflect that spin.

ASPECTS AND FATE POINTS

DEFINING ASPECTS

An aspect is a phrase that describes something unique or noteworthy about whatever it's attached to. They're the primary way you spend and gain fate points, and they influence the story by providing an opportunity for a character to get a bonus, complicating a character's life, or adding to another character's roll or passive opposition.

DEFINING FATE POINTS

Fate points are the currency you use to invoke aspects, and you gain them back by accepting compels. When your aspects come into play, you will usually spend or gain a fate point.

TYPES OF ASPECTS

Every game of Fate has a few different kinds of aspects: game aspects, character aspects, situation aspects, consequences, and boosts. They mainly differ from one another in terms of what they're attached to and how long they last.

GAME ASPECTS

Game aspects are the broadest kind, representing the issues and setting elements decided on during game creation. They tend to be very permanent, sticking around for the whole campaign unless the group decides to change them.

Everyone can invoke, compel, or create an advantage on a game aspect at any time; they're always there and available for anyone's use.

CHARACTER ASPECTS

Character aspects are just as permanent, but smaller in scope, attached to an individual PC or NPC. They describe a near-infinite number of things that set the character apart, such as:

- ♦ Significant personality traits or beliefs.
- ♦ The character's background or profession.
- ♦ An important possession or noticeable feature.
- ♦ Relationships to people and organizations.
- ♦ Problems, goals, or issues the character is dealing with.
- ♦ Titles, reputations, or obligations the character may have.

You can invoke or call for a compel on any of your character aspects whenever they're relevant. GMs, you can always propose compels to any PC. Players, you can suggest compels for other people's characters, but the GM is always going to get the final say on whether or not it's a valid suggestion.

SITUATION ASPECTS

Situation aspects are temporary, lasting only for a scene (or sometimes a scenario), representing something about the environment or immediate circumstances. Situation aspects describe significant features of the circumstances the characters are dealing with in a scene. That includes:

- ♦ Physical features of the environment.
- ♦ Positioning or placement.
- ♦ Immediate obstacles.
- ♦ Contextual details that are likely to come into play.
- ♦ Sudden changes in a character's status.

Who can use a situation aspect depends a lot on narrative context—sometimes it'll be very clear, and sometimes you'll need to justify how you're using the aspect to make sense based on what's happening in the scene. GMs, you're the final arbiter on what claims on an aspect are valid.

Sometimes situation aspects become obstacles that characters need to overcome. Other times they give you justification to provide active opposition against someone else's action.

CONSEQUENCES

Consequences are a special kind of aspect gained in a conflict, representing lasting harm to a character. They're always negatively phrased, describing the type of hurt the character has suffered.

Consequences stick around for a variable length of time, from a few scenes to a scenario or two, depending on how severe they are. Because of their negative phrasing, you're likely to get compelled a lot when you have them, and anyone who can justifiably benefit from the consequence can invoke it or create an advantage on it.

BOOSTS

Boosts are a super-transient kind of aspect. You get a boost when you're trying to create an advantage but don't succeed well enough, or as an added benefit to succeeding especially well at an action. You get to invoke them for free, but as soon as you do, the aspect goes away.

If you want, you can also allow another character to invoke your boost, if it's relevant and could help them out.

WHAT ASPECTS DO

In Fate, aspects do two major things: they tell you what's important about the game, and they help you decide when to use the mechanics.

IMPORTANCE

Your collection of game and character aspects tell you what you need to focus on during your game. Think of them as a message from yourself to yourself, a set of flags waving you towards the path with the most fun.

DECIDING WHEN TO USE MECHANICS

Because aspects tell us what's important, they also tell us when it's most appropriate to use the mechanics to deal with a situation, rather than just letting people decide what happens just by describing what they do.

Players, this comes up for you most often when invoking your aspects and considering compels. Your aspects highlight what makes your character an individual, and you want to play that up, right? So when the opportunity comes up to make your character more awesome by invoking, go for it! When you see an opportunity to influence the story by suggesting a compel for your character, do it! The game will be much richer for it as a whole.

MAKING A GOOD ASPECT

Because aspects are so important to the game, it's important to make the best aspects you can. So, how do you know what a good aspect is?

The best aspects are double-edged, say more than one thing, and keep the phrasing simple.

DOUBLE-EDGED

Players, good aspects offer a clear benefit to your character while also providing opportunities to complicate their lives or be used to their detriment.

An aspect with a double-edge is going to come up in play more often than a mostly positive or negative one. You can use them frequently to be awesome, and you'll be able to accept more compels and gain more fate points.

Try this as a litmus test—list two ways you might invoke the aspect, and two ways someone else could invoke it or you could get a compel from it. If the examples come easily to mind, great! If not, add more context to make that aspect work or put that idea to the side and come up with a new aspect.

Let's look at an aspect like *Computer Genius*. The benefits of having this aspect are pretty obvious—any time you're hacking or working with technology, you could justify invoking it. But it doesn't seem like there's a lot of room for that aspect to work against you. So, let's think of a way we can spice that up a bit.

What if we change that aspect to *Nerdy McNerdson*? That still carries the connotations that would allow you to take advantage of it while working with computers, but it adds a downside—you're awkward around people.

GMs, this is just as true of your game and situation aspects. Any feature of a scene you call out should be something that either the PCs or their foes could use in a dramatic fashion.

SAY MORE THAN ONE THING

Earlier, we noted several things that a character aspect might describe: personality traits, backgrounds, relationships, problems, possessions, and so forth. The best aspects overlap across a few of those categories, because that means you have more ways to bring them into play.

Let's look at a simple aspect that a soldier might have: *I Must Prove Myself*. You can invoke this whenever you're trying to do something to gain the approval of others or demonstrate your competence. Someone might compel it to bait you into a difficult situation you'd rather avoid, or to accept a hardship for the sake of reputation. So we know it has a double edge, so far so good.

That'll work for a bit, but eventually this aspect will run out of steam. It says just one thing about the character. Either you're trying to prove yourself, or this aspect isn't going to come up.

GMs, for your situation aspects, you don't have to worry about this as much, because they're only intended to stick around for a scene. It's much more important for game and character aspects to suggest multiple contexts for use.

CLEAR PHRASING

Because aspects are phrases, they come with all the ambiguities of language. If no one knows what your aspect means, it won't get used enough.

That isn't to say you have to avoid poetic or fanciful expression. *Just a Simple Farmboy* isn't quite as fetching as *Child of Pastoral Bliss*. If that's the tone your game is going for, feel free to indulge your linguistic desires.

However, don't do this at the expense of clarity. Avoid metaphors and implications, when you can get away with just saying what you mean. That way, other people don't have to stop and ask you during play if a certain aspect would apply, or get bogged down in discussions about what it means.

If you're wondering if your aspect is unclear, ask the people at the table what they think it means.

IF YOU GET STUCK

Now you know what makes for a good aspect, but that doesn't narrow down your potential choices any—you still have a nearly infinite set of topics and ideas to choose from.

If you're still stuck about what to choose, here are some tips to make things a little easier on you.

SOMETIMES, IT'S BETTER NOT TO CHOOSE

If you can't think of an aspect that really grabs you and the other people at the table, you're better off leaving that space blank, or just keeping whatever ideas you had scribbled in the margins. Sometimes it's much easier to wait for your character to get into play before you figure out how you want to word a particular aspect.

So when in doubt, leave it blank. The same thing is true if you have more than one idea that seems juicy, but they don't work together and you don't know which one to pick. Write them all down in the margins and see which one seems to really sing in play.

ALWAYS ASK WHAT MATTERS AND WHY

We said above that aspects tell you why something matters in the game and why we care about it. This is your primary compass and guide to choosing the best possible aspect. When in doubt, always ask: what do we really care about here, and why?

The events of the phases should help you figure out what your aspect should be. Ask yourself what really matters about the phase:

- ♦ What was the outcome? Is that important?
- ♦ Did the character develop any important relationships or connections during this phase?
- ♦ Does the phase help establish anything important about the character's personality or beliefs?
- ♦ Did the phase give the character a reputation?
- ♦ Did the phase create a problem for the character in the game world?

If there's more than one option, poll the other players and GM to see what they find interesting.

VARY IT UP

You don't want all your aspects to describe the same kind of thing. Five relationships means that you can't use your aspects unless one of them is in play, but five personality traits means that you have no connection to the game world. If you're stuck on what to pick for an aspect, looking at what kinds of things your other aspects describe may help you figure out which way to go for the current phase.

INVOKING ASPECTS

The primary way you're going to use aspects in a game of Fate is to invoke them. If you're in a situation where an aspect is beneficial to your character somehow, you can invoke it.

In order to invoke an aspect, explain why the aspect is relevant, spend a fate point, and you can choose one of these benefits:

- ♦ Take a +2 on your current skill roll after you've rolled the dice.
-
- ♦ Reroll all your dice.
-
- ♦ Pass a +2 benefit to another character's roll, if it's reasonable that the aspect you're invoking would be able to help.
-
- Add +2 to any source of passive opposition, if it's reasonable that the aspect you're invoking could contribute to
- ♦ making things more difficult. You can also use this to create passive opposition at Fair (+2) if there wasn't going to be any.

Rerolling the dice is a little riskier than just getting the +2 bonus, but has the potential for greater benefit. We recommend you reserve this option for when you've rolled a -3 or a -4 on the dice, to maximize the chance that you'll get a beneficial result from rerolling.

The group has to buy into the relevance of a particular aspect when you invoke it; GMs, you're the final arbiter on this one. The use of an aspect should make sense, or you should be able to creatively narrate your way into ensuring it makes sense.

If the aspect you invoke is on someone else's character sheet, including situation aspects attached to them, you give them the fate point you spent. They don't actually get to use it until after the end of the scene, though.

FREE INVOCATIONS

You don't always have to pay a fate point to invoke an aspect—sometimes it's free.

When you succeed at creating an advantage, you "stick" a free invocation onto an aspect. If you succeed with style, you get two invocations. Some of the other actions also give you free boosts.

You also get to stick a free invocation on any consequences you inflict in a conflict. After you've used your free invocation, if the aspect in question is still around, you can keep invoking it by spending fate points.

If you want, you can pass your free invocation to another character. That allows you to get some teamwork going between you and a buddy. This is really useful in a conflict if you want to set someone up for a big blow—have everyone create an advantage and pass their free invocations onto one person, then that person stacks all of them up at once for a huge bonus.

COMPELLING ASPECTS

A compel is the primary way you're going to bring an aspect's complications into the story. It works kind of like invoking an aspect, but in reverse—instead of paying a fate point for a bonus, you're going to gain a fate point, because whoever compels the aspect is bringing a complication into the story related to it.

In order to compel an aspect, explain why the aspect is relevant, and then make an offer as to what the complication is. You can negotiate the terms of the complication a bit, until you reach a reasonable consensus. Whoever is getting compelled then has two options:

- ♦ Accept the complication and receive a fate point
-
- ♦ Pay a fate point to prevent the complication from happening

The complication from a compel occurs regardless of anyone's efforts—once you've made a deal and taken the fate point, you can't use your skills or anything else to mitigate the situation. You have to deal with the new story developments that arise from the complication.

GMs, you're the final arbiter here, as always—not just on how the result of a compel plays out, but on whether or not a compel is valid in the first place.

Finally, and this is very important: if a player wants to compel another character, it costs a fate point to propose the complication. The GM can always compel for free, and any player can propose a compel on his or her own character for free.

TYPES OF COMPELS

There are two major categories for what a compel looks like in the game: events and decisions. These are tools to help you figure out what a compel should look like and help break any mental blocks.

An event-based compel happens to the character in spite of herself, when the world around her responds to a certain aspect in a certain way and creates a complicating circumstance. It looks like this: you have ____ aspect and are in ____ situation, so it makes sense that, unfortunately, ____ would happen to you. Damn your luck.

GMs, event-based compels are your opportunity to shine. You're expected to control the world around the PCs, so having that world react to them in an unexpected way is pretty much part and parcel of your job description.

A decision is a kind of compel that is internal to the character. It happens because of a decision he makes, hence the name. It looks like this: you have ____ aspect in ____ situation, so it makes sense that you'd decide to _____. This goes wrong when ____ happens.

So the real dramatic impact from these kinds of compels is not what decision the character makes, most of the time—it's how things go wrong. Before something goes wrong, the first sentence could be a prelude to making a skill roll or simply a matter of roleplaying. The complication that the decision creates is really what makes it a compel.

The decision part should be very self-evident, and something a player might have been thinking about doing anyway. If you offer a decision-based compel, and no one can agree on what the decision part should be, it shouldn't cost a fate point to counter—just drop it.

RETROACTIVE COMPELS

Sometimes, you'll notice during the game that you've fulfilled the criteria for a compel without a fate point getting awarded. Anyone who realizes this in play can mention it, and the fate point can be awarded retroactively, treating it like a compel after the fact. GMs, you're the final arbiter—look at the guidelines for event and decision compels above, and see if you can summarize what happened in the game according to those guidelines. If you can, award a fate point.

COMPELLING WITH SITUATION ASPECTS

Just like with every other kind of aspect use, you can use situation aspects (and by extension, game aspects) for compels. Because situation aspects are usually external to characters, you're almost always looking at event-based compels rather than decision-based ones. The character or characters affected get a fate point for the compel.

USING ASPECTS FOR ROLEPLAYING

Finally, aspects have a passive use that you can draw on in almost every instance of play. Players, you can use them as a guide to roleplaying your character. This may seem self-evident, but we figured we'd call it out anyway—the aspects on your character sheet are true of your character at all times, not just when they're invoked or compelled.

Playing to your aspects also has another benefit: you're feeding the GM ideas for compels. You're already bringing your aspects into the game, so all she has to do is offer you complications and you're good to go.

Inserting these kinds of aspect-related details into your narration can help your game seem more vivid and consistent, even when you're not shuffling fate points around.

REMOVING OR CHANGING AN ASPECT

Game and character aspects change through advancement. See the Milestones section in *The Long Game* for that.

Situation aspects can be removed with an overcome action if a character is trying to get rid of a negative one, or simply narrated away by the GM when it stops making sense for them to be around. If a character can interfere with your action, they get to roll active opposition against you as per normal. Otherwise, GMs, it's your job to set passive opposition or just allow the player to get rid of the aspect without a roll, if there's nothing risky or interesting in the way.

Finally, if at any point it simply makes no sense for a situation aspect to be in play, get rid of it.

CREATING AND DISCOVERING NEW ASPECTS IN PLAY

In addition to your character aspects, game aspects, and the situation aspects that the GM presents, you have the ability to create, discover, or gain access to other aspects as you play.

Most commonly, you'll do this with the create an advantage action, which lets you either make a new situation aspect and get a free invocation on it, or discover an aspect that's already there (like a weakness on an enemy) and get a free invocation on that instead.

With some skills, it's going to make more sense to stick an advantage to an aspect that's already on some other character's sheet. In this case, the PC or NPC you're targeting would provide active opposition to keep you from being able to use that aspect.

If you're not looking for a free invocation, and you just think it'd make sense if there were a particular situation aspect in play, you don't need to roll the dice or anything to make new aspects—just suggest them, and if the group thinks they're interesting, write them down.

SECRET OR HIDDEN ASPECTS

Some skills also let you use the create an advantage action to reveal aspects that are hidden, either on NPCs or environments—in this case, the GM simply tells you what the aspect is if you get a tie or better on the roll. You can use this to “fish” for aspects if you’re not precisely sure what to look for—doing well on the roll is sufficient justification for being able to find something advantage-worthy.

Remember that aspects can help deepen the story only if you get to use them—aspects that are never discovered might as well never have existed in the first place. So most of the time, the players should always know what aspects are available for their use, and if there’s a question as to whether or not the character knows, use the dice to help you decide.

In cases where a GM is keeping a genuine secret from the players, we recommend you don’t make an aspect directly out of whatever fact you’re trying to keep secret. Instead, make the aspect a detail that makes sense in context after the secret is revealed.

THE FATE POINT ECONOMY

For the most part, the use of aspects revolves around fate points. You indicate your supply of fate points by using tokens, such as poker chips, glass beads, or other markers.

Ideally, you want a consistent ebb and flow of fate points going on throughout your sessions. Players spend them in order to be awesome in a crucial moment, and they get them back when their lives get dramatic and complicated. So if your fate points are flowing the way they’re supposed to, you’ll end up with these cycles of triumphs and setbacks that make for a fun and interesting story.

REFRESH

Each player gets a number of fate points to start each session off with. That total is called the refresh rate. The refresh for a default, starting character is three fate points, but you can opt to spend up to two of your refresh to buy additional stunts.

At the start of each session, if you have fewer fate points than your refresh, you refresh up to that number. If you have more fate points than your refresh at the start of a session (because you didn’t spend them all last time), you keep the higher total instead.

You get additional refresh as your character achieves a major milestone (which we discuss in *The Long Game*), which you can spend on getting more stunts or keep in order to increase your starting fate point total. You can never have less than one refresh at any time.

At the start of a new scenario, you reset your fate points to your refresh rate no matter what.

SPENDING FATE POINTS

You spend fate points in any of the following ways:

- ♦ **Invoke an Aspect:** Invoking an aspect costs you one fate point, unless the invocation is free.
- ♦ **Power a Stunt:** Some stunts are very potent, and as such, cost a fate point in order to activate.
- ♦ **Refuse a Compel:** Once a compel is proposed, you can pay a fate point to avoid the complication associated with it.
- ♦ **Declare a Story Detail:** To add something to the narrative based on one of your aspects, spend a fate point.

EARNING FATE POINTS

You earn fate points in any of the following ways:

- ♦ **Accept a Compel:** You get a fate point when you agree to the complication associated with a compel. As we said above, this may sometimes happen retroactively if the circumstances warrant.
- ♦ **Have Your Aspects Invoked Against You:** If someone pays a fate point to invoke an aspect attached to your character, you gain their fate point at the end of the scene. This includes advantages created on your character, as well as consequences.

THE GM AND FATE POINTS

GMs, you also get to use fate points, but the rules are a little bit different than the rules for players.

When you award players fate points for compels or concession, they come out of an unlimited pool you have for doing so –you don't have to worry about running out of fate points to award, and you always get to compel for free.

The NPCs under your control are not so lucky. They have a limited pool of fate points you get to use on their behalf. Whenever a scene starts, you get one fate point for every PC in that scene. You can use these points on behalf of any NPC you want, but you can get more in that scene if they take a compel, like PCs do.

You reset to your default total, one per PC, at the beginning of every scene. There are two exceptions:

- ♦ You accepted a compel that effectively ended the last scene or starts the next one. If that happens, take an extra fate point in the next scene.
- ♦ You conceded a conflict to the PCs in the previous scene. If that happens, take the fate points you'd normally get for the concession into the next scene and add them to the default total.

If the immediate next scene doesn't present a significant interaction with NPCs, you can save these extra points until the next scene that does.

Amanda is running a climactic conflict, where the PCs are battling a nemesis they've been trying to subdue for several scenarios now. Here are the characters in the scene: Barathar, Smuggler Queen of the Sindral Reach, a main NPC; Og the Strong, one of her chief enforcers, a supporting NPC; Teran the Swift, an old nemesis of the PCs hired to do Barathar's bidding, a supporting NPC; two nameless NPC sergeants; Landon; Cynere; and Zird the Arcane.

Her total fate point pool for this scene is 3 fate points—one each for Landon, Cynere, and Zird. If Zird had been elsewhere (say, doing some arcane research), Amanda would've gotten two fate points, one for Landon and one for Cynere.

Later, Barathar is forced to concede so she can get away unharmed. She has taken two consequences in the conflict, meaning that she gets three fate points for conceding. Those three fate points carry over to the next scene.

SKILLS AND STUNTS

DEFINING SKILLS

A skill represents a particular field of expertise your character has, a way they interact with the world around them. Skills are rated on the adjective ladder. The higher the rating, the better your character is at the skill. Taken together, your list of skills gives you a picture of that character's potential for action at a glance—what you're best at, what you're okay at, and what you're not so good at.

We define skills in two ways in Fate—in terms of the game actions that you can do with them, and the context in which you can use them. There are only a handful of basic game actions, but the number of potential contexts is infinite.

THE BASIC GAME ACTIONS

We cover these in more detail in Actions and Outcomes, but here's a quick reference so that you don't have to flip all the way over there right now.

Overcome: True to its name, you tackle some kind of challenge, engaging task, or hindrance related to your skill.

Create an Advantage: You attempt to take advantage of aspects already in the story, or place a new aspect (or discover an aspect you didn't know about) that gives you and your allies an edge in a situation.

Attack: You try to harm someone in a conflict. That harm may be physical, mental, emotional, or social in nature.

Defend: You try to keep someone from harming you, getting past you, or creating an advantage to use against you.

DEFINING STUNTS

A stunt is a rules element that changes how a skill functions for your character, always to your benefit. Unlike skills, which are about the sort of things anyone can do in your campaign, stunts are about individual characters. For that reason, the next several pages are about how to make your own stunts, but we'll also have example stunts listed under each skill in the Default Skill List.

Having stunts in your game allows you to differentiate characters that have the same skills as one another.

Landon and Cynere both have a high Fight skill, but Cynere also has the Warmaster stunt, which makes her better at creating advantages with the skill. This differentiates the two characters a great deal—Cynere has a unique capability to analyze and understand her enemies' weaknesses in a way Landon doesn't.

One might imagine Cynere starting a fight by testing an enemy with moves and jabs, carefully assessing her opponent's limits before moving in for a decisive strike, whereas Landon is happy to wade in and chop away.

STUNTS AND REFRESH

Taking a new stunt beyond the first three reduces your character's refresh rate by one.

BUILDING STUNTS

You have complete freedom to invent your own stunts, as long as your GM approves. We recommend most stunts fall into one of three categories: adding a new action to a skill, adding a bonus to an action, or creating a new, interesting effect. We also have a list of all the things that stunts can potentially do, to help you when you're coming up with them for your game. When in doubt, look at the listed stunts for guidance, as well as those the example characters have.

ADDING A NEW ACTION TO A SKILL

The most basic option for a stunt is to allow a skill to do something that it normally can't do. It adds a new action onto the base skill in certain situations, for those with this stunt. This new action can be one that's available to another skill (allowing one skill to swap for another under certain circumstances), or one that's not available to any skill.

Here are some new action stunts:

- ♦ **Backstab.** You can use Stealth to make physical attacks, provided your target isn't already aware of your presence.
- ♦ **The Fight in the Dog.** You can use Provoke to enter the kinds of contests that you'd normally need Physique for, whenever your ability to psych your opponent out with the force of your presence alone would be a factor.
- ♦ **You're Never Safe.** You can use Burglary to make mental attacks and create advantages against a target, by staging a heist in such a way as to shatter their confidence in their security.

Just because you have a stunt doesn't mean you always have to use it when it becomes relevant. Using a stunt is always a choice, and you can opt not to use a stunt if you don't think it would be appropriate or you just don't want to.

ADDING A BONUS TO AN ACTION

Another use for a stunt is to give a skill an automatic bonus under a particular, very narrow circumstance, effectively letting a character specialize in something. The circumstance should be narrower than what the normal action allows, and only apply to one particular action or pair of actions.

The usual bonus is +2 to the skill total. However, if you want, you can also express the bonus as two shifts of additional effect after the roll succeeds, if that makes more sense.

Here are some examples of adding a bonus to an action:

- ♦ **Arcane Expert.** Gain a +2 bonus to create an advantage using Lore, whenever the situation has specifically to do with the supernatural or occult.
- ♦ **Lead in the Air.** Any time you're using a fully automatic weapon and you succeed at a Shoot attack, you automatically create a Fair (+2) opposition against movement in that zone until your next turn. (Normally, you'd need to take a separate action to set up this kind of interference, but with the stunt, it's free.)
- ♦ **Child of the Court.** Gain a +2 bonus to any attempt to overcome obstacles with Rapport when you're at an aristocratic function, such as a royal ball.

CREATING A RULES EXCEPTION

A final way to make a stunt is to create some kind of narrow exception to the way the normal rules function. The only limit to this is that a stunt can't change any of the basic rules for aspects in terms of invoking, compelling, and the fate point economy. Those always remain the same.

Here are some stunts that create rules exceptions:

- ♦ **Ritualist.** Use Lore in place of another skill during a challenge, allowing you to use Lore twice in the same challenge.
- ♦ **Hogtie.** When you use Crafts to create a Hogtied (or similar) advantage on someone, you can always actively oppose any overcome rolls to escape the hogtie (also using Crafts), even if you're not there.
- ♦ **Riposte.** If you succeed with style on a Fight defense, you can choose to inflict a 2-shift hit rather than take a boost.

BALANCING STUNT UTILITY

If you look at most of the example stunts, you'll notice that the circumstances under which you can use them are pretty narrow compared to the base skills they modify. That's the sweet spot you want to shoot for with your own stunts—you want them to be limited enough in scope that it feels special when you use them, but not so narrow that you never see them come up after you take them.

If the stunt effectively takes over all of the skill's base actions, it's not limited enough. You don't want a stunt replacing the skill it modifies.

The two main ways to limit a stunt are by keeping its effects to a specific action or pair of actions, or by limiting the situations in which you can use it. For the best results, use both.

You can also restrict a stunt by only allowing it to be used once in a certain period of game time, such as once per conflict, once per scene, or once per session.

FATE POINT-POWERED STUNTS: another way to restrict how often a stunt comes into play is to have it cost a fate point to use. This is a good option if the desired stunt effect is very powerful, or there doesn't seem to be a good way for you to change the wording of the stunt to make it come up less often in play.

Lenny's considering a stunt for Landon called "My Blade Strikes True." He wants it to add two shifts to any successful Fight attack when he wields his personal, custom-forged family sword. Amanda thinks that's too strong to be a free stunt without some further restriction.

Lenny thinks about it, and says, "Well, how about if it lets me do that whenever I'm fighting a member of a rival family with my heirloom sword?" Amanda asks, "Were we going to establish rival families in this game? I thought the point was for you guys to travel all over the place." Lenny agrees that it probably wouldn't come up often enough, and thinks some more.

Then it comes to him. "How about this—what if, when someone uses their 2-point stress box to absorb one of my Fight attacks with the sword, I can make them use their mild consequence instead?" Amanda likes this, because it'll come up in nearly every conflict Landon gets into, but it won't be something he can take advantage of every exchange. She asks for a further restriction of one use per conflict, and they call it done.

On Landon's sheet, Lenny writes: *My Blade Strikes True*. Once per conflict, you can force the opponent to use a mild consequence instead of a 2-point stress box on a successful Fight attack with your heirloom sword.

STUNT FAMILIES

If you want to get detailed about a particular kind of training or talent, you can create a stunt family for it. This is a group of stunts that are related to and chain off of each other somehow.

This allows you to create things like fighting styles or elite schools in your setting, and helps you get specific about what types of specialized competencies are available, if you want to give your game a sense of having distinct “character classes.”

Creating a stunt family is easy. You make one stunt that serves as a prerequisite for all the others in the family, qualifying you to take further stunts up the chain. Then, you need to create a handful of stunts that are all related somehow to the prerequisite, either stacking the effects or branching out into another set of effects.

Stacking: the simplest way of handling a related stunt is just making the original stunt more effective in the same situation. If the stunt added an action, narrow it further and give the new action a bonus. If the stunt gave a bonus to an action, give an additional +2 bonus to the same action or add an additional two-shift effect to that action. If the stunt made a rules exception, make it even more of an exception.

Keep in mind that the upgraded stunt effectively replaces the original—look at it as a single super-stunt that costs two slots (and two refresh) for the price of being more powerful than other stunts.

Here’s a stunt that stacks: **Advanced Ritualist.** (requires Ritualist.) You gain a +2 bonus when you use Lore in place of another skill during a challenge. This allows you to use Lore twice in the same challenge.

Branching: when you branch, you create a new stunt that relates to the original in terms of theme or subject matter, but provides a wholly new effect. If you look at stacking effects as expanding a stunt or skill vertically, you can look at branching effects as expanding them laterally.

If your original stunt added an action to a skill, a branching stunt might add a different action to that skill, or it might provide a bonus to a different action the skill already has, or create a rules exception. The mechanical effect isn’t connected to the prerequisite stunt at all, but provides a complementary bit of awesome.

Let’s take a look at the Deceive skill. If you look at the skill description, there are several avenues that we might enhance with stunts: lying, sleight of hand and misdirection, disguise, creating cover stories, or social conflict.

So let’s make our first stunt something like this: **Fast Talk.** You get a +2 to overcome obstacles with Deceive, provided you don’t have to talk to the person you’re trying to deceive for more than a few sentences before blowing past them.

Here are some potential options for branching off of that stunt:

Quick Disguise. (requires Fast Talk.) You’re able to put together a convincing disguise in a heartbeat, using

- ♦ items from your surroundings. You can roll Deceive to create a disguise without any time to prepare, in nearly any situation.

Instant Cover. (requires Fast Talk.) You can whip up a cover story like no one’s business, even if you haven’t made an

- ♦ effort to establish it beforehand. Any time you overcome an obstacle in public using Deceive, automatically add a situation aspect representing your cover story, and stick a free invocation on it.

Hey, What’s That? (requires Fast Talk.) Gain a +2 bonus whenever you’re using Deceive to momentarily distract someone, as long as part of the distraction involves saying something.

Every one of those stunts thematically relates to very quick, spontaneous uses of Deceive, but they each have a different flavor of awesome.

THE DEFAULT SKILL LIST

Each skill description contains a list of game actions that you can use the skill for. This list is not necessarily exhaustive—see our guidelines for what to do with edge cases.

Skills are one of your primary mechanical ways to reinforce the setting you're using or creating for your game. The skills provided in this list are deliberately generic so that they can be used in a variety of settings, and the stunts provided continue this trend by not being tied to any particular setting.

When you're creating your own setting for use with Fate, you should also create your own skill list. The default list we provide is a good starting point, but creating skills specific to your world can help make it seem richer by reinforcing the story with mechanics. Stunts, too, should reflect the kinds of abilities available in your world.

Skills and Gear: Some of the skills, like Shoot and Crafts, imply the need for gear. We presume by default that if you have a skill, you also have the tools you need to use it, and that the effectiveness of those tools is built into the skill result. If you want to make gear special, you'll want to look at the Extras chapter.

SKILL	OVERCOME	CREATE AN ADVANTAGE	ATTACK	DEFEND
Athletics	X	X		X
Burglary	X	X		
Contacts	X	X		X
Crafts	X	X		
Deceive	X	X		X
Drive	X	X		X
Empathy	X	X		X
Fight	X	X	X	X
Investigate	X	X		
Lore	X	X		
Notice	X	X		X
Physique	X	X		X
Provoke	X	X	X	
Rapport	X	X		X
Resources	X	X		
Shoot	X	X	X	
Stealth	X	X		X
Will	X	X		X

ATHLETICS

The Athletics skill represents your character's general level of physical fitness, whether through training, natural gifts, or genre-specific means (like magic or genetic alteration). It's how good you are at moving your body. As such, it is a popular choice for nearly any action-y character.

Athletics is all but ubiquitous among every genre appropriate for Fate—it would only be unnecessary in a game that focused exclusively on interpersonal interaction and had no physical conflict.

Overcome: Athletics allows you to overcome any obstacle that requires physical movement—jumping, running, climbing, swimming, etc. If it resembles something you'd do in the decathlon, you roll Athletics. You use overcome actions with Athletics to move between zones in a conflict if there's a situation aspect or other obstacle in your way. You also roll Athletics to chase or race in any contests or challenges that rely on these types of activities.

Attack: Athletics is not meant as an attack skill.

You might decide that Athletics is inappropriate for defense against firearms or other high-tech ranged weapons in your setting. There really isn't any other skill that defends against them, though. If you make this decision, it will make those weapons very, very dangerous. Or have another skill defend against them.

Athletics Stunts

- ♦ **Sprinter.** You move two zones for free in a conflict without rolling, instead of one, provided there are no situation aspects restricting movement.
-
- ♦ **Hardcore Parkour.** +2 to overcome actions with Athletics if you are in a chase across rooftops or a similarly precarious environment.
-
- ♦ **Dazing Counter.** When you succeed with style on a defend action against an opponent's Fight roll, you automatically counter with some sort of nerve punch or stunning blow. You get to attach the *Dazed* situation aspect to your opponent with a free invoke, instead of just a boost.

BURGLARY

The Burglary skill covers your character's aptitude for stealing things and getting into places that are off-limits.

In genres that rely on the use of a lot of technology, this skill also includes a proficiency in the related tech, allowing the character to hack security systems, disable alarm systems, and whatnot.

Create an Advantage: You can case a location with Burglary, to determine how hard it will be to break into and what kind of security you're dealing with, as well as discover any vulnerabilities you might exploit. You can also examine the work of other burglars to determine how a particular heist was done, and create or discover aspects related to whatever evidence they may have left behind.

Attack: Burglary isn't used for attacks.

Defend: Same here. It's not really a conflict skill, so there's not a lot of opportunity to use it to defend.

Burglary Stunts

- ♦ **Always a Way Out.** +2 on Burglary rolls made to create an advantage whenever you're trying to escape from a location.

Security Specialist. You don't have to be present to provide active opposition to someone trying to overcome security measures you put in place or worked on. (Normally, a character would roll against passive opposition for that.)

-
- ♦ **Talk the Talk.** You can use Burglary in place of Contacts whenever you're dealing specifically with other thieves and burglars.

CONTACTS

Contacts is the skill of knowing and making connections with people. It presumes proficiency with all means of networking available in the setting.

Overcome: You use Contacts to overcome any obstacle related to finding someone you need to find. Whether that's old-fashioned "man on the street" type of work, polling your information network, or searching archives and computer databases, you're able to hunt down people or somehow get access to them.

You can also create an advantage that represents what the word on the street is about a particular individual, object, or location, based on what your contacts tell you. These aspects almost always deal with reputation more than fact, such as *Known as a Mean Guy* or *Notorious Swindler*. Whether that person lives up to their reputation is anybody's guess, though that doesn't invalidate the aspect—people often have misleading reputations that complicate their lives.

Attack: Contacts isn't used for attacks; it's hard to harm someone simply by knowing people.

Contacts Stunts

- ♦ **Ear to the Ground.** Whenever someone initiates a conflict against you in an area where you've built a network of contacts, you use Contacts instead of Notice to determine turn order, because you got tipped off in time.

-
- ♦ **Rumormonger.** +2 to create an advantage when you plant vicious rumors about someone else.

The Weight of Reputation. You can use Contacts instead of Provoke to create advantages based on the fear generated by the sinister reputation you've cultivated for yourself and all the shady associates you have. You should have an appropriate aspect to pair with this stunt.

CRAFTS

Crafts is the skill of working with machinery, for good or ill.

The default skill is called Crafts because it's what we use in the examples, but this skill might vary a great deal depending on the setting and what kind of technology is available. In a modern or sci-fi setting, this might be Engineering or Mechanics instead.

If building constructs and creating items is a big part of your game, check out Extras for a discussion of what might result from the use of Crafts.

Create an Advantage: You can use Crafts to create aspects representing features of a piece of machinery, pointing out useful features or strengths you can use to your advantage (*Armor-Plated*, *Rugged Construction*) or a vulnerability for you to exploit (*Flaw in the Cross-Beam*, *Hasty Work*).

Attack: You probably won't use Crafts to attack in a conflict, unless the conflict is specifically about using machinery, like with siege weaponry. GMs and players, talk over the likelihood of this happening in your game if you have someone who is really interested in taking this skill. Usually, weapons you craft are likely to be used with other skills to attack—a guy who makes a sword still needs Fight to wield it well!

Defend: As with attacking, Crafts doesn't defend, unless you're somehow using it as the skill to control a piece of machinery that you block with.

SO MANY CRAFTS... If you're going to do this, make sure that you have a reason for it besides pedantry—if the only thing that splitting the skills gets you is the same effects with different names, you should keep it more generalized and use stunts to handle the specialties.

Crafts Stunts

- ♦ **Always Making Useful Things.** You don't ever have to spend a fate point to declare that you have the proper tools for a particular job using Crafts, even in extreme situations (like being imprisoned and separated from all your stuff). This source of opposition is just off the table.
- ♦ **Better than New!** Whenever you succeed with style on an overcome action to repair a piece of machinery, you can immediately give it a new situation aspect (with a free invoke) reflecting the improvements you've made, instead of just a boost.
- ♦ **Surgical Strikes.** When using Crafts in a conflict involving machinery, you can filter out unwanted targets from whole-zone attacks without having to divide up your shifts (normally, you'd need to divide your roll between your targets).

DECEIVE

Deceive is the skill about lying to and misdirecting people.

Overcome: Use Deceive to bluff your way past someone, or to get someone to believe a lie, or to get something out of someone because they believe in one of your lies. For nameless NPCs, this is just an overcome roll, but for PCs or named NPCs, it requires a contest, and the target opposes with Empathy. Winning this contest could justify placing a situation aspect on your target, if buying into your lie could help you in a future scene.

You can also use Deceive to do small tricks of sleight-of-hand and misdirection.

Attack: Deceive is an indirect skill that creates a lot of opportunities you can capitalize on, but it doesn't do direct harm to an individual.

Defend: You can use Deceive to throw off Investigation attempts with false information and to defend against efforts made to discern your true motives with the Empathy skill.

Deceive Stunts

- ♦ **Lies upon Lies.** +2 to create a Deceive advantage against someone who has believed one of your lies already during this session.
- ♦ **Mind Games.** You can use Deceive in place of Provoke to make mental attacks, as long as you can make up a clever lie as part of the attack.
- ♦ **One Person, Many Faces.** Whenever you meet someone new, you can spend a fate point to declare that you've met that person before, but under a different name and identity. Create a situation aspect to represent your cover story, and you can use Deceive in place of Rapport whenever interacting with that person.

Social Skills and Other Characters: Many of the social skills have actions that let you change the emotional state of another character or make them accept some fact in the story (like believing one of your lies). A successful use of a social skill does *not* confer the authority to force another character to act contrary to their nature or how the person controlling the character sees them. If another PC gets affected by one of your skills, the player gets input on how their character responds. They can't negate your victory, but they can choose what it looks like.

So, you may successfully Provoke by getting in their face and screaming at them, intending to scare them into hesitation and create an advantage. But if the other player doesn't imagine his character reacting that way, you should work out an alternative—maybe you make him so angry that he's unbalanced by his rage, or you embarrass him by making a spectacle around him in public.

As long as you get your advantage, you're fine. Use it as an opportunity to create story with other people, instead of shutting them down.

DRIVE

The Drive skill is all about operating vehicles and things that go fast.

Like Crafts, how the Drive skill appears in your games is going to depend a lot on how much action you intend to have inside of vehicles or other forms of transportation, and what kind of technology is available in your setting.

For example, a low-tech setting (like *Hearts of Steel*) might have Ride instead of Drive, because the main transportation is animal-based. A futuristic setting revolving around people in a space opera military might have Drive (for cars), Pilot (for starships), and Operate (for tanks or heavy military vehicles).

Different Vehicles, Different Skills: The advice is the same as for Crafts—don't go nuts with reskinning this skill unless it makes a real, tangible difference in your game. Especially consider the option of having one skill that's modified by stunts (see Building Stunts).

Create an Advantage: You can use Drive to determine the best way to get somewhere in a vehicle, and a good enough roll might allow you to learn features of the route that get expressed as aspects, or declare that you know a *Convenient Shortcut* or something similar. You can also just read the Athletics description, and then make it about a vehicle. Advantages created using Drive often revolve around getting good positioning, doing a fancy maneuver (*Did a Barrel Roll*, anyone?), or putting your opponent in a bad spot.

Defend: Avoiding damage to a vehicle in a physical conflict is one of the most common uses of Drive. You can also use it to defend against advantages being created against you or overcome actions of someone trying to move past you in a vehicle.

Drive Stunts

- ♦ **Hard to Shake.** +2 to Drive whenever you're pursuing another vehicle in a chase scene.
-
- ♦ **Pedal to the Metal.** You can coax more speed out of your vehicle than seems possible. Whenever you're engaged in any contest where speed is the primary factor (such as a chase or race of some kind) and you tie with your Drive roll, it's considered a success.
-
- ♦ **Ramming Speed!** When ramming another vehicle, you ignore two shifts of damage. So if you ram and hit for four shifts, you only take two yourself.

EMPATHY

Empathy involves knowing and being able to spot changes in a person's mood or bearing. It's basically the emotional Notice skill.

Create an Advantage: You can use Empathy to read a person's emotional state and get a general sense of who they are, presuming you have some kind of interpersonal contact with them. Most often, you'll use this to assess the aspects on another character's sheet, but sometimes you'll also be able to create new aspects, especially on NPCs. If the target has some reason to be aware that you're trying to read them, they can defend with Deceive or Rapport.

Attack: Empathy can't really be used in this capacity.

Special: Empathy is the main skill you use to help others recover from consequences that are mental in nature.

Empathy Stunts

- ♦ **Lie Whisperer.** +2 to all Empathy rolls made to discern or discover lies, whether they're directed at you or someone else.
-
- ♦ **Nose for Trouble.** You can use Empathy instead of Notice to determine your turn order in a conflict, provided you've gotten a chance to observe or speak to those involved for at least a few minutes beforehand during this scene.

FIGHT

The Fight skill covers all forms of close-quarters combat (in other words, within the same zone), both unarmed and using weapons. For the ranged weapons counterpart, see Shoot.

Overcome: Since you don't really use Fight outside of a conflict, it's not often used to overcome obstacles. You might use it to display your fighting prowess in a demonstration, or to participate in some kind of regulated bout or sport fighting, which would allow you to use this skill in a contest.

Create an Advantage: You'll probably use Fight for most of the advantages you create in a physical conflict. Any number of special moves can be covered with advantages: a targeted strike to stun, a "dirty move," disarming, and so on. You could even use Fight to assess another fighter's style, spotting weaknesses in his or her form that you can exploit.

Defend: You use Fight to defend against any other attack or create an advantage attempt made with Fight, as well as pretty much any action where violently interposing yourself could prevent it from happening. You can't use this skill to defend against Shoot attacks, unless the setting is fantastical enough that you can catch missiles or swat them from the air or use laser swords to deflect blasters.

Fight Stunts

- ♦ **Heavy Hitter.** When you succeed with style on a Fight attack and choose to reduce the result by one to gain a boost, you gain a full situation aspect with a free invocation instead.
-
- ♦ **Backup Weapon.** Whenever someone's about to hit you with a *Disarmed* situation aspect or something similar, spend a fate point to declare you have a backup weapon. Instead of a situation aspect, your opponent gets a boost, representing the momentary distraction you suffer having to switch.

The Art(s) of Fighting: It's a given that most games that you play with Fate will feature a decent amount of action and physical conflict. This is another area of emphasis, like with the Crafts skill, where the skills you choose to have for combat speak volumes on what your game's about. In the examples, we've got Fight and Shoot as separate skills, to give us a basic division without getting too much into minutiae. Notably, though, this suggests that fighting with a weapon and fighting bare-handed are pretty much the same—there's no inherent advantage in doing one over the other. It's a pretty common choice to further separate unarmed and armed melee—into Fists and Weapons, for example. You could specialize even further if you wanted different classes of weapons to have their own skills (Swords, Polearms, Axes, Plasma Guns, Slugthrowers, etc.), but again, we recommend you not go too crazy with this unless it's really important to your setting. Specialized weapon use can also be modeled by using extras.

INVESTIGATE

Investigate is the skill you use to find things out. It's a counterpart to Notice—whereas Notice revolves around situational alertness and surface observation, Investigate revolves around concentrated effort and in-depth scrutiny.

Overcome: Investigate obstacles are all about information that's hard to uncover for some reason. Analyzing a crime scene for clues, searching a cluttered room for the item you need, even poring over a musty old tome to try and find the passage that makes everything make sense.

Racing against the clock to collect evidence before the cops show up or disaster occurs is a classic way to use Investigate in a challenge. If that sounds broad, consider the following as just a few of the possibilities for using Investigate: eavesdropping on a conversation, looking for clues at a crime scene, examining records, verifying the truth of a piece of information, conducting surveillance, and researching a cover story.

Attack: Investigate isn't used to make attacks.

Defend: Same here.

Investigate Stunts

- ♦ **Attention to Detail.** You can use Investigate instead of Empathy to defend against Deceive attempts. What others discover through gut reactions and intuition, you learn through careful observation of microexpressions.
- ♦ **Eavesdropper.** On a successful Investigate roll to create an advantage by eavesdropping on a conversation, you can discover or create one additional aspect (though this doesn't give you an extra free invocation).

LORE

The Lore skill is about knowledge and education. As with some other skills, we called it Lore because that fits the particular flavor of our examples—other games might call it Scholarship, or Academics, or something like that.

If your game has a reason to prioritize different fields of knowledge as being separate from one another, you might have several skills that follow the same basic template. For example, you might have a Lore skill that's reserved for supernatural and arcane knowledge, and a Scholar skill for more traditional education.

Overcome: You can use Lore to overcome any obstacle that requires applying your character's knowledge to achieve a goal. For example, you might roll Lore to decipher some ancient language on a tomb wall, under the presumption that your character might have researched it at some point.

Attack: Lore isn't used in conflicts. (In our examples, the magic that Zird the Arcane uses is based on Lore, so that's a unique exception to this—he could conceivably use Lore for magical attacks and defenses. See the Extras chapter for more details about ways to do magic and powers.)

Defend: Lore isn't used to defend.

Lore Stunts

- ♦ **I've Read about That!** You've read hundreds—if not thousands—of books on a wide variety of topics. You can spend a fate point to use Lore in place of *any other skill* for one roll or exchange, provided you can justify having read about the action you're attempting.
- ♦ **Shield of Reason.** You can use Lore as a defense against Provoke attempts, provided you can justify your ability to overcome your fear through rational thought and reason.
- ♦ **Specialist.** Choose a field of specialization, such as herbology, criminology, or zoology. You get a +2 to all Lore rolls relating to that field of specialization.

NOTICE

Notice is the skill of situational awareness and spotting things.

Overcome: You don't really use Notice to overcome obstacles too often but when you do it's used in a reactive way: noticing something in a scene, hearing a faint sound, spotting the concealed gun in that guy's waistband.

Attack: Notice isn't really used for attacks.

Defend: You can use Notice to defend against any uses of Stealth to get the drop on you or ambush you, or to discover that you're being observed.

Notice Stunts

- ♦ **Danger Sense.** You have an almost preternatural capacity for detecting danger. Your Notice skill works unimpeded by conditions like total concealment, darkness, or other sensory impairments in situations where someone or something intends to harm you.
- ♦ **Body Language Reader.** You can use Notice in place of Empathy to learn the aspects of a target through observation.

PHYSIQUE

The Physique skill is a counterpart to Athletics, representing the character's natural physical aptitudes, such as raw strength and endurance. In our example game, we have this skill broken out as something separate in order to create two distinct types of physical characters—the nimble guy (represented by Athletics) and the strongman (represented by Physique).

In your game, you might not find this distinction necessary to make with separate skills—though you might still let players make that distinction with stunts and aspects.

Overcome: You can use Physique to overcome any obstacles that require the application of brute force—most often to overcome a situation aspect on a zone—or any other physical impedance, like prison bars or locked gates. Of course, Physique is the classic skill for arm-wrestling matches and other contests of applied strength, as well as marathons or other endurance-based challenges.

Attack: Physique is not used to harm people directly—see the Fight skill for that.

Special: The Physique skill gives you additional physical stress or consequence slots. Average (+1) or Fair (+2) gives you a 3-point stress box. Good (+3) or Great (+4) gives you a 3-point and a 4-point stress box. Superb (+5) and above give you an additional mild consequence slot along with the additional stress boxes. This slot can only be used for physical harm.

Physique Stunts

- ♦ **Grappler.** +2 to Physique rolls made to create advantages on an enemy by wrestling or grappling with them.
-
- ♦ **Take the Blow.** You can use Physique to defend against Fight attacks made with fists or blunt instruments, though you always take 1 shift of stress on a tie.
-
- ♦ **Tough as Nails.** Once per session, at the cost of a fate point, you can reduce the severity of a moderate consequence that's physical in nature to a mild consequence (if your mild consequence slot is free), or erase a mild consequence altogether.

PROVOKE

Provoke is the skill about getting someone's dander up and eliciting negative emotional response from them—fear, anger, shame, etc. It's the "being a jerk" skill.

To use Provoke, you need some kind of justification. That could come entirely from situation, or because you have an aspect that's appropriate, or because you've created an advantage with another skill (like Rapport or Deceive), or because you've assessed your target's aspects (see Empathy).

This skill requires that your target can feel emotions—robots and zombies typically can't be provoked.

Create an Advantage: You can create advantages representing momentary emotional states, like *Enraged*, *Shocked*, or *Hesitant*. Your target opposes with Will.

Attack: You can make mental attacks with Provoke, to do emotional harm to an opponent. Your relationship with the target and the circumstances you're in figure a great deal into whether or not you can use this action.

Defend: Being good at provoking others doesn't make you better at avoiding it yourself. You need Will for that.

Provoke Stunts

- ♦ **Armor of Fear.** You can use Provoke to defend against Fight attacks, but only until the first time you're dealt stress in a conflict. You can make your opponents hesitate to attack, but when someone shows them that you're only human your advantage disappears.
-
- ♦ **Provoke Violence.** When you create an advantage on an opponent using Provoke, you can use your free invocation to become the target of that character's next relevant action, drawing their attention away from another target.
-
- ♦ **Okay, Fine!** You can use Provoke in place of Empathy to learn a target's aspects, by bullying them until they reveal one to you. The target defends against this with Will. (If the GM thinks the aspect is particularly vulnerable to your hostile approach, you get a +2 bonus.)

RAPPORT

The Rapport skill is all about making positive connections to people and eliciting positive emotion. It's the skill of being liked and trusted.

Create an Advantage: Use Rapport to establish a positive mood on a target or in a scene or to get someone to confide in you out of a genuine sense of trust. You could pep talk someone into having *Elevated Confidence*, or stir a crowd into a *Joyful Fervor*, or simply make someone *Talkative* or *Helpful*.

Attack: Rapport doesn't cause harm, so you don't use it for attacks.

Defend: Rapport defends against any skill used to damage your reputation, sour a mood you've created, or make you look bad in front of other people. It does not, however, defend against mental attacks. That requires Will.

Rapport Stunts

- ♦ **Best Foot Forward.** Twice per session, you may upgrade a boost you receive with Rapport into a full situation aspect with a free invocation.
- ♦ **Demagogue.** +2 to Rapport when you're delivering an inspiring speech in front of a crowd. (If there are named NPCs or PCs in the scene, you may target them all simultaneously with one roll rather than dividing up your shifts.)
- ♦ **Popular.** If you're in an area where you're popular and well-liked, you can use Rapport in place of Contacts.
- ♦ You may be able to establish your popularity by spending a fate point to declare a story detail, or because of prior justification.

RESOURCES

Resources describes your character's general level of material wealth in the game world and ability to apply it. This might not always reflect cash on hand, given the different ways you can represent wealth in a particular setting—in a medieval game, it might be tied to land or vassals as much as gold; in the modern day, it might mean a number of good lines of credit.

This skill is in the default list to give you a basic, easy way to handle wealth as an abstraction without getting into minutiae or bookkeeping. Some people might consider it odd to give a static skill rating for something that we're used to seeing as a finite resource. If that bothers you, see the Limiting Resources sidebar below for ways to limit Resources.

Overcome: You can use Resources to get yourself out of or past any situation where throwing money at the problem will help, such as committing bribery or acquiring rare and expensive things. Challenges or contests might involve auctions or bidding wars.

Attack: Resources isn't used for attacks.

Defend: Resources isn't used to defend.

Resources Stunts

- ♦ **Money Talks.** You can use Resources instead of Rapport in any situation where ostentatious displays of material wealth might aid your cause.
- ♦ **Savvy Investor.** You get an additional free invoke when you create advantages with Resources, provided that they describe a monetary return on an investment you made in a previous session. (In other words, you can't retroactively declare that you did it, but if it happened in the course of play, you get higher returns.)
- ♦ **Trust Fund Baby.** Twice per session, you may take a boost representing a windfall or influx of cash.

Limiting Resources: If someone is using the Resources skill a bit too often, or you just want to represent how continually tapping into your source of wealth provides diminishing returns, you can try one of the following ideas: every time the character succeeds at a Resources roll, decrease the skill by one level for the remainder of that session. If they succeed at a Resources roll at Mediocre (+0), they can no longer make any Resources rolls that session. If you really want to get crazy, you can make finances a category of conflict and give each character a wealth stress track, giving them extra stress boxes for having a high Resources, but we don't recommend going that far unless you plan on making material wealth a major part of your game.

SHOOT

The counterpart to Fight, Shoot is the skill of using ranged weaponry, either in a conflict or on targets that don't actively resist your attempts to shoot them (like a bull's-eye or the broad side of a barn).

Again, as with Fight, if it's important to your setting to make a distinction between different types of ranged weaponry, you might separate this out into skills like Bows, Guns, Energy Weapons, etc. Don't go nuts with this unless it's key to your game.

Overcome: Unless, for some reason, you need to demonstrate your Shoot ability in a non-conflict situation, you probably won't be using this skill for normal obstacles much. Obviously, contests involving Shoot are a popular staple of adventure fiction, and we recommend you look for the opportunity to have them if you have a character who specializes in this.

Attack: This skill makes physical attacks. You can make them from up to two zones away, unlike with Fight. (Sometimes the range will change with the weapon.)

Shoot Stunts

- ♦ **Called Shot.** During a Shoot attack, spend a fate point and declare a specific condition you want to inflict on a target, like *Shot in the Hand*. If you succeed, you place that as a situation aspect on them in addition to hitting them for stress.
- ♦ **Quick on the Draw.** You can use Shoot instead of Notice to determine turn order in any physical conflict where shooting quickly would be useful.
- ♦ **Uncanny Accuracy.** Once per conflict, stack an additional free invoke on an advantage you've created to represent the time you take to aim or line up a shot (like *In My Sights*).

STEALTH

The Stealth skill allows you to avoid detection, both when hiding in place and trying to move about unseen. It pairs well with the Burglary skill.

Overcome: You can use Stealth to get past any situation that primarily depends on you not being seen. Sneaking past sentries and security, hiding from a pursuer, avoiding leaving evidence as you pass through a place, and any other such uses all fall under the purview of Stealth.

Attack: Stealth isn't used to make attacks.

Defend: You can use this to foil Notice attempts to pinpoint you or seek you out, as well as to try to throw off the scent of an Investigate attempt from someone trying to track you.

Stealth Stunts

- ♦ **Face in the Crowd.** +2 to any Stealth roll to blend into a crowd. What a “crowd” means will depend on the environment —a subway station requires more people to be crowded than a small bar.
-
- ♦ **Slippery Target.** Provided you’re in darkness or shadow, you can use Stealth to defend against Shoot attacks from enemies that are at least one zone away.

WILL

The Will skill represents your character’s general level of mental fortitude, the same way that Physique represents your physical fortitude.

Create an Advantage: You can use Will to place aspects on yourself, representing a state of deep concentration or focus.

Defend: Will is the main skill you use to defend against mental attacks from Provoke, representing your control over your reactions.

Will Stunts

- ♦ **Strength From Determination.** Use Will instead of Physique on any overcome rolls representing feats of strength.
-
- ♦ **Hard Boiled.** You can choose to ignore a mild or moderate consequence for the duration of the scene. It can’t be compelled against you or invoked by your enemies. At the end of the scene it comes back worse, though; if it was a mild consequence it becomes a moderate consequence, and if it was already moderate, it becomes severe.
-
- ♦ **Indomitable.** +2 to defend against Provoke attacks specifically related to intimidation and fear.

ACTIONS AND OUTCOMES

IT'S TIME FOR ACTION!

You roll the dice when there's some kind of interesting opposition keeping you from achieving your goals. If there's no interesting opposition, you just accomplish whatever you say you're trying to do.

As we've said in prior chapters, characters in a Fate game solve their problems proactively. Players, during the game you're going to do a lot—you might break into the bad guy's fortress, pilot a starship past a minefield, rally a group of people into a protest, or poll a network of informants to get the latest word on the street.

That's when it's time to take out the dice.

- ♦ Choose the character's skill that is appropriate to the action.
- ♦ Roll four Fate dice.
- ♦ Add your skill rating to the dice roll. The total is your result on the ladder.
- ♦ If you invoke an aspect, add +2 to your result or reroll the dice.

Cynere needs to bribe her way past the guards keeping her from entering the city of Thaalar. Amanda says she'll do this as a straight-up overcome action, because the guards are nameless NPCs anyway and not really worth a conflict.

Lily looks through Cynere's skill list and picks Resources as her skill, hoping she can scrounge enough out of her coin purse to satisfy them. Her Resources skill is Average (+1), so she'll add one to whatever result she gets from rolling the dice.

She rolls and gets: ±0+

Her total result is +2 (+1 from her dice and +1 from her skill of Average), which corresponds to a Fair on the ladder.

OPPOSITION

Every action you take has some kind of opposition, whether it comes from another character (**active opposition**) or from the difficulty of the task itself (**passive opposition**).

Amanda decides to roll active opposition against Lily on behalf of the guards. She decides the most appropriate opposing skill is Will—they're trying to resist the temptation of bribery, after all.

The guards are nameless NPCs with no reason to be particularly strong of will, so she gives them a Mediocre (+0). She rolls and gets: ++0+

...for an incredibly lucky result of +3!

That gives her a Good (+3) result, beating Lily's roll by one.

For the GM: Active or Passive? If there is no character in the way, then look at your situation aspects in this scene to see if any of them justify some sort of obstacle, or consider the circumstances (like rough terrain, a complex lock, time running out, a situational complication, etc.). If something sounds interesting, choose passive opposition and set a rating on the ladder.

Sometimes you're going to run into edge cases, where something inanimate seems like it should provide active opposition (like an automated gun) or an NPC can't provide proactive resistance (like if they're unaware of what the PC is doing). Follow your gut—use the type of opposition that fits the circumstances or makes the scene more interesting.

THE FOUR OUTCOMES

When you roll the dice, either you're going to fail, tie, succeed, or succeed with style.

Every roll you make in a Fate game results in one of four outcomes, generally speaking. The specifics may change a little depending on what kind of action you're taking, but all the game actions fit this general pattern.

FAIL

If you roll lower than your opposition, you fail. This means one of several things: you don't get what you want, you get what you want at a serious cost, or you suffer some negative mechanical consequence. Sometimes, it means more than one of those. It's the GM's job to determine an appropriate cost.

TIE

If you roll the same as your opposition, you tie. This means you get what you want, but at a minor cost, or you get a lesser version of what you wanted.

SUCCEED

If you roll higher than your opposition, you succeed. This means you get what you want at no cost.

SUCCEED WITH STYLE

If you roll three or more higher than your opposition, you succeed with style. This means that you get what you want, but you also get an added benefit on top of that.

For the GM: Serious Cost vs. Minor Cost: When you're thinking about costs, think both about the story in play and the game mechanics to help you figure out what would be most appropriate. A minor cost should add a story detail that's problematic or bad for the PC, but doesn't necessarily endanger progress. You could also ask the PC to take stress or give someone who opposes the PCs a boost.

For the GM: For active opposition, you don't really need to worry about how hard the roll is—just use the NPC's skill level and roll the dice like the players do, letting the chips fall where they may. We have guidelines about NPC skill levels in *Running the Game*.

How Hard Should Skill Rolls Be? Anything that's two or more steps higher than the PC's skill level—Fair (+2) skill and Great (+4) opposition, for example—means that the player will probably fail or need to invoke aspects to succeed. Between that range, there's a roughly equal chance that they'll tie or succeed, and a roughly equal chance that they will or won't need to invoke aspects to do so. Finally, a couple of quick axioms: if you can think of at least one reason why the opposition sticks out, but otherwise just can't decide what the difficulty should be, pick Fair (+2). It's in the middle of a PC's range of skills, so it provides a decent challenge for every skill level except Great (+4), and you want to give PCs a chance to show off their peak skill anyway.

OVERCOME

Use the overcome action to achieve assorted goals appropriate to your skill.

When your character's in one of these situations and there's something between her and her goals, you use the overcome action to deal with it. Look at it as the "catch-all" action for every skill—if it doesn't fall into any other category, it's probably an overcome action.

When you fail an overcome action, you have two options. You can simply fail, which means you don't attain your goal or get what you were after, or you can succeed at a serious cost.

When you succeed at an overcome action, you attain your goal without any cost.

You may occasionally run into situations where it seems appropriate to provide a different benefit or penalty for a given action result than the one listed. It's okay to go back to the basic description of the four outcomes and sub in something that makes sense.

Amanda says, "Okay, so you make it to the top of the tower, and you start working. But then, you hear footsteps echoing below you in the tower—sounds like the next guard patrol got here just a bit early."

Amanda shrugs a bit and says, "Work fast? You're looking at passive opposition here—crunched for time, and dealing with intricate machinery bits, so I'll call that Great (+4)."

Landon chips in a fate point and says, "Well, you know what I always say... Smashing Is Always an Option," referring to one of his aspects. Amanda chuckles and nods, and with the invocation, he manages a Superb (+5). That's enough to succeed, but not enough to succeed with style, so Landon accomplishes his objective at no cost.

CREATE AN ADVANTAGE

Use the create an advantage action to make a situation aspect that gives you a benefit, or to claim a benefit from any aspect you have access to.

Sometimes, that means you're doing something to actively change your circumstances (like throwing sand in an opponent's eyes or setting something on fire), but it could also mean that you're discovering new information that helps you (like learning the weakness of a monster through research), or taking advantage of something you've previously observed (like your opponent's predisposition to a bad temper).

Opposition might be active or passive, depending on the circumstances. If your target is another character, their roll always counts as a defend action.

When you fail, you either don't create the aspect, or you create it but someone else gets the free invoke—whatever you end up doing works to someone else's advantage instead. That could be your opponent in a conflict, or any character who could tangibly benefit to your detriment. You may have to reword the aspect to show that the other character benefits instead—work it out with the recipient in whichever way makes the most sense.

When you succeed, you create a situation aspect with a free invocation.

When you succeed with style, you place two free invocations on the aspect.

The first couple of exchanges have not gone well, and she's taken a couple of big hits already. Lily says, "Amanda, you said there was a lot of filigree and furnishings and stuff laying around, right?"

She says, "Sounds fine to me. Sounds like you're trying to create an advantage with Athletics. One of the golems gets to roll a defend action against you, just because it's close enough to get in your way."

Amanda describes the golems' difficulty with their footing, and now Cynere's got a little bit of an advantage in the coming exchange...

Zird is approaching a local merchant he's been hired to get close to (i.e. spy on) for the sultan of Wanir, in the famous bazaar of Wanir's capital city.

Amanda says, "Works for me. He's a merchant, so his Deceive's pretty high. I'm going to say it's passive opposition, though, because he's not really suspicious of you. Try and beat a Great (+4)."

Amanda looks at her notes, grins, and says, "Okay, here's what you notice. This merchant is obviously a very social fellow, boisterously engaging other shop owners and potential customers as he makes his rounds. This geniality takes on more of a flirtatious, suggestive air any time he speaks to young men—he can't seem to help that."

"Pretty man, huh?" Ryan says. "Does he think I'm pretty?"

Ryan rolls his eyes. "The things I do for business..."

ATTACK

The attack action is the most straightforward of the four actions—when you want to hurt someone in a conflict, it's an attack. An attack isn't always physical in nature; some skills allow you to hurt someone mentally as well.

In addition, passive or not, the opposition always counts as a defend action so you can look at these two actions as being inexorably intertwined.

When you tie an attack, you don't cause any harm, but you gain a boost.

When you succeed with style on an attack, it works like a normal success, but you also have the option to reduce the value of your hit by one to gain a boost as well.

Cynere is locked in combat with Drisban, one of the famed Scarlet Twenty, the elite guard of Antharus. In her inimitable fashion, Cynere attempts to slice him open with her flashing blade.

Amanda rolls for Drisban and gets a -1, bringing his total to Good (+3). Lily wins by two, inflicting a 2-shift hit.

Lily chips in her fate point, making her final result Epic (+7). She gets 4 shifts and succeeds with style, cutting into him with a flourish. She chooses to inflict a 4-shift hit, but she could also have inflicted a 3-shift hit and taken a boost, if she'd wanted to.

As Zird finishes his opening argument, Amanda describes how Skortch uses Provoke as an attack, poking holes in Zird's theories and forcing him to reevaluate. Skortch has a Provoke of Good (+3).

DEFEND

Use the defend action to avoid an attack or prevent someone from creating an advantage against you.

Because you roll to defend as a reaction, your opposition is almost always active. If you're rolling a defend action against passive opposition, it's because the environment is hostile to you somehow (like a blazing fire), or the attacking NPC isn't important enough for the GM to bother with dice.

When you tie a defense, you grant your opponent a boost.

Can I Defend Against Overcome Actions? In general, no—the default assumption is that if a character's trying to overcome an obstacle and no one's actively opposing them, they're just dealing with the difficulty of the task itself. But! You can roll active opposition if you're in the way of any action, as per the guidelines. So if someone's doing an overcome action that might fail because you're in the way, you should speak up and say, "Hey, I'm in the way!" and roll to oppose it. You don't get any extra benefits like the defend action gives you, but you also don't have to worry about the aforementioned bad stuff if you lose.

You'll notice that the defend action has outcomes that mirror some of the outcomes in attack and create an advantage. For example, it says that when you tie a defense, you grant your opponent a boost. Under attack, it says that when you tie, you receive a boost.

CHALLENGES, CONTESTS, AND CONFLICTS

There are three kinds of scenes where the four actions and four outcomes come into more complex play:

- ♦ **Challenges**, when one or more characters try to achieve something dynamic or complicated
- ♦ **Contests**, when two or more characters are competing for a goal
- ♦ **Conflicts**, when two or more characters are trying to directly harm each other

CHALLENGES

Sometimes, things get complicated. It's not enough to pick the lock, because you also have to hold off the hordes of attacking zombies and set up the magical ward that's going to keep pursuers off your back. It's not enough to disarm the bomb, because you also have to land the crashing blimp and keep the unconscious scientist you're rescuing from getting hurt in said landing.

GMs, when you're trying to figure out if it's appropriate to call for a challenge, ask yourself the following questions: Does the situation require different skills to deal with? Holding off the zombies (Fight) while pushing down a barricade (Physique) and fixing your broken wagon (Crafts) so that you can get away would be a good instance for a challenge.

Amanda sees several different components to this scene. First there's the ritual itself, then there's keeping the inn boarded up, and finally there's keeping the panicking inhabitants of the inn calm. That calls for Lore, Crafts, and some kind of social skill—Ryan immediately chooses Rapport.

Now they're ready to start.

GMs, after the rolls have been made, you'll consider the successes, failures, and costs of each action as you interpret how the scene proceeds. It could be that the results lead you into another challenge, a contest, or even a conflict.

Ryan takes a deep breath and says, "All right, let's do this." He takes up the dice.

Ryan sighs and nods, and then goes for the second goal in the challenge, which is calming the locals with his Good (+3) Rapport. He makes his roll and gets a terrible -3 on the dice! Now he has the option to fail or to succeed with a major cost. He goes for success, leaving Amanda to think of a good major cost.

Ryan says, "But they have to be in the inn for that to work!" Amanda is just grinning. Ryan sighs again. "Okay, fine. Some people get totally the wrong idea and are potentially going to get themselves killed. I can just hear them now... Zird, why did you let my husband die? Augh."

Ryan goes for the final part of the challenge—the ritual itself, cast with his Great (+4) Lore. Amanda invokes the boost she got earlier and says, "Yeah, you totally have very distracting zombies chipping apart your barricades. Very distracting." That pushes the difficulty for the final roll up to Superb (+5).

Amanda nods and together they finish describing the scene—Zird finishes the ritual just in time, and the holy power of the Qirik descends on the inn. Some zombies on the verge of breaking in get sizzled by the holy aura, and Zird breathes a sigh of relief... until he hears the panicked screams of villagers outside the inn...

If you have any boosts that went unused in the challenge, feel free to keep them for the rest of this scene or whatever scene you're transitioning to, if the events of the challenge connect directly to the next scene.

Attacks in a Challenge: Because you're always up against passive opposition in a challenge, you'll never use the attack action. If you're in a situation where it seems reasonable to roll an attack, you should start setting up for a conflict.

CONTESTS

GMs, answer the following questions when you're setting up a contest.

That's when the assassins' leader, a cutpurse she knows well as Teran the Swift, blinks in with teleportation magic next to Zird's unconscious form! He starts casting another teleportation spell, clearly intending to leave with Zird. Cynere breaks into a run. Can she get there before Teran finishes his spell?

The previous conflict scene had a situation aspect of Muddy Ground, so she decides to keep that in play.

Teran's going to be rolling his Lore skill for the contest, because he's casting a spell. Because this is a pretty straightforward movement-related situation for Cynere, Amanda and Lily agree that Athletics is the most appropriate skill to roll.

A contest proceeds in a series of exchanges. In an exchange, every participant gets to make one skill roll to determine how well they do in that leg of the contest. This is basically an overcome action.

If you got the highest result, you win the exchange. If you're rolling directly against the other participants, then that means you got the highest rank on the ladder out of everyone. If you're all rolling against something in the environment, it means you got the most shifts out of everyone.

If you succeed with style and no one else does, then you get to mark two victories.

The first participant to achieve three victories wins the contest.

Cynere has Athletics at Great (+4). Teran has Lore at Good (+3).

In the second exchange, Lily turns the tables, rolling exceptionally well and getting a Superb (+5), whereas Amanda only gets a Fair (+2) for Teran. That's a success with style, so Lily picks up two victories and the lead. Lily describes Cynere in a full-on sprint, bearing down on Teran.

In the fourth exchange, they tie again, this time at Great (+4). Lily says, "Forget this noise. I want to invoke two aspects—one, because I have I've Got Zird's Back on my sheet, and Magical Distortions, because I figure that they're going to interfere more with his spellcasting than my running." She passes Amanda two fate points.

Amanda and Lily describe how she snatches Zird just before Teran finishes his spell, and he teleports away without his prize.

CREATING ADVANTAGES IN A CONTEST

Doing this carries an additional risk—failing to create an advantage means you forfeit your contest roll, which means there's no way you can make progress in the current exchange. If you at least tie, you get to make your contest roll normally.

She rolls Athletics to create the advantage and gets a Great (+4). Teran rolls Athletics to defend and gets a Good (+3).

Because Lily didn't fail, she gets to make her contest roll normally. Amanda decides that being semi-blinded isn't going to stop Teran from continuing to cast, so he also gets to roll normally.

CONFLICTS

In a conflict, characters are actively trying to harm one another. It could be a fist fight, a shootout, or a sword duel. It could also be a tough interrogation, a psychic assault, or a shouting match with a loved one. As long as the characters involved have both the intent and the ability to harm one another, then you're in a conflict scene.

Setting up a conflict is a little more involved than setting up contests or challenges. Here are the steps.

SETTING THE SCENE

- ♦ Who's in the conflict?
- ♦ Where are they positioned relative to one another?
- ♦ When is the conflict taking place? Is that important?
- ♦ What's the environment like?

You don't need an exhaustive amount of detail here, like precise measures of distance or anything like that. Just resolve enough to make it clear for everyone what's going on.

The participants in the conflict are pretty obvious—the PCs, plus Og and four nameless enforcers, all NPCs under Amanda's control. The warehouse is the environment, and the group takes a moment to talk about it—boxes and crates everywhere, large and open, there's probably a second floor, and Amanda mentions the loading door is open because they're waiting for a ship to come in.

SITUATION ASPECTS

Good options for situation aspects include:

Situation Aspects and Zones in Mental Conflicts: So, you may not even need situation aspects or zones for a lot of mental conflicts. Don't feel obligated to include them.

Considering our warehouse again, Amanda thinks about what might make good situation aspects.

ZONES

A zone is an abstract representation of physical space. The best definition of a zone is that it's close enough that you can interact directly with someone (in other words, walk up to and punch them in the face).

If you can describe the area as bigger than a house, you can probably divide it into two or more zones—think of a cathedral or a shopping center parking lot.

"Above X" and "below X" can be different zones, especially if moving between them takes some doing—think of the airspace around something large, like a blimp.

She knows there's also a second floor ringing the inner walls, so she makes that an additional zone. She adds Ladder Access Only to the scene.

She sketches the rough map on an index card for everyone to see.

ESTABLISHING SIDES

The normal assumption is that the player characters are on one side, fighting against NPCs who are in opposition. It doesn't always have to be that way, however—PCs can fight each other and be allied with NPCs against each other.

It might also help, GMs, to decide 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? You might change your mind once the action starts, but if you have a basic idea, it gives you a good starting point to work from.

In our continuing warehouse fight example, the sides are obvious—Og and his buddies want to do in the PCs, and the PCs want to keep that from happening.

The conflict starts with everyone on the main warehouse floor. Amanda decides that Og and one of his friends are going to go after Landon, two of the other thugs are going after Cynere, and the final one is going to chase after Zird.

TURN ORDER

If there's a tie, compare a secondary or tertiary skill. For physical conflicts, that's Athletics, then Physique. For mental conflicts, Rapport, then Will.

Zird has a Notice of Average (+1), so he goes second.

THE EXCHANGE

Exchanges in a conflict are a little more complicated than in contests. In an exchange, every character gets a turn to take an action. GMs, you get to go once for every NPC you control in the conflict.

GMs, if you have a lot of nameless NPCs in your scene, feel free to have them use passive opposition to keep your dice rolling down. Also, consider using mobs instead of individual NPCs to keep things simple.

Regardless, you only get to make one skill roll on your turn in an exchange, unless you're defending against someone else's action—you can do that as many times as you want. You can even make defend actions on behalf of others, so long as you fulfill two conditions: it has to be reasonable for you to interpose yourself between the attack and its target, and you have to suffer the effects of any failed rolls.

On Ryan's turn, he has Zird do a full defense—normally, he'd be able to defend and get an action this exchange, but instead, he gets a +2 to his defense rolls until his next turn.

Amanda goes last, and she just has all of her NPCs attack their chosen targets.

Full Defense

If you get hit by an attack, one of two things happen: either you absorb the hit and stay in the fight, or you're taken out.

If, for whatever reason, you want to forego your defense and take a hit (like, say, to interpose yourself in the path of an arrow that's about to skewer your friend), you can.

STRESS

One of your options to mitigate the effect of a hit is to take stress. Mentally, stress could mean that you just barely manage to ignore an insult, or clamp down on an instinctive emotional reaction, or something like that.

On your character sheet, you have a number of stress boxes, each with a different shift value. By default, all characters get a 1-point and a 2-point box. You may get additional, higher-value stress boxes depending on some of your skills (usually Physique and Will).

You can only check off one stress box per hit.

After a conflict, when you get a minute to breathe, any stress boxes you checked off become available for your use again.

Og batters Landon with a whopping 3-shift hit on this exchange, wielding a giant club with spikes.

Because his 3-point box is already checked, the hit must be absorbed by a higher-value box. He reluctantly checks off the 4-point box.

Landon has one more stress box on his sheet, a 2-shift box. That means his reserves are almost gone, and the next major hit he takes is going to hurt bad...

CONSEQUENCES

Consequences come in three levels of severity—mild, moderate, and severe. Each one has a different shift value: two, four, and six, respectively. On your character sheet, you have a number of available consequence slots.

Still, it's better than being taken out, right?

She has two ways to take the hit. She could take one severe consequence, which negates 6 stress. She could also take a moderate consequence (4 stress) and use her 2-point stress box.

Amanda and Lily agree to call the severe consequence Nearly Guttled. Cynere takes a wicked slash from one of the thugs' swords, gritting her teeth through the pain...

Mild consequences don't require immediate medical attention. They hurt, and they may present an inconvenience, but they aren't going to force you into a lot of bed rest. On the mental side, mild consequences express things like small social gaffes or changes in your surface emotions. Examples: *Black Eye*, *Bruised Hand*, *Winded*, *Flustered*, *Cranky*, *Temporarily Blinded*.

Severe consequences go straight to the emergency room (or whatever the equivalent is in your game)—they're extremely nasty and prevent you from doing a lot of things, and will lay you out for a while. On the mental side, they express things like serious trauma or relationship-changing harm. Examples: *Second-Degree Burn*, *Compound Fracture*, *Guts Hanging Out*, *Crippling Shame*, *Trauma-Induced Phobia*.

What Skill Do I Use for Recovery? If you want it to be easier to help people recover physically, you could add it as a default action to a skill. Lore is a good default option, but we could see it as a function of Crafts, too. It might even be important enough in your game to add a Medic or Survival skill.

Recovering from a Consequence

In order to regain the use of a consequence slot, you have to recover from the consequence. That requires two things—succeeding at an action that allows you to justify recovery, and then waiting an appropriate amount of game time for that recovery to take place.

The difficulty for this obstacle is based on the shift value of the consequence. Mild is Fair (+2), moderate is Great (+4), and severe is Fantastic (+6). If you are trying to perform the recovery action on yourself, increase the difficulty by two steps on the ladder.

If you succeed at the recovery action, or someone else succeeds on a recovery action for you, you get to rename the consequence aspect to show that it's in recovery. So, for example, *Broken Leg* could become *Stuck in a Cast*, *Scandalized* could become *Damage Control*, and so on. This doesn't free up the consequence slot, but it serves as an indicator that you're recovering, and it changes the ways the aspect's going to be used while it remains.

Then, you just have to wait the time.

Back at the inn, Zird attempts to bandage up the cut. He has a stunt called, "Scholar, Healer" which allows him to use his Lore skill for recovery obstacles. He makes his Lore roll at a difficulty of Fantastic (+6) and succeeds.

Potions and Other Insta-Healing: In Fate, however, a consequence is largely just like any other aspect. It only comes into play when someone pays a fate point to invoke it (after the initial free invoke, of course), or when it's compelled.

EXTREME CONSEQUENCES

In addition to the normal set of mild, moderate, and severe consequences, every PC also gets one last-ditch option to stay in a fight—the extreme consequence. Between major milestones, you can only use this option once.

Unlike other consequences, you can't make a recovery action to diminish an extreme consequence—you're stuck with it until your next major milestone. After that, you can rename the extreme consequence to reflect that you're no longer vulnerable to the worst of it, as long as you don't just switch it out for whatever your old aspect was. Taking an extreme consequence is a permanent character change; treat it as such.

CONCEDING THE CONFLICT

Concession gives the other person what they wanted from you, or in the case of more than two combatants, removes you as a concern for the opposing side. You're out of the conflict, period.

Second of all, you get to avoid the worst parts of your fate. Yes, you lost, and the narration has to reflect that. But you can't use this privilege to undermine the opponent's victory, either—what you say happens has to pass muster with the group.

Before Amanda's next turn, Lenny says, "I concede. I don't want to risk any more consequences."

Amanda says, "So, what are you trying to avoid here?"

Amanda chuckles and says, "Fair enough. So, we'll say that Og knocks you out cold and doesn't bother to finish you off, because he still has Cynere and Zird to deal with. He may even think you're dead. I feel like the loss needs some more teeth, though. Hm..."

Amanda nods. "Yeah, that's good. He knocks you out, spits on you, and takes your sword."

Getting Taken Out: If you don't have any stress or consequences left to buy off all the shifts of a hit, that means you're taken out.

CHARACTER DEATH

So, if you think about it, there's not a whole lot keeping someone from saying, after taking you out, that your character dies. If you're talking about a physical conflict where people are using nasty sharp weapons, it certainly seems reasonable that one possible outcome of defeat is your character getting killed.

Others are more circumspect, and consider it very damaging to their fun if they lose a character upon whom they've invested hours and hours of gameplay, just because someone spent a lot of fate points or their die rolls were particularly unlucky.

That doesn't mean there's no room for character death in the game, however. We just recommend that you save that possibility for conflicts that are extremely pivotal, dramatic, and meaningful for that character—in other words, conflicts in which that character would knowingly and willingly risk dying in order to win. Players and GMs, if you've got the feeling that you're in that kind of conflict, talk it out when you're setting the scene and see how people feel.

MOVEMENT

In a conflict, it's important to track where everyone is relative to one another, which is why we divide the environment where the conflict's taking place into zones. Where you have zones, you have people trying to move around in them in order to get at one another or at a certain objective.

If you want to move more than one zone (up to anywhere else on the map), if a situation aspect suggests that it might be difficult to move freely, or if another character is in your way, then you must make an overcome action using Athletics to move. This counts as your action for the exchange.

If you fail that roll, whatever was impeding you keeps you from moving. If you tie, you get to move, but your opponent takes a temporary advantage of some kind. If you succeed, you move without consequence. If you succeed with style, you can claim a boost in addition to your movement.

In our continuing warehouse conflict, Cynere wants to go after one of Og's thugs, who has started shooting arrows down from the second floor. That requires her to cross one zone to get to the access ladder for the second floor, and then climb it, making her opponent two zones away.

Lily tells Amanda her intent, and Amanda says, "Okay, the thug you're fighting is going to try and keep you from getting away, so he's going to provide active opposition."

Lily and Amanda describe Cynere faking out the thug, vaulting over a crate, and taking the ladder two rungs at a time to get up top. She takes a boost, which she calls Momentum.

ADVANTAGES IN A CONFLICT

Remember that aspects you create as advantages follow all the rules for situation aspects—the GM can use them to justify overcome actions, they last until they're made irrelevant or the scene is over, and in some cases they represent as much a threat to you as an opponent.

Cover Fire and Other Impositions: You could also put yourself directly between the attack and the intended target, such that the bad guy has to get through you to get to your buddy. Then you're just defending as normal and taking the stress and consequences yourself.

In terms of options for advantages, the sky's the limit. Pretty much any situational modifier you can think of can be expressed as an advantage.

OTHER ACTIONS IN A CONFLICT

As stated above, you may find yourself in a situation where you want to do something else while your friends are fighting. You might be disarming a death trap, searching for a piece of information, or checking for hidden assailants.

Free Actions: GMs, don't fall into the trap of trying to police every little detail of a player's description. Remember, if there's no significant or interesting opposition, you shouldn't require a roll—just let the players accomplish what they say they do. Reloading a gun or fishing for something in your backpack is part of performing the action. You shouldn't require any mechanics to deal with that.

Cynere is trying to get a door open so that she and her friends can escape into an ancient vault rather than fighting off endless hordes of temple guardians.

On that exchange, Cynere successfully defends against an attack, so she uses her action to pick the lock. She fails, and decides to succeed at a cost. Amanda figures the easiest thing is to hit her with a consequence because she's in a fight. So she gets the door open, but not before one of the temple guardians gives her a Gouged Leg.

On the third exchange, she defends and succeeds with style at the Physique roll to get the door open. She signals to her friends and takes a Head Start boost, because it's about to be a chase...

ENDING A CONFLICT

GMs, once you know a conflict has definitively ended, you can pass out all the fate points earned from concession. Players, take the fate points for when your aspects were invoked against you, make a note of whatever consequences you suffered in the fight, and erase any checks in your stress boxes.

After much struggle and insanity, the warehouse conflict is finally over. Amanda concedes the conflict on behalf of Og and his remaining thug, meaning that the PCs stay alive and can proceed to check out the smuggled goods they were interested in.

Because Lenny conceded, he gets fate points. One for conceding, and another two for the mild and moderate consequences he took in the conflict. All the invocations used against him were free, so that's all he gets. Three fate points.

Lily gets no fate points, because all the invocations against her were free, from advantages and boosts. Because she won, she doesn't get awarded for the consequences she took.

TRANSITIONING TO A CONTEST OR CHALLENGE

Now, the guardians and the PCs have mutually opposing goals but can't harm one another, so now it's a contest. Instead of running the next exchange, Amanda just starts setting up for the chase.

TEAMWORK

Characters can help each other out on actions. There are two versions of helping in Fate—combining skills, for when you are all putting the same kind of effort into an action (like using Physique together to push over a crumbling wall), and stacking advantages, for when the group is setting a single person up to do well (like causing multiple distractions so one person can use Stealth to get into a fortress).

If you fail a roll to combine skills, all of the participants share in the potential costs—whatever complication affects one character affects all of them, or everyone has to take consequences. Alternatively, you can impose a cost that affects all the characters the same.

Continuing with our temple chase example, because it's group vs. group, everyone decides it'd be easier to just combine skills.

Amanda's temple guardians only have Average (+1) Athletics, but there are five of them, so they roll Superb (+5) for the purposes of the contest.

Zird and Cynere want to set Landon up for an extremely big hit on Tremendor, the much-feared giant of the Northern Wastes.

They pass those to Landon, and on his turn, he uses them all for a gigantic +6 to his attack.

RUNNING THE GAME

WHAT YOU DO

If you're the gamemaster, then your job is a little different from everyone else's. This chapter is going to give you a bunch of tools to make that job easier during play.

START AND END SCENES

One of your primary responsibilities during the game is to decide definitively when a scene begins and ends. This might not seem like that big a deal, but it is, because it means that you're the person primarily responsible for the pacing of each session. If you start scenes too early, it takes a long time to get to the main action. If you don't end them soon enough, then they drag on and it takes you a long time to get anything significant done.

We have more advice on starting and ending scenes in the next chapter, *Scenes, Sessions, and Scenarios*.

Drama Is Better Than Realism: In *Fate*, don't get too bogged down trying to maintain absolute consistency in the world or adhere to a draconian sense of realism. The game operates by the rules of drama and fiction; use that to your advantage. There should be very few moments in the game where the PCs are free of conflicts or problems to deal with, even if it'd be more "realistic" for them to get a long breather.

PLAY THE WORLD AND THE NPCs

The PCs' aspects also help you decide how to make the world respond to them. As stated in the *Aspects and Fate Points* chapter, the best aspects have a double edge to them. You have a lot of power to exploit that double edge by using event-based compels. That way, you kill two birds with one stone—you add detail and surprise to your game world, but you also keep the PCs at the center of the story you're telling.

Let the Players Help You:

Amanda: "Well, you know that it's using their life force to power itself. If there were a way to do that, what do you think it'd look like? I mean, you're the expert wizard, you tell me."

Amanda: "Yeah, that sounds good. Roll Lore to see if that's there."

You also judge the appropriateness of any invocations or compels that come up during play, like we talked about in the *Aspects and Fate Points* chapter, and make sure that everyone at the table is clear on what's going on. With invocations, this is pretty easy—as long as the player can explain why the aspect is relevant, you're good to go. With compels, it can get a little more complicated, because you need to articulate precisely what complication the player is agreeing to.

You're the Chairman, Not God: Your job is really to have the "last word" on any rules-related subject, rather than to dictate from your chair. Keep that in mind.

CREATE SCENARIOS (AND NEARLY EVERYTHING ELSE)

This job gets a whole chapter all on its own. See *Scenes, Sessions, and Scenarios*.

WHAT TO DO DURING GAME CREATION

Of course, if everyone's amenable, there's nothing stopping you from showing up with a clear vision of exactly what you want to run. "Okay, this is going to be a game about the Cold War in the '60s, except it's all steampunk and mechs. Go!" Just make sure everyone's on board if you go that route. Even one player who isn't into it, and doesn't really feel inclined to get into it, can really affect the game.

Out There vs. Down Here and Top Down vs. Bottom Up: If you're going bottom-up, you'll start with whatever's immediately important to the PCs. That might be anything from a few notable NPCs in their hometown to the name of the guy who works in the next cubicle over. Then the group figures out the details as the story goes along. There's no need to have an idea of how things fit into the world, because everyone will make that up as you go. The world just spirals out from whatever you start with.

Fate can handle either, but the system's support for player-driven contributions to the narrative in the form of aspects and story details really makes the bottom-up method sing. If that's the way you like to play anyway, great! If not, no pressure—but give it a try sometime.

Small Scale vs. Large Scale: As laid out in that chapter, small-scale stories concern events closely connected to the PCs, and probably within a very limited geographical area. Large-scale games are the opposite: epic tales spanning nations, planets, or galaxies with world(s)-shaking consequences. Both types of stories can be a lot of fun—winning the title of Grand Emperor of the Galactic Reach can be just as rewarding as winning the hand of the prettiest girl in the village.

WHAT TO DO DURING PLAY

Now that you've gone through the process of game creation with the players, let's take a detailed look at how to approach your various jobs during a session of play.

The Golden Rule: Decide what you're trying to accomplish first, then consult the rules to help you do it. This might seem like common sense, but we call it out because the order is important. In other words, don't look at the rules as a straitjacket or a hard limit on an action. Instead, use them as a variety of potential tools to model whatever you're trying to do. Your intent, whatever it is, always takes precedence over the mechanics.

But sometimes, you're going to get into situations where it's not immediately clear what type of action is the most appropriate. As a GM, don't respond to these situations by forbidding the action. Instead, try to nail down a specific intent, in order to point more clearly to one (or more) of the basic game actions.

The Silver Rule: The corollary to the Golden Rule is as follows: Never let the rules get in the way of what makes narrative sense. If you or the players narrate something in the game and it makes sense to apply a certain rule outside of the normal circumstances where you would do so, go ahead and do it.

But say you're in a scene where a player decides that, as part of trying to intimidate his way past someone, his PC is going to punch through a glass-top table with a bare fist. It's totally fine to assign a mild consequence of Glass in My Hand in that case, because it fits with the narration, even though there's no conflict and nothing technically attacked the PC.

Lily says, “Well, there’s nothing for it. I’m going after the idol. I take off down the hall, keeping my eye out for fiery death bolts.”

So Amanda asks, “Lily, we need to go to dice, but what exactly do you want to accomplish here? Are you mainly trying to make sure you don’t get hit, or are you blasting through the hall to get to the idol?”

Amanda asks, “So you’re willing to take damage in the process?”

Amanda says, “Okay, so we can do it in one roll. Here’s how we’ll handle it. You roll Athletics against Fantastic (+6) opposition. If you make it, you’re through the trap and don’t take any harm. If you don’t make it, you’re stuck in the hallway and will have to try again to make it all the way through. We’re also going to treat that failure like a failed defense roll, so you’re going to take a hit as well. Because of all the fiery death and whatnot.”

In this example, Amanda combined effects from overcome and defend to determine what happens to Cynere. This is totally okay, because it fits their intent and it makes sense given the situation they described. She might have decided to do both rolls separately, and that would have been fine too—she just wanted to get it all into one roll.

When to Roll Dice

Roll the dice when succeeding or failing at the action could each contribute something interesting to the game.

The worst, worst thing you can do is have a failed roll that means nothing happens—no new knowledge, no new course of action to take, and no change in the situation. That is totally boring, and it discourages players from investing in failure—something you absolutely want them to do, given how important compels and the concession mechanic are. Do not do this.

Situation Aspects Are Your Friend: For example, if a character is trying to sprint quickly across a room, and you have a situation aspect like Cluttered Floors, it makes sense to ask for a roll before they can move. If there is no such aspect, just let them make the move and get on to something more interesting.

Making Failure Awesome

Succeed at a Cost: You can also offer to give the PCs what they want, but at a price—in this case, the failed roll means they weren’t able to achieve their goals without consequence. One way you can do this is by taking a minor cost to the next level. Instead of suspecting that a guard heard them open the vault, a few guards burst in the room, weapons drawn. Instead of being merely cut off from their allies by a collapsing ceiling, one or more of those allies ends up buried in the debris. Instead of merely having to face an awkward situation with Berthold, he’s still angry and out for their blood.

Let the Player Do the Work

You can also kick the question back to the players, and let them decide what the context of their own failure is. This is a great move to foster a collaborative spirit, and some players will be surprisingly eager to hose their own characters in order to further the story, especially if it means they can keep control of their own portrayal.

Setting Difficulties

When you’re setting passive opposition for an action, keep in mind the difficulty “break points” that we mentioned in Actions and Outcomes—anything that’s two or more steps above the PC’s skill is probably going to cost them fate points, and anything that’s two or more below the PC’s skill will be a breeze.

Setting the difficulty right at the PC’s skill level is, as you might imagine, sort of a middle ground between these two extremes. Do this when you want some tension without turning things up to 11, or when the odds are slightly in the PC’s favor but you want a tangible element of risk.

Important: Justify Your Choices. Either let the players know what it is immediately when you tell them the difficulty, or shrug mysteriously and then let them find out soon thereafter (as in, the time it takes to think it up).

Dealing with Extraordinary Success

Or maybe you're trying to finish the famed initiation test of the scholastic Amethyst Order, and the test is only a Fair (+2) Lore roll—what's the deal? Are they going easy on you? Is your appointment a political necessity? Who pulled the strings on that? Or is it just that the reputation of the Order's scholars is a fabrication?

For others, it's not so clear. What's happens when you get a lot of shifts on a Crafts roll or an Investigate roll? You want to make sure those results have some kind of meaning and reflect how competent the PC's are.

Dealing with Time

Game Time: Game time is how we organize play in terms of the real players sitting at the table. Each unit of game time corresponds to a certain amount of real time.

Story Time: Sometimes, though, you can use story time in creative ways to create tension and surprise during the game.

Deadline Pressure: Some of the game's default actions are made to take advantage of deadline pressure, such as challenges or contests—they each limit the number of rolls that a player can make before something happens, for better or for worse.

Of course, it'd be no fun if there was nothing they could do to improve a deadline situation, and it'd be no fun if the crawl toward the deadline was predictable.

Using Story Time in Success and Failure: Taking extra time is a great way to make failure awesome as per the guidelines above, especially using the "Success at a Cost" option—give the players exactly what they want, but at the cost of taking more time than they were trying to spend, thus risking that their efforts will come too late. Or it could be the thing that pushes a deadline over the edge—maybe things aren't completely hopeless, but now there are extra problems to deal with.

If time is a factor, you should also be able to use invocations and compels to manipulate time, to make things easier or more complicated respectively. ("Hey, I'm a Garage Bunny, so fixing this car shouldn't take me that long, right?" "Oh, you know what? Your sheet says I Can't Get Enough of the Fun and Games... doesn't it make sense that if you're looking for a guy in a casino, it'd be easy to get caught up in distractions? All those machines and stuff...")

How Much Time Is a Shift Worth? Just like with any other roll, the number of shifts you get (or the amount you fail by) should serve as a barometer for just how severe the time jump is. So, how do you decide just how much to award or penalize? We recommend you measure in the abstract and express all the game actions as half, one, a few, or several of a given unit of time. So if you imagine something taking six hours, think of it as "several hours." If you imagine something taking twenty minutes, you can either call that "several minutes" or round up to "half an hour", whichever feels closest.

Going past either end of the spectrum moves you down to several increments of the next unit of time or up to half the next unit of time, depending on which direction you're going. So four shifts on the aforementioned roll might jump you from "several hours" to "several minutes." Failing by one, conversely, might jump you from "several hours" to "half a day."

Story Time and the Scope of an Action: It's easy to think of most actions that a PC takes being limited to anything that the character can directly affect, and working on a "person-to-person" scope. And most of the time, that's going to be precisely the case—after all, Fate is a game about individual competence shining in the face of dramatic adversity.

Remember that if you do this with a conflict or a contest, that you scale each exchange appropriately—if a conflict is taking place over the course of a year, then each exchange might be a month or two, and everyone should describe their actions and the results of their actions in that context.

They decide to do it as a conflict, with each exchange representing one confrontation between Landon and the Shroud's trackers. It goes badly for him and he concedes, taking a moderate consequence into the next session. Amanda suggests that they want to bring Landon back into the fold rather than hurt or kill him, so Lenny decides to take I Don't Know What's Right Anymore, reflecting the seeds of doubt they're planting in his mind.

Zoom In, Zoom Out: There's no rule that says you're required to keep your rolls consistent in terms of story time. One cool trick you can do is use the result of one roll to segue into another roll that takes place over a much smaller period in time, or vice versa. This is a great way to open a new scene, contest, or conflict, or just introduce a change of pace.

During the aforementioned six-month break, Cynere has been researching the demon compatriots of the horrific Arc'yeth, who soul-burned her in the last arc of the campaign. She decides to go it alone, even though Zird offered to help, and ends up rolling her newly acquired Average (+1) Lore to succeed at an overcome roll.

Lily says, "Well, hell, I get up and rush in there, grabbing my sword as I go!"

Lily says, "Oh, hell no. I'm going after him. Her, it, them, whatever."

The contest goes badly for Cynere, and the person gets away. Lily immediately says, "Screw that. Someone in town has to know something, or he left some clue behind, or something. I'm going to roll Investigate."

(GMs, see what happened? One roll jumped a week, but Amanda and Lily are playing it at the table in continuous time.)

Amanda says, "Everyone backs away from a lithe woman at the bar, who sneers at them and goes for her sword, bounding off the stool and aiming a whistling cut at your face."

Judging the Use of Skills and Stunts

By now, you pretty much have all the advice you need to deal with skill and stunt use—the individual descriptions in Skills and Stunts, the action descriptions and examples in Challenges, Contests, and Conflicts, and the advice immediately above about setting difficulties and how to handle success and failure.

When you run into this, talk it over with the group and see what everyone thinks.

A lot of the criteria you're going to rely on for these conversations will come from the work you and the players did with the skill list at game creation. See Skills and Stunts for advice on figuring out what the limits are for a skill and what the dividing line between a skill and a stunt is.

Ryan says, "I'm going to spend some time in a local library, researching some history about the site. I'd like to use Lore to create an advantage."

"What kind of info are you looking for?" Amanda asks. "Just book report-type details, or...?"

Amanda says, "Oh, cool. Yeah, roll your Lore, opposition is Fair (+2)." Unexpectedly, Ryan rolls a -4 and ends up with a Mediocre (+0), meaning that he failed. Ryan decides not to spend any fate points on the roll.

Ryan says, "If the site is so powerful, how did the village become cursed?"

In her notes, she jots something briefly about the fact that the site is now magically defiled and that the town's priest is keeping that a secret, changing Ryan's suggestion a little bit and adding some material for him if he decides to ask around.

Skills and Specific Measurements

So how much can a character with Great (+4) Physique bench press? How much can a character with Fair (+2) Resources spend before going broke?

Dealing with Conflicts and Other Weird Stuff

Affecting Multiple Targets

Things get more complicated when you want to filter specific targets, rather than just affect a whole zone or scene. When that happens, divide your resulting total up against every target, who all get to defend as per normal. Anyone who fails to defend either takes stress or gains an aspect, depending on what you were trying to do. (Note: If you create an advantage to put an aspect on multiple targets, you do get a free invocation for each one.)

Zird the Arcane is unleashing fiery death upon his foes in a magical fashion, as is his wont. He has three such foes, charging at him across a battlefield. Zird figures it's probably Landon's fault he's found himself in this circumstance.

He knows he wants to get one of them pretty good, so he opts to divide his spread up as Superb (+5), Average (+1), and Average (+1). That adds up to +7, which was his roll, so he's all good. Now Amanda has to defend for all three of them.

The second defender gets a Fair (+2), beating the attack roll. He charges forward undaunted.

Compels and Multiple Targets: Just a quick note: players who want to compel their way out of a conflict don't get a free lunch on affecting multiple targets, whether it's one aspect or several that justify the compel. A player must spend one fate point for each target they wish to compel. One fate point compels one individual, period.

Environmental Hazards

So, what do you do when the PCs go up against something that isn't a character?

Cynere, Landon, and Zird are exploring the Caverns of Kazak-Thorn, in pursuit of one of the demonic opponents that Cynere's been so interested in lately. Of course, the demon princess in question doesn't appreciate being hunted by pesky adventurers and has summoned the powers of darkness to stand between our heroes and herself. So it goes.

"I think I speak for us all when I say 'Yikes,'" Ryan says.

Lily says, "I'm willing to go for it. Let's do this."

DEALING WITH ASPECTS

As with skills and stunts, the entire Aspects and Fate Points chapter is designed to help you judge the use of aspects in the game. As the GM, you have a very important job in managing the flow of fate points to and from the players, giving them opportunities to spend freely in order to succeed and look awesome, and bringing in potential complications to help keep them stocked up on points.

Invocations

On the other hand, feel free to ask for more clarification if you don't get what a player is implying, in terms of how the aspect relates to what's happening in play. Sometimes, what seems obvious to one person isn't to another, and you shouldn't let the desire to toss fate points lead to overlooking the narration. If a player is having a hard time justifying the invocation, ask them to elaborate on their action more or unpack their thoughts.

Compels

During the game, you should look for opportunities to compel the PCs' aspects at the following times: of the two, you're going to get the most mileage out of event-based compels—it's already your job to decide how the world responds to the PCs, so you have a lot of leeway to bring unfortunate coincidence into their lives. Most of the time, players are just going to accept you doing this without any problems or minimal negotiation.

Weaksaucy Compels: Also, keep in mind that some players may tend to offer weak compels when they're fishing for fate points, because they don't really want to hose their character that badly. Feel free to push for something harder if their initial proposal doesn't actually make the situation that much more dramatic.

Encouraging the Players to Compel: Open-ended prompting can go a long way to create this habit in your players. If you see an opportunity for a potential compel, instead of proposing it directly, ask a leading question instead. "So, you're at the royal ball and you have The Manners of a Goat. Lenny, do you think this is going to go smoothly for your character?" Let the player do the work of coming up with the complication and then pass the fate point along.

Your main goal should be to enlist the players as partners in bringing the drama, rather than being the sole provider.

As a GM, you want to shoot for a balancing act with the opposing NPCs—you want the players to experience tension and uncertainty, but you don't want their defeat to be a foregone conclusion. You want them to work for it, but you don't want them to lose hope.

CREATING THE OPPOSITION

THE NPC TYPES

Nameless NPCs

These thugs are nameless NPCs with Notice and Fight skills of Average (+1).

Normally Cynere's Good (+3) Notice would allow her to act first, but Amanda reasons that the thugs' ability to surround the PCs gives them the drop. In a big group of six, their Average (+1) Notice is increased by +5 to a Fantastic (+6).

Cynere goes next. Lily says, "In a flash, Cynere's sword is in hand and slicing through these punks!" She gets a Great (+4) result with her Fight. Amanda's first thug mob defends with a Good (+3) (+0 on the dice, Average skill, with +2 for the helpers), so Cynere deals one shift to the mob—enough to take one of them out. There are still two in the mob, though, so they only get +1 for the helper when they attack next.

Nameless NPCs as Obstacles: If the situation is more complicated than that, make it a challenge instead. This trick is useful when you want a group of nameless NPCs more as a feature of the scene than as individuals.

Zird wants to convince a group of mages that continuing their research into the Dark Void will doom them all, and possibly the world. Amanda doesn't want to deal with him needing to convince each mage individually, so she makes a challenge out of them.

Mobs

NPC First, Name Later

Trained Thug (Fair) Aspects: The Ways of the Streets, Violent Criminal Skills: Fair (+2) Fight, Average (+1) Athletics and Physique

Supporting NPCs

Skill Levels: A supporting NPC's top skill can exceed your best PC's by one or two levels, but only if their role in the game is to provide serious opposition—supporting NPCs who are allied with the PCs should be their rough peers in skill level. (Another action-adventure trope is to make the “lieutenant” character better than the main villain at combat, contrasting brawn to the villain's brain.)

Teran the Swift, Thief Extraordinaire Aspects: Cutpurse and Scoundrel, I Just Can't Help Myself Skills: Superb (+5) Burglary, Great (+4) Stealth, Good (+3) Lore, Fair (+2) Fight, Average (+1) Physique [Note: 3 physical stress boxes] Stunts: Inside Man. +2 to Stealth in an indoor, urban environment.

Main NPCs

Regarding skill levels, your main NPCs will come in one of two flavors—exact peers of the PCs who grow with them as the campaign progresses, or superiors to the PCs who remain static while the PCs grow to sufficient strength to oppose them. If it's the former, just give them the exact same skill distribution the PCs currently have. If it's the latter, give them enough skills to go at least two higher than whatever the current skill cap is for the game.

Likewise, a particularly significant NPC might have more than five aspects to highlight their importance to the story.

Barathar, Smuggler Queen of the Sindral Reach Skills: Fantastic (+6) Deceive and Fight Superb (+5) Shoot and Burglary Great (+4) Resources and Will Good (+3) Contacts and Notice Fair (+2) Crafts and Stealth Average (+1) Lore and Physique

PLAYING THE OPPOSITION

Here are some tips for using the opposition characters you create in play. Right-sizing the opposition is more of an art than a science.

Creating Advantages for NPCs

It's easy to fall into the default mode of using the opposition as a direct means to get in the PCs' way, drawing them into a series of conflict scenes until someone is defeated.

Likewise, keep in mind that your NPCs have a home turf advantage in conflicts if the PCs go to them in order to resolve something. So, when you're setting up situation aspects, you can pre-load the NPC with some free invocations if it's reasonable that they've had time to place those aspects. Use this trick in good faith, though—two or three such aspects is probably pushing the limit.

Change Venues of Conflict

For example, someone going after Landon probably doesn't want to confront him physically, because Fight and Athletics are his highest skills. He's not as well equipped to see through a clever deception, however, or handle a magical assault on his mind. Zird, on the other hand, is best threatened by the biggest, nastiest bruiser possible, someone who can strike at him before he has a chance to bring his magic to bear.

DEFINING SCENARIOS

As mentioned in *Running the Game*, a scenario is a unit of game time usually lasting from one to four sessions, and made up of a number of discrete scenes. The end of a scenario should trigger a significant milestone, allowing your PCs to get better at what they do.

Along the way, you'll also have some NPCs who are opposed to the PCs' goals interfere with their attempts to solve the problem. These could be your Raymond Chandler-esque "two guys with guns" bursting through the door to kill them, or simply someone with different interests who wants to negotiate with the PCs in order to get them to deal with the problem in a different way.

Once the problem is resolved (or it can no longer be resolved), the scenario is over. The following session, you'll start a new scenario, which can either relate directly to the previous scenario or present a whole new problem.

Creating a Scenario: Step by Step

- ♦ Find Problems
- ♦ Ask Story Questions
- ♦ Establish the Opposition
- ♦ Set the First Scene

Find Problems

Creating a scenario begins with finding a problem for the PCs to deal with. A good problem is relevant to the PCs, cannot be resolved without their involvement, and cannot be ignored without dire consequences.

Your PCs' aspects have a lot of story built into them—they're an indication of what's important about (and to) each character, they indicate what things in the game world the PCs are connected to, and they describe the unique facets of each character's identity.

Because of all these aspects, you already have a ton of story potential sitting right in front of you—now, you just have to unlock it.

You Don't Always Have to Destroy the World: If you want a classic action-adventure story setup, see if you can come up with two main problems for your scenario—one that focuses on something external to the characters (like the villain's scheme), and one that deals with interpersonal issues. The latter will serve as a subplot in your scenario and give the characters some development time while they're in the midst of dealing with other problems.

Problems and Character Aspects

You have ____ aspect, which implies ____ (and this may be a list of things, by the way). Because of that, ____ would probably be a big problem for you. The second blank is what makes this a little harder than an event compel—you have to think about all the different potential implications of an aspect.

Cynere has Infamous Girl With Sword, which implies that her reputation precedes her across the countryside. Because of that, a copycat committing crimes in her name and getting the inhabitants of the next city she visits angry and murderous would probably be a big problem for her.

Zird has Rivals in the Collegia Arcana, which implies that some or many of them are scheming against him constantly. Because of that, a series of concentrated assassination attempts from someone or several people who know how to get past all his magical defenses would probably be a big problem for him.

Problems and Game Aspects

Because ____ is an issue, it implies _____. Therefore, ____ would probably create a big problem for the PCs.

Because The Doom that Is to Come is an issue, it implies that agents of the Cult of Tranquility are constantly trying to fulfill parts of the ancient prophecies that foretell the doom. Therefore, a series of ritual murders in the next town meant to awaken an ancient demon that sleeps under the town would probably create a big problem for the PCs.

Problems and Aspect Pairs

This is where you really start cooking with gas. You can also create problems from the relationship between two aspects instead of relying on just one. That lets you keep things personal, but broaden the scope of your problem to impact multiple characters, or thread a particular PC's story into the story of the game.

Two Character Aspects

Because Cynere is Tempted by Shiny Things, and Landon has The Manners of a Goat, it implies that they're probably the worst partners for any kind of undercover heist. Therefore, a contract to infiltrate the Royal Ball of Ictherya with no backup and walk out with the Crown Jewels on behalf of a neighboring kingdom would probably be a big problem for them.

Character Aspect and Issue

Because you have [] aspect and [] is an issue, it implies that []. Therefore, [] would probably be a big problem for you.

- ◆ Does the issue suggest a threat to any of the PC's relationships?

-
- ◆ Is the next step to dealing with the issue something that impacts a particular character personally because of their aspects?

-
- ◆ Does someone connected to the issue have a particular reason to target the PC because of an aspect?

Because Cynere is the Secret Sister of Barathar and The Scar Triad is an issue, it implies that the Triad could have leverage over Cynere for blackmail. Therefore, the Triad hiring her for an extremely dangerous and morally reprehensible job on the threat of revealing her secret to the world and making her a public enemy across the land would probably be a big problem for her.

Because Landon has An Eye for an Eye, and The Doom that Is to Come is an issue, it implies that anything the Cult does to Landon's loved ones would be met with a desire for vengeance. Therefore, an attack on his hometown by Cult agents on the prowl for more indoctrinated servants as preparation for the End Times would probably be a big problem for him.

How Many Problems Do I Need? For a single scenario, one or two is sufficient, trust us. You'll see below that even one problem can create enough material for two or three sessions. Don't feel like you have to engage every PC with every scenario—rotate the spotlight around a little so that they each get some spotlight time, and then throw in an issue-related scenario when you want to concentrate on the larger “plot” of the game.

Ask Story Questions

That's what you'll do in this step: create a series of questions that you want your scenario to answer. We call these story questions, because the story will emerge naturally from the process of answering them.

We recommend asking story questions as yes/no questions, in the general format of, “Can/Will (character) accomplish (goal)?” You don't have to follow that phrasing exactly, and you can embellish on the basic question format in a number of ways.

To come up with story questions, you're probably going to have to embellish on the problem that you came up with just a bit, and figure out some of the W-How (who, what, when, where, why, how) details. That's also fine, and part of what the process is for.

Two obvious story questions spring to mind already: Will Cynere get the treasure? Will Zird win his trial? But Amanda wants to save those answers for the end, so she brainstorms some other questions.

Then, she needs to figure out why they can't just go straight to the problem. She decides Cynere has an anonymous rival for the treasure (let's call it the Jewel of Aetheria, that sounds nice), and her mysterious employer would be most displeased if the rival beat her to the punch.

So, that gives her three more questions: Can Cynere sniff out her competitor before her competitor does the same to her? Can Zird find an ally to defend him among the Collegia's ranks? Can Zird discover the architects of the conspiracy without suffering further consequences?

Notice that each of these questions has the potential to significantly shape the scenario's plot. Right off the bat, if Zird decides not to go quietly, you have a very different situation than if he chooses to submit to custody. If Zird's investigations get him arrested, then the trial might end up being a moot point. If Cynere decides to help Zird rather than pursuing the Jewel, then they're going to have another source of trouble in the form of Cynere's employer.

Look at one of the questions for Cynere: “Will Cynere discover the identity of her chief competitor for the Jewel before the competitor discovers hers?” Without the emphasized part, it'd be kind of boring—if she fails to discover her opponent's identity, then we've pretty much dropped that plot thread, and part of the game stalls out. No good.

There's also some room to extend material from this scenario into the future. Maybe the identity of Cynere's opponent doesn't get answered this session at all—that's okay, because it's a detail Amanda can always bring back in a later session.

Establish the Opposition

You might have already come up with an NPC or group of NPCs who is/are responsible for what's going on when you made up your problem, but if you haven't, you need to start putting together the cast of characters who are the key to answering your story questions. You also need to nail down their motivations and goals, why they're standing in opposition to the PCs' goals, and what they're after.

- ♦ What does that NPC need? How can the PCs help her get that, or how are the PCs in the way?

- ♦ Why can't the NPC get what she needs through legitimate means? (In other words, why is this need contributing to a problem?)

- ♦ Why can't she be ignored?

For each NPC that you have, decide whether you need to make them a supporting or main NPC. Stat them up according to the guidelines given in *Running the Game*.

Then she decides that the chief arbiter and the architect of the conspiracy are the same—he didn't trust anyone else to stick the final nail in Zird's coffin, so he made sure he'd be appointed arbiter over the trial. Amanda likes this because his political power makes him a formidable opponent to investigate and gives him a powerful lackey in the form of the corrupt barrister.

As for the corrupt barrister, the first thing that comes to mind is a pathetic, sniveling toady who is totally in the arbiter's pocket. But she wants to add a measure of depth to him, so she also decides that the arbiter has blackmail material on him, which helps to ensure his loyalty. She doesn't know what that info is yet, but she's hoping that nosy PCs will help her figure it out through a story detail later.

Set Up the First Scene

Start things off by being as unsubtle as possible—take one of your story questions, come up with something that will bring the question into sharp relief, and hit your players over the head with it as hard as you can. You don't have to answer it right off the bat (though there's nothing wrong with that, either), but you should show the players that the question demands an answer.

If you're in an ongoing campaign, you might need the first scenes of a session to resolve loose ends that were left hanging from a previous session. It's okay to spend time on that, because it helps keep the sense of continuity going from session to session. As soon as there's a lull in momentum, though, hit them with your opening scene fast and hard.

Let's look at our example scenes above. The prompts don't specify where the PCs are when they get confronted with their first choices. So, Amanda might start the session by asking Ryan, "Where exactly is Zird when the brute squad from the Collegia comes looking for him?"

"Perfect!" says Amanda, and holds out a fate point. "So, it'd make sense that your Rivals in the Collegia Arcana would have divined precisely the right time to catch you away from all your magical implements and gear, right?"

"Zird, it's bad enough when your Rivals in the Collegia Arcana give you trouble, but when they pretend to be peasants in the local watering hole, get you drunk, and start a bar fight so they can haul you somewhere secluded, it's even worse. You wake up with a five-alarm hangover and a black eye—someone punched you in the face!" (2 fate points, for Rivals and Not the Face!)

"Cynere, whoever decided to make you this contract offer knows you pretty well. They've included several large gems along with the contract. Problem is, you also know what noble house they were stolen from, and there's no doubt you'll be a wanted woman if you don't sign—and you're infamous enough that you know no one's going to believe how you came by them." (2 fate points for Infamous Girl with Sword and Tempted by Shiny Things.)

DEFINING SCENES

So you can look at it as the foundational unit of game time, and you probably already have a good idea of what one looks like. It's not all that different from a scene in a movie, a television show, or a novel—the main characters are doing stuff in continuous time, usually all in the same space. Once the action shifts to a new goal, moves to a new place related to that goal, or jumps in time, you're in the next scene.

Starting Scenes

When you're starting a scene, establish the following two things as clearly as you can: what's the purpose of this scene, and what's the next bit of interesting action to come.

Now Amanda's thinking about how to start things off next time. The whole situation seems to have really freaked the players out, so she definitely wants to capitalize on that. She figures Anna should return, initially confused about Cynere's role in the theft and ready to fight. The scene will be about coming to an accord with Anna and realizing that they're both on the same side, as it were.

Amanda starts the scene with Cynere and Landon walking back to their lodgings late at night, engrossed in conversation about recent events. Lenny suggests they're not staying at an inn anymore—not after the theft. He figures everyone from the Collegia wizards to the Cult of Tranquility will be looking for Cynere, so they're holed up somewhere safe.

"Whoa!" Lily says. "How'd they know we were going to be here?"

"Fair enough," Lenny says, and they both accept the compel.

If you have a clear purpose going into every scene and you start just before some significant piece of action, it's hard to go wrong.

Ending Scenes

This is an effective approach mainly because it helps you sustain interest for the next scene. Again, you see this all the time in good movies—a scene will usually end with a certain piece of action resolved, but also with a lingering bit of business that's left unresolved, and that's where they cut to next.

Instead of lingering at that scene, though, suggest that they move on to a new one, which helps answer one of the unresolved questions from the current scene. Try to get them to state what they want to do next, and then go back to the two questions for starting scenes above—what's the purpose of the next scene, and what's the next bit of interesting action to come? Then dive right into that.

Using the Pillars (Competence, Proactivity, Drama): Whenever you're trying to come up with ideas for what should happen in a scene, you should think about the basic ideas of Fate that we talked about in The Basics—competence, proactivity, and drama.

Cynere's first impulse is to find out what Anna's talking about—but Amanda knows Landon's impulses are... a little more violent.

"But... we just started talking," Lily says.

Hit Their Aspects

Another good way to figure out the interesting action for a scene is to turn to the PCs' aspects, and create a complication or an event-based compel based on them. This is especially good to do for those PCs whose aspects did not come into play when you made up your scenario problem, because it allows them to have some of the spotlight despite the fact that the overall story does not focus on them as much.

The scene opens on the big trial. Zird stands before a panel of wizards in the Great Hall of the Collegia Arcana. While they pepper him with questions, every now and then a wizard in the gallery throws out a follow-up, an insult, or a word of discouragement. The whole thing's like a lively session of the British Parliament. Cynere and Landon stand in the gallery, following the proceedings as best they can.

"You're right! I can't take it anymore!" Lily says. "I've Got Zird's Back!"

Amanda tosses Lily a fate point. "Nice."

THE SCENARIO IN PLAY

Everything should be smooth sailing from here, right? You present the questions, the players gradually answer them, and your story rolls into a nice, neat conclusion.

The most important thing to remember when you actually get the scenario off the ground is this: whatever happens will always be different from what you expect. The PCs will hate an NPC you intended them to befriend, have wild successes that give away a bad guy's secrets very early, suffer unexpected setbacks that change the course of their actions, or any one of another hundred different things that just don't end up the way you think they should.

Not all is lost, however—the stuff you have prepared should help you tremendously when players do something unexpected. Your story questions are vague enough that there are going to be multiple ways to answer each one, and you can very quickly axe one that isn't going to be relevant and replace it with something else on the fly without having to toss the rest of your work.

Amanda had expected that the scene with Landon, Cynere, and Anna would result in a briefly violent reaction, thanks to Landon, followed by the PCs explaining that they're not with the Cult of Tranquility and everyone realizing that they're all on the same side.

The first swing of Landon's sword fells Anna where she stands, killing what would've been their first contact with the Sun and Moon Society, an important secret organization opposing the cult. Plus, Anna's companions are now convinced that he and Cynere are indeed cultists.

Also, knowing your NPCs' motivations and goals allows you to adjust their behavior more easily than if you'd just placed them in a static scene waiting for the PCs to show up. When the players throw you a curveball, make the NPCs as dynamic and reactive as they are, by having them take sudden, surprising action in pursuit of their goals.

She decides that, while the death of a member of the Sun and Moon Society would go unnoticed by most of Riverton, a guy like Hugo the Charitable would certainly hear about it. He'd already taken notice of Landon after he fought off a few Scar Triad goons. And now this. This newcomer is clearly dangerous, potentially a threat. Worst, he doesn't seem to be working for anyone.

RESOLVING THE SCENARIO

A scenario ends when you've run enough scenes to definitively answer most of the story questions you came up with when you were preparing your scenario. Sometimes you'll be able to do that in a single session if you have a lot of time or only a few questions. If you have a lot of questions, it'll probably take you two or three sessions to get through them all.

The end of a scenario usually triggers a significant milestone. When this happens, you should also see if the game world needs advancing too.

THE LONG GAME

DEFINING ARCS

An arc is a complete storyline with its own themes, situations, antagonists, innocent bystanders, and endgame, told in the span of a few sessions (somewhere between two and five, usually). You don't need to have everything planned out (in fact, you probably shouldn't, given that no meticulously planned story ever survives contact with the players), but you need to have an idea of where things begin and end, and what might happen in the middle.

DEFINING CAMPAIGNS

When you have multiple arcs that are connected and told in a sequence, and that have an overarching story or theme that runs through all of them, you have a campaign. Campaigns are long, taking months or even years to complete (if you ever do).

BUILDING AN ARC

See, the players are so prone to shaking things up and changing things on you that planning more than one arc at a time is often frustrating and futile. Planning the second arc of a campaign based on the events of the first arc, how it turned out, and what your players did, though...well, that can make for very satisfying play.

That said, we know some GMs want to have a greater sense of structure for the long run. We recommend using the same method for building scenarios in the previous chapter to build arcs, but changing the scope of the story questions you come up with. Instead of focusing on immediate problems for the PCs to solve, come up with a more general problem, where the PCs are going to have to solve smaller problems first in order to have a chance at resolving the larger one.

For Zird, his Rivals in the Collegia Arcana makes it pretty easy—she decides that perhaps there's something more sinister behind these rivalries, such as an attempt by a dark cult operating from within to take over the Collegia and turn it to nefarious purposes.

BUILDING A CAMPAIGN

However, if you want to do a little bit of focused planning, the advice is the same as for arcs, except you're generalizing even more. Pick one story question to answer, which the PCs will spend their scenarios and arcs building to. Then, jot down some notes on what steps will lead to answering that question, so you have material for arcs and scenarios.

She knows that to do that, they're first going to need to figure out which of the Cult of Tranquility's factions is right about the prophecy (if either). They'll also need to make sure that none of their personal enemies or The Scar Triad can interfere with whatever they need to do in order to stop the doom. That gives her a good idea of what arcs are going to make up the campaign.

In addition to your characters, the game world will change also. You'll resolve threats as you play, or change the face of a location, or make such an impact on the world that one of the issues may need to change.

ADVANCEMENT AND CHANGE

A milestone is a moment during the game where you have the chance to change or advance your character.

DEFINING MILESTONES

A milestone is a moment during the game where you have the chance to change or advance your character. We call them milestones because they usually happen at significant “break points” in the action of a game—the end of a session, the end of a scenario, and the end of a story arc, respectively.

Obviously, things won’t always line up that nicely, so GMs, you have some discretion in deciding when a certain level of milestone occurs. If it seems satisfying to give out a milestone in the middle of a session, go ahead, but stick to the guidelines here to keep from handing out too many advancement opportunities too often.

MINOR MILESTONES

Minor milestones usually occur at the end of a session of play, or when one piece of a story has been resolved. These kinds of milestones are more about changing your character rather than making him or her more powerful, about adjusting in response to whatever’s going on in the story if you need to. Sometimes it won’t really make sense to take advantage of a minor milestone, but you always have the opportunity if you should need to.

Cynere gets a minor milestone. Lily looks over her character sheet, to see if there’s anything she wants to change. One thing that sticks out to her is that during the last session, Zird has been scheming behind her back a lot and putting her in a bad position.

Ryan says, “Seriously? I mean, it’s not like he does it all the time.”

Amanda approves the change, and Lily rewrites one of Cynere’s aspects.

SIGNIFICANT MILESTONES

Significant milestones usually occur at the end of a scenario or the conclusion of a big plot event (or, when in doubt, at the end of every two or three sessions). Unlike minor milestones, which are primarily about change, significant milestones are about learning new things—dealing with problems and challenges has made your character generally more capable at what they do.

- ♦ One additional skill point, which you can spend to buy a new skill at Average (+1) or increase an existing skill by one rank.
- ♦ If you have any severe consequences, you can rename them to begin the recovery process, if you haven’t already.
- ♦ When you spend your skill point, it’s worth one step on the ladder. You can use it to buy a new skill at Average (+1), or you can use it to increase an existing skill by one step on the ladder—say, from Good (+3) to Great (+4).

Skill Columns

However, there's still a limitation you have to deal with, skill columns. This means you can't have more skills at a certain rank than you have at the rank below it. So if you have three Good columns, you have at least three Average (+1) skills and at least three Fair (+2) skills to support your three Good (+3) skills.

So, let's say you have one Good (+3), two Fair (+2), and three Average (+1) skills. You see how that doesn't work? You're now missing the second Fair skill you'd need to be square with the rules.

So in the case above, you could buy an Average (+1) skill, promote one of your Average skills to a Fair (+2), then bump the original skill up to Good (+3). That would take three significant or major milestones to do. Or, you could wait, bank up three skill points, buy a new skill at Fair (+2), then bump the original skill up to Good (+3). It just depends on whether you want to put new stuff on your sheet or not in the interim.

Zird gets a significant milestone after the end of a scenario. He gains an additional skill point.

If he waits two more milestones, he'll be able to put one of his Average skills at Fair (+2), and then bump his Notice up to Good (+3) like he originally wanted.

GMs, strictly enforcing how the skills work can be a pain in the ass sometimes. If you and the players really want to be able to upgrade a certain skill in a way that breaks the rules now, simply ask that the player spend the next few milestones "correcting" their skill spread, rather than making them wait. It's okay. We won't come after you.

MAJOR MILESTONES

A major milestone should only occur when something happens in the campaign that shakes it up a lot—the end of a story arc (or around three scenarios), the death of a main NPC villain, or any other large-scale change that reverberates around your game world.

Achieving a major milestone confers the benefits of a significant milestone and a minor milestone, and all of the following additional options.

Reaching a major milestone is a pretty big deal. Characters with more stunts are going to have a diverse range of bonuses, making their skills much more effective by default. Characters with higher refresh will have a much larger fountain of fate points to work with when sessions begin, which means they'll be less reliant on compels for a while.

Most of all, a major milestone should signal that lots of things in the world of your game have changed. Some of that will probably be reflected in world advancement, but given the number of chances the PCs have had to revise their aspects in response to the story, you could be looking at a group with a much different set of priorities and concerns than they had when they started.

Cynere reaches the end of a long story arc and is awarded a major milestone. In the game, the PCs have just accomplished the overthrow of Barathar, Smuggler Queen of the Sindral Reach, which leaves an enormous power vacuum in the game world.

She also gets an additional point of refresh. She asks Amanda whether or not she can turn her experience with Arc'yeth into something that will allow her to fight demons in the future. Amanda sees no reason to object, and Lily decides to buy a stunt on the spot.

Lily records the new stunt on Cynere's character sheet, and rewrites the appropriate aspect.

Finally, Landon also reaches a major milestone. Recently in the plot, Landon discovered that the Ivory Shroud was much more than a martial arts society—they've been secret political movers and shakers for a long time, and recently supported Barathar in her efforts to control the Reach.

So we have Cynere with a new appetite for killing demons, Zird reaching a heretofore unseen level of power, and Landon questioning his loyalty to his only real source of discipline. Amanda makes a lot of notes about what this means for the next few scenarios.

One way of looking at a major milestone is that it's the equivalent of a season finale in a television show. Once you start the next session, a lot of things have the potential to be fundamentally different about your game—you might be focused on new problems, several characters will have aspects changed, there will be new threats in the setting, and so on.

So long as you keep them at the same level of refresh and skill points they had, reconvening like this might be exactly what you need to make sure everyone's still on the same page about the game. And GMs, remember—the more you give the players a chance to actively invest in the game world, the more it'll pay off for you when you're running the game.

WORLD ADVANCEMENT

GMs, when the players are changing their characters through milestones, you should also be looking at whether or not the aspects you originally placed on the game during game creation need to change in response to what they've done, or simply because of lack of use.

FOR MINOR MILESTONES

- ♦ Do you need to add a new location to the game, based on what the PCs have done? If so, come up with some NPCs to help give more personality to the location and add an issue to the place.
- ♦ Have the PCs resolved an issue in a location? Get rid of the aspect, or maybe change it to represent how the issue was resolved (*In the Shadow of the Necromancer* becomes *Memories of Tyranny*, for example).

The group reaches a minor milestone because they rescued the Lord of Varendep's son from some of the Smuggler Queen Barathar's minions. It was a small victory that could pay some pretty nice dividends because they now have an ally in Lord Bornhold of Varendep.

FOR SIGNIFICANT MILESTONES

They also created permanent change in the Sindral Reach; that area of the world is no longer under Barathar's sway. Most of the people are grateful, but a few of Barathar's thugs remain to make trouble for the party. Amanda replaces the issue Seat of Barathar's Power with a different one, Smiles in the Open, Knives in the Dark to represent how things have changed.

FOR MAJOR MILESTONES

- ♦ Did the PCs create permanent change in the game world? If so, give it a new issue to reflect this, for better or for worse.

Finally, the heroes confront and defeat Barathar in an epic confrontation. Barathar held a lot of power in the underground throughout the world and her defeat will cause ripples. Someone's going to want to step in and take her place (probably a lot of someones), so Amanda creates the issue Underworld Power Vacuum to reflect this.

If you have aspects you haven't really explored yet, keep them around if you think they're just waiting their turn.

However, you can also change them in order to make them more relevant to what's going on in the moment, or simply to give the PCs more of a sense of being in an evolving world.

The other issue, Saber-Rattling in the East is also interesting, but she thinks that all this confrontation with the Smuggler Queen probably gave Lord Wynthrep the opportunity he needed to escalate things. She changes Saber-Rattling in the East to The East at War!. That should give the PCs an interesting decision to make.

DEALING WITH NPCS

Likewise, when there's a significant change in an issue for a location or the game world, you need to evaluate if the current NPCs are sufficient to express that change. If not, you might need to add one, or alter an NPC you have in a significant way—add more aspects or revise existing aspects to keep that character relevant to the issue at hand.

RECURRING NPCS

With the former, you don't change the NPC, because that's the point—the next time the PCs meet them, they've outclassed them, or they have new worries, or they've somehow grown past that NPC, who remains static. Maybe you even change the category they're in—where they were once a main NPC, now they're a supporting NPC because of how the PCs have grown.

EXTRAS

DEFINING EXTRAS

An extra in Fate is a pretty broad term. We use it to describe anything that's technically part of a character or controlled by a character, but gets special treatment in the rules. If your Fate game were a movie, this is where the special effects budget would go.

- ♦ Magic and supernatural powers
- ♦ Specialized gear or equipment, like enchanted arms and armor in a fantasy game or hyper-tech in a sci-fi game
- ♦ Vehicles owned by the characters
- ♦ Organizations or locations that the characters rule or have a lot of influence over

We consider extras to be an extension of the character sheet, so whoever controls the character to whom the extra belongs also controls that extra. Most of the time, that'll be the players, but NPCs may also have extras controlled by the GM.

THE BRONZE RULE, AKA THE FATE FRACTAL

Before we go any further, here's something important: anything that can be treated like a character, in terms of having aspects, skills, stunts, stress, and so on, can be treated as a character, regardless of what it actually represents.

We call this the Bronze Rule, but you may also have heard of it as the Fate Fractal if you pay attention to the Internet. We've already seen some examples of this earlier in the book; you give your game its own aspects during creation, you place situation aspects on the environment as well as on characters, and the GM can let environmental hazards attack as if they had skills.

CREATING AN EXTRA

Making an extra starts with a conversation. This should happen during game creation or character creation.

- ♦ What elements of your setting are appropriate for extras?
- ♦ What do you want the extra to do?
- ♦ What character elements do you need to fully express the extra's capabilities?
- ♦ What are the costs or permissions to have extras?

SETTING ELEMENTS

Chances are that you already have some ideas for extras in mind after your work in game creation; pretty much every fantasy game has some kind of magic system in it while a game about superheroes needs powers. If the action revolves around some important location—like the characters’ starship, a home base, or a favorite tavern—consider defining that as an extra.

Zird’s magic (and the magic of the Collegia Arcana) comes up as an obvious first choice, as do Landon’s martial arts. Lenny and Ryan both note that they’re not interested in lengthy lists of spells or combat moves. Also, because it’s a fantasy game and magic exists, they agree that enchanted items need consideration.

WHAT EXTRAS DO

In broad terms, sketch out what you want the extras to be able to do, compared to what your skills, stunts, and aspects can already do by default. Also, think about what the extra looks like “on camera.” What do people see when you use it? What’s the look and feel of it?

- ♦ Does the extra influence the story, and if so, how?
- ♦ Does the extra let you do things that no other skill lets you do?
- ♦ Does the extra make your existing skills more useful or powerful?
- ♦ How would you describe the use of the extra?

They agree that it influences the story for several reasons. They imagine vistas full of unknowable magical effects and plot devices for Zird to stick his nose in, as well as the Collegia’s territorial desire over the lore.

Specifically, they rule out the presence of world-altering “high” magic, creating things out of thin air, firebombing whole cities, and so forth. If those things exist, it’s a thread for a scenario, and the product of several people making huge sacrifices.

Using Zird’s magic is all about the weird. Ryan imagines making up odd lists of requirements and ingredients that don’t really follow a consistent pattern—some things he can do quickly, others he can’t, and it’s all about dramatic interest in the moment to determine which is when. The group is comfortable with this looseness, so they assent.

ASSIGNING CHARACTER ELEMENTS

- ♦ If the extra influences the story, then it should use aspects.
- ♦ If the extra creates a new context for action, then it should use skills.
- ♦ If the extra makes skills more awesome, then it should use stunts.
- ♦ If the extra can suffer harm or be used up somehow, then it should take stress and consequences.

There are a few ways an extra can use skills. The extra might be a new skill, not on the default skill list. It could re-write an existing skill, adding new functions to the skill’s four actions. The extra might cost a skill slot during character creation or advancement in order to be obtained. It’s possible that an extra might include one or more existing skills that the character has access to while controlling the extra.

An extra that describes some integral ability of a character might grant a new stress track—beyond physical and mental stress—directly to that character. An extra that is a separate entity from the character—such as a location or a vehicle—might have a physical stress track of its own. You might also designate a skill that influences that stress track—just as Physique provides extra stress boxes and consequence slots for physical stress.

PERMISSIONS AND COSTS

A permission is the narrative justification that allows you to take an extra in the first place. For the most part, you establish permission to take an extra with one of your character's aspects, which describes what makes your character qualified or able to have it. You can also just agree it makes sense for someone to have an extra and call it good.

Fortunately, because extras use character elements that are already familiar to you, dealing with costs is fairly simple—you just pay what you'd normally pay from the slots available to you at character creation. If the extra is a new skill, you just put it into your pyramid like normal. If it's an aspect, you choose one of your five aspects as the one you need. If it's a stunt, you pay a refresh point (or more) to have it.

THE WRITEUP

Extra: Collegia Arcana Magic Permissions: One aspect reflecting that you've been trained by the Collegia.

People who are trained in Collegia magic are able to use their knowledge to perform supernatural effects, adding the following actions to the Lore skill:

Create an Advantage: Use Lore to alter the environment with magic or place mental and physical impediments on a target, such as *Slowed Movement* or *A Foggy Head*. Characters can defend against this with Will.

Defend: Use Lore to defend against hostile magics or other supernatural effects.

EXTRAS AND ADVANCEMENT

MORE EXAMPLES OF EXTRAS

WEAPON AND ARMOR RATINGS

A Weapon value adds to the shift value of a successful hit. So, if you have Weapon:2, it means that any hit is worth 2 more shifts than it would normally be. This counts for ties, so when you're using a weapon, you inflict stress on a tie instead of getting a boost. That makes weapons very dangerous.

We recommend setting a scale for Weapon damage from 1 to 4, keeping in mind that on a tie, a Weapon:4 hit will take out four Average nameless NPCs. Then set your Armor ratings based on what you think you'd need to fully protect against the weapons on each level.

Amanda talks to the group about adding Weapon and Armor ratings. They agree, so now she'll set up examples of weapons and their corresponding ratings. It's a fantasy world, and fairly gritty, so she thinks about the "Weapon:4" guideline above and decides that any large, two-handed weapon (like a polearm or claymore-like sword) would spell doom for a nameless NPC group, even on a clumsy hit.

Weapon:1 corresponds to items like brass knuckles and small saps, or most improvised weapons. Armor:1 is padded clothes.

Weapon:3 covers most swords, maces, and anything you use one-handed. Armor:3 is mail and plate.

Zero-Sum Is Boring: The reason we say this is because the first thing your players will want to do is eliminate the effectiveness of whatever their opponents have by armoring up. And unless you want your NPCs to get slaughtered, eventually you're going to have to do the same. If everyone tends to be the equal of everyone else in terms of weapons and armor, you have a zero-sum game, and you might as well just go back to making everyone roll their default skills.

Another option is to make really good armor unusually scarce, the province of the extremely privileged, rich, or otherwise elite. So while it might be really easy to find a Weapon:3 sword, only the Royal Guard of Carmelion has the master blacksmiths necessary to make armor that's its equal. Players might spend a lot of time trying to buy, cheat, conquer, or steal their way into such a set of armor, but at least you've squeezed some drama out of the attempt.

SUPERPOWERS

Most game settings that have superpowers have the following in common: the purpose of a superpower is to make the stuff you do (your skills) more awesome, and the fact that everyone has superpowers is accepted as a conceit of the game.

Then give every PC a number of additional refresh to buy powers with. These are all taken from a game called Chrome City, home of Simon the Cyber-Ape. It's basically four-color supers with a cyberpunk veneer thrown on it, and he comes from a society of intelligent, cybernetically enhanced apes who practice kung-fu.

Extra: Energy Blast

You can use Shoot to blast other people with energy, without needing a gun or other implement. You have free rein to decide what your blast is like, whether it's some elemental force or just undefined bolts of light. (This doesn't cost refresh, because you can already use Shoot for attacks.)

Extra: Super-Strength Costs: 2-6 points of refresh

Extra: Super-Speed Costs: 3 points of refresh

You take a +2 on all defense rolls with Athletics, or in contests relying purely on speed.

Extra: Super-Resilience Costs: 1-3 refresh

Extra: X-Ray Vision Costs: 2 refresh

This also helps you stay hidden, because you can see when people are looking for you and where they are. +2 to Stealth to avoid detection.

POWERS AND SCALING

As you can see, "balancing" powers in Fate is more a matter of art than science. There are some rough equivalencies you can rely on, like 1 fate point = 1 invoke-equivalent or 1 stunt-equivalent, but when you get into writing rules exceptions like the one for X-Ray Vision, there's no hard or fast rule for what's too powerful. Everything is relative to your tastes, and Fate is hard to break. More precise guidance is in the *Fate System Toolkit*.

SPECIAL GEAR

However, gear can also have a lot of story value. An enchanted sword may have its own legend and personality, or a cursed heirloom might reflect the family that's been forced to keep it for centuries. Use aspects to describe these, and remember that the aspects should provide opportunities for invocations and compels. If you want, you can give the invocations themselves some special flavor, giving them a one-time, stunt-like bonus.

We recommend against going overboard with this and giving every single item your PC owns an aspect or stunt. This is a game about your character, not about his or her stuff. For the most part, you should assume that if your character has a particular skill, that includes the appropriate stuff to use that skill effectively. Reserve extras for items that have unique or personal value, something that you're not going to be changing constantly through the course of the campaign.

Extra: Demonbane, The Enchanted Sword Permissions: Finding the sword during the game.

The sword Demonbane has an aspect called *Slayer of Demon-Kind*. If you are the sword's bearer, you can invoke this aspect when fighting or opposing demons. You may also be subject to a compel due to the sword's enchantment; it continually pushes its bearers to destroy demons with total abandon, and may cause you to lose sight of other objectives, prevent you from escaping a demon's notice, or other complications.

Extra: Brace Jovannich's Dueling Pistol Permissions: Possessing the aspect *The Legacy of Brace*.

Brace Jovannich is the most feared, most respected gunfighter the world of Aedeann has ever known. His gun, known worldwide for the slaying and maiming of hundreds, is yours now. Only you know why you don't just throw it in a canal and save yourself the trouble of its reputation.

The pistol gives you a +2 bonus to any Shoot attack made in a one-on-one duel. We're talking formal duels here, not just singling someone out in a normal gunfight—you challenge or get challenged by someone, there are seconds, etc., etc. If you're using Weapon values in your game, it also has a rating similar to other pistols.

CYBERTECH AND SUPER-SKILLS

In some settings, though, there's another role for cybertech that borders on the magical: it allows people to do things in cyberspace, creating a new context for action related to tech itself.

Extra: Interface Costs: Skill ranks

Overcome: Use Interface to fix a malfunctioning computer system, bypass security lockdowns and other obstacles by hacking your way through, force a piece of tech to trigger a programmed response, and keep a piece of tech from triggering a response.

Attack: Use Interface to break down a computer system directly.

Extra: Media Permissions: Choosing "The Media" archetype at character creation.

Others can spread gossip and rumors, but you have your finger on the pulse of broadcast media. At your word, the events of the day become news, whether it's on television, radio, or the Internet.

Create an Advantage: Use Media to place aspects on an event or an individual reflecting the reputation they gain from your stories.

Defend: Use Media to prevent damage to your own reputation or peace of mind from someone else using the Media skill.

Mob Justice. You can incite people in public to physical violence with Media, and gain the use of two Average (+1) nameless NPCs for that scene, who will attack people at your direction.

WEALTH

When you want a character resource to be finite like wealth is, a good option is to use a custom stress track to represent the exhaustion of that resource. You're creating a new context for conflict when you do this, allowing the new stress track to be attacked and harmed like mental and physical stress.

Extra: Resources, Revisited Permissions: None, anyone can take the skill.

At creation, all characters get a special mild (*A 20-spot From a Friend*), moderate (*Payday Loan*), and severe (*They Want To Break My Kneecaps*) consequence that they can take in wealth-related conflicts.

Attack: You can make financial moves to destroy someone else's resources or force them to overspend to deal with you, and thus inflict wealth stress and consequences. If you take someone out this way, it means some kind of permanent shift in their finances for the worse.

As an interesting advancement option, you might consider allowing permanent downgrades of the Resources skill as a tradeoff for upgrading certain extras, if that extra is something money can buy.

VEHICLES, LOCATIONS, AND ORGANIZATIONS

It doesn't always have to be that complicated, especially if you're going for something more subtle—for example, if you want to tie up some cool stunts into a vehicle and use the superpower or special gear rules above, that's perfectly valid. This is for when you want a vehicle to be a real personality and cornerstone of your game, as iconic as the Enterprise or the Millennium Falcon.

Extra: The Galerider

In this game, the characters are given a handful of extra refresh, skill ranks, and aspect slots to invest into sailing ships. The group decided to invest collectively in one awesome ship.

Costs: Skill ranks, refresh, and aspect slots, invested by several characters.

Skills (representing the ship's crew; PCs can use their own skills if higher): Fair (+2) Shoot, Sail (equivalent to Drive).

Boobytrapped. For a fate point, any PC can have Weapon:2 on an attack or add 2 to the Weapon value of any Fight attack that happens on board, by triggering any of the nasty traps scattered across the deck and interiors as part of their action.

Extra: The Plenary of Ghiraul Permissions: None; assumed as part of the game's premise.

This small nation-state is known for its vast spy network and laws which protect the rich and powerful, usually at the expense of the peasantry. You rule it; congrats. When acting against other nations, use the skills here rather than the ones on your character sheet. In this case, your skills represent the efforts of your spies, nobles, artisans, and armies, respectively.

Skills: Great (+4) Investigate; Fair (+2) Crafts.

Stunts: Counter-Intelligence. The Plenary can use Investigate to defend against other nations' attempts to learn its aspects. Succeeding with style on this defense allows the Plenary to feed the nation an aspect that contains false information instead.

MAGIC

Extra: Lucas's Arts Permissions: None, anyone can commune with a spirit for power.

At creation, characters get an extra three slots for aspects that they can assign to describe their relationship with an ancestor spirit. The aspect should include context, so something like *Sujan Has It In For Me* or *Dammar and I Share Respect* is appropriate.

Commune: This is the skill for becoming one with and manipulating the energy of ancestral spirits.

Create an Advantage: Use Commune to stack free invokes on your spirit aspects, or to retune the spiritual energy in an area to your favor.

Defend: Use Commune to defend against hostile supernatural influences. Failing to defend from these attacks deals karmic stress. (Note: You cannot defend against supernaturally enhanced attacks from humans or other corporeal entities directly with this action.)

Each of the ancestral spirits also gets a writeup, which describes their portfolio, general philosophy, and the benefits they can confer. You gain these benefits by expending a free invoke gained with the Commune skill (as in, only the Commune skill), or by spending two of your fate points. One benefit should always allow you to simply say that something happens in the story without a roll.

Sujan, the Spirit of Warding Philosophy: All life is worth guarding and preserving, even in the face of great adversity.

Extra: Schools of Power

Costs: Aspect slot (for the permission), skill ranks (kind of), refresh.

You can only belong to one order at a time, and leaving an order to join another is practically unheard of (read: interesting option for PCs to pursue over the course of a campaign).

Skills: Great (+4) Learn; Fair (+2) Destroy.

Stunts: Necromancy. +2 to any use of the Black League's skills to affect corpses.

CHARACTER SHEET

A blank character sheet for recording your Fate Core character's aspects, skills, stunts, stress, and consequences. Print this sheet or use the [interactive character generator](#) to create a new character with the skill pyramid and sample aspects.

Fate Core Character

Name

Refresh

Current Fate Points

3

3

Stunts

Notes

CHEAT SHEET

[We leave it to you to design the cheat sheet best suited to your game.]

VETERANS' GUIDE

GAME AND CHARACTER CREATION

Game creation is a variant of Dresden's city creation, but very pared down. At minimum, you only make two aspects called issues to define your game, with the option to drill down if you want to add aspects to faces and locations.

If your game is going to use a lot of extras, or you have specific elements in your game that you want every character to describe with aspects (such as species or nationality), you can raise the number of aspect slots. We don't recommend going higher than seven character aspects—after that, we've noticed that many of them don't tend to pull their weight in play.

3 refresh, and 3 free stunts. Stress boxes work exactly like The Dresden Files RPG.

ASPECTS

Free invocations now stack with a regular one or stack together with other free invocations on the same aspect. Further, an aspect can hold more than one free invoke at a time.

Compels are subdivided into two specific types: decisions and events. This isn't a change in how compels work, so much as a clarification, but it's worth noting.

ACTIONS AND STUFF

The list of actions has been greatly reduced from previous Fate games down to four: overcome, create an advantage, attack, and defend. Movement is now a function of the overcome action, create an advantage subsumes assess/declare/maneuver from previous games under one banner, and blocks can be handled a number of different ways.

Challenges and contests have been greatly simplified and redesigned.

On that note, supplemental actions and skill modifiers are completely removed from the system. Either something is interesting enough to roll for, or it isn't.

SCENARIO CREATION

The advice is way better.

EXTRAS

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