Note To Playtesters

Enclosed is the first draft of the generic *HeroQuest* core rules. As always, I most value detailed feedback from actual play results. I am also, in a reversal of my usual approach, interested in mere armchair opinions from select HQ veterans.

As you'll see as you read the manuscript, I've tried to pare the system down to its bare essence, while keeping the more complicated/simulationist elements that crept into previous editions as options for those who wish to keep on using them, especially in Glorantha. Certain Glorantha-specific complexities are of course omitted from this generic rules set; whether they will be left as is or pared down remains an issue for the author of the Glorantha genre pack to sort out later on down the line.

It's the new or stripped down material that I need tested. So please play with scored contests rather than extended contests, for example.

Another goal you'll immediately detect is to spend much more time explaining what it means, exactly, for Narrators to emulate the choices made by authors of fiction. Please let me know if you feel that these sections finally provide the necessary illumination of this central point.

Results from Glorantha games are not without interest, but I hope most of you will try the game in new settings to look for unanticipated issues in that arena.

We'll be establishing a controlled communications flow for all feedback. Moon Design honcho Rick Meints will be taking on the daunting task of serving as communications pivot. Please send all feedback to Rick at rjmeints@aol.com. He will then make comments as needed and forward the material on to me. Please do not send any feedback directly to me. Don't even cc: me on the email. I assure you that I will read and consider all feedback. Routing it this way allows us to remain on the same page, conceptually speaking, and to collapse two development cycles into one. I may respond to questions directly, or through Rick, as efficiency dictates. It's a method I've used to great success in recent projects for other publishers and hope you will accept the added degree of impersonality as the cost of a much-needed efficiency measure. When sending feedback of actual play, please list the names of all people who participated in your playtests.

One of my nagging fears as I send this out is that I've inadvertently left out some crucial component of the standard rules during the revision process. As you read the document, please be on the lookout for any such colossal omissions!

If you're wondering what the blue text means, it indicates passages lifted from the existing *HeroQuest* rule book. We're keeping track of the lifted text for our internal reference.

Much thanks >>> Robin

Introduction

HeroQuest is a roleplaying rules engine suitable for play in any genre. (In the unlikely event that you've picked up this book without knowing what a roleplaying game is, go immediately to "Roleplaying In a Nutshell", below, and then return to this section.)

The game presents a simple and flexible system allowing Game Masters (hereafter called "Narrators") to make decisions the way authors and screenwriters do when creating novels, TV episodes and movies. *HeroQuest* encourages creative input from your players, resulting in an exciting, unpredictable narrative created through group collaboration. Its abstract resolution methods and scalable character levels make it equally suitable to any genre, from epic fantasy to satirical soap opera. Whether your next game idea draws on the tropes of horror, war, westerns, martial arts, pulps, cyberpunk, cliffhangers, giant robots, super-powered heroes, space opera, cop action, corporate intrigue, furry animals, swashbuckling adventure, Greek tragedy or drawing room comedy, *HeroQuest* can resolve its scenes of conflict, both big and small. You could even use *HeroQuest* to emulate a musical—although we have to concede that it won't do any of the singing or dancing for you.

Tools, Not Rules

Think of *HeroQuest* not as a set of inviolable rules which you must adhere to in order to be running the game properly, but as a toolkit containing a variety of ways of resolving dramatic situations as they arise in play. It is meant to facilitate your creativity—and then to get out of your way, and that of your players. It offers multiple ways of resolving conflicts, and relies on you to choose the best one for the current moment, based on your storytelling instincts.

Every *HeroQuest* Narrator can, and should, use the toolkit the game provides to run in her own way. You may run it differently from one genre to the next, or to suit the changing input of an evolving group of players.

HeroQuest does not make specific decisions for you, but instead helps to shape and guide your own decision-making process. It is well suited to a collaborative, friendly group with a high degree of trust in each other's creativity. If you're stuck with a group whose members are often at odds and who rely on their chosen rules kit as an iron-clad arbiter between competing visions of how the game ought to develop, *HeroQuest* is sadly not the game for you. (Or maybe it's the game you've needed for ages—along with a new group of players.)

It becomes your game as soon as you start to use it. In the shorthand of various *HeroQuest* mailing lists and discussion forums, this principle is known as YGWV: Your Game Will Vary.
[[[BEGIN SIDEBAR]]]

Who Prospers?

It is an unavoidable fact that all roleplaying games favor certain player skill sets. Where other games reward memorization, an instinct for math, and the willingness to comb through multiple rule books for the absolutely most useful super powers, *HeroQuest* tips the scales for creative improvisation, verbal acuity, and a familiarity with the techniques and stereotypes of popular fiction.
[[[END SIDEBAR]]]

Roleplaying In a Nutshell

Experienced roleplayers have read versions of this section many times before. Move along; there's nothing new to see here.

Neophytes, keep reading.

Roleplaying is a hybrid experience, combining elements of game play and collective storytelling. A group gathers together to talk its way through a spontaneously created story. All but one of the participants, called players, creates a fictional character (called PC, for player character) defined by various abilities listed on a record called a character sheet. Using these abilities, the PCs pursue various goals in an imaginary world portrayed by a participant called the Narrator. The Narrator controls various other people and creatures in this fictional environment. The players describe how they pursue their goals; the Narrator challenges them by putting obstacles in their path. Sometimes these barriers to success come in the form of supporting characters who oppose them; at other times, they're impersonal physical or mental challenges, like a lock that must be picked or a cliff the characters have to climb. Whenever the characters try to overcome a difficult obstacle, the Narrator decides how difficult it will be. Using numbers attached to their abilities, the players roll dice to see if they prevail. The Narrator rolls dice to represent the resistance posed by whatever challenge they face. Their success or failure, as determined by the die rolls, changes the direction of the story, in either a big or small way.

Although some games last for only an evening, it is typical for one group to play a series of stories involving the same characters and setting over a period of time. We refer to them collectively as a series, or sometimes a campaign. (The latter term is a holdover from the origins of the roleplaying form in historical war games.)

A transcript from a portion of a *HeroQuest* session might go like as follows. (Don't expect to understand the game rules the players refer to; we'll explain them later.)

Lynne, the Narrator, is running a game she calls TWisTSHocK, in which the characters play a disparate band of people in a dystopian near future united by their shared history as victims of mysterious implantation surgeries. Each has a weird power granted them by these bio-implants. They've been trying to find out who placed these devices inside them, and for what reason, while at the same time evading capture by the secret police.

The players and their characters are:

Rich, who plays Mike McNally, an alcoholic former insurance salesman who can breathe underwater.

Yumei, who plays Lila Frost, a music producer possessing an empathic relationship with electronic devices.

Sara: Anna Najari, a homemaker who can see images from peoples' thoughts.

Ashley: Bruce Cortland, an antiques dealer who can cause small quantities of solid matter to transmute into gas.

The session is already in progress. In the story, it's the middle of the night. The group has broken into the offices of a corporation they believe to be connected to their implantations. They've subdued a security guard, gagging him and trapping him in a chair with duct tape. As a supporting character, the part of the guard is taken by portrayed by Lynne.

***Rich:** I look around the office. What do I see?*

***Lynne:** It's a richly appointed office with heavy mahogany desk. Identical leather books, for decorative purposes only, line the oak shelves. There's a water feature recessed into the marble flooring—a real pond stocked with holographic koi, who swim to the surface and react curiously to your presence.*

***Yumei:** Is there a painting on the wall behind the desk?*

***Lynne:** Yes, as a matter of fact. An abstract painted in Jackson Pollock's famous drip style.*

***Ashley:** Bruce uses his Appraisal ability to see if it's an authentic Pollock, or otherwise valuable.*

***Lynne:** Okay, roll the die.*

[Lynne has decided that the painting is an interesting detail that is tangential to the storyline. As such, its only purpose in the narrative is to give Bruce a chance to shine and demonstrate his competence. Accordingly, Lynne decides that his attempt will, barring an obviously horrible die roll on

his part, automatically succeed. To preserve the players' sense of uncertainty, she rolls her own die, but does not bother to check the result.]

Ashley: *Success, with a 14.*

Lynne: *You identify it as the work of a Pollock imitator named Hayden Trainor. At auction it would probably fetch between ten and twenty thousand dollars.*

Rich: *I take it down from the wall.*

Sara: *What are you doing?*

Yumei: *Don't touch anything!*

Rich: *We can sell it and buy guns!*

Sara: *Guns? I keep telling you guns will just get us in more trouble!*

Bruce: *Besides, do you know how hard it is to sell a stolen painting?*

Rich: *Well, in that case, I take it down and rip a hole in it. These scumbags are gonna pay for messing with me.*

Bruce: *I try to get it out of his hands—safely— before he vandalizes a work of art.*

Lynne: *Mike, do you let him?*

Rich: *No, I want to wreck it.*

Lynne: *Okay, what abilities are you using?*

Rich: *I have Everything I Touch Turns To Crap at 13.*

Bruce: *I have Stop Stupid People From Doing Stupid Things at 17.*

Lynne: *Roll the dice.*

Bruce: *Success, with a 7.*

Rich: *[pumping his fist in the air] Whoo! I got a 1—a critical success!*

Lynne: *That's a minor victory for Mike. He manages to keep it away from Bruce, and then sticks it down on the desk, impaling it on an expensive pen holder.*

Having removed the painting from the wall, you see that there's a safe behind it.

Yumei: *I don't suppose it's open, or the combination is listed on a handy sticky note nearby?*

Lynne: *Afraid not.*

Sara: *[Putting her finger in front of her lips.] I non-threateningly approach the guard and remove the duct tape from his lips. "I don't suppose you know the combination, do you?"*

Lynne: *[in character, as the guard] "You think they trust me with something like that? I'm just a lowly wage slave, with a wife and a family. Six kids, I got. Please don't hurt me, please don't—"*

Sara: *I gently put the gag back on him.*

Yumei*: The safe isn't electronic, by any chance?*

Lynne*: [Who hadn't thought it would be, but realizes where Yumei is going with this and sees a good way to move the story forward.] Why, yes, as a matter of fact.*

Yumei: *Okay, I lean in close and whisper softly to it, using my electronic empathy to coax it open…*

Lynne *calls for Yumei to roll her Electronic Empathy ability, and the story continues from there…*

Thinking In Story Terms

Although there's no right and wrong way to play the game, a certain story-based logic does underlie the entire system.

Where traditional roleplaying games simulate an imaginary reality, *HeroQuest* emulates the techniques of fictional storytelling. (Players completely new to roleplaying often find this principle easier to grasp than those with long experience in the hobby, who've been trained to think in simulative terms from their earliest exposure to it.)

Understanding this distinction will help you to run the game in a natural, seamless manner. Although the game can be run in a more traditional, simulative style, you'll find that it fights you a bit when certain edge cases crop up. One of this book's objectives is to get under the hood of narrative

technique and show you how it works. This will either help you to run the game in its native emulative style, or, if you prefer a simulative approach, to understand how you'll need to modify it to suit your own preferences.

For example, let's say that you're playing a game inspired by fast-paced, non-fantastic, martial arts movies in a contemporary setting. A PC is running along a bridge, pacing a hovercraft, piloted by the main bad guy. The player wants his character, Joey Chun, to jump onto the hovercraft and punch the villain's lights out. You must decide how hard it is for him to do this.

In a traditional, simulative game, you'd determine how hard this is based on the physical constraints you've already described. In doing so, you come up with imaginary numbers and measurements. You'd work out how the distance between bridge and hovercraft. Depending on the rules set, you might take into account the relative speeds of the running hero and the vehicle. You determine the difficulty of the attempt based on these factors, and then use whatever resolution mechanic the rules provide you with to see if Joey succeeds or fails. If he blows it, you'll probably consult the falling rules to see how badly he injures himself (if he lands poorly), or the drowning rules, if he ends up in the river.

In *HeroQuest*, you start not with the physical details, but with the proposed action's position in the storyline. You consider a range of narrative factors, from how entertaining it would be for him to succeed, how much failure would slow the pacing of the current sequence, and how long it has been since Joey last scored a thrilling victory. If, after this, you need further reference points, you draw inspiration more from martial arts movies than the physics of real-life jumps from bridges onto moving hovercrafts. Having decided how difficult the task ought to be dramatically, you then supply the physical details as color, to justify your choice and lend it verisimilitude—the illusion of authenticity that makes us accept fictional incidents as credible on their own terms. If you want Joey to have a high chance of success, you describe the distance between bridge and vehicle as impressive (so it feels exciting if he makes it) but not insurmountable (so it seems believable if he makes it.)

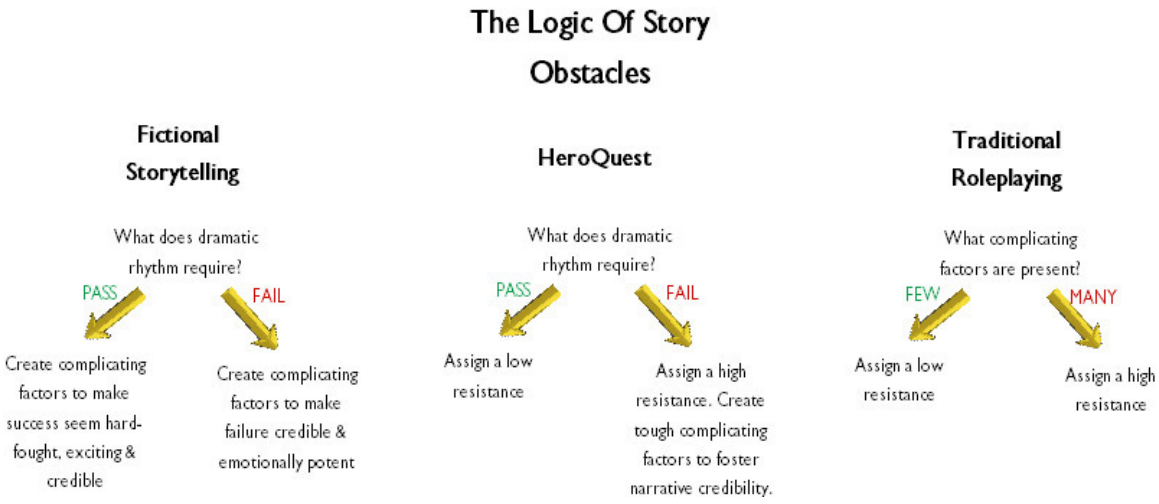
In other words, *HeroQuest* starts with story considerations, deciding the difficulty and then working backward to describe physical details in accordance with them. This, of course, is the way that authors and screenwriters make decisions. If this was a movie, the writers and director would first of all decide whether the Joey succeeds or fails. This is a structural decision; it determines if the scene continues with an thrilling shipboard combat, or concludes with a frustrated hero sputtering in the polluted waters of the Hudson river. After making this choice, they then construct the sequence to be suitably sensational, however it comes out.

Just as fundamental differences separate literature and film, roleplaying is its own narrative form with its own distinct dynamics. *HeroQuest* emulates the decision-making of older narrative forms but adapts it to the requirements of roleplaying. Chief among these is the need for uncertainty to surround all noteworthy conflicts.

Authors and screenwriters create for an audience. In roleplaying, the Narrator and players are their own audience. They must be as surprised by the outcome of events in a story as we are when we read a book or watch a movie. When Joey jumps off the bridge in a game session, everybody should be collectively holding their breath, anxious to see if he gets to duke it out with the bad guy. The result must not be predictable. So instead of deciding if he succeeds or fails, you decide how roughly how likely it is that he'll succeed, and let the die rolls make the final determination.

As Narrator, you then describe either result so that it seems compelling. Then you and the players, through the characters you control, continue to move the story forward until the next point of conflict.

The contrasts between the way obstacles are created and described in fictional storytelling, *HeroQuest* Narrating, and traditional roleplaying games, are encapsulated in the following diagram:



To sum up: **Pick the resistance, *then* justify it.**

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Version History

HeroQuest began its life in 2000, under a slightly different title, *Hero Wars*. The game was first issued, in a revised edition, under its current name, in 2003. The book you hold in your hands is the game's first appearance as a core rules set intended for use in any genre. Previous editions have been set in Greg Stafford's classic fantasy world of Glorantha. Moon Design offers a line of HeroQuest products set in Glorantha, which remain compatible with this new generic version of the rules. A new Glorantha-based genre book, as well as sourcebooks to supplement play in a variety of other settings and genres, will follow this one.

You don't need to know anything about Glorantha to understand this book or play *HeroQuest* games.

[[[END SIDEBAR]]]

First, Second and Third Person

Most of this book is addressed to Narrators. However, in certain instances, particularly in sections explaining what characters can do, its use of the second person shifts to address players. We adopt this convention in the interests of minimal syntactical torture and trust that you'll be able to work it out from context.

It should go without saying that we want both women and men to enjoy playing our game. Pronouns often present an odd challenge in roleplaying game writing, because one often has to refer to a hypothetical single person doing something in the future. To clarify sentences, we will generally refer to our hypothetical Narrator as "she" and the equally hypothetical player as "he." This should not be taken as an implicit statement that only women can run games, and only men can be players.

Previous editions of *HeroQuest* have referred to player characters as Heroes. Although this struck the perfect note for the epic fantasy setting of Glorantha, it seems less apt for other genres you might want to play in. You wouldn't apply the term to the main characters in, say, a Charles Dickens pastiche. Accordingly, these generic rules use the traditional term, player characters, abbreviated as PCs.

Creating Your Character

The following chapter shows you how to create a *HeroQuest* PC. It is addressed primarily to players, with the occasional aside to Narrators.

Before Starting

Before creating your first *HeroQuest* characters, take a few moments to examine your favorite characters from fiction and the movies. Pick three or four characters you like and know well, perhaps from a variety of genres.

For each, make a list of their defining qualities. You'll find that most compelling characters, especially from the various adventure genres, can be summed up with a surprisingly short list of abilities, personality traits, and associations.

Parameters

Before you start, your narrator will provide you with a set of parameters to work within. You'll learn about the setting in which your character operates, the tone of the stories he'll feature in, and any limitations you'll be expected to follow. The Narrator's parameters will include most or all of the following points of information.

Genre

In a few short phrases, the Narrator will tell you what genre you're playing in. Chances are you'll recognize the reference points. If not, ask for examples of existing works from similar genres.

Fun new settings can arise from the collision between genres.

- pirates versus zombies
- *Yes Minister* meets *Starship Troopers*
- Dickensian London with robots
- anthropomorphic teen animals attending an college of magic

Setting

The setting tells you where the story will take place. It might be a familiar contemporary city, or a complete imagined world, ancient or futuristic.

Narrators often use existing settings, either from published roleplaying supplements, or favorite movies, TV shows, comics, or novels. If you're familiar with the source material, the name of the property being used is often all the explanation you need. Because creating characters, creatures and vehicles in *HeroQuest* is as simple as jotting down lists of qualities and assigning numbers to them, it's easy to adapt any existing world as a series setting.

On the other end of the spectrum, your Narrator may create an entirely new world with its own distinct themes, images and character abilities. If they work well, original settings make up for in novelty what they lose in familiarity. They also give you, the player, more license to build elements into your Narrator's creation. A collaborative Narrator might let you flesh out your character's tribe, nation, religion, or culture.

The setting will suggest the sorts of characters you can play, which may be narrowed further by the series premise.

Mode

The Narrator should also indicate narrative mode of the upcoming series, so you can create a character that suits it. Your comic relief character won't suit a grimly realistic portrayal of life on the streets; nor will an amoral mercenary fit in a world of nostalgic cliffhanger thrills.

The mode is a narrative pattern from which the game draws its assumptions. Common examples of narrative modes include:

Epic: an sweeping tale of heroism, against a backdrop of great historical events.

Procedural: as part of their job, highly competent professionals solve a succession of problems, perhaps interspersed with ongoing stories of their personal lives.

Picaresque: likeable rogues experience a series of colorful small-scale incidents over the course of their meandering journeys.

Chronicle: the lead characters manage the economic and political affairs of a community (or other unit, such as a corporation), often over a large span of time. Players may take play multiple characters, perhaps over several generations.

Gritty: amoral characters struggle to survive in a cruel and selfish world.

Parody: goofy characters enjoy comic invulnerability to permanent consequences in an affectionate, silly spoof of a usually serious genre.

Satire: a darkly comic setting infused with biting social commentary.

The mode suggests elements to build into your character. A procedural demands professional competence. A parodic series encourages a series of absurdly named abilities.

Mode also suggests behavioral norms for the characters. Picaresque characters are supposed to be clever and waggish, and remain sympathetic even when they engage in a little larceny. Epic characters, by contrast, should be heightened in both their positive qualities and their tragic flaws.

Ambitious Narrators may blend modes, or switch from one to the other over the course of a long series. The picaresque adventures of a spoiled young prince and his retinue of ne'er-do-wells could slowly transform itself into a more serious historical epic when he ascends the throne and takes his nation to war.

Narrators seeking input from their players may ask them to get together and request a mode. Or they may have you create characters without reference points, and then find the narrative mode that best brings out their potential.

Existing settings often imply a tone and narrative mode. If using such settings in a traditional way, Narrators won't need to specify either. When they depart from the standard assumptions, they'll let you know.

Premise

The premise tells you what the PCs have in common, and either explains or implies a collective goal. It can be summed up in a formulaic sentence: *The characters are X who do Y:*

- The characters are members of a touring rock band continually drawn into supernatural mysteries.
- The characters are interstellar revenue officers assigned to patrol a lawless quadrant.
- The characters are either psychic warriors protecting mankind from extra-dimensional invasion, or hallucinating drug addicts in a deteriorating bungalow in Santa Ana, California; they're never sure which is actually true.

Since the premise impinges the most on the characters' identities and objectives, Narrators should be highly ready to modify them in response to player input. They may suggest a setting and then ask the group to collaboratively create the premise themselves. Or they might allow you to create a disparate team of PCs, place you in an environment, and let you create your own agenda in the course of the story.

Many existing settings imply a premise. Expect to be informed in advance if your Narrator intends to departs from the setting's default premise.

Concept

Now that you know enough about your Narrator's series to create a character to fit into it, it's time to create a strong central concept for your PC. Your concept is a brief phrase, often just a couple of words, that tells the Narrator and other players what your PC does and how he or she acts.

When in doubt, start with a noun or phrase indicating the PC's profession or area of expertise, and modify it with an adjective suggesting a dominant personality trait:

- brutish escape artist
- forgetful professor
- generous gunfighter
- haughty priestess
- hotshot lawyer
- naïve warrior
- randy mecha pilot
- remorseful assassin
- sardonic ex-mercenary
- slothful vampire

You'll note that some of the above examples play on common stereotypes, and others present unexpected juxtapositions. Whether you prefer to rely on time-tested archetypes or to defy expectations is a matter of taste.

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Keywords

In certain genres, especially where the Narrator is able to draw on published *HeroQuest* setting material, you may build your character around one or more **keywords**. A keyword gives you a package deal: you get a number of abilities by selecting a pre-existing character concept, which you then modify. Although you never have to incorporate a keyword into your character, doing so helps you integrate your character with the setting and themes of a series. In the case of unfamiliar or original settings, a well-written keyword comes with a description telling you everything you need to know about the world in order to start playing a character of that type.

Keywords are best suited for use as the character's core area of expertise.

Creating a character for a Glorantha-based game, you settle on the Humakti weaponthane keyword. You decide that your PC, Harmarth, will be a wily Humakti weaponthane.

In certain genres, characters may require multiple keywords: for example, one for area of expertise, another for species or culture, and perhaps a third for religious affiliation.

Otholiel has the keywords Thelemic Effectuator (his area of expertise), Quandari (his race) and Hondaraki (his religious faith.)

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Name

Now provide your character with a name. This is easy when game takes place in a setting where people use familiar names. Historical settings may require some research on your part; lists of names from many cultures and periods can be found with a quick internet search. If your character belongs to an imaginary culture which is supposed to appear as if it has a coherent, made-up language, your Narrator may provide you with a list of sample names.

Names should fit not just the setting and your character conception but the narrative mode. A silly-sounding name, even if drawn from real life, is inappropriate to a gritty series, for example.

Appearance

Visualize your character, and jot down a quick description to repeat to the rest of the group. Listeners will tune out after a few details, so keep the list short and hit the high points first.

Use short cuts to convey visual information. You might want to cast your character as a well-known actor: "She looks like Nicole Kidman with a Bettie Page haircut and a jeweled eyepatch."

Alternately you can borrow images from classic paintings or photographs, bringing copies in to show the group. Or draw an image yourself, if your talents lie in that direction.

Narrative Hooks

Left to their own devices, many roleplayers tend to play their characters in a cautious, risk-averse fashion. Often this happens because they're identifying strongly with their characters and want to keep them out of trouble. Heroes of stories, on the other hand, are always strongly motivated to get into interesting trouble. They're people with strong desires who take decisive, risky action to get what they need or want.

One of your main tasks when first conceiving a *HeroQuest* character is to put him or her under the sort of pressure that will motivate him to get out and do things, even when the consequences of failure are dire. The idea that keeps your character active in the story is called a narrative hook.

Your Narrator will tell you what sort of narrative hook her series requires. Often this varies according to its mode.

In an epic, for example, you might be asked to supply the character's **driving ambition**, which will propel him into the swirl of historical events driving the story to come:

- *Jim Twiller hates Neo-Communism, and will do anything to bring it down.*
- *Brother Bodo wishes to spread the doctrine of St. Ranfel across the Nine Islands.*
- *Zenkichi has always loved the Willow Princess from afar, and will do sacrifice all to protect her from her enemies.*

In a procedural, the characters' motivation is a collective one, inherent to the series premise; they're professionals doing their jobs. They wait for problems to come to them, and then solve them.

Picaresque characters may be required to supply the impulse that gets them into amusing scrapes:

- *Flavio can never resist an opportunity to make himself look cleverer than his fellow man.*
- *Cornucant can't stop himself from propositioning foxy aliens.*
- *If there's something in a tomb you're not supposed to touch, you can be sure that Miles is going to touch it.*

In a chronicle, you may be asked to supply the contribution you make to the community. (Your motivation is implicit; you have to manage this resource, increasing its productivity and protecting it from outside threats.)

- *Bantarling ploughs the fields and brings in the crops.*
- *Mahmoud manages the corporation's relations with its dealerships nationwide.*
- *Paulie "the Clam" Montecchio runs the numbers racket and the labor unions down at the docks.*

Gritty characters may be asked to suggest the situation that will invariably rouse them out of defensive, survivalist mode:

- *Korak X2 is obsessively curious about computer parts from before the collapse.*
- *The scruffy ronin Minekawa is a sucker for children in distress.*
- *Anwar will always risk his own hide to protect a fellow Shi'ite.*

Parodies and satires are often, respectively, spoofy or acerbic versions of other modes. You may be asked to take a serious narrative hook from the appropriate mode and put an absurd or biting spin on it.

Your Narrator will collaborate with you to modify your hook if it doesn't fit the spirit of the series or details of the setting, or if it doesn't seem like it will provide sufficient motivation to seek out risky situations.

Characters can evolve in the course of play, modifying their narrative hooks in response to events as they unfold. Expect your Narrator to work with you are slow to adopt a new and obvious hook when an old one falls by the wayside.

In a tearjerking climactic sequence achieved after many weeks of play, Zenkichi fails to protect his beloved Willow Princess from the bakemono ninja. Now that she lies dead in his arms, what is his motivation to continue?

Vengeance, you decide. Zenkichi will risk all to slay the seven grotesque leaders of the bakemono clan.

If the series continues after he succeeds at that dread task, he'll need yet another narrative hook. But that's a problem for many months from now…

In fiction, major characters are often torn between two contradictory impulses. Tony Soprano juggles his desire to be a good family man against the pursuit of his rapacious appetites, and the need to manage his criminal empire. Hamlet is caught between his desire for certainty and his obligation to avenge his father. Building inner tension into your own characters may achieve powerful results—provided that the warring impulses motivate the PC to go out and do lots of contradictory things, a la Tony Soprano, rather than miring him in indecision, like Hamlet.

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Your Character Sheet

A character sheet is a piece of paper listing crucial information about your character. To emphasize *HeroQuest*'s simplicity and customizability, we encourage you to design your own character sheet, laying it out in a way you find intuitive. It may be a sheet of battered blank paper covered with chicken scratches indecipherable to everyone but yourself, or a work of art in its own right.

Every character sheet contains the PC's name, abilities and their ratings. Your Narrator may ask you to include other information unique to her series, from your narrative hook to a family crest.

[[[END SIDEBAR]]]

Choosing Abilities

Now that you know who your character is, what he does, and why, it's time to better define exactly how he does things, by picking his abilities.

Anything that your character can use to solve problems or overcome obstacles in a story can be an ability. You decide how to describe your abilities. Some abilities, such as your central area of expertise, can be very broad, entailing a wide variety of related capabilities. Others might be very colorful and specific, granting you advantages when you enter into a conflict with an opponent using a less directly applicable ability. The more creative your description of these oddball abilities, the more likely it is that you'll be able to take advantage of this dynamic.

Abilities often include a mix of the following elements:

- Physical qualities, like strength, endurance, or keen eyesight.
- Mental talents, like quick-wittedness, strong memory, mathematical aptitude.
- Personality traits, like good humor, vengefulness, or determination.
- Training in physical pursuits, like rock climbing, football, or martial arts.
- Fields of knowledge, like astronomy, theology, or photography.

- Occupations: martial arts instructor, archaeologist, starship pilot.
- Possessions: a magic sword, a giant robot, a bullet-proof vest.
- Broader resources: a trust fund, a ranch, a holding company.
- Cultural background: Inuit, Brazilian, Martian, Formless One From the Outer Depths. Available choices varying by series.
- Fantastic powers: magic, science fiction gear, mutant gifts. Consult your Narrator for the particular fantastic abilities, if any, available in the series for which you're building your character.
- Inhuman anatomy: In some series, you may not be playing a nonhuman, with its own set of inherent abilities: a robot, an alien, or an elf or troll. These are typically summed up in a keyword. Most series restrict the use of nonhuman characters to a list provided by the Narrator, or don't allow them at all.
- Biographical facts, like born in zero-gravity, Ivy League pedigree, or familiarity with shantytown customs.
- Relationships: other people you can call on to help you solve your problems. These are categorized, depending on their degree of commitment to you, as retainers, sidekicks, allies, contacts, and patrons. Your Narrator can help you categorize them, based on your verbal description, or you can consult p. XX for more detail. Certain series will disallow particular sorts of contacts; your Narrator will tell you ahead of time when this is the case.

To repeat: *if you can solve a problem with it, it's an ability.*

Because you can make up your own abilities, we don't try to group them into strict categories. For example, a skilled photographer requires knowledge and manual dexterity. Does that make it a field of knowledge or a physical pursuit? Well, who cares? That question suits a desire for strict categorization that has little bearing on the ways authors tell stories. The best abilities overlap. In play, *HeroQuest* encourages you to find novel ways to use your abilities to solve problems.

Instead we encourage you to personalize your character sheet to group your abilities in a way that fits your sense of logic, or evokes something about the PC's history and personality.

Describe each ability however you want. Some sound better as nouns, other as adjectives. A colorful phrase is often more fun than a single word.

When choosing abilities, don't bother to specify how good you are at them. That will be determined later, when you assign numerical ratings to each ability. When you pick names that suggest how good you are, these are not taken literally, but instead reflect a subjective, and possibly incorrect, perception of your capabilities. You can't make your character better than others by taking an ability like Best Gunfighter In the West, Never Loses At Chess, or Indestructible. You will lose gunfights, chess matches, and be proven only to some extent indestructible, when you suffer defeats in contests of those abilities. Better to just take the abilities Gunfight, Chess, and Hard To Hurt, and not suffer the embarrassment when your actual capabilities fail to live up to the hype.

[[[BEGIN SIDEBAR]]]

Flaws

Many great fictional characters are defined as much by their humanizing flaws as by their positive qualities. You may assign up to three flaws to your character. Common flaws include:

- Personality traits: surly, petty, compulsive.
- Physical challenges: blindness, lameness, diabetes.
- Social hurdles: outcast, ill-mannered, hated by United supporters.

Most flaws are assigned a rating equivalent to your abilities. Your first flaw is rated at your highest ability, your second shares the same rating as your second-highest ability, and your third equals your lowest ability.

Certain keywords include flaws. Flaws gained through keywords do not count against your limit of three chosen flaws. All flaws after the third are given the same rating as your third ability. You may designate flaws from keywords as your first or second-ranked flaw.

When flaws manifest during play, the Narrator places you in a contest against them, rolls their associated ability ratings as Resistances to your efforts.

This method applies to flaws which primarily present the character with additional obstacles to overcome.

Narrators may decide that certain flaws are better expressed as penalties to your attempts to overcome other resistances. Your first flaw confers a penalty of –9; your second, –6, and your third, –3. These are appropriate where you specify that your ability to solve problems drops under certain specific conditions. Examples might include:

- Tongue-tied in large gatherings
- Lousy with a stick shift
- Can't stand snakes

When assigning values to flaws, you can mix the two types.

Vittorio the nervous anarchist has the flaws Anxiety Attacks, Distracted By Beauty, and Rant-Prone. The Narrator decides that the first and last of these tend to present obstacles of their own, while the second will most likely hamper Vittorio while he tries to achieve other obstacles. Anxiety Attacks gets a rating of 7Ш, which is the same as Vittorio's top ability. His second flaw, Distracted By Beauty, incurs a penalty of –6. His third, Rant-Prone, gains a rating of 13, which is equal to his lowest ability rating.

Some groups find flaws enormously useful in humanizing their characters. Another train of thought considers them unnecessary at best, and more often actively troublesome. Often, PCs' dominant flaws do not appear on their character sheets; they arise more or less unconsciously from the player's style, in the course of the story. The PC may be played as, to name a few common examples, cowardly, dominating, or reflexively dishonest. Characters with both imposed and spontaneously-occurring flaws are generally too unlikable to support the dramatic weight of an ongoing story.

A worse problem with flaws occurs when a spotlight-hogging player uses them to exert control over the rest of the group. Many so-called flaws are in fact fun, in a very selfish sense, to play. They exert more of a disadvantage on the other players, who have to work around them to get to their goals, than on the character they're supposed to harm. Players who use flaws to stop the story and focus attention on themselves shouldn't find active encouragement for their disruptions in the game rules.

Many so-called flaws are in fact abilities in disguise, and should be treated as such. If being, say, vengeful or an outcast can *ever* work to your advantage in a conflict, it's not a flaw, and can't be had for free.

[[[END SIDEBAR]]]

Character Creation Methods

HeroQuest offers three methods of character creation: prose, list, and as-you-go. Innovative Narrators may introduce other methods, like having the players answer a questionnaire, and deriving abilities from their answeres.

The Prose Method

Write a paragraph of text like you'd see in a story outline, describing the most essential elements of your character. Include keywords, personality traits, important possessions, relationships, and anything else about him that suggests what he can do and why.

If you're stuck for possible abilities, see p. XX for examples. Compose your description in complete, grammatical sentences. No lists of abilities; no sentence fragments. Your narrator may choose to allow sentences like the last one for emphasis or rhythmic effect, but not simply to squeeze in more cool things your PC can do.

Bill writes the following prose description:

Charming bounty hunter Dwayne-O Walken is known to millions of television viewers from a reality program following his world-spanning adventures. Dwayne-O's gleaming shotgun Phyllis (part of an endorsement deal) and his catch-phrase, "Ka-Chunk, punk!" strike panic into miscreants everywhere. When not building his enormous muscles or engaging in endurance training, he enjoys a glamorous tabloid lifestyle. Through his website, Dwayne-O cultivates contacts with far-flung fans from all walks of life. A dedicated gadget-lover, he panics whenever separated from his high-end cellphone and its wireless net connection. His schedule-conscious sister Darla makes his travel arrangements and fends off legions of female admirers.

Once your narrative is finished, you then convert the description into a set of abilities. Mark any keywords with double underlines. Mark any other word or phrase that could be an ability with a single underline. Then write these keywords and abilities on your character sheet.

There is no limit to the number of abilities you can gain from a single sentence, as long as the sentence is not just a list of abilities. If your narrator decides a sentence is just a list, she may allow you the first two abilities, or she may tell you to rewrite the sentence. Note, however, that you cannot specify more than one sidekick in your prose description. You may face other restrictions depending on the series the Narrator is running; be sure to learn about these before starting.

After combing through your description, take all of the underlined phrases and convert them to list form. Your Narrator then reviews it, looking for potentially useful abilities you may have missed.

Bill checks his prose description. He's playing in a modern day series where the Narrator has decided keywords are unnecessary, so he'll be giving all abilities single underlines only:

Charming bounty hunter Dwayne-O Walken is known to millions of television viewers from a reality program following his world-spanning adventures. Dwayne-O's gleaming shotgun Phyllis (part of an endorsement deal) and his catch-phrase, "Ka-Chunk, punk!" strike panic into miscreants everywhere. When not building his enormous muscles or engaging in endurance training, he enjoys a glamorous tabloid lifestyle. Through his website, Dwayne-O cultivates contacts with far-flung fans from all walks of life. A dedicated gadget-lover, he panics whenever separated from his high-end cell phone and its wireless net connection. His schedule-conscious sister Darla makes his travel arrangements and fends off legions of swooning admirers.

***Bill has double-underlined the phrase "high-end cell phone" to indicate that it is part of two abilities: the flaw* Panics Whenever Separated From His High-End Cell phone, *and the object itself,* High-End Phone.**

It took Bill's Narrator to see that* Reality Program *might make an ability unto itself; Dwayne-O might use it when he needs to figure out something related to television production, for example.

[[[BEGIN SIDEBAR]]]

Dwayne-O's Abilities, Synopsized

Bill groups his abilities into rough categories, for ease of reference. Categories have no impact on the game system, so list yours in an order that makes sense to you.

Just because you group an ability in one category doesn't mean that you can't use it for other purposes. Enormous muscles might give Dwayne-O an edge in certain social situations, for example.

The categories you pick can further convey the flavor of your character. Bill has created the categories in Dwayne-O's parlance, hence the references to Doing Stuff and Knowing Stuff. For a character in an ancient

historical setting, you might use lofty, fake-archaic terms for your categories. An SF game might require technical terms, and so on.

The Job: Bounty hunter

Doing Stuff: enormous muscles, endurance

Social: Charming, catch-phrase: "Ka-Chunk, punk!", known to millions of television viewers, legions of swooning admirers, strike panic into miscreants everywhere,

Knowing Stuff: dedicated gadget-lover, reality program, wireless net connection, world-spanning adventures,

Taking Care Of Business: endorsement deal, glamorous tabloid lifestyle,

Stuff I Own: gleaming shotgun Phyllis, I-Phone, website,

People: contacts with far-flung fans from all walks of life, sidekick: sister Darla (schedule-conscious, makes travel arrangements),

Flaw: panics whenever separated from his I-Phone

[[[END SIDEBAR]]]

Advantages of the Prose Method: The prose method encourages you to think about your character in words instead of numbers. A skillful player can wring more abilities out of this method than the others; as such, it is meant to appeal to so-called power gamers. These players, who like to bend the rules to their maximum advantage, tend to be number crunchers. This method trains them to be word crunchers instead, helping them to make the leap to the *HeroQuest* ethos from traditional roleplaying games.

One strong idea is more powerful than a dozen unconnected ones; the 100-word limit encourages you to keep your character simple.

The prose method tends to create the most vivid and offbeat abilities and ability descriptions.

Disadvantages: This technique seems to reward the clever, which egalitarian-minded players may find troubling. (Actually, it's debatable whether it's better to have many abilities or just to concentrate on a few, but in questions of gaming preference, perceptions matter.)

The prose method takes more preparation time, both for the players and for the Narrator, than list and on-the-fly methods.

[[[BEGIN SIDEBAR]]]

Creating an Entertaining and Effective Character

Sympathy

Heroes of adventure fiction have one thing in common: even if they are deeply flawed, their creators make sure that the audience remains sympathetic to them. In a roleplaying game, your audience is your narrator and your fellow players. See that your character is likeable or admirable in some way, and you will find that he lives longer. No PC in ***HeroQuest*** can expect to live forever, but if everyone likes your protagonist and enjoys having him in the game the narrator will be more likely to act in his favor to keep him around when the chips are down. Other players will be more inclined to risk their heroes to rescue yours when he runs into trouble. If your character has no redeeming characteristics, they will wave him goodbye.

Backstory

Character description is not a biography. Some players like to write much more than one hundred words about their heroes. Such an extended background is called a backstory. The 100-word narrative gives the current condition of the character; the backstory explains how he got that way. For example, you can use the backstory to explain where the character got certain abilities.

At the end of each play session, check to see how much of your material has actually been heard by the other participants. Choose one aspect to focus on before each session and try to work it into the present story, the one everyone is telling together.

Narrators can use part of a backstory to set up an adventure. Common elements in heroes' backgrounds can tie the group closer together. Thus, if they all hate the same clan, or served together in the same unit in the army, the narrator may bring in characters from their past, even if they are not written in the Relationships section of your character sheet.

Indispensability

If you create a unique protagonist, your narrator and fellow players will probably help to keep him alive. Maybe he has some ability or status that makes him important to the campaign. Maybe he is just plain entertaining. Either way you have made him indispensable, which is a useful technique in roleplaying games.

On the other hand, if your hero is uninspired and run-of-the-mill, or if you tend to play the same hero every time, regardless of his abilities or hero description, neither narrator nor players will care much when he bites the dust. They will expect you to create another one just like him anyway.

Ambiguous References

Sometimes an ambiguous but poetic phrase can get you more than a precise but prosaic one. This is particularly true of fantastic or imaginary abilities, which are wide open to interpretation. You might have only a vague idea of what a phrase means when the game starts, waiting for an appropriate moment in the course of play to propose an exact meaning for the intriguing reference. Ambiguous details can be used for anything: a purpose, a magical treasure, a relationship, or a magical ability.

[[[END SIDEBAR]]]

List Method

What the list method lacks in flavor, it gains in speed and ease of use. Having chosen a character concept and name (and any other elements required by the Narrator, such as a narrative hook) complete the following steps.

1. Note your main area of expertise, which, depending on the series, may be a keyword. You probably already picked this when you came up with your character concept.
2. If your series uses other keywords, such as those for culture, or religion, you may have one for free.
3. Pick 10 additional abilities, describing them however you want. (Essentially you're skipping the writing step from the prose method and going straight to a list. However, you most likely wind up with fewer abilities than the prose version.) Only one of these abilities may be a Sidekick—assuming your series allows them in the first place.
4. If you want, describe up to 3 flaws.

Steve creates a character for the same globe-trotting action series in which Bill's character, Dwayne-O, appears.

His core concept is of a remorseful former counter-insurgent. Steve decides to make him a former member of the Russian military, haunted by atrocities he took part in during the Chechen conflict. After some quick research into Russian names, he calls his PC Nikolai Levshin. His narrative hook is that, if he gets wind of a chance at redemption, he'll sacrifice anything to get it.

Implicit in the concept are two abilities:

Counter-insurgency
Remorseful

That leaves Steve with nine more abilities to pick. He imagines that Nikolai has been living in New York City, making a living as a cab driver:

NYC Cabbie

He chooses some additional abilities to tie into his core concept of a mentally scarred tough guy:

Dead-eyed stare
Intimidating
High Pain Threshold
Psychological Resistance

Steve's Narrator is not using cultural keywords, but elements of Nikolai's backstory imply some language and cultural knowledge. So he chooses the following abilities:

Born and raised in Russia
Infiltrated Chechen rebels

For his last two abilities, he selects contacts appropriate to his background:

Contacts: Russian intelligence
Contacts: Russian mafia

Then he adds a Flaw:

Painkiller addiction

Steven concludes by transferring his rough notes to a character sheet, grouping the abilities into categories evocative of his character:

Nikolai Levshin

Hook: *Seeks redemption*

Past
Counter-insurgency
Intimidating
High Pain Threshold
Psychological Resistance
Born and raised in Russia
Infiltrated Chechen rebels
Contacts: Russian intelligence

Present
NYC Cabbie
Contacts: Russian mafia

Pain
Remorseful
Dead-eyed stare
Flaw: Painkiller addiction

[[[BEGIN SIDEBAR]]]

Cultural and Language Abilities

By default, all PCs are assumed to be reasonably fluent in the base language spoken in the series, and acceptably familiar with the main culture in which it is set. In settings involving unfamiliar cultures, you may have access to a cultural keyword, sometimes called a homeland keyword, which you get for free. Cultural keywords may simply indicate a basic familiarity with a society's customs and language, or may include a number of abilities basic everyone raised there knows. For example, if you have the keyword Inuit you not only speak the language but may (depending on the period) have abilities like Hunting, Cold Weather Survival, and Snowmobiling.

To speak additional languages or exhibit basic familiarity with cultures other than your own (and/or the locale of the series), you must choose them as abilities. In keeping with *HeroQuest*'s use of broad-based abilities, you may find you can squeeze more uses out of an ability by phrasing it in biographical terms. In the example, Steve gives his character the ability Infiltrated Chechen Rebels. This fact about his past indicates that he speaks Chechen well enough to pass as a native, and knows enough details about life in Chechnya to not only survive but prosper there.

Since the series is set in an English-speaking milieu, Steve does not have to expend one of his ability slots on awareness of the language, or of the American scene. However, if he wanted to be able to pass as someone born and raised in the US, his Narrator might require him to take an additional ability to reflect that.

If you want your character to be unable to communicate effectively in the series' default language, or exhibit little familiarity with local customs, take a flaw like Obvious Foreigner, New Immigrant, or Speaks [Language] Poorly. [[[END SIDEBAR]]]

Advantages Of List Method: Many players find the list method faster and less creatively taxing than the prose method. Everyone gets the same number of abilities, no matter how clever they are. Players used to other games will find it the most familiar and comforting of the character creation methods.

Disadvantages: The list method often leads to a series of abilities which are not only drier than you get from the prose or as-you-go methods, but more closely related to one another. It does less than either of the other character creation methods to introduce players to the *HeroQuest* way of thinking about story and character.

As-You-Go Method

In the As-You-Go method, you improvise most of the characters' abilities during play.

Start play with only your basic concept (an area of expertise, which may be keyword, modified by an adjective), a description of the character and, if required, narrative hook.

When events in the story put you in a situation where you want to do something, you make up an applicable ability on the spot. The first time you use an ability (including the two you start play with), assign an ability rating to it. (The process of assigning ratings is explained soon, on p. XX.)

Once you've given yourself 13 abilities (including the two you started with), you're done creating your character. After that, you gain additional new abilities the same way everyone else does—see Improving Your Character, p. XX.

As per the other methods, you are (in series that allow followers at all) restricted to only one Sidekick.

Christine is completely new to roleplaying. Her Narrator, Kathy, takes her through the As-You-Go character creation method.

Kathy: *This story is set in the modern day and takes its inspiration from action movies. You can't have magic or science fiction powers, but you can perform crazy stunts like you'd see in a Bond or Die Hard flick.*

Christine: *Hmm. Okay, where do I start?*

Kathy: *For your first character, let's base it on a character you like, then change it enough so it feels original. What's your favorite action movie character?*

Christine: *Most of those characters are male. I think I'd sooner play a woman. How about Ripley from* Alien*?*

Kathy: *That's sort of a futuristic character. She's an ordinary person who turns out to be bad-ass under pressure. And she works on a freighter. I guess the modern equivalent of that would be a trucker. Do you want to play a tough-as-nails lady trucker, maybe?*

Christine: *Sure. Why not? Let's call her Rachel Fisher.*

Kathy: *Okay, that starts you out with two abilities: tough-as-nails and trucker.*

Christine: *And I'd better be good with a shotgun.*

Kathy: *That makes a third ability—shotgun. Write them down. You have ten abilities to go.*

* * *

The Narrator gets the story rolling, introducing the various PCs and getting them into entertaining trouble. Before she knows it, the rollicking action movie pacing has Rachel as a fish out of water, standing on a cliff in the Peruvian mountains as guerrillas boil out of the jungle toward her.

Christine: *I turn and brandish my shotgun at them!*

Kathy: *There are about eight of them, and they have assault rifles. Your brandishing doesn't slow them down.*

Christine: *Then I guess I better talk to them.*

Kathy: *How do you talk to them?*

Christine: *Obviously Rachel grew up in a border state and speaks Spanish.*

Kathy: *Okay, that's a new ability—Spanish. Write that down on your character sheet. You can communicate with them, but how do you persuade them?*

Christine: *Uh, well, when I was in college, before I got restless and quit, I got good grades in my humanities class because I was able to easily assume any point of view and argue from it. So these guys are Shining Path guerrillas, right? I talk to them in their own ideological terms, and assure them that I'm down with their crazy revolution.*

Kathy: *So the ability is Assume Any Point Of View?*

Christine: *Sounds good.*

Kathy: *And since you're about to use it on their* commandante*, you'll have to assign a value to it. You haven't done that yet, so you can start it at 13 or 17, and then increase it by up to another 10 points.* (This is explained on p. XX.)

Christine: *I think this will be a very useful ability, and besides, I don't want to be shot or forced off the cliff, so I'll go for the max.*

Kathy: *Then write down Assume Any Point Of View 7, with a square W after it, to symbolize a mastery. And now roll to see if you succeed in convincing him that you're a Sendero Luminoso sympathizer.*

* * *

This process continues until eventually Christine ends up with the following abilities:

Occupation: *Trucker*

Traits: *tough-as-nails, never gives up*

Knacks: *assume any point of view, avoid romantic entanglements, wilderness survival, sense of direction*

Items: *shotgun, GPS tracker*

Background: *speaks Spanish, Gymnastics training, make tasty food out of anything, forage*

Advantages of The As-You-Go Method: The As-You-Go method allows you the highest degree of collaboration with your Narrator. It's faster than any other, letting you get started immediately, without any prep work. Because you get to create abilities in response to situations that come up in play, you rarely wind up with items on your character sheet that never get used. This method embodies the "show, don't tell" rule of fiction: like a character in a story, all of your abilities are introduced through action.

As-You-Go is the best way to introduce players who are completely unfamiliar with roleplaying to the form.

Disadvantages: Some players find that the initial fungibility of the As-You-Go character disrupts their ability to immerse themselves in their characters. Others feel that they'd rather have their characters shape the storyline than allow the storyline to shape their characters.

Assigning Ability Ratings

Through one of the character creation methods, you've now defined your abilities. These tell you *what* you can do.

Now you assign numbers to each ability, called ratings, which determine how *well* they do these things.

The ability you find most important or defining a starting rating of 17. Although most players consider it wisest to assign this rating to their area of expertise, which is also often a keyword, you don't have to do this.

All of your other abilities start at a rating of 13.

Now you may spend up to 20 points to boost any of your various ability ratings. Each point spent increases a rating by 1 point. You can't spend more than 10 points on any one ability.

Depending on your series, you may be able to raise all of the abilities from a single keyword by spending 1 point, or may have to buy them up one ability at a time. See sidebar.

[[[BEGIN SIDEBAR]]]

Boosting Keywords

Keywords include entire packages of abilities associated with a given occupation, archetype, or source of fantastic powers, whether that be alien anatomy, cybernetic implants, schools of magic, or types of futuristic gear.

In some series, each of these abilities is treated as separate for purposes of character improvement, both during the ability boosts during character generation, and during later character improvement as a result of play (see p. XX.)

In others, they're treated as a package during improvement, and all abilities increase with a single expenditure.

The more permissive choice results in characters who are broadly capable within their defining areas of expertise, much like iconic heroes in fictional source material.

The restrictive choice is more in keeping with a traditional sense of balance between PCs in a roleplaying group. Some keywords come with more abilities than others; allowing them to advance all at once compounds the apparent disparity between players with ability-rich keywords and those using more modest ones.

In practice, most *HeroQuest* PCs, no matter how many abilities they possess, have multiple ways of solving most common problems, and the choice between them is largely a matter of flavor. Some players find it easier to describe interesting actions from a wide palette of abilities; others do better with a few simple ways of doing things.

We recommend starting with the more lenient option, switching back to the restrictive ruling for later series only if this becomes a serious bone of contention in your group. (The previous version of *HeroQuest* used the restrictive approach.)

[[[END SIDEBAR]]]

Masteries

HeroQuest abilities are scored on a range of 1–20, but are scalable. When you raise a rating of 20 by one point, it increases not to 21, but to 1Ш. The Ш signifies a game abstraction called a mastery. You have now reached a new order of excellence in that ability.

If you're engaged in a contest against an opponent, and you have an ability of 10Ш versus his opposing ability of 10, you enjoy an enormous advantage over him, and can expect to win most of the time.

As you progress, you may gain multiple masteries. A multiple mastery is marked with a number to the right of the Ш symbol. If you have 10Ш2, you have two masteries. 10Ш3 meants that you have three masteries, and so on.

A character with two masteries enjoys the same great advantage over one with a single mastery as a character with one mastery has over an opponent with no masteries.

If you have an advantage of two or more masteries over an opponent, you can pretty much count on pounding him into the dust.

The Ш symbol is a Mastery Rune, which has significance in the world of Glorantha. For other series, you may choose to substitute another thematically appropriate symbol: perhaps stars for a space opera game, or throwing stars for a martial arts extravaganza.

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How Good are Masteries?

- A character with the same ability rating as an opponent will win about half the contests they engage in.
- One mastery will beat anyone who is a full mastery lower about 75% of the time.
- If the character is two full masteries higher, the chance victory is about 95%.
- At three levels, he is all but certain to win.
- At four, he will always be victorious, although opponent *might* survive to tell the tale…

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Bill Assigns His Abilities

Bill starts by assigning the 17 point starting value to his area of expertise, Bounty Hunter. Everything else starts with a 13.

He then raises Bounty Hunter by the maximum 10 points, from 17 to 7Ш. That leaves him with 10 points to distribute between his seventeen other abilities. He devotes 2 points apiece to charming, gleaming shotgun Phyllis, and his relationship with his sister Darla. All of these are now rated at 15. That leaves 1 point each to boost enormous muscles, endurance, catch-phrase, and dedicated gadget lover, raising each of these abilities to 14.

His final character sheet looks like this:

Dwayne-O Walken

The Job: Bounty hunter 7Ш

Doing Stuff: enormous muscles 14, endurance 14

Social: Charming 15, catch-phrase: "Ka-Chunk, punk!" 14, known to millions of television viewers 13, legions of swooning admirers 13, strike panic into miscreants everywhere 13

Knowing Stuff: dedicated gadget-lover 14, reality program 13, wireless net connection 13, world-spanning adventures 13

Taking Care Of Business: endorsement deal 13, glamorous tabloid lifestyle 13

Stuff I Own: gleaming shotgun Phyllis 15, I-Phone 13, website 13

People: contacts with far-flung fans from all walks of life 13, sidekick: sister Darla 15

See how the ratings put the ability descriptions in perspective. Dwayne-O might indeed be known to millions of television viewers, but his ability to leverage this when solving problems is actually fairly modest.
[[[END SIDEBAR]]]

Overcoming Obstacles

Adventure stories consist of a series of obstacles, which the heroes must overcome in order to reach their final goal. This chapter shows Narrators how to think of stories as a chain of obstacles, then demonstrates how to use the game's various resolution systems to move the characters through the story from one obstacle to the next.

Narrators should read on for the story theory underlying the resolution systems. Players wanting to skip to the rules can go to p. XX.

[[[BEGIN SIDEBAR]]]

Other Story Types

Our default assumption throughout *HeroQuest* is that you're using it to run games set in one of the many adventure genres: fantasy, space opera, horror, western, martial arts, and so on.

Although we don't spend much time addressing it, the system can be used for virtually any narrative form.

Comedy, like adventure, consists of a series of obstacles which the hero must overcome on the way to his goal. The structure remains the same, but the scenes are played for laughs, and the worst consequence the hero typically faces is some variety of escalating humiliation. Comedies can range in realism from outright lunacy to the finely-drawn social observation of a Jane Austen novel.

Drama pits the main characters against one another; their obstacles are personal or internal, rather than the external hurdles adventure characters face. They tend to face one develop one developing, multi-faceted crisis and either undergo a personal transformation, achieving redemption, or resist it, and are destroyed.

As we assume that few groups are looking to run series based on *Long Day's Journey Into Night* or 80's teen sex comedies, adapting the advice given here from adventure to other story types is left as an exercise for the aesthetically daring reader.

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The Pass/Fail Cycle

In writing jargon, the structure that arises from a chain of obstacles is sometimes referred to as the pass/fail structure. At each obstacle, the protagonists either succeed, which grants them an advantage that eventually leads to a new obstacle, or fail, which puts them at a disadvantage and sends them up against another obstacle. When they fail, it is often due to an external reason, not because they are weak, mistaken, or incompetent.

For example, let's break down the classic story of Beowulf into a series of obstacles. (We trust that all of you scholars of Old English poetry will forgive the adaptations we've made to the story for the sake of example.)

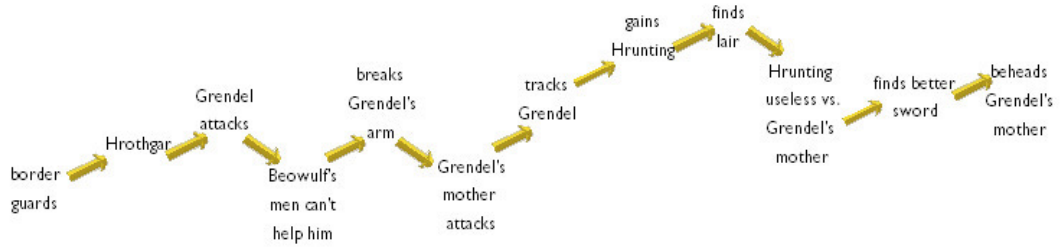
First, we have the goal. The monster Grendel invades the clan hall of the Danish king, Hrothgar, killing many of his men. Beowulf, a hero of Sweden, learns of this and travels to the king's hall, intent on proving himself by slaying the monster.

1. Beowulf is challenged by Danish border guards. He *passes* this obstacle by impressing them, gaining an audience with Hrothgar.
2. Beowulf meets Hrothgar, seeking a place in his hall. He *passes* this obstacle; Hrothgar retains a favorable impression of him from a previous encounter.
3. Now staying in Hrothgar's royal hall, Beowulf and his men are present when Grendel attacks. Beowulf's men *fail* against the monster, who kills one of them.

4. Beowulf turns the tide against Grendel, breaking his arm. He *succeeds*. Grendel staggers off into the night, mortally wounded.
5. Celebrations prove short-lived when Grendel's even more monstrous mother shows up at Hrothgar's hall, seeking vengeance. Beowulf and company *fail*; she kills his loyal retainer, Aeschere.
6. Beowulf tracks Grendel's mother; he *succeeds* in following her to the shore of an icy lake.
7. Moved by Beowulf's skill and bravery, the Danish warrior Unferð, previously his rival, gifts him with the sword Hrunting. Beowulf *succeeds* in gaining an apparent advantage.
8. Beowulf dives into a lake and finds Grendel's underground lair. He *succeeds*.
9. Beowulf initially *fails* to defeat Grendel's mother.
10. Hrunting is useless against her, so Beowulf discards it in favor of an even more fabulous sword found among the creature's treasure hoard. He *succeeds* in decapitating her.

This pattern of successes and failures maps out as follows, with successes represented by upward arrows and failures by downward arrows:

[[[INSERT PASS FAIL.JPG]]]



Although often compared to a roller coaster, the pass/fail cycle, when mapped out, shows a gradual upward motion, with periodic swings downward.

In fiction, the author creates excitement by manipulating the rhythm of successes and failures. If the hero succeeds all the time, we, the audience, stop worrying about him, and disengage from the story. If he fails all the time, our desire for vicarious wish fulfillment is thwarted, and we turn against the narrative, feeling anything from annoyance to anxiety.

In *Beowulf*, we see this principle in action. The pass-fail pattern goes like this: pass, pass, fail, pass, fail, pass, pass, pass, fail, pass, pass. Note that successes outnumber failures by nearly three to one, and that the failures are evenly distributed through the storyline. This means that successes cluster together, but failures do not.

The pass/fail cycle serves its purpose by allowing the author to orchestrate a pattern of tension and release. She creates tension by having the hero fail, or making it seem as if he will fail. Having built up tension and frustration, she releases it by allowing the hero to succeed. We, identifying with the hero, feel the adrenaline rush of excitement that comes with real-world success.

Fiction Is Linear; Roleplaying Branches

If we could just exactly replicate the pass/fail cycle of Beowulf's unknown author every time, our work here would be done. It's not that simple, though. Audiences need an unpredictable pattern of success and failure, and roleplayers want to see their own decisions driving the direction of the storyline.

The author of fiction enjoys an advantage over a *HeroQuest* Narrator: she has to take into account only one possible outcome from any obstacle. She decides if the hero succeeds or fails, and then continues to plot the story in a linear fashion.

Narrators, rather than creating a single plot line for the hero to move through, must anticipate that the heroes will either succeed or fail when confronted by any noteworthy obstacle. Either by preparing in advance or through improvisation, they must be prepared for the story to branch. With a branch at each significant obstacle, there are many possible stories. The decisions of the players, in tandem with the game's resolution system, determine which story actually takes place. The result is also a linear story, but the process must be at all times open-ended, so that the players have determining influence over the outcome of the story. They must not only be granted considerable power to drive the story, they must *feel* that they have it. Oddly enough, it is often easier to accomplish the former than the latter.

In a *HeroQuest* version of the Beowulf story, the Narrator would require his player to use a suitable ability to impress the Danish border guard. She'd have to react with an interesting story choice if he failed his roll, leaving the border guard unimpressed with him. Beowulf's player might decide to approach the king's hall without permission. This would in turn change the nature of the scene in which they seek Hrothgar's permission to billet there, making it harder, or requiring an ability other than Past Great Deeds. Perhaps Beowulf and his entourage decide to stake out the hall from a distance, intercepting Grendel before he arrives…

Although the branched story probably winds up revolving around successive confrontations with Grendel and his mother, as per the original, the series of obstacles, as well as the pattern of passes and failures, no doubt diverges substantially from the original plan. This is how it ought to be, especially when the divergences result from player choices.

Resolution Methods

A player's encounter with a plot obstacle presents a conflict which must be resolved, either as a success or a failure. *HeroQuest* rules present a number of different ways of resolving conflicts, which the Narrator chooses based on their relative importance to the story.

In all cases, the player chooses an ability relevant to the conflict at hand, describes exactly what his character is trying to accomplish, and how. The Narrator may modify these suggested actions to better fit the fictional circumstances, and may describe the actions of the characters or forces on the other side of the conflict. The player rolls a 20-sided die; the Narrator does the same. The Narrator compares the two results, arriving at a degree of success or failure. Armed with this knowledge, she describes the outcome of the conflict, and any lingering consequences to either participant. (When players enter into conflict with one another, each rolls dice, and the Narrator interprets the results, as usual.)

The available resolution methods are as follows:

1. **Automatic Success:** The PC simply succeeds. Depending on the desired emotional effect, the Narrator may not require a die roll, or may pretend to engage in a simple contest (below), fudging her own result to grant a pass to the PC.
2. **Simple Contest:** The PC and Narrator (or PC and another PC) each roll a single die, for an immediate result.
3. **Extended Contest:** A sequence of die rolls, between one or more PCs and one or more supporting characters, breaks the conflict resolution into a series of actions. What this method loses in brevity of result, it gains in suspense and detail.
4. **Scored contest:** This is an alternate version of the extended contest, new to this version of the rules. It fills the same purpose as the latter, but is implemented in a somewhat simpler manner.

A few Narrators may use both extended and scored contests, but most will choose either one or the other, based on the preferences of their groups. They are collectively referred to as **long contests**.

Simple, extended and scored contests can all resolve the actions of multiple characters acting at once, on either side of the conflict.

Conflict Pacing In Fictional Sources

When an author or director depicts a conflict, she decides how much attention to pay to it. Conflicts of minor importance to the storyline are dispensed with quickly, in a line or two:

The doorman at the Black Finn didn't want to let me in at first. Money changed hands, and I swept into the bar, unimpeded.

More important conflicts are described in greater detail. Within each conflict the pass/fail cycle plays out in microcosm. One participant may seem to be on top at first, then lose ground, then recover, only to face another setback, before ultimately prevailing. By presenting the scene in this way, the author invests the audience in it.

The loss of my last sawbuck stung, but I wasn't here to waltz with the help. I was looking for the proprietor. Little Louie was standing behind the bar, all three hundred pounds of him. His eyes were drilling down a waitress' cleavage while he ragged her out for some petty indiscretion. It was nice of the big ape to remind me how much I disliked him. That gave me the anger I needed to do what came next.

I leapt the counter and pistol-whipped him from behind. This had gone too far to let elementary fairness stand in the way. The butt of my .38 scraped a red dent in the thick fold of flesh at the bottom of his skull. He wove on his feet. I thought it was over.

Lou turned and swung. I flew backwards into the bar. Bottles and glasses rained down onto me. My gun went flying. Lou's boys came my way. The big man waved them off.

He feinted me out, then tried to land a sucker punch in my right kidney. I anticipated him, grabbing a highball glass and flinging it in his bony kisser. It shattered satisfyingly. Blood from a lacerated forehead poured into his eyes, blinding him—as he wrapped iron fingers around my trachea.

The Black Finn swirled and swam as my oxygen supply dwindled. My hand drifted across a long, hard object on resting on pegs beneath the bar. The barman's shotgun. I didn't have the distance to fire it, but I could sure use it as a club. I swung it ineffectually, but he drew back instinctively from the firepower.

I jammed it under his throat. His bully boys backed off.

"Remember a poor little waif name of Lili Watson?" I asked him.

He grunted in the vague affirmative.

"Well, you murdering piece of chute trash, we have an appointment—at her unmarked grave."

HeroQuest allows you to make the same sorts of decisions, choosing the amount of time and attention you spend on an obstacle, depending on its importance to the story.

Choosing The Right Resolution Method

In an improvised story created with the collaboration of your players, it may not always be easy to gauge the weight to grant to a conflict resolution. Ideally, neither you nor the players know exactly where the story is headed. Sometimes you'll know instinctively which method to use.

When in doubt, the following general rule is your first resort:

The degree of emotional investment the players have in a conflict determines the complexity of the resolution method used to resolve it.

If, after you remind yourself of this, you're still stumped, break it down further with the following list of eight questions:

1. *If the character fails, can you think of no interesting resulting obstacle to branch toward?* Use an automatic success, possibly disguising it as a simple contest. (See p. XX.) Failed results are interesting when they build tension, which is then released when the characters achieve a success on the pass/fail cycle. A failed result which results in a boring or annoying consequence *deflates* tension. Avoid staging conflicts which lead to tension-killing failures.
2. *Would it seem peculiar for the character to fail?* If so, use an automatic success. Failure can seem peculiar when its results would be comic in what is meant to be a serious scene or when no equivalent character in fiction would ever fail to overcome so petty an obstacle. Failure at minor tasks, especially those directly related to a PC's defining ability may seem out of character, and thus peculiar.
3. *Do the players show little emotional investment in the outcome of the conflict?* If so, consider a simple contest, or even an automatic success. If you expected this to be an important obstacle, but the players are lukewarm to it, you probably haven't established its stakes as sufficiently vital to them. You may want to improvise your way out of the current scene, allow them to find out why it should matter to them, and then return to your planned larger conflict later. Even better, figure out what the players really want to pursue instead of your planned conflict, and build a set of suitably entertaining obstacles to take them to that goal.
4. *Is only the player directly involved emotionally invested in the outcome?* Use a simple contest.
5. *Are the stakes high for everyone?* Use a long contest.
6. *Are the stakes low?* Use a simple contest, if not an automatic success.
7. *Will the outcome change the PCs' circumstances, or long-established facts of the world, forever?* Use a long contest.
8. *Have you already used a couple of longer contests during the current session?* Use a simple contest. If this seems unthinkable, due to the great stakes involved, consider adjusting your pacing so that the long contest occurs at the top of the next session. If, on the other hand, you have the time and everyone seems excited to go, use the long contest.

All of these questions can be rephrased as follows:

Can I get away with doing it more simply?

If you can, do it.

Examples

Jane is running a hardboiled detective game for a solo player, Ronnie. Ronnie plays sardonic private detective Mack McNair. The evening is drawing to a close; Ronnie has learned that Lili Watson, the runaway he's been hired to find, has been murdered. He's also identified the killer—Little Louie Clark, brutish proprietor of a bar called the Black Finn. Now all he has to do is bring him to justice. Ronnie decides that Mack will head to the Black Finn to find Little Louie.

This is a return visit to the bar. Jane has already established that there's always a watchful doorman at the door. Internal consistency demands that there be one present now. Logically, getting past the bouncer presents an obstacle for Mack to overcome.

"I pull out a sawbuck," says Ronnie, "and bribe my way past him."

However, the momentum of the story demands that Mack meet up with Little Louie as quickly as possible. A long scene of negotiation with a nameless doorman will merely draw attention to what should be a minor interaction. It should either be a simple contest or an automatic success.

She asks herself how the story might branch if Mack fails. Is there an interesting possible result that won't take the story on an annoying tangent? Yes—if Mack fails, the bouncer calls for Little Louie,

who comes out onto the street to meet him. This will still allow the confrontation to occur, but with Mack at a disadvantage, because Louie will be prepared for him. (The extent of the advantage would depend on the degree of Mack's failure; see plot augments, p. XX.)

Jane and Ronnie resolve the bribery attempt; Mack prevails and is allowed into the club without further incident.

He looks around for Little Louie. Reflecting the ease of his entry into the Black Finn, Jane describes him as looking in the other direction, polishing a glass behind the bar.

Mack could talk him into custody, using his "It's All Over, Pal" ability. But over the course of his investigation, he's come to feel for Lili Watson, a poor kid who never caught a break. "I leap the counter and whale on him," Ronnie decides.

Jane must now decide how to resolve this fight. This is the big confrontation at the end of the story. Ronnie is emotionally invested in it. The stakes are high; Louie's fate, and Mack's sense of justice, hang in the balance. The answer is obvious—this must be a long contest. Of the two long contest methods, extended or sequential, Jane always uses the latter, and this time is no different.

Contests

Although the various contest types differ in complexity and detail, they are united by the following common features:

- Narrators and players start every contest by **framing** it.
- Abilities may be boosted or penalized by **modifiers**.
- Results are determined by comparing the PC's die roll to that of an opponent, or an abstract **resistance**.
- A character's result can be increased by **bumps**. You get a bump if you enjoy a level of mastery over your opponent, or if you spend a **hero point**.
- **Degrees of success** provide the magnitude of victory—or defeat.

Framing the Contest

Contests in *HeroQuest* are more abstract than resolution methods in most other roleplaying games. They don't simply tell you how well you succeeded at a particular task: they tell you whether or not you achieved your entire goal.

The player(s) taking part in the contest and the Narrator start by clearly agreeing on 1) what **prize** is up for grabs and 2) what **tactics** they're using to try to get it. The Narrator then secretly makes the same determination for supporting character opposition, if any. This process is called framing the contest.

Naming the prize: Narrators start framing the contest by asking the involved player(s) what prize they're trying to win, or what goal they're hoping to achieve.

- This may be a literal prize, like a gold cup, a gun, or a briefcase full of money.
- More often the prize is a metaphorical one, like access to location—a treasure vault or the database servers containing the secret plans.
- In a struggle for resources, the winner gets control of something: a seat in government, a supply of goods, the assistance of an ally.
- In a fight, the prize may be the opponents themselves, who the PCs are fighting to capture or kill. (Just as often they'll be seeking another goal and must incapacitate enemy combatants to get it. In this case, beating the enemy is the tactic, not the prize.)
- The stakes may be defensive in nature, as when the PCs try to stop supporting characters from doing something harmful, like dropping a bomb on a city, or assassinating the king.

Sometimes, especially as they get used to the system, the players' answers will be unclear, or will skip to how they're seeking the prize without first specifying what it is. When this happens, ask the question in concrete terms: "What are you hoping to get out of this?"

If you're having trouble figuring out what is being fought over, it may be a sign that the stakes are too low to justify a long contest. Instead a simple contest, or group simple contest, is called for. (Conversely, you may find that they're all fired up over a situation you planned to resolve more simply. This is a sign that you should invest more focus and suspense into the sequence by using a group scored contest. Never deny the players the chance to feel passionate about events in your game!)

Tactics: Here the player(s) describe how they're trying to get the goal. They name the abilities they intend to use, and describe how they mean to use them. If their suggestions seem unlikely based on the situation, the Narrator describes the circumstances more clearly or explains why the suggested course of action won't work in the game world. When a suitable tactic and governing ability is chosen, the contest has been framed.

Opposition/Resistance: After the contest is framed from the players' point of view, the Narrator decides what the antagonist's goal is (if the PCs are opposed by characters or creatures), or what the opposite outcome will be (if the PCs are resisted by an abstract or impersonal force.) In the former case, the PCs will be resisted by an ability; the Narrator decides what this will be, and prepares to describe it in action.

Alesia is running an anime-inspired game featuring a squad of fearless mecha pilots. Rick plays Fumio, dashing pilot of an A600 Marauder. Mark plays his best buddy, the rakish Seiji, who wades into battle in his obsolete but custom-tweaked XK-6 Ironhawk. They're the last pilots of the Inter-Planetary Alliance left standing after a devastating fight with their former friend, Kamatari. He's melded the engine of his A1000 Peacebringer with the essence of the extradimensional fire entity, Kra'al, quadrupling his power. The fight has overwhelmed his engines. He's about explode. Kamatari plunges toward the heart of the homeworld capital, hoping to take as many people as possible with him when he goes.

Alesia frames the contest. "So," she asks Rick and Mark, "What's your goal?"

"We have to take Kamatari out!" Rick cries.

"So you want to defeat him in combat?" Alesia asks. It's not her place to impose an answer on the players, but her tone suggests that the question warrants a bit more thought.

"No, wait," says Mark. "If all we do is pound on Kamatari's malfunctioning mecha, it will explode, killing thousands of innocent bystanders. Our real goal should be to get Kamatari out of a populated area."

"Good point," agrees Rick. "Yes, that's the goal."

Now that the prize is agreed upon, Alesia will know how to interpret the results if they win their contest against Kamatari—he departs for a depopulated area.

"Okay, and how are you going to accomplish this?"

"How about we lock on him with tractor beams and haul him up into the ionosphere?" Mark suggests.

"Too risky," says Rick. "What happens if we fail? The tractor beams disrupt his already unstable mecha, and he blows—killing thousands of innocent bystanders."

"But I have Tractor Beam at 6W," Mark protests.

"Then let's save that as a fallback. First let's try something where the price of failure is a bit lower. I have Taunt at 19. Kamatari's megalomania makes it difficult to resist insults to his dignity, so I should get a hefty modifier on top of that. What say I mock him and then speed up into the atmosphere? If he fails, he follows me safely into space, and we can fight him there. If we fail, we're no further behind, and we can try your desperate tractor beam scheme."

"Works for me," says Mark.

As it does for Alesia: she now knows the prize of the contest, and the ability being used to wage it. She decides that Kamatari will resist this effort to distract him with his Childish Fury ability. If he wins the contest, he'll simply get angrier, and more determined to take the city center with him when the inevitable explosion comes.

It's time for the contest to begin. "So," says Irina, "how exactly do you taunt Kamatari?"

[[[BEGIN SIDEBAR]]]

Default Ratings

If you enter a contest for which you have no relevant ability whatsoever, your base target number is a 6. Like ability ratings, it may be subject to modifiers.

[[[END SIDEBAR]]]

Modifiers

Where an ability rating represents a general ability to succeed in the narrative, modifiers reflect specific conditions that may make it easier or harder to overcome particular obstacles. They are applied to your ability to get a final **target number**.

Young Crittenden's greatest goal is to steal a kiss from Sofia, the fetching foreign exchange student he's been dreaming about all semester. His Sweet Talk ability is 3. However, because Beasley and Taunton filled his sneakers with herring, his current odor is less than conducive to romance. This imposes a 6-point penalty on his attempt to romance Sofia, taking his target number down to 18.

If the tactic you have chosen for the contest seems either especially easy or difficult, or the governing ability only partially suited to it, the Narrator will assign appropriate modifiers.

For more on modifiers, see p. XX.

Resistance

Most dramatic obstacles come in the form of supporting characters opposed to your goals. When you face impersonal or abstract forces, the Narrator chooses a Resistance to represent the difficulty of the obstacle.

Rebuffed by Sofia, Crittenden heads for his private place of meditation—his favorite tree, where he will sulk and plot dark vengeance against the hated Beasley and Taunton. Wintry showers pelt down on him, coating the tree with a slick layer of ice. Under normal conditions, Crittenden could not fail to climb his tree, but now he must enter a contest to succeed. The Narrator assigns a Resistance of 14, representing the new difficulty of getting up the tree.

Guidance for Narrators on assigning Resistances appears on p. XX.

Die Rolls

To determine how well your character uses an ability, roll a 20-sided die (d20). Compare the rolled number with the target number (ignoring masteries for now); low rolls are better than high. At the same time, the narrator rolls for the resistance.

Critical: If the die roll is a 1 (even when the target number is 1), you succeed so brilliantly that the narrator may reward your character with an additional, unexpected effect.

Success: If the die roll is greater than 1 and less than or equal to the target number, you succeed, but there is nothing remarkable about the success.

Failure: If the die roll is greater than the target number but not 20, you fail. Things do not happen as you hoped.

Fumble: If the die roll is a 20, you fumble (even when the target number is 20). This is the worst result possible, and you will suffer a disturbing or entertaining catastrophe. The degree of success or failure of the PC and narrator's rolls are compared in either a simple or an extended contest.
[[[BEGIN SIDEBAR]]]

Altering Probabilities

Statisticians may find the probability curves of *HeroQuest* disturbingly unruly. They favor narrative unpredictability over the easily grasped linear progressions of more mathematically oriented games.

Groups who want higher abilities to win out slightly more often can invert the results when both contestants get the same result, so that the high roller, not the low roller, wins the marginal victory.
[[[END SIDEBAR]]]

Bumps

A bump affects the degree of success or failure of the die roll. A bump up improves the result by one step, changing a fumble to a failure, a failure to a success, or a success to a critical. Bump ups come from two sources: masteries and hero points (applied in that order). A bump down reduces the degree of success of your opponent. Bump downs come from one source: masteries.

Bump Up with Mastery

You get one bump up for each level of mastery your PC has greater than your opponent's. Opposed masteries cancel out (based on target numbers, not beginning ability ratings), so if your opponent has as many or more masteries as you do you will not get a bump up.

*Crittenden's faculty advisor, the hapless Mr. Jenkins, comes to talk him down from the tree before he catches his death of cold. Jenkins opposes his Gentle Persuasion ability of 13 against Crittenden's Specious Logic ability of 6**W**. Crittenden's player, Colin, rolls a 5—a success. The Narrator rolls a success for Jenkins—a 12. Because Crittenden has a mastery over Jenkins, he bumps up his result by one step, from success to critical.*

[[[BEGIN SIDEBAR]]]

Hero Points

Each character starts the game with a pool of 3 hero points, and gains more of them at the end of every session. These are a precious resource, as they are used both to boost characters' contest results, and to improve abilities over the long term. For more how hero points are awarded, and how they can be used to improve your character, see p. XX.
[[[END SIDEBAR]]]

Bump Up with Hero Points

You can spend a hero point to bump up any result by one step. You may only bump your own rolls, not those of PCs or supporting characters—with the exception of sidekicks and retainers, which, as extensions of your characters, you may spend hero points on. You can decide to use a hero point for a bump after the die roll results are calculated (including any bump ups resulting from masteries).

Crittenden remains in the tree even as the weather grows more turbulent, and a rare wintry thunderstorm lashes the school grounds. A bolt of lightning strikes the tree. The Narrator requires a simple contest for Crittenden to remain safely in its branches. Colin rolls his admittedly lacking

Athletics ability of 13, against the lightning bolt's rating of 10. Colin gets a 6; the Narrator, a 7. The Lightning bolt bumps up from a success to a critical. To succeed, Colin must spend Crittenden's last hero point. That bumps him up to a critical result, too. Since his roll is lower than the Narrator's (see simple contest chart, p. XX), he earns a minor victory. He remains in the tree—barely—dangling by a sturdy branch.

During long contests, you may spend only one hero point per exchange. You may spend up any number of hero points on a simple contest.

Bump Down with Mastery

A bump down works like a bump up, but in reverse. It decreases the result by one step: a critical to a success, a success to a failure, or a failure to a fumble. If you have a critical and still have one or more "unused masteries," you can use them to bump down an opponent, since you cannot get a result better than a critical for yourself. The opponent receives one bump down for each level of mastery remaining. Bump downs come from masteries, never hero points.

Crittenden's near-fall inspires him to come down from the tree to get back at Taunton. He wants Taunton to think that he's got valuable contraband hidden up in a hole in the tree. When Taunton climbs it, he'll sit on the branch, which Crittenden has sawed halfway through. Crittenden uses his Elaborate Deception ability of 14 to spread rumors through the school. Taunton resists with his Untrusting ability of 17. Both roll successes. Crittenden's first mastery bumps his result to a critical, which is as high as it can go. So his second bumps Taunton's result down one step, to a failure.

Degrees Of Success

Sometimes all you need to know to interpret the results of a resolution is whether the character succeeded or failed. In other instances, you'll want to know how well a protagonist succeeded, or how badly he failed.

All of the resolution methods yield degrees of success for the victor. The possible degrees of success, from least to greatest, are: marginal, minor, major, complete. Ties are also possible. A success for one contestant means a corresponding failure for the loser.

Tie: Tie means no result. Effort was expended, but the net result is that nothing consequential occurs, or else both sides lose or gain equally.

Marginal: A nominal victory or defeat, with little gain or loss. The victor gains only the immediate benefits of winning. The loser suffers no lasting effects of his defeat beyond the end of the contest.

Minor: A clear victory or defeat, with a significant but limited effect. The victor gains the immediate advantage of his victory, plus the defeat has some lasting effects, although they are typically annoyances. The loser suffers penalties that last for at least a day, possibly longer.

Major: A resounding victory or defeat, with serious consequences for all participants. The victor may gain fame or glory. The loser is prevented from pursuing his plans until he somehow counters the results, and he will likely suffer lasting penalties. For both, the effects are long-term, lasting weeks or even months.

Complete: A total victory or defeat, with momentous consequences for all involved. These repercussions are often permanent or irreversible; the narrator might make their removal the goal of an entire adventure or campaign. The victor will be famous (at least for a while). The loser suffers a severe penalty.

[[[BEGIN SIDEBAR]]]

No Repeat Attempts

A contest represents all of your attempts to overcome an obstacle. If you are defeated it means that no matter how many times you tried to solve the problem with your ability, you finally had to give up. You can try again only if you apply a new ability to the task or your narrator agrees that special circumstances exist.
[[[END SIDEBAR]]]
[[[BEGIN SIDEBAR]]]

Sample Contest Consequences

Climbing
Complete Victory: You reach the top in record time, possibly helping your companions along the way.
Major Victory: You climb quickly and competently to the top.
Minor Victory: You make slow but steady progress to the top, albeit without flare.
Marginal Victory: You took a long time and had some problems, but you reached the top.
Marginal Defeat: You got nowhere, and may be hurt.
Minor Defeat: You made no progress, and are tired, sore, and perhaps impaired.
Major Defeat: You fall while climbing, and are injured.
Complete Defeat: You fall from a great height, and are badly wounded, perhaps even dying.

Combat
Complete Victory: Your opponent is down, probably dying; or he surrenders.
Major Victory: Your foe is badly injured and stops fighting.
Minor Victory: Your foe takes a significant wound.
Marginal Victory: Your opponent is slightly wounded, but otherwise intact.
Marginal Defeat: You are hurt enough to affect your ability and want to get out of the fight.
Minor Defeat: You are wounded enough to significantly affect your abilities.
Major Defeat: You are injured badly enough that your ability to escape is compromised.
Complete Defeat: You are dying.

Finding Your Way
Complete Victory: You got there the best and easiest way.
Major Victory: You are very sure of your way, and get there quickly and without problems.
Minor Victory: You know where you are going, and get there easily.
Marginal Victory: You get there, but it takes awhile.
Marginal Defeat: You thought you knew where you were going, but take a wrong turn.
Minor Defeat: You went off track somehow.
Major Defeat: You are utterly lost.
Complete Defeat: You are lost, and in a dangerous place.

Romance
Complete Victory: She is like putty in your hand, besotted by your presence and eager to do whatever you want.
Major Victory: She smiles and stares into your eyes, rapt in your presence and eager to please you.
Minor Victory: She smiles at you and stares into your eyes.
Marginal Victory: She smiles at you.
Marginal Defeat: She turns away.
Minor Defeat: She frowns.
Major Defeat: She gives you a very cold look and makes an accusation of impropriety and insult.

Complete Defeat: She makes a detailed accusation of lewdness in front of a crowd, and wants you run out of town.

Social Conflict
Complete Victory: You have driven your opponent from the company in disgrace.
Major Victory: You have acutely embarrassed your opponent in front of his peers.
Minor Victory: You made your opponent look foolish.
Marginal Victory: You seem to be right, but it is debatable.
Marginal Defeat: You are uncertain of your behavior.
Minor Defeat: You embarrass yourself.
Major Defeat: You are abashed and cannot look people in the eye. Your social standing is affected.
Complete Defeat: You are mortified to the point of having to leave or do something drastic. Your social standing is affected permanently, and you may face exile, demotion, or punishment of some kind.
[[[END SIDEBAR]]]

Automatic Success

In an automatic success, the Narrator decides that the character will succeed, and he does. The process breaks down as follows:

1. The player describes what his character is trying to do, and with what ability.
2. The Narrator decides that the character will succeed. If degree of success matters, the PC scores a minor victory.
3. The Narrator describes what happens.

Automatic successes are appropriate when failure would seem peculiar or out of character, and in cases where the Narrator can't envision an interesting or entertaining plot branch arising from failure.

In some cases, especially the latter, Narrators may want to preserve suspense by calling for a die roll anyway, and engaging in a **mock contest**—see sidebar.

Automatic successes without the need of a die roll create a sense of power and accomplishment for players These may be appropriate for conflicts early in a story or session, which establish the protagonists' high level of competence in the face of minor opposition.

In instances where the player wants more than a minor victory, he can gain a complete victory by spending 1 hero Point. (This desire indicates that the player has a stronger stake in the outcome than you'd anticipated, and that you probably should have at least run a simple contest. Oh well; you can't spot 'em all.)

PCs can never gain automatic successes against other PCs.

Simple Contest

A simple contest unfolds as follows:

1. Frame the contest.

2. Figure your target number using the ability rating and any modifiers.
Your **target number** is the rating of your ability, plus or minus **modifiers** the narrator may give you—especially if the ability is not well-suited to the task. The higher the number (and the more masteries), the more capable your character is.

3. The narrator selects the resistance.

The narrator opposes your hero with a **resistance**—the harder the task or tougher the opponent, the higher the resistance.

4. Roll a die to determine your degree of success or failure, then apply any bumps. The narrator does the same.
Roll a twenty-sided die for your action. At the same time, the narrator rolls for the resistance. Compare the number you roll with your target number to see how well you succeeded or failed with your ability, as described in "Die Rolls: Success and Failure" on page 61. Remember to apply any bumps from masteries or hero points, as described previously under Bumps.

5. Determine level of victory or defeat.
Compare your success or failure with the narrator's on the Simple Contest Results table to find your level of victory. It is possible for a character to succeed at his die roll but still be defeated.

6. Determine effects of hero point expenditures, if any.
In a simple contest, characters may spend any number of hero points to bump up their results. If they do so, their final levels of victory or defeat are modified accordingly.

6. Determine contest consequences.
Describe the result based on "Contests: Victory and Defeat" on p. XX. If necessary, compare the level of victory or defeat with the Contest Consequences table on p. XX.

Simple Contest Results

	Contestant B			
Contestant A	**Critical**	**Success**	**Failure**	**Fumble**
Critical	Low roll receives marginal victory, else tie	Contestant A receives minor victory	Contestant A receives major victory	Contestant A receives complete victory
Success	Contestant B gains minor victory	Low roll receives marginal victory, else tie	Contestant A receives minor victory	Contestant A receives major victory
Failure	Contestant B gains major victory	Contestant B gains minor victory	Low roll receives marginal victory, else tie	Contestant A receives minor victory
Fumble	Contestant B gains complete victory	Contestant B gains major victory	Contestant B gains minor victory	Tie*

* In a group simple contest (see p. XX), the narrator may declare that both contestants suffer a marginal defeat to indicate that, although their results cancel out with respect to each other, their situation worsens compared to other contestants.

[[[BEGIN SIDEBAR]]]

Confusing Ties

Narrators will find most tied results easy to describe—as inconclusive standoffs, in which neither participant gets what he wanted.

Petrov and Bulgakov struggle for the luger. It falls from both of their grips, down into the storm drain, where neither of them can get it.

However, in some situations, ties become difficult to visualize. Chief among these are contests with binary outcomes, where only two possible results are conceivable.

To go back to the example of Crittenden trying to stay in the tree as it gets struck by lightning, what happens if Crittenden and the storm tie? He's either in the tree, or out of it; he can't be both.

Narrators resolve confusing ties in favor of the PC, awarding him a marginal victory. Contests between PCs tend not to be binary; in the rare cases where they are, award the minor victory to the PC with the highest number of unspent hero points. (This adjudication does not require the winner to spend any of those points.)

[[[END SIDEBAR]]]

[[[BEGIN SIDEBAR]]]

Mock Contests

In a mock contest, the Narrator calls for a simple contest but alters the die roll for the opposition, creating what is in effect a secret automatic success.

The Narrator goes through the usual process for a simple contest. If the PC scores a victory without intervention, that result stands. If the opposition would otherwise win the simple contest, the Narrator describes a marginal victory for the PC.

Mock contests contain a small element of risk: when characters fumble, they are treated as ordinary simple contests, which the PC will either lose, or must spend one or more hero points to bump their way out of. (This rule is necessary to prevent players from knowing that you were planning on fudging the roll on their behalf.)

In a game of bikers versus zombies, Zero Hour Mobley (played by Brian) finds a source of transportation as the undead blindly rage on the heath above. He has spotted a derelict motorcycle hidden in the brambles.

The Narrator, Alison, has placed the motorcycle in the location as an emergency exit strategy for the PCs, should they need it. And they do—as the result of earlier obstacle resolutions, their own rides have been, respectively, blown up, smashed into a tree, and mangled by machinegun fire. Not wanting to tip her hand, Alison wants it to seem *as if acquisition of this cycle is less than a sure thing. So she decides to make it a mock contest.*

Zero Hour runs to pull the cycle from the bushes. "What shape is it in?" Brian asks Alison.

"It's rusted and battered."

"I try to get it started anyhow, with my Miraculous Mechanic ability!"

"It's a simple contest. Roll away."

Alison rolls, though she doesn't bother to set a resistance, since she's going to let Brian win anyhow. Brian gets a 14; her roll is a 7. If this were a real contest, he'd lose. But it isn't, so he succeeds.

"With slavering zombies plodding your way, you fumble desperately to reattach the gas line. At the last minute, the bike roars to life. You hop on and blast away into the night, leaving ravenous zombies groaning in your wake."

Accordingly, Narrators should never use mock contests for situations where it would seem jarring or out of character for the PC to fail—only for those in which, for dramatic reasons, victory should be (almost) guaranteed.

Mock contests are impossible between player characters.

[[[END SIDEBAR]]]

Simple Contest Example

Singer (played by Joerg) is an ordinary man who has discovered that many of his friends and neighbors in his small logging town seem to have had their personalities dulled by an unseen force. He hopes to alert the unaffected populace by starting up a public access broadcast on the local television channel. To do so, he'll have to convince the station manager, Joe Hutchens (a supporting character played by the Narrator, Anja) to bump somebody else from the schedule to make room for him.

Step one: Joerg and Anja frame the contest. *"What prize are you going for?" Anja asks.*

"I want Hutchens to give me a half hour show on his cable station."

"Great. Very clear goal. Now what tactic are you using to get it?"

"I'm going to use my Contact: Joe Hutchens ability, arguing that Cozy Craft Time With Mrs. Meurer *has really gone downhill over the last year or so. But really I'm relying on the favors he owes me—subtly reminding him of the venison I brought him last year, and how I fixed his lawnmower free of charge."*

Anja, as arbiter of the world, could, in theory, decide that Joerg's details about his prior relationship with Hutchens don't fit her world. However, as an entertaining Narrator who welcomes player input, she happily accepts them, without further comment.

Step two: figure target numbers. *"What's your Contact: Joe Hutchens ability rated at?" asks Anja.*

"13. But he was there when I pulled Mr. Wilkins out of the fire the other day. I figure I can apply the +3 bonus I got to my reputation as my consequence of victory to this."

"Sure," says Anja. "Increase your target number to 16."

Step three: The Narrator determines resistance. *Anja, who has had no need to create game statistics for Hutchens until now, decides that he has a Caution ability, rated at 13.*

Step four: Roll the dice. *Joerg rolls an 11; Anja, a 17. That's a success for Singer (below his target number of 16) but a failure for Hutchens (above his target number of 13.)*

Step five: Determine success level: *Consulting the Simple Contest chart for success vs. failure, Anja sees that Hutchens has scored a minor victory. She checks the write-up for minor victories, seeing that it yields a significant victory with temporary effect.*

Step six: Determine results of hero point expenditures, if any. *Anja has not given Hutchens, a minor supporting character, any hero points. Nor is he sufficiently passionate about this issue that he'd spend them if he had them. Joerg doesn't need to spend his hero points—he's already come out on top.*

Step seven: Narrator describes consequences: *In character as Hutchens, Anja says, "Uh, well, Singer, you know I think of you as an old friend and all. And I hate to hurt Mrs. Meurer's feelings. Let's say I give you a one-show try-out, and take it from there, okay?" Getting the show is a significant effect, but it is limited, in that Hutchens only promises a try-out at first.*

Singer intends no negative consequences for Hutchens, who is his somewhat reluctant ally, not an adversary. He just wants access to the local TV audience. So, aside from his need to deal with a possibly hurt Mrs. Meurer, Hutchens suffers no lingering ill-effects from this contest.

Consequences

Contests, in addition to deciding whether the character gets the prize he was after, carry additional side effects, or consequences. These are negative if the character loses, and positive if he wins.

States Of Adversity

When characters lose contests, they may suffer states of adversity: literal or metaphorical injuries which make it harder for the characters to use related abilities.

- In a fight or test of physical mettle, characters wind up literally wounded.
- In a social contest, they may suffer damage to their reputations.
- If commanding a war, they lose battalions, equipment, or territories.
- In an economic struggle, they lose money, other resources, or opportunities.
- After losing artistic contests, they may suffer bouts of crippling self-doubt, preventing them from doing good work. (In fact, morale crises are a useful catch-all consequence for any number of contests in which lingering ill-effects are otherwise difficult to think of.)

From the least to the most punishing, the five states of adversity are: Hurt, Impaired, Injured, Dying, and Dead. The first four are possible results of any contest. Dying characters become dead,

unless they receive intervention of some sort. In extreme cases, characters may die immediately as a consequence of a scored contest—see p. XX.

Consequences Of Defeat			
Defeat Level **(Simple or Scored Contest)**	**Final AP Total** **(Extended Contest)**	**State Of Adversity**	**Penalty**
Marginal	0 to –10 AP	Hurt	–3 penalty to appropriate abilities
Minor	–11 to –20 AP	Impaired	–6 penalty to appropriate abilities
Major	–21 to –30 AP	Injured	Automatic bump down on uses of appropriate ability
Complete	–31 or fewer AP	Dying	No actions allowed

Healthy

Characters who aren't in a state of adversity at all are considered healthy.

It is possible to seem banged up without suffering any measurable penalties. If you get into a long contest during which you were at a disadvantage for a long time and finally came from behind for the win, you may seem bruised, winded, anxious, or otherwise the worse for wear. Although this apparent harm may yield you useful sympathy, it doesn't actually slow you down at all.

[[[BEGIN SIDEBAR]]]

Dazed

In some situations, the Narrator may rule that a character is dazed. Dazed characters are conscious but unable to initiate actions of their own. If another character engages them in a contest, they can snap out of it and defend themselves.

Unconscious

Characters can be rendered unconscious by contests where achieving this state is the contest's stated goal. Unconsciousness can, depending on genre, result from chokeholds, inhalation of sleeping gas, sleep spells, rayguns set to stun, or the simple failure to remain awake while fatigued. In most adventure genres, unlike real life, it fairly easy to knock people out without doing them permanent damage. This convention allows the heroes to remove opponents as obstacles without permanently harming them. In series employing this conceit, you can knock opponents out on a minor victory or better. On a marginal victory, they become dazed instead.

In settings where player characters routinely kill helpless opponents, Narrators should ensure that it is never easier to knock enemies out than to kill them. For more on this problem, see p. XX.

[[[END SIDEBAR]]]

Hurt

A hurt character shows signs of adversity and finds it slightly harder to do things related to his defeat. Either his flesh or pride may be bruised. If he's halfway sensible, he'll enter similar situations with some reluctance—at least until he recovers. Until he does, he suffers a –3 penalty to all related abilities.

While auditioning for the Singleton and Jones Carnival, the Great Corbucci attempts a difficult feat on the trapeze, and suffers a marginal defeat. The Narrator describes this as muscle strain, and rules that he suffers a –3 penalty on all physical activities.

Characters may suffer multiple hurts to the same ability. These are cumulative until recovery occurs.

That night, Corbucci suffers another minor defeat while trying to prevent a drunken patron from entering the backstage area of the hoochie coochie tent. He's been bruised and jarred, and now suffers a –6 penalty to all related actions.

Unless the Narrator has a compelling dramatic reason to decide otherwise, hurts vanish at the end of a session, after one day of rest per accumulated hurt, or when in-game events justify their removal.

Impaired

An Impaired character has taken a jarring blow, physically, socially, or emotionally, and is much likelier to fail when attempting similar actions in the future. He suffers a –9 penalty to all related abilities. Impairments combine with hurts and with other impairments.

As bad as the character's condition may be, there's nothing wrong with him that some prolonged inactivity won't fix. A single impairment goes away after one week of rest, or when an in-game event (like miraculous or extraordinary treatment) occurs to make their removal seem believable.

Injured

An injured character has suffered a debilitating shock to the system, one which renders him all but helpless.

To even participate in a contest, he must succeed at a prior **contest of wherewithal** to rouse himself to action.

Appropriate abilities for contests of wherewithal might include:

- *Physical action:* Endurance, High Pain Threshold, Grim Determination, etc.
- *Intellectual activity:* Concentration, Iron Will, Love Of Country (if action to be attempted is patriotic), etc.
- *Social humiliation:* Savoir Faire, Unflappable, Stoic Dignity

The default resistance for a contest of wherewithal is 14, though the Narrator may choose to alter this when dramatic logic seems to demand it.

Even if the injured character succeeds at the contest of wherewithal, he takes an automatic bump down whenever he uses any related ability in a contest. (The bump down does not apply to the contest of wherewithal itself.) Where it seems apt, the Narrator may choose to ignore the bump down if the character scores a major or complete victory on the contest of wherewithal.

Any active hurts or impairments continue to be counted against him as well.

In a post-apocalyptic game, Bruno the Hook (Mikko) has been injured by radiation poisoning. The Narrator, Susan, describes this as a physical injury which also impairs mental functioning. Prior to his radiation burn, Bruno suffered a Hurt in a scuffle with plaguemen.

The rest of Bruno's scrounger band goes off in pursuit of some gasoline canisters they see up on a ridge, leaving him to suffer on a pallet in a cave. After they're gone, a hungry mutant coyote snuffles its way into the cave mouth. Bruno wants to scare it off, using his Hurl Object ability to toss a rock at it.

First, he must succeed at a contest of wherewithal. "I use my Adrenaline Rush ability to momentarily ignore the pain and clear my mind," says Mikko. This ability is rated at 16; he rolls an 8. Susan chooses the standard resistance of 14 and rolls a 16. Success vs. failure is a minor victory, allowing Bruno to go on to attempt to throw the stone at the coyote.

(If he had failed, he might grope for the stone, only to have it fall out of his debilitated grasp.)

Bruno has Hurl Object at 7Ш; his single Hurt reduces the target number to 4Ш. The Coyote has Dodge at 18. Mikko rolls a 6; Susan gets a 20. The bump up Bruno would normally get for his mastery is canceled out by the bump down from the injury. The end result is a failure vs. fumble, in Bruno's favor—a minor victory. The rock grazes the coyote's leg, surprising it and sending it yelping off into the phosphorescent night.

Physical traumas will impose these penalties on nearly all actions; severe pain makes it hard to concentrate on mental and social activities, too. Some mental injuries will likewise make it difficult to perform physically.

Certain other injuries are compartmentalized in effect: a particular subset of abilities is penalized, but others work as normal. Social injuries are a prime example: you may be unable to present your face in polite society, but that won't stop you from solving equations, firing a pistol, or painting a portrait.

In realistic settings, physical injuries take many months to recover from, even with quality medical treatment. Without treatment, they may become permanent, or even send the character on a deteriorating spiral into eventual death.

Most games inspired by serial fiction will treat injury in a more forgiving way, allowing the character to return to full health after spending an undefined amount of time between sessions undergoing hospital treatment.

If magical or advanced healing is a part of your setting, you may be able to recover immediately from injuries, given the proper treatment.

The time it takes to recover from injuries to one's morale, social standing, and so on should be roughly equivalent to physical injuries. (An argument might be made that in very realistic genres, psychological traumas should last even longer than physical ones, perhaps even becoming permanent. Use this reasoning with caution; players will probably find it unduly punishing. In fiction, emotional damage is healed only through cathartic events, in which the character completes his so-called "story arc" and undergoes a redemptive transformation.)

Dying

A dying character will, without rapid and appropriate intervention, soon expire. To save him, the PCs must typically overcome a story obstacle and/or succeed at a difficult contest. According to the conventions of dramatic storytelling, the character typically has just enough time left for the other characters to make this one attempt.

Example One: *Mountaineer Jurgen Deindl suffers a complete defeat while attempting to scale a sheer ice face. He falls and breaks his back. He is dying.*

To save him, the Narrator explains that the other PCs must get him back to base camp, where he can receive treatment and his condition can be stabilized. It will take them eight hours to descend to camp. A fellow mountaineer with First Aid rolls to see how long Jurgen has left. He succeeds; the Narrator tells him that Jurgen has maybe eight hours, give or take.

The Narrator decides that the suspense in the scenes about Jurgen's rescue revolves around the effort to get him to base camp. If the PCs get him there, he survives—no roll by the medic supporting character will be required. Instead, a long contest of the team's mountaineering abilities determines whether they get him back in time. If they do, he lives.

Example Two: *Explorer Jean-Pierre Duvivier suffers a complete defeat while trying to avoid the bite of the deadly Burmese krait. The anti-venom is back at camp, which is fifteen minutes away. Coincidentally enough, he has about that much time before the toxin's effect on his body becomes irreversibly lethal.*

The Narrator decides that in this instance the suspense surrounding Jean-Pierre's survival revolves around the administration of the anti-venom. Jean-Pierre's character will get to camp in time,

at which time the player must roll his Hardy Constitution ability against the krait's Venom. A victory means survival; defeat means death.

When it seems unbelievable for the time between dying and death to coincide with the time it takes for intervention to occur, Narrators should choose a longer interval between dying and death. Contrive toward character survival, except when players obviously prefer dramatic deaths over last minute revivals.

Minor supporting characters no one cares about saving typically die after a few perfunctory gasps, as do characters who have no chance of being saved.

Successful intervention usually leaves the character injured. Depending on the narrative circumstances, a complete victory on the intervention attempt may leave him merely impaired.

If intervention fails, the character will die, but not necessarily immediately. Although irrevocably doomed, he may survive long enough to deliver a poignant final speech…or linger in his deathbed for agonizing months. He will be lucid enough to deliver dialogue but, unless the Narrator deems it dramatically appropriate, unable to perform any task complicated enough to require a contest.

Like other states of adversity, dying may be literal or metaphorical. Your standing in society, business or politics may be on the brink of permanent extinction. You may be facing mental death—a permanent lapse into madness or senility. For more on metaphorical death, see below.

Dying adversaries may, if rescued by their allies, be taken off for appropriate intervention, surviving to vex the protagonists another day.

Dead

A character who dies as a result of physical injuries is gone from the game, period. Your fellow PCs will perhaps hold a funeral as the player creates a new character from scratch, and works out with the Narrator a way to integrate him into the ongoing series.

Death from a non-physical contest will likely be metaphorical. (Unless you're playing a game based on 19th century novelists like Thomas Hardy, in which case it is entirely in genre to literally die of embarrassment or heartbreak.) If you die in an economic, social, spiritual, or artistic contest, you permanently lose entire suites of abilities.

Charismatic bounty hunter Dwayne-O Walken (p. XX) has suffered a scandal so shocking that even a tabloid figure can't come back from it. The Narrator rules that he's effectively dead as a celebrity and social figure. She takes his character sheet and crosses off the following abilities: Charming, catch-phrase, known to millions of television viewers, legions of swooning admirers, strike panic into miscreants everywhere, reality program, endorsement deal, glamorous tabloid lifestyle, world-spanning adventures, website, contacts with far-flung fans from all walks of life. She even rules that his faithful sister/sidekick Darla deserts him.

Harsh? You bet. That's death for you.

With so many of his most enjoyable abilities stripped from him, Bill decides that Dwayne-O isn't really Dwayne-O anymore, and decides to send him into ignominious retirement, so he can create a new character unencumbered by metaphorical death.

Even if you're only metaphorically dead, the Narrator is within her rights to declare that your character has undergone changes so dire as to make him unplayable. He may be incurably insane, or so socially shamed that he retires to a life of obscurity or religious meditation. He may be shunned by all around him, sent into permanent exile, or sentenced to long-term imprisonment with no hope of escape.

[[[BEGIN SIDEBAR]]]

Followers and Adversity

If your followers (p. XX) participate with you in a contest in which you are defeated and put in a state of adversity, they suffer one more level of adversity than you do. If your reputation is hurt in a verbal sparring match, that of your faithful sidekick is impaired.

(If you need to determine only a follower's level of defeat, it also is one step worse than yours. Your marginal defeat is your follower's minor defeat, and so on.)

[[[END SIDEBAR]]]

Lingering Benefits

Just as characters who suffer defeat can suffer ongoing ill-effects in addition to the loss of the prize at hand, characters who win can gain lingering extra benefits.

Feel free to assist the Narrator by suggesting possible benefits, recognizing that she retains final say.

Examples:

- *Lieutenant Xornox climbs a high cliff. He can apply what he learned to future uses of his Climb skill.*
- *Thandak the Barbarian wins a fight against a wizard. His player argues that he should get a bonus the next time he fights a wizard, because he no longer thinks they're so tough.*
- *Robbie Segretti hacks into the database of Black Hook LLC. This will give him serious cred in the hacker community, which he can apply to his Score Info From Fellow Hackers ability.*
- *The Alexandre successfully defends his honor in a duel against the Comte de Tourvel. Given the importance of dueling at court, his player argues that the ensuing bonus should apply to any social ability.*

If the Narrator accepts your case, you get a bonus on the selected abilities, or in the specified situation, as determined by your victory level.

Consequences Of Victory

Victory Level (Simple or Scored Contest)	**Extended Contest Final AP Total**	**Bonus**
Marginal	0 to –10 AP	+0
Minor	–11 to –20 AP	+3
Major	–21 to –30 AP	+6
Complete	–31 or fewer AP	+9

The bonus lingers until you suffer a defeat on a contest using either the bonus or the ability with which you won the original contest.

"Howlin'" Horace McLaglen is a member of a quasi-criminal private firefighting gang in 1850s New York City. He gains a +6 bonus after heroically preventing a potentially devastating fire, and applies it to all contests he undertakes relating to his run for a position at city hall. He used his Firefighting ability to gain the bonus, and uses it again to combat a new fire in Chinatown. He's knocked out of that contest. His failure eclipses memories of his previous triumph. He loses his +6 bonus on all political activities.

You can't decline the bonus when you think you might lose it; you must always use it in any contest in which it ought, in the Narrator's judgment, to apply.

Narrators should keep a record of all active lingering benefits, to alert themselves to situations where they might be lost.

When you lose lingering benefits, your Narrator may use them as inspiration for states of adversity.

McLaglen is physically Impaired at the end of the Chinatown firefight. The Narrator describes him as suffering from smoke inhalation. But since he built so much of his political campaign on his prior firefighting success, she also rules that he suffers the standard Impairment penalty to all political activity. He will have to not only do something to recuperate physically, but politically as well.

At the end of a storyline, especially when a significant period of game-world time passes between the conclusion of one episode and the beginning of the next, the Narrator may declare that all lingering benefits have expired.

You may apply bonuses from multiple lingering benefits to a single contest.

Professor Hexagon battles the Green Menace on the wing of a gyrocopter. He applies two lingering benefits to his ability to arrive at his target number.

The first is a +3 bonus from a minor victory in which he rescued a group of orphans forced into slave labor by the Green Menace. After this contest, Hexagon's player, Aidan, suggested that the bonus represented his increased determination to bring the loathsome villain to justice—and should be applied to all contests toward that aim.

The second lingering bonus comes from his recent defeat of the Green Menace's chief henchman, Morgo, who turned out to be a machine-man, just like his master. Aidan asked that this bonus, a +6 (from a major victory) be applied to any future fights against machine-men.

Hexagon fights using his Super-Serum Enhanced Physique ability of 7Ш. The total bonus from both lingering benefits is +9, taking him to a target number of 16Ш.

Narrators should be alert to circumstances in which the lingering benefit applies, even though the player doesn't know about it, or has forgotten to ask.

Even if Hexagon didn't already know that the Green Menace was a machine-man, he should still be eligible for the +6 bonus.

The Narrator is always free to assign lingering benefits to supporting characters, including antagonists.

Clearly Inferior Opponents

Defeating clearly inferior opponents neither teaches you anything nor significantly enhances your reputation; you are ineligible for a lingering benefit if the ability rating (*not* target number) you used in the contest exceeded your opponent's by 6 or more. If, in the case of long contest, you or your opponent used multiple abilities, compare the best ability you used to his worst.

Long Contests

Most conflicts should be resolved simply and quickly, using the simple contest rules. However, every so often, you'll want to stretch out a resolution, breaking it down into a series of smaller actions, increasing the suspense the players feel as they wait to see if they succeed or fail.

Think of the different ways a film director can choose to portray a given moment, depending on how important it is to the story, and how invested he wants us to feel in its outcome.

For example, there are two ways to shoot a scene in which a thief cracks a safe.

The action can be portrayed quickly, perhaps with a moment where the actor catches his breath to see if the tumblers fall into place, and a brief swell of music on the soundtrack. Then he sighs with relief, opens the safe, and gets whatever is inside. Directors choose to dispense with such actions relatively quickly when they're tangential to the main point of the story. In this instance, the story is about what happens after the thief gets what's in the safe, not about what might happen to him if he fails.

Another film might instead choose to make the opening of the safe provides either a pivotal turning point in the story, if not its climactic moment. It would spend many scenes building up to the safe-cracking sequence: introducing the team of thieves, underlining the difficulty of the attempt, and

making us care what happens if the safe isn't opened. Unlike the above example, this is a movie about a bunch of guys who set out to crack a safe. Naturally, then, it would be a huge disappointment to the audience, after all of that build-up, if the director quickly and anticlimactically allowed the lead character to succeed or fail in a few short moments. Instead he breaks the attempt into a series of obstacles. There is an ebb and flow to the action, as film techniques manipulate our sense of tension. The pace of editing often increases. The pulse of the music tightens its subliminal grip on us. First the hero seems to be succeeding, then failing, then maybe succeeding, and then failing again… until the moment when final triumph is won—or disaster ensues.

Even a movie driven by action and suspense will typically include only a handful of these set-piece sequences. They need the rest of their running times to build up to their big moments, to make us care about the characters, and to give us quiet moments to contrast with the white-knuckle parts.

Set-piece moments of action, suspense or heightened drama, are resolved in one of two ways: scored contests, and extended contests. These two contests types allow you to focus on important sequences, drawing them the suspense surrounding their outcomes. They can be exciting when employed sparingly, but lose their luster when overused. Most groups will find that the typical four-hour session should contain at most one or two group scored contests. Don't throw them in gratuitously, even if it means that entire sessions go by without any scored contests.

There is no action that is always by definition important. You may be tempted, for example, to adjudicate every fight with an extended or scored contest, because fights seem like they should take a while and focus the players' attention. Doing this will dilute the impact of all of your fight scenes.

Think of your favorite action movie. Fights with main villains and their featured sidekicks are fully dramatized, with an ebb and flow of suspense as the relative advantage flows back and forth between the two sides. But anonymous guards and bad guys are dispensed with in seconds, because conflict with them is not what the scene at hand is about.

Always know why you're using one of the pivotal scene contest methods. If you can't articulate to yourself why this is a pivotal scene in the current session, use simple contests instead.

If the stakes don't matter much, use simple contests instead.

If the players aren't emotionally invested in a situation, think about using a simple contest. Maybe you didn't lay enough groundwork, and need to go back and insert story development scenes in which they come to understand why this matters. Then come back to it and run it as a long contest. Possibly the players have a different idea of what the story is about than you do, and you need to follow their lead. Find out what they care about, make the stakes of the drama revolve around that, and use one of the two long contest mechanics to drive *that* sequence instead.

Picking the Right Long Contest For Your Group

The two types of long contest are the extended contest and the scored contest. Both serve the same purpose, to build excitement and suspense as the characters accumulate a series of small victories and defeats on their way to ultimate success or failure.

Most groups, after some experimentation, will want to pick the one type of long contest that works for them.

The advantage of extended contests over scored contests is that they are more participatory, allowing players to make tactical decisions by deciding how much risk each time they attempt an action during the contest. This is also the disadvantage of extended contests: some players find this level of choice more baffling than empowering and would rather roll some dice and get on with it.

The control over risk in extended contests can have surprising pacing effects; they can be very short or very long. Scored contests tend to come in at a more predictable, moderate length.

Even if you prefer extended contests for most situations, you may want to switch to scored contests when the opposition and the opposition is an abstract or impersonal force. Although the

mechanics of the extended contest certainly work in this instances, many Narrators find it conceptually odd to be choosing bid values on behalf of a forest, a mountain, or an economic trend.

Extended contests have been integral to the system since its first publication. Scored contests are new to this volume.

Extended Contest Sequence

Events almost always make it clear who acts first, usually the character who initiates the contest. The sequence below assumes it is your PC, but it could just as easily be a supporting character. When order of action is unclear, allow PCs to act before supporting characters, and PCs with high target numbers in their governing abilities to go before PCs with lower ones.

1. Frame the Contest

2. Figure your starting AP total using the target number plus any source of additional AP you may have.

Advantage points (AP) measure how well a character is doing against his opponent in an extended contest. Each contestant's **starting advantage point total** equals the target number of the ability he uses in his first round of the contest, including all modifiers and augments (p. XX). The AP include +20 for each level of
mastery, and can also be increased by followers.

3. The Narrator figures starting APs for the opposition/resistance.
Taking the abilities and target numbers for the opposition or resistance, as determined during contest framing, the Narrator calculates starting AP values for the opposition or resistance.
[[[BEGIN SIDEBAR]]]

Putting the Opposition At a Disadvantage

Because your opponent's starting AP total is based on his response to your first action, it is clever to take an initial action that forces your opponent to resist using an ability with a low rating. That way, his advantage point total will be lower for the rest of the contest. What's sauce for the goose is sauce for the gander: your enemies may try to engage you in contests in a way that forces you to defend with a poor ability.
[[[END SIDEBAR]]]

4. Carry out one or more rounds.

Each round is an action and immediate response; it might represent a few seconds (in a fistfight) or a season (blazing a secret trail through the mountains). For your action, you risk a number of your advantage points in an attempt to reduce your opponent's AP, but if you fail the attempt you lose AP yourself. When you have finished, it is your opponent's turn to do the same. Thus, each contestant's advantage point total rises or falls during the contest as he gains the upper hand or is driven back. Roleplay each glorious advance and bitter setback of your character's struggle—describe the events as an onlooker would see them. The ebb and flow of AP is a tool to help the players and narrator in narrating the contest; see "Advantage Points and Combat" on p XX.

a. State your character's attempted action, ability used, and AP bid.

Describe your hero's immediate action towards the desired outcome, what ability he uses, and how much risk he takes. "I want to climb straight up to that outcrop, taking chances if needed." You can specify your AP bid; if you do not, the narrator will determine this based on the amount of risk you are taking. If this is the first round of the contest, you already stated the ability your PC would use, in step 1.

The size of the **bid** mirrors how bold and risky your character's action is. Extreme or aggressive actions mean a high AP bid, and cautious actions require less. Cooperation is in order to figure this. See the "Sample Bids" on p. XX for examples of inconsequential, cautious, normal, determined, and reckless bids.

b. The narrator selects the resistance.

If this is the first round of the contest, the narrator already determined the resistance. Otherwise, she should determine what the exact resistance to the current action and ability is. This does not have to be the same as it was during the first round. Additionally, the ability used to resist your character's move does not have to be the same ability the opponent will use when it is his turn to act.

c. Roll a die to determine your degree of success or failure, then apply any bumps. The narrator does the same.

Roll a twenty-sided die for your action. At the same time, the narrator rolls for the resistance. Compare the number you roll with your target number to see how well you succeeded or failed with your ability, as described on page 61 in "Die Rolls: Success and Failure." Remember to apply any bumps from masteries or hero points, as described previously under Bumps.

d. Compare your result to your opponent's to determine AP gains and losses.

Compare the results of the two die rolls on the Extended Contest Results table to determine who loses AP; only when a player has a critical can his character gain AP from his opponent. *1/2x, 1x, 2x, 3x*: The AP bid is multiplied by this number before applying the results. Thus, if a player bids 3 AP and the result is "Opponent *loses* 2x bid," the loser loses 3 ◎◎2 = 6 AP. Round half points up.

Loses: The bid is subtracted from the loser's advantage points total.

Transfers: The AP bid is subtracted from the loser's AP total and the same number is added to the winner's AP total. The victor can never add more advantage points than the loser actually had, but the loser still loses the full amount, possibly driving his AP below 0. Thus, a character may have to transfer 6 AP, but have only 2 remaining. He falls to –4, but his opponent adds only 2 AP to his total. Because of transfers, a contestant can temporarily have more advantage points than he had at the start.

Tie: Neither contestant loses AP.

Extended Contest Results

	Contestant B			
Contestant A	**Critical**	**Success**	**Failure**	**Fumble**
Critical	High roll transfers ½x bid, else tie	Contestant B transfers 1x bid	Contestant B transfers 2x bid	Contestant B transfers 3x bid
Success	Contestant A transfers 1x bid	High roll loses ½x bid, else tie	Contestant B transfers 1x bid	Contestant B loses 2x bid
Failure	Contestant A transfers 2x bid	Contestant A loses 1x bid	High roll loses ½x bid, else tie	Contestant B loses 1x bid
Fumble	Contestant A transfers 3x bid	Contestant A loses 1x bid	Contestant A loses 1x bid	Tie*

* In a group extended contest, the narrator may declare that both contestants lose ½x bid to indicate that, although their results cancel out with respect to each other, their situation worsens compared to other contestants.

[[[BEGIN SIDEBAR]]]

Always Round Up

In *HeroQuest*, whenever you need to convert a fraction to a whole number, round it up. Accordingly, if a contestant loses half of a seven-point bid, he loses four, not three, advantage points.
[[[END SIDEBAR]]]

e. Now it is your opponent's turn.

The narrator describes the opponent's action, you say what your character does about it, and it is resolved as described above. The narrator makes her bid, and your PC provides the resistance.

f. Repeat as necessary.

Once the PC and his opponent have both performed an action, a new round occurs if both have positive AP totals. In most cases, the same contestant will start each round.

5. Determine contest consequences.

Exchanges continue until one contestant reaches 0 advantage points or fewer. At that point, the contest is over (even if it is the middle of a round). The loser's **final AP total** determines whether the victory and defeat are marginal, minor, major, or complete; see "Contests: Victory and Defeat" on p. XX and, if necessary, "Contest Consequences" on p. XX.

Advantage points are only relevant for the length of a particular contest. Your PC does not have any until the next extended contest begins, when you calculate them all over again.

Advantage Points

Bidding Advantage Points: The size of your AP bid reflects the risk inherent in your character's action. Describe his action and intent, and say how many AP you want to bid. If you describe an all-out offensive with your sword cutting vicious arcs, you need to bid a lot of AP; if you say your PC is circling his foe cautiously, a low bid is in order. The narrator will look at the level of risk your character is taking, and may suggest that you change your bid to better match his action. If you do not declare a bid before rolling the die, she will decide how many points are bid (using 3 as a default), with riskier actions calling for higher AP bids.

Followers and Advantage Points: Followers can act in different ways during a contest, augmenting the character with their abilities or allowing him to use one of their abilities as if it were his own. Alternatively, a follower with a relevant ability or keyword can simply add its AP to the character's at the beginning of the contest. Remember to figure any modifiers into the follower's ability before adding it to your starting AP total.

Neither the player nor the narrator makes action rolls for followers. Instead, their actions are subsumed into those of their leader. The follower's relevant ability or keyword is used solely as a source of advantage points.

One character can assign his followers to another, although the hero may have to succeed at a contest to convince a reluctant follower to go along.
[[[BEGIN SIDEBAR]]]

How Much Should I Bid?

Some players will want to let story considerations dictate their choices: when the character feels like taking risks, he will bid high. When he feels cautious, he will set small stakes. This is a fun way to

decide how much to bid, and is certainly a good approach to take when getting used to the system. However, we cannot avoid looking at the numbers. Until you have played through few contests, it is hard to know how many advantage points to bid on any given action. On a mathematical level, some choices are more likely to succeed than others.

- Start out with a low stake in the first round. Wait until later rounds (when you can ask for your opponent's current advantage point total) before betting big.
- If you think your opponent has a better target number than you, limit the contest to as few rounds as possible by making large bids. The fewer rounds, the better chance that luck will counter his superior skill. On other hand, if you think your target number is higher than his, you can afford to pick low stakes for a while, letting statistical odds work in your favor.
- Don't stake more than half your advantage points until your opponent's AP total is low enough for you to put him out of the contest with one action. Even then, think about the consequence you want him to suffer and the consequences you risk if you fail. Decide if benefits outweigh the risks.
- When the story is at its most exciting, don't be afraid to let the story outweigh the math. There is no drama without risk.

Advantage Points Knowledge: Once your opponent has won or lost advantage points during the current contest, you can ask the narrator at any time what his AP total is. This is where the element of skill comes in. When choosing how many AP to stake, you must weigh the effect you want to get if you succeed versus the risk face if your action fails.
[[[END SIDEBAR]]]

Advantage Points and Combat

HeroQuest combat is modeled on popular fictional sources. You rarely see or read about fighters delivering a succession of permanent wounds to each other until one of them finally keels over. Instead, they jockey for a favorable position, ducking, dodging, knocking each other over, tossing each other around, and smashing up the furniture. Up until the final blow, they generally deal out only minor bruises and cuts. Advantage points thus reflect much more than the contestants' physical condition:

- Advantage points measure a fighter's position: Is he upright, or has he been thrown to the ground? Does he have his balance? Does he have the advantage of high ground, or is he fighting from below? Is he on even, uncluttered ground and therefore able to move easily, or is he encumbered by hazards such as clinging vegetation, broken flooring, sucking mud, or cliff edges? Does he have his weapon in hand? If not, is he close to objects that make for impressive and entertaining impromptu weapons or shields?
- They also measure a character's emotional state. Is he ready and willing to fight, or has the instinctive fear response that impels us to run from danger taken over? Is he clear-headed enough to make split-second decisions, or is he dominated by anger, a thirst for violence, or concern for his reputation?
- APs eventually determine if the character is wounded, but they are *not* "hit points." Until a character drops to 0 or fewer advantage points, any wounds will be superficial. They may well cause considerable pain, ruining his concentration and slowing him down, and even heroes that are never hit will begin to tire as they fight through their third or fourth round. But in the end, if a character finishes the fight with a positive AP total, he is not wounded.

Example Extended Contest

Cherise is running a game of big business intrigue set in Texas. Two PCs, Brick McNabb (James) and Colt Prosper (Eli) have been butting heads for a several sessions.

Step One: Frame the Contest. *"I'm sick and tired of this sanctimonious upstart telling a Texan how he ought to do business in Texas," says Eli, in character as Colt Prosper. "The Prosper family's been runnin' things here since his family was nothing but a bunch of good-for-nothing drifters. I'm going to teach him a lesson—I'm launching a hostile takeover attempt on Southwest Holdings, Ltd."*

"Hey!," protests James. "That was my very first company. It still owns the first oil well I ever struck."

"Well, soon it's going to be my oil well," sneers Eli. "I'm going to use my Fancy Lawyering, rated at 18, to take it away from you."

This move will change the balance of power in the series, and has both players clearly engaged—even agitated. Cherise decides that only a long contest will do. She always uses extended contests in her series.

"I assume you both have the same goal..," Cherise says, "to control Southwest Holdings at the end of the contest."

James and Eli agree.

"So, Brick, how do you respond?"

"I appeal to the shareholders to stand by the man who built this company up from nothing. I'm using my Hard-Scrabble Origins ability, rated at 1🕮*, to defend against his move."*

"That's all well and good," says Eli, "but that exposé of your recent excesses that ran in the Houston Herald last month should put a dent in your sterling reputation." (James doesn't need to be reminded that Colt owns the Herald, and this blow to his public image was the result of a previous contest won against him.)

"That's right," says Cherise. "You suffer a –3 penalty on account of that article. Your target number is now 18, too."

Step Two: Figure Starting AP Totals: *"Your Target Numbers are both 18, so that's how many Advantage Points you start out with," says Cherise.*

Step Three: Figure AP for Opposition/Resistance: *In a contest between PCs, this step does not apply.*

Step Four: Carry Out One Or More Rounds. *"You initiated this, Colt, so you go first."*

Round One: *"I have my legal team find shareholders I have a hypothetical right to launch lawsuits against. Then I tell them I might be inclined to settle amicably if they sell me their shares."*

"That's a bold move to start out with. Must be worth a high AP bid."

"Not so bold. I'm doing it sneakily. I bid 6 points."

"Well," says James, "I've sensed for a long time that Colt's been ready to make a move on me. So I make a point of jawing with my major shareholders, reminiscing about the good old days, and making them feel they'd be betraying Texas by going behind my back to a snake like Colt Prosper."

James rolls a 5, a success. Eli rolls a 1, a critical.

Cherise interprets the result: "The shareholders loved talking to you, Brick, but by mentioning what a snake Colt was, that just made them all the more scared when he started threatening them. You were good, but he was terrifying." Cherise consults the chart: on a critical vs. success result, the loser transfers an amount equal to the bid to the winner. "James, you lose 6 points to Eli."

Eli's AP total increases to 24; James's drops to 12.

"I shoulda bet more," drawls Eli.

Cherise prompts James: "What action do you take in response?"

"I go on cable TV and do my best homespun entrepreneur act, rallying the rest of the shareholders to my cause. Fancy lawyerin' can't counter that. I bid 8 points."

Eli smiles; James has stepped into his trap. "In that case," he says, "I counter with my Media Empire ability at 5🕮*. I make sure the cable newsers also interview the reporter who wrote that exposé."*

Eli's switch to a new, more appropriate ability doesn't change his AP total, but still gives him the advantage of a higher target number for the ensuing roll.

He rolls a 16, to James's 15. His mastery bumps his failure bumps to a success, but it's still a higher roll than James's success. Consulting the chart, Cherise sees that Colt's AP total will drop by half the bid, while Brick's remains the same. She interprets as follows: "Colt's pet reporter scores a few points against Brick, but

overall he reminds them that they'd rather be in business with a self-made man than a member of the notorious Prosper clan."

Eli's AP total drops by 4 points, to 20. James's remains at 12.

***Round Two:** "Going back to Fancy Lawyering," says Eli, "Consulting my loan agreement with his ex-wife, I find a forfeiture clause that allows me to take her shares. Hard-Scrabble Origins won't do squat to stop me from doing that. I bid 8 points."*

"I'll use my Complicated Love Life to go to Mae-Rose and tell her I still have feelings for her, and she shouldn't let the shares go."

"That shouldn't help," argues Eli. "I'm forcing the shares out of her; her feelings for Brick should have nothing to do with it."

"I'll allow it," says Cherise. "A good roll on James's part means that she's inspired to hire tough lawyers of her own. But it's a stretch (see p. XX), so he'll face a –6 penalty on his target number."

Eli rolls a 19; a failure. James gets a 13, barely missing his modified target number of 12. In a failure vs. failure, the high roller loses half the bid. His AP total drops by 4, to 16, while James's holds steady at 12.

"Mae-Rose is none too happy to hear from either of you," Cherise interprets. "She slaps both your faces—but she slaps Colt with an injunction, too."

"In response," says James, "I use my Bare-Knuckled Business Savvy (rated at 18) to announce a dividend increase, making owners more reluctant to let go of their shares. I bid 6."

"I use Media Empire to portray that as a desperation move," replies Eli.

James rolls a 3, to Eli's 19. Eli's mastery bumps his result to a success, but it's still a success vs. success with James as low roller. Eli loses half the bid, 3 points, reducing him to 13 APs. His edge against James has nearly disappeared.

***Round Three:** "I own the land surrounding Brick's first gusher," says Eli, referring to a fact already established in the series continuity. "Using Fancy Lawyering, I launch a suit against him, accusing him of polluting my ranch lands. That should drive down the stock value and allow me to snap up shares as they're dumped on the open market. Let's call that a 7-point bid."*

James counters. "I use my Environmental Activist ability, to show how unlikely it is that I, a great friend of the land, would lose this suit. It's rated at 3Ш."

Each rolls a thirteen. James's failure is bumped to a success by his mastery. This makes it a tie. No result.

"Neither move garners much attention. The story has dragged on in the business media for a while now," Cherise explains, "and people are beginning to tune out."

"Then, for my action, I capitalize on that," says James. "I make a tour of my prominent stockholders, using Bare-Knuckled Business Savvy, and tell them that Colt's efforts are losing steam. If they just hold onto their stock, it'll bounce back again when he takes his ball and goes home."

Eli describes his defense: "I go to my Media Empire to run more scandal articles on him."

"Since we've already established that public interest in the story is waning," says Cherise, "I'm gonna say that without a fresh scandal to reveal, you're at a disadvantage. You're at a –3 penalty." That takes Eli's Media Empire target number to 2Ш.

James rolls a 10 to Eli's 15. That's success vs. success, with James as high roller. Colt's AP total drops by half the bid (rounded up, as always), so he loses 4 points. Colt's new total is 9 APs. For the first time, he is behind Brick, who is still holding at 12.

***Round Four:** "If I'm getting diminishing returns from my Media Empire going after Brick," says Eli, "I'll go right to the remaining shareholders themselves, sending investigative reporters sniffing into their business. They'll get the hint and sell me their shares. I should have thought of this in the first place! I'm going all in, bidding 9 APs."*

He's right; if he'd thought of a way to open the takeover attempt with his higher-rated ability, he'd have more APs to play with.

James searches his character sheet for an appropriate counter to this. "Uh, how about I go on a morale-building tour, using my Rugged Charisma?"

Cherise considers this. "Even if they like you personally, it's not really a direct counter to the fear of their dirt being dug up. It's a real stretch: –6 modifier."

That will hurt. Brick's Rugged Charisma is only 16 to begin with.

James's luck holds out, as he rolls a 2 to Eli's 11. With Eli's bump, this is a success vs. success, but with him as high roller. He loses half the bid, dropping to 4 APs.

"Brick was in rare charming form during that shareholder tour. He infused his shareholders with courage they didn't know he had," interprets Cherise.

Now it's James's move. "I use Rugged Charisma again, to rally the general Houston business community against Colt's underhanded tactics. If he sends investigative reporters into my shareholder's trash, who's to say they won't be next? I encourage them to set up a syndicate to launch their own takeover attempt—for the Houston Herald. This is an 8-point bid."

"I resist with Fancy Lawyering, putting a poison pill into the Houston Herald's shareholder's rights plan, to make a takeover bid less attractive."

James rolls an 8, to Eli's 9. This success vs. success result is again in James's favor, causing Colt's APs to drop by half the bid, or 4 points. This takes him to 0, knocking him out of the contest.

"Obviously you found out that the poison pill clause wouldn't deter them. Rather than face a challenge to your vaunted Media Empire, Colt has clearly decided to withdraw from his assault on Southwest Holdings."

***Determine contest consequences:** Consulting the extended contest consequence chart, Cherise sees that, at 0 AP, Colt has suffered a Marginal Defeat, and is Hurt. She rules that he suffers a –1 penalty to all abilities he used in the contest: Fancy Lawyering and Media Empire, which, barring a reversal of fortune in the course of the evening, will last until the end of the session.*

Group Extended Contests

When an extended contest involves three or more contestants, it is a **group extended contest**. The conflict is often between two groups; each side wants to knock the other out of the contest by reducing all of its opponents to 0 or fewer advantage points. Sometimes a contest will be a free-for-all involving three or more groups.

Rounds in a group extended contest differ in that the order of resolution is more complicated. At the start of the round, each contestant states his action and AP bid (or his level of daring, see "Sample Advantage Point Bids" below) and singles out one or more opponents. The narrator then determines the order in which the contestants act. Taking surprise, withdrawals, and similar situations into effect, she has three options:

- Contestants can go in order from most daring to least daring bid: a reckless bid goes before a daring bid, as defined in "Bidding Advantage Points" on the previous page. Thus, the most heroic actions take precedence, acting in order of decreasing boldness. (In case of a tie, the contestant whose actual bid is higher goes first.)
- Contestants can go in order from highest bid to lowest: a bid of 20 AP goes before a bid of 5 AP. (In case of a tie, the contestant whose bid is the most daring goes first.)
- Contestants can go in order from highest to lowest AP total. (In case of a tie, the highest or most daring bid goes first.)

In the first round of the contest, the order in which contestants act has a big impact on AP totals. The contestant who acts first bases his starting AP total on the ability he acts with, and his target bases his AP on the ability he uses to resist that action. As each contestant acts or resists for the first time in the contest, the ability he uses determines his starting AP total.

During a standard extended contest an opponent immediately responds to your action with his own, but in a group extended contest this is not true—he cannot act (against you or anyone else) until his turn comes. You may want to change your declared action if another character attacks you first, and your narrator will normally allow you to do so, usually to return an attack in kind. The order in which contestants act is also important because a character (whether PC, opponent, or a follower of

either) can be knocked out of the contest before his turn comes. If your chosen opponent is knocked out before your character acts, the narrator decides if you can change your declared action.

A contestant always has the option of delaying and allowing other contestants to act before him. He can jump back into the action at any time during the round, although again the narrator determines if he can change his stated action.

When all characters still in the contest have completed their action, the round ends and a new one begins.

Extended Contest Options

Multiple Opponents

Sometimes, your PC may engage more than one opponent. In any contest, it is harder to attack and defend against multiple opponents than it is to focus energy and attention on one.

Narrators use a credibility test to determine how many individuals can believably attack a single target; the "rule of six" says that about six people can effectively act against one person. In combat, only about six attackers can reasonably surround and attack a defender of about the same size; in a contest of words, too many attackers will completely drown each other out; etc.

Multiple Defense Modifiers: A combatant can defend against any number of opponents, but he suffers an accumulating –3 modifier for each defense after the first. Thus, he resists the first opponent using his full ability rating, he resists the second at –3, the third at –6, etc.

Multiple Attack Modifiers: In an extended contest, a combatant can attack multiple opponents in a round. He must use one ability, rolls the die only once, and suffers a cumulative penalty of –3 for each extra opponent. Each opponent gets a die roll, and the narrator uses their best roll to oppose the hero. If the hero wins, he divides his AP bid against the defenders in any way he likes.

Parting Shot

When you defeat an opponent in an extended contest, you can act again immediately to try to make the consequences of his defeat more severe. This is called a parting shot. You once again bid AP and use an appropriate ability against your opponent. If you succeed, his AP will decrease; his level of defeat may or may not change, but he cannot finish the round by taking an action against you.

Kere Adaran (played by Andre) has won an extended contest against ARKONN, the berserk, intelligent computer controlling the colony on Asteroid Seven. Kere has reduced ARKONN to –8 AP. His intention was to dismantle the computer permanently, but–8 translates only to a marginal victory. The Narrator, Holly checks the Consequence rules and declares that ARKONN will been knocked off-line for only about six hours. After that, its redundant backup systems will be able to restore its control over the outpost. This isn't a long enough window, so Andre tries to extend it with a parting shot.

"As he shuts down," Andre says, "I'm going to attempt to insert a new subroutine into his backup grid, which will put him on a permanent failure loop he won't be able to diagnose. It's tough to write all this code on the fly, so this is a 16-point bid."

Andre again rolls his Computer ability of 5W against ARKONN's Sentient Computer ability of 19. He rolls a 4; Holly gets a 10. His W bumps his success to a critical. Success vs. critical causes the bid to be transferred to the winner. At this late stage of the contest, the transfer means nothing, but ARKONN's loss of an additional 16 points, taking it to a final result of –24: ARKONN is now Injured. "The computer is now helpless to control the station, until repaired," Holly rules.

Parting shots are risky; if you fail, an AP transfer might bring your opponent back into the contest. Your stumble can give him an opening that he can exploit in an effort to snatch victory from the jaws of defeat.

Boxer Lancelot Stokes (Santo) has obviously won his match against the pitiless heavyweight champion Vladislav Tekh. Tekh reels, and his manager is reaching for the towel. But Santo wants to

give Tekh some demoralizing, lingering pain to remember him by, so he'll be afraid to call for a rematch. Tekh is at –4 AP; Stokes has 8. Santo bids 10 points and rolls Stokes' Sting Like a Butterfly ability of 18 against Tekh's Brutish Hard Man of 17. He gets a 5, but the narrator scores a 1. Critical vs. success means that Stokes must transfer 10 points to Tekh. Tekh goes from –4 to 6 APs. Stokes is now at 2 APs.

The Narrator describes the result: "Your lunge at Tekh gives him an opening. He rouses himself from his stupor to deliver a thundering blow to your ribs, sending you staggering back into the ropes!"

Not only has Stokes inspired Tekh to keep on fighting—now he's the one on the verge of defeat.

The consequences of defeat can remain after a parting shot, if the narrator chooses. Thus, an opponent might keep a penalty from a defeat even if he is handed another chance by his opponent's failed parting shot.

Tekh goes on to win the fight, but the Narrator decides that, since he was down to –4 at one point, that he is Hurt. (This becomes important when another PC, crooked manager Chicky Monroe, tries to sign the dazed Russian to a punitive contract, taking advantage of his punch-drunk state.)

Final Action

If your character falls to 0 or fewer advantage points in a standard extended contest, he is defeated. In a group extended contest, however, he can still try a **final action** to stay in the contest as long as he is not **dying** (which allows for no actions). A final action represents the knack to come back when your opponent turns away to gloat or deal with the other heroes. A characater may only attempt one final action in any contest. (Be warned: important narrator characters might also have this option.)

To attempt a final action, the character must be free from attention by the opposition. You must spend a hero point. This does not provide a bump up on the roll to come; it is the cost of performing a final action. You can use a relevant ability in a simple contest against the number of advantage points your hero is below 0. Even if you succeed, the consequences of the original defeat still apply: a hurt character who succeeds at a final action still takes a –1 to appropriate abilities until healed. You cannot try a final action if your opponent is attempting a parting shot, since you are not free of his attention.

If you win the simple contest, you rejoin the contest with a positive AP total. Your new total is a fraction of the your original AP total at the outset of the contest. If you fail the simple contest, your AP total drops even further, perhaps worsening your consequences.

Final Action Results Table

Result	**AP change**
Marginal Victory	Rejoin contest with 1/8 of your starting APs
Minor Victory	Rejoin contest with 1/4 of your starting APs
Major Victory	Rejoin contest with 1/2 of your starting APs
Complete Victory	Rejoin contest with full starting APs
Marginal Defeat	Lose APs equal to 1/8 of your starting value
Minor Defeat	Lose APs equal to 1/4 of your starting value
Major Defeat	Lose APs equal to 1/2 of your starting value
Complete Defeat	Lose APs equal to your full starting value

The PCs, escaped slaves of the Bird-Men of Yalk, are attempting to flee a Yalkite raiding party. Marta's character, Cloth Cleaner, has been knocked out of the contest, with a final AP result of –14. The Narrator interprets: "The blue-headed Yalkite tosses a constrictor net over you and leaves you to pursue Heavy Lifter through the gorse ravine."

With the attention of her erstwhile opponent now elsewhere, Marta says, "I roll my Wriggle Free ability of 16 to see if I can free myself from the constrictor net."

"That's a tough one," says the Narrator, Claudia. "It tightens with your every move."

"I'll be a slave no longer! I try to free myself from the slavemaster's horrid net—bidding 20 points."

At –14 APs, Cloth Cleaner is Impaired; the ensuing penalty reduces her Target Number to 7. Marta rolls a 6; the Narrator gets a 20. Success vs. fumble is a Major Victory—meaning that she rejoins the contest with an AP total equal to half of her original. Marta started the contest with her Wriggle Free ability, increased by a positive modifier, for an original starting total of 20 APs. So now, as Cloth Cleaner slips free of the constrictor net, she rejoins the contest with 10 APs.

Desperation Stake

PCs can stake *more* advantage points than they currently have, to a maximum of their **starting AP total**. This allows a character to attempt a desperate retaliation even when he is within a single AP of defeat. Abstract forces can never stake more advantage points than they have, nor can followers or most narrator characters; it is one more mark of the importance of protagonists. The narrator can allow a major narrator character to use a **desperation stake**.

Unrelated Action

You can forfeit your action to do something unrelated to the object of the contest. You might want to try to open a door, haul an important piece of equipment out of your saddlebags, heal yourself with magic, or augment an ability. Depending on the circumstances, you may have to engage in a simple contest to find out if you succeed at the **unrelated action**.

Switching Abilities

You can usually switch freely from one ability to another in the middle of an extended contest. It makes sense to do so if you think a different ability will yield a better result. You may need to do an unrelated action to switch abilities—for example, when changing weapons or equipment.

Your AP total stays the same when you change your ability, so it makes sense to start the contest with your best ability (appropriate to your goal, of course). If this seems odd, remember that advantage points measure *advantage*—how well the character is doing in the contest at the current moment. They do not measure proficiency; that is what the target number is for.

When you switch abilities, your goal does not Change, just the means by which you pursue it. When you switch your goal itself, of course, the ability you use to pursue the new goal will probably change as well.

Disengaging

To disengage from an extended contest when your opponent is actively trying to keep you in the conflict, take an unrelated action to make a simple contest roll against the adversary or opposing force. You use an ability relevant to your attempt to disengage; the adversary counters with an appropriate ability of his own. These abilities may or may not be those used in the main contest.

On any victory, you are able to leave the contest. On any defeat, you must remain in the contest, and transfer a fraction of your current APs to your opponent:

AP Transfer From Failed Disengagement

Level Of Defeat	**APs Transferred**
Marginal	1/8 of your current total
Minor	¼ of your current total
Major	½ of your current total
Complete	Your current total, less 1

Rapper L8er (Daniel) faces off against his hated rival, Dragon Don, at a basement warehouse MC contest. His freestyle flow seems to have deserted him tonight; he's down to 8 APs, against Dragon Don's 24. He could just storm off the stage, but doing so would cause permanent damage to his rep—worse than if he lost. He has to find a way of leaving that the audience will deem at least halfway acceptable.

"I've got to get out of here," Daniel says, "I compose a rhyme about Dragon Don's terrible reptilian stink, and how I can't stand to breathe the same air as him anymore. If the audience seems to be buying it, I leap off the stage and make my premature exit—as if it's a gesture of contempt for Don, and not an admission of humiliating defeat."

Patricia, the Narrator, judges this a believable description of a possible exit, and allows him to try. In this case, both L8er and Dragon Don will be rolling against the abilities they've been employing for the main contest: Freestyle Rap, at 18 for L8er and 19 for Dragon Don. As this is a type of unrelated action, it is a simple contest with no need for an AP bid.

Patricia rolls a 16 for Dragon Don; Daniel rolls a 19. This is a success vs. failure result: a minor defeat. L8er fails to disengage.

"As soon as the audience thinks that you're trying to exit early, they start to hoot and toss their beer cups at you," Patricia narrates.

The minor defeat causes a transfer of 1/4 of L8er's AP. He has 8 points, and so loses 2 of them to Dragon Don. His new total is 6; Don's is now 26.

If you withdraw from a group contest and later decide to rejoin it (or are forced to), you rejoin with the advantage point total you had when you left. If you can show how your leaving and returning substantially changes the situation, the narrator may restore some of your AP—for example, if you leave a street fight to get your followers from a nearby tavern. Leaving a contest just to pick up a weapon or catch your breath is an unrelated action, and does not change your advantage points.

AP Lending

AP lending is a common and important option in extended contests. Characters can transfer some or all of their advantage points to another PC engaged in a group contest on their side. With more advantage points, he can stay in the contest for longer, or make larger bids without driving himself to failure.

A contestant cannot lend advantage points to himself.

If a follower's AP are already included in your AP total, the follower cannot lend them to you.

Use an unrelated action and describe what your character is trying to do to improve the position of the target.

For example, your PC might throw him a weapon, jeer at an opponent, or simply shout words of encouragement. Then, state the number of AP you are trying to lend. (The narrator may suggest a higher or lower bid based on the action you describe.) This determines the resistance you face in a simple contest, with results as determined below. Beware: heroes trying to aid their comrades in this way risk worsening their friend's position.

Complete Victory: Target gains the attempted AP; lender does not lose AP.

Major or Minor Victory: Target gains the attempted AP; lender loses the AP.

Marginal Victory: Target gains ½ the attempted AP; lender loses ½ the attempted AP.

Tie: No effect.

Marginal Defeat: Target gains nothing; lender loses ½ the attempted AP.

Minor or Major Defeat: Target gains nothing; lender loses the attempted AP.

Complete Defeat: Target and lender each deduct the attempted AP from their totals.

The PCs are businessmen of the old west hoping that their town, Snakewood, will attract a railway line. Their opponents are rival sharpsters from the nearby community of Red Gulch. Each PC sets out to build an impressive business in the months before the railroad men show up for their reconnoiter: Theo

Sands (Nick) builds a new hotel; Jack Horn (Colin) constructs a livery stable; Arabella Rush (Sarah) starts up a telegraph office.

Several rounds into the contest, Theo is doing well, with 28 APs stacked up against rival hotelier Swede Olson, who is down to 4. Arabella is holding her own. But Jack Horn, who's trying to outbuild Red Gulcher Slim Hardimon, is down 2 APs to 14. Nick decides to forgo his action this round to attempt to lend points to Jack. "I send down a large contingent of my workers to pitch in and help Jack recover from that fire," says Nick. "I'll try to lend him 8 APs."

*With a resistance of 8 against Nick's Wheeler Dealer ability of 7**W**, this seems like a done deal. The Narrator, Avis, rolls a 3, against Nick's 15. Nick bumps the failure up to a success, but Avis' roll is still lower. It's a marginal defeat. "Your workers don't cotton to the dirty work of fire clean up," interprets Avis. "Away from your watchful eye, they take the opportunity to drink and fight."*

Nick loses half of the AP, or 4 points, taking him from 28 to 24. Jack gains nothing, remaining at 2.

AP Gifting

Characters who are uninvolved in the contest can also increase a participant's AP total. They bid a number of APs which may not exceed their target number. The resistance is twice the bid. Results depend on degree of result:
Complete Victory: Recipient gains 2x bid.
Minor or Major Victory: Recipient gains bid
Marginal Victory: Recipient gains 1/2 of bid
Marginal Defeat: Recipient's opponent gains 1/2 bid.
Minor or Major Defeat: Recipient's opponent gains bid.
Complete Defeat: Recipient's opponent gains 2x bid.

Manu (Luca) and Pierrot (John) are colonial police detectives in 1930s Algeria. Manu is pursuing a notorious criminal, Lambert, across the rooftops of the Casbah. Pierrot has arrived on the scene too late to have a chance of catching Lambert on foot. However, when the Narrator describes a couple of accomplices waiting to block Manu's path (her interpretation of a transfer from Manu to Lambert), John decides to step in. Manu's down to 6 APs, against Lambert's 14.

"I take out my rifle and fire a few shots, to scatter them," says John. He's using his Sharpshooter ability of 20. To give himself a solid margin for error, he decides to attempt to give Manu 7 APs. That means he'll be rolling against a margin of 14 (7 × 2.)

He rolls a 12, against the Narrator's 11: a success for him, but a failure for the resistance. That would get him half the bid, or 4 points. John decides that he really wants Lambert caught, and so decides to spend a hero point, bumping up to a critical, for a major victory. Manu gains all 7 points, putting him back in the contest, with 13, to Lambert's 14.

[[[BEGIN SIDEBAR]]]

Edges and Handicaps

Some Narrators want rules to represent opponents who strike rarely but with great effect or who strike often but with little impact per blow. The first quality can be represented with an edge; the second, with a handicap. Edges and handicaps are designated using a Force rune (^5, for example), handicaps with a minus sign (–^5). Edges and handicaps affect only the advantage points bid in an extended contest. An attacker's edge is added to his AP bid when his opponent must forfeit or transfer AP. An attacker's handicap is subtracted from his bid when his opponent forfeits or transfers. A contestant's edge or handicap never affects his AP when he defends, only when he is attacking.

Most Narrators find edges and handicaps more trouble than they're worth, and depict these phenomena with description alone. Earlier books made more extensive use of edges and

handicaps. When using older supplements, you may wish convert them into bonuses and penalties on a 1:1 basis.

[[[END SIDEBAR]]]

No Nesting

Never "nest" one extended contest inside another. If an extended contest is in progress and a character wants to perform an action that you would normally require an extended contest, make it an unrelated action anyway, or disallow it completely during the current contest. If necessary, you can run two extended contests simultaneously, but never hold up one extended contest to run another.

Picking Advantage Point Bids

As Narrator, you have a responsibility to help the players have fun. In a choice of entertainment value or a rigorous evaluation of the opponent's tactics, always favor entertainment. An extended contest may be dragging on forever, with cautious bids passed endlessly back and forth. You can throw caution to the wind and stake all your remaining advantage points on a last exchange. The contest system gives you control over the amount of time spent on contests. Take advantage of this control when necessary.

Scored Contest Sequence

1. Frame the contest

2. Carry out one or more rounds, repeating as necessary

A scored contest unfolds as a series of simple contests. At the end of each Simple Contest, the winning character (or resistance) scores a number of Resolution Points (RPs) to his tally, which varies between 1 and 5, depending on the result. Tied results leave the score unchanged.

Unlike in an extended contest, where you usually take part in two exchanges with your opponent per round (one in which you choose the AP bid, and one in which your opponent does), here you and your opponent engage in a single exchange. In a scored contest there is no distinction between aggressor and defender.

The first of the contesting characters to accumulate a total of 5 points wins; his opponent is knocked out of the contest and loses whatever is at stake in the storyline.

The number of Resolution Points the winner garners at the end of each exchange depends on the degree of victory he scored. He gets 1 point for a marginal victory, 2 for a minor victory, 3 for a major victory, and 5 for a complete victory. After using the following chart for your first few scored contests, you'll quickly memorize these scores:

Resolution Point Chart

	Critical	*Success*	*Failure*	*Fumble*
Critical	1	2	3	5
Success	2	1	2	3
Failure	3	2	1	2
Fumble	5	3	2	N/A

[[[BEGIN SIDEBAR]]]

What Scores Represent

Your Resolution Point score, tells you how well you're doing, relative to your opponent, in the ebb and flow of a fluid, suspenseful conflict. If you're leading your opponent by 4–0, you're giving him a thorough pasting. If you're behind 0–4, you're on your last legs, while your opponent has had an easy time of it. If you're tied, you've each been getting in some good licks.

In a fight, scoring 1 point might mean that you hit your opponent with a grazing blow, or knocked him into an awkward position.

Scoring 2 points might mean a palpable hit, most likely with bone-crunching sound effects.

A 3-point hit sends him reeling, and, depending on the realism level of the genre, may be accompanied by a spray of blood.

However, the exact physical harm you've dished out to him remains unclear until the contest's end. When that happens, the real effects of your various victories becomes suddenly apparent. Perhaps he staggers, merely dazed, up against a wall. Maybe he falls over dead.

In a debate, a 1-point success might occasion mild head-nodding from spectators, or a frown on your opponent's face.

2 points would occasion mild applause from onlookers, or send a flush to your opponent's face.

On a 3-point result, your opponent might be thrown completely off-track, as audience members wince at the force of your devastating verbal jab.

In interpreting the results of individual simple contests within a scored contest, Narrators are guided by two principles:

1. No consequence is certain until the entire scored contest is over.
2. When a character scores points, it can reflect any positive change in fortunes, not just the most obvious one.

[[[END SIDEBAR]]]

3. Determine Contest Consequences

If you lose a Scored Contest, you probably suffer lasting consequences, depending on the number of Resolution Points your opponent (or, in some cases, opponents) scored against you.

Where it is appropriate for the loser(s) of a Scored contest to suffer lasting Consequences, they are determined in one of two ways, according to the contest's position in the overall narrative.

Determining Consequences During the Rising Action

The term "rising action" refers to all of the many plot events and complications that occur between the beginning and ending of a story. During this phase of your story, use the Rising Action method to assess consequences.

Find the difference between the winner and loser's Resolution point scores as of the contest's conclusion, and cross-reference with the following chart to find the severity of lasting consequences suffered by the loser. (As you'll see, in the case of a close-fought contest, it is possible for the winner to be Hurt, too.)

Rising Action Consequence Chart

Difference Between Results	Negative Consequences For Loser	Negative Consequences For Winner	Winner's Victory Level
1	Hurt	Hurt	Marginal
2	Hurt	Unharmed	
3	Impaired	Unharmed	Minor
4	Impaired	Unharmed	
5	Injured	Unharmed	Major
6	Injured	Unharmed	
7	Dying	Unharmed	Complete
8	Dead	Unharmed	
9	Dead	Unharmed	

The Rising Action method may slightly scuff up the contest winners, but nonetheless allows them to move quickly onto the next scene of the story without having to take significant time off for physical, emotional, spiritual or political recuperation. Losers, naturally, will emerge considerably worse for wear.

(If you want the heroes to suffer zero risk of lengthy recuperation, even if they lose, be sure to frame the contest so that it lacks lasting consequences.)

Determining Consequences During The Climax

For the final, climactic confrontation that wraps up your story, use the following, more punishing method of doling out consequences.

The winner's victory level is determined as it would be in a rising action contest, according to the difference between results in the exchange that knocked the loser out of the contest.

Consequences, however, take into account all Resolution Points scored against all participants. Winners and losers alike, add up all Resolution Points scored against them by any opponent. The result is then cross-referenced against the following chart:

Climactic Scene Consequence Chart

Total Resolution Points Scored Against Character	Consequence
0	Unharmed
1	Dazed
2	Hurt
3	Impaired
4	Injured
5	Injured
6	Dying
7	Dying
8+	Dead

In this determination method, even the winners may pay a horrible price for their heroism.

If used for climactic battles, this method can result in a scene resembling the conclusion of *Hamlet* or a Hong Kong heroic bloodshed movie. It is possible for a hero to win a series of fights, and then, just as he realizes his ultimate triumph, to slump to the ground, dead. Under this determination

method, it is sometimes safer to be quickly knocked out of a fight with mere Impairment or Injury, than to get repeatedly hit during a series of triumphant but punishing skirmishes with various opponents.

Parting Shot

In the round immediately after you take an opponent out of the contest, you may attempt to increase the severity of the consequences they suffer by engaging in a parting shot. This is an attempt to, metaphorically or otherwise, kick your opponent while he's down:

- Striking an incapacitated enemy
- Attacking a retreating army
- Attaching one more punitive rider to a legal settlement
- Demanding additional compensation from a business partner
- Delivering one last humiliating insult

It's down to the final two competitors, Carole and Diana, in a grueling depression-era tap dance marathon. Carole pits her Pluck (augmented by Tap Dancing) of 19 against Diana's Endurance (augmented by Chorus Girl) of 18.

After 4 rounds, Diana wins her contest over Carole, with a score of 5–1. This is a climactic scene, so all 5 points count against her. Carole's ability to participate in future dance contests will suffer the equivalent of an Injury. But this isn't enough for Diana: she never wants to see Carole darken the doors of the Rubicon Dance Hall again. She decides to go for a final action. "As she collapses, I finish with a triumphant flourish of energy, showing everyone—including Johnny—that I wasn't even close to losing." (Johnny is the raffish gangster whose attentions Carole and Diana have been vying for.)

The ability you use must relate to the consequences the character will suffer, but needn't be the same one you used to win the contest. If the loser is still in a position to use an ability, he does so; otherwise the Narrator rolls a suitable resistance value.

As Diana is trying to demoralize Carole, the Narrator rules that her Pluck ability is still appropriate to the contest. Diana's description of her action also makes it clear that Endurance, still augmented by Chorus Girl, still applies, too.

If you succeed in your parting shot roll, you add the result from your roll to the final number of resolution points scored against the opponent in the exchange that removed him from the contest.

If Diana scores a Critical and Carole gets a failure, the score goes to 8–1 in Diana's favor. Carole's confidence in herself as a dance marathoner, the Narrator rules, is Dying. Unless someone intervenes with a very effective emergency pep talk, she'll leave the Rubicon, never to return.

However, if the opponent succeeds, he takes the number of resolution points he would, in a standard exchange, score against you, and instead *subtracts* them from the number of resolution points scored against him in the exchange that removed him from the contest. If the revised total is now less than 5, he returns to the contest, and may re-engage you. The Narrator describes this as a dramatic turnaround, in which the victim's overreaching foe has somehow granted him an advantage allowing him to recover from his previous misfortune. The provisional consequences he suffered now go away, and are treated as a momentary or seeming disadvantage.

If Carole scores a Critical and Diana, a failure, Carole takes the 3 resolution points she would, in a normal contest, apply to Diana and instead subtracts them from the total lodged against her. The score goes from 5–1 against her to 2–1.

The GM narrates: "Carole is so enraged by this attempt to humiliate her that she looms unsteadily up onto her feet, shambles over to the dance floor, and executes a thundering buck and wing!"

"Hey, the contest's over!" exclaims Diana.

The narrator (playing the grizzled contest judge) says, "That girl's got pluck! I'll allow it! The contest continues!" The audience rapturously applauds.

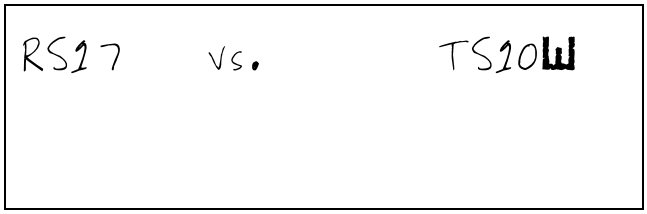
The contest then continues…

Where it makes sense in the narrative, unengaged characters may attempt parting shots against opponents taken out of the contest by third parties. Defenders who are enabled to return to the group contest may rejoin the contest they previously lost, or start a new exchange, most likely against the over-reaching enemy who tried to harm them when they were down.

Characters may not revive their teammates by using their lamest abilities to make parting shots on them; this, by definition, does not pass a credibility test (p. XX.)

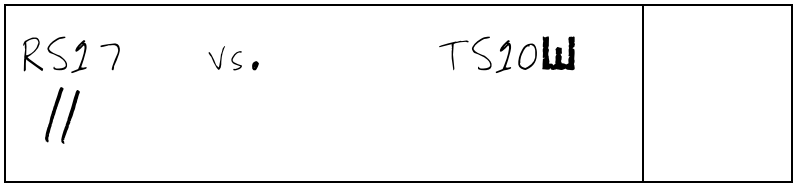
Notation

Scored contests are easy to keep track of. For each contest, draw a rectangular box. Write the initials of the PC in the upper left hand corner, along with their current rating in the ability that character is using. In the upper right hand corner, jot down the initials and relevant rating of the PC's opponent. (If two PCs are engaged in a contest, choose the order arbitrarily; it doesn't really matter.)



For a rising action contest, add a smaller box to the right of the first:

At the end of each exchange, mark the score *against* each character with a tally beneath their initials.

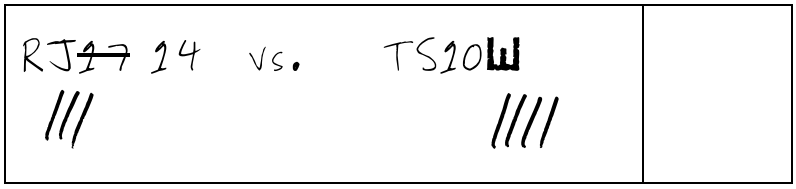


When either tally hits 5, the crossbar clearly shows you that the contest has ended.

For a rising action contest, you can then mark the difference in the right-hand box:

During a group scored contest (see below), having a group of these boxes on the page allows you to quickly and easily perform the bookkeeping for a complicated sequence involving many characters. As characters are eliminated from and the victors go on to start new contests, you can draw in new boxes on the fly.

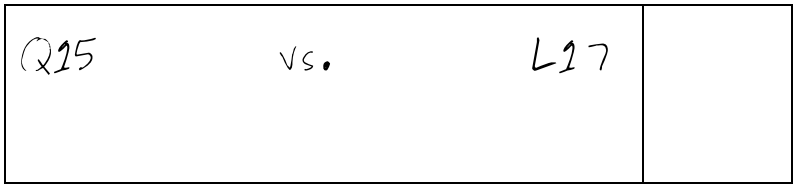
If a character's rating is altered in mid-contest, either by modifiers, or because the character has switched to another relevant ability, you can alter the rating in your notation box. (Practically speaking, you'll only have to do this for supporting characters. Players will keep track of their own ratings.)



Example: Scored Contest

In a contemporary crime thriller, Q-Dogg (played by Sally) is trying to escape from Mr. Lenkowski (played by Jafar) during a car chase. If Q-Dogg wins, he'll get away from Mr. Lenkowski without having to deal with him physically. If Mr. Lenkowski wins, Q-Dogg will be trapped in a way that gives Mr. Lenkowski full access to him.

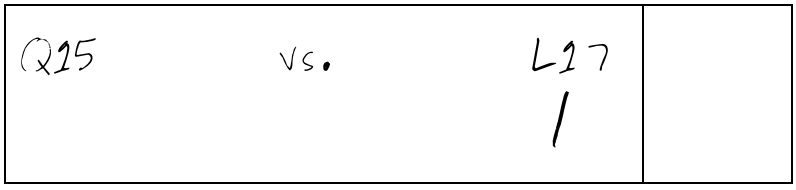
The contest pits Q-Dogg's Drag Racing ability of 15 against Mr. Lenkowski's Relentless Driving ability of 17.



"As soon as I see Mr. Lenkowski's Jaguar driving into the taco shack parking lot, I peel out of there like a bat out of hell," says Sally.

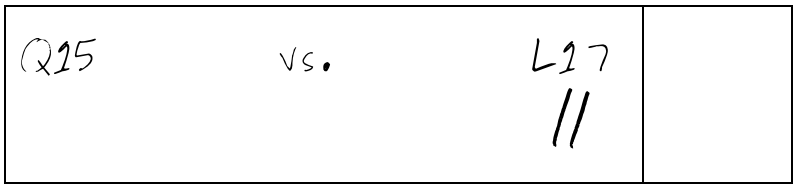
"I see Q-Dogg, pull the car into a screaming U-turn, and slam my foot on the accelerator!" responds Jafar.

In their first exchange, Sally rolls a 15, and Jafar, a 4. That's a Success vs. Success tie, with the win going to Jafar as the low roller. Consulting the chart, the Narrator sees that this gives Mr. L a single resolution point.



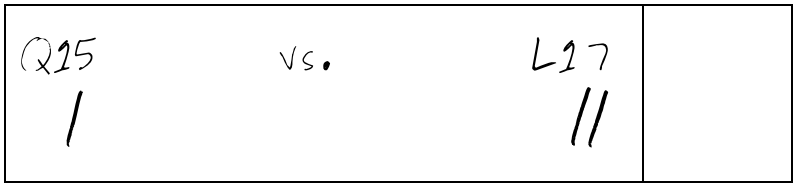
"The other cars on the highway compensate furiously as you zip through them, keeping Q-Dogg's distinctive banana-yellow Dodge Charger firmly in sight."

On the second exchange, Jafar rolls a 2, and Sally gets a 10. Another success vs. success result, with Jafar winning again. He picks up another resolution point. The score is now 2–0 in his favor.



"I weave through traffic like a god on wheels," exults Jafar. "I'm close enough to read Q-Dogg's stupid vanity license plate."

***The third exchange**: Sally gets a 4; Jafar, a 12. This success vs. success result favors Sally. Now she's behind by only one point, with a score of 2–1 in Mr. Lenkowski's favor.*

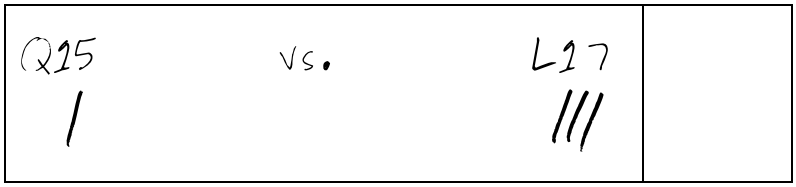


"Q-Dogg rushes an intersection, leaving Mr. L stuck in front of a red light."

"I pound the steering wheel in frustration!" cries Jafar.

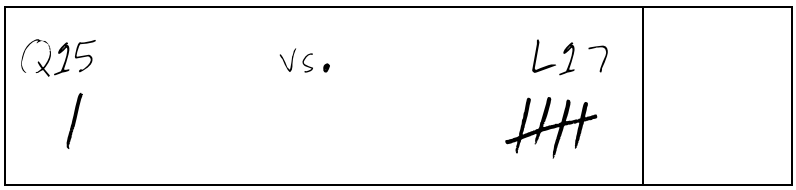
"Q-Dogg zooms up onto a freeway turnoff," says Sally.

***Fourth exchange**: 3 for Jafar, 5 for Sally, another success vs. success that takes the score to 3–1.*



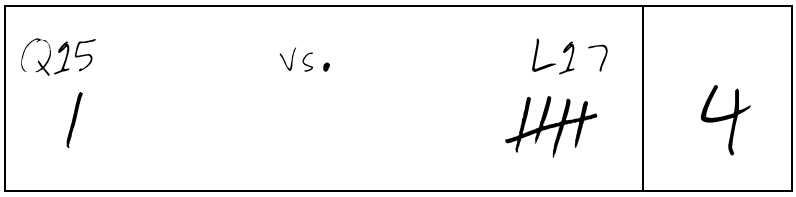
"Oops! There's a construction crew on the off-ramp," says the Narrator. (Inspired by Jafar's loss in the face of a very good roll, she's inspired to describe an external obstacle to represent his loss of relative advantage.)

***Fifth exchange:** Sally gets another 5, but this time Jafar rolls a 1. Critical vs. success gives Jafar another 2 points—giving him a total of 5 Resolution Points, enough to win the contest.*



"Before he can get past the construction crew, I glide right up to him, boxing him in," says Jafar. "I get out of the car, pointing to the bulging shoulder holster under my jacket. He's got no choice but to talk with me now."

With a final score of 5–1, the difference is 4.



Q-Dogg could theoretically suffer a consequence of Impaired for anything related to his driving. The Narrator thinks for a moment, to decide what this might be.

"If you want, you can slam into his car, Mr. L., and give him an Impaired result on driving until he gets expensive repair work done."

Jafar considers this. "I'll pass. I want Q-Dogg to cooperate, so it makes no sense to gratuitously piss him off. Besides, the construction crew guys could report me to the cops, and I don't need the heat."

"OK," says the Narrator.

"As soon as I go nose to nose with him, though, I make sure to point out how I could have scratched his lovely paint job, and elected not to."

Asymmetrical Exchanges

You may choose to briefly suspend your attempt to best your opponent in a scored contest, in order to do something else. An instance where one contestant is trying to win the contest and another is trying to do something else is called an asymmetrical exchange. In an asymmetrical exchange, a character pursuing an objective other than victory does not score points against the other if he wins the exchange. Instead, he gains some other advantage. He still loses points if he fails. Often he will be using an ability other than the one he's been waging the contest with, one better suited to the task at hand. This becomes additionally dangerous when the rating associated with the substitute ability is significantly lower than the one used for the rest of the contest.

Notorious buccaneer "Tawny Port" Jackman is engaged in a cutlass duel on his ship, the Red Opal, against the dreaded Portuguese Bill. Tawny Port notices that a trail of gunpowder on the deck has ignited. Unless the path of the flame is interrupted, it will reach the cargo hold where the ammunition is stored, and blow the entire ship sky-high. You'd think that his opponent would also see an interest in briefly stopping the fight to aid with the firefighting effort, but Bill has always valued vengeance over self-preservation.

The score in their scored contest stands at 3–3. Tawny Port has been fighting with his Swashbuckling ability of 19; Portuguese Bill with his Iron Sword Arm ability of 2W.

Tawny Port's player, Mike, quizzes the Narrator: "If I execute a flashy acrobatic maneuver while trying to snuff out the flame, that still counts as a use of my Swashbuckling ability, right?"

"Sure!" says the Narrator. "Sounds like textbook swashbuckling to me!"

"Okay. Being in the middle of a furious boarding action and all, there's got to be a bit of loose rigging flying by, right?"

"Absolutely!"

"Then I grab it as it goes by, fly up into the air, and whoosh like a pendulum over to the line of gunpowder, dispersing it with my boots before the flame reaches it. And, oh yeah, I may be spending a hero point on this..."

Mike rolls a 3. The Narrator, rolling for Portuguese Bill, gets a 20—a fumble, which his W allows him to bump up to a mere failure. Still, it looks like Mike won't be spending that hero point after all.

Success vs. failure yields a minor victory. The Narrator decides that this means that Tawny Port has snuffed out the line of gunpowder, but does so somewhat gracelessly, yelling in panic as the rope swings him across the deck. "A stray bit of shot pierces your hat on the way back," the Narrator adds.

Tawny Port does not get the 2 points he would normally apply to his score against Portuguese Bill. This is too bad, because he would otherwise have been able to knock his hated enemy out of the fight. Nonetheless, that's better than having his ship blown up, with him on it.

In addition to secondary objectives, as in the above example, characters may engage in asymmetrical exchanges to grant augments to themselves or others. Disengaging (immediately below) requires success at an asymmetrical exchange.

Disengaging

You can always abandon a contest, but, in addition to losing the prize under contention, you may also suffer negative consequences. Many contests will have no stakes other than the mutual intent to harm one another—each contestant is trying to attach negative consequences to the other. In such instances, you will always suffer negative consequences if you simply withdraw—unless you successfully **disengage**.

To disengage, make an asymmetrical exchange, usually using the ability relevant to the contest you're trying to wriggle out of. If you fail, your effort is wasted, and the score against you increases, as it would have during a normal exchange. If you succeed, you escape the clutches, literal or metaphorical, of your opponent, without further harm.

*Jenny Morrison (played by Adrienne) a libidinous teenager at summer camp, is being attacked in a boathouse by a knife-wielding slasher. She's been defending herself with a trash can lid but the slasher has already lodged a score of 3–0 against her. The slasher has been attacking with Homicidal Maniac 5**W**, with Jenny defending with a Tenacious When Cornered ability of 17. Adrienne decides that it's time to disengage. "I throw the trash can lid at his head, then try to leap through the boathouse window and jump into the lake."*

The Narrator rolls a 20 for the slasher. Adrienne rolls an 18, a failure. The slasher's mastery advantage bumps his fumble to a failure. Adrienne spends a hero point to bump the failure up to a success.

This leaves the final result as a success vs. failure: a minor victory for Jenny. "You fling the lid at him," narrates the Narrator, "momentarily stunning him. You take advantage of the pause in his rampage to climb out the boathouse's tiny window and dive into the lake's dark and freezing waters."

[[[BEGIN SIDEBAR]]]

Example Reversed: Jenny Fails To Escape

Let's take a look at the example of Jenny and the slasher with the opposite outcome:

If, the rolls had been reversed, with Adrienne getting a 20 and the Narrator, an 18, this is what would have happened: Even with a hero point spent by Adrienne, the exchange resolves as a success vs. failure in the slasher's favor. Jenny not only fails to escape, but has another 2 resolution points scored against her. With the total against her at 5, she is defeated by the slasher, and rendered helpless. Even under rising action resolution, the difference of 5 points means she is injured. As homicidal maniacs aren't known for their mercy, and there's no one around to rescue Jenny, she becomes another unfortunate addition to his kill list for the night.)

[[[END SIDEBAR]]]

You must describe your actions in a way that makes your enemy's inability to inflict further harm on you seem credible. In the case of a fight where opponents mean to hurt or kill you, you must definitively leave the scene of the battle. Less visceral conflicts may allow for a complete surrender without having to physically depart.

Suave super-spy Corin North is engaged in a high-stakes baccarat game with the master criminal Le Pompeux, and is losing badly, with a score of 4–1 against him. He hoped to shame Le Pompeux in front of a potential contact, but now recognizes he's lost that battle. Now he wants to quit the game without suffering lasting damage to his reputation as an unflappable gambler. In this instance,

successfully disengaging doesn't require him to leave the casino. In fact, that would be a sign of weakness.

"There's a gorgeous woman watching the game, I imagine," ventures Corin's player, Eric."

"There are many gorgeous women watching the game," the Narrator replies.

"I want to make it seem as if I have grown bored with it, and am instead interested in seducing the most receptive-seeming of the stunning onlookers."

Eric and the Narrator resolve Corin's disengagement, using his Suave ability, which is even more highly rated than his Gambling. Corin prevails.

All onlookers believe that Corin has withdrawn from the game not because he's losing, but because he has found a more diverting use of his time. He remains in the scene to chat up his new date for the evening.

Your opponents may pursue you if you disengage, but will have to succeed in chasing you down, or otherwise forcing you back into the suspended conflict, before starting a new contest with you. Pursuits in this context should be resolved with simple contests. If your opponents are able to catch up with you and re-engage you immediately, with no intervening events to change the balance of power between you, the previous suspended contest resumes, with its original score intact.

Le Pompeux may believe that Corin has abandoned the baccarat table for purely carnal reasons, but that doesn't quench his desire to humiliate the world-famous secret agent. He taunts North. A simple contest ensues, pitting the agent's Suave ability against Le Pompeux's Get Under Your Skin. If Le Pompeux wins, he lures Corin back to the table, resuming the contest with its original score of 4–1.

If you disengage from a contest using the rising action method of consequence determination, you suffer no consequences from it.

In a climactic scene, however, resolution points scored during contests you disengaged from are still taken into account when determining consequences. In the case of a group contest, consequences against you are determined as soon as you disengage.

Scientist Luca Donadoni (played by Sverre) is part of a geographic team penetrating the carnivorous jungles of Gliese 581c. Their exploratory attempt is the climactic sequence of the evening. Each PC engages in a contest against the impersonal natural challenges posed by the meat-eating rainforest. After several exchanges, Luca faces a score of 0–3 against him. He gives up and decides to return to base camp. The Narrator calls for a disengagement roll, to see if some creeping botanical menace entangles him, or otherwise prevents him from retreating. Luca succeeds and returns to camp, but still has 3 resolution points lodged against him. He is therefore Impaired—a consequence the Narrator interprets as the result of multiple punctures and lacerations inflicted by the planet's malign plant life.

Group Scored Contests

Group scored contests proceed as a series of scored contests between pairs of characters, interwoven so that they happen nearly simultaneously. As in a scored contest between two characters, only one exchange per pair of adversaries occurs each round. Usually the PCs make up one team, and their supporting character antagonists the other.

The classic example of a group scored contest is a big hand-to-hand fight. Other climactic situations that could be resolved with a group scored contest include:

- an election campaign
- a lobbying effort
- a large-scale military engagement
- an entire war
- an attempt to corner the silver market

As with any contest, the Narrator and players begins by framing the contest and choosing relevant abilities.

At the outset of the first round, the Narrator determines the initial pairings between PCs and their opponents. All else being equal, players generally have more fun when they can choose their own opponents. If you choose to do this, allow the players to act in the order of their ratings in the abilities they'll be using in the contest, from highest to lowest.

It is possible for one character to wind up facing more than one opponent. In this case, he is considered to be part of two (or more) pairings.

Mr. Keighley is forced to defend his caddish behavior against all three of the Lumley sisters during a large dinner party. If humiliated, his social standing could be severely damaged. This verbal conflict is played out as a series of three pairings, all of them involving Mr. Keighley:

1. *Mr. Keighley versus Sarah Lumley*
2. *Mr. Keighley versus Emaline Lumley*
3. *Mr. Keighley versus Jane Lumley*

Order of action doesn't matter much in a group scored contest. Unlike more traditional roleplaying combat systems, where the chance to take the other guy out before he can hit you provides a big benefit, here there is no great advantage to acting first. Accordingly, Narrators can resolve the various sub-contests that make up a group scored contest in the order they find most intuitive. Usually you'll find it most convenient simply to use player's seating order to determine the sequence in which the initial exchanges of a contest occur. Exchanges are always resolved in the same order from round to round.

In round one, Sarah contests Mr. Keighley, followed by Emaline and then Jane. The order of action in round two is the same: Sarah, then Emaline, then Jane.

Having determined the order in which the various pairings will be resolved, it's time to start the first round. Start with the first exchange in the order, then go onto the second, and so on, until all pairings have resolved a single exchange. Once this happens, the round concludes, and a new one begins, starting over with the first exchange.

As in a single scored contest, each member of a pairing is trying to be the first the score 5 points against another. When a character has 5 points scored against him *by a single opponent,* he is eliminated from the contest.

If defending against multiple opponents, it is possible to have more than 5 points scored against you in total, but remain in the contest. (Points scored against you by opponents who fail to eliminate you can come back to haunt you in resolutions using the Climactic Consequences Chart.)

By the second round of their verbal conflict, Sarah has scored 3 points against Mr. Keighley, and Emaline has scored 2. Although the total of these two scores is 5, he is not out of the contest—and will not be, until one of them scores a total of 5 points against him.

As characters are eliminated from the group contest, their victorious opponents may then move on to engage new targets, starting new contests, which are then added to the end of the existing sequence.

The group scored contest ends as soon as there are no active characters on one side of the conflict. The side with one or more characters left standing wins.

Consequences to all participants are then determined.

If using the Rising Action Consequence Chart, only the difference between scores *in the exchange that felled the affected* character is taken into account.

Emaline scores another 3 points against Mr. Keighley, knocking him out of the contest with a final score of 5–2. The damage to Mr. Keighley's social reputation is commensurate with a difference of 3; all abilities relating to it are therefore Impaired. The 3 points scored by Sarah are not taken into account. Although Keighley's reputation is harmed, the story continues, and he can try to work his way out of his humiliation before it reaches its climax.

When using the Climactic Consequence Chart, characters total up all of the points scored against them by all characters, including those from individual contests they won, and contests left incomplete at the time of their elimination from the group scored contest.

At contest's end, the scores of the three exchanges are as follows:

Mr. Keighley versus Emaline: 2–5

Mr. Keighley versus Sarah: 3–3

Mr. Keighley versus Jane: 4-0.

In this climactic version of the scene, the social harm is more serious, and suffered by all involved. Emaline has 2 points scored against her; her reputation is Hurt. Sarah has 3 points against her; her reputation is Impaired. Poor anxious Jane has 4 points against her; her reputation is Injured.

Mr. Keighley totals the points scored against him for all three exchanges, for a total of 8. His reputation is Dead. He cannot show his face in London society again, and knows it. Shortly thereafter, he moves to Antigua, to manage his uncle's sugar plantation, and is never seen again.

With the Consequences determined, the winners are now free to claim their prize. In a contest to resolve the climax of the story, the claiming of the prize concludes it. Otherwise, the story develops further, taking into account the results of the winners' victory.

Unrelated Actions

Characters not currently enmeshed in an exchange—either after a successful disengagement, or after winning an exchange—may take actions within the scene that do not directly contribute to the defeat of the other side. These unrelated actions may grant an augment to themselves or to a teammate. They may achieve a secondary story objective.

They resemble asymmetrical exchanges, except that, as they performed by characters who are not targeted by any opponents, impose no additional risk.

[[[BEGIN SIDEBAR]]]

Disengagement In Group Scored contests

- Original scores remain intact if you re-enter a group scored contest after having disengaged from it, assuming that your previous combatant(s) are now in a position to re-engage you. An engagement with fresh opponents is treated as any other new contest.
- If an opponent attempts to disengage from you while you are also engaged by at least one other contestant, you suffer a penalty of 5 when you roll to counter to his disengagement.

[[[END SIDEBAR]]]

Assists

A character take an unrelated action to grant a an *assist* to a teammate enmeshed in an exchange. To make an assist, a character engages in a simple contest, either against a suitable resistance, or an applicable ability of an affected opponent.

Assists are subject to the same restrictions as augments (p. XX): they must be both credible and interesting.

The recipient alters the current score against him by a number determined by the result of the assisting character's simple contest:

Assist Results

Contest Outcome	Change To Score Against Recipient
Complete Victory	–4
Major Victory	–3
Minor Victory	–2
Marginal Victory	–1
Marginal Defeat	0
Minor Defeat	+1
Major Defeat	+2
Complete Defeat	+3

As the chart reveals, assists are risky: if they fail, they can add to the score against the recipient, possibly even eliminating him from the contest.

Points from an assist can be applied to a single exchange only. Scores in exchanges can never be reduced below 0.

The good guys are trying to pilot their starfighters through the asteroid field to blow up the AQ'ak satellite before it activates and fills the Guidon Sector with tri-polarizing radiation. Hotshot pilot Harsteni Valk has just sent the AQ'ak Screamfighter on her tail spinning into the void. Now she sees that her comrade, Dirk Fles, is in trouble, with a laser burn eating its way through his aft engine. (In rules terms, the score in Dirk's current exchange is 2–4 against him.) Rather than engage the Screamfighter directly, Harsteni decides to execute a spiral pass maneuver and get close enough to Dirk's ship to spray it with retardant, putting out the fire. Having already established the asteroid field as a challenge to navigate through, the Narrator assigns a difficult resistance, which Harsteni nonetheless beats, scoring a marginal victory. The score in Dirk's exchange changes from 2–4 against him, to 2–3.

Remember that even in a fight, the relative scores of opponents in an exchange reflect only the relative strength of their positions. They may or may not track to physical damage, the real extent of which is determined at the end of the fight. (See p. XX.) Players lending assists needn't describe them as actions that heal or help their comrades; they can also describe aggressive maneuvers against their friends' opponents.

In the above example, Harsteni's player could just as well have described her actions as a volley of distracting fire against the AQ'ak Screamfighter.

In most standard roleplaying games, the smart thing to do when you finish off an opponent and want to help a comrade who's getting pasted is to join the fight and start reducing that opponent's hit points. In *Heroquest*, this may or may not be the tactically sound move, as you simply start a fresh exchange with the opponent. Depending on the situation, you may want to do this (perhaps allowing your ally to disengage), or to give your ally an assist.

Engaging Multiple Opponents

If you are engaged by more than one opponent, you suffer a –3 accumulating penalty for each opponent after the first. So you engage one opponent at your base ability rating, the second at a –3 penalty, the third against a –6 penalty, and so on, up to the maximum number of opponents who can credibly take you on at once.

Bare-knuckled archaeologist Harvard Payne is charging through the rain forest with a golden idol under his arm, using his Dodge ability of 9 to avoid being tackled by three members of a rival team: Heinrich, Fritz, and Joachim. Each of them is trying to bring him down using their Tackle abilities. Harvard will face one of them at his full 6, another at 3.

During a round in which you are already engaged with multiple opponents, you can prioritize between them, deciding against whom you use your full ability, and against which other opponents you face the various levels of penalty.

Harvard knows that Heinrich is the toughest of the lot, so he allocates his full ability against him. Fritz insulted him back in the cantina, so he takes the –3 penalty in his exchange with him. This leaves Joachim, against which he takes the –6 penalty.

However, if an additional opponent starts a new exchange against you during a round in which you have already completed exchanges against other opponents, you are immediately assessed the next level of penalty for that round. (Remember that new exchanges are always resolved after existing ones.)

Several rounds have passed, during which Fritz has been eliminated from the contest. The Narrator has a surprise in store for Harvard: another member of the rival team, Wolfgang, is lying in wait for him up ahead, having captured his pilot. The Narrator resolves Harvard's contests with Heinrich (no penalty) and Joachim (now at –3), and then starts the new exchange against Wolfgang, who leaps out from behind a gigantic fallen log to attempt a flying leap into Harvard. This third exchange puts Harvard at a –6 penalty.

The next round, Harvard may again allocate his attention. He wants to keep his unpenalized ability against Heinrich, who he now has at a 4–1 disadvantage. He knows Wolfgang is tougher than Joachim, and so decides to take a –3 penalty against him, and his –6 penalty against the relatively ineffectual Joachim.

When you one of your several opponents is knocked out of a contest, your penalties against other opponents are reduced accordingly, effective immediately.

*Harvard, using his full ability of 9**Ш**, wins his contest against Heinrich, who ends up winded and panting in the jungle, unable to pursue any further. This leaves Harvard now facing two, not three, opponents. This means that he may now resolve his contest against Wolfgang with his full 9**Ш** ability, and his contest against Joachim at a –3 penalty. (If he were take Wolfgang out, he could then also evade Joachim at his full ability rating, too.)*

If the Narrator's description of the contest places more than one opponent within striking range (literal or metaphorical) you may choose to engage multiple opponents, opening up exchanges against each. You suffer multiple opponent penalties of –3 per exchange, for each opponent after the first.

Followers

Players may choose to have their followers (p. XX) take part in group scored contests in one of three ways: as full contestants, as secondary contestants, or as supporters.

Contestant: The follower takes part in the contest as any other character would. Players rolls for their followers as they would their main characters. However, followers are removed from the contest whenever 3 resolution points are scored against them in a given exchange. When they are removed from a contest, an additional 2 resolution points are scored against them. This increases the severity of any consequences they suffer.

*Simon's character, tortured juvenile delinquent Jett Stark (Quick Wit **Ш**) has a loyal sidekick, Sal Plato (Repeat Stuff He's Heard Jett Say 17.) Along with other members of Jett's gang, they're engaged in a verbal cutting contest against the East Side Ramblers. The winners get to take out the local contingent of sweater girls; the losers slink home in shame.*

If Sal acts as a contestant, Simon rolls for both Jett and Sal, who enter separate exchanges. Jett takes on East Side leader Frank Hinton; Sal trades insults with the aptly-named Goon Fremick.

Jett does well in his first exchange, but Sal isn't so lucky, suffering a critical vs. failure result. A score of 0–3 takes him out of the contest. As he goes down to stammering defeat and the harsh laughter of the assembled gang girls, the Narrator lodges an additional 2 points against him. The 5-point

difference (in this rising action contest) will cause him to become Injured in all wooing- and insulting-related abilities.

(In genres that allow but de-emphasize followers, Narrators may rule that they may never act as full contestants. Narrators may also disallow this, on a case-by-case basis, simply to keep large group contests manageable.)

Secondary contestant: To act as a secondary contestant, the follower must have an ability relevant to the contest. The follower sticks by the character's side, contributing directly to the effort: fighting in a battle, tossing in arguments in a lobbying effort, acting as co-pilot in an aerial race, or whatever. Although the player and narrator describe this, the player does not roll for the follower. Instead, these efforts benefit the main character in two ways:

1. When confronted by multiple opponents, the main character may ignore the multiple opponent penalty for one foe for each for each follower acting as a secondary contestant.

Despite Sal's early humiliation, Jett's Jets (as his gang is called) prevail over the East Side Ramblers and get the girls. Later the Ramblers come back for a rumble, to soothe their injured pride with a little spilled blood.

This time Sal acts as a secondary contestant. Simon and the Narrator describe him sticking by Jett's side as he takes on both Frank Hinton and Goon Fremick in a fists-flying donnybrook. Although forced to take part in two exchanges per round, Jett suffers no multiple opponent penalty against either, thanks to Sal's loyal presence.

2. The main character may, at any point, shift any number of resolution points to a follower. Followers with 3 or more points lodged against them are removed from the scene. When a follower is removed from the scene, an additional 2 resolution points are lodged against them, increasing the severity of consequences they suffer. The main character loses the protection against multiple opponents afforded by the follower.

Jett is already down 2-3 against Goon Fremick when the East Sider gets lucky and nails him with a Critical vs. Fumble result. Maybe Jett shouldn't have spent all of his hero points during the cutting contest! Jett would normally go down with a final score of 2–8. Instead, he shifts 4 of those points to Sal. Sal is removed from the scene instead. The Narrator adds another 2 points to that, so that Sal will turn out to be Injured (physically this time) when consequences are determined.

Supporter: The follower is present in the scene, but does not directly engage the main character's opponents. Instead he may perform assists and other unrelated actions.

Darran's PC, Cookie Simmons, has a sidekick of his own: the bookish Four-Eyes. Four-Eyes doesn't fight, but when Cookie is on the ropes, he grants his main man an assist (see p. XX), reflecting light from his glasses into the eyes of Cookie's baseball bat-wielding assailant.

Followers acting in any of these three capacities may be removed from the contest by otherwise unengaged opponents. To remove a follower from a scene, a character engages him in a simple contest of relevant abilities. On any failure, the follower is taken out of the contest. For consequence determination purposes, the follower has X+2 resolution points lodged against him, where X is the usual number levied by the Resolution Point chart.

An East Sider, Moose Grinnage, is left unengaged after knocking a third PC out of the rumble. Deciding that Four-Eyes has been too effective in helping Cookie, he lays into him with Brass Knuckles 15. Darran rolls Four-Eyes' Backpedal Out Of Danger to counter. The Narrator rolls a 2 to Darran's 11, scoring a Minor Victory for Moose. That's enough to take Four-Eyes out of the contest. He suffers the 1 resolution point a character would usually take from the losing end of a success vs. success result, plus an additional 2, for a total of 3. When Consequences are racked up, he'll prove to be Impaired.

[[[BEGIN SIDEBAR]]]

Consequences and Group Scored Contests

In a Rising Action contest, if you win more than one exchange, you can theoretically be hurt multiple times—once for each contest you win with a difference between results of 1.

If you win more than one exchange in either Rising Action or Climactic contests, and then need to determine a final level of victory (to determine, for example, lingering benefits from the contest), use the victory level you attained against the character who contested against you with the highest target number.

*Political pundit Theo Arlino holds his own in a televised debate against two more famous talking heads. He scores a minor victory against Florence Rutka and a major one against Hyman Durrell. Florence contested Theo with Ad Hominem Attacks 4**W**; Hyman resorted alternately to Heated Rhetoric 18, Circular Logic 17, and Damned Lies and Statistics 3**W**. The highest of those ratings is Florence's 4**W**, so Theo's victory level for the entire group contest is minor.*

[[[END SIDEBAR]]]

Example Group Scored contest

The PCs are the Burgundy Killzones, a gang of nanotech-enhanced gladiators, taking on their hated rivals, the Emerald Death Rats, in a televised battle royale. The Narrator, Irene, has been building anticipation to this fight for a couple of sessions, so its use of the Climactic Scene Consequence Chart is entirely apt.

The Burgundy Killzones are:

- *The bloodthirsty (and ironically named) Big Ripper, with a 19 in Small But Deadly. Played by Gilberto, who has 3 hero points.*
- *The bombastic Bonespike H-Bomb, with a rating of 3**W** in Bludgeoning Brawler. Played by Michelle; 2 hero points.*
- *The apelike zen master Red Shaman fights with his Unarmed Combat rating of 17. Played by Sam, 1 hero point.*
- *And, finally, the Heavy Rapper, who stomps into the arena with a rating of 9**W** in Big and Bad. Played by Jukka, with no hero points left.*

Tonight's opponents are:

- *Thundering Satanhead, who boasts a rating of 9**W** in Electro-Trident. No hero points.*
- *Treacherous Clara, with a rating of 17 in Lamprey-Mouthed Tentacles. 1 hero point.*
- *Horrible Pete, who fights with Lithe and Ropy 17. 3 hero points.*
- *And, last but not least, Zombie Elvis, with a rating of 3**W** in It Takes More Than An Axe In My Head To Slow Me Down. No hero points.*

The arena sends the combatants out in randomly chosen chutes, so you never know who's going to face who in the first exchanges of the melee. (The Narrator has prepared the players for the fact that they don't get to pick their engagements, so that they accept it as a detail of the setting, rather than resenting the loss of choice.)

Irene uses miniature figures to replicate the effect of the chutes. She mixes up the miniatures representing the combatants, determining the initial pairings:

- *Big Ripper vs. Treacherous Clara.*
- *Bonespike H-Bomb vs. Horrible Pete.*
- *Red Shaman vs. Thundering Satanhead.*
- *Heavy Rapper vs. Zombie Elvis.*

***Round One:** The first exchange is between Big Ripper and Treacherous Clara. "I dart between her legs and mangle her with my power-saw!" Gilberto cries. He rolls a 4; so does the Narrator. This tied result leaves them at 0–0 for the first round.*

[[[BEGIN SIDEBAR]]]

The Implied "I Try To"

When narrating their characters' actions, players will often describe them in a way that suggests the outcome. For example: "I dart between her legs and slash her with my power-saw!"

Of course, the outcome is decided not by what the players say, but by the resolution system. However, Narrators should beware the temptation to act as phraseology cops, slapping down the players whenever their descriptions seem to cross the line between attempt and result. It's sometimes hard to come up with colorful descriptions, and it's part of your job to enable the creativity of the players. Rather than correct them, read all such declarations as if they begin with the implied phrase "I try to…"

As in: "I try to dart between her legs and slash her with my power-saw!"

This point applies to all contest forms.

[[[END SIDEBAR]]]

Irene narrates the ensuing standoff: "Clara anticipates your standard move and blocks you. The two of you circle each other warily, as the crowd screams for blood."

Now comes the exchange between Bonespike H-Bomb and Horrible Pete. "I leap up, muay thai style, and try to nail him on the back of the head with my elbow spikes," says Michelle. Irene rolls an 11 to Michelle's 16. Bonespike's ***Ш*** *bumps this success vs. success to a critical vs. success, in his favor. Horrible Pete is outmatched but rich in hero points, so Irene spends one on his behalf, ending in a critical vs. critical. With the lower roll, Horrible Pete ekes out a marginal victory. The score is now 0–1.*

Irene narrates: "Pete lithely ducks beneath your hammer blow and delivers a glancing blow to your abdomen with his ropy fingers."

Next up: Red Shaman takes on Thundering Satanhead. "I try to grab his electro-trident and use its leverage to flip him over." Irene rolls a 6 to Sam's 13, which, with Satanhead's bump, results in a critical vs. success result in his favor. The score is 0–2.

"He takes advantage of your attempt to grab the electro-trident, and gives you a solid jolt from it. You think you can smell your teeth burning."

Finally for this round, it's Heavy Rapper versus Zombie Elvis. "Duh…" says Jukka, "I try to club his head off with my baseball bat." Jukka rolls a 2; Irene, a 4. This success vs. success result goes to Heavy Rapper, who lodges a resolution point against Zombie Elvis, for a score of 1–0.

"You club him good," says Irene, "and there's a big dent in the side of his cranium. He grins as if barely fazed."

Everyone has now participated in an exchange, so that's the end of round one.

Round Two: *"I slash off Treacherous Clara's right kneecap!" cries Gilberto (Big Ripper.) He rolls a 14; Irene, a 6. That's a success vs. success in Clara's favor.*

"She takes advantage of your telegraphed swing to rake your face with her lamprey-tentacles!"

"Yowch!" cries Gilberto.

The score is now 0–1 against Gilberto.

Bonespike H-Bomb versus Horrible Pete: "I bonespike him with an elbow to the throat," Michelle follows up her bombast with a roll of 1. The Narrator rolls a 15. Bonespike's mastery bumps his success down to a failure, for a provisional result of critical vs. failure. Irene then spends one of Pete's hero points, narrating the final result: "You jam him right in the trachea, but, miraculously, Pete dis-impales himself. His ropy flesh heals up around the exposed wound."

That's a critical vs. success, which lodges 2 resolution points against Pete, for a new score of 2–1.

Red Shaman vs. Thundering Satanhead: "Learning my lesson about the electro-trident, I try to get behind him and deliver a roundhouse kick," says Sam. He rolls a 4, to the Narrator's 12. Satanhead's mastery bumps his failure into a success, but that still leaves Red Shaman with the low success, for a success vs. success result in his favor. "The kick hits home!" Irene narrates. "Thundering Satanhead reels back, apparently stunned." The score is now 1–2.

"Zombie Elvis may be in his Vegas period," says Jukka, " but his girth is no match for Heavy Rapper! I try to belly-flop onto him, crushing him beneath my enormous weight!"

Jukka rolls a 5; the Narrator, a 15. That's a success vs. failure, scoring Heavy Rapper 2 more resolution points against Zombie Elvis, for a total score of 3–0. If Zombie Elvis doesn't turn it around soon, he's headed straight for undead Graceland.

***Round Three:** "I kick my power-saw into turbo mode and fling it at Clara's face!" howls Gilberto. He rolls a 6 for Big Ripper; Irene rolls a 17 for Treacherous Clara. That's a marginal victory (success vs. success) in Gilberto's favor. Irene narrates: "Clara ducks, but the edge of the saw still shaves a notch out of her ear." Big Ripper lodges another resolution point against Clara, bringing the score to 2–0.*

[[[BEGIN SIDEBAR]]]

Keeping Score

To maintain the sense of back-and-forth of a suspenseful scene, make sure you keep your players aware at all times of where they stand by reminding them of the scores after each exchange. You may even find it useful to mark the running scores on a whiteboard or (for the technically well-equipped) projected computer image.

Preserve consistency by always marking scores with the PC first and the supporting character second. When players contest against one another, list the scores according to seating arrangement, with the player to your left first.

[[[END SIDEBAR]]]

"Bonespike fakes out Horrible Pete with a feinted elbow-slam, then nails him with a hit from his knee-spike instead," says Michelle—then rolls a 20. Fortunately, her 🜂 *over Pete bumps that up to a mere failure. Irene rolls a 9 for Pete, a success. Success vs. failure lodges another 2 points against Bonespike, for a new score of 2–3. "Horrible Pete takes advantage of the feint, waiting until you're off balance to kick your legs out from under you," Irene narrates.*

"The Red Shaman leaps up into the air to kick Satanhead in his devil-masked face," declares Sam. He rolls an 11 to the Narrator's 9. Satanhead's 🜂 *bumps his success into a critical, scoring 2 more resolution points against the Red Shaman, for a score of 1–4. Irene winces in appalled sympathy at what is about to happen. "Satanhead hits you as you leap, delivering a shuddering blow to the groin with the back end of his electro-trident. You go down—hard!"*

Heavy Ripper has no time to pity his teammate; he has the Zombie Elvis pinned and vulnerable. "I grab him by his lifeless pompadour and smash his skull repeatedly into the floor!" Jukka exults. He rolls a 5, to the Narrator's 18. Success vs. failure scores 2 resolution points against Zombie Elvis, for a final score of 5–nil. "You pound him till his corpse-like body stops shuddering. He's out of the fight," Irene says. Jukka stands and bellows out a victory roar.

***Round Four:** "I pull a couple of force shurikens from my belt and fire them in a wide angle at Treacherous Clara," says Gilberto. "And it's time to even the score, so this time I'm spending a hero point." Maybe he should have waited for his result: he rolls a 1, while the Narrator rolls a 9. As Gilberto already has a critical, his hero point bumps Clara down one result level, to a failure. That would put Clara out of the fight, so the Narrator decides to spend her sole hero point to keep her in. That brings her back to a critical vs. success, and lodges another 2 resolution points against her. "She ducks and weaves," Irene narrates, "the shurikens home in on her; she dodges them—but then they come around again to slash her hip and shoulderblades." The score is now evened, at 2–2.*

"Bonespike goes for a double-handed flying hammerblow," says Michelle. She rolls a 12 to the Narrator's 7. As the result would be a success vs. success in her opponent's favor, putting her on the brink of defeat, Michelle elects to spend a hero point. As that would put Horrible Pete on the brink of defeat, the Narrator decides to spend his last hero point, returning the result to success vs. success, in Pete's favor. "Pete ducks out of the way, leaving you to slam into a pillar." The score is now 2–4.

The Red Shaman is up next and, at 1–4, is already on the brink of defeat. In a street fight, he would try to disengage, but if he does it during a championship gladiatorial match, he knows he'll destroy his

career and lose all of his endorsement contracts—a fate worse than defeat. "I let Satanhead come at me, and try to use his momentum against him, with a sharp jab to the solar plexus." Sam rolls a 16 to the Narrator's 9. That's a success vs. success in Satanhead's favor, bringing the score to 1–5. "He comes at you, but is too deft to let you past his defenses. Your blow fails, and he smacks you between the eyes with the butt of his electro-trident. You convulse like a fish on a hook and slide to the flooring in a heap." The Red Shaman is out of the fight.

Heavy Ripper finished off his own foe last round, so he's primed to take a little blubbery vengeance on behalf of his downed comrade. "While Satanhead's still prancing in victory, I come up from behind and slam into him like four hundred pounds of piledriver!" Jukka declares. (He's taking a minor liberty by describing Satanhead's reaction, but it's entertaining and in character, so the Narrator embraces his description.)

Although this will be Satanhead's second exchange in a single round, it is not occurring while his first opponent is still engaging him. Therefore he faces no multiple opponent penalty, as he would have done if Red Shaman was still active in the fight.

Irene draws up a fresh exchange box to keep track of the new score. Now Satanhead is picking on someone his own size; both combatants have scores of 9Ш.

Jukka rolls a 3 to the Narrator's 7. That's a success vs. success, in his favor—a resolution point scored against Satanhead. "He sees you coming, soon enough to avoid being caught completely flatfooted, but you still tag him with a palpable body-check." The score is 1–0.

***Round Five:** "I rush headlong at Clara and sink my toxic teeth into her inviting leg," says Gilberto. (For flavor's sake, he's switched to another combat ability, Poisonous Incisors, which happens to have the same rating as his Small But Deadly ability.) Uh-oh: he rolls a 20, to Irene's 4! Gilberto spends a hero point, but even then the result is success vs. failure, in Clara's favor. "As you open your mouth to take a chomp on her, she sinks her lamprey tentacles into your own cheek! Your red blood engorges her ravening appendage." She scores 2 points against him, for a new total of 2–4. Now he too stands on the brink of defeat.*

In a similar position is Bonespike H-Bomb, on the wrong end of a 2–4 score in his exchange with Horrible Pete. "I bounce off the pillar and dive at him, elbow ready to jab a spike right into his jugular vein!" Michelle rolls, planning on spending a hero point, and gets a 16, against the Narrators' 20. Her Ш over Pete bumps her failure up to a success. Her hero point bumps her result one notch further, to a critical. Pete has no hero points left to spend, so the final match-up is a critical vs. fumble—5 points for Bonespike. "You jab your bony thorn right into his throat. Pete goes from pale to paler, and collapses, gurgling and clutching his punctured Adam's apple." Bonespike comes from behind for a final total of 4–7.

With Red Shaman and Zombie Elvis down, that leaves one exchange left to resolve this round: the relatively fresh showdown between Heavy Rapper and Thundering Satanhead. "Now that he's off-balance," says Jukka, "I plow him with a plain and simple piledriver to the face." He rolls a 12; Irene, an 11. This failure vs. failure result resolves in Satanhead's favor, tying the score at 1–1. "'Not so fast,'" grins Satanhead, as he probes your blubber with a tentative but potent electro-trident jab."

***Round Six:** "I draw a serrated blade from my boot, and slice through the boot to slit her Achilles' tendon," says Gilberto, clearly switching back to Big Ripper's slightly luckier Small But Deadly ability. He rolls a 15 to Irene's 2, but spends his last hero point to bump it up. Treacherous Clara has none left to spend, so the result stands at critical vs. success: 2 resolution points lodged against her. "Blood gushes out of her slashed boot. You don't know if you hit the tendon, but you've definitely hurt her." The score is now tied at a white-knuckle 4–4. Barring a tie, somebody's going down next round.*

Or are they? Bonespike joins the fight against Treacherous Clara, knowing that this will give Big Ripper a better shot at disengaging next round. "I come at her from behind, trying to elbow-spike the back of her neck." As Clara has already engaged in one exchange this round, she suffers a penalty of 3 to her relevant ability in this new exchange with Bonespike. Her Lamprey-Mouthed Tentacles ability is reduced to 14. This makes little difference, as the Narrator rolls a 4, to Bonespike's 16. His Ш bumps

that to a success, but it's still one in Clara's favor. "Unfortunately, her back is right where her tentacles sprout from. She latches one of them onto your bulging pectoral muscle, and is now lustily sucking blood from you and Big Ripper alike." After one round, Clara is up 0–1 against Bonespike.

Now back to the Heavy Ripper/Thundering Satanhead match-up. "I try to hip check him into a wall, then pin him there," Jukka says. He rolls an 11 to the Narrator's 20. Failure vs. fumble yields 2 points for Heavy Ripper, taking the score to 3–1. "You've got him pinned, all right," the GM narrates. "Pinned and struggling to free himself."

***Round Seven:** Down by 4 points, and with Bonespike H-Bomb now running interference for him, Gilberto decides that it is time for Big Ripper to disengage from Treacherous Clara. In this case, it's a literal disengagement, as he has to get her lamprey-headed tentacle off him in order to get away. "I'm Small But Deadly, so she probably has to strain her tentacle downwards to get at me," Gilberto reasons. "I think I can use that ability to get away." The Narrator agrees, finding Gilberto's reasoning suitably credible. If he succeeds, he gets away. If Clara succeeds, she scores resolution points against him, finishing him off. Because she is now in another exchange with Bonespike, her Lamprey-Mouthed Tentacles rating is reduced by 3 points, to 14. (She could also choose to apply an additional 3-point multiple opponent penalty to this roll, in order to be able to engage Bonespike with her full rating in the next exchange, should she succeed at this one. However, anxious to bolster her reputation with fans by dropping an opponent, she elects to try her best to keep Big Ripper attached to her tentacle.)*

The Narrator rolls a 19, to Gilberto's 16. That's a success vs. failure, in Big Ripper's favor. He successfully pulls the lamprey from his puckered flesh and retreats to a distant corner of the arena. (In order to assure that he is not later re-engaged, he would have to leave the scene entirely, but gladiators are locked in the arena until the end of the match, so he remains at risk.)

"With Satanhead pinned, I slam his head against the wall," exclaims Jukka. He rolls a 4 to the Narrator's 8. Success vs. success gives him 1 point, bringing the score to 4–1 in his favor. "He's dazed, with a trickle of blood running from the mouth of his skull mask."

Now it's Bonespike versus Clara. If she'd held onto Big Ripper, she'd be facing a penalty of 3 to her rating. However, since she is now engaged with only one opponent, she fights at her full rating. "I slice at her tentacle with my sharpest elbow spike!" Michelle announces. Both she and Irene roll 7s. The tie means that the two combatants jostle one another other without noticeable effect.

***Round Eight:** There are now two active exchanges left.*

First, Heavy Rapper against Thundering Satanhead. "Neither mercy nor creativity are in my nature," Jukka declares. "I just keep freaking pummeling!" He rolls an 8 to the Narrator's 9. That one point difference is enough to give the Rapper a success vs. success victory, and the final point he needs to take out Satanhead, with a final result of 5–1. "You break his mask into a dozen pieces. He falls against you, dazed and unable to continue."

Second, Bonespike against Clara. "I grab the tentacle that's still stuck to me and wrap it around her throat, strangling her with it," says Michelle. She rolls a 14 to Clara's 16. This success vs. success result takes the score to a 1–1 tie. "To stop you from choking her with her own tentacle, she detaches it from your chest."

***Round Nine:** There is only one ongoing exchange as the round begins, that of Bonespike versus Clara, so it is resolved first. "I spike her in the head!" an impatient Michelle cries. Her roll: 16. The Narrator's: 7—a success vs. success, in Clara's favor, scoring a resolution point against Bonespike. "She ducks your blow, and fixes another tentacle to your arm." The score is now 1–2.*

Heavy Rapper starts a second exchange with Clara. He's her second exchange of the round, so she suffers a 3 point penalty to her rating. "I try to slam her across the room," Jukka grunts. He rolls a 15 against her 19. With his mastery bump, this makes the result a success vs. failure, in his favor. After one round, he has a score of 2–0 against her. "You send her flying, wrenching her tentacle painfully—for her—from Bonespike's arm."

Round Ten: *Clara is now engaged with two opponents and can now decide against which of them her multiple opponent penalty is applied. She chooses to concentrate on Heavy Rapper, who has demonstrated himself to be the more frightening opponent.*

That puts her rating against Bonespike down to 14. "Heavy Rapper sent her flying," Michelle observes. "Was it toward me, by any chance?"

Defaulting to yes (see p. XX), Irene says, "Sure, why not?"

"In that case, I wait for her, spikes outstretched, to impale herself on me."

He rolls a 3 to her 6. His ***W*** *bump takes that to a critical vs. success. "Ouch!" says Irene, "You puncture her in several places!" Their score is now 3–1.*

"I run into her, slamming her further onto his spikes!" declares Jukka.

"Hey, wait a minute…" Michelle protests.

"I'll slam carefully," says Jukka, rolling a 2, compared to Irene's 18. With a ***W****, this is a critical vs. failure, worth 3 resolution points. The score is 5–0: Treacherous Clara is KO'ed.*

"She's on H-Bomb's spikes so hard you have to strain to shove her off."

Aftermath: *The crowd goes wild as the medics hit the floor. Now's the time to see how badly everyone's injured.*

Zombie Elvis fell after a single exchange, with the standard 5 points against him. He's Injured.

Horrid Pete went down after a single exchange, with an unusually high 7 points against him. He's Dying.

Thundering Satanhead had 1 resolution point against him in his victorious mano-a-mano with the Red Shaman, and then fell against Heavy Rapper with 5 points, for a total of 6. He, too, is Dying.

Treacherous Clara lasted too long for her own good. She got hit with 4 resolution points in her suspended exchange with Big Ripper, and then took 3 in her go-round with Bonespike, before succumbing to Heavy Rapper's 5-point onslaught. At a total of 10 points, she is already Dead.

What of our victorious heroes?

Big Ripper disengaged after being docked for 4 resolution points. He's Injured.

Red Shaman went down with 5. He's Injured, too.

Bonespike H-Bomb got hit for 4 resolution points from Horrid Pete, then another 1 from Treacherous Clara. That makes 5 points, so he's also Injured.

Heavy Rapper had only 1 point lodged against him in any of the three exchanges he took part in. He's merely Dazed, and able to complete an addled victory lap as the bloodthirsty crowd showers him with flowers, recreational pharmaceuticals, and cash cards.

The other survivors, losers and victors alike, are rushed off, groaning, on stretchers, bound for top-notch medical treatment befitting the top stars of the American Gladiatorial League.

It has been a glorious day in the arena.

Modifiers

This section contains additional information on modifiers. As you'll recall, modifiers are added to or subtracted from a character's ability to arrive at his final target number. Positive modifiers are called bonuses; negative modifiers are called penalties.

Positive modifiers, or bonuses, may raise an ability high enough to gain a mastery, in which case the character gets the bumps up or down a mastery would normally supply.

Negative modifiers, or penalties, may lower an ability to the point where it loses one or more masteries. In this case, the character loses the bumps up or down he would normally get.

Modifiers should only be used to alter a character's target number to reflect unusual circumstances he helped to create, or has some control over. Unusual circumstances primarily affecting opponents result in modifiers to their abilities. If an unusual situation applies to a resistance, change the resistance number. (As you'll see in the section on resistances on p. XX, best practice is to decide how difficult a task ought to be dramatically, choose a resistance, and then, if necessary, invent modifying circumstances to account for any unusual or changed degree of difficulty.)

This is a change from past versions of the game, which suggested that PCs gain modifiers for external circumstances, like varying wind conditions or the attitude of a supporting character. As modifiers complicate bookkeeping, it's always preferable to fold them into a resistance whenever you can.

[[[BEGIN SIDEBAR]]]

Target Numbers Of 0 Or Less

If penalties reduce a target number to 0 or less, any attempt to use it automatically results in a complete defeat. The character must find another way to achieve his aim.

[[[END SIDEBAR]]]

Specific Ability Bonuses

Because players get to name their own abilities, a tension exists between the vivid, specific ability descriptions that make for fun and memorable characters, and the dully non-specific ability names that increase the number of actions they can logically attempt. The system rewards creative and specific ability choices over all-encompassing abilities by awarding Specific Ability Bonuses.

Example broad abilities: Smart, Strong, Fast, Warrior, Vehicle Expert.

Example specific abilities: Imaginative, Circus Muscleman, Reacts Quickly, Unarmed Combat, Pilot.

Even more specific abilities: Thinks In Geometric Shapes, Lifts Heavy Objects, Dodge Hurled Objects, Trained In Wushu, Helicopter Pilot.

When you contest against an opponent whose ability is less specific to the situation at hand than your own, you gain either a +3 or +6 modifier, with the higher modifier reflecting a larger gap between the specificity of the two abilities.

Johnny and Jimmy enter into an arm-wrestling match. Johnny's most relevant ability is Strong. Jimmy's most relevant ability is Arm-Wrestling. Johnny's ability is about the broadest that could possibly be used for this contest, while Jimmy's is specifically targeted to it. Jimmy gets a +6 bonus.

After making short work of Johnny, Jimmy calls for another opponent. Joey steps up. His ability is Barroom Athletics. This is also highly specific, but still broader than Johnny's ability. Johnny only gets a +3 bonus against Jimmy.

Broad abilities are penalized not to maintain a balance against the Narrator's world, but within the group, so that colorful choices are rewarded. Accordingly, when PCs contest against

abstract forces, the Narrator uses the abilities of the other PCs as a benchmark of specificity. If another member of the group has a somewhat more applicable ability than the one you're using, you take a –3 penalty to your attempt. If the ability is vastly more applicable, you take a –6 penalty to your attempt.

This rule applies whether or not that character is also using the same ability in a parallel contest. The PC being used as a benchmark needn't even be present during the current scene.

Bruce (played by Chris) wants to move a huge boulder away from the mouth of a cave. His best ability is Strong. The Narrator, Nicole, checks her copies of the other characters' sheets, and find that Fred (played by Hal) has Sentenced To Five Years Hard Labor as one of his abilities. It has already been established in the story that Fred's hard labor involved the toting of rocks back and forth. Nicole decides that this is a somewhat more applicable ability, as rock toting still just one thing that Fred's ability can do. (If it were Toted Rocks In a Prison Yard, it would be a vastly more applicable ability.)

Fred isn't present. He's on the other side of the island, looking for the lost astrolabe— but that doesn't matter, because this rule exists to reward players with entertaining ability descriptions, not to simulate anything happening in the world. Chris' character should not be able to outshine Hal's at rock toting. Bruce faces a –3 penalty on his attempt.

The ability to which yours is compared must share a common origin or general theme with it.

Xervox (played by Steve) has an ability called Disintegrator Ray. It could conceivably used to achieve Bruce's ultimate purpose—to get the rock out of the cave mouth. However, since it's thematically quite different, Chris isn't stealing Steve's thunder when he uses his strength to move the rock. Nicole doesn't consider this ability when assigning broad ability penalties.

Stretches

When you propose an action using an ability that seems completely inappropriate, the Narrator rules it impossible. If you went ahead and tried it anyway, you'd get a Complete Failure—but you won't, because that would be silly.

In some cases, though, your proposed match-up of action and ability is only somewhat implausible. A successful attempt with it wouldn't completely break the illusion of fictional reality—just stretch it a like. If you saw the same scene in a book or movie, you might smile a little at the convenience of it all, but still remain engaged with the story.

Using a somewhat implausible ability is known as a **stretch**. If your Narrator deems an attempt to be a stretch, you suffer a –6 penalty to your target number. Further, any major or complete victories you might score are instead treated as minor victories.

A strong explanation can turn an implausible action into a mere stretch.

Professor Hexagon has the ability Egyptian Hieroglyphics 16. Exploring a tomb deep beneath the streets of Baghdad, he encounters a tablet bearing an inscription in Sumerian cuneiform. "Hmm," says his player, Aidan, "Can I say that, back at the British Museum, I spent enough time around colleagues in the Sumerian department to puzzle through a translation attempt?"

The Narrator, Maggie, takes a moment to think about this. If this was a TV show, and Hexagon justified his knowledge with a similar line of dialogue, she'd spot it as a screenwriter's contrivance, but still accept it. "It's a stretch, but I'll allow it."

The definition of stretch is elastic, depending on genre. All sorts of crazy stunts ought to be possible in a high-flying martial arts game. Conversely, even common cinematic conceits ought to be impossible in a realistic espionage game inspired by John Le Carre novels.

Narrators may allow stretches for the same reason authors and directors do: to keep the story moving. If they disallow an action as implausible during one session, they can still reserve the right to rule it a stretch later on—provided they do some fancy justifying to explain the apparent internal contradiction.

Narrators should not impose stretch penalties on action descriptions which add flavor and variety to a scene, but do not fundamentally change what the character can do with his ability. These make the scene more fun but don't really gain any advantage, much less an unfair one, for the player.

Rebecca is running a fight sequence in a fantasy series, using the extended contest rules. Martin, playing Caladro the Swordsman, fights with his Flashing Cutlass ability. Thanks to a series of atrocious rolls, he's missed a bunch of times against what should be an inferior opponent. "To heck with the sword!" Martin cries. "I'm going to kick him into the wine barrel!"

A Narrator accustomed to saying "no" to her players might consider this a stretch, given that his described action involves neither flashing nor a cutlass. But really it, if successful, accomplishes the same end as an action using the sword—reducing the opponent to 0 APs in an ongoing fight. The Narrator allows it to pass without comment.

Narrators running series in those rare genres that enforce very strict realism should, rather than impose a penalty, instead propose a more suitable action description.

Likewise, if you, in any setting, get creative with an action description in a way that impinges on another player's signature gimmick, the Narrator should ask that you amend your description to keep the PCs distinct.

*Later on during the same fight, Dennis, who has the combat ability Heavily Armored Knight augmented to 18**W**, says "I pick up Marta's bladed shield and go to town on the goblins with it, sawing and slashing at them!" He's referring to the distinctive weapon carried by another PC, Marta. Marta's player, Sonia, has even drawn an elaborate sketch of the shield. During the last round, Marta lost a large number of APs, prompting Rebecca to describe her as having dropped her weapon. Various penalties have reduced her target number to 2**W**, so Dennis's character, Sir Percheron, will easily outclass her in the use of her own defining gimmick. What's worse, Dennis and Sonia have been mildly sniping at one another all evening. Whether Dennis is knowingly trying to annoy her, this is a clear instance where direct Narrator intervention is called for. As always, strong collaboration involves suggesting a cool alternative, instead of simply saying no:*

"That steals Marta's thunder a bit, don't you think? How about you wade in with your two-handed sword, kicking the shield back to her on your way to engage the goblins?"

Protecting PC uniqueness sometimes requires delicate judgments. Some players care deeply about having their gimmicks eclipsed, while others make that a low priority compared to group creativity or achievement of in-story goals. Don't bother enforcing it if no one in your group gives a hoot. Even within a single group, some instances of schtick-stealing might seem egregious, and others actively fun.

Let's say that the above incident unfolded differently. Sonia and Dennis are getting along fine, and Marta has just been knocked out of the contest with a sneaky blow from behind. She's down enough APs that she'll be badly Injured when consequence time rolls around.

"Screaming for vengeance in Marta's name," Dennis says, stirringly, "I hoist her shield high and drive it deep into the treacherous varlet's flesh!"

Sonia is pumping her fist in excitement, so it's clear that she won't consider this an act of scene-stealing. The Narrator allows it as is.

Prior versions of the rules advised a wide range of different modifiers for various actions, based on the degree to which they were improvised from the base ability. Here we've decided that something is either a stretch or it isn't, and that improvisation is a thing to encourage in a game of narrative collaboration.

Situational Modifiers

Narrators may also impose modifiers when, given the description of the current situation, believability demands that a character should face a notable advantage or disadvantage. During a long contest, they should typically last for a single exchange, and reflect clever or foolish choices by the

character. Assess modifiers of +6, +3, –3, or –6. Modifiers of less than 3 don't exert enough statistical effect to be worth the bother. Those higher than 6 give the situational modifier a disproportionate role in determining results.

Augments

An augment is a bonus a character gets to his target number as a result of a prior contest. This can be either a contest he took part in, or one performed by another party. Unlike the case of a lingering benefit, which is a side effect of a contest conducted for another reason, an augment contest is conducted for the sole purpose of gaining this bonus.

Narrators choose between two sets of augment rules, depending on the nature of their series.

Dramatic augments are suitable for the vast majority of series. They keep the number of augments to a minimum, but allow each one to noticeably influence results. Use dramatic augments for settings and genres in which preparation is alluded to but not heavily emphasized.

Incremental augments are suitable for settings which place a heavy emphasis on preparation and the careful accumulation of many small advantages. A special forces campaign drawing on the participants' real world military experience might qualify for this treatment. The world of Glorantha is envisioned by its creator, Greg Stafford, as a place where preparation is so important that it takes on a ritual, mythic significance, and as such uses the incremental augment rules. (Of course, as Your Game Will Vary, there's no reason why you can't run Glorantha with the looser dramatic augment rules.)

A third source of augments, **plot augments**, are compatible with either of the above.

Dramatic Augments

To grant a bonus to a character in an upcoming contest, you engage in a simple contest against an appropriate resistance chosen by the Narrator. Together with the Narrator, you frame the contest, making it clear how your action will assist the recipient (who might be you, or another character).

In order to work, an augment attempt must be entertaining and memorable. The Narrator decides whether your description is entertaining, using the following criteria:

Is it fresh? If the Narrator finds something new, original, or unexpected (but fitting) about your description, she'll consider it entertaining. Conversely, if you've recently (either in this session or previous ones) used the same ability to achieve the same end, the attempt is probably repetitive, and therefore not entertaining.

Dr. Abel (Sam) is about to perform surgery on Linus (Lawrence) to remove the alien parasite from his spinal column. Nils, playing the company android, Xera, proposes to augment Dr. Abel's attempt. "My hydraulic fluid contains an anti-bacterial agent to prevent infectious agents dangerous to humans from lodging in my internal systems. It's harmless to humans, but we saw the mother creature shrink back from me when I was leaking fluid. If you inject a small quantity of it into Linus, it may stun the bioform, causing it to loosen its hold on his nerve fibers."

This is the first time Nils has suggested using his Android Anatomy ability as to augment a medical procedure, and his explanation is both vivid and novel. Norah, the Narrator, gives him the go-ahead to attempt the augment.

The next time he tries it, it won't be fresh any more. Nils will have to wait for a session or two, or find an additional twist on it, to wring an augment out of the concept.

Does it illuminate character? Does your action reveal or confirm something about your character, or your relations with the augment's intended recipient? If it does, without being repetitive, your augment works.

Stan and Adrian play a father and son team of gladiators, Brunius and Marcellus. Marcellus, who rashly spoke out against the Emperor, is about to go into the arena to face nearly certain death at the

hands of three opponents. "I use my Love For My Son ability as I deliver a final inspirational speech to Marcellus," says Stan. "What matters is not whether he survives, but how he brings glory to the house. Of course, secretly I'm hoping that the fearlessness I aim to instill grants him the necessary savagery to survive."

Does it create suspense? If your augment attempt puts you at genuine risk—physical or otherwise—it will invest the group more heavily in your success, and thus deserves a chance to work.

Bravo Team is pinned down in an alleyway by sniper fire coming from the bell tower of a derelict church. Rolland (played by Doyle) is going to expose himself to fire long enough to fire his missile launcher at the tower. "I'm going to create a diversion," suggests Rex, who plays Bagger. "I'll make a run for it to the next alleyway, drawing his fire, using my Duck and Weave ability. That should give Rolland a bonus on his attempt to hit the tower without getting shot in turn." Because Rex is risking injury to his character, his augment attempt generates additional suspense—and warrants approval by the Narrator.

Does it elicit an excited or emotional response? If the rest of the group reacts to your description with obvious enjoyment—laughing, sincerely applauding, sitting forward in their seats, riffing on what you've just suggested, you have objectively proven it entertaining. This criterion trumps all others.

Burly super-powered hero Stonehenge has a catch phrase he utters every time he enters a truly important combat: "What time is it? It's Punch You O'clock!" By all rights, Stonehenge's player, Andrew, ought to have exhausted all augment possibilities from this battle cry months ago. Yet, whenever he bellows it out, he does so with such relish and enthusiasm that the group can't help smiling and laughing. Before his character wades into a rooftop donnybrook to take on the sinister Cubeface, Andrew delivers the line yet again— and once more scores an augment to his own Big Punching Guy ability.

At first glance, it may seem that this rule puts the Narrator in the uncomfortable position of critiquing player performance. In practice, players can be counted on to step up to the creative challenge, and will, after a few tries, learn to propose entertaining augments.

Further, Narrators should work collaboratively with players, using the "yes, but" principle (p. XX) to suggest ways that might make a mundane or repetitive suggestion into an entertaining action.

If the Narrator accepts the augment, you engage in a simple contest to see if it works. The magnitude of the bonus granted depends on the victory level. Any augment roll carries with the small chance that you'll hamper the recipient, levying a penalty against him.

Augment Results

Success Level	**Bonus**
Complete Victory	+ш
Major Victory	+9
Minor Victory	+6
Marginal Victory	+3
Marginal Defeat	+0
Minor Defeat	+0
Major Defeat	+0
Complete Defeat	–3

Nils rolls to see if Xera's attempt to augment Dr. Abel's surgery attempt works. Xera's Android Anatomy ability is 18. Norah sets the resistance at 14. Nils rolls a 1 to her 3. Critical vs. success results in a minor victory. Xera's infusion of android serum does indeed send the parasite into a quiescent state, granting a +6 bonus to Dr. Abel's Surgery roll.

You get one chance to receive an augment on any given contest. If the augmenting character succeeds, you get that augment bonus, and no other. If he fails, you gain no bonus, or even a penalty—

and can gain no other bonus from any other augment for the contest in question. (This does not include proposed augments which the Narrator considers insufficiently entertaining to have an effect.)

Augments can, however, combine with other bonuses, including those from lingering benefits.

Although some groups will find endless chains of contests exciting, the vast majority of Narrators will want to rule that it is impossible to augment an augment roll.

Augments last for the duration of a single contest, whether simple or long. The story's internal logic will dictate whether a given augment has to be used right away (and is useless if the recipient is somehow delayed or interrupted), or whether the recipient can deploy it at will.

- *In the Bravo Team example, above, Rolland must take split-second advantage of the diversion Bagger creates for him. If something delays his shot, the moment will have passed, and he won't get the augment.*
- *In the Marcellus and Brunius example, Marcellus can probably save the augment and use it against his dangerous foes, even if he first has to face an incompetent opponent the arena masters have thrown up against him to add a little extra blood to the proceedings.*

In some cases, Narrators may rule that an augment intended for one situation can be used for another.

After Stonehenge makes his battle cry, a new opponent suddenly appears in the fight—Nebulon, a villain the big guy loathes at least as much as he does Cubeface. The Narrator rules that his catch phrase augment is just as applicable to one marquee baddie as another.

Incremental Augments

Incremental augments are accumulated automatically, without the need for a roll or an entertaining moment, and may be combined without limit.

You state what ability you are going to use, and then automatically gain a bonus to your target number. You can only gain an **automatic augment** from an ability or keyword written on your character sheet (i.e., you cannot gain an augmentation from an ability with the default rating of 6). The value of the automatic augment is equal to the target number of the augmenting ability divided by 10 (round up fractions of 0.5 or more). Thus, *Hate Robots 18* could give an automatic augment of +2 to *Sword and Shield Fighting* when facing robots, and a magical *Jumping 14* gives a +1 to *Leap*.

Some abilities are inherent characteristics, such as *Strong*, *Clever*, or *Large*. It usually takes no time to augment with them, so even augmenting with multiple abilities does not take an unrelated action in an extended contest. Thus, during each round of combat a giant automatically gets +6 each for its *Large 18*W2 and *Strong 18*W2, and another +3 for its *Tough 10*W. Not all abilities are inherent, and augmenting with an active ability takes time. The narrator decides if an automatic augment takes an unrelated action. Even an automatic augment from a magical ability does not *automatically* take an unrelated action.

Plot Augments

A plot augment is a bonus earned by overcoming a particular plot obstacle created by the Narrator. The magnitude of the plot augment is +3, +6, +9, or +Ш. The more challenging the plot obstacle, the higher the augment.

Unlike dramatic augments, plot augments probably require the PCs to succeed at a number of simple contests. They may fail a few, but still triumph in the end to overcome the obstacle. Some plot augments might be available simply through clever and interesting roleplaying, without a die roll in sight.

Narrators introduce plot augments so that it is obvious that overcoming one obstacle will grant an advantage in a later one.

The entire group is soundly and humiliatingly defeated by the wrathful warrior Achilles. Then they hear that the oracle Dodona knows his secret weakness. To learn the secret, they must journey through the treacherous Serpent Vale, and then pass a series of tests to prove their fealty to the earth goddess.

The PCs spend an entire session overcoming the obstacles involved in both the journey and the tests of Dodona. They suffer setbacks along the way, undergoing a pass/fail cycle. They ultimately succeed, and learn that Achilles can be defeated by stabbing his heel. This knowledge gives all combatants against him a +1 bonus to their fighting abilities.

Player prompting may also suggest possible plot augment scenes to the Narrator.

The group plans for the presentation before the Galactic Parliament. They know that their patron's rival, Orgoj Orgosian, will try to line up allies against them. "He's got to have a secret in his past," says Reinier, one of the players, "that we can use to tarnish his reputation, and give us an advantage when we try to sway the Senators back to our cause."

The Narrator hadn't considered this until now, but it sounds like an idea ripe with entertaining possibilities. They go off digging into Orgosian's background, and she decides give them a chance to get a file on him, which will give them a +6 bonus in negotiations where the Senator's reputation is a relevant factor. Naturally, to get the document, they'll have to overcome suitably interesting and challenging obstacles.

Depending on the story, a plot augment can modify the abilities of several characters. They typically apply only to a single situation, going away when that situation is resolved.

The first time the PCs fight Achilles, they get the modifier that comes with knowing his weak spot. After that, he figures out what they're up to, learns about his vulnerability, and makes sure the back of his foot is carefully armored from that moment on. If the PCs still want to take him out, they'll have to find some new advantage over him.

Plot augments combine with other modifiers, including other augments. Multiple plot augments can be applied to a single contest.

Armor and Weapons

Roleplaying games, especially the fantasy games that gave birth to the form, have traditionally fetishized armor and weaponry. You could even argue that many rules systems built their mathematical scales in order to recognize the slight differences in efficacy between various armor types, the many different sorts of swords, and so on.

HeroQuest models arms and armor like it does everything else: any piece of gear, if sufficiently important to even mention, is treated as an ability you use to solve problems. The degree to which you can overcome an obstacle with your quilted leather armor or your glaive-guisarme depends not on any qualities inherent to the objects themselves, but to the points you've allocated to the ability.

Thus, a Heavily Armored Knight ability of 18 makes a character as effective at combat as would Acrobatic Swashbuckler at the same rating. This corresponds to the way action scenes are depicted in the movies. Every effective combatant has a defining gimmick, which may or may not be connected to their gear. Characters are assumed to be equipped with the best weapons and armor for their combat style, as part of their ability.

The difference between them lies in the types of actions you can describe, and what you can accomplish in unrelated actions and unusual contests. If you get caught in a crushing trap, you could contest with your Heavily Armored Knight ability to avoid harm, where the Acrobatic Swashbuckler, once in the trap, will have to rely on some other, possibly lower-rated, ability to get out of trouble. Conversely, Acrobatic Swashbuckler could help the second character swing on a chandelier, a task to which Heavily Armored Knight is (pardon the pun) unsuited.

You can also create separate abilities around your gear: you could have a Knightly Combat ability of 18, and a Gleaming Armor of 16. You could then use Gleaming Armor to try to augment Knightly Combat before wading into battle.

The impulse to finely detail differences between weapon and armor types is so ingrained in some players that they'll want you to make an exception to the game's narrative approach, and bolt a level of simulation onto it just to cover this one area. Although it might seem evocative of a few genres, in practice it results in a bunch of counting of fiddly modifiers that produces more useless bookkeeping than it does effective simulation.
[[[END SIDEBAR]]]

Hero Points

Hero points are a resource players must carefully allocate. They allow you to heighten your victories and dull your defeats. They are the price you pay to improve your abilities over time. They are also used in a few unusual adjudications—resolving tied results between PCs, for example (see p. XX.)

Gaining Hero Points

You get 3 hero points when you create your character.

At the end of every session, you get another 3 hero points. Optionally, at the end of the session, the Narrator polls the players to suggest which of them delivered the most entertaining play. If a clear winner emerges by quick consensus, this player gets an additional hero point.

At the climactic conclusion of a multi-session story arc, the Narrator awards an additional 3 hero points per player, and may also poll the players to select an MVP for the entire storyline.

Improving Your Character

You may improve any ability by 1 point per session, at a cost of 1 hero point.

You can't increase every ability within a keyword just by spending 1 point; you have to increase each separate ability on its own.

You can add a new ability by spending 1 point; it begins with a rating of 13. If the ability seems out of character for your PC, your Narrator will probably require you to come up with a believable explanation before approving it. The easiest way to get an apparently out-of-character new ability approved is to do something in the game to justify it.

> *You get a little tired of playing the big dumb guy and decide to give him a surprising familiarity with existential philosophy. Knowing that your Narrator will probably question this choice, you decide to set this up in play. When the group searches a professor's apartment, you describe yourself as irresistibly drawn to a copy of* Being and Nothingness *on his bedstead, pocketing it to read on the way to the next obstacle. When you then try to buy a new Existentialism ability, you've already established this in-character, and your Narrator is in no position to object.*

Conversely, events that occur in play often serve as inspiration for organic-seeming new abilities. If you befriend an interesting supporting character, you can acquire a Contact or Patron ability that ensures an ongoing relationship with him. (In some instances, your Narrator may ask that you not establish relationships with supporting characters she has other plans for.) Likewise, you can make sure that you can permanently hold onto a new piece of equipment by buying it as a new ability. This process is called **cementing an experience**.

> *You play Carter Flanison, planetary explorer. As you tread the soupy surface of Epsilon-9, the Narrator describes a fuzzy hopping insect creature following you like a lonely house pet. As far as she's concerned, this is a throwaway image meant to add a little flavor to the scene. You're tickled by the idea, though, and describe yourself as picking one up and taking it back to your access pod. At the end of the session you buy the ability Pet: Hopper 13. What problems the furry little guy will help you solve remain to be seen, but you're sure you'll think of something.*

If your setting includes extraordinary abilities not found in the real world, these may be, in keeping with the fictional reality of the world background, restricted in either availability or rate of improvement.

> *In Joanne's futuristic world of DNA manipulation, players may choose up to three specific extraordinary abilities from a list she supplies. Because these abilities are installed in the womb, players*

can't add them during play—what they start out with is what they get. Joanne also specifies that these cost 3 hero points to raise 1 ability point.

To raise an ability by 2 points at once costs 3 times the cost of raising it by 1 point. 3 points at once costs 6 times as much. To raise it by 4 points at once, which is the maximum per-session increase, costs 10 times what it would to raise it by 1.

Catch-Ups

Players have a strong incentive to increase their biggest and most useful ability at the end of every session. Over time, this tends to leave their more colorful, but less versatile, abilities in the dust, languishing on the character sheet with their starting values. This tendency reinforces itself; as the gap between highest and lowest abilities increases, they're even less likely to be used.

A package deal, called a catch-up, softens this tendency. Whenever you acquire a new mastery, your five lowest-rated abilities also increase by 3 points apiece. When two or more abilities tie for position among your lowest-rated abilities, you may choose between them. Flaws are not counted as abilities for this purpose.

Your character, cynical hospital administrator Dr. Brutus Carcasonne, has a rating of 20 in Bluster. You spend 1 point to increase it to 1W. This allows you a catch-up, increasing your 5 lowest-rated abilities by 3 points apiece. Your lowest ratings are: Seduction 13, Heal Thyself 13, Whining 14, Spot Similarities 15, Generosity 15, and Adaptable 15. The first three are unequivocally your lowest, but that leaves three abilities tied at 15. You have only two slots left, and so choose to increase Adaptable and Generosity, but not Spot Similiarities.

Seduction and Heal Thyself go from 13 to 16. Whining increases to 17. Generosity and Adaptable go up to 18. That leaves Spot Similarities, still at 15, as your lowest-rated ability. The next time you get a catch-up, it will increase by 3.

Directed Improvements

On occasion a Narrator may increase one of your abilities, by 1 to 3 points, or give you a new ability, rated at 13. These are called directed improvements.

Ability increases are usually rewards for overcoming particularly important or dramatic obstacles. They happen immediately, rather than at session's end. Directed increases are not counted against you when determining the cost of an ability increase for that session.

Bodo, a humble rat-catcher in a grim Renaissance fantasy world, uses his low-rated Eloquence ability to sway the cruel Viscount Heingrim from executing his friends. His player, Tadaaki, roleplays the scene splendidly, and tops it off by rolling a critical against the Narrator's failure. The Narrator, Mika, describes the Viscount as moved to tears. The moment is so memorable that she immediately increases Bodo's Eloquence by 3 points, from 13 to 16.

At the end of the session, Tadaaki wants to raise Eloquence by another point. The directed improvement is ignored when determining the cost of the improvement, so it takes only 1 hero point to take the ability from 16 to 17.

New abilities are provided as logical outgrowths of the plot, and need not reflect success at a particular contest.

Cybersoldier Jonathan "Psycho" Vallone inhales a dose of an alien drug and goes on a hallucinatory trip which grants him a sudden understanding of an arcane local philosophy, Rhomboidalism. To allow him to draw on this new insight, the Narrator gives him the ability Romboidalism 13.

[[[BEGIN SIDEBAR]]]

Why Advance Characters At All?

Few of the adventure genres we draw inspiration from actually feature significant character improvement through the course of a series. Mysteries, pulps, military adventures, westerns, and space operas tend to feature characters who are highly competent from the outset. Occasionally a secondary character, most often a male ingénue, starts out as a greenhorn and proves himself in the course of the story. (Just as often, a once-competent secondary character redeems himself and returns to his legendary past level of competence.) Other, grimmer genres, like horror, satirical SF, and arguably post-apocalyptic survivalism, keep their protagonists relatively weak throughout.

Fantasy is a prominent exception: it is not uncommon to follow a character from humble beginnings to epic achievement.

Rate of improvement is basically, then, a genre element. Narrators who want a rapid growth curve should decrease the costs of ability improvement. Those who want slower growth should increase them.

That said, roleplayers really like increasing their PC's abilities on a regular basis. Regular ability boosts helps to keep them invested in their characters, and thinking of their futures. This is one area where *HeroQuest* bows more to the demands of the roleplaying form than to precedents set by the source material.

[[[END SIDEBAR]]]

Recovery and Healing

States of adversity of Injured or less lapse on their own with the passage of time. However, you'll often want to remove them ahead of schedule, with the use of abilities.

Healing Abilities

The ability used to bring about recovery from a state of adversity must relate to the type of harm sustained by the victim.

Physical injuries can be healed by medical abilities. These include the ordinary healing practices available to the culture in question, and may include extraordinary healing appropriate to the setting: magic in a fantasy world, nanotech in a science fiction series, mutant powers in a world of caped crusaders, and so on. In many settings, mundane healing can at best remove a single level of adversity, whereas extraordinary powers can return a dying patient to full health in the wink of an eye.

Mental traumas, including those of confidence and morale, may be removed with mundane psychology, or through extraordinary abilities. They might also be removed through a dramatic confrontation between the victim and the source of the psychic injury.

Social injuries must be healed through social abilities. They probably require public expiation of some sort, often including a negotiation with the offended parties and the payment of reparations, either tangible or symbolic.

Damage to items and equipment requires some sort of repair ability. Extraordinary items may require genre-specific expertise: a broken magic ring may require a ritual to reforge.

Healing attempts will almost always unfold as simple contests. An exception might be a medical drama, in which surgeries would comprise the suspenseful set-piece sequences of the game.

Resistances

Default resistances to remove states of adversity are as follows:

Healing Resistances

State Of Adversity	Resistance
Hurt	14
Impaired	17
Injured	5Ш
Dying	20Ш

Healing attempts, especially of dying characters, provide splendid opportunities for plot augments (p. XX.)

Wu Long has been poisoned by the dreaded Black Darts, and is dying. Chan Dun knows his attempt to harmonize Wu Long's chi flow is likely to fail—unless the Giang Hu warriors can reach the floating pavilion on the Lake of Ghosts, and retrieve a vial of Red Powder from the shadow monks there.

High Adversity

For healing to remain meaningfully difficult in series where characters with multiple masteries are the norm, Narrators can instead base healing resistance on the opponent's target number in the contest that brought about the state of adversity.

High Adversity Resistances

State Of Adversity	Resistance
Hurt	¼ of opponent's target number
Impaired	½ of opponent's target number
Injured	¾ of opponent's target number
Dying	opponent's target number

Do not use this formula where it would result in a lower than default healing resistance.

[[[BEGIN SIDEBAR]]]

Long Contests and Healing Resistances

Narrators anxious to recognize the fine gradations of long contest results can use the following rules.

In an extended contest, the final negative AP result becomes the resistance.

In a scored contest (rising action), the resistance is 14, or three times the difference between results, whichever is greater.

In a scored contest (climactic scene), the resistance is 14, or three times the total resolution points scored against the character, whichever is greater.

[[[END SIDEBAR]]]

Consequences Of Healing

A successful healing attempt removes one level of adversity for each level of victory. A major defeat increases the subject's level of adversity by 1; a complete defeat adds an additional 2 levels of adversity.

[[[BEGIN SIDEBAR]]]

Healing During Long Contests

Characters with healing abilities may use them during long contests. They are not reducing states of adversity but are rendering other assistance.

In an extended contest, this is represented by AP lending.

In a scored contest, healing is represented as an assist.

[[[END SIDEBAR]]]

Example Of Healing: The Spear Wound

After a pitched battle with the Picts, General Romanus lies on his death bed, having been impaled by a spear. His officers admit into his presence a wild woman of the woods, Ioetis, who proposes to heal him with her ritual magic.

Ioetis receives an blessing from the legion's priest in the name of the gods of Rome, adding 6 to her magical healing ability of 8Ш, for a final target number of 14Ш.

Romanus is dying, so the resistance is 20Ш. Richard (Ioetis' player) rolls a 13; the Narrator, Cathy, rolls a 19. This is a success vs. success result, with Richard the low roller. He scores a marginal victory.

His one level of success reduces Romanus' state of adversity by one step, from dying to injured.

Example Of Healing: The Apology Tour

Teenage singing sensation Deirdre Jump flips out during a late night club appearance, drunkenly screaming racial epithets at her audience. After camera-phone footage winds up all over the Internet, public relations wiz Carmen Hemphill (played by Fiona) is called in to repair the damage. She coaches Deirdre on the right things to say and sends her on an apology tour to various media outlets. Although it's Deirdre doing the talking, she's a supporting character, so the roll will be made by the player using her character's abilities.

Carmen's Public Relations ability is 8. Deirdre's career is Injured, so the resistance is 5. Fiona rolls a 1; the Narrator, an 11. With masteries canceling out, this is a critical vs. failure result. A major victory is three levels of success, so Deirdre loses all three of the levels of adversity she's currently faced with.

Thanks to Carmen, her sincere contrition—and admission that she's checked into rehab—has completely erased all damage to her career from the deplorable incident.

Relationships

HeroQuest allows you to play out social conflicts with as much suspense and drama as other games devote to fighting. As such, your success in a typical *HeroQuest* will depend as much, if not more, on your social abilities as on your sword arm or trusty laser weapon.

Social abilities can be inherent to your character, like Charming, Intimidating, or Famous. Just as effective are your relationships—connections to supporting characters, who you can draw on to overcome plot obstacles.

Relationships With Supporting Characters

Many relationships connect you to supporting characters controlled by the Narrator.

When you try to use one of these relationships to solve a problem, you contest with your relationship ability. You can't simply go to the supporting character you have a relationship with, stick them with the problem, and expect to see it solved.

If you succeed, the supporting character helps you solve the problem. If you fail, they don't. As with any ability, you must still specify how the contact goes about overcoming the obstacle. Calls on relationships are almost always simple contests.

In Cold War Berlin, MI-6 operative Alec Gwynne (played by Jeff) wants to engineer the recall of French military attaché Henri Jouvet, who is probably a double agent. Gwynne has the ability Contact: Reporter Desmond Audley 17. "I tell Desmond about the Granholm incident," says Jeff, "and suggest that he talk to Jouvet's superior at the embassy about it. That ought to get him yanked back to Paris, tout suite." The Narrator, Ellen, sets an overall Resistance of 18, which represents the sum total of a number of factors, from Audley's possible disinterest in the case to the French embassy's commitment to Jouvet. Ellen calls for a simple contest.

Jeff rolls a 6 against Ellen's 17. Audley goes off to research his story. Soon Gwynne hears that Jouvet has been recalled to France.

In especially crucial situations, it may seem dramatically inappropriate for a PC to solve a problem indirectly, by working through others. Player characters should be the driving force in any narrative. They should have to expose themselves to risk to overcome pivotal obstacles. Where characters seem to be taking the easy way out, Narrators can simply provide plot justification for a very high resistance.

Later, Gwynne wants Audley to sneak into a hotel to get a document for him. This is a big risk he should be taking himself, so Ellen imposes a Resistance of 18 [illegible]2. When Alec fails, she explains via dialogue, in Audsley's voice: "Are you daft, man? I'm an ink-stained wretch, not a spook!"

Alternately, the Narrator can expose the supporting character to serious risk. If the character dies or otherwise suffers a change of status that renders him useless to the PC, the player permanently loses the relationship ability. Permanent loss of an ability is a steep price to pay. It can also occasion scenes of dramatic angst, in which PCs are confronted with the terrible consequences of risking others' lives to achieve their ends.

Before putting relationship characters at serious risk, Narrators should make sure the players understand the magnitude of the possible consequences. Players have a right to be annoyed if they think they're dispatching a PC on a minor errand, when in fact he's being sent into a meat grinder.

When relationship characters undertake significant risk, they may suffer states of adversity commensurate with the level of the character's defeat in the contest of the relationship ability. Or it may simply be the PC's relationship with them that is damaged or destroyed.

Gwynne calls on Audsley to deliver an envelope to an East Berlin dead drop, even though he knows it's under surveillance by the KGB. He is well aware of the danger, but has no other way of informing a deep cover agent that his identity has been blown. Gwynne rolls his Contact: Desmond

Audsley ability against a high resistance, and suffers a major defeat. The Narrator interprets this to mean that Audsley is captured by a KGB goon squad. She can either decide that Audsley has been literally Injured, or that his willingness to ever again do favors for Gwynne is metaphorically Injured.

Supporting characters have their own agendas within the game world and mostly act independently of your PC. When they do so, the Narrator rolls on their behalf, using abilities she has assigned to them.

Even though Audsley is on friendly terms with Gwynne, he's also working on a story which may expose MI6 assets in East Germany. Gwynne may well wind up contesting against him, treating him as a minor antagonist, in an upcoming session.

Like any ability, the sorts of problems a relationship can solve for you depend on how you describe it—in this case, how you describe the supporting character. (The chance of success is, also as always, determined by the rating.) As a form of short-hand, useful relationships with supporting characters fall into three categories: allies, patrons, and contacts.

In order to make use of a relationship, you must be in a position to communicate with the supporting character. No amount of pull will help you when you can't get ahold of your friends in high places.

Allies

An **ally** is a character of roughly the same level of accomplishment as you, often in the same or a similar line of work. You share a commitment to a broader goal. The ally likes or admires you but expects the relationship to function as a two-way street. For every favor you ask of him, he'll ask one of you. These reciprocal favors will be roughly equivalent in terms of risk, time commitment, difficulty, and inconvenience. An ally's ability ratings are about as high as yours.

- *You're playing an entrepreneurial star pilot interested in making an honest buck with your ship. A suitable ally might be another pilot, or a mechanic, navigator, or weapons officer. The ally shares your basic goals, and so is a fellow self-employed adventurer. Sometimes you'll help each other out; sometimes you'll be friendly competitors.*
- *You're a spear-wielding warrior fighting to defend your community of bronze-age cattle herders. A suitable ally might be another stout-armed warrior of your own community, or an opposite number from a friendly neighboring clan. You could also pick another sort of effective defender from either community, like a wizard, a healer, or explorer.*
- *The PCs belong to a cell of revolutionaries plotting the overthrow of the android government. Your ally is probably a member of parallel cell.*

If you think of your PC as a comic book character, an ally is a character who also has his own comic book, and is making a guest appearance in yours.

Patrons

A **patron** is an employer, mentor, commander or other person of senior rank. Patrons enjoy greater access to resources than you do, either through personal ownership (as in the millionaire benefactor) or authority (the general of an army.) They may lend you advice or provide you with resources but are too busy and important to personally perform tasks for you. They may hire you to do jobs, or issue orders within a command structure to whom you both belong. A patron may feel considerable affection toward you, or perceive you merely as a useful underling. Even if he sees you as a surrogate child (or an actual one, for that matter) and possible successor, he is likelier to help you after you've completed an assignment for him than if you've been shirking your obligations. In other words, when you roll your Patron relationship, the Narrator adjusts the resistance depending on what you've done for him lately.

A patron will have ability ratings two or more masteries higher than yours in political, social, and resource-related abilities. You probably outshine him in other areas, although he may once have been far better than you are now at piloting a ship, swinging a sword, or infiltrating a complex.

- *The patron of an independent star pilot would probably be a regular client.*
- *The clan warrior's patron is a clan elder, perhaps the chief.*
- *The revolutionary's patron is the charismatic leader of the entire movement, or perhaps a higher-ranking rebel who recruited him into the struggle.*

[[[BEGIN SIDEBAR]]]

Changing Ability Ratings Over Time

Supporting characters with whom you have relationships improve over time. Values for their ratings are comparative to yours. As you improve, so will they. Narrators needn't track the improvement over time, but simply update their ratings whenever they reappear in the storyline.

When Audsley first appears, his rating in his main ability, Reporter, is set to be the same as Gwynne's top ability, MI6 Agent, at 5. Several sessions go by before Gwynne again feels the need to call on him. By this time, his MI6 Agent ability has increased to 8. Audsley's Reporter ability has done the same.

Narrators may, for plot purposes, decide that supporting characters suffer states of adversity unrelated to the PCs' actions—provided the PCs can, by overcoming obstacles, reverse them. Perhaps a story revolves around a patron's fall from grace, and the group's efforts to restore him to his previous (and useful) place of high status.

[[[END SIDEBAR]]]

Contacts

A contact is a specialist in a profession, hobby, or area of expertise. Although you must be able, if prompted, to explain how you cultivated these contacts, they needn't necessarily relate to your keyword or other defining abilities. Contacts provide information and perform minor favors, but will expect information or small favors from you in return. They may share your goals but are more likely to view them neutrally. The commitment a contact feels toward you is at best that of a friendly acquaintance. Perhaps he regards you as a valued customer or fellow enthusiast. Without powerful incentives, contacts won't stick their necks out for you.

A contact's ratings in his main areas of expertise are on a par with your best rating.

You can describe a contact as being a particular individual, or as a group of similar individuals. If you draw on a group, you can expect to conduct normal business with them but not to get them to go the extra mile for you. Group contacts are most useful to get you in touch with classes of people who are otherwise difficult to contact. Depending on the setting, examples might include criminals, revolutionaries, demonic entities, wandering shamans, or sentient robots.

- *A starship pilot's contacts might include various clients or vendors, but could just as easily include artists, scientists, cantina scum, and assorted professionals.*
- *A clan warrior's contacts might include farmers, hermits, wandering traders, itinerant holy men, and benevolent mythological creatures of the surrounding wilderness.*
- *The revolutionary might know smugglers, gun runners, and hackers. From his daily life, he could know anyone from homemakers to movie stars.*

[[[BEGIN SIDEBAR]]]

Professional Contacts

Any professional ability can be treated as a source of contacts. If you're a lawyer, it stands to reason that you know many other lawyers, and probably politicians, members of public interest

groups, and businessmen associated with your legal specialty. Mercenaries know other mercenaries, along with an array of arms dealers, brokers, and international shady characters. A priest knows fellow ecclesiasts, various parishioners, and maybe a theologian or two.

However, a profession used as a source of contacts will always be considered a Stretch (p. XX.) To more reliably draw on particular contacts associated with your profession, take an explicit ability, too.

[[[END SIDEBAR]]]

Relationships As Flaws

Certain relationships with supporting characters act as flaws. They impose obligations on you, prompting the Narrator to present you with obstacles you have no choice but to overcome.

Dependents

A dependent is a person, usually a family member or loved one, who requires your aid and protection. Your Narrator will periodically create storylines in which the dependent is endangered. In action-oriented genres, the danger will be literal: your dependent may be kidnapped or menaced on a semi-regular basis. In more cerebral settings, the danger may be financial or moral.

Adult dependents may have abilities rated as highly as yours, but none of them are particularly useful in dangerous situations.

Child dependents have only a handful of abilities, rated at a maximum of 8 to 12, depending on the age.

Rather than taking a dependent as a flaw, you may find it more fruitful to specify the nature of your relationship as an ability, such as Love For Wife or Love For Son. That way, you still guide the Narrator to include the rescue of your loved one as a story motif, while also getting an ability you can use as an augment in appropriate situations.

Adversaries

An adversary is a rival, enemy or other individual who can be relied upon to periodically disrupt your plans. Your adversary's goals are probably the opposite of yours, although he could be a bitter rival within the same community, organization, or movement. His antipathy for you is definitely personal, perhaps rooted in some past clash or slight.

Adversaries needn't be passively waiting for you to do things so they can obstruct you. Narrators will give them plans and schemes you will discover and attempt to disrupt.

By default, your adversary has as many abilities and rating points as you do. Players who like to be hard pressed may request adversaries who outclass them by at least one mastery in their top 2 to 3 abilities.

Because you have defined yourself in part by your relationship to your adversary, expect your Narrator to contrive to keep your adversary alive and kicking, even in circumstances when you could permanently dispose of similar opponents.

When one member of a group chooses an adversary, the other PCs usually wind up dealing with him, too. As such, you should consult with your fellow players before writing him into your series. The group may want to specify a single adversary for the entire party, or group their disparate adversaries together in the service of a single organization or cause.

To treat an adversary as an ability, rather than a flaw, describe your emotional response to him. Examples: Hates Leonard Crisp, Fears the Electronaut, Sworn Vengeance Against Heimdall. That way, you still inspire the Narrator to add the plot elements you desire, but can use your antipathy toward the enemy to augment your target numbers against him.

Followers

A follower is a secondary character who travels with you and contributes on regular basis to your success. There are two types of followers: retainers and sidekicks.

Followers need not be people, or sentient beings: you can write up a spirit guardian, trusty robot, or companion animal as a follower.

Retainers

A retainer is a more or less anonymous servant or helper. You may specify a single retainer, or, where appropriate to your character concept, an entire staff of them.

Like an ability, a retainer ability allows you to overcome relevant obstacles by engaging in a contest.

> *Cigar-chomping newspaper tycoon Wilford Conrad (played by Rory) seeks vengeance against a business rival. "I use my Retainers: Paparazzi ability to stake out the club his wild quasi-celebrity daughter frequents, and get scandalous shots of her." The Narrator, Eva, specifies a simple contest, chooses a Resistance of 10 (the daughter is notorious for this sort of thing), and Rory rolls his ability of 18 against it. He gets a 1 against her 12: a critical vs. failure, or major victory.*
>
> *"Your paparazzo minions do you proud," says Eva, "You have your choice of severe inebriation pictures, or ones showing her in a state of accidental undress."*

Retainers generally regard you with all the affection and loyalty due to an employer or master. If you treat them more poorly than is expected for your culture, the Narrator will increase the Resistance of attempts to make use of their talents.

To model the contribution of combat-oriented retainers, such as bodyguards and spear carriers, to a fight, use them as an augment to your ability. Where appropriate, you and the Narrator describe the effect their presence has in the ongoing fight.

> *Charismatic privateer Finian O'Connor (played Walter) has the ability Retainers: Complement Of Motley Rogues 18. He gets into a bar brawl in Port-au-Prince, and augments his Swashbuckling Action 5Ш with his retainers. Walter scores a +9 bonus with a dramatic augment, by enthusiastically describing the shock and horror with which his rogues react to the insults lavished on him by the bar's inhabitants. Finian enters the extended contest with a target number of 14Ш. The Narrator treats all of the enemy brawlers as a single entity (see p. XX) with a target number of 5Ш.*
>
> *Finian's first roll is a failure. The Narrator describes as follows: "The men of the Stinking Unicorn barrel into your rogues, bearing down on them with broken chair legs. One musclebound bloke delivers a thundering blow to the back of your head."*
>
> *Later, when Finian scores an AP transfer from the bar brawlers, the Narrator also includes his retainers in the description: "With a well-placed groin kick, you send your muscular enemy sinking to his knees. Meanwhile, your men rally as one, forcing their opponents up and over the bar."*

Other sorts of servants can likewise contribute to non-violent conflicts.

During a conflict in which you use retainers in a fight, the Narrator can rule that states of adversity apply to them. Retainers who are routinely Impaired in battle, or Injured even once, are apt to leave your service, even when well treated. You must then overcome one or more plot obstacles to secure replacement retainers before your retainers ability is restored.

Retainers suffering non-violent states of adversity are less likely to depart, though it is still possible.

> *A major defeat in the paparazzo example, above, might have meant that Conrad's photographers were, thanks to clandestine maneuvering by his rival, hired away by a rival agency, who then destroyed their negatives.*

Sidekicks

A sidekick is a secondary character under your control. Most of the time he stays at your side to render assistance, but he can also go off and perform errands or missions on his own.

Give your sidekick a name. Be prepared, when asked, to explain how the sidekick came to be your follower, and why he continues in that role.

Sidekicks start with three abilities, one rated at 17 and the others at 13. Any of these abilities may be a keyword. At least one of them should indicate a personality trait. (A sidekick is often a less experienced version of yourself, with the same main abilities as your PC.)

If the sidekick is nonhuman or a member of an unusual culture, one of its three starting abilities must be its species or culture keyword.

In games where creatures are given fixed game statistics (see p. XX), your Narrator may allow you to start the game with the being's base values. Creatures who start with abilities significantly greater than your own may not be available as sidekicks.

Once you've determined the sidekick's base abilities, divide 15 additional points between three of them, spending no more than 10 on any one ability.

These abilities, like your main character's, can be improved through the expenditure of hero points.

You may use any of your sidekick's abilities as you would your own. Your sidekick can go off and do things without your character.

Sidekicks confer various benefits during long contests, described on p. XX and XX.

Randy creates a sidekick for his character, Lance Arrakian, a PC in a futuristic series. Deciding on a creature instead of a human character, he opts to create a holographic artificial intelligence called a secondary. Looking through the Narrator's list of game statistics for secondaries, he settles on the model called a psychopomp. Its base abilities are:

Psychological Counseling 13, Soothing Countenance 13, Historical Knowledge 13, Harakisian Theology 18, Holographic Entity 13.

Randy can now add 15 points to up to 3 of these abilities. He adds 7 to Harakisian Theology, bringing it up to 5Ш. He adds 8 to Soothing Countenance, increasing it to 1Ш.

He names the secondary Father Jenkins. As a nonhuman, Jenkins lacks personality; Soothing Countenance is as close as it gets.

Replacing Lost Sidekicks

As a consequence of defeats in which they participated, sidekicks can be killed or leave your service permanently. (Sidekicks suffer worse states of adversity than your main character; see p. XX.)

Defeat in physical contests can lead to literal death. Metaphorical deaths from nonviolent contests indicate a break with the main PC. The sidekick may angrily withdraw from service, but is more likely to sorrowfully retire. You may be able to bring a sidekick back from metaphorical death by overcoming story obstacles. These should be difficult, most likely taking the main focus of an entire storyline within the series.

If you lose a sidekick, you may create a new one with as many abilities as the lost supporter. Subtract 3 rating points apiece from the sidekick's top three abilities. Then distribute the modified ratings among the new sidekick's abilities.

Ace dirigible pilot Smoky McCoy (played by Herve) loses his sidekick, Ralphie Jones. At the time of his unfortunate plunge into the Swiss Alps, Ralphie's abilities and ratings were as follows:

Lucky 7Ш, Scrappy Brawler 2Ш, Mechanic 13, Mysterious Amulet 14.

When the top 3 abilities are reduced by 3 apiece, these ratings become:

Lucky 4Ш, Scrappy Brawler 19, Mechanic 13, Mysterious Amulet 11.

Herve can now create a new sidekick with four abilities, rated at 4Ш, 19, 13, and 11.

If your old sidekick was a creature and your new one is a standard character, the new character gets only a number of starting abilities equal to 3, plus the number of new abilities you added to the creature sidekick during play.

If your new sidekick is a creature, it has its base abilities, plus an additional one for each new ability you added to your previous sidekick during play. If the new sidekick has more abilities than the old, any abilities left over after you've allocated the modified ability ratings are rated at 13.

PCs with retainers may find it convenient to promote them to sidekick status, giving them names and personalities, with a sudden boost in abilities and ratings to match.

[[[BEGIN SIDEBAR]]]

Availability Of Followers

Sidekicks are inappropriate for many genres, and may be disallowed by your Narrator. Check to see if they are permitted before building them into your character. By introducing a clever concept and agreeing to certain parameters, you may be able to get a follower approved for a setting which does not usually allow them.

Sidekicks are usually suited to fantasy, pulp adventure, and the super-powered hero genre.

They are not generally suited for games in which the protagonists belong to command structures, like police procedurals, or military games. If you are among the officers of a starship, the PCs probably comprise the top of the command chain (or an elite unit farther down the organizational chart) and treat the rest of the crew as either retainers, or a community.

Although it is standard in adventure genres for the antagonists to command squads of faceless henchmen, it is extremely unusual for the good guys to have retainers. This may be appropriate in certain fantasy or historical settings—Glorantha, for one. In these unusual cases, the Narrator may allow you to allow retainers to confer the same benefits in long contests as sidekicks do. For this purpose, each retainer gets a single ability rated at 17, which can't be improved. You may still improve your retainer rating, which determines your chances of solving problems with your retainer in other circumstances.

[[[END SIDEBAR]]]

Communities

Heroes in many adventure genres are rootless wanderers whose competence in the violent arts keep them at a remove from the ordinary people they fight to protect.

Your character, however, may be part of one or more communities—large groups of people to whom you owe an obligation of protection, formal or otherwise, and in return receive moral and material support.

Possible communities include: your family, your government, companies or corporations, the place where you live, social movements, professional associations, guilds or unions, religious sects, hobbyist groups, and organizations devoted to common philosophies or ideologies.

Your Narrator will often supply you with one or more community as part of the premise of her series. In this case, you receive for free, as an additional ability, your relationship to that community.

Machiko creates a series in which the PCs are colonists on an isolated planet, who all live in New Paradise, a hardscrabble settlement of about five hundred people. All characters get the ability Community: New Paradise for free.

Whether or not community ties are integral to a series, you can also connect yourself to additional communities. If setting of the series is unfamiliar to you, collaborate with your Narrator to find one that fits your concept.

Hayato, a player in Machiko's game, wants his PC to have ties to a second community. Machiko suggests making him a member of New Paradise's tightly knit community of Hasidic Jews. Hayato

finds this an intriguing concept, which inspires him to completely change his character's name and backstory.

Like any ability, you use a community relationship to overcome plot obstacles. Communities are useful abilities because the possible aid they can grant you, either through contests or augments, is very broad. They can provide you with goods, information, advice, and contacts. Communities can boost your morale, offer healing, and provide safe haven while you recuperate. Your ability reflects not the size, power, or influence of your community, but the degree to which you can leverage it to solve problems. Thus it is possible to have a very high rating measuring your relationship to a small community, or a beginning-level rating in your relationship to a large and mighty one.

Hayato's character, Menachem Hager, has the abilities Community: New Paradise at 17, and Hasidic Community at 20. Although the second group is only a sub-sector of the settlement's overall population, Menachem's connections to it are stronger, and he can rely on them for greater support than he can the town as a whole.

As with professional contacts, you may be able to argue that connection to a community is implicit in another ability.

If you have the ability Cop, you undoubtedly enjoy the community support of your fellow local police officers. However, drawing on this may be considered a stretch, whereas if you also take Thin Blue Line as its own ability, you know you'll be able to use it without penalties.

Like relationships to individuals, your bond to a community is a two-way obligation. You must aid its people and further its aims. Communities with strict hierarchies expect you to obey their recognized leaders. Even informal groups usually have de facto authorities, who you flout at your peril. Communities tolerate various levels of hypocrisy; you may be expected to live strictly by their ideals, or only pay moderately convincing lip service to them. Depending on the economic customs prevalent in your setting, you may be required to pay a portion of your earnings to your community. Communal societies with no notion of personal property may add all of your earnings into the group kitty. Other communities, like corporations and bureaucracies, may pay you to belong to them.

If you refuse to render aid when needed, break with community traditions, or otherwise set yourself apart from your people, you suffer a state of adversity in regard to it. This can happen not only as a consequence of defeat, but through roleplaying choices alone.

One of Menachem's fellow police officers is suspected in the beating death of a young Hasidic man. His religious community approaches him to demand that he call for the police officer's arrest. Menachem demurs; he doesn't want any community, even his own, to dictate who gets charged with a crime in New Paradise. The Narrator rules that his Hasidic Community ability is Impaired for the duration of the crisis.

As the above example attests, many dramatic stories can arise from a conflict between competing community obligations.

Possessions and Equipment

HeroQuest treats your possessions and equipment like it does everything else: as abilities you can use to solve problems, or to augment other abilities, which you then use to solve problems.

By listing a piece of equipment as integral to your character, you imply that you know how to use it. It's never necessary to split the item and the ability to use it into two separate abilities.

If you take the ability Flashy Sports Car, you don't also have to give yourself a Drive ability in order to operate it. However, if you do take a separate ability, like Race Car Driver, you can use that to augment Flashy Sports Car, or vice versa.

Some items of gear are just objects. Others may carry social associations rendering them useful in solving other problems.

Flashy Sports Car not only gets you places, but can be used to impress a certain subset of people. It may also imply a range of contacts, like fellow car enthusiasts.

Choose possessions not only for their utility, but to illuminate your character's personality.

There are many different types of flashy sports car. Is your character best defined by cherry-red Ferrari fresh off the lot, a restored 1961 Aston Martin, or a classic 70s muscle car?

Narrators may need to describe, verbally or in writing, pieces of equipment which are common in the setting but unfamiliar in our modern world, to give you an indication of what they can do. This is especially necessary for fantastic or imaginary gear; see p. XX.

Armor and Weapons

Roleplaying games, especially the fantasy games that gave birth to the form, have traditionally fetishized armor and weaponry. You could even argue that many rules systems built their mathematical scales in order to recognize the slight differences in efficacy between various armor types, the many different sorts of swords, and so on.

HeroQuest models arms and armor like it does everything else: any piece of gear, if sufficiently important to even mention, is treated as an ability you use to solve problems. The degree to which you can overcome an obstacle with your quilted leather armor or your glaive-guisarme depends not on any qualities inherent to the objects themselves, but to the points you've allocated to the ability.

Thus, a Heavily Armored Knight ability of 18 makes a character as effective in combat as would Acrobatic Swashbuckler at the same rating. This corresponds to the way action scenes are generally depicted in fiction and movies. Every effective combatant has a defining gimmick, which may or may not be connected to their gear. Characters are assumed to be equipped with the best weapons and armor for their combat style, as part of their ability.

The difference between them lies in the types of actions you can describe, and what you can accomplish in unrelated actions and unusual contests. If you get caught in a crushing trap, you could contest with your Heavily Armored Knight ability to avoid harm, where the Acrobatic Swashbuckler, once in the trap, will have to rely on some other, possibly lower-rated, ability to get out of trouble. Conversely, Acrobatic Swashbuckler could help the second character swing on a chandelier, a task to which Heavily Armored Knight is (pardon the pun) unsuited.

You can also create separate abilities around your gear: you could have a Knightly Combat ability of 18, and a Gleaming Armor of 16. You could then use Gleaming Armor to try to augment Knightly Combat before wading into battle.

The impulse to finely detail differences between weapon and armor types is so ingrained in some players that they'll want you to make an exception to the game's narrative approach, and bolt a level of simulation onto it just to cover this one area. Although it might seem evocative of a few genres, in practice it results in a bunch of fiddly modifiers exerting minimal statistical impact on conflict results, producing more bookkeeping than effective simulation.

Wealth

In most settings, wealth is treated as just another ability you use to overcome obstacles. Your ability is not an objective measure of the size of your fortune, but instead indicates how well you solve problems with money and resources. As always, you are encouraged to select a more specific and colorful name for your ability than the generic term wealth, like Millionaire Philanthropist, Oil Tycoon, Herds Of Cattle, Trust Fund, or Treasure Vault.

This is in keeping with fictional sources, which never bother to provide a detailed accounting of a character's financial affairs. Even in works where the acquisition of wealth is a focus, from the business-based soap opera to the adventures of freebooting barbarians, the exact state of the protagonist's exchequer is handled as an abstraction. We know that the hero is either prospering, or in a state of financial crisis requiring him to actively overcome story obstacles.

Wealth-oriented stories usually put the heroes in charge of the prosperity of a financial entity, like a corporation, small business, or community. Generally, the financial crisis is the story's central problem, and the heroes regain their state of prosperity at its successful conclusion.

States Of Prosperity

The following rules are suitable for series in which the ongoing financial health of a community or company is of major interest. Don't bother with them in genres and settings where they're not needed.

To model the level of abstraction at which economic stories are typically told, Narrators need keep track only of the general state of the financial operation. The six states of prosperity are as follows:

Contraction: The operation no longer has the funds to operate. Unless the heroes overcome one or more story obstacles, it faces an ultimate catastrophe. The nature of the catastrophe depends on the nature of the operation—bankruptcy for a modern company, starvation or dissolution for a community.

Erosion: The operation's expenditures exceed its income. If this trend is not reversed, it will eventually go into contraction. People with a stake in the operation (community residents, shareholders, employees) become restive, worrying about its future, and demanding that its financial stewards take corrective action.

Equilibrium: The operation is self-sustaining. Its expenditures equal its income. The people who depend on it have everything they need, though probably not everything they want.

Profit: The operation's income exceeds its expenditures. The people who depend on it can divert the excess wealth it generates to enhance their own comfort and status, or can invest back into the operation, attempting to grow it. If they do the former, the operation, barring changes in external circumstances, will remain in profit. If they do the latter, it will enjoy an expansion.

Expansion: The operation is growing in size, but also in its demand for investment. It seems flush with cash, but is also unstable. If the PCs slow its growth, it will return to a state of profit. If they continue, they must periodically (at least once per session) overcome obstacles, or enter a state of unsustainable growth.

Unsustainable Growth: The operation has proven so successful that it is now in trouble. Although it should be profitable in the long term, it currently faces a short-term demand for funds that cannot be offset by profits alone. Each session, the PCs must overcome one or more economic obstacles, or enter a state of erosion.

Changing States

States of prosperity change either due to or external circumstances as a consequence of financial contests.

External circumstances are plot elements introduced to the Narrator, usually as part of the story's premise. They put the operation under threat in some way, prompting the protagonists to take action to neutralize the crisis.

A financial contest is often undertaken proactively by the players. It can be anything from an attempt to secure new investment to a raid on your neighbor's cattle herd. The first would be accomplished with an explicitly economic ability, like Rugged Entrepreneur or Slick Financier. The latter would be accomplished by force of arms—which in its own way is the primal financial ability.

The degree of change between states depends on the magnitude of result.

Financial Consequences Chart

Success Level	Change In State Of Prosperity
Complete Victory	Increases by 3 steps
Major Victory	Increases by 2 steps
Minor Victory	Increases by 1 steps
Marginal Victory	Increases by 1 step*
Marginal Defeat	Decreases by 1 step*
Minor Defeat	Decreases by 1 steps
Major Defeat	Decreases by 2 steps
Complete Defeat	Decreases by 3 steps

*Change is temporary, and is reversed at beginning of next session.

These consequences do not apply during a state of unsustainable growth; at that step, all failures result in a state of erosion.

In Maya's fantasy series, the PCs are the local heroes of the village of Stornwood. It survives on a mixture of farming and fishing. Some of the crises the protagonists encounter in the series are primarily economic; others are religious and military. Stornwood begins tonight's session in a state of economic equilibrium. However, Maya has decided that tonight external circumstances may interfere with that. A new fishing fleet, manned by people from an unfamiliar culture, begins to harvest from Stornwood's traditional waters.

After debating various options, from an impromptu naval battle to the calling down of ancestral spirits, the PCs decide to send out their group diplomat, Ferren the Clever (played by Gary) to negotiate with the strangers. Several misadventures ensue before they manage to arrange a face-to-face with the foreign captain.

"I inform him that these waters are ours, by right," Gary describes, "and suggest a modest settlement if he agrees to sail up the coast to fish the waters of our hated rivals, the Glendinning."

Gary rolls Ferren's Silver-Tongued Diplomat ability of 5W against the captain's Gruff Obstructionism of 7W. Maya rolls a 3 to Gary's 6. This is a success vs. success, with the captain as low roller. Gary suffers a marginal defeat, for a temporary decrease in prosperity of 1 step.

Maya narrates the results: "The captain says he honors your ancestral rights to these waters—which is why he will only fish them for the next two weeks, and then be on his way."

Stornwood's economic condition is now in erosion. The players know that this is only temporary, and argue that taking other measures against the captain may bring about a worse result. Better to take the momentary hit and move on to other matters.

However, this result leads to another obstacle. Odo the Querulous, the village malcontent, argues for a marine raid on the foreigners. The tale continues…

Steps which would take a state below contraction or above unsustainable growth are ignored.

Certain economic contests may be asymmetrical, in that they lack an easily imagined upside or (more often) downside. Narrators may rule that either defeats or victories have no effect on a state of prosperity, but instead have other consequences.

Ferren proposes a trade arrangement with the sentient ducks of Clotha Vale, whereby the Stornwooders will sell their raffia mats at the Rosethorn Market. He fails his contest and the ducks turn him down. Maya can't see how this lost opportunity would cost Stornwood so badly that it would lose a state of prosperity. Instead she decides that the ducks have coined an unflattering nickname for Ferren, which he will hear incessantly whenever he goes to Rosethorn. This will impose a –6 penalty on any reputation-based contests he undertakes there.

Economic Modifiers

Extreme states of prosperity may affect the PCs in contests which do not directly affect the financial condition of the operation they manage. These may be contests using economic abilities, like Bribery or Haggling, or perhaps even social abilities, when used in situations where their general prestige is at issue.

The modifiers are: –6 (contraction), –3 (erosion), +3 (profit), +6 (expansion) and +9 (unsustainable growth.) This last bonus pertains because, to outsiders, an operation never seems so prosperous and flush with potential than when it is a state of dangerously rapid growth. Characters may be tempted to prolong this unstable state in order to draw out their period of high prestige.

Later in the Stornwood series, Ferren the Clever goes to the hated Glendinning people to negotiate an end to their generations-long feud. Ferren gets a +6 bonus when he contests his Silver-Tongued Diplomacy against the rival chieftain's Respect Ancestral Hatreds.

Because they create a feedback loop (or, if you're doing badly, a death spiral), these modifiers should never be applied to contests which stand to change an operation's state of prosperity.

After sealing a peace arrangement, Ferren suggests an agreement whereby Stornwooders sell Glendinning horses at the Rosethorn market. Maya decides that this arrangement might impact their state of prosperity, so the +6 bonus does not apply.

Creating Genre Packs

This chapter shows Narrators how to adapt the game to various genres and settings.

A genre pack is an information kit for your players, telling them what sort of world they'll be operating in, what they can expect to be doing in it, and what extraordinary abilities, if anything, they can use to accomplish these aims.

In many instances, you won't need a genre pack at all. The more familiar a genre or setting is, the more you can rely on a common shorthand understanding of the world. If everybody is already big fan of fantasy author X, you can probably run a game set in his world without any preparatory work at all.

HeroQuest's descriptive approach to game mechanics mean that you can easily use any reference materials designed for existing settings. All you have to do is concentrate on the words and ignore the numbers. You can use existing lines of game supplements from other companies, or non-gaming setting bibles produced for many well-known books, television shows, and movies. Mine relevant text passages for ability names, just as you would the 100-word description from a character created using the prose method.

Moon Design Publications will also be producing setting packs for various popular genres, and continuing its series of *HeroQuest* supplements set in the world of Glorantha.

Keywords

Almost every genre presents us with a series of recurring character types. The western gives us, among others, the flinty-eyed gunfighter, the comically grizzled sidekick, the earnest schoolmarm, the feather-bedecked saloon gal, the greedy cattle rancher, the hard working homesteader and, depending on when it was written, the savage or noble Indian. Hardboiled mysteries have smart-mouthed private dicks, femme fatales, thick-skulled cops, slick mobsters, dodgy club owners, and so on.

Either through their literary resonance or mere repetition, these have become the archetypal characters of their genres.

Keywords are a tool Narrators use to encourage players to play the signature character types of their settings. They consist of a list of abilities standard to that type, along with explanatory text laying out the character's activities, appearance, outlook, and goals.

For existing genres, the process of creating keywords is one of looking at the source material, identifying the types, describing them, and listing the abilities they need to do what characters of that type do.

However, with these very familiar genres, you can often get away with not writing up keywords at all. Everybody who's seen a fair number of westerns knows the sorts of things a grizzled sidekick can do. Just give the character the ability Grizzled Sidekick and interpret it generously in play.

It's in unfamiliar worlds that keywords become absolutely necessary. Keywords were first created to present the world of Glorantha, which has its own unique set of archetypes: Humakti Weaponthane, Dragonewt Scout, Seven Mothers Missionary, and many others. Players who don't know Glorantha can't draw on a common understanding of these types to infer what they can do in play. They need textual description to orient them, and a list of abilities to suggest what actions characters of their chosen type can take.

A well-written keyword tells the player everything he needs to know to get started playing in an unfamiliar world, through the point of view of his character. You may wish to drive home this point by writing the explanatory material in the second person.

Choosing Keyword Abilities

There is no set number of abilities that ought to go into each keyword. However, you should try to keep the numbers of abilities granted by each type of keyword roughly on a par with one another. Occupational keywords probably grant more abilities than cultural keywords.

Absolute balance between keywords is neither necessary or achievable. Players with many abilities gain only a marginal advantage in play. The range of tasks they can attempt is somewhat greater. They're less likely to face stretch penalties. More abilities may make it easier to avoid repetitive augment attempts. On the other hand, players with fewer abilities can advance them faster. Having fewer abilities to keep track of allows many players to react more quickly. Ultimately, the core idea of the system, that every ability is mechanically identical to every other, takes care of most game balance issues for you. That said, keywords with comparatively few abilities will seem less attractive to players than fully-loaded ones.

Use this dynamic to ensure that the mix of characters in your group reflects the most common archetypes. If you're running a cyberpunk game, for example, you want a hacker, a mercenary with an implant, and maybe an information broker. If nobody picks any of these types, the game won't really feel like cyberpunk. It is perfectly acceptable to reward players for making in-genre choices by giving these core types longer and cooler ability lists.

Players look to keyword ability lists for inspiration when inventing their own abilities. Provide a good example by making the ability names evocative and particular. Berserk Spearman is better than Warrior.

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Sample Occupational Keyword

This keyword is from a science fiction campaign set in the towering, labyrinthine city of Loom Respite. In this setting, people mutate to fit their occupations, so this keyword includes physical as well as learned abilities.

Pulper

Reviled and feared by the dwellers of the upper reaches, you are a pulper, a worker in the waste vats. Born and raised in the fetid, lightless trash chambers of the city, you have gained an aspect others find fearsome. Your dark, outsized eyes are highly adapted to low-light conditions. Your skin is pallid, your muscular frame hunched and twisted. Generations of natural selection has rendered you immune to most toxins and pollutants. Accustomed to back-breaking manual labor, you exhibit fearsome upper-body strength. The presence of hungry blood eels beneath the fetid liquid waste has taught you to quickly scuttle out of danger. Forbidden to own firearms, you've learned the martial art of klastan, which uses an trash waste shovel as its prime weapon. Though you speak Loom Respite's commlingua with a crude and halting accent, you converse fluently in chathar, the vulgar tongue of laborers and outcasts. Every Ursday you take part in the mass percussive rites of your workclan, affirming your solidarity with the beleaguered toilers of the lower reaches.

Abilities: Waste Vat Worker, Reviled and Feared, Low-Light Vision, Grotesque Aspect, Muscular Frame, Upper Body Strength, Immune To Toxins, Quick Scuttling, Klastan (shovel-based martial art), Speaks Chathar, Percussionist

Flaws: Light Sensitivity, Speaks Commlingua With Crude Accent

[[[END SIDEBAR]]]

Cultural Keywords

Abilities for cultural keywords reflect the background knowledge the character gains simply by growing up in the culture in question. They usually include:

- a language (if their native language is not the lingua franca of the series that all characters will be assumed to be speaking in)
- knowledge of an area, which may range from a neighborhood to an entire region, depending on the distance people travel in that culture in the course of their ordinary lives
- (in pre-industrial societies) one or more subsistence skills, such as farming, hunting, foraging, and various crafts
- (in modern societies) basic education in reading, math, and so on. These abilities can usually be left implicit and needn't be spelled out.

Many culture keywords will also include a working knowledge of a religious faith or ideology. Pantheistic cultures may allow you to take both a general keyword for the core mythology, and then to take one or more religious keywords to specialize in the rites and myths of particular gods of their pantheons.

In some settings characters might belong to two cultures: a base culture, and a sub-culture.
[[[BEGIN SIDEBAR]]]

Sample Cultural Keyword

This keyword is from a fantasy campaign.

Ak-Thul

You are of the Ak-Thul, the people of the white wastes. From birth, you were carried on your mother's back in a fur-lined papoose. When you first walked, you walked on snow. Soon you learned to wander for miles at a time without tiring. When you could pick up a spear, you learned to hunt. The animals you hunt are sacred to you; from their bodies you make everything you need, from the hides you wear to the bone spears you use to hunt them. At night, your people gather in their snow huts and tell the tales of the maker gods, Big Snow and Cold Water. To build your strength, you wrestle. Your language is called Tj-thul; outsiders cannot speak it, because it hurts their tongues. Since the people from the south came, bringing with them their strange huts made from giant dead plants, you have learned to speak their tongue, as well. They are nowhere as good as the Ak-Thul at smiling, riddling, or stone carving.

Abilities: Arctic Survival, Hunting, Spear, Distance Walking, Wrestling, Smiling, Riddling, Reverence For Animals, Craft Hide Clothing, Craft Bone Tools, Stone Carving, Mythology: Big Snow and Cold Water, Languages: Tj-Thul, Umerian.
[[[END SIDEBAR]]]

Religious Keywords

Religious organizations may provide not only tutelage in the rites and myths of a particular god, but also serve as mutual aid societies teaching occupational and other abilities.

In most settings, religion won't play a sufficiently central role to require religious keywords.

For series set in imagined worlds, you may still want to list the faiths available to the characters, with explanatory descriptive text.
[[[BEGIN SIDEBAR]]]

Sample Religious Keyword

This keyword is from the same campaign as the Ak-Thul cultural keyword, and details one of its specialty religions:

Bitter Wind Shaman

Big Snow and Cold Water made the world by mating, and in so doing had many offspring. The middle brother was Bitter Wind, who keeps their world in its proper round shape by continually running around it, pounding it with his feet. Without him, the land would flatten and break apart, like

sea ice in the melting season. Yet his gift is a harsh one; if you get too close to him, he burns your skin or fills the air with suffocating snow.

From birth, people could see your affinity for Bitter Wind, in the fast-moving shapes your breath made when it left your mouth. When you came of age, you were exposed to the elements. Bitter Wind blessed you, not only suffering you to live, but granting you his magic. Now you may intercede with him, summoning his winds when needed, and calming them when they grow too violent.

Like any shaman, you dispense advice to the people. You embody the great spirit who grants you power by sharing his moods: you swing unpredictably from good humor and protectiveness to raging fury.

Abilities: Give Advice, Predict Weather, Mythology: Bitter Wind, Good Humor, Protectiveness, Raging Fury, Shaman

Magical Abilities: Summon Winds, Dismiss Winds, Whip Up Snow, Resist Cold

[[[END SIDEBAR]]]

Extraordinary Powers

It's easy to apply common sense to situations when characters use abilities that exist in our real world. You know that a man can't run as fast as a horse, bend a crowbar over his knee, or access a credit card database with his mind.

In the various fantastic and futuristic genres, characters may be able to do some or all of those things. Any ability which is impossible in the real world but possible in a genre setting is called an extraordinary power. Most genres offer only one means of acquiring extraordinary powers: through magic, physical mutation, the use of technology, or whatever. A few may allow multiple sources of extraordinary powers: examples include comic book heroes and genre mash-ups, like fantasy/cyberpunk.

Extraordinary powers are limited by two factors.

One, like any ordinary ability, is the rating. That tells you how well the character can use the ability to solve problems.

The second limitation lies in your textual description of the extraordinary power. This specifies what the power can do, and (if you choose to do so) lays down the upper limits of its effectiveness.

Textual descriptions can be as loose or tight as you wish.

For a very loose, improvisational series, in which the ground rules for extraordinary powers are determined as you go, use only the ability titles. Under this approach, there is no hard-and-fast limit to extraordinary powers. The players can attempt to do anything that seems like it might happen in a story of this type, bounded by credibility tests (p. XX.) Establish resistances based on the narrative requirements of the pass/fail cycle, and then describe the magnitude of result based on success levels. You may wish to supply the players with a complete list of ability names available in your setting, provide a few examples and allow them to invent like abilities, or permit them to invent any abilities they want, without prior input from you.

To instead inject a sense of nitty-gritty reality into your fantastic world, write detailed descriptions of what each extraordinary power can do. If prep time is at a premium, supply only lists of available abilities before character creation. Wait until you see which ones the players choose, then write up descriptions for them before the first session of actual game play.

The less tightly you define your series' extraordinary powers, the more its tone will resemble a wild and crazy movie blockbuster or a four-color comic book. Greater definition reduces the potential for over-the-top action, and tends to resemble the action in a novel or a more down-to-earth TV series.

Fidelity to source material provides another reason to tightly define extraordinary powers. If you're trying to reproduce a particular property, you want its force sabers or rings of ancient evil to work they way the do in the original material.

The way you write ability descriptions conveys, in addition to specific information about your series, a sense of tone. In a militaristic or futuristic series, you may want to precisely lay down statistics for weapons, vehicles, and other items of technology—even though you will then probably avoid clear numerical references during adjudication. You want to convey the *feeling* of a nuts-and-bolts setting, even if the rules don't make any great use of these numbers thereafter.

Conversely, for a fantastic or ancient setting, you'll want to define abilities in terms that evoke the way characters see that world. You could measure everything in cubits or imaginary units of measure. More appropriately, use relative comparisons. Instead of telling the players that they can lift so many hundred pounds for x number of seconds, tell them that they can briefly lift a small pony into the air.

Frameworks

Most series, even those without extraordinary power descriptions, benefit from an overall **framework** explaining the origin of extraordinary powers, and the general limitations under which they operate. These allow you to apply a few overall rules of the setting to all uses of the power, creating a sense of consistent internal logic, and making it easier for you to figure out what makes common sense in a world of imaginary abilities.

The framework consists of the following elements:

The **origin** tells you where the extraordinary abilities come from. This gives you something to fall back on when you try to figure out if an unusual use of an ability lies within the realm of possibility. The origin story may be well-known, or kept as a secret from your players.

Overall limitations indicate what powers of this sort can never do.

Overall requirements tell you what a character must do to access these powers. These include elements that must be present in a character's backstory to allow him to use the powers in the first place.

Depending on the sort of extraordinary ability you're describing, you may need to add other categories of information.

Complicated conceptions of imaginary powers may require sub-frameworks. For example, there might be many schools of magic which all have a single origin and limitations, but different requirements.

Alternately, a single setting may include several types of extraordinary powers with completely different origins. These may seem superficially similar (like variant forms of magic) or obviously unrelated (technology and mutant powers.)

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Example Framework

This is a framework for a pulp-inspired series, Eerie Wonder Tales. This is written by the Narrator for her own reference; a redacted version is given to the players.

Origin: No one today, aside from a few insightful madmen, knows that the gods of mythology were real, and once walked the earth alongside mortal men. They retreated to their immortal realms when monotheism swept the western world, paying only occasional visits since then. They vanished for good after the Enlightenment, but left traces of themselves behind. As the myths tell us, the gods were fecund and lustful, and mated with many of the world's greatest beauties. Now, when individuals bearing DNA traces of two or more gods undergo a traumatic or event, their innate divine power awakens, granting them great physical prowess or covert magical abilities.

Overall limitations: All-American good guys can't use any effect that looks outwardly magical. They can seem extraordinarily lucky, or perform unlikely feats of physical prowess, but nothing that obviously appears to defy the laws of physics. They can build and use wondrous items, so long as they can be explained with a veneer of pseudoscientific babble.

Player characters must be exotically foreign to access obviously magical effects. (Evil supporting characters of any background may use them.) They appear to get these by performing rituals and incantations they find in ancient tomes, or which are handed down by oral tradition within evil sects. Workers of magic believe themselves to be drawing power directly from demonic entities, but, like everyone else in the world, are really activating their innate divine energies.

Overtly magical effects can only occur in mysterious or isolated places, under cover of darkness, or where people are predisposed to believe in supernatural phenomena.

Overall requirements: About one in ten thousand people have enough divine DNA to wield latent extraordinary powers. All PCs are assumed to fall into this category, even though neither they (nor their players) know this as the campaign begins. Instead, each player is required to provide an origin story explaining how they first discovered their heroic potential.
[[[END SIDEBAR]]]

Simulation vs. Emulation

On the list of elements gamers find appealing about the roleplaying experience, the opportunity to vicariously wield cool imaginary powers earns a top spot. Ordinarily, roleplaying rules systems mark the relative importance of a subject according to the density of rules surrounding them. If the characters are meant to spend significant chunks of time using guns, the guns rules are both longer and more finely detailed than other elements of the game. If persuasion and social interaction is the key experience of a game, the rules devoted to those subjects receive the greatest degree of loving detail.

Having been conditioned to this way of thinking, you may be tempted to indicate the importance of the extraordinary powers in your series by enshrining the differences between them in layers of rules detail.

Let's say, for example, that you have a fantasy world distinguished by its innovative approach to magic. In this world, there are four different types of magic, each with a different origin, methodology, and feel. Divine magicians evoke magic by reenacting the mythic deeds of their gods. Rationalistic sorcerers memorize formulaic spells from musty tomes of academic lore. Shamans negotiate with spirit entities, cajoling or commanding them to produce supernatural effects. Mystics seek inner understanding, and as a side-effect learn to manipulate the material manifestations of a world they believe to be largely illusionary.

You can present the extraordinary abilities arising from this four-fold magic system in one of two ways.

One, you can bolt additional rules onto the *HeroQuest* framework to underline your degree of interest in this aspect of the setting. If the practitioners of the various styles of magic progress at different rates, you can increase the ability improvement cost for the slower styles. You can make some abilities cost more to acquire than others. Certain powers might be available only after achieving a set rating in prerequisite abilities. Abilities can be subdivided: maybe the characters get a broad sphere of influence, but must then individually learn and master specific effects within them. This approach uses game mechanics to make various types of extraordinary power seem different from others.

Two, you can describe the laws of magic from the point of view of its practitioners in the world, and use the *HeroQuest* framework as is, without adding more rules detail. In play, you use your knowledge of how magic works to interpret contest results, just as you use your familiarity with gravity to describe what happens when somebody falls from a balcony. This approach uses your descriptive powers to make various types of powers seem distinct—just as an author or director does.

Which of these two approaches you choose is a matter of taste. That said, the designer recommends that you try the second, simpler approach first. Many players and Narrators think they need the additional level of detail in theory, only to discover in practice that they feel liberated without it. If you still need the feeling of solidity denser rules provide, you can always switch back to the first approach.

Magic

To build magic into your setting, first create a framework. If there are multiple origins for magic, create a framework for each. The framework can be a few paragraphs long, or run for thousands of words, depending on how tightly you wish to define your world. Some players love detail; others will skim any documents you send them and rely on you to explain as you go.

In specifying what magicians can actually do in your world, you can then choose between three levels of detail:

Ability names only: Use only your framework and the names of abilities to define what the characters can do. When players try to use the ability in play, you decide what they can and can't attempt, based on what seems credible and fun. This approach gives the greatest room for improvisation, but may strike some as too loose to provide a sense of reality.

Aimee chooses to define magic with only a brief framework and ability names. She doesn't have much prep time and prefers to allow her creative players to collaborate in defining her world.

One of her players, Bob, decides to play Ikthut, an Ak-Thul Bitter Wind Shaman (p. XX.) He writes down the magical abilities from the keyword, and play begins. Soon Ikthut encounters a hunting party of invaders from the south, and looks at his sheet to see what magic he can employ to deter them from locating his community.

"I use Whip Up Snow to create an enormous, blinding cloud that will send them back to where they came from," Bob says.

Aimee nods; that sounds like a reasonable description to her. The leader of the southern hunting party, a supporting character called Coarse Treader, has magic of his own: a shard of spirit bone housing granting him the ability Find the Trail. Aimee calls for a simple contest, pitting Ikthut's Whip Up Snow 18 against Coarse Treader's Find the Trail 3. *She rolls a 14, to Bob's 16: a marginal success for Coarse Treader.*

Aimee narrates the result: "Winds of your patron spirit appear from every direction, stirring up a blinding cloud of whiteness. The southerners disappear into the growing plume. But finally one of them emerges, holding a shard of bone before him, as if it guides his way. He's covered in ice crystals, but stands before you, and sees your people's snow huts in the distance. This day, his magic has proven stronger than yours."

Describe specific effects: For each ability, write a paragraph explaining how it works. Specify either its breadth or its limitations, plus any interesting side notes that might have an impact on the story. When players try to use the ability in play, you collaboratively consult the description to decide if the proposed action falls within its parameters. what is and isn't possible. This approach strikes a balance between improvisation and structure, but requires significant preparation time.

Leslie likes to write up details of her world, and finds that her players prefer some guidance where their imaginary powers are concerned. She writes a description of the Whip Up Snow magic provided by the Bitter Wind:

Whip Up Snow: causes high winds to swirl in from all directions, picking up loose snow, hurling into the air, and keeping it there. Only works if loose snow is present, and only outside. Lasts until shaman wills it to cease, or until he performs some other action. Presence of the great Bitter Wind spirit is detectable by anyone who can see into the spirit world.

Lesley runs the same situation as above for her player, Martin. He starts by reading his sphere of influence description. "It says here I can whip up a cloud of loose snow. Can I use that to obscure their vision, and keep them from spotting my people?"

Lesley agrees. She then consults her sphere of influence description for Coarse Treader's Find the Trail magic:

Find the Trail: Contained in a bone shard, this magic causes the object's pointed end to always point to the user's desired destination. The user must enter into a semi-trance state, concentrating on where he wants to go. He may frame this in concrete terms ("I wish to find the stream where we killed the deer") or abstract ones ("I wish to find the man with the red hat.")

Again, it seems appropriate that Clear Treader can think "I wish to find the nearest community" and use the bone to point him through the snow.

If you want to tie yourself down even further—perhaps because it gives your players a greater sense of control over contest outcomes—you could go so far as to describe specific results from various victory levels for each magical ability.

Magical Equipment

Many settings allow only specialized practitioners with long training or innate talents to directly evoke magical effects, but allow anybody to make use of magical objects. Common magical objects include weapons, armor pieces, rings, wands, gems, medicine bags, and potions.

Pieces of magical equipment are abilities. Characters can have such abilities as Protective Ring, Orc-Slashing Sword, or Salve Of Invisibility. They can even invent vague but evocative items, like the Orb Of La-Koth, and, with your collaboration, work out in play what they can do with them. If you write detailed descriptions for the magical powers in your game, you should do it for items as well.

Characters draw on magical equipment like they would any other ability. They use the description to see if it applies to their goal, describe what they're doing, and roll the ability corresponding to the item.

You may permit characters to find magical items during play. Until they buy an ability allowing them to use the items, they wield them with a default ability of 6.

When a player buys a found item as an ability, it becomes as much a part of his PC as any item he described during character creation. Until then, you can have the item stolen or destroyed without qualm. Also like any ability, items can suffer states of adversity, reducing the character's ability to use it, or, in the event of death, destroying the item entirely.

Making Items

Here are some sample guidelines on magical items suitable for a generic fantasy series. Discard them as necessary to create your own unique take on magic items in your world, or to emulate an existing setting.

When creating your framework, decide how common magical items are and how hard they are to make. They may be produced on a regular basis by alchemists and magically capable artisans. Or they might be extremely rare, created only by, say, reclusive dwarves living in distant mountains, or the gods in their various heavens. Perhaps there haven't been any magical items made for eons.

If items are rare, you'll either want to severely restrict the number of item abilities the players can build into their characters, or explain as part of your series premise why the group owns so many of these incredibly scarce relics.

In settings where item creation is common, PCs and supporting characters should be able to make them. Here are default rules for item creation in a conventional pseudo-Tolkien meets quasi-Howard fantasy series:

Each type of item requires its own separate crafting ability: Create Magic Weapon, Create Magic Armor, Brew Potion, Write Magic Scroll, Craft Magic Ring, and so on. Exotic item types require their own abilities, like Make Crystal Ball or Grow Homunculus, which explains why they're rare and exotic in the first place. Characters must also take the mundane equivalent of the craft in question: Blacksmithing, Chemistry, Calligraphy, Silversmithing, and the like.

Certain cultures or schools of magic may specialize in particular items. Nomadic shamans may make items from animal products. Artfully crafted glass and metals are made only in large settlements capable of sustaining populations of artisans.

Depending on the rules of magic in your world, you may want to specify that makers of these items can themselves work the type of magic they're instilling in their items: if you want to create a Fire-Breathing Sword, you need the magical ability Fire-Breathing.

It is not unreasonable to rule that characters must get a complete victory to craft a fully functioning item. Lesser results may get you items which work only briefly (perhaps only once in the case of a marginal victory), or deliver only partial results. A less-than-perfect Fire-Breathing Sword may throw off a burning aura that is somewhat useful as a light source, but does nothing to burn your enemies in battle. Although unpredictably wonky results are more fun, here are default ranges for imperfect magical items, for moments when inspiration fails you:

Major victory: Item works for a month.

Minor victory: Item works for a week.

Marginal victory: Item works once.

Complete defeat: Item appears to be perfectly functional, but backfires disastrously on its wielder when first used.

Any other defeat: Item

Not all items need be created in the same way: shamanic items might have spirits bound into them, and work only when the entities are appeased. Mystical items might require a state of enlightenment in the user.

Exhaustible Items

Items which are consumed during use, like potions, are a fantasy staple. To model them in *HeroQuest*, focus on the maker, not the user. The magical craftsman creates the item with an appropriate ability, like Brew Potion or Write Magical Scroll. The Narrator makes note of the rating used to make the item. Then, when it is used, the user rolls, using the item creator's rating, not his own, as the basis for the target number.

*Madison Furnish (played by Don) purchases a potion of sorcerous vision disguised as an ecstasy tablet. He ingests it before meeting his target, famous record producer Stan Geist. The tablet was manufactured by a occulto-pharmacologist with a Second Sight rating of 18**W**. Stan is an alien demon with has Resist Detection ability of 15. Don rolls for the potion; the Narrator, Fiona, rolls for Stan. Don gets a 1 to her 12. His extra mastery bumps Stan down to a failure, for a Critical vs. Failure result: a major victory.*

"You see him as he really is," Fiona says, "a pulsing jellyfish-like creature with a thousand blinking eyes."

Because these items can give players access to ratings far above their own, Narrators should ensure that they overcome significant obstacles to acquire items by highly-rated makers.

Although your framework may establish different ground rules for magic, it stands to reason that temporary items are easier to make than permanent ones. Victory levels might determine the number of doses of potion you make, or the number of times you can use a magic scroll before its calligraphy fades from view.

[[[BEGIN SIDEBAR]]]

Ordinary vs. Extraordinary

In many settings, abilities may be available in either mundane or extraordinary form. It is crucial to distinguish between them.

When framing contests, Narrators must determine what is credible within the reality of their worlds, and rule out contests where the desired outcome is impossible (see p. XX.)

A character might have Strength as either an extraordinary or an ordinary ability. One with ordinary strength must conform to believable human limits. Another PC with extraordinary Strength faces either no limit, or a higher-than-normal limit set by the Narrator in her framework or power description.

Ability ratings do not represent an absolute scale, but the character's chance of solving problems with that ability. It is therefore possible to have, in the same group, a character with an ordinary Strength of 18Ш and one with extraordinary Strength at the same rating. The difference between them is that the extraordinary character can frame contests without regard to ordinary human limits, where the ordinary one is constrained by the limits of narrative credibility. The ordinary guy might be able to beat the extraordinary at arm wrestling, because he's better leveraging his mundane strength. However, unlike his extraordinary counterpart, he can't ever lift a car over his head.

To prevent the ordinarily strong guy from beating the extraordinarily strong one at arm wrestling, put a cap on ordinary abilities. If Mr. Ordinary tops out at 18Ш but Ms. Extraordinary can keep improving without limit, she'll eventually leave him in the dust.
[[[END SIDEBAR]]]

Super Powers

The super powers wielded by costumed heroes are only slightly less elastic, in terms of the wide range of problems they can solve, than broadly-defined magical abilities. After creating your framework, you can either create a master list of abilities or leave ability names up to your players. If you do create a list, you can leave it at ability names or define them more tightly, as with magical abilities.

Assuming players who are all passably acquainted with the genre, you can use a short hand by defining particularly tricky powers by comparison to well-known characters from your favorite comics.

Comic book fans recognize various power levels within a superhero universe. On one end of the spectrum, you see the street-level heroes who depend mostly on athletics and gadgets to fight crime. On the other, you get cosmic heroes who meet god-like beings and battle over the fate of worlds. *HeroQuest*'s scaling allows heroes of both sorts to interact. A street-level hero will even be able to overcome his cosmic counterpart with sufficiently high ratings in his comparatively mundane abilities.

> *Street-level vigilante Agent Orange tries to keep an informant quiet as cosmic-grade hero Nebula attempts to read his mind. Agent Orange pits his mundane Intimidation ability of 12Ш2 against Nebula's extraordinary ability Mindmeld, rated at 6Ш. Barring some lucky rolls or a hero point expenditure on Nebula's part, Agent Orange is likely to scare the informant so badly that his thoughts become unreadable.*

However, if you want to enforce one style over the other, do so by restricting the sorts of super powers available to the characters. For a street-level series, you might insist on only powers that extraordinarily extend normal human abilities. When creating a cosmic series, you might insist that all of the characters be able to survive in, and travel through, the vacuum of space.

Thematic Unity

Each costumed hero's powers tend to revolve around a unified theme. The guy who breathes underwater also commands the denizens of the sea. The gal with the carapace and proportional strength of a scorpion also produces a stunning venom to inject into her prey. To maintain this conceit, require your players to justify the thematic unity of the various powers they propose to take.

Power groupings should also follow a narrative unity. All of the character's super powers ought to arise from a single origin. If a player proposes a character who has mutant healing powers,

then got bitten by a radioactive animal, and later acquired cyborg limbs, collaborate with him to find a more coherent way to group together the various powers he seeks. Be prepared to bend this rule in the face of a particularly compelling origin story. Some famous comics characters, like that regenerating guy with the claws, attribute their powers to disparate sources.

(Multiple power origins may be especially appropriate in a post-modern supers game that seeks to emulate the sometimes absurdly convoluted continuity of contemporary comics. Perhaps the hero acquired a theme-breaking second set of powers when a new creative team took over his comic book and radically revised his original concept.)

Power-Specific Limitations

Limitation on super powers are a standard genre device, granting each hero a useful Achilles heel to keep him suitably vulnerable. There's the guy with the heart condition, the hero who crumples in the presence of certain green rocks, and that other guy who can't handle anything yellow.

You may require players to create limitations on their powers, or, if your players exhibit an especially laid-back approach to issues of character control, surprise them by imposing limitations during play.

Player-created limitations should be at least as credible as the examples from the source material. Often they tie into the hero's origin story. Check proposed limitations to see that they neither dominate play by cropping up all the time (as in, say, a vulnerability to electronic devices) or are so rare that they never come up at all.

These limitations function as a type of flaw. As with any flaw, make sure that the brunt of the disadvantage falls on the player and his character, not on the group as a whole. Enforce this even when the player can point to multiple examples in the source material. The classic instance of this would be the power that malfunctions and turns the hero into a berserk killing machine who attacks his friends.

It is not uncommon for players to happily build limitations into their super-characters, but to rebel when you do what a comic book writer would do, and insert them into the story to prevent the character from doing something obvious to bring the story to an premature conclusion. Junk limitations entirely if you think some of your players will object to their use. Comic book heroes tend to have absolute powers, which work all the time unless blocked by a limitation. *HeroQuest* characters are always limited by their ratings, so all you need to do to protect a plot situation requiring a high likelihood of failure is to assign it a high resistance.

> *AC Comics' marquee character, Uberhuman, only fails while using his X-ray vision power when the thing he's trying to perceive is shielded by lead.* HeroQuest *character Ultraperson fails whenever his player rolls poorly in comparison to the Resistance.*

To keep limitations more in tune with the source material, treat them as absolutes. Instead of assigning a rating to the flaw and rolling it as a resistance, the Narrator simply rules that the character cannot succeed in situations where the resistance comes into play. If the PC realizes ahead of time that the limitation is in play, the character won't bother trying, and will thus avoid a humiliating defeat.

> *Ultraperson wants to peer inside a vault but already knows that it's lead-lined. There's no point trying, so he calls on a gadget-wielding ally to whip up an impromptu ultrasound device to do the job instead.*

High Tech

Unlike magical spheres of influence or super powers, the capabilities of an item of futuristic technology are not necessarily explicable from a mere descriptive phrase.

Items which are simply souped-up versions of contemporary technological items may be summed up with a cool-sounding make and model, followed by, in brackets, a generic descriptive phrase, as in:

- *Hellharrier M-2O (tank)*
- *NeuroStopper (taser)*
- *Heckler-Wesson Bugdropper Max (grenade launcher)*

When allowing players to devise their own tech under the narrative character creation method, do not count the entertaining brand names of devices against the 100-word total, unless they are in and of themselves descriptive of the item's capabilities. Otherwise, you're penalizing players for adding fun flavor to your game.

Wholly imaginary pieces of gear will require item descriptions.

If you're open to allowing the players to contribute background material to your setting, allow them to submit item names and descriptions during character creation or improvement. As with any player-Narrator collaboration, you may find yourself tweaking the details to conform to your setting framework, while still accommodating the kernel of the idea the player found appealing in the first place.

You may, however, prefer to present your players with a fully-realized world, presenting them with an imaginary catalogue of technology and item descriptions, allowing them to pick only from the list you supply. Some players find it easier to get into the hard-edged gear-head mindset by flipping through a list of tantalizingly shiny items than by being asked to make up their own.

Item descriptions can be brief and general, or longer and highly specific. The degree of detail you lavish on them depends on the style of science fiction setting you want to evoke. Space opera adventure is best supported by broad, loophole-filled item descriptions, which allow the characters to improvise wild applications of their technology under pressure, with the aid of gum and paper clips. If you're emulating hard SF, with its loving descriptions of imaginary works of engineering, you want the tech to feel real, right down to the nuts and bolts—with accordingly constrained ability descriptions. In keeping with the slide-rule ethos of the sub-genre, these can be full of numbers and math, real or imaginary. These may set limits for credibility tests (p. XX) but are otherwise to be treated as merely descriptive, not simulative. They're there to evoke a mood, not as a basis for narrative reasoning that replaces the pass/fail cycle.

To integrate your imaginary items of technology more fully with your setting, develop social associations for them. Just as the ownership of a particular type of sports car tells you about the person who owns it, other characters should be able to make assumptions about you (accurately or otherwise) based on your choice of vacuum rifle, photon grenade, or cyber-implant.

In realistic settings, items of cutting-edge technology can be expected to exhibit design defects, or experience failure under certain conditions. Narrators can package these flaws into their tech descriptions.

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Sample Tech Descriptions

Here are two takes on the same item: one a brief description suitable for a broadly interpretive space opera game; the other, a nuts-and-bolts description suitable for a harder style of SF:

Blink gun: Emits a teleportation ray that can instantly relocate a single target to any position within 50 m.

Blink gun: Emits a narrowly focused energy beam which breaks a single target down on the molecular level and reassembles it at any position within 50 m. The target must be discontinuous with other objects, preventing users from teleporting a column from a building or the wheels of a moving vehicle. It is not possible to teleport only a portion of an opponent. Targets may not exceed a surface area of $3m^2$ or mass of 175 kg.

The beam is nearly invisible, appearing as a rippling distortion in space. It emits only trace quantities of heat energy.

In factory condition it can move targets only to unoccupied space, ensuring safe rematerialization. An experienced customizer can hack the firmware to remove this limitation, turning the blink gun into a lethal weapon which materializes victims inside other objects or beings.

Even portable teleport technology takes enormous computing power. A state of the art blink gun's onboard processor clocks in at 14k quadrohertz.

Energy requirements are high; the gun's barrel-mounted battery weighs 6 kg and gives out after six shots. Batteries reach a surface temperature of 80° C after use and so must be removed with insulated gloves to avoid flesh burns.

Blink guns can be disrupted by high-frequency radio waves. Anti-BG emitters are available in large, stationary industrial models, which jam blink beams very effectively, or as portable body armor attachments, which are notoriously unreliable.

Developed for use in prison riots, the non-lethal blink gun was repurposed in a host of devious ways during the Cluster War. Ownership of a blink gun suggests a background in law enforcement, insurgency, counter-insurgency, or mercenary work. It has become increasingly fashionable among the so-called Robin Hood gangs, who use it to non-lethally neutralize armed guards from the banks they're robbing.

Brand names include: Heckler-Wesson ReCager, Pommworks Spatial Twister, and NuKrupp BG-122.

[[[END SIDEBAR]]]

Vehicles As Characters

In settings showcasing vehicle action, from starship combat to giant robot slugfests, vehicles may be defined like characters, with multiple abilities of their own. Like other complicated pieces of equipment, vehicles may possess flaws, too.

In a world where vehicles come off the rack, and iterations of any given model possess essentially identical capabilities, the Narrator should provide a list of vehicles with pre-determined abilities and ratings. The following example suits a WWI flying ace game:

Sopwith Camel

This single-seat fighter plane earns its nickname from the hump-like configuration of its gun installation.

Maneuverability 6Ш, .303 in Vickers machine guns 6Ш

Flaws: Chokes On Takeoff 18, Hard To Handle –6

In fanciful settings where each PC operates in his own distinctive vehicle, Narrators may require players to invent them from scratch, just as they do their characters. This example is from a giant robot series, inspired by the wackier, kid-friendly side of the genre:

Kaleidotron

This carnival-themed mecha can disguise itself as a rollercoaster.

Rainbow light rays 7Ш, Armor (trestle-like projections) 3Ш, Rolling punch 20, Skate on car-like feet 18.

Both of these vehicle examples skimp on the details. For a series that revels in technical details, buff them up with extensive passages of statistics and engineering lore. In the case of real vehicles, these are available in profusion in the Internet. For futuristic settings, make up your own additional details, as in the fleshed-out example for the blink gun, above.

As a rule, vehicles should not be subject to character improvement. Characters can increase their Piloting or Driving ratings, but the vehicles themselves don't grow more effective over time. An exception pertains when the vehicles are sentient or possessed of artificial intelligence, and therefore capable of learning and adjusting to their environments. In certain settings you may allow characters with engineering abilities to increase various vehicle ratings or decrease flaws by a point or two,

reflecting their tinkering and customizing abilities. In general, however, vehicles designed for high performance are considered to be at the top of their capabilities as of their debut appearances in the narrative.

Narrators can frame contests involving character-like vehicles in one of two ways:

1. The character uses an ability related to handling the vehicle (such as Flying Ace or Mecha Pilot), taking a relevant augment from one of the vehicle's abilities.
2. The character enters into a contest using one or more of the vehicle's abilities as he would his own, perhaps using his driving or piloting ability to augment, perhaps using another of the vehicle's abilities.

Psychic Talents

Psychic abilities appear in the superhero genre, as one of many sources of super powers. They also show up in some SF, and in tales of the fantastic and supernatural. In over-the-top genres you may want to treat them as open-ended super abilities. In most cases, though, emulating the source material requires a tight cap on the ability of psionic powers to solve problems.

Because they short circuit many standard plot devices, mental abilities are generally problematic in roleplaying games. PCs who reliably read minds can overcome any deception by supporting characters. Clear premonitions theoretically allow the PC to sit at home and wait for the vision in which the mystery is suddenly solved, without risk or effort. Overcoming a villain by controlling his mind is usually anti-climactic.

Mind control exposes another gap between genre material and roleplaying practice: the danger that players will lose control over their characters. Many players get very upset when this happens, and would rather see their characters killed than lose their volition, even briefly. This becomes especially fraught when it's one player taking control of another's PC. (For more on this general issue, see "The Limits Of Persuasion," p. XX.)

If you look to the source material, you'll see that psychic powers are kept generally unreliable. Characters can't choose when they activate, or achieve more than partial successes with them. Underline this as you write ability descriptions for the various psi talents you want to include in your series. Emphasize the fuzziness of their results: a mind reader might be able to detect only moods, or know when a character is lying, but not what he is lying about.

You may wish to impose limits on ability ratings. Another way to handle this is to cap degree of success for mental powers. Perhaps all major and complete successes are treated as minor.

Outside of science fiction, stories in which multiple protagonists exhibit mental powers are rare. Your standard horror/mystery allows for one psychic among a team of otherwise normal investigators. You may wish to permit only one player—perhaps the one with the best attendance record—to give his PC psychic powers. This single psychic should be restricted to one to three extraordinary abilities. To save yourself time creating write-ups, you might want to ask the player to, drawing on genre material for inspiration, propose the types of abilities he wants to have. Then you can write up detailed descriptions for only these powers. This is less work for you, but risks disappointing a player who envisioned the ability with different limitations.

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Example Psychic Talent

EVP Reader

The character is adept in the manifestation and interpretation of Electronic Voice Phenomena, or EVP. These are mysterious voices recorded on tape by presumably psychic means. The psychic makes a recording of either open air in an empty room, a radio tuned between stations, or another source of electronic white noise. When played back, the user may locate short bursts of nearly incomprehensible verbiage. It may sound like an inhuman whisper, or several voices murmuring at

once, sometimes in multiple languages. On a successful use of the ability, the voices reveal information of relevance to the psychic's situation. Whether the voices are produced by entities from beyond our reality, or imprinted on the tape by the psychic himself, has yet to be conclusively determined. The phenomena are also sometimes called Raudive voices, after the parapsychologist who extensively documented them.
[[[END SIDEBAR]]]

Species Traits

A large number of settings let players portray nonhuman characters, from the elves and dwarves of epic fantasy to the aliens of space opera. Although some alien races might be humans with superficial cosmetic differences, it's standard for such races to exhibit fun biological quirks that can be treated as extraordinary abilities.

- The elves in your setting might boast great longevity (and thus a wealth of knowledge from centuries of life experience) or be plant people who partake of a universal mystical consciousness.
- Your version of dwarves will probably give them high strength and endurance, along with a range of sensory abilities related to their subterranean lifestyle.
- Your aliens might include pointy-eared logicians with limited psychic powers, or bony-headed warriors boasting multiply redundant internal organs.

To express these conventions in *HeroQuest* terms, create a species keyword with both second-person description, and a list of abilities, with extraordinary ability descriptions as necessary.

Where an ability might be either ordinary or extraordinary, be sure to specify which of the two possibilities pertains. You may wish to place an upper limit on a species' extraordinary version of an ordinary ability. Do so by adding, in parenthesis, a brief quantitative descriptor after the ability name. This defines the maximum result for this species at this extraordinary ability, after which attempts fail the credibility test (p. XX) and cannot be attempted. Examples might include:

- Dwarven strength (lift a horse; kick in a steel-reinforced wooden door)
- Gnoll damage resistance (shrug off arrow hits)
- Grok'nar running speed (outrun a horse over sprint distances)

You may be tempted to give a species an extraordinary version of an ordinary ability because you want to show that the species is better than the average human in a particular area. This is not necessary: you're already making all characters of this type better than average simply by giving them the ability in the first place. (Remember, average is a rating of 6!) Whether the player of this species keeps this ability higher than that of the other PCs is up to him, and depends on how he allocates his build points during character creation. Keep in mind that the other PCs are also above average in any area they choose to highlight by choosing an ability.

Most species keywords include a range of ordinary abilities, as well. These are typically social, informational and sometimes occupational abilities arising from their cultures.

Species keywords may also include cultural, social, or physical flaws. Rate the most serious of these at 17, and the others at 13. These reflect the ratings endured by starting player characters. Other supporting characters of the same species may have them at even higher ratings.

Players may not choose other abilities directly contradictory to their species flaws. This does not stop them from selecting abilities which might on occasion be used to counter them.

If a species has the flaw Low Pain Threshold, you can't cancel it by taking the ability High Pain Threshold.

Grim Determination, which could be used to counter High Pain Threshold (among many other resistances in a variety of other situations) remains perfectly acceptable.

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Sample Species Keyword

High Elves Of Ammelon

You are of the fair people, the willowy immortals who act as guardians of the forests and repositories of ancient wisdom. You grew up in an isolated community, away from humans, encountering them only during your adulthood—that is, after you were a hundred or more years old. Unless slain by violence or misadventure, you will never die. If you are like most of your kind, you cleave to cautiously to your immortality, avoiding needless risk.

Physically, you are taller and thinner than the average human. Your hair is a silvery blond color; your skin, pale and slightly florid. Elven eyes may be cerulean blue or forest green, but are uniformly clear and penetrating. Your slightly pointed jaw holds forty-four small teeth of such perfection that the goblins of the Murklands traffic in them, valuing them as semi-precious stones.

When the angelic creator beings known as the Sirhal departed from the world, they made you guardians of the earth. As such, you feel an instinctive harmony with nature, one reflected in various innate sensory abilities.

Abilities: Archery, Beautiful, Imperious, Singing, Woodland Survival, Woodland Warfare, Nature Knowledge, Elven History, Language: Ammelon, Lore of the Sirhal, Goblin-Fighting Lore.

Plus any one of the following abilities: Wood Carving, Leather Working, Craft Bow & Arrow.

Extraordinary Abilities: Longevity, See In Darkness (outdoors)

Flaws: Teeth Traded As Commodities, Despised by Goblins, Low Pain Threshold.

Elven Longevity: The High Elves of Ammelon live are effectively immortal. Though susceptible to pathogens, the character is immune to congenital or degenerative disease. This ability is used in contests where the character's long life experience comes into play, ranging from knowledge of history to tests of emotional maturity and detachment.

Creatures

Imaginary creatures appear in a long list of genres, from fantasy to science fiction and horror. Narrators can create entire menageries of fantastic animals and monsters before embarking on their series, or can make them up as they go along.

In settings where PCs can take creatures as followers or companions, they'll expect a sense of which beasties fit the bill, and what their abilities and ratings are. Create a dozen or so prime candidates in advance, or provide a longer list of brief descriptions to the players and then flesh out the ones they find interesting.

Give creatures as many abilities as you think they need. Before assigning ratings to the abilities, decide how tough you want them to be in relation to heroic player characters. If they should easily overwhelm the average hero, give them multiple masteries in their most important abilities. If they're a match for the average hero, give them a rating of 7 in their top ability. Moderately challenging creatures should top out at 16.

Animals that never pose a challenge to people in any way don't warrant ability ratings. Treat them as apart of the scenery. A swarm of ants might have a Resistance to an exterminator, but needn't usually be given game statistics.

Consciousness

In fantastic settings, it's not always clear whether a creature is just an animal, or an intelligent being in its own right. Where necessary, distinguish between the two by noting the creature's Consciousness.

Most settings require three states of Consciousness:

Sapient: The creature is intelligent, has a personality, and can make conscious choices. It is can therefore be affected by standard social abilities, including personality traits. (This assumes that the characters attempting to do so are able to meaningfully communicate with them.) In a fantasy setting, sapient creatures might include dragons, sphinxes, and tree-men.

Animal: The creature lacks self-awareness and the ability to make conscious choices, instead operating on instinct and perhaps a handful of trained responses. It cannot be communicated with and is not subject to persuasion, social pressure, or the influence of personality.

Certain magical abilities may allow the user to harness these instincts, commanding the creature as if fully trained, or to awaken a sense of sapience, either permanently or temporarily.

(In some fantasy worlds, all common animals are actually latently sapient, and can respond intelligently to magical communication.)

Sub-Animal: The creature is at least somewhat mobile and responds to environmental stimuli, but otherwise lacks even the autonomy instinct grants to animals. It cannot be trained, commanded, or communicated with. Examples might include carnivorous plants, spatial anomalies, and other oddities.

In some fantasy worlds, plants may possess latent animal consciousness, or even sapience.

Consciousness is a descriptive trait, not an ability. It establishes what sorts of interactions characters can conduct with the creature without violating credibility.

Abilities vs. Absolute Values

Creature ability ratings, like those of any other character, are expressed in abstract, relative terms, not as a concrete scale providing a hard-and-fast numerical comparison between creature types. Always keep in mind that ratings measure a being's ability to solve problems with the ability in question, not its absolute parameters.

Imagine two crocodiles, each 15 feet long and weighing 1800 pounds. The one on the left—let's call him Scar—is an older specimen, while the one on the right—Blackie—remains young and vital. Each is the same size, but Blackie is better able to leverage his size against its prey when it attacks. Even though they are identical in mass and length, Blackie can have a Size ability rated at 18Ш2, while Scar has only Size 18Ш.

Likewise, a rat might have a Fast rating of 8Ш, indicating his ability to get out of trouble by scurrying away. A horse might have a Fast rating of 8Ш, indicating its ability to move quickly from one place to another. This does not mean that the rat can outrun a horse on a race course—or that a horse can slip through a predator's clutches by zipping into the underbrush. During contest framing, the Narrator employs a credibility test, using common sense to separate out the problems a fast rat can believably overcome, versus those obstacles suited for a fast horse.

In most cases, common sense alone can help you determine which contests to allow, and which to reject because they seem patently absurd. However, especially where imaginary animals are concerned, you may want to include some quantitative numbers in your creature descriptions, under the heading **Relevant Statistics**. Don't knock yourself out listing figures for qualities which will never figure in a contest. It makes sense to reference the top speed of a cheetah, but not of a tree sloth. If, like most Narrators, you can wing it without them, by all means do so. You can always make up absolute values for your imaginary creatures as the need arises.

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Sample Creature

Griffin

Griffins are ferocious flying carnivores with the bodies of oversized lions and the heads, wings, and forelegs of eagles. They live in great communal nests of up to a dozen individuals, often

located in caves or other natural shelter. They particularly prize horse meat, and may attempt to grab a fresh supply from mounted humans. Although they give birth to live young like mammals the females do not lactate, and instead feed their young with meat, just as eagles do. Griffins cannot be tamed, and any attempt to do so will meet with a violent response from the animal.

Griffins prefer hunting in plains or grasslands, often traveling in packs of two to five adults. They generally attack from above using their Aerobatics and Grab Victim abilities, often hoisting a victim aloft with their foreclaws and then raking and tearing at them with their hind legs and sharp beak. If a victim resists in the air, the griffin will drop it. Once the prey is dead, the griffin will carry it back to its aerie.

When fighting smaller opponents, griffins use the same technique, and may drop victims from great heights. If a creature is too heavy or bulky to lift, griffin will attack with its beak and foreclaws, from above if possible. Several
griffins may mob a single attacker. Against aerial opponents, the griffin makes repeated runs past the target, and attacks with its beak and foreclaws.

Abilities: Bite and Claw 5Ш3, Thick Skin and Feathers 13, Aerobatics 5Ш, Cunning 18, Fly Fast 15, Grab Victim 2Ш, Large 5Ш, Spot Prey 2Ш, Strong 5Ш, Tough 18.

Consciousness: Animal

Relevant Statistics: males 400-600 lb, 8–9 feet long; females 325-400 lb, 7–8 feet long; flying speed 80 mph (short distances only), wingspan 12–14 ft.

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Narrating

No matter what rules set you use, running an entertaining roleplaying game remains a fun and rewarding challenge. This chapter presents advice specific to the *HeroQuest* system, as opposed to more general advice on applicable to all games. Beginning Narrators who need help on the fundamentals can look to a number of high quality standalone products providing general game mastering advice.

Assigning Resistances

To choose a resistance, start by deciding whether you want the odds to lean toward failure or success, and to what extent. Some Narrators arrive at resistances based purely on their own creative instincts, without reference to any of these rules. That's not just acceptable, but commendable. Your own experience as a Narrator should be granted greater weight than the following set of guidelines.

Resistances fall into the following six classes, from most to least daunting: Nearly Impossible, Very High, High, Moderate, Low and Very Low. (To translate a resistance class into a final number, see the next section.)

If the scene is a climactic one you've been building toward for the bulk of the session or series, assign High or Very High Resistances.

If the action the character proposes seems so unlikely as to strain credibility, but not quite enough for it to completely fail a credibility test (p. XX), assign a Nearly Impossible Resistance.

If the action attempts to leapfrog a series of interesting obstacles to solve the main problem of the story in a disappointingly abrupt fashion, assign a Very High Resistance. (If they succeed, you must then find a new main problem arising from their solution of the one you were prepared for.)

If you can't envision an interesting story branch from failure, make success automatic. Do not require a contest at all.

If you can envision story branches from failure, but they seem less entertaining than from success, assign a Very Low Resistance.

If you can envision equally entertaining story branches from either result, look to the PCs' current position on the pass/fail cycle. You can do this instinctively or mechanically. To measure instinctively, read the players' collective mood. Do they think they're doing well, and starting to get cocky? If so, hit them with a High Resistance. Do they perceive that they're faring poorly, and growing disheartened? Give them a Low Resistance. Does their mood seem neutral? If so, use a Moderate Resistance. (Note that you, knowing what's going on in the world, may think that the players are doing better than they are. Make resistance determinations based on their perceptions, no matter how misguided they might seem to you. Think of the players as the audience in a movie; if they're feeling pressured and depressed in what is meant to be an escapist adventure, it's time to lighten the mood. If they no longer feel a sense of urgency or jeopardy, tighten the screws.)

To track the pass/fail cycle mechanically, make a chart of the story as it progresses, measuring the result of each major obstacle. The chart consists of two elements: point-form descriptions of each obstacle as it is resolved, and connective arrows. If the PCs succeed, place an upwards-pointing arrow after the obstacle notation. If they fail, mark it with a down arrow. For an inconclusive result, use a level arrow. Mark major victories and defeats with double arrows.

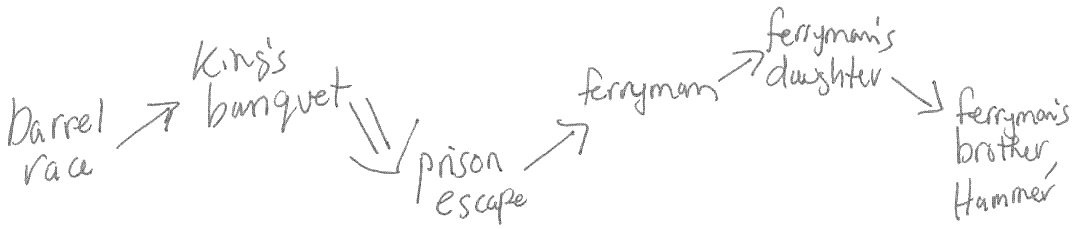
When a group of PCs acts separately but simultaneously to each overcome the same obstacle (as when scaling a cliff, bluffing their way through security, or moving silently through a secured area), note the worst outcome on your diagram.

Include on your diagram only the resolutions of major obstacles. Don't treat augments or other contests which set the stage for another resolution as separate contests. Also disregard obstacles tangential to the storyline, or of interest to only a single PC. A success gained by one PC on a matter of

little importance to the others shouldn't increase the resistance for a pivotal contest all of them are invested in.

Extremely punctilious Narrators may wish to keep separate pass/fail charts for each PC, or mark each character's results with different colored pens. They can then use these to keep track of subplots or to spot when an individual player has gone for a depressingly long time without a win, even when the rest of the group has been performing superbly.

Here's an sample pass/fail notation:



As you can see, the PCs in this game have had a victory, a complete defeat, two more victories, and then a defeat.

To use your pass/fail tracking chart in assigning resistances, check the most recent pair of arrows against the Pass/Fail Resistance Assignment Table, below. Treat each major defeat as two defeats, and each major victory as two victories.

Pass/Fail Resistance Assignment Table

Previous Two Results	Resistance For Present Contest
3–4 Defeats	Very Low
2 Defeats	Low
2 Ties	Low
1 Defeat + 1 Victory or Tie	Moderate
2 Victories, 0 Defeats	High
3-4 Victories, 0 Defeats	Very High

In the example diagram, the two most recent results are a victory and a defeat. This means that the next resistance, barring other factors, ought to be Moderate.

You may find the maintenance of a pass/fail tracking diagram a useful exercise even if you continue to rely on story instinct rather than slavishly resorting to the table.

Are any of the players breaking the fictional illusion by openly speculating on what the resistance of the current obstacle will be, based on the dramatic considerations we're describing here? Surprise them by setting a resistance contrary to expectation, and by presenting them with an shocking (and probably undesirable) plot twist arising from the contest's outcome. If they're expecting a tough obstacle, use a Very Low Resistance. If they're expecting an easy time of it, impose a Very High Resistance.

Calculating Resistances

Resistances are determined relative to the PCs' collective ability ratings. This rule allows you to pick resistances which will, over time, provide results that mimic the pass/fail cycle, without erasing the unique advantages particular players have painstakingly built into their characters.

Before starting play for the first time, examine each character sheet. Select two key abilities for each character. The first is the highest-rated, or **master** ability. For the second, pick the most distinctively oddball ability which the player has chosen to rate higher than its base starting value (usually 13.) Neither relationships nor pieces of gear are likely to be off-beat enough to qualify. This is the **color** ability. Then determine the group's average ratings for both its master and color abilities.

Kathy finds the base values for her modern-day action game. The top abilities for each character are: bounty-hunter 7Ш, trucker 7Ш, counter-insurgency 3Ш, and kung fu prodigy 6Ш. Averaged together and rounded up, these ratings come out to 6Ш. This is the base master ability.

For the color ability, Kathy selects one ability from each character sheet: Catch-Phrase "Ka-Chunk, Punk!" 14, Avoid Romantic Entanglements 16, Infiltrated Chechen rebels 17, and Synesthesia 18. She averages these ratings, for a base color ability of 17.

Adjust the values of these two benchmarks as the PCs improve over time. If a player stops improving the color ability you've designated and instead focuses on increasing another ability of a similar off-beat nature, make it the new color ability for that character, adjusting the average as necessary. If another ability's rating surpasses the current master ability, it becomes the new master ability.

During contest framing, determine whether any character's master ability applies to it, even if that character is not the one entering into the contest. The application must be direct, disregarding possible Stretches. If so, the base value from which the resistance will be determined is the group's average master ability. If not, it is the group's average color ability.

After using the methods given in the previous section to choose a resistance class, calculate the final value by checking the following chart.

Resistance Class Table

Class	Value
Nearly Impossible	Base +Ш2
Very High	Base +9
High	Base +6
Moderate	Base
Low	Base –6
Very Low	Base –Ш or 6, whichever is lower

The four action heroes wind up at the bottom of a Peruvian cliff. Atop the cliff is their enemy's base. Their last two major obstacles concluded in a victory and a major defeat, so Kathy, using the Pass/Fail Resistance Assignment Table, determines that the resistance of attempts to scale the cliff ought to be Low. None of the PCs have Climbing or the equivalent as a master ability. Nikolai, who counter-insurgency as a master ability, could argue it as a stretch, but stretches don't count for these purposes. This resistance will therefore be based on the group's color ability rating of 17. To get the resistance, she subtracts 6 from 17, for a final result of 11.

Only then does Kathy describe the cliff: "It's not as sheer as it appeared from a distance, with plenty of handholds and the occasional root sticking out. It'll still hurt if you fall, but you don't have to be Edmund Hilary to scale it."

If you're using incremental augments (p. XX) or otherwise find that players can routinely boost their ratings high enough to render these resistances laughable, recalculate the base values with the usual amount of augmenting already factored in.

This method can also be used to generate relevant ability ratings for characters and creatures opposing the protagonists. Especially with minor characters, it is often advantageous to leave the

ability ratings of antagonists undetermined until you know the dramatic circumstances in which they'll come into play.

Dwayne-O, Nikolai and company get to the top of the cliff. They had a hard and noisy time of it along the way (in other words, the worst performing character scored only a marginal victory) and genre logic dictates that they should have been heard by the guards in the bad guy's complex. Kathy decides that there will be four guards present, and decides to peg their combat abilities to the pass/fail cycle. The last two obstacles have resolved as a major defeat and a (minor) victory. Several of the PCs have master combat abilities, so the abilities of the opposition will be based on the master rating of 6Ш. According to the Pass/Fail Resistance Assignment Table, the resistance should be Low, or 6 points below the master ability value. 6Ш–6 is 20. The guards all fight with the ability Machete 20.

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Simulationist HeroQuest

It is still possible to play *HeroQuest* using a more traditional model of resistance assignment, wherein certain actions possess inherent difficulties, and you determine resistances on a supposedly objective basis, without regard for dramatic necessity or the pass/fail cycle. If you try the dramatic method and remain uncomfortable with its logic, here are some sample resistances to use as a reference point for a simulationist approach to *HeroQuest*.

Climbing
Shallow slope: Automatic success.
Very steep slope: 14 to 20.
A cliff: 17 to 10Ш2.
A city wall: 10Ш to 10Ш2.

Combat
Ordinary person: 6 to 13.
Ordinary soldier/police officer: 17 to 18Ш.
Elite soldier/SWAT team member: 10Ш to 10Ш2.

Romance
Seduce a willing, interested partner: Automatic success.
Seduce a potential partner: 20 to 10Ш2.
Come across as a lovable rogue: 1Ш.
Seduce someone who is married or in love: 5Ш to 20Ш2.

Social Conflict
Spread rumors: 14 to 20.
Spread malicious rumors: 17 to 5Ш.
Passionately sway a friendly crowd: 17 to 20Ш.
Deny malicious rumors: 20 to 10Ш.
Discredit opponent's argument: 1W to 20Ш.
Win over a neutral crowd: 1Ш to 15Ш.
Win over a hostile crowd: 15Ш to 10Ш2.

Tracking/Finding Your Way
Find your way in a familiar region: Automatic success.
Follow an animal's tracks: 14.
Follow verbal directions in a familiar region: 14.

Follow a map in a foreign land: 17 to 5Ш.
Retrace your steps in a foreign land 20 to 5Ш.
Follow an animal's tracks on a windy day: 1Ш to 5Ш.
Follow someone's verbal directions in a foreign place: 10Ш.
Follow an animal's tracks in the rain or over bare stone: 20Ш.

[[[END SIDEBAR]]]

New Conditions, New Resistance

Resistances are usually assumed to have all complicating or mitigating factors built into them, and under most circumstances require no modifiers. Even when the PCs re-encounter a previous obstacle, you can change the resistance directly if the pass/fail cycle or other dramatic or pacing reasons indicate that this is the most entertaining choice.

Make sure that you describe changing conditions so that the change in difficulty appears believable:

- *"It's very windy today, so your shot will be even trickier this time."*
- *"The market is on the rise today, so it's easier to get a return on your investments."*
- *"Those ghosts you stirred up have shown up to howl, ruining your concentration."*
- *"Joaquin's car is running faster today—must be that new ace mechanic he hired from Ecuador."*

If you want a rematch contest against characters or creatures to have a markedly different chance of success, create conditions which mitigate for or against the opposition, altering their target numbers. Wherever possible, express these as modifiers to the PC's abilities, rather than the opposition's. Of course, it's even better if the players actively seek ways to alter the odds in their own favor, with plot and ability augments. That way, they'll have earned their triumphs, rather than merely becoming the beneficiaries of good fortune.

> *During the journey to the guru's subterranean lair, it made dramatic sense for the animated statues around his temple to pose a significant threat. On their way back, it would seem repetitive and annoying to give them the same attention in the narrative—but at the same time a disappointing copout to ignore them altogether. You therefore rule that the chakra powder given to them by the head monk disturbs their mystic senses, granting the characters +9 bonuses to their contests to evade the statues and creep away into the jungle undetected. Thus you preserve the internal reality of the setting while maintaining control of your pacing.*

Credibility Tests

The process of deciding whether a proposed outcome is possible is called a **credibility test**.

In works of fiction, it is the author's job to maintain the illusion of fictional reality by presenting the reader only with events that seem credible within the rules of reality they've established for their world. Often this is an exercise in maintaining the line between the excitingly unlikely and the absurdly impossible.

If you're watching a western and the hero leaps from the top of a bluff onto the back of his speeding horse, you probably buy this as a possible action in the heightened world of the movies. If, however, you saw a movie where the hero is standing on the plain a half a mile behind his speeding horse, and then runs to catch up with it and mount it, you'd find this laughable breach of reality so great as to take you out of the movie.

As Narrator, you are never obligated to allow a contest just because two characters have abilities which can be brought into conflict. If the character's proposed result would seem absurd, you disallow the contest, period. If it seems possible but very difficult, assign an extremely high resistance.

Don't make the mistake of assigning a high resistance to avoid an impossible outcome—lucky rolls and hero points can make your world seem suddenly ridiculous.

Michelle is running a western game. The Minnesota Kid (played by Alex) stands on a salt flat, half a mile away from his horse, Platinum. A posse has appeared on the horizon, and intends to take Minnesota back to town for a necktie party. Minnesota has a Run Fast ability of 18. Platinum's Run Fast ability is rated at 8.

"Hey," says Alex, "I run faster than my horse. Can I sprint half a mile to catch up with him."

Michelle doesn't have to think about this; common sense tells her that the outcome would be inappropriately laughable. "Nope, that would be absurd. You may be better at using your Run Fast to solve problems than Platinum is, but you aren't objectively faster than a horse. And if you were, you could just outrun the posse. Which would also be absurd. Time to think of a more credible solution."

"Okay," says Alex, "Can I call Platinum back to me, with my Piercing Whistle ability?"

Michelle can imagine this happening in a western movie of roughly the same tone as her series, though it should be difficult. She allows the contest, with a suitably high resistance.

Players are typically as attuned to common sense narrative reality as you are, and will not routinely propose patently absurd actions. You'll find that they do almost all of your credibility testing for you. If anything, you'll face the opposite problem, where the players act with undue caution even though their characters exist in a relatively forgiving high-adventure setting.

What constitutes a credible action may vary from one setting to the next. In film, directors typically establish early on just what degree of realism we should expect for the duration of the movie. An over-the-top action sequence situates us in a pliable world operating under video game physics. A nasty close-up brawl puts us in the real world, where any blow hurts. If Stephen Chow one day makes a western, he might well establish it as taking place in a cartoonish world where cowboys can outrun their horses.

Traditional roleplaying game rules dictate the reality level you use; *HeroQuest* allows you to adjust it for each setting. In a realistic world, you interpret results with a gritty adherence to physics. In an over-the-top game, you describe the same outcomes as expressions of gravity-defying stunt work.

***Example One:** Adriana is running a realistic espionage game in the style of a John Le Carre novel. A car bears down on protagonist Hamish Carter on the streets of Beirut, intent on pinning him against a wall.*

Hamish's player, Gianfranco, says, "I use my Dodge ability to get out of the way."

"It's a simple contest," says Adriana. "What do you want, if you succeed?"

"I want it to hit something, removing the car as a weapon. I position myself so that it crashes the corner of the alleyway if it misses me."

Gianfranco rolls Hamish's Dodge of 18 against the bad guys' Drive ability of 14. He gets a 1; Adriana, a 13. As it stands, this is a minor victory. Gianfranco spends a hero point to bump his result up, converting it into a major victory.

"The car crumples against the wall, its engine clearly destroyed," Michelle narrates.

***Example Two:** Fiona is running a spy game in over-the-top movie mode. On the French Riviera, a car bears down on protagonist Dirk Steed.*

Dirk's player, Wesley, says, "I use my Death-Defying Leap ability to not only avoid impact, but land on the hood of their car."

Fiona runs a simple contest, pitting Dirk's Death-Defying Leap of 18 against the bad guys' Vehicular Homicide of 14. As in the above example, the player gets a 1 and the Narrator a 13. Wesley spends a hero point to turn the result into a major victory.

"As they barrel toward you," Fiona narrates, "you leap up onto the hood. It's careening along the St. Tropez boulevard, with you clinging onto it. Now what do you do?"

Collaboration Versus Authorship

A narrative-based roleplaying game like *HeroQuest* takes interpretive power away from rule books full of specific descriptions of various powers and abilities, and gives it to the Narrator. In doing so, it also takes a sense of control from the players, who select these powers and use them to influence the game world. For this reason, it is incumbent on you to give them that power back, and more, in the form of creative input. No system is easier to improvise with than *HeroQuest*; all you need to do to create a new supporting character or obstacle is to quickly jot down a few words and numbers on a piece of scrap paper. This makes it a simple matter to switch gears on a dime, and to follow the story leads your players lay down for you.

The narrative style gets a bad rap among some players, who assume that it means an overbearing GM will impose on them a pre-determined story, the outcome of which their characters are powerless to alter. These assumptions usually spring from their past bad experiences with uncollaborative GMs. Address these expectations by allowing the player's choices to lead your narrative. You might start the game with at least one possible interesting storyline in mind, but should always be willing to abandon it if the players seize the reins and take it in an unexpected direction. Your goal is to move the story toward *any* thrilling outcome, not a particular endpoint you've already envisioned.

It does no good to treat your players as creative collaborators if they can't detect their own influence on the storyline. Look for opportunities to solicit their input. Leave gaps in the storyline that allow the PCs to pursue their own agendas.

Create scenes with built-in opportunities for players to detail portions of your world.

Joanne runs a game that weaves together covert supernatural elements with the tropes of 19th century grand opera. Violetta (played by Kim) and her sometimes-lover Ricardo (Raul) attend a ball, where they meet the mysterious Count Larchmont.

"Violetta," says Joanne, "You gasp when you see him, because you once knew him, under a different name. I'm going to come back to you in a moment and ask who he seemed to be at the time, and what your relationship with him was. Ricardo, you too blanch at the sight of him. You know him as a practitioner of a certain type of magic. Think about what type of magic, and how you came to know this."

After a few moment's thought, Kim says, "He was an admirer, of course!" (Violetta's master ability is Legion Of Admirers.) "At the time he went under the name of Alfredo Valmont, and traveled in revolutionary circles. His French accent was good, but never fooled me."

Raul supplies his answer to Joanne's question: "Larchmont is widely known as a Mesmerist. I saw him perform acts of hypnotism at a certain, shall we say, gathering of rakes and libertines. In Paris, last year."

When a player scores an impressive success and you aren't sure what he'd consider an ideal result, ask for suggestions.

After most of the guests have gone home, Violetta tempts Larchmont into demonstrating his mesmeric powers on her. She scores a major victory in her attempt to resist him. Because Violetta's action is defensive in nature, Joanne is hard-pressed to think of an interesting result. So she asks Violetta's player what she'd like to see happen.

"Maybe his power feeds back, and gives me the opportunity to influence him."

"Yes," says Joanne, "but it will have to be subtle."

"I plant in him the suggestion that he accidentally leave his engagement book behind when he leaves."

When players seem unhappy with a result interpretation, find out how it failed to live up to their expectations. If you realize that you've made a huge error of outcome interpretation, don't be afraid to hit the rewind button. It's better to nullify a event that causes players to become seriously dissatisfied with your game than to compensate for it or work around it. Don't worry about breaking

the illusion of reality by taking back a conflict interpretation: it has already been broken, by the expectations disconnect between you and your players.

Sometimes you'll encounter a dominating player who tries to take advantage of your willingness to rewind by appealing a huge number of your interpretive calls, in which case you'll have to push back. However, it's much more common—and damaging—for players to suffer in silence because they don't want to seem whiny.

Some players are going to dislike the narrative style no matter what you do. Among them are tactically-minded players, who enjoy reaping maximum control over a situation with minimal risk. Because they actively seek out anti-climactic results, they'll have trouble enjoying a game where difficulties arise from the pass/fail cycle, which is designed to keep the protagonists in interesting trouble at all times.

Saying Yes

Many of us steeped in the traditions of earlier roleplaying games have unconsciously trained ourselves to reflexively say no to the players. If they ask if there's a wrench under the console, and we haven't planned for there to be a wrench under the console—or a high priest in the temple, or a hungry of look on that lion's face—we say no.

That said, most situations can be enlivened, and made more collaborative, when you say yes to the players. Where the question is of no great consequence, a simple yes will suffice. When saying yes would confer an unearned advantage, make the players work for it by adding a twist or complication. Say *yes, but…* This grants the player's wish, but requires him to overcome an newly introduced plot obstacle to get it:

- *"Yes, there's a wrench under the console, but its jammed under one corner, as if being used as a shim. You'll have to lift it somehow to get at it."*
- *"Yes, according to the attendant, there is a high priest at the temple—but he's notoriously suspicious of wanderers and ragamuffins, such as yourselves."*
- *"Yes, one of the lions looks particularly hungry. What did you have in mind?"*

Players who become familiar with this technique can use it to seamlessly point you toward desired story developments, making your game more collaborative.

Assuming that players are unfamiliar with the world, a collaborative Narrator treats setting details she's created but not yet introduced to the players as provisional, altering them if necessary to say yes to the players.

> *Your notes tell you that Arahaka Station is a run-down orbiter used primarily to advance the empire's territorial claims. One of your players, putting together a cunning plan, asks, "I don't suppose, since this is near the spatial anomaly, there are long-range telescopes on board?" To enable the player to advance his storyline, you revise your notes, and instead specify that Arahaka is indeed an observatory.*

Saying No

Although it's best to say yes whenever possible, there are a couple of instances where the answer to player queries about a situation should be a flat refusal.

Preserving a story premise: A particular dramatic situation may exist only under certain conditions. If the troopers must remain out of radio contact so that they have to deal with a crisis themselves, then the communications array remains dead until the situation has otherwise resolved itself—no matter how hard they try. (Players are more likely to accept situational limitations like this when they match the genre. They expect the phone to go dead when they're recreating a slasher movie. Unless you foreshadow it adequately, managing their expectations in advance, they'll get justifiably frustrated if their magic stops working at the climax of an epic fantasy series.)

Preserving narrative consistency: If you've already established that a fact or situation pertains in your world, it's more important to maintain believability by sticking to your continuity. (Look for ways to have your cake and eat it too, by thinking of a ways to adhere to continuity *and* give the player what he wants.)

Running Contests

The secret of becoming an entertaining *HeroQuest* Narrator is to learn to bend the contest system to fit your style. This section contains further notes and options for running contests.

Group Simple Contests

In the following contest type, multiple participants take part in a contest, each of them rolling once. Use it when more than one character takes part in a conflict which does not warrant the resolution time of a long contest.

A group simple contest can pit all of the participating characters against a single resistance, representing one obstacle.

In a contest against resistance, each player rolls a single time; the Narrator rolls the same resistance value once per player. The two results are compared on the Resolution Point Chart (p. XX), to get a numerical value which the winner then adds to his side's total. The side with the highest total scores a victory, the degree of which is determined by the difference between results, as seen on the Group Simple Contest Result Table. If the results are tied, the outcome is inconclusive or mutually unsatisfactory.

Group Simple Contest Result Table

Difference Between Results	Winning Group's Victory Level	Negative Consequences For Winner
1	Marginal	Hurt
2	Minor	Unharmed
3-4	Major	Unharmed
5+	Complete	Unharmed

Unlike a long contest, the Narrator has everyone roll simultaneously, and holds off on describing the action until all of the results are tabulated and combined. The relative contributions of the participants toward the victory are indicated by the number of resolution points they contributed to their team's final tally. You'll often find it easiest if you wait to describe the top scoring player or players' actions last.

Characters are considered to act more or less simultaneously. (Where the participants would logically take turns acting, instead employ a series of simple contests, with order of action decided by the players, or by other factors arising from the logic of the fictional situation. That way the players can stop as soon as they succeed, which is not possible in a group simple contest.)

In a series inspired by Chinese fairy tales, four hungry travelers are trying to catch a fish in a river. It is a magical fish; if they can catch it, they can harvest enough flesh from it to feed a hungry village, then release it to swim away without harm. However, the fish only rewards those skillful enough to catch him with their bare hands. The four PCs, Tripitaka (Jamie), Monkey (Graham), Pigsy (Scott) and Sandy (Ken) all wade into the river, to catch it.

The Narrator, Vivian, thinks this will be a fun scene, but doesn't want to extend it to epic length, so she decides on a simple contest. In keeping with the lighthearted slapstick style of the series, all of the PCs want to try at once, so she elects to employ a group simple contest. She decides to represent the difficulty of catching the magic fish with a single Resistance value, of 16.

Each player rolls a die; the Narrator rolls 4 dice, keeping track of which matches each player.

Jamie, using Tripitaka's Serene Good Fortune of 18, scores a 14 against Vivian's 13. That's a success vs. success in Vivian's favor—a marginal victory for the resistance, which gives it 1 Resolution Point. The score is now 0–1.

Graham, using Monkey's Deft Capering of 8, rolls a 12 against Vivian's 17. That's a success vs. failure in Monkey's favor, winning his side 2 Resolution Points, taking the total to 2–1.

Pigsy uses his Forage For Food 3; Scott rolls an 11 against the Narrator's 15. That's a success vs. success in his favor, garnering him a single Resolution point. The total is now 3–1.

Sandy uses his Scary Countenance of 8 to frighten the fish into submission. (In a more serious game, the Narrator might consider this a Stretch, but it fits the spirit of this series just fine.) He rolls a 15; so does Vivian. This tied success vs. success result adds nothing to the final total.

That total, at 3–1 in favor of the PCs, means that they've caught the fish. Consulting the group simple contest result table, Vivian sees that it is a minor victory.

Now that the results are in, it's time for Vivian to narrate: "You leap heedlessly into the water, splashing after the fish. Sandy splutters down into the water to scare the fish with his frightening visage, but forgets to breathe and winds up coughing and spluttering. The terrified fish leaps into Pigsy, who stuns it slightly, before it bounces off of him and into a startled Tripitaka, who falls back into the water. Monkey leaps in, deftly snatching it out of the air. The four of you wind up on the bank, wet, spluttering, and exhausted—but with a slippery fish to take to the village, inside a clay pot full of river water."

Alternatively, a group simple contest can take place as a series of paired match-ups between two groups of contestants. Characters forced to participate in more than one contest face the standard multiple opponent penalties.

Lindsay runs a game of post-apocalyptic survivalism. The PCs are the battle leaders for the feral suburban community of Millwood Acres, which is at war with the neighboring gated community of Riverglen Homes. Fearing an alliance between Riverglen and the gothsquads of the nearby amusement park, they decide to launch a series of punitive raids against their enemies. They frame the contest so that, if they succeed, the Riverglenners appear weak and unsuitable for alliance in the eyes of the gothsquadders.

The four PCs are Joella (played by Nina), Steve (Magnus), Stu (Brendan) and Starkweather (Wulf.) They're going to split up and hit four Riverglen defense points all at once. Each will lead a small squad of warriors on motorbikes and scooters. They choose the defense points according to the presence of their various hated rivals. All players roll at once; Lindsay rolls once each for the four antagonist characters.

Nina rolls Joella's Skirmisher rating of 18 against her rival, Irene Caddis, who defends with Fight From Fortification rating of 16. She rolls a 1, versus the Narrator's 9. That's a critical vs. success, which scores 2 Resolution points for her side.

Using Steve's Motorized Assault rating of 8, Magnus contends against the Vigilant Defender 5 ability of his personal enemy, Ratter Glynn. He rolls a 6 versus Lindsay's 2—a success vs. success in Ratter's favor. That scores 1 Resolution point for Riverglen Homes.

Brendan rolls Stu's Find Defensive Flaws ability of 3 against Forsythia's Instill Berserk Fury of 17. He gets a 9, versus Lindsay's 2. That's another success vs. success for Riverglen homes, taking the score to 2–2.

What he hasn't counted on is the return to Riverglen of their old war leader, Salton, who they thought banished to the city lands. Salton pits his Rescuing Cavalry ability of 10 against Stu, who responds with his Adjust To Circumstances ability, which after the –3 multiple opponent penalty, has an effective rating of 2. He rolls a 13 versus Lindsay's 10. That's a success vs. failure for Salton, earning 2 Resolution Points for Riverglen. The score is now 2–4.

It's up to Starkweather to even the odds. He pits his Pinpoint Maneuvers ability of 8 against the Architect's Booby Trap ability of 16. He scores a 13, against Lindsay's 14, but decides to spend a hero

point to turn that result from success vs. success in his favor to critical versus success. That takes the score to 4–4. A tie is disappointing, but better than an unequivocal loss.

With the results now determined, Lindsay can now narrate the results: "Your skirmishes, as skirmishes tend to be, proved less than decisive. Joella led her squad to shoot up Irene's fortifications at Riverglen's west gate, leaving impressive damage. Unfortunately, Ratter saw Steve's motorized assault coming, and repelled it by ordering his men to lay down a persuasive line of covering fire. Forsythia likewise whipped her fighters into a fury, pushing Steve back before he could find a chink in her fortifications. Then Salton suddenly reappeared, roaring in with his men from the rear to humiliating rout Steve's forces. At the same time, Starkweather was blowing like a banshee through The Architect's carefully laid minefield. An impressive showing, but overall, only enough to turn the evening's festivities into an explosive draw. The next day, your contact inside the amusement park crew tells you that the skirmishes won't impact their decision regarding a Riverglen alliance, one way or the other.

Combined Abilities

On certain occasions you may rule that a character can only hope to achieve his goal by using two disparate abilities. When this occurs, average the two ability ratings, then apply any modifiers, to arrive at the target number.

The classic example of this situation is the character who's trying to talk his way out of a beating his opponent is already attempting to administer. Seamus, using his Silver-Tongued 6 ability, is trying to convince Tor Hammerlund that it would be brutish to stomp him for the mere transgression of flirting with his wife. Tor is trying to use his Stomp ability of 18 to hurt Seamus. Since Tor is already tearing the bar apart trying to get his hands on Seamus, the Narrator rules that Seamus can't just stand there talking while he waits for his arguments to sink in. He has to make at least some effort to avoid Tor's blows. Seamus' player, Kevin, proposes using his Duck Blows ability of 18. The average of Seamus' Silver-Tongued and Duck Blows abilities is 2.

Having to combine abilities, rather than using the best one and augmenting it with the lesser one, is always a disadvantage to the character. Only require combined ability use when story logic absolutely demands that the character face a lower chance of success, because he has to do two things at once.

[[[BEGIN SIDEBAR]]]

Force Vs. Words

Persuasive characters will often try to talk their way out of fights. Depending on the situation, you may require the talker to defend with a combined ability (see body text), or stage a simple persuasion contest as before the fight breaks out. In the latter case, the would-be combatant uses an appropriate ability to resist the persuasion, and, if successful, is then permitted to go on to a new contest to resolve the combat. If a fight breaks out, the would-be persuader must now defend with an appropriate physical ability.

[[[END SIDEBAR]]]

Tricky Cases

Beginning *HeroQuest* Narrators are sometimes flummoxed by certain situations which at first glance seem difficult to adjudicate using the contest rules. Thinking through these problems is generally a matter of taking a step back and focusing less on the scene's specific details and more on its overall dramatic purpose.

When in doubt, ask yourself, "How does this happen in books or movies?" Focusing on how like things work in reality often sidetracks you by inspiring you to organize your thinking from the details up, rather than from the narratives structure on down.

Extended Contests vs. Impersonal Foes

Running an extended contest between players and an abstract or impersonal force such as a mountain, market conditions, or their own personality flaws may seem strange at first. Remember, when assigning bids and describing results, that you are not personifying this force, or granting it intentionality. The mountain is not thinking or acting. You are not playing the mountain as a character. You are simply describing a series of setbacks that the character faces in its effort to get up the mountain. As Narrator, you can make strategic choices, bidding amounts of AP which are likely to defeat the character.

If you think a contest with an impersonal force is likely and you know you have problems thinking up possible setbacks on the fly, jot down a list beforehand:

- ***Mountain:*** *icy patch, especially steep bit, crevasse, high winds, altitude sickness, aggressive mountain goats, demoralizing frozen corpse*
- ***Market conditions:*** *investor panic, cable news hype, supply chain disruptions, worker unrest, currency fluctuations*
- ***Hamlet's indecision:*** *doubts reality of ghost, loves his mother, won't kill a praying man, thinks too much, feigned madness becomes real*

When you can't think of a tactically apt bid, assign 1/3 of the impersonal force's starting AP value or half of its current value, whichever is greater.

Missile Combat

Fights conducted from a distance may be more difficult to envision and describe than hand-to-hand combat, where each exchange can be described as an attempt to land a single blow. (Note that it needn't be this way, and that even in a close-up fight, multiple actions can be subsumed under a single exchange.) In part the disconnect comes from the difference between real and dramatic missile fights. In reality, missile combat is a game of caution; fighters run for cover when they're fired on, then hunker down and plink at each other. Dramatic missile combats come in two varieties: the duel, and the fast-moving action sequence.

The iconic type of duel is the western-style shootout. Combatants stand out in the open, blasting away at each other until one of them falls. This fight can easily be described on a shot-for-shot basis, although it is often over so quickly that a simple contest is probably more appropriate.

In action movie gun battles, characters run around, continually exposing themselves to fire, which conveniently (for the heroes, anyway) tends to land just at their feet as they scoot for the next bit of cover. These are best described as battles for superior position. When characters lose exchanges of insufficient magnitude to remove them from the contest, they are best described as having lost position. They've been driven back or forced to retreat to cover. They may be forced to reload (which in action films is a rhythmic choice unrelated to the magazine capacity of any weapon) or presented with some other distracting obstacle, like a baby carriage bouncing down the steps into the middle of a gun battle.

One-Sided Missile Combat

Fights in which one side is armed with missile weapons and the other is not seems at first glance to pose a conceptual challenge: what happens if an unarmed party wins an exchange?

The answer, as always, is to refer back to the framing of the contest. What is the winning party hoping to achieve? If he's trying to defeat the opposition in combat, he achieves some kind of progress toward that goal. The most obvious advantage is that he's able to close the distance between himself and his opponent, and is thereafter able to engage him in close combat. On a big enough victory, he may not only close the distance, but then engage and strike his opponent. Forget the

conventions of other roleplaying games: in *HeroQuest*, a single result can be described as an entire series of actions toward the same end result.

The types of abilities used in such a fight will vary depending on your results interpretation. A character may use Duck and Weave to run through a hail of missile fire, then Fisticuffs to trounce his opponent, who in turn might start with Archery and be forced to switch to Knife Fighter when the distance is closed.

A character without missile weapons may simply be trying to escape harm. If so, a victorious exchange represents progress toward this goal: he gets further away from them.

Characters may be pursuing other goals while enemies with missiles try to harm them: they might be trying to retrieve an object, get to a position, or rescue a person. When they win exchanges, they get incrementally closer to achieving the specified goal, to an extent proportionate to the size of their victory. When they lose, they're driven back or find the goalposts otherwise moved against them.
[[[BEGIN SIDEBAR]]]

Non-Lethal Combat

In almost every genre, experienced combatants should have the option to restrict the harm they inflict on their opponents. To do this, players specify that their characters are fighting to disable, not kill, before they land any blows.
If, at the end of any fight, an opponent is assessed as being Dying or Injured, and the character who knocked him out of the fight was fighting to disable, the result is reduced by one consequence level: from Dying to Injured, or from Injured to Impaired.

The conditions of a fight may decrease consequence results, or prevent lingering harm outright. A fight with padded weapons will have a winner and loser, but will result in serious harm only if something goes horribly awry—perhaps as the result of a fumble.

In some genres—particularly those evoking the upbeat, kid-friendly, whiz-bang adventure of yore, non-lethal fighting should be the default. Players are assumed to be fighting to disable except where they specify otherwise.
In extremely gritty settings, Narrators may assess a penalty to the combat rating of a character intent on fighting non-lethally. In more heroic games, the ability to fight mercifully is considered to be built into the characters' combat ratings.
[[[END SIDEBAR]]]

Mismatched and Graduated Goals

Most contests will be framed so that one of two possibilities pertains:

1. Character A is trying to do something; character B is trying to stop him.
2. Character A is trying to do something bad to character B; character B is trying to do the same to character A.

In either case, the results of the contest are fairly easy to determine. In the first instance, character A either succeeds, or doesn't, and negative consequences strike the loser. In the second, one side wins, the other loses.

Sometimes, though, the two sides in a contest may have goals which do not directly contract one another.

A huntsman pursues a nurse, who is trying to escape through the forest with two small children. The huntsman wants to kill the nurse. The nurse wants to save the children.

When encountering **mismatched** goals, your first job is to determine whether the mismatch is complete, or partial.

In a complete mismatch, neither side is at all interested in preventing the other's goal. A complete mismatch does not result in a contest; the Narrator asks what the PCs are doing, and then describes each participant succeeding at their goals.

The Narrator, Gwen, talks to the two players, Freya (the nurse) and James (the huntsman) to see how mismatched their goals really are.

"Freya," she asks, "you don't care at all if your character survives?"

"As long as I can get the children out of the queen's forest and into safe hands, my life means nothing."

"And James, you really aren't interested in capturing the kids?"

"The queen said kill the nurse. I know she sort of implied that I should capture the kids, but she didn't say it, so I'm going to take refuge in literal-mindedness and only do exactly what she told me to."

"Wow," says Gwen. "Well, then, there's no contest then. The nurse will die, and the children will get free. Freya, why don't you set the scene as you encounter the woodsman?"

With Gwen prompting as needed, Freya and James go on to describe the nurse's murder, and the children's escape to safety. As James and Gwen play out his report to the queen, Freya gets started creating a new character.

In most instances, the contest goals are not actually mismatched, but **graduated**. One or more participants has both a primary and a secondary goal. In this case, the Narrator frames the contest, identifying which goal is which. To achieve both, the winner must score a major or complete victory. On a minor or marginal victory, he achieves only the primary goal.

Few roleplayers would be as careless of their character's survival as Freya, in the above example. The situation would more likely play out like so:

"Freya," the Narrator asks, "you don't care at all if your character survives?"

"Well, of course I do, but if I have to choose between my own life and that of the kids, I'm picking them."

"In other words, you primarily want the kids to get away, but if you can save yourself, too, you'll do that."

"Right."

"That makes it a graduated goal. On a major or better victory, you live and the kids get away. On a minor or worse victory, the kids get away, but you die."

"And James, are you really uninterested in capturing the kids?"

"Mostly I want to kill the nurse. If I can, I'll grab up the kids afterwards."

"Then that's a graduated goal, too. On a major or better victory, you get the kids, too. On a minor or worse, you overcome her in combat—"

"And then I kill her."

A simple contest ensues. Freya pits the nurse's Inconspicuous Departure ability of 18 against the huntsman's Huntsman ability of 6. She rolls a 1, against James' 16—a critical vs. success in her favor, or minor victory. She gets the kids to safety, but is felled by the huntsman's axe.

Joining Long Contests In Progress

When a PC wishes to join a long contest in progress, the Narrator determines whether the player accepts the current framing. If so, he can participate like any other contestant. In the case of an extended contest, he gets a starting number of APs equal to the target number for his first action. In a long contest, he simply selects an opponent and enters into a new exchange.

A new contestant who wants to achieve something other than the goal established during framing may instead perform unrelated actions, including assists and augments.

Mobs, Gangs, and Hordes

Sometimes the PCs will face large numbers of individually inconsequential opponents. You can roll for each of them separately, taking note of the multiple opponent penalties they incur against their enemies.

More simply, you can treat many as one. Divide the number of minor opponents by the number of contesting PCs. Treat each of these sections of the crowd as a single character with one ability rating. They don't impose a multiple opponent penalty; instead, their numbers are factored into the ability rating you assign to them. When the mob loses an exchange, describe individuals within it as being hurt or falling away. When it wins, describe them overwhelming the PC, or swelling in numbers.

Free For Alls

In a few situations, such as demolition derbies or attempts to grab a coveted item, group contests will not take place between two sides, but will be free for alls, where all participants hammer away at each other until only one is left standing. These play out as normal, with each character initially choosing one or more opponents to enter into exchanges with, and seeking out new exchanges after knocking rivals out of the contest. Instead of ceasing when everyone on one side is out, they end when all but one contestant are down.

Accepting Persuasion

When it comes to persuasion, mundane or extraordinary, players exhibit a distinct double standard. They hate to lose autonomy over their own characters, but are only too happy to take it away from others. Expect unhappiness when supporting characters do unto them as they hope to do unto others.

Although extraordinary powers may be defined differently, ordinary persuasion has its limits. In general, you can persuade someone to do something only by convincing him that it serves his own agenda. Unless he has a flaw that suggests he is susceptible to sudden conversion, you can't change his faith, ideology, or other deeply-held beliefs with mere argument, rational or otherwise. Attempts to persuade people to behave in a manner that is completely out of character fail a credibility test. In order to proceed with a contest, the prospective persuader must alter his desired goals and talking points, so that both remain credible.

Killing Helpless Foes

HeroQuest combats, in keeping with most adventure fiction, tend to leave the losers incapacitated but not dead. Sympathetic protagonists do not go on to cold-bloodedly slaughter helpless opponents. They imprison them, turn them over to official justice, or (if they are unimportant to the plot) leave them groaning on the floor and move on.

Roleplayers tend to exhibit a disregard for the lives of their fictional enemies. You can either embrace this as endemic to the form, or present players with reasons to act as sympathetically as their fictional counterparts.

To prevent them from jarringly engaging in callous murder, see to it that your settings contain the normal constraints that prevent such killings. If the PCs act like psychopaths, they'll be treated as such. In modern or highly urbanized settings, authorities will seek out and punish murderers. Ancient and feudal cultures may impose other penalties, such as the payment of wergild, for wrongful killing. Killers may face religious or social sanction; in magical settings, the wrath of the gods may have measurable effects. Certain cultures may provide incentives for keeping one's vanquished enemies alive, from ransoms to prisoner exchanges.

The reluctance of fictional characters to kill mirrors reality. Well-balanced people, especially those who consider themselves basically decent and good, feel an instinctive aversion to murder. Model this by requiring would-be cold-blooded killers to roll an appropriate personality trait, like Sociopath, Vengeful, or Hates the River Folk, against a resistance of 14 to 14ɯ or more, depending on

the victim and overall emotional circumstances. Killing a hardened foreign soldier who slew a relative is easier than slitting the throat of a poor conscripted farmer who grew up in the next village. If would-be killers are defeated in the contest, they are overwhelmed by instinctive reluctance and cannot proceed—just as when they lose in a contest against a personality flaw.

Sometimes players want to kill defeated foes because they're afraid they'll come back later, or alert their allies. To help preserve PC sympathy, always craft situations to give them a better alternative than murder. Give them the ability to reliably imprison their foes for the duration of the current situation. If mercy is consistently penalized, you can expect your protagonists to abandon it.

In general, people will treat downed opponents they way they'd anticipate being treated if their situations were reversed (if not a little better.) Make sure the players know when they're entering into fights where they can expect to be treated mercifully after defeat, or when neither side expects quarter from the other.

In certain settings, like military adventure, the efficient killing of helpless foes is perfectly in-genre and should not be penalized in this way. Even then, it is appropriate to depict it as distasteful, and to make the players feel that they're engaged in a dirty, if necessary, task.

Often what players really want is the chance to rightfully kill a bunch of bad guys in righteous combat. Satisfy this need by pumping up the results when they overcome anonymous or essentially interchangeable minor foes. Treat complete, major or even minor victories as viscerally satisfying instant kills.

Likewise, marginal or even minor victories may mean not that enemies are incapacitated, but that they flee the field of battle, removing themselves as threats. (Don't do this in cases where the PCs want to capture their enemies for ransom or interrogation.)

Appendix: Quick Reference

Simple Contest Results				
	Contestant B			
Contestant A	**Critical**	**Success**	**Failure**	**Fumble**
Critical	Low roll receives marginal victory, else tie	Contestant A receives minor victory	Contestant A receives major victory	Contestant A receives complete victory
Success	Contestant B gains minor victory	Low roll receives marginal victory, else tie	Contestant A receives minor victory	Contestant A receives major victory
Failure	Contestant B gains major victory	Contestant B gains minor victory	Low roll receives marginal victory, else tie	Contestant A receives minor victory
Fumble	Contestant B gains complete victory	Contestant B gains major victory	Contestant B gains minor victory	Tie*

* In a group simple contest (see p. XX), the narrator may declare that both contestants suffer a marginal defeat to indicate that, although their results cancel out with respect to each other, their situation worsens compared to other contestants.

Consequences Of Defeat			
Defeat Level (Simple or Scored Contest)	**Final AP Total** (Extended Contest)	**State Of Adversity**	**Penalty**
Marginal	0 to –10 AP	Hurt	–3 penalty to appropriate abilities
Minor	–11 to –20 AP	Impaired	–6 penalty to appropriate abilities
Major	–21 to –30 AP	Injured	Automatic bump down on uses of appropriate ability
Complete	–31 or fewer AP	Dying	No actions allowed

Consequences Of Victory

Victory Level (Simple or Scored Contest)	**Extended Contest Final AP Total**	**Bonus**
Marginal	0 to –10 AP	+0
Minor	–11 to –20 AP	+3
Major	–21 to –30 AP	+6
Complete	–31 or fewer AP	+9

Extended Contest Results				
	Contestant B			
Contestant A	**Critical**	**Success**	**Failure**	**Fumble**
Critical	High roll transfers ½x bid, else tie	Contestant B transfers 1x bid	Contestant B transfers 2x bid	Contestant B transfers 3x bid
Success	Contestant A transfers 1x bid	High roll loses ½x bid, else tie	Contestant B transfers 1x bid	Contestant B loses 2x bid
Failure	Contestant A transfers 2x bid	Contestant A loses 1x bid	High roll loses ½x bid, else tie	Contestant B loses 1x bid
Fumble	Contestant A transfers 3x bid	Contestant A loses 1x bid	Contestant A loses 1x bid	Tie*

* In a group extended contest, the narrator may declare that both contestants lose ½x bid to indicate that, although their results cancel out with respect to each other, their situation worsens compared to other contestants.

Final Action Results Table

Result	**AP change**
Marginal Victory	Rejoin contest with 1/8 of your starting APs
Minor Victory	Rejoin contest with 1/4 of your starting APs
Major Victory	Rejoin contest with 1/2 of your starting APs
Complete Victory	Rejoin contest with full starting APs
Marginal Defeat	Lose APs equal to 1/8 of your starting value
Minor Defeat	Lose APs equal to 1/4 of your starting value
Major Defeat	Lose APs equal to 1/2 of your starting value
Complete Defeat	Lose APs equal to your full starting value

AP Transfer From Failed Disengagement

Level Of Defeat	**APs Transferred**
Marginal	1/8 of your current total
Minor	¼ of your current total
Major	½ of your current total
Complete	Your current total, less 1

Resolution Point Chart

	Critical	Success	Failure	Fumble
Critical	1	2	3	5
Success	2	1	2	3
Failure	3	2	1	2
Fumble	5	3	2	N/A

Rising Action Consequence Chart

Difference Between Results	Negative Consequences For Loser	Negative Consequences For Winner	Winner's Victory Level
1	Hurt	Hurt	Marginal
2	Hurt	Unharmed	
3	Impaired	Unharmed	Minor
4	Impaired	Unharmed	
5	Injured	Unharmed	Major
6	Injured	Unharmed	
7	Dying	Unharmed	Complete
8	Dead	Unharmed	
9	Dead	Unharmed	

Climactic Scene Consequence Chart

Total Resolution Points Scored Against Character	Consequence	Winner's Victory Level
0	Unharmed	
1	Dazed	
2	Hurt	Marginal
3	Impaired	Minor
4	Injured	Major
5	Injured	
6	Dying	Complete
7	Dying	
8+	Dead	

Assist Results

Contest Outcome	**Change To Score Against Recipient**
Complete Victory	–4
Major Victory	–3
Minor Victory	–2
Marginal Victory	–1
Marginal Defeat	0
Minor Defeat	+1
Major Defeat	+2
Complete Defeat	+3

Augment Results

Success Level	Bonus
Complete Victory	+Ш
Major Victory	+9
Minor Victory	+6
Marginal Victory	+3
Marginal Defeat	+0
Minor Defeat	+0
Major Defeat	+0
Complete Defeat	–3

Healing Resistances

State Of Adversity	Resistance
Hurt	14
Impaired	17
Injured	5Ш
Dying	20Ш

High Adversity Resistances

State Of Adversity	Resistance
Hurt	¼ of opponent's target number
Impaired	½ of opponent's target number
Injured	¾ of opponent's target number
Dying	opponent's target number

Financial Consequences Chart

Success Level	Change In State Of Prosperity
Complete Victory	Increases by 3 steps
Major Victory	Increases by 2 steps
Minor Victory	Increases by 1 steps
Marginal Victory	Increases by 1 step*
Marginal Defeat	Decreases by 1 step*
Minor Defeat	Decreases by 1 steps
Major Defeat	Decreases by 2 steps
Complete Defeat	Decreases by 3 steps

*Change is temporary, and is reversed at beginning of next session.

Pass/Fail Resistance Assignment Table

Previous Two Results	Resistance For Present Contest
3–4 Defeats	Very Low
2 Defeats	Low
2 Ties	Low
1 Defeat + 1 Victory or Tie	Moderate
2 Victories, 0 Defeats	High
3-4 Victories, 0 Defeats	Very High

Resistance Class Table

Class	Value
Nearly Impossible	Base +Ш2
Very High	Base +9
High	Base +6
Moderate	Base
Low	Base –6
Very Low	Base –Ш or 6, whichever is lower

Group Simple Contest Result Table

Difference Between Results	Winning Group's Victory Level	Negative Consequences For Winner
1	Marginal	Hurt
2	Minor	Unharmed
3-4	Major	Unharmed
5+	Complete	Unharmed