

# THE ULTIMATE RPG CHARACTER BACKSTORY GUIDE

EXPANDED GENRES EDITION

PROMPTS AND ACTIVITIES TO CREATE  
COMPELLING CHARACTERS FOR  
HORROR, SCI-FI, X-PUNK, AND MORE

JAMES D'AMATO



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### *The Ultimate RPG Character Backstory Guide*

“[T]his book is pure fun....Newcomers to the genre and returning heroes from past fellowships will find something in this for them.”

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PROMPTS AND ACTIVITIES TO CREATE  
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JAMES D'AMATO

ADAMS MEDIA

NEW YORK LONDON TORONTO SYDNEY NEW DELHI

## Dedication

Dedicated to my spouse, Mel, who supported me through every crisis and showed infinite patience and kindness toward the dyslexic with ADHD who had to write a new book during their pregnancy.



In memory of our friend and colleague Peter Archer. I am so proud of the work we did together; I hope you will be proud of the work we had to finish without you.

# Introduction

Role-playing games are an interactive, fun way to spend time with your friends. A big part of the fun is getting to know everyone's player characters (PCs) and seeing what happens to them as the game progresses. What will they do and why? You want to know more about them—what are their ethics (will your robot have a moral compass?), what is their outward appearance (what is your superhero's suit like?), and what is their motivation (what is keeping your horror protagonist in a clearly haunted house?). With *The Ultimate RPG Character Backstory Guide: Expanded Genres Edition*, you can answer these questions and flesh out your PCs into fully realized people with dozens of entertaining questions and prompts that will pique your curiosity.

When I first created the original *The Ultimate RPG Character Backstory Guide* in 2018, I wanted to give readers exercises and activities to develop PCs—and hopefully enhance the entire RPG experience in the process. I was thrilled to hear that the book not only helped established players; it also welcomed new folks into the hobby, and even helped people doing creative writing get over writer's block! This *Expanded Genres Edition* has more all-new activities perfect for creating characters in many types of stories: Fantasy, Sc-Fi, Horror, X-Punk, Superhero, and Western settings. Plus, the final chapter features entries that can fit into any genre, so you can find a genre for whatever game you are playing, giving you even more options for building out your characters.

How your PC handles a problem depends on what shaped the character into who they are. In these pages, you'll find exercises that will challenge you to create a richer past for the PC you've

brought to life. You'll find d20 chance questions at the beginning of each genre chapter (except for Chapter 8: All Genres), prompts that invite open-ended responses, and tables that feature various options for your characters' traits.

You can complete these exercises on your own, but some might be more fun to do with your gaming buddies. Many of the exercises in this book will address your character as "you," the way a game master might. Whenever the book asks about physical qualities or background details, we're talking about characters and not you, the reader.

Whether you are looking to add some pathos to your half-vampire cyborg detective or figure out how your apocalyptic-punk lead can finally overthrow their oppressors, *The Ultimate RPG Character Backstory Guide: Expanded Genres Edition* will help you bring your beloved PCs to life in a creative and fulfilling way.



## Getting Started

### What Is an RPG?

A role-playing game (RPG) is a type of analog game where players generate narrative through shared imagination. The core concept behind RPGs is similar to imagination games people play when they are young. Just like “house,” using dolls or action figures, and other simple games of pretend, these games call on players to inhabit a role and interact in a shared imaginary space.

“Tabletop” RPGs published in game manuals introduce structure to this process. Published RPGs, or **role-playing systems**, help players establish goals, track abstract information, and resolve conflicts. Rule systems and randomizers help adults make sense of what comes naturally to most children.

### GMs and PCs

Everyone involved in an RPG is playing the game and is therefore a player. When I refer to players in this book, I mean everyone at the table. Traditional RPGs have specific structural roles that help the game function. Broadly speaking, the most popular meta roles are **player character (PC)** and **game master (GM)**.

## What Is a PC?

In most games, the majority of people participating are responsible for controlling individual characters. For our purposes, these characters and the people who play them are PCs.

Narratively, PCs are protagonists. Players in the PC role are the primary authors of their story. PCs choose how their character thinks, looks, and acts. Because PCs interact with outside forces like other players and randomization, a player in a PC role can't control *everything* that happens to their character. However, a PC player always controls how their character reacts.

## What Is a GM?

Many RPGs have a specialized role that controls any elements of the game that are not PCs. The title for this role varies, but here I'll refer to it as the game master (GM).

The GM is like a narrator, director, producer, supporting actor, and crew rolled into one person. Colloquially, we say GMs **run** the game. The GM is usually also the arbiter of a game's rules. On top of that, the GM is also role-playing. They control the actions of non-player characters (NPCs), which function to support or oppose PCs in the story.

## What Is a Backstory?

In most fiction, a “backstory” is the initially unseen history that determines how a character begins their journey. The backstory is the events and details it takes to get a character to the beginning of the story we’re *really* interested in telling. It explains a character’s personality, abilities, and motivations.

To enjoy a story about the legendary swordsman Zorro, the audience can operate with remarkably few details. We don’t need to know that Zorro became a masked vigilante to battle corruption,

that he was taught to fight by his idealistic father, that his lover is the wealthy daughter of an influential Spanish noble, or that a wicked governor wants to use his lover as leverage to gain Spain's support for a violent crackdown against striking laborers. The action of a masked master swordsman outwitting and outfighting car after car of soldiers on a train is exciting enough to justify itself.

However, if you were writing this Zorro adventure, it's helpful to have an idea of those backstory details. They help us know Zorro's abilities and limitations, understand why our hero is willing to take dramatic risks, and make the dialogue in Zorro's inevitable confrontation with the governor more exciting. Even if we don't know how to start, we can discover the backstory as the story unfolds. Even if it is never directly brought into the narrative, it can still have an impact on the story.

Sometimes backstory gets explored in flashbacks that appear after a story has started. Sometimes it appears in the form of characters connected to the protagonist showing up to twist an ongoing plot. Sometimes it appears through subtle details like scars and simple lines of dialogue that hint at a larger story. Occasionally it is never explained at all, and the audience is left to imagine on their own how a character came to be a hero.

For PCs in RPGs, a backstory is something you develop outside what most people think of as "the game." You can work on your own or collaborate with fellow players to answer the questions "Who is this character and how did they get here?"

## Why Create a Backstory?

You don't need to give a character a backstory in order to play an RPG. There are plenty of people who prefer to randomly generate a character and never give a second thought what happened before

they roll initiative. It is also popular to view activities like character and setting creation as being separate from actual “play,” which makes developing a backstory kind of like homework. Why would you ever voluntarily do homework?! It turns out there a lot of good reasons to spend a little time thinking about your character before the game.

### You're More Personally Invested

All stories are more fun when you care about what is going on. Generally speaking, it's easier to like someone when you know more about them. Having a backstory helps you create more confidently, because you know why your character behaves the way they do.

Without a personal connection, a PC is just numbers and phrases written on a character sheet. Developing a backstory incorporates your creativity and your interest into the process. The more effort you invest in a character, the easier it is to care about them.

### Backstories Keep You Involved

It's nice to see two characters kiss, but it's much more satisfying if you know that kiss comes after years of buried feelings and flirtatious arguments. That simple detail makes it so much easier to invest in the action. Especially if you created it.

A backstory helps you understand how your character got where they are, shapes how they think and act, and gets you excited about where they are going.

### It's Fun to Collaborate

A backstory can help your fellow players connect with your character as well. Collaboration is at the heart of RPGs. The easier your character is to understand and interact with, the easier it is to have fun.

GMs will have an easier time making events in the story relevant to your PC if they know where you want that character to go. They can also pull in elements from your backstory to serve their current narrative or even use your backstory as inspiration to develop the setting and plot. Without your input, they have to rely more on guesswork.

Backstories also help you collaborate with fellow PCs. Even if the other PCs don't know your backstory ahead of time, having one gives them new points of interaction and discovery. People can only discover your terrible secret if you have a terrible secret to discover! Also, anything that gives your PC a more pronounced personality will make them more fun to play with.

If you invite your fellow PCs to collaborate or incorporate their own characters into your backstory, it helps them invest in your story—because you'll have also made it *their* story. Likewise, if you take an interest in the backstory of your fellow PCs, you can make choices that will be more fun for them to play with.

## Personal Play Is Creative

Personal play is what we call the moments between sessions where you dream up new characters, develop stories about their past, work to level up and get your character sheet in order, and even just daydream possibilities for your story. You are still engaging with the shared narrative of the game, even if you're doing it alone. That's an experience many players find rewarding in its own right.

Finally, it's fun! Anything you find fun can be an important part of the game. Some players actually get more enjoyment from dreaming up characters and settings than they do from rolling dice and dealing damage. Whether you're creating a backstory for a character you're currently playing, one you hope to play someday, or just as a way to pass the time—fun is the only reason you need.

# What Makes a “Good” Backstory?

First, let’s think about the word “good.” Playing an RPG is a creative endeavor and a form of artistic expression. It’s also something most people do for fun. Applying subjective values like “good” and “bad” is generally not appropriate or helpful.

That said, you can approach creating a backstory with specific purposes in mind—like creating plot hooks for your GM or to add complexity to your character’s story. It *is* possible to develop your backstory to make it more useful for serving goals like those.

## Make It Easy to Understand

Part of collaboration is sharing what you create. Which means you need to think about how you present your ideas. It’s fine to write ten pages of detailed character lore if you find that fun! However, the longer and more detailed your story is, the more your fellow players have to work to engage with it. While there are a few groups who might jump at that opportunity, most will appreciate something more digestible.

Keeping the information you share to a single page or a list of bullet points will make it much easier for other players to absorb. You can always expand on your ideas when people ask to hear more!

The same goes for the density of your material. If someone needs to understand fictional cultural nuance or sci-fi jargon to parse a sentence about your character, consider breaking your ideas down to principles. Evaluate what you are trying to say about your character and rephrase with broader terms.

*Zorg grew up as a bonzolite largiphate in the Quantrax system. Despite being branded a Shallifex, he is happier now.*

Is better served as:

*Zorg was born into a lower caste on his home planet. Despite being exiled as a dissident, he is happier now because he feels like he has more freedom.*

Considering what you write for yourself and what you write to share will help you collaborate with your group and feel better about how your ideas are received.

### **Make It Open-Ended**

Because RPGs are collaborative, a backstory is more useful if there is room for other people to build on it. If your story is full of inflexible details, you run the risk of adding too much information for your GM and fellow PCs to support. You simultaneously limit the options they have to support you. This courts disappointment, as aspects of your backstory might be forgotten, contradicted, or never addressed at all.

An open-ended backstory gives the opportunity for your GM to add details that connect you to their setting and plot. It gives fellow PCs a chance to link their characters' stories to yours. It also leaves you with the opportunity to make adjustments later on in the campaign and add new details to fit your character's evolving story.

Establishing that your hacker Null\_Br1ck is working to avenge their murdered parents is a great detail. Leaving it open allows your GM to make any of the NPCs in their game the murderer and increase the stakes for a dramatic confrontation. Saying Darkcharge Inc. CEO Giuseppe Patricidolini did it himself paints your GM into a corner. They'll have to involve the Darkcharge corporation and Giuseppe himself to pay off on your story.

### **Make It Motivating**

One of the best things your backstory can do is help motivate your character to action. There is a reason that so many Disney films

start with a protagonist who yearns to leave the confines of their familiar home: Those are the sorts of people who go on adventures! A backstory that gives you reasons to take risks and take action will serve you and your group throughout your campaign.

Even if your vision for your character is someone who reluctantly gets pulled into adventure, it's handy to have something in their backstory that is more important to them than complacency. You want a character who *complains* about adventuring while still having an adventure. If you want a little help with this idea, check out the My Character Would Never... exercise in Chapter 8.

### Leave Room to Grow

Remember, a backstory is a way to get your character to the start of a narrative. It should explain, enable, and underscore the action of the game itself. You don't want your backstory to leave your character in a state where they can't be changed or affected by the unfolding narrative. Crafting a story with challenges, unanswered questions, and weaknesses to overcome gives the game room to develop your character into the hero you want them to be.

Part of this is being aware of the constraints of your game system. Plenty of games let you make characters who feel powerful to start. However, some systems are built around gradual advancement, and so characters usually start out feeling less capable. Certain systems won't be able to support a backstory where your PC is the world's greatest assassin because the rules will hold them back.

### Collaborate and Listen

Many players see creating a backstory as a solo activity. While you can definitely develop a backstory on your own, I encourage you to approach it as an exercise in collaboration. Taking an interest in the stories of the other PCs and the GM's plans for the plot and

setting gives you an opportunity to develop connections to them through your backstory. Incorporating other players' ideas into your character will reward you with a narrative that always feels invested in your character.

## How Do I Incorporate My Backstory Into a Game?

Once you have developed a backstory, it's time to pull it into the game. Some GMs ask PCs for backstory summaries, and a few groups use a Session Zero to lay the foundation for their game collaboratively. **Session Zero** is a term for a meeting between players where they plan aspects of their game, characters, and setting. It's a great way to discuss things like your backstory. (You can find a guided approach to running a Session Zero in *The Ultimate RPG Gameplay Guide* if you want to learn more.) Outside of those circumstances, it's usually up to PCs to work out how to pull their ideas into the game. Here are some ways you can bring your character's story into your play.

### Tell People

Talking to other players—especially your GM—about where your character came from and where you want them to go will help them be better collaborators. This means talking to people outside the game and being direct about the information you want them to have.

### Is Meta-Gaming a Good Idea?

Some players keep their stories secret to prevent “meta-gaming” or to build up to surprise plot twists. I caution against working this way. It makes more work for the other players and increases the likelihood that your ideas won’t work the way you

want. It's almost impossible to collaborate with someone if you don't know what they are trying to do. It's much easier to have other players work with you to chase the story you are dreaming of.

Direct out-of-game conversation isn't the *only* way to bring other players into your character's backstory. You can also use narration and dialogue to communicate indirectly. If you want to hint at your character's past as a pirate, you can describe their nautical tattoos, make them familiar with knots and navigational tools, or have them tell stories about traveling on the sea. Dropping hints about your past gives the other PCs an opportunity to investigate, ask follow-up questions, and become a part of your story.

You can also just have your character volunteer information about themselves. It is absolutely fine to have your character simply tell people about their life. There should be no stories that your character will *never* tell. In fiction, a secret is something that simply needs the right conditions to come out. Talking to the other PCs brings everyone into your story and builds connections between characters. That serves the game in every way!

### Connect It to What's Happening

You can also use your backstory as a way to support other people's ideas! Collaboration works both ways, but supporting yourself while supporting someone else is easier than you think.

Could the assassin who just tried to attack your group be the childhood friend you thought died in an industrial accident? Is another PC's mentor the same scholar who writes the books your character is obsessed with? Is the villain who destroyed your companion's village the same swordsman who once defeated you in a duel? Asking questions like these leverages your backstory to add the significance of choices made by your fellow players.

In all of these cases, you should ask your GM and fellow players if they are open to making connections. In most cases, other players will appreciate you working to support their story. Even if your idea doesn't fit, asking opens the door to finding something that will work better.

### Appreciate How It Creates Motivation and Depth

A backstory can be present in a narrative even if it isn't explicit—even if you are the only one appreciating it. The game, plot, and mechanics provide reasons for you to make choices as a player, but a backstory provides the *character* reasons to make choices.

The choice to enter a condemned government facility is much easier to justify if your character is looking for answers about their sibling's disappearance. You'll look at the risks inherent to that scenario differently and push the story into more exciting territory.

A backstory can also enhance your experience passively by providing context for events that are already part of the story. If your backstory says your character has only ever trained for combat, you'll know that each hit and miss of their first battle means that they are struggling to translate that training to real life. That knowledge adds dimension to your experience that can be enjoyable even if no one else knows about it.

### Let the Backstory Open Doors for You

A character's backstory is most helpful when it motivates them to do dramatic and exciting things. If you find your backstory is holding you back or taking you away from the choices of the rest of the group, it might be doing more harm than good. Instead of asking "Should I do this?" ask "Why do I do this?"

## How to Use This Book

Developing a character backstory is a creative activity, so there are infinite “right” ways to do it. That’s why this book is not an instructional manual. Instead, it’s a toolkit, workbook, creative partner, and coach. It’s here to make backstory and character development easier, faster, and hopefully more fun! Let me explain how the book works.

## Structure

This book is divided into chapters based on popular tabletop RPG genres. Chapters 2 through 7 have exercises for Fantasy, Sci-Fi, Horror, X-Punk, Superhero, and Western genres. The exercises in these chapters are designed to support tropes and archetypes common to those settings. Chapter 8 covers All Genres, with material that should fit characters from just about any setting.

Each chapter is divided into exercises that will help randomize and break down the creative process. Just like an RPG, these exercises use mechanics to aid your storytelling. Each chapter has eight or more exercises, with fourteen in Chapter 8: All Genres. No matter what game you are playing or who your PC is, there should be plenty of exercises that feel relevant to their story!

## Ideas over Rules

This book is meant to help you on your way to creating backstories you really love. The rules and guidelines within are only useful if they are driving your creativity. If an idea pops into your head while you are going through an exercise and the structure of the exercise seems to be getting in the way, ignore the rules! If you got an idea that you like, then the book has already helped you exactly the way it was meant to.

Some exercises can be done before character creation to give you a foundation to build on. Others can be used to flesh out a character while you are building them, or even to fill in backstory details after

you finished creating your character using a game system. Some will help you organize and honor your character's evolving story as you play. A few even have tools to help you and your GM incorporate the backstory you come up with into a game.

Many exercises in this book are intentionally more specific than the character creation tools you'd find in most RPGs. I aim to empower you to have fun making your characters distinct and nuanced. This also means that not every exercise will be a good fit for every character. Browse and find something that speaks to you.

## Tools

The exercises in this book use a common set of game mechanics adapted from RPGs to aid your creativity. If you don't know what an exercise expects you to do, take a look at the instructions in the introductory paragraphs and refer back here.

### A Note about Pronouns

This book uses "they/them" as indefinite and gender-neutral pronouns. We want to represent any character you could possibly come up with, and in RPGs the possibilities are limitless.

### ROLLING DICE

Certain exercises call for the use of polyhedral dice. Most die rolls will provide you a random prompt from a numbered list or table.

We use common RPG notation when referring to dice. A six-sided die will be noted as a "d6," a ten-sided die will be referred to as a "d10," and so on. If you need to roll multiple dice, the number of individual dice will be noted first. For example, two six-sided dice will be written as "2d6."

Some exercises call for rolling 2d6 and adding to your result based on your answers to yes or no questions. Results are divided

into three categories:

- Results of **10 or more** being mostly advantageous
- Results of **7–9** providing mixed results and offering success with complications
- Results of **6 or less** being mostly disadvantageous and focusing mostly on complications

This 2d6 rolling structure was adapted from mechanics created for the *Apocalypse World* RPG, created by Vincent and Meguey Baker. It uses further innovations to that system developed by Brandon Leon-Gambetta in his game *Pasión de las Pasiones*.

## DRAWING CARDS

Some exercises call for a deck of standard playing cards. You'll find prompts based on the value and suit of your draw. In all cases, an exercise will note whether or not jokers are meant to be included in your deck.

A few exercises will call for you to arrange the deck facedown on a flat surface in a ring. I recommend something roughly 12 inches in diameter. You don't need to be exact, but ensure the ring has no gaps when you set it up. Drawing a card that creates a break in the ring provides special results or ends some mini-games.

## CHOICES

Exercises that ask you to “make choices” provide a bulleted list of concepts to inspire you. These will always be preceded by a question, a sentence to complete, or a category. They will also tell you how many concepts you are supposed to pick, saying something like “Choose one” or “Choose two to three.”

These are meant to narrow your focus to a few essential concepts while answering prompts. I generally recommend treating leftover choices as getting ruled out. That means if you choose your

ship to have “lasers” from a list of “lasers, rockets, or grapplers,” it won’t have rockets or grapplers.

## QUESTIONS AND PROMPTS

These are open-ended questions or directions to cue you to create something specific. They are phrased in a way to avoid yes or no answers and other simple one- to two-word responses. The point is to direct your creativity while encouraging you to answer in different ways, no matter how many times you answer.

They are meant to give you deeper insights into your characters’ feelings, illustrate moments from their past, and create striking images that allude to their deeper story.

## THE PRIORITY SYSTEM

Exercises using the priority system help you add complexity to simple ideas. They break down elements like characters, objects, and locations into component parts. Then they task you with making each part a priority from 1 to 5. Read the corresponding descriptions to understand how the different levels of priority affect the detail you are defining. This ensures your ideas have strengths, vulnerabilities, assets, and complications.

Generally speaking, the closer you rate something to priority 1, the more beneficial it will be to your character. Conversely, ranking something priority 5 indicates complications or challenges to your character. Ranking something close to 3 will make it less relevant overall and not really positive or negative.

### When Things Go “Array”

If your setting calls for more volatile strengths and weaknesses or just something less dramatic than the top and bottom ranks allow, the standard 1–5 ranks might not work for you. Instead, you can try using one of these arrays:

- 1, 1, 3, 5, 5

- 2, 2, 3, 3, 5
- 1, 2, 2, 4, 4
- 1, 3, 3, 3, 5

The point of the priority system is to make anything you create varied between strengths and weaknesses. Changing things a little in either direction will still give you interesting results!



## Fantasy

For many people, fantasy is synonymous with RPGs, thanks to dungeon-crawling sword and sorcery popularized by *Dungeons & Dragons*. Fantasy focuses on heroic travelers from different backgrounds questing for wealth, glory, and righteousness by exploring the world, battling monsters and hostile kingdoms, and growing in power as they go. These worlds are home to elves, dwarves, and dragons—drawing influence from mythology and foundational fiction like *The Lord of the Rings* and *Conan the Barbarian*.

Fantasy has countless variations. Primary-world fantasy incorporates fantastic elements like magic, monsters, and nonhuman civilizations into the real world; secondary-world fantasy creates an entirely fictional world unrelated to the earth or its history. Some fantasy focuses on speculative exploration of how the fantastic might change the way people live, while others use tropes to explore new mythology. There are dozens (if not hundreds) of subgenres that influence what “fantasy” means.

For that reason, it is difficult to make generalizations about fantasy protagonists. However, exploration and growth are popular themes in most types of fantasy. To get you started, here are

questions to help you develop goals, beliefs, strengths, and challenges for your fantasy hero.

## Fantasy d20 Questions

🎲 Roll a d20 three times and answer the corresponding questions for your character:

1. When did your character first feel powerful or capable based on their own abilities? Does this power excite, assure, or intimidate them?
2. What is something your character has always wanted to learn? Where do they think they will be able to learn it?
3. Where would your character have heard stories of far-off places? What fascinated them the most about these stories?
4. What is a tradition that your character grew up with that is unusual in the wider world? Do they feel compelled to share it?
5. What is something your character had forbidden to them growing up? Did your character desire this forbidden thing?
6. Who does your character see as their most important teacher? What was the biggest disagreement they had with this teacher? In what way were they most aligned?
7. What goal or prize is your character chasing, even passively? What goal or prize have they abandoned? Why?
8. Who or what does your character most crave validation from? How did they develop these values?
9. What challenge does your character dread even if they would not run from it? Why does this challenge stand out?
10. Does your character have a place they feel at home? If so, why would they choose to leave? If not, what would tempt them to settle?

- 11.** Who does your character pity? Would that person or group see themselves as pitiable?
- 12.** What knowledge or skill does your character have that no one else does? Do they understand this is special?
- 13.** What secret does your character keep that is dangerous to them? Who else knows this secret?
- 14.** Who is your character's most formidable foe? What would it take to change this relationship? Does your character want that?
- 15.** What flaw, weakness, or vulnerability is your character sensitive about? How do they manage their sensitivity?
- 16.** What was your character's favorite story growing up? Why did they love it? Who told it to them?
- 17.** What skill did your character learn to survive? What skill did they learn out of interest?
- 18.** What question does your character long to find an answer for? What answer do they hope for? What answer do they fear?
- 19.** How does your character show affection for friends, people they respect, romantic interests, and people they want to protect?
- 20.** What is your character good at hiding about themselves? What are they bad at hiding?

## My Culture Is Less Weird When You Get to Know Me

Fantasy often brings together beings with very different backgrounds, allowing them to learn about one another as they work toward a common goal. Early on in your adventures you can have a lot of fun defining cultural norms that appear odd to outside observers.

This exercise will help you create compelling objects, decorations, and behaviors to make your character stand out in interesting ways. Define different elements of your character's culture by making choices and answering the following questions.

## Accessory

This is an aesthetic accent to your appearance that carries cultural significance. In your culture, this sort of accessory is always visible. You might conceal it in the wider world, but you would never dream of going without it.

✳ Pick two things that make this accessory odd:

- It looks as though it's alive
- It reminds people of death
- It drastically alters your appearance
- You consider it formal, and outsiders consider it informal
- The materials used to make it are unusual

✍ What is this accessory? Where is it worn? Describe what it looks like:

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✍ Based on its appearance, what rumors do outsiders spread about its true nature?

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✍ What does it actually represent in your culture? Why does that bring you pride in the face of prejudice?

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## Food

You grew up enjoying a food that isn't commonly eaten outside your culture or species. Others find it disgusting or brutish, but to you it brings comfort.

✳ This food is... (choose one):

- A rare and exciting treat
- A staple of your culture's cuisine
- Something common to eat for survival

✳ Choose two traits that make it odd to outsiders:

- It uses something that is poisonous to others
- It comes from a creature other cultures consider a nuisance or associate with decay
- It possesses a strong flavor that outsiders consider overpowering or painful
- It has a strong and distinct scent
- The texture or appearance of this food reminds outsiders of unpleasant things

✍ What sort of food is this? Does it come from an animal or plant? Is this a meal on its own or something one would use to season other food? Describe it:

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- ✍ What complaints or comments do people make about this food when you eat it? Do any of them make you feel self-conscious?
- 
- 

- ✍ What fond memory do you have of this food from your home?
- 
- 

## Sound

You grew up with a song, instrument, chant, or prayer that is specific to your culture. Either there is a great deal of cultural importance placed on it, or you find it comforting to hear.

- ✳ Choose two things most outsiders dislike about this sound:
- It involves high, piercing notes
  - It has intimidating and powerful low notes
  - The lyrics or words are easy to misunderstand or are frightening
  - It is almost unavoidably loud
  - It involves an instrument that makes it even more disruptive

- ✍ Is this a prayer, song, or something else?
- 
- 

- ✍ Why is it important to your culture? When are you expected to make this sound?

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✍ Why is it important to you? Are you considered skilled or unskilled with this sound, according to your culture?

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✍ What is the politest way you have been told to stop making this sound?

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## Tool

You carry a tool in your culture that is a staple of everyday life and gets used frequently. Elsewhere, this tool doesn't exist or it looks very different.

- ✳ Choose two facts about the way this tool is used in your culture:
- It was created for a specific purpose but is used for many daily tasks
  - It is tied to a specific milestone and is often a gift from people close to you
  - It is a celebrated aspect of an honored position
  - It has an almost ceremonial routine for maintenance
  - Its intended purpose is essential for living as your species or in your ancestral homeland

- ✿ Choose two things that make this tool unusual to outsiders:
  - It is associated with a task that outsiders find distasteful at best or taboo at worst
  - It looks dangerous
  - Outsiders commonly see it used in a frightening context
  - Outsiders really can't have a context for how it is intended to be used
  - The decorative nature of its design obscures its purpose

✍ What was this tool designed to do? Do you use it for other things?

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✍ What is the most outlandish question you have been asked about this tool?

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✍ When have you seen someone from outside your culture use this tool? Did they use it correctly? How did you feel seeing this?

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## Your Order's Banner

Membership in a sacred or secret order carries plenty of narrative opportunity. Some of that rests in how you establish and display your membership. Fantasy provides opportunity to make something more interesting than a badge.

This exercise helps define details for the symbol you carry from an important order. Use the priority system to rate the following categories from 1 to 5 without repeating a number, with 1 making that aspect more beneficial or important to your character, and 5 making it unimportant or detrimental to your character.

Reputation\_\_\_\_\_

Renown\_\_\_\_\_

Concealability\_\_\_\_\_

Authority\_\_\_\_\_

Utility\_\_\_\_\_

Now read the prompts that correspond to each rank to create your concept. (For example, if you ranked Reputation 1, you would follow the first direction in the Reputation list.)

## Reputation

This determines how the larger world views your organization. If your order is well-regarded, then your banner might open doors and ease tensions as you travel. If not, it could cause problems.

1. Members of this order are known for being righteous, powerful, and capable. Most people you encounter will be welcoming and gracious. Seeing your banner may even inspire hope in the hopeless. Any enemies will be cautious about how they choose to defy or engage you.

2. Your order is well regarded. Most folks who recognize your banner will respond positively. However, it is either affiliated with something corrupt or imperfect, or with stories that are so good they are hard to believe. In some cases, you need to devote time to proving yourself and your mission to skeptics.
3. Your order is either well loved or well respected, but not both. You can choose to have most people either be happy to see your banner or to respect the institution it represents.
4. Your order has a checkered past. It might have been valorous at one point and fallen from grace or have a reputation marred by propaganda, or there is so much misinformation you can't possibly account for expectations to live up to.
5. Your order is generally hated and feared. This can be earned or unearned, but when people recognize your banner, they will generally see a threat.

## **Renown**

This determines how known your order and its banners are. Some organizations are household names known throughout the land; others are esoteric groups known to an educated few, and others are secrets best kept hidden.

1. Stories of your order are universal. Everyone you encounter is likely to recognize your banner if they see it, even in places very far away.
2. Most people near your homeland will recognize your banner and the position it grants within your order. The farther you get from home, the greater the chance there will be confusion and misinformation.
3. Your banner is either only recognizable to certain groups of people or widely recognizable, but very few people know how

to authenticate it. This can cast doubt on you and cut you off from useful social advantages.

4. Your order is in some way secret or defunct. Only very specific people will recognize your banner. This severely limits the power of your title, but it can still be useful in the right circumstances.
5. Your order is entirely secret. Only other members will recognize your banner, and that is by design. Unless you are dealing with a fellow member, your banner can only cause trouble.

## Concealability

This determines how easy it is to hide your banner when you need to. Sometimes you need to move in secret, and that is much easier if your banner can be hidden away.

1. Your banner is perfectly hidden while not on display, making it impossible for an enemy to find while searching for you. It can also be produced at will in a case where you need to prove yourself.
2. Your banner is small and has a trick to being seen. Perhaps it is only visible in a specific kind of light, or it is a tattoo on an easily hidden part of your body. Well-informed enemies might know where to look, but it isn't something they can do casually.
3. Your banner is small, portable, and easily hidden—like a ring, badge, amulet, or tattoo on an extremity. It can be found in a search or even lost or stolen. However, it is easy to move and keep safe, especially if you want to travel in secret.
4. Your banner is large and visible. If it is an object, it is something like a sword, shield, or flag. If it is a marking on your body, it is located somewhere that is difficult to conceal or is just very large. Without care, it will be found, and hiding it might draw suspicion.

**5.** Your banner is large and unmistakable. It might be a uniform or a full suit of armor. If it is a part of you, it could be an extreme modification like a metal limb or glowing eyes. Even if people don't know what it means, they will see it.

## Authority

This determines the legal and social privileges generally granted to a member of your order. They can get you an audience with powerful people, allow you to control legal processes, and even provide exemption from certain crimes.

- 1.** This banner entitles you to many special privileges. You might be exempt from certain laws, have jurisdiction over royalty, or have access to highly restricted information and locations anywhere it is recognized.
- 2.** In specific areas, you have at least one very special privilege that almost no one else has. It also earns you a portion of general respect anywhere it is recognized, gaining you an audience with powerful people—if not influence over them.
- 3.** Your banner offers a modest level of authority anywhere it is recognized. In specific cases it might even allow you access to tools and information that are normally privileged.
- 4.** This banner carries both authority and responsibility. You may find a level of respect and be granted special authority where it is recognized. However, you will also be expected to adhere to a strict and difficult code of conduct.
- 5.** This banner carries no special authority even if it is recognized. It may even identify you as a pariah or enemy of the state.

## Utility

This category determines if your banner also acts as a useful tool, enhances your abilities, or even grants you special powers.

1. This banner grants you extraordinary powers. It might transform you, grant you special abilities, or enable you to fight powerful enemies.
2. This banner provides you access to a few specialized powers that enhance your natural abilities. These powers have a specific purpose and might be limited by rules.
3. This banner is an important tool in its own right. It might be a weapon that targets a specific enemy, a shield that provides special protection, or an aid to your senses. It allows you to do a specific thing more effectively.
4. This banner is also a specialized mundane or lightly magical tool. It might unfold into a magnifying glass, contain a set of lock picks, or hold a healing salve. Its use is limited but handy.
5. This banner is simply a banner and does nothing but identify you with your order.

## A Code of Honor

Many fantasy protagonists are sworn to follow a code that spurs them to action and challenges them on their journey. Some games have these codes built into their setting or draw on codes of conduct from historical organizations. Sometimes, though, it's better write your own rules!

Make choices, use character-building mechanics, and answer prompts to develop a complex and interesting code of honor for your character.

### The Core of the Code

Before you create rules for your code, you need to know *why* it exists. Most codes of honor are meant to guide behavior to serve a specific agenda. There is a reason behind every rule—even if it is not clear at first.

## WHAT AUTHORITY CREATED THE CODE?

✿ Choose all that apply:

- A god: Your code is dictated by a specific deity or religion. It is designed to honor the core tenets of that religion or the deity's domain.
- A culture: Your code is dictated by a culture of familial tradition. It is designed to connect you to an identity and honor the people you share it with.
- An order: Your code is dictated by an organization with specific goals and values. It is designed to compel someone to serve those goals and honor those values.
- A philosophy: Your code is the result of an idealistic commitment. It is designed to keep your behavior true to your beliefs.
- An oath: Your code is connected to a promise you made to another individual or to yourself. It is designed to keep you true to your word.

It's okay for these to overlap. A culture might bind you to a god; committing to a philosophy might involve an oath. Knowing the authority mandating your code tells you who wrote the rules and who judges how they are meant to be followed.

## WHY DID THEY WRITE IT?

✿ Choose all that apply:

- Protection: These rules help adherents defend something precious. They were written to prioritize the existence and well-being of that thing.
- Pursuit: These rules help adherents seek and claim something. They were written to prioritize that pursuit.

- **Virtue:** These rules impose a sense of morality, fairness, or honor. They were written to enable idealized behavior.
- **Prestige:** These rules were designed to exalt adherents. They were written to define a higher standard of behavior for a special group.
- **Definition:** These rules distinguish a group or identity. They were written to determine who belongs and who does not.
- **Control:** These rules were written to bind adherents, perhaps to protect themselves or others, or to prevent an unwanted circumstance.

This lets you know what your code is trying to achieve. That will help you navigate situations where the code seems to contradict itself or even to evaluate if you want to continue to follow it.

## DECIDING ON YOUR CODE

Based on your choices, think about the following questions:

- Who created your code?
- What is your code trying to achieve?
- Who determines how it should be followed?
- Is this code objective or open to interpretation?

## Writing the Rules

Next, you'll need to define specific rules for your code. These are broken into two categories: I Must Always—rules that compel you to take specific actions, and I Must Never—rules that create taboos and restrict your behavior in specific ways.

For each, choices will help you define your rule and how strictly it must be followed. The choices you make for each rule are tied to a point value. The higher the point total for a rule, the more impactful it will be. Track the combined total for all of your rules to complete your code. I recommend most codes stay between twelve and

twenty points. This ensures your code doesn't become overly complicated or restrictive.

### I MUST ALWAYS...

These rules are more interesting if they guide you toward difficult or risky behavior. It should be a challenge to honor your code and a temptation to divert from it.

✳ This rule compels me to... (choose one to three):

- Face danger +1
- Serve others +1
- Follow a procedure +1
- Take a difficult path +1
- Add to my priorities +1
- Endure pain or suffering +1

✍ The basic rule is:

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—

✳ How flexible is it? This determines how clear and open to interpretation or exception a rule is.

- Inflexible (+3): There are no exceptions to this rule.
- Strict (+2): Choose one exception that makes it easier to follow this rule.
- Flexible (+1): Choose two exceptions that make it easier to follow this rule.

✳ Exceptions

- Timeline: This rule doesn't always compel immediate action. As long as you work to act on a reasonable timeline, you are not in violation.

- **Conditions:** There are specific conditions when this rule does not apply. If you need to break it, there is a right way to do it.
- **Valid Targets:** This rule only applies when dealing with specific people or groups.
- **Invalid Targets:** This rule does not apply to specific people, groups, or organizations.

✍ Summarize your rule with a simple statement:  
“I must always

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”

Rule point totals: \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_,

### I MUST NEVER...

These rules are more interesting if they make finding solutions to problems more complicated, encourage defining character traits, and force you to confront temptation. Although these rules are meant to restrict you, they shouldn't remove you from the action.

- ✳ This rule... (choose one to three):
- Forbids a common behavior +2
  - Forbids an unusual behavior +1
  - Forbids a pleasure +1
  - Limits your options +1
  - Compels an aversion +1

✍ The basic rule is:

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---

✳ How flexible is it?

- **Inflexible (+3):** There are no exceptions to this rule.
- **Strict (+2):** Choose one exception that makes it easier to follow this rule.
- **Flexible (+1):** Choose two exceptions that make it easier to follow this rule.

### ✳ Exceptions

- **Scale:** This rule applies in degrees and allows for lesser violations.
- **Conditions:** There are specific conditions when this rule does not apply. If you need to break it, there is a right way to do it.
- **Interpretation:** Wording suggests more than one valid approach to following this rule.
- **Valid Targets:** This rule only applies when dealing with specific people or situations.
- **Invalid Targets:** This rule does not apply to specific groups or situations.



Summarize your rule with a simple statement:

“I must never

---

Rule point totals: \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_,

### Under Penalty

Violating a code of honor should have consequences. In the realm of fantasy, those consequences can be supernatural—such as revoking gifts or doling out curses and other punishments. They can also be mundane, like sanctions from a governing body, or even just feelings of guilt and remorse.

The penalties are divided into three levels based on the severity of the violation. Each level also has a method of repentance for a person in violation to return to good standing. You can either create penalties based on the specific violation or create stock penalties that are applied to every violation indiscriminately. If you choose stock penalties, add +2 points to your code total.

## MINOR

A penalty for a minor violation should be noticeable but not overwhelming. It is a plot point rather than a full storyline. This serves the role of establishing a boundary with a clear message.

✳️ This penalty... (choose two):

- Compels stress
- Causes social discomfort
- Causes temporary physical pain
- Leaves a temporary mark
- Has a written or spoken warning
- Reduces power, privilege, or responsibility

✍️ What is it?

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✳️ To repent I must... (choose two):

- Meditate, contemplate, or pray
- Repair damage
- Offer an apology
- Make a small sacrifice

## MEDIUM

A penalty for a medium violation should be inconvenient and difficult but not permanent. It is a significant storyline but not a radical shift for the character or plot. This provides real consequences to support a code without derailing a character entirely.

✳️ This penalty... (choose two):

- Causes intense emotional turmoil
- Causes lasting physical pain
- Causes social estrangement or isolation
- Leaves a lasting mark
- Involves a rebuke from a superior or group
- Suspends power, privilege, or responsibility

✍️ What is it?

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✳️ To repent I must... (choose two):

- Complete a quest or labor
- Pass a trial
- Lose some pride or dignity
- Make a major sacrifice

## MAJOR

A penalty for a major violation should be overwhelming and catastrophic. In the vast majority of cases, a major punishment is a looming threat or something a character encounters externally rather personally experiences. If a character does experience a major penalty, it means a permanent and radical shift for the character and status quo of the story.

 This penalty calls for... (choose two to three):

- Death
- Excommunication
- A permanent or bloodline curse
- Permanent injury
- Absolute loss of power and social standing

 What is it?

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 To repent I must... (choose two):

- Perform a miracle
- Challenge and defeat an authority
- Prove I did not transgress
- Change the code
- Succeed in the spirit of the code where adherents fail

## Final Code

To determine the total value of your code, add points from I Must Always, I Must Never, and the flexibility of potential punishments.

Code totals: \_\_\_\_\_

## RULES

- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_

- 
- 

## PUNISHMENTS

- 
- 
- 
- 
- 
- 

## ATONEMENTS

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## Five Victories

Whether your character is a veteran adventurer or someone who is just starting out on their journey, they should be equipped with past accomplishments that make them stand out. Even heroes with hard luck who regularly face difficult challenges need something to draw on for strength when things look dark.

Make choices and answer prompts to give your character a collection of victories to serve as the foundation for what is to come.

## The Beginning and the End

You can use this exercise at any time during a character's journey. For characters just starting out, these initial victories will seem small in comparison to what they will achieve. As you play, you might find that you replace certain answers with ones that came from play and better fit your character's overall story.

Veteran heroes can use this as a way to establish what they have achieved thus far and help you judge when and where they are being challenged. You can also approach your game as the end of your character's story and use these achievements as the result of a faded prime that will never be topped.

### Over a Rival

This victory is over someone or something you contended with or struggled against but wasn't a threat to your life. In doing this, you met a difficult challenge presented by a capable foe. In the end, you managed to walk away proud.

✿ I challenged my rival... (choose one):

- In a formal competition
- On a social stage
- In a matter of the heart
- On an ideological front
- In front of an authority we respect
- In a private duel

✿ They are a rival rather than an enemy because... (choose two):

- You are essentially on the same side
- They follow a code that means they would never really hurt you
- You appreciate how they push you to be better

- The stakes in your conflicts are usually low
- You share a mutual respect

✍ What prize did this victory bring you? Why was it important then, and is it important to you now?

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✍ You have clashed with your rival many times in the past. Why was this incident important or memorable?

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✍ What lesson did you learn from this victory that has served you well?

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## Over a Superior

This victory was over a person or organization that under most circumstances should have bested you. There is a wide gap of power between you, making your success all the more impressive. The consequences of this victory, good or bad, are important.

✳ This victory was over... (choose one):

- An individual
- A group
- An organization

 Your opponent was superior in terms of... (choose two):

- Physical power
- Skill or ability
- Authority
- Intellect
- Class
- Wealth

 This victory earned you their... (choose two):

- Respect
- Disdain
- Rage
- Attention
- Affection

 What prize was worth contending with an adversary so dangerous? Or, what were you trying to protect?

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 Who most appreciated the risk you took?

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 What unsettled matter related to this victory still lingers?

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## Over a Circumstance

This victory is over a challenge, event, or condition rather than an opponent. It might be over a natural disaster, a daunting obstacle, or a condition in your own body. It is something that makes you formidable in a way that is disconnected from violence.

✳ What made this circumstance especially difficult was... (choose two):

- I faced it alone
- A great number of lives were at risk
- I was under-equipped
- I was already past my limit
- No one had ever succeeded before me
- I did not feel capable

✳ You found victory primarily thanks to... (choose two):

- My will
- My power
- My skill
- My intellect
- My spirit
- Luck

✍ How long was this ordeal? What surprised you about how long it took?

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✍ Was your victory widely celebrated or barely noticed? Did it mean more or less than your other victories?



How long did it take you to recover? Did you recover fully?

## Over an Enemy

This victory was over an opponent who sought to destroy you or what you love. The stakes in this situation were serious—if death was not on the line, it was at least a possibility. This set the stage for your life to come as an adventurer.

✳️ This enemy... (choose three):

- Reveled in violence
- Targeted you specifically
- Targeted people close to you
- Did violent work
- Was prone to dispassionate cruelty
- Was very clever
- Was very powerful

✳️ In order to best them, you had to cast aside... (choose one):

- Fear
- Doubt
- Restraint
- Pain
- A belief

💡 What physical or emotional mark do you carry from this encounter?

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💡 Did you kill your enemy? Are they still a problem for you today?

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💡 What action did this victory force you to take?

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## Over Yourself

Heroes also need to struggle internally. Being able to face the things that might cause you to falter is what allows you to achieve amazing things and what makes your achievements so impressive. A victory like this can be over weakness or darkness; it depends where you are on your journey.

✳️ Of these, what do you fear the most?

- That I might hurt others
- That I am in some way fundamentally flawed
- That I might be broken
- That my body might fail me
- That my mind or will might fail me
- That I am unworthy

 What has this fear held you back from doing?

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 How has that hurt you in the past?

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 When did this fear daunt you at a critical moment? What was at stake?

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 Where did you draw the strength needed to overcome this fear?

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 Do you still struggle with it? How did this victory make that struggle easier?

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## Special Titles

Occasionally heroes gain special titles based on their accomplishments and reputation. Some titles are official honorifics granted by a kingdom or order. Others are the result of story and rumor. All of them help explain the story of your character quickly and easily.

This exercise will help you create an exciting title to bring part of your backstory to the forefront. All you need is a standard deck of playing cards with the jokers removed. Decide if your title came from affiliation with **Strength**, **Nature**, **Study**, **Religion**, or **Infamy**. Draw two cards and compare your results to the appropriate chart.

Most results have multiple choices separated by commas. Results with “()” mean a component is optional. Results with “[ ]” mean there are open-ended choices within a category. Dashes “-” mean you can combine parts 1 and 2 of your title into a single word. Two dashes “--” denote a blank space in your title.

## Strength

This is a name you acquire because of your physical prowess. It focuses on how strong, tough, or fast you are. These are common names for warriors, martial artists, gladiators, wrestlers, and even local folk heroes.

	Part 1	Part 2
Ace	(The) Invincible, Unbeatiable, Indomitable	[any mythological creature]
King	(The) [a type of royalty]	[a type of royalty]
Queen	(The) Explosive, Frenzied, Berserk, Wild, Untamed	[natural disaster]
Jack	Big, Long, Broad, Strong, Colossal [first name]	[weather event]
10	(The) [a weight or height]	[large or strong animal]
9	(The) [a description of body like “Broad-Shouldered” or “Two-	[any laboring profession like “Blacksmith” or “Lumberjack”]

	Fisted"]	
8	(The) [facial expression or emotional noise]	Mountain, Hill, Cliff, Tower, Fortress, Fort, Wall
7	(The) Swift, Keen, Fast, Quick	[moving natural formation like "River" or "Glacier"]
6	(The) Siege, Barricade, Battering [any tool]	[any handheld weapon], Fist, Heel, Palm
5	(The) [strong metal, stone, or other element like "Granite" or "Iron"]	[any siege weapon], Breaker, Smasher
4	(The) Rippling, Ripped, Built, Tough	-man, -woman, -folk, Warrior, Knight
3	The Human [any fantasy species]	[last name]
2	The [location]	[first name, last name]

## Nature

This is a name you acquired because of your connection to nature. It focuses on how you steward, bond with, or thrive in natural environments. These are common names for witches, druids, rangers, woods folk, and any enigmatic figures who make their homes in the wild.

	Part 1	Part 2
Ace	(The) [a word for divinity]	Soul, Spirit, Specter, Shadow, Ghost, Wraith
King	(The) [a heavenly body]	[a heavenly body]
Queen	(The) [an extreme weather phenomenon]	[a weather phenomenon]
Jack	(The) Bright, Radiant, Luminous, Luminescent, Dazzling	Bane, Slayer, Butcher
10	(The) [a mythological creature]	Bearer, Holder, Wielder, Carrier, Keeper
9	(The) [an animal]	Breaker, Smasher, Crusher, Crasher, Shatter(er)
8		

	(The) [a type of tree or plant]	Seeker, Tracker, Hunter, Stalker
7	(The) Wise, Clever, Brilliant	Healer, Mender, Curer
6	(The) Swift, Quick, Fleet	Cutter, Shaper, Molder, Carver
5	(The) Poison, Venom, Toxin, Toxic	[a type of familial relation]
4	(The) [type of natural environment]	Whisperer, Speaker, Voice, Caller
3	(The) [a color]	Fountain, Spring, Well, Stream
2	(The) (for example, a result from two 2s could be "Leaf" or "The Claw")	[plant or animal part like "Leaf" or "Claw"]

## Study

This is a name you acquired through the strength of your intellect. It focuses on your dedication to scholarship and knowledge. These are common names for wizards, tinkers, occultists, historians, mages, and any heroes who focus on unraveling the mysteries of the universe.

	Part 1	Part 2
Ace	(The) [a word for information]	Soul, Spirit, Specter, Shadow, Ghost, Wraith
King	(The) Master, Absolute, Perfect, Preeminent, Ultimate	Supreme, Sovereign, Prime
Queen	(The) [a word for a spellcaster]	[profession that requires study like "Chemist"]
Jack	(The) Bright, Radiant, Luminous, Luminescent, Dazzling	Doctor, Professor, Chancellor
10	(The) Rogue, Maverick, Rebel	Bearer, Holder, Wielder, Carrier, Keeper, Minder
9	(The) Mind, Wit, Witted, Witty, Conscious	Seeker, Tracker, Hunter, Stalker
8	(The) Ancient, Old, Elden, Timeworn, Hoary, Primal, Aged, Eternal	[a word for a spellcaster]
7		

	(The) Wise, Clever, Brilliant, Sagacious	[a word for a teacher or student]
<b>6</b>	(The) Swift, Quick, Fleet, Keen, Sharp	Cutter, Shaper, Molder, Carver
<b>5</b>	(The) Learned, Studied, Tested	Wit, Quip, Intellect, Mind
<b>4</b>	(The) [subject of study]	Whisperer, Speaker, Voice
<b>3</b>	(The) Holy, Sacred, Gilded	One
<b>2</b>	(The) --	[draw a second card for this column to determine an additional part of your [title] of [location]] [for example, a draw of J, 2, 5 could be "The Radiant Carver of Santa Rosa"]

## Religion

This is a name you acquired through piety or connection to the divine. It focuses on acts you may have performed in the name of a deity, your rank within a holy order, or your personal enlightenment. These are common names for clerics, priests, monks, and prophets from all sorts of religions.

	Part 1	Part 2
<b>Ace</b>	(The) God, Spirit, Angel, Demon, Devil	Soul, Spirit, Specter, Shadow, Ghost, Wraith
<b>King</b>	(The) High, Arch, Elevated, Pure, Noble, Exalted, Master, Ultimate, Divine, Almighty	Supreme, Sovereign, Prime
<b>Queen</b>	(The) Priest, Cleric, Pontiff, Pontifex, Preacher, Father, Mother	Priest, Cleric, Monk, Sage, Preacher, Curate
<b>Jack</b>	(The) Bright, Radiant, Luminous, Luminescent, Dazzling	Savior, Martyr, Aspect, Vessel, Saint
<b>10</b>	(The) Holy, Sacred, Revered, Hallowed, Consecrated, Cherished	Bearer, Holder, Wielder, Carrier, Keeper
<b>9</b>	(The) Secret, Mysterious, Elusive, Hidden, Numinous, Enigmatic, Inscrutable	Whisperer, Speaker, Voice

8	(The) Golden, Silver, Platinum, Gilded, Jeweled	[a word for a spellcaster]
7	(The) Ancient, Old, Elden, Timeworn, Hoary, Primal, Aged, Eternal	[a word for a teacher or student]
6	(The) Wise, Brilliant, Sagacious	[a word for a humble profession like "Shepard" or "Builder"]
5	(The) Saint, Prophet, Seer, Anointed, Blessed	Of [location or concept]
4	(The) Learned, Studied, Tested	Jewel, Stone, Gem [any specific gemstone]
3	(The) [subject of study]	One, Singularity
2	(The) --	[draw a second card for an additional part of your title] of [location]

## Infamy

This is a name you acquired through association with criminal behavior. It focuses on a dangerous or mysterious persona. These are common names for thieves, smugglers, assassins, criminals, and practitioners of taboo arts. Many other titles are purely positive, but ones rooted in infamy depend on context. In the criminal underworld, being "The Umbral Dealer" could be a point of pride; among mainstream society, it's probably something you want to keep to yourself.

	Part 1	Part 2
Ace	(The) Great, Glorious, Infamous, Notorious, Nefarious, Marvelous	[combine any Part 2 face card result with any Part 2 number card result]
King	(The) [any word for royalty]	[a weapon]
Queen	The Dark, Shaded, Umbral, Shadowy	[a word for ghost]
Jack	(The) Dread, Vile, Terrible, Death, Bone, Flesh	[a word for shadow]

<b>10</b>	(The) [a sneaky or lurking animal]	Devil, Demon, Imp [name or title for an evil deity]
<b>9</b>	(The) Masked, Caped, Hooded	Pirate, Smuggler, Assassin, Thief, Bandit, Plunderer, Robber
<b>8</b>	(The) [article of clothing]	Killer, Ripper, Slasher, Strangler, Crusher
<b>7</b>	Doctor, Professor	Fog, Mist, Smoke, Cloud, Plume
<b>6</b>	The [any emotion or color]	Blight, Scourge, Plague
<b>5</b>	The [any facial] expression	[a sound like “Cackler” or “Screamer”]
<b>4</b>	(The) [word for visible injury or scar]	Swindler, Gambler, Pretender, Charlatan, Rook, Rascal, Dealer
<b>3</b>	(The) [type of victim]	[any Part 2 number card result] [any name]
<b>2</b>	(The) [location]	[any element] [draw a second Part 2 card]

## Keeping Up Appearances

Many heroes have family, mentors, employers, or other people in their life they feel compelled to impress. A few are unlucky enough to have relationships with people they need to impress in order to maintain their lifestyle.

If you would like your character to have a fraught and somewhat transactional relationship with someone who has power over them, make choices and answer the following prompts. You'll also need a d10 and at least 8d6 of two different colors.

### Create an Entity

There are many different figures a hero could be beholden to.

- ❖ To get started, choose what you want this group or figure to be. If you don't have an idea for it, roll a d10 to randomly choose

one of the following options:

- 1.** A parent
- 2.** An aunt or uncle
- 3.** A sibling
- 4.** A lover
- 5.** A patron or personal hero
- 6.** A boss, superior, or leader
- 7.** A school, church, or company
- 8.** A government
- 9.** A deity or supernatural force
- 10.** A mark you are conning

 **What makes your relationship with them rocky? Choose two:**

- They don't fully trust you
- They think you are incompetent
- They want a different life for you
- They get emotional easily
- They have strange ideas
- They observe a lot of rules and taboos
- They are difficult to impress
- You have failed them in the past

 **What does this entity care about most?**

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 **How do they wish you were different?**

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 What do they despise most that you can't seem to avoid?

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 What are the three things they most want you to do?

1.

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2.

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3.

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## Create a Need

Things would be less complicated if you could simply write this entity off, but you actually need them. A good need will keep you coming back—putting up with disapproval and accepting control—because the alternative is much worse.

 What drives your need? Choose two to three:

- Financial support
- Professional status
- Social status
- Civic authority
- Reputational leverage
- Access to magical power
- Strong desire for validation

💡 Why can't you meet this need anywhere else?

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💡 How has their favor helped you in the past?

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💡 What important goal will their support help you reach?

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💡 How have they chosen to reward you in the past?

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## Define Their Power over You

Keeping up appearances helps you avoid punishment as well as reap rewards. Not only do you rely on this entity for support and privilege; they also have real power to affect your life should you displease them.

\* Choose two short-term punishments your entity can inflict on you:

- A lecture or insult that dramatically impacts your confidence and emotional state
- You are publicly humiliated or shamed

- They can add a requirement or caveat that makes your work difficult
- They cut off part of their essential support of you for a short time
- They require you to do something that fits with their vision of your future
- They force you to do an inconvenient or difficult job that interferes with your goals

✳ Choose two long-term punishments your entity can inflict on you:

- An audit, scrutiny, or probation that submits your activity to review by authority
- Requiring you to sacrifice, offer, or surrender to them something you find valuable
- They demote you or threaten your professional ambitions
- They suspend some essential support until you go out of your way to apologize
- They task you with an ongoing oath or requirement that makes your work more difficult

✍ What punishment have you endured in the past?

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✍ What usually helps you return to good standing?

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## Use Your Connection

With your GM's permission, you can bring your connection into the game. You might try to use the entity's credit for a loan, use their reputation to sway someone, or invoke their authority to cease power. It might help you in the short term, but there is a reason you do this only as a last resort.

Before invoking your connection to your entity, ask the following questions:

- ✿ Is it possible they will never find out?
  - Yes
  - No
- ✿ Does their name carry authority where you are trying to use it?
  - Yes
  - No
- ✿ Are you currently in good favor?
  - Yes
  - No

**6** For every question you answered with yes, add +1 to a roll of 2d6.

- On a result of 10+, your play is successful and your connection to your entity will add significant advantage to what you are attempting to do. You can also opt to outright succeed by voluntarily choosing a short-term punishment to be inflicted on you.
- On a result of 7–9, your attempt to exploit your connection is successful and provides an advantage; however, it carries a consequence that you will have to face with your connected

entity. Choose two short-term punishments or one long-term punishment.

- On a result of 6 or less, something goes very wrong with your gambit. It hurts your chances at success, giving you a disadvantage and either over-obligates or enrages your connected entity. You'll have to accept one short-term and one long-term punishment before you can exploit your connection again.

## Correspondence

To maintain your connection, you'll have to keep them informed about your travels. This can be done by letter, magic, or some other form of long-distance correspondence. In your messages, you take pains to paint yourself in a good light, even if it means you need to misrepresent the truth.

News can travel, and you never know how and when news of you will reach your connection. Remember, they are judgmental, and you never know what will upset them.

## ROLL IT OUT!

To determine how your correspondence is received, create a die pool of red and white d6s. Start with zero die and add as described in the following prompts.

- ✿ Add one white die to the pool if any of the following are true...
  - You can mention what they value most
  - You are able to hint at each of the three things they want you to do
  - An accomplishment can be validated with evidence
  - You are in good standing
- ✿ Add two white die if the following is true...

- You were commended by the entity during your adventure
- ✿ Add a red die to the pool if any of the following are true...
  - You need to lie by omission
  - There is evidence that contradicts your word
  - Someone might complain directly to your entity about your actions
  - You had to delay or set aside any bit of their agenda
- ✿ Add two red die if any of the following are true...
  - You had to tell a deliberate and direct falsehood
  - You were chastised by the entity during your adventure

 Roll the die pool.

- Every 5 and 6 on a white die will get you one success.
- Every 6 on a red die will get you a failure.

Successes and failures cancel out to provide you with your overall result. Compare your result to the following chart to see how you did.

Number of Successes	
6+	The entity distrusts your account as “too good to be true” and temporarily punishes you.
5–3	The entity is pleased, and you are rewarded and returned to good standing.
1–2	The entity is underwhelmed; there is no change to status quo.
0	The entity is displeased but not enough to punish you.
<0	The entity is upset, and you will be punished.

## Fantasy Companion Statements

Jumping into a one shot or starting a campaign midgame makes it harder to have fun with character relationships. It's easier to

develop a fun dynamic with your companions if you have a little spark to get you started.

This exercise lists quotes from your character's perspective, giving thoughts and history about the people around them. Simply fill in the blanks with PC and NPC names to give yourself a strong foundational perspective to start your game.

## Positive

These quotes establish the foundation for positive relationships, centering on admiration, cooperation, and affection. I generally recommend you use these for your fellow PCs. There can still be conflict in positive relationships, but it's easier to manage party dynamics if you start out aligned.

“ \_\_\_\_\_ has a heart that is not meant for battle. I wish to protect that.”

“No matter how dangerous our destination might be, I feel safe with \_\_\_\_\_ watching my back.”

“The quiet nobility I see in \_\_\_\_\_ makes me question all of the things I have been told about people like them.”

“I have come to appreciate \_\_\_\_\_’s cunning as a force on par with any weapon or magic.”

“ \_\_\_\_\_ is stronger than they know. I want to help them find that strength without suffering the losses that I have.”

“I have pledged myself to study the mysteries of the cosmos and unraveling the secret truths of the world. But \_\_\_\_\_’s wisdom surprises me at every turn.”

"I don't truck with many gods, but \_\_\_\_\_'s care means I owe something to at least one."

"No matter how tired and battered I am from the day, a few moments by the fire with \_\_\_\_\_ cheers me to my core."

"\_\_\_\_\_ is a quiet and serious person. I feel privileged as their friend to have seen the warmth they hide away."

"I know \_\_\_\_\_ is good at keeping secrets, because they hold so many of mine."

"I will never forget the terrible power I know \_\_\_\_\_ holds at bay. Part of me hopes to see it again."

"It took me a long time to understand \_\_\_\_\_, but now that I do, so much of their strangeness feels like charm."

"\_\_\_\_\_ and I could spend all night comparing scars and still have new stories to tell one another come morning."

"Part of me knows that protecting \_\_\_\_\_ will be one of the most important missions in my life."

"The road is lonely, but I am certain that if I can spend a little more time with \_\_\_\_\_ I will feel distinctly less lonely."

## Negative

These quotes establish negative relationships centering on conflict, rivalry, and distaste. I generally recommend these for NPCs and use complicated prompts to find conflict in relationships with other PCs.

"\_\_\_\_\_ is a dangerous coward. It is made all the worse by the fact that people see them as a hero."

"I will face many monsters before I would face \_\_\_\_\_'s temper."

"Just hearing \_\_\_\_\_'s name chills me to my core."

"Even if \_\_\_\_\_ ultimately wants what is right, their stubbornness makes them more of an obstacle than an ally."

"\_\_\_\_\_ trifles with forces they do not understand. It will spell their doom and perhaps ours as well."

"People think \_\_\_\_\_ is helpful only because they don't want to see all of the suffering their 'help' causes."

"One must be careful around \_\_\_\_\_. They are always searching for weakness, and you never know when it might be used against you."

"\_\_\_\_\_ is a fool. Worse, they draw others into that foolishness."

"I was betrayed by \_\_\_\_\_, and I intend to pay them back."

"On the battlefield, \_\_\_\_\_ is more like a destructive force of nature than a being of flesh and blood."

"\_\_\_\_\_ has all the wealth and power they need to be one of the most dangerous forces in the world, and they know it."

"I hate encountering \_\_\_\_\_ because I can't shake the feeling that they have somehow already won."

"\_\_\_\_\_ has weaknesses, but they cover them with dreadful fury."

“It cannot be denied that \_\_\_\_\_ is clever, but they treat people as though they are pieces in a game.”

“All the people who trust \_\_\_\_\_ have died or are destined to do so unpleasantly.”

## Complicated

These prompts establish complicated relationships intermingling positive and negative elements. These are perfect for both PCs and NPCs where you want extra dramatic tension at the center of the story.

“Few travel a road as long and winding as mine, and so I keep few friends. I know \_\_\_\_\_ sees me as one, but I fear I will disappoint them.”

“\_\_\_\_\_ has suffered a terrible ill because of me. It is my duty to do things as well as I can.”

“Every moment I share with \_\_\_\_\_ makes me ache to forget our past.”

“I don’t want a serious connection with \_\_\_\_\_, but I crave the comfort of their company.”

“I resent the way \_\_\_\_\_ makes me regret the terrible things I have been forced to do.”

“It’s not that \_\_\_\_\_ shouldn’t be in charge. It’s that I hate following orders and anyone giving them.”

“I delight in nothing more than irritating \_\_\_\_\_ and dreaming up new ways to do it.”

“Trust has hurt me more than any monster or trap, which makes \_\_\_\_\_ the most dangerous being I have ever met.”

“\_\_\_\_\_ is wise and works hard to guide me, but I know they are holding something back.”

“I value my relationship with \_\_\_\_\_, which is why I see them as a threat.”

“All I want is for \_\_\_\_\_ to respect me, but every time I try to prove myself, I seem to upset them.”

“The way I feel about \_\_\_\_\_ scares me.”

“I am jealous of \_\_\_\_\_, but I would never want to carry their burdens.”

“\_\_\_\_\_ is a fool free of care and worry. I am ashamed that I find so much joy in their company.”

“I know that following \_\_\_\_\_ will mean my death, but I have never wanted to do anything more.”



## Sci-Fi

At its core, sci-fi is speculative fiction. Imagining how changing technological and environmental factors alter human experience, understanding, and capability. It poses questions that range from “What might we find in the far reaches of space?” to “What does it mean to be human in a world of digital consciousness?” and even “How would your commute change if most people owned jetpacks?”

Like fantasy, sci-fi is a broad genre that allows for a wealth of different worlds, stories, and characters. A sci-fi character can be an alien that doesn’t match any known animal type, a bodiless artificial intelligence, an android, or a human who lives in our world with subtle technological differences. Some sci-fi blurs the lines of fantasy with psionic powers, impossible digital landscapes, and unexplainable cosmic phenomena.

With so many options, I recommend focusing on creating relatable traits to ground characters. To emphasize the genre, focus on your character’s relationship to the technology that defines the setting. Use the following questions to get yourself started or explore your character further after doing an exercise.

## Sci-Fi d20 Questions



Roll a d20 three times and answer the corresponding questions for your character:

- 1.** Do you understand most of the technology you use every day?  
What do you do when it fails you?
- 2.** What does your character do to relax? How is it unrecognizable to you?
- 3.** What historical event in this setting had the most dramatic impact on your character's life? Were they aware at the time?
- 4.** Who is closest to your character outside of the companions they travel with? How do they keep in contact?
- 5.** What is a common technology your character dislikes, fears, or simply refuses to engage with?
- 6.** What is an emergent technology that your character has an appreciation for, obsession with, or enthusiasm for?
- 7.** What experience is mundane for your character that would be profound to you? What experience would you both find profound?
- 8.** What is something that you can experience that is simply lost to your character? Do they feel its absence?
- 9.** What is an inconvenience caused by technology your character deals with frequently?
- 10.** How was your character's education different from yours? Did they have a favorite subject to study?
- 11.** Does your character dream of an advancement that they might not see in their lifetime?
- 12.** What is a dream your character has that is difficult to achieve but not impossible? What is a dream that feels absolutely impossible?
- 13.** What looming anxiety about the future worries your character but fails to stop them from living their life?

- 14.** Does your character have any romantic history? How has technology affected their identity and ability to connect with others?
- 15.** Has your character ever been saved or altered by advanced medical technology? How do they view their experience? or What would they think of that possibility?
- 16.** What is something dangerous your character believes they will never do? What is something dangerous they believe they must do?
- 17.** What is a question your character yearns to answer? How do they need to change their life in order to find that answer?
- 18.** What does your character think of as the ideal existence? What separates them from or threatens that existence?
- 19.** What skill brings your character pride? What skill do they have that you find impressive, that they find ordinary?
- 20.** Who did your character admire as a role model when they were young? Who do they admire now?
- 21.** Does your character consider their life ordinary or extraordinary? Does this thought bring them joy or sorrow?

## Identify Five Contacts

Heroes can't do everything alone; sometimes you need to call someone to help your party out. Finding help is always more interesting if your character has a history with them.

This exercise will help you quickly develop a relationship with NPCs in specific roles. Pick a relevant type of NPC; choose a fact, asset, and complication; then answer questions to create a compelling contact.

### The Criminal

Even if you try to live on the straight and narrow, sometimes you need a line to the underworld. This is someone who has skill and knowledge you need but responsibilities you'd rather not think about.

✳️ Facts—choose one:

- You met in prison
- They have a better reputation than you do
- They always dress well

✳️ Assets—choose one:

- Skilled thief
- Wealthy gambler
- Successful smuggler
- Gangland lieutenant

✳️ Complications—choose two:

- You broke a promise to them
- One of you owes the other money
- They also need something from you
- They are always lying about something
- You can never get away with lying to them

✍️ This person has wronged you in the past. Why can you look past that now?

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✍️ You knew this person before they adopted this lifestyle. What makes you still feel close to them?

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## The Doctor

Sooner or later, you are going to get hurt. When you do, it's always better to get treatment from someone you know. This is someone you can call when people are hurt or need help with physical issues.

✳️ Facts—choose one:

- They have a family
- They are a rising star in their field
- Their glory days are behind them

✳️ Assets—choose one:

- They practice innovative care
- They care more about the work than the money
- They provide enhancements alongside treating injuries

✳️ Complications—choose two:

- Their practice keeps official records you'd rather avoid
- Their services cost more than anywhere else offering the same treatment
- They don't have easy access to all the best treatments even if they know how to administer them
- You put them in danger whenever you see them
- They despise one of your companions

✍️ You have known this person since you were very young. How did they come into your life?

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- 💡 This person doesn't approve of your current lifestyle. What do they wish you were doing with your life?
- 
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## The Dealer

Living a life of adventure tends to saddle you with a need for very specific goods. This person can buy, sell, or tell you where to find *anything*. The drawback is that dealing with them is not always a... professional experience.

✳️ Facts—choose one:

- You were the child they never had
- You were the apprentice who got away
- You are related to them by blood

✳️ Assets—choose one:

- They can't say no to you
- If they don't have what you're looking for, they know where it is
- You are always safe in their place of business

✳️ Complications—choose two:

- There is an unsettled debt between you
- You were both involved in a job that went very wrong
- They are in over their head with other business
- They take payment in something more inconvenient than money
- It takes real work to hold their respect

- 💡 This person has a hobby or interest that weirds you out. How is it unignorable?
- 
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- 💡 You learned a lot from this person over the years. What skill did you learn that is critical to you now?
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## The Informant

This person makes it their business to know things and profits by trading what they know. They might be a spy, a snitch, or a person with authority and responsibility. You call them when you need to know something, even if someone might die for it.

✳️ Facts—choose one:

- You have a romantic history with this person
- You have a simmering tension with this person
- You absolutely hate this person

✳️ Assets—choose one:

- They are in direct contact with a target
- You can ensure their discretion
- They are an expert on a world you can't see

✳️ Complications—choose two:

- They want to know one of your secrets
- You are certain they have betrayed you in the past
- They are always lying about something

- There are always unseen costs to working with them
- You tend to lower your guard around them

✍ This person always has a strong emotional reaction to you. What is it, and how does it make you feel?

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✍ Every time you see this person, it puts them at risk. Which of you is more bothered by that?

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## The Rival

This is a contact you don't often call, but they do tend to show up. You compete, you clash, you get in each other's way. This relationship is important to both of you while being disastrous for everyone around you. If you ever need to reach out, you are probably really desperate.

✳️ Facts—choose one:

- They are flashy and beloved
- They are brilliant and stuck-up
- They are exactly like you

✳️ Assets—choose two:

- They are a little smarter than you
- They are a little more attractive than you
- They are a little richer than you
- They are a little more skilled than you

- They are a little stronger than you

✳️ Complications—choose two:

- You are generally on the same side but compete for renown
- You are generally opposed but trust one another deep down
- You care only about their attention when they are around
- They have a better reputation than you
- They are better than you in superficial ways, and it bugs you

💡 There is an important event in your shared history that you both remember differently. How do you remember it? How do they remember it?

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💡 You have a long-standing or recurring wager with this person that easily escalates into risky behavior. What is it?

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## A Career in Science

Scientists make great sci-fi protagonists because they give you plenty of license to explore the setting. That also makes “scientist” a popular PC career choice. For this reason, you’ll want to define a distinct relationship between your character and their occupation.

Use the priority system to rank the following categories from 1 to 5 without repeating a number, with 1 making that aspect more

beneficial or important to your character, and 5 making it unimportant or detrimental to your character.

Interest\_\_\_\_\_

Respect\_\_\_\_\_

Discovery\_\_\_\_\_

Prosperity\_\_\_\_\_

Ethics\_\_\_\_\_

Now read the prompts that correspond to each rank to create your concept. (For example, if you ranked Interest 1, you would follow the first direction in the Interest list.)

## Super Science Emeritus

This exercise addresses your character's career in the present tense. This exercise also works if your character is retired or has been forced out of their profession. Imagine the following list items as applying to their background and current standing based on what feels appropriate.

### Interest

This defines how much your character cares about their current work. It separates idealistic minds working on their dream experiment from jaded academics and corporate cogs.

1. Your career allows you to work on your dream project—something you find profoundly meaningful personally and idealistically. You are doing the specific experiments you want to conduct.

2. Your career allows you to study the field and subject you care about most. However, you have not had the opportunity to explore the specific experiments and projects of your dreams.
3. You found work in your field of expertise, and everything you do is technically relevant to your interest. However, there is a particular subject within your field you haven't had the opportunity to explore.
4. You feel no passion for your work. It's either outside your preferred field or a simplistic and unchanging role within that field that merely supports the "real" work.
5. You actively despise your work. If you ever had passion for it, that died long ago. You might have left the world of science behind, continue with hollow disinterest, or simply do a bad job.

## Respect

This determines what people think of you and your work in your field. You could be a revolutionary thought leader or a fringe oddball.

1. You are or were the most respected voice in your field. No matter where you are in life, people look to your opinions and work as authoritative and essential.
2. You are an authority within your field. If you are known to laypeople, you are treated as an expert. However, among your peers there is a great deal of social and intellectual sparring. Your status makes you a target.
3. You are afforded the respect that most people in your field receive. While you don't have many doors barred to you as a matter of course, you can't really move the world with your name either.
4. There is something you have to work against in nearly every aspect of your scientific work. Perhaps you are young and

unestablished, you hold a marginalized identity, or your ideas are controversial. Whatever the case, you have to work harder for everything.

5. You are seen by and large as a joke within and perhaps outside your field. It might be that your theories are considered fringe or pseudoscience. You might also be disgraced for being associated with a well-known disaster. No matter what, your name is always a hindrance.

## Discovery

This determines how focused your work is on discovery. Many sci-fi characters are pushing the bounds of what is known and what is possible. Others simply apply established knowledge to achieve incredible things.

1. You have already made a world-shattering discovery, and you have the research and record to back it up. This is on the cutting edge of your field and could inspire untold innovation for years to come.
2. You have either already made a spectacular discovery and simply need to document it, or you are extremely close to revolutionizing your field in a dramatic way.
3. Your work is relevant and pushing toward discovery, but it moves at a plodding pace. Success comes between long bouts of grant writing, funding pleas, shareholder meetings, and red tape.
4. Your work isn't really about discovery. If you do make new things, they are refinements of existing ideas. You don't change the world; you respond to how it changes.
5. Your work is either irrelevant, outdated, or actively regressive. If you're lucky, you just teach or apply old ideas. If you're not, then you have put time and effort into being proved wrong. There is

even the chance that you work to counteract and stymie actual innovation.

## Prosperity

This determines how materially rewarding your work is. You could be a billionaire or actively putting yourself in steep debt.

1. Your work has brought you fabulous wealth and opportunity. It allows you comfort and security to pursue your interests and passions independently without worry.
2. Your work is very materially rewarding. While you don't have to worry about basic necessities, you don't quite have the resources to do anything you want. Funding your own research, for example, could be a huge risk.
3. Your work in science pays like any other job. You depend on that income to survive, and, despite being stable, you face a few hardships.
4. Your work in science takes active material sacrifices to pursue. It might be that your field simply isn't valued by wealthy interests, that you need to take abusive internships to get your foot in the door, or that you can't find funding so you run everything yourself. You have problems, and science is to blame.
5. Science has ruined you financially. Maybe you are suffering from the fallout of a huge disaster, scandal, or controversy. Maybe you made the wrong enemies. No matter the reason, you struggle to survive because of your scientific work.

## Ethics

This determines how ethically sound your scientific work is. Some sci-fi stories are focused on interrogating the ethical

implications of splicing genes and programming AI; others just want mutants and robots without complication.

1. Your work is guaranteed to make the world a better place. Even your research improves lives and adds good to the world. There is no concern about it being co-opted or corrupted in any way.
2. Your work is for the greater good ultimately, but you do face a few hurdles. You might have to allow unscrupulous people to profit from it or perform risky experiments to get it where it needs to go. In the end, it will likely balance out.
3. Your work is complicated. It offers the possibility of immense good for the world, but it could also introduce new harm. Alternatively, your work doesn't really concern itself with ethics or the larger impact on the world at all.
4. If your work isn't somehow inherently ethically compromised, there are people actively working to use it toward bad ends. There is potential for good, but it's definitely diminished by the clear negative impact.
5. Your work actively depends on ethically reprehensible behavior. You are destroying things, hurting people or animals, and adding real evil to the world every time you do your job.

## Forming an Ideology

In fantasy and many other genres, the division between good and evil is sharply defined. Sci-fi is usually less invested in treating morality as a force. Heroes can still be principled and fight for their beliefs, but those beliefs have a more personally driven meaning.

Make choices and answer prompts to develop unique and strong core principles.

### I Believe...

This is a part of your ideology that places faith in something. Either a belief in something intangible and idealistic or a belief in something unproven and unknown. This is an aspect of your ideology that you base many of your actions on.

 Choose two true statements about the thing you believe:

- I would die or kill to defend it
- It often leads me to feelings of isolation
- I have been mocked for it
- I sometimes have doubts
- I would do anything to prove it
- It is unwelcome in society

 What is your belief?

---

---

 Who shares or shared this belief? How are they important to you?

---

---

 What risk have you already taken based on this belief?

---

---

 Has this belief ever truly been challenged? If so, what happened? If not, what would it take?

---

---

## I Trust...

This part of your ideology places faith in something or someone real. It might be an ally you rely on, an institution you think highly of, or a skill you depend on. This is something that brings you comfort most of the time, but it is a tangible thing that can fail you.

 Whom or what do you trust?

---

---

 Choose two true statements about the thing you trust:

- I can rely on this when I am not strong
- It will keep my loved ones safe
- It has my best interests at heart
- It can overcome any challenge
- It would never hurt me

 How did this thing gain your trust?

---

---

 What do you place at risk with this trust?

---

---

- ✍ When have you been let down in the past? Whom or what did you blame that on?
- 
- 

### I Love...

This is a person or thing you have a complex and intimate connection to. It mostly brings you joy, but it is not flawless. You accept it for its flaws, allowing it to enrich your life. The safety and sanctity of this thing is something you are devoted to protecting.

- ✍ Whom or what do you love?
- 
- 

- ✳ Choose two true statements about the thing you love:

- I worry about it constantly
- I want the world to be a good place for it
- I am willing to face trials for it
- I dream of peace with it
- I want it to grow beyond me

- ✍ What joyful moment did you share with the thing you love?
- 
- 

- ✍ What have you learned from the thing you love? How did that lesson make you feel more complete?

- 
- 
- 
- ✍ How has the thing you love hurt you? Did this help you reach a new understanding or leave you grappling with anxiety?
- 
- 
- 

### I Hate...

This is a person, group, or thing that you cannot stand. That feeling may or may not be justified. Its existence feels like a threat, and when you can, you act against it.

- 
- 
- 
- ✍ Whom or what do you hate?
- 
- 
- 

- ✳ Choose two true statements about the thing you hate:

- It haunts or hunts me wherever I go
- It threatens my beliefs as much as it threatens my safety
- It is brutish or unsophisticated
- It is loved by the misguided and the corrupt
- It appropriates discovery for shortsighted gain
- It obstructs progress

- 
- ✍ What has the thing you hate taken from you?
-

---

 What thing you care about has been tainted or warped by the thing you hate?

---

---

 Do you see the thing you hate as something you can defeat or overcome—or are you resigned to constantly give ground to it?

---

## Create a Social Code

Space is vast, and adventuring parties are small. On many ships, characters are forced to live in proximity, and in order to survive the trip and whatever chaos awaits at their desalination, they must maintain good relationships. The Procedure is a complex set of social rules that allow spacefaring outcasts to have difficult discussions and keep the peace. Of course, being designed by a committee with members who chose their life because they hate rules, things can get a bit strange.

 Some aspects of the Procedure call for a Reward or a Punishment. In those cases, roll a d8 and use the following results to inspire you to create one.

### REWARDS

1. A publicly recognized ranking or status

2. Verbal praise or acknowledgment
3. Increased authority
4. Increased rations or recreation
5. Rare or specialized treats
6. Specialized celebration, like a party
7. Officially tracked merits
8. A trophy, medal, or uniform decoration

## PUNISHMENTS

1. Reduction of rations or recreation
2. Unappealing food or drink
3. Difficult or unpleasant work
4. Restraint or confinement
5. Tracked demerits or strikes
6. An embarrassing title
7. Service to the group or a specific member
8. Cut or loss in compensation

## A Way to Convene

This is a way for your crew to gather, tackle essential business, and occasionally bond. Some of the other aspects of your crew's social procedure might be a part of these meetings.

- ✿ This happens regularly... (choose one):
  - After every job
  - On the way to a new location
  - Once a week
  
- ✿ There are some finicky rules... (choose two):
  - People are only allowed to ask questions at certain times
  - Subjects must be addressed in a specific order
  - Crew who don't attend receive a punishment

- There are strict time limits
  - There are complicated rules about who is allowed to speak
  - Crew who don't observe rules receive a punishment
- \* There are aspects that make it strange... (choose two):
- A mantra or chanting
  - Music or dance
  - Ceremonial foods or treats
  - Costumes or uniforms
  - Roles and titles
- 💡 What aspect of this structure was made at your request?
- 
- 

💡 How has this structure caused you frustration?

---

---

💡 How has it relieved your frustration?

---

---

## A Way to Express Frustration

Most crews are stuck with one another. They can't afford to alienate their companions or drive people away. However, they also can't afford to tolerate someone making avoidable mistakes or

mistreating other members of the crew. This rule helps people make complaints without splitting up the group.

✳ To protect all parties, frustrations are... (choose two):

- Voiced anonymously
- Addressed as a group
- Issued alongside compliments
- Issued in an oddly tender and intimate way
- Issued and received at the same time

✳ To ensure frustrations are addressed, the offending party... (choose two):

- Is assigned an accountability buddy
- Must acknowledge their fault to the group
- Must apologize for transgression or repair damage
- Is offered rewards for improvement
- Has to face punishments for transgression

✳ To ensure tensions dissipate... (choose one):

- Frustrated parties must accept apologies
- Offending parties may not respond outside of formal settings
- All parties are obligated to perform a bonding ritual
- If anyone has a frustration, everyone must acknowledge a frustration

✍ What are three things people must always do when voicing or acknowledging frustration?

1.

---

2.

3.

- 
- ✍ What are three things people must never do when voicing or acknowledging frustration?

1.

2.

3.

- 
- ✍ When is it acceptable to voice a frustration? How often does this happen?

- 
- ✍ What is an offending party expected to do? How is that enforced?

- ✍ What strange rule or taboo must be observed that only makes sense to the people who devised this system?
- 
- 

## A Way to State Needs

Certain forms of vulnerability are difficult even when discussing necessities. Also, with limited resources, it's difficult to decide how needs can be met. This rule allows crew members to comfortably state their needs and fairly decide how to meet them.

- ✿ To enable crew to state needs... (choose one):
  - Suggestions are accepted anonymously
  - All crew are required to state a need
  - Crew are entitled to make requests at predetermined intervals
  
- ✿ To protect limited resources... (choose two):
  - Everything is put to a vote
  - Needs are ranked by priority
  - There is a strange bureaucracy to how requests are handled
  - Crew members have specific times they can make requests
  - There are councils or subcommittees that make specific decisions
  - Rank and standing are considered when meeting needs
  - There are competitions, games, or trials
  - There are lotteries or intentionally random systems
  
- ✿ An extra quirk that makes things a little dysfunctional... (choose one):
  - Crew can swap or gamble for priority

- Needs have to be issued in a strange format like rhyme or verse
- There are byzantine fine-print rules that can be gamed or exploited
- Alliances form and shift constantly around this system
- There is an uncontrollable neutral force that makes outcomes difficult to predict

💡 When two needs are in conflict or competing for resources, how does the crew make a decision?

---

---

💡 How does the crew work to honor or enforce social requests?

---

---

💡 When has this system frustrated your character? When has it made your character's life better or easier?

---

---

## A Way to Give Accolades

Accolades help morale by making crew members feel good about themselves and giving people goals to focus on during long journeys. These systems are especially helpful for crews that struggle to engage each other directly about personal issues.

For each type of following accolade, roll and refer to the previous reward list to determine how it is rewarded, jot down how the reward relates to the accolade (for example, a result of 4 on the table with option 2 might mean that the ship grants extra time on the holodeck as a reward issued through secret ballot), then choose one:

- This accolade is granted by a public vote



- This accolade is granted by a secret vote



- This accolade is controlled by one crew member with special authority



- This accolade is granted according to a system of set rules beyond the control of any individual



## TO ACKNOWLEDGE VALOR

This accolade is a high honor and an opportunity to express genuine admiration. It is strong enough to make an outsider a full part of the crew, help a struggling member prove their worth, and honor a profound act of heroism.

-  When was the last time an accolade like this was granted?

 Have you ever received it, or do you aspire to?

---

 Who has risked their life trying to earn an accolade like this?  
What did you feel about their effort?

---

### **TO REWARD DUTY OR IMPROVEMENT**

This accolade is more causal. It is something that makes the difficult work on your crew more enjoyable and at times helps crew members who are struggling find motivation.

 When are these usually awarded?

---

 When did you last receive this? Did you find it gratifying?

---

 When have you seen this make a difference for another crew member? Did that change how you feel about it?

---

### **TO ELEVATE SOMETHING FRIVOLOUS**

This accolade is a part of a reward for a strange competition, hobby, or interest that has captured the attention of many if not all members of the crew. It might be tied to a spitting contest, to tracking puns made in meetings, or to rewarding crew members who find the lost pieces of a jigsaw puzzle. It is motivated by boredom more than necessity.

💡 What activity is this attached to? How is everyone drawn in to participate?

---

💡 Who argues over this accolade the most? Have you ever settled or led one of these disagreements?

---

💡 Are you invested in this? What is your favorite memory surrounding it?

---

## A Way to Settle Disagreements

Sometimes crew members in conflict are too stubborn to budge, have irreconcilable needs, or need a definitive way to settle their differences. When all else fails, it comes down to this. It might be a competitive game, a trial, or a nonlethal duel. It's made to de-escalate hostility and provide definitive judgments.

✳️ This has sacred rules... (choose two):

- Any crew member has the right to invoke this, but their opponent must agree to initiate it
- There must be a neutral judge even if they are not a part of the crew
- Results are binding unless a new crew member represents the same cause
- It takes priority over everything but immediate danger
- Cheating or foul play receives harsh punishment

✳️ There are some quirks... (choose two):

- In addition to settling disagreements, the winner receives a reward and the loser receives a punishment
- Opponents are also expected to make additional wagers
- It requires special equipment or outfits
- There is a taboo against speaking its name
- Cheating and foul play are essential to the process

✍ What essential matter was established by this process in the past?

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✍ Have you ever won or lost one of these conflicts? What happened?

---

---

✍ Which crew member is most feared in this process? Who is most underestimated?

---

---

## Generational Divides

Even in worlds thousands of years more advanced than our own, older generations will still clash with younger ones. Where your character fits into this kind of divide can help you define so much

about their personality. Sci-fi provides many exciting opportunities to put twists on this dynamic.

Choose details and answer prompts to divide a young sci-fi generation from an older one.

## Challenges and Opportunities

One of the core differences between generations is where they face challenges and find opportunities. It's easy for older folks to dismiss problems they don't understand and hard for younger folks to understand problems that no longer exist.

✳ Core facts about the world... (choose two):

- There are new frontiers to explore
- There are new cultures that need to find a way to coexist with old ones
- There is a deep divide between the wealthy and the poor, or there is a new post-scarcity society
- A great war has recently ended
- A potential great war is looming on the horizon

✳ A challenge faced by older generations that no longer exists... (choose one):

- Scars from conflict
- An economic depression
- A widespread illness
- Technological limitations

✍ How did this impact the mindset of people from an older generation?

---

---

 How was this problem solved?

---

---

\* An opportunity available to older generations that no longer exists... (choose one):

- Clear professional opportunities
- Access to affordable education
- Affordable and abundant housing
- Affordable and effective medical care

 How did this opportunity inform the way older generations view success or security?

---

---

 Why is it no longer available?

---

---

\* A challenge faced by younger generations that older generations can't understand... (choose one):

- Complex new social dynamics
- Diminishing resources
- Loss of assumed privacy or protection
- Expanded essential individual responsibilities

 How does this add to the stress of everyday life?

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✍ How is this a looming societal threat?

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---

✳ An opportunity available to younger generations that older generations distrust... (choose one):

- Expanded personal expression
- Unique recreation
- Education that challenges established paradigms
- Unfamiliar frontiers

✍ What are younger generations able to learn that older generations are afraid to investigate?

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---

✍ Why is it easy for older generations to see this as frivolous or indulgent?

---

---

---

## Technology

Sci-fi is all about radical technology changing the way people live. In this world, a new invention has proliferated that makes life

for younger people almost unrecognizable to older people.

✳ This technology... (choose two):

- Makes it possible to travel faster, farther, or easier
- Depends on something that alters the mind or body
- Changes the way people communicate
- Connects people with a new ally or enemy
- Could be connected to something dangerous
- Is something people use everyday

✍ What is it called?

---

✍ In a sentence, what does it do?

---

✍ How do younger people use it in a way that frightens older people?

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---

## Social

There is a new social trend defined by or popular with younger generations.

✳ This trend... (choose two):

- Changes the way people approach sex
- Involves mind-altering substances or devices
- Is a way for people to celebrate or revel
- Is glamorized in popular culture

- Has been relentlessly commercialized
  - Has origins in an unfamiliar culture
- \* While this isn't dangerous in most cases... (choose one):
  - It is treated like it is by the mainstream
  - Enforcement of regulated or illegal status makes engaging with it dangerous
  - There are dangerous activities surrounding it

💡 What is it called?

---

---

💡 Did your character enjoy it the first time they tried it?

---

---

💡 What element are you weary of even if you know it is mostly safe?

---

---

## Fashion

Fashion changes quickly, and you can usually tell which generation a person belongs to just by looking at how they decorate themselves.

- \* New fashion trends upset older generations because... (choose two):
  - They challenge gender norms

- They violate modesty or sexual taboos
- They are connected to an intimidating political or social movement
- Younger generation style icons criticize older trends
- Certain aspects of decoration are dramatic or permanent

✳ The current trend is... (choose one):

- Aggressive and bold
- Elegant and indulgent
- Provocative and empowering
- Pragmatic and simple
- Warm and cheerful

✳ It prominently features accessories... (choose two):

- Helmets
- Masks
- Devices
- Gloves
- Piercings/implants
- Tattoos/grafting
- Makeup
- Uniforms
- Bags/holsters

✳ Consider the economic conditions of the setting and choose an origin for this trend... (choose one):

- It allows the poor to claim a sense of individuality
- It takes advantage of plentiful resources
- It is based around a popular industry
- It rejects or subverts industrial norms
- It was developed out of the sight of mainstream culture before proliferating

 Choose the most appropriate descriptor and create a word for this style based on your choice:

- **Counterculture:** Choose a harsh single-syllable word and add “Neo” or “X” before it.



- 
- **Revolutionary:** Choose a bold, vast, or idealistic word and add “-ist” or “-ic” as a suffix.



- **Industrial:** Use the name of the industry, a tool of the trade, or a common form of waste associated with the industry and add “core” or “wear” as a suffix.



- **Indulgent:** Choose a word meaning “bright,” a nonsense word, or a portmanteau and add “Glam” as a prefix, or “play,” “-conne,” or “-style” as a suffix.



 In what settings is this style most popular?

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 What signifies a devotee of this style when they are in a mainstream setting?

---

---

## Language

The final separator between younger and older generations is how people speak.

- ✿ Younger generations... (choose one):
  - Complexify language
  - Simplify language
  
- ✿ Their speech and lexicon are influenced by... (choose two):
  - Alien cultures
  - Programming
  - Novel communication platforms
  - Experiences with travel or industry
  - The fallout of a tragedy
  
- ✿ What unique trait has this vernacular adopted? Choose one or two:
  - It incorporates images or references to images in speech
  - It incorporates gestures into speech
  - It incorporates fashion or accessories into communication
  - It involves communication through scent, touch, or novel senses
  - It references experiences only accessible to this generation
  
- ✍ Based on your choices, define a word to:
  - Describe an undesirable situation: \_\_\_\_\_
  - Call someone attractive: \_\_\_\_\_
  - Suggest someone who is cool or stylish: \_\_\_\_\_
  - Call someone oppressive: \_\_\_\_\_

- Call someone inauthentic: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
- 💡 What entertainment or activity does someone need to speak in this vernacular to enjoy?  
\_\_\_\_\_
- 💡 How can younger people tell when a word has fallen out of favor?  
\_\_\_\_\_
- 💡 What term is widely misunderstood by older generations?  
\_\_\_\_\_

## Bond, Bleep, Blast

On a long haul between worlds, over strange drinks in the back of an extra-dimensional cantina, or over a chat app with your sim-net pals, you can learn about yourself by asking the ultimate question: Bond, Bleep, or Blast?

- **Bond:** foster a long-term and devoted relationship
- **Bleep:** share a nonserious physical (and probably sexual) encounter
- **Blast:** kill or destroy

The following are groups of three characters you must decide to Bond, Bleep, or Blast. Within each group of three, assign each character number to the corresponding column on the right-hand

side. You must assign only one to each character without repeating a number. It's likely that you won't want to do any of these things with or to certain characters. How you choose between two bad options can be fun and illuminating to think through!

	Bond	Bleep	Blast
1. A robot; 2. an android; 3. a cyborg			
1. The leader of the rebellion; 2. the galactic emperor; 3. an average outworlder			
1. A space pirate; 2. an ace pilot; 3. a bounty hunter			
1. A hologram; 2. a hallucination; 3. an automaton			
1. A hacker; 2. a smuggler; 3. a dealer			
1. A rock-based life-form; 2. a slug-based life-form; 3. a bug-based life-form			
1. A princess; 2. a knight; 3. a smuggler			
1. A living planet; 2. a bodiless program; 3. a microscopic organism			
1. An ambassador; 2. a bodyguard; 3. an assassin			
1. Your best friend; 2. your best friend's clone; 3. your clone			
1. Yourself from an alternate universe; 2. yourself from an alternate timeline; 3. your clone			
1. A programmer; 2. an engineer; 3. an executive			
1. An alien; 2. a mutant; 3. a person with a robot body			
1. Your commanding officer; 2. your parole officer; 3. your debtor			
1. Your oldest enemy; 2. your newest friend; 3. a random stranger			
1. Your self-aware ship; 2. your self-aware communicator; 3. a self-aware space station			
1. An alien with a bird's head; 2. an alien with a fish's body; 3. an alien with an insect's arms			
1. A legendary captain; 2. a godlike entity; 3. a planetary ruler			
1. The wisest being in the universe; 2. the kindest being in			

the universe; 3. the most attractive being in the universe			
1. The most foolish being in the universe; 2. the cruellest being in the universe; 3. the ugliest being in the universe			
1. The person who designed your favorite program; 2. the person who designed the device you use to run it; 3. the person who delivered the device to you			
1. A telepath; 2. a brain symbote; 3. a sophisticated behavioral predictive AI			
1. A great fighter; 2. a great negotiator; 3. a great artist			
1. A detective; 2. a crime boss; 3. a middle manager			
1. Your ex from a timeline where they became a billionaire; 2. your ex from a universe where they were ten times as strong; 3. your actual ex			
1. An intergalactic pop star; 2. an intergalactic chef; 3. an intergalactic massage therapist			
1. An alien who navigates by echolocation; 2. an alien who navigates by sensing electromagnetic waves; 3. an alien who communicates through smells			
1. A captain; 2. a scientist; 3. a doctor			
1. Your most hated enemy; 2. your most annoying friend; 3. your greatest fear given form			
1. Your copilot; 2. your commanding officer; 3. your main rival			

## Futuristic Gadgets

Sci-fi revolves around exciting technology. Usually it only focuses on certain concepts, leaving other elements to exist in the background or never be addressed at all. As a character who lives in a sci-fi world, your experience of this technological wonder is more personal. You can learn things about a character by looking at the mundane tools that help them live their lives.

Make choices and answer the prompts to create and customize an array of futuristic gadgets for your character.

## A Way to Stay In Touch

Communication is usually a form of tech that sci-fi stories pay attention to. Take some time to add personality to your device.

✳ Your device is... (choose one):

- Handheld
- Wearable
- Implanted

✳ Is that considered normal for your world?

- Yes
- No

✍ How do you wish your device was different?

---

🎲 Roll a d6 to create a quirk for your device:

1. It's an older model that has a noticeably different function
2. It's specifically damaged
3. It's branded based on one of your character's interests
4. It has been decorated with decals or other customizations
5. There is something unique about the display
6. It has a special case that makes it look different from other units

✍ How did your device come to have this quirk? Why does it suit you?

---

---

 Do you like your device? How does that show?

---

---

 Have you ever been in an argument about your device? If so, why?

---

---

## A Way to Groom

Hygiene isn't something most sci-fi settings spend time focusing on, so you can get pretty wild with your ideas. Imagine something your character uses daily but probably only thinks about when they need to.

 This device is... (choose one):

- Pocket-sized
- Small enough to hold in your hand
- Something that doesn't dominate a small room
- Something the size of a small room

 This device can... (choose three):

- Help keep you healthy
- Conceal or eliminate imperfections
- Help keep you fresh
- Help you decorate yourself
- Help you style yourself
- Help you relax

-  What aspect of your style is this device essential for maintaining?
- 
- 

-  What special setting or mode do you depend on or particularly enjoy?
- 
- 

-  How would you feel about someone asking to borrow this device?
- 
- 

## A Way to Cook

Even in the future, everybody has to eat. Many sci-fi stories focus on the convenience or efficiency of advance culinary technology. The devices you use to cook tell us something about you.

-  Choose two assets for this device:
- It can make luxurious meals
  - It is mobile
  - It is easy for you to use
  - It has great general utility
  - It doesn't require much maintenance
  - It is automated and can be used passively

 Choose two weaknesses for this device:

- It is flawed, easily over- or undercooking food
- It is cumbersome or stationary
- It is difficult for most people to use
- It requires attention
- It can only be used to make specific things
- It is costly to use properly

 You had options when choosing this device. How was this one suited to your lifestyle?

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 How can you use this device to treat yourself?

---

---

 What kind of people might judge you for having this sort of device? What might they say?

---

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## A Way to Express Yourself

This device enables you to do something creative, fulfilling, and perhaps even productive. This is a way to profoundly connect to your character's individuality or to simply pass the time.

 Choose one:

- This allows you to express yourself in a way that simply doesn't exist with current technology
- This makes an existing form of creative expression much easier or more convenient
- This changes an existing form of creativity in an interesting way
- This replicates many different kinds of creative expression

 **This device is... (choose one):**

- Implanted
- Able to fit in your pocket
- Easy to carry
- Able to move on its own
- Hard to lug around
- Mostly immobile
- An actual room

 **How did you learn to use this device?**

---

---

 **What is your favorite thing you have done with this device?**

---

---

 **Do you share creative projects made with this device?**

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---

## A Way to Stay Healthy

This device has something to do with medicine, healing, or monitoring your physical health.

✳ This device can... (choose four):

- Stop bleeding
- Manage pain
- Accelerate healing
- Proactively prevent disease
- Stabilize serious injury
- Treat diseases
- Detoxify
- Temporarily replace vital systems
- Aid surgery
- Provide cosmetic treatment

✳ This device... (choose one):

- Is new or well maintained
- Is older and almost untouched
- Is ancient and heavily used

✍ What part of this device is most often used? How has it worn from frequent use?

---

---

✍ When have you needed this device? Who used it on you? Were you ever forced to use it on yourself?

---

---

- 💡 Do you feel confident around this device? Is there anyone you would prefer using it over you?
- 
- 

## A Handy Tool

This is a device that serves many purposes—the sci-fi equivalent of an army knife. This device is essential for anyone living a life like yours, the kind of thing you feel helpless without.

- ✳️ This tool can... (choose four):

- Open things
- Cut things
- Interface with computers
- Identify and analyze things
- Bind things
- Project things
- Monitor things
- Assemble things
- Conceal things
- Mend or repair things
- Destroy things
- Calculate things

- ✳️ Its style is \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_... (choose two):

- Classic
- Minimalist
- Streamlined
- Elegant
- Practical
- Natural

- Industrial
- Alien
- Toyetic
- Grungy

✍ How does this complement your general aesthetic?

---

✍ How has this worn from use in ways that make it more familiar to you?

---

✍ What kind of people usually carry a device like this? Do you feel that fits you?

---

✍ This was a gift. Who did you get it from and what do they mean to you now?

---

✍ When has this saved your life?

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## A, Robot

Artificial beings are a staple of sci-fi. There is a wide range of possibility for what a robot could be depending on your setting. Whether you are making a robot as a PC or an accessory to your PC, it's easy to get lost in the fantasy of wanting everything. RPGs tend to focus on balancing traits; doing so will help your concept fit the structure of a game.

Use the priority system and assign rank to the following categories from 1 to 5 without repeating a number, with 1 making that aspect more beneficial or important to your character, and 5 making it unimportant or detrimental to your character.

Autonomy\_\_\_\_\_

Mobility\_\_\_\_\_

Utility\_\_\_\_\_

Personality\_\_\_\_\_

Armament\_\_\_\_\_

Now read the prompts that correspond to each rank to create your concept. (For example, if you ranked Autonomy 1, you would follow the first direction in the Autonomy list.)

### Autonomy

This determines how capable a robot is of acting independently. Some need a person to control their every action, others need management, and some are fully capable on their own.

1. This robot is an independent being that either recognizes you as an authority or feels deeply invested in your mission. It can both follow orders and create and enact its own plans.
2. This robot understands its role and can act on its own initiative in many situations. It may struggle to follow certain orders or require occasional supervision.
3. It is programmed in a way that allows it to carry out complex tasks, but it has little to no initiative to perform those tasks on its own.
4. This robot is actually a suit or remote-controlled object. It relies on a pilot actively engaged with its controls to function. Otherwise, it is all but completely immobile.
5. This robot is an independent being. It has goals and motivations that may be counter to yours. It does not recognize you as an authority. If it follows your instructions, it does so by choice.

## Mobility

This determines how easy it is for your robot to move in different environments. It defines whether your robot can go all the places you can and what holds it back.

1. This robot can travel at blazing speeds in nearly any environment—perhaps moving between planets and stars in the blink of an eye. There is no place it cannot travel, no obstacle it cannot overcome.
2. This robot can travel many places you cannot. It has the ability to fly and to move through a vacuum, a dense atmosphere, and all types of terrain. It has impressive speed but depends on vehicles for long journeys. Certain extreme conditions pose a threat and must be encountered sparingly.

- 3.** This robot can go almost anywhere a human can, at reasonable speed. It struggles in certain environments like mud, sand, or water, but it can move in at least one environment that a human cannot, like a vacuum.
- 4.** This robot has limited mobility. It can follow humans in ideal conditions like spaceship hallways or paved roads. However, it is either incapable on uneven terrain or limited by slow and awkward movement.
- 5.** This robot depends on other beings or vehicles to help it move, is too small or slow to move on its own all the time, or is built to only move within a certain area. There are many places it simply cannot go.

## Utility

This determines how versatile a robot is in terms of function. This exercise assumes a robot is capable of fulfilling its core purpose, but higher utility gives it the ability to adapt beyond that.

- 1.** This robot not only has tools and the ability to operate other machines; it also has the ability to reshape itself to create new tools as needed. Using nanomachines, complex 3D printing, or a nearly infinite number of bespoke functions—this robot can do pretty much anything.
- 2.** This robot has a wide range of tools and the ability to operate other machines to suit its needs. As long as it has access to the right controls, there is almost no limit to what it can achieve. It can also compensate for other flaws in a limited capacity using these tools.
- 3.** This robot was equipped with a slate of essential systems made to support its primary function. These tools might have a broader use, but they are limited outside their intended function.

4. This robot was designed for an extremely specific purpose and was given little functionality beyond that purpose. If it needs tools, it will use them, but they probably aren't built in.
5. This robot—whether it was designed for broad functionality or not—is actively unhelpful outside its primary function. It may even have some personality quirks or modifications that make it unsuited to do even that.

## Personality

In sci-fi, robots can range from being sophisticated tools to fully realized characters. This determines how much depth there is to their personality.

1. This robot is a fully realized being with a strong personality. They make meaningful contributions, have original ideas, and have an individual spirit that can bolster the people around them. They also have authentic depth, making them capable of a full range of emotions.
2. This robot has a distinct and humanlike personality. Generally, it is difficult to differentiate them from other beings. However, they might possess one or two quirks that set them apart as “artificial,” like unfailing obedience or unfamiliarity with emotion.
3. This robot has a personality, but it lacks the depth of other thinking beings. It might be more like an animal with wants, likes, and idiosyncrasies that are authentic but simplistic. Or it might have a dynamic human voice that lacks real emotional depth.
4. This robot has little to no personality. It is merely a vessel to serve a set of programs and functions. Any voice it possesses is preprogrammed mimicry.

5. This robot has an emergent or fully realized personality with real depth. However, it predisposes the robot to cause trouble or impede progress more than anything else. It has to be managed more than it can be collaborated with.

## Armament

This determines how capable your robot might be in a fight. It determines if your robot is also a weapon.

1. This robot is the result of a cosmic or top-secret weapons program, making it one of the most dangerous weapons in the setting. There is nearly no limit to what it can achieve.
2. This robot is an extremely capable combatant. It outpaces many conventional weapons but still has realistic limitations. It can be overwhelmed, outmaneuvered, or outmatched by another robot in its class without thoughtful tactics.
3. If this robot was designed for combat, it is about as capable as a regular party member. If it was not designed for conflict, it probably struggles to actually be useful in a battle—needing protection rather than offering it.
4. This robot is not meant for combat and may have specific programming forbidding it from getting involved in conflict. It will try not to get in the way, but it can't do much more than that.
5. This robot is an active impediment to combat. It makes noises at the wrong times, moves in the wrong directions, or has programming and personality that will lead it to take actions that work against you.

## Science Fiction Companion Statements

Jumping into a one shot or starting a campaign midgame makes it harder to have fun with character relationships. It's easier to develop a fun dynamic with your companions if you have a little spark to get you started.

This exercise lists quotes from your character's perspective, giving thoughts and history about the people around them. Simply fill in the blanks with PC and NPC names to give yourself a strong foundational perspective to start your game.

## Positive

These quotes establish the foundation for positive relationships, centering on admiration, cooperation, and affection. I generally recommend you use these for your fellow PCs. There can still be conflict in positive relationships, but it's easier to manage party dynamics if you start out aligned.

"I want \_\_\_\_\_ to teach me everything about their home. I never get tired of their stories."

"\_\_\_\_\_ is cleverer than they let on. Anyone who underestimates them is in for a nasty surprise."

"I never understood what the word 'genius' meant until I met \_\_\_\_\_."

"I would travel to the farthest and darkest reaches of the cosmos as long as I get to do it with \_\_\_\_\_."

"I don't feel comfortable most places. I am so thankful to \_\_\_\_\_ for trying to make me feel welcome."

"I have so much to teach, and I have never met a more eager student than \_\_\_\_\_."

“Every time I think I have experienced all of the wonders of the universe, \_\_\_\_\_ shows me something incredible.”

“\_\_\_\_\_ has a rough exterior, but there is almost no one more committed and caring once you earn their respect.”

“Many people would call \_\_\_\_\_ a coward, but I know they stand up when it counts.”

“\_\_\_\_\_ is sweet and kind in a way few beings are. I never want that to change.”

“The optimism \_\_\_\_\_ shows is infectious. I find myself believing them surprisingly often.”

“\_\_\_\_\_ does unpleasant work, but I know they are a good person deep down.”

“I think \_\_\_\_\_ is so sophisticated. I would love to be a part of their world.”

“When I struggle, I know that \_\_\_\_\_ will always be there to help keep me going.”

“I know \_\_\_\_\_ is troubled by many complicated feelings. I make a point of trying to cheer them up.”

## Negative

These quotes establish negative relationships centering on conflict, rivalry, and distaste. I generally recommend these for NPCs and use complicated prompts to find conflict in relationships with other PCs.

“\_\_\_\_\_ actually scares me. I don't care what others say; I see through their mask.”

"I am tired of cleaning up after \_\_\_\_\_. Every time I give them slack, they make things worse."

"\_\_\_\_\_ is too naive for me to work with. We don't have time to pick up the pieces when their illusions come crashing down."

"I don't think \_\_\_\_\_ is capable of valuing life in the same way I do, and that makes me uncomfortable."

"Whenever I talk to \_\_\_\_\_, I feel like they are trying to trick me."

"\_\_\_\_\_ cares about the wrong things. Constantly looking past the important details causes everyone trouble."

"I hate the way \_\_\_\_\_ acts like they are better than everyone else. I want to put them in their place."

"\_\_\_\_\_ works to be charming so everyone will look past their crimes."

"I am waiting in dreadful anticipation for the day \_\_\_\_\_ finally calls in the favor I owe them."

"\_\_\_\_\_ makes my skin crawl. I hate working with them, and if it were up to me, we'd burn them on every deal."

"I can't seem to stop offending \_\_\_\_\_. Everything I do or say seems to step on some cultural sensitivity or open an old wound."

"It bothers me how overly familiar \_\_\_\_\_ is with \_\_\_\_\_. They don't have any idea who they are talking to."

“\_\_\_\_\_ really needs to give up on \_\_\_\_\_. It’s starting to threaten the group, and no one wants to say anything.”

“I can tell \_\_\_\_\_ doesn’t respect me. I’m getting sick of looking for ways to prove myself.”

“I wish \_\_\_\_\_ would take their work seriously and that \_\_\_\_\_ would call them out when they don’t.”

## Complicated

These prompts establish complicated relationships intermingling positive and negative elements. These are perfect for both PCs and NPCs where you want extra dramatic tension at the center of the story.

“I value \_\_\_\_\_’s opinion more than anyone else’s, which is why their words hurt me so often.”

“I can’t stand the thought of \_\_\_\_\_ outgrowing me. I feel like I am constantly struggling to keep up.”

“I am in love with \_\_\_\_\_ even though I know we can never be together in the way I want.”

“I can’t stand \_\_\_\_\_. I talk to them constantly, seek their attention whenever I can, and think about them when they are away. Can’t. Stand. Them.”

“There are definitely unresolved tensions between \_\_\_\_\_ and me. We can’t risk them getting in the way of our work though.”

“No matter what I do, no matter how much I accomplish, I feel like I never get the approval I crave from \_\_\_\_\_.”

"I find \_\_\_\_\_ confusing and fascinating. They challenge so much of what I know, but that excites me."

"\_\_\_\_\_ has forgiven me for the things I did, but I will never feel like I deserve it."

"It feels like every time I go back to \_\_\_\_\_ they are a different person, and I never know if that is someone I can trust."

"\_\_\_\_\_ is my best friend, but I feel like I don't mean the same thing to them, and I'm afraid it's because of something I can't change."

"I crave a confrontation with \_\_\_\_\_, which means I will not allow them to be harmed by anyone else."

"\_\_\_\_\_ is an enemy I know better than any other... which also means I know the circumstances in which I can trust them."

"I don't like the way \_\_\_\_\_ looks up to me as though I am some kind of hero. I'm dreading the day they finally understand me."

"I can't let myself get closer to \_\_\_\_\_. It can only end in pain."

"I keep overlooking the ways \_\_\_\_\_ undermines me because I want them to improve, but I know they are getting worse."



## Horror

**H**orror is scenario-based speculative fiction, with the core of that speculation being “what if something really bad happened?” It focuses on tragedy, pain, suspense, evil, and the macabre.

Many horror stories take place in recognizable settings. This helps the audience identify with protagonists and feel their fear. Even if very few people have ever been chased by a masked killer, many of us have been alone in a dark house at night. Those universal points of connection help horror work its magic.

Vulnerability is essential to horror characters. The threats of the genre need to be relevant to your character to be effective. At times that means physical vulnerability, but it can also mean emotional or spiritual vulnerability. Either way, when bad things happen a horror protagonist should be affected. Some horror stories allow characters to grow in power or knowledge to be less vulnerable over the course of a story, but to be really grounded in the genre you need to start by defining a character’s vulnerabilities.

## Horror d20 Questions

These questions focus on creating traits for horror characters that make them grounded and prime them to be vulnerable.

 Roll a d20 three times and answer the corresponding questions for your character:

- 1.** Which companion does your character not trust? Why is this mistrust important to them?
- 2.** Who blames your character for something they didn't do? How does this put people in danger?
- 3.** What secret burdens your character? Why does it isolate them?
- 4.** What valuable skill will help your character confront the horror? How does it also pull them toward danger?
- 5.** What mundane fear outside the horror does your character have? What memory is tied to this fear?
- 6.** Is your character more skeptical or open-minded? If they are skeptical, why is this skepticism important to them? If they are open-minded, why do others dismiss their ideas?
- 7.** Which groups see your character as a troublemaker? When has this put your character in danger in the past?
- 8.** Who among your companions do you want to change your relationship with? How would you like it to change?
- 9.** Which companion does your character look to in a time of crisis? How have they helped you in the past?
- 10.** How has the horror indirectly confronted your character in the past? Did they recognize that event for what it was?
- 11.** Is there anything your character would be willing to die for? Do they often take risks regarding it?
- 12.** How has your character abused power or privilege in the past? Who did this hurt the most?
- 13.** What superstition or folk belief did your character observe growing up? What relevant information is hidden within it?

- 14.** What is your character trying to prove to the world? What traits, styles, or behaviors have they adopted to send this message?
- 15.** What is a special interest, hobby, or area of esoteric expertise your character has? What collection or special equipment did this lead them to amass?
- 16.** Who doesn't know that your character is responsible for a tragedy they faced? How do they still manage to make your character feel guilty?
- 17.** What iconic piercing, tattoo, or other bold style choice does your character have? What inspired them to make it a part of their identity?
- 18.** What essential tool does your character have? Why is it unreliable? How has it saved them in the past?
- 19.** Which companion makes your character feel small? Why does your character tolerate it? When did this hurt them in the past?
- 20.** Who has your character taken revenge against? How did it go further than they intended?

## Tables of Terror

If you're new to horror or you're just not sure what kind of character you want to make, you can always fall back on classic archetypes. Die-hard horror fans know all about the Jock, the Stoner, and the Final Girl. These archetypes define a character's role in the story. As RPGs are generally unpredictable, it's better to focus on how you want to connect your character to the horror.

Following, you'll find five basic archetypes suited to different play styles and stories. Choose one that you feel complements your style and your game's scenario. Then roll on the five d6 tables to create a personality outline for your new character.

## The Heel

The Heel is a character defined by negative and morally reprehensible traits. They are bad on purpose partially so the audience doesn't feel bad when the horror catches up with them. This archetype allows you to put some distance between yourself and your character so you can just enjoy watching them suffer.

I enjoy...		I believe...
1 Intimidating, threatening, or humiliating people		I will never suffer consequences for my actions
2 Indulging myself at the cost of others		I am morally justified to do what I do
3 Flaunting my privileges while scorning others' disadvantages		People who don't think like me are weak
4 Enforcing my reprehensible beliefs		In escalating my behavior wherever possible
5 Something that harms animals, public spaces, or the environment		That everyone thinks like me
6 Physically harming people		It genuinely doesn't matter what others think if I get what I want
I tend to...		I have the advantage of...
1 Lash out when I feel challenged		Conventional good looks
2 Ignore commonsense advice		High social standing, authority, or a position of leadership
3 Try to enlist others in my bad behavior		Considerable wealth
4 Partake in a vice that is unpleasant for others		An enviable career and life
5 Blame others for my mistakes		Love I don't deserve from people I don't care for
6 Target people who make me feel bad about myself		Perceived physical superiority

## The Victim

The Victim is a character who has positive traits and a sympathetic struggle. They are designed to be liked by the audience

to give the story higher stakes. Unlike the Heel, this archetype motivates you to avoid the danger of horror and protect your character.

	I enjoy...	I believe...
1	The company of friends and loved ones	People deserve empathy, kindness, and care
2	A hobby or craft that creates beauty	I am responsible for the well-being of one, some, or all of my companions
3	Telling jokes and making people laugh	In the sanctity and beauty of my environment
4	Defending people who are weaker than me	I can make my dreams come true
5	Studying something unusual	There is fundamental goodness in the world
6	Caring for something that depends on me	My life is about to get better
	My secret is...	I struggle with...
1	I have a fear that I have carried since childhood	Debt and financial stability
2	I want a deeper connection with one of my companions	Self-confidence and advocacy
3	I feel guilty over something I can't be blamed for	Living up to the expectations of people close to me
4	There are traumatic events I can't remember	Finding the confidence to chase my dreams
5	I have an identity that I am afraid will be judged	Traumatic events in my past
6	I have skills and talents I don't like to call attention to	An injury or disability

## The Explorer

The Explorer is a character who has a mission or goal to uncover and understand truth. They are designed to unravel a mystery when most people would back off. This gives you an opportunity to

engage with the horror despite the danger, while still being capable and clever.

	I enjoy...	I believe...
1	Stories, myths, and legends	Seeking the truth is more important than safety
2	Learning, teaching, and the power of education	Understanding is what empowers us to overcome adversity
3	Solving puzzles, discovering information, and asking questions	In justice
4	An immersive hobby that involves a lot of detailed creation	My job helps people and the world
5	Inspiring and caring for my loved ones	One person can make a difference
6	The possibility of discovery and invention	People need to know the truth, even when it is uncomfortable
	My expertise is...	
1	In theoretical science like physics or mathematics	Obsession with my own work
2	In life science like medicine or biology	Skepticism that alienates people and puts me in danger
3	In history or historical science like archaeology, paleontology, or anthropology	The feeling that my career has somehow halted and I need a big break
4	In practical science like chemistry, engineering, or computing	The feeling that I have wasted years on a dead end
5	In human nature like psychology, journalism, or detective work	Gatekeepers who prevent me from getting the resources I need
6	In occult study like cryptozoology, fringe science, or magic	A vice that I use to deal with the stress of my life

## The Fighter

The Fighter is a character who starts out vulnerable and slowly adapts the tools and abilities they need to defeat or escape the horror. This character allows you to play into the fear and danger that drive the story early on and make a stand by the climax.

	I enjoy...	I protect...
1	My career and the fulfillment it brings me	My family by caring for and sheltering them
2	Finding difficult challenges to overcome	My comrades through leadership
3	Situations where I don't have much responsibility	Myself by avoiding risks and painful subjects
4	Pursuing a meaningful goal	My beliefs by making tough choices and sacrifices
5	Peaceful moments with people I love	A place by preserving and defending it
6	The study of a subject I am passionate about	People I see as innocent by standing between them and danger
	My strength is...	I struggle with...
1	My wits and instincts under pressure	Things I have done that I'm not proud of
2	Skills or training that I have a difficult relationship with	Providing for my loved ones while staying available to them
3	Endurance and the will to keep going	Dependence on people who do not value me
4	Intelligence and the curiosity to look for answers others won't seek	Maintaining my own beliefs or values
5	Courage to face real danger	Opening myself up to others
6	Finding compassion even when it is difficult	Seeing myself as inherently weak or damaged

## The Slayer

The Slayer is a character equipped with the knowledge, strength, tools, and skills to confront horror. This character challenges a lot of standard horror structure. They are almost never truly “vulnerable to danger”; it would be more accurate to say they are “daunted by challenges.” Despite this, the Slayer is a common archetype for many horror RPGs that focus on power fantasies.

	I enjoy...	I deny...

<b>1</b>	The feeling of victory	My own humanity
<b>2</b>	The opportunity for revenge	What would ease my suffering
<b>3</b>	The feeling of power	What tempts me to darkness
<b>4</b>	The validation of righteousness	What makes me vulnerable
<b>5</b>	The peace earned with my labor	The fate I have been given
<b>6</b>	Subverting hostile power	A weakness that could destroy me
<b>My strength is...</b>		<b>I struggle with...</b>
<b>1</b>	My cunning	Loneliness
<b>2</b>	My knowledge	Darkness within myself
<b>3</b>	My stubbornness	The expectations of others
<b>4</b>	My resilience	Resentment for my situation
<b>5</b>	My courage	Knowledge of doom
<b>6</b>	My virtue	Memories of my failures

## Picture of a Dead Person

Many horror protagonists struggle with a difficult past. Sometimes stories embed these wounds in pictures, possessions, and locations to allow the audience to see a character's internal journey. Make choices and answer prompts to create images tied to your character's traumatic history.

### Trauma

“Trauma” is a clinical term used in psychology and medicine to describe injury and a person’s response to it. For the purposes of this exercise, we’re looking at “ongoing trauma” related to a wound—physical, psychological, or emotional—that struggles to heal. No matter what happened or how long ago this trauma occurred, your character is living with a wound tied to it. That means these wounds are still relevant even if your character confronts horror much later in life.

To start, identify the source of your character's trauma. A traumatic event doesn't necessarily need to be extreme. A character can be traumatized by something extreme like a monster eating their sibling. However, people can also be traumatized by something mundane, like getting barked at by a particularly scary dog. Trauma also doesn't need to be the result of a single event or even something that happened directly to the character. When creating a traumatic event, stay within your comfort limits and be mindful of the content you bring to your fellow players.

✿ I carry trauma from... (choose one):

- An incident that happened to me
- An incident that happened to a loved one
- An event that unfolded in my community
- Living in an environment that was physically or socially hostile

✿ I experienced this... (select all that apply):

- Physically: I was injured or scarred from this event. I have pain, visible marks, or a memory of a long and difficult recovery.
- Psychologically: This affected the way I think and perceive the world, at times making me feel out of step with the people around me.
- Emotionally: I experienced an intense and uncontrollable emotional response.

✿ This made me feel... (choose two):

- Powerless to protect myself
- Guilty, as though I had done something wrong
- Foolish, as though I had been too careless or trusting
- Vulnerable, as though there is no real way to be safe

- Angry, like I need to settle a score

✳ Afterward I was... (choose one):

- Cared for by professionals and loved ones committed to helping me
- Treated kindly despite feeling misunderstood
- Given inconsistent care by people not prepared to address my problems
- Ignored or unsupported by people who grappled with their own struggles or were alienated by mine
- Mistreated by people who compounded my struggle

✳ Over time I... (choose one):

- Became obsessed with what happened to me
- Pretended to be further in my recovery to make others comfortable
- Withdrew from anything and anyone associated with my experience
- Repressed my memories to the point that I barely understand what happened

✳ This caused... (choose two):

- Distance between myself and loved ones
- A distrust for strangers
- Discomfort for people getting to know me
- Many underlying issues to go unresolved
- Me to feel like I addressed my trauma better than I actually did

✍ What is the traumatic event you carry from your past?

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💡 Is this event directly related to the horror? If so, why is it necessary for you to confront the horror now? If not, how is the horror reflective of your traumatic experience?

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💡 Do you feel that it still plays a major role in your life? If not, what truth are you ignoring? If so, how do you try to minimize its impact?

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## Artifacts

Now that we have a clear idea of your character's trauma and generally how they dealt with it, it's time to create images related to that trauma for you and your fellow players to use during the game.

💡 Start by rolling a d10 and compare it to the following list to determine which artifact your character will have.

1. A photograph
2. A painting or drawing
3. A tool
4. A piece of jewelry
5. A book
6. A statue or carving
7. A toy
8. A song or sound

**9. A location**

**10. A fragment of a living thing**

Pair the artifact you rolled with one of the following prompts to create a memory that ties it to the traumatic event. For example, if you rolled a 3, you could select any of the following prompts and use them to develop a tool. If you went with the first one (What Was Lost), the tool might be your father's wrench that you two were using to restore a classic car before you were in a wreck that killed your passion for the project.

#### **What Was Lost**

**This artifact is connected to something you feel no longer exists. It could represent a loved one who passed away, your lost sense of safety, or a connection to dreams and ambitions that did not come to pass. Seeing this makes you focus on what might have been if you never experienced your traumatic event.**

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#### **What Feels Foreign**

**This artifact represents something you can't really bring yourself to identify with. It might be tied to a happy memory that feels sullied, a memory you struggle to recall, or a version of yourself that wasn't struggling with trauma.**

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#### **What You Can't Look At or Let Go Of**

This artifact is painful to engage with. You spend most of your time trying to avoid it. However, you still can't bear to get rid of it. It spends its time in storage, waiting to be unearthed to menace you once more.

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#### What Helps You Feel Grounded

This artifact is tied to memories that help you feel strength, positive emotions, or a sense of purpose. It might be grounded in a happy memory, be related to your recovery and sense of resiliency, or remind you of what you have to live for.

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## Five Reasons to Stay

If you frequently consume horror fiction, it's easy to recognize all the signs that most characters ignore, and yell at them: "You are going to die! Why on earth are you staying in that situation?!" It's fine if the reasons feel flimsy in something we're enjoying passively, but in an RPG, you need to make decisions as your character. You can't really disengage from the story because that would end the game. It's also really hard to play a character when you can't justify why they do what they do.

This exercise is designed to help you flesh out the reasons your character doesn't just walk away from a scary situation—or, it at least explains why they put off running away until it is too late.

Consider the following prompts and find answers that feel true to your character.

## Financial

Financial boundaries frequently keep protagonists in place. You can't sell the house because you risked everything to move in, you can't leave the remote research facility because you need the job, or you went to stay in the remote cabin because it was such a good deal.

✳ Choose two:

- I invested everything in this
- I'll never have this chance again
- This will give me what I need to change my life
- I need this to provide for people I love
- If I don't take this, someone else will

✍ What would you have to destroy in order to run away?

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✍ Who apart from yourself might suffer if you experience financial disaster?

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✍ Why is it easy to imagine that you need to stick around just a little longer?

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## Guilt

Sometimes characters are kept in place because they feel they deserve punishment. Whether it's something real or imagined, feelings of guilt keep them from avoiding clear danger.

\* Your guilt is leading your feelings because... (choose two):

- You feel that you deserve to suffer
- You avoided a fate meant for you
- You have benefited from tragedy
- You hurt someone who did not deserve it
- You are the reason this started

✍ When you are alone, how do you stew in your guilt?

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✍ What best-case scenario are you imagining that is causing you to draw closer to the horror?

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✍ Who (present or absent) is at least partially a focus for your guilt?

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## Coincidence/Destiny

Sometimes it's not characters keeping themselves in a haunted location but the world itself. Forces beyond your control conspire to keep you in the wrong place at the wrong time.

- ✍ What series of unlikely coincidences led you to discovering this place?
- 
- 

- ✍ Why was it easier to get here than it is to leave?
- 
- 

- ✍ What aspect of leaving this place depends on other people?
- 
- 

- ✍ What aspect of leaving this place depends on forces beyond human control?
- 
- 

## Curiosity

Curiosity makes answering questions more important than the threat of horror. Not only does it call you to danger; it also keeps pulling you deeper.

 What ethos drives your curiosity? Choose two:

- I love a good mystery
- Only answers can bring peace
- The truth must be known
- I have to prove I'm not irrational
- Understanding is compassion

 When did you develop this ethos?

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 Whom do you feel you have to share your discoveries with?

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 What benefit will discovering the truth bring you?

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## Safety

Ironically, what sometimes keeps characters in place is a looming threat that they consider more reasonable than the horror. This is usually a conditional threat that can be avoided by sheltering and waiting.

 Leaving might be unsafe because of... (choose two):

- The weather and climate
- The terrain
- Your supplies
- Dangerous people

- Dangerous animals

✍ Do you have personal experience with this kind of danger? How do you know to treat it seriously?

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✍ Why do you believe there will be a more ideal window to leave?

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✍ What wisdom or experience tells you that you should only face this danger as a last resort?

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## Scars and Lines

Horror leaves a mark on heroes. Even if you make it out of a story alive, you will be changed. PCs in horror campaigns face countless unimaginable situations. Allowing that history to affect them will help characters feel more grounded and connect them to their history.

This exercise helps you commemorate your horror adventures by making physical changes to your character's appearance. You'll need a standard deck of playing cards with jokers removed, a d12, and a d6.

## Prompts

After each adventure ends, draw a playing card from your deck. Each card is tied to a prompt on the following table. The color and suit of your card affect the type of change you will carry to your next adventure.

### RED: LINES

Red cards signify changes that are natural but that are probably accelerated by your experiences. This can be a change like a wrinkle in your skin, the color of your hair, or even your posture. **Hearts** signify changes that are easy for anyone to see. **Diamonds** signify changes that are usually only visible to people very close to you.

### BLACK: SCARS

Black cards represent changes that are caused by external intervention. Rather than natural changes related to aging, these are caused by injury or body modification. **Clubs** signify changes wrought by accident or injury, like scars or burns. **Spades** are changes related to intentional body modification, like tattoos or piercings.

	Hearts	Diamonds	Clubs	Spades
Ace	One of your visible features changes in a supernatural or otherworldly way, shifting to a strange color or glowing	You adopt a "monstrous" feature that can be concealed beneath clothing, like scales, patches of fur, or even new body parts	You gained a scar on your face, neck, or arms that appears stylish or that complements your features	You gain a tattoo, piercing, or prosthetic that can serve as a tool or weapon against the horror
King	Your silhouette or posture change, like changing weight or holding yourself in a menacing way	Your voice takes on a new quality like rasping, deepening, or adopting an emotional tone	You are injured in a way that changes how you hold yourself or move	You modify your body in a way meant to offer you defense or

				protection from the horror
<b>Queen</b>	Your eyes or neutral expression change noticeably	Your laugh or another common form of emotional expression changes	You gain a scar or mark (like skin discoloration or veining) on your chest, legs, or back	You change your hair in a dramatic way through dye or styling
<b>Jack</b>	The quality of your skin or features changes, like growing pale or getting dark circles under your eyes	You become dramatically stronger or weaker	You are treated for an injury in a way that incorporates a device into your body like a bone screw or brace	You modify your body in a way intended to communicate a clear message to strangers
<b>Even</b>	You gain a new wrinkle on your face like crows' feet or worry lines	Something changes with one of your teeth, like discoloration, cracks, or appearing sharper	You gain a scar on your arms, hands, neck, or legs that makes strangers uncomfortable	You gain a tattoo in a visible location
<b>Odd</b>	Your hair starts to gray or fall out	You gain a harmless mark on your chest, waist, or beneath your hair	You have an injury that might be temporary but has a visible treatment like stitches	You gain a piercing in a visible location

## Tell the Story

Once you have a prompt that determines how your looks are changing, it's time to decide what that change communicates to the outside world and how it looks.

First, think about your character's experience during their last adventure and choose a major feeling connected to it. This being horror, fear is the easy answer—so we recommend looking past it. Instead, focus on a different part of their journey to highlight.



If you can't decide, choose from the following list or roll a d12:

- 1.** Anger
- 2.** Love or Loneliness
- 3.** Sadness
- 4.** Pride
- 5.** Shame
- 6.** Tranquility
- 7.** Cruelty
- 8.** Euphoria
- 9.** Relief
- 10.** Confusion
- 11.** Trust
- 12.** Triumph

This feeling or the experience tied to it is ultimately what is reflected in the change. This might seem counterintuitive, as many of these changes are the result of misfortune and injury, but remember, you are showcasing a complex journey.

A scar might represent relief if it appears on the hand your character used to pull their loved one out of a burning building. A laugh can represent the sadness tied to losing a home—especially if it sounds hollow and empty. A burn can represent trust if you got it holding a seance circle against hellfire to protect a friend while they read a spell.

 Roll 1d6 for each category for inspiration on this change:

Shape	Color	Sound
1. Jagged	1. Red/Pink	1. Rasping
2. Winding	2. White/Silver	2. Squeaking
3. Spiraled	3. Tan/Brown	3. Trembling
4. Thin	4. Black	4. Whispered
5. Geometric	5. Yellow/Bruised	5. Deep
6. Neat	6. Textured	6. Hollow

 How do others feel when they see me?

---

 How do I feel when I see myself?

---

 How do I want to be seen?

---

 Describe your new feature:

---

 Describe yourself incorporating your new feature:

---

## Multi-Classing

When working in horror, you want to emphasize how a character's journey was difficult and costly, which is why this exercise focuses on signs of age, injury, and stress. In many cases, those themes will also fit characters from Western and x-punk stories.

Genres like fantasy, superhero, and sci-fi tend to be more focused on a power fantasy. If you still want to give your character scars and lines in those genres, focus on how those marks signify experience, building strength, and achievement.

## Five Habits

Horror protagonists often behave in baffling ways. They poke their nose where it doesn't belong, they sneak away when they should stay with the group, and they look for clues when normal people panic. This type of behavior is definitely useful because it makes characters vulnerable, but it can also take you out of the action. Part of what leads to this feeling of confusion is the story failing to establish why a character behaves this way or failing to explain that this behavior is consistent.

These prompts will help you add a little personality to your character while giving you an excuse to indulge in behaviors that allow horror tropes to happen.

### Feeling Conflicted

Many of these traits have the potential to introduce conflict between PCs. Horror protagonists are constantly getting in arguments, splitting up, and hiding information to add tension to their circumstances. Conflict is great for horror, but it can be trouble at the table if your fellow players aren't on board. It's always good to ask if people are open to introducing conflict between PCs before initiating anything. Once everyone is on board, it will be easier than ever to tempt fate.

### One That Causes Trouble

This habit adds new and interesting problems that don't necessarily add to the threat of horror but that certainly complicate situations. It might be a propensity to tease and alienate companions, the tendency to tune out distractions when focused, or an impulsive impatience.

- ✿ The problem caused by this habit... (choose one):
  - Is social
  - Distracts others

- Distracts you
- Is destructive

 What is it?

---

 Why does this only come up occasionally?

---

 Which of your companions helps you manage this habit, and why doesn't it always work?

---

### One That Takes You Away

This habit pulls you away from other people. It might be a vice you are ashamed of like smoking, or a need for secrecy to act on extreme emotions you hope to conceal. It's something you probably shouldn't do, but you still need.

\* What drives your need... (choose one):

- Emotion
- Dependence
- Curiosity
- Impulse

 What is it?

---

 Why do you need to be alone to do this?

---

 How is it also dangerous for you not to do this?

---

### One That Makes You Strange

This habit is harmless and useless, but it makes your character distinct. It might be something like whistling, flipping a coin, or eating a specific candy. It helps your character stand out.

 This habit is... (choose one):

- Something visible
- Something audible
- Something that uses a prop
- Something social

 What is it?

---

 Who usually brings this up, you or other people?

---

 Does it usually bother or charm people?

---

### One That Keeps You Calm

This habit provides you an anchor to find focus when tensions are high. It might be a mantra, a prayer, or a security object. It cannot banish your fear, but it can provide clarity when you need it.

 This habit... (choose two):

- Takes a little time
- Makes a little noise
- Requires an object
- Requires another person
- Is something you need in most situations

 What is it?

---

 How did you pick it up?

---

 Does it usually make you feel strong or weak?

---

## One That Can Save Your Neck

This habit is extremely useful in a horror setting. Maybe you always lock doors or look up when you enter a room. This in some ways undermines horror tropes, but it does that in a reliable way your GM can work with.

 This habit... (choose one):

- Makes you more aware
- Makes you more prepared
- Makes you harder to find
- Makes you harder to catch

 What is it?

---

 When did you start doing this and why?

---

 Why is it important to you?

---

## Curses!

Most horror games deal with monstrous threats like beasts or killers that PCs can fight or flee. However, there are many wonderful horror stories that make the idea of doom more abstract—subjecting protagonists to suffering at the hands of a supernatural curse.

This exercise uses the priority system to help you design a curse for your character to suffer from. Assign priorities for the following categories from 1 to 5 without repeating a number, with 1 making that aspect more flexible and advantageous to your character, and 5 making it detrimental to your character.

Rules\_\_\_\_\_

Fate\_\_\_\_\_

Contagiousness\_\_\_\_\_

Subtlety\_\_\_\_\_

Time\_\_\_\_\_

Now read the prompts that correspond to each rank to create your concept. (For example, if you ranked Rules 1, you would follow the first direction in the Rules list.)

## Rules

This determines how structured and rigid the suffering of a curse might be. Rules can be manipulated or managed, or they can spell certain doom.

1. This curse has clearly defined rules, giving sufferers full knowledge over the limits of their condition. The rules are rigid but can be outwitted or even exploited. A canny victim might be able to escape their curse or even use it to their advantage.
2. This curse has an ordered structure, offering potential treatments or even ways to escape fate. However, those rules are not clearly defined. A victim will have to work to find the truth about their condition through potentially disastrous trial and error.
3. This curse has a very loose structure to its rules or a deceptively simple set of rules that can easily be misinterpreted. This makes it harder to predict and outwit.
4. This curse is a numinous mystery. There is very little logic to it, and the few things sufferers are able to figure out provide little aid or comfort.
5. This curse has iron-clad rules that make it certain and inescapable. Every new thing a victim learns will be unpleasant and reinforce the grim certitude of doom.

## Contagiousness

This determines how likely it is for a curse to affect people beyond the primary victim. It determines if a curse poses a threat to other PCs or the setting at large.

1. This curse affects only the primary victim. There is no risk of others getting drawn into their terrible fate. If it can be passed on to another, that process will entirely free the original victim.

2. This curse primarily affects only one victim at a time. However, it can also be passed on to another. In these cases, it buys a temporary reprieve for the original victim. After it has claimed the new victim, it will return to finish its work.
3. This curse draws in those who are close to the sufferer. Causing harm to others might simply be a part of its structure, or it targets anyone who tries to interfere with its work.
4. This curse can target an unlimited number of victims. There can be multiple sufferers who are cursed from entirely unrelated incidents.
5. This curse is designed to grow and spread. Sufferers can easily draw those around them into their fate. The curse might even compel sufferers to take actions that will ensure it gains new victims.

## Fate

This determines how severe the suffering of victims can be, like death, transformation, or simple irritation. It also influences the intention behind the curse.

1. This curse is actually somewhat gentle in nature. While it clearly has a drawback, it ultimately guides a sufferer toward something good or desirable. The greater the pain it inflicts, the greater the reward it delivers.
2. This curse is a sort of trial or corrective measure. It aims to burn out flaws and failings in its victims. A sufferer might emerge from their experience stronger or wiser, or with moral clarity. It's also entirely possible that the curse will destroy the sufferer before they complete their trial.
3. This curse is unpleasant, but it does not necessarily kill its victims. If death is a possible outcome, it is not guaranteed. It still brings pain, horror, and social consequences.

4. This curse means death or something like it. It also likely means a good deal of suffering leading up to that death. It is awful, but it will end.
5. This curse means a fate far worse than death. A sufferer under this curse is doomed to an eternity of torment without relief or a fate so viscerally unpleasant that death might feel preferable.

## Subtlety

This determines how noticeable a curse is to both victims and outsiders. It is a curse that explains itself and gives victims an opportunity to act, allowing them to lessen their suffering or perhaps escape a terrible fate. Obvious signs might also threaten a victim with rejection by people who are fearful of its power.

1. This curse in some way announces itself, giving sufferers and people who interact with them clear and undeniable evidence that something is very wrong. However, many of these signs can ultimately be concealed if desired.
2. This curse becomes more apparent as it wears on. Initially, a sufferer might not understand that they have been afflicted. Over time, though, they will develop clear marks that make their situation unmistakable.
3. There are periods where this curse is extremely obvious and periods where it is barely noticeable. A sufferer might shift forms, enter periods of heavy affliction, or only be able to live under certain conditions. Obvious signs also threaten alienation or rejection from outsiders and loved ones alike.
4. This curse works to conceal itself from everyone but the sufferer. It bides its time to strike only when the sufferer is alone, strikes in ways that can be easily dismissed, or leaves signs that can only really be experienced by the victim.

5. This curse is extremely subtle, and it is possible for it to run its course without a victim even knowing they are afflicted. Only an expert or individual with specialized perception will be able to identify it, and even in those cases it might leave room for doubt.

## Time

This determines how long a curse can bring suffering to a victim and how quickly a victim faces a fate that carries grim finality.

1. This curse has a specific and short period of time where it is able to affect victims. All suffering is guaranteed to be temporary. This might seem like a disadvantage for a curse that means death, but if a victim is able to run out the clock, they will be beyond the curse's power to harm them.
2. This curse:
  - A. Has an element of finality that is initially far away—like death after a period of years, or
  - B. Operates in cycles—mixing periods of heavy suffering with periods of recovery and calm, or
  - C. Has the ability to continue until a specific condition is reached, ultimately intending to be temporary
3. This curse is chronic or indefinite. There is no predetermined period of suffering. It will last until it has run its course, the victim dies, or it is otherwise broken.
4. This curse has an immediate and urgent timeline. It pushes victims toward a fate that carries heavy finality. Whatever the fate, it looms close at hand.
5. This curse is infinite. It can extend beyond a single lifetime and beyond death, or even afflict generations of people connected to the original victim. It will endure forever, so long as it is unbroken.

# Horror Companion Statements

When you want to start playing right away, it's sometimes easier to develop character histories and relationships with your companions if you have a little spark to get you started.

This exercise lists quotes from your character's perspective, giving thoughts and history about the people around them. Simply fill in the blanks with PC and NPC names to give yourself a strong foundational perspective to start your game.

## Positive

These quotes establish the foundation for positive relationships, centering on admiration, cooperation, and affection. I generally recommend you use these for your fellow PCs. There can still be conflict in positive relationships, but it's easier to manage party dynamics if you start out aligned.

“\_\_\_\_\_ is brilliant. I know one day the world will see that.”

“Sometimes it feels like \_\_\_\_\_ is the only person I can really talk to.”

“I would do anything to protect \_\_\_\_\_. They don't even need to ask.”

“I am hopelessly in love with \_\_\_\_\_—nothing else matters as long as I have them.”

“\_\_\_\_\_ is the kind of friend I could happily share a beer with even if the world is on fire.”

“I have missed \_\_\_\_\_, I can't wait to catch up with them.”

“\_\_\_\_\_ is a real badass...I have never met anyone tougher.”

“I really want some time alone with \_\_\_\_\_. There are things we need to sort out.”

“I love watching \_\_\_\_\_ do wild stuff—they are hilarious.”

“\_\_\_\_\_ is a natural leader—I feel safe with them in charge.”

“There is something really special about \_\_\_\_\_. I can’t stop thinking about them.”

“\_\_\_\_\_ is the glue that holds our group together.”

“I know that \_\_\_\_\_ would be so much fun if they could let themselves unwind, and I want to show them how.”

“\_\_\_\_\_ is so mysterious. I feel like there is something really cool about them that most people don’t see.”

“I am so proud of \_\_\_\_\_...they have come a really long way.”

## Negative

These quotes establish negative relationships centering on conflict, rivalry, and distaste. In most genres, I recommend these for NPCs and use complicated prompts to find conflict in relationships with other PCs. However, certain types of horror thrive with conflict between main characters.

“\_\_\_\_\_ is a jerk, and they pick on me every chance they get.”

“I think \_\_\_\_\_ is a creep, and I keep an eye on them for everyone’s sake.”

“I don’t understand what everyone sees in \_\_\_\_\_. They are so obnoxious.”

“I have never met anyone as vacuous as \_\_\_\_\_ in all my life.”

“The biggest thing standing between me and \_\_\_\_\_ is \_\_\_\_\_.”

“I keep trying to make things work with \_\_\_\_\_, but I’m afraid they are only getting worse.”

“I feel like I have changed, but \_\_\_\_\_ clearly hasn’t.”

“\_\_\_\_\_ is constantly dragging everyone down with them.”

“I hate the way \_\_\_\_\_ makes me feel inadequate—I’ll show them.”

“\_\_\_\_\_ will never accept me. My only option is to show them up.”

“I have to beat \_\_\_\_\_ at whatever game they are playing.”

“I have been toying with \_\_\_\_\_ for ages, setting them up for the perfect fall.”

“\_\_\_\_\_ is constantly poking around where they shouldn’t, and it is bound to cause trouble.”

“If \_\_\_\_\_ gets on my nerves one more time, I am going to snap.”

“I need \_\_\_\_\_ to like me, and I’ll say and do anything to make that happen.”

## Complicated

These prompts establish complicated relationships intermingling positive and negative elements. These are perfect for both PCs and NPCs where you want extra dramatic tension at the center of the story.

“I can feel the spark fading between me and \_\_\_\_\_. We need time away from life’s distractions.”

“I want to support \_\_\_\_\_ in the work that brings them happiness, but I feel like it is pulling them away.”

“All of the problems in my life would disappear if \_\_\_\_\_ paid attention to me.”

“I have had trouble with \_\_\_\_\_ in the past, but I am hoping we can move past it.”

“I don’t like working with \_\_\_\_\_, but I have no one else I can really trust to help me.”

“I don’t really want to be here, but it is worth humoring \_\_\_\_\_ because I hate to burden them.”

“Life would be so much easier if I were \_\_\_\_\_; they have everything they could want.”

“I will always be loyal to \_\_\_\_\_, but the way they treat \_\_\_\_\_ bothers me.”

“I am so tired of sanctimonious lectures from \_\_\_\_\_.”

“After what I went through with \_\_\_\_\_, I will always have their back, but I don’t always love the things that means I have to do.”

“I am so frustrated by \_\_\_\_\_. Every time it feels like we are getting closer, they start to push me away.”

“\_\_\_\_\_ has definitely earned my respect, but some of the things they say are starting to worry me.”

“I want to impress \_\_\_\_\_, but it feels like every time I try, it upsets \_\_\_\_\_. I wish everyone got along.”

“I pity \_\_\_\_\_. I wish they didn’t have to face what lies ahead of them.”

“I really like \_\_\_\_\_, but I’m afraid everyone will judge me if they discover \_\_\_\_\_. ”



## X-Punk

X-Punk is defined by a core thematic exploration of oppression, identity, and resistance. These worlds are ruled by a class of **oppressors** who foster a society that limits people's resources, freedom, and expression using the violence of **enforcers** to enact their will. Underneath the heel of the oppressors are the **oppressed**: people who are confined, controlled, and exploited by society. Protagonists are usually punks, people who reject societal control, get forced into the margins, and occasionally actively resist oppressors.

The "x" in "x-punk" is a variable representing a defining aesthetic for the world, such as "cyberpunk," "steampunk," "apocalyptic-punk," and so many others. They all look and feel very different. Almost anything can become a root for punk if it is used to guide the core themes and shape the look of the world and characters.

### X-Punk d20 Questions

To create a backstory for any punk character, you need to understand how that character relates to the core themes of oppression and expression through the lens of a particular aesthetic. The questions will help make the struggles and style of the world more personal to your character.

🎲 Roll a d20 three times and answer the corresponding questions for your character:

1. Does your character remember a more peaceful time? If so, what do they miss about it? If not, are they aware of a more peaceful time in history?
2. Is your character tempted by or struggling with a dangerous vice? What keeps them grounded and what drives them to indulge?
3. What communities does your character identify with? What identities are forced on them?
4. Can your character move freely in the world controlled by oppressors? What aspects of life are restricted to them?
5. Does your character feel shame or regret over periods in their past? Are they trying to avoid their shame or confront it?
6. What is something your character dislikes that they feel oppressors forced them to do? Was there an alternative?
7. Where does your character feel they can move and act freely? What risk do they take being there?
8. Whom does your character know that has suffered the most at the hands of oppressors? What happened to them?
9. Does your character see themselves as a punk or revolutionary? When did they start thinking of themselves that way? or What would it take for them to feel that?

- 10.** What aspect of your character's world do you find appealing or desirable? Does your character also enjoy that aspect of the world?
- 11.** What form of communication does your character have easy access to that you do not? In what ways is communication more restricted to them?
- 12.** What possession gives your character the greatest sense of identity? How did they get it?
- 13.** What skill makes your character feel powerful or dangerous? How did they learn it?
- 14.** Who admires your character? How does your character feel about this attention?
- 15.** What accomplishment is your character most proud of? What trophy or token do they carry from that moment?
- 16.** Does your character have any long-term goals? Do they have any dreams they consider too unrealistic to be a goal?
- 17.** What authority figure does your character have a personal and antagonistic relationship with? When do they have to deal with them?
- 18.** Has your character ever been punished by the oppressors? If so, what do they carry from that incident? If not, what punishment do they fear?
- 19.** What is something harmless your character does that others see as dangerous? What is something your character knows to be dangerous that others see as harmless?
- 20.** Does your character feel like they acknowledge a secret truth most people don't see? If so, what does this truth compel them to do? If not, what trait binds them to other punks?

## Criminal Record

It is easy to get on the wrong side of the law in punk fiction because the law is wrong. Giving your character a criminal record illustrates how the world pushes them to the margins.

Decide which of the following crimes fit your character's story, make choices, and answer questions to develop an interesting criminal record. You'll need 1d12.

### A Youthful Indiscretion

This is a crime that you committed very early on in your life. It may have affected you, but ultimately it could have been worse. It is also probably not your best work or smartest move.

✿ What inspired you to commit this crime? Choose two:

- Passion
- Desperation
- Ignorance
- Arrogance
- Outside forces
- Survival

✿ What happened? Choose one to three:

- Something was broken
- Something was taken
- Someone got hurt
- Authority was challenged
- You expressed yourself
- Someplace was invaded
- Contraband was found

✍ What did you intend to do? How and why did it spin out of control?

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✍ Why were you caught?

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✍ How did you avoid a worse consequence?

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✍ When does this haunt you?

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### A Shameful Crime

When the law is wrong, it is difficult to establish the line between civil disobedience and lashing out at your community. This is a crime that you aren't proud of now, if you ever were. Sometimes, when coming of age, you miss the mark and do something you regret.

\* What emotion drove this crime? Choose one:

- Anger
- Fear
- Disgust
- Righteousness
- Spite

\* What unintended victim suffered because of this crime? Choose one:

- Someone honest
- Someone kind
- Someone loved
- Someone already suffering

✍ What were you intending to do?

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✍ Was this victim hurt as the result of an accident, or was your plan fundamentally wrongheaded?

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✍ How was the damage to the victim greater than the punishment you suffered? Did you understand that at the time?

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✍ Did you ever attempt restitution for what you did? Were you forgiven? Did that ease your conscience?

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### An Infamous Crime

This is a crime that garnered you a reputation among punks, enforcers, or both. It is the reason some people trust you, but it is also the reason others have it out for you.

\* This crime was impressive because of... (choose two):

- Its scale
- Its target
- Its long-term effects
- Its ingenuity
- The chaos that followed

\* Choose an enemy and an ally this feat earned you:

- A local gang leader
- A high-ranking enforcer
- A prominent entertainer
- A revolutionary leader
- An influential aristocrat
- An impoverished neighborhood
- A local political figure

✍ What good did this crime manage to accomplish?

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✍ How did you manage to escape punishment for this crime?

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✍ How did this crime impact your enemy? How did they try to strike at you after you got away initially?

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 How has earning the respect of your ally changed your life?

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### A Flawless Operation

This crime is not counted on your record, but is a point of pride for you in the criminal underworld and communities of punks. It was a plan that went perfectly and paid you back many times over.

\* You were critical to this plan because... (choose two):

- You created it
- You pulled the team together
- You led the team
- You took the biggest risk
- You pulled the trigger
- You made the getaway
- You tied up the loose ends

\* You don't have to worry about being caught because enforcers... (choose one):

- Pinned it on a patsy
- Were never contacted
- Still haven't noticed
- Covered it up to save face

 What is the biggest impact committing this crime had on your life?

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 Who or what was the target, and why did you make that choice?

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 Despite the success of this crime, what problems did it create for you down the line?

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 Were any of your companions involved? If so, who were they and what did they do to help? If not, are any of them aware that this is in your past?

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### A Crime You Perpetrated Against You

This is a crime that was actually perpetrated against you. It likely came at the hands of enforcers, oppressors, or any of the many people who take advantage of the way society favors wealth and power.

\* What motivated this crime against you? Choose one:

- Greed
- Indifference
- Hatred
- Revenge
- Cruelty

\* What were the most lasting effects? Choose two:

- Humiliation
- Fear
- Losing someone
- Struggle with scarcity
- Vengeful resentment
- Isolation
- Loss of home or property

✍ What prevented this injustice from being answered?

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✍ How did the institutional response to this make you feel helpless?

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✍ How did your reaction to these events make you feel isolated?

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✍ Which figure do you blame most for this incident?

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### Telling the Story

For each crime you developed for your character's record, establish when they usually tell the story. These events affect characters differently. How and when you choose to share your story says a great

deal about how your character views their own history. It will also help you as a player to decide when you want to incorporate your backstory into the narrative.

🎲 **I tell this story when... (choose one or roll 1d12):**

1. I am boasting at a social event
2. Introducing myself
3. Justifying my radical beliefs
4. Establishing my credentials
5. I have been pushed into revealing something personal
6. I am speaking to someone who has been through something similar
7. Sharing an embarrassing secret
8. Trying to take the weight off my soul
9. I am trying to make someone laugh
10. Clearing up a misunderstanding
11. Issuing a warning
12. Signaling to a friend that they can be open with me

## Passing Through

Many punk settings make protagonists into wanderers who bounce between different communities across a sprawling wasteland. Your character probably has a history with many of the places you as a player are encountering for the first time. With a little on-the-fly backstory, you can assume a history and spot changes to add tension to the story.

Choose one to three of the following categories and roll a 2d6 twice to establish something in a location that was important to you and how it has changed. Then answer prompts to flesh out how you feel about these changes.

### Individuals

These are people who had personal ties to you. The changes any individual undergoes might significantly change how you view them or how they view you—giving you room to balance the tension of a reunion with what you remember from your time before.

What You Knew...		How It Changed...
1	An Enemy	Developed a grudge
2	A Rival	Fought the battle you avoided against... (roll 1d6 in the first column of Individuals or Factions)
3	A Dependent	Lost everything
4	A Colleague	Made something of themselves
5	A Friend	Became powerful
6	A Lover	Learned from you and never forgot

✍ **How did you meet this person?**

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✍ **How has this change made life more dangerous for you or them?**

✍ When you reconnect, who will be looking for something—you or them?

## Factions

These are groups of people and organizations that you have established a relationship with. You might be a former member, have worked with them, or have been victimized by them.

What You Knew...		How It Changed...
1	A threat: A group actively dangerous to people like you	Seems to have disappeared without a trace
2	A nuisance: A group that got in the way but was never dangerous	Lost their ideological center
3	An institution: A school, religious order, or club	Has a desperate need that only you or your group can fulfill
4	A company: A business or organization seeking prosperity	Are in conflict with... (roll 1d6 again and choose another group from the first column)
5	A family: Folks with close and complicated emotional ties	Are the only thing preventing this place from collapse
6	Allies: Folks specifically dedicated to your cause	Became the most important force in this place

✍ How did your interactions with this faction benefit you? How did they put you in danger?

✍ What made this faction one of the most important things in your life?

✍ What unsettled matter is there between you and this faction? How will this change affect that?

## Economy

This determines how you used this place and how it in turn used you. Both hardship and prosperity can dramatically alter a location and your ability to survive there.

What You Knew...		How It Changed...
1	Crime: Danger that exists outside the domain of the oppressor's law but possibly driven by their rule or tolerated by their society	A dramatic shift has completely eliminated this from the community
2	Enforcement: The presence of oppressive forces restricting	Reliable sources for this have dried up. You will need to go

	freedom and prosperity	out of your way to find what you need
3	Accommodation: The ability of this place to make space for you	A problem separates you from what you need most
4	Work: Things that you can do in exchange for something you value	Someone now controls this entirely... (roll 1d6 and choose another option from the first column of Individuals or Factions)
5	Information: What can be learned here	This place is experiencing an unusual and perhaps temporary glut of this
6	Goods: What is available to use or consume here: tools, resources, etc.	By a strange twist of fate, you can find something you didn't know you needed

✍ How did this economic factor draw you here when you first visited?

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✍ What was your biggest success thanks to this factor?

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✍ What event tipped the scale to start this change? Could you have influenced it?

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✍ Now that the change has occurred, is there still a place for you here? What do you have to do to claim it?

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## Environment

This is the physical and environmental condition and character of a place. It determines both the look and the atmosphere.

What You Knew...		How It Changed...
1	Danger: Sources of challenge or threat inherent to the area like toxic gasses, unstable terrain, or harmful wildlife	This used to be a defining trait of this area, but now from what you can tell it is completely gone
2	Monuments: Artificially constructed landmarks	This has moved to the brink of a looming disaster
3	Nature: The presence of flora, fauna, and natural formations	This has been co-opted or altered by... (roll 1d6 and choose an option from the first column for Faction or Economy)
4	Infrastructure: Aspects of the environment with utility that enable travel and accessibility of resources	This has evolved to take on a unique character that you appreciate but struggle to get used to
5	Culture: Movements, scenes, or customs that offer entertainment or creative and spiritual fulfillment	This was noticeably replaced by (roll again and choose something from the first column)
6	Safety: A natural way this place provides shelter, anonymity, and calm	An explosion of growth has made this far more common than it used to be

✍ What about this environmental feature makes this place unlike anywhere else you have ever been?

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✍ What memory involving this environmental feature will you never forget? What did it mean to you at the time? What does it mean to you now?

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✍ After the change, will this place feel familiar to you at all? Is that good or bad?

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✍ Who benefits most from this change: oppressors, the oppressed, or punks?

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## Places

These are the distinct locations and communities within a larger place. Every city, town, and settlement contains a multitude of different experiences. You might hate a town but love a bar within it.

What You Knew...		How It Changed...
1	A place to fear: This is a place you dread because of how it has hurt you or what it has taken from you	It feels as though something essential about this has died; it resembles what you knew, but what you knew is clearly gone
2	A place to worship: This place allows you to feel a connection to what you hold sacred	This place is under threat of collapse
3	A place to defend: This place needed you to be its protector	This place faces a danger only you can really see
4	A place to unwind: This is somewhere you went to be entertained or to engage in revelry	It struggles in every way but the one you find most important
5	A place to learn: This is somewhere you studied, sought council, or trained for a skill	This place is on the precipice of glory or prosperity
6	A place to rest: This is somewhere you found comfort or tranquility	You have changed, allowing you to see this place in a new way

✍ How did you first encounter this place? How did it change the way you view this location?

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✍ What is the most significant thing this place gave or took from you?

 What is missing or threatens to be lost here after this change?

 What about this change makes you wish either that you had never left or that you never returned?

## Something Still Sacred

Punk lends itself to jaded characters and cynical worlds. Modern capitalism has inspired a great deal of foundational punk fiction. As a result, much of the oppression it portrays reflects hollow and commodified destruction of sincerity. Punks see so much of their world as artificial—all good things being dressed-up fragments of bad things priced for sale.

A jaded perspective is a natural response to those conditions. However, that kind of cynicism undermines passion, and passion is essential to being a punk. It's not enough to just see oppressors; you have to fight them too. Ultimately, that means you need to believe in something.

This exercise will guide you through creating something truly sacred to your character. Something they can look to when they feel the stifling crush of oppression that gives them the will to fight.

### Define What's Sacred

To begin, you'll need to define something that exists within your world that represents an idea that is meaningful and in some way incorruptible. It should be something that cannot be controlled and is dangerous to oppressors. It is likely especially dangerous because it is shared among a group of people.

 Roll 6d6 and find your results in each these categories to get a general sense of this sacred thing and how it works.

What is it?		What sort of feeling does it evoke?
1	A place	Somber remembrance
2	A symbol	Sincere communal care
3	An event	Empathy
4	A form of expression	Disregard for normal rules
5	A holiday	Exuberant self-expression
6	An experience	Anti-authoritarian agitation
How does it make itself known?		What makes it especially dangerous to oppressors?
1	Heard: experienced through songs, music, sayings, poems, and slogans	It encourages or commemorates a challenge to their authority
2	Seen: experienced through signs, symbols, and decorations	It undermines fear and hate they used to divide people

3	Tasted: experienced through foods, drinks, and spices	It encourages people to rely on one another rather than authority
4	Performed: experienced through the actions of a community of participants	It is connected to a past they want people to forget
5	Taught: experienced through the instruction and remembrance of critical cultural history	It celebrates an expression they intend to repress
6	Felt: experienced through a shared indefinable and magical sense	It is held sacred by groups beyond punks and revolutionaries
<b>How do the oppressors try to control it?</b>		<b>Why do they fail?</b>
1	Punishing and limiting behavior adjacent to it	They believe everyone is as cynical as they are
2	Confiscating and destroying related imagery	They are more interested in cruelty than control
3	Supplanting it with a different concept they find more favorable	They assume their control is more complete than it is
4	Attempting to silence it through denial	There are too many people who teach and remember the truth
5	Attempting to pervert or destroy it through propaganda	Even their enforcers believe in this to some degree
6	Attempting to appropriate it through propaganda	They fail to understand that their suppression makes it stronger

Based on your results, decide what this sacred thing is. It might be a holiday or recurring celebration, a monument or recurring symbol, a form of music or artistic movement, a shared cultural story or legend, or even something supernatural like a physical or metaphysical change in the population. Try to reflect the themes of your setting and aim for something that is difficult to repress with brute force.

✍ Is this a constant or recurring thing?

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✍ How is it shared within a community?

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✍ How do fellow observants recognize one another?

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### Establish a Personal Connection

This detail will be more effective if your character is invested in perpetuating, protecting, and preserving this sacred thing. That means establishing a personal connection to it through your backstory.

✿ This is especially meaningful to me because it... (choose two):

- Is firmly connected to my memories of a loved one
- Helped me understand myself

- Protected me or someone I love
- Connected me to people I cherish
- Represents a specific goal I want to believe in

✍ Who taught you the meaning behind this sacred thing? Why were their words significant to you?

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✍ What memory is tied to this sacred thing that brings you a sense of safety, comfort, empowerment, or joy?

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✍ When did this sacred thing restore or replace something you feared you had lost forever?

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### Make It a Part of Yourself

Even if you encounter this sacred thing infrequently, it is important enough to you that it has become a part of your identity. That incorporation extends to both your appearance and actions.

\* What visually distinct imagery connects to this sacred thing? Choose two:

- Specific colors
- Body parts
- Symbols
- Patterns
- Textures
- Materials

✍ How does this show up in your clothing or accessories?

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✍ What mark—like a tattoo or scar—do you bear related to this sacred thing?

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\* What social customs are associated with this sacred thing? Choose two:

- Greetings
- Songs
- Poses or songs made with the body

- Stories
- Poems or sayings
- Stories or characters
- Foods or drinks

✍ What do you do almost every day that evolved from a custom related to this sacred thing?

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✍ How can you identify a fellow adherent by seeing or speaking to them?

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\* Which tools of resistance have you allowed to be informed by this sacred thing? Choose two:

- A weapon
- A shelter
- A pseudonym
- A protest
- A flag

✍ What tool is meant to intimidate or taunt enforcers?

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✍ What tool is meant to rally punks and the oppressed?

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## Old Colors

Many punks have a history with a group that works outside or even against the law. Former affiliation with a gang, crime syndicate, revolutionary group, or even law enforcement agency can provide you with plenty of plot hooks, character traits, and complications to play with.

Use the priority system to define your former group by rating the following from 1 to 5 without repeating a number, with 1 making that aspect more beneficial or important to your character, and 5 making it unimportant or detrimental to your character.

Reputation\_\_\_\_\_

Marks\_\_\_\_\_

Relationship\_\_\_\_\_

Favors\_\_\_\_\_

Strength\_\_\_\_\_

Now read the prompts that correspond to each rank to create your concept. (For example, if you ranked Reputation 1, you would follow the first direction in the Reputation list.)

### The Organization's Reputation

This determines how society views the organization your character belonged to. Punk complicates the idea of "society." What is acceptable to oppressors is unacceptable or even dangerous to punks, with the oppressed caught in between the two. A high priority aligns this organization with punks, and a low priority aligns this organization with oppressors.

1. This organization is a legendary ideal to punks and a beacon of hope to the oppressed.  
Oppressors see this group as extremely dangerous, which might frighten or deter some authorities.
2. This organization is well regarded for punks or the oppressed but not both. If it is liked by punks, many oppressed people might see the organization as too radical or dangerous. If it is liked by the oppressed, punks might see it as weak or compromised. Oppressors will have a negative view of this organization, no matter what.
3. Choose one group—punks, the oppressed, or oppressors—to favor your organization. Most people of that group see your organization as a neutral force that is somewhat flawed. Other groups will see the organization as a nuisance, compromised, or distasteful.
4. The oppressed and oppressors view this organization as acceptable within the mainstream, but you may choose one group to favor it. If it is favored by the oppressed, you aren't seen as dangerous, but oppressors don't respect it. If it is favored by oppressors, members are shown special respect by authority figures and are feared by the oppressed. Punks dislike this organization and don't respect its members.
5. This organization is seen as a pillar of mainstream society, drawing fear from the oppressed and respect from oppressors. Punks have a special hatred for this organization and its members. They will distrust and act against anyone they see associated with it.

### Marks

This determines how obvious it is that you were once a member of this organization. Marks can be a permanent signifier, like body modifications or tattoos; subtle, like skills or licenses; and some are completely secret until you choose to reveal them.

1. Your affiliation with this organization is secret. There is no way for an outsider to identify you as a former member. You have the ability to identify yourself as a former member definitively at will.
2. Your affiliation with this organization is secret but not fully protected. You have an artifact like a badge, patch, token, sealed record, or well-hidden body modification that can identify you. In most cases, it is possible to be separated from your mark, which can be trouble if you need to identify yourself.
3. Your affiliation with this organization isn't hidden, but it isn't widely known. You have a mark that you need to take steps to conceal, like a tattoo or nonvisible body modification. You also carry a nonphysical signifier like an accent, a vernacular, or a specialized skill. It is difficult to identify yourself without revealing your mark and passing a simple test like appearing in a database, divulging privileged information, or having someone vouch for you.

- 4.** Your affiliation with this organization is an open secret. Not everyone talks about it, but people really just need to ask around to discover the truth. You have a mark that is extremely difficult to conceal, like a tattoo or scar that is visible with most outfits.
- 5.** It is obvious to anyone that sees or interacts with you that you have a connection to this organization. The mark is unmistakable and all but impossible to hide, like a robot body.

### **Your Relationship with Members**

This determines what current and former members of this organization think of you. You can be beloved, polarizing, or despised.

- 1.** You are a legend. People who knew you are still loyal to you, and people who never knew you think of you as a larger-than-life hero.
- 2.** The majority of people within the organization remember you well and would probably go out of their way to help you. There might be one or two people in leadership positions who aren't fond of you, which makes the prospect of reaching out stressful or even dangerous.
- 3.** You are a divisive figure within this organization. There are as many people who would help you as would spit in your face. The official policy for the organization is decidedly against you, which means you need to step carefully.
- 4.** You are a loathed figure among the vast majority of people in this organization. There might be one or two people that knew you well who still hold some affection for you.
- 5.** Part of this organization's main agenda is devoted to destroying people like you or you specifically. You have no allies, and getting noticed by any member courts a serious threat.

### **Favors Members Owe You**

This determines if individual members within this organization might owe you favors. This category is connected to your Relationship, as it's easier to get what you need from people who like you. However, you can still call in favors with people who are on bad terms.

- 1.** You hold something akin to a life debt over this organization or key members within it. This allows you access to even privileged resources held by this organization. Depending on your relationship, it might be hard to access these resources officially, but it is hard to truly burn this bridge.
- 2.** You are entitled to a specific type of formal support from this organization, or there are specific members who feel obligated to take risks to help you. These debts might be significant, but they can be settled. Call on them carefully.
- 3.** You have a tally of favors and debts between yourself and any members of this organization who don't actively hate you. These aren't the sort of favors people would risk their lives to repay, but doing some risky work or dealing with the occasional inconvenience isn't out of the question.
- 4.** You have one critical favor that you can call in from someone you knew during your time in this organization. That might spare you some trouble, but it is a big chip to cash.
- 5.** You actually owe members of this organization more than they owe you. Reaching out presents the possibility of someone calling in one of your debts.

### **How Much Strength the Organization Holds**

This determines the resources and influence the organization currently holds. It might have changed since you were a member.

- 1.** This is one of the most powerful and influential organizations in the world, like a government agency, crime syndicate, or megacorporation. They have access to specialized information,

equipment, and privileges that could help you in a number of ways. This also makes them a terrifying enemy.

2. This organization is one of the most influential in a very specific field, like a research group or military branch. They hold resources no one else does, but those resources have limited application.
3. This organization has influence and power within a specific locality, like a law enforcement branch or gang. They are formidable in that area but not on a larger scale.
4. This organization is fading from power and relevance. Most of their resources are outdated or tied to a specific time period.
5. This organization is officially defunct with personnel and resources scattered to new places or sealed in storage. There might be value in a connection to it, but you will have to work to find it.

## Last Will

In punk fiction, death is something protagonists walk with almost constantly. Every member of the oppressed class lives with the knowledge that enforcers have the power and will to take their lives. Punks reject the control of oppressors and even actively resist it, making themselves targets. Even if a punk works in secret, carefully taking steps to avoid detection, they know their work might get them killed. How your character prepares for that possibility says a lot about who they are and what they value.

Make choices and answer the following prompts to create a will your character has prepared in the case of their death.

### A Confession

This is something your character could not bring themselves to say in life but cannot bear to take to their grave. It could be an earth-shattering secret that puts all of your behavior in a new perspective or just something deeply personal that you struggle to carry. This might even be something your character hopes to say while they are alive but that they wrote down in case they don't get the chance.

✳ What stops you from confessing this right now? Choose two:

- You are afraid of how someone will act on this information
- You are afraid of how you will be seen
- You are afraid it will disrupt important work
- You are afraid of the answer to a question
- Dishonesty feels more familiar than honesty
- All you have known is your own judgment, and you cannot imagine mercy

✳ This confession revolves around... (choose one):

- Something you feel
- Something you did
- A truth you know about a loved one
- A truth you know about a major event
- A solution that feels dangerous

✍ Who needs to see this confession more than anyone?

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✍ What is the worst thing that could happen as a result of making this confession?

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✍ Why is it difficult to imagine living with that result?

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### A Mission

This is a task that you give to someone you trust to carry out after you are gone. You need this to be done, but you either don't have the strength or the ability to do this while you are alive.

\* What makes this task difficult or impossible to do while you are alive? Choose two:

- It requires information you don't have
- It involves someone you can't contact
- It is a deeply emotional task
- It is life-threatening or dangerous
- It is part of how you want to be laid to rest
- It involves giving up something you need

\* What motivates you to make this request? Choose two:

- Sentimentality
- Tradition
- Revenge
- Guilt
- Duty
- Love

✍ Do you think this request will come as a surprise to your companions? Why or why not?

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✍ Whom do you trust to carry this out? Apart from yourself, whom are you making this request for?

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✍ What do you hope this mission accomplishes?

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### A Message to Carry

This is a message you either can't or don't want to deliver personally. The only way you can ensure it is done is by asking someone to do it for you.

✳ Who is the intended recipient of this message? Choose one:

- A close loved one or loved ones
- An estranged loved one or loved ones
- An enemy
- An organization

✳ What do you hope it will accomplish? Choose two:

- Deliver a warning
- Offer closure
- Make up for a misdeed
- Offer comfort
- Inspire hope
- Give people a critical opportunity

✍ Why can't you carry this message while you are alive?

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✍ How have you prepared this message? How did you choose to make it personal or impersonal?

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✍ What makes your companions more fit to deliver this message than you?

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### Something to Destroy

As a punk, destruction is part of the identity you have been forced to adopt. There is one last thing you need to be destroyed in your name.

✳ What is it? Choose one:

- Something small
- Something large
- Something intangible
- Something of yours
- Something unbreakable

✳ How do you want it done? Choose two:

- With all your companions together
- In a place you consider sacred
- Brightly and loudly

- In a way that is sure to cause collateral damage
  - In cheerful remembrance
  - After quiet contemplation
  - As quickly as possible
  - At a very specific time

 What made you choose what you did for destruction?

[View Details](#) | [Edit](#) | [Delete](#)

 Is this task more for you, your companions, or someone else? What do you want it to achieve?

[View Details](#) | [Edit](#) | [Delete](#)

 How did you make this request? Was it while you were alive? A message you prepared? Do you really expect it to be done?

[View Details](#) | [Edit](#) | [Delete](#)

## Gifts

Punks don't own much, but it all has to go somewhere. In this final section, you choose to specifically mark possessions, words, or other precious things for the people closest to you.

◆ Choose a companion or important NPC and roll a d10 for a prompt that will help you create what you leave to them. You can track all the companions and gifts in the table that follows.

1. A promise
  2. Words of wisdom
  3. Something you used every day
  4. Something that saved your life
  5. Something you know they admired
  6. Something you inherited from someone else
  7. Something you hope they will learn to use
  8. Something you know to be extremely valuable
  9. Something that was literally or figuratively a part of you
  10. Something you believe will help them solve a critical problem

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## Five Masks

In a punk world, being yourself can get you killed. In some settings, punk characters need to be able to move between different groups, only showing the parts of themselves that will be accepted in those environments. Sometimes this challenge manifests in actively maintaining different false identities; sometimes it is just changing your appearance and behavior.

This exercise will help you define five different contexts where your character selectively shows or conceals different parts of themselves. For most of them you will need to define six rules you must follow to stay in the mask: three things you must always do and three things you must never do.

### Multi-Classing

This is also a great exercise for superhero characters, especially if you're looking for an angrier and more introspective take on the genre. In punk, people hide to protect themselves from an oppressive world, while in superhero stories, characters tend to hide in order to protect the people around them from being drawn into the dangers of their heroic work. To adapt this exercise for superheroes, consider what your character is protecting and why they think hiding parts of themselves will help them protect it.

### Professional Mask

This mask is what you wear to conduct business. It could be what you use for your day job within the world of the oppressors or in an underworld hustle. This mask is crafted around survival and made to cover vulnerability.

Wearing this mask I must never...	Wearing this mask I must always...
1. _____	1. _____
2. _____	2. _____
3. _____	3. _____

✍ Does this mask make you more intimidating or more passive than you actually are? Why is that important in this context?

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✍ What physical things do you have to conceal to adopt this mask?

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✍ What is the worst thing that could happen if you let this mask slip?

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✍ Who would you never want to see you wearing this mask?

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### Soapbox Mask

This is a mask you adopt when you speak your mind. In punk, speaking out is dangerous. It's likely that this is a pseudonym or a side of yourself you only show to fellow punks.

Wearing this mask I must never...	Wearing this mask I must always...
1. _____	1. _____
2. _____	2. _____
3. _____	3. _____

✍ How does this mask make you feel powerful?

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✍ How does it make you vulnerable?

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✍ Does anyone know that you wear this mask? If so, who? If not, do you wish someone did?

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✍ Do you feel like this mask accomplishes things, or do you wear it mostly to vent feelings you cannot express openly?

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### Mundane Mask

This mask helps you hide from your troubles. It allows you to cling to normalcy in a world that feels unstable. It conceals your anguish, rage, and even mortal dread in order to enjoy—or pretend to enjoy—small moments of comfort. You might wear this mask around family, lovers, and certain friends.

Wearing this mask I must never...	Wearing this mask I must always...
_____	_____

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_

 Who benefits from you wearing this mask more: you or your loved ones? Why?

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 What is something about this mask that you wish was authentic?

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 What comfort or pleasure does wearing this mask give you access to?

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 What is painful about wearing this mask?

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### Masquerade Mask

This is a mask you adopt when you unwind. This could be when dancing, tripping, or partying. This is a part of yourself that you need to feel alive in a world that feels dead.

Wearing this mask I must never...	Wearing this mask I must always...
1. _____	1. _____
2. _____	2. _____
3. _____	3. _____

 Does this mask have an identity, like a name or reputation? Or is part of its appeal a feeling of total anonymity?

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 Do you feel more or less connected to others when you wear this mask? Why is that desirable?

 Are you ever risking your physical safety in this mask?

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 Do you feel in control wearing this mask? If so, do you feel that control anywhere else? If not, do you find that appealing?

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### **Void Mask**

This is less of a mask and more of a connection to your deepest individual self. So much of punk revolves around reclaiming yourself from a world that rejects or tries to destroy you. This is what remains.

What about this mask makes you feel pride?	What about this mask do you fear?
1. _____	1. _____
2. _____	2. _____
3. _____	3. _____

 Has anyone besides yourself encountered this mask?

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 When do you confront this mask most often? Why are those circumstances rare?

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 Do you want this mask to change?

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 Do you believe you have ever encountered another person's void mask? Who was that person, and how did this moment make you feel?

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## X-Punk Companion Statements

When you want to start playing right away, it's sometimes easier to develop character histories and relationships with your companions if you have a little spark to get you started.

This exercise lists quotes from your character's perspective, giving thoughts and history about the people around them. Simply fill in the blanks with PC and NPC names to give yourself a strong foundational perspective to start your game.

### Positive

These quotes establish the foundation for positive relationships, centering on admiration, cooperation, and affection. I generally recommend you use these for your fellow PCs. There can still be conflict in positive relationships, but it's easier to manage party dynamics if you start out aligned.

"I follow \_\_\_\_\_ even if authority is for chumps."

"\_\_\_\_\_ is too beautiful for this broken world."

"I have seen dozens of punks talk a big game, but I believe \_\_\_\_\_ more often than not."

"I'll never understand \_\_\_\_\_, but I respect them."

"Only challenge \_\_\_\_\_ at \_\_\_\_\_ [choose contest] if you are looking to get thrashed."

"I'd wreck anyone who so much as says an unkind word about \_\_\_\_\_."

"If I'm at my lowest, I'd want to see \_\_\_\_\_ before anyone else."

"\_\_\_\_\_ is earnest, and that is one of the rarest virtues left in the world."

"\_\_\_\_\_ showed me the person I really want to be."

"There are more legends about \_\_\_\_\_ than I can count. I'm pretty sure most of them are true."

"It's not a real party unless I can get a moment to sit and talk with \_\_\_\_\_."

"If I don't know something, \_\_\_\_\_ is always the first person I turn to."

"\_\_\_\_\_ needs someone to watch out for them and show them the ropes. I'm \_\_\_\_\_ to do that."

"\_\_\_\_\_ has a grip on life that I wish I had."

"I'm pretty sure if we sent \_\_\_\_\_ into the wastes, the wastes would flinch first."

### Negative

These quotes establish negative relationships centering on conflict, rivalry, and distaste. I generally recommend these for NPCs and use complicated prompts to find conflict in relationships with other PCs.

“\_\_\_\_\_ dresses like a cop.”

“I have never met anyone who folds under pressure like \_\_\_\_\_.”

“\_\_\_\_\_ is ruthless. All of the most awful things in the world were dreamt up by people like them.”

“I can never trust \_\_\_\_\_ again after what they did to me.”

“\_\_\_\_\_ will always give you the cheap, busted version of whatever you want from them.”

“Every time I see \_\_\_\_\_, I get sadder about what they have become.”

“I don’t think \_\_\_\_\_ will ever be able to take care of themselves, and I think everyone who tries to care for them is at risk.”

“\_\_\_\_\_ is smart in all the ways that make them dangerous, and foolish in all the ways that make them reckless.”

“Sometimes it feels like \_\_\_\_\_ is a corporate mascot who ended up in a person’s body.”

“I have seen \_\_\_\_\_ promise the world to countless people, only to leave them in the dirt when they have served their purpose.”

“\_\_\_\_\_ is almost too far gone, and I don’t have the patience to try to save them.”

“I think \_\_\_\_\_ fights because they like to hurt people. If a few coins had fallen differently, we would be complete enemies.”

“You can go to \_\_\_\_\_ for help, but they wouldn’t hesitate to put a knife in your back if they thought it might make them money.”

“\_\_\_\_\_ needs to learn how to control their feelings. I’m tired of getting drawn into their messes.”

“I feel like I have failed \_\_\_\_\_ too many times to ever be forgiven.”

“\_\_\_\_\_ creeps me out. I don’t know what it is, but I’m never going to let my guard down around them.”

### **Complicated**

These prompts establish complicated relationships intermingling positive and negative elements. These are perfect for both PCs and NPCs where you want extra dramatic tension at the center of the story.

“\_\_\_\_\_ is lying to \_\_\_\_\_. I don’t want to have to intervene, but I will if the truth doesn’t come out soon.”

“I love \_\_\_\_\_, which is why it hurts me to see what they are doing to themselves.”

“I recognize that \_\_\_\_\_ is working hard to earn my trust, but I just can’t look past what they used to do.”

“I want to get over my feelings for \_\_\_\_\_, but the past keeps slipping into my thoughts... even if rehashing things is a bad idea.”

"I know \_\_\_\_\_ saw me do something I am ashamed of, and it kills me that they haven't said anything yet."

"Me and \_\_\_\_\_ are the only survivors of a job that went wrong. No one understands me like them; no one reminds me of pain like them."

"I want to tell \_\_\_\_\_ how I really feel about them, but I lose my nerve every time."

"Nothing makes me happier than getting a leg up on \_\_\_\_\_."

"\_\_\_\_\_ owes me more money, favors, and apologies than I can count. But if it came down to their word against someone else, I'd pick them every time."

"I watched \_\_\_\_\_ grow up, which makes it hard for me to accept they are ready to make their own decisions."

"I lose sight of red flags whenever \_\_\_\_\_ gets involved."

"\_\_\_\_\_ lets me off the hook constantly. I don't want to do wrong by them, I can't seem to stop, and I don't know what I would do if they ever called me out."

"The way \_\_\_\_\_ treats \_\_\_\_\_ really pisses me off, but people should stand up for themselves!"

"I'd be lost without \_\_\_\_\_, but I hate listening to them."

"I try to be a better person for \_\_\_\_\_, but I'm afraid I will never change."



## Superhero

Superhero fiction revolves around basic themes of morality and the battle between good and evil. Characters with extraordinary powers and abilities use their gifts to protect the innocent and oppose the forces of evil.

The core of a superhero protagonist is their mission, their reasons for pursuing it, and what they will sacrifice to do the right thing. Many modern superhero stories revolve around the tension that comes from heroic responsibility disrupting personal satisfaction and relationships. This plays out through struggles to maintain secret identities, to find a sense of belonging, and to protect loved ones.

### Superhero d20 Questions

Answering these questions will help establish your character's relationship with their power, responsibility, and individual goals. Focusing on a character's desires and how their ideals make them difficult to attain will give you lots to play with in a superhero story.

- 🎲 Roll a d20 three times and answer the corresponding questions for your character:

- 1.** Does your character feel positively or negatively about the powers/abilities that make them a hero?
- 2.** Was there a time in your character's life before they had extraordinary powers/abilities? Do they look on this time fondly?
- 3.** Whom does your character fear the most? What separates this person from other threats?
- 4.** What do you need to do that occasionally gets in the way of your heroism? Why do you need to do it?
- 5.** Do you have a fear or physical weakness that makes you vulnerable in a fight? If so, what? If not, what might distract or limit you in critical moments?
- 6.** Who is your character closest to? How are they vulnerable to mundane or supernatural harm?
- 7.** Who isn't a villain but acts as an antagonist for your character —doing perfectly legal things that make life in and out of a mask more difficult?
- 8.** What about your character or their life makes it difficult for them to relate to the people around them? What about your character makes it difficult for others to relate to them?
- 9.** Is there a tool, weapon, or contact you depend on for your heroic work? What makes this sometimes unavailable?
- 10.** Do you have a central plan or mission in your heroic work? What inspired this goal?
- 11.** Do you have a goal outside your heroic work? How do you make time to pursue this goal?
- 12.** What is a relationship that your character has that they would like to change? How do they want to change it?
- 13.** What is a flaw your character struggles with? How has this caused them unhappiness in the past?
- 14.** Is there a secret that your character fails to see? What prevents them from jumping to conclusions other people might find

obvious?

- 15.** How does your character dream of spending free time? What do they see as the biggest obstacle to enjoying themselves that way?
- 16.** Who would your character most like to impress? What have they done to try to win this approval?
- 17.** Who needs your character's help in a way not related to their heroic work? Why is it a struggle to provide this help?
- 18.** What moment is burned into your character's memory? How is it a source of strength? How is it a source of weakness?
- 19.** Who plays an important role in both your character's private life and heroic life? Is this role similar in both areas?
- 20.** What is a mundane problem you face because of your heroic work? How is your character's life out-of-mask unexpectedly useful in their heroic work?

## Five Obligations

If your hero has a secret identity, life pulls them in many directions. You aren't just committed to fighting the forces of evil; you're committed to your loved ones, your professional and academic life, and so much more. In RPGs, we're usually pulled in the direction of the rest of the party, so it's easy to miss out on the fun of trying to juggle obligations.

Make choices and answer prompts to flesh out obligations for your character outside of heroics.

### Family

Family are people we are unavoidably bound to. Whether our relationships are good or bad, they add dimension to our lives. Obligations to family can be something you long to fulfill or something you dread.

 What family members is your hero closest to?

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 What do you feel they need from you?

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 What does it take to provide that for them? Choose two:

- Time
- Emotional availability
- Money
- Meeting specific goals
- Protection

 What happens when you can't provide what they need?

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## Friends

Friends are people we choose to have in our lives. Without maintenance, they can disappear.

 Choose an important friendship your character has:

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 What do you enjoy most about this friendship?

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✳ What struggles do you help your friend with? Choose two:

- Social isolation
- Romantic drama
- Family drama
- Self-doubt
- Self-control
- Dark impulses

✍ What crisis might come to a head if you are not there to intervene?

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## Professional and Academic

The world at large has demands for everyone that don't disappear just because you save it. These might be relevant because they allow you to survive or maintain your place in society. Others are tied to your personal ambitions. Adult heroes are usually saddled with some kind of professional obligation, while younger heroes face academic obligations.

✍ What is your biggest professional or academic obligation?

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✳ What is the core reason this obligation is important to you?

Choose one:

- Survival

- Social pressure
- Ambition

✳ This obligation is particularly demanding. To struggle with it, choose one of the following options; to satisfy it, choose two; to thrive, choose three:

- Time: Actual hours devoted to this obligation
- Focus: Mental bandwidth devoted to understanding and developing this obligation
- Consistency: Time and attention within specific, regular, and often inflexible parameters
- Passion: Creativity, dedication, and personal investment in work related to this obligation
- Labor: Work that is physically or mentally taxing
- Charisma: You need to connect with, care for, or impress others to find success

✍ What is the bare minimum you need to do to avoid failing this obligation?

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✍ What happens when you struggle with this obligation?

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✍ What happens if you thrive with this obligation?

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## Recovery

This obligation stems from dealing with all of your other obligations. Heroic adventures and daily life alike take a toll on people. Even if you fulfill your obligations, you need to process and recover from stress. Without that, you run the risk of breaking down.

✿ When you experience stress, decide which of the following categories it fits:

- **Emotional:** This could be driven by interpersonal conflict, confronting past trauma and current tragedy, or dissatisfaction with your circumstances, body, or other stress.
- **Physical:** This could be caused by illness, injury, exhaustion, and general incapability.
- **Mental:** This could be caused by trying to learn difficult concepts, unraveling a complex problem or mystery, or simply juggling too many problems at once.
- **Spiritual:** This could be caused by feeling caught between multiple desires, struggling with problems that have no clear answer, and dealing with feelings of guilt or shame.

✿ Based on the type and severity of your stress, choose one to three things you need in order to recover:

- Time
- Rest
- Nurturing
- Guidance
- Closure

 What is your preferred recovery activity?

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 Based on the stress you carry, what would a breakdown look like if you aren't able to address your problems properly?

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## Fun Stress in Solitude

RPG sessions don't always give you a chance to let your character be alone or manage their feelings about their adventures. Your table doesn't need to see every part of your story in order to understand what's going on. Heroes in comics usually only get a few pages or even panels to address recovering from difficult adventures. Sharing a few lines between action scenes about the state of your character's body or environment can do wonders to pull them into a more complete story you are enjoying on your own.

## Personal

Your hero also has obligations to themselves. Being a hero and keeping a secret identity are never the full extent of a character's personality. People who discovered their powers had dreams before they were heroes; characters who grew up with power develop tastes and curiosities outside of their job. Without care and attention, dreams can die and desires gain weight.

 What is a dream you have for yourself, possibly from before you became a hero?

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 What would have to happen to make you change or give up on this dream? How would that change the way you see yourself?

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 What is a joy you long to indulge or a curiosity you long to satisfy?

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 Why do you feel incomplete when you feel separated from this part of yourself?

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 What do you like about yourself?

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 What makes you feel connected to that aspect of yourself?

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## Well Suited

An origin in comics means that visually compelling and unique character designs are a staple of the superhero RPG genre. Because RPGs live in the theater of the mind, it's possible for visually driven details to get lost.

This exercise uses the priority system to help you make a costume that opens up story potential. Assign priorities for the following categories from 1 to 5 without repeating a number, with 1 making that aspect more beneficial or important to your character, and 5 making it unimportant or detrimental to your character.

Protection\_\_\_\_\_

Utility\_\_\_\_\_

Secrecy\_\_\_\_\_

Readiness\_\_\_\_\_

Message\_\_\_\_\_

Now read the prompts that correspond to each rank to create your concept. (For example, if you ranked Protection 1, you would follow the first direction in the Protection list.)

### Protection

This determines how much physical protection your costume offers you in dangerous situations. Some costumes are just for show, others are armor designed to protect you as a hero, while still others are a robust defense system that can protect others alongside yourself.

1. Through cosmic, mystic, or technological means, your costume makes you almost invincible. It can also be used to defend others who don't have the same invulnerability. The design for this armor is not necessarily visually noticeable, but it definitely looks special.
2. Your costume is a complete set of armor with details like plates, mechanical elements, or shielding. It keeps you safe in situations that would be seriously dangerous even for other heroes. It also has special abilities to defend you against esoteric threats and catastrophic danger.
3. This costume offers a few basic protections like a helmet or goggles. Protection exists, but it isn't the focus. It might have a bulkier silhouette and details that are obviously designed for safety.
4. This costume offers no real protection. It might be a simple spandex suit, regular fabric clothing, or armor that would actually be completely impractical in an actual fight.
5. This costume carries a special vulnerability that you don't have otherwise. It may even still offer helpful protection in other contexts, but this vulnerability can pose a real threat if your enemies are savvy about it.

## Utility

This determines the various ways your costume enables you in your heroic work. Some costumes are weapons unto themselves or have a wide array of tools, analytical systems, and other gadgets to aid you. Others are just there to look good and not get in the way.

1. This costume offers you nearly endless solutions for any number of problems. It might be the very source of your power. Additionally, it has built-in tools that allow you to hack computers, repair machines and electronics, disguise yourself,

travel through space...really anything you can think of! Thanks to nanomachines, magic, or wild extra-dimensional nonsense, it's not limited by the constraints of physics or logic.

2. This costume has several specific utilities. They are meant to support you in challenges that you face as a hero, so they will be useful often. Even if you don't have the exact tool you need built in, you can probably figure something out.
3. This costume provides you with a few essential tools that help you with your heroic work and complement your powers. Picture web shooters that help you move around a city, a drone that helps you assess threats, or computer goggles you can use to understand your opponent's abilities. They aren't everything you do, but they make the things you do much easier.
4. Your costume has a few basic and unremarkable tools like flashlights, radios, or magnifying glasses. Maybe you just have an extraordinary number of pockets or pouches to store all the gear you need. These utilities are nice, but it's rare that they will save your neck in a crisis.
5. Your costume doesn't have any utility beyond hopefully looking good.

## Secrecy

This determines how well your costume protects your identity. This isn't a big concern for every hero, but it is for many. If you do have a secret identity, you'll want a costume that keeps you covered.

1. This disguise is completely impenetrable. It could be a total bodily transformation or a magical concealment of your identity. Even if some of your features remain, they can never be discovered unless you choose to reveal yourself.

2. This costume covers all of your notable physical features. There is no way your enemies will be able to determine your secret identity unless they unmask you. If you transform, some element of your true features might remain, but it would be a big leap to determine your identity. There is a slight chance that close loved ones will still be able to recognize a part of you, but they will have reasonable doubts.
3. Some part of you is exposed in this costume. Identifying features like your eyes, hair, mouth, and such are easily visible. Those closest to you will suspect even if they don't know.
4. This costume doesn't provide any protection for your identity at all. Your whole face or other distinct identifying features are on display. If you want a secret identity, you need to conceal your true self in general society. Otherwise, your civilian identity is public knowledge.
5. You don't have a costume at all. The things that make you super are always a part of you. Not only can you not really hide your identity; it's also hard to participate in society because your super-heroic persona is always "on."

## Readiness

Most superheroes are reactive. Danger rears its ugly head, and then they spring into action and save the day. Many heroes can transform or change clothes quickly, while others need special conditions to suit up.

1. You have access to your costume at any time; you don't really need to put it on. It might be that your "costume" is actually a transformation of some kind and you can never really lose it.
2. This costume can easily be concealed beneath your clothing, and all you need to get ready is a semiprivate space. In an emergency, these are never really hard to find.

3. This costume is a bit of a hassle. You'll need a private space and a few minutes of time to get ready. Pulling away from others in an emergency is always a bit of trouble.
4. Your costume depends on an object or accessory that you need to have on your person. This means you can be separated from it in an emergency and potentially have to take risks to reclaim it before you can take action.
5. Your costume can only really be accessed through a hideout or fortress. You can't really respond to emergencies, so an appearance of your heroic persona has to be planned in advance.

## Message

Fashion is a form of communication, and a good costume communicates that you are there to help or to intimidate enemies. A bad one might lead people to make odd assumptions or even make it more difficult for you to do your job.

1. Your costume easily and perhaps magically projects the message of your mission. In moments of crisis, your appearance makes people feel safer, and you are never really met with suspicion from critics based on your appearance.
2. Your costume is designed to project a message, and it does that very effectively. However, that message is limited. If you want criminals to fear you, the public may be slow to trust you. If you want to be a friendly face, villains won't take you seriously.
3. Your costume clearly identifies you as someone who belongs in a super-fight, but it's not doing anything special. At the end of the day, your actions are more important than your appearance.
4. Your costume can occasionally lead people to make incorrect assumptions about you. You might look a little scary, or people might assume you have abilities that you don't actually have.

It's more annoying than dangerous, but you can occasionally get into trouble because of this.

5. The look of your costume causes problems for you all the time.  
Your appearance might be so intimidating that the people you are trying to help actively fear you. You constantly need to work to prove people wrong.

## Five Accidents

Plenty of heroes have their origins and motivations shaped by a series of wild coincidences, tragedies, and mistakes. This exercise has prompts that will help you outline mishaps that helped shape your identity as a hero.

### One That Made You Strong

This is an accident that left you more capable or resilient. Perhaps this is the event that gave you your powers or the confidence you needed to take risks no one else would.

✳ This left you stronger... (choose one):

- Physically
- Mentally
- Emotionally
- Spiritually

✳ You were in these circumstances because... (choose one):

- You were pursuing a passion
- You were helping a loved one
- You were struggling with another path
- You were in the wrong place at the right time
- Circumstances sought you specifically

💡 Was this situation dangerous? What tragic outcome was averted?

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💡 How did you rise to this occasion in a way that no one else would have?

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💡 Did you notice your newfound strength? How did you first decide to use it?

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## One That Made You Lucky

This accident is simply an example of good fortune in your past. It might be an event that brought you wealth and fame; it could also be a tragedy that you miraculously survived where others would have perished.

✳️ This accident... (choose two):

- Brought you inspiration
- Brought you attention
- Brought you wealth
- Gave you freedom
- Left you unscathed

✳ You look back on this accident... (choose one):

- Fondly
- With regret
- Unable to fully remember it

✍ Others who know about this accident would describe you as "lucky." Do you agree? Why or why not?

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✍ Even if you gained something from this accident, you also lost something. Do you feel the loss was worth what you gained? Why or why not?

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✍ Does any part of you want to change the events of this accident? Would you make changes even if it meant losing what you gained?

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## One That Made You Afraid

This accident left you haunted, giving you a fear that you struggle with. It might have been a near-death experience or a tragedy that befell a loved one. It makes you feel small and vulnerable.

✳ This accident... (choose two):

- Nearly took your life
  - Took a loved one from you
  - Changed the way the world treated you
  - Changed how you had to live afterward
  - Happened when you were very young
- \* This accident left you with a deep and primal fear. In extreme circumstances, that fear can cause you to... (choose up to two):
- Suffer panic attacks
  - Flash back to the inciting tragedy
  - Lash out at people close to you
  - Want to flee from responsibility
  - Bury your fear in a different negative emotion
- 💡 What primal fear did this circumstance leave you with?
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- 

💡 How extreme do conditions need to be or how closely do circumstances need to resemble this accident for you to have a reaction?

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💡 What, if anything, have you done to address this fear and the impact it has on your life?

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## One That Made You Jaded

This accident instilled hatred or resentment, or it diminished your faith or hope in a significant way. It might be the result of mistreatment by a specific group or a failure to act honorably by someone or something that was once close to you. No matter the circumstance, this left you slow to trust or hesitant to believe.

✳ This accident made it difficult for you to... (choose one):

- Trust people looking to get close to you
- Believe in the potential for good within a specific group
- Trust others to handle problems you see as important
- Respect people who don't live the way you do

✳ In this accident... (choose two):

- Someone abandoned you
- Someone hurt you
- Someone or something you care for was irreparably hurt
- A promise was broken

✍ How does feeling jaded in this way make your life more difficult?

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✍ Does feeling jaded in this way present a danger to people around you? Why or why not?

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- 💡 What sort of intervention do you think you would need to move past these feelings?
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## One That Gave You Hope

This accident is a coincidence that makes all of the struggle and sacrifice of your heroism feel worth it. It is an affirming thing that brings you comfort when you are uncertain. This is something good that you didn't intend or imagine being the result of your heroism.

- \* This is the result of you... (choose one):
- Inspiring someone
  - Saving someone
  - Trusting someone
  - Protecting something
  - Suffering on behalf of another
- \* You didn't notice the impact you had because... (choose one or two):
- It happened because of something you do every day
  - You were too focused on your own pain or struggle
  - You were focused on a larger unrelated goal
  - You don't bother thinking about what happens after you finish your work
  - You have become jaded by misfortune
- 💡 What larger good came from your intervention?
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💡 How did this help you, your mission, or something you hold dear?

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💡 How did you discover this?

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## Your Nemesis

There is always one villain who stands above the rest. They are the villain your hero dreads to face but your audience hopes to see. The things that make a compelling nemesis depend on the hero.

To narrow your options, use the priority system to rank the following categories from 1 to 5 without repeating a number, with 1 making your nemesis more formidable and personal, and 5 making them vulnerable and less invested in you.

**Obsession** \_\_\_\_\_

**Power** \_\_\_\_\_

**Relationship** \_\_\_\_\_

**Influence** \_\_\_\_\_

**Responsibility** \_\_\_\_\_

Now read the prompts that correspond to each rank to create your concept. (For example, if you ranked Obsession 1, you would follow the first direction in the Obsession list.)

## **Obsession**

This determines how personally your nemesis approaches their opposition to you. Some are villains specifically to vex you, others are simply driven by the challenge you pose, and some don't care for the hero at all.

1. Your nemesis thinks only of you, and it shapes all of their behavior and ambitions. Everything they do is to send you a message.
2. Defeating or destroying you has become a gateway to their dreams. They technically want to do other things, but all of their plans are forced to circle back to beating you.
3. Your nemesis is obsessed with something that isn't specifically you, but it is diametrically opposed to everything you stand for. This obsession spurs them to behavior that you always have to oppose.
4. Your relationship to your nemesis is, for lack of a better term, "assigned" on a cosmic level. You both represent ideas larger than yourselves, and those ideas are necessarily in conflict.
5. You are obsessed with your nemesis. Perhaps they have wronged you or someone you love, or they are in charge of circumstances that make the world a worse place. Part of your reason for being a hero is specifically to take them down.

## **Power**

On a basic level, power determines how dangerous your nemesis is. It also affects what you hope to achieve when facing them. Some

villains can be defeated; others are merely stopped or slowed in their plans.

1. Your nemesis has a mythic or cosmic level of power that makes them closer to a god than a mortal being. There is almost no destructive feat they are incapable of, though they might have to push themselves to achieve things related to their ambitions. Defeating them is a daunting task—even thwarting their individual plans will be difficult.
2. Your nemesis has a superhuman or supernatural level of power. They are capable of things that would be impossible for any other being. Defeating them will be difficult; thwarting their plans and allowing them to escape is the most likely outcome.
3. Your nemesis is extremely capable. They might have some extraordinary power, but what makes them special and dangerous is how they apply their abilities. It's still entirely possible to defeat them as you thwart their plans.
4. Your nemesis is distinctly mundane. They might be intelligent, skilled, or equipped to make themselves dangerous—however, everything they can do is possible for any other being like them. It will often be easier to defeat them than thwart their plans.
5. Your nemesis has no extraordinary ability. If not for their ideology, they would be a normal person. Defeating them isn't really difficult, but thwarting their plans is a wicked problem.

## Influence

This determines how much influence your nemesis has over others. Some command armies of minions in their image. Others can only manage to command a small group of followers and are seen for what they are.

1. Your nemesis can command planetary federations, sprawling megacorporations, or interdenominational armies. There is no

limit to the scale of their influence. They can generally present themselves however they would prefer to be seen.

2. Your nemesis commands something on the scale of nations, large corporations, or significant military forces. They are formidable by any standard, but there are practical limits to their influence. They can portray themselves as they prefer with very few pockets of resistance to question them.
3. Your nemesis commands a corporation, political party, religious order, or paramilitary force. They are formidable but are by no means the largest force in the world. Their reputation is contentious despite their efforts.
4. Your nemesis leads a gang, organized crime family, or a team of specialized agents. They are usually seen as they want to be seen by people close to them, but they cannot control their reputation with the outside world.
5. Your nemesis likely works alone or with a very small group. They accomplish most of what they do personally. They can't really control how they are perceived, but that might not matter to them.

## Relationship

This determines how connected you feel to your nemesis. Some heroes fight their darkest villains with empathy and compassion, hoping that they might one day change. Others think of them as just another dangerous villain.

1. Your nemesis, for good or for ill, is the most important relationship you have in your life. They understand you in a way that no one else does. Everything they do feels very personal. Even though you are fighting, you are partially motivated by care for one another.

2. You have an important relationship with your nemesis that extends beyond your heroics. They might be family, a significant other, or an old friend. No matter what, your relationship with them is important and affects your decisions.
3. Your relationship with your nemesis is complicated. You may have been close with them before being driven apart, or you have been clashing so long that they have become a familiar and reliable part of your life. You know them so well that you can even occasionally work together because you trust their principles even if you disagree with them.
4. You only know your nemesis by their actions and reputation. If they are important to you, they are important as an obstacle. You don't know each other more than you need to in order to battle.
5. You don't have any kind of relationship with your nemesis outside of your unending battle against them. Who or whatever they used to be has been whittled away, leaving only an enemy.

## Responsibility

This determines to what degree you are responsible for the existence of your nemesis. Some nemeses blame heroes for the events that drove them to villainy—occasionally, they even have a point.

1. Your actions led directly to your nemesis gaining their abilities, adopting their ideology, or both. In a very real sense, you can be blamed for their actions.
2. Your nemesis can only be defeated by someone with your abilities. You aren't to blame for their behavior, but it is up to you to stop them.
3. You don't actively bear real responsibility for the behavior of your nemesis. They developed their powers and ideology on

their own. However, they ultimately blame you for every villainous decision they make.

4. Your nemesis is opposed to what you stand for more than who you are personally. Their ideology would probably drive them to lash out no matter what. You just happen to be the person best equipped and most motivated to stop them.
5. You have absolutely no responsibility for your nemesis and how they choose to use their abilities. They would still live their lives the same way even if you were not around.

## No More

A classic story for superheroes with secret identities is giving up their heroics to live a normal life. Superheroes exist for a reason, though, and this kind of choice has consequences—even if they are hard to see while struggling to find happiness balancing two lives.

Make choices and roll d6s to walk through the possibility of ending your heroic career, investigating how it might change your life for the better while making the world worse.

## What I Stand to Gain

Selflessness is part of what defines a hero. However, this sometimes calls for sacrifice, and during dark periods the need for selflessness can feel like a heavy burden. Giving up heroic responsibility can represent regaining the things you pushed to the side.

- ✿ My heroic life usually calls for me to set aside... (choose two):
- My love life
  - My family
  - My friends
  - My career

- My education
- My health
- My hobbies

To figure out how leaving heroics behind affects these neglected areas of your life, answer the following questions:

✳️ Has setting this aside hurt you emotionally?

- Yes
- No

✳️ Has setting this aside hurt you physically?

- Yes
- No

✳️ Has setting this aside hurt people in your life?

- Yes
- No

🎲 For every question you answered with yes, add +1 to a roll of 2d6.

- On a result of 10 or more, you manage to make meaningful progress in these areas of life and you find it fulfilling.
- On a result of 7–9, you manage to invest in these areas successfully but find they don't fulfill you in the ways you imagined.
- On a result of 6 or less, you discover that it wasn't your heroic work keeping you from fulfillment in these areas.

✍️ What thing that you always cared about do you get to pursue?

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 How does investing in this benefit you?

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 What do you discover about yourself that brings you pride, comfort, or joy?

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 What do you discover about yourself that brings you shame, fear, sorrow, or confusion?

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## Whom I Think I Will Please

Your heroic life also affects the people around you. Making a major change to your schedule or personality will affect some of the people you know.

 Roll a d6 to determine one of the relationships in your life that will change if you give up heroics:

1. A family member
2. A friend
3. A colleague
4. A mentor or superior
5. An antagonist or enemy
6. A love

Ask the following questions about your relationship with this person:

✳ Have you wanted more time with this person?

- Yes
- No

✳ Have you wanted to impress this person?

- Yes
- No

✳ Did you feel like you were failing this person?

- Yes
- No

**6** For every question you answered with yes, add +1 to a roll of 2d6.

- On a result of 10 or more, choose two changes for this relationship that feel positive.
- On a result of 7–9, choose two changes, one that feels positive and one that feels negative.
- On a result of 6 or less, choose two changes that feel negative.

#### CHANGES

✳ Choose based on previous die roll results.

- This person changes their opinion of you.
- This person has new expectations for you.
- This person feels they understand you better.
- You feel closer to this person.
- You learn something surprising about this person.
- One of you wants to alter something about your relationship.
- This person follows through on long-standing plans.

- ✍ What moment do you get to share with this person that normally would have been interrupted by heroic work?
- 
- 

- ✍ What lesson do you learn from spending more time around this person?
- 
- 

## What I Lose

A superhero persona is a part of your identity. It represents a specific aspect of your capabilities and values. Cutting yourself off from it limits you in a way you probably didn't anticipate—especially if you were focused on finding a kind of normalcy.

- ✍ What about your heroic identity or powers makes your experience of your body different from most people? How does being around “ordinary” people make you more aware of this?
- 
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- ✍ What is something you got to indulge in your heroic persona that you feel like you don't have a real outlet for anymore? When do you feel the urge to do it now?
- 
-

✍ What minor inconvenience did you avoid because of your heroic persona? Why does it feel especially stifling and oppressive now?

✍ What activity that most people are invested in feels trivial or underwhelming to you now?

✍ What problem have you encountered that you would have been able to address as a hero? How have you managed the stress of feeling powerless?

## Who Gets Hurt

Heroes help people intentionally and unintentionally in ways they might not see. Stepping away from that role means avoidable calamities unfold without your intervention. If you are lucky, your past success can mitigate tragedy while you look the other way.

6 Roll 2d6 to find a calamity where you would normally intervene and a victim it affects:

Calamity

Victim

<b>1</b>	An accident that leaves people trapped	A family member
<b>2</b>	A disaster that makes time critical	A friend
<b>3</b>	A seemingly small incident that turns life-threatening	A group of acquaintances or especially vulnerable civilians
<b>4</b>	A petty crime that could turn violent	One or more important public officials
<b>5</b>	A hostage situation	An antagonist of yours
<b>6</b>	A villain attack	Roll twice to select two victims

Ask the following questions:

- ✿ Am I convinced that my interventions just make matters worse?
  - Yes
  - No
  
- ✿ Do I hear about harm from my actions more than I hear about the good I do?
  - Yes
  - No
  
- ✿ Do I feel like being “normal” means not having to be “good”?
  - Yes
  - No

**6** For every question you answered with yes, add +1 to a roll of 2d6.

- On a result of 10 or more, choose two Mitigating Factors from the following table that barely averted a consequence of your choice; explain how you found out after the fact.
  
- On a result of 7–9, choose a Mitigating Factor and a Consequence; explain how something terrible happened and

how it could have been worse.

- On a result of 6 or less, choose two consequences and explain how even after a change of heart you were helpless to intervene. You can just choose any options; you don't need to roll.

Mitigating Factors	Consequences
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Your example inspired an average person to courage</li><li>• A person you saved aided victims</li><li>• Someone trying to fill your shoes was already working to help</li><li>• Something you created to aid your heroic work made a critical difference</li><li>• Resources made to oppose you ended up being useful</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Someone you know is seriously or permanently hurt</li><li>• Something you value is damaged or destroyed</li><li>• An event you were looking forward to is ruined</li><li>• The crisis is prolonged or escalated</li><li>• A dangerous plot is revealed</li><li>• Unnecessary death</li></ul>

 How could a person with your abilities have easily resolved this problem?

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 What trivial thing were you doing instead?

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- 6 Despite the tragedy, how did this event clearly illustrate the impact your heroic persona had on the world?
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## Daring Escapes

Superheroes are known for getting out of impossible situations. Some are the result of dastardly villains plotting, others are brought on by unpredictable calamity, and a few are the result of tangled and conflicting obligations. If your character has been a hero for a while at the start of your game, then they probably have a few escapes under their belt already.

Roll a d6, make choices, and answer the following prompts to create some dramatic escapes to have in your backstory.

### Because You Were Underestimated

This escape was made possible by a villain who didn't take you seriously enough. Many villains are clever, but they are also arrogant. Some of their most diabolical plots are undone by a failure to understand or respect you.

- 6 What did your foe underestimate about you? Roll 1d6:

1. Your strength
2. Your intellect
3. Your will
4. Your adaptability
5. Your moral center
6. How different you are from them

 This situation involved a... (choose two to three):

- Loved one in peril
- Group of people in peril
- Temptation
- Difficult choice
- Danger you chose to face
- Danger you couldn't avoid

 Despite underestimating you, this villain's plot was oddly thoughtful. What information about you did they try to exploit?

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 When did you realize you were in control of the situation?

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 What did you learn about yourself making this escape that actually made you feel stronger?

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## With Help

Even a superhero can't do everything alone! This escape was made possible with assistance from another person. In a critical moment, someone stepped up to help you in your work, and it turned a disaster into a victory.

 Who helped you? Roll 1d6:

1. A fellow hero
2. Someone you love
3. Someone who doesn't like you
4. Someone you underestimated
5. Someone you were trying to save
6. A villain

 Because of their help, you... (choose two):

- Actually had a chance
- Were able to avoid collateral damage
- Were spared a serious injury
- Were able to save more people
- Were able to apprehend a villain

 Did you ask for help, or was it offered to you freely? What moment did they step in?

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 What skills or opportunity did the person who helped you bring to the table that made the difference?

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 What did you learn about the person who helped you? Did it change your relationship going forward?

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## Through Luck

This escape was only possible because of a wild coincidence. Heroes have to succeed because the consequences for their failure are usually unthinkable. It's not a comforting thought, but not all of your victories were guaranteed. Sometimes it comes down to sheer luck.

 How did luck intervene? Roll 1d6:

1. You found a critical clue by chance
2. You happened to have exactly what you needed from an unrelated incident
3. A machine failed, unexpectedly halting an almost certain tragedy
4. Something very small managed to deflect something very large
5. A mistake you made actually put you in the perfect position
6. You guessed a solution you had no hope of finding otherwise

 The stakes were high. How? Choose two:

- The city was at risk for irreversible change
- A villain nearly attained ultimate power
- You were confined and awaiting death
- A great threat nearly had the opportunity to invade
- Two powerful forces nearly entered a destructive conflict
- Authorities almost resorted to a solution with heavy collateral damage

 Did you try to convince anyone that you actually knew what you were doing, or were you honest about your vulnerability?

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 Despite coming out on top, this situation made you feel vulnerable. What did you change going forward to avoid getting so close to disaster again?

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 Did this happen earlier or later in your heroic career? If it happened earlier, how did the lesson you learned save you in a separate incident? If it happened later, how did you confront your own complacency?

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## Through Skill or Will

There is no one else who could have made it through this situation. It was more than your powers or equipment that saw you through—it was skill honed through dedication or fierce principled determination.

 You faced a dangerous situation. What happened? Roll 1d6:

1. You had lost your powers temporarily
2. You had a serious and life-threatening injury
3. You were weakened through exhaustion, starvation, or poison
4. You had lost one of your major senses
5. You were far away from anywhere or anyone familiar
6. You were set against a problem no one had overcome before

 When you were out of options, you drew strength from...  
(choose two):

- Thoughts of your loved ones
- A selfless will to do right
- Knowledge that came from a non-heroic passion
- Forgiving yourself for a memory that haunted you
- Skills you fought hard to master
- Determination to face your fears

 You left this situation with a greater appreciation for your own strength. How did you invest in yourself after this?

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 How did victory here help you face a challenge in your non-heroic life?

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 What permanent mark do you bear from this experience?

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## Out of Costume

This escape might have nothing to do with heroism at all. In this circumstance, you narrowly avoided steep social, academic, professional, or familial consequences.



You faced an uncomfortable situation. What happened? Roll 1d6:

1. One of your secrets was about to be exposed
2. You were obligated to appear at two important and conflicting events
3. You made a huge mistake after barely making up for small mistakes
4. You lost or destroyed something irreplaceable
5. You unintentionally broke an important promise
6. You were surprised by a major obligation at the last minute



To make matters worse... (choose two):

- Your nemesis was after you at the same time
- You were on the verge of losing a critical position
- Your abilities were acting up in an unpredictable way
- You were feeling guilty or burdensome
- You were struggling to communicate your own needs
- You were delirious from fatigue wrought by overcommitment



How did an initially simple solution actually make matters worse?

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What were you forced to do that you were trying to avoid? How did it end up helping in a way you never expected?

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- 💡 What negative assumption of yours did this situation challenge?
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## Superhero Companion Statements

When you want to start playing right away, it's sometimes easier to develop character histories and relationships with your companions if you have a little spark to get you started.

This exercise lists quotes from your character's perspective, giving thoughts and history about the people around them. Simply fill in the blanks with PC and NPC names to give yourself a strong foundational perspective to start your game.

### Positive

These quotes establish the foundation for positive relationships, centering on admiration, cooperation, and affection. I generally recommend you use these for your fellow PCs. There can still be conflict in positive relationships, but it's easier to manage party dynamics if you start out aligned.

“ \_\_\_\_\_ has so much potential. I can't wait to help them reach it.”

“I am constantly inspired by \_\_\_\_\_...they show me the person I want to be.”

“I trust \_\_\_\_\_ more than anyone else—even myself.”

“It was easy to fall in love with \_\_\_\_\_. Their beliefs and actions consistently show they are someone truly special.”

“\_\_\_\_\_ is fascinating. I learn so much whenever I spend time with them.”

“I struggle to keep friends, but \_\_\_\_\_ makes me feel welcome and accepted in a way that lets me know we will always be close.”

“\_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ represent two aspects of heroism that I hope to embody. I’ll find a way to honor them even when they disagree.”

“I never feel like I am truly in danger when \_\_\_\_\_ is around. I know they can protect me from anything.”

“\_\_\_\_\_ is truly good in a way I fear I will never be. They keep me from losing myself to darkness.”

“Without \_\_\_\_\_ leading the way, I don’t know where I would be in life.”

“I am so proud to see what \_\_\_\_\_ has become. They will surpass me one day if they haven’t already.”

“\_\_\_\_\_ is brilliant, and I trust them to see and make solutions that I could never imagine.”

“\_\_\_\_\_ reminds me of myself and I want to give them a much better life than I had.”

“\_\_\_\_\_ took care of me when I was vulnerable. Now that I am strong, I will take care of them.”

“Despite all of the wild things I deal with every day,  
\_\_\_\_\_ always manages to make me smile.”

## Negative

These quotes establish negative relationships centering on conflict, rivalry, and distaste. I generally recommend these for NPCs and use complicated prompts to find conflict in relationships with other PCs.

“\_\_\_\_\_ goes too far and is a stone’s throw away from being a villain themselves.”

“For all their preaching about the greater good, \_\_\_\_\_ isn’t willing to do what it takes to actually keep people safe.”

“For some reason \_\_\_\_\_ has it out for me, and it doesn’t matter what I do or who I save. They are obsessed.”

“I know I can’t use my abilities on a normal person, but \_\_\_\_\_ torments me in my out-of-mask identity to the point I wish I could.”

“I want to believe there is good in every person, but in \_\_\_\_\_, I am afraid it is buried so deep I may never see it.”

“Everyone seems to trust \_\_\_\_\_, but I feel something is seriously off about them.”

“I can’t stand taking orders from \_\_\_\_\_; they have to be the most stuck-up jerk on the planet.”

“\_\_\_\_\_ is so irresponsible and their disregard for authority is going to get people hurt.”

“I have never encountered a more dastardly mind or one more dedicated to villainy than \_\_\_\_\_.”

“Not only does \_\_\_\_\_ cause me nothing but trouble; they are so effortlessly cool as they do it. No one makes me angrier.”

“\_\_\_\_\_ acts like I am destined to follow them. It frightens me, but nothing makes me feel more determined to be my own person.”

“I can’t ignore that \_\_\_\_\_ has a connection to something that has caused me so much pain. Even if the others do, I will never trust them.”

“\_\_\_\_\_ makes me more sad than anything else. They were hurt so badly, and I wish they could find a better way to deal with it.”

“Throughout my life, \_\_\_\_\_ has made it their mission to terrorize me and everyone I love. I fear I will never be rid of them.”

“I have turned my back on \_\_\_\_\_ completely. They can never atone for what they have done.”

### Complicated

These prompts establish complicated relationships intermingling positive and negative elements. These are perfect for both PCs and NPCs where you want extra dramatic tension at the center of the story.

“I trust \_\_\_\_\_ every time they ask me to, and almost every time, they betray me.”

“\_\_\_\_\_ is an arrogant, bumbling fool. Weirdly enough, in many contexts, I trust them more than almost anyone else.”

“I can never tell where I stand with \_\_\_\_\_; they think so differently than anyone else I know. It makes them hard to read.”

“\_\_\_\_\_ is constantly doing things that I have sworn to oppose. But they always step up when something important is on the line, and I cannot deny my attraction to them.”

“I know that \_\_\_\_\_ is a person of earnest virtue and courage. For some reason they also get on my nerves like no one else. It makes me quick to anger when I’m around them.”

“\_\_\_\_\_ is a harsh teacher; it almost feels abusive. However, they have taught me so much and I hold a deep respect for them.”

“My history with \_\_\_\_\_ is so complicated, but I know I have to put on a brave face for the good of the team.”

“I know \_\_\_\_\_ is a better leader than me. I want what they have so badly that I can’t resist trying to take it at every opportunity.”

“I believe that there is still something of the person I knew in \_\_\_\_\_, and I’m willing to put myself at risk to bring them back.”

“I know \_\_\_\_\_ loves me, but they truly hate a part of who I am. I don’t know how to live with that.”

“\_\_\_\_\_ makes me want to give all of this up. It’s a part of who I am and important to the world, but it might be worth changing for them.”

“I love \_\_\_\_\_, but they are constantly getting into danger because they are close to me.”

“I love both \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_, but I think they each only see and love a part of me. Choosing either one feels like burying a part of myself.”

“I cannot forget the kindness \_\_\_\_\_ showed me in the past. Even if I now really want to.”

“I want to be closer to \_\_\_\_\_, but they seem determined to push me away no matter how hard I try to connect with them.”



## Western

The Western genre focuses on themes of survival, scarcity, and justice. Harsh and dangerous environments divide people into struggling communities. People suffer not only from harsh conditions but also from greedy and callous predators. Where there is prosperity, there is likely also corruption and injustice.

Protagonists in Western fiction are defined by their ability to survive. They have the skills to endure hardship and face danger—and they usually paid a heavy price to get them. Western heroes are often challenged to stand in the place of absent justice to defend people who cannot protect themselves.

These questions will help you establish why your character lives a difficult life and why they are willing to work so hard to survive.

### Western d20 Questions

🎲 Roll a d20 three times and answer the corresponding questions for your character:

1. What environmental danger has your character learned needs to be respected? What did this lesson cost them?

2. Who from your past are you most afraid to face? What memory drives this fear?
3. What possession would you risk your life to keep safe? Why is it worth the risk?
4. What is the most beautiful thing you have ever seen? Did you appreciate it at the time?
5. Is there a life you would rather live than this one? If so, what stands in your way? If not, what comfort might tempt you?
6. What does your character consider to be the worst thing they have ever done? How do they deal with that memory?
7. What does your character believe in? How does this belief ground them in times of trouble?
8. What injustice was your character forced to suffer in their past? What have they done to protect themselves from suffering that way again?
9. What is something your character is searching for? Would they know what to do if they actually found it?
10. Which organization do you view differently than most people? What event gave you this special insight?
11. What thing that most people love does your character despise? When has this saved them? How has this hurt them?
12. Does your character see suffering as temporary or constant? How does that perspective make them think of their work?
13. What danger that most people fear does your character approach with calm? How did they develop this familiarity?
14. What brings your character a sense of peace? If it is a vice, what problems come with it? If it is not a vice, how is it rare?
15. What figure or institution do most people look to for justice? Do you believe in it? Why or why not?
16. What honor has your character received that they don't feel they deserve? Why can't they avoid acknowledging it?

- 17.** What is a trait your character doesn't realize makes them strong? What is a weakness they see as an asset?
- 18.** What problem will your character always empathize with? Is this empathy usually rewarded or exploited?
- 19.** When was a time your character went hungry? How often have they faced this struggle?
- 20.** Where has your character sworn never to go? What could cause them to reconsider?

### Woah There!

Many of the genres in this book have a connection to harmful tropes in their foundational fiction. The Western genre has by far the strongest connection to racism, colonialism, and imperialism. Approach your storytelling conscientiously, with an awareness of how indulging in harmful tropes perpetuates the harm they cause.

Especially avoid dehumanizing portrayals of indigenous cultures. This includes implications that people are uncivilized or culturally predisposed to violence, and/or reductive mysticism.

## There's No Place Like the Homestead

Westerns often follow protagonists in a life of dangerous wandering, with no home but a harsh road. If Western heroes do have a home somewhere, their relationship with it is complicated.

Use the priority system to create a home full of dramatic baggage by rating the following categories from 1 to 5 without repeating a number, with 1 making that aspect more beneficial or important to your character, and 5 making it unimportant or detrimental to your character.

Love \_\_\_\_\_

Fortune\_\_\_\_\_

Obligation\_\_\_\_\_

Memory\_\_\_\_\_

Population\_\_\_\_\_

Now read the prompts that correspond to each rank to create your concept. (For example, if you ranked Love 1, you would follow the first direction in the Love list.)

## **Love**

This defines the people you left behind and how they feel about you. The higher priority you give this category, the more likely you are to find some kind of warm welcome when you return.

1. You will always be remembered as a hero here. Even if you left under complicated circumstances, the people who are most important to you care for you profoundly. Former rivals and enemies may have even come to respect you and reform themselves as a testament to your memory.
2. You are remembered by almost everyone who still lives here. The people who matter most to you still care for you. However, any emotional scars you left behind still remain, and you may have to work to resolve some pain.
3. Your reputation back home exists in extreme contrast. There are some people who love you as a hero and others who hate you as a villain. It is likely some of the folks you care about most will think of you in painful ways.
4. There are only a small handful of individuals or perhaps just a single person who think highly of you. Everyone else has a reason to hate you.

5. Everyone who remembers you hates you. Folks might not always attack you on sight, but there are at least a few people who will. This might be based on a misunderstanding or complicated circumstances, but even folks you care about don't think of you fondly.

## Population

This category determines how large the community you came from was and potentially how much of an impact you had when you left.

1. This place is a metropolis. It is so large that your story was a small drop in a vast ocean. While there are definitely smaller communities within this place, you can move through many areas in relative anonymity.
2. This place is large like a city but is organized in a way that makes it difficult for you to avoid confronting your past unless you are careful. Your actions here have a chance of making an impact.
3. This place is a reasonably sized town. While you might be able to pass through without making waves, you definitely can't stick around for long without being noticed. Your actions here have real impact.
4. This is a small town or close-knit community or organization. It is impossible to return without being noticed unless you are using a disguise. Anything you did here, even very small things, have the potential for lasting impact.
5. This place is incredibly small, like a compound, estate, or homestead. Almost everyone here had a personal relationship with you to some degree. All actions can be devastating.

## Fortune

Is it a place of scarcity or plenty?

1. This is a place of extreme luxury. It is up to you how this excess is distributed—there is more than enough here for everyone to live comfortably to some degree. You may be entitled to a portion of this wealth even if there are good reasons you don't accept it.
2. There is a remarkable amount of wealth here, though it is not currently well managed or distributed. If you are entitled to any of this wealth, it comes with heavy and uncomfortable compromises. Still you can find most of what you might need here.
3. This place is currently in flux. It's experiencing unstable wealth and is about to collapse, it's a formerly struggling community with newly found wealth and power, or it's a divided place squabbling over essential resources.
4. Circumstances are deceptive. This could be a place that appears prosperous but is actually deeply in debt, or a humble place with hidden plenty.
5. This place is in abject poverty. If wealth does exist, it is in the hands of the worst individuals imaginable.

## Memory

This determines how you think of this place. Memories can be sweet, have a touch of bitterness, or be outright nightmares.

1. You have endless fond memories of this place. To you, it is almost an ideal you are striving to find or create as you travel the world. During the darkest moments you face on your journeys, peace and love instilled here ground you.
2. Your memories here are mostly positive, though they might be rendered bittersweet by the shadow of something traumatic.

3. There is extreme contrast in your memories of this place. You carry many sweet, almost idyllic moments as well as lifelong trauma. These memories pull you back home and push you away in different ways.
4. This place haunts you. The shadows of unresolved trauma, injustice, or even fractured loves tempt you back. The longer you spend away, the more terrible your memories seem. If there is something positive here, it's probably what gave you the strength to leave in the first place.
5. Nearly every moment you spent here was painful. These memories are the source of countless nightmares and bitter oaths. That pain seems to follow you no matter how far you wander. You know you will never be free until you return.

## **Obligation**

This determines if there is a debt in your relationship with this place. Either from it to you or you to it.

1. This place owes you in some way. Perhaps you were wronged and are owed reparations, or there is some honor or treasure you are destined to claim. You may have reasons for staying away, but when you return you will find something that will benefit you.
2. There is a problem here, and you are the solution that will unlock prosperity. Only a person with your ability and experience can make a difference here. If you choose to return, it will be to the benefit of everyone you care about.
3. This place is a tinderbox. Left alone, it will erupt into uncontrolled chaos. If you return, there will still be chaos, but you will be able to influence how it burns out or save what little you can manage.

4. There is a problem here that only you can solve that will likely require great sacrifices. It will not undo any of the harm people have suffered and may only improve things very slightly.
5. You owe this place a terrible debt. Many of the worst aspects of life here can be traced back to things you did. You will never be able to escape that fact. Eventually you will have to return and pay prices higher than you can imagine.

## Worthless and Priceless

Many Western protagonists are forced to be survivors, cutting out luxury and comfort and keeping only essential items. We often only see rough exteriors of Western protagonists, hardened and defensive. This makes establishing a relationship with anything nonessential really illuminating.

This exercise will help you create items your character keeps but doesn't really need. Their reasons for doing this will tell you volumes.

### Something Homemade

This is something you made for yourself. It might serve a purpose, but it doesn't do so effectively. You'd be better off replacing it or dropping your craft, but something keeps you going.

- ✿ This is supposed to... (choose one):
  - Help me find my way
  - Keep me organized
  - Defend me from threats
  - Keep me healthy
  - Protect me from the elements

- ✿ It's flawed because... (choose two):

- It's the wrong size
- It doesn't last
- It keeps needing repair
- It has holes that it shouldn't
- It only works in certain conditions
- It's more difficult to use than it should be

 What is it?

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 Does everyone need something like this to survive? Why is it essential for you?

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 How do you handle situations when this object fails you?

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 What about this item makes you feel proud? How have you made yours unique?

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 What do you hope for when you make or repair this item?

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## Something Gifted to You

This can be an essential item or something completely impractical. It was given to you by someone you care about or is tied to an event that was important to you. That sentimental connection makes it difficult to let go, even if you probably should.

\* Who gave this to you? Choose one:

- Someone you lost
- Someone you love
- Someone you saved
- A person or organization you respect
- Someone who made you feel something you don't normally feel

✍ What do you remember when you look at it?

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✍ Why do you want to be close to this person or moment?

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\* How is this item inconvenient? Choose two:

- It takes up too much space
- It's too heavy
- It leads strangers to the wrong conclusion
- It's outdated or inefficient
- It's costly to maintain or protect

 What have you sacrificed to keep carrying this?

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 When did you nearly give this up or lose it? What made you hang on to it?

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## Something You Found

This is something that should be meaningless, but it has an ineffable hold on you. It's something you have no connection to outside of what you project onto it.

 Where do you keep this object? Choose one:

- A hidden place where no one will find it
- Somewhere it is always close to you
- Shifting about your packs and pockets
- Somewhere that makes it easy to forget you have it most of the time

 This fascinates you because... (choose two):

- Of where or how you found it
- You don't know its purpose
- It has an extremely distinct look
- You feel like it holds a secret
- You want to be a part of its story

 What is it?

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💡 Did this object have a previous owner? Whom do you imagine them to be?

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💡 What hope or fantasy do you have surrounding this object?

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💡 Have you ever shown this to anyone? If so, who?

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## Something You Savor

This is a luxury or rarity—something that you love but cannot normally have. Although you own this, you keep yourself from enjoying it, waiting for the perfect time or place. Until then it takes up space, taunting you.

✳️ You are hesitant to indulge because... (choose one):

- The joy it brings is fleeting
- It is one of the last of its kind
- It can only be appreciated once
- It would be too easy to waste

✳️ You tell yourself you will indulge... (choose two):

- In the right company
- After reaching a goal

- On a far-off date
- When you are worthy
- One day very soon

 What is it?

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 How did you come to own it?

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 How do you know it is special?

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 How do you keep it safe?

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## Something You Need to Get Rid Of

This is something you plan to eventually get rid of, but you are struggling to find the right opportunity. It was easy to justify picking it up because you knew that you would be rid of it one day, but as time goes on, that seems less and less likely.

 You are looking to... (choose two):

- Deliver this to the right hands
- Properly honor it

- See that it finds good use
- See it cared for or repaired
- Fulfill a difficult request

✳ That is difficult because... (choose two):

- It feels like only you appreciate it
- You don't have the guidance you feel you need
- The proper place is hard to reach
- You won't be able to fix a mistake
- The longer it takes, the higher your standards become

✍ What is it?

---

✍ Who made you the shepherd of this object?

---

✍ Whom do you feel like you would be letting down if you left it in the wrong place?

---

✍ How long has it been with you? Is that longer than you felt you would carry it when it first became yours?

---

✍ Who offered to take it from you? Why did you refuse?

---

---

## Stand Out in a Crowd

The details you choose to focus on when describing your character not only define your look; they can also reveal clues about your backstory and personality. There is a reason PCs are chosen among all the characters in a crowded saloon. Your narration can reflect that.

This exercise helps you create a tableau defining the ways **Intellect**, **Physique**, **Sociability**, **Lawfulness**, and **Skill** interact with your character. There are four expressions of these details:

- **Worn:** Clothing, accessories, and other decorations. Focus on quality, color, and age.
- **Carried:** Tools, weapons, and other useful objects you have with you. Focus on what they do and how they show use.
- **Marked:** Bodily indicators like scars, wrinkles, and tattoos. Focus on what they say and how your character feels about that.
- **Projected:** Behavior and activity. Focus on what you are doing, how you hold yourself, and how your feelings show.

Each expression has at least one **strong** prompt that will help indicate the ways your character is competent, and a **weak** prompt that indicates the way your character struggles. A few have **mixed** prompts that change depending on your answers. Use the prompts to create a defining tableau for your character.

### Intellect

These details illuminate the power of your mind. Defining a strong detail shows you are educated and capable. Defining a weak

detail shows you don't value study or that you are foolish.

Worn	
A pin, broach, or signet ring denoting a college education, officer rank, or membership in an exclusive intellectual social club	
 <b>What is this organization dedicated to?</b>	 <b>Is it made of fine or simple materials? Does it show signs of age?</b>
A major article of clothing like a jacket, shirt, or pants that have an obvious flaw a cannier person would have avoided	
 <b>What story did the salesperson tell you to make you buy this?</b>	 <b>Do you regret your purchase, feel pride in it, or both?</b>
Carried	
A specialized tool attached to an educated trade like a medical bag, a compass, or a fountain pen	
 <b>How is your tool displayed? Are you using it?</b>	 <b>What unique marking does it bear?</b>
A clearly used sham medication like snake oil	
 <b>What condition is it meant to treat?</b>	 <b>What have you added to the sales pitch that got you to buy it?</b>
Marked	
Fingers marked with charcoal or ink from writing or drawing	
 <b>Aside from the markings, do your hands show signs of strength or wear from labor?</b>	 <b>How fresh are the marks? Were you working recently, or is it as if these marks are worn into your skin?</b>
An injury from an easily avoidable mistake	
 <b>How serious is the injury?</b>	 <b>Are you embarrassed by your error or happy to share the tale?</b>
Projected	
An activity that isolates you from drinking and socializing, like reading, minding a ledger, or studying a map	
 <b>What is the object you are occupied with?</b>	 <b>Are you enjoying the atmosphere or bothered by others?</b>
Trying to balance a thing on your face that will clearly fall and ruin your night	
 <b>Is this for your own amusement or part</b>	 <b>How have you been tricked?</b>

of a wager?

## Physique

These details focus on the power of your body. Strong prompts will define aestheticism and size. Weak prompts will define delicacy.

Worn	
Your clothing looks undersized or had to be modified to help you move	
 Where is it patched, worn, or strained?	 Are your muscles displayed to minimize the strain on your clothes or obvious beneath the tailoring?
Your clothing looks oversized or needs belts and suspenders to stay on you	
 Does this make you look younger or smaller than you actually are?	 Despite the fit, is the clothing fashionable?
Carried	
You have a pack or tool of obvious heft that you carry easily	
 Are you excitedly talking about it or casually holding it?	 How do you use it to gesture or communicate?
You use a delicate tool to accomplish a task most people don't need one for	
 What task do you struggle with?	 How have you personalized this tool?
Marked	
You have bruises, lines, or calluses from an activity that conditioned part of your body	
 When are they most noticeable?	 Do they betray your profession or could they be mistaken for something else?
Your hands, complexion, or limbs look delicate and almost fragile	
 Does this make you look strange or beautiful?	 What activity do your features complement? What would they make look strange?
Projected	
Your voice either reflects your body or contrasts it	
 Does it have the power to fill the room, or is it quiet and understated?	 Is your tone jovial, gruff, sultry, sweet, or musical?
Your movements are noticeably confident or awkward	

 What does the way you walk call attention to?

 How do you hold a drink?

## Sociability

This indicates how open and comfortable you are in the company of others. Picking a strong detail means you are charming or friendly. Picking a weak detail means you are standoffish or awkward.

### Worn

An accessory or jewelry with a whimsical shape or pattern

 Which interest of yours does this reflect?

 What line do you have prepared for when people ask you about it?

A major article of clothing like a shirt, dress, or jacket that shows evidence of you being in a fight

 How recent was the encounter? Is there blood?

 What weapon damaged the clothing?

### Carried

Something to play a game, like a deck of cards, dice, or a board and pieces

 How do you handle these materials with a flourish?

 What is unique in the design of your object?

A unique weapon carried openly

 How is this designed or held with intimidation in mind?

 How did you further customize it to signal you are a threat?

### Marked

Makeup, styling, and/or perfume that attracts attention

 How does this decoration showcase your wealth or expertise?

 When you have caught the eye of someone you like, how do you signal they should approach?

A style of dress that is clearly outdated or culturally out of step

 Are you aware that you look different?

 Whom are you talking to? Do they seem comfortable?

### Projected

A crowd of people gathered around you

 What emotion are they displaying?	 Are they clearly entertained, in awe, reverently attentive?
A confrontation you are a part of	
 Who is the clear aggressor?	 How can an observer tell what you are planning to do if it escalates?

## Lawfulness

This indicates where you generally operate in society. Picking a strong trait here implies you uphold, or your interests are favored by, the law. Picking a weak trait implies that you are a criminal or keep unsavory company.

### Worn

A fine set of matching clothes signifying your status within society

 Are you associating with all sorts or sticking with folks dressed like you?	 Are they obviously new or just well cared for?
---	--

An accessory like a hat that could easily conceal your identity if needed

 Are you sitting in a place you can be seen?	 Whom do you appear invested in hiding from?
---	---

### Carried

A uniform or badge of lawful office

 Does it look new or old?	 Are you at ease or alert?
--	---

An innocuous-looking object that is actually a weapon

 Is this an appropriated tool or something designed to deceive?	 Do you carry it in a way that implies it's there for self-defense or to surprise a victim?
--	--

### Marked

Battle scars that you made an effort to conceal, or that cause you to dress in a way that makes you appear respectable

 Is there one significant scar or so many it's hard for any to stand out?	 Do you self-consciously attend to your dressings to ensure scars stay covered, or do you not pay them much thought?
--	---

Scars or tattoos that chronicle a relationship with violence or outlaw achievements

 Are these marks you gained voluntarily	 How is it clear that you collected these
--	--

or something inflicted on you?

over time?

### Projected

Certain folks make a point to stop and pay you respects, whereas others regard you with caution

 Which group is dressed well?

 Which group do you look most comfortable around?

Someone buys you a drink

 What did they get you? How expensive was it?

 What is their expression like when you acknowledge their gesture?

## Skill

This indicates your ability with different tasks. A strong detail indicates what you're best at, while a weak one shows what you are trying to learn.

### Worn

A set of old clothes associated with a specific profession

 How do they show use? How have they been cared for or maintained?

 Who might this make you useful to?

A set of new clothes associated with a specific profession

 What detail on them is unblemished in an eye-catching way

 How are they damaged in an irresponsible way?

### Carried

A rare and specialized tool or weapon that takes real skill to use properly

 How do you carry it in a way that makes it readily available?

 What about your relationship with this object is reflected in your posture or movements?

A showy status symbol associated with a trade

 How have you positioned it to be noticed?

 What would an expert notice about it that betrays your inexperience?

### Marked

Hands shaped by your work

 How are your hands shaped and how do they move? Are they strong and thick?

 What is noticeable about the quality of your skin and nails? Do you have calluses?

Long and graceful?	Where might they be?
An injury or painful posture from a repeated, unnecessary stress you put on your body because of your inexperience	
 What was your mistake?	 Who is making fun of you for it?
Projected	
You are regarding something with a careful eye or curiosity because of your knowledge and experience	
 Why did it catch your attention?	 Do you want to know more about it, or are you calculating a threat?
A situation where you are nervous or awkward	
 Who, if anyone, are you with?	 What is obvious about you in the way you hold yourself?

## Trusty Steed

Western heroes often travel on the backs of beasts of burden, a living thing that helps you get from one place to another and joins you on most adventures. Your steed is a tool, a lifeline, and a companion. This role is traditionally played by a horse, but in RPGs it can be any number of creatures.

This exercise uses the priority system to add a bit of character to your steed. Assign priorities for the following categories of **Loyalty**, **Temperament**, **Speed**, **Endurance**, and **Cleverness** from 1 to 5 without repeating a number, with 1 making that aspect more beneficial or important to your character, and 5 making it unimportant or detrimental to your character.

Loyalty\_\_\_\_\_

Speed\_\_\_\_\_

Temperament\_\_\_\_\_

Endurance\_\_\_\_\_

Cleverness\_\_\_\_\_

Now read the prompts that correspond to each rank to create your concept. (For example, if you ranked Loyalty 1, you would follow the first direction in the Loyalty list.)

## Loyalty

This determines how much your animal cares for you. On the road, your steed can be your most loyal friend or a pain in the rear.

1. Your steed is the most faithful companion imaginable. It follows your orders, would cross any distance to find you if you were missing, and risk its health and safety to serve you well.
2. This steed is indeed loyal, but it cares more about you than your commands. In certain situations it might break free from enclosures, seek you out, or attack people it sees as threats to you. This doesn't happen often, but it's a risk.
3. This steed trusts and maybe even loves you. It is more patient and comfortable around you than other riders. However, it is still an animal, and instinct occasionally overrides training.
4. This animal is stubborn and troublesome. It seems to defy you willfully in some cases. It always seems to act up at inconvenient moments, but it's not usually dangerous.
5. This animal is actively malicious. There were even one or two occasions where it put your life in danger. The only thing that stops it from killing you is its own self-interest. When you aren't in danger, you have to watch your back.

## Temperament

This determines how well your animal behaves in extreme circumstances and how it treats everyone who isn't you.

1. This animal has the perfect temperament. In the heat of the moment, it is neither frightening nor flustered. It is kind and gentle to all friends and wary of enemies. It will occasionally act up, but only in situations where it sees danger that you don't.
2. This animal is completely unflappable. In most circumstances, this is a great quality in a steed. However, it is so calm it might not run from danger unless ordered.
3. This animal is like many others of its type. In familiar situations that it was trained and bred for, it will act as expected. It has one quirk that makes it unpredictable in certain circumstances, like fear of a particular predator or an aversion to water.
4. This animal has some eccentricities. It might jump at loud noises or act defensively among strangers. Not just anyone can take its reins, and it's hard to leave it unsupervised.
5. This animal is the devil on legs. There is a very thin line that separates it from a particularly malicious wild beast. Anyone but you attempting to ride it is courting mortal peril. It might not be trying to make trouble for you, but it relishes making trouble for the world.

## Speed

This determines how fast your steed can go and how fit it is to compete with other animals.

1. This is one of the fastest animals on the planet. You have seen this creature outrun animals and vehicles that are supposed to be much faster. Not only that; it has an awareness and love of its own speed and will push to compete in desperate situations.
2. This animal is certainly one of the fastest of its type. In ideal conditions it can easily compete with creatures born and bred

for racing. This speed isn't miraculous, and you'll have to rely on good handling to get it to perform in extreme circumstances.

3. This animal is not much faster than others of its type. Most of the time that is plenty fast enough. In extreme circumstances you will need to push it to perform. It will never be able to compete with racing animals.
4. This animal may be a bit past its prime. It struggles with speed, and most of the time you take things at an easier pace. There is a possibility that you can push it under extreme conditions, but it is a serious risk, and you'll need to take care helping it recover.
5. This animal is much slower than others of its type. You usually need to add a few days to your travel plans to accommodate its pace. If speed is critical, you are better off leaving this steed in the stable.

## Endurance

This determines how far your steed can travel, how hard it can work, for how long, and in what conditions.

1. This animal is dauntless. You have never seen it tire, and you may never. Through any condition, any terrain, over any distance, and even through injury, this beast will keep moving and performing at the top of its abilities.
2. This creature can push itself beyond the limits of normal living things. When other creatures are tired, struggling with difficulty, or wracked with pain—your steed continues on. There are limits to its endurance though. Pushing past limits is still pushing.
3. This creature is strong, healthy, and capable. It can move over long distances, work for long periods, and even struggle through adversity—that's what it was bred and trained to do.

However, there are limits. If it is overworked, overdriven, or even forced to work in bad conditions or terrain, you'll risk serious injury.

4. This creature is brushing against age or injury. It can work fine under normal conditions, but you have to be gentle and cautious. Pushing this animal at all will put it at serious risk.
5. This creature is well past its prime and needs to take things easy. There might be a few tasks it can do without problems, but you have to take more time traveling and treat your steed with special care.

## Cleverness

This determines how many commands your steed can learn, how well it follows them, and its common sense. A clever steed can solve problems for you, and a less or too clever steed will cause new ones.

1. There is something unnatural about this creature. If you haven't noticed, it's because it is actively fooling you. This creature might be a god, a person trapped in the form of an animal, or some other supernatural being. One thing is certain: It is too damn smart to be what it appears to be.
2. This creature is brilliant. Not only can it think through complex situations where most animals would be stumped; it also occasionally outthinks you and your enemies.
3. This creature is clever for its type. It can learn and follow an impressive number of commands. However, it is helpless in pretty much all situations an animal would typically be helpless. If you do dangerous work, you can't always count on this creature taking care of itself.
4. This creature isn't very bright. It only knows a few simple commands, and it muddles those fairly frequently. On top of

that, it often wanders obviously into trouble.

5. This creature is actually intelligent but only in ways that cause chaos. It will open enclosures, remove objects from heavy carts, and get into treats whenever it can. It can learn commands, but it is difficult to motivate and instruct.

## Quilt

Every hero carries the weight of their adventures with them. Sometimes character growth is really hard to see. Taking time to contentiously look back can show you how far you have come. Westerns provide you a perfect object to support self-reflection and track your growth via quilt creation. Everyone needs a blanket out in the wilderness, and one with patches representing your character's experiences of their own adventures will help you connect their past to their present.

This is an exercise that helps you develop a system of thematic iconography and use it to create an object your character uses to remember their journey.

### Ain't That a Little Domestic?

At first it might feel like a quilt is an odd choice for a rugged Western hero, but it's important to remember that a quilt is a practical necessity for survival and that traveling from place to place leaves people with long idle periods. A form of self-expression that also addresses a basic need is exactly the sort of hobby you'd want to adopt. It's also accessible to characters who might not be literate. If your character doesn't seem like the sort to sew a quilt, choosing to have them make one only makes them more interesting.

## Color

Colors are a simple and powerful way to tie emotion to an image. While there are plenty of real-world cultural meanings for different

colors, fiction gives you the freedom to tie meaning to your character's perspective.

Based on your character's history, consider the emotions on the following chart. What colors might your character associate with them? They can be simple, like green or brown, subtle like periwinkle and seafoam, or even complex patterns like paisley and tartan. Don't worry about trying to make a palette that fits well together. Quilts are meant to be colorful and complicated, just like stories.

Emotions	Colors
Love	
Hate	
Fear	
Courage	
Peace	
Anger	
Sorrow	
Joy	
Shame	
Pride	

The listed emotions are suggestions for a foundation; you may find that your character's story needs more specific feelings. Feel free to include your own ideas on this list.

## Symbols

Quilts are both pieces of art and objects of utility. A character might use one for remembrance or to keep the chill away. It's personal and something that anyone they travel with is likely to see. Rendering a story on patches through symbols allows your character a measure of privacy. A character might also choose to

use symbols to reflect some aspect of their culture, or just make the scenes on their quilt easier to render.

🎲 Roll 1d12 to find a prompt, then assign each to one of the meanings on the following chart:

1. A common animal
2. A plant
3. An uncommon animal
4. A body part
5. A person
6. A supernatural being
7. A geological feature
8. A natural phenomenon (like weather)
9. A tool
10. A natural object
11. A created object
12. An abstract symbol

Meaning	Symbol
You	
Your Family	
Your Companions	
Your Past	
Justice	
Injustice	
Death	
Life	
Violence	
Kindness	
Victory	
Defeat	

Just like with colors, you may find your story has a need for more specific meanings. Add in concepts you feel might be missing to represent your character's journey.

### **Stitching the Patches**

A character with a quilt creates patches to represent significant periods in their life. They might not make one for every adventure, achievement, or loved one—but you'll know when the moment is right to make a new patch. Some events might even require more than one patch.

- ✿ First, state why you have decided to make a patch:
  - I want to remember something or someone
  - I want to honor something or someone
  - I want to express a feeling I can't speak aloud
  - I need something to do with my hands
  - I want to make something in my head real
  
- ✿ Choose a phrase to describe the fabric on this patch based on your available materials:
  - Fancy and delicate
  - Soft and comforting
  - Rough and strong
  - Stained and threadbare
  
- ✿ Choose two words that best describe your stitching work:
  - Confident
  - Enthusiastic
  - Messy
  - Methodical
  - Detached

- Overworked
- Decorative

✿ Describe your patch and consider these questions:

- What symbols do you use?
- What colors are they?
- How long does it take you to complete it?
- How do you feel when you look at it?

### Filling In the Blanks

This is a perfect exercise for tracking your character's experiences while they are out adventuring, but they probably started their quilt before they first rode out. To create patches based on their past, consider:

✍ When your character first left home

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---

✍ The first time their life was at risk

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---

✍ A goal they'd like to reach someday

---

---

✍ A patch gifted to them by a loved one

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## Nothing Left to Lose

We meet some Western protagonists at a point where they are willing to face death. It could be for a good cause, like protecting a community from wicked people. However, a person with nothing to lose is also capable of throwing everything at a grudge with a person they have just met.

Make choices and answer the following prompts to determine what you have lost and how it made you ready to do things most people never will.

### Hacking and Slashing

This exercise was designed as a journey. If your character hasn't quite reached the point of having nothing left to lose—but they are on the way—you can choose to do just a few of these.

This exercise is also a good fit for characters in x-punk and horror settings by changing only a few details. It can even fit certain sci-fi and fantasy settings.

### My Love

This can be an individual or a group that you have lost your connection with. They might be dead or simply estranged. Losing them hurt you in a way that makes it feel unsafe to get close to anyone ever again.

✳ You lost a... (choose one):

- Family member
- Lover
- Child

- Community or culture

✳ Through... (choose one):

- Rejection
- Betrayal
- Exile
- Death
- Destruction

✳ That you believe was caused by your... (choose one):

- Failure
- Helplessness
- Weakness
- Otherness

✳ In a moment of... (choose one):

- Traumatic upheaval
- Somber regret
- Heated emotion
- Bitter liberation
- Silent resignation

✍ Why does it feel as if reconciliation is impossible?

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✍ When have you assumed kindness or acceptance was hollow or something you could never deserve?

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- ✍ When you feel someone is getting too close, how do you usually try to push them away?
- 
- 

## My Feeling of Safety

In Westerns, many people live without homes or even a sense of place. For you, it is a step further; you wander without a hope of ever finding a home. Either your past will catch up with you or you will eventually destroy any peace you find.

- ✳ You will never be safe because you are... (choose two):

- Unfit for society
- Only seen as a threat
- Only skilled at facing danger
- Running from things you carry with you
- Running from something that is hunting you

- ✳ Your best shot at surviving is... (choose one):

- Running
- Hiding

- ✍ What is the longest period of time you spent anywhere? What forced you to move on?
- 
- 

- ✍ What is the most terrible thing you have been called by a stranger? What moved them to say that to you?

- 
- 
- 
- ✍ What moments bring you the closest to peace? How do you show caution even then?
- 
- 

## My Sense of Identity

Many of the places you travel and people you meet see you as a stranger—a person unknown and unknowable. You have come to see yourself that way as well. You used to have an idea of what you wanted from life, but now the only thing that keeps you going is momentum.

- 
- 
- ✍ What dream did you used to have for yourself?
- 
- 

- ✍ Why was that important and even essential to the person you used to be?
- 
- 

- ✍ Why would it be impossible for you to chase that dream now?
- 
-



What skill or artifact do you carry from your broken dream?

Now instead of identifying yourself with this dream, what do you say you are when people ask? Choose one or make your own answer:

- A wanderer
- A stranger
- A hired hand
- Nobody

## My Innocence

The world is harsh and full of terrible things. You know this because you have endured many of them. You also believe that you have *become* one of them, crossing a line that separates you from normal people.

You crossed a line... (choose one):

- Trying to survive
- Trying to right a wrong
- Trying to reclaim something you lost
- Because you were lost to passion
- Because you thought you wanted to

You gained a shameful and fleeting reward... (choose one or two):

- Revenge
- Comfort

- Wealth
- Notoriety
- A feeling of power
- Respect from the wicked

✍ Why can the terrible thing you did never be undone?

---

✍ How long did it take for your reward to turn to ash in your mouth? What was that moment like?

---

✍ Apart from yourself, who would be most disappointed in you? Did you make an effort to confess to them?

---

✍ Did crossing this line make it easier to do other terrible things or harder?

---

✍ Have you tried to seek absolution for your deeds? If so, why does every effort fall short of your standard for yourself? If not, what is holding you back?

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## My Fear of Death

You have faced death many times in your travels, but a recent brush with it has left you with the knowledge that living no longer matters to you. It's not that you seek death, but you don't feel the same fear you see in others.

✳ The encounter with death that showed me I had lost my fear was... (choose one):

- A fight with another person
- A struggle against nature
- A clash with impossible odds
- Pushing myself to my absolute limit

✍ What moment almost killed you? Why did you live?

---

---

✍ How did you react to this revelation? How did that surprise you?

---

---

✳ Your lack of fear has enabled you to do things that most people are incapable of... (choose two):

- Saving lives
- Confronting dangerous people
- Claiming valuable prizes
- Avoiding terrible consequences

- Recovering from terrible harm

✍ What did you expect to feel after doing these things? What did you feel instead?

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✍ Who has noticed your lack of fear? What did they say to you and how did it make you feel?

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## Western Companion Statements

When you want to start playing right away, it's sometimes easier to develop character histories and relationships with your companions if you have a little spark to get you started.

This exercise lists quotes from your character's perspective, giving thoughts and history about the people around them. Simply fill in the blanks with PC and NPC names to give yourself a strong foundational perspective to start your game.

### Positive

These quotes establish the foundation for positive relationships, centering on admiration, cooperation, and affection. I generally recommend you use these for your fellow PCs. There can still be conflict in positive relationships, but it's easier to manage party dynamics if you start out aligned.

“\_\_\_\_\_ knows how to handle themselves, which means they are worth taking risks to help.”

“I have heard many beautiful voices in my time, but none sweeter than \_\_\_\_\_.”

“I thought all the beauty and poetry had left the world, remembered only in the rambling pages of dead artists. That is, until I saw \_\_\_\_\_.”

“\_\_\_\_\_ hands don’t have any calluses, but I can see they have strength enough to build them.”

“I can’t deny that there is a part of me that wants to be like \_\_\_\_\_.”

“\_\_\_\_\_ is proof enough that some good can come from a body devoting a lifetime to book study.”

“A few years back I was caught in a mudslide. Horrible thing, killed dozens. The only thing I really remember about it is \_\_\_\_\_ pulling me out.”

“Losing a fortune drinking and laughing while playing cards with \_\_\_\_\_ is money well spent.”

“The animals trust \_\_\_\_\_. That’s how I knew there was something gentle beneath that rough exterior.”

“I know for a fact that \_\_\_\_\_ could spot a candle at four hundred yards during a storm. It’s only been useful once.”

“Plenty of folks are quick, but \_\_\_\_\_ is careful too.”

“I can see the way \_\_\_\_\_’s eyes light up whenever I show them something. It makes me wish I had more to teach.”

"I have always admired how sharp a dresser \_\_\_\_\_ is, even out here. They have the kind of refinement I wish I could afford."

"People complain about \_\_\_\_\_, but they treat their animals well, they treat their tools well, and they look out for folks on a job. That's the only kind of manners that matter."

"Sometimes I wish I had \_\_\_\_\_ faith. Even if I can't make myself believe half of what they say, I'm happy to hear them say it."

## Negative

These quotes establish negative relationships centering on conflict, rivalry, and distaste. I generally recommend these for NPCs and use complicated prompts to find conflict in relationships with other PCs.

"If \_\_\_\_\_ is smiling, it means something horrible is going on somewhere."

"\_\_\_\_\_ thinks upholding the law is just doing whatever rich folks tell them to do."

"I'd make \_\_\_\_\_ swear on a Bible, but I'm sure it would burn their skin."

"You'll never hear a complaint about \_\_\_\_\_ because they kill everyone who tells the truth."

"\_\_\_\_\_ could play naked and I'd still be checking their sleeves for cards."

"If I were dying of thirst, I would refuse a glass of water if \_\_\_\_\_ was giving it to me."

“\_\_\_\_\_ will die on any hill he can find.”

“When the wolves are howling at the moon, I like to imagine it’s nature’s way of cussing out \_\_\_\_\_.”

“\_\_\_\_\_ will do anything they can get away with. Like swallowing powdered glass, it’s never anything large enough to make you think you need to put a stop to it, but it will kill you sure enough.”

“They could devote a whole section of the cemetery to folks \_\_\_\_\_ has killed.”

“\_\_\_\_\_ has a talent for telling folks whatever they need to hear in order to work themselves to death.”

“\_\_\_\_\_ can convince a community of good folks to watch someone starve to death over ‘propriety.’ And they can do it with a smile on their face.”

“I would have called \_\_\_\_\_ family at one point. By the time I found out they didn’t see me the same way, their knife was already in my back.”

“I don’t hold much stock in religion, and \_\_\_\_\_ is one of the reasons why.”

“\_\_\_\_\_ is so stubborn they’d let hell swallow the earth before admitting opening the gate was letting in heat.”

## Complicated

These prompts establish complicated relationships intermingling positive and negative elements. These are perfect for both PCs and NPCs where you want extra dramatic tension at the center of the story.

“\_\_\_\_\_ is a bit of a bastard, and part of me hates their guts. But there is no one I’d rather have in charge.”

“I think \_\_\_\_\_ is a good person, but they have been weathering a bad world so long that I’m not sure how much of them is left.”

“\_\_\_\_\_ wants all the right things for the world, but they are willing to do the most distasteful things in order to get them.”

“I don’t like \_\_\_\_\_; they watch me too closely. I’m afraid I’ll teach them something awful.”

“\_\_\_\_\_ is lost. I’m afraid if I try to find them, I’ll get lost too.”

“I have feelings for \_\_\_\_\_, but love is like a mirage. You might use the last of your strength running toward it only to find it was never there.”

“I can’t face the things I’ve done. I definitely can’t face \_\_\_\_\_ because I know they will try to forgive me.”

“Winning respect from \_\_\_\_\_ is the greatest feeling in the world. But their disapproval burns like a brand.”

“I don’t understand why \_\_\_\_\_ seems to want to be unhappy, but it kills me to watch them push people away.”

“\_\_\_\_\_ used to make the hard trail a bit easier by being cheerful. They have changed, and I don’t know if they’ll ever be the same. Now traveling with them is harder than traveling without them.”

“I want to see \_\_\_\_\_, but I don’t want them to see who I have become.”

“\_\_\_\_\_ is nice, but they seem determined to poke rattlesnakes. Without someone watching, they could get a lot of people killed.”

“I used to feel closer to \_\_\_\_\_ than anyone. Now I feel like they are hiding something from me, and I can’t tell what it is.”

“For the longest time, \_\_\_\_\_ has shown me the right path. Now I can feel them wandering astray, and I don’t know how to get them to listen to me.”

“\_\_\_\_\_ clearly knows so much more about this life than I do, but I can’t stand the thought of learning the lessons that gave them that knowledge, because I have seen what it turned them into.”



## All Genres

Many players are drawn to RPGs because of the creative freedom these games provide. While many games construct their rules to help emulate different genres or create guided experiences, ultimately the players at the table determine what a game will be like. If it feels right to the group, a rule can be bent, adjusted, selectively applied, or ignored entirely.

The previous chapters in this book constructed exercises to aid the creative process for specific genres. Even those can be altered to suit your needs. You can use a Western exercise to develop a sci-fi character to underscore your relationship to themes of survival and isolation, or a superhero exercise for a fantasy character to emphasize the idea of living a double life. This book is a tool kit, and you can use those tools as you like to customize your experience.

Of course, the freedom in RPGs is so robust that even something like a genre might feel too constricting, which is why this chapter features exercises that will easily work with all genres. They focus on helping develop truly open-ended backstory elements, tying backstory into an ongoing game, and making specific character archetypes work. This chapter doesn't include any d20 question exercises because those are too open-ended to be useful, but you'll find a variety of other creative activities.

## I Have Never...

Work alongside your group whenever you can when creating a backstory. Many groups will make time to host a Session Zero, where everyone gathers to collaborate on characters and setting before the game begins. Without structure, it can be difficult for some groups to figure out how to make the most of these sessions and really work together.

This exercise uses a common party game to collaboratively create a backstory as a group. You'll need all your fellow players, a d20, and a d6, and everyone will start by putting up all fingers on one hand.

### Roll for History

🎲 With the rest of your group, roll a d20 to pick a random life experience from the following list:

- 1.** Left home
- 2.** Faced mortal danger
- 3.** Claimed a treasure
- 4.** Fell in love
- 5.** Lost a love
- 6.** Was betrayed
- 7.** Betrayed another
- 8.** Lost faith
- 9.** Lost a close loved one
- 10.** Solved a mystery
- 11.** Held an important secret
- 12.** Been responsible for others
- 13.** Got in a fight
- 14.** Went hungry
- 15.** Held a position of real power

- 16.** Felt alone
- 17.** Suffered a defeat
- 18.** Committed a crime/Got arrested
- 19.** Killed someone
- 20.** Died

Decide if your character went through that experience. If they did, let the group know by putting one of your fingers down.

### **Expand Your History**

Starting to the left of the GM, each PC will either explore a moment in their character's history or determine how their character feels about the possibility of facing that experience in the future. If you put a finger down, follow the instructions in **You Have**. If you left your finger up, follow the instructions in **You Have Not**. Once those activities are complete, play passes to the PC on your left. Once everyone has addressed the experience, roll a new one.

#### **YOU HAVE**

If you put a finger down, establish when in your character's past this event took place. Then explain the basic outline of the event to your group. Once you have established what you feel is important, the GM will add to the story.

 GMs roll 1d6 or choose one of the following options:

- 1. Add a detail:** Add a piece of new information to the story that complicates matters or provides the character with privileged information. The PC states how their character feels about this information.
- 2. Make a connection:** Establish a link between this experience and another PC or an aspect of the setting. The PCs decide if they understand each other's involvement.

- 3. Create an artifact:** Create an object related to this character's experience. The PC decides if they possess this artifact or if they are looking for it.
- 4. Present a mystery:** Establish a question the character has about the event that they are seeking an answer for. The PC decides if this mystery haunts or excites them.
- 5. Present a challenge:** Give the character a goal or unfinished business related to this event. The PC decides if they are actively pursuing this goal or trying to avoid the responsibility.
- 6. Request a secret:** Choose an aspect of the experience the character holds as a secret. The PC chooses why they want to hide that information.

After the GM has added their detail, one of the other PCs must ask a follow-up question about the experience that has not been covered. This allows you to add more detail to the event or to further explore how your character feels about it.

## YOU HAVE NOT

-  If you left your finger up, roll 1d6 and answer the corresponding question:
1. What do you fear most about this experience?
  2. When you imagine this happening, what comes to mind? Who is involved?
  3. How would you feel about going through life never experiencing this?
  4. What about this experience excites or inspires curiosity in you?
  5. What is the most precious thing you would sacrifice to have or to avoid this experience?
  6. Decide:

- A. You actually have had this experience but aren't aware that you have. Ask your GM why you don't remember.
- B. While this didn't happen to you, it happened to someone close, making you very familiar with it. Ask your GM who this was.

After answering your question, another PC in your group must ask a follow-up that allows you to expand on your answer.

## Ending the Game

The game ends after at least one character has put five fingers down or your group has considered eight experiences. Once everyone completes the You Have and You Have Not activities for the last round, PCs answer final questions based on how many fingers you put down.

### THE MOST

If you were one of the PCs who put down the most fingers, answer the following questions:

 Which experience was the most traumatic?

---

 Which experience is your character the most grateful for?

---

 What aspect of your character's past are you most excited to explore in-game?

---

### THE LEAST

If you were one of the PCs who put down the fewest fingers, answer the following questions:

- 💡 Does your character consider themselves inexperienced? If so, when are they sensitive about it? If not, what do they consider more important?
- 

- 💡 Who in this group does your character look up to? Ask their player what they have told you about their adventures.
- 

- 💡 Which experience is your character most curious about?
- 

## IN BETWEEN

If you did not put down the most or the fewest fingers, answer the following questions:

- 💡 Which of the experiences are you most interested in your character having during the game?
- 

- 💡 What goal is most important to your character?
- 

- 💡 Decide if your character admires, cares for, or pities one of the PCs who put down the most or the fewest fingers. Explain why.
-

## My Character Would Never...

It's always frustrating to have a game derailed by players deciding the action doesn't fit their character. Reluctant heroes can be fun to watch and to play, but we don't want them to disrupt the game.

The secret to playing a reluctant hero is providing caveats to the traits that would normally drive them away from action and giving them reasons to participate in the adventure despite their complaints.

For this exercise, choose the statements that reflect your reluctant hero's worldview. For each statement, choose two to three exceptions that allow them to go against their own wishes and stay in the story.

✿ I'd rather be studying, but... (choose two or three):

- I need to test my ideas
- There is a missing text that haunts me
- I have found a discrepancy I need to verify
- No one has written about what I am most passionate about
- I need to find a student

✿ I think my work here is so important, but... (choose two or three):

- I am desperate to fund it
- I need materials that are impossible to get here
- I need to find people who will appreciate it
- I have been disgraced and need to do something to prove myself
- It depends on me locating a missing colleague

✿ I only look out for myself, but... (choose two or three):

- I'll help people if I think I can get a reward
- I look after people who remind me of myself

- Anyone who messes with stuff I care about is messing with me
- I love a challenge
- I'm hot tempered and easy to goad into action

✿ I don't like other people, but... (choose two or three):

- I'll take my anger out on anything that reminds me of the ways I have been mistreated
- I don't like watching them suffer
- There are threatening forces that I hate way more
- I don't want to behave selfishly like they do
- I want to protect something adjacent to them

✿ I'd rather avoid responsibilities, but... (choose two or three):

- I have a destiny that will make responsibility find me
- I'll take risks to have fun
- I genuinely care for people and will work to protect them
- I care about people who take responsibility seriously
- I have a deep sense of justice that calls me to action

✿ I prefer peace and quiet, but... (choose two or three):

- I will go to extreme lengths to preserve my solitude
- I don't know what to do when people aren't put off by my initial attempts to drive them away
- I care about something more than my own life
- I can't find peace unless I have settled all my affairs
- I'm emotional and easy to provoke

✿ I'm avoiding a painful past, but... (choose two or three):

- Part of me yearns for redemption
- I'll work to prevent someone from making my mistakes
- I genuinely care about people and won't let someone get hurt

- I'll take a chance to get revenge if I see it
- Part of me would rather go out in a blaze of glory

✿ I'm too smart to take risks, but... (choose two or three):

- I believe in something I'm willing to die for
- I feel responsible for people who do
- It's easy for me to get distracted by my thoughts
- I'm obsessed with learning about inherently dangerous things
- I love solving difficult problems

✿ I want to be normal, but... (choose two or three):

- My abilities cause problems that I can't avoid
- My "normal" has been irreparably destroyed
- My attempts to be normal make me stand out more
- I actually don't enjoy normal things
- I need something before I can ignore what makes my life unusual

✿ I don't want any trouble, but... (choose two or three):

- I'm clumsy or unlucky and accidentally fall into it
- I can't help blurting out things I shouldn't
- I have a stubborn sense of justice
- I'll help anyone if they ask me
- I always coincidentally look or act in a way that leads people to the wrong assumption

✿ I'm a coward... (choose two or three):

- I can't let anyone know because I'm protecting a reputation, or I like to impress people
- I have a desire that can distract me from seeing danger until it is too late to avoid

- I have flashes of courage when I'm put in desperate situations
- My panicked reactions usually appear brave to outsiders
- When I try to run or hide, I unintentionally escalate dangerous situations

## Five Regrets

Regret can motivate someone, tell them what they want or don't want for themselves, or torment someone as they face other struggles. RPGs generally revolve around group action, leaving little opportunity to reflect or reminisce. Building regret into your backstory can help you support essential character traits or add personality to their story.

Consider which of the following five regrets best fit your character. Make choices and answer prompts to flesh them out.

### The One That Got Away

This regret is related to something that eluded you and might have changed your past. Even if you are satisfied with your current life, you still long for it. You reflect on this regret in bittersweet nostalgia.

✳ This is... (choose one):

- Someone you loved
- A rare opportunity
- A task you failed
- A temptation you indulged or resisted

✳ Things might have been different if I had... (choose two):

- Been wiser
- Been braver

- Been kinder
- Been honest
- Been freer
- Changed a simple choice

\* I might have been... (choose two):

- Happier
- More accomplished
- Safer
- Less burdened
- Wealthier

✍ How have you changed for the better since this time? Are you grateful for the journey that brought you those changes?

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✍ After losing this, did you ever make an effort to win it back? If so, why did you fail? If not, why didn't you try?

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✍ Is this truly lost to you? What would have to change for you to recover this?

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## The Time I Failed

This regret is related to a time you fell short of a goal. It is a painful reminder of your fallibility and limitations. You often reflect on this regret in your darker moments of self-doubt.

✳️ Looking back, I... (choose one):

- Blame myself
- Blame someone else
- Feel helpless

✳️ In reality... (choose one):

- There is nothing I could have done
- There are many others who are responsible
- I don't want to admit the extent to which I am at fault
- I don't want to blame who is really at fault

✍️ Why was it important to you to succeed?

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✍️ Who suffered the most because of this failure?

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✍️ Did your reaction to this failure help the victim or make matters worse?

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 What landmark or object reminds you of this regret?

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## The Time I Succeeded

This regret is tied to a time you fought for something that ultimately made you unhappy. It is the difficult lesson that holds you back from toxic self-righteousness. You reflect on it when you are trying to hold yourself back.

 At the time, success was important because I... (choose two):

- Was misled
- Was afraid
- Was greedy
- Was shortsighted
- Didn't want to be wrong

 I thought my success would bring me... (choose two):

- Justice
- Wealth
- Fame
- Peace
- Approval
- Honor

 What did this success cost you?

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 Why were the rewards not worth that price?



What shameful artifact do you carry from this regret?

## The Thing I Never Say

This is a regret you carry with you almost every day, maintained by inaction. It is something you want or *need* to say but can never bring yourself to do it. You think of this constantly but especially around certain people.

✳️ Speaking this aloud might... (choose two):

- Alleviate guilt
- Enable acceptance
- Win joy
- Allow you to see the truth
- Settle a matter
- Banish fear

✳️ You know it will cost you... (choose one):

- Embarrassment
- Respect
- An easy connection
- The safety of fantasy
- A chance to try again
- A necessary penalty

✳️ You fear it will cost you... (choose two):

- Safety
- Humiliation
- Stability
- Rejection by a single person
- Rejection by a group
- The chance to say it perfectly

✍ Whom do you most need to say this to?

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✍ Have you ever lied directly about this? What did you say? If not, how have you lied indirectly to cover it?

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✍ When have you lashed out because of the pain of this regret?

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✍ What nervous habit have you adopted because of the way this regret makes you feel?

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## The Thing I Never Shut Up About

This regret is core to your personality. You share it to celebrate a glorious past, to amuse people, or to spare people the pain of

making mistakes you have already made.

✳ This story comes up... (choose one):

- After I have seen that someone could benefit from hearing it
- After I consider someone a friend
- If someone spends a few days around me
- Every night the mood strikes me
- As soon as I meet someone

✳ The story is about... (choose one):

- A prize that should have been yours
- The lesson that made you who you are
- A life you left behind
- A time your heart was broken

✍ What painful memory are you regretting while telling this story?

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✍ Who has heard this story the most times?

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✍ What do your companions find irritating or charming about this story?

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# What Are You Wearing?

A character's look is an efficient way to communicate their personality and backstory. This mini-game is designed to help you create a backstory for elements of your character's visual design. You can play alone or with a group. Simply pick a visual detail for your character, roll a d20, and answer the question in the resulting prompt. A good session will help you define stories for four to five aspects of your look.

If you are playing in a group, other players should feel free to ask each other follow-up questions to tease out more details. Once the prompt and follow-ups have been answered, play passes clockwise. Groups should have players answer two to three prompts.

 Roll a d8 to determine what kind of item you are defining:

1. A top: shirts, blouses
2. A bottom: pants, skirts
3. A cover: coats, jackets, capes, dresses, coveralls
4. Protective gear: helmets, bracers, chest plates, etc.
5. An accessory: hats, belts, glasses
6. A decoration: jewelry, tattoos, piercings
7. A tool: lock picks, communication devices, books, watches
8. A weapon: swords, firearms, magical focuses

 Roll a d20 to find a prompt:

1. This was somehow modified or customized to fit you. Why was that necessary?
2. This has been mended, cleaned, or repaired many times. Why do you devote so much time to caring for this item instead of replacing it with something in better shape?
3. You made this item for yourself. Do you make things for yourself often? What aspect of it brings you pride?

4. This was a gift from someone you love. How did they pay thoughtful attention to your needs in picking it out or making it?
5. This was stolen or claimed as a prize from an enemy. Why did this stand out as something you needed to take for yourself?
6. There is something about the design of this item that entertains your idle curiosity. What explanation did someone offer that doesn't seem right?
7. If you lost this, you would be absolutely devastated. Why? What measures do you take to protect it?
8. You don't use this item for its intended purpose. What is it meant to do, and how does it suit your needs in another way?
9. You often say that this saved your life. How did it save you? When do you tell the story?
10. This is much nicer than almost anything else you own. What did you need to risk or sacrifice to get it? Does it complement or contrast the rest of your look?
11. This is something you fiddle with in idle moments. What about its shape or texture is striking? How does it move in interesting ways?
12. This is something you consider a "statement piece." To the extent that you have a sense of style, this is a perfect match. How does it feel to see yourself wearing it? What has someone said about it that sticks with you?
13. This item is outdated, old-fashioned, or inefficient. Why do you feel more comfortable using this than something "better"?
14. This has a detail that only someone from your place of origin could really understand or appreciate. Did you take this from your home or have it made as a remembrance?
15. This is broken or damaged in a way that makes it less useful. Why are you planning to restore it? What do you need to complete this project?

- 16.** You have this in preparation for an unlikely special event you hope to attend at some point in the future. Why is the fantasy of attending this event important to you?
- 17.** This was given to you by a mentor, teacher, or hero to aid your development. What lesson were they trying to teach you? Was that lesson helpful or insulting?
- 18.** This is designed with a secret to help you in a desperate situation. What can it do? How did you get the idea for this?
- 19.** This is something so new and innovative that most people simply don't understand it. Why have you adopted something so cutting edge? Do you relish or dread the opportunity to explain it?
- 20.** This is actually a significantly powerful artifact that you don't understand. What is its true purpose or history? How do you misuse it, and why is it well suited to that function?

## Better with You

The stronger the connection between your character and their companions, the easier it is to find meaning and build stakes in your role-play. Telling a coworker to “be careful” is different than saying the same thing to your oldest friend. You can strengthen your bonds through a backstory by connecting companions to different events in your history. This also makes whatever events you choose more significant by making them relevant to more characters.

Grab one of your fellow PCs, then choose an event from your backstory and decide how you both want your character to be connected to it. Work through the choices and questions together.

## A Shared Experience

You and one of your companions experienced the same event together. This shared history is a part of your bond. You might not

have the same perspective on this event, but it was important to you both.

✳ This event occurred... (choose one):

- When you were both very young
- When you were coming of age
- When you were first on your own
- Just before you met the rest of your group

✍ What truth do both you and your companion know because of this experience?

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✍ Was one of you more impacted by this event than the other? If so, how has this informed your dynamic? If not, how does your shared experience make it difficult for both of you to connect with others?

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✍ How does your reaction to this experience differ from your companion?

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## A Parallel Experience

You and a companion either experienced the same event separately or had different experiences that resemble one another. This gives you the potential to understand and empathize with one another.

\* Because you experienced this event, you... (each choose two):

- Are jaded about something most people are not
- Are hopeful about something most people are not
- Have a goal most people can't understand
- Fear something most people don't understand
- Feel responsible for something most people never would
- Are marked in unique way

✍ What valuable thing did you learn from your experience? What did your companion learn?

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✍ What burden do you carry from your experience? What burden does your companion carry?

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✍ Have you opened up to one another about this part of your pasts? If not, what would it take for you to do that? If so, how did learning about this similarity change the way you saw each other?

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## An Experience Related to Another Event

Your companion experienced an event in their past that is somehow directly related to an event in your past. These events don't need to have played out at the same time or in the same place. They do need to be linked to the same larger picture, making your experiences part of the same story.

 Choose two similarities:

- You both experience similar emotions looking back at these events
- These events changed your lives
- These events occurred around the same time
- These events left you with the same ally or enemy
- You don't talk to many people about these events
- These events benefited the same interest

 What did this experience cause you to search for in your life?

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 What essential clue do you have from your experience?

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 How can your companion help you find what you are looking for? How can you help them?

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## An Experience a Companion Was Involved In

One of your companions was directly involved in a critical event in your past. You may or may not know about their involvement, but they played a pivotal role during a critical moment.

Decide if this event was traumatizing or empowering. Your companion should decide if they are ashamed or proud of their role in this event. Together you must decide if at the time the other player had your best interests at heart.

✳ What lingering needs do each of you carry related to this event? Each choose one:

- Closure
- The truth
- Absolution
- Guidance
- Revenge
- To achieve a goal

✍ Do you know that your companion was involved in this event?

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✍ If not, how would you feel if you discovered they were? If so, what is something critical or clarifying that you don't know about their involvement?

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- 💡 What is more important to each of you? Your needs or your relationship?
- 
- 

## Five Gifts Given

If you travel the world and risk your life alongside a group of people long enough, chances are you will end up giving a few gifts. These gestures represent your relationship and past together. They are a simple way to indicate that your group has shared more than what the game has explored.

For this exercise, I recommend approaching fellow PCs to collaborate on answering the prompts to create gifts that your character has given theirs during their adventure together.

### To Make an Apology

This gift was part of an effort to make up for something you felt you did wrong.

- 💡 What infraction prompted this gift?
- 
- 

- ✳ It was offered... (each choose one):
- With sincere care
  - With clumsy earnestness
  - With begrudging reluctance
  - In secret

 **It was... (each choose one):**

- Handmade
- Carefully composed
- Painstakingly prepared
- Somewhat expensive
- Thoughtful but imperfect

 **What made you feel your apology warranted a gift?**

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 **How long did this gift take you to make?**

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 **It was received... (companion chooses one):**

- With grace and gratitude
- With cautious relief
- With exasperated frustration
- Without acknowledgment

 **It... (companion chooses one):**

- Met an unexpected need
- Showed care and attention
- Is something you use at every opportunity
- Was never used or discarded

 **Is this gift the sort of gesture you would expect from your companion?**

- 
- 
- 
- 💡 These days, what do you think of more: the gift or the infraction?
- 
- 

### To Express Admiration

This gift was a serious and meaningful expression of admiration. It might have been a gesture of respect, infatuation, or gratitude.

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- 
- 
- 💡 What emotion defined your admiration?
- 
- 

- ✳️ It was offered... (choose one):

- With a subtle gesture that would not have been noticed by almost anyone else
- With the solemn seriousness dictated by culture
- Privately in a romantic setting
- With fumbling shyness

- ✳️ It was made with... (each choose one):

- Sweet words
- Careful time and attention
- An object holding deep personal value
- Raw natural beauty
- Awkward sincerity

 Which of your companion's qualities are you trying to honor with this gift?

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 How do you hope they will react to your gift?

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\* It was received... (companion chooses one):

- With humble grace
- With surprised awe
- With disbelief or discomfort
- With sincere affection

\* It... (companion chooses one):

- Is too great an honor
- Will be cherished always
- Means my feelings are returned
- Just made my life much more awkward

 Do you see yourself the way your companion sees you?

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 Where and how will you keep it?

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## To Aid in a Struggle

One of the blessings of traveling in a party is that you are never left to face your trials alone, even when it feels like you are. This is a gift you gave to help someone in a time of need.

✍ What do you see as the largest obstacle in your companion's struggle?

---

✳ It was offered... (choose one):

- With words of wisdom
- In secret
- With stoic silence
- With warm encouragements

✳ It was... (choose one):

- A specific tool
- A critical lesson
- Little more than a gesture
- Meant to help heal a wound

✍ Why is this gift something only you could offer?

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✍ Was this thought out or spontaneous?

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✳ It was received... (companion chooses one):

- With solemn gratitude
- Reluctantly
- With concerted effort
- With overwhelming emotions swirling

✳ In your hands, it... (companion chooses one):

- Feels clumsy
- Rests with heavy weight
- Finds trembling fingers
- Feels like a bridge to power

✍ Are you able to appreciate this gift in the moment it is given?

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✍ Are you surprised to receive something like this from your companion?

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## To Feel Understood

Being far from home alongside others who are also far from home means teaching things you never thought you would have to teach. Being alone in understanding your culture can feel isolating.

Sometimes the only way to show someone who you are is to give them a piece of your home.

✍ What do you miss sharing from your home?

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✳ It was offered... (choose one):

- Out of exasperated frustration
- With self-conscious hesitation
- With a sincere desire for acceptance
- With delicate care

✳ It was imperfect... (choose one):

- Because this region necessitates substitutions
- Because you lack the training to do this properly
- Because showing an outsider is harder than teaching a child
- But that suits your soul just fine

✍ What did you give?

---

✍ How has this made your life easier?

---

✳ It was received with... (companion chooses one):

- Bemused surprise
- Silent wonder

- Careful reservation
- Earnest respect

✳️ In it, you found... (companion chooses one):

- A new respect for your companion
- A shade of your companion's sorrow
- A new joy in life
- The answer to countless questions

💡 How do you change your behavior after receiving this gift?

---

---

💡 What did this gift make you imagine about your companion's home?

---

---

## Without Thought

We affect our companions in ways we can never predict. Even the small and the ordinary can have an extraordinary impact in the right circumstance. You gave this gift without really meaning to, but it was treasured nonetheless.

💡 When do you and this companion usually interact?

---

✳️ It came... (companion chooses one):

- In the heat of battle

- During a rare moment when you were alone
- As a surprise
- Despite undeniable tension

✳ If you knew what it meant... (companion chooses one):

- It would fill you with pride
- It would make you feel embarrassed
- It would make you laugh
- You'd have given it sooner

✍ What did you notice about your companion after they received your gift?

---

---

✍ How did this make you closer?

---

---

✳ It was received... (choose one):

- With profound surprise
- With deep embarrassment
- Almost subconsciously
- With quiet joy

✳ In it you found... (choose one):

- Confidence
- Solace
- Wisdom
- Hope

 What did your companion do for you without your knowing?

---

---

 How have you repaid them?

---

---

## It's Complicated

Pulling an NPC from your past into an ongoing story is a really fun way of adding to the stakes and connecting the plot to your character. If you and that character share a messy history, it fills your reunion with uncertainty, making it easy to find exciting dramatic moments.

This exercise will help you sketch out a fraught relationship between your character and someone from their past.

Roll 1d6 for each of the seven statements that follows. Use your results to answer the prompts and enjoy the drama that ensues!

 First Roll: We started...

1. Separated by class, status, or reputation
2. Disliking one another
3. Knowing one another only by reputation
4. As strangers
5. As close friends
6. As family or something close to it

 Who were they?

---

 How did you meet?

---

 What is your first memory of them?

---

 Second Roll: Eventually...

1. We became heated rivals
2. We were forced to live apart
3. We were forced to work together
4. One of us saved the other's life
5. We decided to pursue a dream together
6. We fell in love

 What nickname did they have for you? Did you like it?

---

 Did you have a name for them? How did they feel about it?

---

 Third Roll: And then...

1. One of us betrayed the other
2. Our families or society disapproved of our relationship
3. One of us was revealed to be living a lie
4. We could never admit the truth to one another
5. We found a brief period of mutual prosperity
6. We ran away together

 What promise did you two exchange during this time?

---

 Did you keep it? Do you still intend to?

---

 Fourth Roll: We were forced apart...

1. By an emotional decision
2. By a disaster
3. By an attack
4. By people more powerful than we were
5. By an opportunity that one or both of us could not ignore
6. In an effort to keep each other safe

 What possession do you keep tied to this memory?

---

 Fifth Roll: In our time apart...

1. My emotions about them grew more intense
2. I regretted things I said or did
3. I searched for them without success
4. I gained perspective on things that were hurtful
5. I came to see more of their virtues
6. I was motivated to grow

 Did you feel better or worse without them as time passed?

---

 Sixth Roll: Our paths crossed again...

1. But I was sure they did not recognize me
2. On a life-and-death situation
3. While one of us was in disguise
4. And it was like nothing changed
5. As we locked eyes across the room while music played
6. When one of us tracked the other down

✍ Why did you part again?

---

6 Seventh Roll: I regretted...

1. Not getting revenge
2. Telling them the truth
3. How I treated them
4. Leaving them
5. Not forgiving them
6. Not telling them the truth

✍ Does any part of you want to see them again? What would it take for you to seek them out?

---

✍ What are you afraid you might have to do if you saw them again?

---

## Unread

Adventuring in any setting usually means leaving people behind. It is both wonderful and heartbreakingly sad for characters who were once

very close to develop independently. Trying to keep in touch, falling out of contact, and reconnecting are great stories on their own. They can also add stakes and emotional weight to ongoing events in the overall story of your campaign.

This mini-game helps you tell the story of a correspondence between your character and an important NPC they left behind. It explores how both characters grow and change until their correspondence eventually stops altogether. Grab 2d6, make choices, and answer prompts for a hint of bittersweet in your past.

## Setup

To get started, you'll need to decide who you are communicating with and the method you use to communicate.

### WHO IS IT?

 You might already have a character in mind, but if not, roll a d6 to find a relationship type:

1. Parent or caretaker
2. Sibling or extended family member
3. Mentor
4. Friend
5. Colleague or non-romantic partner
6. Lover

Once you have chosen a relationship, answer the following questions:

 Who left, necessitating correspondence?

---

 Did you consider your relationship healthy?

 Is there any part of your relationship you wished to change?

 Did they have any hopes for you? Did you have hopes for them?

 Did you think you would reconnect? If so, how did you imagine it?

## HOW DO YOU COMMUNICATE?

Next, decide how you and this NPC keep in touch. If your game is set in a modern world, this might be chains of text, video, or audio. In a historical setting, they might simply be written letters. Fantasy and sci-fi allow people unique ways to communicate, like spells, holograms, or avatars.

 Choose two advantages of this form of communication:

- It travels quickly
- It can be created easily
- It is stable and reliable
- It is almost always available

- It allows for direct connection
- It is convenient

✳ Choose two disadvantages of this form of communication:

- It is costly
- It allows for ambiguity in communication
- It moves slowly
- It is unstable or unreliable
- It is only available in certain conditions
- It requires time, focus, or attention to create

✍ Based on your choices, what form of communication do you use for correspondence?

---

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Ask yourself the following questions:

✍ Is this how most people communicate? If not, why have you chosen this method?

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✍ What could prevent a person from communicating this way?

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✍ How quickly do people expect responses through this system?

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📎 How involved are messages between parties?

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---

---

📎 How do you store correspondence?

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## Sending and Receiving

Every correspondence starts with your character and the NPC engaging with one another through your communication system. Over time, you each undergo changes that end your correspondence.

### SENDING

When you send a message, choose connections from the following list that you want to include in your message. Each point will take an hour of your time to address. (You can choose whichever connections/challenges you want; no need to roll to decide.)

Then ask yourself the following questions:

- ✳ Am I responding within a reasonable time?
  - Yes
  - No

✳ Am I confident in my connection with the recipient?

- Yes
- No

✳ Do I have the time and energy to say everything I need to say?

- Yes
- No

**6** For each question you answer with yes, add +1 to a roll of 2d6.

- On a 10+, every point of connection you desire comes through.
- On a result of 7–9, select half of your Connections and an equal number of Complications.

Connections	Complications
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Update your partner about important changes in your life</li><li>• Respond to everything in the last message you received</li><li>• Clear up a miscommunication</li><li>• Communicate an essential emotion</li><li>• Apologize for something hurtful</li><li>• Ask an important question</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Your words are misinterpreted</li><li>• An emotion you don't intend comes through in your words</li><li>• You lie or omit an essential truth</li><li>• You hold back on something you really want to say</li><li>• Your message will take longer to be received than you'd like</li><li>• You missed something important to your partner</li></ul>

- On a result of 6 or less, there is a problem that prevents your message from being received: Mark a Missed Connection.
  - If your result was odd, you will need to send a message before you receive one.
  - If your result was even, you won't discover your message was missed until your partner contacts you.

## RECEIVING

When you receive a message from your partner, ask yourself the following questions:

✳ Did I receive this response in a reasonable amount of time?

- Yes
- No

✳ Am I more happy than anxious to see a response?

- Yes
- No

✳ Do I feel like we are free from lingering issues?

- Yes
- No

6 For each question you answer with yes, add +1 to a roll of 2d6.

- On a result of 10 or more, choose two Connections or three Connections and a Complication.
- On a result of 7–9, choose an equal number of Connections and Complications. (You can choose whichever Connections/Complications you want; no need to roll to decide.)

Connections	Complications
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• They share some welcome news</li><li>• They validate important emotions</li><li>• They respond to your concerns</li><li>• They give you needed support</li><li>• They offer something special or unique</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• They share bad news</li><li>• They make a request that will be difficult to fulfill</li><li>• They express that they were hurt by something you said</li><li>• They say something you find hurtful</li></ul>

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• They react in a way you hoped for</li> </ul>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• They failed to understand something critical</li> <li>• Their message is incomplete</li> </ul> |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• On a result of 6 or less, there is a problem that prevents their message from getting through: Mark a Missed Connection.           <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• If the result is odd, your partner will contact you before you contact them; roll a new message and add an additional Complication to your result.</li> <li>• If the result is even, you will contact your partner, adding a Complication.</li> </ul> </li> </ul> |   |

## LET TIME PASS

If you reach a point in correspondence where there is so much turmoil that it feels like sending a letter would do more harm than good, one of you can elect to let time pass. This creates a gap that can settle minor issues. When reestablishing correspondence after time has passed, ask the following questions:

- ✳ Can we still understand each other's lives?
  - Yes
  - No
  
- ✳ Will both parties be happy to restart the correspondence?
  - Yes
  - No
  
- ✳ Were the issues between you easy to overlook or explain away?
  - Yes
  - No
  
- ✳ For each question you answer with yes, add +1 to a roll of 2d6.

- On a result of 10 or more, someone sends a message with three points of Connection.
- On a result of 7–9, someone sends a new message with two points of Connection and two Complications from the following list.
- On a result of 6 or less, choose two options from the following list, take a Missed Connection, and let time pass again before restarting your correspondence.

#### COMPLICATIONS FOR LETTING TIME PASS

- ✳ Choose based on previous die roll results.
  - One of you has changed in a way that disappoints the other
  - One of you hasn't changed, disappointing the other
  - The sender reopens old wounds in their message
  - The sender immediately regrets something they wrote

### Ending the Game

The game ends when you reach five Missed Connections, causing one of you to leave a letter unread.

**1.** If you leave your partner unread, answer these questions:

- ✍ Where do you keep their last message and when will you open it?
- 
- 

- ✍ What are you most afraid to find inside?
-

- 
- ✍ If you hear your partner is nearby, will you seek them out or avoid them?
- 
- 

**2.** If your partner leaves you unread, answer these questions:

- ✍ What did you say in your last message that you need them to know? What did you say that you hope they never hear?
- 
- 

- ✍ Why do you assume they chose to end your connection?
- 
- 

- ✍ What question do you want them to answer?
- 
- 

## Five Gifts of Culture

Characters carry aspects of their cultural identity with them throughout their stories. Not every one of these gifts is positive. If

your character has a complex relationship with culture in their backstory, it will be easier to develop nuance in their narrative.

This exercise has prompts for both positive and negative gifts your character received from their culture or upbringing. You'll need 2d6.

To begin, ask yourself the following questions:

- ✳ Is your character proud of their cultural identity?
  - Yes
  - No
- ✳ Did they mostly have a positive experience growing up?
  - Yes
  - No
- ✳ Did they spend most of their time developing within their own culture?
  - Yes
  - No

**6** For each question you answered with yes, add +1 to a roll of 2d6.

- On a result of 10 or more, choose four positive gifts.
- On a result of 7–9, choose three positive gifts.
- On a result of 6 or less, choose two positive gifts on an odd result and one positive gift on an even result.

Distribute your positive and negative gifts as you like, make choices, and answer the questions to flesh them out.

## Made Me Fear/Appreciate

This gift taught you lessons about something significant. These lessons either led you to fear and despise that thing or to regard it with greater care and appreciation.

✳ This lesson was about... (choose one):

- An animal or plant
- Something inanimate (natural)
- Something inanimate (artificial)
- Something abstract
- An individual
- A group

✍ What does this lesson make you see that others do not?

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---

✍ How did this lesson make you prepared?

---

---

✍ How did this lesson make you vulnerable?

---

---

## Made Me Feel Accepted/Rejected

This gift either gave you a community and an appreciation for others, or it isolated you and made you guarded. A character who grew up with a community is quick to feel comfortable around

others. A character who grew up as an outsider is slower to trust and more comfortable in solitude.

- ✍ What were you called in your culture? How did it make you feel?
- 
- 

- ✍ What did others expect of you growing up? Do those expectations apply now?
- 
- 

- ✍ What does it take for you to trust a stranger?
- 
- 

- ✍ How do you respond to betrayal? How do you offer forgiveness?
- 
- 

### Made Me Proud/Ashamed

This gift left you with either a source of self-esteem and confidence or a source of anxiety and guilt. Pride can help a character develop a sense of identity but leave them with a

vulnerability. Shame can keep a character in turmoil but provide them with motivation.

✳ This feeling is... (choose one):

- Internalized: grounded in your own thought patterns with little regard for outside forces.
- Externalized: grounded in external forces and what you perceive in them.

✳ It is grounded in your perception of... (choose two):

- Achievement
- Behavior
- Status
- Capability
- Being

✍ Do you judge others based on this gift?

---

✍ What validates these feelings?

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---

✍ How do you react when something challenges this cultural assumption?

---

---

Made Me Accepting/Judgmental

This gift either opened you up to outsiders and people with varied experiences, or it closed you off, causing you to dismiss what is unfamiliar. A judgmental character can struggle to connect with most others but find respect in the right conditions. An accepting character is open to more people and experiences but occasionally has to defend them.

✳ These values were mostly reinforced by my... (choose two):

- Family
- Religion
- Teachers
- Leaders
- Heroes
- Friends
- Experiences

✳ Because of this gift, within my culture I am... (choose two):

- considered a person with authority
- more comfortable than anywhere else
- comfortable but not satisfied
- trusted by people in the margins
- judged for the company I keep

✳ Because of this gift, outside my culture I am... (choose two):

- considered unapproachable or unfriendly
- able to question things most people do not
- often surprised, confused, or uneasy
- not concerned with what others think
- more comfortable and welcome despite my differences
- slow to feel at ease even when folk try to welcome me

✳ Who challenges the lessons of this gift most often?

---

---

✍ How does this gift make you feel about connecting with others from your culture?

---

---

✍ How does this gift affect the way you think of your companions?

---

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### Made Me Hopeful/Jaded

This gift instills your character with either a sense of optimism and trust or a feeling of bitterness and skepticism. A hopeful character can find motivation even in their darkest moments, leaving them vulnerable to disappointment. A jaded character sees danger and corruption everywhere but is never deceived by an insincere facade.

- ✳ This feeling is the result of... (choose one):
- Education
  - Faith
  - Community
  - Institutional justice
  - Chance

- ✳ This feeling became ingrained when I... (choose one):

- Was very young
- Came of age
- Was first on my own
- Left home
- Returned home

✍ Which individual is most responsible for this gift?

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✍ When has this outlook saved you?

---

---

✍ When has it put you in danger?

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## Juicy Secrets

Major character secrets are a celebrated aspect of building a backstory. It's easy to dream up the "what" of a juicy secret. Everyone loves a disguised prince, former assassin, or failed revolutionary. You can make your secrets and the tension surrounding them more dramatic by fleshing out why you keep a secret, beyond the obvious reasons.

This is an exercise that will help you create a series of events in your character's past to provide them with compelling reasons to

keep a big secret in the face of hardship. You need a standard deck of playing cards with jokers removed.

## Creating a Secret

First, evaluate how significant your character's secret is based on the likely consequences of it being revealed. The more significant the secret, the more cards you should draw from your deck.

1–2 Cards	3–4 Cards	5+ Cards
You might experience shame or embarrassment. This is uncomfortable but temporary.	The general outside world is likely to treat you differently in a way that makes you feel like an outsider. Even if this treatment is preferential, it is still isolating.	Even most people close to you will see or treat you differently, making it impossible to find any place where life feels "normal."

Drawing cards from your deck will provide you with prompts that will define how your secret has affected your life. The color determines how your secret made life difficult:

- Red cards have prompts related to moments you suffered while protecting your secret.
- Black cards have prompts related to moments your character and people around them suffered after the secret was revealed.

The value of your card determines a specific prompt to create a moment from your past defined by your secret.

	Red	Black
A	You abandoned a life full of loved ones to avoid anyone discovering your secret.	Someone close to you died protecting your secret.
K	You paid a significant ransom to a blackmailer.	Someone people respect tried to harm you after learning your secret.
Q	You used threats or violence to silence someone.	Someone you trusted cast you out after learning your secret.

J	You broke the heart of someone dear to you.	You were uncomfortably alienated or revered by a group who discovered your secret.
10	You avoided necessary care and treatment for an injury.	Someone broke your heart after discovering your secret.
9	You denied yourself a significant honor or reward to avoid attention and scrutiny.	Something precious was destroyed after your secret made itself known.
8	You gave up a treasured pastime or concealed a valuable skill because it connects you to your secret.	Someone who didn't know your secret was harmed protecting you from someone who did.
7	You destroyed something precious of someone you loved in order to hide evidence of your secret.	You were given advantages based on your secret that others were forced to suffer without.
6	You lashed out at people prying into your life in a dramatic outburst.	People close to you, whether they were aware or not, kept encountering danger for reasons related to your secret.
5	You allowed yourself to be punished in a way you did not deserve rather than offer an explanation that might uncover the truth.	You told someone, only to have them chastise you to never speak about it again.
4	You allowed an injustice to go unanswered.	The only people who have received knowledge of your secret warmly have made you feel uncomfortable.
3	You associated with people you despised because they didn't ask questions.	Everyone you actively confessed your secret to has cried.
2	You endured harsh conditions at the desperate edges of society.	Your secret quietly makes you think ugly things about yourself.

Your resulting hand represents the key moments in your character's history that made them decide keeping their secret is important. During moments they long to open up to their companions, these events are what gives a character pause.

You can choose to assemble these events into a timeline or define them further when your character is given a reason to revisit their

memories. When you define these events, ask yourself the following questions:

- ✍ What words or images from this moment stay with you?
- 
- 

- ✍ Is there a physical artifact you retained from this moment, like an object or scar?
- 
- 

- ✍ Do you fixate on this memory or repress it?
- 
- 

## Confessions

Secrets are a great source of intraparty intrigue. However, if you guard them too carefully, you might never get to really play with them. Generally, I recommend letting your group know you have a secret, so they can help you play it out. However, not everyone finds it satisfying to play secrets with an open hand. Others struggle to create the right story beats to make their reveal satisfying.

Confessions is a mini-game you can add to your campaign that creates story beats for building up and revealing a deeply held character secret. You'll need a deck of playing cards with jokers removed.

## Getting Ready to Play

First, let your GM know that you want to use this structure to play out one of your character secrets. You might need their help to introduce some of these elements to the game, and it's easier to do that if they know the rules you want to use.

Choose a secret you want to make a central part of your character's story. Decide how important it is to your character to keep this information hidden. The more important your secret, the more cards you should draw for this mini-game. If you're having trouble, use the following chart as a guide.

1–2 Cards	3–4 Cards	5+ Cards
This is a small secret that your character might keep to avoid discomfort. If it is revealed to companions, it may make life difficult for a while.	This is a significant secret that will very likely change the way at least some of your companions see you. Positive or negative, that change disrupts a status quo you find comfortable.	This is a major secret that will absolutely upend your life. If revealed, it will drastically change the way your companions see you. It also means your group will likely have to address issues you have been avoiding.

Draw an appropriate hand from the deck. Each card in your hand represents a prompt for a scene to incorporate into your game.

- Red cards represent moments where your character draws closer to confessing the truth.
- Black cards represent actions your character takes to conceal their secret.

The value of each card is tied to a specific prompt.

## Synergy Bonus

If you used a juicy secret (see preceding activity) to define your history with keeping your secret, you can use the hand you created in that exercise instead of drawing a new one.

	Red	Black
<b>A</b>	Tell one member of your group, but swear them to secrecy.	Describe one of your companions discovering a piece of evidence that connects you to your secret that your character can't be aware of.
<b>K</b>	During a state of unusual vulnerability, tell one member of your group a part of your tale.	Destroy something valuable that would reveal your secret, then attempt to cover up your deeds.
<b>Q</b>	Write a confession, seal it, and be careless with how you hide it.	An NPC connected to your secret reaches out to you seeking help in a way that makes you feel obligated to acquiesce.
<b>J</b>	Make an effort to contact someone connected to your secret and enlist a companion for help.	Tell two companions incompatible lies related to your secret.
<b>10</b>	Ask a companion to assist you in a task that will help you understand something new about your secret. Do not tell them why you need their help.	You receive an anonymous message blackmailing you over your secret. They demand you do something risky or lose something valuable.
<b>9</b>	Admit to telling one of the lies you used to cover your secret without revealing the truth.	Become quietly upset with a companion for a reason related to your secret, then act out without explaining why.
<b>8</b>	Offer empathy to a companion based on a perspective you have only because of your secret.	Accuse a companion of lying after telling a lie related to your secret.
<b>7</b>	Choose how your deception has harmed a companion and try to make it up to them without admitting your actions are strange.	Object to doing something reasonable because it is related to your secret.
<b>6</b>	Use a piece of knowledge connected to your secret to aid a companion.	Decide how your secret has physically marked you, and take pains to conceal it. Decide how at least one ally has an opportunity to discover it.

5	Amend a lie you told previously to bring it closer to the truth.	Visit a monument related to your secret and offer a remembrance. Choose a companion who follows you on purpose or catches you by coincidence.
4	Lose a piece of evidence that connects you to your secret and enlist a companion to help find it.	You accidentally wake a companion reacting to a nightmare related to your secret.
3	Promise to tell a companion the truth someday.	You develop an entirely baseless suspicion that one of your companions knows something about your secret. You feel compelled to actively mislead them.
2	Introduce a collection of physical evidence you carry with you that ties you to your secret.	Find a moment talking to a companion when you feel a strong desire to reveal your secret, then decide against it.

As you play, look for opportunities to introduce scenes from your hand. Some will fit into events more naturally than others. You can always ask your GM for help framing one of your scenes if you are struggling to find the right place. For long campaigns, I recommend playing a scene every other session. For shorter campaigns, try to introduce one scene for every session you play.

Scenes coming from prompts should make up a small portion of events in a single session. They'll allow you to introduce your secret to your fellow players without putting everything on the table at once. These should make ongoing events more complicated, but not steal focus from what's happening in the game.

After playing a card from your hand, mark its color on your character sheet and discard it. At this time, you may choose to draw a replacement for one of your remaining cards.

## Ending the Game

Once you have played all the cards from your hand, it is time to reveal your secret. If you played more red cards than black cards, your character is ready to tell their companions the truth, and they get to do so on their own terms.

If you played more black cards, fate conspires to uncover the truth for you! Ask your GM to reveal your character's secret to everyone in the party in a dramatic moment.

If there is an even split between red and black, you try to confess just as fate makes hiding the truth impossible. Tell your GM you are going to confess, and to interrupt you at the most dramatic moment.

Once the truth is out there, it's time to enjoy the changes that come from a new character dynamic. Ask yourself:

💡 How has the truth made me happier?

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💡 How has it made life more difficult?

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💡 How will I change my behavior?

---

---

💡 Whose trust have I earned?

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---

---

 Whose trust have I lost?

---

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## We Have a History

You can save a lot of time by starting your game with an established connection to one of your fellow PCs. Introductions can be awkward, especially when you'll probably be back-to-back in life-and-death situations soon. Established relationships let you move past all that. However, without knowing your shared history, it's harder to role-play. This exercise will help you establish a few points of commonality that you can use early on to create a fun dynamic. Roll a d6 and refer to the tables to make choices that generate details, then answer prompts to flesh them out.

### The Thing We Never Talk About

There is something in your history that is a sensitive subject. Although it had a big impact on both of you, you avoid discussing it at all costs.

 Roll 2d6 to determine what happened, and how you feel about it:

What Happened		How We Feel About It
1	A foolish misadventure with big consequences	Afraid to be vulnerable
2	We did work we are not proud of	Cheekily embarrassed
3	We were forced to do desperate	Concerned that the past could catch

	things to survive	up with us
4	A serious crime that could change our lives if discovered	Disquietingly ashamed
5	A moment of intimacy that nearly changed our relationship	Angry at each other whenever we start to think about it
6	One of us betrayed the other in a moment of weakness	Distracted and off the dynamic we have come to depend on

 **This comes up... (roll a d6):**

1. When one of us becomes intoxicated
2. When one of us gets angry
3. When one of us gets careless
4. When one of us takes a risk
5. When one of us opens up to another person
6. Oddly enough, fairly frequently

 **How long ago was this?**

---



---

 **Is your silence a compromise or the reason you can't resolve the issue?**

---



---

 **What euphemisms do you use to refer to this event and your mutual silence?**

---



---

## The Thing We Always Argue About

There is a disagreement between you that both of you are aware will never change and that presents no real threat to your relationship. Your sparring around is performative and almost comforting.

 Roll 2d6 to determine the details of the disagreement:

What It's About		How We Play It Out
1	Something esoteric that requires a level of expertise just to understand	By enlisting bystanders to support our side
2	Manners, propriety, or cultural differences	By searching for dramatic examples to prove our points
3	Our work	Through casual exchanges while we do familiar work
4	The names for anything we own together	Through small wagers and competitions
5	Anything we can think of	Indirectly by venting to others
6	Who is better or worse at different things	Through elaborate and poetic public displays

 This comes up... (roll a d6):

1. When we are in combat
2. When we meet new people
3. When we unwind
4. When we are doing menial tasks
5. Almost once a week
6. Whenever other people get us started

 What happens when someone tries to intervene in your arguments to put a stop to them? What about someone who tries to participate?

---

---

---

✍ Can you get distracted when you start arguing?

---

---

---

✍ How do your arguments cause collateral damage?

---

---

---

## The Things We Trust

Although your relationship appears rocky to outsiders, you stick together because you can depend on each other. Your companion has good and bad traits that irritate and comfort you in equal measure. Above all, they are understandable and reliable, which means you can depend on them in any situation.

✍ What do you see as your companion's most noble quality?

---

---

---

✳ Choose one:

- I tell them they should show that side more often
- I mock them for it
- I only praise this quality when speaking to others
- I never acknowledge it openly

 What is your companion's most impressive skill?

---

---

 Choose one:

- I have faith in it more than almost anything else
- I respect it with uncharacteristic sincerity
- I fear it just a little
- I belittle but never underestimate it

 What is your companion's greatest weakness or flaw?

---

---

 Choose one:

- I worry it will destroy them
- I trust that it can be changed one day
- I will attack anyone who points it out
- I have come to rely on it as much as their positive traits

## The Thing We Want

Despite your differences, you share a core goal or ideal with your companion. You strive for something, and you strive for it together. This is the reason that through all the challenge and adversity you face, you know that you can fully depend on one another.

 This goal is... (choose one):

- Abstract and philosophical
- Perpetual and endless
- Daunting and improbable

- Small yet still out of reach

✳ We pursue it with... (choose one):

- Boundless determination
- Exuberant pride
- Half-hearted optimism
- Melancholy hope
- We don't actually pursue it, but we talk about it a lot

✳ It involves... (choose two):

- Defeating a great foe
- Finding a great treasure
- Getting righteous vengeance
- Building an incredible dream
- Proving a monumental point

✍ Why do you need each other to reach this goal?

---

---

✍ How does this goal coincide with your journey?

---

---

✍ What small things related to the goal do you disagree over?

---

---

# Time Jump

Time jumps are mostly used as a device to satisfy the plot. However, they are a great opportunity to embrace new and interesting character paradigms.

This exercise is made to help one or more PCs explore significant moments that occurred during a time jump, so they can have a fresh and interesting start when they emerge.

## Getting Started

First, you'll want to jot down the answers to a few basic questions to orient yourself to tell stories during your jump.

 How long is the jump?

---

 What are you doing generally?

---

 Who are you with?

---

 What are you trying to accomplish, or, what are you waiting for?

---

Next, take a standard deck of playing cards with jokers removed, shuffle them, and lay them facedown in a circle on a table or other flat surface.

## Scenes

Each card in the ring is tied to a prompt for a scene that occurred during the time jump on the following chart. These scenes aren't necessarily life- or personality-altering events. They are simply significant scenes that inform the tone of the jump for your character. You can use them to decide what this time period was like for your character and how they emerge on the other side.

Each suit represents a specific kind of scene and asks you to answer a question from a list to accompany your prompt.

### HEARTS: INTERPERSONAL

These scenes are defined by interactions with other characters. They can be with companions, NPCs, or even characters we haven't seen in the story before this point. Characters don't need to be physically together to have interpersonal scenes; these can play out over letters, phone calls, or some kind of magical connection.

After drawing your prompt, answer one of the following questions:

- Which companion will you treat differently now?
  - Did this make your life easier or more complicated?
  - What did you learn about yourself?
  - What decision did you have to make because of this?
- 
- 
- 

### DIAMONDS: INTROSPECTIVE

These scenes are defined by a character's relationship with themselves. They can occur anywhere—even around other

characters—but they are driven by a character’s thoughts and actions about their own personality, values, or goals.

After drawing your prompt, answer one of the following questions:

- What new goal do you have?
  - What new behavior did this add to your routine?
  - What behavior did you abandon after this?
  - How did this affect your mood?
- 
- 
- 

## CLUBS: CHALLENGES

These scenes are driven by problems, hardships, and defeats suffered by your character during the jump. They don’t always need to end badly, but they do always represent struggle. Even if you win in the end, it wasn’t easy, and that stands out.

After drawing your prompt, answer one of the following questions:

- What new oath do you swear?
  - How do you grieve?
  - How did you come back stronger?
  - What mark do you bear from this?
- 
- 
- 

## SPADES: FORTUNES

These scenes are defined by moments of luck, grace, and achievement experienced by your character over the jump. They don't all represent victories necessarily, but they were valuable and positive for your character.

After drawing your prompt, answer one of the following questions:

- How has this continued to benefit you?
  - What new confidence did this give you?
  - What weakness do you feel further from?
  - When and how do you boast about this?
- 
- 
- 

	Interpersonal	Introspective	Challenges	Fortunes
A	You solidify a profound and meaningful bond with someone important	You identify a critical negative trait in yourself and begin the work to change yourself for the better	You have a near-death experience	You save someone or something extremely precious to you from a terrible fate
K	You settle a critical disagreement with someone close	You discover a new philosophy that helps you accept yourself	You are confronted with the negative consequences of a choice you made	You impress an ally through your character without knowing they were watching
Q	You discover a new connection or recontextualize an old one in a positive way	You question beliefs that have caused pain for yourself and others	You fail at a critical task entrusted to you by someone important to you	You are spared an ill fate that you thought was inevitable through an act of mercy

J	You perform a great act of service that wins you respect	You make progress uncovering a mystery about your own past	You are forced to seek help from someone you would rather avoid	You stumble on an object, information, or fortune that opens new possibilities
10	You find a place of honor or welcome with a new group	You take a short moment to confront grief	You lose something that you considered critical	You find exactly the person you need to help you
9	You share a personal secret with an ally or you have one shared with you	You find joy in a new hobby or pastime	You are forced to challenge your values in order to survive	You spot something suspicious before you fall victim to it
8	You share a flirtation with someone you know or find a temporary connection with someone you don't	You begin to understand something that has never made sense to you before	You learn that someone or something you truly loved is gone	You happen on a circumstance where someone with exactly your skills and experience is needed
7	You teach or are taught a critical lesson	You allow yourself a moment of rest	You struggle to use a skill you normally rely on	You avoid a disaster by chance
6	You are misunderstood by someone you want to trust you	You find time to have a moment of nostalgia	You go through a time of harsh scarcity and have to sacrifice to survive	You learn a new skill
5	You make a serious promise to someone	You swear an oath to yourself	You are confronted with a choice between two options that are equally good or equally bad	By chance, you try something you would otherwise never do, and you discover a new love
4	You start an argument that	You manage stress in a	A lie you told forces you to	You find a solution to a

	escalates further than you intend	destructive way	take desperate action to support or dispel it	complicated problem is actually very simple
3	You discover a secret about someone you know that changes your opinion of them	You lie to yourself to make a difficult situation easier temporarily	You suffer an important defeat that sets back one of your major goals a great deal	You lose a contest but find consolation or experience more valuable than victory
2	You are betrayed by or betray someone you trust	You indulge a seriously harmful flaw	You enter a contest, and it is more demanding than you imagined	You are detained, but are put exactly where you need to be

If at any point during the game someone draws a card that creates a visible break in the circle, they must immediately draw another card and compare their result to prompts on the Twists table. Twists drastically change characters in ways that will be investigated long after the time jump.

Twists	
Ace	You change one of your core beliefs
King	You experience an event that forever tarnishes something you believe in
Queen	You get bad news about someone very close to you
Jack	You lose something you believe to be irreplaceable
Even	You get a new scar
Odd	You get a new permanent decoration like a piercing or tattoo

## Ending the Game

There is no limit to the number of scenes you can examine in a time jump. However, I recommend limiting yourself to two to three per PC. Focusing on a few poignant scenes will be more effective

than bogging down your character with threads you might struggle to honor and resolve.

## Sticking the Time Landing

Changes that come from moments that happen outside narration are tricky. It's a challenge to balance honoring that a character has changed while holding on to what defined them. Sometimes it's hard to judge how you want to display change. This exercise walks you through ways to incorporate and honor changes to your character. It makes a great companion to Time Jump!

**6** Roll 1d6 for each category on the following tables to determine the nature of your changes.

Impact	
1–3	Temporary: This change is temporary and represents your current circumstances. You may change again with time or even revert to your old ways given the right circumstances.
4–6	Permanent: This change is lasting and represents permanent growth or actions that cannot be undone. Even as you continue to grow, this change will leave its mark.
Visibility	
1–2	Hidden: This change is well hidden, and even your character might not be fully aware of it.
3	Subtle: Those closest to your character will need to probe to detect this change.
4	Muted: Acquaintances could easily miss this, but those who know you well will see it clearly.
5–6	Obvious: This change is striking and can be detected by anyone who knew you before.
Acquisition	
1–2	Lost: This is something you have disowned or discarded. It may have even been taken from you.

3–4	Exchanged: This is the result of you replacing one thing for another. Things are different, but there is no more or less to you than that was before.
5–6	Gained: This is something entirely new that you did not have before.

## Body

This is a change to your physical form or features. It can manifest as altering personal style or showing age, injury, physical development, or even radical transformation.

✳ This change makes you... (choose one):

- Stronger
- Weaker
- Distinctive
- Common

✳ This change makes you feel... (choose one):

- More complete
- Tired/Powerful
- Sorrowful/Joyous
- No different

✳ Choose two notable features of this change:

- This change forced you to adapt
- This change is the result of a great defeat or victory
- This change was sudden or gradual
- This change was intentional, accidental, or forced on you

✍ Describe how your body has changed:

---



---

✍ Do you feel like this change fits your idea of yourself?

---

 Do you hide or display this change?

---

## Where Does This Belong?

Sometimes pinning down where to explore a specific change is difficult. If an android gets a new robotic arm, should that be explored through Body or Equipment? Ultimately, there is no wrong way to approach these changes, but we recommend trying to approach things from the character's perspective. If a character sees a piercing as a major change to their body, use Body; if it's a minor aesthetic touch, Clothing might yield better results.

### Clothing

This is a change in style that affects your most iconic look. While this can always be taken at face value adding, subtracting, and altering items in a character's wardrobe; it can also mean a change in general quality or condition of a wardrobe, or even the way a character chooses to wear things.

✿ This change shows your... (choose one):

- Wealth
- Disposition
- Achievements
- Losses
- Responsibilities

✿ Choose two notable features for this change:

- The colors are striking
- It alters your silhouette
- The material stands out
- It fits or clashes with the rest of your outfit

 Describe this change:

---

---

 How did it come to you?

---

---

## Equipment

This change relates to tools and other useful items that you use in your adventures. You can treat a change here as a visual indicator of intangible changes. A new piece of equipment can denote a new skill or the refinement of an existing one. This can also be an aesthetic alteration of an existing tool that is important to you to reflect your journey.

 This change... (choose one):

- Opens new possibilities
- Indicates your journey
- Shows your pride and prowess
- Shows how you think about the future or past

 Choose two notable features for this change:

- It is best appreciated by experts
- It is seen as a status symbol or a mark of shame
- It is expensive or shabby
- It suits you or looks out of place

 Describe this change:



When do you usually use or carry this?



How does it change the way you see the world?

## Attitude

This represents a change to your emotional state, philosophy, or personality. Most of the changes in this exercise are physical. This might not be related to a physical artifact, but it is still visible. When describing it, think about how this change would be observed.

✳️ This change... (choose one):

- Is something you have worked toward
- Is something you would have judged yourself for before the time jump
- Is the result of chance
- Represents something you are still grappling with

✳️ This change makes you feel... (choose one):

- Mature or Old
- Open or Vulnerable
- Wiser or Jaded
- Capable or Broken

 Choose two notable features for this change:

- It rests in your voice
- It shows in your movements
- It affected your relationships
- It plays out in your mind

 Describe this change:

---

---

 Have your companions noticed? How does that make you feel?

---

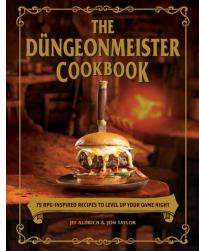
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## Acknowledgments

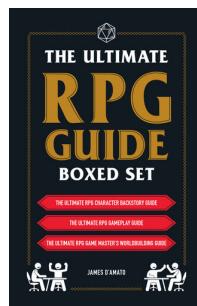
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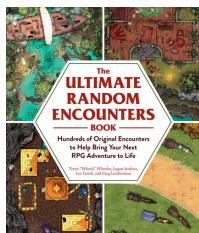
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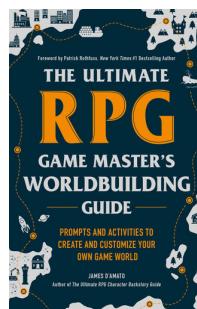
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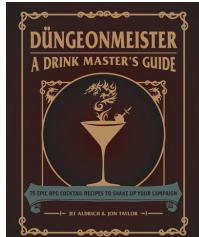
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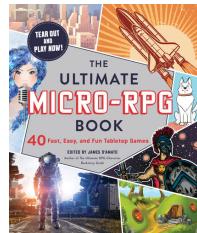
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James D'Amato is the author of *The Ultimate RPG Gameplay Guide* and *The Ultimate RPG Game Master's Worldbuilding Guide* as well as the editor of *The Ultimate Micro-RPG Book*. He is the creator and game master of the *One Shot* podcast and several spin-off podcasts dedicated to RPG gameplay. He trained at Second City and iO in Chicago in the art of improvisational comedy. He now uses that education to introduce new people to role-playing and incorporates improvisational storytelling techniques to create compelling and entertaining stories for RPG campaigns and one-shot adventures.



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Adams Media  
An Imprint of Simon & Schuster, Inc.  
100 Technology Center Drive  
Stoughton, Massachusetts 02072  
[www.SimonandSchuster.com](http://www.SimonandSchuster.com)

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First Adams Media trade paperback edition June 2022

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Interior design by Colleen Cunningham

Interior layout by Julia Jacintho

Interior images © 123RF

Cover design by Julia Jacintho

Cover images © 123RF/Khoon Lay Gan, Sudowoodo, Vanreeell, PPBIG

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data has been applied for.

ISBN 978-1-5072-1791-7

ISBN 978-1-5072-1792-4 (ebook)

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