

# EclipseSHOE | Version 0.5

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## Introduction

This is an adaptation of *Eclipse Phase* to the GUMSHOE rules system. The GUMSHOE rules enable players to focus on mysteries and investigations in their games. This rulebook is not a replacement for the *Eclipse Phase* rulebook. To play *Eclipse Phase* with these rules, you still need the *Eclipse Phase* rulebook to look up what the game is about and what kind of themes it deals with.

With this book you can:

1. Create characters using the GUMSHOE system. (The *Eclipse Phase* rulebook is still necessary for the background information.)
2. Play or design investigative scenarios, where the focus is not on whether the characters find the information, but on how they use it.

If you are not familiar with Eclipse Phase, I suggest you take a look at it at this point. It is easily available online both freely and purchased. If you already know about Firewall and existential risks, you can try creating some characters.

## A Time of Eclipse

For more information on the setting, read the [Eclipse Phase rulebook by Posthuman Studios](#).

## Your Character

Create player characters by choosing your character concept, investigative abilities, and general abilities.

Investigative abilities allow you to find the information your character needs to move forward in a mystery-solving narrative, plus occasional additional benefits.

General abilities help you survive while you're gathering information and solving problems. You create characters by spending build points on your character's abilities. Each ability has a numerical rating. Every rating point costs 1 build point to purchase.

The GUMSHOE rules define your character by what he or she can accomplish in an investigative scenario. The component elements of each ability don't matter in rules terms. The rules don't care if your Forensic Accounting ability is one part native mental acuity to two parts training or vice versa, although you can mention them when describing your character to others. All that matters is how you solve cases, and overcome other obstacles arising from them.

## Ratings and Pools

The number you assign to each ability is called a rating. Although you may improve them gradually over time, ratings remain static over the course of the typical game session.

For each ability your character has a pool of points, which fluctuates over the course of each session. You begin each case, or scenario, with pool points equal to your rating. You might then immediately spend some of them during a prelude phase to the investigation itself. You will definitely spend points as you conduct the investigation. At times your pool may increase, sometimes refreshing to equal its rating again.

The distinction between ratings and pools is a crucial one; keep it in mind as you read and interpret the GUMSHOE rules.

## Step One: Concept

### Backgrounds

The first step to creating your character is to choose a background. Was your character born on Earth before the Fall? Were they raised on a habitat commune? Or did they start existence as a disembodied AI?

You must choose one of the backgrounds for your character from the list below. Choose wisely, as each background may provide your character with certain characteristics to start with. Keep in mind that your background is where you came from, not who you are now. It is the past, whereas your faction represents whom your character is currently aligned with. Your future, of course, is yours to make.

The background options presented below cover a wide selection of transhumanity, but they cannot cover every possibility. You may work with your Gamemaster to develop a background that is not included on this list, using these as guidelines to keep it balanced.

Each Background comes with points in Investigative Abilities, General Abilities or both. Some Backgrounds come with other advantages or disadvantages. They also mention common morphs.

For descriptions of the backgrounds, see Eclipse Phase rulebook page 131.

#### **Drifter**

Abilities: Astronomy 1, Space Craft 2, any Networking 1

Advantages and Disadvantages: None

Common Morphs: All, especially Bouncers and Hibernoids

#### **Fall Evacuee**

Abilities: Ground Craft 1, any Networking 1, Sense Trouble 1

Advantages and Disadvantages: In character creation first point of Resources costs 3 points

Common Morphs: Flats, Splicers

#### **Hyperelite**

Abilities: Protocol 1, Networking: Hypercorps 2, Resources 3



Advantages and Disadvantages: May not start with flat, splicer, or any pod, uplift, or synthetic morphs

Common Morphs: Exalts, Sylphs

### **Infolife**

Abilities: Programming 2, Research 1

Advantages and Disadvantages: Get 2 points for every 1 point put in Infosec, Programming and Research. Get 1 point for every 2 points put into Interpersonal Abilities. Cannot put points into Kinesics at character creation.

Common Morphs: Infomorphs, synthetic morphs

### **Isolate**

Abilities: Any Abilities 2

Advantages and Disadvantages: First level of the first Networking Ability bought costs 2 points

Common Morphs: All

### **Lost**

Abilities: Any Investigative Abilities 2

Advantages and Disadvantages: Get 1 point for every 2 points put into Stability. First level of the first Networking Ability bought costs 2 points. Get first level of 1 Psychic Power for free. Must start with the Futura morph.

Common Morphs: Futuras

### **Lunar Colonist**

Abilities: Ground Craft 1, any Technical or Academic Ability 1, Networking: Hypercorps 2

Advantages and Disadvantages: None

Common Morphs: Flats, Splicers

### **Martian**

Abilities: Ground Craft 1, any Technical or Academic Ability 1, Networking: Hypercorps 2

Advantages and Disadvantages: None

Common Morphs: Flats, Splicers, and Rusters

### **Original Space Colonist**

Abilities: Space Craft or Athletics 1, any Technical or Academic Ability 1, any Networking 2

Advantages and Disadvantages: None

Common Morphs: All, use of exotic morphs is common

### **Re-Instantiated**

Abilities: Ground Craft 1, any Networking Ability 1, Sense Trouble 2

Advantages and Disadvantages: In character creation first point of Resources costs 5 points

Common Morphs: Cases, Infomorphs, Synths

### **Scumborn**

Abilities: Flattery or Flirting 1, Preparedness 1, Networking: Autonomists 2

Advantages and Disadvantages: None

Common Morphs: All, especially Bouncers

### **Uplift**

Abilities: Athletics 2, Perception 1, Sense Trouble 1

Advantages and Disadvantages: Must choose an uplift morph to start

Common Morphs: Neo-Avian, Neo-Hominid, Octomorph

## **Factions**

Each Background comes with points in Investigative Abilities, General Abilities or both. Some Backgrounds come with other advantages or disadvantages. They also mention common morphs.

For descriptions of the factions, see Eclipse Phase rulebook page 132.

### **Anarchist**

Abilities: Any Ability 1, Networking: Autonomists 3

Advantages and Disadvantages: None

Common Morphs: All

### **Argonaut**

Abilities: any Technical or Academic Abilities 2, Networking: Scientists 2

Advantages and Disadvantages: None

Common Morphs: All

### **Barsoomian**

Abilities: Athletics 1, any Ability 1, Networking: Autonomists 2

Advantages and Disadvantages: None

Common Morphs: Cases, Flats, Rusters, Splicers, Synths

### **Brinker**

Abilities: Space Craft 1, any Ability 1, any Networking Ability 2

Advantages and Disadvantages: None

Common Morphs: All

### **Criminal**

Abilities: Intimidation 1, Networking: Criminal 3

Advantages and Disadvantages: None

Common Morphs: All

### **Extropian**

Abilities: Flattery, Flirting or Negotiation 1, Networking: Autonomists 1, Networking: Hypercorps 1

Advantages and Disadvantages: None

Common Morphs: All

### **Hypercorp**

Abilities: Protocol 1, Networking: Hypercorps 2, any Networking Ability 1

Advantages and Disadvantages: None

Common Morphs: Exalts, Olympians, Splicers, Sylphs

### **Jovian**

Abilities: Melee Combat or Shooting 2, Athletics 1, Networking: Hypercorps 2

Advantages and Disadvantages: Must start with a Flat or Splicer morph, may not start with any nanoware/advanced nanotech

Common Morphs: Flats and Splicers

### **Lunar**

Abilities: Language 1, Networking: Hypercorps 2, Networking: Ecologists 1

Advantages and Disadvantages: None

Common Morphs: Cases, Exalts, Flats, Splicers, Synths

### **Mercurial**

Abilities: any Abilities 2, any Networking 2

Advantages and Disadvantages: None

Common Morphs: Infomorphs, Synths, uplift morphs

### **Scum**

Abilities: Athletics 1, any Ability 1, Networking: Autonomists 2

Advantages and Disadvantages: None

Common Morphs: All

### **Socialite**

Abilities: Flattery or Flirting 1, Protocol 1, Networking: Media 2

Advantages and Disadvantages: May not start with flat, pod, uplift, or synthetic morphs

Common Morphs: Exalts, Olympians, Sylphs

### **Titanian**

Abilities: any Technical or Academic Abilities 2, Networking: Autonomists 2

Advantages and Disadvantages: None

Common Morphs: All

### **Ultimate**

Abilities: any Abilities 2, any Networking 2

Advantages and Disadvantages: May not start with Flat, Splicer, uplift, or pod morphs

Common Morphs: Exalts, Remades

### **Venusian**

Abilities: Shuttle Craft 1, any Ability 1, Networking: Hypercorps 2

Advantages and Disadvantages: None

Common Morphs: Cases, Exalts, Mentons, Splicers, Sylphs, Synths

## **Morphs**

Morphs are not of equal value, but are instead paid in General Ability points. They provide Boosts to some abilities, define starting Health and some of them have other advantages and disadvantages.

Some morphs provide boosts in one or more Abilities. The effect of the boost depends on whether the boost is in Investigative or General Abilities. A boost in an Investigative Ability add 1 to the pool of the Investigative Ability after any points have been spent from that pool. A boost in a General Ability adds 1 to the result of any roll in that Ability.

For descriptions of the morphs, see Eclipse Phase rulebook page 139.

## **Biomorphs**

**Flats** Health: 4

Advantages and Disadvantages: No biomods, mesh inserts or cortical stack.

General Ability point Cost: 0

Credit Cost: High

**Splicers** Health: 4

Advantages and Disadvantages:

General Ability point Cost: 1

Credit Cost: High

**Exalts** Health: 6

Advantages and Disadvantages: Boost to 1 General Ability

General Ability point Cost: 3

Credit Cost: Expensive

**Mentons** Health: 6

Advantages and Disadvantages: Boost to 1 Academic or Technical ability

General Ability point Cost: 4

Credit Cost: Expensive

**Olympians** Health: 8

Advantages and Disadvantages: Boost to Athletics

General Ability point Cost: 4

Credit Cost: Expensive

**Sylphs** Health: 6

Advantages and Disadvantages: Boost to Flirting

General Ability point Cost: 4

Credit Cost: Expensive

**Bouncers** Health: 6

Advantages and Disadvantages: Boost to Athletics and physical rolls in zero-g (Melee Combat, Hardware etc.)

General Ability point Cost: 4

Credit Cost: Expensive

**Furies** Health: 10

Advantages and Disadvantages: Boost to Melee Combat, Shooting and Perception, 1 point of armor against shooting, always acts first in a combat round, toxin filters for most common airborne toxins

General Ability point Cost: 8

Credit Cost: Expensive

**Futuras** Health: 6

Advantages and Disadvantages: Mostly for the Lost

General Ability point Cost: 4

Credit Cost: Expensive

**Ghosts** Health: 9

Advantages and Disadvantages: Boost to Infiltration, Melee Combat and Perception

General Ability point Cost: 7

Credit Cost: Expensive

**Hibernoids** Health: 6

Advantages and Disadvantages: Require only 1-2 hours of sleep on average, can go into a hibernation for 40 days

General Ability point Cost: 3

Credit Cost: Expensive

**Neotenics** Health: 4

Advantages and Disadvantages: Small (Hit Threshold 4)

General Ability point Cost: 3

Credit Cost: Expensive

**Remade** Health: 8

Advantages and Disadvantages: Boost to 1 General Ability, require only 1-2 hours of sleep on average, toxin filters for most common airborne toxins, resistance to extreme temperatures (-1 damage), can breathe in high and low pressure atmosphere

General Ability point Cost: 6

Credit Cost: Expensive

**Rusters** Health: 6

Advantages and Disadvantages: resistance to extreme temperatures (-1 damage), can breathe in high and low pressure atmosphere

General Ability point Cost: 3

Credit Cost: Expensive

**Neo-Avians** Health: 3

Advantages and Disadvantages: Beak/Claw Attack (-1 Damage), Flight

General Ability point Cost: 3

Credit Cost: Expensive

**Neo-Hominids** Health: 4

Advantages and Disadvantages: Boost to Athletics

General Ability point Cost: 3

Credit Cost: Expensive

**Octomorphs** Health: 4

Advantages and Disadvantages: 8 arms (Boost to Athletics or Melee Combat when multiple arms is beneficial), Beak Attack (-1 Damage), Ink Attack (blinding), 360-degree vision (Boost to Perception), Chameleon skin (Boost to Infiltration when hiding)

General Ability point Cost: 5

Credit Cost: Expensive

**Pods**

Pods are vat-grown biological bodies with cybernetic brains that cannot reproduce and are often run by AI. Cyberbrains can be remotely controlled.



**Pleasure Pods** Health: 4

Advantages and Disadvantages: Cost to use Interpersonal Abilities other than Flattery and Flirting +1, Boost to Flirting, can switch sex

General Ability point Cost: 2

Credit Cost: High

**Worker Pods** Health: 6

Advantages and Disadvantages: Cost to use Interpersonal Abilities other than Flattery and Negotiation +1

General Ability point Cost: 2

Credit Cost: High

**Novacrab** Health: 8

Advantages and Disadvantages: 10 legs (Boost to Athletics for balance Tests and similar), Carapace Armor (2 points), Claw Attack (+0 Damage), can survive in vacuum for short periods of time, resistance to extreme temperatures (-1 damage)

General Ability point Cost: 6

Credit Cost: Expensive

**Synthetic Morphs**

All synthetic morphs share some qualities:

- **Lack of biological functions.** No need to eat, sleep etc. Doesn't bleed.
- **Pain filter.** You don't need to make Consciousness Rolls.
- **Immunity to Shock Weapons.** No damage from Shock Weapons.
- **Environmental Durability.** Only take damage from extreme environments.
- **Toughness.** Unarmed Damage is -1 instead of the normal -2.
- **Social stigma.** All synthetic morphs may suffer from social stigma in areas where their use is not commonplace. This is especially true for more exotic morphs, like combat morphs. In these situations the cost to use Interpersonal Abilities is one higher.

**Case** Health: 3

Advantages and Disadvantages: Armor 1, Cost to use Interpersonal Abilities +1

General Ability point Cost: 1

Credit Cost: Moderate

**Synth** Health: 8

Advantages and Disadvantages: Armor 1, Cost to use Interpersonal Abilities +1

General Ability point Cost: 3

Credit Cost: High

**Arachnoids** Health: 8

Advantages and Disadvantages: Boost to Perception, 10 Arms/Legs (Boost to Athletics for balance Tests and similar), Armor 2

General Ability point Cost: 5

Credit Cost: Expensive

**Dragonfly** Health: 3

Advantages and Disadvantages: Flight, Small (Hit Threshold 4), Boost to Infiltration

General Ability point Cost: 2

Credit Cost: High

**Flexbots** Health: 3

Advantages and Disadvantages: Armor 1, Small (Hit Threshold 4), Boost to Hardware

General Ability point Cost: 2

Credit Cost: Expensive

**Reaper** Health: 12

Advantages and Disadvantages: 4 limbs (4 weapon mounts), Armor 3, Boost to Shooting, Melee Combat and Perception, Cyber claws (+0 Damage), flight

General Ability point Cost: 10

Credit Cost: Expensive

**Slitheroid** Health: 9

Advantages and Disadvantages: Armor 2, Boost to Athletics

General Ability point Cost: 4

Credit Cost: Expensive

**Swarmanoid** Health: 4

Advantages and Disadvantages: Swarm Composition (only 1 Damage per attack, except from area weapons; physically weak), Flight

General Ability point Cost: 3

Credit Cost: Expensive

**Infomorph** Health: -

Advantages and Disadvantages: No physical form; any damage taken is dealt to Stability

General Ability point Cost: 0

Credit Cost: 0

## Step Two: Assign Investigative Abilities

Investigative abilities are central to any GUMSHOE character; they enable you to gather information and drive the plot forward. The number of points each player spends on investigative abilities varies according to the number of regularly attending players, according to the following table. The GM leads the group through the list of investigative build points, ensuring that each one of them is covered by at least one member of the group.

Players who can only attend every now and then get the same number of investigative build points as everyone else, but are not counted toward the total when deciding how many points to allocate.

# of players	Investigative build points
2	25
3	19
4	17
5+	16

## **What Good Are Investigative Ratings?**

Players used to the bumbling half-competence of their characters in other investigative game systems may be surprised to learn how effective even a single rating point is.

Any rating in an investigative ability indicates a high degree of professional accomplishment or impressive natural talent. If you have an ability relevant to the task at hand, you automatically succeed in discovering any information or overcoming any obstacles necessary to propel you from the current scene further into the story.

You may ask to spend points to gain special benefits. Sometimes the GM will offer you the chance to spend points. In other circumstances she may accept your suggestions of ways to gain special benefits. Use them wisely; spent points do not return until the next investigation begins.

Once all of the abilities are covered, you are permitted, if you desire, to reserve any remaining build points to spend as situations arise during play. You may assign yourself additional abilities, or increase your ratings in the ones you've chosen, as seems appropriate to your character and the situations she finds herself in. When you choose to do this, you are not suddenly acquiring abilities on the spot, but simply revealing for the first time what the character has been able to do all along.

If you want, you can save build points from character creation to spend later. If your GM is running an ongoing series, you will accumulate additional build points during play.

## **Investigative Benchmarks**

When choosing investigative abilities it is better to get a large number of abilities with fairly low ratings. Even a 1-point rating is worth having. You'll rarely want to spend more than 3 or 4 points on any one investigative ability.

You must have an investigative ability at a rating of at least 1 to get useful information from it.

## **Investigative Abilities**

The following abilities are the bread and butter of GUMSHOE characters.

Ability descriptions consist of a brief general description, followed by examples of their use in an investigation. Creative players should be able to propose additional uses for their abilities as unexpected situations confront their characters. Certain specific actions may overlap between a couple of abilities.

Some abilities, like Research, are broadly useful, and will crop up constantly. Others may be called for many times in the course of one scenario, and not at all in others. When building your character, strike a balance between the reliable workhouse abilities and their exotic, specialized counterparts.

Investigative abilities are divided into the following sub-groups: Academic, Interpersonal, Technical and Networking. The purpose of the sub-groups is to allow you to quickly find the best ability for the task during play, by scanning the most likely portion of the overall list.

### **Academic Abilities**

**Archeology** You excavate and study the structures and artifacts of historical cultures and civilizations. You can:

- tell how long something has been buried
- identify artifacts by culture and usage
- distinguish real artifacts from fakes
- navigate inside ruins and catacombs
- describe the customs of ancient or historical cultures
- spot well-disguised graves and underground hiding places

**Anthropology** You are an expert in the study of human cultures, from the stone age to the Internet age. You can:

- identify artifacts and rituals of living cultures
- describe the customs of a foreign group or local subculture
- extrapolate the practices of an unknown culture from similar examples

**Art** You're an expert on works of art from an aesthetic and technical point of view. You can:

- tell when something has been retouched or altered
- call to mind historical details on artists and those around them
- create works of art
- evaluate the monetary worth of works of art

**History** You're an expert in recorded human history, with an emphasis on its political, military, and economic and technological developments. You can:

- recognize obscure historical allusions
- recall capsule biographies of famous historical figures
- tell where and when an object made during historical times was fashioned
- identify the period of an article of dress or costume

**Languages** For each rating point in Languages, you are verbally fluent and literate in one language other than your native tongue. You may specify these when you create your character, or choose opportunistically in the course of play, revealing that you just happen to speak Javanese when circumstances require it. You are not learning the language spontaneously but revealing a hitherto unmentioned fact about your character. You may elect to be literate in an ancient language which is no longer spoken.

**Law** You are familiar with the criminal and civil laws of your home jurisdiction, and broadly acquainted with foreign legal systems. At a rating of 2 or more, you are a bar-certified attorney. You can:

- assess the legal risks attendant on any course of action
- understand lawyerly jargon
- argue with police and prosecutors

**Medicine** You are an expert in the applied care and maintenance of biological beings and life. You can:

- conduct physical exams
- diagnose ailments and analyze samples
- perform autopsies
- recognize biotech and use nanotech medical tools

Note that the Medicine cannot be used to heal Health damage during an investigation. That is covered by the Medic General Ability.

**Physics** You are an expert in physics ranging from theoretical physics to material science. You can:

- explain unusual physical phenomena and technologies based on them
- determine what elements are needed to nanofabricate something
- analyse exotic materials

**Political Science** You are an expert in the politics of transhumanity. You can:

- name and recognize the most important power-players in transhuman politics
- name and recognize all of the transhuman factions
- recognize which factions would benefit from some event

**Xenology** You are an expert in life forms that are not native to Earth. You can:

- recognize alien races
- recognize alien ruins, architecture and artifacts
- with the help of Biology, analyze alien nanoviruses and plagues

### **Interpersonal Abilities**

**Bureaucracy** You know how to navigate a bureaucratic organization, whether it's a governmental office or a large business concern. You know how to get what you want from it in an expeditious manner, and with a minimum of ruffled feathers. You can:

- convince officials to provide sensitive information
- gain credentials on false pretenses
- find the person who really knows what's going on
- locate offices and files
- borrow equipment or supplies

Bureaucracy is not a catch-all information gathering ability. Bureaucrats wish to convey the impression that they are busy and harried, whether or not they actually are. Most take a profound, secret joy in directing inquiries elsewhere. When players attempt to use Bureaucracy to gain information more easily accessible via other abilities (such as Research), their contacts snidely advise them to do their own damn legwork

**Flattery** You're good at getting people to help you by complimenting them, as subtly or blatantly as they prefer. You can get them to:

- reveal information
- perform minor favors
- regard you as trustworthy.

**Flirting** You're adept at winning cooperation from people who find you sexually attractive. You can get them to:

- reveal information
- help you in small ways
- date you

It's up to you whether a high rating in Flirting means that you are physically alluring, or simply exude a sexual magnetism unrelated to your looks.

**Impersonate** You're good at posing as another person, whether briefly misrepresenting yourself during a phone call or spending long periods undercover in a fictional identity.

Successfully disguising yourself as an actual person known to those you're interacting with is extraordinarily difficult. Brief voice-only mimicry requires a spend of at least 1.

Face-to-face impersonation requires a spend of at least 2 to 3 points for every five minutes of sustained contact between you and the object of your impersonation. Especially wary or intelligent subjects cost more to hoodwink than dull-witted walk-on characters.

**Interrogation** You're trained in extracting information from suspects and witnesses in the context of a formal police-style interview. This must take place in an official setting, where the subject is confined or feels under threat of confinement, and recognizes your authority (whether real or feigned.)



**Intimidation** You elicit cooperation from suspects by seeming physically imposing, invading their personal space, and adopting a psychologically commanding manner. Intimidation may involve implied or direct threats of physical violence but is just as often an act of mental dominance. You can:

- gain information
- inspire the subject to leave the area
- quell a subject's desire to attempt violence against you or others

**Kinesics** You can tell when some people are lying. You must usually be interacting with them or observing them from a close distance, but sometimes you can spot liars on television, too. Unfortunately, nearly everyone lies, especially when facing possible trouble from the authorities. Sometimes you can infer why they're lying, but it's hard to reliably discern motive or get at the facts they're working to obscure. This sense doesn't tell you what they're lying about, specifically, or see through their lies to the truth.

Not all lies are verbal. You can tell when a person is attempting to project a false impression through body language.

Certain individuals may be so adept at lying that they never set off your bullshit detector. Some people believe their own falsehoods. Psychopathic personality types lie reflexively and without shame, depriving you of the telltale tics and gestures you use to sense when a person is deceiving you. Sometimes you need leverage to get information out of people who you know are lying – re-interviewing suspects in the light of additional facts is a genre staple.

**Negotiation** You are an expert in making deals with others, convincing them that the best arrangement for you is also the best for them. You can:

- haggle for goods and services
- mediate hostage situations
- swap favors or information with others

**Protocol** Protocol is the art of making a good impression in social settings. This includes keeping up with the latest memes, trends, gossip, interests and habits of various (sub)cultural groups. You can:

- determine who is the appropriate person to speak to
- impress someone with your grasp of customs
- fit into a specific social/cultural grouping
- negate social gaffes

**Reassurance** You get people to do what you want by putting them at ease. You can:

- elicit information and minor favors
- allay fear or panic in others
- instill a sense of calm during a crisis

### **Technical Abilities**

**Astronomy** You study celestial objects, including the stars, planets. You can:

- plot the movement of planets and other celestial objects
- recognize objects in space from sensor readings or descriptions
- name objects in the known space

**Biology** You are an expert on life forms that are native to Earth. You can:

- identify plants and vegetation
- recognize and know how to handle animals
- understand and analyze biological processes like evolution and mutation

**Chemistry** You're trained in the analysis of chemical substances. You can:

- among a wide variety of other materials, identify drugs, pharmaceuticals, toxins, and viruses
- match samples of dirt or vegetation from a piece of evidence to a scene

**Cryptography** You're an expert in the making and breaking of codes, from the simple ciphers of old-school espionage tradecraft to the supercomputer algorithms of the present day. You can:

- crack spoken and written codes
- use cryptographic tools to crack complex encryptions
- find and recognize data hidden with cryptographic methods

**Geology** You are an expert on rocks, soils, minerals, and the primordial history of the planets in the solar system. You can:

- analyze soil samples, crystals, minerals, and so forth
- determine the age of a rock stratum
- date and identify fossils
- evaluate soil for agriculture or industry
- identify promising sites for oil or water wells, mines, etc
- anticipate volcanism, seismic events, avalanches, and other earth phenomena

**Engineering** You're an expert in the principles of designing and building devices, habitat systems and vehicles. You can:

- spot hidden rooms from floor plans
- find the weak spots in habitat systems
- figure out what it takes to make a space shuttle to break in a specific way

**Forgery** You're an expert in forging credentials, ID's and security hashes. Forgery applies both to physical and digital documents. You can:

- create false identities
- get people through customs
- create plausible looking old records

**Investigation** You're adept at finding, bagging and tagging important clues. You can:

- spot objects of interest at a crime scene or other investigation site
- note relationships between objects at a crime scene, reconstructing sequences of events
- store objects for forensic analysis without contaminating your samples

**Perception** You're adept at the use of your physical senses (including cybernetic) and awareness of the physical world around you. You can:

- notice small details about your surroundings
- spot hidden objects

Note that this skill doesn't cover investigation of a crime scene. That is covered by Investigation. This skill also doesn't cover spotting ambushes, traps or the like. That is covered by Sense Trouble.

**Programming** You're an expert in algorithms, programs and data. You can:

- understand what a program does based on its code
- find flaws in programs
- design virtual settings

Note that Programming does not cover information security and hacking. That is covered by Infosec.

**Research** You are adept at looking up information on the mesh: searching, sifting, mining, and interpreting data. This includes knowing where to look, what links to follow, and how to optimize your queries. You can:

- look up the answer to a question
- find databases
- search archives
- track down anything online
- track somebody with their mesh ID

### Step 3: Assign General Abilities

Each player gets 70 points to spend on general abilities, regardless of group size.

General abilities use different rules than investigative ones, which allow for possible failure. They help you survive while you investigating. When choosing general abilities, you'll want to concentrate your points among a few abilities, giving your comparatively higher ratings than you want in the investigative category.

You start the game with 4 points in Stability and your starting Health is determined by the morph you chose.

Although there is no set cap on abilities, the second highest rating must be at least half that of the highest rating.

### **What Good are General Ratings?**

General abilities use a different set of rules and are measured on a different scale than investigative abilities. The two ability sets are handled in different way because they fulfill distinct narrative functions. The rules governing general abilities introduce the possibility of failure into the game, creating suspense and uncertainty. Uncertain outcomes make scenes of physical action more exciting, but can stop a mystery story dead if applied to the collection of information. This division may seem aesthetically weird when you first encounter it, but as you grow used to the GUMSHOE system you'll see that it works.

GUMSHOE focuses not on your character's innate traits, but on what they can actually do in the course of a storyline. Why they can do it is up to each player. Your characters are as strong, fast, and good-looking as you want them to be.

### **General Ability Benchmarks**

A rating of 1-3 indicates that the ability is a sideline. 4-7 is solid but not off the charts. 8 or more suggests a dedicated bad-assery that will be immediately apparent to observers when they see you in action.

### **0-Rated General Abilities**

If you have a rating of 0 in a general ability, that is you have put no build points into it, you cannot make a test on that ability. That is not to say you can't do the thing at all; it's only if you want to attempt something requiring a roll that you will not succeed. Your character might be able to drive, but with a Drive rating of 0 you will not be able to deal with a car chase or potential crash.

### **General Abilities as Investigative Abilities**

Many General abilities also function as Investigative abilities, either when used to gather a clue (rather than to overcome opposition) or to interact with people devoted to those abilities' use: Melee Combat, for example, can be used investigatively to infiltrate a dojo or gymnasium, and to gather information or gossip from the clientele or managers. When used as Investigative Abilities, General Abilities don't require tests, only the use of the ability and possibly point spends.

## Cherries

Some General abilities have a cherry, a feature that kicks in when the character has 8 rating points or more in it. Characters can always use that special benefit, even if their pool in that ability has dropped to 0.

## General Abilities

This chapter lists all the General Abilities. There are two special categories of General Abilities, Networking Abilities and Psi Sleights. They work slightly differently, but are still purchased with the same points as other General Abilities.

**Athletics** Athletics allows you to perform general acts of physical derring-do, from running to jumping to dodging falling or oncoming objects. Any physical action not covered by another ability, probably falls under the rubric of Athletics.

*Athletics Cherry:* If your Athletics rating is 8 or more, your Hit Threshold, the Target Number your opponents use when attempting to hit you in combat, is 4. Otherwise, your Hit Threshold is 3.

**Demolitions** You're an expert in bombs and booby-traps. You can:

- defuse bombs and traps
- reconstruct exploded bombs, determining their materials, manufacture, and the sophistication of the bomb-maker
- safely construct and detonate explosive devices of your own

*Demolitions Cherry:* If your Demolitions rating is 8 or more, you may spend points from Demolitions to add damage to your bombs. You do this after damage has been rolled and can add 1 point of damage for each 2 points spent.

See [Explosions](#) for more information on how Demolitions works.

**Ground Craft** You're a skilled defensive driver, capable of wringing high performance from even the most recalcitrant ground vehicle. You can:

- evade or conduct pursuit
- avoid collisions, or minimize damage from collisions
- spot tampering with a vehicle
- conduct emergency repairs

**Gunnery** You are good at use and maintenance of large, vehicular, or non-portable weapons systems. Firing these weapons is more like playing a video game than firing a gun.

**Hardware** You're good at building, repairing, and disabling devices, from atmosphere sensors and ground craft to mainframe computers. Given the right components, you can create jury-rigged devices from odd bits of scrap.

**Health** Health measures your ability to sustain injuries, resist infection, and survive the effects of toxins. When you get hit in the course of a fight, your Health pool is diminished. A higher Health pool allows you to stay in a fight longer before succumbing to your injuries.

When your Health pool is depleted, you may be dazed, wounded, or pushing up the daisies. For more on this, see "Exhaustion, Injury and Gruesome Death."

Your Health depends on the morph you are currently inhabiting.

**Infiltration** You're good at placing yourself inside places you have no right to be. You can:

- pick locks
- deactivate or evade security systems
- move silently
- find suitable places for forced entry, and use them

Despite its name, Infiltration is as useful for getting out of places undetected as if its for getting into them.

**Infosec** You are adept at cracking security systems and bypassing firewalls or stopping them from being cracked. You can:

- bypass authentication
- deactivate, evade or create digital security measures
- create or disable worms, viruses or malware
- throw off security measures tracking you

*Infosec Cherry:* If your Infosec rating is 8 or more, you get 1 free rating point in the Investigative ability Cryptography. You can also encrypt your team's electronic communications against all but highest level cracking.

**Medic** You can perform first aid on sick or injured individuals. For more on the use of this ability, see “Exhaustion, Injury, and Death.”

*Medic Cherry:* If you have 8 or more points in Medic, you get 1 point in Medicine.

**Melee Combat** You can hold your own in a hand-to-hand fight, whether you wish to kill, knock out, restrain, or evade your opponent.

**Palming** Your nimble fingers allow you to unobtrusively manipulate small objects. You can:

- pilfer clues from a crime scene under the very noses of unsuspecting authorities
- pick pockets
- plant objects on unsuspecting subjects

**Preparedness** You expertly anticipate the needs of any mission by packing a kit efficiently arranged with necessary gear. Assuming you have immediate access to your kit, you can produce whatever object the team needs to overcome an obstacle. The rules for Preparedness are defined in the section on Gear.

Other abilities imply the possession of basic gear suitable to their core tasks. Characters with Medic have their own first aid kits. If you have Shooting, you have a gun, and so on. Preparedness does not intrude into their territory. It covers general-purpose investigative equipment, plus oddball items that suddenly come in handy in the course of the story.

The sorts of items you can produce at a moment’s notice depend not on your rating or pool, but on narrative credibility. If the GM determines that your possession of an item would seem ludicrous or and/or out of genre, you don’t get to roll for it. You simply don’t have it. Any item which elicits a laugh from the group when suggested is probably out of bounds.

Inappropriate use of the Preparedness ability is like pornography. Your GM will know it when she sees it.

**Psychosurgery** You are adept at use of machine-aided psychological techniques to repair, damage, or manipulate the psyche. You can:

- implement behavioral control or masking or emotional control
- conduct deep learning or psychotherapy
- conduct interrogation or psychotorture



- edit personalities

Using Psychosurgery requires specialized facilities and a willing or constrained patient that is placed in a simulspace as a digital consciousness.

*Psychosurgery Cherry:* If you have 8 or more points in Psychosurgery, you get 1 free point in Flattery, Interrogation, Kinesics or Reassurance.

**Sense Trouble** Keen perceptions allow you to spot signs of potential danger to yourself and others. Information gained from this ability might save your skins but doesn't directly advance the central mystery. You might use it to:

- hear someone sneak up on you
- see an obscured or hidden figure
- smell a gas leak
- have a bad feeling about this

Players never know the Difficulty Numbers for Sense Trouble before deciding how many points to spend. Players must blindly choose how much to spend.

When more than one player is able to make a Sense Trouble test, the group decides which of them makes the attempt. Only one attempt per source of trouble occurs, conducted by the chosen PC.

*Sense Trouble Cherry:* If you have 8 or more points in Sense Trouble, you don't need to test for surprise when an opponent tries to surprise you. You don't take any negative modifiers for surprise.

**Shooting** You're adept with shooting all kinds of weapons from kinetic weapons to spray and beam weapons.

**Shuttle Craft** You're adept at flying craft used in and around celestial objects that have an atmosphere.

**Space Craft** You're adept at flying craft used in moving from one part of the solar system to other parts of it.

**Stability** Jarring or stressful events can exert a damaging long-term psychological toll. Your Stability rating indicates your resistance to mental trauma.

You get Stability 4 for free.

**Resources** You have material resources at your disposal. This may mean money, stocks, or any other resource that is easily traded. Resources can be used to acquire goods and services.

Resources can also be combined, forming a shared Resource rating.

## **Networking Abilities**

There are 7 different networking Abilities, but they all work in the same manner. Points from rep can be used to get information, favors or equipment from contacts. Unlike most other General Abilities, Networking Abilities use a Toll Test and they often double as Investigative Abilities. See [Using Networking Abilities and Resources](#) for more information.

Networking comes in the following flavors:

**@-Rep (Autonomists)** Network Name: The Circle-A List

Networking Field: Autonomists

Covers: anarchists, Barsoomians, Extropians, Titanian, and scum

**C-Rep (Hypercorps)** Network Name: CivicNet

Networking Field: Hypercorps

Covers: hypercorps, Jovians, Lunars, Martians, Venusians

**E-Rep (Ecologists)** Network Name: EcoWave

Networking Field: Ecologists

Covers: nano-ecologists, preservationists, and reclaimers

**F-Rep (Media)** Network Name: Fame

Networking Field: Media

Covers: socialites (also artists, glitterati, and media)

**G-Rep (Criminals)** Network Name: Guanxi

Networking Field: Criminals

Covers: criminals

**I-Rep (Firewall)** Network Name: The Eye

Networking Field: Firewall

Covers: Firewall

I-rep is only available to characters that belong to the Firewall.

**R-Rep (Scientists)** Network Name: Research Network Associates

Networking Field: Scientists

Covers: argonauts (also technologists, researchers, and scientists)

### **Psi Sleights**

It costs 5 build points to gain a rating of 1 in any Psi Sleight and 1 build point for each additional build point after 1.

Purchasing Psi Sleights means that your character is infected with the Watts-MacLeod strain of the exsurgent virus. See the [Psi rules](#) section for more information.

There are several forms of different Psi Sleights:

**Pattern Recognition** You're adept at recognizing patterns. You can:

- Substitute Pattern Recognition to Language, Investigation, Research or Programming when the task is about recognizing patterns.

**Charisma** You can influence the target's mind on a subconscious level to appear charming, magnetic and persuasive. You can:

- Substitute Charisma to Flattery, Flirting, Negotiation or Reassurance.

**Cloud Memory** You can temporarily disrupt the target's ability to form long-term memories, if you succeed in a Test. The Tests difficulty is normally 4, but might be higher for exceptionally strong-willed individuals. Cloud Memory affects the target for one scene.

**Deep Scan** You can telepathically invade the target's mind and probe it for information, if you succeed in a Test. The Tests difficulty is normally 4, but might be higher for exceptionally strong-willed individuals. For every point you succeeded over the difficulty you get to ask the gamemaster one yes/no-question. The target is aware that their mind is being probed.

**Ego Sense** You can detect the presence and location of other sentient and biological life forms (i.e., egos) within a short range. You have a rough idea of the size, type of creature, and distance of the egos. The result of your test determines what the range of Ego Sense is:

- Result 4: every ego within 5 meters.
- Result 6: every ego within 10 meters.
- Result 8: every ego within 15 meters.
- Result 10: every ego within 20 meters.

**Mindlink** You can communicate with others telepathically. Mindlink costs 1 point per target to use. You must succeed in a Difficulty 4 test against unwilling targets.

**Psychic Stab** You can use Psi to attack others. You must succeed in a test against the target's Hit Threshold to do Damage +0 against them. Psychic Stab ignores armor.

## Starting Gear

Every character starts off free with a standard muse and 1 month of backup insurance at no cost.

Other gear needs not to be defined before it is needed in the game, with Preparedness working as the description of how well equipped a character is.

You can also assume that characters own the basic gear needed to use their Abilities. What this means for each Ability is up to player interpretation. For example, this doesn't mean that all characters with Demolitions have bombs in their pockets, but that they have access to bomb disposal and installation equipment.

Augmentations for starting morphs are handled a bit differently: players can set aside some points from their Preparedness to a special pool for personal augmentations. They can use this pool to test for having augmentations on their starting morph at any point in the game. To test for augmentations they must use at least 1 point from that pool. Points can never be added to this pool. Players have a chance of returning any unused points to their pool whenever they change morphs. Any further augmentations for morphs should be acquired as described in [the rules for gear](#).

## Motivations

Each PC follows motivations, giving him, her or it good reason to act heroically and curiously. By following your motivations, you keep the story moving and ensure that your behavior is in keeping with the science-fiction horror genre.

These are memes, in the form of ideologies or goals, which your character is pursuing. These may be as specific as “undermine the local triad boss” or as broad as “promote hypercapitalism,” and they may be short term or long term.

Motivations should be listed on your character sheet as a single term or short phrase, along with a + or – symbol to denote whether they support or oppose it. For example, +**Fame** would indicate that your character seeks to become a famous media personality, whereas –**Reclaim Earth** means that your character opposes the goal of reclaiming Earth.

Choose 3 motivations for your character. Motivations should reflect both the character and the game. Choosing +**Fame** in a campaign that is about uplift rights may or may not be appropriate. Motivations should be discussed both with the GM and the other players.

### Example Motivations

- Alien Contact
- Anarchism
- Artistic Expression
- Bioconservatism
- Education
- Exploration
- Fame
- Fascism
- Hedonism
- Hypercapitalism
- Immortality
- Libertarianism
- Martian Liberation
- Morphological Freedom
- Nano-ecology

- Open Source
- Personal Career
- Personal Development
- Philanthropy
- Preservationism
- Reclaiming Earth
- Religion
- Research
- (AI/Infomorph/Pod/Uplift) Rights
- (AI/Infomorph/Pod/Uplift) Slavery
- Socialism
- Techno-Progressivism
- Vengeance
- Venusian Sovereignty
- Wealth

## **The GUMSHOE Rules System**

This section describes the basic GUMSHOE rules system and is addressed to players and GM alike. But first bear with us for a little explanatory theory.

### **Why This Game Exists**

GUMSHOE speeds and streamlines the time-honored form of the investigative roleplaying game. The central question a traditional RPG asks is:

Will the heroes get the information they need?

Assuming that they look in the right place and apply appropriate abilities to the task, GUMSHOE ensures that the heroes get the basic clues they need to move through the story. The question it asks is:

What will the heroes do with the information once they've got it?

If you think about it, this is how the source materials we base our mystery scenarios on handle clues. You don't see the forensic techies on CSI failing to successfully use their lab equipment, or Sherlock Holmes stymied and unable to move forward because he blew his Zoology roll.

You don't see this because, in a story failure to gain information is rarely more interesting than getting it. New information opens up new narrative possibilities, new choices and actions for the characters. Failure to get information is a null result that takes you nowhere.

In a fictional procedural, whether it's a mystery novel or an episode of a cop show, the emphasis isn't on finding the clues in the first place. When it really matters, you may get a paragraph telling you how difficult the search was, or a montage of a CSI team tossing an apartment. But the action really starts after the clues are gathered.

**Investigative scenarios are not about finding clues, they're about interpreting the clues you do find.**

GUMSHOE, therefore, makes the finding of clues all but automatic, as long as you get to the right place in the story and have the right ability. That's when the fun part begins, when the players try to put the components of the puzzle together.

That's hard enough for a group of armchair detectives, without withholding half the pieces from them. Every investigative scenario begins with a crime or conspiracy committed by a group of antagonists. The bad guys do something bad. The player characters must figure out who did it and put a stop to their activities.

When you do see information withheld from characters, it's seldom portrayed as a failure on the part of the competent, fact-gathering heroes. Instead the writers show an external force preventing them from applying their abilities. In a space opera show, you might get the proverbial ion storm that prevents the crew from scanning the planet before they go down. Information is only withheld when it makes the story more interesting—usually by placing the heroes at a handicap while they move forward in the storyline. In GUMSHOE terms, they're not trying to get an available clue and failing; they're using an ability for which no clue is available.

Historically, story-based roleplaying, of which investigative games were an early if not the earliest example, evolved from dungeon-bashing campaigns. They treat clues the same way that dungeon games treat treasure. You have to search for the clue that takes you on to the next scene. If you roll well, you get the clue. If not, you don't—and the story grinds to a halt.

However, treasure gathering isn't the main event in a dungeon game. There, the central activity is killing the monsters and enemies who live in the dungeon. The treasure-finding phase comes afterwards, as a mere reward. If you don't get

all the treasure in a room, you lose out a bit, but the story keeps going, as you tromp down the hallway to the next monster-filled chamber.

Imagine a dungeon game where you always had to roll well to find another room to plunder, or sit around feeling frustrated and bored.

Many of our favorite roleplaying games use the traditional roll-to-get-a-clue model. You may have been lucky enough to play in them without ever seeing your game ground to a halt after a failed information roll. Perhaps your GM, or the scenario designer, has carefully crafted the adventure so that you never have to get any specific clue to advance the story.

More likely, your GM adjusts on the fly to your failed rolls, creating elaborate workarounds that get you the same information by different means. When you think about it, these runarounds moments are essentially time killers. They bring about a predetermined, necessary result while giving you the illusion of randomness and chance. GUMSHOE cuts out these filler moments in favor of scenes that actually advance the story. With the time saved, you can construct more detailed, compelling mysteries for the players to sort out. That's where the streamlining comes in.

If you've never had a game stop dead on a missed clue, you may naturally figure that it never happens to anyone. Having run GMing seminars at conventions for years, I can assure you that this is not the case. People come up to me all the time to share their horror stories of games that literally go nowhere on a blown spot test. This should not be surprising. GMs are doing what the rules tell them to do, and failing to see the unwritten rule that they should then spend five to twenty minutes of game time introducing a workaround.

GUMSHOE gives you the rules you should actually use as written, and skips the workaround.

But even if you've never noticed this problem, play it because it focuses and streamlines play, eliminating the elaborate workarounds your GM has to use to make the missed information rolls invisible to you. It replaces these moments of circular plotting with more interesting scenes that move the story forward.

## Mystery Structure

Every investigative scenario begins with a crime, conspiracy, or other act of disorder committed by a group of antagonists. The bad guys do something bad. The player characters must figure out who did it and put a stop to their activities.

Your GM designs each scenario by creating an investigation trigger, a sinister conspiracy, and a trail of clues.

The investigation trigger. This is the event, that attracts the attention of investigators.



- The discovery of a murder victim, obviously slain during a ritualistic killing.
- The discovery of a corpse slain by supernatural means, perhaps by a creature.
- Sightings of supernatural creatures or phenomena.

The sinister conspiracy. This sets out who the bad guys are, what they've done so far, what they're trying to do, and how the investigation trigger fits into the overall scheme. The GM also determines what has to happen to prevent the plot from going forward. This, unknown to the players, is their victory condition — what they have to do to thwart the bad guys and bring the story to a positive conclusion.

Once the GM has the logic of the story worked out from the villain's point of view, she then thinks in reverse, designing a trail of clues leading from the investigation trigger to an understanding of the sinister plot and its players, sufficient to get to work destroying it.

Optionally, the GM may also plan a series of antagonist reactions. These lay out what the bad guys do when they find out that they're being investigated. The GM determines what conditions trigger them, and what the antagonists attempt to do. These may include further crimes, giving the team more to investigate. They may try to destroy evidence, hinder the investigation by planting false leads, or to intimidate or dispose of potential witnesses, including accomplices they no longer trust. They may attack the investigators. Foolish, overconfident or risk-taking antagonists may take them on directly. Clever antagonists will strike from a distance, taking great pains to cover their tracks.

Ordinary crime dramas may call for a simpler structure. The bad guys could still be furthering a sinister plot, or they may be doing nothing after committing the triggering crime other than hoping that the investigators don't catch up with them. In this case there is no ongoing conspiracy to disrupt. To achieve victory and bring the scenario to a successful conclusion, the investigators need merely prove their case against the criminals. The climactic scene might involve wringing a confession from the wrongdoer, or provoking him into revealing the crucial bit of evidence which will ensure his conviction.

## **From Structure To Story**

The GM's structure notes are not a story. The story occurs as you, the team of players, brings the structure to life through the actions of your characters. The story proceeds from scene to scene, where you determine the pace, discovering clues and putting them together. Your characters interact with locations, gathering physical evidence, and supporting characters run by the GM, gathering expert and eyewitness testimony.

The first scene presents the mystery you have to solve. You then perform legwork, collecting information that tells you more about the case. Each scene contains information pointing to a new scene. Certain scenes may put a new twist on the investigation, as the initial mystery turns out to be just one aspect of a much bigger story. As clues accumulate, a picture of the case emerges, until your characters arrive at a climactic scene, where all is revealed and the bad guys confronted. A wrap-up scene accounts for loose ends and shows the consequences of your success—or, in rare instances, failure. (Why is failure possible at all? Its possibility creates urgency and suspense.)

To move from scene to scene, and to solve the overall mystery, you must gather clues. They fuel your forward momentum.

### **Tip For Players: Containing Speculation**

Investigative scenarios often bog down into speculative debate between players about what could be happening. Many things can be happening, but only one thing is. If more than one possible explanation ties together the clues you have so far, you need more clues.

Whenever you get stuck, get out and gather more information.

## **Gathering Clues**

Gathering clues is simple. All you have to do is: 1) get yourself into a scene where relevant information can be gathered and 2) have the right ability to discover the clue and 3) tell the GM that you're using it. As long as you do these three things, you will never fail to gain a piece of necessary information. It is never dependent on a die roll. If you ask for it, you will get it.

You can specify exactly what you intend to achieve: “I use Cryptography to determine if the file has any hidden information.”

Or you can engage in a more general informational fishing expedition: “I use Investigation to search the crime scene.”

If your suggested action corresponds to a clue in the scenario notes, the GM provides you the information arising from the clue.

Some clues would be obvious to a trained investigator immediately upon entering a scene. These passive clues are provided by the GM without prompting. Scenarios suggest which clues are passive and which are active, but your GM will adjust these in play depending on how much guidance you seem to need. On a night when you're cooking with gas, the GM will sit back and let you prompt her for passive clues. When you're bogging down, she may volunteer what would normally be active clues.

## Core Clues

For each scene, the GM designates a core clue. This is the clue you absolutely need to move to the next scene, and thus to complete the entire investigation. GMs will avoid making core clues available only with the use of obscure investigative abilities. (For that matter, the character creation system is set up so that the group as a whole will have access to all, or nearly all, of these abilities.) The ability the GM designates is just one possibility, not a straight jacket – if players come up with another plausible method, the GM should give out the information.

Some clues would be obvious to a trained investigator immediately upon entering a scene. These passive clues are provided by the GM without prompting. Scenarios suggest which clues are passive and which are active, but your GM will adjust these in play depending on how much guidance you seem to need. On a night when you're cooking with gas, the GM will sit back and let you prompt her for passive clues. When you're bogging down, she may volunteer what would normally be active clues.

## Special Benefits

Certain clues allow you to gain special benefits by spending points from the relevant investigative ability pool. During your first few scenarios, your GM will offer you the opportunity to spend additional points as you uncover these clues. After that it's also up to you to ask if there's anything to be gained by spending extra time or effort on a given clue. You can even propose specific ways to improve your already good result; if your suggestion is persuasive or entertaining, the GM may award you a special benefit not mentioned in her scenario notes.

Each benefit costs either 1 or 2 points from the relevant pool, depending on the difficulty of the additional action and the scope of the reward. When asking you if you want to purchase the benefit, the GM always tells you how much it will cost. Additional information gained provides flavor, but is never required to solve the case or move on to a new scene. Often it makes the character seem clever, powerful, or heroic. It may grant you benefits useful later in the scenario, frequently by making a favorable impression on supporting characters. It may allow you to leap forward into the story by gaining a clue that would otherwise only become apparent in a later scene. On occasion, the additional information adds an emotional dimension to the story or ties into the character's past history or civilian life. If you think of your GUMSHOE game as a TV series, an extra benefit gives the actor playing your character a juicy spotlight scene.

The act of spending points for benefits is called a spend. The GM's scenario notes may specify that you get Benefit X for a 1-point spend, or Benefit Y for a 2-point spend. Sometimes minor non-core information is available at no cost.

GMs of great mental agility who feel comfortable granting their players influence

over the details of the narrative may allow them to specify the details of a special benefit.

If you wish to make a spend in a situation where the GM has no special benefit to offer you, and cannot think of one that pertains at all to the investigation, you do not lose the points you wish to spend.

### **Inconspicuous Clues**

Sometimes the characters instinctively notice something without actively looking for it. Often this situation occurs in places they're moving through casually and don't regard as scenes in need of intensive searching. The team might pass by a concealed door, spot a droplet of blood on the marble of an immaculate hotel lobby, or approach a vehicle with a bomb planted beneath it. Interpersonal abilities can also be used to find inconspicuous clues. The classic example is of a character whose demeanor or behavioral tics establish them as suspicious.

It's unreasonable to expect players to ask to use their various abilities in what appears to be an innocuous transitional scene. Otherwise they'd have to spend minutes of game time with every change of scene, running down their abilities in obsessive checklist fashion. That way madness lies.

Instead the GM asks which character has the highest current pool in the ability in question. (When in doubt for what ability to use for a basic search, the GM defaults to Evidence Collection.)

If two or more pools are equal, it goes to the one with the highest rating. If ratings are also equal, their characters find the clue at the same time.

### **Simple Searches**

Many clues can be found without any ability whatsoever. If an ordinary person could credibly find a clue simply by looking in a specified place, the clue discovery occurs automatically. You, the reader, wouldn't need to be a trained investigator to find a bloody footprint on the carpet in your living room, or notice a manila envelope taped to the underside of a table at the local pub. By that same logic, the Investigators don't require specific abilities to find them, either. When players specify that they're searching an area for clues, they're performing what we call a simple search.

Vary the way you run simple searches according to pacing needs and the preferences of your group. Some players like to feel that their characters are interacting with the imaginary environment. To suit them, use a call-and-response format, describing the scene in a way that suggests places to look. The player prompts back by zeroing in on a detail, at which point you reveal the clue:

You: Beside the window stands a roll-top desk.

Player: I look inside!

You: You find an album full of old photographs.

At other times, or for players less interested in these small moments of discovery, you might cut straight to the chase:

You: You find an album full of old photographs in the roll-top desk.

In the first case, the player who first voices interest in the detail finds the clue. In the second, it goes to, at your discretion:

- the character to whom the clue seems most thematically suited (for example, if you've established as a running motif that Agent Jenkins always stumbles on the disgusting clues, and this clue is disgusting, tell his player that he's once again stepped in it)
- a player who hasn't had a win or spotlight time for a while
- the character with the highest Perception rating

## Die Rolls

All die rolls in GUMSHOE use a single ordinary (six-sided) die.

## Tests

A test occurs when the outcome of an ability use is in doubt. Tests apply to general skills only. Unlike information gathering attempts, tests carry a fairly high chance of failure. They may portend dire consequences if you lose, provide advantages if you win, or both.

Even in the case of general skills, the GM should call for tests only at dramatically important points in the story, and for tasks of exceptional difficulty. Most general ability uses should allow automatic successes, with possible bonuses on point spends, just like investigative abilities.

There are two types of test: simple tests and contests.

## **Simple Tests**

A simple test occurs when the character attempts an action without active resistance from another person or entity. Examples include driving a treacherous road, jumping a gorge, sneaking into an unguarded building, binding a wound, shooting a target, disconnecting a security system, or remaining sane in the face of creeping supernatural horror.

In the game world, expenditure of pool points in this way represents special effort and concentration by the character, the kind you can muster only so many times during the course of an investigation.

The GM does not reveal Difficulty Numbers beforehand. This rule is meant to force players to decide how much they want to commit to the situation, with the gnawing emotional dissonance that comes from the possibility of making the wrong move.

## **Boosts**

Some morphs, augmentations or equipment provide boosts in one or more Abilities. The effect of the boost depends on whether the boost is in Investigative or General Abilities. A boost in an Investigative Ability add 1 to the pool of the Investigative Ability after any points have been spent from that pool. A boost in a General Ability adds 1 to the result of any roll in that Ability. Boosts never stack: having more than one boost for an Ability may be useful if the boosts apply only to specific situations (like climbing).

## **Difficulty Numbers and Story Pacing**

Just as the GUMSHOE system keeps the story moving by making all crucial clues accessible to the characters, GMs must ensure that tests and contests essential to forward narrative momentum can be easily overcome. Assign relatively low Difficulty Numbers of 4 or less to these crucial plot points. Reserve especially hard Difficulty Numbers for obstacles which provide interesting but nonessential benefits.

For example, if the characters have to sneak into the cannibal campground in order to stage the final confrontation, assign the relatively low Difficulty Number of 4 to the task. If it seems to the characters that they ought to have a tougher time of it, insert a detail justifying their ease of success. The cannibal assigned to patrol duty might be found passed out at his post, say.

Where it is essential to overcome a General obstacle in order to reach a core scene, allow success whatever the result, but give a negative consequence other than failure for the test. For example, the PC climbs a fence, but receives an injury. This rule never protects characters from Health or Stability loss.

The test represents the character's best chance to succeed. Once you fail, you've shot your wad and cannot retry unless you take some other supporting action that would credibly increase your odds of success. If allowed to do this, you must spend more pool points than you did on the previous attempt. If you can't afford it, you can't retry.

### **Piggybacking**

When a group of characters act in concert to perform a task together, they designate one to take the lead. That character makes a simple test, spending any number of his own pool points toward the task, as usual. All other characters pay 1 point from their relevant pools in order to gain the benefits of the leader's action. These points are not added to the leader's die result. For every character who is unable to pay this piggybacking cost, either because he lacks pool points or does not have the ability at all, the Difficulty Number of the attempt increases by 2.

In most instances a group cannot logically act in concert. Only one character can drive a car at one time. Two characters with Preparedness check their individual kits in sequence, rather than checking a single kit at the same time.

### **Cooperation**

When two characters cooperate toward a single goal, they agree which of them is undertaking the task directly, and which is assisting. The leader may spend any number of points from her pool, adding them to the die roll. The assistant may pay any number of points from his pool. All but one of these is applied to the die roll.

### **Continuing Challenges**

For tasks where drama, verisimilitude or suspense call for a feeling of repeated effort, assign the obstacle a pool representing the base Difficulty of doing it all at once unaided: this will generally be 8 or higher, often much higher. The tests per se use the standard Difficulty of 4.

The players may take turns, cooperate on each action, or use any other means at their disposal in a series of tests: Athletics to batter down a door, or Digital Intrusion to penetrate a firewall, for example. The points they roll and spend accumulate; when they have enough points to overcome the initial Difficulty, the task is done. No points or rolls spent on a failed test add to the total.

Characters can't render an impossible task possible just by applying the continuing challenge rules.

## **Zero Sum Contests**

A zero sum contest occurs when something bad or good is definitely going to happen to one of the PCs, and you need to find out which one takes the hit. Each player makes a test of a general ability. A zero sum contest can be positive or negative. In a positive contest, the character with the highest result gets a benefit. In a negative contest, the one with the lowest result suffers an ill consequence. When embarking on a contest with an open Difficulty, inform the players that this is an open Difficulty, and whether this is a positive or negative test. They then decide in advance how many points to spend to modify their rolls, keeping this number secret from other players by writing it down on a piece of paper. They then roll the dice, reveal their expenditures, and announce their final results. You can cap the maximum spend.

Be cautious when treating events with negative outcomes as zero sum contests. Because they guarantee that something bad will definitely happen to one of the PCs, make sure that the negative consequence is distressing but does no permanent harm to the character.

Worse results of zero sum contests are acceptable if the characters have had some other fair chance to avoid exposure to the bad situation.

If players are tied for best result (in the case of a positive test) or worst (in a negative test), the tied players may subsequently spend any number of additional points from the pool in question, in hopes of breaking the tie in their favor. Should results remain tied after additional expenditures, the GM chooses the winner based on story considerations.

## **General Spends**

Occasionally you'll want to create a task at which there is no reasonable chance of failure, but which should cost the characters a degree of effort. To do this, simply charge the character(s) a number of points from relevant general ability pools. Where tasks can be performed by cooperative effort, multiple characters may contribute points to them. 1 or 2 points per character is a reasonable general spend.

## **Making General Tests Without Abilities**

You can always make a test of any general ability if your rating is 1 or more, whether or not you currently have points in its pool. You can never test a general ability when your rating is 0.



## **Toll Tests**

In a toll test, your success is assured, if you want it enough, but the cost of your effort is not. The GM informs you of the Difficulty; you roll the die without announcing an expenditure. Once you see the die result, you then decide whether to spend the points needed to bridge the gap between die roll and Difficulty, or to allow yourself to fail. The base Difficulty of a toll test is 6, which may be modified upwards as circumstances warrant.

## **Contests**

Contests occur when two characters, often a player character and a supporting character controlled by the GM, actively attempt to thwart one another. Although contests can resolve various physical match-ups, in a horror game the most common contest is the chase, in which the investigators run away from slavering entities intent on ripping them limb from limb.

In a contest, each character acts in turn. The first to fail a roll of the contested ability loses. The GM decides who acts first. In a chase, the character who bolts from the scene acts first. Where the characters seem to be acting at the same time, the one with the lowest rating in the relevant ability acts first. In the event of a tie, supporting characters act before player characters. In the event of a tie between player characters, the player who arrived last for the current session goes first in the contest.

The first character to act makes a test of the ability in question. If he fails, he loses the contest. If he succeeds, the second character then makes a test. This continues until one character loses, at which point the other one wins.

Typically each character attempts to beat a Difficulty Number of 4.

Where the odds of success are skewed in favor of one contestant, the GM may assign different Difficulties to each. A character with a significant advantage gets a lower Difficulty Number. A character facing a major handicap faces a higher Difficulty Number. When in doubt, the GM assigns the lower number to the advantaged participant.

Throughout the contest, GM and players should collaborate to add flavor to each result, explaining what the characters did to remain in the contest. That way, instead of dropping out of the narration to engage in an arithmetical recitation, you keep the fictional world verbally alive .

## **Fighting**

Fights are slightly more complicated contests involving any of the following abilities:

- **Melee Combat vs. Melee Combat:** the characters are fighting in close quarters.
- **Shooting vs. Shooting:** the characters are apart from one another and trying to hit each other with guns or other missile weapons

**Initiative:** Determine whether the character who attempts to strike the first blow seizes the initiative and therefore gets the first opportunity to strike his opponent, or if his intended target anticipates his attack and beats him to the punch—or shot, as the case may be.

As GUMSHOE is player-facing, how this works depends on whether the PC in the situation is the aggressor or the defender.

In a Melee Combat contest, the PC gets to go first if his Melee Combat rating equals or exceeds that of his target.

In a Shooting contest, he gets to go first if his Shooting rating exceeds that of his target.

Otherwise, the opponent goes first.

In the rare instance where two PCs fight one another (when one of them is possessed, say), the PC with the higher applicable rating (Melee Combat or Shooting) goes first. If their ratings tie but their pools do not, the one with the higher pool goes first. If both are tied, roll a die, with one player going first on an odd result and the other on even.

A contest proceeds between the two abilities. When combatants using the Melee Combat or Shooting abilities roll well, they get the opportunity to deal damage to their opponents.

**Hit Thresholds:** Each character has a Hit Threshold of either 3 (the standard value) or 4 (if the character's Athletics rating is 8 or more.) The Hit Threshold is the Difficulty Number the character's opponent must match or beat in order to harm him. Less competent supporting characters may have lower Hit Thresholds. Creatures may have Hit Thresholds of 4 or higher, regardless of their Athletics ratings.

**Dealing Damage:** When you roll on or over your opponent's Hit Threshold, you may deal damage to him. To do so, you make a damage roll, rolling a die which is then modified according to the relative lethality of your weapon, as per the following table:

Weapon Type	Damage Modifier
Fist, kick	−2
Small improvised weapon, police baton, knife	−1

Weapon Type	Damage Modifier
Machete, heavy club, light firearm	+0
Sword, heavy firearm	+1
Very heavy firearm, all guns used with Gunnery	+2

For firearms, add an additional +2 when fired at point blank range.

Characters may never spend points from their combat pools to increase their damage rolls.

The final damage result is then subtracted from your opponent's Health pool. When a combatant's Health pool drops to 0 or less, that combatant begins to suffer ill effects, ranging from slight impairment to helplessness to death; see sidebar.

Unlike other contests, participants do not lose when they fail their test rolls. Instead, they're forced out of the fight when they lose consciousness or become seriously wounded.

## Exhaustion, Injury and Death

Unlike most abilities, your Health pool can drop below 0.

**When it does this, you must make a Consciousness Roll.** Roll a die with the absolute value of your current Health pool as your Difficulty. You may deliberately strain yourself to remain conscious, voluntarily reducing your Health pool by an amount of your choice. For each point you reduce it, add 1 to your die result. The Difficulty of the Consciousness roll is based on your Health pool before you make this reduction.

**If your pool is anywhere from 0 to -5,** you are hurt, but have suffered no permanent injury, beyond a few superficial cuts and bruises. However the pain of your injuries makes it impossible to spend points on Investigative abilities, and increases the Difficulty Numbers of all tests and contests, including opponents' Hit Thresholds, by 1.

A character with the Medic ability can improve your condition by spending Medic points. For every Medic point spent, you regain 2 Health points—unless you are the Medic, in which case you gain only 1 Health point for every Medic point spent. The Medic can only refill your pool to where you were before the incident in which you received this latest injury. He must be in a position to devote all of his attention to directly tending to your wounds.

**If your pool is between -6 and -11,** you have been seriously wounded. You must make a Consciousness roll.

Whether or not you maintain consciousness, you are no longer able to fight. Until you receive first aid, you will lose an additional Health point every half hour. A character with the Medic ability can stabilize your condition by spending 2 Medic points. However, he can't restore your Health points.

Even after you receive first aid, you must convalesce in a hospital or similar setting for a period of days. Your period of forced inactivity is a number of days equal to the positive value of your lowest Health pool score. (So if you were reduced to -8 Health, you are hospitalized for 8 days.) On the day of your discharge, your Health pool increases to half its maximum value. On the next day, it refreshes fully.

**When your pool dips to -12 or below, your morph is dead or destroyed.** Time to figure out when your last backup was taken.

### Bigger Fights

Combat becomes more chaotic when two groups of combatants fight, or a group gangs up against a single opponent.

If one group of combatants is surprised by the other, the surprising side goes before the surprised side.

Otherwise, determine initiative as follows.

**Close-up fight:** if any PC has a Melee Combat rating equal to or greater than than any combatant on the other side, the PCs act first.

**Shoot-out:** if any PC has a Shooting rating equal to or greater than than any combatant on the other side, the PCs act first.

Shoot-outs may devolve into scuffles; this does not alter the already-established initiative order.

The time it takes to go through the ranking order once, with each character taking an action, is called a round. When one round ends, another begins.

In the course of each round, either the PCs or their enemies go first, as already established by the initiative order. Then the other side responds. The order in which the two sides act remains unchanged from round to round.

During the portion of the round devoted to the PCs, each participating PC makes an attack in sequence, according to the players' seating order, from left to right. Sequence becomes irrelevant, obviously, when only one PC is participating (or still standing) in the fight.

In their portion of the round, opponent(s) respond with their own wave of attack attempts, ordered by the characters they're targeting, again using a left to right player seating order. Where multiple opponents attack a single PC, the GM determines their order of action in whatever manner she finds convenient—usually the order in which she's tracking them in her rough notes.

The order of action can therefore change slightly from round to round for the PCs' opponents, but not for the PCs.

Some beings may strike more than once per round. They make each attack in succession, and may divide them up between opponents within range, or concentrate all of them on a single enemy. GMs order these attacks in whatever order they find convenient, so long as they fall within portion of the round devoted to enemy attacks. Usually it's easiest to have them act against multiple PCs at once, starting when they reach the first target in the seating order

When called upon to act, each character may strike at any opponent within range of his weapons.

Creatures may choose to use their actions to deal additional damage to downed or helpless opponents rather than engage active opponents. They automatically deal once instance of damage per action. Only the most crazed and bestial human enemies engage in this behavior.

Characters who join a combat in progress come last in order of precedence. If more than two characters join during the same round, the GM determines their relative precedence using the rules above.

The fight continues until one side capitulates or flees, or all of its members are unconscious or otherwise unable to continue.

## **Surprise**

Player characters are surprised when they find themselves suddenly in a dangerous situation. Avoid being surprised with a successful Sense Trouble test. The basic Difficulty is 4, adjusted by the opponent's Stealth Modifier.

Player characters surprise supporting characters by sneaking up on them with a successful Infiltration test. The basic Difficulty is 4, adjusted by the opponent's Alertness modifier.

Surprised characters suffer a +2 increase to all general ability Difficulties for any immediately subsequent action. In a fight, the penalty pertains to the first round of combat.

## **Armor**

Armor may reduce the damage from certain weapon types. If you're wearing a form of armor effective against the weapon being used against you, you subtract a number of points from each instance of damage dealt to you before applying it to your Health pool.

Body armor marks you out as someone looking for trouble. This applies doubly to military-grade body armor. Investigators can't expect to walk around openly

wearing armor without attracting the attention of the law-enforcement team. Armor and heavy weapons may prove useful in discrete missions conducted away from prying eyes.

See **Gear: Armor** for more details on armor.

## Cover

In a typical gunfight, combatants seek cover, hiding behind walls, furniture or other barriers, exposing themselves only for the few seconds it takes them to pop up and fire a round at their targets. The GUMSHOE rules recognize three cover conditions:

**Exposed:** No barrier stands between you and the combatant firing at you. Your Hit Threshold decreases by 1.

**Partial Cover:** About half of your body is exposed to fire. Your Hit Threshold remains unchanged.

**Full Cover:** Except when you pop up to fire a round, the barrier completely protects you from incoming fire. Your Hit Threshold increases by 1.

## One Gun, Two Combatants

If your opponent has a gun well in hand and ready to fire, and you charge him from more than five feet away, he can empty his entire clip or chamber at you before you get to him, badly injuring you. You are automatically hit. He rolls one instance of damage, which is then tripled. Yes, we said tripled. And, yes, the tripling occurs after weapon modifiers are taken into account. This is why few people charge when their opponents have the drop on them.

If your opponent has a pistol but it is not well in hand and ready to fire, you may attempt to jump him and wrestle it from his grip. If he has a pistol well in hand but is unaware of your presence, you may also be able to jump him, at the GM's discretion. The characters engage in a Melee Combat contest to see which of them gets control of the gun and fires it. The winner makes a damage roll against the loser, using the pistol's Damage Modifier, including the +2 for point blank range.

If you jump an opponent with an unready rifle, a Melee Combat combat breaks out, with the opponent using the rifle as a heavy club.

## Ammo Capacity

GUMSHOE sets aside the loving attention to firearm intricacies characteristic of most RPG systems. For example, characters need reload only when dramatically

appropriate. Otherwise, they're assumed to be able to refill the cylinders of their revolvers or jam clips into their automatic weapons between shots.

When reloading is an issue, GMs may request a Shooting test (Difficulty 3) to quickly reload. Characters who fail may not use their Shooting ability to attack during the current round.

## **Range**

The effect of range on firearms combat is likewise simplified nearly out of existence. Handguns and shotguns can only be accurately fired at targets within fifty meters. The range limit for rifles is one hundred meters.

## **Non-Lethal Weapons**

In GUMSHOE, non-lethal attacks never take an opponent out faster than standard combat. Otherwise players will have their characters simply knock their enemies out and kill them in cold blood, which is unsympathetic and out of genre. Thus tasers and stun guns work less effectively in the game than in real life.

## **Fighting Without Abilities**

A character with a Shooting rating of 0 is not allergic to guns. Anyone can pick up a revolver and empty it in the general direction of the foe. Likewise, a character with no Melee Combat ability is not going to just ignore the fire axe sitting on the wall when a blood bursts through a partition wall.

However, such characters will use their weapons ineffectively and hesitantly. Using a weapon (including fists or feet) without ability has the following drawbacks:

- You automatically do an additional -2 damage
- You must declare your action at the beginning of each round and cannot change it if the tactical situation alters.
- You automatically go last in each round.
- If you are using a firearm, a roll of 1 means you have accidentally shot yourself or one of your allies, as selected (or rolled randomly) by the GM. Do damage as normal (including your automatic -2 penalty).

## Called Shots

In certain situations simply hitting an enemy isn't enough: you need to get him in a particular spot. When taking a called shot, specify the desired location of the strike and any additional intended effect other than injury to the opponent. The GM decides whether this is a likely outcome of such a hit. If it is clearly not a likely outcome, and your character would logically know this, she warns you in advance, so you can do something else instead.

The GM then adds 1 to 4 points to the target's Hit Threshold, depending on the additional difficulty entailed. Use the following table as a guideline. Body locations assume a human of ordinary size. Hit Threshold modifiers for ordinary body parts of extraordinary creatures are left as an exercise for the GM. Vehicle locations are in *italics*.

Desired Location	Modifier to Hit Threshold
Large carried object (rocket launcher, laptop computer, backpack)	+1
Torso, <i>windshield</i>	+1
Chest (if attacker is facing target)	+2
Gut, <i>specific window, tail rotor</i>	+2
Head or limb	+2
Hand or foot, joint, <i>tire</i>	+3
Heart, throat, mouth, or face	+3
Weapon or other hand-held object	+3
Eye, <i>headlight</i>	+4
Chest (if target faces away from attacker)	+4

With the new Hit Threshold determined, you then make a combat ability test, as per the standard rules. If you succeed, your specified effect occurs as desired.

If you struck an ordinary person in the head, throat, or chest with a weapon, add +2 to the damage; hitting the heart adds +3 to the damage. Neither can be combined with a point-blank gunshot, which is already assumed to hit a vital location.

If you struck an ordinary person in a joint (wrist, knee, etc.) or throat with an aimed hand-to-hand blow, lock, or kick, add +2 to the damage; hitting an eye adds +3 to the damage.



This assumes a trained, targeted strike intended to disable or cripple. You may narrate some other crippling strike to suit your own specific martial arts idiom, but the modifiers remain the same if you want to do the extra damage.

If, after this damage is dealt, the victim is already Hurt but not Seriously Wounded, you may then pay an additional 6 points from the fighting ability you are using to reduce the target to -6 Health. If the target is already Seriously Wounded you may then pay an additional 6 Shooting, Weapons, or Hand-to-Hand points (whichever applies) to kill the target outright.

## **Running Away**

Fleeing from an ongoing fight requires an Athletics test. The Difficulty is 3 plus the number of foes you're fleeing from: to flee one enemy is Difficulty 4, fleeing two enemies is Difficulty 5, fleeing four enemies is Difficulty 7. On a success, melee ends and you flee; if they intend to chase you, your foes must roll first in the ensuing full contest of Athletics. If you fail, the opponent with the highest damage value automatically deals one instance of damage to you. Melee still ends, but you must roll first in the ensuing chase.

In situations where it seems appropriate to make flight more difficult, on a failure, any directly engaged opponent might spend 3 Athletics to block you from fleeing—interposing himself between you and the exit, tackling you, slamming the garage doors, or whatever the narrative description warrants. In this case, your enemies forgo the damage they would otherwise deal.

## **Explosions**

Explosions are simplified with the use of three ranges. A character may be so close to an explosion that it is instantly fatal. This range depends on the explosive device, and small explosions may not have this range.

The second range is for characters that are not close enough to die immediately, but are in the open when the explosion happens. They take full damage from the blast. The damage is one die plus a number ranging from +1 to +12.

The third range is for characters that are in cover or outside the direct blast radius, but still close enough to be harmed by the explosion. If they succeed in an Athletics test, they don't take damage. Otherwise, they take damage of one die + half of what the modifier was for the previous category.

It is often up to the person installing the explosive what the danger zones are, with targeted or guided explosions. A failure to install an explosive successfully results in a larger or smaller area of explosion, or lesser or greater damage.

The exact amount of damage depends on the explosive used, the amount used and the skill of the person targeting the explosion. It is also a question of narrative convenience: explosives set by enemies usually have a narrative goal.

You should be given a Sense Trouble roll when you are entering the close range of an explosive device, unless it is already clear that there is an explosive device present. You should not die from a blast that you did not see coming – it is the GM’s job to tell you about it. If you choose to stay within the blast radius – to save civilians, to defuse the bomb etc. – you have made the choice to stay behind and your fate may be up to the dice.

## Hazards

In or out of combat, the characters’ survival may be threatened by assorted hazards, from electrical shock to poisoning.

### Electricity and Other Shocks

Damage from exposure to electricity varies according to voltage. You can suffer:

**Mild shock**, equivalent to briefly touching an ungrounded wire or damaged electrical appliance. You lose 1 Health and are blown backwards for a couple of meters.

**Moderate shock**, equivalent to a jolt from a cattle prod. You lose 2 Health and (if in combat time) your next four actions. You always lose at least one action, but may buy off the loss of other actions by paying 3 Athletics points per action.

**Extreme shock**, equivalent to a lightning strike. You suffer one die of damage, with a +4 modifier.

The GM should always give you some opportunity to avoid being shocked, whether it be an Athletics test to avoid unexpected contact, or a Sense Trouble test to spot the danger.

If you are reduced to –6 or fewer Health, the current is assumed to have traveled through your heart or brain, causing cardiac arrest or brain damage, respectively. The GM describes appropriate symptoms and futuristic treatments during your sick bay convalescence.

### Other Hazards

Many other hazards can be emulated using the mild/moderate/extreme breakdown above. Simply change the narrative description and side effects, keeping the Health pool losses.

### Example Hazard Description: Alien Fungal Infection

**Mild:** For the next two intervals, you lose 2 Health every time you make an Athletics test.

**Moderate:** Make a Health test against a Difficulty of 4. If you fail, you suffer an extreme shock at the beginning of the next interval.

## **Fire**

Damage from exposure to fire varies according to the surface area of your body exposed to the flame, and repeats for each round (or, outside of combat, every few seconds) you remain exposed to it.

**Minor exposure**, most often to an extremity like a hand or foot, carries a damage modifier of -2.

**Partial exposure**, to up to half of your surface area, carries a damage modifier of +0.

**Extensive exposure**, to half or more of your surface area, imposes a damage modifier of +2.

The GM should always give you a chance to avoid being set on fire. The difficulty of extinguishing a flame is usually 4, but might be higher for anomalous flame-like manifestations, or when you are coated with a futuristic accelerant.

## **Suffocation**

When deprived of air, you get two minutes before the nastiness kicks in. After that point, you lose 1 Athletics every ten seconds, as you struggle to hold your breath. Once that pool depletes, you start losing Health, at a rate of 1 point every five seconds.

## **Toxins**

Toxins are either inhaled, ingested or injected directly into the bloodstream. They vary widely in lethality. A dose of a low-tech cleaning substance may impose a damage modifier of -2, where a viro-active nerve gas might range from +6 to +16. Inhaled toxins tend to take effect right away. Injected and ingested toxins take delayed effect, anywhere from minutes to hours after exposure. Their damage might be parceled out in increments, and may prevent you from refreshing Health points until somehow neutralized. As with any hazard, the GM should always give you a chance to avoid exposure to them.

## Digital Minds

Bodies can be exchanged, minds can't. Encountering horrors in space makes characters lose Stability, but fortunately digital minds can be repaired with psychosurgery.

### Stability Tests

Mental stresses can take you out of commission, temporarily or permanently, as easily as physical injury.

When an incident challenges your fragile sanity, make a Stability test against a Difficulty Number of 4.

If you fail, you lose a number of Stability points. The severity of the loss depends on the situation. As with any other test of a general ability, you are always permitted to spend Stability points to provide a bonus to your roll. However, it's never a good bet to spend more points than you stand to lose if you fail.

Your Stability loss from failed tests is capped at the worst incident in that scene. Points spent on providing bonuses are still lost.

Incident	Stability Loss
Encountering non-sentient aliens	2
A human opponent attacks you with evident intent to do serious harm	2
Encountering highly advanced or exsurgent-modified technology	2
You are in an accident serious enough to pose a risk of injury	2
A human opponent attacks you with evident intent to kill	3
You are brought back from a backup after dying	3
Experiencing someone's death via XP	3
Encountering sentient aliens	4
You see an particularly grisly murder or accident scene	4
You learn that a friend or loved one has been violently killed	4
Encountering an exsurgent-infected transhuman	4
You discover the corpse of a friend or loved one	6
Encountering hostile aliens or exsurgent life forms	7
You see a friend or loved one killed	7
You see a friend or loved one killed in a particularly gruesome manner	8

Incident	Stability Loss
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GMs should feel free to assess Stability Losses for other incidents, using the examples provided as a benchmark.

Characters make a single roll per incident, based on its highest potential Stability loss.

Groups craving an additional point of complexity can occasionally alter Difficulty Numbers for Stability tests depending on the character's attitude toward the destabilizing event. Characters who would logically be inured to a given event face a Difficulty of 3, while those especially susceptible face a 5. A character whose daytime identity is that of a surgeon or coroner might, for example, face a lowered Difficulty when encountering gruesomely mutilated bodies. No character type gets a break when encountering exsurgent creatures or other existential threats.

### Losing It

Like Health, your Stability pool can drop below 0.

**If your Stability ranges from 0 to –5**, you are shaken.

Difficulty Numbers for all general abilities increase by 1, and it becomes more difficult to use investigative abilities.

If you want to make an Investigative spend, make a test with the absolute value of your current Stability pool as your Difficulty. You may deliberately strain yourself, voluntarily reducing your Stability pool by an amount of your choice. For each point you reduce it, add 1 to your die result. The Difficulty of the Stability test is based on your Stability pool before you make this reduction. If you fail, you still make the spend, but you should roleplay this failure.

**If your Stability ranges from –6 to –11**, you acquire a mental illness.

This stays with you even after your Stability pool is restored to normal. See below for more. You also continue to suffer the ill effects of being shaken. Furthermore, you permanently lose 1 point from your Stability rating. The only way to get it back is to purchase it again with build points.

**When your Stability reaches –12 or less**, you are incurably insane. You may commit one last crazy act, which must either be self-destructively heroic or self-destructively destructive. Or you may choose merely to gibber and drool. Assuming you survive your permanent journey to the shores of madness, your character is quietly shipped off to cold storage, never to be seen again. Time to create a new character.

## Mental Illness

If driven to mental illness you face a range of possible mental disorders. The GM rolls on the following chart or chooses a disorder based on the triggering circumstance. The player is then sent out of the room, while the GM and other players collaborate on a way to heighten his sense of dislocation and disorientation.

1. Post-Traumatic Stress Syndrome (PTSD.) You are haunted by dreams of the incident, and spend your days in a constant state of anxiety and alert, as if prepared for it to repeat itself at any moment. Whenever your senses register any input reminding you of the incident, you must make a Stability test (Difficulty 4) or freeze up. If you freeze up, you are unable to take any action for fifteen minutes and remain shaken (see above) for twenty-four hours after that. Tests to see if you show symptoms of PTSD do not in and of themselves lower your Stability pool.
2. Delusion. The other players and GM decide on a mundane detail of the world which is no longer true and has never been true. For example, there might be no such thing as a squirrel, a Volkswagen, or orange juice. Maybe John Lennon was never assassinated, or never existed in the first place. PCs and supporting characters deny knowledge of the chosen item, person, or event.
3. Homicidal Mania. The GM takes the player aside, tells him that he knows one of the other players is a supernatural creature, and tells him just how to kill the monster.
4. Megalomania. When the character fails at a dramatic moment, the GM describes the outcome of his ability attempt as successful, then asks the player to leave the room. Then the GM describes the real results to the other players, and invites the megalomaniac player back into the room.
5. Multiple Personality Disorder. At moments of stress, another player is assigned control of the character, speaking and acting as if he's an entirely different person.
6. Paranoia. The other players are instructed to act as if they're trying to keep straight faces when the affected player returns. Occasionally they exchange notes, make hand signals to the GM, or use meaningless code words, as if communicating something important the player is unaware of.
7. Selective Amnesia. The group decides on an event that did happen in the world that the player has now forgotten all about. He's married, or killed someone, or pseudonymously written a best-selling book. Everyone he meets refers to this new, verifiable fact that he has no knowledge of.

## Psychological Triage

If a character is acting in an erratic manner due to mental illness, a another character can spend 1 point of Reassurance to snap him into a state of temporary lucidity. He will then act rationally for the remainder of the current scene.

**Psychosurgery** Using Psychosurgery requires specialized equipment that is not easily portable. This equipment should usually be available to characters with Psychosurgery, but reaching it may take time and effort.

**Psychotherapy** A character with the Psychosurgery ability can spend points from that pool to help another character regain spent Stability points. For every Psychosurgery point spent, the recipient gains 2 Stability points.

Mental illness can be cured through prolonged treatment using the Psychosurgery ability. At the beginning of each scenario, in a prologue scene preceding the main action, the character administering the treatment makes a Psychosurgery test (Difficulty 4.) After three consecutive successful tests, and three consecutive scenarios in which the patient remains above 0 Stability at all times, the mental illness goes away.

However, if the character ever again acquires a mental illness, he regains the condition he was previously cured of. Permanent cure then becomes impossible.

A successful Psychosurgery test undertaken during the course of a scenario suppresses its symptoms until the patient next suffers a Stability loss.

## Using Networking Abilities and Resources

Networking abilities and Resources are General Abilities, but also work as Investigative Abilities.

Whether it is appropriate to use Networking Abilities or Resources depends on the surrounding economy. If it is an old economy, only Resources can be used to acquire goods and services, but both Networking Abilities and Resources work for getting information. If it is a transitional economy, both can be used for all purposes. In the new economy, only Networking Abilities are effective.

In some cases only Resources or a specific Networking Ability can be used. Paying a ransom can't be accomplished without Resources, although Networking may help in acquiring those Resources. Convincing the local crime syndicate that you're trustworthy can't be accomplished with Resources and only the Networking: Criminals Ability is appropriate.

## Burning Points from Rating

If you don't have enough points in your pool to pay for the cost of using Networking Abilities or Resources, you can burn points from your rating. These count as points spent from the pool, but are lost permanently. You still count as having a rating in that Ability for the purposes of finding core clues until the end of the current scenario and should work with the other players and the gamemaster to ensure that that Ability is also covered in future scenarios.

## Burning I-Rep

Firewall operatives may burn 1 point of i-rep to send a priority request that guarantees any and all resources that they request and Firewall can supply. This doesn't mean that the character gets exactly what they request, as Firewall may simply not have the resources requested in the time frame they are needed in.

Burning i-rep for a priority request marks the request as being necessary to combat an impending and immediate existential risk. Misusing i-rep by sending an unnecessary priority request leads to the character losing all their remaining i-rep rating.

## Networking and Resources Tests

Trivial favors don't require tests, only a rating of 1 or more in the relevant Ability. Other favors are treated as Toll Tests, with the player first rolling the die and then deciding whether the favor requested is worth the spend.

Asking for information that is necessary to complete the story is always free. **Core clues are always free to acquire, and don't require tests, only the use of an appropriate ability.**

Other requests have the following difficulties:

## Acquire Gear

Difficulty	Gear
0	Acquire gear with an expense of Trivial.
4	Acquire gear with an expense of Low.
6	Acquire gear with an expense of Moderate.
8	Acquire gear with an expense of High.
10	Acquire gear with an expense of Expensive



## Acquire Services

Difficulty	Service
0	Trivial favor: Get someone to perform services for 15 minutes. Move a chair. Browbeat someone. Catch a ride. Research someone online. Borrow 50 credits. Other Trivial cost services.
4	Minor favor: Get someone to perform services for an hour. Move to a new cubicle. Rough someone up. Loan a vehicle. Provide an alibi. Healing vat rental. Minor hacking assistance. Basic legal or police assistance. Borrow credits worth 1 Resource. Other Low cost services.
6	Moderate favor: Get someone to perform services for a day. Move to a habitat in the same cluster. Serious beating. Lookout. Short-distance egocast. Short shuttle trip (under 50,000 km). Minor psychosurgery. Uploading. Reservations at the best restaurant ever. Major legal representation or police favors. Borrow credits worth 2 Resources. Other Moderate cost services.
8	Major favor: Get someone to perform services for a month. Move a body. Homicide. Getaway shuttle pilot. Industrial sabotage. Large-volume shipping contract on bulk freighter. Medium-distance egocast. Mid-range shuttle trip (50,000–150,000 km). Moderate psychosurgery. Resleeving. Get out of jail free. Borrow credits worth 3 Resources. Other High cost services.
10	Partnership: Get someone to perform services for a year. Move dismembered body. Mass murder. Major embezzlement. Acts of terrorism. Relocate a mid-size asteroid. Long-distance egocast. Long-range shuttle trip (150,000 km or more). Borrow credits worth 4 Resources. Other Expensive cost services.

## Acquire Information

Difficulty	Information
0	Common Information: Where to eat. What biz a certain hypercorp is in. Who's in charge.
4	Public Information: Make gray market connections. Where the "bad neighborhood" is. Obscure public database info. Who's the local crime syndicate. Public hypercorp news.

Difficulty	Information
6	Private Information: Make black market connections. Where an unlisted hypercorp facility is. Who's a cop. Who's a crime syndicate member. Where someone hangs out. Internal hypercorp news. Who's sleeping with whom.
8	Secret Information: Make exotic black market connections. Where a secret corp facility is. Where someone's hiding out. Secret hypercorp projects. Who's cheating on whom.
10	Top Secret Intel: Where a top secret black-budget lab is. Illegal hypercorp projects. Scandalous data. Blackmail material.

## Gear

Any gear with a cost can be bought with Resources or acquired through Network, according to the rules in the previous section.

Gear may also be had with a Preparedness test. These items need not be bought with Resources or acquired through Network. Well prepared characters may simply have them handy. You make a simple test; if you succeed, you have the item you want. The difficulty for the Preparedness test is the difficulty given in the gear table +2.

You needn't do this in advance of the adventure, but can dig into your kit bag (provided you're able to get to it) as the need arises. Once it is established that you have a piece of gear, you always have it with you, at least until you change morphs or get separated from your gear. You can't use Preparedness to suddenly have augmentations that weren't in your morph to begin with.

Gear comes in two different types: **augmentations** and **equipment**. The only difference between these two is whether the gear is internal or external to your current morph. Augmentations are internal to the morph and can't be easily removed and adding them requires surgery. Equipment is external and can be easily added or removed, usually by simply picking items up or dropping them down.

**Gear are divided into five cost categories: Trivial, Low, Moderate, High, and Expensive.** Their effectiveness is dependent on the cost: more costly equipment is more effective.

**Gear with a cost of Trivial is commonplace**, easy to manufacture and acquire. These items don't usually give mechanical benefits, but may be necessary to acquire for other reasons. Examples:

- food and drink
- opera tickets or a taxi fare

- melee weapons of -1 damage

**Gear with a cost of Low enable the use of an Ability.** Characters are usually assumed to have the tools to use their abilities, but this might not always be the case. Characters with Art don't usually carry around oil colors in case they need to paint a painting in the style of the Renaissance masters. Examples:

- first-aid kit for Medicine
- a make-up kit for Impersonate
- a rental car for Ground Craft
- basic firearms, with pistols starting at +0 damage
- light body armor

**Gear with a cost of Moderate enable the use of an Ability in an enhanced way or enable new kinds of actions.** This is usually a specific benefit to a way of using an Ability. Moderate cost equipment may also enable way ways of acting, like breathing under water, surviving in vacuum or staying awake (or sleeping) for long periods of time. Gear with Moderate cost may also make you gain 2 points in a General Ability pool in some specific circumstance. Note: no gear makes you automatically gain Health or Stability. Examples:

- a boost to all uses of Athletics for climbing or swimming or a boost to all uses of a type of advanced mathematics.
- a berserker-augmentation or drug that makes you regain 2 points of Melee Combat after being wounded for the first time,
- a tactical AI that makes you gain 2 points of Sense Trouble after engaging in shooting combat.
- Heavy body armor
- heavy weapons (+1 damage)

**Gear with a cost of High give a boost in any one Ability.** Gear with High cost may also make you gain 4 points in a General Ability pool in some specific circumstance. Note: no gear makes you automatically gain Health or Stability. Very heavy weapons (+2 damage) are High cost. Examples:

- a fighting exoskeleton for Melee Combat
- muscle augmentation for Athletics
- advanced cracking tools for Infosec
- a smart stealth suit that helps you regain 4 points of Infiltration once by staying still in darkness

**Gear with a cost of Expensive are either items usually rarely owned by private persons,** like farcasters, vehicles like cars or shuttles, or specialized equipment. Using Expensive gear may refresh up to 3 pools in General Abilities in some circumstances or return Health over a period of time. Examples:

- specialized equipment, like quantum computers and desktop cornucopia machines
- exotic weapons, with +1 or +2 damage and other features, like sniper rifles with a long range
- combat AI that refreshes Athletics, Melee Combat and Shooting when fighting against the same or similar foes

The following chapters list example equipment, but you are free to come up with new equipment following these guidelines.

### Personal Augmentation

Equipment cost is listed after its name.

Some equipment is only applicable to biological morphs. For example, synth-morphs don't need sleep, so Circadian Regulation is unnecessary for them.

**Adrenal Boost, High** You gain 4 points in Melee Combat when you are first damaged in combat. If you also have endocrine control, you can activate adrenal boost at will.

**Bioweave Armor, Low (light)/Moderate (heavy)** Your skin is armored. With light bioweave armor you get 1 armor against shooting. With heavy bioweave armor you get 1 armor against shooting and melee combat. +1 Cost to use Perception for touch-related information. Cumulative with worn armor.

**Carapace Armor, Moderate** 2 armor against shooting and 2 against melee combat. Not cumulative with worn armor.

**Circadian Regulation, Moderate** You need only 2 hours of sleep.

**Claws, Low** Cybernetic claws. Unarmed damage is -1.

**Cosmetic Mods** Assume any cosmetic modification for the cost of Trivial, Low if the modification is exotic (fins, feathers etc.)

**Eelware, Low** Implanted shock weapon with +0 Damage.

**Endocrine Control, High** Boost to Flirting, Impersonate or Flattery. Player chooses which one when acquiring. +2 to rolls against suffering from hunger, fear, or emotional manipulation. Can stay awake for 48 hours.

**Enhanced Pheromones, Moderate** Boost to Flirting. Doesn't affect uplifts, xenomorphs or synthmorphs.

**Enhanced Senses, High** Boost to Perception.

**Enhanced Respiration, Moderate** Can live comfortably in both high and low pressure environments with no need for gradual decompression. Can hold breath for 30 with minimal activity and 10 minutes with strenuous activity before starting to suffocate.

**Gills, Moderate** Can breath under water.

**Grip Pads, Moderate** Boost to Athletics when climbing. Maximum difficulty for climbing tests is 4.

**Hibernation, Moderate** Can go into a hibernation, surviving 40 days without food or water. Maintains a dim awareness of both touch and sound.

**Hyperlinguist, High** Boost to Languages.

**Math Boost, Moderate** Boost to any Test requiring math calculations. (Note however that this is not a free boost to all Infosec Tests or similar. Using specific skill requires more than simply calculations.)

**Muscle Augmentation, High** Boost to Athletics.

**Prehensile Feet, Moderate** Boost to Athletics in zero-g environments. Compensates for any additional difficulty added to Hardware or Melee Combat by being in zero-g environment by 1 point.

**Prehensile Tail, Moderate** Boost to Athletics in tests of balance. Can be used for grasping objects.

**Sex Switch, Moderate** Can change sex to male, female, hermaphrodite or neuter in a week.

**Temperature Tolerance, Moderate** Can survive in temperatures ranging from -30 to 60 Celsius without discomfort or ill effects.

**Toxin Filters, Moderate** Immune to chemical and biological toxins. Can breath smoke and drink salt water. Provides no resistance to acid, nanotechnological attacks or similar destructive agents.

**Vacuum Sealing, High** Requires bioware armor or carapace armor. Can survive vacuum and resist temperatures from -75 to 100 Celsius. Usually combined with enhanced respiration, oxygen storage or both.

## **Armor**

**Armor Clothing, Trivial** 1 armor against shooting

**Armor Vest, Low** 1 armor against shooting and melee combat

**Body Armor (Light), Low** 2 armor against shooting and 1 against melee combat

**Body Armor (Heavy), Moderate** 2 armor against shooting and melee combat

**Crash Suit, Low** 1 armor against shooting when inactive, 1 armor against shooting and melee combat when active

**Helmet, Trivial** Additional 1 armor against shooting and melee combat when worn with other armor

**Second Skin, Low** 1 armor against melee combat, may be worn with other armor

**Smart Skin, Low** 1 armor against shooting and melee combat, may be worn with other armor, takes 1 round to activate

**Spray Armor, Low** 1 armor against shooting, works only when worn by biomorphs, degrades in 24 h

## Communications

The oldest and most widespread communications technology still in regular use is radio. Every habitat and world inhabited by transhumanity is awash in radio traffic, with humans, machines, and uplifts all constantly communicating with one another. The smallest radios are no larger than a speck of dust and have a range of no more than 20 meters, while the largest are the size of a truck and have a range of many thousands of miles. Radios large and small are ubiquitous and almost all devices contain at least short-range radios so they may interact with the mesh. Most morphs are equipped with basic mesh inserts that include an implanted radio.

**Quantum Farcasters, Low to Expensive** Quantum farcasters need to be entangled with each other by being present in the same location, but the quantum encryption between them cannot be broken.

Quantum farcasters range from small and local to large and capable of instant long range communications over any distance.

## Covert and Espionage Tech

**Chameleon Cloak, Low** A loose, poncho-like cloak that perceives the surroundings and replicates it on its surface. The user can take choose to take a roll of 4 instead of rolling a die when stationary and gives a boost to all Infiltration rolls.

**Cover Operations Tool (COT), High** A handheld device which contains sensors and smart tools for infiltration. Gives a boost to all tests to bypass a lock.

**Disabler, High** A device that can be attached to a (helpless) synthetic morph's or pod's head. Emits an overloading signal that effectively shuts down the person's cyberbrain until the disabler is shut down.

**Psi Jammer, Moderate** A small device that stops the use of ranged psi sleights.

**Quantum Computer, Expensive** Advanced device capable of quantum computer. Gives a boost to all Infosec rolls.

**Smart Dust, Moderate** A small nanobot generator that creates a cloud of tiny nanobots. When released, the nanobots cover all surfaces in a room over a period of 20 minutes. The nanobots analyze all substances on the surfaces, allowing the use of Biology, Chemistry and Investigation on the samples collected.

**Traction Pads, Low** Gloves, shoes and kneepads designed for climbing. Boost to Athletics when climbing. Maximum difficulty for climbing tests is 4.

**White Noise Machine, Trivial** Generates masking sounds that protect from eavesdropping.

### Everyday Technology

**Portable Sensor, Moderate** Small portable sensor system. Can be of several types, for example infrared, lidar, radar, x-ray. Can give a boost to Abilities in some circumstances. For example, using a x-ray sensor to scan through a room may help in Investigation.

**Smart Clothing, Low** May change its color, texture and even its cut in just couple of minutes. Can give a boost to Infiltration if the wearer doesn't move faster than a slow walk. Will also keep the wearer comfortable in temperatures ranging from -40 to 70 C.

**Smart Vac Clothing, Moderate** Like smart clothing, but can also transform into a light vacsuit.

**Specs, Low** Vision-enhancing glasses that connect directly to the wearer's visual cortex through their mesh implants. Give a boost to Perception.

### Nanotechnology

**Healing Vats, High** Can be used to heal almost any wound or illness. Can also be used to install implants or bioware without requiring surgery or recovery.

Recovery in a healing vat depends on the needs of the story, but you can use the following times as guidelines:

- Healing from minor damage: few hours
- Healing from being hurt: 6 hours
- Healing from being severely hurt: 1-2 days



- Healing from being dead: 1 week
- Recovering from minor modification: 1 hour
- Recovering from a major modification: 12 hours
- Recovering extreme modification: 3 days

### Scavenger Tech

**Mobile Lab, Moderate** A handheld device with different types of sensors. Gives a boost in Chemistry.

### Services

**Anonymous Accounts, Moderate** Discreet online accounts that are hard to track.

**Backup, Moderate** One-time backup of your ego.

**Backup Insurance (per month), Low to Moderate** Services that guarantee either acquiring the cortical stack from a dead morph, or if that is impossible or difficult through legal channels, backup from an earlier ego. Price depends on the individual: the more dangerous life an individual lives, the more costly the insurance.

**Body Bank (per month), Moderate** Cost for keeping a body in storage.

**Bot/Pod Rental (per day), Moderate** Renting a helper bot/pod.

**Egocasting, Expensive** Using a farcaster to transfer an ego to another habitat.

**Fake Ego ID, High** A forged ID that will pass most system security.

**Morph Brokerage, see chapter Morphs** Buying new morphs.

**Psychosurgery (per month), Moderate** Use of an high-fidelity simulspace with psychosurgeon AI.

**Simulspace Subscription, Low (day) / Moderate (monthly)** Access to a simulspace of your choice.

**Space Travel, High / Expensive** Intra-habitat shuttle trip within the same cluster or from a planetary body's surface to orbit costs High. Everything else is Expensive.

## **Software**

**Programs** Programs are created for some particular purpose in mind, be it scanning images or exploiting vulnerabilities. Most users have all the common programs needed for everyday mesh use. Programs of Low cost are required to perform advanced analytics, tracking or advanced encryption.

Programs of Moderate cost give a pool of 2 points in a General Ability like Infosec or 1 point in some Investigative skill like Engineering, for some particular purpose, like intruding on a system, tracking a user, or analysing a space stations plans for possible covert entrances.

Programs of High cost give a pool of 4 points in a General Ability or 2 point in some Investigative skill.

**AI's and Muses, Moderate to Expensive** **Standard muses** (High cost) work as assistants, providing reminders, research and help with communications.

**Vehicle and device AI** (High and Moderate cost) perform services appropriate for the vehicle or device. They usually don't have pools that could be used in Ability tests, but may test the appropriate Ability if no transhuman pilot is available. (Note that most routine operations, like docking a shuttle, don't need tests.)

More specialized AI and muses are also available, usually for Expensive cost. They have a pool of 4 in some General Ability or 1 point in a Investigative Ability, which they may use independently.

## **Survival Gear**

**Nanobandage, Trivial** Stabilizes a seriously wounded character so that they no longer lose Health.

**Vacuum Suits** Most vacuum suits are skin-tight garments that use the pressure of their advanced smartfabrics on the wearer's body to resist vacuum. When the wearer is in a breathable atmosphere, the smartfabric also loosens the suits to serve as ordinary clothing or be easily put on or taken off. In all cases, the

suits can become skin-tight within 3 Action Turns. All vacsuits contain advanced rebreather units capable of maintaining a breathable atmosphere for several hours or days.

**Light Vacsuit, Low:** All models include a lightweight belt or torc containing a miniature oxygen tank and advanced rebreather unit that provides 3 hours of air. 1 armor against shooting and melee combat. Instantly self-seal, unless the damage is enough to make the target hurt.

**Standard Vacsuit, Moderate:** hey are fitted with more substantial life support belts that includes a maker capable of recycling all wastes and producing air for up to 48 hours and food and water indefinitely. 2 armor against shooting and 1 armor against melee combat. Instantly self-seal, unless the damage is enough to make the target hurt.

**Hardsuit, High:** Hardsuits look like large metallic ovals with jointed arms and legs. A built-in high-quality maker produces sufficient food, air, and water for a user to remain in a hardsuit indefinitely. Their gloves incorporate smart materials that allow each hand to use the equivalent of a utilitool. Hardsuits also contain radios and sensors equivalent to those on standard vacsuits. 2 armor against shooting and melee combat. These suits are maintained by a fixer nanoswarm, are instantly self-sealing of any breach unless the damage is enough to make the target seriously wounded.

## Psi

Psi Sleights don't work against synthmorphs, bots or vehicles. The difficulty to affect pods is 2 higher and using Psi in place for Investigative Abilities to affect pods costs 1 point more.

Characters can only use Psi if they are in a biological morph. Characters in pods may use Psi, but the Difficulty of tests is 2 higher and using Psi for Investigative Abilities costs 1 point more.

Affecting a target with psi requires touching them.

Characters with Psi abilities are more susceptible to trauma and exsurgent viruses. Add 1 to any Stability loss after an unsuccessful Stability roll. The difficulty of all tests to resist exsurgent viruses is 2 higher for them.

## Regaining Pool Points

Spent points from various pools are restored at different rates, depending on their narrative purpose.

Investigative and Networking ability pools and Resources are restored only at the end of each case, without regard to the amount of time that passes in the game world. Players seeking to marshal their resources may ask you how long

cases typically run, in real time. Most groups finish scenarios over 2-3 sessions. Players may revise their sense of how carefully to manage point spending as they see how quickly their group typically disposes of its cases.

(GMs running extremely long, multi-part investigations may designate certain story events as breakpoints where all investigative pools are refreshed. For example, a planet-hopping investigation where the team meets a separate team of enemies in five different locales might allow refreshment of investigative pools after each group of enemies is neutralized.)

Use of the Psychosurgery ability permits limited recovery of Stability points in the course of an episode. Full refreshment occurs between cases. It is possible only when the character is able to spend calm, undisturbed quality time with friends and loved ones uninvolved in the shadowy world of the Firewall. In campaigns where the teammates' personal lives are a matter of background detail only, refreshment automatically occurs between episodes.

GMs who wish to add a soap opera element to their campaigns, in which the characters must balance the everyday pressures of ordinary life against their activities as covert operatives, can complicate this process. In this campaign type, the characters must work to keep their support networks intact. If they fail, they regain no Stability between episodes. As part of the character creation process, players must detail their network of friends and loved ones in a paragraph or two of background text, which is then submitted to the GM for approval.

Following Motivations restores Stability. Whenever a character makes significant progress in pursuing their Motivation, they regain 1 point of Stability.

The Health pool refreshes over time, at a rate of 2 points per day of restful activity. (Wounded characters heal at a different rate, over a period of hospitalization.) Use of the Medic ability can restore a limited number of Health points in the course of a session.

Players may restore 3 General Ability pools to full whenever they spend a few hours resting in a safe place. They don't get to restore the pools if they get ambushed, attacked or harassed while resting.

### **What Do Pool Points Represent?**

Pool points are a literary abstraction, representing the way that each character gets his or her own time in the spotlight in the course of an ensemble drama. When you do something remarkable, you expend a little bit of your spotlight time. More active players will spend their points sooner than less demonstrative ones, unless they carefully pick and choose their moments to shine.

Remember, all characters are remarkably competent. Pool points measure your opportunities to exercise this ultra-competence during

any given scenario. Even when pools are empty, you still have a reasonable chance to succeed at a test, and you'll always get the information you need to move forward in the case.

Pool points do not represent a resource, tangible or otherwise, in the game world. Players are aware of them, but characters are not. The team members' ignorance of them is analogous to TV characters' obliviousness to commercial breaks, the unwritten rules of scene construction, and the tendency of events to heat up during sweeps.

We represent this most purely in the case of investigative skills, which are the core of the game. Their refreshment is tied to a purely fictional construct, the length of the episode.

However, where a pool could be seen to correspond to a resource perceptible to the characters, we handle refreshment in a somewhat more realistic, if also abstract, manner. Characters' ebbing Health scores are perceptible to the characters in the form of welts, cuts, pain, and general fatigue. Stability is less tangible but can be subjectively measured in the characters' moods and reactions. Physical abilities, also tied to fatigue and sharpness of reflexes, are also handled with a nod to the demands of realism.

## **Improving Your Character**

At the end of each investigation, each player gets 2 build points for each session they participated in. (This assumes a small number of 3-4 hour sessions; if you play in shorter bursts, modify accordingly.) Players who had characters die in the course of the investigation only get points for each session involving their current character.

These build points can be spent to increase either investigative or general abilities. You may acquire new abilities or bolster existing ones. If necessary to preserve credibility, rationalize new abilities as areas of expertise you've had all along, but are only revealing later in the series.

## **Opponent Statistics**

You usually only need game statistics for characters, including ODEs, that the investigators in some way have to overcome through general abilities. Most witnesses, suspects and non-combatants require only a text description, indicating for example which interpersonal abilities they're most likely to respond to.

Opponents use the same Hit Threshold and Weapon Damage rules as player characters.

When choosing Health ratings for dramatically unimportant foes, don't worry about simulating their relative robustness in comparison to the general population. Focus on how many hits they ought to be able to take before dropping, according to dramatic logic. If you want a thug who falls to a single burst of automatic fire, give him a Health of 1 or 2.

An Attack Pattern is an optional game statistic suggesting how the opponent might spend its Melee Combat and/or Shooting points from round to round of a fight. GMs should always consult story logic and dramatic needs first and resort to the attack pattern second. You might want a vast lumbering creature to smash doors and walls around the PCs, and a small vicious ODE to attack with unerring precision. These numbers are a fallback if you can't decide how the opponent would spend, or are uncomfortable choosing to spend enough to guarantee a hit each time. Don't use them just because they're there, even if you find the pull of numbers—oh, sweet, beautiful numbers—generally irresistible.

When you do use the Attack Pattern, increase the spends after each miss until the opponent either starts to hit, or runs out of points. Once engaged, opponents figure out how hard the PCs are to hit, and adjust their efforts accordingly.

Armor is subtracted from each instance of damage the opponent takes. Where a weapon or weapons is listed in brackets after the number, the Armor reduces damage only from those weapons. Some Armor may protect against all Melee Combat attacks but not Shooting attacks, or vice versa.

An opponent's Alertness Modifier represents its ability to sense your activities, whether through standard senses like sight and hearing, or exotic ones like echolocation, pheromone recognition, or energy signature reading. When you try to sneak past it, the Alertness Modifier is applied to your base Infiltration Difficulty, which is usually 4. It also applies to Infiltration tests when you're trying to observe the opponent without being observed in turn. The Alertness Modifier reflects all of the individual's sensing capabilities, both natural and technological. A second number appearing after a slash represents the opponent's Alertness if its gear is somehow neutralized or taken away.

An opponent with a Stealth Modifier is either significantly harder or easier to spot with Sense Trouble. It alters the difficulty number for that or similar tests.

## **Opponents and NPC's**

These stats are not supposed to represent important NPC's, but should be used for faceless and nameless NPC's that are encountered on the way.

**Assassin** Even in the age of backups, there is a need for assassins. They may be sent to kidnap an ego, erase memories or pop the stacks of unfortunate targets.

**Morph:** Ghost

**General Abilities:** Athletics 12, Ground Craft/Pilot 8, Health 9, Melee Combat 12, Shooting 10

**Combat Damage:** wasp knife -1, light pistol +0, sniper rifle +2

**Hit Threshold:** 4

**Armor:** Armor clothing: 1 vs. shooting

**Alertness Modifier:** +1

**Stealth Modifier:** +2

**Anarchist Saboteur** Anarchist wanting to bring revolution to the inner system.

**Morph:** Splicer

**General Abilities:** Athletics 6, Demolitions 6, Ground Craft 2, Health 4, Melee Combat 6, Shooting 2

**Combat Damage:** unarmed -2, microwave agonizer +0

**Hit Threshold:** 3

**Armor:** None: 0

**Alertness Modifier:** +0

**Stealth Modifier:** +1

**Bodyguard** Bodyguard for XP stars, hypercorp, political figures or crime bosses.

**Morph:** Olympian

**General Abilities:** Athletics 10, Ground Craft 6, Health 8, Melee Combat 12, Medic 4, Shooting 6

**Combat Damage:** unarmed -2, heavy pistol +1

**Hit Threshold:** 4

**Armor:** Armor clothing: 1 vs. shooting

**Alertness Modifier:** +2

**Stealth Modifier:** +0

**Criminal Enforcer** Employed thugs, whose skills lean towards violence and intimidation.

**Morph:** Olympian

**General Abilities:** Athletics 6, Ground Craft 4, Health 8, Melee Combat 8, Shooting 4

**Combat Damage:** unarmed -2, expendable baton -1, heavy pistol +1

**Hit Threshold:** 3

**Armor:** Armor clothing: 1 vs. shooting

**Alertness Modifier:** +0

**Stealth Modifier:** +1

**Gang Member** Gang members often clinging to pre-Fall ethnic or cultural affiliations.

**Morph:** Ruster

**General Abilities:** Athletics 6, Health 6, Melee Combat 8, Shooting 2

**Combat Damage:** unarmed -2, cybernetic claws -1, light pistol +0

**Hit Threshold:** 3

**Armor:** Armor clothing: 1 vs. shooting

**Alertness Modifier:** +0

**Stealth Modifier:** +0

**Pirate** Pirates work in crews that prey on isolated habitats, long-haul shipping vessels and small prospecting stations.

**Morph:** Bouncer

**General Abilities:** Athletics 10, Health 6, Melee Combat 8, Shooting 6

**Combat Damage:** wasp knife -1, shard pistol +1

**Hit Threshold:** 4

**Armor:** Standard Vacsuit: 2 vs. shooting, 1 vs. melee combat

**Alertness Modifier:** +0

**Stealth Modifier:** +1

**Security Trooper** Low-rez recruits assigned to military, police or security details.

**Morph:** Exalt

**General Abilities:** Athletics 6, Health 6, Melee Combat 6, Shooting 6

**Combat Damage:** shock baton -1, medium pistol +1



**Hit Threshold:** 3

**Armor:** Armor Vest: 1 vs. shooting and melee combat

**Alertness Modifier:** +1

**Stealth Modifier:** +0

**Exhuman Predator** Predators seek to transform themselves into an ultimate top-of-the-food-chain evolutionary contender.

**Morph:** Custom

**General Abilities:** Athletics 12, Health 10, Melee Combat 12

**Combat Damage:** cyberclaws -1

**Hit Threshold:** 4

**Armor:** Carapace Armor: 2 vs. shooting and melee combat

**Alertness Modifier:** +2

**Stealth Modifier:** +2

**Exsurgent Shifter** Shifter are synthmorphs that are made of a shapeshifting material that can stabilize as a hardened metallic shell or liquefy and reshape itself into other forms. It can visually mimic other forms, including biomorphs (though they are easily detectable as synthmorphs at other wavelengths or by touch). Shifters may also reshape parts of their shell into melee weapons such as knives or clubs.

**Morph:** Custom

**General Abilities:** Athletics 10, Health 10, Melee Combat 10

**Combat Damage:** knives and clubs -1

**Hit Threshold:** 4

**Armor:** Carapace Armor: 2 vs. shooting and melee

**Alertness Modifier:** +2

**Stealth Modifier:** +1

## Tests and Supporting Characters

Game statistics in GUMSHOE are, whenever possible, player-facing. When you as GM have the choice between making a determination based on a player test, or on a test made by you on behalf of a supporting character, always choose the player. For example, you may want to specify that there's a chance a

harried relative of a kidnapping victim might eventually lose her patience with the investigators and participate in a damaging press conference. Rather than having her make a Stability test to see when and if this happens, set it up so that a player makes a Reassurance spend to forestall her.

Likewise, if you want to have a supporting character steal something in a situation where the PCs are in no position to affect the outcome, simply decree that it happens. Don't bother testing the character's Filch ability. To do otherwise is to engage in false branching: you are creating unpredictability for yourself in a way that remains invisible to the players. They don't get a chance to alter the outcome, and thus gain no benefit from the uncertainty you've introduced.

## Designing Scenarios

The GUMSHOE system supports a certain style of scenario design. The rules are less important to the success of your game than the way you structure your adventures.

### Clues

If a piece of information is essential to move the story on, it's a core clue. It costs nothing. You can also offer minor tidbits of information at a 0 points, if the information not consequential enough to be worth a point spend.

If you have a piece of information that offers a fun sidelight on the action but is not essential to move through the story, you can make this available with a 1- or 2-point spend. Choose the cost of the spend according to the entertainment value of the information, not the game-world difficulty of completing the task. The whole point of the system is to make clues easy to acquire, so that players can get on with the fun of figuring out how they fit together. Facilitate this by making choices that get information into the hands of players. Habits die hard, so make sure you're not slipping back into the old paradigm and making the clues hard to get.

If an action's consequence of failure might be madness, death or injury, by all means make it a test. If game world logic suggests that a supporting character will actively oppose the PC, make it a contest.

### Clue Types

Special clue types are as follows.

**Floating Core Clues** It can be useful to structure a scenario with one or more free-floating core clues. These typically advance the story from one distinct section to another. Where an ordinary core clue is linked with a particular scene, a floating clue can be gleaned in any one of several scenes. The GM determines during play which scene gives up the clue.

Floating clues allow you to control the pacing of a scenario. They allow the characters to play out all of the fun or interesting experiences in one section of the scenario before the story takes a dramatic turn. For example, you might want them to separately meet all of the suspects before they, and the Investigators, get locked up for the night in an old dark house. To achieve this, withhold the core clue that moves the investigators to the dark house until after they've met all of the relevant supporting characters. That way, you prevent them from leaping ahead into the narrative without getting all the information they need to fully enjoy what follows.

Likewise, a floating clue allows you to perform like a ruthless editor, skipping unnecessary scenes when you need to kick the narrative into a higher gear. Let's say you've chosen five possible scenes in which the Investigators might logically get a necessary core clue. You figure that this phase of the adventure should take about an hour. If the players breeze through the scenes in ten minutes apiece, you can save the core clue for the last scene. If they linger, taking twenty minutes per scene, you'll want to make the core clue available after the third scene.

Player frustration level usually serves as a better trigger for a floating core clue than a predetermined time limit. If they're having obvious fun interacting with the vivid supporting characters you've created, or being creeped out by uncanny phenomena, you can give them more of what they want by saving the core clue for the final scene. On the other hand, if you see they're getting bored and frustrated, you can slip in the floating clue earlier.

**Leveraged Clues** A staple element of mystery writing is the crucial fact which, when presented to a previously resistant witness or suspect, causes him to break down and suddenly supply the information or confession the detectives seek. This is represented in GUMSHOE by the leveraged clue. This is a piece of information which is only available from the combined use of an interpersonal ability, and the mention of another, previously gathered clue. The cited clue is called a prerequisite clue, and is by definition a sub-category of core clue.

**Pipe Clues** A clue which is important to the solution of the mystery, but which becomes significant much later in the scenario, is called a pipe clue. The name is a reference to screenwriting jargon, where the insertion of exposition that becomes relevant later in the narrative is referred to as "laying pipe." The term likens the careful arrangement of narrative information to the work performed by a plumber in building a house.

Pipe clues create a sense of structural variety in a scenario, lessening the sense that the PCs are being led in a strictly linear manner from Scene A to Scene B to Scene C. When they work well, they give players a “eureka” moment, as they suddenly piece together disparate pieces of the puzzle. A possible risk with pipe clues lies in the possible weakness of player memories, especially over the course of a scenario broken into several sessions. The GM may occasionally have to prompt players to remember the first piece of a pipe clue when they encounter a later component.

**Restricted Clues** Certain clues which are necessary to the solution of a mystery will not be known to everyone with the ability required to access them. Instead, these are restricted clues—secret, esoteric or otherwise obscure facts which one member of the group just happens to know.

Only a select few people know about OPERATION CORNWALLIS, but if it is necessary to the completion of an investigation, an investigator will be one of them.

To preserve the sense that the group has access to little-known facts, only one group member knows the information in question; its revelation comes as news to all of the other investigators, even those who have the same ability. The first character with the relevant ability to take an action that might trigger the clue is the one blessed with this fortuitous knowledge. Where no clear first actor exists, as in a clue provided as soon as the investigators enter a scene, the GM chooses the investigator with the highest current pool in that ability (if applicable) or the investigator who has had the least recent spotlight time or most requires a positive reversal of fortune. Alternately, the GM may allow applicable background considerations to determine the possessor of the restricted clue: for example, a character with high Bureaucracy might recognize a suspect from back office work.

### **Timed Results**

The following structural technique applies to any GUMSHOE game where the characters have access to the services of a forensic lab, and rely on tests performed by others.

You can shape the pacing of a case with a timed result. This occurs when believability requires a suitable interval between the submission of evidence to forensic experts and the results of the testing they perform. In police procedurals, it is common for the direction of an investigation to be suddenly changed when the lab results come in. The scientific evidence may exonerate the current top suspect or point the investigators toward new witnesses or locations. Alternately, it can change the meaning of previously gleaned information, causing the investigators to conduct re-interview previous witnesses, or conduct closer searches of crime scenes.

A timed result can serve as a delayed-reaction core clue, directing the PCs to a new scene. These are useful devices in cases where the scenes can be connected in any order. If the PCs get bored or bogged down in one scene, they can receive a phone call from the lab techs calling them in to receive some much-needed exposition, which sends them in a new direction.

The arrival of a timed result can also change the players' interpretation of their current case notes without moving them to a new scene. They might dismiss a suspect's alibi, alter their timeline of events, or reject information provided them by a witness whose perceptions are revealed as unreliable.

News of a lab report requiring the team's attention can also be used to cut short a scene that the players won't abandon, even though they've already collected all available clues.

### **Records are your Friend**

In addition to your adventure notes, there are two other documents you need to run the game.

When you are creating your adventure, make a note of the investigative abilities you've used on the Investigative Ability Checklist. It's a good idea to add clues for as wide a range of abilities as possible. You can also use the Checklist during character creation to ensure all the abilities are covered, and that redundant abilities are left out.

Secondly, during character creation, have your players note their choices of investigative abilities on the GM's Investigator Roster. This enables you to pick out which characters might notice obvious clues, and ensure spotlight time is evenly spread.

When you prepare your next session, you can use the Investigator Roster to see what interests your players. If someone has a 3-point rating in Art, you could add a some forged artwork or a menacing sculpture to your notes. This is particularly useful in an improvised game.

### **Scene Types**

Having planned out your mystery, it's time to arrange it into scenes. Each of these takes place in a different location or involves an interaction with a different supporting character—usually both. Under the title of the scene, write the scene type, and the scene or scenes which lead to the current scene, and scenes which lead from it. Here is an example scene header from the introductory adventure.

#### **The Good Reverend**

Scene Type: Core

Lead-In: The Briefing

Lead-Outs: The Visionary, The Skeptic, Newshounds of Sequoia City

Scenes fall into the following types.

### **Introductory**

This is the first scene of the episode. It establishes the premise of the mystery. If it's the characters' first meeting, have the agents first rendezvous with one another. Then, they meet Mr. Verity in a second secure locale where you provide the briefing and answer questions. When sent to deal with an emergency already in, they go direct to the scene and are briefed there by Mr. Verity. You can extend this scene if it's your first session of the Esoterrorists. See the Introductory scene in Operation Prophet Bunco.

### **Core**

Core scenes present at least one piece of information necessary to complete the investigation and get to the climactic scene.

Each core scene requires at least a single core clue.

A core clue typically points the group to another scene, often a core scene.

Avoid hard sequenced core clues, which can only lead to one another in a single order.

You're constructing one way to move through the story to another core clue, not the only way. In play, you may find yourself placing the core clue from one scene in another, improvised scene inspired by the logical actions undertaken by the players. (This is also true of published scenarios, by the way.) The scene structure guarantees that there's at least one way to navigate the story, but should not preclude other scene orders. By following the structure you also ensure that you're creating a branching narrative driven by player choices. This avoids the syndrome of the story driven by the actions of supporting characters, which the players observe more or less passively.

### **Placing Information**

A core scene typically includes many pieces of information in addition to its core clue. Facts may provide understanding and context. Or they may obscure the mystery, by focusing attention on irrelevant details. Creating a scene is about anticipating the questions the players will ask and figuring out which answers ought to be available to the investigative experts their characters happen to be.

Don't make all non-core clues spends. Add spends when:

- you think of facts that seem enjoyably arcane
- a piece of information is tangential or obscure
- the players might get information more quickly than they otherwise would
- they might secure some other practical advantage

If a spend doesn't make the character giving up his points seem more impressive, or confer some other advantage, it shouldn't be a spend.

### **Alternate**

Alternate scenes provide information which may be of some use in understanding and solving the central mystery, but aren't strictly necessary to reach the conclusion. They often provide context and detail. Or they might provide the same information as core scenes, but in another way. As a third option, they might allow the group to eliminate a red herring possibility. These exculpatory facts are valuable; they let the lasers narrow their search to the real answer, even though they don't strictly speaking, lead to another core clue.

### **Antagonist Reaction**

This is a scene of danger or trouble in which supporting characters opposed to the group's success take action to stop them or set them back. This might be a fight scene, but could just as easily be a political hassle, act of sabotage, or other less direct challenge. If it helps you keep track, you might note in brackets that the enemies faced are tangential rather than primary opponents. Antagonist reactions can be floating, that is, you can use them to kick up the pace if things are flagging.

### **Hazard**

A hazard scene presents the crew with an impersonal obstacle to their safety or ability to continue the investigation. It must typically be overcome through tests or contests.

## **Sub-Plot**

A sub-plot scene gives the characters an opportunity to wheel, deal, explore and interact without directly altering the course of the investigation. These may arise from personal arcs, side deals, public relations efforts, or simply the curiosity of one or more agents. Where the central mystery provides structure and forward momentum, the sub-plot adds flavor and character. Sequences arising from it may be what the group remembers long after the mystery has been put to bed. Sub-plots are more suited to long-running campaign play.

## **Conclusion**

The conclusion brings the group to the end of its investigation and often confronts it with a moral dilemma, physical obstacle, or both. Functionally, it's a final hazard or antagonist reaction scene, although it may be initiated by the players busting in on esoterrorists or ODEs. The classic conclusion of an RPG mystery is a big fight. Your group may insist on a climactic scrap, or prefer to avoid it through quick talking and clever thinking. It's easy to make a fight or other action scene feel exciting and conclusive. In *The Esoterrorists* conclusions tend to be gory and sanity-threatening.

## **Hybrid Scenes**

Some scenes double up, most often when a general challenge leads to an information opportunity. It's okay to give out a core clue as a reward for overcoming an obstacle only if that core clue is also available by other means. Otherwise you risk creating a situation where a core clue becomes unavailable, violating the central tenet of the GUMSHOE system.

## **Scene Diagrams**

To check that player choice matters in your scenario, diagram its scenes. Connect them with arrows, checking to make sure that they can be unraveled in any order. It's acceptable to add unpredictability and variance with non-investigative scenes (antagonist reactions, hazards, and sub-plots), but better form when the players can connect the core and alternate scenes in more than one way.

## **Activating Players**

A common complaint about investigative scenarios is that they "railroad" players into tightly following a slavishly predetermined story path. Although you rarely



see the opposite complaint voiced, a significant number of groups flail in confusion when not steered in an obvious direction.

Let players weigh options for as long as the discussion seems lively and fun. If you see the group get frustrated and unable to make a collective choice, gently insert yourself into the discussion. Summarize the various suggestions made and direct the discussion toward a conclusion. Guide the players in eliminating choices without nudging them to a preferred answer. This detachment is easier to attain when you don't settle on one.

Remind the players that the only way forward in a mystery scenario is to gather more information. When things get static, refer to the characters' drives. Ask them which choices before them most suit their specific drives.

Be ready for moments where players feel overwhelmed, either because there are too many choices to choose between or, more likely, no obviously risk-free choice. Nudge them onward by invoking their drives. Remind them that they've been trained by the OV as problem-solvers. Perhaps unlike the players, the characters are used to forming hypotheses, testing them by gathering information, and revising their theories, and moving forward. They respond to dilemmas by breaking them down into steps. With a little coaching, they'll quickly internalize this problem-solving methodology. Your players will learn to take the initiative, abandoning the "wait for clues" passivity trained into them as they were run through more predetermined scenarios.

### **Avoid Negation**

When running a mystery scenario, it helps to think two or three scenes ahead of the players. It's often useful to have a possible climactic sequence in mind, too. That allows you to foreshadow enough to make the ending appear to be a logical outgrowth of the scenes that preceded it. (For more on this, see the next section.)

Don't let the possible plot forks you have in mind become too fixed in your imagination. Instead, keep them provisional, so that you can turn away from them and substitute new choices more in keeping with player input.

This is a long-winded way of restating the basic principle of improvisation used by stage actors: never negate. If, as a sketch unfolds, one performer identifies the other as his mother, the second performer must embrace and build on that choice. To simply swat down the choice and say, "I'm not your mother," is extremely poor form. It stops the story dead and punishes the other participant for attempting to advance it.

In a like vein, train yourself to respond to unexpected possibilities by embracing them and building them into the ongoing storyline. You may have decided that the pathologist Elsa Hower is an innocent dupe in an esoterror scheme which requires fresh corpses. However, the players heavily invest themselves in seeing

her as a villain, you might consider setting aside that planned revelation, so they can feel a sense of unmitigated triumph when they bring her to justice.

You don't have to accept every piece of player direction at face value. Keep the story surprising by building twists onto the elements you do incorporate. When in doubt, make the player half-right. Perhaps Elsa has been parasitized by an ODE which can be extracted and subjected to an emotionally satisfying comeuppance, allowing the team to both save an innocent and punish the guilty.

It's not necessary to turn the narrative on a dime with every piece of player input. The key is to avoid a scene in which nothing happens, or in which your scene is less interesting than the one suggested by the player. When a player says that the computer archive in the ruined citadel must have a holographic librarian, it's a disappointing to rule it out, or prevent the players from finding it because they haven't the right skill to spend from. Extracting useful information from a holo-character is more fun, and more plot-advancing, than not. This doesn't mean, however, that there the program shouldn't afterwards spring a nasty surprise on them.

## **Leading and Following**

Improvising is a technique, not an ultimate goal. Occasionally you'll find that it's more entertaining for all involved if you seize the narrative reins and steer them in a particular direction. This will tend to happen more near the end of a scenario, when you're trying to wrap all of the threads together into a coherent and satisfying conclusion.

Again this is a matter of responding to the mood and attitude of the players. When they're actively engaged in the story and throwing out fun suggestions, follow their lead. When their creativity hits the wall, pick up the slack. Improvisation is an organic process of give and take.

## **Running Scenarios**

The GUMSHOE Rules System covers much of what you need to run EclipseSHOE; this section supplements that with additional GM-centric advice.

## **Giving Out Clues**

To give out information, the PC needs to be in the right place, with the right ability, and use that ability. This section deals with each of these preconditions. In short though, whatever you've done in other games, you should always err on the side of giving out information, not holding it back.

## **Having the Right Ability**

The rules offer a number of way to call on abilities, depending on the situation. Choosing the right way to call on an ability is crucial to the forward momentum of your investigative plot. Make this choice according to the consequences of failure.

If the consequence of failure is that a character fails to get a piece of crucial information, success should be automatic provided that the character has the ability in question, and the player thinks to ask for it. However, any credible attempt to get information that would yield a given clue yields that clue, whether or not this is the ability you've specified in the scenario.

(Even at that, you may need to improvise during play if no player steps up to claim the needed clue, bending the details of the scenario so that the same information can be garnered with a different ability, possibly by another player.)

## **Using the Right Ability**

You can give out clues both actively and passively. By default, though, GUMSHOE assumes that the use of interpersonal abilities is active; the players have to correctly choose an appropriate ability and describe how they're using it to open a contact up to questioning. When you see that players are hesitant, tell the player with the relevant ability that his experienced OV character can sense that it will work here:

- “You get the feeling that this guy will crack if you lean on him a little.” (Intimidation)
- “He seems kind of smitten by you.” (Flattery)
- “Offering them tea would be customary here.” (Protocol)

## **Being in the Right Place**

GUMSHOE procedural series require their own conceits in order to keep the story moving in an entertaining manner. They require the audience's complicity in looking the other way. Here GM and players handwave certain elements that break the rules of realism in order to keep the game running smoothly, just as TV scriptwriters. For example, the conceit of primacy in shows such as *Law and Order* ensure that the lead characters get the juiciest cases and more action than any cop is likely to experience in a lifetime. Just as the aforementioned devices arise from the requirements of TV drama, GUMSHOE's conceits grapple with the limitations of a roleplaying session.

The major device you'll want to adopt, needed for all but the smallest groups, is the conceit of elastic participation

Use the concept of elastic participation to ensure that there is always a PC in the right place.

GUMSHOE works best when you assume that everyone is kind-of sort-of along for every scene—without squinting too hard at any resulting logic or staging absurdities.

### **Rolling for Clues and the GUMSHOE Style**

Just as in games where you roll for clues, players always have to describe a logical course of action that might lead to their getting information, directly or indirectly suggesting the ability you use to get it. In the traditional model, there's a roll; you supply the information on a success. In GUMSHOE, this step is skipped—but it's the only step skipped.

Traditional style:

Player: I examine the body looking for a cause of death .

GM: Roll Medicine

Player: I succeed.

GM: It's blunt force trauma to the back of the skull. There are traces of a slimy residue

GUMSHOE style:

Player: I examine the body looking for a cause of death.

GM: [Checks worksheet to see if the player's character has Medicine, which she does.] It's blunt force trauma to the back of the skull. There are traces of a slimy residue.

In neither style do you see players grabbing their character sheets as soon as they enter a new scene and shouting out "Anthropology! Archaeology! Art! Notice!" They don't do this because it would be weird, boring, and stupid—and because in neither case does it fill all the requirements necessary to get information from a scene.

The only difference between GUMSHOE and those systems is the lack of a die roll. You know your group. Give out information in the same way you would usually give out information, actively, passively: GUMSHOE doesn't care. Your players will solicit it, or you will give it out, just as you always do. There will be a strong effect on your gaming, but from a subtle change.

### **Ending Scenes**

In a novel or TV episode, writers can freely cut to the next scene when their characters have acquired all of the clues available in the current one. The

characters might stick around for hours tying up loose ends and pursuing fruitless questions, but this doesn't happen on screen. We, the audience, are not forced to sit through such sequences.

This kind of concise editing isn't so easy in the roleplaying medium. Players don't know when they've got all the clues.

Here's a simple trick to gently steer them onwards, without unduly breaking the illusion of fictional reality:

Before play, take an index card and write on it, in big block letters, the word SCENE. As soon as the players have gleaned the core clue and most or all of the secondary clues in a scene, and the action begins to drag, hold up the card. When the players see this, they know to move on. (Of course, you have to explain the cue to them before play begins.) Easy, efficient, yet somehow not nearly as disruptive or jarring as a verbal instruction.

Even better, use one of the musical stings available from the Pelgrane Press website for just this purpose.