POCKET GUMSHOE

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WHAT IS GUMSHOE?

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 an antagonist or 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.

CHARACTERS

Each Pocket GUMSHOE scenario includes a selection of pregenerated characters. These characters have background and roleplaying information, but mechanically, they are defined by their abilities.

ABILITIES

Each character has two types of ability: investigative approaches and general skills. Investigative approaches allow you to find the information your character needs to move forward in a mystery-solving narrative, plus occasional additional benefits. General skills help you survive while you're gathering information and solving problems.

The number you have in each ability is called a rating. For each ability your character also has a pool of points, which fluctuates over the course of the investigation. You begin each scenario with pool points equal to your rating. You will spend points as you conduct the investigation. At times your pool may increase, sometimes refreshing up to its rating again.

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

INVESTIGATIVE APPROACHES

There are three investigative approaches, and every character has at least one rating point in each: Academic, Interpersonal, and Technical. Each character also has tags under each approach that define and refine how they use that approach to collect information.

ACADEMIC

This approach deals with knowledge gained through education or research. Unlike Technical, Academic is focused on "book learning" and theory more than direct application.

Tags under Academic relate to different fields of study. Examples include: anthropology, archaeology, architecture, art history, botany, forensic accounting, forensic psychology, geology, history, languages, law, occult studies, pathology, research, textual analysis, and trivia.

INTERPERSONAL

You use the Interpersonal approach when dealing with other people: witnesses, experts, and suspects. This approach can reflect personal charisma, long years of experience, or even dedicated training in reading and manipulating human beings.

Tags under Interpersonal refine the particular tactics you might employ when talking to an individual, and examples include: authority, bullshit detector, bureaucracy, charm, cop talk, flattery, flirting, high society, impersonate, inspiration, interrogation, intimidation, negotiation, oral history, reassurance, respect, streetwise, and taunt.

TECHNICAL

The Technical approach covers "hands-on" scientific or mechanical activities that are used to collect information in the field or a laboratory. While this approach may provide general knowledge similar to Academic, more often it requires access to tools or equipment and time to perform tests.

As with Academic, tags under Technical deal with specialized fields of training. Examples include: astronomy, ballistics, chemistry, crafting, cryptography, data retrieval, document analysis, electronic surveillance, evidence collection, explosive devices, fingerprinting, forensic anthropology (autopsies), forensic entomology, forgery, hacking, locksmith, medical expertise, notice, outdoor survival, photography, and traffic analysis.

GENERAL SKILLS

General skills cover the "action" familiar from many other roleplaying games beyond the gathering of clues. Running, jumping, climbing trees, shooting the bad guys while you're up there. Unlike investigative approaches, which just work, general skills involve an element of chance. That is offset by spending points, and you'll notice that most of a character's general skills will have much higher ratings that their investigative approaches.

Not every Pocket GUMSHOE scenario will use all of these general skills. Some skills and rules are marked with an icon noting whether they are appropriate mainly for high-action games ⊕ or horror games ☻.

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.

DRIVING

You're a skilled driver, capable of wringing high performance from even the most recalcitrant automobile, pick-up truck, or van. You can: evade or conduct pursuit; avoid collisions, or minimize damage from collisions; spot tampering with a vehicle; and conduct emergency repairs.

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 wounded, or even killed. For more on this, see "Exhaustion, Injury and Gruesome Death" on p. 16.

You get Health 1 for free.

GENERAL SKILLS AS INVESTIGATIVE TAGS

There may be situations when having a particular general skill gives you unique insight into the investigation. At the GM's discretion, any general skill in which you have a rating of 2 or more can count as a tag on a single investigative approch. In almost all cases, this applies to the Technical approach, though the GM may decide that Medic, for example, applies to Academic instead.

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; and find suitable places for forced entry, and use them. Despite its name, Infiltration is as useful for getting out of places undetected as it is for getting into them.

MECHANICS

You're good at building, repairing, and disabling devices, from classic pit-and-pendulum traps to DVD players. Given the right components, you can create jury-rigged devices from odd bits of scrap.

MEDIC ⊙

You can perform first aid on sick or injured individuals. For more on the use of this skill, see "Exhaustion, Injury and Gruesome Death" on p. 16.

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. You make a simple test; if you succeed, you have the item you want. 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.

Items of obvious utility to the investigation do not require a test. These include but are not limited to: note paper, writing implements, laptop computer, a PDA with wireless Internet access, mini USB drive, cell phone, various types of tape, common tools and hardware, light weapons, flashlights of various sizes, chem lights, batteries, magnifying glasses, thermometer, and a no-frills audio recording device.

Other abilities imply the possession of basic gear suitable to their core tasks. Characters with Medic have their own first aid kits; Photographers come with cameras and accessories. 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 skill is like pornography. Your GM will know it when she sees it.

SCUFFLING ⬤

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

SENSE TROUBLE

Keen perceptions allow you to spot signs of potential danger to yourself and others. Information gained from this skill 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, or smell a gas leak, for example.

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.

SHRINK ☻

You can provide comfort, perspective and solace to the mentally troubled. You may be a therapist or counselor, a priest or pastor, or just a empathetic and intuitive individual. You can restore panicked characters to a state of calm, and treat any long-term mental illnesses they accrue in the course of their investigations.

SHOOTING ⬤

You are adept with firearms.

STABILITY ☻

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

When your Stability pool is depleted, you risk developing mental illness. For more on this, see "Losing It" on p. 19.

You get Stability 1 for free.

THE GUMSHOE RULES SYSTEM

This section describes the basic GUMSHOE rules system and is addressed to players and GM alike.

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) take the right approach to discover the clue. As long as you do these 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 my Academic approach to determine if the memo was really written by Danziger."

Or you can engage in a more general informational fishing expedition: "I use a Technical approach to search the crime scene."

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.

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

CORE CLUES

Each scene has at least one core clue. This is the clue you absolutely need to move to the next scene, and thus to complete the entire investigation.

The scenario notes give a particular approach necessary to gain a core clue. If you have an appropriate tag and use the right approach, you will get the clue. The GM should be flexible in what approaches can yield a particular skill. If a player can make a reasonable argument for another approach that fits the scene and their tags, the GM should still give out the clue.

But what if you don't have an appropriate tag? You can still use an approach that fits the scene, but the GM will charge you one point out of your pool in that approach. This represents a flash of inspiration or briefly remembered fact that unlocks the core 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.

SPECIAL BENEFITS

Certain clues allow you to gain special benefits by spending points from the relevant investigative approach 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 it 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 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 in 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.

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 using the Academic or Technical approaches. 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. The Interpersonal approach 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 ask players what approach they're taking in what appears to be an innocuous transitional scene. Instead the GM asks which character has the highest current pool in the approach in question. (When in doubt for what approach to use for a basic search, the GM defaults to Technical.)

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.

DIE ROLLS

General skills always involve an element of chance, and Pocket GUMSHOE uses a single ordinary (six-sided) die to resolve that chance.

TESTS

A test occurs when the outcome of a general skill 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 skill uses should allow automatic successes, with possible bonuses on point spends, just like investigative abilities.

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, shooting a target, disconnecting a security system, or remaining sane in the face of creeping supernatural horror.

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.

When you make a simple test, decide how many points you want to spend from your general skill pool. 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 assesses a Difficulty Number for a test based on the situation. The average Difficulty Number is 4, giving a player a 50/50 chance without spending any pool points. The GM may or may not reveal Difficulty Numbers before you roll.

Roll one die and add the number of points you spent to the result. If the total is greater than or equal to the Difficulty Number, you succeed at the test.

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 skill 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.

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 skill pools: 1 or 2 points per character is a reasonable general spend. Where tasks can

be performed by cooperative effort, multiple characters may contribute points to them.

MAKING GENERAL TESTS WITHOUT SKILLS

You can always make a test of any general skill, even when you have no points in its pool, or even if you have a rating of 0.

CONTESTS

Contests occur when two characters, often a player character and a supporting character controlled by the GM, actively attempt to thwart one another.

In a contest, each character acts in turn. The first to fail a roll of the contested skill loses. The GM decides who acts first. Where the characters seem to be acting at the same time, the one with the lowest rating in the relevant skill 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 skill 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 Scuffling and/or Shooting, where two or more parties try to harm or kill each other.

Initiative: 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. Each character and antagonist (or group of antagonists, if several bad guys act at the same time for simplicity's sake) gets to take a turn during each round.

The GM determines which character or antagonist goes first in the first round. That character acts in combat, then announces who goes next after them. When an antagonist takes a turn, the GM announces which character goes next. The last character to act in the round decides who goes first in the following round.

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.) This 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
Machete, heavy club, light firearm	0
Sword, heavy firearm	+1

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. (In other words, treat the negative number as a positive. For example, if your Health pool is at –3, the Difficulty of the roll is 3, and so on.) 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 approaches, and increases the Difficulty Numbers of all tests and contests, including opponents' Hit Thresholds, by 1.

A character with the Medic skill 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 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 Medic 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, you are dead. Time to create a replacement character.

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 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.

RUNNING AWAY

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

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 skill, 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
A human opponent attacks you with evident intent to do serious harm	2
You are in a car or other vehicle accident serious enough to pose a risk of injury	2
A human opponent attacks you with evident intent to kill	3
You see a supernatural creature from a distance	3
You see a supernatural creature up close	4
You see a particularly grisly murder or accident scene	4
You learn that a friend or loved one has been violently killed	4
You discover the corpse of a friend or loved one	6
You are attacked by a supernatural creature	7
You see a friend or loved one killed	7
You see a friend or loved one killed in a particularly gruesome manner	8

GMs should feel free to assess Stability Losses for other incidents, using the examples provided as a benchmark. Some especially overwhelming creatures may impose higher than normal Stability losses when seen from a distance, seen up close, or ripping your lungs out.

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

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 skills increase by 1, and it becomes more difficult to use investigative abilities.

If you want to make an investigative spend, make a Stability 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 a psych facility, never to be seen again. Time to create a new character.

MENTAL ILLNESS

If the incident that drove you to mental illness was mundane in nature, you suffer from Post-Traumatic Stress Syndrome (PTSD.) You are haunted by dreams of the incident, and spend your days in a constant state of anxiety, on high 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.

If driven to mental illness by a supernatural occurrence, you face a range of possible mental effects. These are not intended to reflect real-world mental illnesses, but the bizarre effects of the supernatural. There are two approaches. First, the default, players can chose from the following listed conditions. The second option should only be offered with the complete buy-in of all participants.

In this case, the GM rolls a die 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 their sense of dislocation and disorientation.

(1) 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.

(2) 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.

(3) Megalomania. When the character fails at a dramatic moment, the GM describes the outcome of his 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.

(4) 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.

(5) 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.

(6) 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

A character with the Shrink skill can spend points from that pool to help another character regain spent St points. For every Shrink point spent, the recipient gains 2 Stability points.

If a character is acting in an erratic manner due to mental illness, another character can spend 2 points of Shrink to snap him into a state of temporary lucidity. He will then act rationally for the remainder of the current scene.

WHAT DO POOL POINTS REPRESENT?

Pool points are an abstraction, representing the spotlight time each character gets 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.

Pool points measure your opportunities to exercise your character's 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.

REGAINING POOL POINTS

Spent points from general skill pools are restored at different rates, depending on their narrative purpose. Investigative approaches and any general skill not mentioned below does not refresh during play. (Option: If you run more than one scenario using the same characters, all ability pools refresh between scenarios.)

Use of the Shrink skill permits limited recovery of Stability points in the course of an episode.

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 skill can restore a limited number of Health points in the course of a session.

Pools for the physical abilities of Athletics, Driving, Scuffling, and Shooting are fully restored whenever twenty-four hours of game-world time elapses since the last expenditure.

OPPONENT STATISTICS

You usually only need game statistics for characters 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 tags 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, we don't worry about simulating their relative robustness in comparison to the general population. Instead, we focus on how many hits they ought to be able to take before dropping, according to dramatic logic. If a thug should fall to a single burst of automatic fire, we give him a Health of 1 or 2.

An **Attack Pattern** is an optional game statistic suggesting how the opponent might spend its Scuffling 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 beast 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.

Instead of a combat pool, some opponents may have a static value to attack. If so, apply this modifier to each attack.

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 Scuffling 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 Sense Trouble 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.

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 an Interpersonal 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 skill. 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.

HAZARDS

In or out of combat, the characters' survival may be threatened by assorted hazards, from electrical shock to poisoning.
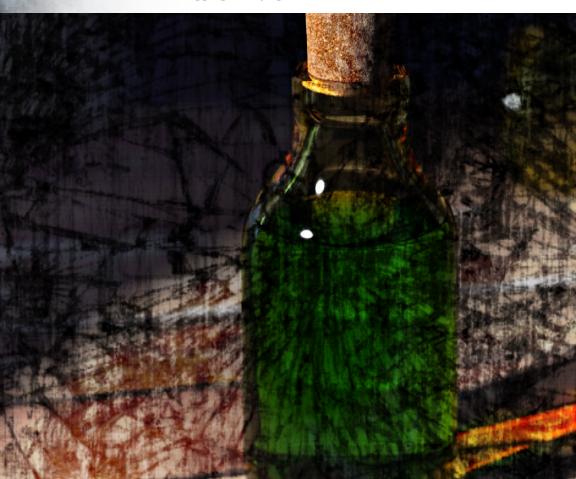
ELECTRICITY AND OTHER SHOCKS

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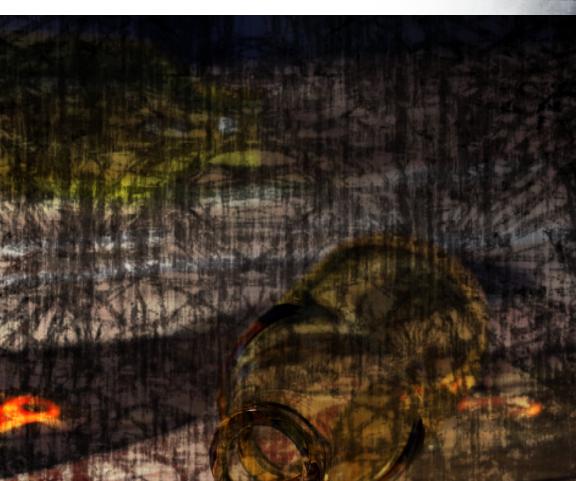
Many other hazards can be emulated using the mild/moderate/extreme breakdown above. Simply change the narrative description and side effects, keeping the Health pool losses.

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 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.

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

A scenario may be structured 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 in 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.
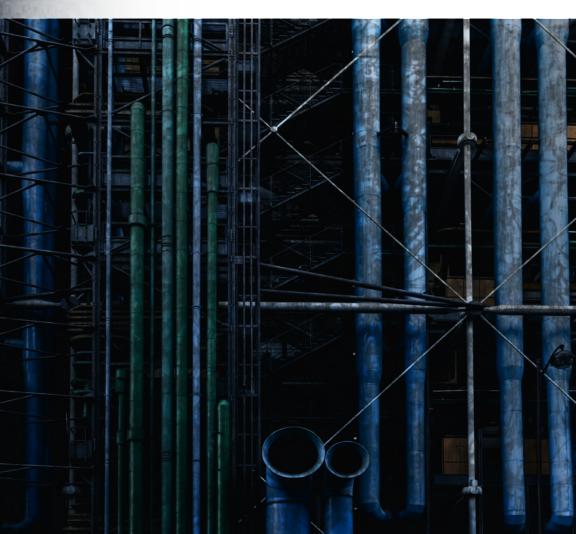
LEVERAGED CLUES

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 the Interpersonal approach, 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.

SCENE TYPES

Every Pocket GUMSHOE scenario is arranged 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, you will find the scene type, the scene or scenes which lead to the current scene, and scenes which lead from it.

INTRODUCTORY

This is the first scene of the episode. It establishes the premise of the mystery. It is typically short, unless the characters are meeting each other for the first time. Players should introduce their characters and spend some time roleplaying to establish relationships.

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.

Core scenes and core clues present 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. 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.

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 investigators 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. 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 characters with an obstacle to their safety or ability to continue the investigation. It must typically be overcome through tests.

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 often a final hazard or antagonist reaction scene, although it may be initiated by the players busting in on their enemies. 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.

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.

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. Ask them which choices before them most suit their specific backgrounds and motivations.

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. Softly nudge them onward, and 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 occult 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 possessed by an parasitic demon 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 disappointing to rule it out. Extracting useful information from a holo-character

is more fun, and more plot-advancing, than not. This doesn't mean, however, that 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.

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. (Or print out the SCENE card provided in your Pocket GUMSHOE scenario.) As soon as the players have gleaned the core clue(s) 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.

POCKET GUMSHOE