# The Wyrd Engine

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# CHAPTER 1: THE WYRD ENGINE

The Wyrd Engine is designed for fast-paced, story-driven play, blending the narrative freedom of Fate with a more structured approach to character abilities. The system emphasises quick character creation and streamlined mechanics, making it an excellent choice for one-shots and episodic campaigns. Game Masters should be able to generate all player characters for a session in less than an hour, and players should be able to pick up a pre-made character and start playing within minutes, allowing for flexible, drop-in play that suits rotating groups or short, focused sessions.

With accessibility in mind, The Wyrd Engine is built to be intuitive for newcomers to tabletop roleplaying games. By reducing mechanical complexity and focusing on descriptive actions, it ensures that even those with no prior experience can easily engage with the game. The system provides a strong foundation for storytelling while avoiding cumbersome rules, making it ideal for groups that want to dive straight into adventure without an extended learning curve.

## TYPES OF PLAY

Roleplaying games can be structured in different ways, each offering a unique experience. The Wyrd Engine is primarily designed for *one-shots* and *episodic play*, but it can also support longer campaigns with some adjustments.

### ONE-SHOTS

A one-shot is a self-contained session that tells a complete story in a single sitting. These are excellent for introducing new players, testing out new settings, or running short, focused narratives without long-term commitment.

#### PROS:
- Easy to set up and play with minimal preparation.
- Great for newcomers and drop-in players.
- Allows for high-stakes storytelling without long-term consequences.

#### CONS:
- Limited time for character development.
- Less room for complex, unfolding plots.

### EPISODIC PLAY

Episodic games consist of multiple short adventures featuring recurring characters. Each session is largely self-contained, but there may be ongoing story threads that connect them.

#### PROS:
- Balances flexibility with continuity.
- Easy to accommodate changing player rosters.
- Encourages character growth while keeping stories manageable.

#### CONS:
- May lack the deep, overarching narrative of long campaigns.
- Requires careful pacing to make each session feel complete.

### CAMPAIGN PLAY

A campaign is a long-running game with an ongoing story, often spanning multiple sessions with the same characters and overarching narrative.

#### PROS:
- Allows for deep character development and long-term storytelling.
- Provides a sense of progression and investment.

#### CONS:
- Requires long-term player commitment.
- Can be difficult to maintain momentum if players miss sessions.

The Wyrd Engine is optimised for one-shots and episodic games, ensuring quick character creation and fast-paced play. However, it can support campaigns with minor modifications, such as introducing progression mechanics or expanding character options over time.

## PHILOSOPHY AND DESIGN GOALS

The Wyrd Engine is built upon the following key design principles:

### NARRATIVE-DRIVEN MECHANICS

While many systems provide detailed simulationist mechanics, The Wyrd Engine prioritises narrative flow. Rules are designed to reinforce storytelling rather than constrain it, ensuring that mechanics facilitate player agency and character development rather than slow down the action.

## MODULAR AND SETTING-AGNOSTIC

The Wyrd Engine is intended to be adaptable to multiple settings, from Victorian steampunk mysteries to cosmic horror and high fantasy. Core mechanics remain consistent, while setting-specific options allow groups to tailor the experience to their preferred genre.

## ACCESSIBILITY AND EASE OF PLAY

Complexity often serves as a barrier to entry for new players. Two staples of roleplaying games—*narrative play*, where players act out scenes, and *detailed rule sets*, rooted in strategy games—can be stumbling blocks. These two elements are paradoxically at odds: if improvisation is difficult, rules help resolve interactions, but overly complex systems slow down play. **The Wyrd Engine** leans toward narrative play, with most outcomes determined through roleplaying and the Game Master's discretion. However, its simple skills and traits system provides a structured resolution method when needed.

## COLLABORATIVE STORYTELLING

Roleplaying is a shared experience, and The Wyrd Engine encourages player collaboration. Mechanics are designed to give all players opportunities to contribute meaningfully to the story, ensuring that every character has a role to play in the unfolding narrative.

## WHAT THE WYRD ENGINE IS NOT

While the system borrows elements from both narrative and tactical games, it is not intended to be a rigid simulation of reality. It does not use attributes, equipment-heavy mechanics, or detailed statistical modelling. Instead, it focuses on storytelling flexibility while maintaining just enough mechanical structure to create meaningful choices in gameplay.

By keeping these goals in mind, The Wyrd Engine offers a roleplaying experience that is both structured and freeing, supporting deep character development and immersive storytelling without unnecessary mechanical complexity.
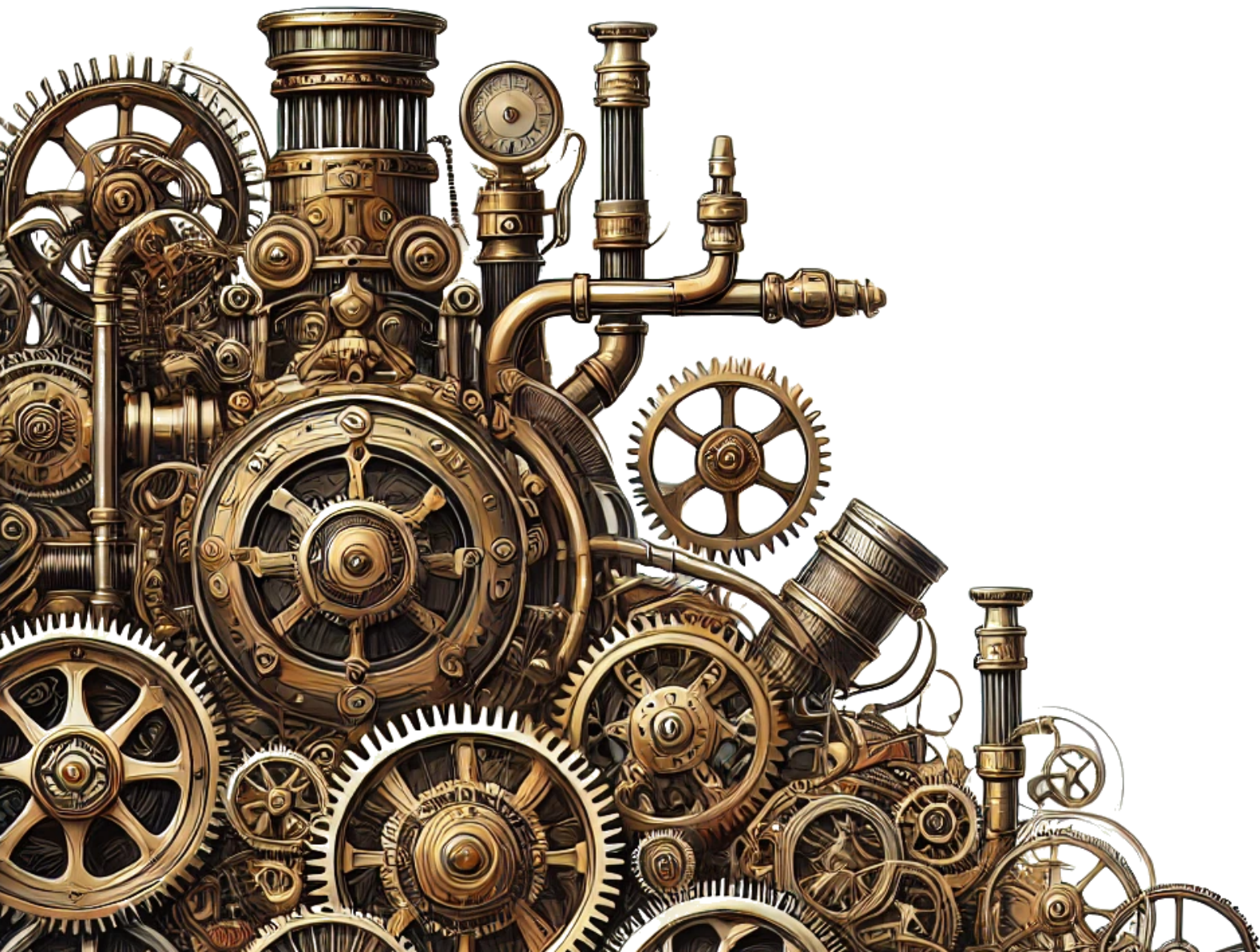
# Part 1

# The Wyrd Engine Mechanics

# Chapter 2: Core Mechanics

The Wyrd Engine is a lightweight, narrative-driven tabletop roleplaying system designed for quick character creation, streamlined play, and minimal bookkeeping. It aims to provide a simple yet flexible framework that new players can easily pick up while still offering enough depth to engage experienced groups. The system leans into storytelling and improvisation, ensuring that the mechanics never overshadow the unfolding drama of the game.

Unlike more complex RPG systems that emphasise character progression, detailed mechanics, and long-term development, the Wyrd Engine is built for episodic or one-shot adventures where characters are meant to be jumped into and played immediately. This makes it ideal for groups with varying levels of experience, casual game nights, convention settings, or groups that enjoy shifting between different settings and tones without committing to long-term character advancement. By focusing on scene-based resolution, simple skills and traits, and intuitive conflict resolution, the Wyrd Engine keeps the story moving forward while maintaining a satisfying level of challenge and tension.

While the system lacks deep specialisation mechanics, its flexibility allows players to create compelling, unique characters through traits, skills, and equipment that influence their play style. Success in the Wyrd Engine isn't dictated by meticulous number-crunching but rather by player ingenuity, teamwork, and the creative use of their abilities. Every character is designed to be compelling and memorable right from the start, ensuring they have the tools to make an impact within the narrative. The result is a game that emphasises momentum, character-driven storytelling, and high-action scenarios without getting bogged down in excessive rules.

## Conflict resolution at a glance

Whenever characters encounter an obstacle—be it an unsolvable riddle, a desperate struggle to escape a flooded sewer or a battle against a coven of deadly necromancers—they must find a way to overcome the challenge. Whether through wit, skill, or sheer determination, resolving conflicts is at the heart of the game, driving the story forward and shaping the fate of the characters.

With The Wyrd Engine, all conflict resolution follows the same pattern that combines **4dF** Fudge Dice, described on this page, **Skills** described on on page 6, and **Traits** described on on page 8. You combine these three and compare them to a **Difficulty Rating (DR)**, described on on page 10, and the result determines the outcome of a conflict.

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### Steps in conflict resolution

- Roll four Fudge Dice (**4dF**). Each die has **+ (plus), - (minus), and 0 (blank) faces**. Add up the plusses and minuses.
- The roll result is added to a relevant **Skill** modifier.
- If relevant, **Traits** can be applied as bonuses.
- The final result is compared against a **difficulty rating (DR)** to determine success or failure:
  - **4dF + Skill + Trait > DR** (Success)
  - **4dF + Skill + Trait = DR** (Tie)
  - **4dF + Skill + Trait < DR** (Failure)

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A **Tie** will usually qualify as a success, but the GM may decide that the outcome is a partial success or a compromise. This is up to the GM's discretion and should be based on the context of the situation and add minor complications to the success.

These steps will always be the general pattern for resolving conflicts, only differing in which skills and traits are involved, how the difficulty rating is determined, and what the consequences of success or failure will be.

## Fudge dice (4dF)

Fudge dice are dice that can give you one of three values: ⊟, ▪, or ⊞. You can buy this type of dice if you want, but you can also use any normal six-sided die and declare 1 and 2 to be ⊟, 3 and 4 to be ▪, and 5 and 6. to be ⊞.

Whenever we roll dice in The Wyrd Engine, we roll four such dice (we write it as 4dF) and we add up the result, where ⊟ counts as -1, ▪ as 0, and ⊞ as +1. So, for example ⊞⊞⊟▪ = +1 + 1 - 1 + 0 = 1 and ⊟⊞⊟⊟ = -1 + 1 - 1 - 1 = -2.

Using 4dF gives us a distribution of outcomes that look like this:
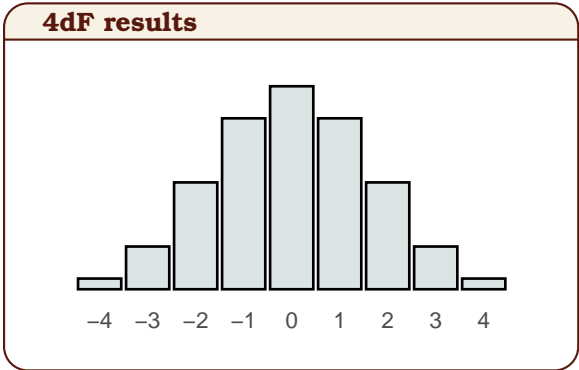
You are unlikely to roll the extremes; you should expect to hit ±4 about 1% of the time (each)—about one time out of a hundred rolls, you should get +4, and about one time in a hundred, you should get -4. You expect to get an outcome above +3 or below -3 about 6% of the time (each)—about one in twenty for each.
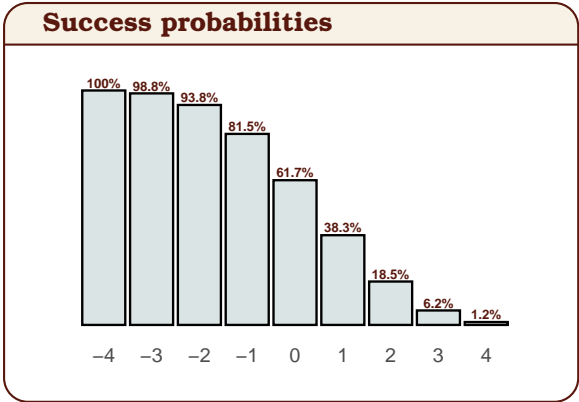
Another way to visualise the outcome of a 4dF is as the chance you have of rolling higher than some threshold value:

### Success probabilities



It is impossible to roll lower than **-4** with a **4dF** roll, but you can tie with it (with probability 1/81). To roll higher than or equal to **-3**, you just have to avoid ⊟⊟⊟⊟ , and this outcome only happens one out of 81 rolls. To roll equal to **+4** you *have* to roll ⊞⊞⊞⊞ , which also happens with probability 1/81. To roll *higher* than **+4** is impossible, since this it the highest value you can roll.

In conflict resolution, this graph is relevant as it tells us how likely it is for a character without the necessary skills and relevant traits to succeed at any given difficulty rating. It is this graph of success probabilities you should have in mind when setting difficulty levels, and we return to it later. The graph, as it is here, is the probabilities you get if you had to rely on 4dF alone, without any skills or traits.

# Skills

Skills represent a character's proficiency in various actions, from keen observation and quick reflexes to mastery in combat or persuasion. Whenever a character attempts a significant action where success is uncertain, they roll **4dF** and add their relevant skill modifier. For player characters and most non-player characters they encounter, skills are range as:

### Skill Levels in The Wyrd Engine

| Skill Level | Description |
|---|---|
| Untrained (0) | A character with no special training, relying on instinct or common sense. |
| Novice (+1) | Someone with basic knowledge or minimal hands-on experience in a skill. |
| Skilled (+2) | A well-trained individual who regularly practices and applies their ability. |
| Expert (+3) | A master in the field, capable of performing under extreme conditions. |

For extreme monsters, e.g., demons, dragons, or killer robots, skills might go higher. You will usually not go lower than **Untrained (0)** unless a character is impaired, e.g., drugged or recovering after severe physical or mental trauma, in which case you can.

Characters begin with a defined set of skill ranks, representing their strengths and weaknesses. Unlike systems with extensive skill lists, The Wyrd Engine keeps skills broad and flexible, allowing them to cover a wide range of related actions. For instance, a character with a high **Athletics** skill might use it to outrun pursuers, climb treacherous cliffs, or leap between rooftops. Similarly, depending on the character's background, Lore could represent expertise in ancient history, arcane knowledge, or scientific principles.

The list of skills a character can have will depend on the setting in which the game is taking place, and there is not a fixed list of skills for all Wyrd games. Generally, you should feel free to make up your own skills—remembering to keep them broad in scope—and decide between player and GM when a skill is applicable. If you like, though, you can make more detailed skill lists if that is more to your taste. In the sidebar, you can see an example of this from *The Grand Casebook* setting, a Victorian/Steampunk/Gothic Horror setting.

When a character lacks a skill, they roll with a default modifier of 0, relying solely on luck and circumstance. This ensures that even untrained characters have a chance—however slim—of succeeding in tasks outside their expertise.

## Skills in Action

Let us throw the character *Inspector Julian Hargrave* (see sidebar) into some difficult situations and see how he can use his skills to resolve them.

# INSPECTOR JULIAN HARGRAVE

*Determined and methodical, Inspector Julian Hargrave is a seasoned detective. His years of experience have made him an expert at uncovering the truth, though his rigid approach sometimes clashes with the unpredictable nature of crime-solving.*

| Skills | |
|---|---|
| **Expert (+3)** | Investigate |
| **Skilled (+2)** | Notice, Rapport |
| **Novice (+1)** | Will, Provoke, Athletics |
| **Untrained (0)** | Stealth, Burglary, Shoot, Resources |

EXAMPLE SKILLS

## INVESTIGATION & KNOWLEDGE

- *Investigate*—Analysing crime scenes, following leads, searching for hidden clues.
- *Lore*—Understanding history, science, the occult, and the unnatural.
- *Notice*—Spotting details, sensing danger, and staying aware of surroundings.

## SOCIAL & INFLUENCE

- *Rapport*—Gaining trust, persuading, and negotiating.
- *Deceive*—Lying, creating convincing cover stories, and disguises.
- *Provoke*—Intimidation, interrogation, and getting a reaction from others.
- *Contacts*—Knowing the right people, gathering information through connections.
- *Empathy*—Reading emotions, understanding motives, and connecting with others.

## PHYSICAL & DEXTERITY

- *Athletics*—Running, jumping, climbing, and escaping dangerous situations.
- *Stealth*—Moving unseen, tailing a suspect, sneaking into restricted areas.
- *Fight*—Engaging in hand-to-hand combat, fencing, or using melee weapons.
- *Shoot*—Firearms, throwing weapons, and ranged combat.

## RESILIENCE & MENTAL FORTITUDE

- *Will*—Resisting fear, staying composed under pressure, enduring mental strain.
- *Physique*—Strength, endurance, and the ability to withstand injury or exhaustion.

## MECHANICAL & PRACTICAL SKILLS

- *Burglary*—Lockpicking, safecracking, and breaking into places unseen.
- *Resources*—Access to wealth, favours, or valuable possessions.
- *Crafts*—Repairing devices, modifying tools, or working with mechanical systems.

## ANALYSING A CRIME SCENE

**Situation:** A renowned socialite has been found dead in her study. The room appears to suggest suicide, but something about the scene seems off. Julian examines the area for inconsistencies.

**Difficulty Rating:** The GM decides that the difficulty rating is **Formidable (+3)** – The crime scene is staged well, but subtle clues remain for an expert to notice.

**Resolution:** Julian rolls ⊞⊞⊟■ and adds **+3 (Investigate)** for a total of +4. Since he exceeds the DR, he notices an overturned chair that contradicts the suicide setup. A closer look reveals a footprint near the window, suggesting an intruder.

## SPOTTING AN AMBUSH

**Situation:** Julian follows a suspect through the fog-laden streets when he hears an unusual shuffle behind him. Is someone trailing him?

**Difficulty Rating:** The GM determines that the difficulty level is **Difficult (+2)** – The follower is cautious but not an expert in stealth.

**Resolution:** Julian rolls ⊞⊟⊟■ and adds **+2 (Notice)**, for a total of +1, meeting the DR. He catches the reflection of a blade in a shop window just in time to evade an ambush.

## GAINING A WITNESS' TRUST

**Situation:** A frightened maid refuses to discuss her employer's illicit dealings. Julian must convince her to cooperate.

**Difficulty Rating:** The GM decides that the difficulty is **Challenging (+1)** – She is hesitant but not impossible to persuade.

**Resolution:** Julian rolls ⊞⊟⊟⊟ and adds **+2 (Rapport)** for a total of +0. A tie is a failure, or is it? If he changes his tactics or offers protection to try again, it might turn into a partial success.

## INTIMIDATING A THIEF

**Situation:** A pickpocket is caught red-handed. Instead of arresting him, Julian wants to frighten him into revealing who he works for.

**Difficulty Rating:** The GM judges that the difficulty is **Basic (0)** – The thief is young and inexperienced but used to trouble.

**Resolution:** Julian rolls ⊞⊞■■ and adds **+1 (Provoke)** for a total of +3. He exceeds the DR, causing the thief to stammer out the name of a notorious smuggler before running off.

EXAMPLE CHARACTER

# FELIX CAVENDISH

*A brilliant but erratic inventor-for-hire, Felix Cavendish is both a mechanical genius and a walking disaster. His creations are revolutionary—when they don't explode. A rogue innovator who skirts the edges of legality, he thrives on the challenge of solving impossible problems with machines that push the limits of science.*

### Skills

| | |
|---|---|
| Expert (+3) | Crafts |
| Skilled (+2) | Investigate, Resources |
| Novice (+1) | Lore, Will, Contacts |
| Untrained (0) | Notice, Stealth, Deceive, Athletics |

### Traits

**Master Tinkerer** — *Gain +2 to Crafts when repairing or modifying machinery.*

**Unstable Prototype** — *Once per session, declare an experimental gadget with an unpredictable effect.*

**A Calculated Risk** — *Use Will instead of Athletics when escaping dangerous situations.*

# TRAITS

In *The Wyrd Engine*, Traits represent unique abilities, specialised knowledge, or personal characteristics that distinguish characters and items from one another. Unlike skills, which define general competence, Traits provide a *mechanical advantage* or *narrative permission* in certain situations.

Each player character has exactly **three Traits**, carefully chosen to enhance their strengths or reflect their backstory. Non-player characters and monsters can have fewer or far more traits. Traits are broader than skills and allow a character to *break* or *bend* normal rules in ways that make them feel distinct.

Items can also have traits (but not skills). This is a way to add game-mechanic flavour to non-creatures and replaces weapon bonuses and similar mechanisms in other role-playing rule sets.

## HOW TRAITS WORK

Traits function in the following ways:

- **Situational Bonus:** A Trait can provide a *+2 bonus* to any relevant skill check if it clearly applies.
- **Expanded Capabilities:** A Trait may allow a character to attempt actions that others simply *cannot*, such as deciphering an ancient language or crafting elaborate mechanical devices.
- **Once per Scene/Session Special Ability:** Some Traits grant a powerful ability that can be used once per scene or once per session, such as instantly escaping a locked room or declaring an old friend in the right place at the right time.

Traits *do not stack*—if multiple Traits apply to a roll, the player must choose which one to use.

## CREATING EFFECTIVE TRAITS

When designing Traits, they should:

- Be *broad* enough to be useful in multiple situations.
- Be *specific* enough to define a unique aspect of the character.
- Provide a *clear mechanical or narrative benefit*.

Traits can reflect personality, training, supernatural gifts, or anything else that defines a character's abilities. Below are examples of well-crafted Traits:

## USING TRAITS IN PLAY

In the following examples we see how traits can be used in different situations to help our characters resolve a situation they find themselves in.

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### EXAMPLE 1: APPLYING A +2 BONUS

**Situation:** Felix Cavendish, an eccentric inventor, is attempting to repair a damaged mechanical safe under a tight time limit. His player wants to use his Trait *"Inventive Genius"*.

**Difficulty Rating:** The GM sets the repair difficulty at **Arduous (+4)** , as the damage is severe.

**Resolution:** Felix rolls ⊞⊟⊟■ and adds his **Crafts skill (+3)** for a total of **+2** which would normally be a failure. However, because his Trait *Inventive Genius* applies, he adds an additional **+2**, bringing his final result to **+4** which is a success. The safe is repaired flawlessly and even runs more efficiently than before.

## CORNELIUS "CORNY" FLINT

*A silver-tongued thief and a master of misdirection, Cornelius Flint moves between high society and the criminal underworld with effortless charm. He lives by one rule—if someone is foolish enough to leave their wealth unguarded, it deserves a new owner. While he prefers to talk his way out of danger, he always has an escape plan ready when words fail.*

### Skills

| | |
|---|---|
| **Expert (+3)** | Deceive |
| **Skilled (+2)** | Burglary, Rapport |
| **Novice (+1)** | Athletics, Stealth, Notice |
| **Untrained (0)** | Contacts, Fight, Will, Resources |

### Traits

**Master of Misdirection** — *Gain +2 to Deceive when distracting someone in conversation.*

**Sleight of Hand** — *Once per session, declare you have already lifted a small item unnoticed.*

**Always an Escape Plan** — *Use Burglary instead of Athletics when escaping confinement.*

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EXAMPLE CHARACTER

## ISADORA "ISA" LOVELACE

*A renowned spiritualist and occult investigator, Isa Lovelace walks the thin line between science and the supernatural. Some believe she is merely an expert in human nature, while others whisper that she truly communes with forces beyond the veil. With piercing intuition and an enigmatic presence, she seeks knowledge that others fear to uncover.*

### Skills

| | |
|---|---|
| **Expert (+3)** | Empathy |
| **Skilled (+2)** | Investigate, Lore |
| **Novice (+1)** | Rapport, Will, Notice |
| **Untrained (0)** | Stealth, Deceive, Resources, Contacts |

### Traits

**A Glimpse Beyond the Veil** — *Gain +2 to Empathy when sensing the emotions of the deceased.*

**Foreboding Intuition** — *Once per session, declare a warning based on an unseen force.*

**The Cards Never Lie** — *Use Lore instead of Investigate when predicting an outcome.*

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## EXAMPLE 2: EXPANDED CAPABILITIES

**Situation:** Isadora Lovelace, a gifted spiritualist, wants to communicate with a recently deceased victim in order to uncover clues about a murder. Normally, the **Lore** skill wouldn't allow this.

**Trait:** *"A Glimpse Beyond the Veil"* allows her to attempt supernatural interactions.

**Resolution:** Since her Trait permits it, the GM allows a roll using **Lore**. The outcome determines how much information she can extract.

## EXAMPLE 3: ONCE PER SESSION ABILITY

**Situation:** Cornelius Flint, a silver-tongued rogue, has been cornered in an alley by the city watch. Escape seems impossible.

**Trait:** *"Always an Escape Plan"* allows him, once per session, to declare he had an escape route planned all along.

**Resolution:** Instead of rolling, the GM allows him to describe a secret hatch in the alley leading to the sewers, letting him escape cleanly.

## FINAL NOTES ON TRAITS

Traits are not just mechanical advantages; they define a character's core competencies and role in the narrative. Players should use them creatively, and GMs should reward clever applications that fit the story.

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**GAME MASTER TIP**

If a player wants to use a Trait in a way that isn't obvious, ask them to describe *how* it applies. Encourage creativity while keeping balance in mind.

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# GEAR

Unlike other systems that track individual items, inventory weight, and resource management, The Wyrd Engine keeps gear streamlined and abstract. Instead of worrying about encumbrance, ammunition, or minor supplies, characters only track **gear that truly matters**. This means that most mundane equipment is assumed to be available when reasonable, and only items that provide a mechanical or narrative advantage are recorded.

## GEAR AS TRAITS

Gear in *The Wyrd Engine* functions similarly to Traits. Instead of listing specific damage values or weight, an item has a **trait** that defines its benefit in play.

The Wyrd Engine gear should:

• Provide a *specific mechanical advantage* (e.g. **+2 bonus** to a relevant skill check).

- Offer a *unique function* that enables new actions.
- Be *narratively significant*—not just generic supplies.

Notice that the first two requirements closely resemble the description of traits. This is intentional, as it allows gear to have game mechanic effects while reusing the same rules already introduced.

## Using Gear in Play

Gear should not be micromanaged but used to define a character's tools, specialities, and advantages. If an item logically fits a character's concept—such as a detective having a notebook or a thief carrying lockpicks—it's assumed to be available without taking up a slot. Only equipment that *enhances gameplay* or *creates narrative opportunities* should be explicitly listed.

The trait-like behaviour of gear can also serve a second purpose in *The Wyrd Engine*: Gear provides a way to boost characters abilities—quite substantially—by **+2** bonuses whenever the gear's requirements are met. For advancing characters when preparing them for a battle with the final boss of a scenario, a Game Master can gift the players with increasingly powerful gear as rewards for minor battles. Using gear is a simple way to handle character advancement in *The Wyrd Engine*.

Once player characters start relying on such powerful items, a Game Master has a second trick to add excitement: unlike traits, gear can be taken away again. Recovering stolen gear

necessary for the final confrontation is an excellent way to add side-quests to a game session.

# Difficulty Levels

While *The Wyrd Engine* uses a simple resolution mechanic, it is important to establish how difficult a given action is. The Game Master determines the **Difficulty Rating (DR)** based on the complexity of the task, the environment, and any obstacles the characters may face.

## Passive Opposition

The **Difficulty Rating (DR)** represents the challenge level of a task. The simplest tasks involve no active opposition—where success or failure is determined solely by the character's own abilities. This could be deciphering an ancient cipher, scaling a rocky cliff, or crafting a delicate mechanism—situations where the only obstacle is the task itself, rather than an opposing force.

In these cases, the player rolls **4dF** + their **Skill Modifier** and applies any relevant **Trait** or **Gear bonus** (Gear Traits). If the total meets or exceeds the DR, the action succeeds.

The GM determines the difficulty rating based on two factors: how inherently challenging the task is and how critical it is to the game's progression. A well-balanced difficulty keeps the players engaged—offering real challenges without creating dead ends. While setbacks can enrich the story, a GM should never impose an insurmountable barrier that halts progress entirely. Instead, every challenge should be an opportunity for clever thinking, teamwork, and dramatic tension.

The following table can guide you in determining the difficulty rating for a task:

## Difficulty Levels in The Wyrd Engine

| Difficulty Rating | Example Task |
|---|---|
| Trivial (-3) | A task so easy that failure is nearly impossible (walking across a stable floor, recalling your own name). |
| Simple (-2) | A straightforward action requiring minimal effort (identifying a common herb, climbing a ladder). |
| Easy (-1) | A minor challenge that most people can accomplish without effort (jumping over a puddle, recalling common knowledge). |
| Basic (0) | An ordinary action requiring some attention (spotting a misplaced item, balancing on a narrow beam). |
| Challenging (+1) | A moderate test of skill or effort (spotting a hidden compartment, climbing a wooden fence). |
| Difficult (+2) | A task requiring training or experience (tracking footprints in the rain, persuading a sceptical guard). |
| Formidable (+3) | A demanding task that pushes a character's limits (picking a complex lock under pressure, leaping between rooftops). |
| Arduous (+4) | A near-impossible feat requiring mastery (detecting a forged document at a glance, sniping a target from extreme range). |
| Extreme (+5) | A task on the edge of human capability (convincing a lifelong enemy to trust you, performing surgery in total darkness). |
| Impossible (+7) | A superhuman achievement defying all odds (dodging bullets mid-air, convincing an ancient dragon to surrender). |

For levels up to **Basic (0)**, rolls are usually unnecessary unless dramatic tension is involved. For characters with appropriate skills, **Basic (0)** tasks can also be handled without rolls.

We can superimpose the difficulty levels on the 4dF success rate graph to directly visualise how difficult it will be with just dice rolls to reach a given level:



**4dF versus Difficulty Levels**
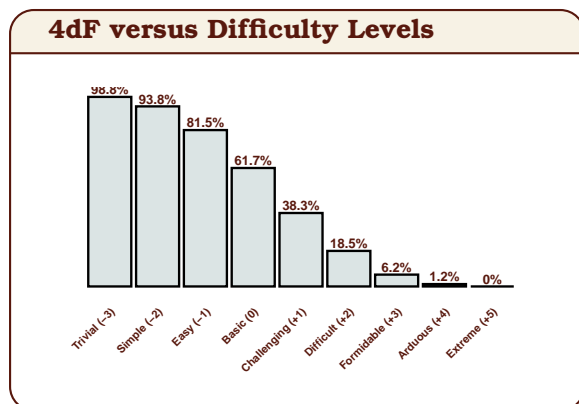
The graph tells us that even **Trivial (-3)** tasks can fail if you are unskilled and unlucky enough,

and **Challenging (+1)** tasks will fail a third of the time for someone without the necessary skills.

Adding skills effectively shifts the difficulty levels. When playing the game, we add skill levels to the 4dF rolls, as this is the easiest way to calculate the result, but when setting difficulty levels, it is easier to think in terms of how difficult an unskilled character would find a task, and then shift the difficulty levels down by one for each skill level a character has.

A skill level of **Novice (+1)** adds one to the 4dF, which effectively shifts the difficulties down by one. If we are adding **+1** to a roll, the unmodified range of **-4** to **+4** for a **Untrained (0)** character instead becomes the shifted range of **-3** to **+5**, for example. With this switch, the difficulty with which a **Novice (+1)** character hits a **Challenging (+1)** level will be the same as if he only had to reach the **Basic (0)** level.



**Skills shifting difficulties**
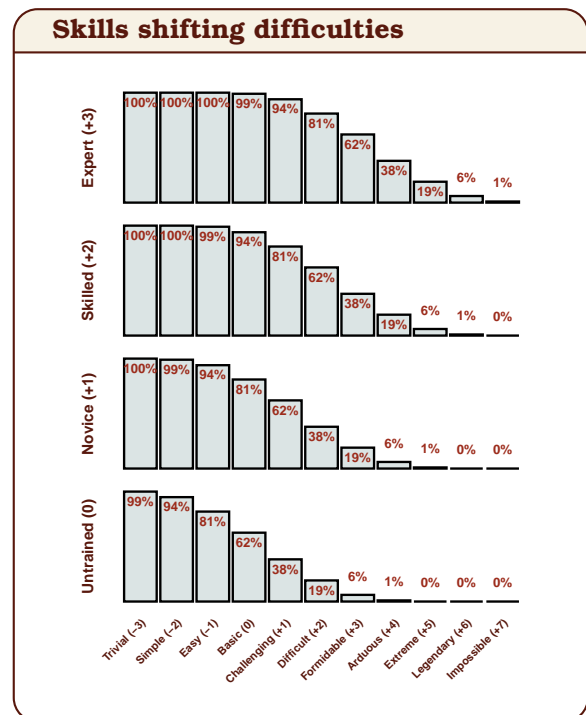
A **Basic (0)** task, which has a 2/3 chance of success for an **Untrained (0)** character will be a success one out of twenty for a **Novice (+1)** and a guaranteed success for an **Expert (+3)** character. An **Extreme (+5)** task, which will be impossible for an **Untrained (0)** and not much easier for a **Novice (+1)**, has a one-in-five chance of success for an **Expert (+3)**. Add in a **Trait (+2)**—which shifts the range by an additional two points—and an **Expert (+3)** character will, under the right circumstances, have a one-in-three chance of doing the impossible.

The table below shows the probability of success for the different difficulty levels at different skill levels:

| Difficulty | 0 | +1 | +2 | +3 |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Trivial (-3) | 98.8% | 100.0% | 100.0% | 100.0% |
| Simple (-2) | 93.8% | 98.8% | 100.0% | 100.0% |
| Easy (-1) | 81.5% | 93.8% | 98.8% | 100.0% |
| Basic (0) | 61.7% | 81.5% | 93.8% | 98.8% |
| Challenging (+1) | 38.7% | 61.7% | 81.5% | 93.8% |
| Difficult (+2) | 18.5% | 38.7% | 61.7% | 81.5% |
| Formidable (+3) | 6.2% | 18.5% | 38.7% | 61.7% |
| Arduous (+4) | 1.2% | 6.2% | 18.5% | 38.7% |
| Extreme (+5) | - | 1.2% | 6.2% | 18.5% |
| Impossible (+7) | - | - | 1.2% | 6.2% |

Players will not need to consult this table during a game—in *The Wyrd Engine* we are not keen on using tables for game mechanics—but it should give a Game Master a rough idea of how to set difficulty levels when planning a game session.

> **Game Master Tip**
>
> When deciding on difficulty levels, you should focus on the narrative aspects of the game rather than realism in difficulty. You want to give the players exciting challenges, but any conflict resolution should have narrative relevance. Don't ask for dice rolls if you can act out a scene instead, and don't ask for dice rolls unless both failure and success will have exciting consequences. It is okay to have automatic wins and automatic losses if the alternative will break the story you are trying to tell, and it is okay to set unrealistically low or high difficulty levels if that is what it takes to tell a good story.

## Active Opposition

When two characters compete directly but are not in combat (for that, see below), both roll **4dF + their relevant skill**. The highest result wins. If the character that attempts to do something gets the higher result, he will succeed, but if the opponent gets the higher result, he will not.

If you want to add a little flavour to active oppositions, at the Game Master's discression, you can add **boons** to active opposition resolution:

> ### Optional Rule: Boons
> - If one character beats the other by **1 or 2 points**, they succeed with a minor advantage.
> - If they beat the other by **3 or more points**, their success is so impressive that the GM can, at their discretion, provide the winning character with a **boon**.

A **boon** is a one-use trait invented for the situation at hand. It is only active for the current scene and is lost if not used after the scene ends.

## Ties and Partial Successes

Not every roll results in a clean success or failure. When a roll **ties** the Difficulty Rating, or

when failure would halt progress entirely, the GM may introduce a **complication**:

- **Success with a Cost:** The action succeeds, but at a price (e.g., escaping a pursuer but losing an important clue).
- **Mixed Success:** The character achieves part of their goal, but not completely (e.g., unlocking a door but setting off an alarm).
- **A New Complication:** The failure introduces an unexpected twist (e.g., picking a lock only to find guards already inside).

## Interpreting Failure

A failed roll doesn't necessarily mean the character is incompetent—it simply means their approach didn't work this time. The GM should ensure failures lead to new choices, not dead ends.

> **Game Master Tip**
>
> If a failed roll would stop the story in its tracks, offer the player an alternative: "You can still succeed but at a cost." This keeps the momentum going while making failure meaningful.

## Boosts: Optional Rule for Increasing Success

As an optional rule, you can allow players to create **Boosts**—temporary numerical bonuses such as +1 or +2 that can be applied to a relevant roll. Boosts represent situational advantages, quick thinking, or clever tactics that enhance a character's chance of success.

Boosts can take different forms, including:

- **Preparation**: Taking extra time to study a problem, setting up tools, or laying a trap.
- **Tactical Advantage**: Gaining higher ground, flanking an enemy, or exploiting a distraction.
- **Environmental Factors**: Using dim lighting for stealth, a rainstorm to obscure movement, or an echoing chamber to amplify a command.
- **Teamwork**: Coordinating efforts with allies, assisting with a skill check, or providing cover in combat.

To gain a Boost, a player must describe how their actions create an advantage and roll an appropriate skill or trait check. If successful, they gain a Boost that applies to their next relevant roll. Boosts typically last for a single action but may persist longer if narratively justified.

Boosts are a simple way to reward creativity, reinforce teamwork, and give players more control over their success in *The Wyrd Engine*.

# Effort: Optional Rule for Complex Tasks

Closely related to boosts is to gameplay splitting an obstacle into multiple tasks.

Not every challenge can be solved in a single moment. Some obstacles are too complex, too dangerous, or simply too massive for one roll to resolve. In such cases, you can use the optional **Effort** rule to let characters build toward success over time.

The Effort rule allows a player to spend **multiple turns**, using **different skills**, to gradually construct a bonus that can help them overcome a task that would otherwise be impossible. This rule is especially useful when facing high difficulty thresholds, narrative bottlenecks, or complex multi-stage problems.

Each step in the process must be justified through the narrative. The player describes how each skill contributes to the larger goal, and the GM may call for a roll to determine how effective that contribution is. Each successful roll adds a cumulative **+1 bonus** toward the final test.

The Effort rule is not meant to replace contests or challenges that already involve multiple rolls. Rather, it provides a mechanical way to reward creative multi-step problem solving when dealing with static, high-difficulty tasks.

## Game Master Tip

This approach can, in theory, build up bonuses to a level where nothing is impossible. To rain it in, there are several options.

- Limit the number of steps to three or four or cap the total bonus to a maximum of e.g. **+3**.
- Add consequences for failure, such as resetting the bonus or introducing complications from wasted time and effort. This works best if there are narrative

consequences for failure.

- Require that each step be a different skill, or at least a different trait. This will force players to think creatively and use their skills in unexpected ways.

Consider using Effort when the challenge is dramatic, but not urgent. Time pressure is often a reason to deny Effort and force a direct roll instead. Likewise, Effort should not be used in combat unless the narrative supports a multi-round buildup (e.g., preparing a magical ritual or charging a weapon).

This optional rule encourages teamwork, creativity, and versatility. It gives characters a way to use more than just their best skill—and lets the story breathe while heroes rise to meet daunting challenges.

## TEAMWORK: OPTIONAL RULE FOR ASSISTING ALLIES

In *The Wyrd Engine*, collaboration can be just as important as individual skill. As an optional rule, players may assist one another to increase the chances of success in a task or conflict. When a character helps an ally, they provide a **Teamwork Bonus**, a small numerical boost that enhances the primary actor's roll.

Teamwork Bonuses can take different forms, including:

- **Direct Assistance**: Actively working alongside an ally, such as two people lifting a heavy object or multiple minds solving a puzzle.
- **Tactical Coordination**: Calling out enemy movements in battle, providing covering fire, or distracting an opponent.
- **Shared Knowledge**: Using past experiences or expertise to guide another character's actions, such as an engineer giving instructions to a less skilled mechanic.
- **Moral Support**: Bolstering an ally's resolve with encouragement, inspiration, or leadership.

To assist, the supporting player must describe how they are helping and roll an appropriate skill or trait check. If successful, they grant the primary actor a **+1 bonus** to their roll. In special cases—such as exceptional teamwork, well-planned strategies, or group efforts—the GM may allow the bonus to increase to **+2**.

Only one character can provide a Teamwork Bonus per roll unless the GM rules that multiple participants are required. This system encourages cooperation and allows players to combine their strengths to overcome greater challenges.

## BASIC COMBAT IN THE WYRD ENGINE

The role of combat varies by setting, scenario, and playstyle. Some games favour **quick, brutal**

encounters, where a single shot or swift blade ends a fight instantly, while others emphasise **heroic battles** against overwhelming foes. The **tone and pacing** should reflect the game's themes—whether it's gritty realism, where injuries are severe, or cinematic action, where characters endure incredible feats. Combat may be **tactically complex**, rewarding careful planning, or more **freeform**, focusing on dramatic exchanges over strict mechanics. The Wyrd Engine offers a flexible system to suit different narratives. For combat mechanics and customisation, see CHAPTER 4: COMBAT.

Basic combat in THE WYRD ENGINE, as described in this chapter, is designed to be **fast and cinematic**. Most combat encounters resolve within a few quick rounds of opposition rolls, keeping the action moving without bogging down in excessive mechanics. At the same time, characters are relatively hard to take out. In real life, a single blow, stab, or gunshot wound is enough to kill a person, but in the combat rules in this chapter, taking out a character will take a few rounds unless the opponent is super-human in capabilities.

The combat rules do not distinguish between physical and mental combat. If your setting involves psychic or magic attacks, the wounds characters can suffer might all be on the inside, but the game mechanics will be the same as physical combat.

## INITIATIVE: WHO ACTS FIRST?

Combat follows a structured yet flexible turn order:

### DETERMINING INITIATIVE

- **Surprise & Readiness:** If one side is clearly ambushing the other, they act first.
- **Tactical Positioning:** If no clear ambush is present, the GM determines turn order based on readiness.
- **Rolling for Initiative:** If multiple characters are competing to act first, roll **4dF + Notice** (or another relevant skill). The highest roll acts first, with ties resolved narratively.

## TAKING ACTIONS IN COMBAT

On their turn, a character can do the following:

- **One primary action** (Attack, defend, use an item, complex manoeuvre)
- **One minor action** (Draw a weapon, reposition, open a door, shout a command)
- **Free actions** (Speaking briefly, minor environmental interactions)

## Attacking and Defending

Attacks are resolved using opposed rolls:

### Attack Resolution
- The attacker rolls **Attack = 4dF + skill + traits**
- The defender rolls **Defend = 4dF + skill + traits**
- If **Attack > Defend**, the attack lands and deals damage.

Relevant skills depend on the setting, but attack skills could be **Fight** for melee or **Shoot** for firearms, while defence skills could be **Athletics** for dodging or **Fight** for parrying. Traits are any relevant character or gear traits that match the combat situation.

If the defender has a higher score than or equal to the attacker, the attack is averted, and no damage is dealt. Ties are always in the defender's favour. If the attacker scores higher, the damage inflicted on the defender is the attacker's score minus the defender's.

### Calculating Damage
Stress = Attack- Defend when Attack > Defend.

**Stress** is determined by how much the **Attack** exceeds **Defend**. Effects such as weapons efficiency or armour thickness are considered through the gear's traits in the combat rolls. This has the same effect as adding weapon and defence bonuses within the existing conflict resolution system. We don't need extra combat rules if we don't want them.

### Example Attack
Jonathan Blackwood swings a cane at an enemy thug. He rolls **4dF +2 (Fight)**, while the thug rolls **4dF +1 (Athletics)** to dodge. If Jonathan's result is higher, the hit lands; otherwise, it is defended.

Jonathan rolls ⊞ ⊞ ⊞ ⊟ = 2 and gets a score of **Attack = +4** when combined with his **Fight** skill. The thug then rolls ⊞ ⊟ ⊟ ◼ = -1, giving him a score of **Defend = 0** when combined with his **Athletics**.

Since Jonathan's score is higher, so he scores a hit, and the damage he inflicts is **Stress = Attack- Defend = +4 - 0 = +4**. The thug takes **+4** in damage.

## Stress: Fatigue and Wounds

The Wyrd Engine uses the term **Stress** for all types of damage a character can sustain. This includes physical, mental, and social damage. Stress is a measure of how much damage a character can take before they are incapacitated. The term **Stress** is used to represent the overall damage a character can take, while **Fatigue** and **Wounds** are used to represent different types of damage.

The Wyrd Engine uses **Fatigue** to represent minor injuries and **Wounds** for more serious, lasting harm. Neither kind of stress is necessarily physical; mental damage is lumped in with physical stress in the core rules. In games where reputation or social standing is important, social damage can be represented as stress or wounds. The GM and players should agree on how to represent these types of damage in the game.

### Fatigue and Wounds
- **Fatigue:** Represents minor setbacks, fatigue, or temporary injuries. These are automatically cleared after a fight.
- **Wounds** come in three levels of severity. They take longer to heal, and adds penalties for future actions.

Any damage inflicted must be soaked up by either **Fatigue** or **Wounds**. Each player has four *Fatigue boxes*, OOOO, and five *Wounds boxes* where the wounds are split into three categories: three **Mild Wounds** (♡♡♡), two **Moderate Wounds** (❤❤), and one **Severe Wounds** (❤). These boxes, combined, are where a character can soak up damage.

| Stress | |
|--------|--|
| **Fatigue:** | OOOO |
| **Mild:** | ♡♡♡ _____ |
| **Mod:** | ❤❤ _____ |
| **Severe:** | ❤ _____ |

When a character sustains **Stress**, the damage dealt is converted one-to-one into these stress and wound boxes. Stress is soaked up by the boxes top-to-bottom; the fatigue boxes will soak up the first four points of stress. After that, the following three stress points are inflicted as mild wounds, the next two as moderate wounds, and finally, the character suffers a severe wound. If all stress boxes are ticked off, the character is **out of action** (see Death and the End of Combat on page on page 17).

### Example: Fatigue Damage
As Captain Elias Mercer crouches in the engine room, setting the last charge to sabotage the enemy airship moored at the Tower of London, he is caught off guard by a patrolling crew member. A swift jab to the ribs and a pistol

# CAPTAIN ELIAS MERCER

*A daring sky pirate and master pilot, Elias Mercer is a rogue smuggler with a reputation for getting the job done—no matter how dangerous. Once a decorated naval officer, he now flies under his own banner, evading bounty hunters, rival captains, and the law alike. He lives by one rule: a captain never abandons his crew.*

### Skills

| | |
|---|---|
| Expert (+3) | Pilot |
| Skilled (+2) | Shoot, Deception |
| Novice (+1) | Athletics, Awareness, Combat |

### Traits

**Always One Step Ahead** — *Gain a bonus when avoiding pursuit or laying traps.*

**A Captain Never Abandons His Crew** — *Once per session, resist an effect that would separate him from his crew.*

**Knows Every Trick in the Book** — *Can reroll a failed Deception test when lying or fast-talking.*

### Stress

| | |
|---|---|
| Fatigue: | ○○○○ |
| Mild: | ♡♡♡ _____ |
| Mod: | 💗💗 _____ |
| Severe: | 🖤 _____ |

whip to the shoulder deal **+3** damage. With no previous injuries, the damage is absorbed entirely by his fatigue boxes.

### Stress

| | |
|---|---|
| Fatigue: | ✗✗✗○ |
| Mild: | ♡♡♡ _____ |
| Mod: | 💗💗 _____ |
| Severe: | 🖤 _____ |

Gritting his teeth, he shoves the attacker aside and makes his escape—knowing the real danger will come when the explosives detonate.

When you tick off fatigue boxes, the damage has no noticeable effect. Fatigue is not considered lasting damage but the exhaustion accumulating from combat (or the "flesh wounds" from 90s action movies). Once the damage goes into wounds, however, future skill rolls are affected.

| Wound Type | Effect |
|---|---|
| Mild Wound | -1 to relevant skill rolls |
| Moderate Wound | -2 to relevant skill rolls |
| Severe Wound | -3 to all physical actions |

When taking a wound of any of the three kinds, the player and Game Master decide on which relevant skills or traits are affected by the wound. The **-2** and **-3** penalties for **Moderate** and **Severe** Wounds can be split among multiple skills as long as the total penalty remains the same. Any future rolls involving those skills or traits will have the penalty applied until the wound is healed (see HEALING AND RECOVERY on page 17). Additional wounds of the same kind do not add additional penalties when using the core rules.

## EXAMPLE: WOUND DAMAGE

While fleeing the engine room, Captain Mercer, the enemy he knocked aside, recovers, reaches for his gun, and fires off a shot ( ⊞⊞⊟■ + **Shoot (+1)** for an **Attack** of +2). Mercer attempts to duck ( ⊞⊟⊟■ + **Athletics (+1)** for a **Defend** of **0**). The difference is a **Stress** of **+2**.

Mercer only has one fatigue box left, so one of the damage points goes into a **Mild** wound, and the player and GM decide that the bullet graces Captain Mercer's shoulder, which would affect the **Athletics** skill.

### Stress

| | |
|---|---|
| Fatigue: | ✗✗✗✗ |
| Mild: | ✗♡♡ Athletics (-1) |
| Mod: | 💗💗 _____ |
| Severe: | 🖤 _____ |

Taking the wound in his strides, he exits the room and continues his escape.

As long as a character has any damage is in a wound category, the penalty applies. Additional stress to a wound category that is already marked does not add additional penalties. Penalties from different categories can stack, however.

## EXAMPLE: WOUND DAMAGE

Captain Mercer rushes to the railing of the airship to throw himself off before the explosive device he planted detonates. The interruption in the engine room, unfortunately, has delayed him too long. The second he jumps, the bomb detonates. The shockwave hits his back with a whooping **+3** of damage. He can absorb two with his remaining **Mild** wounds, but one will go into his **Moderate** wounds. The **Moderate** wounds give him a penalty of **-2**, which he and the GM decide to split between **Atheletics** and **Awareness** (reasoning that getting blown up is likely to affect Mercer

both physically and mentally).

**Stress**

Fatigue: ✘✘✘✘

Mild: ✘✘✘  Athletics (-1)

Mod: ✘❤  Athletics (-1), Awareness (-1)

Severe: ❤  _____

The two penalties to **Athletics** stack, so any roll involving **Athletics** will have a -**2** penalty.

If all stress boxes are filled, the character is out of action. What this means is up to the GM, but games are usually more fun if player characters live to fight another day. For one-shot games, it is okay to kill off characters towards the end of the session, but don't do it early in the game.

## HEALING AND RECOVERY

- **Fatigue** clears at the end of a scene.
- **Mild Wounds** require a short rest (a few hours) or first aid.
- **Moderate Wounds** require days of rest or professional medical care.
- **Severe Wounds** require weeks of rest, surgery, or supernatural healing (if applicable).

When healing wounds, *all* marked wound boxes are cleared at the same time. They are healed in parallel, so a character with both **Mild** and **Moderate** wounds will have the mild wounds healed the following day (regardless of how many wounds are ticked) and the moderate wounds after a week (with no delay because the mild wounds were healing at the same time).

## COMBAT MANEUVERS AND SPECIAL ACTIONS

Instead of simply attacking, players can use tactical manoeuvres:

### COMBAT MANEUVERS

- **Disarm:** Use Fight to knock a weapon from an opponent's hands.
- **Grapple:** Use Fight vs. Athletics to restrain an enemy.
- **Push:** Use Athletics to shove an opponent into hazards.
- **Feint:** Use Deceive to trick an enemy into missing a defence.
- **Suppressing Fire:** Use Shoot to force enemies into cover.
- **Intimidate:** Use Provoke to demoralize foes.

THE WYRD ENGINE does not have rules for all the myriad ways actions can be used in combat.

However, the GM should generally convert an action into either an unopposed or opposed obstacle and let the outcome affect bonuses and penalties for future dice rolls. Using manoeuvres gives players a way to use skills besides the obvious combat skills (e.g. **Fight** or **Shoot**) as part of a combat encounter. A character with poor combat skills, with little chance of effectively dealing damage, might use other skills to stack up bonuses until an effective attack is possible.

## WEAPONS AND GEAR IN COMBAT

Weapons do not deal numeric damage but affect combat through **Traits**. Weapon traits work the same way as any gear trait and can be used when attacking or defending.

### TYPES OF WEAPON TRAITS

- **Weapons with Traits** grant **+2** in relevant situations (e.g., "Mastercrafted Rapier" gives +2 to Fight in duels).
- **Firearms** can inflict instant Wounds if the shot is well-placed.
- **Improvised Weapons** may impose a penalty unless the character is skilled in their use.

When a weapon's **Trait** adds to the attack of a character, it will indirectly affect the damage the attack is inflicting. More interesting uses of weapon traits give other advantages to their wielder.

### EXAMPLE WEAPON TRAITS

- **Fine Dueling Sabre** – *+2 to Fight when dueling.*
- **Hidden Derringer** – *Once per scene, draw a concealed firearm unnoticed.*
- **Reinforced Cane** – *Can be used as both a weapon and a defensive tool.*

## DEATH AND THE END OF COMBAT

When a character suffers a **Severe Wound** and takes further damage, they are at risk of death. The simplest choice here is to equate all damage boxes ticked off and character death, but this is not always the best option. It might be fine for nameless mooks the players are fighting but for player characters or important (or just interesting) NPCs, it is often more interesting to consider such a character **defeated** rather than **dead**.

Instead of killing off characters, take them captured. Beat them up and leave them for death. Anything *interesting* that can still count as a defeat. Of course, depending on their

situation and the setting you are playing in. A zombie is unlikely to capture a character, so true to the zombie genre, you might want to kill off characters there. A vampire, on the other hand, could start monologing about vampiric superiority for long enough that the character could be rescued.

If you do consider the last wound as essentially death, you might still allow:

• A final desperate action before succumbing.
• A chance to survive if an ally intervenes.
• A dramatic consequence, such as permanent injury.

## CONCEDING THE FIGHT

Taking damage until every **Stress** and **Wound** box is filled isn't the only way to lose a fight. Aside from relentless automatons or mindless undead, few combatants fight to the bitter end if they can avoid it. Most will choose survival over certain death, whether that means surrendering, retreating, or negotiating terms. Even when capture is worse than death, most characters will attempt to escape rather than throw their lives away in a hopeless battle.

In THE WYRD ENGINE, conceding a fight is a structured choice, not a failure. When a character concedes, they avoid immediate defeat on their opponent's terms but **must accept significant narrative consequences**. The victorious side determines the outcome, though the conceding player can influence how events unfold. A character might escape, but only after dropping their weapons and fleeing unarmed. They might surrender and be taken prisoner, leading to future complications. A successful concession may even allow a character to bargain their way out, leaving them battered but still in play.

By conceding, players trade mechanical defeat for **a more dramatic and survivable consequence**, shaping the story in ways a simple knockout never could. Game Masters should encourage this approach—fights that end in death leave no room for development, but those that end in setbacks, bargains, or rivalries fuel engaging future encounters.

Combat ends when one side is defeated, flees, or surrenders. Survivors must then deal with the consequences of their wounds, the choices they made, and the path ahead.

**Game Master Tip**

Avoid fights to the death if you can avoid them. Sometimes, the real story begins when the players choose to live. If they decide to retreat, create a scenario where escape comes at a steep price: perhaps a vengeful enemy is set on their trail, or a priceless artefact slips into the hands of their foes.

The same goes for foes. You can let the players kill their enemies if that is what the story calls for, but having enemies escape—to inform their superiors about the players' plans or to return with backup later—can be far more interesting.

Remember, death is merely the final chapter of a battle, but the consequences that haunt the survivors can turn a simple conflict into a rich, unfolding saga.

# Character Creation

Creating a character in The Wyrd Engine is a quick and streamlined process, designed to get players into the game with minimal preparation. Each character is defined by a small but meaningful set of attributes that shape their role in the story. Unlike systems with long-term progression, The Wyrd Engine prioritises narrative impact over mechanical advancement, making character creation simple yet flexible.

Every player character is built using the following elements:

## Step 1: Concept

Before assigning mechanics, players should develop a brief **character concept**. This is a short description of who the character is, their role in the story, and what makes them interesting. Concepts should be evocative but flexible, helping guide both roleplay and mechanical choices.

## Step 2: Choose Skills

Each character has a set of **Skills** that determine their strengths and weaknesses. Skills represent broad areas of expertise rather than hyper-specialised talents, ensuring versatility.

Characters receive a total of **six skill ranks**, distributed as follows:

- **1 Expert (+3)** skill
- **2 Skilled (+2)** skills
- **3 Novice (+1)** skills

All unselected skills default to **Untrained (0)**.

When assigning skills, players should consider their character's background and expertise. A veteran detective might prioritise **Investigate** and **Notice**, while a rogue might favour **Stealth** and **Deceive**.

The total sum of skill ranks should equal **10**. This ensures that every character is balanced in overall competence while allowing for specialisation.

## STEP 3: SELECT TRAITS

Every character has exactly **three Traits**. Traits represent exceptional abilities, personal quirks, or special training that set a character apart.

**Traits provide one of three benefits:**

- A **+2 bonus** when applied to a relevant skill check.
- A **special ability** that can be used *once per scene or session*.
- A **narrative permission** to attempt actions that would normally be impossible.

Traits should enhance a character's strengths and provide unique advantages in play. They should not be overly broad or cover multiple unrelated areas.

## STEP 4: SELECT GEAR

THE WYRD ENGINE does not track mundane items or encumbrance. Instead, characters select **three pieces of notable gear** that have a mechanical or narrative impact.

Each piece of gear functions like a Trait, providing either:

- A **+2 bonus** when used appropriately.
- A **special ability** usable once per scene or session.
- A **narrative permission** to perform unique actions.

## STEP 5: STRESS AND WOUNDS

Characters have a limited ability to absorb harm before suffering long-term effects. A standard character has:

- **Four Stress Boxes** – Used to absorb minor failures.

- **Mild, Moderate, and Severe Wounds** – Represent lasting harm or setbacks.

### Stress

**Fatigue:** ○○○○
**Mild:** ♡♡♡ _____
**Mod:** 🖤🖤 _____
**Severe:** 🖤 _____

Wounds replace traditional hit points and can reflect physical, mental, or social strain. A "Mild" consequence might be a bruised rib, while a "Severe" consequence could be a permanent injury or a shattered reputation.

## STEP 6: FINAL DETAILS

With mechanics in place, players can now define their characters':

- **Name** – Fitting for the setting and character concept.
- **Appearance** – Distinctive traits, clothing, and demeanour.
- **Personality** – Key personality traits, motivations, or quirks.
- **Backstory** – A brief origin story or notable past experiences.

FINAL ADVICE FOR PLAYERS

**Focus on character over numbers.** The Wyrd Engine is designed for narrative-driven play, so build a character that fits the story rather than optimising for maximum efficiency.

Once these steps are complete, the character is ready for play!

# CREATING NON-PLAYER CHARACTERS

**Non-player characters**, or **NPCs**, are any characters controlled by the GM that the players interact with. While NPCs can follow the same rules as player characters, this is often unnecessary and can slow down gameplay. Instead, THE WYRD ENGINE provides a flexible approach to NPC design, ensuring that simple

characters are easy to run while important ones get the attention they deserve.

Not every NPC needs a full stat block. A faceless soldier or a bystander caught in the action doesn't require the same level of detail as a powerful antagonist or a recurring ally. To keep gameplay fluid and engaging, NPCs in THE WYRD ENGINE are divided into three categories:

1. **Mooks:** Nameless threats that exist to provide obstacles or increase tension.

2. **Dramatis Personae:** Named characters who have a role in the story but whose details may be fleshed out as needed.

3. **Living, Breathing Characters:** Fully realised NPCs with the skills, traits, and motivations to shape the world.

## FOR NPCS, THE RULES DO NOT APPLY

For all three categories, the key rule of NPCs is this: **NPCs are not Player Characters**. The rules that apply to player characters see the previous section, do *not* apply to NPCs. NPCs can be both more powerful and far weaker than player characters.

### NPCs CAN BREAK THE RULES:
- NPC skill lists do not need to follow the distribution that player characters' do.
- NPCs can have more skills than players and often have fewer.
- NPCs can have skill levels below **Untrained (0)** and above **Expert (+3)**.
- NPC skills do not have to be taken from the official setting's list of skills—it is often more interesting if NPCs have special skills.
- What applies to skills also applies to traits: NPCs can have more powerful traits, have any number of them, and the traits can be more or less powerful than player characters' traits.
- The rules for stresses and wounds do not apply to NPCs; NPCs can have any number of stresses and wounds as long as they fit the story.

NPCs can break the rules in any way that improves the story the game is trying to tell.

Furthermore, **NPCs do not have to be fully specified** when the game begins. NPCs are usually defined to serve a particular role in the game and will only have the relevant stats for that. A bank clerk the players are supposed to interact with when solving a white-collar crime doesn't need fighting stats. However, if the players somehow get the clerk into a fight, it is perfectly valid to add stats on the fly. This is not cheating; the NPC could have had those stats from the very beginning, but it saves a lot of time

for the GM to only worry about the most relevant stats when planning the game.

## MOOKS: QUICK AND DISPOSABLE

Mooks are the nameless henchmen, foot soldiers, or cannon fodder that serve as obstacles in an encounter. They are not designed to be major threats on their own but can become dangerous in large numbers. The purpose of mooks is to provide **fast-paced action and cinematic combat** without requiring complex stat tracking.

### RUNNING MOOKS IN PLAY

Mooks are NPCs you do not have to interact with as individuals but rather groups of NPCs players interact with as a collective. Mooks typically:
- **Have a single skill rating for all actions.** This is usually set between **Weak (-1)** and **Skilled (+2)**.
- **Have minimal or no stress boxes.** A single hit often takes them out.
- **Do not have wounds.** Instead, the GM can describe their defeat narratively.
- **Attack in groups.** Mooks can be treated as a collective, rolling as a single entity for simplicity. The same **Attack** or **Defend** result is then used for the entire group.

### EXAMPLE MOOK: GANG ENFORCER

A hired bruiser working for the city's criminal underworld, easily replaced if taken down.
- **Skill: Combat (+1)** (used for attacks and defence).
- **Mook Rules:** Drops in one hit if the attack is successful.

Mooks keep combat **fast and exciting**, allowing players to feel competent against lesser threats while setting the stage for bigger challenges.

## DRAMATIS PERSONAE: FUNCTIONAL BUT FLEXIBLE

**Dramatis Personae** (or "Characters of the Drama") are named individuals who serve a purpose in the story but don't need a full character sheet upfront. They might be **rivals, informants, recurring antagonists, or allies** that the players interact with frequently, but their exact abilities may be determined as needed.

## Key Traits of Dramatis Personae

Typical Dramatis Personae will have the following traits:

- **Have two or three defined skills** based on their role.
- **May have one or two traits** that give them an advantage in relevant situations.
- **Track stress, but often avoid wounds.** If they take significant damage, they are either removed from play or retreat.
- **Can be adjusted on the fly.** The GM does not need to finalise their full stats until necessary.

### Example Dramatis Personae: Captain Evelyn Graves

A cunning airship captain known for running illegal cargo through dangerous territory.

- **Skills: Pilot (+3)**, **Deception (+2)** , **Combat (+1)**
- **Trait: Born to Fly** – Gains a bonus when piloting under pressure.
- **Trait: Smooth Talker** – Can reroll a failed deception check when negotiating.
- **Damage:** 2 stress boxes, no tracked wounds.

The Dramatis Personae NPCs **fill the world with interesting characters** without overwhelming the GM with excessive bookkeeping.

## Living, Breathing Characters: Fully Realized NPCs

Living, Breathing Characters are the **central figures** of the campaign—the ones who drive the story forward, oppose the players or become long-term allies.

### Key Traits of Living, Breathing Characters

Living, Breathing Characters are often as fully fledged out as player characters (with the exemptions from strictly following the rules, however):

- **Have full skill allocations** (with the number of skills and levels of skills as appropriate).
- **Have 2-4 defined traits** that impact their playstyle (or as many as needed for the story).
- **Track stress and wounds**, just like player characters (as many and of which kind, as fit the story).
- **May have recurring influence in the game world.**

Living, Breathing Characters **serve as the driving force behind conflicts and challenges** in the campaign. They are **designed to be memorable** and should be treated as full characters in their own right.

## CHOOSING THE RIGHT TYPE OF NPC

When introducing an NPC, consider their **narrative function** first:

- If they exist to be fought and defeated quickly, they are mooks.
- If they are an ally or minor rival, they are dramatis personae.
- If they are a major figure who shapes the world, they are living, breathing characters.

By keeping NPC design **streamlined and flexible**, THE WYRD ENGINE ensures that GMs can **focus on storytelling, not stat sheets**. With these guidelines, every character—whether an unnamed mercenary or a legendary villain—can serve their role in the most engaging way possible.

# CHAPTER 3: THE WYRD ENGINE TOOLBOX

EXTENDING the game rules to fit your own settings and temperament, also known as **homebrewing**, is part and parcel of the roleplaying experience, and THE WYRD ENGINE is designed with this in mind.

The core rules are intentionally light, providing a solid foundation that can support a wide variety of genres and play styles. Whether you're running gritty pulp noir, whimsical faerie tales, or a post-apocalyptic dieselpunk odyssey, the core mechanics should serve you well with minimal adjustment.

That said, different settings often call for subtle (or not-so-subtle) variations in emphasis. A cyberpunk setting may need rules for hacking and digital warfare. A high fantasy world might benefit from expanded magic systems or creature creation tools. A campaign focused on interstellar diplomacy might want more structure around social interaction, negotiation, or influence mechanics. Likewise, a game centred on intense action could benefit from more detailed combat options or gear-related traits.

THE WYRD ENGINE will never be a hyper-detailed or simulationist system—but it doesn't need to be. It is a flexible engine. Think of it not as a finished machine, but as a well-stocked toolbox. Pick the tools that suit your table, refine them to your taste, and don't be afraid to build new ones when the need arises.

If you treat the rules as a starting point, rather than a strict framework, you can adapt THE WYRD ENGINE to power almost any story you want to tell.

## THE TOOLS IN THE BOX

At the heart of THE WYRD ENGINE are three core mechanics: **Skills**, **Traits**, and **Stress**. These simple, flexible systems can be adapted in a variety of ways to support different genres, tones, or levels of complexity. Whether you're adjusting for a new setting or tailoring the rules to your group's preferences, these are the tools you'll be working with.

## SKILLS

The skill list in THE WYRD ENGINE is intentionally broad and compact. Each skill is designed to cover a wide range of actions, making character creation quick and gameplay fast-paced. However, you may wish to expand or refine the skill list to better suit the tone of your game.

The setting will determine the general shape of the skill list. For example, a gritty noir game might include *Investigate*, *Deceive*, and *Stealth*. A high fantasy setting might use *Lore*, *Magic*, and *Survival*. A science fiction game might feature *Technology*, *Piloting*, and *Engineering*. A horror game might include *Survival*, *Fear*, and *Occult*. A social drama might introduce *Politics* or *Etiquette* as distinct skills.

The **granularity** of the skills is also important. The basic skill list is designed to be broad enough to cover most actions, but you can break skills down into more specific areas if you want to focus on particular elements of gameplay. For example, in a game with a strong combat focus, you might divide *Combat* into *Melee*, *Ranged*, and *Unarmed*. You could go even further, creating skills for specific weapon categories such as *Swords*, *Guns*, and *Bows*, or even individual weapon types like *Rapier*, *Revolver*, and *Longbow*.

The type and granularity of skills affect the game in two main ways: they help set the tone of the game, and they influence the **complexity** of character creation and gameplay. A more granular skill list allows for highly specialised characters, but it can slow down character creation and add overhead during play. A broader skill list is easier to manage but may result in characters that feel more generalist.

We return to ideas for using skills to adapt THE WYRD ENGINE to your needs on page 27.

## TRAITS

Traits are the unique abilities, advantages, and edges that define what makes a character exceptional. They can represent training, supernatural powers, social status, species features, or personal quirks. In a science fiction setting, Traits might include *Cybernetic Interface* or *Zero-G Adaptation*. In a magical world, you might see *Pyromancer*, *Familiar Companion*, or *Blessed by the Moon*. Traits are one of the most adaptable parts of the system and offer a

powerful way to express the flavour of your setting.

The core rules give each player character three Traits that either provide a **+2 bonus** to a relevant skill check, allow the character to attempt actions that others cannot, or grant a **once per scene/session** special ability. This is a solid starting point, but you can modify it to suit your setting. You might allow different levels of bonuses, more flexible activation conditions, or variable Trait counts.

You can also experiment with negative or limiting Traits. For example, a Trait that imposes a **-2 penalty** under specific circumstances could be exchanged for a stronger or broader positive Trait elsewhere—such as a larger bonus, wider applicability, or more frequent use. This approach supports more diverse and flavourful character builds.

We explore adapting Traits further on page 27.

## STRESS

Stress in THE WYRD ENGINE is a simplified form of damage or pressure. It does not distinguish between physical, mental, or emotional harm. Instead, it represents the overall toll that events take on a character, supporting a more narrative-driven approach where the focus stays on the story.

That said, you can use the same mechanism to track different types of stress. For example, a horror game might benefit from tracking physical injury separately from psychological trauma. A political drama might introduce a stress track for *Reputation* or *Favour*. This modular design allows you to shape the stress system around your setting's themes.

You can also use stress tracks to monitor other expendable resources, such as magical energy, divine favour, or battery power—making stress a universal mechanic for whatever matters in your game.

The number of Fatigue and Wound boxes a character has can be scaled up or down to fit the tone. A gritty, high-stakes game might give players fewer boxes, making every setback feel impactful. A more cinematic game might allow greater endurance, supporting fast-paced action and dramatic comebacks.

You can also adjust how stress is applied, what effects it imposes, and how characters recover. In horror, stress might linger or worsen over time. In pulp action, it might reset between scenes. These decisions shape not only the mechanics but the emotional pacing of the game.

We return to ideas for adapting stress on page 27.

# BALANCING

Before we dive into the techniques for adapting the core mechanics, it's worth taking a moment to discuss the role of **balance** in your game. Many traditional RPG systems place a heavy emphasis on mechanical balance—ensuring that all player characters are equally powerful, or that monsters and NPCs scale precisely with the players' capabilities. THE WYRD ENGINE takes a different approach.

## BALANCING PLAYER CHARACTERS

In some systems, strict rules are used to ensure characters remain roughly equal in power. These systems often rely on classes, levels, or point-buy mechanics to produce balanced builds, and considerable effort goes into ensuring that a wizard and a warrior of the same level are comparable in combat effectiveness. In practice, however, these systems rarely achieve true balance—some builds will always be more effective in certain situations than others.

THE WYRD ENGINE does not assume that mechanical balance between characters is necessary or even desirable. The goal is not to make every character equally powerful in a mechanical sense, but to ensure that every player has a meaningful and enjoyable place in the story.

Balance in THE WYRD ENGINE is achieved at the **narrative level**, not the mathematical level. What matters is that each character has opportunities to shine, and each player gets a fair share of the spotlight. A party made up of one massive ogre and three nimble goblins may be wildly imbalanced in raw power, but it can still be balanced in terms of narrative weight, character focus, and fun. In fact, such contrasts often make for the most memorable stories.

As a GM, your role is not to enforce mechanical parity, but to ensure that every character has a role to play in the unfolding events. A character who is physically weak might be the only one who can read the ancient runes. Another might lack combat ability, but serve as the party's voice in diplomatic scenes. So long as each character is relevant to the story being told—and given space to contribute—they are "balanced" in the ways that matter most.

## Balancing Encounters

Many traditional RPGs structure progression around steadily increasing power. As characters advance in levels or gain equipment, they become stronger—and to keep the game challenging, enemies and obstacles are scaled up accordingly.

The Wyrd Engine does not assume this kind of scaling is necessary. Characters may improve over time, but improvement is generally narrative or situational, not exponential. More importantly, the mechanics are scale-independent. Since skill modifiers are relative, any change to a player's abilities can be matched by adjusting the difficulty of the task or the capabilities of the opposition.

There is no need to calculate experience levels, hit dice, or challenge ratings. You do not need to scale up monsters or NPCs in order to make them "fair" for the players. Simply assess how difficult you want a given encounter to be, and assign it a target difficulty or build an NPC with abilities that present a meaningful challenge. A +2 bonus for a player or a +2 bonus for a monster works the same way—both shift the odds, but the relative difference is what really matters.

This makes encounter design fast, flexible, and focused on the fiction. You can decide how hard a challenge should feel, and adjust accordingly without needing to worry about perfect symmetry.

## Balancing the Game

In the suggestions for adapting the rules in the remainder of this chapter—and in the following chapters focused on specific rule variants—we often provide guidance for building characters using fixed numbers of "points" assigned to various aspects. This is not intended as a strict point-buy system, but rather as a helpful rule of thumb. Assigning the same number of points to each character can ensure that everyone has a similar range of abilities and options, which can be useful during character creation.

However, as discussed above, mechanical equality is not the same as meaningful balance. Giving every character the same number of points does not guarantee a balanced or enjoyable game. What truly matters is that each character feels relevant to the story, has opportunities to act meaningfully, and receives a fair share of the narrative spotlight.

If some characters are significantly more powerful than others on paper, that's not necessarily a problem—as long as the story provides space for everyone to shine. A clever but frail investigator can be just as important as a combat powerhouse, depending on the situation. The key lies not in rigidly enforcing parity, but in designing scenarios that offer a variety of challenges and highlight the strengths of different characters.

When adapting the rules, always keep this broader view of balance in mind. Create *interesting* characters with unique roles in the story, and shape your game around moments that let each of them take centre stage. That's where true balance lies—not in the numbers, but in the shared spotlight.

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### A Note to GMs: Spotlight over Symmetry

It can be tempting to obsess over keeping characters mathematically equal—but don't. Your goal isn't to ensure everyone has the same numbers; it's to ensure everyone has a reason to be at the table. One player might solve puzzles, another might command in battle, and a third might charm their way through a tense negotiation. As long as the story makes space for them all, you've achieved balance where it counts.

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# Adapting Skills
## Skill progression and prerequisites

Narratively enabling skills are a great way to add depth to your game. You can use them to create a sense of progression, or to add prerequisites for certain skills. For example, you might require that a character has the *Unarmed Combat* skill before they can learn *Martial Arts*. This can help to create a sense of realism and immersion in your game world.

## Levels of detail

# Adapting Traits

**define narative permission**

# Adapting Stress

# Chapter 4: Combat

THE core combat system, as described in the previous chapter, will suffice for any setting where combat is not a large part of the play. There is next to no combat in Agatha Christie's novels, so we don't need detailed combat mechanics in a setting modelled around such types of crime mysteries. They would only get in the way.

However, the role of combat in a game can vary significantly depending on the setting, the importance of combat in a given scenario, and the style of action you wish to create. Some settings favour **quick, brutal encounters**, where a single well-placed shot from a sniper or the swift blade of an assassin can end a fight in an instant. In contrast, other games may emphasise **heroic, drawn-out battles**, where warriors clash against hordes of monsters, trading blows in a struggle for survival.

The **tone and pacing of combat** should reflect the themes of your game. In a gritty, realistic setting, injuries may be devastating, making every decision in combat critical. A high-action cinematic game, on the other hand, may allow characters to withstand multiple attacks, diving through gunfire or dueling atop a burning airship without immediate risk of death.

For those who prefer **tactical complexity**, combat may involve detailed positioning, cover mechanics, and resource management, rewarding careful planning and teamwork. Alternatively, a more **freeform approach** might abstract combat into a series of dramatic exchanges, focusing on storytelling rather than strict mechanics.

No matter the approach, THE WYRD ENGINE provides a flexible combat system that can be adjusted to suit your narrative and playstyle. That is the topic of this chapter.

## Dealing damage
## Recovery

# Chapter 5: Magic

## Soft Magic Examples

- *The Lord of the Rings* – Gandalf's magic is powerful but undefined. We never know exactly what he can or cannot do; his power serves the story and themes rather than a consistent rule set.
- *A Song of Ice and Fire* – Magic is rare, ancient, and often unknowable. Prophecies, shadowy rituals, and dragons contribute to an atmosphere of mystery.
- *Princess Mononoke* – Spirits and curses operate on symbolic and emotional logic more than mechanical rules. Magic enhances the mythic tone rather than offering player-like abilities.

## Hard Magic Examples

- *Fullmetal Alchemist* – Alchemy follows strict rules based on equivalent exchange. Characters learn and master the system, and much of the story turns on its limitations.
- *Avatar: The Last Airbender* – Bending is tied to clear disciplines and elements. While fantastical, it has well-defined boundaries and is learned like martial arts.
- *Mistborn* (Brandon Sanderson) – The magic system is fully explained, involving specific metals and predictable effects. Characters strategically plan how to use it in conflicts.

*Tip:* Soft magic enhances wonder and mystery. Hard magic enables strategy and player agency. Choose the flavour that suits your story—or blend them.

AGIC can do anything that the story demands—at least when it's in the hands of non-player characters, monsters, gods, or mysterious artefacts. In those cases, the Game Master can simply decide what magic does, how powerful it is, and what its limits are (if any). The power level is set not by fixed rules, but by what serves the narrative best.

However, as soon as player characters are expected to interact with magic in a consistent or mechanical way—*especially* if they can wield it themselves—we need structure. We need rules that define what magic can do, how it works, and how it fits into the rest of the system. Without that, magic becomes either arbitrary or unfair.

Whether your setting treats magic as rare and mysterious or common and scientific, this chapter provides tools and examples for creating magic systems that are flexible, balanced, and narratively satisfying. You can use these as written, combine elements, or use them as a foundation for crafting your own.

# Design Goals for Magic Systems

Before diving into the mechanics of magic, it's important to consider what kind of magic best fits the story you want to tell. Not all magic systems are created equal, and not all of them need the same level of structure. In designing a system for your game, you should consider tone, genre expectations, and how much emphasis you want to place on magical abilities during play.

To help with this, we'll frequently refer to two ends of a spectrum: **soft** magic and **hard** magic.

## Soft Magic vs Hard Magic

A **soft magic system** is mysterious, unpredictable, and often unexplained. Magic might appear as divine will, ancient curses, or the unknowable power of nature. Its role in the story is usually thematic or atmospheric, and it's more likely to serve as a narrative device than a mechanical tool. Soft magic works well in games that lean into horror, wonder, or mythic storytelling, where the unknown is part of the appeal.

A **hard magic system**, by contrast, is defined, repeatable, and governed by rules. Players understand what magic can do and what it can't, and their characters are often trained practitioners who rely on clear mechanics. Hard magic systems shine in tactical or high-fantasy games, where magic is a tool to be mastered, and players want to build characters who use it with precision and strategy.

Most games fall somewhere in between. A setting might use soft magic for gods and ancient powers, but provide a hard magic system for player spellcasters. Or it might begin with soft, mysterious magic that gradually becomes more structured as players learn its secrets.

## The Goals of Magic in The Wyrd Engine

The Wyrd Engine treats magic as just another kind of narrative power—like stealth, combat, or persuasion. It should support character expression, meaningful choices, and dramatic moments. Whether magic is rare and ritualistic or common and codified, the goals for any magic system in The Wyrd Engine are:

- **Flexibility:** Magic should adapt to your setting. The system should be easy to customise, whether you're building druidic rites, psychic powers, arcane science, or divine miracles.

- **Narrative Focus:** Magic should enhance the story, not overwhelm it. Magical abilities should feel impactful, but they should also create interesting complications, choices, and consequences.
- **Player Agency:** Magic should be something players engage with actively. Whether casting spells or dealing with magical effects, player characters should have tools to shape outcomes and influence the world.
- **Simplicity:** While magic can be powerful and varied, it should not require pages of rules or countless exceptions. The system should be simple to run and easy to learn.

In the following sections, you'll find guidance for building both soft and hard magic systems using the tools provided by THE WYRD ENGINE. You can use the included example systems as written, or treat them as a foundation to craft something unique for your world.

# BUILDING MAGIC WITH CORE MECHANICS

THE WYRD ENGINE is built on three simple yet powerful components: **Skills**, **Traits**, and **Stress**. These same tools can be used to create a wide variety of magic systems, from subtle enchantments to world-shaking sorcery. By using the existing mechanics in flexible ways, you can design a magic system that fits seamlessly into your setting without adding complexity for its own sake.

## USING SKILLS FOR MAGIC

One of the simplest ways to represent magic is to introduce a dedicated *Magic* skill (or multiple skills for different magical traditions). This allows characters to roll to cast spells, channel energy, decipher magical texts, or sense supernatural forces.

How much you rely on skills depends on how "hard" your magic system is:

- In a **soft magic** system, a Magic skill roll might be used to determine success when calling on mysterious forces or interpreting omens. The effects are largely narrative.
- In a **hard magic** system, you might define clear actions or effects that can be performed with a Magic skill roll, possibly using fixed difficulties or cost thresholds.

You can also split the skill into multiple domains for more granularity—*Ritual Magic*, *Elementalism*, *Divination*, etc.—depending on how central magic is to your game.

## USING TRAITS FOR MAGIC

Traits are ideal for granting magical capabilities and defining the flavour of magic in your world. A Trait can do any of the following:

- Provide a **+2 bonus** when using a skill to perform a magical action (e.g., *Fire Adept* might give +2 to Magic when wielding flame).
- Allow a character to perform a unique magical action others cannot (e.g., *Speak with the Dead*).
- Grant a **once per scene/session** magical effect (e.g., teleporting a short distance, summoning a spectral ally).

By combining Traits with appropriate skills, you can model everything from specialised spellcasters to innate magical creatures. Traits also work well in soft magic systems—serving as vague, evocative powers that offer narrative permission to do magical things without strict limitations.

You can also create themed Trait sets—such as schools of magic, elemental affinities, or bloodlines—to further flavour your system and character options.

## USING STRESS FOR MAGIC COSTS AND RISKS

Stress represents the toll magic takes on the caster. The toll doing magic does to the caster's system might be damage that the usual stress boxes will have to absorbe. Casting a powerful spell might deal 2 points of Fatigue, or cause Wounds on a botched ritual. This reinforces the idea that magic is dangerous or exhausting, and creates tension when players must choose between casting and conserving energy. Alternatively, you can introduce a separate track of stress boxes, or "mana points", to represent magical energy. This allows for a more tactical approach to magic use, where players must manage their resources carefully.

In more structured systems, you can assign stress costs to specific spells or magical effects. You can also track magical corruption, instability, or backlash using separate stress tracks or consequences. For example:

- *Casting from life force:* Wounds as cost.
- *Psychic strain:* Fatigue or a separate "Mind" track.
- *Chaotic magic:* On failure, take stress or roll for a side effect.

Stress can also be used to limit magic-use in a more freeform system. Instead of spell slots or mana, the caster simply takes stress each time they cast—and must choose when to risk pushing too far.

## TYING IT ALL TOGETHER

Most magic systems built in THE WYRD ENGINE will use all three , skills, traits, and stress, in some way. For example:

- A character has the Trait *Stormcaller*, granting +2 to Magic when controlling weather.
- They use their Magic skill to attempt to summon lightning during a scene.
- The GM assigns a difficulty based on conditions and scope, and on a success, the spell works.
- Casting the storm drains 2 Fatigue, and if the character pushes further, they risk a Consequence.

With just a few consistent mechanics, you can create highly flexible and thematic magic systems that feel integrated with the rest of the game.

In the following sections, we'll explore different examples of how to structure magic systems, both soft and hard.

# THE GIFT OF TWILIGHT

The Gift belongs to old places—forgotten villages, mist-shrouded woods, windswept moors, and crossroads that never appear on maps. It lingers in lullabies and carved stones, in stories passed down by those who no longer remember why. Magic in these lands is not studied or controlled; it is felt, inherited, and feared. The boundary between the mundane and the mythic is thin, and those who bear the Gift often do so at a cost—marked by dreams, strange silences, or eyes that see too much. In such settings, the world itself seems to remember things long past, and sometimes it remembers you back.

*The Gift of Twilight* is a *soft magic* system—high in narrative freedom, low in mechanical constraint. It's not about control or precision, but about mystery, symbolism, and emotional resonance. Magic in this system emerges through intuition and memory, where the line between the real and the unreal is blurred. Effects are not measured in damage or distance, but in meaning.

The system relies on evocative **Traits** that grant narrative permission to perform strange or wondrous acts—such as speaking to stones, sensing lost things, or recalling forgotten names. When the outcome is uncertain, the GM may call for a skill roll—typically **Lore**, **Presence**, or **Will**. Success stirs old powers. Failure may draw their attention.

## Using the Gift: The Mechanics

The Gift isn't cast—it's invoked. It happens when the moment is right, when something remembered or promised is brought forward into the present. Magic often takes the form of subtle interventions, coincidences, or quiet revelations.

Player characters with the Gift should have one or more Traits reflecting their connection to the otherworldly, such as:

**Example Gifts**

- *Touched by the Old Road*
- *Knows the Names of Trees*
- *The Last of the Dreaming Blood*

These Traits don't provide fixed bonuses. Instead, they grant narrative access to supernatural effects. When a player wish to use the Gift, they describe what they want to do and how it connects to their Trait. The GM may ask for a roll if the outcome is uncertain, but the focus remains on the story rather than strict mechanics.

**Invoking the Gift**

| | |
|---|---|
| Player: | "I want to call on the old road to find a way through the fog." |
| GM: | "That's a good use of your Trait. Describe how you do it." |
| Player: | "I close my eyes and listen to the whispers in the mist. I remember the stories of those who walked before me." |
| GM: | "Roll Lore to see if you can hear them." |

In the sense of mechanics, *The Gift of Twilight* is as simple as it gets. We have added a special type of Trait called **Gift** and everything else is handled by improvisation. The Gift is not a skill, nor a power, nor a spell. It is a narrative permission to do something that is not possible otherwise.

For a player group that likes improvisation and storytelling, this is a great way to add magic to the game. But it does rely heavily on improvisation, and for new and less experienced players, it may be a bit overwhelming.

## Guidelines for GMs

- Let players describe what their magic looks and feels like. Trust the tone of the moment.
- The Gift rarely solves problems directly—it changes the context, shifts fate, or reveals hidden truths.
- Magic should always have a cost, but not necessarily one tracked in stress. A memory, a favour, or an unwanted connection may be more appropriate.

## Optional Consequences

For tables that want a bit more mechanical tension, consider adding one of the following consequences:

- **Wyrd Tides:** After invoking the Gift, roll a die. On a ▬, something unintended stirs.
- **The Debt:** Each use of the Gift creates a narrative debt to a power or presence. It will call on the character—sooner or later.
- **The Mark:** Frequent use leaves visible or spiritual traces—glowing eyes, silence that follows them, or unsettling dreams. These may attract attention from beings better left undisturbed.

## In Summary

*The Gift of Twilight* is for stories where magic is strange, subtle, and laced with consequence. It invites wonder, not certainty. Players who enjoy mystery, folklore, and the poetry of power will feel right at home.

# The Warden's Path

The Warden's Path winds through deep forests, high peaks, sunlit plains, and storm-wracked shores. It is not a road of cities or empires, but of roots, rivers, and stones warmed by ancient fire. Those who walk it do not command the elements—they listen to them, learn from them, and earn their trust.

A Warden feels the tremor beneath the ground before it speaks. They know when the rain is mercy and when it is warning. They do not cast spells—they shape their will through discipline, ritual, and connection to the world around them.

And when the balance is broken, they are the ones who rise to restore it.

*The Warden's Path* is a *medium-soft to medium-hard* magic system built on balance, focus, and elemental harmony. It is ideal for martial elementalists, ritual guardians, wandering monks, or nature-bound mystics. Power flows through alignment—not domination—and magic is shaped through action, breath, and will.

Where *The Gift of Twilight* is narrative and mysterious, the Warden's Path is equally narative in structure, but building up magical effects involves the core mechanics to a larger degree. It offers players a structured but flexible toolkit, grounded in consistent effects and cinematic pacing.

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**Game Master Tip**

The Warden's Path is ideal for players who want magic that is rhythmic, grounded, and tactical. The build-up mechanic supports tension and dramatic releases, while elemental attunement reinforces character identity.

- **Pros:** Evocative, balanced, works well in both exploration and combat; supports big moments.
- **Cons:** Requires players to think ahead; less spontaneous than freeform systems.
- **Best For:** Elemental guardians, ritual casters, martial mystics, nature-based traditions.
- **Not For:** Chaotic or academic spellcasters (see *Codex Infinitum* for those).

---

## THE MECHANICS OF THE WARDEN'S PATH

Magic in this system is built from two components: **Elemental Traits** and **Skills**.

- **Elemental Traits** represent the character's attunement to a specific element, such as fire, earth, water, or air.
- **Skills** represent how that element is directed—whether to attack, defend, reshape the environment, or endure hardship. These are the usual skills from the core rules.

---

**ELEMENTAL TRAITS**

- *Heart of the Flame* — attuned to fire and heat
- *Stonebound* — attuned to earth and endurance
- *Voice Like Thunder* — attuned to air and storm
- *Dancer of Tides* — attuned to water and flow

---

Together, the elemental trait and skills allow the character to channel magic through action. There are two primary modes of use **Build-Up** and **Release**.

### BUILD-UP

A **Build-Up** action lets the caster use an element combined with a skill to channel magical energy into a new or held spell. Each successful build-up adds a **+2 bonus**. These bonuses stack until the spell is released.

### RELEASE

A **Release** action combines an element + skill to perform an immediate magical effect (standard skill roll). The element only adds narrative flavour, not mechanical bonuses.

## CASTING AND CHANNELING

When a Warden uses elemental magic, they declare which element and skill they are using. The GM sets the difficulty as normal.
   - **Immediate use** = roll and resolve as normal.
- **Channeling** = roll as a preparation action. On success, gain **+2** to your next elemental spell. This can be done repeatedly to build up energy over time.

---

**USING AND BUILDING MAGIC**

| | |
|---|---|
| Player: | "I want to raise a stone wall between the villagers and the raiders." |
| GM: | "Using your *Stonebound* trait and `Elemental Control`? You can cast now or spend a round channeling." |
| Player: | "I'll channel—try to raise something strong." |
| GM: | "Great. Roll `Elemental Control`. Success gives you a +2 for when you release." |
| Player: | "I got a Great (+4)!" |
| GM: | "The stones tremble at your call. You may build up further, or release next round with a +2." |

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The player can now: - Channel again for another +2 (if successful), or - Release the spell and apply all accumulated bonuses to a dramatic effect.

This creates meaningful tension—does the Warden act now, or build for a greater impact?

## ELEMENTAL LIMITS

Wardens can only manipulate elements they are attuned to. A character with only *Dancer of Tides* cannot raise fire or command earth—unless they acquire another Trait through training, trial, or mystical revelation.

This encourages thematic specialisation and makes each Warden feel distinct.

## OPTIONAL MECHANICS

- **Burnout:** If a character fails a channeling attempt, they take 1 Fatigue. This adds risk to continued buildup.
- **Unstable Cast:** If a character channels for more than +4 and fails their release, the spell misfires.
- **Elemental Stress:** Channeling can cost stress instead of a roll, allowing automatic buildup—at a price.

## Magic Skills

The core skill used for elemental manipulation is often called `Elemental Control`, but the GM may allow alternative skills like:

- `Discipline` — to contain or direct powerful elemental forces
- `Endurance` — to absorb an elemental effect
- `Combat` — to weaponise the element
- `Survival` — to sense or respond to natural conditions

Players are encouraged to describe how their action fits their skill.

## In Summary

*The Warden's Path* is a disciplined form of elemental magic, focused on harmony, patience, and power with purpose. Its unique build-up mechanic rewards foresight and character-driven expression. Players who enjoy cinematic timing, strategic tension, and the poetry of elemental balance will find themselves at home.

# Codex Infinitum

The Codex is not a book you hold. It is written in the bones of the world, encoded in starlight, hidden in the spaces between words. But for those who study, who sacrifice, who inscribe its logic upon their minds—it opens.

In the Great Archive, beneath miles of stone, Arcinel traces the glyphs again. Not by rote, but by understanding. Geometry, breath, and balance. He speaks the final syllable and the construct animates, bronze limbs unfolding with a hiss of steam and spell.

One mistake would have meant ruin. But knowledge—true knowledge—is power. And he has earned it.

*Codex Infinitum* is a *hard magic* system—structured, tactical, and rule-bound. Magic is studied, codified, and practiced like an arcane science. Every spell has a defined effect, cost, and scope. It is ideal for high fantasy campaigns, magical academies, arcane duels, or settings where power comes through discipline and logic rather than intuition.

Unlike the symbolic ambiguity of *The Gift of Twilight* or the intuitive flow of *The Warden's Path*, this system prioritises clarity, precision, and balance. It appeals to players who enjoy mechanical depth, reliable outcomes, and strategic spell use.

### Game Master Tip

Codex Infinitum is a structured spellcasting system for players who enjoy crunchy mechanics, defined options, and

tactical play. It's ideal for magical scholars, arcane tacticians, or campaigns with rigid magical laws.

- **Pros:** Clear rules, consistent resolution, easy to balance, satisfying for planner-type players.
- **Cons:** Less improvisational; may feel rigid in dreamlike or mythic settings.
- **Best For:** Magical universities, wizard duels, fantasy warfare, arcane espionage.
- **Not For:** Folkloric or mystery-focused campaigns (see *The Gift of Twilight* for those).

# The Codex Mechanics

The Codex system is built around **spell skills**. While the GM may require a Trait (e.g., "Trained at the Obsidian Spire") to justify access, it is not mechanically necessary—spells function like any other Skill.

To cast a spell, the player chooses one from their known list and resolves it like any action: the GM sets a difficulty, the player rolls, and the outcome determines the effect. Spells are either broad skills (e.g. *Warding*) or specific entries from a spellbook-like list.

## Spells as Skills

In the simplest approach, spells are purchased like any other Skill and function similarly. Each represents a broad domain of arcane expertise.

## Spell Skills

- *Veilcraft* — manipulate light, sound, or sensation to obscure or deceive
- *Flameworking* — conjure, shape, or project fire
- *Warding* — create magical barriers, seals, or protections
- *Chronoshaping* — manipulate time in small, focused ways

Because spells are purchased like Skills, they should have similarly broad scope. While magic invites narrative freedom, the goal is to keep effects consistent and balanced with the rest of the game.

## Grimoires and Spellbooks

Alternatively, GMs may define a separate spell list distinct from normal skills. This allows for more granularity in effect and cost, and supports different advancement rules. You can require spells to be purchased from a separate budget, or at higher costs than regular skills.

## Spells with Detailed Effects

- *Mirror Veil* — Appear as another humanoid. Lasts until damaged or disrupted. Costs 2 stress. Opposed by **Notice** or magical detection.
- *Flame Tongue* — Imbue a weapon with fire. Grants **+2** damage and ignition. Lasts one scene. Costs 2 stress.

- *Ward of Binding* — Seal an entryway. Lasts 1 hour or until dispelled. Costs 3 stress. Opposed by **Will**.
- *Time Slip* — Take two actions this round or gain **+2** to initiative and evasion. Costs 3 stress. May not be used back-to-back.

## MAGIC STRESS

Stress is used to limit spell use and create tactical pressure. Each spell costs stress to cast—either from your main Fatigue/Wounds tracks or from a separate **Magic Stress** pool. If you want a more heroic or flexible tone, use Magic Stress as a distinct track. If you want a grittier tone, use the normal stress boxes.

### MAGIC FATIGUE

**Player:** "Can I still cast *Flame Tongue*? I'm nearly out of Fatigue."

**GM:** "You can, but you'll need to mark a Wound box instead. That fire has to come from somewhere."

**Player:** "Let's do it."

## SPELL RANKS

To reflect increasing power, spells can be ranked. A spellcaster may only cast a spell at a rank equal to or below their Skill level in that spell. Higher ranks have stronger effects and higher stress costs.

### SPELL RANKS

- *Mirror Veil* — Costs 1–3 stress
  - Rank 1: Appear as a specific person you've studied
  - Rank 2: Appear as any generic humanoid of chosen type
  - Rank 3: Shift appearance at will; mimic voice or gait
- *Flame Tongue* — Costs 1–3 stress
  - Rank 1: Weapon deals +2 damage
  - Rank 2: Weapon deals +4, ignites flammables
  - Rank 3: Weapon deals +6 and can emit a flame burst (area effect)

## MAGIC SCHOOLS

Schools offer another axis for character customisation. Each school defines a category of spells. Characters may specialise in a school to gain bonuses or unlock more advanced spells.

### MAGIC SCHOOLS

- *Elementalism* — Fire, water, air, earth. Terrain shaping, blasts, weather magic.

- *Necromancy* — Raise the dead, drain life, bind souls.
- *Illusion* — Glamour, misdirection, invisibility.
- *Divination* — Foresight, scrying, omen-reading.

Schools can be implemented as Traits or gating requirements. You may require a Trait like "Disciple of the Red Tower" to access spells of a given school—or allow open learning at reduced effect unless a school is mastered. Schools can also offer bonuses (e.g. +2 to fire-related spells) or unlock higher ranks.

## Guidelines for GMs

- Define spells with your players. Leave room to expand as the campaign grows.
- Consider spell rarity. Forbidden or legendary spells might be unlocked via quests or secrets.
- Mastery tiers—Apprentice (Rank 1), Adept (Rank 2), Master (Rank 3)—help track progress.
- Adjust stress recovery based on your setting. In high-magic worlds, it may reset each scene. In darker ones, it might take a ritual or rest.

## In Summary

*Codex Infinitum* offers a disciplined, tactical approach to magic. For players who enjoy clearly defined powers, mastery through learning, and meaningful resource trade-offs, it provides a rich and flexible system. Magic, in this vision, is not wonder—it is knowledge made dangerous.

# The Known and the Named

Mireya traces the final sigil into the chalk-drawn circle. Each stroke is deliberate, each angle precise. The name must be perfect. Not spoken aloud—never aloud—but inscribed with full understanding.

"To perceive the flame," she whispers, "you must know more than heat. You must know hunger."

Around her, candles gutter as unseen winds stir. She doesn't flinch. She lays her hand on the page beside her—six glyphs, etched in gold leaf, glowing faintly.

*Perceive. Flame. Memory. Self.*

She speaks the final syllable.

For a heartbeat, she sees the fire's history: who lit it, why, the pain it consumed. The flame flickers back, knowing it has been seen.

Magic is not in the word alone—but in the one who names it rightly.

The Known and the Named is *medium to very hard magic* with an elaborate system of rules and mechanics. It adds complexity and depth to the game, making it suitable for settings with a focus on magic, such as high fantasy or magical academies. It is ideal for players who enjoy tactical gameplay and character progression through mastery of magic. It is best avoided for one-shots.

# CHAPTER 6: RACES & CREATURES

ON -player characters, also known as **NPCs**, are characters controlled by the GM that the players interact with.

# PART 2

# ONE-SHOTS

# PART 3

# EPISODIC PLAY

# CHAPTER 7: EPISODIC SETTINGS

# CHAPTER 8: THE GRAND CASEBOOK

London , 1896. A city of gaslit streets, towering factories, and secrets lurking in the shadows. This is an era of progress, where steam and steel reshape the world—but beneath the veneer of industry and refinement, the old mysteries remain. The line between science and the supernatural is thinner than most would dare to believe.

You are part of The Grand Society of Inquiry, a clandestine organisation of detectives, scholars, and unconventional thinkers dedicated to unravelling the mysteries the world would rather forget. The police may handle mundane crimes, but when the case is impossible, when the authorities turn a blind eye, or when the answers defy reason, that is where you come in.

The aristocracy hides more than it reveals. The city's underworld knows whispers of truths the elite wish to bury. Strange happenings unfold in laboratories, occult circles, and long-forgotten ruins. It is your job to investigate, to bring truth to light—whether the world is ready for it or not.

You will encounter murderers whose motives defy logic, inventions beyond their time, secret societies vying for power, and horrors that exist just beyond the veil of reason. Some mysteries should never be solved, but you have chosen to chase the truth regardless.

London may not thank you for what you uncover. The truth is rarely comforting. But if not you, then who?

So, tell me: What mystery has found its way to your doorstep tonight?

## THE SETTING

London in 1896 is a city of contradictions. At its heart lies a tension between progress and tradition, the rational and the arcane. Airships drift over soot-covered rooftops, automata assist in the factories, and steam-powered cabs rattle through the cobbled streets. Yet for all these marvels of industry, old fears still lurk in the fog. Ancient horrors persist in forgotten crypts, and whispers of the occult echo in gentlemen's clubs and back alley gatherings.

This is a world where gaslight barely holds back the darkness, where rational minds struggle to explain the inexplicable. The Grand Casebook embraces the interplay between Victorian-era crime fiction, steampunk ingenuity, and the gothic supernatural.

## THE GRAND SOCIETY OF INQUIRY

Founded in the wake of the Crimean War, The Grand Society of Inquiry was established by a coalition of scholars, detectives, and adventurers who recognised that certain mysteries lay beyond the reach of conventional authorities. Though their official purpose is to investigate "unusual" occurrences, they are as much a secret society as an investigative body. Their members come from all walks of life—former police officers, rogue academics, disgraced aristocrats, and those who have glimpsed the supernatural and can never return to ignorance.

The Society operates in secrecy, liaising with those who have knowledge of the unseen world—whether they be alchemists, mesmerists, or reformed criminals. Their headquarters, a sprawling archive hidden beneath a London bookshop, contains a wealth of esoteric knowledge that only a select few are permitted to access.

## THE POWERS THAT BE

While the Society pursues truth, others work to obscure it. Various factions hold sway over London, each with their own stake in its mysteries:

- **Scotland Yard:** The official enforcers of law and order, most officers dismiss the supernatural, though a handful of seasoned inspectors have learned otherwise. The Yard tolerates the Society only when their interests align.
- **The Ministry of Esoteric Affairs:** A shadowy government branch that monitors supernatural activity. Their agents operate with impunity, and their goals often clash with those of the Society.
- **The Order of the Silver Dawn:** An occultist cabal that seeks power through ritual and ancient knowledge. Some claim their origins stretch back to the alchemists of the Elizabethan court.
- **The Industrial Magnates:** The great industrialists of London have their own secrets, from illicit experiments to unspeakable dealings with forces beyond human comprehension.
- **The Underworld Syndicates:** Smugglers and thieves have always known the truth—London's alleys and docks are haunted by more than mere criminals.

## TYPES OF PLAY

The Grand Casebook is structured as an episodic mystery-driven setting, where each session presents a new case to unravel. While overarching plots may weave through multiple cases, each game is designed to be a

self-contained investigation. The types of mysteries players may face include:

- **Classic Crime:** Murders, thefts, and conspiracies with unexpected twists.
- **Scientific Anomalies:** Unstable inventions, rogue automata, and the consequences of reckless experimentation.
- **Supernatural Encounters:** Hauntings, curses, and beings that should not exist.
- **Political Intrigue:** Power struggles within the aristocracy, blackmail, and espionage.
- **Exploratory Adventures:** Venturing into forgotten catacombs, abandoned asylums, or hidden laboratories.

## CHARACTER ROLES

Players take on the roles of Society members, each bringing unique skills to the investigative team. Some possible roles include:

- **The Detective:** A seasoned investigator skilled in deduction and intuition.
- **The Scientist:** A brilliant mind on the cutting edge of technological advancements.
- **The Occultist:** A scholar of the esoteric, familiar with arcane lore.
- **The Rogue:** A streetwise operative connected to the city's underbelly.
- **The Aristocrat:** A well-connected socialite whose influence opens doors.
- **The Soldier:** A combat-trained veteran, ready to handle more physical threats.

## RULE ADAPTATIONS FOR THIS SETTING

The Grand Casebook modifies standard play to suit its unique blend of investigation, steampunk technology, and gothic horror. Some adjustments include:

- **Stress and Wounds:** Psychological stress plays a more significant role, with lingering mental consequences affecting future investigations. You can leave out stresses and wounds entirely for most mystery adventures and simply act out any confrontation.

- **Tools of the Trade:** Players may access specialised investigative tools, such as clockwork analysers, ectoplasmic detectors, or enchanted relics.
- **Mystery Structure:** Cases follow a structured flow, focusing on gathering clues, making deductions, and confronting the truth.
- **Supernatural Threats:** Unnatural foes require specific knowledge or preparations to overcome, emphasising research as much as combat.

# ADVENTURES

The following adventures are aimed at 3-5 players and should take 2-4 hours to play.

## THE CALL TO ADVENTURE

At the heart of every investigation lies The Grand Society of Inquiry, an esteemed and enigmatic organisation dedicated to the relentless pursuit of truth. Operating from the opulent halls of the Grand Hall, the society boasts a network of detectives, scholars, and specialists, each possessing a unique skill set vital to solving the most perplexing cases.

When a new case emerges, summons are discreetly dispatched to those deemed most suited for the task at hand. These messages—delivered via courier, pneumatic tube, or even through more esoteric means—call upon select members to assemble and uncover the mystery that awaits. No two groups are ever quite the same, for the **Grand Analytical Engine**, a vast and intricate steam-powered construct housed in the depths of the Grand Hall, determines the composition of each investigative team.

> **FRAMING THE CALL TO ADVENTURE**
>
> The setup for starting adventures is typical for episodic games where the players can vary from session to session. Having an explanation for why the characters vary from case to case means that no further in-game explanation is needed.

## BEATRICE LANGLEY

*A captivating hostess at the Brass Orchid, hiding a desperate past behind a charming smile.*

### BACKGROUND:

Beatrice Langley built a reputation as one of the Brass Orchid's most sought-after hostesses, but her true past is far less glamorous. Once entangled in dangerous affairs, she sought refuge in the club's gilded halls, only to have her secrets catch up with her. When Edward Mercer threatened to expose her, she took the only way out she saw—murder.

| Skills | |
| --- | --- |
| **Expert (+3)** | Deception |
| **Skilled (+2)** | Stealth, Persuasion |
| **Novice (+1)** | Awareness, Empathy, Etiquette |

**Traits**

**Charming Manipulator** — Gains a bonus when deceiving or misleading someone with her charms.

**A Past Worth Killing For** — Once per session, may create an advantage related to her hidden past.

**Desperate Measures** — Can reroll when acting under extreme pressure or life-threatening circumstances.

### THE MURDER VICTIM

## EDWARD MERCER

*A cunning blackmailer who underestimated the desperation of those he ensnared.*

### BACKGROUND:

Edward Mercer was well-known in London's underworld for his talent for unearthing dirty secrets and using them to his advantage. He approached his victims with a cold, calculated patience, squeezing them for all they were worth. His last target, however, proved more dangerous than he anticipated—Beatrice Langley, a woman with too much to lose. He was found dead in his private lounge at the Brass Orchid, the victim of a locked-room murder.

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# MURDER AT THE BRASS ORCHID

The investigators are called to **The Brass Orchid**. The establishment is filled with wealthy patrons, performers, and staff—each with their own secrets to hide. The club's reputation is at stake, and the clock is ticking before the police arrive to sweep things under the rug.

The players must piece together the events of the evening, question patrons and staff, analyse the crime scene, and determine who had the means, motive, and opportunity to commit the crime. However, the deeper they dig, the more they realise that this murder is just the tip of the iceberg.

## PREMISE

A high-society soirée at the exclusive cabaret, The Brass Orchid, is cut short when a well-connected financier is found dead in a locked room. The party was attended by the city's elite, but none saw the murder happen—or so they claim. The investigators must navigate a world of secrets, deception, and hidden rivalries to uncover the truth.

## WHAT REALLY HAPPENED

**Beatrice Langley**, a hostess at The Brass Orchid, killed the financier, **Edward Mercer**, to protect herself from blackmail. Mercer had uncovered details about Beatrice's past life and was threatening to expose her unless she paid a steep price. Desperate and out of options, she poisoned his drink and used the club's pneumatic tube system to dispose of the evidence. However, a miscalculation led to certain clues being left behind.

---

**GAME MASTER TIP**

The suggested passive opposition rolls in the following are only that, suggestions. Feel free to adjust the difficulty based on the investigators' actions, skills, and the pace of the game. Remember that the goal is to keep the story moving forward, not to bog it down with unnecessary obstacles.

---

## ACT 0: INTO THE FRAY

At the Game Master's discretion, the summons to the **Grand Hall** may be role-played, allowing players to experience firsthand how the **Grand Society of Inquiry** assigns cases. A Society Official, with an air of quiet authority, presents the latest mystery: a locked-room murder at the prestigious **Brass Orchid**. The club's owner, **Madame Yvette Duval**, contacted the Society in desperation, realising that only the most capable investigators could unravel the enigma before her reputation—and her clientele—are irreparably damaged.

The Brass Orchid remains under lockdown, but such restrictions cannot last indefinitely. Its wealthy and influential patrons will not tolerate confinement for long unless the authorities

## MADAME YVETTE DUVAL

*The esteemed owner of the Brass Orchid, a woman who knows the price of every secret whispered in her establishment.*

### BACKGROUND:

Madame Duval built the Brass Orchid into London's most exclusive cabaret and gambling house, catering to the city's wealthiest and most influential figures. While she maintains a persona of graceful hospitality, she has survived in a cutthroat industry, using her intelligence and influence to navigate political and criminal circles alike.

#### Skills

| | |
|---|---|
| **Expert (+3)** | Persuasion |
| **Skilled (+2)** | Deception, Resources |
| **Novice (+1)** | Awareness, Etiquette, Insight |

#### Traits

**Silver-Tongued Schemer** — Gains a bonus when negotiating delicate matters or extracting information.

**Web of Favors** — Once per session, call in a powerful favour from a well-connected patron.

**A Whisper Can Kill** — Can reroll when leveraging blackmail or manipulating a dangerous individual.

### Game Master Tip

In episodic settings, the **Call to Adventure** often renders such introductory scenes optional. However, in the first few sessions, as players familiarise themselves with the world, engaging in a scene outside the primary investigation can add depth and immersion. Receiving a case assignment is a natural opportunity to establish tone, introduce key NPCs, and reinforce the Society's role in orchestrating these investigations.

## ACT 1: THE CRIME SCENE

The investigators arrive at **The Brass Orchid**, where the air is thick with tension. The club's usual vibrancy is subdued, with hushed murmurs among staff and patrons alike. A staff member, **Delilah "Della" Moreau**, was the first to notice something was amiss. Mercer, a regular patron, had not emerged from his private lounge as he typically would during the intermission. Concerned, she knocked on his door. When he did not respond, she fetched **Madame Yvette Duval**, the only person with an extra key to the private lounges.

Upon unlocking the door, they were met with a grisly sight—Mercer's lifeless body slumped in his chair, his drink half-finished, a scrap of paper clutched tightly in his hand. The room, untouched since their discovery, remains eerily undisturbed. Knowing that the scandal could ruin the Brass Orchid, Madame Duval took swift action. Rather than contacting the authorities, she turned to the **Grand Society of Inquiry**, summoning the investigators to handle the matter discreetly.

From the moment the body was found, no one has been allowed to enter the lounge—yet the investigators will soon find that secrets have a way of slipping through even the tightest of locks.

### EXAMINING THE CRIME SCENE

Upon entering Mercer's private lounge, the investigators find the room frozen in time. A single lamp provides dim lighting, casting long shadows across the plush furniture. A card game sits abandoned at the table, with half-smoked cigars in an ashtray. The air is thick with the scent of liquor, tobacco, and a faint, lingering trace of something bitter—something off.

The body of Edward Mercer remains slumped in his chair, untouched since discovery. His expression is frozen in surprise, his grip unnaturally tight around a crumpled scrap of paper. The investigators are free to explore the scene, but careful examination will be required to extract meaningful details.

### PRIMARY CLUES

- A **half-finished drink laced with poison**, still resting on the table near Mercer's body. A faint almond scent lingers, barely noticeable beneath the overpowering aroma of brandy.
- The victim's **missing pocket watch**, unaccounted for at the crime scene but later discovered in an unexpected location.
- A **scrap of torn paper**, crumpled tightly in Mercer's hand, as though grasped in his final moments—either in desperation or as a final act of defiance.
- The **pneumatic tube system**, a hidden network connecting various parts of the club, shows signs of recent tampering.

### WHAT THE CLUES REVEAL

- **The poisoned drink** confirms the cause of death. The faint almond scent suggests cyanide or a similar fast-acting toxin but without an obvious delivery method.
- **The missing pocket watch**, later found in the servers' area, is not inherently suspicious—but its location is. It suggests that someone, likely a staff member, moved through that area after Mercer's death. **Henry "Rigs" Rigby**, the bartender, recovered it but might need some persuasion to reveal the circumstances.
- **The scrap of torn paper** remains tightly clutched in Mercer's hand. The jagged edge suggests it was ripped

from a larger document. Whether Mercer seized it in a moment of panic or it was forcibly torn from him before he collapsed is unclear, but its contents might point to the motive.

- **The tampered pneumatic tube system** is the key to the locked-room mystery. It provides a discreet means of entry and escape, but only staff or someone intimately familiar with the club would know how to exploit it.

## THE POISONED DRINK

Sitting on the table near Mercer's body, the glass contains a dark amber liquid, partially consumed. A faint almond scent lingers beneath the brandy's aroma.

- **How to discover:** Simple observation will reveal the drink, but recognising the almond scent requires a **Basic (0)** **Notice** or **Investigate** check. Recognising this as the telltale scent of cyanide requires a success at the **Difficult (+2)** level.
- **Further examination:** A character with medical knowledge may confirm cyanide poisoning, but testing the drink will require resources outside the club.
- **NPC reactions:** Madame Duval insists no one could have tampered with drinks **without her bartenders noticing**, subtly diverting suspicion.

## THE MISSING POCKET WATCH

Mercer's prized gold pocket watch is conspicuously absent from his body.

- **How to discover:** Searching Mercer's belongings will reveal its absence, but noticing the absence of something requires that you expect its presence. Any of the staff will know that Mercer always shows off his pocket watch, so if **Madam Duval is present** when the investigators examine the body, she will notice. Otherwise, have other NPCs drop hints about a watch later in the investigation.

## THE SCRAP OF TORN PAPER

Clutched tightly in Mercer's lifeless hand, the small scrap appears hastily ripped from a larger document.

- **How to discover:** Anyone inspecting the body will notice the paper.
- **Further examination:** It is possible to pry the paper from Mercer's hands, but it must be done carefully to not tear it further.
- **What it reveals:** The scrap contains part of a name and a few words, possibly relating to Mercer's blackmail scheme.
- **NPC reactions:** Beatrice Langley, if questioned, will become visibly uncomfortable but will attempt to play innocent unless pressed. A **Basic (0)** **Empathy** roll will reveal her discomfort. At **Formidable (+3)** or higher, the investigators will recognise her emotions as fear.

## THE TAMPERED PNEUMATIC TUBE SYSTEM

A discreet brass panel built into the wall leads to the club's internal message system, normally used for sending notes and receipts between staff areas. However, someone has recently pried it open, and subtle modifications suggest it was used for more than just correspondence.

- **How to discover:** Searching the walls near Mercer's table reveals (with a **Difficult (+2)** **Investigate** or

**Notice**) that the panel is slightly ajar, its edges scratched as if it was hastily forced open. Staff might mention the system in passing if prompted.

- **Further examination:** A **Challenging (+1) Crafts** check confirms that the panel has been modified. At **Difficult (+2) Craft** the examination reveals that the usual constraints, meant to restrict messages to small notes, have been bypassed—suggesting something larger was sent through. Additionally, the airflow mechanism appears to have been overridden, allowing the tube to function more like a one-way transport chute rather than a message system.
- **What it reveals:** The system connects to the servers' area, and traces of fine fabric fibres or a stray hair inside the tube hint that it was used to transport something—or someone. A close look reveals faint scuff marks on the panel's interior, possibly left by someone squeezing through.
- **NPC reactions:** Most staff will dismiss the idea that a person could fit inside, but a seasoned investigator might realise that someone **small or desperate** could have used the system as an escape route.

After examining the crime scene, the investigators are free to explore the Brass Orchid in search of clues. The investigation takes place in Act 2, where they will question staff and patrons, analyse testimonies, and piece together the events of the evening. The order in which they explore the locations in the next act is up to them.

> **Game Master Tip**
>
> The mystery is designed to be straightforward, making it ideal for new players still learning the rules and getting comfortable with investigative roleplay. However, you can easily heighten the challenge by introducing conflicting testimonies from staff and patrons, forcing them to untangle half-truths, personal biases, and hidden agendas as they piece together what really happened that night.

## ACT 2: THE INVESTIGATION

Players must navigate the web of lies surrounding the Brass Orchid's elite clientele and staff. Key locations include:

> **KEY LOCATIONS**
>
> - **The performers' dressing rooms**, where whispers of illicit affairs and secret dealings emerge.
> - **The club's bar**, where a bartender, **Henry "Rigs" Rigby**, may know more than he lets on.
> - **The back office**, where financial records hint at Mercer's recent blackmail attempts.

> **Game Master Tip**
>
> Encourage players to interact with the environment beyond skill rolls—describe how their characters examine the clues, interpret body language, and make logical leaps. If they become stuck, use an NPC to nudge them toward a promising line of inquiry rather than outright giving answers.

A chase scene or social confrontation may occur if a suspect attempts to flee or cover up crucial evidence. The club's owner, **Madame Yvette Duval**, will insist on discretion, urging players to avoid drawing attention.

### THE PERFORMERS' DRESSING ROOMS

A backstage sanctuary for the Brass Orchid's entertainers, the dressing rooms are filled with the scent of perfume, powder, and secrets. Between costume changes and whispered conversations, this space holds clues about hidden relationships, illicit affairs, and last-minute confrontations. If anyone saw Beatrice Langley before the murder, it would have been here.

Speaking with the club's performers, the investigators learn that **Mercer and Beatrice** have been spending an unusual amount of time together lately. The prevailing gossip suggests an affair, though many find this unlikely—such a scandal would not go unnoticed, and **Madame Duval** would never tolerate it. Still, secrets have a way of slipping through even the most watchful eyes. . .

If the investigators take the time to search the dressing rooms carefully, they can uncover additional clues that paint a clearer picture of Beatrice's state of mind before the murder:

> **CLUES TO DISCOVER**
>
> - **Beatrice's Travel Bag:** A half-packed bag in her dressing room suggests she was preparing to leave in haste. Its hurried state implies she either abandoned the plan or ran out of time.
> - **A Torn Letter:** A small stove used to heat the performers' dressing room contains scraps of partially burned paper that can be spotted with a **Challenging (+1) Notice** roll. A **Difficult (+2) Notice** or **Crafting** reveals that the paper matches the torn note found in Mercer's hand. If pieced together, it may hint at the nature of their final confrontation.
> - **Testimonies from Performers:** Some performers recall Beatrice arriving shaken before her performance, while others remember her slipping away after intermission. None, however, can say where she went.

### THE CLUB'S BAR

A bustling hub of conversation and vice, the club's bar is where fortunes are won and lost, secrets change hands, and alliances are forged over a well-poured drink. The air is thick with the mingling scents of brandy, cigars, and ambition. At the centre of it all stands **Henry "Rigs" Rigby**, a bartender with an ear for whispers and a knack for knowing when to keep his mouth shut. He's seen it all—but getting him to share what he knows will require a delicate touch or a not-so-subtle push.

## THE PATRONS OF THE BRASS ORCHID

*An exclusive mix of aristocrats, socialites, and shadowy figures seeking entertainment, influence, or illicit dealings. Many were present on the night of the murder—some more observant than others.*

### LORD ALISTAIR PEMBROKE

Wealthy Industrialist – A steel magnate with an imposing presence, known for both his ruthless business tactics and his excessive gambling. **What He Knows:** Pembroke had his own business to attend to at the tables, but he noticed Mercer acting smug and confident, calling for more drinks and toasting to "fortune smiling at last."

### GENEVIEVE ASHDOWN

Scandalous Socialite – A striking woman with a penchant for dangerous liaisons and whispered rumours. She thrives on court intrigue and nightlife gossip. **What She Knows:** Genevieve witnessed Beatrice and Mercer talking earlier in the night. She saw Beatrice grab Mercer's wrist in desperation, pleading in hushed tones before Mercer simply laughed and pulled away.

### DR. ELIAS FORSYTHE

Respected Physician – A surgeon with a growing reputation, attending the Orchid to enjoy his vices away from prying eyes. **What He Knows:** Dr. Forsythe noticed Beatrice downing a drink with shaking hands just before leaving for Mercer's booth. He was too focused on his own affairs to linger, but he distinctly recalls her expression—not anger, but sheer dread.

## THE STAFF OF THE BRASS ORCHID

*A well-oiled machine of waiters, bartenders, entertainers, and security staff, all working under the careful watch of Madame Duval. Each has their own secrets—and some know more about the murder than they let on.*

> **GAME MASTER TIP**
>
> These are all Mook NPCs but can be fleshed out more (as Henry "Rigs" Rigby) if necessary. Most likely, you will not need their stats, though, but can use them simply to add flavour and drop clues and hints.

### HENRY "RIGS" RIGBY

Bartender – Henry "Rigs" Rigby has served drinks and collected secrets at the Brass Orchid for years. A man with a sharp eye and a sharper tongue, he knows how to keep patrons talking—especially when they've had a few too many. **What He Knows:** Rigs found Edward Mercer's missing watch tucked behind the bar, likely dropped by someone in a hurry. He can also confirm that Beatrice Langley was seen speaking with Mercer earlier in the evening.

### DELILAH "DELLA" MOREAU

Head Hostess — Poised and perceptive, Della keeps track of the Orchid's clientele and ensures the staff stay in line. **What She Knows:** Della saw Beatrice Langley looking distraught before her performance. She had a brief but intense exchange with Mercer in a quiet corner of the club, after which she rushed backstage, visibly shaken.

### THEO FINCH

As the investigators enter, they catch a glimpse of **Rigs hurriedly slipping something into his pocket**. Keen-eyed characters may notice a **hint of gold** flashing before it disappears (a **Notice** roll at **Difficult (+2)** will confirm this). It's **Mercer's pocket watch**, and Rigs isn't keen on explaining how he came by it. At first, he'll feign ignorance, but a successful **Interrogate**, **Intimidate**, or **Rapport** roll at **Formidable (+3)** will loosen his tongue—grudgingly.

> **CLUES TO DISCOVER**
>
> - **Mercer's Missing Pocket Watch:** Rigs found it in the servers' area after the murder, where Beatrice likely dropped it in her rush to escape. He will only admit this if pressured.
> - **Unsettled Debts:** A bar ledger records Mercer's outstanding tabs—far higher than usual. However, in the past few weeks, he had been paying off large amounts, suggesting a new source of income.
> - **Patron Gossip:** Some recall Mercer speaking privately with Beatrice earlier that night, while others overheard him boasting about a "big payday" that was going to change everything.
> - **The Pneumatic Tube Exit:** The bar's pneumatic system, normally used to deliver drinks to private lounges, has a discreet access point beneath the counter. Investigators examining it will find **signs of forced entry**—a clear indication of tampering.

## HOW RIGS FOUND THE WATCH

**Henry "Rigs" Rigby** insists he had nothing to do with Mercer's murder—he just found himself in the wrong place

at the wrong time. After the body was discovered and the club went into lockdown, he was doing his usual post-shift rounds behind the bar when something **caught his eye**. A glint of gold beneath the service counter near the **servers' area**.

Curiosity got the better of him. He bent down, fished it out, and immediately wished he hadn't. It was **Mercer's pocket watch**. Rigs didn't know how it had ended up there, but he did know one thing: he wanted no part of it. If word got out, he'd be dragged into the mess, and he had no interest in becoming a suspect. So, he **shoved it into his pocket** and carried on pouring drinks, hoping no one would notice.

Under pressure, Rigs will admit that he found the watch **near the entrance to the back hall**, close to where servers pick up drinks for the private lounges. This strongly suggests that **someone—likely staff or someone who knew their way around—moved through that area after Mercer's death**. More importantly, the way it was found indicates that it had been **dropped in a hurry**, likely by someone escaping through the **pneumatic tube system**.

If investigators push him further, Rigs will recall something odd: **he heard a soft thud from the back hall minutes before he found the watch**. At the time, he thought nothing of it, assuming it was a staff member shifting crates. But now, in hindsight, it might have been the sound of someone landing after climbing out of the pneumatic system.

## The Pneumatic System

Beneath the bar, tucked behind a row of gleaming brass pipes and aged mahogany panelling, lies a **discreet access point** to the club's **pneumatic tube system**. Normally, these tubes are used to send drink orders, notes, and discreet payments between the private lounges and the bar, but this particular panel has been **forcibly pried open**. The latch usually kept flush with the wall, is now bent slightly out of shape as if someone had wrenched it open in haste.

Upon closer inspection (**Challenging (+1) Investigate**), **faint scratches** on the brass lining suggest that something—or someone—was pulled through recently. A **thin layer of dust** clings to the inner rim of the tube, disturbed in streaks where fingers or fabric may have brushed against it. Investigators with a **keen eye** may notice a **small shard of glass** caught between the tubing's metal framework, its edges glistening under the low bar light. If examined, it matches the **broken vial** found at the exit point, the lingering scent of bitter almonds confirming its deadly purpose.

The tube itself is narrow, **just large enough for a slender person to squeeze through**. A metal **service ladder** is affixed to the interior, meant for maintenance workers to access the system when needed. However, one of the lower rungs has been bent, possibly from the weight

of someone climbing through in a hurry. Looking deeper inside, investigators can see where the **tube splits**, with one passage continuing toward the back hall and another leading **upward**, toward the private lounges—including Mercer's.

Any investigator willing to **crawl inside** will find it claustrophobic, the **walls cool and slick** from years of condensation. The air carries a **faint metallic tang**, mingled with the stale scent of old receipts and spilt brandy. A **Difficult (+2) Notice** roll will reveal that a few **scraps of paper** cling to the corners of the passage, suggesting messages were hurriedly sent or torn up mid-transit. If they push forward, they may notice **a single dark thread caught on a rivet**—a clue that someone in dark clothing passed through recently.

This passage is the key to unravelling **how the killer escaped the locked room**, but whether the investigators are willing to **follow the same route** remains to be seen. . .

### What Can Be Found in the Pneumatic System

- **Signs of tampering:** A bent latch, scratches, and disturbed dust suggest recent use.
- **A broken glass vial shard:** Found inside the tube, confirming poison use.
- **A service ladder with a bent rung:** Indicates someone climbed through in haste.
- **A split passage:** One leading toward the back hall, the other to the private lounges.
- **Traces of the killer's passage:** A dark thread caught on a rivet, scattered paper scraps.

## THE BACK OFFICE

Tucked away behind a locked door, the back office is where the club's finances are managed, and sensitive dealings are recorded. The ledgers here reveal an interesting financial pattern. Mercer had accrued a **significant gambling debt** at the Brass Orchid over the past year—yet, in the past few weeks, he had begun paying it off in unusually large sums. Where did the money come from?

### Clues to Discover

- **Financial Records:** The ledgers show that Mercer has made **several large payments** on his debt, suggesting he had recently come into a substantial amount of money. If the investigators follow this trail, they will discover that the timing aligns suspiciously with the time when **Beatrice** started spending substantially more time with him.

## ACT 3: THE REVEAL

With all the pieces in place, the investigators must confront **Beatrice Langley**. She is visibly shaken when accused but clings to her innocence, insisting that she had **nothing to do with Mercer's death**. However, as the investigators present their findings, cracks begin to show in her story.

### Evidence That Breaks Her Resolve

- **Traces of poison:** A broken glass vial, found near the pneumatic tube exit, contained the same poison that killed Mercer. Traces of the toxin linger on Beatrice's clothing.
- **Witness testimonies:** Multiple staff members recall Beatrice acting erratically—arriving shaken, disappearing after intermission, and returning only once the club was in an uproar.
- **The torn letter:** Fragments of a document, partially burned in the dressing room stove, match the scrap found clutched in Mercer's hand—evidence of a final desperate message. **Witnesses will testify** that Beatrice added fuel to the stove a short time before the murder scene was discovered.
- **The missing pocket watch:** Dropped in the servers' area after she fled through the pneumatic tube; its location exposes her escape route.
- **Inconsistencies in her alibi:** She initially claimed she was in her dressing room before and after her performance, but no one can confirm seeing her at the critical moment.

Faced with undeniable proof, Beatrice's composure crumbles. If the investigators press her with a firm but measured approach, she may confess outright, revealing the truth about Mercer's blackmail and the desperate decision that led to his death.

However, if they push too aggressively or fail to secure a clear confession, Beatrice panics. She makes a break for the nearest exit—whether attempting to vanish into the crowd, lock herself in her dressing room, or even slip through the pneumatic tubes one last time. This could lead to a tense chase or a final dramatic confrontation as the investigators must decide whether to apprehend her themselves or alert the authorities before she disappears into the night.

### Game Master Tip

If you want to add tension, Beatrice's flight can turn into a frantic pursuit through the back halls of the Brass Orchid, with obstacles such as locked doors, security guards, or even club patrons unwittingly getting in the way. A climactic moment could see her cornered on a balcony, deciding whether to surrender or make a desperate escape attempt.

## RESOLUTIONS

Depending on how the investigators handle the case, different outcomes may occur:

- **Justice Served**: Beatrice is arrested or confesses, ensuring the truth is revealed.

- **A Deal in the Shadows**: The investigators allow Beatrice to flee, leveraging her knowledge for future gain.
- **The Wrong Culprit**: A scapegoat is framed, or the authorities arrest someone else entirely.
- **A Mystery Unsolved**: The players fail to piece everything together, leaving The Brass Orchid haunted by unanswered questions.

Regardless of the resolution, this case's events ripple across London's elite, setting the stage for future intrigues.

# The Clockmaker's Deception

A shocking murder has thrown London's scientific and industrial circles into disarray. The esteemed inventor, **Dr Sebastian Thorne**, stands accused of killing a rival engineer, **Arthur Bellamy**, who was found dead in Thorne's workshop. The evidence against him seems irrefutable—Bellamy's body was discovered with blunt force trauma, and the only witness claims that one of Thorne's own clockwork creations struck the fatal blow.

But something about the case doesn't add up. The mechanical automaton, a prototype designed to assist in fine-detail engineering, should be incapable of such an act. Was this an unfortunate accident, or has someone manipulated the scene to frame Thorne? The investigators must untangle the mystery before the city condemns a man who may be innocent—or worse, before a hidden truth shakes the foundations of science itself.

## Premise

A renowned inventor is accused of murder when his latest clockwork creation is found standing over a dead body. The case seems open and shut, but a deeper conspiracy lurks beneath the surface. Was the machine truly responsible, or is someone using technology as a convenient scapegoat?

## What Really Happened

Arthur Bellamy had uncovered a secret—one that threatened powerful interests within London's scientific community. He arranged a meeting with Thorne under the guise of a professional discussion, intending to share his findings. However, before he could reveal the full truth, an unknown party silenced him.

The real killer staged the scene, positioning Thorne's automaton as the culprit. By tampering with the machine's mechanisms and manipulating witnesses, they ensured that suspicion would fall on Thorne. Now, as the city rushes to condemn him, the investigators must uncover the true murderer, reveal the secret Bellamy died for, and navigate the dangerous underworld of industrial espionage.

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### Game Master Tip

As with the previous scenario, you can act out the summoning to **The Grand Society of Inquiry** as a way to introduce the investigators to the case. If the set of player characters in this scenario differs from the player characters in the previous one, this would give you an excellent way of introducing the new characters to the players.

### Game Master Tip

This case provides an excellent opportunity to explore themes of scientific advancement, ethical dilemmas, and the fear of technology gone rogue. The case may also lead

into larger conspiracies within London's industrial elite, depending on how deep the investigators choose to dig.

## ACT 1: THE ACCUSATION

The investigators are summoned to the scene of the crime—the locked workshop of Dr Thorne. The city's authorities have already decided his guilt, but the inconsistencies in the case suggest a deeper truth.

### KEY ELEMENTS OF ACT 1

- **Examining the Crime Scene:** Bellamy was struck down in Thorne's workshop. The automaton is positioned near the body, but no command sequence should have allowed it to act violently.
- **The Automaton:** A marvel of engineering, yet it lacks any known capacity for independent action. Its gears and actuators show signs of tampering.
- **Thorne's Testimony:** The accused swears he is innocent, claiming he was in another room when the murder occurred.
- **The Witness:** A factory worker insists he saw the automaton move on its own to deliver the fatal strike. But is he telling the full truth?

With the evidence stacked against Thorne, the investigators must uncover what really happened in the workshop that night.

## ACT 2: THE HIDDEN CONFLICT

As the investigation deepens, the players discover that Bellamy's death was not a simple case of mechanical failure—it was a carefully orchestrated act of sabotage.

### KEY ELEMENTS OF ACT 2

- **Bellamy's Discovery:** The victim had uncovered something significant—plans, a prototype, or a hidden truth that made him a target.
- **The Secret Rivalry:** The industrial elite of London are at war behind closed doors. Bellamy and Thorne were both entangled in a larger battle over technological supremacy.
- **The Sabotaged Automaton:** Someone tampered with the machine's internal mechanisms. If the players investigate closely, they may find evidence of deliberate reprogramming or mechanical interference.
- **A Race Against Time:** The longer the investigators take, the more pressure mounts to convict Thorne. Influential figures want the case closed quickly, and the truth buried.

By the end of Act 2, the investigators should have a suspect—but proving their guilt will require uncovering their true motive.

## ACT 3: THE MASTERMIND REVEALED

With all the pieces in place, the investigators must expose the true murderer before Thorne is sentenced.

### KEY ELEMENTS OF ACT 3

- **The True Killer:** A rival inventor? A corrupt businessman? Or someone from Thorne's own inner circle?
- **The Motive:** Bellamy's research, a dangerous secret, or industrial sabotage? What truth was worth killing for?
- **The Final Confrontation:** The players must gather the final proof, present their case, or prevent another murder before the truth is lost forever.

## RESOLUTION: JUSTICE OR COVER-UP?

The players' choices will determine the final outcome:

- **If Thorne is cleared:** He is freed, but powerful enemies remain.
- **If the killer is exposed:** The consequences will depend on their connections—justice may not always be served.
- **If the truth is buried:** The industrial elite breathe a sigh of relief, but the players leave knowing they only scratched the surface of something far larger.

One thing is certain: the march of progress is unstoppable, but the cost of invention is often paid in blood.

# THE SILENT COURIER

The investigators are drawn into the case when the body of **Henry Graves** is discovered in the early hours of the morning; his pockets turned inside out except for the strange, untouched letter. The local police dismiss it as a robbery gone wrong, but those with a keen eye know better.

The players must follow the trail of clues left behind, track down those involved in the message's delivery, and decipher the meaning of the letter. But they are not the only ones searching for the truth—dangerous individuals are watching their every move, determined to keep the past buried.

## PREMISE

A messenger is found dead in a foggy alley, clutching a letter sealed in an unknown cypher. The contents of the letter are clearly valuable—valuable enough to kill for. Who was the intended recipient, and what secret was worth a man's life?

## WHAT REALLY HAPPENED

The messenger, Henry Graves, was delivering a coded message between two rival factions of a secret society. The letter contained evidence of a betrayal within their ranks. However, a third party, fearing exposure, intercepted the courier and silenced him before he could complete his task. The letter remains intact, but its sender and intended recipient remain a mystery—one the investigators must unravel before the killers strike again.

## ACT 1: THE BODY AND THE LETTER

The investigators arrive at the crime scene—a foggy alley where Henry Graves was found dead. The police have ruled it a botched robbery, but subtle inconsistencies suggest otherwise.

### KEY ELEMENTS OF ACT 1

- **Examining the Crime Scene:** Players can search for physical evidence—how was Graves killed? What does the positioning of his body suggest?
- **The Letter:** The only item left untouched in his possession, written in an unfamiliar cipher. Why was it spared when everything else was taken?
- **Witnesses and Leads:** The investigators may find someone who heard or saw something—a vagrant, a night watchman, or a fellow courier. Their accounts might be fragmented, but they hint at someone following Graves before his death.
- **The Silent Pursuers:** A subtle but key element—players may not realize it yet, but they are being watched. The

moment they take an interest in the case, their names are added to the list of people who know too much.

Once the investigators realize this was no ordinary mugging, the mystery broadens. Who was Henry Graves delivering the letter to, and what was so important that it was worth his life?

## ACT 2: THE TRAIL OF SECRETS

Following leads from Act 1, the investigators begin piecing together Graves' movements before his death. His route suggests he was in contact with powerful individuals who rarely leave behind traces.

### KEY ELEMENTS OF ACT 2
- **Tracking the Letter's Origin:** Discovering who wrote the letter is just as crucial as finding its recipient. The players must investigate Graves' recent commissions and any known associates.
- **The Rival Factions:** As the investigation deepens, it becomes clear that the letter is tied to a schism within a secretive society. Who is working against whom, and what information was in the letter?
- **Attempts to Stop the Investigation:** By this point, the players will have drawn attention. Shadowy figures may approach them with offers, threats, or outright attempts on their lives.
- **A Key Betrayal:** An NPC the investigators have relied on may be compromised, leading to a moment where the players question who they can trust.

At the end of Act 2, the players should be closing in on the recipient of the letter. However, the conspiracy is still one step ahead, and the final piece of the puzzle remains missing—the full contents of the letter.

## ACT 3: THE TRUTH UNVEILED

The final act sees the investigators face their most dangerous challenge yet. The true nature of the letter is revealed, and they must decide what to do with it.

### KEY ELEMENTS OF ACT 3
- **The Letter's Recipient:** At last, the players find the person who was meant to receive the letter. But will they be an ally, or do they have their own agenda?
- **The Real Enemy:** The true mastermind behind the murder emerges—was it a rogue faction leader, a powerful noble, or someone much closer than the players realized?
- **The Final Confrontation:** Whether it's a chase, a duel of words, or a desperate escape, the players must

navigate the resolution carefully. The wrong choice could cost them their lives.
- **The Fate of the Letter:** The letter contains damning evidence—exposing corruption, revealing a dangerous truth, or holding the key to an even larger mystery. What the players choose to do with it will shape the story's aftermath.

## Resolution: The Consequences of Truth

The outcome of the scenario depends on how the investigators handle the final confrontation and the letter itself:

- **If the letter is destroyed:** The conspiracy continues, but the players may have made powerful enemies or secret allies.
- **If the letter is revealed:** The truth spreads, but at what cost? Some factions may fall, others may rise, and new threats may emerge.
- **If the letter is delivered to its intended recipient:** The consequences will depend on who the recipient truly is and whether they were acting in good faith.

No matter the resolution, one thing is certain: **The Silent Courier** was only the beginning.

# PART 4

# CAMPAIGNS

# INDEX