

ALTERNITY®

DARK MATTER™

Fast-Play Game

by
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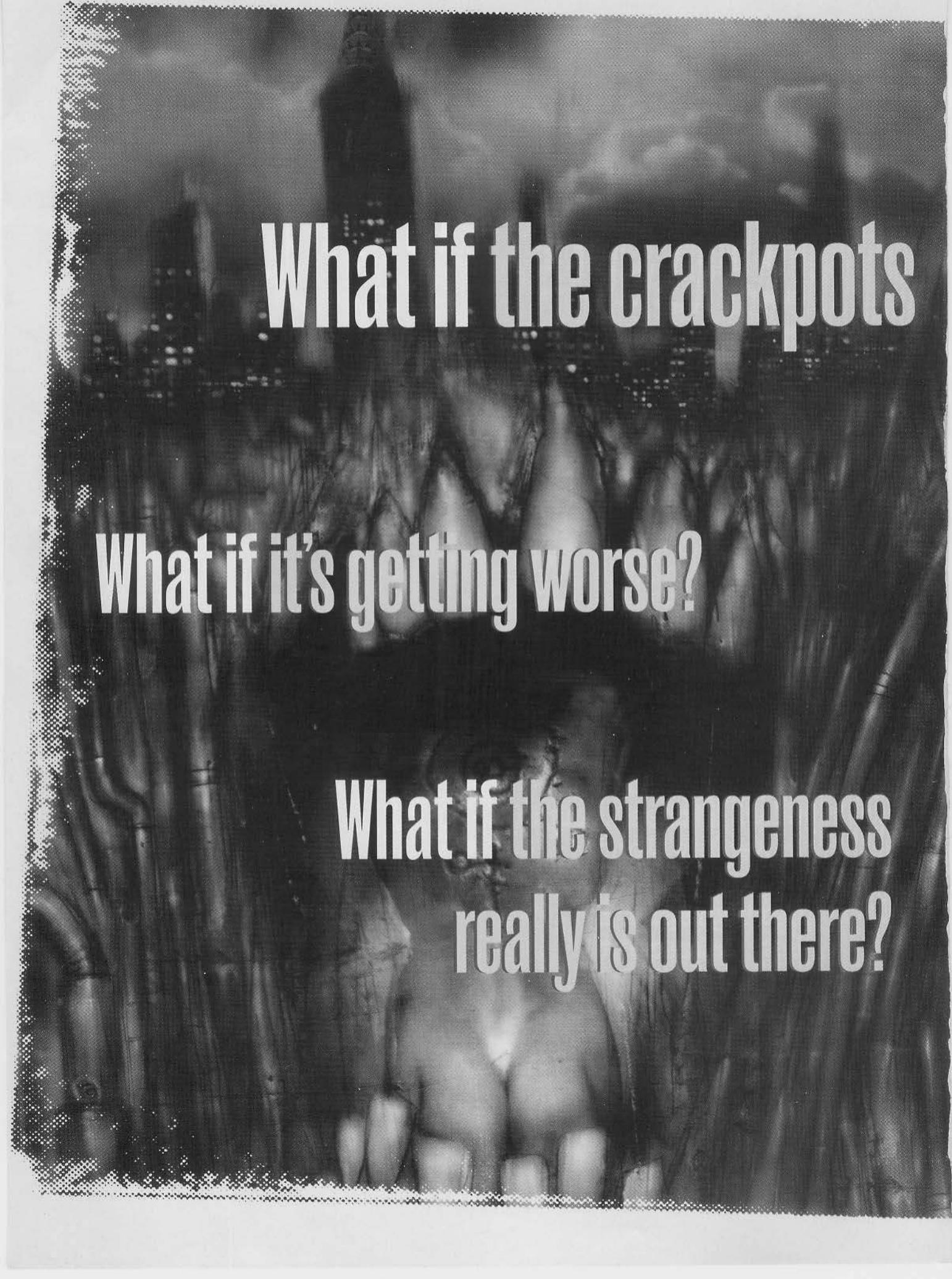
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Exit 23

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What if the crackpots

What if it's getting worse?

What if the strangeness
really is out there?

WE LIVE IN A WORLD WHERE SUSPICION HAS DISPLACED TRUST, A world where belief in the strange is replacing belief in the normal. When pressed, most laugh off such claims, or at least ignore the greater implications of such beliefs. But every now and then, something unexplainable occurs—something that

are right?

shouldn't have happened the way it did, or that surely can't mean what it seems to suggest. It is at precisely those moments when the facade of comfort drops, and we can't help but wonder:

What if it's all true?

Welcome to a world of the peculiar and unexplainable, a world where the "can't be true" has been replaced by the "anything is possible," a world where mysterious players weave a drama of secrets and disinformation. A Dark Tide is rising, and danger and intrigue lurk in every shadow. The only weapon capable of holding back the darkness is knowledge: knowledge of what's out there, what it's trying to accomplish, and how to stop it. Welcome to the world of the DARK•MATTER™ game.

A World Like Our Own

The DARK•MATTER campaign setting takes place at the dawn of the twenty-first century. On the surface, Earth appears much the same as it does today. Nations, corporations, and famous individuals are all the same—at least at first glance. The world is as familiar as the one outside your own window, but with subtle twists just beneath the surface.

Of course, that's the whole point. The DARK•MATTER setting isn't about grandiose visions of the future. It's about what you already know—or what you think you know. Strange things lurk at the fringe of societal awareness, and the DARK•MATTER setting falls firmly within that fringe.

The DARK•MATTER campaign setting is a specific world designed for use with the ALTERNITY science fiction roleplaying game. In these pages, you'll find rules to introduce you to the basics of the ALTERNITY science fiction roleplaying game and the DARK•MATTER setting.

Heroes of DARK•MATTER

Unlike many other science fiction roleplaying games, DARK•MATTER heroes are, to a large extent, just like the people around you. They're teachers and police officers, scientists and businessmen, reporters and soldiers. They are otherwise normal individuals who have been awakened to the realities of their world and thrust into decidedly abnormal circumstances.

DARK•MATTER heroes do have one thing in common: the

Hoffmann Institute. For reasons perhaps known only to itself, this private organization has sought out the heroes and gathered them together to learn about the growing darkness and, if possible, to stem the tide.

What Is ALTERNITY?

The ALTERNITY science fiction roleplaying game is the game system or set of rules that the DARK•MATTER setting was designed to use. In computer terms, the ALTERNITY rules are the hardware, and the DARK•MATTER setting is the software. While the ALTERNITY game system embraces a variety of science fiction genres, ranging from super-spy technothrillers to far-future space opera, the DARK•MATTER game places you in a more specific role—you're a modern-day ghosthunter, criminologist, conspiracy theorist, or UFOlogist investigating the weird and disturbing world of paranormal events.

Getting Started

Here's what you need to do to start playing:

- Read through the next few pages of the fast-play rules, but stop when you get to the Gamemaster section on page 89.
- Find a few friends to play with. You'll need one person to be the Gamemaster, and anywhere from two to six players to make up heroes and play them in the game.
- Find a set of polyhedral dice—four-sided, six-sided, eight-sided, twelve-sided, and twenty-sided dice. Most hobby stores sell sets of polyhedral dice pretty cheap.
- Find a good place to play. You'll want someplace you can stay for a couple of hours.
- Pick a hero from the hero templates. You can photocopy the hero sheet if you like.
- If you're the Gamemaster, take some time before the game to read the Gamemaster's fast-play rules, beginning with "So You Want to Be the Gamemaster."

The Gamemaster

One player in the game acts as a referee, or Gamemaster. Everyone else takes on the role of a character (a hero) in the story the Gamemaster tells. The Gamemaster narrates the story, creates the challenges the other players must face, and plays the role of every other character or creature the player-controlled heroes interact with during the adventure.

It's a big job, but it's a lot of fun, and every roleplaying game needs a Gamemaster. If you think you'd like to be the Gamemaster, finish reading the fast-play rules for players—which includes everything up until the hero templates—and then read through the section titled "So You Want to Be the Gamemaster".

The Player's Role

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As a player, your primary job in any ALTERNITY game is to portray one of the heroes in the story your group decides to play out. The heroes are the stars of the unfolding adventures that make up a Gamemaster's ongoing DARK•MATTER campaign.

To do this, you need a hero—an imaginary character who serves as your "connection" with the Gamemaster's setting and the other players' heroes.

Your hero starts out as a collection of numbers and descriptive terms; from then on it's up to you to make that hero come alive through roleplaying. By reacting as you think your hero would react and interacting with the other characters using your hero's voice and opinions, you're doing your job as a player. You need to be clever, resourceful, and more than a little bit paranoid if your hero is going to discover the truth about what's going on.

Key Concepts

Let's take a look at the key concepts behind the ALTERNITY game. These concepts include basic game mechanics, fundamental character information, and a few special terms that players need to become familiar with.

Hero: An imaginary character controlled by a player.

Gamemaster: The participant in the game who acts as the moderator, narrating adventures and representing other characters in the adventure who aren't controlled by the players.

Supporting Cast: These are the aforementioned "other characters," including the heroes' friends and enemies, as well as any other characters the heroes come into contact with. Although the heroes are the stars of the show, it's possible for members of the supporting cast to be just as powerful as the heroes—or sometimes even more powerful. Villains, supernatural monsters, and dangerous alien creatures are supporting characters who might defeat the heroes outright in a game confrontation.

Adventure: A scenario in which the heroes interact with the supporting cast to create a group story. Every adventure is built around a situation (typically a mystery the heroes need to solve), and it concludes when the heroes have either achieved their goal or failed to do so. When you sit down to play the scenario described in the Gamemaster section of these rules, you're playing an adventure. It might take an hour of the players' time, or it may take several play sessions.

Campaign: Just because the heroes solve one mystery or defeat one villain, their story isn't over. In a roleplaying game, the heroes may undertake a number of adventures. A campaign is a series of adventures in which the same group of heroes take on new challenges. As long as the Gamemaster keeps running new adventures for the same heroes in the same imaginary world, he or she is running a campaign.

Setting: The backdrop against which an adventure or campaign takes place. The fast-play adventure presented in the Gamemaster's fast-play rules section takes place in a rest stop in the mountains of Idaho during a winter storm.

Profession: Every hero in the ALTERNITY game is built around a profession. A profession is an overarching occupation

that describes in general terms what the hero is good at. It's the first defining concept associated with a hero. The four basic professions—Combat Spec, Diplomat, Free Agent, and Tech Op—are introduced in these fast-play rules.

Abilities: All characters (heroes and members of the supporting cast) have six Abilities. These are Strength, Dexterity, Constitution, Intelligence, Will, and Personality.

Ability Scores: Each Ability is expressed as a number, called the Ability Score. A high score (11 or better) means that a character excels in that area; a low score (6 or less) indicates that a character is definitely below par.

Skills: Ability Scores represent a hero's natural aptitudes, but skills tell you what your hero has been trained to do. Think of your hero's skill list as a summary of his or her education and professional training. Skills are based on your hero's Ability Scores, just as training adds to a person's natural talents. A hero's proficiency with a skill is expressed as a number, which is known as the skill score.

Actions: When a hero wants to use a skill or an Ability to accomplish something, he or she attempts an action. There are different types of actions, each involving the use of different skills and characteristics.

Dice: When the outcome of an action is in doubt, or when the Gamemaster needs to measure a character's degree of success, dice are rolled. The ALTERNITY game uses two kinds of dice: a single control die and situation dice of various sizes. The control die and a situation die are rolled together to determine the outcome of an action.

Note: The lower the roll, the better the chance that the hero succeeds in what he or she tries to do. The following section contains more information on how to use the dice.

Playing the Game

The basic rule at the foundation of the ALTERNITY game is a simple one. Your hero has some important game statistics, including Ability Scores, skill scores, and an action check score. In many cases, when your hero attempts to accomplish something, the Gamemaster asks you to roll dice. You then try to roll a number that's *equal to or less than* the appropriate score. If you roll higher than your hero's score, your hero fails. Whenever a hero tries to do something that might fail, this dice roll determines if he or she succeeds.

As you read through this section, refer to the hero templates in this chapter. You'll see how a hero's characteristics work in the context of the game system.

Rolling Dice

The ALTERNITY game system uses a set of polyhedral (many-sided) dice. The set includes four-sided, six-sided, eight-sided, twelve-sided, and twenty-sided dice. These are almost always abbreviated as d4, d6, d8, d12, and d20.

Sometimes, you may need to roll several dice and add the results together; in this case, you'll see an abbreviation such as 2d4 (roll the four-sided die twice, adding the results) or 2d6 (roll the six-sided die twice, adding the results). If you have enough dice, feel free to roll both six-siders or four-siders together.

Finally, you'll also run across die modifiers, such as d4+2 or d6-1. All you have to do here is roll the appropriate die and then modify the result by adding or subtracting the given number. For example, you're rolling d4+2 wound points because your hero shot a werewolf with a silver bullet. If you roll a 3 on the d4, the result is 5 wound points.

Skill Checks, Action Checks, and Feat Checks

In a roleplaying game, dice determine the outcome of a character action with uncertain results. In the ALTERNITY game, there are three types of common die rolls: skill checks, action checks, and ability feat checks.

Skill Checks: When your hero attempts to use a skill in play, you must roll a skill check. You'll roll a d20, and you may add or subtract a penalty or bonus die assigned by the Gamemaster. If the total on the dice is equal to or less than the appropriate skill score, your hero succeeds at the skill check.

Action Checks: During combat scenes or fast-paced challenges, it's important to know which character goes first. This is resolved by an action check. When the Gamemaster tells you to make an action check for your hero, you should roll a d20 and compare it to your hero's action check score. The lower you roll, the faster your hero acts.

Feat Checks: Sometimes you may want your hero to try something that doesn't have any real skill or training associated with it. For example, you might want your hero to pry open a crumpled car door to help an accident victim, or wriggle through a small space to escape from a pack of slavering ghouls. The Gamemaster may ask you to make a feat check using one of your hero's six Ability Scores to determine success or failure.

The Most Important Rule: Not every action requires a dice roll! Gamemasters call for rolls only in dramatic situations to determine the success of an action whose outcome is in doubt, or when they need to judge the degree of an action's success.

If your hero wants to cross a street or carry a small pack, no dice rolls are necessary. But if she wants to cross the street carrying a wounded companion, while being shot at by snipers, then the situation is dramatic, and dice should be rolled.

A pilot hero trained to fly a spacecraft and read star charts doesn't need to roll dice to perform the normal duties associated with his or her area of expertise. But when these actions go beyond the call of duty and lives hang in the balance, the Gamemaster may call for skill checks or feat checks.

Base Situation Die

Before you can slide up or down on the Situation Die Steps Scale, you need to know where to start. That starting point is called the base situation die.

- For an action check, the base situation die is +d0, or no modifier to the control die.
- For an ability check, the base situation die is +d4. Roll the d20 and add a d4, adding the results together.

The Control Die and Situation Dice

The ALTERNITY game uses two kinds of dice: a control die and a situation die. Whenever the Gamemaster calls for a roll, you roll one control die and one situation die. The sum of the die results indicates a success or a failure.

When you roll the dice, in game terms you're making a check for your hero—in effect, “checking” to see how the dice roll compares to one of your hero's scores. In any case, you're looking to get as low a result as possible—the lower the roll, the better the chance that your hero succeeds at what she is trying to do.

- The control die is always a 20-sided die (d20).
- The situation die for any particular check is one of the following: a four-sided die (d4), a six-sided die (d6), an eight-sided die (d8), a 12-sided die (d12), or a 20-sided die (d20). There is also a d0, a placeholder to represent the situation die in a case when success is determined only by the roll of the control die.

Further, the situation die on any check is either a plus die or a minus die. A plus die, such as +d4, is bad for the roller, because it tends to produce a higher result. A minus die, such as -d6, is good for the roller, because it helps to achieve a lower result.

Add or subtract the situation die from the control die as instructed by the Gamemaster. If the result is equal to or less than the score related to the hero's action, the action succeeds. If the result is greater than the score, the action fails. The degrees of success are explained on the next page.

Example: Your hero wants to make a quick repair to his motorcycle so he can stay on the trail of the fleeing criminals. Fortunately, he's carrying a small tool set in his backpack. This action is a skill check using your hero's Technical Science—*juryrig* skill score. The Gamemaster tells you to roll the control die and a -d4 (the hero has the right tools for the job, so the Gamemaster decides that the situation is moderately favorable). Your hero's *juryrig* skill score is 13.

You roll the dice, and these numbers come up: 14 on the control die, 3 on the situation die. The result is 11 (14 - 3), which is lower than your hero's *juryrig* score. The action succeeds!

- For a skill check against a specialty skill, the base situation die is +d0.
- For a skill check against a broad skill, the base situation die is +d4.

If the Gamemaster tells you to apply a bonus or a penalty to your hero's roll, start at the base situation die and move the proper number of steps in the appropriate direction to determine which situation die to roll.

SITUATION DIE STEPS SCALE

-d20	-d12	-d8	-d6	-d4	+d0	+d4	+d6	+d8	+d12	+d20	+2d20	+3d20
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BONUS

PENALTY

Situation Die Steps

The Situation Die Steps Scale can help you quickly determine what situation die to roll with the control die. It's printed on the previous page and on the hero templates that appear later.

Your Gamemaster tells you what bonus or penalty applies when you roll to see whether your hero can perform a certain action.

A +1 step situation penalty means you start with your hero's base situation die (see the sidebar on the previous page) and move one step in the "Penalty" direction to find the die you'll be rolling. For instance, if your hero's base situation die for an action is +d4, then a +1 step situation penalty changes the die to +d6.

A -2 step situation bonus means you find your hero's base situation die on the scale and move two steps in the "Bonus" direction. For example, if your hero's base situation die for an action is +d4, then a -2 step situation bonus changes the die to -d4.

Degrees of Success

Every dice roll has one of five possible results: Critical Failure, Failure, Ordinary success, Good success, or Amazing success. The lower your dice roll, the greater the degree of success your hero achieves. The three numbers associated with every skill score and action check score (the base score and two smaller numbers) represent the dividing points between the degrees of success.

Regardless of what number comes up on the situation die, a roll of 20 on the control die always produces a Critical Failure. Generally, this means that bad luck has befallen the hero, and no matter how high his or her skill score or Ability Score is, this action doesn't succeed.

A result greater than the score is a Failure; equal to or less than the score is an Ordinary success; equal to or less than the second number is a Good success; and equal to or less than the smallest number is an Amazing success. For example, if your hero has a skill score of 12/6/3, a roll of 1 to 3 is an Amazing success; a roll of 4 to 6 is a Good success; a roll of 7 to 12 is an Ordinary success; and a roll of 13 or higher is a Failure.

On the hero templates, the "Action Check Score" line begins with a number that represents a Marginal result. A hero can't get a Failure or a Critical Failure outcome when making an action check; if the dice roll yields a number greater than the action check score, the "Failure" is a Marginal result instead.

Scenes

Every adventure your Gamemaster sets up is built out of scenes. A scene is a distinct episode that has a beginning and ending. The three types of scenes are combat, encounter, and challenge. A combat scene lasts from the start of a battle to its conclusion. An encounter scene lasts from the moment characters meet to when they part company. A challenge scene lasts as long as it takes the heroes to identify the challenge, then overcome it or be defeated by it.

Action Rounds

For the purpose of determining who acts when in a scene, every scene is divided into action rounds. During an action round, every hero performs one action.

A round is divided into four phases. Each phase relates to one of the degrees of success that are achievable on an action check: Amazing, Good, Ordinary, and Marginal, in order from the first phase to the last. Heroes can attempt only one action in a round.

To determine who acts first in a round, every participant makes an action check by rolling a d20 and comparing the result to the hero's action check score. The result determines the earliest phase in which a hero can act. So, if a hero rolls a Good action check, the earliest phase he or she can act in is the second, or Good, phase.

All actions in a phase occur simultaneously, with the results of those actions being applied at the end of the phase.

Example: Your hero has an action check score of 11. At the beginning of a round, the Gamemaster calls for action checks. If you roll a 5 (a Good success for a score of 11), the earliest phase in which your hero can act is the Good phase. He can't do anything in the Amazing phase since his action check wasn't low enough, but he can take one action in the Good phase. If you roll a 13 (a Marginal result), your hero can't act until the Marginal phase (the last phase of the round).

Damage

Heroes lead dangerous lives. Eventually, your hero will suffer damage. As indicated on the hero templates, damage comes in three forms: stun, wound, and mortal.

Stun Damage

Stun damage is the lightest type of damage your hero can sustain. It represents shocks and bruises that rattle a hero but don't result in lasting injuries. When your hero suffers stun damage, mark off one stun box for each point of stun damage she sustains.

Knockout: When all of her stun boxes are marked, your hero is knocked out and can perform no actions until she recovers.

Wound Damage

Wound damage is more serious than stun damage. It represents injuries that cause lasting harm to the body. When your hero receives wound damage, mark off one wound box for each point of wound damage he sustains.

Secondary Damage: Wound damage causes secondary stun damage. For every 2 points of wound damage inflicted on your hero, he also receives 1 point of stun damage.

Knockout: When all of his wound boxes are marked, your hero is knocked out and can perform no actions until he recovers.

Mortal Damage

Mortal damage is the most severe form of damage. It represents massive injuries to vital body parts. When your hero receives mortal damage, mark off one mortal box for each point of mortal damage she sustains.

Secondary Damage: Mortal damage causes secondary stun damage and wound damage. For every 2 points of mortal damage inflicted on your hero, she also receives 1 point of wound and 1 point of stun damage.

Dazed: Mortal damage takes a toll on a hero immediately. For every mortal box marked, your hero receives a +1 step situation penalty to any actions she attempts.

Death: When all of your hero's mortal boxes are marked off, she dies. Don't worry; you can always make up another hero and rejoin the adventure when the Gamemaster deems it appropriate.

Recovery

How heroes recover from damage depends on their condition (conscious or not) and the type of damage they have suffered.

Stun Damage: Stun damage is fleeting and disappears at the end of a scene. It can be repaired during a scene by the use of Knowledge—*first aid*, Medical Science, or some other form of medical treatment.

Wound Damage: Wound damage remains until it is healed by rest and/or medical attention.

Mortal Damage: Mortal damage requires the use of the Medical Science—*surgery* skill and medical attention to repair.

Knockout: Assume that if a hero is knocked out from stun damage, she remains unconscious for the rest of the round in which she was knocked out and all of the following round. At the start of the round after that, she recovers 1 stun point and awakens. If a hero is knocked out from wound damage, she can't awaken until at least 1 point of her wound damage is healed through medical attention.

The Hero Templates

Take a look at the hero templates. The compilation of numbers and game terms on these one-page descriptions makes up a hero template. All the information that you need to know about the hero to play the ALTERNITY game is listed here.

The ALTERNITY *Player's Handbook* contains extensive rules for creating your own hero from scratch. We've taken the liberty of creating six characters for you. All you have to do is pick one that you'd like to play in the game.

Flip back and forth between the hero templates and this section as we explain what these terms and numbers mean.

1 Name and Gender

We've come up with names, genders, and personality notes for each hero in the template section. You don't have to use any of this material if you don't want to. Feel free to think up a new name for the hero you want to play, change the gender indicated on the sheet, or play the hero with a different personality than the one suggested on the template.

2 Profession

Four distinct hero professions are available in these fast-play rules.

- **Combat Specs** (short for specialists) are gunmen, brawlers, martial artists, and soldiers who rely on physical power and endurance to supplement their training in the tactics and techniques of battle.

- **Diplomats** are negotiators, managers, deal-makers, merchants, clergy, and any others who use interaction skills and personal resolve to accomplish their jobs.
- **Free Agents** are troubleshooters and field operatives who rely on agility, interaction skills, and natural independence to get a job done. They're agents who might be for hire, or they might have ties to a specific government or organization.
- **Tech Ops** (technical operatives) are skilled in the use of particular equipment or have been specially trained to create or maintain high-tech equipment. They rely on natural genius, agility, and expert training to accomplish their goals.

Pick a profession that fits the kind of hero you want to play, then select one of the corresponding fast-play hero templates.

3 Career

The career entry on the hero template is a description of what kind of professional the hero is. During hero creation, the career guides your selection of skills appropriate to your hero. In these fast-play rules, the entry is nothing more than a tagline to identify what your hero does for a living.

4 Abilities

The six Ability Scores rate your hero's natural aptitude or capability for meeting physical and mental challenges. These scores range from 4 to 14; 10 represents the average for a hero.

- **Strength** (STR) defines a hero's physical power and prowess. Donna Truitt, one of the hero templates, has a Strength score of 9, which is slightly below average for a hero.
- **Dexterity** (DEX) measures the quality of a hero's agility, coordination, and reflexes. Donna's Dexterity is 12, so she's significantly more agile than the average hero.
- **Constitution** (CON) describes a hero's overall physical fitness and toughness. Donna's Constitution is only 8, which is lower than that of an average hero, so she's not very tough.
- **Intelligence** (INT) indicates a hero's mental quickness and learning ability. Donna's Intelligence of 12 means that she's pretty sharp.
- **Will** (WIL) gauges a hero's mental fortitude and intuitive capacity. With a Will of 9, Donna's slightly less strong-willed than an average hero.
- **Personality** (PER) indicates a hero's social abilities and charisma. Donna's average here, with a Personality of 10.

Untrained: The "Untrained" score is equal to one-half of the full Ability Score, rounded down. This is your hero's skill score when she attempts an action that requires a skill she doesn't possess. For example, Dr. Akens doesn't have the Unarmed Attack skill, which is based on Strength. If Dr. Akens tries to throw a punch, his skill score is half his Strength score—4, in this case.

Resistance Modifiers: Resistance modifiers affect the type of dice your hero's opponents roll when confronting your hero. Positive modifiers (such as a +1 step penalty) are good for your hero, because they provide a penalty to the opponent; a negative modifier (such as a -1 step bonus) is bad, because it makes

it easier for your hero's opponent to succeed. These modifiers apply when the opponent is using a skill that your hero could resist because of her natural aptitude in one particular ability score. Refer back to "Situation Die Steps" in the previous section.

Example: A hero with a Dexterity score of 11 has a +1 step resistance modifier for that Ability. If an opponent fires a pistol at her, that +1 step is applied as a penalty to the opponent's chance of successfully hitting his target.

5 Action Check

The *action check* is a game tool for determining when your hero gets to go in the course of an action round. See the section called "Skill Checks, Action Checks, and Feat Checks," above.

6 Durability

The "Durability" section of each hero template provides a means for keeping track of any damage your hero might sustain over the course of an adventure. Your hero's stun and wound ratings equal his Constitution score. Your hero's mortal rating equals one-half this score, rounded up.

As your hero suffers damage during an adventure, mark off open boxes to keep track of how much damage he has sustained and how much more he can afford to take.

7 Skills

Each hero template has a selection of skills printed on it. There are two kinds of skills: broad skills and specialty skills. Specialty skills are printed in *italic* type to differentiate them from broad skills. Think of a broad skill as general training in a particular field (medical school). A specialty skill, on the other hand, represents a particular task or focus (surgery or internal medicine).

A character must possess a broad skill to learn a specialty skill associated with it.

Rank: Rank is the amount of advanced training the hero has in a particular specialty skill. If a hero possesses a specialty skill, she automatically has a rank of at least 1 in that skill, but some heroes might have 2 or even 3 ranks in skills they're very good at. Broad skills don't have ranks, since they represent more general education and training.

Skill Descriptions

This fast-play chapter doesn't have enough space to contain details of what a particular skill enables a hero to do. Those details are provided in the *ALTERNITY Player's Handbook*. However, for the purpose of learning how the game system works (and for putting heroes through the fast-play adventure), complete skill descriptions aren't necessary. You and your Gamemaster should have little trouble determining when a certain skill comes into play.

In most cases, the name of a skill is a pretty strong clue to how the skill can be used. For example, a hero with the Manipulation broad skill is talented at performing actions that require a high degree of eye-hand coordination, such as picking a lock.

Skill Score: The skill score is the total of a character's natural aptitude—her Ability score—and any special training she possesses in a particular skill—her skill rank. Broad skills have scores equal to their associated Abilities, since they don't add ranks. The higher the skill score, the more likely it is the hero will succeed when she attempts to use that skill.

All skill scores are presented with the full score, half that score, and one-quarter that score. This represents the numbers needed to achieve an Ordinary, Good, or Amazing success when the Gamemaster asks you to make a skill check for your hero.

If a hero wants to try something but doesn't have the proper skill, she must use her untrained score for the associated Ability.

8 Combat Information and Equipment

Each hero template includes a selection of equipment the hero has access to—weapons, tools, body armor, and other gear.

The numbers identifying a weapon indicate how much damage the weapon inflicts on an Ordinary, Good, or Amazing success. This damage is either stun (s), wound (w), or mortal (m) damage.

On the next line, "Range" gives the distance at which a weapon can strike a target, either "Personal" if physical contact is necessary, or a series of numbers representing short/medium/long range (in meters) for a gun.

"Type" refers to the kind of damage a weapon inflicts, either low impact (LI), high impact (HI), or energy (En). Fists, knives, clubs, and other muscle-powered weapons are low impact; firearms are high impact; and energy weapons discharge electricity or some other form of energy.

For armor, the die ranges preceding "LI," "HI," and "En" indicate the amount of damage the armor stops when the wearer is hit by a weapon that does this type of damage. If a subtraction from a die roll produces a result less than 1, the armor failed to block any damage on that attack.

Ready to Go?

Now that you understand the basic structure of the *ALTERNITY* game, you're ready to send your hero into action.

You'll probably play through the adventure presented in the Gamemaster's section of these fast-play rules, but if your Gamemaster has experience in designing original adventures, she may have something else planned for you and your companions.

What Do I Do First?

If you're new to roleplaying games, you might be wondering how things get started. Basically, it's pretty simple: After you've created a hero and gotten together with the rest of your group for your first adventure, your Gamemaster presents a situation—maybe something like this:

You're viewing an exhibit in a museum when a man you've never seen before staggers through the entryway. He stumbles around the room until he reaches you. "Help me, please. You can't let them get this," he whispers, pressing some kind of amulet or pendant into your hand—then he collapses to the floor, a knife sticking out of his back.

In the hallway outside, you can hear running footsteps, and the click of someone pulling back the action of a gun . . .

After the Gamemaster sets the scene, she asks, "What do you want to do?" In game terms, doing something is known as taking an action. You might know right away what your hero's action will be, but don't just call out an answer. Wait for the Gamemaster to say it's your turn.

What can heroes do? Almost anything! A hero can say something, move, use a skill, use a piece of equipment, look for clues, duck beneath a table, or anything else you can think of.

After all the heroes have performed their actions and the Gamemaster has had the members of the supporting cast take their actions, the process starts again. Now the situation is different from what it was when the scene opened, and the next actions the heroes attempt might also be different.

So You Want to Be the Gamemaster?

This section of the fast-play rules provides an overview of the Gamemaster's role in an *ALTERNITY* game. It contains a short *DARK•MATTER* adventure that you can use to introduce your players to the game and familiarize yourself with the art of presenting and moderating a roleplaying game.

The Role of the Gamemaster

As the Gamemaster, you have a number of jobs to handle during and between game sessions. Unlike other types of games that have strict rules and deal with limited situations, a roleplaying game such as the *DARK•MATTER* setting is as wide open as the players' imaginations. For this reason, the presence of a game moderator to act as referee, story designer, and narrator is essential.

The players interact with each other and the game environment through the actions of their characters, the heroes. The Gamemaster describes each scene, directs the action, and plays the roles of the supporting cast members—villains, allies, and extras who inhabit the campaign world.

However, the Gamemaster isn't competing against the players. When the Gamemaster and the players get together to tell a fun and exciting group story, everybody wins. That's the power and appeal of a roleplaying game.

Key Concepts

Let's take a look at some of the key concepts behind moderating the *ALTERNITY* game. Some of these terms have also been defined earlier, but they're repeated here for the sake of completeness within the Gamemaster section.

Gamemaster: The participant in the game who acts as the moderator, narrating adventures and controlling characters who are involved in the story but aren't directly controlled by players.

Hero: An imaginary character controlled by a player.

Supporting Cast: The other characters who appear in every story: friends, enemies, and incidental characters with whom the heroes interact. The Gamemaster controls members of the supporting cast.

Setting: The imaginary context and environment within

which the heroes operate. The *DARK•MATTER* game is set in a world very much like our own, except that the broad spectrum of paranormal and occult phenomena is frighteningly real—to those who know what to look for.

Adventure: A scenario in which the heroes interact to create a group story. As Gamemaster, you present an opening situation or scene (called the "trigger"). The rest of the adventure unfolds through the actions of the heroes (as dictated by their players) and the moderation of the Gamemaster (through story events and the supporting cast).

Campaign: A continuing series of adventures that takes place in a single setting and focuses on the same group of heroes. A campaign can be finite, ending after as many adventures as necessary to tell the complete story; or it can be an ongoing tale, progressing like a television or comic book series.

Group Story: While a regular story, such as found in a movie or a book, features a set beginning, middle, and ending, a group story is more dynamic. The Gamemaster has an outline that provides a series of encounters and events, and a few possible ways the adventure could end. The dynamic comes from the group—the players and Gamemaster—who determine the course of the story and its outcome through the interaction of their imaginary characters. In a group story, no one—not even the Gamemaster—knows exactly how it all will end.

Game Session: One distinct period of game play; a time when you gather your friends to play the *ALTERNITY* game. Some adventures can be completed in a single session; others might require several sessions to reach a conclusion.

Using the Game Mechanic

The *ALTERNITY* game is built around a core mechanic that has nearly universal application. All heroic actions in the game are resolved by rolling just two dice: a control die and a situation die. A control die is always a d20; a situation die can be a d4, d6, d8, d12, or d20. Depending on how hard or easy a particular task is, the result of the situation die is added to or subtracted from the result of the control die, as detailed in the player's fast-play rules.

You can use the dice in varying ways, though the mechanic is always the same: Roll two dice, trying to achieve a number that's equal to or less than a character's appropriate score. If the task is associated with a skill, then the skill score is used. If it's a feat check, then the associated Ability Score is used. In all uses of dice during a game session—except when rolling for damage—low results are better than high ones.

Use the mechanic to determine the success of an attack, using an appropriate combat skill; to overcome a challenge, using a physical or mental skill; or to determine the outcome of an encounter, using a Personality skill in conjunction with good roleplaying.

The Most Important Rule

Not every action requires a dice roll. When the heroes attempt normal, everyday tasks, they should accomplish them without consulting the dice. In heroic situations, when the outcome is in doubt and the result could mean life or death, then have the players roll dice.

Name: Jane McDermott

Profession: Combat Specialist
 Career: Law Enforcer (state trooper)

Ability Scores

Ability	Score	Untrained	Resistance
Strength	11	5	+1 step
Dexterity	10	5	
Constitution	9	4	
Intelligence	9	4	
Will	12	6	+1 step
Personality	9	4	

Action Check Score: 13+ / 12/6/3

1-3 Amazing	7-12 Ordinary
4-6 Good	13+ Marginal

Durability

Stun 9	○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○
Wound 9	○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○
Mortal 5	○ ○ ○ ○ ○

Skills

Skill	Rank	Ability	O/G/A
Athletics*	—	STR	11/5/2
Climb	1	STR	12/6/3
Unarmed Attack*	—	STR	11/5/2
Power martial arts	1	STR	12/6/3
Ranged Weapons*	—	DEX	10/5/2
Pistol	2	DEX	12/6/3
Rifle	1	DEX	11/5/2
Vehicle Operation*	—	DEX	10/5/2
Land (car)	1	DEX	11/5/2
Stamina*	—	CON	9/4/2
Endurance	1	CON	10/5/2
Knowledge*	—	INT	9/4/2
First aid	1	INT	10/5/2
Law*	—	INT	9/4/2
Enforcement	1	INT	10/5/2
Awareness*	—	WIL	12/6/3
Perception	1	WIL	13/6/3
Interaction*	—	PER	9/4/2
Intimidate	1	PER	10/5/2

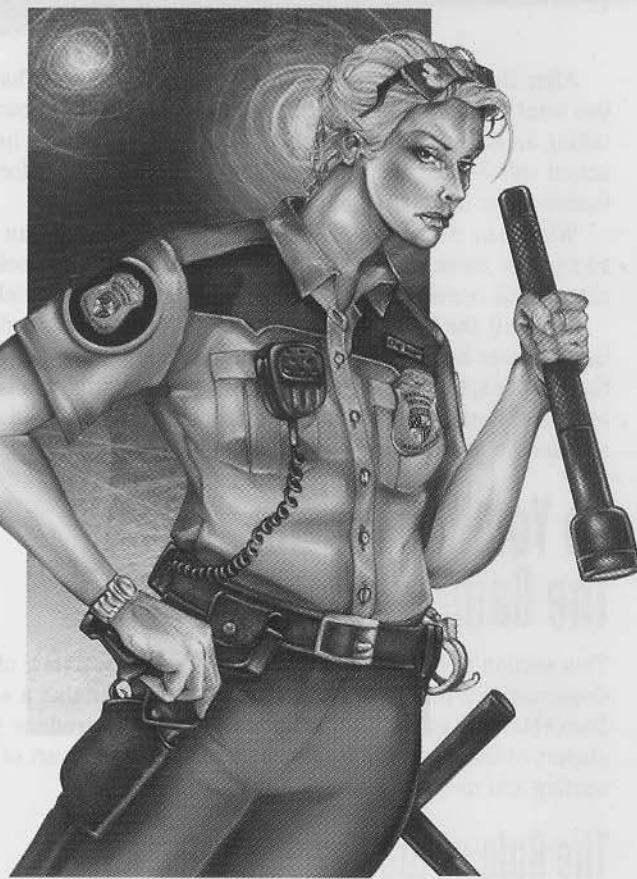
*Broad skill checks carry a +1 step penalty.

Combat Information

Weapon	Score	Range (S/M/L)*	Damage (O/G/A)	Type
Martial arts	12/6/3	Personal	d6+1s/d6+3s/d4+1w	LI
9mm pistol	12/6/3	6/12/50 m	d4+1w/d4+2w/d4m	HI
Shotgun**	11/5/2	6/12/30 m	d4w/d6w/d4m	HI

*Attacks at medium range suffer a +1 step penalty; attacks at long range suffer a +2 step penalty.

**The shotgun inflicts double damage at short range and half damage at long range.



Armor

Kevlar vest d6-3 (LI) d6-2 (HI) d4-2 (En)

Equipment

Kevlar vest*, 9mm pistol with 15 rounds, flashlight, handcuffs (two sets), personal radio, police cruiser with 12 gauge shotgun* and 20 shells*, police radio, toolkit.

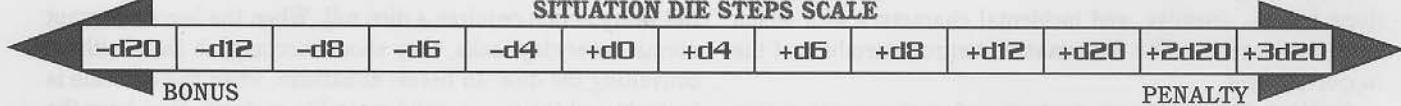
*The vest is stored in the trunk of her car and can be worn under her uniform. The shotgun and ammunition are also in the trunk.

Background and Personality

Jane McDermott grew up in Boise, Idaho. After attending a local community college for two years, she took the Idaho State Trooper exam and passed with flying colors. She's been out of the academy for about a year and a half now, which is long enough that her peers don't call her "rookie" anymore unless they're trying to get under her skin. In fact, her fellow officers made a point of giving her a necklace with a silver bullet on it to commemorate the time she saved a man from a rabid coyote that attacked him while he was changing his tire on the roadside.

Officer McDermott is tall and athletic. She has always enjoyed physical challenges, and she spends a lot of her off-duty time rock climbing and working on her tae kwon do. She's very stubborn and self-reliant, and strongly inclined to handle situations by herself instead of calling in help if it's at all possible. That might get her into trouble someday. . .

SITUATION DIE STEPS SCALE



Name: Will Wheeler

Profession: Combat Specialist
Career: Militiaman

Ability Scores

Ability	Score	Untrained	Resistance
Strength	12	6	+1 step
Dexterity	11	5	+1 step
Constitution	12	6	
Intelligence	10	5	
Will	8	4	
Personality	7	3	

Action Check Score: 14+/13/6/3

1-3 Amazing 7-13 Ordinary
4-6 Good 14+ Marginal

Durability

Stun 12	○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○
Wound 12	○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○
Mortal 6	○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○

Skills

Skill	Rank	Ability	O/G/A
Athletics*	—	STR	12/6/3
<i>Climb</i>	1	STR	13/6/3
<i>Jump</i>	1	STR	13/6/3
<i>Throw</i>	1	STR	13/6/3
Unarmed Attack*	—	STR	12/6/3
Ranged Weapons*	—	DEX	11/5/2
<i>Pistol</i>	1	DEX	12/6/3
<i>Rifle</i>	2	DEX	13/6/3
Stealth*	—	DEX	11/5/2
<i>Sneak</i>	1	DEX	12/6/3
Vehicle Operation*	—	DEX	11/5/2
Stamina*	—	CON	12/6/3
<i>Endurance</i>	1	CON	13/6/3
Survival*	—	CON	12/6/3
<i>Mountain</i>	1	CON	13/6/3
<i>Winter</i>	1	CON	13/6/3
Knowledge*	—	INT	10/5/2
<i>First aid</i>	1	INT	11/5/2
Animal Handling*	—	WIL	8/4/2
<i>Horse riding</i>	1	WIL	9/4/2
Awareness*	—	WIL	8/4/2
Interaction*	—	PER	7/3/1

^{*}Broad skill checks carry a +1 step penalty.

Combat Information

Combat Information		Range (S/M/L)*	Damage (O/G/A)	Type
Weapon	Score			
Unarmed	12/6/3	Personal	d4+1s/d4+2s/d4+3s	LI
.38 pistol	12/6/3	6/12/40	d4w/d4+1w/d4m	HI
Assault rifle**	13/6/3	60/120/300	d4+2w/d6+3w/d4+1m	HI



*Attacks at medium range suffer a +1 step penalty; attacks at long range suffer a +2 step penalty.

**The assault rifle can be fired in full automatic mode. This lets you roll three attacks instead of one, at a +1, +2, and +3 step penalty.

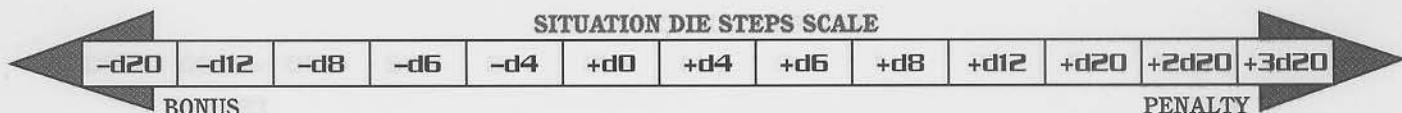
Equipment

Lighter and pack of cigarettes; .38 caliber pistol with 6 rounds, carried in an ankle holster; assault rifle with 30 rounds, in lockbox in the truck; beat-up 4WD Suburban with police band radio and CB radio; 500 antigovernment pamphlets, in truck.

Background and Personality

Will Wheeler is a native of Moscow, Idaho. He joined the Army right out of high school and served for a four-year enlistment before coming back home to work on his father's ranch. When the ranch failed and tax collectors confiscated his family's land, Will decided that he didn't need to support the government with his tax dollars anymore. He's drifted through a couple of militia groups and is currently living in an isolated "free haven" run by a group calling itself the Liberty Church. Will's also a little bit wanted by the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, and Firearms, but they haven't posted an APB on him yet.

Will is a short, broad-shouldered man built like a baby bull. He dresses in camo pants, Army boots, and T-shirts, and he wears his hair shoulder-length. He's paranoid and angry, and he's got a lot of guns. But he honestly believes that America could be a better place, and he's willing to do anything to make it all happen.



Name: Dr. Nadine Neary

Profession: Tech Op
Career: Doctor

Ability Scores

Ability	Score	Untrained	Resistance
Strength	7	3	
Dexterity	11	5	+1 step
Constitution	8	4	
Intelligence	13	6	+2 steps
Will	10	5	
Personality	11	5	

Action Check Score: 14+ /13/6/3

1-3	Amazing	7-13	Ordinary
4-6	Good	14+	Marginal

Durability

Stun 8	○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○
Wound 8	○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○
Mortal 4	○ ○ ○ ○

Skills

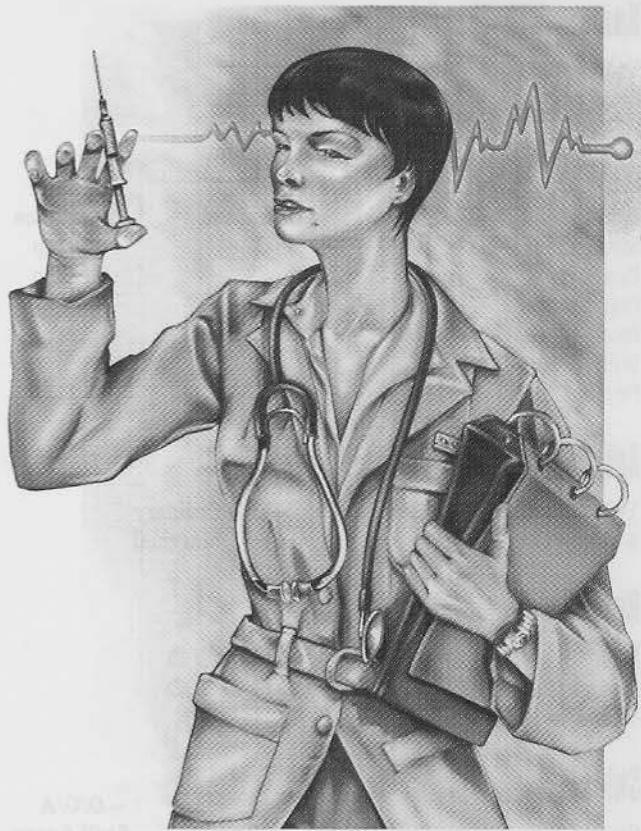
Skill	Rank	Ability	O/G/A	Skill Score
Athletics*	—	STR	7/3/1	
Acrobatics*	—	DEX	11/5/2	
<i>Defensive martial arts</i>	1	DEX	12/6/3	
<i>Tumbling</i>	1	DEX	12/6/3	
Vehicle Operation*	—	DEX	11/5/2	
Knowledge*	—	INT	13/6/3	
<i>Computer operation</i>	2	INT	15/7/3	
<i>Deduce</i>	1	INT	14/7/3	
Life Science	—	INT	13/6/3	
<i>Biology</i>	2	INT	15/7/3	
Medical Science*	—	INT	13/6/3	
<i>Forensics</i>	2	INT	15/7/3	
<i>Medical Knowledge</i>	3	INT	16/8/4	
<i>Surgery</i>	1	INT	14/7/3	
<i>Treatment</i>	3	INT	16/8/4	
Awareness*	—	WIL	10/5/2	
Interaction*	—	PER	11/5/2	
<i>Charm</i>	1	PER	12/6/3	

*Broad skill checks carry a +1 step penalty.

Combat Information

Weapon	Score	Range (S/M/L)	Damage (O/G/A)	Type
Martial arts	12/6/3	Personal	d4s/d4+1s/d4+2s	LI
Gun*	5/2/1	by weapon	by weapon	HI

*Dr. Neary does not have any skill with firearms and doesn't carry a gun. If she picks up a gun and tries to use it, she must make an untrained Ranged Weapons skill check to attack with the weapon.



Equipment

Doctor's bag, personal alarm in purse, beeper, late-model Volvo with cell phone, luggage, road survival kit including 6 road flares, 4 hazard markers, a space blanket, and a gallon of antifreeze.

Doctor's Bag

Dr. Neary can use her training and the supplies in her doctor's bag to help injured characters. She can make Medical Science-treatment skill checks to do the following (with a -1 step bonus because of her *medical knowledge* skill):

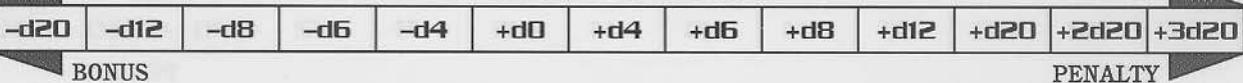
- Revive a knocked-out character.
- Heal 2, 3, or 4 wound points with an Ordinary, Good, or Amazing success on her skill check.
- Stabilize a character with mortal damage.

Background and Personality

Dr. Neary lives in Rochester, Minnesota, where she works at the Mayo Clinic. Her specialty is infectious diseases, and she often consults with the CDC—the Centers for Disease Control. She grew up in Iowa and attended Iowa State on a gymnastics scholarship before she went to medical school; she's still in good shape, and she likes to exercise to get her mind off her work. She is currently headed for Seattle, where she is scheduled to speak at a microbiology conference.

Nadine Neary is a small, slender woman with short-cropped hair and a friendly, open manner. She has a knack for putting people at ease.

SITUATION DIE STEPS SCALE



Name: Donna Truitt

Profession: Free Agent
Career: Thief

Ability Scores

Ability	Score	Untrained	Resistance
Strength	9	4	
Dexterity	12	6	+1 step
Constitution	8	4	
Intelligence	12	6	+1 step
Will	9	3	
Personality	10	5	

Action Check Score: 15+ / 14/7/3

1-3	Amazing	8-14	Ordinary
4-7	Good	15+	Marginal

Durability

Stun 8	○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○
Wound 8	○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○
Mortal 4	○ ○ ○ ○

Skills

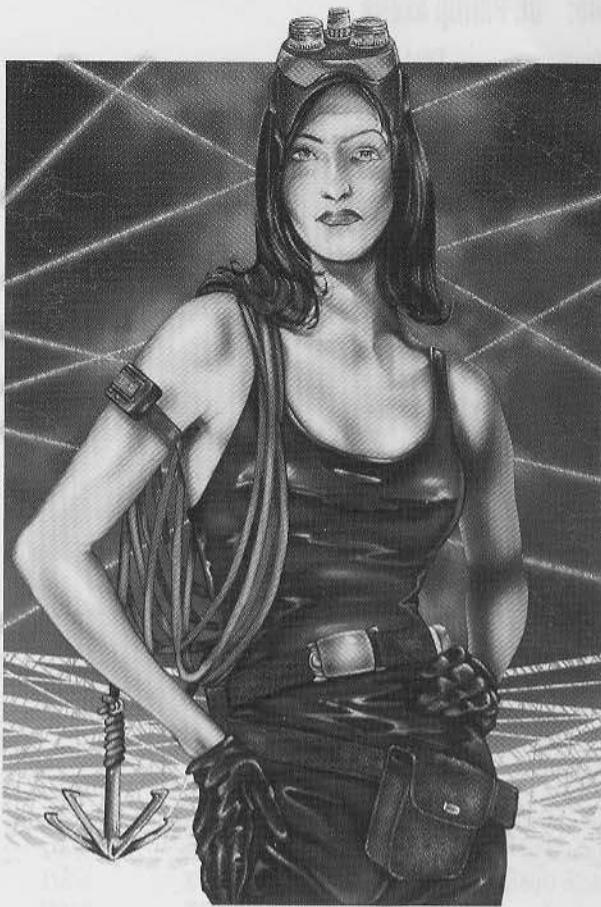
Skill	Rank	Ability	O/G/A	Skill Score
Athletics*	—	STR	9/4/2	
Climb	1	STR	10/5/2	
Jump	2	STR	11/5/2	
Acrobatics*	—	DEX	12/6/3	
Defensive martial arts	1	DEX	13/6/3	
Dodge	2	DEX	14/7/3	
Manipulation*	—	DEX	12/6/3	
Lockpick	1	DEX	13/6/3	
Ranged Weapons*	—	DEX	12/6/3	
Stealth*	—	DEX	12/6/3	
Sneak	1	DEX	13/6/3	
Vehicle Operation*	—	DEX	12/6/3	
Stamina*	—	CON	8/4/2	
Knowledge*	—	INT	12/6/3	
Security*	—	INT	12/6/3	
Devices	1	INT	13/6/3	
Awareness*	—	WIL	9/4/2	
Deception*	—	PER	10/5/2	
Bluff	1	PER	11/5/2	
Bribe	1	PER	11/5/2	
Interaction*	—	PER	10/5/2	

*Broad skill checks carry a +1 step penalty.

Combat Information

Weapon	Score	Range (S/M/L)*	Damage (O/G/A)	Type
Martial arts	13/6/3	Personal	d4s/d4+1s/d4+2s	LI
.32 revolver	12/6/3	4/8/30	d4w/d6w/d4m	HI

*Attacks at medium range suffer a +1 step penalty; attacks at long range suffer a +2 step penalty.



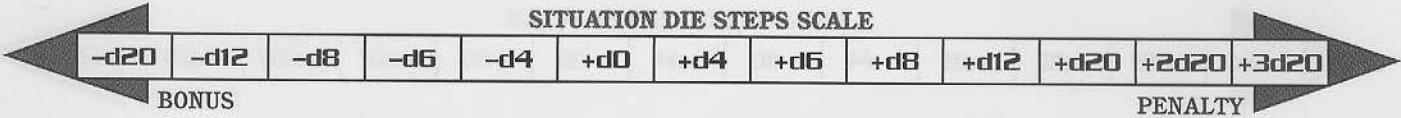
Equipment

Break-in bag with lockpicks, grapnel pistol (30 meters of nylon rope), night-vision goggles, magnetic card for door locks, black jumpsuit, .32 caliber revolver with 5 rounds in purse, cell phone, 2001 Chevrolet Corvette (fire engine red).

Background and Personality

Donna Truitt is a professional burglar. She specializes in corporate espionage and similar high-security break-ins, stealing research data, account information, and similar materials on a contract basis. She was recruited and trained by the CIA out of college, but she left the Agency several years ago to pursue a freelance career. While she's capable of defending herself if discovered, Donna is very careful to avoid hurting people; she even refuses to work for people who might use the material she recovers to harm innocent people. Donna currently resides in Seattle, since many of her jobs take her to various high-tech corridors around the Pacific Rim.

Donna is a physically fit woman with long, dark hair and a disarming smile. She's very cynical and suspicious of people representing business or government interests. She usually tells people that she works as a security consultant.



Name: Dr. Phillip Akens

Profession: Diplomat
 Career: Parapsychologist

Ability Scores

Ability	Score	Untrained	Resistance
Strength	9	4	
Dexterity	6	3	-1 step
Constitution	8	4	
Intelligence	14	7	+2 steps
Will	12	6	+1 step
Personality	11	5	

Action Check Score: 12 + / 11 / 5 / 2

1-2	Amazing	6-11	Ordinary
4-5	Good	12+	Marginal

Durability

Stun 8	○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○
Wound 8	○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○
Mortal 4	○ ○ ○ ○

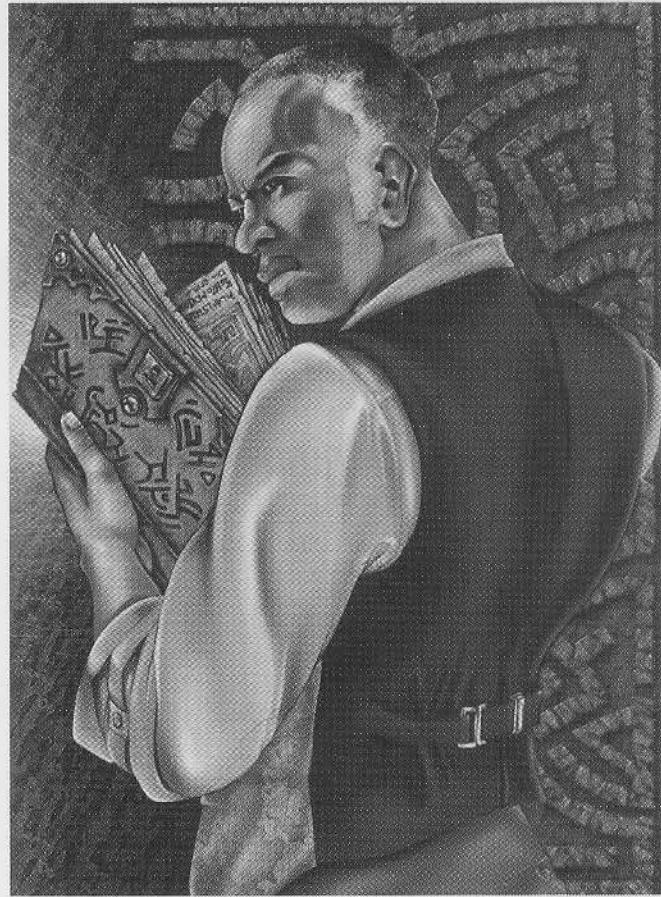
Skills

Skill	Rank	Ability	Skill Score	O/G/A
Athletics*	—	STR	9/4/2	
Vehicle Operation*	—	DEX	6/3/1	
Stamina*	—	CON	8/4/2	
Knowledge*	—	INT	14/7/3	
Computer operation	1	INT	15/7/3	
First aid	1	INT	15/7/3	
Language (Greek)	2	INT	16/8/4	
Language (Latin)	2	INT	16/8/4	
Parapsychology	3	INT	17/8/4	
Social Science*	—	INT	14/7/3	
Anthropology	2	INT	16/8/4	
History	2	INT	16/8/4	
Linguistics	2	INT	16/8/4	
Awareness*	—	WIL	12/6/3	
Perception	1	WIL	13/6/3	
Investigate*	—	WIL	12/6/3	
Research	2	WIL	14/7/3	
Search	2	WIL	14/7/3	
Lore*	—	WIL	12/6/3	
Occult lore	1	WIL	13/6/3	
Psychic lore	1	WIL	13/6/3	
Interaction*	—	PER	11/5/2	
Interview	1	PER	12/6/3	

*Broad skill checks carry a +1 step penalty.

Combat Information

Weapon	Score	Range (S/M/L)	Damage (O/G/A)	Type
Unarmed	4/2/1	Personal	d4s/d4+1s/d4+2s	LI
Gun*	3/1/-	by weapon	by weapon	HI



*Dr. Akens does not have any skill with firearms and doesn't carry a gun. If he picks up a gun and tries to use it, he must make an untrained Ranged Weapons skill check to attack with the weapon.

Equipment

Tape recorder; camera; specimen collection kit; laptop computer with cellular modem, database of paranormal activity patterns; blessed silver crucifix; luggage; VW Microbus with 150,000 miles on it.

Background and Personality

Dr. Akens has been studying paranormal activity for more than twenty years. He started out by investigating alleged haunted houses and psychic phenomena as a graduate student, and he's become one of the foremost experts on ghosts, hauntings, and occult traditions in the Midwest. Most academics don't take him seriously, of course, but Dr. Akens is one of the more reputable specialists in his field. He teaches anthropology and linguistics at Marquette University in Milwaukee to maintain some credibility with the college administration and to fund his occult investigations.

Dr. Akens is a tall, dignified man forty years of age, with a thoughtful manner and a deep, pleasant voice. He always takes people at their word and assumes that they're telling the truth about their experiences until hard evidence proves otherwise.

Dr. Akens is currently traveling to Portland to investigate a reported haunting. He's accompanied by Doug Nichols, a photo-journalist.

SITUATION DIE STEPS SCALE

-d20	-d12	-d8	-d6	-d4	+d0	+d4	+d6	+d8	+d12	+d20	+2d20	+3d20
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BONUS

PENALTY

Name: Doug Nichols

Profession: Free Agent
Career: Photojournalist

Ability Scores

Ability	Score	Untrained	Resistance
Strength	10	5	
Dexterity	11	5	+1 step
Constitution	10	5	
Intelligence	9	4	
Will	11	5	+1 step
Personality	9	4	

Action Check Score: 13+ /12/6/3

1-3 Amazing 7-12 Ordinary
4-6 Good 13+ Marginal

Durability

Stun 10	○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○
Wound 10	○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○
Mortal 5	○ ○ ○ ○ ○

Skills

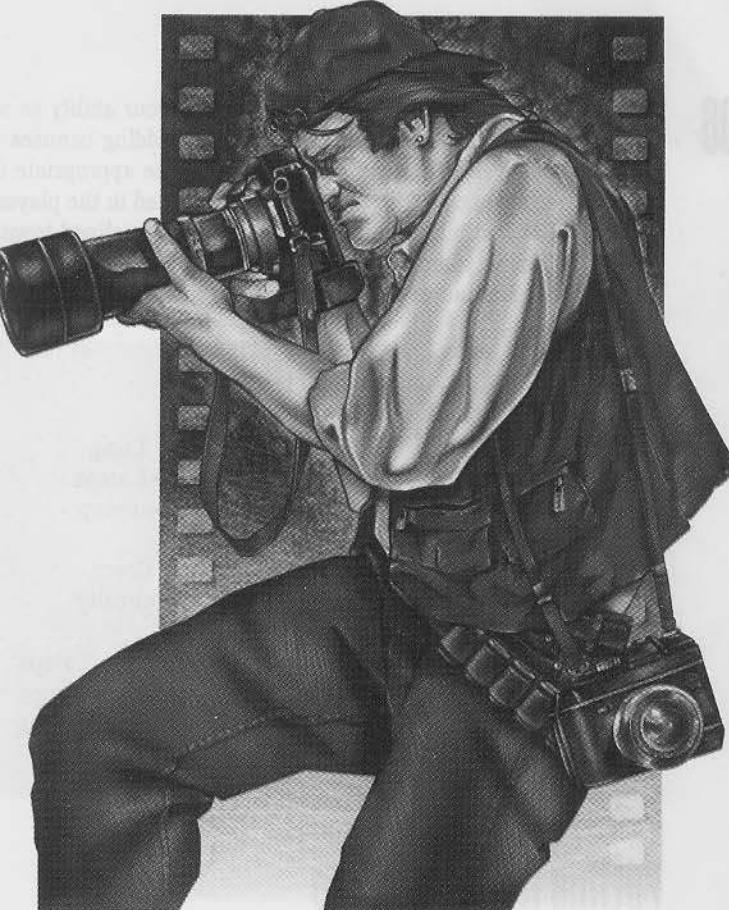
Skill	Rank	Ability	O/G/A	Skill Score
Athletics*	—	STR	10/5/2	
Climb	1	STR	11/5/2	
Ski	1	STR	11/5/2	
Unarmed Attack*	—	STR	10/5/2	
Brawl	1	STR	11/5/2	
Stealth*	—	DEX	11/5/2	
Shadow	1	DEX	12/6/3	
Vehicle Operation*	—	DEX	11/5/2	
Movement*	—	CON	10/5/2	
Trailblazing	1	CON	11/5/2	
Stamina*	—	CON	10/5/2	
Endurance	1	CON	11/5/2	
Knowledge*	—	INT	9/4/2	
Awareness*	—	WIL	11/5/2	
Intuition	1	WIL	12/6/3	
Creativity*	—	WIL	11/5/2	
Photography	2	WIL	13/6/3	
Investigate	—	WIL	11/5/2	
Search	1	WIL	12/6/3	
Interaction*	—	PER	9/4/2	

* Broad skills have a base situation die of +d4.

Combat Information

Weapon	Score	Range (S/M/L)	Damage (O/G/A)	Type
Unarmed	11/5/2	Personal	d4s/d4+1s/d4+2s	LI
Gun*	5/2/1	by weapon	by weapon	HI

*Nichols does not have any skill with firearms and doesn't carry a gun. If he picks up a gun and tries to use it, he must make an untrained Ranged Weapons skill check to attack with the weapon.



Equipment

Professional-grade camcorder; tripod; still camera; tape recorder; laptop computer with video editing software; cellular phone; luggage.

Background and Personality

Ever since he was a kid, Doug Nichols has loved cameras and journalism. He worked on his school paper, served a tour in the Navy as a journalism specialist, and started freelancing as a photographer as soon as he got out of the service. He's been all over the world, specializing in archaeology shoots and nature documentaries. Documentary work pays the bills, but Nichols has another hobby—ghost-hunting. When he can find the time, he tries his hand at paranormal investigation, hoping to catch an image of something that's never been photographed before.

Nichols is a rangy, big-boned man in his late twenties. He has a laid-back manner, and he enjoys outdoor sports of all kinds. He's currently traveling with Dr. Phillip Akens, a paranormal investigator who intends to check out a reported haunting in Portland. But after that, Nichols hopes to get in some mountaineering, extreme skiing, and hiking around the southern Cascades before heading home.

SITUATION DIE STEPS SCALE

-d20	-d12	-d8	-d6	-d4	+d0	+d4	+d6	+d8	+d12	+d20	+2d20	+3d20
BONUS											PENALTY	

Situation Die Steps

The best tool you have as the Gamemaster is your ability to set the odds of any given task. You can do this by adding bonuses or penalties for given situations and counting in the appropriate direction on the Situation Die Steps Scale (presented in the player's section of the fast-play rules). Or, if you're more inclined toward quick resolutions, simply eyeball it by selecting the modifier that matches how difficult or easy you want the task to be.

Examples of Situation Modifiers

Weapon Range	Short	Medium	Long
Pistol	None	+1 step	+2 steps
Rifle	None	None	+1 step
Target has Cover			
Light Cover	Medium Cover	Heavy Cover	
+1 step penalty	+2 step penalty	+3 step penalty	
Situation			
Amazing difficulty	+3 steps	Amazing ease	-3 steps
Good difficulty	+2 steps	Good ease	-2 steps
Ordinary difficulty	+1 steps	Ordinary ease	-1 steps
Marginal difficulty	None	Marginal ease	None

Putting it Into Practice

What do you actually do with this information? That depends. Here are examples of both methods in action. Use either method or a combination of the two, as you see fit.

The Step-By-Step Method: Michele's hero, Detective Jones, wants to take a shot at the villainous cult leader. Jones has the pistol skill, so he has a base situation die of +d0. The cult leader is 10 meters away from Jones, which is medium range (+1 step penalty) for his weapon, and has light cover (+1 step penalty). In addition, because Jones is standing atop a moving train, you declare that the situation has a Good level of difficulty (+2 steps). By counting out the steps on the Situation Die Steps Scale, the Gamemaster determines that Jones has a final situation die of +d12. Michele rolls d20+d12, hoping to achieve a total that's equal to or less than Jones's pistol score. If she succeeds, then Jones hits his target, scoring either an Ordinary, Good, or Amazing success, as detailed in the player's fast-play rules.

Eyeballing It

Situation Description	Modifier	Situation Die
Extremely easy	-3 steps	-d8
Very easy	-2 steps	-d6
Easy	-1 steps	-d4
Average	None	+d0
Tough	+1 step	+d4
Hard	+2 steps	+d6
Challenging	+3 steps	+d8

Eyeballing It: Dave's hero, Jack Martin, needs to slip past the customs official. Since Martin doesn't have the *sneak* specialty skill, his base situation die is +d4. You decide that the official is particularly vigilant today. This makes the situation Hard, causing Martin to take a +2 step penalty. Dave rolls d20+d8, hoping for a result equal to or less than Martin's Stealth skill score.

Running the Game

You can run a roleplaying game very easily by sticking to this one simple formula:

- Describe a scene to the players that demands some action on the part of their heroes.
- Ask the players what their heroes are going to do.
- Resolve the heroes' actions.
- Determine how the resolution of the heroes' action affected the original situation.
- Describe the updated situation to the players, and start the process all over again.

Don't worry; you don't have to make it all up on the fly. Usually, a Gamemaster has a script or a set of notes to work from that outlines the various scenes and situations that make up the adventure the heroes are currently engaged in. The adventure included with these fast-play rules is scripted so that all you have to do is follow the directions.

How does this work in practice? It's pretty easy. Let's say that the heroes are investigating the site of an alien abduction. First, the Gamemaster describes a lonely spot on the open prairie, marked only by a burnt circle on the ground and a set of tire tracks leading away. The Gamemaster then asks the players what their heroes are going to do. Each player decides what action his or her hero takes; one hero may collect a soil sample, another might stand guard to watch out for anyone else approaching, and a third player may declare that his hero will follow the tire tracks.

Next, the Gamemaster resolves the actions the players have declared. Taking the soil sample and standing guard are easy—the players don't have to make any rolls to succeed in those tasks. But following the tire tracks requires an Investigate-track skill check, so the Gamemaster asks the player to roll a skill check for his hero.

Finally, success or failure in the challenges of the scene may dictate a new situation—the tire tracks lead toward a distant mesa if the heroes can follow them. Now they have a new set of decisions to make; they can stay and search the area around the circle, or they can follow the tracks into a new scene.

The Adventure

An ALTERNITY adventure is nothing more than a series of distinct scenes in which the heroes are presented with a situation, decide what they want to do, resolve their actions, and deal with the consequences. Each scene challenges the heroes with enemies to defeat, mysteries to solve, or supporting characters to interact with.

To continue with the previous example, let's say that the adventure is simple: The heroes have been assigned to investigate an alien abduction. Scenes that might make up this adventure include the following:

- A search of the site where the abduction took place.
- An interview with the abductee when the victim is found again.
- A hostile encounter with secretive men in black who attempt to steal evidence the heroes have collected from the scene.
- An attack by angry locals who think that the heroes are somehow behind the abduction.
- A scene in which the abductee must be protected from the men in black or the aliens who originally kidnapped him.

Not all of these scenes might be necessary in the adventure; maybe the heroes never go out to the site of the encounter, or maybe they avoid the locals by driving away from a confrontation before it gets ugly. And, players being players, the Gamemaster might need to respond to their actions with new scenes that reflect the course of the heroes' investigation.

Many Gamemasters make up adventures for their players by thinking up a cool plot, jotting down some notes about the villains or challenges the heroes must defeat, and then creating a good scene to start the heroes in the story. You don't have to do that right away; for your first time as the Gamemaster, use the scripted adventure in this chapter.

The Scene Structure

Every time the players are faced by an obstacle, challenge, or significant encounter with a Gamemaster-controlled character, they're engaged in a scene. A scene is one piece of an adventure—a decision box in which the heroes might succeed, fail, or sidestep a problem altogether. There are three types of scenes: combat scenes, challenge scenes, and encounter scenes.

Combat Scenes

Most roleplaying games resemble action movies. The heroes frequently confront the villains with force and stop the bad guys the old-fashioned way. Even if the heroes aren't willing to use force against the villains, their enemies may not feel constrained to abide by the same restrictions. Ghosts or hostile entities might lash out at investigators; unknown assassins may try to kill heroes getting too close to the truth; ruthless agents might try to make the heroes disappear before the heroes expose their plots. Combat is commonplace in DARK•MATTER adventures.

Setting Up the Fight

The first thing you need to do in a combat scene is set up the fight. Decide who's attacking the heroes, and why they're doing it. Usually, your *adventure notes* can help you determine the opposition the heroes face.

For example, if you've already decided that a government lab is protected by a security team of four guards, it's pretty clear that the heroes must defeat or bypass all four guards to get inside. When you play the adventure later in this chapter, you will know exactly what the heroes may end up fighting against.

Decide where the opponents are in relation to the heroes. If the heroes just stormed a room full of armed gunmen, it's pretty clear that all the combatants are in the same room. If the

heroes drive into an ambush on a bridge, you might determine that the gunmen are kneeling behind cars parked to block both lanes. Then describe to the players where their heroes and the bad guys are in relation to each other.

Finally, some situations may have the potential for surprise. If the heroes are relaxing in a hotel room after a long day of investigation when two assassins kick in the door, they might not be ready for a fight. Have each hero who might be caught off guard make an Awareness skill check; if the hero fails, she is surprised and can't take any actions in the first round of the fight.

Action Rounds

Scenes in which time is critical—gunfights, chases, disarming bombs—need a framework for deciding who goes first. The action round organizes the actions of the heroes and the supporting cast so that the Gamemaster can tell whose turn it is to act.

Every action round is divided into four phases: Amazing, Good, Ordinary, and Marginal. All characters involved in the scene make action checks before each round to determine which phase they may act in. Characters with Amazing action checks act first, then characters with Good action checks, then Ordinary, and finally Marginal.

Although actions in a phase occur simultaneously, you don't want everyone rolling dice at the same time. Instead, all characters who are entitled to an action in the same phase should act in the order of their action check scores—highest score first. The results of their actions (such as damage) are applied at the end of the phase, thus simulating simultaneous activity.

Example: Jones, Martin, and the cult leader all achieve Good action check results. Their action check scores are 13, 10, and 15, respectively. For ease of play, the cult leader acts first in the Good phase, followed by Jones, then Martin.

Attacks

There are three basic ways to attack a creature or a character in the ALTERNITY game system: bare-handed, with a melee weapon, or with a ranged weapon. When a hero chooses to attack an enemy character or hostile creature, he must attempt a skill check using the appropriate skill.

- Hand-to-hand attacks use the Unarmed Attack—*brawl* or *power martial arts* or the Acrobatics—*defensive martial arts* skills. If the character doesn't have any of these skills, he must make an untrained Strength feat check (use the "Untrained" Strength score and add a d4) to attack in hand-to-hand combat.
- Ranged weapon attacks use the Ranged Weapons—*pistol* or *rifle* skills. If the character doesn't have these skills, he must make an untrained Dexterity feat check to attack.

The Gamemaster may add step modifiers to the attack for the target's Strength or Dexterity, or to reflect a tricky situation—a long-range shot or good cover for the target. The result of the attack roll is a Failure (a miss), or an Ordinary, Good, or Amazing success (all hits).

If a character hits his target, he inflicts damage appropriate to the success of his attack. For example, if Officer McDermott achieves an Ordinary success with her 9mm pistol, she inflicts d4+1 points of wound damage.

Damage

Damage comes in three types: stun, wound, and mortal. If a character is hit by an attack or some other damage-causing condition, the degree of success achieved by that attack determines the type and amount of *primary damage* suffered by a character.

- If a character loses all of his stun points, he's knocked out.
- If a character loses all of his wound points, he's knocked out and gravely injured.
- If a character loses all of his mortal points, he's dead.

Each of the hero templates in this chapter lists some examples of weapons and armor, and includes their important statistics.

Serious, lasting injuries—mortal damage and wound damage—cause secondary damage to the character who is injured. For every 2 points of wound damage inflicted on a character, that character also suffers 1 point of stun damage. For every 2 points of mortal damage a character receives, that character also suffers 1 point of wound damage and 1 point of stun damage.

Example: Wheeler fires his .38 pistol at a horrible ice-demon and gets an Amazing success on his attack roll. The damage for an Amazing success with the .38 pistol is d4m.

Recovery

After a character suffers damage, he or she can get back to full health in a number of different ways:

- Stun damage disappears at the end of a scene.
- Wound damage, but not mortal damage, heals naturally at a rate of 2 wound points per week of rest and recuperation.
- The Knowledge—*first aid* specialty skill can heal stun damage on conscious patients, negating 2, 3, or 4 points of stun damage depending on the degree of success achieved on the skill check (Ordinary, Good, or Amazing).

First aid can also revive a character who was knocked out due to stun damage, restoring 1, 2, or 3 stun points depending on the degree of success. This skill can also be used to heal wound damage; any success restores 1 wound point.

- The Medical Science—*treatment* specialty skill can be used to heal stun damage on conscious patients, as per *first aid* above.

Medical Science—*treatment* can also be used to revive a character who was knocked out due to stun damage, restoring 2, 3, or 4 stun points depending on the degree of success.

This skill can be used to heal wound damage; any success restores 2 wound points.

- The Medical Science—*surgery* specialty skill can heal wound damage and mortal damage; a success restores 1 point of mortal and 2 points of wound damage. This skill can be used on a specific patient once every hour. Note that using the *surgery* skill requires the kind of facilities normally found at a hospital—anesthesia, monitoring devices, and so on.

Wheeler's player, Michele, rolls d4 and gets a result of 3. The ice-demon suffers 3 points of mortal damage (the primary damage of the attack) plus secondary damage of 1 wound and 1 stun.

Armor

Aliens, paranormal creatures, and some human characters may possess armor that protects them from the dangers of battle. Armor can reduce the primary damage a hero suffers—but armor has no effect on secondary damage.

Example: Dave's character, Officer McDermott, is wearing her Kevlar vest when a crazed cultist shoots her for 5 points of wound damage. That also causes 2 points of secondary stun damage, which Dave records on the hero template immediately because armor doesn't stop secondary damage. Now Dave rolls to see how well McDermott's armor protected her from the wound damage. The vest blocks d6–2 points of high impact (HI) damage. Dave rolls a d6 and gets a result of 4, for a total of 2 (4 – 2), so the number of wounds is reduced by 2. Dave marks off 3 wound boxes on Officer McDermott's character template (5 – 2 = 3).

Challenge Scenes

Not every threat or obstacle involves a villain with a gun. Heroes routinely scale cliffs, search for hard-to-find clues, try to repair damaged machinery, or use their wits and training to get to the bottom of things. Any time the story hinges on whether or not a hero can successfully use a skill in a non-combat situation, you're dealing with a challenge scene.

Typical challenge scenes include the following:

- Using Athletics—*climb* or *jump* to scale a difficult obstacle.
- Using Manipulation—*lockpick* to get around a locked door.
- Using Stealth—*shadow* or *sneak* to trail someone without being spotted or slip past a guard without a fight.
- Using Medical Science—*treatment* to help an injured character.
- Using Technical Science—*repair* to fix a piece of damaged machinery.
- Using Lore—*occult lore* or *psychic lore* to analyze paranormal phenomena and discern a cause.
- Using Investigate—*search* or *track* to glean a clue from a crime scene or find someone who doesn't want to be found.

In fact, any time the players want to try to use their heroes' skills to advance the story in some way, it's a challenge scene. The adventure in this chapter includes several potential challenge scenes with guidelines on how you should handle them as they come up.

The basic procedure for a challenge scene is simple. Ask the players what skill they want their heroes to use. Determine whether there are factors that make the skill check easier or more difficult, add the appropriate step modifiers to the skill check, and then ask the players to make skill checks for their heroes. Evaluate the results and apply them to the situation.

Many challenges are very short. If a hero is trying to jump onto a moving train, she gets one shot at it and succeeds or fails. Other challenges may be broken up into a number of distinct steps; for example, climbing a mountain may require a

number of Athletics—*climb* skill checks to conquer each stage of the ascent.

Example: Tom's character, Donna Truitt, is trying to slip a tracking device into an enemy agent's pocket in a quiet coffee shop. The skill most appropriate to the situation is Manipulate—*pickpocket*. The Gamemaster decides that, since the place is almost empty, it's hard for Donna to get close without being very obvious about it. He assigns a +2 step penalty, and then adds another +1 step penalty since the enemy agent has a high Will score and a +1 step resistance modifier. (Will represents how perceptive a character is, among other things.) Tom rolls a *pickpocket* skill check on a d20 + d8 and gets a Good success. Not only did Donna plant the tracker, but she hid it in such a way that the enemy agent isn't likely to find it for a while.

Encounter Scenes

An encounter scene describes a conversation or interaction between two characters—a hero and a member of the supporting cast. Two heroes don't make up an encounter scene, since the players who control those heroes are free to talk to each other any time they like. Similarly, two supporting cast members don't have encounter scenes, since the players don't necessarily get the chance to see what happens when the mob boss talks to his underling.

Not every meeting between a hero and a character under the Gamemaster's control should be construed as an encounter scene. Presumably, heroes are real people in a real world. They chat with the cashier at the grocery store, they talk to the other people taking the train they're riding, and they pass by dozens or hundreds of strangers every day as they go about their business. But only a handful of these chance encounters have anything at all to do with the story at hand. In fact, an encounter is worth a scene only if the hero can learn or do something important in the course of that encounter.

Typical encounter scenes include the following:

- Deceiving a gate guard by pretending to have a pass to get into a restricted area.
- Convincing a police officer not to take the hero into custody under suspicious circumstances.
- Conversing with a rival agent in a social situation and trying to get some information out of him.
- Interviewing a witness to a UFO encounter.
- Persuading an authority figure to quarantine an area exposed to an alien virus.
- Convincing a bystander to help the heroes in a dangerous or illegal act.

There are two ways to resolve an encounter scene. The first is the easiest: common sense. If the players say something that sounds convincing to you, the Gamemaster, you can simply rule that their heroes convinced the character they were talking to. Characters in the game should act and react the way real people in the same situation would, so use your best judgment.

The second way to resolve an encounter scene is to ask the players to make a skill check using the appropriate Personality-based skill—Deception, Interaction, or Leadership. If a hero is pretending to be someone else to get past a guard, Deception—*bluff* is probably the best skill to use. If the hero is threatening the guard with imminent violence, Interaction—*in-*

timidate is more appropriate. Ask the player to tell you what his or her hero is saying, and then apply a step bonus or penalty to reflect how effective the player's tactic seems to be in the current situation. Then call for a skill check and evaluate the results.

Example: John's hero, Dr. Akens, is trying to persuade a beat cop to let him leave the scene of a murder without arresting him. This sounds pretty tough, but the Gamemaster asks John what Dr. Akens says to get out of this situation. "I'm telling the cop that I saw the murderer run off in another direction just a moment ago so that I can leave when the police officer goes to investigate," John says.

The Gamemaster decides that the skill this reflects is probably Deception—*bluff*, and that Dr. Akens's approach is weak but not too bad—a +1 step penalty to a Deception skill check is reasonable. Unfortunately, Akens doesn't have the Deception skill, so John must make an untrained Personality skill check for Dr. Akens. He rolls a d20 + d6 (a +1 step penalty for the broad skill check, and the +1 step penalty for the weak argument) and compares it to Akens's Deception skill score. John blows the roll—the cop holds Akens and refuses to let him leave the scene before he can question the good doctor.

Supporting Cast

Each of the players controls only one hero at any given time. The Gamemaster controls all the other characters in the adventure. The most important supporting cast member is the major antagonist. A good villain helps to set the mood of a story and can even become a more-or-less permanent part of the campaign—a recurring figure whose plots and agents constantly threaten the heroes or whatever they hold dear.

Supporting cast members include the major villain; his or her associates and hired hands; the authority figures who command or employ the heroes; the informants, witnesses, and shop owners the heroes interact with; and the valued friends, hirelings, and allies ready to help the heroes at a moment's notice. The Gamemaster needs to be ready to run these characters as they are called upon, or to improvise as the need arises.

It's important for the Gamemaster to give each supporting cast member—especially major opponents and allies—much the same consideration players give their heroes.

Some supporting cast members should be fully developed, with a complete set of skills and vital game statistics. Other characters, such as minor opponents, experts, and bystanders, need only the skill scores and statistics that might come into play during a scene. For example, give a common thug a combat skill or two, durability ratings, and a weapon; give an expert just the skill scores needed to use his expertise on the heroes' behalf.

Roleplaying 101

The best part about controlling the supporting cast is that you can create different personalities during the course of play. Ham it up, play it straight, or go for the dramatic—depending on the mood of the adventure and the personality of the character.

Heroes and Encounter Skills

Villains routinely threaten, cajole, bluster, or rail at the heroes. However, they're not entitled to make Interaction-*intimidate* or Deception-*bribe* skill checks to make the heroes back off or accept a payoff. When a supporting character wants the heroes to do something, it's your job as Gamemaster to convey the character's threat or offer—and then allow the players to decide if their heroes listen.

Of course, there may be consequences to ignoring a threat or insulting a character who's trying to deal with the heroes. It's reasonable for you to point out to the players what these consequences might be, but you shouldn't ever take control of the heroes' actions.

Presenting an Adventure

A roleplaying game's action takes place in an adventure. Within its structure, the participants create the group story. The Gamemaster's role in the adventure centers around narrating the story, portraying supporting cast members, and moving the story along at a satisfying pace.

Narration

The heroes need to be involved in a story during which they act, react, and create a riveting tale. A story consists of a beginning, a middle, and an end, and each one should be filled with conflicts and goals—in other words, obstacles for the heroes to overcome and objectives for them to achieve. It's up to the Gamemaster to have the basics of a story ready when the game session begins.

Remember, though, that the story will be completed by the group—through the actions of the heroes and their interaction with your supporting cast. The heroes play an important part in determining how a story takes shape, and you should make sure their decisions play a part in the process.

You must develop a basic plot (or use a plot from a published product), provide motivations and objectives for the heroes, and have an exciting idea for the ending. A plot requires enough background material so that the story feels like it fits the campaign setting. Other elements that make a good basic plot include a major antagonist (the villain), the antagonist's nefarious scheme, and motivations to make the heroes want to get involved. These elements come together in the adventure's opening scene—called the trigger.

The "Exit 23" adventure (detailed below) provides an example of how these elements work together.

Pacing

Another aspect of presenting an adventure is the pacing of the story. The story shouldn't artificially push the heroes to meet some schedule. Instead, watch how the scenes play out. When a scene starts to drag and the fun factor begins to flag, that's when you step in to give the scene a boost. How? By using the resources at your disposal—maybe have a supporting character show up with some tip that gives the heroes a nudge in the right

direction. If your players don't know what to do next and the story is in danger of stalling, it's up to you to give it new life.

Don't create an adventure outline that's so complete that the heroes can't make any decisions without violating your plot. Start the adventure with action and have lots of other action ideas ready to insert into the flow as the game session progresses. Use combat, challenges, encounters, conflict, tension, humor, and mystery to keep an adventure moving toward its dramatic conclusion.

The basic rule for pacing is that as long as the players are having fun, stay in the current scene. When the action bogs down, then the Gamemaster must help the pacing by getting things moving again.

Moderating the Rules

The player's section of the fast-play rules gives you the basic facts about how the ALTERNITY game works. That's all you need to introduce your players to the game system and run the adventure in this section. In play, it's up to the Gamemaster to moderate the game so that everyone has fun, plays fair, and is challenged. Of all these, the emphasis is always on fun. If a rule gets in the way of everyone's enjoyment, change it. But change it consistently and after consideration. Don't change a rule just for the sake of change.

Final decisions are always left to the Gamemaster. Can the heroes perform a particular action? Can they even try it? That's up to you. Make your decision based on the need to keep the story moving, your interpretation of the rules, and whether or not the action fits the story and increases everyone's enjoyment of the game. Be fair and impartial in your treatment of heroes and supporting characters. Challenge the players and their heroes. The players want to see their heroes tested and to experience the thrill of competing against the odds and coming out on top. Heroes do this sort of thing all the time! Just make sure the players have decisions to make and options to choose from as the adventure unfolds.

If someone disagrees with a decision, call a time out and discuss it with the group. You still get to make the final call, but you can reduce the possibility of hard feelings if you moderate the game fairly. The goal is to tell a good group story and to have fun, not to abuse the heroes.

Sometimes the dice just fall the wrong way. That's okay. But you might want to give the players a break now and then. After all, it's no fun for a player to lose a hero in a stupid and random way. Be lenient when determining the difficulty of a particular action, or change the result before revealing the outcome to the players. This sort of manipulation is the Gamemaster's prerogative, but use it sparingly—and always in the interest of keeping the story moving and the fun factor high.

EXIT 23

An Introductory DARK•MATTER Adventure

"Exit 23" is a short adventure designed to introduce you to the ALTERNITY game and the DARK•MATTER setting. If you're a brand-new Gamemaster, the first thing you need to do is read through the adventure before you run your first game. You



should know how each scene fits into the adventure so that you can present each scene in the best and most exciting manner possible.

Familiarize yourself with the fast-play rules earlier in this chapter. The other players expect you to know how the game works, so make sure that you at least know where to find the answers to any questions that come up. Finally, you should take a minute to look over the hero templates so that you know what kind of heroes your players are controlling in the game.

When you're ready to start playing, assign each player one of the templates. You can choose randomly, or you can tell the players about each hero and ask them which one they want to play. Flip a coin if two players want to run the same hero. (We recommend that you make photocopies of the hero templates to hand out to everyone.) If you have extra templates left over, you might consider running these extra heroes as supporting cast members.

Ask the players to read over their templates and answer any questions they may have about them. The best way to learn the game is by playing, though, so just explain the basics and then get on with the adventure. Most players catch on as you go along.

If you're not the Gamemaster for this game, stop reading here. It's no fun when someone tells you how the movie ends before you see it, and it's no fun to know how the adventure proceeds before you play it.

Adventure Background

Don't read this to the players! This is a brief background of what's happening in this adventure. We'll let you know how to start the game for the players a bit later.

The Hoffmann Institute is an organization devoted to investigating and understanding all kinds of paranormal phenomena. The Institute operates from more than a dozen major offices around the world, dispatching professional investigators to check out reports of ghosts, hauntings, UFOs, mysterious creatures, real magic, and the activities of secret organizations and conspiracies.

Several days ago, agents working for the Institute investigated an old estate formerly owned by a reputed cult leader and diabolist named Michel Galvin. Galvin disappeared about ten years ago, and distant relatives finally sold his manor to wash their hands of the whole business. Hoffmann agent Jonas Riley, who'd been keeping tabs on the old Galvin place, heard of the upcoming estate sale and visited the site to make sure that it was free of Michel Galvin's sinister influence before it was sold to some unsuspecting person.

Riley and his team examined the place in detail, discovering a secret laboratory or conjuration room hidden in the manor's attic. The room was mostly empty, but Riley found an evil artifact concealed in a secret drawer — a snow globe with magical powers. Neither Riley nor anyone else on his team knew what to

make of Galvin's globe, so Riley took it to an Institute expert in Portland, Oregon, for a thorough examination and safekeeping.

Unknown to Riley, other people besides the Hoffmann Institute have been keeping an eye on Galvin's mansion. Galvin's circle of acolytes, *Les Trieze Corbins* (The Thirteen Crows) still exists, and they still watch Galvin's place. They'd searched the grounds several times for the globe but never found the secret drawer. When Riley discovered the globe and removed it from the mansion, *Les Trieze Corbins* wanted it back. They sent Jacob Dumont, one of their number, after Riley to retrieve the globe.

Dumont trailed Riley from Galvin's estate in Montana into the rugged mountain country of the Idaho panhandle. But Dumont isn't alone. With spells learned from Galvin years ago, the cultists conjured a winter-demon and created a vicious blizzard to close the highway and trap Riley at a lonely rest stop in the middle of the night. This allowed Dumont to catch up with Riley.

Overview

What does all of this have to do with the players? The answer is simple: Their heroes are caught at the rest stop along with Riley and Dumont, and it's up to them to stop the sadistic cultist from killing everyone and escaping with Galvin's sinister artifact.

The beginning of the adventure finds the heroes stranded in a rest stop on I-90, near Exit 23 in Idaho. They're on the road for various reasons of their own; for example, Officer McDermott is patrolling this stretch of highway, while Donna Truitt is just driving back to her home in Seattle from whatever business she was engaged in before the start of the adventure. Most of the heroes don't know each other; they're just travelers stranded by a sudden snowstorm.

The adventure opens when the heroes discover that some-

White River Rest Stop

While truckers and locals know it better as the Exit 23 rest stop, the name on the lobby identifies the place as the White River Station. It's located between the eastbound and westbound lanes, and there is a turnoff here for a lonely mountain road that runs about ten miles to the closest town, White River. At the moment, none of the roads is even close to being passable due to the accumulation of snow and the lack of visibility.

The heroes may explore the rest stop anytime they like. In fact, since the adventure assumes that they've been here for a couple of hours before the action starts, you can pretty much tell the players anything they want to know about what's where—their heroes have seen the whole place by now.

1. Vestibule and Phones: The main entrance. There are two phones here, neither of which is working.

2. Lobby: A large, open room featuring an information counter (never staffed), two wall displays with flyers for local tourist attractions, and a big wall map of Idaho.

3. Women's Room: A typical rest room.

4. Men's Room: A typical rest room.

one or something has attacked several other travelers in another part of the building, killing one person and seriously injuring another (Jonas Riley, although the players don't know who he is or what he's doing there when their heroes find him). The adventure should proceed through seven distinct scenes, as shown below:

Scene 1: A Grisly Discovery. The heroes learn that they're not alone in the rest stop and that something waits in the storm.

Scene 2: Danny Wood. The heroes interview the only witness to the winter-demon's attack and learn something about what they're up against.

Scene 3: Who Goes There? The winter-demon lashes out at anyone who tries to track it into the storm and drives the heroes back inside.

Scene 4: Smoke 'em Out: The cultist, Dumont, drives everyone in the rest stop outside so that the demon can make short work of them. He starts a fire that the heroes must extinguish, or they'll have to abandon the tenuous safety of the rest stop.

Scene 5: Firebug. The heroes discover that Dumont lit the fire, and they capture him.

Scene 6: Les Trieze Corbins. The heroes question Dumont to learn more about what they're up against and why he's after Riley.

Scene 7: Fire and Ice. The heroes determine that the only way to survive the storm is to destroy the demon. Arming themselves with improvised weapons, they lure the demon into a final confrontation.

Of course, the adventure may not follow this exact path. Your players will think of dozens of things to try that don't have anything to do with the script. Your job as Gamemaster is to treat each of these improvisations fairly and sensibly, using

5. Arcade: This alcove contains six coin-operated video games.

6. Convenience Store: A small, cluttered shop loaded with knickknacks, caffeine pills, road maps, and souvenirs. The store is closed, and the lobby entrance is blocked by a roll-down grate. Anne Banks, the cashier, is waiting out the storm in the donut shop. She'll open the store if anyone wants to buy something.

7. Storerooms: These are typical stockrooms filled with the supplies needed by the rest stop businesses. All feature large, locked sheet-metal doors leading outside.

8. The Donut Shop: A small shop with a counter, stools by the counter, and a couple of small booths. The shop serves coffee, donuts, breakfast sandwiches, and other light fare. Most of the people in the rest stop have gathered here.

9. Restaurant: A McDonald's that is closed for the night. A pull-down grate covers the counter window, but the seating area is open.

10. Kitchen: The kitchen for the McDonald's. It's crowded with stoves, fryers, and several large refrigerators.

11. Fuel Office: The cashier's stand for the gas station. Ahmed Singh, the cashier, has shut down the pumps and the office everyone else in the donut shop.

what you know about the plot as a guideline for whether or not the player's idea will work.

Players' Introduction

When you're ready to start playing, read or paraphrase the text in the box below to the players. This lets them know where their heroes are and what they're doing when the adventure begins.

You've never seen a snowstorm like this. October in the Idaho mountains can be bad, but for hours now it's been a virtual white-out. The snow must be at least fifteen inches deep on the highway, and the weather's showing no signs of breaking.

It's close to midnight now, but you've been stranded since sundown in a small interstate rest stop, waiting for the plows to come through so that you can get back on the road. A half-dozen motorists share your predicament, plus four or five rest stop employees who have stayed on to serve coffee and food for the duration of the storm.

Each of you has places to go and things to do, but for now you're all stuck here. No one's driving anywhere tonight, and no one's coming to get you out. Some of you have passed the time with a paperback novel or a magazine, while others have been chatting with the other motorists.

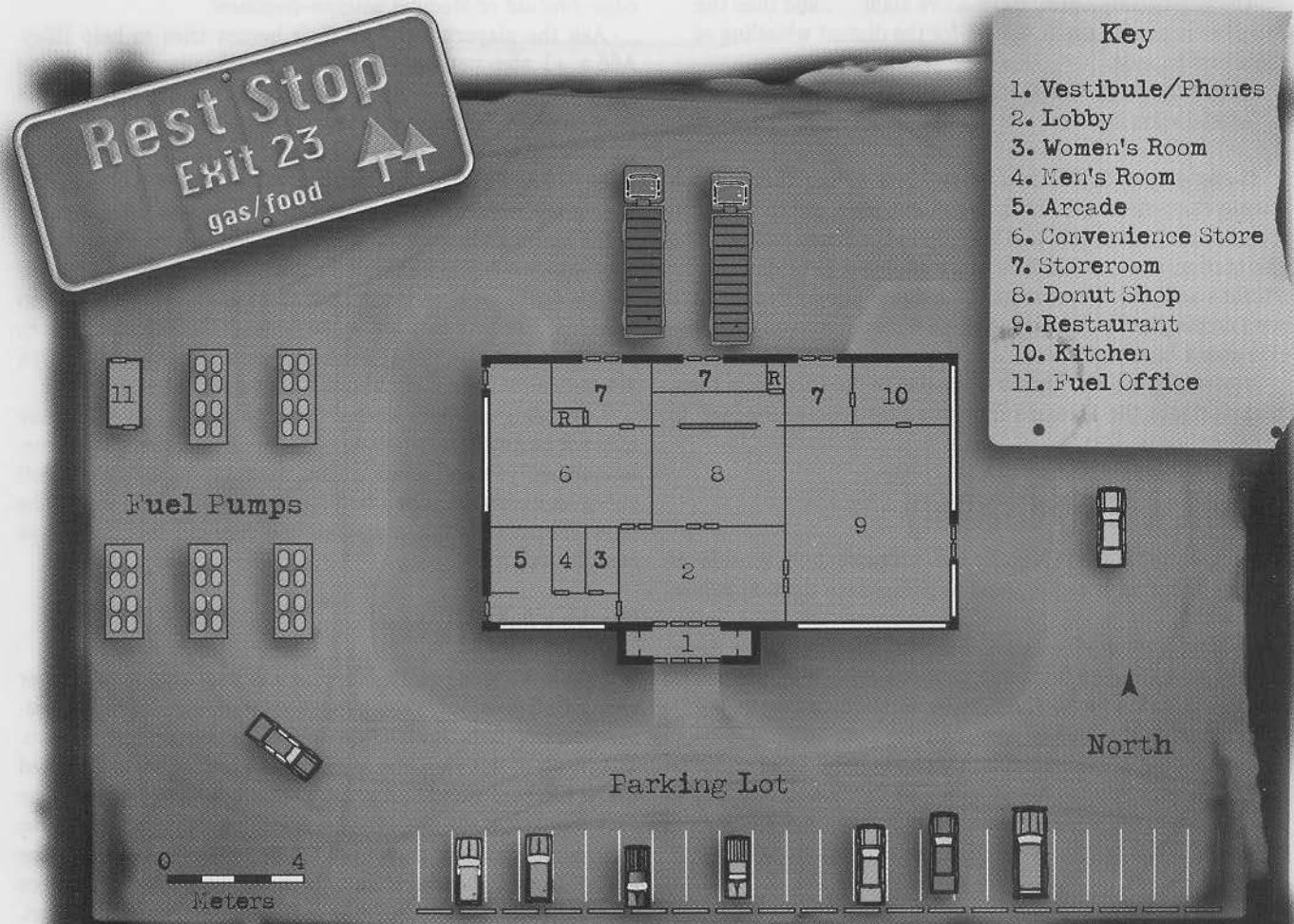
Ask the players to introduce their heroes for the game. Have the players state their heroes' names, describe their general appearance, and maybe even say something about where their heroes were going when the snowstorm set in.

Answer any questions the players have about the situation or the people around them. Here are a couple of the most likely questions you'll get:

What does this place look like? It's an interstate rest stop. You can use the map to explain the general layout of the place. The heroes have been stuck here long enough to look around a little.

Who else is here? In addition to the heroes, a number of supporting characters are at the Exit 23 rest stop. You'll play these characters as the Gamemaster.

- A balding business executive of about 50, wearing a good suit and a conservative overcoat (Jonas Riley).
- A short, stocky lady truck driver wearing a flannel shirt and a sheepskin vest (Norma Thomson).
- A long-haired college student with John Lennon glasses, an Army jacket, and a sketchbook filled with Giger-esque drawings (John Black).
- A matronly waitress of about sixty years who runs the donut shop (Mabel Adams).
- A big, beefy truck driver in a cheap parka and a black ball cap (Jacob Dumont).
- A teenage kid with long hair and an apron who does the



short-order cooking in the restaurant (Danny Wood, the witness in Scene 1).

- A pretty teenage girl who runs the register in the convenience store (Anne Banks).
- A young man with South Asian or Indian features who runs the gas station (Ahmed Singh).

Why can't I just keep driving? Your players may hail from someplace like Georgia or Florida, and they might find it hard to believe that a snowstorm could close a major highway. If any hero tries it, he or she gets about a mile so down the highway and drives into a ditch. It takes a long, cold walk to get back to the rest stop, and then you can continue with the adventure.

Okay, so what do we do now? Tell your players to wait a minute while you finish the introduction, and then they can tell you what their heroes are doing.

You're sitting in the donut shop, nursing a cup of coffee, when the lights flicker. "Oh, great," mutters Mabel, the counter waitress—and then the lights go out altogether. Somewhere on the other side of the rest stop you hear a door slam open, followed by a vicious blast of freezing cold air that somehow finds its way over to where you sit. The wind howls like something alive, scratching and clawing at you with an icy grasp.

Without even thinking about it, you abruptly realize that something is horribly, terribly wrong. Then you hear an awful racket from the direction of the rest rooms—violent blows, choking cries, breaking glass, and finally one more high-pitched scream that makes your blood run cold.

The wind howls again, more doors slam . . . and then the room becomes still again, except for the distant whistling of the storm outside.

"What in heaven was that?" Mabel says in the darkness.

What do you do?

If any player thinks to ask, tell him or her that the following characters are not in the donut shop at the moment: the executive, the cook, and the guy in the Army jacket. (The gas station and convenience store cashiers shut down their stations and joined everyone in the donut shop.) People have been coming and going all night, so it's not unusual that several aren't here right now.

If your players don't know what else to do, encourage them to investigate the screams from the rest rooms. Proceed to Scene 1.

Scene 1: A Grisly Discovery

When the heroes investigate the screams and sounds of struggle they heard earlier, read or paraphrase the text below:

The last gust of wind seems to have knocked out power to the rest stop. There's just enough illumination from various emergency lights to carefully move through the darkened building. Wind screams outside, howling past an open door or broken window clattering shrilly somewhere out of sight.

At the rest room, a body is sprawled in the doorway. It's the young man in the Army jacket, and he's quite dead. Several needle-sharp icicles as long as swords impale the

corpse, now surrounded by a puddle of slick scarlet ice. He seems to have been stabbed through the back as he left the rest room.

Inside the men's room, you find another body—the executive. Like the guy at the door, he's transfixed by several icicles, but while you watch, he groans and stirs. "Help me," he gasps. "So . . . cold . . ."

The dead man is John Black. He's beyond any help the heroes can give. The executive is Jonas Riley. He's been badly injured, impaled through the thigh, upper arm, and side, but by pure chance the icicles missed killing him.

This is a challenge scene, with the following challenges for the heroes to resolve: help Riley; make some deductions about what happened from the first look at the scene; search the scene for hidden clues; and search the surrounding areas. Ask the players what their heroes do, but suggest some of these options if necessary.

Helping Riley

Riley's game statistics don't really matter in this adventure. He's sustained several points of mortal damage in the attack, which means that he'll be unconscious and helpless for the balance of the adventure. It also means that he dies if he doesn't get help.

To stabilize Riley and keep him from dying, a hero must succeed in a skill check using one of the following skills: Knowledge—*first aid* or Medical Science—*treatment*.

Ask the players which of their heroes tries to help Riley. Add a +1 step penalty to reflect the difficulty of working on Riley's injuries in the dark, but ignore the penalty if the heroes provide some light for the doctor to work with.

Remember, to make a skill check, you'll ask the player to roll a d20 and a d0, d4, or d6 (for a +0, +1, or +2 step penalty), adding the results together. If the result is less than or equal to the hero's skill score for Knowledge—*first aid* or Medical Science—*treatment*, she succeeds in stabilizing Riley and preventing his death for now. If the skill check fails, Riley's condition worsens. The hero may make one more skill check at a +2 step penalty to stabilize the agent, and if this fails, Riley dies. (It's not critical to the adventure for Riley to survive.)

Depending on which heroes the players chose to play, there may not be any heroes present who know first aid or medicine. Remember, you can allow a hero to make an untrained skill check using his untrained Intelligence score to help Riley. The hero will probably fail, since this is a very difficult roll, but at least he can try.

Checking Out the Scene

If any player tells you that her hero is just looking around or trying to figure out what happened here, ask for an Awareness—*perception* or Investigate—*search* skill check for the hero. The result of this skill check indicates which of the clues noted below the hero notices. Any hero who looks around the scene sees that the stalls are empty, a trash can stands against one wall, and a condom dispenser hangs on the other wall. The mirror behind the sink has been holed and broken, and ice standing in the sink seems to have frozen right out of the faucet.

With a Marginal or better success, the hero notices that a fine layer of frost covers the entire room. This was not present the last time one of the heroes visited the facility; the rest room is much colder than it should be. (Most heroes notice this.)

An Ordinary or better success also allows the hero to note that no icicles large enough to kill someone have formed anywhere on the building, and certainly not in the rest room.

If the hero achieves a Good or better success, she realizes that Riley's attacker most likely hit him from the front, probably as he stood near the sink, judging by the blood splatters on the wall.

Finally, with an Amazing success, a hero also notices that Riley's coat hangs on a hook on the wall, but no other personal belongings from either victim are in sight.

Hidden Clues

Heroes who search the scene in detail for anything of interest may attempt an Investigate—search skill check.

An Ordinary success allows a hero to find Riley's valise stashed in the trash can underneath a layer of paper debris. It contains some papers (summed up in the sidebar below) and the snow globe. If the player indicates that his hero is specifically checking the trash can, he automatically finds this. (Riley stashed it here when the demon burst in, suspecting that he—or, more specifically, the globe—was the target.)

A Good or Amazing success allows the hero to find a footprint in the puddle of blood surrounding John Black's body. It seems to be the print of a large wolf or maybe a small bear.

Searching the Area

When the winter-demon attacked Riley and Black, Danny Wood was playing video games in the arcade next door. He got a good look at the creature, which scared him out of his wits. He's currently hiding behind an Asteroids game at the back of the arcade.

To find Danny, the heroes need to look around the corridor, lobby, and arcade—in other words, they need to look around outside the rest room as well as inside it. If a player tells you that his hero is examining the hallway, skip ahead to Scene 2.

If the players don't think to look around the area, you can cheat a little bit by telling the players that the heroes hear a clunk or scraping sound in the arcade.

Scene 2: Danny Wood

When the heroes check out the hallway outside the rest room, read the text below to the players:

The corridor outside the rest room is dark and cold. At the end of the hallway, a door leading outside swings in the vicious, gusting wind, banging loudly against the wall. Fingers of swirling snow already dust the floor near the open door.

To your right, the building's arcade is a dark cavern, with the normal chatter of video action silenced by the loss of power. Suddenly, there's a small rustling from somewhere inside, like something moving around in there.

What do you do?

Play this up as a situation that may be dangerous—as far as the heroes know, the murderer could be hiding in here. Of course, it's only Danny Wood, hiding in the back of the room. But the heroes must go into the dark arcade (or at least call out) without knowing exactly what's in here. A good horror game involves an occasional tension-building scene that does not actually endanger anybody.

When the heroes identify themselves, challenge the occupant of the room, or just go in and look around, continue with the text below:

Slowly and carefully, someone dressed in a fast-food uniform and apron stands up from behind a video game. It's the kid from the McDonald's, and he's obviously scared out of his wits. "Please tell me it's gone," he says in a weak voice. "I don't know what it was, but I was sure it was gonna kill me."

He looks around, panic growing in his eyes, and then starts for the door. "Man, I gotta get out of here!"

This is an encounter scene. Danny Wood is the only conscious witness to the killing, but he flees outside to his car and tries to drive away if the heroes don't calm him down and find out what happened.

Keeping Him Here

The first step is to prevent Danny from running off. Ask the players whether the heroes let him leave. The heroes can restrain him physically (a hand on the shoulder is enough to stop him), or they can try to calm him down.

Calm Him Down: A successful Interaction or Interaction—charm skill check calms Danny.

Threaten Him: A successful Interaction or Interaction—in-timidate skill check scares Danny enough to keep him here. Add a –2 step bonus if an obvious authority figure (Officer McDermott or anybody flashing a gun) makes the attempt.

The Snow Globe and Riley's Notes

Jonas Riley's briefcase is stashed in the trash can in the men's room. If the heroes find the briefcase and examine its contents, they'll find the snow globe and Riley's notes about the device and how he found it.

The snow globe is a simple glass sphere about 10 centimeters (4 inches) in diameter. At the moment, it contains a small representation of the rest stop where the heroes are sheltering against the storm, and the tiny flakes flurry downward without ever settling—you don't have to shake the globe to make the snow fall.

The globe is remarkably resistant to breakage and won't crack if dropped, thrown against a wall, or struck a good hard blow. (There is a way to destroy the globe, though the heroes shouldn't discover it at this point. See Scene 7.)

Riley's notes about the snow globe take about half an hour to read. If any hero takes the time to study them, take that player aside and sum up the information that appears in the "Adventure Background" heading. Omit any mention of Jacob Dumont, since Riley doesn't know that Dumont followed him.



Winter-Demon

Ability	Score	Untrained	Resistance
Strength	14	7	+2 steps
Dexterity	11	5	+1 step
Constitution	12	6	
Intelligence	8	4	
Will	12	6	+1 step
Personality	9	4	

Action Check Score: 15+/14/7/3

1-3	Amazing	8-14	Ordinary
4-7	Good	15+	Marginal

Durability

Stun 12 ○○○○○○○○○○○○
 Wound 12 ○○○○○○○○○○○○
 Mortal 6 ○○○○○○

Weapon	Score	Range (S/M/L)	Damage (O/G/A)	Type
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Claws 16/8/4 Personal d4+1w

Icicles** 12/6/3 4/8/12 d4w/d4+2w/d6+2w HI
 * +1 step penalty for medium range, +2 steps for long
 ** The demon can throw three icicles at one time, making three attack rolls at a +1, +2, and +3 step penalty respectively.

Author

Hide* d4+2 (LJ) d4+1 (HI) d4-1 (Fr)

* The demon's armor is of Good quality. Damage rolled from physical attacks degrade by one type before secondary damage is assigned or armor is checked. Consequently, if a hero inflicts mortal damage on the winter-demon, it becomes wound damage. Similarly, wound damage becomes stun damage. If a hero inflicts stun damage (for instance, from a punch), the winter-demon ignores the damage.

Special

The winter-demon can use its action to dissolve into a cloud of ice and snow that can't be affected by any damage except fire, although this prevents the creature from attacking. It can resume its physical form by spending another action to do so.

The demon gains a -1 step bonus to its action checks and a +1 step increase to its Strength and Dexterity resistance modifiers while it is outside in the snowstorm.

The demon can use an action to create a minor supernatural effect (flickering lights, frightening sounds, gusts of wind) within 10 meters. This requires a successful Will feat check.

Background/Personality

The winter-demon is a powerful, malevolent entity from another dimension. Jacob Dumont's fellow cultists conjured it to kill Jonas Riley and retrieve the snow globe, and it obeys Dumont's commands. The creature can shift between two body forms at will. The first is a large, wolflike biped with claws of ice and a gaping jaw filled with needle-sharp fangs; the demon can make physical attacks in this form.

The second form is a cloud of snow, ice, and wind. In cloud-form, the demon can't attack, but it can't be harmed by any force except fire. In cloud-form, the demon can fly at a rate of about 100 kilometers per hour (or 400 meters per round).

The winter-demon is very resistant to normal physical attacks, but magical attacks, fire, and silver weapons can harm it. Attacks of these types do not downgrade in effect.

Get Him Talking: A successful Interaction or Interaction-interview skill check gets Danny talking about what he saw and distracts him.

"It's Out There": If any hero points out that the killer is outside now, Danny abandons the notion of going for his car. No skill check is necessary.

Finding Out What He Saw

Even if the heroes keep Danny on the scene, the cook is very shaken up right now. The sight of Black's body by the entrance to the men's room panics him even more. With the first few questions the heroes ask, Danny just mumbles things like "I dunno" and "Oh, man, it just killed that guy!"

To get some better information from their witness, the heroes need to ask the right questions. Have the hero speaking to Danny make a successful Interaction-interview skill check (Dr. Akens is good at it) to dig out the following facts. Make one check per question, but you can apply a -2 step bonus if the heroes calmed him down or got him talking first.

What happened? "I was over here playing Asteroids when the lights went out. I started to walk out of the arcade, and suddenly the door flew open in the hallway. A big blast of snow and ice came in, and there was something in the middle of the snow—a big white wolf or animal or something."

What did it do? "It went right past me and into the men's room. I looked around the corner, and I saw the dead guy come staggering out, with those icicles sticking in him. I heard someone else yell, and then it came back out again. It looked at the dead guy, and then it left."

Where did it go? "The wolf-thing stopped right there, there where you're standing, and looked right at me. I think it was telling me it coulda killed me if it wanted to. Then it blew apart into snow and ice, and it flew back out the door again. It's outside somewhere."

What did it look like, exactly? "I don't know, mister. It wasn't like anything I've ever seen before. It was part ice, part wind, part animal. It had claws of ice, and eyes that glowed red. It howled, too, just like the wind, but there were a thousand voices in it, saying stuff in some language I don't know. I hope to God I never see it again."

You can allow the players to grill Danny for as long as they like, but the cook doesn't know anything more.

Do I Know Anything About This?

After looking over the murder scene and talking to Danny, your players may ask if their heroes have any knowledge of supernatural entities or murders with this kind of MO (*modus operandi*). Most of the heroes described in the templates simply have had no exposure to this kind of happening before. There are two exceptions, though: Officer McDermott and Dr. Akens.

Officer McDermott: If the player running McDermott asks whether she's heard of any similar killings lately, ask the player to make a Law-enforcement skill check. If the check succeeds, McDermott realizes that there have been no other killings like this in the area.

Dr. Akens: The player running Dr. Akens may ask if he knows anything about this. Ask him to make a Lore—occult lore skill check (add a -2 step bonus if Dr. Akens has read through

Riley's notes on Galvin's snow globe). If successful, Akens can draw the following conclusions from the evidence at hand:

- If Galvin was a diabolist (an evil sorcerer), the creature that attacked Riley and Black may have been some kind of demon. Such things come in many varieties, and ice-demons or winter-demons have been described in some obscure occult texts.
- Demons or spirits are often bound to specific missions or tasks, such as the destruction of a particular person or the recovery of a specific object.
- Demons may be invulnerable to normal weapons, but sometimes possess other weaknesses—a susceptibility to silver weapons, fear of bright light, and so on.

Scene 3: Who Goes There?

At this point, the heroes are probably studying the murder scene, examining Riley's briefcase, talking to Danny Wood, and working to make Riley comfortable. The winter-demon realizes that it still hasn't accomplished its mission, and it lures people outside.

Begin this scene when Scene 2 is starting to finish up. You could also start this scene anytime a hero ventures outside into the storm.

The wind howls outside, and the snow continues to fall. The building is dark and cold, with icy gusts reaching into every corner of the structure. Mabel, the lady running the donut shop, has lit a couple of gas lanterns in that corner of the rest stop, but it's still dim and shadowy in here.

Abruptly, bright light fills the lobby. One by one, the headlights of the cars outside are coming on. Over the moaning of the storm, you can hear a cacophony of horns and car alarms going off all at once. You can also hear glass breaking outside.

What do you do?

The heroes don't have to do anything, of course. They can let the demon outside trash their cars, and no one will get hurt. But several heroes have weapons or special equipment sitting out in their cars, and they may want to retrieve this gear at some point. If the heroes choose to stay inside and do nothing, go on to Scene 4 after the winter-demon commits a few acts of miscellaneous vandalism to the heroes' cars.

Anyone who goes outside to confront the creature or to get some gear is in for a combat scene. The demon does its best to injure or kill someone. It attacks lone heroes who are far away from their companions before it goes after a group of heroes.

The wind screams and rages all around you as you stumble out into the snow. It's surprisingly deep, almost to your knees, and you can't see anything clearly. Suddenly, the car horns and alarms fall silent.

Randomly select one of the heroes who is outside for the winter-demon to attack and have that hero's player roll an Awareness skill check. (Doug Nichols's player can make an Awareness-intuition skill check instead.) If the check fails, the winter-demon gets a free attack on the hero. Read the following text:

From out of the storm's fury, something slams into you like a locomotive, slashing and gouging you with icy claws. From out of the storm's fury, something slams into you like a locomotive, slashing and gouging you with icy claws.

Roll the winter-demon's attack and damage normally.

If the skill check succeeds, the hero senses the winter-demon's presence just before it attacks. Read the following text:

Despite the poor visibility and biting cold, you sense an even greater cold approaching you. And then you see two points of fiery red, like sinister eyes burning into your soul. . . .

After the winter-demon gets its free attack, or after the hero spots the demon just before it attacks, ask all the players whose heroes are outside to make action checks. This means that each player should roll a 20-sided die and compare it to his character's action check score to generate a Marginal, Ordinary, Good, or Amazing result. Roll an action check for the winter-demon, but apply a -1 step bonus to the demon's action check since it's in its own element. Any heroes who are still inside the building must wait until the next action round before they can roll action checks and take any actions in the fight.

Now, count down through each phase of the round. Start with the Amazing phase and ask if any players achieved an Amazing action check. Then proceed to the Good, the Ordinary, and the Marginal phases.

When a player's turn comes up, ask her what her hero does. If the player wants to attack, ask her to make a skill check using the appropriate skill. Add a +2 step penalty to the heroes' attack rolls while they're outside, since driving snow limits visibility.

The winter-demon attacks a hero when its turn comes up.

After you've called for heroes to act in the Marginal (last) phase of the first round, the first round of combat ends. Ask each player to make an action check for the next round and repeat the process. The demon attacks a different hero each round.

Ending the Fight

Repeat the same process of action checks and Amazing, Good, Ordinary, and Marginal actions each round until the fight is over. The fight ends when all heroes retreat back into the building, after the demon injures three heroes, when the demon suffers more than six points of wound damage, or after five action rounds. Read the text below when the fight ends:

Suddenly, the white wolf-thing seems to fly apart in a spray of icy shards. A whirlwind of snow and howling wind dances and spins where the creature was standing. Dozens of shrieking voices seem to gibber and moan in the wind, and the creature laughs maniacally. Then it's gone, flying off into the blizzard. But you can still feel it out there, watching you.

It's very likely that several heroes are wounded without hurting the demon at all. That's okay—this is a horror game, and you want the players to be scared for their heroes.

Assuming that the heroes retreat or drive off the demon and then go back inside, give the players a few minutes to talk things over, and then go on to Scene 4.

Scene 4: Smoke em' Out

While the heroes are occupied with the demon outside, Jacob Dumont decides to drive everyone out of the building and into the storm. He figures that the best way to do this is to start a fire. The demon can pick off individuals one at a time under the cover of darkness, and Dumont can search the rest stop for Riley's valise without interference, at least until he's forced to leave, too. (Dumont is more about action than good plans.)

During the heroes' investigation of the murder scene and fight with the demon, Dumont douses the newspaper stand in the store with gas from the gas pump and lights it. When the heroes are recovering from their encounter with the winter-demon, read or paraphrase the following text:

You're keeping an eye open for more strange happenings when you become aware of a strange orange glow illuminating the dark lobby. At the same time, you smell smoke! Behind you, the magazine stand in one corner of the convenience store is blazing away, and the flames are spreading fast!

What do you do?

This is a challenge scene—the heroes must extinguish the flames within six rounds, or the store becomes a blazing inferno that simply can't be extinguished with the materials at hand. Six rounds after the store goes up, heat and smoke make the lobby and the donut shop untenable. Six rounds after that, the entire building must be abandoned.

Each hero can act once per round, but they have no real opposition to act against—you can skip action checks. Just keep track of how many times each hero has acted.

To extinguish the flames before they spread, the heroes must amass 10 successes with various firefighting techniques, some of which are listed below:

Beat Out the Flames: Heroes can use coats, blankets, or stomping to fight the flames. Each round a hero tries to beat out the flames, have the player make a Strength feat check for his hero. An Ordinary success counts as 1 success toward putting out the fire, a Good counts as 2, and an Amazing counts as 3 successes. If the hero rolls a natural 20 on the control die, he catches fire and sustains 1d4 points of wound damage! He needs to roll on the ground the next round to put out the flames.

Each round that a hero stays up close to the flames, he suffers 1d4 points of stun damage (no armor prevents this). If a hero passes out in here, someone else must use an action to pull him out, or the fire kills him.

Get a Fire Extinguisher: It takes one action to locate a fire extinguisher, and another action to get the extinguisher back to the scene of the fire and get it ready for use. In the third round, the hero may start fighting the fire. Each action with a fire extinguisher requires a Dexterity feat check with a -3 step bonus (d20-d8). On a Failure, the hero scores 1 success toward extinguishing the fire; on an Ordinary, Good, or Amazing result, she scores 2, 3, or 4 successes.

Fire extinguishers are located in the restaurant kitchen, the storeroom of the donut shop, the convenience store (inaccessible due to the fire), and the hallway outside the rest rooms.

Use Water or Snow: To use water or snow effectively, the hero must spend one action to locate a bucket or container. A second action fills the bucket and another action gets him to the scene. After that, it takes one action to load up and one action to get the water or snow on the fire. Have the hero make a Strength feat check with a -1 step bonus. He scores 1, 2, or 3 successes toward extinguishing the fire with an Ordinary, Good, or Amazing result.

Move Flammables Away: Each time a hero spends an action to clear possible fuel for the fire away from the area, she buys one more round before the flames spread. For example, if a hero spends two actions moving flammable objects away from the magazine stand, the fire won't spread until eight rounds have passed instead of six. No skill check is necessary. At best, this tactic can buy six additional rounds before the fire spreads.

Scene 5: Firebug

The heroes should be able to put out the fire. If you have only one or two players in your game, you can make it easier by ruling that it takes 5 successes to put out the fire. Wait until the heroes have finished putting out the fire, then read the text:

Well, you're not cold any longer. Sweat runs down your face and stings your eyes, and you're pretty sure you've got some minor burns on your hands and face. But it looks like you've got the fire under control. It's already dying out. Over the smell of smoke, you can make out a different odor—the sharp tang of gasoline in the air. That fire wasn't an accident.

Suddenly, you hear a couple of loud bangs from the other room. A woman screams: "Look out! He's got a gun!"

What do you do?

Since the heroes extinguished his fire, Dumont is trying something more direct. Any hero in the donut shop sees Dumont draw a gun and move out toward the lobby, firing a couple of shots in the air to drive everybody else to the ground. If Officer McDermott is in the donut shop at the start of the scene, the fight begins right away as Dumont yanks out a gun and starts shooting at her. (Ignore the boxed text below if this is the case.) Otherwise, he steps into the lobby to confront the heroes.

You can hear people screaming and diving for cover in the other room. Suddenly, the big trucker in the black baseball cap appears in the doorway of the donut shop, pointing a pistol in your direction. "I won't let you meddle with my plans any longer," he hisses. He raises the pistol. "Time to die!"

What do you do?

Have the players make action checks for their heroes—this is definitely a combat scene. Make an action check for Dumont, too. When his turn comes up, the cultist shoots at any armed character he can see. If no one is carrying weapons, he shoots

Jacob Dumont, Cult Member

Combat Specialist

Ability	Score	Untrained	Resistance
Strength	12	6	+1 step
Dexterity	11	5	+1 step
Constitution	10	5	
Intelligence	9	4	
Will	12	6	+1 step
Personality	6	3	

Action Check Score: 14+/13/6/3

1–3	Amazing	7–13	Ordinary
4–6	Good	14+	Marginal

Durability

Stun 12	○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○
Wound 12	○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○
Mortal 6	○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○

Weapon	Score	Range (S/M/L)	Damage (O/G/A)	Type
Unarmed	14/7/3	Personal	d4+1s/d4+2s/d4+3s	LI
Pistol*	13/6/3	6/12/50	d4+1w/d4+2w/d4m	HI

*+1 step penalty for medium range, +2 steps for long

Armor

Kevlar vest	d6–3 (LI)	d6–2 (HI)	d4–2 (En)
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Skills

Athletics [12]; Unarmed Attack [12]—brawl [14]; Ranged Weapons [11]—pistol [13]; Vehicle Operation [11]; Stamina [10]—endurance [11]; Knowledge [9]—language (French) [12], language (English) [11]; Awareness [12]—intuition [13]; Lore [12]—occult lore [13]; Resolve [12]; Interaction [6].

Background/Personality

Dumont is a member of *Les Trieze Corbins*, the acolytes of the modern-day sorcerer Michel Galvin. He and his companions have waited for years since Galvin's disappearance to get their hands on his arcane lore. In the current situation, Dumont thinks nothing of killing everyone in the rest stop to accomplish his goals and glorify the dark powers he worships.

Dumont is a large, powerfully built man who dresses like a trucker or longshoreman. He speaks with a guttural French-Canadian accent, when he speaks at all—he's normally surly and unresponsive to any kind of attempts at conversation.

at Officer McDermott. If Dumont doesn't see any armed characters out here, he shoots at whichever character is standing nearby.

Dumont doesn't expect anyone behind him to do anything, so if a hero is in the donut shop, he can attack Dumont from behind with a -2 step bonus to his attack roll.



Most of the heroes are probably armed by this point, so they should kill or incapacitate Dumont quickly. Remember to apply the heroes' Dexterity resistance modifiers to Dumont's attack rolls when he shoots at them. If the fight goes poorly for Dumont (if less than half his wound boxes are left, or he's suffered mortal damage), he surrenders; go to Scene 6.

Taking Down Dumont

Your players might have their heroes tackle or grab Dumont to wrestle him to the ground and get the gun away from him.

If a hero tries to do something like this, have the player make an Unarmed Attack–*brawl*, Unarmed Attack–*power martial arts*, or Acrobatics–*defensive martial arts* skill check. Instead of inflicting damage, the hero puts a hold of Ordinary, Good, or Amazing quality on Dumont. If the heroes use a second action to wrestle with Dumont while he's held, the hold turns into a pin—they get him on the ground and get him under control.

Dumont can continue to shoot or act while held, but he suffers a +1, +2, or +3 step penalty depending on whether he's in an Ordinary, Good, or Amazing hold. He can't do anything while pinned, as long as the heroes keep him under control.

Dumont may use an action to try to break out of a hold, but not a pin. To break out, he must make a Strength feat check (add the Strength resistance modifier of the holding hero) and match or beat the success of the hold. For example, if Dumont were held with a Good hold, he would need a Good or Amazing success on his Strength feat check to break free. Of course, even if he does, he can be tackled again.

If the heroes defeat Dumont without killing him, go to Scene 6. If he gets away or the heroes kill him, go to Scene 7.

Scene 6: *Les Trieze Corbins*

You need to run this scene only if the heroes capture Dumont without incapacitating him. They can't talk to him if he runs off, is dead, or is unconscious. If the cultist can't be questioned, skip ahead to Scene 7.

The trucker is a big man, with a thin beard and a feverish intensity in his eyes. He's dressed in a weathered old parka and wears a black ball cap on his head. Strands of unkempt hair cover his shoulders. He looks up at you with contempt. "You think I am beaten so easily, eh?" he snarls. He's got a strange accent, maybe French-Canadian, in his voice. "I think no. My friend out in the storm will dispose of you one by one. When morning comes, I'll be here, and you'll all be frozen corpses!"

This is an encounter scene. The heroes have a chance to interrogate Dumont and find out what he's up to, what's waiting outside, and how they can defeat it. It's also another way for you to let the players in on the story's background so that they'll understand why their heroes became involved.

Questions and Answers

Ask the players if their heroes are replying to Dumont's threat or asking him questions. Determine what topic they're asking

about and use the guidelines to determine what they can get out of the cultist. Remember, Dumont is contemptuous and angry. He'll spit out anything he says, adding various insults as you see fit.

Who Are You? "I am Jacob Dumont."

If the players ask what he does or where he comes from, Dumont tells them that he is a powerful sorcerer. He threatens them with horrible dooms. "You have meddled with *Les Trieze Corbins*. We shall remember that—always."

What's Going on Here? "Nothing that you should have interfered with, fool."

If the players press harder, call for an Interaction-interview, Interaction-intimidate, or Investigate skill check. (If the speaking hero doesn't have any of these skills, an Interaction check is fine.) Each successful skill check reveals one piece of information:

- Dumont's here to retrieve some artifact.
- The artifact was in the possession of a man named Jonas Riley—the fellow who was injured in the demon's attack.
- The demon is helping Dumont.

What Are You Looking For? "If I tell you, you will keep it from me. I am not stupid."

If the players press, he adds, "It is something sacred—a work of my master's hand. I will not have you defile it with your touch."

What Is the Thing Outside? "A demon of winter—a great and terrible demon. I command it. Soon it will destroy all of you!"

How Do We Beat the Demon? "Hah! Your weapons are almost useless. Better to consider how you want to meet your end."

If the players continue, have them make skill checks as described above. Each successful skill check reveals a piece of the following information:

- The demon won't give up until it accomplishes its mission.
- Magical spells may dismiss the creature. (Unfortunately, neither Dumont nor the heroes know any magical spells.)
- Mundane weapons won't hurt it much, but fire or silver might harm it.

What If We Just Kill (or Hurt) You Now? "I have no fear of death or torture. There are more of us. One sacrifice for the cause is nothing."

Getting Ready?

While the heroes were interrogating or holding Dumont, they might have had some time to make some preparations for another confrontation with the demon. Ask the players whether they want their heroes to do anything while they're questioning Dumont.

Get Weapons: McDermott and Wheeler have some heavy weapons in their cars. Retrieving them takes the heroes only a minute, but make sure you scare the players by allowing them to think the demon may attack at any moment!

Get Fire: Preparing torches or Molotov cocktails (gasoline-filled bottles with rags stuffed into the neck for easy lighting and throwing) is a good idea. It takes only a few minutes for a hero to pump gas from the filling station, but he or she has to go outside first. Again, scare the players to build suspense.

Get Silver: Several characters may have silver jewelry, and the convenience store includes a few pieces of locally made sterling silver earrings. It takes only a few minutes to empty the buckshot from a shotgun shell and stuff it full of silver. Assume that the heroes can put together six shots' worth of silver.

Interview's Over

Allow the players to question Dumont until they've followed up two or three lines of inquiry. Then read the text below and go to Scene 7.

Dumont suddenly throws back his head and laughs. "I tire of this game," he says. "Come to me, my pet!" He gives out a horrifying shriek, spitting out words in a language you don't know.

Scene 7: Fire and Ice

If the heroes kill or incapacitate Dumont, or when Dumont decides the interrogation is over, the ice-demon breaks into the building to finish off the surviving heroes. This time the demon tries to kill everyone it can catch.

Outside, the wind howls. You hear glass breaking and the sound of a door flying open. A gust of icy wind sweeps through the building, as the storm suddenly reaches out for you!

The other people in the rest stop—the employees and your fellow travelers—scatter and run, seeking shelter. In the confusion, a sharp blast of wind knocks over the gas lanterns, which gutter out, leaving you in darkness!

The demon attacks any hero it can catch. Remember that the creature is indoors now, so it loses its action check bonus and superior resistance modifiers.

If you want to make this fight more dramatic, the demon slashes once at a hero and then chases one of the supporting cast members. Mabel runs into the storeroom; Anne and Danny flee into the restaurant; Ahmed runs for the nearest door; and Norma just goes to ground under a table in the donut shop.

Fight Ice with Fire . . .

The players may realize by now that guns don't work extremely well against the ice-demon. There are several ways to attack the demon with fire, though. Dr. Neary has several road flares in her car, and the gas station is nearby. There are three ways to use these weapons against the creature.

Warding: Any open flame or a burning flare deters the demon from attacking a hero who specifically tries to keep the flame between the creature and herself. The demon must make a successful Will feat at a +2 step penalty to ignore a flare or torch and attack the hero carrying the flame.

Douse and Light: There's plenty of gasoline around. A hero could fill a bucket with gasoline and carry a lighter, torch, or flare to light the gasoline fast. Dousing the demon requires the

hero to get close to the demon (3 meters or less) and make a successful Dexterity feat check with a -1 step bonus. Lighting the gasoline takes another action. If the demon is set aflame, it suffers d6, 2d6, or 3d6 points of wound damage on an Ordinary, Good, or Amazing success with the dousing attempt.

Molotov Cocktail: Attacking with a Molotov cocktail requires an Athletics-*throw* skill check (or just Athletics, if the hero has no *throw* skill). The cocktail ignites immediately, without needing an action to torch it off. It inflicts d4, d6, or 2d6 points of wound damage on an Ordinary, Good, or Amazing success with the attack roll.

Aerosol Sprays: Using fire to light the liquid from a can of hair spray, for example, can inflict d4+1 points of stun damage, d4 points of wound damage, or d4+2 points of wound damage for an Ordinary, Good, or Amazing success.

... or Gunfire

Wheeler's assault rifle and Officer McDermott's shotgun aren't much more effective than pistols, since the damage still downgrades before it affects the demon.

Silver Bullets: If the heroes loaded any shotgun shells with silver, they'll do much better. The demon is affected normally by silver weapons (no downgrading effect to damage), and it receives no armor protection against silver projectiles. Since the shotgun inflicts double damage at short range, one or two hits with silver-filled shells should take care of the demon.

Occult Knowledge

Dr. Akens knows enough about the occult to suspect that Dumont doesn't have the skill to control the winter-demon without help. During the battle, have the player running Dr. Akens roll a Lore-*occult lore* skill check. If successful, he realizes that the snow globe may be some sort of talisman that keeps the demon in check. (If Dr. Akens has read through Riley's notes, give the player a -2 step bonus to the skill check.) This successful skill check also allows Akens to theorize that the snow globe may have the same vulnerability that the demon does—fire.



Destroying the snow globe requires that it be engulfed in fire or great heat for 1 round, then struck with a hard object. During the time the globe is heated, the winter-demon is completely vulnerable to *any* attack. If the globe is struck after the round of heat, it instantly shatters, at which point the demon is no longer tied to this dimension (since it can no longer achieve its designated goal). Should this occur, the demon must make a Will feat check at the beginning of each round. If it succeeds, it remains in the fight. If it fails, go to "Victory?" below.

Victory?

If the heroes defeat the demon or destroy the snow globe, read or paraphrase the following to the players:

The howling of the wind and the screaming of the winter-demon rise to an intolerable pitch. Stinging ice scours your flesh, and waves of bitter cold rake your body. Then the creature seems to explode into a spray of ice, dissipating in the wind. Its chattering howls die with it, slowly fading away. The wind relents, and the malign sentience of the storm outside seems to vanish as well.

It's done.

Or Defeat?

If the demon is simply too much for the heroes, you can spare their lives—just make sure that the demon can reach the snow globe. If a hero is carrying the artifact, the demon batters that hero into unconsciousness and then steals the globe; if the globe is simply lying about somewhere, the demon ignores the heroes, seizes the globe, and leaves. If he can, Dumont makes his escape.

If some of the heroes are in bad shape, the supporting characters who work in the rest stop can attempt to save their lives with some quick first aid. Use your discretion, but don't be too harsh.

Conclusion

If Jonas Riley survives, he comes to sometime around sunrise. Although he's weak and exhausted, he carefully questions the heroes about the events of the preceding night. Then he offers the heroes his business card, marked with the Hoffmann Institute logo. "You handled yourselves pretty well," Riley tells them. "We're looking for people like you." This is a great way to set the stage for future adventures.



If Riley didn't survive, another Hoffmann Institute agent named Mary Carter shows up at the rest stop at daybreak, following the snowplows. She pieces together the heroes' story and offers the same deal.

If Dumont made his escape, don't worry. The bad guys might have won the day, but some or all of the heroes probably survived. They know the story of *Les Trieze Corbins* now, and they've got a reason to go after Dumont. You can use this as a springboard for another adventure—perhaps one of your own creation.