

Constructing Organizations with Fate

Organizations are built in much the same way that character's are, with both aspects and skills, albeit from somewhat different lists. While it is possible to build organizations in a phased manner, unless multiple organizations are being created at the same time (such as for a conspiracy game, see below) there is little real reason to do so. GMs are encouraged to make use of the pyramid cheatsheet.

Organizations should be built on the model of 1 aspect per 4 skills, though “freebie” aspects may be appropriate.

Organization Aspects

As with characters, aspects reflect the nature of the organization. It should be possible for someone to read the list of aspects and get a sense of the nature of the organization. As such, organization's aspects should usually encompass the scope and nature of the organization.

The scope of the organization can encompass a number of elements, like the size of the membership or how far-reaching the organization may be. Scope is not synonymous with influence, that's covered by skills, but it is complementary. Scope is rarely measured precisely, but as a rule of thumb it correlates with how many areas of influence (see the influence skill, below) the organization extends to on a roughly 1/1 basis. Scope also sets the default difficulty for many internal activities, especially of an administrative nature. If scope is not clearly implicit in the aspect, assume it to be equal to the highest ranking aspect.

Other aspects should give insight into the nature of the organization, and are things like Sub-Genius, Criminal or Mercantile. These aspects should give a sense of the sort of activities the organization pursues, or what manner of philosophy it follows.

These are not the only aspects an organization may have, but they are the most common. Other aspect may reinforce skills (“Conspiracy” or “Rich”) or may be something else entirely.



Using Scope

In a setting spanning a tightly packed continent, the GM decides there are six major areas of influence: the five main nations and a sixth for “The Wilds” existing at the western end of the known world. In creating the main church for the setting, the GM decides to give it a large scope, represented as

One True Church □□□□□

That's an Epic scope, and it means that the church can be found represented almost anywhere in the setting. However, that means that all administration rolls for the church at large have a default difficulty of Epic.

Organization Skills

Skills measure those things the organization can do, such as exercising influence or drawing upon resources. While there are only a few skill types that an organization may take, they are much like knowledge skills in that they may be taken multiple times to specify the area of use (So an organization might have Influence: England and Influence: France).

Organization skills have very specific uses, and as such cannot be freely substituted for each other. As such, if an organization has a great deal of influence, and wants to use that influence to secure resources, that should be represented by a resources skill (or can default to mediocre).

In general, organizations are bound to the same rules regarding the skill pyramid that characters are, though the GM may grant exceptions for special cases.

The usual skills for organizations are as follows:

Control (Region) - This represents how much overt control the organization holds over a given area, usually in the form of institutionalized rule.

Sway (Region) - Sway represents non-institutional power over a given area, be it due to respect, fear or any other appropriate motivator. Like control, sway is obvious, and it does much which control does.

However, it is less effective than true control, and as such it is at a -1 to all actions.

Influence (Region) - This represents how much secret sway the organization has. Practically speaking, this works in the same way sway does (albeit at -2 from control), but unlike sway (which is obvious) there is no obvious tie back to the organization.



Comment: Why take Sway instead of Control?

The single biggest difference between sway and control is one of responsibility. Control is appropriate for ruling bodies and the like, who are tied to the region they control. In contrast, sway provides some amount of power, but it does not carry the responsibility to the region which control does.

The penalty on Sway and Influence is also somewhat deceptive. The same effect could have been achieved by making them difficult skills (q.v.). However, that would have made it harder to fill a skill pyramid, so we opted for the current model.

Information (Region) - This skill represents knowledge of current events in appropriate areas, and is most appropriate for organizations with decent intelligence and espionage arms.

Arms (type) - Many organizations have access to a number of rough and ready individuals willing to do (or prevent) harm on command. Because these rules are for organizations (rather than nations), the main differentiation is one of quality. A given arms score represents one military aspect of an organization, so if an organization has more than one military arm, more than one skill is appropriate.

Resources (type) - The type is usually money, but sometimes an organization has a great deal of some other sort of resource, like a trade commodity or a particular type of service.

Unity - This measures how unified the organization is with higher unity meaning less internal strife. High Unity organizations tend to be more stable.

Administration - The larger an organization is, the more of its resources it needs to commit to keeping itself in order, and this skill measures how effectively that's done.

Communication - The other side of the coin is communication, which is a measure of how effectively a message may be communicated within the organization. For a small organization, this skill may be entirely irrelevant, but for a large organization, it can be critical. This skill is also highly complementary to high information skills.

Special Skills

Many organizations will have at least one special skill which represents something peculiar which that organization does which others may not. These special skills could be almost anything, depending on the nature of the setting and the organization, but some of the more common types include:

Magic - The organization has access to some manner of arcane arts, be it the blessings of the priests or ties to ancient secrets. This generally means the organization has access to spellcasters of some stripe or another, and the skill represents their quality and type. Much like arms, if the organization has access to multiple types, multiple skills are appropriate.

Assassination - The ability to quietly make people dead. Naturally, this is illegal pretty much everywhere, and had best be accompanied a great deal of secrecy.

Secrecy - This is a measure of how hard it is to find things out about the organization and (at higher levels) whether or not the organization exists at all. Whether this secrecy is an intentional conspiracy or merely the result of extreme obscurity can be determined at creation.

Reputation - The opposite of secrecy, this is the public face of an organization insofar as it may deviate from the reality. Most organizations have an implicit reputation based upon their aspects and activities, but it is possible to put on a "false face", represented by this skill.

Lore - The organization has access to a large body of knowledge of some sort (as with arms: multiple lores mean multiple skills), and it's generally implicit that this is knowledge that may be hard to come by under other circumstances.

Holdings

It is also possible for an organization to spend skill points on holdings, such as safe houses or strongholds. The rules for these are similar to the rules for items, with each skill ranks translating into some sort of quality for the holding. Possible qualities include:

Fortified - The holding is protected in some way.

Hidden - The holding is difficult to find.

Isolated - The holding is far from civilization.

Ornate - The holding is impressive to behold

Big - The holding is extensive

Magical - The holding is magical in some way. This may be useful (it's a node of power) or decorative (it floats over a volcano's caldera). In general, if the magic provides some additional benefit (like defensibility), other qualities should be purchased.



I'm Going Mobile!

The first thing that may occur to a reader is "What about mobile?". It sounds like a great quality - sorcerers with crawling towers and the like seem like a pretty cool option. And it's true, the system supports this (as well as "flying", "alive" or "invisible" or a myriad of others), and in fact, we encourage their use with the simple caveat: do so sparingly. Nothing makes things like this bland faster than overuse.

In general, this shouldn't be a problem since the GM can use their own standards, but if you're running a conspiracy game (see below) it's worth putting some limits on these things, even if they are increasing costs. Invisible could be treated as buying 3 or 6 ranks of "hidden" or a sufficiently different quality, like mobile, might simply cost 3 or more ranks.

Alternately, the qualities could be on a scale - 1 quality of Mobile might allow very slow movement, or only movement within very limited bounds, and many more ranks may be required to make the holdings really powerful. As ever, this balance is a matter of taste, but it's important to stay aware of this element.



Example: Creating an Organization

The Church of Saint Agnes (CSA) is a small militant order within the Quintarian church, dedicated to a warrior-priestess who martyred herself to protect a cloister of monks. CSA followers generally make themselves available to Quintarian priests travelling to dangerous destinations.

The CSA is a very minor sect, so they're being built with only 3 aspects. Because they're a sect of a larger church with no real influence of their own, scope aspects don't seem appropriate. Instead, 2 aspects of "Quintarian" represent their tie to the mother church, while a single aspect of "Militant" reflects their flavor.

A quick look at the aspect cheatsheet says that's 5 Averages, 2 Fairs and a Good. Because the pyramid only technically needs 3 Averages, that means 2 ranks could be put into holdings without breaking the pyramid. With that in mind:

The Good obviously goes into Arms to represent the Templars of the church.

They're fairly well organized and well funded (it's a popular charity for soldiers) so Administration and Resources (Money) are Fair.

At Average are Sway: Beve, Communication, and the special Skill "Charity", which represents the good works (and subsequent good will received) the church pursues.

The two remaining ranks are spent on chapterhouses in the Cities of Beve and Anas, with Beve being their main house (Thus the Sway).

The final write up looks like:

Aspects:

Quintarian	<input type="checkbox"/>
Militant	<input type="checkbox"/>

Skills

Arms: Templars	Good
Resources: Money	Fair
Administration	Fair
Sway: Beve	Average
Charity	Average
Communication	Average

Holdings

Chapterhouse: Beve	<input type="checkbox"/> (Fortified)
Chapterhouse: Anas	<input type="checkbox"/> (Fortified)

Using Organizations

Once play has begun, there are several benefits to having stats for organizations. It provides a good baseline for what various organizations may know and what their interests are. It also provides an excellent shorthand for dealing with NPCs from that organization. If the Knights of Anton have Arms (Knights) at Good, then Joe Nameless Knight can probably be considered to have a “Good” in appropriate military skills.

Additionally, it provides a nicely abstracted way for organizations to come into conflict with one another and to resolve it with a minimum of headache. How likely are Walsingham’s spies (Information (France): Good) to find out about John Ballard’s Jesuit Conspiracy (Secrecy: Fair) to assassinate the queen? Easily determined!

For games which use an “off season”, organization statistics can also be used to represent and resolve longer term conflicts. Organizations may even have their own wound track for GMs wishing to concentrate on this element.

The Conspiracy Game

One interesting option for using this system is as a preamble to another game. Allow each player to construct an organization in a phased fashion, and allow the interactions of the organizations and the choices of the players establish some of the backdrop of the setting. The play of this is simple enough, but a few complications can spice it up:

- Disallow player from making subsequent characters with membership in the organization they created.
- At the end of each phase, have each player secretly write the name of the organizations closest ally or greatest enemy among the group. The GM looks at these secretly, and whenever there is a matchup (including enemy to ally!) add an aspect to each organization called “Connection to <name>”. This means the two groups compliment each other well, but are also vulnerable to each other. After all, in a conspiracy game, what is an ally except an enemy who has not yet shown his stripes?



Option: Nations

It’s easy to see that this thinking could be translated into tracking nations, kingdoms or other political holdings (which will be collectively referred to as domains). And There’s no reason not to, but a few considerations are appropriate. There are a few more complexities that enter the picture when dealing with a kingdom or duchy, things like borders, physical characteristics and armed forces. Most of these things can be handled by adding additional aspect types and redefining existing ones.

Scope translates into the physical size of the domain, from a humble fief (□) to a continent spanning empire (□□□□□□). And here’s the real trick: Do not bother to even try to balance this - Scope is hugely important in this regard, and in general a domain of a given scope will barely notice the goings on in a domain just 2 steps smaller. When dealing with nations, simply determine how big the scope will be before anything else. Subsequent aspects, like Size and Army, might differentiate between same-scope domains, but otherwise, scope is generally going to tell. As a rule of thumb, the scope of a domain represents how many regions it contains, for purposes of skills.

Borders are aspects. Like scope, they provide no skills, but they are important to have. Similarly, if the domain is in a chain of fealty, aspects for those above and below are appropriate freebies.

Other Aspects: Aspects of dogma and specific resources (army size, geographic features) are the aspects a domains built with (and which differentiate them from other domains)

Skills work the same as they do for organizations, though some (like secrecy) are rarely appropriate. Skills like control are not implicit in creation, so it’s strongly suggested that the ruler or rulers rank those skills quite high. Holdings are an excellent way to represent points of interest within the domain.

Sample Organizations

The Amazing Vinka's Travelling Circus

The circus is one of the most popular shows in the kingdom, but it also has a secret. A mysterious patron provides the circus with much of its resources, and in return uses it as a personal group of spies and infiltrators throughout the kingdom.

The Circus is a 4 Phase organization.

Aspects:

Travelling Circus	□□
Spies	□
Obligation	□

Skills:

Espionage:	Good
Secrecy:	Good
Reputation (Circus):	Fair
Entertain:	Fair
Resources (Patron):	Fair
Communication:	Average
Arms (Roustabouts):	Average
Unity:	Average
Administration:	Average

Holdings:

None

Notes:

The Circus has 2 special skills, Espionage and Entertain. Espionage works as a targeted Information skill - they can act as if they have an information skill at that level wherever they are physically located. Entertain represents how well they (as a whole) put on a show.

The Star Rangers

The Star Rangers are the law enforcement arm of the Galactic Empire. Their Blue spacesuits and blasto-pistols are recognized throughout the Galaxy and feared by all those who would do wrong! Of course, they are also consistently underfunded, outnumbered and outgunned, but all the same, the Rangers always get their man!

The Rangers are an 8 phase organization, and the Galactic empire consists of 5 main regions: The Core, The Rim, The Corporate Sector, Wildspace and the Starbelt.

Aspects

Galactic Law Enforcement	□□□□□
"Always Get Their Man"	□□
Honorable	□

Skills

Arms (Rangers):	Great
Unity:	Great
Information (Core)	Good
Information (Corporate)	Good
Information (Starbelt)	Good
Administration:	Fair
Communication:	Fair
Resources (Ships)	Fair
Information (Rim)	Fair
Control (Rim)	Average
Sway (Core)	Average
Sway (Starbelt)	Average
Resources (Money)	Average
Information (Wildspace)	Average

Holdings

Carrier Group Roland □□
The rangers have no fixed base, operating instead out of this mobile force, allowing them to deploy to the 6 corners of the galaxy when the need arises.
 (Mobile, Fortified)

The Dinner Guests

The guests are the politest of conspiracies. Consisting of members of some of the most powerful families in the city, it is a loosely knit group with a shared desire to maintain the power of the nobility and keep the peace within the city. While some members exercise considerable personal power, the Guests' greatest strength is as an information network. With a more complete picture of the byzantine web of politics supporting the city, members are able to stay a few steps ahead of the bulk of the lords, allowing for complicated political machinations without overt effort.

The Guests are a 3 aspect organization. However, their potence should not be judged solely on this fact - while the organization as a whole has little in the way of resources or sway, its individual members have a great deal of both, and for them the goal of the organization is to provide the information that allows them to use that position most effectively.

Aspects

Social Club	□
Aristocratic	□□

Skills

Information (Nobility)	Good
Secrecy	Fair
Communication	Fair
Sway (The City)	Average
Information (Tradesmen)	Average
Information (Bureaucracy)	Average
Resources (Money)	Average

Holdings

Adolpho's	□
<i>A restaurant on The Hill with a very private clientele.</i>	
(Private)	

The Rusted Blade

Servants of Kindalos, Lord of Decay, these zealous assassins pursue a methodical, meticulous agenda of destabilization and decay. The First Law of Kindalos is that the only true growth comes in the midst of chaos and destruction, so the blades seek to promote lawlessness and strife. Their targets are rarely great leaders, instead they are sage advisors and respected experts of the sort whose knowledge and advice keeps things moving smoothly. Needless to say, the mere hint of a cell of blades springing up in an area results in a diligent hunt. Few regimes can afford the sort of attrition in their bureaucracy that the Blades tend to represent.

The Blades are a 6 aspects Organization

Aspects

Cult	□□
Zealous	□□
Decay	□
Secretive	□

Skills

Secrecy	Great
Assassination	Good
Administration	Good
Communication	Fair
Arms (Blades)	Fair
Resources (Money)	Fair
Information (Andalla)	Average
Information (Indit)	Average
Information (Kris)	Average
Lore (Kindalos)	Average

Holdings

Verdigris Temple	□□□
<i>A network of caves, riddled with traps, which doubles as a temple of Kindalos</i>	
(Hidden, Isolated, Trapped)	