Character Creation

While we provide you quite a few examples of creatures and characters for the Asylum setting, a lot of the fun is making up your own! The following rules creates characters that are generally competent and on a level footing with each other. By that we mean that while each character will have their various strengths and weaknesses, they should all be able to contribute meaningfully as useful members of a team.

Every character is assumed to have some practical understanding of both the mundane world the Insiders deal with as well as the more common supernatural elements that Outsiders have introduced. That is not to say that every person in the world shares this level of supernatural experience nor is every Outsider well adapted to the Inside. The world can contain both better and worse specimen than these types of characters. Keep in mind that Narrators don’t have to follow these rules and actually have simpler guidelines they can use to create and manage non-player characters. At the same time, player characters can grow in power and might eventually challenge whatever powers once overshadowed them.

We recommend breaking character creation into two stages: Concept and Details. Both stages are important, but quite often the decisions made during concept inform your decisions and make figuring out the details simpler.

# First Stage: Concept

Step 1: Determine Origin and Type

Step 2: Pick Aspects and Powers

Step 3: Establish Foundations and Harmony

Step 4: Choose Allegiance and Profession

# Step 1: Determine Origin and Heritage

Origin and Heritage probably determine more about who your character is than any other decision, so it’s natural they should come first. Your heritage is basically what kind of creature your character is. This choice determines some of your character’s Aspects and several other traits. If you choose to play an Outsider you have three types to choose from: Fey, Chimera, and Ephemera. Fey are the humanoid “people” of the Outside. Chimera are the intelligent but inhuman fauna that dwell Outside. Finally, Ephemera are the formless intangible spirits that sometimes exist in the hostile interstice between Outside worlds.

Even if you choose to play a human Insider, there are three different types of Heritage to choose from. Scions are humans who inherit a small amount of innate magic from a supernatural ancestor. Cursed are wretched souls who permanently corrupted themselves for magical power. Lastly, Attuned are otherwise “normal” human beings who seem to have become empowered by some greater purpose and connection with the Inside world.

While the decision of your character’s origin has little impact on the rules, it probably says a lot about their history and perspective. For instance, if you are playing a human then your character is almost certainly from Inside, and they are quite likely are familiar with the sight of computers, cars, and airplanes. Of course, Earth is a big and complicated place, so you should probably also think about *where* they were born and raised. Did they grow up in a rural town or a big city? How do the various cultures and beliefs they’ve been exposed to shape their attitudes about Outsiders? What eventually compelled them to become a Contractor?

There are many similar questions to consider for Outsiders. The Outside is composed of almost every location from myths and legends. Your character could be from any of these realms or perhaps even one that humans have never even heard of. What sort of people lived in that place? Why did your character leave their home to travel all the way to Black Iron?

# Step 2: Pick Aspects and Powers

Your Origin and your Heritage determine a lot about who and what you are in general, but Aspects and Powers also help to make your character truly unique. Most of the magical tricks and superhuman abilities that Outsiders perform are Powers. Likewise, human beings sometimes have extraordinary talents and traits, such as beauty or an iron will that make them exceptional. While humanity doesn’t perceive these abilities as paranormal, many Outsiders consider these powers to be a special human kind of magic.

Powers are grouped into shared categories known as Aspects. Aspects aren’t artificial categories but actual benefits that come in addition to the powers you selected. So long as you have *at least one* power from an Aspect you have the benefits of that Aspect. Often it’s easier to decide which Aspects fit your character first to narrow your selection of powers that you have to select from. Another reason Aspects are important is because they help inform you which attributes and skills will benefit your character the most once you’re done with the concept stage of character creation.

## Covert and Manifest Forms

Every player character is considered to be a Contractor, meaning they’ve signed at least one magical contract that has modified some of their spiritual being. We’ll cover the details of those contracts in the last step of character creation. What you need to know for the moment is that while every contract is different, one thing that all magical contracts have in common is they allow the Contractor to physically change between a mundanely human Covert form and an obviously mystic Manifest form.

For Outsiders, the Manifest form is their original body and appearance. An Outsider’s Covert form is a type of magical camouflage and disguise that borrows and blends an amalgam features from the Insiders that they’ve signed contracts with. For Human Insiders it’s the Covert form that is their normal human body. The Manifest form of an Insider is an uncanny reflection of their soul or “perfect self.”

We’re bringing all of this up now because your choice of Aspects shapes both the appearance and capabilities of the Manifest form. For instance, if you decide that your character is a dragon then you might want to start with the Aspects of the Colossus, Inferno, and Savagery. This would mean that in Manifest form your character is a huge fire-breathing monster. Your dragon’s Manifest form might have leathery wings but because you didn’t pick the Aspect of the Sky they can’t carry you through the air yet. Don’t worry; you can still acquire additional Aspects through character advancement during the game.

# Step 3: Establish Foundations and Harmony

Character in Asylum can have very complex and values and motivations. The Hard-boiled Noir and Fairy-tale Fantasy themes of from setting mean that your character might face almost irresistible temptations or perhaps do the *wrong* thing for the most righteous of causes. What is morally right and wrong in Asylum won’t always be simple or clear, but that doesn’t mean your character shouldn’t have strong beliefs or causes. To help emphasize themes of temptation, passion, and corruption all Asylum characters have Foundations and Harmony.

Foundations represent your character’s top 5 principles or causes and thus the five most important qualities of their personality or soul. We provide plenty of example Foundations later in this packet, but you’re encouraged to invent and create new ones that fit your concept. Be sure to write them in order of importance: 1st is your most important Foundation and 5th is your least important. While players don’t *do* much with character Foundations, the Narrator is encouraged to exploit them to tempt characters into interesting choices and actions. Characters can technically barter Foundations using Contracts, but this is directly comparable to selling part of their soul and seen as a foolish and desperate act.

Harmony is a measure of the spiritual and emotional wellness of your character. Engaging in Contracts is akin to carving off pieces of your soul and grafting on new pieces in their place. In a sense, a Contractor becomes a new person after each Contract. This type of fundamental change takes a spiritual toll on the contractor by lowering the Contractor’s Harmony. The more changes a Contractor makes to herself, the lower her Harmony drops.

Your character’s Harmony helps determine how strongly she feels about her Foundations. As her Harmony drops, your character may lose emotional connection to the Foundations that motivated them. Your previous decisions for Origin and Aspects determine your starting Harmony. Most player characters start with a Harmony around 5. A character loses interest and passion for any Foundation rated higher than her current Harmony. For example, a Contractor with Harmony 4 no longer feels a strong emotional attachment to her 5th Foundation.

Harmony loss isn’t permanent so over time a Contractor’s sense of self can gradually recover. Unfortunately, by then they’ve probably done things that they aren’t proud of and may conflict with those reconnected Foundations. If that happens to your character then have fun roleplaying those regrets! Seasoned Contractors commonly suffer from chronic dissociation and detachment from sustained Harmony loss. All Contractors need to consider the tenuous balance between their jobs and their Harmony. A Contractor who trades too much of herself away can suffer from overtly supernatural symptoms before eventually losing all sense of identity and suffering a complete psychotic break.

# Step 4: Choose Allegiance and Profession

Black Iron (the Earth) is a dangerous place and you’re going to need friends and allies here. There are many different important factions and conspiracies competing and cooperating with each other. Our Factions section has them in greater detailed, but as a Contractor your probably work closely either with the government (such as the Bureau of Outsider Affairs), a private company from the Red Market, or an Outsider Pantheon. You don’t have to pick a faction, but each faction grants some unique benefit or drawback to your character.

Government agencies like the Bureau of Outsider Affairs (BOA) are primarily interested in maintaining the peace and secrecy of Outsiders. They need Contractors to investigate supernatural crimes and catch the culprits. The Firms of the Red Market sell magical Contracts and use magic to profit in business ventures. They need Contractors to protect their deals and assets from supernatural criminals and rivals. The Pantheons are disparate organizations dedicated to different Outsider nations. They sometimes resemble ancient mystery cults dedicated to gods like Hermes or Horus, but many of them are now involved in more modern affairs. Pantheons use Contractors as agents and enforcers to strike against their rivals and spread their influence.

Lastly, Asylum is both a faction and a political movement. Asylum wants the various factions to work together to give Outsiders greater liberty as well as prepare for a time when secrecy is no longer necessary. Asylum tries to recruit people who are already “in the know” about the supernatural, and so most Contractors loyal to Asylum are also part of another faction.

While many of the factions have common problems and enemies, they are still at each other’s necks just as often. It can be fun to roleplay those rivalries, but a shared loyalty to the cause of Asylum gives the characters a reason to occasionally cooperate and act heroically. For this reason, we suggest that a new group of players should probably all make characters that are loyal to Asylum in addition to any other faction they’re connected with.

# Second Stage: Details

Step 5: Set Attributes

Step 6: Train Skills and Expertise

Step 7: Calculate Derived Attributes

Step 8: Sign a Contract

Now that you have a good idea about who and what you’re playing, it’s time to work out the nitty-gritty details that influence most of the game mechanics. First you’re going to set your Attributes, then your Skills and Expertise. Those will be used to calculate your Derived Attributes. After all of that you get to sign your first Contract!

# Step 5: Set Attributes

Every character in Asylum has five core Attributes: Agility, Intuition, Might, Presence, and Wits. These attributes represent their general fitness and capability, and each is rated from 1 to 6. A rating of 2 is considered comparable to the “average” person. A rating of 1 in an attribute suggests that the character is somehow flawed or deficient. A rating of 5 in an attribute is extraordinary, and 6 is reserved only for those character whose attributes have been modified by Legendary Aspects.

See page [XX] to learn how each shape Attribute shapes your character.

You start with 15 total points of attributes each of your attribute ratings have a price equal to their rating. For instance, an Agility of 4 costs 4 points. (Because you have to put at least one point into every attribute, you really have only 10 points to spend freely.) After that you should apply any bonuses to your Attributes from Legendary Aspects.

# Step 6: Train Skills and Expertise

Besides their general Attributes, characters also have more specialized Skills that represent the bits of Tradecraft they’ve picked up throughout their lives. A character’s rating in a Skill determines their modifier when rolling dice to succeed at a task. The Skill ratings are Untrained, Trained, and Expert, and Master. The modifiers for these ratings are as follows:

**Untrained:** Half of relevant Attribute (Round down)

**Trained:**  +3

**Expert:** +5

**Master:** +6

You start with seven total points to train skill with. Untrained ratings are free. Trained ratings cost 1 point, and Expert ratings cost a total of 2 points. Master rating can only be achieved through Master Aspects, and these Aspects require that you have Expert rating to qualify. If you start with a Master Aspect, be sure in make sure you spend two points at this step to fulfill your Expert requirement.

For every skill you have a rating of Expert you can obtain an Expertise. See Page [XX] for a list of Expertise to choose from. Each Expertise offers you small customization options and bonuses for specific circumstances.

# Step 7: Calculate Derived Attributes

Derived Attributes represent qualities that are either facets or combinations of your character’s Attributes. Derived attributes are somewhat passive and difficult to train so they rarely improve unless your Attributes or Aspects change. The derived attributes are as follows:

## Health

Health measures how much stress and strain a character can be exposed to before succumbing to injury or illness. The more health a character has, the more she can push herself in the face of danger and exhaustion. A character’s health is calculated as:

Health = 20 + [Might + Presence]

## Focus

Focus measures how much inner strength a character possesses for fueling both his natural abilities and magical powers. Characters with more Focus are better at channeling their willpower and can thus use their powers more efficiently. Focus is calculated as:

Focus = 5 + [Intuition or Presence]

## Toughness

Toughness represent’s a character’s ability to avoid being influenced by physical attacks. The base difficulty for most attacks is determined by the target’s Toughness.

Toughness = 5 + [Lowest of Might or Agility]

## Awareness

Awareness represents a character’s ability to resist mental influence from mundane tricks and deceptions to magical illusions and mind control. The base difficulty for many social skills and supernatural powers is determined by the target’s Awareness. Awareness is calculated as:

Awareness = 5 + [Lowest of Intuition or Wits]

## Reaction

Reaction determines how quickly a character can respond in a stressful situation. Whenever an action scene begins every character rolls a single 1d10 and adds their Reaction rating to determine Initiative. Higher numbers go first, lower numbers go last.

Reaction = Agility + Wits

## Armor and Resistance

Armor absorbs some of the Impact of attacks, allowing characters slightly better odds of avoiding injury when facing danger. Most characters do not naturally have armor, so the most common form of armor is equipment. Below are some basic examples of armor available to characters. For more details see: **Equipment**

**Armor Type Example Armor Rating**

Light Padded Coat 1

Medium Kevlar Vest 2

Heavy Riot Gear 4

In addition to armor rating, some armor provides resistance to certain types of Impact. For instance, a fire fighter’s insulated jacket and helmet might provide resistance to Impact from heat and burning. In game terms this resistance means that you only take half Impact from any Impact type that you have resistance against.

# Step 8: Sign a Contract

You’re almost done! This last step is somewhat optional, but we recommend it because it helps flesh out some final details of your character and links you to the story. Every player character in Asylum is assumed to be a Contractor and so that means you should have at least one Contract.

Remember that Contracts in Asylum can magically exchange Aspects and Foundations between two beings. Now, there’s a chance that while you were perusing those Aspects and Power you saw something that looked cool but didn’t quite fit your concept or work with your origin. This is your chance to get it anyway!

Ask your Narrator about bartering for that Aspect. You don’t necessarily have to give up an Aspect of your own, but if you don’t you’ll have to give something else as valuable. Perhaps you have sworn a blood-oath to owe a dragon a one favor within the next year and a day. You could be sworn to absolute loyalty to one of your factions. Or perhaps there’s something about your character that you don’t think is special but some entity wants it for mysterious reasons!

Of course, you might be very comfortable with your character being exactly who they are. The only problem is that in order to hide among Insiders or be trusted among Outsiders you’re going to have to sign *something*. After all, nobody trusts a complete unknown variable. For that purpose, there are simple contracts that factions frequently use to establish some control over their agents while granting those agents some supernatural edge. Sometimes they’re double-edged swords, but quite frequently they are mutually beneficial. Perhaps the most famous of these limited contracts is the Familiar Bond.