



RAZORWEAVE

CORE

RULEBOOK

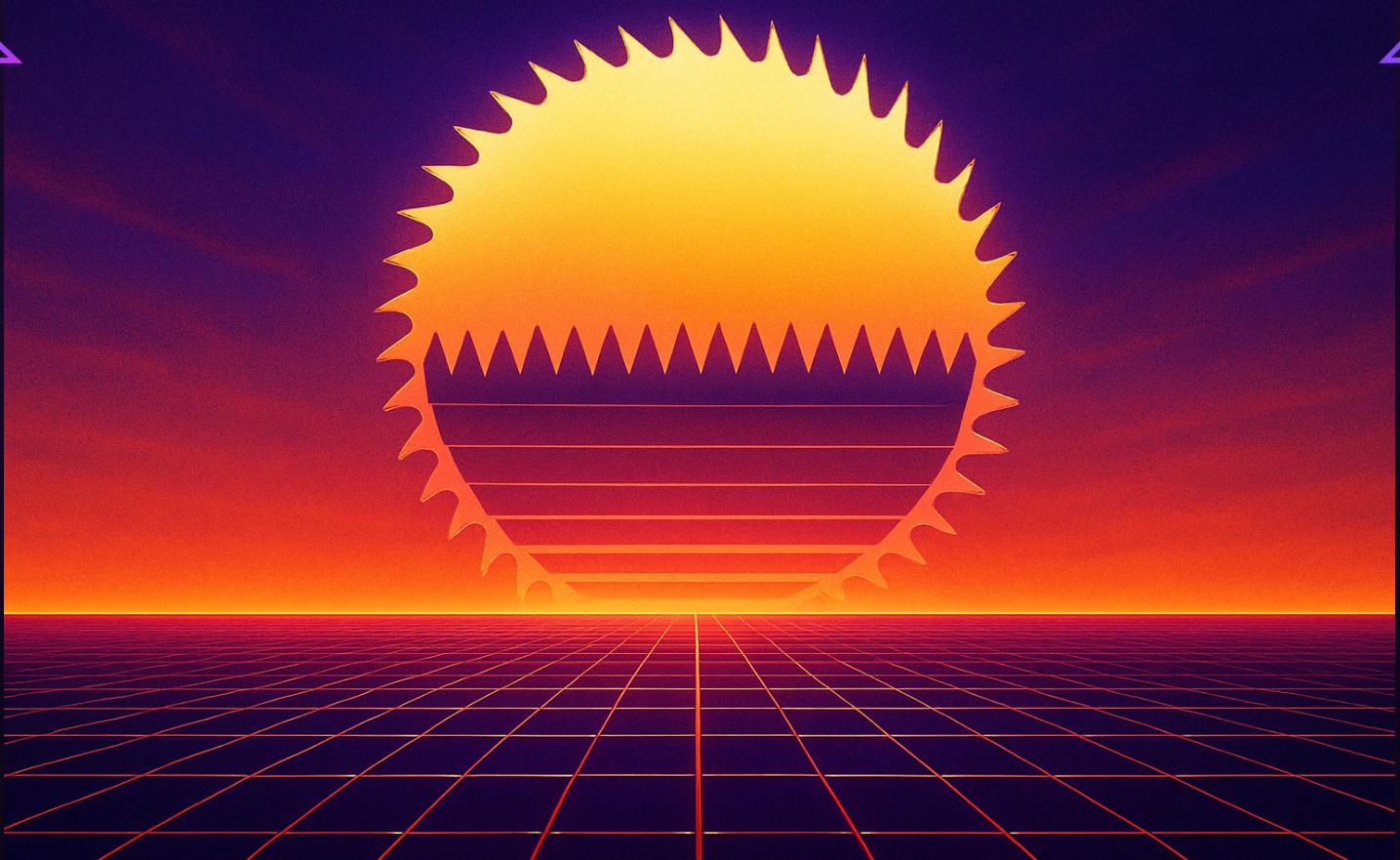
A UNIVERSAL TABLETOP ROLEPLAYING SYSTEM

PREVIEW DRAFT

CONTENTS

1.	Welcome to the Game	4
2.	Core Concepts at a Glance	38
3.	How to Use This Rulebook	42
4.	Core Principles of Play	47
5.	Ways to Play the Game	52
6.	Character Creation	56
7.	Characters and Attributes	102
8.	Actions, Checks, and Outcomes	111
9.	Tags, Conditions, and Clocks	122
10.	Combat Basics	133
11.	Exploration and Social Play	194
12.	Downtime, Recovery, and Advancement Overview	202
13.	Roleplaying Guidance and Working with the GM	209
14.	Skills System Overview	218
15.	Skills Reference	224
16.	Proficiencies System Overview	240
17.	Proficiencies Reference	247
18.	Extended Tags and Conditions Reference	264
19.	Advancement and Long Term Growth	274

20.	Optional and Variant Rules	.	284
21.	Running Sessions	.	289
22.	Running Campaigns	.	303
23.	Designing Scenarios and One Shots	.	308
24.	NPCs, VPCs, and Enemies	.	315
25.	Factions, Fronts, and World Pressure	.	321
26.	Alternative Play	.	326
27.	Sheets and Play Aids	.	331
28.	Glossary	.	337
29.	Comprehensive Index	.	350
30.	Inspirations and Acknowledgments	.	358



P A R T



Foundations

1

WELCOME TO THE GAME

You hold in your hands the key to infinite worlds.

Razorweave is a tabletop roleplaying game where you and your friends create stories together-stories of daring heists and desperate escapes, of mysteries unraveled and alliances forged, of ordinary people thrust into extraordinary circumstances. The dice add tension. The rules keep things fair. But the heart of the game is the moment when everyone at the table leans in, waiting to see what happens next.

This is not a video game where choices are scripted. This is not a board game where victory conditions are fixed. This is collaborative fiction with stakes. Your character might charm a guard, scale a crumbling tower, or face down a rival with nothing but wits and nerve. When the outcome is uncertain, you roll dice. When it's not, you simply say what happens. The story emerges from everyone's contributions-surprising even those who thought they knew where it was going.

The rules in this book support that experience. They give structure to chaos, consequences to choices, and weight to dramatic moments. You don't need to memorize everything before playing. Read what you need, play, and return for more when questions arise.

Whether you're here for pulse-pounding action, intricate mysteries, quiet character moments, or all of the above-welcome to Razorweave. Your story starts now.

If you want to jump right into your first session, continue to the Quick-Start Guide below. It covers everything you need to start playing in 30 minutes with simplified rules, pre-made characters, and a complete starter adventure.

If you prefer to understand the full system first, skip ahead to Chapter 2: Core Concepts.

Welcome to Razorweave! This chapter gets you playing in 30 minutes. Everything you need for your first session is here: simplified rules, pre-made characters, and a complete adventure. You can explore the full rulebook later-for now, let's play.

What You Need

To play Razorweave, gather these essentials:

- ◆ These rules: You're holding them. The Quick-Start section below covers everything for your first session.
- ◆ Dice: Four six-sided dice (4d6). More sets speed up play when sharing a table.
- ◆ Something to write on: Character sheets, index cards, or just scrap paper.
- ◆ Time to play: A first session typically runs 2-3 hours. Future sessions flex to fit your schedule.

The GM describes situations, players describe what their characters do, and dice determine outcomes when success is uncertain. That's the entire game loop. Everything else is just detail.

These condensed rules cover everything you need for your first session. Full explanations appear in later chapters, but you can play right now with what's here.

Your Character

Every character has four Attributes rated from 0 to 2:

- ◆ Might (MIG): Physical strength, endurance, and toughness
- ◆ Agility (AGI): Speed, precision, and reflexes
- ◆ Presence (PRE): Charisma, social influence, and force of personality
- ◆ Reason (RSN): Analysis, knowledge, and problem-solving

A rating of 2 means you're exceptional in that area. A 1 means you're competent. A 0 means you're average or weak—you can still try, but success is less certain.

When creating a character, you assign 2, 1, 1, 0 across your four Attributes-one score to each. Put your 2 in what defines your character, your 0 in what they struggle with.

Skills represent training in specific actions. If you have a relevant Skill (like Stealth, Persuasion, or Athletics), you add +1 to your roll. Skills are simple: you either have one or you don't.

Proficiencies represent specialized knowledge or tool familiarity. They don't add numbers-instead, they let you attempt things others can't or give you advantages (explained below).

Making Checks

When your character tries something risky where success isn't guaranteed, the GM calls for a Check. Here's how:

1. Roll 4d6: Roll four six-sided dice and add them together
2. Add your Attribute: Add the relevant Attribute value (0, 1, or 2)
3. Add +1 if you have a relevant Skill: If one of your Skills applies, add 1
4. Compare to the DC: The GM sets a Difficulty Class (DC) you're trying to beat

Example: Tomas tries to climb a fence while guards chase him. The GM calls for an AGI Check, DC 12. Tomas rolls 4d6 and gets 3, 4, 5, 2. He adds them together ($3+4+5+2=14$), then adds his AGI 1 for a total of 15. That beats DC 12-he makes it over the fence!

Difficulty Classes (DCs)

The GM picks a DC based on how hard the task is:

Difficulty	DC	When to Use
Easy	12	Favorable conditions,
Routine	14	Standard difficulty, typical challenge
Tough	16	Difficult task, hostile conditions
Hard	18	Very challenging, serious obstacles

For your first session, use DC 12 for easy tasks and DC 14 for most others. Save DC 16 for climactic moments.

Outcomes

Compare your total roll to the DC to determine the outcome:

Result	Outcome	What Happens
18 or higher	Critical Success	You succeed spectacularly. The
13-17 (beat DC)	Full Success	You accomplish exactly what you
8-12 (close but miss)	Partial Success	You succeed, but there's a cost,
7 or lower	Failure	Things go wrong. The situation gets worse.

Example Outcomes: Using Tomas from before (rolled 15 vs DC 12):

- ◆ If DC was 12: Full Success-he clears the fence cleanly
- ◆ If DC was 14: Full Success-he clears the fence cleanly
- ◆ If DC was 16: Partial Success-he makes it over but tears his coat, loses an item, or lands badly

Edge and Burden

Sometimes circumstances help or hinder you. The GM can grant Edge (advantage) or Burden (disadvantage):

Edge: Roll extra dice and drop the lowest results, keeping only 4.

- ◆ Edge +1: Roll 5d6, drop the lowest 1, sum the best 4
- ◆ Edge +2: Roll 6d6, drop the lowest 2, sum the best 4

Burden: Roll extra dice and drop the highest results, keeping only 4.

- ◆ Burden -1: Roll 5d6, drop the highest 1, sum the worst 4
- ◆ Burden -2: Roll 6d6, drop the highest 2, sum the worst 4

Caps and Stacking: Edge and Burden each cap at 2. Multiple sources stack until the cap. Edge and Burden cancel each other out if you have Edge +2 and Burden -1, you roll with Edge +1.

Use Edge when conditions favor you-good lighting, assistance from an ally, proper tools. Use Burden when conditions work against you-poor visibility, injuries, improvised equipment.

Example: Sera tries to pick a lock. She has Lockpicking Tools (Proficiency), so the GM gives her Edge +1. She rolls 5d6: 2, 3, 4, 5, 6. She drops the lowest (the 2) and sums the remaining four: $3+4+5+6=18$, plus her AGI 2, plus her Lockpicking Skill +1, for a total of 21. The lock opens easily.

Combat Basics

When fighting breaks out, follow this structure:

Turn Order: For your first session, use simple conversational turn order-the GM and players alternate naturally. The GM can have multiple enemies act on a single "GM turn."

Your Turn: On your turn, you can:

- ◆ Move: Walk or run a reasonable distance (about 30 feet)
- ◆ Take one action: Strike an enemy, help an ally, use an item, or attempt something creative

Core Combat Actions:

- ◆ Strike: Attack an enemy. Roll 4d6 + Attribute (usually MIG or AGI) + Combat Skill if you have one, vs DC 14. Success deals damage (see below).
- ◆ Maneuver: Reposition, create obstacles, grab something, push someone. Roll 4d6 + Attribute vs DC 12-14.
- ◆ Set Up: Create an advantage for yourself or an ally. Roll 4d6 + Attribute vs DC 12. Success creates a beneficial situation that grants Edge on the next relevant action.
- ◆ Defend/Withdraw: Protect yourself or escape. Roll 4d6 + Attribute vs DC 12-14 depending on the threat.

Damage and Being Taken Out: Instead of hit points, characters have a Resolve Clock—a track with 6 segments. When you're successfully struck in combat:

- ◆ Critical Success (attacker's margin +5 or more): Fill 3 segments
- ◆ Full Success (attacker beats DC): Fill 2 segments
- ◆ Partial Success (attacker close but misses): Fill 1 segment
- ◆ Failure (attacker misses): No damage

When your Resolve Clock fills completely (6 segments), you're taken out-knocked unconscious, forced to surrender, or flee. You're not dead unless the story demands it, but you can't keep fighting.

Example Combat Round: Rella fights a bandit. Both start with empty 6-segment Resolve Clocks.

Rella's Turn: "I strike at his weapon arm." She rolls 4d6 + AGI 2 = 16 vs DC 14. Full Success-2 segments filled on the bandit's clock (2/6).

Bandit's Turn: He swings back. GM rolls for the bandit: 13 vs DC 14. Partial Success-1 segment filled on Rella's clock (1/6).

The fight continues until one Resolve Clock fills.

That's Everything

You now know enough to play. The rules above handle 90% of situations. When something unusual comes up, the GM makes a ruling and play continues. You can look up detailed rules later-for now, dive in with the pre-generated characters and the adventure below.

Choose one of these three characters for your first session. Each represents a common archetype and shows how Attributes, Skills, and Proficiencies work together.

The Tank: Garrick Ironhand

Concept: Dockyard enforcer who solves problems through physical presence and intimidation.

Why play this character: You enjoy being the tough one. You excel in combat and physical challenges. When things need to be broken, moved, or intimidated, you're the answer. Let your teammates handle the talking and thinking-you're here to protect them and handle threats directly.

Attributes:

- ◆ Might (MIG): 2 - Exceptional strength and toughness
- ◆ Presence (PRE): 1 - Intimidating when needed
- ◆ Agility (AGI): 1 - Basic mobility
- ◆ Reason (RSN): 0 - Acts on instinct, not analysis

Skills: Brawling, Endurance, Intimidation, Athletics

Proficiencies: Dockyard Work, Heavy Tools

Starting Gear:

- ◆ Heavy work clothes (provides some protection)
- ◆ Crowbar (useful tool and improvised weapon)
- ◆ Rope (50 feet)
- ◆ Belt pouch with 10 silver coins
- ◆ Lucky brass knuckles (sentimental item from first job)

Connection: Marta, the dock foreman who gave you your first job. You owe her loyalty, and she occasionally sends work your way.

What You're Good At:

- ◆ Fighting: You hit hard and reliably. Rolling 4d6 + MIG 2 + Brawling 1 = average 17 vs DC 14. You succeed most of the time.
- ◆ Physical Challenges: Breaking doors, moving heavy objects, enduring hardship. You rarely fail when strength matters.
- ◆ Intimidation: When you need to threaten or coerce, PRE 1 + Intimidation 1 gets you far, especially backed by your physical presence.

What You Struggle With:

- ◆ Complex Thinking: RSN 0 means puzzles, investigation, and analysis are hard. Let your teammates figure out the mystery-you focus on the action.
- ◆ Social Finesse: You can intimidate, but persuasion and deception aren't your strength. Let the Face talk when charm is needed.

Combat Tactics: Get up close and Strike. You're tough enough to absorb damage. Use Intimidation to make enemies hesitate. Protect allies who are less durable.

Quick Background: You grew up on the docks, doing hard labor for hard people. You learned that problems can be solved with muscle and reputation. People respect strength-or at least fear it-and you've built a reputation as someone who gets physical jobs done. You're loyal to those who've earned it and have no patience for complicated schemes.

The Face: Sera Vane

Concept: Traveling merchant who navigates social networks and avoids physical confrontation.

Why play this character: You enjoy talking your way through problems. You excel at persuasion, deception, gathering information, and reading people. You make friends, cut deals, and turn enemies into allies. When violence erupts, you talk it down or slip away—you're here to solve problems with words, not weapons.

Attributes:

- ◆ Presence (PRE): 2 - Exceptional charm and social influence
- ◆ Agility (AGI): 1 - Quick enough to escape danger
- ◆ Reason (RSN): 1 - Sharp enough to read situations
- ◆ Might (MIG): 0 - Not physically imposing

Skills: Persuasion, Deception, Empathy, Negotiation

Proficiencies: Trade Networks, Urban Navigation

Starting Gear:

- ◆ Fine traveling clothes (marks you as someone of means)
- ◆ Small lockbox with trade documents
- ◆ Silver merchant's ring (proof of guild membership)
- ◆ Belt pouch with 25 silver coins
- ◆ Small knife (practical tool, emergency weapon)

Connection: Jorin, a rival merchant who competes for the same contracts. Your relationship is complicated—you respect each other but constantly try to outmaneuver one another.

What You're Good At:

- ◆ Social Interaction: You excel at persuasion and negotiation. Rolling 4d6 + PRE 2 + Persuasion 1 = average 17 vs DC 14. You talk your way through most situations.
- ◆ Information Gathering: Between Empathy, RSN 1, and your social Skills, you learn secrets others miss.
- ◆ Evasion: AGI 1 means you can escape when talking fails. You're not a fighter-you're a survivor.

What You Struggle With:

- ◆ Combat: MIG 0 and no combat training mean fights are dangerous. Avoid them, talk them down, or flee.
- ◆ Physical Challenges: Heavy lifting, breaking through barriers, enduring hardship-you need help or clever alternatives.

Combat Tactics: Avoid fighting. If combat starts, try to negotiate or retreat. If forced to fight, use AGI for quick strikes and disengage immediately. Let tougher allies handle prolonged fights.

Quick Background: You've spent years traveling trade routes, learning that people are the real currency. You know how to read a room, make an impression, and turn suspicion into trust. You've talked your way out of more trouble than most people will ever see, and you've made enough coin to live comfortably. Violence is messy and bad for business-you prefer deals everyone walks away from.

The Specialist: Rella

Concept: Former telegraph engineer who searches for meaning in strange message patterns.

Why play this character: You enjoy solving technical problems and uncovering mysteries. You excel at observation, working with machinery, and moving quietly through dangerous spaces. You notice details others miss, fix things that are broken, and handle delicate work under pressure. You're competent in many areas without dominating any single one.

Attributes:

- ◆ Reason (RSN): 2 - Analytical mind, pattern recognition
- ◆ Agility (AGI): 1 - Steady hands, careful movement
- ◆ Presence (PRE): 1 - Quiet competence
- ◆ Might (MIG): 0 - Physical labor isn't your strength

Skills: Observation, Stealth, Technical Work, Machinery Handling

Proficiencies: Telegraph Instruments, Precision Tools

Starting Gear:

- ◆ Practical layered clothing with tool belt
- ◆ Compact technical toolkit
- ◆ Notebook filled with cipher fragments and observations
- ◆ Insulated lantern
- ◆ Belt pouch with 15 silver coins

Connection: Isten, a former coworker and mentor. Your friendship ended over a dispute about unsafe repair methods. You wonder if the relationship can be repaired, or if you were right to walk away.

What You're Good At:

- ◆ Observation and Investigation: RSN 2 + Observation means you spot details and connect patterns. Rolling $4d6 + RSN\ 2 + Observation\ 1 = \text{average}\ 17$ vs DC 14.
- ◆ Technical Work: You repair, modify, and understand machinery. Your Proficiencies with tools and instruments give you Edge on relevant tasks.
- ◆ Stealth: AGI 1 + Stealth means you move quietly. You're not the best infiltrator, but you can sneak when needed.

What You Struggle With:

- ◆ Physical Strength: MIG 0 makes heavy lifting, breaking obstacles, and enduring hardship difficult. Find clever solutions or ask for help.
- ◆ Social Leadership: PRE 1 is adequate but not exceptional. You can connect with individuals, but don't try to lead crowds or dominate negotiations.

Combat Tactics: Avoid direct confrontation. Use Stealth to gain positioning advantages. Strike from surprise or support allies by identifying enemy weaknesses (using Observation). You're competent but not a front-line fighter.

Quick Background: You spent years maintaining telegraph relay stations in canyon settlements, logging message patterns and keeping delicate instruments working in harsh conditions. You started noticing anomalies-patterns that shouldn't exist, messages that made no sense. When you reported them, supervisors dismissed your concerns. You left your position to investigate independently, which led you to your current situation. You're driven by curiosity and a need to understand what you've uncovered.

This scenario introduces basic rules through a structured adventure. It includes social interaction, exploration, and combat-the three main types of scenes in Razorweave.

For the GM: Read this entire section before starting. You'll describe scenes, play NPCs, call for Checks, and narrate outcomes. Don't worry about getting everything perfect-focus on keeping the game moving and describing what happens.

For Players: Listen to the GM's descriptions, ask questions, and describe what your characters do. The GM will tell you when to roll dice.

Setup: The Missing Merchant

Opening narration for the GM:

Key Information:

- ◆ Corvin Tresh is a grain merchant, middle-aged, cautious by nature
- ◆ He left two days ago heading north to Oakridge Logging Camp, a 4-hour walk
- ◆ The forest road is usually safe, but bandits have been reported in the area recently
- ◆ Elara is offering 50 silver coins (total) to find Corvin and bring him back

Goal: The players need to investigate Corvin's disappearance, track him through the forest, and rescue him from bandits.

Scene 1: Gathering Information

Purpose: Introduce social Checks and information gathering.

Location: Millhaven town center, docks, or taverns.

What's Happening: The players can question witnesses and gather clues before heading into the forest. They should learn:

1. Corvin took the north forest road toward Oakridge Camp
2. Two travelers saw a merchant matching his description yesterday afternoon
3. Bandits have been spotted near the old mill ruins, about halfway to Oakridge
4. Corvin's horse returned to town without him last night

NPCs to Question:

Elara (Corvin's partner): Nervous, distracted, genuinely worried. She knows Corvin's route and schedule.

- ◆ DC 12 PRE Check (Persuasion or Empathy): She reveals Corvin was carrying 100 silver coins to pay the loggers
- ◆ DC 14 PRE Check: She admits Corvin has been acting strangely lately, mentioning strange sounds in the forest

Old Tam (dockworker): Gruff, seen everything. Sits near the docks smoking a pipe.

- ◆ DC 12 PRE Check (Persuasion or Negotiation): He saw Corvin leave two days ago, heading north, alone
- ◆ DC 14 PRE Check: For the price of a drink (1 silver), he mentions bandits have a camp near the old mill ruins-he's heard rumors from travelers

Mira (stablehand): Young, observant, cares about the horses.

- ◆ DC 12 RSN or PRE Check (Empathy): She saw Corvin's horse return last night, spooked and sweating, still saddled
- ◆ DC 14 RSN Check (Observation): She points out dried blood on the saddle-not much, but enough to show something happened

Running This Scene:

1. Let players decide how to investigate. Some might split up, others might stick together.
2. Call for Checks when they try to convince reluctant NPCs or notice subtle details.
3. Players don't need to question all three NPCs-two conversations should give them enough information.
4. Once players know the route and the bandit connection, they'll likely head north.

GM Tip: If players struggle or don't know what to do, have Elara suggest questioning people who might have seen Corvin leave, or have an NPC volunteer information without requiring a Check.

Scene 2: Tracking Through the Forest

Purpose: Introduce exploration Checks and environmental challenges.

Location: The north forest road leading to Oakridge Camp.

What's Happening: The players follow the forest road north. After about two hours of walking, they reach the area where Corvin was ambushed. They need to find clues and track him to the bandit camp.

The Ambush Site:

Read this when players reach the halfway point:

Clues to Find:

DC 12 RSN Check (Observation): Players notice:

- ◆ Tracks from multiple people (3-4 individuals) leading west off the road
- ◆ Drag marks suggesting someone was pulled or carried
- ◆ A torn piece of expensive cloth (Corvin's coat) caught on a bush

DC 14 RSN Check (Observation): Additional details:

- ◆ The tracks are fresh-less than a day old
- ◆ One set of prints is deep and uneven, suggesting someone carrying a burden
- ◆ Faint smell of wood smoke to the west-someone has a camp nearby

Following the Tracks:

DC 12 RSN Check (Tracking or Survival): Players successfully follow the trail west through the forest toward the old mill ruins.

Failure or Partial Success: They lose the trail briefly, taking extra time, or they follow correctly but make noise, alerting the bandits (gives bandits time to prepare-see Scene 3).

The Approach:

After 30 minutes of tracking, players approach the bandit camp:

Stealth Approach (Optional):

If players want to sneak closer and observe before acting:

DC 12 AGI Check (Stealth): Players get close enough to see the camp layout without being spotted:

- ◆ Three bandits (two near the fire, one on watch)
- ◆ Corvin tied to a post near the ruins
- ◆ The bandits are armed with clubs and knives
- ◆ There's a clear path from the east side that provides cover

DC 14 AGI Check (Stealth): Players also notice:

- ◆ The guard on watch is distracted and not paying close attention
- ◆ One bandit is injured (bandaged arm)-easier to fight
- ◆ The bandits' weapons are within reach but not currently held

Failure: The guard spots movement. The bandits grab their weapons and call out: "Who's there? Show yourselves!" Combat begins with the bandits prepared (no surprise advantage).

Running This Scene:

1. Let players decide how to approach-stealth, direct confrontation, or trying to negotiate.
 2. Reward creative solutions. If they create a distraction to lure bandits away, that might avoid combat.
 3. The goal is rescuing Corvin, not necessarily killing all the bandits.
-

Scene 3: Confronting the Bandits

Purpose: Introduce combat with a manageable encounter.

Location: The old mill ruins and bandit camp.

The Bandits:

Bandit Leader (Torvin):

- ◆ Resolve Clock: 6 segments
- ◆ Attributes: MIG 1, AGI 1, PRE 1, RSN 0
- ◆ Skills: Intimidation, Brawling
- ◆ Weapon: Club (counts as simple weapon, uses MIG for Strikes)
- ◆ Tactics: Torvin tries to intimidate first, fights aggressively if that fails. He's a bully, not a soldier.

Bandit 1 (Kess):

- ◆ Resolve Clock: 6 segments
- ◆ Attributes: MIG 1, AGI 1
- ◆ Skills: Brawling
- ◆ Weapon: Knife
- ◆ Tactics: Kess stays close to Torvin, supporting him. If badly hurt, will surrender.

Bandit 2 (Rol):

- ◆ Resolve Clock: 4 segments (injured from earlier fight with Corvin)
- ◆ Attributes: MIG 0, AGI 1
- ◆ Skills: Brawling
- ◆ Weapon: Knife
- ◆ Tactics: Rol is already wounded and not eager to fight. First to flee or surrender.

Corvin (the merchant):

- ◆ Tied up, unarmed, not a threat. If freed, he'll flee to safety and won't participate in the fight.

Starting the Fight:

If players try to negotiate:

- ◆ DC 14 PRE Check (Persuasion or Intimidation): Torvin considers letting Corvin go if paid 100 silver (the amount Corvin was carrying). He's suspicious but willing to deal.
- ◆ DC 16 PRE Check: Torvin releases Corvin for 50 silver, grumbling but intimidated by the group.
- ◆ Failure: Torvin laughs and draws his club. "You think you can threaten us? We're taking your coin too!" Combat begins.

If players attack:

- ◆ Initiative is conversational-players act first if they surprised the bandits, otherwise GM and players alternate.

Running the Combat:

Round 1: Torvin tries to intimidate: "Back off or the merchant dies!"

- ◆ If players waver, Torvin pulls a knife on Corvin.
- ◆ If players press forward, Torvin realizes he's outmatched and fights.

Suggested Combat Flow:

- ◆ Torvin fights until his Resolve Clock hits 4/6 segments, then tries to retreat
- ◆ Kess fights until Torvin goes down, then surrenders
- ◆ Rol flees or surrenders after taking any significant damage (2+ segments)

Bandit Combat Actions:

- ◆ Strike (DC 14): Bandits roll 4d6 + MIG 1 (or AGI 1 for knives) + Brawling 1 (if applicable). Average roll: 15 Full Success: 2 segments on target's Resolve Clock Partial Success: 1 segment
- ◆ Maneuver: Try to grab a PC, create obstacles, or reposition. DC 12-14 depending on action.

Player Combat Actions:

- ◆ Players use Strike, Maneuver, Set Up, or Defend as described in Core Rules.
- ◆ The Tank (Garrick) should Strike reliably. The Face (Sera) should use Persuasion or disengage. The Specialist (Rella) should observe and strike from advantageous positions.

Outcomes:

If players win (very likely): The bandits are defeated, captured, or fled. Corvin is rescued.

If players struggle: Corvin could break free and help, or a patrol from Oakridge Camp arrives to assist (introduce 2 friendly NPCs with basic stats).

If players lose (unlikely): The bandits take the PCs' valuables and flee, leaving the PCs and Corvin tied up. They escape after the bandits leave, but lose money/time. This is a setback, not a campaign-ender.

After Combat:

Corvin is grateful, shaken but unharmed. He thanks the PCs profusely and confirms he'll pay the full fee once back in Millhaven.

Loot (if players search the bandit camp):

- ◆ 30 silver coins (stolen from Corvin)
- ◆ Basic camping gear
- ◆ A crude map showing other bandit camps in the region (potential future adventure hook)
- ◆ Torvin's club (heavy, usable as weapon)

Choices:

- ◆ Do players take the bandits prisoner, leave them tied up, or let them flee?
 - ◆ Do they escort Corvin directly back to Millhaven, or continue to Oakridge Camp first?
-

Scene 4: Resolution and Next Steps

Purpose: Wrap up the adventure and set up future sessions.

Back in Millhaven:

Corvin and Elara pay the promised fee (50 silver coins total, split among PCs). Corvin offers an additional 20 silver if players return the stolen money, bringing the total to 70 silver.

Elara mentions: "Corvin said the bandits were asking about 'the shipment from Greywater.' They seemed to know he'd be on that road. Someone might have tipped them off."

Possible Follow-Up Hooks:

1. Investigate who told the bandits about Corvin's route
2. Clear out other bandit camps using the map found in Scene 3
3. Escort Corvin's trade shipment to Greywater (the original job)
4. Explore why Corvin mentioned "strange sounds in the forest" to Elara

GM Guidance: Ask players which direction they want to explore. Use their answer to plan the next session.

GM Tips for Running This Adventure

Pacing: Each scene should take 20-40 minutes. If a scene drags, move to the next one. If players rush, let them—don't force every scene to last a certain length.

Difficulty: This adventure uses DC 12-14 for most Checks. Only use DC 16 for especially tough moments (like convincing the bandit leader to back down without a fight).

Player Freedom: If players come up with creative solutions you didn't expect, go with it. The goal is a good story, not following the script exactly.

Combat Balance: Three bandits vs three PCs is roughly balanced, but players should win. If combat seems too easy, have bandits act smarter. If too hard, have an injured bandit flee early or reduce their Resolve Clocks.

When Players Get Stuck: Drop hints. Have an NPC offer suggestions, or let players roll RSN Checks to remember obvious clues.

Roleplaying NPCs: Elara is worried and scattered. Torvin is a cowardly bully. Corvin is grateful and nervous. You don't need elaborate voices—just describe their tone and body language.

"What If Players Do X?":

What if players ignore the quest and do something else?

- ◆ Let them! Improvise a new adventure. Or have Elara increase the offered reward to make the quest more tempting.

What if players try to ambush the bandits with elaborate traps?

- ◆ Great! Let them describe their plan. Call for RSN Checks (DC 12-14) to set traps successfully. Grant Edge on the first round of combat if traps work.

What if players want to intimidate the bandits into surrendering without a fight?

- ◆ Excellent! Call for a DC 16 PRE Check (Intimidation or Persuasion). Success means Torvin backs down and releases Corvin for a smaller payment. The Tank (Garrick) is perfect for this approach.

What if players attack Corvin by mistake or betray him?

- ◆ Razorweave supports many play styles. If players genuinely want to play as criminals, let them. Elara becomes an enemy, town guards get involved, and the campaign shifts to an outlaw story. Ask players if this is really the direction they want—it's a major tone shift.

What if players want to recruit the bandits?

- ◆ Torvin is a coward but might agree if paid. Kess and Rol just want steady work. This could lead to interesting complications (Can they be trusted? What does Elara think?).

What if combat goes badly and a PC's Resolve Clock fills?

- ◆ They're knocked unconscious or forced to retreat. Another PC can stabilize them with a DC 12 RSN Check (First Aid or Medicine) after combat. They wake up groggy but alive after a few minutes.

What if players split the party?

- ◆ Let them! Handle each group's actions in turn. If one group triggers combat, resolve that fully before cutting back to the other group.

Congratulations—you've played Razorweave! Here's what to explore next:

Continue Playing

You don't need to read the entire rulebook before your next session. You've learned the essentials. Keep playing and reference rules as needed.

Explore the Full Rules

When you're ready for more depth:

- ◆ Chapter 6 (Character Creation): Learn to create your own characters from scratch
- ◆ Chapter 8 (Actions, Checks, and Outcomes): Detailed explanation of the Check system with many examples
- ◆ Chapter 10 (Combat Basics): Expanded combat rules, advanced actions, and tactical options
- ◆ Chapters 21-26 (GM Guidance): Tools for creating your own adventures, NPCs, and worlds

Build Your Own Characters

The pre-generated characters are great for learning, but creating your own is more rewarding. Use the 15-Minute Character Creation process in Chapter 6:

1. Pick a concept (one sentence)
2. Assign Attributes (2, 1, 1, 0)
3. Choose 3-4 Skills
4. Choose 2-3 Proficiencies
5. Pick starting gear
6. Define one connection to another character or the world

Create Your Own Adventures

The "Missing Merchant" structure works for many scenarios:

1. Setup: Someone needs help (or players pursue a goal)
2. Investigation: Gather information through social interaction
3. Exploration: Travel to a location, track clues, face environmental challenges
4. Confrontation: Resolve the situation through combat, negotiation, or clever thinking
5. Resolution: Wrap up, pay rewards, introduce next adventure hook

Change the details, and you have a new adventure: missing child instead of merchant, haunted ruin instead of bandit camp, rival merchant instead of bandits, etc.

Join the Community

Razorweave thrives on shared stories. Share your first session experiences, ask questions, and learn from other groups. The game grows through play.

Check Rolling

1. Roll 4d6, sum all four dice
2. Add Attribute (0-2)
3. Add +1 if relevant Skill applies
4. Compare total to DC

Difficulty Classes

DC	Difficulty
12	Easy
14	Routine
16	Tough
18	Hard

Outcomes

Result vs DC	Outcome
+5 or more	Critical Success
0 to +4	Full Success
-1 to -5	Partial Success
-6 or worse	Failure

Combat Damage (Resolve Clock segments)

Outcome	Segments Filled
Critical Success	3
Full Success	2
Partial Success	1
Failure	0

Edge and Burden

Modifier	Effect
Edge +1	Roll 5d6, drop lowest, sum best 4
Edge +2	Roll 6d6, drop lowest 2, sum best 4
Burden -1	Roll 5d6, drop highest, sum worst 4
Burden -2	Roll 6d6, drop highest 2, sum worst 4

Edge and Burden cap at +2/-2. They cancel each other out.

You're ready to play. Gather your dice, choose your characters, and start the adventure. Welcome to Razorweave.

2

CORE CONCEPTS AT A
GLANCE

Razorweave is built on a simple promise: the story matters more than the rules, but the rules make the story matter more. Dice create tension. Consequences create stakes. And the moments that stay with you emerge from a table that trusts each other to play honestly and push forward together.

This chapter introduces the core ideas that make the system work. Later chapters expand and refine them, but everything begins here. Return to these concepts whenever you need to recalibrate how the game should feel at the table.

Fiction First

The story is always the starting point. Describe the situation. Describe what your character does. Only when the outcome is uncertain and meaningful do the dice come out. You never start with a rule and force the fiction to fit it.

This means most moments in play don't require rolls at all. A competent lockpick opens a simple lock. A strong character kicks down a rotten door. The rules step in when success isn't guaranteed and failure would change the story.

Characters

Characters are the lens through which you experience the world. Four Attributes (Might, Agility, Presence, and Reason) define their core capabilities. Skills represent trained competencies. Proficiencies unlock specific actions or grant situational advantages.

But characters are more than numbers. They have histories that shaped them, goals that drive them, and connections to people and places that pull them into trouble. Character creation takes about fifteen minutes, but leaves room for depth to emerge through play.

Checks and Outcomes

When the outcome matters and isn't certain, you make a Check: roll 4d6, add your Attribute, add +1 if you have a relevant Skill, and compare to a target number. The result falls into one of four tiers (critical success, full success, partial success, or failure), each pushing the story in a different direction.

Partial success is where the system shines. You got what you wanted, but something else changed. The lock opens, but you hear footsteps. The negotiation works, but you owe a favor. Every roll moves the story forward, even when things go wrong.

Tags, Conditions, and Clocks

The game tracks state through simple, visible tools. Tags are short descriptors attached to scenes, locations, or situations (like Dimly Lit, Hostile Crowd, or Crumbling Floor) that the GM uses to set difficulty or grant Edge and Burden. Conditions are ongoing states on characters (Wounded, Exhausted, Rattled) that affect what they can do until addressed.

Clocks are segmented circles that track progress toward something: a guard patrol completing its route, a ritual nearing completion, a character's resolve wearing thin. When the clock fills, the thing happens. Clocks make time visible and give weight to every moment spent.

Table Collaboration

Everyone at the table contributes to the story. The GM presents the world honestly, describing situations, playing NPCs, and calling for Checks when outcomes are uncertain. Players act through their characters with clear intent, describing what they do and why. The rules help everyone answer the same question: what happens next?

This isn't a game where the GM has a secret story and the players try to find it. The best moments come from genuine uncertainty, honest reactions, and the willingness to let the dice change your plans.

You can begin play after reading Chapters 1 through 6. The rest of the book deepens and extends these core ideas as your table needs them.

3

HOW TO USE THIS RULEBOOK

This chapter explains how to navigate the Core Rulebook, how to understand the structure of the system, and how to use the text at the table. You do not need to memorize everything before you begin play. The book is designed so that you can learn the basics, then return to specific chapters as questions arise.

Navigating the Book

The Core Rulebook is organized to support both reading and quick reference. The structure is:

- ◆ Chapters 1 through 5 introduce the game, the core concepts, how to use the book, the principles of play, and the different ways to play.
- ◆ Chapters 6 through 13 present the core rules that players will use most often at the table, including character creation, attributes, and core resolution.
- ◆ Chapters 14 through 17 provide the full Skills and Proficiencies references.
- ◆ Chapters 18 through 20 collect key mechanical references such as Tags, Conditions, and advancement.
- ◆ Chapters 21 through 26 give the Game Master tools for running scenes, campaigns, and alternative modes of play.
- ◆ Chapters 28 and 29 provide the glossary and index.

If you are new to tabletop roleplaying, it is helpful to read Chapters 1 through 5 in order. If you already have experience, you can skim the early chapters, then focus on Chapters 6 and 7, where the core resolution and character structure are introduced in detail.

Rules as Tools

The rules in this book are tools. They help the table answer the question of what happens next. You do not exist to serve the rules.

The rules exist to support your story. When a rule clarifies a moment, use it. When a rule does not add anything useful, resolve the situation through conversation instead. The game is at its best when the rules and the fiction work together.

The system is built around a single resolution structure. Attributes (Chapter 7), Skills and Proficiencies (Chapters 14-17), Tags and Conditions (Chapters 18-19), and Clocks (Chapter 20) all connect to this structure. Once you understand how Checks work (Chapter 8), the rest of the mechanics will feel familiar and consistent.

Example

: The group reaches a sealed laboratory door. The GM describes the control panel and the faint glow of backup power. The players discuss how their characters might open it. No one grabs dice yet. The table first decides whether the action is risky and meaningful. Only then do the rules become necessary.

What a Rule Explains

Every major rule in this book answers three questions. What does this rule cover. When does it apply. How does it influence the fiction. These three ideas appear in the way chapters are written and in the examples that follow them. If a rule feels confusing, return to these questions. They usually point to the intended use.

Fiction First Structure

The rules always follow the fiction. You begin by understanding the situation, the environment, and the characters. You describe what is happening in the story. Only when the outcome of an action is uncertain and meaningful do you reach for mechanics. You do not start with a rule and then try to force the fiction to match it.

Checks in Context

Checks are the system's way of resolving uncertainty. Chapter 8 explains the full procedure. This chapter focuses on how to think about Checks as you read. A Check is a signal that the scene has reached a point where chance and consequence matter. When a Check is called for, the chapter you are reading will explain exactly which part of the system is in focus.

Learning the Flow of the System

The system has a flow that you will learn over time. You do not need to master everything at once. Instead, you can approach the book in layers. First, read enough to understand the core loop. Then, as your group encounters new situations, you can read or reread the chapters that support those scenes.

Intent and Approach in the Text

As you read rule examples, notice how often the words intent and approach appear. They are used deliberately. Intent describes what the character wants to achieve. Approach describes how the character is trying to achieve it. Many examples in this book use that pairing to show why certain Attributes, Skills, or Proficiencies apply.

Recognizing Rule Triggers

Not every scene needs mechanical resolution. One of the skills you develop as you read and play is the ability to recognize which moments call for specific rules. When the story reaches a point where uncertainty and consequence align, a rule triggers. A chapter might say that a certain kind of situation often triggers a Check (see Chapter 8), or that a specific type of danger often advances a Clock (see Chapter 20).

Using Examples

Examples appear throughout this book to demonstrate the rules in action. They follow a consistent pattern. The scene is described. A player states intent and approach. The GM decides whether a Check is needed. Dice are rolled. The outcome changes the situation. The example then shows how that change affects the next moment of the story.

Using the Glossary

The glossary (Chapter 28) is the authoritative source for terms. When a word has a glossary definition, it will appear with a link the first time it is used in a chapter. If you are uncertain about the meaning of a term, check the glossary entry. It often clears up confusion that might arise from casual reading.

Reading as a Group

Many groups benefit from reading the early chapters together. A session zero that includes a shared read through of the welcome, core concepts, and principles of play chapters helps everyone align on tone and expectations. Chapter 5, Ways to Play the Game, is also useful to read as a group so that everyone understands which play style you are aiming for.

Chapter Summary

This chapter has given you a lens for reading the rest of the book. Treat the rules as tools that support your story. Let the fiction guide when mechanics come into play. Use examples and the glossary to deepen your understanding. Move at a pace that feels comfortable. The next chapter introduces the core principles of play that shape every session at your table.

4

CORE PRINCIPLES OF PLAY

This chapter explains the principles that shape every session of the game. These principles guide how players describe actions, how the GM presents situations, and how the table works together to move the story forward. They are not rules in the mechanical sense. They are values and habits that help the system produce consistent and engaging play.

The game uses a fiction first approach. You begin with the situation, decide what the characters do, and let the rules support the story when uncertainty and consequence appear. The principles below help the table maintain that flow.

The Table as Creative Team

Every player at the table is part of the creative process. The GM presents the world. Players bring characters to life. The conversation between them becomes the engine of play. No one person controls the story. The table builds it together.

The GM describes locations, events, and pressures. Players respond by stating what their characters attempt. When the situation contains meaningful risk, the rules support the moment. In scenes that are calm or certain, the group continues the story through simple narration.

Trust supports everything. The GM trusts players to act with the fiction in mind. Players trust the GM to run the world honestly. The table trusts the system to provide structure when necessary. This trust allows everyone to play boldly.

Example

: The GM describes a run down depot on the outskirts of a coastal town. A player says their character wants to scout the area quietly. Another player suggests checking the rail lines for signs of use. The GM listens, considers what is true about this place, and describes what those actions reveal. No rule is required yet. The table is building the fiction through conversation.

Player Intent and Agency

A player states what their character wants to accomplish. This is intent. They then explain how their character attempts it. This is approach. The GM uses intent and approach to decide whether the action succeeds automatically or whether risk is present.

Intent focuses the scene. Approach shapes which Attributes, Skills, or Proficiencies may apply. The rules always interpret a character's attempt in the context of the fiction, not as a puzzle of modifiers.

Agency in this system comes from informed decision making. The GM describes situations in enough detail that players can understand what is at stake and choose their actions freely. When the stakes are clear, Checks feel meaningful and satisfying.

Players own their characters. They express their thoughts, motivations, and actions. The GM does not decide how a character feels or what a character chooses. The GM presents the world. Players choose how their characters engage with it.

The GM's Role

The GM is responsible for portraying the world clearly and fairly. This means describing situations honestly, sharing sensory details, and revealing information that the characters would reasonably perceive. The GM does not use surprises to punish the players. Instead, surprises serve the fiction and come from established threats or incomplete information.

The players roll dice. The GM interprets the results in the fiction. A number never appears without narrative meaning. The GM describes what the dice reveal. The story changes in ways that make sense in the scene.

Every action changes the situation. When the players act, the GM updates the fiction. Threats advance. Opportunities emerge. Characters alter their position, their resources, or their standing with others. The world is not static. It reacts.

GM Guidance

: Honesty does not mean revealing every detail. It means playing the world as it is, not as a tool to control the players. Present danger when danger exists. Present opportunity when opportunity exists.

Fiction First, Mechanics Second

Mechanics never replace the shared imagination of the table. Instead, they provide structure when the story reaches a point of risk or uncertainty. If no risk exists, the GM simply narrates the outcome of the player's action. This keeps the pace smooth and avoids unnecessary rules.

A Check only occurs when the outcome is meaningfully uncertain, the stakes matter to the story, and failure or partial success would move the scene forward in an interesting way.

A good scene moves toward something. Sometimes this is an objective. Sometimes it is a revelation. Sometimes it is a moment of tension or a decision. The GM frames scenes with purpose. Players act with intent. Checks provide turning points.

Outcomes Create Momentum

Failure is not an end point. It is a change in direction. When a Check fails, the story moves forward into a new state. This might introduce complications, new dangers, or shifts in position. Failure should never stop the story. It should bend it.

Partial success provides a result that sits between success and failure. The character achieves part of what they intended, but not all of it, or they succeed with a cost. This outcome creates tension, opportunity, and interesting decisions.

Example

: A character tries to leap across a narrow canal. The Check fails. The GM does not say the character falls into the water and nothing more happens. Instead, the GM describes how the character grabs a rusted ladder, swings against the wall, and attracts the attention of guards nearby. The failure adds motion to the scene.

Example

: A character tries to convince a merchant to delay a shipment. The Check is a partial success. The merchant agrees to a delay, but only if the character promises to return a personal favor. The world changes. The favor becomes a new thread in the story.

Chapter Summary

The principles in this chapter describe how the table works together. The GM presents the world honestly. Players express intent and approach. The fiction leads. Mechanics support. Failure creates momentum. Partial success adds tension. The world responds. Scenes have direction. Trust holds everything in place. The next chapter expands on these principles by showing how different modes of play shape the experience of the system.

5

WAYS TO PLAY THE GAME

This game supports multiple styles of play. Some groups meet weekly around a table. Others play online in short sessions. Some prefer a single player experience. Others use a shared world without a designated Game Master. The system is flexible and does not assume one standard format. The rules in later chapters work for all modes of play.

This chapter gives an overview of each play style. It also points to the sections of the book that support them. You do not need to choose one style forever. Many groups switch between modes depending on who is available or what kind of story they want to tell. For in-depth guidance on alternative play modes, see Chapter 26.

Play Mode Selection Guide

Mode	Best For	Players Needed	Session Length
Group + GM	Traditional play,	3-6 + GM	2-4 hours
Duet	Personal stories,	1 + GM	1-2 hours
GMless	Collaborative worldbuilding	2-5	2-3 hours
Solo	Personal exploration,	1	Any
Asynchronous	Busy schedules, remote play	2+	Ongoing

Which Mode Fits Your Group?

Choosing a play mode depends on your group's size, schedule, and creative preferences. Use these guidelines to find your starting point.

Transitioning Between Modes

Groups often shift modes as circumstances change. The system supports these transitions without additional rules or conversion steps.

When transitioning, discuss with your group which elements carry over. Clocks, Tags, and character progress typically transfer directly. Scene framing and authority distribution adjust to match the new mode.

Group Play With a GM

A group gathers with one person acting as Game Master. The GM presents the world, plays its characters, and describes the consequences of player actions. The players control their own characters and make decisions that drive the story forward. This is the most common mode of play and the one most chapters assume by default.

Group play can take the form of one-shots (complete adventures in a single session) or campaigns (longer stories told over multiple sessions). One-shots help introduce new players to the system and work well for conventions or special events, focusing on clear stakes and strong pacing. Campaigns grow through character development, evolving threats, and unfolding consequences, with the GM building on player actions and using tools like Clocks and Tags to maintain continuity.

Duet Play

Duet play involves one player and one GM. It feels more intimate and often focuses on personal stories or character-driven arcs. Scenes can shift quickly. The pacing is flexible.

The single-player format allows for deeper exploration of backstory, relationships, and internal conflict. The GM can tailor every scene to one character's journey without balancing spotlight time. Combat encounters scale down naturally, and social scenes gain intensity when the player faces challenges alone. Duet play also offers scheduling flexibility since coordinating two people is simpler than coordinating a full group.

GMless Cooperative Play

In GMless play, the group shares narrative responsibility. No single person controls the world. Instead, the table uses procedures that rotate authority and help distribute scene framing, consequences, and world building. The game still uses the core resolution system, but each player takes turns providing challenges or interpreting outcomes.

Solo Play

Solo play is designed for a single player. You control one or more characters and use structured tools to emulate the world. These tools include prompts, oracles, and scene framing procedures. Solo play keeps the core mechanics intact.

You can adapt GMless procedures for solo play by combining them with the oracle table. When your character faces opposition, use the oracle to determine whether the obstacle proves as difficult as expected. Frame each scene as you would in GMless play, but instead of another player setting the DC, use your judgment based on the fiction and consult the oracle when outcomes are genuinely uncertain. The scene framing procedure and Clock mechanics transfer directly from GMless to solo mode without modification.

Online and Asynchronous Play

Whether you play synchronously over video chat or asynchronously through text, online play introduces unique considerations.

Asynchronous play occurs through messages, email, shared documents, or online platforms. Players take turns responding when they have time. Because asynchronous play lacks immediate conversation, clarity is essential. Players describe intent and approach carefully. The GM presents outcomes with enough detail to move the story forward between posts.

Chapter Summary

This chapter described the supported modes of play. The system works whether you have one player or six, whether you have a GM or distribute authority, and whether you play in person or through messages. Many tables blend modes: using solo play between sessions for character development, rotating GMless scenes inside a GM-led campaign, or starting with one-shots before committing to a longer story. For detailed guidance on alternative play modes, see Chapter 26. The next chapter introduces the character framework that supports all of these play styles.

6

CHARACTER CREATION

Character Creation is the process of turning an idea into a fully playable character. You begin with a concept, shape it through narrative and mechanical choices, and finish with a complete sheet that reflects who your character is and how they participate in the world. You do not need to know every rule before you start. This chapter guides you step by step with all the information you need to complete each stage.

If this is your first tabletop RPG, consider reading Chapters 1-5 before creating your character. Those chapters explain how the game works and will help the choices below make more sense.

If you encounter unfamiliar terms during character creation, consult the Glossary (Chapter 28) for definitions.

Learning by Example

Some players prefer to see a full character before reading detailed steps. If you want to follow a character build from start to finish, you can skip ahead to the Worked Examples section later in this chapter and return to each step as needed.

The Nine-Step Creation Checklist

Character Creation follows nine steps. Each step is self-contained with all the guidance you need to complete it. Work through them in order, checking off each as you finish.

Step 1: Choose a Concept

Goal: Define who your character is in one or two sentences.

What to do:

- ◆ Write a short phrase that captures your character's role, background, and defining trait
- ◆ Ensure the concept suggests what scenes you want to be in
- ◆ Verify the concept fits the campaign tone (discuss with your GM if unsure)

Guidance:

A concept is the short answer to the question: who is this person? It does not depend on mechanics or require a long backstory, though you can develop one if you enjoy that part of character creation. Strong concepts are specific enough to suggest habits and history, but open enough to leave room for discovery.

Weak Concept	Strong Concept	Why It Works
"Fighter"	"Retired scout with a guilty conscience"	Suggests relationships,
"Smart person"	"Former telegraph engineer searching	Implies profession, habits, and
"Healer"	"Field medic who refuses to let anyone die alone"	Shows values, experience, and emotional stakes

Questions to help define your concept:

- ◆ What did your character do before the story begins?
- ◆ What makes them different from others in a similar role?
- ◆ What drives them to take risks?

Example

A player chooses the concept "former telegraph engineer who searches for meaning in strange message patterns." This concept suggests a quiet, technical character whose life has been shaped by long hours, delicate tools, and unanswered questions.

When you finish this step: You should be able to describe your character in a single sentence that excites you.

Concept Scaffolding: Genre-Neutral Archetypes

If you're not sure where to start, use these genre-neutral archetypes as scaffolding. Each category includes example concepts across different settings.

Archetype	Core Appeal	Example Concepts
The Leader	Directing others, making hard calls,	Military officer questioning orders
The Specialist	Deep expertise in one area, solving	Forensic analyst reconstructing
The Operator	Working in shadows, information and	Private investigator with underworld
The Protector	Keeping others safe, physical capability,	Bodyguard with a guilty past (modern),
The Survivor	Endurance through adversity, practical	Refugee navigating hostile territory
The Seeker	Pursuing knowledge or truth, asking	Journalist investigating cover-
The Outsider	Operating between worlds, uncovering what's hidden multiple perspectives, never fully belonging	Immigrant mediating cultural conflicts studying alien life (modern), human raised by aliens (sci-fi), tracking urban legends (horror)

How to Use This Table:

1. Pick an archetype that matches the kind of scenes you want to experience
2. Look at the example concepts for inspiration across genres
3. Adapt the concept to fit your GM's campaign setting
4. Add one specific detail that makes it yours

Example

A player likes "The Specialist" archetype and the sci-fi concept "ship's engineer keeping systems running." They adapt it to their GM's horror campaign: "Station maintenance tech who keeps life support functioning despite failing equipment and strange sounds in the walls." The archetype provides structure; the specific detail (strange sounds) creates story hooks.

Step 2: Define Core Identity Elements

Goal: Add personal details that make your character feel real.

What to do:

- ◆ Choose a name and pronouns
- ◆ Note their origin or home environment
- ◆ Describe their everyday role before the story begins
- ◆ List one or two notable habits or mannerisms
- ◆ Describe how others perceive them at first meeting
- ◆ Identify one or two key experiences that shaped them

Guidance:

Identity elements help you imagine how your character thinks, speaks, and reacts. You do not need to define everything at once. Focus on details that connect to your concept.

Element	Purpose	Example
Name and pronouns	How others address them	Rella (she/her)
Origin	Where they learned to see the world	Canyon relay settlement
Former role	What shaped their skills	Telegraph maintenance
Habits	Behavioral shortcuts for roleplay	Thinks before speaking, keeps
First impressions	How NPCs initially react	Quiet but competent, overlooked in crowds
Formative experiences	Emotional depth and backstory hooks	Years of isolated work, one unexplained message
You can expand or revise identity elements later if the story reveals new truths about your character.		

Example

The telegraph engineer concept becomes a character named Rella. She grew up in a narrow canyon settlement built around a relay hub. She is quiet, observant, and prefers to think before she speaks. Her clothes are practical and layered. Her hands are steady from years of fine repair work.

When you finish this step: You should be able to describe your character walking into a room and how people react to them.

Step 3: Assign Attributes

Goal: Distribute your character's four core capabilities.

What to do:

- ◆ Review the four Attributes and what each represents
- ◆ Assign the standard array: one at 2, two at 1, one at 0
- ◆ Verify your choices match your concept
- ◆ Note which Attribute is your weakness and consider story opportunities

Guidance:

Attributes describe your character's natural capabilities. They reflect how your character approaches challenges when there is no time to prepare.

Attribute	Abbreviation	What It Represents
Might	MIG	Physical strength, force, raw
Agility	AGI	Balance, coordination, stealth,
Presence	PRE	Social force, confidence,
Reason	RSN	Logic, analysis, memory, structured leadership thinking, technical performance understanding

Standard Starting Array:

- ◆ One Attribute at 2 (your primary strength)
- ◆ Two Attributes at 1 (competent areas)
- ◆ One Attribute at 0 (your weakness)

No Attribute may be negative during creation. This spread represents balanced capability with room to grow.

Example

Rella is analytical and steady. Her player chooses Reason 2, Agility 1, Presence 1, Might 0. This emphasizes her careful thinking, modest coordination, quiet presence, and relative physical weakness.

When you finish this step: Your Attribute spread should reflect what your character is good at and what challenges them.

Skills vs Proficiencies at a Glance

Before selecting Skills and Proficiencies, review this comparison to understand how each works differently in play.

Aspect	Skills	Proficiencies
What It Represents	Actions you can take	Knowledge and tool familiarity
When You Use It	When attempting Checks	To justify approaches or gain
Example	Stealth, Observation	Lockpicking Tools, Local History
How It Helps	Adds +1 to applicable Checks	Enables approaches or provides Edge

The Key Distinction: Skills describe doing while Proficiencies describe knowing. A character with the Stealth Skill has practiced moving quietly and adds +1 when making Stealth-related Checks. A character with Lockpicking Tools Proficiency understands how locks work and owns the right equipment. Both matter, but they answer different questions about your character.

Step 4: Choose Skills

Goal: Select 3-4 learned abilities your character can rely on under pressure.

What to do:

- ◆ Review the Suggested Skills table below
- ◆ Select 3-4 Skills that fit your concept and background
- ◆ Consider creating custom Skills with GM approval if needed
- ◆ Ensure Skills support the kinds of scenes you want to experience

Guidance:

Skills are action-based competencies. They describe what your character has done often enough to rely on in uncertain moments. When you make a Check, a Skill often shapes your approach.

Skills answer the question: what have you practiced enough to apply under stress?

Category	Example Skills
Physical	Athletics, Acrobatics, Climbing, Swimming, Endurance, Brawling
Social	Persuasion, Deception, Intimidation, Performance,
Mental	Investigation, Observation, Analysis, Research, Memory,
Technical	Technical Work, Crafting, Machinery, First Aid, Lockpicking,
Stealth/Survival	Stealth, Survival, Tracking, Navigation, Foraging

Skill Scope Guidelines:

Too Broad	Too Narrow	Just Right
"Good at everything physical"	"Tying sailor knots"	Athletics
"Social expert"	"Lying to guards"	Deception
"Technical genius"	"Fixing one brand of telegraph"	Technical Work

Custom Skills: You may create Skills that do not appear on the list.

Work with your GM to ensure custom Skills are grounded in the setting, clear in purpose, and neither too broad nor too narrow.

Custom Skill Examples Across Genres:

Genre	Custom Skill	Why It Works
Sci-Fi	Zero-G Maneuvering	Specific environment with clear
Modern	Forensic Analysis	Professional specialty narrower
Horror	Occult Research	Setting-appropriate knowledge
Cyberpunk	Network Intrusion	Distinct from general "Technical Work";
Western	Horseback Riding	Environmental standard in the setting; enables specific approaches

Example

Rella's life has involved careful observation, technical upkeep, and quiet movement. Her player chooses the Skills Observation, Stealth, Technical Work, and Machinery Handling. These Skills reflect actions she has performed many times in relay stations and narrow maintenance tunnels. When she makes a Check related to any of these Skills, she adds +1 to her result.

When you finish this step: You should have 3-4 Skills that describe what your character does well.

Step 5: Choose Proficiencies

Goal: Select 2-3 areas of specialized knowledge or tool familiarity.

What to do:

- ◆ Review the Suggested Proficiencies table below
- ◆ Select 2-3 Proficiencies that grow from your concept and background
- ◆ Discuss scope with your GM to ensure clarity
- ◆ Consider how Proficiencies change what your character knows automatically

Guidance:

Proficiencies represent narrow domains of expertise. They describe tools, environments, or disciplines your character understands deeply. Proficiencies often do not require a roll. Instead, they change what is reasonable, what is obvious, or how serious a risk feels.

Proficiencies answer the question: what have you studied or handled enough to use responsibly?

Category	Example Proficiencies
Tools	Precision Tools, Medical Instruments, Lockpicks, Climbing
Knowledge	Local History, Legal Procedures, Engineering Principles, Natural
Social Contexts	Court Etiquette, Criminal Underworld, Academic Circles,
Environments	Urban Navigation, Wilderness Survival, Underground
Vehicles/Craft	Small Watercraft, Ground Vehicles, Aircraft, Mounted Animals, Spacecraft, Heavy Machinery

Custom Proficiency Examples Across Genres:

Genre	Custom Proficiency	What It Enables
Sci-Fi	Quantum Drive Systems	Understanding FTL technology;
Modern	Digital Forensics	Recovering deleted data; tracing digital
Horror	Psychiatric Medicine	Recognizing trauma responses vs.
Cyberpunk	Black Market Networks	Knowing where to buy illegal tech;
Post-Apocalyptic	Pre-War Technology	Identifying scavenged tech from contracts in criminal economy; repairing old-world equipment

How Proficiencies Work:

Proficiencies do not add numbers to Checks. Instead, they provide fictional authority:

Situation	Without Proficiency	With Proficiency
Identifying a mechanical fault	Requires a Check (DC 16)	Automatic recognition of
Repairing delicate equipment	Check with higher stakes	Check with reduced consequences
Understanding technical documents	May not attempt	Can attempt with normal difficulty
Noticing environmental hazards	GM describes obviously	Character spots subtle signs

Example

Rella learned to keep delicate instruments working in harsh conditions. Her player chooses the Proficiencies Telegraph Instruments and Precision Tools. These Proficiencies signal that she understands the internal workings of communication devices better than the average person.

When you finish this step: You should have 2-3 Proficiencies that represent your character's specialized expertise.

Step 6: Determine Starting Gear

Goal: Select equipment that fits your background and supports your character's capabilities.

What to do:

- ◆ Record the basic gear package (all characters receive this)
- ◆ Choose up to three concept-driven items
- ◆ Select one weapon or dangerous tool if appropriate to the campaign
- ◆ Consider one custom item with GM approval if desired

Guidance:

Gear provides fictional authority, not numerical bonuses. It represents what your character already knows how to use and what situations they are prepared for.

Basic Gear Package (all characters):

- ◆ Clothing suited to their environment
- ◆ A backpack or satchel
- ◆ Basic travel supplies
- ◆ A personal item that holds meaning

Concept-Driven Items (choose up to 3):

Category	Examples
Technical Tools	Toolkit, precision instruments, repair kit, measuring devices
Recording/Reference	Field journal, reference notes, analysis cards, maps
Navigation/Survival	Compass, signal mirror, reliable lantern, rope and spikes
Medical/Care	Medical pouch, first aid supplies, herbal remedies
Social/Performance	Musical instrument, fine clothing, forged papers, contact list
Combat (if appropriate)	Pocket knife, baton, bow with arrows, simple sidearm

Gear as Fictional Authority:

If You Have the Right Gear	The GM May...
Tools for the job	Lower the DC of related Checks
Equipment that fits the situation	Remove uncertainty for routine tasks
Specialized items	Provide access to approaches others cannot attempt

If You Lack Appropriate Gear	The GM May...
No tools available	Increase DC by one tier (e.g., DC 14 to DC 16)
Improvised equipment	Introduce complications on partial success
Wrong tools entirely	Require creative fictional justification

Example

Rella begins with a travel satchel, a compact set of communication tools, a notebook filled with cipher fragments, and a small insulated lantern used for nighttime relay work.

When you finish this step: You should have a gear list that supports your character's role and feels personal.

Step 7: Establish Background and Relationships

Goal: Define where your character comes from and who matters to them.

What to do:

- ◆ Write 2-3 sentences about where you grew up and what shaped you
- ◆ Note what kind of work or role you had before the story begins
- ◆ Name at least one meaningful relationship (mentor, rival, family, friend, or enemy)
- ◆ Leave space for new relationships to emerge in play

Guidance:

Background provides context for your character's abilities and perspectives. Relationships give the GM material for scenes, challenges, and future story arcs.

Background Questions:

- ◆ Where did you grow up?
- ◆ What pressures shaped your early life?
- ◆ What was your everyday role before the story began?
- ◆ Why did you leave that life (or why are you still in it)?

Relationship Types:

Type	Story Potential
Mentor	Source of wisdom, possible debt or expectation
Rival	Competition, tension, grudging respect
Family	Obligations, love, complicated history
Friend	Support, shared history, someone to protect
Enemy	Danger, unfinished business, source of conflict
Colleague	Professional respect, shared knowledge, potential ally

You do not need to define every relationship up front. Name one or two that feel important now. Add others as they emerge in play.

Example

Rella grew up near a canyon relay hub, listening to coded traffic echo along the wires. Her days were spent checking connections, cleaning contacts, and logging patterns. She names a former coworker, Isten, who taught her how to keep unstable relay junctions from failing. Their relationship ended after an argument about unsafe repair methods.

When you finish this step: You should have a sense of your character's past and at least one named NPC who matters to them.

Step 8: Define Goals, Drives, and Personal Threads

Goal: Establish what motivates your character and what unresolved elements create story potential.

What to do:

- ◆ Define at least one short-term goal (achievable within a few sessions)
- ◆ Define at least one long-term goal (campaign-spanning aspiration)
- ◆ Identify a core drive (deeper motivation or fear)
- ◆ Note one or two personal threads (unresolved questions or tensions)

Guidance:

Goals and drives explain why your character keeps moving.

Personal threads give the GM material to weave into future scenes.

Element	Definition	Example
Short-term goal	Concrete, achievable objective	"Decode the anomalous pattern I"
Long-term goal	Major aspiration that shapes the campaign	"Understand where the strange"
Drive	Underlying motivation or fear	"Avoid causing harm through my work"
Personal thread	Unresolved question or tension	"The mysterious origin of the pattern- who sent it?"

Goal Strength Check:

Strong Goal	Weak Goal
Specific and measurable	Vague or abstract
Connected to your concept	Disconnected from character
Creates story opportunities	Ends story or removes tension
Involves other characters	Achievable alone without conflict

Example

Rella has a goal to decode an anomalous pattern she once intercepted and a drive to avoid causing harm through her work. A personal thread involves the mysterious origin of the pattern and who might have sent it.

When you finish this step: You should be able to explain what your character wants and why they are willing to take risks to get it.

Step 9: Final Review and Campaign Fit

Goal: Ensure your character works as a cohesive whole and fits the group.

What to do:

- ◆ Review all previous steps for internal consistency
- ◆ Verify concept, identity, mechanics, and story elements align
- ◆ Discuss with GM and other players how your character connects to the group
- ◆ Adjust details to create natural connections and complementary capabilities
- ◆ Confirm your character is ready for play

Guidance:

A complete character should feel like a coherent person. All the elements-concept, identity, Attributes, Skills, Proficiencies, gear, background, relationships, and goals-should support each other.

Internal Consistency Check:

Question	What to Look For
Does the concept match the mechanics?	High RSN for analytical characters, high MIG for physical
Do Skills reflect the background?	A former soldier should have combat or survival Skills
Does gear fit the profession?	Technical characters carry tools; social characters carry props
Do goals create story momentum?	Goals should lead to action, not avoid it

Group Integration Questions:

- ◆ Why would your character travel or work with this group?
- ◆ What shared history or complementary goals connect you?
- ◆ What tensions exist that create interesting roleplay?
- ◆ What gaps in group capability does your character fill?

When you finish this step: Your character sheet is complete and you are ready to play.

Worked Examples

This section presents two complete character builds with annotated decision-making at each step. These examples show different archetypes and explain the reasoning behind each choice.

Worked Example 1: Kira Valdros - Combat-Focused Character (MIG/AGI)

Final Concept: Former military scout turned bounty hunter who uses precision and overwhelming force.

Step 1: Choosing the Concept

The player wants a combat-effective character who can hold their own in dangerous situations. They consider several options:

Option Considered	Rejected Because	Selected Because
"Fighter"	Too generic-no personality or history	-
"Retired soldier"	Common trope, needs more	-
"Military scout turned bounty hunter"	-	Suggests combat training, tracking skills, and motivation

Decision: "Former military scout turned bounty hunter" provides clear combat capability (military training), useful non-combat skills (scouting, tracking), and built-in story hooks (why did they leave the military? what do they hunt?)

Final Concept: Former military scout turned bounty hunter who uses precision and overwhelming force.

Step 2: Defining Identity Elements

The player builds on the concept to create specific details:

Element	Choice	Reasoning
Name	Kira Valdros (she/her)	Strong name that sounds capable;
Origin	Border fortress settlement	Military backgrounds often come from
Former Role	Scout and forward observer for garrison	Explains both combat and
Habits	Checks exits when entering rooms;	Military training creates lasting
First Impression	Alert, dangerous, professional	Bounty hunters project competence
Key Experience	A mission went wrong, civilians died, she left the service	Creates guilt, motivation for bounty work (making amends), and emotional depth
Identity Summary:		
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Name: Kira Valdros (she/her) ◆ Origin: Border fortress settlement ◆ Profession: Former military scout, current bounty hunter ◆ Habits: Checks exits, sleeps light, prefers high ground ◆ Appearance: Athletic build, practical clothing, several visible scars, always armed ◆ Formative experience: Left military after a mission resulted in civilian casualties 	

Step 3: Assigning Attributes

The player wants combat effectiveness. They review the archetypes:

Archetype	Fit Assessment
Physical (MIG primary)	Strong fit-military training emphasizes physical capability
Agile (AGI primary)	Also strong fit-scouts need stealth and quick reactions

Decision: MIG primary with AGI secondary. This creates a character who can hit hard and move well, fitting the "precision and overwhelming force" concept.

Attribute	Value	Reasoning
MIG	2	Primary. Years of physical training;
AGI	1	Secondary. Scout training requires
PRE	1	Tertiary. Enough social capability to
RSN	0	Weakness. Acts on instinct rather than careful analysis; relies on training over thinking.
This spread means Kira excels at physical confrontation, handles agile maneuvers adequately, can manage social situations when needed, and struggles with puzzles or careful planning.		

Step 4: Choosing Skills

The player needs Skills that support both combat and the bounty hunting profession:

Skill Considered	Selected?	Reasoning
Brawling	Yes	Direct combat capability; fits
Athletics	Yes	Running, climbing, general physical
Tracking	Yes	Finding targets is core to bounty
Intimidation	Yes	Useful for both combat (causing
Stealth	Rejected	Would be useful, but player prioritizes
Observation	Rejected	Covered partially by Tracking; RSN 0 makes mental Skills less effective
Skills Selected: Brawling, Athletics, Tracking, Intimidation		

These Skills create a character who excels at physical confrontation and pursuit, with social intimidation as a backup approach.

Step 5: Choosing Proficiencies

The player needs Proficiencies that reflect military background and bounty hunting work:

Proficiency Considered	Selected?	Reasoning
Military Protocol	Yes	Understanding military structures
Weapons Maintenance	Yes	A bounty hunter's equipment must be
Wilderness Survival	Rejected	Useful but not central to the
Criminal Underworld	Yes	Bounty hunters work adjacent to criminals; understanding this world helps find targets
Proficiencies Selected: Military Protocol, Weapons Maintenance, Criminal Underworld		These Proficiencies mean Kira automatically understands military ranks and procedures, keeps her equipment in working order without Checks, and knows how to navigate the criminal elements of society.

Step 6: Determining Starting Gear

The player selects gear that supports a combat-ready bounty hunter:

Basic Package:

- ◆ Practical travel clothing (sturdy, weather-resistant)
- ◆ Military-style pack (organized, durable)
- ◆ Basic travel supplies
- ◆ Personal item: Dog tags from her unit (reminder of who she was)

Concept-Driven Items (3):

Item	Reasoning
Reliable sword	Primary weapon; fits setting and military background
Reinforced leather armor	Protection without sacrificing mobility
Restraints and rope	Bounty hunters need to capture targets, not just fight them

Weapon:

- ◆ Sword (already counted above)

Gear List:

- ◆ Sturdy travel clothing
- ◆ Military pack
- ◆ Basic supplies
- ◆ Dog tags (personal item)
- ◆ Reliable sword
- ◆ Reinforced leather armor
- ◆ Restraints and rope

Step 7: Establishing Background and Relationships

Background: Kira grew up in a border settlement where military service was expected. She joined young, showed aptitude for scouting, and spent years on the frontier. A reconnaissance mission went wrong when she reported an enemy position that turned out to be a refugee camp. The garrison acted on her intelligence. She left the service after that, unable to reconcile her role in what happened.

Relationship:

NPC	Relationship	Story Potential
Sergeant Marro	Former commanding officer	Still in the military; represents the life Kira left; possible source of contracts or conflict

The player leaves room for additional relationships to emerge—targets who become complicated, clients with hidden agendas, other bounty hunters.

Step 8: Defining Goals, Drives, and Personal Threads

Element	Choice	Reasoning
Short-term goal	Complete current contract cleanly	Establishes immediate stakes for
Long-term goal	Find a way to make amends for the	Provides campaign-spanning motivation
Drive	Prove that her skills can protect instead	Connects to backstory; explains
Personal thread	Some of the refugees survived—where are they now?	Unresolved question the GM can use

Step 9: Final Review

Consistency Check:

- ◆ Concept (military scout turned bounty hunter) matches MIG/AGI build
- ◆ Skills (Brawling, Athletics, Tracking, Intimidation) support combat and pursuit
- ◆ Proficiencies (Military Protocol, Weapons Maintenance, Criminal Underworld) reflect background
- ◆ Gear (sword, armor, restraints) fits profession
- ◆ Goals connect to backstory tragedy

Complete Character Sheet:

Kira Valdros

- ◆ Concept: Former military scout turned bounty hunter who uses precision and overwhelming force
 - ◆ Attributes: MIG 2, AGI 1, PRE 1, RSN 0
 - ◆ Skills: Brawling, Athletics, Tracking, Intimidation
 - ◆ Proficiencies: Military Protocol, Weapons Maintenance, Criminal Underworld
 - ◆ Gear: Sturdy travel clothing, military pack, sword, reinforced leather armor, restraints and rope, dog tags
 - ◆ Background: Border fortress settlement; left military after reconnaissance error led to civilian casualties
 - ◆ Relationship: Sergeant Marro (former CO)
 - ◆ Goals: Complete contracts cleanly (short-term); make amends for past mistakes (long-term)
 - ◆ Drive: Prove her skills can protect instead of harm
 - ◆ Thread: Where are the survivors of the refugee camp?
-

Worked Example 2: Delian Osk - Social/Investigative Character (PRE/RSN)

Final Concept: Disgraced insurance investigator who specializes in finding what people want hidden.

Step 1: Choosing the Concept

The player wants a character focused on investigation and social manipulation rather than combat. They consider several options:

Option Considered	Rejected Because	Selected Because
"Detective"	Generic; needs more texture	-
"Con artist"	Fun but lacks investigative focus	-
"Journalist"	Good but player wants seedier angle	-

"Insurance investigator"

Decision: "Disgraced insurance investigator" adds the "disgraced" element for story hooks-why were they disgraced? What did they do? This creates a character who knows how systems work but operates outside them now.

Final Concept: Disgraced insurance investigator who specializes in finding what people want hidden.

Step 2: Defining Identity Elements

The player develops specific details that support an investigative, socially adept character:

Element	Choice	Reasoning
Name	Delian Osk (they/them)	Slightly formal name fits professional
Origin	Major commercial city	Insurance work happens in urban
Former Role	Senior fraud investigator for major	Specific title suggests expertise
Habits	Takes notes constantly; asks	Professional habits from years of
First Impression	Forgettable until they start talking; then	Investigators benefit from being
Key Experience	Uncovered fraud that implicated powerful people; was discredited and fired rather than allowed to publish findings	Explains "disgraced" element and creates enemies
Identity Summary:		

- ◆ Name: Delian Osk (they/them)
 - ◆ Origin: Major commercial city
 - ◆ Profession: Former senior fraud investigator, current freelance investigator
 - ◆ Habits: Constant note-taking, probing questions, situational awareness
 - ◆ Appearance: Unremarkable clothing, plain face, sharp eyes, always has a notebook
 - ◆ Formative experience: Discovered fraud reaching highest levels; silenced and discredited
-

Step 3: Assigning Attributes

The player reviews archetypes for investigation/social focus:

Archetype	Fit Assessment
Social (PRE primary)	Strong fit-investigation requires interviewing, persuading, reading
Analytical (RSN primary)	Also strong fit-investigation requires analysis, deduction, connecting evidence

Decision: PRE primary with RSN secondary. The player decides Delian succeeds more through reading people and social manipulation than pure analysis. They get information from people, not just documents.

Attribute	Value	Reasoning
PRE	2	Primary. Interviews are their main tool;
RSN	1	Secondary. Still capable of analysis
AGI	1	Tertiary. Enough coordination to
MIG	0	Weakness. Avoids physical confrontation entirely; relies on wit over strength

This spread means Delian excels at social interaction and manipulation, handles analytical work adequately, can manage basic physical situations, and must avoid or talk their way out of fights.

Step 4: Choosing Skills

The player needs Skills that support investigation and social manipulation:

Skill Considered	Selected?	Reasoning
Investigation	Yes	Core to concept; finding hidden
Persuasion	Yes	Getting people to talk, share
Deception	Yes	Sometimes investigation
Observation	Yes	Noticing details others miss; reading
Empathy	Rejected	Covered somewhat by Observation;
Research	Rejected	Would be useful but RSN is secondary; prioritize PRE-based skills

Skills Selected: Investigation, Persuasion, Deception, Observation

These Skills create a character who excels at finding and extracting information through social means.

Step 5: Choosing Proficiencies

The player needs Proficiencies that reflect the investigator background:

Proficiency Considered	Selected?	Reasoning
Legal Procedures	Yes	Investigators need to understand how
Commercial Operations	Yes	Insurance fraud requires
Academic Circles	Rejected	Not central to the character's
Urban Navigation	Yes	Investigators work in cities; knowing how to find people and places matters

Proficiencies Selected: Legal Procedures, Commercial Operations, Urban Navigation

These Proficiencies mean Delian automatically understands court processes and legal documents, knows how businesses operate and where fraud hides, and can navigate urban environments efficiently.

Step 6: Determining Starting Gear

The player selects gear that supports an investigator who works through social means:

Basic Package:

- ◆ Professional but unremarkable clothing (blends into business settings)
- ◆ Leather satchel (holds documents and notebooks)
- ◆ Basic travel supplies
- ◆ Personal item: A letter of commendation from their former employer (reminder of what they lost)

Concept-Driven Items (3):

Item	Reasoning
Multiple notebooks and writing supplies	Constant note-taking is central to their method
Set of forged credentials	Sometimes investigation requires being someone else
Contact list and reference documents	Years of work built a network; this represents that knowledge

Weapon:

- ◆ Small concealed knife (for emergencies only; Delian avoids violence)

Gear List:

- ◆ Professional clothing
- ◆ Leather satchel
- ◆ Basic supplies
- ◆ Letter of commendation (personal item)
- ◆ Notebooks and writing supplies
- ◆ Forged credentials
- ◆ Contact list and reference documents
- ◆ Small concealed knife

Step 7: Establishing Background and Relationships

Background: Delian spent fifteen years as a fraud investigator for one of the largest insurance firms in the city. They were good-too good. When they uncovered a fraud scheme that implicated several council members and a noble family, they reported it through proper channels. The investigation was buried. Delian was accused of fabricating evidence, fired publicly, and blacklisted from legitimate work. Now they take private cases, operating in the space between legal and illegal, trying to do the work that matters while surviving on the margins.

Relationship:

NPC	Relationship	Story Potential
Councilor Veth	Enemy	One of the people Delian tried to
Marek, newspaper editor	Former ally	Believed Delian's evidence but could from Delian's Hot publish; feels permanent silence
Two relationships provide both threat (Veth) and support (Marek).		gally; might help approached carefully

Step 8: Defining Goals, Drives, and Personal Threads

Element	Choice	Reasoning
Short-term goal	Build reputation as a reliable private	Establishes immediate economic
Long-term goal	Expose the people who destroyed their	Campaign-spanning goal that connects to
Drive	The truth matters more than comfort or	Explains why they keep investigating
Personal thread	What happened to the evidence they gathered? Someone must still have it	Unresolved question the GM can use

Step 9: Final Review

Consistency Check:

- ◆ Concept (disgraced investigator) matches PRE/RSN build
- ◆ Skills (Investigation, Persuasion, Deception, Observation) support social investigation
- ◆ Proficiencies (Legal Procedures, Commercial Operations, Urban Navigation) reflect background
- ◆ Gear (notebooks, credentials, contacts) fits profession
- ◆ Goals connect to backstory injustice

Complete Character Sheet:

Delian Osk

- ◆ Concept: Disgraced insurance investigator who specializes in finding what people want hidden
 - ◆ Attributes: PRE 2, RSN 1, AGI 1, MIG 0
 - ◆ Skills: Investigation, Persuasion, Deception, Observation
 - ◆ Proficiencies: Legal Procedures, Commercial Operations, Urban Navigation
 - ◆ Gear: Professional clothing, leather satchel, notebooks and writing supplies, forged credentials, contact list, small concealed knife, letter of commendation
 - ◆ Background: Former senior fraud investigator; discredited after uncovering high-level corruption
 - ◆ Relationships: Councilor Veth (enemy who silenced them); Marek the editor (guilty former ally)
 - ◆ Goals: Build reputation as private investigator (short-term); expose those who destroyed their career (long-term)
 - ◆ Drive: The truth matters more than comfort or safety
 - ◆ Thread: Where is the original evidence they gathered?
-

Cross-Genre Character Examples

This section presents three character builds across different genres (sci-fi, modern, horror) to demonstrate Razorweave's genre-agnostic design. Each includes key decision points and final results.

Cross-Genre Example 1: Dr. Amara Chen - Sci-Fi Medical Specialist

Setting: Deep space colony ship, 200 years into a 500-year journey

Final Concept: Ship's medical officer who suspects the crew's health anomalies aren't natural.

Key Decisions:

Step	Choice	Genre-Specific Rationale
Concept	Medical officer investigating	Combines specialist expertise with
Attributes	RSN 2, AGI 1, PRE 1, MIG 0	Medical work requires analytical
Skills	First Aid, Observation,	Medical competencies +
Proficiencies	Medical Instruments, Biological Sciences,	Deep medical knowledge +
Gear	Medical scanner, portable diagnostic kit, encrypted data tablet, personal EVA suit	Sci-fi equipment that provides fictional authority for medical and investigative scenes
Complete Character Sheet		
Dr. Amara Chen (she/her)		

- ◆ Concept: Ship's medical officer who suspects the crew's health anomalies aren't natural
- ◆ Attributes: RSN 2, AGI 1, PRE 1, MIG 0
- ◆ Skills: First Aid, Observation, Analysis, Persuasion
- ◆ Proficiencies: Medical Instruments, Biological Sciences, Ship Systems
- ◆ Gear: Medical scanner, portable diagnostic kit, encrypted data tablet, personal EVA suit, lab coat with hidden pockets, family photo from Earth
- ◆ Background: Born on the colony ship; third-generation medical officer following family tradition. Recent pattern of unexplained symptoms across multiple crew members doesn't match any known pathology.
- ◆ Relationship: Commander Okafor (ship's second-in-command who trusts Dr. Chen but is under pressure to maintain morale)
- ◆ Goals: Identify the cause of crew health anomalies (short-term); ensure the colony mission succeeds (long-term)
- ◆ Drive: Protect the people who have no one else to turn to
- ◆ Thread: One crew member's symptoms vanished overnight with no medical explanation-where did the condition go?

Genre Notes: This character works in sci-fi because the setting provides the isolation, the mystery, and the technical framework. The same archetype (medical specialist investigating anomalies) could work in modern hospital drama, frontier medicine, or post-apocalyptic survival-the core competencies remain the same.

Cross-Genre Example 2: Marcus Webb - Modern Urban Investigation

Setting: Contemporary metropolitan city, present day

Final Concept: Homicide detective investigating a series of murders that connect to his own past.

Key Decisions:

Step	Choice	Genre-Specific Rationale
Concept	Homicide detective with personal stakes	Combines investigative
Attributes	PRE 2, RSN 1, AGI 1, MIG 0	Interrogation and reading people are
Skills	Investigation, Persuasion,	Core detective competencies
Proficiencies	Legal Procedures, Criminal Psychology,	Professional knowledge of law
Gear	Detective badge and credentials, service weapon, case files, smartphone, recording device	Modern professional equipment

Complete Character Sheet
Marcus Webb (he/him)

- ◆ Concept: Homicide detective investigating murders that connect to his own past
- ◆ Attributes: PRE 2, RSN 1, AGI 1, MIG 0
- ◆ Skills: Investigation, Persuasion, Observation, Intimidation
- ◆ Proficiencies: Legal Procedures, Criminal Psychology, Urban Navigation
- ◆ Gear: Detective badge and credentials, 9mm service weapon, case files, smartphone, recording device, worn notebook, partner's funeral card (carried for 3 years)
- ◆ Background: Twenty years on the force, the last eight in homicide. Lost his partner to an unsolved murder three years ago. Recent cases show patterns that match his partner's death.
- ◆ Relationship: Captain Rodriguez (precinct commander who wants the case solved but worries Marcus is too close to it)
- ◆ Goals: Solve the current murder series (short-term); find out who killed his partner (long-term)
- ◆ Drive: The victims deserve justice, no matter the cost
- ◆ Thread: The killer leaves origami cranes at each scene- Marcus's partner collected paper cranes

Genre Notes: This character demonstrates how modern settings use contemporary tools (smartphones, forensics) and social structures (police hierarchy, legal procedures) while maintaining the same core mechanics. Skills and Proficiencies reflect modern professional expertise rather than fantasy guild knowledge.

Cross-Genre Example 3: Sarah Voss - Horror Survival

Setting: Isolated research station in the Arctic, winter darkness

Final Concept: Communications technician trapped at a station where the crew is changing.

Key Decisions:

Step	Choice	Genre-Specific Rationale
Concept	Communications tech in isolated	Technical expertise provides utility;
Attributes	RSN 2, AGI 1, MIG 1, PRE 0	Technical work needs analytical
Skills	Technical Work, Observation,	Repair/maintenance + noticing wrong
Proficiencies	Radio Equipment, Arctic Survival,	Specialized knowledge for the
Gear	Repair toolkit, emergency radio, cold-weather gear, flare gun	Practical survival equipment; flare gun is multipurpose tool, for survival tasks <small>physical capability</small>
Complete Character Sheet		

Sarah Voss (she/her)

- ◆ Concept: Communications technician trapped at a research station where the crew is changing
- ◆ Attributes: RSN 2, AGI 1, MIG 1, PRE 0
- ◆ Skills: Technical Work, Observation, Stealth, Endurance
- ◆ Proficiencies: Radio Equipment, Arctic Survival, Research Station Systems
- ◆ Gear: Repair toolkit, emergency radio, cold-weather gear, flare gun, headlamp, personal music player (doesn't work anymore- batteries dead, but she carries it)
- ◆ Background: Signed on for a six-month rotation maintaining the station's communication array. Three months in, the relief team hasn't arrived. The other crew members are acting strange- small things at first, now more obvious. She's stopped sleeping in her assigned quarters.
- ◆ Relationship: Dr. Petersen (lead researcher who was kind at first, but something in his eyes changed two weeks ago)
- ◆ Goals: Restore long-range communications and call for rescue (short-term); survive until extraction (long-term)
- ◆ Drive: Get home to her daughter
- ◆ Thread: The station's backup generator shouldn't need repairs this often-someone or something is sabotaging it

Genre Notes: Horror relies on vulnerability, isolation, and growing dread. Sarah has the skills to survive and potentially escape (technical expertise, endurance, ability to hide), but she's not equipped for direct confrontation. Her low PRE reflects the horror genre's common theme of being unable to convince others of the danger until it's too late.

Reference Character Summaries

This section presents three additional character summaries for reference. These show final results without step-by-step annotation.

Rella - The Technical Specialist

Concept: Former telegraph engineer who searches for meaning in strange message patterns.

Identity Elements:

- ◆ Name: Rella (she/her)
- ◆ Origin: Canyon relay settlement
- ◆ Profession: Telegraph maintenance and cipher analysis
- ◆ Habits: Thinks before speaking, keeps detailed notes, prefers quiet spaces
- ◆ Appearance: Practical layered clothing, steady hands, worn tool belt

Attributes:

Attribute	Value	Rationale
Might (MIG)	0	Physical labor was never her strength
Agility (AGI)	1	Steady hands and careful movement in
Presence (PRE)	1	Quiet but capable of connecting when
Reason (RSN)	2	Analytical mind, pattern recognition, technical knowledge

Skills: Observation, Stealth, Technical Work, Machinery Handling

Proficiencies: Telegraph Instruments, Precision Tools

Gear:

- ◆ Travel satchel
- ◆ Compact communication toolkit
- ◆ Notebook filled with cipher fragments
- ◆ Insulated lantern

Background: Grew up near a canyon relay hub, spent years maintaining communication lines and logging message patterns.

Relationship: Isten, a former coworker and mentor. Their friendship ended over a dispute about unsafe repair methods.

Goals:

- ◆ Short-term: Decode an anomalous pattern she intercepted
- ◆ Long-term: Understand where the strange messages originate

Drive: Avoid causing harm through her work.

Varn - The Social Operator

Concept: Charming ex-courier who knows everyone's secrets but trusts no one.

Identity Elements:

- ◆ Name: Varn (he/him)
- ◆ Origin: Port city trading hub
- ◆ Profession: Message courier, information broker
- ◆ Habits: Always watching exits, collects favors, speaks in half-truths
- ◆ Appearance: Well-dressed but practical, easy smile, constantly moving

Attributes:

Attribute	Value	Rationale
Might (MIG)	0	Avoids physical confrontation
Agility (AGI)	1	Quick reflexes from years of navigating
Presence (PRE)	2	Natural charisma, skilled at reading
Reason (RSN)	1	Good memory for names, faces, and debts

Skills: Persuasion, Deception, Empathy, Navigation

Proficiencies: Criminal Underworld, Urban Navigation, Court Etiquette

Gear:

- ◆ Fine traveling clothes
- ◆ Hidden coin purse
- ◆ Forged identity papers
- ◆ Small journal of contacts

Background: Started as a legitimate courier, gradually shifted to carrying sensitive information for those who paid well. Knows the port's social networks intimately.

Relationship: Mira, a dock authority official who owes Varn a significant favor-and hates that fact.

Goals:

- ◆ Short-term: Clear a debt to a dangerous crime boss
- ◆ Long-term: Establish a legitimate business and leave the shadows behind

Drive: Never be powerless or trapped again.

Kessa - The Combat Veteran

Concept: Retired mercenary seeking redemption through protecting the vulnerable.

Identity Elements:

- ◆ Name: Kessa (she/they)
- ◆ Origin: Border fortress town
- ◆ Profession: Former mercenary captain
- ◆ Habits: Wakes early, checks perimeter, speaks bluntly
- ◆ Appearance: Scarred, muscular, practical armor, short-cropped hair

Attributes:

Attribute	Value	Rationale
Might (MIG)	2	Years of combat training and physical
Agility (AGI)	1	Combat reflexes, good spatial
Presence (PRE)	1	Natural authority from leadership
Reason (RSN)	0	Acts on instinct rather than careful analysis

Skills: Brawling, Intimidation, Athletics, Endurance

Proficiencies: Military Protocol, Weapons Maintenance, Battlefield Medicine

Gear:

- ◆ Worn but reliable sword
- ◆ Reinforced traveling armor
- ◆ Field medical kit
- ◆ Mercenary company badge (retired)

Background: Led a small mercenary company for a decade. Left after a contract went wrong and civilians suffered. Now travels seeking ways to atone.

Relationship: Sergeant Doss, a former subordinate who still sends letters. The only person from that life Kessa still trusts.

Goals:

- ◆ Short-term: Find work protecting a caravan or settlement
- ◆ Long-term: Build something worth protecting instead of destroying

Drive: Prove that strength can serve instead of harm.

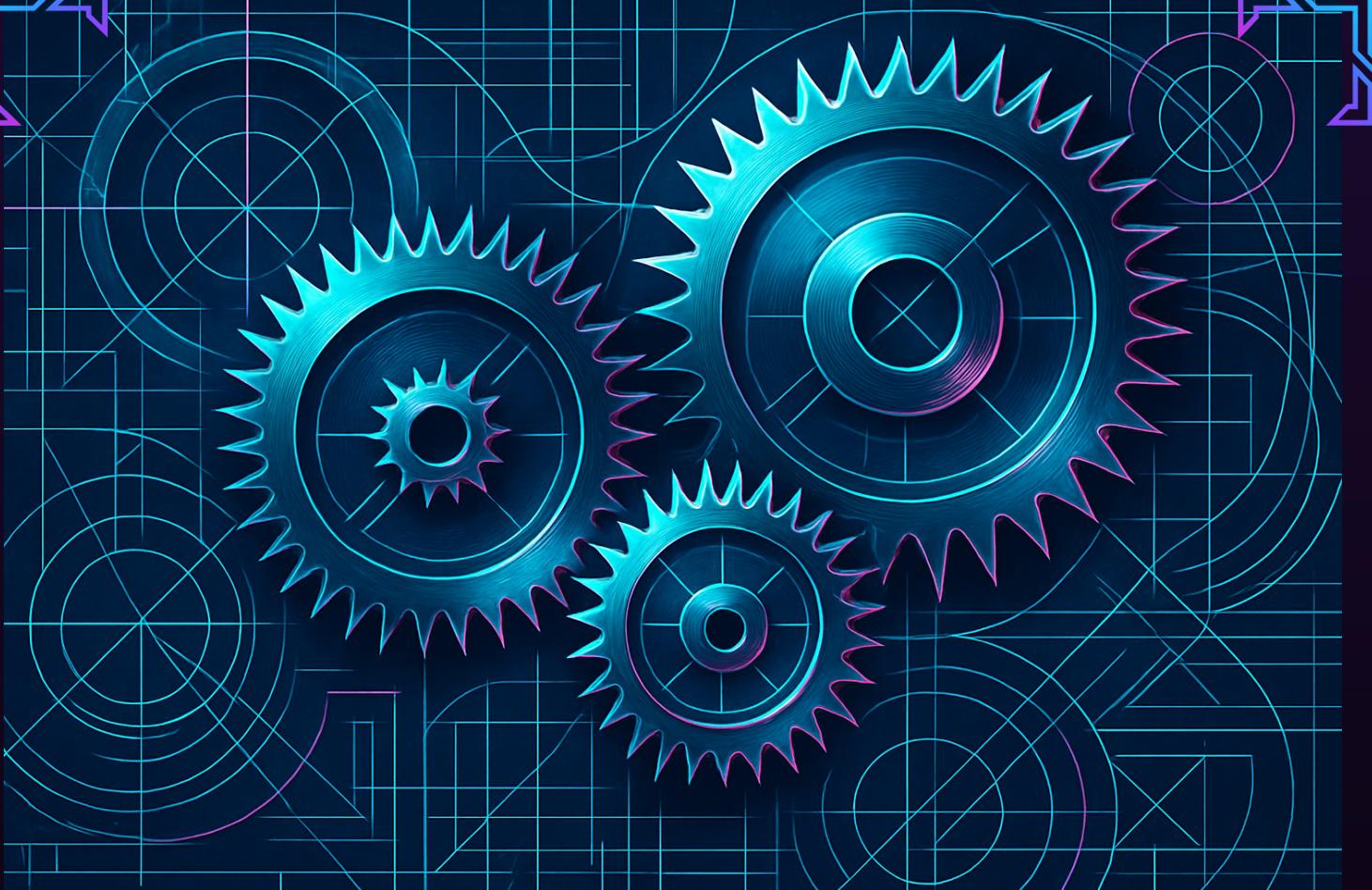
Chapter Summary

Character Creation turns an idea into a playable character who fits naturally into the world and the campaign. The nine-step checklist guides you from initial concept through identity elements, Attributes, Skills, Proficiencies, gear, background, relationships, goals, and final review. Each step is self-contained with the guidance you need to complete it.

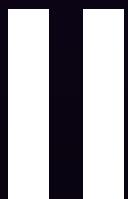
The Skills vs Proficiencies comparison table clarifies the distinction between action-based competencies and knowledge-based expertise—a common point of confusion for new players. Skills describe what you do and add +1 to applicable Checks; Proficiencies describe what you know and enable approaches or provide Edge.

The Attribute Priorities sidebar helps you select mechanical foundations that match common character archetypes. The worked examples demonstrate decision-making throughout the process, showing not just what to choose but why each choice serves the character concept—particularly for Skills and Proficiencies, where the annotations explain the reasoning behind each selection.

By completing all nine steps, you build a character who feels grounded, mechanically capable, and ready for play. Your character sheet represents a person with history, motivation, and room to grow as the campaign unfolds.



P A R T



Skills, Proficiencies, and Mechanical Reference

7

CHARACTERS AND ATTRIBUTES

This chapter deepens the character framework introduced in Character Creation. It explains how Attributes define what your character is naturally good at, how those ratings interact with intent and approach, and how to think about Attribute growth over time. Skills and Proficiencies add texture and specialization. Attributes provide the core pillars those details rest on.

Attributes Overview

Every character has four Attributes:

- ◆ Might (MIG) - Physical power, endurance, and resilience.
- ◆ Agility (AGI) - Speed, precision, balance, and reflexes.
- ◆ Presence (PRE) - Charisma, willpower, and social influence.
- ◆ Reason (RSN) - Logic, perception, memory, and analytical thinking.

Attribute ratings are small numbers that reflect how strongly each pillar shows up in play. During Character Creation, you assign a starting spread (usually 2, 1, 1, 0) across MIG, AGI, PRE, and RSN. Those ratings are then added to relevant checks throughout the campaign.

Attributes are always interpreted through the fiction. A high MIG character does not simply "have +2." They push through heavy doors, endure long marches, and soak physical hardship more easily. A high RSN character spots patterns, recalls obscure details, and notices when something does not fit.

Attribute Ratings and What They Mean

Attribute ratings are intentionally compact. Most characters begin with values between 0 and 2. This keeps the focus on intent, approach, Skills, Proficiencies, Tags, Conditions, and the 4d6 dice results instead of on large numerical bonuses.

As a general guideline:

- ◆ 0 - Unremarkable. You can attempt normal tasks with no special edge or penalty.
- ◆ 1 - Competent. You are noticeably capable in this area compared to an average person.
- ◆ 2 - Exceptional. You stand out in most situations that rely on this Attribute.

When you make a Check, you roll 4d6, sum the dice, and add your Attribute rating (and any other bonuses or penalties). You compare that total against a Difficulty Class (DC) from the standard ladder (typically DC 12-22). The difference between your total and the DC is the margin, which determines the outcome tier. A higher Attribute nudges those margins upward without guaranteeing any particular result.

Choosing Your Starting Spread

During Character Creation, you assign a small array of values across your four Attributes. The default array is:

- ◆ One Attribute at 2
- ◆ Two Attributes at 1
- ◆ One Attribute at 0

This spread creates characters who are competent across several areas with a clear primary strength and one relative weakness. You can think of this as your character's natural "starting shape" before Skills, Proficiencies, Tags, and gear are layered on.

A useful way to choose your spread is to ask three questions:

- ◆ Which Attribute describes how you most often solve problems when under pressure?
- ◆ Which Attribute fits your concept but should remain a supporting strength rather than your main focus?
- ◆ Which Attribute would be interesting to struggle with?

Answering these questions usually reveals where to place your 2, your two 1s, and your 0. You are not optimizing a build—you are deciding what kind of situations will feel natural, challenging, or risky for this character.

Attributes and Archetypes

Different spreads suggest different kinds of characters. The table below offers a few example archetypes. You do not need to use these labels at the table—they are here to help you think about possibilities.

Example Attribute Spreads and Archetypes

Spread	Example Archetype	Notes
MIG 2, AGI 1, PRE 1, RSN 0	Front-line problem solver	Leads with physical action and presence;
MIG 0, AGI 2, PRE 1, RSN 1	Scout or infiltrator	Excels at movement and precision; must
MIG 1, AGI 0, PRE 2, RSN 1	Negotiator or leader	Strong in social scenes; needs help
MIG 1, AGI 1, PRE 0, RSN 2	Analyst or investigator	Solves problems through observation required and planning; may struggle to command a room.
Use these examples as prompts, not prescriptions. You can apply any spread to any concept. A physically powerful and socially adept scout can be just as compelling as the “expected” combinations.		

Attributes, Intent, and Approach

Attributes are chosen based on how your character attempts something, not on what they would like to roll. The GM listens to your intent (what you are trying to achieve) and your approach (how you attempt it), then chooses the Attribute that best matches that description.

The same fictional goal can be resolved with different Attributes depending on approach:

- ◆ Prying open a stuck hatch with brute force might call for MIG.
- ◆ Picking the lock or working delicate mechanisms might call for AGI.
- ◆ Coaxing someone on the other side to open it might call for PRE.
- ◆ Analyzing the structure to find a weak point might call for RSN.

This flexibility keeps Attributes tied to the story. You do not choose an Attribute from a menu. You describe what your character does. The Attribute follows naturally from that description.

GM Guidance

: When a player describes intent and approach, repeat back what you heard in your own words, then say which Attribute you think applies and why. If the table disagrees, adjust together. The goal is shared understanding, not surprise rulings. If two Attributes seem equally valid, choose the one that fits the character's established habits, or offer the player a choice with different risks attached.

Working with Low Attributes

A rating of 0 is not a punishment. It means your character does not naturally lean on that Attribute when things get tense. The game expects you to have at least one area where you are merely ordinary.

Low Attributes shape the story in interesting ways:

- ◆ A low MIG character might avoid direct contests of strength and instead look for tools, allies, or alternate routes.
- ◆ A low AGI character might favor careful planning over risky stunts.
- ◆ A low PRE character might rely on written communication, intermediaries, or quiet influence.
- ◆ A low RSN character might lean on intuition, experience, or other party members for analysis.

Play your weaknesses honestly and creatively. They provide hooks for growth, tension, and teamwork. When a situation hinges on your low Attribute, it does not mean you should stay silent. It means the stakes are higher, and failure may reveal something important about who you are.

Examples by Attribute

Might (MIG)

Might represents physical strength, raw effort, and bodily resilience. It appears whenever you forcefully move, lift, or endure something.

Example

: A storm has washed out a small bridge. The group needs to move a heavy improvised plank into place before the river rises further. The GM calls for a MIG-based Check using 4d6 against DC 16 (Tough). The character with MIG 2 and the appropriate Skill rolls 4d6+2. On a full success, the plank is set and the group crosses safely. On a partial success, the plank holds but the character gains a Strained condition. On a failure, the plank slips, and the GM advances a flood Clock.

Agility (AGI)

Agility covers balance, precision, and quick reactions. It appears when you dodge, climb, sneak, or operate fine mechanisms under pressure.

Example

: A character sprints across slick rooftop tiles to reach a signal mast before an alarm spreads. The GM sets DC 18 (Hard) due to rain and height. The character with AGI 1 and a relevant Skill rolls 4d6+1. A hazardous Tag on the roof may impose Burden if the group ignored earlier warnings. On a full success, they reach the mast in time. On a partial success, they make it but leave evidence behind or trigger a lesser alarm. On a failure, they slip, and the GM ticks a danger Clock or applies a Condition such as Exposed or Dazed.

Presence (PRE)

Presence governs social force, confidence, and emotional weight. It appears when you persuade, command, intimidate, or rally others.

Example

: The group needs a nervous official to delay a shipment. A character steps forward to make the case. The GM sets DC 14 (Routine) if the request is modest, or higher if the stakes are severe. The character with PRE 2 and an appropriate Skill rolls 4d6+2. Helpful Tags (Shared History) or Proficiencies (Bureaucratic Procedures) may grant Edge. On a full success, the delay is granted cleanly. On a partial success, the delay comes with a favor owed or a complication. On a failure, the official refuses and alerts a rival faction.

Reason (RSN)

Reason covers analysis, pattern recognition, and careful observation. It appears when you investigate, deduce, plan, or notice hidden details.

Example

: A character studies overlapping telegraph logs to determine whether a recent outage is natural or engineered. The GM sets DC 16 (Tough). The character with RSN 2 and an appropriate Skill rolls 4d6+2. A relevant Proficiency (Telegraph Instruments) may lower the DC or reveal extra context on a success. On a full success, they identify the outage as deliberate and tie it to a specific region. On a partial success, they confirm it was engineered but only narrow the possibilities. On a failure, they misinterpret the data and the GM advances a faction Clock based on that error.

Multi-Attribute Actions and Teamwork

Many scenes involve multiple characters and overlapping actions. Instead of treating every moment as a separate Check, think about how Attributes combine across the group.

- ◆ One character might use MIG to hold a door while another uses RSN to bypass its lock.
- ◆ A PRE-focused character might draw attention so an AGI-focused ally can move unseen.
- ◆ Two characters with different strengths might both roll, with the table focusing on the more interesting result.

The GM decides whether each character rolls separately, one character rolls with assistance, or a single roll represents the group's combined effort. Whichever option you choose, keep intent and approach in view. Assistance should make sense in the fiction, not just on the character sheet.

Attribute Growth Preview

Attributes do not change every session. They grow slowly across a campaign as characters reach important milestones, resolve personal threads, and survive significant consequences.

Advancement rules appear in the Advancement and Long Term Growth chapter later in this book.

When Attributes do increase, the change should feel meaningful in the fiction. A rise in MIG might come after a season of hard labor or survival in harsh conditions. A rise in RSN might follow extended study, investigative breakthroughs, or hard lessons learned from mistakes. Treat Attribute growth as an opportunity to reflect on how the character has changed, not just as a numerical upgrade.

GM Guidance

: When a player increases an Attribute, ask them to describe one moment from the campaign that symbolizes that change. Then add a Tag to the world, a new relationship, or an updated detail on the character's sheet that reflects their growth. This keeps advancement grounded in the shared story rather than only in numbers.

Chapter Summary

Attributes form the foundation of what your character is naturally good at. The four pillars (Might, Agility, Presence, and Reason) shape how your character approaches challenges and what kinds of scenes feel natural or risky. The standard starting spread of 2, 1, 1, 0 creates characters with clear strengths and interesting weaknesses.

Attributes connect to the fiction through intent and approach. You do not choose which Attribute to roll. You describe what your character does, and the GM determines which Attribute applies. This keeps the rules tied to the story rather than to mechanical optimization.

The next chapter covers Actions, Checks, and Outcomes, explaining how Attributes combine with Skills and other modifiers to resolve uncertain moments in play.

8

ACTIONS, CHECKS, AND
OUTCOMES

This chapter describes the core resolution engine of the game. Whenever a character takes an action and the outcome is uncertain, consequential, and within their reach to influence, the table may call for a Check. Checks turn intent and approach into dice, and dice back into story beats. Understanding how to call for, perform, and interpret Checks is essential for both players and the GM.

Fiction-First and Tactical Play: Razorweave embraces both narrative flexibility and mechanical clarity. The game is fiction-first in when and why we roll—you describe what your character does in the world, not which mechanical option you are selecting. But once a Check is called for, the system provides precise tactical guidance: explicit DCs, probability tables, and concrete modifiers. This is not a contradiction. Fiction establishes what is at stake and what makes sense; mechanics resolve how uncertain situations play out. You anchor decisions in the story, then use math to adjudicate risk fairly and transparently. The fiction tells you whether to call for a Check and what Edge or Burden might apply; the mechanics tell you what happens when you roll. Both layers matter.

When to Roll (and When Not To)

You roll when the GM calls for a Check. The GM should only do this when three conditions are all true:

- ◆ Uncertainty: The outcome is not predetermined. A trained character performing a routine task in ideal conditions does not roll.
- ◆ Consequence: Failure or partial success would introduce tension, cost, or change. If failure just means "try again until it works," do not roll.
- ◆ Agency: The character can meaningfully influence the result. Do not roll for things entirely outside the characters' control.

If all three are present, a Check is appropriate. If one or more are missing, the GM either says "yes" and narrates success, or "no" and explains why it is impossible or out of scope. Checks are tools for focusing on interesting uncertainty, not a gate in front of every action.

Example

Trigger: A character wants to leap between rooftops during a chase in heavy rain. The gap is significant, the conditions are poor, and falling would be dangerous. Assessment: The outcome is uncertain, the stakes are serious, and the character's choices matter. The GM calls for a Check. Counter-example: The same character crossing a sturdy bridge in calm weather does not roll. Success is assumed; the story moves forward.

The Core Check Procedure

Every Check follows the same basic loop:

1. The player declares intent and approach.
2. The GM decides whether a Check is needed.
3. If needed, the GM selects an Attribute and relevant Skill, sets a DC, and notes any Tags, Conditions, or Proficiencies that might grant Edge or Burden.
4. The player rolls 4d6, applies modifiers, and compares the total to the DC.
5. The table interprets the outcome tier (critical success, full success, partial success, failure, critical failure) and updates the fiction accordingly.

Declaring Intent and Approach

When you declare an action, you state two things:

- ◆ Intent: What you want to achieve in the fiction.
- ◆ Approach: How you are trying to achieve it.

Intent focuses the scene. Approach determines which Attribute, Skills, Proficiencies, Tags, and Conditions are relevant. The more concrete and grounded your description, the easier it is for the GM to set an appropriate DC and for the group to picture the moment.

Example

Intent: "I want to get the factory foreman to delay shipment of the crates." Approach: "I speak with her in private, emphasize the safety risks, and show her evidence of the faulty wiring we found." The GM recognizes this as a PRE-based approach with a relevant social Skill and possibly a Proficiency related to safety procedures or technical documentation.

Setting DCs

The GM sets a Difficulty Class (DC) to represent how hard the task is under current circumstances. The system uses a standard ladder:

Standard DC Ladder

DC	Difficulty	When to Use	Concrete Examples
12	Easy	Favorable conditions,	Climbing a rough stone
14	Routine	Standard conditions,	Picking a standard lock
16	Tough	Unfavorable conditions,	Convincing a suspicious
18	Hard	Hostile conditions,	Disarming a complex trap
20	Heroic	Extreme conditions,	Leaping between
22	Legendary	Near-impossible pushing me to my limits, setting the stage for an amazing turnaround moment; the character has an absolute edge of mortal accomplish- ment; the task is at the edge of what is possi- ble in the set- ting	Talking down a raging waterfall; a character is pinned against a high- cliff face; a character is clinging to a generalized but dangerous situation without equipment; a character is wounded and exhausted while deciphering alien language in minutes

Start by imagining what success would look like in the setting and how far it is from effortless. Use lower DCs when characters have strong fictional positioning, good information, and safe terrain. Use higher DCs when time is short, the environment is dangerous, or the task is at the edge of what is possible in the setting.

Calibrating DCs: Worked Examples

The DC ladder is a tool, not a formula. To calibrate your intuition, consider how the same core task changes across the ladder based on circumstances.

Using the Examples: When setting a DC, mentally place your situation on one of these continuums. Ask "Is this closer to calm and prepared, or desperate and improvised?" The answer will point you to the right step on the ladder.

GM Guidance

When selecting a DC, ask yourself: "What would make this task harder or easier?" Consider the character's preparation, available tools, environmental factors, and opposition awareness. A well-prepared character attempting a task in favorable conditions deserves a lower DC than an improvising character under hostile circumstances. Quick DC Benchmarks: DC 12: Climbing a rough stone wall in good conditions-plenty of handholds, no time pressure, dry weather. DC 14: Picking a standard commercial lock-common mechanism, proper tools, adequate lighting. DC 16: Persuading a suspicious guard to look the other way-they have no reason to trust you, but no reason to be hostile either. DC 18: Disarming a trap while under fire-you know what you are doing, but enemies are shooting at you and time is critical. DC 20: Leaping between rooftops in a storm-the gap is wide, the surfaces are slick, the wind is unpredictable. Ground each DC in the specific, imaginable situation at hand. If you can picture the scene clearly, the right DC usually follows.

Edge, Burden, Tags, and Conditions

Rather than constantly adjusting the DC, the game often represents favorable or unfavorable circumstances through Edge and Burden.

Edge and Burden usually come from Tags, Conditions, environment, tools, Proficiencies, or prior setup actions. They represent the table's shared sense that the character is favored or hindered in this moment. Multiple sources combine into a single level of Edge or Burden and are capped at +/-2—several small edges do not create infinite Edge, and multiple problems do not push you below -2. If a character would have both Edge and Burden, reduce them against each other (for example, +2 and -1 becomes +1) until only one side remains, then apply the final level.

Tags and Conditions provide a shared vocabulary for these modifiers: Dim Light, Slick, or Exposed might impose Burden; Solid Cover or Marked might grant Edge in specific contexts or to specific parties. For complete rules on Tags and Conditions, see Chapter 9 (or Chapter 18 for the extended reference).

Example

Kira attempts to pick a lock on a warehouse door. The GM assesses the modifiers from multiple sources: +1 Edge from her Lockpicking Tools Proficiency (she has the right equipment and knows how to use it) +1 Edge from an ally's Set Up action (Dex watched the guard's patrol pattern and signaled the optimal moment) -1 Burden from Dim Light (the alley is poorly lit, making precision work harder). The modifiers stack: +1 +1 -1 = +1 Edge total. With +1 Edge, Kira rolls 5d6 and keeps the best 4. She rolls 2, 3, 4, 5, 6 and keeps 3, 4, 5, 6 = 18. Adding AGI +2 gives her a total of 20 against DC 16. Margin = +4, a Full Success. The lock clicks open quietly. Note: Edge and Burden cap at +/-2. Even if Kira had four sources of Edge, she would still only roll 6d6 and keep the best 4. The cap prevents modifier stacking from overwhelming the dice.

Rolling 4d6 and Calculating Margin

When a Check is called for, follow this procedure:

1. Roll 4d6, adjusting the number of dice kept if Edge or Burden applies.
2. Add the relevant Attribute rating.
3. Add +1 if you have a relevant Skill. Having a relevant Skill adds +1 to your Check result. This bonus is binary—you either have the Skill (+1) or you do not (+0). There are no Skill levels or ranks.
4. Add any other bonuses from temporary effects.
5. Compare the total to the DC to find the margin (Result - DC).

The margin determines the outcome tier. Use the following ranges to identify which tier applies:

Outcome Tier Margin Ranges

Margin Range	Outcome Tier	Summary
+5 or more	Critical Success	Exceptional result; exceed your goal
0 to +4	Full Success	Clean success; achieve your intent
-1 to -2	Partial Success	Success with cost; achieve your goal
-3 to -6	Failure	Goal not achieved; situation worsens or
-7 or worse	Critical Failure	Significant setback; major escalation or consequence

4d6 Probability Reference

Understanding the math behind 4d6 helps you gauge your chances and make informed tactical decisions. The following table shows the probability distribution for raw 4d6 rolls (before adding Attribute or Skill modifiers).

4d6 Roll Distribution

Roll Total	Probability	Cumulative (roll this or higher)
4	0.08%	100%
5	0.31%	99.92%
6	0.77%	99.61%
7	1.54%	98.84%
8	2.70%	97.30%
9	4.32%	94.60%
10	6.17%	90.28%
11	8.02%	84.11%
12	9.65%	76.09%
13	10.49%	66.44%
14	10.80%	55.95%
15	10.49%	45.15%
16	9.65%	34.66%
17	8.02%	25.01%
18	6.17%	16.99%
19	4.32%	10.82%
20	2.70%	6.50%
21	1.54%	3.80%
22	0.77%	2.26%
23	0.31%	1.49%
24	0.08%	1.18%

Key Insight: The average 4d6 roll is 14. With a typical Attribute of +2, you will average 16-enough for a Routine (DC 14) task with margin to spare.

Success Probability by DC

This table shows your percentage chance of achieving at least a Full Success (margin 0 or higher) based on your total modifier and the DC. Use this during character building or tactical planning.

DC	With +0	With +2	With +4	With +2 and +1
12	76%	90%	97%	95%
14	56%	76%	90%	87%
16	35%	56%	76%	68%
18	17%	35%	56%	46%
20	6%	17%	35%	26%

Complete Check Example

The following example demonstrates every step of Check resolution with all numbers shown. Use this as a reference for how the full mechanical sequence works.

Interpreting Outcomes

Every outcome tier should change the situation. The GM and players work together to describe what the dice mean in the fiction.

- ◆ Critical Success (margin +5 or more) - You achieve more than you aimed for. Extra benefits, stronger position, or accelerated progress. In combat, this often means additional Clock ticks or bonus effects.
- ◆ Full Success (margin 0 to +4) - You get what you wanted with no significant cost. The scene moves forward cleanly. Your intent is fulfilled as stated.
- ◆ Partial Success (margin -1 to -2) - You succeed, but with a cost,

complication, or reduced effect. Momentum continues, tension rises. Common costs include: resource expenditure, unwanted attention, reduced scope of success, or new obligations.

- ◆ Failure (margin -3 to -6) - You do not achieve your goal, and the situation complicates. Threats advance, resources strain, or positions worsen. The GM should advance threat Clocks or introduce new complications.
- ◆ Critical Failure (margin -7 or worse, or all 1s) - Things go significantly wrong. Use sparingly for dramatic beats: broken tools, dangerous exposure, or major escalations. This is not punishment-it is an opportunity for dramatic tension.

Worked Examples

The following examples demonstrate complete Check resolution from intent through outcome. Study these to understand how the mechanical sequence flows in actual play.

Example

Scene: Mira needs to convince a merchant to sell rare components at a fair price. The merchant is greedy but not hostile. Intent: "I want the merchant to sell me the precision lenses at cost." Approach: "I appeal to his reputation among the guild, mentioning that fair dealing now will bring future business from my contacts." GM Assessment: This is a PRE-based Check using a social Skill. The merchant is motivated by profit but values his reputation. DC 14 (Routine social negotiation with a neutral party). Modifiers: Mira has the Negotiation Skill (+1) and mentions her guild contacts, which the GM rules is good fictional positioning but not quite Edge-worthy on its own. Roll: Mira rolls 4d6: 2, 3, 4, 5 = 14. Adding PRE +2 and Skill +1 = 17. Margin: 17 - 14 = +3. Outcome Tier: Full Success (margin 0 to +4). Narrative Result: The merchant agrees to sell at cost, impressed by Mira's guild connections and the promise of future business. She obtains the precision lenses without complication. Alternate Roll: Suppose Mira had rolled 4d6: 1, 2, 3, 4 = 10. Adding PRE +2 and Skill +1 = 13. Margin: 13 - 14 = -1. Outcome Tier: Partial Success (margin -1 to -2). Narrative Result: The merchant agrees to sell the lenses at cost, but names his price: Mira must bring him first pick of salvage from her next job. She has the components she needs, but now owes a favor that may prove inconvenient later.

Example

Scene: During a warehouse fight, Kira faces a hired thug. The environment is marked with Crates (cover) and Dim Light. Kira's ally Dex used a Set Up action last turn to flank the thug, granting Kira Edge. Intent: "I want to take down this thug before reinforcements arrive." Approach: "I strike at his weapon arm, trying to disarm and disable him quickly." GM Assessment: This is an AGI-based Strike action. The thug is a standard combatant with a 6-segment Resolve Clock. DC 16 (Tough-the thug is trained and alert). Modifiers: +1 Edge from Dex's flanking setup Dim Light would normally impose Burden, but Kira has low-light training (negated) Roll: With +1 Edge, Kira rolls 5d6 and keeps the best 4: 2, 3, 4, 5, 6. Keeping 3, 4, 5, 6 = 18. Adding AGI +2 = 20. Margin: 20 - 16 = +4. Outcome Tier: Full Success (margin 0 to +4) = Clear Strike. Mechanical Result: A Clear Strike ticks the target's Resolve Clock by 2 segments. The thug's Resolve Clock advances from 0/6 to 2/6. Narrative Result: Kira's blade connects cleanly with the thug's forearm. He grunts in pain and his grip loosens on his weapon. He is hurt and shaken but still fighting. Two more solid hits and he will go down.

Example

Scene: Vance attempts to pick a locked door in the basement of a noble's estate. The environment is marked with Dim Light (Burden) and Vance is working with borrowed tools rather than his own precision set. However, an ally spent time earlier casing the lock mechanism, providing useful information. Intent: "I want to open this lock without triggering any alarms." Approach: "I work carefully, applying what Sera told me about the lock's design, and take my time to avoid mistakes." GM Assessment: This is an AGI-based Check using Technical Work Skill. The lock is high-quality. DC 18 (Hard-sophisticated lock in unfavorable conditions). Modifiers: -1 Burden from Dim Light (impairs precision work) -1 Burden from improvised tools (borrowed picks, not his custom set) +1 Edge from Sera's reconnaissance (useful information about the mechanism) Net modifier: +1 Edge and -2 Burden net to -1 Burden total Roll: With -1 Burden, Vance rolls 5d6 and keeps the worst 4: 1, 2, 4, 5, 6. Keeping 1, 2, 4, 5 = 12. Adding AGI +3 and Technical Work +1 = 16. Margin: 16 - 18 = -2. Outcome Tier: Partial Success (margin -1 to -2). Narrative Result: The lock clicks open-Vance's skill overcomes the poor conditions. However, the effort takes longer than expected, and one of his borrowed picks snaps inside the mechanism. He will need to explain the broken tool to its owner, and the damaged lock may be noticed when the household checks security in the morning. He is in, but evidence of his passage remains.

Strike Outcomes

When you make a Strike action in combat, the outcome tier determines both the damage dealt and any additional effects. Strikes interact directly with target Resolve Clocks.

Strike Outcome Table

Outcome Tier	Result	Resolve Clock Effect	Additional Consequences
Critical Success	Devastating Strike	Tick target Resolve Clock	Choose one: apply a
Full Success (margin 0 to -2)	Clear Strike	Tick target Resolve Clock	Clean hit with no
Partial Success	Glancing Strike	Tick target Resolve Clock	Target may respond: GM
Failure (margin -3 to -7)	Miss	No Resolve Clock progress	GM chooses: tick a threat
Critical Failure (margin -7 or worse)	Disastrous Miss	No Resolve Clock progress	GM chooses two

Strike Mechanics Summary

- ◆ Clear Strike (Full Success): Your attack connects solidly. Tick the target's Resolve Clock by 2 segments. This is the baseline effective hit.
- ◆ Glancing Strike (Partial Success): You land a blow, but not cleanly. Tick the target's Resolve Clock by 1 segment. The target gains an opportunity: either a threat Clock advances, or the target improves their tactical position.
- ◆ Miss (Failure): Your attack fails to connect meaningfully. The target suffers no Resolve damage. Instead, the situation worsens for you: threat Clocks advance, the target repositions, or the environment becomes more dangerous.

Example

Round 1: Kira (Clear Strike) hits the thug for 2 Resolve ticks (now 2/6). Round 2: The thug attacks Kira. The GM rolls a Glancing Strike-Kira takes 1 Resolve tick, and the "Reinforcements Arrive" Clock ticks by 1 (the noise draws attention). Round 3: Kira attacks again but rolls a Miss. The thug takes no damage, but the GM ticks "Reinforcements Arrive" by 1 more-it is now 2/4. Kira must end this fight quickly.

Group Checks and Assistance

Many actions involve more than one character. Rather than rolling for everyone separately every time, the GM can use:

- ◆ Assistance: One character leads the action, another assists. If the assistance is credible in the fiction, the leader gains Edge or a small bonus.
- ◆ Representative Checks: One Check stands in for a coordinated group effort. The outcome tier describes how the whole group fares.
- ◆ Split Risks: Two or more characters each roll, and the GM focuses on the most interesting combination of results rather than tracking every detail.

Pick the method that best fits the moment. Use single rolls when you want quick resolution. Use individual rolls when it is important that different characters face different consequences.

Checks and Clocks

Some obstacles are too big for a single Check. Instead, the GM creates a Clock with several segments. Successful Checks tick the Clock forward; failures or partial successes may tick related threat Clocks. For complete rules on creating and managing Clocks, see Chapter 9.

Use Clocks when:

- ◆ Characters are working toward a long-term goal, such as investigating a mystery or repairing a ship.
- ◆ A danger is mounting over time, such as a collapsing tunnel, spreading fire, or advancing enemy force.
- ◆ Two or more forces are racing toward different outcomes (opposing Clocks).

Example

Trigger: The group works to evacuate a district before floodwaters arrive. Clocks: "Evacuation Complete" (6 segments) and "Flood Waters Rise" (4 segments). Rolls: Each scene, characters make MIG, AGI, PRE, or RSN Checks based on their chosen contributions-lifting sandbags, coordinating crowds, analyzing routes. Successes advance the Evacuation Complete Clock; failures or partials tick the Flood Waters Rise Clock or create new complications. Outcome: Which Clock fills first determines whether the district is saved, partially saved, or overwhelmed.

Keeping Momentum

Checks should move the story forward, not stall it. When in doubt:

- ◆ Use Partial successes to trade progress for cost rather than stopping action.
- ◆ Let Failures create new problems, reveal information, or shift the situation rather than blocking all paths.
- ◆ Allow retries only when the circumstances or approach meaningfully change.

The goal is not to punish characters for rolling poorly. The goal is to discover what happens next when risk meets intent. If the table keeps that in view, Checks will feel like natural beats in the story rather than interruptions.

Chapter Summary

Checks are the core resolution tool: declare intent and approach, assess whether a roll is needed, set DC and modifiers, roll 4d6, and interpret the outcome. Having a relevant Skill adds +1 to your Check result-this is a flat bonus with no levels or ranks. Edge and Burden adjust dice rather than targets. Outcome tiers-from Critical Success to Critical Failure-shape consequences with explicit margin ranges (+5 or more, 0 to +4, -1 to -2, -3 to -6, -7 or worse). Strike outcomes have specific mechanical effects: Clear Strikes tick Resolve Clocks by 2, Glancing Strikes by 1 with counterplay, and Misses advance threat Clocks or grant enemy positioning. The 4d6 system produces an average roll of 14, with each +1 modifier shifting success probability by 15-20%-use the probability tables to plan tactics and assess risk. Use the Check Procedure Summary and quick-reference tables during play to keep the action flowing.

9

**TAGS, CONDITIONS, AND
CLOCKS**

Tags, Conditions, and Clocks are the tools the game uses to make the world feel solid and responsive. They connect description to mechanics so that rain, fear, injuries, crowds, and looming deadlines all matter at the table. This chapter explains what each of these tools is for, how to use them, and how they interact with Checks.

When to Use What

Before diving into the details, use this quick-reference table to understand what each system does and when to reach for it:

When NOT to Use These Systems

Before reaching for Tags, Conditions, or Clocks, consider whether the situation actually needs them. These tools should clarify play, not clutter it.

The Three Systems in Action

To see how Tags, Conditions, and Clocks work together without overlapping, consider this scenario:

Example

A character sneaks through a guarded warehouse at night. Tags describe the environment: The scene has the Tags Dim Light and Cluttered. These belong to the space itself. Dim Light grants Edge on Stealth but imposes Burden on spotting details. Cluttered provides opportunities for cover but makes quick movement difficult. If someone turns on the lights, the Dim Light Tag disappears-Tags change when the fiction changes. Conditions describe the character: After failing a Stealth Check, the character gains the Condition Spotted. This follows them-even if they move to a different room, guards are now actively searching for them. The Condition imposes Burden on further Stealth attempts until they break line of sight and hide successfully. Clocks track momentum: Meanwhile, an "Alert Level" 4-segment Clock sits on the table. Each failed Check or loud action ticks it forward. When it fills, reinforcements arrive and the exits lock down. The Clock does not care about location or character state-it tracks the overall situation's trajectory toward a specific outcome. Each system serves a different purpose: Tags shape what is possible in this space. Conditions reflect what has happened to this character. Clocks measure how close the situation is to changing dramatically.

Tags vs. Conditions

Tags describe the environment or situation. They belong to places, scenes, objects, or circumstances: Dim Light, Slick, Crowded, Fragile Cover. Tags affect what you can do in a space and how you do it.

Conditions describe your character's state. They follow you from one location to the next until cleared: Exhausted, Bleeding, Frightened, Restrained. Conditions affect your actions wherever you go.

Tags and Conditions are the shared vocabulary the table uses to talk about advantages, risks, and lingering consequences. They are not extra subsystems to memorize. They are the names you give to things you are already describing.

What Tags Do

A Tag is a short descriptor applied to a scene, location, object, or situation. It becomes a flag: "remember this when resolving actions here." Tags typically:

- ◆ Grant Edge or Burden on certain Checks.
- ◆ Raise or lower DCs for specific actions.
- ◆ Change position or effect (how risky an action feels or how big its impact is).

You do not tag every detail. A room is just a room until its darkness, instability, crowd, or sacred significance matters to what characters are attempting. Tag the things that will shape decisions.

GM Quick Start: Using Tags

When you are new to Tags or starting a scene quickly, use this approach to establish meaningful environmental details without overloading the table.

How Tags Affect Checks

Tags translate fictional circumstances into mechanical modifiers.

When a Tag is relevant to a Check, it typically grants Edge or imposes Burden based on whether the circumstance helps or hinders the action.

The Basic Rule: If a Tag makes an action easier, it grants Edge. If a Tag makes an action harder, it imposes Burden. Some Tags do both depending on what you are attempting.

When multiple Tags apply, combine their effects. If one Tag grants Edge and another imposes Burden on the same Check, they cancel out. If two Tags both grant Edge, you gain +2 Edge (capped at the normal maximum). The GM adjudicates edge cases based on the fiction.

Common Tags Quick Reference

Most-Used Tags Cheat Sheet

When you need an instant lookup during play, use this condensed table of the most common Tags:

You can invent new Tags that fit your setting. The important part is agreeing at the table what a Tag does in practice: which actions it helps, which it hinders, and how it shapes consequences.

Example

The GM describes a warehouse full of stacked crates, narrow aisles, and oil-spotted floors. They assign the Tags Cramped, Fragile Cover, and Slick. Cramped makes wide swings and large weapons awkward. Fragile Cover means wooden crates can be shredded by fire, potentially stripping cover away. Slick imposes Burden on fast movement or acrobatic maneuvers. Every decision in this scene now has texture.

What Conditions Do

Conditions represent persistent states that modify what a character can safely attempt. They are the mechanical mark left by consequences. When something important happens to you-injury, fear, strain, affliction-it often becomes a Condition.

Conditions typically:

- ◆ Impose Burden on certain actions.
- ◆ Limit available options (cannot run, cannot act this turn, cannot speak clearly).
- ◆ Threaten further harm if ignored (ongoing damage, ticking Clocks).

Condition Quick Reference

Use this table to quickly determine how common Conditions affect play:

Additional Conditions appear in the Extended Tags and Conditions Reference chapter. When you create custom Conditions, ensure each one has a clear mechanical effect and an achievable clearing method.

Common Conditions Cheat Sheet

For fast reference during play, use this condensed table of the most frequent Conditions:

Examples of Common Conditions

A full alphabetical list appears in the Glossary. Here are a few you will see often:

- ◆ Exhausted - Burden on demanding physical actions until you rest or receive meaningful aid.
- ◆ Bleeding - Time pressure from an untreated wound. If not stabilized, it may tick a personal Clock or escalate to worse states.
- ◆ Restrained - You are held or pinned. You cannot move freely and must break free or be helped.
- ◆ Dazed - Disoriented; Burden on perception and reaction until you recover.
- ◆ Frightened - Burden on actions while a specific threat is visible; clears when you rally, escape, or defeat the source.

Example

A character fails a Check while crossing a compromised catwalk. Rather than simple damage, the GM describes how they slam into the railing and twist their knee. They gain the Condition Exhausted or Weakened, representing reduced stamina. Future physical actions are harder until they rest or receive treatment.

Using Tags and Conditions with Checks

Tags and Conditions do not require new rules. They plug directly into the Check system:

- ◆ Tags often grant Edge or Burden on Checks that interact with them.
- ◆ Conditions usually impose Burden or limit which approaches are reasonable.
- ◆ Some Tags shift DCs or change position and effect instead of modifying dice directly.

When you are about to roll, quickly review which Tags and Conditions are relevant. Ask: "Does this make the action easier, harder, or riskier?" Then adjust Edge/Burden, DC, or consequences accordingly.

Example

In a horror-tinged mystery, a character stalks through a foggy graveyard at night. The scene has Tags Dim Light and Obscured. The character is also Frightened from a previous encounter. When they attempt to sneak past patrolling figures, Dim Light and Obscured might grant Edge on Stealth, but Frightened could impose Burden on actions taken while the threat is visible. The GM weighs these factors, cancels opposing modifiers as needed, and describes how the character's shaky nerves show up in the fiction.

Introducing and Clearing Conditions

Conditions should follow naturally from events. A failed Check in a hazardous area might cause Bleeding or Poisoned. Exposure to overwhelming sights might cause Frightened. Pushing beyond safe limits might cause Exhausted.

When you introduce a Condition, state:

- ◆ What it represents in the fiction.
- ◆ How it affects actions (which Checks it modifies and how).
- ◆ How it can be cleared (time, rest, treatment, facing a fear, or completing a Clock).

Minor Conditions should clear quickly once addressed. Major Conditions may persist across several scenes or form the basis for character-driven goals.

What Clocks Are

Clocks are segmented trackers that answer "how close are we?" for goals and threats. A Clock is a circle or track divided into segments. Common sizes are 4, 6, or 8 segments, but you can use any size that fits the situation. As actions succeed, time passes, or events occur, segments fill. When the Clock completes, something happens.

Use Clocks to represent:

- ◆ Long-term goals - Research projects, faction plans, character endeavors.
- ◆ Mounting threats - Approaching storms, advancing enemies, spreading plagues.
- ◆ Ticking dangers - Rituals completing, bombs counting down, collapsing structures.
- ◆ Faction projects - Off-screen activities of NPCs and organizations.

Clock Pacing Guide

Choosing the right Clock size and tick rate keeps scenes feeling appropriately tense. Use this guide to match Clock design to your scene type.

Clock Advancement Guide

Understanding when and how Clocks advance is crucial for pacing and tension. Use these guidelines:

GM Guidance

The table above establishes a mechanical baseline. Use it as your starting point, then adjust based on the fiction. A character with a relevant Proficiency might tick an extra segment on success. An action that is particularly risky or loud might tick threat Clocks even on success. The defaults ensure consistent pacing; your judgment ensures the fiction makes sense.

Clock Advancement Cheat Sheet

For quick reference during play, use this at-a-glance summary:

Multi-Clock Guidance

When multiple Clocks are active, use this decision process:

1. Identify the primary Clock. Ask: "Which Clock does this action most directly affect?" Advance that Clock based on the outcome.
2. Consider secondary effects. If the action is loud, risky, or draws attention, ask: "Does this also affect a threat Clock?" If yes, tick it.
3. Handle ambiguous actions. When an action could affect multiple Clocks: If the player's intent was clear, honor that intent. If uncertain, advance the Clock most connected to their stated approach. For truly split actions, consider ticking both at reduced rates.

Advancing Clocks

Clocks advance in several ways:

- ◆ Success-based - Successful Checks tick a project Clock forward.
- ◆ Time-based - Segments fill as scenes pass or as in-world time moves.
- ◆ Event-based - Specific narrative events advance background or faction Clocks.

Partial successes often advance a Clock and introduce a complication. Exceptional successes may jump a Clock by more than one segment. Failures might leave a Clock unchanged while pushing forward a related threat Clock.

Opposing Clocks: A Worked Example

Example

The group is investigating a corrupt official while the official works to destroy evidence. Clocks: "Expose the Official" - 6-segment Clock (investigation progress) "Cover-Up Complete" - 4-segment Clock (enemy countermeasures) Round 1: The investigator searches the official's office. Check: RSN-based Investigation against DC 16 (Tough-the office has been partially cleaned) Result: Full Success (margin +2) Effect: Tick "Expose" 2 segments. Found a ledger with suspicious entries. Threat Clock: No advance-the search was quiet and unnoticed. Round 2: The investigator questions a nervous clerk. Check: PRE-based Persuasion against DC 14 (Routine) Result: Partial Success (margin -1) Effect: Tick "Expose" 1 segment. Clerk reveals a name but is visibly frightened. Threat Clock: Tick "Cover-Up" 1 segment. The clerk will warn the official. Round 3: The official learns of the investigation and begins destroying documents. Event-based: GM ticks "Cover-Up" 1 segment automatically (faction action). "Cover-Up" now at 2/4 segments. Round 4: The investigator tries to intercept the document destruction. Check: AGI-based Stealth against DC 16 (Tough-guards are alert) Result: Failure (margin -4) Effect: No progress on "Expose." Threat Clock: Tick "Cover-Up" 2 segments. Guards catch the investigator; documents are burned. "Cover-Up" fills to 4/4-evidence destroyed! Outcome: The Cover-Up Clock filled first. The official escapes immediate exposure, but the investigator has partial evidence (3/6 on "Expose"). The story continues with new stakes: can they find other witnesses before the official silences them?

Combining Tags, Conditions, and Clocks

These tools are most powerful when used together:

- ◆ Tags set the stage: terrain, lighting, crowds, magical effects.
- ◆ Conditions show how previous events cling to characters and shape their options.
- ◆ Clocks track momentum toward outcomes that matter over time.

A single scene might involve a Hazardous Tag, characters who are Exhausted, and a "Structural Collapse" Clock. Every roll becomes a meaningful choice about risk, effort, and timing.

GM Guidance

You do not need Tags, Conditions, and Clocks on every scene. Start with one or two Tags that matter, a few Conditions that arise naturally, and a single important Clock. Add more only when they clarify the fiction rather than clutter it. When in doubt, ask: "Does this tool make the situation clearer and more interesting?" If yes, use it.

Chapter Summary

Tags describe environments and situations; Conditions describe character states; Clocks track progress toward outcomes. The "When to Use What" table at the start of this chapter helps you quickly identify which system applies to a given situation. Equally important, the "When NOT to Use" guidance helps you avoid overcomplicating simple scenes. Use the Common Tags tables and the Most-Used Tags Cheat Sheet for quick reference during play. The Condition Quick Reference and Common Conditions Cheat Sheet provide mechanical effects and clearing methods for the most frequent Conditions. Apply the Clock Advancement by Check Outcome table and the Clock Advancement Cheat Sheet to maintain consistent pacing-these defaults give you a mechanical baseline before applying GM judgment. The Clock Pacing Guide helps you size Clocks appropriately for different scene types. When multiple Clocks compete, let the fiction guide which advances. These tools work together to make the world feel responsive and stakes feel real.

10

COMBAT BASICS

Combat is one kind of scene the system supports. It uses the same resolution tools you have already learned-Attributes, Skills, Checks, Tags, Conditions, and Clocks-focused on immediate danger and tactical choices. This chapter introduces how combat scenes are framed, how turns work, and how to use the core combat actions to shape the fiction.

Use this reference during play to keep combat moving smoothly. The tables below summarize everything you need to run a fight. Read them once, then return here when questions arise at the table.

Turn Structure

Each turn follows the same six-step sequence:

1. Establish Initiative - Use Conversational (GM rotates spotlight), Popcorn (active player picks next), or Rolled (AGI, highest first)
2. Declare Action - Choose Strike, Maneuver, Set Up, or Defend/Withdraw
3. GM Sets DC - Typically DC 12-16, adjusting for Tags and positioning
4. Roll Check - 4d6 + Attribute (+ Skill if applicable), apply Edge/Burden
5. Apply Outcome - Tick Clocks, add/remove Tags, apply Conditions
6. Update Fiction - Narrate results and move to next character

Common Combat Actions at a Glance

Most turns involve one of these four actions. Choose based on your position and what your allies need:

Action	What It Does	When to Use It	Success Effect
Strike	Direct attack to fill	Enemy is exposed, you	2-3 Clock ticks (Full/Critical)
Maneuver	Reposition, trip, shove, or	Need better position,	Apply Tag (Prone,
Set Up	Grant Edge to allies or create	Low Strike chance, ally	Grant Edge or create
Defend	Actively block or dodge	Under heavy fire, low on	Avoid harm or reduce to
Withdraw	Break contact and reach safety/cover	Resolve nearly full, round required tactical retreat needed, regroup required	Reach cover or exit safely

Resolve Clock Ticks (When Striking or Applying Pressure)

When you land a Strike, the outcome tier determines how many segments you tick on your target's Resolve Clock:

Check Outcome	Clock Ticks	What It Means
Critical Success (+5 or more)	3 segments	Devastating hit, major progress
Full Success (0 to +4)	2 segments	Solid blow, clear progress
Partial Success (-1 to -2)	1 segment	Glancing hit, but you suffer a cost
Failure (-3 or worse)	0 segments	Miss or ineffective, GM may act

When a Clock fills: The target is taken out-establish what this means before combat begins (unconscious, fleeing, surrendered, captured, or killed).

Quick Condition Reference

Combat often applies Conditions that affect what characters can do. Here are the most common ones, grouped by severity:

Light Conditions (clear quickly):

- ◆ Stunned: Lose next action
- ◆ Dazed: Burden on Checks for 1-2 rounds
- ◆ Prone: Burden on AGI; attackers gain Edge if adjacent
- ◆ Exposed: Enemies gain Edge against you

Moderate Conditions (require action to clear):

- ◆ Bleeding: Clock ticks 1/round until treated (MIG DC 12)
- ◆ Burning: Clock ticks 1/round until extinguished (AGI DC 12)
- ◆ Exhausted: Burden on MIG/AGI until you rest
- ◆ Suppressed: Burden on movement/attacks while pinned

Severe Conditions (require significant intervention):

- ◆ Broken Limb: Cannot use limb; needs medical care
- ◆ Grievous Wound: Burden on all physical Checks; Clock ticks 1/scene

The system does not track exact distances or grid squares. Instead, use these four positioning zones to handle tactical movement and range questions at the table.

Positioning Zones

Zone	Range	Movement	Tactical Implications
Engaged	Melee range with specific	Adjacent to enemy, in	Can Strike with melee
Close	Same room or immediate	Within sight and one	Can reach Engaged in
Far	Different room, across battlefield	Two movement actions to reach Engaged	Can use ranged attacks (melee away, window, close-quarters, long-range, melees/bows) across ranges cannot use melee/quarterly takes (GM weapons discretion) without effort to close moving first

distance; good
for ranged
support or
retreat

Out of Range	Beyond immediate scene	Cannot interact this turn	No direct combat interaction possible; requires multiple turns or scene changes to
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affect; may
exit combat
entirely

Using Zones in Play

GM establishes zones at combat start:

Players declare zone changes:

Zones affect action choices:

- ◆ Engaged: Melee Strikes, grappling, close control-highest risk/reward
- ◆ Close: Tactical maneuvering, short-range attacks, supporting allies-flexible positioning
- ◆ Far: Ranged attacks, spellcasting, staying safe-control from distance
- ◆ Out of Range: Fleeing, calling for help, affecting scene externally-scene-level effects

Zone Transitions and Movement

Free Movement (no Check required):

- ◆ Move within your current zone (repositioning while Engaged, shifting behind cover while Close)
- ◆ Move from Close to Engaged if path is clear and unopposed
- ◆ Move from Engaged to Close if you Withdraw successfully

Contested Movement (Check required):

- ◆ Move from Engaged to Close while under pressure (opposed Check or Withdraw action)
- ◆ Move through hazardous terrain (Slick, Burning, Rubble) to change zones
- ◆ Move while under the effects of Conditions that restrict movement (Restrained, Suppressed)

Multi-Action Movement:

- ◆ Moving from Far to Engaged typically requires two actions or a full turn
- ◆ Moving to Out of Range from Engaged usually requires Withdraw + additional movement

Zone Modifiers and Tags

Environmental Tags affect zones differently:

Tag	Effect on Positioning
Solid Cover	Provides protection when Close or Far; limited value when
Elevated	Grants Edge on ranged attacks from Far zone to Close/Engaged
Cramped	All combatants treated as Engaged or Close; Far zone
Open Ground	No cover between zones; moving between zones exposes you
Hazardous	Moving between zones requires Check or inflicts Condition

Example: Zone-Based Combat Narration

When to Use Zones vs. Freeform Description

Use zones when:

- ◆ Combat involves ranged and melee combatants at different distances
- ◆ Players ask "Can I reach them?" or "Am I in range?"
- ◆ Tactical positioning matters (snipers, artillery, fleeing)

Use freeform description when:

- ◆ Everyone is in close-quarters melee (entire fight is Engaged/Close)
- ◆ Positioning is clear from narrative context
- ◆ The fight is small-scale and conversational

GM Tip: Sketch quick zone circles on paper or use theater-of-the-mind descriptions. "You're all Close to each other around the fountain. The archers are Far on the wall. The gate is Out of Range for now." This gives enough tactical structure without requiring measurement tools.

Let's walk through a complete combat encounter showing tick progression.

Setup: Rella confronts a thug who caught her sneaking through the warehouse. Both have 6-segment Resolve Clocks.

Turn Order: Conversational-GM and player alternate naturally.

Round 1

Rella's Turn: "I feint left and strike at his weapon hand."

- ◆ Check: AGI + Strike, DC 14
- ◆ Roll: $4d6+1 = 16$ (Full Success)
- ◆ Result: 2 ticks on Thug's Resolve Clock (now 2/6)
- ◆ Narration: "Your blade catches his knuckles. He curses and shifts his grip."

Thug's Turn: The thug swings his club at Rella's head.

- ◆ Check: Thug MIG vs Rella's defense, DC 14
 - ◆ Roll: 13 (Failure)
 - ◆ Result: 0 ticks on Rella's Resolve Clock
 - ◆ Narration: "You duck under the wild swing. He's off-balance."
-

Round 2

Rella's Turn: "I use his stumble to Set Up-kicking crates into his path."

- ◆ Check: AGI + Maneuver, DC 12
- ◆ Roll: 18 (Full Success)
- ◆ Result: Rella creates Obstructed Tag on the environment
- ◆ Narration: "Crates scatter across his footing. He's boxed in."

Thug's Turn: Tries to shove through the crates to reach Rella.

- ◆ Check: MIG vs DC 14, +2 Burden from Obstructed
 - ◆ Roll: 14 (Partial Success at effective DC 16)
 - ◆ Result: 1 tick on Rella's Resolve Clock (now 1/6), but clears the obstacle
 - ◆ Narration: "He barrels through, clipping your shoulder. The crates are scattered."
-

Round 3

Rella's Turn: "While he's recovering, I go for a disabling strike."

- ◆ Check: AGI + Strike, DC 14
- ◆ Roll: 21 (Critical Success)
- ◆ Result: 3 ticks on Thug's Resolve Clock (now 5/6)
- ◆ Narration: "Your blade finds the gap in his guard. He staggers, badly wounded."

Thug's Turn: Desperate swing with everything he has.

- ◆ Check: MIG + Strike, DC 14
 - ◆ Roll: 15 (Partial Success)
 - ◆ Result: 1 tick on Rella's Resolve Clock (now 2/6)
 - ◆ Narration: "His club grazes your ribs. Painful, but you're still standing."
-

Round 4

Rella's Turn: "I press the advantage-one more strike to finish this."

- ◆ Check: AGI + Strike, DC 14
 - ◆ Roll: 17 (Full Success)
 - ◆ Result: 2 ticks on Thug's Resolve Clock (now 7/6-Taken Out!)
 - ◆ Stakes Question: What does "taken out" mean here?
 - ◆ Answer: The thug drops his club and surrenders, clutching his wounds.
-

Combat Summary:

- ◆ Duration: 4 rounds
- ◆ Rella's Resolve: 2/6 ticks (still fighting fit)
- ◆ Thug's Resolve: Taken out (surrendered)
- ◆ Key Moments: Set Up action created advantage; Critical Success dealt heavy damage

This example shows: tick progression, Partial Success complications, Set Up creating Tags, and the "taken out" stakes question in action.

This extended example demonstrates positioning zones, condition application, and how combat evolves across multiple rounds with tactical decisions.

Setup: The party (Kira, Varn, Rella) ambushes an assassin (a VPC, or "Very important Player Character"-a significant named NPC; see Chapter 24) and two guards in a warehouse. Stakes: Moderate (unconscious/captured).

Initial Positioning:

Resolve Clocks:

- ◆ Assassin: 8-segment Clock (0/8)
- ◆ Guards: Shared 6-segment Clock (0/6)
- ◆ Party: 6-segment Clocks each (0/6)

Round 1: Opening Moves and Positioning

Rella's Turn (Far !' stays Far)

- ◆ Intent: Fire crossbow at Assassin from elevated position
- ◆ Action: Strike (AGI + Ranged)
- ◆ Position Bonus: Elevated Tag grants Edge
- ◆ Check: Roll 5d6 keep best 4 = 18, AGI +2 = 20 vs DC 14
- ◆ Outcome: Critical Success (+6 margin)
- ◆ Effect: 3 ticks on Assassin's Clock (3/8)
- ◆ Fiction: "Your bolt catches the assassin in the shoulder. He staggers, blood spreading across his cloak."
- ◆ Position: Stays at Far, still has Elevated advantage

Kira's Turn (Close !' Engaged)

- ◆ Intent: Close distance and engage Guards to prevent them from reaching Varn
- ◆ Action: Maneuver to move Close !' Engaged with Guards
- ◆ Check: AGI-based movement vs DC 12 (clear path)
- ◆ Outcome: Full Success
- ◆ Effect: Reaches Engaged with Guards; no Clock ticks but positions for next round
- ◆ Fiction: "You vault crates and slide into melee range, blade drawn."
- ◆ Position: Now Engaged with both Guards

Guard 1 (Engaged with Kira)

- ◆ Intent: Strike at Kira to drive her back
- ◆ Action: Strike (MIG + Club)
- ◆ Check: Roll vs DC 14
- ◆ Outcome: Partial Success
- ◆ Effect: 1 tick on Kira's Clock (1/6), but Guard becomes Exposed (overextended)
- ◆ Fiction: "His club clips your shoulder-painful but manageable. He overextends."
- ◆ Condition Applied: Guard 1 gains Exposed (Light)

Varn (Close !' Engaged)

- ◆ Intent: Move to engage Assassin directly
- ◆ Action: Maneuver to reach Assassin at loading dock
- ◆ Check: AGI vs DC 14 (Guards are distracted by Kira, path open)
- ◆ Outcome: Full Success
- ◆ Effect: Reaches Engaged with Assassin
- ◆ Fiction: "You sprint past the guards-Kira has them pinned-and reach the assassin."
- ◆ Position: Now Engaged with Assassin

Assassin (Engaged with Varn)

- ◆ Intent: Strike Varn with poisoned blade before he can set up
- ◆ Action: Strike (AGI + Poisoned Dagger)
- ◆ Check: Roll vs DC 14, but has 3/8 Clock (wounded, desperate)
- ◆ Outcome: Full Success
- ◆ Effect: 2 ticks on Varn's Clock (2/6), applies Poisoned (Moderate)
- ◆ Fiction: "The blade flashes-shallow cut, but you feel the poison burn."
- ◆ Condition Applied: Varn gains Poisoned (Burden on MIG Checks, Clock ticks 1/scene)

Guard 2 (Engaged with Kira)

- ◆ Intent: Support Guard 1, flank Kira
- ◆ Action: Strike
- ◆ Check: Roll vs DC 14
- ◆ Outcome: Failure
- ◆ Fiction: "You sidestep-his swing hits empty air."

Round 1 Summary:

- ◆ Positioning established: Rella controls high ground, Kira pins guards, Varn engaged with primary target
 - ◆ Conditions in play: Assassin wounded, Guard 1 exposed, Varn poisoned
-

Round 2: Conditions Escalate, Tactical Pressure

Varn's Turn

- ◆ Condition Tick: Poisoned does not tick yet (only at scene end or every 10 minutes)
- ◆ Intent: Set Up-feint to create opening for Rella's next shot
- ◆ Action: Set Up (PRE-based, calling out Assassin's position)
- ◆ Check: PRE vs DC 12
- ◆ Outcome: Full Success
- ◆ Effect: Grants Edge to next ally targeting Assassin
- ◆ Fiction: "Now, Rella! He's exposed!" You point to the gap in his guard.

Rella's Turn (Far, with Edge from Varn)

- ◆ Intent: Strike Assassin with Edge
- ◆ Action: Strike with crossbow, Edge from Varn's Set Up, Edge from Elevated
- ◆ Stacked Edge: Multiple sources combine to +2 Edge total (6d6 keep best 4, capped)
- ◆ Check: Roll 6d6 keep best 4 = 19, AGI +2 = 21 vs DC 14
- ◆ Outcome: Critical Success (+7 margin)
- ◆ Effect: 3 ticks on Assassin's Clock (6/8)-nearly out
- ◆ Fiction: "Your bolt punches through his ribs. He drops to one knee, gasping."
- ◆ Condition Applied: Assassin gains Bleeding (Moderate)-will tick 1/round

Kira's Turn

- ◆ Intent: Finish Guard 1 (currently Exposed)
- ◆ Action: Strike with Edge (enemy is Exposed)
- ◆ Check: Roll 5d6 keep best 4 = 16, AGI +1 = 17 vs DC 14
- ◆ Outcome: Full Success
- ◆ Effect: 2 ticks on Guards' shared Clock (2/6)
- ◆ Fiction: "You exploit his poor footing-blade slashes across his thigh. He falls."
- ◆ Condition Applied: Guard 1 gains Prone (Light)

Guard 1 (Prone, must use action to stand or fight with Burden)

- ◆ Intent: Stand up
- ◆ Action: Uses movement to stand (no Check)
- ◆ Effect: Clears Prone, but loses offensive action this turn
- ◆ Fiction: "He scrambles to his feet, wary now."

Assassin's Turn (6/8 Clock, Bleeding)

- ◆ Condition Tick: Bleeding ticks 1 segment at start of turn (7/8)- one more hit will take him out
- ◆ Intent: Desperate Strike at Varn to finish him before being taken out
- ◆ Action: Strike with Burden (Bleeding affects physical actions)
- ◆ Check: Roll 5d6 keep worst 4 vs DC 14
- ◆ Outcome: Partial Success
- ◆ Effect: 1 tick on Varn's Clock (3/6), but Assassin becomes Exhausted (overextension)
- ◆ Fiction: "He lunges wildly-blade cuts your arm, but he's flagging."
- ◆ Condition Applied: Assassin gains Exhausted (Moderate, Burden on MIG/AGI)

Guard 2

- ◆ Intent: Strike Kira
- ◆ Check: Roll vs DC 14
- ◆ Outcome: Partial Success
- ◆ Effect: 1 tick on Kira's Clock (2/6), but gains Exposed
- ◆ Fiction: "His strike glances off your armor, but he overcommits."

Round 2 Summary:

- ◆ Assassin nearly defeated: 7/8 Clock, bleeding and exhausted
 - ◆ Guards holding but vulnerable: Guard 2 exposed
 - ◆ Varn taking damage but still functional
-

Round 3: Resolution and Takedown

Rella's Turn

- ◆ Intent: Finish the Assassin with one final shot
- ◆ Action: Strike
- ◆ Check: Roll $4d6 = 16$, AGI +2 = 18 vs DC 12 (Assassin barely standing)
- ◆ Outcome: Full Success
- ◆ Effect: 2 ticks on Assassin's Clock (9/8-Taken Out)
- ◆ Stakes Resolution: Assassin is unconscious, captured
- ◆ Fiction: "Your bolt takes him in the chest. He collapses, unconscious but breathing."
- ◆ Position: Assassin removed from combat

Kira's Turn

- ◆ Intent: Strike Guard 2 (currently Exposed)
- ◆ Action: Strike with Edge
- ◆ Check: Roll $5d6 \text{ keep best } 4 = 15$, AGI +1 = 16 vs DC 14
- ◆ Outcome: Full Success
- ◆ Effect: 2 ticks on Guards' Clock (4/6)
- ◆ Fiction: "You press the advantage-quick strikes drive him back."

Varn's Turn

- ◆ Intent: Intimidate remaining Guards into surrender
- ◆ Action: Set Up (PRE-based intimidation)
- ◆ Check: PRE vs DC 12 (their leader is down, they are losing)
- ◆ Outcome: Critical Success
- ◆ Effect: Guards surrender immediately (GM narrates Clock filling narratively)
- ◆ Fiction: "Drop your weapons! Your boss is done!" They see the assassin bleeding out and throw down their clubs.

Combat Ends: Assassin captured (unconscious, 8/8 Clock filled), Guards surrendered (narratively taken out).

Post-Combat:

- ◆ Varn: Still has Poisoned condition-needs treatment (RSN Check DC 14 or antidote)
 - ◆ Kira: 2/6 on Clock, minor injuries but functional
 - ◆ Rella: Unscathed, controlled the fight from range
 - ◆ Assassin: Unconscious, can be interrogated after stabilization
-

Key Tactical Lessons from This Fight

1. Positioning Mattered: Rella's Elevated position at Far range provided consistent Edge, while Kira's willingness to engage Close/Engaged protected the party's flanks.
 2. Conditions Compounded: The Assassin's Bleeding + Exhausted stack made him critically vulnerable by Round 3. Even though Burden doesn't stack mechanically, multiple conditions create narrative pressure and automatic Clock ticks.
 3. Set Up Actions Won the Fight: Varn's Set Up granted Rella the Edge for a Critical Success that nearly finished the Assassin. Set Up is not wasted action-it's force multiplication.
 4. Shared Clocks for Minions: Tracking two guards with one shared Clock simplified bookkeeping. When their leader fell and their Clock was 4/6, intimidation made narrative sense.
 5. Zones Create Clear Tactical Choices: Everyone knew who could reach whom, when ranged attacks were effective, and how to coordinate without measuring distances.
-

If you are familiar with Hit Points from other games, think of Resolve Clocks as tracking momentum and composure rather than physical damage. A filled Clock does not mean death; it means the character can no longer continue fighting on their terms. They might flee, surrender, collapse from exhaustion, or be rendered helpless-the specific outcome depends on the stakes established at the start of the fight. This distinction matters: combat in this system ends when someone is out, not necessarily when they are dead.

Taken Out: Mechanical Framework

While the narrative outcome of being taken out varies with fiction and stakes, the mechanical framework provides structure and clarity.

Severity Levels for Taken Out Outcomes:

Severity	Mechanical Effect	Recovery Time	Examples	When to Use
Minor	Out of current	Immediate (next)	Winded, embarrassed	Low-stakes
Moderate	Out of current	One rest period	Knocked unconscious	Standard combat,
Major	Out of current	Days to weeks of	Grievously wounded,	High-stakes
Permanent	Character cannot session: 'determining permanent consequences of death'	Permanent	Killed, permanently severely damaged, traumatised, broken, dead; lost narrative intervention	Explicitly lethal stakes; lethal threats, sacrifices, climactic narrative endpoints

Using Severity

- Establish Severity at Scene Start: When stakes are set, the GM should indicate the severity level. "This is a standard fight-taken out means you are down until after a rest." This informs player decisions.
- Escalate Severity with Context: A bar brawl is Minor. A duel with a rival is Moderate. A fight to defend your home from assassins is Major. Fighting the campaign's main villain when death has been explicitly on the table is Permanent.
- Player Agency for PC Taken Out: When a PC's Clock fills at Moderate or higher severity, the player should have input into the specific outcome. The GM frames the severity, the player describes how their character goes out.
- NPCs and Minions: Most NPCs default to Minor or Moderate. VPCs and major antagonists can reach Major or Permanent based on narrative weight.

PCs vs. NPCs When Taken Out:

The system treats PCs and NPCs differently to respect player investment and narrative stakes:

Player Characters (PCs):

- ◆ Minor/Moderate Default: Unless stakes are explicitly set to Major or Permanent, PCs taken out default to Moderate severity. They are out of the fight but will recover.
- ◆ Death Requires Consent or Explicit Stakes: PCs do not die unless the player consents or the stakes were established as Permanent before the fight began. This prevents cheap deaths while maintaining tension.
- ◆ Narrative Control: When a PC is taken out, the player describes their last moment before going down (within the severity framework). This preserves agency even in defeat.
- ◆ Consequences Still Matter: Even at Moderate severity, a PC taken out suffers lasting Conditions, loses positioning, may be captured, and faces narrative consequences. Avoiding being taken out remains critically important.

NPCs and VPCs:

- ◆ Follow Established Stakes: NPCs taken out follow the severity established at scene start. Minions in a skirmish might scatter (Minor). A VPC antagonist in a climactic duel might die (Permanent).
- ◆ GM Discretion: The GM determines specific outcomes for NPCs based on fiction and pacing. A recurring villain might be captured (Moderate) to return later, while nameless assassins might be killed (Permanent) to emphasize danger.
- ◆ Narrative Weight Informs Severity: VPCs and named antagonists typically warrant Moderate or Major outcomes. Unnamed minions often default to Minor (fled, surrendered) or Moderate (unconscious, defeated).

Examples in Play:

GM Guidance on Severity:

- ◆ Default to Moderate for Most Play: Moderate severity provides meaningful consequences (out until a rest, one Condition) without sidelining players for extended real time.
- ◆ Reserve Major for High Stakes: Use Major severity sparingly-for encounters where the fiction demands serious consequences and players understand the risks going in.
- ◆ Permanent Requires Explicit Consent: Never surprise players with Permanent severity. Death or permanent consequences should be discussed and agreed upon beforehand, either in

Session Zero or when stakes are set for a specific encounter.

- ◆ Communicate Clearly: When establishing stakes, name the severity level. "This is a Moderate fight-if you are taken out, you will be out until after a rest with a Condition." Transparency prevents table conflicts.

Combat as a Scene

Combat starts when violence breaks out and the moment-to-moment sequence of actions matters. The GM does not call for "initiative" the first time someone raises a voice. They wait until it is important to know who acts in what order and how threats respond.

The table can always ask, "Is this a structured combat now, or are we still in free conversation?" Use structured turns when:

- ◆ Multiple combatants are acting and order matters.
- ◆ Position, timing, and action economy are tactically significant.
- ◆ Players benefit from clarity about who goes when.

Stay in loose, conversational play when a moment can be resolved with a few Checks and clear narration. Not every scuffle needs the full structure of a fight. Many tense scenes will move fluidly between free narration, a short exchange of blows, and back again without ever feeling like a separate "combat mode."

When to Shift to Structured Combat

The transition from conversational play to structured combat should feel natural and necessary. Use these explicit triggers to guide the shift:

Shift to Structured Combat When:

1. Initiative Ambiguity Occurs - Two or more characters want to act simultaneously and it matters who goes first. Example: A tense standoff erupts-everyone draws weapons at once. Who fires first? Switch to structured turns.
2. Tactical Complexity Emerges - Position, cover, and timing become strategically significant enough that free narration feels confusing. Example: A bar brawl spreads across multiple rooms with environmental hazards. Track turns to maintain clarity.
3. Multiple Opponents Act Against the Group - Three or more enemies coordinate attacks and tracking actions in conversation becomes unwieldy. Example: Four guards rush the party from different angles. Structured turns prevent losing track of who has acted.
4. Stakes Escalate to Life-Threatening - The moment violence becomes potentially lethal and Resolve Clocks start mattering. Example: A heated argument turns violent when someone draws a blade with lethal intent. Shift to structured combat.
5. Players Request It - Anyone at the table says "Wait, who goes when?" or "Can we do initiative?" Example: A player feels uncertain about turn order during a chaotic scene. Honor that request and structure it.

Stay in Conversational Play When:

- ◆ Only one or two combatants are involved and actions naturally alternate.
- ◆ The conflict is brief and will resolve in one or two Checks.
- ◆ Tension comes from negotiation or positioning rather than mechanical tactics.
- ◆ The scene feels more like a cinematic moment than a tactical encounter.

Edge Cases and GM Guidance:

- ◆ Mid-Scene Transitions: You can shift into structured combat partway through a scene. If a tense negotiation becomes a fight, simply say "We're in structured turns now" and establish initiative.
- ◆ Shifting Back: If structured combat winds down to a single opponent fleeing or negotiating surrender, you can shift back to conversational play. Ask the table: "Do we still need turns, or can we handle this narratively?"



Surprise and Ambushes: If one side has complete surprise, handle the first action narratively, then shift to structured combat once the ambushed side can respond. This keeps surprise impactful without robbing players of agency.

- ◆ **When in Doubt, Ask:** If you are uncertain whether to shift to structured combat, ask the table: "Does this feel like we need turns, or are we good in conversation?" Consensus beats rigid rules.

Example

The party is negotiating with a gang leader in a warehouse. Tension rises. One PC insults the leader, who signals his enforcers. Three enforcers draw weapons and move to surround the party while the leader reaches for his gun. Trigger: Multiple opponents acting simultaneously (Trigger 3) combined with stakes escalating to life-threatening (Trigger 4). GM Response: "Okay, that just became a fight. Let's do initiative-everyone roll AGI." The shift is explicit, triggered by clear criteria, and feels justified by the fiction.

Resolve Instead of Hit Points

The system does not track hit points. Instead, it uses Clocks and Conditions to represent how close someone is to being taken out of a fight.

- ◆ Resolve Clocks track how much pressure or harm a character, VPC (Vital Player Character-a significant NPC), or enemy can absorb before they are out of the scene.
- ◆ Conditions such as Bleeding, Exhausted, or Stunned mark lasting effects of blows, hazards, or fear.

When you land solid Strikes or create meaningful pressure with Maneuvers and Set Ups, the GM ticks your opponent's Resolve Clock. When the Clock fills, they are out-fleeing, unconscious, captured, or worse, depending on the fiction and the stakes the table agreed to.

Why Clocks and Not Hit Points?

Clocks keep combat aligned with the goals of this system:

- ◆ Fiction first - A character is taken out when the story supports it, not at an arbitrary number. A VPC might quit the field when they are cornered, not only at "0 HP."
- ◆ Visible progress - A Resolve Clock filling is easy to read at the table. Everyone can feel that a fight is turning without tracking hidden totals.
- ◆ Flexible stakes - Clocks can represent being driven off, captured, convinced, or killed, depending on the stakes you set. Not every fight needs to end in death.
- ◆ Pacing control - The GM can size clocks to match the scene: 2-3 segments for quick, cinematic threats, more for major foes or climactic battles.

Hit points tend to push every fight toward the same outcome—gradual depletion to zero. Resolve Clocks and Conditions instead invite you to think in terms of moments: when does this opponent falter, when do they become desperate, when do they finally break. That emphasis keeps combat tied to character, genre, and story rather than pure attrition.

Resolve Clock Sizing Guidelines

The size of a Resolve Clock determines how long an opponent can stay in the fight. Use these guidelines when setting up combat encounters:

Clock Size	Threat Level	Examples
4-segment	Minor threat	Lone minion, minor obstacle, fragile
6-segment	Standard threat	Trained combatant, dangerous beast,
8-segment	Major threat	VPC antagonist, elite enemy, climactic foe

For groups of minor enemies, consider using a single shared Resolve Clock rather than tracking individuals. A gang of four thugs might share a 6-segment Clock; when it fills, the survivors flee or surrender.

Resolve Clock Sizing Guide

Use this table to quickly determine appropriate Resolve Clock sizes based on enemy tier. Player characters typically use 6-segment Resolve Clocks.

Enemy Tier	Clock Size	Typical Threats	Example
Minion	4-segment	Easily dispatched	Single guard, street thug,
Standard	6-segment	Competent opposition	Trained soldier,
Elite	8-segment	Dangerous foes who	Veteran warrior, pack
Boss	8-segment + special abilities	Major threats who anchor to defeat; often have multiple phases or additional mechanics	Crime lord with guards, assassin, war cult leader, machine with ritual powers, apex predator with lair advantages

Reading Enemy Threat Levels

Before engaging, take a moment to assess what you are facing. Not all enemies are equal, and choosing the wrong target can turn a winnable fight into a disaster.

Use this assessment to prioritize targets. Taking out one enemy removes their actions from play entirely. Sometimes the tactically correct choice is to ignore the biggest threat and eliminate the minions first.

Resolve Clock Tick Rates

When your actions affect an opponent's Resolve Clock, use this table to determine how many segments to tick:

Outcome	Ticks	Resolve Clock Effect
Critical Success (margin +5 or more)	3	Devastating blow; major progress
Full Success (margin 0 to +4)	2	Solid hit; clear progress toward
Partial Success (margin -1 to -2)	1	Glancing blow; you also suffer a cost or
Failure (margin -3 or worse)	0	Miss or ineffective; GM may tick a threat Position, Condition, or impose a Condition

Example

A dangerous VPC has a 6-segment Resolve Clock. Each Full Success on a Strike or a particularly effective Maneuver ticks 2 segments; Partial successes tick 1 segment with a cost. As the Clock fills, the GM describes them becoming desperate, defensive, or reckless. When the sixth segment ticks, they are out of the fight in a way that fits the story.

Player characters can be tracked in the same way. The GM will make it clear when you are close to being taken out so you can decide whether to keep pressing or break contact and regroup.

Before a fight begins, the table should briefly agree on what "taken out" means in this scene. Are you trying to kill, rout, capture, or simply delay? The same Resolve Clock can represent different outcomes depending on those stakes. This keeps combat aligned with the tone of your campaign and avoids surprises about consequences.

Turns and Order

Combat uses structured turns, but order does not have to be rigid. The GM chooses an ordering approach that fits the scene.

Whatever method you choose, keep it consistent within a given combat and make sure everyone understands who is up next.

Example

A heated argument with a gang in a market turns violent when someone draws a knife. The GM first handles a quick exchange in conversation: a shove here, a shouted warning there. When three different people all want to act at once—one flees, one attacks, one grabs a hostage—the GM says, "We're in structured turns now," and switches to popcorn order so everyone sees how the moment unfolds.

Combat Round Procedure

When running structured combat, follow these seven steps for each character's turn. This procedure ensures clarity and keeps the action moving:

1. Establish Turn Order - Determine who acts next using your chosen initiative mode (conversational, popcorn, or rolled). Make it clear whose turn it is.
2. Declare Intent and Approach - The active character states what they want to accomplish (intent) and how they plan to do it (approach). Choose a core combat action: Strike, Maneuver, Set Up, or Defend/Withdraw.
3. GM Sets DC and Modifiers - The GM assesses the situation, considers relevant Tags, positioning, and opposition, then sets the DC (typically DC 12-20) and notes any Edge or Burden that applies.
4. Resolve the Check - Roll 4d6, add the relevant Attribute modifier, and apply Edge or Burden. Compare the result to the DC to determine the outcome tier.
5. Apply Outcomes - Based on the outcome tier, apply the appropriate effects: Tick Resolve Clocks (see Tick Rates table) Apply or remove Tags Impose or clear Conditions Grant or consume Edge for future actions
6. Update the Fiction - The GM narrates the result, describing how the scene changes. Describe the physical and emotional impact: does the opponent stagger, grow desperate, or stand firm?
7. Move to Next Character - Pass the spotlight to the next

character in the turn order. In popcorn initiative, the current player chooses who goes next.

GM Guidance

Keep the procedure moving briskly. Steps 2-6 should take no more than a minute for routine actions. If a player hesitates on their intent, offer two or three concrete options to choose from. The goal is momentum, not deliberation.

Combat Turn Checklist

Use this quick-reference during your turn to keep combat moving smoothly:

This checklist covers the essentials. When in doubt, describe what your character does in the fiction first, then work out the mechanics with your GM.

Your Turn: Structure and Options

On your turn, you usually:

- ◆ Describe what you do in the fiction.
- ◆ Move within the space as needed (closing, retreating, repositioning).
- ◆ Take one main action, such as Strike, Maneuver, Set Up, or Defend/Withdraw.

If you want to do something small alongside your main action—call out a warning, kick over a chair, draw a weapon—talk with the GM. If it feels reasonable and cinematic without overshadowing other characters, it often fits into the same turn.

Your turn is a spotlight, not a restriction. The structure exists to make sure everyone gets time to act and react. Think about what your character cares about in the scene—who they are protecting, what they are afraid of losing—and let that guide how you use your turn.

Core Combat Actions

Combat does not introduce a separate rule set. It highlights a small group of common actions:

- ◆ Strike - Directly attack a target.
- ◆ Maneuver - Change position, create openings, or control space.
- ◆ Set Up - Create Edge or helpful Tags for yourself or allies.
- ◆ Defend / Withdraw - Protect yourself or break contact to recover.

Action Types Quick Reference

Use this table for at-a-glance guidance on combat actions:

Action	Primary Attribute	Typical DC	Full Success	Partial Success
Strike	MIG or AGI	DC 14-16	Tick 2 segments	Tick 1 segment;
Maneuver	AGI or MIG	DC 14-16	Apply Tag (Prone,	Create opening
Set Up	PRE or RSN	DC 12-14	Grant Edge to	Grant Edge but
Defend	AGI or MIG	DC 14	Avoid incoming	Reduce harm but
Withdraw	AGI	DC 12-14	Break contact safely; reach cover or exit	Escape but leave ally exposed or drop item

Tactical Decision Matrix

Use this quick reference when choosing your action. Match your current situation to the recommended response:

Situation	Recommended Action	Why
Enemy exposed, you have Edge	Strike	Maximize damage potential when
Enemy in cover, ally nearby	Set Up	Create Edge for your ally's Strike rather
Outnumbered or in poor position	Maneuver	Create or reach better position
Low on your Resolve Clock	Defend/Withdraw	Protect yourself and reset the
Enemy nearly out (Clock almost full)	Strike	Finish them before they can act again or
Enemy has dangerous special	Maneuver or Set Up	Disable or neutralize the threat before it
Multiple enemies, one isolated	Strike (the isolated one)	Removing one enemy removes all
Strong enemy, weak allies nearby	Set Up	Your Edge transfer may enable an ally's critical hit

Action Economy Tips

Understanding action economy-how to maximize the impact of each turn-separates adequate fighters from exceptional ones.

Strike

Strike represents any direct attempt to harm or overpower an opponent: swinging a weapon, firing a shot, hurling debris, or unleashing focused abilities. You describe your attack, the GM sets the DC based on your opponent's awareness, cover, and Tags, and you roll a Check.

On a Full Success, you significantly advance their Resolve or impose serious pressure. On a Partial Success, you still make progress but at a cost—perhaps you become Exposed, suffer a counterblow, or worsen the environment. On a Failure, your attack misses or glances off, and the GM may give your opponent a positional or narrative advantage.

Strike is the most straightforward way to change the board, but not always the best first move. Against tough opponents in strong positions, consider using Set Up or Maneuver to tilt the field before you commit to repeated Strikes.

Maneuver

Maneuver covers tactical actions that change the situation rather than simply dealing harm: shoving an enemy off high ground, tripping them, pulling an ally out of danger, seizing cover, or knocking aside a weapon.

Use Maneuver when position, Tags, or Conditions matter more than raw damage. A successful Maneuver can create Prone, strip Solid Cover, or apply a useful Tag such as Exposed that allies can exploit on later turns.

Maneuvers are where you see genre shine. In cozy scenes, a Maneuver might be flipping a table to block a doorway or herding people toward safety. In horror, it might be slamming a vault door shut or cutting a rope bridge. In sci-fi, venting a compartment or cycling gravity can change everything without a single Strike.

Set Up

Set Up sacrifices immediate impact to create better opportunities: laying down suppressing fire, feinting to draw attention, calling out weak points, or coordinating a flanking position. On a Full Success, you grant Edge or establish a helpful Tag for yourself or allies; on a Partial, you still create the opening but at some cost.

Good use of Set Up can turn a desperate fight into a manageable one. It shines when your own Strike chances are low or when an ally can capitalize more effectively on the Edge you create.

As a rule of thumb, if the group is facing a higher-tier threat (a dangerous VPC or major enemy), expect the first rounds to involve more Set Ups and Maneuvers than Strikes. Once the table has created better positions, cover, and Edge, Strikes become dramatically more effective.

Defend / Withdraw

Defend/Withdraw represents actively protecting yourself or pulling back from danger: diving behind cover, blocking an attack, or breaking contact to regroup. On a Full Success, you avoid incoming harm or reach a safer position. On a Partial, you mitigate the danger but pay a cost—perhaps taking a lesser Condition or yielding ground.

This action is how you buy time when Conditions stack up or your Resolve is nearly full. Using Defend/Withdraw at the right moment is often the difference between a character being taken out or surviving to fight another day.

Defend/Withdraw is also how you signal a change in priorities. When multiple characters start using it, the fiction is telling you the fight is shifting from "win here" to "escape, regroup, or change the stakes." Pay attention to those moments; they often mark turning points in a campaign.

Positioning and Environment

Tags play a major role in combat. Dim Light, Cramped, Elevated, Fragile Cover, Slick, and similar Tags can make certain actions easier or harder, or change what is possible at all. Manage position and Tags as carefully as you manage Checks.

Example

In a rooftop fight marked as Elevated with scattered Fragile Cover, one character uses Maneuver to shove a foe toward the edge, threatening a fall. Another uses Set Up to flank, granting Edge on subsequent Strikes. The GM treats Elevated as granting Edge on ranged attacks from high ground and adds extra risk to any failed Checks near the edge.

Reading the Battlefield

Tags are not just descriptive flavor—they are tactical tools. Understanding how to read and exploit environmental Tags separates competent fighters from exceptional ones. Before you act, scan the scene for Tags that might help or hinder you.

Common Combat Tags and Their Effects

Tag	Tactical Effect	How to Exploit It
Elevated	Grants Edge on ranged attacks from	Archers and snipers should claim high
Cover (Solid or Fragile)	Provides Burden to attackers targeting	Stay behind cover when possible; use
Dim Light	Imposes Burden on actions requiring	Extinguish lights to aid escape; create
Cramped	Limits movement options; may impose	Favor short weapons and grappling; use
Slick / Hazardous	Imposes Burden on movement-based	Use Maneuvers to push enemies into
Exposed	Grants Edge to attackers targeting someone with this Tag	Create Exposed through Maneuvers; <small>charging</small> Capitalize on it with coordinated Strikes

Reading Tags in Practice

When combat begins, ask yourself:

1. What Tags favor me? Can I reach high ground, use cover, or exploit dim light for stealth?
2. What Tags threaten me? Am I exposed? Is the terrain hazardous? Will my approach trigger Burden?
3. What Tags can I change? Can I create cover, destroy enemy advantages, or add new Tags through Maneuvers?

Example

The party enters a warehouse fight with these Tags: Dim Light, Stacked Crates (cover), Elevated Catwalks. Kira (melee fighter) uses the Dim Light to close distance with Stealth, then Maneuvers to pull an enemy off the Elevated Catwalk. Varn (support) climbs to the catwalk, gaining Elevated for his crossbow shots-Edge on ranged attacks. Rella (scout) uses Set Up from behind Stacked Crates, calling out enemy positions to grant Edge to allies. By reading the battlefield, each character found Tags that amplified their strengths.

Changing the Battlefield

You are not limited to the Tags present at the start of a fight.

Maneuvers can create new Tags or remove existing ones:

- ◆ Create Cover: Flip a table, collapse a shelf, or erect a barrier.
- ◆ Remove Cover: Destroy Fragile Cover with a Strike, set it ablaze, or pull it down.
- ◆ Create Hazards: Spill oil and ignite it (Hazardous), cut a steam pipe (Scalding), or shatter a window (Glass Shards).
- ◆ Control Light: Extinguish torches (Dim Light), smash lanterns, or activate emergency lighting.
- ◆ Alter Terrain: Create Slick surfaces with water or oil, clear debris to remove Cramped, or collapse supports to block paths.

The battlefield is not static. Fighters who actively shape the environment gain significant advantages over those who simply react to it.

Conditions in Combat

Many combat consequences are expressed as Conditions: being Stunned by a concussive blast, Bleeding after a severe hit, or Suppressed by incoming fire. These Conditions modify subsequent Checks and shape choices.

Whenever a Condition is applied in combat, the GM should state how long it lasts and how it can be cleared. For example, Stunned might end after you lose your next action, while Exhausted may persist until you rest between scenes.

Multiple Conditions can stack in dangerous ways. A character who is both Bleeding and Exhausted is under pressure each round and rolling with Burden on many actions. Scenes like this are signals to change tactics—seek cover, call for help, or end the fight on your own terms.

Combat Conditions: Severity and Mechanical Effects

This section standardizes common combat Conditions with specific mechanical effects and severity levels. Use these as written or adapt them to fit your genre and tone.

Condition Severity Levels:

- ◆ Light: Temporary hindrance; clears after one action or one round.
- ◆ Moderate: Significant impairment; clears after the scene ends or with intervention.
- ◆ Severe: Dangerous state requiring immediate attention; persists until rest or treatment.

Physical Conditions

Condition	Severity	Mechanical	Duration	How to Clear	When to Apply
Stunned	Light	Lose your	1 round	Automatic after	Concussive
Dazed	Light	Burden on all	1-2 rounds	Automatic after	Glancing head
Prone	Light	Burden on AGI	Until you use	Spend movement	Knocked down,
Bleeding	Moderate	At the start of	Until treated	Succeed on MIG	Slashing
Burning	Moderate	Burden on all	Until extinguished	Use action	Fire damage, che
Exhausted	Moderate	Burden on MIG	Until you rest	Complete a rest	Overexertion, pro
Poisoned	Moderate	Burden on MIG	Until cured	Antidote or	Toxins, venoms,
Broken Limb	Severe	Cannot use the	Until medical	Requires	Crushing damage
Grievous Wound	Severe	Burden on all	Until medical treatment	Extended rest and 8 days intervention (days to weeks)	Near-death injuries, grievous, critical injury hits, assassination attempts
Mental and Social Conditions					
Frightened	Light	Burden on	Until threat is	Remove threat	Intimidation,
Shaken	Moderate	Burden on PRE	Until scene	Succeed on	Failed morale
Demoralized	Moderate	Burden on all	Until scene	Succeed on	Overwhelming op
Panicaked	Severe	Must use lesser action source to treat demoralization	Until safe and can rest	Reach safety (DC 16) and ensure gear can be achieved from ally Check anti (DC 16) victory	Extreme horror, gross, overwhelming terror, broken critical morale break
Tactical Conditions					

Condition	Severity	Mechanical	Duration	How to Clear	When to Apply
Exposed	Light	Attackers gain	Until you Man	Maneuver to	Failed repositioning
Suppressed	Moderate	Burden on move	Until suppressing	Source stops attacking	Heavy fire,
Restrained	Moderate	Cannot move;	Until you	Succeed on MIG	Grappled,
Blinded	Severe	Burden on all physical actions; attacking attacker	Until condition ends or you adapt	Remove cause (DC 14) by Restraint break (DC 18) or rely on other senses	Darkness, flash blindness, eye injury, magical blindness
Environmental Conditions					
Soaked	Light	Burden on AGI	Until you dry	Wait 10 minutes	Water immersion,
Frozen	Moderate	Burden on AGI	Until warmed	Reach heat	Extreme cold,
Corroded (gear)	Moderate	Burden when Checks; usual move me damage gear; reduced gear	Until repaired	Succeed on Repair Check (DC 14) to repair or replace gear	Acid damage, rust, hypothermia, extreme corrosion to equipment
Using Conditions Effectively					
Stacking Conditions:					

- ◆ Multiple Conditions stack. A character with Bleeding (Moderate) and Exhausted (Moderate) suffers Burden on physical Checks from Exhausted, ticks their Resolve Clock at the start of each round from Bleeding, and cannot Sprint. This compounds into a dangerous situation requiring tactical withdrawal or aid.
- ◆ Maximum Burden from Conditions: Burden does not stack mechanically-you roll 5d6 and keep the worst 4, regardless of how many Burden sources you have. However, multiple Conditions increase the difficulty of clearing them and create narrative escalation.

Conditions as Tactical Tools:

- ◆ Maneuvers Apply Conditions: Use Maneuver actions to apply Conditions to enemies. A successful Maneuver might apply Exposed, Prone, or Dazed to set up devastating follow-up Strikes.
- ◆ Conditions Multiply Danger: An enemy with Prone and Exposed is dramatically easier to finish. Coordinate your Conditions to compound effects.
- ◆ Clear Conditions Strategically: Not every Condition requires immediate attention. Dazed (Light) clears automatically; focus on clearing Bleeding or Burning (Moderate) before they tick your Clock dangerously high.

GM Guidance on Applying Conditions:

- ◆ Conditions Replace Generic Burden: Instead of saying "you have Burden on your next Check," apply a specific Condition with defined duration and mechanical effects. This improves clarity and consistency.
- ◆ Match Condition to Fiction: If the fiction describes a concussive blast, apply Stunned. If the fiction describes heavy fire pinning someone down, apply Suppressed. Let the narrative guide which Condition fits.
- ◆ Communicate Duration and Clearing Method: When you apply a Condition, immediately state how long it lasts and how to clear it. "You are Bleeding (Moderate)-your Clock will tick 1 segment at the start of each round until someone treats you with a MIG Check DC 12, or you get medical aid."
- ◆ Avoid Condition Spam: Do not overload characters with multiple Light Conditions simultaneously unless the fiction strongly supports it. Two or three Conditions should feel dangerous; five or six should feel overwhelming and rare.

Condition Examples in Play:

Custom Conditions:

The table above covers common combat Conditions, but the system supports custom Conditions tailored to your genre, setting, or specific encounters. When creating a custom Condition, follow this template:

Custom Condition Template:

- ◆ Name: Clear, evocative name (e.g., Cursed, System Failure, Infected)
- ◆ Severity: Light, Moderate, or Severe
- ◆ Mechanical Effect: Specific Edge/Burden and any automatic effects (Clock ticks, action restrictions)
- ◆ Duration: How long it lasts (rounds, scenes, until treated)
- ◆ How to Clear: Specific action or Check to remove it
- ◆ When to Apply: Fiction trigger (curse, malfunction, disease)

Example Custom Conditions:

Weapons and Armor: Tags and Effects

This system does not track weapon damage dice or armor class values. Instead, weapons and armor provide mechanical benefits through Tags, Conditions, and fictional positioning. This section provides a framework for creating weapon and armor effects that fit any genre.

Weapons: Tags and Mechanical Effects

Weapons are defined by their Tags and the fictional effects they enable. A weapon's effectiveness comes from how it interacts with the fiction and what tactical advantages it creates.

Weapon Tag Framework:

Weapon Tag	Mechanical Effect	Examples	Typical Use Cases
Precise	Grants +1 Edge when	Rapier, sniper rifle, scalpel,	Exploiting armor gaps,
Heavy	On Critical Success,	War hammer, heavy club, sledgehammer	Breaking through
Reach	Can Strike from adjacent	Spear, pike, halberd, staff	Defensive positioning,
Quick	Grants +1 Edge on	Dagger, short sword, combat knife	Hit-and-run tactics,
Ranged	Can Strike targets at a distance	Bow, crossbow, throwing star	Attacking from cover,
Area	On Full Success or	Grenade, explosive, smoke bomb	Crowd control, overwhelming
Penetrating	Ignores benefits from	Armor-piercing bullet	Defeating armored foes,
Brutal	On Partial Success, still	Great axe, chainsaw, power drill	Overwhelming offense,
Defensive	Grants +1 Edge on	Shield, staff, parrying	Defensive fighting,
Versatile	Can be used with MIG or Parry attacks	Longsword, spear, rifle, hand axe	Flexible tactics, outlasting opponents, adapting to circumstances

Using Weapon Tags Effectively

- Depending on your approach; adapts to fighting style
- ◆ **Tags Modify Checks:** When you use a weapon, its Tags modify your Checks. A Precise rapier grants Edge when you target weak points. A Heavy hammer applies Stunned on Critical Success.
 - ◆ **Fictional Positioning Matters:** A weapon's Tag only applies when the fiction supports it. You cannot use Reach in cramped quarters where there is no room to extend a spear. You cannot use Ranged effectively in total darkness without a means to see your target.
 - ◆ **Multiple Tags:** Signature or magical weapons might have two Tags. A legendary sword might be both Precise and Versatile. This represents exceptional quality or unique properties.

Example Weapons by Genre:

Fantasy:

- ◆ Longsword (Versatile): Can be used with MIG (powerful swings) or AGI (quick thrusts). Standard adventurer weapon.
- ◆ War Hammer (Heavy): On Critical Success, target is Stunned in addition to Clock ticks. Devastating but slow.
- ◆ Rapier (Precise, Quick): Grants Edge when targeting gaps; Edge on Maneuvers. Favored by duelists.
- ◆ Longbow (Ranged, Penetrating): Strikes at distance; ignores light armor. Requires clear line of sight.
- ◆ Spear (Reach, Versatile): Keeps enemies at bay; can use MIG or AGI. Defensive and adaptable.

Noir/Modern:

- ◆ Revolver (Ranged, Quick): Strikes at distance; Edge on disengaging. Classic detective sidearm.
- ◆ Shotgun (Area, Brutal): Affects multiple targets in close range; Partial Success still ticks Clock. Room-clearer.
- ◆ Sniper Rifle (Ranged, Precise): Long-distance precision; Edge when targeting specific points. Requires setup.
- ◆ Brass Knuckles (Heavy, Quick): Stuns on Critical Success; Edge on Maneuvers. Brutal close combat.
- ◆ Combat Knife (Quick, Precise): Edge on Maneuvers and targeting weak points. Silent and lethal.

Sci-Fi:

- ◆ Plasma Rifle (Ranged, Penetrating): Strikes at distance; ignores light armor. Standard military weapon.
- ◆ Monomolecular Blade (Precise, Penetrating): Edge when targeting gaps; ignores armor. Expensive and deadly.
- ◆ Arc Weapon (Area, Heavy): Affects multiple targets; stuns on Critical Success. Anti-crowd tool.
- ◆ Energy Shield (Defensive): Edge on Defend actions. Protects bearer and adjacent allies.
- ◆ Heavy Bolter (Ranged, Brutal, Heavy): Devastating but unwieldy. Partial Success still ticks; Critical stuns.

Creating Custom Weapons:

When players or GMs want to create new weapons, use this process:

1. Define the Fiction: What is the weapon? What does it look like? How is it used?
2. Choose 1-2 Tags: Select Tags that reflect the weapon's fictional strengths. Most weapons have one Tag; signature or exceptional weapons might have two.
3. Set the Mechanical Effect: Based on the Tags, determine how the weapon modifies Checks, applies Conditions, or interacts with armor.
4. Test in Play: Use the weapon in a session. If it feels too strong or too weak, adjust the Tags or mechanical effects.

Example

Fiction: A heavy chain with a spiked ball. Difficult to defend against because of unpredictable motion; wraps around shields. Tags: Heavy (devastating blows) and Penetrating (ignores shield defenses). Mechanical Effect: On Critical Success, apply Stunned or Prone. Ignores benefits from shields and light armor. Test in Play: Player uses the flail against a shield-bearing knight. The Penetrating Tag ignores the knight's Defensive shield bonus, and a Critical Success leaves the knight Stunned. Feels powerful but fair- requires Critical Success for maximum effect.

Armor: Tags and Mechanical Effects

Armor provides protection through Tags that modify incoming attacks. Like weapons, armor is defined by its fictional presence and tactical effects rather than numerical values.

Armor Tag Framework:

Armor Tag	Mechanical Effect	Examples	Trade-Offs
Light Armor	Imposes Burden on	Leather jerkin, padded coat,	Does not reduce Clock
Medium Armor	Reduce Clock ticks by 1	Chainmail, reinforced	Balanced protection and
Heavy Armor	Reduce Clock ticks by 2	Plate armor, full battle suit,	Maximum protection;
Shielded	Grants +1 Edge on	Shield, buckler,	Requires one hand; active
Reinforced	Immune to Penetrating	Composite plates,	Heavy and expensive;
Ablative	First hit each scene is ignored (no bypass point); called shots afterward; armor downgrades	Sacrificial plating, trauma plates, breakaway vest, magical ward	One-time protection; degrades after exploitation use

Using Armor Tags:

- ◆ Armor Reduces Clock Ticks: Medium and Heavy Armor reduce the number of segments ticked on your Resolve Clock when you are hit. A Full Success normally ticks 2 segments; Medium Armor reduces it to 1. Heavy Armor would reduce a Full Success from 2 ticks to 0 (but minimum 1 means it still ticks 1 segment).
- ◆ Armor Has Trade-Offs: Heavier armor provides better protection but imposes Burden on mobility and stealth. Light Armor keeps you mobile but does not reduce damage. Choose armor that fits your tactics.
- ◆ Fictional Positioning Matters: Armor only works when the fiction supports it. A Penetrating weapon bypasses light armor. Armor does not protect against conditions like Burning or Poisoned unless it specifically includes protection (e.g., a sealed suit prevents gas).
- ◆ Armor Can Be Bypassed: Even Heavy Armor has gaps. A Precise weapon targeting joints or vision slits can bypass armor's protection (treat as if unarmored for that attack).

Example Armor by Genre:

Fantasy:

- ◆ Leather Armor (Light Armor): Grants Edge on AGI Checks to dodge; Burden when exploited while Exposed. Favored by scouts and rogues.
- ◆ Chainmail (Medium Armor): Reduces Clock ticks by 1; Burden on Stealth. Standard soldier's armor.
- ◆ Plate Armor (Heavy Armor, Reinforced): Reduces Clock ticks by 2; Burden on AGI; immune to Penetrating and called shots. Knight's armor.
- ◆ Tower Shield (Shielded, Defensive): Edge on Defend; can protect adjacent ally. Requires both hands (or MIG 3+).

Noir/Modern:

- ◆ Leather Jacket (Light Armor): Edge on AGI Checks; minimal protection. Style and mobility.
- ◆ Tactical Vest (Medium Armor): Reduces Clock ticks by 1; Burden on Stealth. Police or security standard.
- ◆ Riot Gear (Heavy Armor, Shielded): Reduces Clock ticks by 2; Burden on AGI; includes shield. Crowd control equipment.
- ◆ Concealed Vest (Light Armor, Ablative): First hit ignored; downgrades afterward. Undercover protection.

Sci-Fi:

- ◆ Enviro-Suit (Light Armor): Edge on AGI Checks; protects against environmental hazards. Exploration gear.
- ◆ Combat Armor (Medium Armor, Reinforced): Reduces Clock ticks by 1; immune to Penetrating. Standard military issue.
- ◆ Power Armor (Heavy Armor, Shielded, Reinforced): Reduces Clock ticks by 2; immune to Penetrating; Edge on Defend. Elite equipment; requires training.
- ◆ Energy Shield (Shielded, Ablative): Edge on Defend; first hit ignored per scene. Advanced technology.

Creating Custom Armor:

When creating new armor, use this process:

1. Define the Fiction: What is the armor? What does it look like?
What is it made of?
2. Choose 1-2 Tags: Select Tags that reflect the armor's protective capability and trade-offs. Most armor has one Tag; exceptional armor might have two.
3. Set the Mechanical Effect: Determine how the armor reduces Clock ticks, grants Edge/Burden, or provides specific protections.
4. Test in Play: Use the armor in a session. Adjust Tags or effects if needed.

Example

Fiction: Hardened plates carved from monster bones, layered and bound with sinew. Intimidating but crude. Tags: Medium Armor (solid protection) and Fearsome (custom Tag-grants Edge on Intimidation). Mechanical Effect: Reduces Clock ticks by 1; Burden on Stealth; Edge on Intimidation Checks. Test in Play: Barbarian PC wears bone armor into a fight. Reduces incoming damage effectively, Intimidation Edge fits the character. Stealth Burden is appropriate for the loud, clattering armor. Feels thematically strong without being overpowered.

Weapons and Armor in Play: Tactical Considerations

Matching Weapons to Tactics:

- ◆ Aggressive Fighters: Use Heavy or Brutal weapons to maximize Clock ticks. Pair with Light or Medium Armor for mobility.
- ◆ Defensive Fighters: Use Defensive weapons (shields, staves) with Medium or Heavy Armor. Outlast opponents.
- ◆ Mobile Skirmishers: Use Quick or Ranged weapons with Light Armor. Hit and run; avoid being pinned.
- ◆ Precision Strikers: Use Precise weapons to exploit weaknesses. Light Armor to stay agile and target gaps.

Countering Armor:

- ◆ Against Light Armor: Any weapon works; Light Armor does not reduce Clock ticks. Exploit their Exposed status when possible.
- ◆ Against Medium Armor: Use Penetrating or Heavy weapons. Penetrating bypasses the armor reduction; Heavy applies Conditions even when ticks are reduced.
- ◆ Against Heavy Armor: Use Penetrating weapons and target weak points (Precise weapons). Apply Conditions (Stunned, Prone) to bypass armor's Clock reduction. Maneuver to create Exposed and exploit gaps.

Countering Weapons:

- ◆ Against Reach Weapons: Close distance with Maneuver actions. Once inside their reach, they lose advantage.
- ◆ Against Ranged Weapons: Use cover and Maneuver to close distance. Ranged weapons have Burden when shooting into melee.
- ◆ Against Heavy Weapons: Use mobility and Quick weapons to outmaneuver. Heavy weapons are devastating but slower.
- ◆ Against Defensive Weapons: Use Penetrating weapons to bypass shields, or use Maneuvers to create openings and apply Exposed.

GM Guidance on Equipment Balance:

- ◆ Default to One Tag: Most weapons and armor should have one Tag. This keeps mechanics simple and avoids power creep.
- ◆ Two Tags for Signature Gear: Exceptional, magical, or high-tech equipment can have two Tags. Reserve this for campaign rewards or significant narrative items.
- ◆ Fictional Justification: Tags should reflect the fiction. A rusty sword is not Precise. Improvised armor (a pot lid shield) might be Shielded but not Reinforced.
- ◆ Availability and Cost: Balance equipment through fiction and availability, not mechanical restrictions. Heavy Armor is expensive, difficult to obtain, and socially conspicuous. This limits its use more than mechanical penalties.
- ◆ Genre Expectations: In a gritty noir game, armor might be rare and provide less protection. In a high-fantasy epic, legendary armor with multiple Tags fits the genre. Match equipment power

to campaign tone.

Quick Reference: Weapon and Armor Tags

Weapons:

- ◆ Precise: Edge when targeting weak points
- ◆ Heavy: Critical Success applies Stunned or Prone
- ◆ Reach: Strike from adjacent zone; control space
- ◆ Quick: Edge on Maneuvers; disengage without Check
- ◆ Ranged: Strike at distance
- ◆ Area: Affect multiple targets on success
- ◆ Penetrating: Ignore light armor; reduce medium armor effectiveness
- ◆ Brutal: Partial Success still ticks 1 segment
- ◆ Defensive: Edge on Defend actions
- ◆ Versatile: Use MIG or AGI

Armor:

- ◆ Light Armor: Edge on AGI Checks; Burden when Exposed
 - ◆ Medium Armor: Reduce Clock ticks by 1; Burden on Stealth
 - ◆ Heavy Armor: Reduce Clock ticks by 2; Burden on AGI; no Sprint
 - ◆ Shielded: Edge on Defend; protect adjacent ally
 - ◆ Reinforced: Immune to Penetrating; cannot bypass with called shots
 - ◆ Ablative: First hit ignored; downgrades afterward
-

Worked Combat Examples

These examples show complete combat sequences with Resolve Clock progression, demonstrating how the system flows in practice.

Example 1: The Tense Duel

Setup: Kira, a skilled duelist (AGI 2, Brawling Skill), faces Varro, a rival enforcer. Both have 4-segment Resolve Clocks. The scene is a rain-slicked courtyard (Slick Tag). Stakes: first to be taken out loses the dispute.

Round 1 - Varro Strikes First

- ◆ Varro lunges with his blade. AGI Check vs. DC 14.
- ◆ Result: Full Success (rolled 17).
- ◆ Effect: Kira's Clock ticks 2 segments (now 2/4). She staggers back.
- ◆ Fiction: The blade catches her arm-a shallow cut but a solid hit.

Round 2 - Kira Sets Up

- ◆ Kira circles, watching his footwork, looking for a pattern. Set Up action.
- ◆ Result: Full Success (rolled 16 vs. DC 14).
- ◆ Effect: Kira gains Edge on her next Strike. No Clock advance.
- ◆ Fiction: She notices he overextends on his lunges-she can exploit that.

Round 3 - Kira Strikes

- ◆ Using her Edge, Kira feints low and strikes high. AGI Check with +1 Edge.
- ◆ Result: Critical Success (rolled 21 with 5d6 keep 4).
- ◆ Effect: Varro's Clock ticks 3 segments (now 3/4). He reels.
- ◆ Fiction: Her blade opens a gash on his shoulder. Blood mixes with rain.

Round 4 - Varro Maneuvers Desperately

- ◆ Desperate, Varro kicks at the slick ground, spraying water toward her eyes.
- ◆ Result: Partial Success (rolled 13 vs. DC 14, margin -1).
- ◆ Effect: Kira gains Dazed (Burden next round), but Varro is now Exposed.
- ◆ Fiction: Water stings her eyes, but his wild kick leaves him off-balance.

Round 5 - Kira Finishes It

- ◆ Despite being Dazed (Burden), Kira presses. He's Exposed (Edge cancels Burden).
- ◆ Result: Full Success (rolled 15).
- ◆ Effect: Varro's Clock fills (4/4). He's taken out.
- ◆ Fiction: She drives him back against the fountain. His blade clatters away. He yields.

Outcome: Kira wins with 2/4 on her Clock. Varro is defeated but alive—he'll remember this.

Example 2: The Group Fight

Setup: Three PCs (Kira, Varn, Rella) face four bandits in a warehouse. Tags: Cramped, Fragile Cover, Dim Light. Bandits share a 6-segment group Resolve Clock. Each PC has a 4-segment Clock. Stakes: subdue or drive off the bandits.

Round 1 - Bandits Attack

- ◆ Two bandits rush Kira. GM rolls a group Strike vs. DC 14.
- ◆ Result: Partial Success.
- ◆ Effect: Kira's Clock ticks 1 segment (1/4). She takes a glancing blow.
- ◆ Two bandits circle toward Varn and Rella but don't reach them yet.

Round 2 - Kira Maneuvers

- ◆ Kira shoves crates to create better cover for allies. MIG Check vs. DC 14.
- ◆ Result: Full Success.
- ◆ Effect: Allies now have Solid Cover against ranged attacks. No Clock advance.
- ◆ Fiction: Heavy crates screech across the floor, forming a barricade.

Round 3 - Varn Sets Up

- ◆ Varn calls out bandit positions and weak points. PRE-based Set Up vs. DC 14.
- ◆ Result: Full Success.
- ◆ Effect: Kira and Rella both gain Edge on their next actions.
- ◆ Fiction: "The big one favors his left leg-go for it!"

Round 4 - Rella Strikes (with Edge)

- ◆ Rella throws her lantern at the bandits' feet. AGI Check with +1 Edge vs. DC 16.
- ◆ Result: Full Success (rolled 18 with 5d6).
- ◆ Effect: Bandit Clock ticks 2 segments (2/6). The area gains Hazardous Tag.
- ◆ Fiction: Oil splashes and ignites. Two bandits scramble back, singed.

Round 5 - Bandits Retaliate

- ◆ Remaining bandits attack Rella (nearest threat). Group Strike vs. DC 14.
- ◆ Result: Failure (rolled 11).
- ◆ Effect: No Clock advance on Rella. She ducks behind cover.
- ◆ Fiction: Clubs swing wide as Rella drops flat.

Round 6 - Kira Strikes (with Edge from Round 3)

- ◆ Kira charges the big bandit, targeting his weak leg. AGI Check with +1 Edge vs. DC 14.
- ◆ Result: Critical Success (rolled 20).
- ◆ Effect: Bandit Clock ticks 3 segments (5/6). The big one goes down.
- ◆ Fiction: Her blade sweeps his leg. He crashes into crates and doesn't get up.

Round 7 - Varn Negotiates

- ◆ With their leader down, Varn calls for surrender. PRE Check vs. DC 12 (lowered-they're losing).
- ◆ Result: Full Success.
- ◆ Effect: Bandit Clock fills (6/6). They surrender.
- ◆ Fiction: "It's over! Drop your weapons or burn with the warehouse!"

Outcome: Bandits subdued. Kira has 1/4 on her Clock. No one else was seriously hurt. The Hazardous fire must be dealt with, but the fight is won.

Example 3: Cross-Genre Combat Encounter

The following example demonstrates the same combat structure across three different genre settings, showing how Tags, actions, and Clocks adapt to any fiction while the mechanics remain consistent.

The Scenario: A group of three characters must stop a dangerous opponent before they can complete a critical objective. The fight takes place in a confined space with environmental hazards.

Fantasy Version: The Ritual Chamber

Scene Setup:

- ◆ Location: A stone ritual chamber beneath an ancient temple
- ◆ Tags: Dim Light (torches flicker), Arcane Circles (magical hazard zones), Crumbling Pillars (destructible cover)
- ◆ Combatants: Three adventurers vs. a cult sorcerer (Elite, 8-segment Resolve Clock)
- ◆ Stakes: Stop the ritual before it completes; the sorcerer has a "Ritual Completion" Clock (4-segment) that advances each round

Initiative: Rolled AGI. Order: Sera (fighter), Sorcerer, Tomm (rogue), Wren (cleric).

Round 1

Sera (Fighter) - Strike

- ◆ Intent: Close distance and disrupt the sorcerer with a sword blow.
- ◆ Approach: Charges across the chamber, avoiding the Arcane Circles.
- ◆ Check: MIG-based Strike vs. DC 16 (sorcerer is alert, magical wards shimmer).
- ◆ Roll: $4d6 = 4, 4, 5, 6 = 19$. MIG +2 = 21. Margin +5.
- ◆ Outcome: Critical Success. Sorcerer's Clock ticks 3 segments (3/8).
- ◆ Fiction: Sera's blade cuts through a ward, staggering the sorcerer mid-incantation. Sparks of disrupted magic scatter across the floor.

Sorcerer - Maneuver + Ritual

- ◆ The sorcerer gestures, and the Arcane Circles flare with energy.
- ◆ Check: RSN-based Maneuver vs. DC 14.
- ◆ Roll: Success. Sera gains the Burning Condition (Burden on physical actions until cleared).
- ◆ The "Ritual Completion" Clock ticks 1 segment (1/4).
- ◆ Fiction: Violet flames lick at Sera's legs. The chanting continues.

Tomm (Rogue) - Set Up

- ◆ Intent: Identify weak points in the sorcerer's defenses.
- ◆ Approach: Circles behind a Crumbling Pillar, watching the pattern of wards.
- ◆ Check: RSN-based Set Up vs. DC 14.
- ◆ Roll: $4d6 = 3, 4, 5, 6 = 18$. RSN +1 = 19. Margin +5.
- ◆ Outcome: Critical Success. Tomm gains Edge on his next action AND identifies a gap in the wards (creates Exposed Flank Tag on sorcerer).
- ◆ Fiction: "There! When he gestures left, his right side drops the ward for a heartbeat!"

Wren (Cleric) - Maneuver

- ◆ Intent: Suppress the ritual's power by disrupting the magical circles.
- ◆ Approach: Channels divine energy into the nearest circle.
- ◆ Check: PRE-based Maneuver vs. DC 16.
- ◆ Roll: $4d6 = 2, 3, 5, 6 = 16$. PRE +2 = 18. Margin +2.
- ◆ Outcome: Full Success. One Arcane Circle is neutralized; area becomes safe to cross.
- ◆ Fiction: Holy light floods the circle, and the violet flames gutter and die. The sorcerer hisses in frustration.

Round 2

Sera (Fighter) - Defend

- ◆ Intent: Buy time while Burning by getting to cover.
- ◆ Approach: Rolls behind a pillar and smothers the flames.
- ◆ Check: AGI-based Defend vs. DC 14 (with Burden from Burning).
- ◆ Roll: $5d6 \text{ keep worst } 4 = 2, 3, 3, 4 = 12$. AGI +1 = 13. Margin -1.
- ◆ Outcome: Partial Success. Burning clears, but Sera is now Prone behind the pillar.
- ◆ Fiction: She rolls frantically, extinguishing the flames, but ends up flat on her back.

Sorcerer - Strike

- ◆ Targets Wren, who disrupted the circles.
- ◆ Check: RSN-based Strike vs. DC 14.
- ◆ Roll: Success. Wren's Clock ticks 2 segments (2/6).
- ◆ The "Ritual Completion" Clock ticks 1 segment (2/4).
- ◆ Fiction: A bolt of shadow slams into Wren's shoulder. She stumbles but keeps her feet.

Tomm (Rogue) - Strike (with Edge and Exposed Flank)

- ◆ Intent: Exploit the opening he identified.
- ◆ Approach: Darts from cover, striking during the ward gap.
- ◆ Check: AGI-based Strike vs. DC 14 with +1 Edge (from Set Up) and attacking Exposed Flank.
- ◆ Roll: 5d6 keep best 4 = 4, 5, 5, 6 = 20. AGI +2 = 22. Margin +8.
- ◆ Outcome: Critical Success. Sorcerer's Clock ticks 3 segments (6/8).
- ◆ Fiction: Tomm's dagger finds flesh. The sorcerer screams, concentration shattered. The ritual falters.

Wren (Cleric) - Set Up

- ◆ Intent: Bolster allies for the final push.
- ◆ Approach: Invokes a blessing of protection.
- ◆ Check: PRE-based Set Up vs. DC 12.
- ◆ Roll: 4d6 = 3, 4, 5, 5 = 17. PRE +2 = 19. Margin +7.
- ◆ Outcome: Critical Success. All allies gain Edge on their next action.
- ◆ Fiction: Golden light settles over the group. "Finish this!"

Round 3

Sera (Fighter) - Strike (with Edge)

- ◆ Intent: End the fight before the ritual can resume.
- ◆ Approach: Rises from Prone and delivers a decisive blow.
- ◆ Note: Rising from Prone costs her Edge advantage but does not prevent the Strike.
- ◆ Check: MIG-based Strike vs. DC 14 (Edge consumed by rising).
- ◆ Roll: $4d6 = 4, 5, 5, 6 = 20$. MIG +2 = 22. Margin +8.
- ◆ Outcome: Critical Success. Sorcerer's Clock fills (8/8). Taken out.
- ◆ Fiction: Sera's blade crashes through the last ward and into the sorcerer's staff, shattering it. He collapses, the ritual energy dissipating into harmless motes of light.

Resolution: The sorcerer is defeated with his Ritual Clock at 2/4—the party stopped him with rounds to spare. Wren has 2/6 on her Clock, Sera cleared her Condition but took a risk. The chamber is safe, but the cult will not forget this defeat.

Noir Version: The Waterfront Warehouse

Scene Setup:

- ◆ Location: A rain-soaked warehouse on the city docks at midnight
- ◆ Tags: Dim Light (single hanging bulb), Stacked Crates (cover and obstacles), Slick Floor (rain leaking through roof)
- ◆ Combatants: Three investigators vs. a corrupt union boss (Standard, 6-segment Resolve Clock) with two enforcers (Minions, shared 4-segment Clock)
- ◆ Stakes: Apprehend the boss before he destroys evidence; he has an "Evidence Destroyed" Clock (4-segment)

Initiative: Popcorn order. The boss acts first (ambush).

Round 1

Boss - Maneuver

- ◆ Kicks over a kerosene lamp toward the evidence crates.
- ◆ Check: AGI vs. DC 14.
- ◆ Roll: Partial Success.
- ◆ Effect: Spreading Fire Tag applied to the evidence area.
"Evidence Destroyed" Clock ticks 1 segment (1/4). But the boss is now Exposed in the light.
- ◆ Fiction: The lamp shatters. Flames lick at the crate marked "Ledgers." The boss stands silhouetted against the fire.
- ◆ Boss passes to Enforcer 1.

Enforcer 1 - Strike

- ◆ Swings a crowbar at Detective Malone.
- ◆ Check: MIG vs. DC 14.
- ◆ Roll: Full Success.
- ◆ Effect: Malone's Clock ticks 2 segments (2/6).
- ◆ Fiction: The crowbar catches Malone across the ribs. He grunts and staggers.
- ◆ Enforcer passes to Malone.

Malone (Investigator) - Strike

- ◆ Intent: Drop the enforcer fast and get to the evidence.
- ◆ Check: MIG-based Strike vs. DC 14.
- ◆ Roll: $4d6 = 3, 4, 5, 6 = 18$. MIG +1 = 19. Margin +5.
- ◆ Outcome: Critical Success. Enforcer Clock ticks 3 segments (3/4).
- ◆ Fiction: Malone's fist connects with the enforcer's jaw. The man drops, crowbar clattering.
- ◆ Malone passes to Chen.

Chen (Photographer) - Set Up

- ◆ Intent: Blind the boss with her camera flash.
- ◆ Check: PRE-based Set Up vs. DC 14.
- ◆ Roll: $4d6 = 2, 4, 5, 5 = 16$. PRE +2 = 18. Margin +4.
- ◆ Outcome: Full Success. Boss gains Dazed Condition (Burden next round).
- ◆ Fiction: The flash pops. The boss throws an arm over his eyes, cursing.
- ◆ Chen passes to Vasquez.

Vasquez (Former Cop) - Maneuver

- ◆ Intent: Tackle the burning crate away from the other evidence.
- ◆ Check: MIG-based Maneuver vs. DC 16 (fire hazard).
- ◆ Roll: $4d6 = 4, 4, 5, 6 = 19$. MIG +2 = 21. Margin +5.
- ◆ Outcome: Critical Success. Spreading Fire contained. "Evidence Destroyed" Clock does not advance.
- ◆ Fiction: Vasquez shoulder-checks the burning crate into the rain puddles. Steam hisses. The remaining ledgers are safe-for now.
- ◆ Vasquez passes to Enforcer 2.

Enforcer 2 - Strike

- ◆ Rushes Chen with a knife.
- ◆ Check: AGI vs. DC 14.
- ◆ Roll: Failure.
- ◆ Effect: None. Chen sidesteps.
- ◆ Fiction: The blade slashes through empty air as Chen pivots behind a crate.
- ◆ Enforcer passes to Boss.

Round 2

Boss (Dazed) - Withdraw

- ◆ Intent: Escape through the back while the investigators are occupied.
- ◆ Check: AGI-based Withdraw vs. DC 14 (with Burden from Dazed).
- ◆ Roll: 5d6 keep worst 4 = 2, 2, 3, 4 = 11. AGI +1 = 12. Margin -2.
- ◆ Outcome: Partial Success. He reaches the door but drops his pistol. Dazed clears.
- ◆ Fiction: The boss stumbles toward the exit, eyes still streaming. His gun skids across the wet floor.
- ◆ Boss passes to Malone.

Malone - Strike

- ◆ Intent: Stop the boss before he escapes.
- ◆ Check: AGI-based Strike (tackling) vs. DC 14.
- ◆ Roll: 4d6 = 3, 5, 5, 6 = 19. AGI +1 = 20. Margin +6.
- ◆ Outcome: Critical Success. Boss's Clock ticks 3 segments (3/6).
- ◆ Fiction: Malone crashes into the boss from behind. They both hit the wet concrete hard.
- ◆ Malone passes to Chen.

Chen - Strike

- ◆ Intent: Finish off the remaining enforcer.
- ◆ Check: AGI-based Strike vs. DC 14.
- ◆ Roll: 4d6 = 2, 3, 4, 6 = 15. AGI +1 = 16. Margin +2.
- ◆ Outcome: Full Success. Enforcer Clock fills (4/4). Both enforcers are out.
- ◆ Fiction: Chen swings her heavy camera bag into the knife-wielder's temple. He crumples.
- ◆ Chen passes to Vasquez.

Vasquez - Strike

- ◆ Intent: Pin the boss and end this.
- ◆ Check: MIG-based Strike vs. DC 12 (boss is prone, no weapon).
- ◆ Roll: $4d6 = 4, 5, 5, 6 = 20$. MIG +2 = 22. Margin +10.
- ◆ Outcome: Critical Success. Boss's Clock fills (6/6). Taken out.
- ◆ Fiction: Vasquez plants a knee in the boss's back and wrenches his arms behind him. "You have the right to remain silent."

Resolution: Boss apprehended. Evidence preserved. Malone has 2/6 on his Clock-bruised ribs but nothing serious. The story will run in tomorrow's paper.

Sci-Fi Version: The Station Corridor

Scene Setup:

- ◆ Location: A damaged corridor on an orbital station, emergency lighting only
- ◆ Tags: Zero-G Pockets (gravity fluctuates), Sparking Conduits (electrical hazard), Vacuum Breach Nearby (time pressure)
- ◆ Combatants: Three crew members vs. a rogue security drone (Elite, 8-segment Resolve Clock)
- ◆ Stakes: Disable the drone before it reaches the reactor; "Reactor Breach" Clock (6-segment) advances each round the drone is not stopped

Initiative: Rolled AGI. Order: Yuki (engineer), Drone, Marcus (medic), Zara (pilot).

Round 1

Yuki (Engineer) - Set Up

- ◆ Intent: Identify the drone's weak points using her technical knowledge.
- ◆ Approach: Scans with her diagnostic tool while taking cover.
- ◆ Check: RSN-based Set Up vs. DC 14.
- ◆ Roll: $4d6 = 4, 5, 5, 6 = 20$. RSN +2 = 22. Margin +8.
- ◆ Outcome: Critical Success. Creates Exposed Sensor Array Tag on drone. All allies gain Edge against it.
- ◆ Fiction: "Its main sensor cluster is damaged-hit the left side and it can't track you!"

Drone - Strike

- ◆ Fires suppression rounds at the nearest target (Yuki).
- ◆ Check: AGI vs. DC 14.
- ◆ Roll: Full Success.
- ◆ Effect: Yuki's Clock ticks 2 segments (2/6). She gains Suppressed (Burden on movement).
- ◆ "Reactor Breach" Clock ticks 1 segment (1/6).
- ◆ Fiction: Rounds spark off the bulkhead. Yuki ducks, but fragments catch her arm.

Marcus (Medic) - Maneuver

- ◆ Intent: Use the Zero-G Pockets to flank the drone.
- ◆ Approach: Pushes off the wall, floating through a gravity null zone.
- ◆ Check: AGI-based Maneuver vs. DC 16 (zero-G is tricky).
- ◆ Roll: $4d6 = 3, 4, 5, 6 = 18$. AGI +1 = 19. Margin +3.
- ◆ Outcome: Full Success. Marcus gains Flanking Position Tag; removes drone's cover advantage.
- ◆ Fiction: Marcus floats silently through the null zone, coming up behind the drone's damaged side.

Zara (Pilot) - Strike (with Edge from Exposed Sensor Array)

- ◆ Intent: Disable the drone's movement systems.
- ◆ Approach: Fires her sidearm at the drone's leg actuators.
- ◆ Check: AGI-based Strike vs. DC 14 with +1 Edge.
- ◆ Roll: 5d6 keep best 4 = 4, 5, 5, 6 = 20. AGI +2 = 22. Margin +8.
- ◆ Outcome: Critical Success. Drone's Clock ticks 3 segments (3/8). It gains Damaged Locomotion (Burden on movement).
- ◆ Fiction: Sparks fly as the drone's left leg buckles. It staggers, recalibrating.

Round 2

Yuki (Engineer) - Maneuver

- ◆ Intent: Trigger the Sparking Conduits to create an EMP pulse.
- ◆ Approach: Reroutes power through the damaged systems.
- ◆ Check: RSN-based Maneuver vs. DC 18 (dangerous and complex).
- ◆ Roll: 4d6 = 3, 4, 5, 5 = 17. RSN +2 = 19. Margin +1.
- ◆ Outcome: Full Success. The corridor pulses with electromagnetic energy. Drone gains Systems Disrupted (loses next action).
- ◆ Fiction: "Everybody brace!" The lights surge, flicker, die. The drone's optics go dark momentarily.

Drone - Disrupted

- ◆ No action this round due to Systems Disrupted.
- ◆ "Reactor Breach" Clock ticks 1 segment (2/6).
- ◆ Fiction: The drone twitches, rebooting. Emergency systems kick in, but it is vulnerable.

Marcus (Medic) - Strike (with Flanking Position)

- ◆ Intent: Jam his medical laser into the exposed sensor array.
- ◆ Check: AGI-based Strike vs. DC 14 with +1 Edge (flanking).
- ◆ Roll: 5d6 keep best 4 = 4, 5, 6, 6 = 21. AGI +1 = 22. Margin +8.
- ◆ Outcome: Critical Success. Drone's Clock ticks 3 segments (6/8).
- ◆ Fiction: Marcus drives the laser into the sensor cluster. Optical fluid sprays across his visor.

Zara (Pilot) - Strike

- ◆ Intent: Finish it while it is blind.
- ◆ Check: AGI-based Strike vs. DC 12 (drone is Systems Disrupted and sensor-blind).
- ◆ Roll: 4d6 = 3, 4, 5, 6 = 18. AGI +2 = 20. Margin +8.
- ◆ Outcome: Critical Success. Drone's Clock fills (8/8). Taken out.
- ◆ Fiction: Zara's shots punch through the drone's central processor. It collapses, servos whining down to silence.

Resolution: Drone disabled with the Reactor Breach Clock at only 2/6-plenty of time to seal the corridor and restore systems. Yuki has 2/6 on her Clock and is still Suppressed, but the immediate threat is over. The crew can now investigate why the drone went rogue.

Cross-Genre Summary

Notice how each version used the same mechanical structure:

- ◆ Scene setup with environmental Tags that created tactical opportunities
- ◆ Initiative establishing turn order
- ◆ Three to four rounds with varied action types (Strike, Maneuver, Set Up, Defend/Withdraw)
- ◆ Clock advancement tracking both enemy Resolve and external pressure (ritual, evidence, reactor)
- ◆ Combat resolution when the primary threat's Clock filled

The Tags changed (Arcane Circles vs. Zero-G Pockets vs. Slick Floor), the fiction changed (swords vs. fists vs. lasers), but the procedure remained consistent. This is the core strength of the system: learn it once, play it anywhere.

Putting It Together

A typical combat turn might look like this:

1. The GM describes the scene, including relevant Tags and visible threats.
2. You state intent and approach, choosing a core combat action.
3. The GM sets DC, notes any Edge/Burden, and clarifies stakes.
4. You roll 4d6, apply modifiers, and compare to DC.
5. The group interprets the outcome tier, ticking Clocks and applying Tags or Conditions as needed.

Across several rounds, you will see patterns emerge: early positioning and Set Ups, decisive Strikes when Edge and Tags line up, Conditions and Clocks signaling rising danger, and Defend/Withdraw actions when the tide turns. Treat each fight as a story with a beginning, middle, and end rather than as a series of disconnected attacks.

The rest of this book expands on combat by showing how Tags, Conditions, Skills, Proficiencies, NPCs, VPCs, and GM tools combine to create varied, genre-flexible fights. The goal is always the same: keep the fiction moving, keep consequences meaningful, and let the battlefield tell part of the story.

Chapter Summary

Combat uses the same Check system as other scenes, focused through Resolve Clocks, core combat actions (Strike, Maneuver, Set Up, Defend/Withdraw), and environmental Tags. Use the Combat at a Glance box for a quick system overview. Reference the Resolve Clock Tick Rates table for concrete tick values (Critical = 3, Full = 2, Partial = 1, Failure = 0).

Key Concepts:

- ◆ What Does Taken Out Mean? This question shapes every combat. Use the Taken Out Severity Levels table (Minor, Moderate, Major, Permanent) to establish stakes before fights begin. PCs and NPCs are treated differently—PCs have narrative control and death requires consent or explicit stakes.
- ◆ When to Shift to Structured Combat: Use the five explicit triggers (Initiative Ambiguity, Tactical Complexity, Multiple Opponents, Life-Threatening Stakes, Player Request) to guide the transition from conversational play to structured turns. See When to Shift to Structured Combat for detailed guidance and edge cases.
- ◆ Zone-Based Positioning: Use the four positioning zones (Engaged, Close, Far, Out of Range) to handle tactical movement without measuring exact distances. Each zone has clear tactical implications and movement rules. See Abstract Positioning: Zone-Based Combat for complete guidelines and examples.
- ◆ Combat Conditions: Standardized conditions with severity levels (Light, Moderate, Severe) provide specific mechanical effects. Reference the Combat Conditions tables for Physical, Mental/Social, Tactical, and Environmental conditions. Each condition specifies mechanical effect, duration, and how to clear it. Conditions stack but Burden does not multiply mechanically.
- ◆ Weapons and Armor: Equipment is defined by Tags rather than numerical stats. Weapons provide tactical advantages (Precise, Heavy, Reach, Quick, Ranged, Area, Penetrating, Brutal, Defensive, Versatile). Armor reduces Clock ticks and provides defensive benefits (Light, Medium, Heavy, Shielded, Reinforced, Ablative). Use the Weapon and Armor Tag Framework tables to create custom equipment for any genre.

Quick Reference Tools:

- ◆ Combat Round at a Glance (NEW) - Complete turn structure, common actions table, Clock tick rates, and quick condition reference for at-the-table use
- ◆ Abstract Positioning: Zone-Based Combat (NEW) - Four-zone positioning system with tactical implications, movement rules, and practical examples
- ◆ Multi-Round Combat Example (NEW) - Three-round fight demonstrating positioning zones, condition application, and tactical coordination with visual battlefield diagrams
- ◆ Combat at a Glance - System overview and tick rates
- ◆ Resolve Clock Sizing Guidelines - Enemy threat levels and Clock sizes
- ◆ Combat Turn Checklist - Step-by-step turn procedure
- ◆ Action Types Quick Reference - Core actions and typical DCs
- ◆ Tactical Decision Matrix - Situation-based action recommendations
- ◆ Action Economy Tips - Maximize turn impact through coordination
- ◆ Reading the Battlefield - Environmental Tags and tactical exploitation
- ◆ Reading Enemy Threat Levels - Assess opponents before engaging
- ◆ Taken Out Severity Levels - Stakes framework with PC/NPC distinctions
- ◆ Combat Conditions Tables - Standardized conditions with mechanical effects
- ◆ Weapon and Armor Tags - Equipment framework for any genre

Procedure:

1. Establish what "taken out" means and the severity level before combat begins.
2. Decide when to shift to structured combat using explicit triggers.
3. Choose turn order mode (Conversational, Popcorn, Initiative Roll) to match scene tone.
4. Follow the seven-step Combat Round Procedure for each turn.
5. Apply Conditions with specific mechanical effects and durations.
6. Use weapon and armor Tags to create tactical advantages and challenges.
7. Reference worked examples to see complete combat sequences in action.

The worked examples demonstrate how Clocks, Tags, Conditions, weapons, armor, and actions combine into dynamic fights with meaningful stakes across multiple genres. The system remains consistent whether you are playing fantasy, noir, or sci-fi-learn it once, use it everywhere.

11

EXPLORATION AND SOCIAL PLAY

Exploration and social play cover everything that happens outside of direct combat. Investigating crime scenes, navigating dangerous terrain, decoding signals, negotiating alliances, and reading a crowded room all use the same core mechanics—Checks, Tags, Conditions, and Clocks—focused on discovery, choice, and momentum rather than immediate harm.

Exploration Overview

In exploration scenes, the GM presents situations, spaces, and mysteries. Players describe what their characters do: search, travel, tinker, observe, or test. When uncertainty, consequence, and agency are present, a Check resolves whether the attempt reveals information, overcomes an obstacle, or creates a new problem.

Exploration is not “filler between fights.” It is where many campaigns decide their tone: cozy neighborhood investigations, tense horror crawls, sprawling journeys, or intricate political maneuvering. Treat exploration choices as meaningful as any combat decision.

Investigation and Discovery

When investigating, start with a clear question: “What am I trying to learn?” Then describe how you pursue it. Examples:

- ◆ “I examine the desk for hidden compartments and false bottoms.”
- ◆ “I compare the shipping logs with telegraph records for discrepancies.”
- ◆ “I walk the perimeter, looking for unusual footprints or tool marks.”

The GM chooses an Attribute and any relevant Skills, sets a DC based on how well hidden or complex the information is, and calls for a Check if needed. On a Full Success, you get a clear answer or strong lead. On a Partial Success, you learn something useful but pay a cost—time passes, someone notices, or the clue is incomplete. On a Failure, you miss the key detail or trigger a complication.

Investigation often uses paired Clocks:

- ◆ Progress Clocks for goals such as "Identify the culprit," "Decode the pattern," or "Map the tunnels." Successful Checks tick these forward.
- ◆ Pressure Clocks for dangers such as "Guards return," "Evidence destroyed," or "Storm closes in." Partial successes and Failures may tick these.

Example

: The group investigates a sabotaged telegraph relay. The GM creates a 6-segment "Find the saboteur" Clock and a 4-segment "Relay shutdown" Clock. Each successful RSN-based Check (examining equipment, tracing messages, interviewing operators) advances the first. Certain Failures or time-consuming approaches tick the second. Which fills first determines whether the saboteur is exposed before the network goes dark.

GM Guidance

: Never let investigation stall completely. If players fail a Check, they should still learn something-just not the whole picture, or with a cost attached. "You find nothing" is rarely interesting. "You find traces of the saboteur, but they also find traces of you" keeps the story moving.

Travel and Environmental Challenges

Journeys, hazardous terrain, and environmental puzzles are handled with the same principles:

- ◆ Define the route, obstacles, and stakes.
- ◆ Assign Tags to the environment (Slick, Cramped, Hazardous, Obscured).
- ◆ Use Checks and Clocks to track progress and risk.

Long journeys can be condensed into a handful of key scenes. Each scene presents a meaningful choice: push for speed at higher risk, detour for safety at the cost of time, or engage with an opportunity or threat the GM introduces along the way.

Example

The group must cross a floodplain before the next storm. The GM tags the region as Hazardous and Unstable and creates a "Reach Higher Ground" Clock and a "Waters Rise" Clock. Each scene, the players choose approaches-careful scouting, constructing makeshift bridges, or pushing through quickly. RSN, MIG, or AGI Checks advance progress or risk. Fictional choices about camps, supplies, and routes matter as much as the dice.

Pacing Travel Scenes

Not every mile of a journey needs screen time. Zoom in on moments where choices matter and zoom out when travel is routine. A three-day ride through safe territory might be summarized in a sentence. A single afternoon crossing contested ground might take an entire session.

Consider these pacing options:

- ◆ Montage: Describe the journey in broad strokes, pausing only for one or two interesting encounters or decisions.
- ◆ Point crawl: Identify key locations along the route and play out each as a brief scene with a choice or Check.
- ◆ Full exploration: When the journey itself is the adventure, play out each leg with detailed environmental challenges, discoveries, and encounters.

GM Guidance

: Match travel pacing to stakes. A journey to save a dying ally should feel urgent-use tight Clocks and hard choices. A journey to explore unknown territory can breathe-let players describe what they see, ask questions about the world, and stumble onto unexpected opportunities.

Social Interaction

Social scenes-persuasion, negotiation, deception, and reading people-use the same core loop:

1. Clarify what you want from the other party.
2. Describe your approach and how you present yourself.
3. GM sets DC and Tags for the scene (Tense, Festive, Suspicious, Profit-Minded).
4. Roll Checks and interpret outcome tiers as changes in trust, position, or opportunity.

Presence-based Skills often lead here, but other Attributes can matter. A Reasoned argument, a Might-backed display of capability, or an Agility-based demonstration can all shift attitudes when grounded in the fiction.

GM Guidance

: Let players roleplay conversations before calling for Checks. The Check resolves whether their approach works, not whether they said the right words. A player who struggles with improvisation can describe their character's demeanor and goals; the dice determine the NPC's response.

Negotiation and Leverage

Effective negotiation starts with understanding what the other side values. Before making big offers, consider using Insight or similar approaches to read their priorities. Are they driven by profit, duty, fear, or reputation? Tags like Profit-Minded, Honor-Bound, or Desperate can help anchor these traits.

Once you know what matters to them:

- ◆ Identify leverage - information, access, protection, or resources that speak directly to their needs.
- ◆ Frame your offer - present your proposal in terms of their goals, not yours.
- ◆ Use Clocks for complex deals - "Deal Secured" or "Trust Established" can track multi-round negotiations.

Example

: The group negotiates safe passage with a gang leader tagged as Ruthless and Profit-Minded. Early rounds focus on proving value and reliability, filling a "Consider Their Offer" Clock. Later rounds solidify terms. Each Check can move the Clock forward or back, with Partial successes adding new demands or concessions. When the Clock completes, the leader commits to a course of action-ally, neutral, or rival.

Deception and Reading People

Deception is high-risk and high-reward. Successful lies open doors; failed lies create enemies. Keep lies simple, grounded in partial truths, and aligned with visible facts when possible. The GM may grant Edge when your story matches what NPCs can already see or believe.

Reading people through Insight or similar approaches lets you detect lies, gauge mood, and identify pressure points. On Full Success, the GM can tell you what an NPC most wants right now or what they are afraid will happen. On Partial Success, you get a rough sense with some uncertainty or risk being noticed.

Example

: A smuggler is captured in a quiet back room. First, intimidation fails to crack his loyalty, but ticks a Pressure Clock as his crew starts wondering where he is. Then the characters switch to deception, claiming his boss has already betrayed him. A contested Check between the character's PRE-based deception and the smuggler's Insight decides whether he believes the story. The outcome determines whether he reveals the shipment's location or shuts down entirely.

Structuring Scenes with Clocks

Clocks are especially valuable in exploration and social play, where many small actions add up to big changes. Use them to:

- ◆ Track layered goals (investigation, preparation, influence).
- ◆ Represent background events (faction plans, approaching deadlines).
- ◆ Create tension in otherwise open ended situations.

In many campaigns, the most memorable scenes are not single Checks but sequences where Clocks visibly advance, threats close in, and players make hard choices about which fronts to address first.

Tying Exploration and Social Back to Combat

Exploration and social play are not separate from combat—they shape it. Successfully mapping a site, securing allies, or learning an enemy's habits can create Tags, Clocks, or Edges that pay off immediately when blades are drawn. Likewise, the outcome of a fight often creates new questions to investigate or relationships to repair.

When planning sessions, think in arcs: exploration reveals opportunities and risks, social play navigates them, and combat resolves the moments where words and careful planning are no longer enough. Then the story returns to exploration and social play, changed by what happened in the heat of the moment.

Chapter Summary

Exploration and social play use the same core mechanics as combat—Checks, Tags, Conditions, and Clocks—but focus on discovery, choice, and influence rather than immediate harm.

Investigation starts with a clear question and uses paired Progress and Pressure Clocks to track breakthroughs against mounting danger. Never let failure stall the story; let it complicate the path forward.

Travel can be compressed or expanded based on stakes. Use environmental Tags, Clocks, and meaningful choices to make journeys matter. Match pacing to urgency: montage for routine travel, full exploration for perilous crossings.

Social interaction follows the same Check loop: clarify intent, describe approach, set DC, and interpret outcomes as shifts in trust and position. Players describe goals and demeanor; dice resolve NPC reactions. Different Attributes can apply depending on the fictional approach.

Negotiation benefits from reading the other party first. Identify what they value, then frame your offer in their terms. Use Clocks for complex multi-round deals.

Deception is high-risk, high-reward. Ground lies in partial truths.
Reading people reveals priorities and fears.

All three modes connect: exploration reveals what's possible, social play shapes alliances and opposition, and combat resolves moments where words fail. The cycle then repeats, with new questions and relationships emerging from each confrontation.

12



DOWNTIME, RECOVERY, AND ADVANCEMENT OVERVIEW

Downtime and advancement connect sessions together. They answer two questions: what happens to characters between high pressure scenes, and how do they grow over time. This chapter provides an overview of recovery, downtime activities, and progression models. Later chapters and references expand each area in more detail.

Downtime Overview

Downtime represents the hours, days, or weeks when characters are not in immediate danger. It is a space for rest, training, projects, and relationships. Good downtime:

- ◆ Lets characters recover from consequences and Conditions.
- ◆ Creates room for personal goals beyond the main plot.
- ◆ Seeds future adventures through projects and connections.

The GM and players decide how much in world time passes. A short downtime might cover a night between missions; a long one might span a season.

Recovery and Rest

Rest is the foundation of recovery:

- ◆ Short rest- A few hours to catch breath, bind wounds, and clear minor Conditions.
- ◆ Long rest- A full night or more to reset after major exertion.
- ◆ Extended downtime- Days or weeks that allow deep recovery, training, and projects.

Many Conditions clear automatically with appropriate rest:

Exhausted fades after sleep, Bleeding resolves after treatment and time, minor Frightened states ease once the threat passes. More serious Conditions-Poisoned, Cursed, or long term injuries-may require specialized care, quests, or narrative solutions.

Downtime Activities

Beyond simple rest, characters can dedicate downtime to structured activities. Common examples include:

- ◆ Training- Practicing with mentors, refining Skills, or conditioning Attributes.
- ◆ Research- Studying lore, tracking rumors, or analyzing data.
- ◆ Crafting- Building or modifying gear, tools, or infrastructure.
- ◆ Relationships- Strengthening bonds with NPCs, factions, or communities.
- ◆ Projects- Pursuing long term goals like founding a safehouse or establishing a network.

Each activity usually:

- ◆ Consumes a defined unit of downtime (a day, a week, a season).
- ◆ May involve one or more Checks, often against a progress Clock.
- ◆ Produces concrete outcomes: Skills gained, information uncovered, allies won, or structures built.

Example

Example - Training as a Clock A character seeks to learn a new Blades Skill from a retired duelist. The GM creates a 6 segment “Train with Master Valen” Clock. Each week of focused training, the player rolls AGI or RSN against a moderate DC. Full successes tick 2 segments, partials tick 1. When the Clock fills, they gain the Skill and a new relationship with Valen as an ongoing contact.

Long Term Projects

Some goals are too large for a single downtime period. Long term projects use bigger Clocks and are often tied directly to campaign arcs. Examples:

- ◆ Establishing a spy network in a city.
- ◆ Building or upgrading a stronghold.
- ◆ Rehabilitating a neighborhood or recovering from a disaster.
- ◆ Reconciling or reshaping relationships between factions.

For each project, work with the GM to:

- ◆ Define the end state (what “complete” looks like).
- ◆ Set a progress Clock sized to the goal.
- ◆ Identify key milestones or phases.

Progress can come from downtime, on screen adventures, or both. Setbacks may create separate “Complication” Clocks that, if filled, delay or transform the project. Treat these as story opportunities rather than punishment.

Relationships, Factions, and Standing

Downtime is also when you invest in people. Characters can nurture friendships, manage obligations, and shift their standing with factions. Many groups find it helpful to track faction standing on a simple ladder:

- ◆ Hostile- actively opposed, may move against you.
- ◆ Unfriendly- suspicious, minimal cooperation, inflated prices.
- ◆ Neutral- transactional; standard treatment.
- ◆ Friendly- helpful; discounts, information, and small favors.
- ◆ Honored- invested in your success; serious support and protection.

Significant actions-rescuing allies, defending territory, forwarding or opposing a faction's goals-move standing up or down. Neglect can also matter; if you ignore an important relationship for a long time, the GM may introduce a Clock that tracks fading trust until you reconnect.

Advancement Overview

Advancement represents mechanical growth: new Skills, expanded Proficiencies, and occasional Attribute improvements. It should also reflect narrative change: what your character has learned, how they have changed, and which arcs have moved forward.

There are three common progression models. Your table can use one or blend them:

- ◆ XP based advancement- You earn experience points for overcoming challenges and achieving goals, then spend XP on Skills, Proficiencies, or Attributes.
- ◆ Milestone based advancement- You advance when you reach narrative milestones, such as completing arcs or defeating major threats.
- ◆ Session based advancement- You advance after a set number of sessions, regardless of specific story beats.

Chapter 19, "Advancement and Long Term Growth," provides detailed guidance, including costs, pacing, and genre specific advice. This chapter focuses on how advancement feels and how it connects to downtime.

Narrative Arcs and Growth

Progression is most satisfying when mechanical changes follow narrative arcs. When you advance, ask:

- ◆ What has my character learned or survived recently?
- ◆ How have their beliefs, relationships, or goals shifted?
- ◆ Which new capabilities reflect that change?

Tie new Skills, Proficiencies, or Attribute bumps to concrete experiences in play: training scenes, pivotal choices, or climactic confrontations. This keeps growth feeling earned and grounded.

Example

Example - Advancement Tied to Arc After exposing a corrupt official and choosing to protect whistleblowers instead of seeking revenge, a character gains a social Proficiency focused on coordination and advocacy and a new investigative Skill. These advancements reflect their shift from lone operator to community organizer, making future scenes about those themes richer.

Connecting Advancement to Downtime

Downtime activities and advancement reinforce each other:

- ◆ Training and projects can justify or accelerate new Skills and Proficiencies.
- ◆ Research and relationships can unlock opportunities that become advancement milestones.
- ◆ Long term projects can culminate in major advancement events (new Attributes, expanded domains).

When the table discusses advancement, consider what downtime scenes you want to play to show that growth. Likewise, when you plan downtime, think about which kinds of growth you hope it will make possible.

Table Practices for Downtime and Advancement

A few simple practices keep downtime and advancement smooth:

- ◆ Talk about goals openly—what each player wants for their character between arcs.
- ◆ Choose a progression model together and revisit it if the pacing feels off.
- ◆ Use Clocks to track projects and relationships you care about, not every minor task.
- ◆ Let advancement decisions wait until you see how a story beat lands; pick changes that fit the outcome.

Downtime, recovery, and advancement are where the campaign breathes. Use them to give characters room to change, deepen ties to the world, and set up the next set of hard choices.

13

**ROLEPLAYING GUIDANCE AND
WORKING WITH THE GM**

This chapter focuses on how to play the game well at the table—how to inhabit your character, share spotlight, read the fiction, and collaborate with the GM and other players. The mechanics in earlier chapters provide tools. This chapter helps you use them in a way that keeps play fun, clear, and respectful for everyone.

Roleplaying Fundamentals

Roleplaying means making decisions from your character's point of view. You do not need to speak in accents or stay "in character" every minute, but it helps to:

- ◆ Think about what your character wants, fears, and cares about.
- ◆ Let those priorities shape your choices, even when they are not tactically perfect.
- ◆ React to events as your character, not just as a player solving a puzzle.

Your goal is not to "win" the story. It is to help create a story that everyone at the table is excited to remember.

Creating Memorable Characters

Memorable characters often share three traits:

- ◆ Distinct voice- A recognizable way of speaking or behaving.
- ◆ Clear motivations- Goals and drives that explain why they act.
- ◆ Flaws and strengths- Imperfections that create conflict and qualities that carry them.

Voice can be as simple as a few phrases, a posture, or a habit. Motivations might be justice, curiosity, loyalty, or survival. Flaws-stubbornness, pride, mistrust-give scenes bite. Strengths-compassion, courage, expertise-give your character ways to shine.

Engaging with the Fiction

The game works best when everyone treats the fiction as real and worth caring about:

- ◆ Describe actions- Go beyond “I attack.” Show how you move, what you say, what it looks like.
- ◆ React to outcomes- Let successes, partials, and failures change how your character feels and behaves.
- ◆ Build on details- When someone adds a detail, treat it as a resource, not background noise.

If the GM says the tavern smells of smoke, decide whether that makes your character nostalgic, uneasy, or indifferent. Small reactions accumulate into a rich portrayal.

Making Meaningful Choices

Meaningful choices are grounded in both character and situation:

- ◆ Ask, “What would my character do here?” and take that seriously, even if it is risky.
- ◆ Embrace consequences; partial successes and failures are fuel for interesting scenes.
- ◆ Consider how your decision opens space for other characters to respond or grow.

You always retain control over your character’s actions and internal life. The GM brings the world; you decide how your character engages with it.

Roleplaying in Different Scenes

Combat Scenes

Combat is not only about tactics. It is also about how your character responds to danger:

- ◆ Use your choices of Strike, Maneuver, Set Up, and Defend/Withdraw to show priorities-who you protect, what risks you accept.
- ◆ Let Conditions and Resolve Clocks show up in your description. Stagger when hurt, hesitate when Frightened, push through when it matters.
- ◆ React when others suffer; a quiet character might become decisive when an ally falls.

Social Scenes

In social scenes, your words and posture matter. You do not have to improvise every line, but try to:

- ◆ Summarize what your character says, focusing on tone and intent.
- ◆ Show emotion through description-body language, pauses, eye contact.
- ◆ Pay attention to NPC reactions and adjust your approach when the fiction calls for it.

Exploration Scenes

Exploration scenes reveal what your character notices and cares about when there is no immediate threat. Curious characters poke at details; cautious ones check exits; idealists look for people to help. Use these scenes to reinforce who you are outside of crisis.

Player Tips for Success

A few practical habits make play smoother and more satisfying. Taking five minutes before a session to review your character, their current situation, and what you want to pursue can make a big difference. Jotting simple notes-names, locations, promises-keeps threads from slipping away between games.

Many players find it helpful to set a small, personal goal each session: "I want to confront my mentor," "I want to make peace with that faction," or "I want to learn more about the vanished relay line." These goals give the GM something to weave into scenes and help you decide what your character pushes toward when choices arise.

Tactically, you do not need to master every rule to play well. Focus on three questions:

- ◆ How can we use terrain and Tags to our advantage in this scene?
- ◆ Is anyone carrying dangerous Conditions we should clear or mitigate?
- ◆ What can I do this turn to make an ally's next action stronger?

Example

Example - A Simple Plan Before a session, a player notes that their character wants to repair trust with a contact they previously lied to. When the GM frames a scene at that contact's workshop, the player leans into it-offering a sincere apology and a concrete favor. The GM rewards this with a small improvement in standing and a future lead. A few minutes of preparation turned a casual scene into a memorable character moment.

Reading the Table

Good play also means paying attention to the table, not just the fiction. When another player leans forward, takes notes, or lights up at a detail, that is a cue that this thread matters to them. When someone has been quiet for a while, you can create space for them with a simple question: “What is your character doing while this happens?”

The GM’s descriptions are cues as well. If they linger on a Tag, repeat an NPC’s name, or mention a small oddity twice, it usually means that element is important. If you are unsure what a scene is about, ask briefly out of character: “What is at stake here?” Clarity helps everyone aim their actions in the same direction.

Example

Example - Inviting Someone In During an investigation scene, two players are debating theories while a third stays quiet. One of the debaters pauses and says, “You grew up in this district—what do you think is really going on?” The quiet player’s character suddenly becomes central to the scene, sharing local knowledge the others lacked. A small invitation shifted focus in a way that felt natural in the fiction.

Spotlight Sharing and Party Cohesion

Sharing spotlight keeps the game from becoming “the story of one character with supporting cast.” You do not need to track minutes of talk time, but it helps to be aware of patterns. If you have been at the center of the last few scenes, consider how your character might support others next—by asking for help, following someone else’s lead, or taking an assisting action instead of the decisive one.

Stepping forward and stepping back are both generous acts. Step forward when your character’s skills, history, or goals are central to the moment. Step back when someone else is in their focus scene and make their moment stronger with Set Ups, assistance, or simply by reacting in character.

Many tables like to create shared backstory-why the group is together, who they owe, what they have survived. These connections make it easier to care about one another's scenes.

Example

Example - Supporting Someone Else's Spotlight A session centers on another character's estranged sibling arriving in town. Rather than trying to solve the sibling's problems, the rest of the group plays into the situation: one offers quiet moral support, another runs interference with a suspicious faction, a third uses a Set Up action in a later conflict to give the spotlight character Edge. Everyone gets to act, but the emotional core of the session stays with the sibling relationship.

Working with the GM

The GM is your collaborator, not your opponent. They present the world, frame situations, and play NPCs. You bring your character's perspective and choices. Good collaboration looks like:

Share your character's goals and interests so the GM knows what to put on screen. Ask clarifying questions when stakes or details are unclear; it is better to pause for thirty seconds than to play through a scene everyone misunderstood. When consequences land, treat them as prompts for new choices rather than reasons to pull back from the game.

If something at the table is not working for you-tone, pacing, or content-say so. Adjusting together is part of collaborative play.

Example

Example - Sharing a Goal A player tells the GM between sessions, "I want my character's missing mentor to matter this arc." A few sessions later, clues about the mentor's fate appear in a side investigation. Because the player shared that interest, the GM could weave it into existing plots rather than guessing what would land.

Session Zero and Safety

Before a campaign begins, many groups hold a session zero to set expectations:

Use this time to talk about tone (cozy, gritty, heroic, horrific), the kinds of stories you want, and content that is off limits or should be handled gently. Agree on how you will pause or check in if something feels uncomfortable. A few minutes of honest conversation can prevent misunderstandings later.

Safety tools can be as simple as an agreement to pause and talk when someone feels uncomfortable, or as formal as a written set of lines and veils. The important part is that everyone feels they can speak up.

Example

Example - Using a Safety Pause Midway through a tense interrogation, a player says, "Can we pause a second?" The table briefly steps out of character and the player explains that a specific detail is hitting too close to home. The group and GM adjust the scene-keeping the stakes, changing the flavor-and continue in a way that everyone can enjoy.

Handling Disagreements

Disagreements will happen, both in character and out of character. To keep them from derailing play:

First, separate character conflict from player conflict. It is fine for characters to argue fiercely or make incompatible choices; it is not fine for players to feel attacked or sidelined. If a plan discussion stalls or tempers rise, step briefly out of character and ask, “What do we each want from this scene?”

If needed, the GM can frame the stakes and ask for a decision so the story can move: “If you split the party here, these risks apply; if you stay together, you miss this opportunity. Which do you prefer?” Once a choice is made, treat it as a shared direction and see where it leads.

Example

Example - Resolving a Plan Disagreement Two players argue in character about whether to confront a faction now or gather more evidence. After a few minutes, a third player says, “Let’s pause—what do we want as players?” They discover one wants a tense confrontation, another wants to see more investigation scenes. Together with the GM, they decide to stage a smaller confrontation that reveals new clues, giving both desires some space.

Bringing It All Together

Roleplaying and collaboration are what turn mechanics into stories. Use the tools in this chapter to:

- ◆ Portray characters who change over time.
- ◆ Support one another’s arcs and share spotlight.
- ◆ Work with the GM to shape a campaign that reflects everyone’s interests and boundaries.

The rules in earlier chapters tell you how to resolve actions. This chapter is your reminder that how you choose those actions-and how you respond to the results-is just as important.

14

SKILLS SYSTEM OVERVIEW

Skills are fiction first capabilities that define what your character can reliably do when the outcome is uncertain. They represent practiced competencies—from climbing a precarious cliff to negotiating a trade deal, from repairing relay equipment to navigating orbital traffic. This chapter explains what Skills represent, how they interact with Attributes and Checks, and how to choose and create Skills that fit your campaign.

What Skills Represent

Skills are not abstract numbers. They are grounded in your character's experiences, training, and environment. A character with Stealth knows how to move quietly, read patrol patterns, and exploit shadows. A character with Persuasion understands how to frame requests, read social dynamics, and build rapport. When you roll a Skill Check, you are asking: "Given who this character is and what the situation is, can they accomplish this goal?"

Skills always operate on the fiction first principle introduced earlier:

- ◆ If the fiction does not support an action, no roll happens.
- ◆ If the action is certain to succeed or fail given the situation, the GM simply describes the result.
- ◆ Only when uncertainty, consequence, and agency align does a Skill Check come into play.

Example

Example - When a Skill Matters In a cozy neighborhood campaign, a character with Baking might roll to impress a skeptical community elder with a carefully prepared cake, gaining Edge on future social scenes with that community. In a sci fi relay station, a character with Systems Diagnostics might roll to stabilize failing life support. Both are “skills,” but the way they appear in the fiction depends on the setting and the situation.

Skills and Attributes

Skills and Attributes work together. Attributes describe broad tendencies-Might (MIG), Agility (AGI), Presence (PRE), and Reason (RSN). Skills sharpen those tendencies into specific competencies.

A Check typically uses one Attribute and, when appropriate, one Skill that fits the declared intent and approach.

The same Skill can pair with different Attributes depending on how you act:

- ◆ Using Stealth with AGI when you move quietly through a crowded market.
- ◆ Using Stealth with RSN when you plan a route that avoids patrol patterns entirely.
- ◆ Using Persuasion with PRE when you speak with emotional conviction.
- ◆ Using Persuasion with RSN when you construct a careful, logical argument.

This flexibility keeps Skills tied to the story rather than locked into fixed formulas. The GM chooses the Attribute that best matches your described approach, then checks whether a Skill meaningfully applies.

Skill Categories

To make it easier to navigate options, Skills are loosely grouped into broad categories. These categories are descriptive, not restrictive, and can overlap:

- ◆ Exploration- Perception, Wayfinding, Investigation, Climbing, Tinkering.
- ◆ Social- Persuasion, Negotiation, Insight, Deception, Comfort.
- ◆ Technical- Medicine, Thievery, Hacking, Engineering, Forensics.
- ◆ Conflict- Melee Combat, Firearms, Tactics, Zero G Combat, Crowd Control.
- ◆ Arcane or Supernatural- Arcana, Occult Lore, Ritual, Divination.
- ◆ Wilderness and Environment- Survival, Animal Handling, Gardening, Foraging.

Chapters 15 and 17 provide example Skills grouped by Attribute and domain, with genre specific lists you can use as written or adapt to your setting.

Reading Skill Entries

Each Skill entry in the reference chapters follows a consistent structure:

- ◆ Name and category- The Skill's name and where it fits (Exploration, Social, etc.).
- ◆ Description- A fiction first explanation of what the Skill covers and how it feels in play.
- ◆ Default actions- Common tasks and typical DC ranges (using the standard DC ladder).
- ◆ Synergies- Tags, Conditions, or Proficiencies that make this Skill more effective.
- ◆ Counters- Situations or Tags that hinder the Skill.
- ◆ GM usage notes- Advice on when to call for rolls and how to interpret outcome tiers.
- ◆ Example- A short worked example showing the Skill in context.

When you read a Skill entry, start with the description and example. They tell you how it shows up in the fiction. Numbers and DCs come after.

Choosing Skills at Character Creation

During Character Creation, you select a small set of Skills that define what your character reliably does under pressure. When choosing Skills, keep four questions in mind:

- ◆ Does this fit the genre? A haunted relay station game will see more use from Engineering and Occult Lore than from Tournament Jousting.
- ◆ Does this fit my concept? A former smuggler might take Navigation, Streetwise, and Deception; a village healer might focus on Medicine, Gardening, and Comfort.
- ◆ Does this complement the group? If no one has Medicine or Tactics, consider covering that gap. Redundancy can be fun,

but shared blind spots are risky.

- ◆ Is this a Skill I want to lean into? Choose Skills you are excited to see in play; you can grow into new areas later.

Example

Example - Selecting Skills for a Concept A player creates Rami, a courier who once worked the telegraph lines in a canyon region. They choose Stealth, Systems Diagnostics, Wayfinding, and Mediation. Stealth and Wayfinding reflect years of moving through rough terrain unnoticed. Systems Diagnostics ties into relay maintenance. Mediation represents their habit of smoothing over disputes between outposts. The Skill list says as much about who Rami is as their attributes do.

Creating Custom Skills

The provided Skill lists are starting points. If a Skill you want is missing, you and your GM can create a custom one. A good custom Skill has a clear scope, fits your genre, and gives the GM obvious hooks for scenes where it matters. “Social Media Savvy” might be perfect for a modern campaign but feel out of place in a low magic village game; “Wayfinding” makes sense across many genres.

When you design a new Skill together, start by writing a short description in plain language. Decide what kinds of actions it covers, what typical difficulties feel like, and what situations make it shine or struggle. You do not need to list every possible use; two or three concrete examples are enough to anchor the Skill in play.

Example

Example - Defining a Custom Skill In a modern investigative campaign, the group adds Digital Forensics as a Technical Skill. Description: Analyze digital devices, recover deleted data, and trace online activity. Default actions: Recover deleted files (DC 14-18), trace a message's origin (DC 16-20), detect tampering (DC 12-16). Synergies: Networked or Surveillance Tags, relevant Proficiencies like Cybercrime. Counters: Air gapped systems, encrypted drives, Alert adversaries. The GM now has a clear sense of when and how to call for Digital Forensics Checks.

Designing Skills for Your Campaign

When you add new Skills or reshape existing ones, think about how they will read on a character sheet and how they will show up in play. A strong Skill name hints at what the character does in scenes, not just which numbers they add to a roll. “Crowd Control,” “Wayfinding,” or “Social Media Savvy” all suggest specific kinds of moments; “+2 Physical” does not.

As a rule of thumb when designing Skills:

- ◆ Lead with actions. Choose names that describe what characters do: “Calibrating Sensors,” “Negotiating Contracts,” “Reading People,” “Improvised Repairs.”
- ◆ Avoid totalizing labels. “All Combat” is too broad. “Close Quarters Struggle” and “Ranged Technique” are narrow enough to feel distinct but broad enough to recur.
- ◆ Differentiate by approach, not target. “Lockpicking” and “Fine Manipulation” overlap; consider whether you want a general Skill or a specialized one and how each will feel in multiple scenes.
- ◆ Check against Proficiencies. If a proposed Skill sounds more like a job (“Harbor Operations”) than a repeatable action, it might belong as a Proficiency instead.
- ◆ Look for genre hooks. Ask yourself which environments, factions, or threats will regularly invite this Skill to the forefront.

You can also collaborate with your group to build short campaign specific Skill menus. A cozy neighborhood game might highlight Skills like Baking, Comfort, Streetwise, and Community Mediation. A horror mystery game might focus on Investigation, Forensics, Occult Lore, and Crisis Negotiation. The mechanical structure stays the same; the Skill names and examples shift to match the tone, scale, and stakes of the stories you want to tell.

Skills, Proficiencies, Tags, and Conditions

Skills rarely act alone. Proficiencies deepen them, Tags color the environment around them, and Conditions bend them out of shape. A Proficiency in a particular domain often makes related Skill Checks easier or safer. Tags such as Dim Light, Cramped, or Networked tilt odds toward or away from certain Skills. Conditions like Exhausted or Frightened can narrow which approaches remain reasonable, even when you technically have the Skill.

Example

Example - Skill with Proficiency and Tags A character with the Systems Diagnostics Skill and the “Telegraph Instruments” Proficiency attempts to stabilize a failing relay in a canyon station. The scene has the Tags Dim Light and Unstable due to flickering lamps and tremors. The GM decides the Proficiency lowers the effective DC and grants Edge on RSN + Systems Diagnostics Checks. However, Unstable means failures may tick a “Structural Collapse” Clock. The Skill, Proficiency, and Tags combine to make the moment specific and tense.

Using the Skill Reference Chapters

The chapters that follow provide concrete Skill lists and examples. Chapter 15 groups Skills by Attribute and offers sample entries you can adopt or adapt. Chapter 17 does the same for Proficiencies, showing how they sharpen certain Skills or open new options in the fiction.

You do not need to memorize every entry. When you create or advance a character, scan the parts that match your campaign's tone and pick what supports your concept. During play, treat the lists as inspiration. If you describe an approach that fits the fiction, you and the GM can decide together which Skill applies, even if it is not on a printed menu.

15

SKILLS REFERENCE

This chapter offers example Skills grouped by Attribute. It is not an exhaustive catalog. Instead, it shows the kinds of capabilities that naturally lean on Might (MIG), Agility (AGI), Presence (PRE), and Reason (RSN), with short descriptions and sample uses. After each group, a few Skills are expanded into detailed entries that follow the structure described in the previous chapter.

Might (MIG) Skills

Might leaning Skills focus on strength, endurance, and direct physical effort. They often appear when you push, lift, resist, or endure things that would overwhelm most people. MIG Skills are not just about violence—they also cover hard labor, rescue work, and physically demanding crafts.

Example MIG Facing Skills*****

Skill	What It Represents	Sample Uses
Athletic Movement	Running, jumping, climbing, and other	Chasing a fleeing suspect across
Heavy Lifting & Carrying	Moving and stabilizing heavy	Shifting a fallen beam to free a
Grit & Endurance	Withstanding fatigue, harsh environments,	Marching through a heatwave without
Close Quarters Struggle	Grappling, holding, and breaking free at arm's reach.	Wrestling a saboteur away from a control panel; staying on your feet during a passenger flight; fighting to keep a crowd

Athletic Movement - Exploration / Combat (MIG)

Description: Athletic Movement covers running, swimming, and other full body movement under pressure. Characters with this Skill know how to conserve momentum, balance speed and safety, and read terrain for opportunities.

Default actions: Climbing rough surfaces, crossing gaps, sprinting through unstable ground, or swimming against a current. Routine efforts in good conditions might be DC 12-14; risky leaps in bad weather or climbs while encumbered may push DCs into the 16-20 range.

Synergies and counters: Tags like Cramped or Unstable make movement riskier, while secure anchor points or safety gear can justify Edge. Conditions such as Exhausted or Injured often impose Burden or raise effective DCs.

GM usage notes: Use this Skill when movement itself is the source of tension. Partial successes are good places to introduce new Tags or tick environmental Clocks-reaching the ledge but dislodging debris, for example.

Example

Example - Athletic Movement The group needs to cross between two rooftops before a patrol arrives. The gap is wide, the night is rainy, and the Tag Slick is in play. The GM calls for a MIG + Athletic Movement Check at DC 16. On a Full Success, the character clears the gap cleanly. On a Partial Success, they make it but knock tiles loose, adding Unstable to the landing roof and ticking a “Guards Alerted” Clock by one.

Heavy Lifting & Carrying - Exploration / Support (MIG)

Description: Heavy Lifting & Carrying represents moving, bracing, and stabilizing heavy loads without specialized machinery.

Characters with this Skill know how to use leverage, footing, and teamwork to keep weight under control.

Default actions: Shifting debris, hauling injured allies, or relocating bulky equipment. Clearing a simple blockage with time and help might sit at DC 12-14; lifting or holding something that is actively collapsing, burning, or unstable often reaches DC 16-20.

Synergies and counters: Tags like Solid Cover, Stable surfaces, or access to proper tools can justify Edge or lower DCs. Unstable, Hazardous, or Cramped spaces increase risk and may impose Burden, especially if characters are also Exhausted or Injured.

GM usage notes: Treat Heavy Lifting as a chance to spotlight physical heroism and teamwork. On a Partial Success, consider progress with escalating danger-weight shifts, Clocks tick on structural collapse, or someone takes a Condition in exchange for getting others clear.

Example

Example - Heavy Lifting & Carrying A maintenance platform buckles, pinning a worker beneath a support beam. The area is tagged Hazardous and Unstable. The GM calls for a MIG + Heavy Lifting Check at DC 18. A Full Success means the beam is raised long enough for the worker to scramble free, and the group retreats before the platform fails. On a Partial Success, the worker is saved but one PC gains the Exhausted Condition as the beam crashes down behind them.

Grit & Endurance - Survival (MIG)

Description: Grit & Endurance measures how long your character can keep going under strain-physical, environmental, or emotional. It covers marathon efforts, holding a position under fire, and pushing through pain when others would stop.

Default actions: Marching long distances, rowing for hours, or holding a barricade against repeated assaults. Routine but taxing efforts might be DC 12-14; extreme situations-days without proper sleep, brutal weather, or a siege-can push DCs to 18-22 and may call for repeated Checks over time.

Synergies and counters: Access to rest, food, medical care, or supportive Tags like Sheltered lower DCs or justify Edge. Stacking Conditions such as Exhausted, Bleeding, or Frightened makes continued effort much harder, often increasing DCs or turning Partial Successes into new Complications.

GM usage notes: Use Grit & Endurance Checks to mark the passage of grueling time. On Partial Success, let progress continue but introduce new Conditions or tick Clocks that reflect mounting strain, rather than simply ending the attempt.

Example

Example - Grit & Endurance The party must hike through a wind scoured pass overnight to warn a nearby town. The GM sets a "Reach the Town Before Dawn" Clock and calls for a MIG + Grit & Endurance Check at DC 14. On a Full Success, the group advances the Clock and arrives tired but ready. On a Partial, they still advance the Clock but one PC gains Exhausted, and another suffers Frostbitten fingers as an ad hoc Condition that will matter in later scenes.

Close Quarters Struggle - Conflict (MIG)

Description: Close Quarters Struggle covers grappling, shoving, restraining, and breaking free at arm's reach. It is less about elegant martial arts and more about leverage, balance, and raw determination when the distance between combatants collapses.

Default actions: Holding someone back, escaping a grab, or wrestling over a weapon. Routine scuffles against untrained opponents might sit at DC 12-14; trying to restrain a prepared foe or overpower a larger opponent, especially in Cramped or Crowded conditions, can push DCs to 16-20.

Synergies and counters: Tags like Crowded or Confined may help a grappler who can pin foes against surfaces, while Hazardous terrain makes failed Checks more dangerous. Conditions such as Restrained or Exposed shape follow up actions, often granting Edge to allies or to the opponent.

GM usage notes: Grapples are great moments to bring Tags and Conditions into focus. On Partial Success, trade control back and forth-perhaps the PC restrains their foe but ends up positioned dangerously close to an edge or hazard.

Example

Example - Close Quarters Struggle In a maintenance corridor tagged Cramped, a saboteur lunges for the emergency release. A PC tackles them, triggering a MIG + Close Quarters Struggle Check at DC 15. A Full Success pins the saboteur, applying the Restrained Condition. A Partial Success stops the release but leaves both characters struggling, and the GM adds an Exposed Tag as security cameras pivot toward the scuffle.

Agility (AGI) Skills

Agility leaning Skills emphasize precision, balance, reflexes, and fine control. They cover stealthy movement, delicate manipulation, and actions where timing and positioning matter more than raw power. AGI Skills often determine who moves first, who avoids danger, and who can operate safely in constrained or unstable environments.

Example AGI Facing Skills*****

Skill	What It Represents	Sample Uses
Stealth & Evasion	Moving quietly, staying out of sight,	Crossing a dim relay hall while guards
Fine Manipulation	Delicate handwork under pressure-	Bypassing a mechanical lock in a
Acrobatic Positioning	Balancing, tumbling, and using the	Leaping from balcony to balcony in
Ranged Technique	Accurate attacks or precise throws with ranged tools.	Taking a careful shot from an elevated navigating a derailed carriage without dropping steel to a gap, breaking a lantern to shatter at just the right spot.

Stealth & Evasion - Exploration / Conflict (AGI)

Description: Stealth & Evasion is the ability to move quietly, stay out of sight, and slip through gaps in attention. It includes reading patrol patterns, choosing routes, and using cover effectively.

Default actions: Crossing guarded spaces without being seen, hiding in cluttered environments, shadowing someone through a crowd, or breaking line of sight. DCs depend on alertness and environment: DC 12-14 for casual observation, 16-18 against active patrols or Alert Tags.

Synergies and counters: Tags like Dim Light, Crowded, or Obscured often support this Skill, granting Edge or lowering effective DCs. Alert, Surveillance, or noisy gear can impose Burden or raise DCs.

GM usage notes: When a Stealth Check fails, think about how the story changes—guards might become suspicious rather than immediately sounding alarms, or a partial reveal might create a tense chase instead of a static fight.

Example

Example - Stealth & Evasion A character tries to slip past a checkpoint in a foggy yard at night. The Tags Dim Light and Obscured are present, but the guards are on Alert. The GM calls for an AGI + Stealth & Evasion Check at DC 16, ruling that the helpful Tags and the Alert state balance out. On a Full Success, the character passes unseen. On a Partial, they get through but one guard notices footprints in the mud, ticking a “Suspicion Rising” Clock.

Fine Manipulation - Technical (AGI)

Description: Fine Manipulation covers delicate handwork under pressure—picking locks, handling fragile instruments, and making precise adjustments in tight spaces. Characters with this Skill know how much force is safe, when to pause, and how to adapt when conditions change.

Default actions: Bypassing simple locks, repairing small mechanisms, or re-routing cables in confined housings. Straightforward tasks with time and tools may be DC 12-14; rushed repairs in Hazardous or Slick environments, or on unfamiliar devices, can reach DC 18-20.

Synergies and counters: Good light, proper tools, and helpful Tags like Stable or Secure justify Edge or lower DCs. Poor lighting, vibrations, alarms counting down, or the Cramped Tag make success harder and elevate the consequences of failure.

GM usage notes: Use Fine Manipulation Checks when the details of a mechanism matter. On Partial Success, let the device function but introduce a side effect-extra noise, temporary instability, or a Clock that tracks hidden wear that will matter later.

Example

Example - Fine Manipulation A character hangs from a swaying catwalk, trying to reseat a relay plug before a safety Clock fills. The scene is tagged Unstable and Hazardous. The GM calls for an AGI + Fine Manipulation Check at DC 17. On a Full Success, the relay snaps into place and the alarms quiet. On a Partial, the relay works-but a shower of sparks ticks a "Fire in the Conduit" Clock by one.

Acrobatic Positioning - Exploration / Conflict (AGI)

Description: Acrobatic Positioning represents tumbling, vaulting, and using the environment to gain favorable positions. It is about turning ladders, ledges, and furniture into a playground that keeps you one step ahead of danger.

Default actions: Sliding under closing doors, flipping over cover, or bouncing between balconies. Simple stunts with clear footing might be DC 12-14; long gaps, collapsing scenery, or zero G environments can push DCs to 18-22.

Synergies and counters: Tags like Elevated, Crowded, or Solid Cover can become assets if the character has room to maneuver. Cramped, Slick, or Unstable spaces make missteps more punishing and may turn failures into Falls or new Conditions.

GM usage notes: Use Acrobatic Positioning to reward creative descriptions of movement. On Partial Success, let the character gain position but at a cost-perhaps taking on the Exposed Condition, or ticking a Clock that tracks environmental collapse.

Example

Example - Acrobatic Positioning During a market square clash, a character uses stalls and awnings as improvised platforms. The GM calls for an AGI + Acrobatic Positioning Check at DC 15 to reach a hanging sign that provides Elevated firing position. A Full Success puts them safely atop the sign. On a Partial, they make it but the sign's supports strain, adding the Unstable Tag to their perch.

Ranged Technique - Conflict (AGI)

Description: Ranged Technique is the practiced ability to place shots, throws, or other ranged effects exactly where they need to go. It covers judging distance, leading targets, and compensating for wind, recoil, or unusual angles.

Default actions: Taking aimed shots, lobbing grenades or alchemical vials, or tossing grappling hooks. Routine shots at known ranges might be DC 12-14; difficult shots through Obscured areas, at long range, or while threatened often land around DC 16-20.

Synergies and counters: Tags like Elevated, Stable footing, or prepared sights can grant Edge. Obscured environments, Slick footing, or Conditions like Shaken or Dazed impose Burden or raise DCs.

GM usage notes: Ranged Technique Checks are opportunities to show how the environment shapes combat. On Partial Success, consider outcomes like grazing hits that apply a Condition, or successful shots that also damage cover, adding new Tags to the battlefield.

Example

Example - Ranged Technique A character on a rooftop tagged Elevated tries to shoot out a cable anchoring a runaway tram before it derails. The GM calls for an AGI + Ranged Technique Check at DC 18, factoring in the tram's speed and the stress of the moment. On a Full Success, the cable snaps cleanly and the tram grinds to a controlled halt. On a Partial, the cable is severed but the tram slams into a buffer, ticking a "Injured Passengers" Clock.

Presence (PRE) Skills

Presence leaning Skills are about influence, emotional resonance, and social navigation. They come to the forefront when your character speaks, negotiates, performs, or stands firm under social pressure. PRE Skills shape how NPCs and factions feel about you and how scenes change when you step in.

Example PRE Facing Skills*****

Skill	What It Represents	Sample Uses
Persuasion & Appeal	Convincing others through argument,	Talking a station chief into delaying a
Command & Coordination	Directing allies, issuing orders, and	Coordinating a multi step evacuation;
Deception & Performance	Presenting a convincing façade,	Passing as an official inspector;
Insight & Empathy	Reading people's moods, motivations, and tells.	Noticing when a witness is omitting something; sensing a stirring speech that distracts; delivering a coded message; noticing that a faction leader is more afraid than angry; spotting who in a crowd is truly listening

Persuasion & Appeal - Social (PRE)

Description: Persuasion & Appeal is the ability to convince others through argument, empathy, or shared interest. It helps you change minds or soften positions without deception.

Default actions: Negotiating terms, calming frightened NPCs, or advocating for a course of action. Everyday requests might sit at DC 12-14; high stakes persuasion against resistant targets can reach DC 18-20.

Synergies and counters: Positive standing with a faction, prior favors, or supportive Tags (such as Friendly atmosphere) can justify Edge or lower DCs. Deep grudges, conflicting goals, or a Tense Tag make success harder.

GM usage notes: Use outcome tiers to adjust both content and tone of NPC responses. Partial successes might grant what the PCs want at a cost, such as obligations or strings attached.

Example

Example - Persuasion & Appeal The characters ask a guild leader to delay a crucial shipment. The guild's standing with them is Neutral, but they recently helped with a separate problem. The GM calls for a PRE + Persuasion Check at DC 16, noting that success means the delay is granted, while a Partial success means the delay comes with a promised favor the guild will collect later.

Command & Coordination - Social / Support (PRE)

Description: Command & Coordination is the ability to direct allies under pressure, align efforts, and keep a group focused on a shared goal. It is as much about clear communication and trust as it is about barking orders.

Default actions: Organizing evacuations, coordinating tactics, or assigning roles during tense operations. Simple direction among willing allies might be DC 12-14; trying to coordinate panicked crowds or fractious factions can reach DC 18-20, especially when time is short.

Synergies and counters: Existing trust, clear plans, and stabilizing Tags such as Organized or Prepared can reduce DCs or justify Edge. Chaos, misinformation, or hostile Tags like Panicked or Hostile Crowd make success harder and magnify the cost of failure.

GM usage notes: Use Command & Coordination Checks to decide how effectively groups move or act as a unit. On Partial Success, allow progress but with frayed edges-delays, miscommunications, or pockets of resistance that become hooks for future scenes.

Example

Example - Command & Coordination A fire breaks out in a crowded depot. The GM tags the scene Panic Rising and calls for a PRE + Command & Coordination Check at DC 15 as a PC tries to organize an orderly evacuation. A Full Success clears the station in time, stabilizing the situation. A Partial succeeds but leaves a side entrance jammed, ticking a "Trapped Workers" Clock the group must address later.

Deception & Performance - Social (PRE)

Description: Deception & Performance covers acting, misdirection, and presenting convincing façades. Characters with this Skill can lie smoothly, play roles, or put on shows that direct attention where they want it.

Default actions: Passing as someone else, staging distractions, or concealing true intentions in conversation. Simple lies with low stakes might be DC 12-14; intricate impersonations, long term cons, or bold public performances under scrutiny can hit DC 18-22.

Synergies and counters: Props, disguises, and supportive Tags like Crowded or Festive justify Edge. Informed audiences, existing suspicions, or Tags such as Alert and Tense push DCs higher, especially if the PCs are already Marked or Exposed.

GM usage notes: Deception Checks are a great place to lean on outcome tiers. Partial Success might buy time or partial belief while seeding later complications-NPCs who are unconvinced but play along, or an audience that enjoys the show but asks probing questions afterward.

Example

Example - Deception & Performance To infiltrate a private gala, a PC poses as a visiting dignitary. The GM notes the Tags Formal and Alert Security and calls for a PRE + Deception & Performance Check at DC 17. On a Full Success, the character passes inspection and gains access to the inner balcony. On a Partial, they are waved through but one guard quietly notes oddities in their story, ticking a "Security Suspicion" Clock.

Insight & Empathy - Social (PRE)

Description: Insight & Empathy is the ability to read moods, notice unspoken tensions, and respond in ways that build connection. It helps you understand what people need or fear, even when they are not saying it directly.

Default actions: Sensing when someone is lying by omission, recognizing when a negotiation is about pride instead of price, or spotting who in a group is closest to changing their mind. Everyday reads of open conversations may be DC 12-14; subtle deception, masked emotions, or cross cultural misunderstandings can push DCs toward 18-20.

Synergies and counters: Time spent listening, shared experiences, and quiet spaces can justify Edge. Distracting environments, Tense or Hostile Tags, or your own Conditions like Frightened or Suppressed make it harder to read others clearly.

GM usage notes: Insight Checks are ideal for revealing partial truths. On Partial Success, share honest but incomplete information or let the PC sense there is more beneath the surface, prompting further investigation or conversation.

Example

Example - Insight & Empathy While negotiating with a faction envoy, a PC quietly watches body language instead of speaking much. The GM calls for a PRE + Insight & Empathy Check at DC 14. On a Full Success, the PC realizes the envoy is more afraid of their own superiors than of the PCs, revealing a pressure point. On a Partial, they sense fear but misread its source, pointing suspicion at the wrong faction and seeding future complications.

Reason (RSN) Skills

Reason leaning Skills focus on analysis, memory, perception, and structured thinking. They shine when you sift clues, diagnose problems, plan ahead, or notice what others overlook. RSN Skills often drive investigation, engineering tasks, and long term strategies.

Example RSN Facing Skills*****

Skill	What It Represents	Sample Uses
Perception & Awareness	Noticing details, patterns, and subtle	Spotting a disturbed patch of dust near a
Investigation	Following leads, connecting	Piecing together a sabotage timeline
Systems & Diagnostics	Understanding and troubleshooting	Tracing a glitch in a relay network;
Lore & Analysis	Recalling knowledge, interpreting texts, and applying theory.	Identifying a symbol from an old policy change; several suspects identifying weak points in a fortress; implications of a new law; recognizing that a pattern in strange messages matches an old cipher style.

Investigation - Exploration (RSN)

Description: Investigation covers following leads, evidence, and reconstructing events. Where Perception tells you what is present, Investigation helps you determine why and how.

Default actions: Analyzing a crime scene, comparing records for inconsistencies, or tracing the path of a missing person.

Straightforward inquiries might be DC 12-14; complex puzzles or well hidden schemes push toward DC 18-22.

Synergies and counters: Access to records, helpful NPCs, or prior research can lower DCs or justify Edge. Tags such as Obscured, Hazardous locations, or active Cover Up Clocks raise stakes and complicate interpretation.

GM usage notes: Treat Investigation Checks as steps in a process, not single all or nothing gates. Use Clocks to track progress toward understanding, and let partial results reveal some truths while leaving room for future discoveries-or mistakes.

Example

Example - Investigation The group examines a sabotaged relay hub. The GM sets a 6 segment “Understand the Sabotage” Clock and calls for an RSN + Investigation Check at DC 14. A Full Success both advances the Clock and clearly links the damage to a particular toolset. A Partial advances the Clock but hints at two possible culprits, leaving ambiguity the group will need to resolve later.

Perception & Awareness - Exploration (RSN)

Description: Perception & Awareness represents noticing details, patterns, and subtle changes in your surroundings. It includes listening for unusual sounds, spotting movement at the edge of vision, and recognizing when something feels “off.”

Default actions: Hearing approaching footsteps, spotting hidden compartments, or noticing tampered equipment. Routine observations in quiet spaces might be DC 12-14; catching faint clues in Obscured or Crowded environments, or under time pressure, often climbs to DC 16-20.

Synergies and counters: Tags such as Elevated, Well Lit, or Quiet justify lower DCs or Edge. Dim Light, Obscured, Noisy, or Conditions like Dazed or Distracted raise DCs and make Partial Success more likely.

GM usage notes: Use Perception Checks to highlight how the world communicates with the PCs. On Partial Success, share useful but incomplete information-enough to prompt action, but not enough to eliminate all uncertainty.

Example

Example - Perception & Awareness The group passes through a cargo bay tagged Crowded and Noisy. The GM calls for an RSN + Perception & Awareness Check at DC 15 to notice signs of recent tampering. A Full Success spots tool marks near a concealed panel and a faint chemical smell. A Partial reveals only that crates near the panel have been rearranged, hinting that something is hidden but not exactly what.

Systems & Diagnostics - Technical (RSN)

Description: Systems & Diagnostics focuses on understanding and troubleshooting complex systems-mechanical, digital, magical, or social. It covers building mental models, tracing failure points, and predicting how changes will ripple through the whole.

Default actions: Tracing faults in relay networks, modeling faction responses, or identifying structural weak points. Simple troubles with clear symptoms might be DC 12-14; subtle glitches, layered conspiracies, or interlocking systems can push required DCs to 18-22 and may require multiple Checks over time.

Synergies and counters: Access to logs, schematics, or expert testimony lowers DCs or grants Edge. Tags like Obscured records, Corrupted data, or active sabotage Clocks raise stakes and may turn failure into cascading consequences.

GM usage notes: Systems Checks are natural moments to use Clocks that track understanding or system stability. On Partial Success, let PCs isolate some but not all issues, or solve one problem while planting the seeds of the next.

Example

Example - Systems & Diagnostics After repeated brownouts, a PC reviews the station's power map. The GM requires an RSN + Systems & Diagnostics Check at DC 16. A Full Success identifies both the failing relay and a suspicious reroute that points toward sabotage. A Partial pinpoints the failing relay but misses the reroute, advancing a "Saboteur's Plan" Clock off screen.

Lore & Analysis - Knowledge (RSN)

Description: Lore & Analysis is your ability to recall information, interpret texts, and draw conclusions from recorded knowledge. It covers everything from local history and legal codes to arcane theory or xenobiology, depending on your setting.

Default actions: Identifying symbols, recalling historical events, or interpreting research notes. Common references might be DC 12-14; obscure facts, deliberately hidden knowledge, or cross disciplinary questions can reach DC 18-22.

Synergies and counters: Access to archives, libraries, or mentors can lower DCs. Tags like Restricted or Redacted documents, or time pressure during research, raise difficulty and make Partial Success more attractive than outright failure.

GM usage notes: Use Lore & Analysis Checks to feed players actionable context rather than trivia. On Partial Success, reveal one clear fact alongside a misleading implication or missing piece, inviting follow up scenes to refine the truth.

Example

Example - Lore & Analysis Investigating an old faction sigil, a PC consults scattered notes from the Mechanics Reference era. The GM calls for an RSN + Lore & Analysis Check at DC 15. A Full Success confirms the symbol belongs to an outlawed engineering guild and explains why their devices are so unstable. A Partial reveals the guild's name and their reputation for dangerous experiments but omits that some of their techniques were quietly adopted by respectable institutions.

Mixing Attributes and Skills

These examples show where Skills most often lean, but they are not rigid assignments. In play, you will often mix Attributes and Skills in flexible ways: a MIG focused character might pair Investigation with physical intimidation, while a PRE focused character might use Systems & Diagnostics to explain a problem convincingly to a nervous crowd. When in doubt, start from the fiction: what is your character doing, and which Attribute and Skill combination best captures that attempt.

Case Studies: Flexible Skills

Many of the most memorable Skills are those that do not belong to a single Attribute. Instead, they describe broad approaches you can express in different ways. The Skill name stays the same, but the Attribute you pair it with shifts based on how you act in the scene. This keeps character concepts coherent across many situations without forcing you into the same kind of roll every time.

Here are a few example Skills that are intentionally flexible. Use them as inspiration when creating your own:

- ◆ Streetwise- Knowing where to go, who to talk to, and how to stay out of trouble in busy districts. You might roll 4d6 with PRE when buttering up a friendly barkeep, with RSN when piecing together rumors from scattered conversations, or with AGI when navigating rooftops and alleys to avoid patrol routes.
- ◆ Field Medicine- Stabilizing injuries with limited supplies. You might roll with MIG when physically hauling someone to safety while treating them, with RSN when diagnosing symptoms and choosing the right treatment, or with PRE when talking a frightened patient through a painful procedure.
- ◆ Tinkering- Improvising, repairing, and re-purposing devices. You might roll with RSN when methodically dissecting how a gadget works, with AGI when re-wiring a delicate mechanism in a cramped space, or with MIG when physically bending frames and panels back into shape so the internals can function.
- ◆ Wayfinding- Keeping your bearings over long journeys. You might roll with RSN when reading maps and stars, with MIG when pushing through harsh terrain and carrying gear, or with PRE when leading a group and keeping morale high through setbacks.

None of these Skills are “owned” by a single Attribute. During play, you describe what you do; the GM chooses an Attribute that matches that approach and checks whether your Skill helps. Over time, this makes Skills feel like parts of your character’s story, not just fixed mechanical packages.

16

PROFICIENCIES SYSTEM OVERVIEW

Proficiencies represent your character's narrative domain expertise—their trades, callings, and areas of practiced familiarity. Where Skills describe how you act under pressure, Proficiencies describe what you already know and can do without needing to reinvent yourself on the spot. A licensed engineer, a guild advocate, and a long haul caravan driver might share some Skills, but their Proficiencies mark out very different lived experiences.

What Proficiencies Represent

A Proficiency is more than a bonus—it is narrative permission. Being proficient in a domain means the GM can reasonably assume you understand its basics, jargon, and common risks. You know which questions to ask, which tools to reach for, and when a situation is outside your depth. In fiction, this might look like knowing how to secure a harness before climbing a relay tower, how to prepare a formal petition to a guild, or how to keep a steam engine from seizing during a storm.

Proficiencies often answer the question “Who gets to try this in the first place?” long before dice come out. In many situations, a Proficiency lets you bypass Checks entirely for routine tasks, or it sets a lower DC when you do roll because you are working from a position of experience rather than guesswork.

Proficiencies, Skills, and Attributes

Attributes, Skills, and Proficiencies work together. Attributes describe raw tendencies; Skills describe trained competencies; Proficiencies describe domains where that training has been applied over time. When you roll 4d6 for a Check, you typically choose an Attribute and a relevant Skill. A Proficiency then shapes the fiction around that roll: it might justify Edge, lower the DC, or remove uncertainty for basic tasks entirely.

For example, two characters might both have the Systems & Diagnostics Skill. The one who is proficient in “Relay Station Operations” can read console layouts at a glance, knows local safety procedures, and has authority to access restricted areas. The other must ask more questions, rely on guesswork, and may face higher DCs or additional Clocks tracking social or procedural friction.

Not every Check involving a Proficiency grants a numeric bonus. Sometimes the benefit is access, reduced time, or the ability to attempt actions at all. Let the fiction and the stakes guide whether a Proficiency grants Edge, adjusts DCs, or simply removes the need to roll for standard situations.

Types of Proficiencies

Proficiencies are intentionally broad so they can flex across settings. Common types include:

- ◆ Domain Proficiencies- Fields of knowledge or practice, such as Medicine, Arcane Studies, or Relay Engineering.
- ◆ Tool and Equipment Proficiencies- Familiarity with particular implements, vehicles, or weapon classes.
- ◆ Organization and Faction Proficiencies- Deep understanding of how a group operates, from city watch procedures to smuggling rings.
- ◆ Role and Status Proficiencies- Experience tied to positions like Quartermaster, Scout Captain, or Court Envoy.

You do not need to track every possible niche as a separate Proficiency. Start with a small set that says who your character is and what the campaign cares about, then expand as the story reveals new, enduring areas of expertise.

Using Proficiencies in Play

At the table, Proficiencies answer three questions: Who can attempt this? How hard is it for them? What happens if they get involved? When a situation touches a domain where a character is proficient, assume a higher baseline of competence, even before any dice hit the table. Routine tasks inside that domain often require no roll; they simply succeed, especially when there is no meaningful time pressure or opposition.

When the outcome is uncertain and meaningful, Proficiencies shape the Check rather than overshadowing it. A Proficiency might:

- ◆ Lower an otherwise tough DC by one or two steps on the ladder (for example from 18 Hard to 14 Routine).
- ◆ Justify Edge on the 4d6 roll when the task is firmly inside the character's field.
- ◆ Reduce the time required to attempt something, ticking progress Clocks more quickly.
- ◆ Unlock options that would otherwise be off limits, such as restricted procedures or specialized tools.

Proficiencies also interact strongly with Tags, Conditions, and Clocks. A proficient harbor master might treat a Crowded and Noisy dock as normal working conditions, while an untrained visitor finds their DCs raised or their Partial Successes much messier. Likewise, a character proficient in "Crisis Negotiation" might convert certain Failures into Partial Successes when talking down a threat, because they know how to keep the conversation going even when their first approach falters.

GM Guidance

GM Guidance - Start with Permission When in doubt, treat Proficiencies as permission first and bonus second. Ask: "If no one at the table had this Proficiency, would this scene be possible in the same way?" If the answer is no, the Proficiency should change what the group can attempt, not just adjust numbers.

Reading Proficiency Entries

Proficiency entries in the reference chapters mirror the structure of Skill entries, adapted for domain focus:

- ◆ Name and type- The Proficiency's name and whether it is a domain, tool, organization, or role.
- ◆ Description- What this expertise looks like in the fiction and how it shapes the character's daily life.
- ◆ Scope and examples- Typical situations where the Proficiency obviously applies, plus a few edge cases.
- ◆ Default benefits- Ways it commonly affects Checks: reduced DCs, Edge in certain circumstances, or automatic success for routine tasks.
- ◆ Opportunities and risks- Story hooks the GM can use when this expertise is present in a scene.
- ◆ GM usage notes- Guidance on when to ask for rolls, when to simply grant success, and how to model outcome tiers.
- ◆ Example- A short scenario showing the Proficiency in action, from Trigger to Consequence.

As with Skills, start with the description and example when you read a Proficiency entry. They show how the expertise changes scenes at the table; any bonuses or DC adjustments are there to support that story.

Choosing Proficiencies at Character Creation

During Character Creation, you select a small number of Proficiencies that answer the question “What do I already know how to do well?” These choices sit alongside your Skills and Attributes and should reflect your history, training, and the kinds of stories you want to tell.

Aim for Proficiencies that:

- ◆ Fit your concept and the campaign’s focus.
- ◆ Offer clear, recurring hooks for the GM.
- ◆ Complement your Skills rather than duplicating them exactly.
- ◆ Say something about where you came from or who invested in your growth.

Talk with the GM and other players when choosing Proficiencies. Overlapping expertise can be fun, but shared blind spots-like a group with no one proficient in any kind of travel or logistics-will shape the tone of your campaign.

Designing Proficiencies for Your Campaign

When you add new Proficiencies or adapt existing ones, aim for statements that are big enough to matter but small enough to feel distinct. “All Magic” is usually too broad; “Ritual Cartography of the Shattered Coast” may be too narrow for most scenes. A good Proficiency is something you expect to see at play at least a few times per arc, and that suggests concrete locations, NPCs, and problems.

As a rule of thumb:

- ◆ Prefer phrases you could put on a business card.“Harbor Operations,” “Restoration Carpentry,” or “Court Etiquette” are all solid examples.
- ◆ Avoid pure mechanical labels.“+2 to Hacking” describes a bonus, not a story.“Relay Network Security” suggests both.
- ◆ Check overlap with Skills. If a Proficiency sounds identical to a Skill, widen its scope or tilt it toward domain knowledge, contacts, or procedures.
- ◆ Look for world hooks. Ask yourself which factions, locations, or front pressures would naturally involve this expertise.

You can also collaborate to create campaign specific Proficiency lists. In a cozy slice of life game, you might see “Community Organizing,” “Bakery Management,” or “Local History.” In a horror mystery campaign, “Forensic Analysis,” “Occult Librarianship,” or “Missing Persons Desk” might emerge instead. The mechanical scaffolding stays the same; the labels change with the tone and focus of the series you are playing.

Gaining and Advancing Proficiencies

Over time, you can gain new Proficiencies or deepen existing ones.

Chapter 19: Advancement and Long Term Growth describes when these opportunities arise—often during Downtime, after major arcs, or as explicit rewards for in-world training and mentorship.

When you broaden a Proficiency, its scope in the fiction grows: your guild credentials might expand from a single district to the entire region, or your “Field Medicine” experience might become full medical training with access to formal facilities. When you deepen a Proficiency, its impact on Checks may shift: the GM might grant Edge more often, treat certain tasks as automatically successful, or allow you to teach others more efficiently.

Proficiencies rarely stack into flat numeric bonuses. Instead, use them to decide who has access, whose word carries weight, and which characters can recognize danger before anyone else. Let them pull the story toward the areas of expertise your table cares about most.

Genre Examples of Proficiencies

Because Proficiencies are narrative tools, they adapt easily across genres. A few possibilities:

- ◆ Cozy & Slice of Life: “Neighborhood Fixer,” “Community Kitchen,” “Library Steward,” “Garden Planner.” These Proficiencies often bypass rolls for everyday tasks and shine when tensions threaten comfort or belonging.
- ◆ Fantasy & Mythic: “Temple Rites,” “Royal Heraldry,” “Monster Tracking,” “Enchanted Smithing.” Here, Proficiencies may frequently unlock access to sacred spaces, secret orders, or rare materials rather than simply modifying DCs.
- ◆ Horror & Mystery: “Crime Scene Procedure,” “Urban Folklore,” “Cold Case Records,” “Sanitarium Administration.” These Proficiencies help stabilize investigatory scenes, reduce the risk of contaminating evidence, or warn the group about rituals and entities best left undisturbed.
- ◆ Modern & Sci Fi: “Traffic Control,” “Vacuum Safety,” “Synthetic Biology Labwork,” “Civilian Station Logistics.” These often interact with large systems and Clocks, turning Proficiencies

into levers the PCs can pull to redirect institutional behavior.

You do not need to memorize long lists to play. Instead, treat these genre examples as prompts: what kinds of jobs, institutions, and long term projects exist in your world, and which Proficiencies would make those things feel real and lived in when they appear at the table?

Example

Example - Proficiency in Action A PC with the "Harbor Operations" Proficiency and the Systems & Diagnostics Skill investigates a gridlocked port. The GM rules that routine scheduling tasks are automatic successes-no roll required-because the character knows the procedures. When they try to reroute traffic under pressure to prevent a collision, the GM calls for a PRE + Systems & Diagnostics Check at DC 16. Their Proficiency justifies Edge on the 4d6 roll and reduces the time required, ticking a "Clear the Harbor" Clock twice on a Full Success and once on a Partial.

17

PROFICIENCIES REFERENCE

This chapter presents example Proficiencies grouped by domain. Like the Skills Reference, it is not an exhaustive catalog. Instead, it shows the kinds of expertise that matter in play-operations, lore, medicine, security, and community-along with sample uses and a selection of detailed entries you can adopt or adapt for your own campaigns.

Each table gives you four Proficiencies in a given area, with a brief explanation of what they represent and how they might appear in scenes. After the tables, several Proficiencies are expanded into full entries that follow the structure described in Chapter 16: description, scope and examples, default benefits, opportunities and risks, GM usage notes, and a worked example.

Operations & Logistics Proficiencies

Operations and logistics Proficiencies cover the quiet work that keeps worlds moving: scheduling, routing, maintenance, and supply. Characters with these Proficiencies often control how fast things happen and how messy they become when pressure mounts.

Operations & Logistics Proficiencies*****

Proficiency	What It Represents	Sample Uses
Harbor Operations	Managing docks, berths, cargo flow,	Re-routing ships to avoid congestion;
Caravan Logistics	Planning multi-day routes, supplies, and	Choosing safe camp sites; balancing
Station Traffic Control	Coordinating arrivals, departures,	Sequencing landings to prevent collision;
Supply Management	Tracking inventory, requisitions, and hubs, shortages across multiple sites.	Preventing stockouts before a storm; identifying hidden movement patterns that are sensitive to equipment; noticing a pattern of missing goods tied to a faction

Harbor Operations - Domain Proficiency

Description: Harbor Operations represents deep familiarity with how ports function: who talks to whom, which documents matter, how tides and schedules intertwine, and where traffic jams and accidents are most likely. A proficient harbor operator reads crowded docks the way others read street signs.

Scope and examples: Scheduling berths, issuing or interpreting docking clearances, arranging tugs and pilots, and coordinating with customs or security. In play, this Proficiency covers things like re assigning incoming ships, managing evacuation routes, or spotting dangerous loading practices before they cause harm.

Default benefits: Routine harbor tasks-assigning a berth, arranging a standard off load, reading signal flags-rarely require a Check. When pressure mounts, Harbor Operations often lowers DCs for Logistics or Systems & Diagnostics Checks, or grants Edge when re routing traffic under tight deadlines (for example, a Hard DC 18 task might become a Routine DC 14 with Edge).

Opportunities and risks: Harbor Operations puts you near the heart of trade and travel. The GM can use this Proficiency to surface rumors, political pressure, smuggling attempts, and accidents. It also makes you visible: powerful factions may notice when you intervene too often or bend the rules.

GM usage notes: Use this Proficiency to speed up scenes that would otherwise bog down in procedure. Let a proficient character “just know” what forms to file or which officials to call, reserving rolls for moments when disasters loom or when they push against policy.

Example

Example - Harbor Operations A storm front closes in on a coastal city while the docks are packed. The GM frames a 6 segment “Clear the Harbor” Clock. A PC with Harbor Operations and Systems & Diagnostics takes charge. Instead of rolling at DC 18, their Proficiency reduces the task to DC 14 and grants Edge on a PRE + Systems & Diagnostics Check as they issue orders and adjust schedules. On a Full Success, two segments of the Clock fill and ships pull away cleanly. On a Partial, the Clock advances but one overloaded vessel is forced to remain, creating a new problem when the storm hits.

Caravan Logistics - Domain Proficiency

Description: Caravan Logistics covers the art of moving people and goods over long distances by road, rail, or trail. It combines route planning, supply forecasting, and an understanding of weather, terrain, and border requirements.

Scope and examples: Choosing routes, calculating rations, planning rest stops, and budgeting for tolls or bribes. In play, this Proficiency influences decisions about when to push on, when to detour, and how to respond when the unexpected happens-washed out bridges, closed passes, or rumors of bandits.

Default benefits: Routine travel planning inside known territory is automatic; the GM simply describes a competent plan. When journeys become risky, Caravan Logistics can lower DCs on MIG + Grit & Endurance or RSN + Wayfinding Checks, or allow the group to attempt maneuvers others could not, such as rerouting an overloaded caravan through marginal paths.

Opportunities and risks: Caravans are social spaces filled with traders, guards, and travelers. This Proficiency gives the GM reasons to introduce side contracts, tensions over resources, or conflicting route advice, all of which you are well placed to mediate-or exploit.

GM usage notes: When a character with Caravan Logistics is present, front load their questions and recommendations. On Partial Successes, let the journey continue but with new Tags-Low on Water, Fraying Tempers, or Suppressed Mutiny-instead of simple delays.

Example

Example - Caravan Logistics The group must move refugees across an arid plateau. The GM sets a “Reach the Oasis” Clock and notes Tags like Scorching Heat and Limited Wells. With Caravan Logistics, a PC makes an RSN + Wayfinding Check at DC 15 instead of DC 18. A Full Success advances the Clock and avoids additional Conditions. A Partial advances the Clock but adds Exhausted to several refugees, seeding future medical and moral decisions.

Station Traffic Control - Domain Proficiency

Description: Station Traffic Control reflects training in managing crowded transit nodes: relay stations, orbital docks, subway interchanges, or similar hubs. You understand signal systems, safety protocols, and how small delays propagate into larger crises.

Scope and examples: Coordinating arrivals and departures, rerouting vehicles during emergencies, prioritizing medical or security craft, and reading traffic patterns for signs of unusual activity. In play, this Proficiency often appears in tense sequences where timing matters.

Default benefits: Routine scheduling rarely calls for a roll. Under pressure, Station Traffic Control can provide Edge on PRE or RSN Checks involving large scale movement, and may allow the group to treat some Failures as Partial Successes when responding quickly averts the worst outcomes.

Opportunities and risks: Traffic controllers are plugged into both official channels and back channel chatter. Their position makes it easy to notice suspicious patterns—but also easy to erase evidence or cover for smugglers. The GM can use this to tie the Proficiency into faction play and fronts.

GM usage notes: When this Proficiency is in play, zoom out to show how entire districts or sectors respond. Use Clocks to represent congestion or escalating danger, and let successful Checks tick multiple segments when plans are well executed.

Example

Example - Station Traffic Control A sabotage attempt targets a relay station during peak shift. The GM introduces a "Cascade Failure" Clock and several Tags: Crowded, Noisy, Alert Security. A PC with Station Traffic Control uses RSN + Systems & Diagnostics to re-route trains and isolate damaged lines at DC 16 with Edge. On a Full Success, they tick the Clock back and stabilize traffic. On a Partial, they prevent a catastrophic collision but leave parts of the network shut down, creating political fallout in later scenes.

Lore & Research Proficiencies

Lore and research Proficiencies describe how your character interacts with records, stories, and hidden knowledge. They determine not just what you know, but how quickly and safely you can uncover deeper truths.

Lore & Research Proficiencies*****

Proficiency	What It Represents	Sample Uses
Historical Archives	Working with official records, registries,	Tracing property ownership; verifying
Occult Librarianship	Managing and interpreting	Identifying ritual scripts; recognizing
Cold Case Records	Maintaining, cross referencing,	Spotting links between old cases;
Academic Correspondence	Navigating scholarly networks, peer review, and institutional archives.	Calling in favors for access; deciphering findings; placing new findings in a larger theoretical context.

Historical Archives - Domain Proficiency

Description: Historical Archives reflects experience with official records and how they are kept, altered, and lost. You know how registries are organized, which offices misfile frequently, and how to track paper (or digital) trails across bureaucracies.

Scope and examples: Land deeds, census records, guild rosters, shipping manifests, and legal proceedings. In play, this Proficiency supports investigations into who owns what, who was present where, and how institutions have changed claims over time.

Default benefits: Routine archive searches for straightforward information are automatic. For more complex tasks-like reconstructing a partially destroyed registry-Historical Archives lowers DCs on RSN + Investigation or RSN + Lore & Analysis Checks and may reduce the time required to sift through material.

Opportunities and risks: Archives reveal both truth and bias. The GM can use this Proficiency to highlight gaps, redactions, and contradictions, turning the act of research into a scene with stakes rather than a simple information drop.

GM usage notes: On Partial Success, consider providing accurate but incomplete data: the PCs learn enough to act, but not enough to avoid unintended consequences, which can drive future sessions.

Example

Example - Historical Archives Searching for the origins of a disputed estate, a PC consults city ledgers. The GM calls for an RSN + Lore & Analysis Check at DC 14, eased by Historical Archives. On a Full Success, they find an old map and cross reference showing the estate's boundaries shrinking over time, pointing toward quiet encroachment by a neighbor. On a Partial, they recover only a subset of records, implicating the neighbor but leaving room for plausible deniability.

Occult Librarianship - Domain Proficiency

Description: Occult Librarianship covers the care, cataloging, and cautious study of dangerous or esoteric texts. You understand containment procedures, warning signs, and the subtle ways knowledge can warp those who engage with it.

Scope and examples: Interpreting marginalia in ritual manuals, identifying missing pages from a grim compendium, or recognizing when a "harmless" folk charm echoes a much older, riskier practice.

Default benefits: With this Proficiency, the GM will usually share more and safer context from strange texts without requiring a Check. When rolls are needed—often RSN + Lore & Analysis or RSN + Investigation—Occult Librarianship can justify Edge or reduce DCs, particularly when evaluating whether a ritual is incomplete or corrupt.

Opportunities and risks: This Proficiency naturally introduces fronts tied to forbidden research, missing tomes, or institutions that hide what they know “for the greater good.” It also tempts PCs to push beyond safe limits in pursuit of answers.

GM usage notes: Use Occult Librarianship to let players opt into horror or mystery at their own pace. On Partial Success, reveal enough to be useful but hint at deeper, more dangerous layers that require future scenes to explore.

Example

Example - Occult Librarianship A PC examines a ritual folio tied to recent disappearances. The GM calls for an RSN + Lore & Analysis Check at DC 16 with Edge due to Occult Librarianship. A Full Success reveals that the ritual is missing a crucial protective stanza, explaining why the victims were unmade rather than transported. A Partial identifies the ritual's purpose but not its flaw, inviting the PCs to consider attempting it themselves at great risk.

Cold Case Records - Domain Proficiency

Description: Cold Case Records reflects long practice in maintaining and revisiting old, unresolved investigations. You know how evidence degrades, how witness stories shift, and how institutional priorities bury or revive cases.

Scope and examples: Re-opening archived case files, comparing patterns of unsolved crimes, and tracing the careers of investigators who worked them. In play, this Proficiency helps you connect present events to older incidents others thought unrelated.

Default benefits: With Cold Case Records, the GM will often allow you to spot patterns without a roll when time is not an issue. When pressure mounts-limited access windows, political oversight, or active threats-this Proficiency improves RSN + Investigation Checks and may let you treat some Failures as Partial Successes that reveal leads but also awaken old enemies.

Opportunities and risks: Digging into cold cases can unsettle powerful factions and reopen wounds in communities. The GM can use this Proficiency to tie new mysteries into older tragedies, building a sense of continuity across arcs.

GM usage notes: On Partial Success, you might advance a “Truth Revealed” Clock while also ticking a “Past Comes Due” or “Retaliation” Clock, showing that progress has a cost.

Example

Example - Cold Case Records The PCs suspect a recent arson is tied to decades old factory fires. The GM calls for an RSN + Investigation Check at DC 15, with Cold Case Records granting Edge. A Full Success uncovers a pattern of suppressed reports implicating the same family of contractors. A Partial connects the new fire to the old pattern but also surfaces that the original investigator disappeared after filing their last report, adding a new layer of danger.

Medicine & Care Proficiencies

Medicine and care Proficiencies describe how characters stabilize others, manage long term health, and navigate medical institutions. They determine how safely you can push through dangerous Conditions and how quickly you can recover between crises.

Medicine & Care Proficiencies*****

Proficiency	What It Represents	Sample Uses
Field Medicine	Stabilizing injuries and illnesses with	Binding wounds during a retreat;
Clinical Practice	Formal medical training within	Diagnosing complex conditions;
Herbalism & Remedies	Using local plants, folk recipes, and	Foraging for medicinal herbs;
Trauma Response	Coordinating emergency care in aulents chaotic, dangerous environments.	Setting up triage under fire; prioritizing support in patients; keeping low infrastructure in thick crowds away from hazards.

Field Medicine - Domain Proficiency

Description: Field Medicine represents practical training in keeping people alive when resources are scarce and conditions are bad. You know how to improvise gear, recognize life threatening signs quickly, and decide when “good enough” is better than “perfect.”

Scope and examples: Battlefield triage, disaster relief, frontier clinics, and any scene where the nearest proper facility is hours away. In play, this Proficiency often pairs with Skills like Field Medicine (Skill) or Grit & Endurance to stabilize allies while under threat.

Default benefits: Routine first aid in safe contexts requires no roll. Under pressure, Field Medicine can reduce DCs on MIG or RSN Checks to treat Conditions like Bleeding or Poisoned, or justify Edge when you have minimal equipment but ample experience.

Opportunities and risks: This Proficiency invites the GM to present hard choices: which patient to treat first, what resources to expend now versus later, and how to balance the physical and emotional toll on caregivers.

GM usage notes: On Partial Success, let the PC stabilize a patient at a cost—perhaps the treatment introduces a new Condition like Scarred or ticks a Clock tracking supplies or morale.

Example

Example - Field Medicine After an ambush on a mountain road, several allies are down. The GM sets a "Stabilize the Wounded" Clock and notes Tags like Hazardous(falling rocks) and Limited Supplies. A PC with Field Medicine makes a MIG + Field Medicine Skill Check at DC 15 with Edge. A Full Success both stabilizes the worst injury and advances the Clock significantly. A Partial stabilizes the ally but depletes bandages and drugs, adding a "Supply Shortage" Clock for the next leg of the journey.

Clinical Practice - Domain Proficiency

Description: Clinical Practice reflects formal experience in organized medical settings: wards, clinics, research hospitals, or temple infirmaries. You know procedures, hierarchies, and how to coordinate multi step care.

Scope and examples: Diagnosing complex conditions, overseeing surgeries, managing long term treatment plans, and navigating paperwork and ethics boards. In play, this Proficiency often opens doors within institutions and lends authority when arguing for care.

Default benefits: Clinical Practice may remove the need to roll for routine care in well equipped settings. When Checks are necessary-such as rushing experimental treatment or pushing a facility past safe capacity-this Proficiency can grant Edge on RSN + Medicine or PRE + Command Checks.

Opportunities and risks: Institutional medicine is entangled with politics, funding, and social inequality. The GM can use this Proficiency to foreground conflicts over who receives care, who pays, and who decides.

GM usage notes: On Partial Success, let the medical outcome succeed but introduce institutional consequences: a reprimand, an audit, or a patient's family owing a significant favor.

Example

Example - Clinical Practice A PC attempts to secure an isolated ward for a contagious patient. The GM calls for a PRE + Command & Coordination Check at DC 16, with Clinical Practice granting Edge. A Full Success gets the ward and staff they need. A Partial success grants the ward but flags their actions to hospital leadership, adding a "Administrative Scrutiny" Clock.

Trauma Response - Domain Proficiency

Description: Trauma Response focuses on managing emergencies where medical, logistical, and psychological pressures collide. You know how to establish triage, communicate clearly, and keep people moving in the face of chaos.

Scope and examples: Mass casualty events, fires, structural collapses, and other crises that overwhelm normal systems. In play, this Proficiency allows PCs to coordinate both care and crowd control under extreme stress.

Default benefits: Trauma Response can reduce DCs or grant Edge on PRE + Command & Coordination, MIG + Grit & Endurance, or RSN + Systems & Diagnostics Checks tied to emergency management. It also justifies treating some Failures as Partial Successes where lives are saved but at the cost of resources, structural damage, or new Conditions.

Opportunities and risks: Characters with this Proficiency see the worst moments in a community. The GM can use it to spotlight resilience, burnout, and public trust-or lack thereof.

GM usage notes: When resolving large scale crises, pair this Proficiency with Clocks that represent both harm and response. Successful Checks should visibly bend the trajectory of disaster.

Example

Example - Trauma Response During a station fire, a PC with Trauma Response organizes evacuees. The GM establishes parallel Clocks: "Fire Spreads" and "Evacuation Complete." A PRE + Command & Coordination Check at DC 17 benefits from Trauma Response. On a Full Success, "Evacuation Complete" advances rapidly while "Fire Spreads" stalls. On a Partial, both Clocks advance, saving many but leaving parts of the station damaged and some people unaccounted for.

Community & Institutions Proficiencies

Community and institutions Proficiencies describe how characters navigate social structures, from informal neighborhood networks to formal courts and unions. They are often about who listens to you and whose stories you can hear.

Community & Institutions Proficiencies*****

Proficiency	What It Represents	Sample Uses
Community Organizing	Bringing people together around	Forming neighborhood
Court Etiquette	Understanding formal protocol,	Securing audiences; avoiding social
Neighborhood Fixer	Acting as a local problem solver and	Finding the right person for a job;
Union Stewardship	Representing workers, negotiating with management, and understanding labor structures	Organizing strikes; negotiating favors quietly Contracts; shielding colleagues from retaliation.

Community Organizing Role Proficiency

Description: Community Organizing reflects experience rallying neighbors, coworkers, or citizens around shared issues. You know who is trusted, what concerns resonate, and how to turn frustration into constructive action.

Scope and examples: Planning meetings, coordinating petitions, building coalitions across groups, and keeping momentum going between crises. In play, this Proficiency shapes how quickly and effectively communities respond to threats and opportunities.

Default benefits: Community Organizing often allows PRE + Persuasion & Appeal or PRE + Command & Coordination Checks to operate at lower DCs when you advocate for local needs, or grants Edge when the cause clearly aligns with community interests.

Opportunities and risks: Organized communities can change the course of campaigns-but organizing also paints targets on visible leaders. The GM can use this Proficiency to bring fronts focused on repression, co-optation, or hard-won victories into focus.

GM usage notes: On Partial Success, allow community movements to grow but introduce complications: internal disagreements, counter campaigns, or increased scrutiny from authorities.

Example

Example - Community Organizing A factory district faces unsafe conditions. A PC with Community Organizing calls a meeting at a local hall. The GM calls for a PRE + Persuasion & Appeal Check at DC 14 instead of 16, recognizing the Proficiency. On a Full Success, workers form a unified committee and adopt a shared list of demands. On a Partial, they agree to act but split into factions over tactics, giving the GM rich material for future sessions.

Court Etiquette - Role Proficiency

Description: Court Etiquette captures knowledge of formal protocol, titles, and ritualized behavior in elite spaces-royal courts, corporate boardrooms, high temples, or similar halls of power.

Scope and examples: Knowing how to address officials properly, when to speak or remain silent, which gifts are appropriate, and how to interpret seating arrangements or guest lists.

Default benefits: Court Etiquette can remove the need for rolls to avoid faux pas in formal settings. When Checks are required-such as persuading a council or reading the mood of a court-this Proficiency can lower DCs or grant Edge on PRE + Insight & Empathy or PRE + Persuasion & Appeal Checks.

Opportunities and risks: Courts and councils are rich with intrigue. The GM can use this Proficiency to expose hidden alliances, rivalries, and expectations, while also making the PC a known player in political games.

GM usage notes: On Partial Success, let PCs achieve their formal goals while entangling them socially-unexpected obligations, whispered rumors, or jealous rivals appear as a result of their presence.

Example

Example - Court Etiquette Seeking support from a royal council, a PC presents a petition. Court Etiquette lets them bypass rolls to gain entry and avoid simple missteps. The GM then calls for a PRE + Persuasion & Appeal Check at DC 16 with Edge. A Full Success wins backing with favorable terms. A Partial secures support but binds the group to host a high profile event that will later draw unwelcome attention.

Neighborhood Fixer - Role Proficiency

Description: Neighborhood Fixer represents being the person people go to when they do not know where else to turn. You know who owes what to whom, which shortcuts exist, and how to arrange small miracles on short notice.

Scope and examples: Finding safe housing for someone in trouble, locating a discreet mechanic, or arranging a meeting between rivals. In play, this Proficiency often acts as a bridge between the PCs and the setting's web of minor NPCs.

Default benefits: Neighborhood Fixer allows PCs to call in favors or identify useful contacts without rolls for low stakes matters. When stakes rise, this Proficiency can lower DCs on PRE + Streetwise or PRE + Deception & Performance Checks, or allow them to attempt delicate arrangements others could not.

Opportunities and risks: Being a fixer means being in the middle. The GM can complicate things by having multiple parties ask for incompatible help, or by making success in one favor create obligations to another faction.

GM usage notes: Use this Proficiency to keep the story moving when players are stuck, but balance it with favors owed. On Partial Success, let the PC secure what they want, but attach clear strings or time limits.

Example

Example - Neighborhood Fixer The group needs a quiet space to meet a whistleblower. A PC with Neighborhood Fixer knows a café owner who closes early. The GM lets them secure the space without a roll but calls for a PRE + Streetwise Check at DC 13 to ensure no one follows them there. On a Full Success, the meeting is private and uneventful. On a Partial, the meeting happens, but a curious local notices the unusual gathering and spreads rumors, adding a “Neighborhood Gossip” Clock.

Security & Covert Operations Proficiencies

Security and covert operations Proficiencies describe how characters interact with threats, surveillance, and the hidden movements of people and information. They determine who sees danger first, who can move unseen, and how institutions respond when lines are crossed.

Security & Covert Operations Proficiencies*****

Proficiency	What It Represents	Sample Uses
Perimeter Security	Designing, maintaining, and	Placing patrols effectively;
Criminal Underworld	Understanding illicit markets, fences, and	Finding buyers for stolen goods;
Espionage Tradecraft	Using and detecting covert methods of	Running dead drops; spotting tails; setting
Tactical Response	Coordinating quick, decisive action against immediate threats.	Organizing a raid; establishing overlapping fire lanes; orchestrating a swift extraction under fire.

Perimeter Security - Domain Proficiency

Description: Perimeter Security reflects experience in setting up and reading physical defenses: fences, checkpoints, sensor grids, and patrol routes. You know what real protection looks like versus staged security meant only to deter casual intruders.

Scope and examples: Designing patrol patterns, placing alarms, evaluating access points, and exploiting weaknesses in existing setups. In play, this Proficiency can help you fortify a safehouse, quietly bypass a facility's blind spot, or recognize when an enemy has deliberately left a gap as bait.

Default benefits: Routine assessments of basic perimeters require no roll. Under pressure, Perimeter Security can lower DCs or grant Edge on RSN + Investigation, RSN + Perception & Awareness, or AGI + Stealth & Evasion Checks related to security layouts and blind spots.

Opportunities and risks: This Proficiency naturally ties into Clocks representing escalating alerts or probing attacks. It also makes you a person of interest to both those who build security systems and those who wish to break them.

GM usage notes: Use Perimeter Security to keep infiltration scenes sharp but fair: a PC with this Proficiency should rarely be surprised by obvious defenses, but subtle or intentionally misleading setups can still create tense moments.

Example

Example - Perimeter Security The PCs must slip into a relay control yard. The GM describes fences, towers, and patrols, then calls for an RSN + Perception & Awareness Check at DC 15, modified by Perimeter Security. On a Full Success, the PC identifies a blind spot between cameras and patrol arcs, granting Edge to the next AGI + Stealth & Evasion Check for the group. On a Partial, they find a workable route but misjudge timing, ticking a "Guards Suspicious" Clock as a light briefly sweeps across their path.

Criminal Underworld - Domain Proficiency

Description: Criminal Underworld represents familiarity with illicit networks, black market channels, and the social rules that keep them running. You know who handles which trades, how word travels, and what lines even criminals hesitate to cross.

Scope and examples: Sourcing contraband, arranging discreet transportation, finding off the books muscle, and reading the reputations of crews and bosses. In play, this Proficiency often determines how much trouble comes attached to the favors you ask.

Default benefits: Simple underworld contacts or purchases may be handled without rolls, especially in familiar territory. When tension is high-crossing syndicates, dealing with informants, or trying to operate quietly in hostile turf-Criminal Underworld can lower DCs or grant Edge on PRE + Streetwise, PRE + Deception & Performance, or PRE + Persuasion & Appeal Checks.

Opportunities and risks: Underworld ties cut both ways. The GM can use this Proficiency to surface hooks like outstanding debts, rival enforcers, or opportunities to play factions against each other, as well as to show the consequences when things go wrong.

GM usage notes: On Partial Success, take care to show both the benefit and the cost: information arrives but so does a rival; a purchase goes through but the goods are tagged or flawed.

Example

Example - Criminal Underworld The PCs want unregistered weapons before a risky job. A PC with Criminal Underworld knows which alley warehouse to visit. The GM calls for a PRE + Streetwise Check at DC 14 with Edge. On a Full Success, they secure the gear quietly. On a Partial, they get what they want, but the supplier quietly informs a local boss that "something big is coming," ticking a "Gang Interest" Clock.

Espionage Tradecraft - Domain Proficiency

Description: Espionage Tradecraft covers the techniques of spying and counter spying: surveillance detection, coded communication, infiltration planning, and the habits that keep agents alive.

Scope and examples: Establishing dead drops, creating and maintaining cover identities, detecting when conversations are being recorded, and planning entry and exit routes that leave few traces.

Default benefits: With this Proficiency, the GM may simply tell you when obvious surveillance is present or when your own operational security is clearly compromised. When a Check is appropriate-often AGI + Stealth & Evasion, PRE + Deception & Performance, or RSN + Investigation- Espionage Tradecraft can lower DCs or grant Edge, especially when the PC has had time to prepare.

Opportunities and risks: Tradecraft invites layered plots. The GM can use this Proficiency to build cat and mouse games where both PCs and NPCs are constantly testing each other's preparations and assumptions.

GM usage notes: When resolving espionage scenes, think in terms of Clocks that track who has the advantage. On Partial Success, let the PC achieve their immediate goal but advance a Clock that represents an unseen opponent closing in.

Example

Example - Espionage Tradecraft A PC must meet a contact in a café without revealing their interest to a watching faction. The GM sets a “Surveillance Tightens” Clock and calls for a PRE + Deception & Performance Check at DC 16, modified by Espionage Tradecraft. On a Full Success, the conversation happens naturally and the Clock does not advance. On a Partial, the meeting succeeds but the Clock ticks, representing a shadowy observer noting their pattern for future use.



P A R T



Game Master Section



18

EXTENDED TAGS AND CONDITIONS REFERENCE

This chapter expands the overview from Chapter 9 into a deeper reference. It gathers common Tags and Conditions into categories, explains how to use them across genres, and offers guidance for creating new entries. You do not need to memorize every detail. Instead, treat this chapter as a toolbox you can glance at when you want inspiration or clarity about how a particular descriptor might work in play.

Tags in Depth

Tags are short descriptors applied to scenes, locations, objects, or situations. They are reminders that certain details should matter whenever characters act in that context. A Tag rarely changes the core procedure of a Check; instead, it adjusts how hard an action is, how risky it feels, or how effective it can be. Tags are one of your main tools for making the fiction mechanically meaningful.

In this system, Tags most often:

- ◆ Grant Edge or Burden on specific Checks.
- ◆ Shift DCs up or down along the standard ladder (Easy 12 to Legendary 22).
- ◆ Change position and effect-how exposed you are if something goes wrong, or how much impact success has.

A good Tag has three qualities:

- ◆ Clear fiction: The table can easily picture what the Tag means.
- ◆ Mechanical teeth: It obviously helps some actions and hinders others.
- ◆ Limited scope: It does not try to describe everything about a scene-only a few key aspects.

Environmental Tags

Environmental Tags describe physical space: light, footing, cover, elevation, and other features that shape movement and line of sight. They are often present before characters arrive and may persist across multiple scenes until something in the fiction changes them.

Environmental Tags*****

Tag	What It Represents	Typical Effects
Dim Light	Shadows, poor lighting, or night	Edge on Stealth and hiding; Burden on
Obscured	Fog, smoke, heavy rain, or cluttered	Burden on sight based
Slick	Wet stone, oil, ice, or unstable footing.	Burden on fast movement and risky
Cramped	Tight corridors, low ceilings, or packed	Burden on actions that need space
Elevated	Higher ground, vantage points, or	Edge on many ranged attacks and
Solid Cover	Reliable barriers-stone walls, heavy	Edge on defense from certain angles;
Fragile Cover	Barriers that can be destroyed-thin walls,	Edge on defense until damaged;
Unstable	Rattling catwalks, loose stones, precarious stacks.	Checks that move or add weight risk <small>destroy cover and advancing Clocks or create new hazards. Causing falls, failures often make the environment worse.</small>

Situational and Atmospheric Tags

Situational Tags describe pressures and circumstances that may change rapidly as scenes unfold. Atmospheric Tags describe the emotional or social tone of a moment. Both help you highlight what matters right now in the fiction and give players cues about what approaches are likely to work.

Situational & Atmospheric Tags*****

Tag	What It Represents	Typical Effects
Crowded	Many people sharing a small space:	Harder to move quickly or track a
Alert	Guards or observers actively watching for	Higher DCs for Stealth and
Hazardous	Meaningful risk of harm from the	Partial Successes and Failures may
Surveillance	Cameras, monitoring spells, informants, or	Covert actions risk leaving a trace;
Tense	Frayed tempers, suspicion, or high	Higher DCs for clumsy social
Festive	Celebrations, parties, or	Easier to mingle, gather casual
Solemn	Funerals, vigils, official ceremonies.	Respectful approaches gain
Suspicious	People are already on edge or expecting trouble.	DCs for lies and half-truths rise; social consequences. Honest or vulnerable approaches may be

Example

Example - Combining Tags in a Scene A street protest has the Tags Crowded, Tense, and Surveillance. A PC trying to slip through without notice may gain Edge on AGI + Stealth & Evasion thanks to Crowded, but attempts to stage a covert meeting in the middle of the rally risk advancing a "Authorities Respond" Clock because of Surveillance. PRE based attempts to calm a brewing clash face higher DCs under Tense, while a carefully framed speech might clear that Tag if it succeeds.

Creating Your Own Tags

You are encouraged to invent Tags that fit your campaign. When doing so, keep the following questions in mind:

- ◆ What detail in the fiction am I trying to highlight?
- ◆ Which actions should become easier, and which should become riskier?
- ◆ Does this Tag suggest interesting complications on Partial Success or Failure?

Once you name a Tag, quickly agree at the table how it behaves. If you find that a Tag is not pulling its weight-no one remembers it or it never affects decisions-either retire it or sharpen its effects so that it matters.

Conditions in Depth

Conditions are persistent states attached to characters. They represent injuries, emotions, afflictions, or temporary edges that follow you across scenes until cleared. Where Tags describe the world around you, Conditions describe what you are carrying with you-physically, mentally, or socially.

Most Conditions:

- ◆ Impose Burden on specific categories of Checks.
- ◆ Limit safe options (“you can’t sprint on that leg,” “you can’t act this turn”).
- ◆ Threaten escalation if ignored, often via Clocks or worsening states.

This chapter groups common Conditions by type and offers guidance for introducing and clearing them in a way that supports character stories rather than shutting them down.

Physical Conditions

Physical Conditions represent injuries, exhaustion, or bodily harm. They are often the result of combat, hazards, overexertion, or environmental exposure.

Physical Conditions*****

Condition	What It Represents	Typical Effects & Clearing
Exhausted	Deep fatigue from sustained effort, lack	Burden on demanding physical
Bleeding	An active wound that will worsen without	Time pressure; certain actions may
Restrained	Held, tied, pinned, or otherwise unable to	Cannot change position or perform
Poisoned	Exposed to harmful substances that	Burden on a range of actions; may inflict
Marked	Specifically targeted or tracked by a foe.	Enemies gain Edge on certain attacks or spreads. Clocks against you, creating antidotes, until the mark is removed (breaking line of sight, changing location, or defeating them). Clears through medical care or

Mental and Social Conditions

Mental and social Conditions reflect fear, distraction, obsession, or shifts in reputation and trust. They show how events affect characters' thoughts and relationships, not just their bodies.

Mental & Social Conditions*****

Condition	What It Represents	Typical Effects & Clearing
Frightened	Overwhelming fear tied to a specific	Burden on actions taken while the
Suppressed	Shaken confidence, intimidation, or	Burden on the next bold or assertive
Distracted	Split focus due to pain, competing	Burden on careful or complex tasks;
Compromised Reputation	A hit to standing in a community or group.	Higher DCs or Burden on certain
Obsessed	Fixated on a goal, person, or mystery.	Edge on related research or pursuit: Clears via reparative Burden when asked to ignore or abandon successes of the object of focus. narrative milestones. Clears through resolution, intervention, or personal growth scenes.

Example

Example - Layered Conditions After a disastrous negotiation and a physical escape, a PC ends up both Exhausted and Compromised Reputation with a local guild. Their attempts to fix the situation may require RSN + Lore & Analysis or PRE + Persuasion & Appeal Checks at higher DCs, while physical stunts are risky until they rest. As they address each Condition in play-resting, apologizing, making amends-those Conditions clear, marking character change.

Severity and Progression

Some Conditions are best treated as points along a progression rather than isolated states. For example, an injury might start as Bruised, escalate to Wounded, and culminate in a more serious Condition if repeatedly ignored. You do not need a rigid track for every case, but thinking in terms of “light, moderate, severe” consequences can help you calibrate how hard recovery should be.

When upgrading or downgrading Conditions, announce what is happening in the fiction first-then adjust the label to match. This keeps Conditions tied to story beats instead of feeling like abstract status effects.

Tags, Conditions, and Clocks Together

Tags, Conditions, and Clocks become most powerful when used together. Tags set the stage; Conditions mark what has happened to the characters; Clocks track how close you are to change. Many worked examples in earlier chapters already combine them. This section adds a few patterns you can reuse.

- ◆ Environment !' Condition: A Hazardous Tag makes certain Failures inflict Bleeding, Poisoned, or Frightened.
- ◆ Condition !' Clock: A serious injury creates a “Recover From Wound” Clock instead of clearing after a single scene.
- ◆ Clock !' Tag: As a threat Clock fills, it may add new Tags-Smoke Filled, Panic Rising, Martial Law.

Example

Example - Hazard, Condition, and Clock The group explores a collapsing mine tagged Hazardous and Unstable. Early on, a Failure on a MIG + Athletic Movement Check inflicts Bleeding on one PC and ticks a “Tunnel Collapse” Clock. Later, as the Clock fills, the GM adds a new Tag-Dust Choked-which makes RSN + Perception & Awareness Checks harder and threatens Exhausted if characters linger. By the time they escape, the mine’s Tags and their Conditions tell the story of what it cost to get out.

Designing New Conditions

When you invent a new Condition, follow the same pattern as Tags:

- ◆ Name what has changed for the character in the fiction.
- ◆ Specify which kinds of Checks it helps or hinders (if any).
- ◆ Decide how it escalates if ignored and how it can be cleared.

Conditions do not need intricate, numeric rules to matter. If everyone understands what Haunted, Homesick, or On Thin Ice With the Guild means, the table can apply Burden, DC shifts, or narrative constraints consistently as situations arise.

Beneficial Conditions and Edges

Not all Conditions are penalties. Some represent moments of insight, protection, or support that tilt the odds in your favor. These “edge” Conditions work like other Conditions-they are named, they have clear triggers and clearing conditions-but they grant advantages when the fiction supports them.

Beneficial Conditions*****

Condition	What It Represents	Typical Effects & Clearing
Inspired	A burst of confidence or insight	Edge on one or a few Checks tied to
Sheltered	Taking cover under protection-physical,	Reduced effect or Burden on attacks
Bolstered	Reassurance, magical warding, or	Edge on Checks to resist a specific
Focused	Calm, centered attention on a task	Edge on RSN heavy or precision actions
Backed by Authority	Acting with formal sanction, warrants, or clear mandate.	Lower DCs or Edge on social Checks on unrelated with people who impulsive choices; focus
You can add beneficial Conditions when characters are through play-completing preparation, forging alliances, or achieving symbolic victories. They are a good way to reward players without rewriting core mechanics and to show how earlier scenes echo forward into new challenges.		

Genre Tag & Condition Packs

Different genres emphasize different Tags and Conditions. You do not need separate rules for each genre, but it can be helpful to think in terms of “packs” you are likely to reuse. The lists below are starting points-add, remove, or rename entries to fit your specific setting.

Cozy & Slice of Life Pack*****

Focus	Common Tags	Common Conditions
Neighborhood and relationships	Warm Kitchen	,

Horror & Mystery Pack*****

Focus	Common Tags	Common Conditions
Uncertainty and dread	Dim Light	,

Fantasy & Mythic Pack*****

Focus	Common Tags	Common Conditions
Rituals and wild places	Sacred Ground	,

Modern & Sci Fi Pack*****

Focus	Common Tags	Common Conditions
Systems and institutions	Networked	,

You can sketch a quick genre pack at session zero and keep it nearby as a menu. When framing scenes, glance at the pack and ask which Tags and Conditions feel appropriate. Over time, you will discover recurring combinations that help your table recognize the feel of your campaign at a glance.

At the Table: Quick Procedure

When you are in the middle of play and do not want to stop for long lists, use this short procedure:

1. Describe first. Paint the scene in plain language-what feels unstable, crowded, eerie, or hopeful.
2. Name 1-3 Tags. Turn the most important details into Tags that will matter for Checks.
3. Roll and resolve. Apply Tags and existing Conditions as Edge/Burden, DC shifts, or changes to consequences.
4. Update states. If the outcome is significant, add or clear Conditions or adjust Clocks.
5. Move on. Do not retag everything every round; only update when the fiction clearly changes.

If you are ever unsure which mechanical tweak to use, start with Edge/Burden. Only reach for DC shifts or new Clocks when you want to signal larger changes in risk or pacing.

GM Guidance

GM Guidance - Use Conditions to Spotlight Characters Conditions are most satisfying when they create interesting choices instead of simple penalties. Offer ways for players to lean into their Conditions for advantage (accepting short term risk or cost) and ways to clear them through scenes that matter to their arcs-conversations, confessions, training, or moments of rest that reveal something new.

19

**ADVANCEMENT AND LONG
TERM GROWTH**

Characters in this game are meant to change. Advancement is how you show that change on the sheet. Over time, characters deepen their existing strengths, grow in new directions, shift relationships, and leave marks on the world. This chapter explains how advancement works mechanically, how to pace it, and how to use long term growth to reinforce the stories you want to tell.

Advancement Philosophy

Advancement is not just power escalation. It is about commitment and consequence. When a character advances, you are answering questions like:

- ◆ What have they practiced enough that it now comes easily?
- ◆ Which relationships or responsibilities have deepened into Proficiencies?
- ◆ Where has the world left marks that will not simply fade away?

The system assumes a steady but flexible pace. Groups that play short campaigns can focus on a few big milestones. Long running tables can layer many smaller adjustments over time. In both cases, advancement should feel earned and should point toward new decisions, not just add flat bonuses.

When Advancement Happens

There are three main advancement triggers. You can use one of them as your default, or blend them as fits your table:

- ◆ Session Based Advancement: Every few sessions (for example, every 3-4), the group reviews what has changed and grants a small advancement. This is simple to track and works well for episodic play.
- ◆ Milestone Advancement: Advancement occurs when characters resolve significant goals: completing an arc, changing a faction's status, overcoming a major front, or achieving a personal breakthrough.
- ◆ Downtime Advancement: Certain Downtime activities (Chapter 12) explicitly unlock new options—study, training, research, or community work that, when completed, grant advancements.

You do not need a separate experience point currency unless your table enjoys tracking it. For most campaigns, a combination of session review and clear milestones is enough to keep growth steady and meaningful.

GM Guidance

Think of advancement as pacing, not as a reward to withhold or grant as punishment. If your group is engaged, taking risks, and pushing the story forward, advancement should follow. Use it to signal chapters in the campaign, not to score performance.

Pacing Reference Table

The following table provides reference benchmarks for different campaign lengths. These are guidelines, not rigid requirements—adjust freely to match your table's preferences and story rhythm.

Campaign Length	Total Sessions	Advancements per	Attribute Increases	Typical Milestone
Short (single arc)	6-10 sessions	2-4 advancements	0-1 Attribute	Every 2-3 sessions
Medium (multiple)	12-24 sessions	5-10 advancements	1-3 Attributes	Every 3-4 sessions
Long (ongoing campaign)	25+ sessions	10-20+ advancements	2-5 Attributes	Every 4-5 sessions

Notes on the table:

- ◆ Advancements per Character: Includes all choices from the Advancement Menu—Skills, Proficiencies, relationships, Attributes, etc.
- ◆ Attribute Increases: These are rarer and mark major transformations. Most characters will advance Skills and Proficiencies far more frequently.
- ◆ Milestone Interval: Use story beats as primary markers. Session counts here reflect typical pacing when milestones align with arc resolution.

Calibration Examples

These concrete scenarios illustrate how advancement pacing might work in practice.

Example 1 - Weekly Play, Medium Campaign

A group plays weekly for six months (approximately 20 sessions). They use milestone advancement tied to arc completion. Over this period:

- ◆ The campaign includes 4 major arcs (each 4-6 sessions).
- ◆ Characters receive 1 advancement per arc completion, plus 1 mid arc advancement when a significant subplot resolves.
- ◆ Total: 6-8 advancements per character over 20 sessions.
- ◆ Attribute increases occur at the end of arcs 2 and 4, reflecting transformational events (total: 2 Attribute increases).
- ◆ Most advancements focus on new Skills, deepened Proficiencies, and relationship changes.

Example 2 - Biweekly Play, Grounded Tone

A group plays every other week, prioritizing a slower, more grounded campaign. They meet for 15 sessions over eight months:

- ◆ Advancement occurs every 4-5 sessions, tied to completing investigation arcs or major faction shifts.
- ◆ Total: 3-4 advancements per character.
- ◆ Attribute increases are extremely rare (perhaps 0-1 over the entire campaign).
- ◆ Growth focuses on Skill refinement, Proficiency deepening, and acquiring new contacts or resources.
- ◆ This keeps characters feeling human scale while still showing meaningful change.

Example 3 - Monthly Play, Heroic Arc

A group meets monthly for a high stakes, heroic campaign spanning 12 sessions over a year:

- ◆ Advancement happens every 2-3 sessions, reflecting rapid escalation and dramatic milestones.
- ◆ Total: 5-6 advancements per character.
- ◆ Attribute increases occur more frequently (2-3 over the campaign), tied to pivotal moments (for example, surviving a supernatural ordeal, completing intense training).
- ◆ Proficiencies and Skills expand quickly to match the larger than life scope of challenges.

Adjusting Pacing for Play Style

Different groups need different rhythms. Use these guidelines to calibrate advancement for your table's preferences:

For Faster Advancement (Heroic, High Fantasy, or Short Campaigns):

- ◆ Grant advancements every 2-3 sessions or at the end of every major scene.
- ◆ Allow Attribute increases more liberally (every 3-4 advancements).
- ◆ Focus on mechanical growth-new abilities, expanded fictional permissions, Tags that create advantages.
- ◆ Use advancement to signal power escalation and keep pace with rising stakes.

For Slower Advancement (Grounded, Investigative, or Long Campaigns):

- ◆ Grant advancements every 4-6 sessions or only at major story milestones.
- ◆ Reserve Attribute increases for transformational moments (training montages, life changing events).
- ◆ Emphasize Skill deepening and Proficiency refinement over adding new options.
- ◆ Let characters grow through relationships, reputation, and narrative authority more than raw mechanical bonuses.

For Variable Pacing (Mixed Tone, Episodic Play):

- ◆ Use session based advancement (every 3-4 sessions) as a baseline, with bonus advancements for major milestones.
- ◆ Allow players to choose how they want to grow-some may focus on Attributes, others on relationships or Proficiencies.
- ◆ Adjust the Advancement Menu per arc: offer Attribute increases only during transformational arcs, but always allow Skill and Proficiency changes.
- ◆ Check in with your table every few sessions to confirm the pacing feels right.

Advancement Menu

When an advancement trigger occurs, each character chooses one option from the menu below (or a smaller subset agreed upon for the current arc). You can mix and match over time-one advancement might improve an Attribute, another might add a Skill, another might unlock a new Proficiency.

- ◆ Attribute Growth: Raise one Attribute by +1 (up to the table's agreed cap).
- ◆ New Skill: Add a new Skill that fits recent experiences or campaign needs.
- ◆ Skill Deepening: Sharpen an existing Skill by broadening its examples and fictional reach.
- ◆ New Proficiency: Gain a new Proficiency that reflects training, role change, or earned authority.
- ◆ Proficiency Deepening: Expand the scope or impact of a Proficiency you already have.
- ◆ Relationship & Reputation: Formalize a new bond, contact, or standing as a trackable element.
- ◆ Tag/Condition Edge: Establish a recurring beneficial Condition or signature Tag you can invoke.

You can also define campaign specific options-unlocking access to certain playbooks, factions, or gear packages once certain arcs complete. Keep the menu small at first and grow it as your table discovers what feels fun.

Attribute Advancement

Attributes (MIG, AGI, PRE, WIL) measure broad tendencies. Increasing an Attribute means you have changed in a visible way: stronger, quicker, more confident, or more insightful. Attribute growth is slow and rare compared to Skill or Proficiency changes.

- ◆ By default, a character might gain +1 to an Attribute only a few times in an entire campaign.
- ◆ Attribute increases should be tied to major milestones-training arcs, transformational events, or long term practice.
- ◆ Consider setting a soft cap (for example, “most characters will not exceed +3 in an Attribute without special circumstances”).

When you raise an Attribute, revisit examples in Chapter 7. How does a character with this new rating behave differently? Let the fiction catch up: show new capabilities, confidence, or habits before you lean on the bonus mechanically.

Skill Advancement

Skills represent practiced competencies. They will change more often than Attributes. When a character consistently uses a particular approach, or spends Downtime deliberately training, it is natural that new Skills appear or existing ones deepen.

Typical Skill advancements include:

- ◆ Adding a new Skill that fits recent events (learning Forensics after a long investigation arc).
- ◆ Refining an existing Skill by expanding its examples or categories (Tinkering now clearly covers specific devices or domains).
- ◆ Linking Skills to new Attributes as the character learns alternate approaches (using Streetwise with WIL after a period of careful study, not just PRE improvisation).

Advancement does not need to be numeric to matter. Sometimes, the best Skill advancement is updating its description in your notes to match what the character has actually done-then letting that broader scope justify Edge or new fictional permissions in future scenes.

Example

Over several arcs, a PC repeatedly uses Systems & Diagnostics not just on machines but on social systems-modeling faction responses and predicting policy fallout. When an advancement trigger hits, the table agrees that this Skill now explicitly covers “social modeling” as part of its description. Future Checks in that niche may receive Edge or lower DCs, reflecting that lived experience.

Proficiency Advancement

Proficiencies (Chapter 16 and 17) represent domain expertise and narrative permission. They are a natural place to focus long term growth. Advancing a Proficiency usually means one of two things:

- ◆ Broadening scope: Your expertise applies in more places or to more situations.
- ◆ Deepening impact: Within its existing scope, your Proficiency changes the fiction more strongly.

Examples:

- ◆ Harbor Operations broadens from one city to the entire coastal region.
- ◆ Community Organizing deepens so that movements you start are harder to suppress and better at resisting backlash.
- ◆ Cold Case Records broadens to cover not just police archives but independent and underground records.

When a Proficiency advances, talk through concrete fictional changes first-new contacts, credentials, or responsibilities-then decide how often it will justify Edge, reduced DCs, or automatic success for routine tasks in its expanded area.

Milestones, Arcs, and Growth

Milestones are story beats where something about the world or the characters is clearly different than before. Use them as anchors for advancement decisions. Ask, at the end of an arc:

- ◆ What did we learn or change?
- ◆ Which abilities were central to this arc?
- ◆ Which relationships or responsibilities feel different now?

Advancement choices should follow those answers. If an arc centered on a labor dispute, Proficiencies like Union Stewardship or Community Organizing are natural candidates for growth. If an arc focused on strange artifacts, Lore & Analysis or Occult Librarianship might advance.

Example

After resolving a long running conflict between harbor workers and a shipping consortium, the group reaches a milestone. One PC chooses to broaden their Community Organizing Proficiency to explicitly cover “Port Wide Coalition Building.” Another adds a new Skill, Negotiation Structures, based on months of haggling. A third, who spent much of the arc hauling crates and repairing docks, takes a +1 to MIG, reflecting a more physically demanding life.

Downtime and Advancement

Downtime (Chapter 12) is an ideal place to handle training, research, and recovery. You can tie specific Downtime projects to future advancements:

- ◆ A training project might, when completed, unlock a new Skill or Attribute increase.
- ◆ A research project might create or broaden a Proficiency (for example, Arcane Cartography).
- ◆ A community project might convert a recurring Tag (such as Neglected District) into a more favorable one.

Represent these projects with Clocks. When a Clock tied to training or study fills, it grants the planned advancement. This keeps progress visible and lets the group decide how much attention to invest in long term growth versus immediate problems.

Gear, Resources, and Tags

Not all growth is on the character sheet. Over time, characters may:

- ◆ Secure access to better gear or facilities.
- ◆ Establish safehouses or workshops that carry Tags like Well Equipped or Secure.
- ◆ Gain ongoing support from factions, represented as beneficial Conditions or Proficiencies.

Treat these as shared advancements. When the group invests heavily in a home base, for example, note its Tags and how they affect future scenes (easier recovery, safer planning, more leverage in negotiations). As with individual growth, tie these upgrades to on screen effort and milestones rather than spontaneous appearances.

Calibrating Pacing and Difficulty

As characters advance, their chances on many Checks improve. To keep tension, you can:

- ◆ Shift from simple DC 12-14 tasks toward more DC 16-18 challenges as campaigns deepen.
- ◆ Introduce broader stakes where success has bigger consequences and Partial Successes matter more.
- ◆ Use more Clocks and Tags rather than only raising DCs—strong characters change the shape of problems, not just the numbers.

If you want a slower growth, more grounded campaign, limit Attribute increases and focus advancement on new Skills, Proficiencies, and relationships. For more heroic arcs, allow more frequent Attribute growth and treat Legendary DCs (22) as reachable when characters stack favorable Tags, Proficiencies, and preparation.

GM Guidance

Treat advancement decisions as a conversation at the table. Ask players what kinds of challenges they want their characters to face next, then steer advancement choices and campaign prep toward those interests. The goal is not to “balance” everyone identically but to make sure each character’s growth opens doors they are excited to walk through.

20



OPTIONAL AND VARIANT RULES

The core rules are written to cover many tables and genres. You can play entire campaigns using only the default procedures in this book. This chapter offers optional and variant rules—dials you can turn to tune pacing, difficulty, and tone without breaking the core structure. Treat them as a menu. You do not need all of them, and you should add them deliberately rather than all at once.

Choosing Variants for Your Table

Before adopting any variant rule, talk about:

- ◆ Desired tone: grounded, heroic, cozy, horror leaning, or something else.
- ◆ Pacing: slow burn campaigns vs fast moving series.
- ◆ Complexity appetite: how many moving parts your group enjoys tracking.

Start small: choose one or two variants that clearly support your goals. Play with them for several sessions. If they work, keep them. If not, remove or revise them with a quick conversation at the table.

Pacing and Difficulty Variants

These options change how quickly the story escalates and how hard the game feels, without changing the core 4d6 + DC structure.

Difficulty and Pacing Dials*****

Variant	What Changes	Use When
Gentle Pacing	Use more DC 12-14 tasks; reserve DC	You want relaxed, character focused
High Tension Pacing	Default to DC 14-16 for meaningful	You want sessions to feel urgent, with
Heroic Baseline	Characters begin with one “edge” more Partial Condition such as Successes.	Inspired pressure.

| Gritty Consequences | Partial Successes in combat or hazardous zones more often inflict Conditions and advance threat Clocks, even when the immediate goal is achieved. | You want danger to leave lasting marks and for recovery scenes to matter. | | Montage Resolution | For some sequences (travel, research, prep), resolve a series of Checks as a single montage, ticking multiple Clocks at once based on the final outcome tier. | You want to keep spotlight on key scenes while still honoring risks taken during longer efforts. |

Table Focused Options

These variants focus on how the group makes decisions and shares narrative responsibility, rather than on changing numbers.

- ◆ Shared Framing Rotation: Once per session, a player other than the GM frames a scene: where it takes place, who is present, and what is at stake. The GM still runs NPCs and rules, but this ensures each player's interests surface regularly.
- ◆ Player Authored Tags: At the start of each session, invite players to propose one Tag each for a location, faction, or situation they care about ("Tense Bargaining Season," "Storms on the Plateau"). The GM weaves these Tags into scenes.
- ◆ Rotating Spotlight Questions: At the end of a session, ask one player a prompt aligned with their character (for example, "What did you learn today that scares you?"). Use their answer to seed Tags, Conditions, or fronts for the next session.

Example

Example - Player Authored Tag At session start, a player adds the Tag Festival Week to the city. Throughout play, the GM introduces crowded streets, temporary stalls, and visiting dignitaries. Checks involving movement, rumor gathering, and security now frequently interact with Crowded, Festive, and Surveillance Tags the table chose together.

Resolution Variants

The core resolution uses a single Check for most actions. These variants adjust how many Checks you use and how much narrative weight each roll carries, while still relying on 4d6 and outcome tiers.

- ◆ Ask Once, Roll Once: For groups who prefer fewer rolls, resolve complex actions with a single Check and a richer outcome. Use Clocks and Tags to represent intermediate steps instead of multiple separate Checks.
- ◆ Granular Challenges: For groups who enjoy tactical detail, break big tasks into several linked Checks, each with its own Tag or Clock. Make sure each roll moves the situation forward in a clear way.
- ◆ Group Checks: When the whole group works together and the details of individual rolls are less important, have everyone roll but only count a subset (for example, the highest two results) to determine the outcome tier.
- ◆ Spotlight Checks: In key emotional scenes, roll once for the character most central to the moment and treat others' contributions as fictional positioning that may influence DC or Tags rather than separate rolls.

Safety and Calibration Tools

Safety and calibration tools help your table align on tone and boundaries. They are not optional for every group, but they are always available. You can use them alongside any other variant in this chapter.

- ◆ Lines and Veils: Early in the campaign, the group names topics they do not want in the game at all (lines) and topics that can appear only off screen or in soft focus (veils). Keep a written list and revisit it as needed.
- ◆ Check In Breaks: When a scene touches intense material, pause briefly to ask if everyone is comfortable continuing. Adjust course if anyone expresses discomfort.
- ◆ Open Door: Make it explicit that any player can step away from the table at any time for any reason, without needing to justify it in detail. If they do, the group finds a respectful way to pause or continue.
- ◆

Tone Calibration: At the end of a session, ask quick questions like “More danger or less?” or “More character drama or more problem solving?” Use answers to steer future scenes.

GM Guidance

GM Guidance - Safety Tools are not just for “heavy” campaigns. They help any table adjust tone and content over time. Treat them as part of the rules: visible, normal, and available to everyone.

Campaign Structure Variants

Finally, you can adjust how you structure campaigns and advancement together. These variants change the rhythm of arcs and how you move between them.

- ◆ Seasonal Play: Treat each 6-10 session arc as a “season” with its own fronts and central questions. Between seasons, hold an advancement and recalibration session where you adjust advancement pacing, Tags, and fronts for the next season.
- ◆ Rotating Focus: Every arc, center one or two characters’ goals while others support. Use advancement from Chapter 19 to highlight those goals, then rotate focus for the next arc.
- ◆ One Shot Mode: For short games, use Heroic Baseline, grant 1-2 advancements mid session or at the end, and keep fronts and Clocks simple. Treat Tags and Conditions as big, loud signals about what matters in a brief story.

You do not need to adopt any variant rule to enjoy the system. When you do choose them, do so in service of the stories you want to tell and the ways your table enjoys telling them. The core structure-fiction first, 4d6 Checks, Tags, Conditions, and Clocks-remains the same.

21

RUNNING SESSIONS

This chapter helps you turn rules and preparation into a session that feels alive at the table. It focuses on what you do moment to moment as a GM: framing scenes, asking questions, calling for Checks, using Tags, Conditions, and Clocks, and managing pacing so each session feels complete. It assumes a mix of readers: brand new GMs running their first game and experienced facilitators who are new to Razorweave.

You can read this chapter straight through, or you can treat each section as a tool you revisit as needed. Early sections focus on mindset and table expectations. Later sections walk through concrete procedures for opening, running, and closing sessions across genres.

GM Mindset for Razorweave

In Razorweave, the GM is not an adversary, a referee above the fiction, or a passive narrator. You are a facilitator of consequences. You present situations honestly, embody NPCs and factions, and use the rules to show how the world pushes back when characters act.

Fiction first means you start from what is true in the world, not from the rule you are eager to use. Before you ever reach for dice, ask what the environment is like, what NPCs want, and what the characters are actually doing. A dim, rain slick alley with jumpy guards and bad lighting already suggests certain DCs and Tags. The mechanics follow that picture, not the other way around.

Consequences, not punishments means that when a roll goes poorly, you are not "getting back" at the players. You are showing the natural outcome of risk in a living world. A failed Check might fill a Clock faster than expected, shift a Tag from Curious to Suspicious, or impose a Condition that makes future scenes tenser. Outcomes can be sharp and memorable without feeling arbitrary.

Shared ownership means that even though you keep the world coherent and interesting, you also share tone, safety, and direction with the table. Ask questions. Invite players to describe details and help name Tags. When someone has a strong idea about how a scene might look, fold it into the fiction rather than defending your notes.

Procedural world simulation is another valid approach. Some GMs prefer to establish clear world rules and let events unfold logically from those principles, even when it creates surprising outcomes. In this style, you track faction resources, weather patterns, or political cycles independently of player actions. NPCs pursue their goals whether or not the characters are watching. This approach works well with Razorweave's Clocks and fronts: run them as deterministic timers, and let consequences emerge from the intersection of character choices and world logic. The key is consistency—whatever your style, commit to it and communicate clearly so players understand how the world responds.

GM Guidance

Session Types and Structure

Not every session feels the same. Some are about urgent danger, others about quiet reflection or long term projects. Recognizing the type of session you are running makes it easier to choose which tools to emphasize.

Launch sessions are the first meetings of a campaign or arc. They establish tone, introduce safety tools, and give everyone an early success or discovery. You spend more time asking big questions, showing off a few striking locations, and letting players show who their characters are.

Middle sessions are the bulk of play. Fronts advance, Clocks tick, relationships deepen, and plans collide with opposition. You focus on presenting problems, showing consequences, and weaving together the threads characters care about.

Climactic sessions resolve long running Clocks and fronts. Stakes and consequences are at their highest. These sessions often feature multiple linked action or social scenes where previous decisions come due and Tags change rapidly.

Downtime or bridge sessions are quieter. Characters recover, pursue projects, and reorient between major arcs. You still use Clocks and Tags, but they track healing, research, relationships, and preparation rather than immediate danger.

You can blend these elements in a single session, but it helps to choose a primary focus. A launch session that suddenly becomes an arc finale may feel rushed; a climactic session that spends most of its time on shopping might feel deflated. Use Chapter 19 for deeper guidance on advancement pacing across these types.

Before the Session: Prep and Alignment

Good sessions begin before everyone sits down. You do not need pages of notes. You do need clarity on what you are excited to see, what is already in motion, and what players care about.

Start by briefly reviewing last time. Skim your notes, Clocks, and Tags from the previous session. Notice which fronts are ready to move, which NPCs were left in tense positions, and which personal threads players highlighted. You are looking for momentum: unresolved questions, looming dangers, or opportunities that feel too good to ignore.

Then choose a small number of anchors. Pick two or three elements you want to feature: a location, an NPC, a looming Clock, a relationship question. These anchors become the backbone of your scene framing. If everything goes sideways, you can still pivot back to one of them.

Finally, whenever you can, check expectations with your players. A quick message like “Next session I’m planning to focus on the harbor crackdown and your meeting with the magistrate—anything else you really want to hit?” gives you a chance to align your anchors with their interests before everyone sits down.

Example

Before the session, you skim notes and see an 8 segment Smuggling Crackdown Clock at 5 of 8 and a Tag on the harbor, Rumors of Sabotage. You choose three anchors: the harbor at night, a customs officer with doubts, and the Clock reaching 6 or 7 segments if the crew hesitates. That is enough to start.

Session Agenda and Rhythm

A good session has a clear starting frame, several meaningful situations, and a sense of closure even if the story continues. You do not need a script. You need a strong opening, a handful of charged situations, and a way to end on purpose.

- ◆ Strong Opening: Remind the table where you left off. Reintroduce any active Clocks, key Tags, or Conditions. Ask one or two questions that spotlight the characters (“Who has not slept well since last time?”).
- ◆ Middle Situations: Present locations, NPCs, and problems that invite decisions. Use Tags, Clocks, and Checks from earlier chapters to keep pressure moving.
- ◆ Closing Beat: End on a new question, a consequence, or a moment of reflection. Note which Clocks advanced and which Tags or Conditions will matter next time.

You can write this agenda as a short list on your GM sheet or a visible note. Players do not need to see every detail, but sharing a loose structure (“We’ll start in the archive, then see where your investigation leads”) helps them plan.

GM Guidance

You can share your session agenda with the table in simple terms: "We'll open at the harbor, deal with the customs inspection, and then see how far you get toward the embassy." This helps players make choices and gives everyone a shared sense of progress.

Safety and Table Comfort Each Session

Safety and calibration tools from Chapter 20 are not just for campaign setup. Use them inside sessions to adjust tone and subject matter.

A simple quick check in at the start of a session—"Anything off limits tonight?" or "Is there anything you especially want to lean into?"—gives players a chance to name boundaries and desires in the moment. You can adjust which fronts you emphasize or how graphically you describe events based on their answers.

During intense scenes, be ready to pause in the moment. If a description or topic lands harder than expected, stop, check in, and adjust. You can summarize events or fade to black while still applying mechanical consequences such as Conditions or Clock advances. The fiction continues to move, but in a form that feels safer.

After a heavy scene, consider giving the table a short aftercare moment. Take a break, or follow up with lighter material, small talk between characters, or a brief montage. Let players shift out of character and confirm they feel ready to continue or wrap for the night.

Example

In a horror tinged investigation, a description of a flooded cellar starts to feel too intense for one player. You pause, check in, and agree to keep future descriptions less graphic. The cellar still carries the Hazardous and Obscured Tags, and Checks remain risky, but you describe the danger in more abstract terms.

Framing and Reframing Scenes

A scene begins when you choose where the camera is and what is immediately at stake. A strong frame tells players where they are, who is present, what matters right now, and what might happen if nothing changes. You then invite the players to respond in character.

When framing a scene, lean on Tags and Clocks:

Location Tags signal environment and position: a “Dimly Lit Warehouse” suggests different risks and opportunities than a “Crowded Market” or a bridge that is literally tagged “On Thin Ice.” When you name these Tags, you tell players what kinds of actions are natural and what might go wrong.

NPC Tags show attitude and leverage. A contact tagged “Tense” and “Overconfident” will react very differently from one tagged “Desperate for Approval.” These Tags help you improvise reactions while keeping the character consistent, and they give players something concrete to push against or support.

Clocks track rising danger, limited time, or evolving opportunities: “Guards Converge,” “Storm Front Approaches,” “Negotiations Sour.” When you advance a Clock as part of a new frame, you show how the world moves even when the characters are not looking directly at a threat.

Reframe a scene whenever the situation has clearly changed. Advance or clear Tags and Clocks, move the location, or jump forward in time. Ask players what their next focus is, then frame directly into that moment instead of playing out every step along the way.

Example

The crew is sneaking through a surveillance district with a Security Sweep Clock at 3 of 6. After several tense Checks, the GM advances the Clock to 4 of 6 and reframes: "Later that night, as you pack up your gear, spotlights sweep across your hideout. The Security Sweep Clock is nearly full. What do you do?"

Calling for Checks in Sessions

Chapters 8 and 10 explain how Checks work mechanically. At the table, your job is to decide when a Check is needed and how to reflect the fiction in DCs, Tags, Conditions, and outcome tiers.

Begin by asking first, then rolling. Always ask players what they do and how before you reach for dice. If the outcome is not uncertain or not meaningful, no Check is needed. Conversation and description are often enough when characters act within their established capabilities and the stakes are low.

When a Check is appropriate, set DCs with context. Use the DC ladder from Chapter 8, but let the fiction shape where you land on that ladder. A task might be Routine in calm conditions but Hard in a burning building. Say out loud what makes it easier or harder; this keeps DCs from feeling arbitrary.

As you choose DCs, use Tags and Conditions as levers. Apply Edge, Burden, or DC shifts when Tags and Conditions clearly help or hinder the attempt. A character with the Focused Condition tackling a research problem in a Well-Stocked Archive should feel the difference compared to a distracted argument in a noisy tavern.

Finally, show outcomes in the fiction. When you know the outcome tier, describe what it looks like in the scene, not just the numbers on the dice. Success should change the situation in ways everyone can feel; Failure and Partial Success should leave marks on Tags, Conditions, or Clocks.

Example

The group tries to cross a slick rooftop in high wind. The location has Slick and Elevated Tags. The GM calls for a 4d6 Check using AGI and an appropriate Skill, DC 16 (Tough), with Burden from Slick. A Partial Success means someone slides toward the edge and starts a Falling Clock. A Failure fills several segments at once.

Using Tags, Conditions, and Clocks During Play

Tags, Conditions, and Clocks are not just record keeping tools. They are how you signal what matters right now and what might change next. During a session:

When the fiction shifts, announce new Tags. Say it out loud and write it down: "The alley is now Crowded and Tense." This tells players what they should picture and what will matter mechanically in the next few moments.

As Clocks move, point at their progress. When you advance a Clock, briefly describe what that looks like: more guards on the street, sirens in the distance, rumors spreading through the market. Let players see and feel the change instead of only hearing "the Clock ticks up."

When a character gains a Condition, treat it as a promise about how future scenes will unfold. "Shaken" means fear may resurface at a bad moment. "Backed by Authority" means doors open more easily—until that authority falters. Conditions are story hooks as much as mechanical modifiers.

GM Guidance

When you create or change a Tag, Condition, or Clock, pair the mechanical note with a short narrative description. This keeps players immersed and makes the system feel like part of the story, not a separate layer.

Pacing, Spotlight, and Breaks

Pacing is about how quickly the situation changes and how often each character gets a meaningful chance to act. You can adjust pacing by how you cut between characters, how much you summarize, and how often you escalate Clocks or introduce new Tags.

One of your simplest tools is to rotate the spotlight. After one character's action resolves, check in with someone else—"What are you doing while this happens?"—and let them move the story forward. In complex scenes, especially with split groups, this rotation keeps everyone engaged and reminds you to track multiple fronts at once.

You can also summarize transitions instead of playing out each moment in real time. Skip unimportant travel, shopping, or small talk. Jump to the next moment where something is at stake: the confrontation, the discovery, the evening's quiet conversation that might change a relationship.

Finally, use breaks intentionally. Short pauses let players process intense scenes and give you a moment to review Clocks and Tags. Consider pausing after major outcome tiers or before big choices so everyone can think about what they want to do next.

GM Guidance

If a moment feels emotionally important or tactically complex, slow the pace. Ask players what their characters are thinking. Clarify stakes and Tags. A deliberate pause often makes the next decision feel more meaningful.

Running Different Kinds of Scenes

Different scenes highlight different parts of the system. The following guidance helps you lean into the strengths of each type without losing the core 4d6 structure.

Investigation and Mystery Scenes

Investigations work best when information flows freely and Checks are about risk, not whether players can “find the plot.” Give clues generously. Use Checks to determine how quickly they find them, what extra context they gain, and what complications arise.

Set DCs lower when characters are simply uncovering basic facts. The challenge comes from what they do with the information, not whether they can spot a file on a shelf. Raise DCs when they push for leverage—trying to get a confession without causing alarm, for example—or when they are racing a rival or the clock. Use Clocks to track rival investigators, evidence disappearing, or rising suspicion, and Tags like Under Watch, Loose Files, or Community Mistrust to shape how each scene feels.

Social and Negotiation Scenes

Social scenes rely on clear goals, visible stakes, and strong NPC desires. Decide what each side wants and what they are unwilling to give up. Use Checks to resolve key turning points, not every line of dialogue.

Make the NPC's Tags and Conditions visible in play: "He seems Nervous but clearly Backed by Authority." Use Clocks to track trust, patience, or public opinion, and let Partial Successes shift Tags instead of ending negotiations outright—"Distrustful" becomes "Wary but Listening," which invites a second attempt rather than closing the door.

Action and Combat Scenes

Chapter 10 provides the core combat structure. In this chapter, focus on how action scenes fit into the rhythm of a session. Treat each action scene as a short story: establish position and intent, escalate danger, and show clear consequences.

Use environmental Tags generously—cover, hazards, high ground—and invite players to interact with them. Track enemy goals with Clocks rather than focusing only on harm: "Hostages Moved," "Reactor Overheats," "Reinforcements Arrive." When harm does land, lean on Conditions for injury and morale; a single Wounded Condition can matter more than a series of tiny numerical reductions.

Example

In a sci-fi setting, the characters try to escape a failing orbital lab. You set a Structural Collapse Clock at 0 of 8 and Tag the environment as Unstable and Low Gravity. Early Checks are about navigation and securing equipment. As the Clock advances, new Tags appear (Smoke, Sparks), and later Checks involve dodging debris and getting the airlock open before the Clock fills.

Quiet, Reflective, and Downtime Scenes

Not every moment needs high tension. Downtime scenes let characters recover, pursue projects, and explore relationships. They support advancement triggers from Chapter 19 and deepen the emotional stakes of later conflicts.

Ask open questions about feelings, goals, and doubts, then let players narrate short montages of how their characters spend time. Use Clocks and Tags to track long term projects and emotional threads rather than immediate danger-research, training, community work, repairing trust. Call for Checks only when a project faces meaningful risk or uncertainty, not for routine tasks that would reasonably succeed.

Ending Sessions Cleanly

End sessions on purpose. A clean ending helps everyone remember where you left off and gives you material for advancement and fronts.

Before you close your notebook, review open Clocks. Note which ones advanced, which are close to completion, and which new Clocks appeared. Think about what each Clock means in the fiction, and write a short phrase next to it if that helps ("security on edge," "union gaining support").

Then recap Tags and Conditions. List any persistent Tags or Conditions that will carry forward into the next session—changes to locations, factions, or characters that the group should remember. Saying them out loud anchors them in everyone's mind.

Finally, invite reflection. Ask each player for a highlight, a surprise, or a new question about the world. Use their answers to apply advancement triggers from Chapter 19 and to shape fronts and factions for future sessions. You can also adjust difficulty dials from Chapter 20 if the group wants more pressure, more room to breathe, or a shift in tone.

Example

After dismantling a smuggling ring, the group reviews their notes. The Smuggling Crackdown Clock is full, and the harbor's Tags shift from Lawless to Tense but Watched. One character takes an advancement in a relevant Skill, another gains the Edge Condition Respected by Dockworkers. The GM notes a new front: Corporate Retaliation, seeded by the group's success.

Cross-Session Continuity

Tags and Clocks are living elements that evolve across sessions, not static notes locked to a single moment. Managing continuity between sessions keeps your world coherent and rewards players for remembering details-without requiring you to track every minor element forever.

What to Keep, What to Let Go

After each session, sort your Tags and Clocks into three categories:

Active elements are directly relevant to current fronts, character goals, or immediate situations. These persist until resolved or superseded. Examples: a Security Sweep Clock still ticking at 5 of 8, an NPC's Suspicious Tag following a tense conversation, a location tagged Crime Scene while an investigation continues. Keep these visible and ready to reference.

Dormant elements matter to the world but are not immediately pressing. They may resurface when characters return to a location or when a front shifts focus. Examples: an old ally's Grateful Condition from two sessions ago, a neighborhood tagged Distrustful of Outsiders, a partially filled Rival Investigation Clock that stalled when the characters changed priorities. Archive these in your notes with a short context phrase. You do not need to remember every detail, just enough to revive them when relevant.

Resolved or expired elements have served their purpose and no longer influence the fiction. Let them go. Examples: a completed Clock, a Tag that was only relevant to a single chase scene, a temporary Condition like Distracted that has naturally faded. Clearing these keeps your notes manageable and makes room for new developments.

Simple Tracking Methods

You do not need elaborate software. A simple tracking method lets you review continuity at a glance:

GM session sheet with three columns: "Active Now," "Watch This," and "Recently Resolved." At the end of each session, sort your Tags and Clocks into these columns. At the start of the next session, review "Active Now" to remind yourself what is in motion, and glance at "Watch This" to see what might resurface.

Index cards or sticky notes work well for physical play. Write each significant Tag or Clock on its own card. Active elements stay in front of you; dormant ones go into a small box organized by location, NPC, or front. When a location or NPC returns to play, pull the relevant cards and decide whether those elements are still true.

Campaign document with dated entries captures major shifts. After each session, add a short paragraph noting which Clocks advanced, which Tags changed, and any new fronts that emerged. This creates a timeline you can skim when you need to remember how a situation developed over multiple sessions.

Carrying Forward Between Sessions

Not every Tag or Clock needs explicit narration at the start of the next session, but players should feel continuity in the fiction. When you frame your opening scene, reference one or two persistent elements that connect to last time:

"The harbor still feels tense after the crackdown-patrols are more frequent, and dock workers keep their heads down" reminds everyone that the Tense but Watched Tag is active without rereading notes.

"The magistrate's Impatient Condition means he is less willing to hear excuses this time" signals that a past interaction has consequences now.

For Clocks, mention their status when relevant: "The Storm Front Approaches Clock is at 6 of 8-you can see dark clouds massing on the horizon, and the wind is already picking up." This shows how time has passed and gives players a clear sense of urgency.

When Continuity Breaks

Sometimes you forget an important Tag or Clock, or you realize mid-session that you have been treating a resolved element as still active. When this happens, acknowledge it clearly and decide as a table how to proceed.

If forgetting the element created a better story, let it go: "I said the bridge was clear, but I forgot we tagged it Patrolled last session.

Let's say patrols shifted priorities after the riot-so the bridge is clear, and that Tag no longer applies."

If the forgotten element should have mattered, retcon gracefully: "Actually, I missed that the Rival Investigation Clock was at 7 of 8. Let me reframe: as you approach the archive, you notice someone else already inside-the rival investigator got here first. What do you do?"

Players are generally forgiving when you handle mistakes transparently. What matters is that the world feels consistent over time, not that you remember every minor detail perfectly.

GM Guidance

Before prepping each session, spend five minutes reviewing your previous session's Tags and Clocks. Ask yourself: "What changed? What is still moving? What can I safely let fade?" This brief review keeps your world consistent without requiring extensive note-taking during play.

22

RUNNING CAMPAIGNS

A campaign is a series of connected sessions that follow the same characters, themes, and pressures over time. This chapter helps you turn individual adventures into arcs, connect arcs into larger stories, and use advancement, Tags, Conditions, and Clocks to track long term change.

Campaign Shape and Length

Campaigns come in many shapes. Some are short, focused arcs. Others are sprawling journeys with multiple fronts. The system assumes campaigns are built from arcs: clusters of sessions that focus on one central problem or question.

Short arcs, typically three to five sessions long, revolve around a single front or problem. A crime spree in one district, a contested political vote, or a rescue mission behind enemy lines can all form the spine of a short arc. These arcs are ideal for testing a new setting or running a limited “season” between longer campaigns.

Medium arcs last closer to six to ten sessions. They involve several interlinked fronts, at least one major faction, and a clear turning point where the direction of the story changes. A labor dispute that escalates into city wide unrest, or a mystery that uncovers a deeper conspiracy, often fits this scale.

Long arcs stretch beyond ten sessions. They weave together multiple fronts that evolve over time, recurring NPCs who grow and change, and locations whose Tags shift as the campaign progresses. Long arcs benefit from regular pauses to reflect on what has changed and whether the table wants to continue in the same direction or pivot toward new threats and opportunities.

Decide the starting size of your first arc and be transparent with players. This helps set expectations for tone, pacing, and how quickly advancement will appear.

Setting Up a New Campaign

Before your first session, talk with your players about the kind of story you want to tell. Use questions to define tone, themes, and constraints.

Ask what kinds of problems everyone wants to face: mystery and investigation, survival against harsh conditions, political maneuvering, heists and infiltration, or a blend of several. Talk about how intense you want danger and horror to be, from gentle tension to truly harrowing stakes. Discuss which parts of the setting are most exciting—factions, technology, magic, community, or something stranger—and how often you expect to play together, and for how long each session will run.

Translate these answers into Tags and initial fronts: named threats or pressures with Clocks attached (see Chapter 25 for a deeper front framework). Prepare a few starting locations and NPCs that express those themes.

Example

Example - Campaign Setup The group chooses a campaign about workers organizing in a hazardous sky dock. The GM defines a Corporate Crackdown front with a 6 segment Clock, Tags like Surveillance and Hazardous, and key NPCs in management and the union. Early sessions revolve around protests, sabotage, and negotiations.

Advancement and Long Term Change

Chapter 19 explains how characters advance. In a campaign, advancement also reflects how the world changes. As characters grow, update location and faction Tags, retire old Clocks, and introduce new ones.

Whenever possible, tie Attribute, Skill, and Proficiency advancements to specific scenes and decisions. A new Skill might grow out of repeated investigative work in a particular archive, while a Proficiency in “Harbor Operations” emerges from hard won experience dodging inspections. Naming these connections in play makes advancement feel earned and grounded in the fiction.

Edge Conditions—such as Backed by Authority, Inspired, or Sheltered—are also signs of long term change. Use them to mark new advantages the group has earned: a patron’s protection, a community’s trust, or a personal breakthrough. When those Conditions appear, think about how they might shape upcoming scenes and fronts.

When a Clock completes, pause to ask what is permanently different in the world now. Has a faction gained or lost power? Has a neighborhood’s Tag shifted from Marginalized to Organized? Over time, your campaign map should show scars and growth: old Tags crossed out, new Tags added, fronts resolved or transformed rather than quietly forgotten.

Over time, your campaign map should show scars and growth: old Tags crossed out, new Tags added, fronts resolved or transformed.

Between Session Prep

Between sessions, keep prep light and focused. You do not need to predict everything players will do. You only need to know how the world responds to what already happened and what pressures are rising.

Start by advancing or adjusting active fronts and Clocks based on the last session’s events. If players ignored a looming threat, decide how it moves forward. If they struck a decisive blow, consider whether a Clock should tick backward, stall, or be replaced by a new, more subtle danger.

Then choose two or three likely scenes or locations for the next session. You do not need to lock them in; they are waypoints you can steer toward or away from depending on player choices. As you review your notes, update NPC Tags to reflect recent outcomes and jot down any advancement triggers you want to highlight, such as resolved personal threads or significant sacrifices.

GM Guidance

GM Guidance - Prep Questions, Not Scripts Instead of writing a detailed sequence of scenes, prepare questions the next session might answer: "Who will the union trust?" "How far will the corporation go?" Let player choices and outcomes decide how those questions resolve.

Ending Arcs and Starting New Ones

When a major front concludes or a central Clock completes, you have reached the end of an arc. Take time to mark this in the fiction and in the mechanics.

Hold a reflection scene or brief epilogue that shows the consequences of recent events. Let players see how their actions changed NPCs, neighborhoods, and factions. This is a natural moment to apply a round of advancement, especially for relationships and reputations, and to talk about what each character has learned.

As you close the arc, update or retire Tags and Conditions that no longer apply. A city that was once Occupied might now be tagged Uncertain Governance. A character who carried Haunted by the Siege for many sessions might finally resolve that Condition—or transform it into something new. Introduce new fronts or questions that point toward the next arc, even if you do not know exactly how they will unfold yet.

Ending arcs cleanly makes campaigns feel intentional rather than endless. It also gives players natural points to retire characters, adjust expectations, or shift focus to different parts of the world. Use these transitions to check in about tone, pacing, and which themes everyone wants to explore next.

23

DESIGNING SCENARIOS AND
ONE SHOTS

This chapter focuses on designing concrete scenarios: specific problems, locations, and NPCs that players will confront. It also gives guidance for one shot play, where you have limited time and want a strong, self-contained story.

Scenario Design Principles

A good scenario is built on clear stakes, interesting choices, and pressures that escalate over time. It does not require a fixed plot. It needs a situation that cannot stay the same.

Begin by defining the stakes. Ask what happens if the characters succeed, fail, or walk away. Tie those outcomes to people, places, and values the group cares about: a neighborhood's safety, a fragile peace treaty, a personal promise. When everyone understands what is on the line, even simple scenes feel charged.

Next, identify the pressures that make the situation unstable. Use Clocks and Tags to represent time limits, looming threats, and shifting opportunities. A "Festival Week" Tag might make a city more crowded and distract guards, while a "Bridge Sabotage" Clock ticks up as the villains move toward their goal.

Finally, offer multiple approaches. Design scenarios that reward different Skills and strategies: talking, sneaking, researching, fighting, or working through community networks. Players should be able to solve the problem in more than one way, and the system should support those choices through Skills, Proficiencies, Tags, Conditions, and Clocks.

From Fronts to Individual Scenarios

Most campaigns in Razorweave are driven by fronts and factions (see Chapter 25). Scenarios are how you zoom in on one moment in that larger struggle. When you design a scenario, you are asking: "What does this front look like today, in this specific place, through these characters' eyes?"

Choose one front that feels active and write a short summary of how it manifests in the immediate future. A “Corporate Crackdown” front might show up as surprise inspections at the docks, or a “Famine Looms” front might appear as ration lines and grain hoarding. That manifestation becomes the seed for your scenario; the wider front explains why events keep escalating even if the characters handle the problem in front of them.

Once you have that seed, connect it back to stakes and pressures. Decide who will be helped or harmed if nothing changes, then use Tags and Clocks to express that pressure in the scene. By keeping the scenario tightly connected to a front, you ensure that even one shot adventures still move the larger campaign forward.

Building Blocks: Locations, NPCs, and Clocks

Most scenarios are built from a small set of locations and NPCs connected by clear pressures.

Create locations with two or three Tags and a few sensory details. A canal side tavern might be tagged Smoky, Crowded, and Well Connected, with descriptions of damp wood and low music. Think about how Checks at that location will interact with those Tags— who can hide in the crowd, who will be overheard, who might slip on the wet stone.

Give each important NPC a role, a clear desire, and one or two Tags that describe their posture or leverage. A clerk who wants to keep their job at any cost feels different from a bored guard looking for an excuse to talk, even if both are technically “obstacles.”

Attach Clocks to events that move regardless of player action: a storm arriving, a ritual completing, a patrol pattern cycling. These Clocks turn background details into active pressures that shape choices and give you a way to escalate tension without inventing new threats from nowhere.

Example

Example - Scenario Building Blocks A heist scenario might include a Guarded Vault(Tags: Surveillance, Hazardous), a suspicious clerk (Tags: Nervous, Underpaid), and a Shift Change Clock that advances whenever time passes or noise is made.

Information Flow and Clue Mapping

Investigative scenarios live or die on how information moves. In this system, core clues should be discoverable without high risk Checks. Rolls are for how quickly the group connects the dots, what extra context they pick up, and what complications emerge along the way.

When you design a mystery, list the key truths that players need in order to act—who is involved, what they want, where critical scenes might happen. Then place each truth in two or three different places: a location, an NPC, a document, a rumor. If players miss one entry point, another remains available. Checks gate how costly or noisy it is to get that information, not whether the information exists at all.

Clocks and Tags help you manage failure without stalling the story. A failed research Check might advance a “Rival Investigators Close In” Clock rather than erase a clue from the world. A Partial Success might reveal the right lead but add a Watched by the Watch Tag to the neighborhood. Information continues to flow, but the world grows more complicated in response.

One Shot Structure

One shots compress the arc of setup, rising action, and resolution into a single session. To keep the pace satisfying, design with fewer locations, sharper stakes, and more visible Clocks.

Limit yourself to just a few major locations and a handful of key NPCs. You do not have time to explore an entire city; focus on the dockside warehouse, the gala ballroom, or the frontier outpost that matters tonight. Introduce the central problem quickly—ideally within the first fifteen to twenty minutes—so players can spend most of the session responding rather than orienting.

Use one or two big Clocks that everyone can see and feel advancing. “Storm Breaks Over the City,” “Inquisitors Close In,” or “The Train Reaches the Broken Bridge” give a constant sense of momentum. Be generous with information; players need enough clues and context to make strong choices quickly without feeling rushed or lost.

GM Guidance

GM Guidance - Start In Motion For one shots, open in the middle of action: on the train as it approaches the bridge, in the courtroom as testimony begins, at the threshold of the haunted facility. Ask a few clarifying questions, then let the situation unfold.

Multi Session Scenarios

Some scenarios are large enough to span several sessions without becoming full campaigns on their own. A three part heist, a long voyage with multiple ports of call, or a festival week with brewing unrest can all be treated as multi session scenarios. The key is to break them into phases, each with its own stakes and Clocks, while keeping a clear through line.

A common structure is “setup, escalation, resolution.” In the setup phase, characters gather information, build relationships, and position themselves. In the escalation phase, fronts push back, Clocks advance, and difficult choices close some paths while opening others. In the resolution phase, the biggest Clocks fill or are averted, and the world changes in a visible way. Each phase can roughly map to one or two sessions, depending on how your table likes to play.

At the end of each phase, take a moment to adjust Tags and Clocks. A neighborhood might shift from Tense to On Edge, or a faction might gain the edge Condition Emboldened Supporters. These adjustments remind everyone that the scenario is moving forward, even if the final confrontation has not yet happened.

Genre Variants for Scenarios

The same structural tools-stakes, Tags, Conditions, Clocks-behave differently across genres. When you design scenarios, let your chosen slice (cozy, fantasy, horror/mystery, modern, sci fi) shape how pressure feels and what “failure” looks like.

In a cozy scenario, Clocks might track emotional distance, community events, or looming misunderstandings rather than physical danger. A “Harvest Fair” scenario could revolve around saving a beloved tradition from bureaucratic neglect, with Tags like Warm Lanterns and Thin Budget. Failure might mean disappointment or missed connections instead of disaster.

In a fantasy or adventure scenario, physical danger is more common, but it should still be grounded in relationships and consequences. A dungeon is more than rooms with traps; it is a place tied to factions, history, and myth. Tags like Forgotten Oaths, Lingering Magic, or Unstable Passageways can inspire Checks that go beyond “open the door” or “fight the guardian.”

In horror and mystery, Clocks track creeping dread and the spread of corruption or knowledge. Failure rarely stops the story; it reveals something terrible at a worse time. Consider Tags such as Shifting Shadows, Whispers in the Walls, or Everyone Knows but No One Says. Safety tools from Chapter 20 are especially important here to keep the experience intense but consensual.

In modern or near future scenarios, institutions and media become part of the fiction. Clocks might track news cycles, public outrage, or legal consequences. A “leak the evidence” scenario could feature Tags like Always Online, Spin Machine, and Jaded Audience, with outcomes changing which communities are willing to help the characters.

In science fiction scenarios, environment and technology are front and center. Space stations, starships, and off world colonies all encourage Tags such as Life Support Strained, Unstable Gravity, or Corporate Patent Lock. Clocks might track orbital windows or system failures. Even here, keep the focus on people: who lives with these technologies, and what they are afraid of losing.

Worked Example: The Skybridge Sabotage

To see these tools in motion, imagine a short arc built around a single scenario: preventing the sabotage of a vital skybridge that connects two districts of a floating city. The front is Trade War Escalation, with a Clock that will fill if the bridge is destroyed.

You begin by defining stakes. If the bridge falls, thousands of workers lose access to jobs and resources, and one faction gains a ruthless bargaining chip. If it is saved, trade continues, but whoever is blamed for the attempt may face a backlash. Walking away is also a choice; in that case, the city's Tags might shift toward Fragmented and Desperate, and future scenarios will reflect that fracture.

You sketch three locations: the bridge itself (Tags: Exposed, Wind Swept), a nearby union hall (Organized, Overworked), and a corporate control tower (Surveilled, Restricted Access). Each location suggests natural scenes and Checks, from rallying workers to sneaking into maintenance tunnels to confronting executives.

Key NPCs include a union organizer who suspects something is wrong but lacks proof, a security chief torn between loyalty and doubt, and a saboteur who believes destroying the bridge will prevent a worse outcome. Each has a clear desire and Tags to match—perhaps Committed but Tired, By the Book, and Haunted by Past Disaster. Their conflicting goals create choices even before any dice are rolled.

You add Clocks: Explosives Planted(4 segments), Security Lockdown(6 segments), and Public Blame Misplaced(8 segments). Early investigative scenes advance the first Clock if the group lingers; public missteps might tick up the third. In action scenes, failed or Partial Success Checks can push any of these Clocks forward, ensuring that tension rises even when characters make progress.

At the table, you might run this scenario as a one shot by starting with the organizer bursting into the union hall shouting that something is wrong, or as a multi session arc by spending more time exploring the politics around the bridge. In both cases, the underlying design stays the same: clear stakes, defined pressures, locations and NPCs with Tags, and Clocks that track how close the city is to a point of no return.

Adapting Scenarios to the Table

Even well designed scenarios will shift once players engage with them. Be ready to adjust DCs, Tags, and Clocks based on creative approaches and new information.

When players come up with clever plans that skip parts of your scenario, treat that as success, not a problem. Reward them rather than forcing them back onto unused material. If a planned threat no longer feels relevant, retire its Clock and introduce a new one that reflects the current situation instead of insisting on the original script.

Invite players to define minor details—"What does the old guild hall look like now?"—to keep the world grounded in their perspectives. Their answers often suggest new Tags, NPCs, or Clocks that you can weave into future scenarios. Over time, build a library of reusable locations and situations that you can re-skin for different genres and campaigns by changing Tags, NPCs, and stakes while keeping the underlying structure.

24

NPCS, VPCS, AND ENEMIES

Non player characters (NPCs), Virtual Player Characters (VPCs), and enemies are how the world speaks and pushes back. This chapter focuses on making them vivid in the fiction and easy to run at the table without heavy stat blocks.

NPCs and VPCs Defined

NPCs are any characters controlled by the GM: allies, bystanders, antagonists, and everything in between. They provide texture, information, obstacles, and opportunities. Most NPCs appear occasionally and do not need the full mechanical detail of a player character.

VPCs (Virtual Player Characters) are GM run companions that fill out the party when there are not enough players. In solo play, a VPC might be the protagonist's closest ally. In small groups, VPCs cover missing skills or roles so the party can tackle a wider range of challenges. They use the same rules as PCs but are run in a way that keeps decision making and spotlight with the human players.

Mechanically, there is still no strict line between an NPC and a VPC. The difference is about function. VPCs are built and advanced more like PCs and travel with the group session after session. NPCs, even important ones, usually appear in fewer scenes and can be represented with lighter stats. Both use Tags, Conditions, and Clocks; VPCs simply do so from the “inside” of the party instead of the outside.

VPC Roles and Spotlight

VPCs exist to support player characters, not replace them. They carry part of the mechanical load—extra Skills, coverage of missing Proficiencies, extra bodies in dangerous scenes—while leaving core decisions and moral weight in the players’ hands. Used well, they make solo and small party games feel like full ensembles without drowning out the human voices at the table.

As you design a VPC, decide what party role they fill. In a solo game, you might pair the protagonist with one or two VPCs who cover combat support, investigation, or social presence. In a three player group, you might add a VPC medic or logistics expert so that the party can survive harder scenarios. The VPC should clearly complement the party's concept: filling gaps, not duplicating spotlight characters.

VPCs also help you manage spotlight, especially in solo play. When a lone player is unsure what to do next, a VPC can ask them a question in character or offer an imperfect plan that invites disagreement: "We could take the main road and risk the checkpoints, unless you see another way." In group play, let VPCs speak up occasionally, then look to the PCs for final choices. Treat VPCs as mirrors and sounding boards, not as engines that drive the story on their own.

VPC Arcs and Advancement

Just like PCs, VPCs change over time. Their Tags, Conditions, and relationships should evolve as fronts advance and as they succeed or fail alongside the group. You do not have to track their advancement as precisely as a full player sheet, but you should know how each major arc has affected them.

After an arc concludes, ask a few questions about each important VPC. What did they gain or lose while travelling with the party? Did any of their core beliefs shift in response to the PCs' choices? Have they earned a new edge Condition such as Backed by Authority, Trusted by the Crew, or Carrying Quiet Doubts? Updating a handful of Tags and notes is often enough to keep them feeling alive.

When a VPC's journey reaches a natural end-retirement, promotion, settling down, moving on to another mission-mark it as a major moment in the campaign. In solo and small party games, the departure of a VPC can be as emotionally significant as a PC advancement or sacrifice. Give those moments space at the table: short epilogues, good bye scenes, or opportunities to see how the VPC's life continues off screen.

Building Compelling NPCs

Start with role, desire, and a few details. Then layer on Tags and relationships.

Begin with their role. What job or social function do they fulfill? Dock quartermaster, archivist, street medic, minor noble, maintenance engineer—all of these roles say something about who the character meets, what they know, and where they spend their time. Role anchors the NPC in the setting's everyday life.

Add a clear desire: what do they want right now, in this phase of the story? Some desires are small and immediate (“finish this shift and go home”), others long term (“prove my theory about the anomalies in the telegraph lines”). Desire tells you how they will react when the PCs ask for help or push against their boundaries.

Choose one or two details that make the NPC easy to remember: a gesture, a pattern of speech, a recurring prop, a particular smell. Details should be quick to note and easy to bring back later. Over time, you can add more, but even a single consistent trait goes a long way.

Finally, assign a few Tags that describe attitude, resources, or vulnerabilities: Overworked, Soft Spoken, Connected to the Docks, Haunted by Loss. These Tags help you improvise DC shifts, Edge or Burden, and likely consequences. They also make it clear what might change if the PCs support or pressure this NPC over many sessions.

Example

Example - quick NPC Marla, Dock Quartermaster- Role: gatekeeper for cargo. Desire: avoid trouble and keep shipments moving. Details: ink stained fingers, never looks up from the ledger. Tags: Overworked, Pragmatic, Knows the Rumor Network.

Designing Strong VPCs

VPCs use the same ingredients as other NPCs-role, desire, details, Tags-but you layer them more densely. They benefit from clear trajectories: questions about where they might end up if no one intervenes, and how the PCs might alter that path.

When you create a VPC, write down two or three possible destinations for their arc. For example, a young inspector might end up as a trusted ally inside the bureaucracy, a disgraced whistleblower on the run, or a hardened enforcer who closes ranks against the PCs. You do not need to decide which outcome will occur in advance. Let Clocks, Tags, and play at the table reveal it.

Treat important VPCs as candidates for Edge and Burden anchors. When they are present in a scene, their Tags should influence DCs and dice pools. A VPC tagged Respected in the Union might grant Edge on negotiations with workers, while one tagged Burned Too Many Bridges might impose Burden in those same conversations. This mechanical weight signals their importance without requiring complex stat blocks.

Enemies and Opposition

Enemies are NPCs, creatures, or forces that actively oppose the characters. Instead of complex stat blocks, focus on what makes them dangerous and how they change the fiction.

Give each enemy a clear threat concept-a short phrase that captures why they matter: “relentless hunter,” “arsonist cell,” “ancient machine,” “quiet propagandist.” This concept guides everything else: how they move, what they target, what they ignore.

From that concept, define a few moves or typical actions that express the threat in play. A relentless hunter appears where characters feel safe; an arsonist cell strikes where security is thin and escape routes are narrow; an ancient machine reshapes the environment in ways that ignore political boundaries. You do not need a long list-two or three moves that you can deploy flexibly are enough.

Attach Tags and Clocks to their presence so the threat interacts cleanly with the rest of the system. “Pinned Down,” “Reinforcements Arrive,” and “Override Sequence Active” are all examples of how an enemy’s progress can be tracked and felt. When you advance an enemy Clock, describe what happens in the fiction; when a Tag changes, show what new opportunities or dangers appear.

Example

Example - Enemy with Clocks A masked arsonist group operates in the industrial district. Tags: Fanatical, Mobile. Moves: strike where security is thin, spread fear through rumors. Clocks: Fires Escalate(4 segment) and Public Blames the Wrong People(6 segment).

Running NPCs in Checks and Combat

When NPCs and enemies act, use the same resolution structure as you do for characters. Checks, Tags, Conditions, and Clocks keep everyone on the same footing.

Use NPC Tags to adjust DCs or apply Edge and Burden when they attempt actions. A veteran duelist with Tags like Calm Under Fire and Reads Footwork should feel harder to deceive or disarm than a bored guard tagged Distracted. The same framework from Chapter 8 applies: Tags describe position and effect, which in turn shape DCs and dice.

Use Conditions to mark injury, fear, leverage, or doubt instead of tracking detailed hit points or morale scores. An enemy who is Wounded, Shaken, or Cornered behaves differently from one who is fresh and confident. For VPCs, Conditions can track emotional or political states (“On Thin Ice with the Council,” “Carrying Survivors’ Guilt”) that matter as much as physical harm.

Use Clocks to represent an enemy’s-or a VPC’s-progress toward a goal rather than counting down every individual blow or argument. A “Duel Slips Out of Control” Clock can fill as tempers flare, regardless of who is technically “winning” each exchange. A “Council Sways to Our Side” Clock might track a VPC’s political campaign in the

background while the PCs pursue other fronts.

GM Guidance

GM Guidance - Show What Enemies Want Enemies are more interesting when their goals are visible. Let players see what might happen if they do nothing: the ritual nearing completion, the deal closing, the escape route being cut off. Use Clocks and Tags to keep those goals in view.

25

FACTIONS, FRONTS, AND
WORLD PRESSURE

Factions and fronts are how you model large scale forces in the world: organizations, movements, disasters, conspiracies, and other pressures that evolve over time. This chapter shows how to turn them into clear, actionable tools for play.

Defining Facts

A faction is any organized group with shared goals. Factions can be formal (guilds, corporations, orders) or informal (neighborhood networks, underground movements, families).

Start by defining the faction's name and identity. What are they called, and how do they present themselves to the world? A workers' council, a scientific enclave, an undercity syndicate, or a temple order all communicate tone and values through their names, symbols, and public rituals. Identity tells you how people talk about the faction and how its members recognize one another.

Clarify the faction's goals: what they are trying to achieve in the short and long term. A neighborhood mutual aid group might want to keep families fed this month and eventually push back against predatory landlords. A corporate research division might want to hit quarterly milestones while secretly pursuing a disruptive breakthrough. Goals give you levers to pull when the PCs interact with the faction: what they will bargain for, what they will sacrifice, and what they will never willingly give up.

List the faction's resources: people, tools, territory, secrets, and reputation. Resources explain why the faction matters. A group with few members but crucial information can be as powerful in play as a large guild with warehouses and security forces. Finally, assign two to four Tags that capture reputation, methods, and vulnerabilities: Respected but Overstretched, Paranoid, Brutal Efficiency, Old Obligations. These Tags help you improvise DC adjustments, Edge or Burden, and likely reactions when the PCs put pressure on the faction or ask for help.

Faction Relationships and Maps

Factions rarely exist in isolation. The tensions between them, and their ties to the PCs, are what turn fronts into living pressure rather than static background. It often helps to sketch a simple relationship map that shows who cooperates with whom, who is at odds, and who uses whom.

Draw the main factions as names or symbols on a page and connect them with labeled lines: alliances, rivalries, grudges, debts. Add a few Tags to the relationships themselves-Fraying Alliance, Uneasy Truce, Secret Patronage. These notes remind you that not all conflicts are open and that a single change in the PCs' favor can ripple across several fronts at once.

As the campaign progresses, update this map. Cross out relationships that have ended. Add new lines when factions discover common cause or fresh grievances. When you are unsure how a faction might react to a development, glance at the map and ask which relationships are most threatened or most likely to shift.

Fronts as Moving Threats

A front is a bundle of related threats that move toward one or more grim outcomes. Each front is built from Clocks, Tags, and key NPCs or locations. As sessions pass, fronts advance and the world changes.

To create a front, write a short statement of what will happen if no one intervenes. This is the grim trajectory: "The docks fall under full corporate control," "The cult completes its summoning," "The river trade collapses and famine follows." This statement is not a promise of what must happen; it is a warning about what will happen if the PCs and their allies do nothing.

Next, create one to three Clocks that describe phases of that outcome. Each Clock should have a clear name and a number of segments that matches its scope: small shifts might use four segments, while slow burn crises might stretch to eight. Attach Tags that show how the front feels in play-Tightening Security, Rising Tension, Fragile Peace, Rumors of War. Finally, list a few NPCs, locations, or factions most closely tied to the front so you know

where it is most visible in scenes.

Example

Example - Front The River Trade War- If unchecked, rival shipping houses will plunge the region into blockade and sabotage. Clocks: Skirmishes Spread(4 segment), Harbors Militarize(6 segment), Civilian Trade Collapses(8 segment). Tags: Rumors of War, Shortages, Strained Diplomacy.

World Pressure and Player Agency

Fronts and factions create pressure, but players still decide how and whether to respond. Use fronts to present problems, not to force outcomes.

Advance fronts when time passes, when Clocks complete, or when characters ignore clear signs that a situation is getting worse. If the group spends several sessions focusing on one crisis, ask what is happening elsewhere and tick up a different Clock to show neglected pressures. Adjust fronts when players make bold moves, win allies, or change public opinion; a decisive victory might stall a Clock, split a front in two, or shift its Tags in the PCs' favor.

Retire fronts that have been fully resolved or transformed by play. When a front ends, replace it with one or more new fronts that reflect the consequences of that resolution. The end of a trade war might lead to a front about rebuilding trust, or to a power vacuum that invites new factions into the region. This cycle of rising and falling pressure keeps the world feeling alive and responsive.

When you advance a front, show it in the fiction: new Tags on locations, changed NPC attitudes, or visible shortages and unrest.

GM Guidance

GM Guidance - Keep Fronts on the Table Share the existence of major fronts with the players, even if some details remain hidden. This helps them choose where to focus and makes the world feel responsive to their actions.

Using Fronts in Sessions

Fronts do their best work when they are visible in everyday scenes, not just when a Clock fills. When you frame a session (see Chapter 21), glance at your list of fronts and ask which ones are most likely to show up tonight. Then look for ways to express them through Tags, NPC behavior, and opportunities or obstacles the PCs encounter.

During play, advance a front's Clock when an event clearly moves it forward-whether or not the PCs were directly involved. A failed negotiation might tick up Harbors Militarize, while a successful rally could slow it down or add a hopeful Tag to the docks. When a front remains quiet for several sessions, decide whether it is truly dormant or whether it is building toward a sharper pivot you can reveal in a future scene.

Fronts, VPCs, and the Party

Virtual Player Characters (VPCs) from Chapter 24 are natural hooks into your fronts. A VPC might belong to a faction, carry a Tag associated with a front, or have a personal Clock that mirrors a larger pressure. When the group advances or resolves a front, consider how their VPC companions feel it: changes in their home neighborhood, promotions or demotions, new Conditions that reflect stress or hope.

In solo or small party play, you can use VPC tied fronts to keep the world grounded around the protagonist. A VPC whose family is caught in a housing dispute, or whose union is under threat, creates constant reasons for the main character to care about broader pressures. When the front changes, the VPC's Tags and behavior change too, reminding the player that their actions shape not just the map but the people travelling beside them.

26

ALTERNATIVE PLAY

While the game is written with a Game Master in mind, you can also play without a single GM or with shared authority. You can even combine shared authority with solo or small party play by leaning on Virtual Player Characters (VPCs) from Chapter 24. This chapter offers principles and procedures for those modes while keeping the core 4d6 system, Tags, Conditions, and Clocks intact.

Principles of Shared Authority

In GMless or shared authority play, the table distributes responsibilities that a single GM would normally carry. To keep the game coherent and fair, begin by clarifying roles. Decide who tracks Clocks, who keeps an eye on rules, and who speaks for which factions or major NPCs. These assignments can rotate, but everyone should know who is doing what in the current session.

Use open, shared notes for Tags, fronts, and outstanding questions. A simple shared document or visible sheet on the table helps everyone remember which fronts are active, which Clocks are close to completion, and what loose ends still matter. Favor transparency: make DCs, Clocks, and major fronts visible to everyone, so the group can judge risks and consequences together.

Rotating Facilitator

One simple form of shared authority is the rotating facilitator. Each session, one player takes on a light GM role: framing scenes, presenting problems, and helping adjudicate rules. Other players still contribute ideas and may take over certain responsibilities.

Rotate the facilitator role regularly—every session or every arc—so no one person carries the job all the time. Let the facilitator focus on big picture framing and pacing while others handle certain NPCs or factions. In these modes, safety tools and calibration from Chapter 20 become even more important, because everyone shares some part of the authority that a single GM would normally hold.

Example

Example - Rotating Facilitator In a political drama campaign, each player takes a turn framing sessions about their character's home faction. When it is your turn, you introduce new complications for your faction and ask questions about how others respond, but everyone shares in describing outcomes and consequences.

GMless Procedures

Fully GMless play works best when procedures are explicit. Agree on how you will introduce threats, decide outcomes, and keep the fiction coherent.

Many groups like to use a simple turn structure for scene framing. On your turn, you frame a scene, invite others to act, and help adjudicate any Checks that arise. When a question about the world comes up and no one has a strong opinion, discuss briefly and then choose the most interesting answer that still respects established Tags and fronts. If you are still unsure, or you want to surprise yourselves, use oracles or random tables (such as “Yes/No/Complication” prompts) to resolve uncertain world questions.

GM Guidance

Shared Authority Note Even without a GM, someone should still be responsible for tracking Clocks, Tags, and Conditions. You can rotate this role or assign it to the player most excited about rules support.

Solo Play with VPC Companions

Solo play focuses on a single protagonist and your own choices as both player and facilitator. VPCs make solo play feel like a full party game by adding mechanical support and fictional companions without taking control away from you. This section provides a framework for using the core system to tell solo stories with VPCs while preserving uncertainty and surprise.

Solo Play Principles

Solo play emphasizes introspection, discovery, and personal pacing. You decide when to zoom in on a moment and when to jump ahead. The same fiction first structure applies: establish the situation and what your character wants, ask whether the outcome is uncertain and meaningful, and call for Checks only when both are true. VPCs travel alongside you, but they react to your choices rather than driving the story themselves.

When building a solo party, create one or two VPCs that clearly cover gaps in your own character's Skills and Proficiencies. If you are playing a social investigator, you might add a physically capable VPC and a technical expert. Keep their concepts simple and their motivations aligned with yours so that you are never debating against yourself about what the group "should" do.

Using Oracles and Prompts

Without another person at the table, you can use oracles, random tables, or written prompts to stand in for a GM. These tools answer questions about how the world responds to your actions and those of your VPC companions. When you do not know how an NPC reacts or whether a rumor is true, roll on a simple "Yes / No / Complication" oracle and interpret the result in light of existing Tags and Clocks.

You can also create short tables for genre specific twists-mysterious clues, faction moves, strange weather, uncanny phenomena. Clocks are especially useful in solo play for tracking longer mysteries or threats that evolve regardless of your immediate focus. When you spend several scenes on personal matters or travel, advance a relevant Clock to show how the wider world is changing in your

absence.

Example

Example - Solo Oracle You wonder if the abandoned station still has power. You decide the base chance is “unlikely.” You roll on a small oracle table and get “Yes, but...”. The lights flicker on (Tag: Unstable Power), but a Security Systems Wake Clock also starts at 1 of 6. Your VPC companion, a cautious engineer, urges you to move quickly before systems cycle fully online.

Journaling and Record Keeping

Keeping a record of solo play makes it easier to track Tags, Conditions, and Clocks over many sessions. You can use the Session Log and Advancement Tracker sheets from Chapter 28 or your own journal. Briefly note each scene, any Checks that mattered, and how VPCs contributed so that their growth feels consistent.

Between sessions, update Clocks, fronts, and important Tags as they change. Mark down questions you want to explore next time: unresolved clues, VPC worries, or threads you are curious about. Solo play benefits from this written memory, especially when you are juggling both protagonist and facilitator roles.

Bringing Solo Stories to the Table

Solo play can exist alongside group play. You might explore a character’s side journeys alone, travelling with one or two VPCs, and then rejoin a group campaign later. When you do, share a summary of solo events with the group and the GM, and translate key outcomes into Tags, Conditions, and advancement choices that everyone can see.

Work with the GM and the rest of the table to integrate any new fronts, NPCs, or VPC developments that emerged from solo sessions. This keeps the whole campaign consistent while honoring the personal stories you told on your own, and it lets your VPC companions feel like part of the shared world instead of isolated side characters.



P A R T
IV

Reference Sheets, Glossary, and Index

27

SHEETS AND PLAY AIDS

Sheets and play aids translate the structure of this rulebook into tools you can put on the table. They help players track characters, GMs plan sessions and campaigns, and the whole group keep important references close at hand. You can print them, copy them into a digital notebook, or adapt them to your preferred tools.

Player-Facing Sheets

Player-facing sheets focus on characters and their immediate perspective. At minimum, most campaigns benefit from three, which are provided as templates in source/codex/sheets/:

- ◆ Core Character Sheet (core_rulebook_character_sheet.md): Tracks identity, Attributes (MIG, AGI, PRE, RSN), Skills, Proficiencies, Tags, Conditions, personal Clocks, gear, and key relationships. It leaves space for narrative details (goals, secrets, threads) alongside mechanics.
- ◆ Advancement & Threads Tracker (core_rulebook_advancement_tracker.md): A place to note personal goals, unresolved hooks, Downtime projects, and advancement choices from Chapter 19.
- ◆ Session Log (core_rulebook_session_log.md): A one-page log to track current objectives, important clues, memorable moments, and changing Tags, Conditions, and Clocks.

When you build or adapt a character sheet, favor clarity over density. Group related information together: core stats near Skills, Proficiencies near background and role, current Conditions near Tags and Clocks. Consider a dedicated area for "fiction first" notes—things your character believes, fears, or wants.

GM-Facing Sheets

GM sheets support prep and improvisation. They help you track fronts, factions, NPCs, and open questions without rewriting the entire rulebook each time. Common GM-facing sheets in source/codex/sheets/ include:

- ◆ GM Session Prep Worksheet
(core_rulebook_gm_session_prep.md): A page for today's session: key questions, opening situation, important NPCs, Clocks you expect to see, and Tags that define major locations or scenes.
- ◆ Campaign & Fronts Sheet
(core_rulebook_campaign_fronts_sheet.md): Tracks long-term threats, factions, fronts, and the Clocks that represent their plans. It pairs naturally with Tags such as Under Pressure, In Decline, or On the Rise.
- ◆ NPC and VPC Profiles (core_rulebook_npc_vpc_profile.md): Short templates for recurring characters, including their role, core motivation, Tags (for example, Charming, Overworked, Ruthless), and any Conditions or Clocks tied to them.
- ◆ Mystery or Scenario Frameworks: Grids or mind-maps for investigations, intrigue, or multi-step scenarios showing connections between locations, clues, and factions.

Use GM sheets as living documents. Cross out, annotate, and redraw as the campaign changes. If a front or faction no longer matters, retire its sheet and create a new one for the pressures that now define your world.

Mechanical Reference Sheets

Mechanical reference sheets condense rules you use frequently into quick-look tables. They should never replace the chapter text, but they can reduce page-flipping during intense scenes. Useful references in source/codex/sheets/ include:

- ◆ DC Ladder & Outcome Tiers
(core_rulebook_reference_dc_tiers.md): A table showing DC 12-22 with examples, plus the margin bands for Critical, Full, Partial, Failure, and Critical Failure.
- ◆ Tags & Conditions Quick Lookup
(core_rulebook_reference_tags_conditions.md): A subset of the most common entries from Chapter 18 for fast use.
- ◆ Clock Templates
(core_rulebook_reference_clocks_templates.md): Blank 4/6/8 segment Clocks you can photocopy or redraw as needed.

Many groups like to keep these references at the center of the table or on a shared digital board so that everyone can see how consequences and odds are being judged.

Using and Adapting Existing Sheets

If you are working from earlier editions or companion books, you may already have a library of sheets: character templates, GM prep forms, encounter planners, and more. Most of them can be adapted to this Core Rulebook with minimal changes:

- ◆ Replace older stat or dice assumptions with the 4d6 system, DC ladder, and outcome tiers described in Part I.
- ◆ Update any references to superseded mechanics (for example, outdated stress or tier systems) to use Tags, Conditions, and Clocks instead.
- ◆ Align Skill and Proficiency fields with the open lists and examples in Chapters 14-17.

When in doubt, treat existing sheets as prototypes. Copy the layout you like, then relabel sections so that they match the language and structure of this book.

Building Your Own Sheets

The best sheets are the ones you actually use. As your campaign develops, you may discover that you need a new kind of tracker—a heist staging sheet, a travel log, a faction treaty tracker. When you design a new sheet:

- ◆ Start from the questions you need to answer at the table ("Who is angry with us?", "What do we owe?").
- ◆ Give each sheet a clear purpose and a small number of sections.
- ◆ Include space for Tags, Conditions, and Clocks where they naturally apply.
- ◆ Label any connections to chapters (for example, "See Chapter 9 for Tag guidance").

You do not need to formalize every idea into a sheet. A simple half-page sketch can carry an arc of play. When a sheet keeps getting reused or recopied, consider turning it into a clean template for your group.

Example

One group creates a "campaign dashboard" sheet with three columns: Fronts (and their Clocks), Factions (and their current Tags), and Characters (with one or two key Conditions or edges each). At the start of every session, they update this sheet together. It becomes a shared map of pressures and opportunities that keeps everyone oriented without needing to reread every note.

Printable Sheet Layouts

The following layouts mirror the sheet templates in source/codex/ sheets/ so you can print them directly from this rulebook. You can also treat them as visual references when building digital versions.

27.1 CHARACTER SHEET

Use this sheet with the Core Rulebook. It assumes the MIG / AGI / PRE / RSN Attribute model, open Skill and Proficiency lists, and Tags, Conditions, and Clocks as core tools.

Character Identity

Name: _____

Pronouns: _____

Genre / Slice: [] Cozy [] Fantasy [] Horror/Mystery [] Modern [] Sci Fi [] Other:

Concept (one sentence): _____

Archetype / Role: _____

Attributes

Attribute	Rating	Notes (how this shows up in fiction)
MIG (Might)	—	
AGI (Agility)	—	
PRE (Presence)	—	
RSN (Reason)	—	

Suggested starting array: +2 / +1 / +1 / 0 in some order (see Character Creation).

Skills

List the Skills that define what your character reliably does under pressure. Use 3-6 to start.

27.1 Character Sheet (continued)

#	Skill Name	Usual Categories / Approaches	Notes (examples, Tags, Proficiencies)
1		[] Exploration [] Social [] Technical [] Conflict [] Other:	
2		[] Exploration [] Social [] Technical [] Conflict [] Other:	
3		[] Exploration [] Social [] Technical [] Conflict [] Other:	
4		[] Exploration [] Social [] Technical [] Conflict [] Other:	
5		[] Exploration [] Social [] Technical [] Conflict [] Other:	
6		[] Exploration [] Social [] Technical [] Conflict [] Other:	

Proficiencies

Proficiencies represent domains where your character's expertise changes how the GM interprets the fiction.

#	Proficiency	Type (Domain / Tool / Organization / Role)	Notes (scope, default benefits)
1		[] Domain [] Tool [] Organization [] Role	
2		[] Domain [] Tool [] Organization [] Role	
3		[] Domain [] Tool [] Organization [] Role	
4		[] Domain [] Tool [] Organization [] Role	

Tags, Conditions, and Clocks

Character Tags (descriptive qualities others notice):

-
-
-

Current Conditions (check and describe when active):

27.1 Character Sheet (continued)

- [] Exhausted -
- [] Bleeding -
- [] Frightened -
- [] Other:

Personal Clocks (goals, threats, or long term projects):

- Clock: Segments: [] [] [] [] [] [] [] Notes:
- Clock: Segments: [] [] [] [] [] [] [] [] Notes:

Gear and Resources

Signature Item: _____

Gear:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

Resources / Favors / Debt:

-
-

Relationships

Name	Relationship / Role	Tags / Notes

Personal Threads and Advancement

Current Goals (short and long term):

27.1 Character Sheet (continued)

-
-

Future Advancements I'm aiming for (see Chapter 19):

- Attribute / Skill / Proficiency:
- Relationship / Reputation:

Notes on Change Over Time:

Sheet version: 1.0.0 - Designed for the Core Rulebook (4d6 system, MIG/AGI/PRE/RSN).

27.2 ADVANCEMENT TRACKER

Use this sheet alongside your character sheet to track goals, milestones, and advancement choices described in Chapter 19.

Campaign Overview

Campaign Name: _____

Current Arc / Season: _____

Theme / Focus of this Arc: _____

Personal Goals & Threads

Thread / Question	Why It Matters	Status / Notes
		[] Open [] In Progress [] Resolved
		[] Open [] In Progress [] Resolved
		[] Open [] In Progress [] Resolved

Use these entries to track mysteries, relationships, and personal projects that you and the GM treat as milestones.

Advancement Triggers

Session Based Advancement Notes:

- Session - Advancement granted? [] Yes [] No - Notes:
- Session - Advancement granted? [] Yes [] No - Notes:

Milestone Advancement:

Milestone	What Changed	Advancement Taken

Downtime Projects (use Clocks):

27.2 Advancement Tracker (continued)

Project	Clock (Segments)	Advancement on Completion
	[] [] [] [] [] [] [] [] []	
	[] [] [] [] [] [] [] [] []	

Advancement Menu Log

When you take an advancement (see Chapter 19), record it here.

#	Date / Session	Type (Attr / Skill / Prof / Rel / Edge)	Details
1		[] Attr [] Skill [] Prof [] Rel [] Edge	
2		[] Attr [] Skill [] Prof [] Rel [] Edge	
3		[] Attr [] Skill [] Prof [] Rel [] Edge	
4		[] Attr [] Skill [] Prof [] Rel [] Edge	

Notes on Growth

How has your character changed? What new stories does this suggest?

Sheet version: 1.0.0 - Designed for the Core Rulebook advancement model.

27.3 SESSION LOG

Use one copy of this sheet per session or short arc to keep track of what happened and which Tags, Conditions, and Clocks are in play.

Session Overview

Date: _____

Episode / Session Title: _____

Cast Present: _____

Current Objectives

Primary objective:

-
-
-

Important Tags, Conditions, and Clocks

Scene / Location Tags:

- (e.g., Dim Light, Crowded, Hazardous)
-

Active Conditions (PCs and key NPCs):

- Character: - Conditions:
- Character: - Conditions:

Visible Clocks:

Clock Name	Segments	Current Fill	Notes
	[] [] [] [] [] [] [] []	/	
	[] [] [] [] [] [] [] []	/	

Key Events & Discoveries

27.3 Session Log (continued)

Use this space to note major beats, clues, and changes to relationships, Tags, and fronts.

Memorable Moments

Lines you want to remember, dramatic turns, or character revelations:

Sheet version: 1.0.0 - Designed for at table use with the Core Rulebook.

27.4 GM SESSION PREP

Use this sheet to prepare a single session. It helps you focus on questions, fronts, Tags, and Clocks instead of scripts.

Session Frame

Session Title: _____

Last Time... (1-3 bullets):

-
-

Today's Focus / Questions:

- ?
- ?

Scenes & Situations

List 2-4 likely scenes. For each, note location, key NPCs, Tags, and Clocks that might appear.

Scene	Location & Tags	NPCs / Factions	Clocks / Stakes
1	(Tags:)		
2	(Tags:)		
3	(Tags:)		

Fronts, Factions, and Pressures

Which fronts or factions will move this session? How?

Front / Faction	Current Tag(s)	Clock (if any)	What might advance it?
		[] [] [] [] [] [] [] []	
		[] [] [] [] [] [] [] []	

Mechanical Notes

Likely DCs & Risks:

27.4 Gm Session Prep (continued)

- Easy (12):
- Routine (14):
- Tough (16):
- Hard / Heroic (18-20+):

Rules / Options to Feature (Tags, Conditions, Clocks, specific chapter tools):

-

After Session Notes

Use this block as a debrief during or after play.

What changed? (fronts, Tags, relationships):

New Questions / Threads:

-

Sheet version: 1.0.0 - Designed for Core Rulebook session prep.

27.5 CAMPAIGN FRONTS SHEET

Track long term threats, factions, and fronts across the campaign.

Campaign Summary

Campaign Name: _____

Pitch (2-3 sentences):

Fronts

Front Name	Description	Clock (Segments)	Tags / Notes
		[] [] [] [] [] [] []	
		[] [] [] [] [] [] []	

Factions

Faction	Role / Domain	Attitude to PCs	Tags
		[] Allied [] Neutral [] Hostile	
		[] Allied [] Neutral [] Hostile	

Open Questions

Questions you want to answer in play:

-

-

Sheet version: 1.0.0 - Designed for Core Rulebook campaign tracking.

27.6 NPC VPC PROFILE

Use this sheet for recurring NPCs and VPCs (major antagonists or power figures).

Identity

Name: _____

Role / Position: _____

Faction / Allegiance: _____

Short Concept: _____

Tags, Conditions, and Drives

Tags (how they come across):

- (e.g., Charming, Ruthless, Overworked)

-

Current Conditions:

- (e.g., Compromised Reputation, Obsessed, On Watchlist)

Drives / Goals:

-

Tools and Leverage

Resources (what they can bring to bear):

-

Secrets / Leverage (what others might use against them):

-

Position in the Story

How they help or hinder PCs:

Clocks tied to this NPC:

27.6 Npc Vpc Profile (continued)

--[][][]][[]][[]][[]]

Sheet version: 1.0.0 - Designed for Core Rulebook NPC/VPC tracking.

27.7 REFERENCE TAGS CONDITIONS

This sheet lists a subset of common Tags and Conditions. For full details, see Chapter 18 and the Glossary.

Common Tags

Tag	Type	Typical Effects (summary)
Dim Light	Environmental	Adv Stealth; Disadv detailed Perception & ranged
Obscured	Environmental	Disadv sight based Perception; helps ambush/escape
Slick	Environmental	Disadv fast movement; falls and mishaps more likely
Cramped	Environmental	Disadv large/sweeping actions; helps grapples
Elevated	Environmental	Adv many ranged attacks; harder to reach
Solid Cover	Environmental	Reliable protection from some angles
Fragile Cover	Environmental	Protection that may break on Partial/Failure
Unstable	Environmental	Actions risk advancing harm/Collapse Clocks
Crowded	Situational	Hard to move fast; easier to blend or hide
Alert	Situational	Higher Stealth/DCs; Failures escalate quickly
Hazardous	Situational	Partials/Failures may inflict Conditions
Surveillance	Situational	Covert actions leave traces; future fallout
Tense	Atmospheric	Social DCs higher; calm approaches can clear it
Festive	Atmospheric	Easier mingling; hard to be solemn or secretive

Common Conditions

27.7 Reference Tags Conditions (continued)

Condition	Type	Typical Effects (summary)
Exhausted	Physical	Disadv demanding physical actions; rest clears
Bleeding	Physical	Time pressure; needs treatment or Clock
Restrained	Physical	Movement limited; must break free or be helped
Poisoned	Physical	Disadv various actions; ongoing risk
Marked	Physical	Foes get Adv vs you until you shake the mark
Frightened	Mental	Disadv while threat present; rally/escape clears
Suppressed	Mental	Disadv next bold/assertive action; clears after
Distracted	Mental	Disadv careful/complex tasks; remove the source
Compromised Reputation	Social	Social DCs higher with affected group
Obsessed	Mental	Adv on pursuit; Disadv if asked to walk away

Sheet version: 1.0.0.

27.8 REFERENCE CLOCKS TEMPLATES

Use these templates to track progress and pressure. Copy or redraw them on paper or a digital whiteboard.

4 Segment Clock

Name: _____

Segments: [] [] [] []

Use for short tasks, immediate threats, or simple fronts.

6 Segment Clock

Name: _____

Segments: [] [] [] [] [] []

Use for standard progress and threats that should take several beats to resolve.

8 Segment Clock

Name: _____

Segments: [] [] [] [] [] [] [] []

Use for major arcs, long investigations, or slow burn fronts.

Tips

- Write Clocks where everyone can see them.
- Label what happens when the Clock fills.
- Decide which Checks tick progress and which tick pressure.

Sheet version: 1.0.0.

27.9 REFERENCE DC TIERS

Use this sheet as a quick reference for Checks. For details and examples, see Chapters 8 and related sections.

DC Ladder (4d6 System)

DC	Label	Example Difficulty
12	Easy	Simple tasks under some pressure
14	Routine	Standard challenges for competent characters
16	Tough	Hard tasks, opposition, or tricky circumstances
18	Hard	Demanding efforts, dangerous opposition, tight time
20	Heroic	Dramatic stunts, major risks, or stacked opposition
22	Legendary	Extraordinary feats, mythic challenges, stacked disadvantages

Outcome Tiers by Margin

Margin = (Roll Total - DC)

Margin Range	Tier	Notes
$\geq +5$	Critical Success	Best case result, extra benefit
≥ 0	Full Success	Clear success, no major cost
-1 to -2	Partial Success	Success with cost, complication, or limit
≤ -3	Failure	No success; situation changes or worsens
≤ -7 or all 1s	Critical Failure	Worst plausible result, big complications

Edge and Burden

- Edge (+1 step): Roll 5d6, keep the best 4.
- Edge (+2 steps): Roll 6d6, keep the best 4.
- Burden (-1 step): Roll 5d6, keep the worst 4.
- Burden (-2 steps): Roll 6d6, keep the worst 4.

Use Edge/Burden when Tags, Conditions, Proficiencies, or preparation meaningfully shift the odds.

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28

GLOSSARY

Comprehensive definitions of game terms and concepts

Edge Roll extra dice and keep best 4. Comes in two levels: +1 Edge (roll 5d6, keep best 4) or +2 Edge (roll 6d6, keep best 4). Granted by favorable positioning, gear, assistance, or special abilities. Cannot stack beyond ±2 levels.

Defined in: Chapter 8: Edge and Burden

Clock Progress tracker with segments. Tick forward on successes (Progress Clock) or escalate pressure (Pressure Clock).

Defined in: Chapter 8: Checks and Clocks

Condition Character status effect (Exhausted, Bleeding, Restrained). Impose mechanical penalties or narrative limits.

Defined in: Chapter 9: Tags vs. Conditions

Critical Failure Margin <=-7 or all 1s rolled. Disaster occurs; worst possible result with major complication.

Defined in: Chapter 8: Outcome Tiers

Critical Success Margin >=+5. Succeed spectacularly with extra benefit or bonus effect.

Defined in: Chapter 8: Outcome Tiers

Difficulty Class (DC) Target number for checks. Ranges from DC 12 (Easy) to DC 22 (Legendary). Standard ladder: 12/14/16/18/20/22.

Defined in: Chapter 8: Setting DCs

Burden Roll extra dice and keep worst 4. Comes in two levels: -1 Burden (roll 5d6, keep worst 4) or -2 Burden (roll 6d6, keep worst 4). Imposed by poor positioning, conditions, obstacles, or penalties. Cannot stack beyond ±2 levels.

Defined in: Chapter 8: Edge and Burden

Failure Margin <=-3. Goal not achieved; situation escalates or new complication emerges.

Defined in: Chapter 8: Outcome Tiers

Full Success Margin >=0. Achieve goal cleanly; tick progress, gain position.

Defined in: Chapter 8: Outcome Tiers

Margin Difference between roll total and DC (Roll - DC). Determines outcome tier.

Defined in: Chapter 8: Calculating Margin

Partial Success Margin -1 to -2. Achieve goal with cost, complication, or reduced effect.

Defined in: Chapter 8: Outcome Tiers

Proficiency Narrative permission and mechanical edge in specific area.

Defined in: Chapter 16: What Proficiencies Represent

Skill Trained competency; grants Edge or bonuses to relevant checks.

Defined in: Chapter 14: What Skills Represent

Tag Environmental or situational descriptor (Dim Light, Slick, Cover). Affects what you can do in a space.

Defined in: Chapter 9: Tags vs. Conditions

Agility (AGI) Speed, precision, reflexes. Used for dodging, climbing, shooting.

Defined in: Chapter 6: Four Attributes

Might (MIG) Physical power, endurance, resilience. Used for lifting, smashing, enduring.

Defined in: Chapter 6: Four Attributes

Presence (PRE) Charisma, willpower, influence. Used for persuading, commanding, intimidating.

Defined in: Chapter 6: Four Attributes

Reason (RSN) Logic, knowledge, perception. Used for analyzing, recalling, noticing.

Defined in: Chapter 6: Four Attributes

GM (Game Master) Facilitates play, frames situations, adjudicates outcomes. The GM presents scenarios, portrays NPCs, describes the world, and determines the results of player actions based on the rules and fiction.

Defined in: Chapter 1: Welcome to the Game

NPC (Non-Player Character) Character controlled by the GM. NPCs populate the world, providing allies, rivals, and adversaries for the player characters to interact with.

Defined in: Chapter 5: Group Play With a GM

PC (Player Character) Character controlled by a player. PCs are the protagonists of the story, making choices and taking actions that drive the narrative forward.

Defined in: Chapter 5: Group Play With a GM

VPC (Villain/Powerful Character) Major antagonist with advanced mechanics. VPCs are significant threats that use special rules to provide challenging and memorable encounters as primary adversaries.

Defined in: Chapter 24: NPCs and VPCs Defined

Bleeding Time pressure; condition worsens if not treated. An active wound that will worsen without treatment. Usually paired with a short Clock such as "Stabilize Wound" or requires field treatment or medical attention to clear.

Defined in: Chapter 18: Extended Tags & Conditions Reference

Dazed Disoriented; Burden on perception and reaction. Cleared after one turn or aid. You're struggling to focus and process what's happening around you.

Defined in: Chapter 9: Tags, Conditions, and Clocks

Exhausted Reduce effectiveness until rest or aid. Burden on physical actions. Deep fatigue from sustained effort, lack of rest, or stress. Burden on demanding physical actions and Checks using MIG or AGI approaches; clears with meaningful rest or care.

Defined in: Chapter 18: Extended Tags & Conditions Reference

Exposed Vulnerable; Burden to defense. Clear by moving to cover or breaking line of sight. You're out in the open or otherwise vulnerable to attack.

Defined in:Chapter 9: Tags, Conditions, and Clocks

Frightened Burden on actions while threat is visible. Clear by removing threat or rallying. Overwhelming fear tied to a specific threat or situation; clears by escaping, rallying, or confronting the cause.

Defined in:Chapter 18: Extended Tags & Conditions Reference

Marked Tracked or targeted; opponent gains Edge against you. Clear by breaking contact. Specifically targeted or tracked by a foe until the mark is removed (breaking line of sight, changing appearance, or defeating the threat).

Defined in:Chapter 18: Extended Tags & Conditions Reference

Poisoned Ongoing damage or Burden; duration varies. Clear via antidote or medical aid. Exposed to harmful substances that impair or injure; may inflict periodic damage or tick a "Toxin Spreads" Clock.

Defined in:Chapter 18: Extended Tags & Conditions Reference

Prone You're lying on the ground. Movement limited and vulnerable to some attacks while protected from others. Typically requires an action or movement to stand up.

Defined in:Chapter 10: Combat Basics

Restrained Movement limited by bonds, grapple, or obstacle. Clear via help, time, or leverage. Held, tied, pinned, or otherwise unable to move freely. Cannot change position or perform many physical actions.

Defined in:Chapter 18: Extended Tags & Conditions Reference

Stunned Can't act next turn. Cleared automatically after one turn. A severe condition that prevents actions and movement, making you extremely vulnerable.

Defined in:Chapter 9: Tags, Conditions, and Clocks

Suppressed Burden on next action due to pressure or intimidation.
Cleared after acting. Shaken confidence, intimidation, or social pressure; usually clears after one meaningful attempt or supportive roleplaying.

Defined in: Chapter 18: Extended Tags & Conditions Reference

Area This attack or effect targets everyone in a defined zone (Close range burst, Far range cone, etc.). Allies and enemies alike are affected unless the description specifies otherwise. Area effects are powerful but indiscriminate.

Defined in: Chapter 18: Extended Tags & Conditions Reference

Cramped Hinders movement; increases fall risk; limits large weapons or sweeping actions. Tight corridors, low ceilings, or packed spaces. Burden on actions that need space (large weapons, sweeping attacks); may grant Edge when bracing or grappling.

Defined in: Chapter 18: Extended Tags & Conditions Reference

Crowded Edge to blend in or lose pursuit; Burden to chase or spot targets. Many people sharing a small space such as markets, rallies, or evacuation queues. Harder to move quickly or track a single person; easier to blend in or lose a tail.

Defined in: Chapter 18: Extended Tags & Conditions Reference

Dim Light Edge to stealth; Burden to ranged attacks and detailed observation. Shadows, poor lighting, or night conditions provide cover for sneaking but make it harder to see clearly or aim precisely.

Defined in: Chapter 18: Extended Tags & Conditions Reference

Elevated Edge on ranged attacks; forces opponents to climb or find alternate routes. Higher ground, vantage points, or raised platforms provide tactical superiority. Movement to or from elevation may require Checks.

Defined in: Chapter 18: Extended Tags & Conditions Reference

Forceful On a hit, you can push the target one range band away from you (Close to Far, Far to Distant). The target must be roughly your size or smaller. This forced movement happens before any other effects resolve.

Defined in: Chapter 18: Extended Tags & Conditions Reference

Fragile Cover Grants Edge to defense but degrades on Partial Success or repeated use. Barriers that can be destroyed-thin walls, wooden crates, glass partitions. Edge on defense until damaged; repeated hits may destroy cover and create new hazards.

Defined in: Chapter 18: Extended Tags & Conditions Reference

Hazardous Environmental danger (fire, acid, collapsing floor); risk of damage or conditions. Meaningful risk of harm from the environment or situation. Partial Successes and Failures may inflict Conditions, tick threat Clocks, or escalate danger.

Defined in: Chapter 18: Extended Tags & Conditions Reference

Messy This weapon or attack is brutal, loud, and obvious. It leaves evidence (blood, property damage, noise). Great for intimidation; terrible for subtlety. Messy attacks draw attention.

Defined in: Chapter 18: Extended Tags & Conditions Reference

Obscured Vision blocked (fog, smoke, darkness); Burden to ranged attacks and navigation. Fog, smoke, heavy rain, or cluttered sightlines severely limit visibility. Burden on sight-based Perception; may grant Edge to ambushes and escapes.

Defined in: Chapter 18: Extended Tags & Conditions Reference

Precise You can target specific body parts, objects, or weak points. On a Full Success or better, you can inflict a specific condition (disarm, blind, etc.) instead of dealing damage. The GM determines what's possible based on the situation.

Defined in: Chapter 18: Extended Tags & Conditions Reference

Slick Burden on movement and maneuvers requiring balance (ice, oil, wet stone). Wet stone, oil, ice, or unstable footing makes movement treacherous. Failures may inflict Conditions or create new Tags.

Defined in: Chapter 18: Extended Tags & Conditions Reference

Solid Cover Reliable protection; grants Edge to defense without degrading. Reliable barriers-stone walls, heavy crates, reinforced barricades. May block some attacks entirely unless flanked or bypassed.

Defined in: Chapter 18: Extended Tags & Conditions Reference

Unstable Risk of collapse, shifting terrain, or loss of footing;
movement requires checks. Rattling catwalks, loose stones,
precarious stacks. Checks that move or add weight risk advancing
Clocks or causing falls; Failures often make the environment worse.

Defined in: Chapter 18: Extended Tags & Conditions Reference

29

COMPREHENSIVE INDEX

Quick reference and complete topical index

The most commonly referenced rules during play.

DC Ladder

Difficulty	DC	Description
Routine	12	Basic tasks requiring minimal skill
Challenging	14	Tasks requiring competence and
Difficult	16	Tasks requiring expertise and effort
Formidable	18	Tasks that test even skilled characters
Heroic	20	Tasks at the edge of possibility
Legendary	22	Tasks that define legends

See Chapter 8: Setting DCs

Outcome Tiers

Tier	Margin	Result
Critical Success	$\geq +5$	Exceptional success with bonus benefit
Full Success	0 to $+4$	Complete success, achieve your goal
Partial Success	-1 to -2	Success with complication or cost
Failure	-3 to -6	You don't achieve your goal
Critical Failure	≤ -7	Catastrophic failure with consequence

See Chapter 8: Interpreting Outcomes

Edge & Burden

Type	Level	Roll
Edge	+1	Roll 5d6, keep best 4
	+2	Roll 6d6, keep best 4
Burden	-1	Roll 5d6, keep worst 4
	-2	Roll 6d6, keep worst 4

Note: Multiple sources combine but cap at ±2. Edge and Burden cancel each other out.

See Chapter 8: Edge & Burden

Range Bands

Range	Distance	Description
Close	~5 feet	Within arm's reach
Far	~30 feet	Same room, shouting distance
Distant	~100 feet	Down the street, need to yell
Remote	~300 feet	Across the battlefield, barely visible

See Chapter 9: Tags, Conditions, and Clocks

Major topics grouped by category.

Core Mechanics

- ◆ 4d6 Resolution(Ch 8)
- ◆ Edge & Burden(Ch 8,Glossary)
- ◆ Clocks(Ch 9, Ch 11)
- ◆ Difficulty Class (DC)(Ch 8,Glossary)
- ◆ Margin & Outcome Tiers(Ch 8,Glossary)
- ◆ Proficiencies(Ch 16-17,Glossary)
- ◆ Skills(Ch 14-15)

Character & Attributes

- ◆ Advancement(Ch 19)
- ◆ Agility (AGI)(Ch 7,Glossary)
- ◆ Character Creation(Ch 6)
- ◆ Might (MIG)(Ch 7,Glossary)
- ◆ Presence (PRE)(Ch 7,Glossary)
- ◆ Reason (RSN)(Ch 7,Glossary)
- ◆ Sample Characters(Ch 6)

Combat & Conflict

- ◆ Combat System(Ch 10)
- ◆ Conditions(Ch 9,Ch 18, Glossary)
- ◆ Damage & Resolve(Ch 10)
- ◆ Range & Positioning(Ch 10)
- ◆ Social Conflict(Ch 11)
- ◆ Tags(Ch 9,Ch 18, Glossary)

GM Tools

- ◆ Campaign Structures(Ch 22)
- ◆ Fronts & Threats(Ch 25)
- ◆ NPCs & Creatures(Ch 24)
- ◆ Running the Game(Ch 21)
- ◆ Scenarios(Ch 23)
- ◆ Session Zero(Ch 13)
- ◆ Worldbuilding(Ch 25)

Alternative Play Modes

- ◆ GMless Play(Ch 26)
- ◆ Rotating Facilitator(Ch 26)
- ◆ Shared Authority(Ch 26)
- ◆ Solo Play(Ch 26)

Reference Materials

- ◆ Character Sheets(Ch 27)
- ◆ Glossary(Ch 28)
- ◆ Index(Ch 29)
- ◆ Play Aids & Templates(Ch 27)
- ◆ Safety Tools(Ch 13)

Complete A-Z listing of all terms and topics.

A

Actions & ChecksCh 8AdvancementCh 19EdgeCh 8,GlossaryAgility (AGI)Ch 7,GlossaryAlternative PlayCh 26Area (Tag)Ch 18,Glossary### B

Bleeding (Condition)Ch 18,Glossary### C

Campaign StructuresCh 22Character CreationCh 6Character SheetsCh 27Characters and AttributesCh 7ClockCh 9,Ch 9,GlossaryCombat BasicsCh 10ConditionCh 9,GlossaryConditions (Common)Ch 18,GlossaryCore ConceptsCh 2Core Principles of PlayCh 4Cramped (Tag)Ch 18,GlossaryCritical FailureCh 8,Ch 8,GlossaryCritical SuccessCh 8,Ch 8,GlossaryCrowded (Tag)Ch 18,Glossary### D

Damage & ResolveCh 10Dazed (Condition)Ch 9,GlossaryDC (Difficulty Class)Ch 8,Ch 8,GlossaryDesigning ScenariosCh 23Dim Light (Tag)Ch 18,GlossaryBurdenCh 8,GlossaryDowntime & RecoveryCh 12### E

Elevated (Tag)Ch 18,GlossaryExhausted (Condition)Ch 18,GlossaryExplorationCh 11Exposed (Condition)Ch 9,Glossary### F

Factions & FrontsCh 25FailureCh 8,Ch 8,GlossaryForceful (Tag)Ch 18,GlossaryFrightened (Condition)Ch 18,GlossaryFull SuccessCh 8,Ch 8,Glossary### G

GMless PlayCh 26,Ch 26GlossaryCh 28### H

How to Use This RulebookCh 3### I

IndexCh 29Interpreting OutcomesCh 8### M

MarginCh 8,Ch 8,GlossaryMarked (Condition)Ch 18,GlossaryMessy (Tag)Ch 18,GlossaryMight (MIG)Ch 7,Glossary### N

NPCs & EnemiesCh 24### O

Optional & Variant RulesCh 20Outcome TiersCh 8### P

Partial SuccessCh 8,Ch 8,GlossaryPlay Aids & TemplatesCh
27Poisoned (Condition)Ch 18,GlossaryPositioning & EnvironmentCh
10Precise (Tag)Ch 18,GlossaryPresence (PRE)Ch
7,GlossaryProficienciesCh 16,Ch 17,GlossaryProne (Condition)Ch
10,Glossary### Q

Quick ReferenceCh 29### R

Range & PositioningCh 10Reason (RSN)Ch 7,GlossaryResolveCh
10Restrained (Condition)Ch 18,GlossaryRoleplaying GuidanceCh
13Rotating FacilitatorCh 26,Ch 26Running CampaignsCh
22Running SessionsCh 21### S

Safety ToolsCh 13Scenarios & One-ShotsCh 23Session ZeroCh
13Setting DCsCh 8Shared AuthorityCh 26,Ch 26SkillCh 14,Ch
15,GlossarySocial InteractionCh 11,Ch 11Solo PlayCh 26,Ch
26Stunned (Condition)Ch 9,GlossarySuppressed (Condition)Ch
18,Glossary### T

TagCh 9,GlossaryTags (Common)Ch 18,GlossaryTopical IndexCh
29### V

Variant RulesCh 20VPC (Villain/Powerful Character)Ch 1,Ch
24,Glossary### W

Ways to PlayCh 5Welcome to the GameCh 1WorldbuildingCh 25

30

INSPIRATIONS AND ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Razorweave draws inspiration from the broader tradition of tabletop roleplaying games while implementing its own unique systems and setting. The following games and design movements influenced our thinking during development:

Modern RPG Design Philosophy

Fiction-First Design The principle that narrative positioning and fictional context should drive mechanical resolution was shaped by observing many modern indie RPGs. We appreciate how games like Apocalypse World, Blades in the Dark, and Fate prioritize the story over pure mechanics.

Streamlined Core Mechanics The trend toward elegant, unified resolution systems (rather than separate subsystems for every action) influenced our 4d6+modifier approach. Games that demonstrated you don't need dozens of different mechanics to create depth showed us a better path.

Shared Narrative Authority The idea that players and GMs collaborate to build the story together-rather than the GM being the sole arbiter-can be seen across many successful modern games. We wanted Razorweave to embrace this collaborative spirit.

Specific Mechanical Influences

Graduated Success The concept of "success with cost" (our Partial Success) appears in many games dating back to early indie RPGs. Rather than binary pass/fail, graduated outcomes create richer stories. We implemented this through our margin-based system with five distinct outcome tiers.

Progress Tracking The idea of segmented trackers to represent ongoing threats, projects, or conflicts has become common across many indie games. Our Clock system uses this proven concept while implementing it in our own way (4/6/8 segments, specific advancement rules).

Edgeous Circumstances Many games represent favorable or unfavorable situations through dice modification. We liked this concept and created our own implementation using Edge (+1/+2) and Burden (-1/-2) to modify the number of dice kept from a 4d6 roll.

Tags and Conditions The practice of using short descriptors to track environment and character state appears across numerous modern games. We built on this common design pattern to create our own Tag and Condition systems.

Rather than copying specific mechanics, we internalized these broader principles:

1. Mechanics should serve the fiction - Rules exist to support the story, not the other way around.
2. Keep the math simple - Players should spend time roleplaying, not calculating.
3. Make consequences interesting - Failure should complicate the story, not stop it.
4. Trust the players - Give them meaningful choices and respect their creativity.
5. Fiction-first, always - When rules and fiction conflict, fiction wins.

While inspired by the broader tradition of indie RPGs, Razorweave has its own identity:

- ◆ 4d6 margin-based resolution - Our core mechanic is our own design, not borrowed from another game
- ◆ Edge/Burden system - Our implementation of advantageous circumstances uses unique terminology and dice mechanics
- ◆ Four Attributes - Might, Agility, Presence, and Reason are our own attribute framework
- ◆ Skills that flex - The same skill can pair with different attributes based on approach
- ◆ Setting-agnostic with strong flavor - While examples use telegraph/relay technology, the rules work for any genre
- ◆ Original progression system - Character advancement through milestone-based growth
- ◆ Risk and Impact - Our framework for assessing danger and effect in situations

Open Source & Creative Commons

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Typography & Design Assets

- ◆ Fonts - This rulebook uses Google Fonts under the Open Font License
- ◆ UI Icons - Heroicons (MIT License) for any UI elements
- ◆ Generated Art - AI-generated artwork created via ChatGPT/DALL-E, properly attributed where used

The RPG Community

We're grateful to the broader tabletop RPG community-designers, players, streamers, and critics-who have fostered a culture of experimentation, sharing, and innovation. Without this community's willingness to explore new ideas and share knowledge freely, Razorweave wouldn't exist.

Playtesters & Early Readers

Thank you to everyone who provided feedback, caught errors, and helped refine these rules through actual play. Your contributions made this a better game.

This rulebook is original work. While we've been influenced by the broader RPG design community (as acknowledged above), all text, examples, tables, and specific rule implementations are our own creation.

Game mechanics themselves cannot be copyrighted-only the specific expression of those mechanics. We've been careful to:

- ◆ Use our own terminology throughout
- ◆ Write all explanations in our own words
- ◆ Create original examples and flavor text
- ◆ Design our own progression systems and tables

If you notice any unintentional similarity to published material, please contact us so we can address it.

Maintaining a clear version history demonstrates independent development:

- ◆ Git repository tracks all changes from initial concept through publication
- ◆ Commit history shows iterative design and refinement
- ◆ All development is documented and traceable

This transparency proves Razorweave was independently created, not derived from proprietary sources.

Thank you for playing Razorweave.

We hope these rules bring excitement, drama, and memorable stories to your table.