

Part I: Foundations

Part I introduces the core ideas of the game: what it is about, how to read and use this rulebook, and how to build characters who feel grounded in the world. These chapters define Attributes, Actions, Checks, Tags, Conditions, Clocks, and the overall flow of play.

By the end of Part I, you should understand how to create a character, how to resolve uncertainty at the table, how combat, exploration, and social scenes work, and how to collaborate with your group and GM to tell stories together.

1. Welcome to the Game

This Core Rulebook is the single source of truth for the system. It explains how to create characters, how to resolve uncertain moments, and how to build stories together across many different genres. You do not need to memorize the entire book before you play. You only need to know where to look when questions arise.

The rules are written with a fiction first mindset. The story comes first. Mechanics support the story when the outcome of an action is uncertain and meaningful. When the outcome is clear, you simply describe what happens and move on.

This game is built for cooperative play. The table is a creative team. Players bring characters to life. The **Game Master** presents the world, its challenges, and its opportunities. The rules help everyone answer a single question together: what happens next?

The chapters that follow will introduce the core concepts, show you how to use this book, and guide you through creating your first character. Later sections deepen the rules and provide tools for long running campaigns, solo journeys, and shared authority play.

2. Core Concepts at a Glance

This chapter introduces the most important ideas in the system in a compact form. Later chapters expand and refine them, but everything begins here. You can return to these concepts whenever you need to realign on how the game is meant to feel at the table.

Fiction First

The story is always the starting point. You begin by understanding the situation, describing what the characters do, and only then reaching for rules if the outcome is uncertain and meaningful. You do not start with a rule and then try to force the fiction to match it.

Characters

Characters are the main lens through which you experience the world. They are defined by four Attributes (Might (MIG), Agility (AGI), Presence (PRE), Reason (RSN)), a small set of Skills, a focused group of Proficiencies, and the choices they make. Characters also have histories, goals, and unresolved threads that tie them to the world.

Checks and Outcomes

A Check is the system's way of resolving uncertainty when the stakes matter. When you make a Check, you use an Attribute, a Skill, and the shared fiction to determine what is at risk. The result produces an outcome tier, which becomes the next beat in the story. Success, partial success, and failure are all ways for the story to move forward.

Tags, Conditions, and Clocks

Tags and Conditions are short descriptors that shape how the world and characters behave. Tags are applied to scenes, locations, or situations. Conditions are ongoing states on characters. Clocks are visual trackers of danger, opportunity, or change. Together they help the table feel the weight of time and consequence.

Table Collaboration

The system assumes that everyone at the table contributes to the story. The GM presents the world honestly. Players act through their characters with clear intent and approach. The rules help resolve what happens when those actions encounter uncertainty or resistance.

You can begin play after reading Chapters 1 through 6. The rest of the book deepens and extends the 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, Skills, Proficiencies, Tags, Conditions, and Clocks all connect to this structure. Once you understand how Checks work, 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. Later chapters explain the procedure in detail. 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, or that a specific type of danger often advances a Clock.

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 at the end of the book 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 Is a 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.

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 Drives Action

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.

The GM Presents the World Honestly

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.

GM Insight 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.

Failure Creates 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.

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.

Partial Success Is a Core Story Beat

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.

The GM Describes Outcomes, Not Numbers

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.

Player Agency Comes From Clear Choices

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.

The World Responds to Character Action

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.

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.

Respect for Player Ownership

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.

Scenes Have Direction

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.

Trust at the Table

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.

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.

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.

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.

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. The player controls one or more characters and uses structured tools to emulate the world. These tools include prompts, oracles, and scene framing procedures. Solo play keeps the core mechanics intact.

Asynchronous and Play by Post

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.

One Shot Sessions

A one shot is a complete adventure played in a single session. These sessions help introduce new players to the system and work well for conventions or special events. One shots focus on clear stakes and strong pacing.

Campaign Play

A campaign is a longer story told over multiple sessions. Campaigns grow through character development, evolving threats, and unfolding consequences. The GM builds on player actions and uses tools like Clocks and Tags to maintain continuity.

Hybrid Styles

Many tables blend modes. Some groups use solo play between sessions to develop character arcs. Others rotate GMless scenes inside a GM led campaign. Some begin with a one shot and transition into a long form campaign. The system supports these transitions without additional rules.

Choosing the Right Mode

There is no single correct way to play. Each mode offers a different experience. Choose group play for shared storytelling and dynamic character interaction. Choose duet play for intimate stories. Choose GMless for collaborative world building. Choose solo play for personal

exploration. Choose asynchronous play for flexible schedules. Choose one shots for quick adventures. Choose campaigns for deep, evolving narratives.

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. 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 and tells you when to reference later chapters for details.

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 example character later in this chapter and return to each step as needed.

The Creation Flow

Character Creation follows a clear sequence. You begin with story driven questions, then add mechanical structure, then return to fiction to finalize your concept. Each step builds on the previous one.

1. Step One: Choose a Concept
2. Step Two: Define Core Identity Elements
3. Step Three: Assign Attributes
4. Before You Choose Skills and Proficiencies
5. Step Four: Choose Skills
6. Step Five: Choose Proficiencies
7. Step Six: Determine Starting Gear
8. Step Seven: Establish Background and Relationships
9. Step Eight: Define Goals, Drives, and Personal Threads
10. Step Nine: Final Review and Campaign Fit

Step One: Choose a Concept

Every character begins with a concept. A concept is the short answer to the question, who is this person. It is the foundation for every choice you make later in the process. The concept does not depend on mechanics. It does not require a long backstory. It is a clean expression of identity, role, and theme.

Strong concepts are specific enough to suggest habits and history, but open enough to leave room for discovery. A concept like retired scout with a guilty conscience offers a clearer direction than simply fighter. The first concept suggests relationships, regrets, and a way of moving through the world. The second is mostly a job title.

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.

Your concept should tell you what kind of scenes you want to be in, what skills you might have learned, and what challenges might matter to you. If you feel stuck, talk with the GM and the other players. The group can help you find a concept that fits the tone of the campaign.

Step Two: Define Core Identity Elements

Identity elements are the personal details that give your character depth. They are the details that help you imagine how your character thinks, speaks, and reacts. You do not need to define everything at once. The goal is to add enough information that the character feels real.

Useful identity elements include:

- Name and pronouns
- Origin or home environment
- Everyday role or profession before the story begins
- Notable habits and mannerisms
- First impressions and social style
- One or two key experiences that shaped them

These details are most helpful when they connect to your concept. If your concept involves quiet work and technical skill, identity elements that reflect that focus will make the character feel grounded.

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.

You can expand or revise identity elements later if the story reveals new truths about your character. For now, capture the parts that feel most important.

Step Three: Assign Attributes

Attributes describe your character's natural capabilities. They reflect how your character tends to approach challenges when there is no time to prepare a careful strategy. Attributes are not personality traits. They are expressions of how your character acts when the moment demands action.

The system uses four Attributes:

- **Might (MIG)**: Physical strength, force, and raw endurance.
- **Agility (AGI)**: Balance, coordination, stealth, and quick reaction.
- **Presence (PRE)**: Social force, confidence, emotional expression, and leadership.
- **Reason (RSN)**: Logic, analysis, memory, and structured thinking.

New characters begin with the following Attribute spread.

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

No Attribute may be negative during creation. This spread represents balanced capability.

Characters begin competent but not exceptional in every area. As the campaign progresses, advancement rules will allow Attributes to grow.

Assign these values based on your concept and identity elements. Ask yourself which Attribute your character relies on most often, which areas they find challenging, and which weaknesses might create interesting story moments.

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.

Before You Choose Skills and Proficiencies

This system does not rely on a fixed or exhaustive list of Skills or Proficiencies. The rulebook provides examples and frameworks, but players are encouraged to work with their GM to define custom entries that reflect their character's experiences, training, and background.

Skills and Proficiencies serve different purposes.

- **Skills** are action based competencies. They are used directly in Checks when your character attempts something under pressure or uncertainty.
- **Proficiencies** are narrow domains of expertise. They describe tools, environments, or disciplines that your character understands well and that shape how the GM interprets the fiction.

Open lists and collaboration allow the system to support many different genres and character concepts without requiring constant balance adjustments. Because the resolution system and advantage rules keep extremes in check, creative choices stay within a stable range.

The GM has final approval over the scope of any custom Skill or Proficiency. A good entry is grounded in the setting, clear in purpose, and neither so broad that it covers everything nor so narrow that it rarely matters.

Step Four: Choose Skills

Skills represent learned abilities and practiced competencies. They describe what your character has done often enough to rely on in uncertain moments. Skills connect directly to action. When your character makes a Check, a Skill often shapes their approach.

Skills answer the question, what have you practiced enough to apply under stress. They cover actions such as moving quietly, reading a room, patching an injury, climbing, or analyzing a pattern. Skills are usually written as verbs or verb like phrases.

During Character Creation, choose a small set of Skills that reflect your concept and background. These are the actions your character knows how to perform with some confidence. Later chapters describe Skills in more detail and provide example lists grouped by Attribute.

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.

You do not need to optimize your Skills. The best choices are the ones that support the kinds of scenes you want to experience. If your group plans to focus on investigation, travel, or social tension, choose Skills that will shine in those situations.

Step Five: Choose Proficiencies

Proficiencies represent narrower areas of expertise that influence how the GM interprets the fiction. They describe tools, technologies, environments, or disciplines that your character understands deeply. Proficiencies often do not require a roll at all. 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. They often appear as nouns or domain labels, such as medical tools, survey equipment, or small boat navigation.

During Character Creation, choose a small number of Proficiencies that grow naturally out of your concept and background. Work with the GM to make sure each Proficiency has a clear scope and fits the setting.

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.

Proficiencies do not add numbers to Checks. Instead, they influence difficulty, consequences, and access to information. A character with the correct Proficiency may identify a hazard more quickly, avoid an unnecessary roll, or reduce the severity of a complication.

Step Six: Determine Starting Gear

Your character begins play with a small set of equipment that fits their background, reflects their concept, and supports the type of stories they are about to enter. Gear does not provide numerical bonuses. It provides narrative capability, fictional positioning, and a sense of grounded reality.

Starting gear should feel personal and practical. It represents what your character already knows how to use. It also helps the GM understand what kind of situations your character is prepared for.

Basic Gear Package

New characters begin with the following items:

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

These are the essentials that allow any character to operate in the world.

Concept Driven Gear

In addition to the basic gear, each character chooses up to three items that reflect their background or profession. These items help define who they were before the story begins. They also give the GM material to work with when shaping scenes.

Examples include:

- A well used toolkit
- A compact field journal
- A collection of reference notes
- A handmade navigation compass
- A signal mirror
- A small medical pouch
- A set of precision tools
- A reliable lantern
- A simple musical instrument
- A deck of analysis cards
- A set of rope and climbing spikes

These items should feel directly connected to your concept and identity.

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.

Tools and Equipment as Fictional Authority

Gear provides fictional authority. If your character carries the right tools for a task, the GM may:

- Lower difficulty
- Remove uncertainty
- Change the stakes
- Provide clearer approaches

Gear does not guarantee success. It enables meaningful choices and supports your character's expertise.

If the character does not have suitable gear, the GM might increase difficulty or introduce complications. Gear matters most when the environment or situation is demanding.

Weapons and Dangerous Tools

If the campaign tone allows for weapons or hazardous tools, characters may begin with one simple item that fits their concept. This might be:

- A pocket knife
- A small baton
- A bow with a few arrows
- A sturdy multi tool
- A simple sidearm, if the genre supports it

Weapons should be grounded in the fiction of your setting. They are not meant to be superior mechanical objects. They are narrative tools that help shape how your character approaches risk.

If your world does not include weapons or includes them only sparingly, this section may be reduced or removed based on GM preference.

Custom Gear

The player and GM may collaborate to create custom gear that supports the concept. The item should be:

- Clear in purpose
- Grounded in the setting
- Useful in scenes
- Not mechanically overwhelming

Good custom gear is memorable and unique without dominating the story.

Step Seven: Establish Background and Relationships

Every character comes from somewhere. They have lived a life before the story begins. They have connections, memories, challenges, and unfinished business. Establishing background and relationships gives the character emotional depth and provides the GM with narrative tools that will enrich scenes, challenges, and future arcs.

Background should answer simple questions about where you grew up, what kind of work you used to do, which pressures shaped you, and who influenced your habits. You do not need a long timeline. Focus on the few details that explain your current self.

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. The steady routine and quiet tension of relay work shaped her temperament and made her comfortable with long stretches of focused attention.

In addition to background, define one or two meaningful relationships. These might be mentors, rivals, family members, coworkers, or friends. The relationship does not need to be fully detailed. It only needs to be important enough that it might matter later.

Example Rella 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. The disagreement left tension that has never been resolved.

You do not need to define every relationship up front. Leave space for new connections to emerge in play. When a new NPC feels important, you can add them to your relationship list.

Step Eight: Define Goals, Drives, and Personal Threads

Goals and drives explain why your character keeps moving. They are the internal pressures that shape choices and responses. A goal is something concrete your character wants to achieve. A drive is a deeper motivation or fear that pushes them.

Personal threads are unresolved elements in your character's life. They might be unanswered questions, unfulfilled promises, or lingering tensions. These threads give the GM material to weave into future scenes.

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.

Try to define at least one short-term goal, one long-term goal, and one or two personal threads. You can always revise these as the story unfolds.

Step Nine: Final Review and Campaign Fit

Once you have completed the previous steps, review your character as a whole. Ask whether the concept, identity elements, Attributes, Skills, Proficiencies, gear, background, relationships, goals, and threads feel like parts of the same person.

Talk with the GM and other players about how your character fits into the campaign. Look for natural connections, shared history, or complementary goals. Adjust details where needed so that the group feels like a cohesive cast.

Example Character Build: Rella

This section presents Rella as a complete example character, summarizing the choices made in each step. Use this example as a reference when creating your own characters.

Chapter Summary

Character Creation turns an idea into a playable character who fits naturally into the world and the campaign. By moving from concept to identity, Attributes, Skills, Proficiencies, gear, background, relationships, and goals, you build a character who feels grounded and ready for play. Later chapters explain how these elements interact with the core mechanics during sessions.

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; relies on others for deep analysis.
MIG 0, AGI 2, PRE 1, RSN 1	Scout or infiltrator	Excels at movement and precision; must negotiate around brute-force obstacles.
MIG 1, AGI 0, PRE 2, RSN 1	Negotiator or leader	Strong in social scenes; needs help when delicate physical work is required.

Spread	Example Archetype	Notes
MIG 1, AGI 1, PRE 0, RSN 2	Analyst or investigator	Solves problems through observation 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 scholar or a 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 – Calling for an Attribute 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 – MIG Check

Trigger: A storm has washed out a small bridge. The group needs to move a heavy improvised plank into place before the river rises further.

Roll: 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'.

Consequence: 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 – AGI Check

Trigger: A character sprints across slick rooftop tiles to reach a signal mast before an alarm spreads.

Roll: 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 Disadvantage if the group ignored earlier warnings.

Consequence: 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 – PRE Check

Trigger: The group needs a nervous official to delay a shipment. A character steps forward to make the case.

Roll: 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 Advantage.

Consequence: 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 – RSN Check

Trigger: A character studies overlapping telegraph logs to determine whether a recent outage is natural or engineered.

Roll: 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.

Consequence: 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 – Signaling Growth 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.

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.

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 – When to Roll

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 Advantage or Disadvantage.
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 and Approach

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:

- DC 12 – Easy
- DC 14 – Routine
- DC 16 – Tough
- DC 18 – Hard
- DC 20 – Heroic
- DC 22 – Legendary

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

Advantage, Disadvantage, Tags, and Conditions

Rather than constantly adjusting the DC, the game often represents favorable or unfavorable circumstances through **Advantage** and **Disadvantage**.

- **+1 Advantage:** Roll 5d6, keep the best 4.
- **+2 Advantage:** Roll 6d6, keep the best 4.
- **-1 Disadvantage:** Roll 5d6, keep the worst 4.
- **-2 Disadvantage:** Roll 6d6, keep the worst 4.

Advantage and Disadvantage 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 Advantage or Disadvantage and are capped at ±2—several small edges do not create infinite Advantage, and multiple problems do not push you below -2. If a character would have both Advantage and Disadvantage, 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 described in earlier chapters provide a shared vocabulary for these modifiers: *Dim Light*, *Slick*, or *Exposed* might impose Disadvantage; *Solid Cover* or *Marked* might grant Advantage in specific contexts or to specific parties.

Rolling 4d6 and Calculating Margin

When a Check is called for, follow this procedure:

1. Roll **4d6**, adjusting the number of dice kept if Advantage or Disadvantage applies.
2. Add the relevant Attribute rating and any bonuses from Skills or temporary effects.
3. Compare the total to the DC to find the **margin** (Roll – DC).

The margin determines the outcome tier:

- **Critical Success:** Margin $\geq +5$.
- **Full Success:** Margin ≥ 0 .
- **Partial Success:** Margin -1 to -2 .
- **Failure:** Margin ≤ -3 .
- **Critical Failure:** Margin ≤ -7 or all 1s.

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** – You achieve more than you aimed for. Extra benefits, stronger position, or accelerated progress.
- **Full Success** – You get what you wanted with no significant cost. The scene moves forward cleanly.
- **Partial Success** – You succeed, but with a cost, complication, or reduced effect. Momentum continues, tension rises.
- **Failure** – You do not achieve your goal, and the situation complicates. Threats advance, resources strain, or positions worsen.
- **Critical Failure** – Things go significantly wrong. Use sparingly for dramatic beats: broken tools, dangerous exposure, or major escalations.

Example – Cross-Genre Check

Trigger: In a cozy town, a character tries to calm a panicked neighbor during a storm. In a sci-fi station, a character tries to reassure a frightened technician during a systems failure.

Roll: Both are PRE-based Checks against DC 14 (Routine) with an appropriate social Skill.

The cozy scene might grant Advantage if the characters have a strong existing relationship.

Consequence: Full success calms the NPC and stabilizes the scene. Partial success calms them but attaches a new obligation or rumor. Failure escalates the panic, spreading fear or misinformation.

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 Advantage 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.

Clocks and Checks

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.

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 – Clock and Checks

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 clock; failures or partials tick the flood 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.

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.

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 Advantage or Disadvantage 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.

Common Tag Categories

While Chapter 18 provides an extended reference, this chapter introduces three broad categories:

- **Environmental Tags** – Physical features of space: *Dim Light, Slick, Cramped, Elevated, Solid Cover, Fragile Cover, Unstable.*
- **Situational Tags** – Circumstances and pressures: *Crowded, Alert, Hazardous, Obscured, Surveillance, Networked.*
- **Atmospheric Tags** – Social or emotional tone: *Tense, Festive, Solemn, Suspicious.*

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 – Tags in a Warehouse Fight

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

Examples of Common Conditions

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

- **Exhausted** – Disadvantage 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; Disadvantage on perception and reaction until you recover.
- **Frightened** – Disadvantage on actions while a specific threat is visible; clears when you rally, escape, or defeat the source.

Example – From Event to Condition

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 Advantage or Disadvantage on Checks that interact with them.
- Conditions usually impose Disadvantage 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 Advantage/Disadvantage, DC, or consequences accordingly.

Example – Tag and Condition Interaction

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 Advantage on Stealth, but *Frightened* could impose Disadvantage 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 4, 6, or 8 segments. 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.

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.

Example – Investigation and Cover-Up Clocks

The group is investigating a corrupt official.

The GM creates an “Expose the Official” Clock with 6 segments and a “Cover-Up” Clock with 4 segments. Successful RSN-based investigation, social, or infiltration Checks advance the first Clock. Certain failures, loud approaches, or conspicuous visits advance the second. Which Clock fills first determines whether the truth comes out cleanly, is revealed with fallout, or is buried.

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 – Start Small 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.

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.

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.”

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, 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.

Example – Enemy Resolve

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:

- **Conversational order** – The GM asks “Who acts next?” and rotates spotlight. Simple and flexible for small skirmishes.
- **Popcorn order** – After you resolve your turn, you choose who goes next. This keeps attention moving and avoids predictable patterns.
- **Initiative (optional)** – If the table prefers, you can use a simple initiative roll or fiction-based ordering for more structure.

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

Example – Conversational vs. Structured Order

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.

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 Advantage or helpful Tags for yourself or allies.
- **Defend / Withdraw** – Protect yourself or break contact to recover.

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 Advantage 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 Advantage 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 Advantage, 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. Maneuver position and Tags as carefully as you manage Checks.

Example – Using the Battlefield

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 Advantage on subsequent Strikes. The GM treats *Elevated* as granting Advantage on ranged attacks from high ground and adds extra risk to any failed Checks near the edge.

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 Disadvantage on many actions. Scenes like this are signals to change tactics—seek cover, call for help, or end the fight on your own terms.

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 Advantage/Disadvantage, 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 Advantage 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.

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 – Dual Investigation Clocks

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.

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 – Crossing the Floodplain

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.

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.

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 – Multi-Round Negotiation

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 Advantage 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 – Interrogation Contest

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 Advantages 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.

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 – 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 – 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 – 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 – 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 – 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 Advantage. 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 – 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 – 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 – 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.

Part II: Skills, Proficiencies, and Mechanical Reference

Part II explains the Skills and Proficiencies that give characters texture and focus, and collects key mechanical references used at the table. Skills represent what your character can reliably do under pressure; Proficiencies represent domains where their knowledge or training changes how the GM interprets the fiction. Extended Tags and Conditions, advancement options, and optional rules round out the mechanical toolkit.

These chapters describe how to build and customize skill lists, how to group examples by Attribute and domain, and how to use mechanical references to tune campaigns. GMs and players can work together here to define new entries and options that fit the tone and needs of each table.

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 – 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 Advantage 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 – 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 – 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 – 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 Advantage 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 full-body movements under pressure.	Chasing a fleeing suspect across rooftops; hauling yourself and a companion up a crumbling ledge; forcing your way through a crowded platform before the train departs.
Heavy Lifting & Carrying	Moving and stabilizing heavy loads without specialized equipment.	Shifting a fallen beam to free a trapped worker; carrying an injured ally out of a collapsing tunnel; loading crates quickly before a storm hits.
Grit & Endurance	Withstanding fatigue, harsh environments, and prolonged exertion.	Marching through a heatwave without proper shade; rowing against the current for hours; staying on your feet during a long night watch after earlier exertions.

Skill	What It Represents	Sample Uses
Close-Quarters Struggle	Grappling, holding, and breaking free at arm's reach.	Wrestling a saboteur away from a control panel; restraining a panicked passenger without hurting them; fighting to keep a door closed against a crowd.

Athletic Movement — Exploration / Conflict (MIG)

Description: Athletic Movement covers running, jumping, climbing, 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 Advantage. Conditions such as *Exhausted* or *Injured* often impose Disadvantage 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 – 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 Advantage or lower DCs. *Unstable*, *Hazardous*, or *Cramped* spaces increase risk and may impose Disadvantage, 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 – 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 Advantage. 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 – Grit & Endurance

The party must hike through a wind-scorched 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 Advantage 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 – 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, and slipping past attention.	Crossing a dim relay hall while guards converse nearby; disappearing into a festival crowd when spotted; circling around to flank an enemy without drawing fire.
Fine Manipulation	Delicate handwork under pressure—lockpicking, tools, instruments.	Bypassing a mechanical lock in a cramped stairwell; patching a cable while the platform shakes; quickly reconfiguring a delicate device during a scene.
Acrobatic Positioning	Balancing, tumbling, and using the environment to your advantage.	Leaping from balcony to balcony in a theater; sliding under a closing gate; navigating a derailed carriage without falling through gaps.
Ranged Technique	Accurate attacks or precise throws with ranged tools.	Taking a careful shot from an elevated walkway; tossing a grappling line to a rooftop; hurling 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 Advantage or lowering effective DCs. *Alert*, *Surveillance*, or noisy gear can impose Disadvantage 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 – 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 Advantage 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 – 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 – 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 Advantage. *Obscured* environments, *Slick* footing, or Conditions like *Shaken* or *Dazed* impose Disadvantage 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 – 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, empathy, or shared interest.	Talking a station chief into delaying a dangerous launch; persuading a frightened neighbor to share what they saw; calming a restless crowd before panic spreads.
Command & Coordination	Directing allies, issuing orders, and aligning efforts under stress.	Coordinating a multi-step evacuation; calling out tactics in a tense standoff; rallying scattered workers to resist a threat together.
Deception & Performance	Presenting a convincing façade, playing roles, or masking intent.	Passing as an official inspector; staging a minor argument as a distraction; delivering a stirring speech that hides a coded message.
Insight & Empathy	Reading people's moods, motivations, and tells.	Noticing when a witness is omitting something; sensing 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 Advantage 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 – 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 Advantage. 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 – 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 Advantage. 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 – 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 Advantage. 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 – 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 changes in the environment.	Spotting a disturbed patch of dust near a hidden panel; hearing the telltale click of a misaligned relay; realizing a crowd's mood is shifting before anyone speaks.

Skill	What It Represents	Sample Uses
Investigation	Following leads, connecting evidence, and reconstructing events.	Piecing together a sabotage timeline from logs; reconstructing a confrontation from scattered signs; determining which of several suspects had the opportunity to act.
Systems & Diagnostics	Understanding and troubleshooting complex systems—mechanical, social, or digital.	Tracing a glitch in a relay network; modeling how a faction will react to a policy change; identifying weak points in a fortress layout.
Lore & Analysis	Recalling knowledge, interpreting texts, and applying theory.	Identifying a symbol from an old campaign; interpreting the 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, connecting 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 Advantage. 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 – 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 Advantage. *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 – 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 Advantage. 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 – 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 – 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 Advantage, 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 Advantage, 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 Advantage 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 – 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, Advantage 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 Advantage 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 – 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 Advantage 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, and vessel traffic in ports.	Re-routing ships to avoid congestion; spotting irregular manifests; fast-tracking a vessel through customs without raising suspicion.
Caravan Logistics	Planning multi-day routes, supplies, and contingencies for overland journeys.	Choosing safe camp sites; balancing loadouts against terrain; arranging escorts and guides across changing jurisdictions.
Station Traffic Control	Coordinating arrivals, departures, and emergency responses in busy hubs.	Sequencing landings to prevent collision; opening priority lanes for emergency craft; identifying patterns that suggest sabotage.
Supply Management	Tracking inventory, requisitions, and shortages across multiple sites.	Preventing stockouts before a storm; hiding the movement of sensitive 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 Advantage when re-routing traffic under tight deadlines (for example, a Hard DC 18 task might become a Routine DC 14 with Advantage).

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 – 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 Advantage 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 – 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 Advantage 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 – 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 Advantage. 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, and long-term documentation.	Tracing property ownership; verifying lineage claims; finding inconsistencies in public reports.
Occult Librarianship	Managing and interpreting collections of dangerous or esoteric texts.	Identifying ritual scripts; recognizing censorship patterns; locating a specific grim fragment among scattered notes.
Cold-Case Records	Maintaining, cross-referencing, and revisiting unresolved investigations.	Spotting links between old cases; recognizing recurring signatures; finding witnesses long after events.
Academic Correspondence	Navigating scholarly networks, peer review, and institutional archives.	Calling in favors for access; deciphering jargon; 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 – 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 Advantage 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 – 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 Advantage 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 – 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 Advantage. 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 limited time and tools.	Binding wounds during a retreat; preventing shock; improvising splints from available materials.
Clinical Practice	Formal medical training within hospitals, clinics, or infirmaries.	Diagnosing complex conditions; coordinating treatment teams; navigating medical hierarchies.
Herbalism & Remedies	Using local plants, folk recipes, and traditional techniques to treat ailments.	Foraging for medicinal herbs; brewing tonics; providing long-term support in low-infrastructure areas.
Trauma Response	Coordinating emergency care in chaotic, dangerous environments.	Setting up triage under fire; prioritizing patients; keeping panicked 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 Advantage 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 – 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 Advantage. 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 Advantage 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 – 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 Advantage. 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 Advantage 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 – 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 shared concerns and goals.	Forming neighborhood watches; coordinating mutual aid; planning collective responses to threats.
Court Etiquette	Understanding formal protocol, hierarchy, and unspoken rules in elite settings.	Securing audiences; avoiding social missteps; reading power dynamics in ceremonies.
Neighborhood Fixer	Acting as a local problem-solver and information broker.	Finding the right person for a job; smoothing over disputes; calling in favors quietly.
Union Stewardship	Representing workers, negotiating with management, and understanding labor structures.	Organizing strikes; negotiating 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 Advantage 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 – 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 Advantage 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 – 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 Advantage. 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 – 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 exploiting physical security setups.	Placing patrols effectively; identifying blind spots; recognizing when a perimeter has been tested or breached.
Criminal Underworld	Understanding illicit markets, fences, and unofficial rules of crime.	Finding buyers for stolen goods; learning which gangs control which blocks; reading when a deal is about to turn sour.
Espionage Tradecraft	Using and detecting covert methods of communication, surveillance, and infiltration.	Running dead drops; spotting tails; setting or sweeping for bugs; planning cover identities.
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 Advantage 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 – 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 Advantage 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 Advantage 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 – 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 Advantage. 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 Advantage, 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 – 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.

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 Advantage or Disadvantage 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
-----	--------------------	-----------------

Tag	What It Represents	Typical Effects
Dim Light	Shadows, poor lighting, or night conditions.	Advantage on Stealth and hiding; Disadvantage on detailed Perception and long-range attacks.
Obscured	Fog, smoke, heavy rain, or cluttered sightlines.	Disadvantage on sight-based Perception; may grant Advantage to ambushes and escapes.
Slick	Wet stone, oil, ice, or unstable footing.	Disadvantage on fast movement and risky maneuvers; Failures may inflict Conditions or new Tags.
Cramped	Tight corridors, low ceilings, or packed shelves.	Disadvantage on actions that need space (large weapons, sweeping attacks); may grant Advantage when bracing or grappling.
Elevated	Higher ground, vantage points, or raised platforms.	Advantage on many ranged attacks and observation Checks; movement to or from elevation may require Checks.
Solid Cover	Reliable barriers—stone walls, heavy crates, reinforced barricades.	Advantage on defense from certain angles; may block some attacks entirely unless flanked or bypassed.
Fragile Cover	Barriers that can be destroyed—thin walls, wooden crates, glass partitions.	Advantage on defense until damaged; Partial Successes or repeated hits may destroy cover and create new hazards.
Unstable	Rattling catwalks, loose stones, precarious stacks.	Checks that move or add weight risk advancing Clocks or causing falls; Failures often make the environment worse.

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: markets, rallies, evacuation queues.	Harder to move quickly or track a single person; easier to blend in or lose a tail.
Alert	Guards or observers actively watching for trouble.	Higher DCs for Stealth and deception; Failures more likely to trigger immediate consequences.
Hazardous	Meaningful risk of harm from the environment or situation.	Partial Successes and Failures may inflict Conditions, tick threat Clocks, or escalate danger.
Surveillance	Cameras, monitoring spells, informants, or watchful neighbors.	Covert actions risk leaving a trace; some Failures may not trigger immediate danger but add to future complications.
Tense	Frayed tempers, suspicion, or high stakes in conversation.	Higher DCs for clumsy social approaches; successful calm or empathetic actions may clear the Tag.
Festive	Celebrations, parties, or communal joy.	Easier to mingle, gather casual information, or go unnoticed; harder to hold solemn attention.
Solemn	Funerals, vigils, official ceremonies.	Respectful approaches gain trust; overt disruption may have outsized social consequences.

Tag	What It Represents	Typical Effects
Suspicious	People are already on edge or expecting trouble.	DCs for lies and half-truths rise; honest or vulnerable approaches may be more effective than elaborate cover stories.

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 Advantage 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 Disadvantage 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 of rest, or stress.	Disadvantage on demanding physical actions and Checks using MIG or AGI approaches for many scenes; clears with meaningful rest or care.
Bleeding	An active wound that will worsen without treatment.	Time pressure; certain actions may risk further harm. Usually paired with a short Clock such as "Stabilize Wound"; clears with field treatment or medical attention.
Restrained	Held, tied, pinned, or otherwise unable to move freely.	Cannot change position or perform many physical actions; Checks to break free or receive help can clear or downgrade this Condition.
Poisoned	Exposed to harmful substances that impair or injure.	Disadvantage on a range of actions; may inflict periodic damage or tick a "Toxin Spreads" Clock. Clears via antidotes, medical care, or time, depending on fiction.
Marked	Specifically targeted or tracked by a foe.	Enemies gain Advantage on certain attacks or Checks against you until the mark is removed (breaking line of sight, changing appearance, or defeating the threat).

Mental and Social Conditions

Mental and social Conditions reflect fear, distraction, obsession, or shifts in reputation and trust. They show how events leave marks on 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 threat or situation.	Disadvantage on actions taken while the source is present; clears by escaping, rallying, or confronting the cause.
Suppressed	Shaken confidence, intimidation, or social pressure.	Disadvantage on the next bold or assertive action; usually clears after one meaningful attempt or supportive roleplaying.
Distracted	Split focus due to pain, competing demands, or intrusive thoughts.	Disadvantage on careful or complex tasks; clears when the distracting factor is addressed or set aside.
Compromised Reputation	A hit to standing in a community or group.	Higher DCs or Disadvantage on certain social Checks with that community; clears via reparative actions, public successes, or narrative milestones.
Obsessed	Fixated on a goal, person, or mystery.	Advantage on related research or pursuit; Disadvantage when asked to ignore or abandon the object of focus. Clears through resolution, intervention, or personal growth scenes.

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 – 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 Disadvantage, 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 grounded in recent events.	Advantage on one or a few Checks tied to the source of inspiration (a speech, a victory, a vow); clears once that benefit is used or the scene ends.
Sheltered	Taking cover under protection—physical, social, or institutional.	Reduced effect or Disadvantage on attacks against you from certain angles or factions; clears when you leave protection or it is withdrawn.
Bolstered	Reassurance, magical warding, or careful preparation.	Advantage on Checks to resist a specific danger (fear, charm, fire, interrogation); often tied to a short Clock or a single scene.
Focused	Calm, centered attention on a task or goal.	Advantage on RSN-heavy or precision actions related to the focus; may impose Disadvantage on unrelated impulsive choices; clears when you are interrupted or choose to break focus.
Backed by Authority	Acting with formal sanction, warrants, or clear mandate.	Lower DCs or Advantage on social Checks with people who respect that authority; higher DCs when dealing with those who resent or fear it. Clears when the mandate expires or is revoked.

You can add beneficial Conditions when characters earn them through play—completing preparation, forging alliances, or achieving symbolic victories. They are a good way to reward smart choices 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	<i>Warm Kitchen, Rainy Evening, Familiar Faces, Quiet Street</i>	<i>Comforted, Homesick, Compromised Reputation, Inspired</i>

Horror & Mystery Pack

Focus	Common Tags	Common Conditions
Uncertainty and dread	<i>Dim Light, Obscured, Whispering Walls, Off-Limits</i>	<i>Frightened, Haunted, Obsessed, Distracted</i>

Fantasy & Mythic Pack

Focus	Common Tags	Common Conditions
Rituals and wild places	<i>Sacred Ground, Ancient Ruins, Fey-Touched, Dragon's Shadow</i>	<i>Marked, Hexed, Bolstered, On Thin Ice With the Guild</i>

Modern & Sci-Fi Pack

Focus	Common Tags	Common Conditions
Systems and institutions	<i>Networked, Surveillance, Lockdown, Crowded</i>	<i>Compromised Reputation, Backed by Authority, On Watchlist, Suppressed</i>

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 Advantage/Disadvantage, 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 Advantage/Disadvantage. Only reach for DC shifts or new Clocks when you want to signal larger changes in risk or pacing.

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 – Pace, Not Payment

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.

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, RSN) 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 RSN 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 Advantage or new fictional permissions in future scenes.

Example – Skill Advancement Through Play

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 Advantage 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 Advantage, 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 – Milestone Advancement

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 – Advancement as Conversation

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 18+ for boss moments. Pressure Clocks fill more slowly.	You want relaxed, character-focused play where failure still matters but is less punishing.
High-Tension Pacing	Default to DC 14–16 for meaningful challenges; pressure Clocks advance on more Partial Successes.	You want sessions to feel urgent, with frequent tough choices and visible pressure.
Heroic Baseline	Characters begin with one “edge” Condition (such as <i>Inspired</i> or <i>Bolstered</i>) each session that they can cash in for Advantage on a pivotal Check.	You want characters to feel competent and lucky, especially in climactic scenes.

Variant	What Changes	Use When
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 – 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 – Safety Is a Shared Tool

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.

Part III: Game Master Section

Part III is written primarily for Game Masters, but curious players are welcome to read it as well. These chapters focus on framing sessions and scenes, managing pacing, designing scenarios and campaigns, and making effective use of NPCs, VPCs, factions, and fronts.

Together with the earlier rules, this section forms a complete toolkit for running the game: from first session to long-term arcs, from intimate character drama to sweeping faction conflicts. You can read it straight through or dip into the specific chapter you need before a session.

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.

GM Guidance – The Three Questions

When you feel stuck in a scene, return to three questions: "What do the NPCs want? What do the players care about here? What would happen if no one acted?" The answers almost always suggest the next move, a new Tag, or a Clock to start.

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 – Lightweight Prep

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 – Keep the Agenda Visible

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 – Adjusting a Scene

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 – Reframing Around a Clock

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 Advantage, Disadvantage, 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 – Check with Tags and Outcome Tiers

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 Disadvantage 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 – Speak Your Mechanics

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 – When in Doubt, Slow Down

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 – Multi-Phase Action Scene

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 – End of Session Recap

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.

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 – 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 – 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 – 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 – 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, Advantage or Disadvantage, and likely consequences. They also make it clear what might change if the PCs support or pressure this NPC over many sessions.

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 **Advantage and Disadvantage 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 Advantage on negotiations with workers, while one tagged *Burned Too Many Bridges* might impose Disadvantage 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 – 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 Advantage and Disadvantage 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 – 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, Advantage or Disadvantage, 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 – 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 – 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 – 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.

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 in-fiction 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 – 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.

Part IV: Reference Sheets, Glossary, and Index

Part IV provides quick reference tools for play: printable sheets for characters, GMs, and shared campaign elements, plus a glossary of key terms and an index to help you find topics quickly. The glossary ensures that everyone uses the same language for Attributes, Skills, Proficiencies, Tags, Conditions, Clocks, and outcome tiers.

Use these chapters as anchors during play. When you are setting up a new game, reach for the sheets. When a term feels ambiguous or you are unsure where to look for a specific rule, start with the 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 – Campaign Dashboard

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.

Core Character Sheet (Printable)

Outline:

- Character Identity (name, pronouns, genre, concept, role).
- Attributes (MIG, AGI, PRE, RSN with notes).
- Skills (3–5 key competencies with categories).
- Proficiencies (domain, tool, organization, or role expertise).
- Tags, Conditions, and personal Clocks.
- Gear, relationships, and personal goals/threads.

Character Identity

Name: _____

Pronouns: _____

Genre / Slice: Cozy Fantasy Horror/Mystery Modern Sci-Fi Other: _____

Concept (one sentence): _____

Archetype / Role: _____

Attributes

Attribute	Rating	Notes (fictional meaning)
MIG (Might)	—	_____
AGI (Agility)	—	_____
PRE (Presence)	—	_____
RSN (Reason)	—	_____

Skills

#	Skill Name	Categories / Approaches	Notes / Examples
1	_____	<input type="checkbox"/> Exploration <input type="checkbox"/> Social <input type="checkbox"/> Technical <input type="checkbox"/> Conflict <input type="checkbox"/> Other: _____	_____
2	_____	<input type="checkbox"/> Exploration <input type="checkbox"/> Social <input type="checkbox"/> Technical <input type="checkbox"/> Conflict <input type="checkbox"/> Other: _____	_____
3	_____	<input type="checkbox"/> Exploration <input type="checkbox"/> Social <input type="checkbox"/> Technical <input type="checkbox"/> Conflict <input type="checkbox"/> Other: _____	_____
4	_____	<input type="checkbox"/> Exploration <input type="checkbox"/> Social <input type="checkbox"/> Technical <input type="checkbox"/> Conflict <input type="checkbox"/> Other: _____	_____
5	_____	<input type="checkbox"/> Exploration <input type="checkbox"/> Social <input type="checkbox"/> Technical <input type="checkbox"/> Conflict <input type="checkbox"/> Other: _____	_____

Proficiencies

#	Proficiency	Type	Scope / Benefits
1	_____	<input type="checkbox"/> Domain <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> Tool <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> Organization <input type="checkbox"/> Role	_____
2	_____	<input type="checkbox"/> Domain <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> Tool <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> Organization <input type="checkbox"/> Role	_____
3	_____	<input type="checkbox"/> Domain <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> Tool <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> Organization <input type="checkbox"/> Role	_____
4	_____	<input type="checkbox"/> Domain <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> Tool <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> Organization <input type="checkbox"/> Role	_____

Tags, Conditions, and Clocks

Character Tags:

- _____
- _____
- _____

Current Conditions:

- Exhausted – _____
- Bleeding – _____
- Frightened – _____
- Other: _____

Personal Clocks:Name: _____ Segments: Name: _____ Segments: **Gear, Relationships, and Threads****Signature Item:** _____**Gear:** 1) _____ 2) _____ 3) _____ 4) _____ 5) _____**Relationships:** _____**Goals & Future Advancements:** _____

Advancement & Threads Tracker (Printable)

Outline:

- Campaign / Arc header (name, season, theme).
- Personal Threads table (questions, why they matter, status).
- Advancement Triggers (session-based, milestones, downtime projects with Clocks).
- Advancement Log (what advancements were taken and when).
- Notes on character growth.

Campaign Name: _____

Arc / Season: _____

Arc Theme / Focus: _____

Personal Threads

Thread / Question	Why It Matters	Status
_____	_____	<input type="checkbox"/> Open <input type="checkbox"/> In Progress <input type="checkbox"/> Resolved
_____	_____	<input type="checkbox"/> Open <input type="checkbox"/> In Progress <input type="checkbox"/> Resolved

Advancement Log

#	Session / Date	Type	Details
1	_____	<input type="checkbox"/> Attr <input type="checkbox"/> Skill <input type="checkbox"/> Prof <input type="checkbox"/> Rel <input type="checkbox"/> Edge	_____

#	Session / Date	Type	Details
2	_____	<input type="checkbox"/> Attr <input type="checkbox"/> Skill <input type="checkbox"/> Prof <input type="checkbox"/> Rel <input type="checkbox"/> Edge	_____

Session Log (Printable)

Outline:

- Session overview (date, title, cast).
- Primary and secondary objectives.
- Key Tags, Conditions, and Clocks for the session.
- Space for key events, discoveries, and memorable moments.

Date: _____

Session Title: _____

Cast Present: _____

Primary Objective: _____

Secondary / Personal Objectives:

- _____
- _____

Key Tags / Conditions / Clocks This Session:

- _____
- _____

GM Session Prep Worksheet (Printable)

Outline:

- Session frame (last time, today's focus/questions).
- Scenes & Situations table (location & Tags, NPCs/factions, Clocks/stakes).
- Space for fronts/factions and mechanical notes (likely DCs, rules to feature).
- After-session notes on changes and new questions.

Session Title: _____

Last Time...

- _____
- _____

Today's Focus / Questions:

- _____
- _____

Scenes & Situations

Scene	Location & Tags	NPCs / Factions	Clocks / Stakes
1	_____ (Tags: _____)	_____	_____
2	_____ (Tags: _____)	_____	_____

Campaign & Fronts Sheet (Printable)

Outline:

- Campaign summary (name and pitch).
- Fronts table (description, Clock, Tags/notes).
- Factions and their attitudes can be tracked on a parallel sheet or in notes.

Campaign Name: _____

Pitch: _____

Fronts

Front	Description	Clock	Tags / Notes
_____	_____	□ □ □ □ □ □ □ □	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____

NPC / VPC Profile (Printable)

Outline:

- Identity (name, role, faction, concept).
- Tags and Conditions that define how they show up.
- Drives/goals and resources/leverage.
- Clocks or notes tying them into current fronts and stories.

Name: _____

Role / Position: _____

Faction / Allegiance: _____

Concept: _____

Tags: _____

Conditions: _____

Drives / Goals: _____

DC Ladder & Outcome Tiers (Printable)

Outline:

- DC Ladder table (12–22, labels, example difficulties).
- Outcome tiers by margin (Critical Success to Critical Failure).
- Use with the advantage/disadvantage rules in earlier chapters.

DC	Label	Example Difficulty
12	Easy	Simple tasks under some pressure
14	Routine	Standard challenges for competent characters
16	Tough	Hard tasks or tricky circumstances
18	Hard	Demanding efforts, tight time, or strong opposition
20	Heroic	Big stunts and high-risk moves
22	Legendary	Extraordinary, mythic-level feats

Margin	Outcome Tier	Summary
$\geq +5$	Critical Success	Best-case result, extra benefit
≥ 0	Full Success	Clear success, no major cost
-1 to -2	Partial Success	Success with cost or limitation
≤ -3	Failure	No success; situation changes or worsens

Margin	Outcome Tier	Summary
≤ -7 or all 1s	Critical Failure	Worst plausible result, big complications

Tags & Conditions Quick Lookup (Printable)

Outline:

- Common Tags table (type and short effect summary).
- Common Conditions table (type and short effect summary).
- Use with the full reference in Chapter 18 and the Glossary.

Tag	Type	Summary
Dim Light	Environmental	Adv Stealth; Disadv detailed Perception & ranged
Cramped	Environmental	Disadv large/sweeping actions; helps grapples
Crowded	Situational	Harder to move fast; easier to blend in
Alert	Situational	Higher Stealth DCs; Failures escalate quickly
Hazardous	Situational	Partials/Failures may inflict Conditions

Condition	Type	Summary
Exhausted	Physical	Disadv demanding physical actions; rest to clear
Bleeding	Physical	Time pressure; treat or risk escalation
Restrained	Physical	Movement limited; must break free or be helped
Frightened	Mental	Disadv while threat present; rally/escape to clear

Condition	Type	Summary
Compromised Reputation	Social	Social DCs higher with affected group

Clock Templates (Printable)

Outline:

- 4-segment Clock layout for short tasks and immediate threats.
- 6-segment Clock layout for standard progress and pressure.
- 8-segment Clock layout for major arcs and long-term fronts.

4-Segment Clock: Name: _____ Segments:

6-Segment Clock: Name: _____ Segments:

8-Segment Clock: Name: _____ Segments:

Chapter 28: Glossary

Comprehensive definitions of game terms and concepts

- [Core Mechanics](#)
- [Attributes](#)
- [Character Types](#)
- [Common Conditions](#)
- [Common Tags](#)

[Core Mechanics](#)

Advantage

Roll extra dice and keep best 4. Comes in two levels: +1 Advantage (roll 5d6, keep best 4) or +2 Advantage (roll 6d6, keep best 4). Granted by favorable positioning, gear, assistance, or special abilities. Cannot stack beyond ±2 levels.

Defined in: [Chapter 8: Advantage and Disadvantage](#)

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 $\geq +5$. 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](#)

Disadvantage

Roll extra dice and keep worst 4. Comes in two levels: -1 Disadvantage (roll 5d6, keep worst 4) or -2 Disadvantage (roll 6d6, keep worst 4). Imposed by poor positioning, conditions, obstacles, or penalties. Cannot stack beyond ± 2 levels.

Defined in: [Chapter 8: Advantage and Disadvantage](#)

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 Advantage 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](#)

[Attributes](#)

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](#)

Character Types

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](#)

Common Conditions

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; Disadvantage 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. Disadvantage on physical actions. Deep fatigue from sustained effort, lack of rest, or stress. Disadvantage 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; Disadvantage 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

Disadvantage 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 Advantage 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 Disadvantage; 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

Disadvantage 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](#)

Common Tags

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. Disadvantage on actions that need space (large weapons, sweeping attacks); may grant Advantage when bracing or grappling.

Defined in: [Chapter 18: Extended Tags & Conditions Reference](#)

Crowded

Advantage to blend in or lose pursuit; Disadvantage 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

Advantage to stealth; Disadvantage 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

Advantage 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 Advantage to defense but degrades on Partial Success or repeated use. Barriers that can be destroyed—thin walls, wooden crates, glass partitions. Advantage 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); Disadvantage to ranged attacks and navigation. Fog, smoke, heavy rain, or cluttered sightlines severely limit visibility. Disadvantage on sight-based Perception; may grant Advantage 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

Disadvantage 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 Advantage 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](#)

Chapter 29: Comprehensive Index

Quick reference and complete topical index

- [Quick Reference](#)
- [Topical Index](#)
- [Alphabetical Index](#)

Quick Reference

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 focus
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](#)

Advantage & Disadvantage

Type	Level	Roll
Advantage	+1	Roll 5d6, keep best 4
	+2	Roll 6d6, keep best 4
Disadvantage	-1	Roll 5d6, keep worst 4
	-2	Roll 6d6, keep worst 4

Note: Multiple sources combine but cap at ± 2 . Advantage and Disadvantage cancel each other out.

See [Chapter 8: Advantage & Disadvantage](#)

Range Bands

Range	Distance	Description
Close	~5 feet	Within arm's reach

Range	Distance	Description
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](#)

Topical Index

Major topics grouped by category.

Core Mechanics

- [4d6 Resolution \(Ch 8\)](#)
- [Advantage & Disadvantage \(Ch 8, Glossary\)](#)
- [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)

Alphabetical Index

Complete A-Z listing of all terms and topics.

A

Actions & Checks

[Ch 8](#)

Advancement

[Ch 19](#)

Advantage

[Ch 8, Glossary](#)

Agility (AGI)

[Ch 7, Glossary](#)

Alternative Play

[Ch 26](#)

Area (Tag)

[Ch 18, Glossary](#)

B

Bleeding (Condition)

[Ch 18, Glossary](#)

C

Campaign Structures

[Ch 22](#)

Character Creation

[Ch 6](#)

Character Sheets

[Ch 27](#)

Characters and Attributes

[Ch 7](#)

Clock

[Ch 9, Ch 9, Glossary](#)

Combat Basics

[Ch 10](#)

Condition

[Ch 9, Glossary](#)

Conditions (Common)

[Ch 18, Glossary](#)

Core Concepts

Ch 2

Core Principles of Play

Ch 4

Cramped (Tag)

[Ch 18, Glossary](#)

Critical Failure

[Ch 8, Ch 8, Glossary](#)

Critical Success

[Ch 8, Ch 8, Glossary](#)

Crowded (Tag)

[Ch 18, Glossary](#)

D

Damage & Resolve

Ch 10

Dazed (Condition)

[Ch 9, Glossary](#)

DC (Difficulty Class)

[Ch 8, Ch 8, Glossary](#)

Designing Scenarios

Ch 23

Dim Light (Tag)

[Ch 18, Glossary](#)

Disadvantage

[Ch 8, Glossary](#)

Downtime & Recovery

Ch 12

E

Elevated (Tag)

[Ch 18, Glossary](#)

Exhausted (Condition)

[Ch 18, Glossary](#)

Exploration

Ch 11

Exposed (Condition)

[Ch 9, Glossary](#)

F

Factions & Fronts

[Ch 25](#)

Failure

[Ch 8, Ch 8, Glossary](#)

Forceful (Tag)

[Ch 18, Glossary](#)

Frightened (Condition)

[Ch 18, Glossary](#)

Full Success

[Ch 8, Ch 8, Glossary](#)

G

GMless Play

[Ch 26, Ch 26](#)

Glossary

[Ch 28](#)

H

How to Use This Rulebook

[Ch 3](#)

I

Index

[Ch 29](#)

Interpreting Outcomes

[Ch 8](#)

M

Margin

[Ch 8, Ch 8, Glossary](#)

Marked (Condition)

[Ch 18, Glossary](#)

Messy (Tag)

[Ch 18, Glossary](#)

Might (MIG)

[Ch 7, Glossary](#)

N

NPCs & Enemies

[Ch 24](#)

O

Optional & Variant Rules

[Ch 20](#)

Outcome Tiers

[Ch 8](#)

P

Partial Success

[Ch 8, Ch 8, Glossary](#)

Play Aids & Templates

[Ch 27](#)

Poisoned (Condition)

[Ch 18, Glossary](#)

Positioning & Environment

[Ch 10](#)

Precise (Tag)

[Ch 18, Glossary](#)

Presence (PRE)

[Ch 7, Glossary](#)

Proficiencies

[Ch 16, Ch 17, Glossary](#)

Prone (Condition)

[Ch 10, Glossary](#)

Q

Quick Reference

[Ch 29](#)

R

Range & Positioning

[Ch 10](#)

Reason (RSN)

[Ch 7, Glossary](#)

Resolve

[Ch 10](#)

Restrained (Condition)

[Ch 18, Glossary](#)

Roleplaying Guidance

[Ch 13](#)

Rotating Facilitator

[Ch 26, Ch 26](#)

Running Campaigns

[Ch 22](#)

Running Sessions

[Ch 21](#)

S

Safety Tools

[Ch 13](#)

Scenarios & One-Shots

[Ch 23](#)

Session Zero

[Ch 13](#)

Setting DCs

[Ch 8](#)

Shared Authority

[Ch 26, Ch 26](#)

Skill

[Ch 14, Ch 15, Glossary](#)

Social Interaction

[Ch 11, Ch 11](#)

Solo Play

[Ch 26, Ch 26](#)

Stunned (Condition)

[Ch 9, Glossary](#)

Suppressed (Condition)

[Ch 18, Glossary](#)

T

Tag

[Ch 9, Glossary](#)

Tags (Common)

[Ch 18, Glossary](#)

Topical Index

[Ch 29](#)

V

Variant Rules

[Ch 20](#)

VPC (Villain/Powerful Character)

[Ch 1](#), [Ch 24](#), [Glossary](#)

W

Ways to Play

[Ch 5](#)

Welcome to the Game

[Ch 1](#)

Worldbuilding

[Ch 25](#)