



A role-playing game by Ben Wright

<http://chthonic.150m.com/rpg/>

Second Edition

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**Major changes in the second edition:**

- The Tactics skill has been removed.
- Character types have been revised, and two new types added.
- Rules for preparation have been stated a different way.
- The benefit for losing a Vital Element has been changed.
- The alchemy tree has been vastly simplified into an open-ended format.
- Secret techniques for alchemy have changed, and equivalent special techniques have been introduced for other skills.
- Experience and advancement rules have changed.





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Major Croker waved his men out of the van as its turbine coughed into silence. They took up positions crouched down behind the mansion-house's garden wall. He brought the radio up to his mouth.

"Report, over."

His lieutenant's voice was hoarse, trying to stay quiet.

"In position, over."

The major smiled. There were only two ways out of the house, and now both of them were covered.

"Acknowledged. Over and out."

He pulled his revolver from its holster and checked the chambers. It was loaded with explosive rounds, the kind he preferred when dealing with this kind of prey.

They gained entrance to the house easily. It seemed deserted.

"Don't be fooled," he told his men, "We are dealing with the most dangerous kind of criminal- an alchemist. In fact-" he stopped to tap a wall "-he has sealed up an entrance here. Sergeant, find some hammers. We will drag him from his hidey-hole."

Croker was sure the fugitive would be hidden there, but he chose to sweep the rest of the expansive house anyway. There might be proscribed books to send to the Purity Alliance, after all. The fire was out in the lounge, but the Major's keen eyes saw an alchemical circle drawn onto the floor. He would have to send some men to destroy it before he left, so its wickedness couldn't tempt someone else into sin.

There was light spilling out of the study, the two doors thrown wide. He crept across the room, giving the circle a wide berth, and slipped through them.

A single lamp was burning on the desk, illuminating a room lined with book-cases. A travelling bag was perched on the end of the desk as a grey-haired man buckled it closed.

"I expected you earlier, Major," the man said.

Croker kept his weapon raised, and double-checked there was no-one else in the room, hiding in a corner or behind one of the doors. When he knew the man was alone, he still didn't let down his guard.

"You fooled us for quite some time, Milner," the major said, "A respected man of the town was the perfect cover. But you got sloppy."

"I was planning to move on, anyway," Milner said, amiably, "I have learned what I came here to learn."

"I suppose the doorway in the corridor hides evidence of your 'experiments'?"

"Actually," the man chuckled, "That's the cloakroom. I wanted to give your men something to do while I packed my things away."

"You won't leave here alive," Croker told him, and pulled back the hammer on his gun, "There is no time for any of your heretical sorcery."

"On the contrary, Major, it's you who have run out of time."

The doors closed with a gentle thump. Major Croker whirled round to see half a circle drawn on the back of each. The complete ring glowed blue briefly, then the doors turned into hundreds of wooden splinters and shot towards him.

Milner stood up from behind the desk, tutting as he noticed some of the wooden spikes had stuck in his bag. He stepped over the major's body, then paused.

"You weren't a bad man, you know. But you served bad masters. I may have learned the truth behind them, but on balance I would much rather have stayed in ignorance."





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# ALCHEMY FOR THE LAYPERSON

*"At ease and be seated. I am Sergeant-Major Atkins. This is one of the final parts of your formal training before you leave the warm and loving bosom of boot camp and are posted somewhere out in the real world. The title of this lecture is 'Alchemy for the Layperson'.*

*"Let's see what the dictionary has to say on the matter: 'Alchemy is the science of manipulating the shape of and creating movement in objects via use of a 'gyre' draw on or around them'. That's correct as far as it goes, but you need to know more than that.*

*"Pay attention all of you. At some point you are going to be assigned to a unit with an alchemist attached to it. You may even command such a unit one day. I'm here to tell you what alchemy is, what it can do and, more importantly, what it cannot do. This knowledge may save your life one day.*

*"First and foremost, alchemists carry a rank, but they are somewhat outside the normal command structure. This means that that they can't give orders except to other alchemists of lower rank. But if you'll take my advice, when an alchemist gets all antsy and strongly suggests that you do or do not do something, don't try to argue. They've probably noticed some alchemy at work that you won't understand. Although they are nominally under the command of a regular army officer, they are on a very long leash. Their abilities will be put to use in support of the unit, but they are usually also under orders from Central that their C.O. is not necessarily privy to. Think of them as a specialised piece of field equipment.*

*"I imagine that many of you think you already know what alchemy is. Some of you may even have friends or relatives who are registered alchemists. But to be on the safe side, these are the basics. Alchemy is not magic; it is a science. Like any science, it takes a lot of boring study to master. An alchemist can, using scientifically validated techniques, alter the shape of objects. These changes can be subtle or dramatic. I have seen an alchemist demolish a house by making its foundations flow out from under it. I have seen a different alchemist encase a criminal in a block of glass. Alchemy may be very powerful, but the alchemist is bound by its laws. He cannot change one*

*thing into another thing - lead into gold, for example. He cannot change the weight of an object. He can change the volume of an object only if it's made of a material that can be compressed or expanded. If he does not know what material and object is made of, he cannot use it. He may use alchemy on people and animals only for surgery or first aid. An alchemist can make a bridge across a chasm in seconds, but it takes an engineer to make a bridge that will last decades.*

*"Alchemy comes in many branches, each representing a different kind of base material the alchemist can manipulate. Most alchemists know more than one, but specialise in a single branch. The main branches are stone, wood, metal, water, fire, air and medicine. I would not be here today without that last one. If there is an alchemist with your unit, make it your business to find out what branches he knows as soon as possible. Not everybody who knows a little about alchemy can actually perform it - I know more about it than most, but that just means I can recognise it when I see it.*

*"Like any scientist, an alchemist needs tools. A simple piece of chalk is an important part of any alchemist's arsenal, and here's why: all alchemy requires a circle, or as they call it, a gyre. This circle can be drawn onto the object itself, or merely around the object on some handy surface. The circle must then be filled with symbols - these reflect the material composition of the target and what the alchemist intends to do with it. It can take an hour or more to create a suitable circle for what seems like a modest transmutation. Those final few seconds, when solid rock or metal flows like water into a new shape, that's just the end of the process. Don't expect miracles from an alchemist who has not had time to prepare.*

*"That said, alchemists are nothing if not cunning, and most of them have some means of hurrying the process along. Perhaps the most common method is to wear clothing or armour with the circle already part of the pattern. A circle drawn in that way can be used on the clothing itself or on an object it is pressed against - as long as it is the right circle for the material. A more permanent approach is to have the circle tattooed on the*





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body. Some alchemists have even perfected ways of drawing crude gyres in less than a second, should the need arise.

*"Once the alchemist has his circle, he needs to touch it. This is important. If you ever have to face a rogue alchemist, concentrate on pinning his hands. Nine times out of ten, that will render him harmless. The other time in ten, there was nothing you could do anyway."*

*"Particularly powerful alchemists only need the gyre as a starting point - they can make their material leap out of the circle or spread the effect of their alchemy beyond it. Don't think that just because the circle is small and out of the way that its effects can't reach you."*

*"And now a final word - there are certain kinds of alchemy that alchemists are forbidden to attempt. Not just by the State, but by the laws that govern alchemy itself. Don't even make jokes about them when an alchemist is in earshot. If you catch wind of an alchemist performing any of these acts, even a State-endorsed alchemist, tell your senior officer as soon as possible. All of them carry the death penalty. The forbidden types of alchemy are: Alchemy of the Soul - trying to separate a person's soul from their body, or creating life from nothing. Alchemy of the Flesh - any use of alchemy on living creatures for non-medical purposes. Unnatural Alchemy - attempting to change one kind of material into another. Degenerate Alchemy- trying to destroy or create material. Finally, Mental Alchemy - attempting to manipulate intangible things like memory or knowledge."*

*"I don't expect you to have taken all of that in right away - it's lot of unfamiliar material - so take a copy of these notes on your way out. Remember - here in Stravia we have tamed alchemy and put it to good military use. Outside our borders, it's practised just any old how."*

### Rumours about Alchemists

- They need to use their own blood in their rituals.
- Alchemists kidnap babies in order to conduct their research.
- Alchemy is a gift from God.
- Alchemy is a gift from the Underworld.
- No alchemist is capable of love.
- Alchemists are much more powerful than they seem - they keep their strongest alchemy hidden in case the people turn against them.
- Every act of alchemy takes a day off your life.
- Alchemy is powered by human life force - not from the alchemist but from innocent by-standers.
- It's all done with mirrors.







# INTRODUCTION

This is a role-playing game about the price of success and the necessity of secrecy.

In this game, one person takes the role of the Game Master (or GM), who has overall responsibility for running the game. The other participants each take the role of a single character - a Player Character (or PC) within the game world. They have autonomy over their PC's intentions and words, the GM assumes the mantle of responsibility for everything else. That said, suggestions and banter between all the players are thoroughly encouraged.

The game world is one similar in tone to the end of the nineteenth century in Europe. There are a number of powerful nations jockeying for position amongst themselves. There's been no great age of colonisation, so the scuffles have been up close and personal for the countries and their people. Science and industry are still finding their niche in society and warfare. What makes this world different from the real world is the science alchemy. We would consider it magic. Alchemy is the ability through words and sigils to shape an object however you wish, even to the point of flinging it across the room with enough force to kill a man. The inhabitants of the world, however, believe that alchemy is a science: well-understood, practical and reliable. Most of the time, they are right.

When the GM decides that the outcome of an intended action is in doubt, she will call for dice to be rolled. The character will want to succeed while at the same time avoiding any unpleasant consequences. If the roll

If you have 'Fudge Dice', a particular kind of six-sided die, they can be used in this game. A roll of '+' can be used for success and to avoid consequences. A roll of '-' can be used for success only. A roll of ' ' can't be used for anything.

is good, he gets both. If the roll isn't quite so good, he will have to choose between success without consequences and failure without consequences. If the roll is bad, well, you can guess what that means.

The Player Characters are a mismatched bunch. Each of them has lost something terribly, terribly important to them. Whether they're driven by vengeance, atonement or altruism, they band together against a dark conspiracy because when the chips are down, they are good people. They have to deal with the conspiracy in secret because they don't know how close to the top it reaches, or who else they can trust.

You will need some six-sided dice, pencils and paper to play the game. Oh, and some imagination.

## These Rules

The next section gives some background information on the game's world and its people. After that there are the all-important instructions on how to create a character.

The rules come next, with details of what the skills are in detail and how you use them. The next part is information and inspiration for the Game Master, although other players are free to read it without discovering anything they shouldn't - apart from, perhaps, the example Conspiracy.

The final section contains rules on how characters improve.

A blank character sheet and conspiracy sheet are at the very back.





# GAZETTEER

The world of The Ring of Changes centres around four great nations - the Republic of Stravia, the Holy Mallinese Empire, the Kingdom of Isemgard and the Duchies of Habgaria. The technology of the world is broadly on a par with that of our world in the late nineteenth century. They have the radio and the telegraph for communication, field artillery and machine guns for war. Gas turbine engines are used instead of steam power for rail transport; there are also motor vehicles powered by gas turbines. The Kingdom of Isemgard has begun to experiment with dirigibles for a variety of purposes, including a branch of the military fielding armoured dirigibles.

The second most important thing to remember is that this world is only partly defined here; details of people, places and customs can and should be made up while playing the game. Not just by the Game Master, either, but by any player with the GM's assent. If a player wants her character to have a history with the senior officer in the town he is visiting, then the GM can make it so without risking contradicting any established material. By making up details as you go, you can ensure that every detail you decide on is important in some way - by making the Player Characters an integral part of the world or creating the type of non-player character you want in a given situation. The countries and other specific things mentioned in this section are given only the scantiest definition, some quotes from people living in this world and a selection of rumours. The GM gets to decide which rumours, if any, have a grain of truth to them.

The most important thing to remember is that this is not a game where the PCs drift through the world while having little actual impact on it. The PCs can easily set out with grand plans to change the world in some way, and the GM should not throw roadblocks in their way just to preserve the setting. Even if the players are reluctant to rock the boat themselves, the antagonists they may face are not. In short, something important in the world should be on fire by the end of the second game session at the latest. Every detail that's created about the world

should exist to further the story in some way, even if that way is fairly trivial. A player should not ask 'Is there a seedy bar in this town?', rather she should say 'I walk into the seediest bar in town and ask for my usual'. The world is a play-thing, nothing more.

Don't get too obsessed with reading and memorising information about the setting. If the GM gets something 'wrong', then in your particular game the setting is a little different, that's all. What information is given exists only to act as a starting point for your game, to establish the basics and avoid leaving all of the work to you.

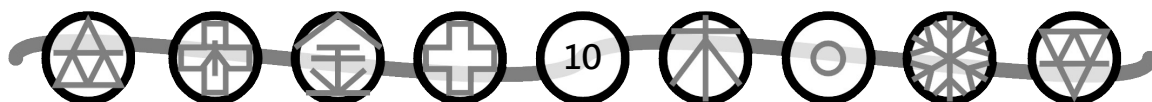
When it comes to rumours about people and places, it's up to the GM how many, if any, of them are true.

## The Republic of Stravia

**Militaristic - Arrogant - Populous**  
**Head of State:** General-Elect Domville  
**Ruling Body:** General-Elect Domville  
**Capital:** Central  
**Adjective:** Stravian  
**Demonym:** Stravian

*"Listen, I don't care what anyone says about the Republic, or the General-Elect. Things are better now than they used to be. There's law and order, for starters. Sure, you get some bleeding-heart types complaining that there are soldiers on the street rather than policemen, but at least you know they're armed. Burglars and louts will think twice if there's a chance they'll be challenged at the point of a gun. It's only right and proper that Toft Central has control of the other towns we're stronger together. Toft Eastern and Toft Valley nearly ruined us all with their funny money before Central took charge. And if any of the neighbours start to make a fuss I hope we send a battalion of men to teach them a little respect."*

- Arthur Barraclough, Blacksmith



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*"Stravia, as a nation, is a recent invention. Until twenty years ago, there were a number of city-states - 'Tofts' - that traded with one another and with other countries. Two out of the three largest cities experimented with fiat currency, an enterprise that was ultimately undermined by alchemy. In the ensuing crisis, Central rose to prominence and unified the area by force. Despite the propaganda, the different areas of Stravia have subtle but definite cultural differences. The new government wishes to stress unity above all else, including liberty. It*

*has even gone so far as to remove 'Toft' from the official names of its towns and cities. The position of Governor of Central has a term limit - but the General-Elect is abusing a technicality which means that the clock doesn't start until he formally takes office. As long as Stravia continues to enjoy military success, the situation is stable."*

- Erasmus Cutter, Historian



*"I have only been to that strange place once. Their own alchemists must either join their army or submit to frequent, humiliating spot checks and restrictions on movement. As an alchemist from elsewhere, I was tolerated within their borders only under military supervision. I did not stay long. Their knowledge of alchemy is adequate but they do not respect learning as they should."*

- Ciria, the Silk Alchemist

*"So those Stravian boys think they're something special with their alchemists fighting for them? Well, let them try to take on Isemgard. We've got flame tanks!"*

- Massey Colpepper-Merchant, Engineer

## Rumours About Stravia

- Central was behind the collapse of the fiat currencies, using its own alchemists to create counterfeits.
- There is something very wrong with the alchemy of Stravia.
- The General-Elect has been dead for years, and his role is played by doubles under military control.
- Registered Alchemists act as a secret police force for the government.
- Stravia is gearing up for a war with one of the surrounding countries.
- The highest-ranking alchemists are the power behind the General-Elect.
- Registered alchemists have been disappearing.

## The Holy Mallinese Empire

**Zealous - Xenophobic - Poor**

**Head of State: Emperor Stott**

**Ruling Body: Imperial Council of Mallinet**

**Capital: Connipolis**

**Adjective: Mallinese**

**Demonym: Mallinesian**

*"If you don't want to get cheated, always look for the Triple Crest on anything you buy at market. That means it's been made in Mallinet, in a workshop with a certificate to say it's free of alchemical taint. If it doesn't have the crest, it's either shoddy workmanship from some back-street factory or, worse, imported. If you ever end up with imported merchandise, destroy it as soon as you can in case the Purity Alliance come to do a spot check."*

- Jennifer Solent, Shop-keeper

*"Do not despair, my brothers! We may have to tighten our belts today, but our reward is a pure spirit and the certain knowledge that we follow God's will! The pangs of hunger we feel will be nothing compared to the gnawing pain that the foul foreign alchemists shall feel when their very souls are consumed by the witchcraft they embody. In Stravia, Isemgard and Habgaria they will soon know God's wrath for their reliance on the abomination of alchemy - their hubris is absolute and their downfall is inevitable. We will be the inheritors of the world. We who know the truth will begin a new golden age with untainted hearts! Please give generously to the chapel roof fund."*

- Calico Jones, Preacher

*"Some say you can't do business with the Mallinese. I know better. Sure, imports are banned, but you can get your goods into the country if you know how. Do it at one remove, though, because you don't want to be caught smuggling in their country, oh no. The best part is, we can undercut their wholesale price by so much that we're cheaper even with the smugglers' cut. They're so backward that our mass-produced cloth is better quality than the rags they make themselves."*

- Madrigal Matterson-Smith, Mill Owner





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*"The greatest tragedy about Mallinet is that once it was the centre of all alchemical knowledge. Now all of its secrets are locked away in the vaults of the Purity Alliance or destroyed on pyres. The knowledge of the past has tempted more than one alchemist to make that land his grave. Please, do not make it yours."*

- Ciria, the Silk Alchemist

### Rumours About Mallinet

- The Imperial Council is actually a cabal of alchemists, who want to make sure they have no competition.
- Every Inquisitor of the Purity Alliance has his heart removed when he takes up his position.
- Their religion is bunk, but their high priests know something the rest of us don't.
- The current attitude to alchemy came about as a result of a transgression in the past so great no-one dared record it.
- Performing alchemy is more difficult than usual in Mallinet.
- Priests can stop alchemy cold by invoking God.
- There are whispers that a popular revolution is brewing, particularly amongst those who feel Mallinet is taking too soft a line with its neighbours.

### The Kingdom of Isemgard

**Industrious - Rapacious - Squalid**

**Head of State:** Queen Abigail I

**Ruling Body:** The Guildmasters' Committee

**Capital:** Isemgard

**Adjective:** Isemgard

**Demonym:** Isemgarder

*"Let the supplicant step forward. Brother Archibald, you have proven yourself a Craftsman of no small ability, bringing respect and wealth to our illustrious Guild. Present you now an example of your work, demonstrating the skill and patience that we would expect of a man who pleads to become a 3rd degree Journeyman. If your effort meets with the approval of those equal, but more senior than you, your wish may be granted. But know that you, as do all of us, are expected to keep the secrets and dignity of this great Guild at all times. Should you fail, there will no succour for you here but the hot iron of torment and the cold shackles of disgrace."*

- William Lesley-Newcombe, Guild Proctor

*"I was running through the accounts for my division when I spotted what I thought was an error. I brought it to the attention of my supervisor, who said he would deal with it. I didn't hear anything more about it. Three weeks later, I found the same thing again. I went back to the old accounts to see how my supervisor had squared it away, but saw he hadn't. He'd just signed off on them despite the error. I went back further, and found more instances where the discrepancy was ignored. It all traced back to the Deputy Guildmaster. I went over my supervisor's head with my findings, confident that I had uncovered evidence of massive embezzlement. When I was summoned to the Guildmaster's office, I was told I was being fired for gross misconduct. I was out of the Guild, and blackballed so no other guild would take me on."*

- Elizabeth Farrow-Hatley, Beggar





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*"I went to Isemgard once, but I could barely stand it. First there's the smell. Depending on which part of the city you're in, it's either exhaust fumes, stale sweat or open sewer. Everyone's always rushing about. If you get in someone's way, even by accident, they'll knock you into the gutter without a backward glance. A trace of a foreign accent and everyone assumes you're some kind of pauper looking to steal from them. If someone bumps into you and apologises, that's a sure sign that your purse has just been stolen."*

- Edgar Jessop, Engineer

*"I hope the flame tanks frighten the enemy. They sure scare the crap out of me."*

- Richard Chesterton-Featherly, Tank Technician

### Rumours about Isemgard

- The Queen is not just a figurehead, but is subtly manipulating the Guildmasters' Committee.
- Isemgard is spoiling for a fight with Stravia, just so they can test their new weapons.
- Every year the Guildmasters meet with General-Elect Domville and the Archduke Gantt in order to jointly decide what's going to happen with the economies of the three countries in the coming year.
- Stravia invaded Campport because Isemgard was on the brink of negotiating its purchase from the then Governor.
- The Guild of Engineers has a dark secret - all of its knowledge comes from a stash of scrolls uncovered in the Larrakh desert containing ancient wisdom.
- Alchemists from a number of guilds have ambitions of forming an Alchemist's Guild, uniting them all in a single powerful organisation.
- In the poorest parts of the capital, a deadly new contagious disease is spreading.

## The Duchies of Habgaria

**Fractionous - Pompous - Rich**

**Head of State: Archduke Gantt**

**Ruling Body: The Conference of Dukes**

**Capital: Gantt House**

**Adjective: Habgarian**

**Demonym: Habgarian**

*"I'm not sayin' nothin' you haven't all thought at some point. I want to tell you that how things are now is not the only way they can be. The nobles have it comin'. We are not chattels. We are men and women, and they treat us like dirt. There are some of them who help us, who treat us fairly. But every one of them thinks, in his heart, that we're less than he is. They get all the book-learnin', the posh clothes, the cars and time to read and sing and dance. We get back-breakin' labour every hour o' the day, and many o' the night. They have to keep us down, because if they don't, we might learn that we're stronger than we think. Stronger than they think and, aye, stronger than them. If we stand together, they cannot deny us. So throw down your tools, all o' you! I'm callin' a strike!"*

- Sam Bramwell, Agitator

*"Frankly, my dear, if the lower orders did not have our civilising influence, they would fall to cannibalism within the week."*

- Clancey, Third Duke of Winbourne

*"I find when journeying across the wide plains and rolling hills of Habgaria that I can associate with either the nobles or the serfs, but not both. Trying to do so means losing the trust of both. It is easier to get things done with the influence of the nobility, but the common men and women have a diligence and a sense of natural justice that makes them ideal apprentice material. Even if you take the student out of Habgaria, you cannot take Habgaria out of the student. He will carry a distrust of those from a different social station until the day he dies."*

- Ciria, the Silk Alchemist





## RING OF CHANGES

*"It is said that the wealth of Habgaria lies in the dark. Its two largest exports are its famous cheeses and its plentiful ores. The market for Habgaria Blue-Vein is as buoyant as ever. Its mining methods are behind the times, but the factories of Isemgard are always hungry. The low wages in Habgaria makes the ores competitively priced, even after import duty has been imposed by the Seafarers' Guild. Factory-owners also welcome any source not controlled by the Refiners' Guild. Were it not for the ravenous foundries of Isemgard, the nobility of Habgaria would not be able to sustain its lavish lifestyle."*

- Erasmus Cutter, Historian

### Rumours About Habgaria

- The nobility is so inbred they can only count up to eleven.
- Most of the mines have actually run out of usable ore. The nobles are importing ore from overseas to keep that fact secret.
- The souls of miners lost in accidents watch over their families to keep them safe.
- The secret ingredient in Habgaria Blue-Vein is alchemy.
- The duchies of Habgaria are laid out so that one Duke can ride to the aid of any of his neighbours in half a day.
- The Isemgard Refiners' Guild is negotiating the purchase of Drab Island, just off the coast of Habgaria. No-one seems to know why they are so keen to own it.
- Archduke Gantt is falling into early senility.

### Campport

**Aesthetic - Elitist**

**Leader: Governor Beltrami**

**Adjective: Campport**

**Demonym: Campporter**

*"Ah, Campport! I used to do most of my business with that quaint old place. It's not been quite the same since the Stravians took it over, but there's always a market for cloth there. Just don't take any of the sombre stuff there, even the very best tweeds, because it won't sell. Go for colours - pastels are a safe bet but a lot of the street performers like to get the garish stuff. Short runs. If you can make your goods stand out, with some fancy lace edging or a unique pattern, you can clean up. Of course, the Stravian import duties take some of the profit off the top, but not enough to risk smuggling stuff in."*

- Madrigal Matterson-Smith, Mill Owner

*"Campport legend says that it is the birthplace of culture, the origin of writing, drama and poetry. Their 'poets' - essentially revered itinerant performers - certainly like to repeat that claim. Their army is a joke and they have no contingency plan in place in case of invasion. They will be an easy target to give our country access to the sea. The Campport library, the largest in the world, is a resource we should not overlook."*

- Stravian Intelligence Report, dated two years ago

*"It's a place of decadence and debauchery. That's why I go back there every year."*

- Harrison Troughton, Tourist

*"If you ask a poet that passes  
A question with answers two,  
As sure as beer comes in glasses  
Three answers he'll give to you."*

- Campport nursery rhyme





## RING OF CHANGES

### Rumours about Campport

- There's a secret section of the library filled with the diary of God.
- Campport let itself be invaded as part of some opaque gambit.
- Campporter women can steal a man's heart and soul by whispering in his ear.
- If you don't give money to a poet in the street, you will have bad luck until you find him again and give him money.
- Poets attempt to shape society thought subtle messages in the stories they make popular.
- Poets act as spies for the Governor, reporting everything they see and hear as they travel the world.
- Governor Beltrami arranged with the Stravians to have his city conquered on the understanding that he would remain in office.

*"Before I take you as my apprentice, you must swear that your loyalty to the Order is absolute and that you will guard our secrets well. We do not expect perfection. You may be forgiven in one of three circumstances: Firstly, torture can draw truths from even the most reluctant mouth. Secondly, if you must reveal a secret technique in order to save your life, or that of another member of the Order. Thirdly, if there is some threat against the Order itself that can only be met by demonstrating or sharing one of its secrets. Do not take this oath lightly."*

- Amadou, 3rd degree Hermetic Alchemist

*"You have been judged guilty of betraying the Order's secrets. You will be taken to a Place of Punishment, there to have enacted upon your flesh the worst abuses alchemy can devise. You will lose your humanity, your sanity and your life, in that order. The sentence will be carried out immediately, and will be enacted over a period of three months."*

- Tanto, 5th degree Hermetic Alchemist

## The Hermetic Order

**Secretive - Distrustful**

**Leader: Unknown**

**Adjective: Hermetic**

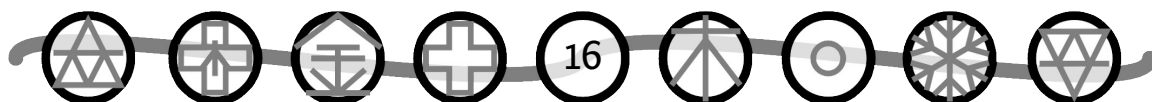
**Demonym: Hermite**

*"I once spent several months travelling with a Hermetic Alchemist. I was amazed at every turn with his mastery of the craft. The efficiency of his gyres was breathtaking. I could not help but notice, in time, that he turned to alchemy for every task. He was reliant on it, having nearly no other skills to draw on. I realised then why the Order had never risen to greatness, never turned its pre-eminence in the art of alchemy into political power. They have blinded themselves to the value of any skill apart from alchemy and it has stunted them. We became friends, the Hermite and I, but in all those once he never once revealed any of his techniques to me. Learn from his mistakes - broaden your knowledge and do not guard your research too jealously."*

- Ciria, the Silk Alchemist

*"They claim to have invented alchemy. They claim that the alchemy practised outside their precious Order is a pale shadow of the 'true alchemy' they know. They talk big, but they burn just as easily as anyone else."*

- Major Rick Stallion, the Pyrrhic Alchemist.







## Rumours about the Hermetic Order

- They are up to something.
- They know the secret of immortality.
- They invented the rules about transgressive alchemy just to keep alchemy's greatest treasures for themselves.
- They can't blink.
- They police all alchemy and punish those that transgress.
- They have been quietly sabotaging many areas of alchemical research by those outside the Order.
- If you don't eat your greens, a Hermite will come and get you.

*"No, I have not heard the 'one' about the alchemist and the blind prostitute. Would you enlighten this humble seeker of knowledge?"*

- Ciria, the Silk Alchemist

*"The city does not run itself. We can't just complacently rely on our walls and other defences to keep any enemies at bay. If our enemy is patient enough, we would fall. But we can see to it that we are far too much trouble to conquer. And part of that strategy is cultivating a reputation for being ungovernable."*

- Llew Jenkins, First Speaker of Nantdddywyll

## Nantdddywyll

**Defiant - Boisterous**

**Leader: First Speaker Jenkins**

**Adjective: Nantdddywyllleg**

**Demonym: Nantdddywyllwr**

*"Storm the Ravine? Are you crazy? Those wing-nuts have been fortifying that city for decades. First you've got the outer wall and ditch systems. If you breach that, it's all uphill through a maze of secondary defensive walls, past all the towers. If, by some miracle, we reach the heart of the place, it's on God knows how many levels connected by, no lie, ladders. And the mountain itself is shot through with secret tunnels. If you're serious about storming Nantdddywyll, General, I hope you've got a hundred thousand men in that valise of yours."*

- Colonel Foxworthy, Mutineer

*"You came all the way here from Mallinet? I think that calls for drink! Hey, Megan, give my friend here something that'll make his hair grow back!"*

- Ewan Parry, Drinker

## Rumours About Nantdddywyll

- Tunnels lead from Nantdddywyll to the capital of each major country.
- The city maintains its independence by providing highly trained concubines to the leaders of its neighbours.
- Someone or something else made the tunnels- the locals moved into them a few hundred years ago.
- The tunnels were made with alchemy.
- If a soldier from Nantdddywyll draws his blade, it must be bloodied before he can put it away.
- Nantdddywyll is the largest single supplier of oil-based fuels in the world, drawn from deep wells - This may explain why Stravia is so keen to conquer it.
- Nantdddywyll is the last remnant of an older civilisation that collapsed long before Stravia or Isemgard existed as political entities.





## Distant Places

*"The Larrakh desert is a vast expanse and almost completely uninhabited. Isemgard only claims sovereignty over the areas that directly abut it. There are signs that it was once fertile and extensively settled, a long time ago, but little is known about its former inhabitants. The consensus is that poor land management destroyed the arable land and left the desert in its place. Evidence has been found of watercourses, natural and man-made, which were probably allowed to dry up after the soil became barren. Few people cross the desert except for hardy nomads, who speak of a large and wealthy country on its far side."*

- Erasmus Cutter, Historian

*"There's a lost island in the southern seas. Few have found it, fewer still have landed there. I glimpsed it once, in rough seas, before I had to steer away to save my ship. Some say you can only find it in a storm. I met man who said he'd been shipwrecked there for a year and a day. It took him all that time to make a raft that survived the passage through the reefs. He said the strangest thing was that the animals there knew alchemy."*

- Farley Chambers, Mariner

*"Sign up for a trip to the New World! All the land you can build a fence around, free for the taking! A perfect fresh start for you and your family! And if you're single, the natives are friendly and very accommodating, if you get my drift. Hundreds have made the journey south and are already enjoying all the benefits their new lives offer. Don't listen to the lies about the weather - it's not so toasty here either, is it? Just bring a warm jacket and you're good to go!"*

- Lucy Langley-Bergman, Promoter

*"At great cost, we managed to acquire intelligence about 'Ganjeguk', west of Mallinet. The Mallinese try to have as little to do with the inhabitants of this distant empire as they do with us, and for similar reasons. Ganjeguk is said to have a healthy tradition of alchemy. Naturally, information about the Art is much garbled after passing through the ignorance of Mallinese minds, but two independent, reliable sources imply that their traditions of alchemy are very different from ours. Despite the difficulty in doing so, I recommend find out as much as we can about it."*

- Stravian military intelligence report.





## RING OF CHANGES

Erika had been expecting some sort of feeble attempt at intimidation when she entered the warehouse, so when a sudden bright light shone into her face she just shielded her eyes with her left arm and waited.

"Miss Gascon-Merriweather?" a voice asked, from somewhere behind the glare.

"That's Captain Gascon-Merriweather, if you don't mind," she replied.

"I do not mind at all, Captain Gascon-Merriweather," said the voice, "But I had assumed you would not want your military affiliation widely broadcasted, particularly given the nature of this enterprise."

Erika could pick out shapes now her eyes had adjusted a little. Three people behind the spotlight, one on the tall side. The voice seemed to belong to one of the other two.

"That's only a concern if I'm part of the enterprise," she countered, "And I certainly haven't decided on that, yet."

There was silence. She slid her right hand to her holster and drew her pistol part way out of it. The click of the safety catch was clearly audible.

No-one moved. Erika could hear them shuffling from foot to foot. It was even quiet enough that she could hear them breathing. Rapidly, nervously. They were worried. She had wondered if the anonymous offer she had received was some kind of sting, an attempt to entrap her into committing a treasonous act. But the men in the room with her weren't giving off the right vibes for that to be the case.

They were in earnest, and they were fully aware that they were taking a big risk. If she gave evidence on what she had seen already, that would be put them all in prison, or worse. For all their bluster, she was holding all the cards.

"Caution is wise," the tall shadow said, and stepped forwards into the light.

He was old, maybe sixty, with a thick mop of grey hair. There were wrinkles around his eyes, but he didn't look like he laughed much.

"Captain," he continued, "If it was possible to work through the proper channels, we would do so. You know our tip on the Machinists' Guild's announcement was good. Will you trust the rest of the information we sent you?"

"One good tip doesn't mean you are on the level."

"Indeed not. Having come this far, will you at least look at the rest of the documents my letter told you about?"

She nodded. The old man fetched a small wooden table, and slid a folder onto it. He touched a clawed hand to the table's edge, and it slid noisily across the floor towards her. He retreated back behind the light.

He hadn't been lying about being an alchemist, then. Without taking her hand off her gun, she took a piece of paper at random and pulled it up to just below eye-level so she didn't have to look away from the shadows.

It was the last page of a letter, discussing communications with a Mallinese Council official. The key terms were codewords, but it fitted the template of a missive co-ordinating a military build-up. The signature at the bottom was that of General Hayes-Gordon. It was genuine. She'd seen it plenty of times before. He'd signed a marriage contract with her, after all. She tried to keep her reaction out of her expression.

"Okay," she said, eventually, "I'm interested. There's enough here to warrant further investigation. Where do I fit in?"

The alchemist stepped back into the light.

"Let us discuss this somewhere more congenial. The cloak and dagger business was necessary, but a poor way to build a working relationship. Simon? You can stand down."

A man stepped out of the shadows behind her, sheathing a dagger. Erika had to prevent herself from hissing in surprise. He'd been there all the time and she hadn't even heard him breathe.

"This is a high stakes game," she mumbled.

The alchemist nodded sadly, "I can't imagine any way the stakes could be higher."





# MAKING A CHARACTER

Your character is your avatar in the game, the person you control and voice. He can be one of a number of different types, listed later. Not all the characters need be alchemists, although it is unusual if no character is an alchemist.

The group of characters that you all control is called the *cabal*. It can be an alliance of characters from disparate backgrounds united by a common purpose, a group of close friends used to working together, or something in between.

Before you begin making a character it is useful if you discuss with the other players, particularly the GM, what sort of game you are going to play. If the game will have an emphasis on combat, that can guide your choice of character type and how you customise it. A game that contains a lot of alchemical research is most enjoyable if the majority of the characters are alchemists. If the Game Master intends the game to be set in one particular place, you can consider picking a character type suited to that location.

Once you have a basic idea for your character, you follow these steps:

- Pick a character template from the list.
- Spend the free points the character has.
- Choose special techniques, if any.
- (Alchemists only) Decide if your character has transgressed, and if so what form his transgression took.
- Note down what weapons your character has access to and any unique traits listed for their type.
- Choose your character's three Vital Elements.

The rules elements are written onto a character sheet. Other important information such as name, sex, background and so on can be written on the back.

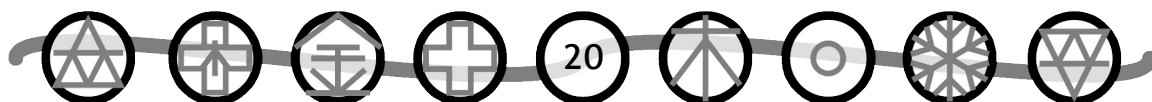
Once all the players have got that far with their characters, the GM leads the group through the final stage, where each character has one of their Vital Elements destroyed. It's that loss that serves as the defining moments of the character's personal history.

## Character Sheets

This is a blank character sheet for an alchemist:

SKILLS		ALCHEMY		NAME	
Alchemy	1	Air		VITAL ELEMENTS	
Athletics		Fire			
Bureaucracy		Medical			
Ciphers		Metal			
Close Combat		Stone			
Craftsmanship		Water			
Disguise		Wood			
Driving					
Endurance					
Engineering					
Firearms		INJURIES		SPECIAL TECHNIQUES	
Gabble					
Heavy Weapons					
Interrogation					
Medicine					
Sabotage					
Stealth					
Survival					
Tracking					
ASSETS					
Library					
Rank					
Standing					
Wealth					

Down the left-hand side is a list of skills and assets. Skills can have a score that says how good a character is at it. Assets have a similar score that determines their personal resources and influence. Some skills and assets will be left blank, for a score of 0. Assets also have space for a brief description.





All alchemists have a general alchemy score of 1, and boxes for the different branches of alchemy.

The triangular tabs on some skills indicate that special techniques are available for them. If your character is good enough at a skill, you can write one or more secret techniques for it into the box provided.

The endurance skill changes how many injuries your character can receive. For each point of endurance, blacken the outline of one of the grey injury boxes. Only these black-bordered boxes count for injuries.

There is a box for the three Vital Elements for your character, as introduced later.

Non-alchemists have a character sheet without the alchemy skills, and a little more space for the other sections.

## Character Types

There are a number of character templates to choose from. They are sorted into three basic categories – one for alchemists, one for soldiers and other militant types, one for characters that don't fall into either category.

Alchemists are the only characters capable of performing alchemy. Alchemy is the most versatile of all the abilities. Most alchemists also learn techniques that allow them to fight using their alchemy. A powerful alchemist is a very dangerous foe.

You want to make your own character type, because none of the ones here quite fit the concept you want? Well, each character gets 24 skill points, including ones pre-spent as part of the type. Each alchemy point costs two regular skill points. Each type lists 9 trained skills. Exceptional training counts as two of those slots. Decide if the character is limited to a particular background, then you're good to go. Naturally, you can only do this if the GM approves of your type, and agrees that it fills a gap between the ones here in the book.

Soldiers have more mundane modes of combat at their disposal, and an array of other skills they need to perform their duty.

Characters from the miscellaneous category can still have a high degree of skill in combat, but they are seldom as dangerous as either of the other two.

If you want to fully exercise the possibilities of alchemy, choose an alchemist type; you do not need to worry about being weak in combat. If you want your character to be dangerous but not an alchemist, then pick a military character. If your idea for a character is a fixer, an investigator or an artisan of some kind then a miscellaneous template might be the best fit.

Some templates are limited to a character background from one particular part of the world. This does not mean that the character must have been born there, or must currently live there; rather it means that the character must have spent a significant part of their life there and still have some kind of tie to it.

Note that the templates are not written as if for an ordinary person in that position, they are written with powerful, resourceful, kick-ass-and-take-names plater characters in mind.

## Names

For the most part, you can name your character as you see fit. The Game Master might insist that you don't use a joke name, if that would break the mood.

For most character backgrounds, an 'ordinary' name works well. You can make it a little more flashy sounding than a real name, as befits fiction.

Isemgarders typically have double-barrelled surnames. The tradition is for the first part of the name to be taken from the father and the second from the mother. There are plenty of people living in Isemgard with roots elsewhere, so 'normal' names are not uncommon.

Hermetic alchemists can come from anywhere, but upon admission to the order they cease using their birth name. Instead, their master gives them two new names – one for use in general affairs and a secret name known only to the two of them. Trusting someone else with the secret name is usually done





only as a fool-proof means of sending a message through a trusted third party. Both of the new names are vaguely poetic-sounding.

People from Nantddwyll typically have Welsh-sounding names.

Registered Stravian alchemists are given a name of the form 'the something alchemist' to reflect their expertise and as a mark of prestige, in addition to their ordinary name. This form was originally used by independent alchemists, but some of them have dropped it to avoid the military association.

Finally, characters with military rank or who are of noble birth can have titles, as described in the later sections for the Assets 'Rank' and 'Standing'.

## Skills and Assets

There are 19 skills and 4 assets in the game. Skills are abilities your character has that can be used to solve problems. Assets are resources your character has to draw on, such as money or influence.

Each character template comes with a list of 'Trained Skills' that characters drawn from the template have had opportunity to learn and/or practice. For these skills, the maximum score a character can begin with is 5. For any other skill, the maximum score a character of that type can start play with is 3. Areas of training help define the character type.

Similarly, characters can only have an asset score of 3 unless the asset is included in this 'trained' list.

Character types need minimum scores in certain skills and assets. A person without those scores would not be able to become that character type. These minimum scores are always in trained skills, and are listed in brackets.

Each character type comes with a pool of free skill points that can be spent on acquiring skills and assets, on a one for one basis, respecting the maximum values described above. Minimum scores for a type come for free, and points can be spent improving them up to the usual limit.

Many character types offer 'exceptional training' in a certain skill or asset. This is indicated in the list by **\*Asterisk and Boldface**. With exceptional training, a character can begin play with a score of 6.

A character without at least 3 in one of Alchemy, Close Combat or Firearms is extremely vulnerable in a fight. Such a character should probably surrender if offered violence. This means that if you want your character to be able to participate in fights, you should spend points in at least one of those skills.

## Skill Levels

A skill of 1 indicates that the character is knowledgeable about the skill, but not actually able to use it. An engineering score of 1 would let a character know if a damaged building is in danger of collapse, for example.

A skill of 2 or more is enough to be able to use the skill. If the task is not ambitious, under pressure or dangerous, no dice roll is required. For tasks that *are* ambitious, under pressure or dangerous, the higher the skill the more dice you roll.

A skill of 4 or more opens up 'special techniques' for the skill.

A skill of 6 is the highest a character can have at generation.

The maximum value for any skill is 8.

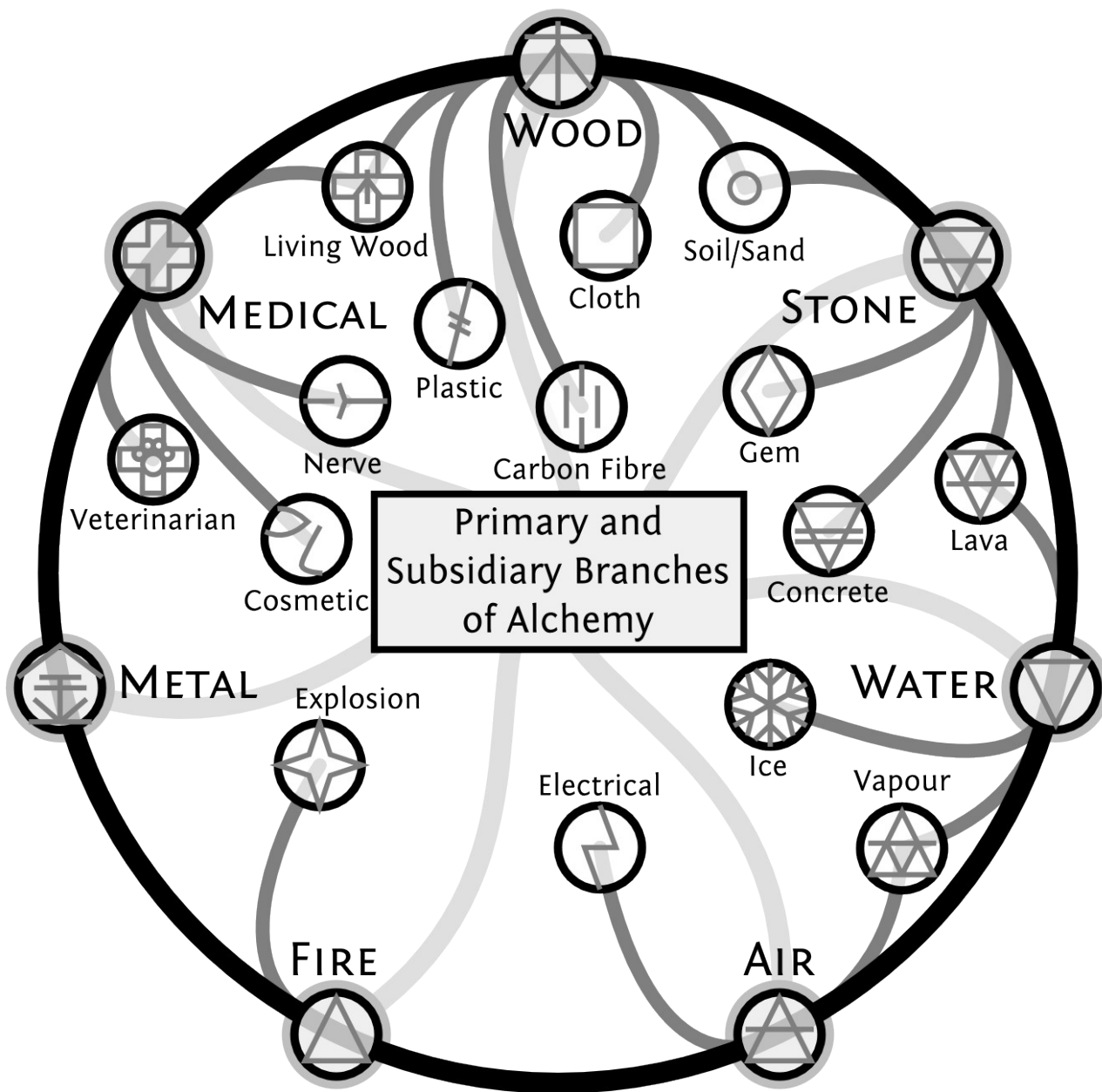
## Asset Descriptions

Assets are not usually used for dice rolls. The score in an asset instead describes the level of wealth or influence or the rank of the character. Assets require some additional description as well as the numeric value. For example, the Library asset should be qualified with which library or collection of libraries the character is affiliated with, and the Wealth asset should describe what fungible wealth the character has, or describe their stake in a business.

An asset of 6 is the highest a character can have at generation.

The maximum value for an asset is 8, although sometimes there is effectively a lower ceiling if there's not enough 'room' in the command structure.





## Alchemy

Alchemy works differently to other skills. A non-chemist can have a score of 1 in alchemy at most.

Alchemists have a separate pool of points to spend on alchemy. All alchemists get 1 point of 'alchemy' for free, which acts in the same way as 1 point of any other skill. All branches of alchemy are open to all alchemist characters, without the training limits ordinary skills have.

Alchemy has a number of branches, but each of them builds on that one-point 'root'. So, the first point you spend on a branch of alchemy increases your rating in it to 2, and the second increases it to 3, and so on.

A skill of 2 is enough for your character to perform that kind of alchemy, but only with significant preparation time.



## RING OF CHANGES

An alchemy score of 3 is sufficient for your character to perform alchemy in a hurry, and use his alchemy as a combat skill. Hurried alchemy has additional risks.

Alchemy has its own version of special techniques, called 'secret techniques', that your character can learn if they have an alchemy skill branch at 4 or more.

There is no absolute limit on how high skill in a branch of alchemy can go, but 8 is exceptional and seldom bettered.

The highest score a character can begin with in any branch of alchemy is 9, assuming you pick the type with the most alchemy points and specialise in only one branch.

### *Transgressions*

An alchemist character may have broken the rules of alchemy at one point in their life, and a committed a terrible transgression against nature and science. These transgressions leave a permanent mark on the alchemist, quite literally.

If you are creating an alchemist character you should decide whether or not they have transgressed. A transgression is a secret shame that must be kept hidden, for fear of being on the receiving end of bloody justice. Every organised body of alchemists, and in particular the Hermetic Order, considers the death penalty the only fitting punishment for alchemical transgression. The positive aspect is an enhanced knowledge of and ability with alchemy, a lure that has snared many alchemists.

If you wish your character to have transgressed, you should specify which taboo was broken, and what kind of disfigurement was suffered as a result. You can put this details on the back of the character sheet, and maybe add a reminder in the special techniques box. More detail on transgressions, and alchemy in general, is given in a later chapter.

### Other Attributes

Some characters have some additional information. Characters proficient with weapons that are not part of the organised military typically own a weapon or two as standard. Character types with links to particular organisations or traditions might have resources unique to them.

The difference between these explicit attributes and equipment picked up in the course of play is that the former is an important part of the character, and the Game Master should avoid depriving the character of it except in the most desperate of situations.

For example, a gun a character has bought might be lost over a cliff edge, destroyed in a house fire or go missing forever when the character is kidnapped. A gun that is part of the character type should only be taken away temporarily as part of a plot event, and be easily recovered once the emergency has passed.

Information on these other attributes should be recorded on the back of the character sheet.

### Injuries

During dangerous activities, characters suffer injuries. The default number of injuries a character can sustain is 4. For each point of Endurance, this increases by 1. If your character has the Endurance skill, darken the outline of the right number of grey boxes on the character sheet.







Be specific and personal with Vital Elements.

'Honour' is far too broad.

'Loyalty to the Republic of Stravia' is better, but not quite personal enough.

'Loyal to General Langley' fits the bill - presumably there's some personal history with whoever this Langley is.

'Rock-solid belief in the justness of the Republic' is also good because of the personal belief it contains.

## Vital Elements

The final step is one of the most important. By now you have an idea of what your character is capable of, and what paths have led them to where they are now. All memorable characters have something that drives them, something that makes them plunge into danger and stand firm against any threat. Your character should be no exception.

In fact, you should decide on 3 such things, and call them 'Vital Elements'. Each vital element is something exceptionally important to your character. It can be a person, a bond of loyalty or trust, perhaps even some aspect of your character's self-image.

It must be important enough that your character would put their life on the line in order to preserve it.

These vital elements exist to drag your character into the story. The Game Master will put them at risk, frequently. They can

also be used to force difficult

decisions on your character and, by extension, you.

Events might unfold in a such a way that the need to protect a vital element makes huge trouble for

your character, or ends up causing huge problems for everyone. This is intentional, and you should not feel put upon when the Game Master makes it happen. Betraying someone for a few bars of gold is weak. Betraying someone to save the life of your sister is powerful drama.

## Shared Creation

When everyone is ready, the Game Master collects in all the character sheets, and does the following with each of them. She can choose in what order she deals with the characters.

For each character, she crosses out one of the Vital Elements with a thick line. This particular thing has already been lost or destroyed, beyond any hope of recovery. If it is a person, they might be dead or irrevocably estranged from the character. If it is related to self-image, some terrible incident has contradicted that perception. If it is an ideal, it has probably been broken. In any case, it is very harsh.

Once the Game Master has done this, she asks for volunteers from the other players to have their character be, in some way, responsible for that terrible loss. If someone volunteers in this way, everyone at the table can offer ideas and suggestions as to how it happened and why. If no-one volunteers, then the character was responsible for the loss himself. The details might need to be flexible, depending on what vital element was destroyed.

For alchemists that have transgressed, a slightly different approach is used. In those cases, the character is always implicated in the loss of their own vital element, and it must be related in some way to their transgression. The Game Master can ask for volunteers for other characters to be involved in some way along with the alchemist.

The loss of vital elements should always be a negative thing. No explanation that tries to cast the destruction as a noble act, an innocent mistake, a necessary but tragic sacrifice, not really the character's fault or an unavoidable accident should be accepted.

Brief descriptions of the events decided on by the group should be added to the details on the back of the character sheets for the characters involved.





No character is a bright, shining hero. They are all damaged goods. If a character ended up without being the one responsible for the loss of anyone's vital element, they will still have lost one themselves. They have each received a terrible kicking but, more importantly, they have stood back up again. Whatever demons haunt them don't stop them from acting.

This destruction gives another angle to a character, and a different way they feel motivated to get involved in the story. It also creates strong links between characters, although perhaps not of the kind you would normally expect.

You might wonder how characters like this work together. In some cases, the events are ancient history between people who have been friends for years. For some people, the wound is raw but expressed in bitter dislike rather than overt hostility. Some characters might be too beaten down by the loss to feel hatred or have become too cynical to let it colour their decisions.

There are many reasons why the characters might work together in the game, not least of which is that they are facing a powerful conspiracy of unknown extent, and at least the devils they know are guaranteed to not be a part of it. Whatever personal grievances they have, they are banding together against something that is shaping up to be far, far worse. What they seek, more than anything else, is atonement for mistakes they have made in the past. If that atonement comes at a great personal cost, they are prepared to pay it.

- It must be on a grand scale
- It must be already in progress, thus hard to stop
- Alchemy must be involved somehow

Together with the pages for character sheets, there is also a 'conspiracy sheet'. The Game Master can use this to craft the conspiracy ahead of time, if she wants, or fill in details as she decides on them. The players can have a blank sheet on which to enter pieces of information they've discovered about the conspiracy, or draw up plans for their own counter-conspiracy. Alternatively, the players can create a few snippets of a conspiracy themselves and give those to the Game Master to expand on as she wishes.

One starting point for a game is just after the characters start to put together pieces of the puzzle and realise that something terrible is afoot. To start with more of a bang, the GM could begin with a large, set-piece event that makes it clear that something important is afoot, and throws out a few clues as to the grander scheme's nature.

There is more information about creating a conspiracy and the people involved in it in the GM section, later. An important point is that while the conspiracy, or the people behind it, may have had a hand in one or more of the incidents that led to a lost Vital Element, they should not remove responsibility from the character that has claimed it.

## The Conspiracy

The world is full of conspiracies. International political intrigue threatens to plunge the world into war. Ambitious generals may harbour desires to place themselves in charge of their country, no matter the cost in lives. Powerful business interests may manipulate markets for their own gain heedless of the potential to consign whole countries to starvation. A cadre of Hermetic Alchemists may go against all of their teachings in a foolhardy attempt to achieve immortality. The key elements of the driving conspiracy for a game of Ring of Changes are:





## RING OF CHANGES

### Conspiracy Ideas

- *A group of Hermetic alchemists have discovered a technique for viewing a colour the eye cannot normally perceive. For some reason, they are now plotting to destroy the Stravian Republic.*
- *A group of renegade Guild Alchemists is replacing important public figures at home and abroad with alchemically-created doubles.*
- *The Stravian military is researching techniques to turn alchemists into mindless war machines.*
- *The inner council of Mallinet has come into possession of a prototype device which can perform alchemy without human intervention.*
- *One of the Habgarian dukes is performing transgressive alchemy on his subjects. The other dukes are closing ranks to protect him.*
- *An archivist in Campport has discovered a hidden army of 10,000 nearly invincible stone warriors, created through long-lost alchemy, that he intends to use to fulfil his deranged dreams of ruling the world.*
- *An alchemist from Nantddywyll stumbled upon a new branch of alchemy that can turn matter into a burst of pure energy. He is on the run from all kinds of people who want that secret.*





# ALCHEMIST CHARACTER TYPES

## Apprentice Alchemist

### Any background.

*"Was it supposed to do that? Because I'm fairly sure it wasn't supposed to do that."*

Alchemy is not an innate skill. Everyone has to learn it and your study has really only just begun. You may have mastered the basics, but you are a long way from the heights of skill that your seniors display. You need not be particularly young - you may have taken up alchemy as an alternative trade quite late in life. If you are studying in Stravia, your learning is overseen by the military and you are expected to undertake much of the same training as a soldier. If you are attached to one of the Isemgard guilds, the guild is paying for your instruction and expects you to work for reduced wages once you are qualified to make back their investment. A far more care-free life would be as an alchemist learning directly from an independent master, a true apprentice, following her wherever she goes.

Apprentices are a good character type if you want to use alchemy but still want a wide variety of other skills, even if you do get all the mucky jobs. You will never be a powerhouse of an alchemist, but playing catch-up can be a fun experience. If there are other alchemists in the group, you can ask one of them to volunteer to be your instructor. If you prefer, or no alchemist character is quite suitable, your character might have a GM-controlled teacher or have run away from their apprenticeship.

## Trained Skills

Athletics  
Ciphers  
Disguise  
Driving  
Endurance  
Gabble (2)  
Medicine  
Stealth (2)  
Survival  
3 free alchemy points.  
14 free skill points.

**A Quick Learner:** When you improve your alchemy with the assistance of a teacher, you can learn a secret technique from him for free, assuming he is prepared to let you learn it.

## Guild Alchemist

### Isemgard background.

*"Hold my ale and watch this..."*

There is no unified Alchemists' Guild in Isemgard. Instead, most of the Guilds have some alchemists on their rolls. Although the Guilds take a highly academic approach to alchemy, there is little co-operation between practitioners from different guilds. In fact, they pool resources with alchemists from outside Isemgard more readily. Where Guild Alchemists excel, however, is in the resources each Guild has available. Research grants, well-stocked scientific libraries and quid-pro-quo arrangements with other institutions are a boon to alchemical endeavour. The responsibilities attached to them can be drag, however. You may be dissatisfied with Guild life, seeking a way out from the web of intrigue. You may even come to learn that your Guild is involved in something truly horrible, that you cannot in good conscience allow to happen.





Guild Alchemists are reasonably powerful alchemists, and are the natural choice for a character who is both an alchemist and something of a gentleman about town. Their Standing gives them a certain amount of heft in social situations. Waistcoats and fob-watches are optional.

## Trained Skills

Bureaucracy  
Ciphers  
Craftsmanship  
Engineering  
Gabble  
Medicine  
**\*Library (2)**  
Standing (1)  
6 free alchemy points.  
9 free skill points.

## Hermetic Alchemist

**Any background.**

*"Please stop firing bullets at me. Melting them out of the air is not hard, but the noise makes it difficult to talk."*

The Hermetic Order is old and, in some ways, very cruel. It has very strict rules and the penalties for breaking them are severe, but many of the rules are about making sure that Hermetic Alchemists look out for one another in the face of outside threats. A senior Hermite is a powerhouse of alchemical knowledge, and probably privy to dark secrets few men have ever known. Their secrecy can be an obstacle, though; they are seldom trusted by outsiders and more than once a renegade cabal has conducted truly obscene experiments out of sight of its peers. You may have suspicions about certain elements of the Order, but have no-one within it you can work with to investigate further.

A Hermetic alchemist offers the strongest alchemy a character can start with. This is a good type to pick if you want your character to be powerful, remote and potentially sinister. The drawback is that so much is invested in alchemy that a Hermite has few other skills. Ironically, this loner character works best in a group.

## Trained Skills

Athletics  
**\*Ciphers (3)**  
Close Combat  
Disguise  
Medicine  
Stealth  
Survival  
Tracking  
8 free alchemy points.  
5 free skill points.

## Independent Alchemist

**Any background.**

*"Don't worry, Mrs. Hutchinson, I'll replace the kitchen table. I'm pretty sure I know what I did wrong, too."*

As an independent alchemist, you are free of any ties to a particular organisation. You can travel the world, learning from those that will teach you and putting your skills to use helping people. Like all travellers, you often have to deal with locals who do not trust you and border posts that are reluctant to let you through without a solid reason. You are supposed to sign a bond promising you will not practice alchemy in public when you enter Stravia, and you only enter Mallinet covertly and with great trepidation. You rely on the generosity of others for access to research materials, but you probably have contacts in many cities that can lend you workshop space when you need it. The freedom you enjoy can sometimes blind you to the fact that the world is not perfect. You may just realised that most people don't have the luxury of moving as freely as you do, and have to deal with persistent problems rather than fleeing them. Your conscience tickles you, and you are moved to do what you can to make the world a better place.

The Independent alchemist is one of the more powerful alchemist types, and is a good all-round character. It makes a good pick if you don't want to be attached to a particular nation, perhaps because you want to get into the game without having to do any boring background reading.





## Trained Skills

None.

7 free alchemy points.

10 free skill points.

**Generalist:** Although you have training in no skills, you can spend up to 4 points in untrained skills, instead of 3. You can still only spend up to 3 points on assets.

## Registered Alchemist

**Stravian background.**

*"Pick up the chalk if you're feeling lucky, punk."*

Growing up in Stravia there was a choice between giving up alchemy and enlisting in the military. You took the latter. The rough training and rougher companions have changed you, turned you into a soldier, even if you intended for the military life to only touch you lightly. You are expected to have absolute obedience to the Republic, and more than once you have received orders that went against your own personal principles. The Stravian expansion has brought war and death to many places, and as a Registered Alchemist you have been

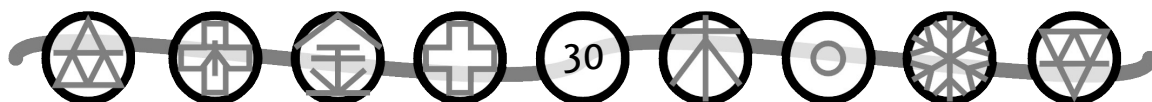
at the forefront of the carnage more than once. Your conception of alchemy is as a tool to help people, but you are expected to use it to kill. It won't take much persuasion for you to use your position and skill on something the chain of command would not approve of.

A Registered alchemist has military rank and can be trained in mundane instruments of death. If you want your character to be a combat specialist and still an alchemist, this is the type to pick.

## Trained Skills

Ciphers  
Close Combat  
Driving  
Firearms (3)  
Heavy Weapons  
Medicine  
Sabotage  
Library (1)  
Rank (2) - Lieutenant  
5 free alchemy points.  
8 free skill points.

**Armed:** You carry two weapons, at least one of which must be a firearm.





# MILITARY CHARACTER TYPES

## Balloonist

### Isemgard background.

*"Never bring a knife to an artillery duel."*

The Isemgard Air Force is a recent invention, part of the Weavers' Guild. What began as a reconnaissance unit now carries bombs and other heavy weapons intended for use on the battlefield. Each balloonist has an armoured dirigible to fly, as part of this unit. Having your own aircraft is not quite the boon it might be, as you are supposed to stay near wherever you are stationed most of the time. On the other hand, your balloon does make it incredibly easy to go AWOL. Your ties, to Isemgard and to the Weavers' Guild, are not as strong as they might be, because from the air you have come to realise just how pointless borders are. You will put yourself and your balloon at your companions' disposal if it is for the greater good.

The Balloonist type is a character to play if you want a military character more privileged than most. Heavy weapons sound like fun, but can lead to problems with collateral damage and friendly casualties.

### Trained Skills

Driving (2)  
Engineering (2)  
Firearms  
**\*Heavy Weapons (2)**  
Survival  
Tracking  
Rank (2) - Flying Officer  
Standing  
16 free skill points.

**Dirigible:** You have been assigned to a small war dirigible. You do not own it. If your Rank is 4 or higher, you are in command of your vessel and you can use it for your own purposes unless you are on active assignment. Characters with Rank 2 or 3 are

members of a flight crew, who have less freedom to do what they want. Most such dirigibles have a standard crew of 2 or 3. It can carry up to 10 people, loads a few dozen bombs, and has one heavy weapon that can be fired from the gondola, and if it is small enough detached and carried around. It has a gasbag for lift and a turbine engine driving propellers for movement. Sheets of metal fan out from the underside of the gondola, angled slightly upwards, that act as armour and protect the gasbag and engine against attacks from below.

## Eagle Commando

### Stravian background.

*"The extraction team never made the rendezvous. We had to live on insects and grey water for three weeks. Man, that was a fantastic way to spend the winter."*

The Eagle Commandos are the elite special forces of the Stravian military, hand-picked from based on distinguished service and excellent training scores. They are rightly feared and respected throughout the world. You have first hand experience of the dirty jobs they are sent to do, some of which would turn the stomachs of even the staunchest Stravian patriot. The hunger of Stravia for new territory seems insatiable and the longer you stay with your unit, the more atrocities you see committed. Maybe your superiors have noticed your crisis of loyalty, because they're giving you fewer assignments. The only thing you know for sure is that once an Eagle Commando, always an Eagle Commando.

An Eagle Commando is the type to pick if you want your character to be the archetypical hard-ass special forces type. They have a good selection of skills to fit that niche, although they have less





## Trained Skills

Close Combat (3)  
Endurance  
Firearms (4)  
**\*Sabotage**  
Stealth  
**\*Survival (3)**  
Rank (4) - Major  
10 free skill points.

**Armed:** You carry a combat knife, a pistol, and one other weapon of your choice.

## Lancer

**Habgarian background.**

*"Wait for it... Let them get fully clear of the trees. Ready... Charge!"*

The Lancers of Habgaria were once the most powerful military unit in the world. The implacable march of technology overwhelmed them, though, leaving them as something of a white elephant. Recent reforms have replaced horses with turbine motorbikes. The riding skills have mostly transferred over. Although attached to one particular Duke, the Lancers can be posted anywhere in the country, defending against bandits or incursions by foreign powers. On the rolling hills of Habgaria, nothing gets from A to B as fast as they do; not even trains. Becoming one of the Lancers is pretty much the best gig a commoner can get in Habgaria, but even if you have 'arrived' you're still not entirely happy with the hegemony in your country. Acting against the nobles directly would be foolish, but you can still make a difference if you find the right group of like-minded individuals to work with.

A Lancer is a good choice if you want your military character to be part of a somewhat old-fashioned outfit. Cavalry charges are not the decisive factor they used to be, what with cannons and automatic weapons. If you want your character to be something of a drifter, spending long periods alone in the countryside, this is the soldier type to pick.

## Trained Skills

Close Combat (2)  
**\*Driving (4)**  
Endurance  
Firearms (2)  
Sabotage  
Survival  
Tracking  
Rank (3) - Captain  
13 free skill points.

**Mount:** You own a combat-ready motorcycle. You have a responsibility to your Duke to answer a call to muster, but are free to go where you will at other times. You can make a charging attack with a mêlée weapon from your mount using your Driving skill instead of Close Combat.

**Armed:** You carry a rifle and a large mêlée weapon, usually a lance.

## Monk Militant

**Mallinese background.**

*"I am afraid that at this point, there is only one form of help I am permitted to give. I promise you that I will make it hurt as little as possible."*

The Monks Militant are an unusual branch of the military. They are technically a holy order, sent out to do good work without interference from their superiors in the clergy. Their combat training emphasises personal development and spiritual perfection. This makes them a somewhat odd force on the battlefield, eschewing firearms in favour of plunging into face-to-face fighting with single targets. When they are not fighting for their country, they have pastoral duties to perform. They are well-respected, if not exactly liked, by the Mallinese people. As a Monk Militant, your faith is unshakeable. However, you are coming to realise that there's a wider world beyond Mallinet's borders and it's not the hive of evil you were told it was. There are good people out there too, who would benefit from your wisdom.







If you want to play a character like a martial artist from a Hong Kong action film, pick a Monk Militant. They have the best possible Close Combat, and a suitably spiritual side.

## Trained Skills

Athletics  
Ciphers  
**\*Close Combat (3)**  
Endurance  
Medicine  
Stealth  
Survival  
Rank (1) - Deacon  
20 free skill points.

**Battle Monk:** Your 'Rank' is actually a Mallinese clerical title from the Standing table.

## Soldier

**Any background.**

*"I told the CO that the column had come under attack, and we lost two dozen men. 'Never mind the men,' he said, 'How many lorries?'"*

A soldier has signed his life away in the service of his country. You are one of them. Whatever rank you hold, you have distinguished yourself for your

courage and ingenuity. The biggest obstacle to your career advancement has been your willingness to put national interest aside in favour of the interests of ordinary people. You try to avoid enemy casualties as well as allied casualties. You suspect that your superiors would prefer it if you didn't think that way, but find you too valuable an asset to demote or transfer you. You may harbour ambitions to climb the ladder right to the top of the military, and remake it according to your principles, but that goal still seems half a lifetime away.

A Soldier character has tremendous versatility. Choosing Firearms 6 and Rank 1 implies a lowly soldier who happens to be an incredible marksman. Choosing Rank 6 puts the character very high up in the military hierarchy.

## Trained Skills

Close Combat (2)  
Driving  
**\*Firearms (2)**  
Heavy Weapons  
Medicine  
Sabotage  
**\*Rank (1)** - Sergeant  
19 free skill points.

**Armed:** You carry two weapons appropriate to your skills and position.





## OTHER CHARACTER TYPES

### Bureaucrat

**Any background.**

*"This had better be good. I'm late for the meeting with the bunting supplier who can't tell the difference between blue and red."*

Everywhere needs government. Whatever rung you are on, you have responsibility for either an area of the country in general or for a service to provided to it. You may well have a broad array of odd skills you've picked during your time in that post, or be an expert in one field who has moved into politics. You're not just a pen-pusher - you take your position very seriously and will discharge your duties in the best way you can. You understand the role that governance plays in keeping people well and content, and will not hesitate to expand your horizons such that you try to stop evil plots in their tracks. Others in your position may become corrupt, but you hope for a better legacy.

A Bureaucrat doesn't have to be a stuffed shirt or a jobsworth. If you want to play a character who has connections and influence, this type is the way to go. Bureaucracy as a skill might sound dull, but it includes knowledge of the law, which can be very handy when a friend gets arrested.

#### Trained Skills

**\*Bureaucracy (2)**

Ciphers

Disguise

Interrogation (1)

**\*Library (3)**

Standing (1)

Wealth

17 free skill points.

### Council Agent

**Mallinese background.**

*"I can't begin to tell you how unfortunate it is that your memory has let you down. Unfortunate for you, that is."*

The councilmen of Mallinet prefer their faces not to be known. That is why they employ agents to act in their stead. These agents must be capable, ruthless and willing to do whatever they are told, no matter how bloody or cruel that is. The religion of Mallinet is useful for keeping its citizens loyal, but it can have the unfortunate effect of giving some zealous individuals the belief that its rulers should be held to the same moral standard. Your job is to run interference for your patron, arranging matters so that his rivals and detractors do not prosper. If some of the tasks you are called to do are technically illegal, the patronage of the councilman insulates you from any consequences as long as you avoid being caught red-handed. Your face may be unknown, but your name casts a long shadow. You might not technically be a mover or shaker, but you are the next rung down and hoping that when a space opens up, you will be ale to fill it.

A council Agent is a spy. If you want to play a character who works in the shadows and is a little fuzzy on the distinction between right and wrong, this type is ideal.

#### Trained Skills

Bureaucracy (3)

**\*Disguise**

Gabble

Sabotage

**\*Stealth**

Standing (3)

Wealth

18 free skill points.





## Engineer

### Any background.

*"Of course it's safe. I designed it!"*

It is an age of invention and industry, and the engineer is at the forefront of the revolution. An inquiring mind can take a man far in the world, with the right backers. You're lucky in that the industrial revolution of the world has only just begun, and an engineer can be an authority on just about every field he cares to learn about. In time, engineers will have to specialise but for now you can be a jack-of-all-trades. Unlike the craftsman, your work is appreciated for its utility rather than its aesthetic properties and this may have developed in you a dismissive attitude to matters of beauty. You may well be given to exotic scientific expeditions or side projects, as the down time between large commissions can be significant.

An engineer character can be played as a gadgeteer, a stuffed shirt, a genius mechanic of any combination of the three. The type doesn't get obvious glory, but when one of his skills is needed the chances are that no-one else will hold a candle to them. Engineers make good partners for alchemists that work with stone, metal or wood, because creating something that will last more than a few moments takes an engineer's eye.

### Trained Skills

Bureaucracy  
Craftsmanship  
Driving  
**\*Engineering (3)**  
Heavy Weapons  
Sabotage  
Library (1)  
Wealth  
20 free skill points.

**Maker of Things:** You can create better devices using your engineering skill than usual.

## Guild Man

### Isemgard background.

*"We have to hurry. If I get caught letting outsiders into the Lodge, I'll be stripped of my ribbon."*

To get ahead in Isemgard, you have to be Guilded. Practising any kind of trade without a Guild license is against the law; although the enforcers generally skip the trial and go straight to part with the roughing up and the throwing into the river. Progress through Guild ranks is based on time served and boot-licking rather than ability at your craft, so you may be dissatisfied with your lot. You look through the leaded windows of your Guildhall and crave life in the wider world. You may lose the respect of your peers, but you think there are better things to do with your life than spend it working for the glory of an organisation so bedevilled with political in-fighting. You can't cut yourself completely free of the Guild, however, or you will have nothing to come back to.

This type is a good pick if you want your character to have a lot of resources to draw on and potential for a varied skill set. As part of polite Isemgard society, he moves in influential circles.

### Trained Skills

Bureaucracy (2)  
**\*Craftsmanship (3)**  
Engineering  
Gabble  
Medicine  
Library  
Standing (2)  
Wealth (1)  
16 free skill points.





## Inquisitor

### Mallinese background.

*"We're friends. Let's not keep secrets. If we do, we might not be friends any more. You want to stay my friend, don't you?"*

Mallinet has regular police for most matters. For other matters, there is the Inquisition. Unlike the Monks Militant, who are at least made welcome by the people of Mallinet, Inquisitors are positively feared. They deal with espionage and heresy, including the worst heresy of all - alchemy. Some revel in their position initially, meting out harsh judgement secure in the knowledge that no-one will dare speak out against them. As time goes by you're finding it harder to reconcile the Inquisition's punishments with the sometimes minor transgressions that earn them. You've dragged a father out of the family home in the dead of night one too many times to be unchanged by your job. You could have become a monster. Somehow, you did not. What you do now may save your soul, bring the hounds of the Inquisition to nip at your heels or both.

The Inquisition is the Mallinese secret police. If you want to play a character who is a part of that terror, with the skills to match, this is the pick for you. On the other hand, playing an irredeemably bad character is a poor choice as it will leave you locked out of a lot of the other characters' plans and discussions. It is better to treat the Inquisitor as a character who has recently undergone an epiphany.

### Trained Skills

Alchemy (1)  
Bureaucracy (2)  
Disguise  
Firearms  
**\*Interrogation (3)**  
Stealth  
**\*Tracking (3)**  
Standing  
15 free skill points.

**Alchemist Hunter:** As indicated above, you begin with 1 skill point in alchemy that helps you track down alchemists. It is not a 'trained skill', technically, and you cannot increase it any further.

## Labourer

### Any background.

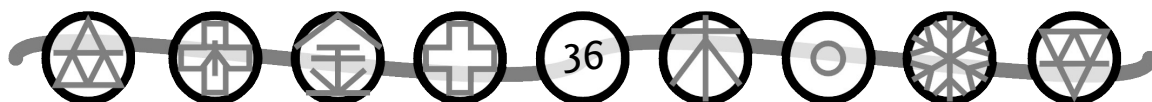
*"Back off, alchemist. You should never have threatened my family. Turn around and walk away while you still can."*

There's an easy camaraderie between the unskilled labourers of different nations. When you don't own much, you fear potential robbers less. Which is not to say that there is no misplaced national pride, just that it's not taken particularly seriously. Being at the bottom of the pile may get you plenty of outdoor exercise but it doesn't give you much free time or opportunity to develop valued skills. You're free to walk away from your job, but it's unlikely that you will have saved up much money to live on until you get another. There's not much nobility in the simple life you've had, but you've been on the wrong end of injustice enough times to recognise it when you see it. And if you find someone you can trust who can make sue of your strong back, you'll not hesitate.

A Labourer is the best 'bruiser' character type to pick, and is the most dangerous in combat of those that aren't either alchemists or soldiers.

### Trained Skills

**\*Athletics (2)**  
Close Combat  
Disguise  
Driving  
**\*Endurance (2)**  
Stealth  
Survival  
20 free skill points.





## Merchant

### Any background.

*"Everyone has their price. Even you. Even me."*

Some people make a living by selling things that they have created. Some make a living lending the strengths of their backs to the first kind. You are neither, because you make a living buying and selling what others have made. You're no slouch when it comes to making a deal, and you've made a name and a small fortune for yourself by capitalising on that ability. You know how to make a living without getting your hands dirty, whether you are a travelling merchant or a respectable shopkeeper. The finer things in life are yours whenever you want them. Money for money's sake loses its appeal after a while, though. You'd consider philanthropy, were you not about to be dragged into a dangerous conspiracy.

The Merchant has wealth galore, and can capitalise on it more easily than other types. He makes an excellent spokesperson for the cabal, greasing a few palms here and there to make things easier.

### Trained Skills

Bureaucracy  
Craftsmanship (1)  
Disguise  
Gabble (3)  
Medicine  
Tracking (1)  
Standing  
**\*Wealth (3)**  
16 free skill points.

**Merchant's Bond:** As a recognised name in trade, perhaps even part of a notable trading company, it's easier for you to arrange for loans or credit wherever you go. You can leverage your Wealth asset even when you are far away from your cash reserves or your usual place of business.

## Noble

### Habgarian background.

*"Blood will out. In this case, all over the place."*

To be born into the Habgarian nobility is to be born truly privileged. All work can be delegated to your staff, even those tasks traditionally considered the duties of an aristocrat. Many in your position simply live a luxurious life, putting in an appearance at the Conference of Dukes a couple of times a year for the look of the thing. You take a more active interest in your estate's affairs, however, using your station and wealth shrewdly. You may pursue a hobby, work to improve the lot of your vassals or become active in foreign affairs. You can only go so far, though, without becoming ostracised by polite society for your eccentricities. Perhaps you resent the indolence of your family and friends, and seek out adventure worthy of your heritage.

Any character with standing can bear a noble title, but Habgaria takes its aristocracy a lot more seriously than other countries. If you want to play a character who's noble title means something, rather than being an extra few words on his letterhead, this type is a good choice. A Noble can also be a competent fighter and a wealthy backer.

### Trained Skills

Bureaucracy (1)  
Driving (2)  
Firearms (2)  
Interrogation  
Medicine  
Tracking  
**\*Standing (3)**  
Wealth (3)  
13 free skill points.

**Deference:** Within Habgaria's borders, your status guarantees you at least some co-operation from commoners when you issue orders. Relying on this too much or for too long without making yourself known to the local noble is asking for humiliation at the next Conference of Dukes.





## Poet

### Campport background.

*"Let's just say the Grand Duke wasn't ready to be introduced to satire."*

The poets of Campport are part of a tradition that dates back centuries. Unlike the mummers that other places had as a traditional form of storytelling, poets were expected to be original, pushing the boundaries of art and writing new performances to delight the watching crowds centuries before innovative art forms were appreciated elsewhere. Part of the pride of the poet is to perform for free, living only on donations. Like all poets, you are driven to perform - be it theatre, music, poetry or all of the above. You tell stories to delight and challenge your audience. Campport may be your home and favourite place to put on a show, but you take your works to anywhere you can get to as a matter of professional pride.

The Poet is an unusual character type. He has plenty of the skills you associate with the spokesperson of a cabal, but he also comes with his own gang of followers who can help with minor tasks, or get help when things get unpleasant.

### Trained Skills

Athletics  
Ciphers  
Disguise  
**\*Gabble (4)**  
**\*Medicine**  
Library  
Standing  
20 free skill points.

**Troupe:** You travel with up to a dozen assistants and hangers-on. They fill out the cast when you put on a play, take the hat around at the end of the show and carry the group's possessions around. They won't get into a fight for you, but they'll happily create a distraction while you sneak away. Individuals will come and go, but the troupe will remain, assuming you don't get them all killed somehow.

## Policeman

### Any background other than Stravian.

*"There's plenty of time to tell your side of the story down at the station."*

Crime doesn't pay. Policemen are the reasons why not. In Stravia, the army has taken over the duties of the police, with consequences as unpleasant for the populace as you might imagine. The other nations, however, have independent police forces that do their best no matter how much they are undermined by the aristocracy (in Habgaria), Guild politics (in Isemgard) or alchemy (everywhere). As a professional investigator tasked with keeping the peace, there's a good chance you will have first contact with the conspiracy your cabal fights.

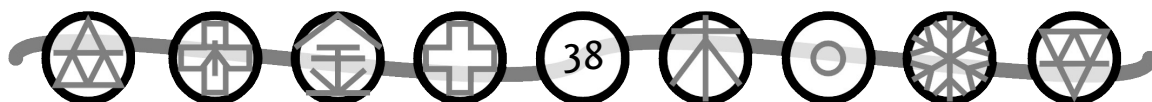
A policeman is a good character if you want authority without military or aristocratic overtones. As a 'good guy by default', it's easy to get people to trust you and no-one will bat an eye-lid if you start poking your nose into other people's business.

### Trained Skills

Bureaucracy (1)  
Close Combat (2)  
Driving  
Endurance  
Firearms  
**\*Interrogation (2)**  
Stealth  
Tracking (2)  
17 free skill points.

**Long Arm of the Law:** When you present evidence to the people in charge or make an accusation, people are obliged to sit up and take notice rather than just ignore you. The case might still get dropped on orders from above, but you have better chances than most of getting justice done.

**Armed:** You carry a truncheon.





## Reprobate

### Any background.

*"What's the word on the street, Johnny?"*

Crime pays. You're living proof. You've made your way in the world through criminal enterprise. Other people have got hurt along the way, but you've got through somehow. You might have spent some time in jail, but it didn't scare you straight. Despite your criminal ways, you won't do someone a bad turn without provocation. You were never innately bad, just desperate. Now, crime has become a habit. There are some lines you won't cross, and when you learn of the conspiracy you'll use every trick in the book to stop it, if only because it threatens you and yours.

The Reprobate is a character familiar with the seedier side of life. It's a good pick if you want to play a bad person redeeming himself, or in conflict with his conscience.

### Trained Skills

Bureaucracy (1)  
Close Combat  
**\*Disguise (2)**  
Endurance  
Interrogation (1)  
Sabotage (2)  
Stealth  
Wealth  
**18** free skill points.





## EXAMPLE CHARACTERS

Here are four characters, created together as part of the 'Department of Alchemical Investigations', a newly-created special branch of the Stravian military that deals with crimes involving alchemy and alchemists. Does such a unit exist? Well, clearly it does for this hypothetical group's game.

The notes about the characters given here are verbose so as to provide some extra context. In your game, a lot of the detail will be decided on at the table and remembered, so the details on the back of your character sheet can be a lot briefer. Character sheets filled in for these characters follow.

### Colonel Natalie Carrows

**Soldier.**

**Stravian background.**

Alchemy	1	
Bureaucracy	2	
Close Combat	3	
Driving	3	
Firearms	4	(Take Down)
Interrogation	2	
Medicine	2	
Library	2	- Central Alch. Lib.
Rank	5	- Colonel

**Vital Elements:**

~~I will keep my team safe.~~

Justice will be done.

I won't let alchemy harm anyone.

Carries a rifle and a sabre.

Colonel Carrows is nominally in charge of the DAI team - both at her request and because her superiors wanted to see her sidelined. Her team is young and for the most part eager - though they're not all eager to do the same thing.

The first big case for the DAI was a disaster, and she lost good people. The DAI was almost over before it had really begun, but now Colonel Carrows is determined to see the Department's success. She can't blame anyone else for her mistake.

### Major Frank Goddard

**Eagle Commando**

**Stravian background.**

Alchemy	1	
Athletics	2	
Ciphers	2	
Close Combat	3	
Firearms	5	(Take Down, Lonely Shot)
Interrogation	2	
Survival	3	
Tracking	2	
Rank	4	- Major

**Vital Elements:**

~~I will never kill an innocent man.~~

The Eagle commando oath of Unity.

Medal for unparalleled bravery.

Carries a combat knife, a pistol and a sniper rifle.

Frank is new to the DAI - transferring out of the Eagle Commandos to provide 'heavy-handed support' to the team. Slightly unused to the less rigorous, more office-centred work of the Department, Frank is uneasy around the rest of the team.

What few people know is that his transfer wasn't exactly voluntary. His last mission before the transfer he went in hard without checking the intel he'd got from Marcus Swift and shot an innocent woman.







## Lotte Fantasm, the Raven-Eyed Alchemist

Registered Alchemist.

Stravian background.

Alchemy	1	
Air Alchemy	3 (+1)	
Medical Alch.	2 (+1)	
Stone Alchemy	2 (+1)	
Wood Alchemy	2 (+1)	
Bureaucracy	2	
Ciphers	2	
Driving	2	
Firearms	3	
Stealth	2	
Library	1	- Central Alch. Lib.
Rank	2	- Lieutenant

### Vital Elements:

My duty to keep the Republic safe.  
~~My fiancé, Chris Gallows.~~  
I will never dishonour the Republic.

Carries a pistol and a knife.

### *Attempted Alchemy of the Flesh*

Lotte is nothing if not absolutely loyal to both the Republic and Colonel Carrows. A deep scar runs down her once pretty face - a stark reminder for both her and the Colonel of the importance of what they do and the danger of rogue alchemists. Lotte fights with a dogged persistence to make the world a better place as part of the DAI.

Lotte's ambition led her to try to take short-cuts with Medical Alchemy. Her attempts to cheat by dabbling with forbidden techniques led to the death of her fiancé when he walked in on a ritual gone horribly wrong. The same accident gave her that scar and a horribly withered left leg.

## Marcus Swift

Bureaucrat

Stravian background.

Bureaucracy	6	
Ciphers	4	
Driving	2	
Firearms	1	
Gabble	2	
Interrogation	2	
Library	5	- Central Law Lib.
Standing	1	- Minor nobility
Wealth	1	- Family townhouse

### Vital Element:

Absolute faith in the rule of law.  
~~His sister June, who raised him.~~  
The alchemical secrets in his father's journal.

Marcus moved to the Colonel's project from Central government, hoping to make the leap from paperwork to fieldwork where he felt he could make a real difference. Shortly after the tragedy with the Colonel's first case, she invited Marcus to join the team on a full time basis as a field agent. Of course, Marcus doesn't quite have the experience out in the field that the others do.

His record isn't without blemish - he's been known to do sloppy work when he's slipping away to spend time decoding his father's journal. A small transcription error led to him sending a squad of Eagle Commandos to his sister's address, with predictable results.





# RING OF CHANGES

## Character Sheets

Colonel Natalie Carrows

SKILLS		VITAL ELEMENTS	NAME
Alchemy	1		
Athletics			
Bureaucracy	2		
Ciphers			
Close Combat	3		
Craftsmanship			
Disguise			
Driving	3		
Endurance			
Engineering			
Firearms	4		
Gabble			
Heavy Weapons			
Interrogation	2		
Medicine	2		
Sabotage			
Stealth			
Survival			
Tracking			
ASSETS			
Library	2		
Rank	5		
Standing			
Wealth			

*Central Alchemical Library*

*Colonel*

Major Frank Goddard

SKILLS		VITAL ELEMENTS	NAME
Alchemy	1		
Athletics	2		
Bureaucracy			
Ciphers	2		
Close Combat	3		
Craftsmanship			
Disguise			
Driving			
Endurance			
Engineering			
Firearms	5		
Gabble			
Heavy Weapons			
Interrogation	2		
Medicine			
Sabotage			
Stealth			
Survival	3		
Tracking	2		
ASSETS			
Library			
Rank	4		
Standing			
Wealth			

*The Eagle Commando oath of unity*

*Medal for unparalleled bravery*

*Take Down (F) - bonus dice to disable*

*Lonely Shot (F) - bonus dice at long and extreme range*

*Major*

Lotte Fantasm, the Raven-Eyed Alchemist

SKILLS		ALCHEMY	NAME
Alchemy	1		
Athletics		Air 3	
Bureaucracy	2	Fire	
Ciphers	2	Medical 2	
Close Combat		Metal	
Craftsmanship		Stone 2	
Disguise		Water	
Driving	2	Wood 2	
Endurance			
Engineering			
Firearms	3		
Gabble			
Heavy Weapons			
Interrogation			
Medicine			
Sabotage			
Stealth	2		
Survival			
Tracking			
ASSETS			
Library	1		
Rank	2		
Standing			
Wealth			

*My duty to keep the Republic safe*

*My fiancée, Chris Gallows*

*I will never dishonour the Republic*

*Attempted Alchemy of the Flesh*

*Central Alchemical Library*

*Lieutenant*

Marcus Swift

SKILLS		VITAL ELEMENTS	NAME
Alchemy			
Athletics			
Bureaucracy	6		
Ciphers	4		
Close Combat			
Craftsmanship			
Disguise			
Driving	2		
Endurance			
Engineering			
Firearms	1		
Gabble	2		
Heavy Weapons			
Interrogation	2		
Medicine			
Sabotage			
Stealth			
Survival			
Tracking			
ASSETS			
Library	5		
Rank			
Standing	1		
Wealth	1		

*Absolute faith in the rule of law*

*His sister Jane, who raised him*

*The alchemical secrets in his father's journal*

*Central Law Library*

*Minor nobility*

*Family townhouse*



# RING OF CHANGES

Here are character sheet for two more characters, both alchemists, from before the shared creation step where a Vital Element is destroyed. One is an Independent Alchemist, demonstrating a mix of alchemical secret techniques and special techniques, the other is a Hermetic Alchemist with a heavy specialisation.

**Ciria, the Silk Alchemist**

SKILLS	ALCHEMY	VITAL ELEMENTS	NAME
Alchemy	1	Air	
Athletics	4	Fire	
Bureaucracy		Medical	
Ciphers		Metal	
Close Combat		Stone	
Craftsmanship		Water	
Disguise	2	Wood	
Driving			
Endurance	2		
Engineering			
Firearms			
Gabble			
Heavy Weapons			
Interrogation			
Medicine			
Sabotage			
Stealth			
Survival	2		
Tracking			

**INJURIES**

**SPECIAL TECHNIQUES**

Wire Whip (Met.) - bonus dice  
 Cloth Alchemy (Wood)  
 Root (Wood) - bonus dice for snares  
 Parkour (Ath)

**ASSETS**

Library

Rank

Standing

Wealth

**Lumenfall**

SKILLS	ALCHEMY	VITAL ELEMENTS	NAME
Alchemy	1	Air	
Athletics		Fire	
Bureaucracy		Medical	
Ciphers	3	Metal	
Close Combat		Stone	
Craftsmanship		Water	
Disguise		Wood	
Driving			
Endurance			
Engineering			
Firearms			
Gabble	3		
Heavy Weapons			
Interrogation			
Medicine			
Sabotage			
Stealth			
Survival			
Tracking	2		

**INJURIES**

**SPECIAL TECHNIQUES**

Breath of Fire (Fire)  
 Ignition (Fire)  
 Leaping Flames (Fire) - fast  
 Sunlight and Shadows (Fire)

**ASSETS**

Library

Rank

Standing

Wealth



## RING OF CHANGES

*"I need two more minutes!" Alan shouted, into a lull in the gunfire.*

*Erika risked a glance around the corner, pulling back as soon as she had placed the soldiers. Sporadic fire hit the stone wall, throwing chips of it around.*

*"I don't think we have more than one," she bellowed back, slightly muffled by the cloth over her face.*

*The soldiers had to have heard her, for what it was worth. She'd counted five of them, advancing carefully through the cellar. The light was behind them, which was to her advantage, but even if she thought she was able to take them all on she didn't want to take them out. She hadn't wanted to get into it with them at all, come to that.*

*Alan planted one foot on the wall and heaved on his iron bar. The grille moved a little in its socket, but not enough.*

*Firing blind would force the soldiers to take cover, but she couldn't be sure what, or who, she would hit. Her glance had caught the sergeant mid-gesture, sending Anderson to take up position just the other side of the wall. Erika rolled across the floor, behind the other wall. Before the soldiers could take stock, she leaned out and fired low, hoping to catch Anderson in the leg.*

*The corporal had knelt down, and the shot caught him in the shoulder. His pistol fell to the ground. As she ducked back behind cover, Erika grimaced. She hoped the man wasn't injured.*

*With a strangely organic-sounding pop, Alan forced the grille free. He pulled it away from the hole in the floor and beckoned her back over.*

*Erika shook her head. Even with a torch they would have to take it slowly through the storm drains or risk making a wrong turn. She had to buy them a little more time.*

*She could hear someone dragging Anderson away, hopefully to bandage his wound. That left, what, three to pursue them? Bad odds in a confined space. They didn't seem to have realised she wasn't shooting to kill. They'd be emboldened once they did, even if they couldn't work out why.*

*Alan wasn't waiting for her. He jumped down all at once. The lack of a splash told her the drains were dry, which was the first piece of luck they'd had so far.*

*She pulled the ledgers out of her pack and flung them towards the hole. They hit the lip on the way down, fluttering madly. She heard Alan swear as he gathered them up.*

*Underneath them was the flare she was going to use to signal the others when they were clear of the barracks. It would make a perfect distraction, but it would leave them high and dry once they left the drain network. Unless they had lost their pursuers by then, it would be a fatal problem.*

*Erika looked at the pack again. It was standard issue to all infantry soldiers in the Isemgard army, and used for just about everything, including demolitions. A flash of inspiration hit her and she grinned evilly. She tucked the flare into her belt.*

*She waited until she could hear one of the soldiers starting to move, covered by his comrades. She slid the pack across the floor, as far into the cellar as she could, then made a great show of throwing herself flat behind the wall with her hands over her ears.*

*"Bomb!" someone shouted, followed by the scrabbling of boots.*

*Erika could imagine how they had reacted. Whoever was treating Anderson would have thrown himself flat over his wounded friend. The other three would either run for the steps or hit the ground behind whatever cover they could find. It was instinct, a reaction she herself had taught them.*

*In this case, their caution gave her the crucial seconds she needed to drop down the hole. For a heart-stopping moment she thought she was alone, but then she saw Alan at the next junction, carefully covering his torch. Once he saw it was her, he let it shine.*

*She was about to follow when someone grabbed her face. It was the sergeant, leaning down through the hole. She beat on his arms with the pistol in her hand but couldn't struggle out of his grip.*

*Alan used the pole like a spear, ramming it into the forearm just below the elbow. The sound of the bone breaking right in her ear was one Erika knew would repeat itself in her dreams.*

*Her scarf came away from her face as Alan dragged her to safety. She found herself staring at the sergeant's dumbfounded face as he recognised her as his superior officer.*





# ROLLS AND CONTESTS

Whenever you want your character to perform an action, the Game Master will either narrate the outcome or ask you to roll dice. Dice rolls should only be made when the outcome is important and the risks notable. If stopping for a dice roll would slow the story down or detract from an upcoming climax, one should not be made. Similarly, the GM needs to make sure that a failed roll never stops the story cold - there should always be some sort of follow-up available, even if that is just dealing with the crisis caused by the failed roll.

recognise common guns and draw conclusions about a gunfight by inspecting bullet-holes and casings after the fact.

Skills with a score of 1 are useful for investigation. If there's a clue to be found related to that skill, a score of 1 is all that is required to find it. It follows that every character who can use the skill normally is also an expert in finding clues with it.

Clue-finding is not magic. Often the character will have to specifically look for or look at something to find the clue.

## Interpretation

As a yardstick for what a skill value means:

Skill Rating	Description	You are...
1	Knowledge only	
2	Passable	...nothing special.
3	Competent	...respected.
4	Skilled	...the best in the village.
5	Renowned	...the best in the town.
6	Masterful	...the best in the city.
7	Wizardly	...the best in the country.
8	Legendary	...the best in the world.

Alchemy is a whole different ball game, and due to the secrecy of alchemists it is hard to tell exactly how many have a certain level of power.

### Example

*Janus has 5 points in Firearms. Hugo has 1 point in Firearms. They head to a house to meet a contact, but when they arrive the door is open and the contact is lying dead in a pool of blood. It's obvious he's been shot.*

*Janus examines the body. The entry wound is obvious. The GM tells him there's a powder burn around the wound, suggesting a close-range shot. The entry and exit wounds suggest a weapon of .22 calibre.*

*Hugo scans the walls of the room for bullet-holes. He prises the killing bullet out of the plaster with a knife. The bullet has dried blood on it, and is indeed from a .22. Hugo pulls out a lens and looks at the markings on the bullet. It's deformed, but he can just about tell that the weapon was probably Stravian military issue.*

*Neither of them thought to look for the bullet casing, so they don't find it under the bookshelf with a huge thumb-print on it.*

## Using Knowledge

A character with a score of 1 in a skill cannot practice it themselves, but has a working knowledge of it. Someone with a Firearms skill of 1 cannot shoot straight, but they can maintain a weapon,





# RING OF CHANGES

## Simple Actions

Actions that any reasonably competent character can perform, conducted at little risk, do not require a dice roll. And character with a skill score of 2 or more can do them.

Tasks that are particularly complicated, have significant consequences for failure or undertaken under risky conditions require a skill roll.

## Skill Rolls

The Game Master calls for a skill roll when a character attempts an action that is unusually difficult or has risks associated with it. A skill roll is a single roll of the dice to determine the outcome of the action; success, failure and any consequences the character suffers.

The 7 steps below define a Skill Roll. There are further elaborations on the idea in the following sections, but it is important to bear in mind that they are all optional. They exist only to handle specific situations that might crop up in play, and the GM can use as many or as few of them as she wishes. It's not necessary for the other players to be familiar with them.

### Step 1

Describe the action you are attempting. You will have a 'success slot' you will have to fill for the attempt to be a success. If the task is particularly difficult, the Game Master might require you to fill additional success slots.

### Step 2

The GM then tells you what consequences you are facing as part of the action. Usually, there is one 'consequence slot' you need to fill to avoid the consequences. In particularly dangerous situations, there may be additional consequence slots, as the GM describes.

### Step 3

Roll a number of six-sided dice equal to your skill.

### Step 4

Assign the dice you have rolled to the success and consequence slots, one dice per slot. You want dice with 3 or more in success slots, and dice with 5 or 6 in consequence slots. You cannot leave a slot empty.

### Step 5

If all of the dice in success slots are 3 or higher, your action has succeeded. Success is 'all-or-nothing'.

### Step 6

For each dice in a consequence slot that is 4 or lower, you suffer the consequence for that slot. Consequences are 'case-by-case'.

### Step 7

The Game Master, based on your suggestions, narrates the outcome of the action, including any consequences suffered.

The temptation is to get into the habit of thinking of Skill Rolls in terms 'avoid consequences, then see if you have enough dice to succeed'. While much of the time that's a sensible attitude to take, it's often more exciting to throw caution to the winds. After all, a central theme of this game is 'What are you prepared to sacrifice to achieve your goals?'

### Example

*You are driving a car at speed to escape pursuers. You say you want to slip down a side road to shake off pursuit. The GM says that as the streets are so crowded, you need to fill 2 success slots, and that the consequence is that you crash the car. She could have chosen any of a number of consequences, but thought that one was the most interesting. You have a Driving skill of 3. If there was another possible consequence, or something else to make the task more difficult, you would not be able to attempt the task.*

*You roll 1, 3 and 6.*





## RING OF CHANGES

*You assign the 6 to the consequence slot, and the other dice to success. Your attempt to shake off the pursuers fails, because of the 1. At least you haven't crashed. The GM tells you that you have to slow down so much to make the corner that the car following you has no trouble staying with you.*

### **Example**

*With the same scenario and dice rolls as before, you choose instead to assign the 1 to the consequence, and 3 and 6 to success. This time, you have shaken off pursuit, but you've suffered the consequence. The GM tells you that your sudden swerve catches your pursuers by surprise, but you lose control and slam into a wall. The chaos of the accident delays the chasing car, and you slip away on foot.*

### **Example**

*With the same scenario as before, say you roll 1, 2 and 3. No matter how you assign the dice you will fail at the task and suffer the consequence. The GM tells you that you get the turn all wrong, and crash the car through the front of a haberdashery shop. As you stumble out of the wreckage, your pursuers surround you.*

## **Spare Success Dice**

Most of the time, if you have spare dice showing 3 or more, there is potential to improve the outcome. The Game Master may allow you to spend those dice on improving your success, as though you had had extra success slots to fill for a particularly difficult action.

The flexibility of allowing adding extra dice is very powerful because it side-steps the all-or-nothing nature of success slots. Extra dice should only be allowed if it makes sense that there's an opportunity to make the outcome noticeably better.

This is a list of potential ways to improve the roll, which the Game Master can also use to help gauge when to add an extra mandatory success slot. It's not exhaustive, and good suggestions for an improvement, perhaps specific to the task involved, shouldn't be discounted.

### **Better**

Some tasks lend themselves to being done simply 'better'. If the product of the roll is something that can be judged on quality, for example, an extra dice might be used to make it better.

### **Extra Damage**

In fights, some weapons allow you to increase their damage by spending spare success dice.

### **Faster**

Some tasks that take longer than an instant to complete can be done more quickly using extra success dice. The exact amount of time saved depends on how long the task would otherwise take, and how much the Game Master decides it can be reduced.

### **More Stylishly**

If there's no practical benefit to performing the action in a meaningfully better way, you can always just look better while doing it.

### **More Thoroughly**

If you want to make particularly sure that your action succeeds in a Skill Contest, you can double- or triple-up on your intended action with spare success dice. This has no effect in Skill Rolls.

### **Side Benefit**

A spare success dice can be spent on a simple additional action, to represent taking advantage of a golden opportunity presented during the action. This behaves in a way similar to Multiple Actions, described later.

### **Quietly**

If the task usually makes a lot of noise or is easily noticed, a spare success dice can be used to make it less noticeable.





## RING OF CHANGES

### Example

*You have a commission to carve a statue. Your Craftsmanship is 4. The GM says there's a single success slot, and the consequence is damaging some of your tools in the process of making it. You roll 2, 4, 5 and 6.*

*You assign the 6 to consequences. You assign the 5 to success, but you can also add the 4 to improve the quality of the statue.*

### Example

*You have spotted an enemy scout from your watchtower, and you heft your rifle to bring him down. Your Firearms skill is 6. The GM says the range means you need to fill 2 success slots, and the consequence is your rifle jamming. You roll 1, 2, 3, 5, 6 and 6.*

*You avoid the consequences and make the shot easily, and can also increase the damage of your shot by 1 by adding that extra success.*

A character with a skill of at least 2 can help another using the same skill. For the help to be useful, it needs to be a task where an extra pair of hands or eyes will be useful. A novice marksman might assist a sharpshooter in pinning an enemy down behind cover, but he won't be able to help the sharpshooter take out the madman hiding behind a hostage. As ever, the Game Master decides when help will be useful.

When a character receives useful help from another, they get a dice showing '4' for free. There is no additional benefit for receiving help from more than one character.

A character can receive help and prepare for a task, earning both bonus dice.

## Consequences

Consequences are things that can go wrong for a character in the course of attempting the action. Wherever possible, the Game Master should avoid setting a consequence that presupposes that the action was a failure. Ideally, the success and consequence should be phrased such that are independent of each other. Based on the dice, there are 4 possible outcomes - unqualified success, success at a price, harmless failure and damaging failure - and each of those outcomes should make sense if it happens. For that reason, it's usual for the GM to reach for consequences that seem only tangentially related to the task at hand. The only requirement is that it is something that could go wrong during the action, not that it's something that could go wrong as a consequence of the action.

Some consequences are markedly worse than others. Choosing what consequences to set is one way, apart from setting additional consequence slots, that the GM can model how dangerous a situation is.

### Example

*You are fighting for possession of a valuable book on top of a building. The Game Master sets two consequences - losing your grip on the book and falling off the roof. If you fall, you will surely become injured. The two consequences are separate problems, and are two separate rolls. They are suffered independently.*

## Preparation and Help

For many complicated tasks, preparation can make a huge difference. Preparation is specific action taken ahead of a Skill Roll to make it easier. Laying a trap for an enemy, thoroughly researching the literature before attempting alchemy or casing a building before breaking into it would all count as preparation.

When a character has preparation on their side for a task, they get a dice showing '4' for free, in addition to what they roll. Preparation can make an otherwise impossible task possible (see 'Impossible Actions', later, for more information on when actions are impossible). Only one such free dice can be earned through preparation.

The underlying mechanic is based on 'Otherkind Dice' created by D. Vincent Baker. They've been badly mutilated, but they're just recognisable. He writes some good RPG stuff. You should look it up.

If a certain amount of preparatory work is an inherent part of the task, such as when an architect draughts building plans, there is no bonus dice for preparation.







### Example

*You are running on top of a train, which is crossing a bridge over a deep gorge. The GM sets falling off the train as a consequence. Falling off the train is only a single consequence slot, but will lead to very serious injury if it is not avoided.*

## Consequence Rolls

Sometimes a character is facing consequences of some kind, but not as part of their own action. The commonest time for this to happen is at the end of a Skill Contest (described later), but it can also happen at other times. For example, if a building is collapsing and a character is trying to avoid being crushed, there's no action as such, just an attempt to avoid consequences. A Consequence Roll is identical to a Skill Roll except that it has no success slots, only consequence slots. Because consequence slots are harder to fill successfully, Consequence Rolls are harsher than a Skill Roll with the same number of total slots.

## Slot Precedence

Sometimes the success and consequence slots the Game Master sets for a Skill Roll don't make sense with some success/fail combinations. In this case, the GM can insist on slots being successfully filled in a certain order, to preserve logic.

For simple Skill Rolls with one slot of each type, this rarely happens. For more complicated situations, with multiple consequence slots this can happen more easily. It's not always possible to make each consequence independent of the others, or make every consequence independent of the success slots. Slot precedence keeps the outcome plausible when either of those happens.

### Example

*You are facing two consequences:*

- 1) The thief grabs the book.*
- 2) The thief escapes.*

*In this circumstance, because the thief is so determined to obtain the book that he wouldn't leave without it, the Game Master doesn't want you to assign success to the former but not the latter. So,*

*she tells you that the first can only be stopped if the second is stopped as well. As far as consequences go, there are only 3 options rather than 4 – thief escapes with the book, thief grabs the book but can't get away, thief fails to grab the book.*

*If the thief was less determined, the GM might not have applied the restriction, allowing the fourth option – thief fails to get the book and escapes in panic – to occur.*

## Squeezed Skills

Usually, for any given action one skill is obviously appropriate. Sometimes, the action is appropriate for more than one skill. In this case, either skill can be used as normal.

Sometimes a character lacks the skill they need for the action they want to perform, but they do have a skill that almost fits this particular task. When this is the case, the Game Master might allow them to use the skill, but add an additional consequence slot to reflect how they're at the limits of applicability for the skill. This consequence slot is set in the usual way.

Squeezing skills in this way should never be routine, otherwise it becomes a way for a character to abuse a single highly-rated skill.

Branches of alchemy are far more versatile than other skills, but they are more expensive to take at character creation to reflect that fact.

Sometimes the GM might want you to roll dice for an action, but no skill in the game quite fits that action. If your character is challenged to a game of chess, for example, there's no obvious skill to use. In this case, she can just have you roll 2 dice for the usual 2 slots.

### Example

*You want to set charges to destroy a bridge. Normally, this would require a Sabotage roll, but you don't have the Sabotage skill at 2 or higher. Instead, you make a case to use your Engineering skill, which you have at 4.*

*The Game Master agrees to this use, as knowledge of how to build a stable structure should also help know how to make such a structure fall down. She sets an extra consequence slot for the attempt. The*





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*two consequences are 'You leave behind a clue as to your identity' and 'Debris is blown too far and damages some nearby houses'. Note that either of these consequences can occur independently of whether the demolition attempt was a success or not.*

*Later on, you want to pick a lock. In this case, the GM denies you the opportunity to use the Engineering skill, as the task is too specific to Sabotage and allowing you to squeeze in Engineering risks making Sabotage redundant. On the other hand, for this task it might be appropriate to squeeze the Stealth skill.*

### Desperation

If a character is facing consequences of some kind, but lacks an appropriate skill to try to protect themselves, they always have the option of rolling 2 dice for a Consequence Roll.

This option is strictly worse than having an available skill with a score of 2 because the latter has the option of taking an action, rather than only avoiding consequences.

### Special Techniques

Certain prominent skills have lists of special techniques for them. Each special technique affects how the skill is used in some way.

Special techniques fall into two basic categories. The first group contains techniques that let the skill be used for something it cannot be used for normally, for example esoteric martial arts strikes that your average brawler can't manage.

The second kind of techniques give the character an advantage when using a specific, narrow application of the skill. This kind of specialisation gives the character a free dice showing '4' when the special technique is applicable. In this latter case, only one such dice can be given by special techniques, even if more than one technique fits the situation.

### Impossible Actions

There is a limit on how difficult a task a character can attempt. Any Skill Roll that would require more total slots than the character has dice in the skill is simply impossible. Note that this means when that contrary circumstances impose more consequence slots, the maximum number of success slots is lower.

Preparation, assistance and special techniques can each give an extra dice, and hence increase the limit.

No slot, success or consequence, can be left without a dice to assign to it, which is where this limit comes from. The sole exception to this rule is when a character is facing more consequences than they have dice, in which case they can make a Consequence Roll and try to avoid as many consequences as possible, getting to select which consequences they avoid in the process.

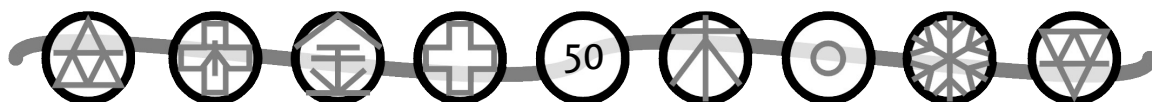
### Skill Against Skill

Sometimes the Game Master will want to set the difficulty of a Skill Roll to reflect the skill score of another character. The simplest robust way to do this is to set the number of success slots equal to half the other character's skill score, rounding down. To a minimum of 1.

### Multiple Actions

If a character wants a Skill Roll to include more than one action – for example keeping a policeman talking while at the same time slipping a piece of evidence into a pocket – then each action requires at least one success slot.

Unlike a normal Skill Roll, where all success slots are all-or-nothing, in this case each distinct action can succeed or fail independently. Within each action, slots are all-or-nothing.





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### Example

*You are driving a car at speed down a forest road to escape some alchemical abominations. At the same time you want to fire a flare gun up into the sky to attract the attention of your comrades, as you cannot face them alone.*

*The Game Master decides that this is a multiple action roll. She sets two success slots for 'escaping the abominations', one success slot for 'firing the flare gun effectively' and one consequence slot for 'rolling the car into a ditch'.*

*You have a Driving skill of 4, so the action is just possible. You roll 2, 3, 4 and 6. You assign the 6 to the consequence slot. You put the 4 into firing the flare gun, and the 2 and 3 into the driving.*

*The GM narrates that you are still being chased by the abominations, avoiding the consequences but failing the escape portion of the roll. The flare shoots up into the sky, signalling your distress and your position to your allies.*

## Multi-Skill Actions

Sometimes a character action ends up so complicated that the Game Master decides it requires the use of more than one skill. Somersaulting off a balcony while shooting an enemy, for example, implies the use of Athletics and Firearms.

If one component of the multi-skill action is sufficiently straight-forward that it would fall under a Simple Action, then as long as the character has the skill at 2 or more then no change is made to the Skill Roll.

For any skills that are a significant part of the intended action, in that they would merit a Skill Roll of their own if done separately, then **Step 3** of the Skill Roll changes slightly. You roll the dice for your best skill being used, but then immediately throw away dice until you only have as many left as your worst skill being used.

If you are using two skills with the same score, this means that nothing changes, so you can pull off these hybrid actions with no extra complication.

If the skill scores are different, then although you only end up with the same number of dice you would for your worst skill, they are likely to be better numbers than you would have got just with those dice. This small but significant advantage provides a way for you to use your powerful skills in imaginative ways. In particular, characters with only moderate combat skills who get into fights benefit from finding ways of bringing their other skills into the roll.

### Example

*You have been ambushed by a gunman in a factory. He seems to be a better shot than you, so you decide to get creative. You take the fight up onto a suspended walkway, and then try to shoot out one of the supports while he is crossing it.*

*The Game Master picks up on your intentions and says this is a multi-skill action involving Firearms and Sabotage.*

*She decides to set a single success slot - 'collapsing the walkway and spilling the attacker off it'. She also sets two consequence slots - 'You are shot' and 'You fall from the walkway'.*

*Your Firearms is 3 and your Sabotage is 4. You roll 4 dice and get 1, 1, 2 and 3. Ouch. You then discard one of the 1s. The only sensible option left is to put the 3 into success and take both consequences with the 1 and 2.*

*The GM narrates that you take so long placing the shot that you are noticed. Although you shoot out the support and the walkway collapses, the attacker just manages to shoot you in the shoulder as he starts to fall. To make matters worse, the remaining supports pop out of their sockets and the entire gantry breaks apart, taking you down with it.*





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### Skill Contests

A Skill Contest is an extended conflict between two or more characters that runs over several Skill Rolls. Because of the time it takes to resolve a full Skill Contest, it is best to reserve them for particularly dramatic moments in the story.

The concept of the contest is relatively simple. Each time a character gets to act, they say what they are intending to do and the Game Master tells them what skill they need. Each participant typically has an obvious goal they want to fulfil, which will be the success slot or slots for your rolls.

The GM decides which participant gets to roll first, based on the situation. Going first is an advantage.

The number of success slots needed is set by the GM, as normal. You can use a different skill each time you roll, as long as it is appropriate to the action you want to perform. If you succeed at a roll, the success is turned into a consequence slot for an opponent to try to avoid.

If you come to make a roll but aren't facing any pending consequences, the GM must set at least one consequence slot as per a normal Skill Roll. If you come to make a roll and you do have pending consequences, the GM can add additional consequence slots as appropriate.

When a character fails to avoid a decisive consequence, they are knocked out of the contest. In other words, participants can effectively set 'win the contest' as their action, and if they succeed and the enemy fails to avoid the consequence generated, one opponent leaves the contest. When there is no longer a conflict between the remaining characters, the conflict is won.

Even after victory has been achieved, there are usually some unanswered consequences for the victor to deal with, requiring a Consequence Roll.

Narration of rolls in a Skill Contest is deferred until after any associated consequences are rolled for. The Game Master can turn narration duties over to the players involved when she feels it's appropriate, which is often the case in arguments and other verbal contests.

### Additional Dice

In a Skill Contest, spare success dice that are spent improving the outcome can have a mechanical as well as narrative impact. These benefits can also be the purpose of a Skill Roll, rather than an attempt to impose consequences on opponents.

If the Game Master agrees it is appropriate, extra dice can be used to:

#### *Manoeuvre for Position*

Increase the number of success slots one or more opponents need when rolling against you by 1, or decrease the number of success slots you need to fill against one or more opponents in future rolls by 1, to a minimum of 1.

This shifts the odds in your favour for the rest of the contest, or at least until an opponent uses the same benefit.

#### *Example*

*In a running gunfight, you are out-numbered. While taking a shot, you spend a spare success dice to get behind cover – a 'side benefit' in the terms of the Skill Rolls section. This increases the number of success slots your enemies need to fill to shoot you.*

*If any of them spends a spare success dice to move to a better position, they won't have this problem shooting you any more.*

*Equally, one of them could declare that finding a better position is his action, rather than shooting you. If he succeeds, he no longer has the penalty.*

#### *Extra Consequences*

Rather than make the main action harder to resist, you can impose extra, different consequences for the action you are taking. These need not be assigned to the same opponent as your action.

#### *Example*

*You are trying to bluff your way past a guard on the service entrance to a large estate. Your ruse is that you are returning laundry that was sent away to be cleaned.*





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*Your rolls ends with an extra success dice, so you choose to apply an additional consequence. After a moment's thought, you decide that consequence is the guard paying you money for what you claim is the outstanding balance on the laundry bill.*

### ***Do It More Thoroughly***

As suggested in the Skill Rolls section, dice can be spent to make it harder for your opponent to avoid the consequences of your action. Each dice spent this way adds an extra consequence slot for the same named consequence. Your opponent needs to avoid consequences in all of those slots to avoid the consequence itself.

This is change from the usual rule with consequence slots, which is that each is independent and distinct. It makes for a more entertaining game if this option is only taken when inspiration for something more interesting runs dry, or as a strong statement about how important this action is to you.

### ***Shortening Skill Contests***

Skill Contests have a positive feedback loop built into them. The better one roll, the more slots the opponent needs to fill, which in turn probably reduces the number of slots you need to fill, and so on. It's not impossible to turn a Skill Contest around, but the feedback loop helps bring it to a conclusion.

Inevitably, sometimes a Skill Contest outstays its welcome. Perhaps it wasn't as

A Game Master at a loss as to how to handle the unnecessarily complicated situations that bear in mind a simple principle underlying Skill Contests - a dice gets you a dice. An extra success generates an extra consequence slot of some kind, or makes some future roll or rolls one slot easier or harder.

interesting as it looked like it would be, perhaps one participant has an advantage but is struggling to turn it into victory.

If this happens, sometimes the Game Master can simply call the

outcome, as the eventual winner is obvious. At other times, she can give an extra consequence slot to everybody in the contest. This consequence should be something that will stop the contest cold, and not necessarily in any side's favour.

If, somehow, that still doesn't work, she can add further consequence slots until something gives.

#### ***Example***

*You are involved in a brawl in a pub. The scene is starting to drag, so the Game Master says that all rolls now have the consequence 'The police arrive'. As soon as any character fails to avoid that consequence, the fight will be over.*

*Some characters might even wish for that consequence to happen, and deliberately assign a low dice to it.*

### ***Taking Turns***

If there are two characters in a Skill Contest, it's obvious that the action will move back and forth.

With more characters involved, there are several approaches the Game Master can take. She is not obliged to use the same method in every conflict.

#### ***Round Robin***

Everyone gets a turn in whatever order seems sensible. This makes sure everyone gets roughly equal participation, but if there is an imbalance in numbers it skews the contest heavily in favour of the larger side.

#### ***Two Teams***

If the conflict breaks down into two sides, then the sides alternate turns. Which character acts for the side each roll is up to their 'team'. This is useful in situations where the advantage of numbers wouldn't make much of a difference, such as a formal debate. It can often lead to only one character making one side's rolls for the contest, because they have the highest skill for the task at hand. This is good for simplicity and making it clear that character takes the lead in this type of conflict, but it can be a disappointment for their allies.





## Cinematic

If you wish to assist another in a Skill Contest, giving them the bonus dice, you must forego the opportunity to make your own roll in the contest.

In this style, the Game Master decides who acts next, based on the flow of the scene and what is dramatic and interesting. Usually, the next character to act is one currently with outstanding consequences. This can lead to dynamic and punchy scenes, but can risk leaving characters out in the cold if no consequences are thrown their way. The cinematic style is very forgiving of one side being badly outnumbered, so it can be a useful way of making a major antagonist hard to defeat by the group acting in concert without giving him over the top skill scores or plenty of minions.

## Skill Contest Examples

### Example

Janus and Hugo get into an argument over what they should do next.

Janus starts the argument, and has a Gabble skill of 2. Hugo has a Gabble skill of 4. The Game Master says that until further notice, the default consequence is getting thrown out of the bar they're drinking in - either during the argument or afterwards.

Janus argues, rolling 3 and 6. This avoids consequences and scores a success.

"We can't leave town until we find out who stole the expedition diary."

Hugo argues back, rolling 1, 1, 4 and 5. This avoids consequence slot Janus gave to him and also scores a success.

"We already know that someone has taken an interest in us. We can't continue our investigation if we're looking over our shoulders all the time. We have to move on."

Janus continues the argument, rolling 2 and 5. He avoids consequences but doesn't score a hit.

"Move on to what? We have no other leads."

Hugo tries a different tack, rolling 1, 2, 3 and 3. He can't fill the consequence slot, but as Janus didn't succeed at his roll all this means is that Hugo will get thrown out of the bar when the argument is over. Hugo scores a success, and uses the spare success dice to add an extra consequence slot.

"As I told you YESTERDAY, I've got contacts in the military we can talk to, but not over the phone. Some of them even knew Challenger."

Janus can't avoid consequences and make an argument of his own with only 2 dice, so he makes a Consequences Roll, getting 5 and 6. That's enough to avoid losing the contest.

"Well, maybe. But I'm certain we're missing something here."

Hugo now rolls, but without any consequences to answer it falls to the GM to set an ordinary consequence. She chooses to say that the barkeeper will be even angrier, possibly even violent, when he gets around to throwing Hugo out.

Hugo tries to deliver the coup de grace, rolling 2, 3, 3 and 5. He chooses to assign the 2 to consequences. The other dice score 3 successes, and he piles the extra 2 onto making Janus back down.

"What if we are? We can always come back WHEN we've shaken off our pursuers. People are suspicious of us as it is. Can't say I blame them, given what's happened since we've been here."

Janus can't avoid 3 consequences. He could make a Consequence Roll, but as all the slots are for the same consequence, there is not point doing so. He loses the contest.

"Okay, okay. Have it your way. But drink up before the barman gets over here. He's got a club."

### Example

You are trying to get some information out of a reluctant NPC. You have Interrogate at 3, she has Gabble at 2. Your goal is to find out where a mysterious man went, her goal is to get you to leave her alone.

The Game Master tells you your first potential consequence is making her suspicious of you. You roll 2, 4 and 6. You avoid the consequence, and succeed at the roll.





*"Look, I'm not up to anything dodgy. I just need to find out where he went. I was supposed to meet him here."*

*The GM decides that she tries to fob you off - she has 1 consequence slot to fill. She rolls 5 and 6. She avoids the consequence, and scores a success.*

*"I only saw him for a few moments. He didn't say where he was going."*

*You roll 1, 2 and 5. You avoid the consequence, but don't put her under any pressure.*

*"Are you sure?"*

*The GM decides that the consequence for the NPC this time is that she lets something slip she shouldn't have. She rolls 1 and 3. She has to take the consequence, but scores a success. The GM decides the detail the woman lets slip is the man's name.*

*"I'm very sure. Brian always just does his own thing."*

*You have a consequence slot to fill, as before. You roll 2, 3 and 3. You have to suffer the consequence, dropping out of the contest, but you inflict 2 consequence slots as you do so. You make the extra one 'Giving away more information about Brian'.*

*"Brian? You know him? Where is he?"*

*The woman has to deal with those two consequences slots. She rolls 4 and 6. The 6 goes into not giving you the main information, but the 4 means she gives a small detail away.*

*"I don't know who he is, or where he went! Good-bye!" - but the GM tells you her eyes flick to one of the roads out of the square nervously.*

*You don't discover where the man is but do at least have an indication as to the direction he took. What is more, the consequence the woman took earlier has given you an extra piece of information - the man's name.*

## Fights

If a Skill Roll or Skill Contest concerns a violent altercation, it is a fight. Fights differ from rolls and contests in a few important ways.

Firstly, no character can set killing or incapacitating an enemy as the goal for a roll. Instead, they can attempt to injure them. When a character has received too many injuries, they are knocked out of the fight.

Secondly, only certain skills can be used to try to cause injury in a fight. Alchemy, Close Combat, Firearms, Heavy Weapons and perhaps Driving can all be used in this way. Athletics and Endurance can be useful in Consequence Rolls. Other skills could be used for side benefits or to manoeuvre for position but not typically to cause injury.

Thirdly, it can become very tedious to explicitly specify every consequence during a fight. For consequences that aren't the result of an attack, the Game Master might decline to specify what they are until they come to pass. If you are faced with a difficult decision on such a roll, you can ask the GM what the consequence is going to be. Most of the time, you can throw a 5 or 6 at the slot and keep the action moving.

## Injuries

Your character has a persistent number of injuries. An injury can be set as a consequence in a fight, and if it is not avoided you mark on your character sheet that you have suffered it.

The number of injuries it takes to put you out of a fight is equal to your Endurance skill +4. For any number less than this, you can keep on fighting without penalty. Once you hit this number, however, you are knocked out of the fight. You can't suffer additional injuries past the one that knocked you out.

If you are knocked out of a fight, you somehow rendered unable to keep on fighting. You could collapse, clutching at your wounds, fall unconscious or something similar. You do not, however, die.





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If your allies prevail, they can get you back on your feet and find some first aid for you. If your enemies won, your future is bleaker. It's a convention of the genre that you won't be killed out of hand, but that doesn't mean that losing a fight won't hurt.

You might wake up in an alley and find that the evidence of treason against your superior you'd spent months painstakingly uncovering has been taken from your coat pocket. You might come to in the Governor's office, with the Governor himself slumped dead across the table. There's a smoking pistol in your hand and the police are battering down the front door. You might be dragged, screaming, to a madman's alchemical laboratory, where the shackles on the operating table await your participation in his experiments with transgressive alchemy.

Sometimes, dying would be a kinder outcome.

Inconsequential enemies, like no-name guards and rioters, are taken out of a fight after a single injury.

### Recovery

Injuries can be removed in three ways.

#### Breather

If you have a moment spare to catch your breath and maybe tend to your wounds when you have 4 or more injuries, you can remove 1 injury. Once you have taken a Breather, you can't take another until you have been injured again.

A Breather is what brings you round after you've been taken out of a fight. If you have an Endurance skill higher than 0, it can also reduce your injuries at other times. Full recovery from significant injury typically involves receiving a breather to get you back on your feet, getting some medical attention to remove at least some of the remaining injuries, and finally a period of rest to remove the rest. Of course, you may not have the luxury of time when fighting the conspiracy, But the breather means you can always get back into the story quickly.

#### First Aid

If someone is given ample time and equipment to treat you with the Medicine skill or Medical Alchemy, you can recover very quickly. A success removes 1 injury. Spare success dice can be spent to remove additional injuries. If you still have injuries left after the medical treatment, you can't receive further first aid until you have completely healed by other means.

#### Rest

If you have time to rest without strenuous activity with adequate medical attention, or at least with some painkillers, you recover slowly. For each half a day you spend convalescing, you remove half your current injuries, rounding down. If you only have 1 injury left, you can remove that instead.

### Weapons

The weapon you use in a fight affects how you fight in three important ways.

#### Speed

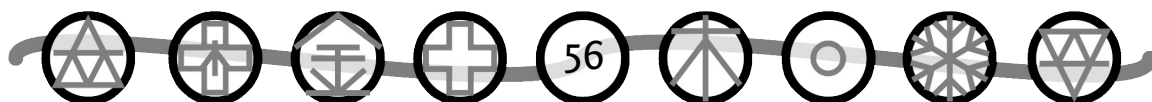
Weapons have one of three speed categories; fast, medium and slow. When the Game Master decides who acts first, fast weapons should be given priority over medium weapons, and both given priority over slow weapons.

If someone with a heavier class of weapon started the fight with an attack, then the faster weapon can still act first but their consequence slot on that first roll might already be an injury.

Once a fight is fully underway, considerations of weapon speed no longer apply.

#### Damage

Weapons are limited in how much injury they can cause. This is usually tied to the weapon speed. Fast weapons can't increase their damage. Medium weapons can increase it by 1. Slow weapons can increase it by as much as you have dice for.







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### *Range*

Weapons have a notional range they are effective at. This is an abstract scale, from 'close' - within range of a punch - through 'short', 'medium' and 'long' to 'extreme' - practically a speck on the horizon. Each weapon can be used at one or more of those range categories. The Game Master specifies what range an enemy is at.

If you want to change the range to an enemy, you can do so by manoeuvring for position. Whether or not this also changes the number of success slots for you or your enemy depends on the circumstances. Usually, one dice spent will change range by one category over open ground. This is intended to be cinematic, not realistic.

If you want to attack but you are currently at the wrong range, you can make a roll with two actions - one for the manoeuvre and one for the attack. Dice precedence means that you have to succeed at the range change before you can put successful dice into the attack itself.

Attacking a target at the longer ranges adds extra success slots to the roll.

Range	Added Success Slots
Long	1
Extreme	2

### *Battle Alchemy*

Alchemy counts as a Medium weapon, but some branches have secret techniques that allow the alchemist to use a different weapon speed. As speed is only relevant at the start of a fight, heavy-hitting alchemy is amongst the most powerful modes of combat.

All alchemy performed in a fight must be improvised, however, requiring an extra consequence slot on top of any consequences generated by enemies.

As alchemy is constrained by its gyre, using at anything further than close range will require at least one additional success slot.

### *Additional Dice*

There are a few ways you can spend spare success dice to add extra consequences specific to fights.

#### *Disarm*

Knock an opponent's weapon out of his hand.

#### *Extra Injury*

Weapon permitting, you can add an extra injury consequence to your target.

#### *Extra Target*

Weapon permitting, you can add an injury to a different foe.

#### *Rearm*

Change the weapon you are using, or recover a dropped weapon. Unless your weapon is drawn at the start of a fight, you might have to rearm as part of your first attack.

You never need to rearm to make an unarmed attack, or perform some other action that needs an empty hand. If the weapon you are carrying can't be held in one hand, or you need both hands for your intended action, you have to drop the weapon. Dropping a weapon doesn't require an extra slot or dice.

### *Escape*

Skill Contests that aren't fights typically end with victory for one side. In a fight, where injury is on the line, one combatant might decide to abandon their goal and flee.

Attempting to escape is an action, which can be attempted using a combat skill or an appropriate other skill. The consequence generated by success is assigned to whichever opponent the Game Master feels is best placed to prevent the escape, should they care to.



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Weapon	Skill	Speed	Extra Damage	Range (C/S/M/L/E)	Other Rules
Alchemy	Alchemy	Medium	Max 1	C/S/M/L	
Unarmed	Close Combat	Fast	None	C	
Knife	Close Combat	Medium	Max 1	C	
Sword	Close Combat	Slow	No max	C	
Grenade	Close Combat	Slow	None	S	Every character in range of the explosion takes an injury consequence.
Pistol	Firearms	Fast	None	C/S/M/L	
Rifle	Firearms	Medium	Max 1	S/M/L	
Shotgun	Firearms	Medium	Max 2	C/S	
Sniper rifle	Firearms	Slow	No max	M/L/E	Spend a spare success dice for 2 extra damage. Cannot be fired if you have consequences to face.
Cannon	Heavy Weapons	Slow	No max	S/M/L/E	Can't be carried.
Elephant gun	Heavy Weapons	Slow	No max	M/L/E	A single extra success slot penetrates any amount of cover.
Flamethrower	Heavy Weapons	Slow	No max	C/S	Spend a spare success dice to start a fire.
Machine gun	Heavy Weapons	Slow	No max	S/M	Spend a spare success dice to hit 2 additional targets.
Mortar	Heavy Weapons	Slow	None	M/L/E	Every character in range of the explosion takes an injury consequence.
Vehicle	Driving	Slow	No max	C	

## Fight Examples

### Example

Hugo was looking through the stacks of the Campport library when a bullet hit a book near his ear. Hugo only has his ceremonial sword, but at least he has a Close Combat skill of 5.

This weapons table is not meant to be a full list of all weapons available. For a different weapon, work out which weapon in the table it is most like and use those rules.

His attacker, at the far end of the aisle, has a pistol and a Firearms skill of 3. The GM says that

although Hugo is currently unarmed, his sword sheathed, so both of them have Fast weapons. The Game Master says the attacker acts first, at Medium range.

The GM rolls for the assassin: 3, 3 and 6. The assassin tries to shoot Hugo in the leg (3), knocking him to the ground (3), with no consequences (6).

Hugo says he wants to duck into the next aisle and rush towards the gunman. This is not an attack, but he still has to deal with the shot at him. He rolls 1, 4, 4, 5 and 6. He dodges the bullet (6) without falling over (5). He ducks into the next aisle (4) and starts closing down the range (4). The GM tells him he'll have to close down the range twice more before he's reached the end of the aisle and is next to the assassin.

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The GM decides that Hugo has cover from ducking into the next aisle, adding an extra success slot to his attacker's roll. She rolls 1, 4 and 6. The assassin misses Hugo and shoots the shelf (1 and 4) with no consequences (6). Hugo made the right decision to get some cover.

Hugo rolls 1, 2, 5, 5 and 6. He closes down the range twice (5 and 5) with no consequences (6). The GM says he is now right next to the assassin, Close range.

The GM rolls 3, 3 and 5. The gunman shoots (3) while backing away to get more range (3) with no consequences (5).

Hugo rolls 2, 2, 3, 4 and 5. He dodges the bullet (5) while reducing the range again (4) and draws his sword (3).

The GM rolls 1, 1 and 1. The gunman fires into the wall (1), only to have his pistol jam (1).

Hugo rolls 1, 3, 3, 3 and 4. He slashes his attacker (4) with extra damage (3) trying to knock him down (3) and disarm him (3). He knocks over a lamp (1).

The GM rolls 1, 5 and 5. The attacker has 4 consequences to deal with, but only rolls 3 dice. He will suffer at least 1 consequence, but picks which ones he avoids with the 5s. He chooses to avoid taking damage (5 and 5) but gets knocked down (1) and disarmed (-).

Hugo rolls 1, 2, 2, 2 and 3. He slashes (3) but knocks some loose papers onto the broken lamp (2).

The assassin has no Close Combat skill. The GM has the option of allowing him to roll 2 dice to avoid the injury, but decides not to. He takes the injury. If the pistol wasn't jammed, the GM could roll Firearms in an attempt to pick it up, and thus have a chance of avoiding the injury as part of the roll. As it is, the assassin now tries to surrender.

In the end, the fire in the papers takes hold so quickly that Hugo has to douse it first, giving the assassin the opportunity to escape in the smoke.

### Example

Janus sees a group of three thugs robbing a foreign woman in a side street and decides to intervene. He pulls his pistol before the fight begins, then challenges them. They turn to attack him. Two are unarmed and one has a knife. They are all close

enough to attack him, but the Game Master decides he should go first as he was ready for them. Janus has a Firearms skill of 5, the thugs have Close Combat 2 each.

Janus rolls 4, 4, 4, 5 and 6. He shoots the thug with the knife (5) and squeezes off shots at the others as well - Extra Targets (4 and 4). Normally, he wouldn't be able to use a pistol against extra targets this way, but he has a special technique that allows him to. He suffers no consequences (6). He also grabs the woman and thrusts her behind him out of harms way (4).

The GM rolls for the unarmed thugs. The first roll is 5 and 5, so the thug isn't shot and swings a punch at Janus. The second roll is 1 and 5, avoiding the shot (5) but not striking at Janus (1).

The GM rolls for the thug with the knife. It's 1 and 4. The thug is shot and goes down (1), but manages a desperate slash at Janus (4).

Janus has two potential injuries. He rolls 1, 1, 2, 2, and 6. The knife goes into his thigh (1) but he dodges the punch (6). His shot in reply is wayward (2).

The unarmed thugs attack again. The first rolls 3 and 3 - trying to grab the woman's arm (3) but accidentally letting his hood slip so Janus can see his face. The second rolls 1 and 2, doing nothing much (2) and tripping over the third thug as he lies on the floor (1).

Janus wants to keep the woman safe, so the grab is a consequence for him. He rolls 3, 3, 4, 5 and 5. He knocks the thug's hand from her arm (5), shoots at him (5), tries to knock him down (4), shoots at the thug who just fell over (3) and kicks the knife down the alleyway out of reach (3).

The first thug rolls 2 and 6 - he avoids the gunshot wound (6) but is knocked over (2). The second thug tries to stand up, rolling 1 and 1. He gets shot (1) and stumbles over again (1).

With two thugs out for the count and the third knocked to the ground, the GM calls an end to the fight. Janus can tell them to get lost or stand guard over them until the police arrive as he chooses. The woman is very grateful, and may well prove to be a significant player in the story later on.



# RING OF CHANGES



## Example

Janus and Caldwell are examining some suspect crates at the docks. They are expecting trouble, guns drawn, but they're not quite expecting the trouble to come in the form of soldier on a patrol boat using its machine gun against them. Caldwell has Firearms 3 and a pistol. Janus has Firearms 5 and a rifle. The soldier has Heavy Weapons 6.

With a pistol, Caldwell acts first. He has the consequence slot 'Get shot'. He rolls 2, 3 and 5. He shoots at the soldier (3) and avoids being shot (5).

With a rifle, Janus acts next. He rolls 2, 3, 5, 6 and 6. He shoots at the soldier (6) for extra damage (5) while taking cover behind a crate (3). He also avoids being shot (6).

The machine gun is the slowest weapon. The soldier has three potential injuries to deal with. The GM rolls 1, 3, 4, 5, 6 and 6. The soldier shoots at Caldwell (5) for 2 extra damage (3 and 4), dodges Janus' shot (6 and 6) but is hit by Caldwell's bullet (1) taking 1 injury.

Caldwell can't attack or run, as he needs all his dice for his 3 potential injuries. He rolls 2, 3 and 3. He suffers 3 injuries all in one go. He has no Endurance skill, so a single additional injury will put him out of the fight.

Janus decides to drag Caldwell behind cover, getting off a shot if he can. He rolls 2, 4, 4, 5 and 5. He drags Caldwell to safety (5) and shoots at the soldier (4) for extra damage (4). He suffers no consequences (5).

The soldier tries to shoot at Janus, but he is behind cover so two success slots are needed. He is also facing two injuries. The GM rolls 1, 3, 3, 3, 4 and 5. The attacker shoots at Janus (3 and 4), for 2 extra damage (3 and 3). He suffers 1 injury (1 and 5).

Caldwell doesn't want to sit out the fight, so he pops his head around the crate to return fire. He rolls 3, 6 and 6. He shoots at the soldier (6), trying to throw his aim off by hitting him in the arm (3) and suffers no consequences (6).

Janus starts firing into the boxes behind the soldier, hoping to hit something explosive. The GM likes the idea, but says that the boxes have cover and not all of them contain something dangerous, so there will

be 2 extra success slots to fill. Janus already has 2 potential injuries, but still has enough dice to try the stunt. He rolls 1, 4, 5, 5 and 6. He hits the boxes (4, 5 and 5) but suffers an injury (1 and 6).

The GM says that the munitions in the boxes explode in a fireball. The soldier has to deal with 2 injuries, but may also be thrown over the side of the boat by the explosion, for three total consequence slots. Including Caldwell's attack, that's a total of 4 consequence slots. Caldwell's action also tried to throw his aim off, which the GM says adds an extra success slot to fill. That brings the total number of slots to 6, which the soldier can only just attempt. The GM rolls 2, 3, 4, 4, 6 and 6. The soldier shoots at Janus (4 and 4). He suffers 1 injury (2, 6 and 6) and is thrown off the boat (3).

The GM says the combat is effectively over, as the soldier is floundering in the water, but Janus still has to deal with his final attack.

Janus rolls 2, 2, 3 and 4. He takes a slug in the arm for his trouble.

At the end of the fight, Caldwell has 3 injuries and Janus has 2 injuries. The soldier has 3 injuries, and as he's treading water and unarmed the two of them have no problems taking him prisoner.





There is an overall pattern to the rules. The dice rolled always depend on the character's skill. Things that make a task more difficult add extra slots to fill. Things that make a task easier add bonus dice showing '4'. These bonus dice can be used to cancel out an extra success slot, so one thing making it harder to succeed and one thing making it easier cancel each other out, leaving the roll as it would be without either factor.

## Monumental Tasks

Some uses of skills are beyond the scope of a Skill Roll or Skill Contest. If you want to use your Engineering to design a massive bridge, it is a project that will take many weeks of effort.

For such large tasks, dice are not rolled. The large amount of time involved, together with support staff and research, smooths out any randomness. The Game Master decides on the relative success of the endeavour based on your skill score and the time and resources available. This will lead to successful completion unless you are tackling a project clearly beyond your abilities.

One important type of monumental task is alchemical research. Deciphering other alchemists' lab notes, reverse engineering their gyres and

conducting careful experiments is how many alchemists hone their skills. In particular, if transgressive alchemy has been uncovered, you might study it in the hope of reversing its effects. Making such an attempt comes with one particular risk - accidentally committing a transgression yourself.

## Vital Elements

Your vital elements are important parts of your character's history. When they get involved, your character gets very motivated.

If the current scene resonates with one of your Vital Elements, even one that you have lost, then after rolling the dice you can choose to re-roll as many of them as you like and keep the new values. You can't re-roll bonus dice from preparation or assistance. You can only re-roll once per scene.

If you lose one of your Vital Elements during a scene, then until the scene ends you get 2 bonus dice showing '4' for *every* roll you make.

## The Electrum Rule

Every rule in this section is there to guide you through the game. Usually, dice rolls are simple to adjudicate. The more complicated rules are there only to handle more involved conflicts. Ultimately, the Game Master is at liberty to ignore any of these rules in favour of whatever approach she thinks is a better option in that scene. She can re-purpose existing rules for different situations or make up new rules to handle unusual situations as she sees fit.





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*Erika shifted position slightly. A clock-tower was cliché, but it worked. From beneath the iron spire she could see most of the town.*

*Valdus was somewhere in the down there in the marketplace. Blenford was only a small town, but it lay on an important rail route from Valley towards the coast. The marketplace was separated from the station yard by a single wall. Valdus was cocky as ever, boasting how easy it would be for him to slip over the wall unnoticed. Erika just hoped he wasn't all talk.*

*She wasn't using the telescopic sight in her rifle. Until she had a definite target, it was a liability. If things went south, her role was to make sure the Valdus could get away.*

*The military carriage of the train was easily recognised thanks to the livery. When the locomotive pulled away, there would be two generals and a brigadier aboard. The Stravian army was massing near Campport, and they were going to join the contingent already in place.*

*Milner had leaked the information they had on the Mallinese and Isemgard military movements to the Stravian authorities. It painted a clear picture of a pincer attack in the north, Isemgard planning on taking Ely in a surprise attack while the Mallinese forces laid siege to Western. That the information had been ignored suggested that the Isemgard/Mallinese alliance had an agent within the Stravian command structure. Perhaps the agent had managed to convince Domville that the leaked plans were misinformation.*

*As Erika watched, Valdus bought an apple from a stall next to the wall. He paid the stall-holder, letting the coin slip through his fingers and onto the floor. The two of them laughed at his fumble-fingered mistake, and she waves Valdus away with a smile. He stepped away from the stall, edging closer to the wall.*

*When the stall-holder bent down to pick the coin up off the ground, Valdus ran for the wall. He put one foot on the wall to give him a few extra inches of height and slung one arm over the top. With a firm grip on the far top edge of the wall, he could lever his body right over. He dropped out of sight on the other side.*

*Erika lost sight of him for a few minutes, in amongst the clouds of steam from the locomotive and the bustle as the porters loaded more crates onto the train. Valdus was wearing a stolen porter's uniform, which made it*

*harder to find him again. She settled for keeping a careful watch on the military carriage. The platform had been closed to everyone except station staff and military personnel, so at least it was less crowded than usual.*

*When she caught sight of him, he was talking to one of the real porters, leaning against a pile of boxes. His insouciance staggered her. After the porter moved away, Valdus walked closer to his target. He'd picked up a long, thin parcel from somewhere, the better to look like he belonged there.*

*They didn't what the generals were transporting to Campport, but it warranted exceptional security. The brief stop in Blenford was the best chance to intercept it. It would have been easier to get one of the alchemists to force the safe, but after the near-miss in Eastern it was too risky for them to travel through Stravia. It was all down to Valdus.*

*He couldn't get into the carriage, though. A crowd of porters were right next to it, arguing over a baggage manifest. Judging by the way the guard was looking up and down the line and reaching for his whistle, there wasn't time to wait for them to move away.*

*Erika ran her tongue around her mouth, trying to alleviate some of the dryness. If she took a shot, she would only have seconds to start running down the clock-tower's steps if she wanted to avoid capture. The rifle's report would alert everyone in the marketplace to her presence.*

*She found what she was looking for on one of the flat trucks. Boxes had been stacked, held in place by rope. It was a difficult shot, but the air was still. The report of her weapon echoes down into the market, turning it into a sea of faces staring upwards. The rope on the boxes parted, springing wildly as the tension was released.*

*The porters hustled over to the truck with some replacement rope, leaving Valdus' way clear. The lock on the door only delayed him for a few seconds.*

*Erika briefly considered running, but she never liked to leave a job half-done. She watched for a couple of minutes more, until he was safely back off the train and had given her a subtle thumbs-up.*

*As soon as she relaxed, she heard soldiers burst through the door behind her. She raised her arms over her head and stepped away from the weapon. She tried not to think about what might happen next.*





## RING OF CHANGES

# SKILLS

Each skill in this game can be used in many ways. Each provides an areas of knowledge that allows you to find clues when investigating the conspiracy and the ability to perform actions that fit the skill. They can also furnish you with contacts you've met while pursuing your skill. These contacts are not necessarily friends, or even well-disposed to you, but can be useful ways of getting a little help or some information. If you have a skill at a reasonable level, there is also equipment that you might carry with you or keep at home. Weapons are a special case, as they are more difficult to get hold of. Skills are often prone to certain common consequences when they are used.

Each skill write-up includes information on all of the above.

(A) Alchemy	(Ath) Athletics
(Bur) Bureaucracy	(Cip) Ciphers
(CC) Close Combat	(Cr) Craftsmanship
(Dis) Disguise	(Dr) Driving
(End) Endurance	(Eng) Engineering
(F) Firearms	(Gab) Gabble
(HW) Heavy Weapons	(Int) Interrogation
(Med) Medicine	(Sab) Sabotage
(St) Stealth	(Sur) Survival
(Tr) Tracking	

## Special Techniques

Some skills have special techniques available for them. When you create a character, you can receive a special technique for each point above 3 you have

in the skill. So, if you have the maximum allowable skill when you create a character, 6, you can pick 3 special techniques from the list for that skill.

Some powerful Special Techniques have a minimum skill requirement before they can be chosen, others require a specific, other Special Technique to be known before they can be learnt. You can't learn the same Special Technique twice.

There is space on the character sheet for you to record your Special Techniques, and which skill they refer to.

There are two main types of special technique. The first allows you to use the skill in a way that is not normally possible. Sometimes this will come with some additional rules related to it. The second is a specialisation in one application of the skill which grants a bonus dice in any Skill Roll that falls under the specialisation. These are indicated by (E) for extension and (BD) for bonus dice in the descriptions. Requirements are put in the same brackets, a number for a skill value and a name for a prerequisite special technique.

Not all skills have a list of special techniques. Only those skills that are particularly important to the story the Game Master wants to tell will have them. As standard, alchemy, combat skills and a few other skills have them. The GM might allow you to create special techniques for other skills, or remove some of the existing special techniques, depending on what she wants the emphasis of the game to be. If she wants the game to avoid fights as much as possible, she might remove any special technique dedicated to combat. If she thinks they are too complicated for the interest they offer, she might ban them completely.

You can create your own special techniques for a skill, as long as the GM approves them. They are an important way of differentiating your character from others with similar skills.





## Alchemy

Alchemy gets its own chapter later on, detailing the different branches and their application. The existence of alchemy affects practically every aspect of life and every other skill. It is a tremendously versatile tool.

**Knowledge:** Knowledge of alchemy allows you to recognise when it has been used to shape something by the patterns left in the material. You can also recognise common alchemical symbols and remember what form of alchemy they refer to. Although alchemical lab notes are too dense and complicated for you to fully understand, you can take a stab at their purpose. Transgressive alchemy is readily recognisable by the way it puts together familiar elements in a strange and counter-intuitive way.

**Equipment:** Working alchemists typically have on hand research journals, reference books and drawing utensils. Some create pre-made gyres on thick card or wood for tasks they have to perform frequently. Others embroider useful gyres onto their clothes or even tattoo them onto their bodies.

**Consequences:** The alchemy spread further than you want, or hurts someone in an unintended fashion.

### *Battle Alchemy*

Any alchemy performed in a great hurry carries additional risks, in the form of an extra consequences slot. When used to fight, alchemy is typically a medium-speed weapon, although some secret techniques can change this.

## Athletics

With athletics you can run, jump and perform other feats of physical strength and dexterity. This includes climbing walls, with or without rope, jumping from roof to roof and other swashbuckling escapades. It can also be used in a Consequence Roll to avoid injury.

**Knowledge:** You can recognise the tools of the trade such as swimming aids and climbing ropes. If they leave a mark you can find out when such things have been used - for example identifying grapple marks on a balcony railing.

**Contacts:** You know athletes, dancers and acrobats by reputation, and a few in person. You know which shops stock any equipment you need to use this skill.

**Equipment:** You seldom carry much with you, but you probably own climbing gear, sensible exercise clothes, athletic supports and footwear.

**Consequences:** Injury or a strained muscle.

## Athletic Techniques

**Contortionist** (E 6): You are incredibly supple. You can slip through awkward openings and twist out of bonds in ways that most people can't.

**Diving** (BD): You have experience in diving, with and without a diving suit.

**Free Climbing** (BD): You are experienced when it comes to ascending without the encumbrance of climbing gear. This also helps you when you are using the gear anyway.

**Heave-Ho** (BD): You have practised pulling on heavy weights, as part of tug-of-war or hauling in a catch of fish. You get an advantage any time you have to drag something towards you.

**Knife-Catching** (BD): You have experience at catching thrown objects, be they knives, balls or even grenades.

**Parkour** (E): You can negotiate obstacles in your way without having to slow down. This often means you can change range in combat far more easily than most.

**Sprinting** (BD): You have an incredible turn of speed when running in a straight line.

**Sure Footing** (BD 5): You have a practised ability at keeping your footing in treacherous or precarious conditions.

**Swimming** (BD): You are a strong and confident swimmer.







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**Tumbling** (E 5): You know how to fall in such a way as to minimise the chance you are hurt, by taking advantage of anything you can touch and rolling properly on impact. You take one less injury from all falls.

## Bureaucracy

You can navigate the Byzantine ways of red tape. This lets you cut through the problem of obstructive officialdom. It also encompasses a working knowledge of the legal system, government and accountancy. You can also use the skill to throw up a bureaucratic smokescreen around your own activities.

**Knowledge:** You can swiftly hunt down the one useful piece of information in a complicated document. You can also spot 'gotcha' clauses in contracts and identify questionable accounting practises and violations of bureaucratic procedure.

**Contacts:** Lawyers, government officials, administrators for large organisations.

**Equipment:** A stout fountain pen.

**Consequences:** A critical mistake in drafting a document, breaking proper procedure or overlooking some small detail that will come back to haunt you.

## Ciphers

Codes are an important part of society. Because alchemy can break into safes and other secure storage so easily, as a second line of defence important documents are often

The reason consequences for Ciphers are phrased as 'not knowing' rather than 'being wrong' is that in the latter case a canny player can use the fact he was wrong to his advantage by inferring the correct translation. By making the veracity uncertain, it's a lot harder to exploit out-of-character knowledge.

written in code. There are thousands of different ciphers, in varying degrees of complexity.

Alchemists usually write their notes in a code derived from the one their teachers

taught them. Enciphering and deciphering documents with the codebook to hand, or with a cipher you know well is simple, but this skill allows you to crack codes you do not know and work with unfamiliar ciphers. It can also be used to solve cryptic and abstract puzzles of other kinds, such as riddles.

**Knowledge:** You can identify the presence of a coded message, even if it is hidden in plain sight behind a mundane message or picture. You are familiar with common ciphering techniques and will know if you ever get your hands on a codebook.

**Contacts:** You have met people who use codes regularly, such as alchemists and high-ranking officials, in might even have worked for them, putting your skill to use translating messages.

**Equipment:** You have a dog-eared copy of a book on common ciphers, and a few letter grids for codes you use frequently.

**Consequences:** Not knowing how accurate some part of your translation is.

## Close Combat

You can fight up close and personal. The full rainbow of edged, pointy and heavy weapons of death are at your disposal. Although you can only fight people right next to you with this skill, you can fight even when you don't have a weapon, which can be a literal life-saver.

**Knowledge:** You can tell when someone is carrying a mêlée weapon, unless it's very small. You can recognise wounds caused by such weapons. You know the basic forms for many styles of fighting and can gauge how experienced a fighter someone is.

**Contacts:** Sparring partners, teachers, people you have crossed swords with - perhaps literally - in the past.

**Equipment:** You weapon of choice.

**Consequences:** Damaging your weapon, losing your weapon, injuring a by-stander.





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### Close Combat Techniques

**Ai-Uchi** (E 5): When you roll Close Combat in a fight, you get 2 bonus dice showing '1'. These are only useful for voluntarily suffering consequences in order to free up other dice for a strong counter-attack.

**Blockage** (E 5): When you fight bare-handed, you can choose to paralyse an enemy instead of injuring them. A successful attack generates a consequence slot for Blockage, and you can spend any number of spare success dice on adding extra ones. You need to make sure your opponent suffers a number of consequences in a single attack equal to (their Endurance +4) / 2, rounding up, to paralyse them and take them straight out of the fight. Otherwise, they shrug off the attack completely.

**Charge** (BD): When you are rushing towards an opponent or ploughing through a door to attack, you get a bonus dice.

**Energy Blockage** (E 6, needs Blockage): When you attack, you can spend up to two spare success dice on Energy Blockage consequences. A character hit by either of those consequences loses the ability to perform alchemy until the injury is healed. The target must avoid these consequences before avoiding the main strike, thus making sure there is an injury to accompany the effect if it is imposed.

**Grappling** (BD): When struggling with an unarmed opponent, or fighting for possession of an object or person, you have a bonus dice.

**Kenjutsu** (E): When fighting with a sword, you can choose to wield it as a fast weapon for your first strike.

**Knife-Work** (E): When using small weapons such as knives, if you attack a completely unaware or helpless opponent you can spend any number of spare successes on extra damage.

**Powerful Throw** (BD): You are better than most people at throwing weapons.

**Slams** (E 5, needs Grappling): When fighting unarmed, you can use throws and choke-holds on your enemy. These attacks, if they connect, automatically apply an extra success slot for your opponent to stand up or free themselves.

**Whirlwind** (E): You can spend any number of spare success dice on Extra Targets.

### Craftsmanship

Craftsmanship is the ability to create a physical object. Works of art fall under this definition. With time, materials and tools, you can create a usable and/or aesthetically pleasing artefacts. The delineation between Craftsmanship and Engineering is that in Craftsmanship the bulk of the skill is involved in the making, whereas in Engineering the bulk of the skill is in the design. Large projects will probably require both. Craftsmanship is more than a way to earn a living; it's a way you can create useful tools for yourself.

**Knowledge:** You can tell the quality of an item by inspecting it, identify the products of major manufacturers.

**Contacts:** Craftsmen and their suppliers.

**Equipment:** Hand-held tools of the trade, or perhaps a small workshop.

**Consequences:** Breaking tools, ruining materials, completing projects late.

### Disguise

Apart from hiding your own identity, Disguise can be used to conceal the nature of many things. Where Stealth is used to shield something or someone from attention, Disguise is used to make the casual glance pass straight over someone or something. Disguise has the advantage that it works just as well when there are many eyes in the area as when there are few. Alchemy makes safes and strongrooms less useful than they might be, so security through obfuscation is the best defence. Alchemists travelling to Mallinet are advised to use Disguise to conceal any alchemical tattoos. Alchemists who have transgressed are advised to use Disguise to hide their disfigurement in public.

**Knowledge:** If you have good reason to suspect something is hidden and a fair idea of what you are looking for, you can find where it is hidden. You can also pick out people attempting to blend into a crowd.





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**Contacts:** Smugglers, and wealthy patrons who have engaged your services in the past.

**Equipment:** Make-up, hair dye, and a few other bits and pieces for hiding your identity.

**Consequences:** Leaving a clue as to your identity behind or leaving a suspicious paper trail in your efforts to get the materials you need.

### Driving

Most people are capable of driving a car, unless they need to do something fancy with it. Having a significant Driving skill means that you can do some of those fancy things, and also have a stab at steering other, more exotic vehicles.

**Knowledge:** You can recognise vehicle makes and models, maintain most ordinary vehicles and take a guess at what led to a crash by studying the damage and tyre marks.

**Contacts:** Repair specialists, vehicle dealerships.

**Equipment:** None.

**Consequences:** Damaging the vehicle, losing control of the vehicle or hitting a pedestrian.

### Difficulty

Driving any vehicle other than a car, van, lorry or motorcycle requires an extra success slot.

Attempting to ram an enemy using a vehicle requires an additional success slot.

### Driving Techniques

**Close Air Support** (E 5, needs Dirigible Pilot): You can steer an airship while operating a weapon, without needing to mix skills or take a multiple action.

**Cross the T** (E 5, needs Dirigible Pilot or Marine Pilot): When controlling an airship or boat, you can spend a spare success on a Driving roll to give every ally fighting from your vessel a bonus dice.

**Dirigible Pilot** (BD): You get a bonus dice when flying airships that offsets the extra success slot. While this is often taken by Balloonist characters, many are content to live without it as complicated manoeuvres are less frequently performed in the air.

**Getaway** (BD): You have particular expertise when it comes to evading pursuit.

**Horseman** (BD): You get a bonus dice when riding horses that offsets the extra success slot.

**Marine Pilot** (BD): You get a bonus dice when steering water-craft that offsets the extra success slot.

**Navigator** (BD): You have experience at travelling long distances across territory with no landmarks, and don't get lost easily.

**Pit Manoeuvre** (E): You can spend a spare success dice when pursuing an enemy in a vehicle to try to nudge them so that they come to a stop safely.

**Ram** (BD): You get a bonus dice when attempting to ram an enemy that offsets the extra success slot.

**Skates On** (E 5): You can attempt ridiculous stunts when using Driving, such as going up on two wheels, using ramps to jump over obstacles and other abuses of the transport system.

**Tank Driver** (BD): You get a bonus dice when driving heavy armoured combat vehicles that offsets the extra success slot.

**Walk Away** (E 6): No matter how terrible a crash you are involved in, you can never suffer enough injuries in one to knock you out of the contest, or prevent you from walking away from the wreckage.

### Common Vehicles

**Turbine vehicles:** Cars, vans, lorries, motorcycles.

**Rail vehicles:** Turbine locomotives, electric trams.

**Water-craft:** Yachts, sailing ships, paddle-steamers.

**Airships:** Dirigibles.

**Military vehicles:** Tanks, armoured personnel carriers, turbine warships, Isemgard flame tanks, Isemgard armoured dirigibles.





## Endurance

Where Athletics is used for feats of strength and dexterity, Endurance is used for feats of stamina. Resisting various poisons comes down to Endurance, as does shrugging off extremes of temperature. Perhaps most importantly, Endurance increases the number of Injuries you can take.

**Knowledge:** You can spot that someone is buff, even if they are fully clothed.

**Contacts:** You know other people who exercise at your gym, or who work in the same labour-intensive job you do.

**Equipment:** None.

**Consequences:** Over-taxing yourself or suffering frostbite or heatstroke.

## Endurance Techniques

**Arctic Creature (E):** You can survive greater extremes of cold than normal.

**Blockhead (E 5, needs Resist Torture):** You either feel no pain or have trained yourself to avoid flinching when hurt.

**Desert Creature (E):** You can survive greater extremes of heat than normal.

**Distance Running (BD):** You have experience or training in marathon runs or long-distance forced marching.

**Resist Torture (BD):** You can resist pain to a greater extent than most people, including that caused by things like tear gas.

**Stun Resistance (BD):** You have a decent chance of staying upright after an electric shock or an explosion.

## Engineering

Engineering is used to design complicated devices and large-scale objects. The difference between Engineering and Craftsmanship is that in Engineering the brunt of the effort goes into the design, and in Craftsmanship the brunt of the effort goes into the making. Large projects might require an engineer and a small team of craftsmen.

Engineering can be used to repair objects, design tools and gadgets. An adventuring engineer can provide tracking devices and specialised weapons to the rest of the cabal.

**Knowledge:** You can tell the purpose of a widget from a thorough inspection. You can assess the safety of buildings and other constructions in a state of disrepair.

**Contacts:** Other engineers, people you have completed projects for and work gangs you have led.

**Equipment:** A well-filled toolbox.

**Consequences:** The item you were working on is destroyed or has an unintended side-effect when used.

## Engineering Techniques

**Architectural Design (BD):** You have considerable skill in designing buildings and other, similar construction projects,

**Exotic Weapons (E 6):** You can create very powerful, one-shot weapons. Such weapons can be used as siege weapons or even against human targets, and are generally tailor-made to the specific encounter they are intended for. These weapons are fired using Heavy Weapons, and can inflict multiple consequences on a successful attack, equal to the the total successes rolled when building the device.

**Gas Grenades (E):** You can make non-lethal grenades with a variety of useful effects. Stink bombs, smoke grenades and tear gas are just some of the types you can make.

**Good As New (BD):** You are very good at coaxing damaged machines back to life.

**Listening Devices (BD):** You have skill at creating eavesdropping equipment.

**One I Made Earlier (E 5):** You can roll your Engineering skill in order to just happen to have a small but unusual piece of equipment to hand in an emergency.

**Overload (E):** You can push an engine or other mechanical device far beyond its usual limits for a short period of time, leading to its destruction afterwards.





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**Shock Weapons (E):** You can make shock batons and stun gloves. These are slow Close Combat weapons, that inflict injuries that disappear on their own in a couple of minutes.

**Spit and Bailing Wire (BD):** You can make do with inferior equipment. This offsets an extra success slot for having inadequate equipment or materials.

**Vehicle Design (BD):** You have experience at designing vehicles such as cars, dirigibles and boats.

## Firearms

Firearms are the commonest weapon used by armed forces all over the world. They are light enough to be simple to use, and can be deadly at range. Although its not exactly legal to tote them around in most towns and cities, in places like Campport that have seen recent warfare it's not unusual for someone to keep one in the house for protection.

**Knowledge:** You can identify different makes of firearm, clean and maintain a weapon and find ballistic evidence left behind when guns are fired.

**Contacts:** Gun shop owners or illegal arms dealers.

**Equipment:** Gun cleaning kit, ammunition.

**Consequences:** The gun jamming, misfire, a bystander being injured.

## Firearm Techniques

**Covering Fire (E):** When you spend a spare success dice to manoeuvre for position and add success slots to an enemy, you can make that success slot a requirement for any action that enemy tries to take, not just attacking you.

**Hawkeye (E 5, needs Lonely Shot):** When firing at extreme range, you do not have any penalty for range.

**Lonely Shot (BD):** You have a steadier aim when shooting at long or extreme range.

**Point Blank (E):** When shooting a helpless target, you can cause as many injuries as you wish with only a simple success.

**Precision (BD):** You are very good at target shooting, and any other occasion where extreme accuracy against a static target would be useful.

**Quick Draw (E):** You do not have to spend a slot to draw a pistol.

**Spread the Love (E):** You can spend spare success dice on extra targets when using a pistol.

**Stopping Power (E):** Whenever your Firearms consequence is not avoided by an enemy, he cannot manoeuvre for position to reduce the range on that roll.

**Take Down (BD):** You have practice at shooting to disarm an enemy, or to hit an alchemist's hands and prevent them from using alchemy.

**Trick Shot (E 5):** You can use ricochets, indirect fire and other interesting tricks to pull off attacks that would otherwise be impossible.

## Gabble

This skill is all about keeping talking. You can stall for time, divert uncomfortable questions, deceive and persuade other people to see things your way. It won't turn enemies into allies, but it's the grease on the wheel of human interaction. It can also be used to goad someone into rash action or bluff someone into backing down.

**Knowledge:** You can tell someone is keeping some information back, and judge a person's mood by their words.

**Contacts:** Chancers and charlatans, and people you have manipulated before.

**Equipment:** None.

**Consequences:** Making an enemy, being caught in a lie, making yourself memorable in a bad way.

## Heavy Weapons

Heavy weapons are the largest tools of war a single person can wield. They are large, clunky and impossible to conceal. Some require significant set up time. It takes a different kind of skill to use these weapons than it does to fire a pistol or rifle. With this skill you can fire them from a braced standing position, from prone, or when they are fixed on a mount on a building or vehicle.





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**Knowledge:** You can maintain and set up heavy weapons, and recognise them by the sound of their reports.

**Contacts:** Soldiers, armourers and machinists.

**Equipment:** Ear defenders, safety goggles, gloves.

**Consequences:** A misfire, unintended collateral damage, destruction of the weapon.

### Heavy Weapon Techniques

**Collateral Damage (E):** When you fire a heavy weapon, you can choose to cause serious damage to nearby buildings, furniture or flora.

**Indirect Fire (BD):** When making an indirect attack with a heavy weapon, such as with a mortar or cannon, you have a bonus dice.

**Kill Zone (E):** You can spend a single spare success dice to turn the kill of a single minor target into a kill of a whole group, assuming that they can each only take 1 injury.

**Ranging Expert (BD):** You have an advantage when firing at long or extreme range.

**Splash Damage (BD 5):** You are skilled at making attacks against multiple targets.

### Interrogation

Interrogation is used to extract information from the reluctant. There are a great many ways to go about it, from the manipulative to the violent, and ability in this skill covers them all, even if there are some you would never stoop to. This skill isn't restricted to confrontational situations, it can be used to tease out clues from people without even tipping them off that they're being pumped for information.

**Knowledge:** You can recognise when someone is using an interrogation technique, on you or someone else.

**Contacts:** Police, independent detectives, snitches and journalists.

**Equipment:** If your approach runs that way, piano wire, handcuffs and lengths of rubber hose.

**Consequences:** You push someone just that bit too far, you are uncertain whether the information you have received is accurate.

### Medicine

This skills covers all forms of medical treatment. For some forms of medicine, alchemy is far more effective, so medicine as a mundane skill reaches its highest levels in those areas that alchemy struggles with. Medical alchemy can accelerate the body's own healing measures and manipulate bones back into place, but it is less useful for treating diseases caused by the body's processes running overtime, such as fevers and allergies. Not everyone has access to a doctor with alchemical training, so common medicine is the first port of call for most sick people.

**Knowledge:** Diagnose illnesses and injuries.

**Contacts:** Other doctors, patients you have treated in the past.

**Equipment:** A doctor's bag filled with the usual paraphernalia.

**Consequences:** Making the patient worse rather than better in some way.

### Medical Techniques

**Field Medic (BD):** You have experience at treating trauma caused by violence.

**Pathologist (E):** You can use your Medicine skill to establish cause of death, time of death and other interesting details when examining a dead body. You can also perform blood tests on living and dead patients.

**Poisoner (E):** You know how to concoct poisons, antidotes and agents to render people unconscious, insensible or otherwise compromised.

**Surgeon (BD):** You have experience with surgery.

**Vet (E):** You can use your Medicine skill to treat animals as well as people.





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### Sabotage

Sabotage is the skill used to break things, sometimes artfully. Sabotage can be used to pick locks, tap into phone lines, bring down buildings with explosives and disable vehicles. Done artfully enough, the sabotage can escape notice until someone tries to use the item in question.

**Knowledge:** You can recognise that something has been sabotaged, and how the deed was done.

**Contacts:** Thieves, black ops teams.

**Equipment:** Lock picks, fuse-wire, explosives, a very specialised box of tools.

**Consequences:** Leaving behind evidence that points to you, unintended side-effects of breaking something.

### Stealth

Stealth is the skill used for escaping notice. Unlike Disguise, which makes no effort to hide something but instead misrepresents its nature, Stealth attempts to keep something out of sight. The most obvious application is to move without being spotted, but it can also be used to conceal objects and other people. Stealth is most effective when used to evade a small number of eyes, preferably with advantageous lighting conditions.

**Knowledge:** You can identify likely hiding places or covert access points.

**Contacts:** Spies, information brokers and common criminals.

**Equipment:** Dark clothes.

**Consequences:** Leaving behind evidence of your presence, making inconvenient noise.

### Survival

Outside towns and cities, the world can be a dangerous place. In the wilderness, simply finding your way can be a challenge. Finding adequate food and shelter is a further complication. The Survival skill allows you to care for yourself and your friends when far from the conveniences of civilisation. It can also come in handy when you need to go 'off the grid' closer to a major population centre.

**Knowledge:** Which way is north, what plants are safe to eat, what dangerous animals might be abroad.

**Contacts:** Frontiersmen and hunters.

**Equipment:** A bedroll, hunting and skinning knives, a tent and sensible boots.

**Consequences:** Being unsure you are headed the right way, leaving obvious signs of your passage, picking a suboptimal route.

### Tracking

It can be difficult to find people who don't want to be found. The Tracking skill is more than following a set of foot-prints, it includes drumming up information on where someone has gone to ground, where their known associates are likely to be and other legwork the average flatfoot spends most of his life doing. At a push, it can also be used to analyse more abstract things like the spread of a resistance movement through the area.

**Knowledge:** How to avoid leaving obvious signs you have been somewhere, how to know when you are being followed.

**Contacts:** Investigators and hunters.

**Equipment:** Unremarkable clothes, binoculars.

**Consequences:** You tip off the person you are tracking or are diverted onto the wrong track.





# ASSETS

Assets are similar to skill in that they are scored on the same kind of scale, but they represent something subtly different. Whereas skills are innate abilities you have, assets represent your place in the world and the resources that place grants you. Assets rarely need to have dice rolled for them. Unlike skills, which only increase slowly as you become more experienced, assets can change for the better or the worse, and in response to what happens in the story.

It's possible to spend time deliberately increasing your assets, although some are easier to improve than others. A high asset is not an unequivocal advantage, as high asset scores typically come with responsibilities and require more effort to maintain at their current level.

Assets can supply contacts in the same way as skills. They can also provide allies, who will more readily put themselves out for you. If you treat them poorly, however, even allies might abandon you. When fighting the conspiracy, you can never be completely sure that the allies you get from assets can be trusted. As a rule of thumb, you can use an asset to call on an ally with skills relevant to their profession at a score one less than your asset score. This means that an asset score less than 4 doesn't really offer much potential for finding skilled allies, but it is still useful to get more warm bodies doing your bidding.

Suggestions on ways that an asset can change are included in the descriptions. Increasing an already high asset takes a lot more effort than increasing a low one. Similarly, it's harder to lose points from a low scoring asset than a higher one.

## Library

Research is an important part of many careers. Alchemists, in particular, need to spend a great deal of time planning their gyres to be properly effective. Engineers, lawyers and historians also have a frequent need to access them. The library asset is useful to learn specific information, or as a means to bolster your skill for an important task. Library research can be a form of preparation for Skill Rolls. For Monumental Tasks, the Game Master can add the Library asset to the relevant skill as a means of measuring your maximum potential. Library privileges can be shared amongst members of the cabal, so it is useful to have a variety of different kinds of library within the group. In larger libraries, there are levels of access granted, so you can be associated with a large library even if your score is low. Being associated with multiple libraries can increase your score beyond what it would be for any of those libraries singly.

**Roll:** When you need to find a specific book or piece of information in a hurry.

**Contacts:** Other researchers in your field, librarians.

**Allies:** None.

**Increase:** When you are given access to a new library or fuller access to an existing one.

**Decrease:** When a library you have access to loses a large quantity of books, or your reading privileges are revoked.







Library	Books	Subjects	Score for full access
Avid reader's shelves	100	Varied	1
Bibliophile's personal collection	1,000	Varied	2
Miners' Guild Library	12,000	Geology, general science	3
National Library of Mallinet	50,000	Theology and history	4
Central Alchemical Library	80,000	Alchemy	5
Campport Library	1,000,000	Mostly fiction and history	6
The hypothetical Hermetic Vault	500,000	Alchemy	8

## Rank

If you are part of a military or paramilitary organisation, you have a rank. You can still be part of a military organisation even with a Rank of 0, it just means you are on the lowest rung of the ladder. Higher rank implies a better position in the command structure, better access to information on what the organisation is doing and a larger number of subordinates. Any rank comes with a heavy burden of responsibilities, not least of which is the requirement to obey orders given to you by your superiors. Unless you can find a way of making your investigation of the conspiracy relevant to your duties, you might have to pursue them in what little free time you have or risk disciplinary action. Policemen also have a rank score, and have a lot more free time and leeway in what they do on the job. The downside is that they have a lot less control over their subordinates. Detectives are plain-clothes

police officers who hold the same ranks as their uniformed counterparts, although the police ranks at 4 and above are administrative positions and as such are normally in uniform when they are on the job. The highest ranks of all are reserved for those in control of an entire branch of the military. You can only achieve one of those ranks by replacing the existing holder. General-Elect Domville, for example, holds a Rank of 8, even though he doesn't claim the title Field Marshal. Ranks not listed in the table count as whatever score they would fit best with.

**Roll:** When you are exerting authority over civilians, or testing the loyalty of your subordinates by going against your orders.

**Contacts:** Others in the military superior to you, or of the same rank.

**Allies:** Your subordinates in your unit.

**Increase:** When you are promoted.

**Decrease:** When you are demoted.

Score	Army Rank	Naval Rank	Isemgard Air Force Rank	Police Rank
0	Corporal	Seaman	Corporal	Constable
1	Sergeant	Petty Officer	Sergeant	Sergeant
2	Lieutenant	Lieutenant	Flying Officer	Inspector
3	Captain	Lieutenant-Commander	Flight-Lieutenant	Chief Inspector
4	Major	Commander	Squadron Leader	Superintendent
5	Colonel	Captain	Wing Commander	Chief Superintendent
6	Brigadier	Commodore	Group Captain	Chief Constable
7	General	Admiral	Air Marshal Stark-Carruthers	
8	Field Marshal	Fleet Admiral		





## Standing

Standing is similar to Rank in that it confers status and power, but rather than coming from a formal power structure it comes from political influence and leverage. It is a lot more nebulous than Rank. Some forms of standing come from inherited titles, although they are not necessary. Standing does not necessarily correlate to political office, as men of influence can work from behind the scenes. A lowly Guild clerk can have considerable standing if he has his fingers in enough pies. In Habgaria, the aristocracy is still a big deal, and standing is often linked to a family title. Within the Dukes, some have senior positions within the Conference that gives them more Standing than the others. Other countries have similar titles, but the correlation between Standing and title is weaker. In Mallinet,

the clergy have a more prominent role than in other countries, and most members of the clergy have some Standing. The link between title and Standing is weakest of all for religious titles. A Standing of 4 is high enough to have significant estate holdings, a Standing of 6 implies you are an active figure in national politics. Standing 8 is reserved for leaders of entire countries.

**Roll:** When you need to call in a marker in hurry or wriggle out of legal difficulties.

**Contacts:** Others who move in your social circles.

**Allies:** people who owe you loyalty, or who owe you favours.

**Increase:** When you make more deals for power or eliminate rivals.

**Decrease:** When you lose your grip on your power base.

Score	Habgarian Title	Mallinese Clergy (title)
1	Minor nobility	Deacon ( <i>Reverend</i> )
2	Baron/Baroness	Priest ( <i>Reverend/Father/Mother</i> )
3	Earl/Countess	
4	Marquis/Marchioness	Bishop ( <i>Right Reverend</i> )
5	Duke's child	Archbishop ( <i>Most Reverend</i> )
6	Duke/Duchess	
7	Duke/Duchess ( <i>with senior conference position</i> )	
8	Archduke Gantt	





## Wealth

Although each country has its own coin, all of them are linked to the value of the precious metals they're made of. The exact composition of the coins varies, as does the standard weight, but currency conversion is straight-forward if you can live with the money-changer's cut. The reliance on the value by weight is a natural consequence of how easy it would be for alchemists to forge coins worth more than the value of their constituent metals. The Wealth asset can represent less liquid assets, such as a part share in a business or ownership of land. Diamonds and other gemstones do not have the value you might expect, as gem alchemists can forge them from suitable raw materials. Having at least one point of Wealth entitles you to live more extravagantly than most people. Having a Wealth score of 0 does not imply destitution, as it covers

any level of affluence insufficient to have a meaningful impact on your day-to-day operations. Wealth allows you to meet out of pocket expenses more easily and hire expertise when you need it. A carefully placed bribe can open many doors. It is possible to buy your way into another asset by sacrificing a point of Wealth to earn a point of Library, Rank or Standing, as long as your Wealth doesn't drop below the asset you bought in the process.

**Roll:** When trying to raise a large sum of money in a hurry.

**Contacts:** Merchants.

**Allies:** Anyone you can hire for a day's work.

**Increase:** When you obtain a large sum of money or make a killing in business.

**Decrease:** When money is stolen, or you spend too much in too short a time.





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Milner looked up from his desk when he heard the front door open. Down in the cellar, he could hear footsteps crossing the wooden floor and see the dust drift down as the floorboards bent and creaked.

Someone rapped on the trap-door.

Tap. Taptap. Taptaptaptaptap.

Milner relaxed a little when he heard the agreed signal. If the pattern had ended with four taps, it would mean that his partner had been compromised - either forced to open the door or already been induced to give up the code.

Only a little, though. They'd had a close call in Nantddwyll, and they couldn't afford to get careless.

Rowanshade climbed down the ladder, holding an armful of books.

"I couldn't find a copy of the Igneous Primer," he said, "Not even for sale. We'll have to work from memory."

Milner rose and reached for the books. Rowanshade batted his hand away.

"These are Hermetic texts," he chided, "Only I can work with them."

Milner frowned. "You've seen what little we've deciphered of the Staintz Codex. Do you really think your superiors would hold back if they knew what we knew?"

"Maybe they would," Rowanshade replied, "Some of this lore has been kept secret for hundreds of years."

"There isn't the time, Rowan..." Milner implored.

The prize Valdus had liberated from the Stravian train was an alchemical work - the Staintz Codex - filled with dense writing. It had proved impenetrable until by chance they found a reference to it in one of the older books in Nantddwyll's library. That had given them a clue as to the cipher used which, in turn, had let them start unlocking its secrets.

They had hit a wall. Either the cipher changed once the details began, or they were missing some important background information. Maybe both. Hence Rowanshade had gone to tap a hidden cache of Hermetic Order books. Milner wondered how many such caches were scattered over the continent.

The Hermite, hesitated, then passed a book to Milner.

"You're right. Any delay could be disastrous. If I end up swinging for this, well, it's still the right thing to do."

The ancient book had raised letters on its cover - Liber Catacumba. They were not embossed or inlaid. Rather, the wooden cover had been formed into the letters through alchemy. Milner flicked through the pages, marvelling at the neatness of the script.

"I'll provide you with a working translation," Rowanshade said, "Naturally, I'd be obliged if you didn't compare the translation too closely with the original. This particular Hermetic cipher is considered, ah, sensitive."

"But naturally, you translated a little of it on the way here."

Rowanshade smiled. "Indeed. I had to be sure it was useful," the smile faded, "Fair warning: it's very advanced. I only made half-way through the introductory section before I reached the limits my knowledge."

The two of them looked at the Staintz Codex. It was a copy, sent south to Campport for safe-keeping. The original was probably still in Ely. It was starting to look like the unlikely alliance between Mallinet and Isemgard - and the planned war - was just a ploy so someone could get their hands on a copy of the Codex. If someone wanted it that badly, Milner needed to work out why, preferably before they succeeded. Presumably someone in the Stravian military had realised its value and arranged for the copy to be made and transported. They didn't know how faithful a copy it was.

The introduction to the Staintz Codex was a glimpse into a mind warped by madness. Diatribes against people the author felt had wronged her, incoherent ramblings about everyday affairs. The meaningful passages, however, were stark in their implications. Ophelia Staintz had been pursuing forbidden alchemy, and the transgressive nature of her research leapt off every page. Just the thought of it made the two of them feel ill.

"Any word from Valdus?" Milner asked, drawing his thoughts away from that unpleasantness. Valdus had insisted on seeing if Erika could be rescued, claiming that he owed her a debt. Alan had gone with him, on the basis that only Milner and Rowanshade were able to work on deciphering the Codex.

Rowanshade shook his head.

They looked back at the Codex. It was going to be a long, unpleasant night.





# ALCHEMY

Your skill in alchemy is spread across a number of different branches. Each of these counts as its own skill for the purposes of Skill Rolls. A single point of alchemy, which comes for free for alchemist characters and can be gained by non-alchemist characters, grants knowledge of alchemy, as per the Skill Rolls chapter, for all of those branches. Each branch of alchemy works on a particular class of substances. Alchemists talk of the difference between 'hard' alchemy, where the gyres can be drawn directly onto the material, and 'soft' alchemy where gyres can only ever be drawn around it.

The basic tools of the trade for an alchemist is chalk. They typically carry other utensils for drawing on surfaces that chalk can't, geometric drawing tools and a small selection of reference books for when they need to look up details for glyphs and positioning when working. Many alchemists keep a supply of cards or wooden blocks with alchemical gyres already drawn on them that they use for simple, common tasks. More ostentatious practitioners have alchemical gyres embroidered onto their clothing. This is for more than eye-catching attire, however, particularly for alchemists who might have to defend themselves. Because of the need for the alchemist to touch the gyre, some alchemists embroider them on the inside of their clothing, which has the added benefit of making the clothing look normal. Those alchemists that are extremely committed to their profession go as far as to have gyres tattooed on their bodies, often the hands, so they are never without a usable circle. Although most people think of alchemy as being triggered by a touch from the hands, in point of fact

any physical touch unencumbered by an intervening material will work for a skilled enough alchemist.

All skill rolls to perform alchemy get an extra dice if The Alchemist has committed at least one transgression.

The details of a gyre determine exactly what happens to the object when the circle is activated. To create a four-legged stone table, an alchemist needs

to draw a gyre that specifies the size and shape of the table-top, its thickness, the position and thickness of each of the legs and the overall height. The gyre for a three-legged stone table would use many of the same glyphs but have them arranged very differently. A gyre is specific to the task, and even a small change in the desired product requires most of the gyre to be redrawn. This means that pre-drawn gyres, on wooden blocks or on flesh, are either very specific to a task or left incomplete, with some details to be filled in each time they are used.

Each alchemist maintains a research journal, where they record their experiments in alchemy with different arrangements or little-explored glyphs. These journals are written in code, probably one derived from the code the alchemist's tutor taught them. Stealing a rival's journal and breaking the cipher is a gross professional discourtesy, but it happens often enough that alchemists are often paranoid about keeping their research secret. Alchemists who are not travellers typically have a laboratory where they conduct their experiments, which might have useful gyres carved into the furniture, floors or ceilings. Hermites are rumoured to have concealed laboratories all over the world.

Alchemists develop an alchemical sense for their elements. They can draw a simple gyre to discover unseen properties of material they can work with. For example, stone alchemists can draw a gyre and learn how far down they would have to dig to find empty space, or how far down an aquifer or seam of ore was. This is called the 'alchemical touch', and is amongst the subtler abilities alchemists have.

## Alchemist Sigils

By tradition, alchemists have sigils that serve as a mark of allegiance. These sigils are simple heraldic devices, often incorporating common alchemical glyphs, that are used on personal seals and on letterhead. Registered alchemists are supposed to use the Stravian Bear as their sigil, but many have





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their own sigil they use in conjunction with it. Guild alchemists have the device of their guild worked into their sigil.

### Impromptu Alchemy

When time is critical, an alchemist doesn't have the luxury of creating a proper gyre to work with. If you have a score of 3 or more in the branch you are using you can attempt to perform an alchemy with an imperfect gyre, using your will to bridge the gap at some personal risk. This allows you to participate in combat by either hurriedly drawing a full but crude gyre or using your incomplete pre-drawn gyres as they are

The drawback is that you have an extra consequences slot to fill dedicated to 'alchemical backlash'. The precise nature of the backlash varies, depending in part on the branch of alchemy you are using. Most forms of backlash will make it impossible to perform much further alchemy until you get treatment for the injuries.

Alchemy is usually a 'medium' speed weapon in combat, but secret techniques can change that.

### Spare Success Dice

A normal alchemy skill rolls involves producing or moving an object about the size of a chair, constrained entirely within the gyre and reaching no higher above it than about head-height, and to a similar depth below it if desired. Spare success dice can be spent on creating a more impressive effect, and these descriptions can be used by the Game Master to set additional success slots for more complicated alchemy.

#### *Bigger*

An extra slot can make the object the size of a small cottage. Further slots increase the size by a similar factor each time. A bigger object requires a bigger gyre, unless an extra slot is given over to the 'spreading' effect.

#### *Extra Damage*

When using alchemy in combat, a single spare success dice can be spent on increasing damage consequences, as alchemy is a medium speed weapon.

#### *Moreso*

For alchemical approaches that don't involve movement, you can increase the potency of the effect with an extra slot.

#### *Remote*

If you draw two gyres within line of sight, specifically with this effect in mind, you can touch one to activate the other. The distance between the two gyres is irrelevant. You can also draw a gyre to attempt to activate an ordinary gyre within line of sight, even one not drawn by you. This, however, requires two additional slots.

#### *Spreading*

With additional effort, the object can leave the gyre, or travel more than head-height above it. Sometimes this involves using the gyre like a cannon, imparting enough momentum that the object is flung some distance even after the alchemy has stopped effecting it. Other times a moving column of material snakes through the air, the base still within the circle and hence being controlled by alchemy.

Having the effect leave the gyre in either way requires an extra success slot, and can move an object up to Short range, as per weapons. Each range category beyond that requires an extra slot.

#### *Triggered*

It is possible to draw a complete gyre and activate it in such a way that it remain dormant until a certain condition is met. For example, you could draw half a gyre on each of two doors, activate the halves in this way, and then when the doors close and the circle is complete the gyre activates fully, even if you long since left the area. Another way is to draw a gyre that will remain dormant until its marking are scuffed or defaced, at which point the intended effect is triggered.





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A single slot will let this gyre remain dormant for a day, after which it will lose power and become inert. Additional slots increase this time to a month, a year, and indefinitely.

### Secret Techniques

Alchemy has its own equivalent of special techniques for each branch of alchemy. These 'secret techniques' can extend the variety of materials that alchemy can be used on, or provide an advantage when performing a specified rote working.

The only downside to using Special techniques for ordinary skills is in letting a potential enemy know that you can use it. For secret alchemical techniques, there is also the real danger that your enemy will reverse engineer your technique and learn to use it himself. Secret techniques are often, therefore, only used in secret or when there is no alternative. They are also the primary reason why alchemical research is only recorded in code.

Some secret techniques are actually quite common, and are openly taught in certain guilds or by certain alchemy teachers. The secret technique that allows air alchemists to control vapour is known by at least of practitioners of air alchemy. Other secret techniques, such as the one that allows fire alchemists to touch off explosions in most materials, are closely guarded secrets. Between the two extreme are techniques that are kept secret in general, but willing taught to friends and allies. The trade in secret techniques is almost a shadow economy amongst alchemists.

As an alchemist, at character creation you get to pick secret techniques in the same way as special techniques. Your fourth point in a branch of alchemy gives you one secret technique, and each point beyond that gives you another one. As with special techniques, you must meet any skill score requirement and have any prerequisite secret techniques.

Some secret techniques appear in more than one branch of alchemy. This can happen when there are different approaches to the same general problem. Vapour alchemy, for example, is a secret technique for both air alchemy and water alchemy. In the

former case, the vapour and condensation is moved by a containing bubble of 'clean' air. In the latter, the condensation is pulled through the air and drags the vapour and clean air with it.

You are encouraged to make up your own secret alchemical techniques, both in the course of play and as part of character generation. Naturally, the Game Master will veto anything that is grossly overpowered. On the other hand, alchemy is a central part of the game so very powerful techniques are expected. In fact, they are self-limiting. The more powerful a secret technique, the less willing you will be to use it, in case you give the secret away. If anyone learns about your technique, then the number of people who are trying to steal your secret, and how dangerous they are, depends on how powerful your technique is.

Some very powerful techniques have got 'out of the bag', as it were, and have dramatically changed the way that alchemy is used. One such technique is ice alchemy, which is so useful as to be almost embarrassingly common amongst water alchemists.

Finding a novel use for alchemy is one of the most interesting parts of the game. If you find a trick that you like, talk to the GM about turning it into a secret technique, for additional mechanical benefits and the glory that comes from teaching it to allies.

The descriptions of secret techniques use the same format as special techniques, with BD for Bonus Dice and E for Extensions to the branch's ability. Prerequisite skill scores and other secret techniques are also listed.

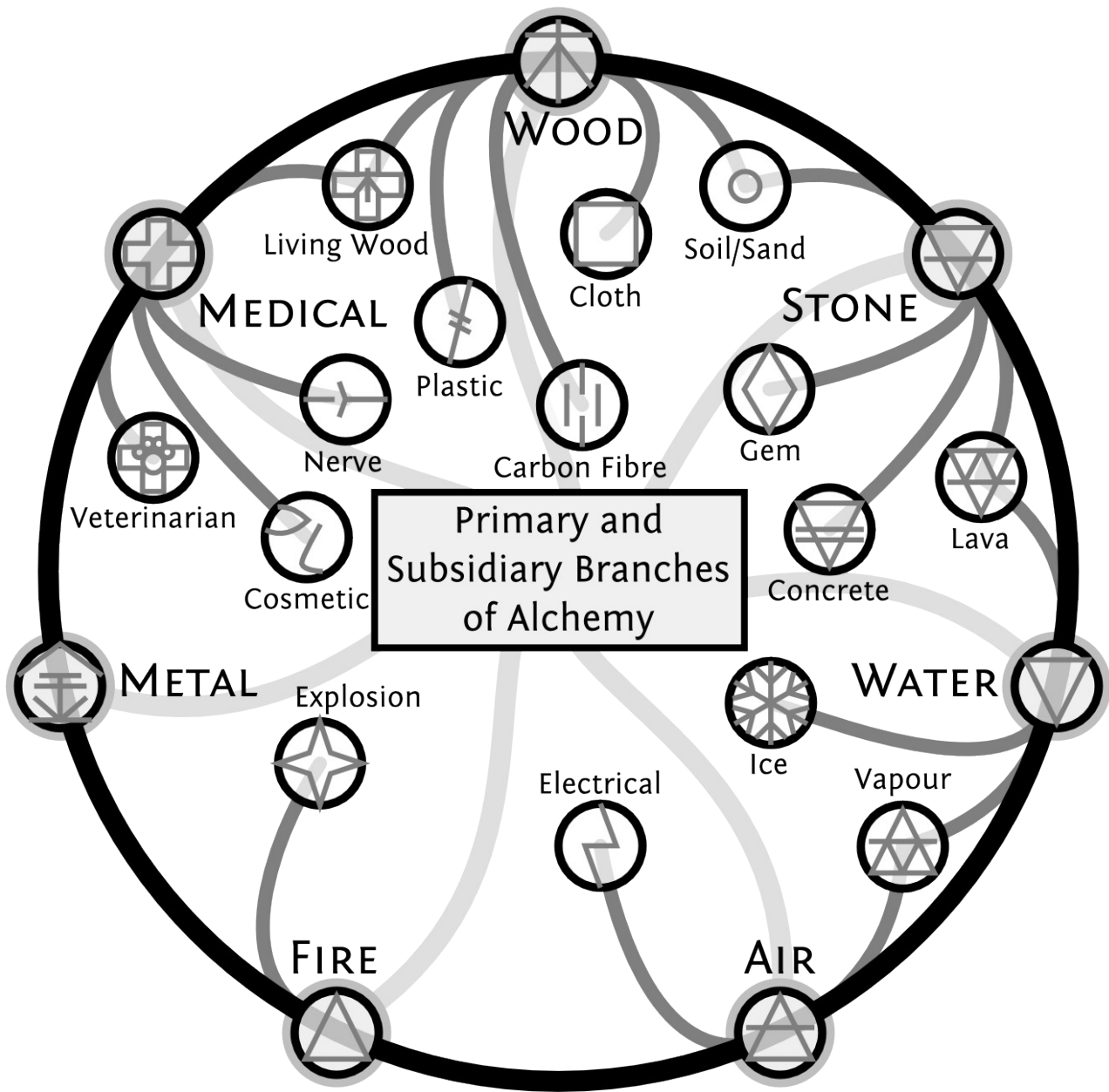
### Air Alchemy

Air alchemy allows you to control the air around you. Materials suspended in the air, such as water droplets or dust motes, are beyond your skill to move directly. You can create winds, separate out the gasses in the air and deaden or amplify sound.

**Touch:** You can tell the temperature of the air, the humidity, and whether or not there are any noxious gasses mixed in with it.

**Backlash:** The gasses dissolved in your blood begin to boil, leading to a case of the bends.





## Secret Air Techniques

**Air Bomb (E):** You compress the air within the gyre, which draws more air into the gyre, and so on until you release it in an explosion of pressure. This technique can be used to inflict injury consequences on everyone in a room, or at least everyone near the epicentre. You can delay the release of the pressure just enough for you to get clear, if you wish.

**Air Purification (BD):** You are experienced at purifying air into a breathable form. This allows you to filter out noxious gasses, including carbon dioxide. You can even hold a gyre over your mouth and continue to breathe normally underwater.

**Air Scooter (BD):** You can ride a rotating ball of air, provided you carry the gyre with you. This allows you to move quickly keeping up with motor vehicles.





**Airless Prison** (BD): You know how to play a game of 'keep away' with an enemy and the oxygen in the air. It takes a couple of minutes for them to feel the effect, less if they are engaged in strenuous activity.

**Aroma** (E): You can exert small control over impurities in the air, concentrating them or dissipating them over a wider area. This allows you to enhance your sense of smell or mask an odour even from bloodhounds.

**Bubble** (BD): You are skilled at creating a protective bubble of air that keeps out wind, rain, sandstorms and arrows. Bullets and sufficiently determined people, however, can pierce it.

**Electrical Alchemy** (E 6): You can cause friction between air molecules that creates a static electrical charge, and guide that charge to the grounding point of your choosing. This is particularly effective at damaging complicated machines. You can also use it to interfere with or eavesdrop on telephone lines, or cause interference with radio receivers.

**Flight** (E 6): Through extremely careful manipulation of air currents, and taking a gyre with you, you can fly. Acrobatic manoeuvres are probably beyond you, but you can sustain even long journeys if the course is straight.

**Gale Force** (BD): Air is naturally mobile, and you can use the Spreading effect more easily.

**Knock, Knock** (BD): You have a talent for throwing powerful blasts of air at people.

**Like the Wind** (E): When you use alchemy in combat, you can choose to use it as a fast weapon.

**Vapour Alchemy** (E): You can exert greater control over material suspended in air, moving clouds of vapour and condensation much more coherently than before. You can also draw up moisture from bodies of water to make a cloud of vapour.

**Weather Cock** (E): You can draw a gyre that acts as barometer, sensing changes in air currents over a large area and predicting the likely weather over the next couple of days with excellent accuracy.

**Weather Control** (E 8, *needs Weather Cock*): You can control the weather. This takes large gyres and plenty of preparation time, but you can change the weather to the point that you can call down monsoons in deserts with a few days lead time.

## Fire Alchemy

Fire alchemy is the manipulation of a process rather than of a substance. Fire is not a material. Fire alchemy can control the chemical process of fire, twisting to burn differently or spread in a different direction. It can also be induced to sweep across surprisingly long distances by carrying its fuel along with it. Fire alchemy can douse flames, but it cannot ignite them without the use of a particular secret technique. Fire alchemy is a relatively recent discovery.

**Touch:** You can sense what fuel a fire is using, and how long it will burn if not disturbed.

**Backlash:** Burns.

## Secret Fire Techniques

**Breath of Fire** (E 6, *needs Ignition*): You have a gyre tattooed on your tongue that allows you to breath fire.

**Explosion Alchemy** (E 6, *needs Ignition*): You can change the composition of solid objects such that they burst into flames violently enough to cause an explosion. This sort of deep manipulation comes dangerously close to transgression, and those that know the technique are often looked on with suspicion.

**Finger of Pain** (E 8, *needs Explosion Alchemy*): With the touch of a gyre, you can cause parts of a person's flesh to explode off their body, a wound that leaves a permanent scar.

**Fireball** (BD): You are practised at firing balls of fire at people.

**Fire Jump** (BD): You practised using goutts of fire to jump long distances.

**Flash** (BD): You have expertise at creating a sudden flash of light from a simple flame, enough to temporarily blind anyone who didn't look away.

**Leaping Flames** (E): Fire is inherently quick, and you can use it as a fast weapon in combat.

**Ignition** (E): You can create fire from thin air, using impurities in the air to gather enough fuel for a brief flame. Once started, you can sustain the fire using your fire alchemy as normal.





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**Silent Heat (E):** You can create intense heat in an area within a gyre, without flames or any other visible sign of its presence. This can be useful for cauterising wounds without risking burning clothes, amongst other things.

**Sunlight and Shadows (E 6):** You can artificially affect the ambient light in an area, dropping it into darkness or boosting what light is there so that everyone can see better.

**Temperature Control (E 6):** You can change the temperature of object within a gyre. You can use this to melt metals and freeze fluids, even if you can't directly affect them using alchemy.

**Vaporise (E 8, needs Ignition):** You can cause fire to start within an object inside a gyre, even a person, burning the item or victim up from within. This technique leaves no ash or residue if the target is completely consumed. When used to hurt someone, this is a slow weapon that causes 2 consequence slots for each dice spent for extra damage.

## Medical Alchemy

Medical Alchemy is the counterpart to mundane medicine, using alchemy to administer treatments that are beyond conventional means. Medical alchemy can suture wounds without leaving a scar, repair blood vessels and physically damaged organs without the need for surgery, and accelerate or slow down metabolic processes. It can also be used to manipulate bones into position so as to set them. What it can't do, however, is change anything inherent about an organism or suppress natural responses to infections without allow the infection free reign. Comprehensive medical treatment requires medical alchemy and the medical skill. Many medical alchemists practise both. Medical alchemy is dangerously close to more than one transgression, and is the most tightly policed of all the branches. Any new secret technique will be viewed as potentially transgressive unless it has been thoroughly vetted. This means that there are very few truly 'secret' techniques for medical alchemy.

**Touch:** Diagnose broken bones, damaged organs and internal bleeding.

**Backlash:** Lapsing into a temporary coma, usually after you have finished the alchemy.

## Secret Medical Techniques

**Clarity (E):** You can give someone, even yourself, a jolt of adrenaline, awareness and clarity to shake off tiredness, sleeping gas or fever.

**Cosmetic Alchemy (BD):** You have experience of removing scars, blemishes and tattoos from people. Changing a person's face is close to transgression, and in any case will leave distinctive marks that close examination will discover. Making someone's face a copy of another person's face is very, very hard to do.

**Field Medic (BD):** You have experience of using medical alchemy when under fire.

**Living Wood Alchemy (E):** Plants and trees that are still growing cannot normally be the subject of Wood Alchemy, but this technique allows you to perform alchemy on it, as long as the process does not kill the vegetation. Some consider that this is transgressive alchemy, but the jury is still out for others.

**Nerve Alchemy (E 6):** You can manipulate the fine electrical currents in nerves to deaden pain, paralyse limbs or tone wasted muscles. Although this can also be used to inflict pain, doing so is a betrayal of the Hippocratic Oath and transgressive alchemy of the words order.

**Poisons (E 6):** You can create biological toxins and poisons from common chemicals. These can be used for specialised medical treatments. You can also make anaesthetic agents, which can be used as a non-lethal means of disabling someone. Naturally, you can also create antidotes to poisons and venoms you identify.

**Riven Bodies (E 8):** You can create a gyre that keeps a person inside alive, against all the odds, as long as you retain concentration. This is used for extensive surgery that would otherwise take several operations, or to keep someone alive long enough to receive treatment after terrible multiple injuries.





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**Surgery (E):** You can open a wound without a blade and expose the internal organs of a creature, the better to see what you are doing for other alchemy or as a convenient means of opening an incision for mundane surgery.

**Veterinarian Alchemy (BD):** You have experience at using medical alchemy on animals as well as on people.

### Metal Alchemy

In the distant past, Metal alchemy began as an offshoot of Stone Alchemy, but it has been around so long it's considered a separate branch in its own right. Metal alchemy allows you to control the shape of metal objects without heating them. You can also mix metals while cold to create alloys, or separate out an alloy into pure metals. Metal alchemy has made metallurgy considerably safer by eliminating the necessity to heat metals to work them. Many metal alchemists carry bars of iron or steel around with them, so they always have material to work with in an emergency.

**Touch:** The composition of an alloy.

**Backlash:** Metal fragments lacerating the flesh of your hands.

### Secret Metal Techniques

**Alchemical Sword (BD):** You can create a metal weapon, perfectly balanced and sized for you. Assuming you have a pre-drawn gyre, you don't need to use impromptu alchemy. What with that and the bonus dice, you are practically guaranteed success without consequences when using this technique. You must fight using your Close Combat, and the weapon speed matches that of an ordinary weapon.

**Armour Shell (E 6):** You can create a thick suit of metal armour around yourself, that will follow your movements perfectly. This makes you almost immune to attacks with swords and guns. The drawback is that you need to have gyres drawn over most of your body for the process to work.

**Magnetism (E):** You can use ferrous metals to create powerful permanent magnets, or create magnetic interference.

**Metal Golem (E 8):** You can create a golem made of metal that you control via thin wires that lead back to your gyre. It fights using your Metal Alchemy skill, and is essentially indestructible until someone cuts the wires. If you draw large gyre and keep the golem inside it, it cannot be defeated until your concentration is broken.

**Prison of Steel (BD 6):** You can create a metal cage around someone who steps into your gyre, trapping them so closely they can barely move at all.

**Saw Palm (BD 6, needs Alchemical Sword):** You can create a spinning saw blade in the palm of your hand and wield it as slow weapon using your Close Combat and Metal Alchemy skills in a multiple skill roll. You need a gyre drawn on your palm or your glove. Because this doesn't require impromptu alchemy, you don't have the backlash consequences slot. The saw counts as a slow weapon.

**Shatter From Within (BD):** You know how to use a gyre to make the metal reinforcing rods and studs in buildings or doors split the construction open, shattering the stone or wood element.

**Slab Smash (E):** Metal is big and heavy, and can cause tremendous damage. You can use your metal alchemy as a slow weapon in combat.

**Smelt (BD):** You know efficient gyres for baking metals out of their ores.

**Wire Whip (BD):** You have perfected a technique for throwing metal cables using alchemy, that can allow you to swing from overhangs or snare enemy limbs.

### Stone Alchemy

Stone alchemy is the oldest form of alchemy recorded. It operates on solid rocky objects, not soil or dirt. Stone can't be shaped with quite the same precision as metal, but it is easier to find in bulk for large projects. A bridge made out of a single continuous piece of rock is usually much stronger than one made out of stone blocks. In particular, it is very difficult to make a stone object with a sharp edge, even using amenable rocks such as flint. Stone





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alchemists usually carry some pebbles with them, but it is not hard to find rocky outcroppings in most places.

**Touch:** Sense cavities in the rock, and how far down they are.

**Backlash:** Stone chips embedded beneath the skin over the hands and arms.

### Secret Stone Techniques

**Concrete Alchemy** (E): Usually, concrete-like substances can't be manipulated with alchemy, as they are small solid object embedded in a kind of glue. Concrete alchemy allows you to manipulate concrete, plaster and gravel as well as solid rock.

**Gather No Moss** (E): You can wield your stone alchemy like a slow weapon.

**Gem Alchemy** (E 6): Glass and gemstones can only be used for alchemy with this technique. You can also create gemstones from suitable raw stone materials, but such are market forces that you wouldn't earn more money doing that than putting your alchemy to work in other ways.

**Lava Alchemy** (E 6): Lava, being partly stone, partly liquid, is particular hard to control. This technique allows you to do so. For an extra success slot you can melt stone into lava, or a reasonable facsimile thereof.

**Marble Splinters** (BD): You can strike a rocky object with a gyre, shattering the object into hundreds of tiny splinters that shoot towards an enemy.

**Quake** (8): You can create an earthquake. You must spend at least 2 extra slots on the size of this working, through Spreading or Bigger.

**Sand Alchemy** (E): Sand, soil and other fine particulates are outside normal stone alchemy's reach, but this secret technique allows you to control them.

**Shafting** (BD 8): You have practised the rather nasty technique of drawing a gyre as a kind of pit-trap, causing anyone who wanders onto it to be dropped into a pit that then closed over them, sealing them in darkness.

**Smelt** (BD): You know efficient gyres for baking metals out of their ores.

**Stone Catapult** (BD): You have perfected using stone alchemy to catapult things or people into the air.

**Tunnelling** (BD): You can efficiently create a tunnel through rock that seals up behind you, assuming you carry your gyre with you.

**Wall of Rock** (BD): You have practise at creating a solid defensive wall of rock, impenetrable to most attacks.

**Weighty** (BD): You receive bonus dice on any roll where you are using the 'Bigger' effect.

## Water Alchemy

Water alchemy acts on any fluid, not just water, although water is easiest to get hold of. The more impurities the water carries the more difficult it is to work with. Water alchemists often carry flasks of water with them in case there isn't a body of water nearby when they need to work. It's impossible to draw a gyre on water, and water has a tendency to wash away gyres if it flows over them, so water alchemists make extensive use of etched gyres.

**Touch:** You can sense how deep water is and what impurities it carries.

**Backlash:** The moisture is leached from your hands, leaving them desiccated, painful and prone to further injury.

### Secret Water Techniques

**Balance Shift** (E): You can create a gyre that interferes with the balance of anyone traversing it. This can make it harder for them to fight, or confound their sense of direction.

**Bathyscaphe** (BD): You have practice at creating a bubble wall that keeps air inside it when underwater. It doesn't stop the air from going bad, but if you make the bubble large enough you can extend how people in it can keep breathing.

**Boating** (BD): You have experience at drawing a glyphs that propel a vessel through the water. The 'vessel' can be as simple as a piece of board, or as large as an ocean-going ship.





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**Condensation** (E): You can draw moisture from the air. The amount of water you produce depends on the humidity and the size of your gyre.

**Ice Alchemy** (E): You can use your water alchemy on its frozen form, ice. You can also freeze water or melt ice using your alchemy.

**Ice Needles** (BD 6, *needs Ice Alchemy*): You have practised turning water, even falling rain, into a shower of needle-sharp pieces of ice that are thrown towards an enemy.

**Ice Tomb** (BD 6, *needs Ice Alchemy*): You have mastered the technique of freezing a person in a block of ice. They are unharmed, although they might have hypothermia or breathing difficulties after a short while.

**Lava Alchemy** (E 6): Lava, being partly stone, partly liquid, is particular hard to control. This technique allows you to do so. For an extra success slot you can melt stone into lava, or a reasonable facsimile thereof.

**Poisons** (E 6): You can create biological toxins and poisons from common chemicals. These can be used for specialised medical treatments. You can also make anaesthetic agents, which can be used as a non-lethal means of disabling someone. Naturally, you can also create antidotes to poisons and venoms you identify.

**Self-Control** (E 8): By covering yourself with gyres, you can exert control over the fluids in your own body, making your flesh hard enough to turn aside bullets and gaining strength enough to punch through tempered steel. It requires enormous concentration to maintain the effect, but while it lasts you are an engine of destruction. You can spend any amount of spare success dice on increasing the damage you deal with your enhanced fists, and you can replace your Endurance with your Water Alchemy to determine how many injuries are needed to put you down. Hermetic tradition proscribes this technique as transgressive. Using a similar technique on other creatures would be considered transgressive by any alchemical authority.

**Single Water Whip** (BD): You have practised the common attack technique of snapping a stream of water like a whip.

**Vapour Alchemy** (E): You can exert greater control over material suspended in air, moving clouds of vapour and condensation much more coherently than before. You can also draw up moisture from bodies of water to make a cloud of vapour.

**Water Barrier** (BD): You can create a wall of water as a means of protection. It is particularly effective at stopping bullets, but can also keep people and other alchemy at bay.

**Weather Cock** (E): You can draw a gyre that acts as barometer, sensing changes in air currents over a large area and predicting the likely weather over the next couple of days with excellent accuracy.

**Well-Work** (BD): This technique makes use of a well, ice hole or similar opening down to a body of water to make lifting the water out of it for use in alchemy much easier. If all you want to do is blast water up out of it in a hurry, perhaps to flood the immediate area, this bonus dice

## Wood Alchemy

Alchemy that acts on plant matter has an important limitation - it only works on dead plant material. Greenery, including shoots and fibrous branches on trees, cannot usually be controlled with wood alchemy. Dead material that is part of a living plant, such as bark and the outer layers of a tree trunk, are subject to alchemy. Many practitioners of wood alchemy consider bad form to strip plants of enough material that they will die. Timber, as used in houses and furniture, is fair game, as is harvested material such as hay. Seeds, being capable of growing a new plant, are still immune to wood alchemy. Leaf litter and other detritus can be controlled, but lacks the structural strength to be very useful. Wood alchemists sometimes carry wooden objects with them to use in their gyres, but many rely on there being a piece wooden furniture or architecture handy when they need it.

**Touch:** Sense how much usable wooden material is in a plant or building.

**Backlash:** Wooden thorns pierce your arms and trap them in place.





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### Secret Wood Techniques

**Carbon Fibre Alchemy** (E 6): Carbon fibre is a material that only alchemy can create. By removing impurities from a large amount of wood, it is possible to leave behind material that is incredibly strong for its weight, and immune to most forms of alchemy. The expense involved in producing it is the major limiting factor in its use.

**Cloth Alchemy** (E): Fabrics woven from plant and animal sources can be controlled with this form of alchemy.

**Cover the Path** (BD 6, *needs Soil Alchemy*): You can cover your tracks through natural areas extraordinarily well.

**Growth** (BD 6, *needs Living Wood Alchemy*): With this specialised gyre you can make plants and trees grow unnaturally fast, fast enough to overgrow a path in seconds.

**Gyre Bow** (BD 6): You carry a bow that has gyre built around where your hand grips it. This gyre, when touched with your finger, accelerates an arrow with far greater power than a conventional bow can manage. A Gyre Bow requires only 1 slot of Spreading to be used at anything less than Extreme range. In other respects it remains an alchemical weapon.

**Leaf Blower** (BD 6, *needs Soil Alchemy*): This technique involves whipping up leaf litter and other debris and creating a swirling cloud out of it. Once raised, the natural cyclone persists for a short while even after you have stopped empowering your alchemy. The technique is used to blind unfriendly eyes, distract or conceal.

**Living Wood Alchemy** (E): Plants and trees that are still growing cannot normally be the subject of Wood Alchemy, but this technique allows you to perform alchemy on it, as long as the process does not kill the vegetation. Some consider that this is transgressive alchemy, but the jury is still out for others.

**Plastic Alchemy** (E): Clays, muds and other plastic materials fall between the cracks of the branches of alchemy. Only with this special technique of wood can these semi-soft materials be used.

**Root** (BD): You have mastered the gyre that uses the dry, dead under-brush to create snares that activate whenever someone steps into them.

**Soil Alchemy** (E): Sand, soil and other fine particulates are outside normal wood alchemy's reach, but this secret technique allows you to control them.

**Stravian Fire** (E 6, *needs Plastic Alchemy*): You know the secret of transmuting a few commonly found natural materials into Stravian Fire, a sticky, highly flammable substance. It won't ignite by itself, but it can cause horrible burns and no small amount of panicked shouting.

### Ritual Alchemy

The forms of alchemy described so far assume that the alchemist needs results in short order. Alchemy can also be used on projects that span days or months of work, creating vast gyres and filling them with very specific, meticulously researched symbols. This ritual alchemy is akin to the idea of Monumental Projects for ordinary skills. The effects of ritual alchemy are largely up to the Game Master, although they should depend on the time and effort spent refining the ritual, the skill of the alchemist, and the research materials he has available. Performing the alchemy is the final step, the culmination of all the hard work leading up to it.

An alchemist engineer might spend two weeks working out how to raise a bridge across a chasm, and perform the alchemy in only a few minutes once the groundwork has been laid. An alchemist in the employ of a large farming community may spend half a year in preparation for a working that greatly improves the harvest.

No dice are rolled for ritual alchemy. If you have enough time to prepare the effect you want and the GM agrees that your skill in alchemy is sufficient, success is guaranteed.

Ritual alchemy can form an important part of the Conspiracy's plans. The clues that the cabal find might just be the trail left by the preparation for this ritual. One central piece of ritual alchemy could even be the Conspiracy's goal. An effective way to counter it can be to prepare a ritual of your own, based on what you have learned about their ritual.





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### Research Alchemy

Research alchemy is similar to ritual alchemy, but has an altogether different purpose. Whereas ritual alchemy uses established and well-known alchemy to produce much larger effects than normal, research alchemy produces only tiny effects - but they are novel. This takes a lot of work, as you imagine, and most research alchemy revolves around finding new glyphs and glyph relationships for a particular branch, extending knowledge by a small but significant amount. Research alchemists spend a lot of their time on such things, dreaming that they may stumble on the holy grail - a whole new branch of alchemy.

Other research might lead to the discovery of a new secret technique, or lead to a significant advance in your understanding of your chosen field of alchemy.

In the absence of a teacher or suitable reference books to work from, research alchemy is the only way to improve your alchemy skills.

The lowest form of research is seeking to reverse-engineer a secret technique you have witnessed, but few alchemists are proud enough to forego such an opportunity should they receive one.

As a player, you will probably be too busy with adventuring to make major progress with research alchemy, but you might well stumble upon another alchemist's work. The big exception is when you need to research what the conspiracy is doing so you know how to counter it. This lack of time is a concession to keeping the game exciting, rather than have the characters disappear into their laboratories for months of game time.

Different traditions of alchemists have different rules for how research should be conducted and recorded. Stravian alchemists are expected to put their notes into the Central alchemical library, although only the most junior Registered Alchemists lack the influence to keep their most interesting work to themselves. Guild Alchemists are expected to present academic papers to their peers to justify their grant money, and again what is discussed in open Guild meetings is only a shadow of the actual research. Paradoxically, it is the Hermetic Order that is freest with its knowledge - but only with order members of the Order. This openness is a result of

the fierce loyalty Hermites have to their brethren, and an absolute desire to ensure that no alchemical secret is ever lost to them. Even so, Hermites often work alone or in pairs for decades at a time, so the circulation of knowledge is rather slow.

### Countering Alchemy

Given that alchemy can be difficult to deal with, even when it's not transgressive, there are several commonly-known ways to close down alchemists that are trouble.

The most obvious is to bring alchemy of your own to the table, directly interfering with your foe's workings.

If you know what branches an alchemist works with, and you can isolate him from any material he can use, he's just someone with a piece of chalk.

If you can deny him his gyres, by taking steps to make them impossible to draw, he's equally useless. A wide open area covered in sand or water is the favoured approach. Of course, if the alchemist has pre-drawn gyres or alchemical tattoos this method is less effective.

If you are very quick on the draw, you can shoot his gyres, defacing them, before he can activate them. The success rate for this method is not great.

If you blind an alchemist, or force him to work in total darkness, he can't draw his gyres or direct his alchemy properly. If you rely on darkness to do this, chances are you are just as badly off.

If you can deny him the proper use of his hands, through shackles or injury, he is much less dangerous. Completely immobilising him is safer still, but not guaranteed to stop any gyre he has tattooed on himself for just such an emergency.

Finally, certain students of advanced martial arts know techniques that allow them to temporarily deny an alchemist his power. Very handy if you can learn it.

As you might imagine, imprisoning particularly dangerous alchemists is very difficult, and requires measures that would otherwise be considered cruel and unusual. This is one reason why police forces seldom make a fuss when a wanted alchemist is brought in dead rather than alive.





# TRANSGRESSIVE ALCHEMY

Few alchemists wake up one morning and think to themselves: 'Today is the day I insult nature and reason with an atrocity that destroys my life'. And yet, a small but influential number of alchemists have done just that by attempting transgressive alchemy.

For some it was hubris. They were so fascinated by the intellectual puzzle and seduced by the accolades that they expected to follow that they committed themselves to research that should not be. Inevitably, it did not turn out as they expected.

Others paved their road to misery with good intentions. They hoped that the noble cause they were working towards would make them lucky, despite their field of research. Those were more naïve than the alchemists who held no illusions over what their actions would do to them, but were willing to make the sacrifice for a shot at a greater good.

It has even happened by accident. Poorly-instructed alchemists working at the limits of their ability can easily reach too far and bring ruin on themselves.

Perhaps the least fortunate are those who turned to it in desperation. If an alchemist has enough experience, they begin see how close transgressive alchemy is to what they already practice. They can see how, if they took leave of their senses, they might attempt it. When pushed far enough, when their lives or the lives of those they care about are threatened, a panicked lunge for that forbidden alchemy seemed like the only option left to them.

All alchemical authorities agree that transgressive alchemy is out of bounds. Even Stravia, with its desire to use alchemists as weapons of war, won't go that far. The Hermetic Order is seen as sinister but its stance on transgressions is well known. If an alchemist's transgression becomes public knowledge, he has no choice but to go on the run. If captured, the kindest fate he can expect is life in prison, after having his hands struck off.

Which is not to say that a transgressive alchemist, or an entire cabal of them, can't be lurking in the ranks of any alchemical organisation. Learning what you need to know to fight such a foe might itself be seen as dangerously close to transgression. Sometimes you just can't win.

You might be forced to reveal your transgression to other members of your cabal. Even if your fellows take a hard line on transgression there will be a stay of punishment until the problem of the Conspiracy is dealt with. Only a fool would destroy someone who is contrite about his mistake when he is an ally against a larger threat.

## My First Transgression

If your alchemist character has already committed a transgression at the time the game starts, then he has already been through this particular wringer.

Any first attempt at transgressive alchemy goes badly, horribly wrong. Transgressive alchemy tears down the veil that lets alchemists pretend that what they do is science and exposes the raw, unpredictable, supernatural forces at its heart. The result is not pretty.

The alchemist in question suffers a permanent disfigurement, the precise nature of which depends on the type of transgression. The destructive forces that the alchemy unleashed run unchecked through the locality, destroying buildings, killing people and animals or leaving them twisted into unnatural parodies. It was this uncontrolled chaos that destroyed your Vital Element, or started a chain of events that led to its loss.

In the instant of your greatest failure, however, you received a glimpse of what you did wrong. You gained a new understanding of your craft that made you stronger in every field of alchemy you knew. That you could learn even more is tempting, but you don't know if you would survive the price of admission a second time.







If you choose for your character to make his first transgression during the game, doing so destroys one of your Vital Elements. That might require the Game Master to stretch credibility a little in order to get a friend or relative to the location where you are attempting it, but the loss is not negotiable.

All alchemists who have transgressed get an extra dice on Alchemy Skill Rolls, providing the roll is for performing alchemy.

## Further Transgressions

Alchemists who continue their studies of the transgressive despite its dire costs are more than half mad. Player characters are expected to turn their back on transgressions, and fight against those that wish to perform them, as a matter of course. It's the antagonists of the Conspiracy that will be using transgressive alchemy.

Learning more transgressive alchemy allows an alchemist to perform strange and corrupt feats that are far beyond normal alchemy. All of these abilities are destructive and vile, and all of them are irreversible. Transgressive abilities don't necessarily reflect the purpose of the original transgressive alchemy attempt.

There is no benefit to further transgression in terms of extra dice.

For some transgressions it is possible to hide your disfigurement through amputation. Even such a major step does not put you beyond suspicion, as plenty of transgressors have taken that step in the past. In fact, any alchemist who has lost a limb, finger or eye might be suspected of having transgressed, unless there's some public record of the injury occurring in a mundane way.

## Types of Transgression

The five types of transgressive alchemy are described here. Each is presented with its '**folly**' - the type of research that leads to it, its '**punishment**' - the disfigurement the alchemist suffers for trying it and '**abilities**' - some of the things that experienced practitioners can use it for.

Transgressive alchemy is not exactly known for its predictable nature, so it's entirely possible that the punishment visited on an unwise alchemist is different from the examples given here. Amoral alchemists who continue their pursuit of forbidden alchemy can know all kinds of strange techniques, not just the examples listed here.

### *Alchemy of the Flesh*

**Folly:** Attempting to reshape or change a living creature beyond the narrow boundaries of Medical Alchemy.

**Punishment:** An animal, or more rarely, part of another person is grafted onto your body, perhaps as a replacement for your natural features. The mismatch is obvious to anyone who sees it clearly.

**Abilities:** The creation of chimera, made from two or more different animals. Twisting animals into giant versions of themselves, or giving animals unnatural abilities. Turning people into beasts, or vice versa.

### *Alchemy of the Mind*

**Folly:** Attempting to manipulate intangible things such as thoughts, memories and emotions.

**Punishment:** Important memories from before your transgression are erased. The extent of the loss is whatever is least convenient for you. Memories directly related to Vital Elements are never lost, but important detail about them might be.

**Abilities:** Altering a person's memories, knowledge or emotions. Tinkering with abstract principles such as gravity and causation.





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### *Alchemy of the Soul*

**Folly:** Attempting to resurrect the dead, create life from nothing, or move a person's soul from one vessel to another.

**Punishment:** Your soul is transferred into a small object that was near you during the attempt. As long as the object is close to your body, you can still move it as normal. If it is more than an arm's length away, you lose your sight, hearing and smell but can still move your body and feel physical sensation. If it is more than five yards away, you lose your sense of touch and can no longer move your body. If it is destroyed, you are killed.

**Abilities:** Moving souls from one vessel to another. Creating shallow mockeries of true life. Damaging a person's mind and soul such that they become listless and obedient.

### *Degenerate Alchemy*

**Folly:** Seeking to create or destroy substance as part of an alchemical working by getting more or less material out than you put in.

**Punishment:** You are plagued by constant, supernatural hunger. You have to eat around twenty times as much as normal, and everything you eat tastes of ash.

**Abilities:** The ability to create or destroy matter as part of alchemy. Changing innate properties of matter such as density, opacity and hardness.

### *Unnatural Alchemy*

**Folly:** Trying to turn one material into another, such as lead into gold.

**Punishment:** Some part of your body is turned from flesh and bone into a solid material such as stone or metal, rendering it non-functional. You can work alchemy on the afflicted part, if you know the appropriate branch, but you have to be careful to leave no piece of it behind because those pieces can be clearly identified as the result of transgressive alchemy.

**Abilities:** The ability to turn one substance into another. The ability to meld substances into strange alloys with mixed properties, such as metal flesh or burning ice.





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*The Hermites opened a passage into the underground chamber just as Milner was putting the finishing touches to his transgressive gyre.*

*He froze, chalk in hand, wondering if there was anything he could say that would save his life. He had come so close...*

*"Peace, fellow alchemist," the lead Hermite said, showing empty hands. The fact that gyres for fire alchemy were tattooed on her palms made the gesture rather less reassuring.*

*"Your friend Rowanshade was attacked by chimeras three days ago. He was able to make contact with the Order. After some inducement, he revealed your plan to us. We have come to assist you."*

*Milner untensed a little. "Really? I wouldn't have thought this would be your style."*

*"If Rowanshade had trusted the Order with what he knew from the start, we might have been able to arrange a less unsavoury counter-measure. As it is, we have little choice but to enact your plan."*

*"How much detail did he give you?"*

*"In the building above us, certain members of the Imperial Council of Mallinet have created a gyre for alchemy of the mind, designed to enslave everyone for many miles around to their will.*

*"You have created this second gyre along similar lines, imposing a simpler command at greater power in the hope that your message will 'drown out' theirs."*

*"That's the gist of it," Milner said, "My instruction is 'carry on as normal', which hopefully won't hurt anyone. If you're serious, get some chalk and start on the secondary gyres. I've fallen behind schedule without Rowan here."*

*The Hermites worked from the construction lines Milner had drawn up.*

*The second Hermite broke the silence. "Liber Catacumba, yes? Although this tertiary formulation is unfamiliar."*

*Milner grinned to himself. The high-and-mighty Hermetic Order didn't know everything.*

*"Rowan and I cooked it up. It counters the amplification glyphs of the other gyre. Only partially, unfortunately. If we had had time to perfect it, we could have cut off their main gyre from the secondaries completely, and avoided this... this mess here."*

*With two extra pairs of hands helping, the full gyre didn't take long to complete. Just as they did so, they could feel the gyre above them starting to come to life.*

*"Not a second to spare," Milner said, "It'll take two of us to activate it."*

*The senior Hermite took up position opposite him. They touched their fingers to the gyre and blue sparks leapt up from sigils all over the room.*

*An explosion of noise filled the room. The second Hermite collapsed to the floor, just avoiding defacing the gyre in the process.*

*In the mouth of the tunnel, General Hayes-Gordon was changed target to Milner. The alchemist didn't dare look up for long, but he saw the rifle pointed straight at him. He had to delay for long enough to complete the activation.*

*"What's in it for you?" he shouted, desperately trying to get the General talking.*

*"The usual. A place of privilege in the new world order."*

*"You realise their alchemy is going to get you too?"*

*"Not if I'm this close to their gyre. Otherwise it would hit them too, wouldn't it? Good-bye, Milner."*

*There was another gunshot, and Milner was amazed to find he was unharmed. Erika was behind Hayes-Gordon, pistol still smoking.*

*"Erika, darling, don't be crazy," the General said, clutching at his wounded arm, "Think about what this could mean. For us. The life we'd have! That was all I wanted."*

*Erika was shaking, but she took a deep breath and lined up the shot.*

*"The why doesn't excuse the what," she said, and killed him.*

*The power of the alchemy was rising, a hum that reverberated off the stone walls.*

*"The others?" Milner asked.*

*"Arranging for the police to gatecrash the party upstairs," Erika said, rushing to the fallen Hermite to see if he could be helped, "But that won't do a thing if you can't stop their alchemy."*

*"No pressure," Milner grunted. He felt the gyre at his fingertips vibrating with the power. Whatever happened now, he had no regrets.*





# GAME MASTER'S NOTES

Running a role-playing game can be a lot of work. The 'good' work is coming with ideas for plot events, creating interesting non-player character and places and creating the skeleton of a story for the players to romp through and elaborate on. The 'bad' work is trying to have the other players turn up on time, get along with each other and make meaningful contributions to what's going on. There will always be missed opportunities and things you'll look back on and wish you had done differently. The two important things are making everyone is having fun and keeping the story moving.

The basic unit is the 'scene', which is a woolly term for an opportunity for a series of things to happen. Often, a scene will be restricted to a single location, although it doesn't have to be. As the Game Master, you set the scene, describe a little of what's going on at the start of it, then let the players loose on it. Once the scene has played out, it's time to close it down and move onto the next. Not all the player-controlled characters will be in every scene, but you should strive to hold the attention of all the players even if their characters aren't there.

## Having Fun

The point of the game is to have fun. If everyone at the table - including you - is having a good time, then carry on with whatever it was you were doing. Keeping everyone entertained is an art form that comes with practice, but even the most experienced Game Master can sometimes flounder a little. Ask yourself if every player is able to contribute to what's going on, even if their character isn't present in the scene. Ask yourself if they're interested. You

can't hold the attention of all the players all the time, but if enough of them are losing interest in the game, find something to grab them and bring them back into it.

'But it's what my character would do!' is a terrible excuse for stopping another player's fun.

Players enjoy different aspects of role-playing games. Some like the game element of using their abilities to their full potential. Some like elaborate plans that achieve their goals without needing much in the way of dice rolling. Some enjoy putting their characters through the wringer, or getting a chance to play out scenes with in-character dialogue. Some just want to have a laugh with their friends. It's almost certain that the group you play with has a variety of these types. As Game Master, your goal is to make sure that each of them gets a chance to do what they like best. Give everyone a fair crack of the whip, and shut down anyone who's starting to crowd out other players of their interests.

## Keeping Things Moving

Once you've given the players a mystery to sink their teeth into, chances are that they won't struggle for ideas in what to do next. What you need to do is get them to prioritise, perhaps by using limited time as a motivator. Then you can run scenes for these plans to keep the story moving.

Not everything needs its own scene. If character wants to get a replacement weapon from the armoury, and there's nothing particularly difficult about that task, you can narrate it and move onto the next interesting thing. You can turn a simple chore like that into a compelling scene if you want to. Let the character meet and talk to a reluctant quartermaster, or bump into an acquaintance. You could even interrupt their task with some sort of ambush or emergency.

The Conspiracy should not be idle, either. Whenever it looks like the pace of the story is flagging, or the sense of urgency is fading, look down at the conspiracy sheet and find something you can use to throw in some action. It does not have to be an event that targets the characters specifically to draw their attention, or something as obvious as dropping a clue into their laps. It could be an oblique consequence of some part of the conspiracy's plan further up the line.





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The most interesting situations are often those that are complicated, so you should take advantage of opportunities to have the plans of different cabals collide. A simple plan can become complicated if the players run into agents with a different - if not necessarily hostile - agenda.

### Making Stuff Up

There's a heavy emphasis in this game on the Game Master making up details about the world, including important people and whole towns. This need not be intimidating - you don't have to come up with everything on the spot. You're free to do as much or as little preparation before play as you like. A simple list of names you've put together beforehand can work wonders on making every character you control seem like they could be an important contact. Another way to reduce the load is to encourage player suggestions, which often turn out to be better than the 'real' answer you had planned on. Let your catch-phrase be 'Sure, why not?'

Be bold when making up details for the world. Your version of it doesn't have to be like anyone else's. Fill it with things that could be part of the conspiracy and let the players work out which actually are. If a character you create entertains the players, make a note of it with the intention of bringing him back later. Think about how the different power groups will react to the cabal's actions and make there be ramifications for what they're doing. You don't have to make every session part of one, big super-story and in fact it's better not to - let there be doubt as to what sinister goings on are part of the enemy's master plan and which are the result of other, lesser, evils. The occasional 'slice of alchemical life' session can ram home the difference between ordinary life and the high-stakes circles the cabal has got involved in.

When thinking about what situations to introduce into the game, particular the challenges the cabal faces, bear in mind their skills. Players want to get opportunities to show off their characters at their best, so give them situations that let them use their best skills regularly. A player setting a skill high is just as much a statement about what they want to see in the game as a statement about what they want their character to be good at.

### Your Characters

The characters you control aren't typically drawn in as much depth as the players' characters. Most of the people of the world will be, as far as the game is concerned, faceless and inconsequential.

Plenty of the rest will be somewhat trivial opposition for the players - recalcitrant officials, cheap thugs or similar small obstacles to their progress. You can make them colourful and memorable, but ultimately they will only ever appear once or twice.

The last kind is a recurring character - one who you can bring back into the story whenever you want to. Such characters don't have to be villains - they can be specialists the cabal ends up dealing with, potential allies of the cabal or even well-meaning people who end up working at cross-purposes with the cabal. You should delight in developing them a little more each time they appear, giving them histories, personalities and their own obligations and demons. Make notes on them to remind you of their traits.

For all characters, you don't have to give them a full set of skills. You only have to worry about how good they are now, at the task they are performing. Consistency is good, but you shouldn't agonise over keeping their skills exactly the same session to session.

### How Good Are They?

The descriptions in the skills section can serve as a rough and ready guide to how good to make your characters. Cheap punks probably only have 2 dice in Close Combat or Firearms, miscellaneous ne'er-do-wells only 2 in Gabble. No-name elite soldiers might have Firearms at 3. Important characters, whether they feature in multiple sessions or only one, can easily have higher skills, but be wary of pushing skills too high as a matter of course. Any character of yours with a skill of 5 or 6 is a significant individual, and should probably be either part of the conspiracy or a possible ally against it. Special techniques can be assigned to eligible characters as you see fit. The relationship between skill score and the number of special techniques only applies for player characters at





character creation. Remember, you only have to decide how many dice to roll if you are called upon to do so. Not every scene will involve a skill roll, so a lot of the time the question won't be raised.

## ***Getting Freaky***

The only monsters in the world are people, and things that people have created. The most visually monstrous are the fruits of transgressive alchemy. When setting up an inhuman enemy, perhaps even wild animals rather than alchemical nightmares, you can invent unique special techniques for them that encapsulate their particular abilities. A big cat might get a Close Combat technique that grants a bonus dice when pouncing, a chimera of a spitting cobra and a woman might get a technique called 'Spit Venom'.

Although transgressive alchemy can create all sort of strange horrors, there are certain kinds of abomination that appear frequently, and that alchemists are trained to recognise.

### ***Bound Souls***

These poor unfortunates are people bound into inanimate objects through alchemy of the soul. Few can speak. Many of them are not truly evil, but compelled to serve those that created them as there is no longer a possibility of them living a normal life. Their bodies have been destroyed, or used in other transgressive alchemy, so there is no going back. They are usually bound into something like a suit of armour, solid but capable of movement, but can be found in just about any shape. They have the same skills they had in life, but do not take Injuries. Instead, part of them may be knocked away or damaged. If they recover a removed part, they can make it part of themselves again. The only way to 'kill' them is through alchemy. This requires some study of Alchemy of the Soul, but is not itself a transgression. Some Bound Souls welcome the release of death, others will fight to keep themselves from destruction. The pragmatic options - breaking them into small pieces and scattering them over a wide area, burying them in cement - work, but are incredibly cruel fates. Bound Souls can endure isolation for longer than people, but will still eventually succumb to insanity.

### ***Chimeras***

A chimera often has features resembling the animal he was created from, with heartbreakingly human features as well. Chimeras tend to the brutish, with emphasis on the skills Athletics, Close Combat and Endurance. Truly epic (and world-threatening) chimeras might have one of those skills higher even than 8. They are created using Alchemy of the Flesh. Chimeras can remember their human lives, as a rule, but the simple, beast-like part of them is always fighting rational thought for dominance. They are unpredictable and transgressive alchemist often use them as guard dogs or shock troops.

### ***Hollow Men***

Hollow men mock life; being lumpen, shoddy attempts at creating it from nothing. Most are vaguely human-shaped, if voiceless and clumsy. They rarely have skills at anything more than 3, although they can be made in bulk and are unshakeably loyal to their creators. An encounter with a large mob of them would probably be better dealt with as a Skill Roll to avoid them, rather than treating it as a fight. They are created using Alchemy of the Soul. They can be pounded to the dust they came from, with effort, and the question as to whether they are alive enough to feel pain is unanswered.

### ***Slates***

Slates, as in 'blank slate', are people who have had their minds and memories warped by Alchemy of the Mind. Their personalities and skills are product of the programming their creator has given them, and little if any spark of the original person remains. As fiercely loyal minions, they lack the numbers of Hollow Men, but they can easily pass for human and be used as spies and saboteurs. Compromising the loved one of an enemy in this way is a particularly vicious act. While it is possible to reprogramme a Slate to something approaching their original persona, it's not possible to truly return them to how they were, and there would always be the worry that some part of the indoctrination remains hidden inside them.





## Making the Conspiracy

The conspiracy has two facets - first, you want it to be credible and threatening opposition. Each part of the conspiracy must serve a purpose, and advance its overall goal. Typical gambits may involve accumulating influence or military force, weakening potential enemies or directing attention away from the real threat. It's not a static scheme, however, and if the player cabal interferes with the plan then it is likely to evolve. If an essential part of the conspiracy is derailed, then alternative arrangements have to be made. Usually, these will be riskier or have less finesse than the original plan. The actions of the player cabal may even be predicted and exploited, if the conspiracy is sufficiently devious.

The second facet is that the conspiracy acts as a story hook for the game. If every variable is locked down tight, then the cabal will not be able to take action against it. It's tempting to drip-feed clues to the players as to where the next part of the plan is taking place, turning the game into a variation of the 'monster of the week' premise, but the problem with this approach is that the players may tire of the format and feel that they aren't making any real progress towards stopping the conspiracy for good.

Letting them lay their own plans to counter the conspiracy is a good way to avoid this. Careful use of the Conspiracy Sheet can give them a sense of how much of the plan they have revealed. If parts of it has changed then there may be new pieces for them to fit together - but the progress they have made is clear to them. Perhaps the most powerful way of expressing how far the game has progressed it to have a definite in-game date when the the final stage of the conspiracy is put into action - regardless of its state of readiness. The actions of the player cabal can upset the smooth implementation the conspiracy wanted, and leave it vulnerable to disruption. The conspiracy needs to score victories from time to time, too, otherwise it will not appear to be a dangerous threat. A useful way to do this is to have these victories scored off-camera, as it were, in places the cabal is not.

When creating a conspiracy, you want to split out the most important parts into multiple possible clues, making the cabal work for the juiciest pieces of information. You should fill in each box with

something you can use to pick up the story if it starts to drag. The stakes need to be high, and the opposition credible. Filling in all the boxes is a way of ensuring you don't run out of ideas during play. Remember that nothing you write on your conspiracy sheet is set in stone until it has been introduced 'on-screen'. You can change bits of it if you have better ideas, or can build in something the cabal has already done.

To begin with, the conspiracy will be faceless. The cabal will only encounter dupes or lowest-rung mercenaries who know only that they are getting paid to do something. As they discover more and seek out information, they are likely to encounter more powerful members of the conspiracy - not those behind it, but their most trusted agents. Finally, they may uncover the masterminds behind the plan. This gradual reveal helps foster a sense of progress but also ensures that there is a constant trickle of new enemies. If you want the big reveal to be that an ally of friend was behind the conspiracy, this allows you to try that method. Be warned, however, players are very good at uncovering a traitor earlier than you would want him found.

The most important thing, for the conspiracy and its servants, is that they are not stupid. They will react to the cabal's actions, try to take them out of the picture, or learn about their strengths and try to tackle them in other ways. If part of the conspiracy is exposed or undermined, the rest of the conspiracy will route around it and try to achieve the same thing a different way.





## An Example Conspiracy

THE CONSPIRACY: KNOWN FACTS		
Who?	Where?	When?
General Harcourt, rogue Hermite with a longevity ritual	Based at Central army HQ	Coup d'état planned at the General-Elect's birthday celebrations
Slave traders between Mallinet and Valley are being sponsored	A rogue Hermite is impersonating an important person	A Hermite discovered alchemy to greatly prolong life
Harcourt founded the Stravian secret police	The Stravian secret police are mostly chimeras	An alchemist on the run changed his face to avoid pursuit
Stravian military documents have been leaked to Poets in Campport	Joseph Gantt, the Arch-Duke's eldest son, is missing	Records suggest Harcourt was born over 200 years ago
A washerwoman in Central told friends she saw something strange, was later found torn apart	The Stravian garrison near the Isemgard border was slaughtered using alchemy	An agent is poisoning the water supply in Ely
Someone is deliberately fostering distrust of foreigners throughout Stravia	A mob is incited to attack the Isemgard ambassador when he visits Eastern	General Langley is implicated in a sordid scandal in Valley
An assassination attempt on General-Elect Domvile	War between Stravia and Isemgard creates a need for a strong leader, without questions asked	Arch-Duke Gantt is being blackmailed to support Harcourt's political ambitions

The example here is a conspiracy sheet fully filled in. It's possible to follow common threads between some of the facts. The lead conspirator is an imposter, a Hermite member living far beyond his normal span, making a grab for power. Several measures have been put in place to instigate war between Stravia and Isemgard. General Langley is presumably an obstacle, so perhaps a scandal is being engineered involving smuggled slaves from Mallinet. The Archduke will be held over a barrel, forced to recognise Harcourt's claim for fear of his son's life. The most drastic part of the plan is killing the General-Elect - whether this is part of the coup or a measure to instigate war is left open.

The washerwoman, probably only one of many victims of the plan, could be a good way of introducing the players to the sinister goings on and draw them into fighting the conspiracy. The chimeras of the Stravian secret police might turn

out to be the main foes the players face, and they only fight against 'Harcourt' directly at the very climax, which could be during the assassination attempt or after, depending on how you prefer to play it. The Archduke could be a tremendous ally if only the cabal can rescue his son.

Note that each part of the conspiracy doesn't give too much away, even when it's closely related to another part of it. In isolation, each fact doesn't reveal a great deal - it's only when they are put together that the picture emerges. If the characters discover that 'Records suggest Harcourt was born over 200 years ago', their first conclusion might be the Harcourt identity is an alias for an imposter, using long-dead general's credentials. If later on they learn that 'A Hermite discovered alchemy to greatly prolong life' they might leap to the conclusion that the Hermite and Harcourt are working together. It might only be when they discover either 'A rogue Hermite is impersonating an important person' or 'An alchemist on the run changed his face to avoid pursuit' that they realise that Harcourt and the Hermite are one and the same. The second of those two confirms their suspicions and they can proceed accordingly.

Naturally, there are many details that will be established during the game. When you are drawing up your own conspiracy sheet, you can have a clear picture of how the pieces fit together, and only use the sheet itself to remind you of the basics. If you plan to run a long campaign, you can use one box as the basis for each session.

## Skill Rolls

You have a lot of options when adjudicating what a particular character's skill roll requires. Deciding how many slots to ask for is not a question of going down a list and counting how many boxes are ticked. It's up to you to decide what is exciting and appropriate for this scene, and work with that. If a similar rolls crops up in a future scene, you can adjudicate differently. You don't need to justify the change with anything more specific than 'this time it's different'.







For Skill Contests, there is more work to do. Apart from setting slots to fill, you also have to handle the ramifications of success dice from characters' rolls. You have three main options - consequences, making things easier for the character, making things harder for the character's foe. It's up to you if the latter choices affect all enemies or just the one. The basic contract to follow for Skill Contests is that one dice gets you one dice. You can break that to reward lateral thinking or dramatic role-play, but stick to that principle and you can't go far wrong.

Player-controlled characters have interesting choices in how they assign dice, and the same is true for you. How you choose to assign dice for the rolls you make changes the mood of the contest. If you always go hell for leather, trying to inflict consequences at the cost of suffering them, you create the impression that the character is desperate, suicidally zealous or insane. If you play the character more capably, he will come across as less committed and cleverer. On the other hand, playing defensively can be frustrating for your players as their efforts will be closed down more frequently. As a truly devious Game Master, you should see that you can choose the option that most suits your twin purposes of keeping the game fun and moving the story along. If a player threw in a brilliant manoeuvre, you can deliberately let the consequence happen and spend the dice another way. If you need to establish a character as a credible threat for later on in the story, you can play defensively so the players know they are dealing with a serious opponent. If a contest is dragging, you can choose to have your participants go all out, just to help bring the contest to a conclusion. Playing 'optimally', in the way that your players tend to, is foregoing an important tool you can use to fine-tune the game.

## Consequences

The consequences you set can be anything you feel is appropriate to the situation. Interesting consequences make for more interesting decisions, even when they are avoided. Consequences should be always so harsh that the players avoid them at all costs. Your goal is to set consequences so that the players are tempted to accept them. Very broad ideas for consequences are:

- Something breaks.
- Something is left behind or lost.
- Someone is dragged into the situation.
- A secret is revealed.
- A bystander is hurt.
- There is a witness.
- A limited resource is wasted.
- Time is wasted.
- Your reputation is damaged.
- An ego is bruised.
- You lose someone's trust.
- You make an enemy.
- Someone is killed.

## Losing Fights

Being put down in a fight does not necessarily mean death, for any character. This means that the players can lose fights, even quite badly, without having their characters die. This does not mean that you should go easy on them, though. There are plenty of ways that being defeated can be awkward - capture, experimentation or just being left humiliated in the dirt are all possibilities. If they get an opportunity to take a breather, of course, they will recover an injury and be a going concern again. The rest of their injuries will still have to be healed regularly, of course.

On the other side of the coin, winning a fight should not be easy for them either. What, for example, do they do with their defeated enemies? Killing outright is unlikely to be an option most of the





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time - there are laws, after all - but that raises the question of what to do with someone who will probably be just as belligerent the next time they cross paths with the cabal. Even if most defeated enemies will never be seen again, the players can never be sure which of them may come back with a grudge. How the characters deal with defeated enemies can be an important litmus test of their ethics - be sure that karma rewards or punishes them accordingly.

Sometimes someone who was once an enemy might bear no grudge, or only have been an enemy due to a misunderstanding. Defeated foes are a source of allies in the fight against the conspiracy, if you can find one you can trust.

Player-controlled characters are not immortal. Character death should be the exception, though, and only considered at an extremely dramatic part of the story. Rather than being the result of a lost fight or a consequence on a skill roll, death should come about as a direct choice of the player concerned. It should be a deliberate, if desperate, sacrifice. Something is at stake which the character values more than his own life; and the player is willing to let the character die. Even if the character is prepared to make that sacrifice, the player should only follow through if letting the character die doesn't derail with the story too much and doesn't scupper the player's plans for their character. Playing that out as a moment of doubt or weakness is a rich source of role-playing potential.

New Player Characters can be created as per the normal rules, including the part where another character may claim responsibility for a lost Vital Element

## Using Vital Elements

You know they're there just for you to mess with them, right? But you need to do it with panache. Don't break a Vital Element just because you can. Your goal is to experiment with the Vital Elements, seeing just how much peril they need to be put in to make the characters break from their plans or

abandon their allies. If the character drops everything to save it, put it in less danger next time. If the character did not even consider going to rescue it, up the danger level instead. Putting a Vital Element in long-term peril - by kidnapping a child, for example - is the gift that keeps on giving.

Rotate through the characters in the cabal to ensure everyone gets put through the wringer at least once.

At some point, you want to put a Vital Element in imminent danger of being destroyed. You want to set things up so that if it is lost that the player was complicit in its destruction. That's the sweet spot you're aiming for. If that happens at the climax of the story, even better.

## Ending the Story

Once the Conspiracy has been defeated, albeit at terrible cost, the story is over. Each character should receive a scene for an epilogue, detailing what happened to them after the story ended. Some characters might have sacrificed so much that there is little left for them any more. Others might have burned so many bridges that their former career is ashes. Perhaps the unluckiest are those who have seen all of the Vital Elements destroyed, leaving them with little to live for.

The world will have changed, too. The Conspiracy failed, but disturbed the status quo. Wars might have been fought, cities burned, or prominent public figures killed.

It is tempting to start a new campaign from the conclusion of the last one, allowing some of the same characters to return. However, it's recommended to start from a completely clean slate, for both characters and setting. The baggage of the previous plot won't be an obstacle to any new players, and the characters will be fresh out of character creation with new and unexplored Vital Elements. More importantly, you are free to create completely new ideas to flesh out the game world. The new campaign can go in an entirely different direction, unfettered by decisions made in the last one.





# CHARACTER DEVELOPMENT

Characters in this game are not static. They can improve their skills, develop their assets and make friends and allies all over the world.

Player-controlled characters, in particular, need to better themselves in order to fight the much greater resources of the Conspiracy. Unlike some role-playing games, where characters start at the very bottom rung of the ladder, your character in Ring of Changes starts out pretty strong, and gets stronger somewhat gradually. For a single-session game, this is a moot point, but for longer campaigns character improvement is one of the chief rewards for making progress.

## Experience Points

Experience points are the currency with which you buy improvements to your character. At the end of each session, you can earn up to 3 points.

**Participation:** You earn 1 point for turning up to the game.

**Sacrifice:** If your character made a meaningful sacrifice during the session, get 1 point. It can be a personal sacrifice, or the sacrifice of a group goal in favour of a personal goal. Losing a Vital Element always qualifies.

**Progress:** If the cabal made significant progress towards stopping the Conspiracy, at the sole discretion of the Game Master, everybody earns 1 point. This can even be earned by characters who weren't in the session. This award is a way the GM can pace advancement through the campaign.

## Improving Characters

There are two main avenues when it comes to improving your character's Skills. Assets are normally changed through in-session actions, but if the Game Master permits it you can treat an Asset as a Skill and improve it the same way.

The first avenue is to find a teacher for a skill. A teacher needs to have a higher score in the skill than you in order for you to increase it, and a teacher can only teach you special techniques he himself knows. Often you can find a teacher within your cabal, but when that is not an option you might have to spend money on hiring a tutor or finding an ally prepared to spend time teaching you.

The second is to spend time in practice and/or research. This way, you don't need to find a teacher, you aren't as limited in what you can learn, but independent study works out as slightly more expensive in experience points.

Alchemy follows the same pattern, but is more expensive to improve. It is rather harder to find a teacher willing to share secret alchemical techniques than it is to find one willing to share special techniques for skills.

With a Teacher	XP Cost
Improve a skill by 1 point	2
Learn a special technique	2
Improve a branch of alchemy by 1 point	4
Learn an alchemical secret technique	2

Independent Study	XP Cost
Improve a skill by 1 point and learn a new special technique	5
Improve a branch of alchemy by 1 point	6
Copy a secret technique you have observed	2
Develop a new secret technique, or copy a technique you haven't had a chance to study	4





## ADAPTING THE GAME

Ring of Changes is written such that it's fairly straight-forward to alter parts of it to your tastes. You can add skills and branches of alchemy, or remove them as you see fit, without breaking any essential part of the game. If you change the overall number of skills significantly, you might want to change the free skill points available at character creation. You can change the flavour of the game by altering the special techniques on offer, or changing which skills have access to them.

The two-tier structure of skills in this game, alchemy and ordinary skills, lends itself to any setting with a similar dichotomy. Alchemy could be turned into schools of magic, or some magic-like talent. The alchemy tier could be done away with altogether, and secret techniques introduced for skills, on the understanding that only particularly gifted characters can obtain these more powerful abilities.

However you decide to adapt the game, it's important to keep in mind the central theme - difficult decisions. Ring of Changes is a versatile system for styles of play where you have to sacrifice one thing to get another and there is a heavy investigation angle to most plot lines. You could use it for a setting without that theme, but it might turn out to be a poor fit for it.

## Inspirations

There are several works of fiction that have either inspired aspects of this game, or would play well to its strengths. Notable ones include:

Hiromu Arakawa's *Full Metal Alchemist*

DiMartino & Konietzko's *Avatar: The Last Airbender*

Kinoko Nasu's '*Nasuniverse*' visual novels

Yashichiro Takahashi's *Shakugan no Shana*

Jim Butcher's *The Dresden Files*

