

GEARS

Game Engine And Rules System



by
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CONTENTS

Third Draft	3	Locked Abilities.....	29	Camouflage.....	39
Completion Status?.....	3	Item Abilities.....	29	<i>Animals</i>	40
Future Implementations?.....	3	<i>Character Growth</i>	29	Riding.....	40
Task Resolution	4	Awarded Growth.....	29	Handle Animal.....	40
<i>The Quick Guide</i>	4	Automatic Growth.....	30	Train Animal.....	40
Difficulty.....	4	<i>Character Point Rating</i>	30	<i>Vehicle</i>	40
Character Creation	6	Rated Abilities.....	30	Drive Car.....	40
<i>Character Creation Points</i>	6	<i>Character Packages</i>	31	Ride Bike.....	40
Buying Talent Abilities.....	6	Creating Packages.....	31	Ride Motorcycle.....	40
Buying Skill Abilities.....	6	Professional Packages.....	31	Skating.....	40
<i>Boosting</i>	7	Association Packages.....	32	Boarding.....	40
Game Boosters.....	7	Life Packages.....	32	Parachuting.....	40
Character Boosters.....	7	Packages-Only Character Creation	32	Sail Boat.....	41
Team Boosters.....	8	32	Operate Submarine.....	41
Item Boosters.....	8	Conflict Resolution	33	Pilot Plane.....	41
Negative Boosters.....	8	<i>Quick System</i>	33	Operate Mecha.....	41
Risky Boosters.....	8	Combat.....	33	???Auto Maintenance.....	41
<i>Disabilities</i>	9	<i>Full System</i>	33	? <i>Technical</i>	41
Defining a Disability.....	9	The Basics.....	33	???Structural.....	41
Triggers.....	9	The Basics.....	33	???Combustion.....	41
Reactions.....	10	?Advanced Use.....	34	???Mechanics.....	42
Severity.....	11	Injury.....	34	???Clockwork Mechanics.....	42
Disability Specifics.....	12	Fallen Foes.....	34	???Hydraulics/Pneumatics.....	42
Disability Boosts.....	13	<i>Flavor Options</i>	34	???Electrical.....	42
Booster Disabilities.....	13	Comicbook Combat.....	35	???Electronics.....	42
Chained Disabilities.....	13	Hollywood Action.....	35	???Chemical.....	42
Delayed Disabilities.....	14	???Hong Kong Action Theater.....	35	???Medical.....	42
? <i>Relations</i>	15	???Blood Ballet.....	36	???Software.....	42
Base Value.....	15	Ability List	37	<i>Craft</i>	42
Loyalty.....	15	<i>Fighting</i>	37	Metalworking.....	42
Alternate Loyalties.....	16	Swordfighting.....	37	Masonry.....	42
Determination.....	16	Knifefighting.....	37	Stonecutting.....	42
Trust.....	17	Axefighting.....	37	Woodworking.....	42
Availability.....	17	Macefighting.....	37	Ceramics/Pottery.....	42
Group.....	18	Staff.....	37	Plastics.....	42
Obligations.....	18	Flail.....	37	Textiles.....	42
???Ranks & Reputations.....	19	Gunfighting.....	37	Painting.....	42
???Growth, Rise, and Fall.....	19	Unarmed Fighting.....	37	? <i>Security</i>	43
<i>Special Powers</i>	19	???Melee Weapon Maintenance.....	38	Conceal.....	43
The Approximated Ability.....	19	<i>Shooting</i>	38	Disguise.....	43
Point Abilities.....	20	Bow.....	38	?Forensics.....	43
?New Component Abilities.....	20	Crossbow.....	38	???Snatch.....	43
Combined-Ability Powers.....	21	Handgun.....	38	???Sneaking.....	43
Passive Powers.....	21	Rifle.....	38	???Hacking.....	43
Boosting Powers.....	22	Heavy Weaponry.....	38	? <i>Medical</i>	43
Sample Powers.....	22	Cannon.....	38	First Aid.....	44
Special Disabilities.....	24	Flamethrower.....	38	Medicine.....	44
<i>Races & Species</i>	24	Spray Gun.....	38	Surgery.....	44
Racial Packages.....	24	Laser.....	38	???Genetics.....	44
The Human Template.....	24	???Firearm Maintenance.....	38	???Psychiatry.....	44
<i>Money & Possessions</i>	26	<i>Throwing</i>	39	???Psychology.....	44
Income.....	26	Rock/Ball.....	39	<i>Academic</i>	45
???Borrowing & Credit.....	27	Stick.....	39	Physics.....	45
???Non-Financially Acquired Gear	27	Spear.....	39	Chemistry.....	45
<i>Advanced Character Creation</i>	27	Knife.....	39	Biology.....	45
.....	27	Axe/Hatchet.....	39	Geology.....	45
Prep Abilities.....	27	<i>Wilderness</i>	39	Economics.....	45
Combination Tasks.....	28	Survival.....	39	Politics/Civics.....	45
Ability Webs.....	28	Traps.....	39	Mathematics.....	45
		Tracking.....	39	Philosophy.....	45
		Hide.....	39	History.....	45
				Law.....	45
				<i>Language</i>	45

<i>Performance</i>	46	<i>Available Technologies</i>	56	<i>???Feeding</i>	67
Acting.....	46	<i>Technological Progress</i>	56	<i>???Habitat</i>	67
Dancing.....	46	<i>???Interacting Technologies</i>	57	<i>???Tactics</i>	67
Singing.....	46	<i>???Other 'Technologies'</i>	57	<i>???Domestication & Training</i>	
Speaking.....	46	<i>???Acquisition</i>	57	67
Music.....	46	<i>???Markets</i>	57	Alice 2.0	68
Presentation.....	46	<i>???Product Order</i>	57	Welcome	69
<i>???Social</i>	46	<i>???Production</i>	57	<i>Alice</i>	69
<i>???Read Person</i>	47	<i>???Issue</i>	58	<i>The Mystery of Alice</i>	70
<i>???Socialize</i>	47	<i>???Inheritance & Gifts</i>	58	<i>Reactions</i>	71
<i>???Coercion</i>	47	<i>???Theft</i>	58	<i>Alice as a Person</i>	71
<i>???Negotiation</i>	47	<i>???Coincidence</i>	58	<i>Alice in the Game</i>	72
<i>???Organizing</i>	47	<i>?Personalization</i>	58	<i>Babylon</i>	72
<i>Geographical</i>	47	<i>Custom Builds</i>	58	<i>The Ziggurat</i>	73
<i>Places</i>	47	<i>?Other Customizations</i>	59	<i>The Portals</i>	73
<i>People</i>	47	<i>Custom Specifics</i>	59	<i>The Resurrection Devices</i>	73
<i>Resources</i>	48	<i>'Murphy' Customs</i>	60	<i>The Academy</i>	74
<i>Current Events</i>	48	<i>Item Abilities</i>	60	<i>The Iron Ring</i>	75
<i>Turf</i>	48	<i>?Item Combos</i>	61	<i>The World</i>	75
<i>???Sensory</i>	48	<i>Character Adaptation</i>	61	<i>Other Worlds</i>	75
<i>???Sight</i>	48	<i>???Usurped Personalizations</i>	62	<i>Strange Civilizations</i>	76
<i>???Hearing</i>	48	<i>?Condition & Maintenance</i> ...62		<i>Realities</i>	76
<i>???Smell/Taste</i>	48	<i>???Condition</i>	62	<i>Alice in Other Worlds</i>	77
<i>???Touch</i>	48	<i>???Durability</i>	63	<i>Operations</i>	77
<i>Learning Abilities</i>	48	<i>???Equipment Design System</i>		Adventures	78
<i>Talent Abilities</i>	49	63	<i>Themes</i>	78
<i>Thematic</i>	49	<i>???Components</i>	63	<i>Visiting Babylon</i>	78
<i>Brand</i>	49	<i>???Performance</i>	63	<i>Company Folk</i>	79
<i>Strength</i>	50	<i>???Frame</i>	63	<i>Agents of Alice</i>	79
<i>Endurance</i>	50	<i>???Strain & Damage</i>	63	<i>Portal Operatives</i>	79
<i>Agility</i>	50	<i>???Samples</i>	63	<i>Genre & Style</i>	80
<i>Dexterity</i>	51	<i>???Oddities, Problems, and</i>		<i>The Genre of Babylon</i>	80
<i>Reflexes</i>	51	<i>Solutions</i>	63	<i>Setting a Style</i>	81
<i>Precision</i>	51	<i>???Equipment List</i>	63	<i>The Role of Alice</i>	82
<i>Intelligence</i>	51	<i>???Game Worlds & Prices</i>	63	<i>The Truth</i>	82
<i>Knowledge</i>	52	Creatures	64	<i>Other Portals</i>	83
<i>Restraint</i>	52	<i>Purpose</i>	64	<i>Others Like Alice</i>	83
<i>Charm</i>	52	<i>Point Value</i>	64	<i>Alice's Influence</i>	83
<i>???Rated Abilities</i>	52	<i>Plot Function</i>	64	<i>Unveiling</i>	84
<i>???Weapon Improv</i>	52	<i>Abilities</i>	65	<i>Adventure Plots</i>	84
<i>???Science Improv</i>	53	<i>Beast Talents</i>	65	<i>Punching Bags of Weirdness</i>	84
<i>???Keen Observation</i>	53	<i>Special Abilities</i>	65	<i>Keep It Secret, Keep It Safe</i>	84
<i>???Killer Instinct</i>	53	<i>Combat</i>	66	<i>Hunting Party</i>	85
Sample Characters	53	<i>Stealth</i>	67	<i>Party Hunting</i>	85
<i>Joseph Preston, fighter pilot</i>	53	<i>???Tracking</i>	67	<i>Project Management</i>	85
Equipment	56	<i>???Other</i>	67		
<i>Technologies</i>	56	<i>???Instincts</i>	67		
		<i>???Self-Preservation</i>	67		

Third Draft

The third version of the GEARS draft includes added rules, some clarifications, a few additions to the *Alice 2.0* setting, and an extended Ability List including the fundamental Talents. It provides a functional game, but not nearly a completed book. The *Alice 2.0* setting is still not integrated into the rules, but remains descriptive only. The game is still *highly* unbalanced, and tuning levels to fix on any kind of 'realism' is a challenge still for the future!

Note that sections beginning with '?' are considered incomplete, and those beginning with '???' are barely even written, but are included to demonstrate their future inclusion.

Completion Status?

With this draft, GEARS moves a lot closer to a full game. Characters can now be produced (and one sample character has been), completely functional and with a good level of detail. Disabilities and Relations expand character concept, and Special Powers provides the first true expansion system that instructs Narrator and players in producing new and game world adapted Abilities. This sets up a core concept of GEARS that can now take on more focus: Systems for content creation! The goal is to allow easy and detailed content creation with just the core rules; monsters, tools, weapons, vehicles and more, from just the core rules. It will not negate the value of expansions, but it will make the GEARS line more manageable and user friendly. At least, that is the rough plan.

There are still some rules with problems. Disabilities (and negative Relations and Obligations) seem to deal clumsily with Specifics, for one. The *concept* of Specifics promotes interesting uses, and it seems to fit together, but too much in the practical, day-to-day game use is left in the wind and needs concrete elaboration. The writing in general throughout the book is still clunky, with poor phrasing and a complete lack of content aesthetics, although the first (crude) attempts at an actual layout have been implemented. Fourth Draft will begin to look at better phrasing and more entertaining text, both in content and layout. There are also several rules that are written in unwieldy language, poorly explained or simply not defined in enough detail, not to mention leftover bits from rule changes that now seem redundant. And the whole GEARS Quick concept needs an overhaul, although it will most definitely continue to be included. These things will all need handling in Fourth Draft, as well.

One of the big questions that is starting to show its head is the core concept of GEARS: Detail! The game is being developed to allow extensive detail, and even though Third Draft already provides ample opportunities for detail, it is now looking at the problem of how to further use this. The true levels of intended need to be given increased attention, now that there is an actual, functional game for them! This includes better exploration of *Background* and other concepts.

Finally, premade 'shopping lists' are needed, especially for equipment, as are more sample designs of Special Powers, characters, creatures, etc. An index will have to wait until a clearer overview over final content exists, though; for now, a content section has to suffice.

Future Implementations?

Non-rule material is still painfully absent. Much of it exists in the form of earlier writings (TAYDS, among others), but it will need transplantation and integration into the GEARS structure. And speaking of structure, GEARS is still a *trainwreck*; sections and subsections are written wherever other sections refer to a topic, and there is little logic put into the progression of the text from start to finish. The only real dividing of the text is between the raw rules and the *Alice 2.0* setting. That setting, luckily, was written in a fashion that makes it pretty much as it needs to be, in terms of sections and sequence. The rules are not. Fourth Draft will hopefully begin to develop that structure.

There are also plenty of things needing implementation. Organizations need a complete revamp before being written in, because changes in Relations rules made the old material obsolete. Equipment rules governing detailed use of gear also has glaring holes in them, and there are more things that need fixing before a full basic rule set is there. And beyond that, there are still advanced systems that need a home, including a very detailed combat system building on the existing one. Odds are many of these advanced rules will go into future genre or world books, or get books dedicated to their subject entirely, but which will get that has yet to be determined. That, however, might be beyond even Fourth Draft, and when it will be truly handled is yet unknown!

But most of all, a truly usable character sheet needs to be designed! The current method of raw paper writeup is useful for test games, but entirely too impractical (and *ugly*) for public consumption!

Task Resolution

[intro to tasks]

The Quick Guide

Every character has a list of *Abilities*. These are used whenever the player wants the character to do something challenging, which is of interest to the story (or the amusement of others in the group. Games are meant to be entertaining, after all).

So when the Narrator says "roll for Motorcycle, Difficulty 5", what does that mean?

It means that you take your character (if the Narrator was talking to you, of course) and look at what the number at its Motorcycle ability says. Then, you roll that many dice and hope that 5 or more roll good. 'Good dice' are when a die rolls 4 or more.

So if your character has Motorcycle at level 12 (written as *Motorcycle[12]*), you roll 12 dice. If 5 or more roll a 4, 5 or 6, your character succeeded in whatever challenge he/she was facing while riding a motorcycle.

It's that simple.

Well, more or less. Some things about your character, the situation, or even the motorcycle can change things. All they really do, though, is let you use more or fewer dice. For example, if the motorcycle is a piece of junk, the Narrator might tell you (or you might already have been told) that the motorcycle gives you "a -2 penalty". You had 12 dice to roll. Now take away 2. So because the bike was a piece of junk, you have to roll 5 good dice with only 10 dice. Of course, if it is a *great* bike, you would not have a -2 penalty. In fact, you might get a +3 bonus. In that case, you get 3 extra dice to your 12, instead of losing dice. In short, a character with Motorcycle[12] rolls 12 dice on a regular bike, but only 10 dice on a "-2 bike", or 15 dice on a "+3 bike". So good gear is good to have!

Bonuses and penalties are collectively called *modifiers*.

Other modifiers may also be involved. For example, riding the bike on a rainslick road might be a -4 modifier that you apply along with the modifier for the quality of your bike. It might sound complex, but it really isn't. For example, a character with Motorcycle[12] riding a good bike (a "+3 bike") on a rainslick road would roll 12+3-4 dice, that is, 11 dice. The Difficulty (5 in the above example) is something the Narrator sets, depending on what you are trying to do. The tougher the thing you want the character to do is, the greater the Difficulty.

One other source of modifiers is an important part of your character. Any character has learned his or her Abilities somewhere, and therefore is familiar with certain ways of using them. They are also used to certain conditions, typical gear, etc. All those things are called *Specifics*, and are listed on the character sheet, under the Ability. For example, your character might be used to riding the bike on city streets (as opposed to highways, country roads or even race tracks), and he/she is more familiar with a sport bike model than a cruiser, motocross, trike or other kind of bike. So under the Motorcycle Ability, there might be noted *City Streets[7]* and *Sport Bike[9]*. If the character is trying something on typical city streets, that's a +7 bonus right there, and if riding a standard sport bike, that's a +9 bonus! And if it is both, you get both bonuses!

For example, a character with Motorcycle[12] riding a good (+3) sport bike (+9) on a rainslick (-4) city street (+7) will be rolling 27 dice!! When everything is the way you like it, getting 5 good dice suddenly doesn't look all that hard. But just wait until you try something with a Difficulty 20... Being on your home turf is a big advantage!

Of course, any character might have some experience with different things, and even if the character above is most familiar with sport bikes, he/she might have tried out cruisers for a while. So maybe under the Motorcycle Ability, it first says *Sport Bike[9]*, and right beneath that *Cruiser[2]*. Yeah, the character has experience with cruisers. But sport bikes are still better suited...

Difficulty

As mentioned, the Difficulty is how many dice have to land on 4, 5 or 6 in order for something to succeed. A die landing on 4, 5 or 6 is called a 'good die', while one that lands on 1, 2 or 3 is called a 'bad die'. So, in other words, the Difficulty is the number of 'good dice' you need to succeed.

But it is never easy to pick a number to describe how 'difficult' something is. Therefore, the following list describes common numbers to use for various challenges, explained in everyday English:

- 1-3: Beginner's stuff. Anybody could probably do it with dumb luck and a few study notes. Most people only do something this easy when they have not really learned anything serious yet. Anyone with even basic training would have to be extremely unlucky, or have horrible tools or conditions, to fail at this.

- 4-6: Easy. Someone who just learned the basics would be proud of doing something like this, but to most others, it would be embarrassing to screw it up. Simple standard tasks like this can be a big part of a routine job, though.

- 7-9: Standard. It takes some training and proper tools (if tools are used) to pull this off on a regular basis, but other than that, it is not that impressive. Someone fairly good at a job would probably be doing it regularly, and it is not worth bragging about unless people you brag to have no idea what you are talking about.

- 10-12: Challenge. This is actually a bit tricky. People who know about what you are doing may be a little impressed, especially if they do not have any particular training themselves. It is not embarrassing to fail at this kind of task, unless you fail several times in a row. Most people handling this level of difficulty at work are hired specifically for tasks of this kind, but they are expected to succeed at it regularly, too!

- 13-15: Hard. This is the kind of tricks that skilled people use to impress each other. It will not win big prizes, but it might turn a few heads. It will seem completely baffling to people with no or little training in the field, and anyone hired to do it regularly can freely call him or herself an 'expert', and probably has only that one responsibility.

- 16-18: Really tough. Nobody hires just one person to do this on a regularly basis; either it is a costly specialist hired on a case-by-case basis, or a team that checks each other's results. This is the realm of serious training and long-term experience, and things can go really bad if you screw up. Which most people will, *regularly*.

- 19-21: Hardcore expertise. Anyone capable of succeeding at this two out of three times is not to be messed with. This is the kind of stuff that makes you famous in professional circles, or public if it is something that people can even understand. Anyone working on this level, even if they do not succeed half the time, can be considered a 'master'.

- 22-24: Truly advanced. Masters work hard to do this just once in a while, and anyone who does it even near regularly is a genius in his or her field. That kind of person probably does very little else, unless the game is fairly unrealistic. These challenges belong in Hollywood movies; they are very rare in real life!

- 25+: Insane! Doing anything like this without cheating or using some *serious* tools is just plain ridiculous. Real people do not work at this level, and nobody expects to hire a single person to handle this stuff, if it ever even becomes needed. A team of crack experts, maybe! For a single person to handle this level of challenge with some real chance would take a secret master. Terms like 'epic' and 'legendary' start making sense here.

If a game is meant to be completely superhuman, Difficulties beyond 25 can easily be defined, especially if a few games are played to fine tune them. The progression is basically endless; Difficulty can be in the hundreds, if needed! But that will take the game over the top and beyond anything even barely realistic. Of course, that can still be *very fun*, but it is hard to describe in normal terms; gods, supernatural legends, mythical heroes and the like may operate there, but real people never do.

Character Creation

When starting a game, or after your character has died, left or been lost, you will need to create a new character (we here assume you do not get a pre-created character to play). In short, you do that by picking a bunch of Abilities, based on what background the character has. You can outline a character story first, or create it while adding the Abilities (a lot of things become clearer while creating the character), or fill in the blanks afterwards. Most players do a combination of all three!

Character Creation Points

Before starting the process, you get an amount of Character Creation Points ('CCP' for short). The Narrator chooses how many CCP each player gets, based on the kind of characters they are meant to create. All players should be given an equal amount of CCP, though, unless something else has been agreed upon.

With your CCP, you buy Abilities. All Abilities function more or less the same way, but there is a slight difference between two kinds of them. These two slight variations are called Talent Abilities and Skill Abilities. The CCP you have will typically be split in two portions, one for buying Talent Abilities, and one for Skill Abilities. The suggested split is 20/80 (20% for Talents, 80% for Skills), but in the end, the Narrator decides, possibly after discussing it with the players. Not splitting the CCP is fully possible, but can give some odd results that will be mentioned later.

Buying Talent Abilities

Talent Abilities are the kind of Abilities that people are usually either born with, or get through hard work, practice, or sudden inspiration. They are usually not something people simply go out and learn. Examples include raw strength, creative thinking, a knack for people, language talent and so forth.

Most Talent Abilities work by adding 1/10 of the level to skills that draw on that particular talent. For example, someone who reacts fast (a Talent Ability called *Reflexes*) would be better at a lot of things, from ducking punches to arcade games to holding onto a wiggly pet. If, for example, that character has Reflexes[35] and is trying to win at an arcade game, the player adds 3.5 (1/10 of 35) to whatever skill is being used. For many things, multiple Talent Abilities can come in handy at the same time! If that same character also has Agility[17] (a talent of being flexible and well-coordinated with your limbs) and the arcade game is a dance game, 1/10 of both talents gets added. That's 4.2 in total. Once all relevant things have been added, the number is rounded down, and the result is the amount of dice rolled.

Such Talent Abilities let players create the kind of characters that have a broad knack for certain things, like the kid who can remember just about anything, or the musical genius, the tech-wiz, the gifted leader, the gun expert, and so forth. They are good to have because each of them works with so many different skills, making

There is a different kind of Talent Ability, called *Learning Abilities*. These let a character learn faster from experience. The exact way this works is described in *Character Growth*. Some Learning Abilities deal with a subject that there is also a 'regular' Talent Ability for, like languages. This depicts the difference between the kind of people who are really good at using the languages they know, and the kind that simply learn another language much faster than others.

For every Talent Ability, it goes that 1 CCP will buy you one level of the Ability. So to add *Reflexes*[35] or *Learn Sciences*[35] to your character, you must spend 35 CCP.

Note that while the most common use for Talent Abilities is to boost Skill Abilities with that 1/10 of the talent, they can also be used straight up as Abilities. For example, *Strength* is handy for lifting things or breaking them through sheer brute force, and *Endurance* is good for withstanding pain. In these cases, the Talent Ability level is just used as-is. Certain advanced rules also draw Talent Abilities in quite directly.

Buying Skill Abilities

As described in *The Quick Guide*, a character does something challenging by the player rolling a number of dice and hopefully getting as many good dice as the Difficulty requires, or more. The number of dice includes the Ability, any Specifics that can be used, and modifiers from the circumstances around the character. The modifiers from the circumstances around the character are something that is described in the given situation, usually by the Narrator. The Ability and Specifics are something that has to be put into the character.

Picking Skill Abilities for the character is not difficult at all, but it requires some thought as to who and what the character is; where he/she is from, what he/she has gone through, and so on. This can be part of a life story the player has already written, or it can be decided as the character is made.

The reason this is important is that 'buying' a Skill Ability means picking the Ability itself (like *Swordfighting*, or *Motorcycle*, or *Speak German*, etc.) and its Specifics. For every CCP spent on a Skill Ability, the character gets 1 level worth of the Ability, but also 1 level worth of a selected Specific chosen for that particular Ability. For example, if the

player spends 14 CCPs on *Swordfighting*, the character gets *Swordfighting*[14]. But at the same time, the character gets a total of 14 levels worth of Specific that apply to the Ability, and the player chooses the exact Specifics! For this Ability, the player might state that the character learned it while fighting in the marshes around his home town as part of a larger army, and they used short swords. All fighting Abilities (*Swordfighting*, *Axe-fighting*, *Fistfighting*, etc.) require the Specifics of weapon, terrain, and engagement to be filled in when buying the Ability. So the character got not just *Swordfighting*[14], but also the scattered 14 points across the Specifics *Shortsword*[6], *Marshland*[3], and *Battle*[5]. If the player then buys another fighting skill, such as *Stafffighting*[6] with a set of Specifics, the same goes there. And **if two or more Abilities in the same category are bought with any identical Specifics, those Specifics are added up**. So if *Stafffighting* is bought with the Specifics Quarterstaff, Marshland and Duelling, the levels it gets in Marshland are added to the 3 levels the character already has from *Swordfighting*. However, **no Ability can ever get a greater bonus from Specifics than the level the Ability itself has**.

Beyond Specifics, each point invested in an Ability also results in a point in a Background. This describes what kind of life the character learned the Ability under. Most of the time, it's a profession, but some may stretch the word 'profession' a bit beyond the usual meaning. The character above learned *Swordfighting* while serving as a soldier, so the Specific for that would be *Military*. If only part of the Ability was learned under those circumstances, other circumstances would add different Backgrounds. For example, the 14 points of *Swordfighting* might be split over the Backgrounds *Military*[8], *Bountyhunting*[4] and *Monsterfighting*[2]. Unlike Specifics, Backgrounds do not add a bonus to the Ability when used. However, if the character is actively trying to hide the influence of a Background, the level of that Background becomes a penalty. So if the character in question wants to fight with a sword, but wants to hide the fact that he has military training, it is at -8.

Background Specifics also play an important role in detailing the life of the character, and that is used when determining how certain people will treat him or her in special circumstances. For example, it doesn't really matter how good you are with a gun, a secretive group of police veterans will only take in someone with a long background in the police.

The implications of each background Specific is described separately later, and in future materials on character backgrounds.

Boosting

There are plenty of ways that someone might increase their chances of success in a task. Better training, better tools, or better circumstances have already been discussed. But depending on what is done and how the game world works, there might also be the option of 'boosting' an Ability.

Boosting relies on Booster Points. These are not one, fixed bag of points, the term is generic, and any game world (or even character) might have any number of different Booster Points, or none at all. For example, the game world might have Honor Points and Mania Points, two different kinds of Booster Points used for two very different things. The term 'Booster Points' is just used here to describe the universal workings of the rule.

Using any kind of Booster Point is simple: By spending a point, the player gets to raise an Ability in the character by 1. Spending more points raises it more; blowing off 8 points from a Booster will boost an Ability by 8, or perhaps even allow the player to spread those 8 across multiple Abilities. The details of which Abilities and under which circumstances a Booster can be used varies from Booster to Booster.

Game Boosters

Perhaps the most basic kind of Booster is the one where every character has a fixed set of points from the beginning, and everyone just gets an equal amount handed to them, at no cost. Such Boosters are typically something the characters cannot have any control over, something like luck, fate or divine whimsy (in *some* game worlds they may influence these things, but typically not). The Narrator has decided on an assigned lot of points, and that's it. They may refresh at fixed intervals, such as after each adventure or for every day in the game world. If 'refresh' means getting a point back, they will often be used casually, and with a modicum of care. If 'refresh' means all points are refilled, players are going to do their best to spend their points before they get that refill!

Alternately, game points can be refreshed by doing something in the spirit of the game. A game that revolves around insane action can reward points for players whose characters do something insane and action-packed. In those cases, characters may start out with no points at all, having to earn them first to spend them later. Of course, if points atrophy and disappear after a while, they'll have to think fast to spend them well!

Character Boosters

In other cases, a Booster is something acquired during character creation, or through growth. Boosters like this are purchased just like Abilities, at 1 CCP per level. Whether the character starts out with a full reservoir of the points or has to earn them depends on the Booster; if earning them, what was purchased in character creation or growth was the

reservoir, i.e. the maximum number of points the character can accumulate before having to spend some. And even if not, the Booster bought is still the maximum; if you purchase a Booster at 7, you may start with 7 points, but you cannot earn more than a total of 7 unspent points.

Powerful Character Boosters make good Rated Abilities!

This type of Booster allows a lot of character customization and detail. Priests may have divine Boosters, warriors may have adrenalin or mythic concentration, and so on. A Booster can also be fairly normal, with most or all characters having it, but differences in level tell whole stories about who and what a character is.

Team Boosters

If players are capable of basic teamwork, they may have one or more Boosters assigned to them as a full team. This could be the Hail Mary support of someone in their organization, every point spent being an emergency equipment drop, with a limited number of them assigned to the team.

The big question with such Boosters is who can spend the points. Any character might be able to spend points, making it important for them to coordinate their use and not for one or two to drain it all. Alternately, spending a point may require another character to second the request, or the permission of a team member handling the Booster. Or it could require unanimous agreement, or just a majority vote. Options are many.

Even though the examples here are Boosters explained by game world rationality, Team Boosters can be just as odd or abstract as any other. Maybe Karma looks at people traveling together, not at individuals (if you travel with them, you must accept their choices and thus carry part of the responsibility, after all), or luck (bad as well as good) might be contagious.

Item Boosters

These differ very little from Character Boosters; the difference is simply that they are 'stored' in an item of some sort, not in the character. That means that taking the item means grabbing the points, and the default assumption is that whoever has the item is the one who can spend the points.

This is typical of cursed or blessed items, or items that have a special meaning in the genre and style of the game. They are acquired along with the item, making them bought, stolen, inherited or the like; item acquisition is discussed under *Equipment*. Some of these items will be fought for bitterly, but the details of the Booster(s) in an item, and other aspects of the item, can just as easily make them less attractive.

Negative Boosters

The idea of spending Booster Points can easily be turned on its head: Instead of having a number of points to spend, each Boost *adds* a point to a pool. The more of these points are accumulated, the worse the effects. The details of such effects are discussed in *Disabilities*.

Negative Boosters can be Game, Team, Character or Item Boosters.

Because more Negative Booster Points means more trouble, these need not have a fixed maximum. If one does, no more Boosts can be had when that maximum is reached, and the points will have to be worn off or repaired away or otherwise gotten rid of to allow more Boosts.

Another version is one that has an impact on the character that is not quite a Disability as described below, but is nonetheless detrimental. The best example is that the equivalent of spending a Booster Point instead results in a point of damage, as explained in the combat system. Depending on the game world, rules used and how characters are built, this can be reproduced with other unpleasant effects, one Booster Point resulting in one point of some other nastiness.

Risky Boosters

Another way that a Booster can cause trouble is if there is an inherent risk of something going wrong by using it. While *Disabilities*, below, will describe some examples of this, one fairly simple one is if the actual number of Booster Points is not known *by the players*. The Booster will work as advertised until there are no more points left. Not knowing when that is, the players are likely to try and spend a point every now and then, not knowing that they have none yet. That is when the risk strikes them: Trying to spend a Booster Point when there are none left results in disaster!

The details of this are entirely up to the design of the Booster. Because the disastrous effect is going to reveal that there are no points left, it can be fairly cruel; they will only experience it rarely, because they will not attempt to spend more points afterwards, not until there is a refill (the amount of which will probably also be unknown to the players!).

Risky Boosters should usually be assigned by fiat to the team, characters or item. Paying for it will be very complex or very unsatisfying, considering how much worry it can include.

Disabilities

What a character can overcome and what a character can achieve is based largely on that character's Abilities. But what the character is truly like depends just as much, if not even more, on problems that the character has. In GEARS, these problems are known as *Disabilities*.

A Disability is something about the character that the player, and in a sense, the character, has no control over. Phobias, manias, deep-seated beliefs and many other things can drive us to act against our own best interests, overpowering or jumping us and ruining our capacity for rational thinking or acting. It need not be overly dramatic, but a Disability takes some influence over the character away from the player.

In game terms, the typical Disability is pretty much an Ability in reverse. Firstly, it does not cost 1 CCP per level, the player actually *earns* 1 CCP per level. So if the character is given a Disability at level 7, the player gets 7 more CCP to spend on other things!

Second, the player does not choose when to roll for a Disability, the Narrator does. Disability checks are brought about by situations the character gets into, and when such a situation arrives, the Narrator can require a check be made.

Third, when rolling, the player should hope to roll as few good dice as possible, because the more 'good' dice are rolled, the worse the affliction hits, no matter what it is.

Fourth, a 'bonus' to a Disability is called an 'increase', and it makes the results of the Disability *worse*. A 'penalty', on the other hand, is 'relief', and it reduces the power of the Disability.

And finally, Disabilities do not use Difficulty! When something triggers a Disability, apply any increase and relief and roll the resulting number of dice (unless it goes to 0 or less; in that case, nothing really happens). The number of 'good' dice rolled describe how bad the character's reaction is (and if it is *rolled* 0, then nothing happens).

So in many ways, Disabilities operate the exact opposite of Abilities.

Defining a Disability

There are two integral parts of a Disability: The trigger and the reaction. The trigger is something that can be encountered, or that can happen. It could be cats, loud noises, seeing violence, being on holy ground, or any other experience. It should not be exceedingly rare, like contact with radioactive waste, but rather be something that there is a plausible chance the characters could run into during an adventure. It *can* be a bit unusual, like running into criminals or having to leave the city where you work and live, because those situations can simply be made a little more common in adventures. But radioactive waste is not going to become a frequent encounter, not without becoming ridiculous at the same time.

The other part, the reaction, is how the trigger affects the character. Sneezing, dizziness, fits of anger, cold fear, confusing flashbacks and more are all options. The severity of the reaction need not be defined in the Disability description; severity is a result of how many 'good' dice are rolled on a check, so a severe Disability is actually just one that the character has at a high level! For example, having *Pyrophobia* (fear of fire) at 5 will lead to occasional discomforts and perhaps the character refusing to go somewhere because of fire. This can be troublesome and embarrassing, or attract attention at very inopportune moments, but it is not lethal. On an unlucky roll for *Pyrophobia*[15], however, the character might attack people, or himself, or destroy valuable or even dangerous equipment to get rid of fire!

The trigger and reaction together make the Disability. Cats and sneezing is an allergy to cats. Dizzying lights and sounds coupled with seizures is epilepsy. Foreigners and anger is racism. People and fear is either a phobia, or perhaps paranoia, depending on the type of fear. At the Narrator's permission, a few exceptions to a Disability's trigger can be made to allow the game to work; the paranoia does not extend severely to fellow characters and close contacts, for example, or a hatred of medicine does not mean the character will choose death over an antidote. In such cases, minor effects, like complaining heavily and acting out afterwards, may be acceptable substitutes. But for the most part, the triggers and reactions are what they are!

Triggers

There are literally *millions* of options for a Disability trigger! Anything and everything can be a trigger, especially if severe mental problems or supernatural afflictions are part of the equation: Seizures from sunlight, bursts of anger caused by statues ("so you won't even acknowledge me?! I know you hear me, damn you!"), a fear of windows, etc., they are all possible, even if they seem silly; it all depends on the kind of game being played. The Narrator can, at any time, disallow a certain Disability, either because it seems to abuse the rules, or because it simply goes against the kind of game being played (like being fanatically anti-violence in a brutal action game), or because it just seems inappropriate somehow (like the slightly silly examples would in a very serious, non-mental illness game).

The following are just some chosen trigger possibilities to get things started. They are sorted into rough categories, but each one is a separate trigger.

Sensory: Loud noises, high-pitch noises, flashing lights/colors, pungent smells, smoke, low temperatures, high temperatures, low humidity, high humidity, body odors, perfumes, smell of certain surroundings (farm, or factory, for example), sudden/unwanted touches or pokes, tremors/shaking, anything salty, anything sweet, anything spicy, natural sunlight, darkness (natural or otherwise), strange whispers/hushed voices.

Substances/materials: Water, treated wood, natural wood, plastics, polyester, latex (it's in rubber boots and raincoats, too), leather, pollen/dust, dirt, sand, meat, dairy products, (harmless) chemicals.

Surroundings or situations: Open spaces, closed spaces, crowded areas, hectic areas, wooded areas, tight discipline (incl. both stringent office rules, and martial law), forced inactivity, being yelled at/scolded, lack of instructions, failure, public speaking/performance, lying (doing it), danger, being in a rush, confused situations, driving, flying, sailing, streams/running water, the ocean, heights, fast movement (faster than running).

Things: Cars, large machines, electronic gadgets, computers, regular animals, small animals (rodents, chihuahuas, etc.), bugs, snakes, large animals (tiger or bigger), windows/doors, statues (any size), plants (any size), dolls, weapons, cameras (being monitored, not operating), exposed moving parts, certain buildings (farm, or factory, or mall).

Affiliations: Other races (typically by skin color), foreigners, other species, (other) religions, (other) political ideologies, (other) corporate brands, general professions, other sexualities, other age groups, other tastes, other lifestyles (vegans, nudists, etc.), 'strangers' (unfamiliar people), other gender, same gender.

Behaviors: Drunk people, 'true believers' (religious), 'true believers' (political), loud people, liars, gossip, fandom (fiction), fandom (corporate brand), angry people, needy people, talking, silence.

Activities: Physical work, mental work, competition, gambling, arguing, violence/combat, talking/chatting, rituals (religious/occult), ritual (secular/professional), routine, unfamiliar activities.

Reactions

Whatever the trigger, there are several ways it can influence the character in very inconvenient ways. The following are a few standard ones, but other ones can be created.

Fear is the basic component of phobias, paranoia, or even various kinds of schizophrenia. The typical way fear works is by making the character want to get away from the trigger, out of its reach, or somehow get the *trigger* to go away. If people are scared enough, they can run into traffic or attack people to escape the trigger. Insane fears can make them remove protective clothing in very bad situations! There is very little rationality in fear, and logic does not make it go away. Still, fears with a paranoid background can make the character try to explain it with theories of varying levels of coherence, up to the point of actually making sense to those that *don't* fear the trigger. Disproving one theory will typically make another surface, perhaps moving a few details about the fear, but not lessen it and not make it go away. Serious (high-level) fears can even make the victim see the trigger where it is not, and perhaps never were; arachnophobia can make people fearful of places where spiders *might* be hiding, for example.

Anger or hatred will make people do stupid things. The character might backtalk, insult, even physically attack whoever the trigger represents. This can take the form of racism, sexism or other bigotry, but it can just as well be a feeling of betrayal towards a former employer, or fanatic ideals. Some hatreds can be outright bizarre, based on tragic events or stories believed, like a hatred of bureaucrats, government administrators, (peaceful) military or the like. Simple taste can even be the influence, making someone despise inner cities or celebrities. And hatred can even be against inanimate things, like despising the smell of fruits enough to want to destroy them, or at least get away from them. And hatred of animals is actually fairly common.

Sorrow, perhaps even melancholy, can cause someone to just shut down, or even *break* down, making them completely useless. This reaction is usually caused by the trigger reminding the character of someone or something, like a lost love, past failures, or even just some extremely sad knowledge or stories heard (though that would require a somewhat emotional person, possibly even an unstable one). An attack of melancholy can occur at very inopportune moments, causing the character to drift away when others are in peril, or when the character has something to do that thus might not get done, or done in time. Severe melancholy can thus cost lives, while lesser versions will have a greater chance of letting the character snap out of it when something important is happening, or just when someone shakes them.

Cravings have a slight twist, in that they can occur in two ways: When the character notices the trigger and starts wanting it (to have it, to consume it, to fiddle with it, or whatever the exact details are), *or* when the character has gone without it too long. The latter is common for addicts, while the former is more the realm of greed and gluttony, or their ilk. The two can interweave, however, causing a crack addict to get urges both when being without a fix for too long, and when walking through a crack den or the police storage area for seized narcotics. Mental cravings can allow anything, from needing thrills and action ('adrenalin junkie') to getting twitchy without some trinket or thing to fiddle with (a variant of the 'safety blanket'). Light cravings usually cause discomfort and turn the character annoying and distracted, while severe ones can make him or her violently try to get to the trigger, whatever it is. Sometimes, a craving blurs logic, and the

character will try to force people to hand it over even if they do not have it, or even understand what it is. At that point, a craving becomes delusional, and the character might believe that people are deliberately hiding the craved trigger.

Compulsions are not that far from cravings, but are about actions, not about material things. Classic compulsions are linked to mental illnesses or powerful habits, from locking doors multiple times to washing hands in times of stress, or to manic behavior like pyromania or kleptomania. In practical game terms, they function like cravings, in that a character might get urges about the compulsion if exposed to something or if unable to give into the compulsion for some time. Compulsions triggered directly by exposure to the trigger include things like gambling, alcoholism, even talking (compulsive chatterboxes or gossipmongers, for example). Compulsions triggered by abstinence can include washing (feeling increasingly dirty or tainted and needing to wash several times a day), walking (essentially, severe restlessness), or even talking (triggered by having been silent for long, rather than being exposed to people talking). If the boundaries between a compulsion and a craving seems blurry, it does not really matter; either one can be picked as explanation, even if the results are the same. Some compulsions are *indirectly* triggered, however; the cause and effect are not closely linked! This includes a compulsion to change clothes after being stressed or scared, or having a need to stay outside for a long time after being inside a restraining vehicle (a car, or regular flight seating). These are typically mental conditions, but many (severe or not) are found in otherwise quite rational people.

Dizziness can take the form of extreme fatigue, physical discomfort, or a few other ways. In most cases, it will be triggered as usual, by being exposed to something that causes the dizziness. An affliction like narcolepsy, which involves falling asleep at strange moments, can be built this way, though the trigger has to be a bit more precise (stress, or inactivity, are possible triggers). But like cravings and compulsions, there are cases where it is the extended *lack* of the trigger that causes problems; lack of sleep is a natural cause and not usually applicable for a Disability (because it is actually included in the Human Template), but some people get dizzy and confused if they do not get a frequent dose of sugar, or even a particular medication.

Irritation reactions take many forms, some of the best known being rashes or trouble breathing, both of which can be associated with strong allergies. Some psychological problems also cause people to get itchy if they are exposed to something they have a subconscious problem with, like people yelling or being in something that moves fast (car, jet, highspeed elevator, etc.). Such reactions can be troublesome for the same reasons as many above, in that the character begins to behave irrationally or even aggressively (physical irritation quickly becomes mental irritation), and may try, possibly violently, to get away from the trigger or get it to stop, as per fear-reactions. But irritation can also cause people to do harm to themselves, scratching until it bleeds or sneezing and coughing violently. In dire cases, breathing problems can even become dangerous all on their own, and rashes may get so bad they bleed or cause serious pain.

Illness might sound like a reaction that only exists in dangerous forms, but nausea, stomach trouble and other things can occur at a level more annoying than actually dangerous. Such illnesses will usually make it hard for the character to do things, especially acting unaffected. Of course, high Severity goes from that to projectile vomiting (or throwing up blood!) and situations that are even nastier. This can cause bad reactions from bystanders and the like, it makes hard to remain discreet, and it can ruin clothes or even other items. Seizures can do the same. Of course, a bad reaction of this kind can require hospitalization or some equivalent, and like cravings, illness may come from the lack of something, most likely prescribed medication. Extremely severe illness reactions can cause heart attacks and strokes, but those should usually be avoided in a character, since sudden death from such things can be very detrimental to enjoying the game!

Susceptibility is a bit more restrictive a reaction, in terms of possible triggers. Basically, anything harmful can be *more* harmful to some people. This includes poisons (which in turn includes drugs and alcohol!), injuries (thin skin, or even hemophilia), physical strain, and so on. In essence, anything that the *Endurance* Talent Ability is involved in can be more harmful than usual. The reaction will generally come in the form of adding the Severity of a check to whatever the harm is. An alternate version, which borders on illness, is to have something usually not harmful act as if it is; vampires may take damage from sunlight or garlic vapors, for example! This 'alternate susceptibility' is most appropriate to non-humans (and typically supernatural or alien ones, at that!), or to very weak humans, often those with dangerous genetic diseases.

Severity

As mentioned, the Severity of a Disability is the amount of 'good' dice rolled whenever a check is made: If the trigger is encountered (or absent for long enough, in some cases; see above), a number of dice equal to the level of the Disability are rolled, and any that turn up 4 or more count for Severity.

The Severity describes how bad a reaction of the kind described in the Disability is; how panicked a claustrophobe gets in tight quarters, how angry a racist gets at seeing foreigners, etc., and how horrible the consequences get. The player should be given some leeway in describing the details of the reaction, but it *has* to amount to what the Severity describes, or the Narrator is free to add to the reaction! The following list describes what various numbers of 'good' dice say about a Disability reaction.

- 1-3: Mild annoyance. The character shows signs of being uncomfortable, which anyone looking will notice, but not

necessarily understand. Apply a penalty equal to the Severity to any Ability used, because the character is distracted by the trigger, or thoughts about the trigger.

- 4-6: Serious annoyance. As above (including the penalty), but the character will physically react, trying to get away or 'walk it off' or the like, or might fixate on things that could solve the problem. If solving the problem would be easy but cause unwanted attention, a *Restraint* check (Difficulty equals Severity) must be made not to try. This could include grabbing something and throwing it at an animal trigger, or simply kicking very visibly at something to get the trigger away.

- 7-9: Strong reaction. The character will be obsessed about the trigger, wanting to get away, succumb to desires, act out, etc. Someone might snap him or her out of it (if an Ability is involved, use Severity as Difficulty), or a situation change like realizing a danger or actually getting some distance to the trigger might do the trick (check *Restraint* against a Difficulty equal to Severity, with a bonus for obvious dangers to the character or someone the character cares the slightest about).

- 10-12: Overpowering reaction. The character becomes completely unaware of anything but the trigger, and will obsess about it to the point of walking obliviously into traffic or failing to notice anybody. Anyone blocking the way will be moved aside, possibly with violence. If possible, the character will *attack* the trigger, even if it is irrational or dangerous. Physical injury to the character, very loud noises or other extreme sensory input (scolding heat, sudden drenching, etc.) allows the character a *Restraint* check against a Difficulty equal to Severity to snap out. Someone with *Psychology* can try to talk the character out of it safely, too, at the same Difficulty; success allows the aforementioned *Restraint* check, but without hurting anyone. One attempt can be made by any person once per minute, as long as the character is available (if the character cannot hear, talking is useless, for example). If the reaction is physical, use *Medicine* instead (*First Aid* will, at most, allow someone to postpone the reaction, by 10 minutes times amount of success, while other solutions are sought!).

- 13-15: Dangerous reaction. As above, but even a successful *Restraint* check will only reduce the Severity by its amount of success, and the character will react violently or self-destructively at failed attempts! A successful attempt will make whatever allowed it the target of the new and reduced Severity; bringing it down to 4-6 with *Psychology* will make the person using that Ability the victim of that 'serious annoyance', with whatever that entails! If the cause for the *Restraint* check cannot be directly targeted (a sudden rainfall on the character, for example), the character might start loudly cursing it and acting irrationally towards it. This includes shouting and striking out at random crowds. If at all possible, the character will get violent towards the trigger.

- 16+: Harmful reaction. The character has snapped, completely, and will attack anything, including him or herself, if there is any imaginable (*not necessarily logical, or even rational; it could be delusional*) way it will solve the problem! The safety of the character or anyone else is ignored completely. If the reaction is physical, it will endanger the character's life, and/or cause the character to act self-endangering to do something about it! As with a dangerous reaction, using professional training can help, but only by reducing the Severity. In the case of harmful reactions, that can easily mean the difference between life and death, however!

Disability Specifics

Like Abilities, Disabilities have Specifics. The categories are universal for *all* Disabilities, however: Trigger subtype, circumstances, and solutions. The presence of any Specific will put an increase on the number of dice rolled to check the severity of the reaction.

The trigger subtype is a particular, specific version of the trigger. 'Furry animals' is a good trigger for allergies or phobias, but while all furry animals trigger the Disability, cats may be worse than the rest. With a severe Disability, more subtypes can be brought into the mix; *Furry animals - Sneezing/choking* (or just *Fur Allergy*) at 8 might include the Specifics *cats[6]* and *rodents[2]*. So all furry animals can start the character sneezing and fighting for breath, but hamsters are a bit worse than the rest, and cats can be an outright health risk! Down the same vein, a fear of foreigners might be especially bad with one visual race (African, European, Middle-Eastern, Asian, or something in that line) or expressed nationality or sympathy for that nationality (the French, the Chinese, the Americans, etc.). Hating industry/Big Business might be worse with certain brands or acts (deforestation, perhaps, or child labor), and so on.

Circumstances are the situations characters may find themselves in, both physically, socially and mentally. A fear of spiders often gets worse in dark, dank basements, and anyone with an anger in them might be practically explosive at a rally, or perhaps more when meeting representatives in the flesh. Being drunk is a circumstance, but it should not be allowed unless the character actually drinks, and the same goes for things like 'not face-to-face' (the character is extremely nasty on the phone, online or when writing flyers and the like, which should only be allowed if the character actually does those things) or 'when abroad' (the character should be the traveling kind).

Finally, solutions are ways that the character prefers to handle a bad reaction, and they will quite often be entirely compulsive. Someone who hates loudmouths might resolve to violence, harassing authorities or bouncers about doing

something, or even use elaborate trickery to make the trigger look stupid. If a solution is possible, the Specific is added to the Disability before making the check, as described. If multiple solutions taken as Specifics appear possible, all are added, but the greatest one will be the primary attempt; others will be used if that attempt is thwarted. So a character who has a fear of birds ('ornitophobia') at 7 and the solution Specifics *Run away*[2] and *Kill them*[5] will be running away from birds a lot, but if there is the option of killing the birds, the phobic violence will be much harder to resist. A character who already has anger management issues might be a fitting vessel for other aggressive solutions!

A Specific is shared with any other Disability of the same or highly similar reaction; someone with *Technophobia*[5] (fear of machines) and the circumstance Specific *Old buildings*[3] will be adding that Specific to any other fear-reaction/phobia, as well. And someone who likes to solve one anger Disability by throwing a public tantrum will also have a tendency for that solution Specific on other anger issues.

Disability Boosts

One interesting combination is Boosters that are based on Disabilities. These allow very dramatic characters, and very dramatic situations. Or they can allow some true strangeness to take place!

The mechanics of it work this way: A character can take a Disability, then spend points (not necessarily the same amount as what was earned from the Disability, though) on a Booster allowed. Instead of finding a way that Booster Points can be gathered, the Disability is what provides them! A Disability check automatically produces Booster Points equal to its Severity, which the character can spend in dealing with the situation. This can produce classic cases of characters breaking speed records when faced with something they fear, or the scrawny guy who becomes a brutal fighter when someone hurts a child! The Booster Points *must* be used for something that attempts to solve whatever triggers the Disability, though; the scrawny guy wants to stop the hurting of a child, and that might not involve attacking the Goblin King. Of course, if it means one of his henchmen end up as goo on the wall, it is still a head start.

This can be used in ways that truly bring out a Disability, for better or worse. Someone who despises the military (an anger Disability) could get a sudden rush of adrenalin-powered strength and precision when breaking through a military barrier or gunning down an attacking unit. Someone who feels the same about people of other religions would match the idea of an empowered champion of a faith, storming into battle. Causes, values, obsessions and the like can be combined with Boosters in surprising ways to produce characters that make an impact!

Booster Disabilities

The opposite effect has already been mentioned briefly, under Negative Boosters. These are when a Booster does not burn off Booster Points, but instead produce or increase a Disability. Basically, 1 Booster 'Point' applied means 1 level for a given Disability. The character need not have that Disability already, and some that would not usually be fitting can fit the bill nicely. For example, a certain Booster may grant bonuses to fighting Abilities. However, each Booster 'Point' so spent builds up as a post-combat illness Disability (trigger: Combat ends. Reaction: Puking). The Booster is typically acquired as a maximum amount of 'points' spent before the Disability takes effect, and overdoing it might trigger the Disability prematurely!!

The effects of such a Disability will re-erupt, should the character spend even a single of those Booster 'Points' before the Disability has had time or treatment to disappear. What makes the effect 'cool off' will depend on the details of it, but just because the character got through one check does not mean the slate is clean again; a post-combat illness Disability, for example, does not drop back to 0 just because the check was succeeded, or even if it was failed! How long it takes, or *what*, precisely, it takes for the Disability to start dropping towards 0, depends on the design of it.

A Booster Disability like this is essentially free; the Booster and Disability will need to be purchased at the same level, negating each other in cost. However, the Disability aspect can be acquired separately, as well, working as an increase to the Disability and being triggered even if there has been no Booster 'Points' spent! Thus, the post-combat illness could be at 6 constantly (earning the player an extra 6 CCP to spend), but the Booster adds to it. In other words, the character gets ill after combat a lot, but if that extra effort is pushed, it gets *much* worse.

An alternate version of the Booster Disability is a Disability that triggers when Booster Points are spent normally. The advantage is that the Booster and Disability need not be acquired at the same levels (players should not generally be allowed to give their characters highly lucrative/high-level Disabilities for something that costs less, or some will abuse it for 'free' CCP, taking a large Disability and just never really using the Booster). Also, it does not really matter how much the Booster is used, the Disability does not get any worse.

Chained Disabilities

One of the more worrying things about personalities seen in the real world is how people can go into a self-sustaining loop of destructive emotions. In such cases, one problem kicks in and starts setting other things off. In game terms, this is a case of *Chained Disabilities*.

When designed into a character, these are created by having the trigger of one or more 'secondary' Disabilities be that another 'primary' Disability is triggered. Or put the other way around, a side-reaction for the primary Disability is that the secondary ones may trigger. For example, a character has a fear of strangers, a classical version of paranoia. If the Disability kicks in, the character will try to get away from any strangers triggering it, probably accusing them (to their face or, more likely, to the character's companions) of being out to hurt the character. But this could be part of a greater psychosis, and once that primary Disability kicks in, the player has to begin checking which of the secondary Disabilities also kick in; that the paranoia has started triggers the rest! So once the fear of mysterious strangers begins to affect the character, checks are made for a hatred of uniformed people ("they work for the government, they're the ones behind it all, dammit!") and a craving for radio equipment ("I have to listen for them, I have to hear if they are broadcasting my position!"). Most Chained Disabilities are rooted in traumas or similar mental illnesses, but exotic explanations, or very complex, but quite ordinary, problems can also be structured in this way.

An important aspect of Chained Disabilities is that once the primary fails, the Severity is noted. It still does what that Severity would do in any case, but in addition to that, it is an *increase* to every secondary Disability attached! So if the paranoia check results in a Severity of 4, *both* the hatred of uniforms and the need for radio equipment have an increase of +4 on them! Having a bad reaction to the primary trigger can send someone completely off the rails because of this.

Secondary Disabilities in this can never be at greater level than the primary, and the player should not be allowed to attach more than one secondary Disability per full 5 levels of the primary. Because the Severity-based increase is a fairly powerful effect, the need to avoid abuse is not as great as it could have been, and a secondary Disability can actually be the primary in a new 'sub-Chained Disability', and so on; *its* secondary Disabilities can then be no greater than *it* is, etc. So the poor character above might have another Disability attached to, say, the hatred of uniforms: Physical illness! A really bad day could involve meeting a group of strangers, and the paranoia kicks in, with a Severity of 4. As soon as the paranoia really starts to take effect (a minute or so after the check), a check on the *Hates Uniforms* Disability is made, at +4 from the Severity. Not only does the hatred kick in, but thanks to the +4 increase, it gets a Severity of 9! The character starts getting not just paranoid but kind of tense, and the second he or she spots a uniformed person, things go from bad to worse. In the middle of screaming hysterically at some unfortunate metermaid, the check for the physical illness is made, at +9 for the hatred Severity! The character's lifelong mental troubles has produced an ulcer, and with the resulting Severity of 8 (had it not been for the increase from the whole chain of Disabilities, that check would actually not have made that Disability kick in!), the character, still trying to scream at the metermaid, starts getting bad stomach pains. If someone does not subdue the character, it will not be long before the scene becomes a mixture of strained yelling and vomiting. And if the need for radios kicked in, as well (as before, it had the +4 increase from the Severity of the original paranoia), the enraged, puking character might dart off to start robbing an electronic store... Multiple Chained Disabilities can get extremely nasty.

Delayed Disabilities

Chained Disabilities work by one erupting Disability triggering another in a growing chain reaction. A variant on this concept uses a very bad variation on Booster Points to substitute sudden insanity with a slowly rising instability. Basically, events that occur will build up Trigger Points, until the character's limit is reached. Then, the Delayed Disability is triggered, and checks begin to get rolled, with an increase equal to how far the limit has been exceeded.

An example: Murdoch has a drinking problem (a craving Disability). He has it somewhat under control, but whenever people get in his face, the player has to roll a check against Restraint, with the Difficulty depicting how annoying these people actually are (more annoying, greater Difficulty). A failure results in a number of Trigger Points being added, equal to the amount of failure. The failure in itself does nothing; Murdoch just gets annoyed. But Murdoch has a Trigger Limit, acquired by the player as an Ability, and once that number of Trigger Points have been accumulated, checks are made for triggering Murdoch's drinking problem, with any amount of Trigger Points exceeding the Trigger Limit added as an increase. So even if the Disability does not erupt, it just means Trigger Points keep accumulating, setting Murdoch up for an even worse case of alcohol cravings next time!

The player should be allowed to describe a way for the character to get some release. This will be an act that would usually be considered a Disability in itself, with two exceptions: The player decides when it is acted upon, and no CCP are earned from it! For example, Murdoch might shout angrily at people or shoplift to take his mind off how he hates people treating him badly. When the character indulges this method of release, a Restraint check is made, with a Difficulty equal to the amount of Trigger Points currently accumulated. For especially spectacular attempts at release (stealing a car instead of just shoplifting groceries, for example), the Narrator should consider handing the player a bonus to Restraint for the check! A success reduces the amount of Trigger Points by the amount of success, a failure does nothing.

In strict CCP terms, this kind of Disability is worth points only if the Trigger Limit is lower than the Disability level. This still has the benefit of providing some added control, but it makes the Delayed Disability neither better nor worse than a regular Disability paying off the same total amount of CCP (i.e. the value of the Disability minus the cost of the Trigger Limit). In essence, a Delayed Disability is a problem constantly hanging over the character's head, constantly getting

worse, but which the character (under the control of the player) has acquired a measure of control over.

?Relations

A Relation is another character, who is somehow connected to the one being created; it might be a friend, contact, enemy, boss, or even a child. In some cases, it is something *built* like a character, but not a character in a usual way; an animal companion, a guardian angel, a haunting ghost, etc. Whatever the case, something built like a character, with Abilities and the like, can be attached to another character as a Relation.

Base Value

At the root of a Relation is the amount of Character Creation Points that the Relation is built on; having an enemy or friend built from 20 CCP is very different from having one built from 150 CCP, all other things being equal.

The base value of the Relation is 1 per 10 CCP that go into the character. So the friend or enemy Relation that is a 20 CCP character has a base value of 2, while the one built with 150 CCP has a base value of 15. If the Relation is a positive addition to the character, the base value is what it costs to have the Relation at all; if a player states that his character Ramsey has a good friend, Benny, who will be built as another 150 CCP character that can help the first character, the player has to pay 15 CCP from Ramsey's available points to make it so. On the other hand, if the Relation is negative, such as an enemy, Ramsey's player *gets* those 15 CCP, instead, just as if it was a Disability.

The Narrator should make sure that the points used to build the Relation are not abused somehow. For an enemy, that could be by investing them in a lot of completely irrelevant Abilities, which can turn even a 400 CCP character into a useless loser. Since that defeats the entire purpose of the Relation being an 'enemy', that should not be allowed; a few 'useless' Abilities for flavor *may* be acceptable, but even then, the Narrator should not allow more than 10% of them to be used that way, and only if it really does give flavor to the Relation and makes the game more interesting! For positive Relations, it is much like it as for a player's own character: Do not allow abusive Disabilities, such as ones that will not affect play or might even have a positive effect! A friend who supplies information and resources but never shows up in person should not be allowed to have Disabilities that will never enter the game because of that. In short, Relations should not be allowed to have Abilities or Disabilities that are irrelevant to the game *and* thus become a free source of Character Creation Points!

Base Value does not have Specifics; it solely represents invested points.

Loyalty

The measure of how far a Relation will go for the character is, as a general term, called Loyalty. A low Loyalty means a Relation that will leave the character hanging the instant there is any real risk on the horizon, and even before that will not care enough to actually show up and make an effort. High Loyalty Relations are the ones who will step up, in person if needed, to help the character out, even when facing bodily harm or other dire repercussions.

When anything is really demanded of the Relation, anything that will require a sacrifice of time, an effort, a risk or the like, a check is made for Loyalty, using the amount of time/effort/risk as the Difficulty. The following should help giving an idea of what Difficulty might be appropriate for a Loyalty check:

- 1-3: Minor annoyance. The Relation is asked to do something that takes a little time but involves no real risk.
- 4-6: Annoyance. The Relation is asked to do something that might involve a drive or spending a few hours, or something that might simply be tedious in some way, like dealing with frustrating people. There may be some indignation involved, but nothing that lasts any longer than the favor done.
- 7-9: Actual problems. The Relation is asked to do something that is actually a notable inconvenience in his or her life, either because it means taking some time out of the schedule, or because the actual favor is seriously problematic. It might get the Relation in trouble with some people, to the point of getting hurt (but no risk of death or serious maiming), or having a social or financial aftermath too small to wreck the Relation, but big enough to require some future work to patch up.
- 10-12: Some Risk. The Relation has a good chance of at least minor injuries or social or financial backlash, and a risk of worse. Death or dismemberment is unlikely, unless things get out of control.
- 13-15: Real Risk. The Relation is walking into trouble. The proper training or luck can get him/her out of relatively unharmed, but injury, loss or long-term consequences are very possible! Either the Relation is walking into danger with the character, or the Relation is putting reputation, finances or friendships on the line.
- 16+: Significant Risk. The Relation is putting a lot on the line, quite possibly walking into significant danger or risking social/financial calamity. Odds are low to get out without at least some bad scraps and needing some time and help to recover.

A failure on the Loyalty check does not have to mean the Relation just walks out; trying to avoid the risks not wanted, or just plainly refusing and offering alternate suggestions like an is just as good. If pressed or ordered to do something, without opportunity for discussion, however, a failure means the Relation just does not do it.

Loyalty, like an Ability, has Specifics. The Specifics for Loyalty are the kind of things that may be requested of a Relation, usually the more challenging requests: To offer up shady information, to partake in combat, to risk jailtime, to risk losing cash, etc. The player and Narrator should determine appropriate requests usable as Specifics, unless a description of the Relation includes what might be asked for.

Alternate Loyalties

There are other ways than actual loyalty to motivate a Relation. The basic assumption is that a Relation built on Loyalty is one who respects the character or even has feeling for that character, enough so to want to help. This concept matches friends, good partners, even devoted colleagues or members of some social circle. But there are alternatives, and these can be used instead of Loyalty to achieve roughly the same. Hence, they are acquired equally; to get the effect of *Loyalty*[12], a character would need 12 levels of an alternate Loyalty.

Fear can make someone obedient, and this obedience can make that someone a Relation. If this is what motivates the Relation, odds are it will only be as obedient as it believes it needs to be, and the instance the character it is obedient to looks weak, the Relation might bolt or even take advantage of the situation. Of course, that requires that the Relation understands that the character is weak, which might not always be the case. *Appearing* in charge will be important with a Relation who is built on fear. The Relation will take risks mainly because disobedience seems a greater risk.

Hire is a substitute for Loyalty used when someone is doing something exclusively as a job. This need not be because the *character* is actually paying the Relation; someone might be hired by a common employer, someone who cares about the character (possibly even in secret!), someone who has something invested in the character succeeding, etc. If the character strays from what the Relation was hired to partake in, there is a good chance the Relation will refuse to cooperate, or even report back. The Relation will be there to do a job, and if things go in a completely different direction, that is equivalent to showing weakness to a Relation based on Fear, or letting down one based on Loyalty. Of course, a hired Relation can be swapped, should something go completely wrong (a loss to death or misuse might not resolve in such a quick replacement, of course!). If the character is actually the one who pays the salary, a Relation like this has a default cost equal to 1 CCP worth of Income (see *Money & Cash*, later) per 1 CCP of Hire as alternate Loyalty. There may be variations depending on the game world, but that is for the game world to describe.

Interest is the mark of the classic adventurer's sidekick, someone who is fascinated by what the character does and wants to be a part of it! As such, the Relation has no real emotional bond to the character, and would not take it so hard if shown lack of gratitude or disrespect (something that would be bad with a Relation based on Loyalty). Instead, the worst thing the character can do is become boring, or take up completely different interests that mean nothing to the Relation. A Relation like this should be built in a way that portrays this (possibly obsessive) interest in what the character deals with regularly.

It is possible for a Relation to be based on more than one of these alternate Loyalties, allowing the character to handle the Relation in different ways, perhaps even grooming the Relation to be a different kind of acquaintance; a student or fan enjoying the fascinating life the character lives (a Relation based on Interest) could start to feel Loyalty to the character, allowing the character to ask with help on things that would otherwise be 'boring'. Or a Relation based on Fear could become stronger, making it sensible to make Hire the reason for the arrangement, and the character using money instead of threats to get cooperation.

Other alternate Loyalties are possible, but they should only be allowed after careful discussion between the Narrator and the character's player, or if a trusted game world description includes them.

Unless they make no sense, Specifics are as per Loyalty.

Determination

If the Relation is a negative one, the most likely explanation is that it is pestering the character out of its own will, or at least its will to do someone else's bidding (who either wants to harass the character, or is doing it quite incidentally, as part of something it wants). What the Relation is willing to put itself through can be determined as per Loyalty: If the Relation is faced with a new/increased risk or challenge, a check is made according to the levels of risk described under Loyalty.

This is called the *Determination* of the Relation, and should be noted. It might stem from personal desire and will, or it could be the equivalent of any of the alternate Loyalties described; the stalker might be hired, or the constant assailant might fear what happens if he/she does not continue to attack (or continues to fail in attacking) the character.

The Specifics for Determination are as per Loyalty, but are what the Relation is willing to endure in order to be a problem for the character.

Trust

While Loyalty defines how much the character can expect from the Relation, *Trust* is a measure of how the Relation views the character. A Relation with high Trust will believe the character to treat it well and honestly, and to have the Relation's interests at heart. This is the kind of Relation that will lend the character money and equipment, and who will not suspect foul play when doing a favor. Even if there is clearly danger in the air, high Trust means the Relation will believe that the character has given it fair warning and preparation for what is about to happen.

Low Trust is the exact opposite. Low Trust Relations will not trust the character with anything of value, and will not do anything before checking that there is nothing hidden behind a favor, that something is not a worse idea than the character has claimed, and that everything is on the level. Such a Relation will not lend the character anything expensive; Loyalty can make the Relation willing to sacrifice some things, but without Trust, the Relation is going to have serious demands when doing so, to make sure it is not being abused.

The relationship between Loyalty and Trust allows for some interesting blends in a Relation. The typical corporate patron is not very loyal (he will not step in to save the character or risk anything serious) but very trusting (he fully expects that gear lent will be returned, and that the character is doing what is claimed). A powerful guild, however, may be very loyal, watching over members like a guardian angel and stepping in the way of fire if needed. But it will not take a member's word for anything, and there are dire penalties and procedures around anything the character would want to borrow, not to mention what the guild might be drawn into if the character is lying. Even with lesser Relations, the Loyalty/Trust issue can be influential: Low in both means someone who will do very little and be skeptical about any request. High Loyalty/low Trust is like the big brother who will come to your rescue, but does not trust you to handle anything or to be frank about why you are in trouble. Low Loyalty/high Trust could be the fickle but well-off friend who will run away at any sign of trouble, but will still let you borrow his expensive car and cool stuff to handle your trouble by yourself. And high in both is someone who will stand by you, believe you, and believe *in* you.

In essence, Loyalty versus Trust is someone willing to help when they take charge versus someone willing to hand you what you need to do it, but you will be doing it yourself. Fine-tuning the levels will allow the creation of a lot of interesting relationships.

Specifics for Trust are the kind of things that a Relation might have to entrust to the character, like cash, access to facilities, sensitive information, special gear, etc.

Availability

No matter how devoted a Relation might or might not be, there is still the matter of actually being able to get in contact with the character. That is where Availability comes in: The higher it is, the more easily accessible the Relation is. Or, more precisely, the easier it is to actually arrange for the Relation to offer the kind of assistance required. Factors include proximity, transport options, possible communications, and schedule, but is not exclusive for that. Especially in game worlds with exotic technologies, magic or the like, other things may enter the picture, like being frozen or an absent divinity.

Whenever there is a need to contact the Relation, a check on Availability for that Relation is made, against a Difficulty that is set by where the character requesting it is. Another is made if wanting to change mode of contact, like first talking on the phone and then asking to meet. The following are Difficulties that cover most such situations.

- 1-3: A central spot, close to the Relation's usual cruising ground, at a time the Relation is known to be fairly available.
- 4-6: In the vicinity of the Relation's frequent haunts, at a time the Relation would commonly be available.
- 7-9: Somewhere that standard transportation works well and there are ample options for communication or good reception, like a city, and not particularly far from somewhere the Relation might frequent, at a time that would seem to fit the Relation's schedule.
- 10-12: On the absolute edge of where the Relation might commonly travel, and with only basic transport options or shaky communication/reception, and at a possibly tricky time for the Relation.
- 13-15: Well outside the Relation's comfort zone, with barely rudimentary transport and communication options, and add a typically bad time for the Relation.
- 16+: Nowhere near where the Relation would travel, with practically no real communication options, and with no real transport options to speak of; the Relation or someone else will need to find a way to make the contact. And timing is pretty impractical.

If time and location are completely opposite each other, take the average of the two appropriate Difficulties. For example, being well outside the Relation's comfort zone (13-15) but at a time the Relation is known to be fairly available (1-3) would be a Difficulty of somewhere around 7-9.

Having an Availability of 20 denotes a Relation that is at the character's side at any required moment, unless something actively prevents it (kidnapping, getting separated, etc.).

Availability has Specifics based on how a Relation might be contacted, such as by phone, by letter, through a middleman, in person, or anything else that might fit the Relation and the genre (telepathy, carrier pidgeon, ritualistic symbolism, hidden messages in radio broadcasts, etc.).

Group

Sometimes, a Relation is not actually one particular person, but rather a group of people. When checking for Availability, a Relation with Group also makes a roll of as many dice as the level of Group. The result is how many people the character can get hold of in that particular call for assistance. If Availability succeeds, it will always be at least one person, and the amount of success on an Availability check is added to the Group roll, up to the maximum Group. For example, if an Availability check succeeds at an amount of success of 4, and a roll at *Group[6]* only yields a 1, the number of people that can help is 4+1, or 5 people. But it can never be more than the 6 that is the level for Group. Each Relation has its own Group level, and not all need have it; without Group, a Relation is just always 1 person (yes, that means that having *Group[1]* is basically one wasted CCP; only 2 or more levels make actual sense).

The drawback is that the point value of the Relation is spread equally across all the members of the Group, no matter how many come to help in a given situation; a Base Value of 150 CCP (at the cost of 15 CCP to the player's own character) and *Group[6]* means each member of the group is built with only 25 CCP. Adding Group to a Relation is highly advantageous, because it allows for a lot of people being on a case simultaneously, but it is not a free double-up on Relation CCP! Another advantage is that it only takes one Availability, Trust and Loyalty for the entire group if all the eggs are in one basket!

Note that all the members of the group need not be designed exactly alike, though they should have significant similarity to make sense as a group. Otherwise, they should be acquired as separate Relations. A unit of soldiers, all with their specialities but all still soldiers, is an example, as is a group of individually unique but still similar conspiracy geeks. Having them be somewhat similar also expedites their character creation; make one, and then simply assign differences.

Specifics for Group are the individual members of the group, but this Specific is used slightly different than usual: It is not added to the Group check described. Instead, if a particular member is requested, a check is made with the Specific plus members available in that attempt, against a Difficulty equal to the number of group members *not* available. If the check succeeds, that group member is available. A penalty of -1 is applied to the check for each member asked specifically for beyond that. So for a *Group[8]* where 3 members are available, asking for a particular member with a Specific of 4 means making a check of 4+3 against a Difficulty of 5 (members missing). If it succeeds, the member is part of those available. If it fails, the member is part of those *not* available.

Obligations

The reverse of a Relation is an *Obligation*, which actually means that the character is someone *else's* Relation. The character might be called upon to do favors and handle tasks at various times and of varying degrees of difficulty and risk. Like a Disability, the player gets an additional 1 CCP per level of anything taken in that Obligation.

An Obligation can be some responsibility the character has to an employer, put down on paper, or it could be something expected of the character by family, social circles, or a certain group. It could even be self-imposed, a responsibility to loved ones or a vow to protect a child or other individual depending on the character.

The two things that matter in an Obligation are the ones that correspond to Loyalty and Availability for a Relation. They both work like they are described above, but in reverse: Obligation Loyalty denotes what is expected *of the character*, while Obligation Availability is the kind of places and times *the character* is expected to be available at. A roll with Availability's number of dice is made at the start of every day, and the Obligation will rear its head in a situation that matches that Availability level described as a Difficulty earlier. If no such situation occurs during the day, the next best level of annoyance is used to call on the character (that goes whether the character is never in enough trouble to be in the situation, or if he/she is constantly in *too much* trouble to be in the rolled situation). When the Obligation finally catches up with the character, a roll is made with dice equal to the Obligation's Loyalty to describe the kind of task the character is given.

So if a character has an Obligation with *Loyalty[14]* and *Availability[5]*, a roll with 5 dice is made in the morning. If it turns up zero 'good' dice, no request is made for the character that day. But if it turns up, say, 4 good dice, that is what is stated as "In the vicinity of the Relation's frequent haunts, at a time the Relation would commonly be available". That could be a regular visit at the office or a call to the character's home, whichever fits the character's description best. When that time comes, a roll of 14 dice (Loyalty) is made. If *that* makes zero good dice, it's just a friendly visit. If it is 7, however, it fits the description "actual problems", as given under Loyalty. So the character will, at a time and place that is convenient to him, be asked to do something troublesome and somewhat time-consuming. Whenever possible and/or

dramatically opportune, there should be some relation to the ongoing adventure in the request, like handling something on the way to a destination or checking information that will be obtainable (perhaps with significant effort) during it.

Once the requested task has been taken care of, another roll for Availability is made, but at a 'penalty' equal to what has been rolled for all previous favors during the day. So in the example above, Availability was last rolled 4. Hence, once the task is carried out, a roll at -4 will be made. In this case, with *Availability*[5], that makes a roll of 1 die only. No good dice means no more favors asked that day. Otherwise, roll Loyalty, also at a 'penalty' equal to the total of what was rolled throughout the day. In the example, *Loyalty*[14] and a total of previous rolls (just one roll, really) of 7 means the next roll is made with 7 dice. This continues until an Availability roll ends up 0 good dice.

The first roll made in a day uses the totals rolled the day before as 'penalties', but after that, only the rolls made that day are counted. Thus, if the character has a lot of requests in one day, or just one really big one, odds are the next day will be less demanding.

Note that the Narrator can at any time use an Obligation request to influence the tasks of an adventure, like adding a twist (they have to get into a mansion, but that character has to steal something valuable, for example).

There should be severe consequences for not fulfilling a request made due to an Obligation. Something equalling a Disability Severity equal to the Loyalty plus Availability rolled is appropriate as a warning. Continued refusal to cooperate should make life even worse for the character. Alternately, the character could loose access to Abilities, Relations or the like equal to Availability and Loyalty rolled, and continued losses until compliance. Serious refusal should result in the Obligation and Abilities/Relations of the same total level plus 50% just evaporating, or Disabilities (perhaps a negative Relation?) of that same level popping up.

As with Relations, *Availability*[20] basically means the character is 'on the job' all the time. This does not have to mean no adventuring, it could simply be someone the character has along all the time and has to protect, or a constant side-gig that needs to be taken care of.

???Ranks & Reputations

[incl. social status]

???Growth, Rise, and Fall

[losing, gaining, improving Relations]

[Maintenance of Relations]

Special Powers

Most of what is described in these pages is centered around providing the kind of game possibilities that exist in the real world; using tools, interacting with people, knowing things, and so on. But there are plenty of game worlds in which that is not really enough, game worlds that require something more. They may have magic as a very important part of the world, or very strange creatures, who are possibly even the players' characters! Some have other strange things, like mutations or Science Gone Wrong, or even the influence of vastly superhuman gods. In short, such game worlds include people who can do things *not* included in the Ability List, or anywhere else in this text, for that matter.

In GEARS, such things are referred to as *Special Powers*. These are typically supernatural or in other ways things that cannot be accomplished in the real world, but they are nonetheless used in ways not unlike standard Abilities. Most are used in one action, or in actions that do not take longer than, say, making a good dinner or repairing a car. The difference is their effects.

The first step to creating a Special Power is to define what is wanted. This can be done through descriptions using no rules at all, with long or short descriptions depending on the desired outcome. Something simple could be "the character can hurl a ball of fire at others", "the character can fly", or even "the character can absorb others and hold them until he/she decides to let them out". The first is a very traditional magic spell, though it could also fit any of a string of other fictional uses (especially in superhero comics!). The second one is fairly simple in concept, and could fit many genres, in different ways. The third is pretty exotic, and could do with a little more explanation, but making it is not impossible at all!

The Approximated Ability

One fact that makes Special Powers a bit easier to handle is that a lot of them are more or less variants of perfectly normal Abilities. For example, having infra-red vision is basically just another variant of *Sight*, and the corresponding Ability can thus be a tweaked copy of that Ability. Being able to blend in with the background is mainly another kind of *Hide*, with the truly effective ones simply having very high levels of it.

A lot of Abilities can be produced by simply considering what they really are, and finding something that covers the concept from a different angle. The Human Template provides a good comparison to build them around, too, showing how

powerful (or not) human inborn Abilities are. If that infrared vision is poorer than human sight, the level can be set by comparison, for example.

Of course, basing an Ability around another does not make them identical, it simply provides a point of reference. Blending into the surroundings can be done almost anywhere, the body (or other means of the effect) shifting in color or turning transparent. But it cannot make use of hiding places; that's what *Hide* is for! And infrared vision cannot read text, at least, not unless it is written with something warm (blood, perhaps, before it cools) or cold.

Point Abilities

A lot of more complex rules in GEARS deal with 'points' of one kind or another. Abilities are used to add or remove points, and some of them allow the use of tools to assist it (those Abilities, however, also depend on the same tools to work at all!). Thus, both *Unarmed Fighting* and *Swordfighting* work by producing damage points, and *Swordfighting* requires a sword but also allows the boons it gives. On the other hand, *First Aid* reduces/removes damage points, and it can be used with almost no tools, or with tools like a medkit. But it can only be used at certain intervals, as opposed to the continual use of combat skills in a fight.

Of course, points themselves can be used in several, very straightforward ways. Boosters are an example already explained, but 'points' can also be bonuses or penalties (or increase/relief to a Disability) that can be accumulated or eroded by a Special Power.

A lot of Special Powers are concerned with adding or removing points like this (in fact, damage is a regular choice). Tearing down mental states, penetrating data systems, repairing damage to vehicles, all of it can be translated into point accountancy. Highly exotic Abilities can be produced by looking at points being moved around, and they can even be created without having a clear description first. An Ability might, for example, produce points in a character that work as a penalty to Abilities dealing with animals. Without having an in-game description, that is the creation of a power that makes someone unappealing or even threatening to beasts of all kinds! Some campaigns could have a lot of use for that power...

?New Component Abilities

There are some things that are not covered by any existing Abilities, nor deal with point systems. Or at least, there are things not covered *well*. For this purpose, a few new types of Abilities are needed.

Any New Component Ability listed here is only the rough, unapplied form; to make it a real Ability, certain details must be decided upon, details described along with the Ability. Thus, any of the New Component Abilities can be turned into a series of entirely different Abilities! Also, the wider application of the Ability might be bound by some rules and restrictions, which are described along with that. Make sure to read the description closely to fully understand its use, and especially (for Narrators) to avoid any abuse of them. It should be noted, though, that New Component Abilities, just like any other entirely new Approximated or Point Ability, are the domain of the Narrator; if players want to create one for their character specifically (typical in superhero games, high fantasy, science fantasy or silly games), the Narrator has the last say on what is acceptable.

The first New Component Ability is *Movement*. It allows access to a new medium to move through, or a new way to move through an old medium. Examples include air (flying), branches (brachiating, like monkeys), water (like fish), or even space or *fire*. The Ability deals with having access to the medium, not just being able to move in its presence; people can walk through fire well enough, or swim through water, and we push through air just by strolling down the street! The Ability makes it possible to move through or along the medium just like we move along solid ground. So someone taking it for fire would actually be able to travel with the flames, and spread wherever they went. The greater the Ability level, the more 'into' the medium the character can go; higher into the air, deeper into the ocean, into denser trees, farther away from any spaceship or the like, etc.

What it does not provide is *controlled* movement, though; take it for air, and all the character will really be able to do is bob around in the air like a soap bubble. All the things that we can usually do as part of moving on the ground are going to need equivalents in the new medium! Thus, being able to carry things requires a *Strength* Talent made for the medium (a character might be hauling loot along the ground, but only be able to carry small trinkets into the air!), speeding around requires an equivalent of *Running* for the medium, and so forth. Things like talking, finding places, or using certain tools may vary depending on the medium. Talking underwater, for example, is out, but someone flying certainly could talk. Places hidden in trees may only be possible to locate while brachiating, so the Ability is useless elsewhere. But firing a weapon from the air, from trees, or even from below water, will typically be possible, at most with a penalty (weird angles, concentration while dangling, or the resistance to fast movement underwater). It depends, and the circumstances should be described clearly in the Power that results from this New Component Ability.

One thing the Ability also does not do is *protect* the character from the medium. Anyone moving with fire should be fireproof, *and* have fireproof luggage only! And while *Shoot Gun* might work underwater, most guns fail after being

submerged for more than a minute, or less. And in space, there is vacuum, solar radiation, temperatures, and a few more nasty things to worry about!

Note also that some beings may have such a different *Movement* as their natural one, like humans have 'ground'; fish and aquatic races live in the water, unable to walk onto land, and space fantasy has plenty of examples of creatures that can live only in the vacuum of space! These have the *Movement Ability* *instead* of the 'ground' one. Adding *Ground Movement* would be unusual for them! See *Races & Species* for more detail on this matter.

[are there more NCAs???

A final New Component Ability is *Weird Effect*. This is a bit of a catch-all for the many strange powers that fill all kinds of fiction. It only really provides one weird, fundamental effect; the true strength of it comes from other weird Abilities that can now be used because the Weird Effect has been successfully used.

Many Weird Effects allow something to work besides the action that the character is otherwise doing; the character might use the Weird Effect and then continue to go about some daily business while the effect just lasts. How long it lasts, and how strong the effect is, is *not* part of this Ability, but depends on other Abilities, some of them possibly Talents, which must be acquired with the Weird Effect, and attached to it (and typically it alone). For example, a superhero might shoot out a glob of sticky fluid, allowing her to stick someone to a wall or hold two things together. The act of shooting out the glue is the Weird Effect (given an appropriate name, of course). If she wants to hit something small, distant or moving, she would need a special variant of *Shoot*, like '*Shoot Glue*'. How well the glue holds up against people struggling against it is a matter of its strength, hence she will need a *Glue Strength* Ability to really make use of it. If it has to last more than a few seconds, it will also need *Glue Endurance*. Once she has all that, however, she can quick-glue a criminal to the wall and just go on with her life while the police get there to get the poor soul out and to the jailhouse. And this Power can be built in different variants because of it, like the annoyingly sticky glue that is not a really big problem, but just keeps sticking for days, or the glob that will hold even a tank, though only for a few seconds. And the character using it might be a crack shot, or only spray it out carefully for traps or quick repairs!

It is important to reiterate that the Weird Effect does practically nothing in itself. The glue is just a funny trick, if it has no strength or endurance and cannot be shot accurately. All Weird Effect really does is produce the effect; making it worthwhile is really up to other Abilities!

Combined-Ability Powers

The main reason for using the term 'Special Powers' and not 'Special Abilities' is that some powers do not really work as single Abilities, or the true power is a combination of options with a small set of Abilities. The aforementioned fireball essentially consists of two steps: Creating a ball of fire, and hurling it at someone or something. Thus, it can be designed as two Abilities: *Create Fireball* and *Shoot Fireball*. The former defines how massive (i.e. damaging) the fireball gets, the latter how good the character is at hitting targets. This way, there is also room for variation, such as between those who fling tiny fireballs with lethal precision, and those who lob huge fireballs at easy targets only.

A good indicator of when a Special Power is best designed as Combined Abilities is the number of action plus physical (or metaphysical) components the action produces. The fireball has the actual ball of fire involved, and it has to hit someone. If the spell instead burned someone that the character was already touching, or charged a weapon that would have to be used against the target (with a completely separate Ability), it would only require creating the magical fire 'in' the person or weapon. Making this distinction requires some detail in the Special Power description, but with that, it becomes fairly easy.

Very complex powers may be constructed with several actual Abilities; essentially, there is no limit to the number of Abilities that may make up a Special Power! Thus, a fireball that can be bounced off of surfaces before hitting its target and then exploding could consist of a total of *four* Abilities: creating the ball, firing it, bouncing it (fail and it goes off target) and exploding it (to determine the spread). Making it stick like napalm could add a fifth Ability, used in a contest with characters trying to get it off their clothes or bodies!

Passive Powers

Not all Abilities are a matter of actually *doing* things, some are things that are done automatically. Most such things are defensive Abilities, which kick in when someone or something is trying to hurt or control the character. A classic example is natural armor, such as hide or scales. They cannot be used actively (at least, not without some very creative moves!), but if someone hits the character, they will automatically attempt to reduce the damage.

A Passive Ability works in a fairly simple way: Whenever it has a purpose to serve, it is rolled for. This typically requires nothing for the character (although interesting Combined-Ability Powers can be made with them, or Boosters!). For

example, if an attacker does 6 damage to a character with *Damage Reduction*[8], eight dice are rolled and the number of good dice subtracted from the damage done. If this is part of a longer fight, the 'safe dice' rule can be used to make the reduction automatically half the level of the Ability.

While having a Passive Power might sound like a perfect deal, the disadvantage of them is that they cannot be directed, nor can they (normally) be activated at will. And if they are to be used to the advantage of others, the character will *have* to actively do something; making your thick, damage-resistant hide protect your buddy means throwing yourself between him and whoever is out to hurt him! None of this means that Passive Powers cannot affect others, at all, though. After all, instead of having a thick hide to protect him or herself from damage, a character might have a Passive Power that *does* damage to whomever attacks. So the poor soul who would otherwise just see his sword do 4 damage less will end up doing full damage but *taking* 4 damage in the process, the instant the attack hits home! Such Abilities need to have very clear descriptions of when they do something, and it has to be in reaction to something done to (or, in *very* clearly explained and non-abusive cases, near) the character.

Boosting Powers

Another notion that is incorrect is that powers are specifically about Abilities. In fact, Boosters are just as useful tools in constructing a Special Power as Abilities. And in many cases, a Booster can entirely substitute an Ability as part of the power!

To return to the fireball example, most of the Abilities used to construct the version above can be exchanged for a Booster: One Booster used to create the fireball, an Ability to fire it at the target (as this is about targeting, it is hard to imagine a Booster taking that job. But not impossible!), a Booster providing bonus to an Ability to make it bounce, and perhaps another Booster (or the same) for the explosion. Dice are still rolled, but instead of using an Ability, the amount of Booster Points spent decides the number of dice. The napalm part can be a Booster, an Ability, or a combination. And which Boosters are the same and which are different can be decided freely when designing the Power.

While Boosters are clearly valid substitutes for Abilities when creating Special Powers, having a Power be *only* constructed from Boosters is something that should be considered deeply before doing it. Removing the idea of having a 'skill' (which most Abilities represent) can make a Power seem weird to some. If several Powers are fueled by the same Booster, it can also make character design break down, because a player can simply raise that Booster significantly and decide what it is used for whenever situations arrive; in essence, the Booster becomes many different Abilities in one, all raised together. For certain exotic Powers, of course, using entirely Boosters, as long as one Booster does not represent to many effects, can be an interesting facet of the game.

On a final note, Boosters used for Powers should generally not be the Style Points discussed elsewhere. The reason for this is that Style Points are a story gimmick, while Powers are something that is supposed to actually exist in the game world. If the two cross paths, there should be a very good, story-based reason. Maybe Karma can be tapped directly. Or maybe dark gods deliberately empower those who live a life of rampaging and ass-kicking. But unless a game world explanation can explain why playing in a certain manner (chosen by the player) can empower the *character*, crossing Style Points and Powers is usually not a good idea.

Sample Powers

The described methods allow any game world designer to produce extremely complex Special Powers; Ability combinations, Boosters and Point Abilities, many of them based on concepts from other Abilities, and even New Component Abilities, all open up a virtual cornucopia of options. The following are just some examples to get things going.

The *Fireball Spell* was mentioned earlier. The simplest version is the Combination Ability using one Point Ability to create the fireball and one Approximated Ability (based on *Shoot (something)*) to hurl it. So *Create Fireball* is rolled against a Difficulty based on how powerful (fire) magic is in the area (yes, that foundation of a magical Difficulty was just created. There is no broad foundation for magic included in the GEARS core rules, and the power of magic in various places seems a valid and interesting concept to use. Other magic systems may use other bases). For each good die rolled above the Difficulty, 1 'point' of fireball is created. The *Hurl Fireball* spell/Ability is used like any other *Shooting* Ability, including adding damage for a good shot. If the fireball hits, the 'size' or number of points it has is the number of damage dice rolled, adding for a good shot up to the full point/size/power of the fireball.

Let's take that as an example, just to make it more tangible: Certius the Firemage wants to hit a foe with a fireball. He has *Create Fireball*[17] and *Hurl Fireball*[14]. So the player rolls 14 dice against a Difficulty given as 5 (magic is not insanely hard to use there, but not insanely easy, either). He rolls 10 good dice. That's a 5-point fireball. He then proceeds to hurl it, with a Difficulty (calculated as per *Shooting* Abilities) of 8, a somewhat tough hit. He rolls 9 good dice, a success of just 1! The fireball hits, doing 5 dice of damage, which the player rolls 2 good dice for. The one die for the success of the hit rolls good, adding 1 to damage, for a total of 3, which is below the maximum 5 a 5-point fireball could get. In short, Certius fires of a minor spitball of scolding flame, and his target takes 3 points of damage. Not a big blow,

but enough for a magical dabbler to get involved in a fight, especially because he can fire off several more before the fight is over.

An alternate version could use a fire-magic Booster instead of the *Create Fireball* spell. That would leave only a spell/Ability to hit the target. In other words, Certius has the *Instant Fireball* spell! He has *Fire Spellpower*[10] (the Booster) and *Instant Fireball*[15]. To really get the target, he pumps 8 points into the fireball and fires it (Difficulty 8, as before), rolling 10 good dice; a hit, and with +2. The 8-point fireball's 8 dice are rolled, getting 4 good dice. The 2 from the successful hit are rolled, adding another 1. The target takes 5 damage. But there is a limit to how many *Instant Fireball* spells Certius can cast, because they drain his *Fire Spellpower*. Once he recuperates, he can play hardball again, but in the meantime, he might find that having *Create Fireball* and *Hurl Fireball* around to attack enemies without spending his mojo is nice.

Note that nothing prevents such a Special Power setup from allowing Certius to spend *Fire Spellpower* on boosting the fireballs he makes with *Create Fireball*; that is the decision of whoever designs the spell, along with the Narrator running the game. *Instant Fireball* is special because it does not require a fireball to be created *at all*; the fireball simply flashes into existence when fired! Depending on added detail, it is also likely that using two spells instead of one takes longer, perhaps making the choice about available time as well as other factors.

Flying was mentioned earlier, as well, and is a fairly common Power in many genres. Assuming the character does not just have a jetpack (which would be considered equipment, not a Power), this is a clear case of the New Component Ability *Movement*, as applied to air. This kind of flight will thus not work in a vacuum, or in certain highly exotic, airless places. The flying character gets this newly created Ability, here called *Aviation*, and can now just take off into the air. Of course, if anything more than weightlessness is wanted, additional Abilities are needed; *Flight* is the equivalent of *Running*, and *Airlift* is used instead of *Strength* for things like lifting, ramming, pushing and other brute behavior in midair. Most Abilities can be used in the air much like they are used on the ground, although doing them at odd angles (like hanging upside down in the air while trying to shoot someone on the ground) will be as troublesome as it would hanging from a rope or posed impractically on the ground.

As a result, the basics of a flying character lets players create a character that mainly hovers over the ground or glides down from tall places at great speeds and skill (low *Aviation*, high *Flight*), someone who only really carries a lot of cargo slowly into the highest clouds, barely able to turn in an emergency (high *Aviation* and *Airlift*, but low *Flight*), or even just a floating 'pack mule' (high *Airlift*, low *Aviation* and *Flight*). Combined with other Special Powers and even normal Abilities, this allows some interesting variations on the typical flyer. High *Aviation* and *Airlift*, low *Flight*, some stealth and a good shooter? You have someone secretly floating around and shooting enemies from above! Very high *Flight*, a fair *Airlift* and low *Aviation* combined with a few good thief skills, and you have the criminal who swipes the loot and zips off, across streets and lakes, without leaving a footprint (he basically hovers very fast).

Now, an even tougher challenge: A supervillain who absorbs people! The people do not simply disappear, but are kept inside his body until he sees fit to release them. This character could be a walking black hole (comicbook interpretation, not scientifically correct), snatching up people for nefarious purposes, or a futuristic hunter, gathering slaves for the evil empire. Whatever the case, this character is a walking prison.

It is hardly a surprise that this Power starts with a Weird Effect, which is here simply named *Absorb*. But what are the advantages of doing this? Well, the character can carry stuff around, completely unseen by others. Of course, for anything to actually survive that, they will have to be kept alive somehow, or at least be stored in a way that simulates that effect. So, it's about carrying, concealing, and keeping alive (unless the Power is meant only for the inanimate, or robots, or for really brief storage. Or if they can be delivered dead). That is basically *Strength* (used to calculate carrying capacity, *and* to hold onto them, two of the Specifics described for the normal *Strength* Talent Ability), *Conceal*, and *First Aid*. It might seem like a cheap deal, but that *Strength* has to manage a grown person, perhaps even multiple, without slowing the character down too much. And concealing a *grown person* requires quite a lot! Keeping one alive is manageable, but if there are a lot, that *First Aid* might be taxed a bit, too.

Of course, some details about the Power will need to be explained, all depending on how it is put together. If it is a very rigid Power, one that is not prone to strange side-effects, it will be running entirely on 'Safe Dice', requiring even higher levels of the involved Abilities. Overloading it might have impractical effects, like rejection or crushing a few absorbed captives. If it is less rigid (i.e. does not have to use Safe Dice all the time), the character might be slowed down by overweight, with nobody knowing exactly why, or captured victims starting to show when the concealment does not hold up entirely. Or some of them simply end up dying inside the character. Whether the character himself gains the full weight and/or size of the absorbed victims is up to the Narrator; a comicbook or space fantasy villain might not have to (although it could be fun), but if it is some fairly scientifically plausible effect, it would seem logical. And there is always the possibility that a Power exists that might allow seeing through the concealment, letting the intrepid hero spot the absorbed captives...

There are millions of other Special Powers just waiting to be created, and all but a few can be created in many different

variations, just as the fireball example.

Special Disabilities

There is also a dark side to the whole 'Special Powers' issue: Sometimes, the unusual things that allow the Powers take over. When they do that, they often cause Special Disabilities. These include things like spontaneous and unintentional fires, attracting insects, causing electronics to malfunction when used, etc. If it can be controlled, it's a Special Power, if not then it's a Special Disability. If it has a mind of its own but the character has figured out how to make an advantage of this, it should be both (but they need not be at the same level!).

Triggers and reactions already mentioned in *Disabilities* can still be part of a Special Disability; the presence of magic can give someone headaches, or a character might be afraid of obvious time travelers. But there are a few new reactions that are a bit unusual. One mimics compulsion, but is not carried out by the actual character; the examples about starting fires or interfering with electronics, for example. This could be something a character did knowingly, with some Special Power, but in this case, the 'Power' acts on its own (as mentioned, the character need not even have the actual Power in order to have the Disability; it could be a completely independent manifestation of it!).

Another 'reaction' is that the trigger actually seems compelled towards the character. The insect version above is an example, but it could be demons, animals, robotic drones, aliens or anything else. In silly campaigns, it could even be lawyers, psychiatrists... or mimes! If there is a game world explanation for it, it could even be material things, or events, like dirt or smoke seeking out the character everywhere (he/she is not producing it, any nearby will just start going in that direction), or traffic accidents constantly happening nearby. If people notice, understand and believe in the link between the character and the events, shunning or worse is possible!.

Beyond that, the only limit is really the imagination, and anything a Power can be built to do under the willing control of a character, a Special Disability can be built to do involuntarily, to the great dismay of the character!

Races & Species

A whole lifetime of games can be played in game worlds with humans as the only playable race. That could be the case either if humans were the only sentient race, or if other races are simply offlimits (because they are supposed to be mysteries, for example, or are just far too powerful, too feeble, or just too strange or disruptive). However, there are also plenty of game worlds in which one of the challenges is the option to play something not human. In fact, there are game worlds in which humans do not exist at all, at least not as we know them!

Racial Packages

A race can be constructed for character use by simply picking some Abilities and Disabilities that the race automatically has. For example, a race of natural hunters would probably have the Ability *Tracking* at some level from birth. A player wanting to build a character of that race would simply need to pay the points that automatically get put into that Ability. So if the only real difference, in game terms, is that members of the race are born with *Tracking*[14], then building a character of the race simply requires the player to pay 14 CCP up front. For that, he or she gets a character with *Tracking*[14] and the associated Specifics already 'installed'. For some added color, a race can be acquired with an Ability at a set level, but the Specifics, or some of them, free for the player to set. For example, the race of natural hunters might come with *Tracking*[14] and the Specific *Desert*[6] for that Ability. So they are natural hunters, especially in the desert, and the player gets to select how the remaining 8 levels of Specifics that come automatically with the race (the Ability provides 14 levels of Specifics to set, and 6 were spent on *Desert*) get placed.

In the same way, a race might come with Disabilities. As with usual characters, natural Disabilities lower the cost of starting out with a character of a certain race, *to the point that the race might have a negative 'cost'!* For example, the race of natural hunters have the Disability *Fear of the dark*[18], making them completely terrified of dark places. That lowers the cost by 18. The result is a cost of -4; the player gets 4 free CCP to spend by making a character this race! Of course, the crippling fear of darkness will come into play, just like any other Disability.

A collection of Abilities and Disabilities that a race comes with is called a 'racial package'. All Abilities and Disabilities in the package have the Background of the race, unless something else is described in the race information. So if the natural hunters have *Tracking*[14] and *Fear of the dark*[18] from being their race, that is a total Background of *Natural Hunter Race*[32]. Of course, most races will have shorter and more poetic names.

Note that racial packages usually describe a highly unimpressive member of the race; impressive members are built by *adding to* the racial package, from the CCP given to create the character.

The Human Template

Of all races, *humans* are no doubt going to be the most commonly played. That would make it logical for the rules to be built with humans as 'normal' or 'average', and letting all other races be described in how they differ from these standard

humans. But that would make a lot of other things harder to explain, like how good someone creature's hearing would have to be in order to make it survive without eyesight. Instead, 'The Human Template' is effectively the racial package for playing humans.

As described here, the package is for a highly unimpressive late teen or early twenties person of undefined race and gender. As such, this person with only the described characteristics would seem puny and uninteresting, assuming anyone would ever notice him/her; making an interesting character is what the CCP handed to players by the Narrator are for! The Talent Abilities are enough for the character to function without being considered invalid; lowering any of them would make the character stand out as physically or mentally handicapped, or (especially in case of *Knowledge*) just *very* backwards. Note also that several seemingly basic Talents are missing: *Precision*, *Reflexes*, and *Restraint*. The basic human is sluggish and fairly emotional. As depicted, the character can just barely get by in the normal society of most human-populated game worlds, but nothing more.

Senses are the same, being only enough to not be considered damaged or chronically underdeveloped; the character can spot things visually and identify things by sight or sound at a limited distance, and will be able to distinguish between clearly different smells, tastes and touched things. The *Movement* Ability denotes someone who can handle moving across flat and solid ground, but not someone who will trek over mountains or even steep hills, and definitely not someone running around the treacherous grounds of the wilderness.

The Disabilities depict the most basic needs of humans: To sleep, eat, drink and breathe. Sleep can be fought with willpower, for some time, and while food is not dire needed every day, water or the like is, and going without food actually can be very unhealthy, not to mention painful and weakening. Oxygen is needed constantly; even a few seconds without it will be distressful, and most cannot truly handle a minute or more deprived of breath. Most only collapse at that point, though; a human can actually survive a few minutes without oxygen before irreparable damage is done to the body and, in particular, the brain. Medical technologies may bring someone back from such lacks, but that is a different matter all together.

The cost of this racial package is 57 CCP. However, characters are considered to have it for free! That means that swapping it for another racial package frees 57 CCP, but that other package will either need a similar base or be an 'inferior' species. This includes animals; if designing an animal, the 57 CCP are available for the 'racial' package, making it possible for many animals to actually be built with less than 0 (added) CCP. Of course, a housecat is typically not a big threat to a human.

Note that reducing any of the stated numbers to or near 0 can create odd results! Any of the Talents would indicate a complete lack of some normal human feature, like no physical strength, a sessile lump (no *Agility*), no hands (no *Dexterity*), completely oblivious or a drooling vegetable, or just completely unappealing (no *Charm*). Anything with no *Endurance* would be hard pressed to even *survive*, and would probably be kept artificially alive in a lab. Reducing senses would be a scary experience, like blindness (or, with *Sight/5* or less, just a strange blur; compare how much detail you can grasp by smell or touch alone, and think if that was the detail you could get with sight!), deafness, anosmia (then again, having no smell or taste *could* make life easier... until you breathe smoke or eat rotten meat without knowing it!), or complete numbness.

The *Movement* Ability is a bit more tricky. Unless substituted by another kind of movement, being unable to function on land would be more than just being immobile (no *Agility* means no way to move your body. Or duck, sit up, etc.), it would actually mean that the character could not physically *function* on land. Most likely, this would be like a jellyfish on the beach, just splatted or even sinking into the ground. Someone who cannot move can still *be* moved; someone who cannot function on land would probably require significant effort to handle enough for just having someone drag him or her away!

As for the Disabilities, lowering these would make the character outright frightening (*raising* them would probably indicate a metabolism problem). Someone without *Crave Sleep* is not just an insomniac, but is constantly awake and unaffected, and probably *unable* to sleep; insomniacs just cannot fall asleep, and are often tired or even mentally impaired by it. Not needing sustenance (food and drink) would be even more alien! Reduced but still present versions of either could match genetically altered supersoldiers, or highly efficient species, but lacking either is robot country (and even robots need something else, like electricity or fuel!). Reduced oxygen needs could also be genetic manipulations, or a natural oxygen storage like whales have (they only come up for air every now and then). No need is a machine or something in that direction.

Of course, interesting species can be created by swapping things around, or substituting them for variants! A being using hearing instead of sight, and having touch as a secondary sense like humans have sound, would function perfectly in the dark, hearing what is where and feeling tremors or temperatures to get some added detail, while light is no more important than smells. If that same being needed sunlight to recharge instead of sleep and 'breathed' dust, sand and ashes (which it might constantly hurl into the air to breathe it, or just suction up), it could handle inhuman climates but would avoid the dark, or clean places. Swap land movement for air, and it would perpetually float about, too...

Human Racial Package (57 CCP)

Strength[7]

Agility[9]

(Specific: Running[6])

Dexterity[11]

Endurance[7]

Knowledge[6]

(Specifics: 'Common' Knowledge[4])

Intelligence[6]

Charm[6]

Sight[13]

Hearing[8]

Smell/Taste[4]

Touch[4]

Movement(Land)[12]

Crave Sleep[8]

Crave Sustenance[8]

(Specific: Water[6])

Crave Oxygen[20]

The player is free to pick the missing Specifics for the Abilities and Disabilities in the package!

Money & Possessions

The Abilities a character has do not automatically come with the tools needed to use them; even if you can drive, you still do not have a car, and no amount of Knifefighting Ability will make a knife just show up in your hand. Characters need to buy these things. Depending on the game played, they may also need to buy homes, travel tickets, hire people and so on. It all comes down to the same issue: Money.

Any character can be created from the start with money, from a bit of pocket cash for necessities, up to massive fortunes. 'Wealth' is handled like an Ability; it is purchased with CCPs at character creation. But it does not grow later with use, nor can Awarded Growth be spent on it. It can only be acquired at creation, because any later wealth is earned as cash for doing jobs, finding treasure and so on.

Every game world needs one fixed number, which defines how much money every CCP of this 'Ability' is worth. Once character creation is finished, the player can spend the money that the CCPs invested in Wealth mount up to. If, for example, the 'point-cash rate' is 20 Dutch Dubloons, and the character has been given Wealth[14], that character starts the game with 280 Dutch Dubloons. To get more dubloons, the character needs to earn them over time or get them from other characters.

Income

In addition to, or instead of, starting cash, a character can have some form of income. Off-hand, this can be assumed to be just some stable income from something that needs no real investment of time, like a trust fund, a good investment portfolio, licenses on inventions, etc. Describe it for the character description. In rules terms, it is bought like an Ability, just like Wealth is. But Income only pays 1/10 of the point-cash rate! It pays it once per week, however, starting one week *after* the character is created. If other time intervals are more fitting (monthly, or based on a non-weekly calendar, for example), simply calculate how many days and figure out how much that would be at the original weekly rate.

If desired, *Income* can be made part of a job or the like by putting various obligations on it. The details are up to the player and the Narrator, but neglecting the obligations that are involved should have a consequence in the income earned, up to and including losing it (but such drastic measures should be reserved for gross neglect, or dramatic cases of regaining lost income!).

???Borrowing & Credit

[incomplete]

???Non-Financially Acquired Gear

[incomplete]

Advanced Character Creation

The Abilities in the list are fairly standard ones, the kind that most people would go out and learn without great fuss. Some game worlds may have legality issues (knowing how to use guns might be illegal. Or how to read a certain ancient language!), but the Abilities in and of themselves are pretty straightforward.

Everything does not need to be like that, though. Even in the real world, there are things so advanced and complicated that to just 'go out and learn it' does not really work. Things can be immensely complicated, and learning an overall subject becomes an intricate web of knowledge and skills. How such advanced structures of character building influence the game will be different from game world to game world; sometimes, those with intricacies are just average people with a demanding trade, while other times, they are the truly wise and powerful.

Luckily for the intrepid game world designer, these things operate on a relatively small handful of concepts, which are simply combined with things like Special Powers, Boosters and existing Abilities or even Disabilities. The way in which they are used makes all the difference, and the following is meant as a guide to setting that up. Players should only be allowed to create these things from scratch under close Narrator scrutiny, lest abuses may sneak in; the guidelines are meant for game world design, more than character creation!

Prep Abilities

While the Abilities in the Ability List are meant to be acquired without any particular requirements, not all Abilities need be. A Preparational or 'Prep' Ability is some Ability need to acquire another; unless the Prep Ability is added to the character, the Ability needing it cannot be added, either!

The reason for a Prep Ability is a combination of things. The Ability that needs the Prep has a lot in common with it, like building on the same theories and prior knowledge. Up to a point, the Prep Ability might even be used instead! That is mainly the case when dealing with such fundamental questions that it is little more than basic knowledge. And yet, the two Abilities go in completely different directions. For example, the *Software* Ability (used for creating or understanding programs for computers) would be the Prep for *AI software* (creating or understanding the programs that make computers artificially intelligent). *Software* deals with all the basics of programming, and having to learn that twice (once for *Software* and once for *AI software*) would be illogical. But still, *AI software* takes the knowledge in a completely different direction; one can be a highly skilled programmer without ever learning how to make artificial intelligence, but one cannot program an artificial intelligence without knowing a certain level of computer programming.

Rather than just having a certain Ability to allow for another, however, the Prep has to be at a certain level to allow the other. For example, *AI software* would have the Prep *Software*[14], meaning the character has to have *Software* at 14 to start adding *AI software* at all. This required level is the actual Ability itself, without drawing on Talent Abilities, tools or other types of aid! It is a certain level of explicit knowledge that is needed to move on.

In addition to this, some Abilities are Prep 'dependent', while others are Prep 'independent'. *AI software* would be Prep independent; once the Ability can be added, its level has nothing to do with the Prep any longer. This is because creating AIs involves entirely different programming structures than normal software, structures that are learned separately in that Ability. *AI software* is a complex and demanding field of study but beyond the basics, it has very little in common with the Ability for creating spreadsheet programs and advanced databases. In fact, an AI programmer would be a poor choice to design a new breed of highly advanced databases, because those things are not meant to act like sentient, thinking beings (which it is here assumed that AIs *are*). One would get an expert but *regular* programmer for that, someone with a high level in *Software*, instead (the two are not mutually exclusive, of course; a character can have high levels in both).

A Prep dependent Ability, however, cannot be at a higher level than the Prep. Because of this, some of them require the Prep at 'level 0' only; the character needs no special level in the Prep, the dependent Ability just cannot get any higher than the Prep. This includes Automatic Growth! If the dependent Ability achieves Automatic Growth but is already equal to the Prep in level, that growth is simply lost. A Prep dependent Ability is typically the Prep used for something it was (presumably) never intended for, drawing on the knowledge and training in the Prep in a whole new way. If it was simpler

or more like the Prep (or just less interesting), it would probably have been a Specific! An example is *Demolition Driving*, a very different variation on *Driving* that uses a (very sturdy) car as a weapon, ramming it into and through things and running over soft targets. In a game world that includes it, there will likely be special moves, equipment and so on that will make no sense to a 'normal' driver, hence making *Driving* insufficient to use it. But still, it is about driving, and one has to be a good driver to be a good demolition driver, because the core of it is about controlling a car. Put another way, if you learn how to be a good demolition driver, it automatically involves the learnings that will make you a good regular driver! Of course, *Driving* could also have the Specific *Aggressively* added, but pulling U-turns, driving across sidewalks and even running someone off the road is not going to make the driver last long against people trained and experienced in using rams and spiked hub caps, finding weak spots in opponent cars, and hunting (and running!) down fleeing drivers in their custom rigs.

It is quite possible for an Ability to have many Preps; in that case, every Prep has to be fulfilled to get the Ability! Sometimes, there will be variants of a truly complex Ability, which cover roughly the same ground but have completely different Preps. Sometimes, a single Ability will simply provide two or more sets of Preps that can each allow the Ability. Such Abilities, however, typically cover quite complex skills, and the reasons and consequences of the Preps will be described along with the Ability.

Combination Tasks

Some tasks are not as easily categorized as others. Much like with Preps, any task might require the character to know more than a single Ability designed for it, and the arrangement of Abilities needed could change from task to task, even within a field of work that, to outsiders, seems fairly uniform! To repair a particular starship drive, for example, the character might need *Fusion Technology*, *Astrogation*, *Quantum Computers*, and even the more hands-on *Ultra-Heavy Machinery* (these Abilities are fictional, futuristic-sounding examples. They are not actually in the Ability List). If advanced rules are handling the repair of starship drives, all the Abilities will somehow be put to use. If not, then a check is simply made against the lowest Ability.

As mentioned, this kind of combination tasks can change from us to use. One model starship drive might not use *Ultra-Heavy Machinery*, having been built in a different way that only requires standard *Mechanics*. Another might have a separate computer that handles the astrogation, and hence, the repair person will not need the *Astrogation* Ability. Then again, the Galaxy Jumpship class needs special drives, which work with alien technology components; the *Alien Jumpgate* Ability is now needed! Whatever the case, if there is no advanced system handling it, the lowest Ability is rolled against whatever Difficulty applies to the drive or repair being done.

Sometimes, a combination of Abilities becomes so frequent that it develops into a whole new Ability. For example, if stardrive technology is sufficiently complex, varied and important, a *Stardrives* (or *Stardrive Technology*, for the full name) Ability is likely to arrive at some point. It is likely to have at least some of the described Abilities as Preps, and there will be Specifics to represent added knowledge befitting the rest. Such an Ability will *not*, however, include the full Abilities that make up its foundation; *Stardrives* will include some astrogation, some quantum computing, and tidbits from the other Abilities mentioned, but it cannot substitute a check against the actual *Astrogation* or *Quantum Computers* Abilities. It only has the bots related to stardrives, so plotting new routes through star systems (astrogation) or designing new hyper-capacity mini-computers (quantum computing) will need the actual Abilities meant for those fields, respectively. *Stardrives* will deal with stardrive technology, and that is it.

And if other combination tasks require those original Abilities, *Stardrives* will be of little or no use there, too. Understanding jumpgate physics requires certain academic Abilities and *Astrogation* because it deals with how things are placed around space. *Stardrives* only handles the the part involving any route planning needed to get a starship from A to B; the physicist will need *Astrogation*, not *Stardrives*. Abilities developing from combination tasks are quite often specialized, even if they are in wide use (advanced societies often specialize people, after all).

Ability Webs

This is not a new angle on Abilities, really. It is a consequence of Preps and combination tasks (and quire possibly the new Abilities arising from them, some loaded with Preps themselves). An Ability Web is the way a bunch of interconnected Abilities and tasks influence one another. Often, it can be shown as a diagram of boxes representing the Abilities in question, and what Preps they require, what Preps their Preps require, and so forth. The point of mapping out an Ability Web, even a small one, is to have a very clear way for players to see what kind of Abilities they can or should give their characters. As such, it is not really an addition to the game world, or even the game, but a handy tool for players and Narrators alike. Any Ability Web of more than four Abilities should be mapped out in some form or another as part of describing a game world. Luckily, this need only be done once, since the Web does not change (at least, not unless the game world changes in important ways. Which is definitely a possibility!).

Some Ability Webs also include one or more Boosters. Some include many! Noting which Abilities are tied to which Boosters can help player decisions a lot during character creation, as they may see alternative ways to achieve the

characters they have in mind, or simply create a character that is not based on mistakes and utterly flawed; in real life, people have the chance to catch most such flaws in their lives before they become completely devastating miscalculations. A character should be assumed to have made those considerations, as well, and a well-understood Ability Web can be the key to that.

Locked Abilities

Some Abilities in a game world will have problems associated with them. This goes right from brief dizziness after using an Ability to outright deals with The Devil (whatever they may *specifically* involve). In a sense, a Disability becomes a sort of Prep for the Ability; it cannot be had without that Disability!

The actual relations between levels of the two can be anything, from mandatory identical levels to the Disability being one third the level of the Ability, with a maximum of 8. The only real rule on the point is that no Disability can earn a character more CCP than what the associated Ability costs. If there are multiple Disabilities locked to an Ability, their *total* value in CCP cannot exceed the cost of the Abilities. If there are more than one Ability, the Disability cannot exceed the total cost of those Abilities. It is, once again, a rule to prevent a clever player from grabbing a 'free lunch', getting points from a Disability that earns more than the associated Ability costs and just never triggering that Disability. If multiple Abilities and Disabilities are all locked together, looking hard at the risks of clever exploitation is greatly advised. Especially if a game world containing the arrangement is meant to be used by people the designer does not know personally!

The exception, of course, is if the Disability's trigger is not tied to the Ability. A Disability might be an extreme sensitivity to places of death, which can affect the character no matter what near burial sites, battle fields, hospitals and the like. This Disability happens to be a requirement for anyone who is capable of seeing the ghosts that walk amongst us. The Disability is a 'Prep' for the Ability, but it triggers all on its own. If it triggered by *talking to* the ghosts that the character uniquely sees, a player could pump the Disability for CCP, spend only a single CCP on the associated Ability, and just never speak to a ghost at all; free CCP, essentially. That is not allowed; everything has a price.

There are plenty of ways for Disabilities and Abilities to be tied together; using certain Abilities can cause a Disability to trigger (if it only triggers when the character uses the Ability, the Disability cannot have a higher level than the Ability. But if it triggers no matter who uses it, and the Ability is not all too uncommon, it can have any level allowed), an Ability can be used as relief for a Disability (*First Aid* can be used to relieve seizures or breathing dysfunctions), and so on. But a locked Ability does not need to have any logical tie to the Disability; they are simply a package. In game world terms, it should have some explanation, even if it is not ironclad science.

Item Abilities

These cover using certain complex items in ways beyond standard item use; the particular powers of a specific magical sword, the operation of a certain model of spaceship, etc. The Item Ability can be used as a substitute for most other Abilities, but only when using that particular (model of) item.

Item Abilities are covered in depth under *Equipment*.

Character Growth

Even after a character has been created, it will grow. New things will be learned, and old skills will improve. With time, what the character *was* and what it *is* will be two very different things!

Awarded Growth

The simplest way to grow is by doing something that the Narrator (possibly inspired by the reactions of players!) deems to be clever, daring, innovative or in other ways worthy of note. It could even just be something that is very fitting for the genre of the game; handling a problem in a particularly funny or silly way could be worth Awarded Growth in a game that is meant to be humorous or silly, for example!

Awarded Growth works basically like character creation does: The player is given a few CCPs and can spend them on raising something in the character. There are some differences, though.

Firstly, the player is completely free to choose between Talent Abilities or Skill Abilities when spending the points. There is nothing like the 20/80 split there was in character creation.

Second, whatever is raised has to have some relation to what was done, or the circumstances under which it was done. This need not be the actual Abilities used, but the player has to explain it. For example, humiliating a foe by a clever trick in a duel at the royal ball could let the player spend Awarded Growth CCPs on the fighting skills involved, on social skills involving the people present (entertaining someone lets you understand how they can be amused, after all).

When a point is assigned to an Ability, that also results in a point in an appropriate Specific *and* an appropriate

Background. The choices have to be clearly explained by whatever the character has been through during the adventure that the CCPs were earned from.

The Narrator is free to award any number of points, but should typically keep the number low per occurrence, and should try to award a roughly equal number of points to each player during the full game. Additional points of Awarded Growth can also be given after the game, for having played an overall good game, in addition to any points given during play for specific deeds.

Another reason for giving limited amounts of points on each occurrence is, that the points take effect immediately! The Abilities raised will be raised instantly, once the points are spent. If a large number of points are spent on a single Ability (or Specific), the Narrator can state that the effect is a little prolonged. But sudden boosts in Ability can make for very dramatic and entertaining scenes!

Automatic Growth

A different way of raising Abilities is 'learning by doing'. Whenever an Ability is used, rolling a success *or failure* that is equal to or no greater than 1/10 of the Learning Ability for that Ability, the Ability used is raised by precisely 1. So is one Specific, player's choice, fitting the situation in which the roll was made (if a certain Specific is not one the character has, the character simply gets it at a level of 1).

Or, instead of this, the player can put the point into any Talent Abilities applied in the roll, or the Learning Ability involved.

Whatever the chosen growth, an (perhaps the only) appropriate Background is raised by 1 in the process.

As an Ability grows, it will become increasingly harder to roll the same amount of success or failure. This is one reason for spending the occasional Awarded Growth CCPs on Learning Abilities.

Like Awarded Growth, Automatic Growth happens right then and there, after the roll is made. Because the growth is only by 1 level, there is never any reason to decide that it comes on gradually. Consecutive 'learning rolls' are simply lucky for the player (and character)!

Character Point Rating

Characters start out with a 'point rating' equal to the amount of CCPs the character is built on. Every time a CCP is spent from Awarded Growth, and every time a roll results in a point of Automatic Growth, the point rating is raised by 1. Essentially, the point rating is how many CCPs it would take to build the character from scratch.

A point rating is used for several things, the first and foremost being to give the Narrator a clear idea of what the characters can handle! The rating is not a perfect indicator, of course; a character might be rated at 188 points, but only 40 points are invested in Abilities relevant to whatever challenge the Narrator has in store. The point rating as such is meant more to match overall adventures with mixed groups of adventurers. Any such match should have additional descriptions.

For those cases where the character point rating does not actually match the *kind* of challenges faced, it can be worthwhile, especially if characters are complex and built on (or grown to) high point values, to note the points by their actual topic. In most cases, the Ability categories used in the Ability List will do; 45 points invested in Fighting Abilities and 29 in Technical, for example. If Talent Abilities are built very high-level, noting the bonus of frequently used Talents can make it even more precise. This helps in preparing adventures for the characters and making sure the challenges match their actual level of points for the individual challenge.

Rated Abilities

Other than the use of point ratings as a way to keep a track of how powerful characters are becoming, the rating can be used for *Rated Abilities*. These are Abilities that cannot be purchased with CCPs under character creation, nor from Awarded Growth. Instead, every time the point rating of a character crosses a certain interval, a new Rated Ability can be acquired at level 1, or an existing one can be raised by 1 level. The interval at which a Rated Ability is raised is set by the Narrator, and should be the same for all players. If the interval is 50, for example, a player can raise or acquire a Rated Ability for every 50 points of the character's rating; the first at 50, the next at 100, and so on. Every interval already 'passed' at character creation will let the player pick a Rated Ability to raise one level. So if characters start at 150 points and the Rated Ability interval is 50, characters start with a total of 3 levels of Rated Abilities already.

Beyond the method of acquisition, Rated Abilities differ by being not only rather powerful, but also involving other Abilities, such as allowing new uses or empowering old ones. Most Rated Abilities will border on unrealistic, but they need not be; plenty of highly unusual skills seem unrealistic but are simply unusual. As with other Abilities, the Narrator decides what kind of Rated Abilities are available, but the difficulty in acquiring them will automatically limit the impact. Adjusting the interval can control it even more, with intervals of 100 or above making them rarely important, while intervals of 10 can make them a dominant factor in the game. 25 or 50 is commonly a balanced interval.

Character Packages

A sufficiently detailed game world will typically have its own common kinds of people; policemen, researchers, mystics, alien interpreters, monster hunters, etc. To insist on making each and every one of these completely original would not only be a lot of work, it would also give unrealistic results; people with similar backgrounds have similarities in their training, habits, even personal peculiarities! And those who stray from such similarities will rarely throw it all out and make their own, but more likely just add some twist to what everyone else has.

What this all means is that a character can be made with sets of Abilities, Disabilities and other traits described. Such a 'set', also called a *character package*, can be snatched up for the character and be added in a few seconds, making character creation much faster and easier. But more than that, it will make the character fit with the overall idea of the game world, because it has the training, habits, etc., that would be expected from a character like that. For example, a 'Police Officer' character package has what is expected of a police officer. The player can just pay the CCP cost of that package and voila, the character is a police officer. And there will usually be plenty of CCP left over for other things, either Abilities purchased one by one, or other packages, or both!

Creating Packages

To make a character package for a game world or campaign is astoundingly easy. All that is needed is to pick the Abilities (and Disabilities, etc., if need be) that such a character would have, pick the appropriate levels, count the CCP needed for them all, and add it all up. For example, the Police Officer package might require *Unarmed Fighting*[14], *Shoot Handgun*[16], *Drive Car*[12], and *Law*[15]. That is a total of 57 CCP. So the Police Officer package costs 57 CCP and gives the stated Abilities at those levels.

When purchasing a package, the Background for the included Abilities (etc.) is typically the name of the package. Some packages may require a definition, like a generic Soldier package requiring the player to define which branch of the military it is from (Army, Navy, etc.). Some packages may also require a certain amount of particular Backgrounds, like Police Detective requiring *Background(Police)*[80], describing someone who has served in the police long enough and well enough to realistically be promoted to Detective.

After assigning a package, it should be allowed, within reason to adjust a few elements in the gained Abilities. Because multiple packages are basically just added on top of one another, this is especially true for characters with mixed backgrounds, like one who has both the Police Officer and Soldier package (having served in the military before going into the police, for example) getting *Shoot Handgun* levels from both. While it would be realistic to assume such a person to be excellent with a handgun, a Narrator might feel that the player could cut a few CCP from the cost by reducing the Ability a few levels. Some explanation might be required, of course, such as the character knowing his excellent skill at shooting and therefore focusing more on some forensic training on the side (i.e. the CCP cut are spent on the *Forensics* Ability).

Like racial packages, character packages may define the Specifics of the Abilities etc. they contain, or they may leave that to the player to decide. The Police Officer package described makes no assumptions on what Specifics are chosen, but it might; *Law* could use the *Civil Law* Specific automatically, assuming that this is what a police officer in the game world chosen deals with.

Note that *character packages are not rules*. They are a way to make character creation easier, and to describe the kind of people that live in a game world. Essentially, they are just Abilities and the like that are bought simultaneously; the same things may be purchased for the character by anyone making it from scratch. Packages just means the whole package can be had in one pick from a list or book, rather than assembling everything yourself.

Also, one way to produce character packages is to simply let players create interesting characters, and asking them what the exact Abilities etc are that define a certain part of the character's life. If a player gives a good description of what the character got from, say, being a fighter pilot, the *Fighter Pilot* package suddenly exists! A Narrator might reward such package creations with a CCP or two extra for the character...

Professional Packages

The Police Officer and Soldier packages described above are what many will think of when dealing with character packages: Some form of profession or education the character has been through. The assumption is that the training involved was completed; incomplete training or a dropped education can be described by taking only pieces of a package. Note that there may be some rules *in the game world* that will affect this, like not taking the full College Degree package meaning the character did not graduate, and therefore cannot have any academic Rank or similar benefits gained from having a graduate's diploma.

Any profession or training can essentially be turned into a character package, including less 'official' ones, like pickpocket, hacker, grifter, or someone trained as a mechanic by a childhood mentor, rather than an actual school. And like the Police Officer / Police Detective, these packages can build on one another, like a good Pickpocket becoming a Thief Apprentice

or the like.

Association Packages

Some things are not learned by someone teaching you, but simply by who you hang around with. This can be entirely official, like being a member of a religious order or a volunteer association, or just a very inspiring club. It could even be a secret brotherhood, or fans of a very 'educational' TV show (if it is not educational, it can still be the foundation of a character package, but the Abilities involved will probably be fringe, or just *weird*). Less official packages could stem from characters running with a certain crowd, like someone living in a bad neighborhood and gaining the *Riffraff* package, or a similar socially founded package. Some such packages even portray the unofficial parts of an education or other professional package; the character might have a *Private School* package, describing the character as someone having been educated in a private school. But the character was not well-adjusted at the school, and ran with a crowd that caused a lot of ruckus, thus adding the *Schoolyard Rebel* package, the typical Abilities and Disabilities of a kid causing trouble at school. Of course, being a schoolyard rebel requires an appropriate school package to be assigned first.

Most game worlds will have millions of possible association packages, from being a sportsfan to being a selfmade street racer to being a hobby geneticist or watching sorcerers work their craft. The Narrator should *never* feel obligated to create even the most common such packages! Anyone wanting to make some part of the game world more accessible or better defined can do it, but to try and recreate a whole world this way is an impossible task.

Life Packages

Some things in life are learned simply by getting into certain situations, or living life in a certain way. Someone living on a farm might develop animal skills, while living near a junkyard is one way to learn how to use spare parts creatively. Brief periods of interest may do the same, like backpacking through the Amazon teaching a character survival skills and cultural understanding, or getting one's hometown caught in the crossfire of a local war hardening a character and teaching some unexpected weapons Abilities! Of the various sources of packages, this is also one of the most likely to have packages with significant Disabilities, simply because many of life's little experiences are what leave the marks that develop into these states of mind. It need not be a debilitating mental illness, of course; seeing families destroyed by poverty and war can make a character develop an almost obsessive devotion to his own family, an Obligation to amke sure the family is safe and happy!

Like association packages, life packages are numerous, because life can throw so much at a person, and because different persons take different things with them from these experiences; one traveler might return with a greater understanding of the world, while another returns with a deep-seated hatred for foreign cultures. Actual personal epiphanies can also fall into this category; many people have them, even if they mean something different to everyone! Personal quests, strange encounters, lucky breaks and unlucky disaster, it all has unique twists but a common center, and it can all be turned into packages. But a Narrator is wise to keep to the main ones, and perhaps leave a few blank spaces, such as what concrete obsessions come from that personal epiphany.

Packages-Only Character Creation

One way to make packages a central element of the game is to require a player to explain everything in the character from a package point of view! The character is thus not created from what Abilities and the like that the player would like for it, but from what the character has been through in life. If something is not taken as an existing package, it would have to be made part of a package created for the purpose and described in a way that seems plausible and, perhaps, dramatically interesting. The packages are still purchased with CCP, and there might be a few CCP allowed for 'package-free spending', just to fill in the holes.

Conflict Resolution

While many challenges can be overcome through the use of Abilities as already described in Task Resolution, there are times when two or more sides square off and things become more complicated. A classical example is combat, but anything from academic arguments to psionic mind-probing can involve the same kind of fighting between knowing participants. Whenever opponents try to beat each other, as opposed to one side simply trying to overcome an unwitting problem, conflict resolution is needed.

Quick System

The easiest way to resolve a conflict between two or more characters is to have all participants select (or be told) the appropriate Ability, add the appropriate modifiers, and roll. The one to roll the greatest number of good dice wins the conflict. If it is a shared victory, the actual details depend on the kind of conflict. Some will actually share the spoils, others will have a dramatic standoff and perhaps allow another roll for the winners to find a final victor, while still others will require an immediate reroll of the winners to find an actual winner that makes sense.

For slightly more detail, rather than simply defining a victor, the winning roll can deal an amount of 'damage' to the losing character (or one selected by the winning character).

Combat

In the case of melee combat, any Fighting Ability is a usable skill. If the quickest method is wanted, simply pair off opponents and roll the Ability. If one character is attacked by multiple enemies, his or her roll is at -3 per attacker (*including* the first), and if he or she wins, only one opponent is defeated; to defeat every attacker, the character would have to win several times.

If the more detailed version is wanted, the same method is used, but instead of a finite victory, the best roll deals damage to a selected opponent equal to how much better the roll is than that opponent. A character can take a total of damage equal to the Endurance Talent, which is acquired during character creation like any other Ability. To reduce damage, half an hour of rest is needed and someone who has the *First Aid* Ability. After that hour, the player of the helping character (or the Narrator, if the character is a NPC) rolls *First Aid* versus a Difficulty equal to the current damage the injured character has. If the roll is a success, the amount of damage is reduced by the amount of success. After 12 hours (game world time), another roll can be attempted. Failure means inability to patch the wounds until they heal a bit on their own. Multiple characters cannot try *First Aid* on the same patient; one try total, per 12 hours!

Full System

For a more detailed treatment of conflicts, the 'full system' is used. Though there are many kinds of conflicts, the examples below use mainly combat to describe the system.

The Basics

The full conflict system starts with the Ability that each character uses for the conflict. No modifiers are applied, not for circumstances, not for terrain, not for tools, not for anything else. Specifics are also not applied. Only the actual Ability itself.

That Ability defines the *Ability Dice Pool*, or just Ability Pool. The Ability level becomes a pool of dice that the player can divide across attack and defense; pushing more towards attack means very aggressive fighting, while a lot of dice put into defense is very defensive fighting. The player is free to put all the dice in either one, for an all-out attack or turtle-shell defense. If the conflict is between multiple participants, the player also has to pick who an attack is aimed at.

Once every character's Ability Pool has been divided and targets selected, everyone is told who is attacking their characters. If they are being attacked by multiple opponents, they divide the defense amongst them. If a character is attacking someone, that someone automatically becomes 'opponent 1' for that character, even if there is no attack back. The character is at -2 on defense for opponent 2, -4 for opponent 3, and so on, when defending against multiple opponents.

After dice have been assigned to an attack or any defense, they *cannot* be reassigned! Realizing that a character has put a lot of dice in defense but nobody is attacking is just too bad; the fighter was needlessly cautious. Likewise, realizing that a lot of effort was put into an attack that could have worked with half of that might be overkill, but combat is often that unpredictable.

With the decisions made, modifiers for circumstances, Specifics and tools (and any other elements that may play a role in the fight) are applied. No single attack or defense can gain more bonus from Specifics than the number of dice invested in

the attack or defense, though!

All attacks are rolled, and all relevant defenses are rolled. When an attack rolls the most good dice, the attack succeeds, and weapon damage is rolled. The surplus amount of good dice on an attack (the amount rolled more than defensive good dice) is added to weapon damage, up to the maximum damage for the weapon. This added damage is what is done through superior skill.

Once all damage has been dealt, the turn ends, and everyone chooses how to divide their Ability Pools for the next turn. Repeat until the battle is won, by whatever criteria used.

?Advanced Use

There are plenty of options in a fight that are not explicitly dealt with in the basics, but the system *is* built for them. Highly skilled fighters know how to gain the upper hand from breaking the pattern of give and take, and even though the mechanic of an Ability Pool might seem simple, it can be used quite creatively.

Firstly, a fighter with a large enough Ability Pool and confidence enough to take a few chances can put dice into multiple attacks. Having, for example, an Ability Pool of 23 dice lets the character put 7 dice into one attack, then 7 into another, and still have 9 for defense. Remember, however, that no more bonus from Specifics can be added to an attack than the number of dice invested in the attack from the Ability Pool! Thus, spreading oneself across too many attacks will erode any advantages of familiarity a character might have. Ironically, having the home court advantage (through terrain, weapons, or whatever) makes a single (or few) focused attack(s) a good idea, to take advantage of your situation. Modifiers from circumstances and good weapons etc. are not affected by this, though, so a good weapon will be good for any number of attacks (this might change if the extended weapon rules are used, but that's a completely different matter).

Other advanced uses involve drawing upon other Abilities to improve combat efforts. **[detailed system to follow...]**

Injury

The simple method of counting Damage, as described in the Quick System, is still applicable, with a few changes:

Damage is based on the number of dice noted with each weapon. Those dice are rolled, and the number of good dice rolled equal the damage done.

The amount of success of the roll to attack is added to the number of dice rolled for damage. However, the total damage cannot exceed the number of dice that should originally be rolled for damage from the weapon alone!

Dice equal to 1/10 of the Strength Talent are rolled as additional damage. The number of dice rolled may not exceed the original damage dice for the weapon alone, but damage done from good dice rolled is not limited.

Every turn of combat that the character attacks or defends in, a check is made for Endurance, with total damage as the Difficulty. If the check fails, the character collapses and can do nothing, including speak or react; the character is completely unconscious! If the check fails by an amount equal to the victim's Endurance, the victim is dead unless someone succeeds on a *First Aid* check, with the victim's damage as Difficulty, in the turn immediately after. Such a successful check will keep the character alive but unconscious. Another check can either wake up the character *or* heal damage equal to the amount of success of the check; performing player's choice, stated before the roll. Only one *First Aid* check can be made by anyone per 12 hours on a character to heal damage. Any number of checks can be made to wake the character or prevent death.

Fallen Foes

Someone who collapses from injuries cannot defend against attacks. To hurt such a person, a standard attack check is made at Difficulty 5 (3 if taking 2 seconds or turns to aim). Weapon damage is dealt as always, including added damage for amount of success on the attack. Fallen foes are very vulnerable!

If there is room for it, taking 10 seconds or turns allows a character to perform an Instant Kill, by cutting the throat or similar action. This requires doing 2 damage to a main artery with a blade, or doing 2 damage with a bullet to the head or heart.

Flavor Options

The Conflict System as presented is the basic way to handle things like combat. But sometimes, a game needs to handle it different, in order to get a certain 'flavor' from a conflict. This is typically an attempt to emulate a special type of stories, in which reality looks a bit different than what is portrayed in the above rules.

When this occurs, there are plenty of ways to alter very small details without throwing the Conflict System away entirely and starting over! Most alterations to combat, for example, are technically minor differences in how damage is given and

received; the deeper technical details are not really the issue! A few options are given here to get things going, but it is not possible to take every twist into account; use what is given or what can be imagined to apply any of your own desired effects!

Comicbook Combat

Comicbooks dealing with classic superheroes often have spectacular combat, in which the combatants are badly hurt, but never die. There are three main elements that fit this kind of combat, and they are fairly easy to emulate.

The first is how much damage can be dealt by powerful people. The rule that the amount of success in an attack is added to damage should not, as it is in the regular rules, be limited to the maximum damage a weapon can deliver; a superhero can rip someone apart with a small knife in many stories! Amount of success, and *Strength*, are simply added to the damage as bonus dice, with no limit.

As for the amount of damage done to combatants without death, that is a slight alteration to the rules for death: Instead of a failed *Endurance* check resulting in unconsciousness and failure equal to *Endurance* meaning death, a failure means the character falls dramatically, thrown to the ground or falling from whatever high place the combat takes place in. Failure equal to *Endurance* means the character loses consciousness, but every few seconds, another *Endurance* check against total damage can be made, and success means the character wakes up. The usual *First Aid* check can also wake the character, but it is made against how much the *Endurance* check was failed by instead of *total* damage.

If the *Endurance* check fails by *twice* the character's *Endurance*, the character is critically injured. *First Aid* can get the character talking, with Difficulty as described above, and even moving if helped greatly, but medical attention (or whatever the character uses to recuperate) is needed to get back up. Only if the *Endurance* check fails by a full three times the character's *Endurance* does it mean actual death, and even then, the *First Aid* option still exists, with the Difficulty described above. Even if the character dies, any *First Aid* attempt will let the character give one final, dramatic goodbye (which might include passing on a vital piece of information!).

Finally, there is the issue of *collateral damage*, i.e. all the damage that is done to the surroundings around the fighting characters. If a character manages to fend off an attack, damage should still be rolled for the attack and the Narrator should note it down. However, this is only if a) the attack is melee and the defending character is placed close to a structure or large piece of interior, or b) the attack is ranged. The damage noted is damage done to *the surroundings*. Any kind of place will have a limit to how much damage it can take, and when that limit is exceeded, things will start falling down around the characters. At that point, every round of combat should start with each character making an *Agility* check, with Difficulty being how much the limit is exceeded. Failure means damage equalling the amount of failure, from being hit by falling debris! If the collateral damage gets bad enough, the Narrator is free to require one last such check, at *double* Difficulty; everything collapses, and there will be no more collateral damage worth mentioning after that, unless the fight moves to a new place!

Most comicbook stories have characters divided between the supers and the 'normals'. Most hired henchmen and innocent bystanders are normals, for example (a rule of thumb says that "anyone without a stated name is a normal"). Normals use the regular rules; they do not get leniency on injuries, nor do they do any real collateral damage. Only supers do those things!

Hollywood Action

Western action movies have a tendency for people to fly around every time they get badly injured. This can be simulated easily, by requiring a check of *Agility* plus *Strength* every time a character takes damage. Difficulty equals damage given, halved if it was from a sharp blade (a sword, for example) or point (a spear or arrow, for example) and doubled if from an explosion. Failure is how many meters (or yards) the character is thrown back. If the character hits anything, roll as many dice as the character was thrown, minus how far away the thing was, as damage for whatever was hit.

For added effect, building features like windows or temporary plywood walls, or even thin gypsym walls, can have a damage limit. If a character is thrown into it with that or more damage from the impact, he or she goes through! In such cases, this damage limit is taken by the character as 'impact damage'. If the character does *not* go through, the remaining distance is just taken as impact damage, and the character is slammed against the building. Any added damage from falling glass and the like is up to the Narrator to decide.

Combining this with *Comicbook Combat* allows for some insanely destructive fights, with characters being punched into buildings left and right.

???)Hong Kong Action Theater

[wire fu, mega damage, super-martial arts, mook domino reactions, smash smash smash, dead man shoots wildly, calculate to make kills kill surrounding mooks]

[Imperial marksman academy?]

???Blood Ballet

[cut limbs, spraying blood, using corpses, shoot/cut through and hit others in same damage... = attack at groups?
exploding bullet hits, slow death/ dead man fighting]

Ability List

The following are Abilities available as standard for characters, separated into categories and with instructions on Specifics needed and available.

Fighting

Abilities for fighting are based mainly on the weapon used. Each Ability needs the following Specifics: Weapon subtype, opponents, terrain, and engagement type. Weapon types are listed per weapon. Opponents are any major mentalities available in the game world, such as fantasy/alien races, criminals, soldiers, police, 'specialists' or the like, or an animal behavior type (predator or herbivore, usually). Odds are, in a world with fantasy/alien races, any such distinctions will vary per race; the world description should include these considerations.

Common terrains are Jungle, Swamp/Marshland, Forest, Brush (*very* tall grass, corn, anything eye-high or more), Field (tall grass, wheat, poppy, anything about knee to waist high), Plain (or cut lawns, as on a golf course), Street (paved, fair quality), Rock (or really bad and broken pavement), Desert, Beach/Coastal (anything based on sand and shallow water), Snow, Tundra, Arctic/Ice. Certain settings may add interesting terrains, such as alien landscapes, starship quarters, offices, ship decks (with the swaying and spraying), and so forth.

Engagement types include duel (includes sports versions), stealth (when springing an ambush, but not once directly engaged), solo (one-on-one), surrounded (one-on-many), team (small collected group), group (many mixed, like a barfight), formation (single-unit under tactically stable conditions), war (clashing armies, may be strategic but fighting is *everywhere*).

Swordfighting

Blades longer than 1/2" (15cm). Weapon subtypes include Two-handed, Longsword, Broadsword, Shortsword, Sabre/Katana (single-bladed one-handed).

Knifefighting

Blades up to 1/2" (15cm). Weapon subtypes include Dagger (double-edged), Huntingknife (single-edged), Curved (Gurka etc.), Small (pocketknife, switchblade, boxcutter), and Shiv (improvised knife).

Axfighting

Bladed heavy heads on a rigid handle. Weapon subtypes include Handaxe (small workaxe/tomahawk), Woodsman's (larger work axe for woodcutting), Polearm (long handle, two-handed), Battleaxe (curved blade, weighted handle), Two-handed.

Macefighting

Heavy-headed with no blade. Weapon subtypes include Club (unbalanced, typically wooden), Mace (heavy metal head), Jointed (segmented head), Maul/Warhammer, Two-handed Maul.

Staff

Straight, typically wooden but can be metal pipe or other material. Weapon subtypes include Baton/Stick (short one-handed), Staff (long one-handed, length of a sword), Quarterstaff (two-handed, long as a person), Longstaff (quarterstaff wielded as a very long sword).

Flail

Flexible and possibly long. Cannot parry but can grab striking arms). Weapon subtypes include Whip, Chain (with or without handle), Morningstar (with weighted head), Segmented (chained length of metal or wood sticks), Wire (very thin and lightly weighted).

Gunfighting

For hand-to-hand fights with firearms, both pistol-whipping, barrel parry and close-quarter/hand-to-hand shooting. Weapon subtypes include Pocketgun (very small caliber), Revolver, Pistol, Semiautomatic, Automatic.

Unarmed Fighting

This is used when the character has no weapons, or decides not to use them. Hands used unarmed are expected to be empty, or at least contain nothing that might hurt them when punching or the like. 'Weapon' types are Hand (punch and chop), Feet (kick), Teeth (bite), Body (slam or pin), Head (headbutts), and for those who have it, Tail (whip or punch). Since this Ability uses no weapon to determine damage, only the damage from the initial hit and the *Strength* Ability will be possible. The total damage cannot exceed total *Strength*.

???Melee Weapon Maintenance

package for swords, axes, etc.

blade, handle, chains

Shooting

Ranged combat with weapons that fire projectiles. Like Fighting, Specifics are weapon subtype, opponents, terrain, and engagement type. Terrains are the same as for Fighting, but adding corridor/alleyway. Opponents are the same. Engagement types are the same but with the addition of gallery (shooting galleries, tournaments, etc.), fixed (usually tripod, but also bunker or vehicle gunner or other fixed mountings) and sniper (careful, undetected firing).

Note that while they have the same Specifics, bonuses earned from Fighting Specifics *do not* apply to Shooting!

Bow

Arrows fired by a pulled string in a stretched frame. For arrows fired by trigger mechanisms, see *Crossbow*, below. Weapon subtypes include Shortbow (small), Longbow (medium), Heavy bow (large/great bow), Compound Bow, and Sportsbow.

Crossbow

Arrows fired by a trigger mechanism, that can be loaded in advance. Weapon types include Light (one-handed), Medium, Heavy, Mounted and Arbalest (a giant crossbow 'cannon').

Handgun

Firing one-handed guns in ranged combat (two hands may be used, for support). Weapon subtypes include Single-Shot, Homemade/Makeshift, Pocketgun (very small caliber), Revolver, Pistol, Semiautomatic, Automatic.

Rifle

Long-barrelled firearms, used for ranged combat. Weapon subtypes include Musket (muzzleloaded), Hunting Rifle, Shotgun, Assault Rifle, Submachine Gun (SMG), Sniper Rifle, and Harpoon (allows terrains Oceanic and (Coral) Reef).

Heavy Weaponry

This is a whole class of weapons defined by high weight and extreme firepower, but difficult use. Most are fired from or hung around the shoulder, or mounted on a tripod or a solid fixture, and recoil countermeasures are a necessary feature. Weapon subtypes include Heavy Machine Gun (HMG), Minigun, Gatling, Gauss/Railgun, Recoilless Rifle (RCL), Grenade Launcher, Bazooka, Rocket Launcher, and Fixed Mount (weapon mount on jets and other vehicles, fired by pilot/driver).

Cannon

Heavy weaponry mounted in fixtures or rolled to battle. Most are fired by a crew, but this Ability is for aiming and firing (most other tasks typically require far less training). Weapon subtypes include Classic Muzzle-Loader, Mortar, Howitzer, Long-Range Artillery, Turret Mount (gunner position), and Mounted Harpoon (fired, not thrown)

Flamethrower

A device that sprays a burning fuel at the target without harming the wielder. Weapon subtypes include Flamegun (weaponized blowtorch, one-handed and portable), Makeshift (the 'flaming hairspray can'), Torch Gun (no backpack, but two-handed), Heavy (two-handed, with backpack), and Mounted.

Spray Gun

Typically not used for actual combat, but can push people back or spray them with harmful liquids. Weapon subtypes include Handheld (one-handed), Soaker (two-handed), Heavy (two-handed, with backpack), and Mounted ('water cannons').

Laser

This weapon is defined by no recoil and no projectile speed (beams fire instantly, despite many movie effects). Weapon subtypes will depend on the setting, as this type of weapon is not effectively deployed or available at the moment.

???Firearm Maintenance

package for guns & rifles

Throwing

This is for hurled weapons, used in ranged combat. Like Fighting, Specifics are weapon subtype, opponents, terrain, and engagement type. Terrains and opponents are the same as for Shooting, while engagement types are the same as for Fighting but with the addition of gallery (shooting galleries, tournaments, etc.)

Note that while they have the same Specifics, bonuses earned from Fighting Specifics *do not* apply to Throwing (nor do those from Shooting)!

Rock/Ball

Actually meant for any solid lump. Weapon subtypes include Rock, Weighted (solid balls), Inflated (in combat, usually a football strapped with explosives. Usable in regular games, too, though!), Grenade (for proximity, not to injure), and improvised (any non-spherical, hand-sized lump solid enough). Those with a sense of humor (or really unusual weapon tricks!) can also add Snowball.

Stick

A balanced stick or short staff, quite common in oriental martial arts. Weapon subtypes include Short (ca. 8' or 20cm), Medium (12' or 30cm), Long (16'-20' or 40-50cm), Piercing (short and pointed metal stick), Boomerang, and Unbalanced (pipes, wrenches, and other stick-like items).

Spear

Long and pointed. Weapon subtypes include Javelin, Straight (no 'head'), Weighted (has a head), Short Straight (less than 20' or 60cm), Short Weighted, and Harpoon (thrown, not fired).

Knife

Typical throwing knife. Thrower can decide whether to go for blade or handle hit. Weapon subtypes include Dagger (double-edged), Huntingknife (single-bladed), Throwknife (small, for throwing only, but with handle), Throwblade (very small, for throwing only, no handle), and Shuriken (throwing star).

Axe/Hatchet

A balanced stick with a handle and a bladed head. Weapon subtypes include Handaxe (small workaxe), Tomahawk (thin, long head), Light Axe (too thin/small for actual combat, typically for light work), Throwing Axe (made specifically for throwing), and Fighting Axe (any larger axe, requires immense strength!).

Wilderness

Abilities of this category are meant to let the character survive and use various environments to his or her advantage. The Specifics for the Abilities are terrain, and target. Terrain is the same as for Fighting, but adding Urban (and having an environment for Fighting does *not* convey anything to Wilderness Abilities, and vice versa), Suburban, and Electronic (through data traces). Target options vary per Ability.

Survival

Finding food and shelter and protection from the elements, whatever that might be. Targets are the various things that may be found or avoided: Food, Clothing, The Elements, Disasters/Accidents, Diseases, and Radiation. The Electronic environment Specific is not applicable.

Traps

Setting up traps that capture or injure or even just trips or reveals the targets. Target options include Large Animals, Small Animals, People (as in, sentient, thinking beings), and Vehicles (controlled by people). Special targets can include anything that has a very special way of thinking (which might be ghosts, robots, or the like).

Tracking

Finding and following signs to find the target. The targets are the same as for Traps.

Hide

The Ability to avoid being discovered. Targets are the method of discovery the character is hiding from and includes Eyesight, Sound, Camera Surveillance, Infrared, Smell, and Movement/Pressure.

Camouflage

The Ability to keep others or other things from being discovered. Targets are the same as for Hide.

Animals

Dealing with animals has the Specifics of animal type, terrain, and situation. Animal types include Horse, Donkey/Mule, Bovine, Great Cat, Wolf, Elephant, Bear, Dog, Cat, Bird, and Rodent. There are plenty more, though, and strange worlds will add new strange options. The listed skills are mainly about knowing the mentality of the animals in question, knowing how they will react and what they are willing to do, but also what they are physically capable of. Terrain is as for Fighting, adding Urban (as per Wilderness) and Track (a racing track or arena), though environments chosen for Fighting Abilities do not convey a bonus to animal Abilities, and vice versa.

Riding

Being mounted on the animal and making it obey to get you around. Not all animals are fit for riding (some are fit for special sizes, like small animals for fairy races). Situations include Racing, Traveling (stable speed for days), Hauling (riding with cargo or dragging a wagon or the like), Obstacle (including jumping gaps), Show, Rodeo, and Mounted Combat.

Handle Animal

Controlling an animals behavior and moods. Situations include Soothing (if angry), Calming (if scared), Motivating, and Intimidating.

Train Animal

Teaching the animal to do certain things. Not all animals can be trained to do all things. Each general kind of 'tricks' is a Situation, like Fetching, Coming (when called), Stay/Sit/Down, Speak (in what ways the animal can produce sound), Attack (on command and at defined target), Guard, and Trust (teaching it to accept and obey a new master).

Vehicle

Operating a vehicle involves making it move as you want to. None of the skills actually involve handling the machinery inside the vehicle, nor can they be used to operate weapons or other devices mounted on or used in a vehicle. The Abilities have the Specific categories vehicle subtype, terrain, and situation. Situation is the same for all Abilities in the category, and includes Straight (fast without significant turns), Race (fast, with plenty of turning), Combat (for actual evasion, ramming and the like, but also for letting people shoot or fight from the vehicle), Casual (usually for checking out and area discreetly), and Careful (for fragile or similar cargo, or for dangerous terrain). Note that many genres, especially futuristic ones, have many additional vehicle subtypes.

Drive Car

Operating cars, or any vehicle with a wide wheel-base of four or more wheels, operated from some equivalent of a dashboard. Vehicle subtypes include Sedan (includes hatchback and most other standard, personal cars), SUV (includes Hummers), Jeep, Truck (including pickup), Semi, Bus, Construction, and Treaded (tanks etc.). Terrain is as for Animal, adding Highway/Freeway and Dirt Road.

Ride Bike

Open vehicles without engines, typically two-wheeled. Vehicle subtypes include City Bike, Mountain Bike, Long John, Front-Hauler, Tandem, Tricycle (also for adults), and Penny Wheel. Terrain as per Drive Car.

Ride Motorcycle

Open vehicles with engines. Vehicle subtypes include Scooter/Moped, Cruiser, Sport Bike, Touring Motorcycle, Street Bike ('naked' bike), Dirt Bike, Easy Rider (with extended length for front wheels. Term is *technically* incorrect), Trike, and Quad. Terrain is as per Drive Car.

Skating

Wheeled boots. 'Vehicle' subtypes include Quad, Inliner, Internal (the wheels are hidden inside the sole of the boots, and the user can either walk or roll), Ice, and Ski (due to similarities in operation). Terrain is theoretically as per Drive Car, but many options will be inappropriate.

Boarding

Largely flat boards, both feet on one. 'Vehicle' subtypes include Skateboard, Snowboard, Surfing, and Off-Roader (special build of skateboard, with large wheels). Terrains are as per Drive Car, adding Water. Most boards are limited in terrain options, though.

Parachuting

Using parachutes to land safely in a designated spot. Terrain Specifics are where the intended landing is. and *not* the way

down! 'Vehicle' subtypes are actually *drop* types, and include Emergency Ejection, Safe Jump (out of plane, common commercial jump), Rear Drop (parachute opens and pulls person out the back of the aircraft), Freight Drop (controlling the chute on cargo or land vehicles dropped), and HALO (High Altitude. Low Opening, very risky military drop method).

Sail Boat

Anything that is used on water (but not below; see *Submarine* for that). Vehicle subtypes include Rowboat, Powerboat, Yacht, Skimmer, Hydrofoil, Hovercraft (GEV, not sci-fi), and Catamaran. Terrains include Ocean, River, and Coast/Shallow. Hovercrafts can also use the terrains from *Driving*.

Operate Submarine

An ocean-going vessel built for, or capable of, controlled travel under the surface. Vehicle subtypes include SCUBA (non-enclosed, one-person diving vehicle), Manned Drone (enclosed vehicle, no wetsuit, one person), and multiple positions on a fully manned submarine. Terrains include Surface (exposed), Near-Surface (unexposed or periscope-only), Submerged, Close Quarters (near ocean floor or underwater walls), and Subsolid (beneath packed ice or in subaquatic caverns).

Pilot Plane

Operating a flying vehicle, in all three dimensions. Vehicle subtypes include Jet, Prop/Biplane, Jetpack (presumably better than today's), Cargo/Commercial Aircraft, and Space Shuttle. Futuristic genres may add various space vehicles.

Operate Mecha

'Mecha' are (the word is both singular and plural, though 'mech'/'mechs' may sometimes be used instead) large robotic vehicles. They vary greatly in size (from an almost skintight exosuit to gargantuan robots) and shape (from human-like to six-legged walking cannons), but their overall operating principles share many similarities. Vehicle subtypes depend on what kinds are present in the game world, and terrains depend on where they are used. If mecha exist, the game world should provide the needed details.

???Auto Maintenance

package for cars etc.

?Technical

Dealing with machinery. Unlike Abilities for operating vehicles or using standard tools to practice some other kind of work, these Abilities deal with complex machine operations that focus heavily on knowing exact functions and manuals. Categories for Specifics are machine subtype, action, concept, complexity and special circumstances. Machine subtype is listed per Ability. If the game world is sufficiently detailed, another category is brands; see the *Equipment* chapter for further information.

Action is what is trying to be accomplished and includes Operation (what the machine is meant for, but *not* complex actions like combat or aggressive driving; there are Abilities specifically for that!), Sabotage, Design (for new machine functions), Build/Repair (according to existing design), Reverse Engineer (figuring out how things work to reproduce their functions), Modify (in an intended way), Rig (modifying it in a way never originally intended), Scrounge (find/identify useful parts) and Dismantle/Shut Down (in ways beyond the intended operation, but safely, not destructively).

Concept is the way a machine is made, whether it is a part of the design philosophy when building it, or something that has to be observed during repair, or even if it is something that must be noticed when understanding the machine. Choices include Artistic (pretty or with a distinct style; multiple existing styles are separate Specifics), Reproductive (it has to look exactly like a certain model or version), Compact (possibly collapsible/foldable), and Ergonomic (good fit in hand or the like).

Complexity is how difficult to understand the machine is, and includes Simple, Complex, Advanced, Cutting-Edge and Experimental. Special circumstances do not always apply, but the machine might be High Voltage, Explosive, Toxic/Corrosive, Unstable (might collapse), Rigged (usually to an alarm), or Fragile.

Large machines, or simply machines meant for use in special places, can also have terrain Specifics, as per Fighting Abilities, to make the machine fit the environmental circumstances of that terrain. Of course there is no overlap between the terrain Specifics for Fighting Abilities and the terrain Specifics for Technical Abilities.

???Structural

Buildings, frames and other fixed structures, from a small hut to a towering skyscraper.

???Combustion

???Mechanics

???Clockwork Mechanics

???Hydraulics/Pneumatics

???Electrical

???Electronics

???Chemical

???Medical

equipment, not treatment!

???Software

virus?

Craft

This category of Abilities is reminiscent of Technical, but deals far more with handling materials and knowing how to shape and assemble them than putting together technical components. Some Craft Abilities may in fact be needed to produce individual, solid components for machines, like creating a particular cog in a machine (other Abilities are used for various components, too, like Chemistry and/or Physics for electronic components, etc.).

Specifics are as per Technical, but there is no overlap between Specifics for Craft and Technical Abilities.

Metalworking

Making things in solid, malleable metals. This includes, if technology allows, welding, smithing stamping and other such work methods. It is also used in repairing blades and other solid metal weapons or metal parts (but not maintaining them; see *Melee Weapons Maintenance* or other Abilities for that!). Subtypes are Blades, Tools (hammers, hooks, etc.), Figures, Welding, Smelting/Molding, Stamping, Mechanical Parts, Support (load bearing beams and the like), etc.

Masonry

Building things in brick. Subtypes include Walls, Surfaces (brick roads etc.), Fixtures (grills, birdbaths, obstacles, etc.), etc.

Stonecutting

Cutting things from stone. Subtypes include Construction (blocks, slabs and the like), Figures (including statues), In-Spot (carving something *into* a large rock, like a doorway), Fixtures (birdbaths, simple decorative forms), etc.

Woodworking

Producing things in wood. Subtypes are as per Stonecutting, plus Mechanical Parts.

Ceramics/Pottery

Using clay productively. Subtypes are as per Woodworking (yes, ceramics are used in many heat-resistant products, too!).

Plastics

Producing things in plastic. Subtypes are as per Metalworking.

Textiles

Creating things in cloth. Subtypes are Fixtures (curtains, carpets, furniture, etc.), Clothes, Tools (cleaning tools, protective covers, etc.), Tapestry (need not be just artistic/decorative; many cultures use it for depiction of events or for coats of arms), etc.

Painting

Working with paint, decoratively, constructively or in other ways. Subtypes include Canvas, Wallwork (incl. graffiti!), Shaped (figures or small, complex devices), Bodypaint, Sandpaint (painting *with* sand, not on it), etc.

?Security

These Abilities are about outsmarting observers or systems. Specifics include use, detection, and circumstances. Use is defined per Ability, while detection includes any kind of natural or artificial sense that could detect something: Sight, Sound, Smell, Touch (good when being padded down!), Infrared/Temperature Scan, Pressure Sensors, Movement Sensors, Retinal, Fingerprint, ID Scan (cards and the like), and Trace (anything dropped or spilled, like body fluids, gun residue or hair). Circumstances include Intrusion (getting in or getting something in somewhere), Examination (checkpoints and the like), Casual (to not be noticed by accident), and Controlled (cracking a security system in peace and quiet or actively cleaning up evidence; the character has time and needs not worry about being watched).

Conceal

This Ability is about hiding things on your person or whatever you have with you; stashing booze in a car, smuggling weapons inside a powersuit, and the like. It does not allow hiding something or someone in a place and then leaving; it's about personal presence and actively trying to make others not notice what is being hidden. For leaving something behind hidden, use *Camouflage*.

Specifics for use include Person/Midsized Animal (big dog, sedated or calm), Small Item (trinket, gun, small axe, calm small animal), Large Item (chair, microwave oven), Cloth/Paper, Involuntary Subject (including scared animal).

Disguise

Using this Ability lets a character make someone look like someone they are not, or simply not look like what they *are*. In a sense, it obscures or fakes an identity. It can be used on *others*, as well, as long as what is done is done in advance; the character can attempt to conceal another person's face against identification (with makeup or concealing clothes, for example), but obscuring the other person's habits takes a lot of training (essentially, teaching the person *Disguise*).

Use Specifics include anything that might reveal that identity: Face, Body, Voice, Smell, Body Language, Personality (habits and reactions), or Wardrobe.

?Forensics

When something has been done and others try to detect it *later*, this is the Ability that is used to hide the evidence. It is still used *during* the act, though; avoiding leaving footprints, leaving no smells behind, not dropping hairs, etc. Failure means something obvious and irremovable is left behind (add the amount of failure to any relevant Abilities to spot it), success is a penalty to any attempts to find anything later on.

Specifics for use include?????

???Snatch

pickpocket etc.

???Sneaking

???Hacking

doing it all with software.

Specifics=other abs

?Medical

These Abilities deal with handling living organisms (occasionally, *formerly* living organisms); repairing, examining, altering, even damaging them, at times. Specifics are specialization, environment, usage, and patients. Specializations vary with each Ability, while environments include Hospital (or clinical sickbay, or the like; dealing with live patients in proper surroundings), Laboratory (including morgue; scientific surroundings), Study/Library (anything dealing with the theoretic, typically written side of a topic), and Field (including combat medics and emergency response professionals). Usage includes Research (seeking new discoveries), Analysis (of specific illnesses, cases, events or effects), Discussion, Theoretic Study, Application (actually *treating* someone), and Writing (for a thesis, for example, or academic texts).

Patients are typically assumed to be (Adult) Humans. In the appropriate game world, other species may be similar enough to fall under this, calling it Humanoids. In others, other sentient species will be individual patient Specifics, either each or in groups, or a combination. Children (age 4-13) and Infants (below age 4) are two separate (humanoid) patient groups, as is Aging (when age has hit affected the body significantly; actual *age* varies)! Note also that *robots* fall under Technical Abilities, not Medical, though the organic side of cybernetics *do*. But entirely other patient Specifics include Small Animals (cats and dogs, mostly), Large Animals, Exotic Animals (exotic physiologies, that is; snakes and bugs are common examples), Rodents, and Birds. In certain game worlds, technology will even add Organic Machines as a patient option! If such technologies are well-established and widespread enough, there could be *several* kinds of Organic Machines patients, such as Small Gadgets, Vat Brains, and Living Starships; the actual options depend on the game world.

First Aid

A patient having taken an amount of damage, or been exposed to something harmful, can be helped by quick and skilled action. This Ability is about what can be done with little to no medical equipment; often, only what can be scrounged up quickly is needed, though a good medkit can be handy! A successful check can keep someone from dying, reduce damage (in most cases by the amount of success of the check), get a victim of something nasty out or transported safely, etc. In bad cases, this is only meant to keep someone alive until serious medical attention can be given. Checks are usually against how bad the damage or source of an ailment is. For extended treatment (such as continually reducing damage), a new check is allowed every 12 hours, whether the former check was successful or not.

Specializations include Blunt Trauma, Bleeding (cuts/punctures), CPR, Fractures, Poisons, Foreign Objects (bullets, shrapnel, etc., removing or making sure they do minimum damage), Exposure (climates), Exposure (radiation), Head Trauma, Cybernetics (biological problems surrounding damaged implants), and Securing (for transport or against disturbances, usually by strapping up safely).

Medicine

The skill to use medication and mildly intrusive repairs to heal someone, like sewing a wound up without causing infections. The Ability is highly dependent on drugs and light equipment, but for minor things, it also includes a basic knowledge of healing herbs and plants. For injuries that do not require surgery (no massive fractures, no continuous internal bleeding), this Ability can be used like *First Aid* but at one attempt per *hour*. As mentioned, though, the proper drugs and tools, or some good substitutes, will be needed, and the patient will need rest and frequent observation.

Specializations include Intensive Care (physical injuries), Anesthetics (sedating or using high-grade painkillers), Hematology (sepsis and other bloodwork), Toxicology (poisons, both treating for them and using them as drugs), Herbology (locating and selecting plants and herbs with medical properties), Performance Enhancement, Cybernetics (typically, curing infections caused by them, or treating minor injuries in the organic/machine connections).

Surgery

Explained crudely, this is the Ability for cutting living things open without killing them, and fixing injuries inside. It also deals with removing things or putting things in, if the technology is available. It is typically used in cases of severe injuries, but does have other functions. Modern surgery requires sterile equipment and surroundings, and work best with certain basic drugs (anesthetics are good, for example!). Surgery before the use of sterile tools tended to have high lethality.

Specializations include Amputations, Foreign Objects (severe cases of what was described in *First Aid*), Ruptures (in organs, not in the skin; that is for *First Aid* and/or *Medicine*), Massive Fractures, Transplants, Cosmetic/Corrective, Cybernetics (removing, installing, or fixing organics in the connections).

??Genetics

forensics, genealogy, therapy

??Psychiatry

only for those patient types who can communicate about themselves(??)

therapy, delusional, involuntary (compulsions), disruptive (concentration).

??Psychology

only for those patient types who can communicate about themselves

as per psychology

Academic

These are bodies of knowledge, typically scientific, dealing with complex systems and a lot of intangible concepts and referencing. Most are university material or at that grade of complexity or higher; only the lowest levels (1-3) are standard grade or high school levels.

The Specifics categories are specialization, environment and usage. Specializations are numerous, only samples are included per Ability. Environment is as per Medical Abilities, though without *Hospital*. Usage is as per Medical Abilities. Neither environment nor usage are *shared* with Medical Abilities, however; Specifics in Medical cannot be used in Academics, and vice versa.

Physics

The science of masses, motion and energy, from lasers and electricity to the rotation of the planets. Specializations include Complex Motion, Mass & Momentum (including propulsion), Electricity, Thermodynamics, Radiation, Lasers, and Material Sciences.

Chemistry

Mixing and interaction of compounds. Specializations include Corrosives, Flammables, Plastics, Crystalline, Metals, and Gasses.

Biology

The science of living organisms, including humans. Specializations include Anatomy, Hematology (blood), Toxicology, Neurology, Bacteriology, Virology, and Entology (bugs).

Geology

The study of soil, stone and the planetary crust. Specializations include Vulcanology, Sedimentology (ages of layers of rock), Petrology (identifying stone sorts), Geochemistry (soil chemistry), Glaciology (glaciers and ice masses), and Planetology (unearthly geology).

Economics

The flow of money, resources, and labor through society. Specializations include International Trade, Business Economics, National Economics, Stock Market, etc.

Politics/Civics

The study of how government and power structures work, in principle and in practice. Specializations include Bureaucratic Theory, Democratic Governance, International Politics, Diplomatic Theory, and many others.

Mathematics

The study of calculations and numeric representations. Practical applications are typically included in other Abilities; this one is about understanding math for math's sake! Specializations include Geometry, Trigonometry, Equations, etc.

Philosophy

The study of human thoughts, very often about why we think what we think, perceive what we perceive, and believe what we believe. Specializations include Ethics, Truths, Theology, and many different schools of complex thought that would make little sense just listing.

History

The study of what happened when with and to whom. Specializations include various periods and historical civilizations like Middle Ages, Imperial Rome, Ancient China and so forth.

Law

The study of legal contexts and representation, either for theoretical purposes, practical knowledge, or as a practice (lawyer). Specializations include Constitutional Law, Civil Law, Corporate Law, etc.

Language

The ability to read, write and speak a language, or simply recognize it. Each distinct language has its own skill. Specifics categories are Dialect/Accent, Use, and Situation. Use includes Speaking, Listening, Reading, and Writing. Situation includes Social, Business, Technical, Jargon (by profession), Prose, and other situations for language usage.

Dialect/Accent is typically based on geography, but some are not, such as text messaging lingo.

Every distinct language is an Ability. Available choices depend on the game world, but some real-world languages are

English, French, Spanish, Portuguese, German, Arabic, Russian, Japanese, Mandarin Chinese, Cantonese, Swahili and so forth.

Performance

These Abilities are all about creating impressions, whether they are moods or misconceptions. Arguably, they can also be used for straight profit, but even then, the profit usually comes from giving an audience some kind of impression. The Specifics categories are stage, impact, role and style. Stage is where or under what physical circumstances the Ability is used: In Studio, On-location Recording, Live Event (like a concert or stageplay), Private (with an individual or small crowd, also used for many kinds of personal auditions), and Planning (not executing it, but planning out how a certain execution might be carried out, like scripting). Impact is about what kind of reaction is desired in the audience and includes Inspirational, (Melo)Dramatic, Humor, Suspense/Fear, Abstract/Artistic ('raw art', meant to make people think about the artform itself) and Ritualistic (very precise and often traditional routines). Role is what part of a possible greater ensemble is played, and includes Solo (there are no others in the 'ensemble'), Lead, Support, and Background. Style are certain ways that the performance can be carried out; the actual styles are suggested at in the Ability descriptions.

Acting

This is making people believe (possibly by willingly suspending their disbelief) that the character is another person (or, occasionally, another *thing*), complete with expressed emotions, situation, notable background, etc. Beyond the mere artistic value it has, the Ability can also be used to actually trick someone into truly *believing* that the character is what he or she claims to be! This is a special (impact) Specific: Conviction!

Styles include Shakespearian, Cinematic (for somewhat cheesy movies), Theatrical, Method Acting or any of a range of acting paths that exist.

Dancing

Movement designed to be evocative or appealing, typically to a certain piece or type of music. Styles include any kind of dancing, from Folk to Disco to Waltz to Headbanging.

Singing

Musical vocals, both remembering lyrics and having the voice and voice *control* to make it sound as it should. Styles include any kind of music that involves vocals, including A Capella and the infamous Human Beatbox.

Speaking

This is for talking to people in a compelling way. Politicians, salesmen, religious leaders and many others use it, as do 'spoken word' artists. It includes both the use of voice and good wordsmithing, not to mention making what is said sound plausible, in respect to what is supposed to be the situation (for example, plausible dialog for someone who is angry or caring). The aforementioned (impact) Specific *Conviction* is available here, too, for making people actually believe something that is nothing but words; in other words, *lying*. Styles include Speeches, Storytelling (including anecdotes and long jokes), Confusion (for fun or less savory things), and Informational (presenting business reports to board members, for example).

Music

Playing an instrument. Styles include any genre of music, from Classic to Death Metal or Rap (the kind that *has* instruments, of course). This Ability also has an additional category of Specifics, namely instruments. It includes any available instrument, including Synthesizer or even Digital Sequencer (where music is not so much played as carefully constructed).

Presentation

Using a range of visual aids to create a show or believable illusion. This includes light shows, dramatic props like banners and symbols (but not regular stage props), PowerPoint, fireworks, or whatever else can provide a nice visual side. It can be very powerful, especially if aided by some good music! Styles include such things as the mentioned Light Show (projectors, lasers, etc.), Pyrotechnics (fireworks, actual fire, explosions big and small, etc.), Stage Decorations (banners and large props), Wardrobes, Location (finding and possibly altering natural surroundings), and Choreography (using extras or multiple artists for impressive results). As with Acting and Speaking, the (impact) Specific *Conviction* is also available, for making a lot of fancy tricks appear as if something else is really going on, from the believable haunted house to a fake bombing!

???Social

environment (social class etc.), action, mood, 'opponent', 'opponent' condition/mood.

???Read Person

checking for lying, getting impressions, watching for what he/she will do next/soon

???Socialize

Socialize is making people like and trust you. Different cultures and parts of society are different skills; high society is very different from working class, and Western, Middle-Eastern, Asian and African versions exist, and so on. These skills are mainly for 'fitting in', including making people think you belong if you don't, and knowing who is who or figuring it out.

seduction, persuasion,

???Coercion

Coercing is used to manipulate people into acting in ways they would otherwise not. Each general technique is a distinct skill, such as intimidation, public/mass speech, confusing (fast-talk or quick lies), and grifting (big lies and cons).

???Negotiation

negotiation (including bargaining),

???Organizing

getting many people to function together. Handling bureaucracy(?)

Geographical

This category of Abilities deals with finding things in an area. Someone skilled at it is a virtual atlas of information about places, people and events! It is mainly focused around the present, but things that *explain* the present may also be known, like the people who built something or why people of an area are locked in the situations they are in. Note that any Geographical Ability reflects the place discussed, *not* the place the characters necessarily are! For example, understanding why an Egyptian acts in a certain way might be possible by knowing something about *Egypt*, rather than the place the man is met. Of course, that is assuming the explanation is found in his national heritage...

Specifics for these Abilities are region, focus, topic, and theme. Regions are broader, geographical parts of the world, typically large countries (Canada, USA, Russia, China) or subcontinents (Scandinavia, Middle-East, etc.). Such a Specific covers things of interest or widely known in/about the region in general, not matters centered on only small parts of them. Focus, on the other hand, deals with narrow areas, like small countries (Denmark, Ghana, Vietnam, Guatemala), states in large countries (Iowa, Quebec, Guang Dong (China), etc.), or very big cities (New York, Rio de Janeiro, Hong Kong, Moscow, Tokyo). Such a Specific will deal with things that have special significance for that place, but limited interest for the greater region or world it is in.

In a multi-planet or other multi-world game world, a 'region' could be allowed to indicate such a planet or world, but only in general terms; for something with the same level of detail as the described regions, a region on/in such a planet or world would need to be selected.

A topic deals with a group or field of interest, like Military, Business, Culture, Science, General Demographics, Religion or the like. One topic of special note is Ties, since it deals with how many places are connected; it will tell of what deals one place has going with another, but not always why. Theme Specifics center around one very particular subject, like a person or event, or even a date of some significance, and puts it into a greater perspective, such as what the theme is tied to. Examples could be 9/11, a celebrity, a certain company, etc. It could even be a small part of what would otherwise be a 'focus' Specific, like knowing how the Bronx ties into New York and what that means for the city in the bigger picture!

Places

This deals with where things are, in terms of landscapes; it is 'maps in the mind'. It can be used for locating cities, particular terrains like mountain ranges or large rivers, highways and railways, or where the borders of a country or state might be. It will also help locate significant landmarks or known spots, like the Brandenburger Tor in Berlin or the Pentagon. Region or focus Specifics zoom in on smaller and smaller such things in the given areas, while topics and themes indicate familiarity with what these places are used for.

In a car, this Ability will let someone navigate cities and towns quicker, and know how to get to them. On foot, it can let the terrain work for the character, knowing where bridges and rivers are, or which way to go through large forests or mountain passes.

People

Using this Ability lets a character locate certain people, know what groups are in conflict (like gang wars, regional disputes, etc.), know who is powerful and who is resentful against that, etc. It works with both general groups (Chinese people in the area, or environmentalists, for example) and with special 'high profile' individuals (a rebel leader, a wealthy business man, a local celebrity, etc.). It will also give a general idea of how to handle them in a face-to-face encounter, but actually *doing* it is a Social Ability; on a success on this Ability, add the amount of success to that check!

Note that this Ability is not about truly 'knowing' people, either, only knowing *about* them; it will let someone know where to find a local crime boss, but it in no way means he or she has even seen the boss before. If there are some deeper ties, it is a matter for the *Relations* rules, not this Ability (and there is no bonus!).

Resources

Having this Ability means knowing where to *get things*. This ranges from knives to rare substances, from blueprints and research data to second-hand rocketships. The character knows where to find the rights markets, the right sellers or buyers, the right sources of labor, even the right investors or a sufficiently wealthy local population to run scams on! It is only about knowing where things are, though, and not about getting them, legally or otherwise; it is about knowing locations, nothing more.

Current Events

Whether from the news, gossip magazines, or various other networks, this Ability is about knowing what is actually happening in different places, rather than just what is there. Major events, situations that have lasted for a long time, things that have just started or things that some (experts or gossiping loudmouths) expect to happen soon, this Ability handles it. Conspiracy theories and mysteries that are still valid (i.e. have not been left to the historical archives yet) are also covered.

'Turf'

Amongst Geographical Abilities, Turf sticks out a little. It contains the element of all the above Geographical Abilities, but centered entirely on a small area; a large town or small city, or a neighborhood/district of a larger city. As a rule of thumb, it will cover an area inhabited by up to about 50,000 people. The area borders must be defined, and *it must be a demographically significant area*. There can be a mix of people, but the area could be easily marked on a map, and easily described in terms of what people live there ("it's the foreign trade district of the city, following a few long streets where the immigrant merchants gather to barter their goods", for example). The character can function as a local (assuming the level of the Ability is high enough for the challenges encountered!).

Because it is already a small area, region and focus Specifics are not available. If the area is diverse enough, subsections may be chosen from it as 'subdistrict' Specifics, instead. A unique Specific is Dialect, which can be added to the Ability when identifying someone as having a dialect from the turf (or spotting someone who claims it but does not). This particular Specific can also be added to the Ability of the Language spoken there in order to sound 'local'. Places with many local dialects closely gathered will have them all included in that one Specific (like 'old local' and 'immigrated local', for example). Most such dialects, however, will be for different languages, making it hard to really make use of the variety the Specific provides. This is the same Specific as found in Language; if both Abilities have matching Dialect Specifics, they automatically get added up!

??Sensory

Specific=details (complex), notice (fast), detect (faint/far), broad (from all sides)??

??Sight

??Hearing

??Smell/Taste

??Touch

Learning Abilities

If the Automatic Growth rule is in effect, a character will need one or more *Learning Abilities* to grow at a practical rate.

The rule describes how the Abilities are used for this.

Each category of Abilities already mentioned has its own Learning Ability. Thus, if there is to be Automatic Growth with the use of 'Animal' Abilities, it will depend on Learning Ability (Animal). Learning Abilities are acquired at character creation like any other Ability; 1 CCP, 1 level in the Learning Ability.

The Specifics for Learning Abilities are the actual Abilities in the respective category, indicating a propensity for learning some Ability more naturally than others.

Talent Abilities

The following are basically Abilities like any other Ability, but they offer a few special advantages. Most allow the player to add 1/10 of their value (rounding down) to a string of Abilities that involve the particular talent described. Examples of the affected Abilities are given, and any precise rules involving the Talents often describe them by name.

Thematic

A thematic Talent is one that revolves around something that the character has a knack for or has simply been around a lot. It could be cars, for example, in which case 1/10 of the Talent is added to practically *anything* that revolves around cars or a car, from driving them to repairing, buying or selling, discussing, attacking, getting out of (or getting others out of) or in any other way handling them. Another might be animals, usable whether training or riding them, doing veterinarian work, tracking/hunting them, knowing where to find them in the world (or where they are typically kept domestically), identifying their food in a warehouse, etc.

For a thematic Talent to work, the theme has to have an *active* involvement, though. It is not enough to be hiding behind a computer to use a *Computer* Talent, but knowing where they have their weak points and trying to shoot someone through a computer (or knowing what computers to hide behind for optimum cover) *would* bring the Talent into play.

Note that the Narrator has absolute final say in whether a theme is acceptable for this Talent. A theme should not be allowed if it is practically everywhere and/or has very limited influence itself on the action. For example, 'electronic gadgets' is too broad a subject for this Talent, and 'batteries' have no real influence on gadget use, so that is not a viable theme, either. Also look first for another Talent that might be doing much of what the proposed thematic Talent would do; *Precision* is used in any carefully aimed device already, including shooting people from hidden positions, so *Sniping* would be redundant as a Talent. *Assassination*, however, might be usable (used for both sniping, poisoning, discreetly stabbing and other nasty methods to kill someone without combat or detection).

Some breeds of Specifics are actually quite usable as themes. Terrain Talents, for example, can be used to give the 1/10 bonus to anything happening in a certain terrain, for making a character who is absolutely deadly in the forest, or the arctic, or other terrains. Unlike the Specifics of the kind, the Talent works in *any* Ability category. And this can be extended to environments, such as labs or business! Typical candidates for this kind of thematic Talent are Specifics that can be found in several different Ability categories.

Other than the 1/10 added to other Abilities, a thematic Talent can also be used to talk about the theme on end, or simply know basic facts (sometimes *obscure* basic facts) about the subject. Someone with a Cars Talent would be able to talk forever about cars, their function in society, various brands, makes and models, car racing sports, etc., or know the top speed of a particular car model. Essentially, if there is no Ability covering something about cars, the Car Talent can simply be rolled for as a normal Ability.

Each thematic Talent Ability is a completely separate entity.

The Specifics for any thematic Talent Ability are the kind of individual Abilities it can be added to, like *Combustion* and *Drive* for a car theme.

Brand

Also known as 'Brand Familiarity', this kind of Talent is only useful in game worlds that have a lot of different brands of technology (or something similar), and whichever brand is picked for a Brand Familiarity has to have a coherent range of products; a brand of computers and digital control systems is perfectly usable, a brand of computers and fusion reactors is fairly acceptable, but a brand of computers and sneaker shoes does not really fit. Of course, if the sneakers are just a side-business of a brand dealing in computers and other digital tools, the shoes are just excluded from the otherwise perfectly usable brand product line. Every Brand Familiarity is a distinct and separate Talent Ability for one particular brand!

Someone with a Brand Familiarity will be able to understand the workings of products from that brand in general, no matter what they are. This is possible because of the (presumed) general production structures, design, user interface, and integration methods used by a brand, and so on. Because brands in the kind of game world that the Talent is meant for will typically be large corporations (or other, similar organizations) with a wide selection of products, Brand Familiarity can let a character fix starships, megacomputers, cybernetic implants and toaster ovens and use vehicles, tools and

weapons of a single brand much easier than other brands. Someone with the right Brand Familiarity might find that it comes in handy both when fixing a stardrive and using medical equipment, because the brand is so distinguished. Biotech or biological magic brands can even produce creatures that have subtle but influential similarities across the brand!

If a brand has different departments that are really different, it can be treated as two or more brands; if the mentioned stardrive and medical equipment are designed very differently even though under the same brand, it can become the OlmaTech Stardrives and OlmaTech Medical brands, respectively, for example, with a separate Talent needed for each.

1/10 of a particular Brand Familiarity is added whenever an Ability is used on something of that brand, like fixing a machine, fighting an artificial creation, or avoiding security surveillance systems of the brand. It is also used whenever tools of the brand are used in applying an Ability, such as using a brand weapon or piloting a brand jet. If the brand is *both* the tools used *and* what they are used on, such as fixing a brand car with brand tools, apply the 1/10 bonus *twice*. Of course, if the car is one brand and the tools another, both of which the character has Brand Familiarity for, just use both once and add them up.

Like thematic Talents, a character can use a particular Brand Familiarity to talk about or know something about the particular brand, like its history, the design philosophies, influential designers, etc.

The Specifics for any Brand Familiarity are the kind of individual Abilities it can be added to.

Strength

This is raw muscle power. When things cause for nothing more than brute force, this is the Ability to check for; breaking things lifting things pushing and pulling, and so forth. 1/10 of it is also added to any Ability that finds an advantage in being used by a strong person, like *Throwing* Abilities, turning a heavy steering wheel, or, especially, damage in hand-to-hand combat.

More than that, *Strength* determines the amount of weight a character can handle, including what can be carried around: If a number of kilograms (double the number to get pounds) equal to or greater than a character's *Strength* is carried by that character, any physical Abilities will have a -1 penalty on them. For each full additional weight of that amount carried, add another -1. So a character walking around with equipment and other encumbrance equal to 3 times his or her *Strength* in kilograms (double that for pounds) would have a -3 to any physical Abilities. Note that this only concerns weight actually *carried*; having a rolling suitcase by your side is not carrying its contents, and certain magical or futuristic devices can make weight seen like less.

Specifics for *Strength* include any clearly defined action that utilizes physical brawn, like Lifting (single lift), Carry (continued lift), Pushing, Pulling, Breaking (by hand), Wielding (heavy equipment, *including* weapons rated with a minimum *Strength!*), Holding (something trying to slip away), Slamming (full body slam, also for slamming through obstacles), Kicking (inanimate, unmoving objects, like kicking in a door, or for added damage in *Unarmed Fighting*), Punching (inanimate, unmoving objects, like punching through a thick window, or for added damage in *Unarmed Fighting*), etc.

Endurance

This is the body's tolerance towards most kinds of punishment, both in terms of surviving it and recovering; injuries, strain, poison, starvation, etc. In combat, it is used to survive taking damage, and in many other cases where the question is whether a character's body can take what it receives, this is the Ability to check for.

The 1/10 is added to Abilities that require the character to endure something physically. This could be socializing in circles that put weight on hard drinking or playful fighting (i.e. fighting that is not really 'combat', per se), dancing marathons, exhausting actions, etc. Most physical Abilities can be used in ways that put as much (or even more!) emphasis on keeping on going than what is actually done, and this Talent is useful there.

Note that in matters where it is a question of whether the character can *mentally* endure things (pain, fear, boredom, etc.), *Restraint* is used. *Endurance* is about how strong the body is in the face of adversity, not about how squeemish the character is or is not. On some matters, the distinction might be difficult; sleep can be about the will to stay awake, but in the end it is about the body's tolerance for going without a shutdown period. This distinction is based on the actual situation, and will typically be up to the Narrator to decide (if all else fails, the rule can simply be 'the lowest of the two'; either the mind or body gives way first, but the results are the same).

The Specifics for *Endurance* include Damage/Injury, Bleeding, Poison, Exposure (hot or cold), Starvation, Exhaustion, and any other situation that might directly tax the body's capacity for survival.

Agility

In situations that require a character to be nimble and in high control of his or her body, this is the Ability to use. It describes the overall flexibility and complex use of limbs, joints, muscles and mass, allowing the character to pose, twist and turn without falling over or straining something. It also dictates speed of body movement, but only that which is

entirely under the character's control; fast reaction times to the surroundings is *Reflexes*, below! Also, because tool usage is very complex and often different from body usage, manual dexterity and other physical uses of hands and fingers are considered a separate Talent, namely *Dexterity*.

Agility should generally be used as an Ability when it is purely a matter of how well the character uses his or her body; balancing, sprinting, tumbling around (on purpose!) and the like are cases where it can come in. The 1/10 is therefore meant for physical acts that depend on the use of the body as a flexible and controlled 'tool', be it dancing or riding a difficult horse.

The Specifics for *Agility* include Balance (standing on wobbly or narrow surfaces), Steady (like Balancing, but while sitting, lying or otherwise not standing), Running, Tumbling, Jumping, Climbing (trees, ladders and the sort; sheer rock or mountain climbing require more than body control!), etc.

Dexterity

This could fully be called *manual* dexterity. While being essentially the skilled use of hands and fingers, it is more precisely the skill to handle tools or in general interacting with things through physical manipulation. This is only really important in case of non-human races or very unusual conditions, where something other than hands might be used; for regular humans, *Dexterity* is in hands and fingers.

Situations where the Talent is used involve the mentioned manipulation of tools, or feats of nimble fingers, like coin tricks or clever hand gestures, or even fingerpainting. Wielding weapons is an example, as is controlling a vehicle via manual controls. Ability Specifics include Typing, Gesturing, Fingerplay (card and coin tricks and the like), Manual Sorting (flipping through cards or the like), Manual Controls, etc.

Reflexes

To react quickly to the surroundings, this Talent is used. The 1/10 is added to any Ability requiring quick reactions, and can be used both physically (dodge, catch, etc.) and mentally (snappy comebacks, quick spotting, etc.). It is rare for it to be used on its own, although certain games or observation tasks can be purely a matter of reacting, without having to *do* anything special.

Specifics include Manual (anything reacted to with the hands, like parrying or catching), Footing/Balancing (not about having a good balance, but reacting to a shift in it), Visual (spotting things that are quickly gone), Sound (reacting to sounds), Creatively (snappy comebacks. *Clever* comebacks require *Intelligence*, as well), Recall (knowing quickly what something is. Knowing *many* things is for *Knowledge*), etc.

Precision

When for whatever reason it is important for something to hit an exact spot, from an exact angle, in an exact way, this Talent comes into play. This can be sniping, parachuting to a defined point, steer a jet between two cliffs, etc. The important thing is that the attempt is carefully aimed in a fairly straight fashion, using eye-hand or similar skills; quick shooting (as in most gunfights) or swinging (or even thrusting) a sword does not fit the definition, nor does an indirect thing like golf or kicking a ball. Carefully inserting cogs into a mechanical clock, however, does, as does a carefully aimed shot.

The Talent's Specifics include Fine Craft (tiny cogs, fine carvings, painting miniatures, etc.), Aiming (for carefully aimed shooting, precision photography, etc.), Throwing (for hitting, not for distance), Leaps (jumps that *cannot* be readjusted after kicking off), Jumps (those that *can* be adjusted after kicking off), Steering (moving vehicle or similar object controlled by hand), etc.

Intelligence

When the brain is needed to make deductions about something that is not explained and not routine, this is the Ability to use. It does not help with raw memory or educated guesses, though; it is purely the capacity to see patterns and make things add up! It *can*, however, be used with something systematic that the character has no Skill Ability for, like understanding a dead or just (to the character) completely unknown language. This will in no way be anything near what knowin the actual language would allow, but a good *Intelligence* check might let a character figure out what a Russian shop sells by comparing simple signs to whatever languages that character knows, and perhaps by looking at a few drawings or strange things in a shop window.

In other Abilities, the 1/10 is added if the Ability involves creative thinking or understanding complex relations. It is not uncommon for *Intelligence* and *Knowledge* (below) to switch places in a mental Ability, depending on use; recognizing a rare virus from microscopic examination is matter of knowing a lot of viruses, making it a job for *Knowledge*. However, figuring out what a (to the character) unknown virus is 'trying to do' and thus how it might be dangerous is a job for *Intelligence*. Quite often, *Intelligence* takes longer time to use than *Knowledge*, because it is about thinking, not just recognizing.

The Specifics for this Talent include Pattern Recognition (looking or listening to something to see if there is a pattern somewhere), Logic (figuring something out by examining possible cause-and-effect relationships), Creative Thinking (thinking up alternative solutions to problems), Parallels (understanding something by comparing it to something similar), and Deduction (providing solutions to something by deep understanding of provided rules or demands, like sudoku, philosophical dilemmas, or complex ransom demands).

Knowledge

This is actually a combination of good memory and having accumulated a lot of facts, theory or experiences. It is a powerful tool in quizzes! It is different from *Intelligence* in many ways, but most notably in that *Knowledge* does not really provide any kind of understanding; a character might know everything about what a war is about, without ever really understanding it. It is essentially just raw, recorded data, a mental library or archive. It does provide anything in terms of recognition, though; someone who knows a lot about something (a culture, a kind of machines, etc.) will be able to recognize it in the field, but will not automatically be able to understand what it is doing there unless that explanation has been read or heard elsewhere. The 1/10 is added when an Ability is used in a way that requires knowledge or remembering something clearly.

Specifics include any general topic (sports, politics, technology, etc.), as well as Numeric Data (remembering lots of numbers about things, like years, costs, homeruns, etc.), Identification (knowing how things look, sound, taste, etc., but only for recognizing them, not necessarily for describing or understanding the descriptions from others), and Textual/Oral Memory (remembering descriptions, stories and the like. This *could* be used to recognize something from comparing a description to a remembered verbal or text description, or reciting such descriptions). One Specific worth special mention is Common Knowledge, which is just the basics for getting by in life. It is mostly of interest in low-*Knowledge* characters or races, since a significantly low level of it means inability to understand day-to-day things. High levels mean a finely tuned common sense and strong wherewithalls.

Restraint

This is in a way 'mental endurance'. It governs self-control and rational behavior (or, possibly, *deliberately* staying irrational or emotional), and lets the character handle such things as irritation, pain, fear, desires and the like without 'giving in'. It can be used as a common Ability to avoid screaming, scratching, crying, or otherwise acting on primal instinct, or as the 1/10 bonus when an Ability is used in ways that are against the basic nature of the character (hurting someone the character really does not want to hurt, acting as if the character likes something he or she actually detests, appearing calm when dancing near ferocious beasts, etc.). It is also used in Disabilities, but that is covered in depth in that particular section.

The Specifics of the Talent are things that it can be used to quell or endure, including Pain, Fear, Revulsion (against something actually disgusting, not something the character simply has personal issues (Disabilities) with), Anger (what the character has personal issues with), Desire/Lusts/Wants, Inappropriate Behavior (typically, making fun of things or mocking others), and Irritation/Stress (scratching or, yes, farting).

Charm

There are people who just naturally are comfortable or even enjoyable to be around. *Charm* does not have anything directly to do with looks; an ugly person can be extremely charming! It is about personality, about how a person interacts with others. The 1/10 is added to any attempt to make someone else feel good about the character in a social situation. It can be used when talking to someone, or when being observed talking to or otherwise interacting with others (someone sees the character play with children, for example, or party with friends, or even speaking to an audience). It can even translate through recordings, making the character seem appealing in a broadcast interview. A check can be made for *Charm* directly (i.e. not using the 1/10 with another Ability) if the character is doing nothing out of the ordinary; being seen talking to a clerk or just making a quick remark to someone. Success will leave a positive impression, failure will make the character as forgettable as anyone else a person might briefly cross paths with.

Specifics include Voice (pleasant voice and choice of words), Expressive (works when looking at the person; facial expressions, mimicry, etc.), particular people (social groups that the person observing the character might belong to) and particular moods (sympathy when sad, amusement when happy, convincing when determined, etc.).

???Rated Abilities

[examples only]

[optional: Rated Ability CCP for buying them separately!]

???Weapon Improv

[make anything into a weapon; glass shards, bones, sheet metal, etc.]

???Science Improv

[fix machines with junk McGyver-style, gadgeteering]

???Keen Observation

[recognition (identify gun or car by sound, drink by look, person by scent, etc. Any sense as good as the others for identifying, appropriate knowledge as needed!)]

???Killer Instinct

[knowing how to use any confrontational or persuasive Ability across spectrum, like military tactics in business negotiation or combat principles in seduction]

Sample Characters

The following are meant as demonstrations of characters, not as premade characters for a campaign (though they can certainly be used for that, too).

Joseph Preston, fighter pilot

275 CCP (+57 CCP for Human Template = 332 CCP)

Born the son of a US Marine and smalltown school teacher, Joseph (he hates being called 'Joe' or 'Joey') was expected from youth to join the military. He was under no particular pressure, but his dad raised him with all the values and views of a soldier, and it stuck. That Joseph chose the Air Force was slightly less expected, but his dad was no less satisfied.

During childhood, Joseph spent a lot of time in the wild, hunting with his dad and his friends, but also playing on his own and with some of his school friends in the vast forests of his native Montana. To this day, he feels more at home there than even on his base, and retreats to nearby forests in times of stress, if possible.

He is a highly capable fighter pilot, but his social mentality is close to the stereotypical assumptions about soldiers: Somewhat stern and matter-of-fact, and pro-military. He has little love for people who bash on the military in general, and tends to express this quite clearly (he has to be badly pushed to get physical about it, though!). When he drinks, he is usually peaceful, but has a knack for turning any discussion into one about history and how "we are like this because of our history", something he also might do in other talks. His only real history background is from his father's stories and basic school learning, though, so the talks tend to be limited in scope.

Other than military and forests, Joseph is not really all that comfortable in most places. He has a notable problem being in crowds, especially the inner city, and his social skills are very limited to military work. He prefers to spend free time riding or in the forest, or reading up on current military issues. He is not antisocial, but he just has no particular interest in surrounding himself with people, at least not unless he knows them or it is for something that has his particular interest. He is not a morning person, either.

In all, the Joseph character is a good military character, if somewhat 'standard'. He is hero material, especially in a military-themed campaign and has fair potential for roleplaying. He is not very point-optimized, but is well-rounded in fundamental skills. He would make a good first character for a rookie player.

Background(Human Race)[129] (57 CCP)

Strength[7] (Specifics: Lift[3], Carry[4])

Agility[9] (Specifics: Running[6], Climb[3])

Dexterity[11] (Specifics: Manual Controls[9], Gesturing[2])

Endurance[7] (Specifics: Exposure[4], Exhaustion[3])

Knowledge[6] (Specifics: Common Knowledge[4], Identification[2])

Intelligence[6] (Specifics: Creative Thinking[4], Logic[2])

Charm[6] (Specifics: Soldiers[3], Natural Leader[3])

Sight[13]

Hearing[8]

Smell/Taste[4]

Touch[4]

(Specifics: Detail[6], Notice[14], Detect[9])

Movement(Land)[12]

Crave Sleep[-8]

Crave Sustenance[-8] (Specific: Water[6])

Crave Oxygen[-20]

(Specifics: Morning[7], Post-stress[12], Concentration[7], Winter[4])

Background(Montana childhood)[50] (32 CCP)

Ride[15] (Specifics: Horse[10], Donkey/Mule[5])

Handle Animal[14] (Specifics: Horse[8], Dog[4], Cat[2])

History[12] (Specifics: American[7], Military[5])

Dizzy in crowds[-9] (Specifics: Inner City[7], Open Areas[2])

Background(Boarding school)[57] (7 CCP)

Spanish[12] (Specifics: Social[6], Speaking[6])

Drive Car[12] (Specifics: Sedan[5], Jeep[3], Urban[4])

Music[8] (Specifics: Guitar[5], Blues[3])

Anger at anti-military sentiment[-11] (Specifics: Young activists[7], Media[4])

Compulsive history talk[-14] (Specifics: When drinking[8], Media commentary[6])

Background(Military/Airforce)[280] (236 CCP)

(* = Added levels to Abilities already in The Human Template.)

*Strength[+6(=13)] (Specifics: Carry[+2(=6)], Punch[4])

*Dexterity[+6(=17)] (Specifics: Manual Controls[+2(=11)], Gesturing[+2(=4)], Manual Sorting[2])

*Endurance[+6(=13)] (Specifics: Exposure[+4(=8)], Exhaustion[+2(=5)])

*Knowledge[+6(=12)] (Specifics: Common Knowledge[+2(=6)], Textual/Oral Memory[4])

Precision[7] (Specifics: Aiming[3], Steering[4])

Reflexes[9] (Specifics: Manual[4], Visual[5])

Restraint[10] (Specifics: Inappropriate Behavior[7], Irritation/Stress[3])

Knifefighting[14] (Specifics: Huntingknife[7], and below)

Unarmed Fighting[13] (Specifics: Hand[6], Feet[4], and below)

(Fighting Specifics: Forest[4], Soldier Opponent[3], Arena[3])

Handgun[12] (Specifics: Pistol[4], Semi-Automatic[8])

Heavy Weaponry[17] (Specifics: Fixed Mount[17])

Survival[16] (Specifics below)

Hide[10] (Specifics below)

Camouflage[12] (Specifics below)

(Wilderness Specifics: Forest[14], Desert[8], Disaster/Accident[8], The Elements[8])

Parachuting[11] (Specifics: Safe Jump[5], Emergency Ejection[6])

Pilot Plane[22] (Jet[16], Cargo/Commercial Aircraft[6])

Mechanics[8] (Specifics below)
Electronics[7] (Specifics below)
(Technical Specifics: Build/Repair[9], Advanced[6])
Conceal[10] (Specifics: Sight[6], Casual[4])
First Aid[14] (Specifics below)
Medicine[10] (Specifics below)
(Medical Specifics: (Adult) Humans[12], Field[5], Application[7])
Mathematics[7] (Specifics: Planning Room('Lab')[5], Trigonometry[2])
Places[12] (Specifics: Government[5], see below for the rest)
CurrentEvents[13] (Specifics below)
(Geographical Specifics: US[8], Canada[2], Military[6], Montana[4])
Obligation(Airforce), Loyalty[14] (Specifics: Air combat[10], Cargo plane[4])
Obligation(Airforce), Availability[8] (Specifics: In person[2], By phone[6])

Equipment

In many cases, a character is only as capable as available tools allow him/her to be. Equipment has a long history of swaying chances of success, both in games and in the real world. But more than that, equipment often has *personality*, at least in compelling stories. This does not mean that it is actually alive, but anyone who has ever shouted at a car for stalling with no apparent reason knows that the things we use in our daily lives can have their own funny 'ideas' about how, when and for what they should be used. In stories, and hence roleplaying games, things like customized spaceships, a sword inherited through generations, or handy little gadgets for identifying monsters in human guises, all get added to the list of things to rely on.

GEARS treats equipment as almost an equal to characters; some items are background, but important ones have a story, and all sorts of details about them that make their use as influential as the presence of any Relation or recurring character. For the most part, however, such items are still owned (or at least claimed) by a character, and it is in the use by that character that the item is truly defined. Players may be allowed to create their own equipment from scratch using rules and guidelines for it, or lists may be provided for them to pick from, at the Narrator's choice. Such lists, the first of which are supplied later on, include informations like weight and size, how much they improve the user's chances, what they can do (and how fast/much of it they can do!). Unique or complicated items are best described separately; some examples of these are also provided, and more can easily be created by anyone.

?Technologies

In describing a game world, the technologies that the world possesses are an important matter. This is both if it is advanced and if it is not; the kind of technologies missing are as important as ones added!

There are three angles on a Technology that are of interest: What Technologies are available, how far along it is, and how it interacts with other Technologies.

Available Technologies

One of the most fundamental questions about a gameworld is what has been invented. The answer not only defines what kinds of gear a character can get, but also how much of the game world works; if there are no cars or trains, getting around will be uncommon, and most people will rely on things close by, and family and friends will rarely live far away. If there are flying cars and elevator tubes, people may live anywhere, and cities may be built in multiple 'layers' of streets!

In GEARS, a 'Technology' is one very clear kind of invention and general way of using it. It could be *Laser Weapons* or *Steam Engines*, for example or even *Metal Blades*. If the Technology exists, things can be made with it, and may even be available in shops. If it does not exist, that is because nobody has discovered how to produce that kind of thing yet; if the *Steam Engine* Technology does not exist, no one has figured out how to make a functional steam engine yet. This does not mean nobody has had the idea, however! Thousands of inventors may be trying to make a steam engine that really works (without blowing up), but until someone succeeds and lets people begin to make them, the Technology does not really exist.

For a Technology to be created, often others need to first exist. *Laser Weapons*, for example, require the development of *Lasers*. Once that Technology exists, the arrival of the *Laser Weapons* Technology means somebody figured out how to make a laser that can actually be used to hurt someone seriously! In most game worlds, these 'Prep Technologies' will not matter much, because something has either been invented or not. But if the Narrator wants a game world to develop and grow during a campaign, knowing when a new Technology might come about (there is no guarantee it *will*, just that it *could*) is a good place to start. The arrival of a new Technology could turn things around a lot! And in campaigns where time passes very quickly (for example, a campaign where the characters get cryogenically frozen for years between missions), it could happen a lot, and in fact be something that they will have to keep track of to do their jobs. They may even plan their missions according to when they expect a new Technology to arrive ("we will need amuch more powerful computer to do this. It might be possible in a decade...")!

For simple game worlds, setting the available Technologies is a quick list of choices. But a more complicated game world can have secret Technologies, known only to certain big companies, nations or the like! For example, the world might be quite used to the existence of the *Lasers* Technology, but only secret military units under a certain mad dictator have access to the *Laser Weapons* Technology! Encountering them might be a painful experience, or the characters may be sent in to *steal* the Technology...

In the real world, it might even be a question of *where* someone is; being in a big city means access to the *Cell Phone* Technology, but in the Australian outback, that just does not exist. No signal, no fresh batteries, no repairs. This could easily be true for game worlds, too.

Technological Progress

It is one thing for a Technology to exist, there is still a lot of work to be done after that! Most Technologies start out with clunky, inefficient blueprints and methods; computers once filled rooms to do basic calculations, and cell phones were the size of a suitcase! But with time and a lot of research, they became smaller, and they continue to grow smaller and faster every year.

This is called *Technology Progress*, or simply Progress. Every new Technology starts out with a Progress of 1 (arguably, it starts out at 0, but that is so inefficient that it is only usable for crude continued research. Of course, someone might still want to steal it, to get that research done first). From there, it increases. A lot of gear and components will be described with a Tech Progress (Technology Progress). That means that the way the item works is based on that Progress. If a game world is designed to have more Progress in something, the item will be more efficient if produced with that Tech Progress. Basically, whatever the item does is raised by 1 or 100% in efficiency per increase in Progress. So if a laser rifle does 1 damage when the *Laser Weapons* Technology is at Progress 1, it will do 5 damage at Progress 5, and 17 damage at Progress 17!

If an item has many different things that can be increased as Progress increases, multiple models simply become available; the laser rifle has a functional range of 500 meters (roughly 550 yards) at Progress 1 of the *Laser Weapons* Technology. So at Progress 5, it can either have the increased damage described above, *or* it can have a range of 2500 meters (roughly 2750 yards). Other models may even mix-and-match, spreading the advances of Progress on different things, like a laser rifle with a range of 1500 meters (circa 1650 yards), and 3 damage; with four increases in Progress (from 1 to 5), range is raised by 200% and damage is raised by 2 (or 200%, as well).

Progress can be noted in the same way as Ability levels, e.g. *Laser Weapons[5]* is the *Laser Weapons* Technology at Progress 5.

As for the aforementioned 'Perp Technologies', many will be set at a certain Progress. For example, the real requirement for the *Laser Weapons* Technology to be discovered is not just *Lasers*, but actually *Lasers[14]*. Yes, the secret of creating laser lights (like those for shows, or for lab research) will exist for some time before even rudimentary laser weapons are invented!

Theoretically, there is a maximum of Progress that can be achieved with a Technology, a point where things just cannot be made better or more efficient. However, most Technologies get replaced by something better long before that happens. If this becomes very important in a game world, the game world designer is encouraged to decide on a maximum for relevant Technologies.

???Interacting Technologies

[how multiple Technologies influence each other in a machine/gadget]

[how multiple Technologies influence each other in society at large, e.g. production methods and distribution; what can produce what and what does that mean for the game world, adventures and characters?]

???Other 'Technologies'

[magic developing as Technologies, other esoteric 'Tech', too!]

???Acquisition

how acquire binds to others!

???Markets

incl black

???Product Order

???Production

???Issue

getting from employer, org, etc.

employment background

Relation?

???Inheritance & Gifts

family/friends background

Relation?

???Theft

proper skills and access

Bad Relations?

???Coincidence

finding. proper circumstances.

Someone seeking? 'Unknown' bad Relations??

?Personalization

Much of the above equipment information is built around the idea of common items, something that is produced by someone, sold or otherwise changes hands, and then used by whoever ends up with it. It *could* be an item produced on request, but it does not really take the end user into account, only what the item is meant to do.

A *personalized* item is made to fit specifically to the user. In whatever way the item is meant to be used, it is designed to fit specifically to one user; hand sizes, balance, height, aura, social standing, anything about the character might be taken into account when the item is created, or when someone alters it to fit that character.

This means that the item will, theoretically, work much better, or even *differently*, in the hands of that character, as opposed to anyone else. Added bonuses, added functions, reduced problems, anything might be made to be better for that character than anyone else who would pick up the item and try to use it. Odds are, the character and item will develop a connection, making them almost like a 'team!' Many fictonal heroes or villains have been as known for one particular piece of equipment (or a set!) as for what they themselves were, did or could!

Custom Builds

The typical idea of personalization is to have a piece of equipment built or modified specifically to the user; something handheld might be designed to fit finger length, grip, manual dexterity and arm strength, even a preferred balance, while something worn would be fitted closely to the character's physical dimensions, rather than an off-the-rack general body size. The cost of such customizations will vary with the advance of the technology used for the user-item interface, mainly design and activation mechanisms (triggers, buttons, voice command, etc.). The default added price is 50% of the overall item, or of the interface part of a very large one (the command chair of a spaceship, for example), but advancements in the technologies involved can bring it down to a pittance, or even make it free, so that any self-respecting vendor will offer a partial or even full customization, free of charge, with only a minute, an hour, a day or the like's extra waiting. In fact, there might be no default setting; the buyer *has* to give some physical stats before the item can be purchased. Getting something for someone else will require detailed measurements, though an advanced society would no doubt make that routine, or perhaps even have a central database of such things pre-measured!

In game terms, a Custom Build provides the character to whom it is customized a bonus. That bonus can be more or less anything, though a maximum of +5 for simple items (roughly hand-sized, no electronics or moving pieces, like a knife or hammer), +10 for larger or slightly complicated items (swords and axes, a car, a personal library), and +15 for very large and/or very complicated things (spaceships, data system breakers, exosuits) is appropriate in most realistic or semi-realistic cases. The downside, other than the aforementioned price (which is *per* +1 bonus), is that the item gets more removed from the original type; the Specific originally used for the weapon is divided by the Customization bonus! For a +1 Custom Build, that means no real effect, but for anything higher, the old Specific become less useful, because the item does not quite behave like what that Specific is for.

To put it as an example: Larissa's longsword was made to fit her hand, tailoring lengths and even finger indentations in the grip. She, and she only, now gets +3 when using the sword. But her *Longsword*[5] Specific now only gives a measly +1 (5 divided by 3, rounded down), which her player notes on the character sheet, by the sword's description. The Custom Build costs her the cost of the sword, plus 150% if the game world does not have good swordsmiths. This makes the

Customization a bit costly for the limited benefit she gets.

The reduced effect of the Specifics affect everyone using the item, even if they do not get the bonus from the Custom Build; the item simply feels different. Other Specifics, however, are unaffected, so things like terrain or opponent will still be the same for Larissa.

It is perfectly possible to later customize an item further. The price will be the same percentage, but added to the *new* price value of the item; if the item went from \$500 to \$575 in the last customization, the percentage for the new customization will be based on the \$575! The craftsman doing the work will also be at a penalty equal to the total Customization bonus on the item (unless a character is actually the one doing the customization, of course, that will not really matter).

?Other Customizations

While an added bonus is a nice thing to have in an item, there are plenty of other beneficial ways items may be customized. Each of the following customizations have the same effect as a +1 bonus customization for all other purposes, like calculating price and reduced effect of a Specific:

Reduce weight 5% (weight cannot go below 50% of original).

+1 to damage, rather than to hit.

+1 bonus to item maintenance.

+1 bonus to any concealment of the item.

reduce needed Strength?? How much???? auto with weight?????

[more options!]

The total customization is measured in the equivalence to bonuses for customization; if an item is customized for a +3 bonus, 10% weight reduction and +2 to concealment, it has a total Customization of 7 (3 bonuses, two weight reductions, 2 concealment bonuses). Use that number when checking the effects of the customizations.

Inversely, an item can be produced (but not customized later on!) with the opposite of any of the listed customizations, including the bonus. Each 'negative' customization will counteract the price increase of one 'positive' customization. If there are more negatives than positives, the surplus negatives reduce the *original* price of the item by 5% each! The item can never be cheaper than 20% of its listed cost, though, and each negative customization is still a customization added to the overall Customization number. For example, a sword might be customized for a +6 bonus and +3 to maintenance (9 'positive' customizations), but be 25% heavier and have a -5 to concealment (10 'negative' customizations). So the price increases are entirely counteracted, with one 'negative' customization left over, making the net price actually 10% *below* list price. The item has a Customization of 19, making the original Specific for its type pretty much useless; it is basically a whole new version of the original item.

Reducing the Customization number costs 20% of list price per level, and adds the same percentage to the time taken to create it. No *single* customization (particular bonus/penalty, weight changes, etc.) may be included more than 4 times, if the goal is a Customization of 0! Any customizations above 4 will be permanent; if weight is customized 6 times and maintenance is customized 5 times, that is a total of 3 levels of Customization that no amount of cash will remove. Items listed to use the same Specific but have different stats can be considered created this way; the added cost is in the original design, not in materials, and mass production is typically implemented to make 10,000 of the customized item cost almost the same as 10,000 of the original.

Custom Specifics

The reduced use of the regular Specific for a Custom Build is somewhat compensated by the fact that a character can develop (or have from the beginning) a Specific for that *particular* Custom Build. This Specific will not be usable for different Custom Builds, even if the type of item is the same (like another longsword for Larissa), so having multiple items using the same Custom Specific would require each item to be customized in the same way. Very clear instructions by the original customizing craftsman or craftsmen (each one, if several customizations have been done on it by different people!), or added time to study the item (typically 20% of the time the customization will take), is sufficient.

When using the item, any Automatic Growth can be applied to either this Custom Specific or the Specific for uncustomized versions of the item. The latter will grow only at normal pace, not faster just because the item makes it less useful.

Needless to say, a character who focuses on the Custom Specific will get much more out of the customization (assuming it was more than +1) than one who insists on raising the original Specific for the item type. Of course, that character will

also grow increasingly dependent on that particular item, since the Custom Specific is useless for items not customized.

An item that is being customized for the second or later time, to raise the bonus further, can still use the same Custom Specific. The reason a later customization is more costly and time-consuming is that the craftsman has to build on the customization concepts used by the one(s) before him/her. Any item customization is an overall concept, rather than just a bunch of little changes.

Heavily customized items often have such drastic effects on the original Specific that it becomes negligible, making the Custom Specific an actual item type Specific for a whole new item type, for all practical purposes.

'Murphy' Customs

Any design system trying to simulate the infinite possibilities of reality, even a fictional reality, is going to be born with flaws. There are simply too many variables for a system to handle without becoming a behemoth of math and data that would put a modern supercomputer into a fatal crash!

The system put forth here is no exception. It is made to offer as many and as believable options as possible, allowing a wide variety of player adjustments, to make their characters and their gear something unique, for flavor, competitive advantage, or whatever reason they may have. But every now and then, an item will be created that, while following the rules to the letter, will be illogical. A simple example could be an item that is built (not customized) to have 60% extra weight (12 weight increases), making it 60% cheaper. That is all nice, until someone realizes that this particular item is much cheaper than the materials it was made from; not only did the customization mean more of the materials were used, but it made the resulting item much cheaper at the same time!

Any customization should be checked to make sure it is not a 'Murphy' (named from the gamer cartoon 'Murphy's Rules' that humorously points out such silliness). Not all Murphies can be caught, because some are highly unexpected and probably not even intentional (if a player deliberately abuses the game through Murphies, that player should be strictly penalized! Unless, of course, such trickery is part of the game antics, as in certain sully games). But if one is found when an item is being designed, the Narrator has every right to disallow the customization, demand further customization to make it plausible, or simply apply a change by fiat to prevent it from breaking the logic of the game world. The rules are *not* fixed above the internal logic of a game world, and players *cannot* point to a rule to permit them to create impossibilities! Of course, if the Murphy is discovered some time after its creation, after having been used repeatedly, the Narrator and player (if it was a player trick, *only* the Narrator) should sit down and decide what about the item can logically be adjusted to make it plausible and still fit with what has already happened.

Item Abilities

If something is complicated enough as an item, it will draw upon a whole line of Abilities. Each of those Abilities undoubtedly has an actual Specific aimed at the item, or at least a category it firmly belongs in. An Item Ability turns that concept on its head: Instead of several general-use Abilities that can be used for the item, amongst others, the Item Ability is one Ability that handles most all of the Item's needs, but is useless on other models.

An example tells it best: A spaceship has a lot of uses, and a lot of features and functions, from flying around to handling freight to the technical systems making it run, and some even have weaponry of various sorts (lasers, missiles, EMPs, etc.). Several Abilities would be needed to deal with all these things as separate topics. Instead, an Ability for that model and configuration of spaceship could handle it all! Of course, it would be useless on other models, while the aforementioned general-purpose Abilities would fit nearly any model. The Item Ability is knowledge and routine in using one particular piece of complex equipment, not broader knowledge of the concepts involved.

One important thing about Item Abilities is that their Specifics include, sometimes consist entirely of, the kind of work all the general-purpose Abilities would be for. For example, the pilot of the spaceship might choose *Tri-Vector Freight Vessel* (the model of the spaceship) as the Ability for handling his job hauling goods in the spaceship, rather than taking both *Pilot Spaceship*, three different Technical Abilities, *Shoot Laser Cannon* and a few other Abilities otherwise needed to do the job. Each of those Abilities would have a Specific for the type of spaceship that the *Tri-Vector* is. In turn, the *Tri-Vector Freight Vessel* Ability has a Specific for each of *those* Abilities. So the pilot might have the Ability with a significant investment in the *Pilot* Specific, and some in the most important one of the technical systems onboard. What is important is that these Specifics are the same as their matches in the general-purpose Abilities; the *Tri-Vector Freight Vessel (Pilot)* Specific is the same as the *Pilot Spaceship ([the Tri-Vector's spaceship subtype])* Specific! A point spent on raising this Specific can thus be seen on both Abilities. Even more important is the fact that *such a 'transferred' Specific is not subject to the limitation of the Item Ability's level as usual, but to the greater of the Item Ability and the typically used Ability!* In other words, if a character has *Pilot Spaceship*[14] and its Specific *Tri-Vector ship subtype*[8], and later adds the Item Ability *Tri-Vector Freight Vessel*[3], that character can actually use the Item Ability with the full Specific from the *Pilot Spaceship* Ability, rather than be capped at a +3 bonus because the Item Ability is too low! Of course, if the character only had *Pilot Spaceship* at 6, neither it nor the Item Ability could fully apply the Specific, and the Item Ability would only get a +6 from the shared Specific.

This is one way characters can transition more easily from general-purpose: By having some Specifics already in place. So even if the Item Ability, like the *Tri-Vector Freight Vessel* Ability, starts out at nearly nothing, a hardened spaceship pilot probably has the Specific to pilot the craft from the *Pilot Spaceship* Ability already. The pilot can start flying the ship around, and the Item Ability for it grows to let him or her use its systems better.

The Item Ability does have to be used for Automatic Growth to raise it, though; using *Pilot Spaceship* will not let anyone learn the deeper skills of handling a particular spaceship type. So some things will need to be relearned, but it can often be well worth the effort!

What is actually being learned depends entirely on what the item in question is. The Item Ability for the spaceship might well be about understanding the stresses the craft must handle, and how it affects the systems, allowing the pilot to both take care of the ship, understand what breaks down and why, and push the baby to its limits! For a complicated magical sword, it can be either the practical routine of getting moves right to trigger spell effects, or it could be a general 'feel' for the sword, or even some metaphysical intertwining of the enchantment and the soul of the wielder. Or it could be all of it, combined. Explanations are up to the game world/item designer, the Narrator, and the player of the character.

?Item Combos

Some 'customized' items mainly consist of two or more existing items slapped together. Nonetheless, these Item Combos can be quite useful, to the point of having a visible impact on a campaign or game world. The use of bayonettes, little more than a knife on the barrel of a rifle (and in many cases, an actual, detachable knife!), had an impact on warfare, and other categories of equipment do similar things.

To create an Item Combo, start by simply adding together their weights. Whatever weight might be redundant (like multiple handles) is compensated for by whatever holds the component items together. This produces one item that can be used as either component item. However, when using one of the component items for its original purpose, every 5% the added item component(s) increase the relevant item component's weight is a -1 penalty to the check.

This basic Item Combo can then be customized according to the above rules. The penalty for weight can thus be reduced by reducing the overall weight; the penalty remains calculated by how much the total weight is increased over that one applied item component's original weight! An Item Ability can even be developed for the new item, meant for its particular usage, but not for using the item components under any other circumstances.

One example of an Item Combo could be the *blade gun*, a staple of modern steampunk and certain other genres. Blade guns are basically long-barreled guns (large ones may be short-barreled rifles) with a sword-like blade attached underneath. This makes the item a firearm and sword in one, albeit an apparently clumsy version of either.

[continue example! get weights!]

each X% of one piece that the other weighs = 1 Customization level? For what piece???

Customization involved (added weight of...?) ...???

The *Blade Gun* Ability will allow the wielder of a blade gun to either shoot or fight in close combat with it, effectively making the Ability a combination of *Swordfighting* and even *Gunfighting*, and *Shoot Gun*, but one that *only* works with the peculiar design of a blade gun, and in fact only *that* particular design (or others that have had the Customization level reduced, expensively); someone with *Shoot Handgun* (or, for long versions, *Shoot Rifle*) can fire it, and someone with *Swordfighting* can fight with it, but someone with only *Blade Gun* cannot use regular swords, rifles or handguns at all!

Of course, there will no doubt be moves that are only possible with a blade gun, no matter how much they use skill from other Abilities (like running someone through with the blade while simultaneously firing off a few shots into the wound). Combinations of other Abilities (in this example, *Swordfighting* and *Gunfight*) can reproduce some, but they will be at significant penalty, because of how odd they will feel if not using that particular item's training!

If the Item Combo becomes a common feature of the game world, it will no doubt become its own niche field of training and have its own markets, models, etc., making it pretty much an item like all others, only with a few more options for how it is used.

Character Adaptation

The idea of customization has an interesting flipside: Sometimes, it is easier to customize the *user* than the tool! While not all too common in the real world, science fiction or fantasy game worlds may use a range of methods to alter people, or animals for that matter, to be able to use tools better. Whole societies may have special breeds or classes of people that are special because of their improved use of certain items. Indeed, they may be the only ones who can use them, at all!

In game terms, this can be done with a Prep Ability (it can also be done with multiple, but that is more complexity than is needed in this particular text). This Ability does not so much describe training as it does some 'adjustment' or 'alteration' to the character, and it cannot be increased by character growth, if it can be improved at all. Depending on the game world, the character might have to take it at a certain level or not at all, indicating a completely standardized alteration. Other game worlds may have inferior versions, either from cheap or flawed alterations, later generations with diluted versions, incomplete alterations on subjects that escaped (or were not completed before The Empire fell!). Different levels may even be meant for tools of different complexity; a special gun might require level 6 of the alteration, while a whole special vehicle requires level 14! This kind of Ability, whatever the rules surrounding it, is called an Adapter Ability.

How and why such Abilities are created is a matter for the game world to define. For the character, it is something to be acquired during character creation to gain access to certain options in equipment. This could be just the use of the equipment, or to handle it at all; without the Ability, a character might not even be able to carry or *spot* the equipment! But while the Ability is technically a Prep Ability, it might still be possible to use the equipment with a lower level, or even without the Ability at all. Instead, using the item(s) will have the effects of a Disability with a level equal to the missing levels in the Adapter Ability! So if *Cybernetic Interface*[10] is needed to handle a certain weapon, trying to do it with only *Cybernetic Interface*[4] will result in a Disability at level 6. Possible options include random firing (the weapon goes off unintendedly, a Disability probably triggered by just moving the weapon when active), physical damage (the improved interface is for managing recoil, and without it, whammo!), severe power drain (and for a cyborg, that is bad), etc. Whether any one item can be used with reduced and/or no level in the Adapter Ability is up to the game world designer.

Of course, the Abilities to actually use the items *well* are completely separate; the Adapter Ability only allows them to function at all with the character!

Also, for some items the Adapter Ability will mainly or only be for certain features. For example, *Cybernetic Interface* need not be to use the weapon at all, but might be to use the advanced targeting system, or for a higher rate of fire, or even for special ammo. Anyone can use the weapon, but someone with the proper Adapter Ability can use it *better*, by using exclusive features, or just use it for different things.

One thing worth considering when creating an Adapter Ability for a game world is whether it is something others can spot. The interface described might be entirely internal, or it could be small plugs in the arm. Or it could be a complete panel of plugs! If it is sufficient trouble, it can be a Disability, triggered when the thing is spotted. It might even be visible only when the character is scanned (or some equivalent, generalized examination technique), making *that* the trigger.

Finally, having an Adapter Ability does not mean items cannot be customized beyond that. Even with that interface, a gun can be modeled to fit one character's hands better than any other's...

???Usurped Personalizations

[Someone with similar features using the item as personalized. Someone *creating* the features, to use the item.]

[Breeds, species or social classes having personalized gear fitted to them, to keep the mob from using it?]

?Condition & Maintenance

Equipment used gets worn. If no care is given to keep the equipment in good condition, the wear will erode it, making it less and less efficient. Gear maintained will work better and last longer. In the end, a character with well-maintained tools will be ahead of the game.

Moreover, there are a lot of adventuring possibilities in buying cheap, old, worn or just badly made equipment, keeping the characters equipped cheaply. The gear might be close to falling apart, but with proper care, a band of rag-tag adventurers can accomplish the impossible, as long as their tools does not fall apart.

Using Condition rules allows this dimension to be added to the game. The character team can use rusty, old gear and be equipped like champions as long as they can hold it together, they can make any tool work better by knowing how to take care of it, etc. In a sense, Maintenance becomes a trick that anyone can learn, to make equipment better than it would normally be.

???Condition

gives bonus, drops when used, gained when maintained.

climates/environments/use hurts condition. Vulnerabilities??

!!-like damage? wear and tear builds up, maintenance = Endurance?

???Durability

until breaking

maintenance gets harder??

!!-like damage? wear and tear builds up, maintenance = Endurance?

Disabilities from bad condition!

???Equipment Design System

complete core design system, a la GURPS Vehicles or Robots!

individual components depend on game world!

fixed numbers + variable numbers ('%'), a bit of math...

???Components

what can do? not functional, instant broken, unless given Frame

???Performance

stramlining/special-forming

???Turrets & Transformations

standard turrets/ full transformations.

???Frame

how sturdy ('Endurance' checks need)? Also for harsh use

armor

???Strain & Damage

harsh use, combat. relay to condition & maintenance!

quick repair rules, relay to condition & maintenance!

???Samples

???Oddities, Problems, and Solutions

strange uses (cooking with lasers, Specific? for cooking...)

incompatible, aborted technology/model, setbacks, rewrites, wtc.

cheaper?

brands

???Equipment List

basic items

???Game Worlds & Prices

differences. Technologies...

Creatures

While not entirely necessary in roleplaying, creatures that do not have the self-awareness to be considered actual people are a very common part of it. These include animals as allies, enemies, or just background 'characters', magical or otherwise different 'monsters', or even the center pieces of a large mystery. Some beasts are mythological, their very presence being a clue or warning about what the adventure is about!

Creating a creature is theoretically a pretty easy task: Just give it a description and some number of dice to roll for whatever it can do. Such creatures are enough to get pretty far in adventure design, and a Narrator might never need anything more than that. But there are more considerations that can be made, and if the creature is meant to play a greater role in the game, making them is a good idea.

Of course, it is not always a question of creating a creature to fit a specific role in an adventure. The idea of collections of creatures, sorted according to concepts or habitats or the type of roles they may work in, is as old as roleplaying games themselves. This lets someone sit down and design these creatures just out of interest, and pick from collections when in need (perhaps tweaking the chosen creatures a bit). Swapping creatures designed is a common practice.

The guidelines for creating creatures, as presented here, allow highly unique creations fairly easy. They are not meant as strict rules, but as mentioned, important creatures especially are worth doing in detail. Even brief encounters can leave a much greater mark if designed with a bit more care than slapping together a few numbers and hoping for the best...

Purpose

The first thing to consider is the actual purpose of designing the creature. While it can seem redundant, it sets a lot of the base for how to design the creature.

Point Value

A good indication of how well matched a creature is with the characters, especially as an opponent, is by its point value. This is set as a character's would be, by making the creature with points and Abilities. Commonly, the Talent Abilities *Intelligence* and *Knowledge* will be reduced, while physical ones like *Strength*, *Agility* and *Endurance* are increased (and *Dexterity*, if the creature can grab things. Such as characters). Beyond that, Abilities for creatures are handled later in the text.

As described for characters, the orientation of a creature's acquired abilities is a good thing to note. Most creatures will be almost entirely focused around one or two orientations, such as hunting, combat, or hiding. The closer the point value of an orientation matches that of a character, the better matched the two theoretically are. In practice, there will be an infinite number of factors to affect this balance, but a good point value comparison is a good foundation for creature encounters! And if a big challenge is what is needed, the point value can be raised, just like a lowered value is good for more casual challenges.

Plot Function

What a creature is meant to do in an adventure is equally worth considering, *before* the creature is picked/designed. Even combat encounters can be improved if the creature's particulars are given such thoughts; should the vault guardian be just a vicious combat beast, or is it actually more something hard to trick and even harder to get by unnoticed? Is the nasty critter in the empty spaceship there to really hurt the characters, or just to wear them down to keep them weak for the rest of the adventure, or even just to provide some entertainment or tell the players something about the place ("wait, if that thing has to breathe, then there has to have been air in here all along!")?

More exotic creatures, or even certain real ones, can cause all kinds of trouble, too! Some may be out to suck the power from magical items, or be drawn to electrical power sources and wanting to suck their stored electricity. Real-world packrats and certain birds steal shiny things! The details of the creature will define what it will end up succeeding at, but its function can be set for anything like that quite easily.

By inserting creatures to do specific things, the critters chosen can fit the task much better. If they are created from scratch, they can even be given Abilities (or Special Powers!) that are directly targeted towards their plot function. For example, a small creature might be easily killed, but it has the Ability to short-circuit electronics it touches, because the Narrator wants the characters to handle a soon-to-come challenge without their electronic gadgets. Or a bug might sting characters with a weak poison that confuses them and therefore makes them susceptible to mind control, the exact trick favored by their nemesis waiting around the corner.

If the characters are sufficiently secluded, or the Narrator is very good at setting things up just right, seemingly innocuous creatures can poke holes in the characters' arsenal of Abilities and tools, so that they are set up for a lot of trouble when they suddenly face a critical challenge!

Much simpler plot functions also exist, of course. Some creatures are not there to do actual harm, but more to frighten the characters (and players), or just make them worry what is coming next. Some creatures may even be included with a particular character in mind, either because that character needs to be pulled down a bit, or to let the player show off the character's Abilities. Or a creature could simply play to some character Disability...

Abilities

If a creature is made in the same way as a character, whatever it can do will be based on Abilities. The details of those will be in the combination; some creatures are highly specialized, surviving by doing one thing and (presumably) doing it well. Others will have several tricks, which either compliment each other or provide a broader spectrum of options.

Certain Abilities take on a slightly different meaning when applied to beasts, of course. The *Unarmed Fighting* Ability, for example, becomes less martial arts and more savage, and *Tracking* becomes about sniffing a trail more than knowing different signs of someone passing through. Other Abilities may be viewed in a slightly different light, making them perfectly good for beast use.

Beast Talents

While there are creatures even in the real world that have surprisingly (sometimes disturbingly) sharp minds, even they still think in ways that are not actually on par with humans or similar races from other genres. Beasts lack certain higher levels of thinking. They lack tool usage. In fact, very few beasts have physiologies and other basic structures that really resemble what a 'person' would have.

The bulk of these fundamental differences are found in Talent Abilities, since they describe many of the things in a being, whether 'person' or 'creature', that deal with core traits. Most animal or animal-like creatures have very little *Knowledge*, for example, since they do not care for information about the greater world, being focused mainly on their immediate surroundings and day-to-day survival. They are not completely without it, though; even beasts will know about the territory around them, or recognize certain features and even other animals. A *Knowledge* of 3 or 4 will match a clever creature, one that has a good overview of what exists around it. 1 or 2 is more of a rudimentary beast, aware only of its immediate surroundings and knowing little about, for example, what plants are poisonous or what places to watch out for. A creature with *Knowledge*[5] might even recognize simple traps and strategies of sentient, tool-using species (like humans). This is a matter of having learned from experience, though, not being able to figure things out.

Figuring things out is *Intelligence*. This varies more than most would think amongst beasts! Down at 1 is the realm of slugs, 2 is most insects and simple birds, 3 is rodent country, and so on. 5 is where simple commands can be learned, and 6-7 is the more clever apes and monkeys. Beyond that, any creature would start to seem disturbingly clever, able to figure humans out in matters not involving complex tools, and plan to act around them (including tricking them in different ways). Any creature with *Intelligence*[5] or better will also be able to figure out how to use something like *Charm* to its advantage, and even figure out what tricks can endear others to it. Less intelligent creatures only have cuteness going for them (assuming they *are* cute, of course).

Finally, *Dexterity* is the measure of handling physical things, even for beasts. Chimps and apes may have it at levels below human but still not that bad; they can handle things and push buttons, even if they don't always understand what they are doing. A creature with paws or less in place of hands will be forced to resort to pushing things around, or dragging them with (presumably) their claws (dragging something with the mouth is not really considered an expression of dexterity). Fictional creatures with fair *Intelligence* (or *Knowledge* and proper training) can use even a low *Dexterity* to turn on machines or even play chess, but below 6, *Dexterity* goes from butterfingers to outright improvisation. 4 is hoofs, lacking the instinctive coordination to do more than knock things about gently. Below that, it is wings and flippers or less, useful for no more than slapping things clumsily. A true *Dexterity*[0] means nothing but a body, like a slug; even snakes can wrap their tails around things, giving them some *Dexterity*, occasionally more than one would like!

Other Talent Abilities work for beasts as they do for people; *Strength*, *Endurance* and *Agility* are about powerful, nimble bodies, which beasts often have even more of than people! *Restraint* is a measure of how well the creature can resist its immediate instincts, often being the difference between those that will fall for the urge to eat something thrown at them, and those that can resist it if they sense danger. And as mentioned, *Charm* is for creatures that are cute, beautiful or otherwise 'attractive'; only a revolting, putrid ooze will actually be able to claim *Charm*[0]...

Special Abilities

While many basic actions of a creature can be made possible with common Abilities, there are still things that animals and especially fictional monsters can do that defy the usual suspects on the Ability List. Luckily, there are Special Abilities, as explained in Character Creation, and these can be produced for creatures, too!

Most Special Powers for creatures are based around self-defense or feeding, but anything is possible, really, especially when fantasy and science fiction creatures are brought into the mix. The rules for making these Powers are the same as for

character Powers, and anything there can be used. For example, a creature might have spikes, like a porcupine. Those are basically a Passive Power that does damage, as the example used in that section; write up an Ability for how much damage they can do, and they are done! If the spikes are not for that but for shooting at others like little darts, the Fireball example can be the guideline for their creation.

A lot of creatures have interesting *Movement* Powers, climbing on cavern walls or digging through the dirt, or even classics like flying or swimming. As stated in that section, completely substituting land movement for another medium means the new Ability is at no cost (if using The Human Template, the level of Land Movement there is the level that the creature automatically gets; it can be increased or decreased for more or less impressive movement).

What creatures have less of is very complex Powers. If they do, odds are they are designed around them, like a creature with a very unusual way to survive in a strange place. Magical creatures, or alien creatures in a 'soft science' campaign (meaning one where scientific principles are easily overlooked in favor of weird ideas and dramatic storylines), or simply those in a silly campaign, may break this rule of thumb. Creatures also tend to have Powers more connected to physical Abilities than mental ones, but in the proper campaign, a creature might be a powerful 'natural' telepath, or possess other Powers that affect the mind or have seemingly non-physical means of working.

In summation, build Special Powers almost as they would be built for characters, but keep the kind of creature wanted in mind.

Combat

When most people think 'monsters', they think something that attacks people, either to eat them or to dominate a territory. While there are certainly other kinds of monsters possible, the prejudice is somewhat logical, since mankind has feared savage beasts for ages for their capacity, and sometimes tendency, to kill people.

Most real animals that attack people (which fairly few do, honestly) have very simple methods of attacking. A roar to scare someone off (if fighting in self-defense) and then just rushing the target is a typical example. Some hunt in packs, but their tactics are often a slight variant of that concept, nonetheless. As for Abilities used, clawing and biting are common, or just pounding the target with heavy paws. All of this is covered by the *Unarmed Fighting* Ability. Add to that a Passive Power against damage, simulating hides and thick skin, and most animals can be handled quite easily.

The exceptions are usually venoms. To design a venom, use a standard Combined-Ability Power: One Ability to deliver the poison, and one to indicate the amount of damage the poison does. The delivery can even be substituted with a clearly defined combat move, like a successful bite or scratch (both of them *Unarmed Fighting* Specifics). Delivery requires one point of damage done, but more damage adds a bonus to the poison check that follows, just like weapon success does with damage! Complex poisons may do less or no damage, but leave the victim sick or delusional; instead of damage, the victim gets an appropriate (and automatically triggered) Disability matching the effects. And some 'poisons' are, in fact, just painful nuisances, like bad mosquito bites. If a poison of any kind stays in the blood for more than a few seconds, continuing to have effects, an added Ability for 'continued effect' should be used, and defined according to the prolonged effect's description.

Of course, complete realism is not a requirement, even in a fairly realistic game! There are indeed animals that go beyond the stereotypical norms for their species, using surprising tactics and attacking for reasons that are hard to deduct. That is tactics, though; the Abilities stay very much the same, even if a bit higher leveled!

Truly unusual combat beasts are more prominent in fantasy, horror, or science fiction. These allow far more creativity in what they do in combat, from exotic poisons (usually constructed as above, but with stranger Disabilities resulting) to powerful attacks. Things like spikes have been described already, and acid spit or the like mimic the simple fireball example pretty well (spitting might also be the delivery system of a poison!). Some beasts even do damage when they bleed; treat that as a Passive Power that reacts to damage, and probably gets the damage done as a bonus (the more blood, the more harm done by it). Powerful claws are mainly higher levels of *Unarmed Fighting*.

Other than their actual attacks, these less realistic creatures may also have very unusual combat tactics. This should require some level of the *Intelligence* Ability, though! Ambushing, playing dead, luring victims into pits, etc., are all acceptable actions of a fictional beast. Clever cooperation (playing dead and letting *others* perform an ambush, for example) are equally valid. Some may even use the environment, breaking the ice underneath someone's feet or tumbling trees or rocks on them. Even real-world animals use such tricks as dragging land creatures (and people) underwater and drowning them!

Whatever the creature does, and however realistic it is, it should be put into the design what its goal with combat is; killing attackers, protecting young or the herd (to the point of voluntary self-sacrifice!), getting to the victim's food, or just getting away, are all valid choices. Again, fictional (and a few real) creatures can have some surprising goals, like using a victim as an incubator, or showing off their kills to attract mates (or scare others away from their homes!). Some just want to get to somewhere, or *back* to somewhere, and will fight whoever is in the way!

Stealth

Not all creatures survive by bettering others in direct combat. A great deal of real-world creatures have actually evolved quite impressive tricks for avoiding combat at all! Cameleon 'camouflage', mimicking the sounds of dangerous animals, slipping away through terrains, and so forth are not uncommonly seen in actual animals. Unreal ones need be no less cleverly equipped, being able to look, sound, smell or otherwise seem to be other beasts.

The most logical Ability that can function as a logical base for such tricks is Hide, but some species of real animals are also capable of mimicking other things, like sound (possibly an Approximated Ability based on Speaking) or appearing like other animals, or even plants (variations and/on Disguise or Acting, depending on what is involved)! Other Abilities allow the creature to run into some hideout, like climbing up a tree or down a hole. With any of these, a long list of strange stealthy Abilities can be reproduced.

What the creature uses these Abilities for differs from creature to creature, because stealth in itself is only a part of a tactic. A creature that is just hard to see is of limited adventure interest, but a creature that is hiding something important, sneaking up for an attack, sneaking in to steal something, or otherwise using its stealth for something more than hiding, can provide interesting challenges. The listed examples would combine stealth with things like *Conceal*, *Sneak*, or *Snatch*, and other Abilities can be made an interesting part of a stealthy creature's tricks. Special Powers can even be constructed to create tricks that are built for stealthy use, like attacks that are hard to see coming, or spook effects delayed to make it seem the creature is somewhere it either left already (it left something behind that spooks the characters) or never was (it throws, shoots or spits something into a corner and lets it spook them).

How stealth is meant to be used should be contemplated in a creature's overall design. And while there are many options, it should be remembered that a lot of creature tricks have evolved simply to let it escape; once the creature snatches some food, it might have a lot of complex tricks to escape unseen, or at least uncaught!

???Tracking

[people, things (magic, electricity, food(s)...)]

[sample Special Powers! Senses more than Tracking Ability. New ones, like 'Fazing'.]

???Other

[entertainment, scientific use (organic 'living kit'), communication (language, message transport...), food(!)]

[sample Special Powers!]

???Instincts

[guiding factors for non-sentients.]

[some Disabilities based]

???Self-Preservation

[fear others, fears certain things (fire, noise, magic...), protect young, protect territory, stash, weird things. Fear/Compulsion Disabs]

[Mating?]

???Feeding

[on what, how constantly, how much? Craving Disab]

???Habitat

[multiple? nomadic? expansive? nesting (fortifying?)? lurking? unwanted??]

???Tactics

[sneaky, fake behavior, scare/psychwar]

???Domestication & Training

[Using Relations to create advanced pets and mounts!]

Alice 2.0

The following is the setting that has been built as the core setting for GEARS. It is constructed to allow a wide variety of campaigns and adventures, while holding key mysteries and a strong storyline to build adventures around, or use for an unusual backdrop.

The setting does not have to be used. GEARS is built to handle any kind of setting. *Alice 2.0* is simply there to demonstrate the level of originality, detail and weirdness that the system makes possible. Other settings will have hints on how they may relate to Alice, but the setting is there as a demonstration of possibilities, not as an ironclad requirement.

And now, without further ado...

Welcome...

... to the world of Alice! Though it may look a lot like the world you and I live in every day, something is very different. Strange things are happening, and they affect a lot of people. And they all revolve around one very special person: Alice!

The game world around Alice is ripe with all kinds of adventure, from deep espionage to crazy college-style shenanigans to adventures into the magical jungles of alternate worlds. The center of it is Babylon, the town Alice created in the Saharan Desert, but the stories reach far beyond its borders. Nearly any kind of character is theoretically possible, though every single one will have its own unique... challenges... in the world that exists after Alice arrived.

Alice

So who is this Alice, and why is she so important to the world?

Let's start at the beginning. The world is much like your own. There are cars and cell phones, politicians and companies, trees and buildings. There is a city called New York and a city called Tokyo. It is exactly like yours looks. Or it *was*, until August 12., 2007. At 7:22 am (Greenwich Main Time), an explosion occurred high above the Atlantic Ocean, 78 miles off the coast of Morocco. The explosion was so powerful that the sky around the entire planet was glowing for four hours. Many historians compared it to the famous Tunguska Explosion in 1908. And just like that mysterious explosion almost a hundred years earlier, nobody knew what had exploded, or why. They only knew it was something powerful.

Military around the world went into action, everybody fearing that it was a nuclear attack or something even worse. Eight hours after the explosion, the entire area was filled with military helicopters. Everybody was looking for debris from a jet plane, a missile, a crashed satellite, or even a UFO. Nobody knew what to expect! The media quickly joined, and every TV station and Internet news site was broadcasting images from the place. All they saw was water. Until someone found something. But it was not a plane, or missile, or even a UFO.

It was a girl.

Floating on her back in the water was what looked like a young girl, probably between 17 and 22 years old. She was a little short, had fair skin, and completely white, shoulder-long hair. She was wearing a blue bodysuit that looked like what surfers wear. And she was unconscious.

Everybody thought she was just someone caught at sea when the explosion occurred, knocking her unconscious. But when helicopters went down above the water to try to rescue her, she woke up! The second she opened her eyes, everything electronic went dead, and helicopters started to crash. It only lasted a second, though, and casualties were few. But while everyone was trying to get the electronics back online, the girl dove down below the water and disappeared.

Nine hours later, a French news helicopter spotted her walking ashore in Morocco, on the coast leading out towards where she was first found. She was wet and still wearing the same blue bodysuit, standing on the shore for a few seconds, looking around, almost as if she wanted to check that she was in the right place. Then, she started running. She started running *fast*. Faster than most Olympic runners, and for several miles, until she reached a small Moroccan town. Helicopters from around the world, and people who were in the town, watched as she ran straight through the streets, jumping over cars and running quickly through crowds, running up stairs and over rooftops, jumping from one roof to the next like a trained athlete. Police attempts to apprehend her were futile, since nobody had the speed and agility to catch her, much less hold her. Finally, almost out of town, she jumped into a jeep and somehow made the driver drive her into the Sahara Desert.

In the desert, she finally stopped. While everyone in the world watched on their TV or computer screens, she walked around the sand in a spot in the Sahara, as if she was looking for something. After twenty minutes, she went back into town. What she did there, nobody really knows. She quickly disappeared in the crowd, even though she looked nothing like the local people, her white hair and blue bodysuit seriously sticking out. But when she finally appeared again, a lot of trucks quickly started following her back into the desert. They stopped at the spot she had been looking at. And then, people jumped from the trucks and started building... something. Hours later, a five stories tall building stood in the desert, a pyramid with a flat top; a 'ziggurat'. And then, the people started putting up tents! Some stayed in the tents, some went back into town. Alice went back into town with them, hitching a ride on the trucks. She quickly returned, though, riding the same jeep she had taken the first time. And others came with her.

Over the next few days, for reasons nobody ever understood, people began moving out into the desert, to live in tents around the strange building that the newspapers simply dubbed "The Ziggurat". Soon, some of the people hired companies to build houses for them instead of the tents. In less than a month, what had been an empty piece of desert became a small town. The newspapers called it "Babylon". The girl who had appeared out of nothing became known as Alice, from the young girl in Lewis Carroll's stories about Alice In Wonderland and Alice Through The Mirrorshade.

Alice still lives in Babylon. And Babylon is now a small city, with 25,000 inhabitants, strange buildings, tourists, trade, and a lot of mysteries. The military still keeps an eye on Alice, and on Babylon. Helicopters, tanks and thousands of soldiers have surrounded the city. They come from many countries that worry about what Alice is up to, and they are coordinated by the United Nations (to the dislike of many of their commanders and home governments!). They are not there to attack Babylon, and people leave and enter the city all the time, coming from all over the world. The soldiers are there in case Alice is planning some kind of war, or in case someone from the outside decides to attack and maybe make her angry. Some have tried, but even if they got through, Alice has somehow stopped them and handed them over to the military force around Babylon. She has never attacked that force, and she seems to be okay with having them there. Again, nobody knows why.

The Mystery of Alice

Every TV station, every newspaper, every magazine, and about a million or more websites follow Alice. A lot of the really big ones have camera recordings from the city of Babylon (yes, Alice lets some cameras record from inside. And others sneak in, though she makes that pretty hard to do). But for every one news program that has serious news about Alice, there are a few hundred that just speculate. What do they speculate about? Anything, really. The following are some common examples:

Where is Alice from? She came out of nothing, but that does not mean she came from *nowhere*. Whatever method she used to get here simply made her seem to pop out of the sky. If she even came from inside the explosion! After all, she was simply found beneath it, there is no evidence that they were related. Possible, yes. Likely, yes. Certain, no. People who think about this question have a lot of interesting answers, but many make no sense. Common ones include that she came from another world, or even another dimension. If it was another world in our universe, she might have blown up in her spaceship. Or maybe she was teleported here, and something went wrong. If she is from another dimension, this might actually be 'normal', we just never traveled this way. That she is from the future is almost like being from space or another dimension; she traveled here (or to the present, actually) in a way that makes a bang, or that failed somehow.

Others think she might be an angel, a demon, a spirit, or something similar. People from different religions of course have different creatures they suggest. She might even have returned from the dead. Since nobody knows of proven, documented cases of this within the last few centuries, it's hard to say if the way she arrived is normal or not. People tend to assume that angels and the like do not slip up, but we know so little for certain. And she might not have been *meant* to go here, at all; she could have snuck out!

Then there are those who say she's from right here, that she is from the very world she is in. Her arrival could be a vehicle that malfunctioned, or some strange new technology. It could even be some kind of magical, mutant or other superpower that nobody knew existed. In fact, she might be the first to use it! Maybe she is a new kind of human that developed through some mutation. Or maybe someone made her that way, through dark magic, cybernetics, genetic engineering, or something far more sinister. Or maybe she just used some weird gadget or machine.

Some have actually suggested that our 'reality' is not real, that we all live in some fake reality. We think it is real because of virtual reality equipment or some other mind control trick. If so, Alice might be a glitch in the fake reality, something not meant to be there. Or someone might have 'hacked' our reality. Maybe Alice is the only one who is 'really real'!

What is Alice? This sometimes gets answered by where she is from. If she is an angel, she is an angel. She came here via some divine act, and now she is an angel *on Earth*. But if she came with a spaceship, is she an alien? Or a human that aliens captured and sent back, maybe after modifying her (making her a *mutant* or genetic experiment, or cyborg, instead)? And if she is from this world, she could be a normal human in very, *very* good shape. Or maybe she uses performance enhancing drugs. Or maybe she has some gadgets hidden in that blue suit. Whatever she is, people think she is powerful. She might be a wizard or a witch, or some psychic superhuman. Or a robot.

The important thing about what she might and might not be is her *powers*. An angel would have the eye of God upon her, a demon the eye of the Devil (unless she is running away from them, in which case *they might be chasing her*). Aliens may have freaky powers, too. If she is a machine of some kind, maybe she needs electricity to work, and her powers will mostly be things technology can reproduce, like strength and speed. In other words, a robot would probably not read minds, but a wizard or psychic alien *might*. But if she is a human, she is probably *extremely* intelligent, or she has powerful secret friends. She built a city from nothing, so she must be special somehow. Maybe she was trained by some powerful group to do this. Or maybe she just has access to insane amounts of cash!

Why is Alice here? This is where things become even more scary: She might be from some weird place and have weird powers, but what does she *want*? Some say power and money. Most who say that are people who already *have* power and money, and what they really think is that she wants *theirs*. But people can get power and money in different ways, most of them much easier. If she is from the future or another world, maybe she is an explorer, seeking to learn about us, our cultures and technologies. The future and aliens may have advanced technologies, but miss some very unique thing we have. Or maybe she is exploring just for fun! Some take a different look at this and suggest she might be looking for

something special, or for *someone*. Maybe she is a galactic treasure hunter, or *bounty* hunter, and her hunt has brought her to Earth (or to the present, if she is from the future). Or *she* could be the one being hunted! But if she is a fugitive, *who is hunting her*, and do we really want to meet them? She could even have been caught already, and Earth is her people's new prison. Australia started as a prison colony, maybe some alien or future race thought we could be a great place to ship *their* prisoners to. Or maybe she is lost and just wants to find a way home. That big explosion could be her people's version of a shipwreck. Of course, a lot of religious people have a very scary suggestion: The end of the world is coming, and Alice is here to find out who gets to go to Heaven! And both religious and non-religious people agree that she could be the first part of a major invasion. Most armies send a scout or two before attacking...

The reason why this question is so important is that it lets us know what she might do, and how we can help her or get out of her way. If she crashed, she really does not want to hurt us, she is just a little scared and wants to get home somehow. If she is here to start Judgement Day, maybe going to church or temple or some other religious place is a good idea! If she is preparing an invasion, then maybe we should strike first? But in all those cases, if we think she is doing something and we are *wrong*, we may make some horrible mistake! If she is checking whether her Advanced And Benevolent Civilization should come to Earth and give us all great gifts, *shooting* her is a bad idea!

Reactions

Because nobody really knows anything, people react very differently to Alice. Ever since she arrived, people have been forming groups to figure out what to do, and most groups disagree on the answer. Some have tried to attack her, by breaking through the military ring around Babylon. They have all failed, either getting caught by the international military or by Alice herself. Others want their governments to attack her, demonstrating in front of capitols and military bases to make them do something. But just as many people want governments to support her, because they believe she has come in peace and that she might bring a better future or solve some problem we have (many say the environment, or war, or famine, or disease). Others just want to stay far away from her, and want their governments or companies or religions to stay far away, too.

People in power, whether politicians or company leaders or leaders of major religions, are all a bit nervous about what to do. They know nothing about Alice, and they hate having to do something without knowing the facts first. This is why the military around the city has simply settled down there, watching over Babylon. It has now become known as The Iron Ring, because it has become a ring of tanks and other military machines around the city (some say it is big enough that it can be seen from space, but that is not really true). But at the same time, governments and other powerful groups try to use spies to sneak into Babylon and find out things about Alice and all that she is doing. If they can get some answers that way, maybe they will know what to do. Maybe.

No matter what people believe, many form groups around some kind of belief. People for Alice, against Alice, and protesting against doing anything with her, they all have organizations that recruit members and make speeches around the world. Some even use vandalism, or violence, but they are still few, luckily.

Alice as a Person

Oddly enough, Alice does not simply hide inside Babylon. She is often seen around the world, showing up to talk to someone or look around an area. She never says why, and there are usually people with her. Nobody seems to know when or where she will show up, either. But people often meet her, and many actually talk to her! Even those who are afraid of her or hate her agree that she is polite and cheerful. She only gets angry when someone tries to hurt her, or the people around her. That includes people who are just in the area she is visiting! A lot of times, some lucky journalist has gotten pictures or even video of Alice protecting some people against someone who is shooting at her or otherwise is about to hurt a lot of people to get to Alice. She is a *very* good fighter, and the people she travels with seem to often be almost like elite soldiers, even though they never look like it before things get dangerous.

There are a few things that people find odd or unnatural about Alice. She always seems to speak the local language, or local *languages*, fluently. Some have noticed that she stops and listens a lot when there is a new language, but after a few minutes of listening to people speak it, she usually starts speaking it, too. Also, she asks a lot of questions, about everything. It could be someone making some food, someone fixing a car, or an animal running across the street. She wants to know things, many of them things that normal people would already know, or be able to see. She does not seem dumb, but she does seem to lack some things that 'normal' people know. Also, she almost never eats or drinks, and she never goes to the toilet. She also never sneezes or coughs, but she blinks a lot. She never falls, and people who have figured this out always duck if she seems like she is falling. Very often, she does this because something is going to fly through the air, and it is a good idea to duck!

Some, especially magazines for girls and women, have noticed that she has a very varied taste in clothes. She favors practical clothes and never seems to wear skirts or dresses, only pants. She also never shows any skin except her face, neck, and hands. She likes stylish but simple clothes, and often wears mostly one color, with a few minor colors for decoration. None of her clothes have any store brands on them, so they may be from anywhere, or even homemade. Some

designs have been impossible to track to any shop, although a few companies have started making clothes that look like hers. She seems to like white, with curly lines in other colors. She never wears jewellery, not even earrings. Funny enough, magazines for *men* have noticed she likes pockets. Big pockets, and a lot of them! And she seems to have things in them, though she only rarely take those things out. Things she has been seen to take out include: Scizzors, black markers, pens, small pocket knives, mini-flashlights, and for some reason, small stones. She seems to collect the stones, picking up one every now and then and putting it in a pocket. She does the same with little machine components that are not inside machines, such as pieces broken off or taken out of a bigger machine.

Whenever someone has seen her do one of her amazing feats, they describe it later to look perfectly natural for her, and not really seem inhuman at all. She is fast and *very* agile, and she seems to be able to take a lot of damage without really getting injured. She has been strafed by cars, been pushed down hills, been hit by people pushed at her hard, and even been hit by stones thrown at her by angry people or by accident. She almost always shrugs it off with a frown on her face, and she rarely falls very far before getting her balance and breaking a fall. She has not yet been pushed off a cliff or building, or out of a flying vehicle. She *has* been thrown from a car, twice, in crashes. One of the times, it was filmed. She rolled for some distance, then stopped. Moments later, she got up, a bit unbalanced but seemingly uninjured. She even helped the driver out of the car until an ambulance arrived. Nobody has ever seen her bleed, or cry. She does get angry if her clothes get ruined, though, but still nobody has seen her expose any skin other than face, neck and hands; she always seems to cover where clothes get torn before anyone looks!

Alice in the Game

The basic reason for not providing a solid, predetermined answer to what Alice is, is that the Narrator should be able to design the game for whatever he/she and the players want. Also, providing a fixed answer would allow players to catch wind of it and basically ruin the entire campaign by knowing The Big Answer in advance.

As will become apparent, a complete explanation for everything about Alice is not needed immediately. She *is* the central mystery, and should be kept mysterious throughout much of the campaign. An idea of how the world around her, including the portals and whoever might or might not be coming for her, etc., should be built up, just to keep things coherent. And of course, leaving some questions unanswered means the campaign can be tailored around her secrets; if the desire is a campaign involving secret super-powerful beings manipulating reality, then that is something Alice could be tied to. If, however, the idea is more a campaign involving clumsy aliens, then that might be what she has ties to. It is the Narrator's decision because the campaign should be the Narrator's decision.

Babylon

The most remarkable thing Alice has done is create the city of Babylon, in the western part of the Sahara, about 200 miles south of Marakech (which actually puts it in Algeria, not Morocco). Babylon is by now a small city, but the size does not make it any less impressive, or any less strange!

Buildings in Babylon are typically two or three stories tall. The only thing taller is the five stories tall Ziggurat roughly in the city center. The architecture of most buildings looks like simple, normal buildings in a small town, most of them light or dark brown (many joke that they look like big blocks of desert sand). What is really strange about them at first sight is how they are placed. Many are at odd angles, and the city is full of buildings that turn in snaking patterns for no apparent reason. Only one fifth of the streets can be used by cars, because of the width of them, but even those streets are confusing and frustrating to drive down, because they turn constantly and in strange ways. People who look at Babylon on satellite photographs sometimes say that the city seems to be built like a set of complex symbols. If that is what Alice wants it to be, the strange turns make some sense. They are part of some gigantic symbol that can only be seen from far above the city. *Why* she might want it to be built like symbols is another question, and nobody knows the answer to that. Except Alice, of course.

Just being in Babylon is an interesting experience, too. There are odd monuments around the city that attract many tourists, and many buildings have weird carvings on the side. But the people who *live* there are the most interesting part! Alice only allows people to move to Babylon permanently if they have some special talent, or somehow serve a function in what seems to be a plan for the city. This can be hardened police people from around the world, or it can be brilliant engineers that build and sometimes *test* strange machines around town. Alice can sometimes be seen talking to people, and very often she is discussing city planning in some street with a bunch of experts. She is very serious about everybody's safety, and sometimes she shows up to tell someone to stop building some of those strange machines in their backyards. She likes talented people and weird projects, but she will not put the people of Babylon at risk.

Most of the safety in the city, however, is handled by the Babylon Security Forces (BSF). They act like police, but only wear a visible patch on the left shoulder to show who they are. There are also BSF people with nothing to show who they are at all, called the Civilian Guard. They almost never do anything other than watch for trouble, but sometimes, a BSF Civilian Guard will step up to someone who is making trouble, show them his or her badge, and tell them to stop. Civilian

Guards are not armed, but they can quickly call in armed BSF if needed. People are not allowed to carry guns or large knives in Babylon, and may only own small handguns that they keep at home. There are well-armed, military BSF soldiers in four bases around Babylon, too, but they only really deal with trouble on the border of the city, when the military around Babylon cannot stop some armed lunatics or if that military force is actually starting to threaten Babylon. The BSF soldiers are heavily outnumbered, but they are extremely well trained and have some impressive weapons.

The Ziggurat

Standing roughly in the center of Babylon is The Ziggurat, the large building that looks like a pyramid but with a flat top. It is five stories tall and each 'step' up is a little over two feet high. There are no actual stairs on it; people *can* climb it, but with these steps, it takes a very good physical condition. Nobody will protest to someone climbing it, but if anyone starts trying to paint graffiti or cut things into it or otherwise vandalize it, they will soon find BSF surrounding it, and Alice will often appear *on the top* to ask them to leave. But no matter what people try, The Ziggurat seems impossible to paint, cut in, or do anything else to. It looks chocolate brown from a distance, but the material is darker up close, and feels strangely warm to the touch, like sun-warm stone but smooth as glass. It seems indestructible, though nobody has ever used heavy weapons on it.

Nobody knows what The Ziggurat is actually for. Alice only appears on it when chasing away people trying to vandalize it. Otherwise, she is only seen at the base of it, though she is quite often there, in a small park around the strange building. In the cases where she chases someone away from the top of The Ziggurat, she tends to stay up there for a little while, looking out over Babylon.

Most people assume that The Ziggurat either has some symbolic meaning, maybe as part of the symbols people think they see on satellite pictures of the city, or that there is something *inside* the building. Since it seems to be indestructible, it would be a perfect place to hide Alice's most important things. Since Alice has no official home in Babylon, many assume she sleeps in The Ziggurat, too.

The Portals

The greatest secret of Babylon, however, is that there are *portals* hidden around the city! In large buildings that look like warehouses from the outside, Alice has hidden huge machines that can send people *into other worlds*. The machines are extremely complex and require a lot of power, so she only has seven of them. They cannot be used near one another, so each portal is in a different place in Babylon. And whenever a portal is used to 'launch' someone through dimensions and into another world, the portal used has to cool down for three or four days afterwards.

Each portal can launch up to six people at once, or something the size of a small car. When a portal is activated, the people or things to be launched stand on a platform between eight big 'antennas' that look almost like small trees without branches. There is a series of loud noises, sometimes *painfully* loud, and for fifteen minutes, energies run wild between the eight antennas. It looks like the people and things on the platform are surrounded by a whirlwind of colors and lightning. Then, with a loud boom, the energies disappear, and the people and things are just *gone*. They have been launched and are now in another world.

The people Alice launches into other worlds are called 'operatives' (sometimes 'portal operatives'), and they have very special training to handle whatever they encounter in those other worlds. They always get very clear orders from Alice or someone working close to her before the technicians start the portal. But missions can still be very open-ended, like "go into this world and explore as much as you can" or "earn money so we can buy things in that world". Operatives arrive in a selected spot, and often there are people there to help them adapt after arriving. They arrive a little up in the air and therefore start by falling a bit; this is actually for safety, because putting them into the world close to the ground risks that they appear *in* the ground! They almost never get seriously hurt from the fall, though. Almost.

Only two of Alice's secret portals can pull someone *back* from another world, and they can only pull people back that were sent there with a portal; they cannot bring back people who belong in that world! Because of this, a lot of operatives are sent into other worlds to build new portals. These *new* portals can then send anybody to another world, both operatives and 'locals' (people who belong in that other world). So if five operatives go to World A, Alice can pull *them* back. But if five operatives go to World A and build a new portal there, they can send *anyone* from World A back to Babylon!

The other worlds are described in the *Other Worlds* section.

The Resurrection Devices

In Babylon, there are three hospitals: Babylon Central Hospital (BCH), Babylon East Medical (BEM) and Babylon Surgical Center (BSC). Mostly, they are just hospitals. Every citizen of Babylon gets free treatment for anything that is a kind of injury or illness, but not cosmetic surgery.

In the Central Hospital, there is a building called 'Foreign Hazardous'. It treats diseases that are dangerous and highly infectious, and it can put people in quarantine if they become infected with anything that dangerous. The people who work

there are specially trained to fight epidemics, and they are very, very good at it. But the Foreign Hazardous building also has a big secret: In its large basements, two full floors below the ground, there are a set of machines built by Alice's scientists, using designs she has given them. These machines can take someone, no matter how badly injured they are, and rebuild their bodies completely again. They have to be *alive*, but as long as they are even barely alive, the machines can fix them. They cannot cure diseases, but if someone has been badly damaged by a disease, the machines can repair that damage.

The machines take a lot of power, and there are only twelve of them. Also, someone who is badly injured has to be in a machine for a long time, sometimes several weeks. This means that only a few people can be fixed this way, and that is why Alice keeps the machines secret: If everybody knew, everybody would want to use them. Now, Alice only uses the machines for operatives or people who work to protect her and Babylon. A few times, someone who has done a lot for the people of Babylon will be fixed when they need help. For example, the president of a large Canadian company had sent helicopters to help get some Babylon citizens out of a natural disaster in Chile. When that man's daughter was very badly injured in a car accident, Alice secretly had her brought to Foreign Hazardous and put in a machine for nine weeks to save her life.

People who have been fixed in one of the machines are not automatically perfect afterwards. Many have to have therapy and take medication for weeks or even months after being badly injured. Operatives sometimes go into other worlds with a bunch of pills they have to take and maybe even crotches. But they survive, and they heal, and operatives are tough.

The Academy

Babylon has a fairly standard school system, although Alice ensures better standards. There are only two private schools in Babylon, and both are very small. Most of their 250 students (total) are children of rich people that have moved into the city to do business with Alice directly. The remaining schools, however, have fairly good funding and highly trained teachers. They teach children up to about the age of 17, using a slightly more complex system of classes and ages than most of the world, in order to ensure optimum challenges and help for each student. Other than optional extended learning, the curriculum for the schools, including the two private schools, are exactly the same. There are no schools based in religion or political views, by order of Alice. All schools do teach about major religions and political views, though, and after-school learning in various clubs, churches and associations is perfectly legal, by the choice of the parents.

The really unusual learning, however, comes at the three Babylon Academic Centers, also known as the BACs or, far more commonly, The Academy. The name 'The Academy' refers to all three centers, along with a few smaller faculties around the city. They are all administrated from a large building near The Ziggurat, but each of the three BACs are located in different places around town.

The BAC known as 'The Lab' is where Academy recruits (they are rarely called 'students' for some reason) learn about all natural sciences and technologies. Its official name is "Babylon Institute of Science & Technology", but everyone calls it 'The Lab' because it is mostly a big building full of various kinds of labs; chemical, physical, computer, engineering, etc. The labs, as well as its auditoriums, are *very* high-tech. It also has a large track for testing vehicles and certain large machines like walking robots, and a bunch of outdoor and indoor arenas for the very popular 'robot fights', where two or more teams build remote-controlled robots to fight each other in different ways. They also have stranger events, like competitions between robots playing ping-pong at *very* high speeds.

The second BAC is known as 'The Club'. Its real name is "Babylon Institute of Social Studies", and it teaches languages, politics and economics, sociology and psychology, and a lot of other subjects dealing with humans and society. As the name suggests, it looks very posh, with elegant study halls and small restaurants inside the building. It is more like a typical college, and also has the Central Academy Library (CAL). A lot of people are surprised to find that *games* are also taught, including such classics as Chess and Go but also strategy games, board games as well as computer games. Every year they have a tournament in a very big and complex strategy game, called simply The Mass Strategy Game.

Finally, the third BAC is known as 'The Gym' (the real name is "Babylon Institute of Physical Education") and provides physical training, from bodybuilding and athletics to rock climbing, parkour and martial arts. They have tournaments of all kinds, and there are legends about very elite fighting tournaments that are secret, allowing only very important guests access. But they also teach meditation and yoga, promoting better body control and overall health issues. The Gym also has a large set of gun ranges, for handguns and rifles. Anything bigger, like rockets or explosives, uses outdoor blasting ranges at The Lab.

Other than the three BACs, The Academy has a few smaller departments around Babylon. One is the Babylon Culinary Institute, which teaches all kinds of cooking from facilities in the restaurant district, or the Babylon Institute of Performance, which teaches acting (some people have noticed that it has a lot of people from The Gym and The Club, and some suspect they train those people to act, as part of becoming spies for Alice around the world).

The Academy is a very visible part of Babylon, and Academy projects, field trips, research and the like can often be

encountered in town. Even around the world, a group of Academy recruits may show up very unexpectedly, doing some study work that makes very little sense to locals. The Academy is still required to act in respect to local cultures and laws, though, and recruits that get too frisky may find themselves facing a very angry Alice, who shows up equally unexpectedly!

The Iron Ring

While Babylon itself is very interesting, there is also a *lot* of drama right outside it. The military force surrounding the city has become known as 'The Iron Ring', and it has become almost a small city of its own. Helicopter landing pads, barracks, even full bunkers and other military buildings have sprung up around the original check points. Over twenty different nations have soldiers and vehicles there, and not all of them like each other. The UN actually has *two* missions in controlling this military force: Make sure no problems arise with Alice, *and* make sure no problems arise between the different armies making up The Iron Ring!

Many believe that Alice has people secretly working in The Iron Ring, and that she both uses them to keep a check on what is going on, and to control some of the decisions being made by UN representatives and the military generals in the armies. Other people believe that all the different nations, as well as a lot of organizations and terrorists, have spies in there, and want to take control of the whole armada of armies. Nobody knows whether they want to attack Alice and Babylon, or just destroy the armies, or even make them leave quietly.

The World

The world around Babylon is very much like it was before Alice arrived: Cars and microwave ovens, newspapers and Saturday morning cartoons. People go to work and school, the police fight crime, and dogs chase cats. Alice is in the news a lot, whenever she is spotted somewhere in the world doing something nobody can figure out, and every news station has a website that reports from Babylon and The Iron Ring around it. But for the most part, the world is still the same old world it was before.

What *has* changed is that many powerful people are taking Alice very seriously. Other than The Iron Ring around Babylon, a lot of them have realized that Alice is very good at convincing people to help her. This makes them fear one thing above all else: *Spies*. Around the world, governments and big companies have specialists or entire *departments* trying to predict what Alice is trying to do, and if she is placing spies inside these governments or companies. The United States, Russia, China, Great Britain, France and many others fear that she already has people in important positions, and companies that produce weapons, energy, big planes and many other things fear that she might be spying on them to copy or sabotage their technologies.

They may be right. Nobody really knows how good Alice is at this. She could be simply sitting in Babylon, talking to some people who study these governments and companies, or she could have spies everywhere. The truth is probably somewhere in between, but where she likes to place spies is hard to say, because nobody knows exactly what she wants. The portal operatives usually call people who work for Alice out in the world around Babylon 'agents'. Some of these are not secret spies at all, but just talk to people and look at what goes on. But an operative might have to go somewhere in this world to get someone with knowledge needed for a mission in another world. When that happens, there will most likely be agents waiting out in the world to help the portal operative.

It is important to note that agents almost never know about the portals. The portals are such a big secret that only operatives and the scientists working with the portals are allowed to know about them.

Of course, the same governments and companies that do not want Alice to plant spies inside them are always trying to plant spies inside Babylon, hoping to snoop out some of Alice's secret plans. They are rarely that good at it, and every week The Iron Ring receives a few new people that Alice's security specialists have captured for spying. How she is so good at figuring out who are spies, nobody knows.

Other Worlds

The greatest secret Alice has is that there are *portals* hidden around Babylon. Seven of them, to be exact. These portals can send ('launch') small groups of people into other worlds. Not other places in the same world, and not other planets, but *other worlds*. These worlds are basically different versions of Earth, where history and society has developed differently, and where technology often works differently, too! Some places even have things like magic, or futuristic technologies that simply do not work back home.

Alice is very interested in these portals, and works hard to both protect them and try to build new ones. Building a portal is *very* difficult; it requires strange materials from all around the world, and it requires those materials to be made into extremely complex and hard-to-make parts. Alice has secret factories in many countries doing this, and she tries to get more factories to do it, so she can produce portals faster. She has seven portals in Babylon right now. She is working to build two new ones in secret places in the city.

It takes a lot to use a portal, too. The power needed is incredible, and a portal has to rest for three or more days after being used. So Alice only sends the best people to other worlds, her 'operatives'.

When operatives go to another world, they always have a mission. Most missions are about making sure it is safe to send other operatives into that world, and operatives need to explore to see if there are dangerous creatures or natural disasters, or even if there are empires that will hunt down operatives if they are sent to the wrong place in the world. Sometimes, the operatives are not there to *see* if it is safe to send more, but to *make it* safe. These operatives go to fight the creatures and disasters that are dangerous, or to create secret places to send operatives from Babylon!

But operatives are not just sent to worlds to get other operatives in. Even though nobody truly knows what Alice is planning, she clearly wants to do two things: Create safe bases in different worlds, and build portals there to make it easier to travel back and forth. Also, it seems that some worlds cannot be reached from Babylon directly, and Alice needs portals in other worlds to get there, almost like flying to a local airport in order to get the plane to where you want to go. When enough operatives are in a world, and near each other, Alice usually wants to start building a stronghold or secret underground organization, so she can make new portals there.

Strange Civilizations

In any world where there are people (and in most worlds, there are), the operatives have to understand how those people live. Most importantly, operatives must figure out who is powerful in the world, and what those people want. In one world, there might be a global empire, with soldiers hunting ghosts and monsters in the thick jungles that surround gigantic cities. In another world, a comet might have hit the Earth, and there are only a few groups of people here and there trying to survive in the ruins of their destroyed cities. The first thing most operatives learn is whether there are such strong empires, or if people live in small groups.

Next is if those empires or small groups fight each other. If there are only three huge empires in the world, they may all live in peace with each other, or they may have constant wars. In the same way, smaller nations, or even small local groups, may get along or fight each other. Some groups may be friends and help fight against other groups that have other friends! Who is helping who and who is fighting who is important information about a new world!

But things like culture and languages are also important. Knowing what people think about, what scares them and what they want, helps operatives fit in and act like they belong in a world. And if an operative can tell other operatives how to fit into a world, the other operatives can get a lot more information, quicker. It also helps them to learn how to make money and get things in the world that can help them even more.

When Alice feels that she and her people in Babylon have learned enough about a world, she will usually have operatives hire people who *live in* the world to do much more work. These people are called 'locals' or 'natives' of the world. Having a lot of locals do much of the work means Alice does not have to use her portals to send many more operatives, and she can instead send those operatives into *different* worlds.

Back in Babylon, Alice gathers information from all her operatives and makes very complicated strategies, with the help of people she trusts and who have a lot of knowledge with such work. But she also knows that the operatives that work in all these worlds have very special knowledge about them, and that they have to be able to react quickly when things get dangerous, or when there is a really good opportunity to do something in a world. So operatives do get a lot of freedom to do what they think should be done, especially if they have shown that they make good decisions this way.

Realities

One of the strangest things about other worlds is that *things often work different there*. In some places, magic works, or some other strange abilities, or weird technologies. In some worlds, *normal* technologies don't work! There are worlds where radios cannot transmit signals, worlds where guns cannot fire bullets, and worlds where *electricity does not work*. In some worlds, these are mixed together, like a world where magic and some strange alien technology work (and the alien devices *don't* work back in Babylon), but gunpowder and electronic gadgets are useless, or just work really poorly, or even dangerously!

The first operatives to get sent into a new world always start by performing a *lot* of tests to see what might work, and what might not. Using a lot of little devices, they can check if electricity, gunpowder, magic, alchemy and dozens of other things work. But still, some worlds surprise operatives even after a long time. In one world, it took several weeks before someone realized that optics (the principles that glasses and the lenses in cameras and lasers use) worked very differently, making it hard for people with glasses to see properly and making pictures taken there look strange. Until then, all the strange visions and pictures were thought to be spirits or some similar lifeforms!

When an operative talks about the 'reality' of a world, he or she means what works and does not work there. If an operative says that two worlds have very similar realities, it means that almost all of the same things will work or not work there. Every operative going into a world is instructed on what other operatives have learned about the world's reality, to avoid very nasty or just silly accidents.

The many, many different realities in the worlds that exist mean that operatives learn a lot about things that will not work in Babylon, or the world around it. Some operatives are trained in magic, so they can use it in the worlds where it works. Others learn about strange technologies. Because of this, there are operatives who know only some basic things that can be used in Babylon's world; they spend all their time training in things that can only be used in *other* worlds.

All these things are typically taught at The Academy (usually at The Lab), but it is taught in secret classes, only for portal operatives. If someone found out these things were being taught, it would be a sensation and a scandal, and the portals would probably be discovered. If anyone believed the person who found out, at least!

Because some things break when taken to a reality that they do not work in, Alice has hidden warehouses in many different worlds to put them. Some magic items, for example, will break if taken back to Babylon, while others will simply not work in Babylon but be fine when taken back to their original world. Babylon has a *lot* of things stored secretly that will only work in the right realities, in the right worlds!

It is worth serious mention that Alice has people working day and night on 'reality technologies', to allow things to work in worlds they should not work in! Many kinds of magic and alien technologies have been made to work in Babylon, but will not work outside it. The results are usually hidden discreetly away, or explained with cover stories. Very strange things happen in Babylon, and especially at The Academy (The Lab in particular), on a daily basis! A few important worlds also have secret bases where Alice's operatives have successfully installed devices to make things work there that should not. It is never an all-or-nothing deal, though; making computers work in a small castle in a world of magic a swordfighting does *not* mean gunpowder will work, or even toaster ovens. It's a complex bunch of sciences and strangeness...

Alice in Other Worlds

Sometimes, Alice goes with operatives to another world, or they meet her already in it. Mostly, she seems like just Alice, the impressive young girl from back home. But sometimes, she shows a different side of herself. There are *many* stories about her from operatives meeting her in other worlds. Which ones are trues is difficult to say, but most are at least very interesting!

Most operatives agree that she has training in skills that do not work back in Babylon. She seems to know magic and have some psychic abilities in worlds where these work. She never uses any of them in flashy ways, but there are stories of her starting or stopping fires with her fingers, and knowing what people think just by looking at them closely. She definitely knows how these things *work*, and can explain the theory behind a spell in great detail. She also knows how to fly certain alien, futuristic or even magical vehicles, and how to ride beasts that do not exist in the world around Babylon. Her uncanny ability to learn languages just by listening works on even some of the strangest, most alien languages; many operatives confirm stories about her in one world, where she learned how to talk to a race of demons that use fire instead of words!

But more unsettling than her strange abilities is the possibility of what she might *be* in certain worlds! While people in Babylon or the world around it still are unsure what she is *there*, some operatives report her changing in small, but very strange ways in other worlds. In worlds where spirits and ghosts are real, some operatives say that she seems to become a little transparent, almost like a gas, just like the spirits do. In worlds where people have technology built into their bodies, some operatives describe her as suddenly looking like she is part machine, although it is so discreet it looks more like she has very well-made doll parts in her body; an artificial piece of arm, an eye that looks a little mechanical, that kind of thing. Some operatives have the theory that she has special abilities that allow her to become different in other worlds, adapting to their realities somehow. There are no detailed explanations on how this is supposed to work, though.

One thing is for absolute certain: Alice knows people in other worlds. Powerful people, and often strange people. She has been seen talking to aliens like they were old friends, and leaders of tribes and small towns have welcomed her with respect, as if she was an important person there. In fact, most times when she shows up to help operatives in another world, it is to make sure someone important knows that they are working for her.

Operations

As mentioned, Alice wants portals to be built in many other worlds. In fact, building new portals seems to be one of the most important reasons she even has operatives going to other worlds!

Like the portals in Babylon, portals in other worlds are hard to build. Not only do they require a lot of things, like the portals in Babylon, but a world with even a slightly different reality needs portals to be built in very different ways than in Babylon! This could mean using magic, or crystal technologies, or alien goo, or all kinds of weird and confusing things. The scientists back in Babylon usually study the tests that operatives make and describe very closely, and have other operatives try to create small machines or the like to test if something will work. Usually, it doesn't work, but the tests tell the scientists something new that they can use in the *next* tests they make operatives perform in the world in question. Sometimes, though, a test is so complex that a scientist has to be sent to the world and do it. Most scientists hate that, and

the operatives get very frustrated dealing with a grumpy scientist who does not know how to deal with a strange world.

Many, many missions are about the portals. Some are directly about them, like having to protect a factory from some danger while it makes an important part for a portal or test. Other missions are only indirectly about the portals, like finding a very skilled person in a world to tell the scientists how something works. It is very rare for that person to actually be told what it is for, of course!

Even just studying a world closely can be a mission about the portals. A lot of strange places must be visited to find the materials for a portal, and a lot of strange people must be dealt with to build parts for a portal, or to keep the world from figuring out that the portal is being built. Understanding another world is important to making portals possible to build.

Of course, some things are simply sent into a world by portals! If something is very easy to get to Babylon and very hard to find in the target world, and if it does not weigh several tons, it is sometimes worth the energy and time needed to send it through a portal. Sometimes, it even gets sent to Babylon from a finished portal in one world and then sent from there to another, or directly from one other world to another, without ever going through Babylon.

Adventures

Babylon is a strange place, and whoever digs beneath its surface will find that it is even stranger there. In other words, the world of Babylon is ripe with adventure!

Because of the unique combination of strangeness, virtually any sort of adventure can be based in that world. The world outside The Iron Ring is basically our own, allowing any adventures that the real world might provide. The portals let characters go to other worlds, as operatives of Alice, and encounter just about anything. And Babylon itself can be the greatest adventure of all, with secrets and the impossible being around every corner.

Themes

The general concept behind a campaign is important to consider early on. While this overall idea can certainly change over the adventures, not having one at all can make all the options more confusing than entertaining.

At the base of the theme is the question of what the characters, and the players, are meant to experience from the world of Alice. This includes what they deal with daily as much as it includes the kinds of secrets that they will uncover.

It is, of course, perfectly possible to ignore Alice and Babylon and simply play the game in a world indistinguishable from ours. Just as it is possible to play it entirely in one of the worlds that Alice's portals have access to. However, it is the assumption of this text that the existence of Alice actually plays a part in the game.

Visiting Babylon

People go to Babylon for plenty of reasons, like tourism or as representatives of governments, companies or other organizations wanting to work with Alice. A group of such characters may either meet in Babylon under various circumstances, or actually go there together.

As visitors, odds are the characters will not be granted access to a lot of the really deep secrets, including the portals. Of course, they may stumble upon secrets; even with the extensive security, there is always that one in a million chance of something going very wrong, and the characters are prime candidates to become bystanders. How their presence will be handled is another matter, but for the adventures to work, they will probably have to be given some leeway.

Alternately, visitors may be involved in other adventures, like confrontations with Babylonians and other outsiders attracted to the city for better or worse. Employees of an organization may encounter unusual challenges in their jobs. And through it all, the feeling that something is very off about the place could grow! Secrets are not spilled outright, but the growing suspicion will be a defining part of the campaign.

Visitor characters will most likely have skills that are not entirely unusual in the real world. This need not make them boring or even ordinary, though; hard-nosed business people, firefighters and police officers, researchers, journalists and more are typical adventure characters that are fully possible. Adding various events increases options, too. The Academy might allow outside martial artists to participate in tournaments, for example. If the campaign is less serious, low-grade psychics, gadgeteering scientists and other odd characters may also be possible. After all, Alice has a great interest in a broad spectrum of things, and strange things seem to be almost attracted to Babylon!

There is the possibility that the characters are not really there to visit Babylon, but to visit The Iron Ring. The massive military presence has constant diplomatic visitors, military consultants and a whole range of other people checking up on them. Some stay in barracks, but staying in Babylon is not that uncommon.

One other option is that the characters are not just visiting Babylon for the purposes they officially claim; they may be spies! Companies and governments the world over have an interest in looking under the hood of Babylon, suspecting

exotic technologies or even weapons to be part of Alice's hidden arsenals. Some are simply cautious, bordering on paranoid, and want to keep an eye on her city without her mingling. She is good at rooting out spies, but the characters may be the exceptions, able to handle the challenge. Or she might have found them out and either let them continue so she can study them and find their employers, or she could be working to turn them (in fact, she might already have)!

Company Folk

Like any city, Babylon has a lot of things that need handling by competent (or so assumed) people. In addition to this, Alice has a lot less usual tasks that she has to hire people for. The characters could very well be employed by her directly, or indirectly through the city.

There are many different kinds of adventures that could result from employment. BSF officers, city engineers, Academy educators and the like each offer different challenges, but all of them can be adventurous. The unusual citizens and secrets of the city make sure of that! Even without some groundbreaking weirdness, keeping Babylon running properly can be hard, and accidents, outside sabotage and just plain experimental installations only add to that. This is compounded by all the people who have a serious loathing for the place, wanting not only to sabotage the city, but to harm anyone employed there or even living there.

This breed of characters will still have realistic skills, but they may be far more extreme and unusual. Babylon has a lot of unusual installations, and the training needed to handle that involves things not commonly seen outside. The combinations of skills can be equally unusual. The same goes for gear, both because Babylonians may have access to different equipment and because they need it to handle some of the unique problems and facilities. And, of course, they may be able to call in support from equally unusual people in equally odd places.

If the characters have access to some of the more secret parts of Babylon, the opportunities for strangeness grows exponentially. This need not be the portals, of course; handling security can get you across anything, including things brought back from other worlds, and research might have to deal with said things directly! Technicians have to repair things damaged suspiciously, professors teach strange things, and so on. They may even know about the portals without ever having seen one... they have encountered what gets sent in from other worlds, however!

Agents of Alice

The many stories about Alice infiltrating the world's governments, corporations and so forth are not just empty rumors. Her network goes deep into crime, too, and anything else that has influence on the world at large. She seems to do it with good intentions, mainly to protect Babylon and its allies, but she is not above manipulation and clever deceit to do it!

And she needs well-trained people to do it for her. Characters may be 'agents', those trained to infiltrate worldly organizations for Alice. This is basically an espionage campaign, a covert version of *Company Folk*. The characters will be dealing with agents of Babylon, its allies and enemies, and with the whole range of supporting casts involved in espionage, from fallguys to assassins to messengers and so forth. If the characters are in on the big secrets of Babylon, they may be the ones capturing back stolen goods from other worlds (stolen from Babylon, that is) or stopping plots to seize and use Alice's portals. If Alice is not the only one in the world with portals, that just makes for logical targets for espionage, sabotage, coercion and many other things!

Odds are that such characters have unusual training, just like company folk do, but more so. They are also more likely to be issued strange gadgetry to do their jobs, usually of the concealed sort. If there are things to be learned from other worlds that surprisingly work in ours, these characters are the ones likely to be trained in them. This could include weak magic or disturbing technology. Of course, that all means others in our world might know similar things!

Portal Operatives

Of all the opportunities for adventure, the core concept behind Alice and Babylon is the idea of the city as the center for otherworldly journeys, and Alice as the reason. Making characters operatives thus puts them in the very eye of the storm, not only because they get the full effect of Babylon itself, but also because they get taken straight into the mystery of Alice's (presumed) otherworldly origins. If there are people out there looking for her, operatives are the most likely people to run across them!

An operatives campaign is almost by definition a multi-world campaign. It need not be a world-a-week show, however, the characters can return to a few, or even one world, again and again, creating special bonds to that one strange place. Fewer worlds means more depth and detail to compensate for less wild variations, but nothing prevents them from being thrown to another world every once in a while, just as the occasional spice. How the focus on few or many different worlds is placed should be given some thought before starting, even if it ends up changing over time.

The big question in this kind of campaign easily becomes the actual role of Babylon. The city easily becomes just 'home base', the place where characters return after missions. But Babylon can still play a very powerful role, if so desired! Many conflicts can have their anchor there, including rivalries between operative teams, or even conflicts with those who are

interested in the strange artifacts brought back (governments, corporations, archeologists, UFO nuts, take your pick!). Things that come back and present unexpected dangers in Babylon can be adventures in themselves, especially if they threaten to alert The Iron Ring or other international watchers. And who better than operatives to squash rumors when nosy people hit upon the secrets of the city...

One possibility for making the campaign more than a trek across worlds is to have mysteries span between worlds. Rival groups, Alice's enemies, strange pasts (perhaps Alice's personal past!), and more may cause things across worlds to be connected in odd ways. Some may be rooted in, or just connected to, Babylon itself, or Alice personally! Such mysteries can offer reasons for a few-world campaign to take a peek at other worlds, tracking down clues. Of course, if one or more operatives turn out to be running their own agenda across the worlds, perhaps in the secret employ of Alice's enemies in the world around Babylon, things can get just as tense and cross-worldly.

With operatives, Babylon also becomes a bit bigger. Operatives study things at The Academy that nobody else knows even exists, they have access to information and even items brought back, and so on. Many of these things can change the game again and again, especially if they have a habit of falling into the wrong hands. And with Alice designing the city so that otherworldly realities (more or less) function in various places, magic and alien technology can become a very real threat in the city!

Genre & Style

What Babylon offers above all is a variety of genres in one game. If characters are operatives, there is no real limit to what genre can spring up around them (time travel is the only one not actively supported, but that does not make it impossible, at all). The realities of different worlds ensure that just hauling Big Guns to the designated world and opening fire will not be a universal solution, and the practical restrictions around the use of portals stops rampant migrations and similar problems from arising.

That does not mean that every genre absolutely has to be included, though! Putting the characters in charge of missions to five different fantasy-based worlds is quite possible, and any mix is really an option. Alice has a complex organization around her, and there is no guarantee that the characters (or the players) will understand why she wants them to regularly travel between two alternate futuristic worlds and one full of stoneage mutant martial artists. In fact, there is no guarantee they are even given a reason, or the true one!

The Genre of Babylon

Living in Babylon is like living in any city roughly its size (probably a bit bigger; Babylon is a bit intense for its size). It is basically built along modern, western lines, down to coffee shops and fire departments. At least, that is the standard version.

Babylon can be anything. Having the architecture be nothing but giant castle walls and medieval houses might make it a tad misplaced, but beneath the immediate surface, Babylon can have magical guilds, cyborg soldier programs, alien conspiracies, or anything like that or even weirder. And the architecture can indeed be changed, even if some choices will stick out. A more fantasy-esque look is possible, just add large stone walls around the inner city and replace asphalt streets with cut stone. There may even be castle-like structures, even if they do not exactly look like England of the Middle Ages. Or the city could be thin monolithic buildings of fifty-story glass towers, looking like they could not possibly stay upright. Alice might even have a rudimentary starport and an orbital station under construction. Any of these things would cause attention, and most likely alarm, but they are not entirely beyond the concept of the strange city that is Babylon!

Even without changing the look of the city completely, most genres can be fitted right into Babylon. The methods used by Alice to make otherworldly realities work can work anywhere, even in areas not intended (the effect can 'spill' out from the intended area into nearby ones), so in pockets around the city, magic and strange technologies can work. For the areas that are actually meant to let these things work, those pockets can be fairly big, such as complete buildings.

As for what lies beneath the surface of the city, Alice has had a lot of projects going. There might be entire complexes built under the city, either in use, sealed up or just abandoned. There might even be old or even ancient places down there! The desert holds many secrets, and there could be reasons down there to explain why Alice chose that exact spot! In a Babylon with heavy fantasy overtones, ancient chambers may lie here to be explored (you know, dungeons), while tabloid genres have free reign to include hidden pyramids or buried saucers.

With this in mind, it becomes fairly easy to impose other genres, even multiple, co-existing ones, on Babylon. Monsters may lurk in the dark, cyborgs may fight street samurais beneath glistening skyscrapers (some of which are probably used by companies based outside the city), and dragons may dwell in lairs beneath it. There are numerous buildings in the city without clear signs of what they are for, and plenty of people can live there without seeing daylight.

What is hard or even impossible to place in Babylon is large-scale wars. The city simply is not big enough for an orcish nation to threaten its borders, or to keep an invading alien armada at bay. If such events are to occur, the only two likely

scenarios are a drastic change of pace for the campaign, or that the whole thing can be done in secret somehow. Also, taking foreign realities beyond Babylon's borders poses a problem, since they are not supposed to work there. Finding out that an alien technology works just fine in 'our' world would affect the international scene immensely! Either there continue to be riddles preventing others from copying it, the technology (or other effect) is used in complete secrecy, some very unique technology allows single items to keep their unnatural effects, or the game will change when the cat gets out of the bag. None of this needs outright prevent such things for happening; the options stated here are actually suggestions! If it makes for a good story to realize that the magic learned from distant worlds works outside Babylon, it should be used. But the consequences should be understood.

Another matter is the reason for using a different genre for Babylon itself. The city was invented (by the original writers, not by the fictional Alice) as a means to cross genres, while still offering a way to keep worlds pure within select genres. If Alice and her strange plans are desired entirely within another genre, the game can be set in a world fitting that. After all, Alice no doubt has a lot of power in other worlds, too! A full campaign could be run with a deep space or horror Babylon in a world designed for it. Whether or not the characters ever go to the Babylon in 'our' world is a matter of campaign choice.

Babylon is a strange city, and it can be recreated in worlds of other genres than modern-day Earth, or other genres can have influence in the city. The choice is fairly open. But any dramatic choices should be thought over to make them seem plausible in the surroundings that the city has.

And of course, characters from other genres/worlds may appear in Babylon, having been brought there by portals built in other worlds. Some will be just fine there, even thrive. Many will be confused and frightened by the place. Some may not adapt well.

Setting a Style

Unlike the genre of Babylon, the mood of Babylon is entirely free for the picking! Rewards and character growth can be awarded for anything chosen, and any action can be directed at anything desired. What is important is that a style, or a blend of styles, is chosen; if not, the many, many possibilities will cause the game to become cluttered and frustrating.

The main style in mind for an Alice and Babylon campaign is 'cheerful action'. A cheerful style has humor, entertaining characters, plenty of interesting places, plots and objects, and focuses on being adventurous and getting into and out of trouble. Alice is seen as a slightly devious but still benevolent influence on the world; a good-hearted trickster. There is room for drama, even some melodrama, but the main enjoyment is exploration and crazy ideas that just might work. The action part is fairly logical: The characters do not simply sit around talking, but go into the field and get into and out of the aforementioned trouble. There are plenty of mysteries, but they exist in order for characters to go explore them, or hunt down clues about the truth. They do not exist simply for the characters to put two and two together and tell their superiors.

Made slightly more extreme, 'cheerful' becomes 'silly'. This is the realm of puns and slapstick, of characters stumbling out of great explosions with little more than a dazed grin on their faces, after stealing the alien UFO to melt the ice cream monster from Uranus. A silly campaign makes fun of stereotypes by exaggerating them or twisting them into something quite different, like combat robots doing kitchen duty (explosions optional) and incompetent lunatics running worldwide empires. It's played for laughs, and it shows. The things walking around Babylon, and Alice's plans in other worlds, are most likely insane. That insanity might be covering for something. Or it might just be insane.

In the other corner, one finds a more 'hard' style, akin to modern spy movies or film noir. This explores struggles and tensions, and will no doubt dig deep into the controversy surrounding the mysterious Alice. Morally grey areas pop up every now and then, and risks are unavoidable. Surviving in the face of bad odds is done by fighting harder and longer, and by being sneaky or just braver. The characters are going to be beaten and broken with frightening regularity, but they are going to get back on their feet and continue the fight. They will also have to decide who and what they trust, and dare to act upon it. Pain and fear are there to be overcome, and evil exists to be fought.

Taking that style one step further puts you in 'dark' territory. This is where pain and fear do not exist to be overcome, but to be endured, even explored! The moral choices go from good versus bad to bad versus plain evil. The innocent are victims, the guilty are the ones the characters have to deal with, even work with. Characters themselves are likely to be tormented and in too deep in many things. Half the time, whatever the characters are tampering with is either ancient evils, moderns abominations, deformed, disturbing, or just disgusting, and either one is likely to rub off on them, in very bad ways.

Doing away with any of these more emotional components of style leaves the game with a somewhat cynical, tactical style. This is fully playable, and is probably the easiest for some players to handle, because it puts the game world at a slight mental and emotional distance. Problems are solved, actions are described, and loss or reward is handled. It can be a great mental challenge, the challenge is just in figuring out puzzles or tactics more than getting immersed in the game world.

Of course, any of those styles can be mixed and matched, some more easily than others (believe it or not, 'silly dark' is quite entertaining!). But knowing how much to lean on which style, when and why (and perhaps with whom; players can vary within a group!) is something that is very worth considering before game begins.

As for the 'action' part, it can be replaced by pure mystery, in which characters mainly visit places and people and gather up clues until they put the pieces together; very little actually happens, the challenge is mainly figuring things out. Or there is drama/melodrama, which involves grand speeches and complex symbolic gestures to emphasize the more subtle themes of the story, or simply enlarge character storytelling greatly. Other activities may substitute or compliment action; a pure drama style is actually possible, but so is action/mystery or other combinations. Again, it's not about what is possible, but about having an idea of what is wanted from the beginning.

The optional rules governing style can be used freely for any style, inserting Awarded Growth or Style Points for acting according to style (preferably in a creative, unexpected way; wanting players to do specific things without telling them is a recipe for disaster!). Possible things to reward include: Snappy one-liners (in action, silly, and hard, for example), impressive monologues or comebacks (dark, drama/melodrama), clever planning (tactical), clever/crazy ideas (tactical, silly, cheerful), character acting (any, though maybe less in tactical), and so forth. Using the rewards gained to promote the style even further is a good circle to encourage (but not force).

The Role of Alice

The entire game world revolves around Alice in one way or another. How, when and if she appears in the game will thus decide how close that game world will feel to players.

A very distant, almost mythical Alice can be made irrelevant or mysterious. If mysterious, the questions about her background and motives are prime material for adventure plots, and anyone or anything that might have had contact with her is juicy stuff. If she happens to show up briefly to interfere when such things are about to be discovered, it makes for a fairly sinister version of her, but overdoing it will just become a bother; there has to be small victories for the players to continue to care.

If, on the other hand, Alice regularly shows up to give orders, guidance, inspection, or even set someone (player character or not) straight, the game will seem involved with her. She can still be mysterious, but she becomes real, not some unseen boogeyman. This should not be overdone, or she will just become another returning character; she is still a special part of the world, and should maintain that image. But having her suddenly appear to lead the charge or drop something off will make situations seem more important and perhaps dramatic. It will also make her seem more human, assuming she acts like one, and might create personal opinions about her in the players (not just characters), as opposed to just making her someone to discuss.

There is also somewhat of a hybrid possibility, in that Alice herself might not show up much, but she clearly shows an interest; special gear and resources, recorded messages, known(!) personal assistants showing up and participating, etc., it can all make her seem like an invisible character looming over them, for good or bad. This is most likely if they work for her or with something closely related to her; common citizens of Babylon, or especially the rest of the world, are unlikely to have Alice looking over their shoulders.

What she is used for is equally interesting. She can certainly be a boon, delivering gadgets and goodies and clearing the diplomatic path (sometimes in less than diplomatic ways). But she might also throw obstacles in the characters' way, preventing them from taking certain actions or constantly demanding that they hand over something useful they found, be it a mighty sword or important information. This can be the case whether the characters are working for, against or not even related to her. She could even be a fairly harmless influence, just constantly wanting to be informed or even take part in something out of pure interest. Especially in silly campaigns, she can be an annoying companion when things are particularly interesting to her! What interests her is anyone's guess, of course.

If Alice is to play an important or just notable or interesting role in adventures, she should have a personality more clearly defined than what is already described. Behaviorisms and habits, ways of approaching people, how she acts with others, what she reacts to good or badly, and other topics should be covered. Unlike any other person in the entire game world(s), Alice cannot be bland. If she is bland, there had better be an air about it that makes both players and their characters suspect it is because she is hiding... something!

The Truth

Who and what Alice is, why she set up Babylon, what she wants with the portals (assuming the characters know about them!), and other questions have already been asked. No clear answer has been given, for two reasons: It should be up to the Narrator, and there is no reason to have a fully fixed answer from the beginning. Alice should above all be a mystery, and the more assumptions can remain plausible but unproven, the better. Is she good or evil, or something less defined? Is she an omen of things to come? Does anyone know her true powers, or her true nature? The game world wonders, and for

some time, so should the players and their characters.

But there are other questions that should be asked, and some of them may need to be answered early on, in order for a campaign to make sense and not contradict itself.

Other Portals

One vital question in a campaign that focuses even slightly on portal operatives is whether Alice is the only one who has access to these kinds of portals. She seems to have built hers herself (with help), and she is clearly handling the construction of gates in other worlds rather directly. Does that mean that anyone with the right knowledge and resources can build such portals? The world holds a lot of powerful people, and Babylonian scientists are not *impossible* to corrupt. Could someone else have portals, and be sending people to other worlds like Alice does? If so, what are their motives, what do they know about Alice's operations, or each others, and are they even sending to the same worlds as Alice or one another? Alice's operatives may stumble upon someone who has long been in a world they only just penetrated, or encounters may be fairly equal because people go to roughly the same worlds.

Expanding that question means asking if people in *other* worlds have portal technologies? Portals work very differently from world to world, which can both make it harder and *easier* to build them. Maybe there are worlds out there that are fairly simple to build portals in. Maybe that is what Alice is looking for, at least as a first step to other things.

And the logical extension of that is to wonder if Alice came from somewhere that already has extensive portal technology and use. Whatever brought her into this world, it is likely to be connected to the whole portal scene, and it could easily have been pumping resources into portal manufacture for eons. Maybe there is some monumental portal civilization out there, which simply has yet to stumble upon this world. Or maybe they are already here, hiding...

Others Like Alice

Even as unique as Alice seems, a lot of people have been speculating if there are others like her. The more advanced speculations include whether she knows about them, and if so, whether she is on good or bad terms with them, if such concepts even make sense for such people. Some more worried people wonder if there are others out there that are more powerful than her.

The existence of others like Alice does not have to be linked to other portals. She has odd abilities, but they are not tied directly to portals, and it is quite conceivable that others like her live an existence that has nothing to do with portals, or at least that they are not directly involved. The question, of course, then becomes where they live. Since the general population does not know about the portals, their only reason to speculate on other worlds is an imagined explanation for Alice's sudden appearance out of nothing. Many hypothesize alien planets, spaceships hidden behind the Moon, or stranger things. The guesses are typically related to what people think Alice is.

For the game, knowing who is out there like Alice need not be an all or nothing matter. Running into someone who seems comparable is not a guarantee that there will be a logical link back to Alice. It definitely does not have to mean they know each other. The two main questions that need answering if there are others out there in the game, is where they can be encountered, and how much connection there is between them. A third question is how many there are, but it is not as essential; knowing where Alice-type individuals have access to, and how they interact (if at all) is more pressing, especially at first. Any team or organization amongst them could be interesting, especially if there is evidence that Alice has a relation to it.

In the game, these people should not be overused. They are masterminds and wildcards, just like Alice. Odds are, any encountered have things going on that match Babylon in strangeness, even if not in scale. Personalities are going to be a bit off; if nothing else, one who seems perfectly normal will be odd because *they are not*.

Interesting added options are individuals hiding, perhaps from governments or groups in whatever world they are in, perhaps even from Alice or others of their kind. Or extremely powerful beings, capable of shaping the very worlds that Alice's portals lead to. Or Alice-type people being shot into worlds at what seems like random; another Alice might suddenly turn up out of nothing, to cause even more turmoil!

Alice's Influence

Other than the portals operatives, Alice still also has her agents. How well she has infiltrated the world's governments, corporations, religions, etc. should be known in very general terms; is she pulling strings everywhere, fighting to control key pieces around the globe, or struggling just to keep a tab on a few major organizations? If the characters encounter agents buried deep inside highly secure organizations, Alice clearly has some clout, and she should not be regularly outmaneuvered by amateur conspirators or unveiled by incompetent detectives. If she is good at it, she is good at it, even if she is not equally deep inside every organization.

One reason that her level of influence through covert agents is important to get a general idea about, is that players will start to rely on what they believe about her. If they encounter helpful infiltrators in everything they touch, suddenly stating

that Alice cannot help them do something fairly simple will seem implausible, to the point of looking like a dirty trick by the Narrator. On the other hand, if the characters are usually alone out there, it is foolish to expect players to make plans involving contacting agents inside an organization.

Finally, if the characters are constantly confronted with (substantiated) stories about how Alice has pulled some strings and changed international politics, they will wonder if she suddenly needs them to do seemingly insignificant investigations. If she can stop an African warlord from attacking a country, why does she have to feel nervous about a small-time arms dealer in that same region? Having a clear image of her influence from the start, even without detailed maps of agent infiltrations, makes everything else seem a bit more sensible as the campaign unfolds.

Unveiling

At some point, the time may come when all about Alice is revealed. If it is revealed to the world at large, it will probably change everything, no matter what the truth is. If it is revealed only to the characters and other key individuals, it can change the campaign, but the world will probably not change that much.

What is important to figure out in advance is whether unveiling Alice is the end to the campaign, or the beginning of a different campaign. If she turns out to be an alien on the run, maybe the characters will help her escape and begin a long fight with the intergalactic police force, or maybe they will turn her over... and earn an enemy for life. Or a job with the intergalactic cops! Whatever the case, the campaign will change, and the new lines will need to be drawn up for *that* campaign to be coherent.

Of course, just because Alice tells them her life story and a few buildings are blown up by strange invaders, it doesn't mean that she is telling the truth...

Adventure Plots

When you know the *kind* of adventures to be played in an Alice 2.0 campaign, the next question becomes "what are the characters going to be doing in the campaign?". In other words, you need *plots*; goals, villains, mysteries, dangers and opportunities, and so forth.

Theoretically, just about any plot is possible in the campaign, because that is what it was designed for (as mentioned earlier, time travel adventures are a bit tricky, but by no means impossible!). The following are ideas to get things moving a bit. Most of them deal with issues surrounding the special aspects of the setting, like Alice, Babylon and the troubles they cause. It is attempted to provide plots and adventure seeds for any of the themes mentioned earlier in this chapter. While they are mostly described in relation to being in Babylon, they can be moved to the outside world *or other worlds* via the portals quite easily.

Punching Bags of Weirdness

Babylon is a weird place, and for someone not prepared, or someone sufficiently unlucky, that weirdness can seem to almost seek people out. So when a desperate spy ring needs a scapegoat, when a lab rat (or human experiment!) escapes The Lab, when political extremists need a hostage, or when even stranger things happen, the players may just find their character smack in the middle of it, (presumably) quite undeservingly.

Of course, this is not just a case of sadistically pummeling the characters. Being a punching bag in this case involves being exposed to weirdness and having to react; finding out what is going on and why, how to avoid the worst, how to solve it, and perhaps even how to heroically (or from a survival need) save others. The adventure is simply activated by something happening to and around the characters, rather than them going out of their way to seek adventure.

It also happens to be a good way to introduce new aspects of Babylon. If the characters/players do not know much about The Iron Ring, having a general and division of armed soldiers show up on their doorstep and demand they hand over 'the codes' (which they have no idea what means) is an interesting way to introduce the concept. The adventure can then lead them deeper into Iron Ring matters, even into The Ring itself!

Keep It Secret, Keep It Safe

There are a lot of secrets in Babylon. Most are Alice's secrets, but others hide things there, too, from her or from entirely third parties. For whatever reason, the characters could end up having to hide a secret, be it their own or someone else's, from Alice, for Alice, or just in her city. Such adventures are often about staying safe, moving the secret under cover of night or something else, and chasing off the nosy. Having some annoyingly clever detective, reporter, police (or Interpol, Iron Ring, espionage, or BSF) investigator or the like constantly on their tail just provides incentive and more challenges.

Of course, the secret might be the characters themselves, having to hide in Babylon from someone following them from the outside world. If Alice feels that they are not to blame for whatever they are sought for, she might agree (tacitly or by non-interference) to let them hide in Babylon, perhaps even in her service! Being on the run from the Russian Mob, a nasty dictator, or even a false accusation for a crime (or a true one that Alice is simply willing to ignore) can result in

'interesting' people trying to sneak into Babylon to extract them, or worse!

Then, of course, there is the opposite view: The characters may be trying to *expose* the secret! This could be about getting evidence to the right people, revealing something quite publically or to a select crowd, finding the person who Knows The Truth, etc. It is the characters doing everything that would be done against them in the above examples. If they do not know the secret in advance, it even becomes a matter of solving a mystery first, and *then* deciding what to do with it.

Hunting Party

One of the classic plots is that someone has something, knows something or has done something (or is at least accused of it), and now people hunt them. Hunting can be very physical, running around and trying to catch up or playing a game of hide and seek. It can also involve trying to get through obstacles, whether it is for the hunter or the hunted.

And characters can be either one. As hunters, they will need to understand the prey, perhaps even to the point of figuring out what that prey is fleeing to attempt; some just want to escape, others want to do something that will give them the upper hand (or prove their innocence)! If they are the hunted, throwing obstacles in the way of the hunters is more important, and that might give *them* incentive to try and get the upper hand (or prove themselves innocent).

No matter what side they are on, the hunt can go through unusual places and deal with unusual people and events, some relevant to the hunt and some just things that cause interesting challenges on the way. And there are plenty interesting things around Babylon! In fact, it could be one way for them to stumble across the portals...

Party Hunting

A more lighthearted adventure option is to have it be about just having some kind of fun. Characters of a young age (or mind) enrolled at The Academy are prime reasons for this choice of adventure, but dedicated socialites may consider all of Babylon their playgrounds. In a sufficiently silly game, there might be a serious reason for having fun, like sabotaging someone's efforts or making someone look bad, or good! It could even be an intergalactic war that must be decided through a twelve-person jello wrestling match.

In less silly games, Party Hunting can be about making other, important socialites feel good, so that they are easier to deal with; the spoiled trust fund kid investing, the corrupt general, the belittled business employee or politician, all may require some leverage, and if they don't soften up from a night on the town (or several), maybe blackmailing them with the pictures will do it.

This breed of adventures will have both strategic elements (knowing where 'the party is at', getting ready to party hard, dressing the part, faking party toughness through preparations, etc.) and exploration (following the party flow, checking out events, etc.). There can be tons of challenges, like dealing with the BSF or troublesome party people, or simply ending up in troublesome places. And in the vein of party movies, walking into serious situations or waking up to realize that something is really wrong are good starting or turning points for strange and dangerous challenges.

Of course, the characters may just be there undercover, to make sure the party people do not cause certain kinds of trouble. And just staying sober without drawing attention can be an adventure in itself!

Project Management

Adventures in Project Management are about making things work that don't want to; incompetent and/or reluctant labor, bad information, impossible goals, missing or faulty resources, and a whole slew of mishaps and frustrations never expected in the time schedule for the project. If you manage the project, solving these problems is your job. If you are *not* in charge, the worst tasks get dumped on your shoulders, repeatedly.

Doing Project Management lets the game include advanced systems of Technical and similar Abilities, socializing (getting people to work together, or convincing a client or supervisor that the way the machine works is actually how it is supposed to. Especially if it is not!), handling accidents and dangerous (or just really annoying) malfunctions, or even old-fashioned fights and chases (if resources are missing because of thieves, for example).

Other than projects to build, research, locate or otherwise handle something big, Alice's frequent work to infiltrate organizations, in any world, can be considered projects, and will need management. And the greatest projects of all are the otherworldly portals that she constantly works to have erected. Having to construct one of those in a strange and inhospitable world is not an easy task!