

FATE CODEx



ANTHOLOGY
VOLUME 2

MAGPIE GAMES

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ANOTHER YEAR OF FATE!

The Fate Codex is a mostly-monthly e-zine—funded through Patreon—that features essays, systems, quickstart adventures, and more for the Fate Core roleplaying system. Throughout 2015, over 650 backers funded six different issues of **The Fate Codex**; now we've brought all of those issues together into this new anthology!

The pages of this volume feature twenty-five original articles produced by a massive miscellany of authors: Tracy Barnett, Heather Beauregard, Richard Bellingham, Don Bisdorf, Brendan Conway, Jason Corley, Marissa Kelly, Kira Magrann, Koji Nishuchi, Mike Olson, Jon Peacock, Jacob Possin, Felipe Real, Sarah Richardson, Travis Scott, Mark Diaz Truman, Clark Valentine, Nicole Winchester, and Tara Zuber.

The art from the original issues—more than thirty original pieces—is carried over to the anthology as well, with works by such artists as Olivia Boyd, Marissa Kelly, Mike Mumah, Juan Ochoa, and Kaitlynn Peavler.

Crack open this book, and you'll be swimming in fantastic Fate content from some of the brightest and most experienced Fate authors in the industry: captivating fiction; essays on how to use flashbacks in Fate, using corruption mechanics to fall under the sway of the dark side of humanity, and building dread for horror games; and quickstart adventures featuring serial killers, secret agents, and warrior princesses.



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FATE CODEX

VOLUME 2 ANTHOLOGY

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BRINGING DFRPG INTO THE ATOMIC ROBO ERA

by HEATHER BEAUREGARD

A lot has happened in the world of Fate over the three years since the DRESDEN FILES ROLEPLAYING GAME (DFRPG) was first released. Bringing Fate Core and the four actions into DFRPG—along with some necessary changes to skills, the addition of boosts, and a few balance tweaks to spellcasting and shields—will breathe new life into an old campaign. For the truly adventurous, a full conversion to the ATOMIC ROBO Fate system will give you brand new ways to use Thaumaturgy and redefine magic by tying it to your modes instead of your mental stress.

Much like a certain private-eye wizard, it's high time CHANGES came to DFRPG.

In this essay, we'll walk through all the steps needed to make the journey into the ATOMIC ROBO era of Fate. To get the most out of it you should have some familiarity with DFRPG; more detailed explanations of all the terminology can be found in DFRPG: YOUR STORY. Page references read as follows: (YS - Your Story); (FC - Fate Core); (AR - Atomic Robo).

Fate Core: Translating the Four Actions

The first step to any Core update of the DRESDEN FILES RPG is to implement the four actions. Nearly all skills in DFRPG can translate directly to their Core counterparts, with a few exceptions we'll discuss later.

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Assessments and declarations become create advantage actions. Replace tags with boosts.

Maneuvers are create advantage actions. For any create advantage or overcome actions involving teamwork, one character makes the skill roll, then adds one to the roll result for each character assisting who has at least +1 in the skill being rolled.

In DFRPG, taking a block action lets you set up a value of shifts that must be overcome to take a specific action; blocks also tie into the grapple rules. Blocking is an old action that is no longer supported by Core, though, so remove it. The main uses for blocking are to set up a secondary defense for weaker characters or to create cover, and you can still do either of those things by using the standard create advantage action.

Grappling, another subsystem of DFRPG, has its own problems, mainly that supernaturally strong characters can do a lot of damage with it while preventing any retaliation. It tends to slow the game down and takes multiple turns to set up. Remove grappling and give characters who have Strength powers (YS183-184) +2 instead of +1 to Physique rolls when creating grapple-style advantages like *In a Headlock* or *Pinned*.

Supplemental actions are another relic of older versions of Fate. They allow you to take a -1 to your roll in order to do a secondary thing like move one zone during your turn or draw your weapon before firing it. These no longer exist in Fate Core, since movement across a zone is free, and characters are assumed to have themselves ready unless some situation prevents them (like being tied up).

One more thing has to go, and that's combined actions. In DFRPG, these let you do two actions at once by modifying your main skill roll by the value of a secondary skill. Generally in Core, if you need to do several things at once you're looking at a challenge (FC147-149), so play it out to the fullest!

Weapon and armor ratings remain unchanged from DFRPG. Use the standard attack action from Core, but with one difference: if you tie on an attack action, you gain the boost only if you don't deal any stress.

SKILLS: THE BIG SQUISH

This is the meat of the conversion to Core and is meant to give GMs a basic checklist to follow. If you're starting a new campaign, make sure to tell your players about these changes in advance!

If you're converting an existing campaign, keep the skill ladder. Switching to the skill pyramid mid-game can make it difficult to retain the essence of a character. If you're starting a new campaign, use the pyramid. Your characters will have fewer high ranked skills though, so create your encounters accordingly.

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The older DFRPG skills Might and Endurance have been combined into Physique. Use this to determine the number of physical stress boxes a character has.

Replace Intimidation from DFRPG with Provoke from Core. It has a much wider scope.

Remove Performance and Survival. These skills can reasonably be covered by Rapport and Empathy or Physique and Stealth, respectively.

Use Will for any True Faith powers (YS187-188) that would normally use Conviction.

Conviction and Discipline are a special case. These skills have been combined into Will in Core, but due to how magic works in DFRPG we need to introduce a new skill for controlling magic: Spellcasting.

FOR ALL THE WIZARDS IN THE AUDIENCE

For those new to DFRPG or who haven't played in a while, Evocation in DFRPG works like this:

Before rolling you choose the strength of your spell, up to your Conviction rating. Then you roll your Discipline to determine if you can control your magic or not. If you succeed, your damage includes the strength of the spell as weapon damage. So a character with high Conviction can cast very powerful spells, but without high Discipline he can't control them, and he can either take backlash (stress damage equal to the failure) or fallout (letting the failure create a negative scene aspect and reducing his roll).

Evocation is a lot of fun and we want to keep it that way, so to fill the gap left by Conviction, introduce this skill:

SPELLCASTING

The Spellcasting skill represents the strength of your will, and affects your ability to summon magic both offensively and defensively.



Overcome: Using magic to destroy objects, remove barriers, and change scene aspects.



Create an Advantage: Introducing scene aspects, cast a Shield, cast Wards.



Attack: Hexing and Counterspells use Spellcasting directly, but you need the Evocation power to deal stress damage with elemental magic.



Defend: Spellcasting is not used for traditional defense, but can be used to create Shields.

Addressing Wizard Supremacy

Magic in DFRPG is extremely powerful, so much so that it's often beneficial to stack up a bunch of advantages for your wizard and just let him one-shot anything that comes at you. It can make encounter design difficult to balance, especially for a new GM. Here are a few optional changes you can make to get those pesky wizard players using their brains instead of just their fireballs:

- Limit Refinement (YS182) to +1 in any given stat. This leads to well-rounded characters instead of wizards who try to solve every problem by setting it on fire.
- Remove focus items and have everyone use their refunded points to create magic items and potions. Focus items are purely stat bonuses on a class of character that doesn't need them and they rarely get mentioned in play. Magic items and potions are tools that define how a character can approach a problem, and players love finding creative uses for them. (See "Crafting", YS278-281.)
- Spending mental stress past your Spellcasting rating should be a tough decision instead of the norm. To do this, you need to take a second hit on your mental stress track for the value of the extra shifts. Casting a bigger spell now means casting fewer spells later. (See "Evocation: How to Do it," YS250-251.)

SHIELDS: HOW DO THEY WORK, AGAIN?

Shields used to be magical blocks; with blocks removed, we need to rethink how they work.

A Shield is an Evocation-based full defense that costs one mental stress. Make a Spellcasting roll at +2, as usual for a full defense. If an attack manages to inflict enough shifts to overcome your armor, the shield breaks and you cannot block attacks with it anymore. This spell lasts until it is dropped or broken at no additional stress cost, but you cannot take any action except defense while it's active.

An acid-spitting snake monster is closing in on Warden Rick, and his friends are still on the way. He puts up a shield to stall for time. He marks one mental stress and rolls his Spellcasting, and gets a result of 4! +2 means he's got a defense of 6, and Armor:6 against whatever the snake spits at him.

Characters who like to play defensively might take Spellcasting stunts like these:

- *Reflexive Shielding*: Use Spellcasting to defend against physical or elemental attacks. (This does not cost mental stress.)
- *Stand Behind Me!*: Once per turn an ally in the same zone can use your shield defense instead of rolling their own.

The Portal to the Future

Fate Core bolts onto DFRPG much like a new hood bolts onto the Blue Beetle, but for those of you who can't help but upgrade to the latest and greatest system that's out, this is where it gets fun. **ATOMIC ROBO** is the first post-Core system that preserves everything good from DFRPG while having its own unique style. Finally, we can bring magic items into the next century through mega-stunts and get rid of that old-fashioned mental stress limit so that spellcasters are free to create whatever advantage they want, with the fate points to spare!

This portion of the essay requires some familiarity with creating characters in **ATOMIC ROBO RPG**, as many of the systems present are brand new to Fate Core.

MAGIC À LA MODES

Define a new weird mode for spellcasters and supernatural characters, called *Magical* by default. (See "Getting Weird," AR70-72.) Players are encouraged to rename this to Wizard, or White Court, or whatever they'd like. This is a reskinned version of the Science mode. Like any other weird mode, this one must be justified by your concept.

The Magical mode costs 3 points and includes Will, Notice, and Lore as a base. The Magical mode should also include any skill that the player wishes to use when they cast magic or use supernatural powers: Combat if they want to fight, Stealth for veils, Empathy to affect emotions, etc. Add the cost of these additional skills to the overall cost of the mode by using the table on AR72.

A Magical mode might look like this:

WARDEN: Athletics, Combat, Contacts, Notice, Physique, Will, Lore (total cost: 9)

This character can use his magic to dodge, fight, cast shields, use magical communication, lift heavy things, resist compulsion, or have a book about vampires. But he doesn't have Stealth, so he can't cast veils! Magical ability is tied to modes in this way because wizards in the Dresdenverse have clear strengths and weaknesses, and no one can do everything. This maintains that same idea without having to use mental stress as a limiter.

You might have noticed Lore in the example. This Lore skill is a bit different from the Lore skill in DFRPG. This variant is a new weird Science skill that includes any kind of knowledge or field of study that pertains to the supernatural. You can specialize in different fields of Lore just like a Science skill (e.g., Lore: Portals, or Lore: Faerie Courts). Lore

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can be used to create advantage and overcome. (See “Science, It’s Special,” AR69.)

Note that Lore doesn’t replace Science and it’s perfectly valid for a character to have both. A doctor might have Science: Medicine and Lore: Holy Objects and that’s okay!

LORE

Every Lore skill other than Notice and Will has the following actions and applications:



Overcome: Know things and solve problems related to the area of magic in question.



Create an Advantage: You can create or discover details or aspects by relying on your knowledge of magic, perhaps by searching through forbidden tomes or remembering what you learned as an apprentice. This lets you determine the hidden weaknesses of monsters (*Allergic to Inherited Silver!*), figure out how to summon a Faerie Queen (*By Name and Blood and Deed...*), or outsmart a sphinx in a riddle game (*It’s Always the Left Door*).

COMBAT IS COMBAT

Evocation in DFRPG was limited by mental stress because of how powerful it is on a per-turn basis. In ATOMIC ROBO, throwing a fireball is just the same as attacking with a gun or a sword. You cast magic to attack by rolling Combat if it’s in your Magical mode. To specialize and increase the power of your magic you can take an Evocation stunt or a mega-stunt. But remember, in ATOMIC ROBO instead of reducing your own fate points to become more powerful, you give the GM more fate points to use against you!

Wizards in the Dresdenverse tend to favor one element over another, so an Evocation stunt might look like this:

- *Combat Wizardry:* +1 to Combat when attacking with water magic. +1 to Combat when defending with spirit magic.
- *One with Nature:* +1 to creating an advantage with Combat or Athletics when you borrow an element that’s present in the scene (water from the nearby river, wind from a ceiling fan, fire from a burning building...).

SUPERNATURAL STUNTS

Powers in DFRPG are priced to come in packages depending on the template you choose to play. There's no such restriction in ATOMIC ROBO, so you can be more specific. Remember that your ability to use magic or turn into a wolf or be a sexy vampire comes from your modes and concept, so you don't need to take a stunt unless you want to focus on that aspect of your character. This is a big change from DFRPG where you followed a template of powers, and it's one of the big draws of ATOMIC ROBO. Think of it like this: If your character's concept is *Nerdy Teenage Werewolf*, then yep, you can turn into a wolf. But unless you take a stunt that makes you better at fighting as a wolf, you won't be any better at it than you were as a nerdy teenager. Stunts are the meat that fleshes out your concept.

Everyone who's not completely human in DFRPG dips into four physical powers: Speed, Strength, Toughness, and Recovery. These powers are fairly easy to reproduce via ROBO's basic mega-stunts (AR76) and even come with built-in catches. Here are some examples of the four powers as mega-stunts. You can cut or add additional benefits to any of these (see AR80 for guidelines).

- *Supernatural Speed:* (YS178) You're absolutely faster than any mortal, but you are weak to _____. In a physical conflict, you always act first. +1 to Athletics when defending or overcoming obstacles. You can move two zones per turn freely instead of one. (4 benefits)
- *Supernatural Strength:* (YS183) You're absolutely stronger than any mortal, but at a cost. +2 to overcoming with Physique when you're using your strength to lift or break something. +2 weapon damage when you can bring your strength to bear. (3 benefits)
- *Inhuman Toughness:* (YS185) You're bulletproof, but weak to _____. You have +1 armor against physical attacks. (2 benefits)
- *Inhuman Recovery:* (YS185) Once per scene, spend a fate point to reduce one of your consequences by a degree of severity (severe to major, major to mild, mild to nothing). +2 to overcome rolls made to recover from a physical consequence. (2 benefits)

Mega-stunts, like the Magical mode, need to be justified by the character's concept. A werewolf might be absolutely stronger than a mortal

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man, but scares the pants off everyone when he hulks out. Or a Red Court vampire might be bulletproof but weak to sunlight.

MAGICAL HARDWARE

Magic items from DFRPG can translate into identical pieces of hardware in ROBO, or an item can even gain more significance by making it into a mega-stunt and giving it function and flaw aspects. Rather than basing a character's artisanship on their Crafting skill, you simply pay for items out of your stunt budget, which opens up all kinds of new avenues for players with signature items. A mega-stunt can even cover several items at a time, or an empty potion slot can be defined in play, just like it can in DFRPG. Here are some examples to get you started:

Empty Bottle: Use Lore: Artifacts instead of another skill to use a potion or simple device. Gain +2 to the effect if you make it ahead of time with a montage instead of declaring on the spot. Once used, you may regain the use of this stunt whenever you have some downtime to tinker or make a brief shopping trip. (1 benefit)

Megastunt: Warden Sword

- Function: *Silver Spellbreaker*
- Flaw: *Weight of a Reputation*

+2 to overcome with Will when dispelling hostile magic. +2 to counter attempts to create an advantage against you with magic. (2 benefits)

THE CHALLENGE OF THAUMATURGY

ATOMIC ROBO has fairly standard rules for conflicts and contests, just like DFRPG, but they've also added something new to the mix—the challenge (FC147)—and it's perfect for thaumaturgy. A challenge occurs when a group of players wants to achieve a goal that's fairly complex but isn't combat (though some combat may occur). The GM runs the challenge as a series of overcome actions, each one using a different skill, and narrating the events as they unfold. Players can create advantages during the challenge, though if they fail then they're no closer to their goal and often give their enemies a bonus.

Thaumaturgy challenges might involve obtaining foci or sympathetic links, finding the right place to cast your spell, or simply having the willpower to hold a difficult spell together. The best part is any

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player can participate in the challenge, and it doesn't have to be just the wizard's show.

If you have a particularly tricky spell in mind, a challenge can help you put a spotlight on it and make it into a full event that can either go perfectly to plan or horribly wrong. A potion might need to be kept at a certain temperature while you chant an invocation in Sanskrit and add three drops of salamander oil at precisely the right intervals or it might explode. (Or worse, not be powerful enough to melt through the bars of the Winter Queen's ice prison like it was supposed to.) That's assuming you're left to the task and no one shows up to either stop or "help" you....

OPTIONAL STUNTS: SOULGAZE, THE SIGHT, HEXING, AND LAWBREAKER

These optional stunts are available to any character with a concept and Magical mode that justify them, and don't count against their stunt total. The double-edged sword is already included. If your Magical mode is rated at +2 or better, you *must* take Hexing. All of these stunts can also be included as part of a larger mega-stunt if further bonuses are desired.

- *Soulgaze*: When you initiate a Soulgaze by looking into the eyes of someone with a mortal soul for the first time, begin a contest. Each of you rolls an attack of Empathy to overcome a defense roll of Will. You each reveal your concepts to the other, and as a result of the roll, you will each reveal one additional aspect. If the attacker wins, the defender reveals either a weakness or a relevant aspect. If defender wins, then the defender chooses which additional aspect is revealed. Treat a tie as if the attacker made a successful attack. A success with style grants an additional free invoke on the revealed aspect or weakness. Note: Soulgazing involves two rolls, so each character serves as the attacker and defender once.
- *The Sight*: For a fate point, you may open your third eye and initiate a contest known as the Sight. During your next turn, roll Notice against a difficulty set by the GM to reveal an aspect on your target. (The more stressful a situation is, the higher the difficulty should be.) You must then defend against that same difficulty with Will in order to close your third eye or proceed to the next round. A success with style on the Notice roll reveals two aspects. You may continue the contest for as many rounds as you like to reveal more aspects, but the difficulty increases by 1 each turn. Failing

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to defend with Will results in taking mental stress equal to the failure, but the Sight does not end until you defend successfully or are taken out.

- *Hexing*: You may deliberately hex electrical devices by rolling your Magical mode's strength against a difficulty set by the GM (YS258-259). If you succeed, you disable the device; if you fail you can still choose to disable the device, but at a cost. The GM can compel your Magical mode aspect to cause this effect to automatically succeed when it would be inconvenient.
- *(First, Second, Third, etc.) Lawbreaker*: When you break a Law of Magic (YS232-246) you automatically take this stunt. You gain +1 to any deliberate action that may lead to a repeated breaking of the law, at a cost. One of your aspects must change to reflect the damage you've done to yourself and others. The third occurrence replaces this stunt with *Repeat Offender*: the bonus increases to +2, and another of your aspects is corrupted. A corrupted aspect is always the most relevant for the purpose of a Soul gaze.

LOOKING TO THE FUTURE

Fate is an ever-evolving system and there's more DRESDEN FILES RPG on the way with the upcoming THE PARANET PAPERS and DRESDEN FILES: ACCELERATED EDITION. I want to thank everyone who helped beta test both the Fate Core and the ATOMIC ROBO conversions, and I hope that my table's experiences with DFRPG can bring a little *fuego!* to yours.



TWO HOUR FATE

by JACOB POSSIN

As gamers get older, they inevitably get busy. This is a sad fact of life. Until we're all in the retirement home gaming together, we'll always have the distractions of life clamoring for our attention. With all of the adult responsibilities, needs, and wants, gaming can be difficult to manage. Who has time to play for four hours, much less those epic twelve-hour games we played as kids? Even if someone in your group has a spare four hours, chances are no one else can squeeze it in on that day. Gaming becomes a big game of scheduling musical chairs. If only games could be played in less time.

I have good news: they can. For the last few years I've been playing mostly online and working on keeping my game nights to about two hours in length. This has helped immensely in getting all of my players to the game. While it's hard to find four hours, we can all find two hours when we're available.

What follows is my method for running a two-hour game session using Fate Core.

The First Session

Your first session will be a little different than the rest of your campaign. You need to:

- Build the game world
- Create characters
- Play through the first scene of the game

BUILDING YOUR WORLD

Some of this will look similar to what you would normally do in a first session of Fate Core; however, this is streamlined and aimed at getting to play as quickly as possible. This means that you may start with less material than you're used to having in a standard game of Fate Core. Think of it as a stripped-down variant.

Before you start the game, someone should have an elevator pitch that offers the rest of the players some direction when they sit down to play. This is usually the GM, but if someone has an awesome idea for a game and everyone is into it, go right ahead and use that. The key to a good elevator pitch is brevity. You want to be able to sum up the core idea of your game in less than thirty seconds.

At the beginning of the first session, build the world as a group, creating the people and locations your player characters will interact with. You cannot ignore this step—even if you're setting the game in your hometown in the modern day, you still have to do some world building. Your group will create the issues, places, groups, items, and faces for the first few sessions of your campaign, giving you a strong foundation to build your game on. Your players can also create an aspect for each item, place, group, and/or face as you make them, though this isn't necessary at this point. You can add in more aspects as the game progresses.

This part of the first session can potentially eat up much of your time; once you hit the hour mark, move on and work with what you have, even if it's not finished. As long as you have one issue and one place, you have enough to get started.

Issues

After presenting your elevator pitch, get the players' input on a good issue for the start of the game. Issues are the people, organizations, situations, and events that motivate the players' actions. As this will drive play for the first few sessions, if not longer, it's crucial that the whole table agrees

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on a starting issue that will intrigue or interest the players and the GM. If the group comes up with several possible issues, take note of their ideas. You only need one issue to get started playing, but you'll add more issues as the game develops.

Good issues are aspects that represent an urgent problem or challenge that cannot be quickly overcome. The focus of your first issue should be on immediate use. Groups of antagonists work well as first issues; they're easy for players to connect their characters to and can be used in multiple circumstances. See pages 22-25 in *FATE CORE SYSTEM* for more on issues.

Places, Groups, and Items

Once the issue has been established, go around the table and ask each player to create a place, group, or item that will play a central role in the adventure to come. Bear in mind that you only need one place to get started playing, although the players may have an easier time getting into the game if they've come up with a few more setting details.

Faces

Go around again and ask each player for a face attached to one of the places, groups, or items. Faces are NPCs (non-player characters) in your game. This grouping of faces won't be all the NPCs you need as the game goes forward, but it gives you a solid grouping of NPCs to play with right out of the gate. Much like with issues, the focus here should be on immediate usability and connection to the world and other characters.

CHARACTER CREATION

When you're running a two-hour game of Fate, abbreviate character creation and focus on just the stuff that matters for immediate play. It won't produce a full character sheet like a normal session of character creation.

Each player should create their character's high concept and trouble as well as their top three skills in the pyramid. You use a similar method for Fate Accelerated, except you fill in the top (+3) and bottom (+0) approaches. As you play through the first couple sessions, the rest of the character sheet will get filled out. For each skill, stunt, or aspect filled in after character generation, the player should describe a quick flashback where the character demonstrates the skill, stunt, or aspect in a cool way. Flashbacks should take no more than a minute or so. If the player is having difficulty coming up with something to say, don't push. You can help out with ideas, ask the other players for their thoughts, or just move on, dependent on time.

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A fun thing about this method of character creation is the fluid nature of the character. The players fill in the stunts, aspects, and skills or approaches that they need as they need them. This can lead to characters that are different than the players might have imagined them if they had constructed them whole cloth at the start of the game.

THE FIRST SCENE

While the players work on their characters, you, as the GM, should plan the first scene. Grab the issue you've just created, add in a place or face, and set up a challenge, a contest, or a conflict. The aspects that the players are creating for their characters and the aspects they've already created for the places and faces can help you build the first scene so that it incorporates the desires of the players. If you have a great scene, but can't figure out why the characters should be in it, ask the players why their characters would be in this place or moving against this face. This creates an opportunity for them to flesh out their characters a bit and maybe build a new aspect.

Ryan is running a game for his friends, Adrienne, Alex, and Chuck. While the players are building their characters, Ryan needs to come up with the first scene they're going to play through. They've already created the threat *Secret Cyborg Invaders* and a couple of places and faces. He decides to start out in the abandoned pet store that Chuck created. Listening to the players discuss their characters, he hears Adrienne bring up her character's high concept *Cop on the Edge*. He decides to start with an investigation into the cyborgs in the abandoned pet store. Alex is playing a hacker, so Ryan quickly discusses a possibility with him—Alex will be trying to digitally exorcise the cyber ghost haunting the pet shop. So now Ryan has the first scene set up for the players. Cyborg invaders are in the pet shop, and everyone is invested in that.

PLAYING THE FIRST SCENE

When moving into your first scene, you want to invest your players in the game world as quickly as possible. You can pull them in through gameplay mechanics or through the narrative. Both work well at getting the players involved and both together is gold. To get them mechanically invested, dive into the game mechanics quickly and smoothly. To get them narratively hooked, pull them into their character's world and mindset. There are a number of ways to do this.

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To engage both mechanically and narratively, start the scene as close to the action as possible. Starting in media res often works really well. Your characters are loosely defined; throwing them directly into the action lets the players retroactively build the characters on the fly. By focusing on the action and tension, you draw the players in through the characters and the scene. They're forced to build a little bit more of their characters mechanically, while engaging with the issue they established earlier.

Your group only has one scene this session, so hit 'em hard. Go with high difficulties or enemy skill levels. Make your players spend those fate points and feel free to compel like mad. Allow the players to get into the ebb and flow of the fate point economy. This is a fine time for your players to come up with a cool stunt or aspect relevant to their character's needs in the scene, with cool flashbacks to break up the action a bit.

The goal of this scene is to give a preview and a hook, leaving your players breathless and in an interesting situation at the end of the session. Fill in only the minimal details required; you can always add more later—details, extensive plot, and big mysteries will all come in the sessions to follow. If your players are impatient for the next game, you did it right.

By the time the scene is over, your two hours should be up; tell your players you'll see them next week.

Regular Play

After your first session, planning and running games is a bit more complex for you as the GM. World building and character creation as a group is over and done. From this point on, when you run into an unknown you can make it up as you would normally in Fate Core. If you find a need for a place, a face, or an item that you don't already have constructed, make one up or have the players help you.

Using hooks from previous sessions will help with your planning, and an **opposition budget** can help you design opposition on the fly.

USE HOOKS TO PLAN

You probably have a dangling hook or two after the epic scene from the first session. A **hook** is an unfinished or unused plot element that's appeared in the game. It could be the mention of a face or item, it could be a captured opponent—any piece of the game that could be a whole scene by itself is a hook. If you can't think of any hooks, look over the aspects of the PCs and the world. Use a couple to compel the players. They get more fate points, and the next adventure gets started.

Once your hooks are set, it's time to plan your adventure. As time is our concern in this method, plan for three to four scenes. You might not

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use all of your scenes in a session, or some may go faster than anticipated, but that's fine. During the first couple of sessions you're dialing into your group's style and speed of play. Conflict scenes tend to take the longest, and challenges the shortest, so keep that in mind when designing your session's scenes.

Although you want to keep the game moving, not all scenes need to be full of clattering dice and mechanical choices. Scenes in which the characters plan the next mission or deal with simple obstacles can be as narratively compelling as any fight.

KEEP SCENES FOCUSED

When you're playing a two-hour game, it's particularly important to keep your scenes focused. Before each scene starts, make sure you know the purpose of that scene—what the players are trying to accomplish. As soon as the purpose of the scene is fulfilled, it's time to move on. See pages 241-243 in *FATE CORE SYSTEM* for more on structuring scenes.

Plan your first scene somewhat tightly so your players can get right into the action. The rest of the scenes should be loosely planned so you can respond to how previous scenes turned out. Before each scene starts, make sure you determine the purpose of the scene so you know when the scene is over and it's time to move on to the next one. When you near the two-hour mark, the purpose of the scene might be to tie up some loose ends or to leave the game on a cliffhanger.

CREATE THE OPPOSITION

You don't need to fully flesh out every opponent mechanically. To maximize your game time, focus on developing one main opponent, then use an **opposition budget** to fill in the rest of your opposition and obstacles. The budget is a variation on the **Bronze Rule**, which states that you can treat anything as if it were a character. Regardless of the nature of the opposition, its mechanical representation is drawn from a pool of aspects, skill ratings, stress boxes, and consequences. This method takes a bit of getting used to, but once you're acclimated to it, it sings.

Main Antagonist

Before the session, fully create one opponent as the main antagonist. This opponent's stats don't pull from your budget. This NPC is frequently an existing face that you or your group created, although it may be a new face you're introducing to the group as well. Building these NPCs will be your largest out-of-game time expenditure, but it's more manageable if you're only creating one fully statted characters for each session. Provided the players don't kill or otherwise remove the opponents permanently, you

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can reuse them. As the campaign goes on, you'll build up a solid stable of mechanically constructed faces that are linked to the player characters. This gradual world building is also useful as it reduces the number of things you need to remember from session to session.

The Opposition Budget

Aside from your main NPC, you don't need to stat out the remaining antagonist NPCs or challenges that the player characters will attempt to overcome. Instead you use a budget that's split amongst the opponents and obstacles for the session. For a two hour session, I recommend starting with a budget of:

- four aspects
- five skill ratings (one +5, two +2s, and two +1s)
- eight stress boxes
- three consequences (one minor, one moderate, and one severe)

This budget has worked out quite well for me with my group, but feel free to tweak it to taste. By varying when you use your budget or the numbers you start with, you can alter the feel of the game, but keep in mind that they aren't all created equal—what you change and how you change it will have different impacts on your game.

Adding stress boxes and consequences can drastically increase the endurance—and thus the length—of a scene by allowing you to throw far more opponents and tougher challenges at the characters. Since consequences are also aspects, they can lead to more drama.

More aspects can add a lot of narrative depth, though problems can come up with keeping track of them all. Extra aspects also allow for longer challenges and minions with more depth.

Increasing the skill ratings can increase the defenses and deadliness of your session by allowing for more obstacles and fewer minions and mooks, unless you also add in more stress boxes. If the players have walked through a few sessions without feeling pushed, increasing the skill numbers can add difficulty without altering the length of play. I don't recommend increasing the ratings more than three over the highest skill rating of the party, as it will make the game feel very desperate and difficult.

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Spending Your Budget

The budget can be spent in a couple of different ways: minions and challenges.

Minions must have a skill rating and at least one stress box. The consequences can be used at any point by *any* of your NPCs, as they belong to the session rather than the character. Minions are useful for conflict and contest scenes, so you'll probably end up making a lot of these.

For a challenge, grab a skill rating; this becomes the default difficulty of the rolls for the challenge. You can attach a stress box to your challenge to increase the difficulty by two. Challenges require at least one aspect from your budget. For every aspect attached to the challenge you get to throw three obstacles at the characters, each with the difficulty chosen at challenge creation. Be wary of putting too many aspects on a challenge, as it can lead to repetition or longer scenes than you intended.

And bear in mind you still have at least one fully fleshed out NPC who can enter at any time. If you're nearing the end of the two-hour mark, have your NPC concede. Concessions are the key to recurring characters, and every recurring character is a character you don't have to invent whole cloth.

POSSIBLE BUDGET EXPENDITURES

A horde of mooks led by a minion [total cost: one aspect, one +5 and two +1 skills, four stress boxes]

- Minion: **Low Level Shot Caller** [1 of the session aspects], one +5 skill for opposing the characters, two stress boxes
- Two Groups of Mooks: no aspect, one +1 skill each, one stress box each

A series of booby-traps, each more clever than the last [total cost: two aspects, one +2 skill, one stress box]

- **This Room Is Filled with Traps; Death at Every Turn** [2 session aspects], +2 difficulty [+2 skill rating], one stress box [increase difficulty by two], Total difficulty +4

Landing a plane on the ocean in a hurricane [total cost: three aspects, one +5 skill, two stress boxes]

- **The Engine Is on Fire; Raging Wind and Waves; Must Save the Passengers** [three session aspects], +5 difficulty [+5 skill], two stress boxes [increase the difficulty by four], Total difficulty +9

Game On

Though we have less time for gaming as the years go by, that doesn't mean that we need to game less. Through some simple planning and some judicious application of the Bronze Rule, anyone can get their Fate games down to two hours or less. While we may not be able to play the games the way we did when we were children, we can still play the games we love. 🎲



DECK OF FATE: VARIANT FATE POINTS

by MARK DIAZ TRUMAN

Nearly every Fate designer I know has spent time trying to assign values to aspects instead of a flat +2 per fate point spent. It seems like it should be easy to diversify aspect ratings, but attempts to create tiers of aspects usually end up wrecking the tightly constructed system of invokes and compels that makes Fate fun. Tiered aspects are a white whale of Fate design, often hunted but never captured.

Instead of changing aspects, what if we change how fate points work? In this systems piece, I'll show you how to use the Deck of Fate (and normal Fate dice) to vary the strength of fate points without sacrificing the Fate economy. These variant fate points aren't quite tiered aspects, but they will create new variety in your Fate stories without a lot of book-keeping or hassle by making use of the Deck of Fate.

Fate Cards as Fate Points

Instead of passing out tokens at the beginning of the session, hand out **fate cards** from the Deck of Fate. Characters with a refresh of 3, for example, should take three fate cards from the Deck of Fate. Hold these cards like a hand in poker; don't show anyone what you've got and try not to give yourself away if you draw something solid. Throughout the session, you can use these fate cards to invoke and compel aspects as if they were fate points... with some fun new tricks.

There's a few rules we have to put in place to make fate cards work:

DECK OF FATE: VARIANT FATE POINTS

- **You've got to keep your hand secret.** If players discuss their hands with each other, talking about the fate cards becomes the focus of play. You can obliquely refer to your cards—"I think I've got a strong hand."—but don't say anything concrete like "I have a +3 fate card."
- **You can only play fate cards when you can spend fate points.** The cards are replacing fate points, so you can spend them only when you would normally spend a fate point: when you're rolling against passive or active opposition or when another character is rolling against passive opposition.
- **Reshuffle and redraw when someone plays a +4 or -4.** Over the course of an entire session of Fate, it's pretty easy to count cards from the deck if you don't reshuffle and redraw. Refresh the deck by collecting everyone's hand, reshuffling all the cards, and redrawing whenever someone plays a +4 or -4 fate card.

Invoking Aspects with Fate Cards

Playing fate cards to invoke an aspect works like a normal invoke—you declare that you're invoking an aspect that's appropriate for the situation and play the card—but they have some new effects. You can play as many fate cards as you want, just as you can spend as many fate points as you want, but any cards played are used up once they leave your hand.

VARIANT INVOKES

When you invoke an aspect by playing a fate card, add the number on the fate card to your total, your opponent's total (against you or a passive opposition), or passive opposition instead of adding +2. Positive cards add shifts to the total; negative cards remove shifts from the total. (Hint: you'll probably want to play the negative cards on your opponent or passive opposition!)

Sometimes this means that your invoke is worth the same or less than a normal invoke (+1 or +2 shifts), but it can also mean that your invoke makes a task more challenging for an opponent (negative cards) or has an extra powerful effect (+3 or +4 shifts). When you play these variants, narrate how the aspect is keeping your opponent from making progress or having an intense or severe effect.

DECK OF FATE: VARIANT FATE POINTS

Marissa and Justin are space pirates hijacking a Revellian trade ship. While trying to leap from ship to ship, Justin's character, Merlavik, comes up short on his roll against a Great (+4) difficulty. Since he's got a pretty low Athletics, he only got a Mediocre (+0) result. Justin has a few cards in his hand, but nothing above a +1. He plays one of them to invoke his **Hard to Kill** aspect to raise his roll to Average (+1) and narrates how Merlavik grabs on to the edge of the ship to keep from flying into space.

Luckily, Marissa has a better hand. Her character, Alleea, is the heavy hitter in the crew, and she's got the +4 card that's going to save Merlavik's life. She plays the card to invoke her **All Eyes Open** and add +4 to Justin's roll against the passive opposition, bringing him to a Superb (+5) result. She narrates that she sees him barely grab on to the ship, and reaches out into space to pull him in before anyone can see him. Since she played the +4 fate card, the GM collects all the cards, reshuffles the deck, and passes new cards out to everyone.

INVOKING FOR A REROLL

Of course, the +0 cards don't do much as variant invokes. It's not helpful to spend a fate card to add nothing to your roll! Instead of using +0 cards to add or subtract shifts from a roll, use +0 cards to invoke aspects to trigger rerolls. You can only trigger a reroll if you rolled the dice; you can't spend them to make someone else reroll.

When they are about to take the ship, Justin realizes that Alleea is actually planning to kill the rival captain to get revenge for some past wrongs. When she starts to blast through the security doors instead of stealing the cargo—rolling -2 on her dice for a total of Good (+3) against a Fair (+2) difficulty—he decides to invoke **Eyes on the Prize** by playing his -3 card. Merlavik yells at Alleea to keep moving toward the cargo, distracting her at the crucial moment.

Marissa's still got options. She decides to play one of her own cards... but she's only got three +0 fate cards left. She plays one to reroll, invoking **Never Forgive, Never Forget** to reroll her dice. She comes up with a +3 on the dice, shifting her total to a success with style! She blasts through the door; Merlavik knows she won't be stopped now.

Looser Invokes

If you want a crazy and wild game of Fate, let everyone play cards to invoke aspects at any time. It won't break the game, but it will mean that players will play cards as often as they can, burning through fate cards quickly and challenging every result. If you do this, however, players will need to accept a lot more compels to collect enough fate cards to keep up the pace.

Free Invokes

When you use a create advantage roll to create a new aspect with free invokes—or add free invokes to an existing aspect—draw a number of cards to your hand from the Deck of Fate equal to the number of free invokes you create. Place that number of cards from your hand face up next to the aspect you just created or improved, **banking** those cards into that aspect. These cards are safe from reshuffling. When you use the free invokes from that aspect, play one of the cards you banked.

Your allies can use banked cards as well, so bank strong cards if you think someone else can make better use of them than you can. Since you can't reveal your hand, creating advantages allows you and your allies to coordinate spending your best fate cards. In addition, banked cards don't get reshuffled, so you can save a card you want for later by banking it!

Once Allea breaks through the door, she orders Merlavik to fan out to catch the captain. She makes a Command roll to create the advantage *Imperial Tactics* based on her former assassin training. She succeeds with style, drawing two fate cards into her hand, one for each free invoke she earned on the aspect. She decides to bank one of her new cards worth -3 and one of her old +0 cards into the aspect. She can use them anytime she can use a free invoke or pass them over to Justin so that Merlavik can use them too. She gets to keep the other card she drew in her hand.

Compels, Story Details, and Stunts

You can use a fate card for anything else that you can use a fate point for in Fate Core, including offering compels, adding story details, or activating stunts. Just discard the card face up—revealing whatever you had on the card—and activate the compel, detail, or stunt as normal. You'll probably use a lot of weaker cards this way, although you might have to sacrifice a strong card if you're in a tough spot.

For the GM

What about the GM? Well... the GM gets fate cards that can be used for invokes as well. At the beginning of each scene, the GM gets to draw a number of cards equal to the number of players in the game. The GM can use these fate cards the same way players can, invoking aspects and modifying rolls. The GM can also offer fate cards from the top of the deck as compels, just as if the cards were regular fate points.

Fate with Variance

The goal of variant fate points is to give aspects some new depth and variety, creating that moment when a special feature of your character makes all the difference in the world. It suits settings where big changes in momentum are fun—like space opera—and gives players new ways to use create advantage to work together. At the same time, it retains the key parts of Fate that matter to a coherent story, and it will challenge your group to continue to add narrative detail every time a card is played. I hope you enjoy it at your table! 🎲

PRIMAL WORLD



PRIMAL WORLD

by BRENDAN CONWAY

The deep oceans of chaos fill the void between worlds. Their depths hide madness and horror, but sometimes...sometimes, a pearl washes ashore onto the shoals of reality. A new world, born from the chaos. Some of these worlds grow and solidify into a new sphere, a sparkling neocosm. But if it does not grow itself quickly enough, it shall be swept back into the dark when the tide returns. How many worlds are lost this way, before they even take root? An endless tragedy, churning beyond sight of all but the darkest eyes.

- Nayala Hex, Scholar of the Spheres

The Chaos Worlds

Infinite different realities dot the multiverse. Spheres, or cosms, or planes, or whatever you choose to call them. Some old, on the brink of dying, like the world containing the Crater Basin and Anglekite. Some middle-aged, with plenty of trials ahead of them before their time is up, like the sphere that Varkith calls home. Some past the edge of their own demise, waiting to be destroyed or recycled, like the cosm known as Lastlife. And some, brand new, still trying to form themselves into concrete reality. Being wiped away before they can assert their own reality is the greatest threat to their existence.

The Last Days of Anglekite and Beyond

Primal World is a part of the same fictional set-up as **The Last Days of Anglekite**, the Dungeon World setting Kickstarted by Magpie Games in February of 2015. While **The Last Days of Anglekite** and the other Chaos World settings from the Kickstarter, **The Cold Ruins of Lastlife** and **The Green Law of Varkith**, are all written up with the Dungeon World system, they still tie together with *Primal World* as individual versions of Chaos Worlds. If you'd like to know more about Chaos Worlds, and about Anglekite, Lastlife, or Varkith, then head to magpiegames.com/chaos-worlds.

THE UNTAMED NEOCOSM

This primal world is such a sphere, a place of neonate essence, to be explored, discovered, and made solid through that discovery. There is no

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history here, no tradition, no rules from past generations. There is only the limitless potential for anything to be created, to be found. And in a world so young, the choices of its inhabitants will reshape it even as they explore it. Such adventurers show the world how to be, even as the world shapes those born to it.

THE NASCENT PILLARS OF CREATION

Even a world as young as this has the beginnings of its structure forming. Critical points, places of order or being, strong notions—these are the first crystallizations of the world's essence.

The Origin

The Origin is the single most structured and solidified point in the world's existence, and its form speaks to the world's underlying nature. Changing the Origin would alter that nature. Destroying the Origin would destabilize the world into non-existence.

Finding out exactly what the Origin is, its form, its purpose, is the first discovery for those exploring and defining the primal world.

The Calling

The Calling is some metaphysical sensation that drives the world's most adventurous denizens together. The Calling is why some explore, investigate, and uncover the nature of this primal world, solidifying it further. It is the survival instinct of the primal world expressing itself through an unconscious drive in the souls of these beings.

The Carnivore

Ideas coalesce and form into new shards of existence in any forming world. Some ideas are kind and gentle, some beautiful and stunning, others lethal and dangerous. There is no telling what wonders await the nascent world. In this case, the primal world's inchoate form gave birth to something terrifying: the Carnivore.

The Carnivore is an enormous beast, thirty feet tall, with a maw filled with row after row of teeth—no two alike. Every possible fang fills its snaggle-toothed misshapen mouth. Its six eyes can see in the dark, can see heat, can see prey in any possible way. Its body is covered in armored plating like an armadillo, its eight limbs thick and powerful, tipped with rending claws or strong, bone-cracking fingers. It represents the hunger for flesh, consumption, predation. The Carnivore is the world consuming itself; every creature devoured is a bit of the world lost to its own hunger.

And of course, that self-destructive impulse leads the Carnivore to hunt those who would solidify the world.

Setting Creation

As a Quick Start Adventure, *Primal World* has everything you need to jump into a weird fantasy Fate game.

Much of *Primal World* is about defining the setting through play, both by discovering it and by shaping it yourself. As a result, you won't be defining that much of the world before you get started. You'll only need to know some of the basics, including:

- The Origin: where you are starting your adventures from.
- The Calling: why you are adventuring together.
- The Issues: what the most prominent known threats are—the Current Issue, and the Impending Issue.

The rest comes from your characters, and from discovery!

THE ORIGIN

The Origin is your primal world's first real location, where your characters have come together and from whence they will venture forth.

To define your world's Origin, choose three aspects. These aspects are in play whenever dealing directly with the Origin.

- Form: how the Origin looks. Is it a crystal palace, or an underground city grown from living rock?
- Function: the Origin's purpose and how that defines the world. Is it a massive library for recording all knowledge? A locked up armory of terrible weaponry?
- Face: the being in charge of the Origin, who came into being with the Origin itself. Is it a regent, ruling over the Origin? Or a caretaker, self-charged with ensuring the Origin's safety?

SAMPLE ORIGIN

Form: *The Infinite Obsidian Tower*, a massive obsidian tower extending as far as the eye can see.

Function: *A Nexus of Doorways Throughout the World*; the Obsidian Tower has an infinite number of doors, which open up gateways to other unformed part of the world.

Face: *The Silent Keylord*, a robed and masked figure with an endless supply of keys, each opening a single door.

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When defining your Origin, think of the strange, the unique, and the weird. Even though the world is brand new, that doesn't mean there can't be incredibly peculiar, oddly eternal elements throughout it.

THE CALLING

The Calling is why characters have come together, their uniting purpose. All characters share the same Calling. If you want to jump into play quickly, use the following calling: ***Discover and Solidify the World***.

If you have time to choose a Calling, pick any of the following options:

- ***Discover and Solidify the World***
- ***Defend the World from Externals***
- ***Shape the New World in Your Image***
- ***Create a New Society***
- ***Nurture the World's Growth***

Talk about the Calling and what it means to you. Remember that it is a metaphysical urge bringing the heroes together, not anything tangible.

THE ISSUES

The Issues are the threats that are either currently dangerous or growing in danger.

Explain and talk about the **current issue**, which by default is ***The Carnivore***. Have the players name at least two faces for the current issue, or use the two provided faces.

Look at the characters' Calling and think about what issues would best threaten it. If the Calling is "Discover and Solidify the World," think about possible barriers against such discovery. If the Calling is "Defend the World from Externals," think about what externals most threaten the world. These will help you craft your impending issues appropriately.

Current Issue: The Origin Devoured

Everything in a primal world is a first, the original form of an idea. The Carnivore is the first creature defined by its need to consume: a predator, the embodiment of predation. The Carnivore's approach threatens the new beings of this world—each one it consumes is an essence lost, given over to the Carnivore. But destroying the Carnivore would also rob the world of a piece of its essence. Slaying the beast is one option...but the costs must be carefully considered.

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Faces:

- The Carnivore. Powerful, hungry, and dangerously intelligent, indifferent to the essence of the world and the cost of destroying whatever it consumes.
- Songbird, an avian creature and sole source of music, whose home lies in the path of the Carnivore's rampage toward the Origin.

THE ORIGIN DEVoured

THE CARNIVORE

*Powerful, hungry, and
dangerously intelligent*

SONGBIRD

*Avian, the sole source
of music*

IMPENDING ISSUES

To craft your impending issues, look at the characters' Calling and establish a major threat with at least two faces that stands in the way. Here's a simple set of possible issues and faces based on the Callings above:

Discover and Solidify the World

The Secretist, a creature defined by its desire to seek and keep secrets, aims to prevent any discoveries of the world's deeper truths.

Defend the World from Externals

Phthogyrak, the Eye of Plague, is a monstrous floating eye surrounded by a haze of black corruption, attempting to infect the world with its own consciousness.

Shape the New World in Your Own Image

The Autocrat, a being defined by its desire for order, seeks to reshape the world into structure and control with every action.

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Create a New Society

Voidseeker, a spiritual monk birthed by the world's empty spaces, seeks to ensure that the world remains unfilled and devoid of any restrictive structures.

Nurture the World's Growth

The Vampire, the ultimate parasite, feeding upon the world's strength, seeks a place to latch onto the neocosm's primal essence and feast.



Character Creation

Primal World is written for Fate Accelerated, and the players should make characters with changes described below or use the sample characters provided on page 47-49.

ASPECTS

Characters in *Primal World* start play with two aspects, a **Name** and a **Question**. Character Names replace their high concepts. Characters from a primal world don't have real names. Instead, Names refer to what they do within the world. Players choose Names that encompass their beings, and flesh them out with a secondary clause if needed. For example, a good Name aspect is **Breaker, destroyer of barriers**.

A PC's Question, on the other hand, is a fundamental inquiry into the core of the character's being, a tension or a struggle within them. It

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should not refer to any specific external thing—*Primal World* is about exploring and discovering the world, so a Question is philosophical or internal, and very difficult to answer. Characters are defined by both the Question and the search for an answer. A good Question for Breaker is *What Walls Should Never Fall?*

Compelling a Question is easy—whenever exploring or dealing with the Question would complicate the character's life, that's a compel—but invoking the Question may not seem obvious at first. Whenever players try to answer the Question, they can invoke the Question aspect to their advantage. This doesn't mean they are definitively answering the Question—only that they are searching for meaning.

APPROACHES

Player characters in *Primal World* start the game with a single approach rated at +3. When choosing an approach, players can choose from the standard Fate Accelerated approaches—Careful, Clever, Flashy, Forceful, Quick, and Sneaky—but they can also choose a different approach, either something from the list below, or from their own imagination. Chosen approaches will define how characters interact with the world, and what that world allows within it.

- Angry
- Boastful
- Brave
- Cheerful
- Co
- Crazy
- Curious
- Dangerous
- Daring
- Defiant
- Deft
- Diligent
- Dramatic
- Dutiful
- Elegant
- Faithful
- Foolish
- Frantic
- Hateful
- Honest
- Inquisitive
- Just
- Kind
- Mighty
- Mysterious
- Obedient
- Perfect
- Sad
- Sharp
- Thrill-Seeking
- Weird

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When players choose (or create) an approach, ask them to answer the following questions:

- How would someone attack in this way?
- How would someone defend in this way?
- How would someone create advantages in this way?
- How would someone overcome obstacles in this way?
- How would someone discover in this way?

For my character, Breaker, I pick the approach Angry. I answer each of the questions:

- I would use Angry to attack someone with violence and barely controlled anger.
- I would use Angry to defend myself by shouting at someone, and using my anger to bull past any harm.
- I would use Angry to create advantages by saying things that hurt or anger others, or by smashing the environment around me in the right way.
- I would use Angry to overcome obstacles by bullying past them with brute force and anger.
- I would use Angry to discover by smashing and hitting to experiment with something, or by demanding information from other sources.

STUNTS

Player characters in *Primal World* still have the three stunts that normal Fate Accelerated characters have, though none have to be chosen at the start of play. Players should fill them in as they play and learn more about the world and their characters.

Discovering Primal World

Primal World uses the Discovery action, as detailed in FATE CODEX issue 1.7, page 6. You can use *create advantage* if you're not familiar with the discover action, but you'll have to remind players that create advantage can be used to unearth new information.

Character Advancement

Over the course of *Primal World*, characters will learn more about the world, and in turn grow and develop themselves. By the end of each session—in addition to any normal milestone advancements—the players can do any of the following to solidify their characters, thereby solidifying the world:

- Create a brand new approach held by nothing else in the world.
- Take an approach already held by another character in the world.
- Create a new aspect referring to something already established within the world.

ADDING APPROACHES

Characters have six slots for approaches: one at +3, two at +2, two at +1, and one at +0. When taking a new approach, characters can shuffle their existing approaches as desired, as long as they stay within their allowed slots.

When taking a new approach, players can choose one already held by another PC, or can take a brand new approach. If they take an existing one, it means that the new world is starting to stabilize (see The World's Structure, below).

ASPECTS

In addition to their starting two aspects, their Name and Question, characters can have three additional aspects. Each additional aspect taken must refer to something external. For example, a character could not take *Full of Hatred* as a third aspect. *Full of Hatred for the Lizard Duke* would work, though, as it refers to something out in the world.

Referring to something already mentioned in another PC's aspect will add that fictional element to the world's stability table (see The World's Structure, below).

The World's Structure

The primal world is new, young and weak, under threat of simple dissolution or extradimensional consumption. To solidify and stabilize the world, the PCs have to learn about it, explore it, and take parts of it into themselves. That means taking new aspects that refer to bits of the discovered world, and new approaches that refer to how the world functions.

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At the start of play, the world is represented by a stability table with five rows and three columns.

Here's what a stability table with a few spaces filled in looks like:

<i>The Carnivore</i>	<i>The First Sword</i>	
Joyful	Curious	Forceful
<i>The Lizard Duke</i>	Defiant	Brave

Any time a PC takes an approach already held by another PC, add that approach into the lowest, leftmost open space in the stability table. "Lowest" supersedes "leftmost"; if there's an open space at a lower level, then fill that before filling a spot more to the left at a higher level.

Filled-in approaches become cemented, a part of the world. Once six approaches have been added, no more may be added. Then, all PCs should adjust their approaches, swapping and changing as necessary, to only use the six approaches in the table. Subsequent NPCs from within this world should only have approaches taken from the table.

Brian adds *Graceful* to The Musician, an approach already held by another PC. Brian then adds Graceful to the World's table, bringing the total number of approaches in the table to six. All players then must adjust their approaches to use only the six listed on the table. They can change and swap their approaches as desired, so Brian puts Graceful into his +3 approach slot, and fills in the other slots with the approaches from the table.

<i>The Carnivore</i>	<i>The First Sword</i>	Graceful
Joyful	Curious	Forceful
<i>The Lizard Duke</i>	Defiant	Brave

Any time PCs take an aspect that points at something another player's aspect already points to, they add that fictional element to the stability table in the lowest, leftmost possible space. This signals that it is

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important: a major part of the world and a recurring item. The fictional element becomes a pillar supporting the world's reality.

Brian adds an aspect to The Musician: ***Greatest Musician in the First Tower***. The First Tower is already established, and another PC has an aspect pointing to it. So, Brian adds "The First Tower" into the lowest, left-most box of the World's table.

<i>The First Tower</i>		
<i>The Carnivore</i>	<i>The First Sword</i>	Graceful
Joyful	Curious	Forceful
<i>The Lizard Duke</i>	Defiant	Brave

THE WORLD'S DISSOLUTION

The world has five conditions, each with two stress boxes attached to it. This is simple stress, so each box is worth one stress. When the world takes stress, the players may assign that stress to whatever empty boxes they choose.

When both boxes of a single condition are marked, the world has that condition as an aspect. If the aspect is removed through action taken by the PCs, then both stress boxes are cleared and can be filled again.

The world's conditions are:

Rifts to the Outside

Warped Native Creatures

Hunters from Another Reality

An Outworld Shard

A Wellspring of Corruption

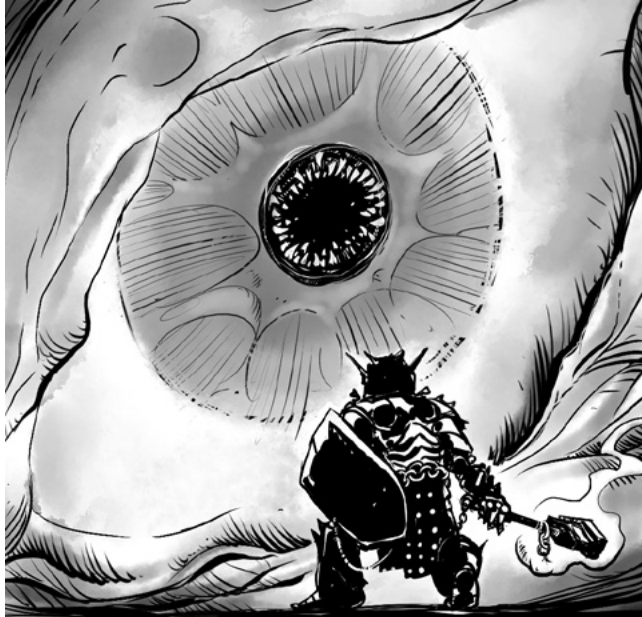
Each condition has a specific action that must be taken to clear the stress track and eliminate the condition. If not eliminated by the end of session, then the condition affects the world as a whole, causing additional problems that threaten the cosm's existence.

Rifts to the Outside

There are gateways, tears in reality, that lead out of this world to other places. By themselves, these rifts destabilize the primal world, with strange effects on natural physical laws. The longer they are open, the more likely other things are to come through...

To Eliminate: Close or block off the rifts.

End of Session Effect: Deal 1 stress to the world.



Warped Native Creatures

Forces from other worlds want to warp and change the creatures of the primal world, making them a mess of twisted monstrosities. Creatures tainted by these forces have approaches that are of the world (if there are any), but also have monstrous alternate approaches. They are from this world, but ruined.

To Eliminate: Find a way to uncorrupt the creatures (killing them would damage the primal world, robbing it of its own life).

End of Session Effect: Empty the upper-rightmost slot in the world's stability table.

Hunters from Another Reality

Many of other worlds happily plunder young, weak worlds, taking whatever is valuable before returning home. These plunderers have found a way in to the primal world. Every piece they remove from this world is another harm dealt to it.

To Eliminate: Get rid of the hunters.

End of Session Effect: Empty the upper-rightmost slot in the world's stability table.

An Outworld Shard

An outworld shard is a piece of another world, or of the Outside itself, that has pierced the primal world. Such shards are invariably powerful, and they are all dangerous—both to those who wield them and those who face them. They are artifacts of astonishing power, not to be trifled with.

To Eliminate: Destroy the shard, or rob it of its power.

End of Session Effect: Increase the difficulty of the Stability roll by +1.

A Wellspring of Corruption

Wellsprings release a warping force, transforming the landscape into something very different. If opened, a wellspring must be plugged before it overwrites the whole of the primal world.

To Eliminate: Plug the wellspring, or contain it.

End of Session Effect: Add 1 stress to “Warped Native Creatures.” If “Warped Native Creatures” has both stress boxes filled in, then there is no other effect.

THE WORLD'S STABILITY

The world has a Stability score, rated from Mediocre (+0) to Superb (+5). In the beginning, the Stability is rated at Mediocre (+0), as the vulnerable world is unstable and impermanent. When every slot in a single row of the table is filled in, the world's Stability goes up by 1. So if all 15 boxes across the five rows of the table are filled in, the world's Stability is Superb (+5).

At the end of every session, the world first suffers any effects of its current conditions, and then the players roll to determine the state of the continued conflict for the world's stability. Roll and add the world's Stability to the roll; compare that roll to a static Superb (+5) difficulty, representing the inherent tendency of new worlds to dissolve:

- On a failure, the world takes 1 stress for every shift by which it fails.
- On a tie, the world takes no stress, but the next time the players roll to determine the state of the world, the static difficulty is Fantastic (+6), instead of Superb (+5).
- On a success, the world suffers no stress.
- On a success with style, the world's reality has been cemented! The players no longer need to roll at the end of every session. The world's stress track is entirely cleared, and the conditions are removed.

Game Structure

Primal World is about exploration and discovery; the characters discover themselves by exploring and solidifying the world itself. During play, put new things in front of the PCs, so they can write new aspects, and see different approaches in action. Meanwhile, force the PCs to respond to individual conditions that the world might incur over the course of play.

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While running *Primal World*, pop in new fictional elements as much as possible, and let the PCs interact with them. Feel free to make them dangerous, or unpleasant—even if they are predatory, they’re still a part of the primal world. When the world suffers a condition, hammer on that condition. Bring in horrible monsters and abominations, and make clear the consequences the world is suffering.

Using the provided Current Issue and the guidelines for Impending Issues, you should have a strong idea of where to start, introducing those faces and elements and exploring them. Here are some good starting, middle, and ending scenes to help guide your play.

OPENING SCENE: THE CHARGE

The characters have gathered at the Origin for the first time. The Calling has drawn them here, and they meet the face of the Origin.

This is a chance for these different potential aspects of the world to meet and interact, to understand each other, and to realize their own differing visions of what the world should be. The face of the Origin can act as an expression of the Calling itself, giving it voice, and can make clear the greatest immediate threat—the coming of the Carnivore.

The characters may not know about the Carnivore, but with the face telling them that the Carnivore is crushing its way toward the Origin, to consume the very source of the world, the Calling will compel them to act quickly and decisively.

The face of the Origin could point them to different rumored pieces of the primal world. The Weapon, for example—first of its kind, the embodiment of a death-bringing tool, changing its form to suit its wielder—could be key to slaying the Carnivore. The Stone Chains—born from solid stone, seamless, capable of holding anything—might have manifested to restrain the beast.

How will they face the Carnivore? How will they interact with each other? What will the Origin and the face come to mean to them? What will they seek for the coming battle?

Starting aspects: *At the Source of It All*, *Stricken by the Calling*, *Distant Thunder of the Carnivore*

MIDDLE SCENE: THE STRUGGLE

On their way to either find tools to use against the Carnivore, or to find the Carnivore itself, the characters encounter more of the primal world’s nascent wonders. In this case, it’s the First Cathedral, a massive temple made from a single piece of shimmering, opalescent crystal with spires scraping the sky. The First Faithful, creatures that look like empty robes,

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inhabit and tend to the Cathedral. It's also home to Songbird, the embodiment of music, who ran here to escape the Carnivore's destruction.

The Cathedral, threatened by the Carnivore, stands between the creature and the Origin. The First Faithful are just snacks for the creature; Songbird will have to flee again, but with no place to hide besides the Origin itself.

The Cathedral could house either the Stone Chains or the Weapon, or something even more dangerous: Jurgen Worldhunter, bearer of Kark-agandr the Rift-Axe, has come to this world. Tearing a rift through the Cathedral's own walls, he comes to claim this world and its treasures for himself.

It's a dangerous situation. Can they get what they want from the Cathedral with the First Faithful and Jurgen in their way? Can they save Songbird? Can they direct Jurgen toward the Carnivore? Will they work quickly enough to avoid the oncoming Carnivore?

Starting aspects: *Home to a Nascent God, Defended by the First Faithful, A Light That Burns Across the Worlds*

FINAL SCENE: THE BATTLE

This is the end. The Carnivore has come, and the characters must stop it. Maybe they can talk it down, or bind it instead of killing it, but there's no way to avoid dealing with it.

Everything comes to a head outside the Origin. The Carnivore has carved a trail of destruction straight towards it. It may have been diverted around the Cathedral, but it's here now, and it's hungry. The face of the Origin is ready to defend it, but has no real chance against a creature as powerful as the Carnivore.

If Jurgen is around, then destroying the Carnivore and conquering the Origin would be on his agenda, as well—the creature threatens his spoils, and the Origin would give Jurgen access to anything he wanted.

Time to use the Weapon, or the Stone Shackles, or stand strong against the Carnivore, and Jurgen, and all other attackers. The world itself reacts to the oncoming battle, with thunder and lightning crackling in the darkening skies above.

Will the Carnivore be slain, and another piece of the world lost? Will the Origin be altered by the battle? Will Jurgen be cast from this world? Will the face of the Origin live?

Starting aspects: *A World-Rending Battle, Lightning and Thunder Above, At the Foot of the Origin*

NEXT SESSIONS: WHERE TO GO FROM HERE?

Remember at the end of the session to make the stability roll. There's a good chance the world will suffer some stress in the early stages, which will lead to conditions. Press on those conditions and their consequences to create new threats, and new places to explore. If you're looking for more ideas, here are some elements that the characters might find in the primal world:

Jethanascoriximolonigan, the Namer

Jethanascoriximolonigan (Jeth for short, but don't call her that) is the Namer, whose mind is filled with possible names and identities for the world around her. The Namer's purpose is to name things and record them on an unending scroll she carries within her arm. Her body is covered in myriad possible languages and glyphs. She is bald, and each of her three eyes is a different color. One long finger on her right arm is a quill that oozes ink, and with a simple shuffle of her left arm, her scroll unfurls itself. Any name she records, she sees as writ upon the very fabric of the world.

- *The Bearer of the First Name*
- *"Do You Want to Know Your Name?"*
- *Sharpened Quill Finger*
- Curious +3

The Sphere of the Dead

The Sphere—enormous and impenetrably black—floats above the world. One can pass through it, like passing through a thick sludge; inside are the souls of the dead, their memories encased for eternity. The world is new and young, and life is just beginning, but already the Sphere is a constant reminder of the end. Perhaps when the world is older, the Sphere will grow and move away from the skies, but for now it floats above as a dark omen in the sky.

- *Prison of the Dead*
- *Visible in the Sky Across the World*
- *Open to the Living*

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Seer

Seer is a scout for the Things from Outside. A horrible creature, made of crystal held together by sinew and muscle. Each crystal looks like an eye, aimed in a different direction on its spherical body. Seer perceives the world, so the Things can find it. It undermines the structure of the primal world merely by observing it. Seer has no interest in killing or feeding on anything in the world itself—it instead seeks the most succulent morsels for its masters to consume.

- *Crystalline Body*
- *Warps Reality Through Observation*
- *Smells Power*
- Forceful +2
- Stealth +2

Sample Characters

THE REBEL

The Rebel opposes order and stagnation, law and structure. The Rebel seeks to keep the primal world constantly shifting, eternally changing. Anything static and unmoving gets the Rebel's attention, and the Rebel is always on the verge of disobedience. The Rebel will stand against corruption, or the completely unnatural change brought on by the incursions of external monstrosities...unless the Rebel can be convinced of that strange, corruptive change's value.

ASPECTS

NAME: THE REBEL

QUESTION: HOW VALUABLE IS CHANGE?

APPROACH

GOOD (+3) Defiant

STRESS

☐ ☐ ☐

CONSEQUENCES

Mild (2) Moderate (4) Major (6)

NOTES

Refresh: 3

THE TERROR

The Terror is the embodiment of fear, an entire being focused on understanding the necessity of fear. The Terror is interested in all facets of fear—its creation and its experience. The external creatures that come into the world are not a part of it, and the fear they create is unnatural, but...instructive, to the Terror.

ASPECTS

NAME: THE TERROR

QUESTION: WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF FEAR?

APPROACH

GOOD (+3) Frightening

STRESS

☐ ☐ ☐

CONSEQUENCES

Mild (2) Moderate (4) Major (6)

NOTES

Refresh: 3

THE DEFENDER

The Defender is a wall against destruction and unmaking. But the Defender isn't defined by what it defends, only *that* it defends. Being a wall has little meaning, though, unless there is something on each side, something to keep out and to keep in. Perhaps the externals are exactly the threat it needs to solidify its own existence: the wall between the monsters from beyond and this world. But if that were so...would the Defender truly want to shut those monsters out for good? Or would it want a constant trickling threat to defend against forever?

ASPECTS

NAME: THE DEFENDER

QUESTION: WHAT IS WORTH PROTECTING?

APPROACH

GOOD (+3) Indomitable

STRESS

☐ ☐ ☐

CONSEQUENCES

Mild (2) Moderate (4) Major (6)

NOTES

Refresh: 3

THE STUDENT

The Student embodies learning. Investigation. Exploration. Discovery. The Student seeks knowledge, of this world and the many spheres beyond. The Student is powerful for all the knowledge it has and collects, but it is also dangerous, as all power swings both ways. If the Student is willing to do nearly anything to learn, then it might make for a dangerous ally to the invaders into the primal world....

ASPECTS

NAME: THE STUDENT

QUESTION: IS THERE EVER TOO HIGH A COST FOR KNOWLEDGE?

APPROACH

GOOD (+3) Curious

STRESS

☐ ☐ ☐

CONSEQUENCES

Mild (2)

Moderate (4)

Major (6)

NOTES

Refresh: 3



CORRUPTION IN FATE ACCELERATED

by CLARK VALENTINE

“Your hate has made you powerful.”

—The Emperor, RETURN OF THE JEDI

“The Ring is mine.”

—Frodo, RETURN OF THE KING

Corruption is a major element in a lot of cinematic and literary settings, one that we need to represent mechanically to really capture the setting in an RPG. In Fate games, the obvious way of representing corruption is to use aspects—the consequence mechanic lends itself well to this, if you imagine corruption as damage inflicted on the character. But aspects may not fully represent all the effects you want to have. This article presents a different way of mechanically representing corruption anchored to a character’s approaches in Fate Accelerated games.

What Corruption Looks Like

To be clear, by “corruption” we don’t mean a cop taking a bribe to overlook a minor violation. We don’t even mean the more fantastical sort of corruption where you read the wrong book or see a tentacular monster rise from the sea, and it breaks your mind.

In this article, we’re talking about situations where The Dark Powers Are Always Willing to Help. And you can take them up on their offer, but only at the price of a part of yourself. In the Star Wars universe, they call this giving in to the power of the Dark Side. In Middle-Earth, it’s using the One Ring for your own gain and benefit—and that’s really the only way to use it. In Harry Dresden’s universe, using certain types of magic

CORRUPTION IN FATE ACCELERATED

burns part of your soul. This type of corruption eventually takes over, twisting you into an agent of evil. Redemption is possible, but difficult.

The corruption rules are intended to model several things:

- Corruption changes you in a fundamental way.
- Accepting corruption should grant you an overwhelming immediate advantage.
- Corruption should allow you occasional advantage without taking on more corruption.
- Corruption sometimes causes you to act against your own interests and better judgment.
- Redemption is possible, at high cost.

How Corruption Works

This corruption system is based on the idea of “success at great cost” as an option for failing a roll. *FATE ACCELERATED EDITION* doesn’t discuss this option much, but *FATE CORE SYSTEM* does—see page 132 for a review. When you really want a failed action to succeed, corruption can be the great cost you accept to convert it to a success. You reach out to the dark powers—whatever they are in your setting—channeling their seductive power to your benefit. They burn a path through your soul, leaving behind their permanent mark.

You are *changed*. You have permanently embraced a more sinister way of doing things. Once you start down that path, it’s not so easy to give it up again.

MECHANICAL EFFECTS

Once you declare that you’re accepting corruption to succeed at great cost, the GM can’t spend additional fate points or invoke additional aspects to alter the outcome—it’s decided. If the number of shifts matters, consider your success to be by 2 shifts.

If the conflict is PC vs. PC, *FATE CORE SYSTEM* doesn’t give a lot of guidance about what to do. If your game group has their own way of handling this situation, go with that. Otherwise, let the general rule be that you can’t embrace corruption in order to beat a player character opponent, unless they consent to it—and if they do, the GM should give them a fate point.

CHANGING YOUR APPROACH

Accepting corruption fundamentally changes the way you approach conflicts. On your character sheet, find the approach you rolled for the action where you accepted corruption. Keep the bonus the same, but *change the name of that approach*. Yes, you change the word written on your character sheet, according to this table:

Corrupt Approaches

Uncorrupt	Corrupt
Careful	Fearful
Clever	Arrogant
Flashy	Aggressive
Forceful	Angry
Quick	Reckless
Sneaky	Treacherous

Fearful: You act out of Fear when you obsessively plan for every contingency, when you are cautious and suspicious to a fault. Fearful actions are ruled by anxiety and paranoia.

Arrogant: You act with Arrogance when you're convinced you're the only one who can do it, when your brilliant plan is clearly superior to anything anyone else can do.

Aggressive: You act with Aggression when you show no mercy, when you get them before they get you. Aggressive actions are often disproportionate to what provokes them.

Angry: You act out of Anger when you let hatred and vengeance rule your actions. If you hate the target of your action, you might be acting Angrily.

Reckless: Your actions are Reckless when you act without considering the consequences to anyone else or, sometimes, to yourself. Reckless actions are frequently ruled by immediate gratification.

Treacherous: Treachery is deceit plus malice. It respects no loyalty, debt, or allegiance. It's not just being sneaky, it's being *mean* about being sneaky.

If the approach you're using is already corrupt, choose a different one. In either case, the bonus remains the same, but the name—and the fiction implied by its use—changes. If you're using a different set of approaches, work with your GM to determine something appropriate for your setting.

CORRUPTION IN FATE ACCELERATED

Andrea is playing a Mystical Space Swordswoman named Parm. While dueling with energy blades against an Acolyte of the Empire, Parm rolls a total of -1 to defend against the Acolyte's attack of +6. Andrea knows this might kill her; she decides to embrace success at great cost by corrupting her Clever approach.

"You fool!" Andrea grandstands in character. "You cannot defeat me so easily! I parry his attack!" She erases "Clever" on her character sheet, replaces it with the word "Arrogant," and keeps the +3 bonus she had for Clever. She also pencils "Arrogant" alongside Parm's aspects, for reasons we'll get to in the next section.

For the corruption system to work, it's important that you're using approaches, rather than skills. And yes, the distinction matters in this case. Approaches describe *how* you solve problems. You match the action you narrate to the approach that best fits your description. Skills, on the other hand, describe what problems you know how to solve. Skills are what you do, rather than how you do it. Just having a short skill list doesn't mean that you have approaches.

Let's say you're playing a very lightweight hack of Fate Accelerated, and have statted Physical, Mental, and Social. Those aren't approaches, because they prescribe what action you take in what situation; punching someone is physical, no matter how you do it. A set of three approaches might be Straightforward, Tricky, and Cooperative. You can perform mental, physical, and social actions in straightforward, tricky, and cooperative ways.

QUICKER, EASIER

Corrupt approaches aren't more powerful than uncorrupt approaches, but they can sometimes lend an advantage. The corrupt approach becomes a permanent character aspect, in addition to your existing aspects, that you can invoke. If the fact that you're not just being *Aggressive*, or *Angry*, or *Treacherous*, but *evilly* so would work to your advantage, describe how, spend a fate point, and benefit in the same way you'd benefit from invoking any other aspect.

On your character sheet alongside your other aspects, note what corrupt approaches you have, so that you remember they're available to invoke (and to be compelled, as we discuss in the next section).

CORRUPTION IN FATE ACCELERATED

MORE SEDUCTIVE

GMs, just as players can invoke their corrupt approaches as aspects, you can use them to make life interesting. You can compel a corrupt approach that a player is rolling (or the player can suggest a self-compel), suggesting how their action is laced with malice and hatred and how that complicates things for them. Do this frequently—make sure there are consequences to becoming corrupt that the player can't ignore. Make it sting, especially if the corrupt character's comrades are more virtuous.

Usually a compel earns a player a single fate point. In this case, it might earn them more, depending on how many corrupt approaches they have. It's also the number of fate points they need to spend to buy off the compel.

Fate Point Cost for Corrupt Approach Compels

Number of Corrupt Approaches	Fate Points Per Compel
1, 2	1
3, 4	2
5, 6	3

If your game uses a different list with more or fewer approaches, adjust the table to fit.

Parm is trying to crack a computerized lock using an advantage an ally created for her. The GM notes that Parm's Clever approach has been corrupted to Arrogant and suggests that perhaps Parm ridicules her ally's skill and in her arrogance ignores his advice and melts the lock. As she now has three corrupt approaches, the compel is worth two fate points. Andrea doesn't have two fate points, so she must accept. She gets two fate points and they'll have to find another way to open the lock.

REDEMPTION

When a corrupt approach is compelled against you, you can buy it off just like any other compel. However, you always have the option of buying it off with three fate points (assuming you *have* three fate points)—if you do, that approach returns to its uncorrupted original approach. Yes, this means that if you have 5 or 6 corrupt approaches, you always have the option of redeeming them when you buy them off.

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Parm (who is now Fearful, Arrogant, and Aggressive) is near her target—the High Interrogator, who must be defeated if peace will have a chance in the galaxy. She’s tracked him down to a power reactor control room aboard the Interrogator’s star cruiser. He’s standing fifty feet away, apparently unarmed and unaware of Parm’s presence.

The GM offers two fate points and suggests that maybe Parm’s Aggression gets the better of her, that perhaps she ignites her energy blade and attacks immediately. But Andrea has other ideas. She thinks Parm will try to turn things around, to pull herself back from the darkness. She drops three fate points and not only buys off the GM’s compel, but also proposes that Parm’s Aggression be redeemed. Swallowing her urge to attack outright, she uses her telekinesis to fill the air with heavy metal equipment from around the room, and trapping the Interrogator and demanding his surrender.

The GM agrees that this expenditure of fate points and narration represents a move away from the darkness; Andrea removes “Aggressive” from Parm’s character sheet, going back to “Flashy,” and also erases *Aggressive* from her list of corrupt aspects.

Roleplaying Corruption

Embracing the darkness might shock other characters who witness the event, depending on how obvious it is. Players and GMs should play up the consequences of this—compel those corrupt approaches regularly.

COOPERATION WITH CORRUPT CHARACTERS

An optional rule players may wish to use is that when a character embraces corruption, characters with fewer corrupt approaches cannot cooperate with them during the remainder of that scene. Aspects that the newly corrupt character creates can’t be invoked by more virtuous allies, and vice versa. In any event, roleplay the mistrust.

PHYSICAL AND BEHAVIORAL MANIFESTATIONS OF CORRUPTION

As your character becomes more corrupt, look at the approaches that you’ve acquired. Consider what they imply about how you use them; you’re no longer Careful so much as you are Fearful, for example. Does this give you trouble sleeping? When you’re rolling Aggressive, do you snap at people you don’t mean to attack? Does your newfound Arrogance make you smug, or perhaps bitter, toward others?

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Do you carry any physical manifestations of your corruption? Do you begin to look sallow and sickly? Do your eyes acquire an unhealthy hue?

WHEN ALL YOUR APPROACHES ARE CORRUPT

So what happens when your final approach goes over to the dark side? There are a few ways to play that, and your group should discuss how you'll handle it.

First, you can become an NPC villain. This assumes that you've gone beyond the point where redemption is possible; you turn your character over to the GM at some appropriate point. Maybe your new character will end up confronting your old one!

Second, you can continue to play, hoping to redeem yourself at some point. Some questions to consider: What problems do your more abrasive approaches cause? What physical manifestation(s) does this produce? What drives you to seek redemption, or what actions might put you beyond the reach of any aid?

Start Down the Dark Path...

Corruption can be modeled in a fun and interesting way in Fate Accelerated. Just make sure that everyone in your group is on the same page about how dark you want the campaign to go, and what it means to become corrupted. Once all the players are ready to go with it, grab the darkness and hold on for the ride. 🎲

Thanks to playtesters Paul Marcinkevage, Andrea Tapia, Ron Tapia, and Amanda Valentine.



PRE-GENERATED ASPECTS

by JASON CORLEY

I've played Fate for a long time, since its spinoff from FUDGE. The primary innovation of Fate, in all its incarnations, is the aspect. As a pillar of Fate's central economy, aspects create the cycle of bad decisions, unfortunate situations, and resolutions that defines much genre fiction. Picking aspects can be great fun: players get excited about them because they're wide-open and promise total, unfettered freedom to express unique characters.

However, this freedom doesn't come without trade-offs. Once players understand how central aspects are to the system and that the field of possible aspects is almost unlimited, some become paralyzed by indecision, I've found. Even worse, some players end up with bland, broad aspects that don't provide clear direction for playing their characters. My personal solution for an ill-conceived aspect—change it to something good after the first minor milestone—doesn't work for people who are in that bind, since the prospect of returning to that agonizing indecision is worse than soldiering on with a off-target aspect.

If your group is experiencing these problems, consider using pre-generated aspects! They give up a bit of the freedom of the wide-open aspect in exchange for stronger direction in play, whether selected by them or by you. In this piece, I'm going to tell you how to tune your aspect categories to your campaign, as well as three ways of using pre-generated aspects. These techniques give better focus for players and play, hopefully provoking creative responses within the tighter boundaries you design.

Sharpen the Aspects

Many of the aspect types in Fate Core are quite broad. By making aspects more specific, you can focus the players' attention on the situations they'll likely encounter in play and help them make more relevant aspects. To sharpen an aspect category, replace a broad one like *trouble* or *crossing paths* with a very specific one like *The Empire* or *Murder*. Be sure the aspect category is relevant to the planned activities of the campaign. It might be a relationship with a specific character that all the PCs have in common, or a concept or theme that you will bring to the fore. The answer to "What is your game about?" should be the same as the answer to "What aspects have you asked the players to write on their character sheets?"

For example, consider a campaign about strangers who are abducted by aliens to battle in an intergalactic gladiatorial contest. In this situation, the crossing paths aspects might not make sense—the characters will be developing their relationships for the first time in play. Instead, you might require that the players give their characters a *Glory!* aspect: do they seek it, shun it, or feel conflicted about it? This aspect will give the players something to turn to when their characters are being interviewed for Interplanetary Sports Entertainment News or when they have the opportunity to do a risky but flashy move that the audience will go crazy for.

This aspect will also clue the players in to what types of situations they will get into in play. If you didn't prompt the players to think about fame and celebrity, they might not be prepared when an opportunity for just that comes around. When you say "The blue-skinned youth at the counter runs up to you and asks if you will laser-tattoo your signature on his forearm," not only will that character's player feel something about the interaction, but also all the players will have useful aspects to direct them in the scene.

Traditional literary genre rules can help you as well. In a recent game based on a space-Western TV show that got cancelled, I asked the players to create aspects addressing the three elements of a Western: the Land, the Law, and the Gun.

For *Land*, the players thought about their characters' connections to the worlds of the frontier: Are you a settler, an explorer? Do you focus on community and towns or individualism and hunting? When the conflict between farmers and ranchers comes, whose side are you really on, Shane? *Law* was the easiest Western element to think of: Are you a bounty hunter searching for fugitives, or a bandit trying to go straight?

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In a town far from people with badges, how does one find justice for the community? And of course, what's a Western without a **Gun**? Are you bloodthirsty or pacifistic? A defender of the innocent or a predator of the wealthy?

All of these aspects proved immediately actionable in virtually any Western Fate scenario I could concoct, because they were drawn from the core elements of Western novels and television shows, as I identified them. When a big-time rancher seized people's land with thugs and shady legal maneuvering, the characters were faced with protecting people's roots, keeping townsfolk safe, but meting out what justice they could with cool-looking six shooters and impassioned social conflict. It was everything one could want out of a John Ford knockoff.

This approach leaves a wide variety of aspects available, but focuses them on the themes and action of the game much more aggressively than the standard Fate Core aspects. There's just no way a Western's going to happen without a showdown or shootout. Intergalactic gladiators are going to get famous. And when this happens, having sharp aspects guarantees everyone at the table will have at least one relevant aspect generating fate points or bonuses, and clear ideas of how to play out the scene.

Pick from Pre-Created Exclusive Aspects

Say your game focuses on the relations of characters to a contained structure: a family, a small town, a military unit. In such a situation, the players might find it easier to understand the setting if they have to select their characters' aspects from a list you created beforehand. Imagine your ideal set of PCs; how do they relate to the situation you are going to toss them into?

If you're creating a game about supernatural family drama, for example, you could begin with a pool of aspects that describe the characters' positions and reputations in the family: **Hated Matriarch**, **Prodigal Child**, **Kooky Uncle**, **Protective Big Sister**, **Harmless Child**, and so on. Lay them out on index cards and have each player pick one for their character.

Although it's tempting to only make as many aspects as there are players—especially when adapting existing properties in which vivid character types are already drawn—doing this will leave one player, the last to pick, with no choice in which aspect to select. The goal of this method is for the players to see, understand, and buy into the nature of the family, not to get trapped into roles they aren't interested in. Make sure you create more aspects for the players to choose from than there are players.

Along the same lines, be sure you tell the players about this part of character creation as you pitch the game. Your players might be all virtuous Fate Core veterans who know to come to a character creation session

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with a blank slate, but I know a player who gets really excited about campaign concepts and starts thinking about and working on character concepts and aspects in advance, even though he knows he shouldn't. (Okay, technically, it's me who does this.) Be clear with them so they don't get locked into an idea that they'll have to discard.

Finally, it's important to be flexible with your list. If someone wants to alter an aspect you wrote, or add something that you didn't think of, their aspect might just work better than yours. After all, the player will have a clearer picture of an aspect they created than of one you did. If their aspect could fit in the category, that player clearly understands the game's concept and is ready to engage with it. Say a player wanted to be the **Hated Patriarch** in the family instead of the **Hated Matriarch**. It's likely they already have a specific idea in mind that will make their **Hated Patriarch** really memorable and cool. That's "mission accomplished"—go with it.

Connect Aspects to Stunts or Equipment

Another way of distributing your pre-generated aspects is to attach them to stunts or pieces of equipment. Put the stunt or extra (depending on how far you want to take it) on one side of an index card and the associated aspect on the back. Only let the players look at the aspect once they've decided they want the stunt. This is a good way to get extremely specific aspects into the game (see **Give Out Pre-Generated Aspects** on page 62), ones that no player would just happen to create.

For example, someone might pick the Gorgeously Attractive stunt, but when they look at the back of the card and discover **The Queen of Faerie Is Jealous**, now their character practically leaps to life—and starts running. The energy of the unknown fuels a new direction for the character that the player discovers instead of authors.

If a player really objects to an aspect but really wants the stunt or extra, that's good! Their strong objection means they likely have an equally vibrant vision for their character. The important thing is not that everything in the game conforms to your vision, but that everyone shares the vision. Work with that player to develop a different aspect for that stunt. Trust me: this will only happen very rarely. Once the player sees an aspect that jumps off the paper—and believe me, what you write will be that good!—they'll really, really want it, even (or especially) if it brings along potentially dire consequences.

Create Non-Exclusive Aspects

Sometimes you may want to have non-unique aspects on a list instead of offering one unique aspect to each player. This is particularly relevant for military campaigns or campaigns where characters have very similar training, background, or capabilities.

In a military game, for example, you might relate an aspect to the specialty you have been most significantly trained in, and require players to pick from a list of specialties offered by the military group the characters belong to: **Radioman**, **Coxswain**, **Infantry**, **Navigator**, and so on. If you are dealing with the United States military, they helpfully publish a great deal of organizational material into the public domain so you can find a way of differentiating someone's military role or experience in a way that will help your game.

In such a game, it might make sense for two people to have the same aspect—or even for all characters to have the same aspect! Consider a game full of **Infantry** characters—this could reflect the devastating effectiveness of the unit portrayed by the characters when they are doing **Infantry** things. (To keep your game mechanically consistent, you might require nameless NPCs to have a comparable aspect if they were teaming up.) But perhaps the PCs end up **Out of Position**, or **Behind Enemy Lines**, or simply in a touchy negotiation, and their infantry training (“go over the top!”) works against them—giving all the players a burst of fate points.

Whether you let players choose the same aspects or not, your method in generating them should be the same: think about the general shape of the campaign events. Who are the antagonists; what are they up to? What is the milieu of the campaign; who is doing what that's relevant to the milieu? What are your plans for advancing different parts of the setting? Once you've answered these questions, create aspects that will put tension on the characters in the situations they'll likely find themselves in.

In a supernatural family drama, having a mysterious benefactor suddenly pass away under suspicious circumstances might be relevant to the **Hated Patriarch** if you have NPCs blame them for the death because they're hated; it might be relevant to the **Curious Mother-in-Law** who is digging into her child's spouse's weird family. In a military game, being a **Radioman** is relevant if the enemy is searching for you but you need to get a crucial message through. If you can't think of a good way to make a pre-written aspect relevant to the campaign, don't put it on the list just to fill out space or because “it makes sense.” Murphy's Law suggests that's exactly the aspect a player will pick first, and it will just sit there as dead weight until traded out.

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If your campaign is going to be extremely varied, with a massive diversity of events, places, and people—say, a group of wandering adventurers or a gang of fugitives on a cross-country trip—it might not be a great idea to use this technique. Remember, the advantage you gain by focusing the PCs in a particular direction has to be significant enough to offset the freedom lost by the players in requiring it.

Give Out Pre-Generated Aspects

You might just give out aspects you made without getting input from the players. This is going to be controversial enough in most groups that I feel like I should lead with some cautions:

- Don't do this unless you're sure you can write a crackling good aspect, something everyone would be pumped to have.
- Don't do this unless you get explicit buy-in from the players. If they really value full (or nearly full) freedom in creating their characters, the cost to their enjoyment of doing this will be too high.

If these aren't problems, though, and you're really looking to create situations that will surprise the players, giving them fully pre-generated aspects can be a powerful, memorable tool.

In the real world, not every part of our life is under our control. (If you accurately wrote out the aspects describing me, you might determine that only two or three are things I can control.) The rest come from our obligations, from our relationships, from our past, and most terrifyingly, from the random dictates of a capricious world. This feeling of being not fully in control of our lives is one of the most common anxieties of humanity at all ages and in all times. Using fully pre-generated aspects—things that neither the characters nor their players deserve—can help the players identify with their characters and become motivated to make changes in their situation.

Consider a game of classical fantasy in which the gods curse or bless certain people for petty offenses, flatteries, or as responses to obscured prophecies or seemingly unrelated debts. This is a game that plays on the anxiety of control, one which asks the players to put themselves in the role of characters who, although perhaps quite powerful in their own right, remain at the whim of the gods and their own fate.

For example, a player might never have thought of his beautiful courtesan as having *Hair Made of Venomous Snakes*, but it makes for great conflicts and immediate action. Why were you cursed like this? Did you

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bang a goddess' husband? Did the husband namedrop you as the hottest thing on Earth? Is your mom a witch draining your beauty for herself and replacing it with her overflowing cruelty and, uh, affinity for snakes? I promise you, that player will want to find out what's going on and fix it!

Of course, you don't want to completely invalidate a player's vision of their character or their actions. If you suggest an aspect that a player is truly opposed to it, take the hint that they aren't interested in going that direction. Going back to the example: perhaps it would be more interesting if only people you fell in love with could see the snakes, or perhaps another curse entirely is more appropriate.

Past the campaign concept, assigning pre-generated aspects lets you point players directly at plot elements and important NPCs. Is there a brave NPC knight in the land whose deeds are relevant to the story? Excellent, make a character ***Wildly in Love with Sir Bedevere***. (Even better, make two characters in love with him!) By doing this, you won't need to use NPCs to keep updating the PCs on Sir Bedevere's activities; they'll be tangled up in them due to their own actions. In another game, is there a new steampunk punchcard virus that's destroying the Intertubes? Perfect, put ***Well Known for Creating Punchcard Viruses*** on someone's sheet. It'll make things easier for the NPC cops, and will bring the PCs into the plot in a memorably aggressive way.

Don't plan ahead too far—make these aspects immediately relevant to the world and story, not something that might be revealed four or five sessions down the road. You want to show players on the first day of play why this aspect you wrote is so great. In a cyberpunk game, if you give someone a ***Bank Error in Your Favor***, make sure the repo agents come right away to take away their car, cybernetic leg, and girlfriend. In a supernatural family drama, give ***Uncle Larry's Murderer*** news first thing that Uncle Larry's pale silhouette, wearing funereal black, has been spotted at the end of the long, winding drive into town, or have the cops show up to ask some questions about the incident.

If you designed and executed the aspect well, the spotlight's immediacy and the aspect's surprise will make the player leap into action on their character's behalf. In this way, you can get that big rollercoaster drop feeling into your campaign: The biggest hill is always the first, right? Right.

Conclusion

If your world is more improvised or collaboratively developed, you might not need to use these methods. But if you're a GM with a clear vision of a world, and you want to help players who might not have a perfect view into your ideas, these methods will help you spark a shared creativity. And don't forget to design NPCs the same way too! The players will

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be able to recognize, respond to, and strategize more in response to the NPCs' situations and traits as they learn how their own situations and traits work.

Remember the core tradeoff: remove a bit of the players' freedom to infinitely customize their characters in exchange for pointed, sharp campaign energy and conflict. If you can make that tradeoff work, you might find it's a huge success. 🍀



AT WHAT COST

by MARK DIAZ TRUMAN

Over the past five years, a new style of indie game design based around APOCALYPSE WORLD has fueled a number of interesting designs like DUNGEON WORLD, MONSTERHEARTS, and SAGAS OF THE ICELANDERS. Despite their differences, all of these games operate with the same core mentality: they reject preplanned “plots” for a “play to find out what happens” ethos that prioritizes moment-to-moment conflicts that build over time.

As I’ve learned more about this style of gameplay, I’ve struggled to express some sort of complementary mentality for Fate. Fate offers something equally engaging, a playing style that hits an entirely different set of buttons for my group and keeps us coming back for more, but it’s a style that requires the GM to put forward more traditional plots and the players to prioritize the broader story over moment-to-moment conflict. It’s not playing to find out what happens at all.

I propose that Fate works best when we *play to find out the costs*. We know that success is all but guaranteed for the heroes, that they will meet challenges and overcome them, but we are playing together to find out what our heroes are willing to sacrifice, whether they are trying to keep the world as it is or change it forever. Our heroes define the costs they are willing to pay, and those costs, in turn, define our heroes.

Playing to Find Out What Happens

When Vincent Baker published APOCALYPSE WORLD in 2010, he gave these instructions to gamemasters (emphasis mine):

Play to find out: there's a certain discipline you need in order to [gamemaster for] Apocalypse World. You have to commit yourself to the game's fiction's own internal logic and causality, driven by the players' characters. You have to open yourself to caring what happens, but when it comes time to say what happens, you have to set what you hope for aside.

(Apocalypse World, page 108)

This blew my mind when I first read it. No planning out plots? No scheduled twists or surprises? How would we have a story if we just bumbled from one encounter to the next? It made no sense.

As I ran more APOCALYPSE WORLD, I came to understand that the rules, the characters, and the fictional setup all created situations for our group without prompting; it was my job to represent the world to the players, to give them an external logic they could bump up against when they engaged the fiction. Their decisions—focused by the world I held constant—added up to a story, albeit one we can only see in retrospect.

APOCALYPSE WORLD-STYLE FICTION

I've realized that Vincent's clever turn of phrase describes more than just a style of roleplaying games; *playing to find out what happens* is really the central tenant of a whole style of storytelling. It encompasses shows like LOST and BREAKING BAD, movies like MAD MAX and PULP FICTION, and novels like the A SONG OF ICE AND FIRE series, THE WALKING DEAD, and pretty much anything by Stephen King.

In this style of fiction, the protagonists—not even necessarily heroes—are vulnerable, physically and spiritually. Their world is beset with troubles, no one is safe, and shocking revelations are a regular occurrence.

Characters die. Plots twist. And the story rolls on. We stick around to find out what happens, to chase the fiction all the way to the end of the road, no matter how ugly it gets. We don't worry about what that story is until we see it in our rear-view mirror, obvious to anyone looking backward but invisible to the characters making decisions about the future.

WHAT ABOUT EVERYTHING ELSE?

But there's another type of fiction that works along a fundamentally different axis, a kind of story in which I know precisely what's going to happen...and I delight in the journey. Superhero fiction. Cop dramas. Animated movies. A style of storytelling that looks a lot like the kind of fiction created by Fate.

Think about movies like *IRON MAN*, *DIE HARD*, or *TOY STORY*. Is there any doubt that the heroes—and there are definitely heroes!—will triumph? Are there really any unexpected deaths or earth-shattering twists that radically shift the course of the fiction? Do we hang on for the ride to see where the story goes or does *something else* keep us grounded in the story as it unfolds?

And if we aren't watching to find out *what happens*, why are we watching?

Playing to Find Out the Cost

I propose that the style of this fiction is concerned not with the literal events of the story—the things that happen—but instead emphasizes the costs of success. We want to know what our heroes are willing to sacrifice to win, what they're willing to change about themselves and the world in order to reach their goals. We know they will overcome the villains, but we want—need!—to see them pay the price to get there.

Take Sherlock Holmes, in any incarnation. We know that Sherlock Holmes can solve every case; he's Sherlock Holmes, the world's greatest detective! But we don't know what pains he'll bear, we don't know how his relationships will change with the people around him, and we don't know how the world will be different after he cracks the mystery. In short, we don't know the costs of this case, both for him and for the world at large.

When we start to gather up fiction that focuses on costs instead of what happens, the list looks mighty familiar: superheroes, serialized crime drama, military sci-fi, adventure-oriented fantasy, etc. It's the kind of fiction that works great in Fate because it has vibrant, dramatic characters who have an outsized impact on the setting. The characters don't usually get stronger or more powerful as much as they become different people, changing to meet the challenges rather than building their power and influence over time.

A SPECTRUM, NOT A BINARY

It can be tempting to view this distinction between these styles as a dichotomy, but it's more like a spectrum. Some fiction that focuses on what happens, like *LOST* or *BATTLESTAR GALACTICA*, sometimes emphasizes costs over uncertainty; characters like Jack Shepherd or Admiral Adama are protected and sacred, shouldering costs and making choices without ever really showing up on the chopping block. Conversely, even superhero fiction can be written in a style that emphasizes moment-to-moment conflicts and internal logic above the costs that the heroes pay to succeed: *KICK-ASS*, *SUICIDE SQUAD*, and *AGE OF APOCALYPSE* all strike me as stories about playing to find out what happens.

I'm not asserting that Fate can't tell stories that focus on events; I'm saying that Fate works best when we acknowledge that the mechanics are built to support playing to find out the costs. It's why Fate struggles to handle horror—a genre built on the anxiety and uncertainty around the events to come—and why long physical conflicts using Fate can be boring and dull. When we focus on the uncertainty around what will happen, like whether or not the heroes will win a single conflict, Fate can drag. Focusing on the costs that the heroes are willing to pay, knowing that they *are capable of paying those costs and succeeding*, makes Fate work at the table.

Using Costs in Fate

But how do we use this stuff? It's great to know that we're playing to find out the costs that the heroes are willing to pay, but how does that help us at the table? What does “playing to find out the costs” really entail?

Above all else, this play style is a commitment to leaving a certain kind of question open within the fiction: **we know that the heroes can win, but what costs will they bear to succeed?** As the GM, you must put forward obstacles that demand sacrifice, pushing the characters both mechanically and narratively, but you also have to be willing to let them choose the costs of their success.

Fate games struggle when we let players pay costs cheaply. Cost is built into Fate at every level—story questions, invokes and compels, stress and consequences—but we too often let our players off easy to get to the next event, the next outcome. How can you make costs count in ways that build meaningful Fate fiction?

STORY QUESTIONS COSTS

Playing to find out the costs starts by selecting story questions (FATE CORE SYSTEM, page 232) that emphasize costs over outcomes. “What will

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it cost the heroes to stop the villains who infiltrated the secret homeland security program?” is a much better story question than “Will our heroes stop the villains who infiltrated the secret homeland security program?” The former question shifts every scene you set up away from *what will happen* to *the costs that the heroes will bear*. Nothing is free, not even for heroes.

Since we’re almost certain the heroes will stop the villains, giving them an arena of cost—in this case, the fate of the secret program—makes their choices much more clear. They might choose to reveal the truth to the world, including exposing their own illicit activity, or they might choose to root out the corruption without toppling the program, risking an incomplete sweep. Either way, the costs will snowball into a new set of conflicts, ripe with potential and drama, based on their decisions.

Framing your story questions this way means that you can skip long physical conflicts or mysteries that conceal information your players will need. (If your players love this stuff, frame story questions that point at those physical conflicts or concealed information.) Instead, you should push them toward the choice points that matter:

- The heroes secure a copy of the program’s secret files. Will they leak what they have to the internet?
- One of the heroes’ friends appears to be working as a mole. Will they confront him or use his connections to learn more about the conspiracy?
- The villains are holding an ally hostage in a secure location. Will the heroes risk injury and pain to rescue them before the traitors kill the hostages?

Note that “Can the heroes defeat the biggest enforcer in a huge combat?” is not a good story question. The answer is ultimately yes; the costs are incidental because the heroes are eventually going to win. They might tangle with the big bad a few times before bringing them down—and might even lose one or two scraps—but almost no Fate GM is going to kill off the characters if they fail. The heroes always get a second shot, so there’s no reason to fight to the death in any given fight. Those aren’t the stakes.

If you want to make a fight with the big bad interesting, you’ve got to find a way to structure the conflict around costs that the heroes might be willing to pay. For example: “Will the hero who refuses to kill execute the villain? Or leave him to fight another day?” or “Will the heroes prioritize stopping the villain or saving innocent people?” Only then will the

stakes of the combat feel real because there are real costs that matter to the heroes in play.

INVOKES AS COSTS

The most common cost that heroes pay is fate points. Since the players have a limited number, each fate point spent is a declaration that a player is willing to pay the price to succeed in this moment (or to fail with a smaller margin). An invoke on an aspect is effectively a narrative declaration that the hero is going to step up a bit—in a particular way tied to their identity—in order to win the battle.

Fate point costs can seem cheap and easy, but remember that a fate point spent now is one that can't be spent later. Any time a player invokes an aspect, they are saying, "Success now is worth more to me than success later. I'm willing to pay real costs later in order to avoid paying any real costs now." That's valuable information!

On one hand, invokes tell you what a player envisions as their character's strengths and weaknesses. A legendary archer might spend fate points every time she shoots something with her bow, but turn down opportunities to intimidate people; a mighty warrior might settle for merely besting his foes by a shift or two in combat, but invoke an aspect whenever he has a chance to play up his reputation. Take that data and build story questions around it, asking how much those players are willing to sacrifice when those strengths and weaknesses are called into question.

The stakes of an invoke also point at useful information. Fate points are used to declare the player's intent cheaply, but they indicate a kind of early redline, a point at which the player is unwilling to accept failure. If the archer spends fate points to save a particular NPC, then that's a place you can push on in the future. Is she willing to pay more than just a few fate points to keep that NPC safe?

COMPELS AS COSTS

Compels are equally revealing. Whenever you offer a compel to a player, you're asking them to pay a cost—usually narrative failure or complications—in order to gain a resource for a later fight. In other words, you're giving them a reverse loan: they can pay now in order to have what they need when it counts.

But the compels they accept define their character more than they realize. When a player accepts the fate point, they are saying, "Yes, I acknowledge that complication you're describing is inherent in my character's story" and they are working that complication into the gestalt

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they've built up thus far. Of course the heroic warrior has enemies that want him dead; that's the *cost* of gaining the kind of reputation he's got.

Because these costs are as definitive as any failure, you've got to push hard with your compels. The problem with "weak" compels isn't just that they flood the system with fate points; it's also that they fail to define the characters. Let the players decide what costs to bear—including when they turn down compels—but make them make a *choice*. It's easy to accept a compel when all it does is merely inconvenience you.

Undeniable Compels

Because compels have to mean something, I'm usually loath to offer a compel when players don't have fate points. It doesn't mean anything to accept my compel when they don't have any other options. When a player runs out of fate points, I instead try to get them to take a self-compel, revealing to me again what kinds of costs they envision as inherent to their character's story.

STRESS AND CONSEQUENCES AS COST

The most obvious cost, of course, is stress. But for the most part, it's not an interesting cost at all. It's fictionless by default, a little box your players check to avoid having to state something interesting about their characters. Consequences, on the other hand, are narrative gold, aspects that define "damage" in ways that further the story.

Thus, you have to distinguish conflicts that are designed to provide meager opposition—like the security guards that stand in the way of our heroes—from events that are designed to push characters toward consequences. We do a disservice to the role that stress and consequences have to play in the system when we mix up these two kinds of conflicts, creating long combats when we need to push the story forward or allowing the heroes to blow past the real antagonists without batting an eye.

In the case of the meager opposition, small to medium mobs (FATE CORE SYSTEM, pages 213-217) are the perfect opposition. If they use teamwork, they hit hard enough to land a punch on the heroes, but they are soft enough to go down without too much of a fight. The heroes get to show off what they can do, but the villains don't distract us from the real costs at work in the scenes ahead.

On the other hand, real antagonists need to push the heroes toward consequences. Here are a few types that tend to work in Fate:

- **Glass Cannons:** A villain with a massive attack score, clever and tricky traps, or hordes of henchmen, and a **weak defense** can knock the heroes off their feet without feeling

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unfair or creating a drag on the story. These kinds of antagonists are doubly useful if they endanger bystanders or the environment in ways that occupy the heroes. Examples: Bullseye, HAL 9000, Hans Gruber.

- **Kryptonite Villains:** All heroes have blind spots and areas of weakness. Villains targeted **directly at those weaknesses** can push the heroes to their limits without short-changing their strengths. Amoral antagonists, for example, often thwart the heroes by expanding the field of conflict in unexpected ways. Examples: Khan Noonien Singh, Scarecrow, T-1000.
- **“Friendly” Foes:** Antagonists who have **emotional sway** over the heroes can be devastating, especially when they are pursuing goals that are almost morally permissible. In these cases, the opposition is effectively a walking story question: will the heroes harm people they love to save the day? Examples: Darth Vader, Stinky Pete, The Winter Soldier.

Note that villains whose main schtick is taking a beating are *not* interesting antagonists in Fate. It’s fun to watch Neo destroy a million Agent Smiths; it is much less fun for Neo’s player to roll the dice and spend fate points until they are finally permitted to move through the plot. Good villains inflict consequences in conflicts; the heroes have to push through those consequences to get what they want.

Consequences That Snowball

In the end, you can judge consequences by what kinds of stories they open up for the characters. A ***Broken Arm*** is a weak consequence...unless the character who suffers it just happens to be the world’s greatest musician. For the average hero, broken arms are run-of-the-mill, the kind of cost that gets hand waved in between sessions because it’s not much fun to be a superhero in a sling. But for the musician, it’s a crisis that requires her to find someone to cover for her while she figures out what to do.

When you push your players to the point that they take a moderate or severe consequence, push them even further. Work with them to create emotional and mental consequences—***Doubting the Mission*** or ***Can’t Let My Guard Down***—that point toward the next session’s conflicts. Make the recovery a story unto itself, so that the cost they paid resonates.

Cheap Costs Cheapen Everything

Like playing to find out what happens, playing to find out the costs requires discipline. But instead of sticking to the strict logic of the setting and characters, your job is to never back down from the costs. Present them fairly. Be honest with your players. Let them know that winning “no matter the cost” might change them. Push them to commit to their own heroism and nobility in the face of massive obstacles. And then drop that hammer when the time comes, demand they pay the toll, and never look back.

We know what happens. We know they win. But what will they pay to get there? That’s up to them. Don’t cheapen it by letting them off the hook at the last minute. Play to find out the costs. 🍀

FORGED BY FATES



FORGED BY FATES

by MARISSA KELLY

Those two have traveled side by side to Hades' realm and back. Together they have defeated horrific monsters, studied with the greatest philosophers, and offered their aid to kings and peasants alike. And on this eve of battle, I pledge my allegiance and trust to them my life, for no god dare deny the respect they are due. The safety of our home is best placed in their hands. I follow their lead, using whatever courage they have stirred within these old bones in this eleventh hour of our need.

—Phaidros of Acanthus

Two Hero Fate

Forged by Fates is designed for two players and a GM, but it also works great if you have a friend make a guest appearance in the story here or there! To help with a guest appearance, there are two fully statted NPCs at the end of this adventure that you can use as pregenerated characters.

Young Earth

In a land full of life and wonder, where villages blossom in green valleys and magical creatures roam the dense forests, there is a cry for heroes, for this beautiful land is not without its share of evils and dangers. Peaceful lands are threatened, threats arise that confound the people, and the need for heroes is great in this time of Young Earth.

Gods, heroes, and monsters wander the world, shaping it in their images. Warlords and kings brandish their flags in times of peace and war, and civil unrest falls upon everyone in turn. Magical caves, legendary swords, and ancient rituals are commonplace for those inclined to seek out power. Those who dare tempt fate can be rewarded, but there are always strings attached...

THE GODS

The gods are the embodiment of concepts, bitter and jealous creatures who succumb to vanity often and without remorse. Gods scheme and manipulate mortals to gain influence and power over earthly affairs,

FORGED BY FATES

because the power of a god only remains strong while the people of Young Earth believe in them.

The gods earn power and status through earthly conquests and epic triumphs done in their name. Aiding or smiting heroes is always in their best interest, and they frequently tempt influential mortals with unspeakable power, unending armies, and unnaturally long life. They bestow supernatural gifts upon those who can serve them, and their names, best.

When not on Young Earth, the gods retire to their realms—physical places where they alone reside and few mortals dare enter. Only heroes have strength enough to undergo perilous quests to a god's realm for glory, love, or to prove their worth. Those who succeed are rewarded with their heart's desire, but also attract the attention of other gods.

MORTALS

The typical citizen praises the gods and lives a modest life with little chance for social or economic advancement. Nobles rule the provinces, protect generations of farmers, merchants, and other townsfolk—and tax them heavily in kind. Many mortals resort to banditry and a life of crime because there are few other ways to survive.

The people of Young Earth are ruled by tradition, but they remain open-minded to new paths forward, especially when they see those paths modeled for them. Class and gender roles are established and traditional, but railing against them is usually rewarded. Destitute men rise from nothing to become great kings, courageous women show more skill on the battlefield than any man, and the masses generally praise them for it.

MYTHICAL CREATURES

Centaurs, mermaids, monsters, and demi-gods make up a minority population on Young Earth. Some, like the Cyclops, are one-of-a-kind, forced to wander the landscape alone as outcasts, while others have communities and command their own formidable armies. These mythical creatures have unfamiliar forms and cultures far different than you might find in a mortal city.

That said, mythical creatures have hopes, dreams, and fears just like any mortal. They may have different traditions and experiences, but humans can interact with them peacefully, often trading or sharing resources if both communities can maintain an alliance.

THE WARRIOR PRINCESS

The Warrior Princess was once a great warlord. Her banner struck fear into the hearts of all who crossed her path, and her armies nearly

conquered the world. Though she has given up who she once was, she is still haunted by her dark and mysterious past.

The Warrior Princess now dedicates her life to atoning for her past cruelty by serving those in need and protecting the weak. She's strong-willed and a skilled fighter, but her new life brings challenges beyond wielding a sword. She finds herself trying to serve and protect the very people who fear and hate her name. The crimes of her past and the ever-present temptation to take the easy way out make following this virtuous path a battle all of its own.

The Warrior Princess can never forgive herself, and alone she might return to her old ways... but she doesn't face the journey alone. A Companion travels with her, the one person who believes in her, guides her, and stands by her side when times look most bleak.

THE COMPANION

The Companion is an ambitious woman from a small village whose dreams of travel and adventure alienated her from her family. Though her rebellious nature makes her an outsider, she still embodies many of her village's traditions, from her training in the arts and healing to her refined storytelling skills.

The Companion values all life and uses fighting techniques that focus on defense, but she is not one to be pushed around. She has always felt compelled to stand up for what's right even when the odds are stacked against her. The Companion knows her friend has done horrific things in the past, but believes in what the Warrior Princess stands for now.

Joining the Warrior Princess was a life changing experience. Their talents complement each other, and they have much to learn from one another, but above all she believes in the good they can accomplish together. Her family back in her village means a lot to her, even if she doesn't admit it, but her heart belongs to adventures and stories untold.

Setting Creation

As a Quick Start Adventure, *Forged by Fates* has everything you need to jump right into your first session. Before you start, discuss the broader setting with your group, perhaps even reading aloud the descriptions of the world, gods, and the Warrior Princess and Companion, so everyone is on the same page.

At the start of play, explain the **current issue** to your players and ask them to fill in one or two additional faces associated with it. These additional characters will provide new plot hooks and twists that tie your players more deeply to Young Earth.

FORGED BY FATES

Then ask your players to choose one of two available **impending issues**: *Thieves of Pandora's Box* or *Mother of a Monster*. Have them fill in one or two additional faces for their chosen impending issue as well, rounding out the larger cast of characters with their suggestions.

CURRENT ISSUE: A WORLD IN TURMOIL

Resources are stretched thin and wars rage across the land. The people grow weary of battle, but Queen Killias grows greedier with each victory she claims. Killias hopes to one day be called “emperor,” and with the warlord Andras under her command, no kingdom can stop her from becoming a god-king of Young Earth.

Faces:

- Queen Killias, who wishes to make herself emperor of Young Earth
- Warlord Andras, a man of simple tastes who prides himself at being the best at what he does

A WORLD IN TURMOIL

QUEEN KILLIAS

*Wants to become
emperor of Young Earth*

WARLORD ANDRAS

a man of simple tastes

IMPENDING ISSUES

In addition to *A World in Turmoil* and the threat it poses, a number of other impending issues trouble the land.

THIEVES OF PANDORA'S BOX

DARIA

High monk of
the temple of Kent

FILLIA

She left the temple
of Kent to become
an Amazon warrior

MOTHER OF A MONSTER

NIKIAS

A monstrous reflection
of the Warrior
Princess' past

MILTOS

Nikias' right hand,
wants to amass a following
powerful enough to
conquer kingdoms

Thieves of Pandora's Box

At the dawn of Young Earth, the benevolent gods locked many unspeakable horrors in an enchanted box. Though guarded and protected for centuries by monks, it was recently stolen by an unknown force. Rumors of the theft have swept across Young Earth, but no one has claimed responsibility or made any demands. The monks blame the Amazons—the woman warriors always believed that the box would be safer in the forest with them, away from the prying hands of men. The Amazons deny responsibility. Whoever is to blame could plunge the world into darkness for a thousand years by opening the box, but the Amazons and monks may come to blows long before that happens.

Faces:

- Daria, high monk of the temple of Kent where the box was kept
- Fillia, a woman who left the temple of Kent years ago to become an Amazon warrior

Mother of a Monster

The sole survivor of one of the Warrior Princess' early conquests, Nikias' thirst for vengeance is her only comfort. Nikias pledged herself to a god of vengeance so that one day she could punish the one who wronged her.

Nikias dedicated her life to becoming as strong and clever as the Warrior Princess and will not stop until the Warrior Princess and everyone she cares about is ruined. Over the past month the Warrior Princess and Companion have felt someone's eyes on them as they travel. It's only a matter of time before Nikias strikes.

Faces:

- Nikias, the monstrous reflection of the Warrior Princess' past, plotting to exact vengeance
- Miltos, the right hand companion of Nikias who has her heart set on amassing a following powerful enough to conquer kingdoms

Character Creation

In *Forged by Fates*, two players take on the roles of the Warrior Princess and the Companion, heroes of Young Earth who adventure together helping those in need. You can use the pregenerated characters on page 92, but both the Warrior Princess and the Companion are broad archetypes; players can create their own versions for your story with unique backgrounds and abilities.

Players can choose any gender (male, female, trans*, other) for their characters, but it's important that both the Warrior Princess and Companion are the **same** gender. *Forged by Fates* is about exploring a bond between two same-gender characters as they journey across Young Earth.

Forged by Fates works best with Fate Core characters. Players select their aspects in accordance with their character type (the Warrior Princess or the Companion), choose skills from the modified list provided, and take stunts, stress tracks, and refresh per Fate Core.

ASPECTS

Both characters start with their own respective **signature high concepts**—*The Warrior Princess* and *The Companion*—and **troubles**—*Mysterious Past* and *A Simple Life Is Not for Me*. These phrases broadly describe how their characters interact with the world and are the same for every pair of characters.

After noting their high concept and trouble aspects, players decide what kind of **signature weapon** their character uses. Their signature

FORGED BY FATES

weapon aspect should reflect something unique about the weapon like how it was received or a characteristic it possesses.

Example: *Staff of the River God* or *The Singing Sword*

With those three aspects filled in, your heroic duo is ready to adventure! Players fill in their other two aspects during play, over the course of the first couple episodes. This allows the heroes to grow together and talk about what aspects would best complement each other.

Aspects for the Warrior Princess

High Concept: *The Warrior Princess*

Trouble: *Mysterious Past*

Signature Weapon:

Open Slot:

Open Slot:

Aspects for the Companion

High Concept: *The Companion*

Trouble: *A Simple Life Is Not For Me*

Signature Weapon:

Open Slot:

Open Slot:

SKILL LIST

Forged by Fates uses a modified version of the skill list from Fate Core. The skills below have been renamed and recontextualized to ensure that they make sense for the setting. All other skills are from the base Fate Core list (Athletics, Burglary, Contacts, Crafts, Deceive, Empathy, Fight, Investigate, Physique, Provoke, Rapport, Resources, Stealth, and Will) and remain unchanged.

Ride (Drive)

Common travelers get from place to place by foot. But to get somewhere quickly or haul a cart of goods, horses are the way to do it.

Mythology (Lore)

Stories of divine intervention and miracles are common knowledge, but only a lucky few have witnessed them. Villagers may have knowledge of a god worshiped at their local temple, but only someone dedicated to study or fortunate enough to survive godly encounters can recall the stories and know the true signs of the gods and their meddling.

Archery (Shoot)

Castle guardsmen, some bandits, and archers of a great army typically possess some degree of aptitude with a bow. Not many other weapons can be used at great distances.

Survival

Forged by Fates uses Survival from THE FATE CODEX, Volume 1, Issue 2. Without modern medicine, wounds and illness often lead to death for ordinary mortals. This setting doesn't feature magical healing, but Survival can justify or accelerate healing with makeshift medical tools like splints and bandages.

Automatic Discovery

Since Notice is removed from the skill list, *Forged by Fates* uses the Automatic Discovery system developed by Ryan Macklin (THE FATE CODEX, Volume 1, Issue 2). Skills rated at Good (+3) or higher automatically succeed at rolls to overcome or create advantages using passive discovery; skills rated at Great (+4) or higher automatically succeed with style on such rolls.

STRESS, STUNTS, AND REFRESH

Forged by Fates uses normal Fate Core stress tracks, stunts, and refresh.

NEW EXTRA: Favor of the Gods

Both the Companion and the Warrior Princess have attracted the attention of the gods. If a god convinced such heroes to serve them it would make them both more powerful. But one must not take a god's involvement lightly, for they are quick to anger and their wrath is not easily ignored. Gods are dangerous, passionate, and individualized. They have wants, fears, and above all else, they harbor desires....

The Warrior Princess and her Companion each have a relationship with a god of Young Earth. This affiliation is tenuous and ever-changing, but the hero and the god are drawn to one another like moths to a flame.

After character creation, each player creates the god with which the *other* character has a relationship: the Companion creates the god affiliated with the Warrior Princess and the Warrior Princess creates the god affiliated with the Companion.

GOD ASPECTS

The gods of Young Earth have powerful aspects: dominion, demeanor, desire, and minions. These aspects work like character aspects. They can be invoked or compelled, and they are true. **Dominion** is what a god is a god "of," **demeanor** refers to what a god's personality is like, a god's **desire** is what they want from the hero they are affiliated with, and their **minions** are their messengers and errand runners.

Dominion

Gods are the embodiments of concepts and ideas. They have the power to enhance and manifest elements related to their dominions. This aspect can be a phrase about a philosophy or concept or a single word that represents the god's field.

Example: *Rainmaker Mother, "Compassion Is Justice," The God of War*

Demeanor

What is the god's natural disposition? How do they usually get what they want? Some gods may have dominion over a violent ideal, but come across as an intimate partner or childish fool. This aspect can be written as a catchphrase or an archetype.

Example: *Seductive, Forceful Yet Friendly, Dangerous Prankster*

Desire

What does the god want from the hero and why? A god could want the hero to be their champion on earth, or want the hero dead because the hero is a reminder of something they hate. This aspect represents the god's intentions for the PC within the story.

Example: *We Were a Great Team Once, Her Voice Will Be My Downfall, The Daughter I Always Wanted*

Minions

Gods don't have to act on their own; sometimes they have help. Animals, people, or flora may be imbued with the power of a god to observe, spy, or deliver a message. This aspect describes a physical thing or group of things that exist in the real world.

Example: *Blue Flames, Watchful Ravens, Secret Cultists*

SKILLS

Gods never roll unless they are manifest. If a god is talking to one of the heroes in her head or appearing in dreams, then that god can only invoke and compel aspects. But if a god manifests in front of the heroes, the god has the exact same skills as their affiliated PC, but every skill rank is increased by one.

STUNTS

All gods receive the same two stunts:

Curse or Blessing: Give a fate point to the PC on which you wish to place an appropriate blessing or curse aspect. The aspect lasts the rest of the session. This aspect has two free invokes.

Better Things to Do: When unopposed, a god can vanish or exit a scene free of cost.

NEW EXTRA: Cast the Die of Fate

More powerful than the gods are the machinations and whims of the Fates themselves; the Warrior Princess and Companion have their attention as well.

A previous adventure into the underworld left the three Fates indebted to the Warrior Princess and her Companion. To repay them, the Fates gave the heroes the gift of their sight. The heroes' fatelines are intertwined with those of the gods, so the Fates only tell them the gods' plan for the adventuring duo. How the Warrior Princess and Companion use that knowledge is up to them....

DETERMINING THE FATES

At the beginning of each session, each player takes two Fate dice of different colors and assigns one of two Fates, either Clotho or Lachesis, to each die. Once the dice are cast, find the result on the table below and read what Atropos, the third Fate, has revealed about the gods' involvement that session.

Atropos reveals that the gods will...

Lachesis

		-	□	+
Clotho	-	...bestow a gift.	...present a unique opportunity.	...drag you into another god's affairs.
	□	...send a messenger with an omen.	...be watching you.	...leave words hanging in the wind.
	+	...visit you.	...use your friend.	...make you a promise.

REVEALING THE GODS

After the Fates have spoken, make these opportunities and prophecies come up in play. Write each opportunity on an index card after it's been rolled and keep it in front of you. Look for opportune or dramatic moments for the gods to intervene in mortal affairs.

Here are some tips for bringing the Fates into play. If the gods...

...bestow a gift: The gods are fond of giving gifts to those they favor, although "gifts" may be more trouble than they're worth.

The god knows that heroes excel in war time and so bestows the gift of battle, on the eve of the peace-giving ceremony, to help the heroes prove their worth.

...present a unique opportunity: Power and fortune require hard work, but the gods can show the way.

The god reveals that the Queen has fallen ill and her people await the appointment of a successor. None of her kin are worthy, and a hero's counsel could influence her choice.

...drag you into another god's affairs: One god is trouble enough, but those with the attention of multiple gods have leverage.

The god and Fareos, the god of Romance, have a wager about to whom the Companion's heart truly belongs.

...send a messenger with an omen: Keep your eyes and mind open; omens are a complicated gift that have driven men mad.

A hooded figure speaks to a hero in a dream, "By the new moon your child will show their true face to the world."

...are watching you: The heroes know they're being watched by the god's minions, but for what purpose? The gods have yet to show themselves.

Crimson hooded figures fade in and out of the crowd as the heroes pass through the village square.

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...leave words hanging in the wind: Godly whispers signal the coming of something big and eventful.

As the Companion attends a royal wedding, the sweet words of a god tell her secrets about the bridegroom.

...visit you: The god takes a mortal form to pay you a visit because the distance between you was too great; the god needs to be closer to you.

The Warrior Princess is in dire need while awaiting punishment from the king's court and the god's beautiful face is among the onlookers.

...use your friend: The god uses a friend to get to you. Heroes make friends on their travels, but without protection those friendships can be fleeting.

To make a point, the god switches the skills of the Companion and the Warrior Princess for a day.

...make you a promise: The silver tongue of a god can be double-edged. Be grateful that you know their intentions, but do not be seduced.

The god promises that he will grant anything the Warrior Princess desires if she can end this battle in his name.

Opening Scene: Bandits in the Woods

The Warrior Princess and her companion never stay in one place for long. They travel through towns seeing if their help is needed, or go to places where they've heard trouble is already brewing.

The scene opens with the player characters on a beautiful forest path to the city of Ithasi when they hear a commotion up ahead: steel against steel and someone crying out for help. Bandits.

It becomes clear that these bandits aren't after gold; they're intercepting a royal messenger and his escort of two men. The messenger carries a military decree for a region-wide draft to fight the Cyclops.

This organized group of bandits is led by Basileios in opposition to the forces of Queen Killias. Their farming village was forced to pay food reparations that bankrupted their town and left them starving after a fall crop went bad.

FORGED BY FATES

How will the players defeat the bandits? Will they help deliver the message or try to change the Queen's mind?

OPENING ASPECTS AND OPPOSITION

Opening Aspects: *Forested Path, Alone in the Woods, Political Mission*

BASILEIOS AND HIS BANDITS

ASPECTS

FARMERS LOOKING FOR A FIGHT

SKILLS

AVERAGE (+1) Fight, Provoke

STRESS

□ □ □

THOMAS, THE MESSENGER OF QUEEN KILLIAS

ASPECTS

LOYAL TO THE QUEEN • SHARP TONGUE • WELL FED

SKILLS

GOOD (+3) Rapport

AVERAGE (+1) Ride

POOR (-1) Fight

STRESS

□

Middle Scene: The Queen's Request

However the characters decide to deal with the messenger and the bandits, just outside the woods they run into the Queen's army. The Warrior Princess is quickly recognized and greeted warmly by Queen Killias herself.

Compel Reminder: Warrior Princess

When the Queen encounters the characters, compel *Warrior Princess*. Of course she's spotted! Everyone knows who *she* is.

FORGED BY FATES

The Warrior Princess owes Queen Killias a debt (*Mysterious Past* compel) and the Queen calls on her to keep her word. Killias drafted her army to take down the Cyclops that destroyed a town on the edge of her realm because her Warlord Andras is busy preparing his men for a much larger attack. Queen Killias asks the heroes for their help in slaying the Cyclops to ensure victory on both fronts.

Will the Warrior Princess and Companion agree to help the power-hungry Queen to save other towns from the threat of a Cyclops?

OPENING ASPECTS AND SKILL CHALLENGES

Opening Aspects: *Army of Spectators*, *Political Pressure*, *Impending Battle*

QUEEN KILLIAS

ASPECTS

STARVING FARMLANDS AND MOUNTAINS OF GOLD

SKILLS

SUPERB (+5)	Will
GOOD (+3)	Rapport, Resources
AVERAGE (+1)	Deceive, Mythology, Provoke
POOR (-1)	Athletics, Physique

STRESS



KILLIAS' SQUADRON

ASPECTS

SMALL ARMY • DRAFTED TO SAVE THEIR TOWN

SKILLS

AVERAGE (+1)	Athletics, Fight
---------------------	------------------

STRESS





Final Scene: Wrath of the Cyclops

Whether the characters leave the Queen to her fate or agree to help, the Cyclops ambushes them with lethal force as they travel past a steep rock face. He attempts to destroy them and anyone they brought along for the fight. When the characters get close to defeating him, the GM may choose to have him concede (FATE CORE SYSTEM, page 167).

After his concession or as his dying breath, the Cyclops reveals that his will was not his own—a masked figure compelled him to attack the village. The Warrior Princess knows that if Queen Killias got wind of this masked figure setting the Cyclops on her territory she would use it to fuel her rapid expansion in the area.

Will the heroes track the masked figure immediately or will they come across evidence of the mysterious figure elsewhere?

OPENING ASPECTS AND OPPOSITION

Opening Aspects: *Mountainous Terrain, Bad Blood in the Air, Angry Cyclops*

THE CYCLOPS

ASPECTS

THICK LEATHER HIDE • LONELY MONSTER

SKILLS

SUPERB (+5) Fight

GOOD (+3) Athletics, Physique

POOR (-1) Will

STRESS

□ □ □

Plot Hooks and Adventure Seeds

The opening episode of *Forged by Fates* isn't the end of their journey. The heroes may have stopped the Cyclops, but there are still people throughout Young Earth who need their help. And don't forget the impending issues! Here are a few plot hooks and adventure seeds to keep the story going, varying the tone and pace of scenes after the initial adventure:

MASKED SORCERER

Rumors are spreading of a masked figure with the power to control monsters and beasts. They've been causing quite a bit of trouble for the Lords and Ladies of Young Earth. Survivors among the ruins of a scorched castle reveal that this figure is in search of a monster so ancient and terrible that it has faded from legend. Who is this mysterious figure and what is their plan? Their trail could lead to anyone—perhaps it's someone close to the heroes, someone from their past, someone who wishes to upset the gods, or a god manifested.

BRIDE OF WAR

A king hopes to avoid war by marrying off his unwilling daughter to a centaur war-prince. She has condemned the marriage as “unnatural” and pleaded with her father for a human suitor. The king knows that forcing his daughter into marriage is wrong, but fears that allowing war would be

worse. The centaurs are willing to offer their prince to the union, but no one has yet spoken to him about the arrangement. How will the centaur prince react and should the princess put aside her feelings for peace?

WARM HANDS, COLD HEART

A suave healer finds himself in a world of trouble when he steals the powers of a god. What happens when the god Shivan comes looking for her mate and instead finds a mortal unable to return the stolen powers? Will the healer's charm be enough to win over the Companion or the Warrior Princess and save him from Shivan's wrath?

LONG LOST SIBLING

Separated at birth, the Companion's twin Mycas has led a relatively quiet life with a decent husband and well-mannered children, until now—a vengeful god meddled with Mycas' life and turned the whole town against her, just to punish the Companion. When the heroes wander into town, the Companion is mistaken for Mycas and put on trial. Mycas manages to get word to the Companion and implores her to clear her name so she can go back to her peaceful life and forget all about this trouble her estranged sister caused her. Can the heroes clear the twin's name without revealing their true identities?

Episodic Play

You only have two players so try to keep each plot bite-sized enough to fit the format and length of a television episode. For advice on how to structure one-shots that feel like episodes, check out my article, *Cooking Up a Fate One-Shot*, in Volume 1, Issue 5 of THE FATE CODEX.

Pregenerated Characters

If your players wish to play pregenerated characters, you can use the sample characters provided on the pages following.

ODELL

Odell's steely eyes are burdened with the pain of her past, but she's tough and resilient. She is unmatched in combat, but strives to be diplomatic about disagreements and uphold local laws and tradition. Her past is mysterious; lovers, enemies, children—to Odell, the past is best kept in the past, but when it catches up to her she faces her relationships head on and without cowardice. But it's Thea that makes her confidence possible. With her Companion by her side, Odell can escape the past and live a new life protecting the innocent and helping those in need.

ASPECTS

HIGH CONCEPT: WARRIOR PRINCESS

TROUBLE: MYSTERIOUS PAST

SIGNATURE WEAPON: COLD STEEL, THROUGH AND THROUGH

OTHER ASPECTS: OPEN SLOT • OPEN SLOT

SKILLS

GREAT (+4) Fight
GOOD (+3) Athletics, Will
FAIR (+2) Contacts, Physique, Provoke
AVERAGE (+1) Archery, Ride, Stealth, Survival

STUNTS

Sharp-Edged. +2 to Fight rolls when you wield a sword or spear.

Battle Cry. When you enter a battle with a fearsome battle cry, roll Provoke against your target's Will. If you succeed or tie, the target cannot attack this round of the conflict. If you succeed with style, you gain a boost against that target. If you fail, the target gets a +2 to attacks against you due to your obvious advance.

I Know a Guy...or Girl. +2 to create an advantage with Contacts when you find someone with which you've had a previous romantic relationship.

STRESS

Mental: ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

Physical: ☐ ☐ ☐

CONSEQUENCES

Mild (2) • Moderate (4) • Major (6)

NOTES

Refresh: 3

THEA

Thea is a dreamer, but she's always kept her feet on the ground. She has a strong sense of duty to Young Earth and all of its wonders; despite the battles she's fought, she chooses not to kill. Thea often stumbles into problems, although her clever and disarming nature earns her the trust of those who can recognize her pure heart. But it's the Warrior Princess that allows her to live her life to the fullest. With the Warrior Princess by her side she can tell tales of sacrifice and love while living the life of a true hero.

ASPECTS

HIGH CONCEPT: THE COMPANION

TROUBLE: A SIMPLE LIFE IS NOT FOR ME

SIGNATURE WEAPON: THE PHILOSOPHER'S STAFF

OTHER ASPECTS: OPEN SLOT • OPEN SLOT

SKILLS

GREAT (+4) Survival
GOOD (+3) Empathy, Mythology
FAIR (+2) Athletics, Deceive, Rapport
AVERAGE (+1) Burglary, Crafts, Investigate, Will

STUNTS

Philosopher's Staff. When you use your staff to defend against someone, use Athletics instead of Fight.

Bardic Training. When creating an advantage by telling a story or singing a song about your adventures with Odell using Mythology, add an extra free invoke to the aspect you create, even on a tie.

Crafter of the People. +2 to create an advantage by using Crafts to make something useful for others in a scene.

STRESS

Mental: ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

Physical: ☐ ☐ ☐

CONSEQUENCES

Mild (2) • Moderate (4) • Major (6)

NOTES

Refresh: 3



ARES, GOD OF WAR

ASPECTS

DOMINION: GOD OF WAR

DEMEANOR: DECEITFUL SEDUCTOR

DESIRE: "WE WERE ONCE A GREAT MATCH"

MINIONS: RAVENS AND CROWS

FAYLETT, GOD OF LORE

ASPECTS

DOMINION: GOD OF LORE

DEMEANOR: BORED AND CLEVER

DESIRE: THEA WILL BE MY NEW MUSE

MINIONS: FIELD MICE

NPCS:

Use these NPCs throughout your *Forged by Fates* campaign!

VALTHEF

Valthef has the gift of magic and foresight. She tries her best to make a modest living and stay out of too much trouble, but no matter where she moves someone is always in need of her services...or at least that's what they convince themselves. More often than not, Valthef's clients leave happy and come back upset and wanting a refund, but magic doesn't work like that.

ASPECTS

HIGH CONCEPT: THE WITCH OF THE WOODS

TROUBLE: THE TOWNSFOLK ARE NEVER SATISFIED

SKILLS

GREAT (+4) Will

GOOD (+3) Mythology, Survival

FAIR (+2) Burglary, Investigate, Stealth

AVERAGE (+1) Deceive, Empathy, Fight, Provoke

STUNTS

Witch of Myth and Ore. When creating something magical, use Mythology instead of Crafts.

The Mirror Never Lies. When creating an advantage by telling a story about an ancient myth to manipulate your victim, add an extra free invoke to the aspect you create.

Harmless Old Hag. Spend a fate point to enter any peaceful crowded scene disguised as an old woman.

Curse the Gods. Once per session you can call on the Fates to learn of the gods' plans for a hero.

STRESS

Mental: ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

Physical: ☐ ☐ ☐

CONSEQUENCES

Mild (2) • Moderate (4) • Major (6)

NOTES

Refresh: 2

DIMITRI

Dimitri is a handsome and cunning salesman who always manages to find the perfect item you didn't know you needed. But Dimitri often finds himself drawn as much to his clients as they are to him. Sexual orientation doesn't matter when it comes to matters of love, and his heart is big enough for many lovers.

ASPECTS

HIGH CONCEPT: MERCHANT OF ITHASI

TROUBLE: ONE TOO MANY LOVERS

SKILLS

GREAT (+4) Deceive
GOOD (+3) Empathy, Rapport
FAIR (+2) Burglary, Contacts, Resources
AVERAGE (+1) Crafts, Investigate, Ride, Stealth

STUNTS

That Smile. When you Deceive someone by flirting add a +2.

True of Heart. When creating an advantage to help a lover, add an extra free invoke to the aspect you create.

Know Just the Thing. When using Contacts to locate an item someone is looking for add +2.

STRESS

Mental: ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

Physical: ☐ ☐ ☐

CONSEQUENCES

Mild (2) • Moderate (4) • Major (6)

NOTES

Refresh: 3



MELORIETH'S COMMANDOS

by DON BISDORF

When Scratch interrupted my prayers that morning, I should have known it was a bad omen. I was kneeling in the courtyard of the castle we'd taken from the Lavarnans, pronouncing my devotions, when I heard the lieutenant's voice at my shoulder.

"Ask your goddess for a plate of bacon while you're at it."

I paused to whisper a prayer for patience. Then I opened my eyes.

Scratch stood there, grinning, her belt full of knives, her raven-feathered wings tucked behind her back. "Thorsh confiscated the Duchess's best supplies. All that's left for us is what she was feeding her troops."

Her soldiers had all been products of spiritualist magic—clacks, or half-souled—and they'd fought us to the death. *Their* deaths, mostly. We'd lost Rooster, though, when a walking skeleton stabbed him from behind with a spear. That had taken the shine out of our victory.

"What do the half-souled eat?" I asked Scratch.

"Moldy bread, looks like. I was thinking about heading across the river. I'll bet someone in town will be happy to cook breakfast for a hero of the Eastern Cities Army."

"For free, I'm guessing."

MELORIETH'S COMMANDOS

"I should hope so. And if they're not feeling grateful to the people who drove off the wicked Lavarnan spiritualist, you can threaten to step on their houses."

She was exaggerating. I'm big, but not that big. Not quite. "You want me to help you steal food from civilians?"

"What else do you have to do today? The Lavarnans are gone, and Kuld doesn't need our help to melt that bell." She aimed a thumb over her shoulder, toward the bell tower, and toward the reason Command had sent us to take the castle.

I stood up. I was far from home, and the sight of a ten-foot tall woman getting to her feet was usually enough to put an end to most arguments out here. But Scratch was used to seeing me, and besides, she'd been born without a sense of fear. It wasn't a Verellan thing. I'd heard the rest of her people were gentle and peace-loving. It was hard to believe after you'd seen what Scratch did with her knives.

"If we can find breakfast," I told her, "I'll pay."

"Suits me. You'll be the one eating ten meals' worth."

That's when we saw Kuld leaving the bell tower. His thick fists were clenched, and he was grumbling around the clay pipe in his teeth. He was so angry he was steaming. I mean that literally. The air shimmered around him, and he left a trail of steam vapor. As a fire elemental, his fury was a physical force.

He was headed for the castle gate. I called across the courtyard. "What happened?"

"They aren't going to melt the damned bell!"

Scratch and I looked at each other. "They're not going to melt it?" she said. "That's what they sent us here for. That's what—"

She put her lips together, but I could finish the sentence myself. The chance to destroy the Lavarnan bell was what Rooster had died for.

Kuld went out the gate. He was either headed to the river to cool off, or to the trees to start a forest fire.

Without another word, Scratch and I started toward the tower. She kicked a bone out of her path, probably part of one of the clacks we'd cut down when we'd taken the place.

The old lord of Fel's Brook had been friendly to the Eastern Cities, but he'd died fighting the Lavarnans, and the castle had fallen into their hands. Intelligence found out that Duchess Noma Retorn, a Lavarnan spiritualist, had arrived at the castle with a large bell. The bell was supposed to contain some sort of potent magic, and Command didn't want to risk a large force against it. They'd sent our squad ahead to take the castle and prevent the Duchess from ringing her bell.

MELORIETH'S COMMANDOS

The castle had been guarded by a mob of walking skeletons and a handful of half-souled soldiers. I didn't mind the clacks. Sure, they never got tired and never felt pain, but it was satisfying to smash them under my iron gauntlets.

Fighting the half-souled bothered me because most of them had been civilians or soldiers the Lavarnans had captured. The spiritualists had torn apart their minds, leaving just enough intelligence to carry weapons and obey orders. A half-souled soldier would fight me to his last drop of blood, and when I'd get back to the Eastern Cities, I'd meet someone's eyes in the street and wonder if I'd killed her husband or son.

After Kuld incinerated the Duchess, the castle was ours. We'd removed the bell's clapper and moved it into the keep on the far side of the castle. Both the bell and clapper were engraved with spiritualist symbols, and Kuld could see that they had to work together to activate the bell's magic. He could have melted the bell, but Captain Melioreth wanted to wait for a second opinion, in case the Lavarnans had rigged the bell to do something unpleasant if we tampered with it.

There had been a garrison of standard Lavarnan soldiers across the river in Fel's Brook, but we'd held the castle against them for a night and a day, until First Company arrived and drove them off. Our reinforcements had brought Lieutenant Colonel Thorsh with them. Supposedly, he was one of the best elementalists the Eastern Cities had. He'd gone up to the top of the tower and studied the bell all night. We thought he was working out how to destroy the bell safely.

We'd been wrong.

During the fight, I'd kicked down the wide double doors to the bell tower. Someone had taken away the wreckage, but the doorway remained open, and Scratch and I could hear Thorsh talking to our captain.

"It's beyond anything we thought the Lavarnans could accomplish," Thorsh was saying. "One stroke of this bell could snuff out the souls of everyone who hears it, from miles away. With this, a single animated skeleton with enough strength to ring the bell could destroy any of our armies. Or our cities. Of *course* it's horrible. That's the whole *point*."

The ground floor of the tower was tidier than the last time I'd seen it. Someone had carried off the bodies of Duchess Retorn's half-souled defenders, and had swept up the ashes that had been the Duchess herself. Four people stood in the empty space: two Eastern Cities soldiers, Captain Melioreth, and Lieutenant Colonel Thorsh.

Thorsh had earned his rank through his mastery of elemental magic and through his political connections, not through military experience. He was in his mid-thirties, tall and pale, and his narrow face and long dark hair marked him as a nobleman of Falconwind. He might have been

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distantly related to the captain, but she wouldn't be happy to hear anyone suggest it.

Our C.O. was about the same age, with the same dark hair and narrow features, but there was no other resemblance. Thorsh's uniform was clean and well-tailored, while Melioreth's had seen months of hard use. While Thorsh posed in the center of the room, gesturing like a stage actor, Melioreth stood silent and alert. From her position, she could watch both the front door and the entrance to the stairway, and though her grip on her bow seemed casual, I knew she could put an arrow in the air the moment a threat appeared.

I ducked through the door, following Scratch. Any other door in the castle might have been more of a problem for me, but this one had been made wide enough for the tower's original bell, and it had admitted the Lavarnan weapon just as easily. When I looked up through the vertical tunnel of the tower, I could see the black metal of the new bell, five stories off the ground. It was big enough that three men could have stood up inside it. It would have been a tight fit for me.

Thorsh lost track of his monologue when he saw me blocking the sunlight. He nearly fell back a step, but he remembered his nobility and held fast.

The captain spoke while Thorsh was still closing his mouth. "Lieutenant Colonel Thorsh, this is Lieutenant Hesst and Sergeant Urn." She gestured to Scratch, then me.

We saluted, and Thorsh sketched a salute of his own. "What is it?" he asked us.

"Lieutenant Kuld looked a little out of sorts," Scratch said. "We thought we'd check in with the captain to see if everything was okay."

Thorsh glanced at the captain, probably expecting her to dismiss us.

She didn't. "Lieutenant Colonel Thorsh believes this bell might be a valuable weapon in the Eastern Cities arsenal," she said.

I was suddenly cold to my bones. I was so stunned that it took me a long moment to realize that I should be ready to grab Scratch in case she went for Thorsh's throat.

Fortunately, her first reaction was to laugh. "*That?*" She pointed up at the bell. "That's not a *weapon*, sir. That's a nightmare that came out of the head of some Lavarnan madwoman."

Thorsh shook his head. "You shouldn't take our own propaganda so seriously. The spiritualists aren't a pack of cackling, hand-wringing villains, doing evil just for evil's sake."

Scratch glanced up at me. "The Duchess *did* cackle a little."

"I would have called it a chuckle," I told her.

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"What I *mean*," Thorsh said, "is that they didn't build this bell with the intent of actually *using* it. Certainly they might use it *once*, as a demonstration, but after that, they'd never have to ring it again. They would end the war with one pull of a rope."

"You don't know that they would have stopped so soon," Captain Melioreth said. "They don't treat human lives the same way we do. They wouldn't think of it as genocide. They'd just be rearranging the spiritual energy of this side of the continent."

He waved a hand, dismissing her words. "I'm not going to argue the point, since it's irrelevant. *We* have the bell now. We can use it to win the war. All of the killing, all of the destruction, could come to an end. Tomorrow."

"When we start using their weapons, we become just like them. That's what we're fighting *against*."

"No. We're fighting for our *survival*," he said. "And this isn't a debate. I'm just following orders. This decision was made at the highest level." He spread his hands and smiled. "Celebrate your victory, Captain. You may never have to fire that bow in anger again."

I'd seen the captain bend the rules. I'd heard her cursing the names of our generals, and I'd watched her shaking her head at written instructions from Command. But I'd never seen her disobey a direct order.

Until then.

In an instant, she had an arrow nocked and was aiming straight up. The arrow's shaft was painted red, which meant it was one of the explosive signal arrows that Kuld had enchanted for her. She let it fly.

Scratch whirled. Her wings smote the air, and she was out of the tower.

The arrow went wide of the bell and struck the crossbar that held it up. There was a bang and a yellow flash.

The captain grabbed the soldier nearest her and dragged him into the shelter of the stairwell.

Thorsh stared up the tower, his hands hovering in the air. I couldn't tell if he was trying to raise his magic, or if he just wasn't sure what was happening.

The crossbar snapped. The bell fell, turning over slowly, trailing fragments of its mounting. It was a black metal fist rushing down at us, and not even a giant woman from Golo could stop it.

I took a step, grabbed Thorsh, and threw him on my shoulder. The other soldier started to draw on me, but I slapped his sword away, took him by the front of his uniform, and pulled him out the front door.

I sidestepped before the bell hit. The ground shook, and stone flew out into the courtyard.

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Soldiers stopped what they were doing and stared at the cloud of dust. Thorsh struggled on my shoulder. “Put me down! I order you to—”

I let go of the soldier, and I put Thorsh back on his feet. This time he did back away from me. “Your captain just—” He put his hands to his forehead and stared into the tower.

At the castle’s front gate, I saw Kuld. He had come back just in time to see the bell fall. He stood there, dumbfounded, holding his pipe.

Scratch was high in the ramparts, looking down at us. I knew that look. She was picking her targets.

We heard stones shifting in the tower, and then the captain appeared, followed by the soldier she’d pulled to safety. He blinked at the sunlight, and saw Thorsh. “Sir, the bell is...it broke in half..”

Thorsh sputtered. He pointed at the captain and shouted loud enough for all of First Company to hear him. “Arrest Captain Melioreth!”

The soldier next to the captain immediately took her arm, and she didn’t move to stop him. Her eyes never left Thorsh. “You need me in the field,” she said, “not in a cell somewhere.”

Thorsh had his composure back now, and he tugged the wrinkles out of his uniform. “Once again, Captain, that decision is not yours to make.”

As they led the captain away, she met my eyes, and shook her head once. She knew what I was willing to do, and we both knew that the rest of the squad would back my play. But the captain didn’t want the rest of us in shackles.

Kuld stood glowering at the castle gate. Scratch lurked in the ramparts, staring back at me.

I had a feeling the captain wasn’t going to be the only one of us disobeying orders. ☒

CAPTAIN ARZA MELIORETH

Despite Arza's noble birth, she tries to avoid Eastern City politics as much as possible so she can do her job: defending her homeland from the Lavarnans.

ASPECTS

HIGH CONCEPT: SPECIAL MISSIONS SQUAD LEADER

TROUBLE: NOT POPULAR WITH THE BRASS

OTHER ASPECTS: DAUGHTER OF FALCONWIND NOBILITY

ARCHER'S PATIENCE • SOME PRICES ARE TOO HIGH

SKILLS

GREAT (+4) Shoot

GOOD (+3) Notice, Will

FAIR (+2) Athletics, Fight, Stealth

AVERAGE (+1) Contacts, Lore, Physique, Ride

STUNTS

Falconwind Longbow. A standard longbow can attack at a range of three zones, but a Falconwind bow has a range of five zones.

Countermagic Arrows. You can use Shoot instead of Magic to remove a magical effect.

Infiltration. +2 to Notice to discover aspects related to terrain and buildings, such as *Good Spot for an Ambush* or *Secret Entrance*.

STRESS

Mental: ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

Physical: ☐ ☐ ☐

NOTES

Refresh: 3

Instead of the Drive skill, this setting has Ride, which characters use to control horses and other transport animals.

LIEUTENANT KULD

Kuld learned fire magic outside the elitist academic structure of the Eastern Cities elementalists, and they regard him with almost as much contempt as he has for them.

ASPECTS

HIGH CONCEPT: HOT-HEADED FIRE ELEMENTALIST

TROUBLE: ANY IDIOT CAN SEE I'M RIGHT

OTHER ASPECTS: I'D RATHER BE HONEST THAN POLITE

WORKING CLASS ROOTS • SPIRITUALISM IS OBSCENE

SKILLS

GREAT (+4) Magic

GOOD (+3) Lore, Will

FAIR (+2) Fight, Notice, Stealth

AVERAGE (+1) Athletics, Investigate, Provoke, Shoot

STUNTS

Fire Magic. see description on page 107.

Demolitionist. +2 to Magic when using fire to destroy inanimate objects.

Too Stubborn to Stop. Use Will instead of Physique to judge resistance to fatigue, poison, or other debilitating physical conditions.

STRESS

Mental: ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

Physical: ☐ ☐

NOTES

Refresh: 3

SCRATCH (LIEUTENANT HESST)

Most Verellans enjoy soaring between the peaks of their mountainous homeland, meditating on the beauty of life and nature. Scratch likes to kill people.

ASPECTS

HIGH CONCEPT: VERELLAN ASSASSIN

TROUBLE: TOO FOND OF VIOLENCE

OTHER ASPECTS: ONE WITH THE SHADOWS

RULES ARE FOR OTHER PEOPLE • HIDING FROM PAST SINS

SKILLS

GREAT (+4) Stealth

GOOD (+3) Athletics, Notice

FAIR (+2) Burglary, Fight, Investigate

AVERAGE (+1) Contacts, Deceive, Physique, Will

STUNTS

Wings of Verell. As a Verellan, you have wings, and you can use your Athletics skill to fly.

Free Bird. +2 to Burglary to free yourself from bonds, manacles, and other restraints.

Knife in the Dark. Use Stealth instead of Fight to attack someone who doesn't know you're there.

STRESS

Mental: ☐ ☐ ☐

Physical: ☐ ☐ ☐

NOTES

Refresh: 3

SERGEANT URN

Though many of the Eastern Cities have abandoned religion, the residents of Golo still revere their goddess, and Urn has joined the Afterlife War as a form of worship for her deity.

ASPECTS

HIGH CONCEPT: ONE-WOMAN SIEGE ENGINE

TROUBLE: MY FAITH IS NOT SUPERSTITION

OTHER ASPECTS: GIVE ME A WORTHY CHALLENGE

YOUR GOLO JOKES AREN'T FUNNY • I LIKE WIDE OPEN SPACES

SKILLS

GREAT (+4) Physique

GOOD (+3) Athletics, Fight

FAIR (+2) Notice, Provoke, Will

AVERAGE (+1) Empathy, Lore, Shoot, Stealth

STUNTS

Golo Stature. The people of Golo are giants, twice the size of other Easterners. Your Scale level (FATE SYSTEM TOOLKIT, page 67) is one step higher than normal characters, which reduces physical harm from incoming attacks by two points.

Wall Crawler. +2 to Athletics to climb over obstacles.

Break Through. You can use Fight to attack everyone in your zone without splitting your shifts.

STRESS

Mental: ☐ ☐ ☐

Physical: ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

NOTES

Refresh: 3

THE MAGIC SKILL

Each magician specializes in the study of one of five elemental forces. If you want to raise this skill to Average (+1) or higher, you must purchase one, and only one, magic specialty stunt, and you must have an aspect that reflects your magic specialty.

The magicians of the Eastern Cities call themselves elementalists, and study either fire, earth, water, or air magic. Lavarnan magicians are all spiritualists, and study spirit magic exclusively.



Overcome: You can use this skill to detect the presence of a magical influence. The level of opposition is equal to the number of zones you are away from the influence. You can also detect the presence of the element you specialize in, with the same level of opposition.

You can use this skill to overcome an obstacle where control over your chosen element would help you.



Create an Advantage: You can use the element you specialize in to create advantages. For example, an air elementalist could scatter her enemies with a *Gale Force Wind*.



Attack: You can attack using your chosen element.



Defend: You may use this skill to defend against magic attacks made by magicians of any specialty.

MAGIC SPECIALTY STUNTS

Fire Magic. You can use your Magic skill to create and control fire and heat. You can put out a fire, but you cannot remove heat to make something colder than it would normally be.

Earth Magic. You can use Magic to shape earth and rock, and create tunnels or local seismic disturbances. You can also sense the presence of tunnels, metals, or precious stones.

Water Magic. You can use Magic to create and manipulate water. You can also create clouds and rain. You can shape and melt ice, but you cannot create ice or snow unless your environment is cold enough to freeze water.

Air Magic. You can use Magic to direct the force of the wind. You can temporarily eliminate someone's need to breathe, or conversely, you can knock the breath out of someone.

Spirit Magic. You can use Magic to manipulate someone's thoughts or emotions, and you can communicate with the dead. You inflict mental harm when you use your Magic to attack.



CONFLICT COUNTDOWN

by BRENDAN CONWAY

Fate conflicts sometimes have a tendency to run a little long. At first, conflicts are exciting and thrilling—filled with gun-toting dinosaurs and two-fisted pulp heroes—but when battles turn into slogs to see who can fill their opponent's stress track first, Fate conflicts lose a lot of their punch. How can we ensure they stay fresh and interesting?

This piece discusses how to use a **conflict countdown**, a system to ensure that your Fate conflicts never bog down and always remain punchy, surprising, and interesting.

Conflict Countdown: The Basics

When a conflict of any kind begins, set up three different stress tracks of two boxes each to pace the fight. Together, these three stress tracks are the **conflict countdown**. Each box is worth one stress: when the stress track is hit for 1-stress, mark one box. Each stress track leads to a **twist**.

STRESS		
1 <input type="checkbox"/> 2 <input type="checkbox"/> TWIST	1 <input type="checkbox"/> 2 <input type="checkbox"/> TWIST	1 <input type="checkbox"/> 2 <input type="checkbox"/> TWIST

These stress tracks are sequential—you start marking stress in the first track, and you don't mark any boxes in the second stress track until

CONFLICT COUNTDOWN

the first is filled. You can keep these stress tracks out in the open for players to see, so they know how far along the track you've filled.

During the conflict, mark 1-stress against your conflict countdown at the end of every exchange—i.e., once every character in the conflict has had one action—*unless* any PC in the conflict...

- succeeds with style on an attack or defense;
- inflicts or suffers a consequence; or
- compels a character using an existing aspect.

Each time you fill both stress boxes on any one of these three tracks in your conflict countdown, create a twist at the start of the next round of the conflict.

If every box of the conflict countdown is full when the countdown takes another 1-stress hit, the battle ends in a shake-up (page 111).

Twists

A **twist** is a change to the circumstances of the conflict, something that complicates, expands, or redirects the stakes of the battle. Twists make the conflicts ever-changing and interesting, but they shouldn't give an advantage to the opposition or punish the players. Instead, they keep the story moving whenever conflicts start to bog down.

FINDING THE STAKES

The first step to introducing a twist is to understand the stakes of the conflict. What does each side really want? What does "victory" look like? The two sides in a conflict may have more nuanced goals than "punch the other guy until he falls down," but often the goals in physical conflicts—"subdue the opposition"—and emotional conflicts—"get the opposition to do _____"—are fairly straightforward.

Sometimes the stakes of the conflict are different for each side. In a physical conflict, for example, one side might have the goal of subduing the opposition, while the other has the goal of simply escaping.

TWISTING THE STAKES

Once you know what the stakes are at the start of the conflict, you can introduce a twist to expand on those stakes. Think of this as *adding another clause* to the existing stakes.

If the stakes of a fight between a gang of criminals and a group of security guards are—on both sides—"subdue the opposition," then a good twist would add the clause, "before the bomb goes off" or "while

CONFLICT COUNTDOWN

being filmed by a news crew.” The twist doesn’t make things easier for the criminals or the guards, but it does heighten the tension for both sides.

COMPLICATION, EXPANSION, OR REDIRECTION

Most twists fall into one of three categories: complications, expansions, and redirections. Here are a few notes about each:

Complication

When you **complicate** the conflict with a twist, you add some factor that makes it more difficult for both sides to achieve their aim in the conflict. Don’t give either side an advantage over the other!

Bad complication: One side of the conflict—the prisoners—just wants to escape from prison, while the other side—the prison guards—wants to subdue the escapees. When the countdown hits a twist, the GM says, “The prison’s security systems shut down, and all the doors swing open!” Huge disadvantage for the guards!

Good complication: In the same situation, the GM says, “Someone upstairs flipped open the rest of the prison cells, but not the exits, and all the other prisoners surge out and a riot starts!” Both sides are hindered, as the escapees have to navigate the riot while the guards have plenty of other prisoners to deal with.

Expansion

When you **expand** the conflict with a twist, you add a new factor to the conflict that makes it larger. A common and effective way to expand the conflict is to add a new faction to the conflict with its own stakes.

Bad expansion: In the prison escape attempt, the conflict countdown hits another twist. The GM says, “More guards come streaming in from other parts of the prison!” That’s not actually expanding the conflict at all; it’s just adding more guys to one side of the fight.

Good expansion: In the same situation, the GM says, “There’s an explosion above you, and then black-clad assassins holding automatic weaponry come down through the ceiling, rappelling down ropes!” The

Expanding the Conflict and NPC vs NPC Action

If you add a new side to the conflict, it might appear that there are three sides at work: two factions of NPCs and one set of PCs. It might make sense fictionally for the NPCs to fight against each other, but who wants to watch that? If NPCs try to harm each other, have the side with the higher skill level automatically inflict stress equal to the difference in skill levels to the other side.

CONFLICT COUNTDOWN

assassins want to kill one of the escapees, and will stop at nothing to do so. The assassins and the guards won't be acting in concert at all, and it certainly adds complications to the escapees' attempt to get out of the prison.

Redirection

When you **redirect** the conflict with a twist, you change the stakes of the conflict for both sides. You alter the situation, so what used to matter is no longer the primary focus.

Bad redirection: The conflict countdown for the prison escape hits another twist. This time, the GM says, "Noxious gas starts pouring into the room from the air ducts and from the other corridors! Everybody who breathes it starts choking!" Not only does this twist seem not to fit fictionally with the situation, it also doesn't change the stakes for one side of the conflict. The guards may switch their stakes from subduing the escapees to simply surviving, but the escapees already wanted to get out. Now, they just want to get out even more. Their stakes haven't actually changed.

Good redirection: In the same situation, the GM instead says, "It turns out that there's a camera crew here, filming some kind of documentary or news report. They come rushing in to catch all the action on film!" The guards now have to be worried about their actions being filmed—if they show too much brutality, they might be in greater trouble than otherwise. The escapees, on the other hand, might be able to get their story out to the outside world, explaining their innocence—or they might have to worry about their guilt in the eye of the public, deciding whether it's okay to do whatever it takes to escape while the cameras are rolling.

Twists, Compels, and NPCs

When you introduce your twist, introduce the new NPCs or new scene aspects you need to make it real. If any of the twists can work as a compel on one of the PCs' aspects or on an existing scene aspect—a great sign of a good twist—the PCs still get their fate points as normal for compels. If a PC refuses a compel based on a twist, don't charge them a fate point; choose a different twist instead.

Shake-ups

A **shake-up** is a major change to the circumstances of the conflict, like a twist but amplified. A shake-up always ends the prior conflict entirely, but often leads directly into another conflict.

CONFLICT COUNTDOWN

At the same time, shake-ups generally don't end a scene or allow PCs or NPCs to clear their stress. When a shake-up leads directly into a new conflict with its own conflict countdown, the consequences and stress from the prior conflict don't go away.

When you introduce a shake-up, build on the circumstances already established to substantially change the environment, the stakes, or the parties in the conflict. Don't introduce a completely random new element from nowhere just to make a shake-up happen; there's a fine line between interesting and random.

Bad shake-up: The conflict countdown hits a shake-up, and the GM says, "The escapees manage to get outside to the courtyard, where they meet a more heavily armed group of guards standing between them and the exit." Not only does this not substantially change the situation, the exact same skills would be useful—the guards will try to pound on the escapees using Fight or Shoot, and the escapees will probably respond in kind.

Good shake-up: In the same situation, the GM says, "The escapees lose the guards in the open areas of the prison and jump into the vents, but the guards saw them go." What used to be a running fight, full of punching and tackling, is now a cat and mouse game between the prisoners trying to find their way out of the labyrinthine vents and the guards hunting them down. It may not be a normal conflict anymore, but that's just fine.

You can ask yourself if a shake-up has truly occurred by asking if the same skills are still applicable. If no side in a conflict has to change their tactics in a meaningful way, then there hasn't been a shake-up! In the above example, any side that was planning on using Fight to resolve the conflict is now going to have to rely on Athletics and Stealth.

TO COUNTDOWN OR NOT TO COUNTDOWN?

The conflict countdown is all about making conflicts as punchy, flashy, interesting, and exciting as possible. If the countdown becomes just another thing you have to track in a conflict because you're already invested in the action, then drop it. It's not necessary in situations where everybody's leaning forward in rapt attention because this is the final fight between the lost prince and his evil father. This is for those other fights, when you're up against the evil father's imperial guardsmen. The conflict countdown will make those fights more exciting and surprising, while also ensuring that they don't overstay their welcome.

I hope you enjoy using the conflict countdown to add some zest to your conflicts! 🎲



RETHINKING STEALTH

by KOJI NISHIUCHI

Stealth comes up a lot in just about every kind of adventure. Whether it's a costumed vigilante lurking in the rafters before a flashy entrance or a terrified teen hiding in the closet from the supernatural serial killer, there are times when the question "Can they see me or not?" becomes vitally important. Stealth is common in RPGs, too—just about every system with a list of skills has at least one focused on stealth.

The Problems of Stealth

In roleplaying games, stealth almost always works the same way: you roll how well you can hide against how well your opposition can spot you, and if you fail, you're found. It's a simple rule, and at first glance it seems to intuitively capture how hiding works in fiction. The problem is what happens when you put those rules into practice.

PASS OR FAIL?

The first time you fail a Stealth roll, you've failed the whole stealth mission. That's because once you're spotted, it's no longer a stealth mission. It's either back to combat as you fight your way through, or a chase scene as you run away. Since you generally only use stealth when it's needed—to avoid a lethal encounter or big social consequences—this failure can range from disastrous to deadly.

Because the consequences of failure are so drastic, if you want to use stealth, you need a high Stealth rank. While it's perfectly acceptable to go into combat with a 50% chance of hitting and a 50% chance of being hit, attempting a Stealth roll with just a 50% chance of success is crazy. It gets even worse when you're called upon to make multiple rolls at multiple

RETHINKING STEALTH

checkpoints against multiple guards while sneaking. Because it only takes one failure to ruin everything, using stealth is heavily punished if you can't reliably—almost trivially—succeed at all times. Even if your character has Great (+4) Stealth and is only up against guards with Fair (+2) Notice, by the third roll you'll have an 88% chance of failing without dipping into your precious reserve of fate points.

But what if your character has a stunt gives them a reliable +2 bonus to their check? What if it's +6 against the measly +2? Then you run into another problem: If you *can* succeed every time, there's no tension or challenge. If you *can't* succeed almost every time, trying to sneak around is likely to cause more trouble than it's worth. While that all-or-nothing approach might work for some, there should be a middle ground.

SOLO STEALTH

Beyond the all-or-nothing nature of stealth, there's another fundamental problem: because stealth is the domain of the expert, non-experts get left behind. When the thief scouts ahead, they get cut off from the party, and if they do get spotted, they're in a whole bunch of trouble. Meanwhile, the other PCs need to...wait—possibly for a whole session. Alternatively, a GM might actively discourage stealth, whether by shaping the adventure to not need stealth, or by making the risks too high, the rewards too low, or the odds too stacked against the stealth expert's favor, punishing them for their investment in the skill.

Now, it could very well be that a GM wants to punish stealth. Maybe stealth doesn't fit the kind of game they're interested in running. Maybe they're more a fan of big action pieces or social drama, where stealth is out of place because it's much quieter and solitary by nature.

This is a false choice, though. Giving power and utility to stealth need not also make it time-consuming and unbalanced. So when a GM wants to allow a player to be stealthy, but at the same time they don't want that player to hog the spotlight, they have options.

Making Stealth Work

These problems aren't new. They've been around from the beginning of tabletop RPGs, appearing in system after system, accepted as just the way things go because most RPGs don't have the tools to tackle the problem at its core. In such games, by trying to emulate reality, it's a challenge to represent stealth in a satisfying way. Simulating stealth can be an even greater challenge than simulating combat, though. You have to consider lines of sight, the ambient lighting, the abilities and skills of every single NPC in your path, and more.

Fate isn't like other RPGs, though—it does have the tools to make stealth worthwhile. Since Fate is all about emulating fiction, not reality, we can think about how stealth fits into stories.

In fiction, stealth tends to be used in two distinct ways. At one end of the spectrum, there is slinking through the shadows, climbing among the rafters, and slowly slipping past detection. At the other, you have dodging just out of someone's field of vision, throwing down a smoke bomb to hide in the fog, jumping out of the shadows and retreating back in, or taking the chance to run for your life. We'll call these, respectively, **Sneaking** and **Hiding**. These aren't new skills, but they will let you use the Stealth skill in new ways.

Sneaking

Actions in Fate can be split into two categories: **quick actions** and **long actions**. Quick actions are things like attacking a monster, jumping a chasm, or noticing a trap. They happen more or less in real time. Long actions are things like researching an ancient cult, finding a buyer for a highly illegal magical artifact, or combing a crime scene for clues. They can take minutes, hours, or even days to complete. Often, players will focus on the quick. They'll say they want to do something, roll the dice, and then it's done. Longer things are thought to be more boring, the kind of "downtime" events that go on between adventures, like crafting magical items or learning new languages.

Stealth is generally a quick action. You hide and move silently while hoping not to be seen. But you can also use stealth as a long action—Sneaking. Like other long actions, Sneaking can take minutes or hours to complete, as your character carefully studies the environment, analyzes patterns, and only moves at the absolute safest moments. In exchange for taking up extra time from the character's perspective, Sneaking is generally safer and, perhaps paradoxically, much faster for the players than standard Stealth. That's because while the normal Stealth approach has you go through every obstacle and encounter on its own, the Sneaking approach can boil it all down to a single check.

When you make a normal Stealth roll as a quick action, it's opposed by the Notice ranks of any would-be observers. With Sneaking, you roll only once against a passive difficulty. Say a player wants to scout an orc war camp. If you run the conflict like a typical roleplaying game, the player might need to succeed on many overcome rolls to slip past multiple sentries, succeed on some more against lower difficulty to get past off-duty warriors, and do it all over again on the way out. A single failed roll will lead to them being surrounded and outmatched in a deadly situation.

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Though from the character's perspective they might be done in just a few minutes, it could take upwards of an hour for the player and GM to run this solo mini-session.

A Sneaking roll condenses all this into a single create an advantage roll, with success revealing useful aspects about the war camp. Failure would mean the character can't find a way to sneak into the camp, but wouldn't alert the camp to their presence; success at a major cost could be the very opposite, getting them the info, but just as they're slipping away a twist of fate has them spotted and then chased all the way back to the party. From the character's perspective, the act of Sneaking could take three hours or more, but from the player's perspective, it's a brief conversation with the GM lasting a few minutes at most that moves the fiction along quickly.

Alice is running a typical fantasy adventure game. The party's ranger sees signs of a band of orcs nearby. Gary is a rogue and wants to scout ahead to see what the party is up against.

Alice: Okay, that sounds like you're creating an advantage using Stealth. I think the difficulty is only Average (+1). Roll it.

Gary: All right. +3 Stealth, and I rolled , so that's a +4!

Since the orcs aren't making any effort to conceal their tracks, they're easy to follow and easy to spot. Gary's tiny halfling can easily avoid the orcs detecting him. Since Gary succeeded with style, he can get a lot closer and get a better look than your average adventurer.

Alice: You follow the tracks to the edge of a campsite where you see a band of a dozen orcs. They seem to be relaxing and drinking, settling in for the night. If you hold the party off for a while, you can take advantage of their **Relaxed and Drunk** aspect with two free invocations. But don't take too long because you also see some human captives in some crude wooden cages, and those cooking pots aren't for veggies. Even though the camp is only a few miles away, you moved slowly to avoid detection, so the whole thing took two hours.

RETHINKING STEALTH

Alice is now running a game of superheroes and villains, and Gary is playing a catsuit thief with ninja training named Ninja Thief. Gary wants to steal the legendary Masamune katana from the superhero headquarters of the Super Seven.

Gary: Okay, so I know it's in Samurai Hero's office, just sitting on his desk. So I head there as stealthily as I can.

Alice: There might not be a building in the whole city with tighter security, not to mention the ever-vigilant superheroes always keeping watch. Just getting that far, you're going to need to roll at least a +7.

Gary: Okay, well, I have +4 Stealth and my Shadow Ninja stunt gives +2 at night. Rolling...and it's a +5. I don't really want to spend any fate points here. I think I'll take the failure.

Alice: After spending two days staking out the Super Seven Tower, you see no weak points. The security there is just too tight. You'll need to find a way past or think of some other way to steal the sword.

Gary: Okay. In that case...hmm...I bet it wouldn't be a problem if I was wearing one of the Steel Sentinel's extra suits. I think I'll call up my contact who offered to help me get close to one of the suits last session....

Hiding

If Sneaking is the long-form version of Stealth, Hiding is moment-by-moment evasion. Hiding most often comes up in two situations: when a PC has been spotted and wants to regain their hidden position, and in combat when a PC wants some concealment for just long enough to launch a sneak attack. The biggest difference between Hiding rolls and other kinds of Stealth rolls is that a player only uses Hiding when someone is already aware of their presence and is actively looking for them.

Like Sneaking, Hiding is a create an advantage roll. When you want to hide, roll Stealth against the highest Notice of the opposition. On a success, your character gains a **Hidden** situation aspect to describe their success at avoiding detection. Like with other situation aspects, you can invoke these **Hidden** aspects to improve your attack and defense rolls. It can also provide +2 passive opposition to attacks as you make yourself a difficult target. This passive opposition doesn't stack with a character's skills for defense rolls, though, so if a player has a higher-ranked defensive skill, such as Athletics or Fight, they'll want to roll with the skill instead of relying on the passive opposition.

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While **Hidden**, a player can create an advantage, opposed by the opposition's highest Notice, to place additional free invokes on their **Hidden** aspect. The player can then offer compels to the GM on that **Hidden** aspect so that they can safely escape. Persistent pursuers might want to resist the compel, spending one fate point per free invoke on the aspect. This integrates Stealth with the standard rules of conflicts without boiling things down to a single check at one end or forcing players to concede in order to escape at the other.

The **Hidden** aspect, just like any other situation aspect, is not a blanket permission to ignore all the other characters. An enemy can still attack after they've been **Blinded** or **Stunned**, and a PC can still be attacked even though they are **Hidden**. The player can invoke the aspect turn a hit into a miss with the +2 bonus—because, naturally, it's more difficult to attack someone who is hiding from you—or offer their opposition a compel to get away from danger, but they are otherwise just as vulnerable as anyone else.

You may wonder, doesn't it make more sense that a **Hidden** aspect must be overcome before a PC can be attacked? For two reasons, no. First, consider the kind of scene that comes up when someone uses stealth in a fight: weaving in and out of smoke, fog, or shadows for strikes, all while the opponent lashes out constantly, trying desperately to predict where the next attack will come from. Sometimes, with enough battle instinct, they land a blow on their stealthy opponent.

Second, and of even greater importance, is that if the **Hidden** can generally only be overcome with a single skill (Notice), the balance of the game breaks. Badly. Characters with low Notice would be nearly helpless against even moderately stealthy enemies. And while it might be fun letting someone get away with being invincible, that kind of power can offer perverse incentives, incentives the players might end up pursuing even if it goes against their character concepts or the fun of the game.

RETHINKING STEALTH

Back in the fantasy adventure, the party has launched a surprise attack on the band of orcs. The party's wizard started things off by conjuring up a *Foggy Mist*, and Gary used create an advantage to give his rogue the *Hidden* aspect, before attacking on the second round.

Alice: Okay, round three. The orc chief pulls the knife out of his shoulder, then he's going to try and kick the halfling that stuck him with it. He gets a +5.

Gary: Okay. Rolling...+4. Wait, how can he even find and attack me if I'm all super hidden in the fog?

Alice: Logically, he can't. You can use one of your free invokes on that *Hidden* aspect to turn that hit into a miss.

Gary: That makes sense. I'll do that.

Alice: The orc swings wildly in the fog. His massive blows create gusts of wind that carve up the fog, but he only strikes empty air while the halfling snickers from a safe distance.

Gary's plan to steal the extra Steel Sentinel suit on display at the Superheroic Super Museum was a success, but before he could disable it, it sent out an alert. Clearly outmatched, Gary wants to escape ASAP.

Alice: The guards chasing you roll a +6, dealing another four stress. So that'll be a moderate consequence unless you want to be taken out.

Gary: Conceding would mean I get away, but without the suit, right?

Alice: That's right.

Gary: Forget that! I'll take the moderate consequence, then I'm getting out of here. Going to keep running and create an advantage again for my *Hidden* aspect...and I got a +5. Can I get the guards to lose me if I offer a compel with that aspect?

Alice: The guards get a +2 on their Notice roll, meaning you succeed with style. You had a free invoke on your *Hidden* aspect already, so you now have three free invokes. Since they only have two fate points, they'll have to take that compel and you're in the clear.

Gary: Awesome!

Final Thoughts

Neither Sneaking nor Hiding is a new rule. They're just two different approaches to using the basic rules of Fate Core. The advice is also very general, suited more for games where stealth is one factor among many rather than the most important element. In a game about thieves or ninjas, it can be fine to zoom in on each stealthy encounter and treat a high Stealth rank as an absolutely broken advantage in combat. And in a game of adventurers, if one player can alter reality on a whim while another can wrestle a handful of demigods at a time, it would be less of a problem for the rogue's *Hidden* aspect to make them nigh invincible.

It's up to a GM to pick the best tools for the job at hand. The goal here is simply to sharpen a few of those tools.

Bonus Stunts

If you do use these guidelines, it can be helpful to have a few stunts on hand for players to customize their approach to stealth with. They're only examples, though: just like anything else in Fate, you can use them as they are or as inspiration for designing your own.

Quick Scout. +2 to Stealth when used for scouting and reconnaissance, and when you succeed with style on such tasks, you finish in a fifth the normal time it would take.

Careful Scout. +2 to Stealth when used for infiltration and thwarting security attempts. If you fail, you can try again, but the second attempt takes twice as long.

Infiltrator. +2 to Stealth while hiding in plain sight, disguised as an evil henchperson, hapless low-level employee, mindless zombie, or something similar, as long as you aren't recognized.

Backstabber. Once per session, gain +2 to attack an enemy while you are *Hidden*.

Absconder. +1 when using Stealth to defend against Notice. Also, if you compel an opponent with your *Hidden* aspect to allow you to escape, they must spend 2 fate points to resist it.

Getaway Planner. When you compel your *Hidden* aspect to escape from a conflict, you can take others with you. For each fate point beyond the first added to the compel, whether by you or another party member, you can take someone else. 🎲

CAMP X



CAMP X

by NICOLE WINCHESTER

I'd only been home for a few weeks when I was recruited. I was halfway into my second gin, distracting myself at one of the cabarets on St-Laurent. The city was full of officers on their way somewhere or another, so yet another one trying to chat me up was no surprise.

It was the reason for Captain Stephenson's interest that I had a hard time believing. How could I help win the war or help my friends from so far away? What could I do?

I couldn't say no.

Some of the boys seemed to think the Camp a bit of a lark, playing spy instead of soldier. I didn't have that luxury. I'd run from France, left people to die. I learned how to hurt the people who had made me scurry away like a rat, the people who had taken my friends and my life.

I didn't want to become the person I am, but I was chosen. I will not feel guilty or ashamed for what I've done. Wars are not won by respectable methods.

- Diana Lefort, Camp X Agent

Welcome to Camp X

It's early 1942, and the world is at war. It's impossible to escape, even in far-away North America—rationed items are more difficult to get, and the news is filled with doom from abroad. As the battles drag on and the casualty figures mount, it has become clear to the higher-ups in every country's military that the Allies are not succeeding on any front, even with fresh and eager American troops ready to fight post-Pearl Harbor.

Enlisting in the military of any nation means immediate integration into the war effort for men and women alike. Most new recruits assume they'll be immediately trained and mobilized to the continent, not picked out of the crowd, chosen for a special assignment so secret they were ordered not tell anyone where they were going. They certainly don't expect to be sent to an installation nestled between quiet farms well east of Toronto, on the banks of Lake Ontario.

CAMP X

From 1941 to 1945, Camp X trained more than five hundred Allied covert operatives from Britain, Canada, and the United States, amongst them five future directors of the CIA. Founded as a paramilitary and commando training installation, it is the first espionage training facility in North America and considered the foundation of modern North American spy training.

MAYHEM AND MURDER

Camp X is filled with accents. There's a range of Brits both training and teaching, from across London and the countryside; French-Canadians that can switch between languages with startling accuracy; Americans from East to West, some that sound closer to the Canadians than anyone else. There are women as well as men: training alongside male officers, working in the communications centre, leading teams already deployed.

They call it the school of “mayhem and murder,” and it's a fair assessment. Reasonable, upstanding officers and citizens teach unimaginable death and destruction—burglary, interrogation, close combat, demolition, silent killing, assassination. The rumor is, when agents graduate, they can kill a man with their bare hands in fifteen seconds. Other lessons include disguise, sabotage, surveillance, and recruitment, along with Morse code and basic encryption to communicate across the ocean while in the field.

HYDRA

Disguised as a Canadian Broadcasting Corporation transmitter, “Hydra” is the codename for the state-of-the-art telecommunication center that links Allied agents across the Atlantic and around the world. This international intelligence hub transmits and receives thousands of messages daily—much of the secret intelligence between the continents. Hydra's staff of Canadian women transcribe, decode, and prioritize messages from agents and installations round-the-clock, escalating and replying to emergency transmissions when necessary. The communications center housing Hydra is secure and secretive, even for a spy school, and outsiders coming too close are shot on sight.

THE GREATER GOOD

Each Camp X recruit was chosen specifically for their skills and abilities, qualities that make them each an excellent spy. They will save hundreds, thousands of lives—or so they're told—by doing terrible things for the greater good. Reconciling the bloody work of espionage with some greater purpose is no easy task, even with the tide of Nazi occupation to break. War is a dirty business, and this is the darkest, dirtiest part.

SETTING CREATION

Camp X is a Quick Start with everything you need to get right into your first session. Before you begin, you'll want to talk about the broader setting with your group, maybe even reading aloud "Welcome to Camp X," "Mayhem and Murder," "Hydra," and "The Greater Good," so everyone is on the same page. At the start of play, explain the **current issue** to your players and ask them to fill in one or two additional faces associated with *The Quiet War*. These additional characters will provide new plot hooks and twists that will tie your players more deeply to the operations they're about to be sent on.

Then ask your players to choose from one of the two available **impending issues**: *Allied Politics* or *Missing Operatives*. Have them fill in one or two additional faces for their chosen impending issue as well, rounding out the larger cast of characters with their suggestions.

A Note about History

This Quick Start is historically inspired, but does not require 100% historical accuracy. There's nothing more you need to know! If you enjoy research, feel free, but the basics of World War II remain the same.

CURRENT ISSUE: THE QUIET WAR

The War has been going badly for the Allies, though exactly how badly is classified. Until the newly recruited agents get to Camp X, they have no idea how dire the situation has become. There are American troops on the way, but there's a strong belief in the military that intelligence will be key to victory. This is the Quiet War, the war of codes and cyphers, of stealth and secrecy, of assignments and assassinations. Camp X operatives are well-trained, skilled, deadly assets for the Allies, but the Axis has its own agents, just as dangerous and unforgiving in their method.

Faces:

William Stephenson: Code Name: Intrepid. Canadian commander of Camp X, a "real life James Bond," according to Ian Fleming.

Mysterious Nazi Spymaster: Code Name: Red Baron. In charge of German intelligence (*Abwehr*), often anticipates Allied agent movements.

CAMP X

The Quiet War

The War has been going badly for the Allies, though exactly how badly is classified. Until Camp X

William Stephenson

Code Name: Intrepid.
Canadian commander of Camp X.

Mysterious Nazi Spymaster

Code Name: Red Baron.
In charge of German intelligence.

IMPENDING ISSUES:

In addition to *The Quiet War* and the threat it poses to the world and our agents, there are a number of other impending issues that put Camp X and its operations at risk, including:

Allied Politics

Everyone is supposed to work together in times of war—but in reality, political agendas aren't so easily forgotten. Camp X is a Canadian installation, but as chief of British Security Coordination as well as commander of the camp, Stephenson is beholden to the Crown. Meanwhile, the United States is gaining greater influence in the war due to resources and at the camp due to proximity. The war-weariness and caution of the Brits must be balanced with the impatience and determination of the Americans in every operation, and agents will negotiate the same politics in their own cells. Agents' "home" organizations will have "friendly" requests that suit their own agendas, and how operatives respond will affect their relationships with superiors.

Faces:

Lieutenant Rupert Sackville: Proper MI6 officer, assigned to "keep an eye on things" at Camp X by the head of Britain's MI6.

Colonel William Joseph "Wild Bill" Donovan: Head of the American Office of Strategic Services, friend to William Stephenson.

CAMP X

Missing Operatives

The risk of getting caught or killed is part of the job, but it's still no less of a shock when there's news of a missing agent—even worse when you know them. René Durant, a Quebecois operative, arrived at Camp X just before the team, and was deployed to France only weeks ago. He went dark shortly after a transmission his girlfriend, Loretta Cregg, received—which she wasn't supposed to decode...but did anyway. René was certain he was being followed, and by someone responsible for the disappearances of a number of agents. But nothing more came from him, and assets keep disappearing across Europe. Is there a leak? Or a mole?

Faces:

René Durant: Code Name: Endure. Missing Camp X agent, last communication received from outside Versailles; Retta's boyfriend.

Loretta "Retta" Cregg: Code Name: Snakecharmer. Hydra communications officer, works on European time; René's girlfriend.



CHARACTER CREATION

Camp X works best with Fate Core characters, as spies in World War II tended to specialize in ways that traditional skills illustrate clearly. If you choose to use Fate Accelerated approaches, players will find they have agents with very similar approaches and capabilities, and only stunts to differentiate them.

CAMP X



In *Camp X*, players take on the roles of newly trained World War II spies, sent to wage a stealth war against the Axis, taking necessary actions for the greater good. It's possible for players to play officers or others that operate out of the camp in Ontario, but as the action will happen in the field, those characters probably won't have a very direct role in the story.

Players should select a high concept and a trouble. In choosing a high concept, consider the reason you were chosen to train at Camp X—what made you stand out as a potential spy? What makes you special?

Instead of the first aspect of the phase trio, players choose a **code name aspect** for their agent, such as *Intrepid*, *White Mouse*, *Prosper*, or *Madeleine*. Code names are very much in the spirit of the spy genre, and can reflect how the character is seen by the people around them. Code names can also be random, but it might be more fun for everyone to suggest some cool code names for one another's agents!

Rather than completing the last two phases of character creation as usual, begin by creating a **war aspect** that connects your character to *The Quiet War*. Why did you agree to training when you were asked to come to Camp X? What makes you determined to be part of this war?

Finally, use a **relationship aspect** to illustrate relationships between the characters, but with a focus on the camp and how they came together there. Are they compatriots, friends, or rivals? What might get in the way of working as a team?

SKILL LIST

Camp X uses some modified skills from traditional Fate Core. These skills aren't new, but they've been renamed and contextualized to ensure that they fit the setting. The other skills (Athletics, Burglary, Contacts, Deceive, Drive, Empathy, Fight, Investigate, Physique, Provoke, Rapport,

CAMP X

Resources, Shoot, Stealth, and Will) remain unchanged. *Camp X* also adds two new skills for agents: **Demolition** and **Language**.

Repair (Craft)

Operatives, especially those responsible for communications, learn how to handle basic electronic and mechanical repairs. They also learn the finer points of sabotage. Repair can be used to cut brakes, cut off communications, and otherwise cause problems for the enemy as long as there's machinery or electrical equipment involved.

Intel (Lore)

All agents are briefed on their missions, but some will do extra homework—or unauthorized digging—to make sure they're well informed. Intel is what you know about Camp X's operations and the Quiet War as it's fought. Whether you have high clearance or friends in high places, you get to read all the good stuff.

DEMOLITION

Some people just like to blow things up. Where Repair is for the building or breaking of machinery and electronics, Demolition is purely for destruction. But it's not as easy as you think to make explosions—the job requires precision, skill, and a certain disregard for personal safety.



Overcome: Destroy bridges and buildings with the appropriate equipment and time. Use multiple actions and challenges for chain reactions, or to limit collateral damage.



Create an Advantage: Create an explosion as a distraction. Cut off a city by destroying the roads out.



Attack: Demolition as an assassination method—create a suitcase bomb or other small explosive for the target.



Defend: It's difficult to use Demolition to defend...unless you want to risk blowing yourself up at the same time.

STUNTS

I'm Taking Them with Me. Get a +2 to overcome or attack actions with Demolitions whenever you put yourself at significant risk to incur maximum damage. Consequences will likely come from the action, depending on the situation.

Who Needs a Key? Use Demolitions instead of Burglary when dealing with vaults, banks, jails, fortifications—anything where you need to get *in*, or get something *out*.

Survival (Notice)

Camp X uses the Survival skill developed by Ryan Macklin in *THE FATE CODEX*, Volume 1, Issue 2. Operatives use Survival to navigate in the field, travel undetected behind enemy lines, and find resources when they need to go into hiding.

Automatic Discovery

As Notice has been removed from the skill list, **Camp X** makes use of the Automatic Discovery system developed by Ryan Macklin for use with Survival (*THE FATE CODEX*, Volume 1, Issue 2). Skills rated at Good (+3) or higher automatically succeed at rolls to overcome or create advantages using passive discovery while skills rated at Great (+4) or higher automatically succeed with style. Spies are trained to notice everything, after all.

LANGUAGE

In the field, it's not just *what* languages you speak, but *how* you speak them: how well, with what sort of accent, what words you use. Language allows characters to speak multiple languages fluently and learn additional languages easily. The Language skill also covers signals and cyphers, making it easier to send and receive messages—or intercept the enemy's.



Overcome: Translating papers; sounding like a local; speaking, reading, or listening to a new language; sending or receiving coded messages.



Create an Advantage: Eavesdropping on conversations; intercepting enemy messages; writing propaganda for the locals.



Attack: You can't attack with Language.



Defend: Language isn't used to defend.

STUNTS

The Long O Means We're in Lyon. You can pinpoint your location based on the regional differences in accent when you listen in on a few spoken phrases in a language you understand.

Heart of a People. When you speak another language, you understand a people. Use Language in place of Empathy to create an advantage when dealing with native speakers.

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GROUP CONSEQUENCES

In addition to the usual stress tracks and consequences, *Camp X* uses a modified version of group consequences from the FATE SYSTEM TOOLKIT (page 61). Since the agents in a cell almost always work as a team, they will be in danger together, face the consequences of their actions together, and could even be compromised together.

As such, the team takes consequences before the agents do. The team has the same number of consequence slots as a character: one mild, one moderate, and one major. When an agent chooses to use a consequence slot instead of taking stress, that consequence is taken by the team if the corresponding slot is empty.

Ben gets into a fight with several German guards. He manages to get away, but the Germans inflict 4 stress. The team currently only has a mild consequence, so Ben fills the moderate slot with *Injured Agent*. He thinks he's cracked a rib. If he gets into another fight, the moderate slot on his own sheet is still free.

A group consequence can be cleared like a regular one, using an overcome action with whatever skill seems most appropriate. For example, if the team has taken the major consequence *Compromised*, actions must be made to arrange new cover identities for everyone before it can be cleared.

Example Group Consequences:

Mild: *German Radio Surveillance, IDed by Local Police, Contact Lost*

Moderate: *Injured Agent, Safe House Inaccessible, Cleanup Mission Required*

Major: *Compromised, Severely Injured Agent, Known to Gestapo*

OPENING SCENE: Breaking into Camp X

All of the newly trained agents have just been put into cells, and the player characters have had a few days to get to know each other and their capabilities. One evening, when coming out of the mess hall, they're pulled aside by a junior officer and taken to a delivery truck with an enclosed cargo area—no windows. They're handed an envelope and a pack of matches and given no other instructions than to read the letter once they're in the back of the truck.

The letter is from Stephenson, the head of the camp, telling them they're next up for the drop into France—there's only one test left. Infiltrate Camp X after being left in the Ontario countryside with only what they have on their backs. Night is coming on fast and the truck doesn't seem to be stopping any time soon. What did they bring with them? And how will the team stand up to the challenge?

Opening Aspects: *Heavy Guard, Electric Fences, Cover of Darkness*

SKILL CHALLENGES:

In finding their way back to Camp X, the characters might encounter a number of obstacles. In general, selecting roughly two challenges per character gives everyone a chance to show their skills. Here are a few challenges the agents may need to make to infiltrate the camp:

Survival: The agents have been dropped off approximately 30 km/19 miles from the camp. Figuring this out, and what direction the camp lies, requires some knowledge of navigation and terrain. Difficulty: Fair (+2)

Repair: The agents might find an unattended car to hotwire and make a quick trip back to base—and when they get there, Repair can help disable the electric fences and alarm systems around the camp. Difficulty: Fair (+2) to Great (+4)

Fight: It's obvious, but it works: knock out the guards. No one said it was against the rules, but the guards might not be too pleased with the team in the long run. Difficulty: Great (+4)

Athletics: Climbing the fences, even if deactivated, takes some skill—even just to avoid cuts from the barbed wire, or an injury from a fall. Difficulty: Fair (+2)

Deceive: If the team is discovered, a clever agent may have to provide guards with a plausible cover story that clears them all. What, that mission? We're done with it already! Difficulty: Good (+3)

MIDDLE SCENE: Dropped Into Action

If the characters succeed, they're able to infiltrate the camp in time to overhear the discussion of two intelligence officers sharing a cigarette outside. They're concerned about the actions of a reckless Resistance contact in France code named "Liselle," though one expresses sympathy: wouldn't anyone be the same over their own missing sister?

Either way, after the new agents report in, they're summoned to Stephenson's office. It's not to call them on the carpet or congratulate them, but to inform them another cell has gone missing in France. This one was in the middle of a mission to destroy a bridge that would cut off German supply lines in much of the occupied country. The intelligence shows a large shipment coming in less than a week, and no teams in Europe can be spared. The team will leave for CFB Trenton, then for Britain immediately.

Flown from England to France at night on a massive cargo plane, the team is set to jump when shots interrupt the drop! The plane has to make evasive maneuvers to avoid the fighters, and when the agents get the chance to jump, they're off course—though they've made it to France mostly in one piece. Now, they must evade German patrols while getting to their target.

Opening Aspects: *Behind Enemy Lines, Position Unknown, Nearby Barn*

GERMAN PATROL

4 German soldiers on regular patrol. They aren't expecting anyone, but they'd love to find someone.

ASPECTS

PATRIOTIC GOONS • ITCHY TRIGGER-FINGERS

SKILL MODES

GOOD (+3) Fighting, Intimidating

POOR (-1) Paying Attention to Detail

STRESS

□ □ □

WILLIAM STEPHENSON

Self-deprecating and unassuming, William Stephenson might say his job is “eighty percent paperwork,” but he’s the heart and soul of Camp X—and some say the money behind it as well. The Winnipeg-born millionaire industrialist and lightweight boxing champ was a World War I flying ace, sent to run both British Security Coordination and Camp X by Churchill himself. It’s rumored he’s in constant talks with the Prime Minister and President Roosevelt, but like any good spymaster, he gives nothing away.

ASPECTS

HIGH CONCEPT: QUIET CANADIAN SPYMASTER

TROUBLE: FEARLESS

CODE NAME: INTREPID

WAR: ONLY MAN FOR THE JOB

RELATIONSHIPS: CHURCHILL’S TRUST

OTHER: FAILURE IS NOT AN OPTION

SKILLS

SUPERB (+5)	Intel
GREAT (+4)	Rapport, Resources
GOOD (+3)	Contacts, Fight, Shoot
FAIR (+2)	Deceive, Physique, Stealth, Survival
AVERAGE (+1)	Burglary, Investigate, Language, Repair, Will

STUNTS

Trust Me. You naturally inspire trust. Use Rapport instead of Deceive when attempting to overcome and make someone believe your lies or cover story.

Extraction Point. You always find a way to get your people out. When a cell is trapped or captured, gain +2 to create an advantage with Intel or Contacts to find a way to free them.

Knockout. You’re good at fighting with your fists. Gain +2 to attack whenever using Fight in a fistfight or bare-knuckle brawl.

STRESS

Mental: ☐☐☐

Physical: ☐☐☐☐

CONSEQUENCES

Mild (2) | Moderate (4) | Major (6)

NOTES

Refresh: 3

FINAL SCENE: Eliminating the Target



When they make it to the target location, their Resistance contact, “Liselle,” a girl of no more than fourteen, is frantic and relieved all at once. The time they’ve spent off-course and evading capture has made them very nearly too late. They can still blow up the bridge before the train is scheduled to arrive, but they’ll certainly put the train—loaded with over two hundred civilians along with the targeted German munitions—in danger. Casualties were not part of the plan, let alone hundreds.

If the team hesitates, Liselle argues passionately that it’s better to cut off the supplies and risk the deaths of “a few collaborators and Nazis” now rather than thousands of her countrymen’s lives later. However, as the team discovered in the previous scene, Liselle is reckless, possibly seeking revenge for her sister’s disappearance. There may be time to stop the train, but should the team trust Liselle? Can they risk condemning that many civilians to death in their first real mission? If they can’t, are they willing to ignore orders and face the wrath of their superiors? Or can they think of another plan?

If the cell decides not to blow up the bridge, Liselle will angrily promise to report their failure to her superiors in the Resistance. The team will have to radio in a report as well, for which they will be reprimanded: orders are orders, unless they had time and opportunity to confirm otherwise. They won’t be pulled from the field, but will be tasked with repairing relations with Resistance contacts in the area—starting with Liselle. Freeing Resistance prisoners held by the Germans in the mission seed “Rescue Mission” (page 136) is an excellent way to do just that.

ANGELIQUE BROCHU, AKA "LISELLE"

Angelique has lived in the same quiet village for most of her life, above her family's bakery. Her older sister has always been her best friend, so when Marie came home talking of a special school she'd been chosen for, Angelique was excited for her. But Marie, along with the prettiest, smartest girls in their village, disappeared. When Angelique tried to find out what happened to Marie, she found the Resistance.

ASPECTS

HIGH CONCEPT: IDEALISTIC REBEL

TROUBLE: IMPULSIVE

CODE NAME: LISELLE

WAR: THEY TOOK MY SISTER

RELATIONSHIPS: OLD ENOUGH

SKILLS

GREAT (+4)	Stealth
GOOD (+3)	Deceive, Empathy
FAIR (+2)	Contacts, Fight, Rapport
AVERAGE (+1)	Burglary, Demolition, Repair, Will

STUNTS

Just a Girl. Get a +2 to overcome or creating an advantage when you're caught in a restricted place or a sticky situation. You're just a girl, you had no idea!

I Get Stabby. Use Stealth instead of Fight when using a concealed knife. This can only be used on the first attack.

Please Stop Crying. Use Deceive instead of Provoke to make a mental attack when you cry in front of your target.

STRESS

Mental: ☐ ☐ ☐

Physical: ☐ ☐

CONSEQUENCES

Mild (2) | Moderate (4) | Major (6)

NOTES

Refresh: 3

PLOT HOOKS AND MISSION SEEDS

The players may have completed their first mission—or refused to do so—but that’s not the end of the War in Europe. And there are still impending issues at work. Here’s a few plot hooks and mission seeds to keep the spies in the field and the story going:

RESCUE MISSION

Where is the cell that disappeared? Where are any of the agents that have gone missing across Europe, especially René? At the camp, they have to assume the worst and wait for word, but in the field, the team can investigate the possible rescue of Allied agents. “Liselle” can show the team the last known location of the cell as a starting point—are the agents willing to go on an unofficial rescue mission that could put them in the sights of German intelligence?

SPYING FOR BIG BROTHER

MI-6 wants to know what Canada’s doing, and the team is Big Brother’s next target. A message comes in over wireless from London, asking for a meeting. When they get to the location, there’s a British asset with word from Lieutenant Sackville, requesting the team’s help, on behalf of the Queen herself: keep the Brits apprised of the cell’s orders from their Canadian commanders. If everything is on the up-and-up, what’s the harm? Does the team agree to the request? Does everyone agree with the decision to work with or alienate the Lieutenant?

DOUBLE AGENTS

With agents missing and drops compromised, there are obviously double agents somewhere within the Allied cause, whether at Camp X, in the military agencies, or in the Resistance. Who can be trusted? Who amongst their contacts and colleagues are really working for the other side and what could be their motivations? What do the Germans know about the team? About their missions? Have they been compromised? Are their closest friends and allies really the people they seem?

Sample Characters

Here are a few characters created just for this Quick Start, built to work together as a cell so group consequences can be used right away! If you want to start playing now, choose between these intrepid agents:

DIANA LEFORT

With a German father and a mother from Montreal, Diana's French is excellent and her German impeccable. A fashionable art student at the Sorbonne until the invasion of France, she fled to Canada, leaving her life behind. That life haunts her now that she knows how little of it is left, many of her friends dead or disappeared. Now, she's equally glamorous and deadly, skills honed sharp by her desire for vengeance.

ASPECTS

HIGH CONCEPT: GLAMOROUS STONE COLD KILLER

TROUBLE: MY NAME IS VENGEANCE

CODE NAME: CHAPLAIN

WAR: THEY KILLED MY FRIENDS

RELATIONSHIPS: CAN'T STAND BULLIES

SKILLS

GREAT (+4) Language
GOOD (+3) Deceive, Stealth
FAIR (+2) Empathy, Fight, Rapport
AVERAGE (+1) Burglary, Contacts, Repair, Shoot

STUNTS

Just Another Villager. It's easy for you to speak with local accents and dialects. Use Language instead of Deceive when attempting to overcome or create an advantage to blend in.

15 Seconds to Kill a Man. You are a lethal weapon. Once per session, you can spend a fate point to add +4 to a Fight roll.

Absolutely Fabulous. You can still dazzle people with your glamour and sophistication. Get a +2 to create an advantage with Deceive or Rapport when you're stylishly dressed.

STRESS

Mental: ☐ ☐

Physical: ☐ ☐

CONSEQUENCES

Mild (2) | Moderate (4) | Major (6)

NOTES

Refresh: 3

INDIRA KHAN

The daughter of an Indian musician and an American scholar, Indira lived in several countries before she could walk. Once the family settled in London, the shy, sensitive girl found joy and confidence in writing children's books. But her strong belief in pacifism couldn't overcome her sense of duty as the war continued on. Indira became a skilled radio operator, learning signals and code quickly. Though her kindness and naiveté concern her superiors, she's the best woman for the job.

ASPECTS

HIGH CONCEPT: DREAMY RADIO NERD

TROUBLE: STUBBORNLY IDEALISTIC

CODE NAME: TEACHER

WAR: BUILDING A BRIDGE

RELATIONSHIPS: PACIFIST IN WARTIME

SKILLS

GREAT (+4) Intel

GOOD (+3) Empathy, Language

FAIR (+2) Repair, Stealth, Will

AVERAGE (+1) Contacts, Deceive, Investigate, Rapport

STUNTS

I Read It in the Briefing. You've read all the briefings. Every single one. Twice. Get a +2 bonus to create an advantage with Intel when it's related to the mission at hand, or any of your past missions.

Shoulder to Cry On. You have an uncanny sense for people's emotional state, and can lend a friendly ear...especially when they have information waiting to come out. Use Empathy instead of Rapport in any roll to do with gaining someone's trust.

I'll Never Talk. When you are being interrogated or tortured, you can choose to ignore any consequence gained during that scene for the duration of the scene at no cost. It can't be compelled against you or invoked by your enemies.

STRESS

Mental: ☐ ☐ ☐

Physical: ☐ ☐

CONSEQUENCES

Mild (2) | Moderate (4) | Major (6)

NOTES

Refresh: 3

BENJAMIN PEARSON

Ben grew up knowing that only two things got men out of the Saskatchewan wheat fields: war and hockey. His father went to war, but didn't have much use for hockey. He tried to listen to his mother and not pay his father any mind, but even if he played hockey well enough to be a hometown hero, he still felt like his father was waiting for him to do something more *important*. When he enlisted, Ben thought his father did seem proud, for once. But now, Ben can't talk about anything he does.

ASPECTS

HIGH CONCEPT: FARM BOY WITH EXPLOSIVES

TROUBLE: SOMETHING TO PROVE

CODE NAME: MONK

WAR: DADDY ISSUES

RELATIONSHIPS: DON'T HURT MY FRIENDS

SKILLS

GREAT (+4)	Athletics
GOOD (+3)	Fight, Physique
FAIR (+2)	Demolitions, Drive, Survival
AVERAGE (+1)	Burglary, Provoke, Rapport, Stealth

STUNTS

Lighting Two Fuses. You're good at exposing weaknesses—by destroying things. Use Demolitions instead of Provoke when attempting to overcome and make the enemy react.

Hard Headed. You're used to taking hits. Once per session, you can spend a fate point to ignore consequences gained during a conflict for one full scene. You still take the consequences, but they can't be compelled or invoked by your enemies for that scene.

He Shoots, He Scores. Years of hockey have made your hand-eye coordination second to none. Use Athletics in place of Shoot when firing weapons.

STRESS

Mental: ☐ ☐

Physical: ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

CONSEQUENCES

Mild (2) | Moderate (4) | Major (6)

NOTES

Refresh: 3



“I REMEMBER WHEN...”: USING FLASHBACKS IN FATE

by TARA ZUBER

Each episode of the television series *PSYCH* begins with a recurring narrative device: a flashback to the main character’s childhood that develops defining relationships, establishes his quirky character and habits, and introduces new elements to his world. An episode about a haunted house begins with a flashback of Shawn as a child witnessing a woman falling from the same house, establishing the house as an existing part of Shawn’s life.

When used well, flashbacks are a powerful technique in any storyteller’s arsenal. They precede or interrupt story time to (re)introduce or establish new world and character elements *without* interrupting story progression. While most traditionally used in film, television, and print, they can also work within tabletop games.

In particular, flashbacks in *Fate* can provide a way to engage your players in ongoing worldbuilding and story building, develop characters and relationships, and give the PCs more opportunities to create advantages and setting aspects.

Why Use Flashbacks?

Flashbacks open up opportunities for both GMs and players. As your players delve into their character's personal histories and the background of the world, you learn more about what they value in the game.

ONGOING WORLDBUILDING

Fate emphasizes player involvement in the initial worldbuilding, but once the game starts players have fewer ways to affect how the world develops. They can declare story details with fate points, but such declarations often relate to immediate circumstances that may not have wider implications. Flashbacks let players focus on the bigger picture instead of immediate problems, adding elements that build the world after character creation.

For example, *ARROW* chronicles Green Arrow's origin by splitting each episode between present day and Oliver Queen's formative time on the island that forced him to grow beyond his playboy youth. This split format introduces or elaborates on elements in Oliver's life. Before appearing in the present day narrative as an active threat, one character—Slade—appeared in the island flashbacks. The flashbacks help the audience understand Slade's influence over Oliver in ways that would be impossible if the character just showed up in the narrative.

Imagine that Oliver Queen is one of your PCs and his player decides, long after the initial game and world creation, that he wants to add an old mentor as one of the party's enemies. In a flashback, the player introduces the mentor and the event that sundered their relationship. This creates the character, his motivation, and a new conflict for the party...all while making the PC's past richer and more detailed.

SHAPING THE STORY

Introducing new facets to a world and story allows players to directly affect the direction and tone of the story. The game we start playing may not match the game we want to play as the group grows together. Perhaps a player realizes they want a darker tone with more serious issues or they want a romantic element that didn't previously seem interesting. Players can tell the GM what they want to see, but that doesn't mean you can snap your fingers and make it happen in the narrative.

Flashbacks give players more direct control over the narrative's scope and tone. A player who wants a more romantic element might flashback to someone they once loved but left behind or to a former spouse and the spark they never managed to quench.

The player's flashback contributes to the overall story with the tone or direction they'd like the story to go. They show the group what they want

"I REMEMBER WHEN..."

instead of just talking about it out-of-character. They can also decide how deeply those elements still influence their character and how the character engages when aspects of the past reappear in the present.

DEVELOPING CHARACTERS AND RELATIONSHIPS

Flashbacks let players share their characters' backstories, fiction that rarely makes it out of their heads or off their character sheets. Using a flashback, a player can share this backstory with the other players, potentially inspiring new ways for their characters to interact.

In a game I run, one PC formed a familial tie with an older woman she met during character creation. Since this NPC informed one of the character's aspects, everyone at the table knew she was an important motivating force for the PC. A flashback revealed that the PC had moved in with the older woman, contrary to the PCs' lifelong preference for solitude and mobility. The flashback showed me how deeply the NPC influenced the character—and gave me a new location the character values and wants to protect.

Flashbacks give players opportunities to share details and bits of story that don't fit elsewhere. They also help anchor characters into the world by providing a sense of past and continuance. They aren't just people wandering around—they're people with a past that has affected and helped form the present day. Their characters have weight in the world and the flashbacks let them show why and how.

CREATING ADVANTAGES AND SETTING ASPECTS

Players can use flashbacks to create advantages by establishing past interaction with current story elements. A player may describe how they visited this town as a young teen, long before they met their current party, and befriended the local bookshop owner (thus creating an advantage based on that friendship). Or they helped the mayor locate his lost child and the mayor owes them a favor (*A Mayor in Debt*) they haven't called in yet.

Anchoring a created advantage into the past creates the sense of history the game might not otherwise have. A PC could charm the bookseller, but using the flashback creates a longstanding relationship that matters.

Each flashback also gives the GM plot and character hooks. The mayor owes the PC a favor, but also views them as a problem-solver now. What new problems might the mayor bring to them? You can also extrapolate from the flashbacks. Some people in town wanted the mayor out. How will they get revenge for their wrecked plans now that the PC is back in town?

"I REMEMBER WHEN..."

Each flashback fills the world with new places to explore that have narrative weight for one of the PCs. When a player shares how their character once got thrown out of a bar, they've created a bar for the PCs to visit during regular story time—complete with ideas for aspects based on the PC's flashback. When they visit the bar, who remembers the PC? How do they react? Each location is no longer just a handful of aspects and some description—it's a place with history for at least one of your PCs. And, likewise, each character is someone a PC knows and has a relationship with. The places and people *matter*. And the PC has an advantage to prove it.

Using Flashbacks in Fate

Setting up a flashback in Fate is easy. The player sets the time and place, framing the situation, and then you—the GM—run the scene, determining if any rolls are needed and narrating the overall outcome. Finally, the player describes how the flashback affected their character, helping the group understand how the elements shape their backstory.

STEP 1: SETTING TIME AND PLACE

Most longer flashbacks in film or on television include a caption like “Five Years Ago” or “2000: Washington DC” to let the viewers know when the scene is taking place. Others may use more subtle cues like background decorations or the apparent ages of the characters.

Before your player describes their flashback, ask them where and when it's taking place. Try to be specific enough that the other players can place the flashback in the timeline, but leave things vague when it works for the story, e.g., “This happened before I lost my hand to a rival swordswoman.”

STEP 2: FRAMING THE SITUATION

The player whose character has the flashback frames the scene; they say what happened as they might describe any scene from the past. Encourage the players to pull in sensory information, such as what they heard, smelled, and felt.

For example, a player might say, “I came through this town about three years ago and helped the mayor find his missing child.” If the player has trouble, ask prompting questions like “What happened?”, “What did the other people there do?”, and “How did you do it?” Try to get a sense of how the scene will play out before you start, but leave it up to the player to detail the situation.

STEP 3: RUNNING THE SCENE

After the player frames the flashback, you still need to run the scene to get the full effect. FATE CORE SYSTEM describes two ways of manipulating story time that also work well in running flashbacks: "Story Time and the Scope of an Action" and "Zoom In, Zoom Out" (pages 198-201).

Scope of an Action

"Story Time and the Scope of an Action" describes using a single contest, challenge, conflict, or skill roll to represent a large span of time to determine the overall outcome. This technique compresses the amount of actual time a series of story actions takes. Since flashbacks should be brief interruptions rather than long scenes, representing the scene with a single roll or set of rolls helps keep the memory contained.

Incorporating at least one roll into the flashback introduces a degree of chance. Since flashbacks are set in the past, the ultimate outcome is clear—the PCs are alive and doing their work, plus the player may have included a final result in their framing. The *way* the outcome came about, however, is more up in the air. If a player frames a scene at a high school dance with an NPC that ends with a sweet kiss and the memory of the NPC as the one who got away, set up a quick challenge with overcome actions like inviting the date, finding the right outfit, and impressing their date with their dance moves. The PC remembers the kiss at the end of the night, but the challenge describes how they reached that point and whether the NPC remembers more than how they did the lawnmower on the dance floor.

Zoom In, Zoom Out

"Zoom In, Zoom Out" gives another way to include chance in the flashback while condensing the amount of time the scene takes. The flashback begins with a broad description, then zooms in on a specific incident that could have gone either way, then zooms back out for the wrap-up. For example, a player may flashback to the year their character spent doing transport for a shady company. As they describe the kind of work they did and their run-ins with the law, zoom in on one of those run-ins and how they convinced the lawmen to let them go. Then zoom back out and ask the player to explain how their run-in affected the rest of their tenure with the company.

As the player describes the memory, listen for points that could be summarized into a roll or series of rolls or for areas where you can zoom in on the action. Remember, the ultimate outcome is already known, but the method is fuzzy. Use rolls to decide *how* something happened, rather

"I REMEMBER WHEN..."

than whether or not it did. And remember that success at a major cost is always on the table.

STEP 4: FINISHING THE SCENE

After the rolls are completed, narrate the outcome as usual. Then let the player briefly describe how the outcome affected the PC and contributed to the personality, skills, motivations, or other areas of their character. Flashbacks help build both the world and the characters.

Take notes on the people, places, things, and ideas the player mentions or encounters during their flashback and reincorporate as many as possible into future scenes. Merge an upcoming NPC with someone from a flashback. Keep track of places so PCs can visit them. Items may always pop up again and ideas may affect how people act or define themselves. Try to create at least one or two strong connections between the past and present.

Other players can consider how the flashback affects their character. Perhaps they've been to the same area or heard of the same special items. Remind your players that their characters may not know about the events of the flashback and so shouldn't suddenly change their behavior until they have in-character knowledge and reason for doing so.

Setting Flashback Parameters

At their best, flashbacks enrich the story and world without breaking the present time or game momentum. At their worst, they confuse story time, add bloat to the game, and contradict what we already know about the story. To get the most out of your flashbacks, set parameters with your players before you start using them in your game.

WHEN DO WE FLASHBACK?

With your group, decide when flashbacks are appropriate and how they can be brought up during play. While flashbacks in the middle of a game session reflect the spontaneity of the game, they also pose a greater disruption to the existing story. It's often better to either start or end the game with a flashback. Since many Fate sessions tend to run overtime, starting the game with one is probably easiest!

Starting with a flashback also gets the game session going with action that's less intensive and may not require all players be present. This is useful if a player is running late or you don't want to get into the meat of the game until after a food delivery arrives. If you start each session with a flashback, it creates a ritual that signals that the game has begun, easing

"I REMEMBER WHEN..."

the players back into the game world and getting everyone focused for the next scene in present time.

HOW MANY FLASHBACKS DO YOU GET?

The next decision is how many flashbacks happen per game and who gets each one. Fewer flashbacks per game means fewer disruptions and ensures that the majority of game action is set in the present timeline.

Players can take turns with their flashbacks or you can offer them a set number of flashbacks, such as three per scenario, adjusting that number by the projected length of the story. If you expect it to be short, offer fewer flashbacks. Give more flashbacks for longer tales.

In the game I run, each session has one flashback at the beginning and the players take turns narrating. Each flashback is set during the year between the end of the character creation scene and the start of the first session. Prior to the game, the players usually give me a heads up about what they have planned, but otherwise the flashback is their show.

Rules for Flashbacks

Flashbacks make your players time travelers who can affect the present time of the game by visiting their characters' pasts. As with time travel, we need some rules to avoid breaking the game, either by creating paradoxes within the story or by making the game uncomfortable for other players. Flashbacks can be extremely powerful, so we must use them responsibly.

RULE #1: DON'T CONTRADICT THE PRESENT!

The first rule is that discoveries in the flashback cannot break the ongoing continuity of the story. While the players travel through time in the narrative, their characters are *not* time traveling: the actions and outcomes of the past don't change the present because they *created* the present. You can't reveal in a flashback that dragons actually exist when the group has agreed they never did.

While players can't contradict the present, they can add new elements to it based on what they learn in the flashback. If your group hasn't said that dragons don't exist (and dragons are appropriate to the setting), a player can introduce dragons by remembering a childhood encounter with one. Nothing's broken when a gap is filled.

RULE #2: THE PAST HAPPENED!

The second rule is that the past *happened*; you can't rewrite an old flashback with a new flashback. Once a flashback is set and described, it happened. The past should be apparent in the present and you can't ignore

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what was revealed. Make sure your players know that whatever they introduce during a flashback is fair game for later incorporation into the game, even if it changes the direction of the story.

After a character has a flashback about a dragon, the players might encounter someone selling dragon scales on the black market. Or maybe they peel back a layer of advertisements on a wall to reveal a faded dragon mural. Some PCs may have thought dragons were a myth, but now they're unsure. This might set up a question for the PCs to investigate: what happened to all the dragons?

RULE #3: HONOR PLAYER BOUNDARIES!

The third rule is that players cannot use a flashback to introduce an element that discomforts other players. If the players decided that rape wouldn't be part of any of their storylines, no one can later introduce rape through a flashback. The flashback is still part of the story, even if the event occurred before the current events began.

If a flashback starts to move toward a topic that your group decided against or that you know makes another player uncomfortable, stop game play to discuss. Ask the player narrating the flashback why they've pulled in this element and brainstorm as a group how to achieve the desired effect in a way that everyone is comfortable with. Such situations are easier to avoid if players run their flashback ideas past the group prior to the game.

Powerful Tools

Flashbacks are a powerful tool for any gaming group. They let players spotlight their characters while giving them an opportunity to contribute to the ongoing development of the world. They also give the GM some feedback on what players want to see in their game. Used well, they can enrich the world and more firmly tie the current setting to each character's backstory, increasing the players' investment in the world and building new and exciting revelations without disrupting the ongoing flow of the story. 🎲



UNDER THE HOOD: SKILLS AS CHARACTER COMPETENCY AND PLAYER INFLUENCE

by TRAVIS SCOTT

Fate Core is a stylish storytelling vehicle built on a pair of simple yet powerful concepts. Aspects are the most noticeable. They're the sleek exterior, the high-tech touch screen in the dash, the body-shaking sound system. Just about everything we can see, hear, and feel in a game of Fate Core is an aspect. But this lean mean narrative machine isn't much fun without a thrumming engine under the hood.

Skills are that engine. They're what we use to act on the fiction represented by aspects. They're what move us around a story, sometimes in hot pursuit of a goal and sometimes purely for the thrill of going as fast as we can. When we're flashing past the mean street's narrative beats—gunning a *Souped-Up Coupe de Ville*, trying to get *The Crown Prince of Mundavia* to safety even though the car is *One Wheel Short*—it's easy to forget that skills are what make it all happen.

Most of us probably drive our real-world cars without more than a vague idea of how an engine works. But if you want to be a top-tier speed demon or an elite mechanic, you need to tear down that engine to examine all its moving parts and how they affect the rest of the system.

That's the goal of this article. We look at how FATE CORE SYSTEM presents skills, and how these one-word powerhouses emphasize player agendas and influence as well as character competency. We also take a closer look at the central role skills play in character creation and how they energize play. And finally, we see how using the full range of skill levels is necessary to create the dynamic and exciting stories your players crave.

What Is a Skill?

FATE CORE SYSTEM defines skills as the part of the system through which characters interact with the game world. Skills are knowledge and ability “which your character might have gained through innate talent, training, or years of trial and error.” Characters in Fate Core are highly competent, and for that reason, “your list of skills gives you a picture of that character’s potential for action at a glance—what you’re best at, what you’re okay at, and what you’re not so good at” (page 86).

In other words, how players rate their skills not only shows their character’s preferred means for taking action, but, equally important, it shows where they want their shortcomings to matter in the story. If aspects are the signs and waypoints that tell you what direction you’re headed, skills are how you’re going to get there, because they *tell everyone where, when, and how you want your character to shine, both in success and defeat.*

SKILLS DEFINE PLAYER AGENDAS

FATE CORE SYSTEM portrays skills as abilities, capacities, and competencies—or, more simply, how well you can do something. There’s an important reason that the designers framed skills this way, which we’ll get to in a moment. But first, we need to tear down that tidy little idea that skills are just, well, skills. Let’s start with an example of how skills work in character creation.

We’re starting a new low fantasy game where we play filthy greenskins in a nasty orc village. Mary creates her character, Zub, a proud **Orc Berserker** who wields ***Kh’zum, An Ancient Dwarven Blade***. She puts together the rest of Zub’s aspects and moves on to skills.

Based on just these two aspects, Mary decides to make Zub’s best skill Fight, ranking it at +4. He’s been grinding the faces of his enemies into the dirt since he was a little slug of an orc, and by now he’s pretty good at it. Nobody crosses Zub unless they want to savor the flavor combination of dwarven steel and their own teeth.

This approach to choosing what Zub is best at is consistent with how FATE CORE SYSTEM describes skills. He’s a wild and brutish warrior from the greenskin tribes. He also has a cool weapon he looted from an enemy. The choice about which skills to rank highest is almost made for Mary by the aspects she wrote. That’s one reason why we write aspects before choosing skills: they give us the fictional pretext for subsequent skill choices. Even if we’re doing a quick start game, FATE CORE SYSTEM

advises, “You should know your best skill to start—that gives us further ideas about your character” (page 52).

The phrase “further ideas” hints at a principle that FATE CORE SYSTEM never quite says explicitly. The choices a player makes when ranking their character’s skills communicates both what the character is good at *and also what the player thinks is interesting*. When Mary declares that Zub is Great at Fighting, she’s telling the GM she wants to get into physical conflicts early and often. She’s also telling her fellow players that Zub is a superior warrior, and she expects him to shine when the blood is pounding in his pointy ears.

As the GM, you can help your players figure out what they might find interesting by asking them to tell you why and how their aspects became true. By telling a little story about the past, aspects provide the logic for choosing skills, which is another reason why we allocate skill points second.

When I ask about the two aspects, *Orc Berserker* and *Kh’zum, An Ancient Dwarven Blade*, Mary creates a vignette about Zub’s history: Zub goaded a hot-headed dwarf into a duel—he won handily and took his foe’s sword. Based on that story, she decides she wants Zub to have Provoke at +4, instead of Fight. He’s still a great warrior, so she puts his Fight at +3. And, since he was quick to pick up on the fine crafting of the sword, she gives him Notice +3. (That also grants him a good initiative, so maybe he needs the aspect *Zub Stabbed First*? Skills can suggest aspects sometimes, too!)

SKILLS PROMOTE NARRATIVE INFLUENCE

Aspects aren’t the only way players tell GMs what interests them. The highest skill also represents a player’s declaration about where and when they want the most *narrative influence*. Mary’s first idea for Zub was a hulking brute who dominated in battle. In other words, she wanted to have the most influence over fights—knocking enemies off balance, avoiding their blows, and forcing stress and consequences on them.

But after thinking a little more about her aspects, Mary made a different choice for Zub’s best skill. She reimagined Zub as more cunning than your average berserker. She decided that over the course of many battles he learned that he can Provoke enemies into foolish actions that open them up to his savage attacks. That choice says something very different about what Zub is good at and what Mary, as a player, is interested in.

Fighting-Zub might be a dumb lummo, a useful tool to anyone who can control him, or maybe a warrior honored for his berserk fury. But,

Provoking-Zub is a different animal. He's the orc who always has a stinging comment for allies and enemies alike. He has a face decorated with scars that lets everyone know who they're dealing with. And especially, Provoking-Zub has just become a character with more influence in the mental and social arena than he has skill at arms. With this one change, Mary just told the table that she wants our game to be about rage and fear more than blood and gore. And she also declared that she wants to be the biggest bogeyman on the block.

Skills in Play

Fate Core sets us up to declare our character's best skill right away, because it gets us right into the action. But what do skills actually do in play? And why should we care about them representing anything besides high degrees of competence? When we open up the combustion chamber of Fate Core—actions and outcomes—we discover that the full range of skills from high to low are how a group of players generates forward momentum within the fiction. High skills stake out the parts of the story where players want their characters to shine, but competency alone isn't enough to drive a story. We need low skills to represent areas where characters are typically fallible, vulnerable, and prone to losing. In other words, handily overcoming every challenge is boring, but struggling as the opposition mounts and things go wrong: that's the stuff of high-octane fiction!

MORE THAN SUCCESS OR FAILURE

When your character undertakes one of the four actions, it leads to one of the four outcomes. In general, a failed roll leads to an interesting complication: the opposition gets stronger or you grant your opponent an advantage in the form of an aspect or boost. Succeeding (with or without style) has the same effect, but the roles are reversed: now the opponent gives up position or strength as they're put under stress or outmaneuvered.

By treating skills only as the relative likelihood of success or failure, Fate Core cleverly hides their role as the real workhorse of the system. If we imagine that a high ranking in a skill means the character is simply good at it, we will still create a fun game. Fate Core allows us to play characters that are highly capable within their bailiwick. It's exciting to be a cat burglar who can tumble through a thicket of laser beams, and sometimes we just don't need to overthink the thrill of being awesome.

A character's highest skill also expands a player's influence over the narrative, tending to make their character the most dynamic figure in certain scenes. From moment to moment, a high skill allows you to

leverage fictional positioning in ways you find most interesting and exciting. You get to say who is *Dangling Precariously*, why the crowd has *Shifting Sentiments*, or introduce some sturdy tables to take *Momentary Cover*. Thus, your best skill is more than what your character is good at doing—their competency. It's also a clear statement about which single area of action you want the most influence over during play.

Choosing your best skill is usually easy. But, nearly every player struggles to fill out the bottom layers of the skill pyramid, including which skills don't get points at all. When we emphasize picking the one thing your character is best at, we can create the feeling that the skills ranked from +0 to +3 mean pretty much the same thing: "These are the things I'm not-the-best-at." One way to help players get over this hurdle is to tell them to think about their lowest skills as areas of the story where they want more resistance, challenge, and, yes, even failure. Instead of thinking of the skill pyramid as a ranking of abilities, GMs can encourage players to think of it instead as a gradation of likelihood, from unqualified successes at the top to complications and partial successes at the bottom.

From this perspective, skills serve a similar function to aspects. FATE CORE SYSTEM advises players to write double-edged aspects that can be used advantageously as well as lead to complications. After a GM asks, "What is the one thing your character is awesome and successful at doing?" she should also ask, "What are some cool ways your character fails?" or "What actions tend to lead your character into more problems?"

When asked these questions, Mary has an opportunity to describe Zub in more detail and to stake out a whole new area of play that would be interesting for her.

Mary decides that although Zub is a master at dishing out threats, taunts, and bluffs, he's not so good at picking up on when others do it to him. She decides Zub should have Empathy +1, because being the scariest orc in the village means he rarely has to think about others' feelings. And if a bellowed threat fails to do the trick, he's still got that sweet dwarven sword and a +3 Fight.

I talk it over with Mary, and we agree that Zub is being set up to get hoodwinked and manipulated, to which he will probably respond violently. She tells the group that she wants to see him develop from a bit of a bully to a character with potential to seize power and lead, and she thinks being weak on social defense is a great place for Zub to have some complications in his story arc.

INTERESTING SUCCESS AND FAILURE

In Fate Core, *interesting* is about so much more than winning or losing. By building the skill pyramid from the top down, the game's text implies that skills are first and foremost competencies, concentrating on success versus failure rather than *interesting success alongside interesting failure*. When we treat skills as mere ability, Average and Mediocre skills risk becoming a kind of dump stat, which causes them to lose their potential for generating excitement and drama.

If we look at skills instead as representing a player's agenda and influence over the fiction, we can drive play towards *interesting outcomes* instead of playing to win. After all, Fate characters almost always win in the end, which means the only question is how interesting is the trip to the victory party?

The four outcomes give us ways for our characters to shine both in success and failure, which is where those low skills come in. Since failed rolls always lead to complications, Average and Mediocre skills effectively tell the GM, "These are the areas where I want my character's complications to shine!"

If you can stand his nasty face, let's take another look at Zub.

After a wildly successful skirmish against those puny dwarves, Zub's reputation has Grigma the warchief worried. The clan is impressed by Zub's terrifying appearance and bloodlust, and if she isn't careful, they might just install him as their new leader.

Zub's meager +1 Empathy is barely enough to guess when some sniveling goblin is lying to him. Typical for a warchief, Grigma rules through lies and rumor. Since Mary told me she wants Zub's social and political life to get complicated, I make the warchief's Deceit +4, which will probably smash callous Zub's Empathy of +1.

I describe how, before Grigma calls a council, she spreads poisonous lies about Zub's true nature: he doesn't even make sacrifices to the dark powers, and secretly follows the Way of the Light!

If Mary and I had not already discussed Zub's low Empathy skill, this might look like I'm metagaming just to set them up for a crushing defeat. But the GM's job is to provide interesting challenges for players, and she helped me to identify where she wanted that challenge, because I talked to her about why she put Zub's Empathy at +1.

Often, GMs focus on a player's aspects to try to deduce what a player thinks is interesting, but this can lead to reinforcing the same ideas over and over again. How many times do we need to be told that Zub is a

berserker with a dwarven sword? Drawing inspiration from a player's skills leads to more immediate and exciting conflicts, for one simple reason: conflicts are active, and skills are how players act. So when I positioned Grigma to trounce Zub in the social arena, what I was really doing was giving Zub a chance to win and lose in a way Mary told me she would enjoy!

As expected, Zub is blindsided by Grigma's lies. It dawns on him too late what happened and who is responsible. Mary and I have talked about how skills work in Fate Core, though, and she knows that failed roll is a gift—she plays her trump card and has Zub challenge that old fool Grigma to a duel! Her failed Empathy roll sets up an opportunity to bring out her big Provoke skill, and now it will be so much sweeter when Zub guts that lying warchief.

These little ups and downs are the meat of great stories. And by treating a character's low skills as an opportunity to explore their weaknesses and vulnerabilities, they become more dynamic and relatable.

Diverging and Overlapping Skills

Some game systems work best when players either avoid overlapping their skills or have certain skills in common. Fate Core, by contrast, works well regardless of which skills and ratings players choose.

Sometimes, it makes sense for skills to diverge.

Jason introduces his character Tusk, a priest of the dark. He decides that Tusk should have Empathy +3, because she savors the terror that electrifies her clan, and also because Jason doesn't want Tusk to be so easily fooled. Getting the wool pulled over Tusk's eyes is just not something Jason wants to happen very often, so he ranks Empathy much higher than Mary did for Zub.

Character ability and player influence shine once again: one character can pick up another's slack (competency), while also making for more dynamic stories by adding something to the game that no other player can (influence).

In some games, players focus on divergent skills to make sure everyone has their own niche. Not only does this ensure that their group of characters will be able to succeed in more varied situations, but it also helps ensure that each player gets to do something special all their own. While this approach is useful or necessary in some games, it is less so in Fate Core.

Tusk excels at sowing fear both among her clan and her enemies, so he ranks her Provoke skill at +4. Mary has already created Zub, who also has Provoke +4. FATE CORE SYSTEM points out that aspects can help to distinguish two characters with a similar skill profile from one another (page 59). Zub is scary because he's an **Orc Berserker**, while Tusk is scary because she has **A Fiery Shadow**. Whenever you can solve a problem with fictional positioning in Fate Core, aspects will do the job.

Another consideration is that, like aspects, overlapping skills point the GM toward the kind of game their players want. When two players make Provoke their best skill, it ought to be a clue that they want to push more at the psychological themes of life in the clan. The players have all but shouted what they want the tone of the setting to be and the kinds of issues they want to explore with their characters.

Rebuilding the Engine

Fate Core's skills bridge the gap between fiction and mechanics. Skills let us undertake the four actions that lead to the four outcomes. They communicate the themes and events a player finds most interesting. Even more importantly, they tell the GM what her players' agendas are.

The beauty of a Fate Core skill is that it works flawlessly as "a broad family of competency at something" (page 86). You'll be screaming down the adventure highway in no time flat if you just choose your best skill and jam down the accelerator. Yet, Fate Core's skills are more than just character competency. By paying attention to what players rank as their best *and* worst skills, we can get a lot more out of the ride. Great stories exist in the friction of moving between success and defeat. And skills create the momentum you need to knock the wheels off and light your story on fire! 🚀



STUNTS ARE COOL

by MIKE OLSON

The three fundamental parts of a Fate Core character, generally speaking, are skills, aspects, and stunts. And it's probably safe to say that, for most people, stunts lag in importance behind aspects and skills. Google offers up plenty of Fate-related discussions on doing away with stunts or even skills, but you don't come across many Fate fans who want to ditch aspects.

It's easy to see why this is. Aspects give you reasons to care about a character. Skills tell you their areas of expertise and competence. But stunts tend to come off as purely mechanical, rules-bending widgets, more concerned with making a character effective rather than *interesting*. Devising stunts that reverse this trend can often be a chore, and "chore" isn't a word you really want to associate with a roleplaying game.

Me, I'm a fan of stunts. Which is good, because between *ATOMIC ROBO: THE ROLEPLAYING GAME* and the forthcoming *SHADOW OF THE CENTURY*, I've written more stunts than I can remember, and as a system editor for a number of *FATE WORLDS & ADVENTURES* products, I've evaluated a fair few more. I've found that writing and evaluating so many stunts is liable to drive one mad (with *Fate Madness*, specifically) unless one tries to find new ways to make those stunts interesting, engaging, and fun. I'm a firm believer that stunts should be invented and personalized for each character, not merely picked from a list—but I also realize what a pain in the ass that can be if you're straying from the two standard stunt formats: "+2 to X with Y when Z" and "Use B instead of A when C."

So in an attempt to help, I'm going to share a few things I've learned about stunt-writing over the past few years. Not rules, but guidelines that've worked for me. This is all from the perspective of a GM—either

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helping a player to come up with stunts, or making pre-generated PCs or NPCs for a game—but players can make use of this material too!

First, though, we need to talk about an uncomfortable issue: *balance*.

NUTS AND BOLTS

As seen in *ATOMIC ROBO*, the unit of measurement I use for “balancing” stunts is the **stunt benefit**. It’s hardly a science, and really, it’s hardly even *balance*, but as a rule of thumb: one stunt benefit is worth a situational +2 bonus to a single skill, or a situational +1 bonus to *two* skills, or the equivalent thereof.

I also tend to limit the stunt benefit to one of the four actions—attack, defend, overcome, or create an advantage—because that’s just how I operate. If the stunt requires sufficiently narrow circumstances, I’ll bypass the action requirement altogether. It’s very dependent on the assumptions of the particular campaign or game, though. I consider all skills equally valuable—there’s no distinction made between “combat” and “non-combat” skills, for example.

For example, say I’m in a Fate Core game set in 17th-century France, and I want to give Vivienne, my swashbuckling-poet character, a signature rapier called Chanticleer, because I’ve always liked that name. I might represent Chanticleer as any of these stunts below, each of which is plausibly worth one stunt benefit:

- +2 to attack with Fight when wielding Chanticleer
- +1 to attack or create an advantage with Fight when wielding Chanticleer
- +1 to defend with Fight or Athletics when wielding Chanticleer
- +1 to create an advantage with Fight or Provoke when wielding Chanticleer
- +2 with Fight when wielding Chanticleer against royalty
- +1 with Chanticleer against nameless NPCs

(Each of these says something markedly different *about* Chanticleer and why it deserves to be a stunt, but we’ll get into more detail on that below.)

So that’s one of the two basic models for stunts. The other substitutes one skill for another in specified circumstances. Substitution is much less objective than the +2 bonus because its value is going to vary depending on a character’s skill ranks.

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For example, if I want Chanticleer be an embodiment of Vivienne's reputation as an impressive swordswoman, I might do something like this:

Use Fight instead of Provoke to create an advantage through intimidation when you show off Chanticleer.

But! If her Fight was Great (+4) and her Provoke was Good (+3), this stunt would be worth less than one stunt benefit—I may as well give her a +2 bonus to Provoke in those same circumstances. You get the idea. It's not *all* about the numbers, but it's at least a *little* about the numbers.

Other Stunts

The stunt benefit of a stunt outside the two basic models is a little harder to determine.

If you're into Weapon and Armor ratings (from the FATE SYSTEM TOOLKIT), a +1 skill bonus is equal to Weapon:2 because the latter's so circumstantial—but a +1 skill bonus is worth as much as Armor:1 because Armor ratings are much more universally applicable (and also because high Armor ratings are much more boring in play than high Weapon ratings). So to make something worth one stunt benefit, you'd get combinations like "+1 to attack with Shoot and Weapon:2" or "+1 to defend with Athletics and Armor:1." What these might reflect—an accurate weapon, a good eye for your target's vulnerabilities, muscle-amplifying body armor, a knack for not getting hurt—is another matter.

When it comes to other, more narrative effects, these are reined in by one of three limiters:

- Spend a fate point
- Once per scene
- Once per session

The more severe the limiter, the more comfortable I am making a stunt worth more than a single stunt benefit.

"Spend a fate point" gives the player almost complete control over how frequently the stunt can be used, which is great. The danger here is creating a stunt that accidentally does *nothing*. If the effect is equivalent to a one-time +2 bonus to a roll, but disguised as something else, that's the same as invoking an aspect, which you can already do with a fate point, so that won't fly. By this I mean effects that *sound* different but aren't, like "reduce a physical hit by 2 shifts" or "increase your Armor rating by 2 against a single attack." Those are worth *zero stunt benefits*. (In fact, using the Armor stunt is objectively *worse* than simply invoking an aspect, because your attacker will likely get a boost!)

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Instead, a stunt costing a fate point needs to do something that invoking an aspect can't (usually) do, or it must carry a purely narrative effect that the player wouldn't use more often than they felt they absolutely had to anyway. Examples include:

- Invoke one specific aspect of yours, chosen when you take this stunt, for a +3 bonus instead of +2. (Common variations on this include invoking an opponent's consequence for +3 instead of +2 or invoking any situation aspect created by an ally for +3 instead of +2.)
- When not being directly observed, you can "disappear" from a scene, as long as there's a reasonable way out. Spend a fate point to reappear in the same scene or a subsequent scene, as long as there's a plausible way to do so.
- When you enter a new city for the first time, you can spend a fate point to declare that you have a contact there. Specify how you know them, and create an aspect with two free invocations to represent your relationship with them. When you leave the city, remove the aspect from play.

An effect with a limiter of "**Once per scene**" will be something you could (or should) expect to see, well, every scene, where applicable. This is good for a broad effect that isn't necessarily tied to a single skill, but is still quantitative and mechanical. (Stunt-worthy narrative effects that happen as frequently as once per scene will either get old fast or not show up as frequently as you'd think.) The stunt might not put in an appearance in literally every scene, but if it does, you should be okay with it. For me, a scene-limited stunt that I'm "okay with" usually does something roughly equivalent to invoking an aspect. A few examples:

- Invoke a specific aspect for free.
- Get a free boost called *Something to Prove* after failing a skill roll.
- When a nearby ally is hit by a physical attack, you can check one of your own physical stress boxes to reduce the shifts of the hit.

A "**Once per session**" effect is the kind of thing you'd expect to see in a TV series around once an episode, if that. It's a chance for a character to do an iconic move or have a moment that can dramatically affect the story. If it has a mechanical effect, I'll usually make it worth two stunt benefits, focused on a single effect, and last for an entire scene. If it has a

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narrative focus, it should be something that, if you were reading a story or watching a movie, would be pretty dull if it happened in *every* scene. A once-per-session stunt could let a character:

- Get a +2 bonus to all actions with a specific skill for one scene.
- Gain Armor:4 against physical attacks for one scene.
- Have just the right tool on hand when you need it, along with a free boost to represent it.

Once Per Significant/Major Milestone

If you take this thinking to the end of the line, there's one more limiter: "**once per significant/major milestone.**" If this kind of option interests you, though, the stunt's effect needs to be character-altering in some way if it's going to seem at all worthwhile. You could tie it into the usual milestone rewards, like gaining an additional skill rank (but not refresh) whenever a milestone grants one. Or you might push boundaries a little and introduce a *communal* stunt that each player can use once per significant or major milestone—something to reinforce the genre or reflect their cohesion as a team.

Things to Avoid

While the possibilities for stunts are nigh endless, not all of them are created equal. These might work sometimes, but in my experience the following are best avoided.

- Messing with the values of stress boxes or consequences. It might not break the system, but it's likely to cause some confusion when a fundamental piece of the conflict works differently for each character at the table.
- Granting additional actions in a round, especially extra attacks. If you want to make a character more effective in a particular area, there are better ways to go about it.
- Receiving a fate point for something other than a compel. If you have a way of getting fate points outside of compels, you're less likely to compel yourself or accept compels.

ADDING COOL

So enough about the nuts and bolts of what a stunt contains. That's only the beginning. Here's some advice on how to make your stunts as interesting and engaging as anything else on your character sheet.

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Name Your Stunts

This is pretty rudimentary, and it's something you probably already do, but it's worth stating right up top. Giving a stunt a distinctive name—or a funny one, or whatever—will nearly always point the way toward something cool. You might come up with the effect first, or not, but either way a good name will really bring things into focus. Name the stunt as if you were coming up with an aspect. Make it flavorful, and odds are the effect will assume some of that flavor. In fact, if you feel like you can't quite capture a character's color like you want with their aspects alone, some well-named stunts can go a long way toward remedying that.

Going back to Vivienne, is the stunt for her sword just called *Chanticleer*? Or does it have a more personal name, like *My Mother's Blade*? Maybe it's a famous *Sword of Kings*, or *Sharper than a Serpent's Tooth*. Each of these tells you something about Vivienne, Chanticleer, or both. If Vivienne's a pre-gen character for a convention game, the stunt's name helps further define the character and gives the player a better sense of how to play her.

Proceed from Aspects

Related to the last suggestion, you can let one or more of the character's aspects lead you to a logical mechanical conclusion. If we know that they *are* this thing, it makes sense they'd be able to *do* that thing. Does an aspect suggest some unique or flavorful way they can bend the rules in their favor?

Paranormal investigator Odin Ortega has an aspect of *Stay Alert, Trust No One*. We can really take his hyper-vigilance to an extreme by giving him this stunt:

It's Not Paranoia: Use Notice instead of Athletics to defend against physical attacks.

Even if giving him +2 to defend with Athletics would be mathematically identical to this, I'd still go this route because it's much more flavorful.

Extrapolate from Skills

Look at the character's apex skill. With this as their primary shtick, what should they be able to *do*? This is a chance to really reinforce a character's chief strength and make them the best at what they do. Stacking a bonus on top of that apex skill will certainly make them more mechanically effective, and doing so is definitely tempting, but see if you can step back and think of some other way to call out their expertise. Odds are it'll be more interesting in play.

Tank is a bipedal triceratops with Superb (+5) Physique. (That's probably why they call him Tank.) If we really want to hammer home his destructive capability and role within the group, we could give him this stunt:

Tank Smash: Spend a fate point to automatically destroy an inanimate object in the scene.

I'm going with the fate-point spend instead of, say, limiting it to once per scene. If a player wants to blow five fate points in a single scene to level the place, I don't have a problem with that.

Mitigate a Shortcoming

This is the opposite of above: instead of reinforcing a strength, use a stunt—especially one that gives a bonus—to make up for a weak skill rank in a specific situation. Skills in Fate Core are usually pretty broad, which is great for characters with equally broad competencies, but sometimes you want a character to be way better with a particular application of a skill than their rating would otherwise suggest.

Princeton astronomer Professor Richard Pierson isn't exactly a combat monster with his Average (+1) Fight, and that's as it should be. But it'd be good if he could hold his own when the chips are down.

Used to Box for Oxford: +2 to attack with Fight when unarmed.

This makes the professor more effective in combat, but only in fairly desperate circumstances, *plus* it tells us a little something about his past.

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Plan for Your Close-up

Stunts with a narrative effect are often a good way to shine the spotlight on your character. While a bonus or skill substitution is usually a passive mechanical thing that nobody really has to know about but you, a narrative stunt can really let you take the reins of the story. Assuming you want that, what's a cool thing you'd like to see your character doing?

Intergalactic smuggler Ahn Loos has Superb (+5) Contacts and aspects of *Been from One End of the Galaxy to the Other* and *Imperial Academy Drop-Out*. It'd be cool if sometimes they could save the day not with fancy flying or the pew-pews, but by simply knowing the right person at the right time, whether that person's a scoundrel or serving in the Imperial Navy. So how about we give them this stunt:

Old Friends: Once per session, you can declare that you know someone who can help you out of a tight spot, assuming you have the means to contact them. Name them, and represent them by putting an aspect into play with two free invocations. Then roll one Fate die. On a 6, they owe you one and are friendly. On a 5, you owe *them* one and hope they're not holding that against you. On a 4, you have a contentious relationship but they're still your best bet.

I limited this to once per session because while there's no guarantee of it happening as frequently as that, I'd be cool with it if it did. If I'd made the stunt cost a fate point instead, it might happen multiple times in a session, which would seem weird (and get old fast).

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Write Toward a Role

If you see your character as embodying an archetype or role—and you probably do—think about how a stunt can help them achieve that. You probably don't want to dedicate more than one stunt toward this, as doing so will tend to dilute your brand, as it were, but one of these should be enough to stand out.

Dervil Meaney, an adventurer and disgraced knight, is the archetypical meat shield. With aspects like *Hard-Bitten Hulk of a Man*, *Protect the Geeks*, and *I Can Handle It*, he's clearly geared toward being the party's point man in a fight. An easy way to make this even more evident in play would be with a stunt like this:

Get Behind Me: When a nearby ally is hit by a physical attack, you can check one of your own physical stress boxes to help reduce the hit.

No frequency-limiter required here—the effects of the stunt itself are cost enough.

IN CLOSING

Okay, you're all set! Go write a hundred stunts.

Whether or not that's a reasonable thing to say, it's worth restating that these are merely guidelines learned from something like eight years of hacking Fate. Don't feel constrained by them. But hopefully they've helped you feel, as I do, that stunts are cool. 🍴

FAMILY MATTERS



FAMILY MATTERS

by JON PEACOCK

*You heard them. The old Lady's not long for this world.
Gather the others; it's time for the game to begin...again.*

*- Father Ernest Garrund, Family Ghost
(23rd April 1552 – 14th November 1587)*

The Garrund Family

The Garrund family's origin is lost to time, but for hundreds of years—or at least as far back as anyone cares to check—they have been a notable feature on the world stage. The family's plentiful money has bought the best education and opportunities for its progeny, making the family famous in many realms of human endeavor.

Until recently. Full of its own success, over time the family became careless with its wealth and didn't notice soon enough that it was trickling away. As many prosperous members distanced themselves from the family, or married into others, it was only the actions of the current Lady Garrund—a clever and meticulous woman—that began to reverse its fortunes.

THE LADY

Lady Edith Marguerite Garrund has been the head of the Garrund family for the last 27 years. Selected for her prudence when the family's fortunes began to wane, she did much to turn the tide. But as old age crept up on her, so too have some of the old problems begun to resurface.

The Lady, now 68, lives in the family manor, alone but for her servants. Though she holds her staff to a high standard, she is well liked by them, and they know her so well that they often see to her needs before she's aware she has them. She appreciates their attention; after half a lifetime keeping the family afloat, she looks forward to seeing out her last few years in relative comfort.

The Lady is a fan of life. She is eager to see her family perform for her, and is open to trying almost anything they suggest to impress her. However, this doesn't mean that the Lady has forgotten what's at stake should the family fall into irresponsible hands; she is still shrewd, and does not intend to see her years of good work go to waste.

LADY GARRUND

ASPECTS

HIGH CONCEPT: AGEING HEAD OF THE GARRUND FAMILY

TROUBLE: A SHARP MIND IN A FRAIL BODY

OTHER ASPECTS: I'VE COME TOO FAR TO LOSE IT ALL NOW;
I SHOULD BE PAMPERED IN MY OLD AGE

APPROACHES

GOOD +3: Careful

FAIR +2: Clever, Forceful

AVERAGE +1: Flashy, Sneaky

MEDIOCRE +0: Quick

CONSEQUENCES

Mild (2) | Moderate (4) | Severe (6)

STRESS

□ □ □

NOTES

Lady Garrund uses Approaches instead of skills, as detailed on page 175.

THE GARRUND FAMILY LEGACY

Lady Garrund, accepting that her end is near, is looking to name an heir from among her descendants. After a healthy and prosperous life, she has many children, grandchildren, nephews, nieces, and their spouses to choose from, and it's up to each of them to demonstrate that they are worthy of inheriting the family's ancient estate and being named the next Lady, or Lord, of Garrund Manor, the family's ancestral home.

The Lady has called all of her potential heirs back to the manor. She plans on spending time with each of them to determine how successful they have been, and how suitable they would be to take over the family estate. Each of the relatives, knowing what's at stake, strives to put their best foot forward in the hope of being chosen. The family is not in the clear yet; the Lady knows that another disastrous heir would spell the end of her hard-won gains.

Only, strange things often happen in the Garrund family when succession is on the line. Implausible accidents and unlikely mishaps plague the potential successors, with even the best-planned displays of worthiness coming apart at just the wrong moment. The hopefuls may bicker and point fingers at each other, but the truth is somewhat stranger.

THE GHOSTS OF GARRUND

The Garrund dynasty is haunted. Not by malicious spirits, but by the ghosts of deceased family members who can't bear to let their descendants go. They watch from the afterlife and make a tweak here, a small change there, helping the family prosper and thrive. They also pick favorites and squabble—as all who spend too much time together do—and their differences come to a head when it comes to the matter of succession.

Whenever the Garrund family gather to pick a new head, the squabbling of the Ghosts becomes a competition, with each of the deceased championing their personal favorite. They stop making only small, beneficial actions and instead take a far more active hand in the fate of the family.

Each Ghost's objective is simple: to ensure that their candidate is ultimately chosen as the new Lord or Lady Garrund. To do this, they follow their chosen successor and watch over their efforts to impress the incumbent Lady, providing assistance where necessary. The Ghosts also interfere with the efforts of their competitors, trying to make the other candidates look foolish or incompetent in front of her. As the time of choosing grows near, the Ghosts are more active than ever; who will emerge as the new Lord or Lady?

Setting Creation

As a Quick Start Adventure, *Family Matters* has everything you need to jump right into a generations-old battle for succession. *Family Matters* is designed as a single-session, competitive game in which you and your friends play the Ghosts of Garrund, embroiled in a fight over whose chosen successor will become the heir of an ancient family, and it uses mechanics from both Fate Core and Fate Accelerated to create two levels of engaging conflicts.

At the start of the game, explain the **current issue**, *The Inheritance*, to your players and ask them to choose from one of the two available **impending issues**, *The Lost Will* or *The Feral Spirit*, which should be introduced by the GM during the game. You might also want to read aloud a few sections like “The Lady” or “The Garrund Family Legacy.”

Arguing Through the Ages

Family Matters walks you through creating a light-fantasy style game, but you could also adapt it to play ancient Als manipulating a futuristic virtual world, meddling fairies disturbing an old wizard trying to pick from among his apprentices, or any other setting you can imagine in which the intangible players interfere with an oblivious group of competitors.

FAMILY MATTERS

CURRENT ISSUE: THE INHERITANCE

The most pressing issue on everyone's mind, and the reason they're all gathered back at the family manor, is *The Inheritance*. The aim of each Ghost, and each potential heir, is to make sure that the Lady chooses the correct person as her successor, and all efforts initially go towards influencing her decision.

IMPENDING ISSUES

To complicate the matter of *The Inheritance*, a number of other factors could come in to play, drastically influencing the family's situation and distracting those involved. These factors include:

The Lost Will

On a rainy morning, Mr. Quarell, of Quarell and Sons, arrives at the manor. He asks for an audience with Lady Garrund as a matter of urgency and, when they meet, presents to her a will from Lord Bartholemew Garrund, the previous head of the family. In it, Lord Garrund leaves the entire estate to a local church. Mr. Quarell claims the will had been lost and has only just been uncovered, but that he will be relaying a copy of the will to the church shortly and suggests that the family should plan to move out very, very soon.

MR. QUARELL

ASPECTS

HIGH CONCEPT: EFFICIENT LAWYER

TROUBLE: BUTTERFINGERS

APPROACHES

GOOD +3: Careful

FAIR +2: Clever, Quick

AVERAGE +1: Forceful, Sneaky

MEDIOCRE +0: Flashy

CONSEQUENCES

Mild (2) | Moderate (4) | Severe (6)

STRESS

☐ ☐ ☐

FAMILY MATTERS

The Feral Spirit

One night, the Ghosts of Garrund feel a strange presence enter their lands. Upon investigation, they find a wild, animalistic spirit stalking the grounds, which, upon spotting them, attacks! The Ghosts quickly find that the spirit cannot influence the corporeal world or harm mortals, but is perfectly capable of, and intent on, hurting them. When dealing with the Feral Spirit, the Ghosts use their Fate skills normally. In addition, when the Spirit comes into play, each Ghost gains three Stress boxes (see “Character Creation,” page 172). If their Stress is depleted, the Ghost dissipates and can no longer participate in the scene, reforming back at the Manor before the next scene begins. If the Feral Spirit’s Stress boxes are filled, it also dissipates, reforming elsewhere to return later in the game.

THE FERAL SPIRIT

ASPECTS

.....
HIGH CONCEPT: THE FERAL SPIRIT

TROUBLE: CANNOT PASS THROUGH CORPOREAL OBJECTS

SKILLS

.....
GREAT +4: Fight

GOOD +3: Athletics, Physique

FAIR +2: Notice, Provoke, Stealth

AVERAGE +1: Burglary, Deceive, Rapport, Will

STRESS

.....
□ □ □

AREA OF PLAY: THE GROUNDS

The Garrund family have held power in the local area for generations and rule over much of the nearby land. *Family Matters* takes place in the lands owned by the family, through which both the mortals and the Ghosts can move freely.

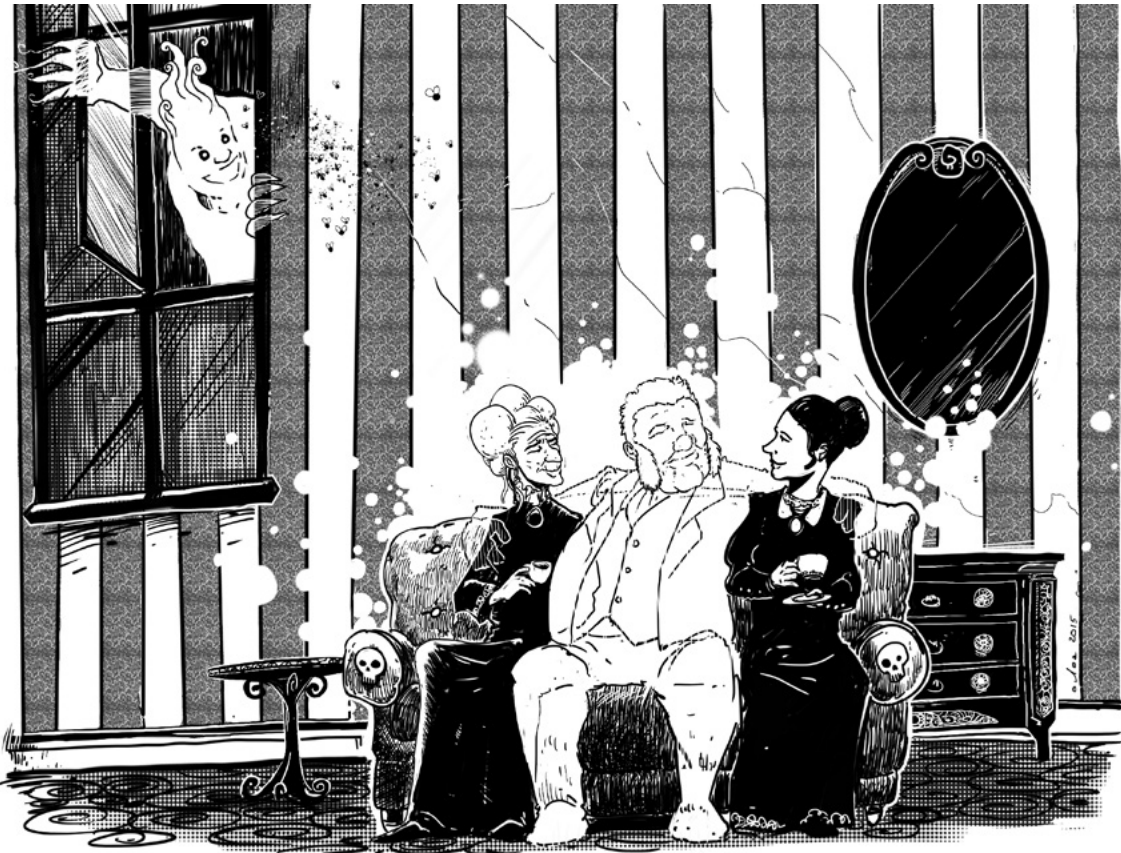
The heart of the estate is **Garrund Manor**, the family’s ancestral home and the Lady’s current residence. The Manor is grand and spacious, but some wings stand empty and abandoned where the Lady has been forced to sell off the family’s artefacts to pay its debts. It’s located high on a cliff overlooking a grey sea, with a treacherous path connecting it to a small, private harbor at the cliff’s base.

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The nearby settlement of **Wedawyn**, located on a costal trade route, is a town of two parts. Near the coast, the town is populated by surly, suspicious fishermen and farmers. They are generally content just to get through the day, hopefully with food on their plates when it ends. Moving inland, the town becomes less ramshackle, with establishments catering to travelers on the road and a busy market where passing merchants and the locals gather to sell their wares.

In the other direction lies the **Davenwood**, the Garrund family's private hunting grounds. The wood hides many wild animals, and the occasional poacher, under its thickly leafed boughs and a mysterious atmosphere permeates its overgrown heart.

There are many other treats hidden in the family's grounds, such as **Farmer Jed's horse racing track**, set up after his crops failed for one year too many, or, rumor has it, a **beautiful secluded cove** hidden among the cliffs that young couples seek out for some private time, so long as they remember to get out before the tide comes in. The potential successors will likely know of a few secret or interesting places of their own to which they will wish to take the Lady.



Character Creation

Making a character in *Family Matters* is slightly different to making one in standard Fate Core. Each player creates two characters—a Ghost and the potential heir the Ghost wishes to see succeed—following the rules below.

THE GHOSTS OF GARRUND

Aspects

The Ghosts of Garrund have four aspects: High Concept, Trouble, and two Beliefs. Their High Concept describes who they were when they were alive and how they died, their Trouble aspect is something that complicates their existence, and their Beliefs are things about their character, or the world, that they hold close to their heart.

Skills

Family Matters uses the standard Fate Core skill list and pyramid, peaking for the Ghosts at Great +4. However, the skills don't function in the same way for the deceased as they do for the living; look below for descriptions of the skills as the Ghosts can make use of them during play.

In general, the difficulty of a roll is determined by how irregular or unusual it is for an object or person to behave in the way the Ghosts wants them to behave: it's much harder to make a calm person angry or to make a scary forest seem serene.

Athletics: Athletics allow a Ghost to force a mortal to take a brief physical action, such as throwing a punch or flipping a switch. If the action goes against the mortal's wishes, it is opposed by the mortal's Careful. If the action is complicated or difficult, excess shifts determine if the mortal's actions succeed.

Burglary: Burglary can be used to mysteriously spirit items to another location within the grounds. Characters observing the object may roll Notice, Careful, or Sneaky to spot the item vanishing, opposed by excess shifts on the Overcome roll.

Contacts: Contacts can be used to draw NPCs of a specified type or temperament to a certain location. Shifts on this Overcome roll dictate how many NPCs are drawn, and how closely their temperament matches that which the player desires.

Craft: Craft can be used to make mundane objects perform their normal function. This ranges from making a clock chime or a door open to animating a mop and bucket to clean the floor. In the right

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circumstances, Craft can be used to Attack, such as when making an aimed gun fire or an explosive detonate.

Deceive: Deceive can be used to create intangible illusions to confuse and disorientate mortals. The GM may allow a mortal to oppose the illusion with Clever.

Drive: Drive can be used to make a vehicle—including horse-drawn carriages—operate without a driver. Shifts on this Overcome or Create Advantage roll work as if the Ghost were driving the vehicle directly. In the right circumstances, Drive can be used to make an Attack roll, such as when knocking someone down with a vehicle.

Empathy: Empathy can be used to haunt an area with a specific feeling, such as making a dark forest seem suddenly spooky or peaceful. Remember that it's easier to make a rose-scented bedchamber feel romantic than it is a dung-filled stable.

Fight: Fight can be used to attempt to physically harm mortals through manipulation of the environment in a plausible way, such as having a window shut on someone's fingers, a wagon wheel break and throw the rider, or a leaning tree finally give up and fall on someone. This skill can be used to make an Attack roll against a target in the same zone as the Ghost. Attacks made with this skill could always be construed as unfortunate accidents. By moving the scenery in useful ways, characters may also make Create Advantage, Overcome, or Defend rolls using this skill.

Investigate: Investigate allows Ghosts to uncover previously hidden details about mortals. Shifts on this Create Advantage roll are opposed by a difficulty set by the GM, based on how outlandish the new details are; for instance, uncovering that someone is left-handed would be easier than uncovering that someone is secretly the head of a worldwide criminal organization.

Lore: Lore can be used to provide mortals with a mental flash of inspiration, gifting them with knowledge they did not previously possess. Shifts on this Overcome or Create Advantage roll are opposed by a difficulty set by the GM, based on how improbable their insight is.

Notice: Notice can be used to focus a mortal's attention on something specific or alert them to danger. If successful, the GM focuses the mortal's attention on something of the Ghost's choice.

Physique: Physique can be used to create impassable spiritual barriers. Shifts on this Create Advantage roll are opposed by a difficulty set by the GM, based on how large the desired barrier is, with excess Shifts setting the difficulty of the Overcome roll needed to pass through the barrier. These barriers can be invoked to block mortals from harm.

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Provoke: Provoke can be used to implant mental suggestions in a mortal or a non-sentient being. Shifts on this Create Advantage or Overcome roll are opposed by the target's Careful, Forceful, or Will, as appropriate.

Rapport: Rapport can be used to affect the emotional state of mortals and non-sentient beings. Targets receive an emotional focus, but the Ghost would need to use Provoke to plant a specific suggestion.

Resources: Resources can be used to provide a mortal with an item they need by forcing an item the Ghost owns through the veil and into the corporeal world. Remember that it's more likely a Ghost would own a sword or pocket watch than a fighter jet.

Shoot: Shoot can be used to telekinetically throw objects at targets, such as causing a kitchen knife to wrench itself from the table and fly across the room, or hurling a stone from a riverbank at the passengers of a passing boat. This skill can be used to make an Attack roll against a target up to one zone away. Attacks made with this skill always seem unusual and unnatural to those observing them. By moving the scenery in useful ways, characters may also make Create Advantage, Overcome, or Defend rolls using this skill.

Stealth: Stealth can be used to render physical objects, or people, invisible, or at least make them harder to notice. Shifts on this Create Advantage roll are opposed by a difficulty set by the GM based on how large or obvious the item is; e.g., a theater ticket would be easier to hide than a building.

Will: Will can be used to counter the interference of other Ghosts. Used in response to another Ghost taking an action, shifts on this Defend roll directly subtract from the shifts that other Ghosts roll when using their abilities, even if the Defending Ghost was not the target of the roll.

Things That Go Bump in the Night

While mortals aren't aware of a Ghost's presence outside of any obvious physical manifestations, one caveat of *Family Matters* is that Ghosts are *always* aware of when another Ghost is using one of the abilities listed above.

Stunts

Each Ghost possesses one stunt, giving them access to a unique ghostly ability in addition to the abilities provided by their Skills. Stunts can do one of three things: add a new Action to a Skill, add a bonus to an Action,

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or create a rules exception. When creating your stunt, build it off the ghostly version of the skill, not the mundane one!

Stress and Consequences

The Ghosts of Garrund do not suffer Stress or Consequences; they're already dead, how much worse can it get? Instead, they fight their battles through their chosen descendants.

Can't Touch This

In *Family Matters*, the Ghosts cannot directly attack each other. Instead they work through their proxies—those in the running for the succession—by engineering situations to boost the prestige of their own chosen candidate while interfering with the efforts of their competitors. This is made possible by the ghostly twist on the standard Skill list, allowing Ghosts to create effects in the corporeal world.

Refresh

Each Ghost has three Refresh, which may not be spent on additional Stunts.

Additional Rule: Movement

Ghosts can float in three dimensions at normal movement rates and can pass through corporeal objects. They may also ethereally transport themselves to any other Ghost or any point within the Grounds at will, dematerializing from their current location and materializing at their chosen destination a few seconds later.

THE SUCCESSORS

Aspects

Each potential heir has only two aspects: a High Concept and a Trouble. These are created as per the normal Fate Core rules.

Approaches

Lady Garrund, the players' chosen heirs, and other mortals in *Family Matters* are created using a cut-down skill system called Approaches, based on Fate Accelerated Edition rules.

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Rather than possessing a full list of Skills, characters' Approaches describe six ways in which they may accomplish any task, as long as their player can justify how it applies to the task at hand. The six Approaches are:

- Careful
- Clever
- Flashy
- Forceful
- Quick
- Sneaky

Mortals possess one Approach at Good (+3), two at Fair (+2), two at Average (+1), and one at Mediocre (+0).

Stunts and Refresh

The successors do not possess Stunts or Refresh.

Stress and Consequences

Each potential heir possesses three Stress boxes which are used for both Physical and Mental stress. They also possess the standard Mild, Moderate, and Severe Consequences.

Seeing Double

While each player gets to create two characters, they do not necessarily have to play them both. Discuss whether you would prefer to have the players controlling their own heirs or whether the GM should control all the mortals. Giving the GM control puts significantly more emphasis on the squabbling Ghosts than their mortal protégés.



Game Structure

A game of *Family Matters* is broken into three acts. The bulk of the game takes place in the second act, which is repeated multiple times. This main section is bookended by an introductory and a closing act.

OPENING ACT: PRESENTATION OF THE CANDIDATES

The act of choosing a successor is a highly formalized affair for the Garrund Family. The game begins at a grand ball organized by Lady Garrund, to which she has invited all of her potential heirs so they may discuss the inheritance.

A few hours into the ball, the attendees break for dinner and are seated at the Lady's table, where she questions them about their lives, successes, and desires. Her memory refreshed, she explains to them that she will be spending time over the next few days with each candidate to get to know them before making her decision regarding the succession.

During this act, the players are encouraged to show off their candidates, describing what they do at the ball before the meal and playing through the scene with Lady Garrund. If the group decided to let the GM control their candidates, this scene allows the GM to see how they behave before assuming control of them from this point onwards.

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The Ghosts of Garrund, of course, are also present at the ball. During this act, their game also begins as they begin undermining and embarrassing their opponents' candidates and promoting their own. During the scene, the Ghosts' aim is to place Aspects on their and their opponents' candidates to begin shaping the Lady's view of them.

The Mad World

To avoid the candidates being dogpiled and overwhelmed by their opponents' ghostly patrons, and to ensure they aren't living in a world that's gone totally haywire, the Ghosts must pay one Fate Point to make an action that affects the corporeal world. They may augment this action by spending further Fate Points as usual. The only exception to this is during the Middle Act, where the player whose scene it is does not need to pay Fate Points to actively defend their chosen. Fate Points refresh at the end of each scene.

MIDDLE ACT: THE COMPETITION

From this point onwards the game is divided into rounds. Each round, every player gets to set a scene for the GM to run in which their candidate, aided by their Ghost, tries to impress the Lady, with the other players interfering as they will. During the scenes, Lady Garrund should challenge her potential heirs about a character flaw she perceives, setting them a task to prove their ability to overcome it.

Scenes can take place anywhere on the Garrund family grounds. Unless the player's desired scene seems unreasonable, the group should assume the grounds are large and well-equipped enough to accommodate their request. Once each player has had a scene the round ends.

There is no limit to how many rounds can take place, but an end point should be agreed upon before the game begins. Allow around 20 minutes for each scene and count your players to estimate how long each round will take and pick a number of rounds accordingly.

Once the scene is over, the GM should score how well the player's performance was received. Taking into account Lady Garrund's personality, as well as the character's performance in the face of any challenges and interference, the GM should award the player **zero** points for a **disastrous** scene, **one** point for a **poorly received** scene, **two** points for a **well-received** scene and **three** points for an **exceptional** scene. Keep the scores secret, but adapt how Lady Garrund treats the participants based on their running total.

Playing Dirty

With the family's legacy on the line, events in *Family Matters* can get a little heated. Sometimes this can result in the death of one of the potential successors—accidentally or purposefully—leaving the Ghost who had been championing the successor out of the competition.

Should this happen, the Ghosts of the deceased successors can make it their mission to ruin their rival's chances. The players of the Ghosts continue in the game, either siding with one or all of the other players to help them win, or just victimizing the chosen of their rival. Players should be wary of killing another contender, as it creates them an unstoppable enemy for the remainder of the game and seriously damages their own chances of victory.

CLOSING ACT: CHOOSING THE HEIR

Once the competition is over, the Ghosts and candidates congregate in the Lady's hall to hear who she names as her heir. Should multiple players be tied for points, this scene becomes a tie-breaker; one final point becomes available for the tying heir who best keeps their composure before the Ghosts' final onslaught. Play this scene in character, but keep the GM's notes on hand as to how they scored each round so players are able to see how the Lady reached the decision she did.

What Next?

Family Matters is designed as a one-off game, but if your group wanted to, the story could easily be extended. Two suggestions of how to do this are presented below.

OVER AND OVER

Once the matter of the succession is settled, the Garrund family falls back into its usual pattern. A short time later Lady Garrund passes away and the chosen heir assumes control of the estate.

Many years later, the new Lord or Lady Garrund decides it's time to choose an heir of their own. They summon a new selection of potential heirs to Garrund Manor, getting the Ghosts' attention and beginning the new round of the game.

The winner of the current session of *Family Matters* becomes the GM for the next session, playing the new Lord or Lady, and watching over the next generation of hopefuls vying for attention. The new GM narrates how the family, and the world, has changed and designs some new **impending issues** to be introduced during the next session. Players keep their Ghost, but design a new mortal to compete for the inheritance.

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ALL FOR ONE

Without Lady Garrund's steady hand, the family's fortunes once again begin to deteriorate and they are beset by new troubles. The family rallies around their new Lord or Lady and sets out to change their fate.

To the Ghosts' surprise, they discover they are able to accompany their descendants outside of the family's grounds so long as they stay reasonably close to them. The family, aided by their spiritual guardians, embarks on a series of adventurous and daring schemes to save their name and put the family back in the global limelight.

Players retain control of both of their characters and the game shifts to a more episodic narrative, following their exploits.

Sample Characters

COLONEL ABYNDON B. GAFFY

Colonel Gaffy served abroad, died fighting for his country, and lives on determined to tell anyone he can about it. He has a military love of order and discipline, but after dying a gruesome death, now abhors the overuse of violence. He values people with practical skills and thinks someone who has proven themselves a success already in life would be best suited to take over the family legacy.

ASPECTS

HIGH CONCEPT: A SOLDIER, KILLED IN BATTLE

TROUBLE: SEEN TOO MUCH

BELIEFS: SHOW, DON'T TELL; EVERYTHING AT THE RIGHT TIME

APPROACHES

GREAT +4: Fight

GOOD +3: Notice, Physique

FAIR +2: Athletics, Resources, Shoot

AVERAGE +1: Contacts, Provoke, Stealth, Will

STUNTS

Military Precision. Colonel Gaffey receives a +2 bonus to Fight when he makes the first roll of combat.

NOTES

Refresh: 3

MS. FLORENCE HARRINGTON-WALSH, GAFFY'S CHOSEN ONE

Florence Harrington was born outside of the Garrund family, but married into the distant Walsh branch. While initially repressed by her husband, his untimely death allowed her to make her passion into her career and she used the money she'd been left to travel the world, becoming a successful botanist. She is well respected in scientific circles and has made back her money through her works—presenting her findings to learned circles and patenting new formulas and medicines she creates.

ASPECTS

HIGH CONCEPT: FAMOUS BOTANIST

TROUBLE: I WONDER WHAT THAT TASTES LIKE...

APPROACHES

GOOD +3: Clever

FAIR +2: Careful, Sneaky

AVERAGE +1: Flashy, Quick

MEDIOCRE +0: Forceful

STRESS

□ □ □

CONSEQUENCES

Mild (2) | Moderate (4) | Severe (6)

LADY LOUISE HARTNETT

Lady Hartnett is the incumbent Lady Garrund’s aunt. She was pleased to see one of the “close family” take the seat when the succession last came around, and is keen to see that the same happens again; she finds the idea of anyone who is not a family by blood taking her seat exquisitely distasteful. She enjoyed the finer things in life and deeply misses being able to partake of them. Time has only made her tongue more barbed, even after it got her killed.

ASPECTS

HIGH CONCEPT: A SOCIALITE, POISONED OVER AN INSULT

TROUBLE: MY MOUTH WORKS FASTER THAN MY BRAIN

BELIEFS: ONLY TRUST BLOOD; COMMONERS HAVE NO VALUE

SKILLS

GREAT +4: Deceive

GOOD +3: Contacts, Provoke

FAIR +2: Empathy, Resources, Will

AVERAGE +1: Crafts, Investigate, Lore, Notice

STUNTS

Simple Minds. Lady Hartnett gains a +2 bonus when using her Deceive against commoners.

NOTES

Refresh: 3

LORD WOOLF GARRUND-MINNETT, HARTNETT’S CHOSEN ONE

Lord Garrund-Minnett represents the current peak of local nobility as one half of the happy (and politically fortuitous) joining of the Garrunds to the rich Minnett family through marriage. Very aware of how important his marriage to the Minnett heir is to the Garrund family, and how much wealth he now has access to through her, he lords his position over the rest of his family and treats them more like servants with each passing day.

ASPECTS

HIGH CONCEPT: UPTIGHT NOBLEMAN

TROUBLE: TRADITION IS TRADITION FOR A REASON

APPROACHES

GOOD +3: Forceful

FAIR +2: Clever, Flashy

AVERAGE +1: Careful, Quick

MEDIOCRE +0: Sneak

STRESS

□ □ □

CONSEQUENCES

Mild (2) | Moderate (4) | Severe (6)



APPROACHES AS SCALE: HOW TO GO BIG IN FATE

by TRACY BARNETT

You're creeping through the tunnels of the dragon's lair, trying to stay as quiet as possible. It doesn't pay to wake a dragon, especially when you're looking to steal from it. There's an ambient glow that gets brighter as you proceed. When you round the last corner and the tunnel opens into the lair itself, you've got one thought:

Holy cow, that dragon is huge.

In a lot of traditional roleplaying games, there are mechanical ways to handle scale. Bigger things hit harder, move more slowly, get more hit points, and so on. In Fate Core, there aren't any specific guidelines for how to, say, throw a giant at your players, or a kaiju. You could add more stress boxes, give higher skills, sure. But I think there's a better solution.

I ran into this problem when I was writing *Iron Edda: War of Metal and Bone* where giants and giant-scale threats feature prominently. In an early draft of the game, my rule for handling giant threats was simple: if it's bigger than you and it hits you, you're dead. Big feet = squish. I thought that would express the danger of the giants. I wanted to highlight the value of having a giant of your own in your group.

In the early playtests, however, the first thing the players wanted to do was the climb the big dwarven destroyers to attack. If I'd squished them outright, it would have taken away their autonomy. They wanted to fight the giant directly. It makes sense. Fate's a game of big action, and

APPROACHES AS SCALE: HOW TO GO BIG IN FATE

when you combine that with Norse myth, it makes little warriors go for the giants.

The fix came when Clark Valentine suggested I use approaches to signal scale. With giant threats, using an approach for its stats does a few things:

- It puts the focus not on *what* the threat is doing, but *how* it's doing it.
- It keeps the range of skills and shifts the same for giant scale.
- It allows human-sized players to easily interact with giant scale threats.

Example Threat: Our Dragon, Kringellion

To look at how all of this works, we need an example threat. Let's give our hypothetical dragon some scales, wings, claws...and a few aspects and approaches:

That'll do for a character outline. Stunts don't factor into this example, so we'll leave them out for now.

KRINGELLION, THE DESTROYER

ASPECTS

MISTRESS OF THE SEVEN HILLS, AND ALL I SURVEY

IT'S MINE, MINE, MINE, ALL MINE

WINGS THAT COVER THE HILLS IN SHADOW

A STOMACH FULL OF HELLFIRE

INTELLECT AS SHARP AS MY BLADED TEETH

APPROACHES

FORCEFUL:	Good (+3)
CAREFUL:	Poor (+0)
SNEAKY:	Average (+1)
FLASHY:	Fair (+2)
QUICK:	Average (+1)
CLEVER:	Fair (+2)

HOW THE DRAGON DOES DRAGON THINGS

APPROACHES AS SCALE: HOW TO GO BIG IN FATE

The interesting thing about using approaches instead of skills to represent something giant-sized is the abstraction. When we see depictions of massive threats, from Godzilla to Smaug, we're not interested in how well they Fight or Shoot. What we're interested in is how Forceful or Flashy they are. It lets our imaginings of them become larger, because the details of their specific abilities are obscured by how they're approaching the conflict. Approaches let big threats stay big.

HOW THE NUMBERS WORK

One of the things that really gets in my way when it comes to scale in other games is that the math gets big along with the threat. You end up adding modifier after modifier, and things tend to bog down. With approaches as a signal for scale, the math stays the same. With our example dragon, I used the same range of numbers as characters in Fate Accelerated. The same number range for skills and such helps keep the game moving.

We can also use the ratings on those approaches to do a few different things, such as giving the players a way to interact with a giant-sized threat. That sounds like a segue!

GIANT-SCALE THREATS AS MAPS

If you run up to Kringellion the Destroyer and try to stab her using Fight, you may or may not do much damage. Mechanically, it's possible to hit hard enough (more on why it's difficult to hurt her later), but human-scale individuals often do best in combat against giant-scale threats by creating advantages and setting things up for their giant-scale allies to do the hitting.

To create those advantages, or have the characters interact with Kringellion, we assign each of Kringellion's approaches to a different section of her body, then map out those sections as combat zones. Each of those zones has a number assigned to it, the same number as the rating on the approach of the zone.

Here's how the approaches and body zones break down with Kringellion:

KRINGELLION, THE DESTROYER

APPROACHES AND BODY ZONES

CAREFUL (HIND LEGS):	Poor (+0)
CLEVER (HEAD):	Fair (+2)
FLASHY (WINGS):	Fair (+2)
FORCEFUL (TAIL):	Good (+3)
QUICK (TORSO):	Average (+1)
SNEAKY (FOREARMS):	Average (+1)

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You could feasibly assign whatever numbers you want to those zones, reflecting an increased difficulty for, say, trying to climb on the dragon's wings. For this example, and for *Iron Edda*, I kept the numbers the same as the approach ratings to keep this method's overhead low.

The ratings on those zones are the difficulties that characters have to overcome to be able to do anything in that zone. The way the approaches are assigned to the body parts also gives you some good information about how to run a giant-scale threat. Kringellion's legs are Careful, with a low rating. This means she won't be leaping around her lair, instead choosing to plant her feet when on the ground. While those feet are planted, though, her Forceful tail will be slapping characters around left and right.

If a human-scale character wants to create an advantage on one of those body parts/zones, you can either have them roll versus the passive difficulty, or you can make a roll with the approach to reflect the dragon's active defense against being **Tied Down**, for example.

This strategy works well if your party of PCs is made up of one or two giant-scale characters and a few human-scale characters that are creating advantages as setups for the big characters to hit hard. What happens when you've got highly adventurous PCs (i.e., all of them), or no giant-scale characters?

When They Hit, They Hit Hard

The ratings for each approach do more than double duty as passive difficulties for combat zones on a giant body. They also serve to reflect how much more powerful a giant-scale threat can be for a human-scale opponent.

I like to keep the math simple in Fate, and the system supports this really well. When using approaches as scale, we handle this by using the ratings on each approach as a Weapon rating on offense, and an Armor rating on defense.

So much damage may seem egregious at first glance; 5 shifts from a mostly average roll seems like a lot. But that's the point—we're talking about threats that are scaled to make the average adventurer quake in their boots. Looking at it from a mostly narrative/fiction perspective, that number of shifts makes sense.

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Delithia the Bold chooses to forego the advantage creation her companions have been doing. She pulls her longbow, takes aim, and lets loose with a human-scale Shoot roll. Her Shoot is +3, and her dice come up **⚡⚡⚡⚡**. Net of 4, and not a bad shot. Kringellion chooses to defend Flashily, using her mighty wings to blow the arrow away. Kringellion rolls **⚡⚡⚡⚡**, for a total of 3. However, because Kringellion is giant-scale, her +2 on her Flashy wings counts as Armor:2. That means Delithia fails by 1 shift, and the arrow goes sailing off into the far reaches of the cave.

To punish Delithia for her temerity, Kringellion plants her feet and whips her tail Forcefully at the archer's head. The dragon rolls well, **⚡⚡⚡⚡**, for a total of 5. Delithia tries to get out of the way with her Great (+3) Athletics, but rolls **⚡⚡⚡⚡**. Kringellion has Delithia by 2 shifts, plus the Weapon:3 on her Forceful approach. That's 5 shifts of dragon tail slamming into our impudent archer.

It also makes sense from a mechanical perspective. There are two factors that feed into the mechanical side of things.

- **The system is Fate.** Yes, that's enough stress to take out most characters in one hit. However, in Fate, characters are resilient, and are built for success. It might come at a cost (consequences, etc.), but characters in Fate generally succeed. They've got fate points to spend, created advantages to invoke, and stress tracks. Big threats mean risk. If the character decides it's worth it, they'll find a way to succeed against opponents at scale.
- **Characters can seek out Armor and Weapons to even the odds.** None of these options for scale negate how Weapon damage and Armor shift absorption work. That might be the most important point of all of this. An Armored character absorbs the extra shifts normally. This allows prepared characters to be able to withstand a blow from a giant-scale threat, and maybe even give back as good as they got.

Stress for Giant-Scale Threats

Fate Accelerated uses only one track for all character and enemy stress. That same method is the default when it comes to giant-scale threats. The same numbers that we used to map the approaches and determine difficulty can be used for stress boxes as well.

By default, give a giant-scale threat a number of stress boxes equal to the rating of its highest approach. For Kringellion, we would assign 3 stress boxes. This doesn't seem like many stress boxes, but since we use that same rating as Armor, it means human-scale opponents have to hit *really* hard to damage something that's giant-scale. This parity also lets us do a few different things:

- Stress is easy to track, and you don't have to do much figuring to whip up a giant-scale threat on the fly. Handy for games where you don't have as much time to prepare as you would have liked.
- Giant-scale threats without a highly rated approach aren't *that difficult* to take down. Most characters in Fate have at least 3 physical stress boxes, so all you're really doing is helping giant-scale threats hit hard, and giving them a chance to absorb stress.

What happens if you make a big, hulking giant-scale threat, stat it out, and decide that 3 stress boxes isn't enough? Well, you've got a couple of options:

- Increase the value of its highest approach. Harder-hitting essentially means harder to take down in this case. Increase Kringellion's Forceful approach to +5, and you're looking at 5 stress boxes for your players to deal with, as well as Weapon:5 damage and Armor:5 absorption. Remember that any rating above +4 is a vastly increased difficulty for the players!
- Look to your threat's aspects. If your threat has an aspect that indicates better defense, give your threat an extra stress box per appropriate aspect. Kringellion has ***Wings That Cover the Hills in Shadow***. It's a small stretch, but it seems like those could be used well defensively, so we could give her a fourth stress box.

Creating Advantages as Giant-Scale Threats

Creating advantages as a giant-scale threat works the same as it does for everyone in Fate Core. There is one situational wrinkle, however: If you send a giant-scale threat against a party that has all human-scale characters, the giant-scale advantage is automatically treated as a success with style on a successful roll. If the giant-scale threat rolls a success with style, then it generates an additional invoke of that aspect.

This brings up another new rule to use for created advantages: use whatever someone rolls to create an advantage as the target number needed to hit to overcome the aspect. If you're human-scale, treat that as normal (a 4 to create the advantage means a 4 to overcome). For giant-scale threats, double that number. So if a giant-scale threat ends up rolling a total of 4 to create an advantage, it will take Legendary (+8) roll to overcome. Feel free to ignore this doubling if a giant-scale character is overcoming the advantage.

You can use these same rules if you have a mixed group with giant-scale and human-scale characters, but you might want to have the giant-scale characters spend a stunt to get the ability. If you don't, it's one more bonus that giant-scale characters have. Threats, being threats, get to break the rules a little bit. If you're hugely balance-minded, make these bonuses cost your threats a stunt as well.

Players with Giant-Scale Characters

It's possible that you'll have players who want to have giant-scale abilities. It all depends on the type of game you're running. In our fantasy-type example, it might not come up as much. Maybe a character would get a magical item that gives them a giant-scale ability, but it doesn't have to be a player option. However, if you're running a take on *Pacific Rim*, then you definitely want to have giant-scale rules available for your players. Here are a few options:

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SITUATIONAL

This is how the Bonebonded work in *Iron Edda*. I built the following Extra:

EXTRA: BONEBONDED

Permissions: Replace your Warrior Clan aspect with a Bond aspect. Your spirit is bound to that of a dead giant. Giants are cruel, capricious, and tend towards evil. They bear no love for humans. However, you have chosen this bond to help save your people from the constructions of the dwarves. You will continually battle the nature of the giant as you use the bones. This battle continues even when you are not working with the bones. The bond is a part of you, always. Look to the approaches you chose for the bones to give you an idea of the temperament of your bond. Some giants are brutish and straightforward, while others are subtle and cruel. This is the burden you will carry with you; choose well.

Costs: 2 refresh; 1 of your starting 3 stunts must be used on your giant.

This Extra is pretty straightforward. You get an aspect that relates to being Bonebonded, you pay 2 refresh (*Iron Edda's* default is 4), and you must assign a starting stunt to the giant. All of the other ramifications are narrative and social, Bonebonded being a new thing in the context of the setting. You can use this as a template to build your own stunt for mecha pilots or dragon-riders.

SINGLE POWER

In *Iron Edda*, there are Runescribed, people with access to a single approach that operates at giant scale. Here's how their Extra is worded:

EXTRA: RUNESCRIBED MAGIC

Permissions: Your Sacred Item aspect is your Rune; indicate which Rune it is and how it's inscribed (scarred, tattooed, burned, etc.).

Example: *Frostburned Rune of Isa* (Ice)

Costs: Reduce your refresh by 1.

You gain a single approach at Good (+3) that reflects your tie to your Rune. That Runic approach operates on giant scale.

Attack: When attacking a giant-scale thing with your Runic approach, you may deal stress as normal. When attacking a human-scale thing, treat your Rune as having a Weapon rating equal to the rating of the Rune.

Defend: You can use your Runic approach to defend against giant-scale attacks as normal. If you use your Runic approach to defend against a human-scale attack, treat the Rune as having an Armor rating equal to the rating of the Runic approach.

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For this, there are also narrative/setting constraints. The Runescribed cannot hold political power, and are often the most devoted to their Clan. These constraints help guide the players so they don't overuse their approach. If they do, there are social consequences.

STUNTS

The final way to handle characters who want to operate at giant scale is by giving them a stunt that costs a fate point to activate. Here is the example stunt from *Iron Edda*:

The Bigger They Are. You've got lots of experience attacking giants, and you know how to hit them where it hurts. For the cost of a fate point, you can use a skill as if it were an approach, allowing it to affect things on giant scale for one exchange.

This is the simplest way to handle giant scale, and a good method if you're looking to slowly introduce the idea of giant-scale threats to your game.

Wrap-Up

Giant-scale threats can add some interesting variety to your campaign. All of the above methods will allow you to literally bring out the big guns—kaiju, spaceships, mecha, etc.—and present your players with threats that act in accordance with their size. When you choose to unveil a giant-scale threat, these mechanical options help provide both a sense of scale and an appropriate sense of danger. Have fun! 🎲

(Special thanks to Clark Valentine for the original idea of using approaches to signify scale. Thanks as well to Fred Hicks, Rob Donoghue, and John Adamus for the refinements that came from the playtest sessions at Metatopia in 2013.)



SWORD AND SORCERESS

HOW TO MAKE YOUR SWORD AND SORCERY FATE GAME SEXY (NOT SEXIST)

by KIRA MAGRANN

Imagine all those beautiful Frazetta Conan illustrations. Actually, don't imagine them: go take a look at them on the internet! When women are featured in the shot, where are they? Most often they're at the feet of our muscled hero, clinging pathetically to his mighty thighs. This communicates an implicit power dynamic, one where the men are strong and the women need saving.

Now imagine a simple gender role reversal. Conan is a woman, and a beautiful beefcake guy, pathetic and scared, clings to the feet of our lady hero. Changes a lot, huh?

But unfortunately, the women in sword and sorcery tales are frequently the ones who need rescuing, the ones who are less than the hero. They might look badass, but they don't get to *be* badass.

Women in sword and sorcery movies and comics sometimes break this mold: Grace Jones and Sandahl Bergman were considered warriors alongside the main hero in the Conan movies and Red Sonja is often depicted as the lady version of Conan—although she is arguably the source of the chainmail bikini controversy that plagues the halls of geekdom. Despite their many problematic elements (mostly an un-equal objectification of their bodies), they're still badass heroes in the Conan mythos.

I love the Conan setting—it's super pulpy and amazing—but I always wished the gender elements were a bit more equitable. A few writers have seen this potential, among them Marion Zimmer Bradley; her

long running *Sword and Sorceress* anthology sought to undermine these tropes. Most of the time though, women in this kind of fiction still end up damseled or following an unfortunate iteration of the rape revenge trope.

So how do you include and highlight gender and sexiness in a sword and sorcery style game without accidentally making your setting sexist? Here are some tips, tricks, and mechanics suggestions for your next sword and sorcery style Fate game.

Creating Gender-Focused Issues

There's a ton of flexibility with settings in Fate, but the big focus is pulp fiction. All that stuff from early comics, sci-fi, smut, and dime novels are what really works in Fate. Manipulate that to your advantage! Sword and sorcery is already pulp fiction...but gender and sexuality in the default setting is extremely limited: very heterosexual, male, and normative.

When creating the setting for your sword and sorcery game, it's pretty easy to accidentally default to one that doesn't include everyone's stories. We need to tweak such settings to make sure we're including all genders in narratives that are meaningful to them. Stories specifically related to sex and gender of people who are not men are different than men's stories, and so when we focus on these people we also have to focus on *their* stories. Otherwise, we're just participating in tokenism—we have representation, but the gender narrative remains centered around the hetero cis man. In other words, including a woman in your story doesn't make it a narrative that's relevant to women's stories.

INTERSECTIONAL ISSUES

One way to make settings inclusive is to focus on *intersectional issues*, especially social concerns invoked by modern feminism. Intersectional feminism posits that there's not one, but multiple cultural issues that help to systematically oppress women and affect people in all kinds of prescribed gender roles. Why use intersectional feminist issues as inspiration? They're core conflicts that your group can utilize to create the main thrust of the action in your game. Here are some common intersectional feminist issues that translate well into sword and sorcery fiction:

- Race
- Sexuality
- Ability
- Class
- Citizenship
- Body Autonomy
- Age
- Spirituality
- Education
- Occupation

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It's easy to use these to subvert traditional themes in sword and sorcery—fighting sorcerers and becoming more manly gets changed to plotting the takedown of a corrupt leader to gain freedom for the poor, for example—but you and your group can come up with your own too.

Avoiding sexist stories doesn't mean avoiding sexism. Sword and sorcery stories are often about criminals, slaves, or other low status people rising to be great adventurers, leaders, or kings, the perfect metaphor for fighting the status quo as a gender minority and ending the oppression of people who, like you, have no power. Use that metaphor in your stories!

If you'd prefer not to have these issues be a major part of your character, PCs don't need to be the characters who face these challenges. NPCs can easily get our heroes wrapped up in stories that address these problems. You can still be a big strong male Conan, and be a good ally to those around you who are fighting these fights!

At the start of your campaign, pick one or two intersectional issues and write them down on index cards to help you create your current and impending issues as usual. Find ways to make them fun and interesting; no one wants to play the “very special episode” of Conan.

Jeromy and Kira are playing sexy sword and sorceress Fate and decide to choose sexuality and spirituality as intersectional issues in their campaign. As they make their characters and talk about the setting, they create their issues based around those themes in a sword and sorcery style setting. They ask themselves, “What would our low status characters need to fight against to bring these themes into our setting?”

After a little talking about what they'd like to see in the game, they come up with:

Sexuality: Sexual expression is strictly forbidden by law in the city of Qaath.

Spirituality: The cult of the God Queen of Snakes believes all men should be covered and modest.

Both of these setting details seem like fun places to engage the themes they chose!

GENDER TROPES

It's easy to fall into gender tropes with narratives too. Pregnancy, children, damseling, and rape are the most common tropes for non-male characters. It's ok to include those things, but try not to emphasize them exclusively, or force them on the PCs as major plot points. If it's meaningful for your players to engage in themes of family, you can introduce child characters, but don't have a woman's children be the only thing she can protect. Don't just have women in danger and needing rescuing—put important male figures in danger too. Subverting those tropes may seem like small things, but it will make all the difference in your game. Evan is running a Fate game and wants to include a conflict for Kira's character. He thinks it would be fun for her to deal with pregnancy as an issue, since their game has sexuality as one of the issues. And since her character's just hooked up with Jeromy's character, it would make sense if she was pregnant from their lusty encounter.

So in the scene after they hook up, Evan says, “Kira, I think your character is pregnant! That'll be a really interesting conflict for you. How will you keep up your roguish ways?”

Kira looks uncomfortable. She wants to decide when her character should be pregnant: “Actually, I'd rather not have my character get pregnant. That wouldn't be a fun conflict for me, and I feel like it's taking away my character agency in a very gendered way.”

Jeromy adds, “Yeah, and wouldn't I be the father? Wouldn't that affect my character too? Fathers dealing with pregnancy is also an important gender issue.”

Evan says, “You're right, I didn't mean to make such a biased gender assumption.” He thinks a moment. “Jeromy, it seems like you might be interested in dealing with a pregnancy storyline. What if I gave the pregnancy plot to you instead? One of your character's exes discovers she's pregnant, and now both of you have to figure out how to navigate that, with your budding relationship with Kira's character?”

Jeromy nods. “That sounds like an interesting complication to explore.”

Kira agrees. “Yes! I think that's a fantastic solution. Let's go with that.”

Creating Inclusive Setting Elements

MAKING CULTURE REAL

Creating different cities or cultures that treat sex and gender differently is a lot like the world we actually live in. Even in the US, there are certain cities that are more queer friendly, like San Francisco or New York City, as compared to Birmingham, Alabama. Showcasing those differences in your sword and sorcery cities reflects upon contemporary real world culture in a way that's meaningful to your players and story.

Culture is a huge part of the setting in sword and sorcery stories because often characters spend a lot of time in cities and towns, instead of out and about adventuring in the wilderness. When thinking about the cultures the PCs come from, consider addressing some specifics. How does this culture think of marriage, for example? Does this other culture celebrate homosexuality *more* than heterosexuality? Are many gender dynamics reversed, or confusing, in this other culture?

The great thing about sword and sorcery settings is that they're fantasy, so don't be afraid to make radically different choices than what we see in the real world. Making those choices can be extra relevant to real world issues, pointing out those differences through metaphorical extremes in your fiction. Consider making some aspects for cities in the setting that are sticky but give the players goals to work toward—things that are true now (*Homosexuality Is Illegal Here*) that the characters will have the opportunity to change during play (*Marriage Equality Is Finally Celebrated Here*).

Using the issues cards based on the themes at play, drill down a bit further to get some city aspects.

Sexuality: Sexual expression is strictly forbidden by law in the city of Qaath.

Aspect: *The Eyes See All in Qaath*

Spirituality: The cult of the God Queen of Snakes believes all men should be covered and modest.

Aspect: *Ruthless God Queen of Snakes*

DIVERSE AND SEXY NPCs

You'll want the characters in your stories to represent a variety of interesting genders, races, and orientations. So, when you're creating NPCs, consider this representation: avoid tokenism (having just one of any minority) and try to pass the Bechdel test (have two women in a scene together talking about something other than a man).

Three NPCs is a good default number to get the feel of a new place. Once you've created these NPCs, create aspects for each of them that tie them to one thematic issue, one PC, and one personal issue that creates conflict in this location. You may want to create these NPCs with your group so you all have some agency over what issues you want to hit in that city/town/area. If you can, try to tie the PCs to more than one NPC, so the conflicting interests of the NPCs create conflicts for the PCs.

Also consider writing down a few notes on how the NPCs look and how they're presenting. Describe skin tone, hair, and one other feature about their body or decoration that seems to stand out. This method isn't perfect, but helps ensure that you introduce diverse races in your stories. And if you create more complex descriptions of characters ahead of time, in the moment you won't just default to stereotypes (as it is easy to do).

Here's an example of three NPCs.

MAGDA, THE SERPENT TAMER

Light brown skin, dark kinky hair gathered in small buns, fiery eyes

ASPECTS

First Serpent Dancer of My Family: A taboo religious practice, drawing from the thematic issue of spirituality.

Tarek's Old Friend: A relationship with a PC (Tarek).

Fierce Protector of the Riverland: A personal issue that creates conflict in this location.

YURIN, THE BROTHEL SLAVE

Beautiful brown skin, shaved bald, a light sandaled step

ASPECTS

Born This Way: He's queer, hitting on the thematic issue of sexuality.

Shereen's Brother: A relationship with a PC (Shereen).

Owned: A personal issue that creates conflict in this location.

PHILOMENA, THE PIRATE QUEEN

Dark brown skin, long glorious black locks with trinkets woven in, many ringed fingers

ASPECTS

River Goddess: She worships none but herself, another tie-in to spirituality.

Shereen's Rival: A relationship with a PC (Shereen).

This River Is Mine: A personal issue that creates conflict in this location.

Focusing on Steamy Screen Time

Sword and sorcery, Conan and Red Sonya style, is 100% sexy. Often in this genre we focus on our heroes slaying enemies, stealing artifacts, winning contests, and freeing spirits...and then going on a drinking and fucking binge until all their hard-earned gold is gone and they have to do another job.

Take these mighty appetites to heart and focus on those stories, giving them a bit more screen time than you might in a normal dungeon crawl. Shift the focus away from fighting monsters and stealing their stuff, and put it more on interactions between other humans and cultures in the city. Consider starting each session just returning from an adventure, jumping right into that tavern/bedroom/quiet walk through town. Fate is best when it focuses on aspects instead of hit points, drama instead of attacks of opportunity.

SEXY SEXY ASPECTS

Intimacy in sword and sorcery can be so many things. People with magical powers and who perform heroic feats of strength and wit tend to have megahuman ways of interacting too. Don't limit characters to physical touching; perhaps there can be magical connections, altered perception, battles for dominance and competition, or picking that lock for an exciting side quest in the dark.

Consent

Just remember no matter what encounter you're crafting, be transparent with the other players about your intent, and get consent both in and out of character. Be sure everyone playing the game is comfortable, and all the characters in the game are comfortable too.

An ideal way to focus on intimacy and communicate this to the other players at the table is to dedicate one of your PC's aspects to an

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intimacy statement about your character. By stating these preferences explicitly on the character sheet, players can easily compel each other toward interesting interactions. These communicate both what types of interactions the player is interested in engaging their character in, but also hint at where they could happen. Aspects like:

- *Wrestling Is Like Sex to This Barbarian*
- *Prefers Long Walks through City Markets*
- *Gifts Are My Love Language*
- *My Mind Is the Key to My Loins*

Remember that, in sexy stories, you're not really driving the narrative toward describing the sex. You're ideally driving it toward the description of everything up until, and then after, the sex. If your group wants to describe all the sexy times, that's awesome too, and there's absolutely nothing wrong with getting into those details. When it comes to the story, though, it tends to be what happens around the act of sex that really drives the story forward.

Consider the attitudes of various characters and NPCs in your game. For example: the women may be as forward as the men. Or perhaps the men are even shyer. The PCs can always drive the interaction, too. As a GM, offering players a romantic option and seeing if they bite is a fantastic way to get their consent to that option. Often when I do this in a game, I'll roleplay what the character or NPC is doing, and then describe them about to make a move ("He leans in to kiss you"). Then pause. At this point, asking out of character, "He's about to kiss you! What do you do?" is a great way of gaining consent to move forward with those actions and that description. It also gives the player agency, allowing them a chance to grab hold of the narrative and describe what they would do!

In Fate it's easy to tie that into compelling aspects. One could compel a character's intimacy aspect, so that you could ask the question while also compelling the aspect at the same time. It would look something like:

Sexy Character Descriptions

"He's about to kiss you at the end of your long walk through the market. I'm going to compel your *Prefers Long Walks through City Markets* aspect with this fate point! Do you accept?"

Chainmail bikinis are sexy as hell. They're also practically ridiculous, but a bikini isn't about practicality, it's about showing skin. It's important to realize that the problematic issues aren't with them as an article of

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clothing, but how the women wearing them are often described/depicted. The person wearing the bikini is on display, ass and tits front and center regardless of body position. A woman often isn't depicted as muscular or as powerful as a man with just as little clothing on. Conan might be wearing just as little, but his strength, his dominance, his brutality are what his body is about, regardless of how much skin is showing.

Strong is sexy! When describing the characters and NPCs, especially in a sexy way, try to describe everyone with similar adjectives. Describe women as strong, men as seductive, trans men as classically beautiful. Think outside the descriptor box, especially noting what your own preferences and biases might be. A simple way to subvert a sexist view of sexiness and objectification of non-man characters is by describing everyone in sexy ways. The beefy barbarian or tricky sorcerer can be just as sexy and beautiful as a swordswoman or sorceress. Remember to include characters of all genders, including trans*, cis, and non-binary too. Keep the chainmail bikini if you like, but make it powerful, not powerless.

CREATING SEXY SCENES

There's a few ways to use Fate mechanics to structure sexy scenes, and then continue to encourage them to happen.

Contests are a non-violent way for characters to have challenges in a Fate game. Want to have a flirtation building up to your sexy scene? Here's a way you could do that.

First, ask the players if they're interested in doing a contest for each other's affection. This could be a neat way to see if you get a sexy scene with that person or not that particular night. It's essential to ask consent for the contest to happen, otherwise it could easily turn into one player forcing another player into a flirtation or sexy scene they don't want. Once you've both agreed it would be fun, set up the scene for your contest. Where are you, what are you doing, what type of contest will it be?

- On the beach, drinking wine, a contest of flirtatious and witty conversation.
- In the gladiator ring, having a duel, a contest of flirtatious wrestling.
- In the market, stealing flowers, a contest of clever thievery.

In a contest, you go back and forth, setting up a series of overcome actions until you get to a conclusion. In this case, you're competing for the same thing (each other's affections) so there isn't really a winner or loser here, merely someone who's showing off more, is more flashy, or

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becomes the ultimate initiator of the intimate scene. The win condition should be defined ahead of time, so everyone knows exactly what you're competing for. Remember, these types of contests are a flirtation. The ultimate goal here isn't sex—you don't win sex from flirtation. You might compete to see who makes the first move, who asks who on a date, or for one person to reveal how they feel about the other first.

Sexy, Not Sexist

This framework is a good start to getting your sexy (but not sexist) sword and sorcery Fate game going. Build with setting aspects, juicy situations, and character aspects to help drive the narrative toward fun encounters with your fellow players. So go forth, smoldering denizens of hot desert city streets, and have fun conquering each other! 🗡️



NEGOTIATIONS IN FATE

by MARK DIAZ TRUMAN

One of my favorite parts of roleplaying is that I get to play characters who can do things I never could: master archers and badass street fighters, werewolves with magic rituals and cyborgs that can hack any computer on the planet. It never matters that I can't shoot a bow, throw a punch, mess with magic, or operate any computer program more complicated than a word processor; my character is the one doing all that stuff, not me.

But there are situations in roleplaying in which player skill and character skill overlap, especially around social skills. If I roleplay out convincing a villain to change his ways, do I need to roll with Rapport or just talk in character? Does it matter that I have a high Rapport if all that's required is for me to roleplay what my character says?

When Brendan Conway and I worked on the new Fate Core update for *Bulldogs!* by Galileo Games, we ran into this problem around haggling over prices. We wanted our players to have fun roleplaying out the back and forth of negotiations, but we also wanted the Haggling skill to matter.

In this article, I explain the new system we developed for *negotiations* in Fate Core, a special system for haggling over costs. Like other lenses for action in Fate—challenges, contests, and conflicts—negotiations work between two PCs or between a PC and an NPC, with any number of assisting characters on either side, helping to structure a series of rolls that encourage players to think strategically about the negotiation while roleplaying out their positions.

Negotiations: The Basics

Like challenges, contests, and conflicts, a negotiation sets up a procedure for handling rolls. Note that a negotiation isn't a challenge, contest, or conflict; those lenses for action are already described in *FATE CORE SYSTEM* (pages 146-175) and cover situations where characters are solving problems, competing for resources, and trying to harm each other.

Negotiation, on the other hand, is about trying to come to a deal. It's not just about convincing the other side that they should buy your products; it's also about pressuring them to take a price you like without revealing how much you want the deal to get done in the first place. Negotiations focus on strengths and weaknesses of a position, in addition to the actual act of convincing, threatening, or tricking someone into taking the deal.

Brendan is GMing a game for Marissa, Isaac, and Justin in which they play FBI agents investigating strange and supernatural cases all over the country. In their second session, they get mixed up in a hostage situation: Isaac's character is taken hostage at a bank they're investigating, leaving Justin and Marissa's characters outside the bank, trying to talk to the bank robbers inside. The group agrees that this will be a negotiation!

Here's how it works:

- Set the stakes for the negotiation
- Select lead negotiators
- Create advantages
- Make a final roll

PHASE 1: SET THE STAKES FOR THE NEGOTIATION

The first step of any negotiation is to agree on the stakes. In *Bulldogs!*, most purchases have a standard cost, but most systems (and situations) don't have such an easy blueprint for outcomes. Before any dice hit the table, both sides have to agree on what will happen if either side succeeds or succeeds with style.

To start, both sides should declare a minimum outcome, whatever it is they think would happen if they "won" the negotiation—remember that this is a negotiation, not a social conflict, so winning can't be something the other side would never tolerate. After those bare minimum successes are detailed, each side should also put forward their version of a

NEGOTIATIONS IN FATE

full victory, what it looks like if the other side mostly concedes in taking the deal.

The players are most interested in getting Isaac and the other hostages out alive, but they'd also like to get the robbers to surrender if the negotiations go well. Brendan thinks the bank robbers are probably most interested in getting away, but they'd also like to take a few hostages with them to ensure their safety.

The players immediately object to the robbers leaving with multiple hostages. There's no way they would let them leave the scene with more than one hostage! Brendan nods, and asks if one hostage would be acceptable. The players agree to that, but only if it's not one of them.

Together, they list out the outcomes:

PC Success: The robbers release Isaac's character, but the robbers still have hostages.

PC Success with Style: The robbers release all the hostages and surrender.

Robber Success: The PCs provide the robbers with a getaway vehicle and ensure their safe passage.

Robber Success with Style: The robbers get to take one NPC hostage with them.

Marissa, Justin, and Isaac agree to those terms—they could live with the robbers getting away with one hostage, and getting Isaac out means that they can put together a plan to free the rest of the hostages!

Ties in Negotiations

Ties in negotiations can mean two things:

- A twist—as would happen in a contest
- The deal falls apart, and the PCs have to find a new way forward

In the event of a tie, the GM chooses which one is more appropriate for the situation at hand.

NEGOTIATIONS IN FATE

PHASE 2: SELECT LEAD NEGOTIATORS

Once the stakes are set, both sides select a lead negotiator. Since the lead negotiator will make the final negotiations roll, it's ideal for both sides to select someone with a high Rapport (or whatever skill makes sense in your setting). At the same time, both sides also want a lead negotiator who has a high resistance skill as well, since they'll also have to defend against any advantages the other side tries to create!

The PCs quickly select Justin's character as their lead negotiator: he's got a Good (+3) Rapport and a Fair (+2) Will. He's not the best negotiator in the FBI, but he's the best they've got on the scene.

Brendan selects Michelle, one of the bank robbers, as the opposing lead negotiator: she's got a Great (+4) Rapport and a Good (+3) Will. The PCs will need to work hard to get her to back down and release the hostages.

PHASE 3: CREATE ADVANTAGES

Now for the fun part: each character involved in the conflict—including the lead negotiators— gets to make one create advantage roll to influence the negotiation. These rolls are based on whatever fictional positioning makes sense for the action the character takes—for example, pointing a gun at someone might let them create an advantage with Shoot. The lead negotiator can then use the free invokes generated by these rolls on the final Rapport roll.

The First to Act?

It's usually clear who should start talking in a negotiation first, but if there's any disagreement, use Empathy to determine who is first to act. A negotiation is a kind of social conflict, and those who have the emotional sensitivity to know when to talk can press the advantage. After that, you can use popcorn initiative (each player chooses who goes next) or go in order of descending Empathy.

The opposing lead negotiator resists these attempts to create advantages—usually with Will—with the hope of turning them around so they create free invokes for the opposition. Sometimes in Fate Core, a failure to create an advantage results in nothing happening; in a negotiation, it *always* leads to the opposition getting free invokes on new aspects. If one character starts waving a gun, for example, with a successful defense the opposition might create the aspect *More Guns than You* (with a free invoke) to remind the other side that they have weapons as well.

NEGOTIATIONS IN FATE

Justin's character has the highest Empathy—Good (+3)—so he gets to act first, talking to Michelle on the phone. He decides to try to talk the robbers down a bit, calming them with Rapport: “Hey, look. I’m sure you’re not bad people. There’s no need for violence. I’m sure we all want to get out of this alive.” He succeeds against Michelle’s Will by a single shift—enough to create **No One Needs to Get Hurt** with one free invoke.

Justin passes the initiative to Marissa’s character; she decides to offer a stick to go along with Justin’s carrot. She levels a sniper rifle into the building and aligns the laser sight right on Michelle’s chest. She doesn’t say anything, but both of them understand the threat. She fails against Michelle, though, coming up short when she rolls Shoot against Michelle’s Will. Michelle says, “If you shoot me, every hostage in this place is dead, even your friend. You know that, right?” Brendan puts **Vulnerable Hostages** down as an aspect with a free invoke for the opposition.

Marissa decides to pass to Isaac’s character. He’s tied up, but he can still help with the negotiation! He Provokes the robbers: “Where are you all going to run to? You took an FBI agent hostage. The best case situation is that you put down your guns now.” He succeeds with style against Michelle’s Will, earning an aspect—**In Over Your Heads** with two free invokes.

Michelle, looking a little panicked, decides to make a show of force. She orders her men to shoot out the window at the cops, driving them back. She rolls with Shoot against Justin’s character’s Will, succeeding once she adds in a +1 for each of the other robbers. She gets **We Still Have Guns** with one free invoke.









Who gets to help?

During the create advantage phase, characters can only lend a +1 to a roll if they aren’t creating an advantage themselves. They can still, however, spend fate points to increase someone’s roll if they can invoke an appropriate aspect. Mobs, who usually have very low rolls, are usually best suited to supporting one NPC instead of trying to create advantages on their own.

NEGOTIATIONS IN FATE


PHASE 4: MAKE A FINAL ROLL

Once the create advantage phase is over, the two lead negotiators make an opposed Rapport roll to determine the outcome of the negotiation, making use of their free invokes. The negotiation is over after this single roll—no repeats—and both sides are bound by the stakes of the negotiation.

Justin rolls     for a total of +4 before adding in any invokes; all the PCs are out of fate points, so they've got to hope their free invokes are enough. Brendan—rolling for Michelle—rolls     for a total of +7, and immediately uses her two free invokes to bring the total up to +11. Justin uses his three free invokes to get up to a +10, but it's not quite enough. The robbers win the negotiation, and the PCs are forced to help them get an escape vehicle provided they leave the hostages behind.

Of course, the mystery is just getting started...

Using Negotiations in Play

Negotiations are a great way to create drama and tension in scenes instead of throwing down into a full conflict or focusing on overcome actions through challenges. We hope you find a use for these at your table! 

BLUE COLLAR NECROMANCY



BLUE COLLAR NECROMANCY

by JACOB POSSIN

It's just a job, dealing with this stuff. The high and the mighty talk all day about High Sorcery and Holy Alchemy, but when things go wrong the necromancers come in to fix the problem. There ain't no theory in necromancy, it is practical know-how that matters. All the book learnin' in the world won't save you from the eldritch horrors and their minions. It's a dirty job. It's a messy job. It's our job.

-Jedidiah Black, Veteran Necromancer

Magics of the Modern World

Magic has always existed. It was dark and mysterious, the power of the gods. For thousands of years, witch doctors, god talkers, and shamans kept the secrets of magic and used them to keep back the night. Three hundred years ago, two events upset this equilibrium: the discovery of High Sorcery and the Church's monopoly on Alchemy. Thus began the primacy of the greater magics and the decline of the old magics, the basis of modern necromancy.

HIGH SORCERY, HIGH ALCHEMY

The discovery of High Sorcery by Gretta the Great changed everything. She unearthed the secrets of manipulating aether, the breath of the gods. Only a select few had the ability, and Gretta gathered all she could to her banner, leading directly to the first Lineage of High Sorcerers.

At around the same time, a man named Christophe Victorine left the Hermetic Order and wrote *Une étude de l'âme de la Matière*, A Study of the Soul of Matter. It set out the precepts of alchemy and how it related to humanity's place in the universe. More importantly, its contents worked consistently and well. The Church destroyed all copies of the book save for those they controlled. This was the beginning of Holy Alchemy, and the Church's monopoly on technology and science.

THE FALL OF THE OLD WAYS

As these discoveries were made and these power bases began to grow, the shamans and priests of the old ways began to lose prestige, seen as rudimentary and superstitious. Only the most dedicated or desperate would remain practitioners, and the skills and knowledge took on a distasteful new name.

BLUE COLLAR NECROMANCY

Many called these old ways black magic—not because they were evil, but because they were seen as a remnant of a darker age when magic was simple and rough. Much like a garbage collector or a plumber, these practitioners were seen as necessary but undignified. As High Sorcery and Alchemy rose in power over centuries, it was thought that these practices would fade from the world. Then the war began.

THE WAR AND RISE OF THE DEAD

The Final War began when Princess Brunhilde of Austria-Hungary was assassinated by an anti-royalist group said to have received funding from the British. War came quickly to these two nations, drawing in the allies and enemies of both. During the conflict, horrors were unleashed upon the world, weapons and magics never before seen. The death toll was incalculable.

Influenza and attrition ended the war fifteen years ago, but the wounds suffered—mental and physical—have yet to fully heal. Plagues followed the war as flies follow garbage. Economies crashed and a great depression set in. Some claim these are but signs of the true horrors to come.

During the aftermath of the war, necromancy's necessity became apparent. The millions dead or dying—and the millions more mourning the loss of life—unbalanced the universe, threatening cities and towns alike. Necromancy slowly rose as a profession once more, unpleasant but essential in a world filled with the dead. Yet after ten years, the scars are still burnt into the aether. There has been no rain in the farm lands for years, and the dust storms rattle across the Great Plains. The despair and horror create more ghosts every year, and draw in things far worse than that.

Setting Creation

As a Quick Start Adventure, *Blue Collar Necromancy* has everything you need to jump right into your first session. Before you start, you'll want to discuss the broader setting with your group. The game is set in Chicago in early 1934—the height of the Great Depression—so read aloud parts of the setting you think they need to know.

At the start of play, explain the current issue to your players and ask them to fill in one or two additional faces associated with the issue. These extra characters will provide new plot hooks and twists to tie your players more deeply to the strange phenomena they face as necromancers. Then ask your players to choose from one of the two available impending issues: *Those Who Meddle* and *End of the World*. Have them fill in one or two additional faces for their chosen impending issue, as well, rounding out the larger cast of characters.

CURRENT ISSUE: UNDEAD ON THE RISE

With the Great Depression and the remnants of the Great War, the aether is out of balance. The weather and the soil have begun to turn on folk—many say it is due to the undead or the overuse of High Sorcery or Holy Alchemy. Nobody's quite sure why it is happening, but everyone is quick to blame. Suicide and murder are on the rise, and the dust that gets kicked up is causing all manner of maladies. The dead are not getting proper funerals. It is not just ghosts on the rise—zombis and evil spirits are arriving in record numbers.

Faces:

- Thomas Kildere, a doctor devoted to unlocking the secrets of life and death.
- The Ghost of Adler House, the ghost of Henry Adler, formerly an outspoken advocate for the lower classes.

Undead on the Rise

Thomas Kildere

Doctor devoted to unlocking
the secrets of life and death.

The Ghost of Adler House

Ghost of Henry Adler,
outspoken advocate for
the lower classes.

THOMAS KILDERE

ASPECTS

HIGH CONCEPT: WELL-TO-DO DOCTOR

TROUBLE: THE RESURRECTION MAN

OTHER ASPECTS: KNOWLEDGE IS MY SCALPEL,
"FRIENDS" HIGH AND LOW, GENIUS IS MADNESS

SKILLS

GREAT (+4): Lore

GOOD (+3): Contacts, Resources

FAIR (+2): Deceive, Rapport, Will

AVERAGE (+1): Crafts, Investigate, Notice, Provoke

STRESS

Mental: ☐ ☐ ☐

Physical: ☐ ☐

STUNTS

Truth of the Bones. Gain a +2 to Investigate when dealing with corpses or cadavers.

Maddening Intellect. You may use Lore to defend against Provoke, provided you can justify it through the use of information or logic.

Weight of Reputation. Gain a +2 to Contacts when you defend against lies attempting to besmirch your name.

CONSEQUENCES

Mild (2) | Moderate (4) | Major (6)

IMPENDING ISSUE: THOSE WHO MEDDLE

The sorcerers at the college have begun to disappear and there are signs of spirit activity related to this. In truth, a vampire is attempting to overcome the limitations of the half-dead and become truly immortal. His very presence is polluting the aether, making ghosts and other phenomena more common. If left to his own devices, he will kill and devour, unbalancing the aether even more.

Faces:

- Lord Fillip, a vampire from Spain, recently arrived in town to kidnap magical theoreticians in order to further his research into immortality.
- Dr. Hugo Riccardo, a professor of magical theory who is searching for his missing graduate students.

BLUE COLLAR NECROMANCY

IMPENDING ISSUE: END OF THE WORLD

A prominent businessman has decided that the world has grown corrupt and evil, and wishes to destroy it by summoning the Great Unchanged. Over the years he has constructed several odd buildings at specific locations. Each of these was designed to enhance and channel the aetheric energies. Should he and his doomsday cult succeed, the Titans, the Jotun, and worse will return, and all will suffer.

Faces:

- Father Mallory, a local priest concerned with the rising number of undead.
- Herschel, a businessman-turned-cult leader who seeks the end of the world in the service of the Great Unchanged.

Those Who Meddle

Lord Fillip

Spanish Vampire, new in town.
Researching immortality.

Dr. Hugo Riccardo

Professor of Magical Theory.
Searching for missing
grad students.

End of the World

Father Mallory

Local priest concerned
with the rising undead.

Herschel

Cult leader in service to
the Great Unchanged.

Character Creation

In *Blue Collar Necromancy* you take on the role of necromancers attempting to drive back the darkness and save the living from the ravages of the dead. No one respects the job you do, but you are the last line of defense between mankind and the end of the world.

Blue Collar Necromancy is designed for use with Fate Core. Create the characters as normal, save for a small change in aspect generation and the addition of a new skill; complete only two phases of the phase trio for your character, and use the final aspect for a necromancy aspect—explaining why your character chose to hunt ghosts and put them to rest.

After creating characters, the players should take a few moments describing their office and their relationship with the powers-that-be. Remind them that the relationship is strained. They provide a useful service, but no one likes to pay them to do such a dirty job. Discuss a few previous jobs and how they went.

About Necromancy

Necromancy has become organized in response to the rising number of spiritual threats. Necromancers have societies, guilds, or unions that have negotiating power with the authorities. When ghosts crop up, folks know to go to the central office of the necromantic community.

NECROMANCY

Necromancy is, at heart, dealing with horrible things from outside the normal universe—primarily the undead and the restless dead. Other things reside outside the universe; some will trade information, and some are just pests to be kept out.

High Sorcery and Holy Alchemy

High Sorcery and Holy Alchemy are important magical practices, but they are not available to Player Characters. *Blue Collar Necromancy* focuses on necromancy and those who practice it. If you eventually expand to include higher magics, here are some quick setting notes:

- Sorcery is born of the blood, from your mother's side.
- Sorcerers have supernal skill in an area and can grant boons to their followers.
- Holy Alchemy is the manipulation of base matter and energy.
- Through sacrifices and rituals, Alchemists create any material they need.

NECROMANCY SKILL

The Necromancy skill captures the training, talents, and skills of those who can manipulate the dead, often working to send them on to their final rest or destroy them completely. There are no prerequisite skills for Necromancy; all you need is to study the topic and select it as a skill. Oddly enough, some of the best monster hunters, while part of a necromancer organization, do not have the Necromancy skill.



Overcome: Use this skill to force a ghost into corporeal manifestation for a short while (allowing the more physical necromancers to fight the beast directly). It also can be used to summon a spirit, demon, or ghost, though it is very difficult without the creature's true name. This skill does not reveal information about spirits.



Create an Advantage: When you need to set up a special ritual circle or implement that will aid in dealing with a spirit, demon, undead, or tear in the universe, you can use Necromancy to create an aspect related to some necromantic tool.



Attack: Cannot be used to attack directly.



Defend: Cannot be used to defend directly.

NECROMANCY STUNTS

Hardened Soul. When summoning a spirit or ghost, you may reduce the stress dealt to you on a failure by one.

Practical Magic. If you succeed with style on a Necromancy roll to overcome an obstacle, you create a full aspect rather than a boost.

Necromantic Summoning

Removing ghosts and other spiritual entities requires work. The Necromancy skill is only useful after you have gathered the correct information. Once you have the ingredients and requisite information, you must perform a summoning ritual to bring the spiritual entity to you. This is a dangerous proposition, as your spirit must touch the one you are contacting and draw it back in. If something goes wrong, you could die. Once you have the creature bound in a circle, you must either make it physically manifest so it can be fought directly, or you must engage verbally with the creature and convince it to leave this mortal plane.

BLUE COLLAR NECROMANCY

You will need several things in order to bind a ghost: the ghost's True Name, its connection to the world, its weakness, and the properly created circle and accoutrements (goat or chicken blood, incense, sanctified salt, and more esoteric items). The difficulty of summoning a ghost is based on its power. Poltergeists are the most powerful and require a difficulty +8 (Legendary) to summon. Knockers are less powerful and require a difficulty +6 (Fantastic) to summon. Haunts are the weakest type of ghost and only require a difficulty +4 (Great) to summon. These numbers are high, but for each task you have completed, you may lower that difficulty by 1. If you fail the Necromancy roll, you take stress equal to the difference you failed by. Should the stress cause a consequence, the ghost gains an attachment to your character and a bonus of +1 to one of its skills for the remainder of the game. Ghosts gain power by creating emotional links to others.

Summoning Results

Fail: The spirit appears, but it is not bound within the circle and it has done the difference of the roll to the summoner in stress.

Tie: It appears and is bound, but has dealt one stress to the summoner.

Success: It appears and is bound within the circle. It cannot leave the circle unless someone breaks the circle.

Success with Style: You also gain a boost on the ghost.



THE NATURE OF UNDEATH

The undead come in many shapes and forms, but they tend to fall into one of three categories:

The Restless Dead

When aether becomes unbalanced, it focuses on points of great human emotion. Wars, funerals, murders, and suicides are lightning rods for aether imbalance, though no one is sure why. When that emotion builds up, it draws a piece of the soul out and creates a ghost. The greater the emotion, the more powerful and unbalanced the ghost or spirit. The longer a ghost exists, the more power it has. The ghost's power is connected to the number of people who have had a negative encounter with the ghost. Ghosts feed on the pain of the living.

The Hungry Dead

Sometimes a burial goes wrong. Sometimes the subtle humors of the body remain after the soul has passed. This is when the hungry dead rise. There's nothing left of the soul—only the desires of the flesh remain. The simplest of the hungry dead are the zombi. Those few that survive long enough go through a transformation. They become guhls. Faster, stronger, and more cunning, the guhls hunt actively for prey. Should there be enough aether around to draw it in, a spirit or demon can inhabit the guhl, granting it powers and intelligence and enhancing its appetites. Beware the demon-infested guhl.

The Half Dead

When an Alchemist or Sorcerer tries to gain life eternal, an exchange must be made: a life for a life. As time passes, these now damned individuals must kill more and more to continue their existence. The magics slowly drive the users mad, shattering their soul, and something else inhabits the body. This is where vampires, werewolves, mummies, and others originate. Experiments in immortality always fail.

BLUE COLLAR NECROMANCY

SPIRITUAL ASPECTS

Spirits have two aspects that motivate them. Passion is their driving emotion, a simple and direct negative emotion, as those are the easiest for the dead to deal with. The Secret is their hidden self—anything from memories they cling to and repeat over and over, to a strong affinity for an object or person. Spirit minds are fragmented, so they often cannot express why their secret is important or even remember what it is.

Spiritual beings have a broad set of skills that let them interact with the world of flesh. As creatures of emotion that require strong connections to grow in strength, many of their abilities are focused on creating advantages and attacking mortals' mental stress tracks.

Elements: the ghost can increase or decrease the temperature of a room, shake the ground, or create strange phenomena (like blood dripping from walls and the like).

Sounds: from ominous whispers to terrifying, booming shouts. Ghosts can terrify with auditory commands.

Knocking: pushing objects over, flinging them across the room, stacking them in unusual formations.

Attachment: ghosts can elicit strange feelings in people, bursts of intense emotion that seem to come from nowhere. This also can cause terrifying nightmares.

These abilities are relative to the strength of the ghost. A poltergeist will have +7, +5, +3, +1, A knocker will have +4, +3, +2, +1. A haunt will have one at +3, one at +1 and the remainder at 0. Should the ghost deal a consequence to a Player Character, increase one of the ghost's skills by +1. A ghost has stress based on its Attachment skill, equal to the rating.

SARAH RACKHAM

An old and powerful ghost who haunts an orphanage.

ASPECTS

PASSION: PROTECT WHAT IS MINE

SECRET: ALL CHILDREN ARE MINE

SKILLS

GREAT (+4): Attachment

GOOD (+3): Sounds

FAIR (+2): Elements

AVERAGE (+1): Knocking

STRESS

□□□□



Undead on the Rise

The characters are approached with a job by the police. A man has been murdered and it looks like a zombi attack. The murder scene is the Adler Mansion, a labyrinth of a building on a sprawling estate.

SCENE 1: A DARK INTELLIGENCE

The Adlers, a well-to-do family of great wealth and renown, claim to have no knowledge of what happened, only that they've had otherworldly issues with the family estate. A ghost of some power has begun to exert influence over the family. Both the zombi and the ghost are of the eldest son, Henry.

As the PCs investigate, some facts will crop up: there are signs of a haunting throughout the house, and the family is very evasive about Henry, claiming he has been on an extended business trip for the last year—the same timeframe for the strange happenings. While the PCs search the house, the zombi is hunting them.

With a connection to the ghost borne from its creation, the zombi has more subtlety than most and attacks only when it becomes difficult to leave the house. While filthy and terrible to behold, the clothing it wears is of the highest quality and tailor fit. The zombi is the notable villain, but the ghost will also take turns to quietly grant aspects to the zombi and manipulate the situation to gain power. Play up the strange effects of the situation and let the players know something is feeding on them. The zombi fights until defeated.

To properly put a zombi down, you need to complete a challenge scene: the necromancers need to hold the thing in place (Physique vs +3 difficulty), incant the ritual (Necromancy vs +2), and then burn the body and salt the ashes (Resources vs +1 to have the right materials on hand, or a Investigate vs +2 to find and use makeshift materials that will do in a pinch).

Aspects: *No One Wants a Necromancer Here; Labyrinthian Decadence; Emotion in the Air; Secrets Buried Deep*

Remaining in Place

The longer a ghost remains in a place, the more the aether becomes unbalanced. Things decay at uneven rates. Chairs molder and fall apart right next to imperishable bowls of fruit. Rats, mice, and insects appear in great numbers, alongside shrews, bats, spiders, and cats. If the ghost exists long enough, time and space can become muddled, as well. Hallways will stretch on forever, or they will disappear in a single step. In a truly haunted house, nights *can* last a lifetime.

THE POLICE DETECTIVE

ASPECTS

LET THE NECROMANCERS DEAL WITH THIS NIGHTMARE

APPEARANCE OF COMPETENCE • CORRUPT BULLY

SKILLS

GOOD (+3): Investigate

FAIR (+2): Contacts

AVERAGE (+1): Provoke

PERCIVAL ADLER

ASPECTS

LEADER OF A POWERFUL NOBLE FAMILY

DON'T WE HAVE PEOPLE FOR THIS SORT OF THING?

KEEP IT ALL IN THE FAMILY

SKILLS

GREAT (+4): Resources

GOOD (+3): Contacts

FAIR (+2): Deceive

AVERAGE (+1): Rapport

MARY ADLER

ASPECTS

DOTING DAUGHTER

BEAUTIFUL ON THE OUTSIDE, BROKEN ON THE INSIDE

MANIPULATIVE SCHEMER

SKILLS

GREAT (+4): Deceive

GOOD (+3): Resources

FAIR (+2): Notice

AVERAGE (+1): Empathy

HORATIO ADLER

ASPECTS

BLACK SHEEP OF THE FAMILY • EMOTIONALLY UNSTABLE

GREAT POWER REQUIRES GREAT AMBITION

SKILLS

GREAT (+4): Deceive

GOOD (+3): Rapport

FAIR (+2): Contacts

AVERAGE (+1): Burglary

THE ZOMBI

ASPECTS

POWERFUL AND FAST UNDEAD KILLING MACHINE

CONNECTED TO A GHOST

BETRAYAL AND RAGE ARE ALL THAT REMAIN

SKILLS

FANTASTIC (+6): Fight

SUPERB (+5): Physique

GREAT (+4): Athletics, Stealth

STUNTS

Strange Connection. Whenever the zombi deals a consequence to a PC, treat it as if the ghost of Henry had done the consequence (increasing its connection to the PCs and increasing its power).

Killing Stroke. Once per scene when a PC would take a consequence, the zombi can increase the severity of the consequence taken.

STRESS

□□□□□

CONSEQUENCES

Mild (2) | Moderate (4) | Major (6)

THE GHOST OF HENRY ADLER

ASPECTS

PASSION: WRATH AGAINST THE LIVING

SECRET: MY FAMILY MUST PAY

SKILLS

EPIC (+7): Elements
SUPERB (+5): Attachment
GOOD (+3): Sounds
AVERAGE (+1): Knocking

SCENE 2: THE GRIND

Once the PCs are deep in the house, the ghost will try to place aspects on the scene to hinder the PCs and get them to fear it. It gets one create advantage roll for every PC die roll. Throughout, make sure the PCs understand that something is interfering with them. They are necromancers; they'll know what to do. This scene involves gathering the information, tools, and resources required to summon the ghost.

Information the PCs may gather from the house and NPCs:

- The ghost's True Name is Henry Adler.
- Mary and Horatio teamed up to kill him so they would inherit.
- The ghost is weak to any artifacts of its mother, Beatrice.
- Beatrice died of influenza and all of her things are sealed up in the attic.
- The ghost is connected to the location of its murder, the root cellar beneath the kitchen.
- Percival has been ill recently; this is due to slow poison by his daughter and brother.

While the PCs travel through the house and talk to the detective and the Adlers, the ghost will be continuously trying to harm them. Stress does not go away—there is no rest on this job. Players should see you spend the fate points against them. Make sure aspects in use are visible so they can try to remove them or use them in interesting ways against the ghost.

SCENE 3: IT ALL FALLS APART

When the PCs summon the ghost, the last act of the story begins. If they make it manifest, this final confrontation is a straight fight: the ghost can attack with Knocking or Elements and defend with Attachment or Elements. When enough stress has been inflicted, it will disperse. Should there be more than a minor consequence to one or more of the PCs, there is a chance that it'll come back in the future, with a different connection and weakness, based on how they took it out.

If they decide to talk it into letting go, the PCs must engage in a contest with the ghost. It will use Attachment as its primary rolling skill and use the other skills to build advantages. If it succeeds, it wants the whole family dead before it will go away, and it breaks free of the circle. If it loses, then it disperses and never troubles the world again. The players can negate one of the ghost's successes by taking a consequence, and if the uncle and sister were arrested prior to summoning the ghost, they start with a one success lead.

Plot Hooks and Adventure Seeds

DIGGING INTO THE NATURE OF THINGS

After the fight with the undead in the Adler house, there will be some cleanup. The body needs to be laid to rest and there may be evidence of misdeeds to be handed to the proper authorities or kept as leverage. In the chaos that follows, the body of Henry Adler goes missing. Dr. Kildere has hired thugs to get ahold of the remains of a zombi. For what dark purpose does the Resurrection Man want zombi remains? Can the necromancers stop him?

LOVE OF FEAR

College boys have gone missing at a local university. One every week for the last month. The police have had no luck in finding them. Last week, a body turned up drained of blood. Rumors begin to fly that a vampire is loose on the campus. The detective in charge of the investigation has been told to bring in necromancers in case it is true. Will the necromancers find the vampire before more young men go missing? How old must the vampire be to need a victim a week? What do they do when the police obstruct their investigations?

SOUNDS FROM THE VOID

Father Mallory has come to the necromancers for help. He believes a social club started by Herschel is seeking to end the world. The Diomedes Club is filled with rich and powerful members of society seeking to remake the world in their image. Will the father get past his bias as a priest and alchemist and deal fairly with the necromancers? Can they stop the plots of the mad cult? What horrors has the cult summoned and kept in the depths of their club? ☠

Sample Characters

JEDIDIAH BLACK

The bastard son of a noble house, Jedidiah had no place in the world of high society or low. He naturally fell to the outskirts. In his teen years, he ran into a haunting and the group of necromancers who dealt with it. He found he had a knack for ghost hunting. He's been doing it ever since, much to the chagrin of his family.

ASPECTS

HIGH CONCEPT: HARDENED GHOST HUNTER

TROUBLE: BASTARD SON OF A NOBLE HOUSE

NECROMANCY: HUNTING IS MY CALLING

OTHER: SALLY IS MY RESPONSIBILITY • DOROTHY NEEDS WATCHING

SKILLS

GREAT (+4): Fight

GOOD (+3): Athletics, Physique

FAIR (+2): Notice, Shoot, Will

AVERAGE (+1): Burglary, Contacts, Drive, Stealth

STUNTS

Ghost Fighter. When fighting ghosts, you deal two additional stress on a successful attack.

Unkillable. Once per session, at the cost of a fate point, you can reduce the severity of a moderate consequence that's physical in nature to a mild consequence (if your mild consequence slot is free), or erase a mild consequence altogether.

Push through the Pain. You can choose to ignore a mild or moderate consequence for the duration of the scene. It can't be compelled against you or invoked by your enemies. At the end of the scene, it comes back worse, though; a mild consequence becomes moderate, and if it was already moderate, it becomes severe.

STRESS

Mental ☐☐☐

Physical ☐☐☐

CONSEQUENCES

Mild (2) | Moderate (4) | Major (6)

DOROTHY BULLOCK

She never wanted to be a necromancer. She started as a researcher, looking into mystic theory. The further she looked, the more she desired to understand the older methods, “the underpinnings of the universe,” as she called it. She went freelance, joining any union or firm she could. She has stolen several necromancers’ techniques this way, and is looking to add Church’s techniques to her own.

ASPECTS

HIGH CONCEPT: PROFESSOR OF MAGIC THEORY

TROUBLE: UNREPENTANT GLORY HOUND

NECROMANCY: ALL THE SECRETS OF THE UNIVERSE

OTHER: I WILL HAVE CHURCH’S TECHNIQUES

SALLY IS A USEFUL LEVER

SKILLS

GREAT (+4): Deceive

GOOD (+3): Lore, Necromancy

FAIR (+2): Contacts, Empathy, Will

AVERAGE (+1): Fight, Notice, Physique, Rapport

STUNTS

Backup Weapon. Whenever someone’s about to hit you with a Disarmed situation aspect or something similar, spend a fate point to declare you have a backup weapon. Instead of a situation aspect, your opponent gets a boost, representing the momentary distraction you suffer having to switch.

Mind Games. You can use Deceive in place of Provoke to make mental attacks, as long as you can make up a clever lie as part of the attack.

Practical Magic. If you succeed with style on a Necromancy roll you create a full aspect rather than a boost.

STRESS

Mental ☐☐☐

Physical ☐☐☐

CONSEQUENCES

Mild (2) | Moderate (4) | Major (6)

CHURCH

His name is not Church, but that is what everyone calls him. He is the founding member of this necromantic union, and the last of the old guard. Recently Church has been mentoring his granddaughter in the ways of Necromancy. He fears the family's methods will die out, and wants to pass on his wisdom while he still can. He has seen just about everything there is to see. He worries that he has begun to lose his edge.

ASPECTS

HIGH CONCEPT: GRIZZLED VETERAN NECROMANCER

TROUBLE: AGE AND DESPAIR

NECROMANCY: THE TRADITIONS MUST BE PASSED ON

OTHER: MY GRANDDAUGHTER IS THE LAST OF MY LINE
DOROTHY IS GUNNING FOR ME

SKILLS

GREAT (+4) Investigate
GOOD (+3) Necromancy, Will
FAIR (+2) Contacts, Notice, Provoke
AVERAGE (+1) Craft, Drive, Fight, Rapport

STUNTS

Human Lie Detector. You can use Investigate instead of Empathy to defend against Deceive attempts. What others discover through gut reactions and intuition, you learn through careful observation of expressions and body language.

Unflappable. +2 to defend against Provoke attacks specifically related to intimidation and fear.

I've Been Around a While. Whenever someone initiates a conflict against you in an area where you've built a network of contacts, you use Contacts instead of Notice to determine turn order, because you got tipped off in time.

STRESS

Mental ☐☐

Physical ☐☐☐☐

CONSEQUENCES

Mild (2) | Moderate (4) | Major (6)

SALLY OBANNON

The only child of her generation in the Obannon family, Sally expressed interest in Necromancy from an early age and devoted a great deal of study to it. She is currently apprenticed under her grandfather, Church. She dreams of bringing back the old days, when necromancers went by other names and were respected.

ASPECTS

HIGH CONCEPT: PRODIGY NECROMANCER IN TRAINING

TROUBLE: LEAPS BEFORE LOOKING

NECROMANCY: I WILL BRING GLORY BACK TO NECROMANCY

OTHER: GRANDFATHER IS FAR TOO SERIOUS
SECRET CRUSH ON JED

SKILLS

GREAT (+4) Necromancy
GOOD (+3) Empathy, Rapport
FAIR (+2) Investigate, Notice, Will
AVERAGE (+1) Athletics, Deceive, Lore, Provoke

STUNTS

Optimistic Charmer. Once per session you can reduce someone else's consequence by one level of severity (severe to moderate, moderate to mild, mild to nothing at all) by succeeding on an Empathy roll with a difficulty of Fair (+2) for a mild consequence, Good (+3) for moderate, or Great (+4) for severe. You must speak with the person for at least a half an hour in order for this effect to take place.

Namer. You may use Investigate in place of Lore when searching for a True Name.

Necromantic Prodigy. Gain a +2 to Necromancy overcome rolls for summoning poltergeists.

STRESS

Mental ☐☐

Physical ☐☐☐

CONSEQUENCES

Mild (2) | Moderate (4) | Major (6)



SUSTAINING DREAD

by RICHARD BELLINGHAM

*Like one, that on a lonesome road
Doth walk in fear and dread,
And having once turned round walks on,
And turns no more his head;
Because he knows, a frightful fiend
Doth close behind him tread.*

—Samuel Taylor Coleridge
“The Rime of the Ancient Mariner”

It's a challenge to sustain dread in a roleplaying game. Playing a game with friends isn't inherently scary, and players are easily distracted by snacks, character sheets, and other gaming paraphernalia. On top of that, Fate undermines the powerlessness that is typically the root of horror by increasing player agency with game mechanics like declaring a story detail and success at a cost.

“*The Horror Paradox*” in THE FATE SYSTEM TOOLKIT provides some excellent advice on the subject of running horror games in Fate (pages 176-178): regular, brutal compels; claustrophobic zone maps; difficult choices; and significant passive and active opposition to the players' actions. This article is a companion to that piece, providing some extra thoughts on how to build a sense of horror and oppression in your Fate games. I'm going to focus on three broad techniques:

1. Building the right **Mood** with your players
2. Finding your players the right **Motivation** to immerse themselves in unfolding events
3. Using **Mechanics** that reinforce the horror themes of your game

Mood

People prefer to avoid feeling dread or horror in real life, but fictional experiences that evoke these emotions are perennially popular. It's easy to get a scare in a horror movie or a Halloween haunted house by using creepy music and jump scares, but the art of evoking and sustaining dread in a roleplaying game is a lot more difficult.

PLAYER BUY-IN

You can't scare your players if they don't want to be scared. Roleplaying is a collaborative activity and you can only sustain dread if your players actively help you create a mood.

In the game and setting creation session, discuss the mood and themes you're aiming at and the mechanical and narrative changes you're making to support them. This is also a good time to talk about what scares the players and ask if there are any topics or situations that they want to be off-limits: Sure, you can get an easy scare by subjecting an arachnophobe to a scene involving spiders, but you should never do so without the player's permission.

The group's willingness to be scared will vary from session to session. If you start playing and it's obvious they aren't in the right mood, ease them into the horror gently or give them a session of respite. If you left off in the middle of a tense and scary scene, you can use a flashback or something similar to cleanse the group's palate and get them back into the right frame of mind to continue with the horror scene once they've settled down.

HORROR CUES

When you transition a scene to start building a feeling of threat and sustained horror, I recommend using some kind of cue to let the players know what's about to happen. You could play a particular piece of music (I've always used John Carpenter's theme from *The Thing* for this), turn the lights down, switch the color of your dice, use a different tone of voice in your narration, grab your bowl of evil points (page 235) and start fingering them, or do anything else that clearly signifies that horror is now on the table.

An advantage of this technique is that you can use your horror cue in the middle of a normal, unthreatening scene and your players will feel a gradually building sense of tension as they wait for the horror to appear. However, you are responsible for making sure they get that payoff; if you use the horror cue without delivering the horror, you'll weaken the cue's effectiveness.

SUSTAINING DREAD

FORESHADOWING AND CUTSCENES

You can encourage the right mood in your players by using foreshadowing and cutscenes. You can do this subtly by using evocative situation aspects that hint at potential nastiness—for example, you might describe a *Claustrophobic Blind Alley* instead of a *Dark Alley*. You can also use foreshadowing in your narration and descriptions, a technique often used by horror authors to let you know that something horrible is about to happen to a character, leaving you waiting for the other shoe to drop.

Outside, Richie Pellow paces nervously as he smokes. He checks the pack again, reassured that he still has another ten after this one. Too bad he won't be alive to smoke them.

The most direct approach to this is the cutscene. Used at the beginning of most modern police procedurals and horror shows, the cutscene shows us one or more of the monster's victims in the moments immediately leading up to their fate. Rather than just describing the scene, give a brief description framing this as the last minutes of the victims' lives and then have the players take the role of the victims or people around them and play it out. Make sure not to reveal too many details during this scene; use short snatches of description to build suspense and give some clues as to the nature of the threat without giving it away entirely.

You start the session off by having Valentina and Rod play two frat boys who are walking home dead drunk from a kegger at another frat house. You spend a few minutes describing how they sense someone stalking them in the darkness, and hear a swish-drag-thump sort of sound from an alleyway. The frat boys decide someone's playing a prank on them and decide to duck into the next alleyway and wait for the pranksters to appear. They hear the swish-drag-thump sound getting closer and closer, before a clawed, scaly hand appears at the corner of the alleyway. Then something rushes them and they get an impression of shining eyes and many, many razor-sharp teeth before arterial blood starts to fly and the pair are ripped to pieces.

Motivation

Why should your players get involved in the horrific events that will unfold throughout your game? And why should they invest themselves in your story to the extent that they find it genuinely scary? Here are some techniques for giving your players reasons to care, and reasons to be scared.

EMPATHY BREEDS FEAR

Effective horror movies take the time to get you acquainted with their characters, making you feel empathy for them before plunging them into horrific situations. It's human nature to feel more afraid for characters with whom you identify or empathize, and this is a powerful tool in sustaining dread. Targeting NPCs with whom the players share positive relationships—codified in one or more aspects—is one way to use this to your advantage in a Fate horror game. This gives you a method of involving the players through the use of compels on those aspects.

A few weeks ago you established a character named Alex, who the group sees as a ***Friendly Neighborhood Hacker***. When you're looking for a victim to drag into a horror plot you decide Alex is a good target, because you can compel this aspect to encourage the players to get involved.

Giving NPC victims aspects that you know will resonate with your players is also a useful tool, but like using a player's own fears and phobias, this is a technique that requires caution.

You know that several of your players are geeks for a popular science fiction show, so when you're crafting your next victim you give them the aspect ***World's Biggest Browncoat***.

FEAR OF THE UNKNOWN

The unknown is scary. Possibly the best proof of this I can offer is the movie *Jeepers Creepers*. The first half is one of the most effective horror movies I've ever seen, and the reason for that is that you hardly see any details of the Creeper. He is shown only at a distance as a hulking, hunched over guy in a trenchcoat or as an unseen driver pursuing the protagonists in his battered old truck.

In the second half of the movie the Creeper is fully revealed, and the scare factor hits rock bottom as a result.

Use fear of the unknown to your advantage by being circumspect in your descriptions of the horrific threats faced by your players. Let their imaginations fill in the blanks and they'll do half the work of scaring themselves. Specifically, try not to give everything away in the aspects you assign to your horror NPCs, hinting at important details rather than stating them outright.

Subverting expectations and violating reality as your players know it is also a valuable tool for inciting fear and discomfort, and follows from similar principles as fear of the unknown. People expect the universe to

work a certain way and it really throws them off when things happen that they can't explain. Blood drips from a puddle up onto the ceiling. A door that has just been smashed flies back together again as if it were never touched. A child speaks like an adult. A great example of the last is in *The Prophecy*, when a girl who is possessed by a war criminal says, in her own voice, "Ever cut off a Chinaman's head? They don't bleed. Not like we do. Or maybe it was the cold."

You can codify anomalies such as these in the aspects you write for horror scenes, using their passive narrative effects to affect the story, using them to compel the PCs, or invoking them to bring a healthy dose of weird scariness into the scene.

FEAR OF THE FAMILIAR

While the unknown is scary, so is the familiar. Sometimes a good person (or thing) doing horrifying, terrible things for sympathetic reasons is far more disturbing and scary than an inhuman monster that's bad just because it is.

When you're designing your horror villains, you can use some of the same tricks I suggested in "*Empathy Breeds Fear*" to make them more sympathetic. Maybe an aspect reveals that they share a relationship or a history with one of the player characters. Perhaps they obviously regret whatever they're doing, but feel as if they have no choice.

There's a reason so many horror films use the trope of the weird child to unsettle and freak people out. The child is acting in a terrifyingly inhuman way but it's *still a child*. You can't just go around killing children, no matter how horrifyingly they're acting!

Creating fear from the familiar is a neat trick, and it relies on the same psychological techniques as subverting expectations. The family pet starts acting weirdly, or attacks the baby of the family without provocation. A character's reflection smiles at her even as it draws its finger across its throat in a threatening gesture. You can use aspects to help you with this, too; apply an aspect like *Unsettling Stare* to the family pet and the awareness that something has changed will begin to prey on the players' minds.

IMPLACABILITY

The great horror villains are implacable. You can't kill them (until you find their weakness) and you can't stop them. They just keep coming after you, and only if you're lucky can you earn a brief respite. The recent movie *It Follows* is an excellent example of this: The follower is barely explained and just keeps coming and coming, walking at a steady pace

towards you and your inevitable death. Sadako from *Ringu* is another great example of this type of threat.

You can use setting aspects to help you portray this implacability. If the implacable horror is taken out before the players find its true weakness, give everyone a fate point to compel a relevant aspect and say that when they turn around the body is gone! Before your villain gets taken out, consider offering the players a concession to say that the enemy gives up the chase (for now) and they gain a brief respite.

Mechanics

Mood and motivation go a long way to getting the feel of an effective horror movie in your game, but you can also use game mechanics to reinforce your horror themes and more effectively scare your players.

HORROR ASPECTS

When you're discussing story and setting aspects with the group, discuss the type of horror that will be featured in the game and decide on some appropriate **horror aspects**. If the game is set to capture the feel of the teen slasher genre, you could choose aspects like *The Killer Is Never Dead the First Time* or *No Door Can Stop Him*. If you're aiming for dread more in keeping with a Cthulhu tale, you could instead choose *Madness Follows* or *That Is Not Dead Which May Eternal Lie*.

Declarations, invokes, and compels on these aspects are a great way to reinforce the horror themes of your game and to put the players in the dangerous, desperate situations that will make them feel genuine fear for their characters or the people they care for.

EVIL POINTS

This optional system gives success at a cost more teeth and thematically reinforces the game's horror aspects and thematically-aligned villains.

You gain **evil points** during a horror scene in two ways:

1. If a player pays a minor cost, you can choose to gain an evil point as that cost
2. If a player pays a serious cost, you gain an evil point in addition to the serious cost

Once you have evil points in your pool, they stay around until you spend them or until the group achieves a significant milestone. Have a bowl (perhaps in the shape of a skull or something equally macabre)

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to put them in, and represent them with something different from your normal fate point stash.

Using Evil Points

Each evil point is a free invoke on one of the game's horror aspects or the aspects of a main horror-themed NPC. Because they are free invokes, you can spend more than one evil point to invoke the same aspect.

The horror aspect *Evil Will always Find You* applies to the game. Valentina is trying to sneak past the serial killer, who is sharpening a knife with his back turned. Valentina rolls Great (+4) while the killer just gets Average (+1). You grin and spend two evil points to invoke *Evil Will Always Find You*. The serial killer doesn't seem to notice Valentina, who makes it past the door, thinking she's home clear...and that's when a meaty hand clamps down on her shoulder.

THE PRICE OF DECLARATIONS

The ability to spend a fate point and declare something to be true in the game world is a powerful tool for the players. From conveniently having a flashlight to finding a hidden escape tunnel in the dungeons, declaring a story detail can make it more difficult to maintain a threatening atmosphere.

To help with this, you can charge an additional cost for every declaration made during a horror scene. A declaration that provides a minor convenience like a flashlight requires a minor cost, a declaration that helps with a major problem or significantly lowers the tension requires a serious cost.

The “Yes, but” improvisation tool is useful when you're coming up with narrative costs for declarations.

Blake is trapped in a stone-lined pit with no apparent exits and the big bad evil monster waiting for him at the top. He has the aspect *Experienced Spelunker* so he spends a fate point to declare that his knowledge and experience of underground caverns means that he knows what to look for; he discovers an old escape tunnel leading out of the pit that was concealed behind some loose earth. You nod and say, “Yes, but the tunnel is cramped and narrow—barely wide enough for your shoulders. You cram yourself into the tunnel, scraping up your back, and start to make your escape. But you've only made it a few feet when you see luminescent green tentacles questing along the tunnel in front of you in search of food...”

HORRIFIC CONSEQUENCES AND COSTS

You don't have to give your players fewer consequences, or ones that can absorb less stress, for injuries to feel significant.

First, give consequences more narrative significance. In a pulpy heroic game, a character with a **Broken Leg** might limp a bit and have it invoked against him, but he can probably just splint it up and be on his way. In a horror game the same consequence has much more lasting significance. He can't walk or run while the leg's broken and even crawling or dragging himself on his arms is torturous. He can't automatically move between zones, sprinting is out of the question, and if he succeeds at a cost on a movement action he'll probably take additional stress.

Second, make it more difficult to treat consequences. Minor consequences can still be patched up in the field by anyone with the appropriate skill, but consequences of moderate or higher require someone with the proper training (represented by a Medic or Psychotherapist stunt) and proper facilities. Increase the opposition by two or more when a medic is trying to treat a consequence without proper facilities or equipment.

Thirdly, consider allowing the players access to one or more collateral consequences in each horror scene (FATE SYSTEM TOOLKIT, page 61) but don't allow them to be treated. The collateral consequences you inflict should be suitably horrific and a direct result of the players' action or inaction. Rather than the players having a set pool of collateral consequences that are with them at all times, allocate them on a scene by scene basis.

The players are about to interfere with the cultists who are trying to draw forth a tentacular beast from a hellish nether-dimension. They have a group of five bound hostages at the scene who are awaiting sacrifice to begin the summoning. You assign the scene a single moderate collateral consequence of ***The Hostages Are Slain, Beginning the Summoning.***

When you create a situation aspect against the players, be brutal when you're describing its narrative effects. Someone who has been ***Tangled in Tentacles*** can't do much of anything until he gets them off, and he can feel them slithering over and around him, up his trouser legs and under his shirt...

You can also reinforce the horror themes of the game with the price you exact when your players succeed at a cost during a horror scene:

Minor costs:

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- Add one or more zones to the map, stretching out distances—this is a great way to represent the “telescoping hallway” effect we see so often in horror movies.
- A bystander suffers significant injury or becomes seriously threatened—and it’s the PC’s fault. If you’re using collateral consequences, this may mean checking off a mild or moderate one.
- Have something weird and creepy happen to evoke the horror theme, complicating the PC’s life in some way. This may involve twisting an existing situation aspect towards horror. For example, a mutilated body crashes to the ground in front of them, turning the *Cobbled Streets* to *Blood-slick Cobbles*.

Serious Costs:

- Close off one or more zones due to a hazard (loose electrical cables, a yawning chasm) or by raising a significant barrier that blocks entry into that zone. This is a good way to hem in the players and make the situation feel more claustrophobic, or to separate them from each other.
- One or more bystanders is brutally killed—and it’s the PC’s fault. If you’re using collateral consequences, this may mean checking off a moderate or severe one.
- Afflict the PC with a mental aspect (or consequence) relating to fear, self-doubt, or another negative emotion.

EXTENDED ACTIONS

Drawing out the action slows the pace and builds tension, and that can be ideal in a horror game. Instead of resolving an attempt to sneak past the serial killer as a simple overcome action, consider resolving it as a contest between the killer and the PC.

Coda

Fate provides some relatively unique challenges to running a horror game and sustaining an atmosphere of threat and horror with your players. However, when everyone is on board with the horror theme, making just a few tweaks to the way you use aspects, consequences, and costs can turn those challenges into advantages.

Have fun scaring each other!

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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FEMININE HORROR

by SARAH RICHARDSON

Horror is personal, and many women have a complicated relationship with it. In horror movies, we're often cast as the first to fall—usually in the guise of the promiscuous hot babe who always trips while running away—yet we're also the final girl—the last survivor with the gender-neutral name who gives the baddie some sorely needed comeuppance. Horror from a feminine perspective usually involves powerlessness, taking place on and inside of our bodies, and in spaces that are supposed to be free from danger. It's also frequently used as an object lesson to teach us that we are at least partly to blame for what is done to us.

A lot of the horror women experience in real life takes place in our homes and workplaces, perpetrated by people we know: our homes, partners, coworkers, even our children can be dangerous. A good GM can reproduce that horrific intimacy at the table by subverting common roleplaying tropes and introducing feminine horror. For example, many games assume the players will be exceptional people in the foreground, and they tend to ignore the unexceptional people in the background. However, our domestic spaces are ripe for terror, and the main roles are filled with people we can identify with—servant, teacher, nanny, cook, parent, babysitter, daughter, secretary, wife. Feminine horror deals with things that should be familiar and comforting, but instead are full of terror.

In this article, I discuss how to bring the uniquely feminine horror themes of the onset of menstruation, women's sexuality, and pregnancy to your gaming table, including aspects you can use to drive home specific themes, stunts for the players to cope with the terror, and example set ups to get your table right into the horror.

Player vs. Player Horror

One feature I emphasize throughout this piece is a player vs. player mechanic where players can spend a fate point to give another player a thematic consequence, spreading the horror around and encouraging the kind of selfish behavior you often see in horror movies; each person tries to survive at the expense of everyone else. In the player vs. player feature, players can spend a fate point to give each other consequences, which can later be compelled with another fate point. These consequences fill the moderate consequence slot, as they weaken the character and make them more susceptible to the horror around them.

Characters can only start to recover from the consequence by resolving the fiction around it, and then it will be gone at the next session. For example, if you are given the *Infected* consequence, you could resolve it by surrendering yourself to the Center for Disease Control and Prevention so that they could make a vaccine. These consequences stay with the original carrier even when they give it to another character, so you can watch the horror spread throughout the group—and it means most of the PCs will have aspects the GM and other players can compel to make the game that much creepier.

Before We Begin...

Playing horror games can be really intense, so make sure both your players and yourself are comfortable. A good horror game manages to terrify and make players uncomfortable without crossing their boundaries, just pushing them right up to that edge. Here are a few methods to help you do that:

- [X-card](#)
- [Lines and Veils](#)
- [I Will Not Abandon You](#)

Above all else, make sure your players know that horror is on the table; it's not fun to get surprised with horror when you were expecting a light-hearted comedy!

Menarche

For many young women, their own maturing bodies can be confusing, or even something to be feared. Even if you've been told about the process, actually experiencing the blood, cramps, and mood swings can be terrifying. It can feel like your own body has turned against you, and it's even worse for young women who aren't prepared. Blood is a scary thing that means injury in most cases, but it also symbolizes life and transformation, especially in the transition from childhood to adulthood. The changing body of a teenager is a perfect canvas for horror.

FEMININE HORROR

Teenagers with newly developed powers is a popular game concept, but it can turn to horror when you focus more explicitly on body horror and a dawning sense of being different, even dangerous. Players can still pick what type of talent their character has, but it should manifest in unexpected or disturbing ways. Powers sound cool, but not if you can't control them, or are unprepared for the new things you can do and how you may be viewed, in a similar manner to how a young girl may look like a physical adult and be viewed in some ways—particularly sexually—as an adult, but is still emotionally a child. Focus on how the changes in the PCs' bodies make them feel different from their peers and even different from their concept of themselves, as well as the harm they unwillingly cause. This can be compounded by the normal teenage struggle to be treated as an adult by their parents, especially if their emotions got ahead of their control.

GAME ASPECTS

Modern

The School: a secluded boarding school might have *Forbidden Rooms* and *Sadistic Teachers*.

Rock Bottom: this private treatment center is a *Front for Scientific Experiments* and is a place where *No One Will Help You*.

Sci Fi

Doing Time: a juvenile penal colony with the expectation of *Hard Work*, *No Play* and *Predatory Guards*.

Facecrime: a sanitized city where there are *Cameras Everywhere* and *Strictly Enforced Behavioral Norms*.

Fantasy

Moon's Blood: a magic user's school with *Tomes of Dark Knowledge* and *Clueless Adults*.

Drawing Down the Moon: a rural village with *Violent Bigotry* and a *Room of Correction*.

EXAMPLE SET UP

The PCs are fresh-faced new recruits to a magic user's school, excited to be away from parental supervision. An older girl shows them the ropes, and volunteers to room with one of the girls. She gives the PC the *Bleed*

FEMININE HORROR

with Me consequence, triggering the girl's destructive power. The girl can spend a fate point to pass *Bleed with Me* along to another female character or the *Boys Have It Easier* consequence to a male character. The *Boys Have It Easier* consequence can be compelled for obsessive, jealous, and violent behavior.

CHARACTER ASPECTS

Goddamned Force of Nature: A character with this aspect revels in their power, but is always on the edge of losing control and hurting the ones closest to them.

Mama's Little Girl: A character with this aspect is torn between their family's teachings and their true nature, and tragedy is always be a possible consequence.

STUNTS

Blood Sisters: When you use Rapport to create an advantage on a friendly NPC, gain an additional free invoke on the aspect you create, even on a tie.

The Devil Has Come Home: Whenever you are in your own home, gain +2 to overcome fear or terror using Will.

Contagious Sexuality

Women carry the bulk of sexual consequences in the form of STIs, pregnancy, and a disproportionate amount of violence, as well as the strain of a sexual double standard and the conflicting media messages between whore and good girl, slut and prude. It's almost like we think female sexuality is contagious, infecting unwary men and innocent women alike, and society tries to control it through these labels and reminders of possible dire consequences. However, many women also find power in their sexuality and how they express it; frequently society deals with this empowerment by portraying them as predatory and obsessive.

To incorporate the trope of dangerously contagious sexuality, you can either go with the literal embodiment of frightening female sexuality—gorgons, maenads, furies, and so forth—or you can take a fear and turn it into a supernatural force. If there's a sexually transmitted marker that attracts death, do the players try to stop it—or do they seduce anyone bent on punishing their licentious ways, thus turning the tables? You can enact a social stigma for promiscuous PCs that follows those they spread their infection to, apply it to those who aren't sexually active—or both! Focus on the juxtaposition between sexuality and contagion.

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GAME ASPECTS

Modern

Key Party: a wife-swapping soiree in a cheesy 70s ranch that contains a *Skeezy Play Room* as well as some *Dangerous Partners*.

Drop Your Pants: A cold and impersonal STI clinic with an *Incompetent Doctor* and *Defective Condoms*.

Sci Fi

Tight Quarters: living on a space ship means *Nothing But Time to Kill* and an *Unwelcome Stowaway*.

The Excessive Machine: a planet dedicated to *Hedonistic Pleasure* contains a *Hidden Dark Side*.

Fantasy

Beautiful But Deadly: a training school for courtesans who double as spies might *Push You to the Breaking Point* as well as have *Easy Access to Weapons*.

The Woods are Lovely, Dark and Deep: a forest filled with *Seductive Fairies* who may have *Deadly Intentions*.

EXAMPLE SET UP

The PCs are all normal people in an STI clinic, making small talk in the reception room. The lights flicker overhead, making the receptionist appear undead, and everything smells of bleach. One by one they're called in to see the doctor, and one player is told they now have the *Infected* consequence. When they share a moment of intimacy with another character, they can spend a fate point to pass it on to that character. While they have the consequence, you can compel them to act on their baser impulses.

CHARACTER ASPECTS

Virgin Next Door: PCs who aren't sexually active might be safe from being *Infected*, but it also means they're building up a lot of steam without an outlet.

Creature of Legend: A PC could be any number of mythological creatures that kill through sex or touch. This comes at a cost, as even casual physical intimacy could harm or possibly kill friends and family. In

extreme cases, this could be something passed on to others, much like an STI without a cure.

STUNTS

Latin for Teeth: Once per conflict, you can spend a fate point to add the aspect *Terrified* to anyone touching you by causing them pain. *Terrified* disappears if someone successfully inflicts stress on your character.

Stranger in a Crowd: People can feel your eyes boring into their backs. Add+2 to Provoke attempts to inspire vague fear in someone in your line of sight.

Monstrous Pregnancy

From *Aliens* to *Rosemary's Baby*, horror often features a strong fear of being invaded, of harboring something *wrong* inside your own body. Take *Rosemary's Baby*, for example—yes, Rosemary's horrified that her baby might be the son of Satan, but first she experiences the horror of being out of control of her own body, of things not being what she thought. It's an outside fear that the protagonists face, something beyond comprehension that has found its way inside.

There are obvious parallels to sexual assault that you should make sure your players are okay with before introducing this kind of material. It's perfectly fine to hand wave or choose a different route to show how their character was “impregnated,” as the focus here is on the aftermath, not the inciting event. Movies frequently use dream sequences that are fragmented and non-linear; you can do the same. It may also have been an innocuous interaction with an alien or supernatural force that infected the PC; no bodily stuff required.

Rather than going straight for demonspawn, start out by setting the scene for subtle body horror as the characters experience things about themselves that just don't seem right. Some examples would be a feeling of shifting weight within their body, distorted reflections, clothes that no longer fit, and unusual cravings. They don't have to be pregnant, or even biologically capable of such a thing, to be carrying some sort of alien parasite around, but pregnancy can serve as a model for the ways in which the PCs' bodies seem to change.

Focus on the unnaturalness of the space that surrounds the characters and crawls inside them.

GAME ASPECTS

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Modern

Creepy Neighbors: your neighbors seem to be *There Every Time You Turn Around* and they ask *Intrusive Questions*.

The Housewife Syndrome: trapped all day in an apartment means *Time Seems to Stand Still*, but there are *Endless Chores* as well.

Sci Fi

Study in Contrasts: the spaceship is *Sleek and Modern*, except where *Dripping Organic Matter* intrudes.

Astronaut: the ship takes care of *Just Your Basic Needs*, but much of it is *Unfriendly to Humans*.

Fantasy

God Has Forsaken This Place: the abandoned living quarters of nuns contains *Dark Secrets* and *Unvoiced Pain*.

Goth As Fuck: a Gothic castle would have *Servant's Quarters* as well as *Ghostly Inhabitants*.

EXAMPLE SET UP

The PCs all live in a run down apartment building in a bad part of town. They can't explain the noises they hear or the actions of that creepy old couple who live on the top floor, but one of the PCs has a horrible nightmare and wakes up with an *Impregnated* consequence. When they confess the alien pregnancy to another character, they can spend a fate point to give the other player the consequence of *True Believer*. While any of the PCs have this consequence, it can be compelled to make the PC take dangerous risks in order to figure out what's going on.

CHARACTER ASPECTS

Almost Human: This character will never be quite accepted or trusted by the rest of the PCs, and their lack of physical weaknesses may not make up for that. They also are unable to reproduce in traditional ways, which can parallel infertile women, and may complicate their feelings about harboring an alien parasite—or making sure someone else does.

Have My Father's Eyes: If a character or NPC is descended from Elder Gods, the Devil, or something equally squicky, they may be powerful, yet unable to conceal their parentage and conflicted over their true nature. While stories like *Rosemary's Baby* rely heavily on an assumption that the maternal urge will override all other factors, this could be an interesting

exploration of the parent/child relationship, particularly from the monstrous child's point of view.

STUNTS

Purity of Purpose: Survival is what you're best at. Gain +2 to create an advantage using Crafts whenever you're stranded in a hostile environment, like someone else's body.

Get Away From Her, You Bitch: Treat any success where you are protecting your offspring as a success with style.

Bringing Horror to Your Table

I've found that the best way to unsettle your players is to use the things that *you* find horrifying and listen to their feedback. What scares you will scare your players, if you focus on how the thing or person makes you feel, rather than describing how it or they really are. When I run a horror game, I pay strict attention to my players. If I notice a nervous tick, like someone rubbing their earlobe, I know that means they're feeling what I'm portraying. I also try to describe things using all the senses; for example, people really freak out when they touch something innocuous, like a couch, and find that it's warm, slightly wet, and moving as if it were breathing. If you're describing a bodily sensation, like the shifting weight from the Monstrous Pregnancy or the first cramps in a game about Menarche, trying standing up and showing with your posture and gestures how that feels. Lean in to your players and speak quietly to create that intimate atmosphere that makes up feminine horror.

Put your mind into the main villain's brainspace and really poke around in there. If you figure out what they truly want and what motivates them, you'll have a more convincing bad guy. All of your NPCs should take actions based on their fears, hopes, and dreams. The alien parasite in your Monstrous Pregnancy game has its own agenda—survival of the species. That's a powerful drive, and it should be clear in all their actions. A punitive antagonist for a Contagious Sexuality game has their own reasons for hunting down and punishing those who have violated sexual norms. What specific incident sparked your villain's design to take up this mantle? Specificity makes for a more compelling NPC, and a deep rooted belief makes for a threatening antagonist. Keep your players off balance by creating spaces that should be safe but aren't, and people they should be able to trust but can't.

Slow descriptions are also a great way to build dread—if you tell the players that it's dark in the room, they'll just try to figure out a way to get light in there. But if you tell them the light is dim and they *think* they

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see something in the corner—something big enough to be a person but it's not moving—the player will first worry about what exactly is in the corner and whether they *want* to see it, rather than worrying about the mechanics of light.

But remember that no matter how much you build the horror in your game, there will always be someone you can't creep out, and laughter is a common response to being uncomfortable or scared. Because horror is so personal, make sure to communicate with your players, and have fun terrifying each other! 🍷



DAMAGED ASPECTS

by BRENDAN CONWAY

Stress in Fate is an abstract resource used to track how long you can stay in a conflict. Often, marking stress doesn't immediately change the story, which is great for a game about highly competent adventurers being awesome at what they do! But it doesn't work so well for some genres such as horror. Why should I be afraid of the monster making me mark stress, when that stress is just going to go away at the end of the scene?

In this article, I present a new system for dealing with stress: damaged aspects. Rather than characters simply absorbing shifts of stress with a stress track, their aspects will change dynamically as they take stress, representing their lives going to hell. You can use this system in games and stories in which protagonists are changeable and the tension is high.

Creating Aspects to Damage

When players create their character aspects, make sure they all follow this simple rule: a character aspect represents a status, not an intrinsic fact. A status is something that can change; it might be true right now, but it might later become untrue. An intrinsic fact is something that is simply true, no matter what.

This is the difference between the aspect *Best Ninja from the Lotus School* and the aspect *Trained by the Lotus School*. Having been trained by the Lotus School is an intrinsic fact—it happened, and nothing can undo it. Being the best ninja, though, is a status that can change. It still implies that the character was trained by the Lotus School, one way or the other, but it doesn't make that intrinsic fact central to the aspect.

DAMAGED ASPECTS

Patrick is an investigative journalist for the Tribune, and Patrick's player wants to pick a high concept that reflects his profession. Something simple like *Investigative Journalist* seems good, but it's more of an intrinsic fact than a status; Patrick could still be an *Investigative Journalist* no matter where he worked, even if he worked on his own. Patrick's player then thinks about *Investigative Journalist for the Tribune*. It's better because it includes Patrick's status as working for the Tribune. Eventually, Patrick's player lands on *Prize Journalist for the Tribune*. This aspect is all status—Patrick works for the Tribune, and he is the prize journalist there.

How to Damage an Aspect

If you're using damaged aspects in your campaign, the characters won't have any normal stress boxes. Every aspect, instead, has five stress boxes attached to it. These work just like regular stress boxes, and all the normal rules of stress and consequences still apply.

NPCs and Damaged Aspects

Using damaged aspects draws attention to how protagonists change throughout a tense and dramatic story. It's not a good idea to use this system for NPCs, though—they're all inherently supporting cast in stories about how the protagonists change. Continue to use normal stress rules for them.

WARPED ASPECTS

When a PC marks the third stress box on one of their aspects, it becomes **warped**. A warped aspect is twisted, not what the character would want, but not yet completely negative. The core of the aspect is still true, but the description and details are different.

An aspect doesn't become warped the very second the third stress box is marked; instead, wait to make the changes until a fictionally appropriate time, generally during the next scene. A PC wouldn't be knocked from their top slot in the Lotus School during a fight against an enemy ninja; it would happen during the following scene, when an elder judges their performance during the previous fight and finds it wanting.

You and the player should work together to write the warped aspect when it's needed, but ultimately you have final say as to whether it is warped enough.

Patrick's high concept is *Prize Journalist of the Tribune*. During a chase scene with a suspect, though, he marks his third stress box on that aspect,

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so he knows he'll have to change it to its warped form during the next scene. When the chase ends, Patrick goes back to the Tribune to find his editor waiting for him. She tells Patrick how worried she is about his recent pattern of behavior. Patrick's player works with the GM to reflect this change in the story, rewriting his high concept to the warped form *Eccentric Journalist of the Tribune*. The core of the aspect—*Journalist of the Tribune*—is still true. But no longer is Patrick the golden boy of his paper; he's starting to be considered a crackpot.

BROKEN ASPECTS

When a player marks the fifth stress box on one of their aspects, it becomes **broken**. A broken aspect is ruined, completely undone, even inverted. The core of the aspect is broken.

Broken aspects should often look like new trouble aspects. They are highly compelling and cause trouble for characters left and right.

Just like with warped aspects, an aspect doesn't have to be broken instantaneously. Wait until the next fictionally appropriate moment to change it, usually during the next scene. A PC wouldn't lose their job in the middle of a shootout; they would lose it when they get back to the police station.

As with warped aspects, work with the player to write the broken aspect, but you have the final say.

During an incredibly tense scene interrogating an ex-serial killer, Patrick takes more stress to his high concept. His aspect is now broken. Nothing changes until the next scene, when Patrick's player and the GM work together to write the broken aspect. They decide that his high concept changes from *Eccentric Journalist of the Tribune* to *Ex-Journalist of the Tribune*. Patrick is fired—the stress he's been taking caused him to neglect and then lose his job. His editor is waiting for him with boxes to clear out his desk.

But What About My High Concept?

If you use damaged aspects, then the core pieces of the PCs might change. That's fine! This system is best used in genres where dynamic characters are interesting and important. If it's a problem that a PC's fundamental character ideas might be undermined, that's a signal that using damaged aspects isn't the right choice for your game.

DAMAGED ASPECTS

REPAIRING ASPECTS

Stress boxes on damaged aspects do not clear at the end of a scene, or even after a session. It takes real work to clear stress on aspects.

To clear the first or second stress box on an aspect, the character must find some way to relieve that stress and succeed on an overcome roll. The opposition is Good (+3) for the first stress box and Superb (+5) for the second. If you want to clear both at once, then it's Legendary (+8) difficulty.

Patrick has accumulated some stress on another of his aspects—**My Family Is My Life**—because he's been neglecting them in favor of investigating the serial killer. His first and second stress boxes on it are both marked. To clear some stress, he decides to spend some quality time with his wife and children. He rolls to overcome with Rapport against Superb (+5) difficulty to clear just his second stress box, reducing the tension but not eliminating it. He rolls and gets a +5—enough to tie, so he succeeds at a minor cost. The GM puts a boost on the table: the serial killer was **Covering His Tracks** while Patrick was spending time with his family.

Once an aspect is warped or broken, however, the PC can only fix it by taking steps in the fiction—and if there is no way to do that, then that's just the way the cookie crumbles. For example, if an aspect referring to the love between the PC and their spouse is broken when the spouse dies at the hands of the serial killer, then the only way to fix it would be to bring the loved one back to life. Good luck with that!

To get an idea of how to repair an aspect, you can outline a number of steps the PC must take. Fixing a warped aspect should take two or three steps; repairing a broken aspect should take three to five steps.

These steps can be as general or specific as you deem appropriate. Repairing a warped aspect of **Contender for the Top Spot of the Lotus School** back to **Top Ninja of the Lotus School** might require a PC to defeat a specific rival, prove themselves on a mission given by the school, and recover their lost sword. Repairing a broken aspect of **Off the Force** back to **On Probation with the Force** might require a PC to give up alcohol, make amends with the police chief, make amends with their partner, and prove their investigation wasn't worthless.

Any rolls related to fixing a warped or broken aspect have Superb (+5) opposition at least, and it may even get higher. Fixing a warped or broken aspect never comes down to a single roll, though; the PC usually need to take multiple actions to get back on their feet.

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Patrick is determined to mend his broken high concept, which is currently *Ex-Journalist of the Tribune*. The GM outlines some steps to repair it back to its warped state: Patrick's character must make amends with his editor, prove he can do the job by the rules, and get the paper a valuable story. When Patrick goes to make amends with his editor, he fails his Rapport roll, so the GM tells him how he can succeed at a major cost: his editor tells him that it's possible to get his job back, but only if he drops this insane investigation into the serial killer. Patrick is left with a hard choice: can he give up on his investigation to get his life back?

Repairing a broken or warped aspect automatically clears the fifth or third stress box, respectively. Repairing an aspect does not clear any other stress boxes on its track. When an aspect is broken, the PC must mend the broken element to clear any stress from it; the PC cannot clear stress from their first or second stress boxes on the aspect, for example, until it is repaired.

When an aspect is warped, the PC can try to clear its fourth stress box in the same way they would relieve the first or second, but against Epic (+7) opposition. Clearing the fourth box doesn't mean the aspect is no longer warped, but it does allow the player to mark it again to absorb stress.

If a PC does mend their warped or broken aspect, then they clear its appropriate stress box and return their aspect to its least-damaged state possible: for example, if the aspect is repaired but its third stress box is still checked, then the aspect returns to its warped state. If the aspect is repaired and its third stress box is not still checked, then the aspect returns to its original, undamaged state.

Patrick accepts his boss's deal to get his job back if he stops looking into the serial killer. It still takes more work, especially with his family, to convince them that this is the right move. But he does it and ultimately clears his fifth stress box on his high concept. His third stress box on his high concept is still marked, however, so the aspect returns to its warped state: he's still an *Eccentric Journalist of the Tribune* instead of a *Prize Journalist of the Tribune*. He'll have to earn that status back, as well, to return his aspect to its original state.

Damaged Troubles

It may seem nonsensical to damage a trouble—after all, it's already pretty much a broken aspect. But troubles can always get worse. Imagine a trouble of *Hunted by Mafia Hitmen* becoming the warped trouble of *Hunted by the Entire Criminal Underworld* and then the broken trouble of *Life Shattered by the Criminal Underworld*. Just remember that warping an aspect is about changing its details but keeping its core, while breaking an aspect is about changing its core—you're not just hunted anymore; they've actually ruined your life.

Damaged Aspects at Your Table

Using damaged aspects will keep the stress and tension much higher for all characters involved, and it'll make the characters much more dynamic. I hope you enjoy the “watching a car crash in slow motion” feel of damaged aspects! 🍀



NOSTRADAMUS

NOSTRADAMUS

by MARK DIAZ TRUMAN

THIS IS THE MABUS. I AM THE KILLER OF THE TWO BOYS FOUND BY PIKES MARKET LAST NOVEMBER. THE AMMOS WAS BRAND NAME SUPER X. I SHOT THEM IN THE HEAD AND CARVED A SYMBEL IN THEIR HANDS. THE POLICE HAVE NOT RELEASED THIS INFORMATION. DO YOU KNOW WHY I KILLED THEM? THEI WERE FATED TO DIE LONG BEFORE EITHER OF THEM WAS BORN. DIRTY FILTHY BROKEN AND LOST. I WORE A CROWN OF PLENTTY AND GAVE THEM DESTINY. IN PARADISE I WILL SEE THEM AGAIN. THEY WILL SERVE ME. FOREVER. I HAVE NOT FORGGOTTEN ABOUT MY CIPHER. PUBLISH IT OR PEOPLE DIE. ITS UP TO YOU.

—*The Nostradamus killer,*
from a letter to the Seattle Gazette,
May 12th, 1972

Seattle, October 1972

The Pacific Northwest was a hotbed of cultural and social change throughout the 1960s; the burgeoning environmental movement, a steady influx of new residents and development, and an economic boom all contributed to the collective consensus that the “Puget Sound promise”—economic prosperity and inclusion for all throughout the region—was close to being fulfilled. But as the ‘70s dawned, Seattleites were reminded that nothing lasts forever. Puget Sound, like the rest of America, soon found that the idyllic dreams of the ‘60s gave way to a waking world of unemployment, high oil prices, and public malaise. And that’s when the murders started...

Who Is the Nostradamus Killer?

The setting of *Nostradamus* is drawn from the real history of Seattle in 1972, but the Nostradamus killer is entirely fictional. Who the killer is, what he hopes to achieve, and what the characters learn about him is completely up to you to discover over the course of play. Don’t worry too much about historical accuracy—pick up the elements you think are interesting from the setting and use Fate mechanics to create the best story you can.

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THE PIKE'S PLACE MURDERS

In November of 1971, Seattle residents were stunned by the kidnapping and murder of two local teens, Hiro Hamasaki and Rolando Diaz. The two boys, walking home from West Seattle High one late fall afternoon, vanished without a trace. Two weeks later, three days before Thanksgiving, a local homeless man found their bodies near Pike's Place Market. The discovery made front page headlines across the country, almost derailing attempts to preserve the market region as a historical site.

Worse yet, the Seattle police were unable to gather any concrete leads about the murders; a few months into the investigation, the police were forced to admit that the trail had gone cold. Conspiracies continued to abound about the exact nature of their deaths, but the police refused to release autopsies, crime scene photos, or interviews with key witnesses, claiming that the “ongoing nature of the case” prohibited them from sharing what they knew.



THE MABUS LETTERS

The Pike's Place Murders were once again thrust into the spotlight six months later in May of 1972 when the Seattle Gazette published a three part series of letters, which included a lengthy cipher consisting

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of non-alphanumeric characters, allegedly delivered to the paper over a period of seven weeks. The letters—written by someone called Mabus or The Mabus—contained previously unreleased information about the murder of the two teens...and similar information about three murders of Seattle residents since 1969, all victims who had been shot by a similar weapon while hiking or exploring areas around Seattle. The writer of the letters claimed to have committed all the murders described, and offered vivid accounts of specific details of each killing.

The Mabus letters, as the Gazette called them, were an instant classic; Seattle residents snapped up all the initial issues of the Gazette's print run, prompting a reprint almost immediately. The Gazette claimed to have verified the information provided through police sources, but the Seattle police force declined to comment.

THE FIFTY-SIXTH QUATRAIN

A few days after the Mabus letters were published by the Gazette, a cryptology professor named Dr. Erica Tyska solved the cipher, discovering the following message:

ALL THAT MATTERS IS THAT WHICH YOU SHOULD KNOW
BUT IGNORE THE MABUS WILL TELL YOU BECAUSE YOUR
DEATHS SHOULD NOT BE IN VAIN <BREAK> SOONER AND
LATER YOU WILL SEE GREAT CHANGES MADE <BREAK>
DREADFUL HORRORS AND VENGEANCES <BREAK> FOR AS
THE MOON IS THUS LED BY ITS ANGEL <BREAK> THE
HEAVENS DRAW NEAR TO THE BALANCE <BREAK> WISE MEN
HEED MABUS AND DESPAIR FOOLS SUFFER ALONE

Dr. Tyska solved the cipher by recognizing the text of the middle stanzas as belonging to prophecies of Nostradamus (Century 1, Quatrain 56); she explained later that the killer's pseudonym, Mabus, was an obvious tip off, a reference to Nostradamus's work that immediately gave her a database of words from which to work. Tyska also discovered several instances of language from other quatrains in several of the Mabus letters, indicating to her that the relationship between the killer and Nostradamus was more than coincidental.

The media immediately grabbed onto the Nostradamus angle, and references to "Mabus" dried up overnight. Local tabloids harped on "the Nostradamus killer," looking for references to the murders in other quatrains and plastering images of a bloody Nostradamus across the front pages of every newspaper in the city. For three months, the city was held

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rapt by the tabloid coverage of the murders...but their attention gave way by the time University of Washington students resumed their studies in the fall. Many Seattle residents even came to believe the entire case was a fraud perpetrated by the Gazette to sell papers as the economy slowed.

THE MARYMOOR PARK SURVIVOR

Whatever hopes Seattleites had for escaping further murders at the hands of the Nostradamus killer were shattered when a young couple was attacked while picnicking on the banks of Lake Sammamish in Marymoor Park in late September 1972. Eric Wells and Caitlyn Ortega, students at University of Washington, were interrupted by a man wearing a hoodie, large antlers, and a mask, holding a revolver and demanding that they both lie down on the ground. Once the students were prone, the man shot Eric Wells five times in the head and neck, then turned to Ortega and shot her once directly in the back, then reloaded and shot her six more times. After securing several pieces of paper to their bodies, the killer left the scene.

Wells was pronounced dead at the scene, but the tourist who found the two victims was able to save Ortega's life. Ortega was later able to provide details on the killer—a white male, approximately 5' 11", 200-250 lbs, dressed in a strange outfit—but did not notice any identifying marks. No one reported seeing the man with antlers, nor were police able to recover any meaningful physical evidence from the scene of the crime.

The Gazette reported a few weeks later—despite protestations from the police—that the paper the Nostradamus killer attached to the victims' bodies contained stanzas of Century VIII, Quatrain 41, scrawled in charcoal on small slips of newspaper:

*a fox will be elected without speaking one word,
appearing saintly in public living on barley bread,
afterwards he will suddenly become a tyrant
putting his foot on the throats of the greatest men.*

TERROR IN JET CITY

By the time October of 1972 hits Seattle, full on terror grips the city; many people talk about the *next* Nostradamus kills as a certainty, as if there's no question that he will kill again before he's caught. The police claim that they're making headway into the case, but no arrests have been made; the Gazette claims they have more letters, but the Marymoor



killings have convinced them that publishing more ciphers does nothing to keep people safe.

Rumors have also started to swirl that the Nostradamus killer is fond of The Zombies' 1969 hit "Time of the Season," and young people out late at night play the song regularly as a sort of protection charm, turning the pop hit into the unintentional theme song of the Nostradamus killer. Anyone walking out after dark, in the gloomy rain and cold of Seattle in October, is sure to hear the song echoing out of an open car window or cracked door, a haunting reminder that until he is caught, the city still belongs to the Nostradamus killer.

Setting Creation

As a Quick Start Adventure, *Nostradamus* has everything you need to jump right into your first session. Before you start, discuss the broader setting with your group, perhaps even reading aloud the descriptions of the Pike's Place Murders, the Mabus Letters, the Fifty-Sixth Quatrain, The Marymoor Park Survivor, and Terror in Jet City so everyone is on the same page. Given the graphic nature of this Quick Start's mystery, it's also worth having a brief discussion about safety mechanisms (see page 241 in Sarah Richardson's *Feminine Horror* piece for safety resources).

At the start of play, explain the **current issue** to your players and ask them to fill in one or two additional faces associated with *The Nostradamus Killings*. These additional characters will provide plot hooks and twists that deepen the mystery of the Nostradamus killer and develop conflicts in the backdrop of the terror that grips Seattle. Character write-ups for the existing faces attached to the current issue are provided, as those characters are likely to be central to the story.

After explaining the current issue, ask your players to choose from one of the two available **impending issues**: *The Boeing Bust* or *Pike's*

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Place Preservation. This impending issue will act as a central point of contact for the characters, a location or problem around which the characters' relationships will circle before they get involved with the killer. Have the players fill in one or two additional faces for their chosen impending issue as well, rounding out the larger cast of characters with their suggestions.

CURRENT ISSUE: THE NOSTRADAMUS KILLINGS

The murders claimed by the man calling himself Mabus have chilled Seattle to the core; no one is sure when he will strike again or who will be his next victim, given that none of the existing victims appear to have anything in common. Since efforts by local law enforcement have been utterly ineffective at discovering his identity (or stopping the murders), the very foundation of civic order in the city is starting to unravel. Many residents are convinced that the killer is a harbinger of the future of the city, an early omen of the urban decay that threatens to undermine the Puget Sound promise, and the populace is a powder keg of fear and unease ready for a match.

Faces:

- Detective Mark Montgomery, the lead homicide detective assigned to the murder of Eric Wells
- Caitlin Ortega, the sole survivor of the Nostradamus attack that killed Eric Wells

The Nostradamus Killings

Det. Mark Montgomery

Lead homicide detective.
Assigned to Eric Wells murder.

Caitlin Ortega

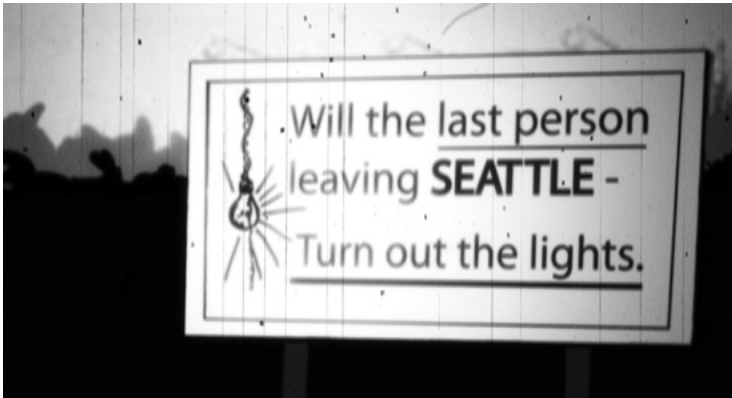
Sole survivor of Nostradamus
attack that killed Eric Wells.

IMPENDING ISSUES

In addition to *The Nostradamus Killings* that have gripped the city, there are a number of other impending issues that residents of Seattle are grappling with in the early 1970s:

The Boeing Bust

After World War II, Seattle underwent an economic transformation fueled by investments in education and infrastructure, a growing population, and the success of the largest local employer, Boeing. Yet as the space program ground to a halt in the late '60s and fuel prices spiked, Boeing's fortunes took a turn for the worse: the airline giant laid off 70% of their Seattle workforce, an economic catastrophe that echoed throughout the city. In 1972, unemployment in Seattle has reached double digits (12%) and local political leaders see few options for turning things around quickly. Many young people in Seattle are contemplating leaving for greener pastures, and a new billboard has gone up near the airport:



Faces:

- Carla Powdrell, an established African-American community organizer in Seattle
- Wesley C. Uhlman, the young mayor of Seattle, elected in 1969 by an optimistic youth movement

Pike's Place Preservation

The local recession may have crippled local businesses, but local community groups secured a major victory in preserving the historic Pike's Place Market for public development in late 1971. Pike's Place Market—a

NOSTRADAMUS

multi-block open air market and famous Seattle landmark—was scheduled to be torn down in the early 1970s by private developers, but community efforts to protect the location caused the city council to pass an initiative that established the market as a historic landmark and returned the market to public ownership. As construction begins to restore the original space into a modern market, the renovations offer unique opportunities for developers, organizers, and merchants, all of whom want to secure their own vision for the Pike's Place Market project.

Faces:

- Betty Bowen, journalist and philanthropist instrumental in saving Pike's Place Market from redevelopment
- Michael Matsumodo, a local developer and consultant to the Pike's Place Market Preservation and Development Authority

The Boeing Bust

Carla Powdrell

African-American
community organizer.

Wesley C. Uhlman

Young mayor of Seattle

Pike's Place Preservation

Betty Bowen

Journalist and philanthropist
instrumental in saving
Pike's Place Market from
redevelopment

Michael Matsumodo

Local developer and consultant
to the Preservation and
Development Authority

Character Creation

In *Nostradamus*, players take on the role of ordinary people caught up in the dangerous mystery of the Nostradamus killer, drawn deeper into a case that threatens to destroy their families and identities even if they emerge with their lives.

Unlike the detectives of a more traditional police procedural, the characters in *Nostradamus* are not police officers assigned to a particular case (see page 261 for more on Mark Montgomery, the homicide detective assigned to the Nostradamus case). Instead they are curious onlookers who become embroiled in the case even as people tell them to mind their own business and let the police do their job.

In order to give their relationships some structure, each character should tie into the impending issue selected at the start of the session (either *The Boeing Bust* or *Pike's Place Preservation*) in addition to their other relationship aspects. These characters don't have to be good friends—a labor organizer working at Boeing, a mechanic who is out of work because of layoffs, and a Boeing executive all tie into *The Boeing Bust* without necessarily being close companions before the start of the story.

In general, *Nostradamus* works best with Fate Core characters, since the different investigators can bring different skills to bear on the mystery. Fate Accelerated approaches don't permit players to make characters that are substantially different from each other in capacity and talents. Characters only receive one stunt and two refresh in this Quick Start.

ASPECTS

Characters in *Nostradamus* start by selecting a **high concept** and **trouble**. Since the characters are ordinary people, players should select high concepts that put them in contact with the killer's messages and victims—*Prize Journalist for the Gazette*, *Underpaid Public Servant*, *Dedicated Labor Organizer*, etc.—and focus on trouble aspects that might push them toward the mystery—*Failing Marriage*, *Nosy and Nervous*, *Drawn to Death*.

Avoiding Intrinsic Aspects

Instead of traditional stress, *Nostradamus* uses **damaged aspects** from Brendan Conway's *Damaged Aspects* piece on page 249. Make sure to create aspects that are states instead of intrinsic facts so that the aspects can degrade over time.

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In addition to their high concept and trouble, players should also select a **connection aspect** to explain how they are connected to the Nostradamus killer and two **investigator aspects** to create relationships among the PCs. These aspects are essentially a modified phase trio, but tell the PCs to focus on regular connections and involved relationships that require consistent contact; the mystery will require their characters to push on through danger and disappointment, and they will want to earn compels from their aspects to do so. See the Sample Characters on page 271 for examples of strong connection and relationship aspects.

SKILL LIST

Nostradamus uses a modified Fate Core skill list that has been recontextualized to better fit a 1970s murder mystery. Most skills remain unchanged (Contacts, Empathy, Investigate, Provoke, Rapport, Resources, Will), but others have been removed completely (Athletics, Burglary, Crafts, Deceive, Drive, Fight, Notice, Shoot, and Stealth) and many that stayed have undergone some substantial revisions. In addition, *Nostradamus* features a new skill that can be added to any campaign: **Command**.

Evasion

Nostradamus combines elements of Deceive and Stealth into Evasion, the art of avoiding conflicts and problems physically and socially. Whenever a character tries to weasel out of a situation, they roll Evasion to determine if they can avoid or undermine a conflict instead of facing it head on. Characters with low Evasion tend to stumble into conflicts, requiring them to engage instead of avoid problems.

Lies, Damn Lies, and Statistics

Nostradamus allows a character to deceive other characters using any social skill—Command, Provoke, or Rapport—as well as Evasion, but places the focus on *how* the character is attempting to deceive the target. Con artists are prone to creating advantages with Rapport to establish false trust, while a guilty wife avoiding questions about an affair would try to overcome the questions with Evasion to cover her tracks.

Cryptography (Lore)

Rather than offer Lore for information about serial killers—an incredibly specific field of knowledge—or the city of Seattle—a broad set of information that may or may not be useful, *Nostradamus* features Cryptography, the study of the codes and ciphers that happen to play a central role

in the killings. Characters can use Cryptography to learn more about the ciphers, evaluate what the killer must know to construct the ciphers, or crack the ciphers directly (with enough time).

COMMAND

While Rapport builds trust and Provoke inspires emotion, Command works to push people to comply with orders, instructions, and demands based on the authority of the speaker. Characters who have extensive management experience (or law enforcement training) usually have high ratings in Command.

Overcome: You can use Command to give orders to susceptible targets, especially people who are panicking or lost or explicitly under your authority. You might also use Command to project an air of authority when someone questions your qualifications or doubts your sincerity.

Discover: Command allows you to observe and interpret authority structures broadly—understanding who is in charge and how the system works—without needing to be told directly by people “in the know.” Questions revolving around Command typically involve asking about the power dynamics of a situation, especially in regards to formal authority.

Create an Advantage: Command allows you to create aspects to represent orders or instructions given to a group by a capable commander, such as “*Take That Hill!*” or “*We’re All in This Together*”. Other uses include distracting your opposition—“*Freeze!*”—or cutting off options to other characters through the force of your presence—“*I’m the Boss Here*”.

Attack: Command is typically not used to attack. If you wish to inflict emotional stress, you’ll have to use Provoke.

Defend: Command defends against any skill used to compel other people to follow the orders or interests of your opposition instead of your orders or interests. It does not defend, however, against people giving you orders. You need Will for that.

NECROMANCY STUNTS

Control, Don’t Feel. Once per session, you can gird yourself against what’s to come by giving yourself orders and instructions. Roll Command against a Fair (+2) difficulty to create an advantage on yourself with two free invokes on a success and three free invokes on a success with style.

No Questions. You can use Command to avoid answering questions instead of Evasion, provided you have enough authority in the situation to cut off or interrupt the questioner.

Physique

Nostradamus combines all the physical skills—Athletics, Fight, Shoot, and Physique—into a single skill. Characters with a high Physique might be ex-cops or soldiers returning from Vietnam, people who have some broad physical training in a setting where most people probably don't know how to handle themselves in a fight or shoot a gun effectively.

Survival

Nostradamus uses the Survival skill developed by Ryan Macklin in *THE FATE CODEX*, Volume 1, Issue 2. Investigators use Survival to navigate the wilderness surrounding the city, to discover crucial resources and escape routes in tense situations, and for determining who acts first in a physical conflict.

LIMITED SKILL PYRAMID

In addition to the modified skill list, characters begin with a reduced skill pyramid that tops out at Good (+3) instead of Great (+4). Note that this has two important effects: fate dice and fate points now matter more relative to the character's skills, and traditional difficulties—Fair (+2)—are slightly harder than normal. Both of these changes are subtle ways of upping the horror quotient in *Fate*; look to Richard Bellingham's article *Sustaining Dread* on page 230 for more ideas to make *Nostradamus* truly terrifying.

DAMAGED ASPECTS

As stated above, *Nostradamus* uses **damaged aspects** from Brendan Conway's *Damaged Aspects* piece (page 249) instead of traditional stress tracks. There's no way to earn additional stress boxes through Physique or Will, and you may want to reduce the number of stress boxes per aspect from five to three if you want to play a short game.

New Extra: Suspects

Rather than force the GM to create a fixed mystery that the characters must explore, *Nostradamus* leaves the question of the killer's identity open. Over the course of several scenes, the players provide input through the use of **suspects**—NPCs flagged as potential murderers by the players before the story begins.

CREATING SUSPECTS

After creating their characters, each player creates a suspect for the player to their right, an NPC that the target player's character believes might be the Nostradamus killer. The suspect creator details three things: the character's name, their relationship to the target PC, and an **evidence aspect** that captures why the target PC has grown suspicious. By default, these characters must all be white men, approximately twenty to forty years of age, and familiar with firearms and codes. Anyone else is not a believable suspect, and the characters must believe deeply that the suspect they are connected to might really be the killer.

Sean is sitting to the left of Kendyl, so he starts to create a suspect for her when he's done with his own character. Since Kendyl's character, Aisho, is the **Owner of a Pike's Place Stall**, he decides to create a regular customer, Isaac, who buys fish from her once a week, after he gets off his shift as a longshoreman. He tells her that Isaac fits the profile, and that she knows that he served in Vietnam in the late 1960s, returning to Seattle after his tour as a communications officer. He finishes off the suspect with the evidence aspect **Missing Weeks** and tells Kendyl that Isaac only missed picking up his fish two weeks out of the last two years—the same two weeks that Aisho's son and Rolando Diaz were missing before they were found dead.

Once all of the suspects have been created, the GM secretly adds a suspect stress track to each one. The length of the suspect track should correspond with the length of the game; a multi-session game might have five to six boxes, while a short game may just have two to three.

USING SUSPECTS FOR SCENES

Each scene of *Nostradamus* revolves around one of the suspects created by the players, either as direct investigations of the mystery surrounding the men that might be responsible or scenes that play out the consequences of the PCs' investigations in their personal lives. It's crucial that these scenes be tightly constructed in order to maximize the tension; it's hard to stay in a horror mindset if every other scene is about something completely unrelated to the Nostradamus killer.

At the start of each scene, the GM helps to facilitate scene setting by asking the group which suspect seems most interesting at that point in the story. Once the group decides on a suspect, the GM frames the scene with multiple characters, entangling several different threads to keep any one character from getting too focused on one and only one suspect.

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For the first scene, the group agreed that it would be interesting to focus on Aisho's suspect, Isaac. Since Brendan is GMing, he says, "Great. Let's have a few of you trailing him home to get a look at his place. Aisho, how did you get Oscar to help you out here? Why did he agree to come with you to trail Isaac? Was it because he's a reporter who *Needs to Get the Story?*"

After that scene is resolved, the group agrees that the next scene should focus around Emily's boss, Alexander. Brendan frames that scene as well: "Okay, I think we'll have a scene between Emily, Oscar, and Alexander's wife, June. You're all at a party for the firm and she starts asking questions about her husband. Emily, what do you think she knows about the book?"

RESOLVING SUSPECTS

For each scene that concerns a suspect, the GM marks one of the stress boxes associated with that character, even if the suspect is only discussed and not directly engaged in the scene. Once all the stress boxes have been filled, the GM has to make a decision about the character: what is this person hiding? Is this the killer? The GM doesn't share this decision, but from that point forward, everything the character does is in line with that new reality. It's possible that none of the suspects is the killer or that there are multiple killers, but nothing is decided until the stress tracks have been filled.

After a few scenes, Brendan marks all the stress boxes on Isaac's suspect track. He decides, based on what they've found already, that Isaac is not the killer. In fact, Brendan decides that Isaac actually spent those missing two weeks looking for the boys, deeply concerned about Aisho and her family. All further evidence that the PCs discover will confirm this fact, and Brendan now only has two suspects left who could possibly be the Nostradamus killer.

Plot Hooks and Further Mysteries

The players may have solved the mystery of the Nostradamus killer—or wisely decided to let the case go and go back to their lives...but that's not the end of the mysteries that abound in Jet City. Here are a few plot hooks and further mysteries to keep the investigators looking for bodies:

ONCE MORE, WITH FEELING

Weeks after the capture (or death) of the Nostradamus killer, another body is discovered, murdered in a similar style: same kind of gun, same attached note, etc. Another letter arrives at the Seattle Gazette demanding that a cipher be published so that “the great game can continue.” But the correspondence and many details at the scene don't match the original letters, and the police suspect that a copycat killer is on the loose. Who is copying the Nostradamus killer? Are they committed to his mad plan or simply using the original murders to throw the police off their scent?

FIVE YEARS FORWARD

Years after the resolution of the case, the PCs find themselves the subjects of a newly-released, hard-hitting documentary film called *Mabus* that claims the PCs interfered with the police investigation and allowed the Nostradamus killer to pursue his murderous plans. Yet as public reaction to the movie swells, the PCs begin to receive late-night phone calls and strange packages, all filled with whispers and notes about “the real Nostradamus killer.” Can they stay away from getting involved again? Or will they be drawn back to the case when the spotlight shines so bright upon them?

EXPERTS OF A SORT

The emergence of a serial killer in Portland—the “Ink Man” kidnaps his victims, tattoos every inch of their body with strange symbols, and then dumps them near public art installations—leads the Seattle police department to invite the PCs into a multi-state task force. But after the initial media circus subsides, a trusted friend within the department reveals the offer sets them up as scapegoats if the investigation goes south. Who can the PCs trust? Will they walk away from the investigation or allow themselves to be drawn back into the orbit of a murderous monster?

Sample Characters

Here are a few characters created just for this Quick Start, ready to pursue the Nostradamus killer into the dark shadows of Seattle. These characters assume that the group has chosen *Pike's Place Preservation* as their impending issue.

AISHO HAMASAKI

Aisho Hamasaki grew up near downtown Seattle, just a few blocks from the Pike's Place Market, and inherited her family's fish stall when her parents passed away in 1966. She struggles to keep the stall running since her son, Hiro, was murdered by the Nostradamus killer last year, but she has two other kids—Eicho and Ina—who need her more than ever. She is deeply frustrated by the lack of progress in the case, and she's starting to contemplate ways to pursue her own investigation.

ASPECTS

HIGH CONCEPT: STRUGGLING FISH MARKET VENDOR □□□

TROUBLE: INVOLVED WITH INA'S MARRIED ENGLISH TEACHER □□□

CONNECTION: GRIEVING MOTHER OF HIRO HAMASAKI □□□

RELATIONSHIPS: OSCAR CARES ABOUT MY SON □□□
EMILY IS HIDING SOMETHING □□□

SKILLS

GOOD (+3): Evasion

FAIR (+2): Command, Provoke

AVERAGE (+1): Contacts, Empathy, Rapport

STUNTS

Asking Around. Once per session, you can spend a fate point to ensure that another character is not at home when you visit their residence. If you tie or fail an Evasion roll while sneaking around inside, however, they arrive home in addition to whatever other costs you incur.

CONSEQUENCES

Mild (2) | Moderate (4) | Major (6)

NOTES

Refresh: 2

SUSPECT

Isaac Roberts □□□

Isaac purchases fish from Aisho each week, his order regular as a clock. Except, of course, for the two weeks her son was missing. During that time, the family friend who ran the stall said that Isaac avoided talking to them, even on days where he had to work in sight of the fish stall.

EVIDENCE: MISSING WEEKS

OSCAR GARZA

Oscar moved to Seattle from Los Angeles with the hopes of getting away from the violence of South Central and spending more time with his fiancé Emily, but the recent murders have put him on edge. He was one of the first people to talk to Caitlyn Ortega at the University of Washington Medical Center, and—despite his editor’s insistence that he stay focused on the development story of Pike’s Place Market—he finds himself asking more and more questions about the Nostradamus killings than he knows is wise.

ASPECTS

HIGH CONCEPT: AWARD-WINNING METRO JOURNALIST □□□

TROUBLE: ANXIOUS AND AFRAID □□□

CONNECTION: NEEDS TO GET THE STORY □□□

RELATIONSHIPS: HEAD OVER HEELS FOR EMILY □□□

AISHO KNOWS MORE THAN SHE SAYS □□□

SKILLS

GOOD (+3): Empathy

FAIR (+2): Contacts, Physique

AVERAGE (+1): Cryptography, Investigate, Rapport

STUNTS

In Tune. You can use Empathy instead of Will to resist mental attacks when you make an effort to understand the reasoning of the attacks instead of denying them.

CONSEQUENCES

Mild (2) | Moderate (4) | Major (6)

NOTES

Refresh: 2

SUSPECT

William Richard Winters □□□

Winters is one of the maintenance staff for the Market, a regular face around the area that most people trust. Oscar’s friend on the police force has told him that Winters is also one of the prime suspects in the murders; the police just don’t have any evidence at this point.

EVIDENCE: INSIDE SOURCE

EMILY KANE

Emily is an architect working on the Pike's Place Market preservation plan, one of five architects working for Morgan Ellis, the firm hired by the city to oversee development of the area. While she's happy on the surface—her relationship with Oscar is going well and her career is booming—she's haunted by a book she found at her boss's home while housesitting: a blood soaked tome of Nostradamus prophecies. She's told no one about the book, and every murder since the discovery weighs more heavily upon her.

ASPECTS

HIGH CONCEPT: JUNIOR ARCHITECT FOR MORGAN ELLIS □□□

TROUBLE: MASSIVE STUDENT LOANS □□□

CONNECTION: GUILTY CONSCIENCE □□□

RELATIONSHIPS: ENGAGED TO OSCAR □□□

AISHO DESERVES BETTER □□□

SKILLS

GOOD (+3): Will

FAIR (+2): Investigate, Rapport

AVERAGE (+1): Physique, Provoke, Resources

STUNTS

Up All Night. You can mark stress to use Will instead of Cryptography to crack ciphers by staying up long hours to work out solutions and answers.

CONSEQUENCES

Mild (2) | Moderate (4) | Major (6)

NOTES

Refresh: 2

SUSPECT

Alexander Currass □□□

Emily's boss, Alexander, is a beloved citizen, architect, and philanthropist, a man clearly above shooting people and sending strange letters to the Gazette. But between the bloody book she found at his house, and the strange things he's said before about destiny and fate, Emily is suspicious that he's not all that he seems.

EVIDENCE: THE BLOODY BOOK



BANSHEE

BANSHEE

by FELIPE REAL

All stories begin with the spark of life. All—except yours.

Yours began in Death.

You weren't "born" into this world; you had never known mortal life. You had heard of it—rumors of distant lands and foreign customs. Maybe you fantasized about first breaths or loving, living, and dying, but you never experienced life "in the flesh."

Until now.

Along with your sisters, you've descended to the mortal plane dressed in garments of flesh and blood with only one mission: ensure that The Book—the registry of everything that was, is, and has to be—isn't altered.

You must make sure that those marked for death exit this mortal coil.

No exceptions.

—Death, The Child of the Great Transformers

The Servants of Death

Banshee is a Quick Start about corporeal manifestations of Death in the mortal realm, sent by Death herself to ensure that mortals perish according to the instructions laid out in The Book.

These manifestations are called **banshees**, female avatars given mortal vessels in order to preserve reality. In their short but eventful lives, they must adapt to the physical world, discover the possible alteration to The Book requiring their attention, and correct the disturbance as quickly as possible.

Yet, the lure of a mortal life is seductive and intoxicating. If the banshees don't act promptly, it's possible they'll forget their responsibilities; the corrupting influence of the material plane may condemn them to become **Hollowed Ones**, creatures that appear mortal but are former banshees that lost their connection to Death.

THE FORCES AGAINST THEM

To carry out their duty, banshees seize the bodies of recently deceased women, which are restored to their prior-to-death state upon Incarnation. The banshees use the residual knowledge and abilities of these vessels to orient themselves in the mortal world. Banshees that forget their nature become zombie-like Hollowed Ones, hungry for death energy. They are little threat when encountered alone—what can a mere mortal do against a banshee and her Deathly Gifts?—but become extremely dangerous in groups. Then, their strength in number and disregard for their own existence make them formidable opponents, even for experienced banshees.

Banshees must also face the *Immortal Cult*, a group of men and women aware of the banshees and their labor. Although they're "mere" mortals, the Cultists have gathered information about their enemy for millennia. They are dangerous zealots, willing to do anything to achieve their greatest goal: block Death from the world—so no one else has to die ever again.

DEATH INCARNATE

Imagine a toddler learning everything that mature humans take for granted. Multiply that by infinity, take it to the depths of forever, and you'll still have barely a glimpse of the mundane but seemingly endless, unsurmountable obstacles the banshees face on their day-to-day existence. Their world was one of subtleties and abstractions, where colors could be seen...but also heard, tasted, and touched. How do you deal with a world where green is *only* something to be perceived by these defective organs mortals call "eyes"?

To the Incarnate, as they call themselves, the physical dimension is a cryptic maze, a source of never-ending awe and wonder. The Other World—as they refer to the afterlife they come from—is a *singular* reality, in which there's no difference between one banshee and another, or between the banshees as a whole and the rest of the dimension. Our material dimension, in contrast, is chaotically confusing, filled with colors, odors, and sensations that pulse with vivid individuality, a disconcerting swirl of attractive distractions that can overwhelm the banshee's singular purpose.

A Subtle Art

A focused banshee, on the other hand, sees the mortal world for what it is: the physical expression of The Book. The banshees' job is a paradoxical one: how can they preserve The Book without making alterations of their own? Every time one of them intervenes in the material reality they're changing it, for better or worse.

The answer is *balance*. Alterations are inevitable, but it's possible, through a judicious use of their abilities, to make as few as necessary to carry out their mission. If a mortal must die, provoking an accident—or better yet, influencing a mortal to provoke it—is superior to plotting a murder directly. In spite of that, there are no straight paths when it comes to the task Death has set before these women.

Setting Creation

Banshee is a Quick Start adventure with everything you need to jump into your first session.

After explaining the core setting, think about the alterations to The Book the banshees will have to deal with. This will be your **current issue**, usually conceptualized as ***Alterations to The Book***. Present The Victim and The Unsub—the person who should have died and didn't and the person who altered The Book, respectively—to the players and ask them to fill out a few additional faces that surround these two characters.

After explaining the current issue, ask your players to choose from one of the two available **impending issues**: ***The Hollowed Ones*** or ***The Immortal Cult***. The impending issue will help structure the challenges that the banshees will face as they try to repair the alterations to The Book. Have the players fill in one or two additional faces for their chosen impending issue, rounding out the larger cast of characters with their suggestions.

CURRENT ISSUE: ALTERATIONS TO THE BOOK

Either a mortal will die too soon or one will live well past the point when Death should have reclaimed them. Either way, an alarm has been triggered in the Other World and you've been sent to deal with this possible alteration as quickly and subtly as possible.

First, you must find *The Victim*—the mortal that's going to encounter or evade Death when they shouldn't—and *The Unsub*, the mortal that knowingly—or not—is playing with reality's tapestry.

Faces:

- **The Victim:** How did they avoid their intended death? Or what threatens to cut their life short? The Victim can be any mortal, from a baby to a dying old man, and their destiny is of the utmost importance.
- **The Unsub:** Are they altering The Book unknowingly? If so, is their alteration born of petty mortal motivation, such as vengeance, jealousy or hatred? Are they part of something bigger? Are they perhaps a pawn—or a conscious servant—of an Immortal Cult scheme?

Impending Issues

In addition to *Alterations to The Book*—and the catastrophic consequences it could bring to reality—there are other impending issues threatening the banshees, including:

THE HOLLOWED ONES

When a banshee loses her connection to Death, she becomes an apathetic mortal with no memory or consciousness of her true nature. That's why they're called Hollowed Ones; they just go on living without any motivation or emotion of their own—except for a dormant hunger to fill that void with death energy. This hidden instinct turns them into a primordial threat; they can sense the death energy of banshees and, once detected, they become obsessed with consuming it—destroying the Incarnated in the process. This is why banshees do their job as subtly as possible: Hollowed Ones can hardly be distinguished from other mortals and they usually are near one another. As a result, any sign of death energy will awaken not one, but many of these predators.

BANSHEE

Faces:

- **Alasdair Wronski:** Alasdair Wronski is a Hollowed One with the ability to transpose her consciousness into another body—in this case a male one. That wouldn't normally be a problem, but she has to gather death energy to maintain her new condition. And for that, she has to hunt down and consume her former sisters.
- **The Harpist:** There are stories about a creature that not only knows about the banshees, he—or she—can also control them. Some say it's through their voice; others, that direct eye contact is their method; and some whisper that they use a harp. There's one thing for certain: this is the boogeyman of the Incarnated—and their greatest fear in the material plane.

THE IMMORTAL CULT

As if the banshees' job weren't difficult enough, they must face the schemes and machinations of the Immortal Cult, a secret society obsessed with Death. Through centuries, if not millennia, of studying their enemy, the Liberators—as the cultists refer to themselves—have gathered copious amounts of information regarding the banshees, their *modus operandi*, and their strengths and weaknesses. They're resourceful opponents and dabblers in the occult, combining any and all weapons they can lay their hands on to oppose Death and the banshees.

Faces:

- **Jeanne Thelion:** The charismatic head of the Cult, she leads and schemes from the shadows; no one has seen her or spoken to her in more than a decade. Cold, calculating, and a natural tactician, the danger she poses to Death, and the banshees, is only compounded by her fanatical devotion to the cause.
- **Michael Marquardt:** Jeanne's right hand and second in command, Michael is in charge of the organization's day-to-day affairs and is personally responsible for coordinating the different cells and their missions. He's a man of few words and fewer mistakes, a perfectionist at heart who envisions the Cult as a clockwork weapon that will stop Death once and for all.

Character Creation

Banshee is written for Fate Accelerated, and the players should create characters incorporating the changes described below or use the sample characters provided at the end of the Quick Start.

ASPECTS

Players should select their aspects as normal, choosing a *high concept* and a *trouble*, two additional aspects, and an *archetype*, an aspect that symbolizes the stage in the life cycle of the banshee's mortal vessel. The archetype should serve as an inspiration for them on how to portray their character, a hint towards her role in the group, and a source of prospective abilities or knowledge. The three available archetypes are:

Maiden

These are women in their earliest stage of development, from the sexual awakening around puberty until their first literal or symbolic pregnancy. Maidens embody the feminine state of enchantment and growth, and they relate to mortals with a contagious youthful enthusiasm. They are the waxing moon, ever growing and driven—even against the advice from their supposed betters.

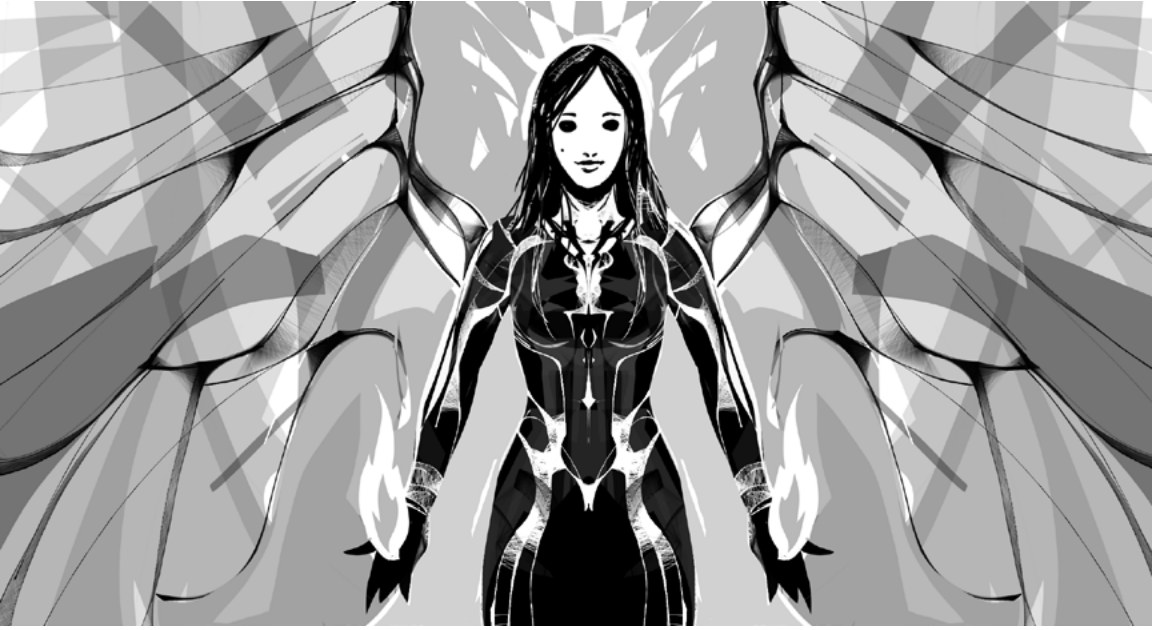
Mother

Motherhood once referred to the literal pregnancy condition; women now become mothers through various other means. The common characteristic of this stage is accomplishing a personal project demanding a profound emotional and affective involvement. All mothers share a stability and resourcefulness that makes them active and independent women. They are the full moon, the feminine condition in its apex.

Crone

The last stage in the female life cycle, the crone is the culmination and final maturity of a woman's existence. They're the keepers of all female wisdom, the patient elderly wise-women who guide the younger, and the possessors of an unbreakable peace of mind. They're the waning moon, moving ever so closely to the dark night. They're the women of endings, the closest mortals in body and spirit to Death herself.

BANSHEE



APPROACHES

Banshee uses the six approaches from Fate Accelerated, but here they have different names to better suit the unique nature of the Incarnated:

- **Devious** replaces Sneaky.
- **Lurid** replaces Flashy.
- **Meticulous** replaces Careful.
- **Persuasive** replaces Forceful.
- **Shrewd** replaces Clever.
- **Swift** replaces Quick.

In *Banshee* players choose one approach to be rated at Fair (+2), two at Average (+1), two at Mediocre (+0), and one at Poor (-1). This reflects the banshee's discomfort in her mortal vessel, and her general adaptation to the material plane.

THE DEATHLY GIFTS

Each banshee possesses three characteristics that measure her connection with the three miens of Death. These *deathly gifts*—as the banshees ironically call them—are used in conjunction with the approaches every time a banshee attempts any action on the mortal plane. Any time a player makes a roll, they choose an approach *and* a deathly gift, adding them together to determine the total.

Correspondingly, the Deathly Gifts are:

- **Atropos** (“Inexorable” or “inevitable”). An action powered by Atropos calls upon the essence of Death herself, putting an end to any form of existence—especially mortal. This is the most powerful, but least subtle of all the Deathly Gifts and its use should be avoided whenever possible.
- **Lachesis** (“Allotter” or drawer of lots). An action powered by Lachesis intends to bring order to the material plane, through the banshee’s knowledge of The Book. This is the reassertion of natural laws, such as gravity, entropy, or the inexorable passing of time. In a way, this is the “anti-magic” Deathly Gift.
- **Clotho** (“Spinner,” as in the one spinning the thread of life). In contrast with Lachesis, an action powered by Clotho invokes the fundamental nature of change to manifest in the mortal realm. If Lachesis is the anti-magic, Clotho is *pure* magic, the blatant alteration of reality to the whims of the banshee. As a result, Clotho covers anything outside the bounds of natural law.

In *Banshee* players choose one Deathly Gift to be rated at Good (+3), one at Fair (+2), and one at Average (+1).

STUNTS AND REFRESH

Like in *Fate Accelerated*, each banshee starts with 3 refresh and 3 free stunts. If the player wants to buy more stunts, they can do so by spending refresh, as normal.

The Mortal Stain

A banshee may fall in love—metaphorically or, worse, literally—with the material world. To reflect this danger—and the corresponding descent into the mortal condition—*Banshee* employs a modified version of the Corruption Rules presented by Clark Valentine in *THE FATE CODEX* Volume 2, Issue 2, pages 6-12. Although it isn't necessary to read that article to understand this section, it's still a much recommended reading!

When a banshee is confronted with a failed action that she really wants—or needs—to succeed, she can renounce a little part of her deathly nature in order to overcome the failure. This mortal stain is generally irreversible and only worsens as the Incarnate spends more time in the material realm. In this sense, the exposure to the physical reality effectively severs the connection between Death and her servants.

Once the player accepts the mortal stain, no further modifications may be made to the situation: the character's success has been decided and incorporated into *The Book*—not even Death herself may interfere. For mechanical purposes, the roll counts as two-shift success regardless of what was on the dice.

The player then changes the name of the approach rolled for the failure-turned-success, and permanently adds +1 to the approach's total.

STAINED APPROACHES

Unstained	Stained
Meticulous	Careful
Shrewd	Clever
Lurid	Flashy
Persuasive	Forceful
Swift	Quick
Devious	Sneaky

Any time a banshee acquires a stained approach, she must also lower one of her Deathly Gifts by 1. No Deathly Gift may ever be rated lower than Mediocre (+0): at that point, the relationship between a banshee and that facet of Death has already been severed.

If a banshee chooses to stain her sixth and final approach, she will immediately lower her last active Deathly Gift to 0, effectively completing her transformation into a Hollowed One.

Game Structure

Banshee is a Quick Start about Death and the wonders of our mortal realm. By interpreting alien creatures who are first experiencing reality, players can reexamine their notions about the nature of the world, their morality—or lack thereof—and the importance of any given mortal’s life.

The game follows a structured format inspired by the classic deductive investigation method—with a twist. *Banshee* isn’t really a whodunit but, instead, the investigation examines the characters’—and, in turn, the players’—reaction to situations where they must do Death’s dirty work. Every *Banshee* scenario is an invitation to question the characters—and players’—assumptions regarding life and death. Will they kill a baby in cold blood? Or, will they save a despicable mortal because The Book tells them to?

What follows is a sample scenario that highlights the structure and usual flow of a *Banshee* session. Feel free to adjust, modify, or ignore anything that’s presented here if that helps you—or your players—have a better time playing the game.

OPENING SCENE: THE NONA HOUR

All the banshees materialize together in the mortal realm with one goal: find The Victim and The Unsub before this possible alteration to The Book causes further havoc.

They appear in a neighborhood whose only remarkable feature is a decades-old Chinese restaurant, *The Wang Emporium*. The history of the place doesn’t interest the Incarnate; an aura of blocked Death energy surrounds the place, and the banshees are sure that the alteration occurred here.

Any investigation reveals that the Wang family has been struck by tragedy. Their only living male member, Fu Wang, died in a tragic accident while driving to the hospital to meet his firstborn. Shortly after that, Jian, the matriarch of the family, almost died from a heart attack. Worse yet, the newborn Wang almost died from an unknown disease and was only saved by “a miracle,” according to various sources. Finally, the child’s mother—and Fu’s widow—Bao Wang almost died from “food poisoning,” according to popular knowledge in the neighborhood.

The truth is more complicated than that. Each of the surviving Wang family members has a story to tell, detailed in the following profiles. Let the player characters propose ways to obtain this information, from simple conversations to magical divinations of their memories. This can be particularly useful—and disturbing—when dealing with baby Yun, so treat the matter carefully.

YUN WANG

Although only a baby with no understanding of the world around her, Yun may be the most dangerous character in the Wang family. If they aren't careful, this tiny little miracle may present the banshees with their first temptation in the material plane. Who can remain steadfast and choose Death when contemplating life in the eyes of a newborn child?

ASPECTS

NEWBORN CHILD | THE GREAT MIRACLE OF LIFE

SKILLS

SKILLED (+2) AT: Crying, breastfeeding, sleeping, melting people's hearts.

BAD (-2) AT: Everything else.

STRESS

None

BAO WANG

Until recently, Bao was a very happy woman. Fu was a thoughtful and loving man and Yun's pregnancy was largely uneventful. The restaurant was booming and even her mother-in-law was more tolerable lately. But then reality hit her really hard: her husband died when driving to meet Yun for the first time, the baby suffered for hours due to an unidentified malady, and her mother-in-law suffered a heart attack. Bao then decided that enough was enough and swallowed all the pills she could find in the house—but even the small mercy of an early grave was denied to her. Now she's trying to cope as best she can, but nothing seems real anymore; instead, she feels trapped in a nightmare.

ASPECTS

THE WORLD IS FALLING APART | IS THIS THE REAL LIFE?

SKILLS

SKILLED (+2) AT: Taking care of others, managing a demanding business, watching soap operas.

BAD (-2) AT: Dealing with customers, paying attention to her mother-in-law, understanding Westerners.

STRESS



JIAN WANG

This old woman saw everything she built with her husband go to waste. First, their oldest son died in a confusing incident with the police. Then, their daughter married a foreigner and ran away with him. Then, their youngest son died in a tragic car accident. This was the last straw, and Jian took matters into her own hands. She dug up old volumes of forgotten lore and invoked the family’s ancestors to protect her daughter-in-law and her granddaughter. Sadly for her the ritual apparently failed, almost killing her in the process. In spite of that, she’s ready to fight anyone—and anything—that threatens her remaining family, even at the cost of her own life.

ASPECTS

WITCH FROM THE OLD COUNTRY | TOUGH AS NAILS

SKILLS

SKILLED (+2) AT: Working *magicks* from the East, cursing her daughter-in-law, complaining about everything.

BAD (-2) AT: Moving around, doing any strenuous physical effort.

STRESS

☐ ☐

WANG FAMILY ANCESTORS

ASPECTS

DEPARTED SPIRITS | INCORPOREAL GUARDIANS

SKILLS

SKILLED (+2) AT: Haunting the family’s house and restaurant, protecting the family members when invoked, avoiding influence from the material plane.

BAD (-2) AT: Affecting the material plane directly.

STRESS

☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

MIDDLE SCENE: THE DECIMA HOUR

Once the banshees know a little bit more about the Wang family, they must discover who The Victim is. How do you decide, as GM, who is the center of this alteration to The Book? Simple: you don't. You *listen* to your players' proposals and follow them through.

If most of them agree that Bao should have died, let them think that they "rightly" discovered that she is The Victim—and Jian would be The Unsub, with her ancestral, magical protection. Or not. What if one of your players says that Bao is The Victim, but The Unsub is little Yun?

What if old Jian is The Victim? Then the most probable answer involves the family's ancestors, who prevented the matriarch's death for reasons of their own. The conundrum then becomes: how do you attack or persuade incorporeal beings? The most obvious solution involves a vulgar display of their deathly gifts—and an invitation for the Immortal Cult to show up on the scene afterwards.

Maybe Fu's death was the alteration to The Book. The banshees must discover the circumstances of his death and travel back in time to stop it. The mechanics involved in this process aren't important; the characters are manifestations of Death who experience time in a different manner from mere mortals, so let them decide how to deal with time travel and, if they decide to risk it, make it happen. It shouldn't be easy, of course—where's the fun in that!—but it should be possible...with a cost. Probably a very high one.

The method for playing *Banshee* is simple, but incredibly rewarding. Once again: don't decide who is who beforehand. Instead, discover it while playing with your friends, and just follow the most "logical outcome"—in your opinion—to each of their actions.



FINAL SCENE: THE MORTA HOUR

After the banshees have discovered-decided who The Victim is, it's time to confront The Unsub, correct their actions, and restore The Book.

It's possible that any of the surviving members of the Wang family is The Unsub. If Yun is the culprit, the final conflict for the characters is more of an ethical dilemma than a physical confrontation. Can they manipulate or even kill a newborn to carry out their mission? Feel free to invoke all the relevant aspects to make any decision the banshees make *costly*, one way or the other.

If Jian's invocation worked and she saved her daughter-in-law or her granddaughter, the banshees are in for a tense battle with an accomplished witch determined to save her family. She cannot be reasoned with or manipulated into lowering her defenses around Bao or Yun, respectively.

What if Bao is The Victim? Perhaps she unconsciously altered reality after receiving the news about her husband's death, her mother-in-law's heart attack, and her newborn daughter's illness in quick succession. What if she unknowingly saved either of them by disbelieving the unbelievably bad news? The banshees must convince her to let either her mother-in-law or her daughter go, or, as last resort, make sure that she dies so either of them follow her to the grave.

The Unsub could be from the outside the Wang family. Perhaps a devout doctor is responsible for the alteration to The Book due to her unusually strong faith. Then, the final conflict will involve both a mystical and a social battle, since Doctor Galeno is such a respected member of the community that any action against her will be met by at least some opposition from one—or more—former patients.

MARÍA GALENO

A second-generation immigrant, raised in a devout Catholic family, Doctor Galeno is the rare true believer in our skeptic times. Although her scientifically oriented mind seriously questioned God in her youth, María found solace and strength in the Creator, to whom she dedicates her labor every day. When all medical answers failed her when treating Yun, she turned to the Highest Power, praying for the little girl at the center of a web of tragedies—and He responded accordingly, from the doctor's perspective.

ASPECTS

HIGH CONCEPT: HEALER OF HEART, BODY, AND SOUL

TROUBLE: I WORRY TOO MUCH ABOUT MY PATIENTS

OTHER: I BELIEVE IN GOD AND SCIENCE

SLEEP IS FOR THE WEAK • I'D DO ANYTHING FOR MY WIFE, LENA

APPROACHES

DEVIOUS: Mediocre (+0)

LURID: Average (+1)

METICULOUS: Good (+3)

PERSUASIVE: Fair (+2)

SHREWD: Fair (+2)

SWIFT: Average (+1)

STUNTS

Trained in Hell. Because I am a doctor who has exercised her profession in the worst places, I get a +2 when I Swiftly overcome obstacles when treating agonizing patients.

The Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost. Because I have a profound faith in God, once per game session I can pray for a miracle and expect Him to answer.

Dedicated professional. Because I put my heart and soul into treating my patients, once per game session I can invoke the help of a relative of or a former patient.

STRESS

☐ ☐ ☐

CONSEQUENCES

Mild (2) | Moderate (4) | Severe (6)

NOTES

Refresh: 3

Plot Hooks and Adventure Seeds

Even if the players discovered The Victim and dealt with The Unsub—therefore stopping the alteration to The Book—their job is far from over. They are the agents of Death and they must be on the lookout for further alteration attempts, as well as other mundane and supernatural problems. Some of these include:

HAUNTED BY THEIR PREVIOUS LIVES

Former relations present serious problems when banshees encounter them. What can a banshee do when a mortal starts screaming in the middle of the street that they saw her in her coffin with their own eyes? Sometimes these encounters occur by mere chance but, in other cases, the mortals that once loved—or hated—the banshee's vessel in life are less than willing to let the matter go. Remind the players that banshees must remain under the radar because other, much more dangerous enemies can appear if these situations are poorly handled.

A BOOK ALTERED

At some point the banshees will fail in their attempts to protect The Book. After all, not even the Incarnated are perfect. What happens then? Does the world end in fire and flames or is the change more subtle, more pervasive? Perhaps the banshees are cut off from Death and the Other World, forever trapped in the material plane as Hollowed Ones. Or perhaps nothing as terrible occurs, but the world becomes worse because of it. What happens when the world has no sun, no moon, or no love? Can the banshees find a way to fix it, even when the alteration has become part of The Book?

THE GREAT RITUAL

The Immortal Cult has finally done it. After millennia of gathering occult knowledge—and especially different forms of *magick*—they have a ritual that can invoke the complete essence of Death, forcing her to manifest on the material plane. Once they have her here, they plan on trapping her, effectively ending her influence on the mortal world. Can the banshees stop the Cult before they execute the complex steps needed to complete this world-ending ritual? And if not, what are the consequences of such a powerful *magick*? Can Jeanne Thelion and other Cultists trap Death or are they foolish enough to invoke her without having the means to control her? Does the world become a second paradise—or a second afterlife with no life in it?

BERNA YILMAZ

Berna was a young and determined woman who considered her personal freedom much more important than the religious traditions of her family and culture. Apart from dressing “normally”—still too conservative for her classmates’ tastes—she was a highly motivated student with a big mouth and an attitude, especially concerning her undeniable rights as a human being. A tragic car accident, however, robbed her of her opportunity to change the world—one mind at a time.

ASPECTS

HIGH CONCEPT: A DAMSEL NEVER IN DISTRESS

TROUBLE: I ALWAYS GIVE MY OPINION

ARCHETYPE: MAIDEN

OTHER: I ONCE READ AN ARTICLE ABOUT THAT
IF I CAN'T FIND IT ON GOOGLE, IT DOESN'T EXIST
NOBODY TELLS ME WHAT TO DO!

APPROACHES

DEVIOUS: Poor (-1)

LURID: Mediocre (+0)

METICULOUS: Mediocre (+0)

PERSUASIVE: Fair (+2)

SHREWD: Average (+1)

SWIFT: Average (+1)

DEATHLY GIFTS

ATROPOS: Average (+1)

LACHESIS: Fair (+2)

CLOTHO: Good (+3)

STUNTS

Don't tell me what I can't do. Because I am a capable young woman, I get a +2 when I Persuasively overcome obstacles when someone has doubted my ability to do so.

I'm feeling lucky. Because I am technologically savvy, I get a +2 when I Shrewdly create an advantage when researching a subject on the web.

What it is to be young! Because I am healthy girl in her prime, once per game session I can clear all of my stress boxes in the middle of a scene.

STRESS

□ □ □

CONSEQUENCES

Mild (2) | Moderate (4) | Severe (6)

NOTES

Refresh: 3

CANDACE TRIGGS

Candace's life was *hard*; abandoned at birth, she wandered from one foster home to the next looking for a place to call "home." Sadly, Candace learnt early on that she had to take care of herself. This philosophy turned her into a fierce and skeptical survivor—until Belle was born. When she first saw her almond eyes she promised her she'd protect her with her own life if necessary—and she did so, when she sacrificed her life to save her daughter's.

ASPECTS

HIGH CONCEPT: JILL OF ALL TRADES

TROUBLE: MOTHER KNOWS BEST

ARCHETYPE: MOTHER

OTHER: BEEN THERE, DONE THAT

WHEN YOU'RE A MOTHER YOU'LL UNDERSTAND
IF YOU'RE GOING THROUGH HELL, KEEP GOING

APPROACHES

DEVIOUS: Average (+1)

LURID: Poor (-1)

METICULOUS: Fair (+2)

PERSUASIVE: Mediocre (+0)

SHREWD: Average (+1)

SWIFT: Mediocre (+0)

DEATHLY GIFTS

ATROPOS: Fair (+2)

LACHESIS: Good (+3)

CLOTHO: Average (+1)

STUNTS

I've done it all, honey. Because I am a multifaceted woman, I get a +2 when I Meticulously overcome obstacles when facing a task I haven't done before.

Do your duty. Because I am a responsible woman, once per game session I can return an approach of another banshee to its unstained original approach by lecturing her.

A lioness when it comes to my cubs. Because I am a protective mother, I get a +2 when I Deviously attack while defending the ones I care about.

STRESS

□ □ □

CONSEQUENCES

Mild (2) | Moderate (4) | Severe (6)

NOTES

Refresh: 3

SHANNON NORRIS

When Shannon was young, she had everything a girl could hope for: fame, fortune, and beauty to spare. Even then, however, she was aware that Father Time neither forgives nor forgets, so she made an effort to wisely administrate her apparently infinite resources, cultivating herself in plenty of areas. The result was a woman who reached maturity and was still full of life and energy when Death came to her in her sleep.

ASPECTS

HIGH CONCEPT: HIGH PRIESTESS OF DEATH

TROUBLE: I DON'T UNDERSTAND YOUNG PEOPLE

ARCHETYPE: CRONE

OTHER: NOTHING REALLY SURPRISES ME ANYMORE

A BIRD IN THE HAND IS WORTH TWO IN THE BUSH
THE ANSWER LIES WITHIN

APPROACHES

DEVIOUS: Fair (+2)

LURID: Mediocre (+0)

METICULOUS: Mediocre (+0)

PERSUASIVE: Average (+1)

SHREWD: Average (+1)

SWIFT: Poor (-1)

DEATHLY GIFTS

ATROPOS: Good (+3)

LACHESIS: Fair (+2)

CLOTHO: Average (+1)

STUNTS

Nothing is certain but death and taxes. Because I am closer to Death than anybody, once per game session I can automatically succeed with a style in any conflict that includes Atropos.

More webs than a spider. Because I am an old woman, I get a +2 when I Persuasively create an advantage when I subtly force a situation to go my way through long-term plans.

Memento mori. Because I remember the truth about Father Time, I get a +2 when I Deviously attack when I remind young people of Death's inevitability.

STRESS

□ □ □

CONSEQUENCES

Mild (2) | Moderate (4) | Severe (6)

NOTES

Refresh: 3



CREDITS

JOHN ADAMUS is a frequent editor and player of many Fate-powered games, and his work can be found in both Fate Worlds books, the forthcoming Paranet Papers supplement for The Dresden Files Roleplaying Game, and Iron Edda. He spends his days helping game designers and authors be more awesome. He frequently tweets about game design and writing techniques on Twitter at @awesome_john and blogs regularly at writernextdoor.com.

Found one day on the side of a lonely road, clutching a broken laptop and a battered copy of the 2nd Edition DMG, **TRACY BARNETT** writes and develops as one half of Exploding Rogue Studios. Tracy's first game, *School Daze*, won a Judge's Spotlight ENnie in 2013. In 2014, Tracy pioneered the Swedish Duck school of martial arts training, quickly adopted by the Secret Global Police. You can find Tracy at @TheOtherTracy. There is no such thing as the Secret Global Police.

In the three years since **HEATHER BEAUREGARD** was "convinced" to start running the DRESDEN FILES RPG she's finished two full campaigns and is in the middle of a third. She's a Fate enthusiast, a dedicated video gamer, and an aspiring author. She lives in Phoenix with her loving husband and two cats.

RICHARD BELLINGHAM is an insurance broker with degrees in microbiology and computer science. He has a weakness for puns, a fascination with what makes people tick, and a serious RPG habit. He's the author of Evil Hat's *The Secrets of Cats*, a game about magical felines who work to protect their human Burdens, and the soon-to-be published *Knights*

CREDITS

of *Invasion*, which is about medieval-style knights duking it out with a variety of alien menaces. He also has a bunch of other stuff in the pipeline which you can read about at <http://www.skimble.me.uk>. He lives in the Southeast of England with his partner Blake and voraciously consumes books and movies in his free time.

DON BISDORF tells stories through fiction and roleplaying, having detoured briefly through video game programming and webcomics. He is the author of the Fate Adventures & Worlds setting *Sails Full of Stars*, and a self-published fantasy novel titled *Stone of Names*. He has more Fate projects in progress and will almost certainly brag about them at <http://donbisdorf.blogspot.com/>.

OLIVIA BOYD is a Chicago-based illustrator and designer, currently studying at Columbia College Chicago. When she's not drinking gallons of coffee or trying to keep houseplants alive, you can find her designing characters, developing graphic novels, and collaborating with other creatives.

When not writing or editing, **SALLY CHRISTENSEN** crochets unspeakable evil. She lives in the wilds of north Toronto, along with two cats, a Portuguese viking, and her tiny overlord.

BRENDAN CONWAY is a co-owner of Magpie Games, and has worked on the *Firefly RPG* from Margaret Weis Productions, the upcoming *Bulldogs!* (Fate Core edition) from Galileo Games, and numerous Magpie Games projects including *Urban Shadows* and *The Fate Codex*. His solo projects include three Chaos World settings for *Dungeon World*—*The Last Days of Anglekite*, *The Cold Ruins of Lastlife*, and *The Green Law of Varkith*. He is currently at work on an upcoming game about young superheroes, *Masks: A New Generation*.

JASON CORLEY is a lawyer living in Southern Arizona. He has been rolling *Fudge* dice since the days of *Heartquest*. (Don't tell him you've never heard of *Heartquest*.)

THOMAS DEENY is a graphic designer who specializes in book layout and game design. His layout and design work can be found in about half of things in Brendan's bio above, but the two have never actually met. Strange. You can review his published works at denaghdesign.com and follow him on Twitter at @denaghdesign.

CREDITS

SHELLEY HARLAN is an editor by day, and by night...is also an editor, because you can't get too much of a good thing. She works for the indie RPG company Faster Monkey Games and still can't quite get used to the idea that people will pay her money to read gaming material. She also thinks it's a fun game to see if you can spot the typo in this bio.

MARISSA KELLY (MK) grew up with roleplaying as a favorite hobby; her father often made up house rules for classic roleplaying games, spinning epic tales of bravery and heart. From a young age, MK was inspired to draw the characters and scenes from these stories. As an adult, she now finds herself drawn to tweaking and changing systems in order to bring those kinds of experiences to a new generation of roleplayers. With her partner, Mark Diaz Truman, she founded Magpie Games in early 2011 and currently serves as Magpie's Senior Art Developer and one of its designers.

KIRA MAGRANN creates jewelry at Anima Metals, writes game critique at Gaming as Women, organizes Indie Games on Demand at Origins and Gencon, and creates sexy, feminist, queer, and cyberpunk games. Some games she's recently designed are *Strict Machine*, *Twilight Dames*, and *Game of Thrones: Play the Cards*. Follow her on G+ or twitter @kiranansi.

MIKE MUMAH has worked for the better part of a decade as a roleplaying game illustrator. His work has appeared in such games as *Shadowrun*, *Rifts*, *Dead Reign*, *Part-Time Gods*, *Babylon 5*, and several others. The Michigan-based artist is currently at large from the Briarsbrook Institute for the Criminally Insane and considered extremely dangerous. If sighted, do not approach him! He may seem very affable and friendly but don't be fooled! Please call the authorities and delay him with free coffee, bourbon, and/or hot wings. He will take the time to enjoy this bait until he can be apprehended. This is for the public's best interest.

KOJI NISHIUCHI has been writing gobs of homebrew content for roleplaying games ever since he was appalled by the idea that a rogue was unable to get bonus damage for headshotting zombies, going on to make Fate hacks for everything from giant monsters that fit in little balls to quirky ghost children to fruit-powered pirates to supernatural heists masterminded by vampires. It's only now that he's gotten the chance to pester people with it on a larger scale.

CREDITS

JUAN OCHOA: Gumshoe whistleblower reporter hero? A narcissistic antagonist out for blood? Fall-guy for a horrifying nanite invasion? Sleeper agent for extraplanar feline intelligence? The FACTS on El Mucho Colombianísimo: he is a straight-dealing, smooth-lined, grit-toothed artist, twainsplit mirror-master-magician-carouser-cavorter, and noted wizard, with knowledge bilingual, exotic, and esoteric, who theoretically does most of his thinking in Español.

MIKE OLSON was born in Encino, California. Later in life, he got to work on some roleplaying games—for money! His credits include *THE KERBEROS CLUB* (FATE EDITION), *JADEPUNK*, and the ENnie Award-winning *FATE CORE SYSTEM* and *ATOMIC ROBO: THE ROLEPLAYING GAME*, among others. He resides in Southern California with his wonderful wife and two equally wonderful sons, but you can find him online on Twitter (@devlin1) or at spiritoftheblank.blogspot.com. His other interests include drum corps, podcasts, kids' TV, and writing about himself in the third-person.

JON PEACOCK is a mild-mannered IT guy by day and a daydreamer by night (he assures us this is possible). He has recently started trying to get these dreams out of his head on to paper with varying degrees of success, most of which can be found at <https://khellmg.wordpress.com/>. *Family Matters* is his first published work.

KAITLYNN PEAVLER, better known on the internet as thedandmom, is a freelance illustrator and graphic designer. She had been producing fantasy art and fun cartoony images for years and has done artwork for Prismatic Art, Conquering Corsairs, Whispering Road and more. Her own projects include *Deck of Legends*, *Experiment 073*, and a new comic in the works called *Falsely Outrageous*.

JACOB POSSIN is a writer and game designer. He is currently the line developer of the Jadepunk line for Reroll Productions. When he is not playing or designing games, he is thinking about games. Seriously, it's a real problem. Right now, as you read this, Jake is thinking about games. True story.

CREDITS

FELIPE REAL is a writer, editor, and translator (EN-SP/SP-EN). He has won various minor literary contests in Chile, Spain, and Mexico and his stories have been included in assorted anthologies and literary magazines. He has translated a number of authors and works, including Neil Gaiman's "I, Cthulhu" and *The Gods of Pegāna* (2014) by Lord Dunsany. He currently works as an editor at Fantasía Austral & EN World TRAIL-seeker. *Banshee* is his first RPG publication.

SARAH RICHARDSON is a graphic artist who illustrates, lays out, and creates tabletop RPGs. She writes for Women Write About Comics, is a co-organizer of ConTessa, and you can hear her on the IGDN podcast, Indie Syndicate. You can see her work at www.scorcha.net and follow her on Twitter as @scorcha79.

JUSTIN ROGERS has had an uncommon introduction to RPGs—he's played five or six different Apocalypse World hacks and a bunch of Fate, but doesn't really have any idea what "a Pathfinder" is. He works sporadically on various projects: a Baltimore city guide for *Urban Shadows*, his analytics-oriented sports blog (thesplog.com), songs for his barely-existent rock band Kodiak Arrest, and his astrophysics Ph.D. thesis, though not necessarily in that order.

TRAVIS SCOTT is a teacher, social worker, art historian, game maker, and game player. His RPG work can be found through any number of clandestine networks accessible at the loneliest corners of the social media darknet, if you know the appropriate passphrases, URLs, and proxy agents. He writes about chickens in postmodernity, draws maps, and thinks more about dragons than anyone ever has.

MARK DIAZ TRUMAN is an independent game developer and co-owner of Magpie Games (magpiegames.com). Mark has authored three indie RPGs—*The Play's the Thing*, *Our Last Best Hope*, and *Urban Shadows*—and written a number of pieces for Evil Hat Productions, including parts of THE FATE TOOLKIT and *Do: Fate of the Flying Temple*. Mark is passionate about creating an inclusive and diverse gaming community and is thrilled to have the chance to put forward pieces by both fresh voices and old friends in THE FATE CODEX!

CREDITS

AMANDA VALENTINE is a freelance RPG editor and developer. Her work includes the *Dresden Files RPG*, *Marvel Heroic Roleplaying*, *Fate Accelerated Edition*, *Little Wizards*, and many others. She also edits fiction, including several of the *Spirit of the Century* novels. She blogs sporadically at ayvalentine.com about editing, parenting, and gaming. At reads4tweens.com she writes spoilerific book reviews for adults who care about what the kids in their lives are reading. You can find her on Twitter as [@ayvalentine](https://twitter.com/ayvalentine) and [@reads4tweens](https://twitter.com/reads4tweens).

CLARK VALENTINE has found a reasonably successful career as a part-time RPG freelance writer, and believe me, he's as shocked as you are about this. He likes running *Fate* and *D&D* and **World* games for his kids and his wife, editor Amanda Valentine, and his friends. In his day job he writes software to make sure everyone gets paid on time, which is boring—until it isn't, at which point it gets pretty darn exciting. His children are already more accomplished than he is, and he wouldn't have it any other way.

NICOLE WINCHESTER is addicted to new experiences, finding adventures by travelling the world, exploring her hometown of Toronto, and playing and making games. Her work has been in *THE FATE CODEX*, *Indie Mixtape Vol. 2*, and at games.cultureaddicthistorynerd.com. As a social media manager and owner of #partytime social media events, she specializes in live-tweeting for sports and entertainment. She is working on *Idols of Light*, a game for Different Play (differentplay.com), and tweets too much [@noizangel](https://twitter.com/noizangel).

JOSHUA YEARSLEY is a professional editor of roleplaying games, board games, and technical literature. He works with Evil Hat Productions as the lead editor of their *Fate Worlds* and *Adventures* line of supplements, along with a variety of other small and independent publishers.

TARA ZUBER grew up on fairy tales and remains mildly obsessed with stories to this day. She looks forward to exploring the Fate system further and discovering new stories to tell and share. Tara can be found in Chicago or online on Google Plus at [+TaraZuber](https://plus.google.com/+TaraZuber).



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