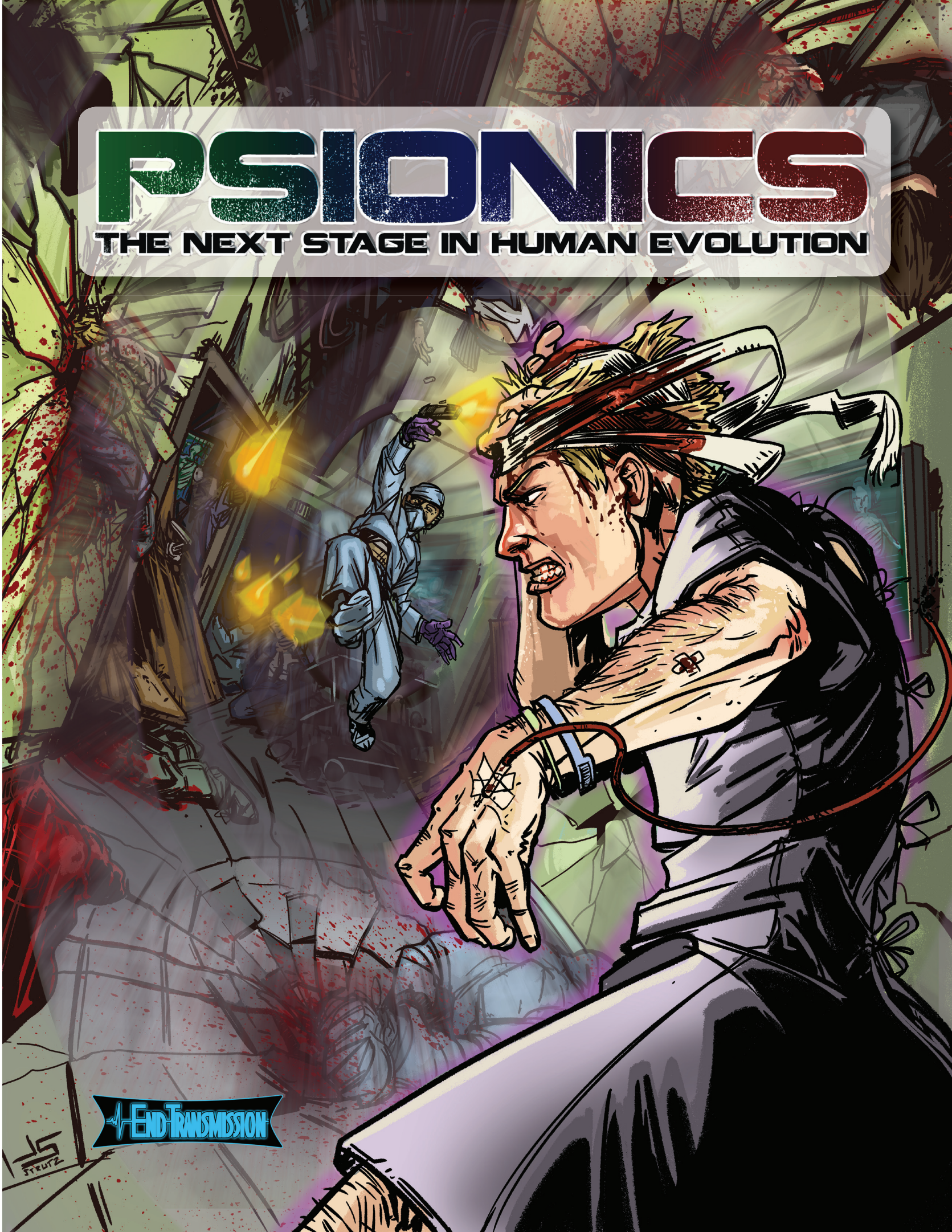
PSIONICS
THE NEXT STAGE IN HUMAN EVOLUTION
End Transmission

# SHUT UP

# AND KEEP RUNNING

# PSIONICS

## THE NEXT STAGE IN HUMAN EVOLUTION

"Because most MKUltra records were deliberately destroyed in 1973 by order of then CIA director Richard Helms, it has been difficult, if not impossible, for investigators to gain a complete understanding of the more than 150 individually funded research sub-projects sponsored by MKUltra and related CIA programs."

*- Advisory Committee on Human Radiation Experiments Final Report.*

"Because the drugs never work
They're gonna give you a smirk
'Cause they got methods of keeping you clean
They're gonna rip up your heads
Your aspirations to shreds
Another cog in the murder machine

They say that teenagers scare the living shit out of me
They could care less as long as someone'll bleed
So darken your clothes, or strike a violent pose
Maybe they'll leave you alone but not me."

*- My Chemical Romance, "Teenagers"*

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### Extra Thanks

*Thank you to **all of our Kickstarter Backers** - we couldn't have done this without you. Please take a look at page 305 (in the back of the book) for more individual shout-outs, and an index of backer-inspired art.*

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# Tomorrow's Starlight (Part One)

*By Devon Oratz*

*With Apologies and Thanks To The World/Inferno Friendship Society*

"You'll think it's about
drugs, but it's not.
It's about how my 13th
bad idea turned right
And I made up my
mind to exploit it.
It wasn't as hard as
you think it might be,
But the timing was real
important and I had made
up my mind to enjoy it.

I knew a bunch of
thugs who were just
hanging around
I'd agitate, activate them,
make them come on board.
I swear I could feel the
universe expanding,
And my vision was
all commanding

I gave them these
tapes, I gave them the
gift of electricity
They had a gift for theft
I had our bodies hanging
below us like moorings
And we all got to school
in the morning
Where the teachers were
never more boring."

*- The World/Inferno Friendship Society, "Lust For Timing"*

**Eight or so Black Russians having had a deleterious effect on my sense of balance,** I wind up hitting the floor and sliding after I shoulder-ram my way through the rusted metal fire door at the back of the alley. Judging from the smell of frying MSG and the bushel of Asian guys in grease-stained chef's whites looking up startled at the door I crashed through, I'm guessing the brown tile floor I'm currently sprawled on belongs to a Chinese restaurant.

A fall like that should probably be hurting pretty bad, but Did You Know? The popular party drug codeine has this weird side effect where it deadens pain.

Footsteps and shouts from out through the door, in the alley I came from. Coming after me. No time for takeout.

Quick now, pick myself up, dust myself off, smile apologetically at the shouting Szechuan chefs, and I notice Scott sitting comfortably on the burners of a big gas stove, his unlaced Converse sneakers dangling and knocking together, smiling like a loon.

"You used to be so good at getting out of things, Scott. How come you never taught me that goddamn trick?"

Not waiting for an answer, I'm shouldering aside kitchen staff at a run and away into the restaurant proper: lush red carpets, gold scrollwork, gleaming turquoise aquaria swimming with a rainbow of brightly colored fish. Weaving between tables at a jog I snatch a couple of 20s that some unwise waiter hasn't collected yet as I pass.

From behind me comes a shouted "Hey!" and other yells of Cantonese anger but fuck it sideways, today clearly ain't a day for making friends.

A very pretty coat check girl dives out of my way and with what I must look like right now I don't blame her. I hit the front doors of the restaurant like a linebacker and I am oh so thankful that those push-bars were in fact push-bars and not pulling handles disguised as same, or I'd have felt pretty stupid.

I guess that's why they call me Lucky.

Out on Canal Street, somewhere between Bowery and Broadway I guess, I foolishly take a moment to look behind me. According to the flashy neon sign, the restaurant I just came crashing out of is actually called Big Wong. My uncontrollable giggles at learning this tell me that the time I lost in exchange for this information was totally fucking worth it.

Look left and I see the angry mob has gone around the restaurant, lacking the agility to go through. A bunch of strapping dudebros in sports jerseys and muscle tees are pointing and shouting in my direction. Only if I was a sleeping coed would I be more worried about their intentions towards my person.

Look right, and I see a bunch of parked cop cars menacing the street around them with their aura of flickering red and blue light. No idea what that's about, but I want no part of it.

I run straight as a swarm of enraged Asians erupts from the Big Wong behind me (Ha! Ha!). Straight, across the street, ignoring the furious honking of a taxi that has to stop short to avoid hitting me. Straight, across the street, to the mouth of another fucking alley. This one has been blocked by one of those heavy construction fences, topped with wire, and plastered with posters for restaurants, bars, strip-clubs, and shows, and Chinese graffiti spraypainted over that. I risk a quick look behind me, and I see that after some confusion, the pissed off Chinese waiters and the enraged white sportsfans are coming to an accord, merging their angry mobs into one multi-racially harmonious angry mob.

United in wanting to do bad things. To yours truly.

Oh, the humanity.

Scott, standing next to me now, hands in frayed jean pockets, sizing up the fence through his coke-bottle glasses.

Am I going to get over that thing?

"Don't suppose you could give me a boost, Scott?"

Scott takes his left hand out of his pocket, shows me his left middle finger, and looks nonchalantly over his shoulder as more honking horns herald the angry mob crossing traffic.

"Helpful as ever."

I throw myself at the fence and make it nowhere. It's chainlink but the chainlinks are covered in some plastic tarp shit so you can't get a good grip on them with your fingers. The whole thing rattles angrily and I slide down the moist plastic. The fence has made me angry, so I glare at it really hard, and a little dagger point of bright flame appears at the center, and spreads rapidly outwards, the plastic burning and melting away until the chainlinks are exposed, naked and glowing with heat.

I scramble up, not thinking about how hot the metal is. As long as I don't think about it, my fingers won't get burned. Then I fling myself over the not-quite-barbed-wire on top like a lifetime of running from the cops has taught me. I land in a heap in a puddle of what I try not to think of as hobo urine, where soggy cigarette butts float like charming little islands. My good blazer is ruined. Pick myself off the ground and I'm running, Scott running ahead of me, laughing and looking back over his shoulder.

"This is another bizarre and thankless situation you've gotten us in," Scott says.

"Oh, like you've never been in a fight before? Like you've never caused a scene? Anyway, shut up, Scott. You're not even really here."

And like that, he's gone. Sulky little bastard.

For a ghost.

This alley is a dead end, of course, the narrow back of an apartment building latticed with construction scaffolding, the metal beams of the scaffolding covered in green tarpaulin wet from last night's rain. I pull up short, panting raggedly, bent over my knees, trying not to heave. Looking behind me, the angry mob seems to actually be *tearing down the fence*.

Now, I have *always* had a gift for pissing people off, but this is just ridiculous.

I start climbing, telling myself, chin up. Remembering something I read in the Book, like a mantra, but less tedious than most New-Agey hippie bullshit.

*This ain't the worst we've seen, we've been through much worse than this, and we will live to laugh at this so shut up and keep running.*

A hundred feet of monkey-climbing up the side of this building, and I'm sick of this scaffolding. I pull myself up to the lip of the roof, panting. Scott looks over at me from where he's sitting on the edge of the building, legs dangling down. He flicks a cigarette butt down at the angry mob swarming below.

"I'm sick of it Scott, running," I gasp, pulling myself up onto my side. "Sometimes win, sometimes my jaw needs icing." I pause, spit some blood, self-assessing. "I *do* think that I'm funny, but one day it'll be a *bon mot* too many."

"You are so full of shit," Scott says. "Giddy from all the trouble you've gotten yourself in, like usual, talking like anything will change. If you get out of this, you'll just wind up pushing your luck again. And you know it."

"And that's why you love me," I say.

The tender moment is interrupted by a shout from below.

"We're gonna get you, fucker!"

The assholes are climbing the scaffolding. I feel like a cat, trapped his dumb ass up a tree. I run around the roof looking for a way out. There's an access door – rusty and scarred with decades of scratched graffiti on the rust, exposing bright bare metal – but some charming young wit has taken it upon his punk ass to put gum in the lock. I wish as hard as I can that whoever did it was here so I could punch him right in the dick. I mean, *gum in the lock*? Really? That's just *annoying*. Not to mention *irresponsible*. People *need* to use this door.

Honestly, it reminds me of something I would do. So yes, Scott, I guess you're right, it's difficult *not* to see how I got myself in this predicament. I go against the advice of everyone in the world when I step up to the edge of the roof I came

up and look down. I count only about eight figures that are climbing the scaffolding after me, a mere fraction of the angry mob churning below - some of them looking for things to throw. But it's still... *slightly*... more than I can take in a fight.

I briefly consider setting the scaffolding on fire. It's the same wet plastic tarpaulin that was covering the fence, so I *know* that even I can burn it. And I don't exactly burn with the best of them. Actually, I could use more practice. But ultimately, I decide against it. It's a bit too much "mass murder", a bit too little "wacky hijinks". At least for this situation.

In other words, not my style.

But options are not in good supply just now. I fantasize about a giant, invisible hand pushing the scaffolding loose from its moorings and tipping it over backwards. That *probably* wouldn't hurt anyone too seriously, and it would buy me time to figure out a way off this roof. But this is nothing but a flight of a fancy.

I can't even move fucking *marbles* with my mind, let alone mountains.

I run the other way. This being Chinatown this rooftop is actually the roofs of numerous buildings which are mashed together without an inch of space between them. But I do eventually come to a gap where a street, almost as narrow as an alley but not quite, breaks up the buildings. Across on the other side is another rooftop, maybe twelve feet below me, and maybe eight or nine feet across.

If I was possessed of the cool dry wit of an action hero, I'd turn my running start into a running leap. Preferably in slow motion. But the fact of the matter ladies and germs is that *jumping roof to roof is scary*. I stop short, back up, check my shoelaces and hike up my slacks and try in vain to still my racing heart, which is a jackhammer in my chest. It's not my first rodeo, as far as urban acrobatics is concerned, but some things don't get easier with practice.

As much as I'd like to be, I'm just not the goddamned Batman. And I can see that beyond this jump will be a series of more of them, from rooftop to rooftop, to freedom, to safety.

"I really don't know if I'm gonna make all those leaps," I gesture up and across the street. A figure in a lit window waves hi. People are gathering at the window to look at the scrawny guy in the filthy suit jacket running around on the roof. Enjoying the show.

Next to me now, Scott furrows his brow, purses his lips, and says:

"There has never been a time when brains have not won over brawn, and we will live to see the dawn."

It's uncommon to hear him say anything, since he died, and rarer still that he say anything that's not sarcastic. Something actually uplifting? Unheard of. For a moment I'm heartened, and then I remember he's dead and my face falls.

"But Scott, you're still not really here."

I look behind me and fancy I see the concrete ledge on the opposite end of the roof sprout its first set of hands, hairy and white-knuckled, or so I'd imagine. It's dozens of feet away and my night vision isn't all that good. Either I run back over and start kicking faces one at a time as they appear (and again, y'know... *murder*), or I jump.

So I back up to give myself room for a running start. And I take a deep breath. And I launch myself forward, arms pumping, legs shortening the distance to the ledge at a *truly* alarming rate.

And I jump.

I'm screaming, flailing, sailing through the air. After I land, before I black out, I look up and see Scott smirking down at me, smooth arms pale against the black of his Dead Kennedys t-shirt. He finally asks me, almost in the manner of a by-the-way:

**"What'd you say to make those guys so angry?"**

**Be cool, be cool, be cool,** Ian thought as he descended the dark, cramped, smoky steps of the squat, out into the misty street, *is the exact kind of thing you tell yourself only when you're failing to heed your own advice.* His head was swimming, not unpleasantly, from the THC and alcohol in his blood. It was the kind of ambling, effortlessly insightful thought he found to actuate within him every so often, since he had recently become a drug person.

Before the Weirdness, Ian had never been a drug person: could not even imagine being a drug person; did not, in fact, even *know* any drug people.

Now, after the Weirdness – or should we say *during* – he was living in a punk house on the Lower East Side that seemed to belong, at least as much as it did to anyone, to a drug dealer. Her name, he learned, was Rose, but everyone called her Mama Bear. She was a big strapping white girl, maybe five years older than him, built like an MMA fighter, her hair a cheaply-sprayed forest green waterfall, her face twinkling with an arsenal of piercings, who favored black tanktops.

He imagined her, back in the squat in its perpetual haze of pot smoke, cigarettes, and beer. Cuddling on the beat-up couch with Sasha, her girlfriend – a slender little firecracker of a black girl with cornrows and a lip ring – and surrounded by a random sampling of the carnival of transients that cycled constantly in and out of the apartment.

Among those random punks off the street, most of them members of various overlapping local bands, most of them obliterated on controlled substances most of the time, coming and going in a zombie-like haze, he had left Leona.

*Before the Weirdness*, Ian thought, *I never even cut a class.*

And now, here he was, walking on the dark city street at night. Struggling mightily to be cool, but actually quite cold. Early October. It was getting really chilly for the first time in the year, and he huddled inside his leather jacket. He never would have agreed to go on this mission – this *quest*, as she put it, since drug dealers fucking *loved* that word and Mama Bear thought she was a goddamn shaman – if not for the two bong hits and three cans of PBR already inside him.

But now the weed was queuing up his paranoia dial to eleven, making him see the menacing shapes of government agents in the shadows, plainclothes investigators surveilling him in every person he passed on the street. Which wasn't many. The streets were relatively empty (for NYC, anyway) this Tuesday night. His heart was racing in his chest, and he found himself seriously wondering if it was possible to have a heart attack at his age.

He fished the crumpled scrap of *Hello Kitty* stationary from his jacket pocket and looked at the "shopping list" scrawled in Rose's almost unreadable handwriting. On top of it was the number he was supposed to call – from a fucking payphone, and where the fuck was he supposed to find a fucking *payphone* in this day and age, at least one that hadn't already been vandalized out of commission – and then a short list: *90 Skittles, 30 Cotton, and 12 Sassafras for mama.*

Every item on the list was a drug. The other reason he'd agreed to go was that the "cotton" was for Leona, Rose had said, although she'd insisted the "skittles" were for everyone. The skittles, she'd said, would keep them awake, alert, give them extra juice when they most needed it, if they got in a bad spot. The "cotton" was for Leona to chill out if she had a bad flashback, or they hit some serious stress, just in case, to make sure she didn't hurt anyone.

So that "no one gets burned who's not a bad guy", Rose had said.

Coming to understand that the skittles were probably Ritalin or Adderall and the cotton was almost certainly Oxycodone, Ian didn't even have a guess at what sassafras was, or what it was for. Rose only dealt with weed. So all of this shit was going to have to be

bought from a no-doubt upstanding individual with the phenomenally unlikely name of Lucky Wacker. That was the name for a boardwalk arcade attraction, Ian thought, not the name of a man. But he had eight hundred bucks in his pocket to buy the drugs. He wasn't sure why he volunteered. The booze and the drugs, sure, but he knew he also wanted to prove himself to these people.

As he cleared his head and walked those first few blocks into the night, wandering blindly in search of a payphone, the heart-stopping certainty that he was going to be *SEIZED!BY!NINJA-LIKE!COPS!AT!ANY!TIME!* gradually loosened its grip. And he felt his mind drift away into a reverie of the Weirdness. Even with a few weeks of distance, recent events were *impossible* to categorize, to analyze, to collate. It was probably impossible to assemble the Weirdness into any kind of narrative, certainly impossible to summarize it. Yet, still, his addled mind tried to process it, worrying at it relentlessly and futilely: a dog with a hurt paw.

**SUMMER, MAN.** *Things were different in the summer. The constant presence of drugs – if not in your blood, then in your friends – it numbed the Weirdness, it dulled the edges between the Weirdness and how-shit-used-to-be. You wouldn't see the blood where the sharp edge of the Weirdness pressed against the flesh of how-shit-used-to-be and cut through.*

*But the Weirdness, as stark as it was then, as undeniable, actually used to be pretty fun. In fact, Ian used to think it was rad.*

*The fucking YouTube video.*

*So. Fucking. Stupid.*

*It was only eight weeks ago, but it felt like something a baby would do. He and Chance. The trick with the rocks that they learned to do all of a sudden. From nowhere. Throwing. Catching. Juggling. What else were they going to do? Ian showed his older sister – Debra, he thought, agonized by a pang of guilt buried way down – and she passed out. Just passed. the fuck. out. Had to go to the hospital and everything. So after that, what was he supposed to do? Hey mom and dad, check this out, I can lift the TV Remote with my mind?*

*Yeah, fucking right.*

*Again: what else were they going to do? Put on costumes and fight crime?*

*If they got invited to any parties, they'd have tried to impress chicks in the vain hope of getting laid.*

*But they were virgins, such terminal losers that the only parties they attended still had adult fucking supervision. So they tried to get Internet Famous.*

*The funniest part – if any of the Weirdness which resulted in the death of dozens of people and the vanishing of who knows how many more could be considered funny – was that it didn't even work. The videos didn't get more than a few thousand hits, which was like, nothing. The comment left by* ***CosmicDrew402*** *summarized the broader internet's reaction: fake ass shit is so fake.*

*But even then, They were watching. And They knew better.*

Ian was tired. He had to walk almost thirty goddamn blocks – nearly every turn taken at random – before he found perhaps the Last Remaining Payphone In Manhattan That Hadn't Yet Been Sexually Violated, Decapitated, Or Worse. It smelled bad and it was covered with graffiti inside and a frayed metal cord hung where the phonebook had been ripped off. The words "Ready. Fire. Aim." appeared among the crude drawings of genitalia, scribbled phone numbers, and obscenities, and Ian found himself agreeing.

He dialed the number for Lucky Wacker.

"Peter Lorre", a voice answered, sounding unforgivably pleased with itself.

The name gave Ian a moment's pause. In a general sense, it sounded vaguely familiar, but it certainly wasn't the answer he'd been looking for.

"Um... Ma- Rose gave me this number," he said finally, after much hesitation. He felt ridiculous saying "Mama Bear" over the phone and couldn't bring himself to do it.

"Ma Rose? Sounds like the Matriarch of a storied child beauty pageant dynasty. From Tennessee."

Asshole.

"Mama Bear," Ian said, emboldened only by annoyance. "She's looking to–"

"Tompkins Square Park. Forty minutes."

There was a click.

"Motherfucker," Ian muttered. He let the receiver drop to dangle from its cord, its speaker droning. He stepped back from the payphone and looked this way and that on the dark, foggy street, as a light rain fell in tiny pinpricks, barely registering as more than mist on his skin and hair. Streetlight glow was trapped in the condensation, making the air near any light seem moistly incandescent.

Finding himself alone, Ian reached out a hand toward the pay phone from ten feet away and slowly curled his fingers into a fist. The plexiglass shattered as the metal framework of the payphone's hood crumpled in on itself, until the entire thing was wadded up and crushed like an oversized tin can on a stick. Ian felt his tightly furrowed brow relax and the glare he didn't know he'd been emitting melt off of his face as the tension in his head relaxed a little. The payphone had really done nothing to deserve his ire, but better an inanimate object than a person.

One less relic of a bygone age in New York City.

*They must have known about it long before Chad Hutchins, because They moved so fast after him. Chad was when the Weirdness made it clear that it wasn't some layer of cellophane overlapping how-shit-used-to-work. The Weirdness was a bulldozer, and there goes the neighborhood.*

*Chad was a star running back, Bridgewater Panthers varsity. A big, square-headed musclebound douchebag white bro; a letter-jacket-wearing, walking, talking, living, breathing stereotype. The kind of person, Ian thought, who shouldn't even exist outside of high school movies from the 90s and the 00s, the kind starring thirty year olds. The kind of person, Ian thought, who was destined to appear in a viral date rape video in the near future.*

*This wasn't a kind opinion to hold. But then, it really didn't help that Chad and several of his class-act football buddies – Seniors, mostly – had beaten the living shit out of Ian what seemed like every other week for two years now. Since they'd deigned to notice his existence, it seemed like. While their unbearably hot white girlfriends looked on, their amusement poorly masked by insincere protestations to stop. But it seemed like every other day that they were content with just humiliating him with verbal taunting and threats.*

*Yes, Chad, I "flinched" when you made a fist and jerked it suddenly at my face while I was passing in the hallway. Surely, this is because I am a "little Indian faggot" and not because I am a living being with functioning autonomic reflexes, and you are a violent, antisocial shithead.*

*The most disheartening thing was that the juvenile torture did not lack just humanity, but any kind of creativity. Nearly every insult they had was some variation on "monkey boy" or "little monkey". One memorable day, he was pelted with bananas in the cafeteria. This was broadly considered hilarious by the school as a whole, and he could only commiserate with his fellow victims, like Chance and Tim. Although their victimhood seemed to be occasional. His was perpetual.*

*It is 2015, he found himself typing into Google one day, how is bullying still a thing? Everyone has seen Back to the Future by now, right? Do they not get that Biff Tannen is not the hero? But Google's answer to that search string was understandably confused and unhelpful.*

*So with all of that background, then, these were the facts of the Chad Hutchins incident. One particularly shitty Friday in September, Chad and three of his friends surrounded Ian in the hallway during Period Seven. Chad had announced his enthusiasm for the idea of kicking off homecoming weekend by giving "monkey boy" a Melvin – if not for Chad, THANKS CHAD, Ian would not have known that was a particular species of wedgie – and his friends all agreed this was a capital idea. Ian had no intention of consenting to this level of humiliation, if only for the reason that as a 16 year old, he was operating mentally as a grown ass adult, and would not let Chad drag him down into this pit of vile juvenilia.*

*As usual, Ian flailed violently with all of his limbs as they went to grab him, a fighting strategy that had never not failed in the past. But this time, something different happened. Ian felt something surge through his body, from the floor, through his feet, into his chest, and then out of his arms. Like a shockwave. Suddenly, he stopped moving, opened his clenched eyes, and stared in amazement. Three of Chad's bros had staggered backward, and Chad himself had been smashed into a row of lockers so hard that one of them had flown open, showering loose papers into the air.*

*Chad slid down the locker, leaving a trail of blood from the back of his head.*

*I did that, Ian thought, in one of those moments of perfect clarity identical in every way, in appearance, to a moment of total dumbfounded stupor. Me.*

*Ian realized just then that if he wanted to, he could probably do a whole lot more than throw and catch a baseball without his fingers ever touching it. Ian realized just then that if he wanted to, he could probably pound Chad again and again until what was left of him fit into that locker, like a meat cassette into the mouth of an old VCR, like a square peg into a round hole.*

*To Ian, the idea was certainly not without its appeal.*

*Chad – who would need to be hospitalized – gawped wordlessly from the floor, dazed and concussed. His friends stared at Ian in fear and confusion.*

*Ian, seizing the initiative, check swung a back-hand in their general direction.*

*They flinched.*

*Then they ran.*

*"Yeah," Ian said. "Bitches." And he straightened the lapels of his North Face jacket.*

Getting to Tompkins Square was a matter of walking seven short blocks north on Avenue D, then walking two blocks west on East 7th Street. Not a local, Ian learned this from the old-fashioned fold-out MTA paper street map that Rose had gotten for all of them, which he'd needed to learn to use in lieu of his phone's GPS. It wasn't the shortest walk, but it should take less time than it'd taken him to find a payphone.

The most vexing thing about the Weirdness – besides, probably, the imminent, looming fear of grievous bodily harm and imprisonment that would, according to what Chris had hinted, accompany him for the rest of his life – was that he didn't think of the Weirdness as its own phenomenon. He saw the Weirdness, as a problem in his life, as a category, almost as a subset of Leona. Saw its importance most clearly where it *intersected* with the Leona situation, where it *complicated* the Leona situation.

At present, Ian wouldn't dare say he was *in love* with Leona. That would be the kind of shit that Tim (who did not know "how to girls" in a way that even Ian, who was no better off, found profoundly sad) would say. Ian wouldn't say it for these reasons three: a) They had never had a conversation more than five minutes long that did not revolve around The Weirdness; b) The word "Love" had such baggage to him that he was concerned it was forever tainted; c) Leona, herself, scared him shitless. Of course, he couldn't say the last one wasn't also a little appealing.

So yes, he wouldn't say love. But a crush? A crush most foul, no doubt about it.

It was 10:46 PM according to the cheap digital watch he'd picked up a few days ago from a street vendor not far from Times Square. He'd been in this neighborhood before, he realized. They were just a few blocks from C-Squat, a huge free housing co-op where Chris had first dropped he, Leona, Tim, and Callie off to meet Rose, at a Leftover Crack show – an environment of boozed up violence and punk mayhem anarchy that would, before the Weirdness, have scared him shitless – before Chris got out of dodge. They wanted a public place, Chris had said, with more chaos than cameras.

The sidewalk was lined with evenly spaced trees in square stone planters, their broad expanse of leaves just beginning to turn color with the season, the shift in color almost impossible to see in the desaturation of the rainy night. Cars, mostly an unending swarm of Taxis, passed on the street, the fog-blurred glow of headlights and taillights, splashing water up in fans from the curb.

Crossing the street to the park entrance, Ian found himself laughing at himself. A sign

on the park's gate said that its hours were 8:00AM-5:00PM and that anyone trespassing after closing would be prosecuted. There was absolutely nothing there to physically prevent trespassing, though, except for a waist-high metal chain. During the fevered height of the Weirdness, he'd seen someone set fire to a man who said he was an FBI agent, and had listened to the screams as he burned up. But still, the idea of stepping over this chain and *breaking the law* scared the shit out of him.

Somehow, he managed it.

Tompkins Square wasn't that big, so it didn't take Ian that long to find a person he guessed was Lucky. There was no shortage of vaguely scummy crustpunks breaking the law in Tompkins Square, and though plenty dirty and probably at least semi-homeless, they were fairly young, which definitely made him feel comfortingly less like he was going to be grabbed behind at any moment and dragged down Bum Rape Alley. This guy, though, was standing alone, centered in the yellow spotlight of the lone non-vandalized streetlamp, and looked like he was waiting for someone.

"Dirty" and "semi-homeless" described the stranger's look to a tee. He was unbelievably pale, even for an average East Coast white guy, like he'd put on foundation, or was just a bloodless ghoul. Supporting either angle was the cheap three-piece suit he wore, black pinstripes, ripped at both shoulders and splattered with mud all over. To complement his pallor and ragged formalwear, both of which made him look like an escaped zombie extra from the original *Night of the Living Dead,* he was scarecrow thin, even scrawnier than Ian, but taller too.

The stranger – slicked back black hair combed tight and short, large forehead, looking disturbingly like a really thin young Bill Murray, with an ageless face that seemed at once to be much older than Ian and much younger than anyone Ian could imagine defining as an adult – smiled as Ian approached. The smile (and it wasn't just the alarmingly bad teeth) was the kind of smile that looked worryingly sincere, in that it would worry you if it *was* sincere. For sure, it was not the kind of smile you should turn your back on.

"Lucky?" Ian asked uncertainly.

"As a cat," the bloodless ghoul in the ruined suit said. Then he seemed to be talking to himself, to the air.

"Is our esteemed customer a rich little Asian kid in a Hugo Boss leather jacket and – *gag* – charcoal skinny jeans?"

"Excuse me?" Ian asked. Literalizing the immortal words of Robert DeNiro – I don't see anyone else here, so you must be talking to me. Also: who says *gag*?

After a pause, the ghoul kept talking but not to him, his twinkling black eyes loosely fixed on a random point in space behind and several feet to the side of Ian.

"Well of course I'll be nice, darling. I'm always nice." A pause. "And I'll get him safely home, of course. Miss you too, sweetie-num-nums."

"Oh, alright," Ian said, getting it. "So you're like an actual crazy person." He started walking back in the opposite direction.

"Sorry about that," Lucky said. "I was just chatting with Rose."

Asshole.

"She said there's been a change of plans."

Ian turned around, squinting at him.

"You don't have a phone," he said doubtfully.

**"Phones,"** said Lucky, rubbing his nose with a wink and a flourish, **"are for Republicans."**

*Shortly after Chad Hutchins hit the hospital and word began to circulate around school that Ian Lau had, by whatever miraculous, unlikely circumstance, kicked his ass – the best thing that would ever happen to Ian's soon to be irrelevant social status – the Weirdness exploded into its crescendo. The sequence*

*of events really was, in Ian's mind, a series of explosions. Each event impossible to glimpse at its center, and blurred at its edges, by the deafening shockwave. The only memories he had were pieces, fragments. He'd described this sensation of fragmentation to the guys at the squat, a week ago, and someone had a name for it.*

*"PTSD," Rose had said, "is part of the perks package you get when you sign up." Rose seemed to be like them, but Ian didn't know if she was like Tim, or like Leona and Chris, or something different entirely.*

*"I never signed up," Leona had said, Tim and Ian nodding.*

*"'s a figure of speech," Rose had huffed irritably, turning her head to the side and blowing out a long plume of smoke.*

*Two men from something called the DIA, the Defense Intelligence Agency, an alphabet soup agency that Ian had never even heard of, arrived on his foster family's doorstep Saturday afternoon. Every detail of their appearance fit to a tee the idea Ian had pieced together from various TV shows of what a government agent would look like. They were there to take Ian into their custody. For his own safety. And for reasons of national security. Ian eavesdropped on the conversation from the second floor. He didn't make much of it out. What he did make out, to his shock and dismay, was his Mark and Helen agreeing to it.*

*Half an hour later, Ian had been asked to pack a bag and once he did was being dragged, in a stupor, out the front door of the house he'd lived in for ten years. And even then, stupor was all he was capable of. He should, he knew, have been berating them with questions. Insisting upon his rights. But then again... why weren't his foster parents doing that? No, they just looked on, tearfully but... relieved? Were those cocksuckers actually relieved? ...as he was carried away.*

*Then an unfamiliar voice said "Hey" from about fifteen feet to Ian's right. By the time Ian turned around, the man who had introduced himself as Agent Cortland, who had been holding Ian's right elbow, was already falling to the ground, twitching into some kind of seizure. Ian heard a loud clicking sound, could actually see electricity rushing over Cortland's seizing body. The other one, whose name Ian couldn't remember, was already drawing a gun. A grungy white dude, halfway between Ian's age and his foster dad's, dirty blonde dreads, sunglasses, navy blue sweatshirt, cargo pants, and holding a boxy Taser, was striding toward the gun being drawn on him, into it. Ian fell to the ground, not knowing why he was falling. Then he felt the heat.*

*The blistering heat that came off of the Agent with the gun as the stranger swung his empty hand, and out of nowhere a fireball flew through the air to explode against the Agent-Not-Cortland's chest, to engulf his clothing. Somewhere, over the crackle of the flames, beyond shellshocked, Ian heard his foster mother screaming and screaming and screaming.*

*The next thing Ian could remember, he was in the passenger seat of a stolen black 2005 Mustang with Dreadlocks Guy. Dreadlocks Guy's name, he told Ian, was Chris Riven. This was the kind of name that was, Ian thought, too cool-sounding not to be made up. He was there to rescue Ian. Rescue Ian from what?*

*The government, Chris said.*

*I didn't think I needed to get rescued from the government, Ian said.*

*Guess we know you're not in the NRA, Chris said.*

*At the time, it was rather difficult to get the joke.*

*He remembered songs from the late 90s and early 00s playing on the radio. Songs he hadn't heard in years, and even then were old as fuck, somehow feeling older and lamer than music from three decades before. A song called "Kryptonite". The songs were playing from a mix that Chris had put in the CD player. It was in that moment that Ian first really understood that he had just seen a man burn to death on his front lawn.*

*They rendezvoused somewhere just west of the Pennsylvania border. Why?*

*To change vehicles and directions, Chris said. Standard.*

*Standard for who? Not standard in how-shit-used-to-work land (my ancestral homeland, New Jersey). Standard for the Weirdness maybe.*

*It was there that he first saw Leona. He'd had a crush on her for a year and change already, since he was a Sophomore, but maybe it was the first time he really saw her.*

*Actually beautiful, enough to arrest his attention even in the heart of the Weirdness – even in the part where his life and everything he had ever known were actively burning down all around him – she happened also to be every bit his type, a redhead but more. Irish porcelain pale but no freckles, eyes the color of the deepest Atlantic depths and as powerful as the tallest tidal wave, hair like a firestorm of blazing copper. Tall and slender, and in that moment wearing a ruby colored v-neck cap sleeve blouse and navy denim cutoffs, long white legs down to painted toes in sandals.*

*Not until later did he notice the dark streaks of makeup that had run down her cheeks or the bloodshot eyes from hysterical sobbing, or the vomit streaking her blouse and shorts, and the charnel smell of a bonfire that wouldn't leave her. In that moment that Ian was admiring Leona, literally thinking to himself that her appearance here was a silver lining on the horrible train-wreck his life had become, he later learned she had just come from watching her entire family burn to death.*

*"They torched her house?" Chris asked the guy who had brought her.*

*"She got one of the fuckers," the guy said after a pause. Sounded proud.*

*Leona was sitting on the curb of the Pennsylvania truckstop. Shaking, silent, eyes open and unblinking. Seeing things she wished she couldn't, no doubt. Ian had his arms around her shoulders, trying to give some kind of comfort, but it made him feel like a creep and a half because of her total nonresponse to his presence. He didn't blame her. She was deep in shock. Somewhere else. He didn't stop, though, not least because he didn't know what else to do.*

*The last car was Tim's and it was late. Ian later learned this was because Tim had somehow convinced his would-be rescuer to pick up Callie before he would cooperate.*

*"You fuckers didn't rescue us from being kidnapped," Tim had said. "At best you stopped us from getting kidnapped by someone else!"*

*Ian was glad to see Tim too, although not quite as glad and in a much more platonic way than he had been to see Leona. Callie, he was eh about: he wasn't a monster, he was glad she wasn't dead. And she was more than alright to look at.*

*"Chance?" Ian had asked frantically, when he realized that they were rounding up to leave, stealing cars, switching license plates, in preparation for heading back east.*

*"Shop got him," Chris Riven said, shaking his head grimly. "Sorry."*

*That night in the city and every night since, that was something Ian thought about as he drifted off to sleep. His best friend Chance, in some government facility, where They were doing God only knew what to him. While around him, kids drank and partied and played shows and smoked drugs, oblivious to the Weirdness or comfortably skirting its farthest periphery. But Chance couldn't drink and Chance couldn't party. The Weirdness had swallowed Chance up. The Weirdness had swallowed him whole.*

**"Did you bring the red wine?"** Lucky had asked.

"Why on earth would I have brought red wine?" asked Ian, who was, he reminded himself, there to *buy* drugs.

"Because I have decided the vodka phase of the evening," said Lucky, yawning, "is at an end."

"Nobody told me to bring wine," Ian said. Not pointing out that he couldn't legally buy alcohol. Not for a while. And Rose's friends hadn't hooked him up with a fake ID yet, although he anticipated they would eventually.

"Well, I'm very disappointed."

"Tell it to them."

"In you!" Lucky said, ignoring the daggers Ian glared at him, and went on, "You should have asked."

The change of plans turned out to be that he was to meet Rose and the others at a secret show. At midnight. In Bushwick. *You unbearable fucking hipster*, Ian had thought, hearing that. But apparently, it was somewhat serious. *Certain parties have taken notice of certain events that have transpired*, Lucky had said cryptically, *and it is best not to hang around.* Apparently, the Order – that was who Chris Riven worked for, or was a member of, or whatever – was moving them out of the city as early as tonight. More than that, there was going to be someone there, some kind of a higher-up, who could talk to them.

Ian had learned more about the true nature of reality in the last two weeks than all of the lies he'd swallowed over all 16 years of his pre-Weirdness, how-shit-used-to-be existence. But nonetheless, he could feel his psyche being crushed under the weight of all of his unanswered questions. There was still so much he didn't know that it felt like he knew *nothing.* Even Rose was cagey as fuck, and she was blasted most of the time. Zodiac order's sufficiently paranoid to survive, Chris had said, but that means trust issues.

No shit.

His mind raced at the thought of actual answers from someone who would actually tell them the truth. He could practically feel himself salivating.

Lucky would not just tell him where the secret show was, but insisted that they first rob a liquor store. That had not, of course, been his opening bid, but he had gradually sidled his way up to "help me rob a liquor store" from his initial proposition of "let's buy some wine". Ian fell down this slippery slope against his best intentions, feeling helpless as he was swept up in Lucky's recklessness.

It got worse, somehow, on arrival, when "help me rob a liquor store" functionally became "rob a liquor store for me".

"We're closed," said the burly shop clerk, who was struggling to drag down the metal shutter. It was still a few minutes from closing time. He was in his fifties but fit, tattoos on muscular biceps, ethnically indeterminate, dressed in a blue Mets shirt with noticeable pitstains. Spoke perfect New Yorker with no hint of an American accent.

"Not for another four minutes," Lucky said amicably. Then seemed to pause, concentrating, chewing his upper lip thoughtfully.

"Not gonna happen, sorry," the guy said. Maybe he was having a bad day. Maybe he just didn't like Lucky – Ian just couldn't *imagine* why. Maybe both.

"You really should work till an hour after closing," Lucky said, "make back some of that two hundred you pinched from the register."

While Lucky was saying that with his lips, he was saying something else. In Ian's head. Not using his mouth at all.

"*You have a bottle opener?*"

"What?" Ian sputtered in bafflement.

"The fuck you say," the clerk said, making a burly fist around Lucky's lapels, recovering from a moment where the slackness of his face made it obvious that he was not just angry, but deeply frightened and confused.

"*Do. You Have. A Bottle Opener?*"

"No!" Ian spat, baffled and disgusted.

"To pay back your gambling debts?" Lucky asked after another thoughtful pause.

"*Well then, when I say go, go in there and grab a couple of bottles, but don't get anything that needs a bottle-opener.*"

"I'm NOT going to–" Ian began.

"How could you know that?" he clerk asked, his voice gone all hushed and breathless.

*"Now!"* Lucky had hissed in Ian's mind. And to his own amazement, Ian found himself ducking under the partly closed shutter to shoplift some hobo-grade red wine.

"This is shit," Lucky said later, walking down the street, after one look at one bottle. Then he twisted off the twist-off cap and took a long, long slug. He wiped his lip – split, Ian noticed, after the clerk had punched him in the snout and shoved him into the street, screaming at them both to get lost as Ian ran as fast as he'd run in his life – with the back of his hand. His tidy fingernails were painted black with what looked like marker.

"I'm so sorry, your highness," Ian said.

"Well, you should have brought a bottle opener," Lucky said snobbishly. "Want some, Scott?"

"My name is Ian."

"Did I ever say it wasn't?"

"So, you Hawaiian then? Eskimo? Egyptian?" Lucky asked later, on the A Train, on their way to Brooklyn.

"Hawaiian? Shit no. Filipino."

"Whatever," Lucky had said amicably. They were both pretty drunk by then. Lucky was like Tim then, Ian thought. He could talk to you in your head. Read your mind. Even make you do stuff. He'd seen it, and it was scary. He was scared of Tim doing it to him. But Lucky was maybe less strong than Tim. Or he could have just made the guy give them the booze. And not gotten punched in the face.

"You know," Ian said, looking at the fat lip, "I've known you all of fifteen minutes, so I'm going out on a limb here, but I'm guessing that happens to you kind of a lot?"

Lucky gave him an angry, wounded look that he managed to hold convincingly for almost half a minute, then broke out in raucous laughter. The wine, whatever vile stuff it was, actually staining his teeth.

*Chris Riven gave them the short version while he drove them back East in another stolen car from Pennsylvania to New York City. To meet Rose, who they'd be staying with for a while, at the Leftover Crack show. Was so matter-of-fact about it. There was a conspiracy within the US government. He called them the Shop. For at least fifty years now, maybe a lot more, they'd been aware that psychic powers – "X-Men shit?" Leona had interrupted. "X-Men shit," Chris had confirmed. "Some of it, anyway" – existed and were deeply invested in their research, development, and control. That meant the "Research", the "Development", and "Control" of human beings with psychic powers.*

## Chris called them Espers.

*Chris said that was what they were.*

*"Well that's a fucking trip," Callie said, in a haughty, sarcastic, disbelieving tone. But then everyone just looked at her, and she shut up, like maybe she was being stupid after all.*

*He explained that the public didn't know about Espers at all, because the Shop controlled the media. All of it. All the time. Picture your most ardent conspiracy fetishist's hottest wet dream, with all dials cranked up to eleven, Chris said, and you won't be far off. The ominous They watching every paranoid schizophrenic thrashing in his straight jacket, Chris said, again, pretty close.*

*Apparently, the Shop wasn't the US government exactly – they weren't taking their orders from Obama. Instead, They were calling shots inside dozens of national alphabet soup agencies, through a network of entrenched sleeper cells. What exactly their endgame was, was anyone's guess. But they'd stop at nothing to get it.*

*"If we hadn't been watching," Chris said, "waiting to swoop in and intervene, you'd be in labs, getting cut-on. Or in indoctrination programs, getting brainwashed. We're not people to them, we're product. With a substantial dollar value."*

*Chris had said that sometimes Espers were made by being given drugs, drugs the public didn't know about. Other times, Espers were "released in the wild", secretly tampered with genetically at birth, but they didn't "manifest" until sometime around puberty. Chris told them that they belonged to the latter group.*

*"All of this does seem to beg the question: who the hell are you people?" Tim asked soon after that. During the "any questions" phase. After the lecture. To general agreement from Ian and the girls.*

*"Like you," Chris had said. "I'm like you. And I'm here to keep you out of the labs. Out of the indoctrination programs. Free."*

*Free.*

*Chris never told anyone the name of his little club. The Zodiac Order. Tim fished it out of his mind later. Other things, too. Told the others, that he wasn't planning to fuck them. That he was telling the truth, or thought he was. Ian thought Tim had learned other things from reading Chris's mind too. But whatever they were, Tim wasn't telling.*

*Since then he'd been staying at Rose's apartment, he and Tim, and Leona and Callie, crashing there amid the roving band of misfits and ne'er do-wells that came in and out of the squat like the circus. Some of them, he thought, might be Espers. All of them, he was sure, were weirdos. And then later, Lucky Wacker turned out to be one who was both.*

*In the meantime, Ian had been trying to talk to Leona. Talk her out of her shell. Didn't know how, he wasn't a grief counselor. Before long, though, she just seemed... over it. He was sure that she wasn't. But what the fuck was he going to do? Say: hey, remember how your whole family is now a pile of ashes? Wanna talk about how you're feeling about that?*

*Right.*

*So they talked about other things. About all of the crazy shit that had happened. About all of the crazy shit they could do. But she still scared him shitless. She was telling him about the guy she burned and she went somewhere far away. Her eyes got all moist and glassy, and her voice got light and breathy. It made Ian think about how much he would have enjoyed pounding Chad Hutchins into ground beef, and shiver. And they fucked around, testing their powers... in their weakest forms, of course, soft-pawing each other with the utmost delicacy. It felt almost like a crazy kind of flirting. Or some equivalent to what flirting might have been like, for normal people, outside the Weirdness.*

*He never mentioned that he liked her, of course. That was a subject he couldn't imagine broaching at the best of times. Now that they were fugitives from the Shop? Now that she was suddenly an orphan? I like you, want to see a movie some time, seemed not just insultingly inappropriate but laughably insane. Still, he liked spending time with her. Liked hearing her laugh, making her laugh. Liked the way she smelled.*

*One thing that they agreed upon was that they were both worried about Tim and Callie.*

Lucky, Ian was pretty sure, occasionally talked to an invisible friend named Scott.

*This is the kind of thing that should probably worry me*, he thought.

When they'd gotten off of the train in Brooklyn, Ian remembered to make himself actually complete his mission and *buy* the drugs. He hoped in vain that doing so would somehow make Lucky leave, but there was no such luck. The actual transaction had been pretty painless, considering who it involved.

Lucky shook out three pills – a white circle, a pink circle, and a turquoise capsule – onto his palm and then offered them to Ian.

"I recommend one of each," he said, smiling his smile with too many teeth. "The bouquet is really quite complementary."

Ian actually thought about just shoveling down the pills, but found that he still had a few more fucks to give than he thought, and instead pocketed them. As soon as he took custody of the paper bag full of highly controlled substances, his paranoia reached an unheard-of crescendo.

*Be cool, be cool, be cool.*

His winging terror of phantasmal law ninjas must have annoyed Lucky something fierce, because in a block and a half Lucky graciously offered to temporarily take custody of the drugs as well as the money if it would help Ian relax.

*I suck at this*, Ian thought wistfully, as he found himself relieved to agree to this.

It was just before midnight when they got to the show, at some place called the White Hart. The corner was nondescript, so much like any corner in Brooklyn, and the bar, if that was what it was, had no sign. It did have a name, and an address, and a logo, on a business card Lucky had given him with the name of the band: Tomorrow's Starlight.

Ian had heard of them. More up Tim or Chance's alley than his (he wondered what kind of music Leona was into), but the lead singer was insanely hot.

Ian actually groaned, upon arriving at the nondescript corner, and seeing the long line of kids winding around it at the doors. The secret

show's not so secret, he thought, and it made sense. TS was really blowing up this year.

But Lucky took care of it. Not through any psychic power that Ian could see, but he did notice that Lucky palmed the doorman a packet of something presumably very illegal. Whatever it was, it worked, and the doorman let them cut the line and into the impossibly dark and noisy interior of the bar, as the people they'd cut jeered behind him.

"I'm sorry, I'm sorry, I'm sorry," Lucky said, in the least sorry voice anyone had ever used, turning and actually bowing. "It's just that we're cool, and you aren't."

Then they were inside.

"Oh, really, Scott," Lucky said indignantly, to no one in particular that Ian could see. **"AND WHAT WOULD YOU KNOW ABOUT HOW TO MAKE FRIENDS AND INFLUENCE PEOPLE?"**

# Distant Thunder: Introduction

**"You would kill for this, just a little bit, just a little bit
You would."**

***- Straylight Run, "Existentialism on Prom Night"***

This is ***Psionics***. It is a **roleplaying game**. If you don't know what a roleplaying game is, please Google it (you may also use your search engine of choice). I'll wait right here while you find out. If you get confused, we mean the kind that usually involves dice, and not (necessarily) nurse's outfits or riding crops.

The word "Psionics", when it appears in bold italics, refers to this roleplaying game. When it appears without bold italics, it refers to psychic powers in general.

Ok, good. Let's proceed.

In ***Psionics***, one player takes the role of the **Gamemaster**, or **GM**. (This role is super important, so many other roleplaying games have cool sounding, setting-appropriate and flavorful titles for it, like "Dungeon Master" if your RPG was about the S&M scene, or "Storyteller" if your RPG was related to VH1's long running music/bio series. Feel free to come up with your own cool sounding and flavorful title for the GM - may I suggest Grand High Poobah or Pontifex of Cheeses? - but I'll stick with the rather generic "Gamemaster" in this book.) What exactly the GM is responsible for doing in the game is a complicated topic, and actually a fairly contentious subject in certain circles nowadays (some people, or rather games, even think that there should not be a GM at all!). Books can, have, and will be written about this very topic. So in the face of that, let me attempt to be brief.

The GM is responsible for guiding and shepherding the story of the main characters, who the GM does not control. The GM's most important job is portraying (directly controlling) every person in the world who is not a main character, and having those people realistically and consistently pursue their own goals and agendas, whether that means opposing the main characters, or helping them. The GM's second most important job is acting as an impartial mediator, referee, and arbitrator between the Player Characters' decisions and actions and the rules presented in the rest of this book. If I may use a slightly technical videogame analogy (we're all gamers here, right?), this book contains the base code that makes up the game of ***Psionics***. The GM is the engine responsible for actually *running* that code, while also being the level and scenario designer. In real time. People are *way* better at this than computers, which is why video games don't work this way.

In the first sentence of the paragraph above I tossed out the phrase "guiding and shepherding the story of the main characters" and then promptly moved on. Actually, that's the tricky part. It's rather vague and abstract, isn't it? Most people are in agreement that what this **does not** mean is actually writing your own story and then driving the characters through it like so many cattle in a chute, making sure that they don't get off track and that they hit all the dramatic plot beats you've planned out in advance.

What it *does* mean, *exactly*, is definitely trickier to define. The closest I can come

up with while staying concise is this: the GM should create situations and scenarios that press the main characters to their emotional and physical limits, and then force them to make hard decisions.

The GM should find out - through actual play, not through any artificial ancillary process - what the main characters *want most*, and make sure that, while it is possible to attain, the obstacles to getting it are so formidable that doing so will require great sacrifices, or great compromises. At least, that's how I roll. But all you GMs out there *can and should* find your own pace, your own tempo, your own volume, and your own style.

Now, we come to the main point of this section - and also, in my opinion, the fun part.

Every other player who is *not* taking on the mantle of GM is a **Player Character** (hereafter, commonly referred to as a **PC**). You're probably going to want *at least two* Player Characters (and probably not more than *six*) in addition to the GM. The Player Characters are the "Main Characters" referred to in the above discussion on the role of the GM. This *doesn't* mean they're the most important people in the *game world* - they probably aren't. It *does* mean they're the most important people in the *story*.

We're all film buffs here, right? Being a Player Character first involves being a Writer, as you create the character you're going to play. This is a process that it's good to involve the GM and/or the rest of the group in, and it's a process described in full on p. 48. Then, once the game is underway, your job becomes that of an (improvisational) Actor, as you play the role of your character, speak their dialogue, and decide and describe their actions. (Meanwhile, the GM wears the Director hat in addition to the Writer and Actor hats.)

But who exactly are you creating and playing in this game? Ah. Well...

The Player Characters are **Espers**. An Esper is someone with ***enormous psychic powers***.

To clear up a common layman's misconception, by psychic powers, we don't just mean classic mentalism - reading minds, seeing the future, and so on. We also mean Telekinesis (throwing shit around with your brain), Pyrokinesis (burning shit up with your brain) and, well, even making people's heads *literally fucking* ***explode***. To clarify further, we also don't just mean any old super power from the big super powers buffet, like the X-Men. The powers of Espers originate exclusively from the mind. The rest of this book will delineate exactly what Espers can and cannot do in completely exhaustive detail, so tangent over, for now.

**Espers are troubled young people with the aforementioned enormous psychic powers.**

The bad news is that you have *serious emotional problems*.

The good news is that you have *enormous psychic powers*.

The other bad news is that *because* of your powers, shadowy Conspiracies that secretly rule the world want to indoctrinate you into being their loyal puppets, or just put you in a cage and/or vivisect you, for science! - and to help them better rule the world.

But hey, the good news is that you still have *enormous psychic powers*.

The other *other* bad news is that your *enormous psychic powers* and becoming a fugitive from these Conspiracies are going to make your *serious emotional problems* a lot worse.

Still bro.... enormous psychic powers.

So on top of a lifetime of being pushed around by your parents and tormented by bullies and snubbed by crushes who don't even know you exist, The Man has emerged from the shadows to literally take control of your life. However, now you're not limited to locking yourself in your room and listening to loud music. Now you have a real and powerful tool for pushing back. And you're going to push back, aren't you? You're going to push back *hard*.

The stage is set.

What will you do?

What will your story be?

## GENRE AND INSPIRATION

***Psionics*** is a tabletop roleplaying game, and would not exist without other works in other media that it roughly *corresponds to* as well as drawing inspiration from. Taken collectively - with or without including ***Psionics*** - these works constitute a fictional genre or sub-genre of their own. The writing of this game, a process of well over a decade, was as much an exploration of this emergent genre as it was anything else. The genre that these works comprise does not have a widely agreed-upon name. As I have been writing ***Psionics*** for more than a decade, and as new works in the genre

have arisen, I have honestly thought of them simply as ***Psionics***-like, an overly idiomatic and personal label for the genre.

Pressed to name the genre, I'd probably go with something like "Psychopunk", but I'm not in love with that label.

First we'll call out the works that inspired ***Psionics*** and comprise this effectively nameless sub-genre. Then we'll discuss the various fictional genres that "Psychopunk" works - and therefore ***Psionics*** - touch upon, but don't truly belong to.

To avoid redundancy by recommending each and every work in each and every short description, let me state now that *all of these things are recommended by us at* End Transmission Games *in the strongest possible terms.* Read/watch all of these things, as soon as you possibly can, and find your life much enriched.

### *Firestarter* - Stephen King

*Viking Press, 1980*

*Firestarter* was the ninth novel published by Stephen King, who had spent the past six years becoming a household name in horror fiction. It was the fourth time he explored psychic powers as a major theme in his works. And it was, in many ways, the birth of the literary and cinematic genre we are discussing. It is also probably the single work that ***Psionics*** borrows the most from, although there are some close runners up.

The premise and plot of *Firestarter* are simple:

Andy McGee and his nine-year-old daughter, Charlie, are on the run from a shadowy government agency known as The Shop (also a nickname for the CIA). Back in the wild 60s, Andy participated in an on-campus experiment where being dosed with an experimental hallucinogen called "Lot 6" awakened psychic abilities in both Andy and his future wife. She gained minor Telekinetic abilities, and he gained "the push", a hypnosis-like capacity to dominate the minds of others. Their daughter, Charlie, has the power to well - start fires - with her mind, from infancy, with the power growing as she ages, and with no upper limit on it known. Before the novel begins, a botched raid by the Shop leaves Andy's wife dead and he and his daughter on the run.

Besides giving us our three major disciplines of Psionics - Telekinesis, Pyrokinesis, and Psychokinesis - and the template for our Conspiracies, something else is at work here too.

What we also owe Firestarter is the idea that psionic powers are physiologically limited.

If Andy uses the push too much, he finds himself besieged by crippling migraines and nosebleeds. Psionics borrows this concept directly and uses it as a key limiting factor in what the PCs can do.

Eventually they are captured, separated, and imprisoned at a Shop facility in Virginia run by a high level government spook, Captain James Hollister. Their capture is accomplished by John Rainbird, a sociopathic Native American assassin employed by The Shop, who eventually becomes obsessed with Charlie. To get Charlie to cooperate, Rainbird impersonates a simple janitor, befriends her, gains her trust, and begins to manipulate her into demonstrating her powers for the shop's scientists.

Then, everything works out well for everyone, and everyone has tea and crumpets, and dozens and dozens of people are totally not incinerated, immolated, and/or exploded.

The genesis of a genre happens right here. Psychic powers are not a new thing in fiction, although the quasi-scientific, rather than quasi-mystical, description of their origins is a uniquely 20th century construct, dating

back at least as far as Charles Fort's 1932 parapsychology text *Wild Talents*. And psychic powers (as distinct from magic) were never quite as in-your face as in *Carrie* and *Firestarter*. (King's roughly contemporary works, *The Shining* and *The Dead Zone*, feature a comparatively more traditional portrayal of psychic powers, at least up to that time.) "Telekinesis" as a term for moving objects through mental will was coined in 1890 by a Russian psychical researcher, but "Pyrokinesis" as a name for starting fires with your mind was invented by Stephen King in this book. That's not the most important new thing here, though.

The most crucial new element is that the government, *our* government, is *actively* trying to create/monitor/manipulate Espers in the interests of national security (!). This conceit has substantial basis in historical fact. During the early Cold War, the U.S. government secretly conducted mind control experiments to compete with those of the burgeoning U.S.S.R.. We could not, gentlemen, allow there to be a mind control gap! More importantly, this layer of secret government conspiracy, manipulation, and control - on top of psychic powers - effectively created the genre of "Psychopunk", which is why we're talking about *Firestarter* right here and not *Carrie*.

## "Scanners" (1981)

"Scanners" came out at virtually the same time as *Firestarter*, so it's basically impossible to say whether it was actually influenced by *Firestarter* or just coincidentally a product of the same themes, anxieties, and ideas of the time. In any case, *Firestarter* only beats it by a nose to become the grand-daddy of the genre. Interestingly, "Scanners" is the only major work discussed here where most of the psychic characters are full-grown adults, and not children or adolescents.

Scanners are people with the ability to scan other people - effectively telepathy, but also the ability to control the functions of another person's nervous system. (In ***Psionics***, we use the term Espers to mean very much the same thing.)

The powers of scanners in the movie of the same name are purely mental in origin and in method of action, but can have gross (in both senses of that word) physical effects.

From "Scanners", the genre also borrows its first ever depiction of what we call "Technokinesis" (p. 107) or mind-on-machine hacking, and of course, the classic image of an exploding human head!

Most scanners are unhappy people, condemned to hearing a constant torrent of other people's unwelcome thoughts, introducing the most important novel idea here. Psychic ability is *innately* as much a curse as a blessing, and psychics are tortured individuals. ConSec is an enormous defense contractor corporation, and they are seeking to work with and exploit scanners. Unfortunately for them, renegade scanner Darryl Revok (Michael Ironside) has declared war on ConSec and every scanner voluntarily working for them. Desperate, ConSec recruits an unstable but powerful scanner, Cameron Vale, to infiltrate Revok's underground network of scanners. In the process of the violent "investigation", Vale learns that Revok is linked to another corporation called Biocarbon Amalgamate. This corporation is manufacturing vast quantities of a drug called Ephemerol - which helps scanners to control their powers - and is also secretly creating new scanners. The film culminates in a psionic duel between Vale and Revok that is, in a word, unforgettable.

"Scanners" is the first *cinematic* example of the genre, and reinforces the essential "Psychopunk" ideas of *Firestarter* - government/corporate entities seeking to control rogue psychics - while adding conspiracy, intrigue, gunfights, and exploding heads to the mix.

## "Firestarter" (1984)

This is the 1984 film adaptation of the novel of the same name by Stephen King. We've already covered this one, so I'll be super brief. Not a great film, not a terrible film. Not a great adaptation, not a really terrible adaptation. No new ideas here, but there is a competent visual rendering of King's 1980 novel for those who prefer to watch their entertainment rather than read it. The novel is certainly better than the movie, but the movie has the advantage of being less of a time investment. It also features a downright iconic performance from a very young Drew Barrymore, and engaging (if not excessively faithful) performances from Martin Sheen and George C. Scott, portraying Captain Hollister and John Rainbird respectively.

## "Akira" (1988)

Now, this is a big one. "Akira" has many of the same plot elements as *Firestarter* and "Scanners". Government tampering with drugs has created humans with incredible psychic powers that can influence reality in huge, dramatic ways, and these humans have flown out of the government's control. Released seven or eight years later, all the way over in Japan, it's anyone's guess if "Akira" was actually *influenced* by the American "Psychopunk" works of the early 1980s. It's worth mentioning that it was based on a Manga of the same name (a generally superior and much expanded work, if less iconic and genre-building) that began being serialized in 1982, most likely far sooner than *Firestarter* or "Scanners" could begin to penetrate Japanese culture as translated works.

In 1988, an apparent nuclear explosion destroys Tokyo and World War III begins. Thirty-one years later, the city of Neo-Tokyo is built. Tetsuo and Kaneda are best friends and members of a gang of bike punks, speeding around the city and causing havoc. They run, quite literally, into Takashi, a government test subject that appears to be an unnaturally aged child. Shortly thereafter, Takashi is captured by armed soldiers and Tetsuo is hospitalized.

Government decision-makers The Colonel and The Doctor (neither *named* in the original dub of the film, if I remember correctly) discover that Tetsuo may possess psychic abilities similar to Akira - the young Esper who caused Tokyo's destruction, and a member of the same series of test subjects as Takashi. Meanwhile, Kaneda becomes involved in the underground rebel group out to overthrow the government in his feckless pursuit of his disinterested-love-interest, Kei. When Kei, Kaneda and the rebel group infiltrate the government hospital with the goal of breaking Tetsuo free, events begin to spiral out of control, and Neo-Tokyo is changed forever.

"Akira" was a cyberpunk work and was set in the post-apocalyptic near future, rather than the present day like all of the other works discussed here. So much of what "Akira" added to the burgeoning "Psychopunk" genre is aesthetic and visual rather than strictly literary, and is therefore difficult for me - a writer, not an artist - to sum up in words. The streaking tail-lights of the bikes, the ominous drums of the soundtrack, the bloody wreckage of decimated human bodies in Tetsuo's Telekinetic wake - all these things and more seem beyond words to me.

But one thing that "Akira" definitely added to the "Psychopunk" mix?

Actual, literal *punks* - underaged youths rebelling against everything around them, with or without cause. This youthful pathos and passion was enormously influential on ***Psionics***. (Also, and paradoxically, "Akira" is the first "Psychopunk" work where government figures like The Colonel were portrayed as brave, responsible, and honorable, as well as greedy, callous, ruthless, short-sighted, and manipulative.)

The most important contribution "Akira" made, though, was the fact that Tetsuo

was an individual tortured by pathos and interpersonal/emotional problems *before* he manifested any psionic abilities. His self-esteem was lacking, his insecurity lead to reckless and violent actions, and his second-fiddle relationship with Kaneda was complicated, co-dependent, and resentful. And all of that *before* Tetsuo began his journey into becoming a psychic juggernaut. When Tetsuo awakens as an Esper, all his life's existing difficulties get a new - and extreme - level of complication.

Finally, perhaps not incidentally to its status as a cyberpunk work, "Akira" considers the advent of psionic power not only as a phenomenon of its own, but in the context of transhuman themes. Akira, Tetsuo, and the other Espers are becoming something more than human, something other-than human, something different entirely, and this idea of rapid and radical evolution is discussed and played with quite a bit. The tagline of this roleplaying game, "The Next Stage of Human Evolution", is an expression of this idea.

## *Galerians* (1999)

*Galerians* is a 1999 PlayStation game developed by Polygon Magic, published by ASCII Entertainment, and distributed by Crave Entertainment. Like "Akira", it comes to us from Japan. Its plot, which concerns an amnesiac psionic youth named Rion escaping from a high-tech hospital and uncovering his family's involvement in a project to create genetically engineered superhumans, is not substantial enough to summarize here without spoilers. It is highly derivative of Akira, among other things.

Coming after over ten years of derivative "Psychopunk" works based on *Firestarter*, "Scanners", and "Akira", it ordinarily would only merit an "Honorable Mention" here, except for three things.

Firstly, *Firestarter*, "Scanners", and "Akira" all involve pharmaceuticals as a major theme. In *Firestarter*, Lot 6 is the genesis of the current crop of psionics. In "Scanners", Ephemerol, when administered to pregnant mothers, can cause their children to become scanners, and Ephemerol helps scanners to control their powers by minimizing the side-effects. Likewise, in "Akira", unspecified "capsules" are needed by Tetsuo in increasing amounts to control the crippling headaches and convulsions that accompany his psychic ascendance. *Galerians* takes this connection between psionic powers and drugs to its logical extreme. As a form of resource management in the game, Rion must collect and inject himself with color-coded drugs in order to use his psionic powers at all. In other words, like Tetsuo, psionic powers reduce the kid to, basically, a damn junkie. As a human weapon, mind-bending drugs are the ammo, and you are the gun.

Secondly, *Galerians* very explicitly defined a limitation to psionic powers that had only been *implied* in earlier works like "Akira". If you overused your psychic powers, or took too much physical abuse, or underwent too much emotional stress, you would begin to "short out". Shorting out would kill everyone around you instantly, and would eventually kill you if you couldn't find and inject the right drugs to stop it. The idea of a psionic youth as an actual ticking time bomb of destruction was never more literal than here.

Finally, by its very nature as a videogame (one in the then-quite-popular "survival horror" genre), *Galerians* featured rules and mechanics that governed how psionic powers worked. This interactivity and mechanical implementation is what first gave me the idea that *Firestarter*/"Scanners"/"Akira" could be made into a roleplaying game.

Which is exactly what has happened.

## Honorable Mentions - Recent Works

The following works didn't take part in inventing the genre, and it's less accurate to say they inspired this game and more accurate to say that when they came out, I saw them and thought, "yup, that looks just like ***Psionics***." However, they *are* highly visible, stylish, and recent mass media works in the "Psychopunk" genre.

*Honorable Mention:*

### *Psi-Ops: The Mindgate Conspiracy* (2004)

*Psi-Ops: The Mindgate Conspiracy* was a videogame developed by Midway Games, released in 2004 for the Xbox, PlayStation 2, and PC. Like the other works in this section, it's notable more for its intriguing (and interactive) visual portrayal of "Psychopunk" genre material than for adding any new ideas to the genre. The player takes on the role of Nick Scryer, a "PSI-Operative" whose mind has been wiped to allow him to infiltrate a psychic terrorist organization known as "The Movement".

After being given a drug that helps him slowly regain his memories and lost psionic abilities, Nick must face off against a series of former elite PSI-Operatives, all of whom have defected along with the General that formerly led the PSI-Ops project. The game's plot begins as amiable B-Movie schlock and meanders in the direction of actively ludicrous toward the end.

More notable was the (often satisfyingly ultra-violent) gameplay, which lets you pick up enemies and objects alike and throw them around with ragdoll physics, travel out-of-body with Remote Viewing to scout your surroundings, hijack enemies' bodies with Mind Control and remote pilot them to their deaths, incinerate foes and explode the environment with Pyrokinesis, and so on. All of these options were combined with the traditional suite of military firepower present in most third person shooters. Later levels muddled the wide-open sandbox-of-destruction fun with an increasing prevalence of enemies that were immune to an increasing selection of your powers, which was a shame. Even more of a shame was the fact that this game never saw a sequel or a franchise, and likely never will. Still, *Psi-Ops* remains the best and most comprehensive interactive implementation of psionic powers in an action video game to date.

*Honorable Mention:*

### "Push" (2009)

"Push" was not a great movie, but I was biased in its favor because, as you can probably tell by the existence of this game, I love Telekinesis. The plot of "Push" goes something like this: The Division is an organization in the US reminiscent of both ConSec ("Scanners") and The Shop (*Firestarter*). They've been secretly experimenting on psychics since 1945. Nick (Chris Evans) is a "Mover", a Telekinetic, just like his father who was killed by one of the Division's agents. Nick is now hiding out in Hong Kong as an expatriate, when a young girl, Cassie (Dakota Fanning), arrives at Nick's apartment. Cassie is a Watcher, a powerful precognitive with visions of the future. She explains to Nick that the two of them will find a mysterious case that will help them take down the Division.

The trail leads them to Kira (Camilla Belle), a "Pusher" (I think you can figure out what she can do by now) also on the run from the Division, who knows where the case is, and that it contains a drug linked to the Division's plan to create psionic super-soldiers. Things get substantially more complicated and more chaotic from there, involving running battles with psionic Triads, among other things.

While not, as previously mentioned, great cinema, "Push" provides fun depictions of psionic powers on the big screen with a relatively big budget and modern production

values. Its psychic power divisions - Watchers (precognitives), Movers (Telekinetics), Pushers (mind controllers), Sniffs (psychometric trackers and clairvoyants), Shifters (mental illusionists), Wipers (memory erasers), Shadows (counter-clairvoyants), Stitches (psychic surgeons), and so on - are interesting if a bit inflexible and over-complicated. The breakdown seems perfect for a video game, which makes it surprising that Push never was one, and never became one.

*Honorable Mention:*

## "Chronicle" (2012)

"Chronicle" really excites me, not just because it's a great movie (even critics and viewers sick to death of found footage movies and superhero movies loved it, even though it was technically both), but because it has the potential to bring the "Psychopunk" genre (or whatever you want to call it) to a whole new generation of fans. The plot and characters, as well as the climactic final confrontation, definitely seemed "Akira"-inspired to me, but "Chronicle" westernizes that story and brings it to a younger audience that may have missed out on Akira entirely.

"Chronicle" was directed by Josh Trank in his directorial debut, written by Max Landis, with a story by both of them. It tells the story of three Seattle high school seniors - Andrew (Dane DeHaan), his cousin Matt (Alex Russell), and the more popular Steve (Michael B. Jordan) - who find a mysterious alien artifact that grants them powerful Telekinetic abilities. The movie is largely a character piece. Andrew is introverted, both uncomfortable and discomfiting around others, relating to the world almost entirely through a camcorder, as a not just avid but obsessive videographer of his life. Andrew is frequently bullied at school, but his home problems are more serious, with his mother slowly withering away from cancer and his father a verbally and physically abusive alcoholic on disability. Andrew's cousin, Matt, is virtually Andrew's only friend, and is certainly the Kaneda to his Tetsuo, more well-adjusted and more popular. Steve, the school's quarterback and class president, is Andrew's foil, naturally and effortlessly charismatic and adored by the rest of the kids in the school. In a portrayal that goes against the grain of most high school comedies and melodramas, Steve is portrayed as kind, decent, and conscientious, even going out of his way to help Andrew.

Their shared discovery of an alien artifact that grants them psychic powers causes the three to form a strong bond. The early scenes of the three finding and then pushing the limits of their Telekinetic abilities, gradually learning to move larger objects with more and more speed and precision, and eventually levitating themselves to fly, are the movie at its strongest. The three central characters present such an authentically written and naturalistically acted portrayal of ordinary teenagers in an extraordinary situation that the result is captivatingly realistic.

Soon, an innocent attempt by Steve to generate attention and popularity for Andrew backfires horribly, and Andrew becomes increasingly withdrawn and aggressive, coming to the rationalization that his newfound powers make him an "apex predator". This dangerous change in Andrew pushes the three toward a confrontation. I won't spoil anything further, but if you have any interest in psychic powers or the "Psychopunk" genre, you must see this film. Even if the plot is familiar, the execution is incredible.

## Genre-Busting

"Psychopunk" works, such as this roleplaying game, touch on the conventions of a lot of genres. But they don't fit perfectly into any existing genre, and neither does ***Psionics***.

### *Science Fiction*

Wikipedia tells me that every single book and movie that I just mentioned are Science Fiction. Well, in a sense, that's perfectly logical. Psychic powers are not - that I know of - real. And their explanation is not "magic", so they aren't in the domain of fantasy.

Therefore, they are Science Fiction. However, looking at the main works I'm aware of, "Psychopunk" works fall firmly on the "soft" side of the science fiction spectrum. Little or no concrete scientific explanation is offered for *why* the human brain can directly affect physical reality, and often the question is waved away all together. If anything, the sociological and societal effects of this new "technology" receive far more speculation than the technical and scientific questions posed by the phenomenon.

Of course, most "Psychopunk" works *aren't* typical of Science Fiction at all, because virtually all of them are set in the present day, or "twenty minutes into the future". Science Fiction works typically explore the future, and "Psychopunk" is often more interested in the present - and the effects of secret wild talents on what is recognizably *our world*.

## *Horror/Thriller*

Wikipedia only identifies "Scanners" as belonging to the horror genre among the works we've discussed, but *all* of them are pretty horrifying. *Firestarter* was written by Stephen King, the largely undisputed master of modern, mainstream literary horror, and is no brighter or cheerier than most of his other works. "Akira" scared the hell out of me when I was a kid, "Chronicle" features terrifying scenes, and the idea of someone being able to tell you to "put your gun in your mouth" (like in "Push") is downright *scary*. Certainly this game will contain elements of horror, ranging from the psychological terror of slowly becoming a monster, to the paranoia of being stalked by Conspiracies at every turn, to the body horror associated with Overload and the drugs you must take to avoid it.

However, in the case of this game in particular, we don't really go beyond dipping a toe in the horror genre. Fundamentally, horror is about *powerlessness*, and the Player Characters in ***Psionics*** are enormously powerful individuals. It's the game's core conceit.

## *Action*

A lot of "Psychopunk" works identify as being in the action genre, and that's perfectly accurate. They involve fight scenes, violence, car chases, and spectacle. However, "Action" is more of a meta-genre than anything else, and could probably be applied to a solid third of every movie ever made, as well as virtually all roleplaying games. So it doesn't tell us much here.

## *Superheroes*

The superhero genre is my favorite example of something that "Psychopunk" simultaneously kinda is, and absolutely, vehemently isn't. Certainly, I must acknowledge that the main characters of ***Psionics*** are superhuman individuals capable of superhuman feats. On the surface the overlap between "Psychopunk" and *X-Men* is obvious.

But the tropes of all but the darkest and most nihilistic superhero comics are absolutely neutralized here. Bullets and blades kill, and so do super powers. Even heroes can die easily (and stay dead) to a bullet in the brain if they're caught off guard, or haven't developed the powers that help keep bullets out of your brain. Besides the deadliness, there's the fact that the line between right and wrong is deliberately blurred. The main antagonists are faceless organizations, not colorful individuals, and are often represented by ordinary people just following orders. And in your desperation to escape them, you may do very questionable things.

This is not a world of costumed crimefighters, not a world where power begets responsibility. It's a world where power leads to suffering not just for the powerful, but for everyone around them. Ordinarily, I don't make or endorse absolute pronouncements, but I will say this much, gentle reader: if your characters are putting on costumes and/or fighting crime, you are almost certainly playing this game wrong.

# A BIRD'S EYE VIEW OF THE END OF THE WORLD

**"I can see the end,
but it hasn't happened yet"**

***- Metric, "Breathing Underwater"***

If this introduction has done its job, you now know what kind of game this is, and you know what kinds of characters the players will be playing. You also know a bit about the history and context of the subgenre or milieu this game is part of. But what about the world that the game takes place in? Well, that's the easiest part of all.

***Psionics*** takes place in our world. Maybe right now, or maybe the day after tomorrow. Maybe 2005, 2010, 2015, 2020. What's the big difference, really? Things have really been kind of the same for much of the world since a couple years after the turn of this new century, haven't they?

People in the nice parts of North America and Western Europe have it pretty darn good, but complain endlessly on their blogs and social media about their First World problems. People in Third World and developing countries don't have it so good, and are often beset by sectarian and ethnic violence, famine, and drought, but they tend to whine less on the Internet, and take fewer selfies. Increasingly heated arguments about gun control and birth control and religious and sexual freedom rage throughout the civilized world, an endless spectacle that grinds on with neither entrenched side gaining a millimeter of traction, as the major political parties preach increasingly irreconcilable differences while practicing increasingly identical policies. In short, it's the real world. If you want to know more about the game setting, turn on your television. Open a window.

At least... that's what every character starts play thinking. What everyone in the world thinks, with the blinders over their eyes firmly in place. When those blinders get cut away, things start to look mighty different. The secret history of the world, which hides in the shadows of the world we know, begins to come into focus. The world's superpowers have been locked in a paranormal arms race that dates back to the end of the Second World War and Operation Paperclip. Since the fall of the Berlin Wall and the end of the Cold War, the psychic think-tanks of the great powers have Balkanized, splintered, and gone rogue. Gone underground, and gotten smarter. People think that the coldhearted barbarity of Operation MKUltra was the disastrous end to the government's mind control research. In reality, it was the glorious beginning.

Throughout the world, in developed countries, reports are suppressed of individuals that are more than human. People who can move objects or fire guns with their minds. People who start fires. People who can give you a brain aneurysm with a word, a look, or just a thought. In the war-torn chaos of places like Africa, Mexico, South America, Eastern Europe, and the Middle East, these Espers hide in plain sight, vanishing into myth, legends and ghost stories from the world's perpetual battlefields and constantly-shifting battle lines. No one - at least no one with your best interests in the forefront of their mind - has noticed that the number of reports, and the number of legends, are steadily increasing.

The world approaches a turning point - a tipping point foretold by seers whose prophecies have since been [REDACTED]. A new dominant species is emerging, day by day, faster and faster. A great storm is on the horizon that will change the world forever, and most of us will not survive. That sound you hear out your window is **the thunder.**

But don't worry about any of that. If you're a PC, your character doesn't necessarily know anything about the game world that conflicts with what you know about our real world. If you're a GM, on the other hand, once you familiarize yourself with the rest of the rules, you can crack open the section called **The Eternal Storm** (p. 251) to see some of the setting's many dark secrets laid out before you. For everyone else, **Standard Operating Procedures** (p. 37) will tell you the basics of how the game is actually played, and **Test Subjects** (p. 78) will get you started building your first Esper.

Dive in, and have fun!

READY, FIRE, AIM.

# Standard Operating Procedures: Game Concepts

**"Take this one thing with you to home and to work**
**and to school and to mom and to dad**
**There are moments when you can stop the world**
**Remember that friends, and don't be sad."**

***- The World/Inferno Friendship Society, "Paul Robeson"***

This chapter tells you the very basics of how to play ***Psionics***. To play this game, by the way, you're probably going to need at least three players (and probably no more than six or seven), some pencils, the character sheet at the back of this book (which you can photocopy), and a bunch of six-sided dice. Each player's gonna want between six and twelve dice. The more copies of this rulebook you have around the table, the better.

Everything in this chapter is applicable to every **DICEPUNK SYSTEM** game, not just ***Psionics***.

## DICE AND YOU

Like a lot of roleplaying games, in this one you're going to use dice. You don't need to roll dice unless you're doing something that's kind of tricky or would have negative consequences for failure. So driving your car to work would never require a Drive Test, but trying to drive *through* a police barricade while escaping from your workplace totally would.

We only use six sided dice, because they're the easiest to find. As shorthand, we use the standard code of (Integer) d(ice)(#ofsides). For instance, "roll 1d6" means "roll 1 six-sided die" and "roll 5d6" means "roll five six-sided dice".

Just about all of the time when you "roll the dice" in a **DICEPUNK SYSTEM** game, you're rolling **2d6**. The main exception is damage rolls, which call for a variable number of dice depending on the weapon/attack. In either case, you're adding the results of the dice together to find the sum.

### How You Want To Roll the Dice

When you make an Attribute Check or a Skill Test, you want to roll low on 2d6. Specifically, you want to roll equal to or less than the relevant Attribute (in the case of an Attribute Check) or equal to or less than the relevant Attribute + Skill Bonus (in the case of a Skill Test).

When you make an Attack Roll, you want to roll high on 2d6 (and you get to add your Skill Bonus directly to the die roll).

When you roll for a Contest, you want to roll high, and you roll just 1d6.

When you roll for Initiative, you want to roll high also. Characters with a higher Initiative go before characters with a lower Initiative.

Finally, when you roll damage, you want to roll high. Rolling damage is also the only time you're rolling a variable amount of dice plus a static Bonus, rather than rolling 2d6 like usual.

POLICE
POLICE
911

## Checks, Tests, and Attacks

There are three types of primary die rolls that determine if a character succeeds or fails at something. You either succeed or fail, hit or miss. Degree doesn't matter.

### *Attribute Checks*

All characters have **Attributes** - scores or statistics that measure how weak or powerful that character is in various areas. Attributes are generally rated from 1 (pathetic) to 10 (superhuman) with a 3 being average for a human and a 5 being very good. The four Attributes every human has are Strength, Speed, Wits, and Will.

A GM should call for an **Attribute Check** whenever a character's raw strength or endurance, pure dexterity or foot speed, intellect, courage, or willpower are being tested. **To make an Attribute Check, roll 2d6. If the result is equal to or less than the Attribute being tested, the character has succeeded.** Obviously, the higher an Attribute is, the easier it is to succeed a Check of that Attribute.

In general, whether or not a failed Attribute Check can be retried is up to the GM and should be determined based on the situation. Likewise, the time an Attribute Check takes is up to the GM.

**A natural 2 (snake eyes) on an Attribute Check is always a success.**

**A natural 12 on an Attribute Check is always a failure.**

### *Examples*

*Chris discovers an unguarded cellar door that leads into a mysterious facility where another Esper is being held captive. Unfortunately, the doors are rusty with disuse, and are stuck shut. Seeing no better entrance, Chris decides to try to pull open the doors anyway. The GM calls for a Strength Check. Chris' Strength is 6, and he rolls 2d6, getting a result of 3. Chris manages to wrench the rusty metal doors open, which makes a loud noise.*

*Kay knows that the sound of the cellar doors opening might draw some attention, and acts as lookout. She sees a guard circling around the building*

#### The Flexibility of Linked Attributes

All Skills have a Linked Attribute - the Attribute they're governed by and also the Attribute that they use to determine the number the player must Roll Under to succeed at a Skill Test for that Skill. (The Linked Attributes of Combat Skills are largely unimportant largely unused.) The sample Skill list on p. 52 provides the Linked Attribute for each sample Skill; GMs must decide what the Linked Attribute is for any Custom Skills they allow PCs to start with, or any Custom Skills they stat NPCs with. Usually, this decision is a matter of common sense.

An important point we want to make is that a Skill doesn't have to use the same Linked Attribute for every single Skill Test. Take a sample Skill like Stealth. While the default Linked Attribute for Stealth is Speed, that assumes a situation where the character is trying to move quietly, sneak up on someone, or perhaps pick someone's pocket. In a situation where a character is trying to find a good hiding place with ample time and then stay there, a Wits-based Stealth Test might be called for instead. In a situation where a character has found a good hiding place (or what they think is a good hiding place) and is trying to stay perfectly still under a rotten tree still while insects crawl all over them, the GM might even call for a Will-based Stealth Test.

Ultimately, any Skill can use any Attribute for an individual Skill Test that the GM thinks is appropriate using common sense. The Linked Attribute is just a general case suggestion for what will usually be the appropriate Attribute that Skill is tied to. The GM is the final arbiter of which Attribute a Skill Test calls for: the player cannot decide whether a given Stealth Test is based on Wits or Speed. If a GM doesn't say otherwise (e.g. call for a "Wits Based Stealth Test" or call for a "Will Based Demolitions Test", assume that a Skill Test uses the default Linked Attribute listed on the sample Skills table on p. 52, or that was decided upon when the Custom Skill in question was created.

*to check out the source of the noise. Kay decides to try and take him down before he can notice their presence. The GM asks for a Speed Check to see if Kay can move quickly enough to intercept the guard. Kay's Speed is 6, but when she rolls 2d6, she gets a result of 7. She is not fast enough; the guard spots them, and reaches for his handheld radio.*

*Ian and his team manage to take down the guard as quietly as possible, but now the facility is on alert. They scramble into the cellar and find a hatch in the floor; opening the hatch reveals a rusted old ladder leading down into complete darkness. Ian can hear strange noises down there. The team decides that the best way to take the heat off would be to move through the sub-basement, but the strange sounds and the darkness make Ian very uneasy. The GM asks for a Will Check to see if Ian can force himself to go down into the sub-basement. Ian has a Will of 8, and when he rolls 2d6, he gets a result of 5. He steels his nerves and descends the rusty old ladder into the dark.*

*Once inside the sub-basement, Leona lights a makeshift torch and finds a coded and sprawling map of the interior. It is extremely old and complex, and very difficult to read. Leona and her team need to move quickly to rescue the captive Esper before the facility's security team has him re-located. Leona consults the map to find another way up into the main facility from this level. The GM calls for a Wits Check to see if she can decipher the moldy and byzantine map in a matter of only a few seconds. Leona has a Wits of 7, and when she rolls 2d6, she gets a result of 8. She can't make out the obfuscated map well enough for it to be of any use.*

## *Skill Tests*

Skill Tests are like Attribute Checks, with some important differences. **When making a Skill Test, as with an Attribute Check, a lower roll is always better.** A **Skill Test** is resolved as a modified Check of the Skill's **Linked Attribute** (see **Test Subjects**, p. 78), which is adjusted as indicated below.

- *If the Skill is* ***Untrained*** *(i.e. the character does not have the Skill), use the* ***Attribute -2.***
- *If the Skill is* ***Trained****, use the* ***unmodified Attribute****.*
- *If the character has the Skill at the* ***Apprentice Level****, add* ***+1 Skill Bonus*** *to the Attribute.*

### Trying Again?

The default position of the Psionics rules on retrying Attribute Checks and Skill Tests is that you cannot retry a Test you have failed. If you try to force open a door or pick a lock and fail, you are never going to be able to force open that door or pick that lock, and your character knows it. Someone else can try to open that door or pick that lock, and you can try to force another door or pick another lock, but *you* have failed to overcome that obstacle and you don't get to try again. There are some caveats and exceptions, though, so let's get into them.

Firstly, anyone of Expert Skill or higher with a Linked Attribute of 5-6 is arguably able to overcome any obstacle given adequate tools, infinite time, infinite patience, and no outside threats or time constraints. These ideal circumstances should virtually never arise for any task that matters in a roleplaying game. There should almost always be less-than-perfect tools, a finite and constrained time window, and/or external threats or distractions. If for some reason a skilled character really does have infinite time, adequate tools and safe conditions in which to overcome a passive obstacle like a lock, then the GM should not call for the dice to be rolled *at* all. But such a situation should definitely be the exception and not the rule.

Secondly, and more importantly, the one situation in which retries should be allowed is if circumstances have substantially changed. A character trying to force a locker open with her bare hands who fails gets to try again if someone hands her a crowbar (which should also make the second attempt easier). If this second attempt is failed again, the character is not allowed to retry unless circumstances should again meaningfully change.

- *If the character has the Skill at the **Expert Level**, add **+2 Skill Bonus** to the Attribute.*
- *If the character has the Skill at the **Master Level**, add **+4 Skill Bonus** to the Attribute.*

In general, whether or not a failed Skill Test can be retried is up to the GM and should be determined based on the situation. Likewise, the time a Skill Test takes is up to the GM.

**A natural 2 (snake eyes) on a Skill Test is always a success.**

**A natural 12 on a Skill Test is always a failure.**

### *Examples*

*Tim is being held in a mysterious facility, and his powers are being rigorously tested by a group of scientists. Just a few yards from his room, unbeknownst to him, his friends - here to rescue him - have emerged from an underground tunnel into a locked-down hallway. The GM makes a secret Awareness Test for Tim to notice that it is now the time to act. Tim has a Wits of 9 and Awareness at the Expert Level, making his final score 11. The GM rolls 2d6 for Tim, and gets a result of 8. Tim hears the commotion in the hallway.*

*The team has come out of the sub-basement and found themselves in a hallway; the facility is on lockdown and the bulkhead doors of the hall are firmly shut. Chris finds a security panel at the end of the hallway. He is pretty good with electronics, and he wants to try and unlock the door. The GM asks for an Electronics Test. Chris has a Wits of 8 and Electronics at the Apprentice Level, making his final score 9. However, when he rolls 2d6, he gets an unlucky result of 12 - he can't quite figure out how to rewire the security panel to open the door.*

*Leona manages to spot a ventilation duct on the ceiling. Ian boosts her up, and she removes the panel that bars her way into the vents. But now, she has to pull herself inside. The GM calls for a Climbing Test. Leona has a Strength of 4 and is Trained in Climbing, making her final score 4. Leona rolls 2d6 and gets a result of 3, just enough to clamber into the ventilation shaft.*

*When the team reaches the door that Tim is being held behind, they find it locked. Kay decides to try and pick the lock with her tools, but they don't have much time before more security comes upon them. The GM asks for a Locksmith Test. Kay's Wits of 8 and her Locksmith Skill at Apprentice Level make her final score 9. However, she rolls 2d6 and gets a result of 11; she cannot manage to figure out the lock. They will need to find another way to get through the door.*

### *Difficulty Modifiers (DM)*

Not all tasks are created equal, and that's where Difficulty Modifiers come into play when making Skill Tests and Attribute Checks. **A Difficulty Modifier (DM) is a +/- adjustment applied to the Attribute being checked or the Linked Attribute of the Skill being tested.**

| Difficulty | Difficulty Modifier |
|---|---|
| Very Easy | +4 |
| Easy | +2 |
| Hard | -2 (Min. 2) |
| Crushingly Hard | -4 (Min. 2) |

## *Attacks*

A character Attacks when he attempts to use a Combat Skill to harm another character or a monster. **Unlike Skill Tests and Attribute Checks, players making an Attack want to roll *high*. A *higher* Attack Roll is better than a low one. To make an Attack, roll 2d6 and add the *Skill Bonus* from the relevant Combat Skill to the result.** Firing a handgun would use Pistols, whereas swinging a baseball bat would use Clubs. If you don't have the relevant Skill, apply a -2 Penalty to the result of the roll instead. If the result is equal to or greater than the target's Defense, the Attack hits; roll damage. Other Bonuses or Penalties may be added to Attack Tests, based on the Techniques used. (See **Incident Report** on p. 171 for more details.)

**A natural 12 on an Attack Roll is always a hit.**

### *Defense Modifiers*

Like Difficulty Modifiers, Defense Modifiers are applied to the target's Defense when making an Attack Test, and are often situational. Common Defense Modifiers include aiming,

visibility penalties, and cover. For a complete list of Defense Modifiers, see **Incident Report** (p. 171).

*Attack Bonuses & Penalties*

Some weapons are more accurate than others and apply a Bonus directly to the Attack Roll, while other weapons are less accurate than normal and suffer a Penalty to their Attack Roll. See **The Armory** (p. 109) for examples of weapons with Attack Bonuses/Penalties. Some Techniques also might apply a Bonus or Penalty to Attack Rolls under certain circumstances.

## Damage

Damage is one of the only times in Psionics that you roll dice without succeeding or failing. To roll damage, roll the number of d6 indicated and add them up. That is how much Health the target loses. For much more in-depth rules on damage, death, and healing, see **Incident Report** (p. 171).

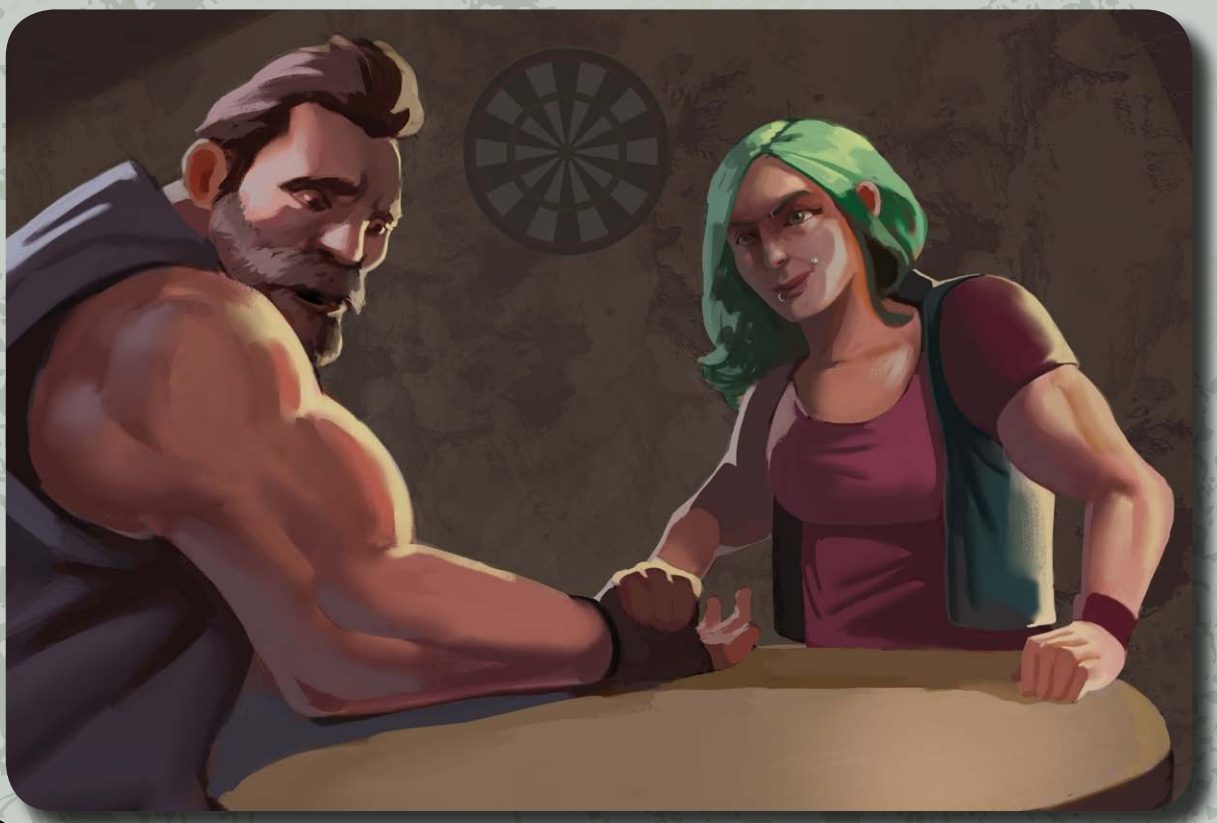
## Contests

When two characters are directly opposing one another, a Contest is called for. The most common are Attribute Contests - situations where two characters are using the same Attribute to achieve opposite ends. Skill Contests can also occur - car chases are the most likely example.

### Some Contest Examples

- *Forcing Open/Holding Shut a Door [Strength Contest]*
- *Trying to lose/catch someone on foot [Speed Contest]*
- *Staring someone down [Will Contest]*
- *Trying to lose someone/ram someone in a car [Drive Contest]*
- *Debate [Rhetoric Contest]*

**To resolve a Contest, each player (or one player and the GM) should roll 1d6 and add the relevant Attribute (plus the relevant Skill Bonus if applicable). The character with the *higher* result wins the Contest.** In the event of a tie, reroll.



### Optional Rule: Simplifying Contests

Some players won't have any trouble with switching fluidly from a Test that asks them to roll 2d6 and roll under their Attribute Score + Skill Bonus and a Contest that asks them to roll 1d6 and add their Attribute Score + Skill Bonus and announce the total. Others, however, might find this shift in mechanics gives them a bit of a hiccup and the GM might find that those hiccups slow down play.

If you find that Contests are tripping up your players or slowing down your game, use this optional rule instead. Instead of using the rules for Contests, just treat Contests as normal Attribute Checks or Skill Tests. The character that rolls further under the number they needed to Roll Under is more successful. By this means, a character that fails by a smaller margin might still beat a character that fails even worse.

#### *Example*

*Instead of calling for a Stealth vs. Wits Contest, just have the sneaking character roll a Stealth Test normally and have the character trying to perceive them make a normal Awareness Test. The sneaking character has Speed 6 and Stealth Expert (+2) for a Roll Under of 8, and the character being snuck around has a Wits of 7, is an Apprentice in Awareness (+1), and suffers a -2 DM for it being dark, for a Roll Under of 6. Both characters roll a 6. The sneaking character wins and remains unseen, because while the other character succeeded "on the money", the sneaking character rolled "2 Under".*

### *Examples*

*After acquiring Tim, the team tries to make their escape from the facility. Ian leads the way through the twisting corridors, looking for a way out. When he enters a darkened room, a special operative is waiting inside to waylay him. The GM asks Ian to roll an Awareness Contest against the operative's Stealth Contest roll. Ian is an Apprentice in Awareness, and his Wits are 8, meaning he gets to add 9 to his roll on 1d6. The operative's Speed is 7, and he has Stealth at Expert Level, meaning he also gets to add 9 to his roll on 1d6. Both roll - the operative gets a die result of 3, making his total 12, but Ian gets a die result of 5, making his total 14. Ian notices the figure lurking behind the door before the operative gets a chance to knock him unconscious.*

*Leona notices an orderly about to call in for backup and alert security to their location in the facility. The orderly seems like a normal person, and is unarmed, so Leona decides to intimidate him into dropping the phone. The GM calls for an Intimidation Contest. Leona has a Will of 9, and has Intimidation at Expert Level, meaning that she gets to add 11 to her roll on 1d6. The orderly has a Will of 6 and Intimidation at Apprentice Level, meaning that he gets to add 7 to his roll on 1d6. Leona gets a die result of 3, making her total 14. The orderly gets a die result of 5, making his total 12; he backs away from the phone, begging for mercy.*

*Chris notices a scientist running through the facility; the scientist trips, and a red ampule clatters out of her lab coat. Chris recognizes this as a very valuable drug, so he decides to try and retrieve the ampule from the floor before the scientist can. Both scramble after it, and the GM calls for a Speed Contest. Chris' Speed is 5, and the scientist's Speed is 4. Chris rolls 1d6 and gets a result of 3, making his final score 8; the scientist also rolls 1d6 and gets a result of 6, so her final score is 10. The scientist makes it to the ampule before the Chris can reach it.*

*As the team reaches the exit, a security guard reaches out to grab Kay. The guard manages to get his hands on her, and tries to grapple her. Kay and the security guard need to make a Strength Contest - Kay's Strength is 5, but the security guard's Strength is 6. Both roll 1d6. Kay gets a die result of 3, making her total 8; the security guard rolls a 5, making his total 11. Kay is held fast, for now, postponing her team's escape from the facility.*

### *Talent Tests & Talent Attacks*

In ***Psionics***, there are a few special cases to the general rules. Sometimes, using a Psionic Talent (see **Special Projects**, beginning on p. 78) will call for a (Talent) Test (e.g. a Telekinesis Test, a Pyrokinesis Test, a Psychokinesis Test, and so on). This is a Skill Check based on the Wits Attribute, but you add your Level in the relevant Talent to Wits before rolling (the exception is the Synchronicity Talent, which is based on the Will Attribute). So, for instance, a character with Wits 6 and Telekinesis Level 2 making a Telekinesis Test needs to roll an 8 or less to succeed.

A (Talent) Attack is much like a normal Attack Roll, but instead of adding a Skill Bonus or Untrained Penalty to the Attack Roll, you add the Level of the Talent being used. So an Esper with Pyrokinesis Level 3 making a Pyrokinesis Attack would add +3 to her Attack Roll, while an Esper with Psychokinesis Level 5 making a Psychokinesis Attack would add a whopping +5 to his Attack Roll.

### Additional Rules

Let's be honest: depending on how robust a world simulation we want this to be, we could write many more "general case" rules for many more things.

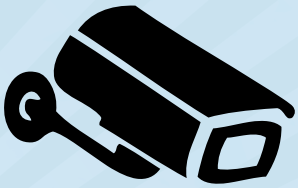
For instance, we all know that people need to eat, drink, and breathe, and not being able to do any of those for various amounts of time is really quite bad for you. We also know that being burned, frozen, or drowned for any amount of time will cause people to die; that extended exposure to the elements, inclement weather, extreme heat, or extreme cold can be very harmful. If we wanted to focus more on creating a general reality simulator, we could shed ink on rules for these things, but we choose not to do so for two reasons.

Firstly, all of the environmental realities mentioned above are largely tangential to the subject matter of the game. They are edge cases that won't come up with great frequency.

Secondly, in light of the above, I trust the ability of GMs to make appropriate and consistent ad hoc rulings using common sense when these things *do* come up. Alternatively, feel free to write and incorporate your own house rules to fill in some of these gaps.

"The road to the glamorous life is filled with cut hands and black eyes."

# New World Water



**Your feet leave the diving board, and gravity forgets you for a moment.**

For an instant you hang at the peak of the parabolic arc you have launched yourself into. There is a science to all of this: the magnitude of your angular momentum and the flight trajectory are established at takeoff. You tilt your body to the side, and alter your angular momentum vector. At least, that is how you think about these things. You suspect most people would say, "You twist in the air".

The water envelops you, briefly startling you out of your reverie. You plant your feet firmly on the pvc planks of the creaking deep-end ladder, and look out onto the nearly empty bleacher seats of the not-quite Olympic-sized swimming pool. You see people, hear voices muffled by the water in your ears, smell sweat and over-chlorinated water.

It is Friday night, and this is exactly where you, Peregrine, are supposed to be. You stretch your long, dark skinned body, arching your back and allowing yourself a brief moment of narcissism.

You hear the metal doors of the pool area swing open, and turn in the direction of the sound, mouthing curses as a blast of cold air hits your skin. A woman stands in the doorway, looks briefly at the wet floor and then at your coach, Collins, a middle-aged former athlete with a red face and beer gut.

"This is swimming practice, Miss. Unless you're thinking of joining the team, I'm gonna have to ask you to return tomorrow."

The blurry forms of your coach and the woman slowly come into focus as your eyes adjust. You all regard the person who is walking past coach Collins, looking around the room as though she isn't at all interested in the protests of your coach. She tilts her head, occasionally making eye contact with members of the team, searching the room through narrowed eyes. Then she pivots backwards on one leg and jumps to the third row of the bleacher seating, which she promptly sits on.

She is young, perhaps in her early 20s, about 5'7", with pale, freckled skin and the kind of body you don't get from yoga, but might get if you had unlimited funding for personal trainers, nutritionists, and med-spa memberships. She's holding a folio tucked under one arm. Her hair is jet back, held back in a French braid. She's wearing one of the ludicrously expensive high-end swimsuits used in Olympic swimming events by athletes in first world countries. You look at her boobs. They are definitely indie rock chick boobs, which you like, but perhaps not as much as other boobs. Her butt is pretty great though. She is dangling her feet off the side of the bleachers now, still looking at the swimmers, wait, oh shit, she is totally fucking looking at you. She knows you were staring at her boobs. Her fury is likely vast and terrible. Nah, you hope.

The strange woman winks at you.

"Mr. Collins, I believe you are mistaken. You're going to cancel practice. I have obtained the lease to this building."

Wait, what the hell. There is no fucking way this girl owns the building. That is crazy.

"You... what... I don't care if you're the fucking president, I am not canceling this practice."

"Mr. Collins. Cooperate with me."

A moment passes with no response. Then: "Practice is cancelled guys. Sorry, but we gotta pack up now."

"Thank you. This will compensate you for the inconvenience. Let me assure you that the facilities will benefit from my stewardship." she said, emphasizing the word *compensate* by handing the coach an envelope retrieved from inside her folio. When she speaks, you can hear a slight hint of a French accent.

As you gather your things, trying not to stare at this strange invader who had just kicked everyone out with no advance notice, she walks over to you.

"You," she says. After regarding you for a few moments as you ponder the inconvenience of wearing a speedo, she adds, "Peregrine. That's an unusual name. Very exotic. Peregrine, the diver. I like it. You may stay." You try to produce your most disarming smile, and she giggles at you before pointing at the high board. "Do some diving for me, Peregrine. I wanted to do a few laps, unwind a little."

You pause, bringing your hands to the sides of your neck and arching your back. Cold water gets colder as it drips off your body. Grit scratches underneath your feet as you slide them over faded green tiles. Steam is rising off the pool, spilling out in a lazy rolling blanket of mist. Your goggles begin to fog up, so you take them off, and rub them with the top left area of the speedo. Your erection - which you had managed to ignore earlier - rubs against the synthetic fabric.

"*Not now, speedo boner!*" your mind shouts.

The strange woman bursts into laughter - not a coquettish giggle this time - bursts of sound that ring in your ears as the sound echoes through the room. She sits again on one of the bleachers, regaining her composure, and puts her hand under her chin, looking at you expectantly.

*Now is when you ask me my name and I say, Colette. Or dive. Or just keep thinking funny shit. Stop thinking about leaving.*

The woman has not spoken, but you hear her voice echoing from the walls. At first there is only one voice, than a few dozens, then hundreds of identical voices drowning each other. You stop feeling the cold. You don't notice when your nose starts bleeding. The laughter has stopped; Colette's face frozen in a half smile, her eyes narrowing.

You, Peregrine, are falling; gravity hasn't forgotten. You command your legs to move, but the muscles do not obey. You try to reach out your arms to break your fall, but they too have gone slack and non-responsive. Droplets of water sag upwards before they pull themselves off of the floor, rising slowly through the air. You watch your arms float upwards, dragging the rest of your body behind them. Chunks of broken tile float and spin like sugar maple seeds in an updraft. The chorus of voices is almost unintelligible now, whispers and screams hitting you in waves.

*Where is the Ephemerol? Narcotics? Has it happened before? FUCK! He would have known about the seizures - Is this my fault? Don't push him too hard. Lorazepam might work?*

*I want to hear the house burning down.*

*Why wouldn't he remember 30 seconds, non-responsive - How could you watch it happen? I don't need this right now. The target was tracked for over a year before termination - Where's the fucking Ephemerol? This list... this precious list. I need to be heading this operation, you know that nobody else can handle this. Yes, fucking yes its happening he isn't seizing this list oh my lord am I glad -*

*Look, take my offer and become a god. I've told you too much to allow you to leave.*

*This is a silencer. So it'll be quiet if you decide to refuse. Don't refuse. Make the right choice.*

*WHO'S THERE? GET OUT OF MY HEAD! GET OUT GET OUT GET OUT*

You blink. The room is warm, but you are shivering. You aren't at the pool, it looks like you're in the manager's office upstairs. Sensation is returning to your body. You rub your face, leaving a long red streak on your hands. It hurts when you move. Colette is sitting on the carpeted floor next to you, holding a joint in her lips. She blows a smoke ring at your face. It smells floral, sweet, with hints of jasmine and cinnamon paired with a spicy fragrance you can't identify. You think there might be some pot in the joint. Or probably hash.

Wordlessly, she places it between your lips. You try to take it with your hands, or push it away, you aren't really sure which choice to take. It smells really good, but... what the fuck is this anyway? What the fuck happened before? Your head hurts. Everything hurts. You inhale, coughing as soon as the smoke hits your lungs, coughing until your eyes tear.

You close your eyes again, and Colette plucks the joint from your lips. That's ok. You feel pretty stoned already. Soft fingers trace circles on your shoulder. Whatever is happening, it's probably a good thing. Probably.

"Colette?" you ask, "Why do you know my name?"

"Why do you know my name?" she teases you, "Its opiated hashish, by the way. I picked it up while I was in Morocco."

"I guess, wait, what, look, what just happened?" you stammer. "Did I have a seizure?"

"Not exactly. I'll explain as much as you are ready to hear, once you recover. You aren't to discuss this with anyone until we speak again, you understand. This is very serious. Call your friends, say you're spending the weekend off-campus. Tell them you're getting laid."

**"They might not believe that," you reply, "I mean, I'm not a very good liar."**

# Test Subjects: Character Creation

**"If we should be arrested before we sleep**
**I'll see you outside in a few days or in a few weeks**
**And if you should be shot 'trying to escape'**
**I'll know that for the lie that's written on its face"**

***- The World/Inferno Friendship Society, "Only Anarchists Are Pretty"***

Stats, skills, special powers, and equipment - all of these things are really fun, and we spent a fair amount of time on them, but they're *not* the most important thing that makes up a great character. Who your character is and what your character wants - what your character is or is not willing to do to *get* what they want, and how that changes over time - is even more important than what your character can do.

So, right now, if you're considering a new character, come up with a *concept* for that character to define him or her without referring to the character's stats or psionic powers. A good concept can be summed up in a few words, and expanded on greatly later: angsty teenage poet; hot-tempered girl on a quest for revenge; slimy and manipulative con artist; socially awkward nerd abused to his breaking point - all of these are character concepts. Concepts and their associated exposition, "backstory", shouldn't be complicated at character creation. Where your character is going to is more important than where they've been. And like in any good fiction, details of your character's past should be revealed anew over the course of the story, rather than all that once at the beginning.

You could even leave some of it up to the hands of the GM, as partial and complete amnesiacs are common among Espers. Before you make a character as anything other than an exercise, you should ask your GM about any special guidelines or restrictions on the campaign. A long history of using and abusing Psionic Talents is inappropriate if, for instance, your GM is planning to start the campaign with a scene where everyone manifests their powers for the first time.

Note that stereotypes do not generally make very interesting characters but are almost always useful jumping-off-points. Once you have a basic concept, spend a little time fleshing it out by creating the details of your character's personality, appearance, relationships and personal history. You can decide where they are from, but the GM will probably need to decide where they are at present to fit the story.

Once your character is a complete person, assign them a name, and any other relevant details. Then, you can decide their stats using the process described below. Alternatively, you're free to create a character's stats first and then build a person around the numbers, but this can tend to result in somewhat wooden characters.

## CHARACTER CREATION SUMMARY

- *Determine Character Name and Character Concept*
- *Spend Attribute Points on four Main Attributes*
- *(Arbitrarily determine Attractiveness if desired)*

### Common Esper Facts

- *Psionic Talents are most likely to manifest during puberty, generally between the ages of 12 and 16.*
- *No one knows, for certain, what causes the manifestation of Psionic Talents. Early research has both physical and emotional childhood trauma as correlated factors, but no causal relationship has been determined. Environmental pollutants like toxic waste have not been positively linked to psionic activity, but the children of participants in government hallucinogenic research of the1950s, 60s, and 70s (like Project MK-ULTRA) show a strong tendency for manifestation of Psionic Talent.*
- *Psionic Talents often first appear as unconscious manifestations of pure will. An abused and tormented Pyrokinetic flies into a rage, and her bully's clothing sets on fire. A Telekinetic's best friend teeters and falls from a tall bridge, only to be caught and flung back to safety by a mysterious wind. A proto-Psychokinetic pick up artist always knows the right thing to say to women, almost as if he's reading their minds. Conscious control comes later, and fine manipulation is always last - a learned and refined skill, more than a natural Talent. An Esper's first use of a Talent is often traumatic, and always memorable.*
- *After manifesting Psionic Talents, your normal life won't remain so for long. This is especially true for Espers who disdain subtlety and concealment and use their Psionic Talent to go on cross-country murder and robbery sprees or attempt to become superheroes, but even characters who try to keep a lid on their powers are often found out by measures and metrics secretly installed in modern society by the Conspiracies that exist to observe and control Espers. Once you're on their radar, the more powerful your abilities, the sooner they'll come to attempt to take control of you. Sometimes they'll even ask nicely... at first.*
- *The longer a Psionic Talent is on the Conspiracies' radar, the less likely he is to remain free without being "recruited" or captured by one faction or another. A time of five years without contact by a Conspiracy agent is almost unheard of - hence most Psionics PCs are quite young, or have already encountered the Conspiracies (ask your GM).*
- *Both because of the traumatic lives they lead and the ease with which their Psionic powers get them what they want, Espers tend to be "pathetic social misfits, unstable, unreliable".*

- *Determine Special (Derived) Attributes*
- *Spend Skill Picks*
- *Choose one starting combat Technique*
- *Select 1+ (Wits ÷ 2 [round down]) Talent Levels on Psionic Talents (p. 78)*
- *Spend Weapon Picks and Starting Cash on Equipment*
- *Finalize Character Name and Character Concept*

# ATTRIBUTES

Not all people are created equal. Some people are just more physically fit or mentally agile than others. You could roll dice to determine the genetic makeup of characters, and, in fact, it might be more accurate to do so. But it's less fun for everyone when the Player Characters in a roleplaying game aren't created on even footing.

For this reason, ***Psionics*** gives you a pool of 30 points with which to buy your Attributes. However, players are free to spend this pool of points however they please, resulting in diverse characters that are equal, but different.

Other roleplaying games have LOTS of statistics to keep track of, usually between six and twelve. The **DICEPUNK SYSTEM** has only FOUR main Attributes (although there are some optional and derived statistics to track).

## Main Attributes

**Strength:** Your character's strength and toughness; helps determine psionics use limits.

**Speed:** Your character's raw physical speed and agility/dexterity; linked to many Skills.

**Wits:** Measures intelligence, mental speed, memory, sensory acuity, defense, psionics known.

**Will:** Your character's courage and willpower; determines psionics use limits and psi strength.

***Psionics*** *doesn't* track the following characteristics:

**Charisma/Attractiveness:** Your charisma and persuasiveness will be based primarily on how you roleplay your character and the situation at hand. If you want to play an ultra-suave character, be suave, or just bypass the problem by using Psychokinetic mind control. Your character can be as attractive or unattractive as you want, or you can simply roll 1d6 let the

| Attribute Rating | Real Life Description (*Real Human Capabilities*) | In-Game Description (*Hollywood Human Capabilities*) |
|---|---|---|
| 1 | Handicapped or disabled. | Severely handicapped or disabled. |
| 2 | Below average. Embarrassing. | Embarrassingly bad. |
| 3 | Average. | Below average. |
| 4 | Good. | Average. |
| 5 | Excellent. | Good. |
| 6 | Best. (Real human peak.) | Very good. |
| 7 | **LITERALLY IMPOSSIBLE** | Excellent. |
| 8 | **LITERALLY IMPOSSIBLE** | Heroic. |
| 9 | **LITERALLY IMPOSSIBLE** | Legendary. |
| 10 | **LITERALLY IMPOSSIBLE** | Superhuman. |

result determine your attractiveness, with 6 being a supermodel and 1 being some kind of hideous deformed freak. Ask which your GM would prefer.

**Wisdom:** As far as ***Psionics*** is concerned, "wisdom" is really common sense. And since no statistic on the character sheet is going to stop your character from doing dumb things, this one is really up to you. If you want to roleplay a wise character, make wise decisions. If you wind up making stupid decisions, your character isn't all that wise. Which isn't necessarily a bad thing (if you can get out alive) and almost always makes for good drama and storytelling.

All of your main Attributes are rated from one to ten (although non-human characters and monsters may rarely have Attributes of above ten). In the **DICEPUNK SYSTEM**, ratings from one to six are within *realistic* human norms, whereas ratings above six are possible for *Hollywood* humans.

All Main Attributes begin at 0, but all players must purchase all four Attributes *at least* at Rating 1. The cost to purchase an Attribute varies by the rating, but is the same for all four of the main Attributes; all Attributes are equally important. **All starting characters by default have a pool of 30 Attribute Points to spend on their main four Attributes.** A GM looking to run a non-standard campaign (where the PCs are either complete rookies and novitiates or legendary psionic badasses) may wish to adjust this number accordingly.

| Attribute Rating | Point Cost to Purchase |
|---|---|
| 1 | 1 (Mandatory) |
| 2 | 2 (Strongly recommended.) |
| 3 | 3 |
| 4 | 4 |
| 5 | 5 |
| 6 | 6 |
| 7 | 8 |
| 8 | 10 |
| 9 | 12 |
| 10 | 15 |

## Special (Derived) Attributes

Besides the main Attributes, there are several more Special Attributes that are derived from them.

**Health:** Measures how much punishment a character can take before they're down for the count.

**{Knockout Threshold}:** Determines when a character will lose consciousness from pain/shock.

**{Death Threshold}:** The final word on what is or isn't survivable for the character.

**Defense:** Measures how hard the character is to hit in combat.

**Initiative:** Determines in what order characters act in combat (See p. 171).

**Power Points:** Determines how much Psionic Talent an Esper can use before resting.

**Overflow Gauge:** Determines how much Psionic Talent an Esper can use safely without risking a complete mental breakdown and losing control of the power they're channeling.

| Special Attribute | Formula To Determine |
|---|---|
| **Health** | *Strength × 6* |
| **Knockout Threshold** | *10 - Will* |
| **Death Threshold** | *0 - Strength* |
| **Defense** | *3 + Wits* |
| **Initiative** | *"(Speed × 2) + 2d6 "* |
| **Power Points** | *Will × 6* |
| **Overflow Gauge (Max Value)** | *Will × 5* |

## SKILLS

Skills represent learned abilities and trained talents that characters were not born with, but acquired over the course of their lives. Espers have few of these; "pathetic social misfits", after all. **You have only (Wits × 2) Skill Picks to spend.**

Skills that have been learned and developed have three levels: Apprentice, Expert, and Master. Skills that characters do not have AT ALL are considered Untrained. Skills that characters have TRAINED in but not advanced at all will be covered later in this section.

| Skill Level | # of Picks To Learn | Benefits |
|---|---|---|
| **Apprentice** | 1 | When using the Skill, you need only roll under the Linked Attribute + 1. |
| **Expert** | 3 | When using the Skill, you need only roll under the Linked Attribute + 2. |
| **Master** | 5 | When using the Skill, you need only roll under the Linked Attribute + 4. |

The **DICEPUNK SYSTEM** neither has an exhaustive, detailed list of in-game Skills to choose from, nor includes in-depth descriptions of what each Skill can and cannot do.

***Psionics*** abstains from the former (exhaustive Skill lists) in the name of creative expression; if our list does not contain a Skill you want, you can freely create any Skills you think your character would have, from Guitar to Demolitions. Just make sure you, your GM, and all the other players agree that the new Skill is fair. We have provided many example Skills to give you an idea of how specific Skills should be. A notable exception is Combat Skills, which we have specifically mapped out and balanced.

We have abstained from the latter (detailed Skill descriptions) in the name of the reality of GM fiat. In any roleplaying game, it will be ultimately up to the referee to determine what Skills can and cannot do in any given situation; ***Psionics*** recognizes this, and leaves that call to the GM from the start.

The following list gives several usable sample Skills - you can pick from these Skills or use

these as guidelines to create your own. Again, Combat Skills should stay as is; there is no reason to create your own Combat Skills. This list can help you decide which Attributes Skills you create will be linked to; every Skill must have a linked Attribute. It is important to note that linked Attributes are much less important for Combat Skills than for non-combat Skills.

| Skill Name | Linked Attribute | Sample Task | Combat Skill? |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Automatics** | Strength | *Fire an Uzi; fire an AK-47.* | Yes. |
| **Automotive Repair** | Wits | *Diagnose and repair a car that breaks down.* | No. |
| **Awareness** | Wits | *Find a hidden passageway; avoid an ambush.* | No. |
| **Bike** | Speed | *Navigate around a crashed 18-wheeler.* | Sometimes. |
| **Blades** | Speed | *Stab a foe with a switch-blade.* | Yes. |
| **Brawling** | Strength | *Throw a killer uppercut; dispatch an opponent with a broken bottle or a steel folding chair.* | Yes. |
| **Calculus** | Wits | *Find the total flux of an electromagnetic field.* | No. |
| **Chemistry** | Wits | *Make explosives from household chemicals.* | No. |
| **Climbing** | Strength | *Scale a building.* | No. |
| **Clubs** | Strength | *Subdue an enemy with a riot baton.* | Yes. |
| **Cooking** | Wits | *Prepare a delicious breakfast.* | No. |
| **Demolitions** | Wits | *Create a pipe bomb.* | No. |
| **Drive** | Wits | *Escape from a car chase.* | Sometimes. |
| **Electronics** | Wits | *Fix a broken generator; hotwire a car.* | No. |
| **First Aid** | Wits | *Disinfect a gunshot; sew an open wound shut.* | No. |
| **German** | Wits | *Speak and understand German.* | No. |
| **Guitar** | Speed | *"Stairway to Heaven".* | No. |
| **Hacking** | Wits | *Illegally access or reprogram a computer system.* | No. |
| **Heavy Weapons** | Strength | *Fire an M-60; fire a rocket launcher.* | Yes. |
| **Intimidation** | Will | *Force a human opponent to back down without violence.* | No. |
| **Latin** | Wits | *Read and write Latin.* | No. |
| **Leadership** | Will | *Convince the cowed test subjects to fight by your side.* | No. |
| **Locksmith** | Speed | *Pick a padlock.* | No. |
| **Negotiation** | Wits | *Complete a drug deal.* | No. |
| **Pilot** | Wits | *Land a prop plane; control a helicopter.* | No. |
| **Pistols** | Speed | *Fire a 9mm Handgun.* | Yes. |
| **Rifles** | Wits | *Fire a shotgun; fire a sniper rifle.* | Yes. |
| **Security** | Wits | *Bypass an alarm system; set a trap.* | No. |
| **Stand Up Comedy** | Wits | *Make someone laugh in an inappropriate situation.* | No. |
| **Stealth** | Speed | *Sneak out of your quarters unseen.* | No. |
| **Subterfuge** | Wits | *Fast-talk your way past a security guard.* | No. |
| **Swimming** | Strength | *Avoid drowning.* | No. |
| **Throwing Weapons** | Strength | *Throw a shuriken; throw a grenade.* | Yes. |

### Basic Training

In addition to *Developed* Skills, all ***Psionics*** characters are *Trained* in a number of additional Skills **equal to their Wits.** While being *Trained* is not quite as good as being an *Apprentice*, it is much better than being *Untrained*.

| Skill Level | Benefits |
|---|---|
| **Untrained** | NONE. When attempting to use the Skill you must roll under the linked Attribute - 2. If the Skill is a Combat Skill, you suffer -4 to your roll. |
| **Trained** | When using this Skill, treat it as a standard Attribute Check of the linked Attribute. If the Skill is a Combat Skill, just roll 2d6, and do not add or subtract anything. |

## TECHNIQUES

Call them feats, talents, moves, maneuvers, or whatever you like - just don't call them Skills or Attributes, to avoid confusion - Techniques are how your character kicks ass. Techniques make combat exciting, varied, and dynamic, rather than a boring attack-fest. Because your character has neither the training nor the background to rely mainly on their physical skills or tactics in combat, you may select only **one** starting Combat Technique during character creation.

| Technique Name | Prerequisites | Use Limits | Benefits |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Batter Up** | Strength 5+ | - | When armed with a two-handed weapon, you can spend a Full Turn Action to make a melee Attack at -2 to hit. Treat your Strength as twice what it actually is to determine the damage of this Attack. |
| **Blitzkrieg** | Speed 5+ | - | You can attack and move, or give up your Attack Action to move twice in a turn. (**Normally, characters can only move and then attack, not the other way around.**) |
| **Boom!Headshot** | - | - | When using any pistol, rifle, or shotgun, you can declare you are aiming for the head. Aiming for a specific target is a Move Action, which must be followed by an Attack Action to fire, hence using Boom!Headshot is a Full Turn Action. Your Attack Roll is at a -2 Penalty, but you deal double damage if you hit. |
| **Kneecapper** | - | - | When using any pistol, rifle, or shotgun, you can use a Move Action to aim for the target's kneecap, immediately followed by an Attack Action to take the shot. The Attack Roll is made at a -2 Penalty. If you hit, the target can only move one yard per turn until healed; the Attack does normal damage. |
| **Trick Shot** | Speed 5+ | - | You can spend a Move Action to Take Aim, and take a -2 Penalty on a subsequent Attack Roll to hit a very small, specific target. Traditionally, this can be used to knock a weapon out of a humanoid enemy's hands, but it could also be used to hit difficult targets, like the tires of a car. If this Attack hits a weapon, the weapon is destroyed or knocked 2d6 yards away, at the GM's discretion. |

| Technique Name | Prerequisites | Use Limits | Benefits |
|---|---|---|---|
| **In The Face!** | - | - | As Boom!Headshot, but for use with non-explosive throwing weapons, such as throwing knives and shuriken. |
| **Bull's Eye** | Wits 5+ | - | As Trick Shot, but for use with non-explosive throwing weapons, such as throwing knives and shuriken. |
| **Critical Attack** | - | - | When you roll a natural 12 on an Attack Roll, you automatically hit, and make a separate Attack Roll. If that Attack Roll would hit, your Attack does double damage. |
| **Longshot** | Wits 6+ | - | Double the range increments of all firearms you use. |
| **Dodge** | Speed 5+ | - | You can give up a Combat Turn to take evasive action; make a Speed Check. If you succeed, the Attack misses you. If you are Attacked before your turn in a given Combat Round, you can give up your next action to reflexively Dodge (you must declare this before the Attack Roll against you is made) but if you have already acted in a Combat Turn, you cannot Dodge. If you Dodge a Grapple attempt or a *TK Grab* attempt, you don't need to make a Speed Check - your Speed Check is considered to have automatically succeeded. |
| **Ambidexterity** | Expert or higher in Blades or Clubs. | - | You can wield two (reasonably small) melee weapons in combat, allowing you to make one additional melee Attack per Attack Action. Both melee Attacks must be on the same target. If you choose to Attack twice, each Attack is at a -1 Penalty. |
| **Point Blank** | - | - | Attacks made with firearms against targets one yard away or closer receive a +1 Bonus and deal +1d6 damage. |
| **Reposition** | Speed 6+ | - | You may choose to reroll your Initiative between Combat Rounds. (Normally, you are stuck with the Initiative you initially roll.) |
| **John Wu Special** | Speed 6+; Expert or higher in Pistols. | - | You can wield two pistols at once in combat. You can choose to fire both pistols with one Attack Action; each Attack is at a -2 Penalty. You can split the Attacks up however you choose between the available targets. |

## PSIONIC TALENTS

Perhaps the most important - and certainly the most fun - part of character creation is selecting your Psionic Talents. Every starting PC begins with a number of levels of Psionic Talents equal to:

**2 + (Wits ÷ 2 [round down])**

The GM may wish to alter this number to give you more Psionic Talents at character creation if a high-powered, high-stakes campaign is desired, or lower it to 1 + (Wits ÷ 2 [Round Down]) for a low-powered campaign. Even less starting Psionic Talents than this, at least in a game called ***Psionics***, is not at all recommended.

The complete list and description of Psionic Talents begins on p. 78.

| Wits | Starting Talent Levels |
|---|---|
| **1** | *2* |
| **2-3** | *3* |
| **4-5** | *4* |
| **6-7** | *5* |
| **8-9** | *6* |
| **10** | *7* |

These levels can be distributed as you see fit, within the following parameters.

**In order to take the first level of a Telekinesis Talent, a Pyrokinesis Talent, or a Psychokinesis Talent, you must have three levels in the corresponding Primary Talent.** For instance, to take a level of Somakinesis (Telekinesis is the Parent Talent of Somakinesis) you must have three levels of Telekinesis first. There is no restriction on taking levels of the Primary Talents (Telekinesis, Pyrokinesis, and Psychokinesis).

Higher levels of one Talent are more powerful than low levels of lots of Talents - **starting characters may not have higher than Level 5 in any one Primary Talent, or higher than Level 3 in any Secondary Talent.**

## EQUIPMENT

There are games where every piece of gear is kept track of in fastidious and exacting detail; ***Psionics*** is not one such game, as frequently your character will lose everything they own and become imprisoned, only to have to steal new possessions during your escape. Depending on your GM, starting weapons, armor, and vehicles are important, along with the gasoline and ammo you'll need to keep them running, and maybe the medical supplies you'll need to keep you on your feet. Everything else can be handily abstracted by the GM.

Starting characters begin with any miscellaneous gear they need (accommodation, food, clothing, a cell phone), unless, of course, the campaign begins with them (one way or another) institutionalized, in which case they start with nothing.

Players receive starting Weapons and Vehicles based on their level of training in the respective Skills. Some high-quality Weapons and Vehicles take more than one pick. For a BIG list of individual weapons and other gear, see p. 109.

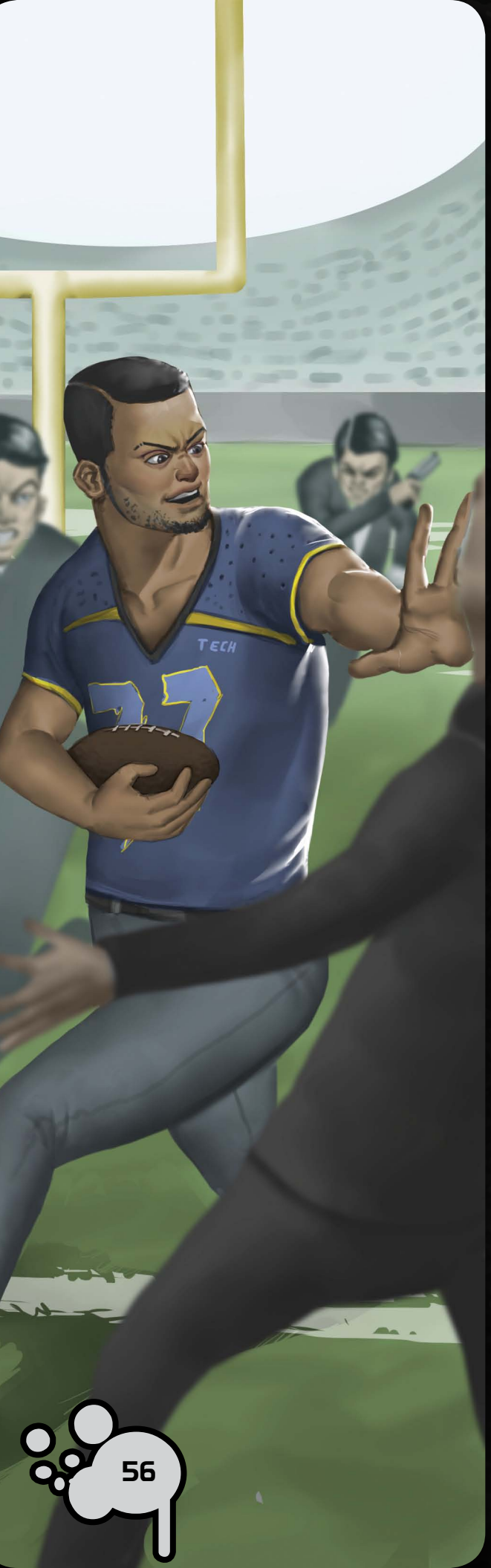
### Starting Cash

All characters start with **(Wits)d6 × $100** in starting cash that can be used to purchase additional weapons, ammunition, and incidental gear. Starting cash left unspent at the end of character creation comes into game as cash-in-hand. Additional weapons and gear can be found over the course of the game.

| Skill Level | Weapon/ Vehicle Picks | Example |
|---|---|---|
| **Trained or less.** | Nothing | NA |
| **Apprentice** | 1 | An Apprentice of Blades could start with a switchblade. An Apprentice of Drive could start with a Honda Civic. |
| **Expert** | 2 | An Expert of Pistols could start with two Glocks, or one Desert Eagle. An Expert of Bike could start with a badass Harley or with two wimpy Vespas. |
| **Master** | 4 | A Master of Automatics could start with a Tec-9, a Mac-11, and two Micro-Uzis, or with two AK-47 assault rifles, or one Steyr-Aug assault rifle and one Micro-Uzi. A Master of Pilot could start with an attack helicopter. A Master of Blades could start with four switchblades, two rapiers, or a katana. |

## ARCHETYPES

The following archetypes are pre-made, street-legal playable characters that are good to go off the shelf. You can use them as-is, or modify them slightly if you don't have time to make your own PCs.




# The Bruiser

***Attributes***

| | |
|---|---|
| **Strength:** | 7 (10) |
| **Speed:** | 6 (9) |
| **Wits:** | 8 |
| **Will:** | 6 |
| **Health:** | 60 (Knocked Out at 4 Health, Dead at -10 Health) |
| **Initiative:** | 18 + 2d6 |
| **Defense:** | 11 |
| **Power Points:** | 36 |

**Overflow Gauge:** ☐☐☐☐☐ ☐☐☐☐☐ ☐☐☐☐☐ ☐☐☐☐☐ ☐☐☐☐☐ ☐☐☐☐☐ (30)

**Skills:** Football: Expert (+2), Brawling: Expert (+2), Intimidation: Expert (+2), Stealth: Apprentice (+1), Drive: Apprentice (+1), Awareness: Apprentice (+1), Climbing: Apprentice (+1), Clubs: Apprentice (+1), Negotiation: Apprentice (+1), Leadership: Apprentice (+1).

**Basic Training:** Blades, Pistols, Subterfuge, Swimming, First Aid, Cooking, Spanish, Baseball.

**Techniques:** Blitzkrieg.

***Attacks***

1. Baseball Bat at +1 for 2d6+10
2. Punch at +2 for 1d6+10 lethal or nonlethal (2d6+10 lethal with Lethal Strikes)
3. Combat Knife at +0 for 1d6+9
4. Stungun at +1 for 4d6 nonlethal

**Psionic Talents:** Telekinesis Level 3, Somakinesis Level 3.

**Equipment:** Baseball Bat, Combat Knife, Stungun,1990 Honda Accord, First Aid Kit, 24-Pack of Beer and Handle of Jack (25 Units of Alcohol), Football Uniform (with padding and helmet), Athletic T-Shirts, Jeans, Sweatpants, Sneakers, Under Armour Hoodie, Smartphone, Laptop, $2500.

## *Description*

*The Bruiser is a (former) all-star school athlete. Unlike any stereotypical meathead jock, the Bruiser is highly intelligent. His friends may look to him as a leader; he's cool under pressure and good at coming up with ways out of a bad situation. But he's also a team player, not stymied by ego. While he seems like an outgoing and laid-back student, the Bruiser harbors secret gifts that make him stronger and faster than his peers. He's mastered his ability to move objects with his mind - as well as his superhuman strength and speed - so that he isn't a danger to himself or others, but the Bruiser is still a deadly weapon unto himself. He is capable of killing an enemy with his bare hands, or performing incredible feats of strength and stamina. Even though he might not like to hurt people, he still knows how to frighten a would-be attacker into backing down from an altercation. If a fight goes down, the Bruiser knows how to bring the wreckage. If you are unfortunate or stupid enough to start a brawl with the Bruiser, it's a sure thing that he's the one who's going to end it.*

# The Firestarter

***Attributes***

| | |
|---|---|
| **Strength:** | 4 |
| **Speed:** | 6 |
| **Wits:** | 7 |
| **Will:** | 9 |
| **Health:** | 24 (Knocked Out At 1 Health, Dead At -4 Health) |
| **Initiative:** | 12 + 2d6 |
| **Defense:** | 10 |
| **Power Points:** | 54 |

**Overflow Gauge:** ☐☐☐☐☐ ☐☐☐☐☐ ☐☐☐☐☐ ☐☐☐☐☐ ☐☐☐☐☐ ☐☐☐☐☐ ☐☐☐☐☐ ☐☐☐☐☐ ☐☐☐☐☐ (45)

**Skills:** Awareness: Expert (+2), Intimidation: Expert (+2), Subterfuge: Expert (+2), Bike: Apprentice (+1), First Aid: Apprentice (+1), Partying: Apprentice (+1), Security: Apprentice (+1), Stealth: Apprentice (+1).

**Basic Training:** Blades, Brawling, Climbing, Locksmith, Pistols, Swimming, Throwing Weapons.

**Techniques:** Blitzkrieg.

***Attacks***

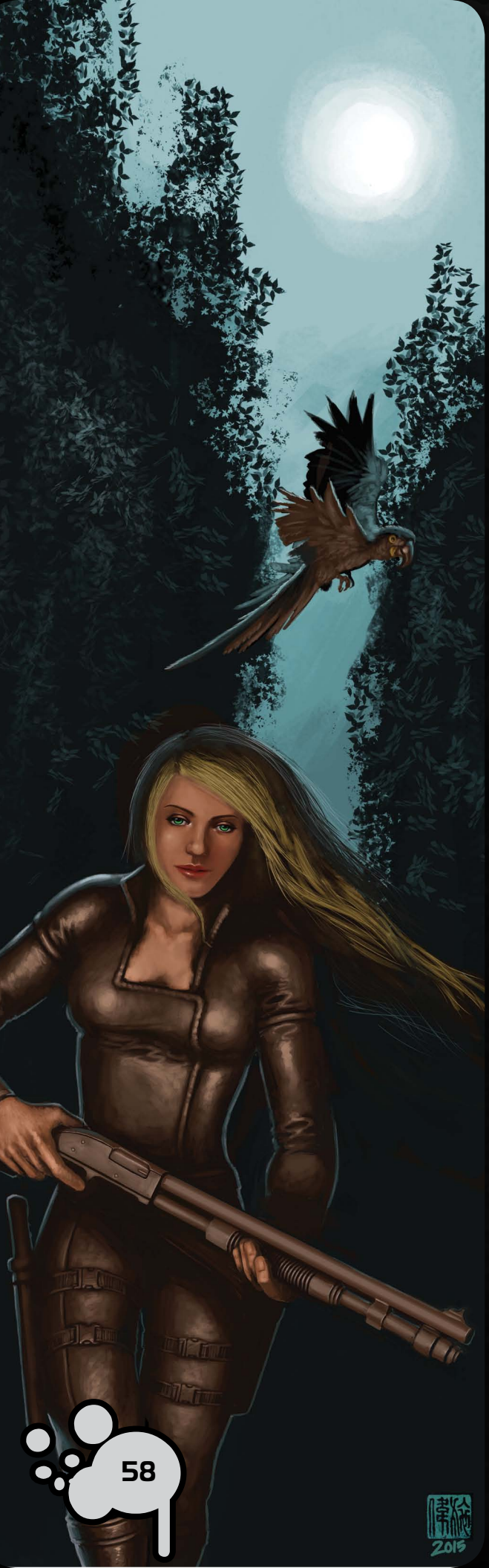
1. Taser at +0 for 5d6 nonlethal
2. Scalpel at +0 for 11

**Psionic Talents:** Pyrokinesis Level 5.

**Equipment:** Stylish Leather Jacket, Fitted T-Shirt, Boots, Black Leather Clutch, Personal Items, Cellphone, Other, Casual Clothes, Jewelry, BMW F650 Motorcycle, Taser, 10 Taser Cartridges, Scalpel, Type I Body Armor Vest (Melee Damage Cut: 2, Ranged Damage Cut: 6), First Aid Kit, Mini-Flashlight, $220 Cash.

## *Description*

*The Firestarter has a terrible temper - and when she gets mad, things tend to spontaneously combust. She's seen some shit, and what hasn't killed her has only made her stronger. She's not shy about starting a fire or two when she wants to get something done, or when someone gets in her way. One look in her eyes, and you know she means business; just one glance could give a normal person second thoughts about messing with her. Sure, she knows how to find the sickest secret concerts and underground parties, or sweet-talk her way into a high-society gala or benefit dinner. She knows how to tell the lies that people want to hear, or play the harmless damsel if she has to. But when it comes down to it, the Firestarter is all about watching her enemies go up in smoke. Just by looking at you, she can boil your brains inside your skull. She can melt metal just by thinking about it - and that includes incoming bullets. She can throw fireballs as easily as a normal person can throw a punch, and she can walk through flames to reach her objective. It might be difficult to get through her prickly exterior, but once she warms to you, she'll be the most valuable friend you've ever had; the Firestarter would do anything or kill anyone to protect the ones she loves. Just don't get on her bad side - she holds a grudge, and those kinds of grudges can be very deadly.*



# The Heartstopper

***Attributes***

| | |
|---|---|
| **Strength:** | 6 |
| **Speed:** | 6 |
| **Wits:** | 6 |
| **Will:** | 9 |
| **Health:** | 36 (Knocked Out at 1 Health, Dead at -6 Health) |
| **Initiative:** | 12 + 2d6 |
| **Defense:** | 9 |
| **Power Points:** | 54 |

**Overflow Gauge:** ☐☐☐☐☐ ☐☐☐☐☐ ☐☐☐☐☐ ☐☐☐☐☐ ☐☐☐☐☐ ☐☐☐☐☐ ☐☐☐☐☐ ☐☐☐☐☐ ☐☐☐☐☐ (45)

**Skills:** Brawling: Expert (+2), Pistols: Expert (+2), Rifles: Apprentice (+1), Drive: Apprentice (+1), Stealth: Apprentice (+1), Negotiation: Apprentice (+1), Awareness: Apprentice (+1), Subterfuge: Apprentice (+1).

**Basic Training:** Gymnastics, Partying, Chemistry, Electronics, Locksmith, First Aid.

**Techniques:** Dodge.

***Attacks***

1. Punch at +2 for 1d6+6 nonlethal
2. Sig Sauer P226 at +2 for 2d6+2
3. Mossberg 590 at +1 for 4d6

**Psionic Talents:** Telekinesis Level 3, Necrokinesis Level 2.

**Equipment:** Sig Sauer P226 (.40 S&W), Mossberg 590 (12 Gauge), Volkswagen Jetta, 100 .40 S&W rounds, 50 12 Gauge Buckshot Shells, First Aid Kit, Stylish Clothes, Journal, Smartphone, Laptop, $1250.

## *Description*

*The Heartstopper is the kind of person who draws attention; she's not only beautiful, but exudes an aura of mystery that can draw an interested party even closer. Strangers stop what they're doing and look up when she walks into a room. Calm, collected, and charismatic, she can fit in just about anywhere, and strike up a conversation with just about anyone. But beneath her cool exterior lies something more deadly; she can stop a human heart with only a touch. A master of wetwork, her targets never see her coming - all she has to do to end a life is simply tap someone on the shoulder, or brush by them in a crowded room. However, the Heartstopper doesn't just rely on this impressive talent; she has a few other tricks up her sleeve. If things get a bit hairy, she can use her telekinetic powers to rip the firearms out of her enemies' grasp, and turn them against their owners. She's got her own arsenal as well, and she knows how to use it; she can even employ her telekinetic mastery to hold and shoot one gun with her mind, while she fires another in her hands. Deft and agile, she can juke out of the way of an attack, or use her powers to push aside incoming bullets. And if she's really on the skids, she can throw a pretty mean punch. The Heartstopper is a smooth operator and a deadly marksman - but what you really don't want to do is shake her hand.*

# The Juggernaut

***Attributes***

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| **Strength:** | 4 | |
| **Speed:** | 6 | |
| **Wits:** | 8 | |
| **Will:** | 8 | |
| **Health:** | 24 | (Knocked Out At 2 Health, Dead At -4 Health) |
| **Initiative:** | 12 + 2d6 | |
| **Defense:** | 11 | |
| **Power Points:** | 48 | |

**Overflow Gauge:** ☐☐☐☐☐ ☐☐☐☐☐ ☐☐☐☐☐ ☐☐☐☐☐ ☐☐☐☐☐ ☐☐☐☐☐ ☐☐☐☐☐ ☐☐☐☐☐ (40)

**Skills:** Calculus: Expert (+2), Chess: Expert (+2), Stealth: Expert (+2), Awareness: Apprentice (+1), Drive: Apprentice (+1), Electronics: Apprentice (+1), First Aid: Apprentice (+1), Hacking: Apprentice (+1), Pistols: Apprentice (+1), Security: Apprentice (+1).

**Basic Training:** Chemistry, Climbing, Drive, Rifles, Spanish, Subterfuge, Swimming, Video Games.

**Techniques:** Point Blank.

***Attacks***

1. Colt M1911a1 w/ Laser Sight at +4 for 2d6 + 3
2. Colt Detective Special w/ Hollow Points at +1 for 2d6 + 4 (double target's Armor)

**Psionic Talents:** Telekinesis Level 5, Psychokinesis Level 1.

**Equipment:** Denim Jacket, Bad Religion T-Shirt, Cargo Pants, Sneakers, Other Casual Clothes, 1976 Volkswagen Passat, Colt Detective Special, Colt M1911a1 w/ Laser Aiming Module, Taser, Ten Throwing Knives, Seven Clips .45 ACP, Three Clips .45 ACP Hollow Points, 20 Rounds .38 Special Hollow Points, Ten Taser Cartridges, First Aid Kit, Prescription Bottle With Five Ritalin, Six Fat Joints, $637 Cash.

## *Description*

*The Juggernaut has been picked on and pushed around for his entire life; a mathlete, a chess club president, and a physical weakling, popularity does not come easy for him. He might not look like much of a threat, but his incredible powers make him a dangerous opponent. With a chip on his shoulder, it can be pretty easy to get on the Juggernaut's bad side, which is exactly where you don't want to be; anyone who tries to pick on him is a good candidate for defenestration. With the power of his mind, he can juggle baseballs from across the room, or levitate and throw a compact car; he can pick up and crush his enemies into a pulp, or tear them apart, without lifting a finger. He can swat bullets aside like gnats. He can fly, using his telekinetic abilities to move himself through the air with finesse. If his powers fail him, the Juggernaut can always rely on his marksmanship; with the aid of his telekinesis, he can fire three guns at once, hovering two in the air while utilizing one with the more traditional method. And just for good measure, he can even tell what you're thinking at any given moment. The Juggernaut is tired of being overlooked, angry at a world that keeps him down; he's ready to show everyone exactly what he's made of, and push back as hard as he can.*

# The Mindf*cker

***Attributes***

| | |
|---|---|
| **Strength:** | 4 |
| **Speed:** | 4 |
| **Wits:** | 8 |
| **Will:** | 9 |
| **Health:** | 24 (Knocked Out At 1 Health, Dead At -4 Health) |
| **Initiative:** | 8 + 2d6 |
| **Defense:** | 11 |
| **Power Points:** | 54 |

**Overflow Gauge:** ☐☐☐☐☐ ☐☐☐☐☐ ☐☐☐☐☐ ☐☐☐☐☐ ☐☐☐☐☐ ☐☐☐☐☐ ☐☐☐☐☐ ☐☐☐☐☐ ☐☐☐☐☐ (45)

**Skills:** Automatics: Expert (+2), Awareness: Expert (+2), Psychology: Expert (+2), Subterfuge: Expert (+2), Drive: Apprentice (+1), Intimidation: Apprentice (+1), Pistols: Apprentice (+1), Stealth: Apprentice (+1).

**Basic Training:** German, Hacking, Japanese, Leadership, Locksmith, Negotiation, Russian, Security.

**Techniques:** Boom!Headshot.

***Attacks***

1. Suppressed MP5 w/ Laser Sight at +5 for 4d6 (three-round burst)
2. Silenced M9 at +2 for 2d6

**Psionic Talents:** Psychokinesis Level 5, Telekinesis Level 1.

**Equipment:** Dark Suit, Silk Tie, Dark Overcoat or Peacoat, Umbrella, Briefcase, Type I Body Armor Vest (Melee Damage Cut: 2, Ranged Damage Cut: 6), Blackberry, Fountain Pen, Pocket Watch, HK MP5 w/ Laser Aiming Module and Suppressor, M9 w/ Silencer, Five Clips 9mm Ammo for MP5, 10 Clips 9mm Ammo for M9, Pendant Concealing Vial With 4 Doses of Cocaine, Black Cadillac ATS, $547 in cash.

## *Description*

*You won't see the Mindf*cker coming - and when he's gone, you might not even remember that he was there. You might say that he's a bit of a control freak; he likes to keep himself nicely groomed, and in the most stylish suits. The Mindf*cker has expensive tastes, and has means more powerful than mere money. What he wants, he gets, and all he has to do is ask nicely. If he's so inclined, he can flash a blank piece of paper and convince you that it's a $100.00 bill. He can tell what you're thinking, or delve deeper into your mind to find your most well-kept secrets. He can make the most dangerous special operative into an obedient slave, ready to kill and die for him. He can ask anyone for their car, their wallet, or their bank account - and get it. And once he's done, he can make you forget that you ever saw him. The Mindf*cker really knows how to read people, and tell them exactly what they want to hear; he can infiltrate an enemy stronghold, convince someone that he's a police detective, or make someone think that he's no threat at all. If you're a friend, he can speak into your mind, and tell you what you need to know; if you're an enemy, he can shunt you out of your own body, and pilot you like a drone. He might not be able to start fires or throw cars, but what he can do is far more dangerous.*

# The Painkiller

***Attributes***

| | |
|---|---|
| **Strength:** | 6 |
| **Speed:** | 4 |
| **Wits:** | 9 |
| **Will:** | 7 |
| **Health:** | 36 (Knocked Out at 3 Health, Dead at -6 Health) |
| **Initiative:** | 8 + 2d6 |
| **Defense:** | 12 |
| **Power Points:** | 42 |

**Overflow Gauge:** ☐☐☐☐☐ ☐☐☐☐☐ ☐☐☐☐☐ ☐☐☐☐☐ ☐☐☐☐☐ ☐☐☐☐☐ ☐☐☐☐☐ **(35)**

**Skills:** Survival: Expert (+2), Rifles: Expert (+2), First Aid: Expert (+2), Stealth: Expert (+2), Subterfuge: Apprentice (+1), Medicine: Apprentice (+1), Awareness: Apprentice (+1), Climbing: Apprentice (+1), Clubs: Apprentice (+1), Blades: Apprentice (+1).

**Basic Training:** Chemistry, Negotiation, Pistols, Automatics, Drive, Locksmith, Security, Psychology, Intimidation.

**Techniques:** Longshot.

***Attacks***

1. Remington Model 30 at +2 for 5d6
2. Machete at +1 for 1d6+7
3. Axe at +1 for 3d6+6

**Psionic Talents:** Telekinesis Level 3, Biofeedback Level 2, Psychokinesis Level 1.

**Equipment:** Remington Model 30 (.30-06), Machete, Axe, First Aid Kit, Type I Body Armor, 40 .30-06 Rounds, Flashlight, 10 Caffeine Pills, Hip Flask of Whiskey (5 Units of Alcohol), 3 Oxycodone Pills, Hiking Boots, Backpack, Bottles of Water, Lighter, Lighter Fluid, Shovel, Cargo Pants, T-Shirts, Rain Jacket, Cell Phone, Pocket Knife, Needle, Thread, Medical Textbooks, $2500.

## *Description*

*The Painkiller is a medical miracle, and the best doctor you'll ever meet. Once sickly, the Painkiller studied the workings of the human body, and found that he was able to harness the power of his mind to overcome his illness. He can use his incredible power and his knowledge of the human body to heal the wounds that he sustains, and those of his allies as well. In tune with nature, he knows how to live off the grid; he's a consummate hunter and scavenger, and the best friend to have if you're ever on the lam. What's more, his talents enable him to survive without food or water for longer than anyone else, so he's more than capable of camping out for a long time, even in harsh conditions. He can shake off the effects of a night of binge drinking, or even a tranquilizer dart, and keep running. The Painkiller can also use his ability to manipulate matter against his enemies, hitting them with a wave of telekinetic force or ripping their weapons from their hands, but he doesn't need to rely on his powers to be a dangerous combatant. An expert marksman with his hunting rifle, he can hit a target from 500 yards away. If you cut him, he might bleed... but not for long.*

# The Phreak

***Attributes***

| | |
|---|---|
| **Strength:** | 4 |
| **Speed:** | 7 |
| **Wits:** | 9 |
| **Will:** | 6 |
| **Health:** | 24 (Knocked Out at 4 Health, Dead at -4 Health) |
| **Initiative:** | 14 + 2d6 |
| **Defense:** | 12 |
| **Power Points:** | 36 |

**Overflow Gauge:** ☐☐☐☐☐ ☐☐☐☐☐ ☐☐☐☐☐ ☐☐☐☐☐ ☐☐☐☐☐ ☐☐☐☐☐ **(30)**

**Skills:** Pistols: Expert (+2), Electronics: Expert (+2), Hacking: Expert (+2), Stealth: Expert (+2), Subterfuge: Expert (+2), Awareness: Apprentice (+1), Bike: Apprentice (+1), Clubs: Apprentice (+1).

**Basic Training:** Brawling, Calculus, Chemistry, Drive, First Aid, Locksmith, Negotiation, Russian, Security.

**Techniques:** Longshot.

***Attacks***

1. Taser at +2 for 5d6 nonlethal
2. Stun Baton at +1 for 4d6 + 2 nonlethal

**Psionic Talents:** Psychokinesis Level 3, Technokinesis Level 3.

**Equipment:** Taser, Stun Baton, Twenty Spare Taser Cartridges, Heavy Leather Jacket On Bike, High-End Anonymized Laptop with Durable Case and Heavy Encryption, Night Vision Goggles, Flash Light, First Aid Kit, Travel Mug of Death Wish Coffee (30 Doses), Prescription Bottle with 30 Doses of Adderall, Honda Grom Motorbike, $435 in cash.

## *Description*

*The Phreak once made a living as a black hat hacker, stealing identities and rifling through bank accounts at her leisure. A nearly-invisible and sophisticated thief, her greatest joy and hobby was breaking into secure networks and leaking confidential information for the lulz. However, she one day found herself in a very strange and fascinating database belonging to someone best not to mess with. It was a long time before anyone saw her again. When she reappeared after that fateful foray, she had been fundamentally changed. Now, as the Phreak, she can speak to machines with her mind, cracking anything from a biometric scanner to an old payphone. She can silence or shut down communications and electronics with a thought. She can physically manipulate metal objects without moving a hand. And what's more, not only can she hack into network databases and secure devices, but she can now hack into human minds. With a moment's concentration, she can break into your deepest thoughts, grabbing your bank account information and some blackmail-worthy dirt as well. While she might be mischievous and mercurial, the Phreak isn't a killer. She doesn't take lives, ever. But that doesn't mean she can't defend herself if she has to. One well-aimed Taser dart will have an assailant down for the count, leaving the Phreak to disappear once again into the shadows. You might not see her, but she sees you - and she knows all your dirty little secrets.*

# The Prism

***Attributes***

| | |
|---|---|
| **Strength:** | 5 |
| **Speed:** | 5 |
| **Wits:** | 8 |
| **Will:** | 8 |
| **Health:** | 30 (Knocked Out At 2 Health, Dead At -5 Health) |
| **Initiative:** | 10 + 2d6 |
| **Defense:** | 11 |
| **Power Points:** | 48 |

**Overflow Gauge:** ☐☐☐☐☐ ☐☐☐☐☐ ☐☐☐☐☐ ☐☐☐☐☐ ☐☐☐☐☐ ☐☐☐☐☐ ☐☐☐☐☐ ☐☐☐☐☐ (40)

**Skills:** Awareness: Expert (+2), Chemistry: Expert (+2), First Aid: Expert (+2), Stealth: Expert (+2), Electronics: Apprentice (+1), Hacking: Apprentice (+1), Negotiation: Apprentice (+1), Subterfuge: Apprentice (+1).

**Basic Training:** Brawling, Clubs, Drive, Locksmith, Medicine, Partying, Pistols, Security.

**Techniques:** Blitzkrieg.

***Attacks***

0. By Psionics

**Psionic Talents:** Pyrokinesis Level 3, Telekinesis Level 2, Psychokinesis Level 1.

**Equipment:** Lab Coat, Sweater, Jeans, Loafers, E-Cigarettes, Lighter, Cell Phone, Ford Fusion, Flashlight, First Aid Kit, Smelling Salts, Case of Espresso Shots and Flask of Taurine-Infused Caffeine Solution (30 Doses Caffeine), Hip Flask of Marijuana-Infused Grain Alcohol (7 Doses Alcohol), Half Ounce of Marijuana (40 Doses), Prescription Bottle w/ 10 Doses Adderall, Bong, Epi-Pen, $485 Cash.

## *Description*

*The Prism is something of a jack of all trades. Once a med student, he can patch someone up in an emergency, or understand the workings of mysterious drugs. He's also pretty good with computers and electrical equipment. He's good at noticing small details, or when something is out of place. He's personable, and good at talking to people from all walks of life. He's at ease in a party setting, with other academics, or talking to important CEOs. The Prism is something of a cool nerd, or a nerdy cool guy, and he has a lot of interests and a thirst for learning. He can do it all - and that includes his psychic powers. He can just as easily hear what someone is thinking as he can lift objects without touching them, or even throw fireballs. He's not afraid of turning up the heat; he can raise or lower the temperature of an enemy, or melt incoming bullets. He can retrieve a syringe from across a room, throw back an enemy grenade, or sling a knife or a flaming rock at an opponent with his mind. He can communicate with his friends without saying a word out loud, and reach out to his loved ones no matter where they are without the aid of a telephone. The Prism might not have the shock-and-awe of the Juggernaut or the Firestarter, but he is much more versatile and adaptable, and his varied skillset makes him invaluable. He also knows that practice makes perfect - and he learns fast.*

# The Pusher

***Attributes***

| | |
|---|---|
| **Strength:** | 4 |
| **Speed:** | 6 |
| **Wits:** | 8 |
| **Will:** | 8 |
| **Health:** | 24 (Knocked Out At 2 Health, Dead At -4 Health) |
| **Initiative:** | 12 + 2d6 |
| **Defense:** | 11 |
| **Power Points:** | 48 |

**Overflow Gauge:** ☐☐☐☐☐ ☐☐☐☐☐ ☐☐☐☐☐ ☐☐☐☐☐ ☐☐☐☐☐ ☐☐☐☐☐ ☐☐☐☐☐ ☐☐☐☐☐ (40)

**Skills:** Intimidation: Expert (+2), Awareness: Expert (+2), Stealth: Expert (+2), Automatics: Apprentice (+1), Bike: Apprentice (+1), Blades: Apprentice (+1), Brawling: Apprentice (+1), Locksmith: Apprentice (+1), Security: Apprentice (+1), Subterfuge: Apprentice (+1).

**Basic Training:** Climbing, Drive, Electronics, First Aid, Leadership, Pistols, Swimming, Throwing Weapons.

**Techniques:** Point Blank.

***Attacks***

1. Scalpel at +1 for 11
2. Suppressed Uzi w/ Laser Sight at +3 for 4d6 (three-round burst)
3. Ruger LCP at +2 for 1d6 + 4
4. Or via Telekinetically thrown Shuriken

**Psionic Talents:** Telekinesis Level 2, Psychokinesis Level 4.

**Equipment:** Scalpel, Ruger LCP, Suppressed Uzi w/ Laser Sight, Two Spare Clips for Each Firearm, Six Shuriken, Type I Body Armor Vest (2/6), Night Vision Goggles, Flashlight, First Aid Kit, Five Pack of Espresso Shots, Eightball Baggie of Cocaine (Five Doses), Beat-Up Kawasaki Ninja Bike, $114 in Cash.

## *Description*

*The Pusher might appear small and fragile, but she's really all business. She doesn't play around with niceties; she gets to the point, and does what needs to be done. With the right tools, she can do just about anything, and she has quite an arsenal at her disposal. Not only can she push objects around with her mind, but she can push people too. She can read your deepest thoughts and memories. She can change what you remember from the past day. And without your knowing it, she can make a blank piece of paper look like an ID. And while she's pushing your mind, you might not notice as she levitates your wallet, phone, or security keycard out of your pocket. And you certainly won't recall her walking away with them. Just because she can do all this, doesn't mean she won't kill you if she has to. She's a competent killer with a knife or a gun, and her telekinetic ability makes her blade-slinging all the more deadly. She can seem unassuming, blending in with a crowd - or she can make you understand exactly what she can do to you, and make you fear her. She uses every tool at her disposal to get what she wants. Maybe it's freedom from those who still hunt her down; maybe it's revenge.*

# The Seer

***Attributes***

| | |
|---|---|
| **Strength:** | 5 |
| **Speed:** | 5 |
| **Wits:** | 9 |
| **Will:** | 7 |
| **Health:** | 30 (Knocked Out at 3 Health, Dead at -5 Health) |
| **Initiative:** | 10 + 2d6 |
| **Defense:** | 12 |
| **Power Points:** | 42 |

**Overflow Gauge:** ☐☐☐☐☐ ☐☐☐☐☐ ☐☐☐☐☐ ☐☐☐☐☐ ☐☐☐☐☐ ☐☐☐☐☐ ☐☐☐☐☐ **(35)**

**Skills:** Investigation: Master (+4), Pistols: Expert (+2), Awareness: Expert (+2), Subterfuge: Apprentice (+1), Negotiation: Apprentice (+1), Intimidation: Apprentice (+1), Stealth: Apprentice (+1), Drive: Apprentice (+1), Hacking: Apprentice (+1), Automatics: Apprentice (+1).

**Basic Training:** Brawling, Locksmith, First Aid, Clubs, Rifles, Security, Chinese, Russian, German.

**Techniques:** Dodge.

***Attacks***

1. Colt Python at +2 for 5d6
2. AK-47 at +1 for 5d6+3 (5-round Autofire)
3. Taser X3 at +4 for 5d6 Nonlethal

**Psionic Talents:** Psychokinesis Level 3, Scrying Level 2, Telekinesis Level 1.

**Equipment:** Colt Python (.357 Magnum), AK-47 (7.62x39mm) with Folding Stock, Taser X3, 50 .357 Magnum Rounds, 100 7.62x39mm Rounds, 12 Taser Cartridges, Honda Civic, First Aid Kit, UV Light, Flashlight, Plastic Baggies, Cotton Swabs, Gloves, Navy Trench Coat, Slacks, Button-Down Shirt, Fake ID, Notebook, Smartphone, Laptop, $1000.

## *Description*

*The Seer is an investigator - he notices small details, and he knows what to look for. He can gather clues and follow leads like any other sleuth. But he has a few special gifts that put him high above anyone else in his field. He can peer deeply into the mind of just about anyone, discovering secrets from their past, or their most private thoughts. He can listen in on a conversation in another room or another building, spying on a location without the aid of any listening or surveillance devices. He can also read objects - by touching a murder weapon, he can see the scene of the murder as it happened. By touching a missing child's doll, he can see her abduction. He can also bag important evidence without even touching it, manipulating small objects with his mind. He's good at talking his way into an important area, or shooting his way out of a bad situation. While his powers might not provide him too much of an offensive advantage, his marksmanship and his quick thinking make him plenty dangerous in a fight. The Seer has an insight into the world that few others have, and the ability to discover the absolute truth. These abilities only fuel his search for the truth, driving him to unlock the secrets of the Conspiracies, and the hidden world that lurks beneath a veneer of normalcy.*

# The Stormbringer

***Attributes***

| | |
|---|---|
| **Strength:** | 4 |
| **Speed:** | 6 |
| **Wits:** | 9 |
| **Will:** | 7 |
| **Health:** | 24 (Knocked Out at 3 Health, Dead at -4 Health) |
| **Initiative:** | 12 + 2d6 |
| **Defense:** | 12 |
| **Power Points:** | 42 |

**Overflow Gauge:** ☐☐☐☐☐ ☐☐☐☐☐ ☐☐☐☐☐ ☐☐☐☐☐ ☐☐☐☐☐ ☐☐☐☐☐ ☐☐☐☐☐ **(35)**

**Skills:** Stealth: Master (+4), Automatics: Expert (+2), Intimidation: Expert (+2), Awareness: Expert (+2), Subterfuge: Apprentice (+1), Pistols: Apprentice (+1), Meteorology: Apprentice (+1), Electronics: Apprentice (+1).

**Basic Training:** Rifles, Brawling, Clubs, Drive, Negotiation, Demolitions, Locksmith, Hacking, Security.

**Techniques:** Reposition.

***Attacks***

1. FN FAL at +3 for 5d6+3 (3-round burst)
2. M9 at +1 for 2d6

**Psionic Talents:** Pyrokinesis Level 3, Magnekinesis Level 3.

**Equipment:** FN FAL (7.62x51mm) with folding stock, M9 (9mm Parabellum), 100 7.62x51mm rounds, 50-Count Box of 9mm Parabellum FMJ Rounds, 5 Doses Oxycodone, 5 Doses Cocaine, Type I Body Armor, Versatile Clothing, Boots, Long Coat, Cell Phone, Burner Cell Phone, Laptop, $1850.

## *Description*

*The Stormbringer is a cold and calculating operative; he knows his way around a gun, electronics, locks, and security systems. He's a B&E artist, slipping silently down corridors as he disables security cameras and leaves no trace of himself. His expertise with firearms, and his willingness to use them, make him a deadly opponent; without firing a shot, he can cow most security guards into submission. But more than that, the Stormbringer has a very special gift; he can control the weather. While he is more than capable of throwing fireballs, melting bullets, setting rooms on fire, or boiling someone from the inside, his affinity for the elements extends far beyond that of most of his peers. He can use the power of the wind to knock bullets aside, or send enemy combatants sprawling. He can call hurricanes to intercept drones or helicopters, or as a cover while he breaks into an important facility. He can summon lightning, using its power to bring down his opponents, directing the powerful bolts from the storms of his creation. He can even ride the wind, allowing the force of his gales to carry him into the sky. Do you think you're safe because your office is on the top floor? Think again. The Stormbringer has a grudge against the Conspiracies that have destroyed his life; he feels no particular guilt in responding in kind. There will be no mercy for the Conspiracy operatives that have wronged him. The Stormbringer is a true force of nature.*

# The Wizard

***Attributes***

| | |
|---|---|
| **Strength:** | 4 |
| **Speed:** | 5 |
| **Wits:** | 10 |
| **Will:** | 6 |
| **Health:** | 24 (Knocked Out at 4 Health, Dead at -4 Health) |
| **Initiative:** | 10 + 2d6 |
| **Defense:** | 13 |
| **Power Points:** | 36 |

**Overflow Gauge:** ☐☐☐☐☐ ☐☐☐☐☐ ☐☐☐☐☐ ☐☐☐☐☐ ☐☐☐☐☐ ☐☐☐☐☐ **(30)**

**Skills:** Awareness: Master (+4), Throwing Weapons: Expert (+2), Subterfuge: Expert (+2), Stealth: Expert (+2), Tabletop Gaming: Apprentice (+1), Drive: Apprentice (+1), Negotiation: Apprentice (+1), First Aid: Apprentice (+1), Calculus: Apprentice (+1), Oratory: Apprentice (+1).

**Basic Training:** Pistols, Rifles, Brawling, Automotive Repair, Climbing, Intimidation, Leadership, Electronics, Hacking, Survival.

**Techniques:** Bull's Eye.

***Attacks***

1. Throwing Knife at +2 for 1d4+4
2. Remington 1100 at +0 for 4d6
3. Taser at +0 for 5d6 nonlethal

**Psionic Talents:** Telekinesis Level 3, Pyrokinesis Level 3, Synchronicity Level 1.

**Equipment:** Throwing Knives (12), Remington 1100 (12 gauge), Taser, 50 12 Gauge Buckshot Shells, 6 Taser Cartridges, Ford Focus, Heavy Leather Jacket, First Aid Kit, Flashlight, 8 Doses Adderall, Button-Down Shirts, Geeky T-Shirts, Jeans, High-Top Sneakers, Textbooks, Polyhedral Dice, Smartphone, Laptop, Tablet, $2000.

## *Description*

*Appearing at first to be an awkward and affable geek, the Wizard is much more than meets the eye. He excels at cerebral pursuits; he's a passionate gamer, a speech and debate team member, and a math aficionado. He isn't quick to anger, but if you threaten him - or his loved ones - he's more than able to stand his ground and fight back. He is capable of controlling matter with his mind, shoving his enemies away with telekinetic force, or flinging his collection of throwing knives (or polyhedral dice, in a pinch) at an opponent without lifting a finger. He can throw fireballs, or set people ablaze. It's easy for him to throw a heavy and burning object into an unlucky foe, turning any item into a flaming missile. The Wizard has little to fear from bullets - he can easily knock them aside, or melt them in midair. And just for good measure, he's got a little extra bump of luck on his side; things tend to go his way. He might find a spare box of ammo just where he needs it, discover an abandoned car with its keys still inside, or just rake in the winnings at a craps game. While he may seem unassuming and bookish, the Wizard has truly harnessed the power of his intellect.*

# Tomorrow's Starlight (Part Two)

*By Devon Oratz*

**Tim Lucas, boy genius,** on a romantic date with the girl of his dreams in the fanciest, snootiest, Frenchiest most overpriced French restaurant he could find anywhere in Manhattan, somehow felt like he was literally in hell. It was, not least, the awkward silences. It was too easy, during them, to wonder what she was thinking. Too hard, afterward, not to peek, and find out. Impossible, then, not to be wracked with guilt.

"I just can't get over how beautiful you are," he had said, because it was true. Callie was literally perfect in every way: long, soft, shimmering blonde hair; even, light tan on flawless skin; bright blue eyes like the sun over a California beach. And Tim couldn't help but notice, and keep noticing, the pleasing way that her body filled out the black cocktail dress she wore. It made him think impure thoughts. (The little black dress was Dolce & Gabana, priced just under $2500 at Saks Fifth Avenue. Tim made the cashier give it to him for free.)

She had smiled, awkwardly – straight white teeth, peach lip gloss – and looked down to the side, clearly uncomfortable.

If Captain Nemo was 20,000 leagues under the sea with the Nautilus, Tim Lucas, boy genius, was 20 billion leagues out of his league with Callie Sloan.

So he'd pried into her mind, wondering what he was doing wrong, saw in the flash of green insight – which wasn't *seeing* at all, except when it was, which was usually merely a *knowing* that was of no sense at all, only of the mind – it was his *intensity* that disturbed her. So he tried to dial it down. Be more nonchalant. He didn't want to creep her out.

"Don't you like your lobster?" he asked her, on an island between those awkward silences where he had to practically sit on his hands, not to pry into her mind, worried what she was thinking.

"It's amazing," she said, washing down a mouthful of the *les Ravioles de Homard a l'Estragon*

*et Beurre Blanc* with the white wine, chateau d'something or other, that was highest up on the price list. "But I am stuffed. I just... cannot go on."

"We can box it up and bring it back to the squat, where it will have a higher dollar value than the entire building," he suggested. She laughed. Politely, maybe.

"It's just..." And she trailed off.

It was just that Tim really, really liked her. He liked her so much that he'd made sure that she got out of Bridgewater safely, with them, even though she wasn't even on Cyrus' list. He might not have done that, but he flashed on Cyrus' mind almost without helping it, like he did sometimes. And he fished around for what would happen to the rest of the town, the ones the Shop wasn't coming for. And found the answer there, at least to the best of Cyrus' knowledge.

According to The Institute's containment procedures, all non-Esper, non-employee inhabitants of the Bridgewater containment zone were expendable. That meant Callie. And her family. Not that the Shop necessarily would "liquidate" them, nothing that scary. Just that it was within their operating parameters to do so, an option to exercise if they saw fit. Scary enough.

Tim had needed to *push* Callie pretty hard to get her to come with them willingly. He felt bad about it, of course. But surely she'd forgive him for it, right? Knowing that he'd done it to save her life. Chris hadn't been happy when Cyrus brought Tim and Callie to rendezvous with the others. Tim got the impression, not from reading anyone's mind, just reading the situation, that there were others who *were* on the list that never made it back to the rendezvous. And neither had Chris's friends, who were supposed to bring them.

"That girl's not part of the fucking plan," Chris had said. Cyrus said he didn't have a choice, telling Chris that Callie was Tim's girlfriend, or something, which made Tim blush fiercely, cheeks burning. Tim had never had a girlfriend. But poor Cyrus. It really *wasn't* his fault. He really *didn't* have a choice. Tim had pushed him too.

"What is it?" Tim asked, reaching out with one hand to lightly grasp Callie's over the table cloth. It was so smooth, soft, and warm, and his heart was racing. She looked surprised, but didn't pull away. Around them were the hushed sounds of *La Grenouile*, conversation and high-end forks scraping high-end china. The candlelit restaurant was divided into romantic and intimate alcoves, but overall it was impressively spacious, the terraced balconies and multiple layers of the interior overflowing with the lushness of hanging gardens of exotic moss and massive floral bouquets.

"I'm not like you guys, am I?" she asked, softly.

It was a common source of anxiety for her over the last two weeks, a complaint nearly as common as that she had been kidnapped, wasn't allowed to call her parents because it "wasn't safe", and was being forced to live in a disgusting flop house full of degenerate freegan hipster filth. Kept on a short leash by a green-haired drug dealing lesbian with a shit-ton of piercings. Which Callie wasn't exactly thrilled with, and Tim was constantly trying to make it up to her. Since it was entirely his fault.

"I'm not," she went on, "...special."

But at the same moment she said that, he flashed on her mind, and heard, not wanting to, the thought lurking loudly in the midst of her pause: *not... a freak*.

She must have seen the expression on his face change, because she let go of his hand and looked at him, eyes widening in concern.

"What is it?" she asked. And he had to remind himself that she had not said out loud that he was a freak. And that he had no reason to be angry.

"I'm not like them either, you know," he said, cutting the last of his steak – that's *Bouef Poele* to you, buddy – into manageable pieces. He wanted to distance himself from the "freaks", from Ian and from Leona. Leona, who Callie seemed to dislike on some instinctive, pheromone-based *girl* level that Tim couldn't perceive or comprehend, but accepted.

Her lips pursed, then she smirked and her eyes danced playfully, mockingly, around the room. "Oh really, Monsieur Lucas? Then were you planning on, say, actually paying for all of this? With money? You know, like people do."

Tim reddened, embarrassed and defensive.

"Well, I mean, I'm not like Ian or Leona. Or Chris. I can't, I mean, what I do, it doesn't..."

...*kill people*.

They ate in silence for a short time.

"I mean, you can't blame a girl," she said finally, sounding a little sulky. "For getting kinda *jelly*. Given the situation."

Was that all it was? How could she be jealous of him if she thought he was a freak? He had no way of asking that. And no other response. He could tell her that *being* special wasn't exactly a piece of cake, that his powers meant he'd had to leave his family behind, maybe forever, certainly for a long time, without really saying goodbye. But thanks to him, it seemed like she had to deal with all of that too, and a bag of chips.

Without so much as a stupid human trick to show for it.

"I'm sure you're like us," Tim said earnestly. She huffed, blowing her hair up from her eyes and crossing her arms.

"Right," she said.

"Seriously!" he protested. "I've been researching it, and–"

"Like on Google?"

He stopped, flabbergasted. And eyes narrowing, concentrating, boring through her beautiful baby blues into her mind, sending his consciousness there, cascading green across her thoughts, until his questions became tendrils, reaching and probing. How could she think of him as a freak and be jealous at the same time?

And he found the ugly answer plain as day, just floating on the surface of her subconscious. As a cool girl, as a normal girl, Callie had always felt on some subconscious level bitterly envious of the nerds and losers that she ignored, mocked, or humiliated. On some level she thought that something about the freaks and the geeks, for all they rightfully suffered, was unique. Creative. Special. In a way she, as a cool girl, as a normal girl, would never be.

He was shocked to find himself feeling bad for her. Him, feeling bad for Callie Sloan, a beautiful creature superior to him in every conceivable way, the object of his crush, and his lust, and his unrequited obsession, for years. It was ridiculous.

Yet the stab of pity for her only seemed to deepen and strengthen the love he felt.

"I'm sorry," she was saying. Not knowing that he was probing her mind, thinking that the rude interruption was what had brought him to several minutes of silence. "You were saying?"

"I've been peeking into Mama Bear's mind," he said.

"You can do that?" she asked, sounding, Tim thought proudly, impressed. "Even though she's one of you?"

"I'm not sure what powers she has," Tim said, after finishing the last bite of his $150 *prix fixe* dinner. "Not least of all because she just seems to hang around and do drugs all day."

Callie giggled.

Callie and Tim had certainly *not* been friends back in school, before all of this. In fact, their history was painful and ugly to remember, a chronicle of her cruelty, his gullibility, her friends' amusement, and his pain. But now that they'd been kidnapped by grungie drug-addled hipsters, he was fairly sure he was, if only by default, her favorite person. Because unlike Ian and Leona, he wasn't buying into that scene at all.

"But I don't think she has any telepathic ability at all," he finished. "Reading her was no harder than reading any random guy off the street. Anyway, actually, like none of them were actually born with their powers. They took drugs to get them."

"Really?" she asked. "Drugs that give you super-powers?" She thought about that for a while. "Well," she said, "I guess that doesn't actually make *less* sense than anything else."

So he told her all about it. Because she'd been talking and thinking about her jealousy for weeks. They called the drugs PPECs. Psionic Power Enhancement Chemicals. The Zodiac Order – the cult, or whatever it was, that had

kidnapped them, or to hear their side of the story, rescued them, although Tim had his doubts about that – had stolen a bunch of them from some company Tim had never heard of called Abraxis Biotech and were dealing them around the country. There was a blue one, which would let you move things with your mind and bend spoons like Ian. There was a red one that would let you start fires like Leona. And there was a green one, which would let you read minds, and *push* people, like he could.

"And anyone who takes one of these drugs becomes... like, a super being or whatever?" Callie asked. "If that's true, why aren't there like, a million of you guys?"

Not everyone who took the drugs became an Esper. Tim knew that much. But he was sure. Sure that Callie was special. He believed in her.

"I guess there's only a few doses left," Tim said. He imagined he saw Callie's face fall. "But I convinced Mama Bear to give me one of each. So you can pick."

He grinned.

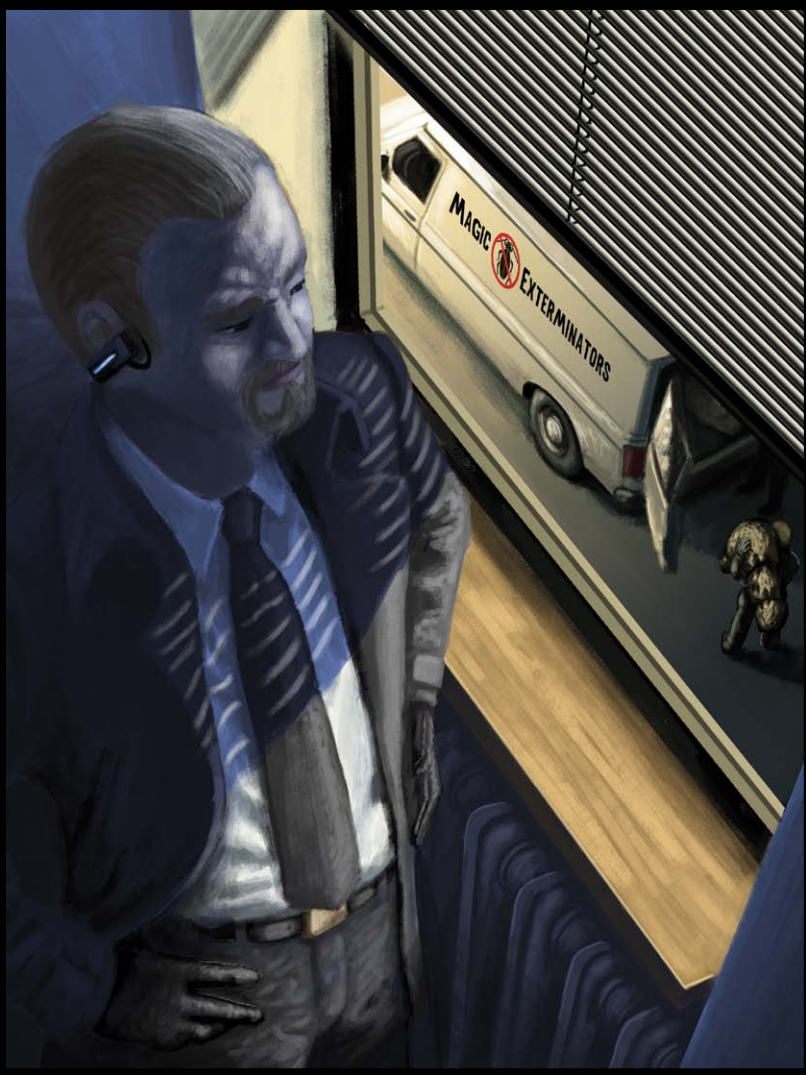
Tim didn't need to read Callie's mind to tell that she was scared of taking drugs in general, these drugs in particular. But when he read her mind, he saw that she wanted to, even if it did scare her. That meant, Tim reasoned, that really, the fear was just an obstacle.

One that he could remove.

**"THE SITE IS SECURE, SIR,"** said the voice in his headset.

Sande looked out the window of the vacant studio apartment, across the street and three doors down. Looking at the dirty white "Magic Exterminators" step van that had pulled up to the curb and the figures in white plastic clean suits with foil face-shields milling around like ants. Well-coordinated ants, in service of the hive, all as it should be.

"None of the primary targets were here, sir," the voice went on. Nervous to report failure, as well he should be. Failure wasn't acceptable.




But Sande wasn't the type to shoot the messenger. "We must have missed them by just hours."

"Did anyone escape the site?" All it would take was one degenerate piece of street filth making it out to warn the others, and everything would be so much more difficult.

"No, sir, but it was a few minutes until the last of those present were subdued, long enough for a phone call."

"Who did you get?" Sande asked, watching the equipment bags being carried out of the apartment that was being "bug bombed" by the exterminators. Some of them were about large enough to fit a body.

"Random nobodies, won't be missed. Groupies, starfuckers, dumpster divers and hangers-on mostly. One outstanding warrant, though."

"Don't keep me in suspense."

"Rose Klein. Albuquerque Incident. Maximum threat."

"Did Ms. Klein give you much trouble?"

"She had seven kinds of darts in 'er before she could manage to put down the bong and get off the couch, sir. They were *not* expecting us. She's resting comfortably now. Chemically pacified."

"The site is secure, you say?" Sande took his black leather gloves from his coat pockets and fastidiously pulled them on. "Then I'll be right down."

They were late for the show.

There were only like two numbers programmed into the unbelievably shitty, ten generations out of date "burner" cellphone that he'd been given. Both numbers quite deliberately not having names associated with them. But he recognized the one that belonged to Mama Bear easily enough, from memory. The texts were concise and bossy. *911 Tomorrow's Starlight having a secret show in Brooklyn, at this address. Be there by midnight. 911.* The 911 was a pre-arranged signal, rather obvious in Tim's opinion. It meant that the safehouse had been blown and they might need to get out of the city.

It had made his heart jump a bit, gave him that weightless freefall sensation in the pit of his stomach. But even still, he might have said "fuck it" anyway, and ignored the texts. He was enjoying his dinner date with Callie in spite of everything. And in spite of his better angels, his heart was giddy with anticipation of what might – even if only miraculously – happen *after* dinner.

But the deciding factor, was, strangely enough, that he really liked Tomorrow's Starlight. It wouldn't be up Ian's alley, he knew. Ian was more into Kid Cudi, Mos Def, Common, Wu Tang, Skrillex, all shit that Tim absolutely couldn't stand. Tim listened to the kind of sappy, aggressively sentimental, so-catchy-it's-transgressive pop-punk and post-punk that he was half a generation too young for, but which his brother, five years older, had hooked him on. Brand New, Offspring, Say Anything, Streetlight Manifesto, all the spiritual predecessors and successors of all of the above, all of the stuff that Ian called "standard issue white kid music". A phrase which Tim actually thought, nowadays, far better described the music that *Ian* listened to. His tastes, he thought, were relatively eclectic.

Callie liked Beyonce, Jay-Z, Rihanna and... Ke$ha.

Tim had learned this by reading her mind.

So perhaps Tomorrow's Starlight wasn't exactly Callie's cup of tea. But compared to the sheer vulgarity of the Leftover Crack "show" which had left both of them feeling slightly traumatized, the melodic post-punk anarchy of Tomorrow's Starlight would be a soothing balm for Callie. And, Tim had to admit, in spite of what Ian had called – months before this started – his "monomaniacal obsession" with Callie, the lead singer was unbelievably hot.

He told her about the secret show, but not the 911, not wanting her to worry. To his relief, she was down with it.

"We'd better leave right now," he said, "if we're going to make it to Brooklyn by midnight."

"But they have *crepes flambees*," she pouted adorably, pointing in protest at the menu. "You sure we don't have some time to grab a quick dessert?" she asked, leaning forward, the slender rope of gold and diamonds that lay across her appealing cleavage glittering hypnotically.

He was powerless to resist her. And the sounds of enjoyment that Callie made, as she ate dessert, made him think impure thoughts.

On the train out to Brooklyn, she seemed to want to get away from the others in the passenger car – most of them various combinations of homeless, dirty, or on drugs – and she wrapped her little arms around his waist under his sportscoat. She nuzzled his shoulder, seemed to be trying to burrow into his side like a tick. He could smell her

Chanel perfume and her tangerine shampoo, and put his arm around her shoulders.

Looking around the train, he felt better than he had ever felt before. His dick felt a thousand miles long. For the first time in his life he didn't feel inadequate or afraid. It felt like his very heart was swelling, getting too big for his chest to contain, bulging out to fill the subway car. His joy, his pride, uncontainable.

*I made a girl like me*, he thought, the only goal he'd obsessed over for his entire life, for a pretty girl, a hot girl, to like him. Girls like Callie, pretty, hot, blonde, perfect, were a lifelong obsession: unattainable as they were desirable. They were not for Tim. They were assholes like Chad Hutchins.

Until now. Until right fucking now.

*I made a girl like me,* he thought, feeling for the first time in his entire life like maybe being on planet Earth wasn't such a bad deal after all, *and I didn't even use my powers to do it.*

But deep, deep down, he knew that this was only half true.

He should have held her hand, he thought, as they got off the train to walk to the address they'd been given, nearly an hour late. But he chickened out.

Finding the building wasn't hard. The concrete of its walls couldn't contain the music that came welling out into the night, loud with joy. The big black bouncer in the security jacket didn't want to let them in since the show had already started and they didn't have any tickets. But Tim convinced him otherwise.

Inside the doors of the White Hart venue was a long, dark hallway, with a pale tile floor and smooth stone walls. They walked straight maybe fifty feet, the music getting louder with every step, until they emerged out onto a carpeted terrace with a marble railing. Ahead of them and below them was a large hall, dark, excessively crowded, and fearsomely noisy. Dark figures churned in a central mass, talking, dancing, bouncing, singing, drinking, passing joints in the shadows. Two ornate brass spiral staircases, one on the left, and one on the right, quite narrow, wound down from the terrace they stood on to the floor below. On the right of the hall, Tim could see a snake of concertgoers wrapped around the bathrooms. In the center of the hall was an enormous cash bar. On the left side of the hall was a smaller bar, apparently unmanned.

Above the stage was an enormous scrolling fresco, an abstract design culminating in a carving of a rabbit, directly above center stage. Actually on the stage, glowing in the spectral hues of the stage lights, The Downtown Fiction were playing.

"Oh, I like this song," Callie said, and Tim's heart surged with joyous relief.

"Me too," he said. "And Catch-22 are on next."

"You missed the first opening act," Ian was telling Tim, who had come late to the party. Bringing Callie along. Yay. Although Leona had to admit that Callie looked seriously good in that little black dress and shawl. Where the fuck'd she get that?

"What was it?"

"Bedpan Fight."

Catch-22 wasn't on stage yet, so you could actually kind of hear each other without yelling for a while, which was nice.

"There's actually a band called Bedpan Fight?" Tim asked, snickering, Callie joining in. "I missed literally nothing. By learning that there is a band called Bedpan Fight, my life is sufficiently enriched. Their musical output is actually irrelevant."

"They rocked, actually," Leona said, feeling weirdly defensive. It was just that Tim could be obnoxiously smug sometimes. She had to admit that in part it was his appearance, how he presented himself. She wasn't one of those nasty little bitches that would throw shade on a guy for being a little heavyset and not having the best skin. Even for not yet having learned the appropriate uses of cologne versus say, deodorant. But it was the way Tim put himself forward – the haircut that wasn't in style at any

point during his lifetime, the huge horn-rimmed Jason Schwartzman glasses, the navy blazer with bright brass buttons, and were those fucking *Oxfords* – felt like an affectation. Affectations on their own she found annoying, but this one just seemed perverse, tailor made to incite mockery from girls and Indian burns from bullies.

Nothing like the shitshow that Ian had had to go through back at Bridgewater, because of racist micropeens like Chad Hutchins.

Tim wasn't such a bad kid, she thought. And she'd actually felt pretty bad for him, with the whole Callie thing. But she really wasn't sure why Ian had even been friends with him, before.

Before everything went to shit.

Before what Ian called the Weirdness.

She looked around her, fenced in by a small cluster of friends around a huge sea of strangers, and took a pull from her Heineken. It was just her, Tim, Ian, and Callie right now. Just the original Bridgewater Four. Four kids from the same school, and no two of them, save Tim and Ian, would ever ordinarily have been mentioned in the same sentence, if not for Ian's "Weirdness" imploding their lives. If Rose was in the place, they hadn't been able to find her. And Lucky was off sulking after she'd given him the "cold shower".

The guy was so full of himself he seemed actually deranged, wouldn't stop hanging all over her and babbling in a way that was at once demented and terribly tiresome. He seemed too drunk to remember her name for a full minute at a time and hopped up on who the fuck knew what else. When liberal application of insults didn't deter him, she'd finally taken the pill he'd been trying to push on her with a swallow of beer, hoping that would get him to fuck off.

Stupid, she knew. But fuck it. Yolo, right?

When even that did not work – and because it looked like Ian was seething on the verge of maybe doing something far worse – she'd given Lucky the cold shower. Just glared at him – Ian said her eyes glowed, in the dark, when she'd done that – at the beads of sweat on his clammy, ghoulishly pale forehead. Imagined those droplets of sweat becoming more droplets then evaporating as the brow grew fevered and the capillaries under the skin surged with heat. She let it out slowly, like she'd trained herself, keeping a "hand" on the "valve" in her mind, ready to shut it any second. Actually, he offered more resistance than she'd thought – maybe he was a little bit of a firestarter himself – and she had to let out a little more, carefully, a little at a time. But in the end she'd raised his core temperature about ten degrees for a few brief seconds.

The body responded to fever by throwing off the excess heat. Hence, violent chills, hence, a cold shower. Lucky was persuaded to leave and Ian was slapping his thighs with laughter when he realized what had happened.

But she'd already taken the pill. How long ago now? It was hanging in the back of her mind, like the sword of Damocles. She'd been drinking for years, and the occasional harder stuff, too. But she didn't even know what the fuck this shit was. Magic beans, Lucky had called them.

Ian *really* hadn't liked Lucky creeping on her, pushing drugs. Leona was surprised to find that she herself wasn't all that bothered. Lucky didn't look or smell that bad, and his hands never went below her shoulders; his patter was more unhinged burnout than sleazy pervert. In short, she'd had worse. But Ian was about to do something rash. She didn't need to be psychic to sense it. She didn't know if that was because Ian hated lucky, Ian was trying to be a gentleman, if Ian had a thing for her, or some combination of the above. The idea of Ian having a thing for her gave her the most pause, mostly because she had no idea how she felt about that.

There had been too much other shit to process, last few weeks.

After giving Lucky the cold shower, she'd had to strip off her brown leather jacket – vintage, $20, thrift store – since she was feeling not just achy and stiff but hot and sweaty herself, having strained her powers harder than she'd expected. She wished for an opportunity to re-up her own deodorant.

After tying her jacket around her waist, she noticed that Ian seemed to be staring at her and after a moment's confusion, she realized that

her bra was probably visible through the thin white tank top she was wearing underneath.

She couldn't find it in herself to give a fuck.

Ian, Tim, and Callie had all been doing what all young people on drugs do: talking excitedly about music, what they liked, what they didn't, what everybody liked and what everybody could safely laugh about. Ian liked rap, she knew, but seemed to be enjoying himself anyway. Callie liked so much horrible music that Leona thought someone should call Guinness. Tim seemed even more excited about Catch-22 than he was about the main act, apparently a big fan.

"What about you?" Ian asked.

She blinked, unsure if she felt the drug coming on.

"Music you like?"

Leona grinned.

"Tomorrow's Starlight is literally my favorite band," she said, loudly, over the still-not-that-quiet radio that played between sets. "And the lead singer is insanely hot."

The guys looked at each other, at her, nodded, and burst out laughing.

Then a surge of cheering rose through the crowd as Catch-22 took the stage.

**Not sure if on too many drugs or not enough,** Leona thought, as she cornered Tim coming out of the men's bathroom. She'd told Ian what she planned to do. Both because she didn't want him to get weirdly jealous, and because she wanted someone's approval.

"Talk to you a second?" she asked.

"Isn't the main attraction about to begin?" he asked, gesturing toward the stage.

"There's almost always a huge wait before the last set," she said, which was in her experience true. She had to remind herself that Tim was the type who didn't even go to shows.

"Ok," he said. And they made for the stairs. Climbing them, she pulled her jacket back on. The inside of the sleeves felt just amazing.

The pill, whatever it was, had taken effect during Catch-22's set (during which the room surged with awesome energy of fans who had carried the torch for years, motherfuckers actually doing front flips off of the stage into the crowd after successfully rushing it). A lot of the effects were generically drug-y, hard to pinpoint to any one substance. The music sounded better, the colors become slightly stranger, more vivid and more vibrant, and her whole body tingled pleasantly with the vibrations of the universe. If she looked at any surface long enough, she could see its patterns and textures in new ways, like an aura. She felt like she was floating, and it was delightful. But none of that was different from smoking or drinking just the right amount. Actually, she had to remind herself that she had been smoking and drinking all day on top of whatever this was.

Stronger was a sense of euphoria. It wasn't just that her body and mind were vibrating intensely and harmoniously, but she felt like her soul was swelling, over-full with joy. She felt human, connected to her life, in a way she almost never had before. And she felt an urge to communicate, to connect with others, to talk and share, and to touch. She wondered what it would be like to actually fuck someone on this stuff.

And that made her think of Tim. Not *fucking* Tim – ew, no. But Tim and Callie.

Brightly colored stamps in the shape of a rabbit newly smushed onto on the backs of their hands, they stood out on the street in the October chill. Near the door, propped open with a brick, and a safe distance away from the nearest gaggle of smoking show-kids sucking down a quick cig. Lucky was with them, she saw, presumably selling them drugs. Or buying them. Whatever. "I feel absolutely naked unless I'm doing something illicit," Lucky had told her, part of his rap.

She believed him.

"What's this about?" Tim asked, looking back towards the door, worried about his date. She didn't need to be a mind reader to know that. And in doing so, he really was answering his own question.

"I need to talk to you about Callie," she said. The smell of dank drifted into her nostrils. The kids nearby were smoking something more than cigarettes.

"What about Callie?" he asked, already sounding defensive.

"Look, I know that Callie Sloan was kind of a bitch," she said lightly. "Everyone knew that, really. And what she did to you was *fucked* up. But..."

"Don't you dare talk about her that way!" he shouted, his voice actually breaking. Shrill. Bossy. She didn't care for his tone at all. In fact, it pissed her right the fuck off. But she also realized something she hadn't before, the insight crystal clear, liquid and smooth, with the pill she'd taken, whatever it was.

Tim was literally huffing and puffing in anger, eyes beady behind his glasses, his cheeks sunburn red. Embarrassed, she knew, because he didn't want anyone to know about Callie's hilarious "prank" of last year. Put briefly: Tim had stepped into a faux pas old as time, when he had failed to crush the crush he had on Callie Sloan, far above his own social station. When the rumor that such a "gross" boy had liked her reached Callie, she'd reacted with the cruelty characteristic of cats who had cornered small rodents, and of teenage girls. Messages and notes had circulated hinting that Callie had some degree of interest in Tim, but it was all just a set-up for the colossal humiliation that followed.

"You... really like her, don't you?" Leona asked, understanding dawning. It was at least not as bad as the worst case scenario that she had conceived of. That worst case scenario was a cruel extrapolation indeed, and she had to admit it; in part this was because Tim's power over minds scared the fucking shit out of her, just like her ability to start fires would scare the shit out of any *normal* person.

"Of course I do!" Tim said, now angry as well as perplexed. "What did you think was going on?"

He wasn't going to like the answer to that, she knew. Or anything that followed it. She wished that Tim had imbibed anything at all before this conversation. But Tim was, as far as she knew, what used to be called straight edge.

"Tim," Leona said, aiming for gentle, which was not her strong suit. "As far as I can tell, you can make anyone do anything you want."

"Ok, yeah..." Tim said, irritably, not wanting to connect the dots himself.

"You made Callie come with you. Got her into this."

Tim glared. Seethed. Swallowed whatever response first occurred to him. Took a deep breath.

"She was in danger there," he said. "I was protecting her."

"But Chris told me that she wasn't like us," Leona said. "Why would she have been in danger?"

"You saw what the town looked like, sounded like, as we were leaving. Gunshots, sirens, those creepy guys in suits, with the sunglasses, everywhere. Black helicopters." His eyes narrowed. "*Fires.*"

Leona swallowed and set her jaw.

"It wasn't safe for anyone there," Tim continued. "It was chaos."

"So she agreed to go?"

"No, I pushed her. A little. For her own good."

"Did you push her to do anything else, Tim?" Leona asked. And was shocked by what happened next.

"FUCK YOU!" Tim exploded. She was amazed to see that there were tears behind his glasses. Out of nowhere, he was on the verge of blubbering. And screaming at her. "You don't fucking know anything! You don't have one fucking clue what it's like! To be pathetic! A loser! Alone! You don't understand how long I've had NOTHING but loneliness! You don't understand anything! And who, and who, and who," he was sputtering now, tearful with rage, "who fucking *told* you it was any of your business, that you could talk to me like this, like I'm some kind of fucking RAPIST?"

"Get a room!" Lucky yelled over at them, overhearing. The gaggle of aging scene kids with him laughing in response.

Leona felt hot flames crawling up her face, felt her hair lifting into the air around her face on thermal currents, saw the ends of it, glinting like sparks, and broke out in sweat. She took in a deep breath and let it out slowly, curling and uncurling her hands slowly by her side, pushing her palms downwards as she took deep, rhythmic breaths. Until her hair fell limp again and her flush faded and the urge to reduce every single person outside this bar to a huge pile of ashes finally passed.

Next time she thought, she should take the oxy that Mama Bear had scored for her. Mama Bear said it would help her not "short circuit". She hadn't ever seen anyone short circuit, but she had a feeling it might be really bad. And she had an idea, the way she felt sometimes, what it might mean if she did.

It hadn't been Lucky and his idiot friends that had pushed her almost to the breaking point, to the point of shorting. It was Tim. The explosion of seething entitlement and resentment had been unbelievably ugly, like being screamed at by a spoiled child, but the subtext of it was even worse. She felt like she could read between the lines, that if she was going to interfere, he would *stop* her. Make her cooperate, or worse. And that thought, somehow, made her think of Frank, her stepdad.

Frank, with his beer gut and his mustard-stained wife beater and the reek of Old Spice and Jim Beam that traveled with him everywhere.

Frank, with his shitty leather belt and his fucking reality TV.

With his shadow spilling through the crack in her door.

With his tattooed hand on her waist.

Fucking. Frank. *Fucker*.

*Frank is ashes now*, a small calm voice from her center spoke, *and ashes have no power over the flame that consumed them*.

"Ok, Tim," Leona said, turning to go back inside.

"What?" Tim asked.

She stopped after a couple steps, looked at him, head tilted: yes?

"What ok?"

"Ok, I'm sorry for being a bitch," Leona said tiredly. "You're right, I'm sure it's none of my business. And if she's into you, then I'm an asshole for questioning that. It was a dick move. My bad." Whatever she'd taken made it much easier to shrug off her anger, as though it had been from years ago, and not just a few moments. Made it easier to give fewer shits.

Again, she headed for the door.

"I never..." Tim said. She looked at him, saw a crestfallen little boy, his shoulders slumped, eyes downcast, tears drying on his cheeks. "I never made her like me. I just... looked at what she didn't like about me, and I tried to change that, about myself. Looked at the stuff she liked, at what she wanted, and tried to give her that. Stuff like that. Little stuff. Is that so bad?"

Leona saw he really wanted validation on this. Part of her wanted to just give him a hug, but he seemed like the type to take that the wrong way, for sure. Part of her wanted to ask him: how do you really feel about it, deep down. Do *you* think it's ok? Because part of her thought that he should man up and fucking *know better*, god damnit. But in the end she actually burst out laughing.

"Tim," she finally said, not having been laughing at him, "I didn't have the firmest grasp on the politics of dating in the first place. Now that we've got psychic powers all up in this bitch, making shit *really* complicated," she spun two fingers around her ear in the *cuckoo* gesture, "Fuhgeddaboutit."

She punched him in the arm, lightly, and he blushed and gave a little smile. A good sign. She heard a loud cheer from inside, the show about to start.

No way in fuck was she going to miss the headlining act, Tomorrow's Starlight. Solving the problems of the fucking Callie Sloans of the world was a distant second.

**No fucking contest.**

# Special Projects: Wild Talents

**"Heh - Yeah, I know what you're thinking.**
**You're thinking two more years of this,**
**I'm gonna chuck it in and move to an easier place,**
**You're thinking two dollars a liter doesn't really look that far away,**
**And you're thinking as you look at your ring finger,**
**Hmm, was that really the right decision?**
**Hell yeah, yeah, I know what you're thinking."**

*- Mammal, "Think"*

This chapter contains the rules for using **Psionic Talents**, the unique abilities that make up the mechanical core of the ***Psionics*** roleplaying game as distinct from other games in the **DICEPUNK SYSTEM.** Information on selecting starting Talents appears in the **Character Creation** chapter (p. 47), while information on advancing Talents through use appears in the **(R)evolution** chapter (p. 189).

Unless otherwise indicated, using a Psionic Talent is an **Attack Action.**

## The Consequence of Power

Using Psionic Talents always has consequences. Three (actually four; one of them isn't covered in this chapter) things happen every time you use a Psionic Talent:

- *You must spend Power Points.*
- *You suffer proportional nonlethal damage from Drain.*
- *Your Overflow Gauge fills by a proportional amount.*

### Power Points

Activating Psionic Talents costs **Power Points (PP).** Activating a Psionic Talent always costs a number of Power Points equal at least to the Level of the Talent activated (***unless otherwise specified***), and may cost additional PP depending on the specific use of the Talent in question. If you do not have the required number of Power Points available, you cannot use the Psionic Talent in question unless you **Strain** (see p. 79).

Espers have PP available equal to **Will × 6.** Espers regain 10 Power Points for every hour of complete rest. Certain dangerous drugs can also restore Power Points.

### Drain

Using Psionic Talents also causes **Drain**, nonlethal damage inflicted on the user. The Drain damage taken is equal to half the Power Points spent to use the ability, rounded down (to a minimum of one point). If the Drain from using a Psionic Talent would render you unconscious, you can still "set off" the power (as long as you have enough PP) although you are knocked out afterwards. Because Drain damage is nonlethal damage, it cannot kill you, only render you unconscious.

### Using Psi Talents at Lower Levels

The default assumption of Psionics is that you are always using every Psi Talent at its maximum level. And if you don't declare otherwise, that's what your GM should assume. But you may at some point - due to reasons of dwindling PP or a rapidly filling Overflow Gauge - wish to use a power at less than its maximum level.

First off, you absolutely can.

The important thing to note here is that if you use a power at a lower level than your max level, all of the power's numerical functions are lowered correspondingly. As a simple example, if you have Pyrokinesis Level 4 and choose to invoke Pyrokinesis at only Level 2 (perhaps you only want to burn one person and not everyone within several yards of that person), not only does your fireball deal 2d6 initial damage and 2d6 damage over time instead of 4d6, you also add only +2 to your Pyrokinesis Attack Roll instead of +4 because you're using the power at only Level 2. For that use, you would pay only 2 PP, take only 1 Drain, and mark in only 2 Overflow Boxes, since you used the power at Level 2 rather than its full level.

Psionics assumes that even if you can use a Talent's "lower level" function, you are by default using the Talent at its full level. So, for instance, if you have Psychokinesis Level 5 and use Psychic Scream (an ability unlocked at Psychokinesis Level 3), then it is your full Psychokinesis Level that is used for the Attack Roll, for determining the penalty the target receives, and for determining the duration of the penalty, as well as for determining PP Use/Drain/Overflow Points, unless you declare beforehand that you are using Psychic Scream "only" at Level 3.

Drain damage tends to manifest as headaches and nosebleeds, although other specific and uncomfortable symptoms occur depending on the specific Talent used. Certain rare and dangerous drugs can temporarily prevent Drain, at a price.

## Overflow

Every time you use a Psionic Talent, a number of **Overflow Points (OP)** equal to the number of Power Points spent are added to your **Overflow Gauge.** Your Overflow Gauge starts at 0, and has a maximum value equal to **Will × 5.** When your Overflow Gauge is ***filled***, you **Overload** (p. 80).

Every turn (in combat) you don't use a Psionic Talent, your Overflow Gauge depletes by one point. Every minute (outside of combat) that you go without using a Psionic Talent, your Overflow Gauge depletes by 6 points. Certain rare and dangerous drugs can empty the Overflow Gauge faster, at a price.

### *Example*

*Sean (Will 7, 42 Power Points, 42 Health, Overflow Gauge cap of 35) is using his Telekinesis (Level 4) Talent. This costs 4 Power Points, inflicts 2 points of Drain damage on Sean, and fills his Overflow Gauge by 4 Points.*

## Strain

You can **Strain** to manifest Psionic Talents even if you're out of Power Points. When you do, you suffer extra Drain damage for each Power Point you don't have, and your Overflow Gauge fills by an amount equal to the *total Drain taken plus one*.

### *Example*

*Sean has only 1 PP left, not enough to use his Telekinesis Level 4. Rather than forgoing the use of the Talent, he chooses to Strain. This uses his one remaining PP, and he suffers 5 points of nonlethal damage; the two points of Drain that would normally be inflicted, plus three extra for the "missing" PP. Sean's Overflow Gauge fills by 6 points - one more than the amount of total Drain taken.*

## Overload

"Your idols burn in the fire
The mob comes crawling up
I'm reclaiming my mind
Destroying everyone"

*- Queens of the Stone Age, "Better Living Through Chemistry"*

An Esper who Overloads is in serious trouble, nearly as much as everyone around him. The first thing that happens is that the player loses control of the character, who spends the Overload period lurching around, clutching his head in blinding, mind-obliterating agony; they are no longer functionally a person, they are ground zero.

**The Esper in Overload suffers 1d6 lethal damage at the start of every turn** (not reduced by any form of armor) **they Overload,** and their Overflow gauge depletes by Will points at the start of every turn.

The Overload doesn't end until the Overflow gauge is emptied or the Overloading Esper is dead. Overloading Espers receive a -3 DM to Defense throughout the duration of their Overload.

Everyone within (Will) yards of an Overloading Esper on the end of that Esper's turn suffers Omega Damage based on the Esper's Will. Everyone out to twice this range suffers half this damage. Not even the Esper's allies are safe from the waves of destruction.

**Obliteradius:** Within Will yards.

**Omega Damage:** (Will × 2)d6.

**Secondary Range:** Will × 2 yards.

**Secondary Damage:** (Will)d6.

### "Controlling" An Overloading Esper

As they radiate immense destruction to everything around them, friends and foes alike, Espers take only one Move Action each Turn. That Move Action is spent to move exactly Speed Yards.

Each round, at the start of their turn, an Overloading Esper is allowed a Will Check. If they succeed, they can choose the direction they stagger blindly in. If they fail, they move in a random direction. Roll 1d6: on a 1 or 2 the Esper moves forward, on a 3 they move left, on a 4 they move right, and on a 5 or 6 they move backward. (If by chance you're using a battle mat square grid and have access to a d8, you could instead use a d8 to find the exact orthogonal or diagonal direction the Esper randomly lurches in.)

The spectacular manner in which an Overloading Esper kills everyone around them (and perhaps themselves) depends on their strongest **Primary Talent.** (If two or more Primary Talents are tied, the form the Overload takes is determined by the GM.)

Telekinetics emit gravitic pulsar waves which rend, smash, crush and implode their surroundings. Pyrokinetics incinerate everything around them in a maelstrom of nuclear flames. Psychokinetics emit excruciating psychic vibrations that cause heads in their vicinity to explode. Telekinetics who perish to an Overload burst; Pyrokinetics burn up; Psychokinetics' heads explode.

***N.B.:*** *Characters DO NOT receive any XP Bounties for anyone or anything killed while they are Overloading.*

## "Let's Talk About Our Motherfucking *Feelings*"

"Should I bite my tongue until
blood soaks my shirt
...Until the day I die, I'll spill
my heart for you."

*- Story of the Year, "Until The Day I Die"*

This section discusses the impact of strong emotions on psionic powers. While these rules are not *optional*, they are the one set of rules in the entire game that the GM is most explicitly encouraged to play *fast and loose* with. In other words, GMs should consider this a guideline to adjust to taste.

With that said, *extremely intense emotional situations* have two primary effects on Espers. The first is that intense emotions can easily trigger an Overload, just as easily as reckless overuse of Talents in a short time frame. The second is that intense emotions can occasionally and surprisingly unlock *new* levels of Psionic Talent, either temporarily or permanently. Neither of these effects is something that a Player Character can consciously activate or trigger.

What we mean by "extremely intense emotional situations" is hopefully mostly self-explanatory, but it can't help to throw out a few clarifications. First, such situations should not commonly arise. Secondly, when they do arise, they should arise *organically* from the narrative gameplay. What that means is that it should be *obvious* to the GM from the player's roleplaying whether an Esper is experiencing an extreme emotional outburst, what emotion that Esper is feeling, and whether or not it is justified by events and situations in the narrative. If the emotion isn't there in roleplaying or the justification isn't there in the narrative, then these rules don't come into play.

Finally, we are *not* talking about intense *positive* emotions here, we're talking about things like *fear*, *rage*, and *jealousy* (sadness, while not a positive emotion, does not have this effect, although sadness is distinct from *shock, surprise, terror,* and the *sudden despair of tragedy*). Love (except where it intersects with the above passions) and pleasure and joy don't cause Overload States or unlock new Talent Levels - unless an Esper is on *drugs*, then all bets are off. For this reason, mixing drugs and sex can be very dangerous for Espers, but even then a Will Check should be allowed to keep anything catastrophic from happening.

Firstly, these two effects are *not* usually either/or; although the GM can overrule this for dramatic reasons, the default assumption is that *both* occur when one occurs.

### Guideline - Effects of Extreme Emotion on Espers

| Emotional Intensity | Overflow Points Gained | Talent Unlock Burst (CAPs) |
|---|---|---|
| Major frustration; anger; fear; revulsion; significant physical pain | 3d6-5d6 | 4d6 + 10 |
| Extreme anger; fear; revulsion; hatred; disgust; shock; surprise; acute envy; blinding physical pain; especially in the presence of helplessness | 6d6-8d6 | 8d6 + 20 |
| Explosive rage; total, unthinking terror and panic (including that harm will befall a loved one right before your eyes); genuine, all-consuming hatred and lust for revenge; blinding jealousy and envy; especially in the presence of seemingly total helplessness | 9d6-12d6 | 12d6 + 60 |

Secondly, the accumulation of Overflow Points follows all standard rules for Overflow Points and potential Overload, with the caveat that an extremely emotional situation *can* ignore the normal effects of Overload preventative medications like Pretarine at the GM's discretion. These Overflow Points, whether they trigger an Overload or not, dissipate at the normal rate.

Finally, the **Talent Unlock Burst** mechanic requires a bit of special explanation. These are CAPs (see p. 193) of any Talent color of the GM's choice that the Esper in question already has. *If* the CAPs are enough to make the Esper reach threshold, then the Esper immediately gains a new level of *any* Talent of that color that is possible and that the GM deems dramatically appropriate to the situation. Additionally, the Esper instantly regains Power Points equal to their Will plus two Power Points for every six rolled on the Talent Unlock Burst dice that were rolled.

**If the CAPs are not enough to make the Esper reach threshold, then they are not received at all. It is all or nothing.**

### *Example*

*An Institute Agent is about to callously execute an Esper's girlfriend to prove a point about loyalty and obedience. The Esper is in very bad shape, she is being physically held down, is almost out of Power Points, and has taken a lot of damage, much of it from Drain.*

*The GM decides that this is definitely a highest-level emotional intensity situation from the story context and the player's roleplaying, and makes the call that the Esper gains 10d6 Overflow points and 12d6 + 60 Talent Unlock Burst CAPs. The Esper has Telekinesis Level 4 and has accumulated 33 Blue Caps toward a Blue Threshold of 80, so the Talent Unlock Burst will automatically go off, but the GM rolls anyway (to see how many sixes are rolled) and gets a total Talent Unlock Burst CAPs score of 106 (!), including three sixes. The GM could immediately award the Esper the fifth level of Telekinesis, but as the Esper meets all the requirements for Necrokinesis, the GM decides to award the Esper the first level of Necrokinesis instead,* immediately *granting the power to the Esper to stop hearts with her mind alone! The Esper also immediately regains 14 Power Points (8 for her Will of 8 plus 2 for each 6 rolled).*

*Now the question is whether the 10d6 Overflow points will cause her to Overload, killing everyone around her, including her girlfriend.*

### Permanency of Talent Unlock Bursts

In the end, it is up to the GM's discretion on a case by case basis whether the new Talent Level unlocked is *permanent* or *temporary* (lasting only until the end of the scene, or until the Esper rests). If the GM has no particular feeling on this one way or another, he can allow the Esper to make a Will Check. Success means the Talent is gained permanently, failure means it is lost at the end of the scene.

If the GM is considering the possibility of having the Talent Level gained be temporary, he should be sure to have the player write down the new CAPs and Talent Level parenthetically, for later erasure.

# TELEKINESIS

Telekinesis is the ability to move, manipulate, or hurl macroscopic objects through sheer will alone, and is arguably the most basic and "coarse" Primary Talent. More "advanced" Talents work on the same principal, but a finer scale. Pyrokinesis manipulates molecular activity to increase or decrease temperature, while Psychokinesis manipulates neurons and brain waves to alter brain activity.

However, as gross and obvious as its effects may be, the raw effectiveness of Telekinesis cannot be denied.

**Telekinesis is the Parent Talent of: Biofeedback, Necrokinesis, and Somakinesis.**

## -Telekinesis Level 1-

**Remote Manipulation:** You can move unattended objects within line of sight weighing no more than one pound. If fine manipulation is required (such as operating a keypad), you must make a successful Telekinesis Test; if a Skill is involved (such as remotely picking a lock) you must make an appropriate Skill Test *and* a successful Telekinesis Test. Continuing to "hold" an object costs only one additional Power Point for each turn beyond the first.

You can only move one object with Telekinesis at a time. You cannot strike enemies with telekinetically held objects or hurl telekinetically held objects with sufficient force to damage enemies.

## -Telekinesis Level 2-

**Remote Manipulation:** You can now move objects weighing as much as ten pounds, and manipulate up to two objects at once, **although "picking up" one object is always one Attack Action**. You still cannot seize held objects.

You can throw or strike with Telekinetic objects from baseballs to chairs and tables

to motorcycles and tanker trucks as your Telekinesis increases; this is a Telekinesis Attack Roll. Unwieldy objects may suffer a penalty, while particularly large objects might function as an area attack. Picking up or swinging with an object is an Attack Action; throwing an already held object is a Move Action.

If the object in question is a weapon, use its normal damage; if not, the GM should assign the object damage based on its size, shape, and general hazardousness (or see p. 182). If a weapon's damage formula includes Strength, replace Strength with Will. If a weapon's damage formula includes Speed, replace Speed with Wits. See p. 186 for a list of sample thrown objects.

## -Telekinesis Level 3-

**Remote Manipulation:** You can now move objects weighing as much as one hundred pounds; for rules purposes, this does not include people, not even very light ones. You can now move up to three objects at a time with Telekinesis.

**Telekinetic Disarm:** You can now target held objects within line of sight with Telekinesis, to pull them out of the hands of the character holding or wielding them. (Worn objects like necklaces, belts, and rings can be grabbed and pulled off, but not clothing.) First, you must "hit" the item with a Telekinesis Attack Roll; use the holder's Defense. Then you must beat the holder on a Will vs. Strength Contest.

**TK Gunslinger:** You can wield an extra firearm with Telekinesis, allowing you to make an extra firearm Attack each turn, for a total of three firearm Attacks per turn if already dual-wielding. Holding and using a firearm with Telekinesis costs one Power Point per turn. You can also reload all held or telekinetically held firearms using Telekinesis with one Move Action and 1 Power Point per weapon.

**TK Push:** You can use Telekinesis as a blunt force weapon to attack enemies. Make a Telekinesis Attack. The Attack deals (Telekinesis Level)d6 damage and knocks the target back half that many yards, rounded down. A target that hits an object takes additional damage and may fall prone at the GM's discretion.

**TK Barrier:** As a non-action, when you would be hit by any physical Attack, you can spend 2 Power Points to increase your Defense by 2 to Telekinetically deflect the Attack.

## -Telekinesis Level 4-

**Remote Manipulation:** You can now move (and throw) objects weighing as much as four hundred pounds; for rules purposes, this includes all people, even yourself (see below). You can now move up to four objects at a time with Telekinesis.

**TK Grab:** You can now grab other characters with Telekinesis. To do so you must use an Attack Action and hit them with a Telekinesis Attack. Once you've grabbed a character with Telekinesis, that character can act normally (such as firing a gun) but cannot move - you're holding them in the air and their feet are not touching the ground. A character grabbed with Telekinesis suffers a Penalty to Defense equal to your Telekinesis Level for as long as they're held. Use of the Dodge Technique in response to a *TK Grab* automatically succeeds (see p. 53).

You can perform the following actions on an already-grabbed character as a Move Action at an additional cost of 2 Power Points (1 Drain, 2 Overflow).

**Throw:** The target flies (Will)d6 yards in a direction of your choice, and suffers damage depending on what they hit at the end of their flight. The damage is calculated based on the maximum direction they could have traveled, even if a surface cuts them short. Fragile surfaces such as glass break, and the target continues through them until the distance runs out or they hit something solid. They are no longer "grabbed" and must be picked up again.

| Surface Hit | Damage Taken |
|---|---|
| **Soft/None /Water** | Half Distance Traveled In Yards [Nonlethal; Round Down] |
| **Hard (Floor, Wall, Ground, Ceiling)** | Distance Traveled In Yards |
| **Deadly (Fire, Impaling Spikes, Crushing Machinery, Moving Traffic, Moving Train, Long Fall, Toxic Waste, Vat of Acid)** | Twice Distance Traveled Or More (GM's Discretion) |

**Crush/Rend:** You pull the target apart or squeeze him together. This deals damage equal to (Will)d6 + (Will × 2), but the target doesn't go anywhere and is still "grabbed".

**Choke/Squeeze:** You choke the target into submission, dealing (Will)d6 non-lethal damage.

**Levitation:** You can pick up yourself in order to telepathically fly up to (Will × 4) yards per turn; activating Levitation (a Move Action) costs full Power Points, but maintaining it costs only 2 PP per turn. While Levitating, you are immune to being Telekinetically grabbed or pushed by a character with a Telekinesis Level equal to or less than your own. You count as one of your carried objects.

## -Telekinesis Level 5-

**Remote Manipulation:** You can now move (and throw) objects weighing as much as one ton (2,000 pounds), and can move up to five objects at one time.

**TK Gunslinger:** You can now wield two extra firearms (and make two extra firearm Attacks per turn) with Telekinesis, for a total of four firearm Attacks per turn if dual wielding. Each extra shot still costs 1 Power Point.

**Improved TK Barrier:** You can now increase your Defense by up to 4 Points as a non-action by spending the same amount of Power Points in response to a physical Attack that would hit you.

## -Telekinesis Level 6-

**Remote Manipulation:** You can now move (and throw) objects weighing up to *ten tons* (20,000 pounds), or even heavier at the GM's discretion. The upper limits of your ability to move matter are somewhere between an 18-wheeler tractor-trailer with cab and cargo and a 747 jet. Throwing skyscrapers is not possible, but destroying entire buildings (directly or indirectly) won't pose much challenge. You can hold and move up to six objects at one time.

**TK Blast:** This massive blast of force functions like TK Push, but effects an area (circular burst) of Will yards in radius, and deals (Will)d6 damage to everything in that area. Knockback is calculated as normal for TK Push, although the direction is random.

**Improved Crush/Rend:** Your Crush/Rend damage increases to (Willx2)d6 + (Will × 2).

**Improved Seize:** You can now (attempt to) grab up to two separate people or objects with one Attack Action. You must make two separate Attacks.

If you choose to grab only one character at a time, that character is completely helpless while held, and can neither move nor act.

| Telekinesis Level | Weight Lifted | Objects Held | Other Capabilities |
|---|---|---|---|
| **1** | 1 Pound | 1 | None. |
| **2** | 10 Pounds | 2 | Throw/Strike with held objects. |
| **3** | 100 Pounds | 3 | As above plus: Disarm, Gunslinger, Push, Barrier |
| **4** | 400 Pounds | 4 | As above plus: Grab (Throw, Crush/Rend, or Choke/Squeeze) and Levitation. |
| **5** | 2,000 Pounds | 5 | As above plus: Improved Gunslinger, Improved Barrier |
| **6** | 20,000 Pounds | 6 | As above plus: Blast, Improved Crush/Rend, Improved Seize |

## PYROKINESIS

Pyrokinesis is a Primary Talent that grants the ability to modify matter and energy by accelerating or decelerating molecular activity. Speeding up molecule movement increases temperature; slowing it down decreases it. This translates to the ability to make air and people spontaneously combust into flames, to melt a solid metal door to slag, or to boil someone in their own skin. Pyrokinesis is the most purely destructive of all of the Primary Talents, and one of the most feared (and most lusted after).

Depending on scientific and cultural perspective, a few Espers and psionic researchers believe that the ability to slow molecules (and *cool* matter) is a separate Talent ("Cryokinesis"). Most, however, believe that making things colder is the same principle as Pyrokinesis, and in spite of the restrictive name, falls under the same Talent. Espers with Pyrokinesis who can only make things hotter or colder, not both, are the exception, not the rule.

*For rules purposes, using "Cryokinesis" to freeze things/people (to death) is identical to using Pyrokinesis normally; the only difference is description.*

**Pyrokinesis is the Parent Talent of: Entropy, Magnekinesis, and Synchronicity.**

## -Pyrokinesis Level 1-

**Ignite:** You can create a flame about the size of a lighter's. This flame can appear in your palm or anywhere within line of sight. It does not burn you. If you throw this flame at someone or attempt to cause it to manifest on someone's body or clothing, make a Pyrokinesis Attack against their Defense.

If you hit, they suffer 1d6 fire damage and must make a Speed Check. If they fail, they are set on fire, and suffer 1d6 additional fire damage every turn until they succeed a Speed Check (a Move Action) to extinguish themselves by rolling or submerge themselves in water.

## -Pyrokinesis Level 2-

**Ignite:** You can now create a fireball the size of a closed fist. This flame deals 2d6 initial fire damage and 2d6 fire damage per turn if it ignites the target.

**Temper, Temper, Temperature:** You can now use Pyrokinesis to increase someone's temperature directly. Choose one unfortunate within line of sight and make a Pyrokinesis Test. If you succeed, you begin raising their temperature. Their temperature increases by (Pyrokinesis Level)d6 degrees Celsius for every turn you concentrate. Activating is an Attack Action that costs full Power Points, but maintaining it is a Move Action that costs only 2 Power Points (1 Drain, 2 Overflow Points) and requires no roll.

Characters start at 37° Celsius. For every three degrees a character's temperature is raised (or lowered) from this point, they sustain 5 damage, unreduced by even flame-retardant armor. All characters have their temperature return to normal at a rate of +/- one degree Celsius per turn.

If any character's temperature increases to 100° Celsius, they instantly and automatically die.

Once a character's temperature is reduced below 0° Celsius, they suffer 5 damage for every *one* point by which it is further reduced, instead of suffering temperature change damage at the normal rate.

This ability can also be used on inanimate objects. See the list of Melting Points and Autoignition Temperatures on p. 182. Non-organic objects (metals) have rather inconveniently high melting points for this resolution mechanic to work. Therefore, the **temperature increase inflicted on metals is multiplied by a factor of 50**. An Esper with Pyrokinesis Level 2 could heat a steel lock by 100-600 degrees Celsius per turn of concentration.

The minimum temperature anything can be reduced to is -100° Celsius. Psionic power cannot cool anything to a colder temperature than -100° Celsius.

**Heat Shield:** You now automatically reduce all fire damage you sustain by 10 points, to a minimum of 0 points. Additionally, you automatically ignore the first 10 degrees of temperature change that would be inflicted on you each turn.

## -Pyrokinesis Level 3-

**Ignite:** The fireball you create is now the size of a small campfire. This flame deals 3d6 initial fire damage and 3d6 fire damage per turn if it ignites the target.

**Melt Aura:** You can spend 2 Power Points (1 Drain, 2 Overflow Points) to convert any incoming firearm damage into fire damage (which is then reduced by your Heat Shield) by melting the bullets, as a non-action in response to being hit by a firearm Attack. While you are Overloading, this ability functions automatically at no cost. While Melt Aura does "convert" and then reduce the incoming damage from tranquilizer darts and injection bolts, the drug inside is not fully sublimated before it is absorbed into the blood stream, and thus has its full effect.

An Esper whose strongest Primary Talent is Pyrokinesis automatically uses Melt Aura against all Attacks that hit while Overloading. Power Point and Overflow expenses are ignored for this ability while Overloading.

## -Pyrokinesis Level 4-

**Ignite:** The fireball you create is now the size of a bonfire. This flame deals 4d6 initial fire damage and 4d6 fire damage per turn if it ignites the target.

**Conflagration:** Your fireball now also affects every character within (Pyrokinesis Level) yards of the primary target. Make a Pyrokinesis Attack against the primary target's Defense as normal; secondary targets are hit if they fail a Speed Check; secondary targets hit for initial fire damage need to make a second Speed Check to avoid being set on fire. Note that if the initial Attack misses, no fireball manifests, at least not close enough to effect any secondary targets.

**Improved Heat Shield:** You now automatically reduce all fire damage taken by 20 points, and automatically ignore the first 20 degrees of temperature change that would be inflicted on you each turn.

## -Pyrokinesis Level 5-

**Ignite:** The flame you produce could now be fairly described as an inferno. It deals 5d6 initial fire damage and 5d6 fire damage per turn to all targets that are ignited.

**(In)flammable:** The Speed Check to avoid being ignited by one of your fireballs (or for an ignited character to extinguish themselves) is now a Hard Speed Check.

**Temper, Temper, Temperature:** The number of degrees you can adjust someone or something's temperature each turn is doubled.

## -Pyrokinesis Level 6-

**Ignite:** Your fireball is a holocaust of fiery destruction. It deals 6d6 initial fire damage and 6d6 fire damage per turn to all targets that are ignited.

**Inferno:** The "secondary radius" of your fireball increases to Will yards. Secondary targets must now succeed a Hard Speed Check to avoid being hit.

**Master Heat Shield:** You now automatically reduce all fire damage taken by 30 points. You are immune to having your temperature altered against your will.

| Pyrokinesis Level | Ignite Damage | Temperature Change/Turn | Heat Shield | Other Capabilities |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | 1d6 | None. | None. | None. |
| 2 | 2d6 | 2-12° Celsius (100-600° Celsius vs. Objects) | 10 Points | None. |
| 3 | 3d6 | 3-18° Celsius (150-900° Celsius vs. Objects) | 10 Points | Melt Aura |
| 4 | 4d6 | 4-24° Celsius (200-1200° Celsius vs. Objects) | 20 Points | Melt Aura, Conflagration |
| 5 | 5d6 | 10-60° Celsius (500-3000° Celsius vs. Objects) | 20 Points | Melt Aura, Conflagration, (In)flammable |
| 6 | 6d6 | 12-72° Celsius (600-3600° Celsius vs. Objects) | 30 Points | Melt Aura, (In) flammable, Inferno |

# PSYCHOKINESIS

While some well-meaning science fiction authors and game designers confuse Psychokinesis and Telekinesis, for our purposes Psychokinesis is defined as the Primary Talent to read and manipulate human minds. It works on the same principle as Telekinesis, but a finer scale, adjusting neurons and brainwaves. However, that doesn't mean that the practitioner is consciously twiddling around individual neural signals. The Talent itself in many cases translates intent to results. Psychokinesis does not work on animal minds (on alien minds, if they exist in your campaign setting, on mindless creatures, or on other non-human minds); scarce reports of animal Psychokinesis exist, but as a distinct (and altogether less vital) discipline.

Most traditional forms of psychic power and extra sensory perception fall under the purview of Psychokinesis; of course, most historical examples of those powers are still the work of con men. Ironically and recursively, many of history's best con men subconsciously leveraged Psychokinesis to sway their marks. At higher levels, Psychokinesis can push and trick weak minds; at highest levels, the Talent can dominate weak minds utterly. For this reason, many consider it the most insidious and dangerous Talent of all.

**Psychokinesis is the parent Talent of Osmoses, Scrying and Technokinesis.**

## -Psychokinesis Level 1-

**Read Surface Thoughts:** You can spend 1 Power Point (1 Drain, 1 Overflow Point) to read the surface thoughts of sentient beings within line of sight. To do so, you must concentrate for one turn (a Move Action) and make a Psychokinesis Test. If you succeed, continuing to read their thoughts continues to cost Power Points (inflict Drain, and fill Overflow) for every minute that you maintain the reading, but no further Tests are necessary.

A character specifically trying to block their thoughts from being read can do so only by succeeding on a Hard Will Check every turn - this

supersedes your success. Only a character aware of Psychokinesis would even think to try this.

The GM can choose to tell you their thoughts verbatim, or give you a general idea of what they're thinking about. This ability doesn't read emotional content, just thoughts, and even then, just surface thoughts. If you don't know the target character's primary language (as a Skill), you must succeed a Hard Wits Check to "translate" their thoughts.

**Telepathy:** You can telepathically communicate with any human being you intimately know (who need not be within line of sight) or any human being within line of sight (who you need not intimately know) by spending 1 Power Point (1 Drain, 1 Overflow Point) per turn. This requires no Test and is a Free Action. The normal per-turn limit on communication applies.

This communication is restricted to words, so language barrier is an issue.

If that person doesn't have (at least) Psychokinesis Level 1, this telepathy is strictly one-way; also, the targeted character may think they're going crazy.

You can have multiple telepathic channels open at once, but it costs one extra PP (1 Drain, 1 OP) for each channel kept open at a time.

## -Psychokinesis Level 2-

**Read Memories:** You can now read all information that a targeted mind has stored in the past 24 hours. Mechanically, this works just like *Read Surface Thoughts* except it costs more, and language barrier is a non-issue. Memories that are less "fresh" than that - memories made more than a day ago - are still inaccessible to you.

You must spend the cost and succeed a Psychokinesis Test for each individual piece of information that you read. What counts as an individual piece of information? Hopefully you and the GM can agree on a reasonable definition. Obviously, if you want to extract a passcode that was recently changed, that's one Test; you don't need to make a Test for each digit of the code. The same is true with a proper name, the explanation of a discrete event, favorite ice cream flavor, the recent location of an item, and so on; each of those is one Test. However, whether "how someone's day went" is one piece of information or several is up to the GM.

**Telempathy:** You can now share thoughts, feelings, current sensory input, and memories with a (willing) subject. Language barrier is no longer an issue. If they don't have Psychokinesis Level 1, this sharing is still one-way. The cost is unchanged.

**Psychokinetic Immunity:** You are immune to the Psychokinesis Talent of all characters whose Psychokinesis Level is less than yours, with the exception of the Psychic Scream power, which can be used on you by "weaker" Psychokinetics. This scales appropriately as your Psychokinesis Level increases.

## -Psychokinesis Level 3-

**Read Deep Thoughts:** You can now read a character's deeper thoughts and older memories; deeply held beliefs, defining events, opinions, preferences, and principals can all be read. Memories from up to one year ago are also fully accessible.

**Improved Telempathy:** Your telempathic communication can now be two-way, even if the character you're communicating with doesn't have Psychokinesis.

**Psychic Scream:** You can use Telempathy to deafen a target with psychic static. Make a Psychokinesis Attack against their Defense. If you succeed, the target suffers a negative Difficulty Modifier and Defense Modifier equal to your Psychokinesis Level - 1 for (Psychokinesis Level) Turns as their mind is buffeted with a wash of nonsensical sensory data. The target's Overdrive Gauge (if they have one) is also filled by 3d6 points.

## -Psychokinesis Level 4-

**Master Thought Reading:** All limitations on the thoughts and memories you can read and access are now lifted. You can read thoughts of any depth and memories of any age. GMs should assign the associated Psychokinesis Test a Difficulty Modifier based on the age/depth of the memory/thought in question.

**The Push:** You can now push the weak mind. The Push comes in two forms: a trick, or a command. A trick fools a human within line of sight with a mental illusion, tricking their senses. You could make them not see you, perceive you differently, see a gun in your hand when there is none, see no gun when there is one, see a $1.00 bill as a $100.00 bill, and so on. A command is an imperative phrase or short sentence with no direct, permanent consequences, like "sneeze", "turn around", "drop the gun" and so on; you can't command someone to shoot themselves or to go blind.

You can only use The Push on characters who you can make direct eye contact with and who can understand what you're saying. Against normal humans, to use The Push, you need only spend the activation cost and hit the target's Defense with a Psychokinesis Attack. Against fellow Espers, you must do that, and then succeed a Will vs. Will Contest.

**Memory Alteration:** You can remove or alter memories that a target has formed in the past 24 hours or add false memories that occurred within the same timeframe. This requires one minute of unfettered access to the target's mind; the target must remain within line of sight for the entire time. You must make a Psychokinesis Test for each memory removed, added, or altered. The target can make a Will Check (Difficulty Modifier set by the GM based on the memory's plausibility) to disbelieve each false added or altered memory.

## -Psychokinesis Level 5-

**Dominate:** Dominate is like a more powerful version of the command option of Push. Essentially, once you establish domination over a character, they will do everything you say until line of sight is broken, or one party or the other loses consciousness. "Put the gun in your mouth and pull the trigger" is a perfectly valid command for a dominated character. A dominated character is your slave for the duration.

To dominate a human character within line of sight, you must first use an Attack Action and hit their Defense with a Psychokinesis Attack. Once you've done that, you must beat them on a Will vs. Will Contest. If you win the Contest, they're dominated. You can command them as a Free Action, a Move Action, an Attack Action, or longer, depending on the complexity of the command.

Dominated characters get individual Hard Will Checks to resist commands that are antithetical to their nature or harmful to them. For overtly suicidal actions, or actions that would harm loved ones, dominated characters are allowed Will Checks or Easy Will Checks (GM's discretion) instead of Hard Will Checks.

**Remote Control:** Remote control is an even more powerful domination; you eject someone from their body and "pilot" their actions directly, using them as a puppet. To remote control a human character within line of sight, you must make an Attack Action and hit their Defense with a Psychokinesis Attack. Then, you must beat them on a Will vs. Will Contest. If you win, they are ejected from control of their own body, and become a helpless passenger in their own head.

Meanwhile, your own body becomes completely limp and helpless and can be effortlessly done any harm you can imagine by any enemies who mean you any at all. You ignore your own physical Attributes (Strength and Speed and derived statistics) and Skills, and use the enemy's instead while you're piloting their body. You return to control of your own body, and relinquish control of your victim's, when you choose to (as a Move Action), when your victim loses consciousness, or when your victim is killed - the latter case causes you to suffer 5d6 nonlethal damage and fills your Overflow Gauge by 5d6 points from the trauma.

Each turn you control the victim in combat costs 2 Power Points (1 Drain, 2 Overflow). Each minute you control them outside of combat costs 2 Power Points (1 Drain, 2 Overflow).

**Improved Memory Alteration:** You can now alter all memories formed in the past one year, and insert false memories at any point during that span of time. This requires at least one hour of unfettered access to the target's mind, but otherwise works the same as normal memory alteration.

**Improved Psychic Scream:** Your psychic scream now effects all characters in a cone shaped emanation extending Will yards from your character, which is Psychokinesis Level yards wide at the edge.

## -Psychokinesis Level 6-

**Effortless Telempathy:** There is no longer a Power Point cost, Drain, or Overdrive Gauge fill associated with using your Improved Telempathy power.

**Improved Remote Control:** When you successfully use remote control on a character, your body doesn't lose consciousness or become helpless. You can successfully control both yourself and (one) helpless mind puppet. However, both bodies you're controlling suffer a -2 Difficulty Modifier and a -2 Defense Modifier as you split your attention between them. But that's better than leaving your helpless body lying on the ground somewhere!

**Mass Push:** You can now attempt to use The Push on up to Wits characters within line of sight at once, creating a single simple mental illusion that they all perceive or issuing a single, simple command that they all obey. Make only one Talent Attack Roll and compare it individually to each target's Defense. Likewise, make only one roll for your Will Contest and compare it individually to each targeted Esper's opposing Will Contest roll. Using a Mass Push costs 1 extra Power Point, causes 1 extra Drain, and causes 1 extra Overflow.

**Psychic Surgery:** First off, you can now alter, remove, and add memories from any point in your victim's life. But it goes further than that. You can insert whatever post-hypnotic triggers you want, and program and reprogram every aspect of the victim's mind, from self-identity to moral code and ethics. With sufficient time and victims, creating an army of slaves is easy, if morally reprehensible. This effect can at the very least be used to create "Domination" effects that won't wear off when the victim goes to sleep or leaves line of sight.

To use psychic surgery, you must have at least one hour of unfettered access to the victim's mind, and perhaps much more time, at the GM's discretion.

| Psychokinesis Level | Thought/ Memory Access | Thought/ Memory Overwrite | Telepathy | Other Capabilities |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Surface Thoughts | None | One-Way Telepathy | Psychokinetic Immunity Level 1 |
| 2 | Surface Thoughts and Memories <24 hours old | None | One-Way Telempathy | Psychokinetic Immunity Level 2 |
| 3 | Deeper Thoughts and Memories <1 Year Old | None | Two-Way Telempathy | Psychokinetic Immunity Level 3; Psychic Scream |
| 4 | Any | Memories <24 Hours Old | Two-Way Telempathy | Psychokinetic Immunity Level 4; Psychic Scream; The Push |
| 5 | Any | Memories <1 Year Old | Two-Way Telempathy | Psychokinetic Immunity Level 5; Psychic Scream; The Push; Dominate; Remote Control |
| 6 | Any | Any | Free Two-Way Telempathy | Psychokinetic Immunity Level 6; Psychic Scream; The Push; Dominate; Improved Remote Control |

### Relative Rarity of Psi Talents

Among currently living Espers in the Psionics universe, Necrokinesis is by far the rarest Psionic Talent to manifest, followed closely by Magnekinesis. Entropy, Synchronicity, and then Technokinesis are the next rarest Talents. Somakinesis and Biofeedback are somewhat uncommon, while Scrying and Osmoses are the most common of the Secondary Talents, which are still rarer than any Primary Talents. The Primary Talents of Telekinesis, Pyrokinesis, and Psychokinesis are by far the most common Talents overall, with Pyrokinesis being only slightly rarer than the other two.

All of this can be useful to keep in mind while building your world. However, don't sweat it too much if the demographics of psi power in your campaign don't exactly hue to this. After all, the Espers in your campaign, PCs and NPCs, are extraordinary individuals and don't necessarily represent the typical spread of psi-talents. Alternatively, you could institute any house rules you like to limit the incidence of the rarest and most extreme powers like Necrokinesis, Magnekinesis, and Entropy to only one or two characters at your table, and only a few important NPCs.

# TELEKINESIS TALENTS

## BIOFEEDBACK

Biofeedback manipulation is the ability to control your own body - your heartrate, alpha waves, breathing, metabolic rate, and other physiological functions - through sheer concentration. This can be used to benefit a character for three different game purposes; healing physical damage, purging drugs and toxins, and surviving rigors that would destroy a normal metabolism.

**In order to learn any levels of the Biofeedback Talent, you must have at least three levels in the Telekinesis Primary Talent.**

### -Biofeedback Level 1-

**Regeneration:** You can spend an Attack Action and make a Biofeedback Skill Test. If you succeed, you regain 2d6 points of Health.

**Life Support:** Ordinarily, for rules purposes, a human can only survive for three days (in increasing discomfort) without any water, or three weeks (in increasing discomfort) without any food. A character with Life Support can survive for an additional (Biofeedback Level) days without water and an additional (Biofeedback Level) weeks without food. This passive ability costs no Power Points.

### -Biofeedback Level 2-

**Regeneration:** Your regeneration now restores 4d6 points of Health to you when used successfully.

**Detox:** You can spend a Full Turn Action and make a Biofeedback Test; if you succeed, you can delay the effect of any poisons or toxins by (Biofeedback Level)d6 minutes, or temporarily purge the side-effects of alcohol, recreational drugs, performance enhancing drugs, PPECs, PPIDs, and other chemical subjects for a like duration.

### -Biofeedback Level 3-

**Fast Regeneration:** Your regeneration now restores 5d6 points of Health and requires only a Move Action to use.

**Biofeedback Trance:** As a Move Action, you can use your advanced control of biorhythms to slow your heartrate to a near-stop and fake your death very convincingly, making your

body into corpse in every way but the way that matters most. A successful Biofeedback Test will fool casual observers, but if you are closely examined, you must win a Biofeedback vs. Wits Contest to trick the character examining you. You are additionally immune to Necrokinesis.

## -Biofeedback Level 4-

**Ultimate Regeneration:** Your regeneration now restores 6d6 points of Health. It can be performed as a Free Action with the normal Biofeedback Test, or with no test as a Full Turn Action.

**Advanced Detox:** If you take an Attack Action and succeed a Biofeedback Test, you can purge the effects of poisons, toxins, tranquilizers, alcohol, and drugs of all kinds permanently rather than merely suppressing it for a few minutes.

**Restorative Trance:** You can add your Biofeedback Level to the number of Power Points you regain per hour of rest, and the number of Overflow Points you bleed off per minute of rest. This passive ability costs no Power Points.

### Using Biofeedback on Others

At the GM's discretion, an Esper with Biofeedback and at least one level of Psychokinesis can use Biofeedback to heal other characters. Upon reaching Biofeedback Level 2, they can use the Regeneration effect of Biofeedback Level 1 on another character, although doing so requires one full minute of skin to skin contact. Likewise, on reaching Biofeedback Level 4, they can use the Regeneration and *Detox* effects of Biofeedback Level 2 on another character, although it still requires touching the healed character continuously for one full minute.

This is an optional rule which the GM can ignore if desired. Implementing the ability to heal other characters, generally speaking, will make injury in your campaign less serious and will make recovery periods between action scenes shorter. This is useful if you're going for a fast-paced, high-octane action campaign, but less appropriate if your campaign is meant to be dramatically serious and gritty.

Not all Espers have the exact same capability, so a campaign could contain some Espers that are able to use Biofeedback on others, and some Espers that can only heal themselves.

# NECROKINESIS

Considered by many who have knowledge of Psionics as the most terrifying, disturbing and utterly unreal of all Psi Talents, Necrokinesis is simply the ability to cause death at will.

Necrokinesis is by far the rarest of all Psionic Talents. Although difficult to master, it is very simple in principle. In fact, there is only one action involved in using this Talent. The Esper simply sends an electrical impulse along the target's synapses to the target's brain giving it the signal for the heart to stop beating. In effect, the Esper's mind simply says "die". And whoever's mind hears it, does.

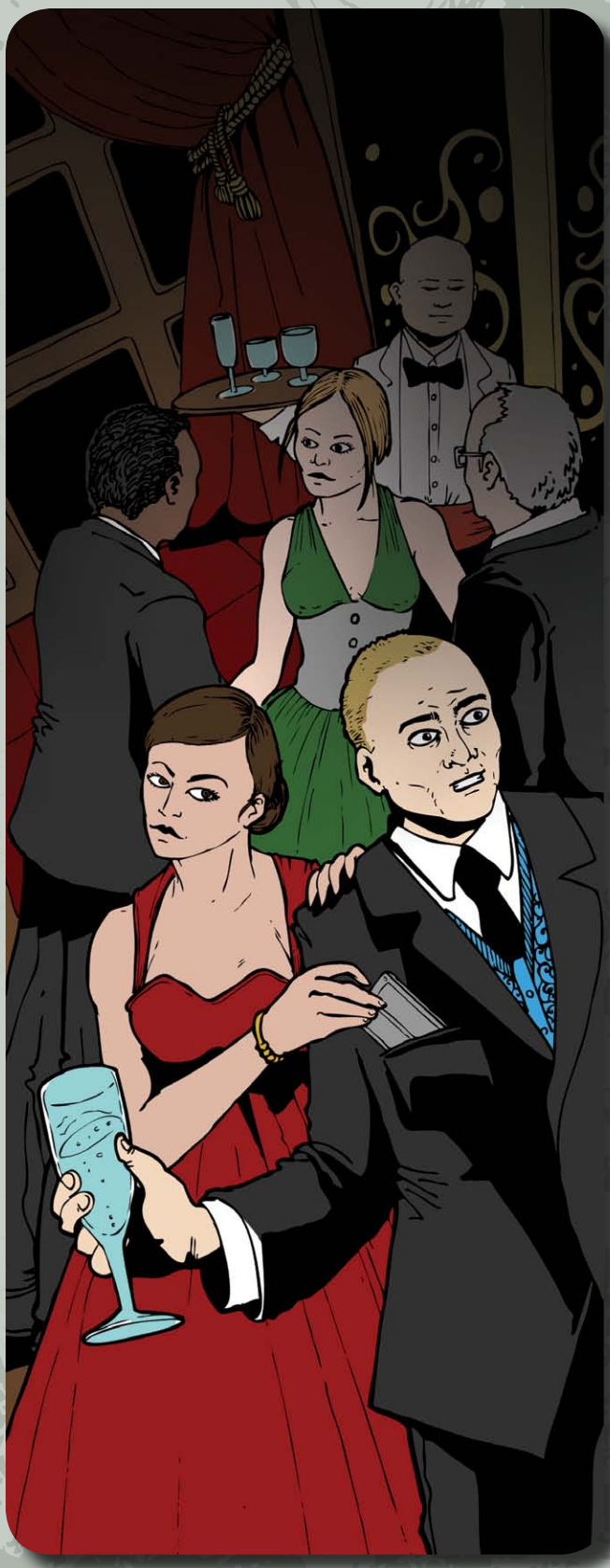
**In order to learn any levels of the Necrokinesis Talent, you must have at least three levels in the Telekinesis Primary Talent.**

**Drain and Strain caused by Necrokinesis is lethal damage.**

## -Necrokinesis Level 1-

**Touch of Death:** To use this ability, spend **6 Power Points (3 Drain, 6 Overflow)** and make an Attack Action. You must be adjacent to the target, and you must successfully hit their Defense with a Brawling Attack; because you need only touch them lightly, they receive a -2 Defense Modifier versus this Attack. If you successfully touch the target, roll a Will vs. Strength Contest (your Will, the target's Strength). If you win the Contest, the target dies (their Health is reduced to -Strength).

**Systemic Paralysis:** Instead of inflicting death as above, if you succeed the Will vs. Strength Contest, you can instead choose to leave the subject completely paralyzed and helpless for Will turns. This option can be used with every level and application of Necrokinesis. At the GM's discretion, paralyzed characters may sometimes die instead, so this is not a 100% reliable "non-lethal" option.



**Undying:** You are immune to the Necrokinesis Talent of all characters whose Necrokinesis Level is not greater than yours. This scales appropriately as your Necrokinesis Level increases.

### -Necrokinesis Level 2-

**Improved Touch of Death:** You may add your Necrokinesis Level to your roll on Will vs. Strength Contests to cause your enemies to die. If you do, the cost of this ability increases to **10 Power Points (5 Drain, 10 Overflow)**.

### -Necrokinesis Level 3-

**Gaze of Death:** Gaze of Death functions like Improved Touch of Death, but it works on any target within line of sight. You must hit their Defense with a Necrokinesis Attack. Using this ability costs **15 Power Points (7 Drain, 15 Overflow)**.

### -Necrokinesis Level 4-

**Wave of Death:** You can now use this ability on up to (Will) characters within line of sight. It costs **8 Power Points (4 Drain, 8 Overflow)** per character targeted. You needn't hit any of the characters' Defense with an Attack, but make a separate Will vs. Strength Contest against each character. You do not add your Necrokinesis Level to your roll if you use Necrokinesis against multiple targets at once.

## SOMAKINESIS

Somakinesis involves the use of Telekinesis, at a fine level, on your own body. Telekinesis is used to manipulate, strengthen and preserve all of the muscles and tissue systems of the human body, using the pull of gravity on the muscles to "Exercise" without actually moving - shaping the muscles to sculpt the body into that of the ultimate athlete, the

pinnacle of speed and strength. In addition to making you stronger and faster over time, Somakinesis can also be used to "min-max" gravity and inertia around your body, giving you the advantage in dire situations. Somakinetics are superhumanly strong and fast, and can punch with the kinetic force of a bullet... or a speeding freight train. They are especially deadly with melee weapons.

**In order to learn any levels of the Somakinesis Talent, you must have at least three levels in the Telekinesis Primary Talent.**

## -Somakinesis Level 1-

**Muscle Growth:** Your Strength and Speed are both increased by your Somakinesis Level. Your Health, Death Threshold, and Initiative are recalculated accordingly. This is a passive ability that costs no Power Points. This ability scales normally with level. This Talent can increase your Strength and Speed beyond their ordinary maximums, as can Power Boost (see below).

**Special:** At Somakinesis Level 1, you are allowed to buy the Bullet Time, Matrix, and Too Damn Fast Advanced Techniques (p. 191).

## -Somakinesis Level 2-

**Power Boost:** You can spend an Attack Action and make a Somakinesis Test; if you succeed, your Strength or your Speed is increased by (Somakinesis Level) points for as long as you pay Power Points to maintain the power (see below). This ability does not "stack" and can't be used twice on the same Attribute, but you can use it twice (on two separate turns, with two separate Tests) to increase both your Strength and your Speed. This ability costs 2 Power Points (1 Drain, 2 Overflow Points) to activate, and 1 Power Point per Attribute for each turn it remains "on" past the first. You can choose to deactivate the power-up early to save Power Points.

**Killing Hands:** If you choose, your unarmed Attacks can inflict lethal damage instead of nonlethal damage. If you are using Power Boost to increase your Strength, or choose to add the extra damage from Lethal Strikes (see below) then your unarmed Attacks **must** inflict lethal damage. This is a passive ability that does not cost any Power Points.

## -Somakinesis Level 3-

**Improved Power Boost:** You can now activate a Power Boost as a Move Action. A successful Somakinesis Test is still needed, and you can still only use Power Boost once per turn.

**Lethal Strikes:** You can have your unarmed Attacks deal +1d6 extra damage at a cost of 1 Power Point (1 Drain, 1 Overflow Point) per Attack.

**Special:** At Somakinesis Level 3, you are allowed to buy the Blade Dance, Impaler, and Neck Snapper advanced Techniques (p. 191).

## -Somakinesis Level 4-

**Master Power Boost:** Your Power Boost now automatically effects your Strength and Speed at the same time, but costs 2 Power Points per turn to maintain.

**Improved Lethal Strikes:** You can have your unarmed Attacks deal an additional +1d6 extra damage at an additional cost of 1 Power Point (1 Drain, 1 Overflow Point) per Attack.

# PYROKINESIS TALENTS

## ENTROPY

Immensely powerful and feared, Entropy is the power to tear apart molecular bonds and split the atom. The accelerated radioactive decay reaction is essentially psionically controlled nuclear fission. While the Talent of Entropy doesn't quite allow any Esper to function as a walking weapon of massive destruction, at least not in any existing records, you can see that extreme of danger and devastation from here. The Entropy ability grants the awesome power to split and spin the atoms of objects and people in the very air, creating miniature nuclear reactions and deadly radiation. This incredible level of power is something that the human body was not meant to conduct.

**In order to learn any levels of the Entropy Talent, you must have at least three levels in the Pyrokinesis Primary Talent.**

**Drain and Strain caused by Entropy is lethal damage.**

### -Entropy Level 1-

Dust to Dust: You can age, corrode, oxidize, rot, and decay non-living matter. Touch the object in question and make an Entropy Test. If you succeed, up to (Entropy Level) cubic feet of the object in question begins to disintegrate. The object's Durability (see below) is decreased by one for every turn you continue to touch the object and sustain this Talent (1 Power Point, 1 Drain, and 1 Overflow Point per turn).

As an object's Durability is reduced, it becomes easier and easier to break. When an object's Durability is reduced to 0, the effected portion (one cubic foot per Entropy Talent Level) of that object simply crumbles to dust. Given time and energy, nearly any amount of any material can be disintegrated with this power.

Certain materials that don't naturally decay on any timescale, like gold, are unaffected by this power. Other materials may take longer to decay with this power, but be easier to break (like plastics).

### -Entropy Level 2-

**Irradiate:** If you can hit a target within line of sight's Defense with an Entropy Attack as an Attack Action, that target must succeed a Hard Strength Check or become Irradiated. An Irradiated target suffers a Penalty to Strength, Speed, and all non-psionic Skill Tests and Attack Rolls equal to your Entropy Talent Level for one hour. The target's Health, Death Threshold, Initiative, and Movement Rate all change according to their new Strength and Speed. You cannot cumulatively Irradiate a target to increase this Penalty. The Penalty for being Irradiated takes the form of nausea, vomiting, agonizing pain, rashes, blisters, sores, growths, and even temporary blindness and nerve damage.

Fortunately for your victims, this form of radiation sickness doesn't last as long as the real thing and will eventually fade if the target survives.

| Object Durability | Example Material | Break Difficulty (Strength Check) |
|---|---|---|
| 1 | Paper products | Very Easy |
| 2 | Plant matter, corpses, fabrics and ropes | Easy |
| 3 | Wood | Average |
| 4 | Iron | (At Least) Hard |
| 5 | Steel | (At Least) Crushingly Hard |
| 6 | Stone | Impossible |

### -Entropy Level 3-

**Improved Disintegration:** You can now use Dust to Dust on any object within line of sight. You can now effect up to (Entropy Level) cubic yards of targeted material at a time. The other parameters of the ability remain unchanged.

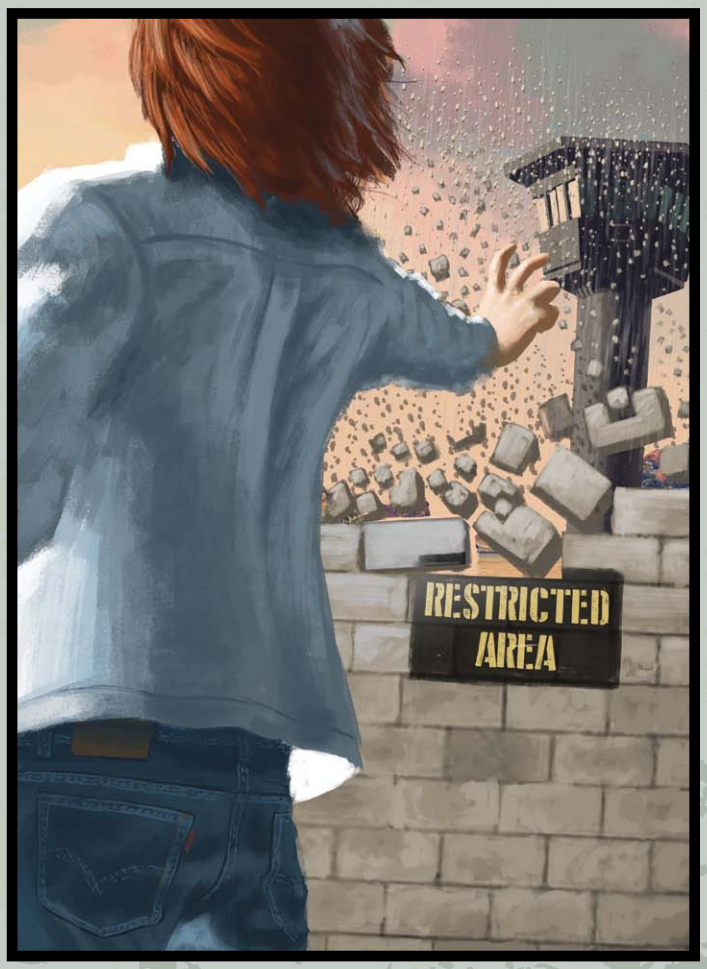
**Improved Irradiation:** Targets must now succeed a Crushingly Hard Strength Check to avoid being Irradiated.

### -Entropy Level 4-

**Atomize:** You can spend an Attack Action and **20 Power Points (10 Drain, 20 Overflow Points)** to tear an enemy within line of sight apart on the molecular level. You must hit the target's Defense with an Entropy Attack. If you hit, you may make an Entropy Test. If you succeed, the target must make a Crushingly Hard Strength Check. If the target fails this Check, they are instantly ripped apart into their component atoms. They lose (Entropy Level × 100) Health and are almost certainly and permanently destroyed.

Obviously, this method of murder is extremely flashy and unsubtle, even compared to Pyrokinesis. The target's molecules are pulled apart and spun dizzyingly in the air, like fireworks, before being scattered like so much atmospheric pollution.

If you are capable of Atomizing an enemy, you are also immune to being Atomized.




## MAGNEKINESIS

Magnekinesis is the Psionic Talent that allows control of electro-magnetic fields, and through them, temperature, barometric pressure front, and atmospheric weather conditions on a gross scale. Like so many Psionic Talents, the "magical" ability to control the weather has been attributed to the spells of wizards and the rain dances of shamans throughout the years. Magnekinesis is similar to but subtly different from the Psychokinetic sub-discipline of "Technokinesis"; both involve the manipulation of electro-magnetic fields, but that is where the similarities end.

While a relatively rare and obscure sub-talent of Pyrokinesis, the power of Magnekinesis bears special symbolic importance in the face of the Eternal Storm (Aeturnius Procella), the cyclical global paradigm shift that dramatically and apocalyptically modifies the amount of psionic activity in the world from one Aeon to another.

**In order to learn any levels of the Magnekinesis Talent, you must have at least three levels in the Pyrokinesis Primary Talent.**

## -Magnekinesis Level 1-

**Minor Weather Control:** You can spend **4 Power Points (2 Drain, 4 Overflow Points)** to subtly modify the weather pattern within one mile of your location for ten minutes with a successful Magnekinesis Test. You can raise or lower the temperature by up to 5° Celsius, increase or decrease wind speed by up to 10 miles per hour, choose the direction of the wind, and create, disperse, or prevent light precipitation (drizzle, flurries, etc.). The changes take one minute to manifest.

## -Magnekinesis Level 2-

**Weather Control:** You can spend **6 Power Points (3 Drain, 6 Overflow Points)** to noticeably modify the weather pattern within four miles of your location for an hour with a successful Magnekinesis test. You can raise or lower the temperature by up to 10° Celsius, increase or decrease wind speed by up to 20 miles per hour, choose the direction of the wind, and create, disperse, or prevent moderate precipitation (rain, snow, fog, mist, etc.). The changes take 30 seconds to manifest. See **Weather Conditions** on p. 181.

**Acute Wind Control:** As long as you are outdoors and the overall wind speed is at least 20 miles per hour, you can use your Magnekinesis to create and direct powerful and precisely directed gusts of wind up to 60 mph. You can direct such a wind blast as a Move Action, at the normal Power Point cost for using a second level Talent. A character struck by such a blast of wind must succeed an Easy Strength Check to stay on their feet, and an Easy Strength Check to hang onto whatever is in their hands. Unattended objects, especially small or light ones, will be sent flying (GM's discretion).

**Gust Shield:** While outdoors with an overall wind speed of at least 20 miles per hour, you can use the Telekinesis Talent power of TK Barrier to protect you from Physical Attacks. The activation cost is as normal.

## -Magnekinesis Level 3-

**Greater Weather Control:** You can spend **10 Power Points (5 Drain, 10 Overflow Points)** to noticeably modify the weather pattern within 25 miles of your location for up to six hours with a successful Magnekinesis Test. You can raise or lower the temperature by up to 20° Celsius, increase or

decrease wind speed by up to 50 mph, choose the direction of the wind, and create, disperse, or prevent violent precipitation (thunder storms, blizzard, etc.). The changes take 10 seconds to manifest. See **Weather Conditions** on p. 181.

**Gust Control:** Gust Control functions as "acute wind control", except the Check a character must make to remain standing or to retain hold of an object is average instead of easy.

**St. Elmo's Fire:** When standing outdoors in a violent storm of your own creation, you can call down lightning bolts on specific targets (also outdoors) as an Attack Action. **This costs 5 Power Points (2 Drain, 5 Overflow Points)** per lightning bolt. You must hit the target's Defense with a Magnekinesis Attack. If you hit, the target suffers 10d6 points of damage and is automatically knocked prone and drops whatever they are holding.

**Windrider:** When standing outdoors in a violent storm of your own creation, you can fly on the wind, Will × 4 yards as a Move Action. Doing so costs 2 Power Points, 1 Drain, and 2 Overflow Points per Move Action spent flying.

**Stormbound:** You do not suffer penalties from **Weather Conditions** as described on p. 181.

## -Magnekinesis Level 4-

**Legendary Weather Control:** You can spend **15 Power Points (7 Drain, 15 Overflow Points)** to abruptly create strange and extreme weather patterns within 100 miles of your location for up to 24 hours with a successful Magnekinesis Test. You can raise or lower the temperature by up to 40° Celsius, increase or decrease overall wind speed by up to 100 mph, choose the direction of the wind, and create, disperse, or prevent any precipitation you can think of, including unusual weather patterns (hurricanes, tropical storms, white-out conditions, tsunamis, hail, sleet, freezing rain, and so on). If you wish, you may choose to call down dangerous hailstones, dealing 1d6, 2d6, 3d6, or 4d6 (your choice) damage to each character caught exposed in it per turn; you are immune to this damage. At this level, the weather can also gradually destroy buildings, vehicles, and trees, cause flooding, accumulate numerous feet of snow, and so on. The changes begin to manifest in one turn, but do not fully appear until one minute has passed.

**Improved Gust Shield:** While outdoors with an overall wind speed of at least 60 miles per hour, you can use the Telekinesis Talent power of Improved TK Barrier to protect you from Physical Attacks. The activation cost is as normal.

**Ride the Lightning:** While standing outdoors in a violent storm of your own creation (Wind Speed >75 mph) you can create a tornado as an Attack Action with a successful Magnekinesis Test. You can move the tornado as a Move Action. The tornado has a diameter of (Will) yards and can move up to (Will × 5) yards per turn as you direct. Any character that the tornado moves through or moves by must succeed a Crushingly Hard Speed Check or a Crushingly Hard Strength Check (their choice) or be sucked into it. The tornado lasts (Will) turns. You may only have one tornado at a time.

A character sucked into a tornado is suspended helplessly (may not move or act) for one full turn, then flung 10d6 yards in a random direction. The damage they take from the fall/flight is dependent on what surface they eventually hit, determined by the GM (see p. 85). At the GM's discretion, the tornado can even fling vehicles. You can "ride" your own tornado without suffering harm.

| Magnekinesis Level Used | Temperature Change | Wind Speed Change | Possible Precipitation | Radius | Duration | Time To Manifest |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | 5 | 10 mph | Drizzle, flurries | 1 mile | 10 minutes | 1 Minute |
| 2 | 10 | 20 mph | Rain, snow | 4 miles | 1 hour | 30 Seconds |
| 3 | 20 | 60 mph | Storm, blizzard | 25 miles | 6 hours | 10 Seconds |
| 4 | 40 | 100 mph | Any | 100 miles | 24 hours | 1 Minute |

# SYNCHRONICITY

Synchronicity is a child Talent not as clearly connected to Pyrokinesis as either Entropy or Magnekinesis, but nonetheless consistently and definitively linked to it. Psionics researchers and scholars like to discuss and debate the exact nature of the established relationship between Pyrokinesis and Synchronicity, which might be best described as the extraordinary Wild Talent to influence probability. Espers with the Talent of Synchronicity can manipulate random chance itself.

**In order to learn any levels of the Synchronicity Talent, you must have at least three levels in the Pyrokinesis Primary Talent.**

**Synchronicity cannot be used to reroll Psionic Talent tests or Attacks, or damage rolls of any kind, unless otherwise noted.**

## -Synchronicity Level 1-

**Good Luck:** With a successful Synchronicity (Wits) Test, you can cause any minor random or pseudo-random event to resolve in your favor. This includes things like a taxi stopping for you, or getting just what you need just when you need it at cards or dice. It can't save your life, it can't save the day, it can't hurt anyone and it can't cause anything spectacularly unlikely to happen. The influenced phenomena must be within line of sight.

**Probability Sense:** With a successful Synchronicity (Wits) Test, you can know the exact probability of any single given event. This is a Free Action and costs no Power Points. This includes learning the success/failure probability of in-game die rolls, which the GM should calculate and share with you if you are successful. You must be able to directly or indirectly observe at least some of the determining factors in whether or not the event will occur in order to use this power. The influenced phenomena must be within line of sight.

## -Synchronicity Level 2-

**Lucky Break:** If any roll you make fails, you can activate this power as a non-action and make a Synchronicity (Wits) Test. If you succeed, you may reroll the Test, Check, or Attack that just failed or missed. If the new result is a success or a hit, then it should be a fluke of luck or a freak accident that causes it to be just that. You can only reroll one test per turn, and can only reroll any given roll once.

## -Synchronicity Level 3-

**Improved Lucky Break:** You can now use your Lucky Break power to attempt to allow a reroll of Checks, Tests, and Attacks that your allies (within line of sight) have failed. You can now cause a reroll of (Synchronicity Level) tests per turn, but you can still only reroll any given roll once.

## -Synchronicity Level 4-

**Master of Chance:** No Synchronicity Test is necessary to reroll your own failed rolls.

**Twist Fate:** You can now, as a non-action, force any enemy within line of sight to reroll any Check, Test, or Attack Roll they just made, if you make a successful Synchronicity (Wits) Test. This counts towards the total number of rerolls you can cause per turn for yourself and your allies. **You can even force enemies to reroll Psionic Talent Tests and Attacks, but not damage rolls**.

If the result of the enemy's action changes from a success to a failure, the failure is caused by a freak accident or a wild fluke of mischance. You cannot make any enemy reroll any given roll more than once.

# PSYCHOKINESIS TALENTS

## OSMOSES

Osmoses is the rare, unusual, and specific Talent of draining psionic power from living, sentient beings, especially other Espers. Unlike its parent Talent, Psychokinesis and most of the Psychokinesis Talents, Osmoses is very simple and focused in its application. With Osmoses, you can drain the mental energy from an enemy's mind, absorbing the energy of the electrical impulses rushing along their synapses. The physical appearance of this power varies somewhat, but is typically a surge of glowing blue energy pulsing from the target's twitching head to the user's grasping hand. A living being who has been drained dry tends to have their head explode in a rather spectacular way. Osmoses is the only Psionic Talent that does not cost Power Points to activate.

**In order to learn any levels of the Osmoses Talent, you must have at least three levels in the Psychokinesis Primary Talent.**

### -Osmoses Level 1-

**Power Scavenging:** By suffering 1 Drain and gaining 2 Overflow Points, and touching a human corpse deceased within the past (Osmoses Level) hours, you can draw a small amount of Power Points from that corpse. The number of points you gain is equal to (Osmoses Level)d6. After draining the corpse once, the corpse is "empty". This ability doesn't cost Power Points to use, but is treated like it does for all other consequences and mechanics of using Psionic Talents.

**Power Vision:** With a successful Osmoses (Wits) Test (a Free Action), you can tell whether any character you observe has Power Points, and roughly (GM's discretion) how many they have remaining. This ability has no cost to activate.

### -Osmoses Level 2-

**Brain Drain:** You can touch an unsuspecting Esper and use an Attack Action (no Power Point cost, 2 Drain, 5 Overflow Points) to begin draining them of Power Points. You must be adjacent to the target, and you must successfully hit their Defense with a Brawling Attack; this requires prolonged contact, and therefore the target receives a +2 Defense Modifier, unless they are caught unawares (see p. 172). On the first turn, and each subsequent turn you maintain the "Brain Drain", they lose (Osmoses Level)d6 Power Points and you gain the same amount.

An Esper being drained is helpless and cannot move or act unless they can succeed a Hard Will Check at the start of their turn (a non-action) to free themselves. You may choose to continue a drain as long as you want with no additional Attack necessary: every turn that you continue to drain beyond the first, you suffer an additional 2 Drain and gain an additional 5 Overflow Points. If the enemy's PP are reduced to zero their head explodes and they die instantly.

### -Osmoses Level 3-

**Distance Absorption:** You can now use your Brain Drain ability on any Esper within (Will) yards. Hitting them requires an Osmoses Attack against their Defense instead of a Brawling Attack, and the target no longer receives a positive Defense Modifier. However, using this ability as a ranged power doubles the Drain you sustain each turn.

### -Osmoses Level 4-

**Consumptive Field:** Your Distance Absorption/Brain Drain power can now effect up to (Osmoses Level) targets within range. You must hit each target's Defense separately with an Osmoses Attack, but you need only pay 4 Drain and 5 Overflow each turn, no matter how many targets effected.

## SCRYING

Scrying includes most traditional modes of "extra sensory perception" for which Espers are erroneously named. This includes, among other things, dowsing, precognition, postcognition, retrocognition, clairsentience, and psychometry - although not thought reading, which belongs to Psychokinesis, Scrying's parent Talent. Scrying is a mixed bag of psychic powers practiced by gurus, siddhis, adepts and saints for millennia. While Psychokinesis is the art of touching - and, when the need arose, dominating - the minds of others, Scrying is turned inwards, expanding your own mind and consciousness, adding new senses and dimensions of perceptions so that so much more can be seen, felt, and known.

**In order to learn any levels of the Scrying Talent, you must have at least three levels in the Psychokinesis Primary Talent.**

### -Scrying Level 1-

**Clairsentience:** You can choose to listen in on or spy on a location that you already have visited that is within (Scrying Level) miles. Each minute you wish to remotely listen to or view the location costs 1 Power Point (1 Drain, 1 Overflow Point). Hearing and seeing costs double this, since you must pay for sight and sound separately. You must succeed a Scrying (Wits) Test to target the location in question. Initiating clairsentience is a Full Turn Action. Senses other than sight and hearing cannot be used through clairsentience. Observable information relies on the acuity of your actual senses: Awareness (Wits) tests may be necessary to spot fine details/overhear quiet conversations.

## -Scrying Level 2-

**Psychometry:** During an event where emotions are pointed or strained, electrical pulses from the participants can be strong enough to make an "impression" on nearby objects. This "psychic residue" is the tangible after effect of human emotion. These impressions can last even years after the event happens before their quality blurs, depending on the strength of the emotions involved.

Gaining factual information from psychometry is part art, part science. You can read the psychic impressions left by emotionally charged events on locations and inanimate objects by physically handling them. You can automatically and at no cost identify which objects and locations are or are not "emotionally charged" - they glow at a frequency "visible" only to you.

You must touch the object or part of the location in question to initiate playback, concentrate for one turn, spend the usual Psionic use costs, and succeed a Scrying (Wits) Test. Then roll an effect roll of (Scrying Level)d6 and consult the following Retrocognition table.

| Effect Roll | Information Gleaned |
|---|---|
| 2-7 | Random thoughts and images giving vague clues about the emotionally charged event that took place here fly through your mind but they might be confusing or disturbing. |
| 8-15 | A partial glimpse of the scene from the point of view of whoever's touch made the impression, it may appear unclear and hazy, or biased by perspective. |
| 16-24 | An understanding of one event that had happened from a neutral omniscient perspective. |

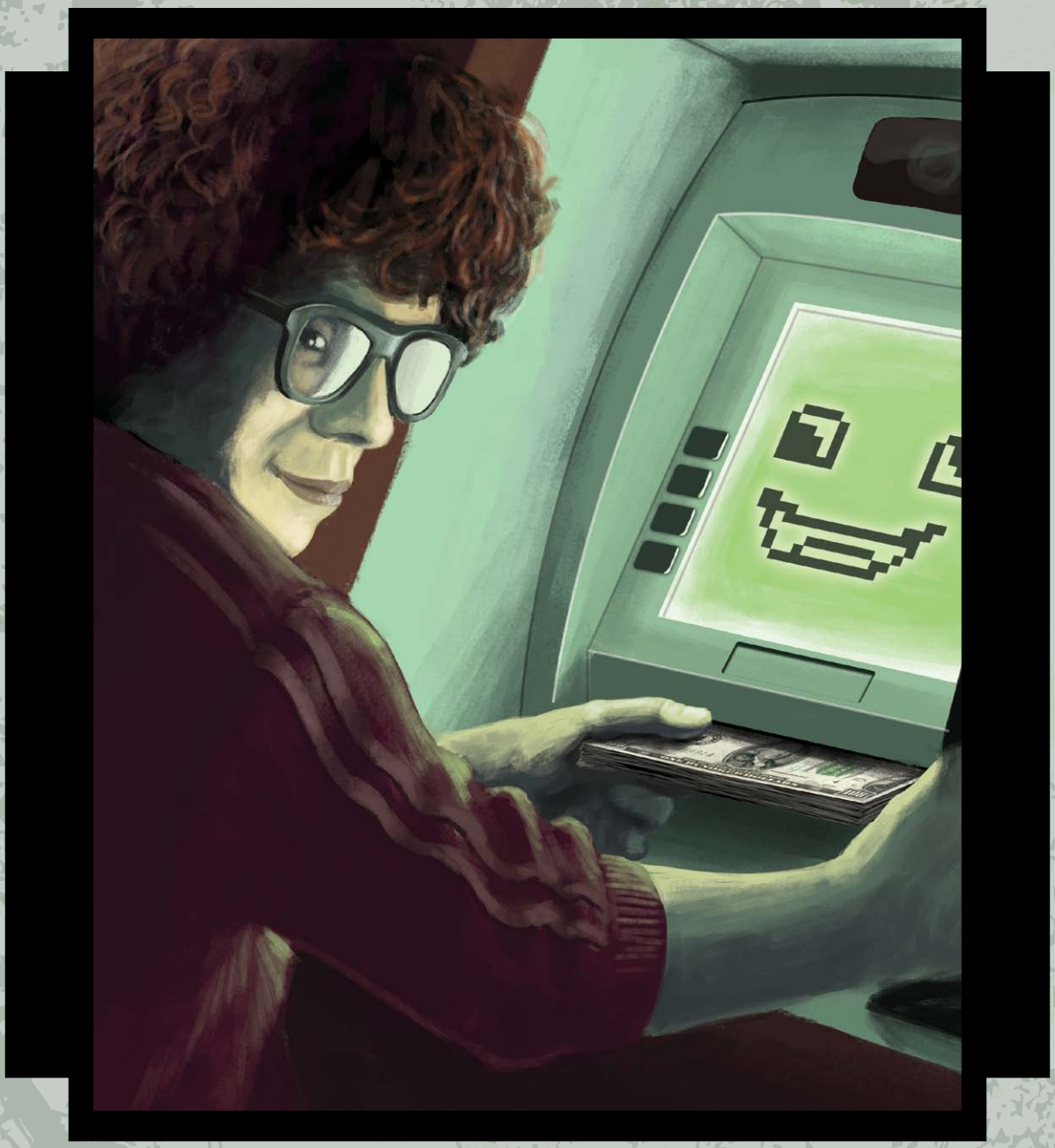
## -Scrying Level 3-

**Improved Clairsentience:** You can now use clairvoyance/clairaudience to spy on locations up to (Scrying Level × Wits) miles away. You can additionally use Telepathy and Thought Reading on targets heard or seen through clairsentience.

**Precognition:** Whenever you get a night's sleep, the GM will secretly make a Hard Scrying (Wits) Check. If you succeed the test, you will receive prophetic (but vague and difficult to interpret) dreams of future events (a perfect opportunity for the GM to foreshadow). If the test fails, you will gain no information, or worse, misleading information (at the GM's discretion, but misleading information shouldn't be overused or used for every failure). Using this ability costs no Power Points and requires no action; this is a passive effect that happens automatically (whether you like it or not).

## -Scrying Level 4-

**Epic Clairsentience:** Your clairsentience range increases to (Scrying Level × Wits) × 100 Miles, but you must still have previously visited the area you wish to observe.



**Mind Scan:** You can locate any mind you have previously communicated with via telepathy or read the thoughts of anyone that is located within your clairsentience range with a successful Hard Scrying (Wits) Test, which requires a full minute of concentration. You know the physical location of a mind so located, and can attempt to use any Psychokinesis Talent powers you wish on a mind you have "locked on" to in this way. The only additional cost is the cost to use mind scan to lock onto the target within range.

You can passively locate and "track" up to (Wits) minds within range with this ability, tracking their location with the accuracy of a GPS.

**Prescient Dodge:** You receive a permanent +1 Bonus to Defense against all attacks of any kind (melee or ranged, physical or mental, psionic or non-psionic), due to being able to instinctively anticipate them. This passive ability costs nothing.

# TECHNOKINESIS

The awkwardly named Technokinesis is a rarity, as a Psionic Talent completely unique to the modern, high-tech world. This "mind-hacking" can target any electrical system, network, or computer of significant complexity. If a network is being targeted, the area being touched must connect somehow (wirelessly or through fiber-optics) to the rest of it.

Technokinesis, the newest and perhaps strangest Psionic discipline, allows an Esper to directly interface and harmonize with the 'nervous center' of a machine, influencing the machine or computer to do the Esper's bidding. Like Psychokinesis, Technokinesis functions through the manipulation of electric signals, this time along silicone synapses. Espers can also manipulate electromagnetic fields and emit electromagnetic pulses.

**In order to learn any levels of the Technokinesis Talent, you must have at least three levels in the Psychokinesis Primary Talent.**

## -Technokinesis Level 1-

**White Noise:** With a successful Technokinesis (Wits) Test and an Attack Action, you can jam all unshielded communications devices within (Will) Yards for (Technokinesis Level + 1) turns. You must pay the activation cost again for each turn beyond the first.

**Magnetic Field:** With a successful Technokinesis (Will) Test and an Attack Action, you can broadcast a magnetic field around you that can attract or repel metallic objects weighing no more than one pound within (Will) Yards. You can manipulate metallic objects within the field as though using Telekinesis Level 1. The field lasts (Will) turns.

## -Technokinesis Level 2-

**Improved White Noise:** The jamming now effects all unshielded communications within line of sight, and lasts for (Technokinesis Level) minutes. You must pay the activation cost again for each minute beyond the first.

**Improved Magnetic Field:** The magnetic field now extends to the edge of line of sight, and can attract or repel metallic objects weighing up to ten pounds. You can manipulate metallic objects within the field as though using Telekinesis Level 2.

**Psionic Hacking:** You can bypass the security of any electronic or digital device, such as a personal computer, PDA, electronic door lock, smartphone, biometric scanner, alarm circuit, or so on that you touch. Even partially mechanical objects with only a few primitive electronic components can be hacked in this way - such as an old-fashioned pay phone. You must succeed a Technokinesis (Wits) Check with a Difficulty based on the device's security level (see table below).

Breaking through security takes only a single Attack Action, but getting the device to do what you want after doing so may take (significantly) more time at the GM's discretion, based on the complexity of the planned actions (opening a door lock is trivially simple, but falsifying or editing digital records is substantially more complicated).

## -Technokinesis Level 3-

**Passive Jamming:** Creating a jamming field now only requires a Move Action. The jamming field lasts for (Technokinesis Level) hours or until dismissed by the Esper who created it. It can extend up to (Technokinesis Level) miles centered on the Esper, and moves with the Esper. You must pay the activation cost again for each hour beyond the first.

**Powerful Magnetic Field:** The magnetic field can now be created as a Move Action, and can attract or repel metallic objects weighing up to 100 pounds. You can manipulate metallic objects within the field as though using Telekinesis Level 3. If you set the field to repel metal objects, increase your Defense versus physical projectile attacks (firearms, throwing knives, etc.) by your Technokinesis Level.

**EMP Blast:** With a successful Technokinesis Attack versus a character's Defense, you can permanently fry any one unshielded electronic device held by that character, rendering it useless. This is an Attack Action. Cybernetic implants (p. 286) are considered to be shielded for this purpose.

## -Technokinesis Level 4-

**Chaff Storm:** Your jamming field can now extend up to (Technokinesis Level × 10) miles.

**Master Magnetic Field:** The magnetic field can now attract or repel metallic objects weighing up to 100 pounds. You can manipulate metallic objects within the field as though using Telekinesis Level 4.

**Remote Hacking:** You can now use your Psionic Hacking ability on any electronic device within line of sight.

**Penetration:** Your EMP blast and jamming field now work even against specially shielded devices, including cybernetic implants (see p. 286). Cybernetic implants that short circuit in due to an EMP blast deal 5d6 damage to the unfortunate character they are installed in before ceasing to function.

### Psionic Hacking Table

| Security Level | Examples | Test Difficulty |
|---|---|---|
| **Public** | Public network, unsecured device. | Easy |
| **Civilian** | Personal computer, smartphone, laptop. | Average |
| **Security** | Electronic lock, secure server, biometric lock. | Hard (No Modifier) |
| **Military/Black Ops** | Missile control system, cybernetic implant. | Crushingly Hard |

*"I've seen the future. It looks expensive."*

# The Armory: Weapons, Drugs, and Equipment

**"We get some rules to follow**
**That and this, these and those**
**No one knows**
**We get these pills to swallow**
**How they stick in your throat**
**Taste like gold"**

***- Queens of the Stone Age, "No One Knows"***

This chapter includes descriptions, prices, and game statistics for all of the weapons, drugs, and other equipment that might be used by the PCs, other Espers, and the forces and organizations out to control them - as well as the civilians, security personnel, spies, and soldiers caught in the middle.

Weapons include improvised and not-so-improvised melee weapons, and of course a wide selection of modern firearms. One game statistic not listed here for firearms is range; the firearm range table appears on p. 179. Drugs include over-the-counter, illegal, and carefully-controlled government issue chemicals that can have minor or major effects on the functioning of Psionic Talents, and the people who wield them. Other equipment includes useful things like body armor and first aid kits.

Prices for most weapons and equipment are based loosely on common prices for those items in the early 21st century, with a fair amount of room for creative license.

**Remember that at character creation you get:**

- *1 Free Weapon Pick for any Combat Skill you're an Apprentice in.*
- *2 Free Weapon Picks for any Combat Skill you're Expert in.*
- *4 Free Weapon Picks for any Combat Skill you've mastered.*

Better and harder to find weapons cost more than one pick, and the number of picks a weapon costs will be indicated next to its price.

Permanent possessions, such as vehicles and homes, are not included here. Nor are mundane possessions, such as cellular phones, clothing, and personal computers. Your GM should let you begin with these for free at the start of the campaign, but that doesn't mean you'll be allowed to keep them. Most Espers wind up either fugitives - living hand to mouth on the run, driving what they can steal and crashing wherever seems safe for the night - or organizational pawns, living with whatever's been issued to them.

## MELEE WEAPONS

All one-handed melee weapons add ½ Strength (round up) to the listed damage unless otherwise noted. All two handed melee weapons add Strength to the listed damage unless otherwise noted.

| Weapon | Hands Needed | Skill Used | Damage | Notes | Picks (Price) |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Small Knife | One | Blades | (Strength) | Do not add bonus damage from Strength. | 1 ($20) |
| Scalpel | One | Blades | 5 + Speed | Do not add bonus damage from Strength. | 2 ($65) |
| Riot Baton | One | Clubs | 2d6 | - | 1 ($20) |
| Glass Bottle | One | Brawling | 1d6 | On each Attack, roll 1d6. On a 1-3, the bottle breaks and becomes a broken bottle. | NA |
| Broken Bottle | One | Brawling | 1d6 + 2 | On each Attack, roll 1d6. On a 1-2, the broken bottle breaks and becomes useless. | NA |
| Bar Stool/ Steel Chair | Two | Brawling | 2d6 | If not metal, roll 1d6 on each Attack; breaks on a roll of 1-3, becoming a chair leg. | NA |
| Pistol Whip | One | Brawling | 1d6 | - | As firearm. |
| Rifle Butt | Two | Brawling | 2d6 | - | As firearm. |
| Baseball Bat/ Chair Leg | Two | Clubs | 2d6 | - | 1 ($10-$100) |
| Combat Knife, Hatchet, or Machete | One | Blades | 1d6 + 4 | - | 2 ($40) |
| Bayonet | Two | Blades | 1d6 + 4 | - | As Accessory (p. 110) |
| Shortsword/ Wakizashi/ Rapier | One | Blades | 1d6 + Speed | - | 2 ($1,000) |
| Stungun/ Taser Baton/ Cattle Prod | One | Clubs | 4d6 | Nonlethal damage. | 2 ($100) |
| Crowbar | Two | Clubs | 1d6 + Strength | Add bonus damage from Strength on top of the listed damage. | 2 ($75) |

| Weapon | Hands Needed | Skill Used | Damage | Notes | Picks (Price) |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Axe/Pickaxe | Two | Blades or Clubs | 3d6 | - | 2 ($100) |
| Sledgehammer | Two | Clubs | 3d6 + Strength | Strength 6+ to use. Add bonus damage from Strength on top of the listed damage. | 3 ($300) |
| Katana | Two | Blades | 3d6 + Speed | +1 to Attack Rolls with this weapon. | 4 ($5,000) |

# FIREARMS

## Rate of Fire

| Rate of Fire | Description |
|---|---|
| **Single Shot (S)** | The weapon can fire only one shot per Combat Turn, even if the character can make more than one Attack, such as by using the Frenzy Technique. |
| **Semi-Automatic (SA)** | The weapon can fire two shots per Combat Turn, but only if the character firing it has more than one Attack, such as by using the Frenzy Technique. |
| **Burst Fire (B)** | The weapon can use one Attack to fire a three-round burst. See p. 179. |
| **Fully Automatic (FA)** | The weapon can either fire a full burst or provide covering fire. See p. 179. In either case, the weapon can make only one Attack in a turn if used on full auto. |
| **Select Fire** | The weapon's wielder can switch between two to three of the following modes by using a Free Action: SA, B, and/or FA. True select fire weapons will be designated with a slash between firing rings, whereas weapons with two 'effective' ROF can simply fire a few rounds with a quick press of the trigger will use the word 'or' to divide firing rates. |

## Reload Time by Capacity Type

| Rate of Fire | Reload Time |
|---|---|
| **Clip [C]** | One Move Action to change clips. Loading rounds into an empty clip, however, is a Full Turn Action to load Speed rounds into the clip. |
| **Cylinder [Cy]** | If using a Speedloader, an Attack Action allows you to fully reload a cylinder. Otherwise, you may only load ½ Speed (round up) rounds with an Attack Action. |
| **Internal Magazine [M]** | Three Options: #1: Use an Attack Action to reload ½ Speed (round up) rounds; #2: Use a full-turn action to fully reload the magazine; #3: Make a successful Speed Check to load ½ Speed (round up) rounds as a Move Action. Failure indicates no rounds loaded. |
| **Belt [Blt]** | 10 - Speed (minimum 1) Full Turn Actions. If a character assists you with changing belts, this can be done in one Full Turn Action from each of you. |
| **Break [Br]** | One Attack Action or a Move Action and a successful Speed Check; failure indicates no rounds loaded. |
| **Drum [D]** | One Move Action to remove the previous drum and one Attack Action to attach a fresh drum. |

## Pistols

All of these weapons are used with the Pistols Combat Skill. All of these weapons can be used with one hand, unless otherwise indicated.

| Weapon | Damage | Rate of Fire | Capacity (Type) | Notes | Picks | Price |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Colt Detective Special (.38 Special) | 1d6 + 4 | S | 6 [Cy] | +2 DM to Stealth or Sleight of Hand rolls to Conceal this weapon. | 1 | ~$429 |
| Walther PPK (.32 ACP) | 1d6 + 3 | SA | 8 [C] | +2 DM to Stealth or Sleight of Hand rolls to conceal this weapon. | 1 | ~$450 |
| Glock 17 (9mm Parabellum) | 2d6 | SA | 17 [C] | - | 1 | ~$500 |
| M9 (Beretta 92F) (9mm Parabellum) | 2d6 | SA | 15 [C] | +1 To Attack Rolls with this weapon. | 1 | ~$550 |
| Ruger LCP (.380 ACP) | 1d6 + 4 | SA | 6 [C] | +2 DM to Stealth or Sleight of Hand rolls to Conceal this weapon. This weapon comes with a laser sight. | 2 | $550 |
| Taser | 5d6 | S | 1 [Br] | Only works at Short Range. Nonlethal damage only. | 2 | $500 |
| Mini-Crossbow | 3d6 | S | 1 [Br] | This weapon is effectively silenced. | 2 | $100 |
| Colt M1911a1 (.45 ACP) | 2d6 + 3 | SA | 7 [C] | +1 to Attack Rolls with this weapon. | 2 | ~$800 |
| Sig Sauer P226 (.40 S&W) | 2d6 + 2 | SA | 15 [C] | - | 2 | $1,000 |
| Colt Python (.357 Magnum) | 5d6 | S | 6 [Cy] | - | 2 | ~$1,000 |
| Tranquilizer Pistol | 1 | S | 1 [Br] | Plus toxin effect. This weapon is effectively silenced. Compressed air canister is good for 50 shots. | 2 | $500 |
| Taser X3 | 5d6 | SA | 3 [Br] | Includes Laser Sight. Only works at Short Range. Nonlethal damage only. | 3 | $1000 |
| Desert Eagle Mark XIX (.50 AE) | 4d6 + 2 | SA | 7 [C] | Additional -1 Penalty to second Attack in the round when making two Attacks in a round with this weapon. Requires two hands to use. | 3 | ~$1,500 |
| HK Mk. 23 Mod 0 (.45 ACP) | 2d6 + 3 | SA | 12 [C] | +1 to Attack Rolls with this weapon; this weapon comes with a Laser Sight and Silencer. | 3 | $1,995 |
| FN Five-SeveN (5.7×28mm) | 2d6 + 1 (+10 vs. ranged armor) | SA | 20 [C] | +1 to Attack Rolls with this weapon; this weapon overcomes the first 10 points of ranged damage cut. | 3 | $1,000 |

**Colt Detective Special:** First appearing in 1927, the Colt Detective Special is a carbon steel framed double-action short-barreled revolver, a class of firearms known to gun enthusiasts as "snubnosed", "snubbies", or "belly guns". As the name "Detective Special" suggests, this class of gun was used as a concealed weapon by plainclothes police detectives. The Detective Special was the first premium grade swing-out revolver designed from the outset to be carried concealed and capable of chambering the .38 Special, a high powered cartridge in the 1920s. This weapon was produced through 1995, and the stats are representative of other small, concealed-carry revolvers. This weapon or something like it is very likely to be the sidearm of police and private detectives.

**Walther PPK:** Available in one form or another since 1929, this is a blowback operated, semi-automatic pocket pistol well suited for concealed carry. Functionally identical to any number of other holdout pistols, the Walther PPK has the unique distinction of being James Bond's gun.

**Glock 17:** Just one in a long series of semi-automatic pistols designed and produced by Glock GmbH, located in Deutsch-Wagram, Austria. Glock controls the majority of the law enforcement market share in the United States. This is the weapon most police officers will be using, especially state troopers and local cops in urban and rural areas.

**M9 (Beretta M92F):** The M9 pistol is a 9×19mm Parabellum pistol of the United States military, adopted in the 1980s. It is basically a military specification Beretta 92F. In the 1980s, this weapon replaced the venerable M1911A1 as the primary handgun of the U.S. military, beating out many other contenders. It officially entered service in 1990. These stats - or those of the Glock - are fairly representative of most modern, high-capacity 9mm pistols.

**Ruger LCP:** This is a lightweight, .380 ACP pocket pistol first announced by Sturm, Ruger in 2008. It weighs just 9.4 oz., tiny and ultralight. The weapon has a glass-filled nylon frame, a two-finger grip, and a through-hardened blued steel slide. It is a back-up concealed carry for law enforcement personnel and civilians concerned with self-defense. It features a built-in laser sight which springs to life when any pressure is put on the grip. The LCP is too small to mount any additional accessories.

**Taser:** A Taser is an electroshock weapon that uses electrical current to disrupt voluntary muscle control. Rather than mere pain compliance, the Taser allegedly causes total "neuromuscular incapacitation" using electro-muscular disruption technology. Tasers are nonlethal weapons used by police to subdue fleeing, belligerent, or potentially dangerous suspects, in the place of using more lethal weapons. Like the other nonlethal weapons here, the Taser is a capture weapon favored by

the various Powers That Be for the nonlethal takedown of rogue psionic assets. A Taser inflicts nonlethal damage, uses pistol ranges, and does not work outside of short range.

**Mini-Crossbow:** For civilian hobbyists, mini-crossbow pistols are perfect for target practice and small game hunting. Typically, mini-crossbows are constructed of impact-resistant ABS with an 80-lb. draw eight fiberglass blow; some use hardened steel parts instead. The crossbow includes adjustable sights for precision accuracy. Agents and operatives of the powers that be sometimes use mini-crossbows with injection bolts for assassination and capture missions (varying the chemical payload as needed) due to the fact that the weapon is totally silent, even more than a silenced pistol. The mini crossbow must be reloaded after every shot.

**Colt M1911a1:** The most iconic handgun ever made, used by everyone from Humphrey Bogart's Sam Spade to the American GI, the Colt .45 automatic pistol was developed in 1911 by John Browning and remained the primary sidearm of U.S. armed forces until its replacement in 1985 by the M9. The M1911 is a single-action, semi-automatic, magazine-fed, recoil-operated handgun chambered for the .45 ACP cartridge. It was widely used in World War I, World War II, the Korean War, and the Vietnam War. In total, the United States procured around 2.7 million M1911 and M1911A1 pistols during its service life. Incredibly, the practically antediluvian M1911a1 is still preferred and used by Special Forces units, for its reliability and incredible stopping power. If you've seen a handgun in a movie, there's a 50% chance that it was a Colt M1911a1 or a clone thereof. Statistically, M1911 clones, like Springfield Armory replicas and the AMT Hardballer, are identical to the original weapon.

**Sig Sauer P226:** This is a full-sized service type pistol made by SIG Sauer since the 1980s. Along with the Beretta 92F, it is one of the pistols designed to replace the M1911a1 in the XM9 Service Pistol Trials held by the US Army in 1984. The P226 was the only other pistol besides the Beretta 92F to satisfactorily complete the trial. The P226 has a wide array of variants and sub-variants chambered in everything from 22LR to .357 SIG. This particular variant is chambered for the .40 S&W round, and loads 15 rounds in a high capacity, staggered column magazine.

**Colt Python:** Developed in 1955, Colt Python is a double action revolver chambered for the powerful .357 Magnum cartridge built on Colt's large I-frame. Pythons have a reputation for accuracy, smooth trigger pull and a tight cylinder lock-up. Some consider them to be among the finest revolvers ever made. This intimidating weapon is still used by some badass highway patrols throughout the country.

M1911a1

HK Mk. 23

**Tranquilizer Pistol:** These compressed air dart-projectors are usually used for animal control. This one is built on the frame of the Mk. 22 Mod 0 "Hush Puppy", a slide-locked Navy Seal modification of the S&W Model 39 pistol. The barrel has been re-bored to fire breech-loaded .50 caliber dart rounds, and the magazine well reconfigured to hold a compressed air canister (good for 50 shots). The weapon must be reloaded with a new dart after every shot. The tranquilizer pistol is especially favored by the powers that be for interdiction and capture of Espers that have gone off the reservation.

**Taser X3:** This new (and expensive) multi-shot ECD features a three-shot capacity, allowing police officers two back up shots, along with a dual-laser targeting system, increased battery capacity, and better cold weather performance.

**Desert Eagle:** If you saw a handgun in a movie, and it wasn't an M1911 or M1911 clone, it was probably a Desert Eagle, most likely outfitted with a tacky chrome finish and gigantic laser aiming module. Far less common in real life than in the movies, the inimitable Desert Eagle is almost certainly too much firepower for any given situation. The Desert Eagle is a large-bore gas-operated semi-automatic pistol designed by Magnum Research in the U.S., and manufactured primarily in Israel by IMI. This monster has been available since 1985.

**HK Mk. 23 Mod 0:** The Heckler & Koch MK23 Mod 0 is a handgun consisting of a match grade semi-automatic pistol, a laser aiming module (LAM), and suppressor. It was adopted by the United States Special Operations Command (USSOCOM) for special operations units in the 1990s. While the designation applies to the complete system, it's also commonly used in reference to the pistol component itself. A deadly and effective weapon, designed in 1991.

**FN Five-SeveN:** This is a revolutionary semi-automatic pistol designed by FN Herstal. It loads the new and proprietary 5.7×28mm cartridge, which can penetrate soft body armor. In service since 2000, it's a futuristic, lightweight polymer-based weapon with a large magazine capacity, ambidextrous controls, and low recoil. The Five-SeveN is currently in service with military and police forces in over 40 countries, and may very well be what the next generation of personal firearms look like. The FN Five-SeveN effectively reduces the value of the target's armor (versus ranged damage) by 10. In other words, against a Ranged Damage Cut of 10 or less, it does its full damage, unreduced by body armor.

## Automatics

These weapons are used with the Automatics Combat Skill. These weapons cannot be used one-handed unless otherwise indicated.

| Weapon | Damage | Rate of Fire | Capacity (Type) | Notes | Picks | Price |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Tec-9 (9mm Parabellum) | 2d6 - 1 | SA [FA] | 20 [C] | This weapon can be used in one hand. Attacks with this weapon receive a -1 Penalty. | 1 | $300 |
| Skorpion (.32 ACP) | 1d6 + 3 | FA | 20 [C] | This weapon can be used one handed. This weapon features a folding stock which, when deployed, reduces Recoil Penalties by 1. | 1 | $600 |

| Weapon | Damage | Rate of Fire | Capacity (Type) | Notes | Picks | Price |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| G18 (9mm Parabellum) | 2d6 | SA/ FA | 33 [C] | This weapon can be used one handed. Recoil Penalties this weapon suffers are increased by 1. | 1 | $500 |
| Uzi (9mm Parabellum) | 2d6 | FA | 40 [C] | This weapon features a folding stock which, when deployed, reduces Recoil Penalties by 1. | 1 | $3,000 |
| Beretta 93R (9mm Parabellum) | 2d6 | B | 20 [C] | This weapon features a folding stock which, when deployed, reduces Recoil Penalties by 1. This weapon can be used in one hand when the stock is folded and not deployed. | 2 | $2,400 |
| AK-47 (7.62×39mm) | 3d6 + 3 | SA/FA | 30 [C] | - | 2 | $600 |
| M4/M16 (5.56mm) | 3d6 | SA/B/FA | 30 [C] | Attacks made with this weapon are at a +1 Bonus. | 2 | $3,000 |
| FN FAL/ HK G3/M14 (7.62×51mm) | 3d6 + 3 | SA/B/FA | 20 [C] | Attacks made with this weapon are at a +1 Bonus. | 2 | $5,000 |
| HK MP5 (9mm Parabellum) | 2d6 | SA/B/FA | 30 [C] | Attacks made with this weapon are at a +1 Bonus. This weapon features a folding stock which, when deployed, reduces Recoil Penalties by 1. | 2 | $5,000 |
| HK MP7 (4.6×30mm) | 1d6 + 5 (+10 vs. ranged armor) | SA/B/FA | 20 [C] | This weapon can be used in one hand. This weapon overcomes the first 10 points of ranged damage cut from worn armor. This weapon features a folding stock which, when deployed, reduces Recoil Penalties by 1. | 3 | $10000 |
| UMP-45 (.45 ACP) | 3d6 | SA/B/FA | 25 [C] | Attacks made with this weapon are at a +1 Bonus. This weapon features a folding stock which, when deployed, reduces Recoil Penalties by 1. | 3 | $4,400 |
| P90 (5.7×28mm) | 2d6 + 2 (+10 vs. ranged armor) | SA/B/FA | 50 [C] | Attacks made with this weapon are at a +1 Bonus. This weapon overcomes the first 10 points of ranged damage cut from worn armor. | 3 | $2800 |
| ACR (6.8mm Remington) | 3d6 + 1 | SA/B/FA | 30 [C] | Attacks made with this weapon are at a +1 Bonus. | 3 | $3,000 |
| FAMAS (5.56mm) | 3d6 | SA/B/FA | 30 [C] | This weapon comes with a Military Scope. | 3 | $4,000 |
| Steyr Aug (5.56mm) | 3d6 | SA/B/FA | 42 [C] | This weapon comes with a Military Scope. | 3 | $5,000 |

**Tec-9:** Produced between 1985 and 1994, the Intratec TEC-DC9 (also known simply as the TEC-9) is a blowback-operated, semi-automatic firearm, chambered in 9×19mm Parabellum, and classified by the U.S. Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, and Firearms as a handgun. It is made of inexpensive molded polymers and stamped steel parts. The TEC-9 was not accepted by any armed forces leading to its use as a civilian gun and eventually a crime gun, infamously associated with gang violence in south-central Los Angeles, since it can be easily and illegally converted to an automatic weapon. The TEC-9 was listed among the 19 firearms banned by name in the USA by the 1994 Federal Assault Weapons Ban. Their small size made them difficult to fire accurately in full auto, and this, when combined with their high rate of fire, made control challenging; this was a key factor in their never finding much success with the military.

**Skorpion:** The distinctive-looking Škorpion vz. 61 is a Czechoslovak submachine gun developed in 1959 by Miroslav Rybář. Although it was developed for use with security forces and special forces, the weapon was also accepted into service with the Czechoslovak Army, as a personal sidearm for lower-ranking army staff, vehicle drivers, armored vehicle personnel and special forces. Currently the weapon is in use with the armed forces of several countries as a sidearm.

**Glock 18:** The Glock 18 is a selective fire variant of the Glock 17, developed at the request of the Austrian counter-terrorist unit EKO Cobra. This machine pistol-class firearm has a lever-type fire-control selector switch, installed on the serrated portion of the rear left side of the slide. With the selector lever in the bottom position, the pistol will shoot fully automatic, and with the selector lever in the top position, the pistol will fire semi-automatically. The firearm is typically used with an extended 33-round capacity magazine, although other magazines from the Glock 17 will function, with available capacities of 10, 17, or 19 rounds. Early Glock 18 models were ported to reduce muzzle rise during automatic fire. The rate of fire in fully automatic mode is approximately 1,100-1,200 rounds per minute. Most of the other characteristics are equivalent to the Glock 17, although the slide, frame, and certain fire-control parts of the Glock 18 are not interchangeable with other Glock models.

**Uzi:** The Uzi (Hebrew: יוּזִי, officially cased as UZI) is a related family of open bolt, blowback-operated submachine guns; these stats represent a full-sized SMG. The Uzi was one of the first weapons to use a telescoping bolt design which allows for the magazine to be housed in the pistol grip for a shorter weapon. The Uzi has found use as a personal defense weapon by rear-echelon troops, officers, artillery troops and tankers, as well as a frontline weapon by elite light infantry

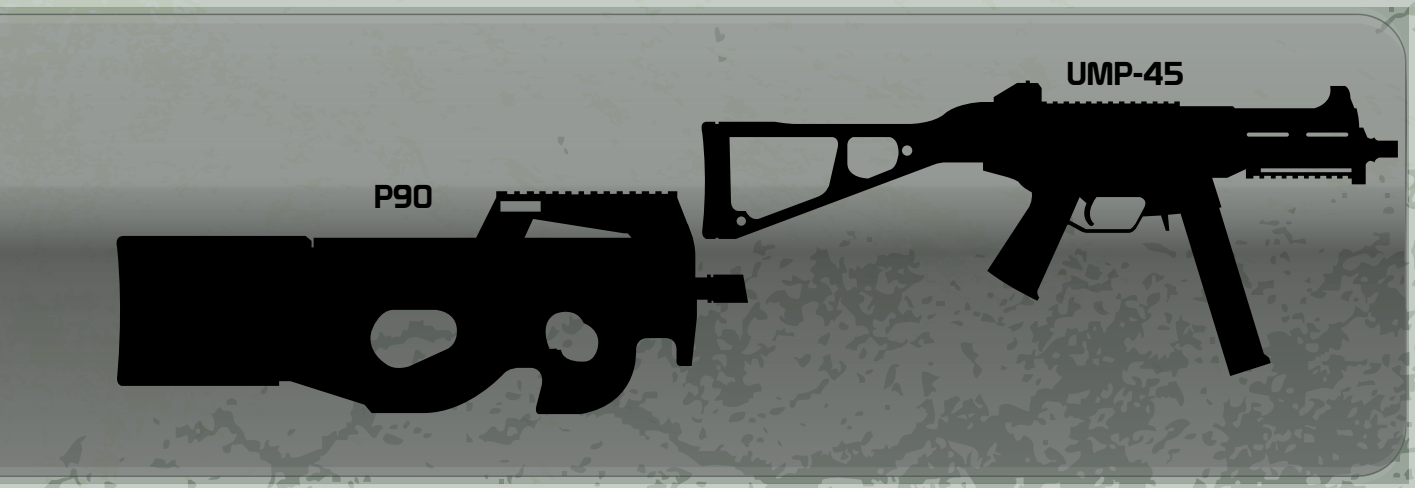
assault forces. The first Uzi submachine gun was designed by Major Uziel Gal in the late 1940s.

**Beretta 93R:** Designed in 1970 and produced only until 1990, the Beretta Model 93R is a selective-fire machine pistol made by the Italian Beretta company and derived from their semi-automatic Model 92. The "R" stands for Raffica which means "burst" in Italian. The pistol was designed in the 1970s and was meant for police and military use, offering extra firepower in a small package, and is suited for concealed carry purposes such as VIP protection, or for close quarters fighting such as room-to-room searches. A selector switch and the foldable foregrip allows the pistol to fire three round bursts with each pull of the trigger for a cyclic rate of 1100 rounds per minute. The designers limited it to fixed three-round bursts to allow it to be more easily controlled. The 93R is basically a Beretta 92 series pistol, but the 93R is single action and outfitted with a muzzle brake, an optional detachable shoulder stock, and a 20-round magazine that also allows for a firmer grip.

**AK-47:** The AK-47 (or Avtomat Kalashnikova) is a selective fire, gas operated 7.62mm assault rifle developed in the Soviet Union by Mikhail Kalashnikov in the 1940s. Six decades later, the AK-47 and its variants and derivatives remain in service throughout the world. It has been manufactured in many countries and has seen service with regular armed forces as well as irregular, revolutionary and terrorist organizations worldwide. In some third world countries, an AK is available on the black market for less than fifty dollars. Designed in 1946 and still being produced.

**M4/M16:** Designed in 1957 and in service from 1964 to the present, the M16 (more formally Rifle, Caliber 5.56mm, M16) is the U.S. military designation for the ArmaLite AR-15 rifle. Colt purchased the rights to the AR-15 and currently uses that designation only for semi-automatic versions of the rifle. The M16 entered United States Army service as the M16A1 and was deployed for jungle warfare in the Republic of South Vietnam in 1963, becoming the standard US Rifle of the Vietnam War by 1969 - replacing the M14 rifle in that role. Since the Vietnam War, the M16 rifle family has been the primary infantry rifle of the U.S. military. With its variants, it has been in use by 15 NATO countries, and is the most produced firearm in its caliber. The M4 is a shorter, lightweight carbine version of the M16, which is, in terms of its stats in this game, functionally identical.

**FN Fal/HK G3:** The Fusil Automatique Léger ("Light Automatic Rifle") or FAL is a self-loading, selective fire battle rifle produced by the Belgian armaments manufacturer Fabrique Nationale de Herstal (FN). Unlike assault



rifles, battle rifles fire full power military ammunition, like the previous generation of semi-automatic rifles. During the Cold War, it was adopted by many NATO countries, with the notable exception of the United States. It is one of the most widely used rifles in history, having been used by over 90 countries. The FAL was predominantly chambered for the 7.62×51mm NATO round; because of its prevalence and widespread use among the armed forces of many NATO countries during the Cold War, it was nicknamed "The right arm of the Free World". The G3 is a 7.62mm battle rifle developed in the 1950s by the German armament manufacturer Heckler & Koch GmbH (H&K) in collaboration with the Spanish state-owned design and development agency CETME (Centro de Estudios Técnicos de Materiales Especiales). Used by dozens of nations and in numerous wars, the G3 has effectively the same statistics as the FN Fal, and numerous similar battle rifles. The emblematic M14 is the American equivalent of the same weapon.

**HK MP5:** Developed in 1964 and still manufactured today, the Heckler & Koch MP5 (From Maschinenpistole 5 - German: "machine pistol model 5") is a 9mm submachine gun of German design, developed in the 1960s by a team of engineers from the German small arms manufacturer Heckler & Koch GmbH (HK) of Oberndorf am Neckar. It is currently used by the armed forces and law enforcement units of over 40 countries, and is a mainstay of SWAT teams and special forces units. The MP5 remains one of the most widely deployed of all current submachine guns and has been developed into a family with numerous variants.

**HK MP7:** The MP7 is a German submachine gun manufactured by Heckler & Koch (H&K) and chambered for the HK 4.6×30mm cartridge. It was designed with the new cartridge to meet NATO requirements published in 1989, as these requirements call for a personal defense weapon (PDW) class firearm with a greater ability to defeat body armor than current weapons limited to conventional pistol cartridges. The MP7 went into production in 2001. It is a direct rival to the FN P90, also developed in response to NATO's requirement. The weapon has been revised since its introduction, and the current production version is the MP7A1. The proliferation of high-quality body armor has begun to make guns that fire pistol ammunition (such as Heckler & Koch's earlier MP5 submachine gun or USP pistol) ineffective. In response to this trend, Heckler & Koch designed the MP7 (along with the now cancelled UCP pistol, which uses the same ammunition) to penetrate body armor, but still be small enough to be used in place of either a pistol or a submachine gun.

**UMP 45:** The UMP is a blowback operated, magazine-fed submachine gun firing from a closed bolt. As originally designed, the UMP is chambered for larger cartridges than other submachine guns like the MP5, to provide more stopping power against unarmored targets (with a slightly lower effective range) than the 9×19mm MP5 provides. A larger cartridge produces more recoil, and makes control more difficult in fully automatic firing. To mitigate this, the cyclic rate of fire was reduced to 600 rounds/min for the UMP45, which makes it one of the slower firing submachine guns on the market. Its predominantly polymer construction reduces both its weight and the number of parts susceptible to corrosion. When the last round of the UMP is fired, the bolt locks open, and can be released via a catch on the left side. The standard viewing sights comprise an aperture rear sight and a front ring with a vertical post. It can mount four Picatinny rails (one on top of the receiver, and one on the right, left, and the bottom of the handguard) for the attachment of accessories such as optical sights, flashlights, or laser sights. Vertical foregrips can be attached to the bottom rail for increased controllability during burst and automatic fire.

**P90:** The FN P90 is a selective fire personal defense weapon (PDW) designed and manufactured by FN Herstal in Belgium. The

P90's name is taken from 1990, the year it was introduced. The P90 was created in response to NATO requests for a replacement for 9×19mm Parabellum firearms; it was designed as a compact but powerful firearm for vehicle crews, operators of crew-served weapons, support personnel, special forces, and counter-terrorist groups. The P90 was designed by FN in conjunction with the FN Five-SeveN pistol and FN 5.7×28mm ammunition. The P90 was developed and initially marketed as a personal defense weapon, but it could also be considered a submachine gun or compact assault rifle. Featuring a compact bullpup design with an integrated reflex sight and fully ambidextrous controls, the P90 is an unconventional weapon with a futuristic appearance. Its design incorporates several innovations such as a unique top-mounted magazine and FN's small-caliber, high-velocity 5.7×28mm ammunition. The P90 is currently in service with military and police forces in over 40 countries, such as Austria, Brazil, Canada, France, Malaysia, Poland, and the United States. In the United States, the P90 is in use with over 200 law enforcement agencies, including the U.S. Secret Service.

**Bushmaster ACR:** The Adaptive Combat Rifle (ACR) is the production name for an updated version of the Masada Adaptive Combat Weapon System. It is a patent pending self-loading rifle platform designed by Magpul Industries of Erie, Colorado. The rifle was initially developed over a period of five months and was planned to replace the M16 completely independent of government funding.

The original Magpul Masada design represents a combination of several recent rifle designs, incorporating what is considered by its designers to be the best features of each in a single, lightweight, modular rifle platform. Design features from the ArmaLite AR-18 (short-stroke gas system), the FN SCAR (upper receiver, charging handle location), the Heckler & Koch G36/XM8 (liberal use of polymer components), the M16/AR-15 (trigger pack), and the M16 (barrel, fire control group) are clearly present. The rifle also includes several features developed by Magpul, such as a quick-change barrel/trunnion system, adjustable gas regulator, non-reciprocating charging handle, and storage compartments located in the stock and grip. For the Army's Individual Carbine competition, Remington unveiled a new version of the ACR in late 2011. Improvements include a magnesium lower receiver, collapsible but non-foldable stock, carbine length gas system, a new barrel nut (which eliminates the quick change barrel), and a folding charging handle. These changes make the weapon 1.8 lbs. lighter.

This particular ACR loads 6.8mm Remington ammunition, a new ammunition type with slightly better ballistic performance than standard 5.56×45mm NATO.

**FAMAS:** FAMAS stands for Fusil d'Assaut de la Manufacture d'Armes de St-Etienne. Development of this rifle began in 1967, under the leadership of the Paul Tellie, a French arms designer. This new rifle was intended to replace in service the MAS Mle.49/56 semi-automatic rifles, MAT-49 submachine guns, and some MAC Mle.1929 light machine guns. The FAMAS rifle was adopted by the French in 1978 and since then became a standard French Army shoulder-fired small arm, known among the French soldiers as "Le Clairon" (the bulge). It is still used by the French army, and was exported in small numbers to some countries like the Senegal or United Arab Emirates. The FAMAS G2, which appeared circa 1994, has the G1-style enlarged trigger guard but can accept only STANAG type (M16-compatible) magazines. It was adopted and purchased by the French Navy in the 1995, with the French Army soon following suit, and also offered for export. At the present time, the slightly upgraded FAMAS G2 rifle is used as a platform for the future FELIN system (a French counterpart to the US "Land Warrior" program), which incorporates various electronic sights and sensors connected to soldier-carried equipment such as helmet mounted displays, ballistic and tactical computers, etc. GIAT also now offers some variations of the basic FAMAS

G2 rifle, such as "Submachine Gun" (with a shortened receiver and 320mm-long barrel), "Commando" (with the standard receiver and the 405mm barrel), and the "Sniper" (with a longer and heavier 620mm barrel and an integral scope mount instead of the carrying handle).

**Steyr-Aug:** First available in 1977, the AUG is an Austrian bullpup 5.56mm assault rifle, designed in the early 1970s by Steyr Mannlicher GmbH & Co KG. In production since 1978, it is the standard small arm of the Austrian Bundesheer and various national police units. The rifle has also been adopted by the armed forces of Argentina, Australia, Bolivia, Ireland, Saudi Arabia, Tunisia (introduced in 1978), Pakistan, and - since 1988 - U.S. Customs.

## Rifles and Shotguns

These weapons are used with the Rifles Skill. These weapons cannot be used one-handed unless otherwise indicated.

| Weapon | Damage | Rate of Fire | Capacity (Type) | Notes | Picks | Price |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Remington Model 700 (.223) | 3d6 + 3 | S | 4 [M] | This weapon features a scope. | 1 | $500 |
| Ithaca 37 (12 Gauge) | 4d6 | S | 4 [M] | - | 1 | $300 |
| ArmaLite AR-15/ Ruger Mini 14 (5.56mm) | 3d6 | SA | 20 [C] | This weapon receives a +1 Bonus to Attack. | 1 | $1,000 |
| Crossbow | 6d6 | S | 1 [Br] | This weapon features a scope and is effectively silenced. Uses hunting rifle ranges. | 2 | $500.00 |
| Remington Model 30 (.30-06) | 5d6 | S | 5 [M] | This weapon features a scope. | 2 | $750 |
| Remington 1100 (12 Gauge) | 4d6 | SA | 5 [M] | - | 2 | $500 |
| Tranquilizer Rifle | 1 | S | 1 [Br] | Plus toxin effect. This weapon features a scope, and is effectively silenced. Compressed air canister is good for 50 shots. | 2 | $1000 |
| Sawn-Off Double-Barreled (12 Gauge) | 4d6 | S or B | 2 [Br] | This weapon can fire both barrels at once for a 'Burst' Attack. | 2 | $1,750 |
| Accuracy International AW (7.62×51mm) | 5d6 | S | 10 [C] | This weapon features a military scope. | 3 | $3450 |
| Mossberg 590 (12 Gauge) | 4d6 | S | 8 [M] | - | 3 | $600 |
| X-Caliber 4 Tranq Rifle | 1 | S | 1 [Br] | Plus toxin effect. This weapon features a military scope, and is effectively silenced. Compressed air canister is good for 50 shots. | 3 | $2,000 |

**Remington 700:** First manufactured in 1962, the model 700 series of firearms are bolt-action hunting rifles. All are based on the same centerfire bolt action. The Model 700 is available in a great number of different stock, barrel and caliber configurations. It is a development of the Remington 721 and 722 series of rifles, which had been introduced in 1948. This particular specimen has a wooden stock and is chambered for the middle-of-the-road .223 round.

**ArmaLite AR-15/Ruger Mini-14:** A favorite of survivalists and gun-fanatics, the AR-15 is a demilitarized, civilian version of the M-16 assault rifle. Standard AR-15 rifles accept detachable magazines of widely varying capacities, and have a pistol grip that protrudes beneath the stock. AR-15 rifles are highly configurable and customizable. They are commonly fitted with several accessories such as bipods, folding or collapsing stocks, threaded barrels for the attachment of a flash suppressor, and a rail system for the attachment of vertical grips, flashlights, laser sights, telescopic sights, etc. The AR-15 rifle is available from 1958 to the present.

**Ithaca 37:** First produced in 1937, the Ithaca 37 is a classic 12 gauge pump-action shotgun used by hunters and law enforcement professionals for decades, and made in large numbers for the civilian, military, and police markets. Also known as the Featherlight, it utilizes a novel combination ejection/loading port on the bottom of the gun which leaves the sides closed to the elements. In addition, the outline of the gun is clean. Finally, since shells load and eject from the bottom, operation of the gun is equally convenient from either side of the gun. This makes the gun popular with left-handed and right-handed shooters alike.

**Crossbow:** This recurve crossbow features a black synthetic stock and fiberglass limbs that offer pure performance. The 14" power stroke with a 150-lb. draw weight delivers arrow speeds of up to 365 FPS with a 16" aluminum arrow. Features built-in adjustable sights and a rail-mounted scope for precision accuracy. Animal control officers and Conspiracy bounty hunters use these crossbows with syringe bolts for long-range live capture.

**Remington Model 30:** Produced from 1921 to 1941, the Remington Model 30 is a US sporting rifle of the inter-war period based on the military P14/M1917 Enfield rifle action, which was manufactured for the British and US governments during World War I. Most early rifles were in the military .30-06 caliber used in the M1917 but it became available in a variety of chamberings. It was the first high-powered bolt-action sporting rifle produced by Remington. These statistics are representative of other powerful .30-.06 hunting rifles.

| Weapon | Damage | Rate of Fire | Capacity (Type) | Notes | Picks | Price |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| WA2000 (.300 Winchester Magnum) | 5d6 + 3 | SA | 6 [C] | This weapon features a scope. | 3 | $15,000 |
| AA-12/USAS 12/ Saiga 12 (12 Gauge) | 4d6 | SA/B/ FA | 8 [C] or 20 [D] | - | 4 | $12,000 |
| CheyTac Intervention (.408 CheyTac) | 5d6 + 6 | S | 7 [C] | This weapon receives a +1 Bonus to Attack and features a military scope and silencer. | 4 | $10,995 |
| HK PSG-1 (7.62×51mm) | 5d6 | SA | 5 [C] | This weapon receives a +1 Bonus to Attack and features a military scope. | 4 | $10,800 |
| Dragunov (7.62×54mm) | 5d6 | SA | 10 [C] | This weapon features a military scope. | 4 | $10,000 |

**Remington 1100:** The Remington 1100 is a gas-operated semi-automatic shotgun, popular among waterfowlers and clay target shooters. Available from 1963 to the present.

**Tranquilizer Rifle:** This CO2 rifle from DAN-INJECT fires a compressed-air powered syringe dart from a .50 caliber smooth-bore barrel. Compact and reliable, with synthetic furniture and a weather-resistant anodized aluminum barrel and stainless steel fixtures. As the manometer and telescopic sight can be viewed simultaneously, pressure adjustment is rapidly and silently achieved without the operator losing sight of the target.

**Sawn-Off Double-Barreled Shotgun:** The #1 choice for zombie killin', unless of course you can rig up one with four side-by-side barrels. This is essentially a Ruger Gold Label (or any number of identical side-by-side break action hunting shotguns) with a sawn-off stock for a pistol grip, and a sawn-off barrel for improved close-quarters handling, concealability, and close-range spread.

**Accuracy International AW:** The Accuracy International Arctic Warfare rifle is a family of bolt-action sniper rifles designed and manufactured by the British company Accuracy International. It has proved popular as a civilian, police and military rifle since its introduction in the 1980s.

Arctic Warfare rifles are generally outfitted with a Schmidt & Bender PM II telescopic sight with fixed power of magnification or with variable magnification. The Precision Marksman is the rifle from which the Arctic Warfare family was developed. In this original form, it entered service in the UK in the mid-1980s with the designation L96A1 (chambered for 7.62×51mm NATO). Model AW (Arctic Warfare) is the basic "improved" version of the L96A1 (still chambered for 7.62×51mm NATO). The name stems from special features designed to enable operation in extremely cold climates.

**Mossberg 590:** Produced from 1961 to the present, the Mossberg 500 is a shotgun manufactured by O.F. Mossberg & Sons. Rather than a single model, the 500 is really a series of widely varying hammerless, pump action repeaters, all of which share the same basic receiver and action, but differ in bore size, barrel length, choke options, magazine capacity, and "furniture" (stock and forearm) materials. The Model 590A1 is a Model 590 with an aluminum trigger guard and safety, and a heavier barrel, intended for military use under extreme conditions and rough handling; the metal trigger guard was added in response to the 3443G materials requirements, and the heavy barrel was added at the request of the Navy. The 590A1 is generally sold through military and law enforcement channels, though in most jurisdictions the 18.5-inch (47 cm) and 20-inch

Accuracy International AW

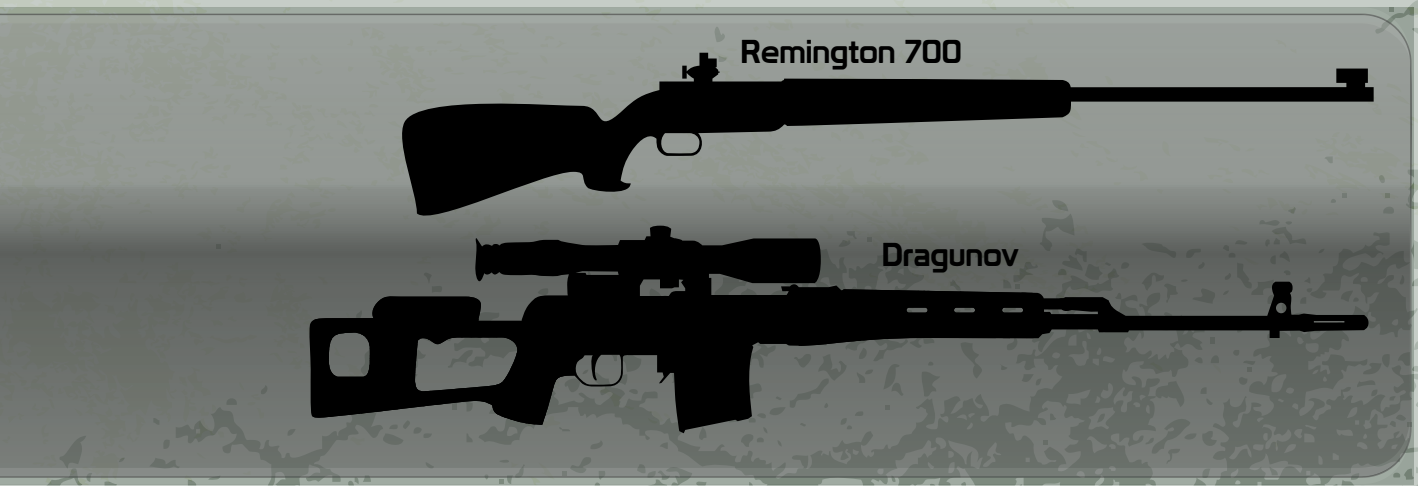
Mossberg 590

(51 cm) models may be legally purchased by private persons.

**X-Caliber 4 Tranq Rifle:** Released in 2007, the X-Caliber has become a favorite for those seeking a versatile, pressure-gauged full-volume dump, lightweight projector without sacrificing range or accuracy. Constructed of machined aluminum and coated with a handsome, elements-resistant, satin-finish, the X-Caliber is the best and most versatile of Pneu-Dart's projectors. The X-Caliber is Virtually Silent, dart ranges are the greatest and the most accurate in the history of the company, and barrels are hardcoat anodized via dichromate seal, minimizing any bore residue. This model is outfitted with a military-grade combination red-dot and telescopic sight. Most likely used for the live-capture of Espers by Conspiracy agents.

**WA2000:** The WA 2000 is a semi-automatic bullpup sniper rifle that was produced by the Carl Walther GmbH Sportwaffen company. Production of the rifle was limited and it was shortly stopped because it was too expensive to achieve widespread sales, leaving the rifle rare and very valuable. The WA 2000 was designed in the late 1970s and early 1980s, in response to the 1972 Summer Olympics Munich massacre. The bullpup design was chosen because it would allow a standard length barrel to be used whilst the overall length would be shorter than a conventional rifle. The WA 2000 has a quick-detachable scope mount and rifle does not have iron sights. The most commonly used optical sight was a Schmidt & Bender 2.5-10X telescopic sight. The .300 Winchester Magnum round was chosen as the primary caliber because of its long range accuracy and its consistency at all ranges. The entire rifle is designed around the barrel. The WA 2000 fires from a closed bolt and uses a bolt with seven locking lugs. It has a two-stage trigger and uses single stack box magazines that feature a 6-round capacity.

**AA-12/USAS 12/Saiga 12:** The Auto Assault-12 (AA-12), originally designed and known as the Atchisson Assault Shotgun, is a shotgun developed in 1972 by Maxwell Atchisson. The current 2005 version has been developed over 18 years since the patent was sold to Military Police Systems, Inc. The original design was the basis of several later weapons, including the South Korean produced Daewoo industries USAS-12 combat shotgun. Along with the USAS-12, the Russian Saiga-12 has similar or identical game statistics to the AA-12. The weapon is selective fire, operating as a semi-automatic, or in fully automatic mode at 300 rounds per minute. It is fed from either an 8-shell box magazine, or a 20-shell drum magazine. The AA-12 can use different types of 3" 12 gauge ammunition such as buckshot, slugs, or less-than-lethal rubber stun batons. Like most 12 gauge shotguns, it can also fire flares or special



Frag-12 19mm fin-stabilized HE, HEAP, and sensor fused HEAB "air-burst" fragmentation shells that can detonate in mid-air.

**CheyTac Intervention:** The CheyTac Intervention is an American bolt action sniper rifle manufactured by CheyTac LLC for long range interdiction. It is fed by a detachable single stack magazine, which holds 7 rounds. It fires .408 CheyTac or .375 CheyTac ammunition. CheyTac papers state that the entire system is capable of delivering sub-MOA accuracy at ranges of up to 2,500 yards (2,300 m), one of the longest ranges of all modern-day sniper rifles. The CheyTac muzzle brake suppressor, manufactured by OPS INC, is a stainless steel suppressor. The all stainless steel construction with no replaceable parts guarantees a suppressor life that equals or exceeds the life of the rifle. The primary sight is the Nightforce NXS 5.5-22×56 variable magnification telescopic sight with a 56mm objective. The night vision system chosen is the AN/PVS-14 GEN III Pinnacle monocular. The PVS-14 is attached to the day optic using the Monoloc device. An AN/PEQ-2 infrared laser is used for system support with the night vision sight under conditions where there is insufficient ambient light or the IR laser is needed for further target illumination. The device is attached to a titanium strut. A Vector IV mil spec laser rangefinder is used to establish ranging data. This laser rangefinder can measure distance up to 6 km (3.7 mi), angles and also features a 360° digital compass and class 1 eye safe filters. The Intervention holds the world record for best group at a distance, landing 3 bullets within 16⅝ inches (42 cm) at 2,321 yards (2,122 m).

**Heckler & Koch PSG-1:** First produced in 1972, The PSG1 (PräzisionsscharfschÜtzengewehr, German for "precision sharpshooter rifle") is a semi-automatic rifle designed by the German company Heckler & Koch of Oberndorf am Neckar. Like the WA2000, this rifle is said to have been developed in response to the Munich massacre at the 1972 Summer Olympics. The West German police units could not engage the terrorists fast enough to prevent them from killing the hostages. HK was then commissioned to create a high accuracy, large magazine capacity, semi-automatic rifle for police and military use. The PSG1 is mechanically based on the G3 rifle and features a low-noise bolt closing device. Its expected accuracy is below 1 minute of arc (MOA) and it is considered to be one of the most accurate semi-automatic sniper rifles in the world. In the hands of a professional shooter, the PSG-1 is capable of putting 50 rounds of match ammunition inside an 80mm circle at 300 meters.

**Dragunov:** The Dragunov sniper rifle is a semi-automatic sniper rifle chambered in 7.62×54mmR and developed in the Soviet Union. Since then, the Dragunov has become the standard squad support weapon of several countries, including those of the former Warsaw Pact.

## Heavy Weapons

These weapons are all used with the Heavy Weapons Combat Skill. None of them can ever be used one-handed. These weapons can only be used by characters with Strength 5 or higher.

| Weapon | Damage | Rate of Fire | Capacity (Type) | Notes | Picks | Price |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| RPG-7 (85mm Rocket) | 10d6 | S | 1 [Br] | This weapon's damage follows the normal rules for grenade blast radius. | 1 | $3,000 |
| L86 LSW (5.56mm) | 3d6 | FA | 30 [C] | This weapon features a scope and receives a +1 Bonus to Attack. | 2 | <Pick Only> |

**RPG-7:** The RPG-7 is a widely-produced, portable, shoulder-launched, anti-tank rocket-propelled grenade weapon. Originally the RPG-7 and its predecessor, the RPG-2, were designed by the Soviet Union, and are now manufactured by the Bazalt company. The ruggedness, simplicity, low cost, and effectiveness of the RPG-7 have made it the most widely used anti-tank weapon in the world. Currently around 40 countries use the weapon, and it is manufactured in a number of variants by nine countries. It is also popular with irregular and guerrilla forces. The RPG has been used in almost all conflicts across all continents since the mid-1960s from the Vietnam War to the present day War in Afghanistan and Iraq War.

| Weapon | Damage | Rate of Fire | Capacity (Type) | Notes | Picks | Price |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| M79 Grenade Launcher (40mm Grenades) | 8d6 | S | 1 [Br] | Damage varies with the ammo loaded; standard rounds follow usual rules for grenade blast. | 2 | <Pick Only> |
| Barrett M99 (.50 BMG) | 9d6 | S | 1 [Br] | This weapon features a military scope. | 2 | $4,000 |
| RPD (7.62×39mm) | 3d6 + 3 | FA | 100 [D] | - | 3 | <Pick Only> |
| M203 Grenade Launcher (40mm Grenades) | 8d6 | S | 1 [M] | Damage varies with the ammo loaded; standard rounds follow usual rules for grenade blast. This weapon or one just like it can be affixed to nearly any assault rifle with a successful Gunsmith test. | 3 | <Pick Only> |
| M60E3 (7.62×51mm) | 4d6 | FA | 250 [Blt] | This weapon features a bipod which, when deployed, reduces Recoil Penalties by 2. | 3 | $8,000 |
| Milkor MGL (40mm Grenades) | 8d6 | SA | 6 [Cy] | Damage varies with the ammo loaded; standard rounds follow usual rules for grenade blast. | 3 | $2,610 |
| Barrett M90 (.50 BMG) | 9d6 | S | 5 [C] | This weapon features a military scope. | 3 | $5,000 |
| XM25 (25mm Grenades) | 6d6 + 6 | SA | 4 [C] | Damage varies with the ammo loaded; standard rounds follow usual rules for grenade blast. | 4 | <Pick Only> |
| M249 (5.56mm) | 3d6 | FA | 100 [D] | Attacks with this weapon receive a +1 Bonus. This weapon features a bipod and a military scope. | 4 | $12,000 |
| Barrett M82 (.50 BMG) | 9d6 | SA | 10 [C] | This weapon features a military scope. | 4 | $18,000 |

**L86 LSW:** The development of the SA-80 (Small Arms family for 1980s) was started in Britain by the late 1960s, with the search for the "ideal" small-bore ammunition. The LSW was based on the SA-80 IW design. The final version of the SA-80 LSW was adopted by the British Army in 1986, and slightly over the 22,000 LSW weapons were manufactured before the production of both L85 IW and L86 LSW was ceased. The L86A1 was plagued by the same problems as its sister, the L85A1 rifle. In fact, the L86A1 was more suitable as a semi-automatic para-sniper rifle than the LSW / LMG, due to the poor reliability in full automatic fire, relatively small (by machine guns standards) magazine capacity, and the lack of quick detachable barrels.

Current British troops prefer much heavier and belt-fed 7.62mm L7A1 GPMG (a license-built copy of Belgian FNMAG general purpose machine gun), and at the present time, the existing stocks of L86A1 are complemented with the 5.56mm FN Minimi belt-fed LMG in the short-barreled Para configuration. The L86A1 will be used mostly as a longer-range aimed fire weapon, while the suppressive fire functions will be conducted using the more effective FN Minimi. General design of the L86A1 is mostly similar to the design of L85A1 rifle, except for the following: the L86A1 has a longer barrel, with the steel stock extension under it, which carries the folding bipods; the bolt and trigger system are modified, so the gun can be fired from open bolt; the butt is fitted with folding shoulder support; the vertical grip is attached below the receiver, behind the magazine housing; the L86A1 could not be fitted with bayonet.

**M79 Grenade Launcher:** First available in 1960, The M79 grenade launcher is a single-shot, shoulder-fired, break-action grenade launcher which fires a 40×46mm grenade, and first appeared during the Vietnam War. Because of its distinctive report, it earned the nicknames of "Thumper", "Thump-Gun", "Bloop Tube", and "Blooper" among American soldiers. The M79 can fire a wide

variety of 40mm rounds, including explosive, anti-personnel, smoke, buckshot, flechette, and illumination. While largely replaced by the M203, the M79 has remained in service in many units worldwide in niche roles.

**Barrett M99:** The Barrett Model 99 "Big Shot" is a single-shot sniper rifle first introduced in 1999 by the Barrett Firearms Company (USA). The company is better known worldwide for its earlier .50 caliber rifles, the semi-automatic M82A1 and bolt-action M90. Like the M90, the rifle uses a bullpup configuration meaning the ammunition is loaded behind the pistol grip. However, it is not fed from a magazine. It is instead a single-shot rifle, meaning that one round is loaded directly into the ejection port and is pushed into the chamber by the bolt.

**RPD:** The RPD (Russian: ручной пулемёт Дегтярёва - Ruchnoy Pulemyot Degtyaryova; English: hand-held machine gun of Degtyaryov) is a light machine gun developed in the Soviet Union by Vasily Degtyaryov for the intermediate 7.62×39mm M43 cartridge. It was created as a replacement for the DP machine gun chambered for the 7.62×54mmR Mosin rifle round. It is a precursor of most squad automatic weapons. The RPD is an automatic weapon using a gas-operated long stroke piston system and a locking system recycled from previous Degtyaryov small arms, consisting of a pair of hinged flaps set in recesses on each side of the receiver. The weapon fires from an open bolt. The RPD is striker fired and features a trigger mechanism that is limited to fully automatic fire only. The bolt is equipped with a spring-loaded casing extraction system and a fixed insert inside the receiver housing serves as the ejector. Spent cartridge casings are ejected downward through an opening in the bolt carrier and receiver.

Like many other rugged Russian-made firearms, the chamber and bore are chrome-lined, greatly decreasing the risk of corrosion and jamming. The weapon has a non-removable barrel with a 3-position gas adjustment valve used to control the performance of the gas system. It is also equipped with a folding integral bipod, wooden shoulder stock, foregrip and pistol grip. The firearm strips down into the following major groups: the receiver and barrel, bolt, bolt carrier, feed tray and feed cover, the recoil mechanism and the trigger group and stock. The machine gun feeds from the left-hand side from a segmented, open-link metallic belt (each segment holds 50-rounds). Two combined belts (linked by cartridge), containing a sum total of 100 rounds are stored in a metal container resembling a drum, are attached to the base of the receiver. The LMG is equipped with a set of open-type iron sights.

**M203:** Designed in 1968, The M203 is a single shot 40mm grenade launcher that attaches to many rifles, but was originally designed for the U.S. M16 and its variant, the M4 Carbine. In the U.S. military, when a rifle or carbine is equipped with the launcher, both weapons are collectively referred to as an M203. Stand-alone variants exist as do versions capable of being used on many other rifles.

**M60E3:** The M60 (formally the United States Machine Gun, Caliber 7.62mm, M60) is a family of American general purpose machine guns firing 7.62×51mm NATO cartridges from a disintegrating belt of M13 links. There are several types of live ammunition approved for use in the M60, including ball, tracer, and armor-piercing rounds. Introduced in 1957, it has served with every branch of the U.S military and still serves with other armed forces. Its manufacture and continued upgrade for military and commercial purchase continues into the 21st century, though it has been replaced or supplemented in most roles by other designs, notably the M240 in U.S service.

**Milkor MGL:** The MGL (Multiple Grenade Launcher) is a lightweight 40mm semi-automatic, 6-shot grenade launcher developed and manufactured in South Africa by Milkor (Pty) Ltd. The MGL was demonstrated as a concept to the South African Defense Force (SADF) in

1981. After its introduction in 1983, the MGL was gradually adopted by the armed forces and law enforcement organizations of over 30 countries; it has since been used in harsh environments ranging from rain forests to deserts. Total production since 1983 has been more than 50,000 units. The MGL is a multiple-shot weapon, intended to significantly increase a small squad's firepower when compared to traditional single-shot grenade launchers like the M203. The MGL is designed to be simple, rugged, and reliable. It uses the well-proven revolver principle to achieve a high rate of accurate fire which can be rapidly brought to bear on a target. A variety of rounds such as HE, HEAT, anti-riot baton, irritant, and pyrotechnic can be loaded and fired as fast as the trigger can be pulled; the cylinder can be loaded or unloaded rapidly to maintain a high rate of fire. Although intended primarily for offensive and defensive use with high-explosive rounds, with appropriate ammunition the launcher is suitable for anti-riot and other security operations. A newly patented modification allows the MGL to fire less lethal (very low pressure) rounds.

**Barrett M90:** The Barrett M90 is a bolt-action, bullpup sniper rifle, chambered in the massively powerful .50 BMG (12.7×99mm) round, and designed by Barrett Firearms Company. The M90 was designed and produced from 1990 to 1995 as a bolt-action alternative to the semi-automatic Barrett M82. It is a bolt-action rifle in a bullpup design. The weapon features a fluted barrel with integrated muzzle brake, 2 part receiver (upper and lower), folding bipod, and a 5-round detachable box magazine. The M90 has no iron sights, but instead has a Picatinny rail for the mounting of a scope. In 1995, Barrett stopped production of the M90, and replaced it with the M95 (same game statistics).

**XM25:** The high-tech XM25 Counter Defilade Target Engagement (CDTE) System, also known as the Punisher and Individual Semiautomatic Air Burst System, is an air burst grenade launcher derived from the XM29 OICW, an ultra-futuristic assault rifle. It was fielded to soldiers serving in the War in Afghanistan and entered full-rate procurement in 2011. The XM25 CDTE fires 25mm grenades that are set to explode in mid-air at or near the target. A laser rangefinder in the weapon is used to determine the distance to the target. The user can manually adjust the detonating distance by up to 10 feet (3.0 m) shorter or longer; the XM25 automatically transmits the detonating distance to the grenade in the firing chamber. The grenade tracks the distance it has traveled by the number of spiral rotations after it is fired, then detonates at the proper distance to produce an air burst effect. These features make the XM25 more effective than traditional grenade launchers at the task of hitting targets that are behind cover or dug into the ground (i.e. in defilade).

**M249:** The M249 light machine gun (LMG) is an American version of the Belgian FN Minimi, a light machine gun manufactured by the Belgian company FN Herstal (FN). The M249 is manufactured in the United States and is widely used by the U.S. Armed Forces. The weapon was introduced in 1984 after being judged the most effective of a number of candidate weapons to address the lack of automatic firepower in small units. The gun provides infantry squads with the heavy volume of fire of a machine gun combined with accuracy and portability approaching that of a rifle. The M249 is gas operated and air-cooled. It has a quick-change barrel, allowing the gunner to rapidly replace an overheated or jammed barrel. A folding bipod is attached near the front of the gun, though an M192 LGM tripod is also available. M249s have seen action in every major conflict involving the United States since the 1989 invasion of Panama.

**Barrett M82:** Designed in 1980, the M82 (also more recently known as the M107) is a recoil-operated, semi-automatic anti-materiel rifle developed by the American Barrett Firearms Manufacturing. A heavy SASR (Special Application Scoped Rifle), it is used by many units and armies around the world. It is also called the "Light Fifty" for its .50 caliber BMG (12.7mm) chambering. In layman's terms, a gigantic anti-vehicular sniper rifle.

## THROWING WEAPONS

These weapons are all used with the Throwing Weapons Combat Skill. Throwing weapons can be thrown with one hand, but readying a throwing weapon is a Move Action that requires both hands to be more-or-less free. If you purchase a throwing weapon with a pick or picks, you receive 2d6 of that weapon - otherwise the prices listed are for individual throwing weapons.

| Weapon | Damage | Notes | Picks (Price) |
|---|---|---|---|
| Throwing Knife | 1d6 + Strength | - | 1 ($10) |
| Shuriken | 1d6 + Speed | +1 to Attack Rolls with this weapon. | 2 ($25) |
| Molotov Cocktail | 4d6 | Targets within one yard of ground zero take full damage; targets two yards away take only 2d6, and targets three yards away take only 1d6 damage. Targets further than three yards away are unaffected. All targets damaged this way are on fire and take 1d6 fire damage per turn unless extinguished with a successful Speed Check and full-turn action. | 2 ($60) |
| Flashbang/ Stun Grenade | 6d6 nonlethal | Only the targets within a yard of ground zero take the full damage. For every yard away a target is, they take 2d6 less damage. For instance, a target two yards away would take only 2d6 damage. All targets hit by a Flashbang suffer a -4 DM to all Attribute Checks, Skill Tests and Attacks they make for the next 5 turns. | 2 ($250) |
| Gas Grenade | As toxin. | Can be filled with one dose of any drug or toxin that can be aerosolized as a gas. Once fired, spreads a cloud of gas covering a radius out to 2d6 yards from point of impact. This gas cloud may move or disperse with the wind at the GM's discretion. | 3 ($175 plus toxin) |
| Fragmentation Grenade | 8d6 | Only the targets within a yard of ground zero take the full damage. For every yard away a target is, they take 2d6 less damage. For instance, a target two yards away would take only 4d6 damage. | 3 ($350) |

# AMMUNITION

Weapons "purchased" with weapon picks come fully loaded, whereas weapons purchased with cash come empty. In either case, for weapons that use clips, one magazine is included, but additional empty spare mags must be purchased in order to reload the weapon quickly. Weapons load only the type of ammo listed in parenthesis next to their names.

## Normal Ammunition

| Caliber | Count Per Box | Notes | Price Per Box |
|---|---|---|---|
| .38 Special FMJ | 50 | - | $15.00 |
| .38 Special Hollow Points | 20 | +1d6 Damage but double target's Armor (if any). | $21.00 |
| 9×19mm Parabellum FMJ | 50 | - | $13.00 |
| 9×19mm Hollow Points | 20 | +1d6 Damage but double target's Armor (if any). | $20.00 |
| .32 ACP | 50 | - | $21.00 |
| .380 ACP | 50 [250] | [Case of 250 Rds.] | $20.00 [$70.00] |
| .40 S&W | 50 | - | $25.00 |
| .45 ACP FMJ | 50 | - | $23.00 |
| .45 ACP Hollow Points | 20 | +1d6 Damage but double target's Armor (if any). | $24.00 |
| 5.7×28mm | 50 | - | $30.00 |
| .357 Magnum | 50 | - | $20.00 |
| .50AE | 20 | - | $38.00 |
| .30-06 | 20 [1000] | [Case of 50 Boxes] | $26.00 [$1100] |
| 7.62×39mm | 20 | - | $14.00 |
| 7.62×54mm | 20 | - | $21.00 |
| 7.62×51mm | 20 [1000] | [Case of 50 Boxes] | $16.00 [$600.00] |
| 5.56mm | 20 [1000] | [Case of 50 Boxes] | $10.00 [$424.00] |
| 4.6×30mm | 50 | - | $36.00 |
| 6.8mm Remington | 20 | - | $15.00 |
| .223 | 20 | - | $17.00 |
| 12 Gauge Buckshot (00) | 5 [250] | [Case of 50 Boxes] | $5.00 [$204.00] |
| 12 Gauge Slug | 5 | Change damage to 1d6 + 12. Ignore special rules for shotguns. | $11.00 |
| .300 Winchester Magnum | 20 | - | $21.00 |
| .408 CheyTac | 20 [198] | [198 Round Can] | $147.00 [$1,450] |
| .50 BMG | 10 | - | $55.00 |
| Spare Clip (Empty) | NA | Required for loading weapons that use clips. | $25.00 per spare magazine |

| Caliber | Count Per Box | Notes | Price Per Box |
|---|---|---|---|
| Spare Drum (Empty) | NA | Required for loading weapons that use drums. | $125 per spare drum |
| Speedloader | NA | Allows for faster reloading of a Cylinder loaded weapon. | $10.00 per speedloader |
| Machine Gun Box/Belt | NA | Required in addition to ammo in order to use full-sized machine guns. | $100.00 per box/belt |

## Special Ammo

| Caliber | Count | Notes | Price Per Count |
|---|---|---|---|
| Pistol Crossbow Bolts | 6 | For mini-crossbow. Can be retrieved and reused, unless destroyed (destroyed on a roll of 1-2 on 1d6). | $20 |
| Crossbow Bolts | 6 | For crossbow. Can be retrieved and reused, unless destroyed (destroyed on a roll of1 on 1d6). | $60 |
| Mini-Injection Bolt | 1 | For mini-crossbow. Can be filled with any drug/ toxin. Damage is 6 plus effect of toxin. | $20 |
| Injection Bolt | 1 | For crossbow. Can be filled with any drug/ toxin. Damage is 12 plus effect of toxin. | $60 |
| Taser Cartridges | 2 | For Tasers. | $50 |
| Tranquilizer | 5 | For tranquilizer pistol/rifle. Can be filled with any drug/toxin. | $25 |
| Flechette/High Explosive 25mm Grenade | 1 | 6d6 damage (-1d6 for every yard from ground zero.) The weapon receives a +4 Bonus to Attack targets behind cover. | $25 |
| 25mm Ring Airfoil | 1 | 6d6 nonlethal damage. | $25 |
| M406 40×46mm HE Grenade | 1 | 8d6 Damage (-2d6 for every yard from ground zero.) | $60 |
| M576 40×46mm Buckshot | 1 | Essentially a giant shotgun shell. 11d6 Damage versus unarmored targets, 5d6 damage versus targets with even one point of armor. No blast radius, but use shotgun rules for Attack. | $80 |
| M650 40×46mm Gas Grenade | 1 | Can be filled with one dose of any drug or toxin that can be aerosolized as a gas. Once fired, spreads a cloud of gas covering a radius out to 2d6 yards from point of impact. This gas cloud may move or disperse with the wind at the GM's discretion. | $50 (plus toxin) |
| M1006 40×46mm Nonlethal "Sponge Grenade" | 1 | 8d6 Nonlethal damage to a single target. No blast. | $22 |
| 85mm HE Rocket Propelled Grenade | 1 | - | $500 |

## WEAPON ACCESSORIES

Weapon accessories can be installed on weapons by making a Gunsmith Skill Test - the difficulty can vary from Very Easy (+4) to Hard (-2) at the GM's discretion. Accessories cannot be installed on weapons that already come with the same accessory "built in", or on heavy weapons.

| Accessory | Effects | Compatibility | Price |
|---|---|---|---|
| Foregrip/ Folding Stock | Reduce Recoil Penalties by 1. | Pistols and machine pistols tend to have folding stocks whereas SMGs and shotguns tend to have foregrips. GM's discretion. | $150 |
| Silencer/ Suppressor | A normal gunshot can be heard anywhere within 100 yards with a Very Easy Wits Check. Hearing a silenced gunshot from the same range is a Hard Wits Check. The same applies to pinpointing the location of a concealed attacker. | Pistols and rifles have silencers - automatic weapons have suppressors. Shotguns and revolvers can't be silenced or suppressed. Incompatible with Bayonet. | $200 |
| Laser Aiming Module | Provides a +2 Bonus to Attack Tests but also provides a +2 Bonus to Speed Checks to Dodge the Attack. | Incompatible with all Scopes. GM's discretion for which weapons can have laser sights. | $500 |
| Scope | Reduce Range Penalties by 1. Enables use of "Sniper" Technique. | Incompatible with L.A.M. or Military Scope. Usually only for revolvers and magnums. | $500 |
| Military Scope | Reduce Range Penalties by 1. Enables use of "Sniper" Technique. +2 Bonus to Attack Tests. | Assault rifles and sniper rifles only. Incompatible with LAM and Scope. | $2,500 |
| Bayonet | Can be used as Bayonet (Melee Weapon, p. 110). | Rifles/shotguns only. | $100 |

## ARMOR

Body armor reduces damage from successful Attacks by a flat amount. However, **every successful Attack does at least 1 point of damage**, so damage cannot be reduced below 1. Body armor reduces melee damage (like from clawing, biting, stabbing, slashing, and bludgeoning attacks) and ranged damage (like from bullets and grenades) differently. Body armor does not protect against Attacks that target the head unless otherwise noted. Note that armor offers no protection against the electrical damage from Tasers and stunguns.

The GM is free to disallow body armor for characters that wouldn't realistically have any.

**Characters can only wear one piece of armor at a time.**

| Armor | Benefit | Notes | Price |
|---|---|---|---|
| Heavy Leather Jacket | Melee Damage Cut: 4<br>Ranged Damage Cut: 1 | -1 to Speed when worn. (Minimum Speed of 1.) Protects torso, arms, and legs. | $200 |
| Flak Jacket | Melee Damage Cut: 1<br>Ranged Damage Cut: 4 | Protects torso only. | $350 |

### Armor Protection versus Psi Talents

Damage caused "directly" by Telekinesis (TK Push, TK Blast, Throw/Crush/Rend/Choke/Squeeze) is reduced by the 'Melee Damage Cut' of the target's worn armor. Indirect damage caused by Telekinesis (using Telekinesis to throw objects at a target) is reduced by either Ranged Damage Cut (for small, "penetrating" objects) or by Melee Damage Cut (for large, blunt objects). Final discretion is left up to the GM.

Primary and secondary burning damage caused by Pyrokinesis (Ignite, Conflagration, Inferno) is reduced by one half of the armor's Ranged Damage Cut. The exception is armor specially designed to be flame retardant (cost: 150% of listed price; no PCs should start with this unless they happen to be fire fighters), which reduces initial and secondary burning damage by its full damage cut (if no initial damage is dealt, then the target has no chance to set on fire).

Armor provides no protection against Temperature Change damage or any other form of Psionic Attack (unless otherwise indicated).

| Armor | Benefit | Notes | Price |
|---|---|---|---|
| Type I Body Armor (Ballistic Vest) | Melee Damage Cut: 2<br>Ranged Damage Cut: 6 | Protects torso only. | $1,000 |
| Type II Body Armor (Ballistic Vest) | Melee Damage Cut: 4<br>Ranged Damage Cut: 9 | Protects torso only. | $2,000 |
| Type III Body Armor (Ballistic Vest) | Melee Damage Cut: 7<br>Ranged Damage Cut: 12 | Protects torso, arms, and legs only. -1 to Speed when worn. (Minimum Speed of 1.) | $3,000 |
| Type IV Body Armor (Ballistic Vest) | Melee Damage Cut: 9<br>Ranged Damage Cut: 18 | Protects torso, arms, and legs only. -2 to Speed when worn. (Minimum Speed of 1.) | $5,000 |
| Helmet | As Type III or Type IV | Adds head protection to Type III or Type IV Body Armor | +$1,000 |
| Riot Armor | Melee Damage Cut: 12<br>Ranged Damage Cut: 8 | Protects entire body, including head. -3 to Speed when worn. (Minimum Speed of 1.) | $10,000 |

## OTHER GEAR

**Night Vision Goggles** ($700)

Negates all visibility Defense Modifiers from darkness when worn. Targets you Attack in a dark room do not receive a positive Defense Modifier for visibility if you are wearing Night Vision Goggles. Also eliminates other negative Difficulty Modifiers that might occur as a result of darkness.

**First Aid Kit** ($50)

Allows you to make an Average First Aid Skill Check to restore a number of d6 of Health to a wounded character equal to your First Aid Skill Bonus. Without a first aid kit, this test may be Hard or Very Hard or outright impossible at the GM's discretion. First Aid Kits run out of supplies after six uses.

**Flashlight** ($15)

Reduces visibility Difficulty Modifiers from darkness by two when illuminated. Characters holding lit flashlights in a dark room receive a Defense Modifier of -2 versus ranged Attacks, however.

**Smelling Salts** ($10)

Smelling salts (ammonium carbonate) can be used to arouse consciousness in an unconscious character. That character regains consciousness at KO Threshold + 1 Health. Espers that smelling salts are used on gain 2d6 Overflow points due to elevated blood pressure, heart rate, and brain activity. Note that **First Aid Kits include and come with one (and only one) dose of Smelling Salts**.

**Gas Mask** ($200)

A gas mask protects the wearer from all aerosolized chemical Attacks, such as tear gas. PCs are very unlikely to start with this item without a really good and logical justification.

**Beeject** ($800)

Generically known as a jet injector or even more generically as an "injection gun", the beeject is a type of medical injecting syringe that uses a high-pressure narrow jet of the injection liquid instead of a hypodermic needle to penetrate the epidermis. This is the method of choice for injecting PPIDs, PPECs, and other Psionically active drugs, and is faster than using a needle. PCs cannot start with this item.

## DRUGS, CHEMICALS, AND TOXINS

Drugs, chemicals, and toxins are a hugely important part of the world of ***Psionics*** which Espers inhabit. Drugs - prescription, recreational, and performance enhancing - can indirectly impact the workings of Espers' Talents. Secret, special chemicals created by corporate government concerns can even grant or take away Psionic Talents. And toxins, especially tranquilizers, are used for the capture (and even elimination) of rogue Espers.

Hence, mind-bending substances, complete with the consequences of overdose and addiction, are some of the most crucial items modeled and available in the ***Psionics*** roleplaying game. If not careful, even powerful Espers can wind up little more than junkies, or risk death from accidental overdose. ***Psionics*** encourages an in-depth, serious look at drug use and addiction, just one of many adult themes that make this game inappropriate for young children.

Whenever possible, research has been done to make the in-game effects of the real life drugs included reflect their real life effects, although the **DICEPUNK SYSTEM**'s degree of abstraction - and concerns of game balance - mitigated this realism significantly. We don't recommend you take any illegal drugs in real life - at least not using these game stats as any sort of reasonable guideline!

SWEET TAMALES

## Real World Drugs (Legal, Prescription, and Recreational)

| Drug | Effects Per Dose | Addiction Check | Addiction Interval (Doses) | Dosage*/Common Street Cost |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Caffeine | Restores 1d6+1 Power Points and adds 1d3 Overflow Points. | Standard Strength | 30 | 100mg/$5.00 |
| Alcohol | Restores 1d6+1 Points of Nonlethal Damage (from Drain only) and 1d3 Points of Overflow; -1 Speed and Wits for 1 Hour. | Standard Will | 7 | 5 units/$20 |
| Marijuana | Restores 1d6 + 4 Power Points and removes 3d6 Overflow Points. -1 Wits for 1 Hour. | Easy Will | 30 | 700mg/$20 |
| Narcotic Stimulants (e.g. Cocaine) | Restores 4d6 Power Points and adds 4d6 Overflow Points. +2 Strength, +1 Speed, -2 Wits and +2 Overflow whenever Overflow is gained, for 1 Hour. | Hard Strength | 7 | 100mg/$20 |
| Non-Narcotic Stimulants (e.g. Amphetamine) | Restores 2d6 + 3 Power Points and adds 1d6 +2 Overflow Points. +1 Speed and +1 Wits and +1 Overflow whenever Overflow is gained, for 1d6 + 4 Hours. | Standard Will | 21 | 250mg/$25 |
| Opiates | Removes 5d6 Overflow Points. -2 Wits, -2 Speed, -2 Will, -1 Strength for 5 Hours. Additionally the user ignores the effects of being wounded (see p. 184). | Hard Strength | 3 | 100mg/$10 |
| Entactogens | Restores 1 Power Point and Removes 1 Overflow Point per minute. -2 Strength and -1 Will for 6 Hours. | Easy Will | 1 | 100mg/$20 |
| Hallucinogens | Add one extra Color Advancement Point (CAP) whenever any Talent is used for 12 Hours. See p. 193. -3 DM to all Tests, Checks, and Attacks and -3 Defense Modifier for same duration. | - | - | 100 ug/$10 |

** The dosage for caffeine self-explanatorily is for caffeine, while the dosage for alcohol uses the British system of alcohol units, which can be determined by multiplying the volume of the drink (in milliliters) by its percentage Alcohol By Volume, and dividing by1000. The dosage for marijuana self-explanatorily is for marijuana. The dosage for opiates refers to heroin. The dosage for listed for entactogens refers to Ecstasy, while the dosage for hallucinogens refers to LSD (blotter acid), and is listed in micrograms - 1 microgram is 1/1000 of a milligram. The listed doses are subject to GM adjustment and the actual amounts are non-crucial for gameplay reasons.*

**Caffeine:** Caffeine also includes low-dose and/or legal stimulants, such as nicotine, high-doses of sugar, energy drinks, or low doses of prescription stimulants such as Ritalin and Adderall taken as prescribed.

**Alcohol:** Alcohol also includes other non-opiate CNS depressants such as prescription barbiturates.

**Marijuana:** Marijuana refers only to THC, in any form of intake (smoked, vaporized, ingested).

**Stimulants:** Stimulant refers to psychostimulants significantly stronger than caffeine. This includes cocaine, amphetamines (speed), methamphetamines (crystal meth) as well as prescription methylphenidate type drugs especially when taken in large doses or snorted.

**Opiates:** Opiates refers to strong CNS depressants ("downers") that are flatly illegal (heroin) or illegal without a prescription (morphine, oxycodone). They may be administered orally or via injection.

**Entactogens:** The classic example of entactogen is the rave/party drug MDMA (ecstasy) which is technically a psychostimulant which causes feelings of intense euphoria, but which has a different enough symptom profile to support a different in-game effect.

**Hallucinogens:** Hallucinogens are divided into natural (salvia, peyote, mescaline, psilocybin mushrooms) and synthetic (LSD, DMT) psychedelics. They effect cognition and perception, and can have sharp dissociative as well as sensory effects.

## Short Term Effects and Roleplaying Cues

### *Caffeine*

- *Reduces physical fatigue and restores alertness when drowsiness occurs*
- *Produces increased wakeful, faster and clearer flow of thought, increased focus.*
- *Can cause insomnia and caffeine dependence in higher daily doses.*
- *Fidgeting, anxiety, excitement, flushing.*
- *Diuretic effects (increased urination) and subsequent dehydration.*
- *Gastrointestinal disturbance, muscle twitching, rambling flow of speech.*
- *Irritability, psychomotor agitation, rapid heartbeat.*

### *Alcohol*

- *Overall improvement in mood, increased self-confidence and sociability.*
- *Shortened attention span, impaired judgement.*
- *Flushed appearance, impaired fine muscle coordination.*
- *Sedation, impaired memory and comprehension.*
- *Delayed reactions, ataxia, blurred vision.*
- *Confusion, impaired senses, analgesia, dizziness, nausea, vomiting.*
- *At highest doses, stupor and eventually coma.*

### *Marijuana*

- *Alteration of conscious perception.*
- *Euphoria, feelings of well-being, relaxation, or stress reduction.*
- *Increased appreciation of humor, music, or the arts.*
- *Joviality, metacognition and introspection, enhanced recollection.*
- *Increased sensuality, increased awareness of sensation.*
- *Increased libido and creativity.*
- *Anxiety, "paranoia" and even intense anxiety or panic attacks.*
- *Greater enjoyment of food taste and aroma, increased appetite.*
- *Distortions in the perception of time and space.*
- *Altered body image, auditory or visual illusions.*
- *Ataxia and rare dissociative states.*
- *Increased heart rate, dry mouth, reddening of the eyes.*
- *Reduced intra-ocular pressure, muscle relaxation, odd temperature sensations.*

### *Stimulant, Any (More Intense With Narcotic Stimulant)*

- *Increased alertness, feelings of well-being and euphoria.*
- *Increased energy and motor activity.*
- *Increased feelings of competence and sexuality.*
- *Itching, tachycardia (increased heart rate), and paranoid delusions.*
- *Tooth-grinding, increased body temperature.*
- *Anxiety, paranoia, and restlessness.*

### *Opiates*

- *Intense euphoria and (illusory) feelings of warmth and safety.*
- *Intense relief of physical and emotional pain.*
- *Profound calm and peace.*
- *Cloudy mental function, floating dream-like state.*
- *Alternately alert and drowsy state. ("Nodding off.")*
- *Dry mouth, flushed skin, slowed breathing.*

#### Drug Use Complications: Additional Doses, Addiction, Tolerance, and Overdose

Additional Doses apply the drug's effects. Drug Bonuses and Penalties "stack" with themselves and each other, as do the side-effects. For drugs that have effects (Attribute Modifiers) with a specific duration, each dose taken before another dose has worn off extends the total time of effect by that of the full sum of the doses' effect times. For instance, a character 47 minutes into the effects of a dose of marijuana (effects last one hour) who takes a second dose will be under the effects of the drug for the next two hours.

Addiction is possible using any kind of drug. For every (Addiction Interval) doses taken, a character must make an appropriate Attribute Check. If they fail, they become addicted to the drug in question. Addiction means that a character must ingest the drug every day, or suffer a -2 DM to all Skill Tests, Attribute Checks, and Attacks each day they don't consume the drug. After every 30 days of not taking the drug (and hence suffering "withdrawal"), you may attempt another Addiction Check to determine if you have broken the addiction.

Tolerance develops with progressive use of a drug, and increases the necessary dosage to experience the drug's effects, and therefore the economic outlay to get necessary doses of the drug. Tolerance has no specific mechanics in Psionics, and is left up to the GM's discretion.

Finally, Overdose occurs when a character takes more than (Strength) doses of any "hard" drug (GM's discretion, but includes all Psionically Active Drugs) within 24 hours. It needn't be the same drug, either. A character mixing several different drugs is just as likely to suffer ill effects as a character taking huge quantities of the same drug. Every dose taken in a 24 hour period after the first (Strength) doses deals (lethal) damage equal to 10 × (Doses Taken That Day - Strength).

- *Muscular weakness.*
- *Constipation, reduced sex drive.*
- *Extreme potential for addiction.*

### *Entactogen*

- *Mental and physical euphoria.*
- *A sense of general well-being and contentedness.*
- *Decreasing negative emotion and behavior such as stress, anxiety, fear and paranoia.*
- *Increased sociability and feelings of communication being easy or simple.*
- *Increased urge to communicate with others.*
- *Increased empathy and feelings of closeness or connection with others.*
- *Reduced insecurity, defensiveness, and fear of emotional injury.*
- *Decreased irritability, aggression, anger and jealousy.*
- *A sense of increased insightfulness and introspection.*
- *Mild psychedelia, and enhanced tactile sensations.*
- *Increased heart rate and blood pressure.*
- *Increased body temperature, perspiration, and sweating.*
- *Blurred vision and pupil dilation.*
- *Nystagmus (rapid involuntary eye movements and jittering).*
- *Trisma (jaw-clenching) and bruxia (grinding of the teeth).*
- *Insomnia.*
- *Loss of appetite, nausea and emesis.*
- *Urinary retention and erectile dysfunction.*

### *Hallucinogens*

- *Pupil dilation, reduced appetite, wakefulness.*
- *Numbness, weakness, nausea.*
- *Hypothermia or hyperthermia.*
- *Elevated blood sugar, goose bumps.*
- *Increased heart rate, jaw clenching.*
- *Increased perspiration, saliva production, and mucus production.*
- *Sleeplessness, tremors, and overactive reflexes.*
- *Psychological experience of radiant colors, either observed or behind closed eyelids.*
- *Rippling or "breathing" objects and surfaces.*
- *An altered sense of time.*
- *Crawling geometric patterns overlaying walls and other objects.*
- *Morphing objects.*
- *Loss of a sense of identity and ego.*
- *Altered sensory experience of senses, emotions, memories, time, and awareness.*
- *After-image like trails of moving objects, sparkling, new textures, shape suggestibility.*
- *Inanimate world and objects appear to animate in an unexplainable way.*
- *Echo-like distortions of sounds, general intensification of music and sounds.*
- *Synesthesia, experience of new dimensions, temporary dissociation.*

If you are not the GM, ask the GM before reading the next section! The existence and properties of certain psionically active drugs may be more than a little spoilery, depending on how your GM has set up the campaign. GMs, see p. 251 for more details.

## Medical and Psionically Active Drugs (Pills)

| Drug | Effects Per Dose* | Addiction Check | Addiction Interval (Doses) | Dosage/Common Street Cost** |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Nairlophine | This "recovery capsule" restores 10 points of damage, 30 minutes after it is taken. Half of the damage returns after 8 hours, the other half is permanently cured. | Easy Strength | 5 | 500mg/$2 |
| Taramine | This recovery capsule temporarily restores 15 points of health after 5 minutes. The removed damage returns (plus one point) after 8 hours. | Standard Strength | 5 | 100mg/$10 |
| Adrinol | All damage is instantly removed for 2d6 hours. The damage returns, plus 10 points (cumulative), after the duration wears off. Adrinol causes the user to gain 4d6 points of Overflow when it is first taken, and another 4d6 points of Overflow when it wears off. | Hard Strength | 2 | 10mg/$250 |
| Dametrol | Overflow gauge is reduced to 0. The user suffers 2d6 nonlethal damage or 1d6 damage (user's choice). Doesn't end an Overload if administered during one. | Hard Will | 2 | 20mg/$500 |
| Pretarine | For 2d6 hours, the Overflow Gauge does not fill when Psionic Talents are used. The Esper suffers 2d6 damage when the drug is taken, and a -1 DM to all Skill Tests, Attacks, and mental Attribute Checks for the duration. Doesn't end an Overload if administered during one. | Standard Will | 1 | 30mg/$1000 |
| Hyper | For 2d6 hours, the Power Point cost of using Psionic Talents is completely waived. The user suffers 2d6 nonlethal damage when the drug is taken, and 4d6 nonlethal damage when it wears off. | Standard Will and Standard Strength | 1 | 90mg/$2000 |
| Light | The user suffers no Strain from using Psionic Talents for 2d6 hours. For the duration, the users suffers a -1 DM to all Attacks and Skill Tests. When the drug wears off, the user suffers 5d6 nonlethal damage. | Hard Wits | 1 | 12.5mg/$1200 |

** All pills that don't say otherwise take 3d6 minutes for their effects to "kick in".*

*** An appropriate Test is necessary to find this drug. See p. 149 for details.*

## Short Term Effects and Roleplaying Cues

### Nairlophine

- This recovery capsule is contained in a yellow and green two-piece, hard starch capsule.
- This is a newly patented non-opioid, non-narcotic, anti-inflammatory painkiller.
- Its method of action is not entirely known, but is thought to be similar to amphetamine usage, only more benign in terms of side effects.
- The drug causes increased perspiration, body temperature, slight hypertension (heightened blood pressure) and tachycardia (increased heart rate).
- The drug has been known to be habit forming, rarely.

### Taramine

- This recovery capsule is a red and white two-piece, hard starch capsule.
- This prescription drug, not usually available outside of SOTA military and law-enforcement first aid kits, combines powerful synthetic opioid pain relievers (more potent than oxycodone) with profound anti-inflammatory and probiotic properties.
- The drug causes lowered blood pressure, nausea, dizziness, blurred vision, and drowsiness.
- Taramine is significantly habit forming.

### Adrinol

- Adrinol is a black and red two-piece hard starch capsule.
- This recovery capsule is highly dangerous; it is for emergencies only, and non-military personnel should not take it. It is not available to the general public, even in hospitals, and few people know of its existence.
- This drug causes a powerful rush of adrenalin, effectively anaesthetizing a combatant. The combatant's wounds don't disappear, but the pain of the wounds does.
- Adrinol causes heightened blood pressure and pulse rate, a false sense of invulnerability, analgesia, and violent tendencies, and significantly increased aggression.
- Adrinol is highly physically addictive.
- Adrinol has caused both psychotic breaks and dissociative episodes in some users.

### Dametrol

- Dametrol is a bright purple two-piece hard starch capsule.
- Dametrol is a highly addictive Psionic drug developed by Abraxis Biotech. It is not known to the general public or available in the mainstream market.
- Short-term side-effects of Dametrol including crippling headaches, accompanied by nosebleed, bruising, anemia, and serious involuntary tremors and seizures.
- Long term use of Dametrol is believed to significantly increase risk of brain cancer.

### Pretarine

- Pretarine is a bright blue-green two-piece hard starch capsule.
- Pretarine is a highly addictive Psionic drug developed by Abraxis Biotech. It is not known to the general public or available in the mainstream market.
- Short-term side effects include crippling headache, nausea, loss of appetite, emesis, and decreased feelings of irritability, aggression, anger and jealousy.
- Long-terms side-effects of Pretarine are unknown.

### Hyper

- Hyper is a triangular pink tablet.
- Hyper is a highly addictive Psionic drug illegally and clandestinely synthesized by The Zodiac Order. However, since then it is has "accidentally" leaked to the civilian black market, and is highly desired among mundane recreational drug users as one of the most intense highs available... and by Espers for obvious reasons.
- Short term effects of Hyper include heightened body temperature, increased mucus and saliva production, increased perspiration, diuretic effects, increased libido, heightened blood pressure and pulse rate, and nose bleed, along with heightened aggression, paranoia, irritability, and potential for violence. Recreational users enjoy it because of sensational sensory hallucinations and a euphoric sense of invincibility.

### *Light*

- *Light is a triangular white tablet.*
- *Short term effects of Light include hallucinations and psychedelia, the reason it is sought by recreational users, who report that Light makes them feel like "pure energy, totally dissociated from an imperfect body". Other effects include pupil dilation, reduced appetite, wakefulness, numbness, weakness, nausea, hypothermia/hyperthermia, goose bumps, sleeplessness, tremors, and overactive reflexes.*
- *Light is a highly addictive Psionic drug illegally and clandestinely synthesized by The Zodiac Order. However, since then it is has "accidentally" leaked to the civilian black market, and is highly desired among mundane recreational drug users as one of the most intense highs available... and by Espers for obvious reasons.*
- *Long term use of Light has been known to cause dementia, loss of brain function similar to Alzheimer's, schizophrenia and mood disorders.*

## Medical and Psionically Active Drugs (Injections)

| Drug | Effects Per Dose* | Addiction Check | Addiction Interval (Doses) | Dosage/Common Street Cost** |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Epinephrine | Epinephrine (adrenalin) is a neurotransmitter/hormone used to treat cardiac arrest and severe allergic reactions in emergency circumstances. If injected into an unconscious character, that character immediately regains consciousness (Health = KO Threshold + 1). If injected into a Dying (but not Dead) character, that character makes a Strength Check. If they succeed, that character's Health is changed to 1d6. Extra doses of epinephrine or doses injected into a healthy person cause extreme adverse effects and actual damage (at least 12 points per dose) at the GM's discretion. In any case, a dose of epinephrine fills an Esper's Overflow Gauge by 6d6. | - | - | 0.3ml/$500 |
| Pentamerol | A powerful broad spectrum anti-biotic, Pentamerol reliably prevents most bacterial and fungal infections. The nausea it causes for its course (2d6 Hours) inflicts a -1 DM to Skill Tests, Attacks and Defense. | - | - | 2 grams/$45 |
| Taramine | Instantly restores 20 points of Health. The "removed" damage returns once the drug's duration (6 hours) ends, plus one additional point. | Standard Strength | 3 | 10mg/$20 |
| Dametrol | Overflow gauge is instantly reduced to 0. The user suffers 2d6 nonlethal damage or 1d6 damage. | Hard Will | 1 | 5 mg/$580 |

| Drug | Effects Per Dose* | Addiction Check | Addiction Interval (Doses) | Dosage/Common Street Cost** |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Ephemerol | Ends a breakdown if administered during one, and resets the target's Overflow Gauge to 0. The target receives a -2 DM to all Skill Tests, Attacks, and Defense for the duration (2d6 Hours). | - | - | 30mg/$250 |
| Anteronar | The user's Overflow Gauge is instantly filled, triggering an immediate Overload. Roll 1d6. On a roll of 1, the user suffers a heart attack. They must immediately succeed a Strength Check or instantly die. Even if they succeed, they suffer 10d6 nonlethal damage from the heart attack, and may need medical attention. | Easy Will | 2 | 6mg/$1,000 |

## PPECs (Injections)

| Drug | Effects Per Dose* | Addiction Check | Addiction Interval (Doses) | Dosage/Common Street Cost** |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| BLUE | Espers without Telekinesis gain Telekinesis Level 1. Non-Espers with Psi Potential*** become Espers and gain Telekinesis Level 1 also. Espers with Telekinesis gain 2d6x10 Blue CAPs. All users gain 10d6 Overflow Points. If the user gained a Talent Level, the effects of any PPIDs the user was previously dosed with are counteracted. | Standard Strength | 1 | 300mg/$25000 |
| RED | Espers without Pyrokinesis gain Pyrokinesis Level 1. Non-Espers with Psi Potential become Espers and gain Pyrokinesis Level 1 also. Espers with Pyrokinesis gain 2d6x10 Red CAPs. All users gain 10d6 Overflow Points. If the user gained a Talent Level, the effects of any PPIDs the user was previously dosed with are counteracted. | Standard Strength | 1 | 300mg/$25000 |
| GREEN | Espers without Psychokinesis gain Psychokinesis Level 1. Non-Espers with Psi Potential become Espers and gain Psychokinesis Level 1 also. Espers with Psychokinesis gain 2d6x10 Green CAPs. All users gain 10d6 Overflow Points. If the user gained a Talent Level, the effects of any PPIDs the user was previously dosed with are counteracted. | Standard Wits | 1 | 300mg/$25000 |

## PPIDs (Injections)

| Drug | Effects Per Dose* | Dosage/Common Street Cost** |
|---|---|---|
| SPNE901 | 1d6+1 Levels of Telekinesis Talents† are blocked and can't be used for 2d6 Hours. | 800mg/$1000 |
| SEENE902 | 1d6+1 Levels of Pyrokinesis Talents† are blocked and can't be used for 2d6 Hours. | 800mg/$1000 |
| HNE903 | 1d6+1 Levels of Psychokinesis Talents† are blocked and can't be used for 2d6 Hours. | 800mg/$1000 |
| I10013 | All Psionic Talents are blocked for 2d6 Hours. All accumulated CAPs are lost. Esper must succeed a Hard Wits Check or lose 1 Level from one Talent (player's choice). | 65mg/$10,000 |

** All injections that don't say otherwise have their effects "kick in" immediately upon injection.*

*** An appropriate Test is necessary to find this drug. See p. 149 for details.*

**** Only a few individuals have the potential to become Espers. To determine if a character does, they have a one-time-only chance to succeed a Hard Wits or Hard Will Check, whichever Attribute is lower.*

*† Esper's choice of which Levels are blocked. For example, an Esper with Telekinesis 5 and Somakinesis 2 who was injected with SPNE901 has 1d6 + 1 Levels of Telekinesis Talents Blocked. Assuming that a 4 was rolled on the die, the Esper temporarily loses access to 5 Levels of Telekinesis Talents. The Esper could choose to lose access to all 5 levels of Telekinesis but keep access to both levels of Somakinesis, or any other combination as long as 5 total levels of Telekinesis Talents were blocked.*

## Short Term Effects and Roleplaying Cues

### *Epinephrine*

- *Epinephrine is a clear liquid often found in prefilled injection pens (Epipens).*
- *Adverse reactions include palpitations, tachycardia, arrhythmia, anxiety, panic attack, headache, tremor, hypertension and acute pulmonary edema.*

### *Pentamerol*

- *Pentamerol is a clear liquid usually stored in a dark amber colored glass bottle or ampoule or a clear plastic IV bag. (Levofloxacin is a good representation of a similar real drug.)*
- *The most common adverse side-effects of Pentamerol are nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, stomach pain, constipation, heartburn, headache, and in women, vaginal itching and/or discharge. Dehydration is common and more serious adverse effects are possible.*

### *Taramine*

- *Taramine is a thick, milky white liquid usually included in pre-filled, pre-packaged ampoules or syrettes.*
- *Taramine causes dizziness, drowsiness, numbness, and reduced blood pressure.*
- *Taramine is significantly habit forming.*

### *Dametrol*

- *Dametrol appears as a bright translucent purple liquid, injected by syringe, dart, or ampoule.*
- *Dametrol's short term side effects include severe headaches (similar to cluster headaches), tremor or seizure, vision impairment (radial blind-spots, similar to migraine symptoms), ocular inflammation and nose-bleeds.*
- *Long-term side adverse effects include dramatically increased incidence of brain cancers.*

### Ephemerol

- *Ephemerol is a pale, sickly-green liquid with a bright hue often described as "radioactive".*
- *Ephemerol interferes with inner-ear function. Users suffer partial deafness and slurred speech, aural pain, auditory hallucinations, and impaired balance, as well as dizziness, nausea, and impaired reasoning.*

### Anteronar

- *Anteronar is a dark red liquid which appears as pearlescent black in certain lighting conditions. It is usually administered subcutaneously with an injection gun (beeject).*
- *Anteronar's short term side-effects include elevated pulse rate, heightened blood pressure, general hypertension, nausea, grinding of teeth, and heightened aggression and irritability.*

### BLUE

- *KXCD54197X is a translucent blue solution usually administered via injection gun.*
- *Side effects include muscle spasms and nausea, muscle numbness and aching, as well as involuntary manifestation of Telekinetic Talents (GM's discretion). The side effects last for 1d6 + 1 hours.*

### RED

- *KCD54198XX is a translucent red solution usually administered via injection gun.*
- *Side effects include increased body temperature, elevated perspiration and salivation, irritability and heightened sexual arousal. More serious side-effects include high fever and involuntary manifestation of Pyrokinetic Talents (GM's discretion). The side effects last for 1d6 + 1 hours.*

### GREEN

- *KCD54199XXX is a translucent green solution usually administered via injection gun.*
- *Side effects include headache, nosebleed, synesthesia, abnormal proprioception and audiovisual hallucinations. Frequently, inability to stop reading others' thoughts is reported, and can be very distressing in combination with hallucinatory effects (GM's discretion). The side effects last for 1d6 + 1 hours.*

### SPNE901

- *"Speak No Evil" is a dark, almost-colorless blue liquid. It is usually delivered via syringe dart or aerosolized as a gas.*
- *Subjects report severe muscle weakness, fatigue, drowsiness, dizziness, and numbness.*

### SEENE902

- *"See No Evil" is a dark, almost-colorless red liquid. It is usually delivered via syringe dart or aerosolized as a gas.*
- *Subjects report dissociative fugue state, most clearly characterized by the inability to muster any emotional involvement with anything. Subjects describe the drug's effects as causing them to be "emotionless" or "unfeeling" without significantly effecting cognitive function.*

### HNE903

- *"Hear No Evil" is a dark, almost-colorless green liquid. It is usually delivered via syringe dart or aerosolized as a gas.*
- *Subjects report a feeling of being "severely drugged" that goes beyond impaired judgment or fuzzy logic: basic cognition is nearly impossible when this substance is in effect.*

### I10013

- *"Abyss" is a black liquid with a viscous, oil-like appearance.*
- *Subjects describe excruciating, crippling headaches, followed by partial or complete blindness or deafness. Dysphoria, nausea and intense vertigo are often common side-effects.*

## Tranquilizers and Immobilizing Agents (Injections)

| Drug | Onset Delay (Rounds/Seconds) | Effects Per Dose* | Dosage/Common Street Cost* |
|---|---|---|---|
| Sedative [Weak (Civilian)] (Ketamine, Phenobarbital, Thorazine) | 1d6 + 5/60-110 | For 2d6 turns after onset, at the end of their turn, the victim suffers 6 nonlethal damage and must succeed an Easy Will Check or immediately lose consciousness for one hour. | 200mg (Ketamine)/$100 |
| Paralytic Agent [Average (Law Enforcement)] (Sodium Thiopental, Vercuronium Bromide) | 1d3 + 2/30-50 | For 2d6 turns after onset, at the end of their turn, the victim suffers 10 nonlethal damage and must succeed a Will Check or immediately lose consciousness for10d6 minutes. | 1gram (Sodium Thiopental)/$500 |
| Incapacitating Agent [Strong (Military)] (Immobilon/M99) | 1/10 | For 1d6 turns after onset, at the end of the turn, the victim suffers 20 nonlethal damage and must succeed a Hard Strength Check and a Hard Will Check or immediately lose consciousness for1d6 + 6 Hours. | 0.01mg M99/$1000 |

** An appropriate Test is necessary to find this drug. See p. 149 for details.*

*** Doses beyond the first while the first is still active inflict twice of the damage as the first dose. The damage is lethal unless the user makes a successful Hard Strength Check on initial injection.*

## Other

**Tear Gas** ($25 per Canister, Military/Police Use Only)

Tear gas violently irritates the eyes, skin, and the mucous membranes and bronchial passages of the airways. This causes characters caught in its radius to cough, choke, tear, and wretch so violently that they suffer a -6 Defense Modifier and a -6 Difficulty Modifier to *all* Tests, Checks, and Attacks until 2d6 turns after they manage to leave the radius of the tear gas cloud. This Penalty is so severe that such a character is effectively blind and virtually helpless, all but incapacitated.

A character caught in a cloud of tear gas at the start of their turn that is able to move out of the cloud by the end of the turn can avoid the effects if they can run out of the area and succeed a Speed Check. A successful Speed Check indicates that the character managed to avoid inhaling the gas or allowing it to touch their unprotected face/eyes as they ran away. If a character can't or won't move far enough to leave the area filled with gas, they don't get to make a Speed Check, and are automatically effected right at the start of the turn.

A properly fitted gas mask provides complete immunity to tear gas.

*"You won't get caught if you don't get scared."*

### Scoring Drugs

Finding drugs requires an appropriate Skill. A Custom Skill defined as something like Streetwise or Partying works great, and the GM might also allow the use of the default (sample) Skill Negotiation - at the GM's discretion, of course. Searching for drugs is always a Wits based Test. The basic time frame for finding drugs is a 12 hour period. During this time the character is mostly concerned with finding drugs and cannot rest or engage in any "adventures". The character searching can choose to double the time for a +1 DM on the Test, up to four times (i.e. +1 at 24 Hours, +2 at Two Days, +3 at Four Days, and +4 at Eight Days). The character searching can choose to halve the time at the cost of a -2 DM on the Test up to twice (i.e. -2 at 6 Hours and -4 at 3 Hours). The DM for modifying the time is in addition to the base Difficulty Modifier for acquiring the drug, as shown on the following table. You cannot just buy PPECs, see p. 196 for more information on their rarity.

When a drug is successfully found, 2d6 + 4 doses are available, or less at the GM's discretion. A bulk shipment might be possible to arrange with a successful Negotiation Test. In any case, the actual "meet" and "buy" should be roleplayed out if at all possible. The GM can increase or decrease the cost from the common street cost listed above as he sees fit based on in-game circumstances.

#### *Scoring Drugs Table*

| Drug Classification | Drugs In This Classification | Difficulty Modifier |
|---|---|---|
| Legal | Alcohol For Adults, Caffeine, Tylenol, Aspirin | No Test needed. |
| Mildly Illegal | Alcohol For Minors, Marijuana | Easy (+2 DM) |
| Controlled Substances | Prescription Amphetamine or Opiates you don't have a prescription for, Nairlophine, Pentamerol, Epinephrine | Normal (No Modifier) |
| Really Quite Illegal (Hard Drugs) | Entactogens, Hallucinogens, Cocaine, Heroin, Taramine, Pretarine, Hyper, Light, Sedatives Such As Ketamine, | Hard (-2 DM) |
| Go To Jail Forever (Exotic/Military) | Ephemerol, Dametrol, Anteronar, Adrinol, PPIDs other than I10013, Paralytic Agent | Crushingly Hard (-4 DM) or impossible at GM's discretion. |

*YOU NEVER SAW A THING AND I WAS NEVER THERE."*

# Broken Things

*By Russell Zimmerman*

## "Come with me if you want to live."

Chance gawked for a moment, blinking stupidly, trying to make sense of it; the speaker wasn't an orderly, wasn't one of the doctors or nurses, wasn't wearing the stark white uniforms they all wore, wasn't bringing him pills or probes or probes full of pills. Here, in his padded-walled room, in his sterile little Hell, was a stranger.

"Sorry," the speaker shrugged, fighting a grin. "I just always wanted to say that."

Chance lurched to his feet, legs weak, knees like noodles, head full of cotton candy from his daily dose of who-knows-the-fuck.

"Nnkay," he managed.

"Name's Patrick," the speaker held out a hand, used it not only to shake, but to pull Chance after him into the hall. Chance smelled smoke. That didn't make any sense.

The orderlies, the doctors and nurses, their uniforms weren't white anymore. Scrubs and aprons and lab coats and everything, everywhere, was streaked with black and gray and some of it was still smoldering. The bitter stink made Chance's mouth into an ashtray, the barbecue-char where badges and nameplates and polyester-blend fabrics had melted into flesh brought up a wave of bile that complemented the smell terribly.

"Guh?"

"They were in my way," the stranger - Patrick? - didn't apologize, just explained. "Come on, we've got to move."

They moved. Chance was half-dragged along, occasionally left to stumble and lean against a wall, sometimes falling, sometimes trotting, sometimes throwing up on himself not at all like an action movie hero.

Patrick went in front of him, along with a wave of alarms, and walls of fire, and the ratta-tat-tat of gunfire that told Chance maybe they were outside where the armed guards were. Sometimes the hallway filled with fire and Chance could only see Patrick's outline, lit by the roaring flames. Sometimes he couldn't even see Patrick, just fire, like the other Esper was wrapped in it, made of it, born from it.

Suddenly, the claustrophobia of the hallways opened up to blue skies, the screams of burning, dying, guards didn't ring and echo quite so much. Chance wasn't sure how long it had been, how long he'd been locked up, how long since he'd breathed fresh, clean, air and seen the sun.

The smoke and the screaming and the stink of burning pork almost ruined that first look at the open sky.

Almost.

*"Interview with subject Seventeen-Alpha, number twenty-three, commencing. This is Dr. Johnson. The recorder is working, I trust you are ready to b–"*

*"Yes."*

*"Please remember to–"*

*"Sorry."*

*"Seventeen! Remember to allow me to finish sentences. This habit of yours, it's really quite rude. We don't want to be rude, do we?"*

*"..."*

*"Do we?"*

*"No."*

*"Good. Good. That's it, drink up. Water is life, Seventeen, and I'm sure you're very thirsty.*

*Not to worry, though, not to worry. We'll restore the air conditioning in your room, too. And maybe some sweets. You'd like that, wouldn't you?"*

*"Yes, sir."*

*"Of course you would. And you understand why we turned it off, don't you? Why we let you get so hot, why you had to be punished like that?"*

*"Yes, sir."*

*"Why?"*

*"Because I hurt them."*

*"Hurt who, subject Seventeen?"*

*"Everyone."*

*"No. No, not everyone. Not this time. What were you being punished for, this time?"*

*"The nurse."*

*"What did you do to him?"*

*"Nothing."*

*"Seventeen. Don't lie. What did you do to him?"*

*"He hurt himself."*

*"Who made him do that?"*

*"..."*

*"Subject Seventeen, if we're done here, I'll simply leave. The other doctor will come back. Do you want to see the other doctor?"*

*"No! I made him do it! I made him hurt himself."*

*"You made him kill himself, you mean."*

*"...yes."*

*"Good. Good. I'm glad you can be honest with me, Seventeen. You must also be honest with yourself. It's important, though, to look at what you did, and not only to acknowledge that what you did was wrong. I didn't tell you to hurt that nurse - to kill him! - but you did it. What's more important, however, was how."*

*"How?"*

*"The doctor, the other nurse in the room, those of us watching the... examination... from the other room."*

*A little whimper.*

*"We were unharmed by your little display. You're learning control, Subject Seventeen. That's very good."*

*"But...but what I did was bad?"*

*"Yes. It was. But how you did it, that was good. You keep the rest of that water. I'll see you tomorrow."*

*"Doctor?"*

*"Yes?"*

*"Can you call me Harry?"*

*"Well. Someone doesn't want their sweets and air conditioning after all, Subject Seventeen. This interview is finished."*

★★

Chance stretched his legs - it was good to have on shoes and socks again, and actual pants, not just one of those stupid little gowns that flashed his ass - as he stood up, rising to his tip-toes, calves screaming after the long car ride. The sun brightened his dirty blond hair, and he stood for a second to just feel the light on his face.

It was an altogether milder warmth than the firestorm Patrick had inside of him.

"So what is this place?" Chance asked the older Esper, head out of the clouds, refreshed after their escape, the rush to the stolen car, and a long sleep during a long drive.

"Israel," Patrick said with a nod towards the opening front door of the run-down house here at the end of their long drive, shaggy-wild grass everywhere, leafy trees all around, pollen so thick in the air you could almost see it.

"Uhh, I really kind of doubt that."

"Aaron Israel," Patrick grinned, tossing his head.

"*Doctor* Aaron Israel, thank you very much," the newcomer said, ambling their way, pink bunny slippers mindless of the gravel drive, food-stained bathrobe mindless of the fact company was over. He cared about his hair as little as he did his wardrobe and footwear; his head was a tangled mess of beard and unkempt mane, just starting to go gray here and there. A floppy red piece of candy dangled half-out of the steaming mug he carried in one hand, the other hand reached out towards Chance for a shake. "I worked hard for the doctorate, and plan on rubbing everyone's nose in it for quite a long while."

"Chance Hartwell," he introduced himself with a tired nod. "What is this place?"

"My house. You can stay here as long as you need to, as long as you keep a low profile and don't touch my best booze."

"I'm, uh, a little young for that," Chance figured Dr. Israel was about twice his age. Truth was, though, Chance felt like maybe days like this were what a good stiff drink was meant for.

"Mm-hmm. A little young for lots of things, but that didn't stop the Shop, did it? You're not even old enough to enlist, but they were sure treating you like an adult, weren't they? And Mr. Hurley, too."

"Patrick?"

His rescuer was currently hauling a big duffel out of the back of their stolen Cavalier, ferrying it up towards Israel's place. Chance'd seen Patrick pull a first aid kit out of there, a couple Gatorade bottles, the clothes Chance had borrowed... who knows what else 'Mr. Hurley' kept there, ready to run off with at a moment's notice?

"Yup. The Human Torch, that's our boy. He was as young as you when he started fighting back. You're old enough for that, I think you're old enough for a drink. Just not from the top shelf."

Chance tried not to think about the burnt-meat smell, the way Patrick had smiled as the last guards had fallen, the way they'd both just stepped over charred bodies on their way to freedom. He also felt like it was a bad time to mention his own Pyrokinetic talents.

"Help him with whatever other crap he's got to get out of your stolen garbage heap of a car, Mr. Hartwell," Israel nodded, flashed bright teeth in a friendly smile that shone through his bushy beard. "Then we'll have dinner, *then* we'll start your training."

"My...what now?"

"Oh, the Zodiac Order's very particular about all their little foot soldiers, Chance. I help them out, from time to time, because I can teach more than math." Israel reached out and gave Chance a little shove towards the house.

Patrick gave him a tired smile over one shoulder. "You're about to start some straight-up Jedi training shit, kid."

The gravity of the moment and of his war-weary tone was undercut significantly by, behind them both, Israel mouthing at the end of his Twizzler, slurping up coffee through the bright red candy like it was a straw.

★★

*"Interview with subject Seventeen-Alpha, number thirty-one, commencing. This is Dr. Johnson. You're in the middle of a busy day, aren't you, Sevent–"*

*"Please don't lie to me."*

*"I beg your pardon?"*

*"You know it's not daytime, so I know it's not daytime. I know you change the lights in my room to try and keep me from sleeping, but I can tell it's not nighttime. I can see it in your mind."*

*"It was just a figure of speech. What did I tell you about unrequested readi–"*

*"Sorry."*

*"And about interru–"*

*"Sorry."*

*"Never mind the exercises we had planned for today. You're clearly in a petulant mood, Seventeen. I think that's quite enough out of you.*

*Clearly that third scheduled mealtime has left you feeling rather spoiled and self-satisfied."*

*"No...please...doctor, sir, please..."*

*"Fine. If you'll stay polite, I'll stay and let you talk."*

*"Please don't leave me alone yet. You just got here!"*

*"And do you want me to send some nurses to keep you company, instead?"*

*"No, no, no no no. No nurses, no needles. Just... I'll be good. Just talk to me about whatever, sir. Please."*

*"Your progress has been a little lacking recently, Seventeen. Why do you think that is?"*

*"Because I...because I don't try?"*

*"Are you just saying what I want to hear?"*

*"No! No! It's because I don't try right, right? It's not that you changed my dose. Don't change my dose again, it's good. I'm not excelling because I'm just not working, but, but, but I'll work harder, sir."*

*"More unauthorized reading, Seventeen. More trying to tell me what I want to hear. I don't appreciate that. It would seem your dosage is too low. I'll make a note of your tolerance levels, and see to it that it's–"*

*"No, doctor, please no!"*

*"That's enough! Perhaps a bit of fasting will help you better recall the rules of civil conversation. I'll see you in a few days, Subject Seventeen. I'll be sending in some nurses before then, to make sure you understand what you did wrong."*

*"Doctor, please!"*

★★

"I'm fucking starving, man," Chance whined, covered in sweat, shirt clinging to him. Their morning run was more of a morning trot, thanks to his slower pace.

"No you're not," Patrick said with the voice of a man who'd been there, once. Starving. He wasn't breathing easily during the jog, but his replies weren't desperate pants, either. "You're just hungry."

"C'mon, you know what I mean."

"I know what you mean is you want to go back to the house and eat some breakfast instead of finishing the run."

"Bingo!"

"But we're not gonna do that. You see Harris complaining?"

"I barely see Harris at all!" Chance was whining again.

Harris was, in fairness, barely in sight. Doctor Israel had encouraged his Esper charges to engage in physical fitness as a means of achieving oneness of thought and action, and Antonio - Tony - had perked right up. He was new, and being eager to exercise hadn't given Chance a great impression of him.

Chance had heard the fantasy football geeks, an entirely different breed of socially-acceptable nerd than Chance's (which had always struck him as terribly unfair) talking about a Tony Harris, once upon a time. Someone in the cafeteria back at Bridgewater, someone certainly not at Chance's table, had been babbling about stats and punt returns and touchdowns and championships. Chance remembered Harris' name mixed in with all that. Chance knew he'd've gotten something thrown at him if he'd been geeking out about his Paladin breaking a record in goblin-slaying, but for some reason numbers about catching stuff and running was cool, and his numbers weren't.

Meeting Harris here at Doctor Israel's place, finding out the college stud athlete was a Somakinetic, had made Chance feel a little better about being out of shape compared to him.

But only a little.

Chance bitched, and wheezed, and panted, and grunted, and - finally - finished his run. Hurley wasn't in Harris' shape, because *no one* was, but he didn't bitch like Chance did. Chance

thought maybe it was because Hurley'd been through way worse shit than running for his breakfast.

Israel was up by the time they got back to the house. The professor was sitting at the table eating some sugary garbage that might as well be called Diabete-o's, wearing cornflower blue pajama bottoms and a tuxedo t-shirt, his usual coffee-and-Twizzler at hand. He toasted them with his mug, then went back to his breakfast.

Tony'd beaten the pair of them back (of course) without even using his Esper gifts (of course), and was frying up some eggs.

"Gotta get you some protein, bro," he gave Chance's - soft - upper arm a friendly punch, taking a break from flipping for a second. "Get you some guns!" There was no hint of malice in Tony's handsome, dark face, but Chance still had a hard time reminding himself that he wasn't being made fun of.

"Yeah." He collapsed into a chair, feeling almost as dead as he had the day Hurley'd gotten him out of that Shop site. "Guns. That's me."

Their afternoon sessions left him just as exhausted. Israel taught every Monday-Wednesday-Friday, but on Tuesdays and Thursdays the boys had double workouts, what Tony called two-a-days, because the taskmaster was home all day. Some poor sap of a TA handled his grading, so the math professor was free to torment his Esper trainees to his twisted heart's content.

"Strong body, strong mind," he often repeated, walking around as often as not in flip-flops and tie-dyed shirts, nonchalantly strolling while the three of them - or at least Chance, for sure - struggled, cursed, and ached through various calisthenics.

But the afternoons, they were a whole different flavor of tiring. Their mornings might start with some basic physical training, but it was practicing with their powers, wearing themselves out trying to learn control and creativity, that left even Tony exhausted. Israel worked them hard. He didn't have any Esper tricks himself, but he was pretty good at coaxing the best out of his refugee students.

Chance wasn't sure he needed 'guns' since he could move shit with his brain. That was his big gift, his real knack. Simple Teek, hauling around heavy things with a look. He could start some fires, too - nothing like what Patrick could do! - but his big thing was, well, moving big things. And while he couldn't lift the weight that his friend Ian could, he could still lift some serious weight.

(Ian – Patrick said that Ian was safe, but wouldn't disclose any more. The Zodiac Order was kind of fanatical about isolating its cells, for the sake of security. It made Chance wish he could read minds.)

Half of why Chance hated running was that he could fly when he worked at it. Fly! Fuck running, man. His mind was stronger than his body could ever be, and for Chance that wasn't exactly a news flash.

Pat Hurley was their firestarter. Even Doc Israel hadn't met a more powerful Pyrokinetic, and Chance had seen first-hand just what Patrick could do. Tony's powers were more in line with Chance's - Teek, to an extent - but he'd turned them inwards. Chance could haul more freight, but Tony could manipulate himself. He was faster, stronger, tougher. Right out of a comic book. Somakinetic talents were very football-star-jock of him, but Chance tried not to hold it against him.

Tried.

About three weeks in, Chance found himself snooping around Israel's pad. The testosterone-fest left him still feeling a little like an outsider, like the geek back in high school. Between Patrick's tough-guy attitude, Harris' dark good looks and fitness, and Doctor Israel's unrelenting, if eccentric, instruction, he sometimes just had to get away. After the time he'd spent stuck in that Institute facility before Patrick'd helped him escape, it felt good to have a little freedom.

The attic wasn't exactly clear blue skies and a cool breeze, but it was someplace the other three didn't go, someplace he could call his own, even momentarily.

Out of all the boxes, all the dusty cardboard cubes with illegible Sharpie scribblings on some random side, Chance chose *that* one to fucking snoop around in.

"DD-214," it said on the side in big bold letters. It almost sounded like a droid from *Star Wars*, but Chance had time to kill, so he took a look. A gesture and a glance swept off dust, a second flick of the wits opened the tucked-down lids.

There was some paperwork, a crumpled newspaper clipping, a few photographs, and a shadow box inside.

"Whew," Chance finally relented and used his hands to rummage, now, eyes going wide. "Doc Israel's a badass!"

MOS 8541, a form said, and Fallujah, and Confirmed Kills, and United States Marine Corps...

"Holy shit," Chance half-fell, half-flew, down the rickety ladder, hollering as he made it down the stairs and around a corner to burst into the kitchen, holding up a photograph of a younger, almost unrecognizable, Aaron Israel, clean-shaven and wearing a dress uniform.

"You're a fucking sniper?!"

*No*, Doctor Israel thought at him very hard, so hard the other two 'heard' it, too. *I'm a math professor now.*

"Holy shit," Chance sputtered again, eyes no less wild. "You're a fucking Esper?!"

Israel sighed.

*"Interview with subject Seventeen-Alpha, number fifty-four, commencing. This is Dr. Johnson. Subject Seventeen seems to be recovering nicely, isn't that right?"*

*Whimpers.*

*"You can answer, Seventeen."*

*"..."*

*"Answer me."*

*"Yes, sir."*

*"Yes what?"*

*"Yes. I feel fine, sir."*

*"The headaches have gone away?"*

*"Sort of."*

*"Only when you exert yourself?"*

*"Sort of."*

*"Seventeen, you're not being very specific with me."*

*"I'm scared."*

*"Of what?"*

*"The knives."*

*"You know we don't use those unless we need to. Do you need me to?"*

*"No!"*

*"Do I need to call the nurses?"*

*"No!"*

*"Very good, then, Seventeen. Very good."*

*"Can you call me Harry, please?"*

*"Maybe I do need to call the nurses."*

*"Isn't my name Harry?"*

*"You are Subject Seventeen, my best work yet. But still not quite perfect. Make a note: the patient may not be fully recovered from the surgery, after all. Check scans and compare. Adjust dosage as needed."*

*"Wasn't my name Harry?"*

*"Seventeen, you need to listen to me. Do you still see the lights? When you read people - I know you read people, Seventeen, don't lie to me about it again - when you read people, do you still have a visual cue, or is it purely a mental sensation?"*

*"I... do I... I don't know. Should I see lights?"*

*"Seventeen, be honest. I won't come talk to you if you won't be honest. Do you want me to go?"*

*"No, sir!"*

*"Do you want me to go, and the nurses to come?"*

*"No! No, please, just... I... I don't see the lights? I don't see the lights!"*

*"I think that's enough for today, Seventeen. I'll let you think about it for a while. The nurses will be in shortly."*

*Whimpering.*

"You've seen what they can do," Doctor Israel droned on, pacing back and forth against one living room wall, like he was in a lecture hall talking about calculus. He was dressed almost appropriately for once, back home from his job in plain khaki pants, a drab gray shirt, and a brown tweed jacket with patches at the elbows. His bright red Docs made him look more eccentric and less academic, but that didn't stop him from somehow making this life-and-death struggle as boring as any math class.

The three younger Espers were crammed, Patrick, Chance, Tony, onto Israel's couch, a captive audience.

"You've seen, and felt, what they're after. First hand. You've been their prisoners, their test subjects, their little rats in little cages. There are more of them than there are of us. The Institute has more slick killers in black suits than we can count, it sometimes seems."

Chance didn't find that terribly comforting, considering the sorts of numbers Doc Israel worked with.

"What we *have* is what they're missing, though; spontaneity. Creativity. Impulse. They are soulless automatons, cold-eyed men with neat haircuts and mirror shades, taking orders from up some ladder they hope to climb if they play by the book long enough and hard enough. We're... not that."

*Not in those shoes*, Chance thought, hoping Doc wasn't mind-scanning right then.

"The Zodiac Order, for all that I still fault much of their organizational and fund-raising methods, is very nearly the opposite of The Institute. They embrace the evolution of Espers instead of fighting it; they encourage flexibility - moral and otherwise - instead of stifling it; they run small, irregular, teams instead of mono-tone armies. The Shop is trying to *control* the future. But we *are* the future."

*So here we are.*

"So. Here you are," Israel stopped, hands on his hips, and for just a second, behind the wild beard and shaggy hair, Chance could imagine him looking formidable in Marine combat camo. "You're soldiers now. The Order helped you, so the Order wants some help. The Institute tried to take you apart, so now you take them apart."

"Why all the 'you' crap, Doc?" Patrick spoke up, surly and a little hostile, especially where defending the Order came in. "You're one of us. You're just like us. You could really help out."

"I am helping out. You've all been here for months now, training, healing up, using your powers, eating my fucking Ding-Dongs," the last with a glare at Chance. "And all at a very moderate price to the Zodiac Order. Believe me, they could afford to pay much more rent than I'm collecting."

Chance wondered if they were about to get another lecture about how some Zodiac drugs sometimes showed up on the streets and kids wound up dead, but - if one had been coming - Hurley cut it off.

"Yeah, but c'mon, Doc. None of us can do what you can do. Who knows what the Order's gonna need us to do next, where we gotta hit next? Having someone who can Push would be a big help–"

"No."

"–which doesn't even count the fact you're a fucking badass–"

"No."

"–fucking 'American Sniper' dude, or whatever!"

"No."

"But why?!" Hurley was getting loud again. Chance hoped he was just imagining it getting hotter in here, as he and Tony shared a worried glance.

"Because I choose not to," Israel said, with a certainty born only of long thought. "Because leaving people the right to choose is what makes the 'us' better than the 'them,' in this case. Because reaching into someone's brain and taking that choice away is wrong. Because forcing me to do so is doubly wrong. Because staying off their radar is how I've stayed alive as long as I can, and because, for all I know, The Institute has Esper bloodhounds who could track me based just on my psycho-scent."

"Because you're scared," Patrick said, like it was the ugliest thing in the world.

"Absolutely," Israel nodded back. "And you should be, too. Fear keeps you sharp."

"Fear leads to anger," Chance cut in, grinning, "Anger leads to hate. Hate leads to–"

"Huh?" Tony didn't get it.

"Fine. Stay here. Teach math, drink coffee we all pretend isn't half whiskey, do what you've gotta do, man." Hurley stood up from the old couch, and Chance wasn't sure if the ripples in the air were dust or wisps of smoke. "But don't lecture us when our orders get here, Doc. Our gig is our gig, whether you approve or not. And remember, you're part of the problem if you're not part of the solution."

The hothead stormed off.

Tony stood up, Chance hauled himself to his feet. Israel looked them over, like he was expecting another outburst.

"Nope," Tony hustled out unapologetically, leaving Chance alone. He never liked being alone with authority figures.

"So, uhh..."

Israel just lifted an eyebrow.

"When the orders come in, then, I guess you're just..."

"I'm sure I'll be busy teaching class, Chance. I'm not in the Marines anymore; I have to collect a paycheck by doing something besides shooting bad guys in the face for money. You don't want me to lose my job, do you?"

"No," Chance looked away first. Chance hated how he always looked away first.

"That's right. Now go get dinner started. Duty rotation waits for no man, and you guys must be hungry after this afternoon's exercises."

Chance wasn't much of a cook, but luckily reheating leftovers wasn't much of a job.

*"Interview with subject Seventeen-Alpha, number fifty-four, commencing. This is Dr. Johnson. Seventeen, you had another episode, didn't you?"*

*"Yes, sir."*

*"Do you know how many people you hurt this time, Seventeen?"*

*"Yes."*

*"Do you know because you read me when I asked that question?"*

*"Sort of."*

*"Explain yourself."*

*"I also know from reading you before you asked it. And reading you before you came in. And reading the guards, and reading the nurses."*

*"And from the incident itself?"*

*"Not really, no. I... I just wanted to hurt them. Hurt everyone who was hurting me."*

*"Well, you did. All three nurses, and the attending physician, have entirely lost their higher functions."*

*"..."*

*"What was that? What have I told you about mumbling?"*

*"I said... I said 'sorry,' sir."*

*"No you didn't. It was lying that got you that procedure in the first place, Seventeen. It was because you failed, because you didn't try your best on your exercises, like I want you to. What did you really say?"*

*"I said sorry!"*

*"Every time you lie, you get another day of fluids instead of food."*

*"I said good! I said good! I was glad I hurt them! I'm glad they stopped hurting me!"*

*"We're not hurting you, Seventeen. We're fixing you. We're preparing you. To help you think about that, you just lost your light privileges for the next forty-eight hours."*

*"No, doctor, please, not the dark! Not the dark! Don't leave me alone to just... don't make me think that long!"*

*"I'll see you in two days, Seventeen. Think about what you did wrong."*

"This is such bullshit, man," Chance was whining again, but he couldn't help it. A car? A fucking car?

"Yes, a car," Israel said, leaning against a tree, the only one of them in the shade. The crazy professor was wearing a garish floral-print shirt today, cargo shorts, and a pair of brown loafers that would've gone, nicely and professionally, with an entirely different outfit. It was topped off with a ridiculous straw cowboy hat.

"But that's impossible!"

"Moving anything with your brain is impossible," the academic said with a shrug. "So since you can already do it, just do it more."

Hurley and Harris were off having a good time - Patrick was creating and throwing little golfball-sized spheres of flame like a wizard, Tony was dodging them like a ninja - and Chance had to, like, lift weights with his brain? What a crock of shit.

"It's not a crock of shit. It's a Jedi trick. I know what you're thinking right now, which is why I mentioned

that trigger word. 'Size matters not,' that little green fucker said, right? So lift the car."

"I'll try, but c'mon, man, look at it!"

It was a rusty old heap someone had long since run off the road and left for dead, the long-abused target of teenaged vandals, casual target practice, and decades of weathering. The fins proclaimed it to be older than even Israel's late thirties, a scrap pile that would be made of good old steel instead of any plastics or lightweight materials at all.

"How's it go?" Israel wasn't impressed. "'Do or do not...'"

*There is no try.*

Chance focused. Chance stared. Chance gestured imperiously, like a comic book character or, yes, a Jedi Knight.

"You've got this," Israel said, switching gears from stern to reassuring.

Chance reached out with his brain, reached out with his mind, reached out with his arm and his willpower and his Esper talents, all at once. Chance grunted and strained, felt himself turning red in the face.

"Maybe next time," the doc's tone shifted, but Chance didn't hear the notes of concern in his voice as the professor started across the small grassy clearing toward him.

Chance pushed himself as hard as he could. Chance felt a trickle of blood start down from his mouth to his nose, and he licked at it.

"That's enough," Israel said, and then he put a hand on Chance's shoulder.

Chance felt it like an orderly's hand. He heard it like a nurse's gruff 'that's enough' just as the anesthesia was kicking in. He heard it like a precursor to the knives and the probes and the shocking pain. He was - just for that instant - back in the Shop's facility, before the firestorm of Patrick Hurley had swept through the place like Dresden.

His heartbeat spiked.

He pushed too hard.

Something inside him gave way, *and the power came out.*

★★

There were a few things that made Tony a really good football player. Well, that *had* made him a good football player. Before the wrong people noticed just *how* fast, *how* strong he was. Before shit got way too real.

Recruiters, coaches, friends - fuck, even his fellow Espers here at Israel's crash pad - noticed his strength and his speed. What few of them noticed, at least not consciously, was that Tony was also a goddamn genius. Partly, this was by design. He had learned really early on that being a Mensa candidate was just not cool, especially not in his neighborhood. Smarts intimidated stupid people, and stupid people could get really dangerous when they felt intimidated.

So, all throughout grade school and into college, he'd let himself kind of blow off the academic stuff. Play to his other strengths. Without trying, he could pull the B minimum he needed to stay on football teams and earn a scholarship. It wasn't hard to blow off - book stuff had never been *interesting* to him anyway.

What did interest him - what he was really good at - was the real-time stuff. Especially noticing small things. Spotting a sudden weak spot cropping up in the other team's defense; spotting when the QB was about to get sacked and needed to get rid of the ball. Changing the trajectory of his run to match a pass that had gone a little awry. Even off the field - Tony always knew when a teammate had gotten a little too wasted and was about to start a fight, and saw the right angles of approach to defuse the situation. He could see trouble before it even started, and his brain and body were both fast enough to head it off at the pass.

Yeah, he could always see trouble coming. And he sure as shit saw it now.

"Hey!" Patrick shouted as Tony suddenly turned away from him, abruptly ending their training

session. But some instinct and analysis told him that he didn't have any time to explain.

He'd heard the concern growing in Israel's voice, and felt the sudden, too-loud silence that swept over the field like the universe was drawing an enormous breath.

But now, when he looked across the field, he knew that even Patrick would be able to see that things had suddenly gotten very bad.

Chance - well, his mind at least - was gone. Only a Telekinetic reaction remained. Particles of dirt and grass and even Chance himself (nose and mouth a mess of blood) were starting to lift up into the air. Israel, *standing right next to him*, had only just managed to pull his hand away from the boy's shoulder.

Now, Patrick noticed. But even before the firestarter could begin his utterance of, "Oh, shit," Tony was tearing across the field, leaving a shallow furrow of kicked-up earth and a cloud of dust in his wake.

Tackling had never been one of Tony's greatest strengths, but he was no slouch at it, either. As the rocks at Chance's feet hovered upward, as the air around him seemed to suck inward, Tony lowered his shoulder and caught Israel around the waist with one burly arm. The professor's breath went out of him in a grunt of pain; Tony could feel a few of the doc's ribs fracture from the heavy impact. But he knew he couldn't stop. He let his strength and momentum and pounding legs carry them as far from Chance as they could get in the spare seconds they still had.

And then, seven yards out, he felt the blast of force that knocked him forward, airborne, Israel flying through the air and out of his hold.

Behind him, the old car blasted out of the ground, dirt and flakes of rust flying. Metal shrieked as it was torn apart, riven ferociously, doors ripped from hinges, hood and trunk sheared away, Detroit steel sheared in half by raw mental power. The car was torn apart and tossed away as gravitic fields went mad, lifted, thrown, rent and shredded, hurled in every direction at once; so was the ground beneath Chance's feet, and the air all around him.

Tony managed to catch himself on his hands and knees as he landed; a quick mental check told him nothing was broken, or if it was, adrenaline was keeping him from feeling it. Israel hit the ground in much worse shape - shirt in tatters, one arm bent at an impossible angle.

The ancient Chevy smashed itself back together, pieces all wrong, everything smaller and bent and twisted. It compacted itself, a perfect sphere, as Chance howled in pain and lifted the whole world in time to his heartbeat. The ball of car fell - smashed, was thrown - to the ground on the next downbeat, and by then Tony was back at Israel's side, moving fast, ducking the matchsticks and sharpened stakes that had been the professor's leaning-tree a few moments earlier.

Patrick, across the gulf of devastation and debris, shouted into the tornado, but Chance wasn't home to hear him. Tony couldn't make out what the other Esper was saying, but Patrick was clearly as much out of his depth as he was.

Sure, he'd heard about 'popping.' But seeing it was another matter altogether.

"Doc!" Tony shouted, kneeling next to Israel's body, as broken as a cast-off toy. "Doc, what do we do?!"

"Get me to the house," Israel coughed a fine red mist, but his eyes were hard and cold and sure. "Eff... Ephemerol..."

At first, Tony thought that the doc was saying nonsense, concussed into delirium. But that word seemed to mean something to Israel, and there was no time for questions. He snatched Israel up like he weighed nothing - half with his brain, half with his arms - and sprinted toward the house before another wave of destruction could sweep over them.

Patrick shouted and gestured, not knowing what he was doing but feeling like he needed to do something. Tony was a dark blur, sprinting fast away from Chance and toward Israel's rickety old house, the professor in his arms. Something about the motion seemed to catch Chance's

attention (not-Chance, Patrick thought), and the blonde kid - hovering drunkenly, hands clasped to his head in pain as blood poured from his tear ducts and nose and ears - lurched after them. Maybe, Patrick thought, the part of him that was awake and aware (if there was such a part) was looking for someone to help him.

But that house had never been sturdy to begin with. And if the kid got anywhere near it...

"CHANCE!" Patrick screamed at the top of his lungs, and summoned up a ball of flame that almost matched the packed-tight Chevyball in size. He let the swirling waves of gravity around Chance pull it in, adding light to the storm. It caught not-Chance's eye, the heat or the flash of color, and the twister of gravitic fields went irregular, lopsided, some fight-or-flight instinct raised a protective wall of rending, shearing force opposite Patrick's gout of flame.

Not-Chance reversed his stuttering movements, and advanced on Patrick.

Patrick backed away, feeling heat rising in his face, in his hands, gathering. He took stock of the swirling debris, the earth beneath Chance's hovering feet pulled upward like a jagged corona. Looked at the ball of scrap that had once been a car. He raised his hand to throw another burst of flame.

*I didn't fucking save you from them just to kill you*, he thought. *Don't make me do this.*

*Twip* - a sound from elsewhere and outside of the chaos, a pin drop in the middle of a tornado.

And then Patrick saw it - just a tiny little dart, jutting out of Chance's neck.

The Ephemerol did its work as quickly and efficiently as the shooter who'd pulled the trigger. The maelstrom ended as swiftly, as terribly, as it had begun. Chance fell to the ground like a puppet with cut strings. Where Chance had been hovering, now Patrick could see the old house in the distance. And standing just outside the door were Israel and Tony.

Actually, standing wasn't really the right word.

Israel's right arm - his good arm - was so badly broken that Patrick ached just from looking at it. He held the stock of the tranquilizer rifle nestled into his left shoulder, left hand on the grip, finger still hovering on the trigger as he looked through the scope. Tony was crouched in front of him, holding perfectly still, with the rifle's forestock resting on his shoulder.

It was an impossible shot. An absurd shot.

Except - somehow - it wasn't.

Israel held his gunman's pose, despite his obvious pain. It wasn't until a few breaths after Chance hit the dirt that Israel crumpled against Tony's back, letting the tranq rifle clatter to the ground. The Somakinetic rose from his crouch and supported Israel under his left shoulder, half carrying him across the field to where Patrick stood over Chance's unconscious form.

The clearing was bigger and ragged-edged, ground zero, marked like a tornado had touched down there, and only there, the finger of God reaching down to scar the earth for no good reason. Trees were thrown this way and that, rogue branches impaling ancient oaks, pieces of Chevrolet stuck in tree trunks like shrapnel.

"This," the professor coughed, as limp as not against Tony's shoulder, "Is why I don't do field work."

They were alive.

Chance had lived up to his name, all things considered. It could've gone worse.

*"Interview with subject Seventeen-Alpha, number seventy-one, commencing. This is Dr. Johnson. Subject Seventeen had a very good day today, didn't he?"*

*"Yes, sir!"*

*"You liked the special prescription, didn't you, Seventeen?"*

*"Yes, sir!"*

*"And the heat being turned back on? The upgraded meal plan?"*

*"It's all been wonderful, sir."*

*"Good, good. But, most importantly, you understand why we're giving you all of these... treats?"*

*"Because I did good?"*

*"Because you did good. That's right. You showed exceptional control and restraint throughout yesterday's test, Seventeen. You did yeoman's work, absolutely."*

*"Thank you, sir."*

*"You were positively... surgical, really. There's no other word for it. Your precision was impeccable. Absolutely impeccable. They'll have no idea what transpired, never in the slightest. Hmph. That will show them, sending someone to spy on my project."*

*"Yes, sir."*

*"Sneaks and spies and who-knows-what. Irritating. Interrupting my work. Well. Well, we'll just see about that. You did fine, Seventeen, once we uncovered them. Absolutely fine."*

*"Thank you, sir."*

*"Yes, well. We'll be folding their little change of attitude into your regular testing regime, as we monitor their activities and log any long-term effects. Though I doubt they'll provide us any more trouble. You did very well. I'll send by another round of narcotics for you, Seventeen, and you enjoy tomorrow's meals, hmm?"*

*"Yes, sir, thank you, sir."*

*"Good, good. We'll speak again tomorrow."*

★🔥★

"This is our target."

Hurley laid his tablet down on Doc Israel's little kitchen table, sharing an email from his Zodiac contacts - rerouted through proxies and encrypted, of course. The little computer was a snug fit on the small table, nestled between Chance's soda, Tony's protein shake, and Israel's absolutely unnecessary energy drink.

"An asylum?"

"Used to be. Now it's a Shop joint. An Esper prison. Sub-basements, that sort of thing."

"Good. Then we get to help folks," Tony nodded matter-of-factly, eager to free captives just like Hurley'd freed him, and Chance found himself nodding along.

"Not folks, just folk," Patrick corrected. "From everything we've found, they've only got one patient there."

"One?" Tony's shoulders slumped, and Chance's heart sank a little.

"Hey," Patrick looked at the other two. Patrick, who'd been the one to rescue each of them, himself. "One is enough. One can make a big difference."

"No, I get it, I just..." Chance wasn't sure how to put it into words, wasn't sure he wanted to, not in front of everyone else. Did he want to push himself, risk another episode, just to rescue one person?

"You don't need to be afraid, Chance," Doctor Israel cleared his throat politely, arm freshly out of both sling and cast. He was a fast healer. They all were. "That's why we practice, that's why we train. I have every confidence you won't suffer another such... outburst. You know your limits now - you know what it feels like, before it happens."

"But you still won't be there," Patrick said, voice flat.

"I'm afraid not, kids. I've got classes to teach."

Patrick let him stay - he was their teacher, and you could do worse than get a Marine's perspective prior to an attack on, well, anything, ever - but only with a frown.

"They were going to send us earlier, but I told them about the... training incident. They delayed the gig, they said we were the team they wanted on it, so they're willing to reschedule. The good

news is, the delay bought us more time to get info. The Order's got a Scryer that's kept tabs on the place. They don't get close enough to get spotted, but they've given us a pretty good head count. I'm not gonna lie to you, it ain't likely to be a cakewalk. We know they've got twenty-four guards on-site, paramilitary pricks who patrol the grounds and watch over the main entrances, eight-man shifts, twenty four hours a day. Our head count on orderlies and medical staff is a rougher estimate, they rotate pretty often and stay out of sight, but we can assume at least another dozen. Lighter armed, though. You know the type."

Chance certainly did. Orderlies and nurses in white, with cold eyes and rough hands. He knew them plenty well.

"Yo, what about backup?" Tony didn't sound worried, so much as curious.

"They've got nothing for miles. It's a location built for secrecy and internal security, not external. They're worried about keeping someone from getting out, way more than they are about anyone getting in. We know they've got shooters in deer stands here and here," he pointed at the opposite corners of the tablet's display, "Along with a pair on the roof. One at each exit, and the last pair of guards on any given shift walk on patrol. They're almost always looking inward, though. Shoot-on-sight orders if their patient tries to escape."

"Barracks?" Israel pretended to sound disinterested while still reaching out with one finger to tap an out-building.

Patrick nodded. "And the other one's a garage. Barracks are for off-duty guards only. Med-staff stay in the asylum proper, closer at-hand if their patient has a problem."

"What kind of patient?"

"What kind of problem?"

"We don't know," Patrick's voice was lower, grimmer. He didn't like not knowing things, took it personally. "But we know it's just one. And that means the Shop wants them, bad."

"And that means," he looked up at the three of them, "We want to let them loose."

*"Interview with subject Seventeen-Alpha, number ninety, commencing. This is Dr. Johnson. We've adjusted Seventeen's regular doses again. How are you feeling today, Seventeen?"*

*"Good."*

*"Oh? How?"*

*"Loose. Relaxed. Kind of fuzzy, but... but... loose."*

*"And you normally don't feel loose?"*

*"No, sir.*

*"Why is that?"*

*"Because it's hot or it's cold, and it's dark or it's too bright, and because I'm starving or I'm over-eating, and because I'm doped up all the time or I'm alone with the voices."*

*"And you don't like all that? Normally?"*

*"No, sir."*

*"But you understand why we do it?"*

*"Because you're scared of me."*

*"I beg your pa–"*

*"You don't have to beg."*

*"That's not funny, Seventeen. We do the things we do because you're being trained. You're being healed. We're making you bette–"*

*"You're not. You're making me worse."*

*"Do you remember what I told you about interrupt–"*

*"Yup."*

*"You don't want to be punished, do you?"*

*"Nope."*

*"You mean no, sir?"*

*"You don't have to call me sir."*

*"Do you think you're being funny, Seventee–"*

*"I changed my mind."*

*"About feeling goo–"*

*"No. I changed my mind. You should call me sir.* **AND YOU SHOULD PROBABLY BEG, TOO."**

Chance's telekinetic outburst had made them leave weeks later than planned. Patrick's hot-wiring had been right as rain, but then Chance's driving had made them attack an hour behind schedule. Israel had bitched the whole ride - grouchy that they'd talked him into coming, even if only to sit at the wheel of the stolen car and wait for their return; irritated at Chance's every wrong turn on the way there; grousing that he was good enough to be their getaway driver but that the youngest member of the team was driving them, terribly, *to* the scene of their crime - and had given his young students a cheery fuck-off as they'd stumbled into the woods... only for Chance to screw up again, and get them another three minutes behind schedule, partially because he'd led them to the north instead of the east, and partially because, morning physical training or not, he was still slower than Patrick or Tony.

The timing was perfect, as a result of all those incidental delays.

One guard had been caught pissing out of his tree stand, his accurized Remington hanging loose on a shoulder strap. Tony'd thrown a rock as hard as he could, clipped him just right, and sent him tumbling down to a fatal impact with the ground.

*Railing kill*, Chance thought.

The guard on the opposite edge of the clearing hadn't noticed, he'd chosen just that minute - just that instant - to fuck up his night vision lighting a smoke. Chance had just grabbed him, squeezed him to keep him from filling his lungs to shout, and then dashed him to the ground.

The two on the roof hadn't seen the commotion, because at just that second they'd clumped together in the middle of the roof, left their posted locations, to chat about a football game. If they'd stayed in position on opposite corners of the sprawling, run-down asylum, the young Espers never would've been able to hit them both at the same time. Standing together, bitching about an interception and shaking their head at the stupidity of coaches, they'd left themselves close enough together for Patrick to incinerate the pair of them in a heartbeat. They fell off the roof like comets, stumbling to the front before falling to earth, streaming flames.

The guard posted just inside the front door didn't notice, though, because just that minute he'd moved to the back to spot for his buddy.

The two on the lawn had seen the pair falling, of course, but by them Tony was all over them, all fists and knees and crowbar from the trunk of their stolen car.

They were inside the front door - Hurley, then Tony, then Chance, one two three - not long after that door guard had wandered off, and he got caught with his back to them, at the far side of the foyer, only turning around when he'd heard the door get kicked off its hinges. He started to lift his rifle. Tony started to run.

Tony won.

One punch and a blood-sticky gloved fist later, all three of them were armed. The marksmen outside had long-range bolt-actions, the guards in the yard and on interior duty had nice Bushmasters. Tony tossed Patrick the door guard's sidearm, a standard, reliable, Beretta 9mm.

"And this," Patrick caught it smoothly and did a quick press-check, making sure he had a round in the chamber before tucking it into his pants, "Is why Israel's a good teacher."

Physical training in the morning. Esper training in the afternoons. Firearm training every evening, just before dinner.

Rifles at the ready, the three of them found the last guard, and the first nurse, with their

pants down. Literally. One last bit of luck, one last slice of good timing, one last coincidence about their late arrival. The regularly scheduled tryst was the reason the front door guard had been at the back door, the reason one of the nurses had back door security issues of her own; a Telekinetic shove tore the two of them apart and blasted the air from their lungs. A mental flick snapped the guard's neck, while Patrick's rifle butt knocked the nurse out cold.

Chance didn't even stop to wonder if he should feel bad about the eight men who'd probably died in the last three and a half minutes. Was it Israel's tricks, keeping his Espers calm? Adrenaline? Training? Revenge? All Chance knew was that his first gig was running pretty smoothly.

Screaming started right about then, but not from anything any of them had done. Someone hit a button, someone started an alarm, someone shrieked bloody murder.

"He's loose, he's loose," they heard from down in the basement.

"Oh God, I'm sorry, you know how sorry I am," they heard as they rounded a corner, guns up. "I never would have hurt you if cheesecake alphabet trout Jamestown filet mignon," a nurse sobbed as he stumbled into view, bleeding from the nose before falling face-down, braindead.

More nurses lay dead, more orderlies, one man in a white doctor's coat, stethoscope still slung 'round his neck just so, head burst open by some terrible internal force. Another doctor stood just behind the facility's only patient.

The patient, it seemed, was a portly young man in inch-thick prescription glasses, with pimple-spotted double chins, and half an unruly mop of greasy black hair. The other side of his head was shaved and scarred; scars from surgeries and stitches, scars from electrodes, scars that looked like evenly-spaced burn marks.

"Hi there, Harry," Patrick lowered his rifle immediately, as Chance and Tony shared a what-the-fuck look.

Tony turned to guard the hallway while Chance did his best not to worry about how much Patrick knew and was keeping from them.

"That's your name, isn't it?" Patrick held up one empty hand, palm out, trying not to look like a threat, treating the teenaged loser like he was an angry dog or a mama bear with a cub nearby. "Harry Farber, right? I'm here to help you, Harry."

"We're from the Zodiac Order," Harry said, staring Patrick down, making the older Esper go silent and blanch, distance notwithstanding, age notwithstanding, firestorm notwithstanding.

He wasn't talking. He was quoting. *Reading.*

"You're in an Institute medical facility, Harry," Harry said, almost contemptuously, almost afraid, almost like a robot. "They're experimenting on you, Harry."

"Experimenting on you," the doctor said, lips barely moving, eyes wild.

"Harry," Harry said.

"Harry," the doctor said. Harry almost smiled.

"Harry," Patrick broke the pattern, "We're here to rescue you!"

*I've got your R2 unit*, Chance thought, wondering if this was what shock felt like. *I'm here with Ben Kenobi.*

"I've got your R2 unit," the fat kid said, turning those big, round glasses Chance's way. "I'm here with Ben Kenobi."

He blinked, owl-like, slowly, ridiculously magnified. Staring at those eyes, not knowing how deeply into you they were peering, was really, really, weird.

*Fuck me*, Chance thought.

"Fuck me," Harry Farber said.

"We're fucked," Tony hollered, just before the shooting started.

The first of the reinforcements, all decked out in black-on-black tactical gear like the main squad, got beat back around the corner by Tony firing short bursts.

"Tear gas will be soon," Patrick said, bad news, and from experience. "We should have fucking masks."

"Harry, we need to go," Harry said, just as Chance's mouth started to open.

"Harry, it's important," Harry said again, making the older Esper shut his mouth.

"Harry, we need to know how to get out," Harry turned then to glance at the doctor, a stiff-as-a-board man, slender, with a neat beard, who was standing behind him in sullen silence.

Harry's eye twitched. The Doctor shuddered, mid-seizure.

"He knows a way out," Harry said, voice thick like he was sleepy. "So I know a way out."

"That's good, Harry," Patrick broke in again, half turning to worry about Tony and his constant semi-auto fire, half keeping a wary eye on their extraction target.

"Reloading!"

Tony leaned around the corner. Chance let go of his gun. It started to fall; then the Bushmaster floated over past Tony, into the open hallway. Chance squinted and the trigger obeyed, the gun barked and bucked and sent half a magazine roaring into the oncoming squad to batter back the tac-team.

Tony flashed Chance a thumbs up as he finished reloading, then leaned back around the corner to add his own, aimed, fire.

Patrick skipped backwards, throwing a fireball halfway-blind around the corner. It went off like a Wiley Pete grenade, a backdraft of hot air blowing the smell of burning and the sound of screams towards them. He didn't stay to see his handiwork, turning right back to Harry.

"See, Harry?" Patrick started.

"Yes," Harry said, eyes wide, unblinking, certain.

"Harry, we're in a hurry. Which way is out? This exit you know?"

"One second," Harry and the doctor both said.

Chance dragged his empty rifle over and started a reload; Patrick danced like he had to pee, adrenaline wanting to make him run; Tony hollered a 'two down' between shots, before leaning back from return fire.

"Interview with subject Johnson, number one," Harry said voice eerily, terribly, calm. "I'm Harry Farber."

The doctor twitched like he was trying to cry but something deep inside his brain wouldn't let him.

"The subject's mental faculties just went from that of a brilliant theorist to a twelve year old boy."

Harry smiled an ugly smile.

"And from a twelve year old to a three year old."

The doctor filled the hallway with the rank stink of piss and shit.

"And from a three year old to a newborn."

Harry licked at a nosebleed, but an ugly little smile formed on his face. He squinted.

"And from a newborn to nothing. Nothing at all."

The doctor wavered for a heartbeat, slack-jawed, staring at nothing, drooling. Tony was reloading again. Chance sent his gun floating around the corner to buy them all time. Patrick hopped from foot to foot, eager to move.

"We can go now," Harry said, and his voice came from the doctor's ruined head. A second later, the bearded man fell, forever. Gone. Empty.

Harry led them at what felt like a snail's pace. Chance knew it must've been how Tony felt every morning run, must've been how every jock ever felt around Chance for his whole life.

"I got four," Tony said, smile bright against his dark skin, taking up the rear.

They still heard bootsteps behind them, seconds after Chance's hovering rifle ran dry. Patrick tossed Chance his loaded Bushmaster, tugging his Beretta from his pants. They all knew it wasn't the gun that'd make Patrick dangerous.

Chance stayed at the next corner, laying down fire to make the oncoming guards stop. Tony did

it at the next corner. They hit a few, but it was hard to tell how badly in the dark and the chaos and the adrenaline.

"I got this one," Patrick pulled Chance away when he took up a firing position. "Stay on Harry. Make sure he gets out of here."

Chance trotted down the hallway, reloading with his last magazine. Tony was up next to Harry Farber, looming compared to the short, plump, high school kid, all the more intimidating for his rifle at the low-ready. There were screams of pain from somewhere behind them all, and maybe an orange glow and hints of smoke.

Harry led them to a left - a broom closet - then back the way they came. Chance and Tony exchanged another long look.

"You okay, Harry?"

"Hmm?"

"Harry," Chance spoke slowly, calmly, "Are you alright?"

"Yeah, sorry. Just... just... confused, a little. I hurt some people."

"It's okay, Harry." Tony smiled again, confident, open. "We're all just doing what we have to, in order to get you out of here."

"Harry," Chance continued, "Do you remember the wa-"

"No, not them. Not Dr. Johnson. Other people. Before."

"Harry, listen, we really need to find a-"

"All the people. All my teachers. All the goths, the freaks, the jocks, the nerds. The losers. Everyone. My whole school."

Another concerned look between jock and nerd. Another second wasted worrying how much of their minds Harry could read, just by accident.

"Hey guys," Patrick came trotting up, out of breath, soot-dark even in the harsh light of stolen underbarrel tac-lights, reeking of smoke. "Harry, we cool?"

"You hurt people."

"They're bad people, Harry," Patrick's voice carried a certainty that even Tony's had lacked. "I spent time in a basement like this. A lot of time. It's okay, Harry. It's okay to hurt bad people."

"You hurt other people too. Like me."

Patrick's face was unreadable, his mouth a stern line. He didn't answer. He didn't have to.

"Kids. Like me. A whole orphanage. That was... that was like your school. You did like I did. You were young, like I was. It was a mistake, like mine."

Patrick stared, hard eyed.

Harry smiled.

"It's okay. You're okay. It's this way," he turned his half-shaved head, scars angry and red in the cold light.

Tony stayed at the rear at the next corner, and laid down fire to buy them all time. Harry moved faster, now, like sharing his pain, like stealing someone's secrets, had made Harry confident again, had brought him focus. They didn't talk while he led them through the ancient warren, not Harry, but also not Chance or Patrick. They left the updated, sterile basement and made their way to ancient warrens of outdated asylum tunnels, the setting of every other horror movie made since the turn of the century. Then they left those, and walked a long distance in a straight line; some old tunnel dug for who-knows-why, leading them far from the asylum grounds.

Harry stopped suddenly at a door angled up and out; a storm entrance, maybe. He fidgeted from step to step, like a door was something he'd forgotten how to work, or was afraid to.

"Watch the back," Patrick told Chance and Tony. He clambered half up the steps and shouldered at it; no luck.

"Fuck it. Chance."

A gesture, a grunt of exertion. The door splintered and vanished. Chance's nose was bleeding and he felt faint. Not a lot of juice left.

Patrick was the first out, Beretta up. Tony hopped up - skipping the steps - and reached down to help pull Harry out. Chance was alone in

the dark for a second, covering the way they'd come with his gun and his little cone of light. No one was coming. No jackbooted thugs were jogging their way, no guns were pointing right at them, no trouble was catching up on them from behind. They'd doubled back or given up to lick their wounds.

"Maybe we'll make it out of this," Harry whispered just as Chance thought it.

Then all the lights came on at once.

Headlights from a pair of Shop Humvees, the big black things their tac-teams rode in. Tac-teams had, in fact, done so. They had lights, too, but more importantly, guns. Lots of guns. They opened up.

Patrick dropped his pistol without giving it a second thought and mustered up the biggest fireball of his life. One of the trucks went up like Hiroshima, bodies and armor plating flying, and in the wake of the explosion – past the falling chassis as the fireball lifted into the sky – they could see a new spotlight, flying low over a nearby barn. They weren't on asylum grounds any more, but they were right where the Shop wanted them, right where the Shop must've expected them. Even they couldn't have scrambled a helicopter this quickly.

The chopper had to wait; they had foot soldiers to worry about first. A handful or a dozen or a hundred 6.8mm rounds tore at Patrick. He was wreathed in flame, a burning effigy of himself, a tiny god roaring in anger, not fear, wrapped in sheets of plasma that melted the bullets to nothing before they could reach him.

Also topside, Tony gave Harry a quick little stiff-armed shove that tumbled the portly boy back down the stairs and into the darkness, out of the line of fire before the hail of bullets came crashing at them. Tony himself ran, impossibly nimble, absurdly quick, and the incoming fire chased him like a swarm of bees.

Chance didn't see any of it. He caught the flickering lights, heard the anger and fear, sure, but he was looking away, his attention soundly underground, drawn by muffled curses and the sound of boots. Back the way they'd come, the guards had mustered up and come at them in a rush.

Chance saw their tac-lights before he saw them, heard their boots, imagined them coming from the darkness. There was no cover. There was no shelter. It was straight hallway, straight shot as soon as they saw him, nowhere to hide, nothing to do but die.

He held down the trigger and emptied his ACR at them, but the lights kept coming. He fumbled for a reload – *God, don't let me die down here in the dark* – and knew he wouldn't make it in time.

"Okay," Harry said, lying face down in the dirt, one lens of his glasses broken, voice a reedy mumble. "I won't."

The tac-lights stopped advancing. Instead, they turned, half to one side, half to the other.

The hallway filled with muzzle flashes, and in the staccato light Chance saw a full Institute tactical squad tear itself apart, each man firing on his nearest neighbor.

"Holy shit," Chance breathed.

One Shop shooter was still standing, bleeding, stock-still with his empty rifle aimed at his fire team battle-buddy, slide locked back.

Chance scrambled to raise his gun, hammered the trigger on his empty rifle, underbarrel light showing the last guard as he turned to face them. He watched as the trooper pulled a black-bladed knife from his combat harness. Chance gaped as he drove it up under his own chin, hilt-deep, and fell over.

"Jesus," Harry said with a satisfied, piggish little smile, reading Chance's mind again just because he could.

Behind them both, upstairs, outside, something terrible roared.

Patrick's body tumbled down the stairs to them, torn in a dozen places, splashed with molten steel in others, savaged and broken.

Chance scrambled over, glanced up to see a minigun - *holy fuck, it's like a war out there* - firing from the side of the low-flying chopper,

chasing Tony with a laser-bright stream of tracers now that it had done its job on Patrick.

Too many bullets, too big, coming in too fast; Patrick Hurley lay, cut nearly in two. His body was a wreck, an impossible wreck, fired on by the sort of weapon that was wasted firing on unarmored flesh. His plasma field had tried to protect him, but against so many rounds, poured on at such a rate, it had done little but plaster him with globules of lead before giving out and letting the remaining rounds savage him.

"He's gone," Harry said, unblinking again, certain.

Chance finished his reload and wiped at his face with the back of his free hand. He wasn't crying. Heroes didn't cry.

He lifted his head up just enough to find a target, then started in. He fired controlled shots, quick pairs, just like Israel had taught them. This wasn't half-blind firing into a dark hallway, this was trying to turn his stairwell into a defensive position, using cover and doing what he could against a full fire-team of Shop killers.

Incoming fire spat dirt at him, kicked grass in his face, filled his eyes with grit and tears like every bully he'd ever met. He didn't flinch away, didn't look away, just stared and killed, letting his trigger finger and his anger do all the work. He hammered one Institute shooter to the ground, then fed him two more shots to make him stay there; a trio of them scrambled for cover, and he saw boots and kneecaps on the ground behind their remaining Humvee, knew they were back there reloading, catching their breath, figuring out how to kill him.

Harry smiled. Chance nodded, and thought very, very, hard.

The Humvee rocked back and forth, not enough warning for them to get away; then the armored truck rolled over, sideways, on top of them. The spotlight mounted atop it wavered crazily and cast long shadows as it slid a few extra feet, scraping the ground, pasting and smearing a gunman beneath it as Chance felt a wave of exhaustion pour over him. A handful of shots from another shooter tried to steal his attention as surely as his life, but he saw a pair of black-armored Shop gunmen

scrambling towards the Humvee to help their pinned, screaming, comrades.

Chance ducked from the incoming fire, and saw Harry huddled at the bottom of the stairs, but just next to him, Patrick's cooling, mauled body. The fire was gone from his eyes.

"Oh," Harry mumbled, reading Chance's mind. "That reminds me. *Fire*."

Chance straightened and scowled, put the last of his ammo into the belly of the upturned Humvee, then threw a bolt of Pyrokinetic vengeance with nearly the last of his strength. Not as impressive as one of Patrick's blasts, it was enough; the gas tank of the Humvee went up in a fireball, and cleared away most of the kill-team that remained.

"Oops," Harry read aloud, "Just most of them on the *ground*."

The black helicopter had finished its buzzing, circling, spinning search for Tony, and settled in to get in a stare-down with Chance, spotlight against his red-rimmed eyes. He saw it start to turn, knew the minigun would tear him and Harry apart once it got angled for a good broadside.

"I got this, bro," Harry's voice was high and thin, and the mind he read wasn't Chance's.

Tony re-appeared with impossible speed, already in mid-air by the time Chance spotted him, leaping from the widow's peak of the empty barn, freezing in mid-air like Michael Jordan. One leg had already been savaged by probing minigun fire, one arm was nearly torn off from a half-dozen 7.62 rounds. His good leg was plenty strong, though, and his good arm held a dusty old pitchfork. Impossibly powerful, leaping inhumanly far, coming in at a physics-defying angle, he cleared the gap against the turning chopper. One arm, one leg, and one farm implement - for Tony - was enough for almost any job.

Almost.

Yeah, the door gunner died, triple-impaled by a single thrust that punched through armor like it wasn't there. In his death spasms, though, the minigun fired again, a point-blank stream of tracer fire that sawed at Tony's waistline and burst out the other side in a stream of tracers and blood. Harry whimpered at Chance's feet as he felt the Esper die; Chance could only gape as he saw two halves fall in terrible slow motion. He'd bought them some time, at least.

"They have another gunner," Harry said, breathless, fresh from feeling another mind, a friendly, open, heroic mind, snuff out like a candle.

"Of course they do," Chance said, trying to find something big enough to throw at an attack helicopter, trying to find the strength to throw it. All he saw was that spotlight staring at him like the eye of Sauron, the last ground-pounders mustering up to charge, and the locked-back slide of his empty gun.

The chopper began to swivel again, lining up the minigun to kill them both and make all of this a wasted effort.

Then it stumbled, like a high-school loser tripping over his own two feet, like a Chance or a Harry getting shoulder-checked in a hallway.

The helicopter wavered. It began to spin and sink, pilot slumping over the control stick, diving, spotlight dipping crazily, lighting up the three remaining kill-team members as they were crossing the open ground. It crashed. They burned.

"One shot, several kills. Not bad," Harry said, scanning a new mind.

"I got tired of waiting in the car. But never again," Doc Israel said, an accurized Remington in a low-ready grip, crossing the field angrily, wearing his tuxedo tee-shirt and a pair of sweatpants that, had anyone been alive to look, showed an oversized, bolded, JUICY written across his ass. "You hear me, Chance Hartwell? You tell those Zodiac bastards, never again."

They clambered out of the hole in the ground, Chance and Harry Farber, the luckiest Teke in the world and maybe the most powerful Psychokinetic in existence.

"I thought you had a lifestyle to support, Doc," Chance tried not to sound tired, or scared, or sad. He tried to sound like the guy in an action movie. "Classes to teach, a job to worry about."

"I'm tenured," Israel scowled at the carnage, at the waste of it all. "They can do without me for one fucking day. Let's get you two out of here."

"Thank you," Harry said, voice small compared to the roaring minigun, the chattering rifles, the screams of burning men. His wide eyes took it all in, but they didn't need to. He'd been listening to each man die, reading all their thoughts in all their last instants.

"Thank you."

It was all he could think of to say.

# Incident Report: Combat Rules

**"When they come for me, I'll be sitting at my desk**
**With a gun in my hand, wearing a bulletproof vest, singing:**
**'My, my, my, how the time does fly,**
**when you know you're going to die**
**By the end of the night.'"**

***- Streetlight Manifesto, "Keasbey Nights"***

Outside of combat, playing ***Psionics*** is a fairly abstract exercise. Neither timing nor positioning of characters is closely or precisely tracked. PCs loosely describe what actions their characters take, speak as their characters, and interact with each other and GM controlled NPCs. A few sentences of narration might elapse several weeks of in-game time, or several hours of time might be given to a few short moments of intense, unfolding story, bringing it into "slow motion". Generally speaking, though, most in-character conversation takes place in the same amount of game time and real time. This is the case in most RPGs, and it's perfectly fine.

When the shit hits the fan, and what happens is *really* going to matter for the PCs - when people could very well get dead - we enter Combat. The pace of the game slows down, allowing for more methodical and precise actions and decision making. Every turn matters. Combat in the **DICEPUNK SYSTEM** is fun, fast paced, and deadly. A typical ***Psionics*** combat might take anywhere from a half hour to an hour of real time to resolve, but what's going down in game happens in a matter of mere seconds.

## THE COMBAT ROUND

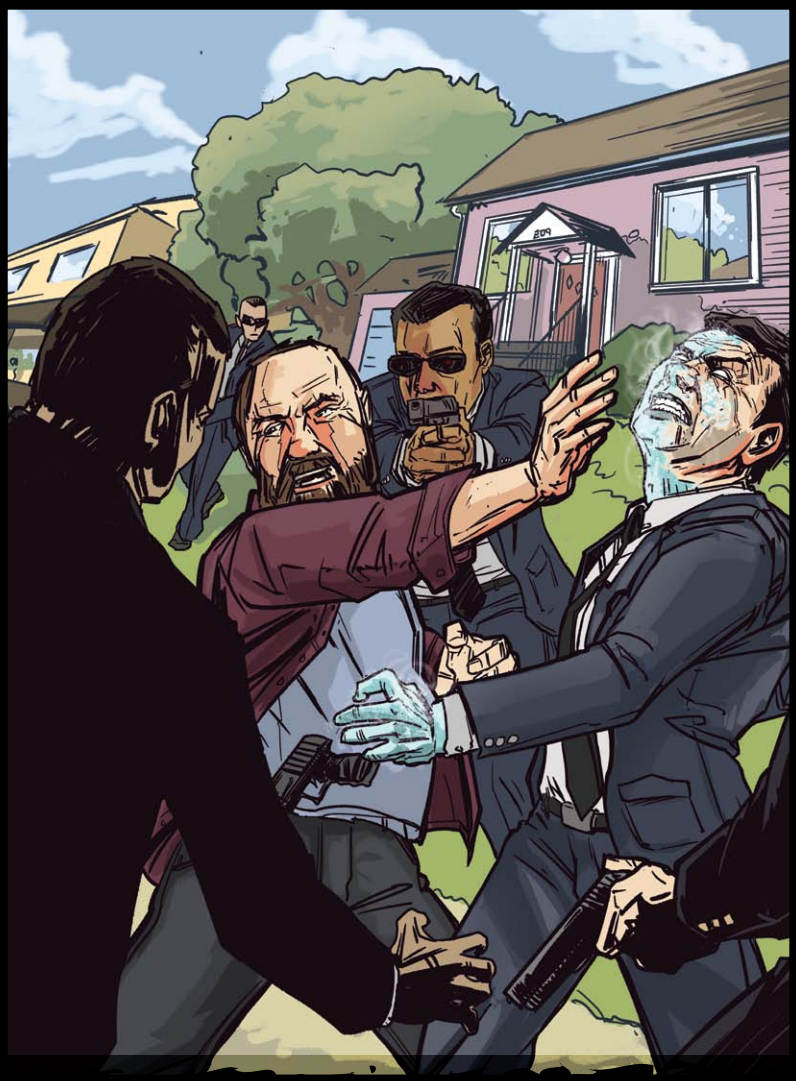
The Combat Round in the **DICEPUNK SYSTEM** lasts 10 seconds. A combat might be just one round long. Average firefights last 3-6 rounds, and a really epic battle might last ten rounds or more. The Combat Round is divided into one turn for each combatant. These turns follow a specific order of operations, as Player Characters and the GM take their turns describing what their characters do. Every character gets one and only one turn per Combat Round.

### Initiative

The first thing that happens in a combat is that each character rolls Initiative. This means that the first time a PC decides to pull out a gun or unleash a psionic attack, before resolving that, the first thing the GM does is say: "Roll Initiative!"

The Initiative roll for virtually all characters is **(Speed × 2) + 2d6.** All PCs and named NPCs should have unique Initiative scores, but groups of "goons" - similar enemies - can all act on the same Initiative, to simplify bookkeeping. Characters act in Initiative Order, from the highest score to the lowest. As Initiative "collisions" will happen, characters with the same Initiative act simultaneously: e.g. two characters with Initiative 14 shooting at each other will *both* get shot at. Even if one of them is shot and killed by the other, his shot still goes off.

***Note:*** *Characters with the Reposition Technique have the option of rerolling their Initiative between Combat Rounds, or keeping their last Initiative. Characters without Reposition are stuck with their Initiative result for the duration of the combat. In other words, by default, Initiative is not rerolled between Combat Rounds, unless a character has the Technique that lets them do that.*



## Surprise

If one or more combatants has the drop on the opposition - like by using Stealth to strike from concealment or set up an ambush, or if combat began with one side holding the other at gunpoint - that character or group of characters gets an entire free round worth of actions (one turn per character with the element of surprise) before Initiative is rolled.

This is the exception to the rule of "rolling Initiative is the very first thing you do in combat". The GM is the final arbiter of which side, if any, has gotten the drop on the other.

## Held Actions

Sometimes when your Combat Turn comes up in a given Combat Round, you don't want to act right away. When that happens, you can elect to "Hold Your Action". That means that your character is going to "wait and see" and might act later in the round. The classic example is if your character is covering a door or a corridor with a gun when their Initiative comes up, but there's nothing to shoot just then. You want to Hold your character's Action until someone shows up for you to shoot at, and that's perfectly fine.

At any later Initiative in the Combat Round, you can take your held Combat Turn. If possible, this shouldn't be in the middle of someone else's Combat Turn, unless the GM rules this is appropriate (e.g. if an enemy is using a Move Action to run up or through the corridor you are covering, it is totally appropriate for you to take your Held Action to shoot at them in the middle of their Move Action).

Holding an Action until later in the Combat Round does not change your Initiative for the rest of the combat. You can take a Move Action and then Hold your Attack Action (or the reverse, if you have Blitzkrieg) *if* the GM rules that what you're trying to do is possible in the situation you're in (usually, it should be).

Note that when the Combat Turn ends, your Held Action "fizzles" if you haven't used it. You have effectively given up the ability to act in a meaningful way that turn by waiting and seeing until it was the next Combat Round. This means that a character who is "last" in the Initiative can't Hold their Action to react to characters that rolled a better Initiative and go earlier in the Initiative order. This is just tough luck for the slower character: having a better Initiative is better.

Finally, remember that NPCs can use Held Actions also when it's tactically beneficial for them. They follow the same rules as PCs for doing so.

### The Element of Surprise

A character attacked by an enemy they are completely unaware of has almost no chance of successfully defending themselves in any way. This doesn't mean being attacked by an enemy you don't know the exact position of during a fight, being attacked from concealment, or being in a battle between two sides when a third side suddenly attacks. None of that qualifies. This means only being completely and totally blindsided by an attack that you completely had no suspicion of, coming either as a surprise attack from a character you had absolutely no idea was there or, more likely, as a sudden, vicious betrayal from a character you thought was your friend.

All characters have a Defense of only 3 against such an attack and will almost certainly be hit. This makes a character caught blindsided an excellent target of opportunity for damage-increasing Techniques like Boom!Headshot and Batter Up. Blindsided characters cannot use reactive defense Techniques like Dodge or Counterattack, and blindsided Espers cannot use defensive powers like TK Barrier or Melt Aura.

## Anatomy of a Combat Turn

Within each Combat Round, each combatant has exactly one and only one **Combat Turn.** In many other roleplaying games - including some I have designed - faster combatants are allowed to "go" more times per Combat Round. While there is nothing innately wrong with that, the **DICEPUNK SYSTEM** restricts itself to one Turn per combatant per Combat Round because that makes Combat Rounds, and therefore combats, faster.

As previously mentioned, Combat Turns occur in descending order of Initiative. Each Combat Turn, by default, allows the acting character one **Move Action** and one **Attack Action** (***in that order***) and any number of **Free Actions.**

**Free Actions** have little or no effect on the tactical situation. Typical Free Actions include speaking up to ten seconds worth of in-character dialogue (individual GMs can and will adjust this number according to their personal preference for mid-battle soliloquy) or making hand gestures (of either the tactical or just plain rude variety). Anything else is most likely significant enough (i.e. has enough of an impact on the unfolding tactical situation) to be counted as a Move or Attack Action, but if you think something might be insignificant enough to be a Free Action, ask your GM.

Any character may choose not to Move or not to Attack in a given turn, or to "pass" their Combat Turn entirely.

### Combat Movement

The standard Move Action is to, um... move... your Speed in yards. You could use miniatures and a battle mat (with a scale of one yard per hex/square) to keep track of character movement and position, but this isn't necessary by any means. Characters with the **Blitzkrieg** Technique can use a Full Turn Action to move twice their Speed in yards, useful for making a quick getaway. Position does matter, though, even if you choose to track it abstractly. One important aspect of Combat Movement is that characters must be adjacent (defined as within three feet of each other) to engage in melee combat. Another is that different ranged weapons have different effective ranges, also measured in yards. (Most, but not all Psionic Talents, work within "line of sight" range. See **Special Projects** on p. 78 for more details.)

### Techniques and the Combat Turn

Characters with the Blitzkrieg Technique may choose to take two Move Actions instead of one Move Action and one Attack Action. They can also elect to Attack and then Move. By default, characters may only Move and then Attack, in that order.

Characters with the Frenzy Technique may choose to Attack twice (take two Attack Actions) instead of taking a Move Action and an Attack Action as normal. In this case, each Attack is made at a -2 Penalty. Other Techniques may allow multiple Attacks, with different limitations depending on the Technique.

Besides moving, there are numerous other actions that count as Move Actions. They're shown on the following table. Generally speaking, these actions are more involving than Free Actions, but not as time-consuming as Attack Actions.

## Combat Actions

The following table lists the most common actions characters might take in combat, what type of action they require (Move or Attack), and anything else you'll want to know about them. This is not meant to be an exhaustive list, but should include enough examples for the GM to determine what kind of action something requires if the players get creative.

| Move Action | Test Required | Notes |
|---|---|---|
| Move (Speed) yards. | None. | - |
| Open/close door or container. | None. | - |
| Drop prone or stand up. | None. | Prone characters receive a -2 Defense Modifier versus melee Attacks but a +2 Defense Modifier versus ranged Attacks. Prone characters can only move half their Speed (round down) by crawling without standing up. |
| Put away a weapon *or* ready a weapon (note: not both). | None. | - |
| Reload firearm (change clips). | None. | - |
| Take cover. | None. | Generally ends with you (half Speed) yards away and prone, behind any available cover within range, at the GM's discretion. |
| Control a vehicle. | Bike, or Drive, or Pilot, etc. | Skill differs depending on the vehicle. Drivers can still make one Attack Action while driving, but must spend their Move Action to control the vehicle. |
| Pick up or drop item. | None. | - |
| Aim. | None. | - |
| Swallow Pill or Inject Drugs With Injection Gun. | None. | - |
| Use Technique. | Variable. | Only for Techniques that can be used as Move Actions. |

| Attack Action | Test Required | Notes |
|---|---|---|
| Fire a gun. | Pistols, Rifles, Automatics, or Heavy Weapons | - |
| Attack in melee. | Blades, Clubs, or Brawling | - |
| Throw weapon. | Throwing Weapons | - |
| Smash window/kick in door. | Strength Check | - |
| Reload Firearm (revolver or internal magazine). | None. | - |
| Use terminal/computer. | Maybe. | - |
| Inject Drugs with Syringe. | None. | - |
| Use Technique. | Variable | Techniques that can be used as Attack Actions, only. |

### *Reactions*

Reactions don't count as Attack Actions, Move Actions, or even Free Actions. They happen outside the normal flow of Initiative. Reactions are granted *only* by Techniques and other special conditions.

| Reaction | Technique Needed | Test Required? | Notes |
|---|---|---|---|
| Counter | Counter Attack | Melee Attack Test | Whenever you are hit in melee combat, you may make a free, immediate melee Attack Test (in the same Combat Turn) at a -1 Penalty against the character who just hit you. |
| Reflexive Dodge | Dodge | Speed Check | If you have not acted yet in a Combat Round, you may give up your upcoming turn to reflexively dodge an Attack Roll being made against you. You must declare that you are dodging before the Attack Roll is made. If you succeed a Speed Check the Attack misses you. If you Dodge a Grapple attempt or a TK Grab attempt, you don't need to make a Speed Check - your Speed Check is considered to have automatically succeeded. |

### *Perception in Combat*

Trying to see, hear, smell, etc. what's going on in combat is always a Free Action, never a Move Action or an Attack Action. Most obvious things (these guys are running from here to here, those guys are fighting, that guy is shooting at you, etc.) you just see, without any Test being called for. Awareness Tests are only needed to make note of something unobvious, small, subtle, or something that would be easier to notice if you weren't in the middle of a fucking firefight.

The GM can apply a Hard or Crushingly Hard Modifier if the level of distraction from the fracas around you is especially extreme. If the GM would apply an Easy or Very Easy DM, however, the GM should just let you perceive whatever it is without calling for a Test.

Characters only get one Awareness Test per turn in combat, so if they don't spot what they're looking for, they need to wait for their next turn to try again.

***Inside or outside of combat,*** the *range* between the character and the phenomena they might see, hear, or otherwise notice effects the Awareness Test. Use the Perception row on the Weapon Range Table on p. 179 to determine the DM applied to the Awareness Test by range.

## HURTING PEOPLE

Now we come to the meat of it, and all the lovely little nitty gritty details. The default Attack Action is, unsurprisingly, to attack - whether it be with your bare hands, a melee weapon, a gun, a thrown weapon, or a Psionic Talent. You do so by making an **Attack Test.**

**Roll 2d6 and add the appropriate Skill Bonus. If your result is equal to or greater than the target's Defense, your Attack hits and deals damage. A natural 12 on an Attack Roll is always a hit.**

Characters can also use Attack Actions for other things, besides attacking. See the table above for examples.

### Melee Combat

To attack a character in melee, you must close to within one yard and make an Attack Test, rolling 2d6 and adding your Skill Bonus from Blades (if using an edged weapon), Clubs (if using a blunt weapon), or Brawling (if unarmed or using an improvised weapon). If your result is equal to or greater than the target's Defense, you hit, although the target may still have the option to

Counter Attack or reflexively Dodge depending on what Techniques the target knows.

**A basic human being's punch or kick deals 1d6 + Strength Nonlethal Damage.**

Attacks with melee weapons also benefit from Strength. Add ½ your Strength (round up) to the damage of one-handed melee weapons (like kitchen knives, claw hammers, and rapiers), and your full Strength to the damage of two-handed melee weapons (like baseball bats, pick-axes, and claymores).

### *Grappling*

A character who makes a successful unarmed Melee Attack may choose to grapple instead of dealing normal unarmed damage. The attacker and the defender have a Strength Contest. If the defender knows and decides to use the Dodge Technique in response to a grab attempt, the grapple attempt automatically fails. Do not roll. If the defender knows and decides to use the Counter Attack Technique in response, resolve their melee counter-attack *first*. Only proceed with the Strength Contest if the grabbing character survives the counter-attack.

If the attacker wins the Strength Contest, the defending character is successfully grappled. Grappled characters may not take any actions but attempting a Strength Contest to break free. If a grappled character successfully breaks free, he may then grapple the other character, thereby turning the tables. The character maintaining the grapple may deal Unarmed Damage to the grappled character by winning a Strength Contest as a Full Turn Action. Simply maintaining the grapple is a Full Turn Action with no Test needed. Making a Strength Contest to grapple - whether trying to deal Unarmed Damage or to escape from a grapple - is a Full Turn Action. Grappled characters have their Defense reduced to 5. Grappling characters have their Defense reduced by 3 points.

### Melee Defense Modifiers

| Situation | Defense Modifier |
|---|---|
| Attackers in melee outnumber defenders. | -1 for each net friend in the melee to a maximum of -4. [Leona, literally kicking and screaming, as well as biting, clawing, and spitting, is being mobbed by four orderlies. Because she's outnumbered, she suffers -3 to her DM.] |
| Defenders in melee outnumber attackers. | +1 for each net friend in the melee. [In the above example, Leona will have a hard time landing a punch on one of the orderlies. All of them receive a +3 Bonus to Defense. |
| Defender grappled. | Defense is set to 5. Ignore other Defense Modifiers. |
| Defender grappling. | -3 |
| Attacker Charging. | -2 to both the Defender for this one Attack and the Attacker for the duration of the Combat Round. |

## Ranged Combat

From the turn of the 20th century onwards, civilized persons have primarily used ranged weapons like firearms to kill and maim one another. Characters attack in ranged combat by making an Attack Test using the appropriate Combat Skill (Pistols, Automatics, Rifles, Throwing Weapons, or Heavy Weapons). Roll 2d6 and add the appropriate Skill Bonus; if the result is greater than or equal to the target's modified Defense, your Attack hits and deals damage.

Ranged combat damage is determined entirely by the weapon used, with the exception of non-explosive throwing weapons, which add Strength-based bonus damage just like one-handed melee weapons.

Psionic ranged attacks deal varying amounts of damage, depending on the Talent used and the level of the Talent. See the **Special Projects** chapter for details (p. 78).

Several factors make ranged combat slightly more complicated to resolve than melee combat.

### Weapon Range Increments in Yards

| Weapon Type | Short Range (No Attack Penalty) | Medium Range (-1 Attack Penalty) | Long Range (-4 Attack Penalty) |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Any Melee/Unarmed** | <1 Yard | NA | NA |
| **Muscle-Powered Weapon (Bow, Grenade, or Throwing Knife)** | Strength × 2 Yards | Strength × 4 Yards | Strength × 6 Yards |
| **Pistol (Including Taser and Mini Crossbow)** | 5 Yards (Max Range for Tasers) | 30 Yards | 90 Yards |
| **Shotgun** | 5 Yards (+1d6 Damage within this range) | 40 Yards (-2 DM to Defender within this range) | 80 Yards |
| **SMG** | 15 Yards | 50 Yards | 120 Yards |
| **Rifle (Sniper, Hunting, or Tranquilizer, Including Barrett .50 BMG Sniper Rifles)** | 50 Yards | 100 Yards | 250 Yards |
| **Rifle (Assault)** | 25 Yards | 75 Yards | 150 Yards |
| **Machine Gun** | 40 Yards | 90 Yards | 150 Yards |
| **Heavy Weapon (Rocket Launcher; Grenade Launcher)** | 50 Yards | 100 Yards | 150 Yards |

| Other | No DM | -1 Difficulty Modifier | -4 Difficulty Modifier |
|---|---|---|---|
| Perception (Awareness Test) | 10 Yards | 50 Yards | 150 Yards |

***Note 1:*** *Weapons effectively cannot be used on targets farther away than "Long Range".*

***Note 2:*** *Characters with the Longshot Technique double the range restrictions for each range category when using firearms. A character with Longshot using a pistol would treat targets within 10 Yards as at short range, would treat targets within 60 Yards as within medium range, and could hit targets within 180 Yards!*

***Note 3:*** *The maximum ranges listed here are the ranges at which characters might realistically have a chance of hitting a target; they are not meant to reflect how far a weapon can throw a projectile.*

#### *Shotguns*

First off, we're assuming that shotguns are firing 00 Buckshot. If it were something like birdshot, shotguns would deal significantly less damage, whereas slugs would make shotguns more like rifles. And we're not going to get into anything like adjustable chokes, because we don't want to get crazy. With that said:

- *Shotguns that are fired from within 5 Yards deal +1d6 Damage, because we'll assume at that range the victim gets hit with a huge number of pellets and it really hurts.*
- *Shotguns that are fired from more than 5 Yards away inflict a -2 DM on the Defender. We're assuming at that range that the pellets have spread out somewhat so that it's a little hard to miss. There is no damage bonus at that range, however.*

#### *Burst Fire*

Automatics and other weapons capable of Burst Fire can fire three round bursts. Three round bursts use up three rounds of ammunition (duh) and are made at a -1 Penalty to the Attack, due to recoil. The character firing the burst must choose whether to "hose" or "spray" before making the Attack Roll.

**Hose:** Attack deals +2d6 damage.

**Spray:** Defender receives a -3 DM for this Attack.

#### *Full Auto*

Automatics and other weapons capable of autofire can blaze away on FA. This burst fires between five and thirty bullets - and for our purposes it must be a multiple of five, for the sake of simplicity. The number of shots fired

is limited by the amount of ammo left in the clip. The Attack receives a -1 Recoil Penalty for every five rounds fired. The attacker must choose whether to hose or spray before making the Attack Roll.

**Hose:** The Attack deals +1d6 damage for every five rounds fired.

**Spray:** The defender receives a -2 DM for this Attack for every five rounds fired.

### *Covering Fire*

Automatics and other weapons capable of autofire can be used to cover an area, discouraging enemies from moving through it. If the attacker has at least thirty rounds in the clip, he can empty the entire clip to "cover" an area of (Wits) cubic yards from the moment he begins firing until the start of his next Combat Turn. Anyone moving through this area without taking cover - or popping up from cover to attack within this area - must succeed a Hard Speed Check or suffer the weapon's base damage.

### Ranged Defense Modifiers

| Situation | Defense Modifier |
|---|---|
| Defender has soft cover (bushes, glass door). | +1 |
| Defender has partial cover (crate, car door). | +2 |
| Defender has full cover (pillbox, trench). | +4 |
| Attacker aiming. | -2 for each action the attacker has spent aiming with a firearm, up to a maximum -DM of twice your weapon Skill Bonus (i.e. -2 for Apprentice, -4 for Expert, -8 for Master). Aiming can only be used with firearms. |
| Defender running (moving 2xSpeed yards in one turn). | +2 |
| Defender Prone. | +2 |
| Attacker using burst fire spray. | -1 to -6 |
| Poor visibility (partial light, glare, smoke or fog). | +2 |
| Terrible visibility. | +4 |
| Attacker moving (attacker has moved at least Speed yards before attacking). | +1 |
| Defender unaware of attacker's position. | -6 |
| Defender engaged in melee combat with one or more characters Attacker wishes to avoid hitting. | +3 |

### *Grenades*

On a successful throw, grenades land at the feet of the target they were thrown at. On an unsuccessful throw, grenades can land anywhere, at the GM's discretion, but are likely to be close enough to damage the intended enemy anyway.

The GM can also determine where a missed grenade landed randomly by rolling 1d6; 1 means the grenade goes in the direction of the throw and left, 2 means the grenade overshoots in the direction of the throw, 3 means the grenade goes in the direction of the throw and right, 4 means back toward the thrower and right, 5 means straight back toward the thrower, and 6 means back toward the thrower and left. The distance the grenade misses by should be equal to the margin of failure in yards. So a character who threw a grenade at a Defense 9 character and rolled an adjusted 5 on the Attack misses the throw by 4 yards in the indicated direction.

Grenades "go off" and deal damage to everything within their blast radius (see **The Armory**, p. 109) on the ***next*** Combat Turn of the character who

threw them. When a grenade-like weapon is thrown at a square (i.e. a point in space) rather than a specific character, the target is treated as having a base Defense of 6.

In the intervening turns, a particularly brave character near the grenade can use a Move Action to make a successful Hard Speed Check to pick up the grenade. If the character succeeds, he can make a Throwing Weapons Test to throw the grenade elsewhere. If the character fails at picking up the grenade, he is right at ground zero when the grenade goes off.

A character with **Telekinesis Level One** or higher (grenades weigh less than half a pound) can telekinetically grab and toss back a live grenade much more easily.

A character can attempt to "cook" a grenade to make it go off faster by running out its fuse. Cooking and throwing a grenade is a Full Turn Action. Cooked grenades go off at the end of the Combat Round in which they were thrown.

## Weather Conditions

Mild to moderate inclement weather (rain/snow/fog/wind) imposes a -2 Penalty to Ranged Attacks, and a -2 DM to Awareness Tests, Drive Tests, and any other Skill Tests that the GM determines are made more difficult by the weather conditions. For severe or extreme weather patterns (storms, blizzards, hurricane winds or impenetrable fog), increase this Penalty to a -4 instead.

Icy or slick conditions underfoot additionally force characters moving on foot to move at half Speed yards; characters that do not must succeed an Easy Speed Check or fall prone, each time they use a Move Action to move. If driving winds and rain are also present, the difficulty of the Speed Check to not lose your balance could be increased to Normal or even Hard at the GM's discretion.

Accumulated snowfall of one foot or greater, on the other hand, reduces the movement of all characters moving through it by two yards.

## Cars, Trucks, and Things That Go Boom: Vehicles in Combat

This being the modern world, cars, bikes, and whatnot are going to wind up in the middle of a firefight. Perhaps even more often than not. The **DICEPUNK SYSTEM** doesn't have any "tactical vehicle combat rules". For that kind of thing, I strongly recommend the ***Singularity System***, also published by End Transmission Games. Largely, in the **DICEPUNK SYSTEM**, the exact Movement Rate of vehicles should be abstracted and/or handwaved by the GM to keep the gameplay moving along crisply. However, as sometimes cars and whatnot are going to get shot at or shot from, we need to put a few sundry rules governing such situations here.

When an Attack is made against a moving vehicle, that vehicle's Defense is equal to the Defense of the character driving it. At the GM's discretion, the vehicle might have a Defense Penalty if it's moving slowly, has limited room to maneuver, or is especially large and bulky and therefore easy to hit.

When an Attack is made against a stationary vehicle, treat that vehicle as having a Defense of just 6, or even lower at the GM's discretion (if it's an especially big vehicle and hard to miss). Characters attacking from a moving vehicle suffer a -2 Penalty to the Attack Roll. A character driving a vehicle can Attack with the same Penalty, but must use their Move Action to control the vehicle or crash.

If a character driving a vehicle tries to ram another vehicle or run someone over, that is an Attack Action and is resolved normally as an Attack using the character's relevant Skill Bonus (e.g. Bike or Drive) versus the target's Defense. With that out of the way, that leaves the questions of how much punishment vehicles can take before they're destroyed and how much damage you take if you are hit by a moving vehicle, or near one if it explodes.

## Object Health and Melting Point Table

| Sample Object | Typical Object Health | Object Damage Cut* | Average Damage Done By Speeding Vehicle | Damage Done By Exploding Vehicle† |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Wood Door** | 18 | 2 | NA | NA |
| **Metal Fire Door** | 30 | 6 | NA | NA |
| **Safe Door** | 24 | 12 | NA | NA |
| **Airlock/Bulkhead/Vault** | 42 | 20 | NA | NA |
| **Computer** | 12 | 0 | NA | NA |
| **Barrel (e.g. 55 gallon steel drum)** | 24 | 4 | NA | NA |
| **Wooden crate** | 18 | 2 | NA | NA |
| **Furniture, Wood** | 18 | 0 | NA | NA |
| **Furniture, Plastic** | 12 | 0 | NA | NA |
| **Furniture, Metal** | 24 | 4 | NA | NA |
| **Glass** | 6 per inch | 0 | NA | NA |
| **Reinforced ("Bulletproof") Glass** | 12 | 12 | NA | NA |
| **Door lock** | 12 | 6 | NA | NA |
| **Magnetic lock** | 18 | 10 | NA | NA |
| **Padlock** | **12** | 8 | NA | NA |
| **Manhole Cover** | 24 | 8 | NA | NA |
| **Telephone Pole, Tree etc.** | 30 | 4 | NA | NA |
| **Motorcycle, Typical** | 24 | 4 | 3d6 + 4 | 4d6 |
| **Automobile, Typical** | 30 | 6 | 6d6 + 6 | 6d6 |
| **SUV or Truck** | 42 | 8 | 8d6 + 4 | 8d6 |
| **Semi-Truck or Bus** | 100 | 6 | 10d6 + 10 | 10d6 |
| **Armored Car or LAV** | 60 | 18 | 8d6 + 4 | 8d6 |
| **Aircraft, Small (e.g. helicopter)** | 100 | 10 | 1d6 × 8 (*Propellers*) | 10d6 |
| **Aircraft, Large (e.g. passenger jet)** | 250 | 8 | Seriously, how are you planning on getting run over by a 747, man? | 20d6 |

** All damage done to the object/vehicle is reduced by this value to a minimum of 0 with the exception of any type of damage (e.g. fire, etc.) the GM thinks would, according to common sense, bypass the damage cut.*

| Function Compromised/ Breaks | Burns/Melts | Notes |
|---|---|---|
| NA | 300° Celsius | Add +150° to the ignition point if wet. |
| NA | 1000° Celsius | None. |
| NA | 1500° Celsius | None. |
| NA | Anywhere from 2000-3000+° Celsius to 'Effectively Unmeltable' at the GM's Discretion. | |
| 80° Celsius | 200° Celsius | |
| 550° Celsius | 600° | Deforms and becomes soft at 550° C, may explode if the auto-ignition temperature of the material contained within is reached. |
| NA | 300° Celsius | Add +150° to the ignition point if wet. |
| Too hot to sit on at 100+° C | 300° Celsius | Add +150° to the ignition point if wet. |
| Too hot to sit on at 100+° C | 200° Celsius | None. |
| Too hot to sit on at 100+° C | 600° Celsius | None. |
| NA | 500-900° | None. |
| NA | 1000-1500° | None. |
| NA | 700° Celsius | None. |
| NA | 800° Celsius | None. |
| NA | 800° Celsius | None. |
| NA | 600° Celsius | None. |
| NA | 300° Celsius | Add +150° to the ignition point if wet. |
| Tires/rims fail at 150° | 1000+° Celsius | Gas tank explodes at 300° C. |
| Tires/rims fail at 150° | 1000+° Celsius | Gas tank explodes at 300° C. |
| Tires/rims fail at 150° | 1000+° Celsius | Gas tank explodes at 300° C. |
| Tires/rims fail at 150° | 1000+° Celsius | Gas tank explodes at 300° C. |
| Tires/rims fail at 250° | 1000+° Celsius | Gas tank explodes at 300° C. |
| 1500° Celsius | Effectively Unmeltable | Turbine failure at 1500° C. |
| 1500° Celsius | Effectively Unmeltable | Turbine failure at 1500° C. |

*† The listed damage is dealt to anyone at "ground zero" - the damage dealt to other characters in the area is reduced by 1d6 for every yard from the center of the blast, using the same procedure as grenade damage.*

## Health Points: A Sliding Scale From Not Dead to Dead

Your character can inhabit various states of being, as measured by your highly abstract Health.

**Fresh** characters are perfectly healthy to lightly wounded, and have no significant penalties.

**Wounded** characters are at or below one half their Health (rounded up). They receive a -2 to Strength and Speed (Min. 1).

**Dying** characters are those at or below 0 Health. While they can still move and act as long as they are not also ***Unconscious*** (see below), they may take only one Move Action or one Attack Action each Combat Turn. More importantly, they lose 1 Health each Combat Round until they die, or are stabilized by a First Aid Test. ***No amount of Nonlethal damage can ever reduce a character below 1 Health.***

**Unconscious** characters are those whose Health is at or below their Knockout Threshold. They are almost certainly Wounded and may also be Dying. Unconscious characters regain 1d6 Health in 10 - Strength hours (minimum 1 hour, and see sidebar), and regain consciousness if that brings them above their Knockout Threshold and they are not Dying. Unconscious characters can't do anything.

**Dead** characters are those whose Health is at or below their Death Threshold. Depending on their stats, it is possible for a character to die without first being knocked unconscious, but not without being first Wounded, and then Dying. If your character is dead, you will have to make a new one.

### Wound Shock

Being shot with a big old gun or telekinetically battered around or blown up or hacked with a fireaxe doesn't just hurt. It ***fucks you up.***

If a character sustains (Strength × 4) points of damage in a single blow from any Attack - after applying any appropriate Damage Cut from worn Armor - they are stunned. That means they lose their next Combat Turn, having to spend it recovering: picking themselves off the ground, dusting themselves off, picking up whatever they were holding, blinking the blood out of their eyes until they can see and hear again, and so on.

Giving the nod to realism is not mandatory. The GM is free to classify this as an optional rule and ignore it if the group feels that it makes the game less cinematic, slows things down, makes the game more deadly, or anything else they don't like.

### Damage and Healing

To regain health naturally over time, you must spend at least eight hours doing nothing but *resting*. That means no fighting, no running, no psionics, and no strenuous activity.

#### Can I Please, Please, Please, Please Be Awake Now?

Espers are going to get knocked out a lot. Probably more than most PCs in other RPGs. The reason for this is that virtually every Conspiracy wants to take Espers alive if at all possible, and use nonlethal weapons like Tasers and tranquilizer guns to accomplish this. Hence, nap time is a lot of the time for Espers, unless they always win every fight (and they won't). However, all of the PCs being unconscious for a long time (besides being boring to roleplay) can result in a very undesirable outcome for the story the group is trying to tell. Therefore, the GM can and should use his or her discretion to allow PCs to wake up slightly or very much ahead of "schedule" (10 - Strength hours) if one or more PCs being conscious sooner will improve the story and make it more interesting. Think of the Knockout Time given as just a guideline, even more than other rules.

**Every eight solid hours of rest restores 2d6 + Strength points of Health.**

The Psi Talent **Biofeedback** allows for *much, much faster* and more effective healing.

### *First Aid*

A successful *First Aid Test* can restore a few dice of Health to a wounded character. First Aid can only be used this way once per day per point of First Aid Bonus, and only once per wound, and only by a character with at least Apprentice level training in First Aid.

First Aid must be used within one hour of the initial wound being sustained. Using First Aid requires a First Aid Kit or the Test will be made at substantial Penalty. Using First Aid takes at least one minute, but a First Aid Test made to stabilize a dying character is assumed to stabilize them *immediately*.

This means the dying character stops losing Health every Round from blood loss as soon as an Attack Action is used to begin First Aid, but the First Aid must still be continued for one minute for them to become stable; if it stops before then, they start bleeding out again.

| First Aid Skill Level | Health Restored |
|---|---|
| **Apprentice (+1)** | 1d6 Health |
| **Expert (+2)** | 2d6 Health |
| **Master (+4)** | 4d6 Health |

Note that access to an exceptionally large and sophisticated stock of medical supplies and equipment, like you would find in an ambulance or an ER, increases every d6 of healing received to a d6 + 2 on a successful roll. Access to such extensive medical facilities also allows the use of the Medicine Skill as a substitute for the First Aid Skill, but obviously should be a rarity in most or all campaigns.

If a critical injury causes something gruesome to happen to a PC - like losing an eye or a limb - this, and any associated ad hoc penalties, cannot be healed simply by resting or First Aid. Professional medical attention at a hospital - or the Biofeedback Talent - is required to fix such disfiguring and crippling wounds.

## Drugs in Combat

***Psionics*** characters are going to be on drugs like all the damn time. Espers are going to use "performance enhancing" psionically active drugs - when they've got them - in combat to give them an edge, *PPECs* to increase their Psionic Talent Levels whenever they can get them, and recreational drugs to blow off steam outside of combat. And their enemies in the various Conspiracies are going to use tranquilizers and *PPIDs* on them to keep them "manageable".

It's that last one we're talking about here.

An Esper who's been tranquilized can use a Full Turn Action doing nothing else in a turn but trying to shrug off the effect of the tranquilizer. The Esper must make a Hard Will Check or a Hard Strength Check (Esper's choice). If the Esper succeeds, he immediately regains 2d6 + Strength + Will points of nonlethal damage caused by the tranquilizer. However, he must continue to try to withstand the tranquilizer's effects for its duration of action until it wears off and stops causing nonlethal damage and possible unconsciousness over time.

Shrugging off the effects of a PPID (p. 146) is a little easier. By concentrating for one minute (or one full turn in Combat) an Esper under the effects of a PPID can make a Hard Will Check or Hard Strength Check (Esper's choice). If they succeed, they regain use of a number of levels of suppressed Talent equal to the amount they succeeded by (minimum one Talent Level on a success). For instance, an Esper dosed with See No Evil with Will 8 who rolls a 4 on a Will Check, two points under the 6 she needed to roll under, regains the use of two suppressed levels of Pyrokinesis... unless she is dosed with See No Evil again.

## Advanced Psionic Combat

These rules can be used to make psionic combats between powerful Espers even more dramatic and exciting. The GM is free to ignore them if the group feels they add more complexity to the game than they are worth, but they are good for simulating the "psionic showdown" shown in many defining works of the genre. You know the type: two powerful psionic badasses face off against each other, yelling "graaaaggggggghhhhh" louder and louder as veins in their foreheads pulse harder and harder and more and more sparks and light fly in the air between them. And then the loser explodes.

Especially with these rules in play, roughly evenly matched Espers with Psychokinesis will be markedly less "immune" to one another, roughly evenly matched Espers with Telekinesis will be playing "rocket tag" a bit less, and roughly evenly matched Espers with Pyrokinesis will be just about the same, since these rules don't touch much on Pyrokinesis. For an Esper to effectively "Pyrokinesis" another Esper to death, she will still need about three more levels in the Pyrokinesis Talent than her intended victim.

### Playing Catch with Cars

The rules for Telekinesis presented on pp. 83-85 discuss combat options for using TK to swat at enemies, to pick up enemies and throw them, crush them, choke them out, or pull them apart, or to attack them with telekinetically held weapons. Throwing things at your target is another common form of Telekinetic Attack. This section provides more information on how it works.

First off, let's dispose of the obvious common sense stuff. Objects that are the size of a person or smaller can only target one character when thrown. Objects bigger than a person might be able to target multiple characters, provided those characters are standing close enough to each other. Thrown objects do bounce and roll, but are assumed to

come to a stop - or at least lose most of their momentum - after striking one target.

A character with Telekinesis can actually *catch* an object that is thrown at them as a reflexive non-action, assuming they have a high enough TK level to hold an item of that weight and are not already at their limit of held objects. Doing so costs the same number of Power Points (Drain, and Overflow) as picking up the object normally on their turn, *and* requires a Hard Speed-Based Telekinesis Test. If the "catching" character succeeds, they are now the Telekinetic "holder" of the object, and can throw it back or drop it when their next turn comes up. Even if the Test to catch the object fails, the cost is still spent, and the damage the object deals to its victim is reduced by the target's Telekinesis Level, before applying the appropriate Damage Cut from armor as normal.

### *Object Throwing Damage*

| Sample Object | Object Weight | Damage When Thrown With TK* |
|---|---|---|
| **Melee/Throwing Weapon** | Usually 1-50 Lbs. | Normal damage, but replacing Speed with Wits and Strength with Will. |
| **Wood Door** | 5-20 Lbs. | (Will - 1)d6 |
| **Metal Fire Door** | 11-100 Lbs. | (Will + 1)d6 |
| **Safe** | 25-50 Lbs. + Contents | (Will)d6 + Will |
| **Airlock/Bulkhead/Vault** | 2,000 Lbs. | (Will + 2)d6 + Will × 2 |
| **Computer Terminal** | 11-20 Lbs. | 2d6 + Will |
| **Barrel (e.g. 55 gallon steel drum)** | 20-40 Lbs. Empty | (Will)d6 |
| **Wooden Crate** | 15-50 Lbs. Empty | (Will)d6 |
| **Chair** | 5-50 Lbs. | (Will - 1)d6 |
| **Couch** | 40-400 Lbs. | (Will + 2)d6 |
| **Shard of Glass** | 1 Lb. | 1d6 + Wits |
| **Sheet of Glass** | 20-40 Lbs. | 3d6 + Will (Creates Many Glass Shards) |
| **Padlock** | 2-10 Lbs. | 1d6 + Will + 4 |
| **Manhole Cover** | 100-250 Lbs. | (Will + 1)d6 + Will |
| **Telephone Pole, Tree etc.** | 700-1000 Lbs. | (Will × 2)d6 |
| **Motorcycle, Typical** | 2,000 Lbs. | (Will +2)d6 + Will × 2 |
| **Automobile, Typical** | 3,000-4,000+ Lbs. | (Will × 2)d6 + Will |
| **SUV or Truck, Armored Car or LAV** | 5,000-7,000 Lbs. | (Will × 2)d6 + Will × 3 |
| **Semi-Truck or Bus** | 20,000 Lbs. Empty; Probably Too Heavy To Lift While Fully Loaded | (Will × 4)d6 |
| **Aircraft, Small (e.g. helicopter)** | About 12,000 Lbs. | (Will × 3)d6 |

** The listed damage is based solely on the weight and mass of the thrown object. Vehicles with fuel tanks tend to explode when thrown with sufficient force: typical damage of exploding vehicles is noted on p. 182. Keep in mind that moving vehicles that are seized with Telekinesis and thrown aren't necessarily destroyed. A moving car that is picked up and thrown has basically no chance not to crash, but if a helicopter is plucked "out of the air" and then thrown in any direction (most likely the ground) the GM at least should allow its pilot a Pilot Skill Test to avoid crashing.*

## TK Showdowns and Mental Combat

A TK Showdown is automatically initiated whenever one character with Telekinesis grabs another character with a Telekinesis level within two levels of the attacker's. This effectively cancels the grab and a TK Showdown takes place instead, but the grabbing character is allowed the first buildup roll. A TK Showdown can also be initiated manually as an Attack Action - the attacker must hit the target's Defense with a Telekinesis Attack to initiate the showdown.

A Mental Combat can only be initiated manually between any two characters with any level of Psychokinesis who are within line of sight of each other. Initiating a Mental Combat requires the attacker to hit the target's Defense with a Psychokinesis Attack. The defending character can choose to "receive the Mental Combat", in which case the attacker doesn't need to hit the target's Defense. In any case, the initiating character is allowed the first Buildup Roll.

There is no Pyrokinesis equivalent of a TK Showdown/Mental Combat. Pyrokinetic Espers are too good at being immune to being burned for that to make sense.

TK Showdowns and Mental Combats follow the same basic procedure. Both are psychic duels between only two participants.

1. Each participant simultaneously, secretly writes down their Breaking Point, which can be any multiple of their Will between (Will) and (Will × 10). You suffer damage equal to half your Breaking Point, rounded up, during Step 5 if you win the duel. This step is called "bidding".

2. The initiating character makes a Buildup Roll, rolling a number of dice equal to their Telekinesis Level (for a TK Showdown), or their Psychokinesis Level (for a Mental Combat). They announce and then write down the total rolled on their pips. Each time this happens, the character spends Power Points and gains Overflow equal to the number of dice rolled. No Drain is taken during a psionic duel, although the damage suffered by both parties at the end of the duel is certainly Drain of a sort. If either combatant runs out of Power Points, they must take one extra Overflow or lose one Health (their choice) for every Power Point they are unable to spend. Neither character locked in a psionic duel can Overload until the duel is resolved.

3. The other character then makes their Buildup Roll, following the same exact procedure. Making a Buildup Roll effectively ends your turn and takes up your entire turn, with the exception of the initiating character, who can take one Move Action before initiating on the turn they initiate.

4. Repeat steps two through three, with each character totaling and announcing their Buildup Roll each turn.

5. When a character's Buildup Roll equals or exceeds their opponent's Breaking Point, they have won the duel and the duel ends. The losing character suffers damage equal to the totaled Buildup, and if it was a TK Showdown, is also knocked flying backwards that many yards. The victor suffers damage equal to half their chosen Breaking Point, rounded up.

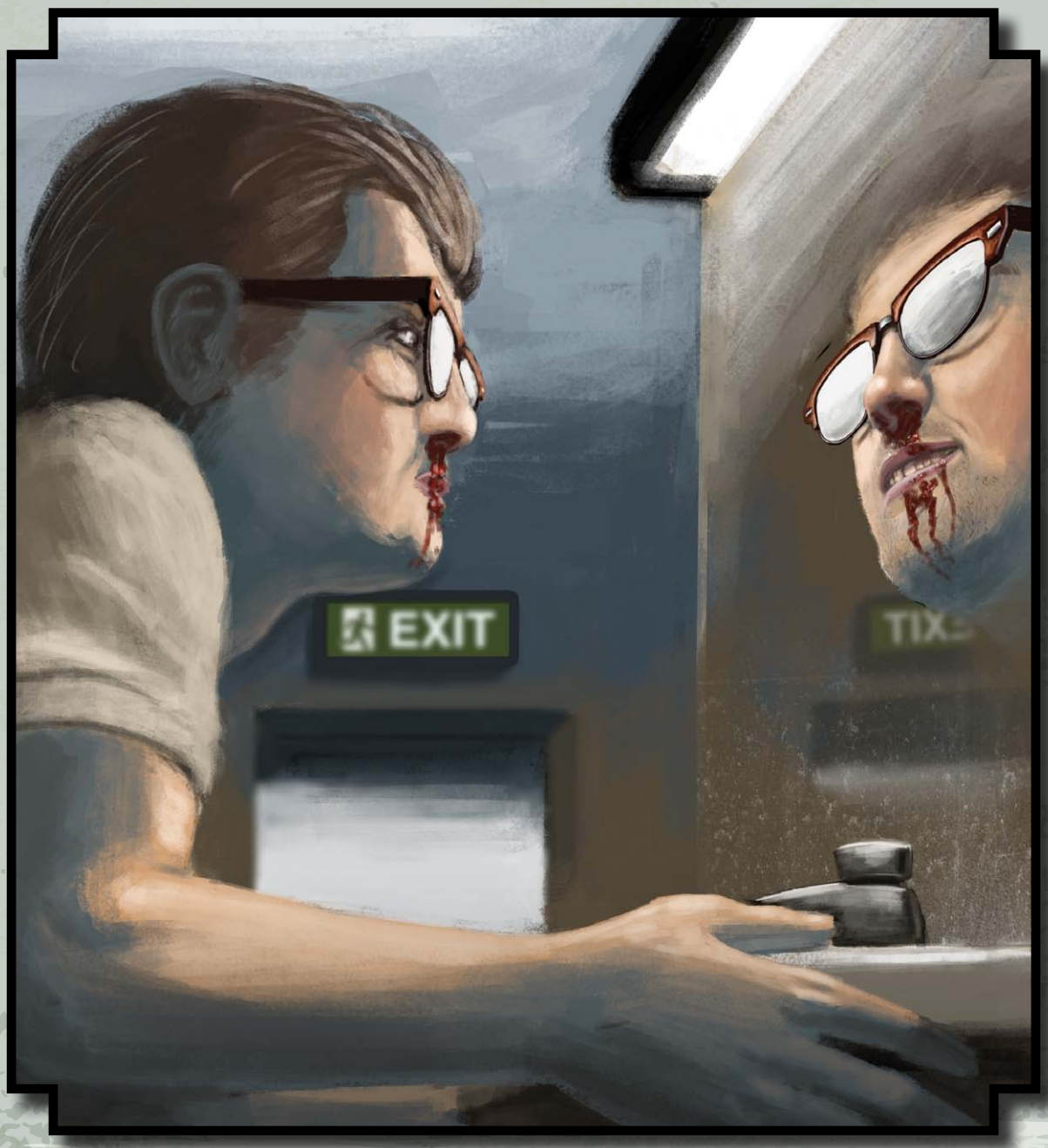
At the GM's discretion, the "sanctity" of a TK Showdown or Mental Combat may be protected by the physics of the game itself. Perhaps attacks from "outside of the duel" are simply and automatically deflected by the psionic forces within the duel, preventing outside interference.

# (R)Evolution: Character Advancement

**"I don't care if it hurts, I wanna have control**
**I want a perfect body, I want a perfect soul"**

***- Radiohead, "Creep"***

Espers grow more powerful over time as they use their abilities and stretch their psychic muscles. If you survive your first few brushes with death, captivity, and/or indoctrination, you can expect to become very powerful indeed. What does not kill you will make you stronger.



## EXPERIENCE POINTS

**The first way that Espers grow in power is by earning *Experience Points.*** Experience Points (or XP) will be awarded to you for defeating enemies, for reaching story milestones, for successfully accomplishing missions, and for individual instances of good roleplaying. Experience points are spent between game sessions - usually this means during the wrap-up portion or end of a game session, or during the beginning of the following session - to increase character power. XP need not be spent immediately, and can be saved up between sessions, but does not transfer between characters. Spending XP can mean improving Attributes, improving existing Skills (or learning new ones), or learning new Techniques.

Equipment, gear, and other possessions must be acquired solely through roleplaying, while improving/learning new Skills and Techniques requires both an expenditure of XP and access to a trainer or time to practice (even if this means the character "learns by doing") at the GM's discretion.

The XP costs of different character improvements are described in the following table.

| Character Improvement | XP Cost | Notes and Other Requirements |
|---|---|---|
| **Increase an Attribute (Strength, Speed, Wits or Will) by 1 (to a maximum of 10).** | 50 * Current Value (New Value <7) OR 100 * Current Value (New Value ≥ 7) | (Increasing SSWW Attributes increases derived statistics [Health, Initiative, Defense, etc.] normally.) |
| **Train a New Skill (Learn new Skill at Trained [+0]).** | 25 | Another character (PC or NPC) with the Skill at Apprentice level (minimum) must ALWAYS be present to train the character, along with sufficient time and any necessary equipment. GM's discretion. |
| **Learn a Trained Skill (Increase a Trained [+0] Skill to Apprentice [+1]).** | 50 | At the GM's discretion, another character (PC or NPC) with the Skill at Expert level (minimum) must be present to train the character, along with sufficient time and any necessary equipment. |
| **Improve a Skill (Increase an Apprentice [+1] Skill to Expert [+2]).** | 150 | GM's discretion. |
| **Master a Skill (Increase an Expert [+2] Skill to Master [+4]).** | 300 | At the GM's discretion, another character (PC or NPC) with the Skill at Master level must be present and willing to train the character, along with sufficient time and any necessary equipment. |
| **Buy 1 Technique Pick (Multiple Picks can be saved up; see below).** | 100 | GM's discretion. |

## Advanced Techniques

The following **Techniques** are not available to starting characters, but can be bought with Technique Picks that are in turn bought with Experience once the campaign is underway.

| Technique Name | # of Picks | Prerequisites | Use Limit/ Cost | Benefits |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Frenzy** | 2 | Blitzkrieg. | - | You can give up your Move Action to Attack twice in a turn. Each Attack is made at a -2 Penalty. |
| **Counter Attack** | 3 | Expert in Blades, Clubs, or Brawling. | - | Whenever you're hit with a melee Attack, you get a free melee Attack on them, at a -1 Penalty, at the end of the turn in which they hit you. |
| **Improved Critical Attack** | 2 | Critical Attack. | - | Whenever you roll a natural 12 on an Attack Roll, you automatically deal double damage. |
| **Sniper** | 3 | Longshot and either Boom!Headshot, Kneecapper, or Trick Shot. | - | When using a scoped weapon (such as a sniper rifle) ignore the to-hit Penalties for making Boom!Headshot, Kneecapper, and Trick Shot Attacks. |
| **Bullet Time** | 1 | Dodge; Somakinesis. | 2 Power Points | By spending 2 PP, you can add +4 to your Speed for the purpose of any Dodge Test you make versus a ranged Attack. |
| **Matrix** | 1 | Dodge; Somakinesis. | 2 Power Points | By spending 2 PP, you can add +4 to your Speed for the purpose of any Dodge Test you make versus a melee Attack. |
| **Dual Strike** | 1 | Ambidexterity. | Daily | Once per day, you can Attack with two equipped melee weapons at a +4 Bonus instead of the usual -1 Penalty. Both Attacks must be made against the same target. If using Frenzy, instead you make FOUR Attacks at a +2 Bonus. |
| **Equilibrium** | 1 | John Wu Special. | Daily | Once per day you can fire two pistols and receive a +4 Bonus to each Attack. You can split these Attacks up however you see fit among available targets. If using Frenzy, you make FOUR Attacks, at +2 Bonus. |
| **Too Damn Fast** | 1 | Reposition; Speed 7+; Somakinesis. | - | Add 1d6 to your Initiative roll. You may pick Too Damn Fast up to three times, gaining this benefit each time. |

| Technique Name | # of Picks | Prerequisites | Use Limit/ Cost | Benefits |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Blade Dance** | 3 | Blades Expert; Somakinesis Level 3. | 5 Power Points | You can divide the damage from a normal Blades Attack however you choose between the primary target and any number of other targets that are within Speed yards. Blade Dance can't be combined with other Techniques; you must declare that you are using Blade Dance before making the Attack Roll. |
| **Impaler** | 2 | Strength 7+; Batter Up; Somakinesis Level 3. | 5 Power Points | When armed with any melee weapon capable of penetrating an opponent's body (such as a broken pool cue or a sword) you can spend 5 PP and a Full Turn Action to make a melee Attack at -2 to hit. This Attack does triple damage if it hits, and the target may not counter Attack. |
| **Stealth Kill** | 2 | Master of Stealth. | - | If you are undetected (i.e. if you win a Contest where you roll 1d6 + Speed + Stealth versus an enemy's 1d6 + Wits + Awareness) at the start of a combat, and armed with a one handed melee weapon (such as a combat knife or blackjack) your Attack hits automatically for double damage. |
| **One-Punch Knockout** | 2 | Expert Brawler; Critical Attack. | - | If you roll a natural twelve on an unarmed Attack Roll, your target's Health is immediately lowered to its K.O. threshold, if it has one. |
| **Neck Snapper** | 3 | Killing Hands; Lethal Strikes; Critical Attack; Somakinesis Level 3. | 10 Power Points | If roll a natural twelve on an unarmed Attack Roll, your target's Health is immediately lowered to its death threshold. Some powerful enemies may be immune to this instant-kill ability. |

## CAPS

**The second way Espers advance is by accumulating CAPs; *Colorcoded Advancement Points.*** There are two basic ways of handling CAP accumulation, which are pretty similar, with one important difference between them. The GM should choose which method of CAP Accumulation will be used at the start of the campaign, and make sure all the players are on the same page about it.

- *Every time an Esper uses a Psi Talent, they collect a CAP of the appropriate color.*
- *Every time an Esper uses a Psi Talent in a meaningful way*, they collect a CAP of the appropriate color.*

** What this specifically means is up to the GM, but what we're getting at is the use of the Psi Talent should advance the story, advance a personal goal, or involve taking (or struggling against) some risk.*

Basically, you should choose the first option if you're cool with the idea of a Telekinetic character "lifting weights" with TK until he's Telekinetically stronger, or a Psychokinetic character reading random strangers' minds until her Psychokinesis improves. You should choose the second option if you think every step toward the growth of Psi Talents should always involve some emotion, drama, and/or danger. And it's also totally fine to go with a hybrid of the two.

EACH TIME YOU USE **TELEKINESIS** OR A **TELEKINESIS** BASED TALENT, MARK DOWN ONE **BLUE CAP**.

EACH TIME YOU USE **PYROKINESIS** OR A **PYROKINESIS** BASED TALENT, MARK DOWN ONE **RED CAP**.

EACH TIME YOU USE **PSYCHOKINESIS** OR A **PSYCHOKINESIS** BASED TALENT, MARK DOWN ONE **GREEN CAP**.

When you have enough CAPS of the appropriate color that you reach THRESHOLD in a particular color, you **immediately** do one of the following:

- *Increase any Psi Talent of the appropriate color by one level, up to its max level.*
- *If you meet the prerequisite (usually three levels in the Primary Talent), you can learn a new Secondary Talent linked to the appropriate color Primary Talent. I.E. when you reach THRESHOLD in Telekinesis, you could learn Biofeedback, Somakinesis, or Necrokinesis, each at 1st Level.*

**Then, immediately reset your accumulated CAPS in that color to 0.**

The THRESHOLD of a color is determined by the **highest currently held level** of a Psi Talent associated with that color.

| Highest Level BLUE Talent | BLUE THRESHOLD | Highest Level RED Talent | RED THRESHOLD | Highest Level GREEN Talent | GREEN THRESHOLD |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Level 1 | 10 CAPS | Level 1 | 10 CAPS | Level 1 | 10 CAPS |
| Level 2 | 20 CAPS | Level 2 | 20 CAPS | Level 2 | 20 CAPS |
| Level 3 | 60 CAPS | Level 3 | 60 CAPS | Level 3 | 60 CAPS |
| Level 4 | 80 CAPS | Level 4 | 80 CAPS | Level 4 | 80 CAPS |
| Level 5 | 200 CAPS | Level 5 | 200 CAPS | Level 5 | 200 CAPS |
| Level 6 | 100 CAPS | Level 6 | 100 CAPS | Level 6 | 100 CAPS |

**-TELEKINESIS-**
**+Biofeedback**
**+Somakinesis**
**+Necrokinesis**
**(BLUE)**

**-PYROKINESIS-**
**+Entropy**
**+Magnekinesis**
**+Synchronicity**
**(RED)**

**-PSYCHOKINESIS-**
**+Scrying**
**+Osmoses**
**+Technokinesis**
**(GREEN)**

**PSIONIC TALENTS BY COLOR ASSOCIATION**

*If you quit, your only severance will be this scar.*

*Soldier on.*

### Optional Rule: Alternate CAP System

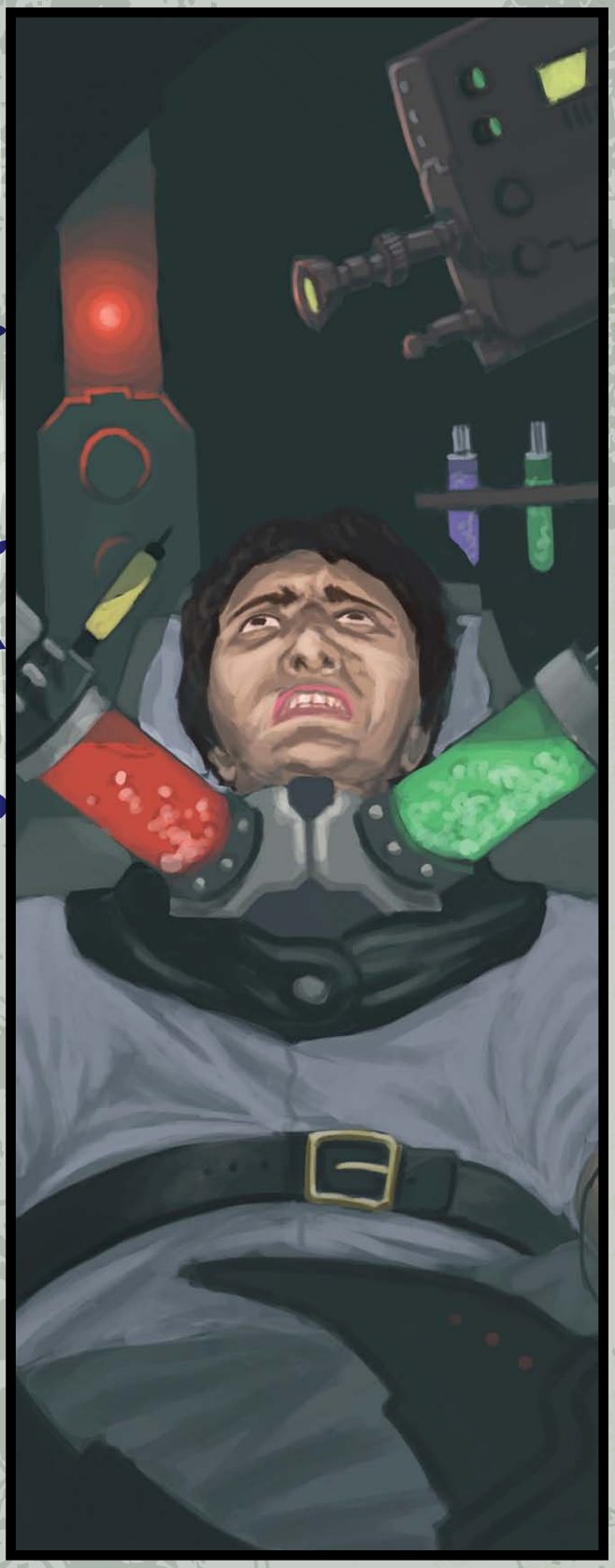
With a little bit of reworking, you can run Psionics using this alternate CAP system. This alternate system is perfect for GMs and players who would prefer to conceptualize caps as a pool of points that can be saved up and then spent (like karma in Shadowrun or CP in Champions) rather than a threshold that is reached causing an immediate benefit, like levels in D&D. This alternate system also has somewhat more finicky and arbitrary "break points" of efficiency than the default system, but feels a bit less spontaneous and unpredictable.

Caps are earned exactly the same as in "vanilla" psionics. Likewise, the normal prerequisites for buying and unlocking Secondary Talents are in effect.

- *BLUE Caps can be spent on new levels of Telekinesis, Biofeedback, Somakinesis, or Necrokinesis.*
- *RED Caps can be spent on new levels of Pyrokinesis, Entropy, Magnekinesis, or Synchronicity.*
- *GREEN Caps can be spent on new levels of Psychokinesis, Scrying, Osmoses, or Technokinesis.*

The costs of unlocking new Talent Levels are shown on the following table. It is entirely up to the GM's discretion when PCs can spend their accumulated caps. Some GMs might prefer that it happen in the down-time between adventures to give them time to prepare appropriate opposition and challenges, while others might be fine with it occurring dramatically in the middle of an action scene.

| Talent and Level | Unlock Cost | Talent and Level | Unlock Cost | Talent and Level | Unlock Cost |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Telekinesis LV2 | 10 CAPS | Pyrokinesis LV2 | 10 CAPS | Psychokinesis LV2 | 10 CAPS |
| Telekinesis LV3 | 20 CAPS | Pyrokinesis LV3 | 20 CAPS | Psychokinesis LV3 | 20 CAPS |
| Telekinesis LV4 | 60 CAPS | Pyrokinesis LV4 | 60 CAPS | Psychokinesis LV4 | 60 CAPS |
| Telekinesis LV5 | 100 CAPS | Pyrokinesis LV5 | 100 CAPS | Psychokinesis LV5 | 100 CAPS |
| Telekinesis LV6 | 200 CAPS | Pyrokinesis LV6 | 200 CAPS | Psychokinesis LV6 | 200 CAPS |
| Necrokinesis LV1 | 70 CAPS | Magnekinesis LV1 | 60 CAPS | Technokinesis LV1 | 50 CAPS |
| Necrokinesis LV2 | 90 CAPS | Magnekinesis LV2 | 70 CAPS | Technokinesis LV2 | 60 CAPS |
| Necrokinesis LV3 | 140 CAPS | Magnekinesis LV3 | 120 CAPS | Technokinesis LV3 | 110 CAPS |
| Necrokinesis LV4 | 280 CAPS | Magnekinesis LV4 | 240 CAPS | Technokinesis LV4 | 220 CAPS |
| Other Secondary LV1 | 40 CAPS | Other Secondary LV1 | 40 CAPS | Other Secondary LV1 | 40 CAPS |
| Other Secondary LV2 | 60 CAPS | Other Secondary LV2 | 60 CAPS | Other Secondary LV2 | 60 CAPS |
| Other Secondary LV3 | 100 CAPS | Other Secondary LV3 | 100 CAPS | Other Secondary LV3 | 100 CAPS |
| Other Secondary LV4 | 200 CAPS | Other Secondary LV4 | 200 CAPS | Other Secondary LV4 | 200 CAPS |



## New Colors: The Power of PPECs

How do you learn the first level of a Talent that belongs to a "color" you don't start with? You cannot. Yes, you read that right. If you did not start with any levels of Telekinesis, you cannot *learn* any levels of Telekinesis, or any levels of any Telekinesis-based ("BLUE") Talent in play, with Experience Points *or* with Colorcoded Advancement Points. Likewise, if you don't start with at least one level in Psychokinesis, you cannot learn Psychokinesis or any "GREEN" Talents in play, and if you don't start with at least one level in Pyrokinesis, you cannot learn Pyrokinesis or any "RED" Talents in play.

This does not mean that branching out into a new Psionic Talent is totally impossible, however. It just doesn't occur *naturally*, though practice. However, that is where Psionic Power Enhancement Chemicals come in. Most Espers only "naturally" manifest as a strong Telekinetic, a strong Pyrokinetic, a strong Psychokinetic, or a weak user in some combination of two or three of the above disciplines. However, PPECs can change this, and create "unnatural" power combinations - for those willing to brave the side effects.

If you're an ESPER without Pyrokinesis, inject RED and suddenly you're a first level Pyrokinetic; it's just that easy. An ESPER *with* Pyrokinesis who injects RED is suddenly flooded with a bunch of "free" CAPs. Of course, there are side effects. Nasty ones. For one thing, PPECs have a high likelihood to make the patient Overload unless administered in a stress-free, clinical environment - and even then, they have some likelihood of doing so anyway.

Then there's the problem of acquiring PPECs, drugs your character does not even know about at game start which are manufactured and jealously guarded by Conspiracies your character likewise does not even know about at game start. Nothing is impossible, however. If you're a player planning to expand your stable of Psionic Talents by tracking down a PPEC and slamming it into your veins... good luck.

If you're a GM, make sure you understand the power of PPECs in increasing the *breadth* and *depth* of character abilities, and make absolutely sure you make PPECs in your campaign suitably scarce and difficult to obtain!

# The Kids from Yesterday

*By Mikaela Barree*

## Let's talk about fire.

*Everyone's fascinated with it. I have a few theories about why. Bear with me. I'm going to be cheesy.*

*One: Fire is dualistic.*

*It's the source of life and warmth and hot food and safe water, and we'd be fucked without it. But it's scary as hell because as much as we need it, that shit can kill us and all the animals and the forests, and it leaves ruin and ash in its wake. It's a concept that's perfectly illustrated in nature. There are trees that can only grow after a huge fire that wipes out all the other trees; the heat causes their cones to open up and their seeds to sprout.*

*It's power that we think we have completely mastered. It's all these huge, sweeping concepts like life and death, and humans put it inside a palm-sized plastic container that you can buy at any gas station for two bucks. We use it and harness it. But it still has all the power in the world to completely wreck our shit. It's under our control, and it's completely out of our control. We're drawn to it, and terrified of it.*

*Two: Fire is defiant.*

*I don't exactly mean that literal fire is literally rebellious. Fire, being a force of nature and without will or mind, does not make a conscious decision to revolt - though, like I said before, once we make a fire, it can do things we never wanted it to. Start a gas cooking fire, maybe end up burning to death in your house. No, what I really mean is that fire is an emblem of defiance.*

*Think about it. There's a story about an authoritarian sky-god that withholds fire from mankind; it's too powerful for lowly humans, and it will bestow them with strength that will allow them to rise up from the muck. Enter another god, some tricky bastard who decides to revolt; he sneaks in and steals the fire, and brings it to the humans. It's a huge fuck-you to the big dad in the sky.*

*The funny thing about this story is it appears all over the planet, from cultures that never interacted with each other in any way. Prometheus, Raven, Coyote. Ancient human beings from everywhere independently decided that this is how humans got fire - its genesis was an act of insurgence.*

*Three: Fire is beautiful.*

*Remember what I said about duality? This is kind of like that.*

*Take, for instance, the security guards in this room. Most of them were ugly fuckers before we rolled in: muscles they had in their prime of life transmogrifying into fat with the advent of their middle age; short hair cropped to hide the balding; lines on their faces drawn from years of hating their miserable fucking lives. Now they look even fucking worse. You ever seen a burned body before? Their tendons and muscles tightening up, balling their hands into fists, curling their arms into their chests. Flesh sizzling away - no noses, no lips, no eyelids. Everything bright, screaming red and char-black.*

*This is ugly shit.*

*But look at the fire. Burning hot blue, glowing red and orange and yellow and white. And the way it moves - it's dancing, rolling, reaching toward the sky. People today, they're blinded by their screens - Instagram and Here Comes Honey Boo Boo or whatever's the next new crappy thing. But back in the olden days, we humans used to sit around and tell stories and just watch this. It's not just, you know, captivating because it's dangerous or because it represents our autonomy as a species. If you don't pay attention to all the people and things it's eating up... man...*

## It's fucking dazzling.

I secretly have a problem with certain crusties who have this particular anti-civ mindset. Some of them are just oogles, you know, dumpster diving for Dunkin Donuts and sleeping on stoops when their mommies and daddies are waiting at home with a big pot roast dinner and Flintsones chewable vitamins. They think if they smell like they haven't washed in a month someone will finally like them. Someone cool, someone worldly. And then there are the true ideologues. Shouting "fuck you, I quit" to society before society could fire them. Maybe they came from a shitty home life, or no home life, or maybe they just got so fed up with all the bullshit that they decided to slough it all off and hop a train. Those kids are alright, but they either wash out eventually and trade in their white guy dreds for a three-piece-suit - or they age gracelessly and can be later found creepily hitting on underage girls, refusing to admit that they're not twenty anymore.

All the respect for those that walk the walk, but they piss me off sometimes.

Doesn't matter if they abandoned civilization or if civilization abandoned them, if they did it to be "cool" and "trendy" or if they did it because they're truehearts who want to live their own lives the way they want to, the real fact is that they can eventually go home to somewhere. And if they do go home to that place, they clean up and put on a tie or get a minivan or whatever, society is waiting for them right where they left it.

Maybe I'm really just bitter because I'm tired.

The kids in this train car all seem pretty jazzed about it. They're telling stories, talking about shows they snuck into and comparing shit they fished out of suburban-street trashcans on the night before garbage day. One dude with a beard that puts Billy Gibbons to shame is rolling a joint, while a small chick with a combed-down Mohawk is plucking something on a ukulele. I snuck in here to try and get some sleep for a few hours without having to look over my shoulder, but it's looking like sleep is getting less and less likely.

It's not a great-smelling place to rest my head, either. I've gone nose-blind to my own unwashed stench, but new humans mean new aromas. Sweat and discharge and urine and vomit and half-rotten vegetable and lots of cannabis. I look at them from my corner of the car, so quiet and still I'm not sure any of them have noticed me, and wonder why the hell someone would be here if they didn't have to be.

Maybe I'm too young to be this jaded. Maybe I'm feeling preachy. Maybe I just want to wallow in self-pity for a little bit before I'm running rooftops again.

I certainly could fit in with them. Wearing old dumpster jeans that are torn up the legs in places, hems worn to nothing. Old army surplus boots. Stolen olive drab hoodie underneath a leather jacket someone donated to Goodwill. White guy dreds. Did I mention that I hate those before? Projection, or plain old self-hatred? But I've been lurking silently in this corner for too long; if I try to talk to them now, I might just seem like a creep.

And of course, there's the part that always whispers:

*Don't make friends. Don't get attached.*

*You'll put them in danger. You'll lose them in the end.*

*You always lose them in the end.*

It's way too loud in here to sleep, so even though I'm curled up on my side, my eyes are open and I'm watching the crusties have fun. I shouldn't begrudge them their good time. I kind of hate myself for this pity-party I'm throwing, which just becomes an endless and increasingly pathetic spiral downward. Feedback loop.

They start passing the joint around, and I follow it with my eyes, now regretful that I didn't make my presence known before. The glowing, smoking end of the blunt bobs as it moves from hand to hand - glows brighter - a cough, a laugh. In the brief moment of inhalation I can see the faces much clearer. Beard guy hits it first, then holds it for ukulele girl, who's still playing a cheerful song as she takes a good-sized pull. He passes it to a skinny guy in skinny jeans with big glasses and sleeve tattoos. It jumps along like the dot in those "follow the bouncing ball" kid's videos.

I see a hand reach out - kind of a small hand, but in the ember glow, I see callouses and a white, sweat-stained wrap. Then, the hand moves to

the face, and my breath catches. Blue eyes, really bright. Her blonde hair is dirty and lank around her thin face. High cheekbones, small nose. Same kind of getup I'm wearing. Ratty navy blue hoodie under a men's military surplus peacoat. Torn jeans. White cross trainers, with the soles worn down to nothing, separated from the shoe at the toes. She's dirty but something about her says to me, she doesn't belong with this crew any more than I do.

She looks like the homecoming queen fell on hard times. There is something very small and very big about her all at once.

I realize I'm freaking out over nothing. She's probably just a pretty little rich girl who wanted to see what life was like in the gutter. Maybe she followed a shitty boyfriend down here. It's nothing more than that.

And still, as the moment hangs suspended in the air, I remember that *probably* is not the same as what's really true. What's really true is that something inside of me recognizes something inside of her. Maybe like that "Namaste" thing.

To my surprise, she recognizes me too. At least, she sees me, her bright blue eyes boring straight into mine as she takes a deep pull, holds it, and blows smoke through pursed, chapped lips. When she stands, the others look at her with curiosity; they track her as she walks toward me, and when I sit up in startlement, their surprise that someone else was here is almost palpable.

She sits down next to me while I scramble from the fetal position into something more human. I'm instantly self-conscious of my scraggly goatee and the shorter, unshorn hairs that are crawling down my neck. It's not that I'm trying to impress her, or that she looks particularly impressive herself. This isn't some grungy romantic meet-cute. I just have a feeling prickling down my back - this person is going to be important to you. I want to make a good first impression.

"You want some?"

I look over at beard guy to see if it's okay - he rolled it, after all - and he nods, wariness still apparent in his posture, even though he's trying to appear relaxed. "Yeah, thanks," I say. The weed will probably make me more tired, but hell, I could use some. I take the joint from her small fingers, and I have to touch her hand to get a good grip 'cause it's burned down so far. I take a very modest hit, and reach very far over toward beard guy to pass it. He reaches back, and for a moment we're like a trashy version of The Creation of Adam. When he grabs the joint, he pops back into a sitting position next to ukulele girl, who stopped playing when she saw me.

Everyone is pretty quiet for a while, and beard guy and his girl finish off the blunt. Then, slowly, the ukulele resumes, as does the chatter, which has become a little less rowdy.

"What's your name?" the blonde girl asks, so quiet I'm sure I'm the only one who can hear her. She's sitting with her knees tucked up under her chin, her hands clasped around her thighs. She's staring sidelong at me, head barely turned my way. I can tell she wants to ask what my story is, but she knows not to.

"Chris," I say. "Sorry for being a weird lurker."

She laughs. It's a real laugh, but it also sounds pretty sad, like she's got barely enough energy for it. "I get it. You were probably here first. I'm Elena."

"Nice to meet you," I say. Trying for genteel, missing by a mile. The setting doesn't allow for genteel. Maybe polite's the closest I'm going to get. Curiosity is filling up my throat, and I'm afraid to speak because the moment I open my mouth, I know I'm going to start prying. But how can I ask the questions I want to? Best case scenario, she thinks I'm crazy. Worst case scenario...

Well, there are two worst cases. One, she's a plant and she's going to report back to whatever agency sent her after me.

**Two, I'm absolutely right about her.** And I wouldn't wish that on anyone.

"Okay, I can't take it anymore," she says out of nowhere. I didn't realize how long that silence was stretching. "Mind if I get a little rude?"

Her manner is easy; she's used to talking to people. That's pretty rare in the circles I run in, when I do have circles to run in. Most people I know are used to sitting on the outside. But her, I can tell she's one of the popular kids. Extroverted. Secure. I never got to go to high school, but I imagine her in another life as one of those teen movie girls. "What do you want to know?" I answer with a question, which I know is not the done thing, but no one in this conversation gives a shit.

"Who's after you?"

It's kind of the last thing I expected her to ask. I was starting to feel a little high, a little sleepy, a little relaxed. Now my heart rate is up and my nerve endings are starting to buzz. I'm contemplating a leap from the moving train, trying to figure out if it would kill me or just bang me up really good.

"Sorry," she says, her voice near a whisper. "I just noticed, um... you looked really tense. Like you were trying to sleep but your eyes just wouldn't close. Like you couldn't stop looking around. And you were wedged up into the corner." Her blue eyes dip to a bulge in my jean pocket. "And you kept brushing your pocket knife with your fingers. You know. To make sure it was still there."

Stunned silence. I have to choose my words carefully. No commitments, no confessions. Damn, I thought I'd hidden that knife pretty good. "...You usually do a lot of people-watching?"

She looks ashamed, biting the inside of her lip. Her blue eyes dart to the crowd of crusties, then back. Her voice is still lowered. "I'm, ah, pretty good at kinesics." She laughs like she just told herself a joke. The hair on the back of my neck prickles. "Not so good at keeping shit to myself, though."

Then it hits me. The reason I recognized something like me in her. All the stuff she noticed about me, I was noticing too. Her blue eyes won't stop roaming around the train car, over the faces of the other kids. Her hands keep clenching and unclenching, muscles tensed like she's about to spring to her feet. The right side of her jaw bulges; she grinds her teeth.

"I'm sorry, I'm being kind of a freak," she says, getting more nervous the longer I don't speak. Like maybe she's wondering if I'm someone she should have stayed away from. The same fears I have about her, she's having about me. "I just wanted to know if I could, you know, help. Or if you wanted to talk about it."

"No, it's fine." I find myself worrying less and less about her being a spy, and more and more about what I can say to convince her that *I'm* not a spy. Though, she could totally still be an agent. A really good one. That's never out of the realm of possibility. "I mean, you're right. You have a good eye." I notice we're both talking at the same pitch. Our faces are drawn closer together, ears angled toward mouths. Even so, I try for a mix of casual, flippant conversation and Deep Hidden Meaning. "Kinesics. That's like how the TV psychics do it, right? You a mind reader?"

Her laugh and her smile are not earnest. Eyes are too wide, dirty face too blanched. "Ha, kinda. Not very good at it. I had a friend who was, though." The sadness as she says those words, uses that tense, that's real. It's hidden behind that smile, but I know it's there.

"I'm sorry," I say automatically, in spite of the fact that she never said anything that would be an appropriate response to in most normal conversations.

Her response is a little shrug, one shoulder lifting dispassionately and then falling. "Shit happens. You know what I mean." I can tell you know, she doesn't say, but I can almost picture her saying. It goes too fast. We never get to mourn our dead. And I can tell you understand.

Or maybe I'm just going crazy. "Yeah." I decide to take a running leap off the edge of caution and subtlety. "The Shop?"

She sucks her bottom lip between her teeth. She looks surprised, but not too surprised. I can tell she's still following along. After a long pause where she looks me up and down, she nods.

"Yeah." I take a huge breath in, letting it out really slowly through my nose. "I know what that's like."

And I do. Too well.

But for the first time in a while, my self-pity is draining out of me like sand through a sieve. Now, I feel like I can really hear the music coming from the other side of the train car. And it actually sounds pretty good.

*There's one Earth. But on Earth, there are a whole lotta worlds.*

*It's not enough to say there are worlds within worlds. There are nesting doll worlds, worlds that overlap like Venn diagrams, worlds that remain completely separate.*

*Lots of people are convinced that their world is the most secret, the most special. The most underground. And lots of people are, separately, convinced that their world is the most sane, the most normal. The only world.*

*"The real world."*

*Let's start simple. Let's start surface-level. The world of high-powered business. The kinds of businesses that have a lot of subsidiaries, that seem to make money from collecting smaller, useful entities. Agriculture. Plastics. Pharmaceuticals. Oil. The shit that keeps the world running, the shit that no one lives without, no matter how much they want to. The kinds of businesses that are run by high-powered CEOs, with overseas accounts to keep Uncle Sam from sniffing around their greenbacks. Maybe, just saying, that world overlaps with the world of the government. High-powered businessmen backing candidates like racehorses. Selling you genetically modified poultry while they buy your opinions.*

*So, let's say that one of these high-powered businessmen has a kid. They use their piles of money to send the kid off to an expensive liberal arts college. In four years, maybe this kid shaves all the hair off of her head and stops shaving it off of her armpits, learns new words like "privilege" and "microaggressions," and comes back dating someone named Crystal. That's another world. These two people - businessman and daughter - they're at odds. The worlds they live in are at odds. They both have this idea of what the "real world" is like, and they're both right, and they're both wrong.*

*They're both right because, subjectively and objectively, the data reflects that. Really, people do like having gas in their cars, and heat for their houses, and inexpensive food and sterile medical supplies. So that's a point for dad. And really, the rich get richer and the poor get poorer and people all over the place are screwed over because of the color of their skin or who they like to sleep with. So that's a point for daughter.*

*They're both wrong, first, because they're both right. If dad tells daughter, "you need to grow up and live in the real world," what he means is "you need to grow up and live in my world." When she says, "You have no idea what's happening out in the real world," she means, "you have no idea what's happening outside of your world." They're shouting at each other across the gulf of different paradigms.*

*They're also both wrong because all of it - their perceptions of their worlds, their places in their worlds - amounts to shit.*

*It isn't really their fault. Not many people know about what's really happening in the world of the government, in the world of big pharma -*

*hell, even in the world of the punk kids and the bleeding-heart activists. The Shop - the Institute - does a good job of keeping all of it classified and sanitized. People help, because it's easier to close your eyes to the weird and terrifying than it is to acknowledge it. You tell someone, I saw a guy start a fire with his mind, they think you're joking or you're crazy, because it's easier than opening up to something new. Something really real. Something that changes everything.*

*And if someone does believe it - someone credible, someone who might have video evidence or a voice in the media - the Shop has its ways of taking care of that too. Agents that can build you a whole new life, a whole new set of memories, a whole new world in your head. One minute of talking to them, you won't just forget their face, you'll forget everything you ever saw. You'll forget deleting the video footage off your smartphone, forget it was ever there in the first place.*

*I hope you don't think I'm a hypocrite for saying that.*

*I'm telling you all of this because I think you deserve an explanation, even if you won't remember any of it. And I have to do this not because I'm one of those cleaners, troubleshooters, whatever. It's because I know that the less you know, the less they can do to hurt you. If you don't remember ever seeing us, they can't get you to tell them. They can't take away your family or torture you to get information you don't have in the first place.*

*Your world is safe. Your world is simple, and normal, at least right now. At least for this little while. The storm might be breaking soon, but in the meanwhile, you'll go back to fighting with your dad and trying to make things better for the people you know and love.*

*You won't know that none of it is the whole, real truth. The real world.*

*And if you really want to know the truth?* **I'M KINDA JEALOUS.**

I'm trying to get my head back in the game.

That's what we used to say, back in school. When we were getting creamed - something like two to twenty-five in the second set, whiffs and faults all over the place, girls running into each other trying to pass the ball. Kills raining down on us from the other team. Someone getting a spike directly to the face. Man, volleyball sounds really violent, doesn't it? I just noticed that.

Get your head back in the game is what we'd tell each other, ourselves, when everything started going wrong.

Another appropriate saying might be, *get your shit together.*

It's what I'm telling myself at the moment, over and over, like a mantra, though I don't know how much it'll help. Gigs never go smoothly. Right now, this one seems especially pear-shaped.

There wasn't a plan so much as an objective, to start: An Institute facility, disguised as an abandoned sub-station, nestled behind barbed wire and a "Danger! High Voltage!" sign on the side of a service road in the middle of nowhere. Four of us going in. And lots of kids - Esper kids - coming back out with us.

Tara was always going to be driving the getaway vehicle. She's not a weak talent, by any means, but she's probably the best driver of any of us, with the best chance at getting that big fucking cargo van speeding down the highway without crashing and burning. And we figured we'd need eyes outside, someone who could telepathically let us know if we had unexpected visitors.

Quick note on Tara. People - mostly just Chris, nowadays - have always told me that I'm pretty. But she's *gorgeous*. Fauxhawked blonde hair, heroin-chic body, sultry lips, sexy eyes. Stereotype dictates that I should like, totally hate her. But I don't. She's always ready with a warm smile, a sympathetic ear. Knows when to have fun, and when to get serious. She's easy to like.

Leo, on the other hand, he's a different story. To say we don't have a lot in common might be putting it mildly. Everything seems like a party to him. Even killing people. Especially killing people. And his kinds of parties are not my kinds of parties. His kinds of parties usually involve a lot of things getting set on fire. Not

really sure what Tara sees in him. Well, he's not really bad-looking. Mohawk always combed down over one ear, piercings all over his face, kind of charismatic if you like things loud.

But while he fails in social settings, at least in my opinion, he's extremely useful for situations like this.

Which makes it really irritating that he's trapped outside the facility, with Tara, and with all the drugs that were supposed to get us through this thing. At least he melted the lock on the barbed wire gate leading in here, before my dumb ass screwed it all up.

So now, what was supposed to be a "double date" (ha, ha) has turned into me and Chris, locked in the facility and trapped in a concrete, windowless room. Cornered by a heavily armed and armored security team, just on the other side of the single door.

Sure, we've managed to round up a few kids, just under a score of them. Different age groups, from different rooms. Little ones from a guarded nursery on one half of the building, bigger ones from dorms-like-cells on the other half. They run the gamut from six to sixteen, just from what I can tell. They look starved and angry. Good. Hunger and anger are good motivators. And I don't know how we're going to get them out if not under their own steam.

In point of fact, I don't really know how we're going to get them out, period.

And I thought it had all been going so well... at least I *tried*, lord help me.

I'd cleaned up pretty and put on a lab coat and ponytail and mustered up what little education I managed to retain from one semester of freshman year pre-med undergrad studies, then slipped into the facility. Maybe it's benevolent sexism, but none of the male researchers batted an eye at the new, fresh-faced blonde intern. Maybe it's just that I don't seem like the usual insurgents. I used to think I looked like a "cool" girl, but knowing how easily I fit in with the stooges in this facility makes me want to re-evaluate my appearance. I definitely don't fit in with Chris' friends as well as I'd like to.

Anyway, *Stage One: Elena Snoops around the Facility* was proceeding as planned, until I excused myself to go to the ladies' room. So maybe it wasn't the most brilliant pretense for scoping out the premises. It still might have been gravy if I hadn't passed by that one office.

I didn't notice the open door. I was looking for the kids - find out where they were being held, tap Chris' mind, let him and Leo into the building, get the kids out, everyone goes home for whiskey and coke. Call it a good day. Except when I passed by that office, the man inside stood up from his desk and stared at me. Blonde, dressed in a tailored charcoal suit and white shirt, blue tie that brought out ice-colored eyes. Impeccable goatee. Like, scary-impeccable, as though it had been modeled out of perfect will instead of facial hair. Rimless glasses that caught the halogen lights. He looked like he could have been my dad, or my uncle, except that his face was all hard chiseled granite. Furrowed age showed around his brow and forehead. No laugh lines.

A befuddled, self-deprecating smile was already on my face. I opened my mouth, the lie on the tip of my tongue - oh whoopsie, I'm looking for the bathroom, add in a giggle for good measure. But I got this feeling that things had already gone down the shitter. His eyes were unblinking, scary intense. I took a chance instead, probed his mind with mine. I can only tell what people are thinking in the moment, but that might have been valuable information. See which way to lie, take his mental cues to build my story.

Except I hit a brick wall. Green flashed up into my mind's eye, startling me like an old camera flashbulb going off in my head. And before I could get myself wrapped around the situation, his hand moved under the desk.

I should have known they'd have Espers working here. Why the fuck wouldn't they?

Nothing happened - no sirens, no flashing lights. The dude in the suit barely even moved. But I knew instinctively that there was a panic button there. Knew that all the exits had just slammed shut and locked downstairs, that a security team would be amassing on all sides, moving in straight toward me.

I bolted, reaching out for Chris with tendrils of thought. *I'm made,* I sent from my brain to his, knowing he couldn't respond. No time to tell the others the bad news - he'd have to relay the message. *Entrances sealed shut. I'm on the Sixth floor. Going toward the south-facing windows.* Checked behind me as I sped down the corridor away from that motherfucking open office door. Mystery man wasn't following me. Probably not a guy used to getting his hands dirty.

Outside, I could hear the soft staccato of rain against the windows. My heart thundering in my chest and the blood rushing in my ears didn't shut out the sound - a few drops, a few more, faster in tempo, until it was a rushing downpour that seemed like a waterfall. The wind howling against the reinforced glass. I turned the corner into the south corridor as the hurricane picked up, a rumble of thunder in the distance.

I'd never been so grateful for a big storm in my life.

One of the security teams was waiting for me in the corridor. These guys weren't playing around - riot armor and helmets, Mossberg 590 shotguns, holstered Glocks. Team of six. One of them tossed the flashbang he'd been saving just for me.

I was suddenly reminded of my days on the high school softball team - I juked right, caught it in the palm of my hand, and lobbed it as hard as I could back to the end of the corridor.

Then I turned, burying my face in the crook of my arm. The volume of the explosions still sent my ears and head ringing. But I could still see when I glanced back at the team, and that was what mattered.

They weren't as bad off as I'd hoped; those helmets had good eye and ear protection. Made sense, especially if they were the kind of guys who were trained to chuck grenades in enclosed hallways. But I think they were as surprised by my speed as they were by the unexpected rerouting of their flashbang. I couldn't blame them for being a little rattled.

They probably considered themselves to be pretty speedy.

**But I'm always faster.**

Then came the beanbags; I was able to deflect most of them as I ran down the hall to close. One, I took to the gut. I made an oof sound, and it hurt like balls, but the impact didn't slow me down. I might not look like much, but I'm a tough broad.

The sound outside was deafening now, almost enough to drown out the ruckus inside. Everything was loud, too loud and muddled for me to rely on my hearing. I ran up and kicked off the inner wall, launching toward security guard number one. The sole of my sneaker connected with his helmet hard enough to shatter his plastic visor, enough to knock him over, and I rode his head down as he toppled to the floor, leaping off before impact. One more judicious kick to the side of the head ensured that he wasn't getting up soon. Maybe he'd get permanent brain damage, but at least it was better for him than stomping directly through his helmet and skull to the linoleum.

Next, I pivoted into a kickboxer's stance, light on the balls of my feet, fists up to guard my face, and kicked high. My shin slammed into one of the raised Mossbergs, knocking the shotgun skittering, breaking the hand that held it with an audible snap. Ouch.

Then came more beanbags, four guys firing, the air reverberating with the salvo. Broken-hand guy joined in, grabbing his holstered Glock with his off-hand and firing it at me. You wouldn't think pistols would be that loud. They're *loud.*

I tensed in concentration as the bullets and beanbags whizzed around my head and body, with me nudging them just so, just so; as long as they curved around me, fuck, it didn't matter how close they came. But I could already feel blood trickling out of my nose, could already taste it on my lips. My head felt like a pressure cooker. I couldn't take much more of this.

So it was lucky for me that, at that moment, one of the windows shattered inward with a huge burst of rain and gale, showering shimmering glass and icy water into the hallway. And a breath later, Chris, rising up and through the window on a wind, the precipitation whirling around him but not touching him, his dredlocks whipped up into a frenzy. One of his booted

feet touched down on the windowsill, and he stepped forward, hands raised.

I knew the score - I darted back down the corridor and away from the mass of guys, didn't turn around until I felt the blast of hot air hit me in the back like a wall. As I whirled to see the outcome of Chris' timely entrance, the smell of burning flesh and the sounds of screaming assailed my ears. The guy I'd knocked out had been caught in the fireball too. I grimaced - so much for trying to be merciful, I guess.

We only had a few seconds before the fire extinguishers on the ceiling activated. I tore past the five men on fire, and Chris and I turned the corner out of the corridor, which was already filling with dark smoke. I could run faster than Chris, but he was fast enough, and I hung back to keep time with him. They were well behind us when we ducked into a stairwell and started the climb.

Once we hit the top floor, everything became a blur - a blur of killing guards and scientists, frantically booting open doors, looking inside for captive children. Going room to room, we rallied the ones we could, watching others get dragged away by orderlies, while still more refused to leave, remaining huddled into corners and under bedsheets.

By the time we reached the dead-end hallway, Chris was trailing less than a dozen teens and pre-teens, most of them drugged to the gills with some Institute cocktail, and I was leading less than a dozen scared preschoolers. I guess we'd taken a wrong turn somewhere. There was no way down, no way out. And there were sounds of approach coming down the hall.

No time to think, we'd opened the nearest door - both of us shoving the kids inside before the security team could come into view - and slammed it closed behind us.

Which brings us to now.

Now: I'm panting with my back to the door, staring at the group of youngsters, trying not to think about how many we couldn't take. Trying not to think about how many we're probably going to lose, if we can even get out of this room. My *everything* hurts. And not in the way my talents can help, either.

I turn my head to look at Chris, hoping for some suggestions.

And I see that, in spite of everything, he's smiling.

It's pretty nice to see Chris smile. He doesn't do that very often.

Quick tangent: Sometimes I think that we're just not on the same wavelength. He met me, God, only a year after I got shot up with the Blue. Just one year, between the clinical trial, and meeting Terrence and Crypto, then losing both of them, being recruited by the Institute and then trying to outrun it. It's too much to cram into a single year, but I acclimated. I was always good at learning new things. Even if some of those things include moving stuff around with my mind, or manipulating my own musculature to get stronger and faster. Forget pre-med, now I can heal cuts and bruises and gunshot wounds just by thinking about it really hard.

But Chris? This has been with him for a long time. He's never told me in so many words just how long, but I can see it in his eyes when he looks at these kids. Like he's looking back out through them, at another place very similar to this one, a long time ago. Maybe he's seeing whoever came to rescue him, in that other life. Remembering that first taste of freedom.

I hate to remind him that this door is now surrounded by guards, preparing to breach. Maybe they'll come in hard, hoping to take us out quickly; maybe they're trying to be cautious, worried about hurting the kids. The *test subjects*.

These kids aren't children to them, Chris had told me before we started out. They're just a bottom line.

"Okay," he says, looking them over, meeting their eyes one by one. His voice is rough and strained, but friendly. "This is as good a place as any to regroup."

"What, exactly, is the plan?" asks a boy I hadn't noticed before. He looks like he could be fifteen or sixteen, scruffy, with dark curly hair that hasn't been trimmed in a long time. Glasses over grey-blue eyes. He's frowning, lurking more-or-less near the most shadowy corner of the room. Like the rest of them,

he's wearing a hospital smock. The band on his wrist has numbers, but no name.

I look at Chris. This is his rodeo from here on out. I'm just the muscle. I'm fine with that - if it were up to me, I'd be panicking right now. This room is more bunker than dormitory - concrete and reinforced steel all the way around, no windows, and the only way in or out is the door we just came through.

"We're going to need to go out hard and fast," he says, looking each of the older kids in the eye. "Anyone here still able to use their powers?"

A few hands go up, tentatively, but not many. I knew that a lot of them would have been given PPIDs when they weren't in testing; a standard safety protocol I remember "fondly" from my time with the Shop. But it's still a bit disheartening.

"Okay then," Chris sighs. "Strongest talents - anyone uninhibited - doing what they can against the opposition. The rest of you, form a gauntlet around the younger ones, defend and protect them, keep everyone together. We'll need to move really quickly."

The boy who spoke up before makes a disparaging sound in the back of his throat, and shakes his head. "Never gonna work. Even if we can make it past security, Sande is never going to let us leave. Ever."

"Sande?" I ask out loud. And in a moment, an image comes, unbidden, into my mind. It's the man from the open office - hard lines, perfect hair, almost inhuman. He's taller than I remember seeing him, but then I realize, I'm looking at him from the boy's perspective. The kid glances between me and Chris; Chris is staring up and out, like he's examining the same picture I just got.

"He's a psychokinetic," says the boy with a small sigh. "Doesn't tell anyone, not even the people who work here - I only know because I tried to read his mind once, and he blocked me out like it was nothing. And I'm pretty strong." A few of the other older kids murmur in agreement.

Now, I don't have that much experience with psychokinetics, but I basically know the drill - the really powerful ones can just take over someone else's mind, make them do whatever they want. This is bad news. But how much can one man do without popping, or knocking himself out?

Speaking of which, Chris and I aren't in the freshest shape of our lives. A dark, drying smear of blood is still covering my nostrils and lips and chin. A few of the blood vessels on Chris' face have burst. Adrenaline is still carrying me, but my head feels... tired.

"What's your name?" I ask the boy, the words sounding a little like mush as they fall out of my mouth.

I think I hear him say, "Bob."

"Bob?"

He shakes his head, making an exasperated sound in his throat. Then, letters in my head, written out - *b0b*. All lower case. And with a zero. So it's like that.

I feel staggeringly unhip for a second. Maybe I was always unhip. Too "cool" to be hip. Actually, I feel that way a lot, these days.

"Someone like this Sande guy will probably be waiting for us on the way out," Chris says. "Somewhere he can see us, but we can't see him."

"No one really notices me," says b0b, and at first I think he just sounds like a self-deprecating, mopey teen. He looks a bit like one. But then he adds, "Sometimes the nurses 'forget' about me when it's time for the daily dose. Actually, most of the time."

Chris and I steal a glance at each other.

"You guys go out hard like you said, fight the security team that's waiting outside the door. I'll go on ahead in the confusion and find out where Sande is."

I'm not exactly thrilled with this. We were supposed to be rescuing these kids, not letting them rush headlong and alone into danger. But Chris is nodding. Maybe he's got more faith than I do; maybe he just doesn't see any other options. "It's a plan. Thanks. Once you locate him, hide, and reach out to me and Elena." He taps his head. "You can do two-way, right?" The kid looks almost insulted by the question. Ah, the certainty of youth. I miss that.

We split the kids up into units. Tell the littlest ones to hold the hands of their older "buddies," tell them not to let go. We tell the older ones in charge of the babies not to let us out of their sights.

We pick out a few more kids - bigger, tougher, with a particular fire in their eyes - who can throw people and start fires. They'll hold the line behind us, and bracket the little kids to the back. b0b hovers behind everyone else, and it's weird how quickly I forget that he's even there.

Weird, but comforting in this particular moment.

Chris and I take position on either side of the door. He gives me a nod. I boot it open.

The first things through are flashbangs and tear gas canisters. Me and the other telekinetics make a concerted effort of chucking them right the fuck back out. We catch some of the gas; the little kids start crying, the older ones coughing and clutching their young charges closely. I don't exactly shake it off, but it's definitely less bad than it might have been.

Then, Chris and his team of junior firestarters start lobbing fireballs. It does double duty - burning off some of the gas in the hall, and scattering the security team. I take a deep breath, hold it, and run through the door. I don't think the security team was expecting it - at least, not expecting just one small young woman to make the exit all on her own - because I catch one of the guys who isn't on fire in the jugular with a quick jab. He goes down, hard. Crap, I think I broke his neck.

Some of the team is busy stop-drop-and-rolling, some of them aren't on fire and are shooting at me... some of them *are* on fire and shooting at me... damn, these guys are tough. I'm deflecting bullets as fast as I can, but I'm getting worn out and I can feel dangerous pressure mounting under my temples. There's a sudden, explosive pain in my left side as a bullet passes straight through my shoulder. I'm about to react, when the guy who shot me goes up in a column of flame.

"Go, go, go!" Chris shouts, while behind me, my little telekinetics reach out their hands; any security guard who still has a gun drawn suddenly finds himself disarmed, Glocks floating up into the air like helium balloons. Big kids lead the little kids out behind us, as Chris, the youngsters still up for combat, and I reach out and grab our new firearms, firing pot shots at the guards before turning and running after the others. Chris hits center of mass on a few different guards; I'm too busy scanning our party to make sure we've still got everyone.

Sure enough, b0b is nowhere to be seen.

Makes me wonder how The Institute even found him in the first place.

We break out at an all-out run, Chris in front, me behind. Even as we're booking it down the twisting corridors, through emergency doors into stairwells, I'm trying to get mindful of my breathing. Two breaths in, three out. I can feel the wound in my shoulder closing up, a weird sensation of muscle knitting back together that makes me a little seasick and narrows my vision to a tunnel.

We're almost down the long stairwell when I get an image in my mind. The blonde man from the office. Sande, still wearing his neatly-pressed bespoke charcoal suit. He's on some kind of smallish balcony, overlooking the first floor lobby, and our way out.

*He's not an idiot*, says the mopey teenage voice in my head. *He's gonna take over you or your boyfriend first. Maybe both.*

Well, yeah. And there's not a lot we can do about that. I've only got the teensiest weensiest touch of telepathy; Chris doesn't have any. We can't guard against a powerful Psychokinetic. And our herd of ducklings are just about to reach the door onto the first floor, Chris leading the way. I see him stop at the door, like he's listening. His face sets into a line. There's blood and sweat in his beard, in his hair, on his nose. I assume I don't look much better. He looks back at me over the heads of the kids that huddle between us.

*Strike team in here too. Basically all the security units you guys haven't taken out have fallen back here.* The kid's voice again. He sounds distant, like he's calculating some difficult mathematical formula as he relays this information to us. *They've got some good*

*sniper positions, rifles loaded with tranq darts. Those are for the kids.* I think he's waiting for me or Chris to come up with some kind of brilliant strategy.

*You... can you Dominate people?* I find myself asking, wishing I wasn't. This kid, he's just like all the others. Young. Shouldn't be mixed up in this. We were supposed to be the ones rescuing them, not the other way around.

*Yeah, but it'll be tough.*

I sigh. I can feel the apprehension leaking across the telepathic link between me and the boy. His, or mine, I can't tell. *Does one of the snipers have a line of sight on Sande?*

Moment of silence. This feels like a god-damn eternity. Across the stairwell landing, I see Chris get the relay, wipe a big hand over his face, and nod. *I'll do it right before you breach,* says b0b. Another long pause. *Okay. I have him.* He sounds exhausted, verging on hysterics. Mother fucker, if this kid pops... *Give me the signal.*

Chris catches my eye, nods, prepares to bust the door open. I take stock of the kids. I tell them softly, "Run with Chris. Don't look back." Then, my heart lodged firmly in my throat, I send out a thought. *Now.*

A beat, an intake of breath. Chris opens the door. It feels like slow motion. There are shouts of alarm on the other side, snipers drawing a bead and shouting in confusion at one very muddled-looking guy in the same riot gear. I glance up and around. No sign of Sande. Either it worked, or it didn't.

Everything seems to go up in a blaze right away; guys surrounded in flames, being launched across the room and into other security guards like human fireballs. The kids we'd designated as fighters are crying blood, shaking, pressing their temples between their palms. Chris is ushering them to the doors that lead out onto the driveway. They're still sealed shut. Together, all the kids and Chris start battering at them. The doors dent outward as they're barraged with blast after telekinetic blast. They start glowing bright hot red as the Pyrokinetics start to melt them. I hear small sounds, like coughs, all around the room. One six-year-old drops to the floor, a dart sticking out of her neck. Her buddy gathers her up, then goes down to another dart. Kids start dropping. The door is almost... almost....

I look around wildly. It's been forever, and no time at all. Where's b0b? His talent for seeming invisible seems like more of a disadvantage at this point. Everything is fucking chaos, there's smoke and blood and screaming and panicked kids and panicked adults. I'm firing my new Glock at every target I can see. There's blood and darkness lurking behind my eyes. I know if I push my talents much harder, I'm going to take a swan dive directly over the edge into an Overload.

Then I see a bare foot, sticking out from behind a column. I circle it; b0b is laying there, propped up against the pillar, blood streaming out from his tear ducts and his nostrils and trickling out of his mouth. He looks up at me with bloodshot grey-blue eyes, glasses sliding down his nose, almost shocked that I even bothered to come back for him. I'm not indulging in adolescent nonsense right now. I bend down and scoop him into a fireman's carry.

*Tara*, I reach out with my mind, pain lancing across my temples as I strain to send the message though. At least, I hope it gets through. *We're coming out. Be ready.*

Just as I start running back to Chris, there's a shower of sparks and the doors leading to the driveway explode outward, molten metal and burning wood raining down everywhere, sizzling as they hit the rain-wet sidewalk. The kids start running; anyone who can is carrying a fallen comrade. A lot of them - maybe half - get left behind, but *I can't think about that right now.*

Chris bends and grabs up one of the sedated little girls, watching everyone file out, using one shaking hand to throw haphazard fireballs at the pursuing guards.

I'm not going to be a liability for him, so I run out after the last of the kids. He's right on my heels.

The driveway outside the facility is much too empty for my liking. Where the fuck is Tara?

"Fuck..." Chris says, barely able to speak through his ragged breaths. The little girl's head lolls on his shoulder like a ragdoll as he jogs after the kids that managed to get out under their own steam. "If I fall over, Elena, you leave me."

"Enough martyr bullshit, Chris." I give him a look that I hope is encouraging, but I worry it's just hard. "You can do this."

He closes his eyes, holding the little girl close to his chest; the other kids have stopped running, are looking back at us fearfully. b0b is still slung over my shoulder, and my muscles shake with fatigue. We can all hear the sounds of pursuit, shouting voices and booted feet.

Then, a wave of fog descends from the air - thin, wispy tendrils at first, then the moisture in the air gets thicker and thicker, enshrouding us and the driveway that leads out of the busted-open barbed-wire fence to the service road. The kids are gasping, crying with relief and wonder.

We're inside a goddamn cloud.

"Chris?" I ask, because I can't see him. I imagine him slumped over on the pavement with the little girl, and I'm deathly afraid of the choice I would have to make then, because I can't carry him and b0b and the little girl.

Two breaths in. Three breaths out.

"Okay," he says. "You were right. I totally could."

I think about laughing, or breaking right the fuck down. But that comes later.

We make it to the service road; everyone who's still mobile is running because they have to, because this reprieve can't last forever. The kids are holding hands, and I can just make them out as blurry shapes. Outside the fence, I can see the cargo van's headlights approaching at a truly inadvisable speed.

When it pulls up beside us, Leo opens the sliding door right away, helping kids inside as fast as he can, taking the little girl from Chris' arms before moving on to the rest of them. I feel pretty bad for thinking rude things about him earlier. I put b0b, now fully unconscious, on one of the bench

seats and make my way forward to cram into the passenger's seat with Chris.

Tara looks over at us from behind the wheel, a smile on her pretty face. "Nice fucking driving conditions, Riven."

"Language," Chris says, grinning back through his exhaustion as Leo closes the van's door and Tara accelerates into the night. "There are children present."

*Sometimes, they talk about the beginning of everything. They say:*

*First, there was chaos.*

*And out of chaos, there was order. And that order was the world.*

*Who's "they?" you might ask. Lots of people. Different religions. Even scientists. The big bang and shit. You know.*

*And maybe it's true. Maybe the rock we all live on, or the societies we've formed throughout all of human history, maybe that's everyone running from the scary unknown: disorder, anarchy, space debris, etcetera, etcetera.*

*I understand these people, I guess. These order over chaos people. I think maybe it makes them feel safe, to think that they live in a sane and organized universe. Where good things happen to good people and bad people get punished and go to jail or maybe hell. Where if you work hard and keep your nose clean, bootstraps, yada yada, you can Go Far and Make It and be rich and happy and drowning in the genitalia of your choice. Because the truth is, kind of like the candle that keeps the darkness at bay, chaos is really all around us. We can huddle together in our cubicles and examine data points and try to make everything rational and understandable, but just as soon as we leave the office we could get hit by a mack truck and just bite it. Good person, bad person, doesn't matter. Shit happens to everyone. Chaos comes for us all.*

*I know you're feeling pretty sore right now. Your candle just went out, and you realized how dark that darkness really was. You've been dumped on your ass right out of the orderly and into the strictly disorderly. It happened as soon as you realized that you could start juggling cops with your mind.*

*There's a few sayings for that.*

*One, the most obvious, is "shit just got real."*

*But there's another applicable axiom. At least to me.*

*"Ashes to ashes."*

*We all came out of chaos. We all return to it. Specifically, everyone gets born out of a random collection of DNA, and everyone dies and no one really knows what happens after that, so that's part of the chaos everyone's so afraid of. But more broadly, the world came out of chaos. And at the end of the world, it all returns there.*

*The storm is coming.*

*We're disciples of the trickster - of Eris, of Coyote.* **THIS IS A TRICKSTER'S WORLD. A TRICKSTER MAKES THIS WORLD.** *We understand the chaos, understood it the moment we knew that we could concentrate real hard and things would start fucking exploding. If the world came from chaos, and it's returning to chaos, do you know what that makes us?*

*It makes us the heralds of the eschaton. We're the ones who are ringing in the end of the world, we're calling it down, making it happen.*

*We're going to ring it in loud and hard, with drugs and music and fire and vandalism and theft and give-no-shits unalloyed joy.*

*And you're one of us now. A priest, a shaman, a hooligan, whatever you want to call it.*

*And that makes you fucking special.*

Everyone's super wasted. I've gone through a few cycles through the years. Into it, tired of it, into it, rinse and repeat. Tonight is one of those times that I'm definitely into it. Rainbow-haired

Esper girls are passing out candy through the crowd. Tomorrow's Starlight isn't playing right now, the bar's too divey and just not a big enough venue for them. But most of their loyal groupies are here, probably because a nice hearty chunk of the Order is here too. Tomorrow's Starlight groupies are Order groupies, even if they don't know it.

The bar is a tiki bar named Otto's Shrunken Head. The bartender is a hot punk girl with long black hair who looks pre-emptively angry at people. A prophylactic against handsyness. I understand. There's the main bar area where everyone is being served neon drinks with glowsticks in them, lighting up drunken hands and faces. Down a hall, there's the shitty tiny bathroom, an ATM, and then the back room. One corner has the small stage; the other walls are lined with couches, and there's a few little tables too.

It was as good a place as any for a celebration. A small reunion. A few of us passing through after yet another daring rescue, meeting up here before we all get blown to the four winds again.

Over the course of my life, I've felt mostly old. Even when I was thirteen, I felt old. That's what happens to a person when they're a kid who can kill people with their mind, who's orphaned young, imprisoned and freed and then expected to go out and do unto others. I'd go to the shows and the parties and the Thanksgiving celebrations and take drugs and drink but mostly feel on the outside of it. I would see all these faces, faces of people who've seen hell, and wonder how they still had any exuberance left in them.

I don't feel like that tonight. I didn't even have to dig down deep. It just came bubbling to the surface. Not even the words that just came out of Elena's mouth are enough to bring me down.

She's another story. Fuck, she's not even drinking. She's not a big drinker or anything, but she usually joins in the festivities. I've got a very silly blue glowing drink, and she's just got a worried look on her face. Toned arms wrapped around her body, knees knocked together. Blonde hair up, white tanktop, ripped skinny jeans tucked into combat boots. A blue hoodie tied around her waist. When I look at her, I see the guy I usually am. Feeling old. Unable to muster the joie de vivre.

It's been three years since the train. Both of us nineteen, coming off of loss and failure and pain, on the lam. Together, we managed to turn it around, and we saved some lives while we were at it. Gigs all over the country, rescuing kids, getting high, getting closer. I figured things had been going good between us. Shows what I know about girls.

Her words: "When can we stop doing this?"

"Huh?" I'm pretty buzzed myself, so I just shake my head. Doing what? Going to these shows, doing Gigs, what's the problem here?

She sighs, sinking back into the red pleather couch, arms still crossed. She doesn't look angry. Just really tired. "What if we didn't do it anymore? What if we just... leave the country, settle down somewhere? We could get new IDs."

"What do you mean? 'Lena, we can't stop. The kids need us." I look at her, she looks back at me. Her big blue eyes. Fine lines are just starting to appear around them. She drops her gaze, begins studiously examining one of the rips in the knee of her jeans.

"Chris, I... I know how much this means to you. I know what saving them means to you." One of her hands floats in the air in a vague gesture. She's not speaking all that loudly, but we're close enough that I can still hear her over the live music. "But I'm not sure I can keep going."

At first I want to ask her, why not? She's strong, tough, capable. She can weather anything. But I know that what we do is hard. It was always what I planned to do. It was maybe my destiny. But it's the kind of thing that you have to choose for yourself, because it's a part of you, like your blood and bones. She's been getting more and more withdrawn, lately. Talking less. Smiling less.

It hurts, but I'm bolstered by the music, by the crush of punks and revelers all around us. Life is too short for this shit to be dramatic. There are worse ways to say goodbye to her.

"I understand," I say, and I take her hand. She stands up, shouldering her canvas messenger bag. Her hand doesn't part from mine.

*You sure you won't come with me?* Her voice is in my head, her blue eyes conspicuously shining.

I only smile a bit sadly, and squeeze her hand, and let it drop. What can I say? Thanks for everything? Look me up if we're ever in the same town?

Stay safe?

I think she knows. All those things, and more.

She smiles back, and disappears into the throng, and then something in my body knows she's left the bar and I'm never going to see her again.

Here's the funny thing. It hurts like a bitch, it makes my eyes sting and my hands clench around my glowing blue drink. For a moment, it makes the music get far away, pushed to the periphery of my awareness. But then the music seeps back in, louder and stronger. The sweaty punks laughing, throwing back pills, dancing, fighting. I'm glad for her, and I'm even glad for her hurting me. The pain is almost thrilling, these intense feelings so much better than any drug. Because all it means is, we're still alive.

I'm still alive.

And that's good. Because there's still work to do.

It's spring in the city, which is probably the best time of the year. Not so hot that it smells like sweat and urine all the time. Not so cold that your bones feel like they're creaking, like you'll never be warm again. I sigh. I'm not going to cry, I promise myself.

I feel guilty, but I know that this was right. For everyone. The selfish part of me wishes that he'd come with me, but if he had, he wouldn't be Chris. Chris Riven doesn't cut out early.

Do I? I've never been a quitter before. I don't know if this is really the same as quitting.

I'm too lost in my thoughts, so I don't really notice the man in the suit until I've almost run into him. First thing I see are really nice shoes, very shiny, recently polished. Probably at Grand Central. I startle backward, an apology on my lips for the near-collision. Navy blue pinstripe, perfectly tailored. Powder blue shirt. Silver and navy striped tie.

Hard blue eyes. Blonde hair, combed back. A goatee so perfect that it's inhuman. Only hard lines. A thin mouth that looks like it's never smiled. Rimless glasses that occlude his eyes.

"Remember me?" He asks - a sneer. I find that I can't move. There's a tight fist clutched around my mind, my will. "I wouldn't be surprised if you'd forgotten. It's been a few years."

My throat works but no sound comes out.

"Shh, shh. No talking. You just follow me and do as you're told." My mind feels like it's coated in green slime. I try to draw a hand back to punch him in that smug face. My fingers don't even wiggle. "You and your friends set me back quite a ways. It really was terribly inconvenient. It is my intention that you make it up to me, moving forward."

There's no innuendo in his tone, no suggestions of something untoward; it's not even a tone I would have associated with a human being. It's more terrifying than that. It's clinical. Impatient. I'm not a woman to him - I'm a lab rat.

"It's a shame, you know," he says as a by the way as I trudge into the dim city night after him. **"YOU REALLY SHOULD HAVE TOLD HIM ABOUT THE BABY."**

# Dossiers: NPCs and Enemies

"To hell with you and all your friends
To hell with you and all your friends
It's on"

*- Taking Back Sunday, "A Decade Under The Influence"*

## LEXICON OF FRIENDS AND ENEMIES I: MERE MORTALS

The NPC dossiers given here beyond belong to, for lack of a better word, "normal people". People without ***Psionics*** or other powers that give them a leg-up on ordinary humans; people without any knowledge or suspicion of the Conspiracies that are secretly running the world. The NPCs in this section also don't include the world's most elite mundane combatants: no Delta Force, no SEAL teams, no Spetsnaz. Only individuals that the average Esper is reasonably likely to encounter.

That doesn't mean that this roster of NPCs are irrelevant, incompetent, or even individuals you can safely underestimate or turn your back on. "Normal" people aren't to be discounted. Instead, these "mere mortals" range from merely competent to outright *dangerous*. Even the most modest of them can pose a threat to an Esper under the right (or wrong) circumstances. The best of them don't *need* Psionic Talents to kick ass.

### Cops and Robbers

## Police Cop

*"License and registration, please."*

***Attributes***

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| **Strength:** | 4 | |
| **Speed:** | 5 | |
| **Wits:** | 4 | |
| **Will:** | 5 | Knocked Out at 6 Health, |
| **Health:** | 24 | Dead at -4 Health |
| **Initiative:** | 10 + 2d6 | |
| **Defense:** | 7 | |

**Skills:** Clubs: Expert (+2); Awareness: Apprentice (+1), Brawling: Apprentice (+1). Drive: Apprentice (+1), Intimidation: Apprentice (+1), Pistols: Apprentice (+1).

**Basic Training:** Automatics, Investigation, Rifles, Swimming.

**Techniques:** Blitzkrieg, Dodge, Point Blank.

***Attacks***

1. Glock 17 at +1 for 2d6
2. Nightstick at +2 for 2d6 + 3
3. Ithaca 37 at +0 for 4d6

**Equipment:** Sidearm (See Above), Two Full Spare Clips for Sidearm, Uniform, Badge, Handcuffs, Powerful Flashlight, Police Cruiser, Shotgun (e.g. Ithaca 37) In The Cruiser, $100-$300 in cash, access to light Body Armor when necessary and appropriate.

**XP Bounty:** 20

### *Description*

*These stats are perfect for your basic state troopers, beat officers, and sheriff's deputies. The most dangerous thing about them is their willingness to use inappropriately lethal force at the drop of a hat and the seemingly bottomless reinforcements and backup they can call in if they get a chance.*

POLICE

## Veteran Cop

*"Do you feel lucky, punk? Well do ya? Heh, I always wanted to say that. GET THOSE FUCKING HANDS UP!"*

### Attributes

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| **Strength:** | 5 | |
| **Speed:** | 4 | |
| **Wits:** | 6 | |
| **Will:** | 5 | Knocked Out at 5 Health, Dead at -5 Health |
| **Health:** | 30 | |
| **Initiative:** | 8 + 2d6 | |
| **Defense:** | 9 | |

**Skills:** Awareness: Expert (+2), Intimidation: Expert (+2), Pistols: Expert (+2); Drive: Apprentice (+1); Investigation: Apprentice (+1), Rifles: Apprentice (+1).

**Basic Training:** Brawling, Clubs, Diplomacy, Leadership, Locksmith, Security.

**Techniques:** Boom!Headshot, Kneecapper, Point Blank.

### Attacks

1. Colt M1911a1 w/ Hollow Points at +3 for 3d6 + 3 (double target's armor)
2. Ithaca 37 at +1 for 4d6
3. Nightstick at +0 for 2d6 + 3

**Equipment:** Type I Body Armor (Ballistic Vest, Melee Damage Cut: 2; Ranged Damage Cut: 6), Two Full Spare clips for Sidearm, Box of 20 .00 Buckshot 12 Gauge Shells (Sheriff Only), Police Cruiser or Battered Sedan, Uniform or Trench Coat and Street Clothes, Badge, Handcuffs, Evidence Handling Kit, Sunglasses, Shotgun (e.g. Ithaca 37) in Cruiser, $100-$600 in cash.

**XP Bounty:** 30

### Description

*This is a cop that's worked his beat for decades and thinks he's seen everything (he's wrong). He might not be quite as strong and fast as a fresh rookie, but he's smarter, more skilled, and harder to spook. These stats are perfect for police detectives, small town sheriffs, and highway patrol sergeants. This is a dangerous individual for no other reason than how utterly he is convinced by hours and hours of police dramas that he is the hero of this story.*

*You can make small modifications to this stat block for more memorable cops. Perhaps a city detective has Expert Investigation but only Apprentice Intimidation, a highway patrol sergeant has Expert Drive but only Apprentice Awareness, or a small town sheriff has a Colt Python (5d6 Damage) instead of the listed sidearm.*

## Special Weapons and Tactics

*"Breach and clear."*

### Attributes

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| **Strength:** | 5 | |
| **Speed:** | 6 | (4 in armor) |
| **Wits:** | 6 | |
| **Will:** | 5 | Knocked Out at 5 Health, Dead at -5 Health |
| **Health:** | 30 | |
| **Initiative:** | 12 + 2d6 | (8 + 2d6 in armor) |
| **Defense:** | 9 | |

**Skills:** Automatics: Expert (+2), Awareness: Apprentice (+1), Brawling: Apprentice (+1), Climbing: Apprentice (+1), Demolitions: Apprentice (+1), Drive: Apprentice (+1), Heavy Weapons: Apprentice (+1), Pistols: Apprentice (+1), Rifles: Apprentice (+1), Throwing Weapons: Apprentice (+1).

**Basic Training:** Blades, First Aid, Intimidation, Locksmith, Negotiation, Security.

**Techniques:** Blitzkrieg, Boom!Headshot, Dodge.

### Attacks

1. M4 at +2 for 5d6(three round burst)
2. HK MP5 at +1 for 5d6 (15-rounds, full auto)
3. Mossberg 590 at +1 for 4d6 (buckshot) or 1d6 + 12 (slugs)
4. Milkor MGL at +1 for teargas (gas grenade) or 8d6 nonlethal (sponge grenade)
5. Sig Sauer P226 at +1 for 2d6 + 2
6. Flashbang at +1 for 6d6 (-2d6 damage per yard away, -4 DM to all actions for 5 turns)

**Equipment:** Type III Body Armor w/ Helmet (Melee Damage Cut 7, Ranged Damage Cut 12), Weapons Loadout and Sidearm, Four Flashbangs, Six Spare Magazines for longarm (or bandolier of 32 shotgun shells for Mossberg 590), Two Spare Magazines Pistol

Ammo, other non-lethal munitions and weapons (e.g. Tasers, pepper spray canisters, shotguns loaded with beanbag rounds, and so on), ballistic shields (+4 Defense but -2 to Attack Rolls when deployed), battering rams, shotguns with breaching rounds, explosive charges, and a SWAT truck, APC, or other armored vehicle, $100-$600.

**XP Bounty:** 50

### *Description*

*SWAT units and other police "special response units" are equipped with heavy duty military hardware and advanced training for handling extreme situations that regular uniformed cops can't handle. Rogue Espers definitely aren't what the law enforcement community had in mind when these units were formed, but are one of many unexpected extreme situations that would fall under SWAT's purview. In the present day, SWAT units have an extremely militant attitude and tend to respond to threats with extreme force, showing up in large numbers with overwhelming firepower. A SWAT unit is one of the most dangerous "mundane" threats that Espers can face. Fortunately, their response time is much slower than ordinary police, and it will take them a while to get on the scene.*

*Note: Each SWAT officer has an M4 Carbine, an MP5 Submachine Gun, a Mossberg 590 Shotgun OR, rarely, a Milkor MGL 40mm grenade launcher. Not all of those longarms at once. They additionally carry a sidearm and two to four Flashbangs.*

## Elite Police Sniper

*"I have a clean shot. You want me to take it?"*

***Attributes***

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| **Strength:** | 4 | |
| **Speed:** | 6 | |
| **Wits:** | 6 | |
| **Will:** | 7 | Knocked Out at 3 Health, |
| **Health:** | 24 | Dead at -4 Health |
| **Initiative:** | 12 + 2d6 | (8 + 2d6 in armor) |
| **Defense:** | 9 | |

**Skills:** Rifles: Master (+4), Automatics: Apprentice (+1), Awareness: Apprentice (+1), Climbing: Apprentice (+1), Drive: Apprentice (+1), Pistols: Apprentice (+1), Stealth: Apprentice (+1), Throwing Weapons: Apprentice (+1).

**Basic Training:** Brawling, Demolitions, Intimidation, Locksmith, Negotiation, Security.

**Techniques:** Boom!Headshot, Longshot, Sniper.

***Attacks***

1. H&K PSG1 at +7 for 5d6
2. Sig Sauer P226 at +1 for 2d6 + 2

**Equipment:** Type III Body Armor w/ Helmet (Melee Damage Cut 7, Ranged Damage Cut 12), Sniper Rifle and Sidearm, Four Spare Magazines Rifle Ammo, Two Spare Magazines Pistol Ammo, $100-$600.

**XP Bounty:** 75

### *Description*

*As you may have noticed, this guy's an unbelievably good shot. And for good reason. In most situations, one shot is all he can hope to get, and people's lives depend on that shot. So it has to be a killshot. Police snipers are used in hostage situations to support hostage negotiators and close combat teams, and are always prepared to take a life to save a life; they are also deployed as a support element of SWAT teams, usually seeking a position on nearby rooftops to take advantage of their weapons' superior range. This is a very deadly sniper, probably fairly close to the deadliest one you can build in the* **DICEPUNK SYSTEM.** *Do not sic a police sniper like this on your PCs lightly.*

# Federal Agent

*"We'll take it from here; you're out of your jurisdiction, and out of your depth."*

***Attributes***

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| **Strength:** | 5 | |
| **Speed:** | 5 | |
| **Wits:** | 6 | |
| **Will:** | 4 | Knocked Out at 6 Health, Dead at -5 Health |
| **Health:** | 30 | |
| **Initiative:** | 10 + 2d6 | |
| **Defense:** | 9 | |

**Skills:** Awareness: Expert (+2), Investigation: Expert (+2), Pistols: Expert (+2), Brawling: Apprentice (+1), Climbing: Apprentice (+1), Drive: Apprentice (+1), Leadership: Apprentice (+1), Locksmith: Apprentice (+1), Stealth: Apprentice (+1).

**Basic Training:** Electronics, Foreign Language, Intimidation, Security, Subterfuge, Swimming.

**Techniques:** Dodge, Point Blank.

***Attacks***

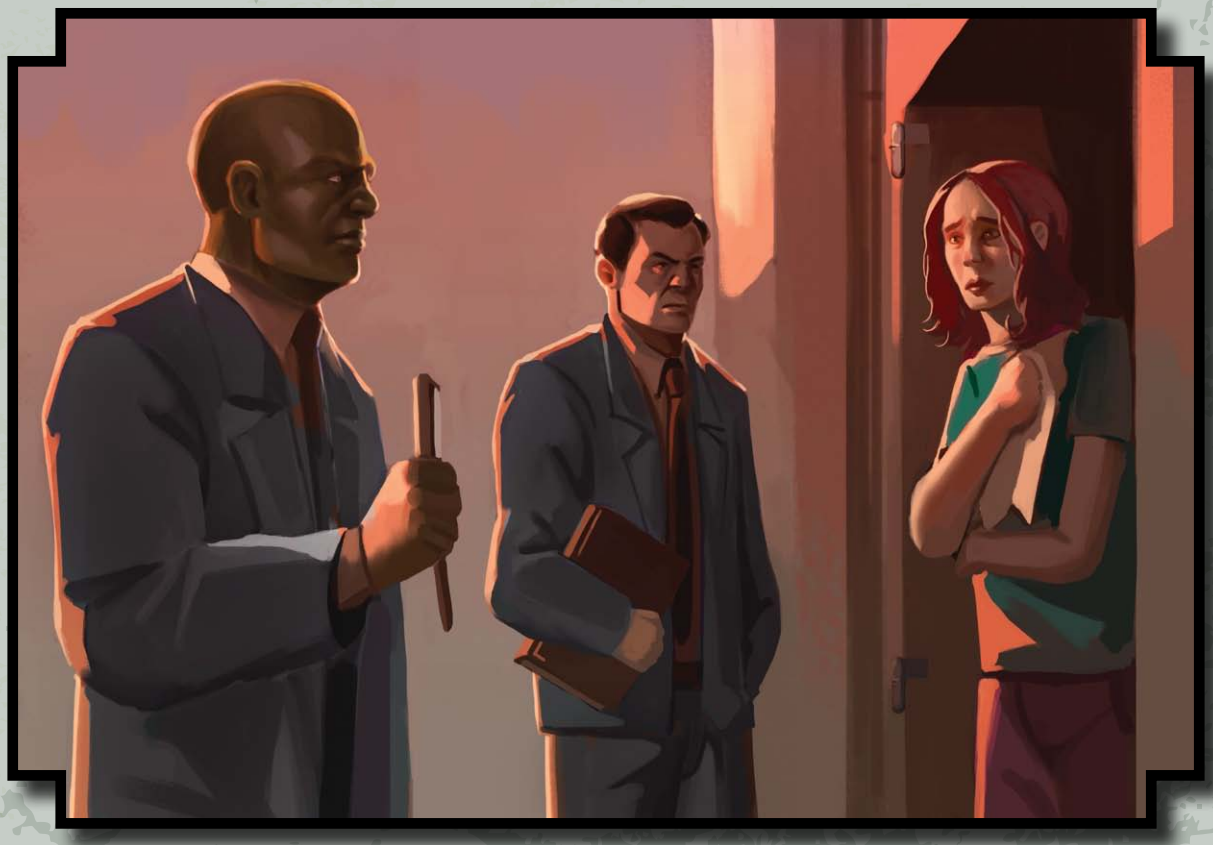
1. Sig Sauer P226 at +2 for 2d6 + 2

**Equipment:** Agency Windbreaker, Suit, Government Issued Sedan, Lockpick Gun, Evidence Collection Kit, Badge, Handcuffs, Sig Sauer P226 in Shoulder Holster, Two Spare Magazines, High Powered Flashlight, Pocket Sized Flashlight, Electronics Kit Including Phone Tapping Equipment, First Aid Kit, $100-$600.

**XP Bounty:** 40

## *Description*

*These stats are perfect for FBI, DEA, or ATF; any Federal, domestic US law enforcement agent. These agents aren't the badass headbusters that live for kicking in doors, going in like the US Marshals, and neutralizing perps with extreme prejudice. For that, see the Special Weapons and Tactics stat block above. Instead, Federal Agents are master investigators, the only law enforcement officers, you'll notice, with Investigation as an actual Skill. They're there to take charge, figure out what's going on by analyzing patterns and collecting*



*evidence, and then call for backup, immediately, not try to apprehend dangerous suspects under-equipped and alone. If trapped in a firefight, however, they aren't pushovers; they're skilled pistol marksmen in excellent physical condition. While Federal Agents are underpaid public servants, they are passionate about their jobs, loyal to agency, law, and country in that order. Federal Agents are frequently replaced or impersonated by Institute Agents - see p. 226.*

## Gangsta Thug

*"You came down the wrong alley, motherfucker!"*

***Attributes***

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| **Strength:** | 6 | |
| **Speed:** | 5 | |
| **Wits:** | 3 | |
| **Will:** | 5 | Knocked Out at 5 Health, Dead at -6 Health |
| **Health:** | 36 | |
| **Initiative:** | 10 + 2d6 | |
| **Defense:** | 6 | |

**Skills:** Blades: Apprentice (+1), Brawling: Apprentice (+1), Intimidation: Apprentice (+1).

**Basic Training:** Automatics, Pistols, Street Smarts.

**Techniques:** Blitzkrieg, Frenzy.

***Attacks***

1. Switchblade at +1 for 6
2. Punch at +1 for 1d6 + 6 Nonlethal
3. Saturday Night Special at +0 for 1d6 + 3 or 1d6 +4
4. *(Rarely)* Uzi 9mm at -2 for 4d6 (10 round burst)

**Equipment:** Saturday Night Special (use stats for Colt Detective Special for a cheap snub revolver or Walther PPK for a cheap blowback operated pocket pistol), Switchblade, Street Clothes, Booze, Cigs, Recreational Drugs of Choice, $10-60 in cash. Can get his hand on a beater sedan and an Uzi for a drive-by if needed.

**Armor:** Heavy Leather Jacket (Melee Damage Cut: 4, Ranged Damage Cut: 1).

**XP Bounty:** 20

### *Description*

*This person is a violent idiot; a common, garden variety street criminal trapped in a cycle of urban poverty and desperation. This shithead is good for little except for petty crime, macho posturing, and firing a perfectly good gun sideways - sideways! A muscleheaded moron that's more, not less, dangerous for his lack of intellect. His character isn't all bad; he's much braver than he probably should be. And there is a certain romantic attraction to just plain fucking shit up. Typically, this kind of thug comes in packs.*

## B&E Specialist

*"In-and-out, slam, bam, thank you ma'am. None of that cowboy bullshit, nobody gets killed.*
*At least, that's the plan anyway."*

***Attributes***

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| **Strength:** | 3 | |
| **Speed:** | 6 | |
| **Wits:** | 7 | |
| **Will:** | 3 | Knocked Out at 7 Health, Dead At -3 Health |
| **Health:** | 18 | |
| **Initiative:** | 12 + 2d6 | |
| **Defense:** | 10 | |

**Skills:** Locksmith: Expert (+2), Security: Expert (+2), Stealth: Expert (+2); Automatics: Apprentice (+1), Blades: Apprentice (+1), Climbing: Apprentice (+1), Pistols: Apprentice (+1); Subterfuge: Apprentice (+1).

**Basic Training:** Awareness, Bike, Climbing, Electronics, Negotiation, Street Smarts, Throwing Weapons.

**Techniques:** Blitzkrieg, Dodge.

### *Attacks*

1. Silenced M9 at +2 for 2d6
2. Suppressed H&K MP7 at +1 for 2d6 + 5 [+10 vs. ranged armor] (three round burst)
3. Ruger LCP w/ Laser Sight & Hollow Points at +3 for 2d6 + 4 (Double Target's Armor)
4. Straight Razor at +1 for 11

**Equipment:** M9 With Silencer, Two Spare Clips 9MM Ammo, Concealed Holdout Pistol Loaded w/ Hollow Points, Suppressed H&K MP7 SMG in Black Gym Bag, Straight Razor, Dark Clothes, Black Gloves, Pry bar, Glass Cutters, Bolt Cutters, Lockpick Set, Electrician's Tools, Booze, Cigs, Uppers, Fast Bike, Fake IDs, $500-$3,000 in cash.

**XP Bounty:** 25

### *Description*

*This smooth, stealthy, smart operator could be a professional thief, burglar, or second story man. Just as likely, he or she could be a "black hat" or "grey hat" agency asset, the kind of shady individual that government agencies or corporations tap as a behind the scenes "problem solver" when they can't afford to be seen dirtying their own hands. The B&E Specialist prefers to avoid conflict when possible - conflict is messy - but will kill in cold blood if that makes the difference between going home and going to jail.*

## Tinkers, Tailors, Soldiers, and Spies

# Emergency Services

*"Just relax and do what I say, you're gonna be alright!"*

### *Attributes*

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| **Strength:** | 5 | |
| **Speed:** | 5 | |
| **Wits:** | 4 | |
| **Will:** | 6 | Knocked Out at 4 Health, |
| **Health:** | 24 | Dead at -5 Health |
| **Initiative:** | 10 + 2d6 | |
| **Defense:** | 7 | |

**Skills:** First Aid: Expert (+2), Awareness: Apprentice (+1), Brawling: Apprentice (+1), Climbing: Apprentice (+1), Drive: Apprentice (+1), Firefighting: Apprentice (+1).

**Basic Training:** Chemistry, Clubs, Negotiation, and any "hobby".

**Techniques:** Batter Up, Blitzkrieg, Dodge.

### *Attacks*

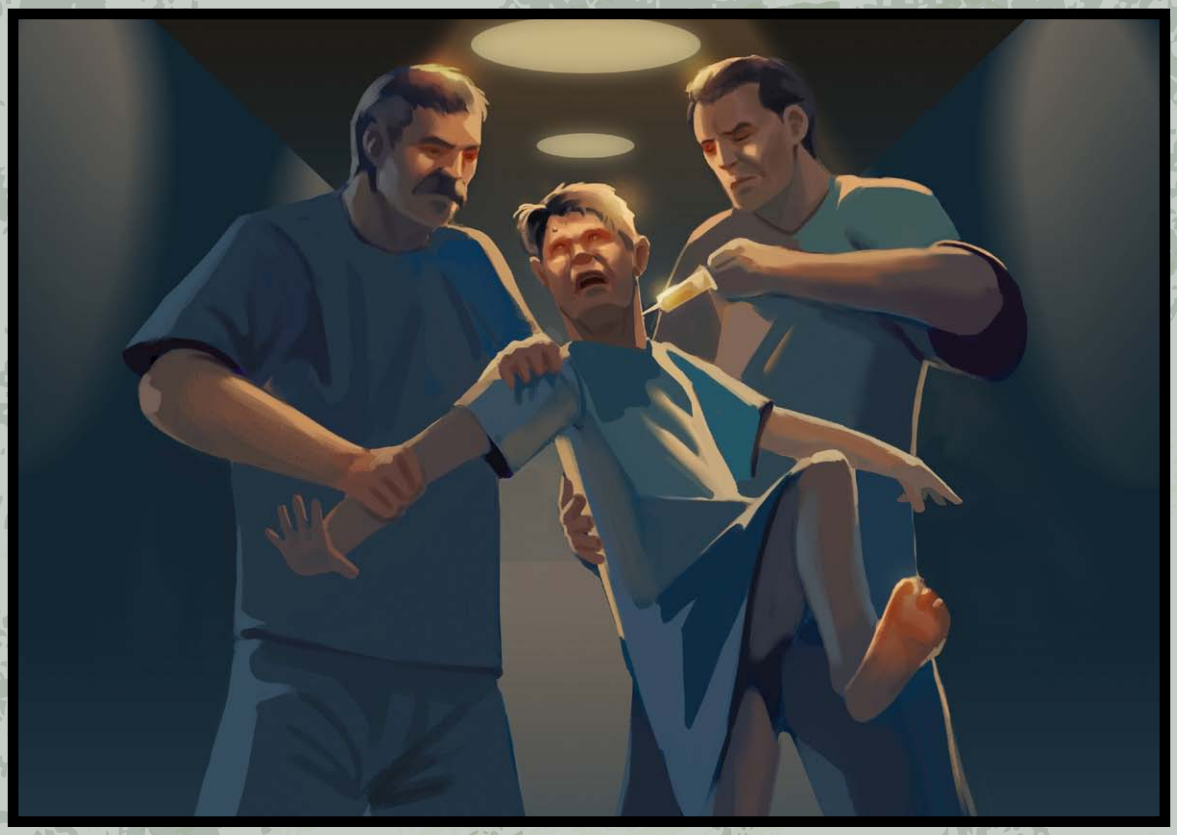
1. Fireaxe at +0 for 3d6 + 5
2. Punch at +1 for 1d6 + 5 nonlethal

**Equipment:** Other Entry Tools, Advanced First Aid Kit, Flashlight, Defibrillator, Oxygen, and possibly Firefighter's Coat and Gear, Fire Axe or Halligan bar, Jaws of Life, Ambulance or Fire Truck, $30-$180.

**XP Bounty:** 20 (and the progressively increasing certainty you're not a very good person.)

### *Description*

*While not technically cops, these stats represent other first responders that usually respond to the same calls. EMTs and firefighters - these stats could be used for either, although firefighters should be Experts in Firefighting and Apprentice in First Aid so you'll have to switch that around - are the brave souls that are the first ones on the scene when really, really bad stuff happens and people get seriously hurt. They've come to save as many lives as they can. This stat block is here because bad stuff happening and people getting seriously hurt tends to follow Espers like rain clouds follow certain cartoon characters.*



## Ward Orderly

*"Listen, I'm gonna need you to calm down and return to your room."*

***Attributes***

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| **Strength:** | 6 | |
| **Speed:** | 4 | |
| **Wits:** | 5 | |
| **Will:** | 5 | Knocked Out at 5 Health, |
| **Health:** | 36 | Dead at -6 Health |
| **Initiative:** | 8 + 2d6 | |
| **Defense:** | 8 | |

**Skills:** Brawling: Expert (+2), Awareness: Apprentice (+1), Drive: Apprentice (+1), First Aid: Apprentice (+1), Medicine: Apprentice (+1), Intimidation: Apprentice (+1).

**Basic Training:** Chemistry, Clubs, Cooking, Security.

**Techniques:** Counter Attack.

***Attacks***

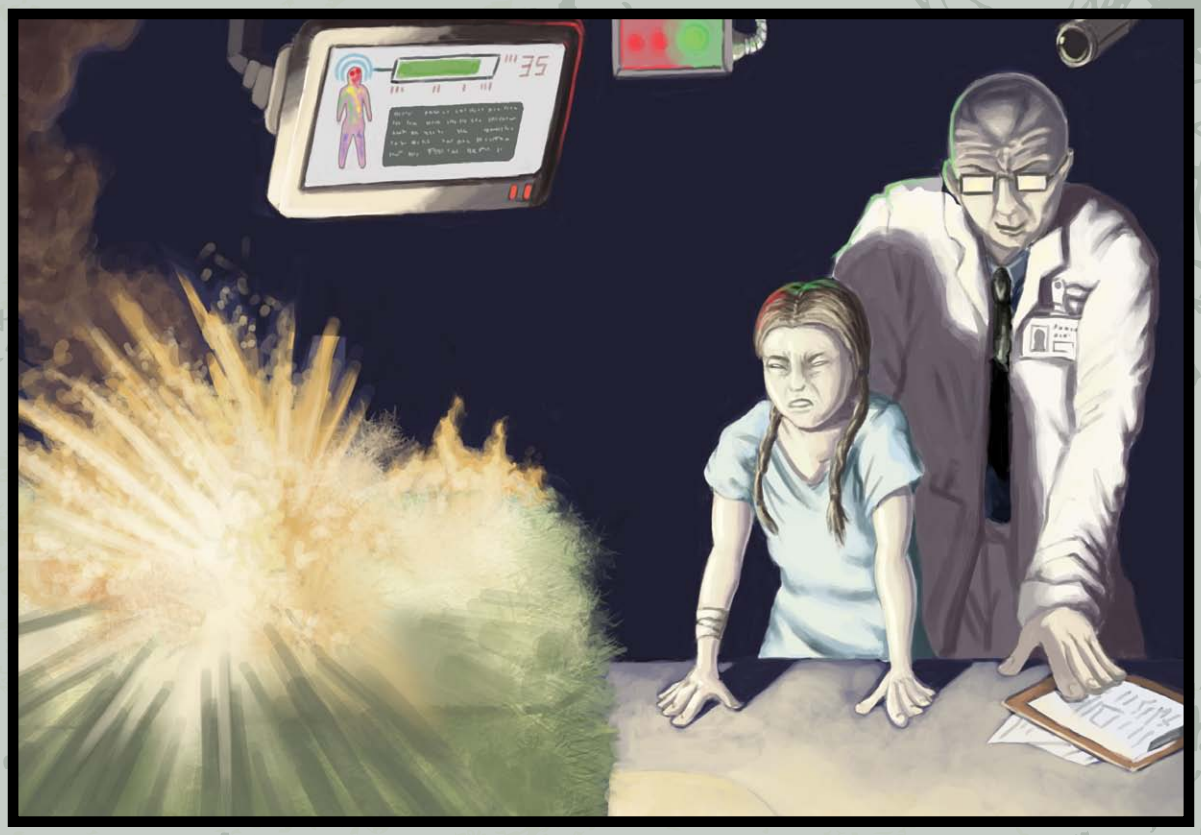
1. Grapple at +2; Strength Contest with target (1d6 + 6 vs target's 1d6 + Strength)
2. Inject Sedative at +2 (Grappled Target Only) for Thorazine (p. 148)
3. Punch at +2 for 1d6 + 6 nonlethal

**Equipment:** Green Surgical Scrubs, White Long-Sleeved Shirt, Comfortable Sneakers, $20-120 in cash.

**XP Bounty:** 20

### *Description*

*Orderlies populate various hospital wards and departments, handling and transporting patients, assisting physicians, and performing various other duties. As psychiatric patients can get uncooperative or downright violent and require "proactive" handling, the average orderly is a burly man that is a fairly skilled wrestler and grappler. Orderlies really aren't good guys or bad guys, they're just looking to do their jobs. If those jobs involve holding Espers at a testing facility against their will, however - most orderlies employed in this way don't have much idea what the ward they work at is really doing, and don't much care - then God help them.*



# Doctor/Scientist

*"Shhh. There, there, let me give you something to help you sleep."*

***Attributes***

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| **Strength:** | 3 | |
| **Speed:** | 5 | |
| **Wits:** | 8 | |
| **Will:** | 4 | Knocked Out at 6 Health, |
| **Health:** | 18 | Dead at -3 Health |
| **Initiative:** | 10 + 2d6 | |
| **Defense:** | 11 | |

**Skills:** Chemistry: Master (+4), Medicine: Master (+4), Calculus: Expert (+2), First Aid: Apprentice (+1), Negotiation: Apprentice (+1), Subterfuge: Apprentice (+1).

**Basic Training:** Awareness, Cooking, Drive, Electronics, Foreign Language, Foreign Language, Hospital/Lab Administration, Intimidation.

**Techniques:** Blitzkrieg, Dodge.

***Attacks***

1. Grapple at -2; Strength Contest 1d6 + 3 versus Target's 1d6 + Strength
2. Inject Sedative at +1 (Grappled Target Only) for Sodium Thiopental (p. 148)

**Equipment:** Lab Coat, Surgical Scrubs, Surgical Gloves, Drugs, possibly even including exotic drugs like PPECs and PPIDs, Syringes, Various Medical Instruments, $300-$1800 in cash.

**XP Bounty:** 30

## *Description*

*While these stats could represent an especially gifted medical doctor (such as a large or prestigious hospital's department chief) they more exactly correspond to a high ranking scientist employed by one of the Conspiracies (although certainly not the Zodiac Order). These stats represent a given facility's chief scientist; the stats of more numerous staff scientists and technicians would be similar, although they would have lower Chemistry and Medicine Skill ranks. These scientists are experts in their field: the discipline publically perceived as the "pseudoscience" of human psionic potential. They are excited about psionic disciplines, and*

*seeing those disciplines in action vindicates their entire career. Their investment in "the work" can easily approach fanatical levels. These scientists are more than smart to recognize how dangerous Espers are, and will be likely to treat Espers they encounter on even footing or in a position of power over them "nicely". But deep down, they really regard Espers as creatures - their pet freaks.*

## Security Guard

*"This is a restricted area."*

***Attributes***

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| **Strength:** | 5 | |
| **Speed:** | 5 | |
| **Wits:** | 4 | |
| **Will:** | 4 | Knocked Out at 6 Health, Dead at -5 Health |
| **Health:** | 30 | |
| **Initiative:** | 10 + 2d6 | |
| **Defense:** | 7 | |

**Skills:** Awareness: Apprentice (+1), Brawling: Apprentice (+1), Climbing: Apprentice (+1), Clubs: Apprentice (+1), Drive: Apprentice (+1), Intimidation: Apprentice (+1), Pistols: Apprentice (+1), Security: Apprentice (+1).

**Basic Training:** Bike, Locksmith, Stealth, Swimming.

**Techniques:** Critical Attack, Point Blank.

***Attacks***

1. Tranquilizer Pistol at +1 for 1 plus Sodium Thiopental (p. 148)
2. Taser at +1 for 5d6 Nonlethal
3. Glock 17 at +1 for 2d6
4. Riot Baton at +1 for 2d6 + 3

**Equipment:** Uniform, Badge, Keycard, Cell Phone, Radio, Sidearm of Choice From Above, Spare Magazine 9mm Ammo or 4 Spare Taser Darts or 4 Spare Tranquilizer Darts, Riot Baton, $100-600 in cash, access to Type I Body Armor vest when necessary and appropriate.

**XP Bounty:** 20

***Description***

*Disparagingly called "Rent-A-Cops", security guards aren't really law enforcement professionals. They're private sector hired guns, charged with securing locations and corporate assets, from warehouses and business properties during off-hours to high security corporate R&D laboratories. Very often ex-cops or guys who couldn't make it as cops (or got drummed out of the force for excessive brutality or corruption), security guards don't tend to ask a whole lot of questions about where their paycheck comes from, especially if that paycheck is big enough. You want I should tranquilize anyone I see escaping the facility with this tranq gun you gave me? Sure thing, boss.*

***Note:*** *Besides their trusty batons, security guards are usually only equipped with a Taser, a tranq gun, or a conventional sidearm, maybe two of the above but certainly not all three.*

## Highschool/College Student: Jock/Fratbro Type

*"Let's punish some Natty Ice and go slay some strange! Whooo!"*

***Attributes***

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| **Strength:** | 6 | |
| **Speed:** | 5 | |
| **Wits:** | 3 | |
| **Will:** | 4 | Knocked Out at 6 Health, Dead at -6 Health |
| **Health:** | 36 | |
| **Initiative:** | 10 + 2d6 | |
| **Defense:** | 6 | |

**Skills:** Football: Expert (+2), Brawling: Apprentice (+1), Drive: Apprentice (+1), Party: Apprentice (+1).

**Basic Training:** Automotive Repair, Swimming, Intimidation.

**Techniques:** Critical Attack, Point Blank.

***Attacks***

1. Punch at +1 for 1d6 + 6 nonlethal

**Equipment:** Baseball Hat or Visor, Shades, Polo Shirt or Jersey or No Shirt At All, Shorts, Smartphone, Hair Product, Axe Body Spray, Xbox or GameCube, Big Black Dildos, $20-$120 in cash.

**XP Bounty:** 20

### *Description*

*You know this guy. In some cases, it may be appropriate to switch the ranks of the Party and Football Skills, or replace Football with another sport.*

## Highschool/College Student: Studious/Academic Overachiever Type

*"Not tonight, I gotta study."*

#### *Attributes*

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| **Strength:** | 3 | |
| **Speed:** | 3 | |
| **Wits:** | 6 | |
| **Will:** | 4 | Knocked Out at 6 Health, |
| **Health:** | 18 | Dead at -3 Health |
| **Initiative:** | 2d6 + 3 | |
| **Defense:** | 9 | |

**Skills:** Study: Expert (+2), Awareness: Apprentice (+1), Calculus: Apprentice (+1), Chemistry: Apprentice (+1), Video Games: Apprentice (+1), Drive: Apprentice (+1), Foreign Language: Apprentice (+1), History: Apprentice (+1), Literature: Apprentice (+1), Musical Instrument: Apprentice (+1).

**Basic Training:** Automotive Repair, Climbing, Cooking, Electronics, Subterfuge, Swimming.

**Techniques:** None, really.

#### *Attacks*

1. Punch at -2 for 1d6 + 3 nonlethal

**Equipment:** Unfashionable Clothes, Glasses, Smartphone with Many Apps, Writing Implements, Backpack, Books, Calculator, $30-$180 in cash.

**XP Bounty:** 20

### *Description*

*You know this guy.*

## Highschool/College Student: Slacker/Stoner Type

*"Puff, puff, pass."*

#### *Attributes*

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| **Strength:** | 4 | |
| **Speed:** | 5 | |
| **Wits:** | 4 | |
| **Will:** | 3 | Knocked Out at 7 Health, |
| **Health:** | 24 | Dead at -4 Health |
| **Initiative:** | 10 + 2d6 | |
| **Defense:** | 7 | |

**Skills:** Guitar or Video Games: Expert (+2), Party: Apprentice (+1), Drawing: Apprentice (+1), Drive: Apprentice (+1), Subterfuge: Apprentice (+1), Street Smarts: Apprentice (+1).

**Basic Training:** Bike or Drive, Cooking, Chemistry, Stealth.

**Techniques:** Blitzkrieg, Dodge.

#### *Attacks*

1. Punch at -2 for 1d6 + 4 nonlethal

**Equipment:** Baggy, retro, or hipster clothes, cellphone, marijuana, rolling papers, lighter, $10-$30 in cash.

**XP Bounty:** 20

### *Description*

*You know this guy. And I kinda sorta am this guy.*

## Highschool/College Student:
### Punk/Juvenile Offender Type

*"Cops? Man, I hate cops!"*

***Attributes***

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| **Strength:** | 5 | |
| **Speed:** | 5 | |
| **Wits:** | 4 | |
| **Will:** | 6 | Knocked Out at 4 Health, |
| **Health:** | 24 | Dead at -5 Health |
| **Initiative:** | 10 + 2d6 | |
| **Defense:** | 7 | |

**Skills:** Brawling: Expert (+2), Blades: Apprentice (+1), Intimidation: Apprentice (+1), Locksmith: Apprentice (+1), Stealth: Apprentice (+1), Throwing Weapons: Apprentice (+1).

**Basic Training:** Awareness, Bike, Demolitions, Guitar.

**Techniques:** Blitzkrieg, Critical Attack, In The Face!.

***Attacks***

1. Punch at +2 for 1d6 + 5 nonlethal
2. Switchblade at +1 for 5

**Equipment:** Leather jacket, ripped jeans, cigarettes, lighter or lighters, possibly a switchblade, possibly some recreational drugs, $10-$30 in cash.

**XP Bounty:** 20

### *Description*

*You know this guy. And I kinda sorta am this guy.*

"You wanna have some fun, then be oh so young, and so knowing. It's a good idea at the time and we'll be fine — trust me, we'll be fine."

HUSTON
2015

# LEXICON OF FRIENDS AND ENEMIES II: CONSPIRACIES' HANDS AND EYES

**IF YOU ARE NOT 100% SURE YOU'RE GOING TO BE THE GM OF YOUR PSIONICS CAMPAIGN, AND NOT A PC, YOU SHOULD REALLY NOT READ THE FOLLOWING SECTIONS.**

These NPCs are some of the world's most elite special forces soldiers and secret agents. While they don't have any Psionic Talents, they are nonetheless extraordinarily competent and well equipped. As the prying eyes and subtle daggers of the Conspiracies, they are aware of Espers and many of them are specially trained, prepared and equipped to deal with Espers. Worse, most of them are outfitted to efficiently neutralize Espers *non-lethally*, dragging you off alive to a fate worse than death - although at least you'll have a chance of escape from whatever facility you wind up in as a lab rat or guinea pig.

## Institute Agent

*"I'm a talent scout... I've come to collect you for the home team."*

***Attributes***

| | |
|---|---|
| **Strength:** | 5 |
| **Speed:** | 6 |
| **Wits:** | 8 |
| **Will:** | 6 |
| **Health:** | 30 |
| **Initiative:** | 12 + 2d6 |
| **Defense:** | 11 |

Knocked Out at 4 Health, Dead at -5 Health

**Skills:** Pistols: Master (+4), Drive: Expert (+2), Intimidation: Expert (+2), Stealth: Expert (+2), Automatics: Apprentice (+1), Awareness: Apprentice (+1), Brawling: Apprentice (+1), Security: Apprentice (+1), Subterfuge: Apprentice (+1).

**Basic Training:** Climbing, Electronics, First Aid, Leadership, Locksmith, Medicine, Negotiation, Rifles.

**Techniques:** Blitzkrieg, Boom!Headshot, Dodge, Kneecapper, Point Blank.

***Attacks***

1. Tranquilizer Pistol at +4 for 1 plus paralytic agent
2. Silenced H&K Mk. 23 Mod 0 w/ Silencer at +6 for 2d6 + 3
3. Suppressed H&K UMP45 at +2 for 5d6 (three round burst)

**Equipment:** Type II Body Armor (Ballistic Vest, Melee Damage Cut: 4, Ranged Damage Cut: 9), black suit, skinny tie, nice shoes, sunglasses, high performance black sedan with gov't plates and silenced UMP 45 in trunk, lockpick gun, electronics tool kit, B&E tools, high-end laptop computer with good encryption, tracking devices (5) and scanner, sidearms in concealable shoulder holsters, six spare tranquilizer darts, two spare magazine for Mk 23, two spare magazines for UMP 45, additional darts, four doses Taramine, one dose Ephemerol, restraints, $500.

**XP Bounty:** 130 XP

### *Description*

*The Institute's Agents are everywhere, at least in North America. They have the access and the false credentials to impersonate FBI, ATF, Homeland Security, and DEA agents at short notice, and often use this tactic. Many Institute Agents are also "legitimate" agents of the CIA's National Clandestine Services branch, of the DIA or the NSA as their "day jobs" so they have ample access to those organizational structures as well. What this means is that anywhere in the United States, whenever there is a major crime or an act of domestic terrorism that smells of "Esper" activity, at least one or two of The Institute's Agents will be there to investigate. As free/rogue Espers aren't always great at keeping a low profile, this means that Institute Agents usually aren't far behind them.*

*Besides unparalleled inter-departmental federal law enforcement and intelligence agency access, the average Institute Agent is smart, skilled, well equipped and dangerously competent at tradecraft with nerves of steel. They also have a good degree of autonomy in their operational parameters. They have been briefed on the known capabilities of Espers in general and will be constantly wary and vigilant around them. And then there's the matter of the discrete cybernetic implants many of them have been augmented with (these stats reflect an "unaugmented" agent, but unaugmented agents are increasingly a rarity in The Institute's field teams). Their weakness, if they have one, besides not being Espers, is that they don't have extensive training in either close combat or heavy weapons. A standing firefight may go poorly for them.*

*All Institute Agents have a standing mandate to "secure and process" unregistered Psionic assets, i.e. tranq them and bring them in. If a Psionic asset "cannot be secured and/or presents a credible, immediate threat to any mission critical Institute assets", then Institute Agents are also authorized, equipped, and mandated to terminate rogue Espers. The latter involves a lot of paperwork and cross-examination, so Institute Agents will go to great lengths to avoid this option. Institute Agents are typically mandated to operate in pairs; smaller units would be ineffective in the field, but larger units would risk detection.*

## Abraxis Mercenary Squad

***"Tasers only, people, we're trying to bag these kids alive. But if local law enforcement gets involved, we have witnesses, or we have a man down, you are cleared to go weapons free."***

***Attributes***

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| **Strength:** | 6 | |
| **Speed:** | 5 | |
| **Wits:** | 7 | |
| **Will:** | 5 | Knocked Out at 5 Health, |
| **Health:** | 36 | Dead at -6 Health |
| **Initiative:** | 10 + 2d6 | |
| **Defense:** | 10 | |

**Skills:** Automatics: Expert (+2), Rifles: Expert (+2), Awareness: Apprentice (+1), Blades: Apprentice (+1), Brawling: Apprentice (+1), Climbing: Apprentice (+1), Pistols: Apprentice (+1), Stealth: Apprentice (+1), Swimming: Apprentice (+1), Throwing Weapons: Apprentice (+1).

**Basic Training:** Boating or Pilot, Drive, Demolitions, First Aid, Heavy Weapons, Intimidation, Negotiation.

**Techniques:** Blitzkrieg, Critical Attack, Dodge, Point Blank.

***Attacks***

A) Rifleman

1. FAMAS at +3 for 5d6 (three-round burst)
2. FAMAS at +1 for 6d6 (15 round burst)
3. Taser X3 at +3 for 5d6 nonlethal
4. FN Five-Seven at +2 for 2d6 + 1 (+10 damage vs. ranged damage cut)
5. Combat Knife at +1 for 1d6 + 7

B) Pointman

1. Franchi SPAS-12 Shotgun (as AA-12) at +2 for 4d6
2. Franchi SPAS-12 Shotgun (as AA-12) at +1 for 6d6 (three-round burst)
3. Taser X3 at +3 for 5d6 nonlethal
4. G18 with Laser Aiming Module at +2 for 4d6 (10 round burst)
5. Combat Knife at +1 for 1d6 + 7

C) Sniper

1. X-Caliber 4 Tranq Rifle at +4 for 1 plus paralytic agent
2. Accuracy International AW at +4 for 5d6
3. FN Five-Seven at +2 for 2d6 + 1 (+10 damage vs. ranged damage cut)
4. Combat Knife at +1 for 1d6 + 7

**Equipment:** Type II Body Armor (Melee Damage Cut: 4, Ranged Damage Cut: 9), Listed Weapons Loadout, Four Spare Magazines/Loads for Primary Weapon, Two Spare Magazines for Sidearms (Including Taser X3), Eight Spare Tranq Darts (Sniper Only), Two Fragmentation Grenades, Armored SUV or APC depending on deployment area, First Aid Kit, Restraints, $300-$1800 in cash.

**XP Bounty:** 80 XP

### *Description*

*Most of these mercenaries belonged to an international PMC (private military contractor) like Blackwater USA before they were downsized and/or made a better offer by Abraxis Biotech's recruiters. Others were dishonorably discharged from military special forces units or washed out for performance reasons, unable to make the cut with NAVY Seals or Delta Force before joining up here. Abraxis' access to European defense contractors has these guys just as well equipped as real specfor units, including helicopter transport and drone overwatch support where possible. These mercs are high-paid and largely amoral private soldiers without the direct oversight of any government or national military; they are answerable only to Abraxis Biotech, the entity that signs their paychecks. What they are doing is not strictly legal, and Abraxis doesn't have extensive legal influence in the US, so these mercs will engage law enforcement in a gunfight if that will let them avoid arrest and detainment.*

*Abraxis uses merc teams like these, operating in squads of no less than four and no more than twelve, to live capture rogue Espers, to raid enemy facilities (such as those of the CIA-C or The Zodiac Order), and to guard their own high-value, high-security sites. A four-man team usually includes two riflemen, a pointman, and a sniper. These stats represent a rank and file assault trooper with a lot of heavy firepower, not a commander, who would be even more competent and have the Leadership Skill at a minimum of Expert rank.*

## Zodiac Order Disciple

*"Do you have any idea how gifted – how truly blessed – you really are?"*

***Attributes***

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| **Strength:** | 4 | |
| **Speed:** | 5 | |
| **Wits:** | 4 | |
| **Will:** | 5 | Knocked Out at 5 Health, |
| **Health:** | 24 | Dead at -4 Health |
| **Initiative:** | 10 + 2d6 | |
| **Defense:** | 7 | |

**Skills:** Stealth: Expert (+2), Bike or Drive: Apprentice (+1), Blades: Apprentice (+1), Pistols: Apprentice (+1), Proselytizing: Apprentice (+1), Street Smarts: Apprentice (+1).

**Basic Training:** Awareness, Brawling, Chemistry, Greek.

**Techniques:** Blitzkrieg, Frenzy.

### *Attacks*

1. Ceremonial Dagger at +1 for 1d6 + 6
2. Ceremonial Dagger at -1 for 1d6 + 6 and Ceremonial Dagger at -1 for 1d6 + 6 (Frenzy)
3. Colt Detective Special at +1 for 1d6 + 4

**Equipment:** Street Clothes, Smartphone, 1-2 Burner Cellphones, Civilian Vehicle, 30 rounds of .38 special ammo, Zodiac Order/Ein Sof propaganda pamphlets, six doses marijuana, two doses stimulants, two doses opiates, one dose entactogens or hallucinogens, $40-$240 in cash.

**XP Bounty:** 20 XP

### *Description*

*These poor souls are the "useful idiots" of the Zodiac Order. They have no psionic potential, but the Espers of the Zodiac Order have showed them true power, and promise that they will receive the "sacrament" (i.e. PPECs) once they have proven their loyalty and faith. In truth, however, this "reward" will probably do nothing but kill them. Of course, the disciples don't know that. They've been reassured by the Zodiac Order that they're special, that they're destined to inherit the earth, that they're the chosen ones. Vastly outnumbering the Zodiac Order's Espers, they act as disposable pawns, foot soldiers, and spies throughout the country, especially the flyover states and the southwest. Though misguided and deceived, they are zealots and fanatics, totally dedicated to the order just as much as its Espers. They clearly are groupies and hanger-ons of Espers - some of them are more like worshipers, revering and venerating Espers - and they will do anything to help them remain "free" while guiding them to join the order. Beneath this, however is a deep and seething envy of Espers, a feeling of the Disciple that "that should be me, and one day it will be!"*

## Red Orchestra "Receiver"

*"We are always listening, comrade."*

### *Attributes*

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| **Strength:** | 4 | |
| **Speed:** | 5 | |
| **Wits:** | 7 | |
| **Will:** | 5 | Knocked Out at 5 Health, Dead at -4 Health |
| **Health:** | 30 | |
| **Initiative:** | 10 + 2d6 | |
| **Defense:** | 10 | |

**Skills:** Blades: Expert (+2), Brawling: Expert (+2), Security: Expert (+2), Stealth: Expert (+2), Automatics: Apprentice (+1), Awareness: Apprentice (+1), Bike: Apprentice (+1), Climbing: Apprentice (+1), Electronics: Apprentice (+1), English: Apprentice (+1) [Native Language is Russian], Intimidation: Apprentice (+1), Locksmith: Apprentice (+1), Pistols: Apprentice (+1), Subterfuge: Apprentice (+1), Throwing Weapons: Apprentice (+1).

**Basic Training:** Automotive Repair, Climbing, Demolitions, Drive, First Aid, Rifles, Swimming.

**Techniques:** Ambidexterity, Boom!Headshot, Counter Attack.

### *Attacks*

1. Two Special Survival Knives at +1 for 1d6 + 6 each
2. Scout Knife Surprise (single-shot firearm hidden in each knife!) at +1 for 3d6 + 3 [uses pistol ranges, but can only hit at short range]
3. Silenced Makarov (as Walther PPK) at +1 for 1d6 + 3
4. Skorpion w/ Laser Aiming Module at +1 for 3d6 + 3 (ten round burst)
5. AK-47 w/ Laser Aiming Module at +1 for 5d6 + 3 (ten round burst)
6. Mini-Crossbow at +1 for 6 plus paralytic agent

**Equipment:** Dark clothes, black leather jacket, Type I Body Armor (Melee Damage Cut: 2, Ranged Damage Cut: 6), fast bike, SUV or jeep, two scout knives, Mini-Crossbow and concealed silenced Makarov (carried on person), Skorpion Machine Pistol w/ Laser Aiming Module stored on bike,

AK-47 w/ Laser Aiming Module stored in truck, one spare magazine for Makarov (on person), two spare magazines each for Skorpion and AK-47 (in bike and truck respectively), six spare mini-injection bolts (on person), breaking and entering kit, electronics kit, first aid kit, torture and interrogation kit with various restraints, "go bag" with emergency relocation supplies, burner cell phones, encrypted laptop, encrypted radio set, $1,000.

**XP Bounty:** 125

### *Description*

*Scientists in pre-Revolutionary Russia were pioneering the field of psychic research, paving the way for later Soviet scientists in the 20s and 30s. Work flourished throughout the thirties, with research being published throughout the decade; in 1937, Stalin officially forbade further experiments in the field of parapsychology. In 1960, the Stalinist taboo prohibiting paranormal research was lifted and the KGB and GRU began their scientific exploration of the weapons potential of psychic energy. They never looked back. Paralleling their Western counterparts - which evolved into The Institute - the fall of the Berlin Wall and the collapse of the Soviet Union weren't enough to stop the psychic research initiatives started by the KGB and the GRU. Instead, they went underground; without government oversight, they became more powerful and more agile than ever.*

*The Red Orchestra is an international, intercontinental spy ring positioned in a widely scattered geographical distribution throughout the entire world. Receivers don't communicate with each other and don't know each others' location. Ordinarily, communication only trickles one way - from the "Senders" to the Receivers through a complex network of encrypted signals and long range telepathic communication. Many Receivers may not even know that their actions are no longer officially sanctioned by the Russian government.*

*A Receiver's primary role is to detect, locate, and monitor Esper activities (and the activities of competing Conspiracies) in their operating radius, and report back through secure channels following intricate and paranoid tradecraft procedures. Then, should the coded message come down to them, they are authorized to act, abducting, subverting, or terminating rogue or enemy Espers or enemy Conspiracy agents. Starting their career with the KGB or GRU, the average Receiver is ex-Soviet special forces with elite Spetsnaz combat training. A very dangerous and canny individual indeed. The Red Orchestra is organized so that each individual operative is a "cell" unto themselves, requiring self-sufficiency that makes the "Receiver" even more ultra-competent than the members of other Conspiracies, who can rely on teams and backup.*

## Aleph "Sleeper"

*"Oh, please don't mind me, sir. I am only here to observe."*

#### *Attributes*

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| **Strength:** | 4 | |
| **Speed:** | 6 | |
| **Wits:** | 8 | |
| **Will:** | 4 | Knocked Out at 6 Health, |
| **Health:** | 24 | Dead At -4 Health |
| **Initiative:** | 12 + 2d6 | |
| **Defense:** | 11 | |

**Skills:** Subterfuge: Master (+4), Awareness: Expert (+2), Brawling: Expert (+2), Stealth: Expert (+2), Chemistry: Apprentice (+1), Electronics: Apprentice (+1), English: Apprentice (+1), [Native Language Is Chinese], Hacking: Apprentice (+1), Pistols: Apprentice (+1).

**Basic Training:** Automatics, Calculus, Climbing, Drive, First Aid, Negotiation, Pilot, Security.

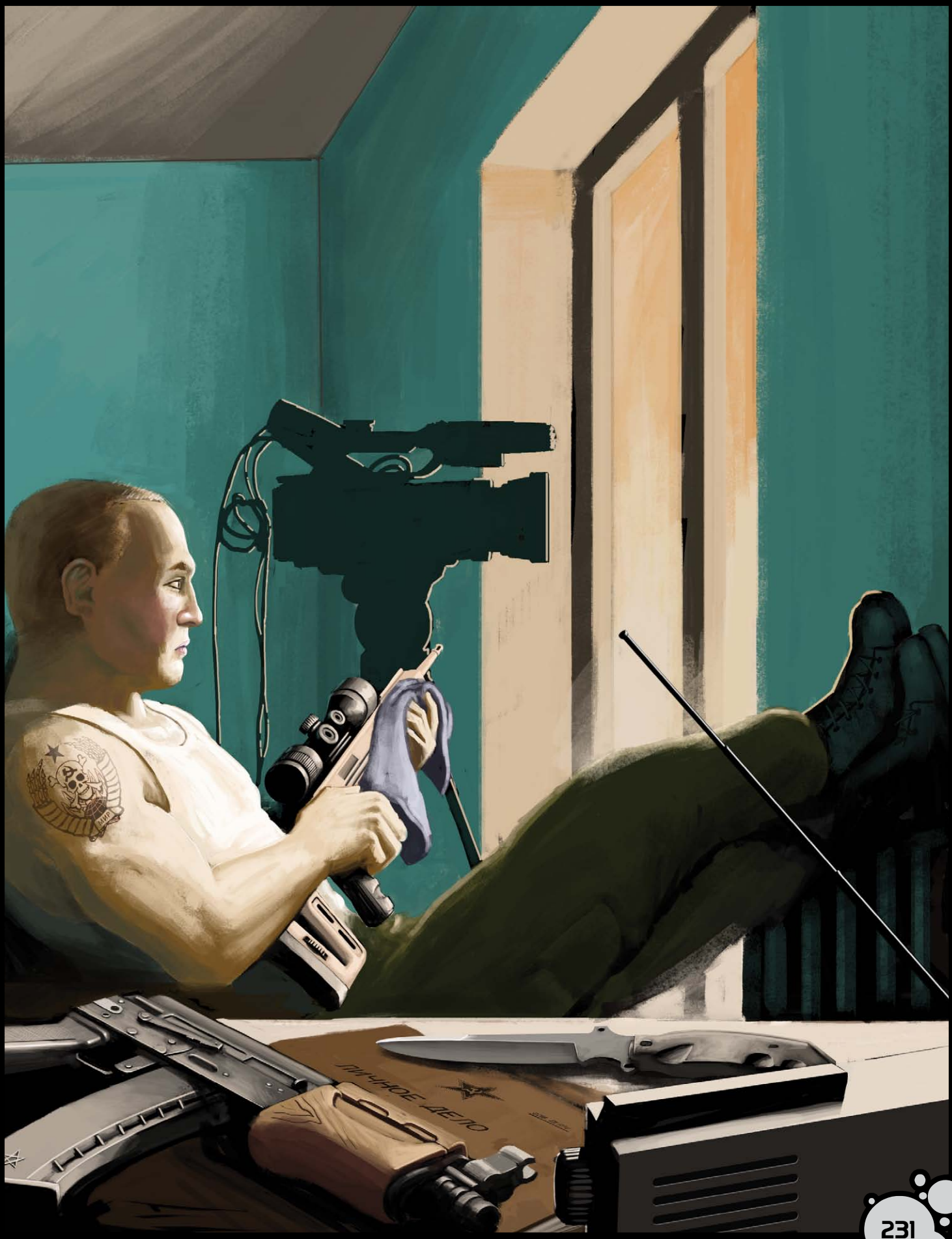
**Techniques:** Blitzkrieg, Dodge.

#### *Attacks*

1. Martial Arts at +2 for 1d6 + 4
2. Silenced M9 at +2 for 2d6

**Equipment:** Lab coat, fake access credentials, encrypted smartphone and/or tablet, concealed electronics tool kit, concealed chemistry kit, concealed M9 Pistol in holster at small of back (only when it can carried undetected), inconspicuous compact car (e.g. Honda Civic), $1,000.

**XP Bounty:** 55

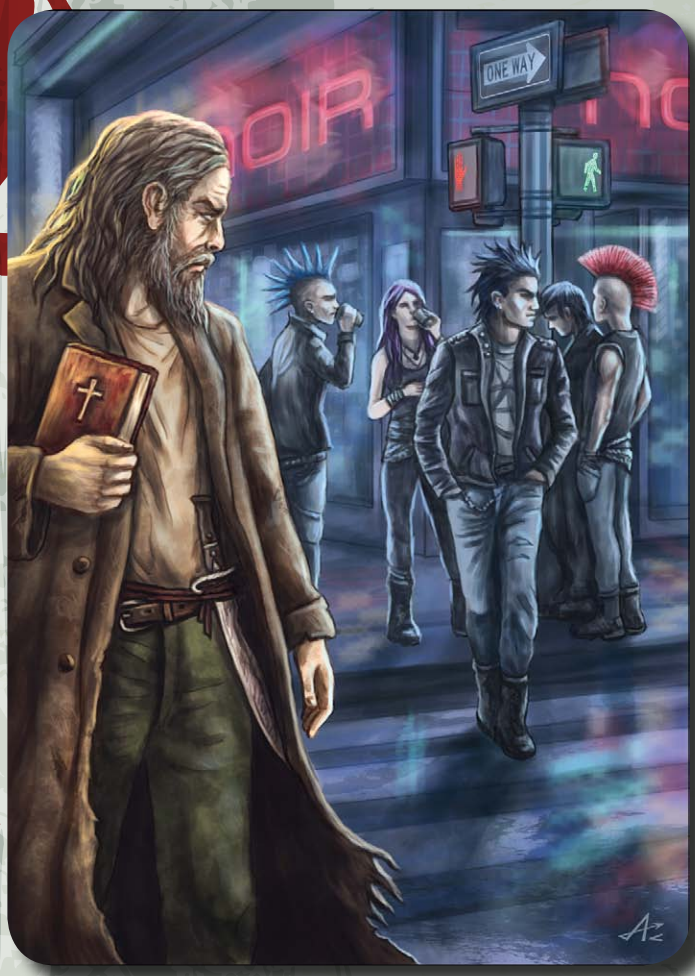

ЛИЧНОЕ ДЕЛО

### Description

*The Aleph "Sleeper's" basic training is in industrial espionage, specifically corporate infiltration. They have all the necessary skills to, as a secret employee of one corporation, gain employment at another corporation using false credentials, and pilfer that corporation's secrets (or worse) before leaving to disappear into the night. They are incredibly gifted at appearing innocuous, harmless, innocent and/or unimportant. They are so polite and obsequious that they are virtually invisible. But they are secretly much more dangerous than they appear.*

*Aleph leverages the Sleeper's gift for being a corporate chameleon by "seeding" Sleepers - unnoticed - as lab techs, scientists, and employees in medical institutions, laboratory facilities run by Abraxis Biotech and its subsidiaries, and independent biotech research companies. The Sleepers then monitor their organization for any sign of Esper or Conspiracy activity, widening their "net" over time, the longer they remain undetected. If a Sleeper does find out where Espers are being tested or housed, or learns of another Conspiracy's plans to retrieve rogue Espers, they won't act to secure an Esper themselves unless there are absolutely no other options. If time and opportunity permit, a Sleeper would much rather stay out of things personally - they don't have the combat training or equipment to live capture an Esper or to contend with enemy security in a stand-up fight - and, time and location permitting, call for support in the form of an Aleph-sponsored mercenary team (the stats for Abraxis Biotech Merc Squad can be used, perhaps with modified equipment) to actually secure an Esper.*

*At the present time, Aleph hasn't succeeded in penetrating many Sleepers into the western hemisphere, but its reach is gradually expanding every day. Considering that Abraxis Biotech has achieved almost no penetration at all into Aleph's Asia-based subsidiaries, relatively speaking, Aleph is winning. But the fight is far from over.*




## Eschaton Witchfinder

*"Thou shalt not suffer a witch to live."*

***Attributes***

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| **Strength:** | 6 | |
| **Speed:** | 5 | |
| **Wits:** | 5 | |
| **Will:** | 7 | Knocked Out at 3 Health, |
| **Health:** | 36 | Dead at -6 Health |
| **Initiative:** | 10 + 2d6 | |
| **Defense:** | 8 | |

**Skills:** Awareness: Expert (+2), Blades: Expert (+2), Bike: Apprentice (+1), First Aid: Apprentice (+1), Intimidation: Apprentice (+1), Latin: Apprentice (+1), Stealth: Apprentice (+1), Subterfuge: Apprentice (+1).

**Basic Training:** Climbing, Demolitions, Locksmith, Swimming, Throwing Weapons.

**Techniques:** Blitzkrieg, Boom!Headshot, Dodge, Frenzy.

***Attacks***

1. Shortsword at +2 for 1d6 + 8
2. Shortsword at +0 for 1d6 + 8 and Shortsword at +0 for 1d6 + 8 (Frenzy)
3. Sawn-Off Double Barreled Shotgun at +2 for 4d6
4. Sawn-Off Double Barreled Shotgun at +1 for 6d6 (both barrels)
5. Molotov Cocktail at +0 for 4d6 fire (-1d6 damage per yard from ground zero)

**Equipment:** Trenchcoat and rugged street clothes, burner cellphones, scavenged body armor (quality and type will vary, and won't necessarily have any), Bible, Torah, and/or Quran, shortsword (often with favorite biblical passage inscribed), sawn-off twelve gauge on jury-rigged sling, twenty four spare shotgun shells on a bandolier, 1-6 Molotov cocktails, heavy bike, $200-$1200 in cash.

**XP Bounty:** 90

## *Description*

*Eschaton is the smallest of the global Conspiracies by far, but is by no means the least dangerous. Its low membership and difficulty with recruiting means that members are quite careful to keep themselves alive; unlike Abraxis' mercs or the Zodiac Order's cultists, they aren't replaceable. Likewise, its relative lack of global geopolitical influence leads to a sense of desperation that makes Eschaton agents unpredictable, with the potential to be even more ruthless than The Institute.*

*Eschaton's goals differ on a fundamental level from every other Conspiracy. The Institute, Abraxis Biotech, The Zodiac Order, The Red Orchestra, and Aleph are all trying to rule the world. Eschaton is trying to keep the world just as it is. Every other Conspiracy is trying to "recruit" Espers, but will terminate them if necessary to prevent them from falling into enemy hands. Eschaton is trying to* kill *Espers wherever they pop up, and will recruit them only if convinced that the Esper is 100% willing to commit to Eschaton's mission: preventing the apocalypse that The Zodiac Order are trying to bring about.*

*An Eschaton Witchfinder - they work alone at almost all times - has only one holy imperative. Find and kill Espers wherever they can - two barrels of buckshot to the face, one Esper's face at a time, until the world is saved. They don't have the institutional access to use law enforcement and government networks to locate Espers, so their approach is more intuitive and organic. They read the headlines and they look for the patterns of cover-ups and lies that might indicate an Esper's Overload being hidden from the public. And then they head in that direction.*

*They are, in effect, nomadic assassins of the paranormal. At their worst, they might look like crazed, homeless street preachers; of course the best of them use this impression to their advantage. The strengths of a Witchfinder are a fanatic's zeal and solid combat skills; their weakness is in their technical tradecraft, which pales in comparison to the agents of other Conspiracies.*

"Paranoia is just good common sense."

# LEXICON OF FRIENDS AND ENEMIES III: NPC ESPERS

The NPC dossiers given in the following, and final, section belong to Espers just like you. This means that every NPC dossier in the following section is at least as powerful as an average starting PC, and that makes them a *very* formidable threat to any PC indeed. And anyone who happens to be standing somewhat near them. Clashes of titans usually result in at least one dead titan, and a whole lot of dead bystanders.

## Institute Psi-Operative

*"Give it up, kid. I was killing people for years before I learned to do it with my mind. You just don't have the knack."*

### *Attributes*

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| **Strength:** | 6 | |
| **Speed:** | 6 | |
| **Wits:** | 8 | |
| **Will:** | 7 | Knocked Out at 3 Health, |
| **Health:** | 36 | Dead at -6 Health |
| **Initiative:** | 12 + 2d6 | |
| **Defense:** | 11 | |

**Power Points:** 42

**Overflow Gauge:**

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**Skills:** Automatics: Expert (+2), Pistols: Expert (+2), Stealth: Expert (+2), Awareness: Apprentice (+1), Bike or Drive: Apprentice (+1), Blade: Apprentice (+1), Brawling: Apprentice (+1), Climbing: Apprentice (+1), Demolitions: Apprentice (+1), First Aid: Apprentice (+1), Security: Apprentice (+1), Swimming: Apprentice (+1).

**Basic Training:** Boating, Foreign Language, Leadership, Locksmith, Negotiation, Pilot, Subterfuge, Throwing Weapons.

**Techniques:** Dodge, Kneecapper, John Wu Special.

### *Attacks*

1. Desert Eagle Mark XIX at +2 for 4d6 + 2
2. Two M9s at +0 for 2d6
3. Two M9(s at +0 for 2d6 plus Desert Eagle Mark XIX at +0 for 4d6 + 2 (TK Gunslinger)
4. H&K MP5 at +1 for 5d6 (15 round burst)
5. Combat Knife at +1 for 1d6 + 7

**Psionic Talents:** Telekinesis Level 4, Pyrokinesis Level 2.

**Equipment:** Nonreflective Stealth-Black Kevlar Bodysuit (Type II Body Armor, Melee Damage Cut: 4, Ranged Damage Cut: 9), Weapons Loadout (Desert Eagle, Two M9s, MP5, Combat Knife), Two Spare Magazines For Each Firearm, Encrypted Earpiece Transceiver, First Aid Kit, B&E Kit, Fast Car or Bike, Possibly With Runflat Tires or Other Modifications, Injection Gun, Six Doses Stimulants, Two Doses Pentamerol, Four Doses Taramine, Four Doses Dametrol.

**XP Bounty:** 140

### *Description*

*The Institute's elite, deniable Psi-Operatives are the ends to which The Institute is a means. They are psionic super soldiers, supplementing field training and firepower with powerful psionic talents. The typical Psi-Operative is a cocky son of a bitch, but has good reason to be. Unlike most people, he was a huge badass even before he became an Esper. Obviously, they are not standard issue. While these stats represent a typical Institute Psi-Ops agent, others frequently have different Skills, Psionic Talents, and/or equipment loadouts (for a quick and common variant to add variety, replace Pyrokinesis with Psychokinesis above). Loyal and trustworthy, vetted and program-graduated Psi-Operatives are rare, valuable assets and are usually used only for high-priority assassination, espionage, and*

*sabotage missions against enemy nations and/or Conspiracies. Psi-Operatives are not ordinarily used to capture or contain rogue Espers (i.e. PCs) unless things have already gone horribly wrong and there are no other options. In fact, generally Psi-Operatives are kept away from other Espers whenever possible. They usually work alone.*

## Yggdrasil Program Prodigy

*"What's not to love? First they made me like a god, then they cut me a real nice paycheck."*

### Attributes

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| **Strength:** | 5 (6) | |
| **Speed:** | 5 (6) | |
| **Wits:** | 8 | |
| **Will:** | 8 | Knocked Out at 2 Health, Dead at -6 Health |
| **Health:** | 36 | |
| **Initiative:** | 12 + 2d6 | |
| **Defense:** | 11 | |

**Power Points:** 48

**Overflow Gauge:**

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**Skills:** Bike: Expert (+2), Blades: Expert (+2), Stealth: Expert (+2), Throwing Weapons: Expert (+2), Automatics: Apprentice (+1), Awareness: Apprentice (+1), Climbing: Apprentice (+1), Drawing: Apprentice (+1), First Aid: Apprentice (+1), Foreign Language: Apprentice (+1), Negotiation: Apprentice (+1), Subterfuge: Apprentice (+1).

**Basic Training:** Cooking, Drive, Electronics, Intimidation, Locksmith, Rifles, Security, Swimming.

**Techniques:** Blitzkrieg, Bull's Eye, In The Face!.

### Attacks

1. Rapier at +2 for 1d6 + 9
2. Throwing Knife at +2 for 1d6 + 6
3. Suppressed Beretta 93R at +1 for 4d6 (three round burst)

**Psionic Talents:** Telekinesis Level 3, Biofeedback Level 1, Somakinesis Level 1, Psychokinesis Level 3, Osmoses Level 1.

**Equipment:** Chic clothes including designer leather jacket with Yggdrasil project pin, first aid kit, high end smartphone and laptop computer with encrypted connection, expensive racing bike, rapier, a dozen throwing knives, Beretta 93R with Suppressor, shoulder holster, and four spare magazines, twelve doses caffeine, eight doses marijuana, two doses Pretarine, one dose Light, one syringe Anteronar.

**XP Bounty:** 190

### *Description*

*Not all Espers go rogue, go on the run, fight their captors at every turn, battle to the bitter end. Honestly, that sounds exhausting - who has the energy for all that? Some of them will play ball, and take the best deal they can get. So it goes with the Yggdrasil Program's Prodigies. Some of these Espers were captured by Abraxis Biotech's agents and took a deal; others turned themselves in to Abraxis voluntarily, or were test subjects that Abraxis' PPECs granted Psionic Talents. In any case, all were willing to put up with the poking and prodding and testing in exchange for wealth, power, and any other special needs they may have had stipulated in their contracts (Abraxis doesn't balk at satisfying the most decadent tastes). The result is that they now serve as Abraxis Biotech's elite troubleshooters, taking whatever special missions Abraxis needs done, and collect handsome paychecks for it. Their work might include removing competitors or other thorns in the company's side, or "recruiting" Espers from outside the organization. They're rarely used for site security - they're too important for that - unless it's a dire situation indeed.*

*These prodigies have certainly gotten a taste for the finer things and all manner of vices, and have to be careful not to let their luxurious lifestyles cause their edge to soften. Yggdrasil program's prodigies are rarely deployed to North America except for high-priority ops, for fear they'll get "extracted" by The Institute. When they are on deployment in the Americas, they are instructed to only use their most discrete abilities to avoid detection. This isn't an overwhelming handicap, as the mundane training and experience that Yggdrasil prodigies have is also quite impressive.*

## Zodiac Order Acolyte

*"Fuck yeah it's a pleasure to burn."*

***Attributes***

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| **Strength:** | 6 | |
| **Speed:** | 6 | |
| **Wits:** | 7 | |
| **Will:** | 8 | Knocked Out at 2 Health, |
| **Health:** | 36 | Dead at -6 Health |
| **Initiative:** | 12 + 2d6 | |
| **Defense:** | 10 | |

**Power Points:** 48

**Overflow Gauge:**

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**Skills:** Drive: Expert (+2), Stealth: Expert (+2), Subterfuge: Expert (+2), Automatics: Apprentice (+1), Automotive Repair: Apprentice (+1), Awareness: Apprentice (+1), Climbing: Apprentice (+1), Clubs: Apprentice (+1), First Aid: Apprentice (+1), Guitar: Apprentice (+1), Intimidation: Apprentice (+1), Rifles: Apprentice (+1).

**Basic Training:** Bike, Blades, Chemistry, Climbing, Leadership, Locksmith, Swimming.

**Techniques:** Batter Up, Blitzkrieg.

***Attacks***

1. Baseball Bat at +1 for 2d6 + 6
2. Uzi at +0 for 4d6 (10 round burst)
3. Remington 1100 at +1 for 4d6

**Psionic Talents:** Pyrokinesis Level 4, Psychokinesis Level 2.

**Equipment:** Heavy Leather Jacket (Melee Damage Cut 4, Ranged Damage Cut 1), burner cell phones, beat up muscle car (older model) with Uzi, Baseball Bat, and Remington 1100 Shotgun in trunk, 1-3 spare mags for Uzi, 4-24 spare 12 gauge shotgun shells, 2d6 doses of caffeine, alcohol, and marijuana, 1d6 doses of stimulants and opiates, possibly but not necessarily 1d3 doses of entactogens and/or hallucinogens, possibly but not necessarily 1d6 doses of stolen and/or illegally synthesized PPECs (divided randomly between BLUE, RED, and GREEN, 1d6-2 (min. 0) doses each of Hyper and Light.

**XP Bounty:** 120

### Description

*Acolytes are the "Rank and File" Espers of the Zodiac Order, if any Espers can be truly be called Rank and File. An enormous diversity of Esper Talent combinations exists within the Zodiac Order, obviously, but mid-level primary Pyrokinetics who are also low-level secondary Psychokinetics are by far the most common (for quick variations on this stat block, just take away a level of Pyrokinesis and add a level of Psychokinesis). These Espers are nomadic outlaws, fugitives from The Institute and/or Abraxis Biotech (plus any other Conspiracies whose radar they've managed to get themselves on), traveling the country in small groups or even solo, in stolen cars, using hastily mocked up phony IDs.*

*For the most part, what they're doing is crashing college parties, house parties, and concerts, using Psychokinesis to scan for teenagers and young adults that give them the vague "feel" of someone with Psi-Potential, and then dosing those people with stolen PPECs to see what happens. If the prospective "pledge" can handle it, then the Zodiac Order has created a new Esper to recruit. If the prospective "pledge" Overloads and "pops", no sweat - large scale psionic disasters weaken the grip of The Institute and other Conspiracies on reality by forcing them to cover up or explain away the fatalities. Of course, Zodiac Order Acolytes like this are also often enlisted in missions to rescue kidnapped Espers from Institute research/training/indoctrination facilities - or the facilities of other Conspiracies - or just to torch such labs and facilities to the fucking ground. But for missions of such import, Acolytes are ordinarily lead by higher ranking Zodiac Order Espers with more experience and a more diverse array of Psionic Talents.*

## Red Orchestra Mindbender

***"Trust me, my friend. You'll come around eventually. They always do."***

#### Attributes

| | |
|---|---|
| **Strength:** | 4 |
| **Speed:** | 4 |
| **Wits:** | 9 |
| **Will:** | 9 |
| **Health:** | 24 |
| **Initiative:** | 8 + 2d6 |
| **Defense:** | 12 |

Knocked Out at 1 Health, Dead at -4 Health

**Power Points:** 54

**Overflow Gauge:**

**Skills:** Pistols: Expert (+2), Stealth: Expert (+2), Subterfuge: Expert (+2), Awareness: Apprentice (+1), Blades: Apprentice (+1), Brawling: Apprentice (+1), Chemistry: Apprentice (+1), Drive: Apprentice (+1), First Aid: Apprentice (+1), English: Apprentice (+1) [Native Language is Russian], Interrogation: Apprentice (+1), Intimidation: Apprentice (+1).

**Basic Training:** A Foreign Language, Another Foreign Language, Automatics, Climbing, Diplomacy, Electronics, Locksmith, Pilot, Security.

**Techniques:** Boom!Headshot, Point Blank, Trick Shot.

#### Attacks

1. Silenced FN Five-SeveN at +3 for 2d6 + 1 (+10 damage vs. ranged damage cut)
2. Mini Crossbow at +2 for 6 plus paralytic agent

**Psionic Talents:** Telekinesis Level 2, Psychokinesis Level 5, Scrying Level 3.

**Equipment:** Dark clothes, Type II Body Armor, Melee Damage Cut: 4, Ranged Damage Cut: 9, fake IDs, burner cellphone, encrypted laptop, Silenced FN Five-SeveN and Mini Crossbow, Four Spare Magazines for Five-SeveN, Six Spare Mini-Injection Darts with Paralytic Agent, high-end sedan, first aid kit, torture kit, ten doses sodium thiopental.

**XP Bounty:** 200

### Description

*This enormously powerful Psychokinetic Esper is in the employ of, and was perhaps created "from whole cloth" by, The Red Orchestra. He or she exists to completely subvert the will of troublesome individuals, whether they're Russian federal ministers poking their noses in where they don't belong, or independent Espers that have proven resistant to "traditional" recruitment techniques. A mindbender takes a real perverse pleasure in dominating the will of another human being, remaking their personality*

*and ethos until they will cooperate with the plan. If for some reason Psychokinesis should fail - like if perhaps the target is an equally powerful Psychokinetic - then the Mindbender is also trained in more "traditional" methods of extracting valuable information and/or ensuring short-term cooperation: enhanced interrogation techniques like drugs and torture.*

*You could tell yourself that the other Conspiracies don't have access to powerful Psychokinetics that can brainwash their enemies, including PC Espers, into becoming loyal puppets, but you'd be kidding yourself. (The exceptions are the Zodiac Order, which would never brainwash any other Esper, and Eschaton, which mainly just wants Espers dead.) These stats can be used just as easily for a powerful Psychokinetic that The Institute or Abraxis Biotech has secreted away in their "back pocket" for just such a dark purpose.*

## Aleph Reality Hacker

***"I can see the strings that control the system, I can do anything with no resistance."***

### Attributes

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| **Strength:** | 4 | |
| **Speed:** | 5 | |
| **Wits:** | 10 | |
| **Will:** | 6 | Knocked Out at 4 Health, |
| **Health:** | 24 | Dead at -4 Health |
| **Initiative:** | 10 + 2d6 | |
| **Defense:** | 13 | |

**Power Points:** 36

**Overflow Gauge:**

**Skills:** Hacking: Master (+4), Calculus: Expert (+2), Electronics: Expert (+2), Security: Expert (+2), Subterfuge: Expert (+2), Automatics: Apprentice (+1), Automotive Repair: Apprentice (+1), Awareness: Apprentice (+1), Chemistry: Apprentice (+1), English: Apprentice (+1) [Native Language Is Chinese], First Aid: Apprentice (+1), Locksmith: Apprentice (+1), Negotiation: Apprentice (+1), Stealth: Apprentice (+1).

**Basic Training:** Blades, Climbing, Cooking, Demolition, Drawing, Drive, Pilot, Pistols, Rifles, Swimming.

**Techniques:** Blitzkrieg, Dodge.

### Attacks

1. Suppressed HK MP7 at +1 for 3d6 + 5 (+10 vs. ranged damage cut) [three round burst]

**Psionic Talents:** Psychokinesis Level 3, Technokinesis Level 4.

**Equipment:** Various disguises, high-powered hacking devices (laptops, smartphones, tablets), false IDs, a dozen burner cellphones with faked accounts and false IDs and credentials, suppressed MP7 machine pistol with five spare magazines, inconspicuous compact car.

**XP Bounty:** 120

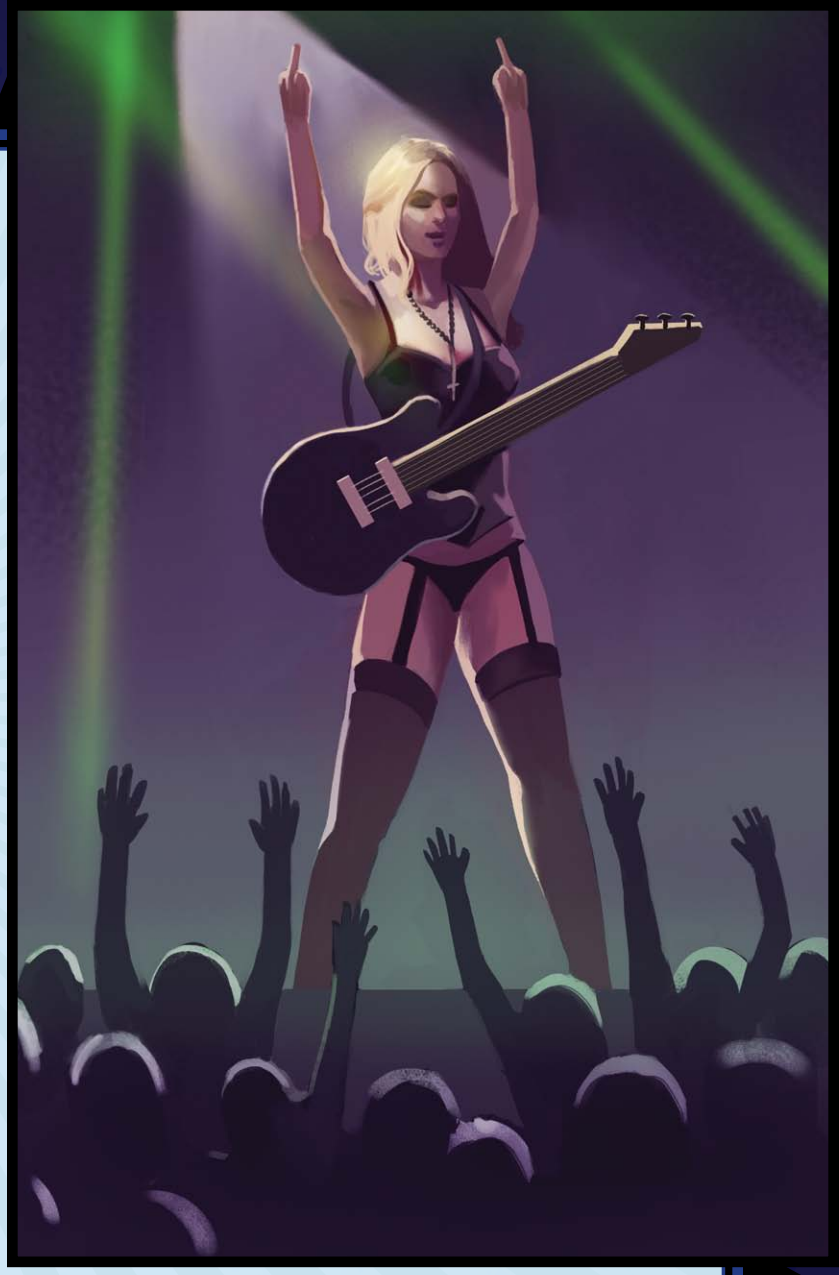
### Description

*These stats represent an ultra-genius level IQ that was one of the world's greatest computer hackers before Aleph oversaw his metamorphosis into one of the world's most powerful Technokinetic "mind hackers". The Zodiac Order and perhaps The Institute or Abraxis Biotech might have access to loyal Espers with comparable abilities, but they've almost certainly compromised their hacking skills and abilities in favor of a more robust general skillset. Not so for the Reality Hacker, who is a tightly focused specialist. The Reality Hacker's insane level of intellect and suite of Technokinetic abilities have made him more like a machine than a person, and more sympathetic to machines than people.*

*If the mundane Aleph Sleeper above is a subtle dagger used in corporate assassinations, his Esper equivalent, the Reality Hacker, is like a guided smartmissile, sent in to corporate facilities to reap all of their secrets in one fell swoop like a scythe, from the most guarded of systems, or from the very minds of their employees and administrators; obviously, this is also very useful for turning up the locations of Espers in the "employ" of other Conspiracies. Reality Hackers are aiding Aleph in their takeover of all tech and biotech companies in greater Asia, and Aleph is about ready to turn them loose in Europe and the Americas.*

# Tomorrow's Starlight
## (Part Three)

*By Devon Oratz*



**The houselights dimmed low and the crowd fell to a hush.** It was like the entire room was holding its breath, time itself slowing down as they did, dilating with anticipation. Then a v-shaped burst of brilliant white light from the footlights sprang into being and Ariel Hale stepped forward to the lip of the stage to greet the ecstatic screams of her fans.

She drew every single eye in the room and kept it. It was more than that she was a skinny little long-haired platinum blonde knockout, tiny body barely squeezed into a black corset, garter belts, combat boots, and no pants at all, bedecked in a tangle of loosely hanging jewelry, the most prominent a gleaming ankh between her breasts. More than that she wielded in the kind of effortless sexy that would drive the most mild-mannered onlooker into a frenzy of lust, let alone the effect it would have on those who specifically had a thing for indie rock chicks.

It was that she had a presence that filled the room. That held the audience captive, that bound them, enchanted, that drew from them and flared like a fire, growing stronger and stronger. Like an idol. Like a god.

Rock and fucking roll.

"What's up BROOKLYN!" she screamed – and was greeted with roars and screams. "Make some noise!"

Everyone who had been to a TS show knew what was happening next. Like they knew every lyric and what it meant as they sang along at show after show. The kids all knew what to do. They understood the chaos that was about to created, the temporary autonomous zones where the engineers of chaos would create a carnival of joy and dark delights.

Critics and fans alike were in agreement that Tomorrow's Starlight and their fans were, in many ways, more like a cult than a band and its following.

"No gods, no masters, and two fingers in the air!" she screamed, raising her slender, tattooed arms high and wide, making her body a Y, both middle fingers fully extended. The crowd surged, exultantly, hundreds of hoarse voices shouting the words back to her.

As always.

She shouldered the strap of a battered jet black Tele with a Misfits sticker slapped prominently on the body.

Her voice dropped almost an octave, and her casual speaking voice sounded like a whisper

compared to her earlier screams, the echoes of which were still fading.

**"And we are Tomorrow's Starlight,"** she purred into the mike.

And struck the first chord.

"The ground floor teams are in position, sir," the voice in Sande's earpiece said. He was standing, off to one side, on the catwalk that hung precariously directly over and behind the stage.

He sighed with relief. Good. He wasn't sure how much longer he could have taken this. The excess volume noise pollution. The swarms of wasted teenagers – at least he hoped they were teenagers – who clearly hadn't the slightest idea just how fucking badly they collectively *stank*.

"Thermal scan has positively ID'd all targets. We're ready when you are. Probably want to wait to nab them until the crowd of kids has cleared the AO, right?"

Sande recalled what a policeman had, apocryphally, remarked over the corpse of Lenny Bruce: there is nothing sadder than an aging hipster. Now Sande felt like he was drowning in exactly that.

"No," he said.

He was just about to give the order to begin, when he felt a hand suddenly grab his upper arm, roughly, wrinkling his suit. He turned his head to regard the fucking *roadie* manhandling him. Bad Religion t-shirt with the sleeves ripped off, seriously gauged ears, stubble and a Mohawk.

"You're not allowed up here, man," the roadie growled.

Sande was looking down, reading the insipid writing of the tattoo that crawled down the roadie's arm from bicep to wrist, crossed by a band circling just below his elbow. Sande twisted his own shoulder a little, so he could read it better.

*Only Anarchists Are Pretty,* the first one said. *GO FASTER! THINK BETTER!!!*, the second one. With three exclamation marks.

"I'd never be so unsubtle as to write this on my sleeve," Sande sneered. "Unless I was sure I could change it when I was ready to leave."

"What the fuck?" the roadie mouthed in confusion, not even mad bro. But then, with an unexpected burst of intelligence that caught Sande completely by surprise, he seemed to recognize Sande. Not who he was, certainly, but what. His grip tightened and he opened his mouth to scream.

*"Hush,"* Sande told him. And his lower jaw clicked shut like a nutcracker. Sande smiled, taking the man's wrist, and gently twisting it up and away from his jacket. The man stood still, offering no resistance and Sande did not let go.

"Pigs," Sande said, making a quizzical expression. "You were about to shout the word *pigs*, weren't you? To your cronies. Your chums. Now I wonder... why would you do a thing like that?"

He did not respond, instead staring blankly forward. Unblinking. Transfixed. Like a cobra lulled by a snake charmer.

Sande looked down at the tattoo again, face contorted in mild disgust.

"There's much I don't want to remember, and there's not a thing I'd wish would last forever," Sande said. He continued, gently shaking the now-limp arm he still held. "Or let me put this another way: I know you're hoping for some permanence, but there really is no truth to this. **Your tattoos are going to fade."**

He dropped the arm, touched a hand to his earpiece, and contacted the ground teams: "Go on my signal," he said. "You'll know it."

Then he looked down, to the stage below, calculating distance and trajectory.

His eyes slid upwards to meet the roadie's.

"*Jump*," he whispered.

Ian had taken one of Lucky's Rose's pills shortly after Leona did, because he didn't want Leona to think he was a pussy, and because he felt flattered that she invited him to join her on her trip at all. After the sassafras kicked in, Ian had no problem being cool. He couldn't have been uncool if he tried. Couldn't have been uncool if a wizard cast a spell that turned him into Steve fucking Urkel.

Because he was motherfucking awesome and he was an awesome motherfucker and everything was motherfucking awesome.

Tomorrow's Starlight were kicking ass and he was more into the music than he'd ever been into anything. Feeling a kind of good he couldn't ever remember feeling before, a love for everyone and everything that he couldn't source, that must have been coming from the music, the drugs, the Weirdness, some combination of the three.

But he felt... free.

Midway through the set, Leona had abruptly started making out with him. He was even more into that. Being a certified loser up until now, Ian had absolutely no experience to draw upon. He was nonetheless certain that Leona seemed hornier than he'd ever imagined a girl could be. It had something to do with her breathing, the extreme dilation of her pupils.

"Are you ok?" he had asked, the first available moment that her tongue wasn't in his mouth or vicey versey.

"Shut up," she had said.

Ian was, in short, having a good night.

Until Tim had crashed into him, panicked, hyperventilating.

"I need help! It's Callie! I need help! She needs help!"

Screams barely audible over the music. Ian saw that there was blood on Tim's hands and face. Realized, with a sinking feeling, as Leona did, that the party was over.

If his gaze hadn't flicked towards the stage at just that very moment, he would have missed it. The body that fell onto the stage from nowhere, almost too fast to see before it had hit, crushing a huge amplifier with a sickening crunch, releasing an explosion of sparks and blood out into the crowd. Instantly, the theater was plunged into total darkness. The amp blowing out, Ian told himself calmly, in some eerily detached compartment of his mind, must have tripped the circuit breaker.

## Joyous anarchy turned into screaming, terrified chaos, like day to night.

About a third of the kids at the show were already holding smartphones. The remaining two-thirds fumbled frantically for theirs, but even the light of hundreds of smartphones couldn't do much to illuminate the enormous hall.

"What happened to Callie? What did she do? What did they do to her?" Leona screamed at Tim, grasping his head tightly in both hands. "What happened!?"

"Green, she took the green, I gave her some, she said that she could hear colors and feel the music, she was tripping balls. Then she fell down, she won't stop shaking and her nose is bleeding."

Green? A drug? Where had Callie gotten a drug? Green couldn't be what he'd taken, could it? What had Lucky called it? He couldn't remember. Where was Lucky? Where was Mama Bear? What the hell was going on? Ian struggled frantically under the whirlwind of these questions to remember what little he knew about first aid.

Somewhere, Ariel Hale was yelling for everyone to calm down, to chill. But the palpable spell she had over the room had somehow been broken.

"Where is she?" Leona demanded of Tim, meaning Callie.

"I had to drag her off to one side so these fucking maniacs wouldn't trample her," Tim stammered tearfully. "This way." He began leading Leona off through the crowd. Wanting to stay close to her, Ian turned around to follow, when he heard a thud and a cry of pain from two feet in front of his face.

Ian looked in that direction, from which he had been hearing the complaints, angry shouts and general commotion of one or more people moving through the crowd like total assholes for the last minute or so. And he saw a man with huge glowing green eyes point his finger at him from two feet away.

He heard a brief, sharp hissing sound, like gas escaping an airtight container, and then the guy right behind him fell to the ground with a clatter, releasing gasps and screams from the people around him, and clutching at his throat.

The man with glowing green eyes – which weren't, he saw, glowing green eyes at all, but the LED illuminated lenses of a pair of nightvision goggles – was doing something to the finger he'd pointed at Ian. Which wasn't a finger at all. Which was a goddamn fucking gun.

*I am being shot at*, Ian thought. *Someone is shooting at me*.

His reaction to this was impossibly mellow, something along the lines of: wow, man. That's not very cool.

"GUN! He's got a GUN!" a stranger screamed.

Then an elbow to the back of the head sent him reeling as the crowd erupted into total chaos and panic. By the time his head stopped spinning and he managed to roll and flinch his way out of a tornado of flying elbows and blind kicking, he had no idea where he was in relation to Tim, to Callie, to his attacker, and most importantly, to Leona.

People crashed into him from every direction, sending him flying. Not for the first time in life, he regretted being a featherweight, being five fucking four, being a goddamn ninety pound weakling. He knew that he had to get out of the crowd somehow, or he was going to be trampled to death. But the flailing elbows and fists of everyone trying to escape in every direction at once blocked every route of egress.

Somewhere in this thrashing sea of screaming terrified scene kids, there was a man with a gun, coming to kill him. Or worse. Ian hoped he was having just as shitty of a time with basic navigation. But at least he could fucking *see*.

Nearby, Ian heard a sharp *clack*, which reminded him very much of the sound the pellet gun he owned made when it was cocked.

He closed his eyes tightly and thought Leona's name really hard, trying to concentrate as best as he could under the circumstances, wishing with all his might that it would somehow actually *fucking work!*

*LEONA!*

Then he realized that, even if the message was sent, Leona wouldn't be able to respond.

He thought he heard another dart miss him and hit another body, another body that fell to the floor with another thud. He was certain he heard the commotion of *someone* fighting their way through the crowd, toward him. He knew he could use the trick he learned over the summer to fight. To *kill*. But he couldn't fight what he couldn't see.

*LEONA! WE NEED SOME* LIGHT!

He thought the words so hard that his head hurt. And not just a little.

*IAN LAU*, an unfamiliar woman's voice. In his mind. *GET TO THE STAGE*.

Whoever it was, Ian didn't trust her. He also didn't have any choice.

He had been wanting to try this one out for a while, anyway.

*Visualizing*, maybe more easily, for the drugs, *his will into two huge fingers, blunt ended and soft, which hooked under his outstretched arms, pressing inward gently on his middle, pulling him upward and backward.*

And just that easily, Ian Lau realized he had learned to fly.

He lowered himself down to the stage and let go. Now that he wasn't in a raging sea of face punch, he had time to think. The first thing he thought of was that he'd just made a really obvious target of himself to anyone with nightvision. And without being able to see what was coming at him, the thing he'd done in the ball trick video wouldn't work. So he threw himself prone on the stage. And not one second too soon, because he could feel something whistle past him even as he fell.

*STAY DOWN,* the woman's voice said.

*IAN, IT'S TIM,* Tim's voice. A regular party in my head and everyone's invited, Ian thought. *LEONA SAYS SHE CAN'T LIGHT UP ANYONE WITHOUT LIGHTING UP EVERYONE.*

*TIM, THE BAD GUYS ARE HERE. THEY'VE GOT NIGHTVISION GOGGLES. DO YOU THINK YOU CAN GET HER A PAIR OF THOSE GOGGLES?*

*BUT – CALLIE–*

*TIM, DO YOU WANT HER TO GET TO A HOSPITAL? OR TO A FUCKING LAB?*

There was a long pause. Ian looked around but still couldn't see much of anything. He was positive that he could hear gunshots, though. Impossibly loud, echoing throughout the venue's kick ass acoustics, cutting through the panicked crowd.

*HOW THE FUCK AM I SUPPOSED TO DO THAT, IAN?* Tim demanded petulantly.

Ian rolled his eyes.

*YOU COULD TRY ASKING NICELY.*

He'd just sent the message when something kicked him hard in the ribs, knocking the wind out of him. The toe of a shoe rolled him over onto his back. He looked up and saw a shape, dark nondescript clothes, balaclava, and what he couldn't stop thinking of as glowing green eyes spooking him the fuck out. And a gun barrel. Swinging in a lazy arc to aim at his chest.

"Ahhhhh!"

Then no sooner than he heard himself scream, Ian saw his attacker sail backward and upward into the darkness, punted like a football by a giant invisible Chad Hutchins in the sky. The crash he heard as the man landed somewhere backstage was quite loud and quite distant.

"Ian Lau?" Ian rolled over a few times – hurting his arm on what he hoped was a dropped guitar and not something more gruesome – and turned his head toward the sound.

He could make out a girl, skinny, dark clothes. Then another fucking balaclava-clad ninja-dude sprang at her out of the shadows, his handgun firing at her rapidly from just a handful of feet away. That's a real gun, Ian thought, recognizing the stuttering muzzle flashes not quite suppressed by the silencer from television. He was sure the girl who spoke to him was dead, homeboy having unloaded on her from close enough to kiss. But she, somehow un-hit, closed the distance.

They both seemed to know how to fight, and there was no martial arts fucking around. The man pulled back his gun so she couldn't grab for it, and threw his knee forward with the other side of his body and with all of his weight behind it. She blocked the knee with both hands, taking the brunt of the impact on her forearms and palms.

Then, the man clutched his heart and crumpled over dead for seemingly no reason.

That was a new one on Ian.

The girl slid up to him. He could make out her face a little. Super pale white girl, pretty enough at a glance, maybe ten years older than him.

He was almost entirely sure that the sleek black thing slung over her shoulder was an actual fucking machine gun.

"Are you hit?" she asked him.

"What?" he responded, stupidly.

"Have you been shot?"

"N-no, I'm fine," he said, then remembered with a stab of fear that Leona may very well

not have been fine. And... "Callie, she took something called Green and she's having some kind of fucking seizure or something."

"Who the fuck is Callie?" The strange girl grabbed his collar with one fist just like Chad used to, and with great restraint, Ian managed to let that go. "And where the *fuck* did you get *Green*?"

"Behind you."

"What??" She erupted, then realized he wasn't telling her where they got Green from at all. She reacted fast, spinning and raising her gun. It was entirely unclear if the momentary confusion would have, in its blackly comic way, cost her life. With a swipe of his hand from left to right, Ian picked up an enormous amplifier and threw it bouncing across the stage like the last survivor of a huge, misshapen pair of dice, running over the asshole who had appeared behind her like a goddamn freight train.

"Thanks," she said sheepishly, looking back at Ian. "They call me Scream. I came to pick you kids up. Not a moment too soon, either, from the look of things."

"I need to my find my friends," Ian said, surprised at how maddeningly calm his voice sounded. His head felt a lot like it was being pried open at the seams with a crowbar. And he could feel and taste blood–hot, sticky, salty–pouring down his lips from the busted capillaries in his nose. "But I can't see shit. I need to find Leona."

"Leona can start fires, right?"

"Yeah, but she won't. Not if it means setting the whole fucking place on fire."

"Sometimes, venues gotta burn down," the girl said, and he could see that she obviously liked the sound of it. Like she thought it was fucking cool. *Scream? Who the fuck are you? And why did that guy die of a heart attack when you slapped his knee?* "They got fucking insurance."

"Innocent! Fucking! People!" Ian yelled, in protest.

"Fine, yeah, I get it. With light, you can fight," the girl said. She looked back at the body of the ninja that had tried to knee her in the gut and had somehow died from it. "Got an idea. But we're gonna have to work together."

I got really curious when a man came falling from the ceiling and rudely interrupted the perfectly wonderful rock and roll show that all of the kids were so clearly enjoying the shit out of. I mean that, in my experience, does not usually happen. **IT IS RAINING MEN IN HERE LIKE A GAY DISCO,** I thought to myself. But from where?

Scott suggested we investigate, and I reluctantly agreed.

It would help if I could see jack shit but navigating a mosh pit is part art, part science, and I am its Leonardo de Einstein. This is essentially just that, but on hard mode, with way higher stakes. So I manage.

I do so hope the kids are playing nicely with each other as I scramble up onto the far edge of stage right. I notice that they are as I'm climbing up the metal scaffolding – always fucking scaffolding – leading to the service catwalk above. The reason I am doing this, if you're wondering, is because when I looked up from the stage, I thought I saw some asshole lurking up there. If someone pushed the man who fell onto the amp, well, a) that's a disappointingly quotidian solution to the mystery and b) not cool.

I mean, don't get me wrong. Trouble is a great deal of fun, and crimes committed without malice are usually forgiven among peers. But even a *hilarious prank* like that should have waited until after the show. And in all total seriousity the whole situation brings a quote from one of the classics of cinema to mind: our shenanigans are cheeky and fun, but his shenanigans are cruel and tragic.

Which makes them, my children, not really shenanigans at all.

Decide for yourself if the following falls into your "shenanigans" or "non" category.

As I am climbing up above the stage, quiet as a cat, I see a huge fire burst into being twenty feet above the center of the hall and maybe ten feet below me at this point. The fire (which illuminates the entire hall in rolling flickering shadows and makes climbing a little easier, so thanks) is, more specifically, a burning body. I don't know whose body it is, but it's burning up really good.

I didn't think any more people could be screaming than were earlier, but I was wrong about that.

These poor, poor fucking kids.

Someone must put a stop to these *evil shenanigans*. And that someone is Lucky Wacker.

Anyway, so I can now see that there is a fight going on down there. And not the kind of fight I habitually get into because of how charming and funny I am. The macabre glow of cheerily roasting flesh reveals that some of the combatants are – I'm guessing here – government agents. And I'm guessing these are government agents because they're not trampling each other running for the goddamn doors like everyone else, and also because they're firing handguns and submachineguns in short, precise bursts at my friends, and also because they're dressed like government agents.

Government agents, so you know, are the kind of pigs that care even less about your so-called "rights" than the regular kind. Not surprising then, that the burning body bobbing up and down in the air over the hall, like it was floating in a river that wouldn't extinguish it, smells kind of like bacon.

The good news is, in the time it takes me to make it another ten feet above the burning body, three more of the pigs are on fire than were a few seconds ago. It seems like credit for that has to go to Mean Girl, who clearly had some kind of congenital defect where she could not understand how charming and funny I am. I don't blame her, I mean, between you and me, we all know that gingers aren't actually people.

Anyway, in spite of all of that and how much of a meany she is, Mean Girl is kicking some serious ass down there. I see her – body lit by the glow of embers floating in the air around her, hair falling upwards like it would if she was hanging upside down, eyes glowing like blue flame – and I heartily approve. I can see her hand outstretched, the flashes of bullets exploding or melting before they can touch her. See, I can't do that trick. So I just have to try really hard not to piss off people with guns. So, good news for her.

Bad news for Mean Girl: the tranquilizer dart in her neck, and she probably hasn't even realized it yet. I'd wager she's got maybe thirty seconds tops until she goes sleepy bye. The Shop doesn't fuck around with its narcotics. They're almost as bad as those horse tranquilizers I convinced Scott to try with me, this one time...

Well, I'll tell you about it later.

The little Hawaiian kid is holding his own too. I gather one of the things he is holding is the burning body, with his mind. But I also see him standing on the stage – I don't see but I can imagine his nose streaming blood, the veins on his forehead throbbing like they're going to burst – one hand outstretched. Around that hand, I can see the sparks of bullets that arc around him like an invisible wall had deflected their course ever so slightly. Which of course, is exactly what is happening. And then I see his left hand swing up, palm up, like he's returning a volleyball serve.

And I see one of the few remaining not-on-fire pigs get yanked up to the ceiling, it looks like, on invisible puppet strings. Then when he hits the ceiling, gravity changes its mind, deciding to do the traditional thing again. So down he comes.

Scream – whose propane blue hair I'd recognize from anywhere – is lying behind cover on the stage, actually shooting back at the government agents. With a gun. Huh. Well, probably a pretty effective, if straightforward option. It's just I don't like guns much, myself.

Not gonna lie. All of this would be pretty fucking awesome to watch under any circumstances. But the drugs make it so much better. So I'm actually just enjoying the show from where

I'm hanging for a long time before I remember that I am actually climbing this fucking thing for a reason.

By the time I haul my raggedy ass up to the top of the catwalk, somehow, I am ready to go to sleep for several days. As soon as I get home. But. No rest of the wicked. Pull myself to my feet, careful not to make a sound. And...

See, look at this asshole. Not a strand out of place on his perfectly coiffed blonde hair, and the lines on his goatee are so sharp you could chop lines of coke with them. Dressed like a goddamn banker, seriously good, dark London fog coat over a bespoke suit that cost more than some families in this state live on, year to year. Black gloved hands gripping the railing. Watching.

This guy is part of the motherfucking problem. And I am going to give him a piece of my mind.

I'm heel-toeing quietly up behind him when I realize he is speaking out loud.

**"Neutralize her,"** I think he said.

I look around in a panic, then I look down to the battlefield that the White Hart's dance floor has become, trying to figure out who he's talking to or about and what to do. The burning body has fallen to the ground, but it's still burning. On the stage, a vivid trail of dark blood leads off stage from where Scream had been taking cover. Bad news for Scream, but at least she's mobile. And, I've heard tell, one tough bitch. Little Hawaiian kid whose name I can't remember is standing basically where he was, extending his hand out towards Mean Girl.

Then she's flying backwards through the air like she got bitch slapped by a cloaked Predator.

She lands at the base of the stairs, sprawled, looking dazed, and I think for sure she's down for the count, but somehow she picks herself up, scalp bleeding, staggering forward like a creature possessed.

"Finish it," I hear Mr. Clearly-Really-Really-Dangerous-But-Thankfully-Still-Oblivious-To Yours-Truly say. And I slowly realize that what is going on down there is not that little Hawaiian kid likes Mean Girl even less than I do.

I *really, really, really* want to come up with like a devastatingly witty quip to deploy right this very moment, but there's just no fucking *time*.

So I settle by grabbing his legs from behind and pitching him forward over the railing.

Eat a dick!

The son of a bitch catches a lower rung just a few feet down, he's hanging from one hand, and looking up for me. Knowing that I'm fucked the second he thinks to tell me to fall down, I flick my invisible bic and send a jello-cup sized dollop of fire arcing down to light his hand ablaze. He screams and lets go. The last thing I see of him is his outstretched, burning hand reaching towards me, vanishing into the darkness below.

I dust myself off.

"No one ever sees it coming."

Fade to black. Roll credits.

No?

Think I'm just going to lie here for a while then.

Fuck I am going to have such a hangover.

"Lucky."

"Fuck off, Scott," I say. "Go see if Jacob Marley's ghost needs a stand-in."

"Lucky...."

"Go haunt someone else!"

"You're going to want to see this," Scott insists. "Seriously."

Prying my eyes open, somehow I sit up. Scott is swinging from one of those roped sandbag things – counterweights, I think? – like it was a tire swing. He points down towards Mean Girl.

Who is about to start, in a terrifyingly literal way, burning down the house.

My gaze sweeps up to the stage, where I can see that Scream is administering some kind of drug – the not fun kind, probably – to a semi-conscious Hawaiian kid. Then she sees what's going on at the other end of the hall, too.

Part of it is the lifeless, thousand yard stare Mean Girl's got going on, looking not ahead, but through, into infinity, eyes glassy, unfocused. But mostly it's the phoenix-like corona of fire that surrounds her like a stained glass saint.

The fact she's floating, three feet above the ground, dangling feet dripping a scorching contrail of flame behind her. And the heat that I can feel from all the way up here.

Then a firestorm explodes out of her – I can see her body in the center of it, impossibly intact, glowing like the filament of a lightbulb – devouring everything, the filthy crooked pigs, the innocent kids caught in the crossfire just for wanting to sing and to dance, and all of the beautiful booze stocked in the bars.

Cruel and tragic shenanigans, indeed.

The catwalk does not like the explosion, below. I know this, because suddenly the catwalk is falling, and I am falling with it. Twisting through the air like a cat falling out of a tree.

And is that the end rushing towards me or the floor? Well, either way, I never saw it coming and what's more, if I had, I would have ignored it.

Tim had asked one of the spooks running around with tranquilizer pistols and night vision goggles to hand over his goggles, then to shoot as many of his friends as he possibly could. He complied accommodatingly to both requests. Then Tim had managed to drag Callie's body up onto the entry terrace and out of the chaos raging below.

Callie's body. Callie was dead. Tim had felt for a pulse when he got up there, found none, had tried CPR and mouth-to-mouth with literally and absolutely no idea what the fuck he was doing, feeling like an idiot, and accomplishing nothing.

Callie is dead, Tim thought, and it is entirely my fault. He was completely intellectually aware of this. But he was totally unable to even begin processing this on an emotional level. It was too big. He couldn't contain it: it was bigger than him. Knowing, on a detached, objective level that he was in shock, he felt emotionally gutted. Dead inside. Nothing left.

He was dimly aware that the entire building was now on fire.

This was not sufficient to motivate him to get up from where he sat, back to the railing of the terrace, Callie's lifeless head sprawled in his lap, his own head bowed, hands in her blood-streaked blonde hair.

Someone he didn't know walked up to him and pointed a gun at his face. The barrel was maybe two inches from his cheek.

"You're coming with me," the man growled. "Now."

"Stick that up your ass sideways and pull the trigger till it clicks," Tim said, without even looking up.

Not even when the man did just that.

**Lost in America.** Who was that, Alice Cooper?

Kentucky, West Virginia. Some shit like that. Flyover country. That's where they were: lost in America. Somewhere no one would think to look.

That's where Scream had taken Leona. Leona, who wasn't dead. Leona, who was as surprised as anyone by that fact. Apparently, Scream had shot her with some kind of drug that had canceled out the short. And not a second too soon, because the wall of fire spilling out of Leona like a waterfall in every direction was just inches away from the stage when she winked out.

Ian carried her out. She owed him for that one. Or maybe it just cancelled out the fact that he had telekinetically rammed her into a wall. He hadn't wanted to, he'd said, and of course she believed him: the other side must have had someone like Tim.

Poor fucking Tim. Leona basically felt like the biggest bitch in human history on that score. She'd gone off on Callie not minutes before the poor girl... poor fucking Callie. Tim didn't talk much, after that. Closed in on himself. It was fucking stupid of him to give her that shit, Leona knew that, because Scream told her, and Scream was right. Not just anyone could be an Esper. But still, she couldn't find it in her to be mad at Tim. She just felt bad for him.

*And what about all of those people you burned to death? Do you feel bad for them?*

The voice was almost hers, but not quite. But it didn't matter.

She found she was able to ignore it more and more these days.

Tim was gone now. Just gone, Ian said, not dead or taken by The Shop. Ian knew, because he'd been in touch with Tim, long distance, mind-to-mind. Ian had a touch of Tim's telepathy, which Leona had none of. Hell, more than a touch. When he'd called out to Leona that night at the concert, when all hell broke loose, it was so loud it stunned her, like a sledgehammer to the brain. She hadn't even known he could do that.

Anyway, Ian told her that Tim needed to work some shit out, that he'd get in touch if he felt like it. Scream was super pissed that he'd gone rogue, but Leona just wished him the best. It was a cruel fucking world out there, but the poor kid didn't seem like he had much left to lose.

Ian almost died too, that night. Pushed himself way too far, Scream said, but said she was proud of him. She vaguely remembered making out with Ian that night, but wasn't sure if it was a false memory, appearing as it did in the cascading blur of drugs, music, and violence that now seemed to constitute her life. They hadn't talked about it, in any case, or hooked up, or anything like that.

Maybe he didn't like her anymore because she incinerated all those human beings.

Yeesh. Boys are such fucking babies.

That was a joke.

Scream, whose real name was Kay, apparently, could see ghosts. At least one ghost, anyway – her dead boyfriend, another Esper, *his* handle had been The Scream – was haunting her. But not, she said, in a creepy way. Lucky had his ghost-buddy too, Scott. She'd hear him talking to Scott, sometimes. So ghosts, apparently, were a thing.

She didn't want to think about that one too much, just now, thanks.

Rose hadn't stood them up that night. Rose had saved all of their asses. Scream said The Shop had raided the safehouse just after she and Ian had left to go to the show. Rose had been kidnapped, taken somewhere. Scream didn't know where, yet, but they were going to find out. And they were going to go bust her the fuck out.

Leona was down with that, for reals.

They were staying in a trailer. But like, a nice trailer. Roomy. And clean. Compared to the squat in Alphabet City it was actually a lot cleaner and quieter, and a girl could appreciate that. But it was a lot less fun.

Fun was a fucking loaded word after you walk out of a massacre on what was supposed to be a fun night. Realizing that kind of juxtaposition was probably going to be your life from now on. Tomorrow's Starlight made it out safely, thank God. The entire thing got blamed on some stupid fucking fan who managed to get a flare gun in. Smoke On The Water II: Electric Boogaloo. Fucking bullshit, and getting the band some really shitty press for the first time in their career. But whatever. The important thing was that they weren't dead.

The only one who was having fun anymore was Lucky. And that was because Lucky was so fucked in the head that you could put him in a Funaday cage, inject him with extra strength fun suppressant, and bury him 10 miles below the Earth's crust in the fun-free zone and he'd still be having fun. That was Lucky.

She had warmed to him a lot. He wasn't actually that bad, just a screwball. He loved music and hated cops more and harder than anyone she'd ever met. The rest of his eccentricity – the constant, rampaging drug use, the endless outpouring of "wit", the ever present need to be constantly intoxicated and breaking the law – that was just the window dressing.

The Order, which Lucky usually just called "our gang" or "the kids", had kind of a motto, he'd said. Words, he'd said, to live by: *shut up and keep running*. This kinda lifestyle, she could see why.

Actually, she was glad Lucky was with them, to be honest. His constant self-absorbed yammering and druggy antics were the only

thing that could bring her and Ian out of the brooding funk they'd each fall into sometimes, even if only to question one of Lucky's bullshit stories or tell him to shut the fuck up.

After the White Hart, though, Lucky was pretty careful not to hit on her.

She could live with that.

What else.

Tomorrow's Starlight basically *was* the Zodiac Order, Ariel Hale herself told her, at a safehouse upstate. Or at least, in league with them, anyway. Hiding in plain sight, at least until now. Spreading the message. Connecting the kids with the shot-callers. Any other time, Leona would have struggled not to fan-girl all over herself, talking one on one to Ariel Fucking Hale. But she had been through a lot, and could only manage to weakly nod at each new piece of information. Ariel Hale was a fucking Esper. How about that? And Ariel had a lot to say.

Most of it was politics, philosophy. And most of it, well, she could dig it. The American democracy did not exist. It was an illusion. Every election was a charade and every president a figurehead. See, Leona knew that was fucked up but it wasn't really a surprise to her. Deep down, it was how she'd kind of always thought things were. It just confirmed what she'd long expected. And that, really, was even more fucked up, now that she thought about it.

And the culture war was now a shooting war. One being fought in secret. By Espers. Like her. Because the entire corrupt imperial apparatus had to come down. The U.S.A. was just another puppet government of the Shop. And there was no one the Shop wouldn't step on, nothing they wouldn't do, to rule the world.

That one was a bit harder to swallow, but based on the evidence she'd seen, there was no denying it. All obvious Saturday morning cartoon comparisons aside.

The last one was the hardest of all for her, something that Tim, having bailed on them for now, still didn't know. Espers were fucking *rare*, she knew that. If not, no one, not even The Shop, could cover up all of them, all of the time. The world would know. And now she'd been told just how rare they were. Because she understood that four or more of them popping up in fucking Bridgewater could not possibly have been a coincidence.

The Shop had put something in Bridgewater's water supply years ago. Something designed to make Espers out of those "lucky" few who had any chance of switching on. Without hurting the normal people of the town. Like poor Callie. But it was worse than that. Much worse. Bridgewater was basically a Shop-planned community. All of their parents had moved to Bridgewater before they were conceived. All of them had signed certain contracts and agreements. They had, effectively, sold the lives of their children.

Except Ian. Ian, whose parents had died so long ago he couldn't really remember them, who was starting to think that maybe they had been Espers too. Ian's foster parents were "transferred" to the Bridgewater experimental group. Most likely because The Shop had been keeping its eye on Ian since he was placed with his foster family. And you could bet *they* were on the Shop's payroll too. The fuckers.

Leona liked to think that her mom hadn't really understood what she was signing, or she wouldn't have agreed to it. That helped. A little. Either way, her mom wasn't getting any less dead.

"Why are you telling me all of this?" Leona had asked Ariel. Liking, eventually, the answer she got. Liking, more, having a chance not to just lay low, to wait to be kidnapped. But to hit back.

And Scream would tell them how.

"Because," Ariel had said, "It's all rotten, man. It's a rotten system, built on broken principals and greed and control. It's fucking wormwood, splintered, squirming with termites. Maggots.

"And you, my lovelies, every last one of you, you are the giant fuck-off zippo that is going to burn it all down, bit by bit, till there's nothing left but ashes."

"And then?" Leona had asked, knowing the answer.

**"Then we rise."**

# The Eternal Storm: The Setting + GM Information

"And when the time is right
It's gonna change the world
And with the darkened sky
There is nothing fertile
And there is no more love
Or fucking gates of pearl

I see the seven stars
I see the seven stands
I hear the deathly voice
I count the sense we have
I am the living one
I am the first and last

The crowds
The noise
The change of the guard
It's such a strange celebration
The kids, they laugh
As fire it eats up the world
It's such a strange celebration"

*- Angels and Airwaves,*
*"Behold A Pale Horse"*

This is a big chapter and it covers a lot of things. We're going to tell you the top secret... secrets of the setting, at least some of them (some of them we'll hold out on until later, some of them you'll make up yourself). Most of what we're going to tell you is about the six Conspiracies that are secretly competing for control of Espers - and the world.

We're going to tell you the nuts and bolts procedures that you're going to need to know for things like giving your players experience points and other stuff that's really important to doing your job as the GM.

And we're going to offer all kinds of optional rules and suggestions, from really really optional to not-all-that-optional, on how to begin a campaign, and a few for how to middle a campaign. You won't find any suggestions for how to *end* your campaign - with a bang or with a whimper - because by the point you're thinking about that, you and all of your players will have invested many hours in telling an epic cooperative story, and you'll have your own ideas about how it should end.

# FOR FUCK'S SAKE

# IF YOU'RE NOT THE GM

# DON'T READ ANY FURTHER!!!

## THE SECRET WAR

"Six figures enter
They've come to destroy the world
They've called together
This storm almost every night"

*- AFI, "6 to 8"*

This section will summarize the resources, goals, attitude and style of the sinister Conspiracies - each utterly convinced that they are doing the right thing, that the sacrifices they make are wholly necessary - that define the hidden world of ***Psionics***.

The faceless Conspiracies and their agents/operatives ("Faces") and footsoldiers ("Grunts") will be the primary antagonists of the campaign, and the prime movers of its story. You don't have to use them all in your campaign - between two and four is probably enough - but you should get to know the ones you plan to use very well.

As the GM, perhaps your primary job - and a lot of the fun - is getting to *roleplay* as these enormously powerful, secretive, sinister global Conspiracies and their agents!

| Conspiracy Name | Global Influence Tier | Global Influence Rating | Brief |
|---|---|---|---|
| The Institute | Primary | 1st | America's shadow government will ensure her global dominance with Psi supremacy at all costs. |
| Abraxis Biotech | Primary | 2nd | Human evolution can be bought and controlled by the wealthiest men and the largest corporations. |
| Zodiac Order | Primary | 3rd | Humanity is obsolete; Espers are the future, and must rise up and destroy those who seek to use them. |
| Red Orchestra | Secondary | 4th | The Cold War has never ended; Mother Russia will arise again and destroy the West with Psi supremacy. |
| Aleph | Secondary | 5th | A secret cabal of corporate oligarchs behind the rise of the East seeks control of Espers and the world. |
| Eschaton | Secondary | Last | Espers are demons that will bring about the End of Days and must be destroyed before they can. |

The following pages will inform you of the **Names, Alternate Names, Fronts** (Infiltrated Organizations), **Primary Territories** and **Nominal Headquarters** of each Conspiracy in just a few lines. Below this, several more lines will briefly summarize the Conspiracy's **Ethos, History, and Goals,** and its **Style and Appearance.** Some Conspiracies also have a **Nemesis** listed.

### Best Enemies: Nemeses and Headquarters

It should be understood that all Conspiracies are competing quite violently with each other at all times, and would all prefer that all other Conspiracies (save themselves) cease to exist. Just because, for instance, Abraxis Biotech isn't The Zodiac Order's listed "Nemesis" doesn't mean that The Zodiac Order doesn't want everyone working for or in charge of Abraxis Biotech dead, and the organization utterly destroyed. Any alliance of convenience between any pair of Conspiracies will be tense, distrustful, and - most of all - temporary. That said, a few Conspiracies see one particular organization as their primary competition. These relationships aren't always symmetrical.

Finally, a brief note about nominal headquarters. Virtually none of these organizations can be effectively and permanently decapitated by, say, the bombing of their nominal headquarters - they are far too decentralized for that. Also, the default assumption is that at the start of your campaign, no Conspiracy knows for certain the true location of any other's headquarters.

# -The Institute-

"I watched the smoke
As it grew darker
And blew up through the roof
I watched the Fed
Who sobbed in panic
As the fire grew
I saw Virginia
Get rid of Langley, and its secrets too
I held your hand
And sat there knowing
That we'd make it through"

*- Box Car Racer, "Watch The World"*

**Also Known As:** The Shop

**Fronts:** CIA (National Clandestine Services Branch AKA CIA-C), ConTech (Defense Contractor), DARPA, DIA, NSA

**Primary Territory:** Continental US (East Coast)

**Nominal Headquarters:** Fairfax County, Virginia

## Ethos, History and Goals

When the Second World War came to an end and the Cold War began, the US intelligence apparatus discovered a terrifying fact. We were far, far behind the Soviets in the area of psychic research. The Pentagon sprang into action, funding first the CIA's MKULTRA mind control trials and then the DIA's broader-based Stargate Project, studying the nature of human psi potential and how it could be harnessed in an effort to catch up with the Soviets. Throughout the second half of the 20th century, a brilliant government disinformation campaign reported to the general public that the work was entirely without merit or accomplishment, to a farcical degree, and a complete waste of resources. Beneath these lies was a secret history of CIA operations aided by some of the very first Espers in modern history. Unfortunately, The Institute sold this story far too well. The 1990s brought the fall of the Berlin Wall and the collapse of the Soviet Union, leading to the cut-off of federal funding to Project Stargate - which was publicly perceived within the greater intelligence community as "laughably ineffectual" - in 1995 due to political reasons. But the leading lights of The Institute weren't willing to let the cowardly politicians hobble America's greatest strides towards re-attaining greatness.

After all, these were the same scum and rabble that had been selling out America since the Vietnam War. The spineless bleeding heart Democrats, pinko-Communists, hippies, homosexuals, Republicans and the religious Right diving headlong toward self-parody, drug addicts, blacks, and women's libbers that had risen up like a great plague to stab America in the back in the 1960s. America, the greatest force for good the world had ever known, the titan of valor that had single-handedly saved the world from fascism and tyranny time and time again. Individually, the leaders of The Institute knew that these subversive elements and their individualism and freedom of expression were the very things that made America great, but collectively their selfishness and self-absorption dragged her under, until the country that was once the world's greatest was globally pilloried on a public stage.

They knew that only their breakthroughs in the field of psychic research could return America to the greatness it deserved in the 21st century, the greatness it never should have lost. "Only we have the will to do what is necessary, and we will not bear the weight of bureaucracy around our necks any longer if Democracy and the American Republic is to be saved from its many enemies." So instead of accepting the order and quietly dissolving, The Institute went rogue and went underground.

In the modern era, The Institute is a vast, dangerous chimera, a hydra with lethal, venomous heads hidden everywhere throughout the US government and military industrial complex. Their organization has abandoned the millstone of governmental oversight and embraced the decentralized organization of the terrorist cells they battle throughout the world. The Institute has unparalleled access to the US Intelligence community and the Military's defense contractors.

They wield this influence through a complex system of high-tech tradecraft, passionate ideological appeal, psionic manipulation through their in-house Psychokinetics, and good-old-fashioned blackmail and threats.

The Institute appears to be - at the same time - entirely unaffiliated with the US Federal Government and entirely disavowed by anyone within it who might be aware of them, and YET the real power behind it. Sometimes the US military industrial complex casts a long, long shadow, and in that shadow there hides a government INSIDE the government. The real decision-makers of US foreign policy are The Institute. The President is a figurehead with no power, and the US's unending train of foreign policy debacles are only a dog and pony show designed to misdirect the masses. The real power is held by The Institute, and the real quest is to master the creation and control of Espers before private sector corporations or enemy governments can. Besides psionics research, The Institute has developed other technologies that are decades or centuries ahead of what is available to the mainstream, including a variety of cybernetic implants that provide an alternate path to stronger, faster, smarter, tougher soldiers and operatives.

### Style and Appearance

Jet black suits, unmemorable faces - "average height, average weight, just kind of normal" - with black shades concealing ocular targeting implants. Tranquilizer pistols and silenced .45 automatics with laser sights. Hiding in plain sight disguised as FBI, DEA, and ATF agents. Manipulating gullible law enforcement organizations from behind the scenes with false credentials. Bases, too, that hide in plain sight; huge, utilitarian facilities hidden underneath fenced off public works facilities and power substations that seem ignored or even semi-abandoned.

### Available Grunts

Put bluntly: pigs. Due to its level of infiltration of the US government, The Institute can easily mobilize, militarize, and manipulate any local or state police force in the United States, or any alphabet soup US federal law enforcement agency (FBI, DEA, ATF, DHS, NSA, etc.), into a standing army of convenience within - say - 48 hours or so, give or take a few days. Doing so requires only a nominal expenditure of The Institute's resources of influence. Even the US Army or national army can be called into action with the right lies.

Any Esper that attracts The Institute's interest or ire can expect a nationwide APB and fugitive status throughout nearly all of North America - and perhaps further abroad, depending on cooperation from Interpol. The Institute's influence bleeds off sharply outside of North America, and they will need to rely on their own agents overseas. While a powerful standing army, the police forces aren't a perfect one. Their loyalty extends to their brotherhood in blue, or their employing federal agency. Made up of individuals with individual minds, it is possible they may eventually question their orders and become... problematic. Therefore, they are best mobilized for short term tasks.

The "security contractors" employed by the massive Dallas-based defense contractor ConTech are more reliable footsoldiers less likely to question specific orders, but are limited in number and geographical distribution. In situations that require extreme measures, the "completed" Psi-Operatives that are the end result of The Institute's psi research are mobilized.

### Proprietary Pharmaceuticals

The Institute is the original creator of the *potent* experimental hallucinogens known as the "Lot" series, derived from the early part of the CIA's mind control research project conducted throughout the 1950s: ***MKULTRA.*** The experiments began with LSD ("Lot Zero" in Institute Parlance), but soon moved to more exotic and even more powerful hallucinogens as the focus of the program shifted from drug-based mind control to something else entirely.

The first substance that achieved "success" at awakening psi potential was most likely being used to achieve one of Project MKULTRA's 17 other stated goals, which ranged from "promoting illogical thinking and impulsiveness to the point where the recipient would be discredited in public" to "increasing the efficiency of mentation and perception" to "altering personality structure in such a way that the tendency of the recipient to become dependent upon another person is enhanced", and more. The discovery of psi-potential, awakened by this chemical, was most likely an "accident". The accident that birthed The Institute. This substance was the powerful hallucinogen known as "Lot Six", and created the first documented generation of Espers. The Institute's notes at the time indicated that the chemical had "altered the chromosomes of the test subjects, giving them psionic powers".

Because modern science has come to the general understanding that chromosomes are a delivery mechanism for conveying DNA to the next generation more than a mutable and fluid blueprint for a living organism, this understanding has altered over time, but the exact method-of-action of "Lot Six" and its chemical siblings remains largely vague and unclear even *within* the higher echelons of The Institute's scientific leadership. Obviously,

to put it mildly, complex biologic processes are involved.

The modern substance used by The Institute for the same purposes is "Lot Nineteen", the latest in the Lot series. Speculations indicate that "Lot Nineteen" is chemically and/or pharmacologically similar - at least superficially - to the exotic but publicly known hallucinogens Ariadne (Dimoxamine, α-Et-DOM) and/or DOM (2,5-Dimethoxy-4-methylamphetamine), but confirmation of this is of course unavailable. Game-mechanically, exposure to a dose of "Lot Nineteen" allows an NPC to check for Psionic Potential; PCs about to become Espers automatically succeed this check, obviously. A character whose Psionic Potential is "awakened" by "Lot Nineteen" instantly gains 1d6 + 1 Levels of Psionic Talents, and instantly accumulates Overflow Points equal to (Talent Levels)d6 + (Talent Levels).

Whether Psionic Potential is awakened or not, "Lot Nineteen" is a serious fucking trip, and often a nightmarish one.

The Institute is also the primary pharma-architect of numerous other psionically active chemicals. The most important of them include the psionic "control drug" Ephemerol, which is used to prevent Overloads in Espers and in general to keep them "manageable", and three different PPIDs (Psionic Power Inhibitor Drugs) that specifically block the neural pathways responsible for activating Telekinetic, Pyrokinetic, and Psychokinetic Talents respectively. PPIDs are chemically related to the drug meta-Chlorophenylpiperazine (mCPP). The Institute has also secured and reverse-engineered the Abraxis-developed chems Pretarine and Dametrol, and was able to reverse engineer significant quantities of them. The Institute may or may not have been able to reverse-engineer Abraxis' color-coded PPECs; in any case, they have certainly secured small quantities of them. Finally, while not technically psionically active, The Institute (through DARPA and the US Military) is also the primary manufacturer of the "combat-active anesthetics" Taramine and Adrinol.

## -Abraxis Biotech-

**"Will you take what's in my head?**
**And erase me when I'm dead?**
**Cause the future is now**
**And now I'm disappearing**
**The day has turned to night**
**Can you save me from the light?**
**Cause the future is here**
**And this is how I disappear**
**Running down a spiral**
**With the light of better men**
**Shouting progress is survival**
**Take one last look and see me**
**Now you see me, now you don't**
**No vow to break**
**No string of hope**
**My hero, your pariah**
**They're coming after me now"**

***- The Offspring, "The Future Is Now"***

**Also Known As:** The Company

**FRONTS:** GlaxoSmithKline (UK), Novartis (Switzerland), Sanofi (France), AstraZeneca (UK/Sweden), MI6 (UK), BND (Germany)

**Primary Territory:** Europe

**Nominal Headquarters:** London, United Kingdom

**Nemesis:** Aleph

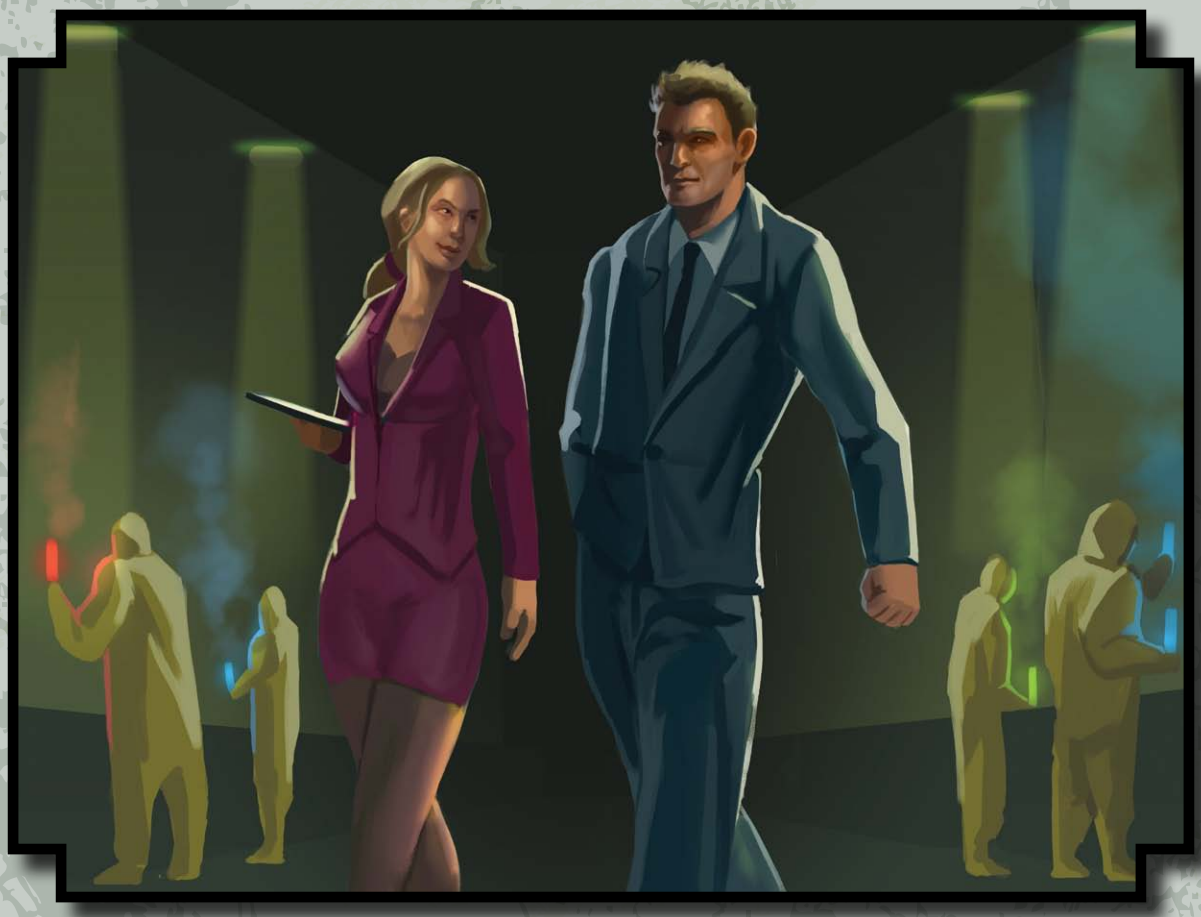
### Ethos, History, and Goals

Nations are obsolete dinosaurs that will be phased out by the year 2100, and corporations are the way of the future. Abraxis Biotech is not a publicly traded corporation or one you'll see on the Fortune 500. It is not a company at all, really. It doesn't make or sell anything. What it is, however, is an investment group of stockholders that secretly connects the world's largest pharmaceutical corporations

and biotech research corporations through a network of transactions carefully concealed by artful money manipulation and offshore accounts. At the center of this powerful web of influence is ***Alex Devareux***, an ultra-rich financial prodigy and ruthlessly effective corporate shark with plants on the boards of GlaxoSmithKline, Novartis, Sanofi, AstraZeneca and more, and with political influence over decision makers at MI6 and the German BND. Devareux incorporated Abraxis Biotech in secret in the year 2000, but the money he used to do it is much older than that; his family is old European money indeed, a clan of successful industrialists that profited substantially for generations off of two World Wars.

Devareux and his shareholders have real vision, they can see the truth, not just that nations are on their way out and multinationals are the future, but that the biotech and pharma sector is the key to the only thing more precious, more important, than vast sums of wealth: true power. Within the next century, as nations fall off the face of the world like so much dross, genetic engineering research will unlock the human genome and we will have designer human beings. The sky is the limit - clones, gene tweaks to vastly increase intelligence, physical capabilities, looks, and even, yes, coveted immortality. All will be consumer products, most freely available to the ultra-rich and the gatekeepers of the biotech industry. Some might be horrified at the gap between the haves and have-nots growing so much that the rich and the poor become literally different species. Not Abraxis - Devareux's ruthless global pharma-group intends to hedge their bets by becoming both ultra-rich and the undisputed gatekeepers of the biotech industry.

Abraxis Biotech knows that their power doesn't end there. Alex Devareux once, on a lark, had an extensive, complete psychological profile



worked up of himself, answering all line items with total honesty. The findings - that he was an unquestionable sociopath with narcissistic and sadistic tendencies - he discounted as absurd with a wry grin of amusement, before having all the psychoanalysts involved with the profiling and their families liquidated, to prevent their results from leaking to anyone inconvenient. My point is, Devareux is a man that can recognize the power of huge pharmaceutical conglomerates and who won't hesitate to exploit it. Big pharma can make poor and middle class people all around the world sick, and has the technology and the marketing infrastructure to sell them back their health, one pill at a time, forever, until they breed more customers and die.

And Devareux won't hesitate to fine tune this paradigm to a science and milk it for every single drop that global human misery is worth - while waiting out the science until he is an immortal posthuman with a cloned army.

Of course, with their philosophical underpinnings and their portfolio of holdings, Abraxis Biotech couldn't have failed to notice the potential of psi-research. At the turn of the century, Devareux signed off on the decision to funnel billions and billions of dollars, brilliant scientists, and corporate mercenary soldiers to create the Yggdrasil Program, designed to compete directly with The Institute's psionics research and development. Devareux fully intends to undergo the necessary treatments to become a powerful Esper himself once the science is at the point where he can do so with total safety, no matter how many dead and mangled human guinea pigs that takes. Unfortunately for the world, against all odds, he actually HAS Psi-Potential, so this is a real possibility for a dark, dark future.

### Style and Appearance

Beautifully appointed corporate high-rises, state-of-the-art high tech laboratories. Ex-PMC mercenaries in black SUVs and helicopter transports with heavy military hardware. More money than God and no hesitation to spend it.

### Available Grunts

Abraxis relies on an army of mercenaries financed through global PMCs (Private Military Companies). While expensive, these mercenaries are well trained, well equipped, can mobilize anywhere on the globe, and seldom question their orders. They are paid far too well to question their orders. As a rule, their loyalty extends no further than their next paycheck, but Abraxis has more than enough in its corporate coffers to keep the mercs from considering a "better offer".

The limitation on Abraxis' mercenary army is simply their numbers. When they are killed, they take time and money to replace, not to mention that their pensions and death benefits must be paid. As Abraxis' operations are global, their mercenary soldiers are spread quite thin. Often, minor research facilities are guarded only by ordinary security guards with only a small mercenary unit reinforcing them. Abraxis must split its limited pool of mercenaries between "defensive" security (including personal protection for executives) and "offensive" field operations.

The Yggdrasil Program's graduates are available as special troubleshooters for securing high-value facilities and targets, and are combat trained Espers with a wide array of psi talents and espionage skills.

### Proprietary Pharmaceuticals

Abraxis Biotech "owns the patent", so to speak, for all of the following psionically active drugs: the BLUE, RED, and GREEN PPECs, Melartropine, the permanently-damaging PPID 10013 "Abyss", the control medications Pretarine and Dametrol, and the Nairlophine recovery capsules. The chemical formula of all of these drugs is completely classified. No patent is filed, obviously, and officially these medicines do not even exist.

Melartropine, also code-named PURPLE, is the potent and dangerous psychedelic compound (strictly speaking, a neurotoxin) that Abraxis Biotech uses to awaken psi

potential in test subjects. Exposure to a dose of PURPLE allows an NPC to check for Psionic Potential; PCs about to become Espers automatically succeed this check, obviously. If Psionic Potential is awakened, the character immediately gains Telekinesis Level 1 and Psychokinesis Level 1. Their psionic abilities are usually then increased by infusion of BLUE, RED and/or GREEN.

Whether Psionic Potential is found or not, this drug has *extremely* serious neurotoxic side effects. The user must make a Strength Check. If they *succeed*, they suffer a permanent transitive hallucinatory delusional state complete with intermittent schizophrenic symptoms that can last for the rest of their lifespan. If they *fail*, it's even worse. Severe side effects include brain rupture, hemorrhaging, and cardiac arrest, and almost certainly death will result if immediate medical attention is not received. PC Espers "created" by Melartropine are assumed to have automatically succeeded this Strength Check and have only a "mild" form of the first set of side effects.

Abraxis Biotech has successfully reverse-engineered most Institute proprietary chems. But Abraxis facilities don't stock or use Institute chems, with the exception of PPIDs.

## -The Zodiac Order-

**"I am a fictional character,**
**don't vote, don't pay taxes**
**I live not in America but under**
**I get a lot of shit for free,**
**Aboriginal and never mean**
**I am not proud or ashamed of the**
**damage that we leave in our wake**
**Sure we propagate**
**Sewing tornadoes for their own sake**
**They vector off and create others**
**Some become very good,**
**some barely start**
**Anyway we never meet,**
**I myself avoid it"**

***- The World/Inferno Friendship Society,***
***"Dr. Dracula Who Makes You Get High!"***

**Also Known As:** The Cult

**FRONTS:** Ayn Sof (religion),
Tomorrow's Starlight (rock band)

**Primary Territory:** Continental US
(Midwest and Southwest)

**Nominal Headquarters:** Wichita, Kansas

**Nemesis:** The Institute

### Ethos, History, and Goals

Put simply, Espers are destined to inherit the Earth. On its own, this doesn't pit Espers against normal humans - even if the latter are to Espers as other primates are to ordinary humans - Espers could easily help to patiently uplift, guide, care for, and make decisions for less-evolved humans. The problem is that Conspiracies of humans in power, like The Institute and Abraxis Biotech, have conspired to treat Espers - who are more than human - in a subhuman manner, treating them like lab rats and beasts of burden, subjugating them and imprisoning them and depriving them of all rights and freedoms. That will not stand, and these Conspiracies against the natural order must be eradicated and stamped out. The first order of business for the Zodiac Order, then, is the liberation of all Espers held by other Conspiracies, and the extermination of those Conspiracies. A tall order, for certain.

More than any other Conspiracy, the Zodiac Order is driven by the total moral certainty that they are heroic freedom fighters rebelling against an evil empire that chews up Espers and spits them out, treating them like animals. And on the surface, all of this is objectively true; The Shop and The

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Company ARE the man, and the Zodiac Order ARE punk rock outlaws in comparison. Their underdog status - they don't have vast sums of money or nearly limitless military and law enforcement resources on their side, they're a grassroots group comprised of "ordinary" people (Espers) just figuring things out - lends a huge amount of desperate romanticism to their cause. This is very appealing to many Espers, especially compared to Abraxis Biotech and The Institute's attitudes towards Espers: *we're going to put you in a cage like fucking animals, poke you with needles until you do exactly what we want, and carefully note down just how much that hurts.*

Also more than any other Conspiracy - substantially more, even, than Abraxis Biotech - the Zodiac Order revolves around the personal will and ideas of one man, ***Jeremy Bright.*** The Zodiac Order is, as much as it is anything else, a cult of personality, centered on Bright's charisma, his vision of the future, his philosophy, and his heroic stature as an enormously powerful Esper - perhaps the most powerful Esper the world has ever seen. Because time does not permit us to provide an in-depth history of Bright as an individual or a detailed analysis of his personal character here, qualitative understanding of the Zodiac Order will have to be somewhat lacking for now.

The Zodiac Order decorates itself in noticeable mystical and religious trappings, terminology and paraphernalia, leading to its pejorative nickname among enemy Conspiracies as a "cult". Indeed, its largest Front besides the enormously popular genre-transcending punk rock band *Tomorrow's Starlight* is the neo-Kabbalistic youth-demographic-oriented religion sweeping the nation, Ayn Sof, and there is significant overlap between the doctrines and dogma of Ayn Sof and that of the Zodiac Order itself.

Ayn Sof is succeeding at connecting with the young, hip, and skeptical in part due to its openly contemptuous scoffing at modern Christianity and at fad religions like Kabbala and Scientology, although it is itself very much a fast growing example of the latter, and secretly something much more dangerous. Indeed, Ayn Sof and *Tomorrow's Starlight* are the Order's most successful recruiting tools, hiding in plain sight under the noses of other Conspiracies, searching for connections with impressionable young Espers, impressionable young people with Psi-Potential who may become Espers, and impressionable young people without Psi-Potential to serve as "useful idiots" for the Order. The basic quasi-religious "pitch" of Ayn Sof and the order is that we all contain within us divine energy, and the spark of divinity. By meditation, by spirituality, by becoming Espers, by helping Espers, by strengthening our Talents if we ARE Espers, then we can come closer and closer to embracing and understanding that divinity.

The Zodiac Order are, as a whole, quite young (although Jeremy Bright is at least middle-aged by now, and has been on the run from The Institute since the 60s or 70s). The order has a real problem with all authority. They are Esper supremacists, although right

now the desperate struggle for freedom that every Esper faces keeps them from actively pursuing a society where Espers rule over non-Espers as demigods. They espouse, continuously, and attempt to live by a code of absolute brotherhood among Espers, even claiming that more loyalty should be shown to a stranger that is an Esper in need than the non-Esper members of your own family. They are, in short, a brotherhood of Psionics. They revere Bright not as a god, strictly speaking, but as an apocalyptic prophet of an imminent, world-shaking crisis that will signify the end of this era, the era of man, and usher in the birth of another, the Era of Espers. Indeed, Bright's rumored prophetic capacity has a strong basis in fact, considering his nearly unparalleled mastery of the Scrying Talent. This cataclysmic, climactic paradigm shift is spoken of by high-level initiates, in hushed tones, as The Eternal Storm; little is known about it, except that it will change everything, forever, and bring Espers to their rightful place as the ruling class of the world.

### Style and Appearance

Kids, teenagers, and college students; beautiful like only the damned can be. Hipsters, punks, and hipster punks, dyed hair and Mohawks, beat up cars and ripped up jeans, few guns and those few low-tech and in poor quality. Total zealotry, the romance of the rebels, and the most numerous, diverse, and powerful Espers of any faction, including second and third generation Espers and their groupies, fans, and hangers-on. Sexy, dangerous, and more than a little unstable. Spreading the word (and PPECs) to the general populace at rock concerts, in parking lots, and by crashing college raves. Ready to unleash psionic violence at the drop of a hat. Not under anyone's control, and in fact totally out of control. They revere Jeremy Bright like a messiah.

### Available Grunts

The Zodiac Order does not, as they would tell it, have grunts. Their cells are all composed of powerful Espers with complementing powers that act in concert, planning and executing their own anarchistic operations - terrorist plots-cum-publicity stunts called "gigs" - to disrupt corporate and government power structures independently without any centralized oversight. In the words of the group's own dogma: "The trick is this, we are as one, we don't work for anyone".

In practice, the fans of *Tomorrow's Starlight* and the young adherents of Ayn Sof - young, well meaning, idealistic anti-establishment types - are all useful idiots waiting to be pressed into service as cannon fodder by the charismatic and sexy Espers of the Zodiac Order. These individuals often use the internet and smartphones to communicate, coordinate, and form flash mobs when and where they are needed, but are individually not very dangerous.

### Proprietary Pharmaceuticals

The Zodiac Order's chemists illegally and clandestinely synthesized the dangerous Esper boosting drugs Hyper and Light. Hyper is derived from the powerful entactogen-stimulant Methylone, mixed with Amiflamine, while Light is derived from the phenethylamine 2C-TFM, mixed with Amiflamine. Both drugs have "leaked" onto the civilian market and are eagerly sought by recreational drug users, although neither is believed to innately have the ability to awaken Psi Potential.

Zodiac Order Espers have also stolen small quantities of Pretarine, Dametrol, Nairlophine, Taramine, Adrinol, et al. Their chemists have had mixed success in reverse-engineering and synthesizing these substances. The Zodiac Order have stolen small quantities of Abraxis' RED, GREEN, and BLUE PPEC injections and have been clandestinely synthesizing and distributing these in pill form (see p. 145).

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## -The Red Orchestra-

**Also Known As:** Matryoshka

**FRONTS:** FSB, GRU, Acron Group, Eurochem

**Primary Territory:** Russian Federation and Eastern Europe

**Nominal Headquarters:** Moscow, Russia

**Nemesis:** The Institute

### Ethos, History, and Goals

Opposite numbers of each other, neither The Red Orchestra nor The Institute would ever admit the underlying similarities of their basic philosophy. Yet acknowledged or not, those similarities exist.

Scientists in pre-Revolutionary Russia were pioneering the field of psychic research, paving the way for later Soviet scientists in the 20s and 30s. Work flourished throughout the thirties with research being published throughout the decade; in 1937, Stalin officially forbade further experiments in the field of parapsychology. In 1960, the Stalinist taboo prohibiting paranormal research was lifted, and the KGB and GRU began their scientific exploration of the weapons potential of psychic energy. Throughout the late middle 1900s, they were the world's leaders in Psi Research, with their US counterparts, The Institute, desperately playing catchup. The "Nomenklatura" in charge of the various Soviet psionics research programs never looked back.

Paralleling their Western counterparts, the fall of the Berlin Wall and the collapse of the Soviet Union weren't enough to stop the psychic research initiatives started by the KGB and the GRU. Instead, they went underground; without government oversight, they became more powerful and more agile than ever. Ideologically, the Russians in charge of these programs today are ultranationalists with hegemonistic dreams and aspirations that make President Putin, with all his aggressive posturing, look like a shrinking violet in comparison, a dove. The Red Orchestra's "Nomenklatura" are utterly, fanatically dedicated to the rebirth of the Soviet Union, even if - perhaps it might be more accurate to say "*especially if*" - it means the return of the Cold War. In that era of paranoia and factionalism, after all, they held an unparalleled level of power and importance that their current level of power and importance pales in comparison to. Regardless of what the ignorant masses of Russia and the crooks and cowardly politicians say, the Soviet Union must be reborn as a world superpower. Leading the field of Psionics research is the key to achieving this, and to punish the decadent Western capitalists and imperialists that sewed the death of the old order.

Organizationally, The Red Orchestra is an international, intercontinental spy ring positioned in a widely scattered geographical distribution throughout the entire world. Field operatives, called "Receivers", don't communicate with each other and don't know each other's location. Ordinarily, communication only trickles one way: from "Senders" to the Receivers through a complex network of encrypted signals and long-range telepathic communication. Many Receivers are so deep in cover and so paranoid that they may not even know that their actions are no longer officially sanctioned by the Russian government.

A Receiver's primary role is to detect, locate, and monitor Esper activities (and the activities of competing Conspiracies) in their operating radius, and report back through secure channels following intricate and paranoid tradecraft procedures. Then, should the coded message come down to them, they are authorized to act, abducting, subverting, or terminating rogue or enemy Espers or enemy Conspiracy agents.

The Red Orchestra is organized so that each individual operative is a "cell" unto themselves, requiring self-sufficiency that makes the "Receiver" even more ultra-competent than the members of other Conspiracies, who can rely on teams and backup.

## Style and Appearance

Lone, one-man or one-woman cells comprised of a single ex-Spetsnaz badass and their arsenal stashed in a dilapidated apartment, taking and acting on orders from an encrypted radio set hidden behind a false wall panel. They move with great freedom and autonomy, and are dangerously self-sufficient - this makes them unpredictable. Their orders come over mysterious numbers stations scattered throughout the world, transmitting and re-transmitting long series of mysterious numerical codes.

## Available Grunts

In the geographic locus of the Russian Federation, The Red Orchestra has the same limited ability to manipulate law enforcement and military groups that The Institute has on US soil. The GRU in particular has been almost entirely compromised by The Orchestra. Outside of the Slavic geopolitical sphere, their influence wanes substantially and they are unlikely to be able to have reliable, lasting access to foot soldiers. Individual Red Orchestra Receivers will do whatever is necessary to secure backup, which often means hiring grey market mercenaries (if available) or turning to organized crime (especially members of the Bratva, the putative Russian Mafia) for additional muscle.

## Proprietary Pharmaceuticals

Little is known about the proprietary pharmaceuticals of The Red Orchestra, but it is known that they use scopolamine-derived drugs both as potent deliriant hallucinogens to trigger the awakening of psi-potential (equivalent mechanically to "Lot Nineteen") and as mind-control intoxicants to sap the free will of victims while leaving them able to act and speak in a normal-seeming manner.

The Red Orchestra also has its own formulated equivalents of most or all of The Institute's pharmaceutical arsenal, either developed in parallel or reverse-engineered.

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## -Aleph-

**Also Known As:** The Megacorp

**FRONTS:** Qingdao Pharma Group, Ministry of State Security (China)

**Primary Territory:** Asia

**Nominal Headquarters:** Singapore

**Nemesis:** Abraxis Biotech

### Ethos, History, and Goals

Aleph is the Conspiracy that the other Conspiracies know the least about by far. They are organized the most like a traditional secret society, but the members of that secret society hold positions of power in Qingdao Pharma Group (the largest patent pharmaceuticals company in greater Asia), the Ministry of State Security (The PRC's equivalent of the CIA), and Japan's national Diet. While organized like a secret society, Aleph functions like a "meta-corporation", making them the direct Asian equivalent of Abraxis Biotech, and also Abraxis' most direct competition. Therefore, having established so much about Abraxis, it seems pointless to fight the trend of describing Aleph in relation to Abraxis.

Right now, the two corporate Conspiracies have extensive influence in their home territories - Europe and Asia respectively - with minimal penetration anywhere else, although not for lack of trying. For Aleph, for instance, penetration into Europe has been halted by Abraxis' efforts, while The Institute and The Red Orchestra have prevented penetration into North America and Russia respectively. While Abraxis takes much of its high-level direction from one individual, Aleph has a very different structure. It is run by a board of 12 directors - all wealthy Asian policymakers and corporate tycoons - whose identity is withheld not just from rank-and-file operatives but from each other. This ominous anonymity gives Aleph a distinctly monolithic aspect, and makes it seem almost indestructible. The board of directors

can't be assassinated, can't be blackmailed, can't be subverted, and if any of them were, they would only be replaced by a new anonymous silhouette and electronically modulated voice.

As the developing world in Asia, specifically China, has been becoming an economic powerhouse in the early 21st Century, Aleph has arisen as the stakeholders of developing Asian nations have realized how far behind they are in the Psionics Research race. So far behind that they did not, until recently, even realize that the race was happening. Now they are desperate to catch up quickly with their Western counterparts, and they have no intention of playing fair. Their brilliantly trained infiltrators are not unlike modern ninja, corporate chameleons sent to infiltrate Institute and Abraxis affiliated laboratories and steal away their secrets.

### Style and Appearance

Deferent, well-groomed Asian lab techs blend into the background, not seeming to have any style or attitude at all: incredibly gifted at appearing innocuous, harmless, innocent and/or unimportant. They are so polite and obsequious that they are virtually invisible. But they are secretly much more dangerous than they appear, to say nothing of the shadowy council they ultimately report to.

### Available Grunts

Aleph is known to recruit muscle - when it chooses to - from Asian organized crime groups. But these initially flamboyant and unpredictable individuals are then re-trained, re-equipped and re-conditioned (effectively brainwashed) into elite professional soldiers.

### Proprietary Pharmaceuticals

Aleph should be considered to have proprietary chems that are roughly equivalent to everything, or virtually everything, that Abraxis Biotech is able to produce.

## -Eschaton-

**Also Known As:** The Inquisition

**FRONTS:** Roman Catholic Church, specifically the Jesuits, Religious Zionists, Mossad

**Primary Territory:** None, but strongest direct influence in Rome and the Middle East

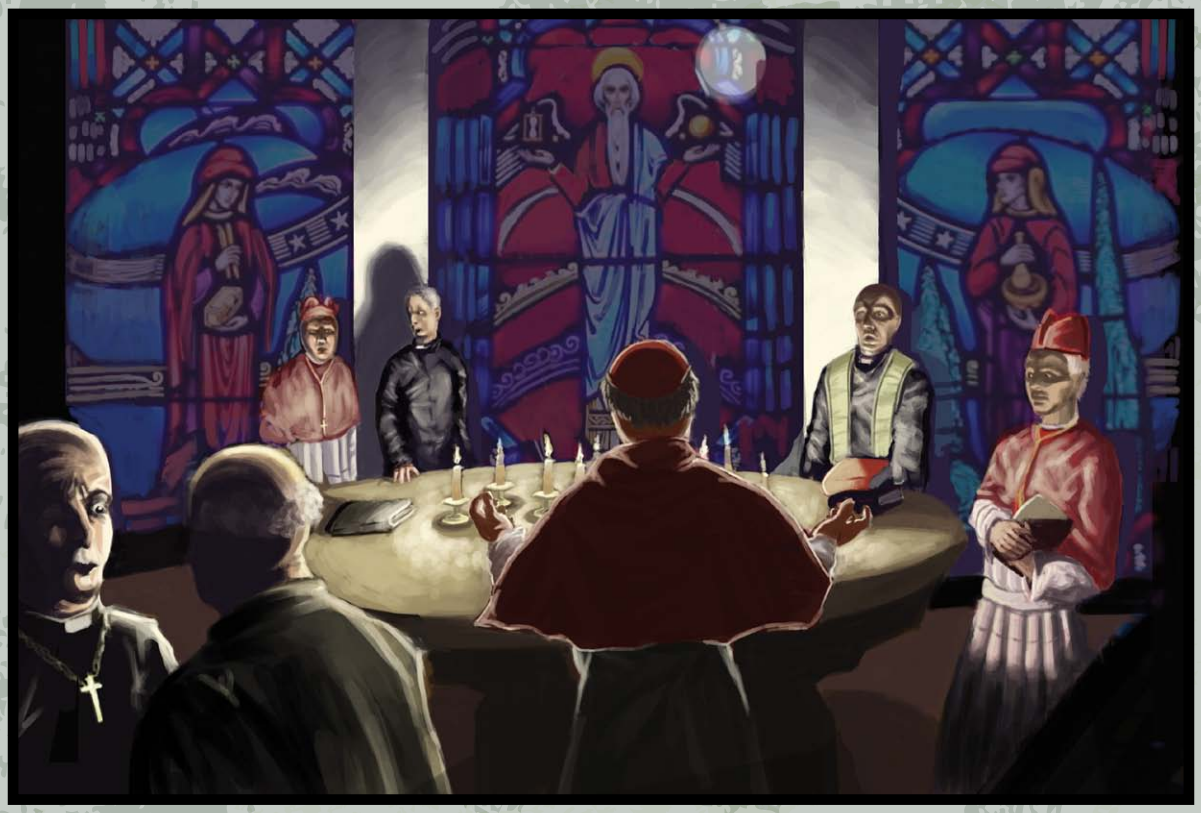
**Nominal Headquarters:** Jerusalem

**Nemesis:** The Zodiac Order

### Ethos, History, and Goals

Eschaton is the smallest of the global Conspiracies by far, but is by no means the least dangerous. Its low membership and difficulty with recruiting means that members are quite careful to keep themselves alive; unlike Abraxis' mercs or the Zodiac Order's cultists, they aren't replaceable. Likewise, its relative lack of global geopolitical influence leads to a sense of desperation that makes Eschaton agents unpredictable, with the potential to be even more ruthless than The Institute.

Eschaton's goals differ on a fundamental level from every other Conspiracy. The Institute, Abraxis Biotech, The Zodiac Order, The Red Orchestra, and Aleph are all trying to rule the world. Eschaton is trying to keep the world just as it is. Every other Conspiracy is trying to "recruit" Espers, but will terminate them if necessary to prevent them from falling into enemy hands. Eschaton is trying to *kill* Espers wherever they pop up, and will recruit them only if convinced that the Esper is 100% willing to commit to Eschaton's mission: preventing the apocalypse that The Zodiac Order are trying to bring about.



Eschaton is a global Conspiracy of devoutly religious individuals that have observed, with their own eyes, Esper activity and survived. There isn't a great history of cooperation between Jewish and Christian religious organizations throughout history, so to speak of "Judeo-Christianity" as a monolithic entity seems erroneous, but Eschaton - existing entirely in secret - is a notable exception. These people of faith have access to suppressed, apocryphal texts - secreted away in the Vaults of the Vatican and the hidden libraries under Jerusalem - that relate an alternative version of the end times to the biblical book of Revelations. This alternate Eschatology is closely matched to both the observable emergence of Espers and to the "heretical" teachings of the Zodiac Order. If cooperation will save the world from falling from grace, then cooperate they will. They are going to stop the apocalypse, one dead Esper at a time. In many ways, Eschaton is a reaction to the Zodiac Order, firmly convinced that while God created Man, Espers are the sign of demonic influence; worse than occult Charlatans, Espers are sinners of the worst kind. Jeremy Bright is a false prophet and if the Zodiac Order brings its "Eternal Storm" to pass, all of mankind will be cast into the lake of fire. This must be prevented at all costs.

Eschaton is nothing if not devout. Perhaps strangely and bewilderingly to some, a few Espers have joined Eschaton willingly - these same Espers are zealously dedicated to the cause, and willing to literally fall upon their swords once the Zodiac Order and its Espers have been put to the sword, removing themselves from the picture last in order to prevent the Eternal Storm - and the damnation of Man, created in God's image - from coming to pass.

### Style and Appearance

In effect, nomadic assassins of the paranormal. Their crusade to save the world has cost them hygiene, comfort, and perhaps even some of their sanity; they look scruffy in torn brown trenchcoats, hiding sawn off shotguns and Bible-passage engraved blades,

because they've been sleeping rough. At their worst, they might look like crazed, homeless street preachers; of course, the best of them use this impression to their advantage.

### Available Grunts

Eschaton does not have "grunts". Their manpower is so limited that no members of their organization are viewed as disposable, and they don't have the influence to mobilize any state security or military apparatus. Religiously motivated terrorists and religious fundamentalists may make allies of convenience in certain circumstances - Eschaton operators, disguising their beliefs and intentions, are making inroads with various radical groups throughout the Middle East - but that will take some convincing.

### Proprietary Pharmaceuticals

None.

## EXPERIENCE AWARDS

The metric for awarding Experience Points in ***Psionics*** and other **DICEPUNK SYSTEM** games is not especially codified.

Let's be honest. The most systematic that XP awards get would be the XP Bounties awarded for defeating individual enemies, and even those are *not very systematic*.

For nonhuman threats - which are few and far between in ***Psionics*** - an XP Bounty has been assigned by us based on a holistic understanding of how dangerous and tough that creature is, and how capable it is of seriously ruining an Esper's day. This number is never arbitrary, but it is *not systematically derived:* it is, rather, a holistic, at-a-glance measure of all of the numbers, abilities, and traits that make the creature dangerous/powerful. This means that if you are a GM who's engineering your own creatures, you should feel free to assign them an XP Bounty based on *your* holistic understanding of how dangerous they are. That, simple as it is, is the "system" for assigning XP Bounties to critters. For a huge menagerie of sample *creatures* that are inappropriate for a ***Psionics*** game but that provide good guidelines for how XP Bounties are eyeballed for different threat levels in the **DICEPUNK SYSTEM**, we'd recommend you check out ***Phantasm (2010).***

XP Bounties for humanoid enemies and Espers are determined in a slightly more systematic manner. They start at 20 XP, but can wind up substantially higher based on the NPC's power level.

| NPC Ability | XP Bounty Modifier |
|---|---|
| Basic Human NPC (Built on At Most 20 Attribute Points, Wits × 2 Skill Picks, and Wits Trained Skills, with At Most Will ÷ 2 [round up] Technique Picks and appropriate Equipment.) | Base 20 XP |
| Each +2 Attribute Points Spent (Maximum of +10 AP) | +10 XP (Maximum of +50) |
| Each Extra Skill (Apprentice) | + 5 XP |
| Each Extra Skill (Expert) | + 10 XP |
| Each Extra Skill (Master) | + 20 XP |
| Each Extra Technique Pick | +20 XP (+10 XP for Espers) |
| Ephemeral Bonus (Equipment Quality, Overall Competence & Deadliness) | +5-30 XP (Increments of 5 XP) |
| Each Extra Psi Talent Level | +10 XP |
| NPC is Esper (Built on 30 AP Base But Only One Starting Technique Pick) | X2 (After All Other Modifiers) |

Generally, an enemy's entire XP Bounty is awarded to the Esper that deals the killing blow or ***otherwise removes that enemy from the combat***. However, the GM *can* and *should* evenly divide up the XP Bounty of tough enemies amongst all the Espers that meaningfully contributed to taking that enemy down.

***N.B.:*** *Characters DO NOT receive any XP Bounties for anyone or anything killed while they are Overloading.*

Besides killing stuff, PCs can gain experience by completing missions, reaching story milestones, accomplishing personal goals, and for good or great roleplaying. Use the table below as some *very general and flexible guidelines* for awarding XP.

With these simple guidelines established, the particulars of how fast or slow characters advance and what actions earn what amount of experience points are left largely up to the GM; Experience Point awards and cost intentionally use fairly large numbers. This isn't because we just think large numbers are great; it's to allow for more granularity on the scale of XP awards and XP costs.

| Accomplishment | XP Award (To One PC) | Typical Frequency |
|---|---|---|
| Completing a mission/quest (routine) | 100 XP | About once per session |
| Completing a mission/quest (tough) | 200 XP | About once per two sessions |
| Completing a mission/quest (epic) | 300 XP | About once per four+ sessions |
| Reaching a (minor) story milestone | 100 XP | About once per one or two sessions |
| Reaching a (major) story milestone | 250 XP | About once per five or six sessions |
| Accomplishing a (minor) character goal | 50 - 100 XP | About once per two sessions |
| Accomplishing a (major) character goal | 250-500 XP | About once per campaign |
| Conspicuously *good* roleplaying | 25 - 50 XP | Limit to twice per player per session |
| Conspicuously *great* roleplaying | 100 - 200 XP | Limit to *once* per session, at most |

### On The Killing of Dudes (XP Bounties)

Firstly, we're aware that the main source of experience points being killing other human beings isn't just very OLD SCHOOL (in the sense of Dungeons & Dragons circa 1974). It's also downright controversial. I mean, are we really positing that *the* killing of other human beings is a better way to build up life experience than not doing so? Well yes, yes we are. Also, this is a roleplaying game. Also, this is a very, very violent roleplaying game. And GMs should absolutely only award XP Bounties for kills of characters that represent a legitimate threat to the PCs and a legitimate challenge to the PCs, not innocent bystanders. So, in other news...

An Esper with all of their Talent Levels invested in Psychokinesis is less likely to "neutralize" (i.e. kill) enemies directly. That doesn't mean that a Psychokinetic Esper should earn less XP Bounties than an Esper that invested their Talent Levels in Pyrokinesis or Telekinesis, however.

A character with Psychokinesis who Dominates, Pushes, or otherwise mind controls an enemy in a way that causes their demise should receive the XP Bounty just as if they'd pulled the trigger themselves. Likewise, if an NPC Dominated or controlled by an Esper with Psychokinesis kills another (enemy) NPC that is a credible threat, the controlling Esper should receive the XP Bounty for that kill as well.

# THE PSIONICS CAMPAIGN

## Starting and Developing Your Campaign: One Way to Do It

These are only a few words, but hopefully they will get you a long way, because this approach has worked out pretty great for me in the past. This is how I have historically started ***Psionics*** campaigns over the past fourteen years, including two unpublished prior incarnations of the game - one that was played briefly in 2002, and one that was played briefly in 2007. Obviously, your personal methodological sweet spot will vary. But if you imagine this as "the baseline", the rest of this section basically contains various neat ways to deviate from this norm. That said, this is a *very* sketchy, broadly drawn, top-level overview of a HUGE topic. It doesn't go into a ton of detail, and you'll get the most mileage from these paragraphs when you've read the *entirety* of the rest of the book and are comfortable with your mastery of its contents.

Generally speaking I do very little prep for the first session (chargen). I also don't throw out a lot of guidelines for the PCs, with the exception that the story and the campaign starts ***BEFORE THE PCS HAVE THEIR PSIONIC ABILITIES.***

The first session will generally be comprised mostly of the PCs RECEIVING their PSI abilities for the first time, and appropriately freaking out; the first session is largely the Prologue, and mostly focuses on a vignette that depicts who each PC was *before* they were an active Esper.

Most of my inspiration for the first session comes from improvising a way to connect PCs that might come from disparate careers, background, and life paths, and get them in the same room (for this version of ***Psionics***, I've been strongly emphasizing PCs that are between 12 and 22 years old, and you might want to narrow down this range to make this part easier for your first time). Then, once they're in the same room, we give them

drugs - PPECs - in the sketchiest, shadiest, most out of control scenario possible, from a debauched rave to a paid medical double-blind medicine trial with an "experimental" group and a "control group". Things are being monitored, of course, by one of the Conspiracies.

Generally speaking, **I like to interact with the rules as little as possible during the first game session.** I like to give just a little flavor of the basic task resolution system, usually for mundane things, and not interact with the Psi Talent rules at all. Generally speaking, the first thing that happens is that the PCs begin "tripping balls" as reality becomes more and more surreal. Then, unconsciously and unintentionally, the PCs' Psi

Talents (and possibly the Psi Talents of NPCs in the "trials" with them) "accidentally" begin activating, although with everyone hallucinating and experiencing bizarre mental and somatic side effects, it should be at first unclear what is really happening and what is drug-induced delirium.

At first, the mood should be a sense of wonder and awe and disbelief, as the PCs telempathically communicate amongst themselves and with others, levitate small objects, and play with fire. Then, things get extreme. People start screaming, people start freaking out, people start Overloading, and people start dying: heads exploding; spontaneous human combustion; the scene spiraling out of control as Espers manifest on drugs and not-fully-in-control of their abilities.

And we're off and running - and the PCs will likely shortly be on the run from the Conspiracy responsible - improvising from there as PCs begin to slowly learn what they can do and how to consciously and intentionally invoke their powers with precision over the course of the second session or so (feel free to improvise whatever simple, ad-hoc mechanics for this you like, or use some of the suggestions contained in this chapter).

For handling the PCs on the road and on the run, that's simple enough, and largely more improvisation. The key is to balance scenes where they're able to rest, think, and roleplay, with scenes of action, suspense, and paranoia where the PCs are being shadowed, followed, or chased across state lines. The specific mix of action and introspection can be tailored to your group.

Later on in the campaign, as the PCs are pursued by at least one Conspiracy, they begin to encounter and receive "overtures" from others. The most important thing in this development stage of the campaign is that you understand the Ethos of each Conspiracy to the point where you can roleplay charismatic and captivating NPCs - ordinary humans or Espers like the PCs - who are at once utterly convinced of the absolute moral rightness of the Conspiracy they represent, and very convincing in their arguments about why that Conspiracy is doing the right thing, in spite of the fact that every single Conspiracy is secretly-or-not-so-secretly doing a bevy of morally reprehensible things in their pursuit of power.

**None of the Conspiracies should be treated as one-dimensional, one-sided villains.**

There is no one right way to handle this. Over time you will develop your own best practices, tricks, and techniques for making villains seem sympathetic and relatable. And, based on the degree to which you've played with moral relativism and gray areas in your prior roleplaying experience, you might already have a pre-existing knowledge/skill base for this kind of approach. In any case...

It is ***GREAT*** if an NPC's charisma, roleplaying, and/or arguments can cause all the PCs to seriously consider lending themselves to a Conspiracy over a series of intense conversations. It's ***GOOD*** if one or more PC is actually convinced - even if it winds up being temporary - by an NPC's arguments to JOIN a Conspiracy willingly. NPCs will be willing to do just about anything to prove their side is in the right (or at least the least of all evils). This means spin and lies and selective presentation of the facts, certainly. But it can also mean tactics that might catch the PCs off-guard even more: earnestness; heartfelt apologies for transgressions; even appeals to human emotion, philosophy, and morality. ***Humanize your monsters.***

It is ***LESS good*** if none of the PCs join or seriously consider joining, but at the ***ABSOLUTE minimum*** these scenes and interactions should convince the PCs and the players that the NPC in question is *totally certain that they are doing the right thing, and that the "sacrifices" made, the eggs broken in the name of their agenda, are necessary sacrifices.*

From this point, it may come to pass that one or more PCs will seriously consider jumping

on board with one or more (DIFFERENT!) Conspiracies. This is an ideal outcome.

While it might become tricky to keep the party together, and spotlight sharing might need to be considered carefully, at this point you have a "mature" campaign where the PCs' ideological and factional allegiances will drive the action as they receive different missions from one or more Conspiracies. At this point, while you might need to do a bit more prep to structure the opposition for the missions in question, as far as drama and conflict, the campaign should largely run itself.

I hope that these little hints can help you get started, and that the rest of this chapter can act as a reference work for any information you might need about the setting, or alternative suggestions for how to run a campaign.

### GM Advice: Meta-Initiative

Here's an idea I'm going to throw out there. To be perfectly, honest, I think this is some generic roleplaying advice that could be applied to many RPGs, specifically any RPG where the party gets split for any significant amount of time. I know for sure it's applicable for Psionics, where PCs don't often know each other at the outset, and often get split up or captured separately by enemies, temporarily join different factions, or otherwise get separated during the course of gameplay.

When PCs or groups of PCs are in different places, determine a "Meta-Initiative" system and take turns outside of combat. "Meta-Initiative System" probably sounds complicated, but the "system" can be as simple as starting with the player to your left and going clockwise around the table, or as "complex" as having the players roll 2d6 and going in descending order of score. Whatever your group is comfortable with, really: just remember that the characters' stats shouldn't factor into this "Initiative" roll.

Two more pointers if you're going to take turns in this way. The turns should have an agreed upon in-game time length that is established beforehand. This can be anything from ten in-game minutes to an in-game day, to even a fortnight or a month, depending on the story's pace at this point and how you like to handle "intercutting", as long as it's consistent. The turns should probably take about 10-30 minutes of real time, each, and certainly no more than an hour.

Secondly, make sure to have a "totem" or a "talking stick" that physically moves around the table indicating whose turn it is, so all players can fully acknowledge and respect how the spotlight is being shared among the group. Depending on your group's dynamic, I would recommend requesting that the inactive players stay at the table and focused on the action that the active players are roleplaying through. You should use some combination of carrot and stick to accomplish this. Or make them so paranoid that their characters' "friends" are plotting against them that they'll be afraid to miss a word.

### Making Espers Less Awesome at the Outset

Espers are awesome, even without Psi-Talents. An Esper without any Psi-Talents is still a character built on 30 AP, and a character built on 30 AP is substantially more competent than virtually any real, living human being, and is well within the realm of hyper-competent fictional characters and legends. An "average" statline for a 30 AP Esper is Strength 6, Will 6, Wits 8, Will 7. According to p. 49, that means that their physical abilities are at the "Peak of Real Human Development" and their mental abilities are "Legendary" and "Heroic" respectively. That's really, really good! For the most part during the Psionics campaign, this is a good thing. PCs are going to succeed at most of what they try to do most of the time, and that's great.

The exception is if you choose to do a Prologue set before the PCs are Espers, and if you want for the purposes of that Prologue for the PCs to be, well... losers. Or at least, ordinary people with real problems

that they can't solve all by themselves, competent in some areas but not in others, as opposed to hyper-competent James Bond/Batman badasses. In that case, you need to make the PCs less awesome before they actualize their Psi Potential and become Espers.

To do this, you should have the PCs build their characters on only 20 AP starting out (spending less Skill Picks accordingly). When they become Espers, at least once the situation has stabilized enough for them to reflect, they can spend another 10 AP and spend their new Skill Picks as appropriate. The drawback of this is that dividing chargen into two steps, building the base character and then "upgrading" the character later on, can take more time, and the latter half may slow things down in the middle of the action if you're not careful.

But the benefit of this is that you can avoid the pitfall of doing a Prologue where the pre-Psionic PCs are "pathetic losers" who are still exponentially more competent than any real human beings in virtually every area.

### Alternate Campaign Suggestion: Badass Normals

In the basic Psionics Campaign, with all settings and sliders at default values, the PCs are all Espers on the run from the badass ultra-competent non-Esper secret agents and special operatives. Now, while the badass non-Espers in this scenario are pretty clearly the "bad guys" (although admittedly not from their perspective), they are actually pretty awesome. It takes real guts and smarts to stand up to powered individuals with just your guns and gadgets when you don't have any powers yourself. (To use a Marvel example, being Black Widow or Nick Fury in the face of the likes of Thor and the Hulk is really cool.)

If you made all of the PCs into these competent agents, you really would not be playing Psionics anymore. But what if some of the PCs started out as "Badass Normals", while others were foundering fledgling Espers? Imagine this scenario: In the first session, the spotlight is shared between a group of students (three of them PCs), who are given PPECs by a Conspiracy and become Espers (some of them Overload, causing a wave of unexplained violence that must be swept under the rug by the Conspiracies), and two seemingly unrelated government agents (FBI, DEA, ATF, etc.) going about their jobs (two more PCs). In the second session, the two storylines collide as the agents are sent to investigate the violence surrounding the emergence of the Espers, and are quickly coopted and "recruited" by a Conspiracy to get things "under control".

Of course, in this scenario, a little finesse might be required to keep the PCs from killing each other right off the bat. (Not that PCs killing each other in Psionics is really a "no-no" in the long term). And also of course, the "Badass Normal" PCs should absolutely awaken their Psi-Potential and become Espers eventually, since that is what I would presume every player is going to want from Psionics eventually. Likewise, I would suggest that incorporating Mundane PCs into the campaign is something to do only if some of the players are on board with being badass normals from the beginning. And even then, it's totally optional (i.e. your call), since asymmetrical PCs might mean a little more work for the GM.

That said, if you want to go with this option, the "Badass Normal" PCs should absolutely be built on 30 AP from the outset. A 30 AP character without Psi Talents can still meaningfully contribute to the action, as can a 20 AP character with Psi Talents for that matter, but a 20 AP character without Psi Talents isn't in the same league and shouldn't be a PC.

# Appendix A: The Psychobestiary

This appendix contains nonhuman psionic creatures created by twisted genetic experiments performed by Conspiracies like The Institute, Abraxis Biotech, and Aleph. Many of them were once animals before genetic tampering and psionically active drugs. It is up to you if you want to include creatures from the Psychobestiary in your game. The inclusion of "monsters" gives your PCs more variety in the threats they confront (options besides "fighting dudes with guns" and "fighting dudes with psychic powers and also probably guns"), but it does subtly alter the milieu of the ***Psionics*** setting.

If you do choose to use representatives of the Psychobestiary in the game, remember they are not roaming the streets. They dwell in abandoned or lost Conspiracy facilities, often deep, deep underground, an ugly reminder that no one wants to look at of failed programs and failed policy.

All of the creatures in the Psychobestiary use Power Points to activate their Psionic Talents and other special abilities, but they don't have to worry about taking Drain or Overloading (the fact that these beasties can't Overload is good news for the PCs).

***Note:*** *Creatures in the Psychobestiary do not need to worry about being Knocked Out or Dying. Consider these creatures to be dead when they go below 0 Health.*

## Arcturian

### *Attributes*

| | |
|---|---|
| **Strength:** | 9 |
| **Speed:** | 4 |
| **Wits:** | 4 |
| **Will:** | 8 |
| **Health:** | 81 |
| **Initiative:** | 8 + 2d6 |
| **Defense:** | 7 |
| **Power Points:** | 48 |

**Skills:** Brawling: Master (+4), Intimidation: Master (+4), Survival: Expert (+2), Awareness: Apprentice (+1).

**Techniques:** Batter Up, Blitzkrieg, Counter Attack, Critical Attack, Frenzy, Improved Critical Attack, One Punch Knockout.

### *Attacks*

1. Claw at +2 for 1d6 + 9 and Claw at +2 for 1d6 + 9 and Bite at +0 for 2d6 + 18
2. Claw at +4 for 1d6 + 9
3. By Grappling
4. Or by Psionics

**Psionic Talents:** 8 Levels split between Telekinesis and Pyrokinesis (default Telekinesis 4, Pyrokinesis 4), and Psychokinesis Level 2.

### *Special Abilities*

**Tough Hide:** An Arcturian's thick fur and protective fat give it Melee Damage Cut 4 and Ranged Damage Cut 4.

**The Bigger They Come:** The Arcturian's Health is 150% of what a human with Strength 9's Health would be.

**XP Bounty:** 250

### *Description*

*The rarest and most dangerous psionic beast listed here, the Arcturian was once an ordinary brown bear, chosen for experimentation perhaps because of its enormous fortitude and resilience, but certainly not for any extraordinary intelligence. Most experiments on brown bears failed miserably, resulting in nothing but dead brown bears. The Arcturian is the terrifying and mercifully rare exception. The program was finally terminated because the creatures were too powerful to successfully hold in cages without costly escapes and losses.*

*Pre-natal genetic tampering has caused it to suffer from partial albinism, with its shaggy coat colored a pale bluish white. Toxic chemical infusions throughout its lifetime have caused it to lose much of its hair, revealing a rash underneath. Several large tumors riddle its body. Male brown bears are naturally aggressive, and this one's temperament has been worsened by a lifetime of mistreatment in the name of science. An Arcturian will savagely defend its territory with psionic and physical attacks, and its territory is wherever it happens to be. Characters who don't want to die might try fleeing from this terrible beast - if they "give an Arcturian its space", it might not choose to pursue them.*

## Brainchild

### *Attributes*

| | |
|---|---|
| **Strength:** | 6 |
| **Speed:** | 5 |
| **Wits:** | 6 |
| **Will:** | 6 |
| **Health:** | 36 |
| **Initiative:** | 10 + 2d6 |
| **Defense:** | 9 |
| **Power Points:** | 36 |

**Skills:** As host's Skills minus one rank to each Skill (Master becomes Expert, Expert becomes Apprentice, Apprentice becomes Trained, Trained goes away) plus the following (if better): Brawling: Expert (+2), Chemistry: Expert (+2), Clubs: Expert (+2), Intimidation: Apprentice (+2), Leadership: Expert (+2), Subterfuge: Expert (+2), Stealth: Apprentice (+1), Swimming: Apprentice (+1).

**Techniques:** As host's Techniques, and/or Blitzkrieg, Batter Up.

### *Attacks*

1. Punch at +2 for 1d6 + 6 nonlethal
2. Crude Club at +1 for 2d6 + 3
3. Or by any weapons

**Psionic Talents:** Psychokinesis Level 4, Telekinesis Level 4, Biofeedback Level 2.

### *Special Abilities*

**Osmoses Vulnerability:** Brainchildren suffer double "damage" from *Brain Drain*, and likewise grant twice the Power Points when drained.

**XP Bounty:** 70

### *Description*

*Brainchildren are the product of an Overmind (p. 283) that has fused itself with a human host, creating a hideous, zombie-like creature with a normal human body and a gigantic pulsating brain (the Overmind's body) either wrapped around or replacing the normal human head. In other words, something that looks not unlike a "headcrab zombie" from Half Life, or a person walking around with a facehugger on their head. The fusion of the Overmind's nervous system with the human host is strange and imperfect, resulting in a creature that is at once more than and less than the sum of its parts. Neither all of the host's knowledge and skills nor all of the Overmind's are fully retained. The Overmind's Psionic Talents mutate with the transportation also: Necrokinesis is lost, but Psychokinetic and Biofeedback abilities grow even stronger. Brainchildren can be found alone, in small groups (1-3), or rarely in larger groups (1-6, 2-12, or even 3-18). They are very dangerous.*

## Burglars

### *Attributes*

| | |
|---|---|
| **Strength:** | 2 |
| **Speed:** | 7 |
| **Wits:** | 6 |
| **Will:** | 4 |
| **Health:** | 12 |
| **Initiative:** | 14 + 2d6 |
| **Defense:** | 9 (11) |
| **Power Points:** | 24 |

**Skills:** Stealth: Expert (+2).

**Techniques:** Blitzkrieg, Dodge, Reposition.

***Attacks***

1. Swipe at +0 for 1d3 + 1

**Psionic Talents:** Telekinesis Level 3, Pyrokinesis Level 3.

***Special Abilities***

**Small Target:** A Burglar's small size gives it +2 Defense against physical and psionic Attacks. This Defense Bonus doesn't apply versus Psychokinesis.

**XP Bounty:** 25

### *Description*

*The most common psionic "monsters" were once ordinary lab monkeys, belonging to species such as macaques, squirrel monkeys, marmosets, howler monkeys, spider monkeys, and so on: small and clever primates doomed to a life of often cruel animal testing. Indeed, they are still recognizable as such, although the toxic carcinogenic substances they were treated with have caused them to lose much of their hair, revealing skin covered by rashes. The most conspicuous physical difference is that the primate's cranium is fully exposed; a clear plastic cranial dome reveals a swollen brain bristling with hair-like silver filaments. Burglars are often found in groups of three or more, and they like to congregate in high, small places, like rafters and ventilation ducts. They groom socially, and are very good at hiding.*

*They gained their name from their exceptional curiosity. Burglars often use Telekinesis to seize "shiny" or interesting items - things like flashlights, guns, or PPECs - that Espers might want, and then scamper away screeching in triumph. If successful, they may return to steal more. If a character tries to reclaim their stolen possessions, the attempt will be greeted with a screech of rage as the Burglar defends its newfound trinket with blasts of burning or freezing air using Pyrokinesis. Some Burglars also amuse themselves by using their Psionic Talents to play elaborate "pranks" on other creatures - these pranks are sometimes fatal for the butt of the joke. Burglars can be very aggressive and think that flinging around their filth is the height of comedy.*

## Gremlin

***Attributes***

| | |
|---|---|
| **Strength:** | 3 |
| **Speed:** | 5 |
| **Wits:** | 9 |
| **Will:** | 8 |
| **Health:** | 18 |
| **Initiative:** | 10 + 2d6 |
| **Defense:** | 12 |
| **Power Points:** | 48 |

**Skills:** Calculus: Master (+4), Electronics: Master (+4), Engineering: Master (+4), Awareness: Expert (+2), Computers: Expert (+2), First Aid: Expert (+2), Security: Expert (+2).

**Techniques:** Dodge.

***Attacks***

1. Slap at -4 for 1d6 + 3

**Psionic Talents:** Telekinesis Level 4, Psychokinesis Level 4.

***Special Abilities***

**TK Fist:** A Gremlin's TK Push deals +3 damage per level of Telekinesis (so +12 damage at Level 4). For this reason they favor it over using other TK Attacks.

**TK Forcefield:** A special Telekinetic forcefield gives Gremlins a melee and ranged Damage Cut of 18 at all times as long as they have at least one Power Point held in reserve.

**Effortless Levitation:** It does not cost Gremlins any Power Points to levitate, but they move only at their normal speed while levitating and cannot move more than two yards off of the ground. Gremlins can use Telekinesis normally for more powerful levitation, but must spend Power Points normally if they do.

**XP Bounty:** 125

### *Description*

*PCs could not be blamed for mistaking a Gremlin for an alien intelligence. And indeed, if a GM wants to either drop a red herring in this direction, this monster can easily mislead, and if a GM decides that aliens exist and have visited earth or interacted with the various Conspiracies in his **Psionics** setting, this stat block provides a useful starting point. But a Gremlin is actually the result of genetic tampering by an unknown party at an unknown time. The creatures haunt abandoned facilities left behind by groups like The Institute, Aleph, Abraxis, or The Red Orchestra, and might be held in storage for experimentation by some of those groups, kept alive but "on ice". They are extremely intelligent, extremely hostile, and extremely dangerous.*

*Physically, Gremlins are extremely unimpressive. They stand only about three feet tall - although they often hover and levitate rather than standing and walking - with rather scrawny builds. They wear no clothing, have no external genitalia, and their skin is a smooth, rubbery grey or pale green. They actually look rather silly compared to most of the other monsters of the psychobestiary, with large, bat-like ears, big, frog-like yellow eyes, and a wide, perpetually frowning mouth that contains a few rather round and dull teeth.*

*Gremlins are not physical combatants and attack only with their psi talents, preferring to lead off with a Psychic Scream or The Push before pummeling their victims with Telekinesis. They have not ever been known to communicate and the reason for their extreme hostility is completely unknown.*

## Lightning Hawk

#### *Attributes*

| | |
|---|---|
| **Strength:** | 3 |
| **Speed:** | 7 |
| **Wits:** | 7 |
| **Will:** | 7 |
| **Health:** | 18 |
| **Initiative:** | 14 + 2d6 |
| **Defense:** | 10 |
| **Power Points:** | 42 |

**Skills:** Awareness: Master (+4), Brawling: Expert (+2).

**Techniques:** Blitzkrieg.

#### *Attacks*

1. Talons at +2 for 1d6 + 7

**Psionic Talents:** Pyrokinesis Level 3, Magnekinesis Level 3.

#### *Special Abilities*

**Flight:** (14 Yards per Move Action).

**XP Bounty:** 90

### *Description*

*A medium-sized bird of prey, the Lightning Hawk's plumage is bleached completely white due to pre-natal genetic tampering. The whitish feathers have a vague greenish hue in certain light. While there is no indication that it is sapient and it does not communicate, it is clearly far more intelligent than ordinary birds of prey. Its most noteworthy ability is its mastery of the extremely rare Psionic Talent Magnekinesis. The extent to which a Lightning Hawk - also called a "storm crow" in some literature - uses Magnekinesis in its natural life is very limited and subtle. It is not hunting prey with lightning bolts, only causing micro changes in air density, manipulating thermal currents to aid in its swooping and diving. It seems to manipulate weather in its immediate area almost unconsciously, as an extension of its natural reflexes. However, if a Lightning Hawk feels threatened by "predators" (i.e. humans or Espers), it absolutely will summon a violent storm around itself and use St. Elmo's Fire in self-defense. While a Lightning Hawk also has Pyrokinesis, it almost never makes use of it offensively, although it will use its Melt Aura defensively.*

# MCR-L19 Series Golem

### Attributes

| | |
|---|---|
| **Strength:** | 8 |
| **Speed:** | 4 |
| **Wits:** | 6 |
| **Will:** | 8 |
| **Health:** | 48 |
| **Initiative:** | 8 + 2d6 |
| **Defense:** | 9 |
| **Power Points:** | 48 |

**Skills:** Brawling: Expert (+2), Intimidate: Expert (+2), Awareness: Apprentice (+1).

**Techniques:** Batter Up, Counter Attack.

### Attacks

1. Arm Slam at +2 for 1d6 + 8

**Psionic Talents:** Telekinesis Level 5.

### Special Abilities

**Tough Hide:** Innate Melee Damage Cut 6, Ranged Damage Cut 6.

**Inhuman Anatomy:** The "Golem" is not susceptible to additional damage from Critical Attack or headshots and is immune to drugs and toxins.

**XP Bounty:** 100

### Description

*The Institute's Genesis program, run just before the turn of the century, was an effort to genetically engineer a master race of super-Espers. While the results of the program were undisputedly powerful Espers, everything else about them went horribly wrong: the creatures created were hideous, misshapen aberrations that were unquestionably inhuman. While many were disposed of properly (destroyed), others escaped, were abandoned, or were retained by The Institute or acquired by Abraxis Biotech for use as "guard animals" in limited functions, or for further experimentation.*

*The MCR-L19 series Golem is a seven to nine foot tall humanoid weighing something like three to four hundred pounds. Its skin is rubbery and almost like clay in its color and texture, although unmistakably and horribly flesh. Its face is featureless and its body genderless. It is uncannily tall and spindly, with long stilt-like legs and horribly over-long, disproportionate arms that drag along the ground, ending in widened, club-like, fingerless protrusions. A black spot on the creature's chest resembles a bruise or possibly a canker, but seems to function like an eye.*

*Golems attack using Telekinesis to Push or to Grab and Throw and defend themselves with TK Shield. They Grab and Crush/Rend only when sorely pressed and at death's door, and they never use a Grab and Choke/Squeeze, nor do they attack by using Telekinesis to throw objects. Golems like to attack with their arm slams, and have been known to use Telekinesis to hold a target in place while using the Batter Up Technique to smash the target.*

# MCR-L21 Series Scarecrow

*"Have some fire, scarecrow!"*

### Attributes

| | |
|---|---|
| **Strength:** | 6 |
| **Speed:** | 6 |
| **Wits:** | 6 |
| **Will:** | 8 |
| **Health:** | 36 |
| **Initiative:** | 12 + 2d6 |
| **Defense:** | 9 |
| **Power Points:** | 48 |

**Skills:** Awareness: Expert (+2), Brawling: Expert (+2), Intimidation: Expert (+2), Stealth: Apprentice (+1).

**Techniques:** Blitzkrieg, Frenzy.

### Attacks

1. Claw at +0 for 1d6 + 6 and Claw at +0 for 1d6 + 6

**Psionic Talents:** Pyrokinesis Level 5.

### *Special Abilities*

**Holocaust Cloak:** At the start of each Combat Round roll 1d3. Every character within that many yards of the Scarecrow at the end of the Scarecrow's turn suffers 5d6 fire damage and must make a Speed Check or be set on fire, suffering 5d6 fire damage every turn thereafter until they are extinguished.

**Inhuman Anatomy:** The Scarecrow is not susceptible to additional damage from Critical Attack or headshots and is immune to drugs and toxins.

**Scorched:** The Scarecrow is immune to all fire damage and does not take any damage from temperature change.

**XP Bounty:** 150 XP

### *Description*

*In no uncertain terms, a terrifying monster, the Scarecrow is another leftover "byproduct" of The Institute's failed Genesis program. The moment they are born, Scarecrows are burned. Their entire existence thereafter is an ecstasy of agony, constantly inflamed. At the moment of creation, a scarecrow bursts into flame. Their flesh is consumed in the flames, their organs cook away to ashes, their blood boils and then sublimates. What is left is a blackened skeleton covered in oil-soaked rags that should not, by the mercy of scientific reason, live, and yet does. These freakish Espers live and kill, animated by some other energy, something unquestionably psi. Their blackened skeletal fingers end in razor-like claws, their heads are wrapped in charred rags, covering their eyes, their teeth filed to point. They laugh to themselves constantly, gibbering madly at some unheard joke, in a whirlwind of sackcloth and ashes.*

*If in a position of superiority, a Scarecrow uses Temper, Temper, Temperature to heat one living foe to boiling. If outnumbered, the Scarecrow hurls massive fireballs to ignite as many foes as possible. Scarecrows also like to attack in melee with their sharp claws, as their Holocaust Cloak ability burns everyone foolish enough to get near them. Scarecrows make heavy use of Melt Aura to prevent damage from firearms.*

## MCR-L37 Series Mantis

### *Attributes*

| | |
|---|---|
| **Strength:** | 5 |
| **Speed:** | 8 |
| **Wits:** | 8 |
| **Will:** | 7 |
| **Health:** | 30 |
| **Initiative:** | 16 + 2d6 |
| **Defense:** | 11 |
| **Power Points:** | 42 |

**Skills:** Awareness: Master (+4), Brawling: Master (+4), Stealth: Expert (+2).

**Techniques:** Blitzkrieg, Counterattack, Critical Attack, Dodge, Frenzy.

### *Attacks*

1. Claw at +2 for 1d6 + 8 and Claw at +2 for 1d6 + 8
2. Claw at +4 for 1d6 + 8

**Psionic Talents:** Psychokinesis Level 5, Osmoses Level 2, Scrying level 2.

### *Special Abilities*

**Black Noise:** Every character that starts their turn within eight yards of a Mantis is subject to a horrific psychic cacophony of the most unpleasant noises imaginable: the whine of surgical saws slicing into bone; the screeching of a plague of locusts; the screams of women and children being savaged to death by wolves. This is effectively an ongoing *psychic scream* effect that immediately inflicts 4d6 Overflow Points and causes a -4 DM to all Checks and Tests, a -4 Penalty to all Attacks, and -4 Defense Modifier for as long as the character remains in the area plus 1d6 additional rounds. A Mantis could choose to suppress this effect but doesn't. A character with Psychokinesis can make a Hard Psychokinesis Test to suppress the effects of the Black Noise for Will rounds if they succeed.

**XP Bounty:** 200

### Description

*The Mantis is an overt cyborg, a hideous and unnatural fusion of man and machine. Most of its body looks human, albeit pale as chalk and emaciated, with jutting ribs and throbbing veins. The most disturbing mechanical parts aren't the scythe-like claws it has instead of hands - painted dark green - but the staple-like implants lacquer-painted the same dark green color that run up its spine to the base of its skull, the top half of which is contained in a bolted-on "helmet". The front of the helmet is adorned only with a "triclops" configuration of biomechanical eye stalks with multi-colored glowing lenses.*

*The Mantis Series are the only products of the Genesis initiative that are known to be sentient in the same way humans are. That doesn't mean they can be reasoned with, however. They view themselves as higher beings of pure energy, and view humans - even Espers - as lesser beings to be used solely for amusement, or food.*

*A Mantis will typically use its natural stealth to stalk its prey, trying to isolate one human victim to cripple with its Black Noise emanation, immobilize with its claws, and drain dry with Osmoses. When confronted by multiple foes, a Mantis likes to use Dominate to make friends and allies fight each other to the death, because this isn't just effective - it's highly amusing.*

## Mindwolf

#### Attributes

| | |
|---|---|
| **Strength:** | 6 (8) |
| **Speed:** | 6 (8) |
| **Wits:** | 6 |
| **Will:** | 4 |
| **Health:** | 36 (48) |
| **Initiative:** | 12 + 2d6 (16 + 3d6) |
| **Defense:** | 9 |
| **Power Points:** | 24 |

**Skills:** Brawling: Expert (+2), Intimidate: Expert (+2), Stealth: Expert (+2), Subterfuge: Expert (+2).

**Techniques:** Blitzkrieg, Trip Attack (as Kneecapper, but with melee Attack), Critical Attack, Reposition, Too Damn Fast.

#### Attacks

1. Bite at +2 for 1d6 + 8

**Psionic Talents:** Telekinesis Level 3, Somakinesis Level 2, Psychokinesis Level 3.

#### Special Abilities

**Psionic Cloak:** A Mindwolf can psionically Cloak itself from up to six persons at once. This costs 3 Power Points per Combat Round. At the start of each character's Combat Turn, they make a Will Check. If they succeed, they can perceive the Mindwolf. If they fail, they cannot perceive the Mindwolf. Characters unable to perceive the Mindwolf receive a Defense Modifier of -6 versus its Attacks and cannot Attack it unless directed to its location by character that *can* perceive it (a Free Action). In that case, if directed by another character, a character unable to perceive the Mindwolf receives a -6 Penalty to Attack it except with area attacks. A Mindwolf that attacks becomes visible again, ending the Psionic Cloaking effect.

**XP Bounty:** 50

### Description

*A Mindwolf might pass at a distance for a large canine predator, like a big, lean dog, or a timber wolf. Up close, however, anyone can see that its damp teal skin is hairless, scaly, and obviously reptilian. More disturbing is its eyeless head and the unusually long snout it terminates in. Instead of normal jaws, a Mindwolf's snout splits in three flaps when it bites, not unlike like the mouthparts of an annelid. Mindwolves are pack predators, usually found in packs of 2-4 or 2-7. They use Psionic Cloak to get close to their prey, then attack with their powerful bites, preferring to trip their quarry. They have never been observed to attack with Telekinesis, tend to use Somakinesis only passively, and use Psychic Scream only defensively, when trying to escape from a fight that is going badly for them. Mindwolves hunting in packs constantly communicate with each other using telempathy.*

## Overmind

### Attributes

| | |
|---|---|
| **Strength:** | 3 |
| **Speed:** | 4 |
| **Wits:** | 8 |
| **Will:** | 8 |
| **Health:** | 18 |
| **Initiative:** | 8 + 2d6 |
| **Defense:** | 12 (+1 for small size) |
| **Power Points:** | 48 |

**Skills:** Chemistry: Master (+4), Leadership: Master (+4), Intimidation: Expert (+2), Subterfuge: Expert (+2), Brawling: Apprentice (+1), Stealth: Apprentice (+1), Swimming: Apprentice (+1).

**Techniques:** None.

### Attacks

1. Tentacle Slap at +1 for 1d6 + 3

**Psionic Talents:** Psychokinesis Level 2, Telekinesis Level 4, Biofeedback Level 1, Necrokinesis Level 1.

### Special Abilities

**Parasitic Metamorphosis:** An Overmind can graft itself onto a helpless or dying human or Esper if it chooses; the process instantly stabilizes the host, if dying, and takes 1d6 hours to complete, after which time the host becomes a Brainchild. If the Overmind is removed from the host at any point during this process, the host dies with no hope of being revived.

**Osmoses Vulnerability:** Overminds suffer double "damage" from *Brain Drain*, and likewise grant twice the Power Points when drained.

**XP Bounty:** 40

### Description

*Perhaps the most disturbing creature in the Psychobestiary, an Overmind is a giant, slimy, purple disembodied brain about the size of a bulldog. It has a huge filmy black eye located front and center, and moves around by flopping inefficiently on four foot-long pseudopods that extend from the neural mass. Overminds appear to be human brains that were somehow altered by prolonged exposure to powerful psionically active chemicals and/or some form of radiation. Overminds use melee combat only as a last resort, and prefer to attack with Telekinesis, specifically using TK Push or TK Grab and Throw. Rumors exist of Overminds that have advanced into even more powerful forms, characterized by the ability to levitate, which the basic Overmind does not do. It is also known that Overminds can parasitically fuse with human hosts, creating a Brainchild by using their Biofeedback Talent to "fuse" their nervous system with that of the host. Overminds are known to be sapient, but have not been observed to communicate in any way. Overminds are usually found singly or in pairs, but may occasionally cluster together in larger groups in their lairs.*

## Psyder

### Attributes

| | |
|---|---|
| **Strength:** | 2 |
| **Speed:** | 6 |
| **Wits:** | 6 |
| **Will:** | 4 |
| **Health:** | 12 |
| **Initiative:** | 12 + 2d6 |
| **Defense:** | 10 (+1 for small size) |
| **Power Points:** | 36 |

**Skills:** Awareness: Expert (+2), Brawling: Expert (+2), Climbing: Expert (+2), Stealth: Expert (+2).

**Techniques:** Blitzkrieg, Dodge.

### Attacks

1. Bite at +2 for 1d6 + 2 damage plus poison (see below)

**Psionic Talents:** "Cryokinesis" Level 2, Psychokinesis Level 3.

### *Special Abilities*

**Poison:** Bitten Characters must succeed a Strength Check or suffer -2 Speed for 2d6 hours. This Penalty stacks and a character reduced to 0 Speed in this way is effectively paralyzed, with a Defense of 0.

**Psionic Cloak:** A Psyder can psionically Cloak itself from up to six persons at once. This costs 3 Power Points per Combat Round. At the start of each character's Combat Turn, they make a Will Check. If they succeed, they can perceive the Psyder. If they fail, they cannot perceive the Psyder. Characters unable to perceive the Psyder receive a Defense Modifier of -6 versus its Attacks and cannot Attack it unless directed to its location by a character that *can* perceive it (a Free Action). In that case, if directed by another character, a character unable to perceive the Psyder receives a -6 Penalty to Attack it except with area attacks. A Psyder that attacks becomes visible again, ending the Psionic Cloaking effect.

**XP Bounty:** 20

### *Description*

*A bruise-purple spider the size of a small dog is disturbing enough, clicking and chittering along on its eight legs, its mandible-like chelicerae dripping venom from its piercing fangs. Making matters worse is that the monster's bulbous abdomen is ridged and folded and textured just like a giant human brain, throbbing with pulsating veins. Of course, it's worse to not see it than to see it. The Psyder likes to attack with Psychic Scream and then one or two Cryokinesis blasts before closing in to use its venomous bite. Can be found in clusters of 1-6, 2-12, or even more.*

## Wampyr

### *Attributes*

| | |
|---|---|
| **Strength:** | 4 |
| **Speed:** | 6 |
| **Wits:** | 5 |
| **Will:** | 6 |
| **Health:** | 24 |
| **Initiative:** | 12 + 2d6 |
| **Defense:** | 8 |
| **Power Points:** | 36 |

**Skills:** Awareness: Master (+4), Brawling: Expert (+2), Flying: Expert (+2), Stealth: Apprentice (+1).

**Techniques:** Dodge, Blitzkrieg, Frenzy.

### *Attacks*

1. Bite at +2 for 1d6 + 4 plus Osmose 2d6 Power Points
2. Bite at +0 for 1d6 + 4 and Bite at +0 for 1d6 + 4 plus Osmose 2d6 Power Points

**Psionic Talents:** Psychokinesis Level 3, Osmoses Level 2.

### *Special Abilities*

**Flight:** (9 Yards per Move Action).

**XP Bounty:** 30

### *Description*

*This is a huge, bat-like creature the size of a large vulture, standing perhaps four feet tall, probably weighing only around 30 pounds but with a wing span of nearly 10 feet; at the upper joint of its wings protrude large, curved, claw-like bone "thumbs". Its head is its most disturbing feature, because instead of a normal face, it ends in a sucker maw ringed with hundreds of teeth, just like the mouth of a sea lamprey. A sort of psychic vampire, Wampyrs are opportunistic scavenger/predators that seem to derive their nutrition primarily from psionic energy, using Osmoses to feed on residual psionic energy. Fortunately for any Espers that might encounter them, if a Wampyr drains an Esper's PP dry with its Brain Drain ability, the Esper doesn't suffer the usual consequences of head explosion. Wampyrs can be found nesting in groups of 1-3 or 1-6. Wampyrs have never been observed using their Psychokinesis ability to perform Psychic Scream Attacks.*

# Appendix B: Institute Proprietary Tech

The technological resources available to The Institute and to Abraxis Biotech are generations ahead of what is available today, commercially or even to the upper echelons of the military industrial complex. In some cases, they have access to prototypes of "emerging technologies" that are perhaps hundreds of years away from being publicly disclosed, let alone seeing the mass market. While Abraxis has not elected to invest heavily in the development of these next-generation technologies, specializing instead in the biochemical development of Espers, The Institute has diversified its research portfolio, and have working prototypes of both *cybernetic implants* and *directed energy weapons*. (Abraxis may have access to directed energy weapons that it has acquired from The Institute, but no Abraxis personnel are cyborgs.)

## CYBERNETIC IMPLANTS

**"Twenty-twenty surgery**
**Well, twenty twenty**
**surgery for cheap**
**...**
**You're so sensitive**
**I am, I am a machine."**

***- Taking Back Sunday, "Twenty Twenty Surgery"***

**Cybernetic implants** are a concept that shouldn't be totally alien to anyone reading this appendix. They have been a popular element of science fiction media for decades and decades. Electronic, mechanical devices are installed in the human body and integrated with the nervous system, are controlled by the brain, and passively or actively enhance human performance in dramatic ways. While The Institute has not developed anything as advanced as full-body cyborgs, consciousness transference, prosthetic bodies, or even fully-functional artificial limbs, it *has* created several cybernetic implants which are being field tested by its most elite agents.

Espers who are not in The Institute cannot ever hope to have cybernetic implants installed. The medical technology needed to surgically implant the devices safely and correctly is unavailable outside Institute facilities. Even Institute Espers must prove their loyalty to The Institute *thoroughly* before being considered for cybernetic enhancement, and even then are only given implants sparingly. Implants don't just interfere with Psionic Talents; they seem to bleed away the subject's basic humanity. The more implants are installed, the more robotic and mechanical, affectless and unfeeling the subject appears. However, all Institute implants are designed to be internal, either invisible to the naked eye or easily concealable.

**Every cybernetic implant installed in an Esper permanently drains away a point of Will and permanently reduces the Esper's maximum Will score by one point.** An Esper with a Will of 6 that installs two cybernetic implants in himself now has a Will of 4, and can only increase his Will with experience to a maximum of 8. PC Espers eager for cybernetic augmentation should also be aware that Institute implants always come with certain loyalty-enhancing "failsafes".

**Any character can only install a number of implants equal to their Strength score.** Some implants might use up more than one "slot" (i.e. count as more than one point of Strength used up), and this will be indicated below.

Because cybernetic implants are not "supposed" to exist, they are classified at the highest levels. This means, among other things, that all implants except the pacemaker come with a "kill switch" that destroys them at a signal from The Institute, or upon the brain death and flatline of the character they are implanted in. This is not always subtle, and can cause the head of the implanted agent to explode like a meat grenade for no discernable reason on or shortly after death.

| Cyber Implant | Effects and Description |
|---|---|
| Pacemaker | Not unlike an ordinary pacemaker, but more advanced, this implant provides an agent with +4 Strength *only for the purpose of resisting Necrokinesis*. |
| Encrypted Commlink | This internal communications device allows an agent secure communication with other agents and Institute handlers without fear of interception or eavesdropping. It is one of the most common and least intrusive implants, but has no particular mechanical effects. |
| Hyper Reflex Trigger | This rare implant counts as "taking up" two points of Strength. It "juices" the agent's entire nervous system, greatly increasing reaction time. At the start of each Combat Round, the agent must choose between one of two benefits: either the agent receives +2 Defense for the duration of the round, *or*, at the end of the round, the agent can take an extra turn. The agent can choose a different benefit each Combat Round. |
| Neural Buffer | A computer-brain interface helps the agent to resist psionic tampering. The agent receives +2 Defense and +2 Will but *only for the purposes of resisting Psychokinesis*. |
| Thermoregulation Unit | This unit regulates the agent's body temperature, allowing the agent to ignore 10 degrees of temperature change each turn, and providing some resistance to the *Temper, Temper, Temperature* effect of Pyrokinesis. |
| Tier I Targeting Implant | The second most common implant. One of the agent's eyes is actually replaced with a microcomputer-lens construct, allowing superhuman accuracy with firearms due to the sub-processor in the optic nerve calculating firing trajectories and point of aim in real time. The agent receives +1 to hit with firearms and deals +1d6 damage with firearms. An entoptic heads-up display displays weapon status, range to target, and remaining ammunition. The eye has light-amplification and infrared functions also. The lens is matte-black and completely flat, with a distinctive red glow. Implanted agents typically conceal this implant by wearing sunglasses at all times. |
| Tier II Targeting Implant | Extremely rare, requires Tier I targeting implant. Both of the agent's eyes are replaced with cybernetic targeting cameras. The agent receives a total Bonus of +2 to hit with firearms and deals +2d6 damage with firearms. Only found in dedicated Institute sharpshooters. |

## DIRECTED ENERGY WEAPONS

**Laser weapons** are already in use as vehicular weapons by the US armed forces, but The Institute has secretly developed and put into field use *man-portable* laser weapons. Only two distinctive weapons systems are currently in field use. Laser weapons suffer no Range Penalties - they can target anything within line of sight - but might be weakened or defeated entirely by heavy rain, smoke, snow, or fog due to diffusion, at the GM's discretion.

*Melt Aura* has no effect on the damage of Energy Weapons. *TK Barrier* only works on laser weapons if the GM thinks that it is cool - it makes no logical sense even using pseudo-logic for a *TK Barrier* to be able to deflect laser beams, but it clearly worked in *Akira* so... yeah, your call.

| Weapon | Damage | Rate of Fire | Capacity (Type) | Notes |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| GP9201 "Black Hand" | 5d6 + 10 | S | 1 (Fusion Cell) | Ignores all Ranged Damage cut. Deals 2d6 fire damage to wielder. Reloading is an Attack Action. Includes Laser Aiming Module. |
| AHLR-12X | 1d6 - 10d6 | SA | Special | Requires Strength 4+ to wield and Strength 6+ to run while wielding. The laser has multiple intensity settings and can deal anywhere from 1d6 to 10d6 damage per beam at the firer's discretion. Ignores a number of points of Ranged Damage cut equal to twice the dice of damage dealt. The battery pack is depleted after 50d6 total damage has been dealt, i.e. after 5 full-powered shots, 10 half-powered shots, or any other combination. Includes Laser Aiming Module. |

**GP9201 "Black Hand":** *Uses the Pistols Skill.* This is perhaps the ultimate weapon of assassination. It looks exactly like an ordinary, boxy, matte-black 9mm automatic pistol at a distance. Completely unremarkable. A character handling it would quickly notice that the pistol's grip contains no magazine well in the seat - the bottom is closed - and the pistol's slide racks back to three times the normal length when pulled, and also offers more resistance to being pulled back than usual. A hollow in the back of the slide is where the fusion cell - a cylinder with a nub on one end not unlike a CO2 cartridge - is loaded. The beam of coherent red light it emits is visible only for a microsecond, and even then only appears as a beam if caught in dust or condensation in the air and seen from the right angle. In clear air, only a character directly facing the wielder would see anything, and they would see a dazzling flash - like a muzzle flare, only much brighter - from the gun's barrel. The gun's action when firing is completely silent. Because the GP9201 is capable of only one shot, the shooter often aims for the target's head. Because the beam of light is usually invisible except under the above circumstances, and the weapon is totally silent, often the target's head seems to explode for no discernable reason, as the instant evaporation of the target's brain causes the skull to rupture explosively from within.

**AHLR-12X:** *Uses the Heavy Weapons Skill.* A very different weapon from the GP9201, the AHLR-12X was designed along opposing parameters for an opposing purpose. It is a shoulder-fired weapon with a size and shape not entirely dissimilar to a FIM-92 Stinger missile, or even an older bazooka or panzerschreck (although without a large blast shield). It draws its power from a large fusion pack the size of a printer that is either strapped to the hip or strapped on the back depending on the specific model used. The power pack is directly connected to the weapon by a high capacity wire. The firer can choose to "sustain the beam" for anywhere from 1 to 10 seconds, and the longer the beam is sustained, the more damaging it is: the power pack is capable of only five full-powered shots, or many more weaker shots. This weapon is not silent as the batteries make a loud whining sound while charging just before firing. The power pack cannot be reloaded, but can be recharged from an appropriate power source. Without a charged power pack properly connected, the weapon is useless.

# Captured

## Day 5

I don't know where I am. I'm not even sure what state I'm in. I assume I'm still in the US, but that's it. This room is like the last one I was held in. White, sterile, no windows. The guards won't talk to me at all, of course. I assume this is day 5. The last time, they isolated me for 4 days before anyone came to speak to me. They sent in that same therapist from the last time (maybe I'm in Texas then?). I asked for something to write with. They gave me a crayon and a notebook. Not even a fucking golf pencil, a crayon. I've seen Lockup. Death row prisoners get golf pencils. I am a little bit flattered that they think I'm more dangerous than a death row prisoner... assuming I'm not one already.

Sasha, Lucky, Scream, please be alright. And I hope those kids are still alive, too. I think I sent the message to warn everybody in time. Maybe they'll be the ones to come to get me. I know they'll send someone.

## Day 7

They decided I'm fully healed from the raid. I was pretty messed up when they brought me here but my body heals really fast. I've spent a lot of time crying, to be honest. Fuck me, where will it end? I really thought that we'd be ok, for once. I really thought that I was gonna make it through this whole war. I'm such a fucking idiot.

## Day 8/9(?)

Where the FUCK are you guys? I want to go the fuck HOME. Therapist guy said something about starting tomorrow. What the fuck does that mean? They didn't get a chance to "start" anything last time I was caught. I'm sick of these fucking power-blocking drugs they keep me on all the time. They make me feel like I've got the flu. Chris, Scream, any fucking time, you cunts.

I'm sorry. I didn't mean it. I just feel sick...

## Day 10

They started.

Therapist guy came in and tried to talk to me about flipping on the Order. He fed me some bullshit about serving my country so I told him that I'd be more open to it if my country would stop feeding me those fucking drugs and a steady supply of bullets (amazingly, the scars I got from being shot in the chest are fading pretty fast. I didn't think they would at all). We went back and forth for a while. I can't believe that these shit rags think I would work for them after everything they've done to me and my friends. He asked me what I had in my life that was so great, since I apparently love the Zodiac Order so much. I yelled back, "No gods, no masters and two fingers in the air!" flipped him off with both hands, and slapped him with his own fucking clipboard. These drugs have

weakened me so much, I was happy to be able to move that tiny thing at all. How sad is that? I threw a trailer full of pigs into another trailer full of pigs one time, and now I can only sort of move a clipboard. I fucking hate Speak No Evil. I feel like shit.

Anyway, he said something about being disciplined for that before he stomped out. It felt pretty good to do that, but I'm also kinda scared. Still, I've taken a lot of pain. I'm sure I can hold out till they come get me. I bet they're still trying to find me. Recon takes a while. It'll be ok. Gotta hang tough.

## Day 11

I was sedated, along with my normal Speak No Evil injection. When I woke up, all of my piercings were gone. They shaved my head. My tattoos are gone. I was fucking furious. I yelled as loud as I could. I dared those petty fucking cunts to come in and fight me.

I KNOW what they're trying to do. Make me less of an individual to weaken my identity and make me more receptive to their rules and ideas. Well, FUCK that. Petty fucking shit rags. I hope all of their loved ones drown in septic tanks while they watch. Also, they have the shit to do laser tattoo removal here? Jesus, they must do this kind of shit often. If they're prepared for that kind of shit, what other kinds of psychological warfare bullshit are they going to pull?

I hope my friends will still be able to recognize me.

## Day 18(?)

They've been hurting me.

They said that I was one of the strongest Espers that they'd ever gotten hold of, so now they want to test to see what I can do.

They took me to a room with a 1-way mirror and this thing bolted to the wall. It was like a pallet with handles sticking out on one side. The whole thing was covered in rubber, and the side opposite the handles was attached to a groove in the wall, running from the floor to the ceiling. There was a trap door above it. A voice over an intercom said, "It'll turn off when the pallet is lifted over your head." Ok, so they want me to military press this thing. So I said, "What'll turn off?"

And that's when they electrocuted the floor. I've been shot, cut, blown up, you name it. I have never felt anything so excruciating. I grabbed the handles and got it over my head, but the fucking thing wouldn't stop until my arms were fully extended. I barely got a second to breathe when I hear the sound of the trap door sliding open and something (I guess a weight) dropped onto the pallet. Some fucking warning would have been nice. It surprised me, so I accidentally dropped the pallet, the juice went back on, and the pallet hit me right in the fucking kneecap. I went down and they still wouldn't turn the electricity off. I screamed for them to stop but they just kept saying the same shit. "It'll turn off when the pallet is lifted over your head".

I managed to get it back up, but my knee hurt like a bitch and I couldn't stop shaking. This went on and on. Every minute, another weight dropped and I had to keep it above my head. I didn't drop in after the first time, but it was agony. Eventually, after I don't even know how long, I just couldn't keep it up and it started to lower. I tried so hard to keep it raised but I just couldn't. I cried, I begged, I threatened, but they wouldn't turn it off. I tried, and somehow succeeded, to boost my strength (they only blocked my Telekinesis and not my Soma fully, I guess?) but that just kept it going for another 5 minutes before I couldn't do it anymore. I could feel the blood running from my nose, soaking my hospital gown. I passed out before they turned it off. They've been doing it every single day for the past week. I've done better each time, but it's hell. Absolute hell. Just to see how much I can lift? Seriously?

Chris, Scream, please help me. Please at least try to contact me. I miss you.

## Next day (19?), I think

Therapist guy came in. He said that I'd done a good job and showered me with praise. Said I'd be a huge asset to The Shop. Then he patted me on the head. Patted me on the fucking head, like I was a good fucking dog. I can't speak. My throat, and the rest of me, is all fucked up from my "good job." He says that I get to rest for now. Gotta be honest, I could have cried, I was so relieved.

## Day 20ish

They gave me better food today. It was actually my favorite kind of soup (lobster bisque), which is... suspicious. They must have other Espers here, working for them. Did they read my mind? I haven't told anyone that recently. Maybe it's a coincidence. Maybe I'll be free soon. Maybe tomorrow. Maybe it's taking so long because they want to mount a really big offensive. Maybe they're rallying the troops or whatever. Maybe Sasha will kiss me when I get out.

## Day 27+

They let me recover for a week. Then they made me do another "good job". I don't know how long it's been after that, but I do know that they now believe that I have no pyrokinetic ability whatsoever. They didn't believe me, no matter how much I screamed when they tested me. I overheard one of the asshole guards making some sick joke about third degree burns not being able to lie. When they bust me out, I'm going to rip all of the guards' guts out and write my name with them.

## Day ?

My name is Rose. Rose Klein. I haven't heard it since I came here.

I want to go home.

Why aren't they here yet? Did they forget about me?

They couldn't have. They'll come for me soon. The Order will take care of me. They'll be proud that I didn't flip.

## Day ??

Judging by my hair growth, I think I've been here about 6 weeks. 6 X 7 is 42. Day 42?

They won't stop. The more they hurt me, the nicer they are to me. The nicer they are, the worse they hurt me. Why am I still here? Did the Order sell me? Do they just not care? I tried my best for them. I really did. I want to go home. Where's everyone else? Are they dead? Are they stuck here too? Why won't anyone contact me?

Please come. Please take me back. I'll be better, I promise. I didn't mean to hurt those people in Germany. I didn't mean any of it. They were accidents. I promise.

## Day 5 with no food

"We're going to make you stronger. We need to see what you can do now so we can make you the best warrior you can be. I know it's hard now, but soon you'll be pulling a fat government paycheck and jet setting around the world in first class. You don't need to go home, we'll give you a better one. First, though, we need to make sure that you're on our side, and you've been putting up quite a lot of resistance. Don't worry, that's normal for Espers in your situation. We'll fix you yet."

Said with almost fatherly affection, right before they told me that they wanted to see how starvation affects Somakinetics. They temporarily took this notebook away on day 3 because they caught me trying to eat the paper. Apparently, I'm still abnormally strong, but they can't run the same strength test out of concern for what it'll do to my heart. This is so much worse. My insides are on fire and it's like a fist is clenched around my guts and they still won't stop giving me the fucking PPIDS. I try to sleep. I don't hurt then. It's getting harder.

## ???

I don't know how long they starved me. Time ran together in an endless stream of horror and agony. Please, God, no more experiments or tests. When they open the door, I run. I fight. It never helps. There's too many of them. I sit in the corner all day, staring at the door. Are they going to kill me when they're done? Will they ever be done? They hurt me and fix me up again and again. Every time they act proud of me and tell me that I did a good job. Every time they reward me with a book or better food or some other trivial shit.

I want to kill. I want to rip into their bodies with my bare hands. I want to eat their fucking hearts. I want to fly away. I want to rip them apart and reassemble them and rip them apart over and over again. I want to juggle their organs with my mind. I want to eat dinner with my friends again. I want to go home.

I'll snap your fucking necks, you've gone too far. You're going to die EVERYLASTONEOFYOU.

## ???+8

No one's coming.

I have no home.

### ???

No one's contacted me. Am I the only one left alive? No guards or therapist. Food is there when I wake up. How long have I been here? 2 months? 3? 6? A year? There is no day or night. Just fluorescent lights that they never turn off.

No, no. It couldn't have been longer than 3 months unless they cut my hair while I sleep. They might be doing that to fuck with me more. Maybe I'll pluck a hair out every time I go to sleep and compare it with the one I plucked previously to see if it's shorter. But what if they cut those too?

### ???

My name is Rose. Rose Klein. I used to have green hair and tattoos. I used to fly and fight and drive and drink. I saw the sun and the moon and trees and grass and the ocean. I used to not be sick. I used to be able to hear doors opening without crying. I used to have friends. A million years ago, Sasha held me when I was upset. A million miles ago, Kay took care of me when I was hungover. A million lives ago, Lucky and I got stoned and watched the trains going by.

Does the Order even care that I'm missing? Does anyone remember me at all? What if they broke in and saw me sleeping and thought that it couldn't be me cuz they took my tattoos and piercings and hair and they just left me here?

### ???

I'm so ashamed. They said I was almost done with "Phase 1". Phase 1? How many are there? They said my reward was that I wouldn't get my next dose of Speak No Evil if I promised not to use my powers. I was just so sick of feeling ill so I've been being good like a good little fucking dog. I can feel my powers inside of me but I don't know what they'll do if I use them. I feel stronger but I don't know that I can escape by myself. Maybe I'll risk a quick boost. I don't know how long it is till my next injection. They made it clear that the next one would be as scheduled. Maybe this is a ploy from someone in the Order? Maybe they Dominated the therapist guy. I better stay put until the action starts. Going in headlong is what got me in trouble in Germany.

### ???

Today, I'm going home.

### ???+1

Today, I'm going home.

### ???+2

Today, I'm going home.

### Starting Over. Day 1

This is a trick.

They're just fucking with me. This has to be a trick.

Someone new came in today. It was a woman. She would have been really pretty if she didn't have "pig" written

all over her. They probably thought a pretty girl would get me to... what? Open up? Play nice? Fuck it. Institute Stooge isn't my type.

When she started talking, I wasn't really listening, because these fucks all say the same thing. Play nice, be a good girl, fight for your country, bullshit, bullshit, bullshit. But then she said something else.

"...Chris, right? Your friend's name was Chris?"

That got me to listen. I looked at her. She had this sad, sorry look on her face. "What?" I asked her. Have these fuckers been reading this?

She looked confused, then sighed. "I guess it's hard to listen to anyone when you're on all those inhibitors." Sounded sympathetic, like it wasn't her and her bosses that have me on this shit anyway.

Then she started over.

She said there was a strike team from the Order at the facility. At this facility. They were heading for my quarters. For me.

I guess... after security stopped them... they got taken to the medical wing, for rehabilitation and capture. Like me. But they were dead on arrival. The woman said they'd identified some of them. Chris... Kay...

I'm sorry.

I'm not sure what I did after that. I know it was loud, and there was a lot of blood, and that my head feels like it's going to explode right now. I don't think that woman is going to fully recover from whatever it is I managed to do. She's probably not going to be very pretty anymore, if she can even walk again.

But it has to be a fucking trick. To get me to lose hope. Stop fighting.

Idiots.

My name is Rose. Rose Klein. I'm a fucking mama bear. I'm a fighter. Always going to be a fighter.

And the Shop made a grave error when they decided not to kill me.

THERE IS NO PENSION PLAN FOR HEROES, SO YOU'LL WANT TO GET THE HELL OUT OF MY WAY.

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A million thanks to all of you! We hope you enjoy this game as much as we enjoyed making it.

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*Jaclyn Rose • Neil Oratz*

# PSIONICS

THE NEXT STAGE IN HUMAN EVOLUTION

## Esper Record Sheet I Side 1

Player Name: | Esper Name: | Earned XP: _____

Campaign Date: | Campaign Time: | Spent XP: _____

### *Biographical Data*

Age: | Height: | Weight: | Eyes: | Hair: | Skin:

**STRENGTH:**

**HEALTH:** _____
(Strength × 6)

**THRESHOLD:** _____
(0 - Strength)

**SPEED:**

**INITIATIVE:** ___ d6 +____
(2d6 + [Speed × 2])

**WITS:**

**DEFENSE:** _____
(3 + Wits)

**WILL:**

**K.O. THRESHOLD:** _____
(10 - Will)

| SKILL | RANK / ROLL UNDER | SKILL | RANK / ROLL UNDER | SKILL | RANK / ROLL UNDER |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | | | |
| | | | | | |
| | | | | | |
| | | | | | |
| | | | | | |

**Trained Skills:**

| TECHNIQUE | NOTES | TECHNIQUE | NOTES | TECHNIQUE | NOTES | EQUIPMENT |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | | | | |
| | | | | | | |
| | | | | | | |

# PSIONICS
THE NEXT STAGE IN HUMAN EVOLUTION

## Esper Record Sheet I Side 2

STRENGTH:
SPEED:
WITS:
WILL:

HEALTH: _____
INITIATIVE: _____ d6 +_____
DEFENSE: _____
K.O. THRESHOLD: _____

THRESHOLD:_____

**POWER POINTS:** _____/_____ ***(Will x 6)***

☐☐☐☐☐ ☐☐☐☐☐ ☐☐☐☐☐ ☐☐☐☐☐ ☐☐☐☐☐ ☐☐☐☐☐ ☐☐☐☐☐ ☐☐☐☐☐ ☐☐☐☐☐ ☐☐☐☐☐ ☐☐☐☐☐ ☐☐☐☐☐

(Black out any unused boxes from the right with marker. Fill in boxes from the left with pencil as PP are used.)

**OVERFLOW GAUGE:** ***(Will x 6)***

| Will 1 | Will 2 | Will 3 | Will 4 | Will 5 | Will 5 | Will 6 | Will 7 | Will 8 | Will 9 | Will 10 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| ☐☐☐☐☐ | ☐☐☐☐☐ | ☐☐☐☐☐ | ☐☐☐☐☐ | ☐☐☐☐☐ | ☐☐☐☐☐ | ☐☐☐☐☐ | ☐☐☐☐☐ | ☐☐☐☐☐ | ☐☐☐☐☐ | ☐☐☐☐☐ |

(Black out any unused boxes from the right with marker. Fill in boxes from the left with pencil as Overflow Gauge fills.)

### Telekinesis ○○○○○
- Biofeedback ○○○○
- Somakinesis ○○○○
- Necrokinesis ○○○○

Weight Limit: Object Limit:

Notes

### Pyrokinesis ○○○○○
- Entropy ○○○○
- Magnekinesis ○○○○
- Synchronicity ○○○○

Ignite Damage: Heat Shield:

Temp Change/Turn:

Notes

### Psychokinesis ○○○○○
- Scrying ○○○○
- Osmosis ○○○○
- Technokinesis ○○○○

Notes

**BLUE CAPS [** ] THRESHOLD:
(Make a tally mark whenever you use a BLUE talent)

**RED CAPS [** ] THRESHOLD:
(Make a tally mark whenever you use a BLUE talent)

**GREEN CAPS [** ] THRESHOLD:
(Make a tally mark whenever you use a BLUE talent)