

TM

CORF RULES



THEATRIX

Design: David Berkman, Travis Eneix, Brett Hackett

Design Contributors: Aaron 'Hardkorp' Croston, Paul Germano, David Oberholzer, John Kater, Chris Kelly

Development: David Berkman, Derek Boain, Travis Eneix, Andrew Finch, Anthony Gallela, Aaron Long, Brett Hackett

Written By: David Berkman, Travis Eneix, Andrew Finch, Anthony Gallela

Editing: David Berkman, Anthony Gallela

Art Director: Anthony Gallela

Art:

Shannon Archaleta - pg 40 & 118
 Dave Ball - pg 41
 Karen Baumann - pg 22, 24, 26, 36, 47, 57, 76, 89 & 121
 Tim Collier - pg 14, 20, 28, 68, 80 & 124
 Oliver Dear - pg 25, 130
 David Fooden - pg 98
 Paul Gudnason - pg 37, 43, 45, 60, 82, 89, 94, 96, 97, 101, 106, 108, 109, 110, 115, 132, 141, 142 & 143
 Ed Heil - pg 70 & 119
 Shawn Klimek - pg 12 & 63
 Arron Long - pg 35, 70, 84, 86, 90, 95 & 112
 Shane Magill - pg 23
 Fernando Marti - pg 38, 50, 65, 74 & 132
 Jeff Menges - pg 114
 Daniel Thron - pg 7, 8, 10, 53 & 127

Cover Design: David Berkman, Derek Boain, Andrew Finch, Aaron Long

Cover Art: Ron Walotsky

Typesetting & Layouts: David Berkman

Production: David Berkman, Travis Eneix, Anthony Gallela, Aaron Long

Staff: Tim Creel, Eric Currier, Beatrice Flamenco, Richard Trafton

Backstage Press: David Berkman, Travis Eneix, Andrew Finch, Anthony Gallela, Brett Hackett

We Said We Would, So Here Goes ...

Brett "I can't believe I came up with that."
Hackett - for doing what no one else could.

David "Great Master of All I — what?" **Berkman** - for that wonderful insight it took only six years to develop.

Travis "Attitude!?, WHAT ATTITUDE!!" **Eneix** - for his [Deleted for Security Reasons] and his surprising objectivity.

Anthony "She wants me." **Gallela** - for calling it like it is.

Andrew "I have just a few words to say about that ..." **Finch** - for having something to say about everything.

Derek "I'm supposed to guess!?" **Boain** - for developing ESP.

Aaron "Deadline? ... There was a deadline?" **Long** - for artwork the likes of which **NO ONE** has ever seen.

David "I can't believe I can be this drunk, and still be this sexy!" **Oberholzer** - for a party only he remembers.

Esther "Would you guys shut up down there!" **Norton** - for extreme patience under fire.

Richard "Is this annoying you?" **Trafton** - for being very, very helpful.

Jill "...But I digress." **Lucas** - for supplying us with more useful information than she'll ever know.

Tara "Don't ask me" **Gallagher** - for being the most knowledgeable person in gaming.

Play Testers:

Many of the play testers listed below bought pre-press copies of Theatrix from us, helping us along as we developed the game. We would like to thank them again for their support. We would also like to thank all of our playtesters for their comments and advice. This wouldn't be the same game without you.

Stephen Beardslee, Cynthia Billops, Brian Boonstra, Jeff Brain, Ron Britton, Gmeron Brown, Jenifer Buring, Matthew Buynosli, Nathan Carpenter, S. Andrew Chance, Deryl Clark, Jacob Clingerman, Christine Craig, Tim Creel, Dona Croston, Eric Currier, Douglas Dea, Gary Delisle, Timothy Dennis, Steve Douglas, Jennifer Drath, Skip Dugur, Andrew Durston, Heleen Durston, Brett Dyer, Chris Elliott, Geoffrey Fagan, Stacey Feters, David Finklea, Scott Fitz, James Fourcade, Sam Freund, Matt Fry, Francis Gallela, Diana Goldsmith, Larry Grossman, Tom Harrington, Joel Hill, Robin Hines, Tanith Hirai, Chris Hockaboot, Dave Hughes, Darrin Hyrup, Paul Jackson, Mike Johnson, Deverne Jones, Shane Judson, Mike Kangle, Bill Kassale, Sarah Keast, David Kenard, Laurinda Kershaw, Japji Khalsa, John Kim, Bob Krotsley, Vary Kuevor, Sophie Lagace, Shannon Lambeth, Jason Lamborne, Magnus Lie Hetland, Nick Lesiecki, Mark Letter, Mark Lieberman, Stacy Linder, Corey Lissau, Chris Love, Jim Love, Gaby Malleod, Bill Mazerat, Kevin Miller, Loren Miller, William Miller, Carlton Moore, Cy Myers, David Myers, Brian Myhre, Bretto Netto, Ashley Nichols, Sean Pagliarulo, William Parham, Joseph Pettit, Tom Pizzino, Chris Poley, Nick Poolos, Nick Ramirez, John Reskusich, Jeff Richardson, Todd Rohrer, Andrew Rose, Gordon Rose, Gurubani Rosenbloom, Lisa Sacco, Vinny Sauzillio, Aaron Schwartz, Matt Scott, Dan Senn, Ami Seymour, Todd Shaughnessy, O.J. Simpson, Gary Smith, Marcus Soulier, Chris Stopelli, Demitri Strathearn, Mike Strathearn, Gobind Tanaka, Jeff Taylor, Chris Thesing, Howard Thompson, Scott Thorne, Daniel Thron, Teresa Thurman, James Tiel, Jim Todd, Richard Trafton, Tanith Tyrr, Gary Vanderhook, Lee Vanderlip, Ron Vardy, René Vernon, Dave Vignola, Gary Walker, Sam Walls, Jeff Washam, Dirk Wells, Robbie Westmoreland, JD Wikert, Jim Wiley, Robin Williams, Stuart Williams, Tami Williams, Holly Wilson, Richard Wilson, Ken Winland, Kriss Wolf, Eddy You, Josh Zerlan

We apologize to anyone whose name was left out, or misspelled. If you played, or purchased, a pre-press copy of Theatrix, and your name is not listed, please write us, and give us your name, address, the place, and date you played Theatrix.

Thank you - Backstage Press.

Special Thanks To:

Nene Tina Thomas	Carlo Lopa
Dean Yuen	Eric Lindstrom
Amrit Kaur Khalsa	Sam Lewis
Coszette Eneix	Tri Tac Systems
Dr. Lyndell Grey	Tara Gallagher
Ester Norton	Richard Trafton
FASA Corporation	Rev. Robert Finch
Francis Gallela	Paul Lidberg
Greg Staford	Paramount Pictures
Jill Lucas	Tim Dunn

Idols & Ideals:

People who have inspired us to try and reach for new heights, who have given us vision, and/or visions.

B.F. Skinner
Buddah-Head
Fritz Perls
Ganja Indica
Gene Roddenberry
Ian Fleming
Kitty
Lao Tsu
Miyamoto Musashi
Syd Field
Undercover S.K.A.

Backstage Press would especially like to thank **Bob Hamilton** for his assistance on this product. We owe you a debt of gratitude. - Backstage Press

Published by Backstage Press
P.O. Box 170243, San Francisco, CA 94117

The purchaser of this book may reproduce the character sheets for personal use only. Any other reproduction of this material, whether in whole, or in part, without written permission of the publisher, is expressly denied, with the exception of short excerpts for the purpose of reviews.

Theatrix is a Trademark of Backstage Press. Copyright © 1993 Backstage Press. All rights reserved. Printed in the United States of America.

The mention of or reference to any companies or products in these pages is not a challenge to the trademarks or copyrights concerned.



TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

INTRODUCTION	9
GAME CONTENTS	9
ROLLING DICE	9
THE BASIC RULE	9
CAPITALIZED TERMS	11
ORGANIZATION	11
CHAPTER BY CHAPTER	11
REFERENCE CARDS	12
GLOSSARY	13
SUMMARY	13

ROLEPLAY

ROLEPLAYING	15
WHAT IS ROLEPLAYING?	15
THE TROUPE	15
ACTING	15
STAGE DIRECTIONS	16
SOLILOQUIES AND VOICE-OVERS	16
DIRECTING	17
TIME	17
SUPPORTING CAST	17
STAGING	17
CONTINUITY	18
CUT! ... TAKE TWO	18
GLOSSARY	19
SUMMARY	19

CINEMATOCLEAFY

CINEMATOGRAPHY	21
DESCRIPTION	21
SET DESIGN, LIGHTING, AND ...	22

MUSICAL SCORE	22
FORESHADOWING	23
CUT SCENES	23
Flashbacks	25
Dream Sequences	25
TIMING AND COINCIDENCE	26
Meanwhile, Back At The ...	26
LITTLE SCENES	26
GLOSSARY	27
SUMMARY	27

MAKEUP AND COSTUMING

MAKEUP AND COSTUMING	29
QUANTIFIERS	29
SCALING	29
AND MORE ...	30
TO QUANTIFY OR NOT TO QUANTIFY ...	30
QUANTIFIED TRAITS	30
DESCRIPTIVE TRAITS	30
Quantifiers for Descriptive Traits	30
UNQUANTIFIED TRAITS	31
SCALING	31
COMPLETING THE SCALE	31
METHODS OF SCALING	32
Scaling By Range	32
Scaling by Norm	32
IF THE MOUNTAIN WON'T GO ...	32
THE DECIMAL POINTS	32
TYPES OF TRAITS	33
PHYSICAL AND MENTAL ATTRIBUTES	33
Physical Attributes	33
Mental Attributes	34
Describing Attributes	34
SKILLS AND ABILITIES	35
Ranking	36

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Skill and Ability Histories	36
Specialization	37
Skill and Ability Descriptions	37
Everyman Skills	37
Skill Categories	37
Example Skills	38
PERSONALITY TRAITS	38
Personality Trait Activation	40
Director's Control	40
Double Activation for ...	41
DESCRIPTORS	41
Descriptor Activation	44
Descriptors Vs. Skills/Abilities	44
THE PRIMARY DESCRIPTOR	44
FLAWS	45
GENERAL THEORY OF ...	45
CONCEPTION	45
LIST ATTRIBUTES, SKILLS, ...	46
THE BASIC RULE	47
TEMPLATES	47
POWER PLAY	47
CHARACTER SHEETS	47
GLOSSARY	49
SUMMARY	49

LIGHTS ... CAMERA ... ACTION!

LIGHTS ... CAMERA ... ACTION!	51
OPPOSED ACTIONS	51
SUCCESS AND FAILURE	51
THE BASIC RULE	51
SKILL VS. PLOTLINE	52
AMBIGUITY	52
ROLEPLAY	52
TRAITS	54
SHORT TIME	54
ROUNDS	54
INITIATIVE	54
USING SKILLS AND ABILITIES	55
DIFFICULTY	55
COLLATERAL SKILLS	55
USING THE STAGE	57
ACTIVELY OPPOSED ACTIONS	57
Rule Of Thumb	58
THE ACTIVE PARTICIPANT	58

DUELING SUCCESSES	58
RESOLUTION FLOWCHARTS	58
RESOLUTION PATHS	59
Basic Resolution Paths	59
Transitional Boxes	60
Advanced Resolution Paths	61
Example	62
Example	63
MAGNITUDE OF RESULT	64
Skill Rank Vs. Difficulty	64
Risk	64
TIMING, TENSION, AND AMBIGUITY	65
RANDOMNESS	66
A Formula For Success	66
GLOSSARY	67
SUMMARY	67

IMPROVISATION

IMPROVISATION	69
TROUPE STYLE ROLEPLAYING	69
DRAMA	69
INFORMATION	70
MACROSCOPIC VS. MICROSCOPIC	70
STRUCTURE	70
PROCESS	71
SUBPLOTS	71
Long Term Vs. Short Term	71
Personal Vs. Troupe	71
Examples of Subplots	72
DISTRIBUTED DIRECTING FOR ...	72
THE STAGE	72
Rule of Thumb	73
STATEMENTS	73
Example	73
IMPROVISE FOR SUCCESS	75
CONSISTENCY	75
PLOT POINTS	76
SPENDING PLOT POINTS	76
Buying Success	76
Blackmail	76
Payment Due	76
EARNING PLOT POINTS	77
Zero Point Subplots	78
Beating the Averages	78

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Downtime	78
Pregaming	78
APPLAUSE	78
JELLYBEAN DIRECTING	78
THE BASIC RULE	78
GLOSSARY	79
SUMMARY	79

EPILOGUE

EPILOGUE	81
PACING	81
PLOT POINT TOTALS	81
SCALING THE CHRONICLE	81
RESCALING THE CHRONICLE	82
BOTTOM OF THE HEAP	82
TOP OF THE HEAP	82
HIGH WATER MARK	82
ADVANCEMENT SUBPLOTS	82
COMPLEXITY	83
THE FORMS OF POWER	83
PLOT DEVICES	83
ACTOR'S CONTROL	83
PUSHING THE ENVELOPE	83
THE BASIC RULE	84
GLOSSARY	85
SUMMARY	85

COMBAT

COMBAT	87
IMPORTANCE	87
ROUGHNESS	88
SCALING TRAITS	88
Success and Failure	88
Results	88
SETTING	88
Flavor	88
Weapons	88
Damage	89
ENVIRONMENT	89
The Stage	89
Props	89
HANDS, SWORDS, GUNS, AND ...	90

CHOREOGRAPHY	90
FIGHTING STYLES	91
Plain Fighting	91
All Out Attack	91
Full Defense	91
Trickery	91
DAMAGE	91
WOUND LEVELS	92
Damage Types	93
SPECIAL EFFECTS	93
SCALING	95
OUT FOR THE COUNT	95
FORCE FIELDS, ARMOR, AND ...	95
A WORLD O' HURT	96
READY, AIM, FIRE!	97
THE BASIC RULE	97
COMBAT ACTION RESOLUTION	98
COMBAT ROUND CHECK LIST	98
THE BIG COMBAT MEGA-EXAMPLE	101
GLOSSARY	113
SUMMARY	113

SETTING

SETTING	115
GETTING STARTED	115
THE STAGE	115
Research	116
The World	116
Politics	116
Values	116
People	117
Dramatic Context	117
VILLAINS	117
UPDATING THE CORE RULES	118
SCALING	118
Something.0 Points	118
Example	118
Example	119
SPECIFIC THEORY OF ...	119
LISTS	120
Skills	120
Abilities	120
Descriptors	122
SYSTEM EXTENSIONS	122

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Example	122
COMBAT	122
RESOLUTION FLOWCHARTS	122
THE BASIC RULE	122
GLOSSARY	123
SUMMARY	123

PLOTLINE

PLOTLINE	125
IDEA	125
A SENTENCE OR TWO	125
CLICHÉ	126
TRANSLATION	126
DRAMA IN 3 ACTS	126
ACT III - THE RESOLUTION	126
Example of the Resolution	127
ACT I - THE INTRODUCTION	127
Secrets	128
Involvement and Motivation	128
Example of the Introduction	128
ACT II - THE CONFRONTATION	129
THE CONFLICT EXPLODED	129
PLOT TURNS	129
Example of Plot Turn I	130
Example of Plot Turn II	130
Planning	130

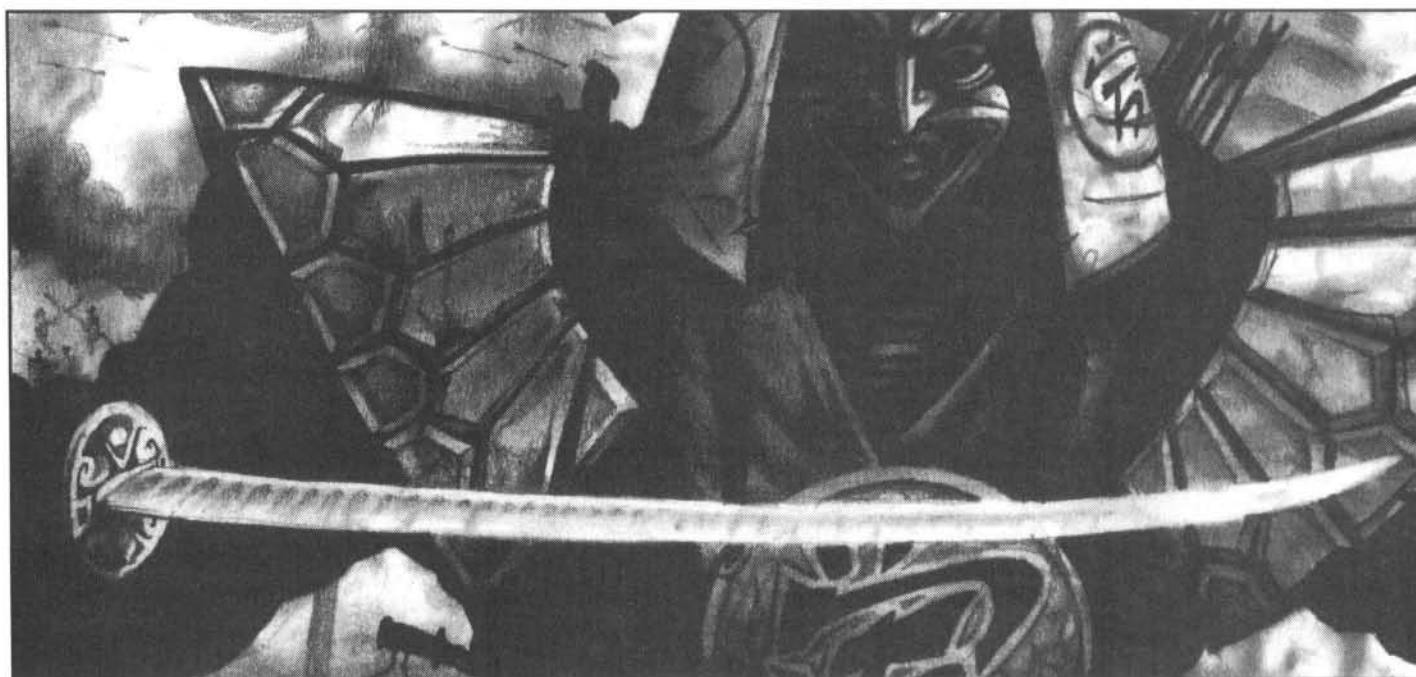
Other Plot Turns	131
MIDPOINT	131
Example of the Midpoint	131
THE PINCH	131
Example of Pinch I	131
Example of Pinch II	132
TIMING	132
THE INCREDIBLE SHRINKING ...	133
FEELING GOOD	133
CUE CARDS	133
SCENE CARDS	133
CAST CARDS	133
Example	134
SCREEN TEST	134
Behind the Scenes	134
THE BASIC RULE	134
GLOSSARY	135
SUMMARY	135

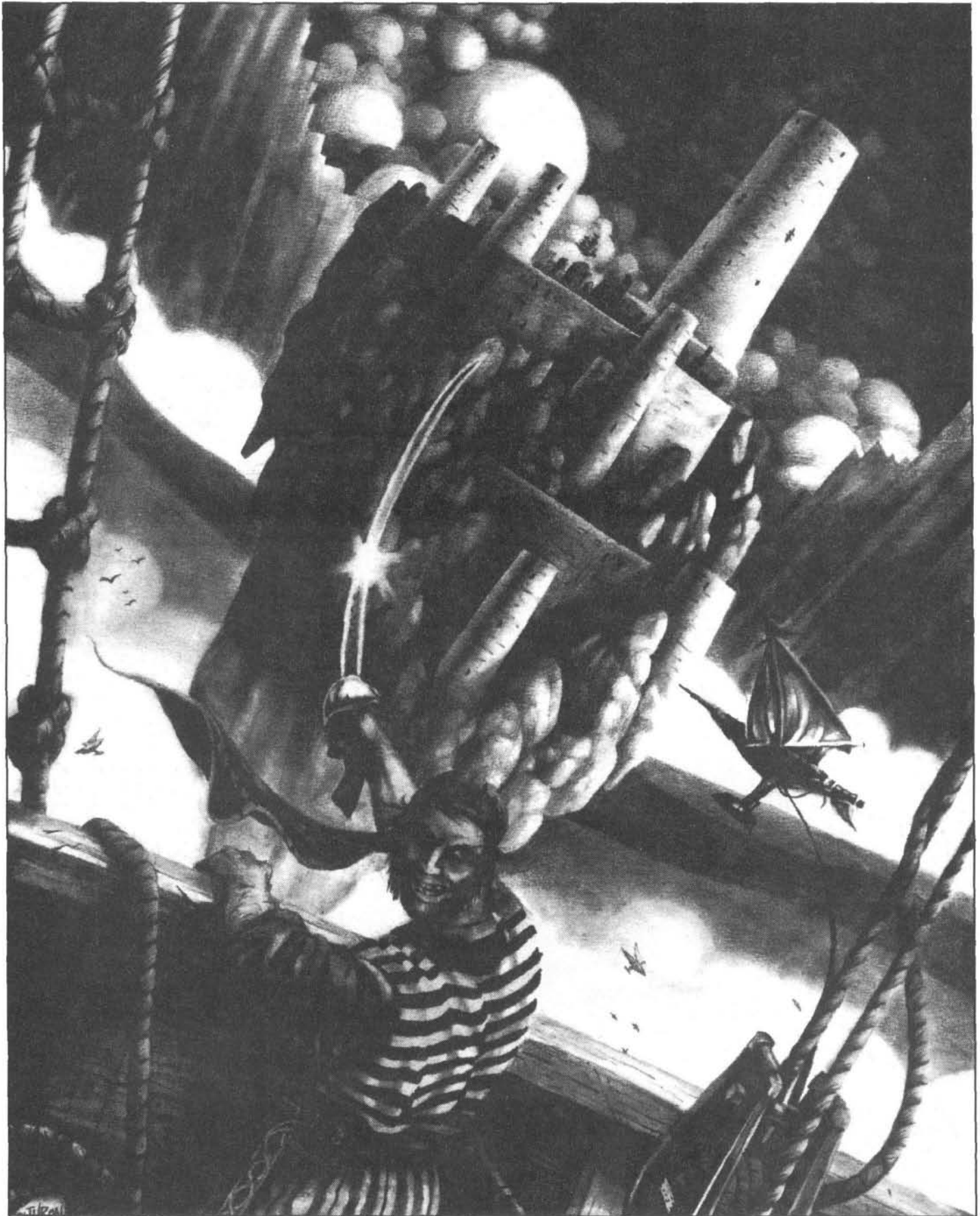
POSTSCRIPT

POSTSCRIPT	136
------------	-----

MINI-ADVENTURE

MINI-ADVENTURE	137
----------------	-----







INTRODUCTION

If you build castles in the air, your work need not be lost; that is where they should be. Now put the foundations under them.

- Henry David Thoreau

INTRODUCTION

Making a story come to life can be a difficult task. Previous generations of game systems have been rules bound, trapped within their own structure and rigidity. We wanted to produce a game that would help you in every way, not hinder you. So we developed a system of rules that is written to evolve along with your style of storytelling and roleplaying. These rules can be used to guide every facet of the game's progress, without becoming intrusive. You can use all the rules, or easily peel them away in layers, until you're running free-form games. The rules heavily encourage adopting this style of play, making themselves unnecessary.

We run *Theatrix* fast and free, using these pages only when we feel they'll be helpful in making a decision. We also keep all the roleplay encouraging rules, such as the Plot Point and Improvisational rules, because we think they're fun. You've paid your money and may do with this book as you see fit. We hope you'll see fit to enjoy it.

The next few sections define terms used throughout this book, so even if you're familiar with roleplaying, you should try to read the rules in the order given. This will also familiarize you with the intent of the rules, which we feel is the meat of the game, far more than the rules themselves. In other words, if what you're reading for the next few pages seems like old hat, please bear with us, and pretend you're beginning all over again.

GAME CONTENTS

Core Rules Book
Reference Cards
Flowcharts

You may also wish to have on hand ...

- ⇒ 10 Sided Dice (Optional!)
- ⇒ Water Soluble Marking Pens
- ⇒ Hex Map (Usable with the Marking Pens)
- ⇒ Lead Figures

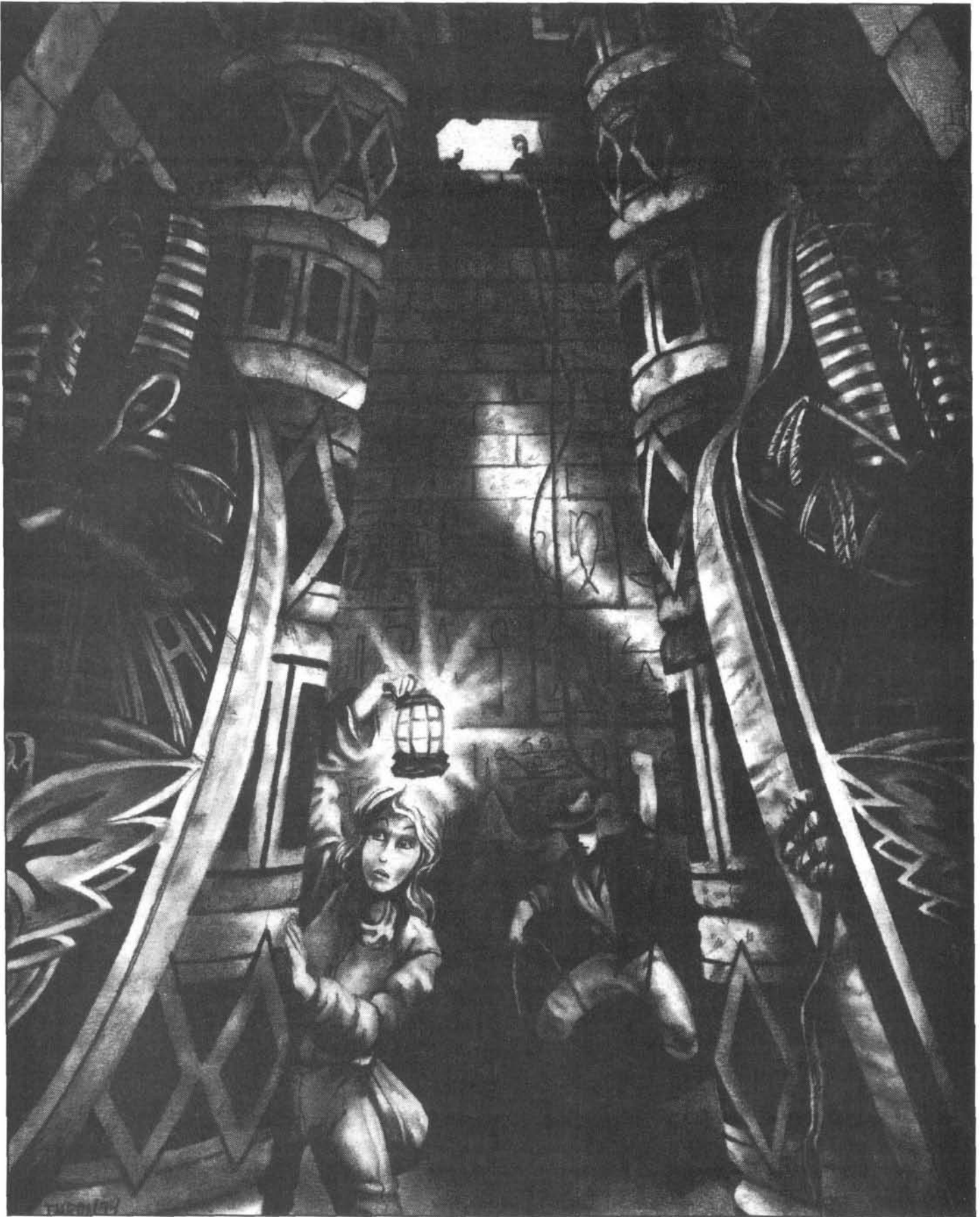
All of the above are available at local hobby stores.

ROLLING DICE

Although no rule within this book ever requires you to roll any dice, there are optional rules that allow for die rolls to be used in making game decisions. There are two kinds of die rolls these optional rules may call for, and both of them use a ten sided die (available at many hobby stores). The first kind is denoted in the rules as a **d10** roll, meaning you should roll one ten sided die, and treat the number '0' as a '10'. This gives a range of '1' to '10'. The second kind of roll will require two ten sided dice. Actually, one die may be rolled twice, or two differently colored dice may be rolled at the same time. We denote this as a **d100** roll. The first die is treated as the tens place in a two digit number. The second die is treated as the ones place. A '0' and a '2' would then be read as '2'. A '5' and a '3' would be read as '53'. A '0' and a '0' would be read as '100'. This gives a range of '01' through '00', or '1' to '100'.

THE BASIC RULE

Throughout the '**Core Rules**', we'll be talking about what we call '**Basic Rules**'. Basic Rules are the only **real** rules of the game. The purpose of rules is to give a consistent way to handle situations and judgements. The Basic Rules are the only ones you need to make your



games run well. Everything else is embellishment. Other rules are there to help you only if you need them, and we promise that the Basic Rules will never hinder you in any way.

CAPITALIZED TERMS

You'll find that some of the terms used in this and other Theatrix products are consistently Capitalized. This convention is used to denote significant terms for these rules. Sometimes, formal definitions will be given for these capitalized terms. At other times, we'll allow a definition to develop naturally out of our usage of the term. We may also provide definitions for more traditional terms that expand upon their traditional usage. These rules are meant to be flexible and open ended, so try not to read them like a legal document. Instead, develop the storyteller's art and adopt, borrow, and re-interpret. In other words, make this book your own.

ORGANIZATION

These '**Core Rules**' are an interpretation of how to create and develop a good story. They act as a skeleton upon which you may detail any universe of your imagining. Theatrix Setting Books are also available to help you with this process. That's where you'll find most of the guidelines for creating a particular genre, starting with character generation, and moving through equipment lists, maps, and story scripts. If a Setting Book was not included with your purchase, you may still use these rules. You'll just have to do a lot of the work yourself. Or, you may purchase one of our richly detailed Setting Books, and adopt its fully realized world of adventure for your own.

This book is organized a little differently from most roleplaying games. What is really given here is a suggestion of how to create improvisational theatre in your living room. Because it's so immediate, if all the participants are up to it, roleplaying can be a very intense experience. What follows is a method for creating and holding that intensity.

The book starts with a basic definition of roleplaying, including the parts of both Actor and Director (see the next chapter, titled '**Roleplay**'). This is followed by a more complex look at the art of Directing from a theatrical perspective. The next four chapters detail most of the game's actual guidelines; starting with creating roles to portray, then moving through the basics of decision making, then on to a discussion of various improvisational techniques, and finally coming to the development of both the story and its characters. The last three chapters form a discussion of the more advanced concepts of Theatrix roleplaying.

Much of this book is written from the perspective of the Director, but that doesn't mean you shouldn't read all of it, even if you never plan on Directing. The whole of the material presented here is valuable for both the Actors and Directors alike. The better your grasp of the concepts included in this book, the more you'll enjoy your games.

CHAPTER BY CHAPTER

A brief synopsis of each chapter follows ...

Chapter I - Introduction

This chapter is intended to prepare you for the rest of the book. This is very different stuff you're about to get into. Some of the concepts we're going to discuss may seem a little obscure until they're clarified in later chapters. We've taken a lot of effort to organize this material in the easiest possible way. So if some notions seem a bit vague, please bear with us and just plow on through. Things will probably make sense in the end.

Chapter II - Roleplay

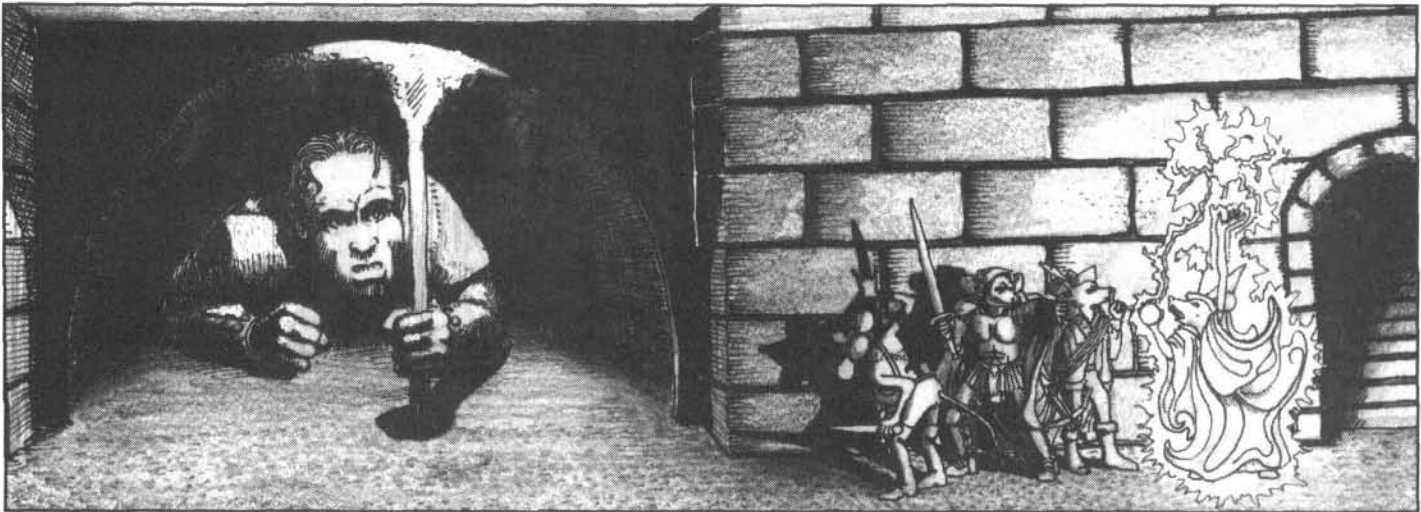
This chapter is a discussion of the basic terms and ideas that build good roleplay. This stuff is survival gear. You'll need much more to actually tackle a real game, but whatever you do with the later rules, you should keep this chapter firmly in mind.

Chapter III - Cinematography

Telling a good story is more than simply describing a linear sequence of events. All the later chapters of this book depend upon your ability to weave a tale in the style of a novelist, or a movie producer. Descriptions should come alive, plots should be woven together to build the fabric of your story, and your movements through time and space should be designed to heighten the suspense and drama of your work. This chapter presents a grab bag of tricks and techniques that will support this kind of storytelling.

Chapter IV - Makeup and Costuming

Every story needs a cast of characters. In fact, all stories are really about their characters, and not their places or events. Places and events are simply the backdrop upon which great characters may achieve meaningful ends. In order to create characters with individual motivations, backgrounds, and histories, capable of achieving specific ends, you'll utilize a set of numbers and descriptions. These numbers and descriptions will act as an objective guide to each character's capabilities. This chapter will detail the use of these numbers and descriptions which underlie all Theatrix character creation, regardless of the specific genre you intend to use for your stories.



Chapter V - Lights ... Camera ... Action!

The art of roleplaying is the art of building a consensual illusion. This chapter is about how to describe the outcomes of a character's actions, in a way that holds together the illusion of reality that makes roleplaying possible. These outcomes must be fair to both character and story. This chapter describes how to use the numbers developed in **'Makeup and Costuming'**, and the Director's knowledge of the story's plotline, to come up with fair, consistent, realistic outcomes for any action, without having to roll dice.

Chapter VI - Improvisation

Heroes are heroes because they get to be daringly competent at the most dramatic moments. Roleplaying means getting to feel just like that. Not all the time, but at the right moments. This chapter describes the ideas and rules we use to make that possible.

Chapter VII - Epilogue

Characters change, grow, and mature as they go through their lives, just as the stories they support grow and mature along with them. This chapter describes the process of advancing your character in a way that's natural and supportive to your ongoing roleplay.

Chapter VIII - Combat

Although it's not required, the life and death struggle of combat is the high point of many stories. Due to the amount of drama and tension involved in such a conflict, we've devoted a whole chapter to the special concepts and techniques required for depicting great duels, including a frank discussion on the nature of weapons, wounding, and recovery.

Chapter IX - Setting

Theatrix is a 'Universal' roleplaying game, meaning that its rules may be applied to stories occurring in any genre, past or future, on earth or in space. This chapter is a construction kit, describing what goes into the creation of a complete genre.

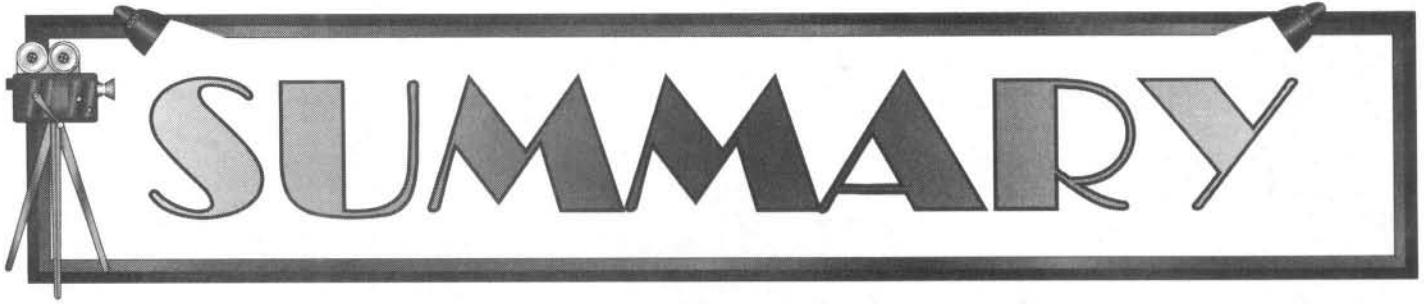
Chapter X - Plotline

This chapter acts as a construction kit for the creation of good plotlines. We have the radical notion that all good tales have the same basic formula, that this formula can be easily mastered, and that by carefully following the steps described in this chapter, you will guarantee yourself complete dramatic narratives you'll be proud of.

REFERENCE CARDS

A lot of useful reference material has been placed on cardboard cards and packaged at the back of this book. Much of this material has been reprinted in the appropriate spots throughout the **'Core Rules'**, but in a much more scattered form. Some of this information is available only on these reference cards. Keep the reference cards beside you as you read through these rules, and you'll have everything at your fingertips. With the reference cards in hand during a game, you may never need to go rummaging through these pages for information.





GLOSSARY

This is the section in future chapters where you'll find short definitions for all the special words we'll use throughout this book. For example ...

Customer - A very important person. Also, the best person to judge how to use the material found in this book.

SUMMARY

This is the space we'll use in future chapters to summarize each chapter's most important points. This space will act as a sort of chapter-at-a-glance. For example ...

- ☒ Try reading the '**Core Rules**' all the way through once, even if you're already familiar with the basic concepts of roleplaying. There are a lot of new ideas here, and a lot of good advice, even for experienced roleplayers.
- ☒ Take a look at one of our Setting Books for ideas on how to turn the '**Core Rules**' into a complete storytelling environment.





ROLEPLAYING

I was born at the age of twelve on a Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer lot.

- Judy Garland

ROLEPLAYING

This chapter will serve as both a general introduction to roleplaying, and as a primer on Theatrix. The chapter sets out the basic roles of both Actor and Director in a Theatrix game; including what it is to be an Actor, what it is to be a Director, and what each role is responsible for. We'll also present a few tips and guidelines to get you started on your way. So without further ado ...

WHAT IS ROLEPLAYING?

We define roleplaying as interactive, improvisational theatre. The purpose of roleplaying is expression, and the medium of that expression is acting. What you hold in your hands now is a game of fantasy and make-believe. Although this is a game, it isn't played with a board or pieces. It's played with your imagination. The idea is to involve yourself in tales of the fantastic, and to become a part of those tales. To create and act out your own adventures. This may seem a little strange at first, but the premise is quite easy, and once you've caught on, it can be totally engrossing. The experience will be so powerful because you'll get to be on the inside of the story, as an active participant, not just an observer.

Roleplaying is also storytelling. One participant will act as the storyteller, creating and keeping the mysteries of the plot. All other participants take on the theatrical roles of characters who are in some way important to the story. The storyteller weaves them into the tale, gives the background, describes Scenes, controls much of the action, and mediates all decisions. The storyteller is also known as the 'Director'. The other participants are the players, or 'Actors'. The fun of this form of storytelling is that it's not pre-scripted. What the Actors do as they play their roles will effect the story. The Director only begins the tale, the Actors help create the rest. The Actors decide

what the personas they've assumed will do in any situation. The Director takes the input of all the Actors, decides what the outcomes of all their actions will be, and describes the appropriate results. The participants are always reacting to the unfolding events created through their interactions. Like an organized form of the games you used to play as a child, only with a few grown-up twists.

Those twists include a complex backdrop against which to set your stories, characters with great depth and attraction, and a sweeping, intense, and riveting plot. To help you achieve all that, we've included a few suggestions on improvisation, acting, plotlines, description, and staging. To make sure that we can justify this as a roleplaying **game**, we've also included a few rules.

THE TROUPE

The Troupe is a collection of Actors. We'll eventually develop within these rules a Troupe style of play. That's where everyone gets to be an Actor, and the job of Director is distributed among the Troupe. Once you're comfortable with these rules, you should be able to freely mix responsibilities; acting within the story, while storytelling and Directing other parts of it. We'll talk more about developing a Troupe style of play in later chapters.

ACTING

Roleplaying is acting, but without the aid of a script. It's like improvisational theatre without the audience. The Actors will create their own roles, developing the personas of the characters they'll play, and adding in details as the story progresses. That means that as the Director sets the Scene, and the other Actors take their self-assumed roles, you'll begin to speak and act as your character in this communal fantasy. For a few leisure hours you'll

pretend to be this other person that you've created. You'll physically play through those actions you can, describing in detail those actions you can't. The Director will keep up a running dialogue with the Actors to describe the changes of the Scene around them as the Actors move, speak, and act. The trick is to immerse yourself in your assumed role. To act and storytell well enough to make your Scenes live in each person's imagination. The more feeling you have for the role you create for yourself, the more fun this will be. Try to create a persona you would enjoy being. Make this persona as complete as possible. How does this character dress, what are her facial expressions, favorite phrases, habits of speech and body language? There will be a lot of you in this assumed role, but it's the differences that make the role enjoyable.

Feel free to play with your character's psyche. There's a tendency for starting players to create only leading roles. Stiff necked heroes get all the girls, but they're boring. It's the challenging roles that Actors seek. How about a coward with a lot of bravado? Someone who suggests daring plans of action, only to try and weasel out of them later. Or a huge ugly hulk with a kind heart? Or a slick dandy with questionable motives who's forced to become an unwilling hero? The kinds of roles with flaws make the most memorable roleplay. The characters are reflections of the Actors. If they can learn to live with their flaws, they're all the more human for it, and we can learn something from that. Even in a genre packed wall to wall with stiff necked heroes, a few quirks like a weakness for the opposite sex, or a fear of snakes, or being unerringly logical, will make a character more interesting. Work with the Director to develop a role that will enhance the story and be fun for all. Play it to the hilt.

STAGE DIRECTIONS

As an Actor, you should always try to be in your chosen role. During the game, try to evolve two ways of speaking; in character, and out of character. In character, you'll be speaking from your role, in the first person, talking out loud to the other Actors and the Supporting Cast (see 'Supporting Cast', coming up in this chapter). Never directly describe your persona's thoughts or feelings, unless you're speaking in character. You can also use fancy techniques, like Soliloquies or Voice-Overs, directed at the Troupe in general (see the following section).

Out of character, you'll be speaking more in the third person, describing the details of your persona's actions. Whenever possible, you should let your own movements, ie. your body motions and your use of the props at hand, serve as this description. Speak out of character only to fill in the visual gaps, or when you can't readily act out your role's physical actions. Most of these descriptions will be fairly plain, such as 'I open the door slowly and look into

the room', or 'my character uses her knowledge of mechanics to attempt to repair the engine.' Sometimes you'll want to describe not only what your persona is doing, but also the way in which she's doing it. This type of description is a little more complex. Some examples of this might include ...

- ⇒ The agitated way in which your character is obviously clutching the gun in her coat pocket.
- ⇒ The vacant stare she gives a friend as she walks past.
- ⇒ The sneer of contempt upon your character's face as she speaks.

Each of these descriptions contains basically objective information. These should be played out in preference, but can be acceptable as descriptions, especially as adjuncts to your acting. But please, try **never** to say ...

- ⇒ My character looks desperate.
- ⇒ My character doesn't seem to recognize you.
- ⇒ My character looks angry.

Those are really interpretations, rather than objective descriptions. Such direct, subjective communications, only detract from the feeling of a lived experience. They remove the right of the other Actors to interpret their own world. It's a fine line, but an important one.

SOLILOQUIES AND VOICE-OVERS

One good technique to help expand your characterization is the well timed Soliloquy. The Webster's Dictionary defines a Soliloquy as ...

so·lil·o·quy, so·lil' o·kwê, n. pl. so·lil·o·quies. [L. soliloquium-solus, alone, and loquor, to speak.] The act or an instance of talking to oneself; in drama, a monologue, usually giving the illusion of unuttered reflections in which the character discloses her innermost thoughts only to the audience and not to the other performers.

The Soliloquy lets the other Actors know something of your character's motivations by delivering a monologue in your character's voice. It's a way of thinking out loud, whenever that revelation would be amusing, or significantly enhance the drama of the moment. Voice-Overs are the cinematic equivalent of Soliloquies, and may be used by the Actors in exactly the same way. Of course these revelations are for the other Actors who are your audience, and not their characters. Those Actors must continue to play their roles as though they were bereft of the knowledge just granted them. Dropped at the right time, this can provide an excellent acting challenge.

DIRECTING

Intricate, balanced, carefully designed, hand-crafted plots. A supporting cast of imaginative characters, with a depth and reality all their own. Complete, mood captivating descriptions of Settings, both exotic and mundane. Comic relief and high tension. These are the products of the storyteller's art. They are the main charge of the Director. You, as Director, will create a story to involve each of the Actors, taking care to include twists that will draw in their individual characterizations, push at their flaws, hold their driving goals in front of them like illusive phantoms, and rivet them to their seats. Because you've been provided with such an excellent system of rules, if you use them well, your Actors will do half the work themselves. All for the love of the art of storytelling.

TIME

Character development takes time. The intention of most roleplay is that the same basic cast of characters will appear in a linked series of stories, or Episodes. Each Episode may be composed of several Acts, and each Act may contain many Scenes. A single Scene is a series of events which compose one unified set of actions, generally taking place at the same location. Examples of single Scenes would be a car chase, a business negotiation, or a combat.

A single Episode may take several sessions to complete, and each session can last several hours. So the flow of time within your story will be continuous and unrelated to the passage of time as we experience it. You may spend several sessions on a few hours of time within the story, or many years may pass with a brief description. The Director is in charge of the passage of time and the pacing of the story. Your Episodes should form a relatively continuous Chronicle of the Actors' adventures, like a series of movie sequels. Sometimes you may want to create roles and act out a single Episode, but the most satisfying roleplay is generally centered on a Chronicle.

SUPPORTING CAST

This is where the Director gets into the act. Your story will probably require more roles than the major parts occupied by your Actors. Lumbering monster, vile villain, or powerful benefactor, all of them will be played by the Director. Even the little one line bit parts should not be overlooked. The Actors should feel that every encounter they have is with a real person. Even a one line part can add to the story. This is your chance to take the Stage. Put some thought into every role you take. Doing this will make your plotlines great.

One trick that practiced Directors use, is to assign supporting roles to Actors whose major characters aren't

present for a Scene. This will keep your Actors involved and lessen your burden at the same time. You can even assign the role of an opponent to an Actor, giving that Actor only enough information about the role to get through the Scene. The same technique works well, when for some reason an Actor is temporarily not in control of her character's actions, such as when a character is possessed by another entity. Give the Actor involved just enough information to continue to play the role, while withholding the persona's new goals. This is a good acting challenge, and a lot of fun to watch.

STAGING

The first job of the Director is the development of the Setting in which her stories will take place. Although we can provide some first class background material, and much more is available from other sources (books and movies are your best guide), you'll still have a lot to do. You must decide exactly where and when your Chronicle is to be centered, and more importantly, why? Every Chronicle should have a focus of attention; some reason why the characters have banded together, and some reason, beyond their individual personalities, for staying together. The Director should help the Actors to create roles which will provide a good match for each other and the focus of the Chronicle. To help engage the gears of your imagination, here are a few examples of well set Chronicles.

- ⇒ An order of wizards in the 13th century, banded together for mutual protection against the hazards of a fantastic Dark Age.
- ⇒ The crew of a galaxy spanning starship, with a mission to search out and explore new worlds.
- ⇒ A group of highly specialized agents working to preserve their culture by traveling through time, in order to correct mistakes in history caused by an alien menace.
- ⇒ The remnants of a military company trying to survive long enough in a post-holocaust battle-zone to reach home.
- ⇒ A band of gunslinging desperados correcting injustices in the Old West.
- ⇒ A group of elite spies working for Her Majesty's Secret Service. They might even be licensed to kill.

- ⇒ A league of super-powered heroes battling super-menaces for freedom, justice, and democracy.

There are many more examples in books, movies, and television episodes. Anything you've read or seen, that has sparked your imagination, can become the focus for a Chronicle. A Setting is then composed of the place, time, span, and focus of the Chronicle.

CONTINUITY

Movies aren't shot in the sequence in which they're viewed. All the Scenes at each location are shot at once, regardless of their final order. In the movie business, Continuity is the word used to describe the task of making sure that the Actors are wearing the right clothes for every Scene, that the time of day of each shot is consistent with the passage of time as it will be seen in the finished film, etc. Continuity grants believability to the final product.

As Director, you're about to craft a story to intrigue and entertain. The Actors are about to put that story through severe stress. Unless you're very careful, they'll find embarrassing loopholes and inconsistencies in your handiwork. They'll find solutions to problems you didn't think any sane person would take. We use Continuity to describe that quality of a plotline that allows it to flow smoothly, even under the duress of your unscripted Actors. You'll only achieve Continuity by putting in some quality time before your game. At the very least, before each Episode, you should write down ...

- ⇒ A basic outline of the problems to be faced by the Actors in the Episode, starting with the major theme of the Episode.
- ⇒ A quick description of all the sites to be visited by the Actors.
- ⇒ The names, descriptions, motivations, and goals of the Supporting Cast in the conflict.
- ⇒ A few rough sketches of possible endings for the scenario. This will help you to develop an idea of how the Episode will effect the Chronicle as a whole.
- ⇒ When you're done with the Episode, it's a good idea to make a list of all the loose ends the Actors have left hanging. They're some of the best material for the creation of future Episodes.

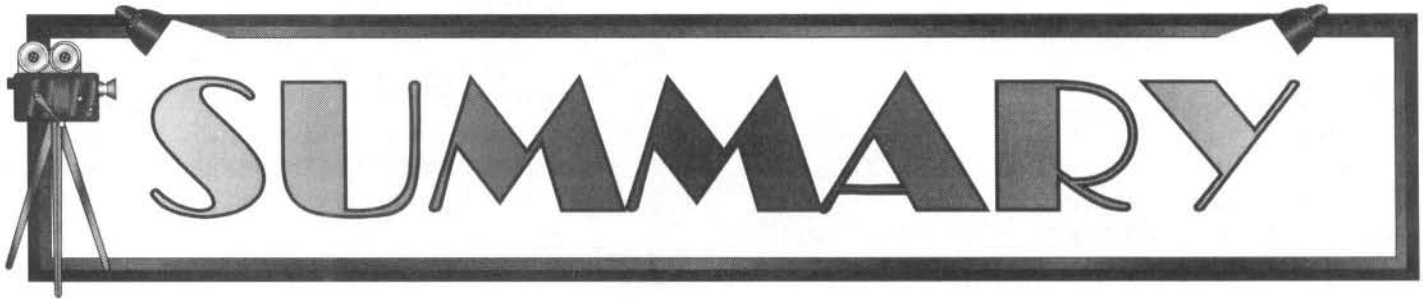
Taking this time will grant believability to your final product. In the end, your Actors will have almost as much influence on the direction of each plot as you do. So if you haven't done this little bit of homework, your plotlines will probably start coming apart at the seams. Some careful planning, on the other hand, can make your plotlines great.

CUT! ... TAKE TWO

The only purpose of roleplaying is fun. We can't emphasize this enough. Realism, mood, and plot, should all take a back seat to fun. Of course things are going to happen to the characters that are not humorous. Without tension, and even tragedy, the roleplay wouldn't be enjoyable. Too much tragedy, and the roleplay **won't** be enjoyable. The Director's primary job is to balance the game so that **all** of the participants feel empowered and enjoy themselves. Roleplay is an emotional experience. Sometimes your players will forget that any one role is secondary to the roleplay. Sometimes they'll forget that the tension and tragedy they feel at the moment is part of their character's life, not their own. Sometimes they'll forget to trust you. Our advice to everyone is ...

- ⇒ The primary reason we're here is to enjoy each other's company. So in moments of tension, leave the tension to the characters.
- ⇒ Be nice to each other, even if your characters are at odds. It'll make the game what it was meant to be.
- ⇒ No one likes it when bad things happen to their characters. Some genres are grim, and wouldn't be the same without tragedy. If you're ever in the wrong place, at the wrong time, allow yourself several minutes of sorrow, then continue to enjoy the spectacle of life going on before you. You get as many more chances to participate as your imagination has roles to play.
- ⇒ Trust the Director. If you feel left out for the moment, say so. The Director will correct the situation soon.

As Director you have ultimate veto power. This game allows the Actors a lot of control over the plot. We suggest you give them as much leeway as possible. But the final say is yours. If something is going on that you don't like, don't let it happen. Just say, 'Cut! ... Take Two'.



GLOSSARY

- Act** - A series of Scenes, which when taken together, complete some part of a story's purpose, comprising an affective whole.
- Actor** - A person taking the part of one of the story's main characters.
- Chronicle** - A series of connected Episodes creating a unified epic.
- Continuity** - Those aspects of an Episode which allow for the suspension of disbelief on the part of the Actors. Also, those touches which draw the Actors into the story, and make them want to stay there.
- Director** - The person who crafts and holds the story together.
- Episode** - A single story told in full.
- In character** - The act of portraying a role in the first person. Walking, talking, and acting as a character in a story.
- Main Cast** - Those roles portrayed by the Actors, usually protagonists, and of major significance to the story.
- Out of character** - Talking 'about' the story, its action, or the characters within it, from the third person.
- Scene** - A unified series of action and interaction, generally focused upon one location, or one event.
- Setting** - A complete world of the imagination, including background, history, social systems, etc. A place in which to create a Chronicle.
- Supporting Cast** - Any role portrayed by the Director, either of secondary significance to the story, or a major antagonist.
- Troupe** - A collection of people who get together regularly to take turns Acting and Directing in each other's stories.

SUMMARY

- ☑ **The Troupe** - Roleplaying is a fun activity done with friends. This game invites everyone to participate. The more each person participates, the more fun it gets.
- ☑ **Stage Directions** - Portray your character. Whenever possible, speak, walk, talk, and think your character. Avoid telling anyone 'about' your role as much as possible. Show them instead. This is true for Supporting Cast roles as well.
- ☑ **Supporting Cast** - The Actors are there to act, so use them for Supporting Cast roles whenever you can.
- ☑ **Staging** - Every Chronicle should have a focus that can weld the individual personalities of the Main Cast into a single group. This focus must provide a reason for group action, and should allow for pro-active participation by its members (ie. the group should be controlled mainly by its members, rather than by any outside agency).
- ☑ **Continuity** - The more quality time you put into making your Chronicle interesting, surprising, and believable, the more fun it's going to be.
- ☑ **Cut! ... Take Two** - Becoming involved in your game is great, but it's not real life. No game is ever worth being hurtful to someone else over. This is a way to bring friends closer together. Use this power only for 'good'.





CINEMATOGRAPHY

Photography is truth and cinema is truth twenty-four times a second.

- Jean-Luc Godard

CINEMATOGRAPHY

Cinematography is the art of filming motion pictures. That is, the art of taking a script and turning it into a visually riveting, visceral experience. We've borrowed a few techniques from the cinematographer's bag of tricks, in order to help you make your plotlines into roleplaying art. These techniques require almost no extra work, and in return will add depth to your stories, and will increase your Actors' involvement in each tale. Some of them should be used frequently, while others lose their effect if used too often, and should be saved for the right moments. Used properly, they'll enhance your plotlines and keep your Actors wanting more. To this end, we'll first discuss the basics of description, the use of props, and the addition of a musical score and sound effects. Then we'll talk about the application of actual cinematic techniques, such as Foreshadowing, Flashbacks, and Dream Sequences. All of these techniques may be initiated by either the Director, or the Actors, which is a practice we'll encourage in a later chapter, titled '**Improvisation**'.

DESCRIPTION

Description is the most important tool in the Director's repertoire. The Actors are stepping into your reality, a place that doesn't exist outside of your imagination. In order for your stories to work, you're largely going to have to make your Scenes live in your Actors' imaginations through the use of words alone. The Director's ability to describe a Scene to the Actors will greatly determine each Scene's power. Use all the senses. Detail the lighting, the smells, the temperature, and the sounds. You're creating each Scene with your narration. You're the Actors' eyes and ears. They can see only through you.

This is especially true when describing locations. These are the sets upon which your Actors will struggle.

They'll wager high stakes upon each Stage. The mood will become as important as the physical details. Paint a dramatic background. Bring your mind's eye view of a Scene into sharp focus. Allow your imagination to become a camera's lens. Describe everything within its view. Allow your description to follow its movements, panning across a Scene as your mind's lens moves, focuses, and zooms. Give a good feeling for the size of the Stage, its important fixtures, entrances and exits, and the placement of individuals.

When describing the members of the Supporting Cast, remember to include the details of their facial features, costume, habits of speech, and body language. When speaking for them, adopt their voice, facial expressions, hand gestures, and posture. Don't be bashful. You're trying to share your imagination. Paint a picture in bold colors. Overemphasize and make each role truly live for all the participants.

When describing, don't just tell the Actors what you mean, show them. Tell them what impinges on their senses without interpreting for them. Give them the feeling of living these experiences by offering objective actions, rather than subjective perceptions. For example, rather than describing ...

- ⇒ a castle as ominous.
- ⇒ a person as mean spirited.
- ⇒ a person as generous and kind hearted.

Instead, try describing ...

- ⇒ the dark brooding clouds hanging above the castle, and the flashes of lightning playing across its age worn surfaces.



- ⇒ her tormenting her employees without mercy, then turning to the Actors and smiling as though nothing had happened.
- ⇒ his daily acts of charity and goodwill (**show** him helping others).

If you can help it, don't tell the Actors about their roles' emotions. Play through whatever circumstances it takes to bring them there. In other words, don't just **tell** them about it, **roleplay** through it.

If a Scene would be boring to roleplay through, we suggest you do one of two things. If the point of the Scene is its tedium, like roleplaying through a long incarceration, or working through a mountain of paperwork, then roleplay through enough of the Scene to allow the Actors to feel the tedium before going on. Feeling is an important part of roleplaying. If tedium isn't the purpose of the Scene, you may have made a mistake somewhere. Alter the Scene so that there is information to be gained, or a lesson to be learned, or a facet of a character's personality to be brought out. Good books and movies don't waste time on meaningless Scenes, or boring dialogue. They're not written that way. Every Scene is written to entertain, and this can be just as true for your tales.

SET DESIGN, LIGHTING, AND COSTUMING

The Director can do a lot to enhance the mood of a story by taking the time, if possible, to alter the lighting and layout of the physical Stage (usually some room in the Director's home). We suggest moving furniture to

conform to the layout of the characters' present locale, moving the Actors from room to room as their character's move, and altering the lighting to represent the physical conditions of each Scene. Furniture can be setup to represent the bridge of a starship, or an airplane cockpit, or a small hotel room. Use whatever room is best suited for an environment. Sometimes it's even possible to leave recognizable clues, or usable props in their proper locations for a Scene. Playing one of the Supporting Cast, and pulling a toy gun out of a drawer to point at the Actors, is much more effective than describing such a Scene. The Actors may then respond in motion (that is reasonable motion, carefully executed) rather than pure description. Lighting can be dimmed for night Scenes, or entire Episodes can be played by candlelight for a Gothic effect. Be aware of the changing lighting of your Scenes and match the physical lighting to it. This is easy to do almost anywhere, and very effective. Setting the Stage can take some planning, and must be done **safely**, but is a great way to sink the Actors into their roles.

MUSICAL SCORE

Music can also help a lot in setting the mood of a Scene. Music in movies tends to follow the Actors and the action. Generally, the major characters will have their own theme music. In addition, there is music to win by, lose by (the villain's theme music), romance by, and scream by (suspense music). A movie's score will herald the villain before he enters menacingly, and herald the hero moments before he comes charging to the rescue.

The audience can't help but respond in preparation to the action. You can achieve the same heightened effect in your Actors by selecting, and preparing ahead of time, the appropriate musical themes. Drop in some theme music before the action it heralds, and drop the Actors further into their roles. This is supposed to be a visceral experience, after all. If you don't have the time to create your own personalized musical score, then you might consider using the sound track from one of your favorite movies, which works almost as well.

To make your Scenes even more visceral, add sound effects. There are many collections of sound effects available in music stores. The sound of storms, gunfire, or traffic, can give the appropriate Scenes a texture all their own. Your Actors will gain an appreciation for this texture when during your battle Scenes, they're separated by some distance, ducked down behind your living room chairs, and are attempting to communicate across loud gunfire. Just make sure the neighbors don't misunderstand.

FORESHADOWING

Foreshadowing is the technique of describing images which give a taste of events to come. Like the storm swept dark castle of a television horror show, running in the background of a Scene, which alludes to the real castle soon to be encountered. The occupants of the horror show's castle might even give the Actors a foretaste of that which awaits them. Foreshadowing is most strongly meant for the Actors, but can also be used to give



the characters information which they'll need later in the plot, such as the long shadow of a church spire's cross, cast in front of a character as she walks home towards evening. A similar shadow cast in front of the character by a smaller cross, as the vampire approaches later in the plot, might tip her off to the salvation hanging in the bookstore window behind her. Such twists of fate tie the plot together, lending it a sense of Continuity.

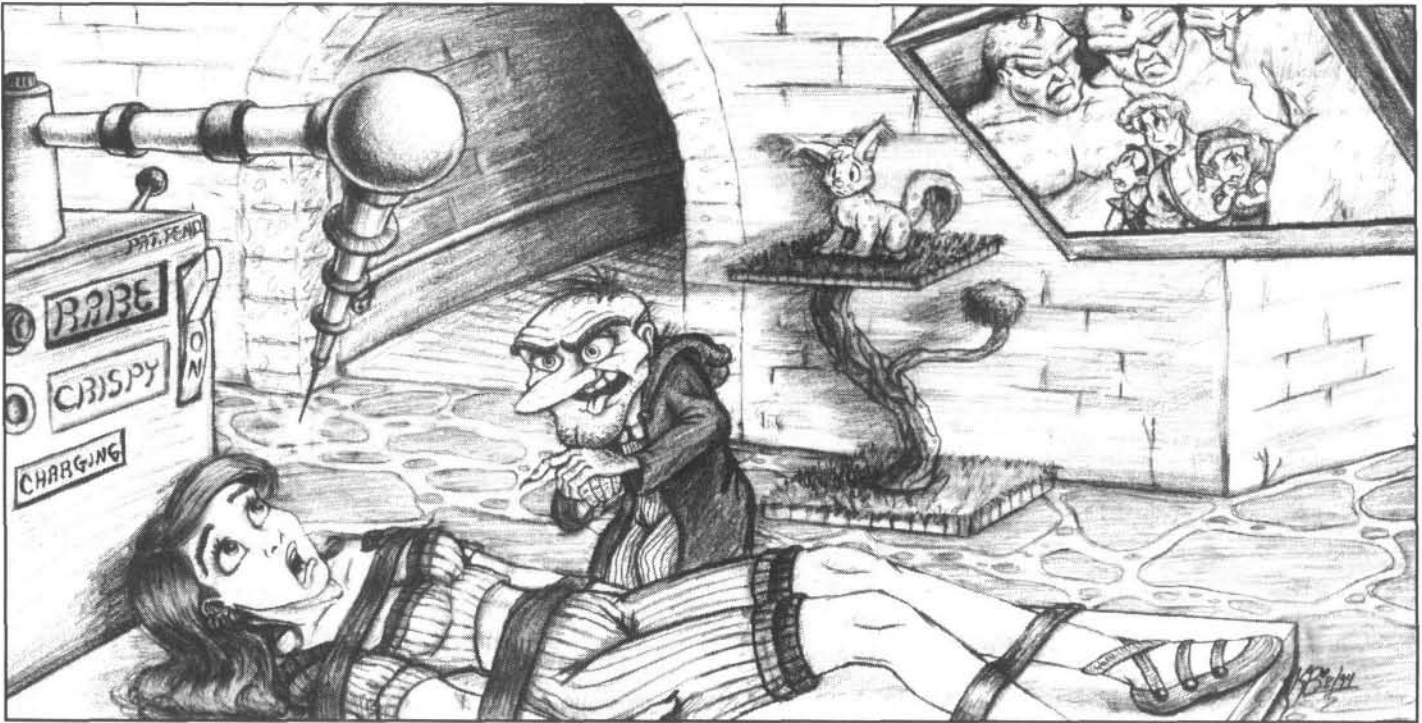
Foreshadowing can take the form of television shows, dreams, the passing words of a stranger, odd shadows, newspaper headlines, etc. This technique is often meant to be obvious to the Actors, but not to the characters they're portraying. The images described stand in stark relief to the Actors through the attention given them by the Director, but are too far removed in time and context to be immediately usable by the characters. To them, the usefulness of such images is only revealed in the fullness of time.

CUT SCENES

A Cut Scene puts the present plotline on hold, in order to unfold a sequence of events that is important to the story. The Cut Scene may contain different characters, and occur at a different time and place than the Scene it interrupts. The Director will call out 'Cut Scene' at the appropriate time, and describe a new Stage and the action that occurs there. The main sequence of the plot picks up again when the Cut Scene is over.

Our classic use of Cut Scenes is to show the Actors what the villains are up to, without granting that knowl-





edge to their characters (which means that the Actors get to know stuff that their characters won't find out for a while). This gives the Actors a sense of urgency, while also providing the all important **acting challenge**. For example ...

- ⇒ Turning away from the view screen depicting the slow progress of our heroes, the evil Dr. Nefarious laughs maniacally, 'Hahahahaha ... They are directly on course for a meeting with my Stone Men! They will die without ever having the pleasure of viewing my latest invention, the Ubitron Transducer. With it, I will bring the world to its knees! And its first victim shall be you, sweet Polly Anne, for your boyfriend can not save you now!' The camera slides back, allowing us a view of Polly Anne struggling, strapped down to a table before the Ubitron Transducer ... fade back to our heroes struggling onward.

Cut Scenes can also be used at the start of a new Episode to set the Stage for the main action. They may give the Actors their first view of a new challenge. Unfortunately, this is often a view of some grisly event which is about to collide with their characters' lives. For example ...

- ⇒ The old man sways as he moves down the dark, damp, dimly lit alley, the brown paper wrapped bottle unsteady in his hand. Suddenly he stops and narrows his eyes, squinting into

the shadows 'Nice ... nice doggy. Wha'dya want? Don't got nothin' fer you ...' a low growl emanates from the shadows, 'Nice .. nice doggy. Don' git mad at me now ...' The old man's eyes go suddenly wide. There's a rush of fur and fang, a terrified scream, and the sound of shattering glass. The camera's angle shows us only the shadow of something large mauling its human victim.

Cut Scenes may simply be described by the Director, or the Actors can take part. An Actor may play their usual role in a Cut Scene, or be asked to take on another role for the duration. It can be amusing to stick the Actors into the roles of victims or other bit parts. Always remember to provide the Actor only enough information to get through the Scene. We want to save the best stuff as surprises for later. For example ...

- ⇒ 'All right, you're an old man, almost penniless. You live from day to day, shelter to shelter. Right now, your vision is blurred by a comforting haze of alcohol. You're drifting down some back alley downtown, still enjoying the bottle in your hand. Ahead in the shadows you can barely make out the form of a large dog ...'

Cut Scenes can be used to handle the difficult job of bringing the Main Cast together, providing instant history for the start of a new Chronicle. For example ...

- ⇒ The Main Cast were all members of the same elite commando unit serving together during the war. They were framed for a crime they did not commit and placed into separate military jails. Now, years later, they're being given a chance for freedom. All they have to do is agree to a special, top-secret assignment. Brought together, shackled and waiting, they have a chance to reminisce about the war. The view transitions to their last combat action together, as the Main Cast roleplays through the fateful day of their frame-up ...

By the time they accept their mission, they've already generated a history together. Which brings us nicely to the subject of Flashbacks ...

Flashbacks

Flashbacks are a form of Cut Scene. They're a way to introduce members of the Supporting Cast to a plot, to add depth to an Actor's characterization, to give a sense of history, to heighten the sense of a lived experience, and to give an Actor some of the information that her character 'remembers'. When giving an Actor information in the form of knowledge her character possesses, try never to say 'Your character knows ...', or 'Your character remembers ...'. If the character knows, let her make it up and come out with it. If the character remembers, try re-living it in the form of a Flashback. This involves more than simply describing a memory, although this can be done. A Flashback involves setting the Scene in which the action actually occurred, then roleplaying through that action. Secondary roles can be passed out to those Actors whose usual roles are not involved. This technique is especially useful when the memory's main value is in its emotional content. For example ...

- ⇒ A character has just heard the name of someone who may have knowledge the character needs. This new person may even be involved with the character's opposition. As Director, this would be a good time to announce that the character recognizes the name. In fact, this new person isn't new at all, but used to be an old flame; a forgotten romance. As the character thinks about it, she remembers the last time they saw each other, over seven years ago ...

The Director would now proceed to set the Stage and roleplay through their last parting. When the Scene is over, approaching this contact for information will have

taken on whole new shades of meaning. Instant history for your plotline development.

Dream Sequences

Likewise, Dream Sequences are also Cut Scenes. They can be used to Foreshadow the introduction of people or events, explore alternate plot possibilities, or give the characters information or warnings. Dream Sequences are best used when the action that occurs should not actually happen. Often the Scene is a warning of what might occur, and gives clues on how to avoid such an outcome. Like the genetic virologist's constant sweating nightmares about his employer's misuse of his research, and the subsequent *end of the world* ...

A Dream Sequence can be played out when a character is asleep, in a delirium, or even while day-dreaming. You needn't tell the victim of the Dream



Sequence that they're dreaming. The Scene will have different connotations depending on whether the character is aware of the nature of the experience or not. It can be interesting for example, to allow the Scene to have an obvious dream quality about it. Or, you can make sure that neither the character, nor the Actor, will be aware of the nature of the experience until it's over. We often prefer the later route for its shock value.

TIMING AND COINCIDENCE

The timing of events is entirely up to the Director. Pacing and timing are the most important factors in maintaining the tension of a plot. Coincidences are fun, so use and abuse the pace of time and action in the story. Whenever you can, shamelessly stretch or shrink the amount of time Scenes take, the distance characters have to travel, and the delays which hold them up, in order to keep the plot interesting and intense. Don't feel bad about altering your plot in mid-game. Feel free to retrofit your plot to the actions of the Actors. You can do whatever you want, so long as it's fun.

Meanwhile, Back At The ...

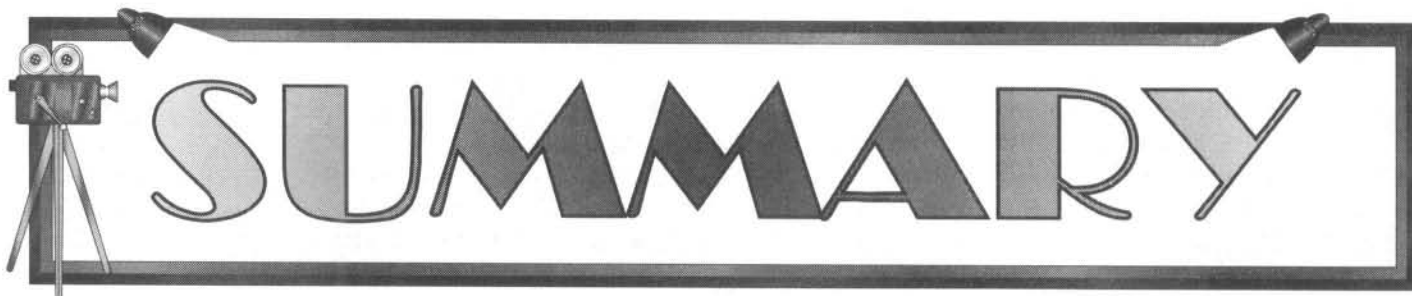
Following the Actors can be tough. Various groups of characters may be in several places at once, all acting at the same time. As Director, you may have to move from group to group to handle the action. The Actors can do a lot of roleplay on their own, but sometimes they must have

the presence of the Director. Try not to leave any group sitting on its thumbs too long. When moving from one group to another, try to time your move so as to leave the Actors in the middle of a desperate situation. That sounds mean, but they'll be a lot more interested in the game in general while you're gone, if they're anxious about it. Try to roleplay all the Scenes in front of everyone. Don't spoil the big surprises, but it's a lot easier for the Actors to wait their turn, if they can watch the other parts of the roleplay unfold.

LITTLE SCENES

We've saved the most important trick for last. These are all the Little Scenes in movies whose main purpose is to provide transition from one part of the action to another, to provide comic relief in the middle of an otherwise turbulent plot, and to give time to the characterization of the Main Cast. Build these Scenes into your stories as they develop. They're the best times for your Actors to interact. To use each other in a way which will breed familiar smiles when they talk about the session later. Don't let them know it, but these Little Scenes are the real reason for the rest of the plot. There are many examples of such Scenes sprinkled throughout every good movie. One holographic chess game between an alien sasquatch and a small robot comes to mind. These Scenes give the Actors a chance to earn roleplay points (to be discussed in the chapter entitled 'Improvisation'), while giving the Director a pause to clear her thoughts.





GLOSSARY

Cut Scene - Any Scene that the Director 'cuts' to, interrupting the story's action briefly.

Dream Sequence - The portrayal of a character's dream as a roleplayed event.

Flashback - The portrayal of a past occurrence, often only a memory of that occurrence, as a roleplayed event.

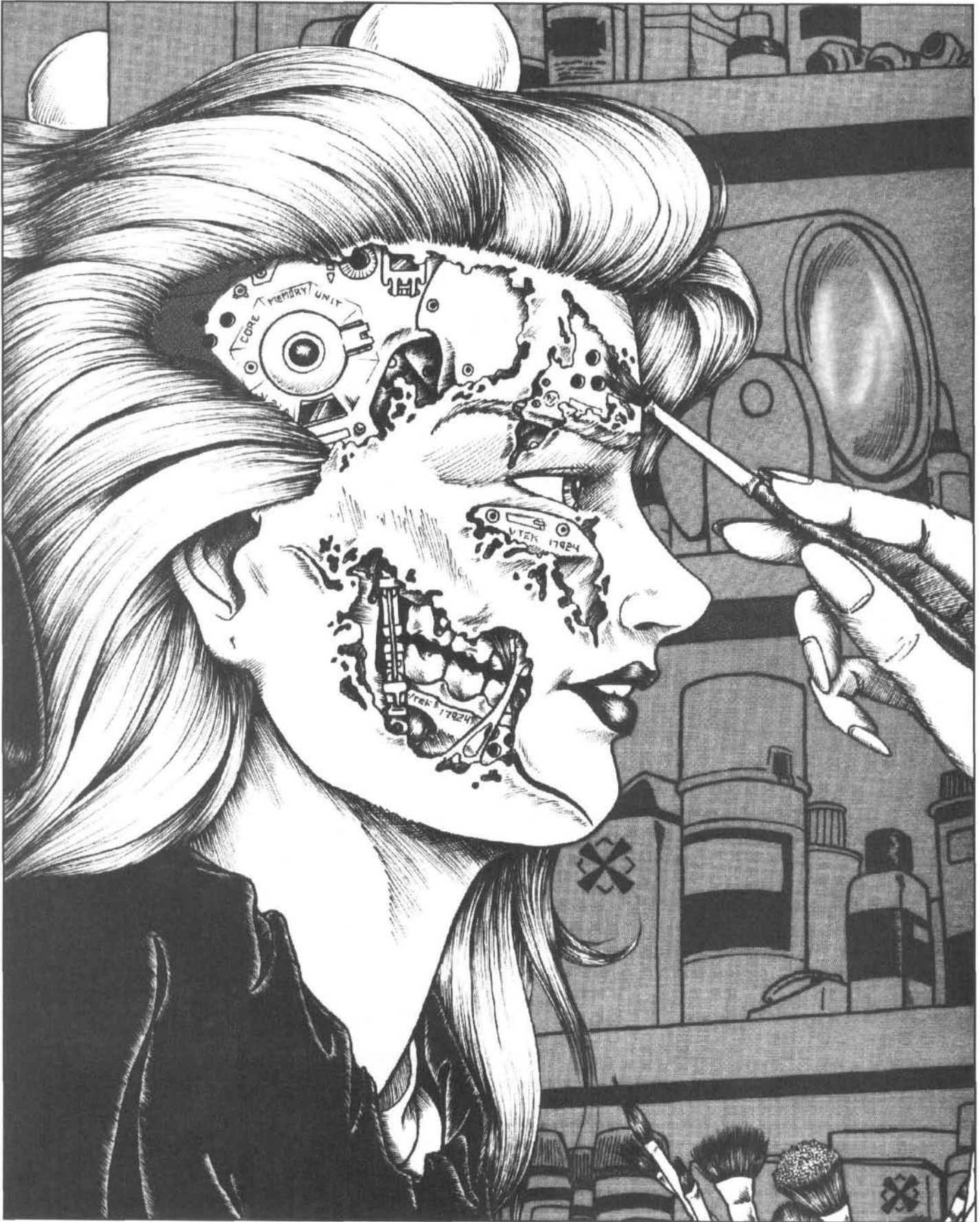
Foreshadowing - The process of using small images and moments to prepare the Actors for some later, and more important, event.

Little Scene - Any Scene whose sole purpose is to provide space and time for the Main Cast to interact, display their individual personalities, and bring the group together.

Stage - The strange mixture of the physical space in which the Troupe roleplays, and the imaginary space in which the story's action occurs.

SUMMARY

- ☑ **Description** - Be the Actors' senses of sight, hearing, taste, smell, and touch, then let them interpret their world for themselves.
- ☑ **The Stage** - This is the most neglected tool in the Director's repertoire. Paying creative attention to the Stage will really sink the Actors into their roles.
 - ⇒ Furniture can conform to the layout of the Stage.
 - ⇒ Lighting can reflect the lighting of the Stage.
 - ⇒ You can leave real clues in the appropriate spots.
 - ⇒ Use musical themes and soundtracks.
- ☑ **Cut Scenes** - Movies would be dull if the camera simply followed the hero or heroine around and watched what they did. Roleplaying games are no different. Cut Scenes ...
 - ⇒ Can be used to give the Actors information.
 - ⇒ Can be used to bring the characters together.
 - ⇒ Can give the Actors their first view of a new challenge.
- ☑ **Foreshadowing** - Story is structure. Good stories exist in small vortexes of coincidence, drama, and suspense.
 - ⇒ Foreshadowing provides a sense of anticipation.
 - ⇒ Foreshadowing ties the various parts of your story together. Your Actors should come out of a Foreshadowed event saying "Oh yeah ..."
- ☑ **Flashbacks** - Structure also means tying together the past and the present. Personal relationships give these ties meaning.
 - ⇒ Roleplaying memories gives a character a personal relationship to her past.
 - ⇒ Flashbacks provide instant history for your stories.
- ☑ **Dream Sequences** - Structure can also be given to that hazy and shifting landscape of the possible future, the longed for, or the purely imagined.
 - ⇒ Dream Sequences can provide insight into what might be, pulling upon the strings of regret.
 - ⇒ Dream Sequences can provide warnings for the future, and clues on how to avoid it.





MAKEUP AND COSTUMING

Superman, disguised as Clark Kent, mild-mannered reporter for a great metropolitan newspaper, fights a never-ending battle for truth, justice, and the American way.

- Anonymous

MAKEUP AND COSTUMING

When an Actor puts on makeup and a costume and walks out upon a stage, she wears more than these thin outer alterations of appearance. In order to play a role, an Actor must take on the attitudes, abilities, mind-set, history, appearance, potentials, and deficits of her role. The character as we see it is the end product of a whole life, lived before we were ever privileged to view it. The character is the sum total expression of that previous life. What follows is a method of taking this totality of expression, and distilling it down to its essence. In roleplaying, it is these essences that we deal with in terms of the rules. In Theatrix, we distill each character down into four basic categories of essence, which are termed 'Traits'. We deal with four basic types of Traits, which are ...

- ⇒ **Physical and Mental Attributes** - These six Traits comprise a description of each character's physical and mental capabilities, and include Strength, Stamina, Coordination, Intellect, Intuition, and Presence.
- ⇒ **Skills and Abilities** - Skills are Traits that measure the depth and facility of your persona's knowledge in particular areas, and expertise at various tasks. Abilities are very much like Skills, but cover feats of a paranormal nature that often fall outside the realm of normal learning.
- ⇒ **Personality Traits** - These Traits form a description of your persona's major psychological motivations.

- ⇒ **Descriptors** - These Traits help to portray the effects of a role's background, history, and social position, as well as some physical oddities and paranormal features.

By dealing with these simplified facets of characterization, ie. Traits, we can provide a basis for a usable system of rules. The rules, in turn, provide a consistent method of adjudicating the results of various actions within the game world.

QUANTIFIERS

The basic composition of each Trait is a description of it, in language. To make judgements about a character's Traits even easier, certain Traits will be further distilled down by assigning them a single number, from '0.0' to '10.0'. This number, or 'quantifier', will indicate the rough magnitude, or strength of that Trait. Traits are sometimes quantified in this way to provide a better objective guide for decision making. Keeping each Trait's basic description in mind, we are able to do some pretty neat things with those numbers, as you'll see in the next chapter, titled 'Lights ... Camera ... Action!'

SCALING

Theatrix is also a universal roleplaying game, and the same Range of numbers (from '0.0' to '10.0') will be used to quantify Traits across all Theatrix Settings. However, because some Settings are gritty and realistic, while others are more expansive and grandiose, this can lead to problems. For example, a Nobel Prize winning physicist in a realistic modern day Setting, might be considered barely competent in a futuristic dimension hopping fantasy. Yet mastery of physics must bear the same numerical quantifier in either Setting (although the actual knowl-

edge represented by that number may vary). We'll solve this dilemma through 'Scaling'. Scaling is the method by which the same Range of numbers ('0.0' to '10.0') may be applied, with roughly the same **meanings**, to any Setting.

AND MORE ...

By using Traits, quantifications, and Scaling, you'll be able to create a complete Theatrix persona, and get precisely the character you want, for any genre you can imagine. The rest of this chapter will now take you through this process in much greater detail, step-by-step. We'll start with a talk about how a Trait's description and quantifier interact, and then move on to Scaling, to give you a feel for how we juggle those numbers, and what they mean. Next, we'll look at each Trait separately, and detail how each one is used within the game. Lastly, we'll discuss how to use all of this information to actually **create** a character, although we'll save any hard rules and limits on this process for you to come up with (of course each of our Setting Books will fully detail a character creation 'system' appropriate to its genre). So let's begin at the beginning.

TO QUANTIFY OR NOT TO QUANTIFY ...

The basic form of every Trait in Theatrix is a description of that Trait, in language, from a few words to a few sentences in length. What you describe is basically what you get (we'll talk about the best methods for describing each Trait under its specific section later in this chapter). Some Traits, as we've said, are also assigned a number, or quantifier. Traits can then be classified as either Quantified Traits, Descriptive Traits, or Unquantified Traits, depending upon whether they're assigned a quantifier or not, and how that quantifier (if any) is used.

QUANTIFIED TRAITS

Skills, Abilities, and Personality Traits are all Quantified Traits. Although all Traits in Theatrix have some form of description associated with them, these Traits will rely heavily upon a simple numerical tag to simplify the decision making process. Although the Director should always attempt to make good use of a Quantified Trait's description, emphasis is often placed upon the numerical quantifier.

DESCRIPTIVE TRAITS

The Physical and Mental Attributes are Descriptive Traits. These Traits exist primarily in descriptive form, but will still lend themselves to quantification when neces-

sary. In this way, these Traits are both quantified and unquantified at the same time, although the emphasis is placed upon their descriptions. For example, even though Attributes may be easily quantified, the Director still uses their descriptions to help decide the basic Success and Failure of actions, to adjudicate their Difficulties, and to help determine the Results of those actions (for more information on these topics, see the next chapter, titled '**Lights ... Camera ... Action!**'). All this demands that each description be complete. Using an example of the Physical Attribute of Strength, we offer the following two choices ...

- ⇒ A big, strong, tough dude.
- ⇒ Or, this character is very strong, but in a Sumo wrestler, anchored sort of way. He stands only 5'8, but is very heavy. To someone who has never seen him in action, he would seem simply overweight. He doesn't have great flexibility, nor maximum lifting power, but he can be impossible to move. His forte would be the lunge. Over a short distance his opponent would be horrified at how much speed he can pick up. His size, speed, and strength can then combine for a ferocious attack.

The first example is not satisfactory. It gives us no sense of the role's advantages and deficits, and no sense of what this role might accomplish. This is a storytelling game. Tell a story when you describe your character's Traits (Attributes or otherwise). This is essential not only to your own roleplay, but also to your basic ability to Succeed at tasks involving those Traits.

The second description, on the other hand, tells us much. We get a sense of the persona's advantages, and some of the persona's deficits. We can see what kinds of actions will be easier for this character, and also what actions might be more difficult. With a description this complete, the Director should rarely need to rely upon this Trait's quantifier. This is why the quantifier for a Descriptive Trait is considered an optional tool for the Director's use, when needed.

Quantifiers for Descriptive Traits

Our suggestion for Descriptive Traits is that the Director jot quantifications down, but keep these numbers from the Actors. A good description should be **more than enough** for roleplay, and an actual value will only interfere with this process. Due to the nature of Descriptive Traits, the Director may be required to alter the value of their quantifiers on the fly, depending upon how each Trait is used, so it's helpful to have thought out the Scaling for your Chronicle in a fairly detailed manner (see 'Scaling',

coming up next). That way, it's easy to produce a new value when you need one, without slowing down the game. For example, you might assign a different value to the Strength Trait described above (our Sumo wrestler type), depending upon whether the role in question was lifting a barbell, or shoving an opponent back in a fight. Or, you may wish to temporarily reduce the quantifier for this Trait, if the character in question was wounded, etc.

UNQUANTIFIED TRAITS

Descriptors are Unquantified Traits which exist only in descriptive form (thus, their name). They will not lend themselves to quantification because their effect upon the game is too complex, and need not be handled that way in any case. With the knowledge in mind that this is a storytelling game, the effects of these Traits can simply be roleplayed as seems appropriate at the time. Unquantified Traits may have any influences and repercussions that the Director desires. Actually, we're going to present several interesting ways of handling the ambiguities of diceless roleplay, such as those represented by Descriptors. We'll discuss some of these methods later in this chapter, then pick up the speed of our discussion under the next chapter, titled '**Lights .. Camera ... Action!**', and finally open up full throttle with the following chapter, titled '**Improvisation**'. Hang on to your seat.

SCALING

Descriptors notwithstanding, the bulk of decision making in Theatrix is, at the very least, guided by quantifications. To make using these numbers easier, even across widely varying genres, all Quantified Traits, as previously discussed, will be assigned numbers on a **Range** of '0.0' to '10.0'. Three points on this Scale are of particular interest ...

- ⇒ **The '0.0' Mark** - A score of '0.0' is always the minimum score. It represents a Trait so low as to lack effect within the context of the story.
- ⇒ **The '3.0' Mark** - A score of '3.0' is always considered the average for any Scale.
- ⇒ **The '10.0' Mark** - A score of '10.0' represents the **practical** limit of any Range; if there's a stronger Trait, it makes no sense to place it upon the same Scale.

This distribution leaves a little more room at the top of each Scale (above the average of '3.0'), than at its bottom (below '3.0'), which is appropriate. Most of your

Main Cast will tend to be heroic in nature, and above the norm in many ways. Leaving more room at the top of each Scale will allow for finer distinctions there, where they'll make the most difference.

The limit of '0.0' to '10.0' will always represent the entire **useful** Range of any Quantified Trait. This allows Traits to be Scaled differently then, depending upon the Setting of a Chronicle and its particular needs, while still using the same Range of numbers, and maintaining each number's basic meaning.

For example, lets again use the Physical Attribute of Strength. Imagine a Chronicle set in a realistic modern day world, dealing with a school of highly trained martial artists. In such a Chronicle, a '10.0' might represent the Strength of a world class grand master in the martial arts, or an Olympic class weight lifter. However, in a Chronicle set in the far future, aboard a Galaxy spanning starship, the Scale for Strength would also have to take into account the existence of non-human races. In that Setting, a score of '10.0' could exemplify a Strength many times that possible for the strongest human. You'll be dealing with the same Range of numbers at all times, and although their specific meanings will change with the Setting, they'll keep their basic connotations ('3.0' being the average, '10.0' being the high mark, etc.). In this way, our standard Range of numbers can be reused to serve an infinite variety of Settings.

COMPLETING THE SCALE

We'll give specific examples of how to go through the process of actually completing an entire Scale later, under the '**Setting**' chapter. For now, you should know that the basic method for Scaling any Trait involves creating a description of the magnitude of that Trait, at each major point upon its Scale, ie. the '10.0' mark of a Scale is formed by a description of the highest magnitude of that Trait, such as ...

- ⇒ **Strength at '10.0'** - Olympic Record Weight Lifter (capable of a snap, cling, and jerk of 550 lbs.)

The '3.0' mark is likewise formed by a description of that Trait's average, such as ...

- ⇒ **Strength at '3.0'** - Joe Average (capable of bench pressing 200 lbs.)

This is generally repeated for each whole numbered point in the standard Range, from '0.0' to '10.0'. As long as all the participants in a Chronicle understand the meaning of each Scale, then it works. We'll discuss the Scaling to be used for the Traits in our genres, along with the other background material we provide in our Setting

Books. If you're creating your own genre in which to set a Chronicle, then you'll need to put some thought into how you wish to handle the Scaling of the various Traits in that Setting.

METHODS OF SCALING

There are two methods you may use to Scale Quantified Traits within Theatrix. The first method is called 'Scaling by Range', and the second is called 'Scaling by Norm'. You may use either method on each individual Trait, without regard to the method used on any other Trait. **Scaling by Range** allows an individual to possess **any** score on the standard Range, from '0.0' to '10.0'. **Scaling by Norm**, on the other hand, limits an individual to a small Range of values, based upon the 'normative' (that's average) value for that role's genetic or racial inheritance. In other words ...

- ⇒ **Scale a Trait by Range** - When you'll be representing a single racial group, as in a Chronicle where all the characters are normal humans, and you wish to emphasize the differences between the individuals.
- ⇒ **Scale a Trait by Range** - When a Trait will be unrelated to any group affiliation, and again, you wish to emphasize the differences between individuals.
- ⇒ **Scale a Trait by Norm** - When you'll be dealing with several distinct groups in the same Setting, and you wish to emphasize the differences between the groups, ie. you don't want the humans arm wrestling the Titans.

Scaling By Range

As stated above, Scaling by Range works best when you wish to emphasize the differences between **individuals** within a Setting. So, for example, if we Scaled Strength by Range, using the martial arts school example given under 'Scaling', a score of '0.0' might represent the Strength of a small child, a '3.0' might represent the average human Strength, and a '10.0' might represent the Strength of an Olympic class weight lifter. All the values in-between would be set accordingly.

Scaling by Norm

As stated above, Scaling by Norm is a good method to choose when you wish to emphasize the differences between **groups** within a Setting. This method works well for example, when you're dealing with several different

racers of aliens in a space faring genre. So, If we Scaled Strength by Norm, using the Galaxy spanning starship example given under 'Scaling', you might set the norm of human Strength at '3.0', the norm for the Strength of a warlike alien race at '6.0', and reserve a score of '10.0' for those horrifically strong alien guest stars who are meant to tackle the Chief Security Officer. Strong or weak specimens of any race may lie somewhat above or below the norm, but usually not by more than a **single point**. So a particularly strong member of a warlike alien race might have a Strength of up to '7.0', given this example.

IF THE MOUNTAIN WON'T GO TO MOHAMMED

Whichever way you choose to Scale each Trait, you really only want to concern yourself with Scaling the **useful** Range. The purpose of Scaling Traits is to produce representative numbers. And the reason we use numbers is to make decisions about those Traits easier. However, many decisions can be made without reference to a number at all. For example, in a fight between a man of normal Strength and a large rampaging locomotive train, there's no reason to bother attempting to Scale the locomotive's 'Strength'. If the Actor doesn't have her character do something really neat, like jump out of the way, that character is squashed. End of story. The locomotive's Strength can be said to be 'Off the Scale'. Attempting to create a Scale to handle all possible interactions is counter-productive and will actually decrease a Scale's usefulness.

If you're using a genre where stopping moving trains with your bare hands is something that's likely to happen, like in a super-hero comic book, then your highest useful Strength may be well above that of a moving train. In that case, your '10.0' mark may represent a Strength literally capable of moving mountains. For each Trait, try to focus in on the maximum value that you're likely to allow. That is, the maximum value that any of the major roles could possibly possess of a Trait. That point becomes that Trait's '10.0' mark for the Setting. Anything much above this mark can simply be counted as 'Off the Scale'. If two locomotive trains ever clash, you're pretty safe in just describing (storytelling) the outcome. It's only when your Actors take on even semi-reasonable odds that you'll need the numbers. The numbers then help to provide a sense of Continuity and fairness to those actions and outcomes involving the Actors' personas.

THE DECIMAL POINTS

All Quantified Traits in these rules may take values from '0.0' to '10.0', which means that you can use the decimal points to assign values like '6.5', or '7.2' to any Trait, allowing a finer degree of control. That gives every Scale a Range of over 100 values. We give our examples

mostly in terms of whole numbers, and often use 1/2 values (like '3.5') when playing the game ourselves, but feel free to use the entire Range if you like the fine shading it gives.

TYPES OF TRAITS

Acting is about playing roles. When an Actor plays a new role, she enters into new possibilities for expression within the world. This expression should be consistent, with its own inherent view-point, background, strengths, and even shortcomings. The world in which this persona interacts must also be consistent, and allow for the Actors' suspension of disbelief. It's this suspension, this quality of Continuity, which gives focus to the Actors' roleplay. The intent of any system of rules is to provide for this sense of Continuity.

The basis for this Continuity within our rules will be the organization of each Actor's persona into Traits. Traits are all those details which give a role its unique identity within the tale. They allow you to define exactly the persona you wish to play, so that both you, the Director, and the other Actors may each share a strong common sense of your character's potentials and deficits. In Theatrix, we use four different types of Traits to help define the four main aspects of any persona's functioning within the Chronicle. These four classes of Traits are, once again ...

- ⇒ **Physical and Mental Attributes** - These six Traits comprise a description of each character's physical and mental capabilities, and include Strength, Stamina, Coordination, Intellect, Intuition, and Presence.
- ⇒ **Skills and Abilities** - Skills are Traits that measure the depth and facility of your persona's knowledge in particular areas, and expertise at various tasks. Abilities are very much like Skills, but cover feats of a paranormal nature that often fall outside the realm of normal learning.
- ⇒ **Personality Traits** - These Traits form a description of your persona's major psychological motivations.
- ⇒ **Descriptors** - These Traits help to portray the effects of a role's background, history, and social position, as well as some physical oddities and paranormal features.

Each of the above categories is treated differently by, and has different uses within, the rules. We'll now take each in turn and explain them in more detail.

PHYSICAL AND MENTAL ATTRIBUTES

There are three Physical and three Mental Attributes, all Descriptive Traits, representing a role's innate potential in the physical and mental arenas. They establish your character's physical and mental capabilities. These Traits are static in a way that's never true for us in our 'real' lives. Weak people can pump iron until they become strong. People with difficult scholastic histories can try new study habits. Good trainers can help even the handicapped to become athletes. One of the joys of life is that we're not really locked into the roles we traditionally define ourselves with.

However, acting is about roles. We count on the stereotypes of our favorite characters. That's why we read particular books, or see certain movies. Your character's Attributes will embody the basic potentials that define the role you choose. The differences between each of the characters' Attributes will also help to define these characters in relation to each other. That doesn't mean your role can't change or grow. Only that such change will have to accommodate the story, the other main characters, and the expectations of your role's original conception.

Physical Attributes

The three Physical Attributes and their descriptions follow ...

- ⇒ **Strength** - This is representative of your pure physical prowess. Your capacity to lift, push, shove, heave, and move. Strength is important whenever you intend to use brute, physical force against either a person, or an object. In hand to hand combat, Strength will also reduce the damage you suffer from your opponents blows.
- ⇒ **Stamina** - This is your capability to endure hardship, both physical and psychological. Stamina's most important component is simply the will to live. Within the bounds of your physical ability, this is also your capacity to ignore fatigue, and to continue long term tasks. The limits of those tasks may be decided by Strength, or Intellect, but Stamina will determine how well you react to the stress. In combat, when you're hurt, Stamina will also determine whether you can take action, and to what extent.
- ⇒ **Coordination** - This Trait covers your capacity for grace in movement, agility, reaction speed, and hand-eye coordination.

Coordination is important in fighting technique, using melee weapons (like knives, or swords), aiming a bow or firearm, and reacting quickly in combat situations.

Mental Attributes

The three Mental Attributes and their descriptions follow ...

- ⇒ **Intellect** - Intellect is your ability to handle difficult mental tasks. This Trait covers your quickness in learning, and your capacity for innovative problem solving of a technical nature. It's important to note that Intellect does not represent common sense, or wisdom. Nor are characters with low Intellect necessarily stupid. Roles possessing high Intellects may even be slow, naive, or without street-savvy.
- ⇒ **Intuition** - This Trait covers your ability in interpersonal tasks, your sensitivity to the nature and needs of others, and your ability to sway others on an emotional level. This Trait can also cover your character's ability to make correct guesses when presented with minimal, or inadequate information. This Trait does not reflect a particular personality type, and is possessed by psychologists, con-artists, and detectives alike.
- ⇒ **Presence** - Presence is the palpable aura of personality possessed by your character. It's the extent to which your role's presence fills the room she enters. Presence can represent physical beauty, charismatic personality, or a complete air of authority. Presence is useful in various forms of communication, commanding respect, and leading others. Presence can represent an aura of fear and danger, as easily as one of authority and trust. Your character's lack of Presence may be important. Being able to pass others without being noticed can be just as useful as commanding their attention.

Describing Attributes

Attributes are Descriptive Traits with many facets. You can emphasize one facet of an Attribute, while describing a deficit in another. The Director may quantify an Attribute differently in different situations, depending upon how it's described, and how it's used in your actions. Your Attributes will be very important in deciding what

your persona can accomplish Successfully, and how that persona will go about it. Think carefully about the personality and background of the role you wish to play, and then give detailed descriptions of your character's Attributes accordingly.

We often find it helpful to describe a role's Attributes from the perspective of that role, or someone who knows that role well, in their own voice. The inclusion of historical examples also adds depth to your description. In this way, by the time the Director has finished reading your character's Attribute descriptions, she will already have a fair sense of your character's personality and history as well. We have two examples for you, to give you a taste of what we mean.

The first example is from a Chronicle set in a mythical ancient China. The character, named Wan Tiao Feng, is a double agent for both the Imperial Secret Police, and a secret society attempting to overthrow the Manchu dynasty. His description of Stamina follows ...

- ⇒ **Stamina** - Finally brother, we have the blessing of heaven. See that small light by the moat. That is our man, Wan Tiao Feng, giving the signal. He will now swim the moat, climb the palisade wall, defeat the guards inside, and crank open the outer gate. Then the others will enter swiftly and finish the job. The traitor government's minister will surely be dead by dawn. No, no. Do not be fooled by his size. I have seen Wan practice night and day ... you see, he is already across the moat. There he goes, bare handed up that wall. He is perfect, both amazing and expendable. Woops ... he seems to have been noticed. They are dropping rocks on him. See there! Still he tries to climb ... ouch! That's gotta hurt ... poor Wan .. Then again brother, it may be best if we left now ...

Notice the history included within this description. Actually each of Wan's Attributes held an example of Wan performing an impossible task, for an impossible mission, and failing. This helped to give the sense of both Wan's many strengths, and his all too human limits.

The second example is from a Chronicle depicting the strange nocturnal lives of a group of vampires. The character, named Scratch, is a torn soul. He was a priest who committed a sin of atrocity, which he feels has damned him to his present state. His description of Intuition follows ...

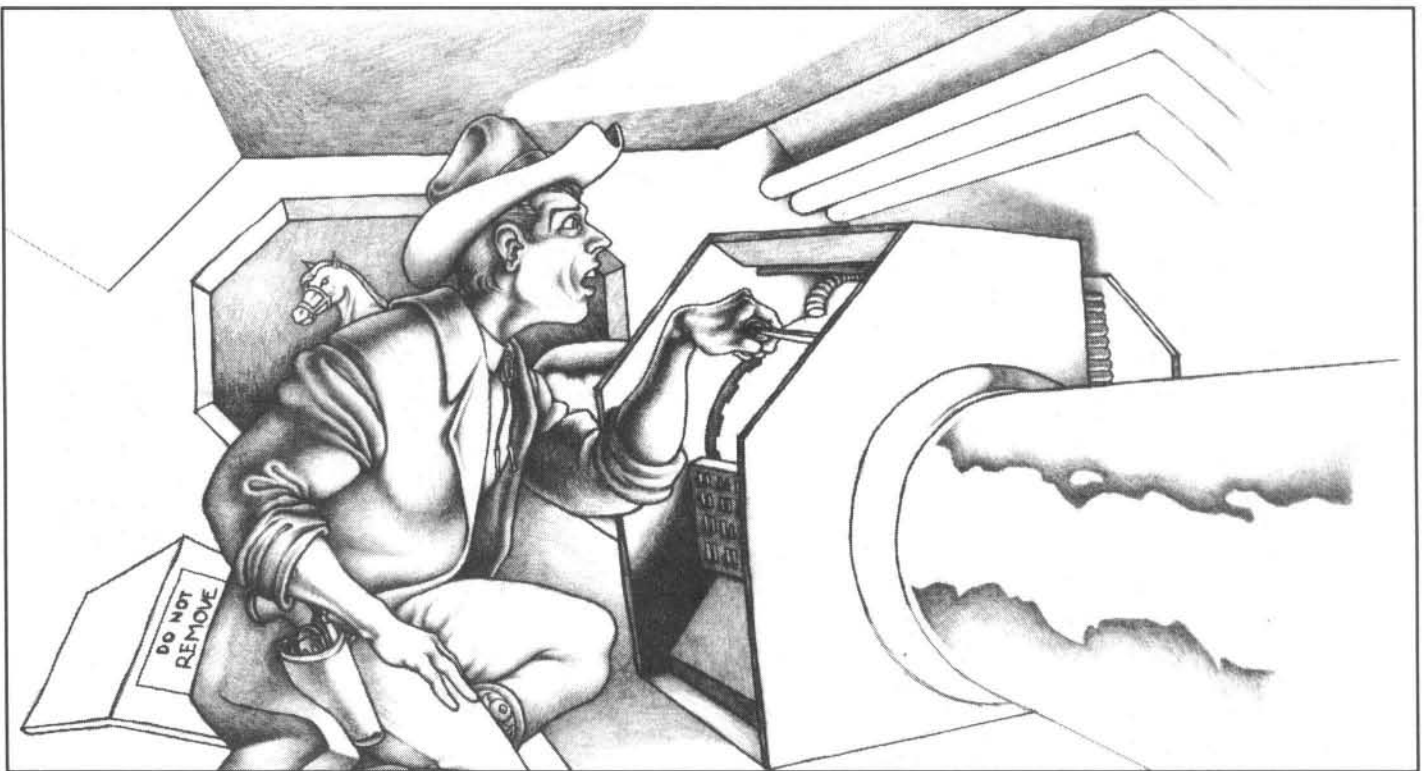
- ⇒ **Intuition** - I knew myself well enough to try to sink into an alcoholic oblivion before I did anybody any real harm. Only problem was I wasn't quick enough. But I'm good with pain.

Good with temptation and power. A real user. And I can see the others out there, like me. Kept me in my frock all during that long slow slide into damnation. And now I wear that on the outside. That doesn't mean you're safe though, so just stay away, cause' lately I've been replacing whiskey with blood.

With this description we get a good sense of Scratch's strong suite in Intuition, as well as a mouthful of his self-loathing, and self-pitty. We find out something about his personality, and get a feeling for the kind of past that could create such a creature. Try to use your Attribute descriptions in this way, as a vehicle to begin

Firearms. Some examples of other Skills might include Sword Fighting, Investment Finance, and Political Intrigue. We'll provide comprehensive Skill lists along with the other background material included in our Setting Books. If you're designing your own Setting, then you'll have to write out your own Skill list for your Chronicle. Such a list will also help you to define your Setting more fully.

Abilities are paranormal feats which your character may perform that wouldn't fit into an ordinary Skill list. We may give suggestions as to what Abilities would be appropriate in our genres, but it's up to the discretion of the Director as to what will be allowed. Whether using our background material or your own, as Director you have



realizing your character as a complete entity, right from the start.

SKILLS AND ABILITIES

Skills are a measure of the depth and facility of your persona's knowledge in particular areas, or expertise at various tasks. The Skills available to describe your character with will differ greatly from Setting to Setting. For example, a character out of the Old West should probably never possess the Skill of Warp Drive Technology, although a starship Captain (to signify his ability to operate such rare weapons) might possess the Skill of Ancient

final say over what Abilities can be taken, and how they'll work within your Setting. There is no complete list of Abilities, and any Actor who wishes their persona to have them will have to describe those Abilities to the Director, in such a manner that both of you are clear on their functioning. The following are a few examples of Abilities from various Settings ...

- ⇒ A character who can foretell the future using Tarot cards, and sometimes get unexpected glimpses of the future in her mind. The higher the rating of the Ability, the more accurate and specific these foretellings will be.

- ⇒ A character who can ignite herself on fire, sustaining no damage, fly through the sky at the speed of a jet, and throw columns of fire at her enemies. The higher the rating of these powers, the faster she'll fly, and the more intense will be her fire. Eventually she'll develop the Ability to use all her energy in one great explosion. This would probably knock her unconscious, but would also do terrific damage. That explosion would have a rating of its own, and so be developed independently.
- ⇒ By physically touching another being, and repeating 'My thoughts are your thoughts, my mind is your mind' and the like, the character can achieve a mental contact with another life form. That contact takes time to establish, but will allow the sharing of thoughts, beliefs, and even emotions.

Ranking

Both Skills and Abilities are Quantified Traits. The Director may use whatever method is reasonable to adjudicate what Skills and Abilities are possessed by a character, and at what score, or 'Rank'. These methods can range from a chat with each Actor about what they want their roles to be like, to a clear rules system for developing the Chronicle's personas.

Both Skills and Abilities are Scaled on the usual Range of '0.0' to '10.0'. For Skills, here's what those numbers mean ...



Skill Ranks

1.0	Basic training. Anything less means a character is Unskilled in the area.
2.0	Basic training level for a journeyman in a Skill. This is the Rank you need for competency.
3.0	The character is skilled in the area, and would be described as very competent and well trained.
4.0	Excellent training and experience, leading to a highly trained individual, capable of instructing others.
5.0	Years of experience, and natural aptitude, have allowed the character to fully master the Skill.
6.0	The character is capable of Extraordinary feats in the area, even under pressure and time constraints. The character possesses a brilliant command of the Skill.
7.0	The character is capable of Impossible feats in the area. Others can only look on and admire.
8.0	The character makes the Impossible a regular enough occurrence, that they could have their own television show.
9.0	The character may have doubts, but they're so good that others don't doubt their capability to do anything with the Skill. The Impossible is to be expected.
10.0	Nothing is Impossible. Nothing.

These descriptions are genre dependent. Exactly what a character is capable of, at any particular Rank, will vary with the Skill in question, the specific task, and most of all, the Setting. For example, a master inventor (Skill Rank '5.0') in a realistic modern day Setting, can be capable of some ingenious work. But a master inventor (also Skill Rank '5.0') in the Setting of four color superhero comic books, can probably put stuff together with spare parts that would put any inventor limited by real world physics to shame.

The Ranking of Abilities is handled a bit differently. Each Ability must be individually Scaled. Although in some cases the learning curve for an Ability may closely approximate that given above for Skill Ranks, a description of what each Ability is capable of, at each Rank, must still be included. The Director must then assign the character a specific Rank in that Ability, placing the possessing role upon this new Scale. The Director may use the above Skill Rank descriptions as an example to aid in this assignment. It's possible for a role to start as a novice in an Ability, or to be a master, near the height of her power. The Director simultaneously adjudicates not only the character's starting power level, but the growth path for each Ability as well. We'll cover the topic of Scaling individual Abilities in more depth, under the 'Setting' chapter, later in this book.

Skill and Ability Histories

Skill and Ability Rank descriptions simply give you a feel for the extent of action these Ranks cover, and provide a consistent framework upon which to develop

characters. They **do not** imply how each persona actually came to acquire these Ranks. An Actor may justify her Skill Ranks in **any** way that fits the background and personality of her character, from acquiring them during years of patient practice, to having a natural aptitude, to instant learning using RNA injections.

Specialization

Characters may choose to Specialize in their Skills and Abilities. They may take one Specialization for each Skill or Ability they possess, to indicate that area at which they're most adept. For example, a Specialization for Sword Combat might be either 'Fencing', or 'Wild Melees'. A Specialization for Business Management might be either 'Wheeling and Dealing', or 'Personnel Management'. Whenever a Skill or Ability is used in its area of Specialization, then any actions requiring that Skill or Ability are more likely to Succeed. How much of a difference this really makes is left up to the judgement of the Director. However, we suggest that you give the Actors more leeway to feel competent when using a Specialized Skill or Ability, in its area of Specialization.

When a character has Specialized in a Skill or Ability, the Director may consider the bulk of the character's training and expertise to be in that Specialized area. Within the Specialization, this will give the character an edge over others of the same Rank. A role can also be a Generalist in a Skill or Ability, and choose not to take a Specialization. A Generalist might not be able to best a Specialist of the same Rank, in the area of their Specialization, but will have the edge in all other facets of that Skill or Ability's use.

Skill and Ability Descriptions

After listing a Skill or Ability, and any Specialization, you should give a short, single line example of your role's archetypical use of that Skill or Ability. This will aid both you and the Director in determining the appropriate Rank for each one, and serve as a decision aid during play. Here are a few good examples of Skills as they would appear on a completed character. Each one takes the form of ...

[Rank] Title (Specialization) - Single line description.

As in ...

⇒ [6.0] Firearms (Marksmanship) - "Oh yeah? Watch this ..." BLAM ... BLAM ... BLAM - BLAM - BLAM - BLAM - BLAM [Bullet-hole smiley face on the target]

⇒ [4.5] Detective Work (Working the System) - "People assume that a complex password is more secure. Not so. Human brains aren't built to store XTJ-501-Alpha590, so people write them down. After going through the desk for a few minutes I found this ..."

⇒ [3.5] Investment Finance (The Market) - "Don't sell yet. It's Christmas Eve. Everyone will sell out just before market close to grab extra cash for the holiday. Wait five minutes and you'll pick up another quarter point."

Everyman Skills

Some Skills (and possibly even some Abilities, depending upon the genre) are so common as to be learned freely by almost everyone within a Setting. For example, Driving, Swimming, and Climbing are Skills known by almost every adult in our society, to some degree. Such Skills may be considered as Everyman Skills. They don't need to be listed for any role unless they are known to some unusual extent, ie. if a role is a race car driver, or a competitive swimmer. Whenever a persona decides to take an action covered by a Skill they do not possess, but which the Director feels is an Everyman Skill for that persona, then the Director may simply assign an appropriate Skill Rank if necessary (usually no higher than '3.0'). If at some future time, an Actor wishes to increase her role's proficiency with an Everyman Skill, they may then begin the increase from their assigned Rank (again, usually starting no higher than '3.0').

Skill Categories

Skills (and possibly even some Abilities, depending upon the Setting) are grouped into Skill Categories according to the profession, or task, most commonly associated with each Skill. Some Skills may be applicable to several Categories, but should be placed into the single most representative one. Skill Categories are important because they help to define the appropriate professions for roles within your Chronicle. Characters within the Chronicle in no way need to fall into these professions, but the Skill Categories chosen will help to define the 'normal' learning paths for your Setting. Some examples of Skill Categories could include Business Skills, Athletic Skills, Warrior Skills, Security Skills, Magical Skills and Abilities, Investigative Skills, and Engineering Skills.



Example Skills

The following page contains a bunch of Skills, from a variety of genres, in alphabetical order. Some of the Skills cover vast areas of knowledge, while others are very specific. This is not meant so much as a Skill list, as a creative tool when designing characters. Look at it while chanting mystic mantras, and all sorts of neat ideas for Skills will pop into your head. We promise.

PERSONALITY TRAITS

Personality Traits are a method for tracking the growth and change of a character's psychological makeup, and for giving the Actors a bonus for roleplaying their role's evolving psyche appropriately. Personality Traits are a description of your persona's major psychological motivations. These could include for example, Greedy, Kind-Hearted, Honorable, Loner, Haughty, Vengeful, Protective, Brave, etc. Anything about your character that's central to her personality. You may have several Personality Traits, and they may even be tangentially opposed, as long as they don't conflict directly. For example, you may **not** be both Brave and Cowardly. You may however, be both Vengeful and Honorable, or both Cowardly and Protective.

Once you've chosen your Personality Traits, you must rate each of them for their level of Severity, as follows ...

- ⇒ **Moderate** - This Trait effects the character's choices in everyday life, her reactions to situations, and sometimes even her choice of targets in combat.
- ⇒ **Strong** - The character is heavily swayed by this Personality Trait, which will influence all facets of the character's life. The character may act irrationally rather than go against this Trait's inclinations. Any decision to ignore this Trait in a situation should involve some internal struggle, or conflict, possibly with another Personality Trait.
- ⇒ **Extreme** - Where this Personality Trait is involved the character will not change her mind for any reason. The character may become totally irrational rather than oppose this Trait's dictates. Any change to such a Trait may only come as the result of extended roleplay. Any decision that ignores this Trait's effects is only allowed through conflict with another Strong, or Extreme Personality Trait. Even then, these decisions are probably the cause of major angst for the character.

Personality Traits are always limited by their Severity Levels for both **action** and **inaction**. That means that if a persona has the Personality Trait of Brave, at Moderate, then that persona may have trouble taking Strongly or Extremely Brave actions. On the other hand, if a role has the Personality Trait of Brave, at Extreme, then that role may be unable to back out of many dangerous situations. Personality Traits are a sword that cuts both ways. We provide a few examples of Personality Traits below. The descriptions which follow them are not normally included, but are given here to provide insight into the temperament behind each Trait.

- ⇒ Vengeful (Moderate) - He dragged the key along the side of his bosses' car. If he couldn't have his vacation time, then they might as well both suffer.
- ⇒ Brave (Strong) - As the Martian horde bore down upon their small encampment a sweat broke out on his brow. The gun in his hands became suddenly heavy, but he stood his ground with his mates.
- ⇒ Arrogant (Extreme) - 'I've never failed in battle or game, I'm simply the best by far... c'est moi, c'est moi, I'm forced to admit, I'm far too noble to lie. The person in whom all these qualities bloom, c'est moi, c'est moi, tis I.'



ADROBATICS	Contortions	Herbalist	OCCULT
ACTING	COUNTERFEITING	Hex	Oratory
ALCHEMY	Criminology		Painting
Alertness	CRYOKINETICS	Hunting	Paramedic
Animal Training	Cryptography	Hypnotism	Pickpocketing
ANTHROPOLOGY	CYBERNETICS	Illusions	Police Procedure
Appraisal	Debate	Instruction	POLITICS
Architecture	DEMOLITIONS	Interrogation	Psychology
Archeology	DIPLOMACY	Intimidation	Security Systems
ARCHERY	Disguise	Unwieldy	Siege
Artillery	DODGE	Journalism	SHADOWING
Astrogation	Electronics	Jumping Kick	Shape Shift
ATHLETICS	EMPATHY	Knife	Sleight of Hand
AUGURY	Enchanting	Law	STARSHIP PILOTING
BLACKSMITHING	Engineering	Leadership	Storytelling
Brawl	Etiquette	Levitation	Streetwise
BREWING	Falconry	LINGUISTICS	Survival
BRIBERY	Farming	Lip Reading	Tactics
Bureaucracy	FAST DRAW	Lockpicking	Tel Teleport
Caligraphy	Feign Death	Magic	Theology
Camouflage	Finance	Martial Arts	Toxicology
Carousing	FORENSICS	Mechanic	Tracking
CARPENTRY	Forgery	Meditation	Underwater Ops.
Clairvoyance	FIREARMS	MELEE WEAPONS	Wentilquism
CLIMBING	Fishing	Psi Bolt	WAGONEERING
Combat	Flight	Metallurgy	WRESTLING
Combat Piloting	GUILE	MIMICRY	Xenobiology
Computer Programing	Haggling	mind control	Yoga
Con Artist	Heraldry	Navigation	ZERO MANEUVERS

Personality Trait Activation

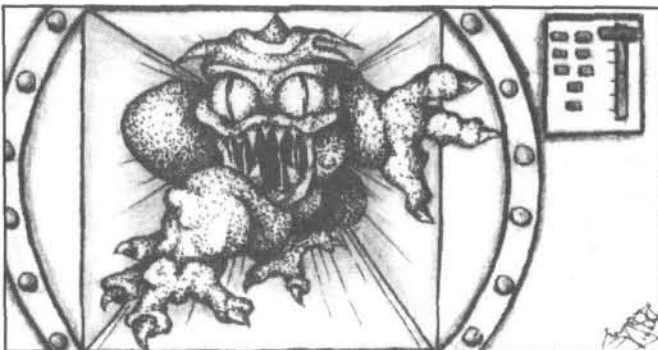
In addition to acting as a guide to the portrayal of your role (for both you and the Director), you may also use your role's Personality Traits to gain special advantages. All Personality Traits may be 'Activated' by the use of 'Plot Points' (described in the chapter titled 'Improvisation'). The expenditure of one Plot Point will Activate a Personality Trait, allowing your character to gain certain benefits.

- ⇒ Anytime you attempt an action that particularly involves one of your Personality Traits, then with the Director's approval, you may Activate that Personality Trait at the cost of one Plot Point, and declare that action a Success. **You will not Fail at that task**, although the extent of your Success may be decided by other factors.

For example, imagine several people standing around the electronic controls to a starship's airlock door. The door is jammed, and unless it closes soon, the escape pod these people are standing in won't release. And if the escape pod fails to release, they'll all be eaten by the alien monster screaming down the corridor at them. One of the characters in this tableau has the Personality Trait of Coward, at Strong. Having no place else to run, he spends a Plot Point, Activating that Personality Trait. He screams 'You don't know anything! Let me at that door!', pushes everyone roughly aside, and begins pounding at the controls randomly. The Director allows the Plot Point expenditure, and miraculously the door closes!

The Director may sometimes declare that your character must take a specified action. This may be due to the influence of drugs, psychic mind control, the sheer terror of the moment, etc.

- ⇒ Anytime the Director demands that you take an action that would be opposed to one of your Personality Traits, you may declare, with the Director's approval, that you ignore such influence for the rest of the **Scene** and act as you like, at the cost of one Plot Point.



If the influence you're trying to avoid continues, then you'll once again fall under its effects at the end of the Scene. However, you may still spend another Plot Point to break the influence's hold once again, at any later time that's appropriate.

Director's Control

Personality Traits are meant as a benefit, and a limit. Therefore, there are several ways that a Director may use a character's Personality Traits, whenever she feels it's warranted.

- ⇒ When a character wishes to perform an action that the Director feels would absolutely require a particular Personality Trait, then the Director may ask that character to expend one Plot Point to Activate that Personality Trait. If the character does not have a Plot Point, or does not possess the required Trait, at the appropriate Severity Level or better, then that character can't bring herself to perform the action.

Only demand the expenditure of a Plot Point in this manner when you feel that circumstances make it necessary. For example, you may require a Brave Personality Trait to be Activated with a Plot Point, in order to allow a character to leap off a roof to an uncertain fate, rather than be taken over by an alien body snatcher. Or you may require a Coward Personality Trait to be Activated with a Plot Point, in order to allow a character to leave his friends to certain death and save his own hide. Or you may require a Vengeful Personality Trait to be Activated with a Plot Point, in order to allow a character to slay a helpless opponent whose pleading for mercy. **Use this option to help the Actors roleplay their personas, not to limit them.**

- ⇒ If the Director ever feels that a character has displayed behavior not in keeping with that character's Personality Traits, over an extended period of time, then the Director may make changes in those Personality Traits accordingly.

This may mean lowering or raising Severity Levels, and adding, or deleting Personality Traits. This is usually done in steps, so try to limit your changes to no more than one Severity Level at any one time. For example, as Director, this may mean that sometimes you'll wish to add a positive Personality Trait, like Brave, to a character who has tended to attempt more Brave actions than the character's current Personality Traits would dictate.



Double Activation for Personality Traits

If an Actor is ever desperate to have her persona perform an action, but finds herself limited, either because the character does not have an appropriate Personality Trait, or does not have one at the appropriate level, then that Actor may expend **two** Plot Points and perform the action anyway. However, anytime you take advantage of this rule, you're asking the Director to seriously consider altering your role's Personality Traits by one step, to reflect your effort to take the aforementioned action. So if you pay double to perform a Brave action, for example, then the Director should consider either decreasing your character's Cowardly level by one step, or adding Brave, or increasing your present Brave level by one step, whichever is most appropriate to your character. This rule only allows you to perform actions, and **does not** allow you to gain automatic Successes by Activating Personality Traits your role doesn't possess.

DESCRIPTORS

Descriptors are Unquantified Traits that portray a persona's background, history, and social position, as well as some physical oddities and paranormal features. There are no strict guidelines to portraying the effects of a Descriptor within a story. Like Abilities, there is no complete list of all possible Descriptors. What is acceptable is only limited by the Actors' imaginations, and the

discretion of the Director. As an example, let's use a Descriptor we'll call 'Berserker Rage'. The description for this Trait is as follows ...

- ⇒ The character is capable of entering a 'Berserker Rage' during combat. If this happens, then the character will continue fighting until all opponents have stopped moving. He'll resist attempts, even from friends, to stop his fury, or to pull him from the fight. All but the deadliest wounds will be ignored. It's not that the character doesn't get harmed, it's just that he'll keep moving despite the wounds, until the end of the Scene. This allows the character to fight on, unaware that he's already dying.

The Director and Actor involved could have decided to handle this Descriptor in many other ways as well. There is no single 'right' way to form Descriptors. The best guideline you have for the creation of Descriptors is your own Chronicle. Descriptors should be formed to enhance the Chronicle and the roleplay within it. The following two pages are full of examples of Descriptors from a variety of Settings. This is just a small sampling of what can be done with these Traits ...



Descriptor Examples

Ace of Aces - The persona was practically born in a plane. She may Activate this Descriptor to gain Successes in stunt flying, dogfighting, and landing. She also has excellent knowledge concerning plane repairs, notable air battles, and anything pertaining to pilot-hood.

Or - Stuntperson, Crack Cryptographer, Motocross Champ

Ambidextrous - The role possesses equal capacity of motion with either hand. She can surprise people by using her "off-hand", and is less inconvenienced when her 'primary hand' gets wounded.

Or - Contortionist, Multi-Lingual

Arch-Magi - The role is a recognized master of the arts arcane. Whether or not the persona in question is capable of performing feats of awesome mystical might or not, it is generally accepted that she could. She may also possess great knowledge of the occult, and the inner workings of magic.

Or - Computer Engineering Ph.d., Cult Leader, Shaman

Bear - The character is a bear. That's right a bear, ie. fur, teeth, immense claws, and everything. This Descriptor may be Activated to gain Successes in foraging, fishing, biting, woodland survival, and growling. Alas, the character must labor under the restraints of a terrible social stigma. You'd be surprised at how few mayoral inaugurations bears get invited to (the world just isn't all hibernation and picnic baskets).

Or - Talking Horse, Family Dog, Mutant Turtle

Blind - Sadly the role has lost her sight due to misfortune, or some ailment. However all is not lost. It is often said that when a person loses the use of one sense, others become sharper to compensate. The role may Activate this Descriptor to gain Success with her remaining senses.

Or - Deaf, No Fashion Sense, Lost

Chameleon - No matter the social situation the character finds herself in, she always blends in with the crowd. Be it a presidential conformation, gang party, or homeless-person's convention; she never seems out of place.

Or - Non-Descript, Shape Shifter, "Zelig"

Chosen One - The character has a very special place in the plans of Higher Powers. She plays an important role in their schemes, and they will see to her safety, and education. Unfortunately, these Powers aren't alone in their contest. Rest assured that their opponents won't appreciate the meddling of this Chosen One.

Or - Destined for Greatness, Prodigal Son, Kwizats Something or Other

Close to the Throne - The role in question belongs to the bloodline leading to the throne, and is not far removed from it. All it would take is for a few strategic 'accidents' to be arranged, and the entire kingdom would be kneeling before her. In the mean time, she has the advantage of being close to the top. People are always trying to curry her favor, and very few are willing to anger her.

Or - Due for Promotion, Princess, Full Apprentice

Cool Car - The character's daddy hasn't taken the T-bird away, at least not yet. This Descriptor may be Activated to win drag races, get to places quickly, or impress guys. The possibilities are only limited by the road conditions.

Or - Streamlined Cargo Freighter, Wind Stallion, Magic Carpet

Cop - This Descriptor may be Activated to gain Successes in intimidation, criminal research, and making arrests. Passively, the role can carry a pistol, walk through police lines, and fix tickets.

Or - U. S. Marshall, Lawyer, Priest

Direction Sense - An ability to unerringly determine the direction to a thing.

Or - Bump of Direction, Drawn to Carrots, Sense for Evil, "Where's my Hougan?"

Explosive - The persona is, well, short fused. She tends to fly off the handle easily, and probably isn't someone you want to tell bad news to at a party. On the other hand, her quick reactions tend to give her an edge over others when speed of decision is a factor.

Or - Lightning Reflexes, Alien Warrior, The Ninja Code

Extensive Library - The character possesses a reservoir of knowledge. This will be useful for looking up pertinent facts, and/or figures.

Or - Internet Sysop, Eidetic Memory, Smart Neighbor

First Son - The character is fortunate enough to occupy a coveted position within the family unit. The character never has to wear hand-me-downs, is the first in line for the inheritance, and can expect some degree of authority over his younger siblings.

Or - Daddy's little Girl, Alpha Male

Flying Thief - For as long as you can remember you've had a great talent for unburdening others of their material possessions. Now that you've learned the secret of flight, nothing can stop you. Walls no longer matter. Who needs rope when you can just swoop in from above? And as for escapes... well let's just say they've become a lot easier.

Or - Invisible Spy, Precognitive Investment Consultant, Shapeshifting Troubadour

Good Fence - The persona knows someone who is always available for converting items of questionable ownership into that ever elusive commodity - cash. This someone is also skilled at keeping such interactions secret.

Or - Shady Art Dealer, Mudskil's Wand of Transformation, Fixer

Gunslinger - The persona is unusually adept at the nuances of the shoot-out. With this Descriptor, the persona can spend a Plot Point to make Successful shots with a gun, or make Statements about the business of gunfighting that may be taken as gospel.

Or - Master Swordsman, Ace Bombardier, Darts Champion

Hideout - Never has there been anything quite so nourishing to the human psyche as a private place to retreat to, and the role just happens to have one. The role can go there to lay low, recuperate, or reload; whatever strikes her fancy. After all, it is her Hideout.

Or - Safe House, Secret Base, Sewers

Immense - Just plain big. The character is impossible to move when she doesn't want to be. The character can often deny others passage by simply standing in the way, and can be quite imposing if she needs to be.

Or - Bulging Biceps, Juggernaut, Giant

Magic Sword - The character possesses a sword of ancient eldritch power. It's powers are beyond the ken of mortal men, and more importantly, the knowledge of the character. It is indestructible, razor sharp, and often warns the character of impending doom. It may possess even more abilities, but only time and tide will tell.

Or - Laser Sword, Fathers Six Gun, Shield of Theros

Really Cute - The role is just plain cute as a button. She may Activate this Descriptor in a plethora of social situations, and is probably treated quite nicely (Passive usage). The down side is that some people may assume that she has more looks than brains, but of course, this can be an advantage in itself.

Or - Sparkling Teeth, Awesome, Aura of Rightful Authority, Venus' Blessing

Rich - The persona is blessed with wealth, never has to worry about her next meal, or how much the repairs to the car will cost. This can also be a measure of temporal influence.

Or - Corporate CEO, Sultan, Famous Actor

Secret Identity - The character has reason to pursue a second life. Most likely she is trying to protect the innocent people who are important to her. If her secret were to come out, they might be put in danger. And there's no telling what one of the character's enemies could do with such information.

Or - Mysterious Past, Lycanthropy, Wanted by the Law

Sidekick - A cast member who follows you around, helps you out, serves as comic relief, and occasionally gets into trouble.

Or - Lovely Assistant, Nosey Neighbor, R3 Unit

Silly - "You're just being silly!" Well yes, but it's not all drawbacks. The role possesses a unique perspective on life that eludes the normal man. Often this is misunderstood, but occasionally the character is able to make intuitive leaps that break past the barriers of conventional thought. She may come up with ingenious, albeit strange solutions to insurmountable problems.

Or - Weird, Otherworldly, Alien, Cracked

Smuggler - The character is a smuggler, and has been for some time. She can call upon this status to find suitable cargos to haul, recognize bribable customs inspectors, and know the safest routes to take.

Or - Gunrunner, Net Jockey, Stagecoach Driver

Teenager - The character in question is on the young side of mature. While this does come with some drawbacks, like not being able to get into over 21 clubs, not being able to vote, and not being trusted with the keys to the secret base, things aren't all bad. For instance, you may be overlooked by the local authorities, and you actually remember all that stuff they taught you in high school.

Or - Kid, Young Looking

Undefeated - Let's face it, you're the best, and no one has ever proven otherwise. No matter how many challengers have come, you have vanquished them all. This has earned you a vast reputation, one which you have been able to capitalize upon in the past. Lately, very few have been brave enough to question your ability, and sometimes you worry that you may lose your edge.

Or - Shrack, Master of the Shaolin Temple, Lucky

Underworld Contacts - The role is familiar with and known by the seedier side of society. She can often call upon these personages for information on upcoming quasi-legal goings-on.

Or - Government Contacts, Guild Member, Archbishop, Social Butterfly

Well Equipped - The persona seems to always have the proper tools. No matter what the situation, she has come well equipped.

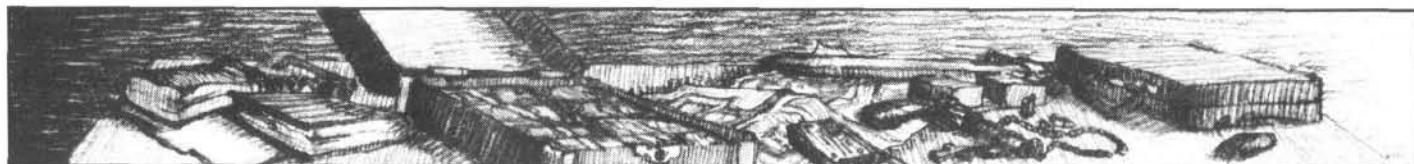
Or - Utility Belt, Omni-Gadget, Aztaro's Tool Box

Wounded - The character is afflicted with an old wound. This unfortunate condition will cause her occasional problems, and may make her incapable of certain physical activities.

Or - No Left Foot, Bad Memory, Cursed, Slow Healer

Zombie - The character is dead, but things aren't as bad as they seem. Someone has been kind enough to restore your mobility. Once you learn to live with this condition it can be quite useful. Sure you may have picked up a few 'odd' quirks, but you know what they say, "You can't kill what's already dead." Chances are, not much is going to slow you down. Having your arm blown off might make it hard to untie your shoes, but you can always sew it back on later.

Or - Vampire, Werewolf, Android, Statue



Descriptor Activation

Like Personality Traits, Descriptors may need to be 'Activated' with the use of Plot Points to gain certain benefits. There's a distinction between the Active use of a Descriptor, which requires Activation with a Plot Point, and the Passive use of a Descriptor, which is for free. The Passive use of a Descriptor covers all of its non-dramatic usages. For example, the Passive use of the background Descriptor 'Owns a large historic library', would allow a persona to be well read and educated, quote poetry, and cite historical references for characterization purposes. However, anytime a Descriptor is used for dramatic purposes, it **must** be Activated with a Plot Point. We define 'drama' here as a conflict which occurs in the context of an Episode's plotline. For example, the Active use of the background Descriptor 'Owns a large historic library', would allow a persona to own a copy of a rare occult tome containing an arcane cypher the character needs, in order to decode a letter he's intercepted containing clues vital to the completion of an Episode. Such a dramatic usage would require the expenditure of a Plot Point. Activating a Descriptor in this way allows it to be used dramatically for the **entirety of a single Scene**.

A character may also Activate one of their Descriptors to gain a Success in a single action, when that action is **directly** related to the Descriptor being used. For example, using the background Descriptor 'Owns a large historic library' in this way, would allow a persona to gain Successes in Skills such as History, Occult Lore, Library Research, etc.

Obviously, some Descriptors will be more prone to needing Activation than others (ie. some Descriptors have precious few Passive uses). The Descriptor 'Berserker Rage' given above, is probably one such example. However, such highly Active Descriptors often gain many benefits for being Activated in battle, as well as allowing for Successes in combat (when using Berserker tactics for example). Such advantages help to offset the Descriptor's more limited Passive functions.

Descriptors Vs. Skills/Abilities

There may be some question as to when a role's potential should be portrayed as a Skill or Ability, and when it's appropriate to use a Descriptor. We suggest that you use a Skill or Ability whenever the capability in question may come into conflict with, and be overcome by, external influences. Descriptors are better used for functions which are inherent within a character's background, functions which effect only the role possessing them, or functions which are not conflictual in nature.

The effects of either Skills or Abilities within the game are also very different from those of Descriptors. A Descriptor may not always be available. A character

doesn't have 'control' of her Descriptors. That is, a Descriptor represents a function which is dramatic in nature, and central to the character who possesses it. Descriptors are very powerful when they're appropriate to the plot, and a Plot Point is available for their Activation. When no Plot Point is available, or the Descriptor's use is not appropriate to the plot, then an Actor **must** come up with a reason why she can't, or won't use this power. For example, a library may not always contain the information you need, and berserker rage isn't always at a character's beck and call.

A Skill or Ability on the other hand, is always available. Their usage may not always be Successful, but there are no limits upon making those attempts. Skills and Abilities are not hinged upon dramatic necessity. For example, Fire Boy's flame projection power may not be strong enough to burn through the Duranium bonds which hold him, but he will still produce his fire, and he may even gain partial Successes (it will take five minutes to burn through the bonds, but will that leave him enough time to save Polly Anne from the evil Dr. Nefarious?). Even more importantly, Fire Boy may blast villains left and right with bolts of searing fire, without coughing up a Plot Point for every dramatic Scene. However, there is a drawback. A Skill or Ability is no guarantee of Success, even at the most dramatic moments. In fact, Skills and Abilities may **not** be directly Activated with Plot Points. To gain an automatic Success in a Skill, through the expenditure of a Plot Point, you must Activate either a **Personality Trait** or **Descriptor** that has a direct bearing on the action in question.

When in doubt, remember that Skills and Abilities are conflictual in nature, while Descriptors are dramatic in nature. All of this will probably become clear after you read the next chapter, titled '**Lights ... Camera ... Action!**'.

THE PRIMARY DESCRIPTOR

Every character may take one Descriptor as her Primary Descriptor. A character's Primary Descriptor labels the character's basic role, or function within the Chronicle. Primary Descriptors reserve a niche for each persona within the Main Cast. For this reason, no two characters may have the same Primary Descriptor, although they may sometimes be close. Some examples of Primary Descriptors include 'Gun Fighter', 'Sorcerer', 'Physicist', 'Samurai', 'Android', 'Private Eye', etc. Whatever the Actor feels best captures her persona's niche within the Chronicle. A Primary Descriptor may be used Passively, or Activated with a Plot Point just as any other Descriptor may be.

Each Primary Descriptor should have only one focus. This means that a Primary Descriptor may not cover all of a role's functions within the Chronicle, but

should cover the main thrust of each role's purpose. So if an Actor wishes to portray a Vampire Gunslinger, she may either take the Primary Descriptor 'Vampire' (and be a Vampire who also happens to be a Gunslinger), or the Primary Descriptor 'Gunslinger' (and be a Gunslinger who also happens to be a Vampire). In any case, no character may have more than one Primary Descriptor.

If several characters want the same Primary Descriptor, such as may happen with the Primary Descriptor 'Gunslinger' in an Old West Setting, then they must each take a Specialty of that Primary Descriptor. For example, the Main Cast of such a Chronicle might contain the Primary Descriptors 'Trick Shot', 'Fast Draw', and 'Eagle Eye', each a Specialty of 'Gunslinger'. Primary Descriptors will be discussed further in the chapter titled '**Improvisation**', later in this book.

FLAWS

Not every Descriptor must be complementary to a character. Every Actor should feel free to assign Flaws to their roles as well. A Flaw is a reoccurring problem that is personal to the role taking it. Flaws may be used to describe phobias, physical impairments, long-term and persistent interpersonal problems, perverse facets of a role's history and background, etc. Flaws may include such descriptions as 'Claustrophobic', 'Blind', 'Requires a special serum', 'Loses all power when bathed in green radiation', 'Walks with a limp', 'Interfering and meddlesome cousin', 'Wanted by the police', etc. The lives of Main Cast characters are **meant** to be complicated by plotlines. That's why they're part of the Main Cast. But a Flaw is a way of letting the Director know that you have a preference for some particular complication. Flaws add depth to many types of characters.

There's also a special bonus for taking a Flaw for your character. Anytime that your role's Flaw is introduced into an Episode, you receive an extra Plot Point for that character, at the end of that Episode. In one way that's not so bad, because if you're going to get in trouble anyway, you might as well get extra Plot Points for it. However, anytime your Flaw shows up, and you get the Plot Point for it (whether you want it or not), then the Director has the liberty of using your Flaw over and over again, in that Episode. For that Episode, your Flaw may become a major complication to your character, and possibly others. Of course, the more complicated an Episode, the more Plot Points everybody will earn (see the '**Improvisation**' chapter), so again, this may not be so bad.

You can Activate a Flaw in the same way as any other Descriptor, although there may be fewer opportunities to do so. You may also use a Flaw in a non-dramatic, ie. Passive way, for characterization purposes, without gaining the Plot Point bonus, or adding the Flaw as a

major plotline complication. So the mere presence of a Flaw does not always count toward gaining the bonus Plot Point for it. For example, if a persona had taken the Flaw of 'Blind', then we assume that role is blind in every Episode. However, the same persona probably has a variety of means for offsetting that penalty, such as the Descriptor 'Highly acute senses', or a high Skill Rank in Walking Cane. To get the bonus Plot Point for being 'Blind', that Flaw must be used dramatically, as a fairly major complication to the Episode. Such a dramatic use might have the character in question running from gunmen who are giving chase, lost, crashing into walls and over garbage cans, unable to find her way, and totally disoriented. That character had best think fast. The Flaw is now worth a Plot Point and may become a major reoccurring inconvenience. It's up to the discretion of the Director to decide how far she wishes to stretch the bounds of plausibility in making an Actor earn that extra Plot Point.

GENERAL THEORY OF CHARACTER CREATION

The use of the Traits detailed in this chapter should allow you to create almost any character your imagination can invent. The only limiting factor is your ability to clearly describe the functioning of your role's Traits to the Director. Once this is done, your character's possibilities will be free to fluctuate in a natural way, depending upon roleplay, plotline, and necessity. This simulates the way characters act and interact in movies, books, comic books, and television. But how do you come up with the kinds of characters you've enjoyed in your favorite stories?

Just as in well written movies, books, comic-books, and television, every well developed role in a Theatrix Chronicle has a purpose. When designing a character for Theatrix, you must keep the needs of the Chronicle in mind. The following section will describe a method of generating a character concept, and then filling in the details, in a way that will work within the context of any Chronicle you wish to develop. This method is based upon purpose. Action defines who a persona is - **action is character**. Personality is action defined by a **purpose**. In order to create an interesting, 'living' role, you have to know what makes your character 'tick'. It's not enough to simply know what your character can do, and why she can do it. You have to know what your character wants to do, and why she wants to do it. In order to get there, you might try the following steps ...



CONCEPTION

The concept for your character might come from books, movies, plays, television, or personal experience. You might want to play a particular role, already fully realized in your imagination, or you might have only a vague notion of what your persona will be like. You may have only a particular Skill, Ability, or Descriptor in mind. You might be trying to fill a specific niche within the Chronicle. Wherever you're starting from, the first step is to decide what you **do** know about your character. Take out a blank sheet of paper and try answering the following four questions.

⇒ What is your character's Primary Descriptor?

- What is your role's main purpose in the context of the Chronicle, eg. vampire, detective, superhero, samurai, artist, or mage? You may at this point come up with more than one Primary Descriptor, so for now, don't worry about limiting yourself to just one. Go ahead and list them all.

⇒ What Traits do you know your character should have?

- It's not important at this point to make distinctions between types of Traits, nor do you need to know exactly how each Trait will work. A list of the **things** you know your persona should be **capable** of, is all you're looking for. Classifying these capabilities comes later.

⇒ What do you know about your character's past?

- How did your character get to this point in her life? How did your role learn/acquire the Skills/Abilities/Descriptors she has? Why did she take this path rather than any other? These answers don't need to be comprehensive, but should include everything you're certain of at this point.

⇒ What is your character's personality like?

- Answering the first three questions should give you some idea of the kind of personality your character should have. Describe the demeanor of your character, and any pieces you may want to use later as Personality Traits.

If you don't have the answers to these questions right now, that's O.K. If you do have answers, don't get too attached to them. As you continue to develop your persona, you may find that the end product differs from your original conception. At this point, all you should have is a fleshed out **idea**. Now you can use these notes to complete the process. Here's how you pull it all together...

LIST ATTRIBUTES, SKILLS, ABILITIES, AND DESCRIPTORS

⇒ List your character's Primary Descriptor -

You may have listed several possibilities above. Now you must choose one. If you have more than one possibility, use all of the information you've collected thus far to help you. You may need to talk to the Director and the other Actors to find out what's needed for the Chronicle, to make sure people aren't taking the same Primary Descriptors, and to help insure that the Main Cast will make a good team.

⇒ Write a brief character history -

Motivations are very important in acting. Writing a character history will give your role greater depth and make her more interesting to play. More importantly, it will help you decide exactly which Traits, from all of those you've listed, you actually wish to keep.

⇒ Describe your character's Attributes -

Now write up each of your persona's Physical and Mental Attributes. You can use pieces from your character history to make these descriptions more 'alive'. Keep in mind the work you've already done on your role's personality, Skills, Abilities, and Descriptors.

⇒ Edit your list of Traits -

Now take your remaining wish list of Traits, and cut it down to what you believe your character will require to be complete. You may not get everything you want in the end, so look especially for those things you **need**.

⇒ Classify and describe your Traits -

Take each of the remaining Traits on your list, and decide how to classify each one, ie. as a Skill, Ability, Personality Trait, or Descriptor. Organize them into separate lists, and add any descriptions they require. Don't forget any Flaws you might want your character to have.

⇒ Quantify your character's Personality

Traits - Now that you know what your role can do, it's time to firm up the reasons why your character does these things. What are your character's psychological motivations, and what level of Severity should they be at? This will complete your character's Personality Traits.

- ⇒ **Give your character to the Director for approval** - The Director makes the final approval of a characters' Traits, and usually quantifies each Skill and Ability. The Director must also be sure that each character will be a benefit to the Chronicle, and to the Troupe.

THE BASIC RULE

Although the above system provides a good base from which to work, there are actually numerous ways in which characters may be created for any particular genre. The Director may use any system of character generation, from an open ended discussion with the Actors, to a randomized or structured methodology for assigning the various Traits. We'll provide a system for character generation that's suited to the background presented in each of our Setting Books. However, when creating your own genres, use whatever method suits your fancy and works well with the stories you're about to tell.

The only **real** rule for character creation is that the Director and Actors talk, and come to a mutual agreement over what Traits the Actors' roles should possess, and at what Ranks. If everyone's clear enough on the concept, then the whole process of assigning Traits may be done away with. The Traits and their associated Ranks are only there as a reminder and a guide, for both the Director and Actors alike.

TEMPLATES

Templates are collections of Traits that form the basic skeleton of a character type. We give suggestions as to the types of roles that would fit into our genres by including Templates for them, along with the other background material included in our Setting Books. Templates are only the suggested skeleton of a character, and need to be fleshed out with some possible alterations, and new descriptions. If you're creating your own Setting for a Chronicle, then it can be helpful to provide your Actors with sample Templates of the types of roles your looking for. Sometimes you'll want a few specific roles for your Chronicle. In that case, you may give out Templates for these roles, and allow the Actors to personalize them with their own descriptions and ideas.

POWER PLAY

Many roleplaying game systems attempt to use some method of balancing out the power possessed by the Actors' various roles at character creation. The most common justification for this is to provide an even playing surface for all. In this way, no player feels disempowered, or less important than another. Indeed, many people



would feel that way if they had to start a Chronicle with a less powerful character than some of their companions. However, most books and movies have characters that represent a variety of power levels. It isn't so much what the character can do, but how interestingly the role is portrayed. It is in fact some character's very weakness, in comparison with their companions, that sets the environment for the creation of a truly interesting persona.

You need to start your Chronicles off on an even footing only if the roleplay is to be a kind of competition. We'd like to see a different side to roleplaying. We feel that each character is an individual, and should be given whatever it takes to portray that character at the time it's created. We feel that the difference in power levels between various roles helps to create an interesting and active dynamic for the Chronicle. We feel that no matter what the difference in power levels, each character can have an irreplaceable niche within the fabric of the story. All that's required is an interesting and vital role (the choice of your character's Primary Descriptor will also help. See the use of 'Statements' in the 'Improvisation' chapter.). It's the Director's job to make absolutely sure that all the Actors feel both empowered and useful. Definitely, if an Actor is going to feel disempowered by having to portray a character with less raw starting power than his companions, then that Actor shouldn't be forced into such a position. But if everyone in the Troupe is comfortable enough with each other, and the Director is willing, then go ahead and create a menagerie of characters, at whatever power levels, made to entertain and enjoy.

CHARACTER SHEETS

When you turn the next page, you'll find a reduced version of the Theatrix Dossier, a nifty pre-prepared sheet for writing down all the stuff you need to know about your characters, with arrows and explanations. You may find a full sized version of this Dossier, which you are free to reproduce for your own use, at the back of this book.

The name of your Chronicle The type of Setting Skill Rank Name that Skill (Specialization)

Look! A place for your character sketch

Personality Traits

Severity level check boxes

Room for a few Descriptors

Some space for other stuff

Simulated coffee stain Wow! A simulated stamp

File #H1750

THEATRIX

DOSSIER

Chronicle: Terror in New York Setting: Modern Horror

Subject: Tony Gallela (M. Zorga) D.O.B.: 3/27/1953 Age: 42

Height: 6'2" Weight: 235 lbs. Hair: Black Eyes: Blue

Description: Tony is a large, powerful man of Italian descent. He favors cheap polyester suits, and speaks with a strong Bronx accent. He's uneducated. Historical Data: Tony was born with the 'gift', like his mother (fortune telling, spirit contact, etc.), but nobody comes to see a guy. So in order to make an 'honest' living, he becomes Madame Zorga. Which is better than doing time.

Attribute Profile

Strength: (5.5) Burly. Big chest. Lots of chest hair. Strong arms capable of powerful brutalizing punches, or crushing a full can of beer. I look like a gorilla stuffed into a polyester suit (when I'm not Madame Zorga).

Stamina: (4.5) Think construction worker. A little pain I can take. A lot of pain hurts. Running tires me out quickly. Lifting is no problem. Like an ox.

Coordination: (4.0) Well, dancing's not something a guy does, ya' know? Hold it. I've walked I beams doing construction, and balanced on window ledges (that broad didn't know her old man was coming home so soon).

Intellect: (2.5) Hey, hey... you calling me stupid or something?

Intuition: (6.0) Out my @\$% ears. And I didn't ask for this @\$%\$. Got the @\$%\$ gift from my mother. I can read a mark inside a minute. I know what to look for. Making time with broads is even easier, know what I mean.

Presence: (4.0) I look like some @\$%\$ named Guido. Women think I'm some kind of wise guy. They eat it up.

Skill Profile

[6.5] Con Games (Cold Reading)

[4.0] Quick Change (Madame Zorga)

[5.0] Disguise (Female Impersonation)

[4.5] Ventriiloquism (Distance)

[7.0] Impersonations (Repertoire)

[4.0] Legedmain (Walleis)

[3.5] Occult Lore (Fortune Telling)

[3.0] Locksmith (Tumbler)

[2.0] Security Systems (Small Scale)

[2.0] Bureaucracy (Gratt)

[2.0] Tax Law (Dodges)

[3.5] Brawling (Bar Room)

[3.5] Fire Arms (Close Range)

[1.5] Weaponsmith (Field Stripping)

[6.0] City Lore - N.Y. (The Bronx)

[3.0] Construction Work (High Rise)

[5.0] Italian (Street)

[5.0] Spanish (Street)

Personality Profile

Brava

Bigoted

Street Honor

Descriptors

The True Gift - Primary Descriptor

Criminal Connections

Notes / Plot Points

For Office Use Only

© 1993 Backstage Press

SUMMARY

GLOSSARY

- Double Activation** - The process of temporarily Activating a Personality Trait a character either does not possess, or does not possess at the appropriate Severity Level.
- Everyman Skill** - A Skill that doesn't need to be specifically written down in order to be possessed. Also, the kind of Skill that anybody should possess to some degree.
- Off the Scale** - A Rank so high that it would break the Scale if you attempted to include it.
- Primary Descriptor** - A Descriptor that defines a role's main function within the Chronicle.
- Range** - The difference between the high and low values in a series of inconstant quantities.
- Rank** - The numerical quantification of a Trait, always upon the standard Range of '0.0' to '10.0'.
- Scale** - An instrument with graduated spaces for measuring. Also, the proportion which the representation of an object bears to the object.

SUMMARY

- ☑ **Scaling** - Allows the same set of numbers and definitions to apply to a wide range of Settings.
 - ⇒ **Scaling by Range** - Creating a Scale which allows its members to freely possess any of its Ranks.
 - ⇒ **Scaling by Norm** - Creating a Scale based upon the normative groups of its members. The members are then restricted to possession of the Rank appropriate to their group.
- ☑ **Traits** - Are the distinguishing features or qualities that define a character.
 - ⇒ **Quantified Trait** - Any Trait that may usefully exist as a single number upon a Scale.
 - ⇒ **Descriptive Trait** - A Trait that exists primarily as a description of its function, without normally being quantified.
 - ⇒ **Unquantified Trait** - A Trait whose effects are entirely contained within its own description, and where numerical comparisons would only detract from its usefulness.
- ☑ **Types of Traits**
 - ⇒ **Attribute** - A series of Traits used to describe the basic mental and physical makeup of a character.
 - ⇒ **Personality Trait** - A Trait describing a driving function of a character's personality.
 - ⇒ **Skill** - A trade or craft requiring special training or experience in its practice.
 - ⇒ **Ability** - A paranormal 'Skill' that can't simply be acquired through normal practice and patience.
 - ⇒ **Descriptor** - An Unquantified Trait providing functions within a Chronicle that are difficult or impossible to handle in any other way. A Descriptor may have any function that can be clearly described in language.
 - ⇒ **Flaw** - A Descriptor that limits a role in some major way. An excellent characterization tool.
- ☑ **The Physical and Mental Attributes**
 - ⇒ **Strength** - Physical prowess, eg. the capacity to lift, shove, heave, and move.
 - ⇒ **Stamina** - The ability to endure both physical and psychological hardships.
 - ⇒ **Coordination** - Grace in movement, agility, reaction speed, and hand-eye coordination.
 - ⇒ **Intellect** - The ability to handle difficult mental tasks and to learn quickly.
 - ⇒ **Intuition** - Interpersonal expertise and a sensitivity to the needs and emotions of others.
 - ⇒ **Presence** - A character's palpable aura, eg. positive, negative, or anywhere in between.





What we want is a story that starts with an earthquake and works its way up to a climax.

- Samuel Goldwyn

LIGHTS ... CAMERA ... ACTION!

Theatrix is a game of roleplay and storytelling. The world it presents lives only in the imagination of its participants. Those participants will interact with the objects and inhabitants of this mindscape as if they were real, testing the boundaries of this imaginary world, as well as their own. The Director is the mediator of this surreal realm. The Actors will climb its mountains, drive its cars, shoot at its villains, and argue in its courtrooms. Or at least they'll try. How well they do is up to you, the Director. You have a story to tell, and it will be told in the Successes and Failures of the actions taken within it. That's what this chapter is about. Success and Failure. How to decide the outcome of any action, and how to describe these outcomes in a way that's fair to the characters performing them, and enhancing to your story and its Continuity. Somewhere between the Skill Ranks of the Main Cast, and the necessities of your plotline, there lies an adventure waiting to be lived. In order to get there, we're going to have to discuss Opposition, Success, Failure, ambiguity, time, initiative, Difficulty, severity, tension, and description. So read on ...

OPPOSED ACTIONS

The emphasis here is on **action**. As an Actor, the roles you play are fully under your control. They will attempt to perform whatever action you describe them as doing. Many times you need only state your intent and the action will be done. Such actions as driving a car across town, mailing a package, or opening an unlocked door are often of this nature. These actions usually aren't Opposed in any way, and are therefore automatically Successful, assuming your character has the Skill and opportunity to perform them. Other actions, such as trying to open a

locked door, are Opposed. In this case the opposition is the lock itself. In other cases your opposition may be a member of the Supporting Cast, or even another Main Cast character. Opposed actions may not always Succeed. Their Success will be determined by your persona's Skill in the area, the extent of the opposition, and in large part, by your roleplay. Actually, your Success or Failure in most activities will be determined by your roleplay. To some experienced roleplayers, this may seem a little odd. In most roleplaying games you determine much of the action by rolling dice. However, due to the unique way in which we've defined the Success and Failure of actions in Theatrix, the Actors will actually determine how well they do, in any situation, by **roleplaying** through it.

SUCCESS AND FAILURE

Success and Failure are based upon the **final intent** of an action. A Successful action occurs when the final intent, the hoped for result, is in any way accomplished. A Failure occurs when that same final intent is not fully achieved; where the basic, hoped for result, eludes the performer of the action. Obviously there is a lot of leeway between Success and Failure. Whether an action Succeeds or Fails, and to what **extent** it does so, is a judgement left up to the Director.

THE BASIC RULE

The Director first decides whether the Result of any action is to be treated as a **Success** or **Failure**, based solely upon the **roleplay** of the Actors and the requirements of **the plot**. That's it. Although the Director isn't required to, she may also wish to take into account other factors in this decision, such as a role's Traits. The Director then chooses the **extent** of the Success or

Failure, based upon how **difficult** the Director feels such an action would be, the Skill Rank of the character performing the action, the character's Traits once again, and anything else deemed important. The Director then describes an outcome that is consistent, that is somewhat plausible, and that lies within the bounds of the previous two decisions.

SKILL VS. PLOTLINE

Whether an action **Succeeds** or **Fails** is **not** dependent upon how skilled a character is. Success and Failure are dependent upon the roleplay of the Actors, and the requirements of the plot only. Any action adjudicated a Success can't Fail, and any adjudicated Failure won't Succeed. No matter how high your Skill Ranks are, if you ignore roleplay, you're not likely to Succeed at actions very often. All your Skill Ranks will do is allow you to Fail with grace. Very creative or very well acted solutions, on the other hand, are more likely to be deemed Successes. So the better your roleplay, the more Successful you're going to be.

Your character's level of Skill will have a much greater effect upon the **extent** of your Results. The plot may call for the Success of some action, assuring you of victory. Whether that victory will be marginal and a coincidence, or overwhelming and due to your ability, will depend largely upon your level of Skill. The same is true of Failure. Even if the plot calls for your downfall, Skill Ranks can cushion the blow, saving you from an overly depressing defeat, and can even allow you to look good while Failing. So if you want to consistently shine at something, you're still going to need those Skill Ranks.

The trick to balancing Success and Failure Vs. Skill Ranks, is to be aware of who, or what is in control. Incredible Success should be directly attributable to the character's mastery of a situation. Poor Success should be attributable to something, or someone else; more coincidence than skill. Use the same scheme for Failure. Absolute Failure is absolutely the character's fault. Marginal Failures occur due to events mostly outside the character's control.

For example, let's take a single incident, four times over. Imagine an old-style Western showdown, at high noon, along a border town's dusty main thoroughfare. Our hero will be by turns, unskilled and exceptionally skilled with the pistol he's about to draw.

- ⇒ **Exceptionally Skilled Success** - Your opponent draws, but you draw even faster. The first of your shots takes the pistol out of your opponent's hand, the next removes his hat, and the third neatly strikes his belt buckle, dropping his pants.

- ⇒ **Exceptionally Skilled Failure** - As you draw your gun, you hear the distinct sound of firing hammers being drawn back, from the doorway behind you, the rooftop to your left, the open window of the general store ... **ambushed!**

- ⇒ **Unskilled Failure** - You never quite get that damned thing out of its holster. At least not before the arm that's trying explodes in searing pain. You stare at the silver dollar sized red stain on your arm as it grows steadily larger. You're feeling kind of sick and dizzy.

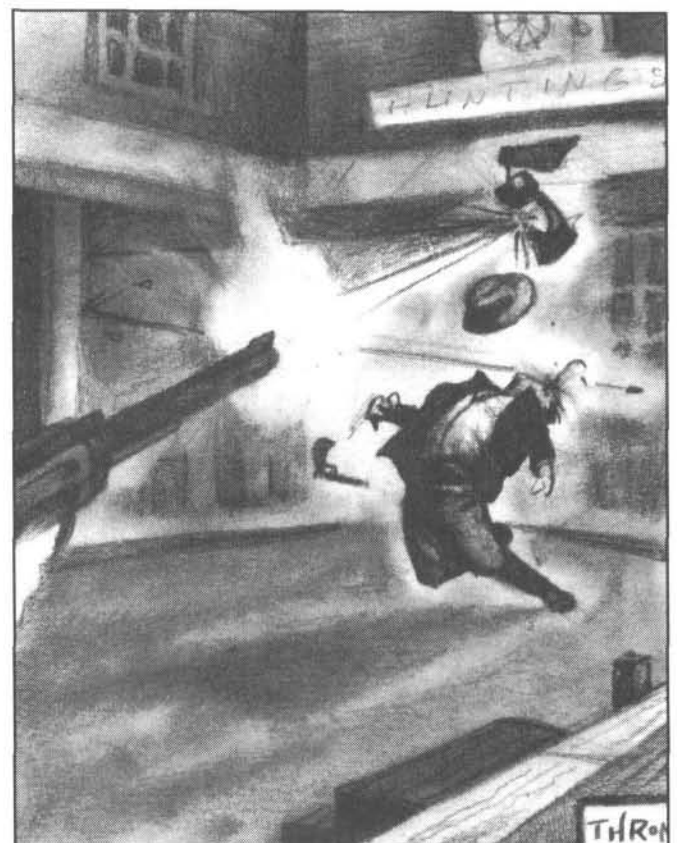
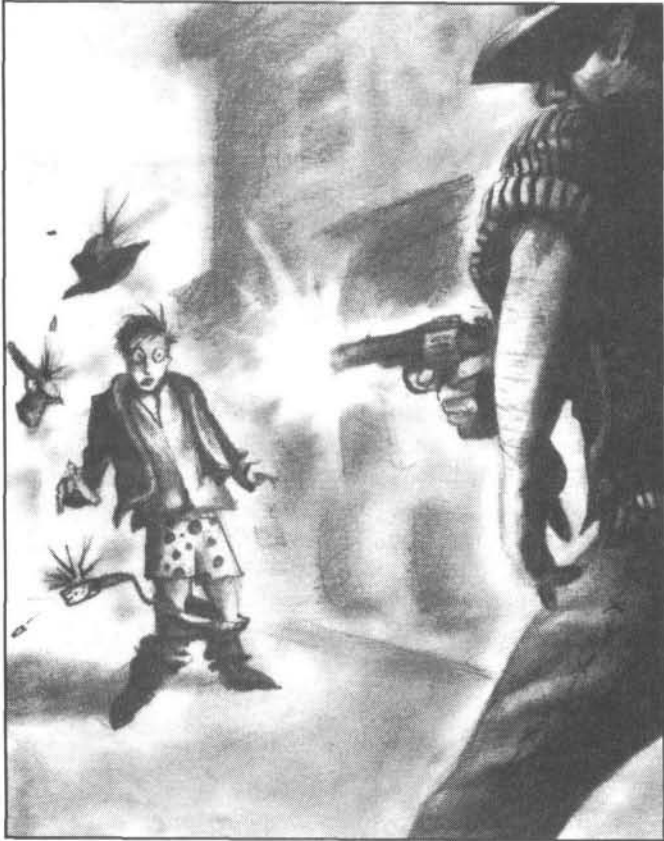
- ⇒ **Unskilled Success** - You jerk that damn thing out of its holster and fire. The recoil of the mighty beast flings your arm up, wide of your mark, and staggers you back. That wasn't such a bad thing, because your opponent's bullet whizzes past your right ear, just where your head would have been. Your bullet strikes a brass lamp hanging to your right, shatters a glass window in the general store, pings a skillet inside, squarely ricochets off the spittoon outside the saloon, and drops your opponent dead in the street. He had the oddest look on his face.

AMBIGUITY

A crucial part of this scheme is the ambiguity between Success and Failure. This ambiguity is vital to promoting the feeling of a lived experience. Never explicitly tell the Actors whether one of their actions has been deemed a Success or Failure. Let the Actors judge this for themselves. Often, an action's repercussions are only felt long term. You may deem an action a Failure and allow it to Succeed in the short term, revealing the true nature of this Result at a later time. Similarly, some Successes may at first seem like Failures. In life, we're often unsure of our Results. One reason for using the supplied Resolution Flowcharts, is that we've optimized our suggestions to give interesting theatrical Results, with plot twists thrown in often enough to keep the Actors guessing.

ROLEPLAY

If roleplay is the key to Success, then what constitutes good roleplay? Well, that's obviously going to depend a lot upon you, your Troupe, your Setting, and the specific situation you're in. As a general guideline though, what we look for is creativity, humor, genre, and plot enhancement.



- ⇒ **Creativity** - If the easy solution always works, then you're going to cut out half the drama in your Episodes. Look for reasons why a solution to a problem would **not** work. If you like some of those, then use em' to create Failures and plot twists. Your Actors will start to learn to think beyond the first solution, and they'll start to become **creative**.
- ⇒ **Humor** - This is a game. It's supposed to be fun. Humorous solutions should always be worth some consideration, as long as they're not downright silly.
- ⇒ **Genre** - Any solution should tend to reinforce the genre your playing in. Roleplay which is destructive to your genre should be cause for a Failure. Roleplay which actively reinforces the genre is a good reason for Success.
- ⇒ **Plot Enhancement** - What holds true for your genre, holds true for your plot. If some piece of roleplay would lead to a solution that destroys your plot, then you've got two choices. First, find some reason why that solution will Fail. Second, alter your plot. Altering your plot is very acceptable, especially if your Actors have found some loophole you hadn't noticed before. If, on the other hand, the Actors' roleplay leads to a solution which is perfect for your plot, then give them the Success they need.

TRAITS

Once again, don't forget the characters' Traits. They define the characters, and therefore much of what can be considered as good roleplay. Actions which make use of a Trait's strengths should have a much better chance of Success. Actions which involve a Trait's deficits should have a greater chance of Failure. This is especially true of the Physical and Mental Attributes. For example, think of the differences between a role defined as large, bulky, and powerful, and one defined as lithe, quick, and taught. They both may have equivalent Skill Ranks in Martial Arts, but they should Succeed and Fail in very different ways. For the large, bulky persona, quick attacks and fast spinning kicks will probably end in Failure. For the lithe, quick persona, powerful lunges and crushing bear hugs will probably also end in Failure. Reverse these two attack modes so that they now fit the appropriate character's Traits, and they've increased greatly their chances of Success.

SHORT TIME

All action occurs embedded in time. During roleplay, we are constantly acting and reacting to each other's descriptions. Those descriptions will need to be arbitrarily broken into usable segments of time and motion, which we term 'Rounds'. As Director, how you cut the extent and scope of an action will determine the pacing of your Scenes. Where you place those arbitrary delineations will also alter the intent of the described actions, and therefore the judgement of their Results.

You can determine the Results of action based upon large breadths of sweeping description, or short segments of extreme detail. If you break the action into short segments, you will be focusing in on the minutiae of the events. This will slow the pace down, but allow the participants finer control. This is a useful way to break the action during high risk events, like mortal combat, and in any event where each detail will have an effect on the overall outcome. During slower, lower risk Scenes, you can break the action into larger pieces, allowing the pace to move more quickly.

ROUNDS

Much of the time you won't need to specifically break up the action into segments at all. The plot will develop with the natural rhythm of the interaction between the participants. At other times you'll want to formalize these breaks in the action into Rounds, to avoid chaos and misunderstanding. A Round is a unit of time long enough to allow useful action to take place, and short enough to allow that action to be handled conveniently by the Director. For example, in combat, a Round is often between 3 and 12 seconds of time.

As Director, you won't normally need to announce the exact time interval you're using for each Round. Just stop your Actors from describing more action than you believe would fit into that time segment. Try to be fair and allow each participant the same amount of time. Describe the Results of everyone's actions, making determinations as you see fit, then go on to the next Round. The actual length of a Round may fluctuate as the action progresses, but should be consistent for everybody within any one Round. You may freely flow in and out of formal Rounds as the action demands.

INITIATIVE

Initiative is the word we use to describe the order in which actions are performed within a Round. Initiative can be a function of ...

- ⇒ A character's Coordination Attribute
- ⇒ The placement of individuals (the person next to the gun can usually grab it quicker than the person across the room)
- ⇒ The Actor's description of her actions (like 'I dive for the gun!')
- ⇒ The needs of the plotline

The Director may decide the Initiative of all actions, ie. exactly what happens when, as is deemed appropriate at the time. There are no hard and fast rules, so you'll have to use your judgement, common sense, and feel for the plotline.

Initiative is often a function of the adjudication of Success and Failure. For example, we can imagine a gunman in a crowd, drawing a weapon and aiming at a speaker on a platform above. Our heroine, an F.B.I. agent, decides to leap from the platform and tackle the gunman, attempting to aim his gun towards the sky. The Initiative of these actions, ie. whether the gunman can aim and fire before he's tackled, is a question of the adjudication of our heroine's Success or Failure.

USING SKILLS AND ABILITIES

The great majority of actions performed by the Actors are Unopposed. In other words, they should just happen, and you can ignore the rest of this chapter. Only when there is reason to believe that the action might Fail, ie. when it's Opposed, should you go through with the following procedure.

What follows is a way of deriving a suggestion for the outcome of any action, based upon an Actor's roleplay, her character's Skill or Ability Ranks, other Traits, and the inherent Difficulty of the situation. What you'll get by using this method is a **suggestion** as to the outcome. It'll be up to you, the Director, to use this suggestion in a way that's consistent with the events and your plot. You can follow this procedure as closely, or loosely as you see fit. You can ignore these rules, use the accompanying flowcharts as a guide, roll dice for your Results, or refer to the flowcharts as law. It's all up to your judgement of the moment.

DIFFICULTY

The extent of any Opposed action's Success or Failure will depend upon the Director's adjudication of the opposition to that action, or its Difficulty. For the purposes of the rules, Difficulty is broken down into the following categories ...

- ⇒ **Easy** - A task you can do anytime. It's only possible to Fail such a task under stress.
- ⇒ **Normal** - Anything you could most likely do given sufficient time, preparation, and equipment.
- ⇒ **Difficult** - A task hard enough that you could Fail, even given sufficient time, preparation, and equipment.
- ⇒ **Extraordinary** - A task so hard that Failure is the most likely outcome, even given that all other factors are in your favor.
- ⇒ **Impossible** - Success, even in the best of conditions would seem ... well, impossible.

All of the above categories are based upon a Skill Rank of '3.0', ie. someone very competent and well trained. No matter what the actual Skill Rank of the character attempting the action, **Difficulties should be chosen based on a Skill Rank of '3.0'**. When time, preparation, and equipment are a factor in performing the task, and any of them are missing, then the Difficulty of the action should be raised accordingly.

As an example, we'll use a surgeon who's attempting an operation. The operation is deemed by the Director to be of Normal Difficulty for a competent surgeon (Skill Rank '3.0'). However, the surgery will be attempted in substandard conditions, at a poor hospital, and in a rush. Under these conditions, the Director deems that Success would be Extraordinary for such a surgeon. So the Result of the operation will be based on an Extraordinary Difficulty.

If you turn the page, you'll find a whole plethora of nifty examples of actions and their Difficulties, from various Settings.

COLLATERAL SKILLS

There are times when more than one Skill may be applicable to a single action. These other Skills are often indirectly related to the action in question. If the performing character has a Skill that relates directly to the action being performed, called a 'Primary' Skill, then that's normally the Skill upon which any Result should be based. However, if the performing character has an indirectly related Skill that's much higher in Rank, then the Director might allow this other 'Collateral' Skill to be used. There are three basic ways to use Collateral Skills. These are ...



Difficulty Examples

Easy - Ahh, an old style electronic lock. Obviously hasn't been cleaned in years. You can see the rust on the exposed wires. It almost seems a shame to use your brand spanking new equipment on such a mess. Still, a job's a job.

Easy - Our heroine finds herself saddled with the unpleasant task of convincing her 90 lb., asthmatic, librarian friend that coming along to the villain's lair is just too dangerous. The last ten minutes of arguing have only proven that her friend won't be swayed from his course. Not having any other choice, she plants one on his jaw, hoping to knock him out.

Normal - 'Re-route the security grid to retract the west quadrant's probe controls? Well they seem to be equipped with version 17.25 seeker progs.... Luckily, I just got a hold of a pirated copy of DeltaTech's newest encoding sequence. Give me two minutes, maybe three, and we're in.'

Normal - Well it's high noon. How many times have you been here before? Countless. And this time fate has smiled upon you. Your opponent is still recovering from a night of drunken debauchery. On the downside, he's good, and you're both playing with live ammo.

Difficult - Our hero is stifled with grief over the very recent murder of a beloved friend. He has decided upon avenging this heinous act with a moving eulogy. However, the perpetrators have made him promise not to speak openly against them, on threat of his life. "Friends, Romans, country men lend me your ears. I come to bury Caesar, not to praise him..."

Difficult - One of the Troupe has made it to the Olympic tryouts. The balance beam routine she's chosen is a killer, but she has practiced it now for months at the gym. However, now that the lights and cameras are on her, she finds she's not used to the reporters, the crowd, and the tremendous pressure. This is the Olympics we're talking about.

Difficult - Cutting off their lines should have taken the wind right out of their offensive, but they seem to be getting supplies from some mysterious benefactor. As much as you are loath to, it looks like you'll just have to face a larger, more well equipped force. Hopefully, the gods of war are watching, and will hold in your favor.

Difficult - 'Given that we know their speed capability, approximate course, and fuel limitations, I want you to plot me an intercept course. We have to find them before they reach the Antares Nebulae. The fate of the Confederation may depend upon it.' How's that for pressure? Fortunately, your ship is faster, and has better fuel reserves. All you have to do is figure out the route that will give your sensors their best coverage.

Extraordinary - Well, your Sensei always did say, 'When confronted with superior numbers, run.' However, that really isn't an option just now. You do have the longer weapon, but there are **three** of them. You could probably keep them at bay, but then you'll never get to rescue your brother.

Extraordinary - The Actor in question, a street smart hustler, is trying to talk her way past the stuffy doorman of a very exclusive country club. Yes, she may be cute, charming, and smooth, but the doorman's job is on the line here.

Extraordinary - It's been raining all day, the trail is two days old, it's spring, and you don't have your glasses. Tracking them Successfully under these conditions would be, well ...

Impossible - Our heroine, an ace pilot, is faced with the task of navigating an asteroid field in her space fighter, usually a Difficult task. Unfortunately two squadrons of crack pilots, in the empire's latest 'S.L.A.S.H.' high performance fighters, are hot on her trail. If that weren't enough, the asteroid field is littered with old style mines and defense droids. And to top things off, the son of Ambassador Qreilm won't stop screaming.

Impossible - The Plot has come to a grinding halt. The Actors just can't seem to figure out how to deactivate the alien probe. One of them, a genius at cryptology and etymology, decides to try and translate the controls based off the only scrap of relevant information they think they have. This is a note in which some ancient explorer seems to have deciphered the phrase, "How are you feeling today?"

- ⇒ **Subtractive (Collateral Skill is acceptable, but only tangentially related to the action in question)** - The Rank of the Collateral Skill is used, but at a penalty. Often the Primary and Collateral Skills are averaged. For example, a highly acrobatic martial arts dodge would normally use the Martial Arts Skill. However, if the Acrobatics Skill were also possessed at a higher Rank, then you might allow the two Skills Ranks to be averaged (Martial Arts at '3.0', and Acrobatics at '5.0', would yield an acrobatic martial dodge at a Rank of '4.0').
- ⇒ **Additive (Both Primary and Collateral Skills are highly related to the action in question)** - The higher Skill Rank is normally increased by half-again that of the lower. For example, a hunter aiming at an innocent and defenseless deer, has both Rifle Skill at '3.0' and Hunting Skill at '4.0', yielding a Skill Rank of '5.5' for a Successful shot.
- ⇒ **Substitutive (No appropriate Primary Skill is possessed)** - If the Collateral Skill used is Subtractive in nature, then use half the Collateral Skill Rank (average it with '0.0'). If the Skill used is Additive in nature, then use the Collateral Skill at full Rank (increased by half of '0.0'). For example, attempting to bypass an electronic lock would normally be covered by the Skill of Security Systems. However, if only Electronics Skill were possessed, then this would be a Subtractive situation, as Electronics is only tangentially related to the action at hand. So half the total Electronics Skill Rank would be used (an Electronics Skill Rank of '4.0' would yield a usable Skill Rank of '2.0').

USING THE STAGE

As an Actor, the Director's description of a Scene can also be used to adjust the Difficulty of your actions. For example, using intervening obstacles properly could lower the Difficulty of sneaking up on someone, by helping to hide you. In combat, it's easier to defend yourself in an area where the opponent's movements are hampered. And by placing yourself properly in a room, it can be a lot easier to get out when the situation turns ugly. If the Actors are clever, they'll use the environment to their benefit. This is where it really pays to describe your actions in an interesting and detailed fashion. In many cases, not using the environment correctly will raise your

Difficulty. For example, trying to sneak up on someone in broad daylight, across open terrain, is going to be very hard indeed. So don't forget the Stage around you, because the Director certainly won't.

ACTIVELY OPPOSED ACTIONS

There are actions which are Opposed by static objects, such as opening a locked door. And there are actions Opposed by their inherent uncertainty, like a medical operation. These are both examples of Statically Opposed actions. Deciding the Difficulty for such actions is fairly straightforward. Some actions, however, are Actively Opposed. This type of endeavor includes combat actions against resisting opponents, attempting to shadow a wary suspect, trying to make a getaway while being followed in hot pursuit, and any other action Opposed by a dynamic, intelligent, and aware foe. The Difficulty of such actions must take into account the ability of the opponent in the most appropriate Opposing Skill.



The final Difficulty of such actions is a hard thing to judge. Generally, anyone with a greater Skill Rank than you will have quite an edge. Even a little Active Opposition can make such actions as sneaking up on someone very Difficult. As Director, you'll have to adjust the inherent Difficulty of the action by the level of the Active Opposition. For example, attempting to hit an opponent in combat, who is roughly equal to you in skill and build, is probably a Normal Difficulty. A Judo flip used against the same opponent would be a Difficult action. Against someone much better than you, a punch might be a Difficult action, and a flip would be Extraordinary. We'll discuss the Difficulty of combat actions further, in the chapter entitled '**Combat**'.

Rule Of Thumb

As a rule of thumb, you can consider raising or lowering the Difficulty of Actively Opposed actions by one step, for each two full points of difference in the opponents' Skill Ranks. This is a very rough rule, and will certainly fluctuate depending on the genre being played and the situation at hand. An action can't be harder than Impossible, and any action less Difficult than Easy is pretty much an Automatic Action. So, if you're going to win out over opponents two or more full points better than you, then you had best be very clever, or bring the battleground into an area where you have the advantage once again.

THE ACTIVE PARTICIPANT

In most cases, as Director, you needn't make separate adjudications for each party in an Actively Opposed action. Choose one party to be the Active Participant. This is generally the person the camera would be focusing upon in a movie. If the choice is between an Actor and a member of the Supporting Cast, then unless you have good reasons not to, choose the Actor. First, set the Active Participant's Difficulty in terms of the action. Next, adjust the Difficulty to take into account the Skill Rank of the opposition, the environment, and most importantly, the roleplay of everyone involved. Make any judgement of Results based off your adjudication for the Active Participant alone.

DUELING SUCCESSES

There are some instances where you'll want to make separate adjudications for several of the participants in an Actively Opposed action. Instead of basing the Result of an Actively Opposed action off of the roleplay of a single participant, you can choose to make multiple determinations of Result. This is the normal route to take in combat. This means that you'll be setting the Difficulty and making

determinations of Success and Failure, separately and simultaneously, for each participant. This also means that it's possible for both sides in the action to Succeed, both sides to Fail, or one to Succeed while the other Fails. To give you an indication of the possibilities, think of the Western showdown example, given earlier under 'Skill Vs. Plotline'. All we knew was that both parties in that conflict had drawn and fired. Yet, even disregarding their roleplay, and their respective Skill Ranks in both Marksmanship and the Fast Draw, there were still a lot of interesting possibilities based upon the assignments of Success and Failure alone. We touched on only a few of them. Taking into account the other factors as well, these situations can get very messy.

RESOLUTION FLOWCHARTS

Resolution Flowcharts are structured decision paths that easily allow you to reach a suggested outcome for any series of actions. To use the flowcharts, all you need to have is a good visual impression of the actions you wish to find a Result for, firmly in mind. By using the flowcharts, you'll quickly develop your own sense of the questions you'll need to answer, in order to create good interactive drama from your fluid impressions of the roleplay. A single Resolution Flowchart may apply to a broad category of situations. Which flowchart best fits a particular dramatic moment is up to the discretion of the Director.

Using the Resolution Flowcharts is a two part operation. Normally, you'd begin with the chart marked 'Basic Resolution Flowchart', so take it out and have a look at it now. To use the flowchart, start with the middle box at the top. Answer the question in the box, following the arrow with your answer on it to the next indicated box. Don't worry terribly about having the 'correct' answer. Simply answer the way your judgement leans toward and go on. Proceed similarly with each subsequent box. When you reach a box exited by a black arrow, you're done with the first stage.

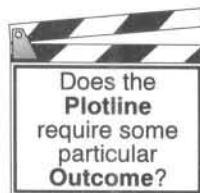
The next step is to choose the most appropriate 'Advanced Resolution Flowchart' for the action. You may choose from flowcharts for 'Athletic Activities', 'Combat Activities', 'Intellectual Activities', and 'Interpersonal Activities'. Other, more genre specific flowcharts will be available in future supplements (many are included within our Setting Books). Once you've found the appropriate flowchart to continue with, start with the box on the new chart, that duplicates your ending box from the previous chart. Move out along the arrows, passing along the most appropriately marked path. Again, don't worry about being overly 'correct'. This is a theatrical game, so keep the pace and be fluid with your decisions. The text at the end of each path is a description that captures the structure of the suggested Result. Just apply this Result to the action in question.

RESOLUTION PATHS

The questions and paths available on the 'Basic Resolution Flowchart' should be fairly self-explanatory. After some use, you may find that you no longer need to look at this chart in order to resolve your judgements. The 'Advanced Resolution Flowcharts' are somewhat more condensed, and you may find yourself referring to them more often. If there's anything that you don't understand on either chart at first glance, don't worry, because we're going to run completely through both charts explaining all the little boxes and ovals. After this, we'll also go through a few full examples, just to make sure you're comfortable with the whole system.

Basic Resolution Paths

Start by taking out all the flowcharts that accompanied the 'Core Rules' you're reading now. Take a look at the 'Basic Resolution Flowchart', starting at the top and center. This is where we'll begin. The first box reads 'Does the Plotline require some particular Outcome?'.



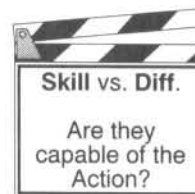
This question is asking whether there is some reason, for the sake of the story, that the action you're resolving should be either a Success or a Failure, despite all other factors, such as Skill Rank or Difficulty.

If your answer to this question is 'Yes', then we take the path to the box which reads 'Does the Plot demand Success or Failure?'.



This is a straightforward question, and leads to the right hand side of the chart, which deals with Success, or the left hand path, leading to the various Failures (no philosophical judgements are intended in our use of right and left handed paths).

If your answer to the center starting box was 'No', then you follow the path to the box which reads 'Skill Vs. Difficulty - Are they capable of the action?'.



This is your judgement as Director, and should take into account Skill Rank, Difficulty, any Specializations, and most of all, Roleplay. Your answer once again splits off onto either the right hand path of Success, or the left hand path of Failure. The choice is yours. If you simply can't decide, then you might try using the semi-random die rolling method we discuss under the section titled 'Randomness', at the end of this chapter.

After the above decisions, you'll find yourself looking at one of two boxes. Both of them have to do with the question of whether to release the tension and reveal your decision now, or whether to hide the outcome in some way, holding the tension of the moment. Both of these boxes are scope independent. What we mean by this, is that your decision can apply as easily to a single exchange of blows in combat, a whole combat, weeks of research, or the execution of an intricate and detailed plan. You may decide the outcome of a whole combat in one pass, using the flowcharts to help direct your storytelling of the intervening events. Or, you may use the charts to help resolve the outcome of a single action, passing through the charts many times in order to resolve something as large as a whole combat, research project, or plan. How much you want to compress into a single decision really relies upon such factors as timing, tension, the importance of the events, and the details of your own story. The charts work just as well, no matter how you wish to use them.

We'll start with the left hand box, which reads 'Release the Tension or let them Struggle?'.



This is really an aesthetic decision, but we suggest that you milk your best Scenes for all they're worth. The

same is really just as true for the right hand box, which reads 'Release the Tension and tell them now?'.



Our rule of thumb is, don't let go of drama that's still worth something. Hold onto that tension until the moment that the conclusion is going to really pay off, in terms of drama, fun, or roleplay. If you can't decide, let your favorite books and movies be your guide.

Once you've decided to give the Actors what's coming, you're presented with two different choices. On the Failure path, you encounter the box which reads 'Inflict Real Damage?'.



This is the point at which you decide to warn your Main Cast, or hurt them. Warning may include some scrapes and bruises, but basically you're letting them off the hook. This is a nice thing to do. However, the kindest thing may be to hurt them a little. Actors can be a bit slow at picking up the clues, and unless they're warned properly, they can manage to get themselves into some really bad situations. Being hurt is a warning that you're in the wrong place, at the wrong time. Hurt the Actors' characters, and the Actors may start thinking about what's happening. Here's a good point for another rule of thumb.

Unless the Actors have just done something truly worthy of getting very hurt, very quickly, we like to use the 'Three Times Lucky' rule. That is, warn them by hurting them a little, then by hurting them a lot, then by ruining their day. That way you've built up a pattern of harm that fairly states, YOU'RE NOT DOING WELL. Of course, depending on what the Actors in question have gotten themselves into, this process may go from bad to worse, in anything from several days, to several seconds.

On the right, or Success side of the chart, you're presented with a much happier decision. There you'll see a box which reads 'And give them Breathing Room?'.



In other words, are you going to give them a few moments to savor their hard won victory, or are you going to keep up the pace of the action by throwing something new at them? If you do give them time to know they've done well, let someone or something in the characters' environment reaffirm that. They've paid for their victory, so let some small piece of their world reflect that triumph.

Transitional Boxes

On the 'Basic Resolution Flowchart' there are six boxes with solid black arrows leading from them. These are the six possible ending points for this chart. These six boxes are duplicated on each of the 'Advanced Resolution Flowcharts', and become your starting points for the next step in this process. We'll deal with the 'Advanced Resolution Flowcharts' in the next section of this chapter. For now, we'll simply continue our explanation with a brief look at each of these possible ending boxes.

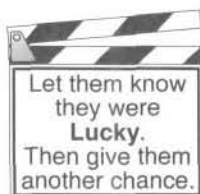
The ending boxes on the left hand side of the chart deal with the various shades of Failure. Lets start with the box that reads 'Try to limit the Damage to suit the Lesson.'



Harkening back to the rule of thumb we presented earlier, this box is simply a reminder that the Director should attempt to warn the Actors before killing their characters. For the gruesome specifics on how to inflict damage in Theatrix, see the 'Combat' chapter coming up in this book.



The next ending box reads 'Let them know they were Lucky. Then give them another chance.'



This box represents a near miss. A warning that the last plan of action was not a particularly favorable one. The Actors involved should know from the ensuing Result that they have only good fortune to thank for their unscathed condition. This is no victory however, and whatever danger they faced should still be all too present and in their faces, so they'd best react quickly.

The last version of Failure is represented by the box which reads 'Give them False Hope.'



Unfortunately, this box indicates that you, as Director, have decided that they should Fail. However, you're not going to let the Actors know that for awhile. Instead, this box represents your wish to hold onto the tension, and to allow the Actors to struggle futilely a bit longer ... before springing the trap. Such are the possibilities of defeat.

On the brighter side, we're now going to take a look at the ending boxes on the right hand side of the chart, dealing with the various shades of Success. The first of these boxes we'll look at is the one which reads 'Give them reason to Doubt. Let Victory be Uncertain.'



Once again, this box represents your wish, as Director, to hold onto the tension of the moment. You've decided to allow the Actors to Succeed in their action, but won't let them know that, just yet. Instead, the Actors should be struggling, possibly still feeling the hot breath of defeat at their heels.

The next Success box is slightly kinder. This reads 'Keep the pace. Present a new Dilemma. (plot twist)'



The Results of this box should allow the Actors to Succeed, but not to bask in their victory. A new problem, possibly an extension of the old problem, and usually an unexpected twist of events, should soon make itself known.

The last ending box allows the Actors a full victory. It reads 'Let them know they've done well.'



Make sure that someone or something in the characters' environment is there to reflect their Success. Little victories can be reflected in little moments or satisfactory descriptions. Large victories should receive the praise due to a job well done.

Advanced Resolution Paths

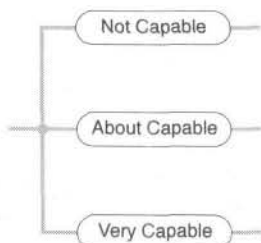
Now take a look at the 'Advanced Resolution Flowcharts'. Notice that each of the starting boxes, on the left hand side of the charts, duplicates one of the possible ending boxes on the 'Basic Resolution Flowchart'.



Start with the box on your chosen 'Advanced Resolution Flowchart' that duplicates your ending box on the 'Basic Resolution Flowchart'. From there, a system of arrows moves out through a number of ovals containing text. Follow along a single path until you reach one of the large ending ovals.



The first set of ovals deals with whether the role performing the task being adjudicated is generally capable of that feat.



This is **not** a question of Success or Failure. That determination has already been made on the previous 'Basic Resolution Flowchart'. This is a question of whether that role **probably** should have been able to perform the task in question. Specifically, was the role Very Capable, About Capable, or Not Capable of the task? This decision will not alter the Result gained, ie. Success or Failure, but will determine its **extent**. Once you've made your decision, travel through the appropriate oval, in the direction of the arrows.

If you want help in determining how capable a character is of the action they're trying to perform, then you may refer to the 'Action Capability Chart', available on the 'Theatrix Reference Sheet B' provided with this package, and duplicated below.

This chart is only a rough guide, and shouldn't be used to replace the judgement of the Director.

If you've decided that a character was either **Not Capable**, or **Very Capable** of their task, then the suggested Result lies directly ahead, in the appropriate large ending oval.

You advance on your foe, pressing him back. A small grin on your lips, as you ... Hold it! What's that shadow behind you? Thud ... Pain!

This suggestion captures the feeling of the intended Result. The suggestion, in conjunction with your previous decisions, should be fairly easy to apply to the situation at hand. Just add a little imagination, and conjure up your own image using the action in front of you. Your description of the outcome should be a reflection of our suggestion in the oval. If you can see the connection, then you know you've got it right.

If you've decided that a role performing an action was **About Capable** of that feat, then we need to know **why** that role Succeeded or Failed? Here you're presented with three ovals containing different possible factors.



Pass through the oval that's most pertinent to the situation, and onto the ending suggestion beyond. What you're looking for is the factor which should have the most effect upon the outcome. There's no 'right' or 'wrong' answers here. There's no reason to agonize over this decision. Make the whole process flow, and simply choose the factor which seems likely to be the most involved in either the role's Success or Failure. These factors are heavily abbreviated, but explanations may be found at the top of each chart. Just to make sure all this fits together, keep those charts out, and we'll run through a few examples now.

Example

We'll start with an example for the 'Athletic Resolution Flowchart'. Imagine an intelligence operative, a spy if you will. He's skiing fast and hard down an extremely difficult slope. Behind him come several counter-espionage agents, also on skis. They're attempting to slow our man's getaway with lots of automatic machine gun fire. He, in turn, wants to lose them by skiing off trail, and through a stand of trees. Being a super-spy, he's a world competition class skier, and has a Skill Rank of '6.0'. The Director judges the slope to be a Difficult one for anyone with a Skill Rank of '3.0'. However, maneuvering through

Action Capability Chart					
	Difficulty				
	Easy	Normal	Difficult	Extr.	Imp.
0.0					
1.0					
2.0					
3.0					
4.0					
5.0					
6.0					
7.0					
8.0					
9.0					
10.0					

- Not Capable
 - About Capable
 - Very Capable

the trees is going to raise the Difficulty to somewhere between Extraordinary and Impossible. The Director also decides that this maneuver is quick-witted and gutsy enough to be worthy of a Success. Also, because the Director wants our hero to get away clean for now, he's decided not to hold the tension of the action beyond this moment.

We'll start at the top. Look at the 'Basic Resolution Flowchart' and follow through the decision steps. We've decided that the plot does require a particular outcome, and that must be a Success. We've decided to release the tension, and to give the character some breathing room. That means we're going to let him know he's done well. Looking at the 'Athletic Resolution Flowchart', under 'Let them know they've done well.', we'll follow the 'About Capable' path. The 'Action Capability Chart' on the 'Theatrix Reference Sheet B' puts this action somewhere between About Capable and Not Capable, because we've given a Difficulty somewhere between Extraordinary and Impossible (Vs. a Skill Rank of '6.0'). We're going to be kind and give our hero a break, leaning towards About Capable. After all, we've got lots in store for him later.

Now the Director must judge the most important factor in this Success. Technique or Environment seem the most fitting. In this case we'll use Technique. It was the use of the trees which gave our hero his Success, but it's our hero's Skill in skiing which is mostly responsible for allowing him to make it through. So moving along the 'Technique' path, we come to the Result which reads, 'Neatly avoiding your pursuers, you pop the car up on two wheels and pass through the narrow alley. You can hear the sound of less skillful collisions behind you.'

Hard to get better than that. The Director describes the remarkable way in which our hero avoids the tangle of trees, the occasional bullet ricocheting off the trunks and branches near him, while simultaneously describing the various crashes and falls of his pursuers. Our spy skis out of the trees, and back onto the slope's trail, this time sans pursuers.

Example

Now let's try an example for the 'Interpersonal Resolution Flowchart'. This time our spy from the previous example is about to encounter a more subtle danger. He's met up with Tatiana, an enemy agent and stunning beauty. Our hero wishes to gently extract information from Tatiana. He knows that no woman can resist him (he has the Descriptor 'Lady's Man'), and so seduces her. By morning he hopes to slip off quietly with the information he needs.

The Scene containing this action takes place in the best suite of a luxury hotel. Tatiana is 'getting ready' in the bedroom while our hero takes a bath. What our hero doesn't know is that Tatiana has been through this game



many times, and is 'getting ready' to ambush him as he comes out of the bath, take the computer chip he now possesses, and then head straight for the border.

Why is this about to happen? Well, when our hero originally attempted the seduction of Tatiana, the Director went through the normal route for resolving the outcome. Starting with the 'Basic Resolution Flowchart', at the top, we'll follow these decision steps. The Director determined that the plotline didn't require a particular outcome, and that due to Tatiana's extreme loyalty to her country, and years of experience as a spy, that even the Seduction Skill of our hero wasn't enough to overcome her. There was no way the Director was going to release the tension early on this one, and so she has decided to give our hero False Hope. That wasn't terribly difficult. Now, at this juncture in the hotel room, the Director has decided to finally release the tension. No other factors have changed, and so our hero will still Fail. However, the Director has decided not to hurt him, but to teach him a lesson. Therefore, we'll follow the path on the 'Interpersonal Resolution Flowchart' marked 'Let them know they were Lucky. Then give them another chance.' Notice how one outcome has smoothly flowed into another, guided by story events and roleplay alone.

The Director decides that due to the close match in Skills, our hero should have been About Capable of the seduction (it was Tatiana's Loyalty Personality Trait that assured him of Failure), and we'll therefore follow the 'About Capable' path. The reason for the continued Failure is still Tatiana's loyalty to her country, and so we'll use the 'Motive' path for the factor. That leads to the Result which reads 'The enemy battleship fires several warning shots across your bow. They repeat their warning not to enter contested space. The line remains open.' The Director translates the Result as follows.

Upon emerging from the bathroom our hero is taken by surprise. Tatiana delivers a stunning blow to our hero's head, and he obligingly slumps to the floor. Tatiana quickly searches our hero's clothes, finds the computer chip, and turns to depart. That was the 'warning shots across the bow'. Tatiana pauses for a moment, bends down and lightly kisses our dazed hero. 'I'm sorry' she says, 'It would have been beautiful. Maybe another time?' She does not kill our hero, and her last statement indicates that the 'lines remain open'. If all goes well, our hero will catch up to Tatiana and get another chance. Next time, who knows?

Stop! No way! The Actor playing our hero doesn't like that ending. This super-spy is a 'Lady's Man'. The Actor spends one Plot Point (see 'Plot Points' described in the chapter titled 'Improvisation') and Activates that Descriptor, declaring his seduction a Success. Our hero wishes to come around just as Tatiana bends down to kiss him good-bye (the strike to the head wasn't as hard as it might have been). Our hero can then grab Tatiana by

surprise and kiss her. She can't leave ... she can't believe it ... what a man ... she's been seduced! Now that's better. The Director likes the use of that Trait, and gives our hero a full Success. Looking at 'Let them know they've done well.', still at 'About Capable', and using 'Mood' this time as the critical factor, the Result reads 'He lowers the shotgun he had aimed at you. "Oh what the hell. I didn't really want to have to shoot you anyway." - Seems you just made a friend.' Well, more than a friend in this case.

MAGNITUDE OF RESULT

One piece that's left off of the flowchart outcomes is the Magnitude of your Results. Instead, an average example is given to communicate the structure of the desired outcome. This structure should be easily applied to most situations, and the Magnitude of the Result modified to fit the need. The Magnitude of a Result should be based off the difference between the performer's Skill Rank and the Difficulty, and upon the sequence of actions in question.

Skill Rank Vs. Difficulty

We'll start with judgements of Skill Rank and Difficulty. Basically, the less competent a character is to perform an action, the thinner or more coincidental should be any Success, or the harsher should be any Failure. For example, if you intend to give an Actor false hope of Success, and the role she plays is very competent in the required Skill, then you might give her only a feeling that she could be close to victory, setting her up for an unforeseen disappointment. If the role in question is barely competent to perform the task, then false hope might imply wild exaggerations of the possibilities, leading the Actor to make some unwise decisions in the situation.

Risk

You must also make your Result fit the actions in question. This comes down to a basic judgement of risk. If the action taken was highly risky, then Failure will generally be that much worse. Also, unless the role undertaking the risk is highly competent in the area, Success should tend to involve more coincidence as well. For example, close range starship dogfighting with laser cannons is normally a fairly risky endeavor. Failure in that endeavor may mean death. However, it can also mean a damaged ship, or only that your quarry gets away. So even a Failure in this risky an event may not mean death. But now, imagine the same fight in a constantly shifting meteor swarm, with rapidly hurtling rocks large enough to destroy your ship. Now this is a **risky** event. Any Failure here is going to be really bad. Any pilot that can make it

through is either going to be really good, or really lucky. These Results will also have far more to do with what your Actors can think up, and with how well they roleplay, than with how well they roll dice.

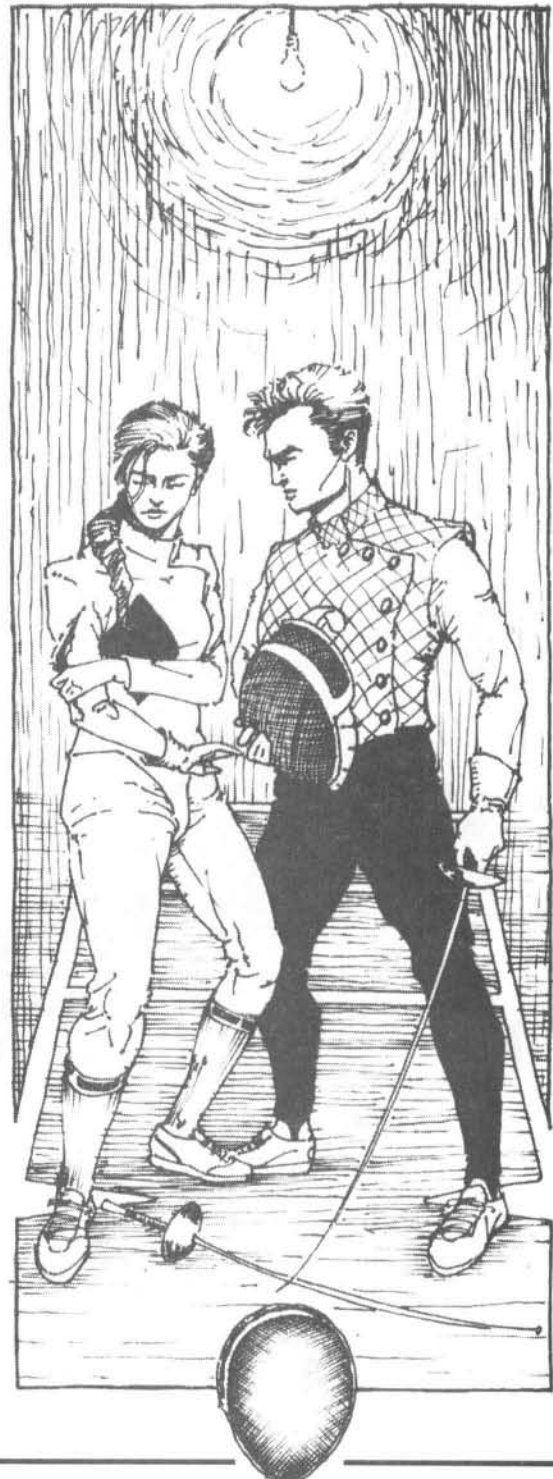
TIMING, TENSION, AND AMBIGUITY

Timing, tension, and ambiguity are interdependent upon one another. Remember that the flowcharts are available to help you come up with Results, but you always need to supply the details of those Results, and all other descriptions, yourself. This allows the flowcharts to be independent of the action, and independent of any time scale. The obtained Result can represent the culmination of some final goal, an intermediary goal, or just the outcome of some brief action. The interval of time between the initiation of the action and the application of the Result may be a single Combat Round, several Combat Rounds, a minute, an hour, a week, a month, or even several years. Even in the short duration given to most combat actions, you don't need to apply a Result in any immediate way. Your description of the Result may even take place over an extended period of time, with the possibility that the Actors will do something during that time to alter the final Result.

For example, in a fencing duel between two fairly matched opponents, you may decide that you'll have the Actor, who's slightly less skilled than her Supporting Cast opponent, lose the duel. You could decide that in order to give the opponent (whom our heroine will meet again) an air of danger, you're going to have him hurt her a little. This way our heroine will be hesitant upon their next meeting, a little doubtful, and therefore victory will be less certain. This is also a good opportunity to express her opponent's villainess. However, you needn't apply this decision in a single Combat Round. Your description could include several minutes of close back and forth sword play, with neither participant able to obtain an advantage. What you're doing here is building the tension by leaving the moment unresolved. Ask the Actor what she's having her character do. Describe how every move is foiled, while she is barely able to parry each of her opponent's strokes. If our Actor can come up with something really brilliant during this time, then by all means change the outcome. Barring this contingency however, after enough of this cat and mouse game has built the tension, bring it to a close by applying your Result. The villain gets in a daring slash of his blade, cutting through the fabric of our heroine's fencing suit, and drawing blood. Our villain apologizes instantly, 'However could the safety tip have come off like that? Must have caught oddly against the fabric of the suit. I'm so sorry. May I help you with that? Maybe we might finish this at another time?'

Feel free to play with the timing of your Results in order to hold the tension in the plot. In fact, you can feel

free to play with the Result itself. Knowledge of the outcome, and Magnitude of a Result, can be withheld for as long as the Director feels is necessary. That makes the Result itself ambiguous. This technique leaves room between the initiation and outcome of an action, for either the Actors or the Director to alter the Result. The Actors may walk away from victory, or change defeat into salvation. That's part of this type of storytelling. Try to hold to your judgements, but be open for anything else, because anything can and will happen.



RANDOMNESS

If there are times when you want some randomness, you can use a d100 roll to obtain the same theatrical Results given above, based off a simple determination of Skill Rank Vs. Difficulty, and a die roll.

A Formula For Success

Warning! : Use this Formula only when you wish the feel of randomness it provides. We feel that the Director is fully adequate to the task of determining the Success and Failure of **all** actions within the Chronicle, without reference to a die roll. However, we're willing to provide this more traditional route for those who aren't comfortable Directing in that manner.

Please take a look at the 'Mean Result Chart' on the 'Theatrix Reference Sheet B', duplicated here for your convenience.

Mean Result Chart						
Skill Rank	Difficulty					
	Easy	Normal	Difficult	Extr.	Imp.	
	0.0	Hmmm	Duck!	Ouch!	Crunch!	Crunch!
	1.0	O.K.	Maybe?	Close	Ouch!	Crunch!
	2.0	Yes!	O.K.	Maybe?	Woah!	Crunch!
	3.0	Excellent!	Yes!	Hmmm	Close	Crunch!
	4.0	Boss!	Excellent!	O.K.	Almost	Ouch!
	5.0	Boss!	Boss!	Yes!	Maybe?	Duck!
	6.0	Righteous!	Boss!	Excellent!	Hmmm	Almost
	7.0	Righteous!	Righteous!	Boss!	O.K.	Hmmm
	8.0	Righteous!	Righteous!	Boss!	Yes!	O.K.
	9.0	Righteous!	Righteous!	Righteous!	Excellent!	Yes!
	10.0	Righteous!	Righteous!	Righteous!	Boss!	Excellent!

To use this chart, simply cross-index the Skill Rank Vs. the Difficulty for any action in question, and find the single word description that references one of the die roll distributions below. An example of one of the distributions is given here.

Yes!

01 - 03 04 - 08 09 - 20 21 - 39 40 - 61 62 - 00

These distributions are broken up into six segments, each labeled with a percentile range. Roll a d100 and find the segment into which your roll falls. This segment in turn references one of the starting boxes on the 'Advanced Resolution Flowcharts'. There is an abbreviated guide at the start of the distribution tables that shows this correspondence.

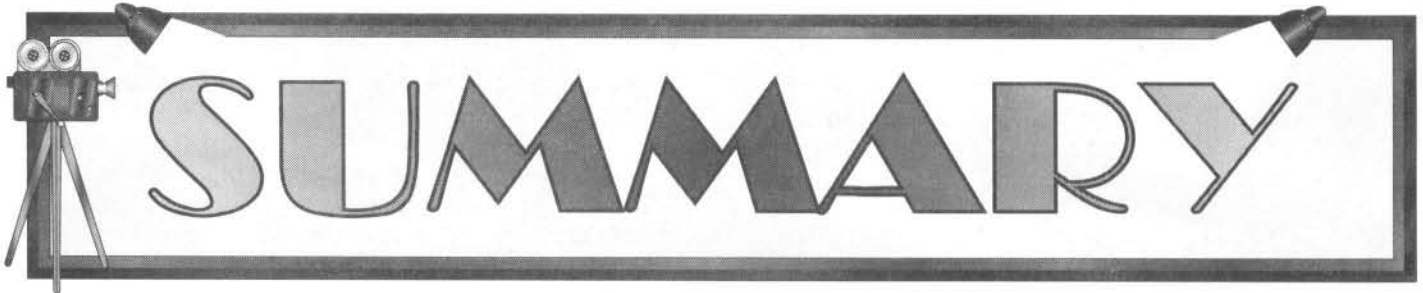
Damage	Lucky	False Hope	Doubt	Dilemma	Done Well

The segments move from lightest to darkest shade, and similarly from the top to the bottom of the 'Advanced Resolution Flowcharts'.

For example, using a Skill Rank of '3.0' Vs. a Difficulty of Normal, the 'Mean Result Chart' refers you to the die roll distribution marked 'Yes!'. Rolling a d100 on the 'Yes!' distribution, and coming up with a '32', would place you on the 'Give them reason to Doubt. Let Victory be Uncertain.' box of the appropriate 'Advanced Resolution Flowchart'. Follow the normal process from there, using the 'Action Capability Chart' to help you determine how capable the character is of the action in question. All you have to do is transform the suggested Result into a description that fits your story.

If the Skill Rank being used is not a whole number, then you're going to have to extrapolate between two adjacent die roll distribution tables. Make a d100 roll and place the outcome on whichever table seems most useful. You may skew a Result between two Difficulty levels using the same method of Director bias. This isn't exactly rigidly defined, but it's the closest Theatrix gets to mathematical precision.

For those of you interested in statistics, or interested in why we used the double entendre of 'Mean Result Chart', it's because the die roll distributions we used are actually perfect normal curves, calculated off of z scores, with means ranging from 0.0 to 6.0, at 0.5 intervals, using values ranging from 1 to 6, all with standard deviations of 1.82. Therefore, each die roll distribution represents a normal curve with a mean set somewhere along the continuum from total Failure to perfect Success. The cross-index of Skill Rank Vs. Difficulty chooses this mean, and the d100 roll picks a randomized point along this distribution. And there you have it.



SUMMARY

GLOSSARY

About Capable - Challenged by the action, but still within the realm of the possible.

Active Participant - The character the camera would be focusing on, in a movie, during the action in question.

Actively Opposed - Any action that's resisted by an aware and reactive opponent.

Difficulty - The likelihood of Successfully completing an action.

Extent - The degree of Success or Failure.

Failure - A Failure occurs when the basic, hoped for result, eludes the performer of the action.

Initiative - The sequence of actions as they occur within a Round.

Magnitude - The scope and meaning associated with the consequences of an action.

Not Capable - Very unlikely to be able to perform the action.

Opposed - Any action to which there is enough resistance that Success is not deemed to be Automatic.

Results - A theatrical description of the effects of an action, embodying the action taken, its Success or Failure, and the Difficulty inherent in the situation.

Round - An arbitrary unit of time used to delineate otherwise continuous actions.

Statically Opposed - Any action that's resisted by an unaware or unintelligent opponent.

Success - A Successful action occurs when the final intent, the hoped for result, is in any way accomplished.

Very Capable - Very likely to be able to perform the action.

SUMMARY

- ☑ **Success and Failure** - Is based upon ...
 - ⇒ The needs of the plot.
 - ⇒ The roleplay of those involved.
 - ⇒ The intent of the action taken.
 - ⇒ The appropriate use of a character's Traits.
- ☑ **Results** - Must take into account ...
 - ⇒ The extent of the Success or Failure of the action.
 - ⇒ The timing and Initiative of the action.
 - ⇒ The theatrical qualities of character and plot that pivot upon that Result.
- ☑ Remember that you can choose to use either Dueling Successes, or base all Results off of an Active Participant.
- ☑ **Resolution Flowcharts** - Start with the 'Basic Resolution Flowchart' and remember ...
 - ⇒ Plot
 - ⇒ Roleplay
 - ⇒ Traits
- ☑ **Advanced Resolution Flowcharts** - Think about ...
 - ⇒ Skill Rank
 - ⇒ Difficulty
 - ⇒ Roleplay
 - ⇒ Stage
 - ⇒ Drama





IMPROVISATION

'The time has come,' the Walrus said, 'To talk of many things: Of shoes - and ships - and sealing-wax - of cabbages - and kings - And why the sea is boiling hot - And whether pigs have wings.'

- Lewis Carroll

IMPROVISATION

Remember when we promised that the Actors were going to put your plotlines through severe stress? Remember when we said that the Actors would do half the work of creating your plots? We lied. Those were understatements, and this chapter is why. We're going to hand much of the decision making process, the creative process, and a lot of the Director's control over to the Actors. We're going to allow the Actors ... actually, **encourage** the Actors to improvise. In this chapter we'll talk about the concepts of drama, Information, plot structure, story process, and Subplots, to set up a basis for improvisational techniques. Then we'll discuss the limits of improvisation upon the physical stage and any Statements which provide new Information. We'll cap this off with a discussion of Consistency, the brother of Continuity. And last, but not least, we'll finally describe in detail all the guidelines for awarding, earning, and spending Plot Points.

You, the Director, will be nominally in charge of this whole mess, guaranteeing the story's continuous flow, and holding it somewhat within the bounds of a single script. It's going to be very important to give the Actors as much freedom as possible. You have the ultimate veto power on all subjects, but try to use it only to keep your genre and story intact. The Actors will twist your plot in ways that will make you cringe. They'll attempt to run roughshod over your carefully crafted tale. You'll be there to guide them. This is going to be a lot like handing you the reins to a team of wild horses. You'll love it. Really.

TROUPE STYLE ROLEPLAYING

The following guidelines will introduce a Troupe style of roleplaying into your Chronicle. What you read here are simply guidelines, but we've done many hours of

play testing to produce just the right mix of rules, rewards, and controls to make the system work as a whole. Basically, a Chronicle that's set up for Troupe style play may have more than one Director. Every Actor may take a turn at the Director's chair for one or more Episodes. Not every Actor needs to take a turn at Directing an Episode, but everyone should be involved in the creation of the Chronicle's Setting. This style of roleplay requires that everyone be sensitive to the work that others have done in creating Supporting Cast members, plotlines, and Subplots for the Chronicle. Although each participant may claim 'ownership' of certain pieces they've created for the Setting, important aspects of the Chronicle must be owned and developed communally. Even if only one person will be acting as Director for the Chronicle, the following rules almost demand fuller participation by the Actors, and require the Director to give up some portion of her control, in favor of allowing the Actors a lot of improvisational freedom.

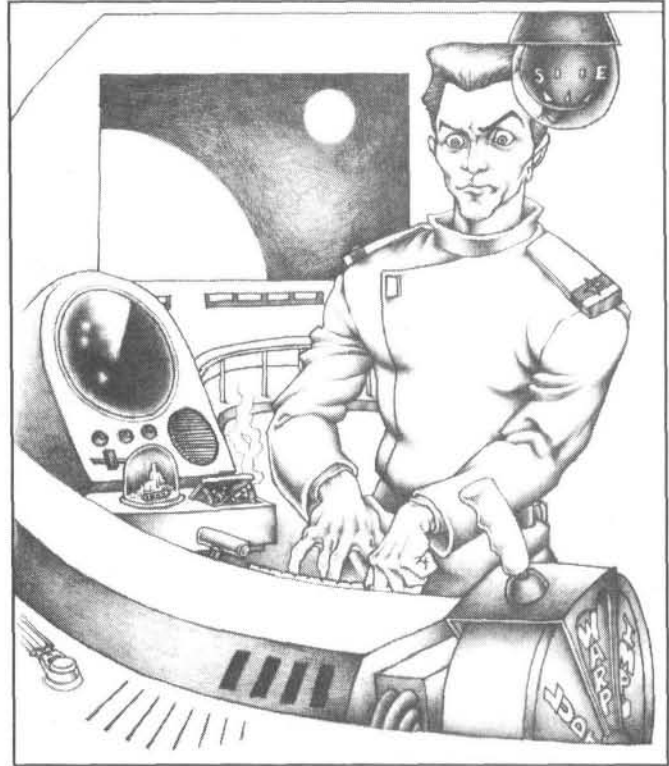
DRAMA

Whether or not you decide to have more than one Director for your Chronicle, Theatrix places a lot of emphasis on allowing the Actors to improvise. We want Theatrix Episodes to create the feeling of drama you get from a good book or movie. The problem is that books and movies have authors and screenwriters. They're scripted to make the protagonists look good. For an author or screenwriter, the main characters and the story are one and the same. Roleplaying games, on the other hand, work with unscripted Actors whose concentration is mainly upon their characters, and pre-scripted Directors whose focus must mainly be upon the plotline of their Episodes. Our solution will be to blur the lines between the Actors and the Director. We wish to give the Actors improvisational control over the story, in essence allowing them to

become their own screenwriters. The net effect of this will hopefully be more attention to the characters and conflict within your Episodes, ie. more drama.

INFORMATION

During the telling of a story most Information is built up in pieces, rather than presented as a single package. This natural process allows everyone involved to take a hand at developing some of the Information available to them. Rooms the Actors enter aren't usually fully described in every last detail. Rather, enough of the details are given to create a sense of completeness. The rest of the Stage may then be filled in improvisationally, providing appropriate props for the ensuing action. When problems occur, their symptoms give only partial Information as to their causes. For example, the plane's engine starts making stalling sounds, or the hero's car won't start as the villain makes his own getaway, or one of the tiles on the ancient Aztec temple floor just depressed with an audible click when stepped upon. These moments are incomplete, waiting for either research or action to discover their meanings. Similarly, many initial sensory perceptions are vague to some degree. There's the dark shadow in the alley, the odd reading on the sensor panel, and the sound of motion made by an unseen foe. The possible requires time and exploration to become the real. With a fair sense of timing, anyone may complete these moments appropriately, manipulating the reality behind them in an improvisational way. This pliability of Information will become



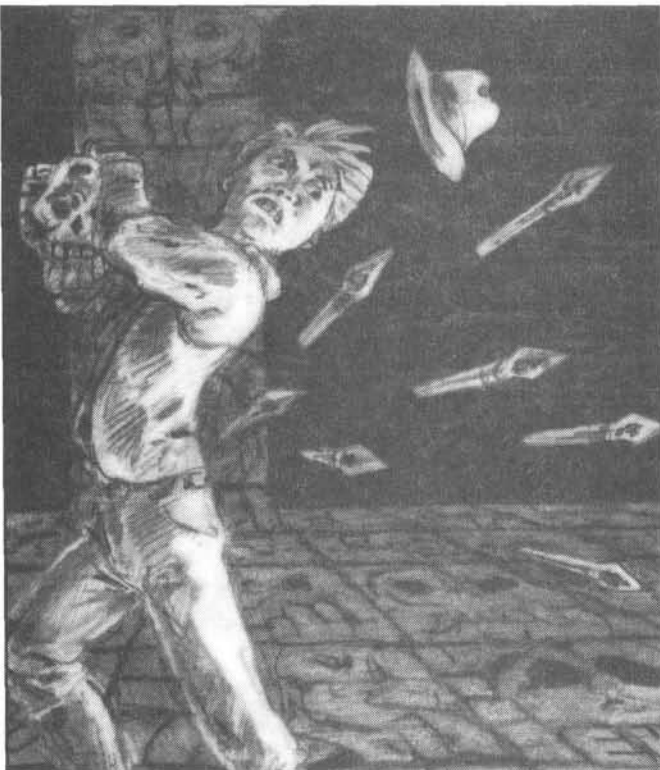
the basis upon which the Actors in your Episodes may fully enter the world of their character's knowledge, perceptions, and Skills.

MACROSCOPIC VS. MICROSCOPIC

In order to understand the following guidelines, you're going to have to start thinking about your plotlines in a Theatrix way. In Theatrix, we consider a story to be enacted upon two levels at once. These levels of abstraction we denote as the Macroscopic level (meaning literally, 'visible to the naked eye'), and the Microscopic level (meaning literally 'invisible to the naked eye'). The Actors in a Chronicle may improvise upon an Episode at either the Macroscopic, or Microscopic level. However, these two types of interventions have two very different effects within the game, and will be handled with two different sets of guidelines and rules. The following sections will further define the Macroscopic and Microscopic levels of plot abstraction, in terms of the structure of an Episode Vs. its process.

STRUCTURE

Theatrix makes a distinction between the structure of an Episode and its process. The structure of an Episode is the framework of plot, character, and dramatic necessity that holds the action of the story together. Dramatic necessity, in turn, is the motivation behind each Episode's



plot, and may range from simple external motivations, like staying alive until help arrives, to complex internal motivations, like trying to find a way to come to terms with feeling responsible for the death of a loved one. Dramatic necessity may therefore be either a function of plot, or a function of character, and ties the two together, moving them towards the conclusion.

All this occurs at the Macroscopic level, with improvisation at this level taking the form of Subplots. Subplots will become the 'currency' of Theatrix Chronicles. The Actors in a Theatrix Episode 'earn' improvisational privileges by engaging in Subplots, allowing them to script their own roles in a heroic way. Like their book and movie counterparts, they'll get themselves captured at dramatically appropriate moments, they'll become involved in love affairs at the worst possible times, and they'll complicate their lives in totally unnecessary ways. They'll work hard to create much of the drama of each Episode, so you the Director won't have to. Don't you love it.

PROCESS

The process of an Episode, on the other hand, is composed of the details that make up each of its individual Scenes. Roleplaying is a medium requiring visualization, and therefore, as in movies, these details may be found in the descriptions of the Stage and the action that occurs there. From the perspective of the Main Cast, this process is all at the level of perception. These perceptions must be communicated descriptively as Information, which, as discussed earlier, leaves a lot of leeway for the Actors to improvise. All this occurs at the Microscopic level, which is normally invisible to the Macroscopic level of structure and plot. Improvisation at this level takes the form of additions and completions to the Stage and the Information it represents.

SUBPLOTS

Subplots are all the smaller stories that get embedded and intertwined in the larger story of the Main Plot, and are the focus of Macroscopic improvisations in Theatrix. Each Subplot is a story within a story. Subplots cover love interests, familial obligations, personal codes of honor, vendettas, mysterious origins, personal quests, internal struggles, or any other self-encapsulated story sequence. These Subplots are most often generated from ongoing character interactions that the Main Cast is involved in. The Main Plot of each Episode can also be seen as a single Subplot, encompassing the primary drama of your story. Along with the primary focus of the Main Plot, there will usually be several secondary foci for the story's action, in the form of other Subplots. These two sets of plots normally intertwine in a complex and mysterious way. Don't worry, that's just what we're looking for.

Without these Subplots, Episodes would seem dull and lifeless, reduced to the pursuit of one-dimensional goals. The goals of the Main Plot are a necessity not for their own sake, but because they provide the tension that turns a character's Subplots into drama.

Long Term Vs. Short Term

Subplots in Theatrix come in two varieties, Long Term and Short Term. Long Term Subplots run over more than a single Episode. The focus of most Long Term Subplots is therefore not directly upon the Episodes in which they appear, but rather upon the lives of the characters involved. Short Term Subplots, on the other hand, are born, live, and die in the space of a single Episode. The Main Plot of each Episode is always of this variety.

Personal Vs. Troupe

Each Subplot in Theatrix can also be classed as either a Personal Subplot, or a Troupe Subplot. Personal Subplots are specific to one Main Cast character, and are usually generated from that character's background, history, and actions. Personal Subplots usually either require the Actor involved to find time to go through the Subplot away from the rest of the Troupe, or can be roleplayed through in the moments when that Actor is separated from the rest of the group. Engaging in a Personal Subplot is a great alternative to sitting around and getting bored.

Troupe Subplots, as their name suggests, usually involve the whole Troupe. However, any Subplot involving more than one Actor is classed as a 'Troupe' Subplot, even if the group so engaged does not consist of the entire Troupe. Personal Subplots that grow to engage more than a single member of the Main Cast (in more than a peripheral way), are then treated as Troupe Subplots for that Episode, as far as Plot Point rewards are concerned (see the section titled 'Plot Points' coming up in this chapter). Again, if a group of Actors has been separated from the main action during an Episode, and are sitting around and getting bored, this is a good time to take them through a Troupe Subplot.

We have a sneaky way that people may 'buy into' somebody else's Personal Subplot, thereby earning Troupe Subplot points for it. The way you do this is by Portraying one of the members of the Supporting Cast in that Subplot. Such a role can be taken on voluntarily, or it may be assigned by the Director. An Actor may even portray one of these extra roles on a continuing basis, if the Director approves. Whenever an Actor becomes involved in this way, as a **Supporting Cast** member in someone else's Personal Subplot, then they share in the Plot Points as though earning them for a Troupe Subplot.

The Plot Points earned in this way still accrue to an Actor's 'usual' Main Cast role. However, this does **not** keep the original target of the Subplot from earning the extra points for a Personal Subplot, unless another **Main Cast** member becomes involved.

Examples of Subplots

Short Term Personal Subplots

- ⇒ A detective obsessed with a case starts having problems with his wife.
- ⇒ A superhero fighting crime needs to come up with rent money this month, before his landlord throws him out.
- ⇒ A case of mistaken identity tags one of the innocent characters with a mob hit, until the mess can be sorted out.

Long Term Personal Subplots

- ⇒ A love triangle that vacillates back and forth each Episode, tugging constantly on the involved personas' heart strings.
- ⇒ A secret identity that constantly needs to be guarded.
- ⇒ A character is wanted by the law and has repeated problems with the police.

Short Term Troupe Subplots

- ⇒ Almost every Episode you'll come up with.

Long Term Troupe Subplots

- ⇒ The Main Cast has constant trouble in their attempt to build, maintain, and run a secret base of operations.
- ⇒ The Main Cast is hunted as a group by a persistent and powerful villain.
- ⇒ The Main Cast must locate and collect a dangerous series of evil mystical artifacts.

DISTRIBUTED DIRECTING FOR SUBPLOTS

Although it's almost impossible to run a Main Plot with more than one Director, it's possible to have several Directors in charge of various Subplots at any one time. This will allow groups of Actors to be involved in a Subplot being run by another Actor, while the Director of an Episode is busy with the rest. If you try this out, you may wind up with a fair number of ongoing Subplots, which at times may even require the attention of the whole Troupe,

and therefore end up competing with the Main Plot. The net effect of this is that the job of Directing will be distributed among all the participants of an Episode, with one person handling the operations of the Main Plot as **the Director**. This requires a little more fluid concept of storytelling, and a lot more cooperation amongst the participants. This also means that in order to keep a sense of mystery, even the Director may not be aware of all the secrets behind all the Subplots occurring during her Episode. We like this style of roleplaying, and so don't mind putting up with the drawbacks. Our rule is to simply inform the current Director of **anything** she needs to know, at the time she needs to know it, in order for her to continue with her Main Plot.

Whether or not you allow such Distributed Directing in your Chronicle, the job of creating Subplots is a matter of improvisational control, and may, therefore, be performed by anyone. Anyone may form a Subplot for anyone else, even themselves, at any time. How much control the Director has over these Subplots, and how much the Director knows about their secrets, will depend upon the style of roleplaying used by your Troupe. The more comfortable you are with each other, the more free you can be in your roleplaying style. Most of all, have fun!

THE STAGE

The Stage, as discussed earlier, will be the main focus for all Microscopic improvisations. Every Stage is really composed of props. This would include telephones, industrial machinery, windows, entrances and exits, and even the Supporting Cast. Everything upon the Stage. Actors are free to declare the existence, condition, and method of operation of props as needed, improvising their surroundings, with a few exceptions. These exceptions follow ...

- ⇒ All improvised props must be appropriate for the Stage, and probable in their existence and operation.
- ⇒ All improvised props must be non-dramatic in nature. An Actor may not improvise upon any prop that is a focus for the current dramatic conflict. However, a non-dramatic prop may be improvised into existence and **then** used within the context of that conflict (in legal language, this is known as a loophole).
- ⇒ If the Director feels that any improvisation of the Stage is inappropriate, for any reason, then she may veto it.

Such improvisations upon the Stage are free, and cost no Plot Points to Activate. However, any improvisation upon a prop that includes a factor of opinion or guesswork, is actually a Statement (see 'Statements' below), and will require some additional guidelines.

Rule of Thumb

We have a rule of thumb concerning the Stage that we use during our Theatrix Episodes. If an Actor asks the Director a question about a prop, that could have as easily been improvised, then that request is automatically answered in the negative. For example, such questions as 'Is there a staircase anywhere along this hall?', or 'Could I have put a gun in my car's glove compartment before I left?', are quickly responded to with a 'no'. The proper way to phrase such requests in Theatrix is 'I spot an emergency exit stairway up ahead and run for it.', or 'I reach into my glove compartment and pull out the gun I always keep there.' Using this rule quickly gets everyone into the improvisational habit, and allows for freer and more fluid roleplaying.

STATEMENTS

Statements are improvisational roleplay in the form of **in character** declarations. In other words, these are descriptions of a persona's knowledge and perceptions in that persona's own voice (whether out loud or by Soliloquy). The Actors may use such Statements as opportunities to improvise, without reference to the Director. Statements always contain some element of **opinion** in them, whether it be pure guesswork, or whether those opinions are backed up by Skill Ranks. A Statement could be used, for example, to have a detective persona declare what clues could be found at the Scene of a murder, as well as what those clues indicated. Or a Statement could be used to have a hardened mercenary declare what the enemy's most probable plan of attack would be in an upcoming battle. This requires a little subtlety on the part of the Actors. If a Statement is not a welcome addition to the Episode at hand, or is not dramatically appropriate for the moment, then it may be denied by the Director.

In any case, Statements do not necessarily reflect reality, but are rather the declaring persona's subjective view of reality. To turn a Statement into concrete fact requires Activation by a Plot Point (see the section titled 'Plot Points', later in this chapter). However, using a statement to improvise, while accepting the possibility of Failure (ie. being incorrect), is free of cost. Statements are special because they work on the Microscopic level, unlike Subplots, but can still be used to intervene directly into the Main Plot (they may effect the **structure** of the Episode). Statements are often the best tool for allowing the Actors to become their own screenwriters. State-

ments may deal with the layout of the Stage, the availability of props, or the timing and probability of events, but always from the perspective of the declaring role.

Statements also have a special relationship with the Primary Descriptor of the persona making them. Only time, or the expenditure of a Plot Point, will determine the ultimate accuracy of a Statement. However, any Statement that falls within the domain of the Primary Descriptor of the declaring role **must** be considered the best possible Information available at the time (not necessarily correct, but certainly the most informed). To reflect this, we've created the following guidelines ...

⇒ A character may Disapprove any other Statement, about any piece of Information that falls within the domain of their own Primary Descriptor. Disapproval may take the form of any reasonable explanation as to why the Disapproved character's knowledge in the area was incomplete, lacking, or mistaken.

⇒ If any character makes a Statement covered by their own Primary Descriptor, then that is the only Statement in the field which may be Activated with a Plot Point to become concrete fact.

These guidelines provide each role with an area in which they may teach, criticize, and pontificate to their heart's content.

One note of caution is that since all Statements are made in character, a role must actually be present in a situation to use one. At a later date, once Information has become reality, either through the expenditure of a Plot Point, or in the normal course of roleplay, then no one may alter that reality. Not through Disapproval, and not even through the expenditure of another Plot Point. Not unless they're really clever anyway. But we'll talk more about this under 'Consistency', below.

Example

The above guidelines for Statements create an odd rules mechanic, at once both very subtle, and very powerful. Actors have their characters make Statements all the time. Your Actors will argue over the probable meaning of events within the Chronicle, over the best course of action to take in various situations, and over their likelihood of Success in those endeavors. The Statements will flow from them in a constant rush, usually without any realization of the power at their fingertips so kindly provided by these rules. And when they do use that power, you as the Director will flinch. But what the heck, they have to spend those Plot Points somewhere.



To demonstrate this power, we'll give a brief example here. The situation at hand is a murder. The Actors have arrived on the Scene after the fact, as part of a police investigation. Two of the Actors are portraying police detectives, more interested in handguns than fingerprints (Primary Descriptors of 'Sharpshooter' and 'Loads of Connections and Informants' respectively). Another Actor is portraying a psychic called in to help in the investigation of this bizarre series of murders (Primary Descriptor of 'Psychic'). And the last Actor is portraying a consulting private investigator with extraordinary powers of deduction and inference (Primary Descriptor of 'Perceptive'). The Director has described a room in brutal disarray, and the body of a large man lying on the floor, his limbs arrayed at impossible angles. The Director has carefully set up the clues so far, the most important of which is the inexplicable escape of a gorilla from a local travelling circus.

One of the police detectives states casually that this must have been the work of the escaped gorilla, however unbelievable. This is a natural Statement, and the kind that gets made all the time in a roleplaying game. The private investigator turns, and using her Primary Descriptor of 'Perceptive', makes a Disapproval of the earlier Statement. The private investigator declares that the bruises upon the victim's neck show that he died of strangulation, and that their size indicates that the perpetrator had hands not the size of a gorillas, but of a woman's. This is not only a Disapproval that falls within the domain of the private investigator's Primary Descriptor, but also a Statement in its own right. The private investigator adds a Plot Point to turn this hypothesis into concrete fact, making sure that she will not be wrong.

This is not what the Director expected at all. To make matters worse, the Actor portraying the psychic now adds to the damage by touching the corpse, thereby receiving a 'flash of clairvoyance'. She declares that the killer was indeed a woman, and that she has come from far off, another land, seeking her victims here. The psychic then also pays a Plot Point for the Active, dramatic use of her Descriptor, guaranteeing her veracity as well.

Well, that's it for the Director's planned plotline. Fortunately, the Statements made do open up many interesting possibilities for the plot, as will often be the case. Just as fortunately, most of the Director's planning will still be usable for this new, deviated plotline, as is also most often the case. If the Statements made had not been so kind to the time and planning the Director had already done for the Episode, then the Director may very well have denied them. Statements may be the best opportunity for the Actors to step in and help 'write' the story in progress, but they must do so in a way that's respectful to the work others have already done.

IMPROVISE FOR SUCCESS

The above improvisational techniques can become critical to the Success of your actions. Such determinations are based largely upon how well you roleplay. Accordingly, making your actions dramatically appropriate, and improvising, should greatly improve your chances of Success. Take liberties with the Stage and use Statements. They're free. For example, next time you're trapped in a building complex, and looking for a way to ambush the hired killers that are out for your hide, don't ask the Director what you ought to do. Simply declare 'Aha! No one ever thinks about up. I'll hide myself in the supports above this false ceiling, break into the building's air duct system, and crawl to a position behind the enemy lines!' Make that Skill in Urban Combat Tactics meaningful. Did the false ceiling or the air duct system even exist before you just declared them? The Director never specifically said they didn't, and that's where your opening for improvisation awaits.

CONSISTENCY

With everybody involved in the story being able to control part of it at any moment, it's easy for things to get out of hand. We're going to need a few guidelines to help make this work. Our basic guideline is **Consistency**. In order to keep Consistency, no improvisation may alter any previous Information that has become fact. The reasons behind the Information may change, and new Information may be added, but any new declarations must logically (or illogically, depending upon the mood of the Director) fit all previous **known** Information.

For example, imagine a small band of brave knights (they all have the Personality Trait Brave) entering a dark cave. They've come here upon rumors of something evil making off with the local maidens. The Director, who's known to have a predilection for dragons, describes that about them by the lurid light of the torches, they can see great claw marks and burned patches at the cave's entrance. The Actors moan and give the Director vile looks, but they proceed on. The Director then describes the movement of some great beast ahead, the metallic scraping, and the unbearable heat. The knights round the corner, swords drawn and shields at the ready, when one of the Actors suddenly declares 'We round the corner only to find the king's minister, operating a large furnace in the cave, and turning a great wheel with a metal rim to make that scraping sound.' The other Actors turn to the creator of this event with stunned expressions, but the Director's smiling. Without skipping a beat, the Director declares that the minister turns to them with a sour look and cries out 'I would have gotten away with it too, if it wasn't for you meddling knights!'

However strange this turn of events may seem, it is Consistent. This new event accounts for the missing maidens (the minister has got them locked up in one of the castle's dungeons), the rumors of an evil beast (the minister in disguise), and the 'dragon's lair' (a fiction created by the minister to scare away would be heroes). The Actor who improvised this event could get away with it because several of the Main Cast have Subplots involving this minister, and it struck the Director's fancy. There are many other declarations that would have fit as well. Or, the Actors might simply have let the Director continue on her own for awhile. Or, they might have come up with something even stranger. Just as long as it's all Consistent.

PLOT POINTS

We've been discussing the various ways in which Plot Points may be used for a couple of chapters now. We'll recap all that information here, plus give the specifics behind earning those elusive Plot Points. This will set us up for a discussion on character advancement (how your roles actually change and get better at things), and some additional ways you may use your personas' Plot Point Totals, in the chapter titled 'Epilogue'.

SPENDING PLOT POINTS

Here's a list of all the ways that you may spend Plot Points, which you may also find reproduced on the 'Theatrix Reference Sheet A'.

Spending Plot Points
Activate a Personality Trait for Success in a single associated action. to disregard external control for one Scene. to perform actions that require that Trait for one Scene.
Activate a Descriptor for Success in a single associated action. for dramatic use of that Descriptor for one Scene.
Activate a Statement to eliminate the possibility of that Statement being wrong.

Everything on this list costs one Plot Point to Activate, with the exception of the special two Plot Point Double Activation for Personality Traits you either don't possess, or don't possess at the necessary Severity.

Buying Success

Now we've said that a Plot Point may buy a Success in an action associated with an Activated Personality Trait or Descriptor, and so it is. But you may be wondering just



how much Success one Plot Point buys. That's up to the Director (you knew we'd say that). Activation of an associated action must bring Success, but how minimal or maximal it is will still depend upon your roleplay and the plotline. One Plot Point spent for a Success in a fight against a bunch of extras may entitle you to go to town on all of them. The same Plot Point spent against a major villain will probably only buy you a single solid strike. The cure in such a situation is to spend lots of Plot Points. That's what they're for.

Blackmail

This is a dirty trick for Directors, that we consider perfectly legal. If your Actors are about to kill one of their long standing enemies, or rid themselves of a long standing problem, just to make sure that they really want to go ahead and wipe out such valuable Subplot material, you may charge them extra Plot Points for the privilege. As Director, you may demand an extra Plot Point or two from everybody involved, as blackmail. If the Troupe doesn't want to pay up, then coincidence saves the object of their wrath at the last moment. We wouldn't suggest using this gimmick very often, but it's very appropriate for the right occasion. You'll know when.

Payment Due

As Director, you'll find your Actors earning Plot Points for every Subplot. Through your control over the boundaries and sizes of these Subplots, you'll have some control over the pace of this process. However, this will not, nor should it stop the constant accumulation of these points. It's your job, as Director, to make sure that the

Actors have reasons to spend them. We've provided you with many tools with which to pry those precious Plot Points away from their owners. In the proper situations, the Actors will be more than happy to throw them into their Personality Traits, Descriptors, and Statements. Plot Points are often the only grease that will move the Actors through the churning gears of your story ... alive.

Your job as Director is to give the Actors situations too tough to get through, and then to demand their creativity and their Plot Points. Creativity provides an opportunity to spend Plot Points, and Plot Points guarantee the Success of the Actors' creativity. If you, as Director, allow the Actors to get through these Scenes without providing both of these necessary ingredients, then you'll end up with either too many Plot Points, or too little drama. Remember all those movies you love so much. The ones in which the heroes always seem to survive impossible encounters by only the thinnest margins. All that bravery, knowledge, skill, and sureness under fire, that's not destined to occur. Those guys are spending Plot Points.

EARNING PLOT POINTS

Actors earn Plot Points for every Short Term Subplot they complete, and at the end of every Episode in which a Long Term Subplot appears. They earn these points whether the Subplot is of their own design, designed by another member of the Troupe, or created for them by the Director (the Actors also earn the normal number of Plot Points for completing the Main Plot of each Episode). Every Actor who becomes more than marginally involved in any Subplot during an Episode earns full Plot Points for it. Plot Points are awarded during each Episode, depending upon the Complexity of the Subplots as they appear during the story.

Each Subplot is judged upon four independent Rating Factors; Intricacy, Danger, Depth, and Technique. Each of these is fully defined in the chart below. Each of these Ratings is assigned a level of Complexity, with the Subplot's Complexity being equal to the average of all of these, fractions rounding up. There are five levels of Complexity; Simple, Average, Complex, Convoluted, and Twisted, approximating the five levels of Difficulty for actions. Each level of Complexity of a Subplot is worth one Plot Point. The following also earn an additional Plot Point either upon completion, or at the end of the Episode in which they appear ...

- ⇒ **Personal Subplot**
- ⇒ **Long Term Subplot**
- ⇒ **Main Plot**
- ⇒ **Activated Flaw**

All of this is summed up as follows ...

Earning Plot Points

RATING FACTORS

Intricacy	The difficulty of obtaining a solution.
Danger	The likelihood that failure will lead to disaster.
Depth	The quality of the roleplaying elicited by the events.
Technique	The use of good cinematography (ie. Foreshadowing, Cut Scenes, etc.).

COMPLEXITY LEVELS

Simple	This Subplot presented only minor obstacles, did not greatly endanger the Actors, and had only secondary significance to the story.
Average	This Subplot presented serious obstacles, placed the Actors in danger, and was a significant part of the story.
Complex	This Subplot presented numerous obstacles, placed the Actors in serious amounts of danger, and was a centerpiece of the story.
Convoluted	This Subplot presented layers of intrigue, placed the Actors in grave danger, and was a major part of the story.
Twisted	This Subplot induced paranoia and neurosis, sunk the Actors in danger way over their heads, was a major part of this story, and will probably take several more to deal with the aftereffects.

Plot Points

Simple	: 1 pt.
Average	: 2 pts.
Complex	: 3 pts.
Convoluted	: 4 pts.
Twisted	: 5 pts.

Personal Subplot	: +1 pt.	Main Plot	: +1 pt.
Long Term Subplot	: +1 pt.	Activated Flaw	: +1 pt.

The chart above is reproduced in the 'Theatrix Reference Sheet A', for your convenience.

Lets go through an example now, just to be sure this procedure makes sense. Lets say a group of Actors has just completed an Episode in which one of their Troupe Long Term Subplots has appeared. This Subplot became long and involved, and several of the characters ended up the worse for it. The Actors suggested several interesting Foreshadowing events, and one excellent Flashback, which were used by the Director. The roleplay was truly excellent, and was partly responsible for the length and involvement of the Subplot. The Director might then rate the Intricacy of the Subplot in question at Convoluted (4), the Danger at Complex (3), the Depth at Twisted (5), and the Technique at Convoluted (4). Averaging all four Rating Factors would give ...

$$(4 + 3 + 5 + 4) / 4 = 4.0$$

... for a Subplot Complexity of Convoluted (4), worth 4 Plot Points, plus an extra for being a Long Term Subplot, for a total of 5 Plot Points apiece for everyone involved. Just like judging a diving contest.

Zero Point Subplots

Although it would be unusual, it's possible for a Subplot to be so easy that it's not worth any points. The Director may give any of the Rating Factors a score of zero, ie. not worth mentioning. If a Subplot's Complexity doesn't average out to at least a '1.0', **before** rounding, then it's worth no points, even if it's a Long Term or Personal Subplot. If the Main Plot of an Episode turns out to be worth no Plot Points by this rule, then you're missing something important.

Beating the Averages

Please note that the 'average' Subplot will always be worth 2 Plot Points (3, if it's a Main Plot, etc.). We mean it, that's the average. You might be thinking that 2 or 3 Plot Points an Episode is too few for proper use of the improvisational rules, or for satisfying character growth (see the next chapter, titled '**Epilogue**'), and you'd be right. The answer is to expect better than the **average** from your Troupe. The only way your Actors are going to do any better, is by coming up with Subplots for their characters, and neat twists and suggestions for the Main Plot. Help them to do this by demanding it. Demand excellence, and when you get it, raise the stakes by realizing that what's now **average** for your Troupe, has just gone up.

Downtime

Downtime is the time that passes within the world of the Chronicle between Episodes. Characters have lives that go on even when the stories don't. The Actors may describe what their personas do with this downtime. This can be a good time for solo adventures (Episodes for one), or writing out a story describing a Subplot for your character. Such solo adventures or written works are worth Plot Points equal to the number given for regular Episodes, and often make good material from which to draw future Episodes for the whole Troupe. The Director is in charge of how much time she will allow to pass between each Episode, if any. But regardless of the length of any downtime, we suggest you allow only one Subplot or small solo adventure, per Actor, per downtime opportunity.

Pregaming

When a new character is created, and embarks upon her first Episode, she'll unfortunately have no Plot Points. That role will have no way to Activate either her Personality Traits, Descriptors, or Statements until she earns some points. This can certainly be just the feel you're looking for. However, if you feel that it's more

appropriate for the characters to begin the Chronicle with a few Plot Points in hand, then we suggest giving them some. Or, you could make the Actors earn their starting points by Pregaming their characters.

Pregaming involves creating a brief solo Episode for each character, dealing with that persona's past, just before she's about to enter the Chronicle. This solo Episode can be written out, or roleplayed through normally. Each character will earn the appropriate number of Plot Points based upon the Complexity of their Pregame, with special emphasis placed upon the amount of trouble this Subplot leaves hanging to enter into the Chronicle proper. This Pregame will give your Actors a better feel for their characters' pasts, as well as providing them with a few Plot Points with which to meet their first Episode.

APPLAUSE

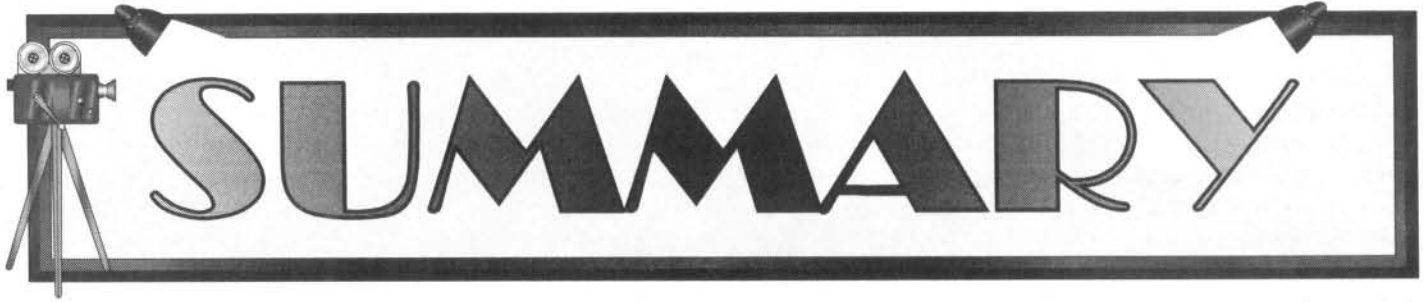
Somewhere among the many reasons for becoming an Actor, and I'll bet usually near the top, right after the money, must be the fame. In roleplaying, however, the odds of making any hard cash are pretty slim (although your purchase of this book is helping us along the way, thank you). For that matter, you're probably not going to end up on the cover of any magazines, either. But like great Actors, you can still bask in the approval of your audience, which, however small, is important. In roleplaying, we **are** each other's audience. So when one of your compatriots does something you like, some believable piece of acting, or a quick upstaging maneuver, let them know it with a little applause, a giggle, or a complement. You can never overate the power of encouragement.

JELLYBEAN DIRECTING

A quick tip for Directors. Keep a bag of jellybeans, M&M's, peanuts, tofu, or whatever you like by your side. When the Actors do something to deserve it, throw them a treat. We know that this sort of pavlovian trick may be a little heavy handed, but many of the greatest Actors of the past have been trained in just this way. You remember Lassie, or Flipper, or Rin Tin Tin ...

THE BASIC RULE

Plot Points encourage roleplay and involvement. Both improvisation and Plot Points empower the characters, allowing them vital niches within the Chronicle regardless of any differences in their raw power. Actors are then free to portray the roles they're interested in, without worrying about whose character can throw around the most weight. We've found that this system works well. If it doesn't work for you, then don't use it. But do find a system that does.

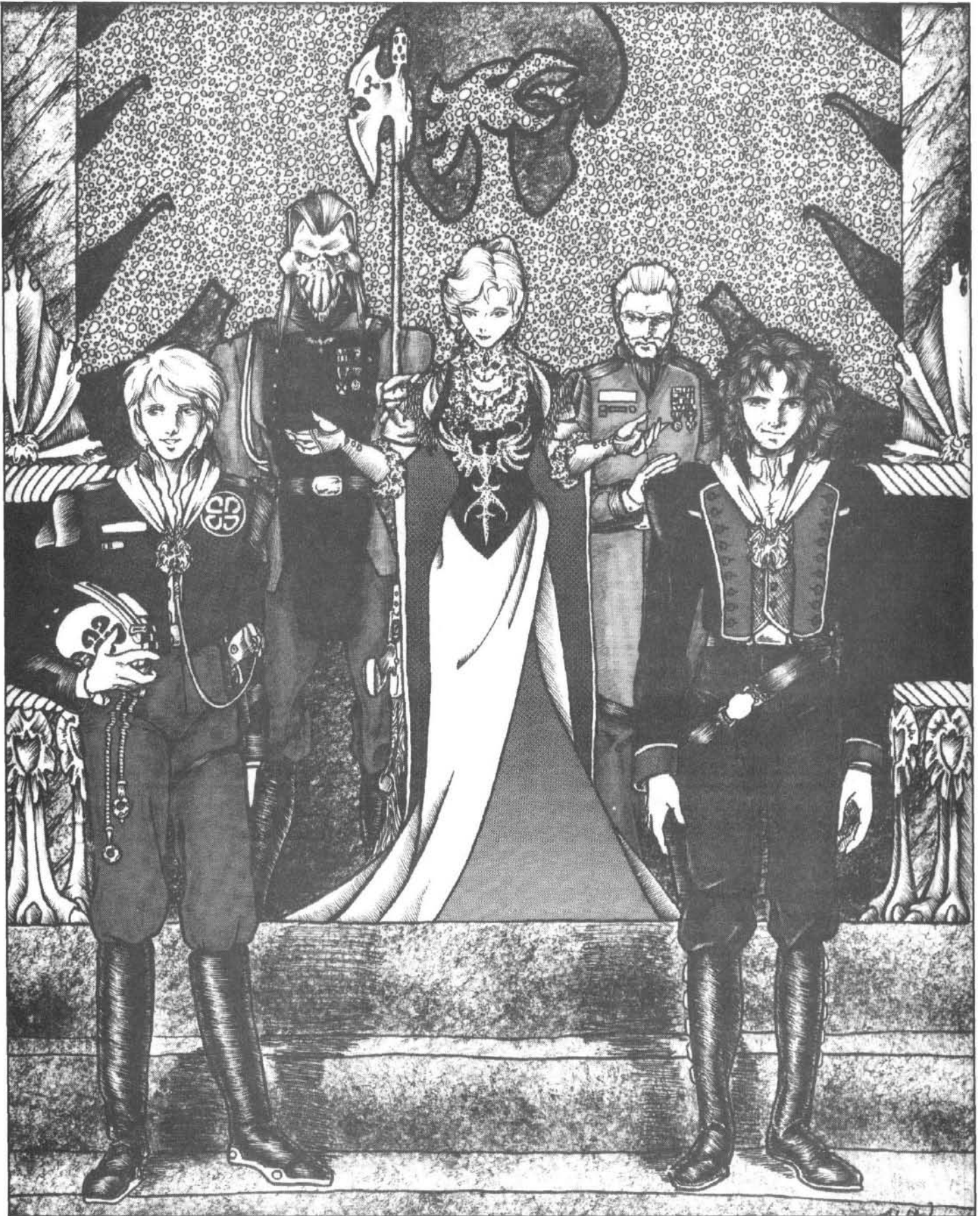


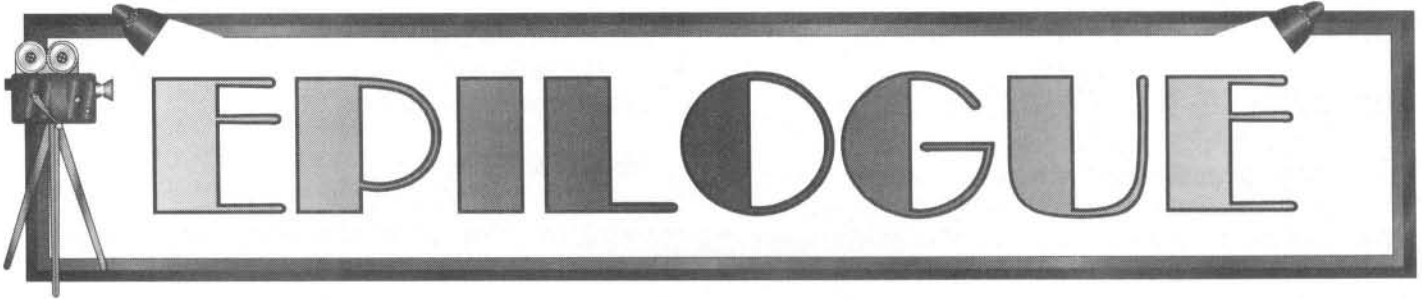
GLOSSARY

- Activation** - The expenditure of Plot Points in order to empower a character to alter the fabric of an Episode's plotline.
- Conflict** - see Drama.
- Distributed Directing** - Blurring the lines between the roles of Actor and Director, allowing the Actors to take control of portions of the plot.
- Downtime** - The time that occurs between Episodes.
- Drama** - see Conflict.
- Improvisation** - To compose, perform, or create on the spur of the moment.
- Information** - Any communication which serves to further define the Stage.
- Macroscopic** - Pertaining to the whole, or from the larger perspective.
- Main Plot** - The plot to which all other plots in the Episode are related.
- Microscopic** - Pertaining to the minutiae of events that make up the whole.
- Process** - The ongoing interaction of descriptions and ideas which comprises the roleplay during each Scene.
- Statement** - Descriptions of a character's knowledge, memories, or perceptions, in that character's own voice, and from that character's perspective.
- Structure** - The framework of plot, character, and dramatic necessity that holds the action of the story together.
- Subplot** - Any story that occurs along side, while still remaining secondary to the Main Plot.
- Troupe Style Roleplaying** - see Distributed Directing, then multiply by a factor of three.

SUMMARY

- ☑ **Information** - Improvisation relies upon ...
 - ⇒ **The Incomplete Moment** - The time between the description of some action and when the Result is actually realized.
 - ⇒ **The Vague Sensory Perception** - Any perception whose description is incomplete, requiring time and/or investigation to be fully realized.
 - ⇒ **The Pliability of Fact** - Through the use of Statements.
- ☑ **Statements** - Provide a means for the Actors to directly effect the ongoing process of the story. Remember that an Actor's Primary Descriptor may effect her Statements as follows ...
 - ⇒ **Disapproval** - A character may Disapprove any other Statement, about any piece of Information that falls within the domain of their own Primary Descriptor.
 - ⇒ **Activation** - If any character makes a Statement covered by their own Primary Descriptor, then that is the only Statement in the field which may be Activated with a Plot Point.
- ☑ **Props** - Actors are free to improvise any non-dramatic prop that's appropriate to the Stage.
- ☑ **Veto** - The Director has final approval over any and all improvisations.
- ☑ **Plot Points** - Every one of those little suckers should be precious. Hard to earn. Harder to spend. And always worth the expenditure. A list of all the ways in which Plot Points may be earned and spent is located on 'Theatrix Reference Sheet A'.





What shall it profit a man if he gain the whole world and lose his soul?

- Jesus of Nazareth

EPILOGUE

The curtains have drawn to a close, the stage is empty, and the lights are turned low. There's a wistful feeling that washes over you. A touch of sadness that it's all over, and a touch of anticipation as you wait to begin the drama anew. Theatre is an odd creation. A balancing act between comfort, stagnation, and metamorphosis. The changes that our favorite heroes and heroines go through draw us back time and again to their stories. If these characterizations don't grow and deepen, then they lack humanity and die of their own shallowness. If their transformations are too severe, then we lose sight of the roles we loved, the very thing we identified with. This same dilemma will confront you. Each Actor must work with the Director to ensure interesting character growth that won't endanger the integrity of the Chronicle. Handling the changes that will accrue to your persona over time will be the focus of this chapter.

PACING

Pacing the growth and change of the Main Cast is the best way to insure a long life for your Chronicle. This is less of a problem in a Theatrix game than it might be in many other roleplaying systems. In Theatrix, a character does not need to be powerful in order to be competent. The Plot Points are empowered, so the characters don't have to be. Plot Points build a lot of rewards into the act of moving through the story itself, and relieve some of the pressure to press characters on to ever greater heights of raw power. This means that you can direct most of the focus of character growth onto the characterization itself, where it ought to be. This also means that any real change in power, ie. an increase in the Rankings of a role's Traits, can be paced more slowly without killing off the fun of

roleplaying. This is important in a game where you're allowed to create characters that are already very competent, fully developed, and sometimes very powerful. Creating such characters obviously leaves less room for your character's personal growth, before such growth starts putting pressure on the bounds of the Chronicle's Setting.

PLOT POINT TOTALS

In order to properly pace your Chronicle, you'll require a measure of the progress that the Main Cast has made within its confines. It should now come as no surprise that we'll be using Plot Points as the basis of this measure. Each Actor will keep two separate records of her Plot Points earned. The first record will be a point pool, out of which the Actor may spend Plot Points to Activate her Personality Traits, Descriptors, and Statements. The second record will be a running total of all Plot Points accumulated, known as a character's Plot Point Total (tricky name).

SCALING THE CHRONICLE

Chronicles have growth paths uniquely their own. From our point of view, the growth of the Main Cast is simply the reflection of a maturing Chronicle. Every Chronicle has a starting point, a course of change, and a conceivable end. There will come a time, if your Chronicle exists for long enough, when the Main Cast has achieved a position of full maturity within your Setting. Continuing beyond this point stretches too far the dramatic elements that contained each Episode. When you begin to develop a Chronicle, part of your task will be to envision its inevitable demise, to sketch out the conflict which will drive the Chronicle towards this conclusion, and to de-

velop a starting point for your Main Cast that's both satisfying, and provides a long life for the Chronicle.

RESCALING THE CHRONICLE

Simply because your Chronicle has reached the end of its useful life-span within your present Setting doesn't mean that it has to end, especially if everyone's still actually enjoying it. If your Chronicle has outgrown your Setting, and you'd like to find new life for your Chronicle, then ReScale the Setting. This will usually involve UpScaling the Setting so that the Main Cast of the Chronicle looks once again like beginners in a wider world. For example, if you'd been using the Setting of four color comic book superheroes who are guardians of a major metropolis, and your Main Cast has outgrown their street level petty criminal enemies, but the Troupe still wishes to continue the Chronicle, then it's time to UpScale the Setting. How about the federal government taking notice of your little band of heroes and deciding to recruit them for the start of its new, 'Federally United Core of the Knights of Unrivaled Protection', a federally funded group of super-beings responsible for the protection of all citizens? Suddenly your group is presented with government regulations and interference, new super-enemies they're unprepared to meet, a super-base that's unfamiliar and unfinished, etc. An instant Setting retread.

BOTTOM OF THE HEAP

Theatrix allows for the creation of very competent roles, with complete backgrounds and a lot of experience. However, in order to get the most out of each of your Settings, the Troupe should always start as absolute beginners within that context. This is not to say that they won't be powerful, just that they should start a good deal less powerful than the threats which they'll face. So, for example, if your Troupe is a band of powerful wizards in a magical medieval realm, then they should be **starting** powerful wizards. If your Troupe is a bunch of Galaxy spanning superheroes wielding cosmic powers, then they should be **starting** Galaxy spanning superheroes. Drama is about conflict, and conflict involves overcoming threat. So whether the arena is to be political, physical, or intellectual, your Troupe should start each Chronicle facing a world of greater challenges.

TOP OF THE HEAP

Plot Points, as discussed under 'Improvisation', are earned through participation in the Chronicle's plot. Since plot is the medium of every Chronicle's growth, Plot Point Totals may become a measure of a Chronicle's maturity, and conversely, a measure of the maturity of the

Main Cast. We therefore use each role's Plot Point Total as a limit upon that role's immediate growth. The more Plot Points earned, the more a role will be allowed to grow towards maturity within the Chronicle.

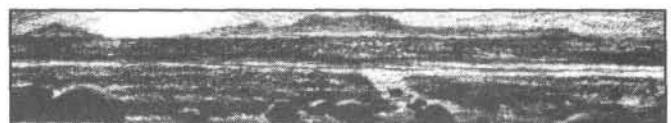
HIGH WATER MARK

This whole system of character advancement depends on two things. The first is the Director's knowledge of where the Chronicle is going, and the second is each Actor's knowledge of where her individual character is going. Neither of these concepts needs to be set in stone, but no matter how fluid these goals become, they ought to be constantly flowing towards some foreseeable point on the horizon. Both the Main Cast and the Chronicle should mature together, apace, and this requires an idea of where you believe things will be ending up.

ADVANCEMENT SUBPLOTS

Characters in books and movies don't have natural learning curves. We, in our mundane existences, grow and learn through practice and hard work. The boring way. Characters in books and movies get to live dramatically. Changes to these roles are always a function of Subplot. Theatrix characters develop in ways which further the plot, or accrue changes due to the plot. Any Subplot which advances a Main Cast persona, in any significant way, is termed an Advancement Subplot. Advancement Subplots may be instigated by any member of the Troupe, be it an Actor, or the Director. Examples of Advancement Subplots could include infusion with strange alien powers, beneficial technological accidents, crash study courses, knowledge from the reading of forbidden tomes, the acquiring of strange artifacts, the assumption of new positions of power, etc. Any plotline that significantly improves a character's Attributes, Skills, Abilities, Descriptors, or position within the Chronicle.

Advancement Subplots may have a dual purpose, and they may act as both an Advancement Subplot for one or more of the cast, while acting as a Personal or Troupe Subplot for any of the **other** cast members involved. Any role that receives positive alterations due to an Advancement Subplot, receives them in lieu of the normal Plot Point reward (that character earns **no** Plot Points for that Subplot). This requires that each Actor engage their role in Subplots that do not advance their character, in order to accrue Plot Points to buy the right to engage in Subplots that do. We'll discuss this more fully under 'Pushing the Envelope', coming up in this chapter.



COMPLEXITY

There's a limit also to the amount of benefit which any one Main Cast persona may receive from any one Advancement Subplot. In general terms, and this is as close as we're going to get to a definition, a Main Cast character may be altered in ways no more Complex than the Advancement Subplot which produces the alterations. In other words, a Simple Advancement Subplot may only make Simple changes to a character. While a Complex Advancement Subplot may make Complex changes. Yes, we are simply dropping in the Director's lap the awesome responsibility of judging what level of Complexity is required, in order to make the changes an Actor wishes for her persona. This subject is so particular to each Setting, each Chronicle, and each Troupe, that you're just going to have to work it out on your own. Don't sweat this too much though. Theatrix is a very open ended system that involves a lot of free discussion between all the participants. The entire Troupe should be deciding what they want for their Chronicle, how hard it is to advance their characters, and at what pace that should occur.

THE FORMS OF POWER

Character advancement comes in many forms, and it would be a mistake to assume that only increases in Trait Ranks should be counted. The Actors' roles are capable of growing along many positive dimensions, other than those represented in numerical form on a character sheet. A lot of advancement will probably occur in the social and political structure of the Setting in which the Chronicle resides, and this is as valid a goal for an Advancement Subplot as Rank modifications (see the 'Advancement Guidelines' chart, on the next page). In fact, we suggest that as Director, you make the most of this sort of role development, and leave the addition of new Skills, Abilities, and Descriptors, for the times when they're truly necessary and appreciated.

PLOT DEVICES

Plot Devices are objects, or sequences of events, or Setting conventions, that serve as a tool for creating alterations in the direction of a plotline. Some examples of Plot Devices include the alien artifact that temporarily provides enough power to defeat the villain, the unseen Secret Service men that come in at the last minute to save the day, after you've done all the 'work', or the consistent loss of your handgun in random accidents, forcing you to always fight the enemy with martial arts. Anything that's used as a 'tool' by the Director can be considered a Plot Device. Sometimes Plot Devices will **temporarily** grant additional power to one of the Main Cast. Sometimes a

Plot Device will **temporarily** strip a character of power. By 'power', we mean Traits and their associated Ranks, social standing, business holdings, political offices, etc. By 'temporary', we mean **any** reasonable amount of time that's limited in duration. Just so long as eventually, the character effected is returned to a position approximately equivalent to the one she left. Plot Devices are a Director's licence to break all the rules surrounding character advancement, for the purposes of the plot, as long as those breaks are temporary in nature. These temporary, but sometimes radical alterations to the characters, can be the basis for some very interesting and Complex plotlines. Think about it.

ACTOR'S CONTROL

Anyone may initiate an Advancement Subplot, or alter a present Subplot to allow for a character's advancement, within the limits of your Troupe's use of Distributed Directing. However, the amount of advancement allowed each Main Cast character will be limited by their Plot Point Totals, as we'll discuss under 'Pushing the Envelope', below. Since every person's role is important to them, and since each Actor must work for their persona's advancement, each Actor should have final say over any permanent alterations made to their persona. There will be times when the Director wishes to permanently alter a character, and a temporary Plot Device simply won't do. However, using an Actor's hard earned Plot Point Total in this way shouldn't be done lightly. There will be times when someone wishes to keep the exact nature of an Advancement Subplot's changes a mystery, in order not to spoil a surprise. This is fine, as long as when those changes finally appear, the Actor portraying the altered role is happy with them.

PUSHING THE ENVELOPE

We've said that each role's Plot Point Total will act as a limit upon their stage of development within the Chronicle. We've said that for this to work, everyone needs to have some idea of where the Chronicle is headed, and where their individual personas are headed. All this is true. The Director also needs a feel for how far along her Chronicle is at any given time, the number of Plot Points it has taken to get there, and the number of Plot Points 'left' in the Chronicle before it ends, or needs to be ReScaled. Basically, the Actors may use Advancement Subplots to mature their roles apace with the maturation of the Chronicle, as represented by their Plot Point Totals. So, if the Chronicle is 25% of the way to completion, then each of the Main cast should be approximately 25% of the way towards their maturity. The tricky part is in knowing how many Plot Points a Chronicle is good for, what percentage of that goal is represented by

each Actors current Plot Point Total, how developed each of the Actors' personas are, and therefore, how much more development they should be allowed at the present time.

Unfortunately, we're probably not going to be able to offer as much advice here as you'd wish. As mentioned under 'Complexity', in this chapter, all the above factors vary far too much with each particular Setting, Chronicle, and Troupe. We can give some rough guidelines though, which we provide in the chart to your right. This chart lists a few typical Settings, the number of Plot Points that would carry you through 10% of a Chronicle in that Setting, and the sort of Advancement Subplot that might allow. However, we caution you to take these numbers with a grain of salt. They're rough, and you're just going to have to develop your own sense of what is theatrically appropriate for each of your Chronicles.

We'd like to note that Plot Point Totals provide a **guide** to pacing the development of characters along side that of the Chronicle. They don't **demand** such development. Actors may choose not to develop their personas until there's a large gap between their present maturity, and their allowable potential. This larger gap makes room for leaps of sudden development. Other Actors will prefer a slow steady pace, developing their characters a little at a time, whenever they're able. Each persona's Plot Point Total only acts as a cap on such growth. The method of development is left up to the individual Actor, the needs of the Chronicle, and the preferences of the Director.

THE BASIC RULE

This is a storytelling game. If you don't like all the numbers associated with the last two chapters ('**Improvisation**' and '**Epilogue**'), then don't feel obligated to use them. A few of the options are ...

- ⇒ Use our magnificently crafted and carefully balanced system, just as you see it here.
- ⇒ Toss out the numbers, and allow the Actors to alter their characters in any way that suits your Chronicle.

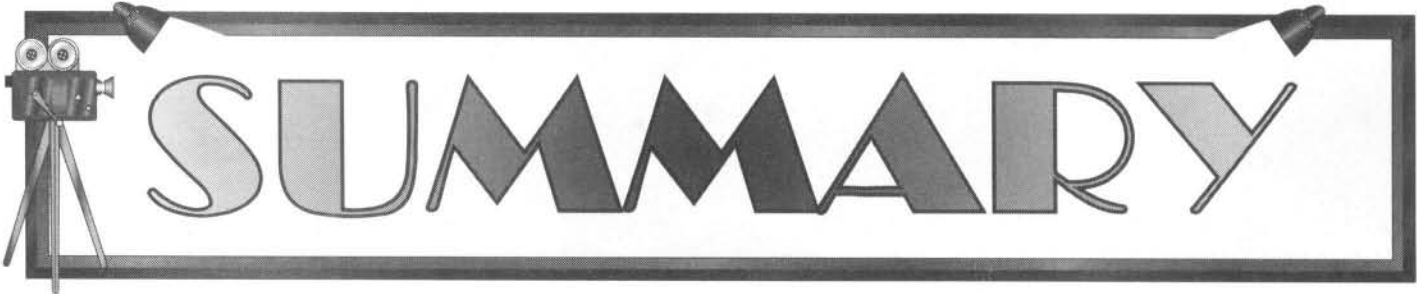
Advancement Guidelines

SETTING TYPE	Pts. / 10%	ADVANCEMENT / 10%
High Fantasy	12 pts.	Acquiring a sword of power - or Being granted a Barony - or Learning the secrets of Alchemy
Superhero	14 pts.	Altering your force field's shape - or Getting funds for the new base - or Given the title of Sorcerer Supreme
Space Opera	16 pts.	Becoming a student of the force - or Winning a starship in a bet - or Promotion to captain of the flagship
Cyberpunk	16 pts.	Learning the art of Dim Mak - or Having your single go platinum - or Finding the backdoor in a database
Low Fantasy	18 pts.	Finding an elven sword - or Being granted Knighthood - or Learning the rudiments of Alchemy
Science Fiction	20 pts.	Earning mercantile trading rights - or Increasing jump drive efficiency - or Gaining entrance to the sisterhood
Gothic Horror	20 pts.	Becoming a sharp shooter - or Finding the tome of Ibn Hazbad - or Getting that grant money at last
Pulp	22 pts.	Hiring a protector and chauffeur - or Learning to fly a barnstormer - or Winning world renown as a writer

- ⇒ Use the Plot Point system described in '**Improvisation**', but don't bother with making the Actors pay for altering their roles.
- ⇒ Don't use Plot Points during your Episodes, but assign Plot Points afterward for the purpose of character advancement only, based on how well the Main Cast did during the Episode.

In other words, just because we don't mind the numbers, and even appreciate how they guide our Episodes, that doesn't mean you need to bother with them.





GLOSSARY

Plot Point Total - The running total of all Plot Points accumulated by a character. Used for judging character advancement opportunities.

Scaling the Chronicle - The act of determining the scope of a Chronicle in relation to its Setting, Episodes, and characters.

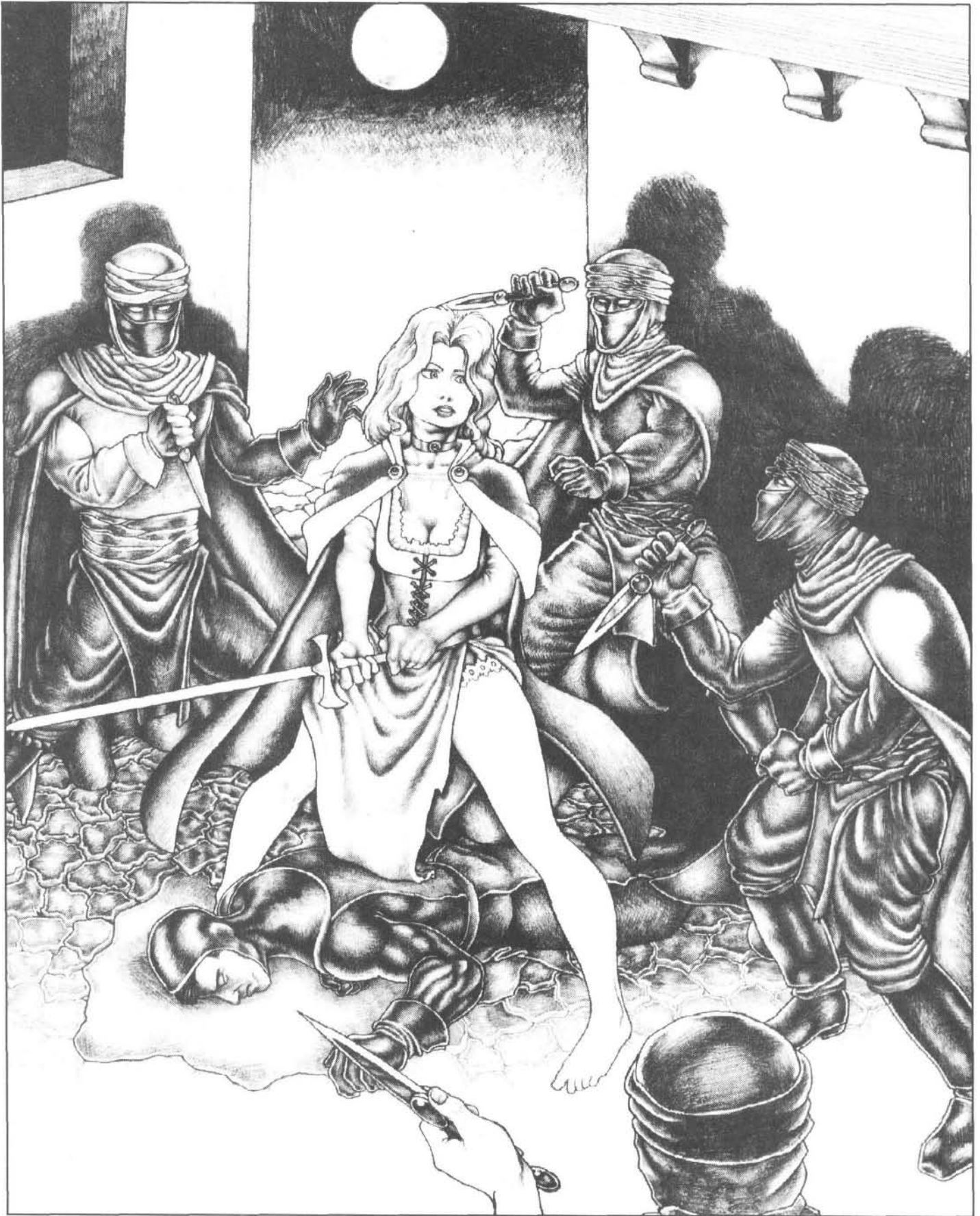
Advancement Subplot - A Subplot worth no Plot Points and used only to initiate changes in a character.

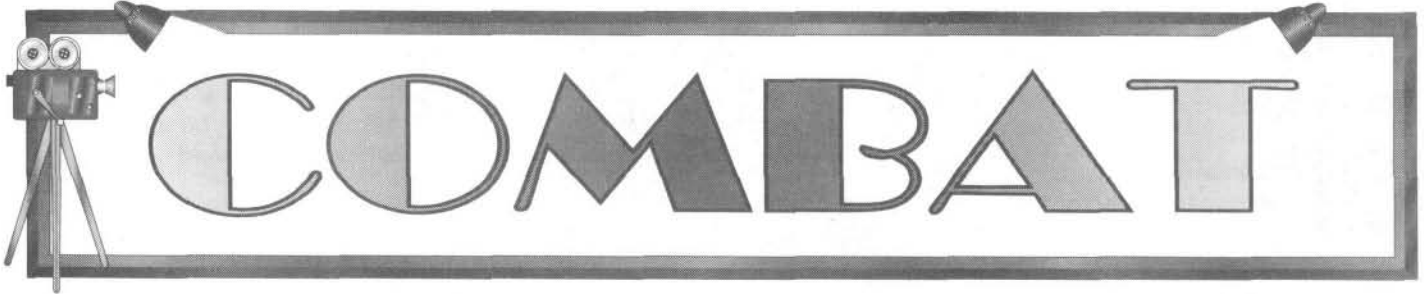
Plot Device - see Deum ex Machina (the machinations of God). Any object, plotline, character, etc., used by the Director to accomplish an act by its mere presence, ie. an accomplished fact.

Rescaling the Chronicle - The act of altering the Chronicle so as to make it a new beginning for otherwise matured characters.

SUMMARY

- ☑ **Scaling the Chronicle** - This is a lot like trying to nail jello to the wall, but it does have a purpose. The important things to keep a handle on, if you want to know where you're going with character advancement issues, are ...
 - ⇒ The start of the Chronicle, where everyone, no matter how powerful, is a beginner.
 - ⇒ The end of the Chronicle, to keep you on course (even if it changes constantly as you approach).
 - ⇒ The total number of Plot Points you believe your Chronicle is good for.
 - ⇒ Where you believe your characters should be at the end of the Chronicle.
 - ⇒ The pace at which you wish to travel from the start to the end.
- ☑ **Advancement Subplots** - All these guidelines are really our way of saying that you should think of character advancement as the total growth of the character. This is not about how many Skills your character has, nor at what Rank she has them, but rather about the extension of roleplaying into the ongoing life of the character. Advancement can and should take the form of not only Skill Ranks, but of social, political, personal, interpersonal, economical, and spiritual changes. It's the character's **life** that advances.





**Can this cockpit hold the vasty fields of France? Or may we
cram within this wooden O the very casques that did affright
the air at Agincourt?**

- William Shakespeare

COMBAT

So here we are. Bet you couldn't wait. Now you'll really get to show off your stuff. Here's the part of the story where you get to swing from the chandelier, one punch the bad guy, grab the girl, jump out the window, and dive into the water below. Here's where you'll prevail against insurmountable odds by the skin of your teeth, and look great doing it. Right?

Wrong! Combat is messy, somebody always gets hurt, and it's never as easy as it looks. In every fight you're going to take the risk of being damaged. Fist fights tear muscles and break bones. Every bullet, no matter how small, is going to spoil your day if it hits you. Combat is a gritty and terrible thing that every sane man avoids at all costs.

But then again, who wants to create stories like that? You're here to create a fantasy as large as your imagination. If you had your druthers, wouldn't there be a chandelier in every fight scene? Some of your most satisfying conflicts will be during stories in which the characters get to do absolutely superhuman things. That's what the cinema is all about.

Well, sometimes. The best part of an Episode will often come during those combat scenes that get frighteningly close to reality. Nothing makes you feel more suddenly alive, which is, after all, the real reason for creating these fantasies.

What we're trying to say through these slightly schizophrenic examples is that every combat can be broken down into a few key elements. These elements must be blended appropriately for the unique requirements of each Scene, Episode, Chronicle, and Setting. All these factors come together to give every combat its own flavor. This chapter will present a theatrical method for allowing you to encompass all the various flavors of combat, and to choose the one that's right each time. As

long as you're sensitive to the needs of your story, and those of your Actors, you'll create drama they won't forget.

IMPORTANCE

Every Scene in a story should have a point. Sometimes that point will be combat, and sometimes it won't. If combat does occur, then the Director has to decide if it's important enough to be portrayed in detail. If the fight in question is not central to the Scene, then that combat may be portrayed in a simpler manner. Allow fewer of the Actor's decisions to carry more of the action. Rather than asking the Actors to account for each detail of their movements, fill in the action by storytelling. In Theatrix, the Actors need never wish they were doing something else, because each Scene may take as much or as little time as you want it to. So if a combat should be taking less time, then get it over with and move on to something more interesting. Sometimes this may minimize challenges, but why attempt to hurt the Actors with every little fight? Some combats are there simply to act as a foil for the Skills of the Main Cast. Some combats are traps, and simply require the Actors to submit to either superior numbers, or superior Skills. Sometimes this gives the participants in the combat less of an opportunity to beat the odds by thinking ingeniously, but that's also appropriate for some Scenes.

If, however, a Scene is to be centered around a particular combat or conflict, then take the time to do it right. Use the flowcharts as a loose guide. Draw things out a bit and let your Actors enjoy the action to the fullest. Paint your Results in exquisite detail. Use your favorite cinematic combats as a guide. Use all the tricks, and allow the villains to improvise with the Stage. Dumb luck can also play a part in combat, allowing the Director to exploit unfair possibilities to prolong the tension. Have fun. When

they're done right, your combats will get the Actors' adrenalin pumping.

ROUGHNESS

The importance of a particular combat should also effect how serious the Director allows it to be. If the fight in question is incidental to the Main Plot, then you probably won't want to hurt the Actors too much. After all, if you kill them off in a minor bar room brawl, then there will be no one left to see the rest of your brilliantly crafted story. On the other hand, if this is **the** confrontation, the one your Episode has been building towards, then you should take off the kid gloves and really make them earn it.

SCALING TRAITS

The Scaling of Traits has effects both upon the determination of Success and Failure in combat, and upon the determination of its Results (ie., the portrayal of the events). We'll deal with Success and Failure first.

Success and Failure

The Scaling of Traits acts as a cap upon the possible Success and Failure of actions. In other words, there are some differences in Trait Ranks that will simply require that one side Succeeds, while the other does not. Returning to a previous example, a normal man simply Fails when he attempts to stop a rushing locomotive train. Similarly, under most Scaling, there is no way to fairly win an arm wrestling match against a Strength of '10.0', when you've got a Strength of '3.0'.

Results

Scaling also effects the portrayal of combat, by determining how grandiose or mundane that portrayal should be. For example, using a fairly 'normal' Scale, a persona with a Strength and Stamina of '3.0', (that of an average human), hit in the gut by an antagonist with a Strength of '8.0' (that of a power lifter), will most likely crumple to the floor, and perhaps even be knocked out by the blow. But on a 'superheroic four color comic book' Scale, the persona with the Strength and Stamina of '3.0' (still average human), will probably be knocked out of the ball park and instantly killed, by a punch delivered by someone with a Strength of '8.0' (now capable of lifting buildings). Basically, the steeper your Scale, the more impressive the descriptions pulled off the Resolution Flowcharts should be. Take a look now at the Combat Resolution Flowchart. The last entry on that chart, from the outcome 'Let them know they've done well', at Very Capable, reads ...

"Kiyaaaaa!" Yeah, right pal. Crack! ... Thud! Nice impact.

This is a fine description for a 'normal' Scale. However, on a 'superheroic' Scale, you would need to modify the example, ReScaling it to read something like this ...

"Kiyaaaaa!" Yeah, right pal. Crack!!! Sky, ground, bounce, bounce, bounce, ... Building! Thoom! Nice impact!

SETTING

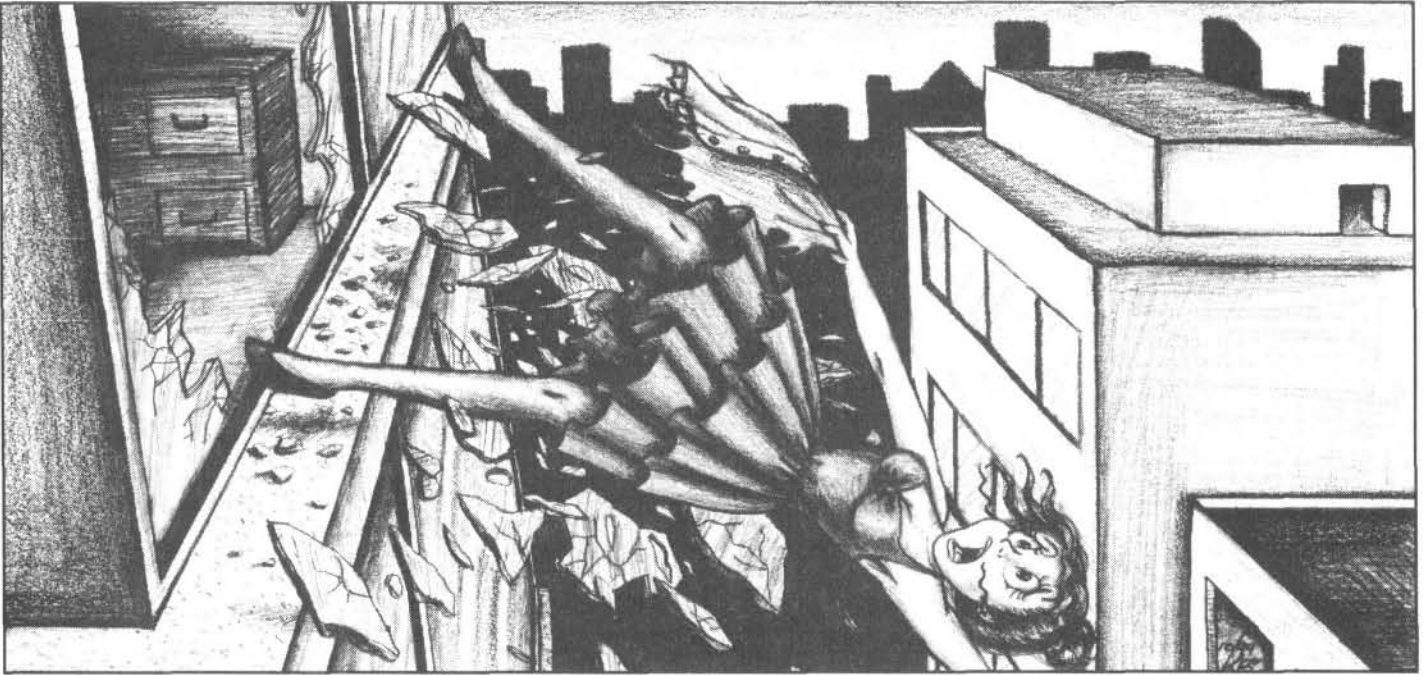
Like Scaling, the Setting of a particular Chronicle also has a big impact upon the determination of Success and Failure, and the portrayal of the combats within it. The Setting determines the 'code' of fighting, which is the 'feel' of combat agreed upon by the Troupe, ie. what is and is not appropriate for each conflict. This includes what weapons are appropriate, how they are used, and when, as well as how damage is handled, ie. graphically, realistically, or more heroically. We'll handle each of these factors now in more detail.

Flavor

What flavor of combat is allowed, or approved of, in your Setting? For example, is it more appropriate to swing from the chandeliers, or to keep both feet firmly planted on the ground? Is it more appropriate in your genre to shoot your opponent while he's barely visible, or to get up close and personal? Is it more desirable to kick them while they're down, or to always give a fallen foe the chance to surrender? An Actor attempting actions which move against the grain of the Setting should be more prone to Failure. Similarly, an Actor acting in accordance with the mores of a Setting should be prone to greater Success.

Weapons

Such mores can also determine how a weapon is used, and how useful that weapon is. For example, in a swashbuckling story, the combatants shoot their flintlocks as they move into sword range, more for dramatic effect than anything else. Alternatively, in a modern war story, your automatic rifle toting characters are going to laugh at anybody swinging a melee weapon. However, in a fantasy Setting, a simple bow is the closest any character is going to come to long ranged combat. Most Chronicles have fairly strong rules; a sort of physics of combat. The trick is to decide, with your Troupe, roughly where your Chronicle lies. Once again, any Actor using a weapon in a manner congruent with the 'code' of a Setting should have an easier time of Success. Any Actor ignoring the 'code' of the Setting should be met more often by Failure.

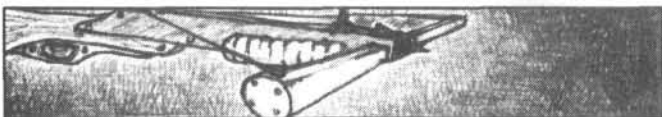


Damage

The 'code' of combat also determines how damage is portrayed in each Chronicle. It dictates how much damage should occur from a blow, how much that damage should effect each persona, and how such damage should be represented. For example, do the characters get really hurt whenever they lock horns, or does the real pounding only come during the big fight Scenes? Do the characters arrive at the end of each Episode wearing every scratch and bruise, or can they put on dinner jackets and head out for the evening, every hair still in place? Should the Actors feel the punishment endured by their roles, or does it take major blood loss for them to notice something wrong? All of these are obviously extremes, but the Troupe's design of each Setting should juggle these concepts to help imbue every Chronicle with an appropriate feel.

ENVIRONMENT

Along with Scaling and Setting, you'll also have to take into account the environment in which each combat occurs. The environment of each conflict will dictate the types of maneuvers allowed by your Stage, as well as the types of props available for use by the Actors. We'll start with a discussion of the Stage, and then move on to a discussion of props.



The Stage

You should always maintain a clear mental image of the Stage. Sometimes making a few quick notes or sketches will help. This will allow you to be consistent with your rulings on the Actors' actions. If the Actors are having trouble imagining a Scene, then it's probably a good idea to draw a quick map of the Stage, showing where the Actors are in relation to the surrounding buildings, cars, and other props. Remember that this is a communal fantasy, so you've got to be sure that, to some extent, all the participants are living inside the same mental space.

Props

As discussed under the '**Improvisation**' chapter, the Actors are allowed to declare the presence of props as part of their improvisational roleplay. Good use of the Stage can create Successes, especially during combat. The Director is always the final arbiter of the appropriateness of any improvisation. However, we urge a certain relaxed leniency towards the use of improvisations which are in harmony with the Chronicle. Simply put, if a particular prop is appropriate to the present environment, and within the 'code' of the Setting, then we urge you to allow that prop. If the prop just doesn't seem plausible, then give the Actor a chance to rationalize its existence. If the Actor can't produce a believable explanation, **then** go ahead and disallow that improvisation.

Some improvisational props are inherent in the description of the Stage. For example, picking up a log to use as a bludgeon when the fight is taking place in a forest.

Some props are less ubiquitous, but can be just as vital. Both the Actors and the Director should try looking for the less obvious improvisations, if only because they're often the most useful. Remember that one of the best ways to impress the Director during a battle, and to maximize your chance of Success, is with the interesting use of a prop. The Director should also endeavor to include the environment and its props in the description of her flowchart Results. Remember all the obstacles on the Stage, ie. the ledges, windows, furniture, protruding objects, etc. These should be included in both the actions and Results of the Main and Supporting Casts. Including the environment in each of your descriptions will make the Scene come alive in your Actors' minds.

HANDS, SWORDS, GUNS, AND AUTOMOBILES

We're going to start getting into some real detail now, so let's begin with a few definitions. In our view, there are three major types of combat; unarmed, armed, and ranged. All of these may occur as either vehicular or non-vehicular combat. In unarmed combat a character has only her own body to rely upon as a weapon. In armed combat the character will be using an implement of some sort, such as a sword, a whip, or a chainsaw. Both armed and unarmed conflicts are types of melee combat, where the cast get to hammer it out face to face. The third major type of combat is ranged. This is where a character has access to some sort of weapon or ability that allows her to carry out combat at a distance. Both guns and magically

generated lightning bolts may be classed as ranged combat.

In non-vehicular combat the cast will be using their own feet to move them around the Stage. For this reason, the fight is likely to be contained within a relatively small space. During vehicular combat the characters will be riding in, or on, a moving 'Stage'. What happens if a persona falls off of her vehicle? What happens if the vehicle runs out of road? What if the combat takes place on more than one vehicle, and an Actor wishes her role to jump back and forth between them? As you can see, the type of combat that the Actors choose to engage in can have a dramatic effect on the feel of each Scene. Each type of combat has a particular pace, and its own methods of portrayal within the Chronicle.

Always remember that the various types of combat can be combined. If a fight Scene only involves two characters in a field swinging swords at each other, that's fine. But imagine the impact of a Scene where two combatants fight for survival on top of a runaway train, one armed with a four foot sword, the other equipped with only her wits, while a third party takes high caliber pot shots from a nearby helicopter. Which combat do you think would be more fun to portray?

CHOREOGRAPHY

Most of the following sections have been condensed onto 'Theatrix Reference Sheet C' for your convenience.

In many other roleplaying systems you generally describe your modes of attack with such heart pounding



descriptions as, 'I swing my sword at the guy.' All that this will kill is the mood. This is **Theatrix**, so you're going to need to use a lot more dramatic license than that. In **Theatrix** you describe your attacks with descriptions more like 'I wait for his swing, parry it over my head with my shield, and take a full swipe with my mace, aiming for his legs in order to sweep them out from under him.' Yeah, the second description is a little longer, but we feel it's well worth the wait. Just remember to have fun and you'll do all right. Not only that, but if you're not having fun, the Director is instructed to lean on you hard. No acting, no action, **no Successes**.

FIGHTING STYLES

While it may be more fun to embellish in combats, it's sometimes hard to do. Especially for those of us who lack basic training in modern and historic weapon's tactics. So we're going to give you a basic framework, off of which you may roleplay through almost any fight, with almost any weapons. The basic options in any **Theatrix** combat are **Plain Fighting**, **All Out Attack**, **Full Defense**, and **Trickery**.

Plain Fighting

With **Plain Fighting** you're simply doing whatever is easiest, making attacks of opportunity, and keeping up a good defense. You're not trying anything too fancy, but you're still attempting to win. You're not going to take any chances, but you're not going to let any get by you either. The disadvantage of **Plain Fighting** is that you can sometimes be caught off balance by a more daring and ferocious attack (see **All Out Attack**). You may describe **Plain Fighting** as ...

- ⇒ Fencing, Taking a rest, Contending, Keeping the pace, Keeping her at bay, Taking her measure, or Sizing her up.

All Out Attack

In an **All Out Attack** you throw caution to the wind and go for the most damage you can possibly inflict. The problem is that you're basically defenseless, and if your opponent is much better than you, probably in a lot of trouble. This is often the kind of action you commit to, only to realize it was a mistake shortly thereafter. However, **All Out Attacks** make excellent finishing moves (putting a fading opponent out of the battle before she has a chance to recover or get lucky), and an unexpected onslaught of this ferocity can occasionally have great effect if used properly. An **All Out Attack** may also briefly cover a lack of skill with a flurry of blows, but this is a dangerous bluff

against anyone who clearly outmatches you. You may describe **All Out Attacks** as ...

- ⇒ Going for It, Raining blows, Going all out, Full committal, Berserk, or Frenzy.

Full Defense

When choosing **Full Defense**, an Actor is concentrating solely on keeping her character alive and uninjured. With this type of fighting the character will be very hard to hurt, but then again, she won't be accomplishing much else. **Full Defense** may sometimes be the only way to keep yourself intact against a superior opponent. The problem with a **Full Defense** is that it's very hard to get the measure of your opponent using such tactics. With **Plain Fighting**, or an **All Out Attack**, you have a much better opportunity to judge your opponents style, pacing, strengths, and deficits. As they say, nothing ventured, nothing gained. You may describe a **Full Defense** as ...

- ⇒ Giving ground, All out defense, Parry, Block, or Dodge.

Trickery

When engaging in **Trickery**, you're hoping to somehow unbalance your opponent into either giving you an opening for an attack, or allowing you to escape. **Trickery** is the use of the unorthodox, such as sleight of hand, sand in the face, baiting an attack with a false opening, etc. **Trickery** is always dangerous, because if it fails, you'll often find that you're the one who has been unbalanced. You may describe **Trickery** as ...

- ⇒ Feint, Hand switch, Throw sand in the eyes, Sleight of hand, Hidden weapon, Bluffing, or Playing Dead.

DAMAGE

One of the most difficult subjects to tackle in a free-form style game like **Theatrix** is how to handle damage. How do you tell when someone has been incapacitated, knocked unconscious, or killed? How long do the effects of damage last? What kinds of weapons do what kinds of damage? Our solution is just to tell your story. Damage is the premier Plot Device. Of course we're going to give you a framework to build your descriptions of damage around, which is why we're now introducing the concept of **Wound Levels**.

WOUND LEVELS

We suggest the following abstract levels to keep track of the damage done to each character ...

- ⇒ **Unhurt** - This means just what it sounds like. The character is uninjured and fine. The character may have a cold, or be having a lazy day, but she's okay.

Also - Fit as a fiddle, Feeling fine, or Doing great.

- ⇒ **Bruised** - The character has been injured in an unfriendly, but not terribly inconvenient way. This kind of wound will heal rather rapidly. You might penalize the Actor by raising the Difficulty of some actions. A few descriptive reminders of the Actor's impairment would also not be unwarranted. For example, 'As your character reaches for the book, she winces in pain from that workout yesterday.'

Also - Scratched, Winded, Flesh wound, or 'I've had worse!'

- ⇒ **Light Wounds** - All right, this is where it starts to sting. An injury of this severity will slow the character's movement speed down if placed in the legs, or will impair an arm's movement. Such a wound may cause a momentary lapse of balance if aimed at the head. A body wound of this nature will probably just bleed a little and get in the Actor's way. An injury of this magnitude will take anywhere from two weeks, to one or two months to properly heal. A reminder of the injury every time the Actor tries something with the effected limb would be appropriate. Such a wound may impair to the extent of being used to adjudicate Failures.

Also - On the rocks, Road rash, Gash, Muscle tear, or Grazed.

- ⇒ **Battered** - Now this one will definitely leave a mark. An injury of this level will slow the character to about half movement if in the legs, or greatly impede the functioning of an arm. This severity of wound located on the Actors body will slow her movement somewhat, and get in the way during any athletic endeavor. Such a wound to the head may briefly knock a character unconscious

(a few seconds will do). An injury of this kind may take several months to heal completely. A very descriptive reminder of this wound every few minutes will have your Actors thinking twice about repeating the experience in the near future. Any quick or uncalculated use of the afflicted body part in an action is begging for Failure.

Also - Sprained, Shot, or Serious Bleeding.

- ⇒ **Grievous** - Here's where it starts to get pretty serious. At this Wound Level a character is very inconvenienced by the injury. Movement will be decreased to a slow walk at best in the case of a leg wound, and an arm with this level of wound may be totally dysfunctional. An injury of this level to the body will be bleeding a lot, and will make any athletic endeavor very difficult indeed. Such a head injury generally results in brief unconsciousness (several minutes), and may cause whiplash, or even a concussion. This injury will almost certainly take several months to totally heal, and will probably require immediate medical attention. A gruesome reminder of the Actor's desperate straits, at every possible opportunity, is definitely in order. If the Actor in question hates you for it, then maybe she won't try the same maneuver next time.

Also - That's Gotta Hurt, 'No sir, I didn't like it.', Broken leg, Cracked rib, or Internal bleeding.

- ⇒ **Incapacitated** - This is the Director's way of telling an Actor that her last action was unwise. This wound level means that the character has had it. Almost all wounds this serious involve the entire body, be it several wounds leading to Incapacitation, one wound that results in serious blood loss, or a single massive trauma. Movement at this point is close to impossible. You might get away with crawling. Basically you should just take a little rest and hope that someone comes along fairly soon to help you. Healing completely from an injury of this type may well take a year or more. Note that this level of wound doesn't necessarily mean that the afflicted persona is in danger of dying. Such a wound may only imply that they've been bruised to the point where they're no longer ambulatory. However, this level of damage usually implies a danger of dying. Whatever happened has got to be ugly.

Also - 'Well, at least you've still got your teeth.', 'I'd rather not look.', or 'I hate it when that happens.'

- ⇒ **Dead** - This is the Director's way of saying that it's time for a long rest. A wound of this level means that you should be thinking about a new character. Well, not really. What it actually means is that if the character doesn't get immediate expert medical attention, she'll soon be dead. Here's an opportunity to ham it up with a really dramatic death Scene. This gives you the opportunity to reveal all those clues you've been keeping to yourself. Or, if this is the death of one of the Supporting Cast, then the Director gets to tell the Actors some vital piece of Information, helping them to unravel the plot. If your character gets to this point, it would be a good idea to spend all the Plot Points you have left to save her. If you can't, then this is also an opportunity to spend your points to help the Troupe. Go ahead, because you can't take em' with you. Even if medical help is forthcoming, healing from this situation can take a very long time. Oh, and as for movement, just forget about it.

Also - Blown to bits, Cut in half, 'Hope your next life goes better', or Game over.

Damage Types

There are several different types of damage that a character's body can be subjected to. The following is a summary of these ...

- ⇒ **Blunt**- The kind of damage someone receives when they're hit by an attack that is not necessarily designed to pierce the skin. Examples of this type of damage would be, being hit by a fist, struck by a club, or stubbing your toe. These kinds of injuries, unless they result in broken bones, are usually fairly quick to heal.
- ⇒ **Edged** - An attack designed to cut the skin, exposing internal organs, and causing significant bleeding. Examples of this kind of damage would be sword strokes, whip slashes, or being thrown through a glass window. Injuries of this nature can take a while to heal, and there's always the possibility of reopening the wound with strenuous activity.

- ⇒ **Burn** - Damage of this type is usually caused by open flames, but could also be the result of exposure to acid, or freezing cold (i.e. freezer burn). Basically, a large portion of skin surface has been stripped away by some unfriendly process. An injury of this type will be particularly painful and Incapacitating until it heals, which for some Burns, can take a long time, and require much surgery.

- ⇒ **Blast/Fall**- These are defined by Blunt trauma that covers more than half of the body. Examples of this would be explosions, being hit by moving vehicles, or falling. The most alarming thing about this type of damage is that it's often accompanied by another. For instance, a fragmentation grenade does Penetrating damage as well as Blast damage. Wounds of this kind can take a fair amount of time to heal due to their extensive nature.

- ⇒ **Penetrating** - This is damage taken from attacks that cause particularly deep wounds. Penetrating damage is similar to Edged damage, in that it pierces the skin and can cause a lot of bleeding. It is different than Edged damage, in that a smaller surface area is generally traumatized to a greater extent. Examples of this include bullets, energy swords, normal sword thrusts, and impalement. Needless to say, this kind of damage often takes a bit longer than Edged damage to heal from.

SPECIAL EFFECTS

Now comes the fun part. Describing to the Actors exactly what sort of nasty thing has just happened to their characters. The idea here is to try and not just say, 'You've received a Grievous wound from a Blunt attack.', but instead to tell a story, like 'The massive impact of the club sends you reeling as you're blinded by blood running into your eyes.' Unfortunately your Actors will probably, at first, want to know exactly how much they've been hurt in game terms. So you'll probably have to resort to something like 'The massive impact of the club sends you reeling as you're blinded by blood running into your eyes. You've just suffered a Grievous Blunt injury.' To help you in this endeavor, we'll now give an example of each Damage Type, at each Wound Level. Sit back, this could take a while.

Unhurt

- ⇒ **Blunt** - Your opponent winces in pain after hitting your jaw.
- ⇒ **Edged** - It's only a flesh wound. I've nicked myself worse shaving!
- ⇒ **Burn** - Hah! Grand-dads soup was hotter than that!
- ⇒ **Blast/Fall** - Strong breeze.
- ⇒ **Penetrating** - Well, you may need a band-aid.

Bruised

- ⇒ **Blunt** - That will raise a nasty welt. You might think twice about handball tomorrow.
- ⇒ **Edged** - Don't worry, it looks worse than it is. Still, you might get an infection. Oh, and you might need a new shirt.
- ⇒ **Burn** - A small first degree burn. Fairly painful. That thumb really stings.
- ⇒ **Blast/Fall** - For a moment you're knocked off balance, and for a split second things go hazy.
- ⇒ **Penetrating** - Well, the dart didn't go very deep, but it's going to bleed once you pull it out.

Light Wounds

- ⇒ **Blunt** - There's a lot of pain, and every muscle in your stomach just cramped. As soon as you get home you should definitely find a nice warm bath.
- ⇒ **Edged** - The cut across your chest stings. As you look down you see a thick line of blood welling up.
- ⇒ **Burn** - Rushing to the sink, you thrust your hand under a stream of cold water. That hand's not going to be usable for awhile. You'll probably want to see a doctor.
- ⇒ **Blast/Fall** - The explosion almost lifts you off of your feet. Good thing you weren't closer. You catch yourself, cough, and try to regain your breath.
- ⇒ **Penetrating** - The quarrel affixes your hand firmly to the deck. Amidst the pain you decide against moving your hand just yet.

Battered

- ⇒ **Blunt** - That last flurry of punches took the fight out of you. Things seem to be moving too slowly and it's hard to stand.
- ⇒ **Edged** - The sword bites deeply into your thigh, and your leg now screams under your own weight. Already, you feel the blood running down. It seems that this will have to end quickly, one way or the other.
- ⇒ **Burn** - You don't get under cover quite fast enough. That heat-beam catches your upper arm. Every movement of it now elicits another blaze of agony.
- ⇒ **Blast/Fall** - You lose your grip on the line and fall two stories to the ground. Fortunately, a couple of well placed hardwood tables help break your fall. Unfortunately, your 'friends' up above probably won't give you your well deserved rest.
- ⇒ **Penetrating** - The shot passes right through your leg. As blood sprays the wall behind you, you struggle to remain standing. 'Running' away is now definitely out of the question.

Grievous

- ⇒ **Blunt** - Your arm cracks and breaks under the impact with a sickening Snap! Your arm now hangs uselessly at your side, and it's hard to see through the haze of pain.
- ⇒ **Edged** - The knife slashes across your belly. As you stumble back you feel light and dizzy as the blood rushes from your head.
- ⇒ **Burn** - Pain rips through you as the chemicals splash over your body. Looking down you see that what's left of your chest probably won't react well to being moved.
- ⇒ **Blast/Fall** - Knocked back several feet, you land in a crumpled heap of pain. Thank god for remote car ignitions, because If you'd been in the car, you'd be in the next time zone by now.
- ⇒ **Penetrating** - Having a spear thrown into your gut is never any fun. As you sink slowly to your knees, your lower half going numb, all you can hope is that he doesn't have another one.

Incapacitating

- ⇒ **Blunt** - Who would have thought a log could swing that fast? When it hit, you felt several



ribs shatter. Now all you can do is lie on the ground, waiting for rescue. It could be worse, it could be raining.

- ⇒ **Edged** - The lash slices your back open. You feel blood gush over your body as everything goes red.
- ⇒ **Burn** - Honestly, there's no way to describe this kind of burn without getting a little too graphic. We therefore leave this one to your imagination.
- ⇒ **Blast/Fall** - Sky, ground, sky, ground, wall, THUD!!
- ⇒ **Penetrating** - The sword goes right through you. A damp coldness envelopes your body, as all the strength drains away from your limbs.

Dead

- ⇒ **Blunt** - You can feel the force of the kick go right through you and crack the wall behind you. Well, I guess that's it.
- ⇒ **Edged** - Cut bad, real bad.
- ⇒ **Burn** - Um ... let's not talk about this. These final moments aren't your best.
- ⇒ **Blast/Fall** - TOUCH-DOWN!! The crowd goes wild!
- ⇒ **Penetrating** - A big hole, a really big hole.

SCALING

As you may have already guessed, the above examples are Scaled in a fairly realistic way. However, this is not the proper feel for many Settings. Movie heroes often survive damage that would hospitalize anyone with less billing. They get lucky. In your Settings, the Director must provide this 'luck', if that's the kind of feel the Troupe wants for the Chronicle.

On the other side of the coin, there are Settings in which the heroes are so tough, that you may never damage some of them enough to reach even Grievous levels. For example, in a superhero comic book Setting, Blunt Bruised damage might look like this ...

Bruised

- ⇒ **Blunt** - The punch sends you flying back through several walls. Quickly you get to your feet and shake off the dizziness, ready for the next Round.

Always remember to keep your Setting in mind when Scaling damage.

OUT FOR THE COUNT

You don't have to blow somebody up to render them unconscious. Sometimes a little tap to the back of the head is all that's needed if you know what you're doing. A role's state of consciousness is mostly determined by the needs of the plot, and the use of Plot Points. If your story requires that the Main Cast be knocked out and taken to the villain's headquarters, then it's nappy-time. Just as validly, if your Main Cast needs a few points, a little sleep at the right moment can complicate the plot enough to do the trick.

FORCE FIELDS, ARMOR, AND HARSH LANGUAGE

Actors may occasionally try to avoid the damage being delivered to their characters. They may wear a protective device of some kind, or try to place an obstacle between them and the offending weapon. If someone is hit by an 'Omega-Death-Ray Gun', then they're probably pushing up daisies. On the other hand, if the same



persona is wearing a 'Super-Quasi-Transducer Shield', then she's probably fine. Really, what it comes down to is a matter of description. If you've told the Actors that a certain vest will stop all pistol rounds from penetrating, then that vest should stop all pistol rounds from penetrating. Of course, that doesn't mean that the characters won't be knocked around a bit by the force of the impact. Just because a character's wearing a flak-vest that will stop a machine gun round doesn't mean that she won't be sent for a loop when it hits. The damage will simply be turned from a Penetrating, into a Blunt type. Any damage that the Actors are saved from will damage their protective gear instead, which may not be under warranty for

life. Armor can be dented and broken, laser protection can be ablated, and force fields may become progressively weaker. All of this does require some extra bookkeeping, but mostly it's all a matter of plot necessity, and so it'll be easier to handle than you might think.

You're going to need a list of what kinds of protection are available in your Setting, and what kinds of damage each type of protection stops. The list doesn't need to be exhaustive, just enough to give everyone an idea. Of course, if you've bought one of our handy-dandy Setting Books, then we'll have already prepared an extensive list for you.

A WORLD O' HURT

Here's a twist you've probably already considered. People and machines aren't the only things that cause damage. The world can occasionally throw a thing or two in the Actors' way as well. Things such as heat exposure, lightning, radiation, and drowning can ruin your day. The most important factor here, as always, is description. Electrocuting by a high tension power cable should look far different than frostbite. To give you another morbid guide, we present the following ...

- ⇒ **Vacuum** - Is very nasty indeed. You are cut off immediately from the vital process of breathing, exposed to deadly cold, baked by radiation, and stretched like a drum, all at the same time. When this happens, you have precious little time before it's all over. Even if you get to safety after a few seconds, you'll still suffer Incapacitating Damage that will be very slow to heal. If you're exposed for more than a few seconds ... well, it's pretty much over.
- ⇒ **Heat** - This type of damage cooks you. It can be fast or slow, depending on the degree of heat employed. Being cooked in an oven makes your skin turn black, quickly renders you unconscious, and rapidly makes life difficult. Exposure to environmental heat, like in a desert, causes accelerated dehydration, exhaustion, and damages exposed skin.
- ⇒ **Cold** - Damage of this type can also be fast or slow. Being soaked in liquid nitrogen turns you instantly into a frozen statue, and if anybody taps you, you shatter. Exposure to arctic conditions can cause frostbite, damage skin, make you very tired, and cause you to shiver a lot, making fine work much more difficult.

- ⇒ **Poison** - These effects really vary. If it's a fast poison, then there's only going to be enough time for the character to grasp her throat, drop over, and maybe croak out a sentence or two. If it's a more common poison, then the character will get sick, and may die without medical attention.
- ⇒ **Drowning** - The thing about drowning that does you in isn't the water, it's the lack of usable oxygen. In this situation, all you've got is a few minutes. If you're fairly healthy, you can probably remain conscious for two or three minutes. After five minutes, you've suffered brain damage, and will most likely die. Also, remember that just because the character has managed to get out of the water, doesn't mean that the water has managed to get out of the character.
- ⇒ **Starving** - This takes a while, and after the first three days you don't really feel hungry any more. At that point you are, however, running lower and lower on energy. While it might take you as much as two months to die of starvation, you will most likely be dysfunctional after a week or two.
- ⇒ **Dehydration** - This is a lot faster than starvation. All you've got is about six or eight days before they start making funeral arrangements. Within the first two days you'll start to experience dizziness and blurred vision. Your throat will probably feel pretty dry too, forcing you to cut back on any speeches.
- ⇒ **Radiation** - This can get really gross. Low levels of exposure lead to cancer, or if the exposure is a little higher, rapid weakening until the time comes. If exposed to high levels of radiation, then the body will simply start to fail and fall apart. Hair will fall out, digestive systems will refuse to function properly, and blood production will become corrupted. At very high levels of radiation exposure, a character will simply, and unceremoniously, fall over dead.



READY, AIM, FIRE!

We didn't want to leave you without talking about how to determine the Difficulty levels for Combat Actions. Once again, this is mostly a function of the Setting. Just think to yourself, 'Is this particular action Extraordinary, Impossible, or common place?' By way of explanation we present the following examples...

This example will use a pistol shot set in a modern day world. The characters have believable Skill Ranks, and the weapon is designed for fairly short range shots. So here goes ...

- ⇒ **Easy** - Shooting a torso-sized target at a range of 20 feet, with plenty of time to aim and no pressure.
- ⇒ **Normal** - Hitting a torso-sized target at a range of 20 feet, taking one second to aim.
- ⇒ **Difficult** - Taking a snap shot at a moving man-sized target at 40 feet.
- ⇒ **Extraordinary** - An off-hand quick draw and snap shot, at a fast moving man at 60 feet.
- ⇒ **Impossible** - A quick draw, attempting to hit an opponent in the head, while dodging, at a range of 150 feet.

Another set of Difficulty levels, using fisticuffs as a basis, might look something like this ...

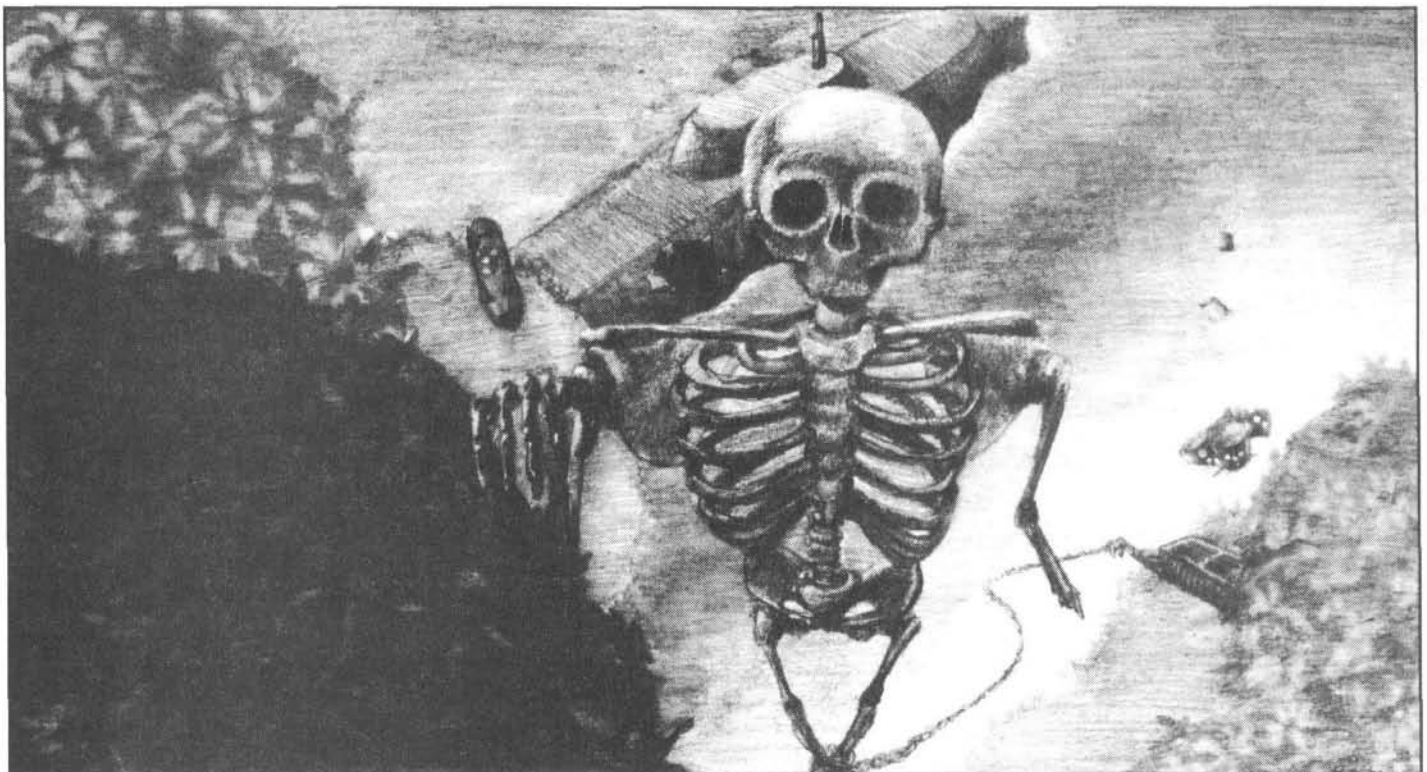
- ⇒ **Easy** - A quick jab to the mid-section.
- ⇒ **Normal** - A hook to the head.
- ⇒ **Difficult** - A quick judo flip.
- ⇒ **Extraordinary** - A spinning back kick.
- ⇒ **Impossible** - The 'Amazing Shaolin Thunder Kick'!

Of course, attempting these maneuvers while engaging more than one opponent, can be even tougher. You should either raise the Difficulty, or reduce the effectiveness of the Result for such maneuvers.

To keep things straight, you'll probably want to make a few detailed notes on the Difficulty levels associated with combat actions in your Setting. Then again, you could buy one of our nifty keen Setting Books, which will include all the appropriate examples.

THE BASIC RULE

Each combat is a story. What you need to do is decide, based off of the current situation, what the Result of each move in combat will be, and what each 'hit' in combat means. Once you have a vision of the combat in mind, use what you're seeing in your 'mind's lens' to assign outcomes and appropriate levels of damage. For instance, if you think that the impact of a speeding car is unavoidable, and will send a character flying back thirty feet, then that's probably an Incapacitating wound. Re-



member that the Scaling of the Setting you're portraying can make a lot of difference here.

Part of the image you conjure up must be based on your adjudication of Success and Failure for the combatants, part on the Attribute Ranks involved, part on the feel of the Setting, and part on the weapons and armor being used in the combat. The time you wish to take on a particular combat also becomes important. In the case of a combat you want to gloss over, a Result of, 'Let them know they've done well.', should end the conflict. In the case of an important combat, the same Result might produce an impairing wound, giving that side an edge.

Keep in mind that Actors tend to be protective of their characters. They don't like feeling that the Director is out to get them. If they've been, despite all your warnings, particularly dense and fool-hardy, then let them have it. But always try to err on the side of the Main Cast. Endeavor to be fair to both the Setting and all the work your friends have put into these roles.

COMBAT ACTION RESOLUTION

We're now going to present you with a small expansion upon the Basic Rule for this chapter. What follows is a step-by-step guide to evaluating, judging, and describing the Results of combat actions. Due to the intense, life or death nature of combat, and the importance of every action to the overall outcome, combat can be the trickiest part of any story to properly direct. Especially in a diceless game, Directors must worry about the fairness of their decisions, the Continuity of the action, the use of wounds, and the completeness of any descriptions. The Actors will be taking action, and judging their chances, off your words alone. Poor, or incomplete descriptions can leave your Actors frustrated and confused. Incongruity between your descriptions can lessen a combat's sense of Continuity, and therefore its realism and drama. What follows is a method for avoiding the pitfalls, and for making the most out of each combat Round.



COMBAT ROUND CHECK LIST

Each Round of combat follows the same basic cycle. Moving through this cycle properly delivers realistic combat action. Below is a simple, step-by-step checklist you may follow for each Round.

Step 1 - Gather Statements of Intent

- ⇒ Clarify Each Statement
- ⇒ Handle Miscommunications
- ⇒ Deliver Warnings

Step 2 - Integrate All Actions

- ⇒ Get a Mental 'Picture' of the Action
- ⇒ Describe All Preparatory Motion

Step 3 - Decisions of Success and Failure

- ⇒ Produce Reasons Using ...
Environment, Wounds, Skill Ranks, and Attributes
- ⇒ Consult the Flowcharts
- ⇒ Judge Extent Using ...
Skill Ranks and Risk

Step 4 - Description of Results

- ⇒ Describe Each Result In Terms of ...
Statement of Intent, Subjective Viewpoint, and Any Keen Bits

Now for the detailed explanation ...

STEP 1 - GATHER STATEMENTS OF INTENT

The first step in any combat Round is to ask each Actor, in turn, what they **intend** their character to do for that Round. This statement of intent may or may not occur as planned. That's up to you, the Director. But the most important part of resolving a combat action, is in understanding each Actor's statement of Intent.

As Director, you may need to describe the intent of any Supporting Cast members. For example, if an Actor states 'I'm waiting to see what the big guy in the corner does', then you have to describe what the big guy is doing. Always do this in an objective way. In other words, describe what the Supporting Cast member does and says, but not why. That's for the Actors to figure out. For example, you might say 'The big guy shrugs and reaches into the left side of his jacket with his right hand ...' An Actor may interrupt your description at any time to react, with something like 'That's enough! I pull my gun, before he pulls his, and fire!' Remember the Initiative of actions. If the Actor in this example waits to see what the big guy is pulling out, it could be too late to react to it. Or maybe

the big guy is actually a Detective, just pulling out his badge; now wouldn't that be a shame ...

Clarify Each Statement

If there's any chance for misinterpretation of an Actor's statement of intent, then clarify it with that Actor. Ask any appropriate questions, then re-word the Actor's final statement as you feel it was meant, and feed it back for approval.

Handle Miscommunications

If it seems obvious that an Actor simply doesn't understand a situation properly, then re-describe it, including the Stage, the position of the Main and Supporting Cast members, and any important actions in progress. You may need to pull out a pencil and paper and draw what's going on. This is a game of fantasy and imagination. If you allow misconceptions to dictate peoples' actions, then it's just going to be frustrating.

If an Actor is having difficulty describing to you exactly **what** her action is, or **how** her character will perform it, then you're going to have to help. For example, that Actor may not know how leverage works while wrestling, or the effective range of a shotgun. You're going to have to supply that information if it's appropriate to the character in question (ie. the character has some Wrestling Skill, or Weaponsmith Skill, etc.). If it's not appropriate to the character in question, then you can let her find out the hard way (see 'Step 4 - Description of Results'). If you don't know much about either wrestling, or shotguns, then discuss these things with the rest of the Troupe. Either someone else will know, or you should be able to come to some mutual agreements. Please don't argue, that's not the point. Just come up with something that **sounds** realistic to everybody.

Deliver Warnings

If, after handling any miscommunications, you find that an Actor wishes to try and perform some action that seems destined to get her character in trouble, and the character in question should know better (ie. that role has the appropriate Skill Ranks to know she's in danger), then you should probably warn her. Warn the Actor whether you plan for her character to Succeed or not. For example, 'Gee, diving for that gun in the middle of the room sure seems like it'll leave you in the open, with all that gun fire going on ...'

You're not doing this to save the character any grief, but rather to make sure that the Actors have no complaints, like 'My character should have known better ...' By the way, sometimes this will stop an Actor from taking a risk her character would have Succeeded at. More's the pity.

STEP 2- INTEGRATE ALL ACTIONS

Now take all the actions you've heard described, and decide how each of your Supporting Cast members will fill out the rest of their combat Rounds. Back up for one moment, and then be creative.

Get a Mental 'Picture' of the Action

Get an overall picture of the entire combat Round in your head. Don't worry, it'll fit. Think about the Stage, the props, and any fortunate, or unfortunate coincidences which might occur. These are always a lot of fun.

Describe All Preparatory Motion

Start to describe what actually happens during the combat Round. Get as far as you can in your description without having to make any judgements of Result yet. This is a set-up for your descriptions of Success and Failure to come. The tip of the iceberg. For example ...

⇒ 'All right, the three of you are rushing the guy on the platform as the curtain begins to fall away behind him. You reach your target as the heavy curtain hits the ground, and you realize that the stage has been built in front of some weird looking holographic screen. You don't have much time to notice, but it seems to be displaying an incredibly realistic 3D view of some alien landscape. You're opponent's eyes go wide as he sees you coming ...'

Now pause for just a moment to let their apprehension sink in.

STEP 3 - DECISIONS OF SUCCESS AND FAILURE

The moment has come. You must now decide who needs to Succeed, and who needs to Fail. Necessity is always in terms of your plot. Every Scene, in each of your Episodes, needs to have a reason for existence. This includes combat Scenes as well. If you don't know why a combat is occurring, then you can't possibly decide how to carry it out from Round to Round. If you know what the purpose of each combat is, then you can play with the individual combat Rounds at your leisure, for maximum effect.

This is so important, we'll repeat it. If you don't know why a combat is occurring, or where its outcome should carry your story, then it's most likely going to fall apart on you. **Theatrical combat always has a purpose, and it is that purpose which guides its portrayal.**

Produce Reasons Using ...

If your combat Rounds are going to have Continuity, and your Actors are going to feel as though their actions have some meaning, then you must have a definite reason for each Success and Failure you adjudicate. Furthermore, if any factor should have tended to dictate an action's Success or Failure, then for Consistency's sake, you must mention that factor. This isn't really difficult to do. The main factors you'll want to keep track of are ...

Environment - as in ...

- ⇒ His sleeve gets caught in the elevator door as you rush him - or
- ⇒ Someone throws a chair in your way, as you dive for the gun - or
- ⇒ A deer, frightened by your shout, leaps across the path, taking the arrow you meant for human prey.

Wounds - as in ...

- ⇒ Your opponent strikes repeatedly for your broken ribs - or
- ⇒ With that sprained ankle, you're finding it hard to run - or
- ⇒ Despite that slash to your midsection, and the loss of blood, you hold your aim steady.

Skill Ranks - as in ...

- ⇒ You clearly outclass your opponent. With a skillful twist of your blade, you ... - or
- ⇒ Had you known more about industrial manufacturing, you wouldn't have chosen to hide behind that machine - or
- ⇒ Her spell is insidious, slowly eating through your defenses. You've never seen such power.

Attributes - as in ...

- ⇒ Your opponent's massive frame seems to absorb your blows with ease - or
- ⇒ You 'see' the look in his eyes, and begin to react almost before you're aware of what you're doing - or
- ⇒ As you slump to the floor, you wonder how you could have turned your back on such a cad.

Any significant factor which contributed to the action that Round, either **by being overcome**, or **by overcoming** a character, should be mentioned in this way.

Consult the Flowcharts

The Basic and Advanced Resolution Flowcharts are there to help you in deciding exactly how to describe any Success or Failure, for any type of action. Just look there to find a template response for almost any situation.

Judge Extent Using ...

Once you've gotten your decision as to Success or Failure down, then you simply need to know how badly each character Succeeded or Failed. This is based off of the difference in Skill Ranks between each of the Main Cast and their opponents, and the Risk each character took. Always keep your plot in mind, and feel free to be creative.

STEP 4 - DESCRIPTION OF RESULTS

When describing Results, you must always respond to each Actor's **Statement of Intent**. Always start with intent, and then go from there. For example, 'You intended to use your greater Strength to pin the assassin and pry his poisoned weapon from his hands, but ...', or 'O.K. You aim your gun in front of the path of your fleeing opponent, and fire at the barrels in front of him. Just as you predicted ...'

Describe Each Result In Terms of ...

Then finish your description of Result, putting each of your reasons for adjudicating either Success or Failure (the ones you developed in the previous step), in terms of the following ...

Statement of Intent

Once again, you must respond with each reason for Success or Failure, to each Actor's original statement of Intent. Otherwise your Actors will not know why they Succeeded or Failed. For example, if an Actor wished to use her character's immense Strength to grapple her opponent, and she is to Fail, then she must know that she failed because her opponent was stronger, or faster, or had a knife she didn't know about, etc. If, as Director, your response to this action is ...

- ⇒ 'You attempt to grapple your opponent, but he hits you, and you go stumbling back.'

... then the Actor attempting this action can only be confused. **Why** did she Fail? Instead try ...

- ⇒ 'You attempt to grapple your opponent, but with a quick move you can't quite follow fast enough, he steps aside and strikes at you. He hits you squarely on the jaw and you go stumbling back, Bruised, and slightly disoriented.'

Our Actor now knows **why** she Failed, ie. her character's opponent was a lot quicker than she thought.

Viewpoint

When you describe the result of an action to an Actor, it should be from her character's point of view. If the reason for the Result is not apparent to an Actor's character, then it shouldn't be apparent to the Actor. For example ...

- ⇒ In the confusion of battle, a character might not have access to every vital piece of information available - or
- ⇒ Due to a lack of Skill in some area, a character might not be able to evaluate precisely why an action Succeeded or Failed

This is fine. As Director, you should instead make clear that such a character is confused, and if possible, once again, **why**. Note the following two examples ...

- ⇒ 'A sudden pain rips through your arm. You've been shot! But in the thick smoke and fire surrounding you, you can't tell who your attacker might be.'
- ⇒ 'With a neat move you can't even follow, let alone reproduce, your opponent flicks your sword out of your hands.'

Keen Bits

Combat has sight, sound, smell, feel, and motion. Use them all. Don't just describe action, make your Actors **feel** it. So, for example, instead of saying ...

- ⇒ 'Your opponent avoids your strike by quickly moving out of the way, pulls out a knife, and finishes with it at your throat.'

... instead try ...

- ⇒ 'You step in and punch as fast as you can, but the only resistance you meet is air. Your opponent spins as you thrust, which is followed

by a metallic scraping noise, and then the feel of a blade's exquisitely sharp point, like a needle under your chin. In your peripheral vision you can see the dust settling.'

We recommend you keep a strong kinesthetic sense in your descriptions. Your Actors will be directly responding to your words. If they get a good feel for the movement involved in combat, then the Results of their actions will make more sense.

THE BIG COMBAT MEGA-EXAMPLE

Well, we gave it some thought, and decided you might appreciate a little help putting this all together. Most other games use long drawn out examples to accomplish this, and basically we couldn't think of anything better. However, our format may be a bit unusual. We've split the action into two columns. The left column contains the storyline proper, while the right column contains the Director's use of the flowcharts and the 'Combat Round Check List', allowing you to glimpse the Director's reasoning at each important juncture. We also include some running commentary on the tricks of Directing. After doing some of this work on your own, I think you'll see that free-from games are mostly a matter of trusting yourself enough to push at the boundary between game and art.

[Thrilling Organ Music]

CAST

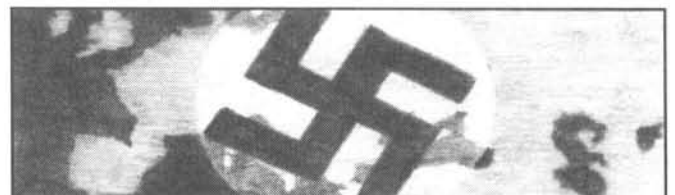
The Good Guys

Johnny 'Tailspin' White
Scott McDonough
Abe Walters

The Bad Guys

The Colonel
SS Trooper
SS Mechanic

Note: Templates for these characters appear at the beginning of the 'Mini-Adventure', included as the last section of this book. You'll find all relevant Skill Ranks, for the characters mentioned above, in that section.



[More Organ Music]

Brought to You By the Makers of -

[Start Jingle]

Sluggypuggies ...

*"Sluggypuggies are the best,
look terrific on your vest -
Serve them to unwanted guests,
stuff your mattress with the rest!"*

Sluggypuggieeeeeees ... mmmhhmmmm."
(courtesy of Warner Brothers®)

ABOARD THE ÜBERZEPPELIN ...

[Announcer]

When last we encountered our heroes, they had made good an escape from their cell aboard the ÜberZeppelin, ruined the airship's guidance controls, and were just making their way towards the hangar deck in order to escape the doomed craft. We now rejoin our patriotic crew, as they once again face down the shrouded menace of ... *Nazi Germany!*

[Heroic Theme Music]

Director - You make your way down the riveted steel staircase. Your footfalls echo along the sheet metal walls, but there is no other sound. You can hear only the low thrumming of the engines ahead. You move along the corridor towards the hangar deck ... when one of the doorways on the left side slams open with a resounding 'Bang!' ...

Scott - What?! I run back up the stairs, fast.

Abe - Damn! I emptied my gun upstairs. I throw myself behind the steel staircase.

Director - All right, but it's an open framework, made to be light. This is an airship.

Abe - Yeah, but it's a circular stairwell, supported by a central pole, and I leap into the space behind the stairs. That will provide better coverage than a straight staircase, anyway.



And now, a word from our sponsors ...

See the '**Mini-Adventure**' at the back of this book.

Description is essential. The movement described here could have been done in a much flatter style, saving time at the expense of mood. However, dropping into narrative form accomplishes two goals. First, it tells the Actors that something important is coming up, so they need to pay attention to the details. Yes, this does forewarn the Actors, but they won't know exactly *what* awaits them, which will create tension. You can't buy tension, you have to paint it with your descriptions. Second, the narrative sets the tone for improvisations, provides some starting props, and guides the Scene by expressing its mood. Flat narrative will inhibit both improvisation and roleplay.

The action here should engender a feeling of constant danger. The Director wants the Main Cast to have to scramble to stay alive. Safety should be hard won.

Good counter-improvisation. It buys a small margin of comfort more than the Director would willingly have given. This kind of interplay forces the Actors to work for an edge, enforces creativity, and provides the feeling that victory was due to the Actors' roleplay and ingenuity.

Director - O.K. [*accepting the improvisation*] What about you Johnny?

Johnny - I draw my gun as I leap, diving forward onto the ground, while firing at whatever comes through that door.

Director - [*Gutsy move. It's a Difficult shot, and it could have been premature if I wasn't planning on having an SS Trouper pounce through that door. On the other hand, she called it right, and she's playing her character's Personality Trait of 'Daredevil' pretty well.*] You leap forward as an SS Trouper leaps through the door. Your gun comes forward as he draws around his Schmeisser MP38. You fire as a hail of bullets rings out against the metal framework of the staircase behind you.

Abe - I try to become small.

Director - Bullets ricochet around the staircase. Abe, one hits right by your head, another by your shoe, and a third comes far too close to removing the family jewels. Johnny, as you hit the ground firing, your second bullet catches the SS Trouper squarely in the chest. The Trouper jerks violently and falls backwards, finger still on the trigger. A neat arc of fire takes out most of the ceiling lights, and the few that are spared are now flickering dimly. Scott, you're fine.

Scott - Whew, that was close!

Abe - I glower up at Scott from where I'm crunched down behind the staircase.

Johnny - I get up from the ground and brush myself off. Hey, anybody want a submachine gun?

Director - Scott, from your vantage point on the staircase, as your ears recover from the thunder of echoing gunfire, you begin to hear an odd sound. It's the rhythm of a booted footfall, followed by someone striking the floor with a metal hammer, repeated, and coming closer.

Scott - Hey guys! Shhhhh. I hear something. Hold it, didn't that Colonel have a mechanical leg?

Step 1 - Gather Statements of Intent

This process began with Scott's quick interjection at the sound of the door opening. By reacting so quickly to the Director's description, Scott grabbed the Initiative for the Actors. Had they waited for the gunman to appear, this may have gone differently.

Step 2 - Integrate All Actions

⇒ Describe All Preparatory Motion

A good example of a set-up for the following Result, followed by a pause to increase the tension a half-notch more.

Here's Abe's payoff for that improvisation. He gets a lot of ricochets, rather than the nastier hit the Director was setting him up for.



Difficult

About Capable

Environment

Zot! Hey, he found the fuse box, but now you've got no lights. What's that sound?

Description leads to improvisation, leads to roleplay, leads to greater character interaction and definition.

The Director has the Actors' adrenaline going, given them a much needed toy, and is now about to introduce the Colonel, for the third time. What the Actors don't know is that the Colonel will not die, not until each Actor spends at least one Plot Point in a direct attack against him. This is a version of the Blackmail rule given in the 'Improvisation' chapter. Until then, the Director will find a way to bring the Colonel back each time. This gives the impression of an undying and undefeatable menace.

Abe - It couldn't be him. That's not possible. I blew him through the control room window with heavy gunfire, after that bastard killed Francois!

Johnny - We never saw the body.

Abe - I'm telling you he fell. He went out the window for Crissake!

Scott - Shhhh! Stop arguing. I'm trying to hear where he is ...

Director - Scott, peering into the darkness, with the meekly flickering lights left in the corridor, you can just make out a hulking form at the top of the stairwell, not 15' from you. What are you doing?

Scott - Well, I come 'Fully Equipped' (a Descriptor), so I take a flashlight off my belt, and see who it is.

Johnny - Would you put that thing away. They may not know we're here.

Director - [*I love these Scenes.*] You know Johnny, in this very dimly lit corridor, you're not quite sure what Scott's doing up on that stairwell, or what he's taken from his belt, on the side facing away from you. Not until you catch the beam of the flashlight, that is. You still want to tell Scott to put the flashlight away?

Johnny - Yes!

Director - Scott, You can hear Johnny telling you something from behind you, but it's sort of drowned out in your head by the horrific vision above you. The figure of the Colonel stands there, illuminated by your flashlight. His head turns towards you, his right eye blinking in the light, while the left robotic eye fixes you in an unmoving red stare. There's a trickle of blood at his temple where you hit him with the toolbox earlier. He smiles at you, and ...

Scott - I jump back down the stairs!

The Main Cast is capable of winning this scenario without killing the Colonel, but in order to kill him, they have to pay. What's odd is that the Actors never question this Terminator-like behavior. They groan, they go crazy trying to kill this undying Nazi menace, but they never question its fairness. This simply becomes part of the Colonel's mystique. Use it.

Passive use of a Descriptor.

This is an important point. One character has just committed to an action which another character believes is a mistake. This is the kind of thing that happens all the time in life; 'Mind that bus.' 'What bus?' 'Splat.' Often, however, the objecting character could not be in a position to know about the offending action, and therefore be able to complain, until after that action has already taken place. In this case, Johnny probably won't know what's going on until Scott actually turns on the flashlight. This is a Director's judgement call on the nature of the perception, the environment, and the situation in progress. However, if you're not careful to enforce the physics of perception and time, then your Actors will happily jump back and abort these actions, with alternate statements of intent. This will hurt game Continuity, cut down on a lot of natural miscommunication and misunderstanding, and remove all the neat consequences of a comedy/tragedy of errors.

The Director once again allows Scott to grab the Initiative with this quick response.

Director - *[He would have to know better.]* Backwards, down a curved staircase?

Scott - Right. I go over the side then, leaping the banister.

Director - O.K. Scott, you hit the ground hard, but on your feet. However, you lose that flashlight in your haste over the banister, and it goes bouncing down the staircase, the beam swinging wildly in the hall. The flashlight lands a moment after you do, at the bottom of the stairs, pointing directly at Abe behind the stairwell.

Abe - No it isn't, because I'm moving for that SS Troupers gun down the hall.

Director - Hold on. You get moving forward, just as a metal claw slams into the floor by Scott's feet, trailing a taught metal cable back up the stairwell, towards that unblinking red eye in the darkness. Scott has just leapt down the staircase, is off-balance, and unprepared for an attack.

Abe - Damn! Damn! O.K. I use my momentum to push Scott out of the way. I want to take the attack instead of him.

Johnny - Good. I'll go for the SS trouper's gun. I'm the closest one to it anyway.

Scott - I'm getting out of the way of the Colonel. Abe can have him.

Director - Scott, getting out of the way is easy, because Abe bowls you right over. You go sprawling against the wall of the corridor. An instant later, the Colonel's form comes hurtling down at Abe. Abe, the Colonel is being drawn down by more than gravity. The other end of that steel cable is attached to the Colonel's mechanical arm, and it's literally pulling him down upon you like a battering ram.

Abe - Can I leap out of the way and let him hit the floor?

Step 1 - Gather Statements of Intent

⇒ Deliver Warnings

Scott's action is so quick that it's being resolved before the Director seeks statements of intent from anybody else. The other Actors will be responding to Scott's action, which is appropriate, since Scott was the first to see the Colonel, and is initiating this segment of combat.

Another attempt by the Director to put Abe on the spot.

Which Abe responds to in action this time, rather than improvisation.

Another important point. The Director is in charge of the timing of all events within the Episode (although these may be affected improvisationally by the Actors as well). In this case, the Director is stopping the action in mid-motion, in order to provide perceptions which the Director feels may change the character's stated intent.

The Director is also forcing the Actor to make a choice which will help to define Abe's psychological makeup.

And here's a similar opportunity for the Actor portraying Scott. This is still on the surface level though. The more personally meaningful the choice, the deeper the understanding of the character will be. Whether the characters win or lose the fight is secondary, because this is where the roleplay is.

Now, if the Director were to allow this, what would happen to the meaning of the choices which Abe and Scott have just made?

Director - No way. Of course, you saved Scott, who would have been a broken rag doll when this guy hit. You look up to see if there's enough time to get out of the way, and caught like a deer, frozen in the headlights of an on-rushing pickup truck, ...

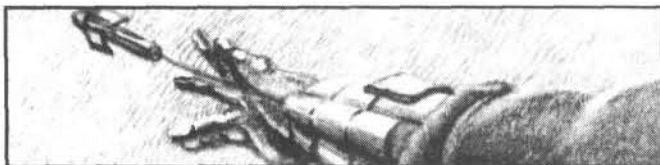
Johnny - Oooh, that's gonna' hurt.

Abe - I'll spend a Plot Point into 'Grounded' to help take the impact. I don't expect to stop the Colonel, so I'm not Activating it for a Success in this action, but rather to become Grounded for the rest of the Scene. Maybe I can slow this guy down enough to let the others get away.

Director - Well, you could drop a second Plot Point for a Success in this action, as well, which might even up the odds a bit. If you could give me a good reason to let you.

Abe - Good reason? What about Francois! This stinkin', yellow, Nazi bastard killed Francois! I mark off another Plot Point. I want to duck just beneath the Colonel's mechanical arm, and catch him in a bear hug, stopping him, and absorbing the impact with my whole body.

Director - Good. Just before the Colonel hits you, the grappling hook releases from the floor, snapping back into the Colonel's mechanical arm. You've grounded your huge frame to meet his charge, filled with rage over the death of Francois. The impact is one of those audible moments they describe in comic books with a big '*THOOM!*'. A lesser man would have had his chest caved in, but your immense size, fast reactions, and righteous rage have saved you. Still, the entire front of your body is bruised. You almost manage to stay upright, but the Colonel's charge carries you back several feet, and over at too great an angle. You both topple to the ground, like a great tree being felled.



And the Director gives the Actor portraying Abe a reason for this self-sacrifice.

This is a good example of the difference between a Descriptor Activated in its own right, for an entire Scene, and a Descriptor Activated to gain a Success in a single action.

However, you're certainly allowed to do both, if you've got the Plot Points.

Notice how the Actor is writing the script here. This is how the Actor sees Abe's Plot Point driven Success. The Director need not accept this version, but there's no reason not to, in this case.

The Actor has spent a Plot Point. This is a special moment, and the Actor deserves to hear how special it is.

Of course there may be some additions. The Director has added a few touches to give the Colonel's impact more reality, without removing the effectiveness of that Plot Point. If there were no way to provide this Success, without destroying genre or realism, then the Director may have denied this Plot Point expenditure.

Scott - I'm outta' here. I'm going for the door to the hangar deck. There's got to be a serviceable plane still on this ship. I'm starting it, waiting for the others, and then we're gonna' leave this mechanical menace behind. He just won't die.

Director - One step at a time. Right now you're going for the door at the end of the hall. You scramble to your feet and start running towards Johnny, who has reached the SS Troupers' body, and liberated the Schmeisser from his dead fingers. Johnny, what are you doing?

Johnny - I'm swinging the gun up, and trying to get a bead on Colonel Blitzkrieg over there.

Director - Abe, you and the Colonel seem to be locked in combat. By the way, since you two are so close now, you can tell that there are several large metal plates across the Colonel's chest and abdomen. That, and the grappling hook gizmo, probably explain how he survived being blasted out a window far above Europe, by high caliber weapon's fire, and is still here to torment you now.

Abe - Great. I don't care anymore. I'm going to roll this guy over, keep him down, and punch him hard in the kidneys, the throat, any vital spot that's still part man. If I get the chance, and I get a thumb hooked in there, I'm gonna take out his other eye.

Director - Well, Abe and the Colonel seem a little too tight for separating with a machine-gun. What are you doing Johnny?

Johnny - I'm gonna sit here with the gun, and the instant I get a good shot, I'm taking it.

Director - Abe, you hammer a couple of hard jabs into the Colonel's sides while you roll around on the floor, trying to get the best of each other. You want to get him under you, but he's immensely strong with that leg and arm, and you have to be careful to keep the mechanical parts hampered. Not very quick though. You're sure that you've almost had him pinned a couple of times. Johnny, are you still waiting?

Scott begins to freak out a little here, which is nice roleplay on the Actor's part.

That was a fast second or two, during which the Director was using very short combat Rounds, and concentrating on Abe. By denying the other Actors the ability to act, for those brief seconds, the Director signals their hesitation. The other Actors must take Initiative after Abe, signifying that *this* is his moment. Now, the Director drops back into a more formal Round structure.

The Colonel had no such instrument until the moment the Director needed to explain his reappearance. Improvising explanations like this, ex post facto (I love Latin ... it's so pretentious), gives the impression of portraying someone far more competent than you actually are. From our point of view, there's nothing wrong with this.

Nice roleplay of Abe's use of Much Death Combat.



Extraordinary

About Capable

Skill

Parry ... Feint ... Wait, he's actually going for it! Now you've got him.

Johnny - Yeah, the instant I drop this gun, I **know** that's when he'll get up. I'm staying right here.

Director - O.K. Scott, you've reached the end of the corridor. The door to the hangar deck is in front of you.

Scott - I open it up and look around for a plane, or another way off this ship.

Director - You pull open the door, and hazily, almost as if in a dream, you hear the sound of gunfire.

Scott - What?

Director - Someone takes a hot iron and forces it across your upper arm. You look down and see a small spray of blood. Distantly, there's the sound of a bullet striking a metal wall far behind you. And then you hear the sound of a second shot, almost in slow motion. You wish you could do something about it. Oddly, a spray of blood and small bone fragments explodes out of the back of your left shoulder. Your sure they were bone fragments. And then the pain starts, like it was being held behind a dam that just broke. The metal floor knocks you on the back of the head. Johnny and Abe, you two hear the distinct sound of a Luger being fired twice. You're very familiar with that noise.

Johnny - Damn! I turn around and look for whoever's firing that gun. I knew this was going to happen.

Director - Abe, what are you doing? Are you going to concentrate on the Colonel, and hope you're not the next target, rolling there in the middle of the hall. You seem to have rolled over near the stairway and knocked that flashlight around. It's near your head, pointing right at you and the Colonel, making you a bright target in a dark hallway.

In the previous description of combat, if the Director had wished, he (we use the male gender here to indicate that the Director was indeed a 'he', as this is an actual transcript, more or less, of an actual game) could have gone into greater detail, describing the opponents' changing positions, and asking for specific maneuvers in response. In this case, however, the Director wants to keep the action moving faster, while keeping the other Actors on their toes.

In Theatrix, perception is a function of Success and Failure. Here, Scott, in his slightly panicked state, has Failed to notice a gunman as he opened the door.



Easy

Very Capable

You advance on your foe, pressing him back. A small grin on your lips, as you ... Hold it! What's that shadow behind you? Thud ... Pain!

Step 4 - Description of Results

⇒ Describe Each Result In Terms of ...
Subjective Viewpoint

Here's an example of a character who is unaware of the exact nature and reason for his Failure. The Director has decided that Scott's character was surprised by the assault, stunned, and confused. The Director describes the following events to Scott, from his subjective frame of reference. The Director is making the Actor portraying Scott aware of Scott's surprise and shock. The description of the wounds inflicted provides a basis for the subsequent portrayal, in character, of this experience. This Failure is a natural extension of Scott's previous roleplay. You get freaked out in a situation like this, you move too quickly, and you get hurt. This could have been simply a warning, or it could have been much worse. The Director has chosen this Result, because it's severe enough to challenge Scott's character, while avoiding being overly punitive (eg. by taking Scott out of the rest of the Episode). The challenge to Scott's portrayal is whether this incident will make Scott more, or less, prone to seeking his own safety. Will he demand that somebody else now go first through each door? Or, having lived through this experience, will he gain a score in the Personality Trait of Brave?



Abe - I had forgotten about that flashlight. I'm gonna' look over, which I know is dumb, so I want you to remember this when you give out Plot Points. But I'm not looking for the gunman. I want to look over at Scott and see if he's alive. It's what Abe would do.

Director - You get a gold star for roleplay. I'll mark it down. Johnny, you see your target. He's a German mechanic, standing in front of a plane, clearly outlined in the doorway. He's got a bead on you, but the gun is shaking in his hands so badly you don't think he could hit the side of a barn. He must have been standing there holding a line on the doorway, waiting for someone to come through, and even then, you're sure he was lucky to have tagged Scott [*Giving Johnny a chance not to fire, and take a prisoner instead, as well as exploring a decision that helps to further define the role.*]

Johnny - I feel real bad. I'm sure it hurt him more than it hurt Scott. But I'm gonna' hurt him even worse. I open up on the Nazi.

Director - He's still pulling the trigger on the Luger as you pour hot death down the hallway at him. There's the faint 'click', 'click', of his empty gun, then the deafening sound of enclosed gunfire [*A cheap trick, but roleplay is about roles, and I like to emphasize that, even during combat*]. The mechanic dances and jerks before slumping against the side of the plane. He leaves a long dark red streak as he falls to the floor. The plane is now riddled with gunfire.

Johnny - Whoops, I hope there's another.

Scott - Yeah, there is. From where I'm lying, dazed, on the floor, but still conscious, I can see one other plane, off to one side. I begin laughing weakly.

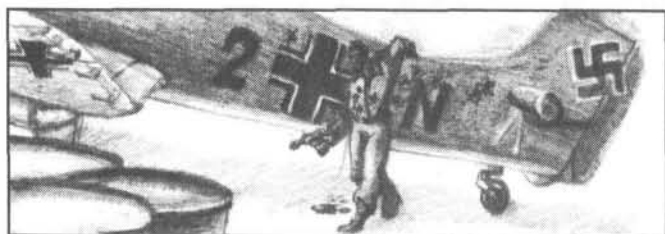
These bits of roleplay are great, but they also take some trust. The Actors know that they're getting their personas into trouble. The Director is using these action to hurt those characters, partly because this is the natural consequence, and partly because not doing so would fail to fulfill the potential of that fine roleplaying.

The Director is attempting a fairly realistic feel for this Pulp-style adventure. Part of maintaining this slightly gritty texture is the exploration of 'grey' moral areas. This is Pulp, and a war story, so the focus is mostly upon a black and white morality, but moments like these help bring the heroic back down, into the realm of the human.

There are no right or wrong answers here. Making this decision helps to define some portion of Johnny's character, and that's the only purpose.

There's no need for the Resolution Flowcharts here. Johnny's going to take this guy out, and one man can't absorb all those bullets.

This emphasis on description has allowed the Actor portraying Scott to weave the character's wounds into his roleplay. This has become part of the Actors' job to maintain, and not simply the Director's job to enforce. The Actor has used this responsibility to define Scott as 'dazed ... but still conscious'.



Director - [Accepting Scott's improvisation with a nod.] Abe, I haven't forgotten about you. There's the sound of two shots. Scott slumps to the floor. You look over to see if he's all right. From here, you can see him moving weakly, looking up, then Johnny fires the Schmeisser, and you never get to hear Scott's laughter. That's when the train runs over your face. The Colonel uses that brief moment to pound your head with his mechanical, piston driven fist. Your world goes black, your ears ring, and a tooth goes flying out the side of your mouth. Johnny, you're turning back towards the battle between Abe and the Colonel, when ...

Johnny - I know, he's coming after me ...

Director - That's right. He throws Abe's unconscious form away from him with that mechanical arm, like a grown man tossing a child. Then he slowly rises from the floor, his lips in a snarl, 'I rise again like the Reich itself. We will never be stopped. I will *never* be stopped!'

Johnny - What a jerk! I'm pegging him to the wall till I run out of ammo.

Director - Abe, your head is swimming in a sea of pain. You have a headache that might last a lifetime, but you also have a Plot Point in 'Grounded'. The eye the Colonel hit won't open, and the floor keeps tilting towards you, but you can move if you're careful. Someone is firing another gun. Johnny, you put 10 or 15 rounds into the Colonel, literally forcing him back against the staircase, before you run out of ammo. Abe, something large bumps against you, then the gunfire stops, then the large thing moves forward again. Johnny, believe it or not, he's still up, and he's still coming at you, like a bloody spectre of death. What are you doing?

Johnny - I'm walking backwards slowly down the hall. I want to lead him. Give Scott a chance to get up and get away, or Abe a chance to act.

Here's the set-up for the ending of this Scene. The Director is going to use Abe's Plot Point in 'Grounded' to provide an opportunity to take the Colonel out, once again, while leaving the Stage open for his return in the next Scene.

The mark of the true villain is megalomania. The Colonel has no redeeming features, no small moments of pathos. He presents a pure villain you can love to hate.

Here's part of the set-up. With Abe momentarily asleep, Johnny is forced to waste the rest of the big gun on the Colonel, while the Colonel is still up, and able to take most of it on armored and mechanical parts.

Now Abe's awake, with the Colonel's back to him.

Out goes the big gun.

Now Johnny sees the possibilities in this situation. He's helping to keep the Colonel's back to Abe.



Director - Scott, you're not sure what's going on behind you. There was lots of gunfire, but with the pain in your shoulder, you can't get your head around to look. You're bleeding pretty bad, and you're not sure if you'll live. *[He'll live, but Scott has no way of knowing that, and he is bleeding a lot].*

Scott - Can I get up, or move? I'll put a Plot Point into my Personality Trait of 'Quiet' to bite down on the pain, and get up.

Director - 'Quiet'?

Scott - Yeah, I don't want them to know how hurt I am. They'll just slow down for me and get themselves killed.

Director - Well, that makes an odd sort of sense. I hadn't thought of it like that, but O.K. You spend a Plot Point, and you can bite down on the pain for the rest of the Scene.

Scott - Then I'm getting up, being careful with the shoulder, and trying to staunch the bleeding.

Director - Abe, what are you doing?

Abe - I'm going to be 'Shrack'. I want this guy out. With his back to me, I'm going to get the flashlight, and then I'm going to bring it down on the back of his unarmored head, with all my might. I'm cold-cocking him. With a Plot Point. I know this will turn out his lights.

Director - O.K. Here it is. Johnny, you see Abe moving slowly for the flashlight behind the advancing Colonel. The side of Abe's face is all black and blue, one eye is swollen up, and there's a trickle of blood from his mouth. Abe, you can see Scott standing up, outlined in the doorway, ashen white. He doesn't look good. Scott, you're trying to steady your feet under you. Johnny, the Colonel is smiling obscenely as he closes on you. Then, Abe quickly and accurately brings the flashlight down across the base of the Colonel's skull. The Colonel obligingly slumps to the floor, one eye unfocused, the other still glowing red and implacable.

The Director takes a moment to press some of Scott's psychic buttons again. The Director is creating an invitation to Scott's Actor, to explore how Scott's personality will develop after a close brush with death.

And here is a part of the return on that investment. Scott responds to this stress with quiet courage. Something closer to bravery than fear.

A Plot Point speaks. Why force Scott's Actor to drop a Plot Point to do this? Because this is a dramatic moment, and a turning point for Scott. He has been afraid, slightly panicked, and under almost constant fire. Spending a Plot Point to quell that fear is very appropriate. The cost helps the Actor to understand the cost for the character, and the permanent changes that such experiences accrue, in layers.

Abe takes advantage of the set-up with a Plot Point of his own. Abe's insuring a solid hit, which is probably a safe bet, because the Director has plenty of reasons to adjudicate a Failure due to Abe's recent pounding.

Johnny - Right. We're going for the plane. Now! I'll help Abe down the hall, and then I'll help both Abe and Scott into the good plane. But, first, I want to lock that door at the end of the corridor if possible, once we're through. That might slow the Colonel down some. I know he's going to be getting up again.

Director - Is that a Statement you want to put a Plot Point into?

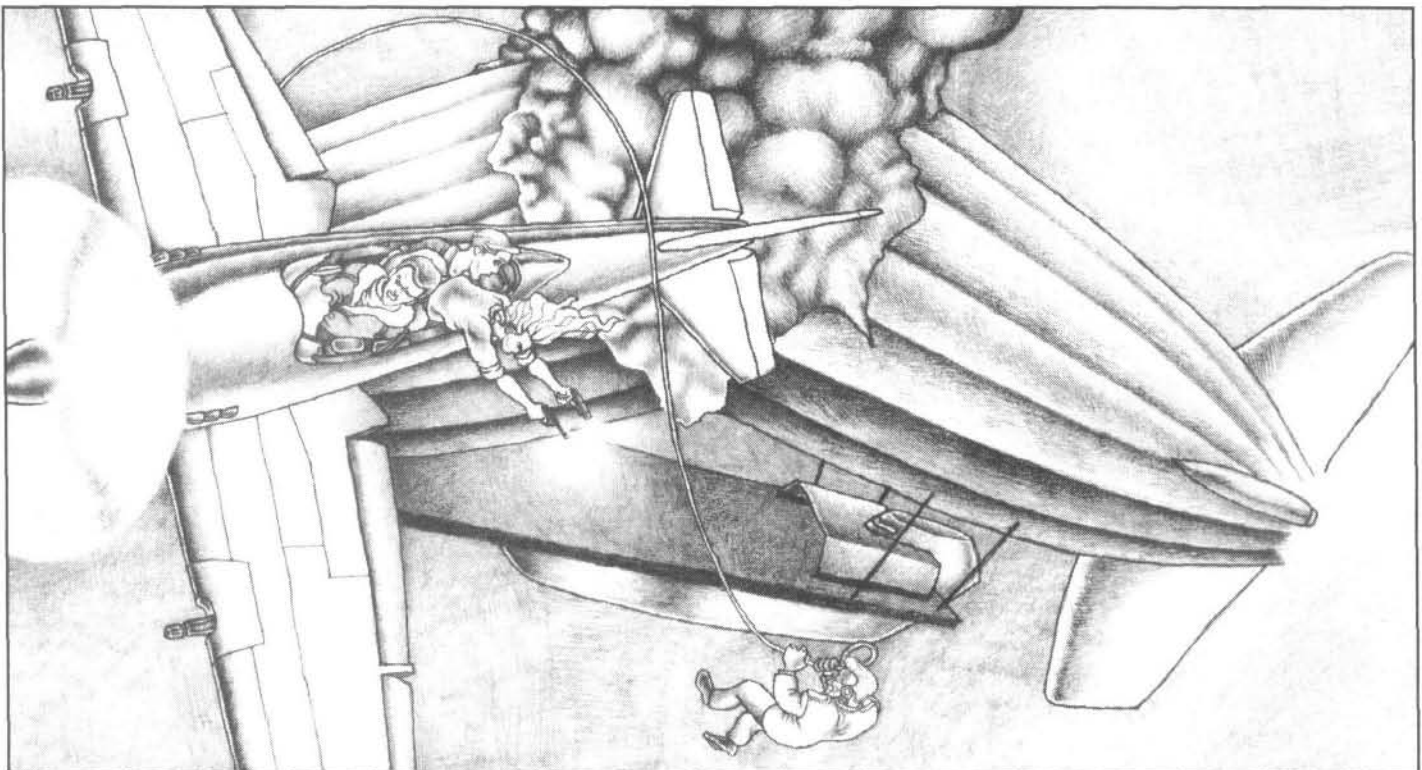
Johnny - No! But I know it's true anyway. I want to get out of here fast!

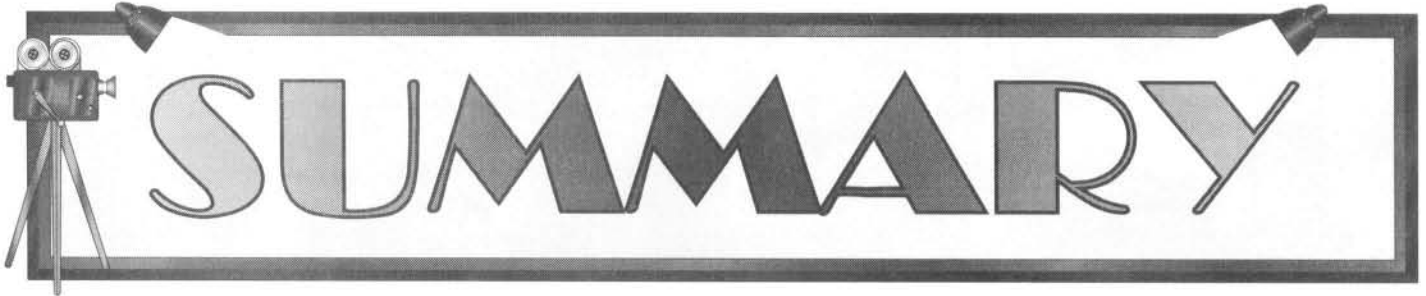
Scott - As we pass by the shot-up plane, I laugh quietly again, and ask Johnny to get the parachute from it. Those bullets are right into the oil pump. That plane is a flying death trap, and I know the Colonel won't give up without using it. And that's a Statement I'll put a Plot Point into.

Neat tie-up for the next Scene. The Colonel has been impressive enough that Johnny won't stop to plug him a few more times while he's down. Instead, the Main Cast wishes to make their get-away while everyone is still alive (which is good, because not everyone has spent a Plot Point in a direct attack against the Colonel, yet. An attempt on his life, at this point, would mean a flood of Nazi guards coming down the stairwell, or a puncture in a mustard gas container secreted in the Colonel's leg, or a bout of sudden turbulence buffeting the uncontrolled aircraft, etc.). As it is, we've been left with a reasonable opening for the Colonel to appear once again, before this Episode is over.

Nice use of a Statement, and backed up by a Primary Descriptor as well. The Director will make good use of this in the next Scene. The Actors have just bought themselves a winning edge in the coming aerial dogfight.

Note: Looking over this example, you may notice how much of the action is formed as a direct response to the Actors' descriptions. The Flowcharts, which were used only a couple of times, help to resolve those moments which the Director is unsure about, or does not have an immediate response for. What drives this Scene is the Director's knowledge of its purpose. As the Main Cast strive for a creative solution to their predicament, the Director is able to judge their effectiveness, and alter the story's flow, based on a firm knowledge of this Scene's meaning in the context of the Episode. Without that knowledge, the Director would be left trying to respond to the Actors using some vague notions of fairness, or realism, which on their own, are not capable of supporting a free-form game. Instead, a Director must control, create, manipulate, allow, reward, and play.





GLOSSARY

All Glossary terms have been organized onto 'Theatrix Reference Sheet C'.

SUMMARY

- ☒ **Importance** - What effect does the combat have on the plot? Answering this question first will help you with the following...
- ☒ **Time** - How much time, both in and out of the game, should be spent on your combat? Your combat may be a 30 year war, but in the context of your story, you may feel a quick description is all you need.
- ☒ **Scale** - How is the Scaling of your Chronicle going to effect your combats? What's right for the genre? Are your heros invulnerable? Or do they come out of a combat wearing every scratch?
- ☒ **Severity** - Does your plot call for a dangerous combat, or a small tiff?
- ☒ **Setting** - Remember your Setting! The Setting will dictate the code of your combats, which should be reflected in the Successes and Failures you assign to actions. Actors who use the Setting conventions in interesting ways should be rewarded.
- ☒ **Environment** - Keep the stage in mind. The locale you choose, as well as your choice of scenery, props, lighting, and weather, will all help create the 'feel' of your combat. Combats with a strong and vivid feel are often the most enjoyable.
- ☒ **Combat Round Check List ...**

Step 1 - Gather Statements of Intent

- ⇒ Clarify Each Statement
- ⇒ Handle Miscommunications
- ⇒ Deliver Warnings

Step 2 - Integrate All Actions

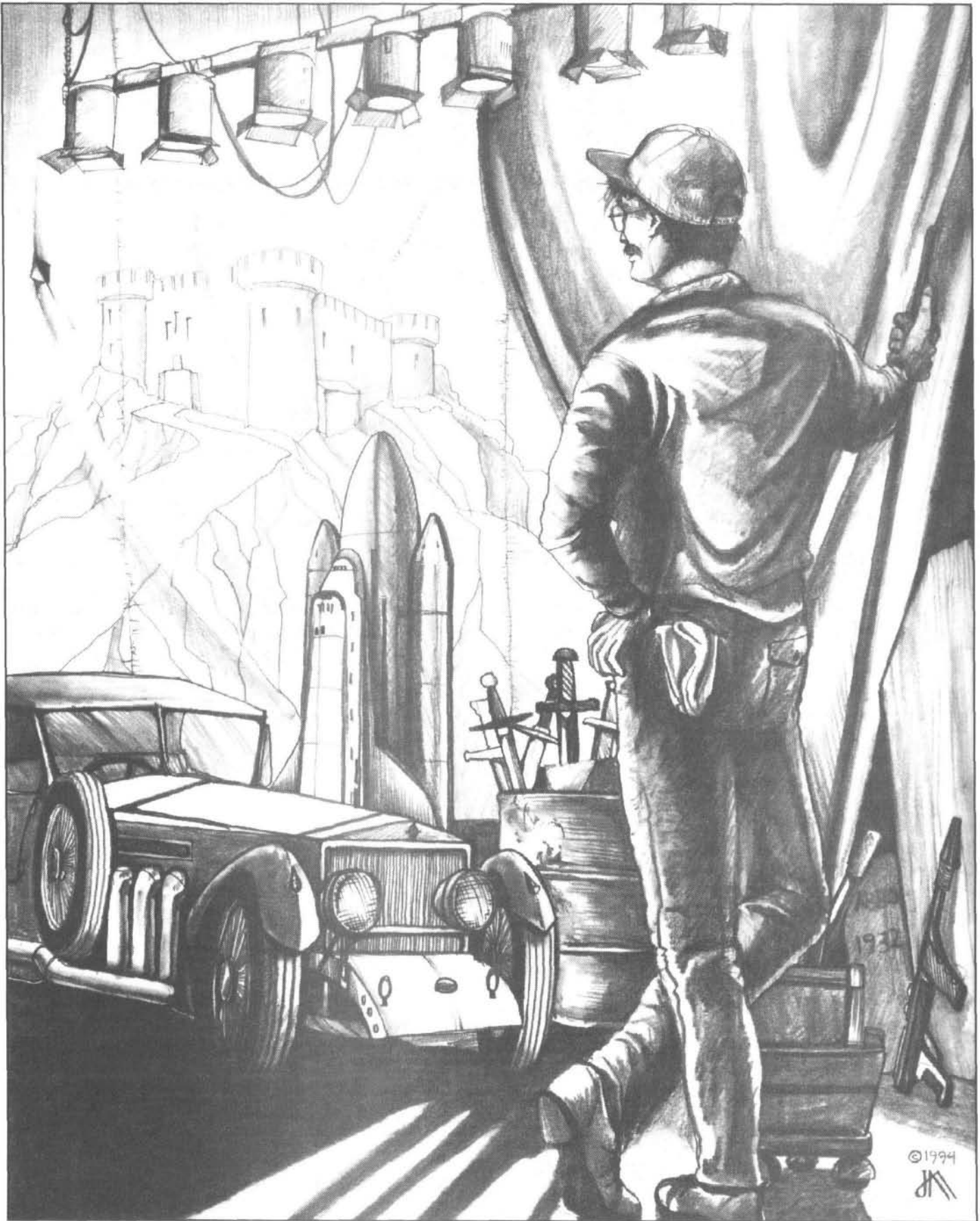
- ⇒ Get a Mental 'Picture' of the Action
- ⇒ Describe All Preparatory Motion

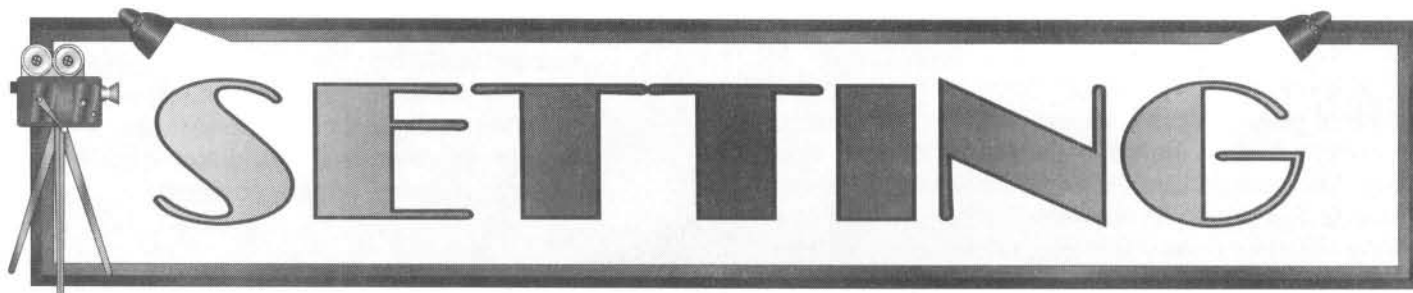
Step 3 - Decisions of Success and Failure

- ⇒ Produce Reasons Using ... Environment, Wounds, Skill Ranks, and Attributes
- ⇒ Consult the Flowcharts
- ⇒ Judge Extent Using ... Skill Ranks and Risk

Step 4 - Description of Results

- ⇒ Describe Each Result In Terms of ... Statement of Intent, Subjective Viewpoint, and Any Keen Bits





SETTING

A myth is, of course, not a fairy story. It is the presentation of facts belonging to one category in the idioms appropriate to another. To explode a myth is, accordingly, not to deny the facts, but to re-allocate them.

- Gilbert Ryle

SETTING

Theatrix is capable of great versatility. A Theatrix Setting may take place in any context, anytime, anywhere. However, the **'Core Rules'** as presented in this book make up only the skeleton around which you'll hang the flesh of your Setting. You'll need to create the geographical, social, political, and dramatic environs of your Setting as well. You may also need to create secondary guidelines to handle the specifics of your Setting. Such guidelines may encompass, for example, the learning and casting of magic, the development and use of psionic powers, or the creation of movie style martial arts. These may entail providing new Skill Lists, creating new Advanced Resolution Flowcharts (a reproducible blank is provided), the detailing of new Setting specific Descriptors, or the formation of new rules for character generation. Such guidelines may be tailored to your specific genre. For example, rule modifications made to handle the feel of magical spells in one Fantasy Setting may differ greatly from the modifications needed to handle them in another. Depending upon your genre, this whole process may require several hours work. However, we feel that such dedication easily pays off in your increased enjoyment of the game.

The sections of this chapter will take you through the process of creating a good Setting, one step at a time. These are, in fact, the same steps we use in creating the Theatrix Setting Books carried by your local gaming or hobby store, wherein you may find completely detailed genres ready for your use, with all the work outlined below already done for you.

GETTING STARTED

The proper starting point for the formation of your Setting is an idea. The idea can be as simple as a single word, such as 'Espionage', or as complex as the reproduction of an existing series of fictional works. We'll handle the translation of this idea into a fully functional world in the following sections. For now, just hang onto your idea and write it down. Putting everything down on paper as you go will help keep this process on track, and with some refinement, will serve as a guide to your Setting when you're done.

THE STAGE

Every Scene in every Episode takes place upon a particular Stage. This Stage is the scenery, the sights, the sounds, and the people with which the Main Cast may interact. We've urged you to use your mind's eye to the fullest in describing these moments. For example, an alley is much more real with the smell of bacon and hamburger grease drifting down it, and the sound of heavy foot falls splashing into puddles of water, echoing off old brick walls and metal fire escapes, than simply as 'an alley'. This is just as true for the Stage of a Setting, ie. the scenery which composes an entire genre. Take your idea and start imagining. Write down some notes on your world. Try to write down the look and feel of it. Try thinking about the books and movies you admire, and about exactly what made them so powerful. What you're forming is an environs. The machinery behind the Chronicle. You'll want to be describing in detail your Setting's geography, politics, values, people, and dramatic context. The last, the dramatic context (see the section titled 'Dramatic Context', coming up in this chapter), will be the most important, and contains elements of all the others.



Research

A quick note on research. Doing research on the Setting of your Chronicle, especially a historic Setting, will provide that all important Continuity for your Episodes. Below, we provide a list of research categories and questions that should be answered in the formation of a Setting. We encourage you to be as detailed as you can stand to get. On the other hand, we encourage you to be flexible and put your story first. Accurate historical touches can really make a Chronicle come alive, while arguing for an hour over the veracity of some small historical detail, will be just as sure to kill it.

The World

This is the layout, geography, and history of a Setting. The questions you'll need to answer to create your world are ..

- ⇒ **History** - How has the present world evolved from its past? What relics and old beliefs are left from those days of glory or barbarity?
- ⇒ **Area** - How expansive is the Setting? Will it take place mostly within a single city, a country, a world, a solar system, a cluster of stars, or a galaxy?
- ⇒ **Population** - How populated is your Setting? Are the inhabitants scattered, or settled mostly in cities? Is the Setting overpopulated, or underpopulated?
- ⇒ **Technology** - What is the technological level available? Swords or blasters? Do people still know how to produce the technology they have? Is technology generally available, or only in the hands of a few?
- ⇒ **Commerce** - What level of commerce is available? Are there small local trade fairs, or mega-corporations needing large centers of industry, wealth, and population to sustain them? How is the wealth distributed? What are the standards of living like?
- ⇒ **Travel** - How is travel accomplished? How fast is travel? How fast are communications? The difference between travel speed and communication speed will determine much about warfare, commerce, and politics within your Setting.

- ⇒ **Flora and Fauna** - What are the flora and fauna of this Setting like? This is an important question because the Troupe's opponents will often be chosen from among these. Are there fairies, demons, ghosts, dragons, super-powered mutants, or galactic aliens?

Politics

These are the socio-political structures used by the various races and peoples of your Setting. The questions you'll want to answer about these are ...

- ⇒ **Systems** - What political systems are in use, and who uses them? The possibilities include feudalism, city states, democracies, oligarchies, dictatorships, demagogues, socialists, communists, and more.
- ⇒ **Machinations** - How do the political machines work? Are they ruled with an iron fist from the top? Are bribes part of the grease that keeps the machinery running? What role does the criminal subculture play within the conventional system? What role does the media play within the culture?
- ⇒ **Power** - How is power defined, ie. by the control of money, industry, land, or labor? Who has power now? Who had power and would like to have it back? And what are they doing to get it back?
- ⇒ **Unrest** - Who is being oppressed, and who is happy with the system?

Values

This is one of the most ephemeral, one of the most overlooked, and one of the most important facets of any Setting. Different cultures have radically different systems of values. They're often nothing like the ones we know. You can create a richly detailed Setting of high feudal fantasy, but if you simply graft our own cultural values onto it, you greatly diminish the quality of the roleplay within it. By attempting to adopt the actual mores and values in use at the time, you make all that work you've done on richness and detail really pay off. That's what roleplay is about.

If you're using a historical Setting, then we suggest you do some research, and attempt to find out what values were actually in use at the time. If you're creating a Setting from the stuff of your imagination, then you should do some serious thinking about what values your

people will hold. In either case, the following questions should be answered ...

- ⇒ **Highest Value** - What is good in life? What should a person be willing to die for? Which is more philosophically important; piety, wealth, honor, or fame? Which one is most important in actual practice? And how does this vary amongst the strata of society?
- ⇒ **Religion** - What religions are in use? What precepts do they teach? Who interprets the religious guidelines? Do the priests have political power, and if so, what is its nature and extent?
- ⇒ **Obligations** - What is the social contract between the rich and the poor? What obligations do those in power hold to those who are not? Are these obligations generally upheld, or only given lip service? What bonds hold the society together; might of arms, religious conviction, shared values, or all of the above?
- ⇒ **Justice** - What systems of justice are in use? Do systems of justice vary amongst the classes of society? What is the highest offense? How is punishment meted out?

People

Tinker, tailor, soldier, spy; what role do people play in the fabric of society? These are the questions you'll need to answer ...

- ⇒ **Professions** - What professions are available in your Setting? How are the Skills associated with these professions transmitted? Are there Universities and/or apprenticeships?
- ⇒ **Classes** - What station in society do the various professions hold and why? How common are they? How rigid is the class system? Is it possible to rise up the ladder of society? How protected are people from falling down the rungs of power?

The above professions are also useful as sample characters, and character templates, because they provide a guide to what's appropriate for your Setting.

- ⇒ **Culture** - What values are expressed by the people in their varied art, architecture, fashion,

foods, languages, music, dance, and entertainment? What are the esthetics of society like?

Dramatic Context

Drama, as we've defined earlier, is **conflict**. Dramatic context is the '**who**', '**where**', and '**how**' that sets up that conflict. That's **who** makes up the conflict, both Main and Supporting Casts, **where** the conflict is to take place, and **how** the events will lead to that conflict. If the context of your Chronicle doesn't promote drama, then it's going to be hard to come up with decent Episodes. If, on the other hand, you design the Setting of your Chronicle with dramatic context in mind, then Episodes will almost present themselves.

In chapter two, titled '**Roleplay**', under the 'Staging' section, we urged that every Chronicle have a focus, i.e. some organization or group that would act as a rationale for holding the Main Cast together. This organization may then be used as part of the Setting's dramatic context. Because the organization transcends the individuals which make it up, it acts as a common Plot Device, binding the Main Cast together within your Episodes. Conflict can then be played out between the organization and its enemies, between the Main Cast and the demands of the organization, and between the Main Cast members themselves, who must overcome personal conflicts in order to keep the organization intact. Instant dramatic context, just add villains.

VILLAINS

Villains are the very essence of drama. They provide you with both conflicts in their motives, and adversaries in their persons. The better you know them, the better you'll portray them. The better you portray them, the more alive your plots will become.

Not all villains think of themselves as bad. Many opponents will have legitimate goals, which are simply irreconcilable with those of the Main Cast. Some villains may even be unfairly oppressed by the organization to which the Main Cast belongs, which may lead to your Main Cast actually sympathizing with the villain. Such moral grey areas often make for interesting Episodes. However, they also leave the dramatic context of the Episode on fairly loose and shifting ground, and so should be used to vary the themes you present as Director, rather than as a mainstay of the Chronicle.

Often, the most satisfying villains are the ones you love to hate. No difficult internal struggles there, just pure unadulterated 'good guys against bad guys' action. Use Cut Scenes to show these villains being bad. Have this kind of villain maliciously hurt the Main Cast, then let your Actors loose.

UPDATING THE CORE RULES

The Theatrix **'Core Rules'** are the basic game mechanics under which all Theatrix Settings will run. We'll be extending the **'Core Rules'** to handle the specific requirements of each of our new Setting Books. The Theatrix system has been built in such a way as to allow for such extensions of the rules, without requiring any alterations to the basic game. The **'Core Rules'** always remain the same. New rules for character creation, new Flowcharts for specific Skills, new systems for magic, martial arts, or cyberspace net running, may all be added easily, using the same game mechanics presented in this book. What we'll discuss below are some ideas for doing just that, extending the **'Core Rules'** to adapt them to the Setting of your choice.

SCALING

If you've gone through the steps given under the **'Getting Started'** section of this chapter, you should now have a well detailed Setting. Now you're ready to take the next step, ie. Scaling the Attributes for your Chronicle. You'll want to take each Attribute in turn and decide whether to Scale it by Range, or by Norm. You may refer to the **'Makeup and Costuming'** chapter for the details of this decision. For each Attribute, you'll want to set the high '10.0', and the low '0.0' ends of the Scale first. Remember that this determines only the **useful** Range of your Scale. Next set the normal '3.0' mark of the Scale, then fill in the rest. Placing the high, the low, and the normal mark first, will provide you with anchor points by which to judge the rest of the Scale. You only need to specifically describe the 'eleven basic' whole numbered points of your Scale (the 'something.0' points, ie. '0.0', '1.0', '2.0', etc.). Take some care in defining these, because they'll form the

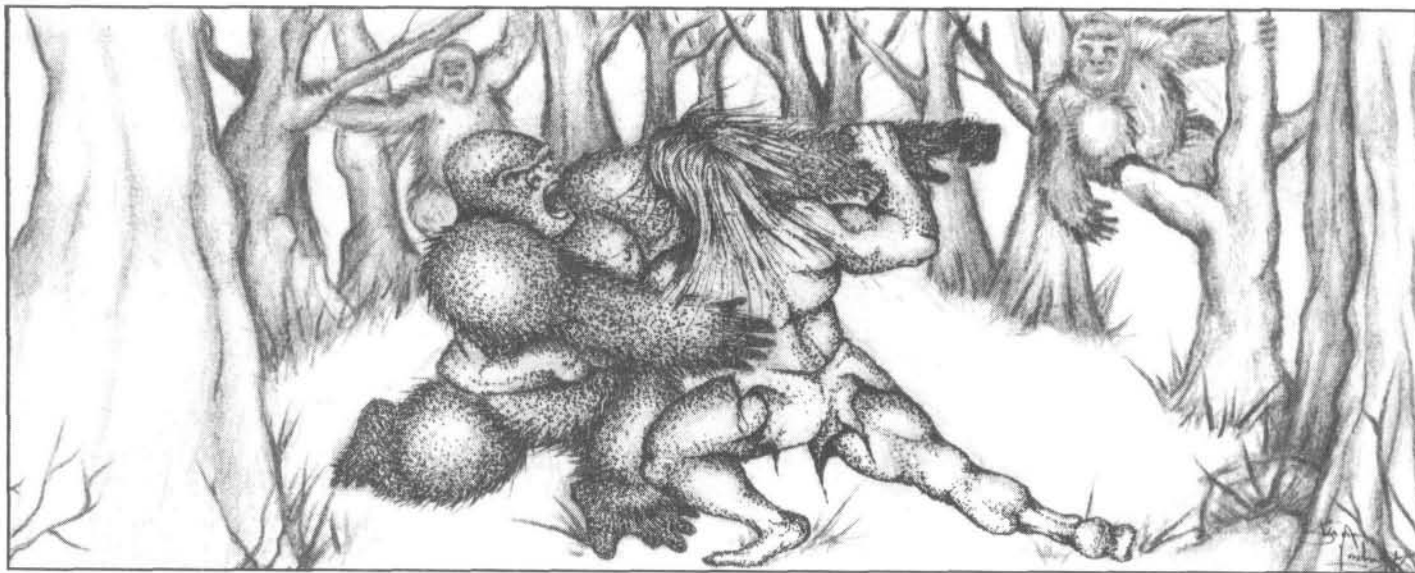
basis upon which all future Attribute comparisons are made.

Something.0 Points

Like everything else in Theatrix, description forms the basis for a Scaled Attribute's basic definitions. These descriptions may contain numerical examples, such as 'can lift about 200 lbs.', descriptive examples, such as 'can memorize the entirety of a large novel in a single reading', or allegorical examples, such as 'the Stamina of a Giant'. The numerical values associated with these descriptions correspond, very roughly, to those used for both Skills and Abilities. In other words, a Strength of '6.0' ought to be capable of 'Extraordinary' feats for the Setting, and the associated description should bear this out. The rest is left up to the Director's judgement.

Example

The Director of a 30's - 40's pulp adventure Setting wants to Scale the Strength Attribute. Since most of the characters will be fairly normal humans, and the Director wishes to stress the variations within that group, she decides to Scale the Trait by Range. Having done some research, the Director finds that people at the time generally thought it impossible for a man to lift more than 500 lbs. So the Director decides to use a 500 lb. lift as the '10.0' mark. The low end of the Scale, at '0.0', will be used to describe the Strength of a baby. The normal mark, at '3.0', will describe the lifting capacity of an average man, or about 150 lbs. give or take a few. After playing with the numbers a little, the Director ends up with the following scale ...



Setting: 30's - 40's Pulp Adventure

Attribute: Strength

Scale: Range

- 10.0 - Can pull a locomotive using only his teeth.
- 9.0 - Strong as an oxen, could carry a horse.
- 8.0 - Bends bars, lifts gates.
- 7.0 - Could tear a phonebook in half.
- 6.0 - Charles Atlas himself (historical reference).
- 5.0 - A thick necked man named Gunter.
- 4.0 - The gym teacher.
- 3.0 - An average Joe.
- 2.0 - 98 lb. weakling.
- 1.0 - A child.
- 0.0 - A baby.

Example

Another Director is creating a Setting of traditional medieval high fantasy. The Director wants to have manticores and dragons, as well as trolls and dwarves. This time the Director is working on Scaling the Attribute of Stamina. The Director decides to Scale this Trait by Norm, because choosing a race should pretty much determine a character's Physical Attributes. Scaling by Norm will also emphasize the differences between the physical makeup of each of the fantasy races in this Setting. The Director considers her Setting, thinking about the toughest and most enduring creature in the land. The Director recalls that J.R.R. Tolkien (The Simarillion, 1977) wrote of a huge dragon that blotted out the sun when it flew. The Director likes this version of dragonkind, and figures that this will serve as the top of her Stamina Scale, at '10.0'. The Director places the smallest sprite at the bottom of the Scale, at '0.0', being the leastenduring creature she can think of. The Director sets human Stamina at the normal mark of '3.0', then fills out the rest of the descriptions. The following is the final Scale ...

Setting: Medieval Fantasy

Attribute: Stamina

Scale: Norm

- 10.0 - Dragon
- 9.0 - Titan
- 8.0 - Giant
- 7.0 - Manticore
- 6.0 - Troll
- 5.0 - Ogre
- 4.0 - Dwarf
- 3.0 - Human
- 2.0 - Sylph
- 1.0 - Faery
- 0.0 - Smallest Sprite

SPECIFIC THEORY OF CHARACTER CREATION

The creation of Main Cast roles is not a static thing in Theatrix. The Actor's role is her vehicle into your Chronicle, her experience within your world. So far, we've only described a very loose method of character creation through the 'General Theory of Character Creation' in 'Makeup and Costuming'. However, the Director may add both Templates and guidelines for the selection of Skills, Abilities, and starting Ranks, to the basic system



presented. Various methods will work better with some Settings than with others. What follows is an assortment of ideas, common to character creation methods in many roleplaying games ...

- ⇒ **Description** - Each Actor writes a story or biography about the persona they wish to portray. The Director then evaluates and creates the role thus described. This gives each Actor a good deal of artistic license, yet leaves the final control in the hands of the Director.
- ⇒ **Dice** - Each Actor rolls dice to randomly determine the starting Ranks of her character's Traits, what sorts of Skills the character will possess, etc. The dice rolls could even be weighted towards the high

end, or be re-rolled if the scores are too low. This method can give the flavor of fate, or destiny in the character's creation. You might even want to roll for each character's parent's occupation, or social class, if these factors are important to your Setting.

- ⇒ **Points** - A point value cost may be assigned to the various Traits. Point value costs may be allocated to Skills, Attributes, Abilities, and even Descriptors, depending upon their desired starting Rank, and inherent usefulness. Each Actor can then be allotted a number of points with which to purchase her role. The starting point allowance for a role could even be increased by adding Flaws to the character, for which the Actor would gain bonus purchase points.
- ⇒ **Templates** - The Director may create character Templates as described under **'Makeup and Costuming'**, which the Actors may then customize and personalize to build their roles. This method may be easily combined with one of the systems described above.

Feel free to mix and match, or invent your own methods, in order to come up with a style that best fits your Setting. Above all, we recommend that you listen to your Actors' needs. If you have an Actor in your group who can't roll dice to save her life, then consider limiting the use of dice in role generation. If one of your Actors is uncomfortable with her writing skills, then you should take this into account as well. The important thing is that you and your Actors have fun, and enjoy the roles that each person develops.

LISTS

After you've hammered out a suitable method for character creation, the next step is to generate a Skill, Ability, and Descriptor list appropriate to your Setting. No Skill, Ability, or Descriptor list can ever be totally complete, nor do you need to strive for that. Don't worry about getting every conceivable area of expertise, power, and background covered. You can add the odd ones later as you need. These lists need only be complete enough to give the Actors a good feeling for the breadth of knowledge, powers, and backgrounds available to them within the Setting. Divide your Skills, Abilities, and Descriptors up into Categories, in order to better represent them by professional classification, or type of power, etc. These Category divisions make it easier for your Actors to pick out appropriate Skills, Abilities, and Descriptors, and act

as a guide for the creation of well adapted Main and Supporting Cast members.

Skills

Skills are areas of knowledge and expertise that may be taught to anyone with time, patience, and a little aptitude. Skills may be as complex as Nuclear Physics, or as simple as Sewing. How much knowledge any one Skill covers, and exactly what Skills are present to be learned, varies greatly with the Setting.

Abilities

Some Settings have no Abilities, while others are rife with them. Where there are few Abilities, you can probably create an adequate list as a guide for your Actors. With Settings that revolve around their multitudes of Abilities, such as superhero comic book genres, you'll only be able to come up with a sketchy outline of the powers available. The rest you'll have to judge on a case by case basis. Almost always, you'll have the chore of individually Scaling each Ability as it's chosen by your Actors. Fortunately, the Skill Rank descriptions correspond closely to those used for most Abilities. Start as you would for Attributes, and set both the high ('10.0', nothing is Impossible) and the low ('0.0' totally unskilled) marks. Remember again, that you're only covering the **useful** Range of each Ability. The high '10.0' mark sets the limit of power for that specific version of the Ability. Fill in the rest of the Scale, referring to the Skill Rank descriptions as a guide, ie. a '3.0' should possess a 'competent' amount of power, a '6.0' should be capable of 'Extraordinary' feats of power, etc. Lastly, place the character somewhere upon this Scale. Repeat this process for each Ability chosen.

For example, let's use a four color superhero Setting, and the Ability to control fire, listed as an example in **'Makeup and Costuming'**. We'll now completely Scale this Ability as might be appropriate for such a genre. In case you don't remember, what we wanted was ...

- ⇒ A character who can ignite herself on fire, sustaining no damage, fly through the sky at the speed of a jet, and throw columns of fire at her enemies. The higher the rating of these powers, the faster she'll fly, and the more intense will be her fire.

The Director discusses this Ability with the Actor in question, and determines the maximum potential that will be allowed for this Chronicle. This serves as the Ability's '10.0' mark. The Director also decides that she'll start the Actor out as a competent, but not masterful fire wielder, so there will still be a lot of room for growth. The character



in question will fly as fast as a small jet, and be able to blast through things with the resistance of a barn wall. The Director places this description as the Ability's '3.0' mark on the Scale, which creates a character who is competent when compared to others of similar Ability, but who still has much to learn. The rest is decided as follows ...

Setting: Four Color Comics

Ability: Flame Powers

Scale: Range

- 10.0 - Max. Flight Speed of 2100 MPH.
- 9.0 - Max. Flight Speed of 1750 MPH.
- 8.0 - Max. Flight Speed of 1500 MPH.
- 7.0 - Max. Flight Speed of 1250 MPH.
- 6.0 - Max. Flight Speed of 1000 MPH.
- 5.0 - Max. Flight Speed of 750 MPH.
- 4.0 - Max. Flight Speed of 500 MPH.
- 3.0 - Max. Flight Speed of 250 MPH.
- 2.0 - Max. Flight Speed of 120 MPH.
- 1.0 - Max. Flight Speed of 60 MPH.
- 0.0 - Sputter, sputter ... phoo

And ...

- 10.0 - Decimate a Manhattan city block
- 9.0 - Blast straight through a skyscraper, the long way
- 8.0 - Slag Dr. Nefarious' Duraloy Robots
- 7.0 - Melt a tank ... the whole thing
- 6.0 - Melt a through a tank wall
- 5.0 - Blast through a vault door
- 4.0 - Blast through a typical brick wall
- 3.0 - Blast through a typical barn wall
- 2.0 - Turn trees into torches
- 1.0 - Start bonfires
- 0.0 - Fizzle

Descriptors

As with Abilities, it can be difficult to come up with any definitive list of Descriptors. However, with some thought, you should be able to produce a full enough list to act as a guide for further expansion.

SYSTEM EXTENSIONS

It's sometimes necessary to create or modify rules to accommodate a Setting. In fact, we not only expect it, but encourage it. The tailoring of Theatrix to a Setting would hardly be complete without new or modified rules. Think over the specifics of your Setting thoroughly before deciding how to handle any system extensions. Make sure that the style and implementation of any new game mechanic meshes well with the present Theatrix methodology. Most Setting specific features may be handled

easily through extensions to the present Skill, Ability, Descriptor, and Flowchart systems.

Try to avoid making up complex mechanics to handle rare cases. For example, if the focus of your Chronicle is magic, where most of the Actors' roles will be sorcerers or magi, then creating rules to handle spell casting and magical constructions is very important. However, if the focus of the Chronicle is to be superheroes, one of whom happens to be a wizard, then instead of separate magic rules, you may want to handle the situation more openly and theatrically.

Example

The Director of a fantasy Setting wishes to create special rules to handle magic. After thinking about what she wants for the feel of the Setting, the Director comes up with an elemental type of magic. Each of the Actors who wishes magical power for their characters will take the Descriptor of an elemental force, eg. earth, fire, darkness, ice, etc., which will act as their magical affinity. Then the characters will take Abilities with appropriate Ranks, to signify their expertise in the various methods of magical control, eg. abjuration, alteration, conjuration, divination, and/or transmutation.

COMBAT

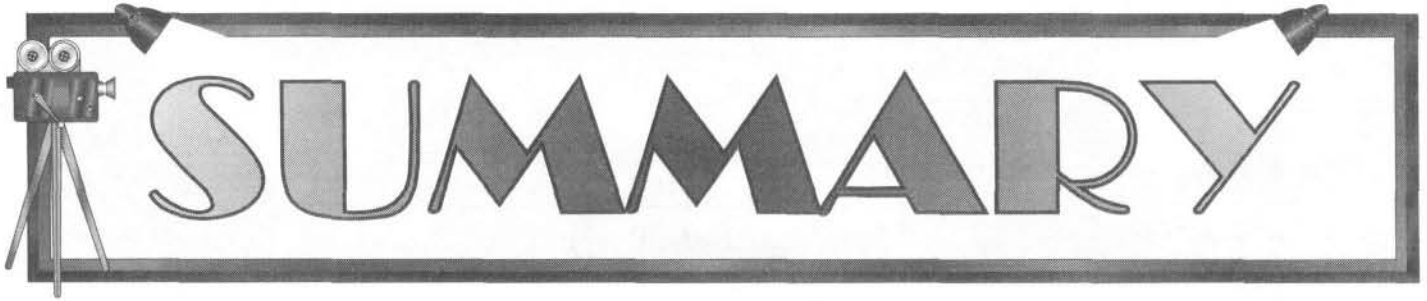
You may also wish to develop a list of Difficulties for combat maneuvers, taking into account the various flavors of combat available in your Chronicle. In addition, a list of the available weapons and armor, including the kinds of damage inflicted by those weapons, and the kinds of protection provided by that armor, can be helpful.

RESOLUTION FLOWCHARTS

The final act of creation you may wish to take, in fully detailing your Setting, is to write out new Advanced Resolution Flowcharts to better handle the feel of your Setting, or to handle Skills or Abilities not easily covered by the basic Flowcharts provided with the 'Core Rules'. We have provided a blank Advanced Resolution Flowchart for just this purpose. This can be used to fill out your Setting with specific flowcharts for archery, magic, or even starfighter combat. Go crazy.

THE BASIC RULE

Avoid all of this mess by purchasing our very professional and fully developed Theatrix Setting Books, which come individually shrinkwrapped and ready for your Chronicle. If you're creating your own Setting, then remember to prepare well, do as much research as you can, be flexible, and above all, have fun.



GLOSSARY

Something.0 Points - The whole numbered points of a Theatrix Scale, ie. '1.0', '2.0', '3.0', etc.

SUMMARY

☒ **The World -**

- ⇒ **History** - How has the present world evolved from its past?
- ⇒ **Area** - How expansive is the Setting?
- ⇒ **Population** - How dense is the population and how is it distributed?
- ⇒ **Technology** - What level of technology is available? Who has access to it, and who understands it?
- ⇒ **Commerce** - What types of commerce are used? Who has access to it, and who understands it?
- ⇒ **Travel** - How do people travel? Who has access to what modes of travel?

☒ **Flora and Fauna** - What types of plant and animal life exist in your Setting? Where are they located?

☒ **Politics -**

- ⇒ **Systems** - What political systems are in use? Who has access to the government?
- ⇒ **Machinations** - How do the political machines work?
- ⇒ **Power** - What determines power in your setting? Who has it and why do they have it?
- ⇒ **Unrest** - Who is being oppressed? Who is happy with the system, and why?

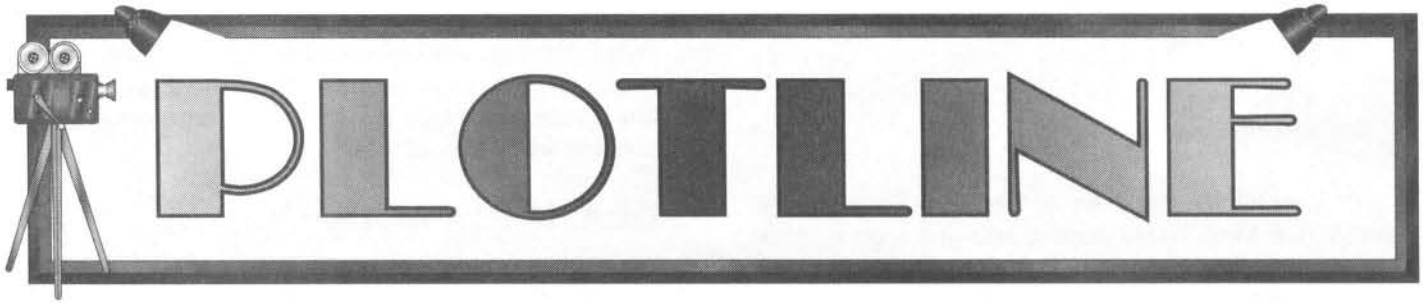
☒ **Values -**

- ⇒ **Highest value** - What is good in life? How does this vary in the strata of your society?
- ⇒ **Religion** - What religions exist within your Setting? What effects do they have on the day to day life of the people?
- ⇒ **Obligations** - What is the social contract between the rich and the poor? The rulers and the ruled?
- ⇒ **Justice** - What systems of justice are in use? Who determines the laws and how? What types of punishment are used, how are they carried out, and who does the carrying?

☒ **People -**

- ⇒ **Professions** - What do the people of your Setting do for a living? What professions are appropriate to your Setting?
- ⇒ **Classes** - What stations in life do these various professions hold and why?
- ⇒ **Culture** - What constitutes high culture in your Setting?





**Cynics have claimed there are only six basic plots.
Frankenstein and My Fair Lady are really the same story.**

- Leslie Halliwell

PLOTLINE

A story is composed of many disparate elements. Stories are made up of character, action, dialogue, development, etc. If all of these elements exist, and are ordered properly, a story occurs. But not always a good one. There seems to be some ephemeral mixture of these elements that makes for good stories. Unfortunately, this mixture is often difficult to put your finger on when you need it. That's why we've included this material. This chapter is not only going to help you put your finger on the specific elements that go into creating a good story, we're going to tie them down so that you can find them whenever you like. We believe that there's a method to the formation of good plots, that this method isn't very difficult, and that once you're comfortable with it you'll be able to form exciting stories of any scope, within any Setting, time and time again. In this chapter, we'll discuss how to go from your concept for a plot, to a finished product that's going to work for your Troupe. The formula outlined below is valid for a plot of any size. The steps you'll take to develop your plot will be the same whether you're planning the Main Plot of an Episode involving the entire Main Cast, or a simple Personal Subplot involving only one Actor. There are four basic steps to plot development. They follow in order ...

1. Idea

⇒ Subject and Structure

2. Drama in 3 Acts

⇒ Resolution, Introduction, and Conflict

3. The Conflict Exploded

⇒ Plot Turns, Midpoint, and Pinches

4. Cue Cards

⇒ Scene Cards and Cast Cards

The following sections will take you through this development process one step at a time. If you work through these steps with a plot idea of your own, then by the end of this chapter you'll have your first Theatrix Episode, ready for your Troupe.

IDEA

There seems to be so much involved in creating a story that it's hard to know where to begin. Often we think that the 'idea' for a story is going to be the hardest part, but this generally isn't true. Ideas alone are really very easy to come up with. There's the grand heist, the quest for the magical artifact, the great cross-country race, the perils of love, the comedy of errors, the mistaken identity, the spy game, etc. Pick up a book, watch a movie, or turn on the television. The problem isn't in finding a story, it's in finding a way to tell it. Most people get stuck because they don't know where to begin.

So let's make it easy. Every story begins with a **subject** and a **structure**. Every story must happen to someone, and must go somewhere. Your story always moves forward, with direction, towards its resolution. The 'subject' is the character that your story happens to, and the action that the character performs. The 'structure' is the dramatic context that holds all the elements of your story together. Structure is the form which your story takes, giving it a definite beginning, middle, and end.

A SENTENCE OR TWO

You should be able to write down your story's subject and structure in one or two short lines. This short summation of your plot should include ...

- ⇒ **character**
- ⇒ **action**
- ⇒ **direction**
- ⇒ **conclusion**

For example, members of the Drug Enforcement Agency (the Main Cast) must locate and stop a large shipment of high grade drugs before it reaches the streets, or hundreds of people are going to die. Just one sentence gives the characters (a DEA team), the action (locating and stopping the shipment), the direction (a struggle with drug kingpins who just want to see their money), and the conclusion (hopefully, the Troupe stops the shipment in time).

Writing down your idea in this short form will keep you on track through the rest of this process. Be simple, short, and clear for now. This is the time to work out the foundations of your story, then stick to them. For example, are you interested in portraying an action story, with some detective elements, or a detective story with strong action elements? This will keep you from wondering where your story went later on down the road. Otherwise you may end up wanting to give up on your DEA investigation turned trigger happy shooting gallery, when you realize that what you really wanted was a complex investigation, and not a complex shoot out.

CLICHÉ

Don't worry about your story being too conventional. Books and movies need to worry about being conventional because they don't want to do something the audience has already seen. Your Actors are going to be inside your story, where no book or movie audience ever is. Your **unscripted** Actors will be inside your story, getting shot at, having long car chases, talking their way out of bad situations, and generally getting in trouble. Cliché or not, it's all going to seem new to them. In fact, some of the most conventional situations, paradoxically, offer the most opportunity for roleplay and role exploration. The more known and stable your environment, the more time you have to explore your own possibilities.

TRANSLATION

Sometimes you'll get a great idea for a story, but it won't be in the right genre. No problem. With only a little work, almost all stories can be translated easily from one Setting to another. All you need to do is translate the visual elements of your plot idea, into those of the Setting of your choice. For example, many of the great Spaghetti Westerns were originally made as Japanese Samurai movies, and there are some excellent futuristic detective stories based on their original 1920's, 30's, and 40's

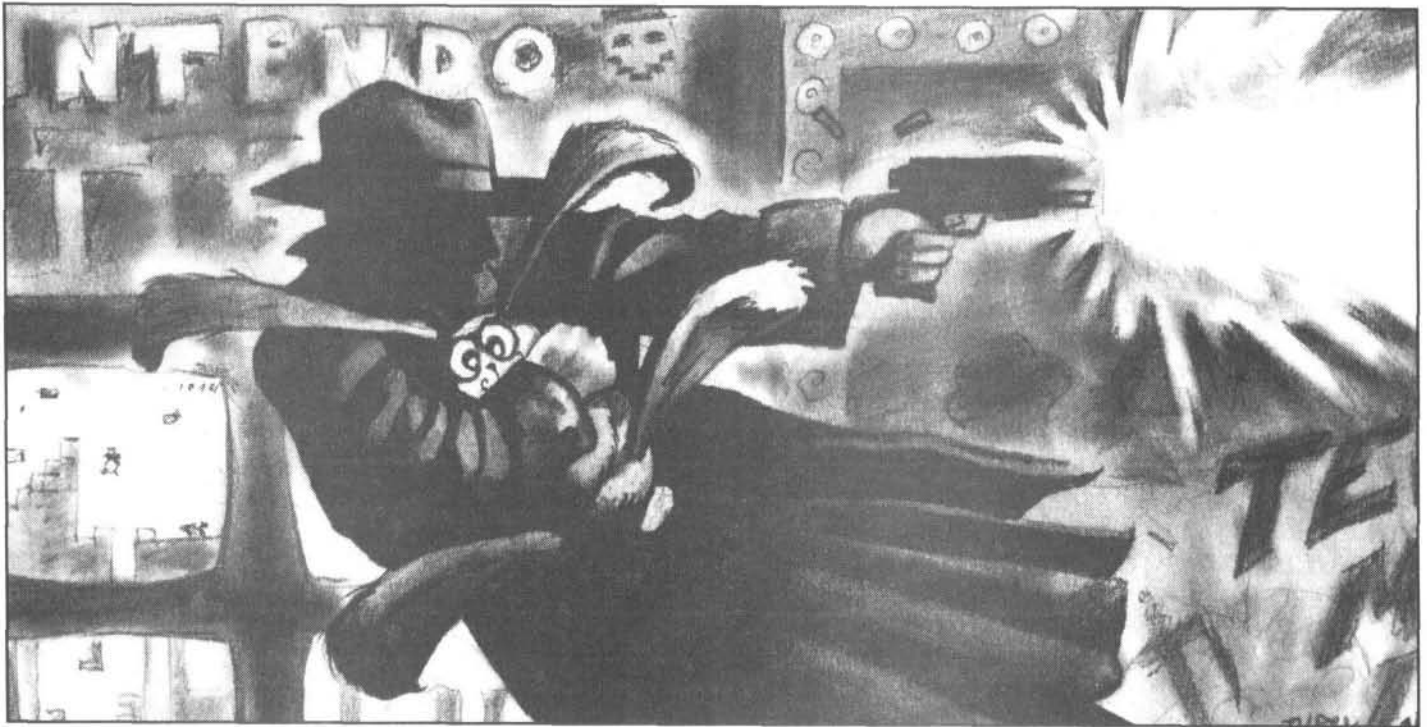
counterparts. Swords may easily be exchanged for guns, cars for anti-gravity vehicles, and traditional iron and rail locomotives for high speed magnetic levitation trains. A few social and technological shifts, and your original concept will still work well.

DRAMA IN 3 ACTS

Theatrix Episodes are stories told in words and pictures, much like movies. Like novels, a Theatrix Chronicle has the time to explore complex issues and situations, and like a play, its focus is upon character and dialogue. Although, within the frame of any single Episode, from the Director's point of view, a Theatrix Episode is most like a movie. The Director is the camera, and the Troupe, like a movie audience, sees only what you choose to show them. The Episode, as a whole, is held together by the same kind of dramatic structure as a movie. Every Episode should happen in three acts; the beginning is Act I, which contains the introduction, the middle is Act II, which contains the confrontation, and the end is Act III, which contains the resolution. This structure is the drama. If you learn to follow the right structure, you'll get good drama every time.

ACT III - THE RESOLUTION

Whenever you start to develop a plotline, you start with Act III. That's because the first thing you're going to need to develop for your plot is its conclusion. Remember, all plots come to a close with a resolution. Resolution means to find a solution, to make clear, or to separate into component parts. In order to give yourself direction, and to help the plot progress, you must have an end in mind. More than that, you must have a **solution** to the plot. Without a solution to head towards, your Actors will probably never reach one. Each Episode's end should also be directly related to its beginning. Once an end is reached, your Actors should say, 'Yeah, that fits.' This doesn't mean that the end needs to be predictable, but it should make sense within the context of your Setting, with the power of hindsight your Actors will have at that time. As you move through the process of developing your plotline, you may find that the end you began with no longer works. That's okay. Just because a plot doesn't look like it's going to end the way you had envisioned it, doesn't mean that it won't be fun. Just keep a definite end in mind, even if it changes. This isn't a binding contract you're making with yourself. It's a writing aid. You say to yourself, 'Here's my idea, here's how it will end, and this will be the solution.' It's a goal to work towards. The direction this gives you is invaluable.



Example of the Resolution

Lets continue with the example of the DEA drug bust we started earlier. We've decided to concentrate on the investigation aspect, but with strong background action. Now we need a solution. We've always liked strange surreal endings, so we came up with this one.

The drugs are being shipped inside large stuffed animals made in Central America. The head of the operation in this country owns a chain of department stores, and is storing the toys, with their deadly payload, on the showroom floor of one of his stores. The kids' toy section no less. He figures, 'Who would look for drugs there?' Our ending will be a deadly running battle through the department store, with elevators, escalators, and stuffed animals exploding with high caliber weapons' fire.

There you go, now we have an end. If you review the above paragraph, you'll discover that there's a whole story contained in it. Because you know the end, and the premise of the plot, you can imagine several ways the Actors could arrive there. Now there's a **focus** and **purpose** to the plot idea. We have an ending and a solution. This gives us direction from now on.

ACT I - THE INTRODUCTION

Now we're going to skip back two beats. The next thing you're going to want to decide upon after your ending, is your plotline's beginning. In the introduction you must set up your story's concept, your characters, and your situation. Your story's concept must be estab-

lished immediately. You need to grab your audience and set the characters up in a strong dramatic context. You haven't got a lot of time to wander about trying to find your story. All of the Actors need to be **involved** and **interested** in the Plot, right from the start. Plots both large and small should open with **action** or **revelation**. Action is just that; it's invigorating, it's exciting, it grabs you and propels you into the story. Revelation is, well, revealing. It **shows** the Actors something about the story and its cast. A revelation says, 'Look at this. You didn't know this. What does this mean?' The scope of the action or revelation will depend upon the size and importance of the plotline. But no matter the plotline's size, some action or revelation must still be there.

You need to set up three major elements within the first part of your first session on a new plotline. These elements are ...

- ⇒ The main character, or who your story is about.
- ⇒ The dramatic premise, or what your story is about.
- ⇒ The dramatic situation, or what the circumstances are surrounding your story's action.

Start with a strong opening Scene. Ask yourself ...

- ⇒ Where does your opening Scene take place?
- ⇒ What happens?

- ⇒ What mood will it evoke?
- ⇒ What is your Main Cast doing?
- ⇒ Where are they coming from, and where are they going to?

Look for visual impressions that will make the Scene work. Describe your opening shots to your Troupe as a film camera would to its audience. If the focus of your opening Scene shouldn't include your Main Cast, then use a Cut Scene. This is a good chance to stick the Actors into alternate roles temporarily, as discussed under '**Cinematography**'. Feel free to play with your style of storytelling and try new things. You might try creating an entire Episode in Flashback sometime, ending the Episode with a reenactment of its opening Scene. Now, there's a strong link between ending and beginning.

After your opening Scene, you should complete your introduction by weaving in the Main Cast if they're not already involved. Follow the focus of your story by introducing all the important Supporting Cast members. It isn't necessary that the **characters** have actually met them all, but the **Actors** should know who they all are by the close of Act I. That means that anyone important the Main Cast hasn't met in person, the Actors should have, through the use of Cut Scenes. Finally, conclude the introduction by defining the problem. You may have already revealed the problem to the Actors in a Cut Scene, but you want to end Act I by bringing that problem directly to the Main Cast. Doing this sets up the story for a strong and dramatic confrontation in Act II.

Secrets

The Actors should 'view' everything that a movie audience, watching your story unfold in a theatre, would see. Plan these Cut Scenes in advance. The only surprises should be the ones that would be sprung on a theatre audience. This may destroy some of the story's mystery, but it will increase the amount of suspense, while also reducing many of the frustrations as well. You will have transformed moments of frustration, into moments of tension instead. Tension between the ignorance and power of the Main Cast, and the knowledge and helplessness of the 'audience' (your Actors). These are the tensions that, in turn, create drama.

Involvement and Motivation

How are all of your Actors going to get together and get involved? At this point you may realize that one or more of your Actors has no business being in this plot. It's important to plan ahead, or you may find yourself with a frustrated Actor saying, 'Why is my character here anyway?' So the beginning of the plot has to be able to bring

the Actors together and **involve** them all. Look at each of your Main Cast characters. Find at least one motivation, for each role, that will drive her to become embroiled in your plotline. If you can't find a way to weave everybody into the plot, then you need to alter your story enough to make that possible.

Arrange for your plots to reveal themselves early in each Episode. This means that the Actors have to recognize what they're in front of. Not how to solve these plots, nor how they'll end, but rather, that the situation at hand is something they should be interested in. Introducing your plots and Supporting Cast early is essential. The Actors must know who the other characters are, and what their connection is, in order to be motivated and react.

Example of the Introduction

Using our continuing example of a DEA drug bust, we'll now suggest a possible introduction. Our Troupe will compose a single team of DEA officers. Our opening Scene will start with the visuals of a convict being released from jail. This particular convict is an 'old friend' of the Main Cast. This Troupe of DEA officers were the ones that busted this guy in the first place (good place to use an old villain who's known to the Troupe). Interspersed with pieces from this Cut Scene, we're going to flash to each of the Main Cast, in turn. The Director will use these flashes to explain that the characters have just come back from their vacations, asking each Actor how their persona's time was spent, what unpacking was like, what they brought back with them, and how returning to work feels? Layered after each interview is another piece of the convict's Cut Scene. That Cut Scene ends with a long segment showing the convict leaving the jail, going back to his old friends, accepting an illegal heist (a department store is to be hit), and performing the robbery. The Director describes the convict ruthlessly killing several guards during the crime, shoving jewelry and expensive goods into bags with his buddies, and finally loading all the goods onto a truck, along with a stuffed animal from the toy section, and then leaving. The visuals of the stuffed animal should be especially jarring, and will act as a Foreshadowing of things to come.

The next Scene might involve the Main Cast being called in on the investigation. The crime is the theft detailed in the Cut Scene above. It looks to be a simple robbery, except for a slight trace of cocaine which marks a pathway through the department store, from the kids' toy section to the front door. That's why the characters from the DEA have been called in. Evidently, that stuffed toy leaked. The Actors might know this, but the Main Cast will not. That trail will be a mystery to them. The next few Scenes will probably involve the Main Cast interviewing the department store owner, hitting the streets to find out

who performed the robbery, etc. The characters are on their way.

ACT II - THE CONFRONTATION

At the middle of your story is a series of Scenes held together by the dramatic context of your plot. This act takes up the majority of your plotline, usually over 50%, and is known as the confrontation. This is because in Act II, your Main Cast members confront and overcome (or not) all obstacles, in order to achieve their dramatic need. Each character's dramatic need is equivalent to what she wants to win, gain, or get. To create each Scene, start by finding the purpose for that Scene, ie. its context, then choose the place, time, and action for that Scene, ie. its content. Determine the components, or elements within each Scene that create conflict, expand dimension, and generate drama.

Drama is conflict. If you know your Actors' needs, then you can create obstacles that generate conflict. The Actors **must** experience this conflict in achieving their dramatic need. Your job is to create situations, and then let your Actors and Supporting Cast members react to each other. Presenting your Actors with a major problem, or dilemma, and then adding minor problems, is what brings out the abilities of your Actors. It's what makes the adventure an adventure. Confrontation takes up the bulk of every good story.

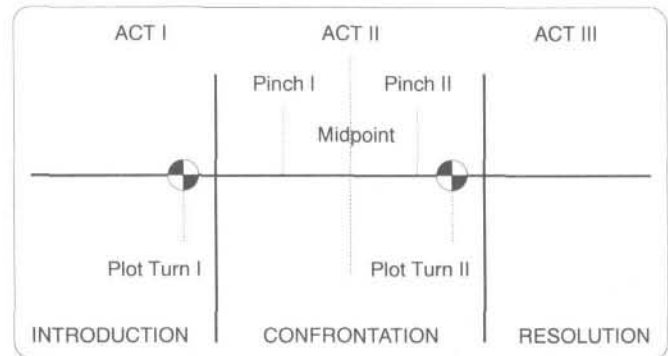
During the confrontation, your story should move forward step by step, Scene by Scene, towards the resolution. Each Scene should reveal at least one element of necessary story information. When creating each Scene, ask yourself ...

- ⇒ What is this Scene's purpose in relation to the plot?
- ⇒ How does it move the story forward?
- ⇒ What happens in the Scene?
- ⇒ When and where is it Staged?

Every plot needs at least 5 specific Scenes during the confrontation. These Scenes break the confrontation up into usable segments of drama. These segments are so useful, that we'll now look at the confrontation in light of its relationship to each of these Scenes.

THE CONFLICT EXPLODED

The chart below gives a visual representation of the progression of a story. You may refer to it as we move through the rest of this chapter.



The 5 necessary Scenes for each confrontation are in order ...

- ⇒ Plot Turn I
- ⇒ Pinch I
- ⇒ Midpoint
- ⇒ Pinch II
- ⇒ Plot Turn II

Plot Turn I separates the confrontation from the introduction, and begins the conflict involved in your dramatic context. Pinch I holds together the first half of the conflict. The Midpoint introduces some vital change into the conflict, turning it towards the resolution. Pinch II holds together the second half of the conflict. And Plot Turn II marks the end of the conflict, and the start of the resolution. We'll now take each of these Scenes and delve into more detail. If you follow this paradigm, and include these Scenes in your plotline, then you'll be guaranteed a good solid piece of work.

PLOT TURNS

The purpose of a Plot Turn is simply to move the story forward. It's an incident, or event, that hooks into the action, and spins the story around into another direction. This 'spin' is usually some unexpected action, or revelation, that helps push the story towards its conclusion. Each of your stories should have a **strong organic structure**, with Plot Turns clearly defined.

Plot Turn I serves to move the introduction into the confrontation. This Scene begins the conflict that will take up the bulk of the story. This is a time for dramatic action, either mental, physical, or emotional, to help thrust the Actors into the confrontation. Plot Turn I acts as a sign post that the conflict has started.

Plot Turn II serves to separate the confrontation from the resolution, and acts as a sign post that the resolution has begun. This Scene will lead into Act III, wherein the characters fulfill at least part of their dramatic

need. Plot Turn II spins the action into the resolution, preparing it for its end. This is a set up for the sequence of Scenes which will follow, drawing the story towards its conclusion and solution.

Example of Plot Turn I

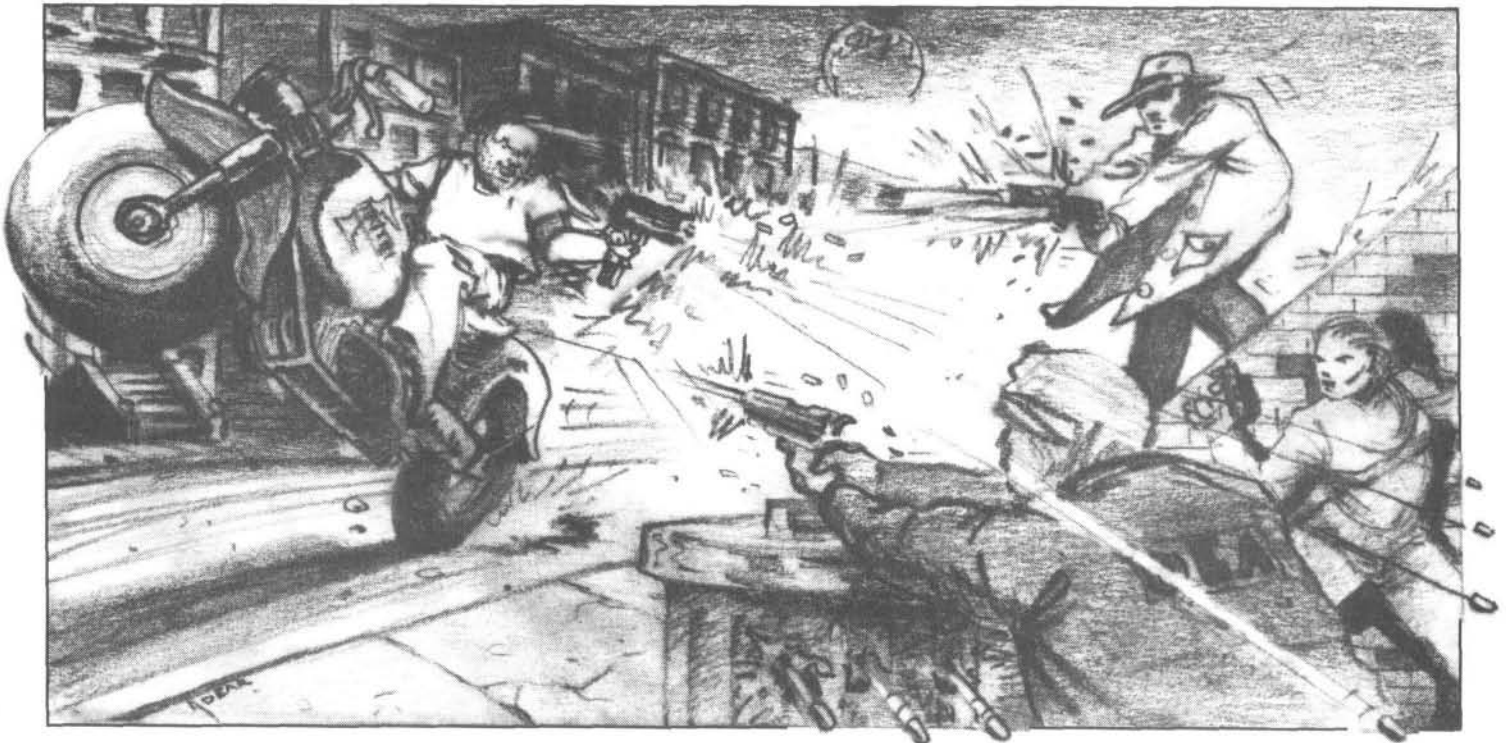
We'll continue our example of a DEA drug bust throughout this section. Now let's work on Plot Turn I, which starts with another Cut Scene. It's the convict again, but in this Scene he's talking to the department store owner. They're talking about the money they'll get from not only the sale of the drugs, but also the insurance money from the burglary. The convict leaves with a pile of cash, and a load of coke, conveniently uncut and laced to kill (the store owner has decided to **terminate** their relationship). The convict parties down for the rest of the evening while taking the drugs. That is, until he's informed that the Main Cast, his 'old buddies' at the DEA, are wondering who pulled the robbery, and are out looking for him. The Cut Scene ends when the convict decides to pay our heroes a visit, and repay them for notes he believes past due. In the fight that ensues, the convict is either killed by one of the Main Cast, or dies of a drug overdose at the end of the Scene. Either way, the characters find out from the lab that he was full of contaminated cocaine. Suddenly there's a connection. Who was the convict involved with this time? Where are the rest of the drugs? And where are they coming from? The conflict begins.

Example of Plot Turn II

The Troupe now knows how the drugs have been entering the country, the involvement of the department store owner, the drug cartel ... everything. Unfortunately, they can't simply bust everyone. The Main Cast has taken the shipment of cocaine away from the bad guys, finding it inside a cargo of stuffed animals at the airport. However, in retaliation, the bad guys have taken someone special, a loved one or two associated with the Main Cast (possibly someone's husband or child). Plot Turn II is the Scene in which the Troupe finds out that the drug kingpins have taken the hostages, but are willing to trade. They want their cocaine back, in return for the hostages' lives. If any cops show up to the trade, the innocent hostages will be killed. The trade will, of course, take place at night, inside the department store. The Troupe must now get together and decide what will happen from here. How are they going to resolve this dilemma? Any way they choose will close this Episode, hopefully with the bad guys in jail, the hostages freed, and the DEA agents in the newspapers as heroes.

Planning

Because the Actors play such a large role in developing every story, you'll only be able to sketch out your Plot Turns before you start roleplaying. Even these need to be fluid to accommodate the Theatrix system. Always be cognizant of the whole plot, and the whole story, during each of your Scenes. Improvise in order to make things



come together, and be prepared for last minute changes. We'll discuss a good way to fluidly prepare for each Episode under the section titled 'Cue Cards', coming up in this chapter.

Other Plot Turns

Besides the two basic Plot Turns mentioned above, your plots may also contain many other Plot Turns of varying size and importance. These will serve the purpose of moving the plot forward and keeping the Actors on their toes. These other Plot Turns are always key points in your story where evidence will be discovered, new characters will be introduced, or important actions will occur. How many other Plot Turns should you have? As many as you need to give substance to your plot. This number is going to vary from story to story.

Remember to be fluid in your organization. This is an interactive storytelling game. You have your plot, and your Plot Turns to get through, but try not to put time stamps on them. Your Plot Turns are only points in the story. Leave it up to the Actors as to when, or if, you arrive at them.

MIDPOINT

Halfway through Act II comes the Midpoint. The **Midpoint** breaks the action of the confrontation into two parts. Your story always moves forward towards some definite goal. The Midpoint gives a place for the action to go after Plot Turn I, and then to leap off from towards Plot Turn II. Knowing the Midpoint is a tool. With it you have a way to focus your plot into a specific line of action.

What is the Midpoint? What is this Scene that links the first and second half of the confrontation? It's the swing of the pendulum, the sudden realization, the turning of the table. Confrontation always moves the action from one state to another. For example, from being hunted to becoming the hunter. From ignorance to realization. Or in a tragedy, from the preparation of the trap to the slow closing of the noose. The Midpoint is the Scene at which a critical mass of action, or events, will cause a sudden shift in the nature of the confrontation, from one state, and towards the next. This is the Scene in which the detective starts to get wise to the situation, in which the hero starts to fight back, or in which the victim has taken the bait.

Example of the Midpoint

Returning to the story of the DEA drug bust, we'll now tackle the Midpoint. This must be the point at which the DEA team will discover how the drugs are being shipped in, and conclusively identify the department store owner as the ring leader. Now all they have to do is stop the drug shipment, then use that evidence to nab the bad

guys. The first half of the confrontation will be taken up with trying to unlock the mystery, and with finding out who's responsible. The second half of the confrontation will be taken up with the DEA's offensive, undoing the drug ring, and forcing them into a position where they'll have to take drastic actions. This sets up the story for Plot Turn II, the abductions, and the eventual gunfight in the department store.

The Midpoint of our DEA investigation will occur during an award ceremony, in honor of the department store owner, for his civic service to the community. The Troupe has been tailing the store owner, and have made their way to the ceremony. During the ceremony, they'll notice that the dead convict's old girlfriend is now with Mr. 'Community Service'. That doesn't seem right. Here suddenly is the missing connection. The drugs must be coming in through this guy's stores. But how? Maybe the Troupe can break into his offices and search through his shipping records. Or, maybe the convict's old girlfriend would be surprised to find out that her old flame was given contaminated drugs by her new beau. Somehow, the Troupe's going to find out about the stuffed animals coming in from Central America, setting themselves up for the second half of the confrontation.

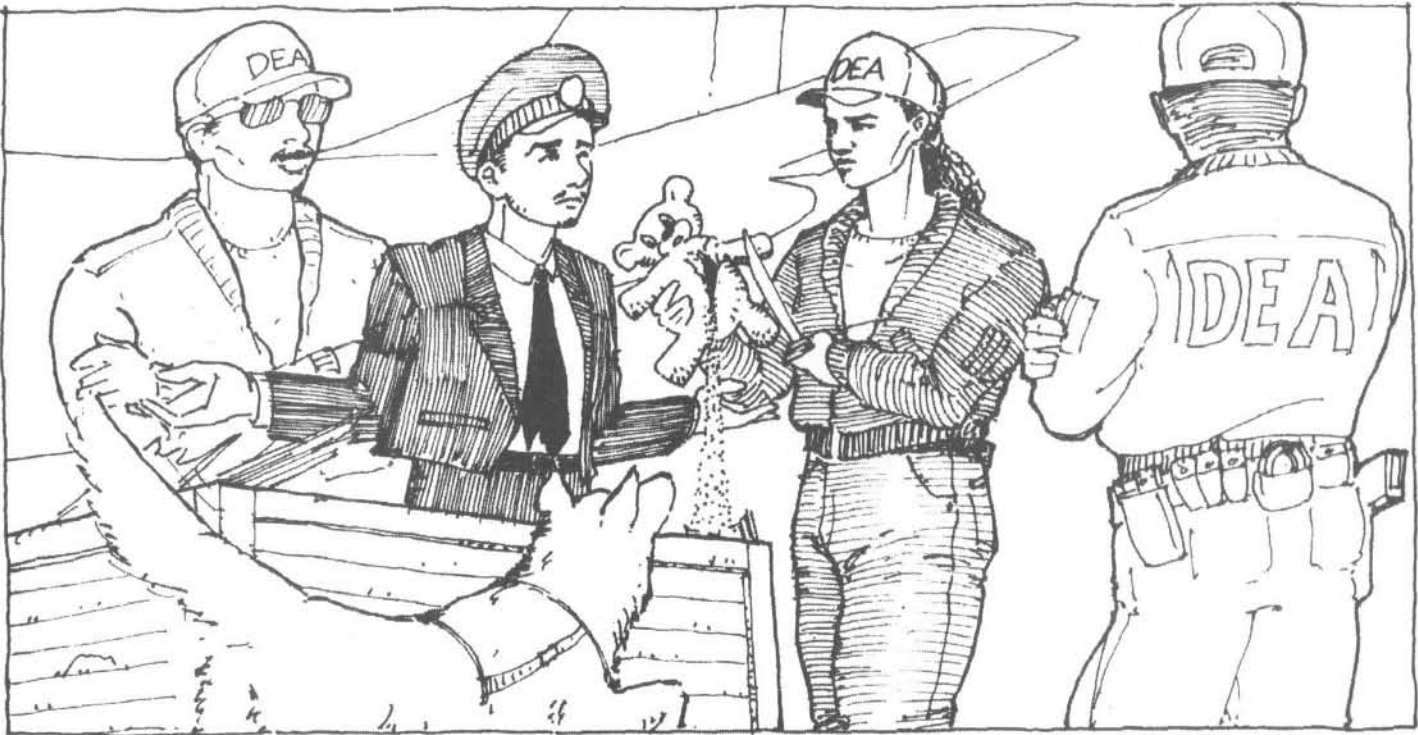
THE PINCH

Once you've figured out the **dramatic context** of each half of your confrontation, you can then provide the **content**. The dramatic context holds the story in place, while at the same time, moving it forward. All you need is one key Scene to hold together each half of that context. This key Scene is called the Pinch, and there are two, one for each half of the confrontation. The **Pinches** become the content of Act II. The Plot Turns define the beginning and end of the confrontation. The Midpoint defines the place at which the confrontation turns. The Pinches **are** the confrontation. The Pinches tie your storyline together and keep it on track. They 'pinch' the confrontation into a single line of story development.

Ask yourself first what the context is for each half of Act II, then decide upon the Scene that best captures that dramatic need. These become Pinch I, and Pinch II, respectively. You now have both Plot Turns, the Midpoint, and both Pinches. Decide upon any other Scenes you need to provide Information, or to explore character possibilities, and you're done.

Example of Pinch I

The context of the first half of Act II is the mystery. How and why did the burglary happen? The Troupe can search out the dead convict's friends and try to get information. Some of them may be scared, and willing to give out a few clues before they're killed. Others may



become violent. The Troupe can look through old insurance claims, or check old burglary records. They can question the department store owner, who won't be very helpful for obvious reasons. A few more nameless people will die on the streets from drug overdoses, just to let the Actors know they're under a time constraint. Eventually, the store owner will settle with the insurance company, and then he'll start using political pressure to strangle the DEA's investigation. He'll be uninterested in pursuing the theft any further. Pinch I will come when the Troupe's boss at the DEA tells them they're on the wrong track, and he's getting heat from above, so they'd better stop hassling that poor innocent department store owner. This is the point at which the Troupe will be sure they've got the right guy, and will be their cue to turn up the heat to full blast. This Scene leads to the surveillance that bears fruit at the awards ceremony, during the Midpoint.

Example of Pinch II

The context of the second half of Act II is the attack. How are the Actors going to hurt the drug ring, and the department store owner specifically? During the Midpoint, the Actors should have uncovered how the drugs are being shipped, and when the next shipment is due. The Troupe plans a DEA raid, and Pinch II becomes the seizure of the drug shipment. The rest of this half of Act II is taken up with storage of the drugs, in preparation for disposal, and an attempt at revenge by the department store owner, who's now on the run. Eventually, the Troupe

gets the fateful call at Plot Turn II, which swings the drama towards the final confrontation.

TIMING

The way Act I, II, and III get split up among your game sessions is going to vary from Episode to Episode. However, we suggest that, in general, you shoot for about a four session split. That is, Act I gets played out in one session, ending with Plot Turn I. Act II gets split up among two sessions, the first ending on the Midpoint, and the second ending on Plot Turn II. Act III should take up the fourth session, at the end of which your Troupe may deal with the issue of downtime, and of assigning the Director for the next Episode. This sequence is going to vary, and it's hardly ever going to be so neat. Some Episodes may be designed for more play than can fit into four sessions, and some may be shorter, taking only a session or two. Of course, how much time your Troupe can allot to each session is also going to make a lot of difference. As a very rough average, about four to six hours per session is probably about right, although your Troupe will find its own pace and rhythm. If you can end a session at a major break point, then that's ideal. This gives each session the feeling of a cliff-hanger, and leaves your Actors hungry for a little more.



THE INCREDIBLE SHRINKING PLOTLINE

The focus of this chapter has so far been on the Main Plots of your Episodes. However, like almost every other concept we've introduced, the ideas in this chapter are Scalable, and apply as easily to Subplots or smaller. We believe that every plot you present, no matter how tiny, can benefit from the techniques in this chapter. Time is not a factor, and the structure presented here can be implemented in as little as a few minutes. Every time you create a Scene, Subplot, or Main Plot, you should have in mind ...

- ⇒ **character**
- ⇒ **action**
- ⇒ **direction**
- ⇒ **conclusion**

Even the smallest Scene contains some dramatic action, and can be played out in terms of the dramatic necessities of the Main Cast. For example, lets take a Scene in which a few of our DEA agents go out to the grocery store to get donuts for the group, which is collectively on a stakeout. The grocery clerk turns out to be a pretty young girl who engages the Actors in some light, flirtatious conversation. One of the DEA agents is a sucker for a pretty face, and can't resist this opportunity. The Director has in mind that the interplay here will lead to a romantic Subplot. Later, this girl will show up again, and become involved in the ongoing Episode. So, in a single sentence, this Scene involves the DEA agents buying sweets and getting more than they bargained for. There is character (two DEA agents and a girl), action (witty conversation, flirtation, and inside humor), direction (getting a date with this willing girl), and conclusion (the introduction of a new Subplot). In terms of the paradigm proper, there is an introduction (going to get the donuts, then meeting this girl at the checkout counter), a conflict (the first half is being engaged by this girl, the second half is engaging her in return), and a resolution (setting a date while dealing with the grumpy people being held up in line). A full plot in ten minutes or less. Putting in this bit of effort is the way to make each Scene come alive.

FEELING GOOD

Plotlines are often full of a lot of downers. The fact is that uncertainty and misadventure are the basis of most good stories. So, make sure you let the Actors feel good about their roles, by allowing them to Succeed where their

characters were meant to, every now and then. That way, they won't mind it so much when you're beating them up.

CUE CARDS

As Director, you'll have a lot to keep track of in each Episode. However, the amount of reference information you'll need on any one subject is usually quite small. Usually small enough to conveniently fit on a 3x5 card. We're going to present some suggestions on how to use 3x5 cards to organize each Episode, and have that information always at your fingertips. Using these cards will give you both the structure you've worked so hard on, and the flexibility to alter that structure, without making it any less useful.

SCENE CARDS

Take a 3x5 card, and write down a few sentences about each Scene in your plotline. Make these sentences short and efficient. Start with your ending Scene, then do your opening Scene, then your Plot Turns, the Midpoint, and then both Pinches, in that order, each on a separate 3x5 card. Then go through and add all the other Scenes you're going to need. Keep these cards in stacks according to the Act in which they'll occur. Separate the confrontation into two piles, corresponding to the first and second halves of Act II.

Some Scenes may require alternate cards. Given the example of the DEA drug bust we've been using, you might want to create several similar cards, each one representing a different way the Actors could obtain the same piece of Information. That way, no matter what decision your Actors make, you'll probably have a Scene prepared to cover that eventuality.

If you build your Scenes properly, then you'll be able to reorder many of your Scenes, as necessary during the Episode, simply by shuffling the 3x5 cards as your Actors flex your plotline, without losing your place, or letting go of your plot. If you use the guidelines given in this chapter, then your story is probably tight enough to get through your whole plotline in this way, with just a few alternate Scene cards. Add a short tag to each card, naming the Supporting Cast members you'll need for each Scene, and any notes you think will help you during the game, and you're ready to go.

CAST CARDS

Here we'll discuss Cast Cards, which can hold all the data you'll need to portray each member of the Supporting Cast well. Go through your Scene Cards, and make up a separate 3x5 card for each important member of your plotline's Supporting Cast, with the following information on it ...

- ⇒ Person's Name
- ⇒ Involvement in the Plot
- ⇒ Physical Description
- ⇒ Roleplaying Tips (voice, gestures, and quirks)
- ⇒ Goals
- ⇒ Values / Personality Traits

Keep all your Cast Cards in their own stack, and whenever a Scene Card comes up, pull out the Cast Cards associated with it. All the information you need to portray each Supporting Cast member will be right in front of you.

Example

The Director of our DEA story needs an informant for her Setting. She wants someone the Actors can remember and go back to in future Episodes. To make the character memorable for everyone, the Director gives the informant an Irish accent, and a derby hat, which the Director can then feign tipping. To explain where the informant's information comes from, the Director makes him a florist. Whenever the underworld is about to make a big hit, they order flowers from this guy in advance. The Director also gives our florist/informant the conflicting Personality Traits of Honorable at Strong, and Greedy at Strong. This will make interactions with the character more interesting, and provide a means for the Main Cast to connect with him.

The Cast Card on our informant might look something like this ...

Person's Name

- ⇒ Sam O'Donnell.

Involvement in the Plot

- ⇒ Florist, Informer for the police.

Physical Description

- ⇒ Small Irishman with red hair and a derby hat.

Role Playing Tips

- ⇒ The Irish accent becomes more pronounced when he's nervous. Always tips his hat to people entering or leaving his shop. Wipes his hands on his florist's apron a lot.

Goals

- ⇒ To earn enough extra cash to turn his small shop into an enterprise he can hand down to his children.

Values / Personality Traits

- ⇒ Greedy at Strong (wants money for his children). Honorable at Strong (hates the mob and feels he makes up for selling them his flowers by informing on them). Cautious at Moderate (values his own life).

SCREENTEST

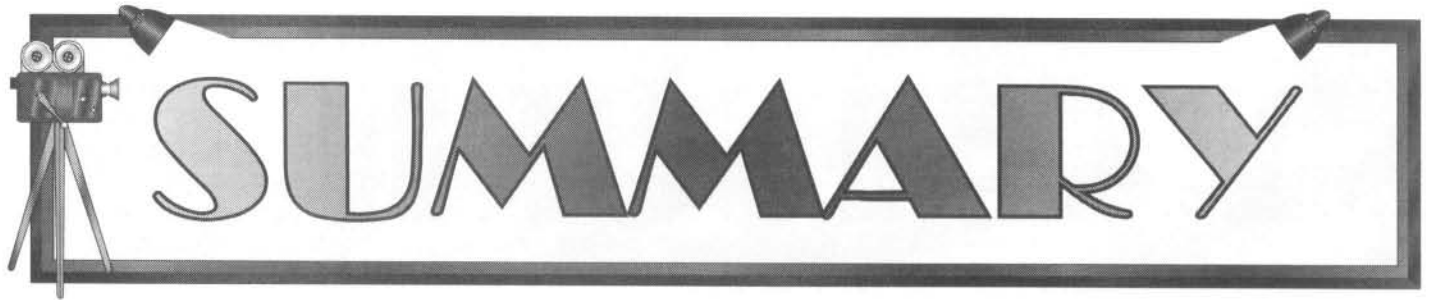
How do you decide what kinds of roles to use as Supporting Cast in your plots? Well, action **is** character. When you watch a movie or read a book, you make determinations about characters through their actions. The same holds true for your roleplaying cast. In developing your plotline, you must look at what type of actions you intend to have your Supporting Cast perform. Think about what kinds of cast members you'll need to carry out these actions? Who would fill such roles? Look at each of your major Scenes. This is the action of your story. Do you need any specific roles in order to complete these Scenes? More than likely, you won't have to think very hard about what general roles are necessary for your plot. Definitely keep in mind any previous Supporting Cast members whom you wish to reuse. By including these people, your stories will take on an added depth of definition and recognition (that Continuity thing again). And don't forget the 'good guys'. They can be part of the Supporting Cast too.

Behind the Scenes

Sometimes it's important to remember that the same amount of time passes for the Supporting Cast, as does for the Main Cast. Your Chronicle will tend to produce a pool of important people; major villains, love interests, benefactors, nuisances, etc. Most of these roles will make only infrequent guest appearances in your continuing Episodes. So, it's helpful to sit down periodically and decide what all your major Supporting Cast members have been doing, while they weren't directly involved in your plots. Updating your Chronicle in this fashion will provide it with an extra measure of Continuity, while often furnishing you with some excellent ideas for future plotlines.

THE BASIC RULE

The Basic Rule for this chapter is the one rule we can't adequately express, which is simply to create good stories. We can give you all the pieces you'll need to do this, and we've tried to, but we can't tell you how to put them all together. That's because good stories are about relationships. They're about the problems of being human, and being alive. Hopefully, playing these games is going to give you more of a sense for what this 'being alive' thing is. This game is a chance to explore these possibilities, and in turn, that exploration is the answer you're looking for. Your stories are 'good' when they provide this opportunity for others. In the end, all we can advise is to be prepared, and be flexible. The rest is practice. So practice. And have fun.



GLOSSARY

Midpoint - This is the swing of the pendulum that turns the story toward Plot Turn II.

Pinch I - The key Scene that connects Plot Turn I to the Midpoint. This Scene captures the dramatic need in the first half of the confrontation.

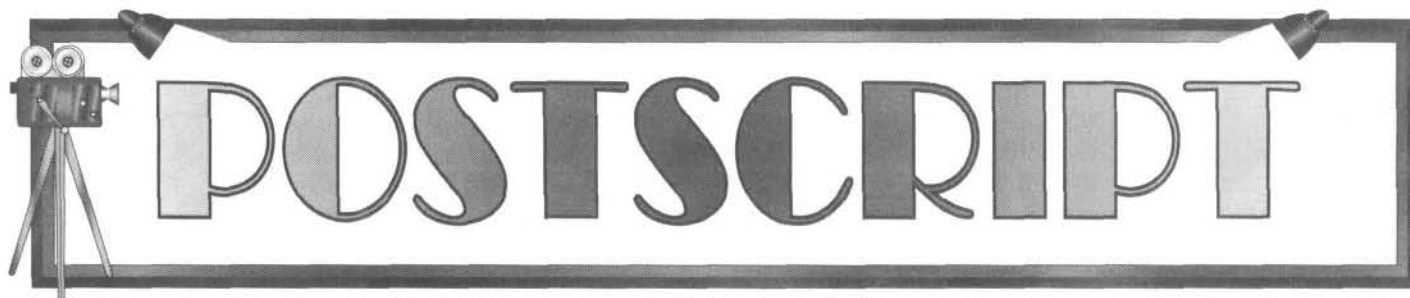
Pinch II - The key Scene that connects the Midpoint to Plot Turn II. This Scene captures the dramatic need in the second half of the confrontation.

Plot Turn I - Serves to move the introduction into the confrontation by introducing the main conflict.

Plot Turn II - Spins the action into the resolution, setting up the story for its end.

SUMMARY

- ☑ **Idea** - Your idea should be encapsulated into one or two sentences that contain the following ...
 - ⇒ **Character** - Who does the plot involve?
 - ⇒ **Action** - What is the dramatic context of the story?
 - ⇒ **Direction** - How will the story move toward its conclusion?
 - ⇒ **Conclusion** - How will it end? (Subject to possible change, of course.)
- ☑ **Act III - The Resolution** - Having your resolution in mind gives your plot direction.
- ☑ **Act I - The Introduction** - The Introduction is where you get your Actors **involved** and **interested**. Make sure your introduction covers the following points...
 - ⇒ The main character(s), or who your plot is about.
 - ⇒ The dramatic premise, or what your story is about.
 - ⇒ The dramatic circumstances surrounding your story's action.
 - ☑ **Start with a strong opening Scene**. Ask yourself ...
 - ⇒ Where does your opening Scene take place?
 - ⇒ What happens, and what mood will it evoke?
 - ⇒ What is your Main Cast doing?
 - ⇒ Where are they coming from, and where are they going to?
- ☑ **Act II - The Confrontation** - During the confrontation, your Main Cast members confront and overcome (or not), all obstacles in order to achieve their dramatic need. Each Scene should reveal at least one element of necessary story Information. Ask yourself ...
 - ⇒ What is this Scene's purpose in relation to the plot?
 - ⇒ How does it move the story forward?
 - ⇒ What happens in the Scene?
 - ⇒ When and where is it Staged?
- ☑ **Conflict Exploded** - Every plot needs at least 5 specific Scenes during the confrontation.
 - ⇒ Plot Turn I - Pinch I - Midpoint - Pinch II - Plot Turn II



POSTSCRIPT

I don't have much to say here that I haven't already said. I was given the opportunity to edit this book, and abused that privilege by interjecting my own attitude, bias, and opinions throughout it. So if you don't like the style, I'm the one to blame. I take it as a sobering critique that the best, most insightful, and most humorous portions of the work, are not mine. So, if you do like the style, that's only because I couldn't find a way to ruin stuff this good. Truthfully, I was the only one dull enough to sit in front of a computer rereading the same paragraphs, over and over again, for hours at a time. That dullness is the prime requisite for an editor, so here I am. Thanks guys. I'm already looking forward to the next one.

- David Berkman

I've enjoyed working in the entertainment industry for many reasons. Being involved in the process of creation is, for me, the most important of these reasons. I don't think many people realize what goes into the stories they enjoy. The creative process is strange, and wondrous, and often offers no easy explanations. This having been said, I hope we have helped to aid you in your creative efforts. I know this work has helped me, and continues to do so. For this, and other reasons, I would like to thank the guys for having me on the crew. Thanks. In the end, I always remember two things: One, you've got to get up to get down. Two, always pet the cat.

- Anthony J Gallela "Harp"

The most important question a Director can ask herself is, 'Why is this fun?' When designing a Setting, working up a plot, or creating a member of the Supporting Cast, chances are that if you can't answer this question to your satisfaction, then your Actors won't be able to either. In other words, your Setting, plot, or cast member won't be fun. The most important question an Actor can ask herself is, 'Why is this fun?' When creating a persona, or Improvising upon the Stage, if you can't come up with a good answer to this question, then that particular Persona, or Improvisation, probably won't be fun. Remember, we play these games to have fun. If, at any time, the experience isn't fulfilling, or at least amusing, then you should probably consider the question, 'Why is this fun?'

- Travis B Eneix

The magic of Theatrix is not only in the fun of roleplay, but also as a source of creative social experience. Play with others, and enjoy this resource.

- Brett Hackett

"Look, stranger, at this island now The leaping light for your delight discovers." - W. H. Auden.

Dreams, imagination, creativity... these talents give light to new realms of possibility. Exploring these phantasms helps us better understand ourselves and the world in which we live. My friends and I have pulled together this set of tools and guides from our own journeys into imagination. I invite you to discover new alternatives, to examine reality, and to challenge the unknown. It's my hope that you will use this book to enhance your own understanding and enjoyment of the opportunities that life grants. Pax.

- Andrew J. Finch

The strengths of this game are manifold, and the degree of empowerment offered to the individual is impressive. However, with power comes responsibility. Theatrix provides no cover from your own mistakes. Failure to think through your world, your game, or your characters, will have a direct impact on the quality of play. There is, however, a payoff. Theatrix provides the tools you need to create any character and any game that you can imagine. It draws players in, and makes them part of the world. It doesn't hamper your strengths, and it doesn't get in the way. If you do prepare properly, Theatrix can provide some of the most satisfying games you may play.

- Aaron 'Hardkorp' Croston



Mini-Adventure

We owe something to extravagance, for thrift and adventure seldom go hand in hand.

- Jennie Jerome Churchill

INTRODUCTION

Welcome to the 'Mini-Adventure'. You had a chance to glimpse a piece of this action in the 'Combat' chapter, under the 'Big Combat Mega-Example'. The rest of the story is here. This is a cut-down, down-sized, complete Theatrix Setting and Episode, with none of the frills, and none of the fancy stuff. The Mini-Adventure is meant to be used as a one-shot introduction to Theatrix, with the Main Cast characters already provided for you on the following pages. We've found that this Episode is best run with a fairly realistic, almost gritty feel, while allowing both the Main Cast, and the Main Villain (his Colonelship, our Main Man, #1, Iron Clad Daddy), to operate on a slightly more heroic scale. Certainly, the Colonel should be given this leeway, if not the Main Cast. The Colonel must be, for the duration of this Episode, the bane of your Actors' existence; almost prescient in his ability to show up at the wrong moment, fanatical in his refusal to give up while the Main Cast remains alive, and unstoppable short of giving into the Blackmail.

Did we say *Blackmail*? I'm afraid we did. You see, the Colonel can not die unless each of the Main Cast makes a direct attack against him, while spending a Plot Point into doing so. Until this happens, the Colonel will come back, time and again, to haunt our heroes. Let this be just our little secret.

SETTING

The year is 1935, four years before Hitler will begin his goose-step across Europe with the taking of Poland. However, dark plans of conquest are already afoot. The world's free democracies, although politically hamstrung, are not idly awaiting the German Blitzkrieg. A joint secret service has been formed, recruited from the best that each nation has to offer. Their mission is to sabotage

Germany's growing military might, in order to give the free-world a fighting chance, once open war becomes inevitable. The men and women of this secret service operate without general political sanction, often within enemy territory, and always with the knowledge that should they be captured, their home countries will disavow any knowledge of their activities. The Main Cast of this Episode is made of such men and women as these.

ADVENTURE SUMMARY

A group of agents (our heroes) are sent in to rescue the renowned German rocket physicist, and anti-war pacifist, Professor Albert Schlessig. Dr. Schlessig is being held captive, and forced to work for the Nazi war effort. Dr. Schlessig has risked his life to get a message through to the Allied cause. He wants transportation out of Germany. The Main Cast is sent in to get him, and they start with no knowledge of the Überzeppelin.

The Main cast enter the research base, only to discover that it's being shut down. The rocket project has been a success, and some of the 'timed-bombs' have already been delivered to the Überzeppelin Base. The heroes rescue Professor Schlessig, who tells them of the mad Nazi plans, and they all head off to destroy the ÜberZeppelin. The heroes reach the mountaintop ÜberZeppelin Base, discover the Colonel's plans to attack Warsaw with this new airship, and his deadly 'timed-bombs', and act in the best interest of the free world by destroying everything in sight.

SCALING

We've foregone the process of Scaling in this mini-adventure for the sake of brevity. All Traits here, with the exception of those possessed by the Colonel, are on a 'normal human' Scale. Really strong guys are, well, really

strong, just like you would expect them to be. Really smart guys are just that, really smart, just like those bright guys you knew in school. Only the Colonel is Überhuman. How far beyond the pale is he? Far enough to scare the wits out of your Actors. However, we feel that it would be good practice, **for you**, to go ahead and make up a set of Scales for this Episode, if you wish to.

TIPS AND KEEN BITS

Below, are a few hints for Directing this Episode, gathered from the many times we've already used it. Stay calm, keep the action moving, improvise where necessary, and you'll have a blast.

Act I - The Start

The action begins with our heroes already into their break-in and rescue. If you want a longer adventure, and an extra chance for the Main Cast to get themselves into trouble, you can start them all in some nearby town, forcing them to plan and execute the rescue mission from the beginning.

Cut Scene

In this Scene, we recommend you don't say Hitler's name. Instead, let the Actors guess his identity through your descriptions, and through his actions.

Scene II

Your descriptions here should help the Actors to wonder why the Rocket Laboratory is being abandoned.

Act II - Scene I

Utilize the townspeople, the bar patrons, and the underground members. Give the town, and each person in it, a life and personality. This is a great Scene for roleplay.

Pinch I

Here's where your Actors will go nuts! They'll come up with a lot of schemes for getting into the hangar, finding the bombs, and destroying the Zeppelin. Throw lots of obstacles in their way. They'll love it... really! Just pull them into the Midpoint when they've had enough.

Midpoint

This Scene can be played long or slow. Your Main Cast may even avoid capture (but they'll have to make their way onto the airship anyway, to stop it before it

destroys Warsaw). Or, they may be captured, but attempt a break. They'll always try to gain every edge before being forced onto the Zeppelin, and creative ideas should definitely be rewarded.

Scene IV and Pinch II

This part of the adventure is a ton of fun. Make this time dangerous, and tense. Retrofit your explanations to maximize the surprises. Provide each of the Main Cast an opportunity to feel important, while using their favorite Attributes, Skills, and Descriptors.

Plot Turn II

The classic resolution for this adventure is the destruction of the ÜberZeppelin using the timed bombs, and the subsequent aerial dogfight. Your Actors may come up with something more interesting. Great! Go with it. Change the Episode's ending. See if we care.

CHARACTER TEMPLATES

Our intention with the Character Templates is to provide the bare necessities, and then to let your Actors personalize the role they choose to play. These Templates give you a pre-Scaled character. Your Actors may then use the Scaling provided, as a guide to filling in their own descriptions.

STAGE

There are four main locations in this Plot, e.g. the Rocket Research Laboratory, the Mountain Village, the Zeppelin Base, and the Überzeppelin itself. In designing this Episode, we intended the following (but don't let this inhibit your improvisations) ...

- ⇒ **The Rocket Research Laboratory** is a small base, taken up mostly by the research facilities.
- ⇒ **The Mountain village** has several shops, taverns, and inns.
- ⇒ **The Zeppelin Base** is very large, and filled with troops, planes, etc. The ÜberZeppelin Hanger itself is immense
- ⇒ **The ÜberZeppelin** is huge. It has four propeller engines, two levels inside, plus the interior support structure. The top level contains the small brig, the officers' quarters, and the like. The bottom level has the airplane hanger, complete with a hydraulic lift to lower the planes, barracks, and the control room. There is also a landing platform suspended below the ship. Yes, this is an aircraft carrier!

ACT I (The Introduction)

Cut Scene

- A motorcade arrives at the secret research camp where Dr. Schlessig is being held. It's Hitler, who has come to inspect the progress of the project. He's amazed at the progress being made, and asks to see the man responsible. Enter the Colonel, who gives an appropriate speech, 'This is a great day for the German people, as we rise above our enemies, raining death from above in the name of the Aryan race ...', etc.

Scene II

- Heroes encounter Hitler's motorcade leaving the camp as they approach (Hitler's car has tinted, closed windows). Trucks full of men, supplies, and odd looking bombs roll on down the road. The Main Cast is driving a commandeered truck up to the gate (CutScene showing bound and gagged German soldiers). They also have stolen security papers and uniforms. The heroes enter the 'Rocket Research Base' only to find it in the last stages of being abandoned.

Plot Turn I



- The heroes find a way to rescue Dr. Schlessig. He is being watched by guards as he puts the finishing touches on a last load of bombs. The good Doctor will be able to tell the heroes of the horrors of his new 'timed-bombs' (meant to be dropped from the air, timed to explode just above the ground for massive damage, and high kill ratios).

[Papers left in the Colonel's abandoned office will contain notes on the ÜberZeppelin itself, able to fly high, out of reach of the planes of the day. There is also a map to the Zeppelin Base left in the glove compartment of a car (or in a safe, or ...). Doctor Schlessig has plans for the 'timed-bombs' (repeat this a lot) themselves, and will provide them if asked.]

Scene IV

- The heroes get the Professor off the base. Feel free to throw in a few Failures, get them noticed by guards, and let loose with a massive gun battle. Let the Main Cast literally destroy what remains of this base, the bombs, the guards, you name it. Whatever happens, **if the Main Cast is not about to go after the ÜberZeppelin itself**, when this is over, Dr. Schlessig will insist that they do so. That Zeppelin is on its way to Warsaw for a test run. Dr. Schlessig knows the Allied forces want him to design weapons of destruction for them, and the Doctor insists that he will do no such thing, unless the Main Cast stop the Colonel and his mad schemes.

ACT II (The Confrontation)

Scene I

- This is the 'Of course I am French, why else would I have this silly accent!' Scene, or the 'Bakery Truck' Scene. The heroes are in a town below the mountain stronghold which houses the top-secret ÜberZeppelin Base. They need a way in. That way is the bakery truck. If the heroes still have Dr. Schlessig, then they can connect with the underground which will carry him to safety. This underground cell is in the town's bakery (Francois can improvise this, or it can be given to him). If the heroes have already left the Doctor behind, then information may be had at the local bar, from German soldiers working at the base, and drinking there off-duty, or from local townspeople working about. Either way, the information gained will tell the heroes that daily deliveries of vegetables, eggs, clean laundry, and BREAD, are made each day to the Zeppelin Base.

Pinch I

- The heroes sneak away from the bakery truck, and must make their way to the large (and obvious) Zeppelin Hangar (Hopefully, they still have those Nazi guard uniforms). The Zeppelin is big, really big, constructed of re-inforced cells, and woven out of some odd bullet-resistant fiber (possibly an early version of Kevlar). It's very tough to destroy. However, there are all these 'TIMED-BOMBS' about, and the Main Cast may even have the blueprints to them. Unfortunately, modifying even a single bomb will take some time, even with the plans (which are slightly out of date), and the place is crawling with guards. The Main Cast will be given away before they complete the setting of the bomb. They may be heard, or stumbled upon, or noted by a suspicious townspeople delivering other goods, but we prefer to have them pointed out by a traitor within the underground movement (possibly someone who insisted upon coming along with them). In walks the Colonel, with loads of guards, with loads of weapons, for the big capture. Yes, the heroes are catupred, forced to listen to the Colonel's speech on the marvels of his ÜberZeppelin, on his plan to test his new bombs out on Warsaw, and on how our heroes will have a chance to witness it all, before they die. The Main Cast is stripped of weapons (unless they are very clever), and loaded aboard the ÜberZeppelin, along with the remaining bombs, including the one they were just working on. Yes, the bomb which is *almost*

set, and ready to go, is loaded on with the others. No one has noticed the heroes' modifications, but you bet the heroes will be able to find it again, at the right time.

Midpoint

- The heroes are loaded onto the Zeppelin, and forced into a locked room, with a guard waiting outside, to await the big show. To complete the adventure, the heroes must get out of their cell. There are a lot of ways they might accomplish this. Not all of the Main Cast need be captured. Someone might sneak away in time, and would then be able to find their way onto the Zeppelin before it takes off, ready to come to the rescue of the others (we like this one a lot). Several of the Main Cast have mechanical Skills, and may be able to pick the lock on their cell, or even go through one of the room's riveted walls. One of the heroes may be able to keep a secret hold-out gun, providing an opportunity to shoot their unfortunate jailer, drag him to the cell, and grab his uniform and weapons before the reinforcements arrive. One way, or another, this is where the action really begins.

Scene IV

- This is a long, deadly, running gunfight. There are SS troupers all over the ship. The Main Cast will want to make their way towards the bombs (to blow up the Zeppelin), or towards a plane in the Hangar Deck (to escape), or both. The first few encounters may allow the heroes some stealth, as the ship will not yet be alerted, which will also allow the heroes to arm themselves. Sooner, or later though, they're going to make a mistake, a guard is going to sound the alarm, etc. Then the Colonel will come, again, and again. This Scene takes up the space between the heroes' escape, and when they inevitably alert the rest of the ship to their presence (which could be almost immediately if they've made a noisy getaway).

Pinch II

- The Main Cast will eventually have to find a plane and get off the Zeppelin. If they're bright, they'll also use one of the 'timed-bombs' to blow the Zeppelin up behind them (doing this complicates the Episode, and is worth more points). They must fight their way towards each of their goals. The second time the Colonel shows up is the right time for a dramatic Scene that we'll call Pinch II. Where are the heroes at this point? Well, we suggest they be in a particularly dangerous and sensitive area of the ship. The heroes route through the ÜberZeppelin will be mostly a matter of improvisational play. This gives you the freedom to set this important fight in a location like the Main Control Room, where gunfire can send the airship careening and pitching, throwing men through glass windows to their doom, or, in the Engine Room, where whirling turbine blades, and pipes full of pressurized steam can provide adequately dramatic hazards. Either way, the ÜberZeppelin should be out of control after this encounter. That will make the Colonel really mad.

Plot Turn II

- The heroes will be harried by gunfire, assaulted by the Colonel, battered, bruised, and really pissed off. They'll eventually make it to the Hangar Deck. If you want a longer Episode, and the Main Cast have thought of the bombs, then you can have the 'timed-bombs' separated from the planes, not yet loaded. This will make the heroes fight their way to the bombs, find the one they were working on before (the others will take too much time to modify, and they can always find 'their' bomb again), and set it to go off at some time in the future. The heroes will then have to make their way to the Hangar Deck, and get off the ship in a plane, before the bomb explodes. Every delay will be really nerve-wracking, which makes this a fun option to use. However, if you don't have the time, or the Main Cast doesn't think of blowing up the ÜberZeppelin, then the bombs may be in the Hangar Deck with the planes, ready to be loaded on for the drop. If the Main Cast is really out of it that day, then a mechanic in the Hangar Deck can have just noticed their tampered bomb, as the heroes enter, which should serve as a clear reminder of their forgotten plan. The heroes will have just set the 'timed-bomb', pulled parachutes out of planes, or sabotaged them, and are preparing to leave, when the Colonel shows up again (if they haven't already killed him). Either the Colonel, or a patriotic German pilot (if the Colonel is dead), will do the honor of chasing down the Main Cast for the aerial dogfight.

ACT III (The Resolution)

Scene I

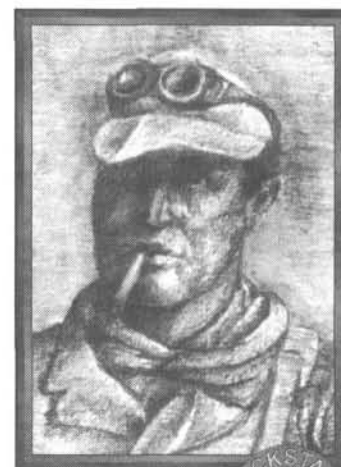
- This is the big finale. If you only have an Ace German Pilot to threaten the Main Cast with, then you'll have to make do as best you can. If the Colonel is still up and kicking (he hasn't yet been Blackmailed to death), then he'll hang on until the last possible moment. Using the grappling hook in his mechanical arm, he'll leap to heroes' plane when his goes down. He'll engage in fisticuffs on the wing of their plane. Make the dogfight, and the ensuing hand to hand action, worthy of the best you've seen or read. Your Actors will love you for it.

THEATRIX

⬆ Abe Walters
⬆ Anastasia Walters

"I like being a grunt. I'm smart, but not a leader. Show me what to do, and I'll do it well."

ATTRIBUTES	SKILLS	DESCRIPTORS	PERSONALITY TRAITS
[6.0] Strength	[5.5] Racing	Shrack (Primary)	M S E
[5.0] Stamina	[4.0] Military Vehicles	Grounded	Cocky <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
[4.0] Coordination	[4.0] Mechanic	Imposing	Brave <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
[3.0] Intellect	[3.0] German	Tools	Nationalistic <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
[3.5] Intuition	[2.0] Spanish	Been There	Determined <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
[5.0] Presence	[3.5] Firearms	Much Death Combat	Protective <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
	[2.5] Masonry	Dark Secret (Flaw)	
	[2.0] Munitions		
	[5.0] Hand-to-Hand		
	[4.0] Security		
	[4.0] Electronics		

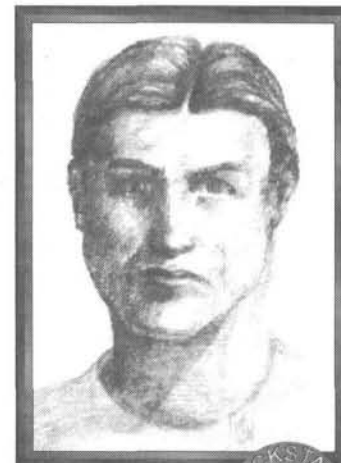


THEATRIX

⬆ 'Boomer'
⬆ 'Boomer'

"Taking out targets was my game, then seek and retrieve, and now it's sneak and plant.."

ATTRIBUTES	SKILLS	DESCRIPTORS	PERSONALITY TRAITS
[3.5] Strength	[6.0] Firearms	Silent Death (Primary)	M S E
[4.0] Stamina	[4.0] Architecture	Agile	Cool <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
[6.0] Coordination	[3.0] History	Tricky	Bitter <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
[4.0] Intellect	[5.0] Stealth	Direction Sense	Extremist <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
[5.0] Intuition	[4.0] Security Systems	Sniper	Confident <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
[3.5] Presence	[4.5] Demolitions	Perfectionist (Flaw)	Unforgiving <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
	[3.0] Munitions		
	[3.0] Military Operations		
	[3.5] Covert Operations		
	[3.0] Mechanics		
	[4.0] Judo		
	[3.0] Chemistry		



THEATRIX

⬆ Joey 'Tailspin' White
⬆ Johnny 'Tailspin' White

"I don't care where you send me, or what we do, as long as I can go fast, and win the day."

ATTRIBUTES	SKILLS	DESCRIPTORS	PERSONALITY TRAITS
[4.0] Strength	[3.5] Aeronautics	Ace of Aces (Primary)	M S E
[5.0] Stamina	[7.0] Pilot	Kinesthetic	Down to Earth <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
[5.0] Coordination	[3.0] Military Vehicles	Daredevil	Loves Speed <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
[3.5] Intellect	[4.0] Carousing	Has an Idea	Patriotic <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
[4.0] Intuition	[4.0] Orienteering	Flown It	Daredevil <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
[3.0] Presence	[3.5] Electronics	Hasty (Flaw)	Proud <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
	[3.0] Firearms		Quick Tempered <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
	[4.0] Hand-to-Hand		
	[3.0] Learned		
	[4.0] Pinball		
	[3.0] Mechanics		

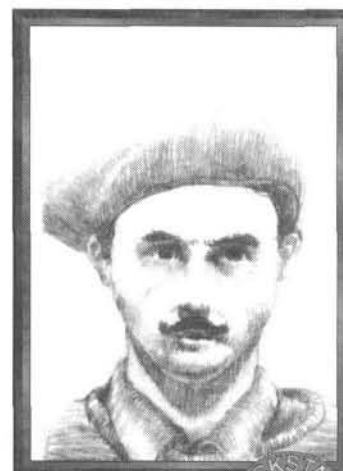


THEATRIX

♂ Francois Sassinot
♀ Babette Sassinot

"I will hit him with my baguette, and then shoot him while he's distracted."

ATTRIBUTES	SKILLS	DESCRIPTORS	PERSONALITY TRAITS
[3.5] Strength	[6.0] Baking	Connected (Primary)	M S E
[4.0] Stamina	[3.5] German	Has a Plan	Nationalistic <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
[4.0] Coordination	[4.0] English	Baguette	Judge and jury <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
[5.0] Intellect	[3.0] Spanish	Contacts	Flamboyant <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
[6.0] Intuition	[6.0] Guile	Well Read	Hates Gerrys <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
[5.0] Presence	[4.0] Subterfuge	Fixer	Passionate <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
	[3.5] Orienteering	French	Self-Serving <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
	[3.5] Sleight of Hand	French (Flaw)	Greedy <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
	[4.0] Smuggling		
	[5.0] Dirty Fighting		
	[4.0] Acting		
	[2.5] Firearms		

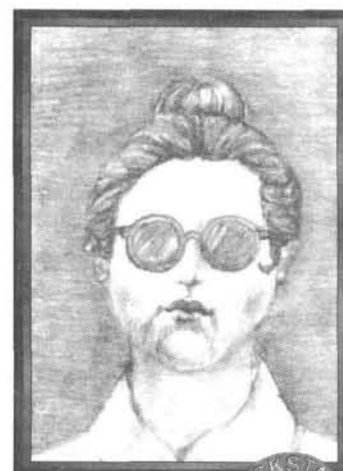


THEATRIX

♀ Sarah O'Mally
♂ Scott O'Mally

"Aye, I could have made it big as an inventor ... cushy job ... I'd rather be puttin' it to some Nazi with a creative little gadget"

ATTRIBUTES	SKILLS	DESCRIPTORS	PERSONALITY TRAITS
[4.5] Strength	[4.0] Chemistry	Mr. Wizard (Primary)	M S E
[4.0] Stamina	[5.0] Mechanics	Comes Fully Equipped	Sarcastic <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
[3.5] Coordination	[3.0] Demolitions	Gadgeteer	Impatient <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
[6.0] Intellect	[4.0] Architecture	Photographic Memory	Strong-Willed <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
[5.0] Intuition	[3.5] Civil Engineering	Perceptive	Nationalistic <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
[3.5] Presence	[4.0] Mining	Can't Resist	Helpful <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
	[4.0] Hand-to-Hand	a Puzzle (Flaw)	
	[6.0] Inventor		
	[3.0] Aeronautics		
	[3.0] Machining		
	[4.0] Firearms		
	[3.5] Pilot		

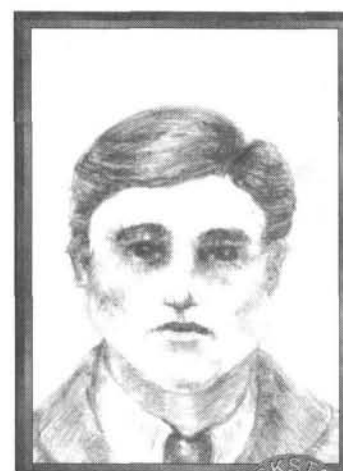


THEATRIX

♂ Reginald Lange
♀ Amber Lange

"Her Majesty has found my skills more suitable to counterespionage than Navy command. I'm rather glad about this, really ... the food is better, anyway."

ATTRIBUTES	SKILLS	DESCRIPTORS	PERSONALITY TRAITS
[3.5] Strength	[3.0] Forgery	Spy (Primary)	M S E
[5.0] Stamina	[4.0] Etiquette	Polyglot	Nationalistic <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
[6.0] Coordination	[5.0] Bureaucracy	Dashing	Level Headed <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
[4.0] Intellect	[4.0] Persuasion	British	Overconfident <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
[5.0] Intuition	[6.0] Firearms	Subterfuge	Fear of Heights <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
[5.0] Presence	[5.0] Hand-to-Hand	Obvious (Flaw)	Patriotic <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
	[5.0] Military Operations		Commanding <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
	[5.0] Covert Operations		
	[5.0] Guile		
	[4.0] Gadgetry		
	[4.0] Investigation		





The Colonel

"At last, all my plans are fulfilled. There'll be no one to stop us this time!"

ATTRIBUTES	SKILLS	DESCRIPTORS	PERSONALITY TRAITS
[8.0] Strength	[7.0] Grand Schemes	Cybernetics (Primary)	M S E
[8.0] Stamina	[5.0] Oratory	Can't Die	☒☒☒
[3.0] Coordination	[6.0] Leadership	Mastermind	☒☒☒
[6.0] Intellect	[4.0] Firearms	Megalomania (Flaw)	☒☒☒
[2.0] Intuition	[5.0] Hand-to-Hand		☒☒☒
[7.0] Presence	[6.0] Pilot		☒☒☒
	[4.5] History		
	[5.5] Tactics		
	[2.0] Japanese		
	[3.0] English		



SS Trooper

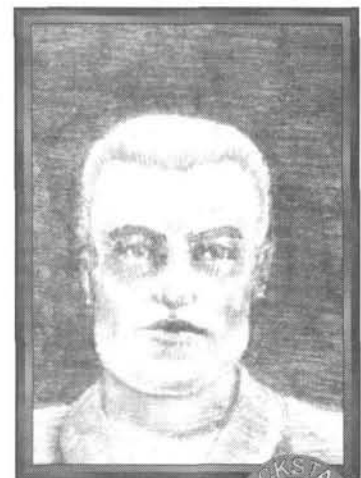
"Halt!"

ATTRIBUTES	SKILLS	DESCRIPTORS	PERSONALITY TRAITS
[3.5] Strength	[3.0] Firearms	Nazi (Flaw)	M S E
[4.0] Stamina	[2.5] Hand-to-Hand		☒☒☐
[3.0] Coordination	[1.0] English		☒☒☐
[2.5] Intellect	[5.0] Carousing		☒☒☐
[1.5] Intuition	[4.0] Military Vehicles		
[3.5] Presence	[3.0] Interrogation		



SS Mechanic

ATTRIBUTES	SKILLS	DESCRIPTORS	PERSONALITY TRAITS
[4.0] Strength	[5.0] Mechanics	Normal (Flaw)	M S E
[3.0] Stamina	[1.5] Firearms		☒☐☐
[3.0] Coordination	[2.0] Hand-to-Hand		☒☒☐
[3.5] Intellect			☒☐☐
[4.0] Intuition			
[3.0] Presence			



Theatrix Reference Sheet A

Skill Ranks

- 1.0** Basic training. Anything less means a character is Unskilled in the area.
- 2.0** Basic training level for a journeyman in a Skill. This is the Rank you need for competency.
- 3.0** The character is skilled in the area, and would be described as very competent and well trained.
- 4.0** Excellent training and experience, leading to a highly trained individual, capable of instructing others.
- 5.0** Years of experience, and natural aptitude, have allowed the character to fully master the Skill.
- 6.0** The character is capable of Extraordinary feats in the area, even under pressure and time constraints. The character possesses a brilliant command of the Skill.
- 7.0** The character is capable of Impossible feats in the area. Others can only look on and admire.
- 8.0** The character makes the Impossible a regular enough occurrence, that they could have their own television show.
- 9.0** The character may have doubts, but they're so good that others don't doubt their capability to do anything with the Skill. The Impossible is to be expected.
- 10.0** Nothing is Impossible. **Nothing.**

Difficulty

Easy	A task you can do anytime. It's only possible to Fail such a task under stress.
Normal	Anything you could most likely do given sufficient time, preparation, and equipment.
Difficult	A task hard enough that you could Fail, even given sufficient time, preparation, and equipment.
Extraordinary	A task so hard that Failure is the most likely outcome, even given that all other factors are in your favor.
Impossible	Success, even in the best of conditions would seem ... well, impossible.

Allways set Difficulty for a Skill Rank of 3.0

Personality Trait Severity Levels

Moderate	This Trait effects the character's choices in everyday life, her reactions to situations, and sometimes even her choice of targets in combat.
Strong	The character is heavily swayed by this Personality Trait, which will influence all facets of the character's life. The character may act irrationally rather than go against this Trait's inclinations. Any decision to ignore this Trait in a situation should involve some internal struggle, or conflict.
Extreme	Where this Personality Trait is involved the character will not change her mind for any reason. The character may become totally irrational rather than oppose this Trait's dictates. Any decision that ignores this Trait's effects is only allowed through conflict with another Strong, or Extreme Personality Trait.

Spending Plot Points

Activate a Personality Trait

for Success in a single associated action.
to disregard external control for one Scene.
to perform actions that require that Trait for one Scene.

Activate a Descriptor

for Success in a single associated action.
for dramatic use of that Descriptor for one Scene.

Activate a Statement

to eliminate the possibility of that Statement being wrong.

Earning Plot Points

RATING FACTORS

Intricacy	The difficulty of obtaining a solution.
Danger	The likelihood that failure will lead to disaster.
Depth	The quality of the roleplaying elicited by the events.
Technique	The use of good cinematography (ie. Foreshadowing, Cut Scenes, etc.).

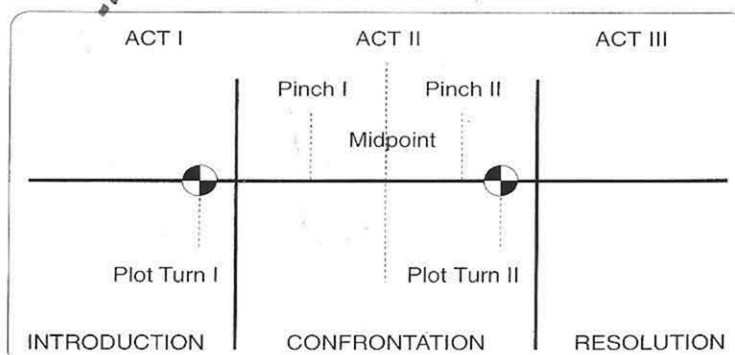
COMPLEXITY LEVELS

Simple	This Subplot presented only minor obstacles, did not greatly endanger the Actors, and had only secondary significance to the story.
Average	This Subplot presented serious obstacles, placed the Actors in danger, and was a significant part of the story.
Complex	This Subplot presented numerous obstacles, placed the Actors in serious amounts of danger, and was a centerpiece of the story.
Convolved	This Subplot presented layers of intrigue, placed the Actors in grave danger, and was a major part of the story.
Twisted	This Subplot induced paranoia and neurosis, sunk the Actors in danger way over their heads, was a major part of this story, and will probably take several more to deal with the aftereffects.

Plot Points

Simple	: 1 pt.
Average	: 2 pts.
Complex	: 3 pts.
Convolved	: 4 pts.
Twisted	: 5 pts.

Personal Subplot	: +1 pt.	Main Plot	: +1 pt.
Long Term Subplot	: +1 pt.	Activated Flaw	: +1 pt.



Theatrix Reference Sheet B

Action Capability Chart						
Skill Rank	Difficulty					
		Easy	Normal	Difficult	Extr.	Imp.
0.0						
1.0						
2.0						
3.0						
4.0						
5.0						
6.0						
7.0						
8.0						
9.0						
10.0						

- Not Capable
 - About Capable
 - Very Capable

Damage	Lucky	False Hope	Doubt	Dilemma	Done Well

Crunch!

01 - 70	71 - 85	86 - 94	95 - 98	99	00
---------	---------	---------	---------	----	----

Ouch!

01 - 60	61 - 79	80 - 91	92 - 96	97 - 98	99 - 00
---------	---------	---------	---------	---------	---------

Woah!

01 - 50	51 - 70	71 - 85	86 - 94	95 - 98	99 - 00
---------	---------	---------	---------	---------	---------

Duck!

01 - 39	40 - 60	61 - 79	80 - 91	92 - 97	98 - 00
---------	---------	---------	---------	---------	---------

Close

01 - 29	30 - 50	51 - 71	72 - 86	87 - 95	96 - 00
---------	---------	---------	---------	---------	---------

Almost

01 - 20	21 - 39	40 - 61	62 - 80	81 - 92	93 - 00
---------	---------	---------	---------	---------	---------

Mean Result Chart						
Skill Rank	Difficulty					
		Easy	Normal	Difficult	Extr.	Imp.
0.0		Hmmm	Duck!	Ouch!	Crunch!	Crunch!
1.0		O.K.	Maybe?	Close	Ouch!	Crunch!
2.0		Yes!	O.K.	Maybe?	Woah!	Crunch!
3.0		Excellent!	Yes!	Hmmm	Close	Crunch!
4.0		Boss!	Excellent!	O.K.	Almost	Ouch!
5.0		Boss!	Boss!	Yes!	Maybe?	Duck!
6.0		Righteous!	Boss!	Excellent!	Hmmm	Almost
7.0		Righteous!	Righteous!	Boss!	O.K.	Hmmm
8.0		Righteous!	Righteous!	Boss!	Yes!	O.K.
9.0		Righteous!	Righteous!	Righteous!	Excellent!	Yes!
10.0		Righteous!	Righteous!	Righteous!	Boss!	Excellent!

Maybe?

01 - 14	15 - 29	30 - 50	51 - 71	72 - 86	87 - 00
---------	---------	---------	---------	---------	---------

Hmmm

01 - 08	09 - 20	21 - 39	40 - 61	62 - 80	81 - 00
---------	---------	---------	---------	---------	---------

O.K.

01 - 05	06 - 14	15 - 29	30 - 50	51 - 71	72 - 00
---------	---------	---------	---------	---------	---------

Yes!

01 - 03	04 - 08	09 - 20	21 - 39	40 - 61	62 - 00
---------	---------	---------	---------	---------	---------

Excellent!

01 - 02	03 - 06	07 - 15	16 - 29	30 - 50	51 - 00
---------	---------	---------	---------	---------	---------

Boss!

01	02 - 03	04 - 08	09 - 20	21 - 39	40 - 00
----	---------	---------	---------	---------	---------

Righteous!

01	02	03 - 06	07 - 15	16 - 34	35 - 00
----	----	---------	---------	---------	---------

Theatrix Reference Sheet C

Fighting Styles

Plain Fighting

With Plain Fighting you're simply doing whatever is easiest, making attacks of opportunity, and keeping up a good defense. The disadvantage of Plain Fighting is that you can sometimes be caught off balance by a more daring and ferocious attack (see All Out Attack).

Also - Fencing, Taking a rest, Contending, Keeping the pace, Keeping her at bay, Taking her measure, or Sizing her up.

All Out Attack

In an All Out Attack you throw caution to the wind and go for the most damage you can inflict. The problem is that you're basically defenseless, and if your opponent is much better than you, probably in a lot of trouble.

Also - Going for It, Raining blows, Going all out, Full committal, Berserk, or Frenzy.

Full Defense

When choosing Full Defense, an Actor is concentrating solely on keeping her character alive and uninjured. With this type of fighting the character will be very hard to hurt, but then again, she won't be accomplishing much else.

Also - Giving ground, All out defense, Parry, Block, or Dodge.

Trickery

When engaging in Trickery your hoping to somehow unbalance your opponent into either giving you an opening for an attack, or allowing you to escape. Trickery is always dangerous, because if it fails you'll often find that you're the one who has been unbalanced.

Also - Feint, Hand switch, Throw sand in the eyes, Sleight of hand, Hidden weapon, Bluffing, or Playing Dead.

Typical Combat Difficulties

HANDGUNS

Easy	Shooting a torso-sized target at a range of 20 feet, with plenty of time to aim and no pressure.
Normal	Hitting a torso-sized target at a range of 20 feet, taking one second to aim.
Difficult	Taking a snap shot at a moving man-sized target at 40 feet.
Extraordinary	An offhand quick draw and snap shot, at a fast moving man at 60 feet.
Impossible	A quick draw, attempting to hit an opponent in the head, while dodging, at a range of 150 feet.

FENCING

Easy	A quick thrust to the midsection, or a strong beat against the opponent's blade.
Normal	A measured attack to create an opening, followed by a quick riposte to take the advantage.
Difficult	A feint used to draw the opponent in, followed by an unguarded thrust against the opening created.
Extraordinary	Disarming the opponent with a twist of your blade.
Impossible	Removing a button from your opponent's tunic.

Damage Types

Blunt - This is the kind of damage that someone receives when they're hit by an attack that is not designed to pierce the skin.

Edged - This kind of an attack is designed to cut the skin, exposing internal organs, and causing significant bleeding.

Burn - This kind of damage comes from open flames primarily, but could also be the result of exposure to acid, or freezing cold (i.e., freezer burn).

Blast/Fall - This kind of damage is defined by Blunt trauma that covers more than half of the body. This type of damage is often accompanied by another.

Penetrating - This type of damage causes particularly deep wounds. It is different from Edged damage in that a smaller surface

Wound Levels

Unhurt - The character is uninjured and fine.

Also - Fit as a fiddle, Feeling fine, or Doing great.

Bruised - The character has been injured in an unfriendly, but not terribly inconvenient way. You might penalize the Actor by raising the Difficulty of some actions.

Also - Scratched, Winded, Flesh wound, or 'I've had worse!'

Light Wounds - An injury of this severity will slow the character's movement speed down if in a leg, or will impair an arm. Such a wound may cause a momentary lapse of balance if aimed at the head. Such a wound may be used to adjudicate Failures.

Also - On the rocks, Road rash, Gash, Muscle tear, or Grazed.

Battered - An injury of this level will slow the character to about half movement if in a leg, or greatly impede an arm. This severity of wound will get in the way during any athletic endeavor. Such a wound to the head may briefly knock a character unconscious (a few seconds will do). Any quick or uncalculated use of the afflicted body part in an action is begging for Failure.

Also - Sprained, Shot, or Serious Bleeding.

Grievous - Movement will be decreased to a slow walk at best if wounded in a leg, and an arm may become totally dysfunctional. An injury of this level to the body will be bleed, and will make any athletic endeavor very difficult. Such a head injury generally results in brief unconsciousness (several minutes), and may cause whiplash, or even a concussion. This injury will probably require immediate medical attention.

Also - That's Gotta Hurt, 'No sir, I didn't like it.', Broken leg, Cracked rib, or Internal bleeding.

Incapacitated - Almost all wounds this serious involve the entire body, be it several wounds leading to Incapacitation, one wound that results in serious blood loss, or a single massive trauma. Movement at this point is close to impossible.

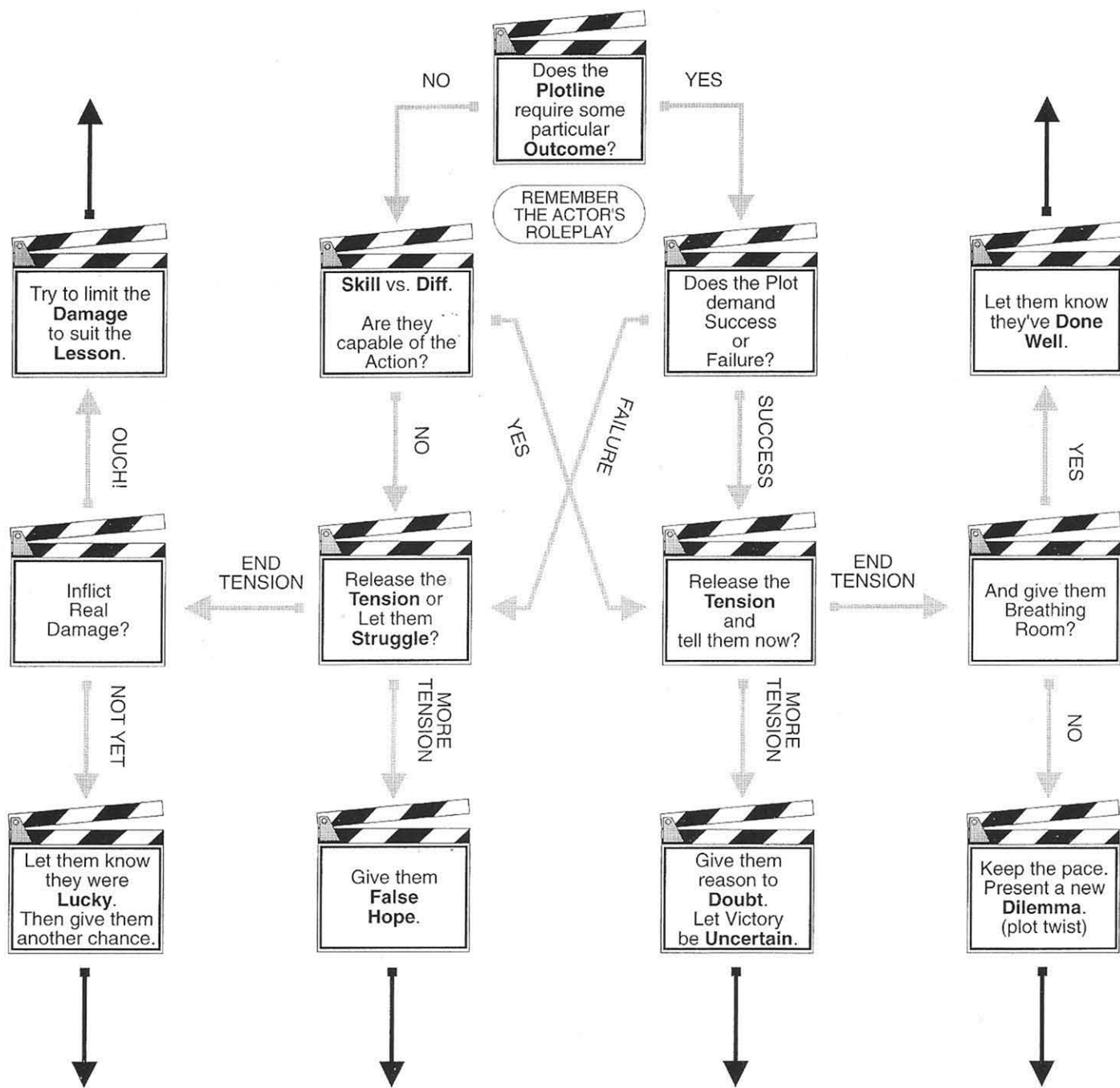
Also - 'Well, at least you've still got your teeth.', 'I'd rather not look.', or 'I hate it when that happens.'

Dead - If the character doesn't get immediate expert medical attention, she'll soon be dead. Oh, and as for movement, just forget about it.

Also - Blown to bits, Cut in half, 'Hope your next life goes better.'

Please consult the Theatrix 'Core Rules' for complete information

Basic Resolution Flowchart



This flowchart can represent any time scale, from a 3 second combat round, to a month or year long research project.

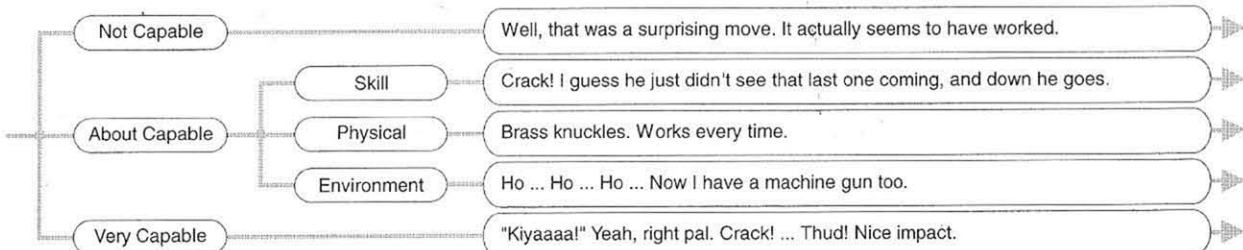
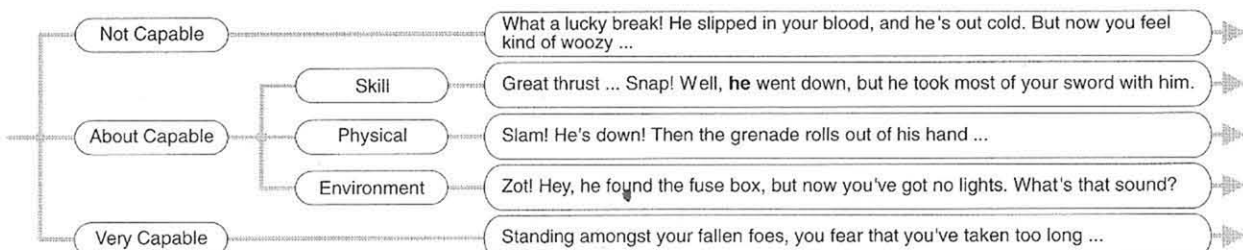
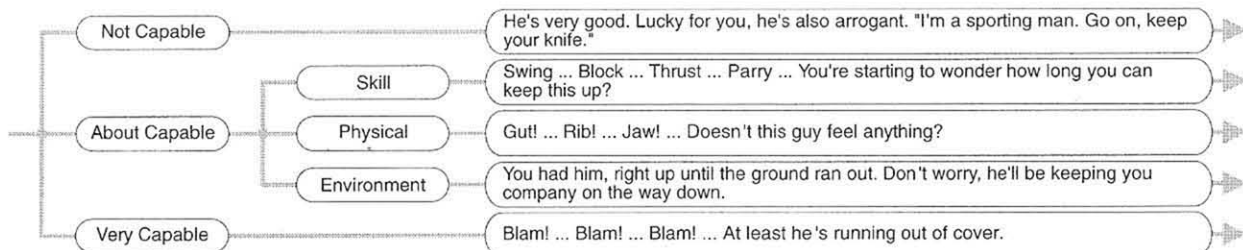
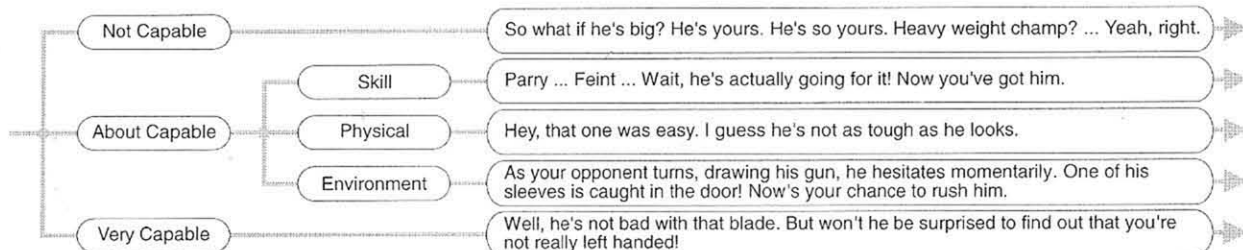
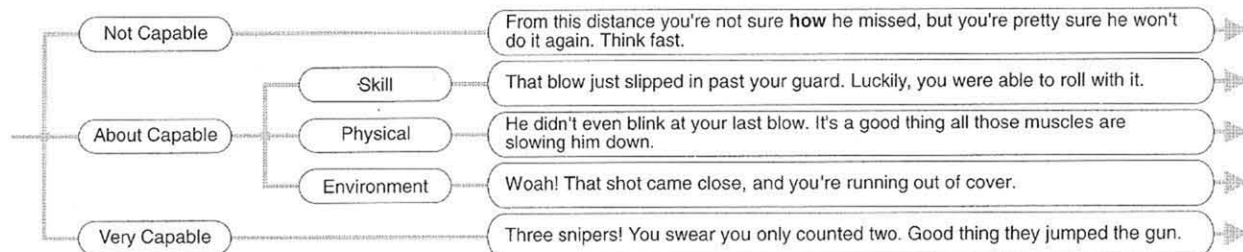
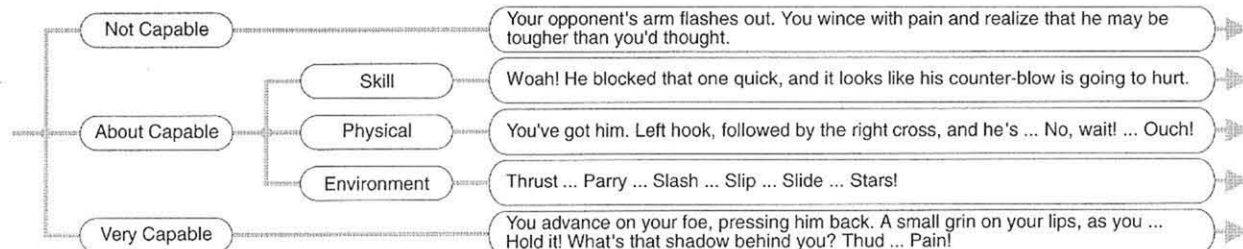
➡ Out to the **Advanced Resolution Flowchart**

Combat Resolution Flowchart

Skill - The level of expertise of the combatants. Their finesse with the various implements of combat.

Physical - The power or force of an attack. The ability of the attack to overwhelm defenses.

Environment - The setting in which the combat takes place, and all the props contained therein.

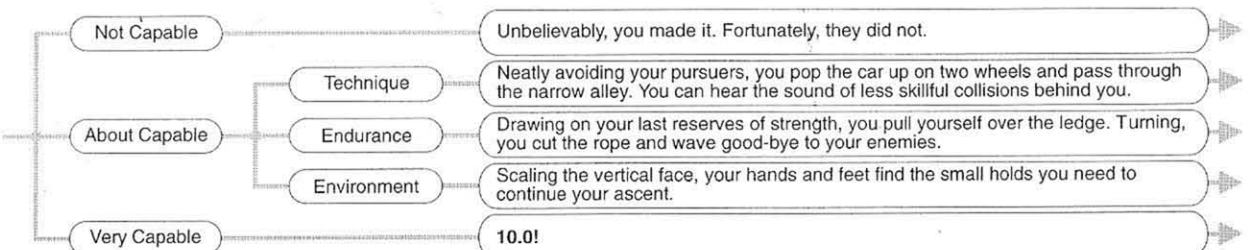
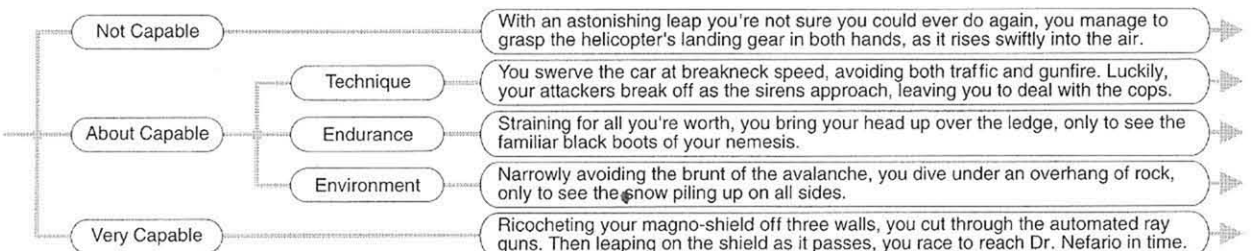
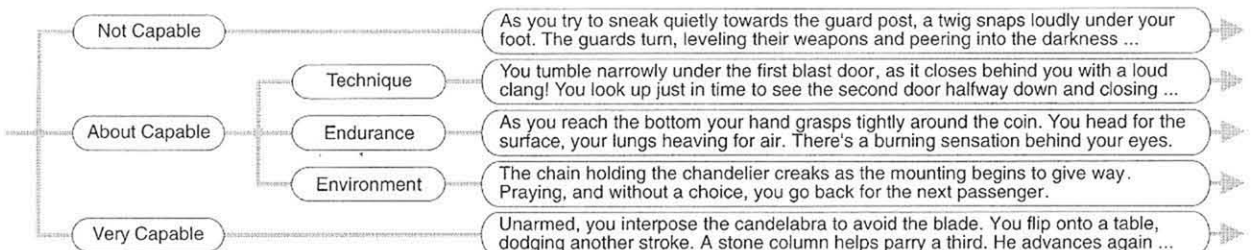
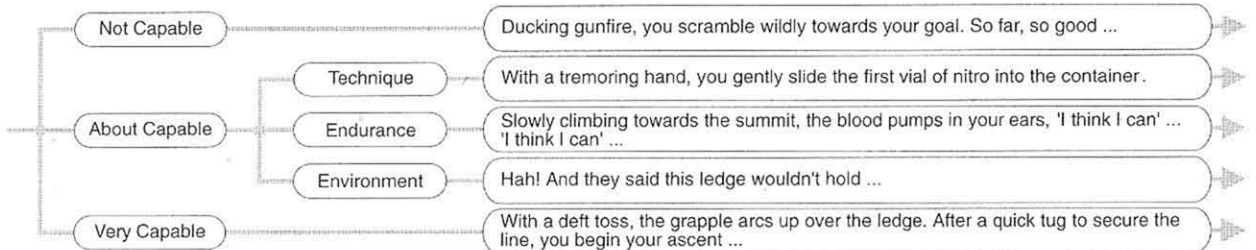
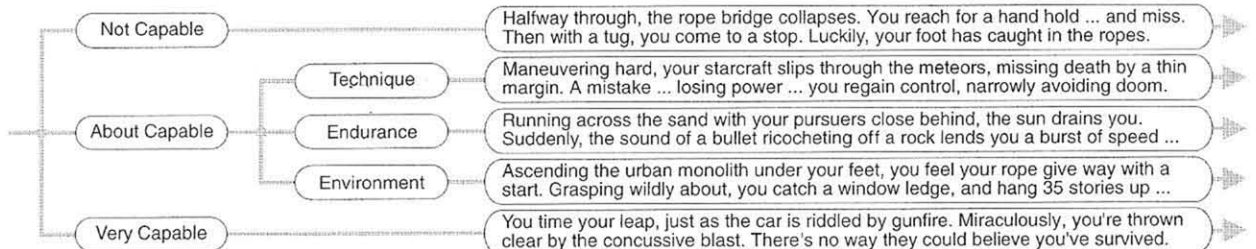
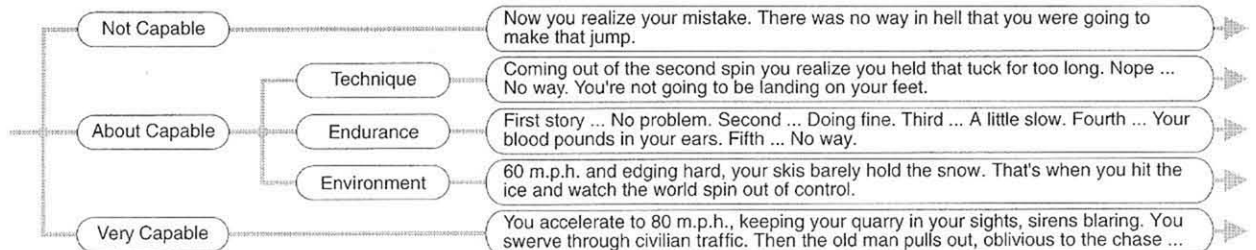


Athletic Resolution Flowchart

Technique - The level of expertise, finesse, and coordination involved in the maneuver's execution.

Endurance - The extent to which the stress involved in the action effects its performance.

Environment - The setting in which the maneuver takes place, and all the props contained therein.

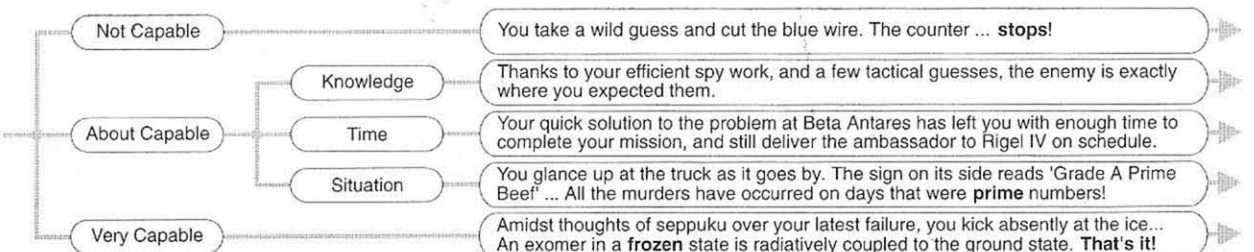
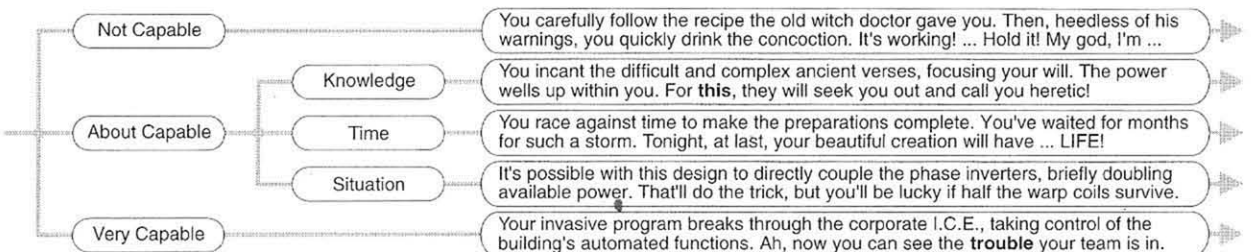
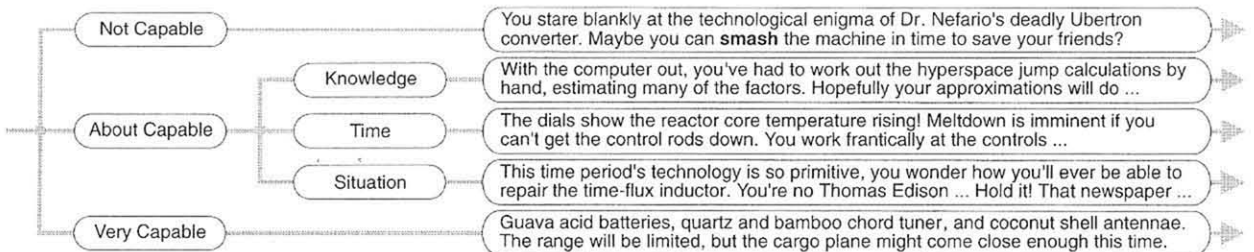
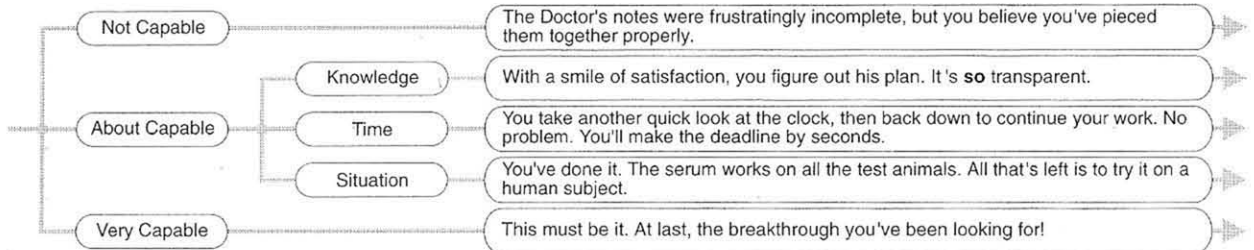
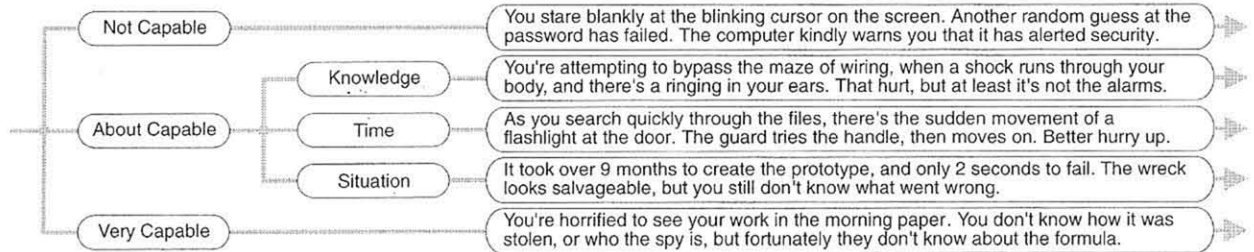
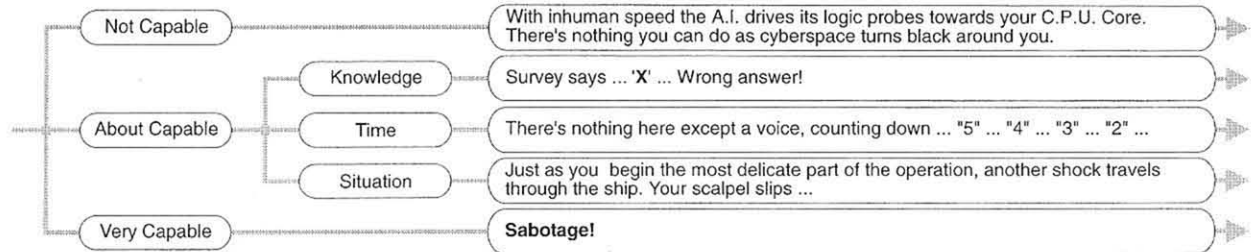


Intellectual Resolution Flowchart

Knowledge - The quantity of information and experience possessed, covering the task at hand.

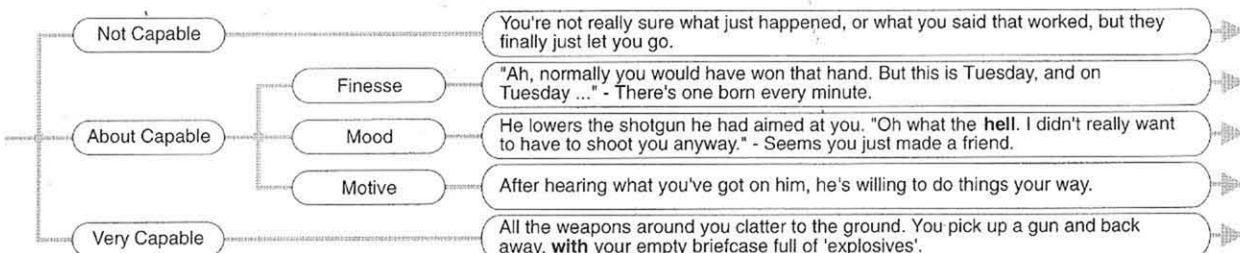
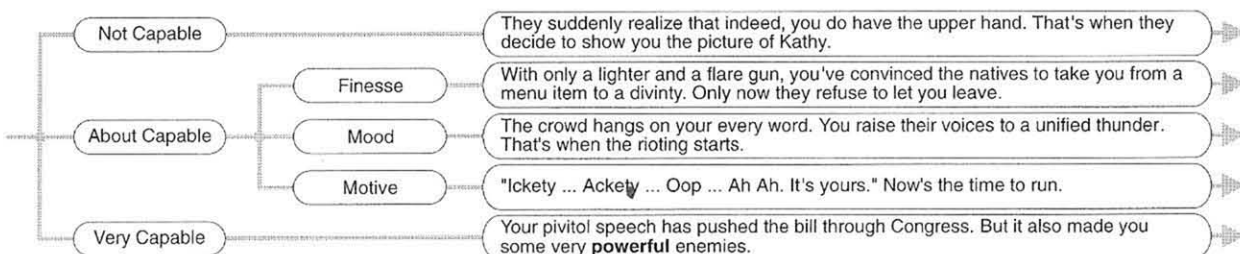
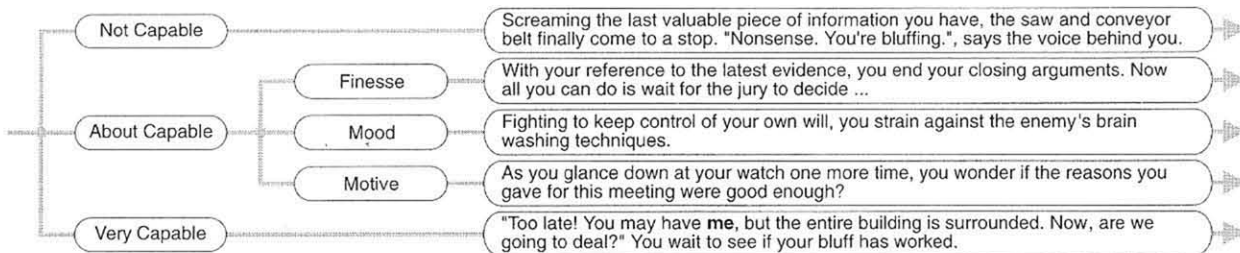
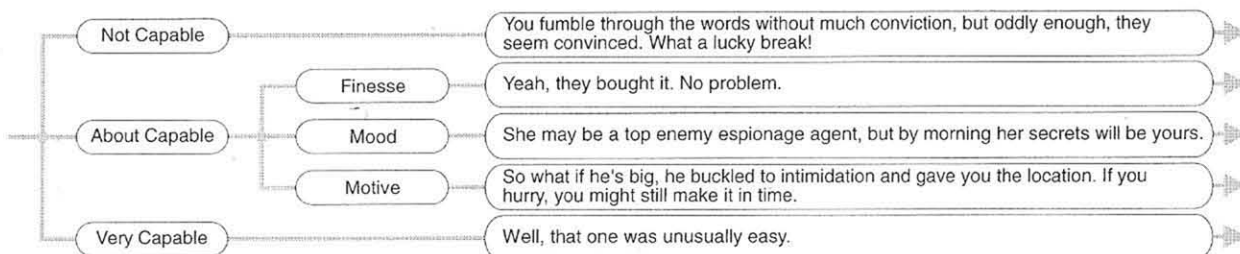
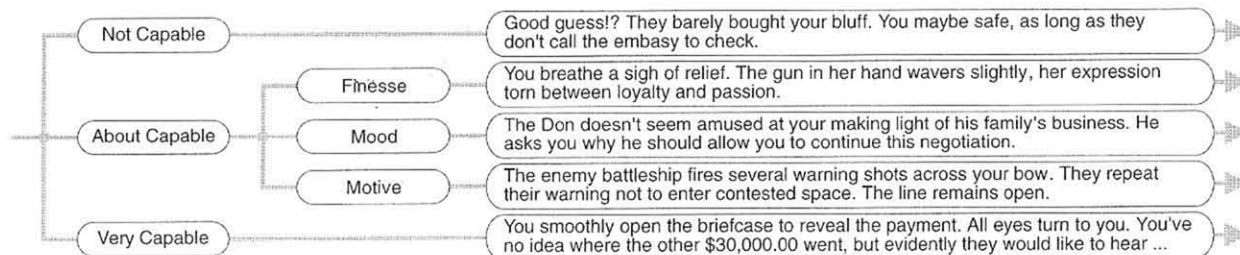
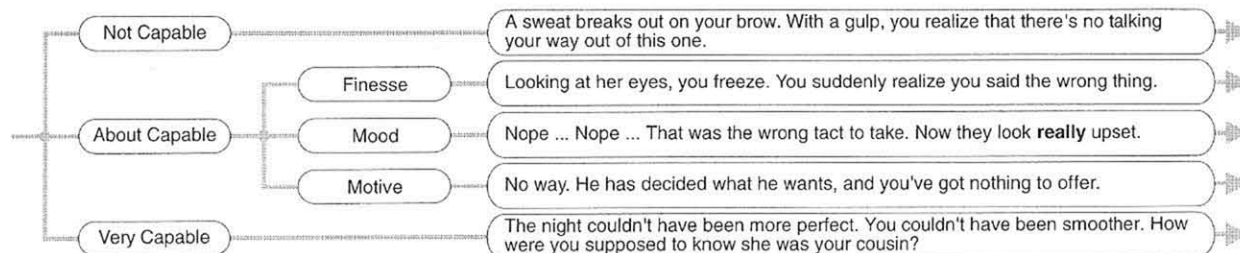
Time - The ability to perform the task within the available deadlines.

Situation - The quality and availability of tools and components, as well as other environmental factors.



Interpersonal Resolution Flowchart

Finesse - The subtlety and skill with which the interaction is conducted.
 Mood - The use of the prevailing emotional characteristics of the Scene.
 Motive - The underlying agendas of the individuals involved.



THEATRIX™

UNIVERSAL ROLEPLAYING

UNIVERSAL The rules allow for the creation of any type of character, from any genre, at any power level.

DICELESS This is a storytelling game. Every decision can be made based upon roleplay alone. Dice are optional.

FUN Plot lines are developed interactively, encouraging everyone to participate fully in the creation of a communal fantasy.

HEROIC The roles you develop will possess all the knowledge, skill, and ability they were created to have.

FLEXIBLE The rules are modular. They're designed to develop along with your style of storytelling, without ever becoming restrictive or cumbersome.

Imagination Necessary • Dice Optional • Some Assembly Required



BACKSTAGE PRESS
P.O. BOX 170243
SAN FRANCISCO, CA 94117

