SKULDUGGERY
The Roleplaying Game Of Verbal Fireworks & Sudden Reversals
by Robin D Laws
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THE GAME AND HOW TO PLAY IT

Skulduggery is a roleplaying game for 2-6 players and a Game Moderator. In Skulduggery, you play:

- a cabinet official attempting to please the President by shepherding an unpopular nomination
- a pirate crewman scheming for the captaincy of his scurvy vessel
- high schoolers vying for the limelight as they stage a musical
- skeevy space traders trying to corner the market on Silurian jump wine

To play Skulduggery, you need this book, a single ordinary six-sided die per participant, paper, and writing instruments. It helps if the GM has access to the Internet and a computer printer.

SKULDUGGERY IN A NUTSHELL

Skulduggery is a roleplaying game. If you have no idea what that means, we congratulate you for accidentally stumbling upon this text, which is aimed at a fervent niche audience. We wish we had the space here to teach you the basics of the hobby. Find friends who know what roleplaying games are and have them demonstrate the basic concept to you. Incessantly bug one of them until they run a session of Skulduggery for you and your friends. You'll be glad you did.

Although it makes a great introduction to the hobby for beginning players, Skulduggery calls for an experienced Game Moderator who is comfortable extensively improvising in response to player actions.

Skulduggery plunges the player characters into situations where they must prevail by guile and persuasion. The game is generic, meaning that its rules can be applied to various settings. It specializes in stories where negotiation and verbal gamesmanship take precedence over fighting and adventure. Left to its own devices, the tone of a Skulduggery session drifts toward the humorous or satirical. With some effort, it might also be put to grimly serious ends.

The setting packs provided in this book allow you to create tales of:

- modern politics and bureaucracy
- the age of piracy
- the high school drama club
- interstellar trade

We also show you how to adapt the basic rules to other situations in the same settings, and in other genres as well. Skulduggery works for any genre dominated by verbal power struggles. Your game packs might feature:

- ecclesiastical scheming
- court intrigue
- faculty politics
- rival generals
- organized crime (ranging from Coppola or Scorsese-style mafiosi to Guy Ritchie cockney villains)
- or even the machinations of anthropomorphic meerkats.

Although persuasion takes center stage in Skulduggery, quick 'n' brutal combat rules allow for sudden eruptions of violence, where thematically appropriate.

Most roleplayers will find Skulduggery an ideal respite
from their usual fare. It’s ideal for one-shot gaming. Play it:
- when you fail to achieve quorum for your usual ongoing campaign
- as a palate-cleanser between long series
- at conventions
- when you decide at the last minute to run an off-the-cuff session.

A typical game lasts for three to four hours. Though Skulduggery is geared to one-shot play, some groups may wish to extend their characters’ scheming and conniving to an ongoing series. The adjustments required for longer-term play appear on p. 47.

TEACHING SKULDUGGERY
Games of Skulduggery should be simple and fast. Don’t bog down the players by teaching them the entire game from the outset. Instead, give them what they need to know, when they need to know it.

When telling players how to play Skulduggery, explain the basics of action resolution, including ratings and pools, boons and levies, refreshes (p. 10) and taglines (p. 34) and the various degrees of success and failure (p. 11). Then let all of the other rules wait until they arise in play. For example, the undermining rule (p.17) allows one player character to interfere with another’s attempt at success. Explain it to the players only when prompted by one player’s stated desire to mess with another.

If you’re using only a few of the special case rules, or none at all, in the course of a session, you’re probably doing it right.

WHAT LIES AHEAD
Here’s what you’ll find in the rest of this book:
- **Core Rules:** The basic rules you need to run any Skulduggery game.
- **Customized Skulduggery:** Guidance for GMs creating their own setting packs and scenarios, including notes on adjusting the core rules to fit your desired genre.

The remainder of the book consists of the following ready-to-run play packs:
- **Yes Wing:** politics and bureaucracy
- **Skulduggery & Crossbones:** pirates
- **Casting Call:** high school musical
- **If Space Permits:** interstellar traders

Optional Settings: Brute Force and Physical Action
Some rules are suitable only for settings where characters might realistically resort to violence. We call this subset of the rules the brute force option. Any paragraph or section marked with the

is a brute force optional rule, for use only in appropriate genres. Violence in Skulduggery is nasty and decisive. Even characters in brute force settings will typically prefer to talk first and get physical only as a last resort.

Certain settings will avoid physical action altogether. In others, action sequences might require characters to run, jump, climb, drive skillfully, and confront a range of harm-threatening obstacles. These are almost invariably also settings where brute force comes into play. However, just in case you think of one where light action fits and violence doesn’t, we’ve marked these with the

so you can separate them when customizing the rules for settings of your creation.

The scenarios in this book are either entirely action-free (Yes Wing, Casting Call) or (Skulduggery and Crossbones, If Space Permits.) We’ve made note of the in-between choice in case you want to use it for your own scenarios, and for our possible future use.
BASIC RULES

This chapter lays out the basic rules GMs use to run any game of Skulduggery. Although players are certainly welcome to read them, they’re simple enough for you to teach your players in the course of a one-shot session.

ASSIGNING CHARACTERS

Typically, Skulduggery characters get used for only three to four hours, so it’s important to assign them quickly. At the start of play, characters are created from modular units called component cards. Premade play packs come with component cards. When you create a play pack for your own customized setting, you’ll create component cards as part of that process. Play packs for sequel sessions featuring preexisting characters don’t require component cards.

Component cards divide into sets. Each set provides an element of the character. The sets of cards are as follows:

1. Identity: Provides the character’s name (with gender variants), along with details of the character’s rank, occupation, and/or status. Also included here are his or her general abilities (p. 26) and one or more of his or her objectives.

Winston / Winona Fingerhut
Secretary Of the Interior

As Interior Secretary, you oversee the federal department responsible for federal lands and programs relating to the country’s aboriginal peoples. Notable units of your portfolio include the National Park Service, Fish and Wildlife Service, Geological Survey, and Bureau of Indian Affairs. Interior Secretaries are rarely considered part of the President’s inner circle, and your experience in the Bierce administration has proven no different.

Collective Goal: Ensure the Senate confirmation of the President’s nominee as Secretary Of State, Francis Cross.

How You Fit In: A subordinate, Chief Alex Rogers of the United States Park Police, turned a strange shade of pale when Cross’ possible nomination was rumored in the press.

Personal Goal: Secure presidential pardon for political mentor Dalton Flask, now serving a five-year sentence for tax evasion.

General Abilities: Eavesdropping 6, Etiquette 4, Gossip 5, Knowledge 4 (Catholic Theology), Management 2, Mischief 2, Moxy 4, Perception 6, Performance (Media Appearance) 2, Wealth 2.

2. Persuade: Provides the character’s Persuade rating and style (p. 23) along with two taglines (p. 34.)

Persuade (Forthright) 7
Trumps: Penetrating
Is Trumped By: Lawyerly
“Mr. President, that’s not in the constitution!”
“If we don’t do this, we’ll not only look stupid. We’ll be stupid.”

3. Rebuff: The character’s rebuff Rating and style (p. 24) along with one tagline.

Rebuff 6 (Obtuse)
Trumps: Glib
Is Trumped By: Intimidating
“Golly, we haven’t had time to read all those documents!”

Note that not all of the sample cards shown here are from the same play pack. Cards 1-3 and 6-7 suit a modern political game, where cards 4 and 5 fit a setting where use of brute force is appropriate.
**4. Attack**: The character's Attack rating and style (p. 25), along with specializations and weapons, if any.

- **Attack**: 8 (Caution)
- **Trumps**: Vexation
- **Is Trumped By**: Parry

**5. Defense**: The character's Defense rating and style; p. 25.

- **Defense**: 6 (Vexation)
- **Trumps**: Strength
- **Is Trumped By**: Caution

**6. Relationships**: Details the character's ability to solve problems by drawing on favors from supporting characters; p. 31.

- **Relationships**:
  - President Allard Bierce 2
  - First Lady Malora Bierce 4
  - Senate Majority Leader Dwayne Pettiford 3

**7. Resistances**: Shows the character's ability to shrug off the temptations that might otherwise lead him or her into entertaining trouble; p. 32.

- **Resistances**:
  - Arrogance 7, Avarice 4, Paranoia 2, Nitpicking 6, Spite 4, Showboating 1

**The Yes Wing**

**Skulduggery & Crossbones**
Handing Out Cards

Premade component cards are largely self-explanatory. For guidance on creating your own, see p. 8.

As the name suggests, each component card is formatted to be cut up into card size. Print them out onto card stock.

Component card sets for the play packs in this book can be downloaded in ready-to-print PDF format from the Pelgrane web site. Print them out onto card stock and cut them up. If you prefer, you can photocopy the cards printed in the back of the book. A card back is provided for double-sided copying.

At the start of the game, fan out the first set of component cards, with the printed side facing you and away from the player. Have each player blindly choose a card from your hand. Then repeat the process for each of the five to seven card sets provided by your play pack. Maintain an illusion of even-handedness by choosing a new player to be first to draw with each set of cards.

At the end of this process, each player will have one component card from each set. The players may then trade cards with one another. Before trading begins, ask each player to list the word given in brackets after the Persuade, Rebuff and (if applicable) Attack and Defense abilities. This is the style of each ability. Read out the explanations of these styles before trading begins. Read out only those styles that appear on the cards in players’ hands.

Persuade Styles

Characters persuade in various ways, revealing their personalities and the tactics they use to get what they want.

- **Glib** — You speak so quickly and easily that listeners find it hard to penetrate your insincerity and deceptiveness.
- **Eloquent** — Your high-flown words and lofty sentiments sweep your listeners along on a cloud of beautiful wordplay.
- **Obfuscatory** — The style of your speech is so opaque, the twists and turns of your syntactical structure so labyrinthine, that your interlocutors can neither grasp what you are saying, nor admit their bafflement, and therefore agree thoroughly with whatever it is you just said.
- **Forthright** — You cut straight to the heart of any question.
- **Charming** — You are so much fun to be around, and so ingratiating, that people can’t help liking you and seeking to please you.
- **Intimidating** — You get your way by fear; every word you utter drips with implied menace. You may be physically imposing, mentally, or both.

Unpersuadable

For plot purposes you may designate that a supporting character is unpersuadable on a given point, whether or not it can be shown that taking action to the contrary would be in his self-interest. This exception to the rules is to be used sparingly. Use it only to prevent the PCs from easily attaining the scenario’s central goal early in the session.

Rebuff Styles

Characters Rebuff persuasion attempts in one of six ways. As with Persuade, these reflect the way they perceive the world, and the means by which they avoid being hoodwinked.

- **Obtuse** — You don’t always get what others are saying. This is not the impediment it might at first seem. When people can’t make you understand them, they get frustrated and give up, before they can trick you.
- **Wary** — Nothing bothers you more than the thought that someone might put something over on you. You instinctively distrust anyone who seems to want anything from you.
- **Penetrating** — You can see through people’s words to the motivations behind them—often discovering that they’re only pretending to care about your interests.
- **Lawyerly** — You use your unerring nose for mile-wide loopholes to spot the flaws in others’ proposals.
- **Contrary** — You hate following someone else’s lead. If someone tells you to look up, you look down. If everyone else wants to go right, you want to go left.
- **Pure-Hearted** — You are utterly guileless. Without even trying to do so, you expose the bad intent of people trying to fool you.
攻撃スタイル

攻撃スタイルの選択には、相手を倒すための戦略が存在します。

- **Strength** — あなたは大きなサイズと筋肉に富む。あなたの利点は、あなたの打撃の単純な力です。
- **Speed** — あなたは速く攻撃することで、その他の人を反応する前に倒すことが可能です。
- **Finesse** — あなたは乱れてお行われる攻撃で、相手を覆うことができます。
- **Cunning** — よく、あなたの環境を分析し、相手の行動を判読し、相手を制御します。
- **Ferocity** — もし相手が、あなたが攻撃するのに抵抗するとしても、あなたは、その抵抗を無視して進むことが可能です。
- **Caution** — あなたは敵を攻撃する前に、敵を注意し、必要に応じて相手を制御します。

防御スタイル

防御スタイルは、相手が攻撃に失敗した理由です。

- **Dodge** — 入ってくる攻撃は、あなたがそれを防いでしまいます。
- **Parry** — あなたの武器を用いて、相手の攻撃を防ぎます。
- **Sure-Footedness** — あなたの動作とバランス感覚が相手の攻撃を防ぎます。
- **Intuition** — 相手の動きを察知し、相手の次の動きを避けてます。
- **Misdirection** — 相手を引きつけるために、相手が予想することを避けて、他の場所に移動します。
- **Vexation** — 相手を激怒させ、相手が避けた場所を攻撃します。

トレードラウンド

トレードラウンドは、相手の強さや弱さを理解するための重要なステップです。

カードがすべて選ばれた場合、トレードラウンドの時間を短くすることを考えてください。通常、トレードラウンドは、プレーヤーの数に応じて決定されます。短めにすることも可能です。

プレーヤーは、キャラクターの設定を理解するために、自分が選んだ能力を活かすことが可能です。キャラクターの設定は、プレーヤーの想像力に応じて変更することが可能です。

トレードラウンドは、プレーヤーの強さや弱さを理解するための重要なステップです。

例えば、あなたが選んだカードが他のプレーヤーの選択に影響を受けた場合、あなたは相手の選択を理解することができます。トレードラウンドは、プレーヤーの強さや弱さを理解するための重要なステップです。

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RESOLVING ACTIONS

When play begins, you’ll present the players with scenes that challenge the characters as they attempt to fulfill both their collective and personal goals. The collective goal appears on the Identity card; the personal goal may appear there or on the Resistances card. When they face obstacles in pursuit of their goals, the rules system helps you determine whether they succeed or fail. In either case, the result pushes the story in a new direction, which will ultimately lead to another obstacle to overcome. Success should move the story in a positive direction for the character, failure in a negative direction.

Influencing the characters’ chances of success or failure are their ratings and pools.

Ratings and Pools
The number appearing after each ability (including Persuade, Rebuff, Attack, Defense and the Resistances) is a rating. Players may increase their chances of success on any attempted action by spending points from a relevant ability. The number of points currently available to spend from a single ability is called a pool. At the start of play, the character’s pool in any given ability equals the rating. As he spends points, the pool drops, until it reaches 0. When a pool reaches 0, the character can still attempt the action associated with the skill, but can’t use spend points to increase his chances of success.

Pool points are most often used to allow you to reroll die results you don’t like, or to force opposing characters to reroll die results they do like.

Refreshes
When a pool refreshes, it again equals the ability’s rating, as it did at the start of play. Players gain refreshes through adroit use of taglines (p. 34.)

Winona Fingerhut’s Eavesdropping pool has fallen to 2. Her rating in that ability is 6; that’s the number of points she had in her Eavesdropping pool at the start of the game. She earns an Eavesdropping refresh, bringing her pool back up to 6.

Ability pools can at times exceed their ratings; if so, they can’t be refreshed.

Boons
Sometimes a character gets to add points to a pool. This is called a boon. A boon can cause your pool to exceed your rating. You can’t get a boon in an ability that doesn’t appear in your card stack.

Winona’s Persuade rating is 7; her pool stands at 4. She gains a boon of 1, raising her pool to 5.

Boons are awarded under various circumstances, which we’ll mention as we go along.

Levies
Certain events, described later in this section, may cost a character points from a particular pool. This is called a levy.

Finnegan’s Rebuff rating is 7; his pool stands at 4. He takes a levy of 1, dropping his pool to 3.

When you must pay a levy you can’t afford, your
a sedative?” This sounds fun and makes as much sense as anything else that’s happened in the scenario, so the GM allows it. Poria’s Physician pool stands at 6. She transfers 3 points to Finnegan’s Athletics pool, increasing it to 5. Her Physician pool drops by 4 points (the transfer of 3, plus the transfer cost of 1), for a new total of 2.

### Transferring Points

### Giving Help to Other PCs

One PC can transfer points in a given ability to another PC’s pool. To do so, the player making the transfer must be able to describe what he’s doing to help the player receiving it in a way that makes some sort of narrative sense. Normally the two pools are in the same ability, but an inventive action description may convince the GM to allow a transfer between different abilities. Each transfer costs 1 point from the transferring character’s pool, in addition to any points granted to the other player. For this reason, it’s cheaper to make one large transfer than several small ones. The transferring character must weigh this consideration against the chance that points from an overly generous transfer will go to waste.

**Space trader Finnegan Swake attempts to pull a parasitic vine from the gullet of his fellow crewman, Serig Allagan, using his Athletics ability. He has only 2 points left in that pool. The ship’s doctor, Poria Manto (played by Erin), wants to help.**

“Can I assist by injecting the parasite with...”

### Success and Failure

When a player wants his character to take an action, the GM first considers whether it ought to face any resistance at all.

If failure would seem ridiculous or unbelievable, the character automatically succeeds. The player describes what he’s trying to do, and you tell him that he’s done it.

Winona Fingerhut’s player, Katherine, says that she’s driving over to the Washington Monument, where she plans to leak a document to a friendly reporter. It would be ludicrous for her to get lost on her way there, so you don’t bother to use the rules to decide if she succeeds. Instead, you just say, “Okay, you’re there, and the reporter is waiting for you. Now what do you do?”

### Pathetic Success

Sometimes a character confronts a challenge which should feel difficult, even though failure would be uninteresting or unacceptably slow down the story. In these cases, allow players to succeed on any result, if they spend all of their remaining points in the relevant pool. Let the characters succeed, but in a way that puts them at some other disadvantage. This is called a Pathetic Success. Make sure that the new disadvantage doesn’t also lead to a dead end.

**The pirate Edward Newcastle has fallen into a tiger pit, far from anyone who can assist him. He gets an Exasperating Failure, pays a point to roll again, gets a Basic Failure, pays a point to roll again, and gets a Dismal Failure. This runs him out of points in Athletics, the ability he’s been using to try to get out of the pit. You rule that he gets out of the pit, but is so exhausted that he easily falls into the clutches of a colonial patrol. This is not a dead end, because you can foresee an interesting story branch even if he fails to talk his way out of arrest.**

If no character in a scene has points to spend in the ability that best applies to the challenge, reconfigure the situation so that another ability comes into play. This allows the story to move ahead.

**If Toby was already out of Athletics points when he fell into the pit, you might have a crazed hermit come along. Toby still has points in Persuade, so he can now try to convince the hermit to throw him a vine and pull him up.**

Pathetic Successes are available only when the GM decides that failure would be boring or slow down the story too much. They are not available to players as a general option.
If both success and failure seem like equally plausible and interesting outcomes, take the following steps to resolve the action.

**Describe the Attempt**
The player describes what the character tries to do and how he tries to do it, specifying the ability he’s using. Players often forget to name the ability; prompt them if necessary. They can use only those abilities appearing on their cards. If they have an ability but no points in the pool, they can still try to use it.

> Winona has been denied access to a pivotal meeting. Katherine describes what she’ll do in response: “I use my Eavesdropping to find a vent that might allow me to listen in, unseen.”

If a player proposes to use an ability that doesn’t fit the task, propose a more suitable alternate choice, or suggest an alternate description of the attempt that better employs the proposed ability.

**Assess Bonuses Or Penalties**
The GM decides whether this challenge is especially hard or easy. Most times it is neither.

If the task is especially hard, the player suffers a penalty. The player subtracts the penalty from the die roll, as made in the next step. The penalty is almost always 1.

> If it had already been established that the site where the meeting takes place is a high-security area, finding a vent seems a little implausible. To reflect the added difficulty, the GM would assess a penalty of 1 to Katherine’s roll.

A separate penalty of 1 applies when the player’s pool in the ability has fallen to 0.

If the player completely lacks the relevant ability, a penalty of 1 applies. Also, any Impressive Successes scored are downgraded to Ordinary Successes (see below.)

When a player proposes to use an ability that is only tangentially relevant to the task at hand, but does so entertainingly and/or convincingly, the GM can allow its use, assessing a levy of 1 or 2.

If the task is especially easy, the player gains a bonus. The player adds the bonus to the die roll, as made in the next step. The bonus is almost always 1.

**Roll a Die**
The player rolls a six-sided die. On any result higher than 4, the character succeeds. On a 3 or less, the character fails. The exact number indicates the degree of success or failure, as per the following table:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Failure (1-3)</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>Dismal</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Routine</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Exasperating</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Success (4-6)</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>Hair’s-Breadth</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Ordinary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Impressive</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Action attempts may also face bonuses or penalties as a consequence of previous story developments.
RESOLVING ACTIONS

Tokens
You may wish to keep on hand a collection of beads, poker chips or other tokens in three colors. Two of the colors represent boons and levies, respectively. The third token represents banked refreshes gained from the use of taglines (p. 34.) In the designer’s group, we use yellow poker chips for levy, green for boons, and blue for refreshes. The exact color scheme doesn’t matter so long as everyone remembers what’s what.

During a contest, when a player scores a Hair’s-Breadth Success, award a levy token. Hand out a boon token for each Exasperating Failure.

When the action is fully resolved, the character refreshes if he has a refresh token and chooses to spend it. He then gains an additional number of pool points equal to the boon tokens in his pile. Then the pool drops by the number of levy tokens, if any. The character may not spend tokens, nor are levies applied until after the action is resolved. No levy will take a pool below 0.

In the course of a Persuade vs. Rebuff contest, Serig Allagan scores two Hair’s-Breadth Successes and one Exasperating Failure. He gets two levy tokens and one boon token. He ends the contest with a Persuade pool of 2. He then immediately modifies his pool according to the tokens he got. One boon and one levy token cancel each other out, leaving him with one levy token. His Persuade pool drops by another point, from 2 to 1.

What happens depends on the character’s final result. (As you’ll see in the next step, characters may roll several times before standing pat on a result.)

On a Dismal Failure, the character fails to achieve his objective, and suffers lingering ill consequences from the attempt. In a humorous

game, the failure is played as amusingly bumbling or horrifyingly funny, depending on the situation. Rerolling a Dismal Failure costs 3 points, instead of the standard 1 point.

On a Routine Failure, the desired result does not take place, but no other consequences or benefits apply. The loss is neither embarrassing or memorable.

An Exasperating Failure is one in which the character comes achingly close to success, only to fail at the last moment. Although the objective is not achieved, the character gains admiration, sympathy, or useful insight for the future. For each Exasperating Failure, the character gains a boon of 1 to apply to the ability at hand. Boons are gained after the action is fully resolved and can’t be spent while it’s in progress. See sidebar for more.

On a Hair’s-Breadth Success, the character seizes a narrow victory from the jaws of defeat. The objective is achieved, but at a cost—for each Hair’s-Breadth success scored in the course of an action resolution, the character pays a levy of 1. The levy is charged only after the action is fully resolved; see sidebar.

An Ordinary Success achieves the objective, no more and no less.

An Impressive Success achieves the objective and another story advantage besides.

In a contest (see below), the character’s opponent must pay 3 points to counter an Impressive Success, instead of the usual 1. It costs 3 points even when you would otherwise pay nothing.

Katherine now rolls for Winona. (Let’s say that she faces neither a bonus nor a penalty.) She rolls a 3—an Exasperating Failure. If she does nothing further, she’ll fail to overhear the conversation.

To mark her Exasperating Failure, the GM hands her a boon token.

Reroll Or Stand Pat
Players who don’t like their die results can attempt to reverse their fortunes by paying to roll again. Rerolling costs 1 point from the relevant ability pool, or 3 in the case of a Dismal Failure. For each reroll, the player must
describe the change in tactics his character is employing to achieve a new and better result.

The resolution continues until the player decides to stand pat and accept the current die result. Players stand pat on favorable results, when they decide the effort isn’t worth the pool point expenditure, or when they run out of points to spend.

When the player stands pat, the current die result determines the final success or failure of the action attempt.

Fortunately for our example, Winona has no intention of failing. Katherine spends 1 point from her Eavesdropping pool to buy a reroll. Her pool drops to 5 points, from its original 6. She rolls again, and again gets an Exasperating Failure. She gets another boon token. She spends another point for another reroll, dropping her pool to 4. She rolls yet again, and gets yet another Exasperating Failure, and a third boon token. Dropping her pool to 3, she buys a third reroll. The third time’s the charm—she gets a 6, an Impressive Success. She achieves her objective, and is now able to hear the proceeds of the meeting. An Impressive Success also requires the GM to grant an additional benefit. Here, the GM decides that Winona spots a listening device in the vent. Winona decides to remove it and point it out to the Secret Service, in exchange for a future favor.

She now collects the 1-point boons for each of her three Exasperating Failures—taking her pool from 3 back up to 6.

Contests
Many times a character’s actions are resisted by the overt actions of another. These situations are called contests. PCs may contest other PCs or supporting characters. In a contest, one character is the actor and the other, the thwarter. The actor is trying to accomplish something, and the thwarter is trying to stop him. Examples might include:

- a pirate tries to catch a guard before he alerts the fortress guardians
- a magician attempts to locate an invisible courtier in the king’s palace
- one actor attempts to distract the other during her big solo

A contest begins with an action attempt by the actor. When the actor succeeds, the thwarter then counters with an action attempt of his own. If he succeeds, the acting character fails...

...unless the actor chooses to spend points to act again...

...in which case, the thwarter can spend points to act again...

....and so on.

The first roll by each contestant is, as per usual, made at no cost. All subsequent rolls, including the first rolls of new exchanges, cost 1 point from the pertinent pool, with two exceptions:

- It costs 3 points to roll again, continuing your own exchange, after scoring a Dismal Failure
- It costs 3 points to initiate a new exchange in response to an opponent’s exchange that ended on an Impressive Success

The contest ends when one of the contestants loses, by:

- ending an exchange on a failure
- declining to initiate a new exchange when the
Winona attempts to enlist deep-pocketed campaign donor Aloysius Donohue in her scheme to arrange a pardon for her mentor. Katherine proposes to use her Knowledge ability (specialized in Catholic theology) to impress Donohoe, a devout fellow Catholic. Donohoe’s nephew, Declan, a supporting character, wants his uncle to stop spending money on politics so he’ll inherit a larger bundle when the frail old man kicks off. He attempts to trip her up by changing the subject whenever she turns the discussion to religion. She is the actor; he’s the thwarter. He’ll be using his Moxy ability to counter her.

As actor, she starts with an action attempt. “I start by dropping the name of my theology professor, a revered figure in Catholic circles.” She rolls a 3, an Exasperating Failure. She gets a boon token.

The GM describes what’s happening in the story: “Aloysius seems impressed when you mention the name of your school, then visibly stiffens at the mention of your prof. You suddenly remember the famous falling out they had in the 1980s.”

“I can’t let that stand,” Katherine says. “I turn it around by mentioning my doctrinal break with my old mentor.” She spends 1 Knowledge to reroll, taking her pool down to 3. She rolls a 4, a Hair’s-Breadth Success. The GM hands her a levy token. She stands pat. “He seems resistant at first,” the GM describes, “but in the end appears to be mollified.” If Declan fails to counter, she wins.

But as this is the beginning of the contest, he has no reason to decline. He rolls his Moxy, getting an Ordinary Success. The GM interprets the result in terms of the scene at hand: “Declan says that he stays out of church politics like he does regular politics, because all the fighting is wearying.

Aloysius nods in agreement.” Declan stands pat; if Winona’s player, Katherine, fails to respond, he successfully counters her action, and old Aloysius will remain cold to the pardon scheme.

So Katherine spends another Knowledge point to reroll, dropping her pool to 2. Speaking in character as Winona, she says, “If people of conscience weren’t willing to weary themselves fighting, the barbarians would take over.” She rolls a 2, a Routine Failure.

The GM describes the unremarkable setback it represents: “He sighs vaguely, as if growing bored with the subject.”

“I switch to a more directly faith-based metaphor,” Katherine says. She spends another Knowledge point for a reroll, taking her pool to 1. She rolls a 6, an Impressive Success. “His eyes light up in ecstatic fervor,” the GM narrates, while handing her a Refresh token.

A forced reroll of an Impressive Success costs 3 pool points. Declan has 3 points in his pool, which would take him to 0. He’s stuck—if he stands pat, he loses. If he spends the point, he loses.

The GM mimes Declan’s reaction, as he frustrated shrugs and starts texting on his mobile phone.

Katherine ends the contest with her Impressive Success. Winona achieves her objective, and something more besides. The GM decides that Aloysius hands her a video tape containing compromising footage of another PC.

### Zero-Sum Contests

In some cases, the distinction between actor and thwarter won’t be clear. The two contestants may both be vying to achieve the same goal in a zero-sum situation where only one can prevail. Examples might include:

- two candidates vie for audience favor in a televised political debate
- two bar brawlers arm-wrestle
- two shuttle pilots race to a distant asteroid

Here the GM decides who goes first (becoming the actor)
**RESOLVING ACTIONS**

and who responds (as thwarter.) In a contest between a PC and a supporting character, the PC becomes the actor. In a contest between PCs, the one who had the greatest role in bringing about the contest, or who stands to gain the most from it, becomes the actor. If neither of these distinctions is clear, the PC who made the most recent action attempt is the thwarter. If none of these conditions apply, flip a coin.

**Trumping**

The Persuade and Rebuff abilities are always used in contests. They’re paired: Rebuff is always used to counter Persuade. Attack and Defense are paired in the same way, with Defense always being used to counter Attack. As you’ve seen, each of these four abilities is defined as falling into one of six styles. Each style *trumps* a style from the opposite in its pair, and is trumped by another style. When a character contests against a style that trumps his, he suffers a levy of 1. This means that each reroll purchased costs the trumped contestant an additional pool point.

If their styles are not already known to opponents before a contest begins, characters reveal them as they make their first rolls of a contest.

*Winona’s Persuade style is Forthright. She attempts to persuade Attorney General Trenton Barlett that her mentor was unfairly tried. Barlett’s Rebuff style is Lawyerly, which trumps Forthright. The cost of every reroll Winona pays for in the course of their contest increases by 1.*

**Wallops**

If a contestant’s rating (not current pool) exceeds another’s by 5 or more, he can short-circuit the normal contest rules by spending 5 points on a *wallop*. No roll is required to wallop. The opposing character has one chance to avoid the wallop—by rolling and scoring an Impressive Success on his next and only roll. Otherwise, the walloping character prevails, as if he had rolled an Impressive Success.

Characters can wallop at any time during a contest. If an actor is walloped in response to a success, the one roll he gets in response to the wallop counts as a reroll, and must be paid for from his pool.

*Aravian Delft, a deceased space trader reconstituted as the cyborg brain that rules the planet Vimble, is a supporting character with a Rebuff rating of 16, of which he has 12 points left in his current pool. Player character Finnegan Swake wants to Persuade him to award an exclusive concession to sell an addictive fish oil to Delft’s clone army. Finnegan’s Persuade is 10. He begins the contest with an Ordinary Success, on which he stands pat. Aravian Delft’s Rebuff rating exceeds Finnegan’s Persuade by more than 5, entitling him to wallop. (His pool is lower than that, but that doesn’t matter for this purpose.) The GM spends 5 of his points, dropping his Rebuff to 7.*

Finnegan’s only chance is to roll a 6 and score an Impressive Success. He rolls a 5. Delft conclusively rebuffs his offer and gets another benefit besides. Putting the rules outcomes in narrative terms, the GM describes the wily cyborg brain not only denying Finnegain’s entreaties, but additionally cowing him into supplying the names of his fish oil vendors.

**Multiple Targets**

Characters may enter into contests against more than one opponent. Players must be able to justify how the single action they’re describing could credibly work against more than one rival. The character acts, and all of the thwarters roll in response. The thwarter who gets the best response after rerolls are made is designated the champion. The champion takes over as sole responder for the remainder of the contest. If that thwarter loses, the others are all affected as well. If two or more thwarers tie for the same best response, the one with the highest pool in the ability at hand is chosen to represent the rest.

*Winona wants to use her Etiquette ability at a dinner party attended by a trio of old money society ladies. Her objective is to show them that she’s their social equal, which in turn will make it easier to get their assistance in her campaign to win a pardon for her mentor. All three of these supporting characters, Eleanora, Sally, and Peggy, will respond with their own Etiquette rolls. Their pools are 4, 3, and 2, respectively.*

Thanks to previous boons, Winona’s pool is 7, even though her rating is only 4. She rolls an Ordinary Success and stands pat. The GM describes her as successfully navigating the use of her various pieces of cutlery at the formal dinner party.
again. Her pool drops from 7 to 4.
“Looking for a similar tiny mistake on her part,” says Winona’s player, Katherine, “and try to point it out in an equally charming way that establishes us as social equals.” She scores an Impressive Success of her own, and stands pat. “You see how quickly she knocked back her pre-dinner cocktail, and joke that a fondness for martinis also runs in your family.”

The GM decides that Eleanora is having none of this, and spends 3 points from her pool to buy a reroll of her own. That drops her Etiquette pool from 4 to 1. She rolls an Exasperating Failure. That leaves her poised to lose no matter what happens—if she spends her last point on a reroll, her pool drops to 0, ending the contest.

“Eleanora attempts what seems like a witty quip about drinking and social class, but it comes out snobbish and cruel,” describes the GM. “To paper over their collective embarrassment, the group begins to treat you like you belong there.”

Undermining
When one player character has paid to make a die roll, but has yet to roll the die, another player may interrupt and attempt to undermine his action. The underminer describes what his character is doing to interfere with the target PC, specifying the ability he’s using. The GM makes sure that the action fits the narrative situation and that the ability is appropriate to it. If not, she may propose an alternate action or ability, or, in rare cases, rule the undermining attempt impossible.

The underminer spends any number of points from the relevant pool. This number is called the stake. The underminer proceeds to make an undermining roll. This roll can’t be rerolled, is subject to no penalties or bonuses, and accrues no boon or levy tokens.

On any success, the stake is subtracted from the target’s pool in the ability he is about to roll.

On an Impressive Success, the stake is then added back to the pool the underminer spent from.
On a Dismal Failure, the pool the underminer spent from drops to 0 and he loses any refresh tokens he may have banked.

The timing of an undermine attempt means that the acting character always gets to make at least the one roll he’s already paid for. However, the undermines may then reduce his pool to 0, making that the last roll he can afford to make.

PCs may never undermine GM-controlled characters. GM-controlled characters may never undermine PCs.

Rum Keg Annie (Brenda) wishes to interfere with John Belmay’s attempt to woo a willowy captive heiress aboard the Black Swan. John’s player, Errol, is about to start a Persuade attempt to capture the girl’s affections. He has 9 points in his Persuade pool. Annie has 7 in hers.

“I begin humming a little ditty about John’s famous exploits of debauchery,” Brenda proposes,“including a mention of his various sexual diseases.”

Errol objects that she ought to be using performance, but Brenda convinces the GM that it’s not the quality of the singing but the persuasive content of her improvised lyrics that ought to reduce John’s chances of success.

Brenda spends 5 Persuade points from her pool on the stake, dropping Annie’s pool to 2. She rolls a Hair’s-Breadth Success. As a result, John’s Persuade pool drops from 9 to 4 before his wooing attempt even begins.

Note that the Hair’s-Breadth Success does not force Brenda to take a levy token.

Only one undermining attempt can be made per resolution. Where two or more players want to undermine the same resolution, the one willing to purchase the highest stake takes precedence. If multiple players want to undermine but no one is willing to outspend anyone else, those characters are assumed to be too busy interfering with each other to undermine the target.

**Pooled Effort**
To boil down a complicated series of tasks into a simple outcome, call for a pooled effort contest. This is appropriate when many PCs are working together to achieve a single goal by varied means. For example, “Skulduggery and Crossbones” treats the effort to board an enemy ship and overcome its crewmen as a pooled effort.

1. First, the GM and group agree on the desired outcome the characters are seeking.
2. Then, each player specifies the ability he wants to use. If it seems unsuited to the task, the GM discusses it, suggesting an alternative ability. Sometimes the task clearly calls for a particular ability, in which case the GM simply announces what that is.
3. The players then describe what they’re doing to achieve their goal.
4. Each player makes an uncontested roll of the chosen ability. When each of these rolls has resolved, with the characters out of points or standing pat, the numerical results of each are added up and averaged together. We are sorry for making you use a calculator.
5. The final average, rounded down to the nearest whole number, is used to determine the degree of success for the group as a whole. (On an additional expenditure of 3 points from a relevant pool by each participating character, round up to the nearest whole number.)
6. If the characters must risk physical harm to complete the task, any character ending on a failure must make a Defense, Athletics or Moxy roll. If this fails, the character takes one injury (p.37), unless the overall failure was Dismal, in which case the character takes two injuries. Defense is used for fights; Athletics for other overtly physical situations, and Moxy when the threat comes from passive or environmental factors, like poison, exposure or disease.

Having fallen on hard time, Finnegan Swake (Kevin) and crewmen Serig Allagan (Andrew) and Poria Manto (Erin) have agreed to act as exterminators, clearing a junked spaceship of its infestation of Silurian neuro-ants. As GM, you start by asking each player how they want to handle this.

“I use Athletics to jump in and zap the ants with the polarizing dechitinizer,” says Andrew, who not coincidentally has the best Athletics rating.
“I use Knowledge (Biology) and my scanner to pinpoint the most psychically active ants, guiding Serig in his targeting efforts,” says Erin.

“I use Attack and wade right in there with my dechitinzer as if they’re a horde of enemy fighters,” says Kevin, whose other relevant abilities are comparatively poor.

The three players roll simultaneously. When it’s all over, Finnegan ends on a Routine Failure, while Serig and Poria both have Hair’s-Breadth Successes. This averages, rounding down, to a 3: an Exasperating Failure.

You tell them what this means: the group nearly gets the ants out of the ship, but then a new swarm appears, as if from nowhere. You decide that each of them must make a Moxy roll to avoid injury from exposure to the ants’ psychic disruption field.

Contestants gain boons or levies from their individual results during a pooled effort, not from the final averaged outcome.

Some pooled efforts may risk physical harm to the participants. Participants suffer wounds according to the following table.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Character's Individual Failure</th>
<th>Group Result: Success</th>
<th>Group Result: Failure</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dismal</td>
<td>1 injury</td>
<td>2 injuries</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Routine</td>
<td>No injury</td>
<td>1 injury</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exasperating</td>
<td>No injury</td>
<td>No injury</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

GANGING UP

Multiple actors can gang up against a single countering character at the GM’s discretion. The GM disallows tasks where the chaos and confusion added by multiple participants outweighs the benefits of combined effort.

Persuasion is the classic example of a task where ganging up doesn’t work. When faced with multiple persuaders, people become defensive and ever more resolved to stick to their original position. Characters wishing to support a Persuade attempt are better off finding unobtrusive justifications to transfer points (p. 11.)

In combat, no more than three man-sized attackers can face off against a single opponent. Defenders may reduce this number by moving into confined spaces or putting their backs against walls.
The characters who are ganging up chooses one of their number as point person. The other characters in the outnumbering side are designated as secondaries. Each secondary must make a transfer to the point person in the ability used to resolve the contest. The resolution proceeds as a normal one-on-one contest, except that the outnumbered character faces a levy equal to the number of secondaries. Any boons or levies gained during the contest from Exasperating Failures and Hair’s-Breadth Successes are awarded to the point person, with the secondaries either left out in the cold or spared additional losses, as the case may be.

If the outnumbered character loses, injuries and other consequences are suffered as normal.

If the outnumbering side loses, any injuries, losses or other consequences suffered by the point person are also suffered by the secondaries. The GM narrates the results so that the secondaries are worse off than if they’d stood back and transferred points without getting directly involved.

The pirates John Belmay (Errol), William Washburn (Claude) and Rum Keg Annie (Brenda) are all trying to wrestle a gigantic shark off the deck of their ship, the Black Swan, and into a hold where it can be safely butchered. John has an Athletics pool of 5, William has 4 and Annie 7. The group decides to make Annie the point person.

Errol transfers 4 Athletics points to Brenda; with the transfer fee of 1 taken into account, this reduces his pool to 0. William transfers 2 points, paying another 1 for the transfer, leaving his Athletics pool at 1. Annie’s pool has increased to 13.

The shark’s Athletics pool is 12, but it now faces a levy of 2 on all of its rolls. Although only Brenda will be rolling and choosing whether to reroll or stay pat during the contest, the GM describes the in-game events as if all three characters are wrestling the shark. And if they lose, all of them will get equally bitten.

Annie leads off with an initial roll of 2, a Routine Failure. “You slip and slide on the deck, your greasy hands unable to find purchase on the shark’s slippery hide,” the GM narrates.

Brenda spends a point to reroll, dropping her Athletics pool to 12. She pays for another reroll, dropping her pool to 11. And gets a Routine Failure. Again she rerolls, dropping her pool to 10, and gets yet another Routine Failure.

“Help out better!” Annie cries to John and William.

“Lead better!” they scream in unison, now wild with frustration.

Finally, after buying another reroll and dropping to 9 Athletics, she ekes out a Hair’s-Breadth Success, taking a levy token in the process. She stands pat.

The shark would normally make its first exchange for free, but with the levy of 2 must drop its Athletics from 12 to 10 just to respond. It gets an Impressive Success.

“Its mighty jaws come snapping down, as if to cut the three of you in two. Which would make for six pieces of pirate... oh, you know what I mean,” describes the GM.

“I don’t believe this!” Brenda growls. She spends the 3 points to keep going against an Impressive Success, taking her pool down to 6. She rolls an Ordinary Success.

“You skitter from its jaws just in time, slipping and sliding on the wet galleon deck,” the GM says.

The shark must spend 3 to respond—the usual 1, plus the levy of 2 for the gang-up. Its pool falls to 7. And it scores another Impressive Success. “The horrible jaws again snap hideously your way,” the GM narrates.

Brenda spends 3 to respond, dropping her pool from 6 to 3. Suddenly it’s not looking so good for the hungry, shark-averse pirates.

The shark’s pool drops from 7 to 3 as it makes its countering roll—yet another Impressive Success!

Horrified groans resound through the gaming room as the GM announces the results. Errol seizes the GM’s die, replacing it with one he hopes will prove unluckier.
Brenda spends her last 3 points, dropping her to 0. This roll is her last, so she’d better succeed—she gasps in relief as it comes up a Hair’s-Breadth Success. She earns a second levy token.

The shark spends its last 3 points, and gets an Exasperating Failure.

“In its attempts to maneuver away from you, it slithers backward into the hold, landing with a thump. Now it can safely suffocate down there, where there’s no one to bite,” the GM narrates.

With her pool already at 0, Brenda’s 2 levy tokens are moot.

If that last roll had gone the other way, all three pirates would have suffered an injury.

Multiple Contestants, One Prize
Multiple characters can engage one another in a zero-sum contest for a single prize. Each character rolls their first result at the same time. After seeing each other’s results, they decide whether to reroll. They pay to reroll results at the standard rates: 3 for a Dismal Failure, 1 to overturn any other result. Once everyone has taken all desired rerolls, the character with the best result wins.

Ties go to the character with the highest pool in the ability being contested. If two tied contestants have equal pools, compare ratings. If they have equal ratings, each rolls again. The first tie-breaker roll costs no points, but the results can be rerolled, at the standard rates. If two or more contestants are determined to win, they may spend a great many points to get Impressive Successes, perhaps precipitating yet another round of tiebreaker rolls.

Multiple contestant contests are an ideal choice when several characters, especially several PCs, all try to get the same favor from a third party character. In this context, the object of their attempts is called a granter. In this case, all of the participants use their Persuade abilities, and no one, not even the character who stands in judgment, Rebuffs. This assumes that the granter has decided to grant the favor but hasn't chosen a recipient. The granter’s Rebuff comes indirectly into play if his Rebuff style trumps or is trumped by a contestant’s Persuade style (see p. 16.) A contestant suffers a levy of 1 if his Persuade is trumped by the granter’s Rebuff and, in an exception to the usual rule, gains a boon of 1 if his Persuade trumps the granter’s Rebuff.

The PCs Winona Fingerhut (played by Katherine), Janine Simmons (Angela), Paul Cutter (Ian) and Henry Doss (Chris) all attempt to convince the president to send them on a fact-finding tour of Italy’s wine-producing regions. Their Persuade pools are as follows: Winona 8, Janine 10, Paul 7, and Henry 8. The president’s Rebuff style is Obtuse; this is trumped by the Intimidating Persuade style, used by Janine, and trumps the Glib Persuade style, used by Paul.

The GM asks all four players, in the order they’re sitting around the room, to make their initial pitch to the President.

“As Interior Secretary,” says Katherine, “it’s important to compare our conservation techniques to those used in other countries.”

“As Chief of Staff,” growls Angela, “I need a break from keeping the media from learning about that little thing we were discussing earlier. That thing you don’t want anyone to know about.”

“I’m Vice President,” says Ian, “and this is the sort of meaningless, foolish trip that only someone in my lowly, useless office should have to suffer through.”

“As Defense Secretary, I can arrange for a NATO junket,” says Chris, “I’ll get all of my counterparts completely blitzed on San Gimignano and then bamboozle them into signing that missile defense agreement we want to shove down their throats.”

All four players roll simultaneously. Katherine gets a Dismal Failure. Angela rolls an Impressive Success. Paul and Chris both get Hair’s-Breadth Successes, and the levy tokens that go with them. Angela’s character, Janine, adds 1 to her Persuade pool, as the boon from her trump. It goes from 10 to 11. Paul loses a point due to his levy for being trumped, dropping his pool to 6.
Janine is in the lead with her Impressive Success. She stands pat. Paul drops out, used as Vice President to getting only the lousy overseas assignments. Winona and Henry keep arguing.

“I of course also know about this thing that Janine is keeping under wraps,” says Katherine, in character as Winona. “I could invite key reporters and columnists over to Tuscany, so they’ll help us keep it mum in hopes of getting invited again next year.”

“I know you’re a muscular and unafraid leader, Mr. President,” says Chris, as defense secretary Doss. “Given a choice between burying some petty scandal and getting big towering anti-missile missiles, you’ll go with the missiles, won’t you?”

Katherine and Chris each pay 1 to reroll, taking their characters’ pools to 7 apiece. Katherine rolls an Impressive Success; Chris gets a Hair’s-Breadth Success, and a second levy token. Winona is now tied with Janine and can go into a tiebreaker round. After a suitable snippet of dialogue, Chris pays another point for an Ordinary Success, dropping his pool to 6. He pays again, taking it to 5, only to roll a Dismal Failure. Not wanting to spend 3 points on a reroll, he withdraws from the contest.

Now both Angela and Katherine must roll again. Keeping the narrative going, the GM questions both of them, in character as the President. They respond with appropriate dialogue and then roll. Angela gets a Routine Failure, but also picks up a pool point from her trump boon, which balances out the expenditure for the reroll. Her pool remains at 11. Katherine scores a Hair’s-Breadth Success. She pays 1 for the reroll, taking her pool from 7 to 6, and takes a levy token.

Keeping up the in-character dialogue, Angela rerolls, again paying effectively nothing for the privilege, thanks to the boon from her trump. She rolls a Hair’s-Breadth Success and takes a levy token. Now that she has the same result as Katherine, another tiebreaker round begins.

Katherine sees the writing on the wall: Angela can keep rerolling for free, unless she’s unlucky enough to get a Dismal Failure. At the same time, every new roll costs Katherine a point, depleting her pool in the game’s most used ability. She bows out, allowing the Chief Of Staff her moment in the Tuscan sun. Surely some mischief can be arranged while Janine’s away.

In character as the President, the GM gives the nod to Janine.

Chris has 2 levy tokens, so his pool is docked by 2, falling from 5 to 3.

Janine has 1 levy token, dropping her pool to 11 to 10.

So does Katherine, whose pool drops from 6 to 5.

Alternately, you might run a contest in which some contestants argue for the favor to be granted in the way they want, using Persuade, and another contestant or contestants argue that it should not be granted at all, using Rebuff. If a character arguing for the favor triumphs in the end, he gets the favor. When the winner argued against giving out the favor at all, it is withheld from everyone.
ABILITIES

Any word that appears in a stack of component cards and has a number next to it is the name of an ability. Characters use abilities to overcome story obstacles, or to defend against attempts to hamper them or remove them from the narrative.

The exact set of abilities appearing in a game of Skulduggery varies by setting. Choosing the set of abilities suitable for a new setting is part of the customization process—see p. 49.

The most important abilities, Persuade and Rebuff, are described first. The major Brute Force options, Attack and Defense, also warrant special treatment. Everything else is a general ability.

Most abilities list one or more automatic successes. These are actions characters with those abilities can accomplish at the snap of a finger, without having to roll.

Persuade

Even in a brute force setting, Persuade remains Skulduggery’s defining ability. Characters use it to get others to do what they want, or to stop doing things

Persuade Hints

Persuade works by finding out what your subject wants and convincing him that doing what you ask will get that for him. When stumped for a plausible line of argument, scan this list of common tactics for the choice that best suits the situation.

In most cases, you can use any of these tactics, regardless of your Persuade style. What changes is the way that you make your arguments. Styles appearing after a icon are tough to fit with the tactic in question. Styles appearing after a icon are especially appropriate to the tactic listed.

Quid Pro Quo: If he does you a favor, you’ll do him a favor of equal value. “I’ll put in a good word for you with the queen.”

Payment: Offer money in exchange for services. (This is the most basic form of quid pro quo.) “I’ll give you ten gold florins.”

Mutual Benefit: Explain how the action will further a plan or goal of the subject’s. Usually you’re predicting that someone else will provide the rebuffer with a reciprocal benefit. “When word gets around that you’ve done this, Muffy will definitely see you as boyfriend material.”

Flattery: Offer the subject ego gratification. “Only someone of your skills could unlock that cabinet without detection.”

Coercion: Threaten to do something bad to the subject if he doesn’t relent. “You don’t want the press to get their hands on that security cam footage, do you?”

Appeal To Ideology: Show how the desired action upholds an abstract principle held by the subject. “Doing this will strike a blow for Anti-Syndicalism.”

Appeal To Loyalty: Offer the emotional reward of doing a good deed either for you, or for someone else the rebuffer admires and supports. “The President needs you to take a hit for him on this one.”

Appeal To Spite: Offer the emotional reward of harming or upsetting one of the subject’s enemies. “Mandy will totally throw a conniption.”

When in doubt, figure out what your opponent most wants, and tailor your argument to make it appear as if they’ll get it by agreeing to do what you want.

As a persuasion attempt continues, you may have to switch tactics. Your subject may agree that the favor you ask will provide the benefit you offer, but require reassurances on other fronts.
they don’t like. To do this, they must supply an at least halfway plausible argument that the desired course of action is also in the subject’s self-interest. Persuade attempts are always contests, resisted by the subject’s Rebuff ability. The persuading character is always the actor; the rebuffing character, the thwarter.

At the outset of a persuasion attempt, the acting player specifies what she wants the rebuffing character to do if she wins the contest. Examples might include:

- “Arrange a secret meeting with the President.”
- “Allow me to spend unchaperoned time with her lovely daughter.”
- “Agree not to try out for the lead role.”
- “Confess to fouling the captain’s rum supply.”
- “Lower his price on quantum chastisers.”

Players who are not skilled negotiators in real life may find it hard to come up with plausible reasons why the desired action would be in the rebuffer’s best interest. Help them out by handing out copies of the Persuade Hint card on p. 23 at the start of play.

Prior to each Persuade roll, she improvises a brief line or two of in-character dialogue explaining why the desired action is in the thwarter’s best interest.

Rebuff
Rebuff is the ability to resist persuasion attempts. It is always used reactively as the thwarting ability in a Persuade contest; see above.

Characters need not Rebuff to counter a proposition that is laughable on its face, either because it asks them to take an action which is ridiculously out of character, blatantly ignores their self-interest, or which has no chance whatsoever of success. Instead, they succeed automatically. Examples of absurd propositions: “Kill yourself now, please.” “Give me all your money.” “Now that I have given you the power of flight, jump off that skyscraper.” “Strip naked and run into the state dinner, wearing this pork chop around your neck.”

Prior to each Rebuff roll, the participant playing the rebuffer supplies a line of dialogue countering the arguments made by the persuader. When the rebuffer is a supporting character, the participant is the GM; otherwise, it’s the player of the rebuffing character. For example:

- “The President clearly said he was not to be disturbed. Tell me what you need, and I’ll take the matter under advisement.”
- “Alas, allowing you to spend time alone with my daughter would open me up to charges of excessive liberality.”
- “Even if I did step aside, your chances of getting the part would still be zero.”
- “I can’t confess to what I didn’t do. It would be dishonest.”
- “In fact, my price for these chastisers has already been heavily discounted. You do intend to pay in universal credits, I assume. Otherwise I have no choice but to add a surcharge of 3.5%.”

### Verbal Trumps
As previously mentioned, each Persuade style trumps, and is trumped by, a Rebuff style.

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>PERSUADE</th>
<th>TRUMPS</th>
<th>Is TRUMPED By</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Glib</td>
<td>Pure-Hearted</td>
<td>Obtuse</td>
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<tr>
<td>Eloquent</td>
<td>Contrary</td>
<td>Wary</td>
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<td>Obfuscatory</td>
<td>Lawyerly</td>
<td>Penetrating</td>
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<td>Forthright</td>
<td>Penetrating</td>
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<td>Charming</td>
<td>Wary</td>
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<tr>
<th>REBUFF</th>
<th>TRUMPS</th>
<th>Is TRUMPED By</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pure-Hearted</td>
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When To Let It Slide
Ideally the players offer further description of their actions before each roll. In practice, you’ll sometimes want to relax the narration requirements and let them get on with the rolling. This may happen if inspiration flags, or when you want to speed up the storytelling. Choosing when to demand description and when to let it slide is as a matter of instinct, best honed over time.
Accepting Persuasion

Skulduggery stands on its head one of the basic unspoken assumptions of roleplaying. In most games, persuasion is a one-way street. The PCs can cajole, interrogate, intimidate and charm supporting characters, but are themselves immune to verbal influence. Players cling to this asymmetrical arrangement because it favors them. They hate losing control of their characters' actions. In Skulduggery, losing control is part of the fun. GM-controlled characters can persuade PCs to do things that aren’t really in their self-interest, but can be made to seem so. PCs can persuade one another. But the wheel of fate turns quickly: the silky-tongued persuader of one scene can become the butt of an amusing scheme the next.

If you think some or your players will have trouble with this concept, be explicit about its central role in the game from the outset. Skulduggery is a game of reversals, and it's not a reversal if it can’t happen to you.

The random, modular character generation helps out here. Players’ emotional investment in their PCs will be lessened compared to a game where the players lovingly build their alter egos from scratch. Here it’s not just okay, but desirable, to maintain an amused detachment from one's characters, so you can set aside the control issues and take amusement from their follies and setbacks.

Interpreting Persuade Results

When a persuasion contest ends on a Hair's-Breadth Success for the persuader, the persuaded character grudgingly submits to his request. He fulfills it as required, but causes some other problem that the persuader will soon have to deal with.

On an Ordinary Success, the persuaded character does as asked, neither exceeding expectations or subtly sabotaging the persuader.

On an Impressive Success, the persuaded character does more than asked, surprising the persuader with a useful additional favor.

Regardless of the degree of success, the persuaded character may still resent or distrust the persuader after having fulfilled the request. The subject’s lingering impression of the exchange persuader may be influenced by persuasion style:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Style</th>
<th>Lingering Impression</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Glib</td>
<td>“I knew I shouldn’t have gone along with him, but he talked rings around me, and before I knew it he had me ignoring what my gut was telling me.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eloquent</td>
<td>“He argued so movingly that he could have signed me up for anything.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Obfuscatory</td>
<td>“I didn’t understand what I was agreeing to, but I didn’t want to seem stupid, so I didn’t say anything.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Forthright</td>
<td>“Maybe I misjudged the situation, but hey, you have to admire his total frankness.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Charming</td>
<td>“He’s such a great guy. I’m sure he didn’t mean for it to turn out like it did.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intimidating</td>
<td>“You don’t understand. He left me no choice.”</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Attack

Your Attack ability allows you to physically harm others. For more detail on physical conflicts, see the Fighting rules, beginning on p. 36.

Defense

Defense allows you to avoid being harmed by enemy attacks. Gracefully avoid blows aimed at you by children, the infirm, and the elderly. For more, see p. 36.
General Abilities
Each setting grants characters access to some but not all of the abilities listed here. Abilities are presented in the following format:

**Definition:** This section broadly describes the sorts of actions the ability allows characters to undertake.

**Automatic Success:** Provides an example of an action the character can perform without having to roll.

**Counters:** Lists abilities you can try to thwart with this ability.

**Is Countered By:** Lists abilities, if any, that might be used to thwart the ability in a contest. When no one actively tries to thwart the ability use, it’s resolved without a contest.

**Appraisal**
*Definition:* After examining a valuable item, you can tell how much money you could get for it and who you’d approach to get the best available price. You can reel off information about the history and manufacture of the item, if pertinent to its value. Appraisal allows you to distinguish authentic items from forgeries, and to create forgeries yourself.

You get one chance to appraise an item; after that effort is resolved, you can’t try again.

**Automatic Success:** Recognizing a renowned masterpiece as the real thing.

**Counters:** Persuade, when used to falsify the value, authenticity, or provenance of a valuable item, or when used to convince you to give up the item for less than its fair value.

**Is Countered By:** Craftsmanship, when it has been used to forge an item.

**Athletics**
*Definition:* Athletics reflects your overall physical fitness, allowing you to perform feats of physical prowess like running, jumping, climbing, lifting, and horseback riding.

**Automatic Success:** Run downstairs, safely swim in untroubled waters without drowning, leap over a ditch, display your physical robustness with your daily exercise routine.

**Counters:** Athletics abilities of rivals in zero-sum contests, like darts, arm-wrestling, foot races, or similar physical games and competitions.

**Craftsmanship**
*Definition:* This ability, found in pre-industrial settings, lets you handcraft a single type of common object, given the necessary equipment and materials. Sample items might include leather ware, cloth, clothing, ceramics, glass vessels, gems, jewels, furniture, or wicker objects.
When examining items of the sort you make, you can identify their quality. On an Impressive Success, you might even be able to name their makers.

When seeking employment or haggling over the value of items in your category, you may spend Craftsmanship points on Persuade or Rebuff.

**Automatic Success:** Make a simple repair to an object in your category.

**Counters:** Craftsmanship, when used in a zero-sum contest to decide whose work is superior.

**Is Countered By:** If used to create forgeries, Appraisal.

\[\text{Driving / Piloting} \]

**Definition:** You skillfully operate a vehicle, its type specified in brackets. You can evade pursuit or catch up to escaping drivers, sometimes executing spectacular and dangerous stunts. You can make minor repairs to vehicles of the specified sort.

For certain vehicles, like galleons or starships, the word “Driving” can be replaced by the more appropriate “Piloting.”

In some settings, vehicles might have weaponry onboard and enter into combat with one another; see p.41. To engage in vehicle combat, the character at the controls must have at least 1 point in his Driving / Piloting pool.

**Automatic Success:** Travel under normal conditions along a well-maintained road or standard route.

**Counters:** Other Driving abilities, in zero-sum chases or stunt competitions.

**Eavesdropping**

**Definition:** Allows you to covertly listen in on conversations. Within earshot, you pay close attention while seeming to direct your focus elsewhere. In modern settings, you might use electronic equipment to listen in from a distance. The consequences for getting caught with unauthorized bugging equipment can range from the embarrassing to the criminal.

**Automatic Success:** Overhear loud nearby conversations whose participants make no effort to keep their words to themselves.

**Is Countered By:** Perception

**Etiquette**

**Definition:** By showing mastery of the social rules followed among the company you find yourself in, you can prove that yourself as a well-mannered and trustworthy member of their group.

**Automatic Success:** Eat in a casual setting without humiliating yourself.

**Counters:** Etiquette, when used to critique someone else’s mastery of fine manners.

**Gambling**

**Definition:** Win at games of chance—sometimes by cheating. If you decide to follow the rules, you easily calculate the odds of various standard bets and gambits. If you wish to cheat, you know how to palm cards, mark decks, and load dice. You can spot the cheating of others. If confronted with an unfamiliar game, you can quickly learn its rules and begin to intuit its optimal strategies. Where wagering...
is illegal or undertaken only in secret, Gambling finds where the action is.

Much of a gambler’s success rests in his ability to disguise his talents until he moves in for the kill. You are adept at portraying yourself as a naïf barely familiar with the rudiments of the game at hand. You can figure out when to quit before angering your gambling companions, and when leaving the table without giving them a chance to recapture your winnings would itself start a fight.

**Automatic Success:** Identify the game being played. Find a gambling den in a community where games of chance are perfectly permissible.

**Refresh:** Take a relaxing day’s break from gaming, avoiding intoxicants and heavy meals.

**Counters:** Gambling, whether used as in a zero-sum contest to see who wins a game, or to spot another’s cheating in a game (see below.)

**Cheating**
Honest play has its limits. Any time you pay to overturn your own Dismal Failure, or to reroll in the face of an opponent’s Impressive Success, your character is cheating.

After a contest by a character who took either option, any other character can attempt to prove that he cheated. To do this, that character must make a successful Gambling roll, ending on a result that equals or bests the end result of the original gambling contest.

**Gossip**
**Definition:** Gather information by tapping a variety of sources and engaging in superficial chatter. The intelligence gleaned tends to be about people’s faults or secrets, professional or personal.

You can check the truth of an assertion by consulting the rumor mill.

Use Gossip to disseminate damaging information about others in a way that can’t be traced back to you.

Gossip can also be used to suppress scuttlebutt regarding your own dirty laundry. On a success, you spread gossip about someone else that makes your own transgressions seem mild and boring in comparison. The rumors about you fade from public discourse as this new, more compelling scandal becomes the center of attention.

**Automatic Success:** Discourse knowledgeably on well-publicized scandals of the rich and famous.

**Is Countered By:** Gossip can be used to identify you as the originator of a rumor, or to ensure that the dirt you’re trying to obscure remains a juicy topic of discussion.

**Knowledge**
**Definition:** Either off the top of your head or through research, reel off facts on a variety of subjects, mostly of an academic nature.

**Automatic Success:** Easily cite the rudimentary facts of your specialization (see below.)

**Specializations**
The subject appearing in brackets after your Knowledge ability is your specialization, the topic of study you know in the greatest depth. Types of specialization depend on the setting. Examples might include Art History, Astronomy, Biology, Constitutional Law, Engineering, Music, or Semiotics.

Checks to see if you know a fact concerning your specialization are undertaken as normal. Checks for somewhat related fields take a levy of 1; the GM determines which fields are somewhat related based on what seems to make sense at the time. A character specialized in Art History probably treats any other historical field as somewhat related. An astronomer probably has somewhat of a handle on physics, mathematics, and general science. Constitutional law implies a glancing familiarity with other legal fields, and so on.

Knowledgeable characters may still make checks for completely unrelated fields of knowledge, but at a penalty of 1 and levy of 1.

**Living Rough**
**Definition:** You can survive in the wilderness. You know how to forage for food and find fresh water. When you need warmth, you can make a fire. In extreme temperatures, you deploy techniques used to avoid frostbite or heatstroke. You know edible plants from toxic ones, and can explain how to safely behave around wild animals.

Living Rough includes the ability to follow the trails in the wilderness, whether left by men or animals.

**Automatic Success:** Deciding to seek shade during a resoundingly hot day. Follow a trail of bloody footprints across white marble flooring.
**Moxy**

**Definition:** Maintain confidence and composure under stress. Appear brave in the face of danger, unruffled in the midst of chaos, and unfazed when confronted with surprising information. Avoid crying out in pain when hurt or injured.

Make Moxy to checks see if you suffer injury when exposed to non-violent environmental factors. It determines your body’s response to poison, intoxicants, and contagions.

In settings where magic or advanced science exists that might override your will or judgment, use Moxy to retain self-control.

**Automatic Success:** Remain calm under stress-free conditions.

**Is Countered By:** Can be used against another character’s Moxy in a zero-sum contest to determine who shows the greater self-control in a stressful or dangerous situation.

**Automatic Success**:
- Smell alcohol on the breath of a drunken subordinate.
- Can be used against another character’s Management ability in a zero-sum contest to manipulate or draw resources from the organization you both belong to.
- Smell alcohol on the breath of a drunken subordinate.
- Can be used against another character’s Management ability in a zero-sum contest to manipulate or draw resources from the organization you both belong to.

**Management**

**Definition:** Perform administrative and bureaucratic duties. Maintain account books. Devise and follow a budget. Spot errors and fraud in others’ ledgers. Accomplish, directly or through intermediaries, household and office tasks. Secure supplies. Notice and rectify personnel issues.

**Automatic Success:** Smell alcohol on the breath of a drunken subordinate.

**Counters:** Can be used against another character’s Management ability in a zero-sum contest to manipulate or draw resources from the organization you both belong to.

**Mechanic**

**Definition:** Repair technological devices, particularly vehicles. In a pre-industrial setting, this ability is renamed to specify a vehicle type. For example, in a pirate game, it becomes shipwright.

**Automatic Success:** Perform a basic check of a vehicle’s soundness while it is docked or parked.

**Counters:** Can be used to improve a vehicle’s condition during vehicle combat, p. 41.

**Perception**

**Definition:** With finely honed senses, you discern telling details in your environment. Pick out and identify strange sounds or smells. Spot out-of-place people and objects.

GMs should call for Perception rolls only when something important is at stake. Players have a right to feel unfairly treated if tricked into spending points on inconsequential information.

If there is something to detect, but you fail your Perception roll, you notice nothing. Unless, that is, you score a Dismal Failure, in which case you perceive something directly contrary to the truth. (For example, if you’re looking for signs of forced entry into your apartment, you decide that your alarm system is in working condition, when in fact the assassins lurking within have skilfully sabotaged it.) However, because you were asked to roll, the player still knows that his character is missing something, perhaps leading to a sense of unease.

When a less-than-practised liar tells you an untruth, Perception may allow you to spot the hallmark signs of deception: fidgeting, averted gaze, too many or too few details. It is not a reliable lie detector. Success represents the gut feeling you get when you hear a fishy story. Perception doesn’t indicate what the truth is; Gossip might help with that.

**Is Countered By:** Perception, to spot the telltale signs of your trap before it is sprung. In a Mischief vs. Mischief contest, two pranksters battle one another, with the loser the one who is deemed by observers to have suffered the most humiliating practical joke.

**Mischief**

**Definition:** Plan and execute pranks, practical jokes and acts of sabotage, provided they have some sort of physical component. This is the ability you use to fill lockers with shaving cream, hack into websites, disable engines, or plant misleading evidence. If your position is one of shadowy power, this ability goes beyond mere japery, allowing you to order acts of kidnapping, cruel interrogation, or even murder.

**Automatic Success:** None.

**Is Countered By:** Perception, to spot the telltale signs of your trap before it is sprung. In a Mischief vs. Mischief contest, two pranksters battle one another, with the loser the one who is deemed by observers to have suffered the most humiliating practical joke.
**Automatic Success:** Seeing objects in plain sight. Noticing the telltale behavior of a really poor and obviously guilty liar.

**Counters:** Gambling (when used to cheat) Stealth.

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**Riding**

**Definition:** You can ride, race, and perform stunts on horseback. In some historical settings, the horse might be replaced with another beast, like a camel. In fantastic settings, the horse might be replaced by a creature from myth or science fiction. Your GM will describe unusual creatures and their quirks as mounts.

Where the character rides more than one type of animal, or the animal is something other than a horse, the beasts are listed in brackets after the ability name.

T. E. “Bumpy” Ryder-Smythe is both a splendid equestrian and an increasingly passable camel rider. His ability reads **Riding (Horse, Camel.)**

Attempts to ride unfamiliar animals are made at a penalty of 1.

**Automatic Success:** Stay on a willing creature’s back at moderate speeds, in normal terrain.

**Counters:** Other Riding attempts in zero-sum contests: races, chases, obstacle courses.

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**Physician**

**Definition:** Treat wounds and injuries. Diagnose and cure disease.

Physician rolls aid injured characters. On a success, you may remove one or more injuries, at a further cost of Physician points.

- **Hair’s-Breadth:** spend 3 additional Physician points to remove 1 injury.
- **Ordinary:** spend 3 additional Physician points to remove 1 injury, or 6 points to remove 2 injuries (suffered by the same character.)
- **Impressive:** spend 1 additional Physician point to remove 1 injury, or 3 points to remove 2 injuries (suffered by the same character.)

**Automatic Success:** Diagnose common maladies.

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**Perceiving With Other Abilities**

GMs may generously allow other Abilities can stand in for (or replace) Perception. To notice the strange characteristics of a wound, you could use Physician instead of Perception. Appraisal can be used to spot forged items; Gambling, to winnow out cheaters.

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**Performance**

**Definition:** Entertain others with a public display of song, dance, acting, music, spoken word, or other performance art. In scenarios centering around performance, the ability may be broken up into a number of separate art forms. Each specialty, indicated in brackets, is an ability of its own, applied to situations that bring that form into play. For example, “Casting Call”, which revolves around the performance of a school musical, breaks the performance ability into singing, acting, and dancing categories, along with various others. Musical performance may specify a particular instrument.

**Automatic Success:** Project basic competence during a low-pressure rehearsal.

**Counters:** other Performance abilities, in a competitive context.

---

**Stealth**

**Definition:** Stealth allows you to take actions without being seen. You can’t hide in plain sight, but you can move deftly and silently past distracted or inattentive observers. Stealth allows you to find good hiding places, ferret away small objects with sleight of hand, even engage in acts of pickpocketing.

**Automatic Success:** Remain unseen in the dark, behind a barrier.

**Is Countered By:** Perception

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**Wealth**

**Definition:** You can solve a problem by throwing money at it. You spend from your vast reserves of cash to hire services, acquire equipment, or purchase favors.

**Automatic Success:** Acquire any standard consumer item at a retail outlet.

**Is Countered By:** Wealth, in a zero-sum contest of status
to show who can muster the bigger bankroll.

**Weaponmaster**

**Definition:** Oversee the operation of a complex weapons system, either installed in a vehicle or built into a fortified structure. The type of system varies by setting: examples include a galleon’s cannons, a starship’s laser array, or the siege engines attacking a medieval castle. Use this ability to determine success when loosing your weapons on an opposing vehicle, structure or force.

**Automatic Success:** Determine the current readiness and state of repair of your weapons system.

**Is Countered By:** See vehicle combat, p. 41.

**Relationships**

Relationship abilities allow characters to further their goals in the story by calling in favors from their allies, colleagues and relatives. A character a PC has a relationship to is called a **contact**. To gain a favor from a Relationship, the character makes an uncontested roll of the Relationship ability. The supporting character never Rebuffs the request. However, he is allowed to outright refuse the request, preventing the contest from occurring at all, if it conflicts with one of his goals, as found in his description. Descriptions of these characters appear in your play pack, formatted as follows:

**Name and Title/Role (as it appears on the component card)**

The title/role information is a phrase summing up the character’s place in the world and implying the sorts of favors he or she can be expected to perform.

**Personality:** the few words that best describe the character’s behavior and attitude

**Goals:** the character’s most important objective or objectives, in order of priority.

**Sample Favors:** a bullet-point list of the types of actions the character is best able to perform for a PC

**Abilities:** the character’s abilities, including Persuade, Rebuff, and (.Face) Attack, Defense and Moxy, along with general abilities

Here’s a sample supporting character written up in Relationship format:

**Khufu, Pharaoh Of Egypt**

**Personality:** imperious, impetuous, indifferent to suffering

**Goals:** 1) build a great pyramid to house his tomb; 2) acquire treasure; 3) sire a male heir; 4) acquire beauteous concubines; 5) maintain reputation as fearsome conqueror

**Sample Favors:** 1) reserve a spot in his tomb for favored persons when he dies, ensuring their ability to bask in his glory throughout the eternal afterlife 2) gift riches and treasure 3) grant rank in army, bureaucracy or priesthood 4) free slaves 5) order enslavement or death of enemies

**Abilities:** Attack 12, Athletics 8, Defense 6, Etiquette 4, Knowledge 4, Living Rough 4, Management 8, Moxy 8, Perception 6, Persuade 4, Rebuff 12, Riding (Horse, Camel) 8.

** Burning a Relationship**

Relationship rolls never deliver favors contrary to the contact’s goals. To gain such a favor, the PC may choose to enter into a Persuade contest against the contact’s Rebuff. As always, the PC must argue that the favor is in the contact’s self-interest, even though it isn’t. Once the contact discovers that it isn’t, he ceases to be a contact and is scratched off the character’s card. The Relationship is now considered burned.
Winona leaves the studio cringing, knowing that the other PCs are now in a position to weaken her with the President. Her consolation prize is the 1 point boon she earns for her Exasperating Failure. This raises her Showboating Resistance back to 1.

Players may always choose to embrace temptation, declining to roll and accepting whatever ill consequences follow from their indulgence. GMs may feel free to intensify the after-effects of an unresisted wallow in temptation.

Each setting recognizes six temptations.

Where the Ω symbol appears in place of a rating, the PC is completely immune to that temptation and need never roll to avoid it. The player may still choose to have the character indulge. If he does so regularly in an ongoing game, the GM may choose to replace the Ω symbol with a rating of 1, to reflect the character’s actual behavior.

GM-controlled characters are subject to the same weaknesses, but never roll to see if they fall prey to them. Instead, the GM lets them succumb or resist, depending on what sort of reversal of fortune the moment seems to call for. In general, their reactions to temptations tend to aid PCs who are currently in the underdog position, and undermine PCs on a winning streak.

Temptations give rise to the character’s key trait, an adjective shown on the character’s resistance card as a quick reference to the PC’s personality and motivations. The key trait usually matches the name of the character’s lowest-rated temptation. The adjective might in some cases be adjusted to fit the idiom of a particular setting.

The temptations are as follows:

### Arrogance

This temptation impels you to demonstrate your superior judgment and intellect. When you succumb to arrogance, you act as if you are infallible. You overrate your own abilities and dismiss those of others. As a matter of reflex, you refuse advice. You wield the petty perks of authority as symbols of your self-evident superiority.

**Key Trait:** Arrogant

### Avarice

This temptation kicks in whenever you are confronted with the opportunity to line your pockets or surround yourself with the fruits of wealth. You drop all other
goals to add to your riches, betraying whoever stands between you and the money you see as rightfully yours. As a penny saved is a penny earned, so you resist with miserly fury any attempt to part you from your hard-won wealth.

**Key Trait: Greedy**

**Dissipation**
The availability of intoxicating substances requires you to resist dissipation. When you fail, you indulge to the maximum, throwing aside concerns for your reputation, relationships, or physical well-being. You can’t just stop at one drink; only absolute inebriation will do. The illegality of a substance merely makes it more appealing.

**Key Trait: Dissolute**

**Gluttony**
If not resisted, the impulse to gluttony leads to shameless overeating. Bouts of gluttony end only when the character has gorged to the point of nausea or immobility. Those with low resistances may be gourmets who salivate for the finest and most exotic cuisine. Alternately, they might seek their fat, salt and sugar desire in the form of low-grade but immediately satisfying junk food.

**Key Trait: Gluttonous**

**Indolence**
When confronted with a difficult task, particularly a physical onerous one, the character who succumbs to this temptation will instead remain comfortably ensconced in a comfortable chair, or perhaps settle in for a long nap. Characters with low resistance to indolence may believe in their goals, but in practice set them aside to indulge in long stretches of untaxing leisure.

**Key Trait: Lazy / Indolent**

**Lust**
The urge to gratify every sexual impulse, no matter how fleeting, rules the fevered consciousness of the libidinous character. He tosses aside long-term goals to pursue liaisons with anyone he finds attractive. The player defines what type of person the character lusts for. This may be tightly defined, or encompass any halfway interested partner capable of sexual congress.

**Key Trait: Libidinous**

**Nitpicking**
The urge to nitpick raises its ugly head whenever someone makes a minor factual error or grammatical mistake. A bout of unrestricted nitpicking never addresses the main point of a discussion, but focuses with dogged persistence on a trivial surface issue. While nitpicking can sometimes work toward a character’s goal, allowing him to torpedo a project with annoying distractions, the temptation applies only to useless or self-destructive descents into pettifoggery. (Strategic nitpicking is probably Obfuscatory persuasion or Lawyerly rebuff.) On a failed resistance, the character makes him seem foolish and annoying to people he needs as allies, or causes him to sabotage his own proposals through delay and vacillation.

**Key Trait: Nitpicky**

**Paranoia**
Believing themselves to be the surrounded by enemies, characters with low resistance to paranoia paralyze themselves with groundless fears. They initiate plots against their supposed foes, turning imaginary
opponents into actual ones. Unable to trust others, they prove untrustworthy themselves. They make false assumptions by weaving completely unrelated events into proof of a vast conspiracy against them. Fearing the ruthlessness of the forces arrayed against them, they feel compelled to respond with bizarre secret schemes that would lead to humiliation or even imprisonment if exposed.

**Key Trait:** Fearful / Paranoid

**Showboating**

Characters who fail to resist the urge to showboat seek public attention. Grasping obliviously for opportunities to appear important, they instead make themselves look foolish. When showboating verbally, the character trips himself up while gratifying his ego. If acting physically, he attempts a dangerous stunt he’s unable to pull off.

**Key Trait:** Show-Offy

**Spite**

Spite is the impulse to gratuitously lash out at rivals, actual or perceived. Characters roll to resist when confronted with a choice of pursuing their main goal, or taking a jab at a person they dislike. They launch their attacks in a passive or indirect manner, which if revealed will be regarded as deplorably underhanded. The character may float ugly rumors, damage treasured items, or make hurtful remarks to the victim’s loved ones.

**Key Trait:** Spiteful

**TAGLINES**

Taglines are snippets of in-character dialogue, looking like this:

- “If I’d known the plank extended over shark-infested waters, I surely would have greeted the arrangement with more vigorous protest.”
- “I’ve got some old costumes. You’ve got a barn. We can still put on the show!”
- “When I proposed a public-private partnership, this is not what I had in mind.”
- “Forgive me while I lapse into unconsciousness.”
- “Sure. Blame it on the alien.”

Some taglines are vague; others imply particular events that might occur in the story. It is not only acceptable but expected for players to drive the plot in directions that allow them to use their taglines.

Taglines initially appear as part of a player’s card stack and are replaced when used. Players start play with these three taglines. When they use a tagline, they get a new one, supplied from the list provided with each scenario. (See pages 34, 63, 71, 79, and 91 for example tagline lists.) Players use taglines by speaking them in character in a way that makes sense in context and is entertaining to the other participants. Appropriate use of a tagline allows the player to refresh one or more pools.

When a tagline is spoken, the GM judges how well it fits the situation.
Temptations and GM-Controlled Characters

Rather than rolling their resistances against the full range of temptations, supporting characters fall prey to one temptation apiece. This temptation is referred to as the character’s downfall. If the player characters successfully place the downfall temptation in the supporting character’s path, they win a significant advantage over him. The GM contrives the situation so that the PCs must overcome an obstacle, scoring at least one success in the process, to confront the supporting character with his downfall. The advantage is as great as the GM can supply without bringing the story to a premature close or otherwise throwing the pacing out of whack.

Winona Fingerhut wants to cajole journalist Billy Crigger into delaying his story about cost overruns at the Flackahoochie Dam project. She uses her Gossip to learn about him. After scoring an Ordinary Success with that ability, she hears that Crigger puts a fresh bottle of whiskey in his desk drawer every morning as soon as he arrives at the newsroom. (Note how the GM is describes the Downfall narratively, rather than just using the rules terms and saying, “Crigger’s Downfall is Dissolute.”) Having scored the success, she can take a bottle of fine single malt to her meeting with Crigger and gain an advantage. In this case, the GM decides to have Crigger crumble altogether and give her what she wants.

Characters’ downfalls need not correspond to the six temptations appearing on PCs’ resistance cards. They may or may not relate to temptations defined in this section; if not, they should be self-explanatory in a word or brief phrase.

Downfalls aren’t provided for supporting characters who appear as the PCs’ Relationships (p. 31.) To get favors from them, players are expected to roll their Relationship abilities.

If the line is completely nonsensical in context, its use confers no benefit. The tagline is not replaced.

If the line makes sense as used, but is not particularly amusing or dramatic in effect and garners no noticeable response from the other participants, the player gains one refresh token. The tagline is then replaced; see below.

If the line makes sense and garners an appreciative response from one or more participants, the player gains two refresh tokens. The tagline is replaced.

If the line is so well placed that it elicits real laughter, spontaneous applause or true gasps of appreciation, the player gains three refresh tokens. The tagline is replaced.

Refresh tokens not spent immediately are referred to as banked. The player may spend a refresh token to refresh any pool at any time a resolution is not in progress. It is never possible to refresh during a resolution or contest, no matter when the tagline is spoken. When a banked refresh is spent, the player hands the token back in.

Taglines are a limited resource. In the unlikely but possible event that a group runs through all of the supplied taglines in the course of a scenario, no more become available. At this time, players get to spend any of their banked refreshes. Once they’ve spent as many as they can or wish to, any banked tokens are removed from play. Refreshes become impossible for the rest of the game.

Frequency of tagline use may vary from group to group and even from one scenario to the next. If you see that refresh tokens are piling up faster than players can spend them, perform an adjustment on the fly to restrict the supply. Award 1 token if the tagline is appropriate, and 2 tokens only for the most spectacularly entertaining uses.

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1 GMs should show mercy to first-time players who don’t seem to grasp the concept. If they genuinely seem confused, and aren’t just trying to ditch a tagline they don’t like, replace the tagline but allow no refreshes. Be sure to re-explain the concept as you do so.
**FIGHTING**

Combats occur as a series of linked contests, in which combatants trade places as actor and thwarter.

The actor tries to hit the thwarter by making an Attack check. If the attacker stands pat on a success, the thwarter may respond with a Defense check. Standing pat on a failure causes an injury to the thwarter.

Then the two combatants swap roles; the former thwarter becomes the actor, attempting to hit his opponent, who is now the thwarter. Again, a success for the attacker injures the defender, unless countered by a Defense success by the thwarter.

When an attacker scores an Impressive Success, the thwarter faces a levy of 3 on his next Defense roll. When a thwarter scores an Impressive Success, the attacker faces a levy of 3 on his next Attack roll.

The first Defense roll in response to an Impressively Successful attack likewise faces a levy of 3.

The fight concludes when one character:

- chooses to surrender
- is walloped by either the Attack or Defense ability (p.37)
- is unconscious, downed, dead, or dying (p. 37)

When multiple combatants are involved, the fight concludes all of the characters on one side of the fight have left the combat for the above reasons.

Events which would ordinarily take place at the end of a contest kick in only at the conclusion of a combat. This includes the final squaring of boon and levy tokens. Characters may not refresh during a fight.

**Who Goes First?**

To determine the order in which combatants act, called the initiative ranking, first determine whether the character starting the fight has surprised his opponent.

**Surprise**

If it’s not clear whether the defender can tell that an attack is coming, contest the attacker’s Persuade or Stealth against the defender’s Perception. Use Persuade if the defender can already see the attacker but may be fooled by his efforts to disguise his hostile intent. Use Stealth if the attacker is ambushing from a hiding place.

If there is more than one defender, this is a contest against multiple targets (p. 16.) The attackers choose which of them takes part in the surprise contest. If they gain surprise, this character is the first to attack.

Should an attacker gain surprise, he and all of his allies (if any) strike first. They choose their respective positions in the initiative rank. If there is a dispute between them as to who acts first, the attacker who entered the surprise contest goes first. Then all of the combatants on the other side go, in order of their current attack pools, from highest to lowest.

**No Surprise**

If no one is surprised, the characters take initiative ranks in order of their current attack pools, from highest to lowest.

**Breaking Initiative Ties**

When breaking ties between characters who would otherwise act at the same time (or to establish any other kind of ranking between Skulduggery characters), give priority to PCs over GM-controlled characters. When breaking a tie between PCs, give priority to the player who will next have a birthday.

**Rounds and Exchanges**

A sequence of attacks, in which each character gets the chance to attack once, in the order determined by their initiative rank, is called a round.

When a round ends, a new one begins. In this new round, every character who has not left the fight gets another chance to attack.

This continues until everyone on one side has left or been removed from the fight, as described above.
Combat Wallops
A character successfully walloping an opponent with the Attack ability may choose the condition he ends up in: hurt, downed, or dead. By spending an additional 3 points, the attacker can kill him in spectacularly visceral fashion.

Walloping an opponent with Defense forces him to immediately disengages from the fight, certain that his attack is doomed to fail. Supporting characters remain disengaged unless left little choice by a dramatic new turn of events, like a renewed attempt to attack or corner him.

Injury
Characters who are successfully attacked and fail a Defense roll, suffer an injury. Injuries are cumulative; the character’s condition depends on the number of injuries he’s racked up.

A character with one injury is hurt. Hurt characters can act normally, but suffer a levy of 2 on any roll—including subsequent Defense rolls.

With two injuries, the character is down. All he can do is lie prone, or maybe writhe in pain. Without others to defend them downed individuals are at their enemies’ mercy. A foe can kill the character merely by trying.

Combat Trumps
Each defense is trumped by one style of attack, and trumps another, like so:

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On a third injury, the character is either you are either dead (if his Moxy pool is 0) or dying. Dying characters have fifteen minutes to live per remaining Moxy point.

Outside of combat, characters may suffer one or more injuries by failing Athletics or Moxy checks. Athletics governs overtly physical threats, while Moxy covers insidious or subtle means of harm like poison, illness, or exposure.

Unconsciousness
In some circumstances, the worst consequence you risk from a failed Defense or Athletics roll is unconsciousness. For example, in combat, an attacker can always opt to knock the victim out rather than risk dealing permanent harm. In such situations, two injuries mean that you’re unconscious, not down. Every half hour the player may make a Moxy roll to see if the character wakes up. After half an hour, others may wake the character by shaking him, dousing him with cold water, or otherwise jolting him. Awakened characters are hurt.

A character who knocks out another and then tries to kill him is invariably interrupted by a surprising event that places him at a sudden disadvantage. While the attacker deals with the troubling plot twist, the intended victim wakes up, unharmed.

Weapons
Skulduggery is interested in conflicts between people, not in the relative strengths and weaknesses of various inanimate objects. For this reason, it doesn’t bother to reflect the differences between types of weapon in its combat system. How well you rend, mutilate and contuse your foes depends on your Attack value. You are free to think of your pool as incorporating the evident bad-assedness of your favored weapon, or of your inherent bad-assedness at using a simple or inferior weapon.

Tracking Boons and Levies
Most other contests call on a single ability, making it easy to assess boons and levies. During combat, players must track which ability a given boon or levy token applies to. When combats start, provide copies of a diagram called the Combat Boon and Levy Collector to each participant. As GM, you’ll need one for each supporting character taking part in the fight. The diagram appears in a photocopy-ready page at the back of the book. (You can also download it in PDF form from the Pelgrane Press website.) When a combatant is assessed a boon or levy, place the token in the circle corresponding to the ability.

Sample Combat
Space trader Finnegan Swake is physically attacked by a vendor enraged by his admittedly long-standing failure to pay his outstanding invoices. Finnegan’s combat-related pools are Attack (Cunning) 8 and Defense (Intuition) 8. The vendor, Dvor, starts with Attack (Strength) 10 and Defense (Dodge) 6. Neither combatant’s Attack styles trump or are trumped by the other’s Defense styles, leaving them more or less evenly matched. Dvor is a GM-controlled character.

Initiative Determination: After chatting less than amiably about Finnegan’s shortcomings as a businessman, Dvor lashes out at him without warning. In a contest pitting Dvor’s Persuade against Finnegan’s Perception (omitted for brevity), Dvor comes out on top. This allows him to strike first.

Round One, Dvor’s Attack: Dvor attacks first. He gets a Hair’s-Breadth Success, and stands pat on
that result." He pulls out a force blade and wildly slashes at you," describes the GM. The GM places a levy token on the Attack circle in the boon and levy tracker she’s using for Dvor.

Kevin’s player, Kevin, rolls Defense and gets a Dismal Failure. “You stumble, and his knife slashes through your jacket,” the GM narrates. If this result is allowed to stand, Finnegan will suffer an injury. Kevin spends 3 Defense to reroll, dropping his Defense pool from 8 to 5. He rolls a Routine Failure. “As you regain your footing, he seems to drive his dagger deeper,” the GM says. Kevin spends 1 point to reroll, dropping his Defense pool from 5 to 4, and scores a Hair’s-Breadth Success. The GM gives him a levy token, which he places on the Defense circle of his boon and levy tracker. Kevin stands pat on this success. Finnegan has not been injured after all. “You dance backwards, looking down at the slash in your tunic left by his force dagger.”

Round One, Finnegan’s Attack: Kevin makes his first Attack roll, which costs him nothing, and scores a Hair’s-Breadth success. He collects a levy token against his Attack pool, and stands pat.

“I scorch the air with a wide slash of my force cutlass!” a triumphant Kevin proclaims.

Now Dvor must respond with a Defense success. He rolls an Impressive Success. “Dvor leaps up on a radiation collector, kicking the blade from your hand,” narrates the GM. This not only ends the attack, but will cost Finnegan a levy of 3 on his next Attack roll.

Round Two, Dvor’s Attack: Dvor makes his first attack roll of the new exchange, which costs him nothing. He gets an Ordinary Success. “From his superior height, he rains down a succession of blinding blows.”

Kevin makes his Defense check, getting an Impressive Success. “The slashes I suffer are inconsequential!” Kevin crows. Now Dvor will also face a levy of 3 on his next Attack roll.

Round Two, Finnegan’s Attack: Kevin pays the levy of 3 required by Dvor’s previous Defense success, dropping his Attack pool from 8 to 5. He rolls a Hair’s-Breadth Success and stands pat. “I aim an arcing blow at his knees!”

Dvor leads off with a Routine Failure. “He yowls,” the GM narrates, “stung by the crackle of contact when between force field and bone.” He pays 1 to reroll, dropping his Defense from 6 to 5. He gets a Dismal Failure. This costs him 3 to reroll, dropping his pool to 2. Dvor scores an Ordinary Success, protecting him from injury.

Round Three, Dvor’s Attack: Because Finnegan’s most recent Defense success was Impressive, Dvor’s first roll faces a levy of 3, dropping his Attack from 10 to 7. He gets a Routine Failure. “Clearly still reeling from the pain, he lunges at you uncertainly,” the GM says. She pays 1 from Dvor’s attack pool for a reroll, taking his pool from 7 to 6. His result is an Exasperating Failure. “Shaking off the pain, he comes at you harder, swiping the air by your cheek.” She collects a boon token for Dvor and pays another point, reducing his Attack pool to 5. This result is an Ordinary Success. “His next swipe hits closer to home—or, more precisely, your ribcage.”
Finnegan must respond or take an injury. His first roll costs nothing. Kevin exults as it comes up as another Impressive Success. He is not only unhurt, but will subject Dvor to a costly levy on his next attack roll.

**Round Three, Finnegan’s Attack:** Kevin makes an attack roll—this time without a levy, because Dvor’s most recent Defense result was only an Ordinary Success. He gets an Ordinary Success and stands pat on it. “I just blitz right at him, with a fury of blows, hoping a few will find their mark,” Kevin narrates.

Dvor now must make a Defense roll. He gets an Ordinary Success and stands pat on it. “He weaves back,” the GM describes, “you make contact a bunch of times but nothing really lands.”

**Round Four, Dvor’s Attack:** Dvor must again pay a levy of 3 for his first roll of the attack, because Finnegan stood pat on an Impressive Defense Success. This drops his Attack pool from 5 to 2. The GM rolls a Hair’s-Breadth Success, collecting a levy token and standing pat. “He shoulders into you, knocking you from your splendid defensive crouch.”

Kevin makes a Defense roll, scoring an Ordinary Success. “I may be off my stride, but I’m still not hurt.”

**Round Four, Finnegan’s Attack:** Finnegan’s first attack roll is an Exasperating Failure. Kevin collects a boon token and pays 1 Attack point to continue, dropping his pool from 5 to 4. The next roll is an Ordinary Success. He stands pat. “My first off-stride swings fall short, but then I bull into him, force blade crackling.”

Dvor’s first Defense result is an Exasperating Failure. Dvor earns a boon token and pays 1, dropping his Defense from 2 to 1. The GM’s next roll is a Routine Failure. He pays his last point for another Exasperating Failure. Out of points and unable to reroll, he takes an injury. “Your aggressive style finally pays off,” the GM says. “Dvor slips and slides and finally you smell the appallingly familiar smell of searing flesh.” Dvor takes his first injury—he is now hurt, and takes a levy of 2 on all rolls.

**Round Five, Dvor’s Attack:** Dvor’s injury forces him to pay a levy of 2 for his first Attack roll. His Attack pool drops from 5 to 3. He gets an Ordinary Success; the GM stands pat on it. “Infuriated by pain, he slices at you with his force knife,” the GM narrates.

Finnegan’s initial Defense roll is a Routine Failure. Kevin pays 1 to reroll, dropping his Defense pool to 4. He gets an Exasperating Failure, and with it a boon token. He pays another point to reroll, getting a Hair’s-Breadth success, and a levy token. “Feet skittering beneath me, I barely escape his wild swings,” Kevin narrates.

**Round Five, Finnegan’s Attack:** “I try to take advantage of his furious motion to find an opening and stick him again,” Kevin says. Finnegan’s first Attack roll is an Exasperating Failure. The GM pays 1 from his Attack pool, dropping it to 3. She rolls another Exasperating Failure, pays another 1 point from Dvor’s pool, and gets a Hair’s-Breadth Success. He has collected two boon tokens and a levy token, and his Attack is now at 2.

Dvor must now defend. If he had any points left, he’d face a levy of 2. With his pool at 0, however, he not only can’t afford to reroll, but faces a penalty of 1 on the one roll he is allowed to make. The GM rolls a 4, which, after the penalty is applied, becomes an Exasperating Failure. “He evades you at first, but finally opens you up to a shot at his ribs. Again your force blade crackles home.”

With two injuries, Dvor is down. He can do nothing but writhe in agony on the spaceport floor.

“I power down my weapon and walk away,” Kevin says. “Let this be a lesson to all and sundry—Finnegan Swake’s accounts payable department is a fearsome blade.”

Finnegan now accounts for his boon and levy tokens. Attack has two levies and one boon, for a total of one levy. His Attack drops from 5 to 4. A single Defense boon raises his pool from 0 to 1.
Vehicle Combat
In some settings, characters pit their vehicles in violent battles. Examples of vehicle combat include:

- galleons pounding one another with cannon fire
- space ship battles
- smash-up derby
- WWI flying aces
- giant robot duels

Each vehicle possesses three abilities: Weaponry is the offensive ability, taking the same role Attack does in personal combat. Maneuverability acts as an equivalent to Defense. In a departure from the pattern for persona combat, a third ability, Integrity, measures the vehicle’s condition after it takes a hit.

Attacks are resolved as follows:

1. The attacker rolls Weaponry. If the attacker stands pat on a success, continue to the next step. If not, the attack ends.

2. The thwarter rolls Maneuverability. If the thwarter stands pat on a success, the attack ends. If not, continue to the next step.

3. The thwarter rolls Integrity. If the thwarter stands pat on a success, the attack ends. If not, the vehicle sustains damage.

When an attacker scores an Impressive Success with Weaponry, the thwarter faces a levy of 3 on his next Maneuverability roll. When a thwarter scores an Impressive Success with Maneuverability, the attacker faces a levy of 3 on his next Weaponry roll.

The first Maneuverability roll in response to an Impressively Successful Weaponry roll likewise faces a levy of 3.

Impressive Integrity rolls impose no levies on the opposing vessel.

Use the Boon and Levy tracker at the back of the book.

For successful vehicle combat to occur, the character at the controls must have at least 1 point in his Driving / Piloting pool. Points in this pool can be spent toward Weaponry or Maneuverability but not on Integrity. The piloting character may make all three sets of rolls for the vehicle. If this is the case, the vehicle is treated as inoperable (see below) when the character’s Driving / Piloting pool drops to 0—unless another pilot with at
SKULDUGGERY

Once it is safely out of combat and parked or docked, the Mechanic ability can be used to repair a damaged or inoperable vehicle. One success restores a damaged vehicle to full repair or renders an inoperable vehicle merely damaged. A vehicle in good repair refreshes its three pools on a Mechanics success attained in safe conditions, in a suitable facility.

Emergency repairs can be conducted during combat. The mechanic acts at the beginning of an opponent’s attack, before her Weaponry roll. The roll itself takes a levy of 2. The vehicle is treated as automatically failing any Integrity rolls for the remainder of the round.

Example Of Vehicle Combat

These two exchanges from a longer contest serve as a brief example of vehicle combat.

The PC’s spaceship, the Vantage, is locked in battle with a retrofitted salvage barge, the Scuttler, intent on retrieving the questionably obtained contents of the former ship’s cargo hold. Finnegan Swake (Kevin) mans the helm as Pilot. Serig Allagan (Andrew) takes charge of the weapons array, while Kala Dharro (Philippa) stands ready with a positronic wrench in the engine room. The players are first up, followed by the Scuttler, as controlled by the GM. The Vantage is in full repair and has the following points in its pool: Weaponry 4, Maneuverability 2, and Integrity 6. The ship is so far unharmed.

Round Two, Vantage’s Attack: As Weaponmaster, Andrew makes the Weaponry roll for his character, Serig. He has 5 points left in his Weaponmaster pool. “I let loose a net full of ion mines,” says Andrew, as Serig. His first result is a Routine Failure. “The mines float wide of the Scuttler’s rusty hull,” the GM narrates. Andrew pays 1 from the ship’s Weaponry pool, dropping it to 3, to reroll. He gets an Ordinary Success and stands pat. “A searing bolt from the main phase cannons dances across their shielding,” he describes.

Since the Scuttler is controlled by supporting characters, the GM doesn’t bother to track separate pools for its crewmen. Its Maneuverability pool is now 4. The Scuttler’s first roll costs it least 1 point in the pool is on hand to take over.

Alternately, the rolls might be made by a specialized crew of three PCs. The Driver / Pilot makes Defense rolls. A character with the Weaponmaster ability performs the Weaponry rolls, and the Mechanic makes Integrity rolls. In this case, the Driver / Pilot can only spend points from his ability on Maneuverability, while the Weaponmaster spends points from that ability on Integrity rolls. If any of these essential three crew members’ relevant ability drops to 0, points may no longer be spent from the corresponding ship’s pool.

When PCs add their own ability pools to a vehicle combat effort, they use a boon and levy tracker for the ship, and keep their own token piles on the side.

This rule is designed to give multiple players a direct role in a ship combat. When running ships crewed by supporting characters, GMs should save time by paying attention only to the ship’s three pools.

Vehicle Damage

After failing its first Integrity roll, a vehicle is compromised. All subsequent Weaponry, Maneuverability and Integrity rolls are made at a levy of 2.

On a second failed Integrity roll, the vehicle is inoperable. It loses its basic propulsion and can longer fire weapons. A sailing ship is dead in the water. Star ships drift in space. Planes and other aerial vehicles must make emergency crash landings; a successful Piloting roll is required to forestall another Integrity check. All occupants of an inoperable vehicle must make Athletics rolls, and suffer injuries on failures.

On a third failed Integrity roll, the vehicle is destroyed beyond any hope of repair. All occupants must make further Athletics rolls, at a levy of 2, or suffer injury. When certain types of vehicle, like spaceships or aircraft in flight, are destroyed, all occupants are instantly killed.

Repair

The PC’s spaceship, the Vantage, is locked in battle with a retrofitted salvage barge, the Scuttler, intent on retrieving the questionably obtained contents of the former ship’s cargo hold. Finnegan Swake (Kevin) mans the helm as Pilot. Serig Allagan (Andrew) takes charge of the weapons array, while Kala Dharro (Philippa) stands ready with a positronic wrench in the engine room. The players are first up, followed by the Scuttler, as controlled by the GM. The Vantage is in full repair and has the following points in its pool: Weaponry 4, Maneuverability 2, and Integrity 6. The ship is so far unharmed.
nothing. It gets an Impressive Success and stands pat. “In an impressive maneuver, the Scuttler’s helmsman tilts his hull to deflect your incoming phase blast,” says the GM. The Vantage will face a levy of 3 on its next Weaponry roll.

**Round Two, Scuttler’s Attack:** The Scuttler’s Weaponry pool stands at 8. The GM rolls an Ordinary Success and stands pat. “Return fire rakes your command pod,” she says. Miming the action in response to the GM’s cue, the players lurch in their chairs, first to the right and then to the left.

In addition to the ship’s Maneuverability of 2, Finnegan has 2 points left in his Piloting pool. His first roll costs nothing; he gets an impressive Success and stands pat. “I let the impact spin me into a perfect Grunzfeld maneuver,” says Kevin. Neither he nor anyone else knows what a Grunzfeld maneuver might be, but it sure sounds effective. The Scuttler will now face a levy of 3 on its next attack.

**Round Three, Vantage’s Attack:** With the Scuttler’s most recent Maneuverability roll an impressive Success, the Vantage must pay 3 for its first attack roll. Andrew spends that three points from the ship’s Weaponry, dropping it from 4 to 1. He scores a Hair’s-Breadth success, taking a levy token for the ship’s Weaponry pool and standing pat. “I am straight for their transduction array!” Andrew cries.

The GM rolls Maneuverability for the Scuttler and gets a Dismal Failure. She pays 3 to reroll, dropping its pool to 1. She rolls an Exasperating Failure. She spends her last point to reroll, getting a Dismal Failure. “The Scuttler tries to compensate but your attack pattern is too dense for it!” the GM describes.

The ship has been hit, but how badly? The GM rolls its Integrity, getting another Dismal Failure. The Scuttler’s Integrity pool is 3, so she has to spend all of it to pay for the reroll. She gets an Exasperating Failure, earning a boon token for the Scuttler’s Integrity. Nonetheless, the ship takes damage and is now compromised. “Sensors indicate severe damage to their power grid,” the GM narrates.
RUNNING THE GAME

Skulduggery games are fast and free-wheeling. They draw on the Game Moderator’s skill to improvise fun obstacles to the character’s goals, personal and collective, while keeping the action moving forward.

ACTION AND REACTION

Just as the game system builds a series of moves and counter-moves into the core of its resolution system, scenarios are built around actions and reactions.

The scenario creates the potential for forward movement on multiple fronts. It gives each player both a personal and collective goal to work towards. The tension between the two goals generates story complications. More importantly, the goals, once established, place the responsibility for advancing the story on the players. They know what they want, and must scheme to get it.

Plotting becomes player-driven. They act, and you react. In concert with the wild swings of fate dictated by the die results, you find ways to put amusing but surmountable obstacles in the PCs’ paths as they attempt to realize their schemes.

Players also act and react with one another. The persuasion system allows players to convince each others’ characters to take ridiculous actions. Some scenario goals put the players in direct contention with one another. Even when they’re cooperating to a common end, self-destructive behavior required by failed temptation rolls creates amusing conflicts between PCs. Often the most entertaining stretches of a Skulduggery session are the ones where the players interact with one another in character, with minimal intervention from you.

Scenarios may provide certain scenes as fallback measures when the players fail to take the lead. Most times you won’t need them. When it’s not clear what happens next, determine which of the players has last had a chance to act or do something memorable. Ask that player the simple question:

“So now what are you up to?”

(This rephrasing of the standard RPG question “So now what do you do?” serves as an empowering hint, unleashing the player’s perhaps suppressed urge toward underhandedness and clever dealing.)

Your challenge is more likely to be to keep up with unexpected schemes they decide to launch. There is no scenario devious enough to compete with a group of roleplaying gamers, so be ready to keep up.

When all else fails, look at the list of temptations, pick the one the least active player is most vulnerable to, and place a tantalizingly related obstacle in the group’s path.

READING SCENARIOS

Adventures for other story-oriented RPGs may read like stories or screenplays you then interpret and modify in play, Skulduggery scenarios are presented as a series of building blocks that you construct into a story on the fly. Though less entertaining to read beforehand, they come to life in play, by giving your players the space to take charge and drive the narrative.

Scenarios provide a very broad structure and a series of springboards to inspire both the player’s actions and your reactions. They consist of the following elements:

• The Setting: This section describes the time period, genre, and place in which the story occurs. In more exotic or imaginary settings, additional background material may be added, allowing you to refer to its unique details. Expect to elaborate further setting details as you go along; Skulduggery scenarios are too short to fully flesh out entire invented worlds.

• Character Cards: These not only provide abilities and ratings for the characters, but the basic attitudes and personal goals that give them reasons to launch schemes and drive the story.

• Relationship Characters: As named on each player’s Relationship card, these characters provide a short-cut to interaction within the setting. Because the PCs know these characters and can expect at least somewhat favorable treatment from them, they can use them to gain information and further their plans.

• Other Supporting Characters: These characters usually represent the opposition the PCs face in furthering their collective goal, and maybe their personal goal, too. They may be outright rivals of the PCs, or less
hostile gatekeepers standing between them and their objectives. (For example, in the “If Space Permits” scenario, p. 80, the rival crews are competitors, while the members of the Vintner’s Council are gatekeepers.) Scenarios where the PCs are expected to more or less work together require a more expansive roster of these characters than ones in which the PCs’ main rivals are the other PCs.

- **Names**: A short series of names for people, places or things you may need when introducing new story elements on the fly.

- **The Opener**: A starting scene that introduces the setting and collective goals.

- **Scenes and Situations**: Notes on possible events which may take place. These are usually fallback events you can reach for when your players have grown stuck, or have rocketed through their goals with surprising speed. Given a choice between using one of these story suggestions and going where the players lead you, always set these aside for the uncharted waters of player-driven narrative.

- **The Closer**: Description of the big finish which will probably wrap up your session’s story—unless, of course, the players have taken you somewhere completely unanticipated.

**INTRODUCING THE CAST**

After component cards are handed out and trades completed, have the players read their character names, descriptions and personal goals to the rest of the group. Remind them that, when it comes to secrets and goals, they’re expected to separate what they know from what their characters know.

**IN CONCERT AND AT ODDS**

Make extensive use of the cutaway technique, where members of the group split up to achieve their own ends. This comes into play when they’re intentionally working at cross-purposes, but also when they divide their efforts to achieve their common goal. PCs may go off on their own, or split off into small teams.

Focus on each separate player/team in short bursts. Don’t be afraid to cut out of a scene in the middle and then come back to it. (In film terminology, this is called “crosscutting.”)

When a player seems momentarily stumped as to what to do next, cut to another player/scene to give him time to find a reaction. When a scene is losing energy, cut away. When it’s picking up energy, stick with it.

Keep players whose characters are not present interested by introducing plot threads that will impact their characters later.

Don’t worry too much about enforcing players’ unawareness of scenes they didn’t take part in. Allow players to keep their actions secret when it makes a difference to the story—for example, when a PC is betraying the others. If players try to use knowledge their characters don’t have to the detriment of another PC, rule out these actions as out of bounds. However, if they cleverly engineer their actions so that they make internal sense at every step, and are still able to discover their rivals’ secrets, well, all’s fair in love and Skulduggery.

In most cases, though, PCs working on their own will plan to fill in their partners on the results of their actions. Don’t spend time having the characters recap each other on events the players already know. Instead, take it as read that this repetitive dialogue has taken place between scenes.

**IT WON’T ALL MAKE THE CUT**

Each scenario contains way more material than you can fit into a single four-hour story. By providing you and the players with multiple elements suggesting many different plot directions, the scenarios provide a foundation for improvisation. Chances are that only three or so of the Relationship characters will show up, and that only one of them will get enough spotlight time to make a memorable impression. You may call for very few Resistance rolls in one scenario, while requiring them constantly in another. This may prove true even within the same scenario, as run for different groups. If your players fret at the end of a session over their unused plot threads, assure them that this is all part of the plan.

As long as the story you create together is fun and keeps moving forward, there’s no shame in leaving possible plot elements undeveloped. To heck with the road not taken! Skulduggery is about the choices you do make.

**BUILDING TO THE CLOSER**

Scenarios give you a certain predictable shape to work within by proposing a likely big finish in which
the characters' goal or goals are either realized or ironically squashed. Sometimes the personal goals come to fruition at the closer, sometimes not. Alternately, the closer might take story one step further by showing you the consequences after the major goal is achieved. For example, Skulduggery and Crossbones, p. 64, ends with a battle between pirate ships that follows after the central goal, becoming captain of the ship, has been disposed of.

On rare occasions the players might completely hijack the scenario, seizing on a new goal not on their component cards. Though this may tax your improvisatory powers by taking you into uncharted waters, be careful not to squelch this surprising turn of events. React to the players, as always, keeping an eye on the clock and envisioning possible big finishes that might satisfyingly wrap up this strange new story during its final half hour or so.

**Final Comeuppances**

In one shot scenarios in which the PCs face the threat of death, and possibly threaten others with death, you may wish to mete out final comeuppances. These allow the main characters to meet blackly humorous demises, satisfyingly restoring moral order in the wake of their unscrupulous hijinks.

During the scenario’s final scenes, feel free to introduce contests that suspend the standard system of combat and injury. Final comeuppances contests result in immediate death on any failed result, with no rerolls permitted. Restrict this grim fate to situations where it will seem amusing or thematically appropriate. Characters should meet final comeuppances when they’ve behaved callously or scandalously, for falling prey to their temptations, or by acting foolishly. Do not apply final comeuppance to properly heroic characters, or those who seem otherwise undeserving of ignominious destruction.

Final comeuppance might lead to a horrible fate other than literal death. Characters might be imprisoned, driven mad, or consigned to a dreary existence tending the sludge vats of Denbor-7.
Why No Character Build System?

By this point you may be skimming through the book looking for the section where we show you how to run games where the players build their characters from scratch. Alas, your quest is fruitless. Even for series play, we strongly recommend starting with randomly assembled characters created from component cards. And by “strongly recommend”, we mean “provide no other option.”

Where other games seek to increase the identification between player and character, successful *Skulduggery* play requires a level of detachment. Players find it easier to watch from a mordant remove as their characters get betrayed, make fools of themselves, fall prey to temptation, and are persuaded to act against their self-interest, when they’re given characters to play. The act of carefully creating a PC increases the sense of protectiveness the player feels toward his fictional proxy. Created PCs are also likely to draw on power fantasy tropes, reflecting the vicarious desire to be cool, masterful, and dangerous. *Skulduggery* sessions undercut all of these impulses, making their protagonists impulsive, wheedling, and deserving of comeuppance. A character build system inevitably creates expectations that the game would then disappoint. Card assignment lets the players know what they’re signing up for from the jump.

Even though players get more input in describing them, replacement PCs (see below) suffer less from this problem, because the convention of detachment between player and character has already been established.

REFRESHING FOR SUPPORTING CHARACTERS

Supporting characters are eligible to refresh some depleted pools after they reappear in the story after an absence of fifteen minutes or more, in real time. Roll a die, which cannot be rerolled.

*Hair’s-Breadth Success:* the character refreshes one pool of your choice.

*Ordinary Success:* the character refreshes two pools of your choice. (In both this and the above instance, pick the pools you imagine they’re most likely to use.)

*Impressive Success:* the character refreshes all pools.

SERIES PLAY

You may find that a one-shot session is so much fun that your players demand to extend it into a series of episodic adventures. If your players are already *Skulduggery* fans, they may agree in advance to an extended, or campaign-style series of games. Players weaned on more traditionally rules- and combat-oriented RPGs, or who prefer a semi-serious tone, may need a self-contained intro episode to inveigle them in to a longer series.

Refreshing Between Scenarios

Characters begin each new scenario with all pools equal to their ratings.

GMs choosing to run series without clear divisions between scenarios should allow all abilities to refresh after suitably long pauses in the action, as circumstances appear to warrant.

Improvement

At the end of each scenario, each player gains a number of improvement points to spend on raising ability ratings:

- 1 point for each session attended
- 1 point if the group, according to your judgment, achieved its collective goal
- 1 point if the character achieved his or her personal goal

Each point can be spent to raise a single rating by 1. Raising your lowest-rated resistance by 1 costs 3 improvement points. Points gained from a single scenario must be spent on separate abilities.

Players may add abilities they don’t have, starting with a rating of 1, provided that the ability appears in at least one other player’s stack of component cards. Players
Replacement Relationships
Where characters regularly move from one place to another, the GM switches out their relationships, creating replacement relationship characters with each new destination or scenario.

Restoring Burned Relationships
When a Relationship is burned (p. 31) it may be restored in a subsequent session. The PC must perform a favor that noticeably furthers one of the contact’s top three goals. Then he must successfully contest his Persuade against the ex-contact’s Rebuff, arguing that he can be trusted from now on. A Relationship burned for a second time can never be restored.

Replacement Characters
When a character dies or is otherwise conclusively removed from the storyline, the player creates a replacement. The character invents the character’s name and backstory, with the GM assisting to ensure consistency with the setting. The player takes responsibility for explaining how the new character connects to the ongoing storyline as a new or newly revealed member of the group.

General Abilities: The new character has as many points in general abilities as the old one did. The player distributes these between as many abilities as desired. Only general abilities appearing on the previous character’s identity card, or on the identity card of other PCs, may be chosen. No rating may exceed the value of the highest-rated ability on the former character’s identity card.

Persuade, Rebuff, Attack and Defense: The player may keep the previous character’s values in these four abilities, or redistribute them between the four abilities. In settings where Attack and Defense abilities do not appear, they may swap Persuade and Rebuff or leave them as is.

When he meets his untimely (if well-deserved) end, Finnegan Swake has Persuade 9, Rebuff 6, Attack 8, and Defense 6. His player, Ian, creates a new character called Grinx Fepp, and redistributes the values as follows: Persuade 8, Rebuff 8, Attack 6, Defense 6. He’d really prefer to give himself a rating of 7 in each ability, but is only allowed to move the values around between abilities without altering the numbers themselves.

Players may assign new styles to any or all of these abilities. As each style appears once in the initial batch of cards, switching to new styles may mean that there will be certain styles that no one in the group is able to trump.

Relationships: The player chooses three Relationship characters from the six currently available. Keeping the three current contacts is perfectly acceptable. The previous character’s three rating numbers, which remain unchanged, are distributed among the three chosen characters.

Resistances: The player may keep the previous character’s Resistances or redistribute their values without changing the numbers—with the exception of Resistances rated at 1, which must remain as is. Ω ratings may be reassigned.

Finnegan’s Resistances were Avarice 1, Dissipation Ω, Indolence 6, Lust 6, Nitpicking 2, Showboating 4. For the new character, Ian must keep the Avarice at 1, but may redistribute the other values. He does this as follows: Dissipation 2, Indolence 4, Lust Ω, Nitpicking 6, Showboating 6.

Personal Goals: Each other player, along with the GM, creates a proposed personal goal for the new character. In scenarios where the personal goals appear on characters’ Identity cards, the goal arises from the character’s role in the group. Where they appear on the Resistance cards, they are inspired by the character’s key trait. In settings that break the formula by relating the personal goal to the value on another card, the new goals spring from that source. The player chooses the new character’s personal goal from the list of proposals.
CUSTOMIZED SKULDUGGERY

This section shows you how to create scenarios of your own, either as standalones or as fresh installments in an ongoing series.

CHOOSING YOUR SETTING

Pick a time, place and situation that you like and which will appeal to your players. Take inspiration from history, media sources, and current events. Genres rich in cliché and stereotype serve well for this purpose. Stock characters and situations give your players an immediate handle on how they’re expected to behave and what sorts of actions they might attempt.

Although Skulduggery is a generic game applicable to many genres and settings, it puts its own distinct stamp on whatever world or situation you decide to portray. Look for settings that either have the following elements built in, or can be altered to include them:

- emphasis on negotiating, deal-making, and resolution through dialogue
- amoral, self-absorbed, or self-seeking characters
- an ironic, satirical or blackly humorous tone

For example, if you want to do a western game, Skulduggery will support that, but it will be more Deadwood than Stagecoach. A game of outlandish assassins who battle one another might resemble the 10th Victim more than it does Wanted. Skulduggery fantasy would owe more to Jack Vance than J. R. R. Tolkien.

ESTABLISHING GOALS

The next step is to establish the collective goal. The pursuit of this goal allows an improvised plot to unfold throughout your game session. The goal should have the following qualities:

- all PCs have a strong reason to pursue it
- it’s easily understandable
- all PCs can make a contribution toward it
- you can envision multiple obstacles standing between the group and the goal
- its ultimate outcome depends on persuasion, negotiation and/or other interpersonal qualities

Next, give some thought to the possible personal goals for each character. You’ll flesh these out more concrete during the next step, when you create the characters themselves.

Start by deciding whether you want to tie the goal to the characters’ identities, or to their key traits. Identity-based personal goals arise from the character’s professional role within the group, or the typical narrative function of the stereotype the character evokes. In scenarios where the personal goal appears on the identity card, the characters consciously pursue mixed agendas,

Serious Settings

Although best suited for blackly comedic games, you can run Skulduggery in a more serious vein.

Taglines present the biggest challenge. Write them as characteristic, but non-humorous statements appropriate to their historical or imaginary era. Scoring big with a straight-faced tagline is hard. Adjust for serious games by awarding two refreshes for any appropriate use, reserving the right to dispense the occasional three-refresh reward for notably dramatic instances.

In most serious settings you’ll want to eliminate temptations. Should you keep them, confine their use to scenes that evoke pity, horror, or pathos.

Design collective and personal goals to arouse sympathy in the players. Include grave consequences for failure.

Games where players scheme against each other tend to descend into comedy. Either remove personal goals entirely, or write them so that they don’t undermine the collective goal.
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balancing their collective goals against their personal ones. Engineer events so that the balancing act goes awry, causing the character’s pursuit of his personal goal to potentially undermine the collective goal.

When the personal goal ties instead to resistances, characters undermine the collective goal against their will, by falling prey to temptations.

To instill a high degree of inter-PC conflict, put the same personal goal on each of the Identity cards, as you see in “Skulduggery and Crossbones.”

CREATING COMPONENT CARDS

For a standalone game or opening series installments, start by creating a set of component cards. Before reading this further in this section, take a look the component cards for the various included scenarios to see what you’ll be replicating.

Identity

Name: Invent a suitable name for each character. If the stereotypes of the genre you’re drawing from are gender-specific (as in “Casting Call,” p. 72), make the sex of each character clear. Otherwise, supply both male and female names, so that the player can choose the character’s gender.

Role / Position: On the second line of the card, list the position or occupation the character fills in the group, or the social stereotype the character conforms to.

Backstory: For each character, write a brief paragraph summing up the character’s background, motivations, and attitudes.

Collective Goal: This goal is repeated on each of the six cards.

Personal Goals: Include the personal goal here if it arises from the character’s role within the group or stereotypical qualities.

General Abilities: From the master list on p. 2, choose the abilities appropriate to your setting. Where needed, change ability names to be more evocative of the characters’ world. The greater your players’ familiarity with Skulduggery, the more confusing it will be for them when you alter ability names. In general, abilities are suited to adventurous settings where you expect action sequences to occur.

Having chosen the abilities available in your setting, now decide which ones ought to be available to each character. Be generous in assigning abilities at this stage, as you can lowball ratings for marginal abilities in the next step. Characters needn’t have the same number of abilities.

Now assign ratings for each ability based on story logic. When in doubt, ask yourself what a character of this type could believably do in a work of fiction.

If the character might have acquired a glancing familiarity with an ability, assign a rating of 1.

2-3 points indicates something the character is occasionally called on to do, even though it isn’t his or her forte.

4-5 points reflects a task basic to the character’s job, position, or personality.

Abilities rated at 6 represent the areas the character truly excels.

If a single ability seems like it ought to be better than any other, assign a rating of 7. Do this only in exceptional cases.

In special cases where a given profession ought to make a character more formidable in an ability that appears on another card, you might specify an adjustment of 1-3 points to one ability. You’ll note that we do this on Allagan’s identity card, p. 2, and on no other. Resort to these special cases very sparingly.

You’ll note that there is no set number of ability points you’re attempting to distribute. Although you should try to keep the various characters within the same basic ballpark, you’re really just eyeballing it, based on what feels right instinctively. Should your players bother to compare their identity cards, they will discover that the game is not entirely fair. We kindly supply the following GM tagline to use when challenged on this by mewling players:

[assuming blandest possible tone] “And what about a game called Skulduggery did you think would be fair?”

Persuade

Use the Persuade cards from “If Space Permits,” as a
Setting-Specific Abilities

In certain fantastical or speculative settings, characters may be able to wield abilities that don't exist in our world. As needed, devise your own setting-specific abilities loosely defining what they are and what actions characters can perform while using them. Depending on the setting, there might be a single fantastical ability available to all characters, one unique ability used by a single PC, or a variety of contrasting abilities, each wielded by a different PC. These may or may not also be available to supporting characters. Specify what abilities it counters, and which counter it, if any. Examples:

Necromancy

**Definition:** The character manipulates the magic of death and the dead. Necromancers can carry on conversations with corpses, briefly raise them as zombies, and can exert control over the undead.

**Automatic Success:** Adopt a deathly pallor.

**Counters:** any other magic

**Is Countered By:** any other Magic; by Rebuff, when used to dominate an undead creature

Freeze Ray

**Definition:** The character projects a freezing ray from his fingertips. It can be used to harm others or shield the character or others from harm. (Points from Freeze Ray can be spent as Attack or Defense points.) It can damage objects, extinguish flames, and turn water to ice. Acts of icy sabotage allow Freeze Ray points to be spent on Mischief actions.

**Automatic Success:** Act as a human air conditioner. Cool any beverage in sight.

**Counters:** Heat Ray

**Is Countered By:** Heat Ray

Rebuff

Use the rebuff cards from “If Space Permits” as a template. Write a single new tagline for each, tailored to your setting and the rebuff style.

**Pure-Hearted** taglines convey a sense of naïve, perhaps shocked, morality.

**Contrary** taglines give the sense that the character raising a reflexive or all-purpose objection out of the sheer love of being a pain in the ass.

**Lawyerly** taglines seize on a small detail, perhaps legalistic but not necessarily so, and use it to swat away the speaker’s entire proposal.

**Penetrating** taglines cut through the fog to question the speaker’s motives.

**Wary** taglines reveal an instinctive sense of fear, trepidation, or caution.

**Obtuse** taglines showcase the character’s protective template. If your group has already played that scenario (or you plan to run it for them in the near future) arbitrarily redistribute the six ratings, without changing the numbers. Substitute two new taglines for the ones on each card. Write your own dialogue snippets, using language and details appropriate to the setting. Match the taglines to the persuade style:

**Glib** taglines are skilfully phrased, often brief, and blithely dismissive.

**Eloquent** taglines use inspiring, lofty language.

**Obfuscatory** taglines are elaborate and amusingly confusing or vague.

**Forthright** are clear, to the point, and disarmingly honest.

**Charming** taglines employ some combination of wit, self-deprecation and flattery.

**Intimidating** taglines convey a threat, overtly or subtly.
layer of stupidity.

Before proceeding further, decide if your setting is an action-adventure oriented one where it feels right to threaten characters with the possibility of death. If so, take the next two steps. If the struggles in your game are instead strictly verbal, skip to “Relationships”, below.

**Attack**

Use the Attack cards from “If Space Permits,” as a template. If your group has already played that scenario (or you plan to run it for them in the near future) arbitrarily redistribute the six ratings, without changing the numbers.

**Defense**

Use the Defense cards from “If Space Permits.” If your group has already played that scenario (or you plan to run it for them in the near future) arbitrarily redistribute the six Defense ratings between the six Defense styles.

**Relationships**

Start by creating six characters peripherally connected to your scenario’s main conflict, who can provide information and dispense a variety of other favors to the PCs in pursuit of their goals. Then, using the Relationship cards from “If Space Permits,” as a template, replace each instance of a character from that scenario with its equivalent from yours. Your first character replaces Juh Cerknor, your second character Verator Vump, and so on. Leave the ratings as is.

**Resistances**

Choose the six temptations that best fit your setting. Then, using the Resistances card from “If Space Permits,” swap out any temptations that don’t appear in your setting, replacing them with your additional choices. Reorder the lists to return your list of Resistances to alphabetical order. Leave the ratings as they are. If you placed the characters’ personal goals on the identity card, remove them here. If their personal goals coincide with their lowest-rated Resistances, include new goals here.

**Other Supporting Characters**

Create the cast of characters the players must battle against, hoodwink, and cajole. These characters will regard the PCs with varying degrees of hostility. Often you’ll want to identify a primary protagonist that the group will want to overcome. Make this character loathsome, obnoxious or outrageously evil, depending on tone you’re striving for and the stakes of the conflict. Evil characters who deserve to die at the end appear in action-adventure settings. Tales of primarily verbal conflict call for milder villainy.

Settings providing the PCs with wide latitude to meet people might call for large supporting casts. If you plan to set the PCs at each other’s throats, they’ll need fewer characters to interact with—with perhaps no antagonist at all.

Start by listing the supporting characters you think you’ll need to tell the story. After working out the role you expect them to play in, devise a downfall for each. These are the weaknesses the characters use, through one or more successful contests, to gain advantage and advance their goals. Create a range of varying downfalls.

Flesh out each supporting character with notes on personality, again achieving a balance of types. You might roll Persuade and Rebuff styles randomly and base the personality on that, or start with the personality and choose the most appropriate styles.

Finally, add additional abilities and ratings. Choose ratings based on the same story logic you employed when assigning abilities to PCs. By default, give them Persuade and Rebuff ratings no greater than 4. Exceed ratings of 6-7 only when creating very formidable physical opponents. They might have Attack or Defense, or Athletics ratings as high as 12.

Don’t knock yourself out writing up every conceivable supporting character. Instead, be ready to invent and elaborate minor figures on the fly. Skulduggery characters are simple, so it’s easy to do.

**SCENES**

Now that you have your component cards, build the scenes that will form your loose story framework. While published scenarios have to be written in full to be comprehensible by readers, episodes of your own devising can be as loose as a quickly jotted sheet of point-form notes.

**Opener**

The opener is an introductory scene that gets the story rolling either by introducing the collective goal, or putting the group in a position to start pursuing it. If the goal doesn’t become apparent until some point during the opener, you’ll want to start the narration before handing out component cards. The opener to
“Skulduggery and Crossbones” works this way. Such preludes must be short. Until the players have their cards, they can’t take action, and are only bystanders in a story you’re telling.

A strong opener possesses the following qualities:

- All PCs are present.
- It places them in a position to start acting on the goal.
- It introduces the setting.
- It establishes a tone, usually of satire or black humor.
- It might also perform other functions:
  - Starting on a thrilling note, with an action sequence. (An option in the opener for “If Space Permits” allows this.)
  - Introduces an antagonist the group will enjoy foiling. (Also in “If Space Permits.”)
  - Establish a time frame for events. When success depends on a future event, such as the musical performance in “Casting Call”, the vote in “Skulduggery and Crossbones”, or the presentation to the Vintner’s Council in “If Space Permits,” you don’t have to worry about events that leapfrog you to the closer in the first few hours of play.

Scheming In the Middle
Most of a session will be taken up with reactions to player-driven actions. As such, the plot between opener and closer can and should remain loose. Don’t plan anything that must happen to the players. Instead, jot down notes preparing for strategies the players are likely to employ. Be ready for them to surprise you with a completely off-the-wall approach.

Temptations, Distractions and Time-Fillers
What you can prepare for are lulls in the action, caused either when the group’s joint imagination for scheming temporarily deserts them, or when they move toward their ultimate goal more quickly than anticipated. Sketch out one or two ideas for scenes that complicate a story that when it starts to drag, but won’t be missed if it’s chugging along nicely without further instigation from you. For an example, see the return of the shark in “Skulduggery and Crossbones,” p. 64.

Don’t worry if you lack the time or inspiration for these fallback story elements. When in doubt, you can always improvise a brush between one or more of the characters and their temptations.

Names
Satisfying names for places and supporting characters are hard to invent on the fly. Compose a list of free-floating names you can apply to new characters and locations you introduce as the story unfolds.

Closer
The closer is the final situation that resolves the group’s pursuit of its collective goal. It may also resolve their personal goals. The closer is often introduced or implied in your opener. While jotting down notes for it, think of dramatic events that might occur during or immediately after the closer, which will end the story with a bang even if the PCs scheme well enough to engineer an otherwise anticlimactic victory.
THE YES WING

THE SETTING
The PCs are cabinet secretaries or other high officials in the administration of recently elected US President Allard Bierce.

Adjust the party affiliation of the characters to contrast with that of your players. If they’re mostly conservative or lean Republican, the PCs are members of a Democratic administration. If they’re liberals and/or Democrats, Bierce is a Republican.

Groups outside the US might have more fun satirically sticking it to the Americans than playing politicians from their own country. If you think they’d better enjoy political shenanigans set closer to home, adjust the proper names, job titles and details of governance to match your native land. Depending on where you are, you’ll either need to alter the type of executive appointment the PCs shepherd through legislative approval, or alter the collective goal entirely.

COLLECTIVE GOAL
Ensure the Senate confirmation of the President’s nominee as Secretary Of State, Francis Cross.

RELATIONSHIPS

President Allard Bierce
“I will absolutely, positively take that under the most urgent advisement.”

Personality: Handsome and superficially impressive, Allard Bierce leaves even his closest allies wondering if there’s anything behind his perfect politician’s mask. He speaks entirely in talking points, reveals as little as possible of his true intentions, and never makes a decision he might otherwise postpone. When he’s interacting with someone, Bierce focuses on them so intently that they leave thinking a close personal bond has been forged. He reinforces this illusion with a stunning memory for names, faces, and personal details.

Goals: Although his administration is currently foundering, Bierce wants to be remembered as a great President. To have a shot at this historical ranking, he’ll first have to get reelected to second term.

Rebuff Trumps / Trumped By: Obfuscatory / Forthright
Downfall: Showboating
Sample Favors: 1) call in favors from people beholden to the executive branch, and from his party hierarchy 2) agree to support legislation 3) issue pardons 4) initiate diplomatic or military actions
Abilities: Etiquette 5, Gossip 4, Knowledge 1 (Sp: Political Science), Management 2, Moxy 6, Perception 6, Performance (Media Appearance) 8, Persuade (Glib) 8, Rebuff (Penetrating) 8, Wealth 4.
First Lady Malora Bierce

“Hmm. Let me talk to Al about that.”

**Personality:** A fierce defender of her husband’s interests, Malora Bierce was a top litigator at a prestigious law firm before moving to the White House. Accustomed more to the verbal one-upsmanship of the legal profession than to politics, she speaks her mind with unswerving certainty. She values personal loyalty above all other qualities, but expects it from others more than she gives it herself—with Allard as the sole exception.

**Goals:**
1. See Allard reelected. 2. Fund a legal scholarship in her name at Harvard Law School.

**Rebuff Trumps / Trumped By:** Forthright / Obfuscatory

**Downfall:** Nitpicking

**Sample Favors:**
1) arrange for a meeting with the President without the chief of staff’s permission 2) quietly change the President’s mind on a decision he’s already taken 3) create opportunities to hobnob with dignitaries and celebrities

**Abilities:** Etiquette 6, Gossip 4, Knowledge 4 (Sp: Civil Law), Management 2, Moxy 6, Perception 6, Performance (Media Appearance) 6, Persuade (Forthright) 6, Rebuff (Lawyerly) 6, Wealth 5.

Senate Majority Leader Dwayne Pettiford

“Well, don’t that just send the porcupine up the poplar?”

**Personality:** Though raised in splendor as heir to a gigantic mining empire, Dwayne Pettiford affects a folksy manner befitting a cartoon rancher. He rose to power in the Senate through sheer slipperiness. He tries to make anyone he’s talking with believe that he’s going to help them, even when he plans to do the opposite. When in doubt, he throws in a confusing rural aphorism, perhaps one that he just made up.

**Goals:**
Although he and the President are of the same party, Bierce’s tanking popularity has sent Dwayne scurrying for cover. He wants to prevent a wipe-out of Senate seats for his party in the coming elections, even if that means distancing himself from the President.

**Rebuff Trumps / Trumped By:** Eloquent / Charming

**Downfall:** Showboating

**Sample Favors:**
1) direct federal money to a particular cause or district 2) strong-arm Senate colleagues to support legislation 3) quash or initiate Senate investigations

**Abilities:** Etiquette 2, Gossip 6, Knowledge 4 (Sp: Mining), Management 1, Moxy 6, Perception 3, Performance
President’s. She wants him to risk his already diminishing poll numbers to press a polarizing social issue of great emotional importance to the party’s base.

Rebuff Trumps / Trumped By: Charming / Eloquent

Downfall: Spite

Sample Favors: 1) donate money 2) convince others to donate money 3) facilitate social connections to the rich, fashionable and/or artistic

Abilities: Etiquette 6, Gossip 6, Knowledge 4 (Sp: Art Collecting), Management 4, Moxy 2, Perception 6, Performance (Media Appearance) 2, Persuade (Intimidating) 6, Rebuff (Contrary) 6, Wealth 12.

General Kelvin Howe, Chairman Of the Joint Chiefs Of Staff

“Never start a war you can’t win.”

Personality: Somehow the rise through the notoriously bureaucratic upper ranks of the US military has not dimmed Kelvin Howe’s idealism. He loves the army and its soldiers, and becomes stirringly sentimental in defending their interests. A holdover from a previous administration, Howe secretly distrusts the President and his advisers but stays in the job to prevent them from rashly placing the young men and women under his command in harm’s way.

Goals: Rebuild the military’s strained capacity.

Rebuff Trumps / Trumped By: Intimidating / Glib

Downfall: Paranoia

Sample Favors: 1) Lend his considerable public popularity to a military-related issue. 2) Provide information on military affairs or foreign intelligence. 3) Call in favors from military contractors.

Maxine Horne, Wealthy Donor

“I don’t write checks just to strengthen my wrist, young lady.”

Personality: Maxine’s imperious manner speaks of her vast wealth and impeccable pedigree. She contributes money to advance her causes, but also to enjoy being fawned over by the nation’s most powerful. Any treatment shy of extreme deference results in a series of sharp-tongued barbs.

Goals: Maxine is a hardcore ideologue whose politics are a more extreme and uncompromising version of the President’s. She wants him to risk his already diminishing poll numbers to press a polarizing social issue of great emotional importance to the party’s base.
**Abilities:** Etiquette 6, Gossip 6, Knowledge 4 (Sp: Art Collecting), Management 4, Mischief 2, Moxy 2, Perception 6, Performance (Media Appearance) 2, Persuade (Eloquent) 6, Rebuff (Pure-Hearted) 6.

**Maddy Lagasse, Network News Anchor**

“Some people say that you’re in over your head. How would you respond to them?”

**Personality:** Under the carefully portrayed exterior of the hot mom next door lurks a ferociously competitive journalist with a well-honed instinct for the verbal kill.

**Goals:** To earn prestige and high ratings with her coverage.

**Rebuff Trumps / Trumped By:** Glib / Intimidating

**Downfall:** Arrogance

**Sample Favors:** 1) Give a softball interview. 2) Give a hardball interview. 3) Pass along leaked information to her network’s investigative reporters.

**Abilities:** Etiquette 2, Gossip 6, Knowledge 1 (Sp: English Literature), Mischief 4, Moxy 5, Perception 2, Performance (Media Appearance) 8, Persuade (Charming) 6, Rebuff (Obfuscatory) 6, Wealth 9.

**Frank Cross, Secretary Of State designate**

“I realize there’s a crapload of dingbats, hayseeds and also-rans opposing my nomination, so whaddaya say we blaze on out there and steamroller ‘em, huh?”

**Personality:** Born with a silver spoon in his mouth and a horseshoe up his ass, the brilliant, confrontational Francis Cross has always had a knack for making the right friend at the right time. Despite his many enemies, he’s bulldozed his way through the Washington power establishment as a diplomat, lobbyist, best-selling author and pundit. Drunk on his own sense of invulnerability, he treats the PCs with back-slapping camaraderie. He never worries about that little cannibalism incident. As far as Frank Cross is concerned, bad things only happen to other people.

**Goals:** 1) Become Secretary of State. 2) Bask in the admiration of the powerful and the contempt of the pusillanimous.

**Rebuff Trumps / Trumped By:** Eloquent / Charming

**Downfall:** Arrogance

**Abilities:** Eavesdropping 4, Etiquette 4, Gossip 4, Knowledge 6 (Sp: Strategic Relations), Management 4, Mischief 4, Moxy 6, Perception 2, Performance (Media Appearance) 6, Wealth 8.

**Chief Alex Rogers, United States Park Police**

“I’ve spent my whole life watching some other guy catch a break.”

**Personality:** Though none too bright, Alex has prospered by doggedly pursuing any tiny crumb of opportunity that might fall his way. This is his right as an American, dammit. Despite his luck in stumbling across a packet of primo blackmail material, and his subsequent snagging of a top job he’s scarcely qualified for, he still thinks of himself as a victim of life’s vicissitudes. No matter what he gets, he’ll still feel slighted and unsatisfied. In person, he’s meek and confrontational, but given a while to stew, he always finds a reason to want more.

**Goals:** 1) Parlay his folio of blackmail material on Francis Cross into a payday that will take care of him for the rest of his life.

**Rebuff Trumps / Trumped By:** Eloquent / Charming

**Downfall:** Dissolute (alcoholic making a shaky stab at recovery)

**Abilities:** Etiquette 4, Gossip 3, Knowledge 3 (Sp: Western Lore), Management 3, Mischief 5, Moxy 1, Perception 2, Performance (Media Appearance) 1, Persuade (Obfuscatory) 4, Rebuff (Wary) 3, Stealth 3.

**Names**

Use these free-floating names for other denizens of the Washington fish tank you invent while improvising your way through the story.

**Men**

Todd Forrest  
Shane Robson  
Ike Palmisano  
Vincent Montano  
Jason Adams  
Nathan Rivard  
Walton Aubuchon  
Fred Crotts  
Langton Eaglebury  
Rick Garcia  
Eric Ballentine  
Robert Barajas  
Colby Maggard  
Myron Hurley  
Andy Kosinski

**ADDITIONAL SUPPORTING CHARACTERS**

**Frank Cross, Secretary Of State designate**

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**Goals:** 1) Become Secretary of State. 2) Bask in the admiration of the powerful and the contempt of the pusillanimous.
**SCENES AND SITUATIONS**

Expect the players to drive the story by selecting the undecided senators they want to woo as they cobb together their ten-seat majority.

**Senators**

To conserve space, all Senators have the same ability ratings except for their varying Persuade and Rebuff styles:

- Eavesdropping 2, Etiquette 4, Gossip 6, Management 2, Moxy 3, Perception 5, Performance (Media Appearance) 2, Persuade (Glib) 4, Rebuff (Wary) 4, Wealth 3.

Some of these characters will change as you play them, so feel free to alter the abilities to fit your alterations.

To gain confirmation, Cross must win a majority of votes from the nineteen members of the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations. (He must then be voted on by the full Senate, but given the makeup of the entire chamber, that’s a reliable formality.) Normally passing the committee would also be a breeze, as it is made up of eleven members of the president’s party and seven opposition Senators. However, Cross has made so many enemies over the years that some Senators of his own party could conceivably nix the nomination.

To secure the nomination the PCs must sway enough undecideds to put Cross over the top when the vote is held. The vote happens as part of the Closer. Decided Senators are loyal partisans to their parties who are highly unlikely to switch—though the PCs might decide to try. PCs face a levy of 1 on all contests made to sway a decided Senator.

There are five undecideds on the President’s side of the aisle, and two in the other party. Cross has seven reliable votes. He needs four more to get over top to eleven. He could pick up all but one of the President’s own Senators. Or he could lose one or two more, provided he can pick up one or both of the opposition undecideds.

We provide sketchier information on the decided Senators, who are less likely to focus the players’ attention. Improvise additional details if players choose to concentrate on them.

To preserve the device that allows you to choose the President’s political party, the Senator’s states have been assigned without regard to the current regional power bases of Republicans and Democrats. Political junkies are encouraged to adjust the states for added realism.

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**Women**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Catherine Barnett</th>
<th>Vicky Current</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Diane Brassfield</td>
<td>Sue Kramer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Priscilla Moody</td>
<td>Jill Divine</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Patricia Alexander</td>
<td>Raia Tarver</td>
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<tr>
<td>Paula Horvath</td>
<td>Debra Stoneking</td>
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<tr>
<td>Helen Eastridge</td>
<td>Kelly Nails</td>
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<tr>
<td>Nancy Wasson</td>
<td>Tammy Anaya</td>
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<tr>
<td>Judith Frewell</td>
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**OPENER**

The action begins in the Oval Office, where President Bierce has gathered his inner council—Simmons, Cutter, Doss, Willis and Odom (or whatever subset of these have been chosen as PCs) to announce a crucial decision. Lowly Interior Secretary Fingerhut is still present from previous business. As often happens, he/she has gone unnoticed in the excitement.

The President announces that, after vetting and interviewing all the candidates for the soon-to-be vacant Secretary Of State position, he’s chosen Francis Cross.

All PCs must roll to Resist Paranoia, or gasp audibly at mention of the name.

Everyone knows Cross as a veteran diplomat known both for his brilliance and his remarkably undiplomatic behavior. Over his long career, Cross has accumulated as many fervent enemies and a few enthusiastic patrons. Even though the President’s party enjoys majority status in the Senate, Cross will prove a hard sell to the protocol-obsessed members of the Foreign Relations committee.

Bierce has fallen under Cross’ brusquely charismatic spell; attempts to talk him out of the nomination face a levy of 4.

He knows how tough the challenge will be—which is why he’ll show his full Presidential gratitude to those who deliver.

By making a few quick phone calls, Simmons can determine which of the senators are likely to be undecided. Cutter can make up an accurate list without having to check.

Any PC knows the public face of each undecided senator (see descriptions, below.) A Gossip success reveals the connection between Cross and any given undecided.
Before bringing any of these Senators into the storyline yourself, give the players the chance to make the first move. They’ll probably reach out to their Relationships for information on them. A thorough poll of the various Relationship characters should yield the scoop on each of the swing Senators. Assuming they ask halfway relevant questions, they’ll learn each senator’s goals and history with Cross. Where goals or histories are secret, they get an intimation that something furtive might be in play.

If the players seem preoccupied with other plot tangents, or fail to see a way forward, have the undecideds contact them. Initial contacts are of course made between low-level staffers; mention this without going into great detail. These Senators hate Cross, but those with active or overt agendas want to see if they can leverage their known distaste for him into a satisfying quid-pro-quo. When a goal is italicized, the Senator, though preferring to be approached first, is willing to make the first move in realizing it.

**Undecided Senators**

**The President’s Party**

**Annette Gilbert**  
Illinois

**Personality:** Annette Gilbert made her way to Congress during a long, uphill struggle to succeed in a man’s world. Unable to enjoy her success, she cultivates the ever-growing chip on her shoulder. And no one, over the course of her long, uphill struggle to power, slighted her more often than the former head of the committee, Chet McGinn.

**Goals:** Now that her party is in the majority, Gilbert has made it her personal project to see McGinn destroyed.

**Downfall:** Spiteful

**Persuade / Rebuff Styles:** Glib / Penetrating

**Rebuff Trumps / Is Trumped By:** Obfuscatory / Forthright

**History With Cross:** His high-handed responses to her in past appearances before the committee convinced her (not inaccurately) that Cross is an arrogant sexist.

**Patricia Gregory**  
Delaware

**Personality:** Unusually skittish and awkward for a politician, Patricia’s straight-talking style keeps her popular back home. For the first time in her life, though, her approval numbers have started slipping. Succumbing to conspiracy theory, she attributes this to a shadowy network of enemies. She knows that this makes her sound crazy—which is exactly how they want it—and takes pains to conceal these feverish imaginings even from her most trusted aides.

**Goals:** 1) Expose the secret conspiracy against her. 2) Get a large public works project approved for Delaware and named after her.

**Downfall:** Fearful

**Persuade / Rebuff Styles:** Forthright / Wary

**Rebuff Trumps / Is Trumped By:** Eloquent / Charming

**History With Cross:** His name comes up frequently on conspiracy-oriented websites, making Patricia wonder if he isn’t part of the cabal that’s persecuting her.

**Douglas Lopez**  
Michigan

**Personality:** Handsome and polished by political standards, Douglas Lopez projects an air of bland competence. In TV appearances, he’s never less than affable, knowledgeable, and well-spoken. However, colleagues and voters alike can’t escape the feeling that there’s something not quite right about him.

**Goals:** 1) To hide his secret hobby (see below.) 2) To join the secret hobby he falsely imagines Cross to be involved in (also see below.) 3) To feast on a well-cooked giant panda.

**Downfall:** Gluttonous. Lopez is a member of Tooth and Claw, a secret society drawn from America’s elite. Every year they gather in a secret location to gorge themselves on decadent food. The leading item on the menu is always the lovingly prepared meat of a rare or endangered species.

**Persuade / Rebuff Styles:** Glib / Wary

**Rebuff Trumps / Is Trumped By:** Eloquent / Charming

**History With Cross:** Lopez heard strange rumors from a fellow Tooth and Claw initiate about Cross’ eating habits. He fears that Cross might be a member of an eating club even more sinister and secret than his own. Whatever it is, he wants in. However, he has to be careful in seeking his ultra-exclusive invitation, lest he reveal the horrible
**Bradley Myers**  
*Minnesota*

**Personality:** This former NFL offensive lineman revels in the spotlight, just as he did in his day giving locker room interviews. He speaks nearly entirely in sports clichés.

**Goals:** 1) To gather support for a presidential run after Bierce’s second term is up. 2) Land a book deal.

**Downfall:** Showboating

**Persuade / Rebuff Styles:** Intimidating / Lawyerly

**Rebuff Trumps / Is Trumped By:** Forthright / Obfuscatory

**History With Cross:** Myers views him as another alpha male, and thus as a threat until dominance is established.

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**Diane Pendleton**  
*Kentucky*

**Personality:** Like many political women of her generation, Diane Pendleton had to harden herself and appear tougher than the men around her. She plays her mean lady professor persona to the hilt.

**Goals:** Conceal her religious conversion.

**Downfall:** After a spiritual crisis following a failed run for her party’s presidential nomination, Diane converted to the quirky faith of Pneumalogics. Though made famous by movie stars and pop idols, this growing worldwide faith is still considered kooky by most, and a dangerous cult by a few. The church hierarchy has instructed Pendleton to keep quiet about her membership in the church, so she can better further their extensive business and legal interests.

**Persuade / Rebuff Styles:** Intimidating / Pure-Hearted

**Rebuff Trumps / Is Trumped By:** Intimidating / Glib

**History With Cross:** In a long ago moment of weakness, when she was a mere White House staffer, Pendleton and Cross had a brief affair, which he ended by leaving a message on her answering machine.

---

**The Opposition**

**Chet McGinn**  
*New Jersey*

**Personality:** A blowhard’s blowhard, Chet McGinn ran roughshod over members of the President’s party when they were out in the minority. He’s having a hard time adjusting to the political wilderness of opposition status. Yearning for the rush of power, he vacillates between being a loudmouth critic of the administration to acting as a deal-maker, according to which move earns him the richest, thickest dose of flattery.

**Goals:** 1) Have as many people groveling to him as possible. 2) Have the first lady’s PR liaison, Nancy Winter, fired for having been caught on tape profanely insulting him. Mrs. Bierce is fiercely loyal to Nancy, who she roomed with as an undergraduate.

**Downfall:** Arrogant

**Persuade / Rebuff Styles:** Eloquent / Lawyerly

**Rebuff Trumps / Is Trumped By:** Forthright / Obfuscatory

**History With Cross:** McGinn is still smarting from a recent appearance with Cross on a cable news show. Cross humiliatingly filleted him.

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**Solomon Thomas**  
*Iowa*

**Personality:** This silver-haired political lion heavily features his much younger wife and fine brood of cute children in all of his campaign literature. Behind their backs, he’s carrying on with leggy staffer Ashley Wafford. Behind her back, he’s also “mentoring” an ex-stripper, ex-meth addict named Nicole Shook.

**Goals:** 1) Successfully juggle his three lives without getting caught. 2) Add a few notches to his one-night stand list.

**Downfall:** Libidinous

**Persuade / Rebuff Styles:** Eloquent / Contrary

**Rebuff Trumps / Is Trumped By:** Charming / Eloquent

**History With Cross:** Thomas’ ex-stripper girlfriend tearfully reports an unpleasant sexual encounter with Cross in the strip club parking lot. She’s a pathological
Fredric Luo, New Hampshire (Obfuscatory / Obtuse) finds it easier to stick to the party line after a head injury robbed him of his ability to form short-term memories. He was so dumb before his kayaking accident that no one around him can tell the difference.

Charles O’Neal, Arkansas (Glib / Contrary) hates Bierce for speaking out against him when both were fellow senators and O’Neal faced ethics charges over corporate-funded renovations to his hunting lodge.

Jesse Reid, Ohio (Eloquent / Pure-Hearted) is too fiercely ideological for Bierce’s people to sway.

Decided For Cross
All of these Senators are firmly loyal to the President:

- Daron Borland, Vermont (Glib / Pure-Hearted) self-righteously believes that no one is more committed to his pet issue than he is. If he’s a Dem, the issue is climate control; if he’s a Republican, it’s a flat tax.

- Gerald Burnlee, Texas (Glib / Obtuse) lives to correct others’ pronunciation, word usage, and punctuation.

- Marsha Eason, Hawaii (Forthright / Contrary) bears a tight-lipped grudge against anyone who dares question her commitment to the President’s agenda.

- Geoffrey Hollis, Rhode Island (Obfuscatory / Contrary) fears being caught out as an idiot and has his staffers do all the talking for him.

- Brian Millay, Virginia (Forthright / Wary) would rather engage in monologue than conversation.

- Stanley Spires, New Mexico (Charming / Wary) hews to the party line because otherwise he’d have to form independent judgments, an exercise he finds wearisome.

- Fredric Luo, New Hampshire (Obfuscatory / Obtuse) finds it easier to stick to the party line after a head injury robbed him of his ability to form short-term memories. He was so dumb before his kayaking accident that no one around him can tell the difference.

- Charles O’Neal, Arkansas (Glib / Contrary) hates Bierce for speaking out against him when both were fellow senators and O’Neal faced ethics charges over corporate-funded renovations to his hunting lodge.

- Jesse Reid, Ohio (Eloquent / Pure-Hearted) is too fiercely ideological for Bierce’s people to sway.

Decided Against Cross
All of these Senators are fierce opponents of the President:

- Brad Froman, Florida (Obfuscatory / Lawyerly) cares only about fundraising. His network of rich Bierce haters would go ballistic if he caved to the President in any controversy.

- John Stamos, California (Glib / Wary) would rather go to the gym than the Senate floor. He’s a lifelong member of the gymming society, and he’s not about to let any President get in his way.

- Trevor Johnson, Texas (Glib / Contrary) is a master of the art of evasive answers. He’s never been caught out in a lie, but he’s never been caught out in a truth, either. He’s the master of obfuscation, and he’s not about to let any President get in his way.

- Cortez Williams, Oregon (Eloquent / Pure-Hearted) is too fiercely ideological for Bierce’s people to sway.
• **Ingrid Belt**, Utah (Obfuscatory / Penetrating) spends her time generating talking points for her party faithful to parrot on cable news shows. She specializes in arguments bulletproofed against rational response by their sheer bat-guano insanity.

• **Joan Trumble**, Arizona (Intimidating / Obtuse), a former prosecutor, believes that the Bierce administration is completely corrupt.

### The Terrible Secret of Francis Cross
Ten years ago, Francis Cross and his longtime friend Jay Dekker got lost while camping in the wilderness near Hi-De-Ho National Park. Dekker died of exposure and a disoriented Cross wandered over the park boundaries, to be discovered by park policeman Ed McCall. In Cross’ knapsack, McCall found Dekker’s severed hand, which showed signs of having been gnawed by human teeth. McCall took photos and videos of his find, including a confession of cannibalism by Cross. After being fed at the station, Cross returned to his senses and offered to pull strings on McCall’s behalf in exchange for suppressing the bit about Dekker’s hand. Assured that Cross didn’t kill his friend, but merely fed on him a little after his demise, McCall agreed. Cross used his political connections to arrange for McCall to be made head of the Park Police, in addition to paying him an annual stipend.

Half a year ago, McCall died in a tragic elk-related accident and Alex Rogers was made head of the Park Police. Rogers found McCall’s secret file, including the video tape, hidden in the ceiling of his predecessor’s office. He’s been sitting on it ever since, anxious to cash in but afraid that it might be a scam or some weird entrapment scheme.

An entry point to this plot line appears on Fingerhut’s identity card. If Fingerhut is not in play, or that player doesn’t pick up the thread, Rogers establishes a connection with another PC and commences a shakedown. Keep the obstacles coming so that the threat that Cross’ secret might be exposed remains active throughout the session.

### Fires To Put Out
Deploy some of following complications if needed, either to bring in a player who isn’t engaged or hasn’t had a shot at the spotlight.

• Current executives at RexMo Insurance contact the Vice President with alarming news. Federal investigators are hot on the trail of financial shenanigans they and Cutter are equally complicit in. If the investigation isn’t blocked, and quickly, they could all wind up doing hard time.

• Fingerhut’s jailed mentor Dalton Flask places a panicked call, claiming that a prison gang is extorting him. He needs out of prison, pronto.

• Software magnate Gilbert Nickels, a supposedly committed backer of Simmons’ senatorial ambitions calls to say he’s having second thoughts. If he doesn’t get some other cool backers on board soon, Gilbert will instead devote his spare cash to orphans in Africa.

• A favorable regime change threatens the chances of war in whatever country Doss has targeted for invasion. Find a reason for Odom
to want to protect the new regime that’s messing up Doss’ plans.

- The President mis-speaks at a banquet, offending one of his core interest groups and threatening his approval rating. He calls on Willis to perform damage control.

### CLOSER

Just as the committee vote is about to take place, a crisis erupts that threatens the support of one or more undecideds who appeared to be in the bag. The PCs must race against time to suppress the impending revelation before it all blows up in their faces. Possible crises:

- a new threat that Cross’ secret will be revealed, from an unexpected source
- one or more of the PCs’ underhanded schemes on Cross’ behalf unravel, threatening both the nomination and their own careers

### TAGLINES

- Let me interrupt you right there. I don’t want to say anything. I just want to interrupt.
- I hope he’s not off “Hiking the Appalachian Trail”, if you know what I mean.
- Don’t mess with my bubble of denial.
- Do I smell the stench of appeasement?
- If Washington is Hollywood for the ugly, you’re a freaking superstar.
- We must stand fast to our principles, after of course determining what those might be.
- The blogs are going to link us into the ground on this one.
- That’s what I admire about you, Senator—your brave embrace of incredibly unpopular causes.
- I wouldn’t let him run the clown barrel at a rodeo.
- Help, I’m running out of euphemisms.
- I’d say you’re toast, but I’m beholden to the bread industry.
- They put the “rank” in “rank and file.”
- It’s only wrong when the other guy does it.
- The day we can’t make a quick buck off this is the day we stop being Americans.
- I’d make a joke about having to kill you, but then I’d have to kill you.
- Could you acronym that for me, please?
- Was that a non-denial denial, or a denial denial?
- That’s a great idea. If you’re Hitler.
- You’re undermining my undermining!
- The English would refer to this as “tired and emotional.”
- Will that make sense if I have some more coffee?
- Grab him by the earmarks and squeeze.
- Maybe just this once the Senators will set ego aside. Kidding!
- I used to believe that, when I was young and drunk.
- He’s gone off the reservation, over the median, and straight through the liquor ‘n’ fireworks emporium.
- Swing voters are not as interesting as the term implies.
- How cute. You still have illusions left to shatter.
- This isn’t a crisis. It’s a cris-portunity.
- This is not entirely consistent with family values.
- I just have a wide stance.
- Ethics, schmethics.
- Redact that son of a bitch.
- They’re not bombs. They’re personnel and terrain readjusters.
- If I said that, I was misquoted.
- How about you take the blame and I take the credit?
- I don’t have a conscience, but I do have an ulcer.
SKULDUGGERY & CROSSBONES

THE SETTING
The action occurs in the early part of the 18th century, aboard the pirate sloop Black Swan, becalmed in the Caribbean.

In this setting, the Mechanic ability is renamed to Shipwright, and allows characters to repair sailing vessels.

COLLECTIVE GOAL
Prepare your becalmed pirate ship to successfully defend against impending attack by the privateer vessel The Indomitable.

RELATIONSHIPS

Shaky Nate, Ship’s Doctor
Personality: Bedraggled and nearly toothless, the grizzled fellow named Shaky Nate is charged with the duty of keeping the crew of the Black Swan hale, healthy, and comparatively scurvy-free. When not called to duty, he spends his time calibrating his perpetual drunken stupor to a state of tipsy bliss. If asked, he claims to have been trained as a doctor back in Portsmouth. In fact, he picked up his medical knowledge second-hand, as assistant to a long-deceased quack aboard a previous pirate ship. Aside from possibly the PCs, no one on the ship seems concerned by the fact that their resident healer is nicknamed “Shaky.”

Goals: 1) Stay drunk. 2) Remain sheltered from heat. 3) Remain in the good graces of his fellow pirates, who keep him fed and supplied with rum.

Sample Favors: 1) Patch up wounds. 2) Mediate disputes.

Downfall: Dissolute

Rebuff Trumps / Trumped By: Intimidating / Glib

Abilities: Appraisal 2, Attack (Caution) 2, Athletics 1, Defense (Parry) 2, Eavesdropping 3, Gambling 4, Gossip 1, Knowledge 4 (Sp: Natural History), Living Rough

4, Moxy 4, Persuade (Obfuscatory) 4, Perception 3, Physician 6, Pilot (Ship) 1, Rebuff (Pure-Hearted) 2, Shipwright 1, Stealth 1, Weaponmaster 1.

Jubsy, Captain Nimmons’ Parrot
Personality: Jubsy is a talking bird who, until moments before the latter’s decapitation by a great white shark, perched perpetually on Captain Nimmons’ shoulder. He speaks in a perfect rendition of his master’s voice. The bird’s eerily accurate imitation extends even to the captain’s uneasy, hesitant body language. Although everyone knows that birds merely mimic human
Character Tracker

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Player</th>
<th>Character</th>
<th>Key Temptation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>John “Peg Leg” Belmay</td>
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<tr>
<td>Christopher “Black Palm” Bradish</td>
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<td>Edward Newcastle</td>
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<tr>
<td>Luc-David “Frenchie” Corriveau</td>
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<tr>
<td>William “Monkey Paw” Washburn</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>“Rum Keg” Annie Evans</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

intelligence, Jubsy seems to match his comments to their conversational context. Characters may come to suspect that he’s the smartest creature on the ship.

**Goals:** 1) Get a cracker.

**Sample Favors:** 1) Give advice as Captain Nimmons would have done. 2) Spy on events with a bird’s eye view, then report back. 3) Strategically defecate on targets below.

**Downfall:** Gluttonous (crackers)

**Rebuff Trumps / Trumped By:** Intimidating / Glib

**Abilities:** Appraisal 6, Attack (Finesse) 6, Athletics 3, Defense (Dodge) 10, Eavesdropping 6, Knowledge 4 (Sp: Philosophy), Living Rough 4, Moxy 6, Persuade (Eloquent) 6, Perception 6, Performance (Singing) 4, Rebuff (Pure-Hearted) 8, Stealth 6.

**Old Tar, Helmsman**

**Personality:** Decades of exposure to wind and sun have baked the brains of the monstrously broad-shouldered helmsman known only as Old Tar. He speaks only in grunts, groans, and of course the obligatory, “Arrhh.” If he’s capable of ordinary speech, no one has heard it. He’s been on the ship longer than anyone—some say he helped to build it. He owes his long survival to his avoidance of piratical politics. Old Tar shows steadfast loyalty to whoever the others anoint as captain, and otherwise keeps his own counsel.

**Goals:** 1) Avoid factional entanglement. 2) Protect the ship.

**Sample Favors:** 1) Provide unintelligible advice on navigational matters.

**Downfall:** Fearful (Avoids conflict)

**Rebuff Trumps / Trumped By:** Intimidating / Glib

**Abilities:** Appraisal 2, Attack (Strength) 8, Athletics 8, Craftsmanship (Woodcarving) 3, Defense (Sure-Footedness) 8, Eavesdropping 4, Gambling 4, Living Rough 6, Moxy 6, Persuade (Intimidating) 1, Perception 4, Physician 2, Pilot (Ship) 9, Rebuff (Obtuse) 7, Shipwright 7, Weaponmaster 2.

**Wee Danny, Cabin Boy**

**Personality:** Wee Danny is a twelve-year old of uncertain origin who stowed aboard the Black Swan when it last docked in the free pirate port of Tortuga. Each person who asks about his life before the Swan gets a different answer. He might be an apprentice who escaped a cruel master, a disenfranchised royal relative, or an ordinary scrappy orphan. The crew of the Swan treats him as a sort of pet, often failing to notice his presence.

**Goals:** 1) Arrange for the election of a captain who will treat him well. 2) Don’t get caught doing it, in case someone nasty wins.

**Sample Favors:** 1) Spy on rivals. 2) Commit acts of
Bartholomew Cubbins, Account Keeper

Personality: Once the account keeper on an honest trading vessel, the meek and mousy Cubbins was kidnapped three years ago by the crew of the Black Swan. Since then he has been forced to perform similar duties for them. He counts all the treasure, making careful records of each man’s due share. When the ship weighs anchor in a place where treasure can be spent, he parcels it out with trembling hand, waiting for the disputes to begin. His captors used to keep him chained up but he is now so resigned to his fate that they let him roam around free.

Goals: 1) Avoid getting his throat slit. 2) Prevent theft of treasure under his care, except when doing so would interfere with goal #1. 3) Create conditions for an absolutely guaranteed safe escape.

Sample Favors: 1) Provide information on status of treasure haul and who is owed what. 2) Give political advice.

Downfall: Fearful

Rebuff Trumps / Trumped By: Forthright / Obfuscatory

Abilities: Appraisal 6, Attack (Caution) 1, Athletics 1, Defense (Dodge) 2, Eavesdropping 4, Gossip 6, Knowledge 4 (Sp: Economics), Living Rough 3, Management 3, Moxy 1, Persuade (Obfuscatory) 2, Perception 4, Rebuff (Lawyerly) 4.

Barrel Bill Buntledge, Captain’s Enforcer

Personality: The titanic bald brawler Barrel Bill is so named because it’s the 18th century and the nickname “Brick Shithouse Bill” hasn’t been invented yet. He likes nothing better than to flog a man within an inch of his life, or slowly break and twist his bones. Barrel Bill doesn’t want to be captain himself, because it’s too much work. That said, Bill can think of many of his fellow crewmen in need of a good keelhauling, and Nimmons’ comparatively lenient tenure has left his bloodlust unsated.

Goals: 1) Make sure that he winning candidate shares his cruel streak. 2) Hurt people and get away with it.

Sample Favors: 1) Beat and torture deserving crewmen. 2) Intimidate the weak.
Replacements

William Vane, First Mate

“I declare your objection null and void, the reasons for which require no explanation.”

Personality: Foppish, nasal-voiced, and supercilious, William Vane has long coveted the captain’s cabin. He believes himself cleverer and more vicious than Captain Nimmons. He and Nimmons grew up together in the south of England. Vane schemed to get ahead; Nimmons always blundered his way to success and brought Vane along with him.

Goals: Gleeful at his hated friend’s demise, Vane steps up immediately to declare himself captain.

Downfall: Arrogance. Although he sort of understands that no one on the ship likes him, he doesn’t see how this might serve as an impediment to his plans.

Rebuff Trumps / Trumped By: Charming / Eloquent

Abilities: Appraisal 6, Attack (Cunning) 4, Athletics 2, Defense (Vexation) 4, Eavesdropping 6, Gambling 5, Gossip 5, Knowledge 4 (Sp: Art Appreciation), Living Rough 4, Management 2, Moxy 2, Persuade (Glib) 2, Perception 1, Pilot (Ship) 3, Rebuff (Contrary) 6, Shipwright 2, Stealth 5, Weaponmaster 2.

Names

Use the following names for additional crewmen.

Peter Coin Black Henry Braden
Joseph “Scar” Robbins Benjamin Cursefield
Mean George Mings Simon Hornigold
Thomas Weston Charles Behn
William Wales Francis Condent
Bloody Sam Challice Christophe Bretagne
Mean George Mings Simon Hornigold
Jerome “the Hook” Vallantine Nicholas Butler
Red Leonard Pike Walter Sawkins

Downfall: Spiteful

Rebuff Trumps / Trumped By: Charming / Eloquent

Abilities: Appraisal 2, Attack (Strength) 10, Athletics 6, Defense (Intuition) 4, Eavesdropping 6, Gambling 3, Knowledge 4 (Sp: Graeco-Roman Sporting Events), Living Rough 4, Moxy 5, Persuade (Intimidating) 4, Pilot (Ship) 1, Rebuff (Contrary) 4, Shipwright 3, Weaponmaster 2.

Replacing Dead PCs

Given the treacherous nature of the storyline, PCs may be killed by their fellows before the session expires. When this happens, allow players to continue, using the same abilities and pool levels, but assigning new names from the above list. Encourage players to create their own new personalities for these replacement characters. However, replacement PCs are introduced with an impediment ruling them out as captain material. Collaborate with players to decide what this might be, varying it for each replacement. Examples might include:

- hasn’t been on the ship long enough
- disqualified by physical impairment
- was already captain once, and made a terrible hash of it
- that incident in port that one time that no one will speak of
- dress code violations

Only if the entire complement of original characters dies will the crew even consider listening to leadership pitches from replacement characters.

This mechanism allows players to keep participating after their first characters are killed, without entirely removing the incentive for killing off one’s rivals.
The ship’s sneering first mate, William Vane, calls the crew to attention. Captain Nigel “Wobbly” Nimmons stands on the forward deck and launches into a speech. Though he is wasted from lack of food, his wig remains combed and powdered. His velvet frock coat seems scarcely wilted. His beloved parrot Jubsy perches on his shoulder. Speaking in the tones of a blandly reassuring bureaucrat, he launches into a speech:

“My friends, I, your captain, stand before you to acknowledge that mistakes have been made. While it is beyond any man’s power to summon the winds, I acknowledge in retrospect that it was a mistake for me to kill that albatross. Though a believer in the advances of science and no slave to superstition, it was insensitive of me to use the beastly thing as target practice. While in no way conceding that my albatross slaying in any way relates to our becalmed state, I apologize for any distress or offense I may have caused.

“Still, we must buck up, for as you will all recall we were pursued by that persistent buccaneering vessel, The Indomitable, before the winds abandoned us. As it is larger and better armed than us, and its larders no doubt deeper, we face genuine challenges when we escape our present woe. Its captain, the sterling and dashing Neville Flynn, would be a dangerous enemy even if we were not starving. So yes, I admit that it was an error on my part, when last we met, to accuse him of having made romantic advances on his sister.

“Nonetheless, I’m sure you’ll all agree that nothing brings a crew together like adversity. With this in mind, I’d like to propose a jolly new round of austerity—”

Before Nimmons can complete his sentence, a great white shark, the largest one any of these seasoned seamen have ever seen, leaps across the ship’s bow. It chomps Nimmons’ head off, swallows it, and disappears over the other side.

Now what do the characters do?
**Drowning**

Pirate adventures being what they are, one of the characters may well end up overboard and facing the risk of drowning. On a successful Athletics check, the character swims and makes it back to the ship without harm. On a failure, he suffers an injury. If others intervene to keep him in the water, he may need to make multiple consecutive Athletics checks, taking an injury for each check failed.

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**SCENES AND SITUATIONS**

### Vane Assumes Command

Moments after Nimmons hits the ground, Willam Vane jumps up and claims command of the ship. Vane admits that this contravenes the ship’s pirate charter, which calls for the election of a new captain. He cites the emergency they now find themselves in as reason to assume that he, as the first mate, would win the vote. If you haven’t already described Vane and how unpopular he is, do so now. He calls Jubsy to sit on his shoulder, but the parrot refuses.

Out of fear, all of the relationship characters treat Vane as captain until the PCs do something to remove him from consideration.

Allow the player-driven scheming to commence. They will probably team up to get ride of Vane, then fall on each other. Some groups will get straight to the backstabbing, where others might agree to a peaceful campaign.

### The Vote

According to the Swan’s pirate charter, a two-day period of discussion and debate precedes the secret ballot to select a new captain. Explain the voting procedures as follows. Italicized passages are for your reference only.

Every time a character takes a successful action that proves popular with the crew during this period, he gains a boon of 1-3 points, which can be applied to the final electioneering contest.

1 point boons are granted for actions that make crewmen happy without materially improving their present position. Election-style promises, especially ones that the characters won’t have to make good on before the scenario ends, fall into this category.

2 point boons are awarded for minor but concrete improvements to the crew’s current state.

3 point boons are granted for big victories, like disposing of Vane or Barrel Bill.

To spur competition, keep track of the running boon total in a way that the players can see: for example, with a white board.

The vote plays out as a multiple participant persuade contest (p. 21) with the crew as a whole acting as grantor. Each candidate moves to the foredeck and gives a short initial speech to the crew. This devolves into a free-wheeling debate, with each reroll representing a new interjection or counterpoint to a previous debater’s point.

The crew’s Rebuff style depends on circumstances when the vote occurs. Contestants can further prepare for victory by arranging for the crew to be in the mood most susceptible to their style of argument. Tell the players which conditions are favorable or unfavorable to their situations.

They’ll be in a Pure-Hearted mood (trumped by Glib, trumps Intimidating) if Wee Danny has done something inspiring or heroic.

If his heroics are exposed as a sham perpetrated by another, the would-be deceiver suffers a levy of 1.

If kept from eating the last of the meager food supply, they’ll be in a Contrary mood (trumped by Eloquent, trumps Charming.) The crew is very intent on eating that food.

The crew will be in a Lawyerly mood (trumped by Obfuscatory, trumps Forthright) if the ship’s lost pirate charter is found and passed around immediately before the vote. Allow any character who determinedly pursues the charter to find it, after overcoming suitably amusing anecdotes. It’s located in the third place someone thinks to look for it.

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They’ll be in a Wary mood (trumped by Charming, trumps Eloquent) if something bad has happened to Wee Danny. However, candidates who are believed to be responsible for Danny’s misfortune suffer a levy of 1 in the vote contest.

The crew’s mood is Penetrating (trumped by Forthright, trumps Obfuscatory) if the treasure has gone missing, or something seems amiss with Bartholomew’s ledgers. Candidates deemed responsible for missing treasure
or bookkeeping irregularities face a levy of 1 in the vote contest.

To induce an Obtuse reception (trumped by Intimidating, trumps Glib), get the crew drunk. Doing so requires the last of the grog supply. Because this is a recipe for later disaster, the Relationship characters will try to stop this from happening. The key to the supplies is in the hand of the third Relationship character asked for it.

When several Rebuff-altering conditions seem to apply, use the one that, as of the beginning of the vote, came most recently into play.

Adjust your pacing so that the vote takes place around the three-hour mark (assuming a four-hour session.)

You may find yourself prompting the players with requests or complaints from crew members. They’ll want to know the candidates’ plans and proposals, for getting the ship moving again and for defeating the Indomitable. Like many requests of real-life voters, the first item is beyond any candidates’ control.

Assorted requests from individual crewmen might include:
- promises of larger grog rations
- better quality grog
- alcoholic choices other than grog
- better food rations
- laundry service
- newer, shinier weapons
- investment in cannons
- sell off some of current cannons to distribute proceeds to crew
- extended shore leave
- juicer targets for plunder
- settling of complex theological questions
- permission for talent competition
- vendetta against white whale
- did we mention the grog?

The Returning Shark and Other Delaying Measures

Campaigning for the captaincy—and undermining the other candidates—should easily take up three hours. If this thread loses energy, confront the PCs with their temptations.

Should another major complication seem appropriate, the giant shark returns, again jumping up out of the water to chomp off an unwary head. It always takes a crewman from the ranks, not a PC or Relationship character.

To kill it, the PCs must devise and execute a scheme to attract its attention when they’re ready for it. For example, an unpopular person might be dangled off the plank as bait. Then a character must score an Attack or Athletics success, armed with a harpoon—or cutlass, if they’re willing to get dangerously close. As the shark only pops up for a few seconds, only one character can try, without rerolls. Clever plans that keep him out of the water longer remove this disadvantage. On Exasperating Success, the shark is wounded and swims away, never to be seen again, granting a 1-point boon to the upcoming vote contest. On an Ordinary Success, it is killed but sinks beneath the waves (2-point boon.) It can be hauled up and served as a feast to a hungry crew (3-point boon) on an Impressive Success.

Closer: Battle With the Indomitable

When the new captain is chosen, check to see if the other PCs do anything immediately to counter his or her accession. If they all seem at least momentarily resigned to the outcome, the winds then suddenly pick up. The Black Swan is able to set sail again!

Not long after they resume their course, their enemy appears on the horizon. It’s the Indomitable. It bears down on them, ready to pound them with its superior guns.

The Indomitable’s statistics (including the values of its helmsman, weaponmaster and engineer) are: Weaponry 12, Maneuverability 8, Integrity 12.

The Black Swan’s values are Weaponry 5, Maneuverability 7, and Integrity 4. The character commanding the ship’s cannons adds his Weaponmaster to Weaponry. The helmsman adds Pilot to Maneuverability; a third character can add his Shipwright to Integrity.

If Old Tar is still around when the fight begins, he promptly collapses, forcing a PC to take his place. He falls prey to whatever condition seems most darkly amusing, given previous story developments. If nothing else makes sense, he dies of starvation, having deprived himself so that other crewmen might eat.

After reducing the Indomitable’s Maneuverability to 0, a successful Maneuverability roll on the part of the Black Swan’s crew allows them to board the Indomitable. The Indomitable can board the Black Swan under reversed circumstances, but might instead prefer to sink the ship from a distance and let all the pirates drown.

Use the pooled effort rules (p. 18) to determine the
outcome of a boarding attempt. Players roll Attack to see how well they did. The pooled effort outcomes break down as follows:

1. **Dismal Failure**. The crew of the Black Swan is defeated and captured, allowing their enemies to take over their ship. Heads roll.

2. **Routine Failure**. The Black Swan crew is repulsed. The Indomitable may be dead in the water, but its crew has proven itself too tough to overcome.

3. **Exasperating Failure**: The crew of the Indomitable rallies at the last moment, beating back the men of the Black Swan. Although their ship remains uncaptured, it’s clear that this bunch won’t be terrorizing any poor defenseless pirates any time soon.

4. **Hair’s-Breadth Success**: The Black Swan takes over the Indomitable, but its crewmen sustain a few minor casualties.

5. **Ordinary Success**: The Indomitable is captured without serious harm to any Black Swan crewman.

6. **Impressive Success**: The Indomitable crew abjectly surrenders, with nary a scratch to the Black Swan crew.

On any failed result, PCs must make Defense rolls to avoid injury.

During the battle, look out for possible Final Comeuppances (p. 46.) Depending on how they fare in the battle, the tale ends with the new captain boldly setting sail toward a new destination for plunder, or going down with all hands as the Black Swan sinks beneath the waves. Or the PCs might escape in a rowboat as the ship sinks. Or do something unexpected. Whatever happens, find a note of finality and call the story to an end.

**TAGLINES**

- I don’t have scurvy. I have scabies. There’s a difference, you know.
- I wove this lanyard from the silken hair of a sharp-toothed mermaid.
- Your breath reeks of grog and rotten lung.
- I propose that we institute “talk like a landlubber” day.
- Have you ever seen a narwhal?
- I would put my culinary supremacy on proud display, had we ingredients of any description.
- That was brave and magnificent—two qualities I loathe.
- The next person to comment on the irony of dying of thirst while surrounded by water gets a dagger in the eye.
- Maybe this is a bad time to mention this, but over the years I’ve killed loads of albatross.
- That is a handsome tattoo. Can I have it when you die?
- I don’t believe the ship’s charter covers such an eventuality.
- I don’t believe the ship’s charter covers such an eventuality.
- We serve under the black flag, but that’s no excuse for rudeness.
- We serve under the black flag, but that’s no excuse for rudeness.
- Rest assured that I betray my friends only after prolonged consideration.
- Rest assured that I betray my friends only after prolonged consideration.
- Don’t you normally wear that patch on the other eye?
- What does this look like? A pope hat, or a pirate hat?
- What does this look like? A pope hat, or a pirate hat?
- A thought comes to mind, but I will save it for your eulogy.
- Why let me tell you of the evil spirit Davy Jones, who perches in the rigging of becalmed ships, his eyes like saucers and his tongue like licks of flame...
- Later, you must tell me how you did that.
- I would gladly trade all my worldly treasure for a moment’s peace. Not literally, of course.
- Are you making pirate sounds, or just clearing your throat?
- The ocean tried to drown me once, but then threw me back up.
- The last time I trusted a parrot, I woke up in Bermuda, with nary a cracker to call my own.
- Is it my malnutrition talking, or have you come increasingly to resemble a leg of mutton?
- The shriek of the gulls is an incessant demand for the spilling of your blood.
- Is that the Black Hand, or have you given up washing again?
- You wouldn’t say that if it weren’t for all the sunstroke.
- They call them pieces of eight, but really it’s eight pieces of something else.
- You give ruthless savagery a bad name.
- Has anyone ever told you that your hairline resembles the coast of Antigua?
- I said that only under duress.
- Never have I set eyes on a more contemptible pack of sea dogs!
- Piracy isn’t what it used to be...
CASTING CALL

THE SETTING
The PCs are seniors at Luserville High in an unspecified American state. Their town, Luserville, is named after the 19th century Belgian-American pioneer and botanist Andreas Luser. Draw on either your real life or your media-derived mastery of American high school stereotypes to fill in the rest.

Before handing out component cards, ask players to keep their personal goals secret. If a player winds up trading away an identity card, however, his new character may act as if he knows the secret of the original card’s personal goal.

Resistances Renamed
To better fit the setting, the following resistances are renamed:

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<tr>
<th>Standard Name</th>
<th>Casting Call Name</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Arrogant</td>
<td>Stuck-Up</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dissolute</td>
<td>Partying</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indolent</td>
<td>Lazy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lustful</td>
<td>Horny</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Showboating</td>
<td>Show-Off</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Nitticky keeps its standard name.

COLLECTIVE GOAL
Stage Luserville High’s threatened annual musical theater production, winning the usual standing ovation from the audience.

RELATIONSHIPS

Chelsea Burns, Class Gossip
“You totally won’t believe the latest wait till I tell you don’t tell anyone else though this is so unbelievable isn’t it?”

Personality: Pretty and loquacious, Chelsea Burns loves people. No, scratch that: she loves talking about people. If you want to know what her fellow students are up to, or wish to introduce information into the school’s social bloodstream, go to Chelsea. Kids with interesting lives fear her; those with boring ones adore the gossip she spreads. Chelsea fears being discredited, and so never spreads a rumor until she’s confident that it won’t backfire on her.

Goals: 1) Learn other people’s secrets. 2) Gain attention and popularity by sharing them.

Gary Cottle, School Principal
“Whoa, whoa. There’s no call to get exercised.”

Personality: Blandness personified, Gary Cottle is a seasoned administrator who rose in the educational ranks by making sure his superiors never received any news they didn’t want to hear. He takes a liking to certain students but keeps his distance from most. Cottle considers the good feelings generated by the annual theatrical production a net positive for the school’s image but won’t go out on a limb to protect it. Strong emotions alarm him, whether they come from students, faculty, or parents. The principal’s overriding instinct is to calm the waters.

Goals: Protect his political position within the system
Jennifer Jurado, Music Teacher
“I’m sorry, gang. I told you I couldn’t promise anything.”

Personality: Attractive and friendly, Ms. Jurado is the young teacher every bookish girl wants to be and every heterosexual boy fantasizes about before bedtime. The school band serves as the pit orchestra for the play; she’ll rehearse and conduct it. Although she has no direct influence over the production, she can try to put in a good word with the director on the characters’ behalf.

Goals: 1) Help the students to achieve their dreams. 2) Show them that authority figures can be cool, too.

Rebuff Trumps / Trumped By: Eloquent / Charming

Sample Favors: 1) Intercede with other teachers or staff. 2) Rally resources to save the show. 3) Give vocal tips to struggling performers.

Abilities: Etiquette 6, Moxy 6, Persuade (Charming) 4, Rebuff (Wary) 4.

Brittany Davison, School Paper Editor
“I am both the Woodward and the Bernstein of Luserville High. They are historical figures you can look up on Wikipedia.”

Personality: The chirpy, idealistic Brittany Davison runs the Luserville Luse-Lip, the so-called school paper. (In fact, it’s a blog, updated daily, under the supervision of a burned out English teacher named Mrs. Truby.) Brittany takes herself seriously as a journalist. She covers any perceived injustice with the pure passion of a politically engaged teenager.

Goals: 1) Fight injustice. 2) Get a headstart for her journalism portfolio.

Rebuff Trumps / Trumped By: Intimidating / Glib

Sample Favors: 1) Run articles favorable to a character’s agenda, provided that they’re serious and not gossipy. 2) Ferret out information.

Abilities: Eavesdropping 6, Moxy 4, Perception 6, Persuade (Eloquent) 4, Rebuff (Pure-Hearted) 4, Stealth 4.

Josh Mandell, Media Club President
“Do you want that in hi-def?”

Personality: Bouncily enthusiastic, Josh loves to spread the joy of computers and audio visual equipment. No matter how geeky the drama kids might be, they’ll never be as far down on the nerdy scale as Josh. Rubbing elbows with them constitutes a social upgrade. Although Josh maintains crushes on all three of the female PCs, his fruitless infatuation with Alyssa Watson
SKULDLUGGERY

CASTING CALL

Goals: 1) Be stoned. 2) Be very, very stoned. 3) Strike lazy blows for freedom. 4) Get and consume junk food.

Rebuff Trumps / Trumped By: Glib / Intimidating

Sample Favors: 1) Supply weed. 2) Create a diversion. 3) Rally fellow stoners. 4) Provide access to Luserville’s criminal underbelly, such as it is.

Abilities: Craftsmanship (Makeshift Bongs) 8, Eavesdropping 3, Gossip 3, Moxy 6, Performance (Guitar) 6, Persuade (Obfuscatory) 4, Rebuff (Obtuse) 4, Stealth 6.

ADDITIONAL SUPPORTING CHARACTERS

Mr. George Fembly, Antagonistic Vice-Principal
“Your’re all pursuing your dreams, which it is my job to discourage.”

Personality: Fembly is the classic antagonist character in high school movies: a pompous, bullying authority figure who hates everything that gives teenagers pleasure. He also despises teachers who undermine him by acting like the students’ friends. The secret source of his eternal spite lies in his own high school years, when he girl he had a crush on ditched him for the lead in the high school play.

Goals: 1) Stop the musical. 2) Keep a lid on the Mr. Kuperhufft scandal (this occurs during the action—see p. 77.)

Downfall: Spiteful

Rebuff Trumps / Trumped By: Charming / Eloquent

Abilities: Eavesdropping 6, Etiquette 2, Moxy 2, Perception 6, Persuade (Intimidating) 4, Rebuff (Contrary) 4, Stealth 3.

Mr. Wynton Kuperhufft, Drama Teacher
“You gotta give yourself the freedom to make mistakes. Terrible, terrible mistakes.”

Personality: Wynton Kuperhufft, born and raised in Luserville, went to New York to become a star on Broadway. While there he accumulated debts and a coke borders on the paralyzing.

Goals: 1) Become marginally cooler without abandoning his nerdish enthusiasms. 2) Have Alyssa acknowledge his existence.

Rebuff Trumps / Trumped By: Charming / Eloquent

Sample Favors: 1) Supply, explain or run audio-visual equipment. 2) Provide computer tech support. 3) Rally other members of the geek tribe. 4) Optimize your Champions character.

Abilities: Craftsmanship (Photoshop) 6, Mechanic 6, Perception 3, Persuade (Obfuscatory) 4, Rebuff (Contrary) 4.

Cody Yamamoto, Lord of the Stoners
“What, did you just... whoa....”

Personality: Skateboarder and THC inhaler supreme, Cody Yamamoto lopes in slow motion through the halls as Luserville’s alpha stoner. Good-natured but paranoid, he may be talked out of his state of extreme relaxation when presented with an opportunity to frustrate the Man.

Goals: 1) Be stoned. 2) Be very, very stoned. 3) Strike lazy blows for freedom. 4) Get and consume junk food.

Rebuff Trumps / Trumped By: Glib / Intimidating

Sample Favors: 1) Supply weed. 2) Create a diversion. 3) Rally fellow stoners. 4) Provide access to Luserville’s criminal underbelly, such as it is.

Abilities: Craftsmanship (Makeshift Bongs) 8, Eavesdropping 3, Gossip 3, Moxy 6, Performance (Guitar) 6, Persuade (Obfuscatory) 4, Rebuff (Obtuse) 4, Stealth 6.
habit. After a stint in rehab he crawled back in shame to Luserville, where he's been inspiring kids to follow their showbiz dreams for over a decade. More undisciplined artiste than authority figure, he begs, screams, cajoles and screams again to mold his charges into the stars of tomorrow.

Kuperhufft loses his position as teacher during the scenario: see p. 77.

**Goals:** Before the “Scandal” scene: 1) Put on the best damn musical performance ever, gosh darn it.. Afterwards: 2) Remain in hiding; avoid prosecution for statutory rape.

**Downfall:** Libidinous / Dissolute

**Rebuff Trumps / Trumped By:** Glib / Intimidating

**Abilities:** Athletics 3, Craftsmanship (Boudoir Photography) 3, Craftsmanship (Choreography) 5, Eavesdropping 3, Etiquette 3, Gossip 3, Mechanic 3, Moxy 3, Perception 1, Performance (Acting) 2, Performance (Dancing) 2, Performance (Singing) 2, Persuade (Eloquent) 4, Rebuff (Obtuse) 4, Stealth 3.

---

**Mr. Stanley Leaf, Replacement Drama Teacher**

“Everybody who stays reasonably quiet the whole period gets an A.”

**Personality:** Some teachers begin idealistically and burn out over time. Good-natured but hopeless Stanley Leaf began mediocre and deteriorated from there. He's waiting patiently for a retirement buy-out package. In the meantime, he savors the bourbon-laced coffee he nurses all day long. More frazzled, distracted babysitter than teacher, he’s parachuted in to replace Kuperhufft after his scandalous departure. The other half of the time he continues in his original role as woodworking teacher in the shop department.

**Goals:** 1) Keep kids under enough control to escape Mr. Fembly's attention. 2) Stay mildly sozzled.

**Downfall:** Indolent / Dissolute

**Rebuff Trumps / Trumped By:** Glib / Intimidating

**Abilities:** Craftsmanship (Woodworking) 3, Etiquette 2, Gambling 2, Mechanic 6, Moxy 1, Persuade (Obfuscatory) 4, Rebuff (Obtuse) 4, Stealth 2.

---

**Deandra Clare, Casting Agent**

“You remind me of a young Lindsay Lohan.”

**Personality:** The bustling, blustery, colorfully-dressed Deandra Clare projects bluff confidence and a breezy cynicism. She regards talented young people with all the empathy of a USDA inspector appraising a side of beef. Her cynicism cloaks her own smothered dreams—when she was in high school, she dreamed of stardom herself, but only got to work behind the scenes.

**Goals:** Deandra is currently trolling local high school productions in search of performers for a reality talent show called *Road Stars*. In the show, contestants will be dumped into the cast of a Broadway touring company. The audience will follow them as they sink or swim. Clare is on the lookout for students who are both talented enough to survive, and screwed up enough to create useful conflict on the show.

**Downfall:** Show-Offy

**Rebuff Trumps / Trumped By:** Forthright / Obfuscatory

**Abilities:** Eavesdropping 4, Etiquette 3, Gossip 3, Moxy 6, Performance (Acting) 1, Performance (Dancing) 1, Performance (Singing) 1, Persuade (Glib) 6, Rebuff (Lawyerly) 6.

---

**Ivan Fembly, Probation Officer**

“You never get a second chance at a second chance.”

Although being an authority figure runs in the family, Ivan Fembly is less of an oppressive jerk than his older brother, George (above.) He genuinely wants the at-risk youth under his supervision, most notably Terrell, to turn their lives around. However, he’s used to disappointment and has wearyly learned not to expect much. Ivan trusts George, especially in his capacity as vice-principal, and would need to be heavily persuaded that his brother’s spin on events is not entirely trustworthy.

**Goals:** 1) Support his family. 2) Keep his job. 3) Occasionally help an offender to help himself.

**Downfall:** Nipicky

**Rebuff Trumps / Trumped By:** Intimidating / Glib

**Abilities:** Moxy 6, Persuade (Forthright) 3, Rebuff (Pure-Hearted) 8.

---

**NAMES**

When adding a supporting character to your improvised narrative, choose a name from the following list.
The action begins with PCs clustered around a bulletin board, waiting for the beloved drama teacher Mr. Kuperhufft to pin up the sign-up sheet for this year's musical production. Explain that the show is the highlight of Luserville's year—even more important than anything sports-related.

If you're running with less than six players, the other PCs still appear, as supporting characters run by you. This is necessary because their personal goals sometimes revolve around another PC.

The sign-up sheet announces that the show will be *Wagons Ho*. A quick trip to the library reveals the information given in the sidebar.

Wait for the players to take the initiative in the scene, pursuing their goals with one another, or trying to influence Mr. Kuperhufft.

Find a way to introduce the main antagonist, the oppressive Vice Principal, Mr. Fembly. If the players give you nothing else to work with he brusquely forces the Partying character to submit to a search for illicit substances.
CASTING CALL

Auditions

The characters audition in turn for Mr. Kuperhufft and Ms. Jurado. Players roll Performance. The audition includes line readings from a scene, performance of a song, and a dance demonstration. Players can therefore spend from all three of their Performance skills. Roll for PCs who have become supporting characters.

Assuming no successful scheming to the contrary, roles are distributed according to the result each character stands pat on. Divide the characters by sex and rank them in descending order of result. The girl with the best result gets Sally Sue Buckton; the runner-up gets Emma Redlace, and the loser gets Aunt Ree. The best boy gets Lonesome Bob, the second-best is Tin Can, and the worst gets to be Hank Buckton. (Other students are auditioning for the roles but naturally the story focuses on the ones who get the lead roles.)

Ties are resolved according to Kuperhufft’s advance pairing of role to personality type:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Character</th>
<th>Kuperhufft’s Default Casting</th>
<th>Final Casting</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Alyssa</td>
<td>Sally Sue</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jayne</td>
<td>Aunt Ree</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carita</td>
<td>Emma Redlace</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tom</td>
<td>Lonesome</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Darin</td>
<td>Tin Can</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Terrell</td>
<td>Hank</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

While resolving ties, start by assigning the top roles and go on until all the roles for that sex are handed out.

If, for example, Alyssa and Jayne tie for first place, both standing pat on Impressive Successes, Alyssa gets to play Sally Sue, as per the default casting. However, then Jayne gets to play Emma Redlace, because it’s a better role than Aunt Ree, despite the default casting. Carita is then given the role of Aunt Ree.

If no one does anything, get the scene moving by bringing a temptation into play:

- the Horny character is tempted to make a pass at the other PC he or she finds most attractive. (If it’s Tom Cleat, and he decides he’s attracted to a male character, allow him to make the pass covertly.)
- the Stuck-Up character must roll to resist a boast about being a shoo-in for the lead
- the Partying character must roll to resist an action revealing him or her to be embarrassingly drunk or stoned

After this interlude, pause to let the players start any schemes they want to pursue in advance of the auditions.

SCENES AND SITUATIONS

In addition to player-driven sequences, the story is marked by three obligatory episodes: the audition, the scandal, and the big night.

Pre-Audition Scheming

Characters can score boons to their rolls in the upcoming audition by:

- Calling in a favor from Ms. Jurado, This earns a 1-point boon at best.
- Learning, via Gossip and then some confirmatory Eavesdropping or Stealth, that Kuperhufft is engaged in an affair with a former student that probably began when she was still in his class, and underage. This might earn as many as 3 points.

Characters can impose 1-point penalties to other PCs by taking action to distract them or prevent them from rehearsing.

Wagons Ho

This year’s play selection is Wagons Ho, a 1956 musical in the corny western mold of Oklahoma! and the movie Seven Brides For Seven Brothers, with book by Leon Sugar and music by the team of Johnny Bridgeman and Irwin Duckworth. The main roles, in order of desirability, are:

- Sally Sue Buckton, the romantic female lead, daughter of a rich rancher
- Lonesome Bob, the romantic male lead, a soulful ranch hand
- Emma Redlace, the rival for Bob’s affections, who gets the best number and most revealing costumes
- Tin Can, the comic second banana role, a friend to Bob
- Aunt Ree, Sally Sue’s confidant
- Hank Buckton, the sinister father figure who keeps them apart

If, for example, Alyssa and Jayne tie for first place, both standing pat on Impressive Successes, Alyssa gets to play Sally Sue, as per the default casting. However, then Jayne gets to play Emma Redlace, because it’s a better role than Aunt Ree, despite the default casting. Carita is then given the role of Aunt Ree.
CASTING CALL

SKULDUGGERY

a senior last year; all of the PCs (except Terrell) know her slightly, as they would a popular girl a year ahead of them. Kuperhufft gave her the lead role in last year’s play. Word has it that her parents searched their daughter’s room, finding a vial of coke and compromising cell phone photos of her with Kuperhufft. She’s of age now but wasn’t last year.

The next rehearsal starts as scheduled. Mr. Leaf proves hopeless: “You kids just do whatever you’re supposed to do.” Ms. Jurado tries her best to fill in the gaps. Things seem dismal.

Scheming characters might Persuade Mr. Leaf that the casting decisions made by Kuperhufft are now in doubt. Female characters might claim that they lost out after spurning his advances.

A Barn and Some Costumes

Let the players drive the plot and pursue their personal goals for a while, as rehearsals founder in the background. Wait for a Dismal Failure or other opportunity for a PC to bring about a potential embarrassment to the school. Fembly appears again, and, unless somehow schemed against and countered, declares the musical canceled. The school auditorium and its resources will be barred to the students. The age of extra-curricular arts events, with their obviously morally degenerating effects, is now over at Luserville High.

At this point it may occur to a player that his or her character has access to a barn. If they assert this, it is true. The obvious corollary of this statement is that another character has some old costumes. This, too, is true if asserted.

As the players consider the various practical implications of putting on the show at an off-campus location without official support, throw entertaining obstacles in their path.

Additional Complications

As always, sit back and allow players to drive the plot by advancing their various schemes and personal goals. Add, as necessary for pacing purposes, additional complications arising from these. Introduce new characters and situations needed, until you have about twenty to thirty minutes left in the session.

Possible complications might include:

• Ms. Jurado being forced to bow out after pressure from Fembly.
• Josh Mandell loses or damages audio visual equipment in lovelorn fit over Alyssa.
• The spiteful character succumbs to the
Casting Call

You were flat in that last number. In more ways than one.
All right. Who mentioned the Scottish Play?
Drama fail!
Your asshat is showing.
Line!
How about we take it from the top, with a little less suck?
In our grade two assembly, I played the role of lead radish.
I hope whoever hurled in the makeup case is proud of themselves.
I can either forgive you, or myself. I choose myself.
Wouldn’t it be terrible if something happened to you right before the show?
I’ve seen better performances from garden furniture.
Sometimes, all you have to do is believe. This isn’t one of those times.
How Disney of you.
I’m, like, twelve seconds from going all Christian Bale here.
Drama club is just an excuse to overcome sexual repression.
I think that smell is coming from your locker.
In your case, you have a small part, and you’re a small actor.
Okay, we’ve rehearsed enough. Pizza!
I wasn’t upstaging you. You were downstaging yourself.
At this point, my character’s motivation is to feel you up.
I have entered a lamestorm.
Don’t make me defriend you.
It’s not about memorizing the words. It’s about memorizing the feeling.
I’m not wasted enough to understand that.
The excitement’s in me, and it’s got to come out.
You should believe in yourself, because no one else will.
I’m photographing this in my mind for later.
Some people just can’t take constructive criticism.
They weren’t clapping. They were booing with their hands.
It’s so great that you can do that without seeming embarrassed.
I’m going to bust the fourth wall on your ass.
If everyone had the same kind of negative attitude you do, they’d have stopped at two Spider-Man movies.
Now that I’ve seen the real you, I’d like to go back to seeing the fake you.
I’m trying to fit this in 140 characters. What’s shorter for “douchebag?”

Closer

And now it’s time for the big show. Build up narrative excitement by describing the gathering crowd and the mixture of terror and anticipation as curtain time approaches.

Ask players if they’re doing anything during the show to achieve objectives other than a successful performance. Play those out, interspersing them with any other crises that you’ve already laid the groundwork for.

Use the pooled effort rules to determine how enthusiastically the audience responds. The audience consists mostly of parents and relatives, so any collective success elicits a standing ovation. However, a Hair’s-Breadth success indicates an obvious pity ovation and an Ordinary Success a palpably average response. Only an Impressive Success yields the surge of affection any high school dramatist craves.

Any PC whose own contribution to the pooled result was an Impressive Success gets approached with an audition offer from the talent scout Deandra Clare. For Darin Hemner, this outcome represents the achievement of his personal goal. This assumes that the group succeeded—if not, individual star turns go unrecognized as a painsed Deandra slips out of the hall before intermission.

Alyssa also achieves her goal on a personal Impressive Success, provided no one else stands pat on an Impressive Success. However, if, while other Impressive Success holders bow, she can attempt Performance (Acting) checks to steal focus from them. If successful for each other Impressively Successful character, she does seem to have garnered slightly louder applause than the others.

Wrap up by addressing, if possible, the achievement of any other personal goals.

Taglines

• This never happened to Stephen Sondheim.
• That’s my glory you’re basking in.

• You were flat in that last number. In more ways than one.
• All right. Who mentioned the Scottish Play?
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• Now that I’ve seen the real you, I’d like to go back to seeing the fake you.
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Closer

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Wrap up by addressing, if possible, the achievement of any other personal goals.

Taglines

• This never happened to Stephen Sondheim.
• That’s my glory you’re basking in.
IF SPACE PERMITS

THE SETTING

If Space Permits is a space opera of whimsical cynicism set in the year 4687. The action occurs in and around the planet Siluria, in a region of space called the Lowflux Reach. Centuries after a paroxysm of interstellar violence known as the Hutton Wars, humanity has settled into a quiet existence on hundreds of habitable planets. Technological mastery has slipped away as people pursue lives of fleeting pleasure. People refer to this present-day period as the Long Peace.

Introduce the setting to your players by reading or paraphrasing the above two paragraphs. Further broad details appear below. Provide these details, in your own words, as responses to player questions.

Finer details of the world appear in a section called the Setting Glossary, on p. 81. References appearing in boldface throughout this chapter are explained there.

Interstellar Travel

Inhabitants of the Lowflux Reach travel the light years between its various colonized planets using a faster-than-light technology known as the strangequark drive. Now poorly understood, these drives can be operated only by engineers trained in the mental discipline of fa-tho. Some engineers style themselves as priests and treat fa-tho as a religious discipline. Others, like the engineer of the Vantage, regard it as a trick of the mind, like meditation or self-hypnosis. Strangequark drives push ships into an alternate dimension-slash-wormhole and then back out again as their near their destinations.

Ship Combat and Weaponry

Interstellar vessels are also capable of propulsion power outside of strangequark space. It is under propulsion power that ship-to-ship battles occur. When two vessels come into close proximity in strangequark space, they are knocked into standard space, where they may then fight it out.

Typical shipboard weapons include concentrated energy bursts called phase beams, bomb-like weapons released in mine nets, and sfishes. The latter are steel-and-ceramic pods containing space creatures resembling gigantic jellyfish. A sfish affixes itself to a ship's hull, releasing the creature, which proceeds to devour its outer surfaces.

After introducing these weapon systems, also allow players to name and describe any suitably space operaish weaponry while describing their actions during any ship-to-ship fights. Likewise, let them improvise the names of ship sub-systems they might be targeting on an enemy vessel, or that they might be repairing on their own ship. Needless to say, you can also make up ship combat details on the fly. However you and the players describe weapons or other ship features, remember that it's the rules that ultimately determine what happens. If a player describes a disintegration beam that supposedly destroys an enemy ship on a hit, you'll
Alien Races
The Lowflux Reach once teemed with sapient alien species. These were wiped out without exception during the Hutton Wars. People of the Long Peace look back on the actions of their ancestors with melancholy regret. Every so often a report emerges of an alien species sighting, but nothing ever comes of it. Some fear a sudden apocalyptic resurgence of vengeful aliens, but that’s never happened, either.

Alien animals still exist, on Siluria and other planets, though often greatly reduced in numbers after centuries of ecological competition from introduced species.

COLLECTIVE GOAL
Secure a monopoly on the interstellar sale of Silurian jump wine.

SETTING GLOSSARY
Flittercraft: a class of hovering cars used for ground transport
gosh: popular Silurian team sport played with skates on an iced surface, with paint guns
jump wine: a powerfully intoxicating beverage fermented from the Silurian madgrape, a genetic hybrid between the genetically modified grapes of Ancient Earth and a local hairy fruit called the loquat. Primarily alcoholic, it also acts as a neurostimulant at the peak of

Ship Types
Common ship types include:

- Skipper: a small freighter accommodating a cargo hold and up to a dozen crewmen. The Vantage is a skipper.
- Hauler: a large freighter requiring a crew of seventy.
- Javelin: a fast-moving, heavily armed attack vehicle, built for police actions against pirates, but sometimes captured by the criminals it was designed to catch.
- Heap, a.k.a. Galleon: a jury-rigged holdover from the Hutton Wars, pressed back into service by pirates. No two are exactly the same, but most are heavily armed and armored and less than agile.
- Flimmer: a lightly armed shuttle craft holding up to six passengers, capable only of short-haul flights from orbit to planetary surface.

Skippers, are capable of entering a world’s atmosphere and docking at a space port on its surface. Other ship types are too large and must remain in orbit. They keep multiple flimmers on hand.

Heavily militarized vessels are rare in the interstellar peace of the contemporary era.

have to step in and modify the description, because the rules don’t allow for one-shot kills.

Character Tracker

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Player</th>
<th>Character</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Goal</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Finnegan Swake / Ula Seizz</td>
<td>Pilot</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Serig / Seriga Allagan</td>
<td>Armsman</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kalan / Kala Dharro</td>
<td>Engineer</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Por / Poria Manto</td>
<td>Medical Officer</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Thortho / Thortha Doxx</td>
<td>Legal Officer</td>
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<tr>
<td>Vraiman / Virala Krikle</td>
<td>Financial Officer</td>
<td></td>
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</table>
**SKULDUGGERY**

**IF SPACE PERMITS**

Drunkenness, causing drinkers to uncontrollably jump and twitch. In a state of high twitch, adherents of the planet’s vine worshiping fertility cult may experience divine visions of the ineffable oneness pervading all existence.

**retronovel**: is a form of narrative entertainment, see p. 91.

**zontari**: electronic instrument played on virtual strings, known for its plaintive dissonance. The traditional instrument of Siluria, it is heard reaching a crescendo during the drunken nights of the vine festival.

**RELATIONSHIPS**

**Juh Cerknor, Judge**

*Personality*: Silver-haired centenarian Juh Cerknor maintains his craggy good looks through regular nano-surgery. He uses the status his judicial offices confer on him as his entrée to romance. When an attractive woman arrives on the Silurian social scene, Juh suavely sidles in to sweep her off her feet. No more or less bent than most in the known galaxy, Juh will happily twist the requirements of his post to feather his own nest.

**Goals**: 1) Romance and seduce beautiful women. 2) Treat himself to small luxuries.

**Rebuff Trumps / Is Trumped By**: Forthright / Obfuscatory

**Sample Favors**: 1) Drop charges or injunctions against patrons and associates. 2) Grant injunctions and increase legal penalties for the rivals of patrons and associates.

**Abilities**: Appraisal 3, Athletics 3, Attack (Caution) 4, Defense (Dodge) 4, Eavesdropping 3, Etiquette 6, Gambling 4, Gossip 4, Management 1, Moxy 3, Persuade (Charming) 6, Rebuff (Lawyerly) 4, Stealth 4, Wealth 1.

**Ora Nosth, Wine Critic**

*Personality*: Prickly and pompous, Ora Nosth expects scraping deference from everyone she encounters. Wine aficionados recognize her as the greatest authority in the known galaxy, and compete with one another to fawn over her. She assumes that all people fit into this category and becomes childishly frustrated when treated in a less than adoring manner. Creased with age and painfully thin, Ora Nosth resembles a well-dressed grape vine.

**Goals**: 1) See that the holy laws of the Vine are properly observed. 2) Foster the bliss and happiness of the faithful. 3) Promote the Silurian wine industry.

**Rebuff Trumps / Is Trumped By**: Intimidating / Glib

**Sample Favors**: 1) Provide favorable advice to members of her congregation. 2) Assign watchers to ensure that a given group of individual does not commit infractions against the faith.

**Abilities**: Craftsmanship 6 (Wine Making), Etiquette 6, Gambling 4, Knowledge 6 (Sp: Theology of the Living Vine), Management 6, Moxy 6, Persuade (Eloquent) 8, Physician 3, Rebuff (Pure-Hearted) 8, Wealth 3.

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**Adjusting For Small Groups**

If no one draws the Pilot identity, the character with the highest Pilot rating gets an upgrade to Pilot 6. That character is taken out of contention for further upgrades.

If no one draws the Armsman identity, the character with the highest Weaponmaster rating gets an upgrade to Weaponmaster 6.

If no one draws the Engineer, a character who has not yet received an upgrade gets Engineer 6.

In a two-player game, one character may be upgraded to both Pilot and Weaponmaster, and rolls both Attack and Defense in ship combat.
**Verator Vump, Customs Official**

**Personality:** A plump, balding sybarite, Verator Vump clothes himself in fine silks and dines in Siluria’s finest eating establishments. His conspicuous expenditures raise suspicions regarding his honesty. Vump explains away his apparent wealth as the income from an inheritance. Fear of exposure from a righteous young district Governor has forced him to accept his bribes more carefully than he used to. Still, his love of pleasure requires him to love money too.

**Goals:** To enjoy good food, fine wine, and fashionable clothing, in that order.

**Rebuff Trumps / Is Trumped By:** Eloquent / Charming

**Sample Favors:** 1) Grant or refuse an export license. 2) Carefully inspect a rival’s cargo hold. 3) Decline to accept an associate’s cargo hold.

**Abilities:** Appraisal 6, Athletics 1, Attack (Cunning) 2, Eavesdropping 6, Etiquette 6, Gossip 6, Management 2, Moxy 5, Perception 2, Persuade (Intimidating) 4, Rebuff (Wary) 4, Wealth 3.

**Quelk Queln, Police Officer**

**Personality:** Quelk Queln takes bribes, but only the token amount required so that his corrupt colleagues will consider him part of the team. It’s not money that thrills this massive and barrel-chested enforcer of the law, but the chance to make others cower before him. More thrilling still is the opportunity to crack a skull and get away with it—which, alas, happens all too rarely now that a new Governor has come to Siluria, inexplicably intent on enforcing the letter of the law.

**Goals:** 1) Hurt people who can’t hurt him back. 2) Bask in the fear of the helpless. 3) Undermine the new governor.

**Rebuff Trumps / Is Trumped By:** Charming / Eloquent

**Sample Favors:** 1) Hassle, arrest or assault rivals. 2) Sabotage criminal charges against his friends.

**Abilities:** Athletics 6, Attack (Ferocity) 6, Eavesdropping 3, Defense (Dodge) 6, Etiquette 6, Moxy 6, Perception 2, Persuade (Intimidating) 4, Physician 1, Pilot (Spacecraft) 1, Rebuff (Contrary) 4, Stealth 2, Weaponmaster 1.

**Sura Zonn, President of Freight Handler’s Union**

**Personality:** The translucent-haired Sura Zonn keeps her orange eyes peeled for any sign of commercial activity in Siluria’s spacedocks that circumvent her union’s right to a fair share. She indignantly upholds the right of her members to their 5.6% pilferage rate, as set out in a 4664 judicial decision. She bristles at any suggestion that her people ought to move more quickly and efficiently as a violation of her union’s long-established rights and customs.

**Goals:** 1) Protect the avarice and indolence of her members. 2) Strike back with ferocious collective inaction in the face of any slight or insult.

**Rebuff Trumps / Is Trumped By:** Fortright / Obfuscatory

**Sample Favors:** 1) Slow, speed, or reject the transport of any goods through the spacedock. 2) Stage a loud and disruptive demonstration.

**Abilities:** Appraisal 6, Athletics 3, Attack (Caution) 2, Defense (Dodge) 2, Eavesdropping 4, Etiquette 1, Gossip 3, Knowledge 2 (Sp: Labor Law and Custom), Management 4, Mechanic 3, Moxy 4, Perception 2, Persuade (Forthright) 2, Rebuff (Lawyerly) 6, Wealth 4.

**ADDITIONAL SUPPORTING CHARACTERS**

These supporting characters place obstacles in the PCs’ paths on the way to achieving their collective goals. They might also get in the way of their personal goals.

**Rival Merchant Crews**

The following characters share the same goal as the PCs: to secure the jump wine monopoly. Names and statistics for their ships are provided after the character entries. Additional crew members for each ship are named and
given downfalls. For brevity’s sake, their ability lists are condensed; add absent abilities as needed.

**Artan Shubb**

**Personality:** Cruelly handsome, Artan Shubb gets under the skin of his rivals by sneeringly mocking them. He carefully tracks the exploits of potential competitors and has well versed himself in the Vantage crew’s humiliating misadventure on Hling—whatever that is. (See “Opener,” p. 87.)

**Downfall:** Arrogance

**Rebuff Trumps / Is Trumped By:** Obfuscatory / Forthright

**Abilities:** Appraisal 4, Athletics 6, Attack (Finesse) 8, Defense (Vexation) 8, Driving 3 (Flittercraft), Eavesdropping 3, Etiquette 1, Gambling 2, Gossip 3, Knowledge 4 (Sp: Extinct Religions), Living Rough 3, Management 3, Mechanic 3, Moxy 5, Perception 3, Persuade (Forthright) 4, Physician 1, Pilot (Spacecraft) 5, Rebuff (Penetrating) 4, Stealth 3, Weaponmaster 1.

**The Refulgent:** Weaponry 11, Defense 7, Integrity 9.

**Refulgent Crew**

**Droser Sfitt, Showboating Weaponmaster:**

**Personality:**

**Rebuff Trumps / Is Trumped By:** Intimidating / Glib

**Glurn Carnakas, Nitpicking Engineer:** Attack (Cunning) 3, Defense (Misdirection) 4, Mechanic 3, Persuade 4 (Eloquent), Rebuff 4 (Lawyerly).

**Viril Vultt, Spiteful Financial Officer:**

**Personality:**

**Rebuff Trumps / Is Trumped By:** Eloquent / Charming

**Cardo Huminth**

**Personality:** The standoffish Cardo Huminth resists human contact, cloaking herself in a translucent bubble-suit to protect her from the bacteria she slavishly fears. When she desires privacy or wishes to conclude a discussion he finds tedious, she fills her suit with an opaque mist.

**Downfall:** Fearful

**Rebuff Trumps / Is Trumped By:** Obfuscatory / Forthright

**Abilities:** Appraisal 5, Athletics 2, Attack (Caution) 3, Defense (Parry) 6, Driving 3 (Flittercraft), Eavesdropping 4, Etiquette 4, Gossip 4, Knowledge 6 (Sp: Transportation), Living Rough 5, Management 3, Moxy 2, Perception 1, Persuade (Forthright) 3, Physician 6, Pilot (Spacecraft) 5, Rebuff (Penetrating) 5, Weaponmaster 1.

Aggravant Crew
Boscki Rrson, Libidinous Weaponmaster: Attack (Ferocity) 5, Defense (Misdirection) 3, Persuade 2 (Intimidating), Rebuff 2 (Contrary) Weaponmaster 4.

Rebuff Trumps / Is Trumped By: Charming / Eloquent

Jobala Drint, Greedy Engineer: Attack (Ferocity) 4, Defense (Vexation) 3, Health 1, Mechanic 3, Persuade 3 (Glib), Rebuff 3 (Obtuse.)

Rebuff Trumps / Is Trumped By: Glib / Intimidating

Trefor Elinc, Dissolute Financial Officer: Attack (Speed) 3, Defense (Dodge) 4, Persuade 2 (Forthright), Rebuff 5 (Lawyery.)

Rebuff Trumps / Is Trumped By: Forthright / Obfuscatory

Dover Blunk
Personality: The skittish and doughy Dover Blunk remains perpetually on the lookout for phonies and fraudsters. He trusts only his own crewmen, and even these he keeps under close watch. He burns with enmity for Elvben Knute (see below), who once swindled him out of a moderately priced lunch.

Downfall: Fearful

Rebuff Trumps / Is Trumped By: Eloquent / Charming

Abilities: Appraisal 3, Athletics 7, Attack (Finesse) 9, Defense (Vexation) 7, Driving 3 (Flittercraft), Eavesdropping 7, Etiquette 3, Gossip 3, Knowledge 5 (Sp: History), Management 2, Mechanic 1, Moxy 3, Perception 2, Persuade (Forthright) 3, Physician 1, Pilot (Spacecraft) 5, Rebuff (Wary) 4, Stealth 2, Weaponmaster 1.

The Damson: Weaponry 9, Defense 8, Integrity 8.

Damson Crew
Glorsy Fraden, Nitpicky Weaponmaster: Attack (Strength) 4, Defense (Sure-Footedness) 2, Persuade 4 (Charming), Rebuff 4 (Contrary) Weaponmaster 2.

Rebuff Trumps / Is Trumped By: Charming / Eloquent

Jamin Dav, Indolent Engineer: Attack (Cunning) 4, Defense (Sure-Footedness) 5, Mechanic 2, Persuade 5 (Eloquent), Rebuff 4 (Lawyery.)

Rebuff Trumps / Is Trumped By: Forthright / Obfuscatory

Rebuff Trumps / Is Trumped By: Forthright / Obfuscatory

Erri Turg, Gluttonous Financial Officer: Attack (Ferocity) 1, Defense (Vexation) 2, Persuade 4 (Eloquent), Rebuff 3 (Pure-Hearted.)

Rebuff Trumps / Is Trumped By: Intimidating / Glib

Elvben Knute
Personality: When not at the negotiating table, the suave and florid-faced Elvben Knute parks himself in the most luxurious gambling den he can find. PCs can undermine him by appealing to his wagering instinct, or by dangling the possibility of vengeance in front of the odious Dover Blunk (above.)

Downfall: Gambling

Rebuff Trumps / Is Trumped By: Obfuscatory / Forthright

Abilities: Appraisal 5, Athletics 3, Attack (Cunning) 6, Defense (Misdirection) 6, Eavesdropping 5, Etiquette 4, Gambling 8, Gossip 4, Knowledge 2 (Sp: Probabilities), Management 2, Moxy 4, Persuade (Glib) 4, Pilot (Spacecraft) 3, Rebuff (Penetrating) 5, Stealth 2, Weaponmaster 1.

The Queen's Ransom: Weaponry 8, Defense 8, Integrity 7.

Damson Crew
Hararc Blabe, Arrogant Weaponmaster: Attack (Caution) 5, Defense (Vexation) 3, Persuade 3 (Forthright), Rebuff 4 (Contrary) Weaponmaster 3.

Rebuff Trumps / Is Trumped By: Charming / Eloquent

Jetton Derc, Fearful Engineer: Attack (Cunning) 5, Defense (Dodge) 6, Mechanic 2, Persuade 5 (Obfuscatory), Rebuff 5 (Wary.)

Rebuff Trumps / Is Trumped By: Eloquent / Charming

Puge Thormis, Suicidal Financial Officer: Attack (Ferocity) 1, Defense (Parry) 2, Persuade 5 (Forthright), Rebuff 2 (Lawyery.)

Rebuff Trumps / Is Trumped By: Forthright / Obfuscatory

Vintner’s Council Executive
The three executive members of the Vintner’s Council jointly decide who gets this year’s monopoly.

Bef Hospitalk, Council President
Personality: The austere and prudish Bef Hospitalk strongly dislikes informality, loose talk, and pleasure of any variety. It is thus ironic that, as heir to the vaunted Hospitalk clan of vintners, that she sells and oversees an product famed for its pronounced intoxicating effect. Under strenuous protest from other council members, she has altered the consortium’s promotional materials to suggest that jump wine be enjoyed only in extreme moderation. She tried and failed to get the word “jump” removed from labels. Bef twitches whenever she hears it. Averse to human desire, she hides her aging face, formerly renowned for its beauty, behind a gossamer veil.

Downfall: Nitpicky
Rebuff Trumps / Is Trumped By: Eloquent / Charming

Abilities: Appraisal 6, Craftsmanship (Winemaking) 6, Defense (Dodge) 2, Eavesdropping 3, Etiquette 6, Gossip 2, Management 6, Moxy 4, Persuade (Forthright) 4, Rebuff (Wary) 6, Wealth 8.

Therugna Fes, Council Vice President
Personality: Red-faced and squat, Therugna Fes forever finds herself on the edge of a verbal explosion. She can’t stand foolishness or stupidity, yet sees it all around her—particularly in the actions of her servants and other social inferiors. Therugna harbors violent fantasies in which she beats Bef Hospitalk to death with her gnarled vinewood club. Yet she is forced to support her hated rival’s continuance on the executive. Hospitalk has in her possession an audio recording of Therugna blaspheming against the vine faith. She is heard reserving special vituperation for the Vine Bishop, Lamas Lem (p. 2.) Penalties she might face were her blasphemies to come to light range all the way up to the holy death penalty. Until this recording is destroyed or its threat somehow nullified, Therugna must do as Hospitalk demands.

When Hospitalk’s term expires next year, Therugna takes over. If something happens to her before then, Therugna ascends to her role immediately.

Downfall: Arrogance (Temper)
Rebuff Trumps / Is Trumped By: Charming / Eloquent

Abilities: Appraisal 6, Craftsmanship (Winemaking) 6, Defense (Dodge) 2, Driving 1 (Flittercraft), Eavesdropping 3, Gossip 2, Knowledge (Sp: Zontari), Living Rough 1, Management 3, Mechanic 3, Moxy 1, Perception 3, Persuade (Obfuscator) 4, Rebuff (Obtuse) 4, Stealth 6, Wealth 3.

Gorala Kabah, Council Past President
Personality: Having run the council for three decades, the outwardly meek and nondescript Gorala Kabah systematically looted its treasury, funneling funds back into her renowned but money-losing Kabah family winery. Despite her efforts to cover up the embezzlement, Bef Hospitalk discovered her crimes during her ascent to the council presidency. Rather than turn her in, Hospitalk blackmailed Kabah into rubber-stamping all of her demands. Kabah would happily destroy Hospitalk, if only she could ensure that the ledgers Hospitalk keeps locked in a vault in her family wine cellars would never be revealed.

Downfall: Greedy (Fear of Failure / Exposure)
Rebuff Trumps / Is Trumped By: Glib / Intimidating

Abilities: Appraisal 4, Craftsmanship (Winemaking) 6, Defense (Dodge) 2, Driving 3 (Flittercraft), Eavesdropping 1, Gossip 2, Knowledge 3 (Sp: Gosht), Management 2, Mechanic 5, Moxy 1, Perception 2, Persuade (Intimidating) 4, Rebuff (Contrary) 4, Wealth 7.

NAMES
When you need a name for a person or place as part of your improvised narrative, choose an item from the lists below.

People
Ati Gah
Ghalith Chaal
Gwel Kostro
Kebo Kurp
Omerth Regia
Seko Govel
Vrent Soblarin
Zew Erlot
Fostro Espen
Guala Der
Hopa Frexix
Maso Sadd
Rel Enneti
Vo Vignont
Wenzel Vhudd

Places
Aoise
Banagraf
Bode
Estolia
Arbel
Barayth
Egura
Hurth
OPENER

The player characters are the crew of a small trading ship, the Vantage. As the action begins, they're approaching the moons of Siluria. Down on their luck after a regrettable incident on the icy surface of the planet Hling, they hope to resuscitate their ailing account books with a successful bid for a monopoly over the export of a famous commodity, Silurian jump wine. (Leave the exact nature of the unpleasantness on Hling for the group to make up themselves—or to allude to vaguely without ever precisely describing—as the story develops.)

They’re hailed by Artan Shubb, pilot of the Refulgent (p. 2.) He calls to trash talk the crew of the Vantage, generally belittling them and letting them know that news of their escapade on Hling has preceded them. Shubb tells himself that he’s shaking their confidence, but is really giving in to his own arrogance. This is not a Persuade attempt on his part: if he did so and won, the scenario would end prematurely with the PCs flying off to soak in their own unworthiness. Not much fun to be had there. However, the PCs are free to turn this around and try to Persuade him of something.

Although Shubb isn’t looking for a fight, a touch of starship combat might nonetheless start the story off with a bang. Look for opportunities to spark a fight via misunderstanding or miscommunication. For example, the PCs are likely to respond to Shubb’s taunts in a rude but non-violent way. Any Dismal Failures they happen to score along the way might cause their gestures to be interpreted as attack maneuvers.

SCENES AND SITUATIONS

The rest of the action takes place in Siluria City, usually referred to simply as “the capital.”

Getting Situated

The ship can dock at its surface-side spaceport, allowing its financially embarrassed crew to sleep onboard without paying for an expensive lodgings. The city bulges with tourists, mostly from elsewhere on the planet. They’re ready for the frenzied bacchanal that is Siluria City’s annual Vine Festival.

Describing Siluria City

Siluria City’s rustic collection of brick and stone buildings scattered amid a series of steeply sloping hillsides. The cold and glassy River Silur weaves through its streets. Some of the hillsides are forested; most are covered with vineyards. Villas, inns, shops and taverns line its winding, cobbled streets. To maintain an illusion of old-fashioned charm, Siluria’s architects discreetly disguise all evidence of technological advancement.
Likely Schemes
Once situated, leave the PCs at loose ends so that the players can drive the plot by developing a suitable scheme to gain the monopoly. The most likely schemes are:

- Eliminating competing bidders
- Manipulating the Vintner's Council
- Something else we haven't thought of that you'll have to completely improvise your way through

Eliminating Competing Bidders
The fun of this scheme lies in finding inventive ways to get rival crews to drop out of the bidding. Allow the PCs to easily learn who their rivals are. They can use Gossip or consult nearly any of their Relationships. It's okay if they fail the first time around, provided they get the list before the effort becomes frustrating. A Relationship character might, for example, supply the names automatically if they've already tried and failed to get them by other means.

Players might come up with inventive schemes completely on their own, or make an effort to tailor their skulduggery to the specific weaknesses of rival pilots. As always, your role is to build on player-driven plot elements by making them more entertaining, not to shut down ideas that we haven't covered or that seem initially unlikely to you.

If they do shape their plots to the downfalls of specific pilots, prepare to respond to schemes like this:

**Artan Shubb** (Arrogance): Challenge him to a contest he thinks he can't lose, with the loser forced to bow out. Crews of both ships undoubtedly cheat to skew the odds in their favor.

**Cardo Humint** (Fearful): Plant a belief in a highly dangerous Silurian contagion that her suit can't protect her from.

**Dover Blunk** (Fearful): Use his paranoia to convince him that his own crew members are plotting against him.

**Elvben Knute** (Gambling): Beat him at a wager, or cause him to incur unpayably large gambling debts to dangerous local casino enforcers.

Alternatively, the longstanding animosity between **Dover Blunk** and **Elvben Knute** might be used to pit the two against one another, so that each does something to remove the other from the bidding process.

The opener establishes Artan Shubb as a primary antagonist. If you can swing it, preserve his role in the story until the very end, so they can eliminate or otherwise dispose of him last. This lends the scenario a sense of structure—the rival introduced at the beginning gets his comeuppance at the end. If the players focus on him early and win, go with that appearance—then have him show up at the end, having miraculously reversed...
their earlier victory over him, spoiling for vengeance. Don’t struggle too hard to make this happen; structure isn’t everything, especially in Skulduggery.

Manipulating the Vintner’s Council
When choosing the recipient of the contract, all three members of the Vintner’s Council must agree on the winning bidder. Each bidder must make a presentation to the group. Presentations are received on the morning of Vine Festival’s final day. The council announces the decision at the festival’s climax, right after the crowning of the Vine King.

Bef Hospitalk judges applicants on an unconventional measure: she wants to award the contract to the crew who will ensure that any promotional material for jump wine is larded with anti-drunkenness messaging. If they do this, the players automatically realize, they’ll cut their potential profits by more than half. To sway Hospitalk, they must Persuade her that they’ll punctiliously enforce her temperance policies. As she’s blackmailing the other councilors into obedience, persuading her wins the contract.

Alternately, they could gain the agreement of the other two by successfully scheming to remove Hospitalk from the council. They might return the blackmail material to Fes and Kabah, or keep it themselves for future use. In the latter case, the councilors scheme to reverse this lamentable development and deliver comeuppance to the PCs.

If the crew secures the contract with anticlimactic ease early in the session, they must then scheme to defend it against attempts to reverse the council’s decision.

- Rival crews try to eliminate them from the field, by taking advantage of their flaws to disqualify them.
- If they’ve agreed to Hospitalk’s demands, adherents of the vine religion learn of this affront against holy intoxication and agitate to have the crew burned at the stake. Their religious ally, Bishop Lamas Lem, remains sympathetic to them in private but must, to retain her own position, seem to be seeking their demise in public. Religious rioters might also attack the council, threatening to destroy the crew’s precious cargo.

The Vine Festival
The scenario’s scheming takes place against the backdrop of the Vine Festival, a religious celebration of divine inebriation. Every temptation is celebrated, giving crew members ample opportunity to be led astray from their schemes.

Becoming Vine King / Queen
The celebration centers around the election of a ceremonial Vine King (or Queen, if the Show-Offy PC is female.) At the end of each of the festival’s three nights, contestants gather onstage in an amphitheater to compete in its three rounds. These are:

1. Hollering. Contestants must demonstrate an aptitude for bellowing. Those who cannot be heard over the hooting, sozzled crowd are eliminated. To stay in the contest requires an Athletics or Moxy success. Allow plausible suggestions of other ability uses, if appropriately underhanded.

2. Projectile Vomiting / Drinking Endurance: Depending on your group’s enthusiasm for juvenile gross-out humor, the second night either pits the remaining contestants in a competition to see who can achieve the longest horizontal upchuck in the wake of epic jump wine consumption, or merely measures the drinkers’ ability to remain conscious. To go on to the next round requires an Athletics or Moxy success (vomiting) or a Moxy success (simple endurance.)

3. Deft Handling of the Vine Pole: At the height of the final night, the remaining handful of contestants are

Where Are Last Year’s Winners?
Players may wonder why the previous year’s contract winner is not bidding again. Any Vintner’s Council member claims that the winning crew, of the ship Oneiros, retired to enjoy their well-earned riches. A Gossip success reveals this to be untruthful: after offloading the cargo, the Oneiros was attacked by the Wastrel, a ship crewed by rival bidders. Both ships were destroyed in the battle.

If the group fixates on this detail, bedraggled, embittered survivors of the Oneiros might show up to claim this year’s contract, as per an obscure clause in last year’s arrangement. Or they could act as ambushing pirates, doing unto the Vantage what was done unto them.
handed a large pole representing the first grape vine to be planted in Siluria. Given that this is a fertility rite, it goes without saying that the pole is strongly phallic in shape. Each contestant in turn must dance and prance suggestively with the vine pole, without dropping it or otherwise allowing it to touch the stage floor. The one whose jiggling and quaking arouses the greatest excitement in the audience, as judged by device called a pheromone meter, wins the contest and is crowned Vine King. At some convenient prior moment, the character learns that the winner is almost always in the jump stage of neurostimulation during his performance. To win, a player must overcome last year’s winner (or a rival crew member) in a Moxy contest. Remaining PCs may perform entertaining and plausible actions to bolster their candidate or hamper others.

The three-evening format of the event allows you to break up the main scheming story with other comic interludes.

To weave the Vine King story thread together with the one in which the PCs eliminate rival bidders, have a member of each competing crew vie for the crown, alongside the PC(s.)

The Show-Offy character’s personal goal asks him to win this contest. Other PCs might decide to enter too, either to throw the event to their friend, or to stir the pot with some inter-party competition.

Other Personal Goals
The Vine King plotline takes care of the personal goals of the Show-Offy character. Be prepared to respond to other personal goals as follows.

Libidinous
The Libidinous character seeks to bed either the son (Dwenp) or daughter (Lwala) of Bef Hospitalk, as his or her proclivities warrant. In either case, this supporting character is good-looking and utterly naïve. The prudish Bef Hospitalk has kept her only child cloistered from the world. Having come of age, the younger Hospitalk has now been enrolled at university by a very reluctant parent, terrified of her child’s potential corruption. Her only friend, Drogo, is actually an employee paid to perform chaperon duties.

When first encountered, Dwenp/Lwala fervently parrots Bef’s censorious views. Deep down he/she yearns for experience, and can be talked into bed if the seducer allows him/her to retain an illusion of loyalty to Bef.

Dwenp/Lwala Hospitalk
Athletics 6, Attack (Caution) 2, Craftsman ship (Bowl Making / Flute Carving) 3, Defense (Sure-Footedness) 5, Driving 3 (Flittercraft), Etiquette 4, Living Rough 3, Moxy 3, Perception 3, Persuade (Charming) 1, Rebuff (Wary) 6.

Rebuff Trumps / Is Trumped By: Eloquent / Charming

This goal could dovetail with the collective goal, if something happens to Bef Hospitalk, Dwenp/Lwala inherits her position on council for the rest of her term. A thoroughly besotted Dwenp/Lwala might happily go along with his/her new lover’s requests.

Nitpicky
The Vintner’s Council is most proud of the mural on their headquarters, painted by the late, great Silurian artist Vomo Thuke. Sadly for this character, it depicts a savage attack on Siluria conducted by his/her ancestor, Ithion. The raid occurred during the late period of the Hutton Wars, when all the alien races were dead and the armed forces fell upon one another to determine who would rule the Lowflux Reach. Siluria celebrates the Battle of Ithion’s Wake as their great leap into the Long Peace.

The character has always been taught that Ithion was forced to bring the Silurian leadership to heel, on the grounds of their being a treacherous pack of low-life swine. Its portrayal of a grotesquely sinister Ithion repulsed by brave Silurians after a cowardly ambush can only be seen (by the Nitpicky character, at least) as a gross historical inaccuracy. Any alteration to the work would be considered a desecration of a beloved and iconic piece of art, not to mention an assault on Silurian national pride and the honor of the Vintner’s Council.

Dissolute
The super-distilled version of jump wine known as p/g418a is not available for sale during the wine festival. One may drink it only at other times of year. Even then one must belong to a special club and, before drinking, sign various legal waivers acknowledging one’s pending temporary insanity. To learn the name of a vendor who has any p/g418a requires a Gossip success; to broach the subject with him requires an Etiquette success. The PC might then Persuade him, or offer some other inducement. It’s most fun to make it hard to get while eventually putting it in the character’s hands.

Once attained, the ecstatic state of frolah that arrives shortly after ingestion fills the user with a feeling of intense spiritual oneness. It also impels the user to total honesty for a twenty-four period. For this duration
the character’s Persuade and Rebuff styles become Forthright and Pure-Hearted. Unwelcome truths can’t remain unspoken; while gripped by frolah, the character can’t help but blurt them out.

**Indolent**

This personal goal allows the player to have fun playing a wild card and disrupting the rest of the group. The retronovel is a form of narrative entertainment delivered via an engineered retrovirus and experienced as a vivid, prolonged hallucination. Meant to be enjoyed while resting comfortably in a darkened room, retronovels feel like they’re happening to you. They stimulate autonomic responses and even make you think you’re eating and drinking as the character does. The experiencer can break from the waking dream before the dosage time elapses, but may confuse reality and fictional events of the retronovel if when he dozes off or lets attention lapse. (Moxy successes allow the experiencer to clear his head.)

**Greedy**

The urge to skim from the rest of the crew speaks for itself, and provides opportunities for inter-group betrayal and revelation.

**CLOSER**

Though your story might go somewhere else, the climactic moments of the Vine Festival offer your most dramatic setting for a final big scene. The final obstacle facing the characters could be any of the following:

- disgruntled rivals attacking or sabotaging them after they get the contract
- an enraged crowd rioting after offenses against the Vine faith, the Vintner’s Council mural, or other taboo-breaking, either by the PCs or their rivals
- Bef Hospitalk discovers their perfidy and sends goons to forcibly remove the contract from their hands

The ideal ending to any scenario in this setting consists of the crew fleeing the planet, narrowly escaping hostile ships. However, your player-driven storyline may naturally lead you to some other equally satisfying final scene.

**TAGLINES**

- You will enjoy being corrected on this crucial point.
- What you say is true, but I must object to the manner of its expression.
- Though not a medical doctor per se, I can’t help but wonder if you have succumbed to an infestation of mind parasites.
- During the Hutton Wars, my ancestors would surely have slain your ancestors.
- When I compare to you a Relixian eel, I naturally refer only to that creature’s best qualities.
- If you are running a cognitive enhancement chip, please inform the manufacturer that it is malfunctioning.
- Run! It’s a brainshark!
- You commit a grave heresy by even looking at it.
- That’s precisely that attitude that led to the Rebellion of Vrenk.
- I don’t care if it’s broken. Make it unbroken!
- I am philosophically exempt from local laws.
- The problem surely lies with your instrumentation.
- Am I the first to perceive the flaws in this system?
- My sub-orbital rotation is legendary.
- This is not trespassing. I am here in response to an implicit invitation.
- I taste a full berry, with impertinent tannins and a hint of space flotsam.
- Allow me to revise my demands.
- I am writing a book on unmitigated hogwash, and will include your theory in it.
- Excuse me. During your lengthy comment, I became mentally absent.
- Such sentiments are common in the galaxy’s less refined quadrants.
- Please grant me pause while I run that statement through my anti-deception software.
- I did say that, but can be excused on the grounds of spontaneous hallucination.
- I covet that.
- I forgive your dullness.
- My lamentations will be heard as far as the Dureo Nebula.
- To use the technical term, this device is ass.
- You are clearly a socialist and/or robot.
- I’d happily comply, were it not for the eleventh protocol.
- I grow weary, and must slake my bodily desires.
- Later we will recall this misunderstanding and enjoy a merry laugh.
- If you pretend you didn’t say that, I’ll pretend I’m not carrying a force blade.
- It will take, at the very least, a leuketic nano-acid to remove this taste from my mouth.
As Interior Secretary, you oversee the federal department responsible for the country’s aboriginal peoples. Notable units of your portfolio include the National Park Service, Fish and Wildlife Service, Geological Survey, and Bureau of Indian Affairs. Interior Secretaries are rarely considered part of the President’s inner circle, and your experience in the Bierce administration has proven no different.

Collective Goal: Ensure the Senate confirmation of the President’s nominee as Secretary Of State, Francis Cross.

How You Fit In: A subordinate, Chief Alex Rogers of the United States Park Police, turned a strange shade of pale when Cross’ possible nomination was rumored in the press.

Personal Goal: Secure presidential pardon for political mentor Dalton Flask, now serving a five-year sentence for tax evasion.

General Abilities: Eavesdropping 6, Etiquette 4, Gossip 5, Knowledge 4 (Catholic Theology), Management 2, Mischief 2, Moxy 4, Perception 6, Performance (Media Appearance) 3, Wealth 2.
Persuade (Glib) 8

Trumps: Pure-Hearted

Is Trumped By: Obtuse

"Let me run that up the flagpole and see what organizational synergies come back down."

"It's only true if we admit it."

"Back home there's what we call a shooting-in-the-face offense. If you're making this a pissing match, you better stand back."

"If we don't do this, we'll not only look stupid. We'll be stupid."

Persuade (Charming) 9

Trumps: Wary

Is Trumped By: Contrary

"That tie makes you look ten years younger."

"Not to change the subject, but I hear Wonkette is considering you for its list of ten hottest cabinet appointees."

The Yes Wing

Persuade (Forthright) 7

Trumps: Obfuscatory

Is Trumped By: Lawyerly

"Mr. President, that's not in the constitution!"

"Consider that idea pre-rejected."

Persuade (Intimidating) 9

Trumps: Obtuse

Is Trumped By: Pure-Hearted

"If we don't do this, we'll not only look stupid. We'll be stupid."

"Back home, that's what we call a shooting-in-the-face offense."

"Let me run that up the flagpole and see what organizational synergies come back down."

The Yes Wing

Persuade (Eloquent) 7

Trumps: Contrary

Is Trumped By: Wary

"Can we stand by and let that happen, here in the land of our glorious forefathers?"

"The force of accumulated history and wisdom dictates but one course of action."

The Yes Wing

Persuade (Obfuscatory) 8

Trumps: Lawyerly

Is Trumped By: Penetrating

"Clearly you have forgotten chapter 5, section 803."

"Consider that idea pre-rejected."

The Yes Wing

Persuade (Charismatic) 9

Trumps: Wary

Is Trumped By: Contrary

"That tie makes you look ten years younger."

"Not to change the subject, but I hear Wonkette is considering you for its list of ten hottest cabinet appointees."

The Yes Wing

Persuade (Eloquent) 7

Trumps: Contrary

Is Trumped By: Wary

"Can we stand by and let that happen, here in the land of our glorious forefathers?"

"The force of accumulated history and wisdom dictates but one course of action."

The Yes Wing

Persuade (Intimidating) 9

Trumps: Obtuse

Is Trumped By: Pure-Hearted

"If you're making this a pissing match, you better stand back."

"Back home, that's what we call a shooting-in-the-face offense."

"Let me run that up the flagpole and see what organizational synergies come back down."

The Yes Wing
**Rebuff** 6 (Pure-Hearted)
**Trumps:** Intimidating
**Is Trumped By:** Glib
“But that would be wrong!”

**Rebuff** 6 (Contrary)
**Trumps:** Charming
**Is Trumped By:** Eloquent
“No offense, but the Devil’s Advocate’s in me and it’s got to come out.”

**Rebuff** 6 (Lawyerly)
**Trumps:** Forthright
**Is Trumped By:** Obfuscatory
“Sure, that would be great...if it weren’t for Farlow v. Tackett.”

**Rebuff** 6 (Penetrating)
**Trumps:** Obfuscatory
**Is Trumped By:** Forthright
“Did you know that 34% of all statistics are completely made up?”

**Rebuff** 6 (Wary)
**Trumps:** Eloquent
**Is Trumped By:** Charming
“The last time you said that, we nearly crashed the global economy.”

**Rebuff** 6 (Obtuse)
**Trumps:** Glib
**Is Trumped By:** Intimidating
“Golly, we haven’t had time to read all those documents!”
Resistances:
Arrogance 7, Avarice 4, Paranoia 2, Nitpicking 6, Spite 4, Showboating 1

Resistances:
Arrogance 4, Avarice 4, Paranoia 6, Nitpicking Ω, Spite 1, Showboating 2

Resistances:
Arrogance 1, Avarice 2, Paranoia 4, Nitpicking 4, Spite Ω, Showboating 6

Resistances:
Arrogance 3, Avarice 6, Paranoia 4, Nitpicking 1, Spite 2, Showboating Ω

Resistances:
Arrogance 2, Avarice Ω, Paranoia 1, Nitpicking 4, Spite 4, Showboating 4

Resistances:
Arrogance 6, Avarice 1, Paranoia Ω, Nitpicking 2, Spite 6, Showboating 4
Personal Goal: Become captain of the vessel The Indomitable.

Collective Goal: Prepare your becalmed pirate ship to successfully defend against impending attack by the privateer vessel The Indomitable.

You began your naval career as an honest quartermaster on an English ship. Mocking your name as “Timmy the Timid,” you were soon promoted to pilot. After some adventures as a common seaman, you were turned to piratical ends. Six years despoiled, rampage and slaughtered. It’s not always fun with them. By taking command you’ll have a little fun with them. You won’t hesitate to use your red-hot hatred of the scurvy sea dog because you’re well aware that it’s time to demand treatment as a man, taking part in an mutiny that stole power and position. When the old man died, you were appointed as his servant in France. Brought to Tortuga as a common seaman. Mocking your name as “Timmy the Timid,” you were soon promoted to pilot. After some adventures as a common seaman, your name was changed to “Hairy Tim,” you were turned to piratical ends. Six years despoiled, rampage and slaughtered. You left a wife and child in England due to your supposed habit of treating your Captain. After a while in the brothel, you finally succeeded in becoming Captain of your own ship, the Black Swan. By seizing command of the ship, you’ll be in charge of the floggings. There haven’t been nearly enough floggings. Of the ship, you’ll be in charge of the floggings. There haven’t been nearly enough floggings. You’ve taken a position aboard the vessel The Monkey Paw, and signed on aboard the vessel The Monkey Paw, at South Carolina and plundered six towns and killed 1,000 people. You’ve turned it to piratical ends. Six years despoiled, rampage and slaughtered. It’s not always fun with them. By taking command you’ll have a little fun with them. You won’t hesitate to use your red-hot hatred of the scurvy sea dog because you’re well aware that it’s time to demand treatment as a man, taking part in an mutiny that stole power and position. When the old man died, you were appointed as his servant in France. Brought to Tortuga as a common seaman. Mocking your name as “Timmy the Timid,” you were soon promoted to pilot. After some adventures as a common seaman, your name was changed to “Hairy Tim,” you were turned to piratical ends. Six years despoiled, rampage and slaughtered. You left a wife and child in England due to your supposed habit of treating your Captain. After a while in the brothel, you finally succeeded in becoming Captain of your own ship, the Black Swan. By seizing command of the ship, you’ll be in charge of the floggings. There haven’t been nearly enough floggings. Of the ship, you’ll be in charge of the floggings. There haven’t been nearly enough floggings. You’ve taken a position aboard the vessel The Monkey Paw, and signed on aboard the vessel The Monkey Paw, at South Carolina and plundered six towns and killed 1,000 people. You’ve turned it to piratical ends. Six years despoiled, rampage and slaughtered. It’s not always fun with them. By taking command you’ll have a little fun with them. You won’t hesitate to use your red-hot hatred of the scurvy sea dog because you’re well aware that it’s time to demand treatment as a man, taking part in an mutiny that stole power and position. When the old man died, you were appointed as his servant in France. Brought to Tortuga as a common seaman. Mocking your name as “Timmy the Timid,” you were soon promoted to pilot. After some adventures as a common seaman, your name was changed to “Hairy Tim,” you were turned to piratical ends. Six years despoiled, ramp
“Clearly you have not yet learned the lessons of the era.”

“Trust that I have thoroughly educated myself in such matters.”

“Dare you trample on the sacred freedoms of the pirate’s code?”

“Beneath our veneer or rapine and plunder, can one not hear the beating hearts of civilized men?”

“I will illustrate the point with a story about a dolphin, an octopus, and a lady’s bodice.”

“Though our contract was verbal, I hasten your attention to this written codicil, deemed valid in many pertinent jurisdictions.”

“The others will not say this, but even for a person trapped on a becalmed pirate ship, your hygiene is in many ways deficient.”

“We are united then, and need speak no further on it.”

“On a purely tangential note, my gleaming cutlass hungers for blood.”

“The last man who said that to me became a meal for the fishes.”
“Despite what my detractors say of me, I am deep down an honorable man!”

“Your argument is replete with misinterpretation.”

“Something smells fishy here. Other than the fish.”

“Mysteriously, you have omitted all reference to your true objective.”

“I attach very little importance to everything.”

“I have one or two days’ grace.”

“In one or two days, I will be sober again, at which point I will grant your offer the consideration it deserves.”

“Your argument is replete with misinterpretation.”

“Your argument is replete with misinterpretation.”

“Something smells fishy here. Other than the fish.”

“I attach very little importance to everything.”

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“In one or two days, I will be sober again, at which point I will grant your offer the consideration it deserves.”

“Your argument is replete with misinterpretation.”
Skulduggery & Crossbones

- Attack 7 (Strength)
  - Trumps: Parry
  - Is Trumped By: Vexation

- Attack 6 (Cunning)
  - Trumps: Intuition
  - Is Trumped By: Sure-Footedness

- Attack 7 (Speed)
  - Trumps: Dodge
  - Is Trumped By: Misdirection

- Attack 6 (Ferocity)
  - Trumps: Misdirection
  - Is Trumped By: Dodge

- Attack 8 (Cautious)
  - Trumps: Vexation
  - Is Trumped By: Parry

- Attack 8 (Finesse)
  - Trumps: Sure-Footedness
  - Is Trumped By: Cunning
Skulduggery & Crossbones

Defense 6 (Parry)
Trumped By: Caution
Trumps: Ferocity

Defense 6 (Sure-Footedness)
Trumped By: Speed
Trumps: Cunning

Defense 6 (Vexation)
Trumped By: Strength
Trumps: Finesse

Skulduggery & Crossbones

Defense 6 (Intuition)
Trumped By: Cunning
Trumps: Finesse

Defense 6 (Misdirection)
Trumped By: Speed
Trumps: Ferocity

Defense 6 (Fortitude)
Trumped By: Caution
Trumps: Finesse

Skulduggery & Crossbones

Defense 6 (Dodge)
Trumped By: Strength
Trumps: Speed
Key Trait: Gluttonous
Resistances:
Arrogant 6, Dissolute 4, Gluttonous 1, Greedy 4, Indolent 2, Spiteful Ω.

Key Trait: Greedy
Resistances:
Arrogant 2, Dissolute Ω, Gluttonous 3, Greedy 1, Indolent 6, Spiteful 4.

Key Trait: Indolent
Resistances:
Greedy 3, Indolent 1, Spiteful 2, Arrogant Ω, Dissolute 2, Gluttonous 6.

Key Trait: Spiteful
Resistances:
Arrogant 3, Dissolute 6, Gluttonous Ω, Greedy 2, Indolent 3, Spiteful 1.

Key Trait: Arrogant
Resistances:
Arrogant 1, Dissolute 3, Gluttonous 2, Greedy 5, Indolent Ω, Spiteful 6.

Key Trait: Dissolute
Resistances:
Arrogant 4, Dissolute 2, Gluttonous 6, Greedy 4, Indolent 5, Spiteful 3.
Alyssa Watson  
*The Popular Girl*

As head of the cheerleading squad and student council vice-president, few would doubt your status as most beautiful and popular girl at Luserville High. Yet one prize eludes your grasp—the acclaim due to the lead in the annual musical. Last year you got the lead even though you weren't a senior—and then were cruelly laid low by a case of mono. Now, in your senior year, you're about to rectify that—and let nothing and no one stand in your way.

**Collective Goal:** Stage Luserville High's threatened annual musical theater production, winning the usual standing ovation from the audience.

**Personal Goal:** Have the audience cheer louder for your bow than for anyone else's.

**Abilities:** Athletics 3, Craftsmanship (Costumes) 3, Eavesdropping 5, Etiquette 3, Gossip 3, Moxy 5, Perception 5, Performance (Acting) 2, Performance (Dancing) 5, Performance (Singing) 3, Wealth 4.

Tom Cleat  
*The Quarterback*

You have everyone else at Luserville High fooled, but you can't fool yourself. Sure, you're a star athlete, and devastatingly good-looking. But inside you've always felt that there's something missing in your life, a part of you that even you don't understand. You're lonely, and when you look in the mirror, you see a big phony. Maybe getting involved in the school play will shake you out of your funk and help you expand your boundaries.

**Collective Goal:** Stage Luserville High's threatened annual musical theater production, winning the usual standing ovation from the audience.

**Personal Goal:** Find true love with someone who understands you for who you really are.

**Abilities:** Athletics 6, Eavesdropping 1, Etiquette 2, Gambling 2, Gossip 1, Mechanic 2, Moxy 3, Perception 3, Performance (Acting) 2, Performance (Dancing) 2, Performance (Singing) 2.

Jayne Bates  
*The Wallflower*

You've always been shy and awkward, but deep down you think you might maybe be capable of blooming into, well, someone other than the pitiful klutz everyone at Luserville High sees you as. Maybe if you were able to speak up for yourself, that self-centered airhead Tom Cleat wouldn't have led you on all last year. He pretended he was interested, but when you gathered up the courage to talk to him, he clammed up and gave you the brushoff. The school play will give you a chance to break through your shell—and make him wish he'd never broken your heart.

**Collective Goal:** Stage Luserville High's threatened annual musical theater production, winning the usual standing ovation from the audience.

**Personal Goal:** Get back at Tom Cleat for toying with your affections.

**Abilities:** Athletics 5, Craftsmanship (Photography) 5, Eavesdropping 6, Etiquette 3, Gossip 6, Moxy 3, Perception 4, Performance (Acting) 4, Performance (Dancing) 1, Performance (Singing) 6.

Darin Hemner  
*The Flamboyant One*

As soon as the school year ends, you're packing up your scarf and your dance belt and hopping on a bus for New York, New York. Maybe you'll audition for American Idol, or possibly one of those dance shows. Though never afraid to be out and proud, you'll still be happy to put Luserville and its small-town attitudes behind you. But if knocking them dead in the school auditorium wins you a leg up in your insatiable quest for fame, that's cool, too.

**Collective Goal:** Stage Luserville High's threatened annual musical theater production, winning the usual standing ovation from the audience.

**Personal Goal:** Get noticed by a talent scout.

**Abilities:** Athletics 5, Craftsmanship (Costumes) 5, Eavesdropping 2, Etiquette 2, Gossip 4, Mischief 2, Moxy 6, Perception 3, Performance (Acting) 3, Performance (Dancing) 5, Performance (Singing) 3, Stealth 2, Wealth 2.

Carita Blackburn  
*The Goth Chick*

School musicals are stupid, and so are everyone in them, because they're so fricking sincere and there are never any vampires in them. But when that stuck-up preppie bitch Alyssa Watson reduced your friend Morgana to tears by picking on her all-black look and genuine antique Victorian parasol, you decided to take the dark vengeance of the night. You'll audition for the stupid play and outshine her in every way.

**Collective Goal:** Stage Luserville High's threatened annual musical theater production, winning the usual standing ovation from the audience.

**Personal Goal:** Get back at Alyssa Watson for being mean to your friends.

**Abilities:** Craftsmanship (Jewelry) 3, Eavesdropping 5, Etiquette 2, Gossip 6, Mischief 4, Moxy 5, Perception 4, Performance (Acting) 6, Performance (Dancing) 2, Performance (Singing) 3, Stealth 3.

Terrell Jerome  
*The Outlaw*

You only recently arrived in Luserville, where you've come to live with your aunt after getting into bad trouble in the big city. Moving away from your running buddies was part of the deal your lawyer made to get your probation on burglary and gun charges. Life isn't easy at Luserville; the guys hate the way the girls look at you. All of them want to prove themselves against you, when all you want is to be left alone. And now your probation officer, Ivan Fembly, is pushing you harder to show you've changed.

**Collective Goal:** Stage Luserville High's threatened annual musical theater production, winning the usual standing ovation from the audience.

**Personal Goal:** Get your probation officer off your back.

**Abilities:** Athletics 5, Gambling 4, Mechanic 3, Mischief 4, Moxy 6, Perception 5, Performance (Acting) 2, Performance (Dancing) 4, Performance (Singing) 3, Stealth 5.
"Are you going to look yourself in the mirror tomorrow and see the face of a quitter? Or is this show going to go on?"

"Is this show to be, or not to be? Because, like, that totally is the question."

"You want the truth? I'll give you some truth."

"Like my grandma used to say, it's always darkest before you get run over by a train."

"You want the truth? I'll give you some truth."

"Before you get run over by a train, like my grandma used to say, it's always darkest.

"You want the truth? I'll give you some truth."

"Is this show to be, or not to be? Because, like, show Bjork to go on."

"Are you going to look yourself in the mirror tomorrow and see the face of a quitter? Or this show, it's better for you to let me take credit."

"Is Trumped By Pure-Hearted

"Is Trumped By Lawyerly

"Is Trumped By Penetrating

"Is Trumped By Charming

"Is Trumped By Wary

"Is Trumped By Contrary

"Is Trumped By Obtuse

"Is Trumped By Glib

"Is Trumped By Linguistic

"Is Trumped By Persuasive (Charming) 8

"Is Trumped By Persuasive (Obfuscatory) 7

"Is Trumped By Persuasive (Intimidating) 9

"Is Trumped By Persuasive (Forthright) 7

"Is Trumped By Persuasive (Glib) 8

"Is Trumped By Persuasive (Penetrating) 7

"Is Trumped By Persuasive (Obfuscatory) 7

"Is Trumped By Persuasive (Linguistic) 8

"Is Trumped By Persuasive (Charming) 8

"Is Trumped By Persuasive (Wary) 9

"Is Trumped By Persuasive (Contrary) 9

"Is Trumped By Persuasive (Obfuscatory) 9

"Is Trumped By Persuasive (Forthright) 9

"Is Trumped By Persuasive (Glib) 9
Rebuff 6 (Pure-Hearted)
Trumps: Charming
Is Trumped By: Elloquent
“Yeah, but all perception is subjectively filtered through our brains, so who’s to say, ‘right’?”

Rebuff 6 (Lawyerly)
Trumps: Forthright
Is Trumped By: Obfuscatory
“Spoken like someone who has not read the full text of the school’s conduct manual.”

Rebuff 6 (Observe)
Trumps: Elloquent
Is Trumped By: Charming
“I’m sorry. Was I supposed to be paying attention?”

Rebuff 6 (Wary)
Trumps: Eloquent
Is Trumped By: Charming
“I just can’t trust someone who wears a jacket like that.”

Rebuff 6 (Obtuse)
Trumps: Glib
Is Trumped By: Intimidating
“I bet that argument works all the time on people who aren’t really listening.”

Rebuff 6 (Contrary)
Trumps: Charming
Is Trumped By: Elloquent
“But that’s something only a horrible person would say.”

Rebuff 6 (Penetrating)
Trumps: Intimidating
Is Trumped By: Elloquent
“Yeah, but all perception is subjectively filtered through our brains, so who’s to say, ‘right’?”
Relationships:
Gary Cottle, School Principal 2
Jennifer Jurado, Music Teacher 4
Brittany Davison, School Paper Editor 3

Relationships:
Chelsea Burns, Class Gossip 2
Cody Yamamoto, Lord of the Stoners 4
Josh Mandell, Media Club President 3

Relationships:
Jennifer Jurado, Music Teacher 4
Cody Yamamoto, Lord of the Stoners 3
Josh Mandell, Media Club President 3

Relationships:
Jennifer Jurado, Music Teacher 2
Chelsea Burns, Class Gossip 4
Josh Mandell, Media Club President 3
Key Trait: Stuck-Up
Resistances: Horny 1, Lazy 3, Nitpicking 2, Partying 2, Show-Off 3, Stuck-Up 1

Key Trait: Horny
Resistances: Horny 3, Lazy 1, Nitpicking 1, Partying 3, Show-Off 3, Stuck-Up 4

Key Trait: Lazy
Resistances: Horny 3, Lazy 6, Nitpicking 1, Partying 2, Show-Off 2, Stuck-Up 3

Key Trait: Nitpicky
Resistances: Horny 3, Lazy 5, Nitpicking 1, Partying 4, Show-Off 3, Stuck-Up 6

Key Trait: Partying
Resistances: Horny 4, Lazy 5, Nitpicking 3, Partying 6, Show-Off 4, Stuck-Up 6

Key Trait: Show-Off
Resistances: Horny 4, Lazy 5, Nitpicking 6, Partying 3, Show-Off 1, Stuck-Up 2

Key Trait: Stuck-Up
Resistances: Horny 4, Lazy 6, Nitpicking 4, Partying 1, Show-Off 2, Stuck-Up 1

Casting Call
Collective Goal: Secure a monopoly on the interstellar sale of Silurian jump wine.

General Abilities:
- Appraisal 1, Athletics 5, Eavesdropping 2, General Abilities.

Collective Goal: Secure a monopoly soon, the ship will be reclaimed by the Raktari, regarded. You know that unless you manage the ship's cash flow and keep the accounts, you risk losing all that you have invested in this venture. You manage the ship's cash flow and keep the accounts through the ship's books, a trusted officer. You keep the ship's records, a trusted officer. Your job is to keep the ship's records, a trusted officer.

On shore, you are the team's bodyguard, providing physical protection when trade disputes threaten to turn violent. On occasion, you might even be asked to initiate aggressive measures, whether scaring off rivals, intervening in local disputes, or strong-arming on behalf of suppliers or clients. You support the ship's trade mission by securing profitable trade arrangements. You hammer out the fine print. You are likewise conversant in the interstellar laws and regulations concerning warfare, piracy, and ship-to-ship maneuvering. You protect the ship from harm. You also manage the ship's cash flow and keep the accounts through the ship's books, a trusted officer. You keep the ship's records, a trusted officer.

On or off the ship, you keep the ship's books, a trusted officer. In battle with other ships, you man the firing array, a trusted officer. You keep the ship's armsman. In battle with other ships, you man the firing array, a trusted officer. On shore, you are the ship's bodyguard, providing physical protection when trade disputes threaten to turn violent. On occasion, you might even be asked to initiate aggressive measures, whether scaring off rivals, intervening in local disputes, or strong-arming on behalf of suppliers or clients. You support the ship's trade mission by securing profitable trade arrangements. You hammer out the fine print. You are likewise conversant in the interstellar laws and regulations concerning warfare, piracy, and ship-to-ship maneuvering. You protect the ship from harm. You also manage the ship's cash flow and keep the accounts through the ship's books, a trusted officer. You keep the ship's records, a trusted officer.

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Persuade (Glib) 8
Trumps: Pure-Hearted
Is Trumped By: Obtuse
“I wish merely to observe the whirligig of humanity.”
“Good faith is the essential grease of commerce.”

Persuade (Eloquent) 7
Trumps: Contrary
Is Trumped By: Wary
“Yours is a name held in high esteem throughout the five quadrants.”
“Enlightened men, having learned the dark lessons of the Hutton Wars, regard a taste for vengeance as a mere historical curiosity.”

Persuade (Obfuscatory) 8
Trumps: Lawyerly
Is Trumped By: Penetrating
“You have wholly forfeited your right of Astlaar, and therefore must relent.”
“Your lapse lies in a failure to read my psychic resonance.”

Persuade (Forthright) 7
Trumps: Penetrating
Is Trumped By: Lawyerly
“Conclude your shilly-shallying!”
“Let’s begin by admitting that we each intend to cheat the other.”

Persuade (Charming) 9
Trumps: Wary
Is Trumped By: Contrary
“I will struggle to keep up with your brilliant discourse.”
“This reminds me of an amusing anecdote concerning the Princess Virah and a ewux.”

Persuade (Intimidating) 9
Trumps: Obtuse
Is Trumped By: Pure-Hearted
“Yield, or face the wrath of a thousand suns!”
“I spend much of my time modulating the edge frequency of this force blade.”
"I grant you that we live in a cynical age, but surely mercy has not been completely extinguished!"

"I have forgotten the crux of our disagreement. Let us drink."

"I don’t know what you’re talking about, and, more fatally, neither do you."

"I repent you logic as an unfortunate by-product of the Kessik Paradox."

"Out of concern for your intellectual welfare, I will correct that logical fallacy."

"Your argument is undermined by the suspicious twitching of your left eyebrow."

"I grant that we live in a cynical age, but surely mercy has not been completely extinguished!"

"I repent you logic as an unfortunate by-product of the Kessik Paradox."

"Out of concern for your intellectual welfare, I will correct that logical fallacy."

"Your argument is undermined by the suspicious twitching of your left eyebrow."

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"Out of concern for your intellectual welfare, I will correct that logical fallacy."

"Your argument is undermined by the suspicious twitching of your left eyebrow."
Attack 8 (Caution)
Trumps: Vexation
Is Trumped By: Parry

Attack 6 (Finesse)
Trumps: Sure-Footedness
Is Trumped By: Cunning

Attack 8 (Strength)
Trumps: Parry
Is Trumped By: Vexation

Attack 7 (Cunning)
Trumps: Intuition
Is Trumped By: Sure-Footedness

Attack 6 (Speed)
Trumps: Dodge
Is Trumped By: Misdirection

Attack 7 (Ferocity)
Trumps: Misdirection
Is Trumped By: Dodge
Key Trait: Show-Offy
Resistances: Avarice 4, Dissipation 2, Indolence 4, Lust Ω, Nitpicking 6, Showboating 1
Personal Goal: Be crowned as Grape King / Queen at the annual harvest festival.

Key Trait: Indolent
Resistances: Avarice 4, Dissipation 6, Indolence 1, Lust 4, Nitpicking Ω, Showboating 2
Personal Goal: Experience the legendary state of consciousness known as frolah, brought on by overindulgence in the questionably legal Silurian wine derivative called p/g418a.

Key Trait: Greedy
Resistances: Avarice 1, Dissipation Ω, Indolence 4, Lust 6, Nitpicking 2, Showboating 4
Personal Goal: Set up a secret arrangement allowing you to skim at least 10% of the revenues of the group’s hoped-for Silurian wine monopoly, overtly denying you your share of the revenues allowing you to skim at least 10% of the revenues.

Key Trait: Libidinous
Resistances: Avarice 2, Dissipation 4, Indolence Ω, Lust 1, Nitpicking 4, Showboating Ω
Personal Goal: Bed, as the character’s sexual preferences suggest, either Dwenp, the handsome son, or Lwala, the nubile daughter, of Vintner’s Council President Bef Hospitalk.

Key Trait: Dissolute
Resistances: Avarice Ω, Dissipation 1, Indolence 4, Lust 2, Nitpicking 4, Showboating 4
Personal Goal: Experience the legendary state of consciousness known as frolah, brought on by overindulgence in the questionably legal Silurian wine derivative called p/g418a.

Key Trait: Nitpicky
Resistances: Avarice 6, Dissipation 4, Indolence 2, Lust 3, Nitpicking 4, Showboating Ω
Personal Goal: Arrange for and supervise the repainting of a mural on the Vintner’s Council headquarters, unfairly depicting a raid conducted on a manor on the Vintner’s Council headquarter’s property during the Hutton Wars, your ancestor Ithion during the Hutton Wars.

If Space Permits
## APPENDICES

### Randomized Styles

Use this chart to randomly roll a Persuade, Rebuff, Attack or Defense style for a character in need of one.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Die Roll</th>
<th>Persuade</th>
<th>Rebuff</th>
<th>Attack</th>
<th>Defense</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Glib</td>
<td>Pure-Hearted</td>
<td>Strength</td>
<td>Dodge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Eloquent</td>
<td>Contrary</td>
<td>Speed</td>
<td>Parry</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Obfuscatory</td>
<td>Lawyerly</td>
<td>Finesse</td>
<td>Sure-Footedness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Forthright</td>
<td>Penetrating</td>
<td>Cunning</td>
<td>Intuition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Charming</td>
<td>Wary</td>
<td>Ferocity</td>
<td>MisdIRECTION</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Intimidating</td>
<td>Obtuse</td>
<td>Caution</td>
<td>Vexation</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Success/Failure

- **Failure (1-3)**
  - 1. Dismal: Pay three points to reroll
  - 2. Routine
  - 3. Exasperating: Gain a boon token

- **Success (4-6)**
  - 4. Hair’s Breadth: Gain a levy token
  - 5. Ordinary
  - 6. Impressive: Costs three points to counter

### Pooled Effort

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Character’s Individual Failure</th>
<th>Group Result: Success</th>
<th>Group Result: Failure</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dismal</td>
<td>1 injury</td>
<td>2 injuries</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Routine</td>
<td>No injury</td>
<td>1 injury</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exasperating</td>
<td>No injury</td>
<td>No injury</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Verbal Trumps

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TRUMPS</th>
<th>Is TRUMPED By</th>
<th>TRUMPS</th>
<th>Is TRUMPED By</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Glib</td>
<td>Pure-Hearted</td>
<td>Intimidating</td>
<td>Glib</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eloquent</td>
<td>Contrary</td>
<td>Charming</td>
<td>Eloquent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Obfuscatory</td>
<td>Lawyerly</td>
<td>Forthright</td>
<td>Obfuscatory</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Forthright</td>
<td>Penetrating</td>
<td>Lawyerly</td>
<td>Forthright</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Charming</td>
<td>Wary</td>
<td>Charming</td>
<td>Eloquent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intimidating</td>
<td>Obtuse</td>
<td>Glib</td>
<td>Intimidating</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Combat Trumps

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Style</th>
<th>Trumps</th>
<th>Is Trumped By</th>
<th>Style</th>
<th>Trumps</th>
<th>Is Trumped By</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Parry</td>
<td>Caution</td>
<td>Strength</td>
<td>Vexation</td>
<td>Parry</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dodge</td>
<td>Finesse</td>
<td>Speed</td>
<td>MisdIRECTION</td>
<td>Dodge</td>
<td>MisdIRECTION</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sure-Footedness</td>
<td>Cunning</td>
<td>Finesse</td>
<td>Intuition</td>
<td>Sure-Footedness</td>
<td>Intuition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intuition</td>
<td>Finesse</td>
<td>Cunning</td>
<td>Sure-Footedness</td>
<td>Intuition</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MisdIRECTION</td>
<td>Speed</td>
<td>Ferocity</td>
<td>Speed</td>
<td>Dodge</td>
<td>MisdIRECTION</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vexation</td>
<td>Strength</td>
<td>Caution</td>
<td>Strength</td>
<td>Parry</td>
<td>Vexation</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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