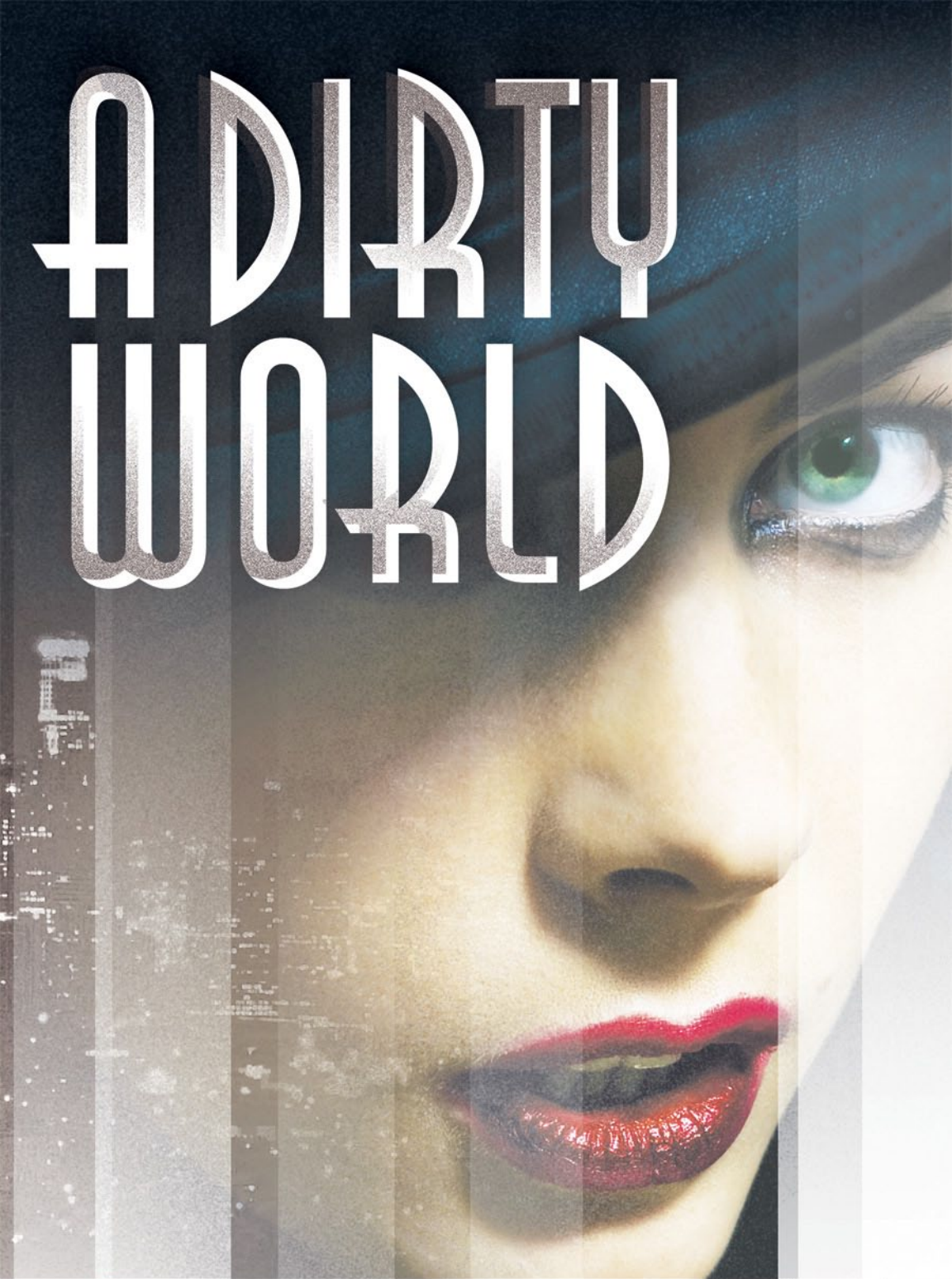


A DIRTY WORLD



Greg
Stolze



A DIRTY WORLD

Greg
Stolze

This book is dedicated to the memory of Thomas Manning.
He was a good gamer, a better artist, and my close friend.

I miss him.

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TWO MONTHS AGO SHE WALKED INTO MY OFFICE IN BOSTON, PUT THAT LITTLE CHIN IN THE AIR AND ASKED ME TO FIND HER FATHER. TODAY WE'RE IN PHILADELPHIA, IN A GRAVEYARD.

Two years ago, I wanted to disappear and never be found.

It was after the war, two years ago, I'd made some enemies and not many friends. I was an MP. Traded in one set of initials for another, became a PI. I don't carry a gun, don't look for trouble. Cheating spouses and missing persons put food on my table.

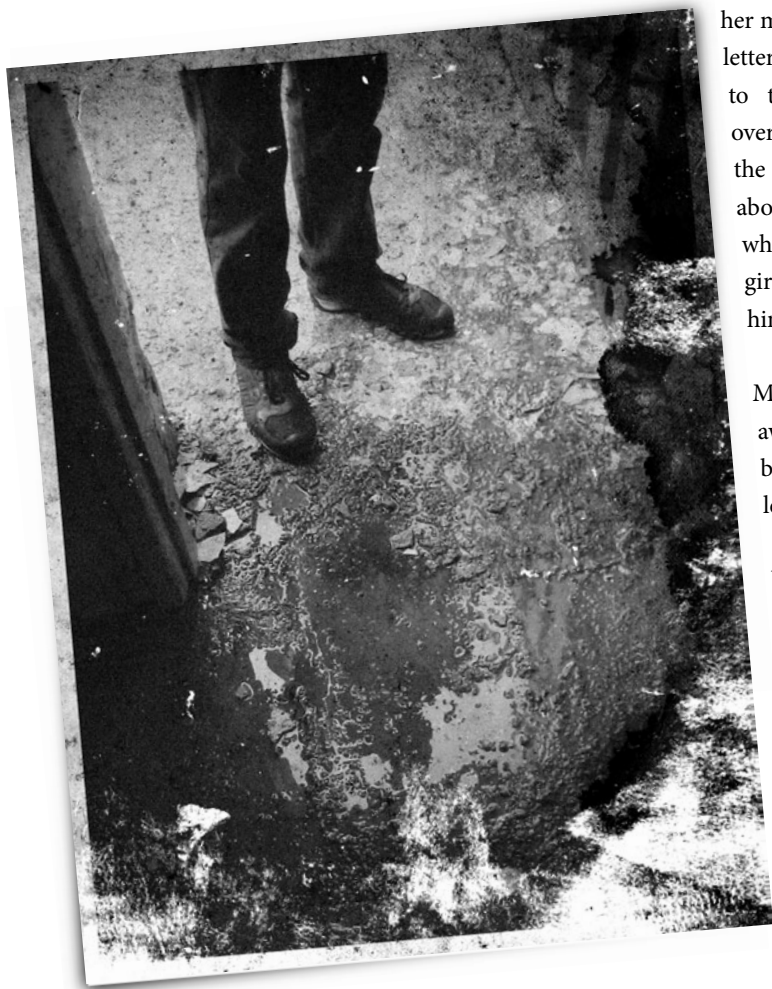
She had a missing person, two months ago. Ian Muldoon, the dad she never knew.

Her mom told her every rotten thing you could think of — Muldoon was no good, a cheat, a bum, ran out when she got pregnant. Her nicest word for him was 'boxer.' My client hinted to me, that her mom had hinted to her about being raped.

Only it wasn't true. After her mom died, she found the letters. Ian Muldoon, writing to the mom, apologizing over and over, referring to the money he sent, asking about the baby, was it okay, what was its name, boy or girl, could she at least tell him it was healthy?

"I'll keep my promise," Muldoon wrote. "I'll stay away until you let me back. But please, please let me back."

Her mom must have been some tough piece of work. So I had 'Ian Muldoon,' the name. I had a photograph — bulky kid, cocky smile, gloves up like Sullivan,



but the eyes confused and hurt. I had 'boxer,' started in Boston. Letters postmarked D.C., jokes about maybe boxing for the president, then New York, then nothing.

She came in two months ago and said, "I want to know what happened," and that chin, fragile and defiant, any decent man would half fall in love seeing that. Just for a moment.

Two years ago, I was getting letters too. My mother, father, sister... I didn't write back. I was some tough piece of work.

I went to D.C., talked to boxers, heard about Muldoon – a withstander, slow, solid counterpunch to the gut but really all he could do was last. No flash, no flair, just a chump who could promise at least three rounds, no matter how much punishment the other guy dished up.

No one in New York had heard about Ian Muldoon, but they knew 'Mully,' a thick guy who could take a beating. Quiet type, kept to himself.

Five years ago, the letters stopped coming to my client's mom. Five years ago I was in the Fatherland. I had to shoot a U.S. soldier who wouldn't come peacefully. He lived, was acquitted of raping some thirteen-year-old fraulien, but got twenty years for assaulting an officer.

Two years ago, my client's mama got sick, died. Two months ago, my client found the letters while cleaning out the attic. Today, we've finally found the grave site the old cut man showed me.

"He didn't give up on you," I say. I went through those letters, each one like a punch to the ribs. In New York they were dumber than in D.C. By the time he wrote about trying his luck elsewhere, he couldn't spell 'Philadelphia.'

"He had a manager, but I couldn't find the guy," I say. "Everyone else just called him 'mumbles.'" I show her the picture. A vacant lot of a face, all the pieces in the right places but so pounded and leathered by gloves and canvas that it wasn't quite human. Like a bad painting of an ugly man. Only the eyes are the same, wounded and baffled.

The tombstone says, I'M IN PHILADELPHIA, AND IT'S RAINING.

"That's all he could remember, at the end," I say. I don't tell her about the other letters, the ones her mother wrote. Maybe that tombstone's enough. If she's still lost, needs to push harder, I'll bring them out. I hope I don't have to.

In Germany I saw a man shot by a firing squad for stealing a teapot. He lifted his chin at the end. My client lifts hers, graceful as a sculpture, and looks at me.

She has her father's eyes.

ORE NOIR

FILM NOIR. EVERYONE SEEMS TO RECOGNIZE IT WHEN THEY SEE IT, BUT NOT EVERYONE CAN ARTICULATE WHAT IT *IS*. THAT'S NO BIG SURPRISE, SINCE THE PHRASE MEANS DIFFERENT THINGS TO DIFFERENT PEOPLE. I FIND THAT APT, ALMOST CONSOLING, BECAUSE A BIG PART OF NOIR IS AMBIGUITY.

There's more to noir than fedoras, cigarettes, detectives with whiskey in the file cabinet and patterned light thrown through venetian blinds. All those are the signs and signifiers, but not the thing itself.

What the rain-slicked streets and purposeful shadows indicate is fundamental uncertainty. Who's on your side? Who's going to betray you? Who killed the girl, and how? Where's the statue and why is it so important? Noir is all about mysteries and uncertainty and when you get to the passionate core that motivated all the ugliness and pain, it's never something simple. At its core, noir means corruption and temptation and redemption and anguished decisions.

The world of noir is dark, uncertain and ill.

It's a dirty world.

The idea of this game is not to present a setting with the noir trappings, but rather to present rules that facilitate stories about betrayed trust, corroded virtue, easy evil and rare, difficult justice. In it, players enact the roles of people with something to hide and something to lose. They come into conflict with mysteries, outside forces, and often each other. Perhaps they reach a resolution you could call 'right' if you squint from its good side. Perhaps the mystery never unravels and they have to walk off into the shadows unsatisfied. Perhaps when they reach the core it's writhing with the most human kind of rot, and all they can do is turn away in despair.





"A WHAT PLAYING GAME?"

My educated guess is that most people who read this are gamers and know exactly what they have. But if you're unfamiliar with gaming and want to know what it's about, I'll refer you to an online article written with absolute beginners in mind. You can find it at <http://www.gregstolze.com/HowtoPlay.zip> along with a lot of other game-oriented material.

HOW THE CHARACTER SHEET WORKS

“THIS IS A DIFFERENT KIND OF GAME. THERE’S NO BOARD, OTHER THAN YOUR IMAGINATION...” MOST EXPLANATIONS OF ROLEPLAYING GAMES HAUL OUT THAT OLD MOTTO. I’VE WRITTEN IT MYSELF SEVERAL TIMES. BUT THINKING THINGS OVER, THERE *IS* A BOARD FOR THIS GAME, AND IT’S YOUR CHARACTER SHEET.

Your character sheet (there’s a blank one on page 70) records how well your character does certain things and what his current abilities are. In most games, there are a few traits that fluctuate during the course of a game session – how close your character is to death, how many bullets remain in his gun, how close to exhaustion he is and so forth. But most traits only improve very slowly. *A Dirty World* is different. In this game, your abilities can change from scene to scene, tracking the alterations in your character’s mood, condition and circumstances. Instead of a vague gauge of his skill at fist fighting or telling lies, your traits reflect how good he is at it *right now*.

There are two kinds of traits on your character sheet: **Identities** and **Qualities**. An Identity is an essential element of who your character is. Every action you take involves an Identity. Qualities are narrower and more volatile. While an Identity may change two or three times every couple of sessions, Qualities are probably going to change in just about every scene. All Qualities and all Identities are rated from 1-5.

There are also spaces for **Specialties**. Where the Qualities are vague, and the Identities are even *more* vague, Specialties are painstakingly specific. Don’t worry about them for now: The Identities and Qualities are what you’re going to use almost all the time.

Identities and Qualities both come in pairs, lying along a continuum. One obvious example is Purity and Corruption. If you look on the character sheet you see them as lines of circles, one above the other.

PURITY



CORRUPTION

Very few people are completely pure or totally corrupt. Someone who’s average has a rating of two in both Qualities. On the character sheet, that’s represented by filling in circles.

PURITY



CORRUPTION

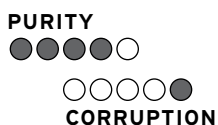


COMBAT POTENTIAL

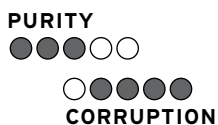
You've got a little box labeled "Combat Potential" on your character sheet. Keep this current. It's equal to the sum total of Vigor, Grace, Wrath and Courage, and it's a general measure of how much bad news you bring to any given brawl. When you try to attack someone with a higher Combat Potential, you roll Courage. When you try to attack someone with a lower Combat Potential, you roll Wrath.

The exception to this rule is when one person is better armed. A knife or a club trumps bare fists, and a gun trumps a hand weapon. Thus, if you have a gun and she doesn't, Combat Potential doesn't matter: You roll Wrath, she rolls Courage.

Someone who is exceptionally pure is very good at tasks where being a generally decent human being is an advantage. He might have a chart like this.



Qualities on the same line *limit each other*. Someone with Purity 5 can't have Corruption higher than 2. That's what the overlapping circles are for. If you have Purity 3 Corruption 4, you can see that the line is filled up and you can't gain more of either without losing its contrary.

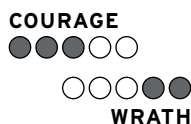


Always fill in circles and mark lines in pencil. Qualities and even Identities can move around a lot. In the course of a game, there are three ways these traits can change.

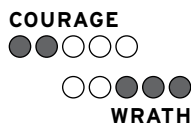
First off, they can simply decrease. If someone hits you hard, you might lose a dot of Courage. You erase it off your sheet and hope he doesn't hit you again. The mechanics of losing your Identities and Qualities is covered under "Conflict," starting on page 41.

Secondly, they can increase. If you make a significant discovery, your reward is gaining a point of Demonstration. You can find more about improving Qualities and Identities under "Swift Justice" on page 33.

Thirdly, and most commonly, they can **slide**. When you slide a quality, it means the allocation of dots on the line changes, but the number of dots stays constant. For example, suppose your character gets struck in a brawl. It's not a serious blow, but it stings. Under the rules, this means your slide a dot from Courage to Wrath. So if you had Courage 3 Wrath 2 before...



...when you get slapped, you have to slide to the right, ending up with Courage 2 Wrath 3, like this.



There are times when it's helpful to have more Courage and times when Wrath is the right tool for the job. To understand this, you have to read the Quality descriptions.

Qualities and Identities never go above 5, and each half of a pair limits the potential of the other half. Simple really: You can't be really generous *and* really selfish at the same time, though it's typical to have elements of both in your personality. If a slide would push a trait over five, it acts as if that dot was simply lost, instead. For example, a character with...

SPECIALTIES

Qualities and Identities are used for just about everything that just about anybody can do. Specialties are for things that most people don't even know enough to attempt. Nobody's going to defuse an A-bomb, pilot a B-52, translate hieroglyphics or perform an appendectomy without training.

If you want your character to have some narrow expertise like that, buy it as a Specialty. It's basically a permission to attempt rolls for something that's normally outside the pale. It doesn't add any dice or reduce penalties or anything, but if you buy 'Pilot' as a Specialty, you can fly planes.

There are gray zones with this. For example, German, Spanish and French are pretty common languages to learn, especially right after WWII. Does a character need a Specialty to speak Spanish? Up to the GM, really, depending on how the game's going and what's already established about the character. If the character has definitively shown he does **not** know a language, he can't pick it up later, unless the GM decides to let him get the Specialty somehow.

Similarly, many people can pick out a passable tune on the piano, change the oil in a car, or knock together an end table if they have the tools and materials. Specialties aren't required for that everyday level of skill. To play a concert at Carnegie, rebuild an engine from the ground up or make a living as a carpenter – for those, a character might need to specialize.

DEMONSTRATION



OBSERVATION

...is subjected to intellectual trickery that makes him overconfident, at the cost of open-mindedness. In game terms, the trick makes him slide an Observation dot to Demonstration. But since Demonstration

is already at maximum (meaning he's pretty pedantic and self-absorbed already) the Observation dot just vanishes.

DEMONSTRATION



OBSERVATION



WHAT TO ROLL AND HOW

A *DIRTY WORLD* IS BASED ON THE ONE ROLL ENGINE, IN WHICH YOU ROLL A COLLECTION OF TEN-SIDED DICE AND LOOK FOR MATCHING NUMBERS. THE NUMBER OF DICE YOU ROLL IS CALLED A **POOL** AND IT'S USUALLY COMPOSED OF ONE IDENTITY AND ONE QUALITY. EXTRA DICE CAN BE ADDED FOR SITUATIONAL ADVANTAGES SUCH AS SECRETS, WEAPONS AND SURPRISES.

When you roll, you look for **sets**, which are just dice whose numbers match. Each set has **Width**, which is how many dice turned up that number. Each set also has **Height**, which shows the number which turned up. Sets are noted down as Width X Height, as shown below.

Example: I roll five dice and get 1,3,6,7,10. I have no sets. I roll again and get 3,3,3,6,6.

That gives me two sets. One is a set of three threes, or 3x3, and the other is a pair of sixes, 2x6.

Width shows how quickly and intensely something happens. Height indicates how much circumstance favors the action, or how difficult it is to stop.

SIMPLE ACTIONS

Simple actions are those where there isn't active, adapting resistance to the action, but there's still an obstacle to overcome. Examples would include climbing a wall, building a zip gun, digging a grave without getting exhausted, or searching a room for a hidden letter. For these, you simply roll an appropriate pool. If any set at all comes up, the attempt succeeded.

CONTESTED ACTIONS

Contested actions are those where someone is trying to stop you. For instance, someone's trying to cheat you out of your house through bogus legal maneuvering, and you take them to court to stop them. Or someone tries to swing a shovel into your face and you duck. Or someone wants to convince you of his honesty and goodwill and you want to know if he's on the level.

When a conflict of this sort arises, both parties roll the relevant pools. The person who's trying to act (the con man, the shovel man, the persuader) picks a set to use. The person on the receiving end picks a set as well, and those dice become **Gobble Dice**.

GOBBLE DICE

Gobble Dice cancel out the dice in other people's sets. If their set gets reduced to 1x, it's worthless – the action is completely foiled. Once a set is converted to Gobble Dice, the dice can be used separately, and the last one is just as useful as the first. This means that if the guy trying to hit you with a shovel has a buddy behind you with a pickaxe, you might be able to spend one Gobble Die to duck the shovel and one to dodge the pick. There are a few important restrictions on Gobble Dice, however.

The Gobbler has to be High enough. Gobble Dice can only mess with sets that are at their Height or lower. If you get a 4x4 and make it into Gobble Dice, it's not going to help you if the other fellow got a 2x8. There are enough Gobble Dice, but they're weak fours compared to his strong eights.

Sometimes, timing matters. In things like seeing through falsehood or arguing in front of a court, it doesn't really matter who 'goes first' and your 2x10 roll can give you enough Gobblers to wreck a 3x5 set. But in things like diving behind a wall before getting peppered by gunshots, quickness matters very much. In that case, the 2x10 is just too slow to protect from that 3x5.

Gobble Dice are powerful, but they're always reactive. They can never accomplish anything, only prevent accomplishment. But when someone's trying to 'accomplish' your demise, you want them.

DIFFICULTY

Some things are hard. Most simple actions have a default Difficulty of 1. Any roll whose Height beats or matches the Difficulty succeeds. Most of the time, then, any roll qualifies. But a more onerous task might have Difficulty 3. That means that x2 and x1 sets aren't good enough to get it done. If a task had Difficulty 10, only sets with a Height of ten could manage it. But by and large, Difficulties should be the exception, not the rule. If you're a GM, only put a Difficulty on when things are really tough, and even then never more than 5, maximum. Anything that would warrant Difficulty 6+ is probably hard enough that the player shouldn't bother to roll. See also "To Roll or Not Roll?" below.

GETTING FANCY

There are a couple things you can do to try and get more mileage out of your pool. Here are the rules for them.

CALLED SHOTS

A called shot is when you want to get a set of one *particular* Height and you don't want to leave it to chance. You might want to get a x10 set to make sure it's hard to defend against. Or you might want to get an x1 set so that you can say (technically) that you did it, while secretly hoping that the action fails.

If you want to specify a number, take your pool and drop one die out of it. Then take one of the dice that remains and set it on the number you want. Roll the rest. If a rolled die marries your set number, you've got the set you want. If you get a different set, you can use that instead, or not.

Example: Having engineered a terribly dangerous fire for his boss and daughter, Carl wants it to look really dramatic when he rescues them. So as he smashes down the door, he wants to get as meager a success as possible. His Vigorous Defiance pool is a meaty 9d, so he drops one out, sets one of the remaining dice to 1, and then rolls the 7d which remain. Getting 1,3,3,4,7,8,10, he can make a 2x1 set or, if he changes his mind, use the 2x3 set.

MULTIPLE ACTIONS

Sometimes you have a lot to do in a little time. (This is particularly true in physical fights.) If you want to try doing two things at once, you need two sets, and you need to pull them out with a penalty because your attention is split.

Knock a die out of your pool, roll, and look for multiple sets. If you get them, you can assign one to each actions.

Example: While assassinating a deputy District Attorney, Marco decides to shoot twice. Factoring in surprise, his weapon and his Graceful Wrath, Marco is rolling a 10d pool. To fire twice in the time it would usually take for one good shot, he drops a die, rolls 9d, and looks for two sets.

When I draw the gun on him, he squeals and puts up his hands. I step back a bit – both for range and because this guy has ‘self-pisser’ written all over him.

“(...)?” he asks, in some language that sounds like wind chimes.

“No Chinese,” I tell him. My boss speaks Chinese, Japanese, Korean too. They all sound alike to me, just like these losers all look alike. Or used to. I think I’m getting so I can see differences, but it doesn’t really matter. I’m just as happy to not know what they’re saying, frankly. That goes for my boss and his mustache buddies, too.

“(....)” I don’t need the language to know he’s pleading. He’s on his knees with his hands folded, like praying.

“Shut up,” I tell him. “Die with some dignity.” He begs some more.

“You don’t like it, you shouldn’t have crossed Mister Hoo.” I have to think the boss likes having a round-eyes torpedo. Even a strung-out one who can’t pick the ponies, but as long as I take out the trash like this, Hoo can always front me some junk and wipe out my losses. Forgive my debts.

“(...)!” Angry now. Time to end this.

I hear the snap and feel the twitch as he crumples, but there’s no acrid urine-stink. Sometimes people show courage in the strangest ways. Or maybe he just went before he left home.

If you want to do three actions, or more, simply keep yanking dice for each extra action and looking for more matches. If you want to try five actions at once, you take four dice out of your pool and look for five sets. (It ain't happening. Do the math.)

What if you want to do two *different* things at the same time? You use the smaller of the relevant pools, then penalize it normally.

Example: Hans is giving a speech at the union meeting and trying to inspire the workers to strike on principle. But at the same time, he's trying to score points with the shop steward's wife by subtly implying to her that he's more man than her husband. Inspiration from principle is Persuasive Purity, and Hans has 8d in that. But seduction is Persuasive Corruption, and he's only got 5d in that. So to do both at once, he takes his smaller pool, knocks a die out of it and rolls, looking for two sets. Getting a 2,2,6,6, he succeeds. If he'd rolled 3,3,7,9, he'd have to decide which he wanted more – uniting the proletariat, or uniting with Mrs. Steward when her husband's working late.

TAKING YOUR TIME

Picking a lock under pressure is Cunning Selfishness. Cracking a safe at your leisure is Patient Selfishness. But if your pool is low, you may want to increase your odds by taking your time to focus.

If you take twice as long to do something, you can add a die to your pool (or cancel out a penalty). If you take a round to get your footing before you throw a punch, you get that bonus die to your roll.

TO ROLL OR NOT ROLL?

You don't need to roll for everything. Don't make the mistake of thinking you do.

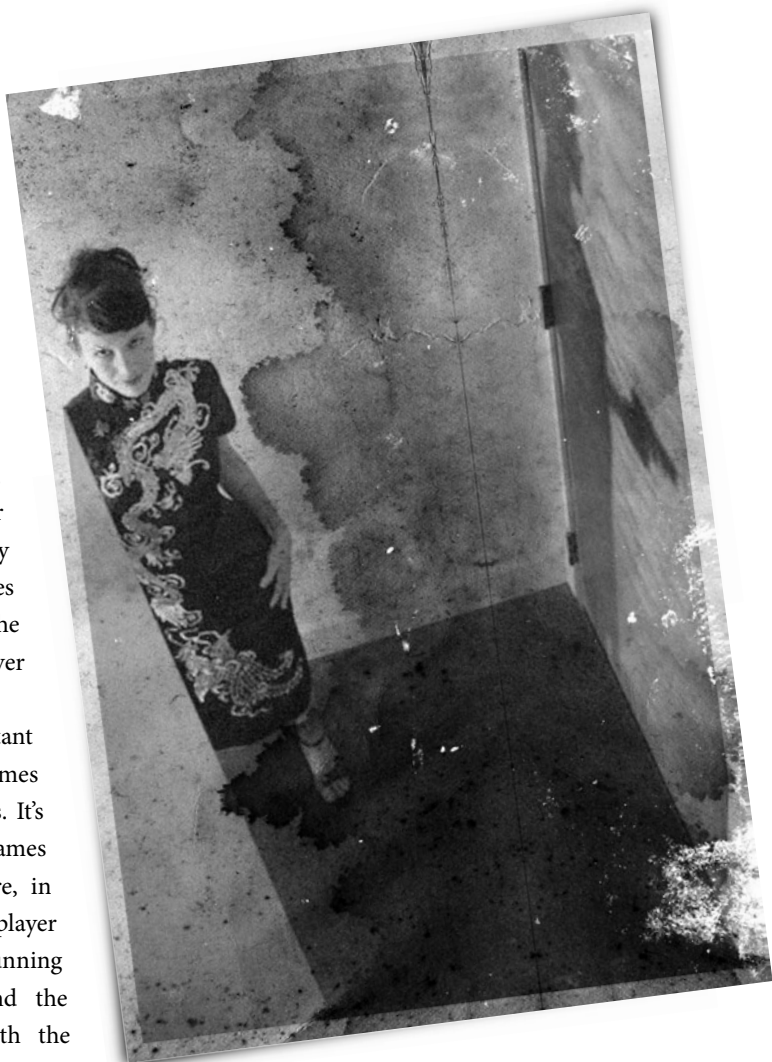
If an action is impossible, there's no point in rolling for it. No matter how big your Vigorous Defiance pool is, no one's tunneling through three feet of concrete overnight with just a spoon. It's impossible. No roll. Accept the automatic failure and move on.

Similarly, if an action is absurdly simple, no roll's required. Characters have basic competence and don't need to roll to make coffee, tie their shoes or pay the phone bill on time. It's an automatic success.

Rolls are only required when it's dramatic and engaging for the outcome to be in doubt. When characters are in conflict over deeply held beliefs, the dice should come out. When someone pulls a knife, or when the freedom of an innocent man hangs on a character's testimony, roll then.

If a character wants to seduce some unimportant minor character, and it has no relevance to the events at center stage? Let the player roll if he wants to let the dice decide whether he's going to play smug or frustrated. Otherwise, why not just let the player write it in? Particularly if the outcome reinforces the player's view of the character as suave lover man (or awkward loser).

A particularly important application of this idea comes up in the matter of clues. It's not uncommon for games to fall into a trap where, in order to progress, the player has to succeed at a Cunning Observation roll to find the dropped matchbook with the phone number on it. Don't you do it. What (exactly) is cool about the characters *not* finding the clue, and then bumbling around in frustration? Clues shouldn't depend on rolls, though sometimes a GM may want to let a successful roll pull *more* out of a clue than is apparent on the surface.



THE THREE IDENTITY PAIRS

NOW THAT YOU UNDERSTAND HOW AND WHEN YOU'RE ROLLING, IT'S TIME TO GET TO THE DETAILS OF *WHAT*. YOUR DICE POOL IS USUALLY AN IDENTITY AND A QUALITY. SINCE IDENTITIES ARE MORE CENTRAL, THEY COME FIRST

THERE ARE THREE PAIRS OF IDENTITIES, EACH OF WHICH HELPS OUT WITH CERTAIN TASKS. THE PAIRS ARE CONTRARY: EXCEPTIONAL GROWTH IN ONE LIMITS THE OTHER TO MERELY ORDINARY LEVELS. HOWEVER, NO IDENTITY CAN EVER EXCEED 5. AS MENTIONED EARLIER, IF A SLIDE WOULD PUSH AN IDENTITY OVER FIVE, THE DOT BEING PUSHED SIMPLY GETS DROPPED INSTEAD.

PATIENCE AND CUNNING: THE MENTAL IDENTITIES

This is the continuum that represents how intelligent your character is, her flexibility in the face of changing information, how quickly and analytically she can manage the things she learns.

Patience indicates an ability to just grind away at a problem, retaining intense focus, until the issue is bludgeoned into submission. Patient people put in hours at the library, go door to door for days showing the picture and saying, "Have you seen this girl?" or meticulously plot out every variable of their bank heist down to the second. Patient people are capable of prodigious effort, but they tend to plod, overthink, and consider all sides of a question (often quite tiresomely).

Cunning is the ability to react quickly, adapt to a changing mental landscape, and rapidly jump to a conclusion that is reasonable, if not infallibly right. Very crafty people are often impatient, and this very impatience can drive them to seek better or more efficient ways to do things. Cunning characters notice that the message can only be decoded if you read it in a mirror, they can explain complicated concepts with a simple metaphor, and their impassioned crimes are often protected by ingenious impromptu cover-ups. Cunning intuition can jump straight to the solution of the puzzle, but impatience can often lead to dangerous false assumptions.





If a character's Cunning is reduced to zero, there are no mechanical penalties beyond small pools when it comes to being alert and in tune.

If a character's Patience drops to zero, she goes **berserk**. Berserk characters are unable to use any of the Mental Qualities, and can't use their Understanding Identity either. Mostly what they can do is yell and hit, or sit in the corner with their arms crossed fuming. Going berserk lasts for one scene, after which the character may slide over a point of Cunning. If she's also out of Cunning, she has to spend the next scene berserk as well, and after that she can take two points off any combination of Mental Qualities and gain a point of Patience.

VIGOR AND GRACE: THE ACTIVE IDENTITIES

The active continuum represents the power and control a character can bring to bear on a physical confrontation or task. Everything from tightrope walking to putting that bouncer in a sleeper hold involves one quality or the other.

Optimizing both Vigor and Grace is impossible. Characters with great Vigor, while strong and tough, tend to be muscle bound and unable to bring their power under full control. Characters of profound Grace, on the other hand, are so used to doing things perfectly and with little effort that they rarely develop the hulking musculature of the vigorous.

Vigor is strength and hale good health. You use it to take a punch and to throw one back, to swim underwater while bullets zing around you, or to run out of the burning building with a drugged kidnap victim over your shoulder.

Grace measures your ability to do things with the minimum possible effort and the maximum control. Driving a car with the wheel shot out, catching the priceless vase as it drops towards the floor, or diving out the window away from a knife-toting maniac are all actions that call for Grace.

If a character runs out of Grace, he's clumsy, but no additional rules punishment is levied. If a character runs out of Vigor, he's dying.

Note that the character is not *dead* – he's dying. Dying characters can't take any physical actions, except to make desperate, dramatic statements. Any character present who wants to finish off a dying character can do it in one action, without even needing to roll a pair. On the flip side of that, characters who want to *help* a dying character can make sure he doesn't fade away.

Assuming that someone summons or provides aid to a dying character, the guy with zeroed-out Vigor has to sit out a scene and can then transfer over some saving Grace. If there's no Grace to be had, he can sit out *another* scene and knock two points off any Physical Qualities, turning them into a point of Vigor and permitting him to stumble out of the Emergency Room against the doctor's advice.

UNDERSTANDING AND PERSUASION: THE SPIRITUAL IDENTITIES

The spiritual continuum is between understanding other people, and making them understand you. This is less a matter of intellect (though that can often play a part) and more a matter of intangible empathy. A very persuasive person just seems trustworthy, even in the absence of evidence. A very understanding person can see right through you, even if he lacks the brains to grasp every nuance of what you're saying.

Understanding measures the ability to see through another's eyes and imagine yourself in her situation. People with a great deal of Understanding know when they're being lied to and more, often can tell when someone is lying to himself. They make good gossips, interrogators, bartenders and shrinks. On the other hand, no one can betray you as well as someone with that

deep understanding, and the openness that makes them sympathetic can make them easy to suborn... or seduce.

Persuasion is force of personality. A very persuasive character can *make* you see things his way, even if you don't want to. While rationally you know his case is full of holes, its passionate delivery makes you doubt *your* analysis, not his. Salesmen, politicians, gold-diggers, priests and con artists all rely on hefty doses of Persuasion. Of course, the cost of broadcasting so powerfully is a certain loss in the ability to receive. But when you're hurting people, understanding them may not be in your best interest.

If a character's Persuasion hits zero, she ceases to be compelling. There's no mechanical problems other than having no Persuasion Identity to combine with Qualities for certain tasks.

If a character's Understanding hits zero, he succumbs to **despair**. Despairing characters just can't figure people out and quit trying. They can't use Vigor or Patience for rolls until they regain some Understanding. Despair lasts for at least a scene, after which the character can shift over a dot of Persuasion. (Essentially, she's persuading herself that people are still worth the effort.) If she has neither Understanding nor Persuasion, the despair lasts another scene, after which she can take two points off any combined Spiritual Qualities and turn them into a point of Understanding.





THE SIX QUALITY PAIRS

QUALITIES ARE THE MORE VOLATILE HALF OF YOUR POOL. THEY GAUGE ABILITIES THAT CAN CHANGE A GREAT DEAL IF YOU'RE SLEEPY OR DRUGGED OR EMOTIONALLY CHARGED UP. JUST LIKE IDENTITIES, THEY CAN'T GO ABOVE 5. IF A SLIDE WOULD RAISE A QUALITY ABOVE 5, THAT QUALITY STAYS AT 5 AND ITS CONTRARY QUALITY DROPS BY ONE.

GENEROSITY AND SELFISHNESS, MENTAL QUALITIES

Generosity represents your ability to perceive what a person or a situation needs, and your wherewithal to provide it. Patient Generosity is the pool you use for long term projects like rooting corruption out of the police department, helping your drunk friend get clean and stay sober, or helping a buddy manage his grief at the death of his wife. Cunning Generosity is more often used to find a quick fix, like trapping your boozy buddy on a slow boat to China where he won't be able to lay hands on hooch for two months. It can also be used to give gifts with strings attached: When a wealthy crook gives a bag of cash to a mayoral candidate under the table at an Italian restaurant, that's not a purely selfless act. It's an act of Cunning Generosity. Whenever you want to buy something or bribe somebody, it uses Generosity.

Selfishness, on the other hand, is a general ability to take things from other people to their cost and your benefit. Cunning Selfishness lets you pick a pocket, break into an apartment or hotwire a car. It's not for violent, confrontational crimes but sneaky stuff. Patient Selfishness operates on a grander scale. It's used for embezzling, running long cons or performing acts of forgery.

DEMONSTRATION AND OBSERVATION, MENTAL QUALITIES

Observation is the skill of noticing and learning things, while Demonstration lets you understand, explain and use knowledge. Demonstration is most useful for things that are matters of fact or abstract logic: It has no innate emotional appeal. Patient Demonstration lets you teach someone to read, explain to someone how to rebuild a car transmission, or rebuild that transmission yourself. It serves as a catch-all for knowledge. If you *might* know how to do something that's mainly a matter of know-how, a roll of Patient Demonstration can determine whether you succeed at it or not. Difficulties are a good way to model tasks that are more, um, difficult.

Cunning Demonstration is used for explaining or figuring things out on the spur of the moment. Where a Patient Demonstration can give someone an outline of how to make a home-made pipe bomb with an alarm clock timer, Cunning Demonstration

can say over the phone, “Is there a cylinder, ‘bout the size of a soup can with a wire coming from it? Cut *that wire* only!” Counting cards at the high-stakes blackjack game is a job for Cunning Demonstration.

Observation, on the other hand, is about being open and absorbing information. A Cunning Observer spots the dropped wallet from the gangster’s nightclub, hears the click of the revolver hammer going back from the shadows in the parking garage, or notices that the tie slung over his bedside chair this morning isn’t the same one he dropped there last night. A Patient Observer tracks trends, does tedious detective footwork, audits the files or spends hours in the library finding old articles about the governor’s first wife.

COURAGE AND WRATH, ACTIVE QUALITIES

Courage measures your ability to cope with danger, while Wrath measures the ability to be cruel when you have the upper hand. The courageous draw on inner reserves of strength to face difficult odds, while the wrathful give in to sadistic urges in pursuit of their goals.

Most practically, you use Vigorous Courage to slug it out with an evenly matched or superior opponent, while Vigorous Wrath is what a pimp uses to slap around a hooker (or what a police detective uses to beat a confession out of a restrained suspect). Graceful Courage handles gunfights when you’re cornered, in the open or badly outnumbered. Graceful Wrath is used by snipers, assassins and cowards. Any time you shoot an unarmed person, it’s Wrath – even if your target could break both your arms in a second if he got close enough.

The quick way to see whether you need Courage or Wrath (all other things being equal) is to simply compare Combat Potential scores. That’s what they’re there for. (Combat Potential is simply Courage+Wrath+Vigor+Grace.)

ENDURANCE AND DEFIANCE, ACTIVE QUALITIES

Endurance is what you use to put up with things. Defiance is what you use when you *don’t* want to put up with things.

Endurance is most often used to keep circumstances from changing. Vigorous Endurance is rolled to hold your breath, carry your wounded enemy across ten miles of desert, or to play football as a lineman. Graceful Endurance is more useful for a wide receiver, or for someone who has to do a precise action over and over for a long span of time.

Defiance, on the other hand, gets you out of or away from things. Vigorous Defiance is what you roll to snap handcuffs, kick in doors, or block the ball bat before it clobbers your secretary. Graceful Defiance is used to squirm out of ropes, squeeze through a tiny heating duct, or dodge out of the way when the mug opens up with his Tommy gun.

PURITY AND CORRUPTION, SPIRITUAL QUALITIES

These measure a character's current attitude towards the world around her and her ideas about how to react to people. The pure tend to judge people kindly, give them breaks or the benefit of the doubt, while the corrupt assume that those they meet are self-interested and venal, or just naïve fools.

Persuasive Purity lets the goodness in you call out to the goodness in others. Use it when you say something like, "Hank, put the gun down. I know you love Jessica – that's why the thought of her betraying you is so painful. You don't really want to hurt her. Put it down before you do something you can never make right." Understanding Purity, on the other hand, lets you get an impression of another person's integrity. The more you observe, the better your results are (of course) but even a moment of interaction can tweak your intuition. It lets you see things through their eyes and understand those motivations they consider their best. A vigilante may be driven by a real need for justice, as well as an urge to hurt people. A meek priest who does nothing while his neighborhood gets worse and worse may just be paralyzed by cowardice... but may also be tormented by an unwillingness to be judgmental, or to admit that some people can never be saved.

Corruption? That's for dirty stuff. Want that square-jawed cop to forget his marriage vows? Show a little leg and roll Persuasive Corruption. Any time you want to bring out the worst in someone, Persuasive Corruption is your go-to pool. As for Understanding Corruption, that's what you roll to spot the eager way that prosecuting attorney hits his second lunchtime martini, or the envious gleam in the neighbor's eye when he sees your friend roll by in this year's flashy car. It helps you understand people's weaknesses, vices and temptations. Have fun with that.

HONESTY AND DECEIT, SPIRITUAL QUALITIES

One can only really tell the truth when one believes in truth, and you cannot practice deception without losing at least some measure of faith in integrity. This is the central tension between Honesty and Deceit.

Persuasive Deceit is used to tell lies face to face and make them seem reliable and true. The art of setting up fake evidence to generate false conclusions – that's more a call for Demonstration. But when you look someone in the eye and say, "I never touched her" or "You know my check is good" or "Just one glass of wine with dinner, officer" – that's a job for Persuasive Deceit. As for Understanding Deceit, that's what wives, landlords and highway patrolmen use to call out the liars who hand out the same tired lines day after day.

Persuasive Honesty is what you use to convince people you're telling the truth when you actually *are*. This might seem less useful than fabrication, but when you have to explain something particularly illogical and get them to listen on faith alone ("No, she was dead when I got here! There's only blood on my hands because I checked her pulse!") it's a lifesaver. Understanding

Honesty, on the other hand, manages your instinct for flawed truth. When someone tells you the truth but it's not the *whole* truth? Or when someone tells you a half-truth, or tells you what they would like to believe, something they're really *trying* to believe? ("I can quit drinking any time I want! I don't have a problem!") Then the gentle inquisition of Understanding Honesty reveals the flaws and pain and denial.

TWENTY THINGS TO DO AND HOW TO DO THEM

The Qualities and Identities can be a little vague until you get the hang of them. Each Quality and Identity has some examples of use under them, but here are a few more examples, with rationales.

DRIVE A CAR: NO ROLL REQUIRED

You don't need to make a roll every time your character gets behind the wheel, just like you don't need to roll to fix eggs in the morning or button your suspenders. Unless an outcome is in doubt, there's no reason for your GM to require a roll. If an action isn't impossible and it doesn't impact the plot, there's no need to drag the game down with needless rolls that tell nothing and do nothing.

DRIVE AT DANGEROUS SPEED IN A RAINSTORM: GRACEFUL ENDURANCE

When there's some risk and drama associated with driving, you can use a static Graceful Endurance roll to represent keeping your vehicle under control by keeping your mind and body controlled. Again, there's no call to roll if there's no pressure, but if you're racing to get to the lab before the bomb goes off, and the plot works just as well whether you succeed or fail... now your GM might make you roll.

LOSE A TAIL: GRACEFUL DEFIANCE (TAIL A SUSPECT: GRACEFUL ENDURANCE)

In the classic car chase, the runner rolls Graceful Defiance and the chaser rolls Graceful Endurance. It's a contested roll, with the runner's pairs becoming Gobble Dice against the chaser's pairs. Both sides roll and the runner tries to ruin all the chaser's sets. If the runner gets a success and the chaser doesn't, or if the runner has a complete set left after ruining everything the chaser rolled, then the runner gets away clean. If neither side rolls any successes, or the runner ruins the chaser's sets but has no extra set, the chase continues. If the chaser gets a set past the runner, the runner has been forced to a stop.

Foot chases are the same, except it's Vigorous Defiance vs. Vigorous Endurance.

CLEAR A JAMMED GUN: CUNNING DEMONSTRATION

Demonstration is used for knowing how to perform tasks. Cunning is used for doing things under pressure. If you need to clear a jammed gun and there's no particular pressure, there's no need to roll.

TALK DOWN A JUMPER: PERSUASIVE PURITY

Convincing someone who's suicidal that life is really worth living requires two things. First, the character has to empathize and present a passionate argument. Secondly, it really helps to *believe* life is worth living. If the character is trying to hoodwink the jumper by making false promises or offering untrue opportunities, then Persuasive Deceit. It's also possible that an appeal to logic might come into play. ("You don't have to *die* to keep the secret. Here's another option...") That would call for Cunning Demonstration.

DETERMINE WHETHER THE NECKLACE IS FAKE: PATIENT OBSERVATION

To tell in a glance whether gems (or documents, or paintings) are real or fake requires Observation. Sophisticated fakes stand up to casual scrutiny and require Patient Observation. Crude forgeries can be seen through with a Cunning Observation set, and if examined long enough can be uncovered without even a roll. (Basically, if you spend enough time to warrant a Patient roll of some type, you can penetrate a crappy fake without the roll.) Trying to see through a really expert forgery at a glance would be Cunning Observation, but one would need some relevant Specialty. A customs agent who deals with passports every day is going to have a better chance of seeing through a good one than an ordinary civilian.

THREATEN SOMEONE TO GET THEM TO TALK: PERSUASIVE CORRUPTION

This is usually a straightforward attack on a Quality – Courage ("tell me or you'll be sucking the bloody stumps of your teeth") or Generosity ("tell me or I can have the tax men all over you") or Honesty ("tell me or I'll slander you until you don't even trust yourself") as examples. A hit reduces the Quality and repeated assaults make giving up more attractive. Naturally, a credible threat helps a lot – so waving a gun or knife can help, as can threatening a secret or revealing a dismaying surprise.

DISGUISE YOURSELF AS A CLEANING WOMAN: PATIENT SELFISHNESS

To carry off a planned imposture under scrutiny requires skill and preparation. (Of course, a good Persuasive Deceit makes a fine backup if someone starts to get suspicious.) A quick-change improvised disguise would be Cunning Selfishness, but it's not going to stand up to any kind of attentive look.

FIND AND PURCHASE ILLICIT DRUGS: CUNNING GENEROSITY

Generosity represents a character's ability to pay for and arrange things. Cunning is needed for sneaky, sleazy, hidden behaviors. Thus, to make an illegal purchase (be it guns, white slaves or sweet lady H) Cunning Generosity is used.

SNEAK UP BEHIND SOMEBODY: CUNNING SELFISHNESS (NOTICE AN AMBUSH: CUNNING OBSERVATION)

Selfishness is needed to take advantage of someone, and Cunning gives the presence of mind to adapt to circumstances (the turned head, the squeaky stair, the shifting patch of shadow). It's handled as an opposed contest: The person being snuck past rolls Cunning Observation and tries to cancel dice out of the stealthy fellow's Cunning Selfishness Set. If neither one gets a set, a coin flip determines whether the sneaker is noticed or not.



Note that successfully sneaking up behind someone can give you a surprise if you later do something where the sudden reveal helps you. Like, for instance, lunging from behind the curtain with a garrote.

CONSTRUCT A SHIV IN PRISON: PATIENT SELFISHNESS

Squirreling away the materials needed to make a stabbing implement requires forethought and steady nerves. Just throwing together some sort of makeshift weapon (chair leg, jagged edge of a broken plate, necktie ligature) could be Cunning Demonstration if you're creating the weapon on the spur of the moment, or it could be Cunning Observation if you're trying to find something in your environment.

PLAY A HEARTBREAKINGLY SAD SONG ON THE PIANO: PERSUASIVE HONESTY

To really splinter someone's heart, you gotta be honest. Persuasive Corruption could also work if the goal is to provoke real sorrow in the listener, or convince him life's not worth it. On the other hand, Persuasive Purity might play to a more uplifting sort of music.

FAKE YOUR OWN DEATH: PATIENT SELFISHNESS

Playing dead after being stabbed is Persuasive Deceit, but an ongoing deception takes more than a plausible swan song. Getting a weighted coffin buried, scrounging up a death certificate and having your own demise look convincing – all these require a lot of forethought. (Creating a false identity after you've faked your death is also a job for Patient Selfishness.)

BOOBY TRAP THE STAIRCASE: PATIENT DEMONSTRATION

(SPOT A BOOBY TRAP: CUNNING OBSERVATION)

Patience lets you plan ahead and Demonstration is the general skill of constructing things. You can make a case for Patient Selfishness as well, since trapping a staircase is a pretty low trick.

If the victim wants to inspect the locale, any Cunning Observation set is sufficient to spot a tripwire. The trapper doesn't really need to roll for the trap until a victim sets it off. Then it's a contest between Patient Demonstration and Graceful Defiance, if the victim tries to escape. If the Defiance roll can counter the Patient Demonstration set, all well and good. But keep in mind that if the victim failed that Cunning Observation roll (or never bothered to check) the Patient Demonstration gets bonuses for surprise, and possibly for weapons as well if the trap is a deadly one.



**MAKE SURE THE GETAWAY CAR IS IN GOOD SHAPE:
PATIENT DEMONSTRATION**

Car work is pretty commonplace, so twenty minutes spent looking a car over not only tops off the gas, oil and air in the tires, it checks the plugs and filters and to ensure a working vehicle. To sabotage a car, use Cunning Demonstration (or possibly Selfishness).

CHEAT ON YOUR TAXES: PATIENT SELFISHNESS

It's scummy and requires long term attention, so it's Patient Selfishness. Simple, right?

START UP A MUCKRAKING NEWSPAPER: PATIENT GENEROSITY

Starting up a new paper is a long-term endeavor requiring a lot of resources. It's legal to start up a paper (even if you're a Commie or Socialist or something) so you'd only need Patient Selfishness if you wanted to keep your rag secret and distribute it only to those who need to know.

**REDECORATE THE LIVING ROOM FOR AN ELEGANT SOIRÉE:
PERSUASIVE GENEROSITY**

It's an odd pairing of a Spiritual Quality with a Mental Identity, but redecorating a room is a pretty odd thing to do in a noir setting. Generosity gives you resources, and Persuasion influences emotion.

**CONCEAL YOUR UNEASE AND CYNICISM AT AN UNFAMILIAR RELIGIOUS
CEREMONY: PERSUASIVE DECEIT.**

Deception isn't just telling the lie. It's also burying the truth.

This doesn't mean the GM should call for Persuasive Deceit every time a character sees something distasteful and doesn't want to wince. If no one's looking at you during that ceremony, you don't need to roll because it makes no difference. If someone gives you the stink eye to see if you're secretly snickering at the Mass, you need to roll. Or if your character is an established anti-Semite, you might need to roll during that Bat Mitzvah. But by and large, the dice should only come out when it makes a difference one way or the other.

HELP SOMEONE ELSE: VARIES

There are many, many situations where it helps to have a voice chorusing, "Hey, she has a point there," or another set of eyes going through the documents, or another set of prints on that bloodstained pickaxe. When you want to help someone, there are two ways to go about it: Beforehand and after the fact.

If you want to help before, you roll before. If you get a set, you add its Width in dice to your buddy's roll when *he* rolls, for whatever it is you're helping him do.

If you want to amplify his success, roll afterwards (or at the same time). If you get a set that's equal to his Height or greater, you can increase the Width of his set by the Width of your set.

Example: Jerry and Johnno are trying to fix the truck before its owner (Jerry's brother Big Stevie) gets home and sees it's damaged. Johnno, the better mechanic, is going to make the primary roll. Jerry wants to help him beforehand, and happens to get a 2x1 set on his Patient Demonstration roll. When Johnno makes his Patient Demonstration roll, he gets to add two dice to his pool.

This gets particularly interesting when the assistance comes from a different kind of pool.

Example: Ambrose is hot tempered and zealous about punishing the bad guys. Noah is a sly devious bastard who has hidden, but not quite smothered, his desire to help out society's victims. They fight crime. During an interrogation, Noah's trying to convince the suspect to go along, that Noah's on his side and that things can go a lot easier if he cooperates. He's rolling Persuasive Deceit because he doesn't care about this pimply little gungel and knows damn well that, with a confession in hand, the D.A. is going to make the kid into sandwich spread. After he declares his action, Ambrose decides to help him out after the fact by giving the little crook a smack across the chops. The kid's resisting with Understanding Deceit, trying to see if Noah's on the level. They roll.

The kid gets a 2x9. Ambrose gets a 2x5. Noah gets a 2x3. Normally, the kid would see through Noah like Norman Bates through a bathroom wall, but Ambrose's success pushes Noah's up to a 4x3. The kid's Gobble Dice reduce it to a 2x3, but it's not enough. With his teeth rattled by Ambrose's chin music, he's desperate to believe Noah can help him out.

SWIFT JUSTICE

CHARACTERS CHANGE QUICKLY AND DRASTICALLY IN A DIRTY WORLD. CONFRONTATIONS OF ALL SORTS CAN QUICKLY WEAR DOWN QUALITIES AND EVEN IDENTITIES, AS DESCRIBED UNDER “CONFLICT.” OTHER EXPERIENCES, HOWEVER, CAN SHIFT A CHARACTER’S TRAITS AROUND OR IMPROVE THEM INSTANTLY.

THE FREE QUALITY SLIDE

At the end of every scene, every player may slide one dot of one Quality, as long as he can explain why his character changed, and as long as he isn’t raising something above 5. He could go from Purity 3/Corruption 3 to Purity 2/Corruption 4. He couldn’t slide dots from Purity to Honesty because they’re not on the same line. Similarly, he couldn’t slide between Vigor and Grace because they’re Identities, not Qualities, and they’re harder to change.

There are two reasons to slide a Quality. One is because it’s in character. The other is to strengthen a Quality you think you’ll need soon. Both these reasons are perfectly valid.

For example, Clint knows the only way his character Bronwen is getting into the Serpentine Temple is through guile and stealth. Therefore, he wants to slide a point from Generosity to Selfishness, because Selfishness is the Quality that helps you pick locks and sneak like a cat burglar. It does not really matter that the scene Bronwen was just in is one where her boyfriend broke up with her over her dangerous lifestyle. Clint wants to sneak.

Another player, Vanessa, goes through a scene where her character Jed endures a savage beating. Specifically, he gets kicked around by indignant congregants who saw Jed browbeating their parish priest – a man who was, it turns out, entirely innocent of any wrongdoing. Jed’s going to help Bronwen infiltrate the temple, but Vanessa specifically chooses to *decrease* Jed’s Selfishness, because she feels it’s in character for Jed to regret getting carried away. She wants him to be more generous later in the game because his motives so far have been pretty venal and low. She’s staying true to character, even at the cost of effectiveness. That’s her decision.





Is one player better than the other? Emphatically no. If the group is having fun, you're playing right. Some groups are going to skew towards tactics and some towards character drama, and as long as all the players understand each other's goals and trust one another, there's no reason Vanessa and Clint can't get along, have a great time and be effective.

But honestly, I think most players can do better than "get along." The system is based on character, and the ideal is to describe your character's moods and growth and reversals of fortune in a way that helps the story move your way. You shouldn't *have* to choose between drama and effectiveness, because the whole system is based on having drama make your character *more* effective.

"SCENE?"

You can slide and improve Qualities once per scene, if circumstances permit. But what, exactly, is a 'scene'? The vague answer is, it's when one immediate situation is resolved and the characters are ready to move to something else. A change in physical location often telegraphs a change of scene, but not necessarily: A scene of looking for Lowbrow Ramone could cover several bars and pool halls. Generally, a scene is complete when the PCs have either attained their goal or switched to a new one. When it's a good time to take a break and reflect, they can go for their free slide and their Swift Justice.

Player motives don't matter nearly as much when you can reach the same result either way. Specifically: Clint can, with a little thought, come up with an *in character* rationale for why the scene made Bronwen more selfish. Maybe she was just starting to trust this guy when he chickened out on her and now it's every woman for herself. Instead of "Bronwen becomes more selfish because it's good for the plot," it's "She decides she's better off without that simp, it's Bronwen for Bronwen and she's done fooling around. She's ready to raid that scumbag temple by hook or by crook."

Similarly, Vanessa has a menu of possible options for Jed that don't have to screw up Clint's plan. She might, for example, decide that Jed's change of heart is more in the active arena than the mental one. Instead of blaming Selfishness for his bad behavior, Jed berates himself for losing his temper. He decides he's going to control himself and make amends by striking the real enemy, no matter how tough they are. Now, instead of "Jed becomes more Generous because it's in character," Vanessa's play is "Jed slides a dot from Wrath to Courage because it's in character... and because if there's a fight at the Temple, he'll probably be outnumbered." Alternately, she could slide from Corruption to Purity if she thought Purity would help, since Jed has become disgusted with himself and resolved to do better. *Or*, if she thought Corruption would protect her, she could slide in the opposite direction. How does she justify raising Corruption? Hell, Jed just menaced a *priest*.

Sometimes, you find motivation from what you want your character to do. That's good because it makes you think about your character. Sometimes, the motivation leads you in a particular direction and you use the Qualities that events have engorged. That's good because your character is now concretely behaving in a manner consistent with the changes she's undergone. Either way, you get both ability *and* insight.

RAISING AND SLIDING IDENTITIES (OR, 'GRADUAL JUSTICE')

At the end of each session, you can slide an Identity. The considerations of sliding Qualities at scene's end apply here, only more strongly. Since this is a more important change, consider both character and tactics with greater care. This change represents the sum total of the session's impact.

Alternately, instead of sliding, you can raise your Identities by trading in Qualities. You can't just trade anything for anything, however. Follow the chart.

To Raise...	...Trade In This	...And This.
Patience	Generosity	Demonstration
Cunning	Selfishness	Observation
Vigor	Courage	Endurance
Grace	Wrath	Defiance
Understanding	Purity	Honesty
Persuasion	Corruption	Deceit

Thus, every Identity costs two points of Quality to raise. This is the only way to improve your Identities, at the cost of your Qualities. Your Qualities, on the other hand, go up on their own.

INSTANT RAISES FOR QUALITIES

Taking certain actions (or enduring certain circumstances) pumps up Qualities naturally. Once per scene, you can explain to your GM which Quality should rise and why. You can't raise more than one Quality per scene, you can't raise a Quality more than once per scene, and you can only improve Qualities when events warrant. In other words, once per scene you can pop up one Quality, and then you're done with instant improvement. Once per scene is pretty frequent, right?

GENEROSITY: HELP THE UNWILLING

It's one thing to help someone out who really needs it. That's very cool. It's another thing to help someone who's going to pay you back. Altruism or self-interest aside, that can be very smart. But helping someone who does not want your assistance, no matter how badly it's needed... that's the test of real Generosity. So when you interfere to keep your virginal niece from sneaking out to see lusty (and darkly fascinating) Tad Holmes, you gain a point of Generosity. You have to genuinely help though – in the sense of improving someone's life (so giving a recovering opium addict her drug of choice even when she's trying to quit – no sale). Also, while short-term successes do work, instant failures do not, no matter how well intentioned. If you stymie the niece's attempt tonight, you get the raise. If you try, and think you succeeded, but she goes out the basement window instead, that won't pay off.

SELFISHNESS: STEAL FROM SOMEONE WHO TRUSTS YOU

It doesn't get much lower than this, does it? Any time you steal from somebody who trusts you, your Selfishness improves. Specifically, you have to steal something meaningful – grabbing some toll change from a millionaire's dresser is not sufficient. Taking a pencil from your sister's desk is not good enough either. You have to take something someone values, something that will be missed. Note that it doesn't matter if you get caught later (or if you rob someone by force, for that matter), you have to steal significant money or a valuable item from someone who did not expect you to do it.

DEMONSTRATION: COME TO UNDERSTAND SOMETHING NEW

Any time you learn something, your ability to explain everything takes an upward jump. You could bone up your brain power by hitting the books at the library for a couple hours (perhaps sitting out a scene while the other PCs are off being heroic). On the other hand, if you figure out the Culvert Strangler's real identity (or discover your brother's gay) that can also provide the sort of mental knock that lets you see the world a new way – and then describe it. As with most of these, if it's trivial ("Huh. Quinn's favorite color is mauve") it doesn't qualify.

OBSERVATION: GET TAKEN BY SURPRISE

Whether it's a trio of gunsels pouncing from an alley or your good friends jumping out from behind furniture yelling "Happy Birthday!" being taken by surprise teaches you to be less introspective and more alert to the world around you. These don't have to be hand-to-the-heart moments of startlement, either. If you were relying on Honest Joe and, in the course of rifling through his briefcase you found the wallet you "lost" on the subway, that's a surprise too. Only important revelations are enough to raise the Quality. Ordering the Tuna Surprise won't quite cut the mustard.

COURAGE: WIN A FAIR STRUGGLE (OR AGAINST THE ODDS)

Unlike real life, in which the 'fair fight' is as scarce as an honest boxing commissioner, *A Dirty World* has math that lets you figure out if a fight is fair or not. It's all covered under "Conflict," but basically if your Combat Potential is equal to or less than the other guy's, or if you're outnumbered or outgunned, it qualifies to improve Courage... which is just what you need to win the next fair fight. Of course, it simultaneously makes the next person you're going to fight fairly that much tougher, but those are the breaks.

This doesn't have to be a boxing match, either. Any form of conflict where you were overmatched can improve your Courage. All you have to do is prevail. But (as with all improvement) it's never the result of unimportant conflict. Beating Professor Hablenfleisch at a friendly game of chess at the park carries no weight. If you bet him a hundred bucks – or agree that if you win he talks about the mysterious Project Paperclip, while if he wins you never trouble him again – then that intellectual triumph certainly matters.

WRATH: TORMENT A HELPLESS PERSON

You'd think slapping the grin off a kidnapper's face to make him spill where he caged the girl would make a detective feel *better*, but in fact the exercise of power over the defenseless tends to be a little bit addictive. It's not just the rough stuff with a rubber hose or some cigarette burns, either. Humiliating a stutterer in front of his date with nothing but harsh language can also make a character feel like a big man and, therefore, make him more capable of the next sadistic act on the menu. It's got to be genuine discomfort – something that bothers the victim for a couple days at least. Stealing a parking spot is not sufficient, not unless you're enough of a jerk to go slash their tires when they're parked a half-acre away.

ENDURANCE: SURVIVE LOSING A FIGHT

Unlike *Courage*, *Endurance* is only improved through physical confrontation. It doesn't matter whether you even got hit or not, as long as you *lost*. If you ran away, got captured, pled for mercy and were taunted out of the bar... well, okay, better luck next time. You cannot jerk up your *Endurance*, however, unless someone tried to do you serious bodily harm – took a swing or took a shot – and you, as a result, backed down or got badly hurt or were otherwise stymied in your goal.

“MY FRIENDS AREN'T VERY FRIENDLY.”

Reading about Swift Justice's rules for *Defiance* and *Wrath*, or *Corruption* and *Deceit*, it may occur to you that the most certain way for your party to gain those precious *Qualities* is to treat each other with desperate cruelty. If your character insults and abuses someone else's character, you can both win – you by gaining *Wrath* and him by gaining *Defiance*. It works just like that.

Many gamers are reluctant to jeopardize 'party harmony,' even when it's in character, but close trust and thoughtfulness just aren't the hallmarks of noir. With these rules, PCs are encouraged to lie to, steal from, and occasionally beat upon one another. Since it's explicitly the nature of the game, don't hold it against your fellow players, and the *Quality* boosts should salve the sting somewhat.

Understand though: This isn't a license to annoy the other players or derail the GM's plot. It just means that characters are encouraged to interact, and noir interaction is seldom warm and sugary.

On the other hand, **every** scene is an opportunity to interact with someone and thereby crank a *Quality*. If you pester and sandbag the other characters just to make your character stronger, it's certainly going to bug them when they're trying to get their characters stronger **meaningfully**. So find a happy middle ground. Get enough tension and antagonism to have fun. When you stop having fun – or more importantly, when the other player stops – then it's time to ease off.

DEFIANCE: BE SCORNE

You know all that stuff that builds up Wrath – from insults up through Chinese water torture? When that gets done to you, your Defiance rises. It's pretty simple, really. Anything that would give him Wrath gives you Defiance. The catch is, you have to be the helpless one. If he spits on you and you deck him, you don't get a Defiance raise. No, you have to wind up biting your tongue and stewing over the injustice. Paying him back later is certainly kosher, and using your newfound Defiance to do it is poetic justice. But you only get this benefit if you were unable (or unwilling) to avenge or extricate yourself during the scene where you were victimized.

PURITY: RIGHT A WRONG, AT COST, WITHOUT DURESS

Purity is difficult to increase, and rightly so: It's a dirty world out there. PCs often right wrongs, as do characters in noir movies and detective novels. So do people in real life, for that matter. But taking a moment to hand a woman a carelessly dropped parcel isn't really a test of purity – too easy, costs nothing, it's more an accident than a 'wrong' and even a real jerk might do it if he was in a good mood or she was pretty enough. This is more like owning up to a lie that hurt someone, when you're pretty sure you could get away with it indefinitely.

That's where the "without duress" clause works in. Owning up to your embezzlement because someone has a gun to your head, or because you're going down anyway and might get a more lenient sentence if you confess... that's not pure, that's just common sense. Admitting a crime you got away with because it's the right thing to do and taking your punishment like a man – *that's* Purity.

CORRUPTION: MAKE SOMEONE MISERABLE, FOR NO GAIN, DELIBERATELY

Another instant improvement with a lot of strings attached, it's nevertheless much easier to increase Corruption. Push a stranger into a mud puddle, slash a random set of tires, vandalize a synagogue... the trick is to do it from no motive other than pure, wretched malice. Stealing somebody's honeymoon cash certainly provides adequate misery, but there the cruelty is alloyed with greed, making the corruption less devastating. By the same token, making someone miserable by accident, while embarrassing, is not the kind of diabolical meanness that's rewarded with an increased ability to do ill.

HONESTY: SUFFER BECAUSE YOU WERE DECEIVED

"Fool me once, shame on you," goes the old saying. "Fool me twice, shame on me." When your character gets tricked and it hurts her, she can come to value Honesty all the more because it's scarce. It has to have some punch, though. Not a petty little "I said I was working late when I really went to the track" lie. Not a harmless "No, your hair looks great like that!" deception. Not a benevolent ruse like "His last words were 'Tell Carla I love her'" when, in fact, his last words were

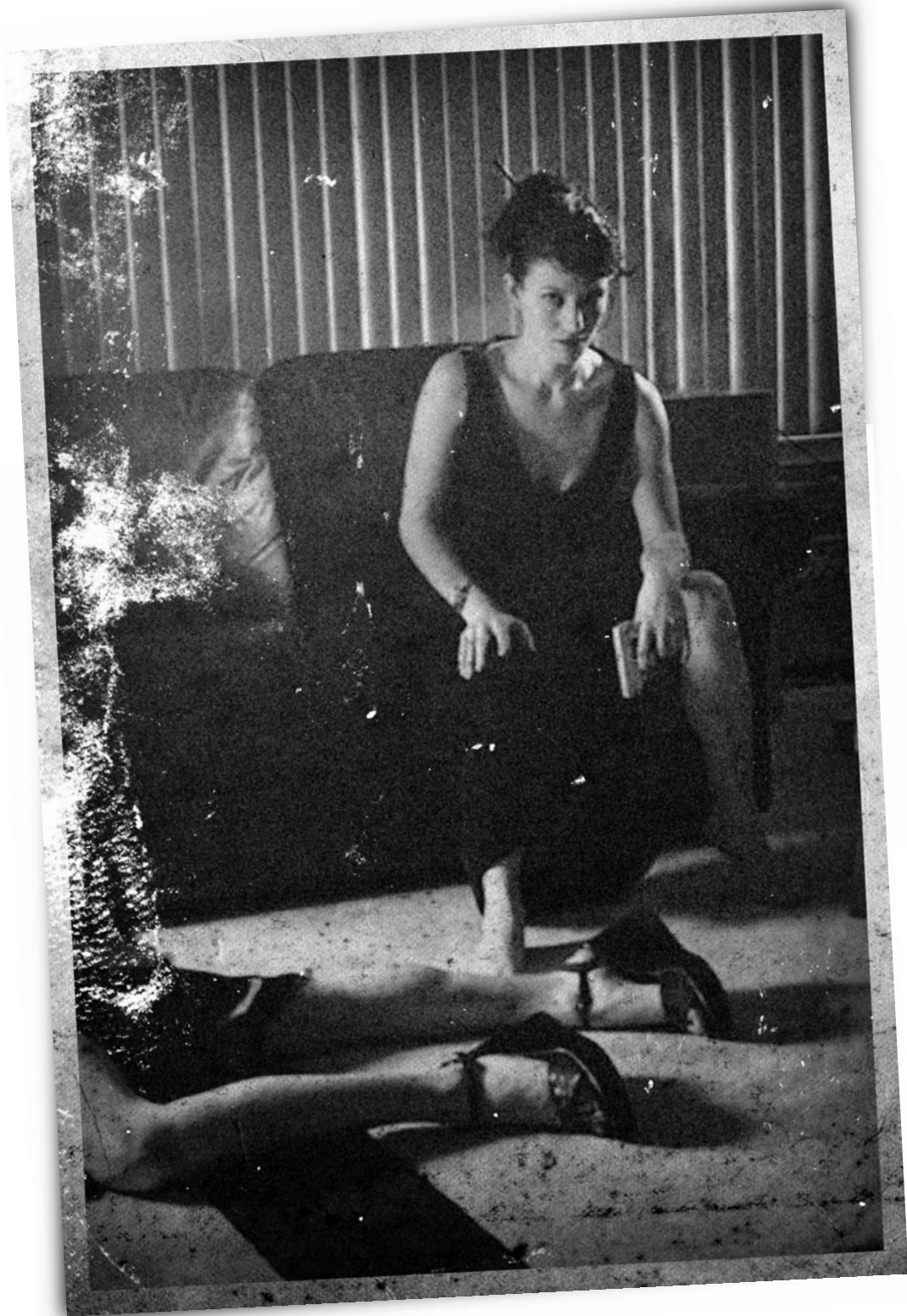
“I’ll kill that dirty rat!” No, you have to get stabbed in the back with something like “I said I was working late when I really went to your sister’s house and banged her.” It has to be a wrenching, major betrayal of trust. Luckily, people in noir circumstances seem to be treacherous with great frequency.

DECEIT: HAVE YOUR FAITH BETRAYED

If you believe in someone and she fails you, you may become cynical and mendacious yourself. If nothing is true, what does it matter whether you were at work or at the track (or at your sister-in-law’s house)? Liars devalue the truth, and nothing makes that easier than being taken in yourself. Plus, on a practical level, if you got fooled you may pick up some pointers.

You may think the circumstances that raise Deceit are very similar to those that raise Honesty. You’re right. There are many circumstances that you can use to increase either Quality. However, becoming more deceptive is easier because its opportunities are broader. To raise Honesty, someone has to do it to you on purpose. Deceit can go up as the result of unintentional failure. If you trust that P.I. to find your daughter and he winds up in a shallow grave, it’s not like he *meant* to deceive you. But you still extended your trust and pulled back a bleeding stump.





CONFLICT

YOU WANT IT, HE'S GOT IT AND HE WON'T SHARE. THAT'S CONFLICT. MAYBE YOU TRY TO CHARM HIM INTO CHANGING HIS MIND. MAYBE YOU APPLY REASON AND LOGIC TO UNDERMINE HIS CONVICTIONS. MAYBE YOU PISTOL-WHIP HIM AND PRY IT FROM HIS UNCONSCIOUS FINGERS. THESE ARE ALL RESOLUTIONS OF DISPUTES, AND THEY ARE ALL HANDLED THE SAME WAY.

STEP ONE: DEFINE THE CONFRONTATION

Every conflict can be defined by how you're trying to attain your goal and how any barriers are opposing your will. Any action you might take can, in turn, be described by an Identity + Quality pool.

Sometimes, you're being thwarted by the inanimate – you need to climb a rock wall (Vigorous Defiance) or crack a cipher (Patient Observation) or patch a leaky hull (Patient Demonstration). You roll your pool, maybe against a Difficulty, and if you get a set, you succeed. If you fail, you may get another try, or not, depending on circumstances.

Far more often, you're at cross-purposes with another person. That's when things get interesting.

Maybe your real goal is something entirely external and he's just in your way: You want to steal the diamonds and he's the security guard. Or you need to see Dr. Owens without an appointment and she's the secretary. In this case, it's an opposed roll between your pool and your opponent's pool. Roll Cunning Selfishness against the guard's Patient Observation to palm the jewel, or Persuasive Purity (or Corruption, Honesty, or Deceit, depending on circumstances) against the secretary's Understanding (of the appropriate Quality) to appeal to her better nature, or to suborn her with a bribe, or to explain your situation, or to come up with a good excuse. The opponent tries to gobble your highest or widest set (you pick) and, if he fails, you surpass his interference.

Just maybe, however, your problem is not something just past that guy. Your problem is *that guy*. Maybe you're the guard and you want to stop the robber who's bolting out with the diamonds. Maybe you're a secretary trying to convince a charming stranger to overcome his reluctance and meet you for a drink later. Whatever the situation, it's handled as an attack on a character's Quality and, once they bottom out, his Identity.

In that case, pick the Quality you want to attack, explain how you're undermining it, and what pool you're using. The guard uses Vigorous Wrath to attack the fleeing thief's Defiance. The secretary uses Persuasive Corruption against her target's Purity.

STEP TWO: ROLL 'EM

Once the relevant pools are defined, everyone rolls at the same time. The Widest set goes first. If two sets have equal Width, the Higher one goes first. If they're equally tall and Wide, they happen simultaneously, or you can roll a die for a tiebreaker.

Any time one of a character's Qualities or Identities takes damage, that character loses a die from an unused set. Once a set is reduced to 1x width, it's no longer a set.

Example: Ron rolls and gets two sets, a 2x6 and a 3x1. But the two palookas beating on him both roll very well, getting a 3x3 and a 3x5. The 3x5 hits first. In addition to the damage, (explained under "Consequences") it knocks a die from one of his sets. Ron chooses to take it on his 2x6. That set is now ruined. When the 3x3 hits, he has to reduce his 3x1 to a 2x1: He can't use the unmatched six to soak up that penalty.

Characters can resist with any plausible action and pool. Dodging a blow is a Graceful Defiance pool, blocking is Vigorous Defiance, resisting seduction through strength of character is Understanding Purity, while resisting it with cynical disbelief is Understanding Corruption. Resistance produces Gobble Dice, which can be applied to spoil an attacker's sets... if they're big enough and (sometimes) fast enough.

Example: Quick Vinnie is trying to dip the wallet out of Agnes' purse without Agnes noticing. He rolls a 3x2 result on his Cunning Selfishness pool. Agnes' player rolls Cunning Observation to spot it and gets a 2x10. While the dice are high enough, Vinnie is just too fast – his action is completed before Agnes has a chance to rally herself and examine her possessions.

Later, Vinnie tries it again on Fred's wallet. He gets a 2x8 this time, while Fred rolls a 3x3. While his set is wide enough, it's not tall enough to ruin Vinnie's smooth moves.

With his luck holding steady, Vinnie goes after Miranda's purse. This time, he rolls a 2x7 and Miranda rolls a 2x7 too. Their actions go off at the same time, and with only one of her Gobble 7 dice she's able to spoil his set. She yanks back her purse and screams for the police.

DID YOU MEAN IT?

Physical actions are clear. If you fire a gun at someone, that's an attack. You either try to climb a wall or you don't. You're either trying to break into the office or you aren't.

It's different with the wars of words and feelings that are a large part of **A Dirty World's** conflicts. Depending on the circumstances and character history, "Move it you sumbitch!" may be construed as a deadly insult or as friendly encouragement. It is therefore imperative for all the parties in an argument to agree on whether the conversation is serious enough to roll dice. Sometimes an exchange of insults is just banter. Sometimes it's a genuine attempt to erode another character's Courage or Generosity. A few words of flattery may be meaningless trifles, or a serious assault on Purity.

This issue is especially acute in conflicts between PCs, which are common in **A Dirty World** and often desirable. In some instances, every few words spoken can alter the other person's Qualities: These are intense and memorable conflicts. In other instances, just one or two rolls on each side may represent an entire lengthy exchange. In that case, the confrontation is less intense: Neither party is committed enough to risk serious Quality damage, the kind of thing that leaves you physically weak, or emotionally drained, or intellectually depressed and distracted for days. These conflicts aren't less important, but the stakes are lower.

TALKED TO DEATH

Since anything can be used to attack anything, does that mean it's possible to talk someone to death? No, for two reasons.

First off, I'm making it a rule: Verbal actions can't reduce someone's Vigor to zero. It just doesn't make much sense.

Secondly, you can't just fecklessly decide you're using this Quality to attack that Identity. It has to make sense. If you're trying to use Cunning Observation to reduce someone's Endurance to zero, you have to explain how, exactly, that's going to work. (I, for one, can't figure out how quick, sly glances would make someone physically exhausted.) The GM has the final say about which Identities and Qualities go in a pool. That's not so she can screw you around, but to keep the game consistent.

Furthermore, you know how physical actions are clear? They're not even that clear. A fight scene against unimpressive local bullies may not warrant a blow-by-blow resolution. A few Wrath rolls may convince them that they're looking for a score, not a challenge.

The more rolls made in a scene, the more intense and important that scene becomes and the more damage it can do to a character – even a character who comes out on top. As a GM, use this as a pacing tool. More rolls means more investment. If the PCs are asking for more rolls, it's because they really want to push the situation. You should only ask them for lots of rolls in really critical scenes. Similarly, if you're a player, understand that you don't have to call for a roll every time you make a statement – only when you think the cut and thrust of argument is enough to make a difference.

STEP THREE: CONSEQUENCES

Against the inanimate, if you beat the Difficulty, it's done.

When getting past an opponent who's just in the way, he applies his gobble dice to your sets. If you can retain a set, you succeed. If not, you've been thwarted.

When attacking an enemy directly, the outcome depends on the Width of your roll, but he always loses a die from a set if you succeed before he has a chance to act.

Width is more important than Height, in this instance, but you still want to roll High because (1) they might go sooner and (2) they're harder to spoil with gobble dice.



MAKING PEOPLE DO THINGS

No character can make another character do anything, except die. Control of a PC is always in the hands of the player. Control of a GMC is always in the hands of the GM. So saying "I'm going to talk Wu Fan out of his evil opium lord ways" is perfectly kosher... but even if your Purity kicks his ass and you beat his Corruption down to zero and then his Persuasion Identity to zero too, you have **not** reformed Wu Fan. What you have done is provoked an emotional and personal crisis. He may decide to continue his nefarious deeds, but he's sure as hell going to have a tougher time of it with no dice in his Persuasive Corruption pool.

Many characters (PC and GMC) can be bullied into doing things because the player just doesn't want to see his hard-earned Qualities and Identities whittled away. But just because you reduced old man Murdoch's Generosity to zero, you haven't made him penniless. You've just made him unwilling to spend money. If you knock out Professor Sanchez' Demonstration Quality, it hasn't made him an idiot: It just means he's going to be distracted and inarticulate for some time.

STEP FOUR:

RETREAT, REPEAT OR ESCALATE

After the fallout, everyone decides what to do next. Some characters may wish to withdraw from the contest – fleeing via Graceful Defiance, glowering and saying “You win this round, Burns” as you stalk out of the bar, or agreeing to go on that date with the persistent secretary. If they are able to withdraw, the conflict is over for them.

Alternately, the characters may be eager for more punishment, in which case you just go back to step one.

The final option is to take the conflict in a new direction – maybe drawing a gun on the woman who slapped you, or maybe taking a punch at the guy who insulted you. It can work the other way too: If Steve’s about to shoot at you and you’re unarmed, you can make an emotional appeal (Persuasive Honesty – “Steve, I never meant to hurt you, you have to believe that!”) or a reasoned argument (Cunning Demonstration – “Steve, the bar next door is full of cops. If they hear a gunshot, they’ll come running and you are far too handsome to fare well in prison”) targeting Steve’s Wrath.

WEAPONS, SURPRISES AND SECRETS

In any conflict, outside factors can give a big edge. In a physical conflict, it could be a weapon. In a clash of minds, it could be an unexpected piece of information or an argument from an unexpected direction. In an emotional struggle, nothing hits below the belt like digging up dirt the other guy thought was well buried.

OUTCOMES

Width Result

- | | |
|-----|---|
| 2-3 | Slide a point off the Quality. If the Quality is empty, slide a point from the associated Identity on the same side of the page (Vigor for Courage, Cunning for Selfishness, Understanding for Honesty and so forth). |
| 4 | Remove a point from the Quality. If the Quality is empty, remove a point from its associated Identity. |
| 5+ | Remove a point directly from the Identity nearest the targeted Quality. |

There are two ways to use an advantage, of whatever type. The first way is to add dice to your pool, making success more likely. The other is to increase Width after you get a success. But when you declare an action in a conflict, you have to say which way you're using your edge. You can use it before or after, but not both.

If it's a minor advantage, it gives +1W or +1d. A serious advantage is +2W or +2d. A grievous advantage is +3W or +3d. Examples are given below.

MINOR LEAGUE (+1)

Physical Weaponry: Half a brick, axe handle, switchblade, kitchen knife, chair leg, bag of gravel, broken-off bottle, tiny little derringer.

Intellectual Surprise: "But the suspect's sister will testify that he was with *her* at 8:00 Sunday night." "Your fingerprint is on the doorknob of the building where the crime took place." "Phone company documents show that the oil company's lawyers called the Senator a week before the critical vote."

Emotional Secret: "You have a major-league crush on Billy Jack!" "Oh, I don't think you'd like it if your husband found out about the surprise party you planned." "When they were picking on Tina, you were jeering right along with them, weren't you?"

SERIOUS MATTERS (+2)

Physical Weaponry: Handgun, fire axe, most antique hand-to-hand weapons.

Intellectual Surprise: "But the suspect was photographed five miles away from the crime scene at 8:00 Sunday night." "Your fingerprint is on the corpse." "Although much has been redacted, we have the minutes of the meeting between the oil company executives and the Senator."

Emotional Secret: "You went all the way with Billy Jack?!?" "Oh, I don't think you'd like it if your husband found out about your appointments with the cabana boy." "When Tina got hurt, you abandoned her like the rest of them, didn't you?"

IT'S HORRENDOUS (+3)

Physical Weaponry: Submachine gun, hand grenade, chainsaw dipped in cyanide.

Intellectual Surprise: "But the suspect was photographed at the cotillion at 8:00 Sunday night. You can see the clock in the background and... isn't that you in the foreground, your honor?" "Your fingerprint is on the interior surface of the corpse's dried skull, as well as on the murder weapon." "On January 10, the oil company transferred \$30,000 to an offshore account. On January 11, the Senator received \$30,000 from that same offshore account."

Emotional Secret: "You knew Billy Jack was your long-lost brother and seduced him anyway?!?" "Oh, I don't think you'd like it if your husband found out that your son was actually fathered by a death-row convict." "When Tina died, you went back to hide evidence and bury the body, didn't you?"

CONFLICTS REVEALED

Because Qualities are a little vague and conflict can be somewhat abstract, here are some examples so that you can see how quick and versatile it is.

EXAMPLE #1: GENE WANTS TO SLEEP WITH MADGE

Gene, with Persuasion 4 and Corruption 3, wants to sleep with Madge (Understanding 2, Persuasion 3, Purity 3, Corruption 2). He knows her husband's working late so he drops by and initially just plays at being the friendly co-worker who happened to be in the neighborhood. Gene's a GMC, and Madge's player is Emily.

GM: As you're talking and offering him that drink, Gene tries to maneuver himself so that he's leaning close to you, but he's subtle about it.

EMILY: "Whoopsie!" Madge gives him the benefit of the doubt and assumes he's just being a little clumsy.

GM: All right, he's going to roll Persuasive Corruption to nonverbally turn you on.

EMILY: And I'm going to roll Understanding Purity to be oblivious.

The GM rolls 7d and gets a 3x3. Emily rolls a 2x2 – her gobble dice aren't high enough. If it'd been x3 or higher, even a pair of Gobblers would ruin his trip threes, because in this instance time isn't a factor.

GM: Gene's looking pretty cute, in a grubby, feral way. Slide a point from Purity to Corruption. He puts his hand on your shoulder, saying, "Is this a new dress?" Another Persuasive Corruption roll.

EMILY: I spill the drink on him to spoil the mood.

GM: Are you going to make it look like an accident, or are you going to deliberately throw it?

EMILY: Mmmm... I'll make it look accidental. Madge always wants to keep up appearances. Persuasive Purity?

GM: Sure.

EMILY: I'm going to try and do it as an attack on his Corruption though.

They roll and this time they both get 2x8 results. Gene slides a point from Corruption to Purity. Emily slides a point from Purity to Corruption.

GM: As you soak him, he puts his other hand on your other shoulder and says, “You’re trembling.” He’s moving in to kiss you.

EMILY: “Gene, don’t. We both know you don’t want me. You just want to hurt my husband.” Persuasive Corruption, attacking his Corruption.

GM: I think you need to use Understanding Corruption. After all, you’re not trying to persuade him of anything, just trying to reveal to him his own ignoble motives. And this time, I think time matters - you want to say your piece before he can put your lips to other uses.

Emily rolls Understanding Corruption, and since her Corruption pool has been amped up to 4, she rolls 6d. She gets a solid 3x4 result. Gene’s diminished Persuasive Corruption pool yields him a 2x10. That kiss would have been something... but Emily’s words put a chill on it. Not only does he slide a point off Corruption (because being a suave seducer man is a far more attractive way to be corrupt than being a sneaky, envious weirdo) but he loses a point from his 2x10 set, giving him no success with which to soil her.

If Gene continues, he may wear down Madge’s Purity (and eventually Understanding) to the point that Emily decides Madge gives in just to keep her Identity intact. On the other hand, Emily could back him off with continued shots to his Corruption (if she can think of more plausible ways to use her improved Corruption), or she could change the nature of the conflict. For example, if she decides she’s going to jerk away from him and go out the door, the GM has to decide if Gene tries to grab her or not, turning the emotional conflict into a physical one. If they go that route, Gene’s probably opening himself up for more Understanding Corruption attacks from Madge, as she bitterly accuses him of showing his true nature – not a romantic, but a brute. Does Gene want to go that far? He’s lost two points of Quality already and there are other fish in the sea. This is becoming an important scene for Madge because the rolls are coming thick and fast.

However the scene ends, Emily gets to slide one of Madge’s Qualities. Possibly she chooses to slide a point of Corruption back to Purity – easily explained if she resisted Gene’s grimy wiles, but even if she caved in she could slide a point back by explaining how much she regretted her moment of weakness and how determined she was to not let the situation get any worse. Furthermore, she can raise a Quality too – there are cases to be made for raising her Observation, Honesty *or* Deceit. If she successfully got rid of Gene without surrendering her virtue, she could get a point of Courage. But only one point is available per scene, so Emily has to choose how this seduction affected Madge.

EXAMPLE #2: AMBROSE WANTS TO CLEAN UP PRECINCT 13

Unaware of his wife's drama, Sergeant Ambrose Dickerson is down at Precinct 13 leaning on Detective Noah Smith. Melvin is playing Ambrose, and one of his fellow players (Carrie) is controlling Noah, so the GM is refereeing a PC on PC conflict.

- MELVIN: Ambrose corners Noah and pulls him into the locker room where they're alone.
- GM: Does Noah go?
- CARRIE: He doesn't want to, but he gives in before risking Qualities.
- MELVIN: Once we're inside, I give him a hard and level stare. "I know about the money, Noah. This can't go on. You have to give it back, make this right."
- CARRIE: "I don't know what you're talking about."
- GM: You guys want to roll for this, or are the stakes not high enough yet?
- MELVIN: We don't have to yet.
- CARRIE: Soon, maybe.
- MELVIN: "I saw you take it. Don't make me go to Internal Affairs. The precinct's short staffed as it is."
- CARRIE: "If you really think I'll do more good behind bars for skimming some money – which I'm not saying I did – when no one got hurt and it would just rot in the evidence locker... then yeah, go ahead. Rat me out. While we're playing Johnny Pureshirt, maybe those Internal Affairs guys would be interested in hearing the truth about Cortez' convenient 'fall down the stairs' right before he told us where Murdoe was holding the girl."
- GM: Okay, these are serious threats. What pools are you two using to browbeat each other. Mel? The Internal Affairs threat?
- MELVIN: Persuasive Honesty?
- GM: Is Ambrose really willing to do it? If it's a bluff, Persuasive Deceit.
- MELVIN: Ambrose... isn't sure. *I'm* not sure. How about Persuasive Purity?
- GM: Okay. What about Noah?
- CARRIE: He'd never fink on Ambrose, but he bluffs about it. Persuasive Deceit.

(Note that Carrie is choosing to play this openly. Other groups might have more fun if the pool she chose was a secret between her and the GM.)

They roll, and neither one gets a set. It's inconclusive.

MELVIN: "It's not the same thing, Noah. Murdoe would have killed her, the clock was ticking... it wasn't just greed. You're a good cop and I don't want to see you lose sight of that! This precinct needs Noah Smith, but the smart Noah Smith who cares about putting scumbags behind bars... not the dirty Noah Smith who's doing the same things those scumbags would do, if they had a badge and the public trust."

CARRIE: Ouch. "Who got hurt? Nobody got hurt, it's not like the case is going to fall apart because it's only a *big* wad of cash instead of a huge one. The thieves were stealing from thieves, and they're both too rich to miss it, too rich to get caught without their fancy lawyers. You know this case is going to be hung in litigation for years, while both of them walk free buying diamond rings and drinking champagne while the two of us make do walking beats in year-old shoes. Why shouldn't I wet my beak a little? Who does it hurt?"

MELVIN: "It hurts *you*, Noah. I can't think of anything worse that could happen to you than to become like *them*. Except maybe for you to change and not even realize it."

GM: Roll 'em.

MELVIN: Patient Generosity? I'm trying to help him, and trying to help the whole precinct.

GM: What are you targeting?

MELVIN: Do I have to target a Quality? Can't this be about my larger goal of ridding the precinct of corruption?

GM: I think you're going to have to do better than that. Are you really willing to go after Noah's Selfishness, even though it's helped you?

MELVIN: If I must... Couldn't I go after his Corruption instead?

GM: Okay.

CARRIE: Great. I'm blocking it with Persuasive Corruption.

GM: Not a counterattack against his Purity?

CARRIE: No, Noah's just ducking and covering at this point.

They roll and Melvin gets a 2x2. Carrie gets a 2x3, and is able to use them as gobble dice to wreck his set.

CARRIE: Screw this. Noah slumps down on a bench and says, “You’re right. I just... I just wanted it to be *my turn*, you know? My turn with the good stuff.”

MELVIN: “That stuff’s no good if it costs you your soul. Are you going to put the money back?”

CARRIE: Noah nods. “I’ll... I’ll pay it back. God Ambrose, I *spent* it, you know? I can’t just get that kind of cash, if I could I wouldn’t have taken it in the first place. I’ll pay it back when I can.”

GM: Does Noah mean it?

CARRIE: Oh, hell no. Persuasive Deceit. I’m not targeting a Quality, I’m just trying to get him to believe it and get off my back.

GM: Melvin? Gobble with Understanding Deceit.

MELVIN: Sure, but before I do, Ambrose claps him on the back and says, “You’ll pay *me* back. I can front you the cash. I’ll take out a second mortgage.”

CARRIE: Ooh, that’s low.

GM: Do we even need to roll?

At the end of this scene, the players have been lucky. Nobody scored enough of a hit to decrease a Quality. Each gets a free Quality slide – maybe Melvin moves one off his Generosity to represent the money he’s fronting to Noah, or maybe he moves one to Courage because he had the strength to confront his colleague and jeopardize their friendship. Carrie has plenty of call to slide stuff off of Selfishness or Corruption or Deceit, since Noah can see Ambrose sacrificing on his behalf.

Furthermore, it’s possible that they can raise a Quality. Ambrose clearly qualifies for a point of Purity, or maybe Generosity instead. Noah probably doesn’t – though if he decides later on to leave Noah hanging financially, or even frame him for the theft, he could easily score a point of Selfishness, and set Ambrose up for a point of Honesty or Deceit in the process.

EXAMPLE #3: AMBROSE WANTS TO KILL GENE

After Madge tells Ambrose about Gene’s licentious behavior, Ambrose goes to visit his co-worker. Madge tries to stop him, in a scene where neither player is willing to risk lost Qualities, but she at least persuades him to leave his gun at home. As soon as he’s out the door, she calls Noah on the phone, but Ambrose is going to get to Gene’s house first.

Ambrose has Vigor 4, Grace 3, Courage 3, Wrath 4, Endurance 3, Defiance 3. Noah has Vigor 2, Grace 4, Courage 4, Wrath 1, Endurance 2, Defiance 2.

Gene has Vigor 2, Grace 3, Courage 1, Wrath 1, Endurance 1, Defiance 2.

GM: Gene opens the door in his bathrobe, blinking. “Sarge? Is there a break on the

Dillworth case?”

MELVIN: I slug him.

GM: No chat first?

MELVIN: I slug him. Courage or Wrath?

GM: You're both unarmed and your Combat Potential is way higher. Wrath him. He's trying to dodge with Graceful Defiance.

Ambrose has an 8d pool against Gene's 5d defense, and since he's got a minor surprise (see page 46) he gets a +1d bonus. He rolls a 3x1, while Gene gets a 2x2. Too slow to dodge. Sergeant Dickerson slams a meaty fist into Gene's breadbasket. Gene slides a point of Courage to Wrath.

GM: “Sarge, what's going on? What?” He seems genuinely baffled and afraid as he stumbles back into the house. He's trying some kind of Persuasive attack on your Wrath.

MELVIN: I don't believe him. Madge wouldn't lie to me. I hit him. Bam, right on the kisser.

GM: Another 8d pool, without the surprise bonus. He's got 6d in... whatever he's using, Honesty or Deceit.

They roll. This time, Ambrose gets a stellar 4x7, while Gene gets a 3x1. Gene would lose a point of Courage, but since it's already gone, he loses a point of Vigor instead. He also loses a die from his set, but since it's wide enough to remain a 2x1, he still gets through to Ambrose and slides a point off the Sergeant's Wrath. The GM nods to Carrie.

GM: At this point, Noah shows up. You pull up just in time to see Ambrose go across Gene's face. Blood arcs so hard you can see it spatter the window next to the front door. What are you doing?

CARRIE: I run up through the doorway and grab Ambrose in a bear hug.

GM: Are you trying to attack a Quality?

CARRIE: No, I just don't want him to clobber Gene again.

MELVIN: I'm clobbering Gene again.

GM: Sure you don't want to kick him? He's curled up in a ball on the floor. He's also pleading for you to stop. “Nothing happened Sarge, I'm sorry, please, I'm *sorry!*”

MELVIN: Is that an attack on my Wrath?

GM: Oh yeah.

MELVIN: One more hit.

Melvin rolls his decreased Vigorous Wrath pool and gets a 2x3. Carrie rolls Vigorous Courage and gets a 2x3 also. Rolling for Gene, the GM gets a 2x8, which couldn't come at a better time. Gene's 2x8 slides another point off Ambrose's Wrath and costs him a die from a set, ruining his attack.

GM: Since Gene is so pathetic, Ambrose is forced to pause – just long enough for Noah to charge in and grab him. Next round – what're you doing? Ambrose, if you want to take another shot at Gene, you need to shrug off Noah – either Vigorous Defiance or Graceful Defiance, depending on whether you want to use muscle or agility. You have to gobble out any successes he rolls. Noah, if you want to just hold onto him, it's either Vigorous Endurance or Graceful Endurance. Gene is trying to scuttle away, clutching his ribs and dribbling blood all over the floor.

MELVIN: I'm doing a multiple action – one to break the grip, one to hit Gene.

GM: One Vigorous Endurance, unless you want to escape Gracefully...? No, why would you? One Vigorous Wrath. Which pool is lower?

MELVIN: Vigorous Wrath is down to 6d.

GM: Roll 5d and hope for two sets.

CARRIE: "Christ Ambrose, you could kill him!" I'm holding on.

GM: You making an attack with the words?

CARRIE: Mmmm... no, I'd better concentrate on just getting around him and keeping him from messing up Gene. I know he's bigger so I'm just being tricky, trying to keep him wrong-footed. Graceful Endurance, then.

They roll. Gene gets no sets on his attempt to dodge. Carrie gets no sets on her attempt to keep Ambrose contained. Ambrose rolls a 3x8 but no second set.

GM: Since you need to get free before you hit Gene again, you have to spend that set on your escape. You are out, though. Gene, however, has scrambled over to a chest of drawers and is fumbling inside it.

MELVIN: Uh oh. Whatever's in there, I want to get it first.

GM: That's... hm, Graceful Wrath. He's using Graceful Courage to get whatever it is. Carrie?

CARRIE: I'm shouting "Both of you, snap out of it! Just calm down!" Double attack on Wrath using Persuasive Honesty?

GM: Try Persuasive Purity.

CARRIE: Crap. That's a pretty low pool.

GM: Take a penalty die and try for two sets. If you want to focus on only one of them – train your body language on him, try to catch his eye – you have to declare which one.

CARRIE: I'll just concentrate on Ambrose. I can't hack the penalty.

MELVIN: Thanks a lot.

They roll. Gene gets a 2x10. Ambrose gets a 2x8. Carrie gets a 2x9.

GM: Gene goes first. He has pulled out his service revolver and aimed it at Ambrose.

CARRIE: Nuts. Can I scrub my attack?

GM: Sure, though sliding a point to Courage might actually help him right now.

MELVIN: Actually, Courage is maxed out.

CARRIE: Never mind then.

MELVIN: Does my set do anything?

GM: Nope. Next round?

MELVIN: I'm trying to Vigorously, Courageously wrench the gun out of his hand.

CARRIE: I'm drawing my gun.

GM: Gene's yelling at you to get back. We'll consider it a Persuasive attack on your Courage. If he gets a set, he's going to use the gun bonus to raise Width.

They roll. Ambrose gets a 4x4, easily acting before Gene's 2x1. He does not damage one of Gene's Qualities, however, because his goal was to seize the gun, not to affect Gene. The GM decides that even though there's no particular rule about it, Gene's warning loses a die from the set, since he doesn't have the weapon any more. Noah has the gun out.



- GM: Flushed with the victorious sensation of beating the blood out of Gene, you're easily brave enough to disarm him. Now it's back to Wrath. You going to throw the gun down? Put it away? Pistol-whip him? Shoot his cheating ass?
- MELVIN: Um...
- GM: We'll come back to you. Gene's putting his hands up. If you break off your attack, he won't try to plead. Noah? Where's that gun of yours pointed, anyhow?
- CARRIE: At the floor... for now. "Ambrose, stop! You'll kill him! And then I... I'll either have to shoot you or help you bury him. I don't want to do either one."
- MELVIN: Yeah... Ambrose is all angried out for the moment. He's going to slowly lower the gun. Dump its shells on the floor. Turn and go.
- CARRIE: "Y'know Gene, I think you should stay away from his wife."
- GM: Gene seems to have figured that out for himself.



CHARACTER GENERATION

TO CREATE A CHARACTER FOR *A DIRTY WORLD* YOU NEED TO HAVE NUMBERS IN ALL HER IDENTITIES, NUMBERS IN AT LEAST SOME OF HER QUALITIES, A SECRET, AND A PROFESSION. (PROFESSIONS ARE EXPLAINED BELOW.) IF YOU FEEL THE NEED FOR SPECIALTIES, YOU CAN GET THOSE TOO. YOU START OUT WITH A POOL OF CREATION POINTS TO SPEND ON YOUR CHARACTER, TYPICALLY 40. YOU GET A PROFESSION FOR FREE, ALONG WITH A SINGLE POINT OF VIGOR, AND THEN YOU CAN SPEND YOUR POINTS AS FOLLOWS.

IDENTITY: Each point in an Identity costs three creation points.

QUALITY: Each point in a Quality costs a creation point.

SPECIALTY: Each Specialty costs two creation points. You can never have more than three Specialties.

PROFESSION: Each profession past the first free one costs three creation points.

When you pick your secret, it's Minor by default. It's something that is, at the very least, embarrassing – you're secretly in love with the wrong person, you pilfered money from the family business, or you were responsible for an accident where someone got badly hurt. If you upgrade your secret to Serious, you get another point to buy Qualities, Identities and the like. But that's for a secret that really changes your life if it's widely known, and not in a good way.

WEAK!

Forty points won't buy you a lot, I'll admit that freely. While the perception that starting characters are incompetent is common to many games, in *A Dirty World* it's especially true. But it's okay. Honest. The reason for this is that good ol' Swift Justice. By the end of a session, your character may have stacked a good 5-6 points directly on her Qualities – more if she didn't lose a lot of points in conflicts, or if the GM is pretty generous with what constitutes a 'finished scene.'

If you feel your character doesn't have the dice pools to succeed, push her into situations where she can utilize Swift Justice. If you can't get exactly what you want, consider raising its opposite and then either using the free slide to move points over or (more deviously) spur conflicts with other PCs and try to provoke them into attacking your Qualities and sliding them **for** you. Of course, that's a risky gamble, because that PC may not quit when your unwanted Quality is empty, and he might get the Wide rolls needed to just hack off a dot instead of sliding it. Don't say I didn't warn you.

Serious secrets are things like being illegitimate, cheating on a spouse, or being an alcoholic. You can get *three* points if your secret is Horrendous. If a Horrendous secret gets out, it wrecks your life, leaving you disgraced and ostracized, if not jailed or dead. Deliberate cannibalism, murder, or betraying your country during wartime are examples of Horrendous secrets.

After you pick your secret, explain it to the player sitting to your left. Her character knows your secret, somehow. If she decides she knows because she was involved (maybe tangentially), that's fine, but she can also know without sharing any guilt. Try to forget the other player knows, if your character doesn't know hers is on to him. If you need a distraction, consider the secret that the player to your right. Here's hoping it's juicy.

THE SIX BASIC PROFESSIONS

Professions represent what you've done with your life. Someone who has spent a lot of time studying, practicing and performing music has a different outlook on life than someone who spent a lot of time studying, practicing and performing acts of grotesque violence. Training and experience give you different strengths, in the form of **professional links**. A professional link is a connection between two Qualities that don't lie on the same continuum. With a professional link, you can slide a point between those Qualities when you use the free slide at the end of the scene. You can't use it when damage is being applied to one of the Qualities, however.

Note that belonging to a profession does not make you *competent* in that profession. Typically, that's a matter for your Qualities and Identities.

ACADEMIC

Someone who has made a life of the mind his primary objective qualifies as an Academic. He typically has social connections and can apply surprising resources – often not his own but those he's patiently convinced the police chief or college president or hospital director to apply. The academic could also be a nurse, a teacher, an inventor or a philanthropist.

Professional Link: Generosity and Demonstration

DETECTIVE

Private investigators, police detectives, snooping reporters and spies of all types thrive on the accumulation of information. A curious combination of skepticism and open-mindedness lets them absorb information without instantly jumping to conclusions – they rarely trust anything, even their own first impressions.

Professional Link: Selfishness and Observation

DEFENDER

This profession could indicate a bodyguard, bouncer or anyone else who provides protection. Most commonly, it's a cop. The job of the police is to preserve order, which often means dealing with people at their worst – sometimes when outnumbered and armed with nothing but six bullets and the authority of a badge. Security guards don't even get the badge. Sometimes, that's enough. Sometimes, they have to take a little punishment and bull their way through.

Professional Link: Courage and Endurance

THUG

Some people like to hurt others. They are often disliked, which means they have to develop some instincts to help them ooze out of the trouble that so often dogs their kick-itching heels. This is also the profession for boxers, enforcers, torpedoes, hit men and a variety of vicious petty crooks.

Professional Link: Wrath to Defiance

INGÉNUÉ

The ingénue doesn't have to be female, though in film noir the honest and pure people typically are. This profession represents anyone who believes in truth and virtue, and strives to follow a higher justice. It could easily be a crusading journalist, a minister, a political organizer or a surprisingly clean union steward. It works just as well for lawyers of several stripes (District Attorney, public defender, lawyer for the oppressed).

Professional Link: Purity to Honesty

FEMME FATALE

The dark counterpart to the ingénue is the femme fatale who, again, doesn't have to be female but often is. This is someone who excels at manipulating the emotions of others so that she can prey on their weaknesses – sometimes for gain, sometimes just 'cause it's what she does best. This is also a good profession for con artists and criminal masterminds.

Professional Link: Corruption to Deceit

EXAMPLE SPECIALTIES

Air Pilot

Architect

Astrologer

Atomic Engineer

Couture Clothing Designer

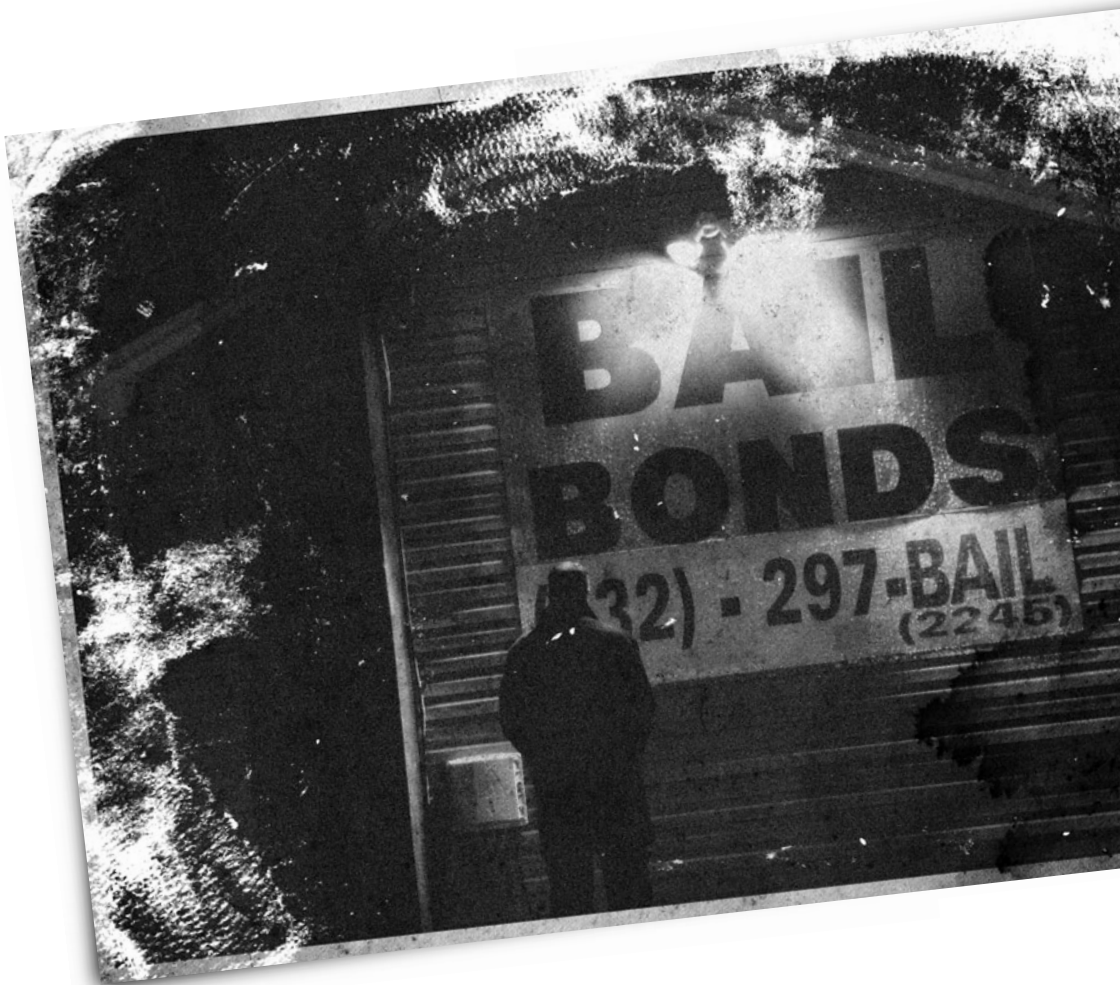
Lawyer

Linguistic Specialist


Optometrist

Ship's Captain

Surgeon



APPENDIX: ONE ROLL LEGAL PROBLEMS



OFTEN, A GM COMES UP WITH A GREAT MYSTERY, SUBTLE CLUES AND DEVASTATING PLOT TWISTS ALL ON HER OWN. THAT'S GREAT, THAT'S AS IT SHOULD BE. BUT SOMETIMES A GM NEEDS (OR WANTS) A LITTLE HELP. NOTHING WRONG WITH THAT, EITHER. TO LEND THAT HELP, HERE'S A RANDOM PLOT GENERATOR.

It works like this. Roll 11d10 (or fewer if you want something less complicated). Sort out the sets and note down the dice outside pairs. The sets indicate the central legal elements of the problem – the crux of the matter that's involving a P.I., lawyer, cop or interested bystander. The loose dice represent twists, complications and revelations.

With one roll, the GM gets a pile of elements, but it's like a tangled skein of yarn. The GM still has to sort, interpret and arrange the events, thereby knitting them into a warm sweater of betrayal, greed and fear.

If you get a wide set, don't worry about anything that comes earlier in the progression: If you get a 4x2, (blackmail) it doesn't mean that the 3x2 and 2x2 results (stalking and amorous badgering) come into play. They sure *can* if you want, but they don't have to. (The 5x5 Divorce is an exception to this, obviously.)

It can be a good idea to consider the Width of the sets as a rough gauge of their seriousness. Events on the chart don't just get more serious as the Width rises: Every die in a set is also a die that's not randomly complicating matters, so devote the energy and time you'd have spent on those complications to the central issue instead.

It can also be a good idea to set some dice to results you want and to just toss the rest to inspire elaboration. If you know you want a Black Dahlia-style killer freakshow, set five dice to 10 and roll the other six to see what other plot clowns are wandering around the noir circus.

CENTRAL DISPUTES

x1 THEFT

- 2x1 Petty, minor stuff.
- 3x1 An item of great sentimental value.
- 4x1 An elaborate, intrusive theft of something very expensive.
- 5x1 Bank robbery.

x2 HARASSMENT

- 2x2 Amorous badgering, the kind of thing that would be funny in a romantic comedy but is kind of creepy elsewhere.
- 3x2 Stalking. That is, anonymous watching and following.
- 4x2 Blackmail.
- 5x2 Twisted, serious death threats. Possibly with props.

x3 PROPERTY CRIME

- 2x3 Petty vandalism.
- 3x3 Destruction of something valuable.
- 4x3 Something is massively fouled, defaced or polluted, such as a boat, building or piece of real estate. Or, if you like, a riot.
- 5x3 Multiple arson.

x4 NEGLIGENCE

- 2x4 Someone was humiliated or a reputation was ruined due to carelessness.

- 3x4 Negligence led to some widespread, low-grade problem – mild illness, a horrible odor from the sewer, car breakdowns, et cetera. Nothing life threatening.
- 4x4 Permanent injury.
- 5x4 Someone died due to another's failure and irresponsibility

x5 DIVORCE

- 2x5 Property is in doubt.
- 3x5 There are custody issues.
- 4x5 One or both sides are making vicious accusations - drunkenness, abuse and the like.
- 5x5 Wealth, fame, and all of the other x5 results.

x6 CONTRACT DISPUTE

- 2x6 Forgery accusations.
- 3x6 A suspicious Last Will and Testament.
- 4x6 Vague wording in an important document.
- 5x6 An international, multi-million dollar deal hangs in the balance.

x7 GOVERNMENT REGULATION

- 2x7 Police Misconduct
- 3x7 Kickbacks
- 4x7 Bribery
- 5x7 Patronage accusations

x8 FRAUD

- 2x8 The short con – a one time deceit meant to take whatever the mark happens to be carrying.
- 3x8 Imposture
- 4x8 Embezzlement
- 5x8 A long, elaborate con job meant to take multiple people for all they've got.

x9 PERSONAL ATTACK

- 2x9 Someone got in a punch-up.
- 3x9 Assault with a deadly weapon - a gun was brandished or a knife came into play.
- 4x9 Assault with intent to kill - the gun went off or serious harm was done.
- 5x9 Mayhem, in the strict legal construction of "depriving another person of a body part."

x10 MURDER

- 2x10 Manslaughter
- 3x10 A crime of passion
- 4x10 An icy, premeditated killing
- 5x10 Perverse, maniacal behavior. Not just killing, but body mutilation, cannibalism, necrophilia and the like.

TWISTS, REVEALS AND COMPLICATIONS

- 1 Evidence of official misconduct, be it police, morgue attendant or forest ranger
- 2 A frame job, or evidence tampering
- 3 Insanity
- 4 Addiction
- 5 Reluctant key witness
- 6 Seemingly damning physical evidence
- 7 An unusually young, naïve or inexperienced suspect
- 8 Passionate, powerful courtroom testimony
- 9 A marital infidelity angle
- 10 It activates, involves or touches on a player character's secret.

FOR EXAMPLE...

THE CASE OF KID KLEPTO

I roll 1,1,2,3,4,5,7,2x8,9,10. That means the actual crimes are petty theft and the short con. Why would a self-respecting noir character give this anything other than a cigarette-scented snort of disinterest? Well, there's always the incident 10 wild card. Nothing like a threat to a secret to spur interest. But let's look at that big pile of external elements.

3 and 7 give us a naïve, possibly insane suspect. Let's stretch 'insane' to cover mental retardation. (In the noir era, that's probably where it got filed.) This gives us a kid who's a kleptomaniac, not really functionally intelligent. Why isn't he in the slammer or an asylum already? Give the kid some rich parents. Rich enough to hire a P.I. for instance.

5 and 9, reluctant witness and infidelity? Cheating makes you shun publicity. So the only one who can clear the kid is a mistress witness. Possibly the theft victim's? Yeah.

2 and 4, evidence tampering and addiction, seem to combine nicely with that 2x8. Addiction can sure provoke deceit and desperation. Okay. I've got it.

Ben Sticks works for the wealthy Diamanté family in some capacity - cook, personal secretary, tutor, butler... anything that puts him at the house most days. He's got a problem with the ponies (4) and needs some money *fast*. But he's not about to rob the Diamantés... not when Ian's around.

Ian Diamanté is the family disappointment (7). Mentally, he's about five years old, and not a bright five either. He likes shiny things (3) and is not at all clear on abstractions like 'property rights' or 'privacy.' He's wandered into neighbors' homes before and helped himself to food, scraps of tinfoil, children's toys and other oddments (2x1). Some neighbors tolerate this (he really is a sweet kid), some have servants to deal with it, but there are still times, about once a year, when the Diamantés have to say sorry and give people an opportunity to graciously forgive. It helps that their apologies usually take the form of cash.

Ben watched and waited for another one of Ian's 'uh ohs' and when it happened at the Claytons' house, he snuck in right afterwards and helped himself to some bearer bonds. No dummy, he hid one in Ian's room to frame the boy (2, 2x8). The only fly in the ointment is that he was seen sneaking out the back door, by someone who was *also* sneaking out the back door. Annabelle Murphy is the Mr. Clayton's side project (9) and she knows it won't do her any good to get between Mr. and Mrs. Clayton (5). Can the PCs clear Ian's name and uncover Ben's perfidy?

THE CASE OF ATHEIST GRACE

Rolling 1,2,3,3,4,5,6,8,10,10,10 I've got petty vandalism and *murder*! What a combo! If you'd killed someone, would you stick around to decorate afterwards? Or if you were just kicking in some windows, would you kill a witness? Hm.

The side elements, once again, seem to be where it's at. 6, seemingly ironclad evidence, plays nicely with 2 (tampered evidence) and both of them work well with 1 (official misconduct). So this isn't just a frame, it's a frame made to exacting professional standards. 4, 5 and 8 give us addiction, a reluctant witness and powerful testimony. Is the powerful testimony the truth from the reluctant witness? Or is it that only the reluctant witness can counter the testimony?

Let's assemble this crazy thing.

Maynard Grace is a strident Communist atheist, prone to standing in front of the cathedral denouncing how it was built on the sweat of the deluded proletariat. Some cops (who just happen to be Catholic) aren't crazy about this behavior and periodically roust him, none too gently. Not long after Maynard got a warning, someone dropped by the cathedral in the middle of the night and threw bricks through several stained-glass windows (2x3).

The catholic cops were sure Maynard did it but couldn't get it to stick. So they decided it was compellingly in the public interest to frame him (2) for heroin possession (4). They grabbed him, made statements that they'd seen him in the alley behind the convent acting suspicious, planted some Mexican brown on him and hauled him off to the slammer (6).

Only here's the thing: While they were busy protecting the public from Maynard Grace, someone sexually assaulted a nun, either before or after strangling her (3x10). Maybe during, the coroner isn't sure. This monster's only plausible escape route? Why, right through the alley where four cops have falsely testified that they were arresting Maynard.

As you can imagine, the altar-boy cops are in a bind. Their options are to stick to their story and let the real killer get away clean, or admit a criminal conspiracy to frame an innocent man (1).

The witness who could damn or exonerate (8) Grace is a 70-year-old nun who took a vow of silence (5) when she entered the convent as a teenager. She claims to remember nothing of that night, nothing at all, and did we mention that her health isn't the strongest?

Atheist Grace needs a miracle if he's going to avoid the chair. Or at least a friend. What he gets is the PCs.

THE CASE OF THE NEAR JUDGMENT

Where the last two examples had plenty of tangential elements, this one's got a heap of sets. With a 1,2,3,3,4,4,5,6,6,10,10 we're looking at vandalism again (2x3), negligence ruining a reputation (2x4), accusations of forgery (2x6) and manslaughter (2x10). The twists? Official misconduct (1) shows up again, as do insanity (2) and the reliably reluctant witness (5).

Let's start with insanity and petty vandalism, which sound good side by side. John Markham is a religious fanatic, complete with glazed eyes, long beard, horrendous body odor and an unbreakable tendency to scrawl, "JUDGMENT IS NEAR" on any available surface. He's homeless and incoherent and frightening, but resourceful at acquiring paint.

Mad John Markham has a few friends. Elena Syzkowski saw how kind he is to birds and strays, and feeds him even as she's seen him feed them. A street preacher named Jordan Watts keeps trying to get Markham off skid row, but it's slow going. A few other bums seem to look out for him too - almost as if they regard him as good luck or a kind of pet.

Seemingly a world away from those gritty streets are two tidy bureaucrats, mild-mannered Miles Dove and foul-tempered Shelby Crowe. They never liked one another, as anyone in the zoning department could tell you. Their petty politicking was the stuff of legend, but when one of them rezoned a hill for industrial construction without a proper geological survey... it sounds like a little thing, a minor mistake, who could care? Only the diggers displaced a cliff under an historic cemetery. The result was not only a disastrous landslide into the construction site, it was a landslide with some highly-regarded corpses bouncing around on top.

Dove blamed Crowe. Crowe blamed Dove. The documents fingered Dove, conclusively, and he was fired in disgrace. Only Dove has always insisted the documents were forged, so when Crowe winds up dead, he's the prime suspect.

Who really killed Crowe? Mad John Markham, but he was provoked. Crowe came upon Markham, painting up a building before it even had its fourth wall. Crowe started yelling. When Markham ignored him, Crowe hit him in the back with a fist-sized chunk of concrete. Markham responded in kind, Crowe charged and Markham ran into the construction site.

Showing the same kind of poor judgment that resulted in the landslide (yeah, it really was his fault), Crowe cornered Markham by the bulldozers, then promptly skidded on a patch of mud and fell. Markham pressed the advantage and beat Crowe's brains in with a lead pipe.

In the meantime, John's friend Elena witnessed the start of the whole thing - the painting and rock throwing, all the way up to the flight and pursuit. She quietly came down and washed the paint off the wall, because she didn't want John to get in trouble again. She figured that mean man (whoever he was) would chase John off, get tired, and go home. She had no idea things would escalate so far.

Dove has no alibi - he claims he was home, by himself, fixing a leaky basement fixture. Elena doesn't want to believe John could have killed that man, and she's also scared of what will happen to her if it looks like she was covering up the murder. If the PCs can't uncover the truth, Miles Dove is doomed.

DIRTY WORLD CHEAT SHEET

IDENTITIES

- Patience (Mental):** Focus on a problem and grind away at it. If it hits zero you go **berserk** and can't use Patience, Cunning or Understanding until some Patience is restored.
- Cunning (Mental):** Reacting to the unexpected and thinking nontraditionally.
- Vigor (Physical):** Good health, strength and raw vitality. If it hits zero your character is dying.
- Grace (Physical):** Balance, body control and delicacy.
- Understanding (Spiritual):** The ability to relate to people and empathize with them on a profound and personal level. If it hits zero, your character despairs and is unable to use Vigor or Patience for rolls.
- Persuasion (Spiritual):** Getting people to see things your way.

INSTANT QUALITY IMPROVEMENTS

- Generosity:** Help the unwilling.
- Selfishness:** Steal from the trusting.
- Demonstration:** Understand something new.
- Observation:** Get taken by surprise.
- Courage:** Win an even or disadvantageous fight.
- Wrath:** Torment the helpless.
- Endurance:** Survive a physical confrontation.
- Defiance:** Be scorned.
- Purity:** Right a wrong at cost, without duress.
- Corruption:** Torment on purpose, for no gain.
- Honesty:** Suffer from being deceived.
- Deceit:** Have your faith betrayed.

QUALITIES

- Generosity (Mental):** Financial resources and social status.
- Selfishness (Mental):** Taking things from other people to their cost and your benefit.
- Demonstration (Mental):** Education, knowledge and experience. Explaining things to people.
- Observation (Mental):** Learning, noticing or observing things.
- Courage (Physical):** Cope with danger. Fight fair or against the odds.
- Wrath (Physical):** Bully and physically torment.
- Endurance (Physical):** Use your body to make something keep happening.
- Defiance (Physical):** Use your body to keep something from happening.
- Purity (Spiritual):** Contact the good side of other people, inspiring them to better action.
- Corruption (Spiritual):** Perceive others' sins and weaknesses, and lure them towards them.
- Honesty (Spiritual):** Deal with the truth.
- Deceit (Spiritual):** Deal with Deception.

QUALITY DAMAGE

- 2x or 3x Set:** Slide a point off the Quality. If it's empty, slide off the Identity associated with it.
- 4x Set:** Remove a point from the Quality. If it's empty, remove a point from its Identity.
- 5+x Set:** Remove a point directly from the Identity attached to the Quality.

WEAPONS, SECRETS & SURPRISES

- Minor:** +1d or +1 Width. Switchblade, embarrassment, circumstantial evidence.
- Serious:** +2d or +2 Width. Handgun, humiliation, objective evidence.
- Horrendous:** +3d or +3 Width. Machine gun, total social upheaval, damning and incontrovertible evidence.



HE WAS SITTING IN THE BOOTH AT THE DINER. A PECULIAR, AMERICAN PLACE, IN MY EYES. SO MUCH CHROME.

“Thank you for meeting me,” he said.

“It was the least I could do,” I replied.

“The least you could do is nothing.” He turned to the window, the corners of his mouth deepening down. “A lot of people do that.”

“I know.”

“Yeah.” He looked back at me. It made me uncomfortable, those doe-brown eyes. “I guess I don’t have to tell you that.”

We sat in silence for a little while. I waited for the waitress, who did not come. “You look good,” he said. I thanked him, and asked him how his job was going.

“Oh, that.” He glanced down, played with his ring. “It’s, um, it’s not easy, making the change back. Like people have forgotten, you know? Forgotten how to act. What normal is.”

I reached across and put my hand on his. I had to. "The changes aren't easy for anyone."

"Guess not." His fingers slowly encircled mine. "People just want something to hold on to, I guess." His head tilted up, gradually, to see my face. "Something they can know for sure."

Those eyes, by nature so warm and trusting. How many men had they watched die? How many of those men had he killed?

"I know you," he said, leaning forward.

"No, I'm not sure you do." I tried to retrieve my hand, but not very hard. He tightened around it, not unpleasantly. I could feel dread poisoning my gratitude.

"I don't know about your childhood or your family or, or your favorite song I guess, but I know you. At least, I know where I stand with you."

"You saved my life."

"I know." He squeezed, then let go. "That's about all I know."

At last, the waitress arrived. We asked for coffee, and he tried to order an omelette for me. When she had gone, he asked my favorite song, and I laughed. It was a sad sound, not a joyful one.

"What is it, that you want from me?" I asked.

He turned those eyes on me again, beseeching. What a horror those eyes could turn into, I thought, with only a very little difference. He did not have to say that what he needed, was to be needed. "I went... there, on a train," I said. I realized I was picking at my sleeve, the button by my wrist. I stopped. "Looking out a hole in the wall, I saw mountains, and forests, and beautiful fields.

Even the war could not make those mountains ugly. The... the sadness, and the fear, it only made it more precious, seeing the sky perfect blue and a river, or a pink sunset cloud. Do you see?"

He shook his head, eyebrows drawn together. I do not think he was well educated.

"I saw beauty there, but the destination was hell. What you want, with me, would have it's priceless times, but the end... that I could not do to you."

"You think being... with me... would be like that?"

"No, do not misunderstand, please! I owe you a debt I can never repay, ever. What you, all of you, did for us... it is not only goodness, but greatness. I understand, and the people you work with do not, yes? To them, it is far away, a... a dream."

"A war story," he muttered.

"You want to know you are a good man who did a great thing," I said, and I wanted to touch him again, but I didn't. "Good men, they do not cheat on their wives."

He left me then, and I drank my coffee and wished I could cry. When the waitress returned, I said I didn't want anything else. He had not paid. As I reached into my purse, the button fell from my sleeve - I had been tugging it again. "Funny birthmark," she said. "Like a five."

"It is a tattoo," I replied.

"A what?"

I didn't explain. I don't think she understood, or was interested. I turned my wrist down and paid, before she could see the other numbers in the string.

A DIRTY WORLD

NAME

GAME

PLAYER

PROFESSION

CURRENT COMBAT POTENTIAL

SECRET

STATUS AND RESOURCES — **GENEROSITY** — PAYOFFS AND BRIBES

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○○○○○

FORGERY, GRAFT, EMBEZZLEMENT — **SELFISHNESS** — STEALS CARS, PICK LOCKS

PATIENCE

○○○○○
○○○○○

CUNNING

EDUCATION AND KNOWLEDGE — **DEMONSTRATION** — QUICK FIXES, JURY RIGGING

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RECONSTRUCT A CRIME SCENE — **OBSERVATION** — SPOT AN AMBUSH

FAIR FIGHT, FISTS — **COURAGE** — FAIR FIGHT, GUNS

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BEAT ON THE INFERIOR — **WRATH** — SHOOT THE UNARMED

VIGOR

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GRACE

MARATHON RUN, HOLD A PIN — **ENDURANCE** — CAR CHASE, BALANCING

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SMASH OBSTACLES — **DEFIANCE** — AVOID OR ESCAPE

SEE SOMEONE'S BEST SIDE — **PURITY** — PERSUADE THROUGH DECENCY

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COMPREHEND DEVIIOUS MOTIVES — **CORRUPTION** — PERSUADE WITH SIN

UNDERSTANDING

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PERSUASION

FIND FLAWS IN TRUE STATEMENTS — **HONESTY** — TELL THE TRUTH CONVINCINGLY

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SEE THROUGH LIES — **DECEIT** — TELL LIES



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