

An aerial photograph of a coastline, showing a mix of brown, rocky land and vibrant turquoise water. The water has a swirling, marbled appearance, suggesting shallow reefs or sandbars. The land is rugged and uneven, with some white patches that could be snow or light-colored rock.

FOR WRITERS
AND ROLEPLAYERS

BUILDING CHARACTERS

DANCING LIGHTS PRESS



BUILDING CHARACTERS

For Writers and Roleplayers

Berin Kinsman

[Dancing Lights Press](#)

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INTRODUCTION

At the heart of all great stories are strong characters. It doesn't matter whether you're reading a short story, writing a novel, or watching a play. The characters found in TV series, comic books, and games are more alike on a creative level than they are different. The symbiotic relationship between character and story is universal across media.

In this book, we'll explore what goes into crafting memorable and enjoyable characters. While the focus here is on tabletop roleplaying games, I'll be using writing terms rather than standard RPG jargon. It's not going to be about crunching numbers or picking abilities. I'll talk about *writing* your character, rather than just playing them. Because while there are other hats that we wear around the table, including those of performer and tactician, we're all writers. Even if we never put pen to paper or fingers to keyboard, it's ultimately the writer's craft that we're dabbling in.

Berin Kinsman

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USING THIS BOOK

There are many elements that can go into the creation of a great character. All of them are optional. Use as many of the elements presented as you choose. Skip over any that don't resonate with you, or fit the project that you're working on. All these elements are system-agnostic and usable with any game mechanics, settings, or genres.

RANKINGS AND RATINGS

There are two units of measure used throughout this book. They can be used unmodified with most roleplaying games that have a core mechanic based on a twenty-sided die. For other roleplaying game systems, only the numerical Ratings will need to be scaled. If you're using this book purely for writing projects, the Rankings and Ratings can still be useful. Simply compare the character's level of ability to the task before them, and use that to decide their degree of success or failure. The specifics of how Ranking and Ratings relate to individual elements are explained in the entries for those elements.

Rankings

Many character elements have a descriptive Ranking. These can reflect a number of things, based on the nature of the specific element. It might be the breadth and depth of an ability, the amount of resources that a character has access to, or how typical some element is compared to what's normative within the setting.

The Ranking levels are as follows:

Low – *The element is absent, or falls into the lowest level possible.*

Below Baseline – *The element is statistically below typical.*

Baseline – *The element's level is typical for the setting.*

Above Baseline – *The character is statistically above typical.*

High – *The element falls into the highest level possible.*

From a story perspective, Rankings help to flag potential conflicts. A character with a low ability Ranking or few resources will have difficulties, to be sure. Other elements that fall outside the norm will also present the opportunity for interpersonal conflicts. Characters that fall outside of physical or ideological norms can run into problems with those who are considered normative. These types of conflicts will be addressed under the individual elements.

Ratings

Each ability has a numerical Rating from +5 to -5. This represents where the character's ability falls relative to the baseline for people in that genre, time, and place. Ratings are a zero-sum game; for every +1, the character must have a -1 in something else.

- 5** *Dangerous in this area.*
- 4** *Incompetent in this area.*
- 3** *Obviously disadvantaged in this area.*
- 2** *Disadvantaged in this area.*
- 1** *Mildly disadvantaged in this area.*
- 0** *No natural Aptitude in this area.*
- +1** *Slightly gifted in this area.*
- +2** *Gifted in this area.*
- +3** *Obviously gifted in this area.*
- +4** *Brilliant in this area.*
- +5** *Exceptional in this area.*

CREATING AND RESOLVING CONFLICT

The key purpose of a character in a story is to create and resolve conflict in an interesting way. No matter what type of story you're telling, or what sort of character you're creating, you need to begin with these questions:

What sorts of problems does this character create and resolve?

Every character will lean toward one or the other, but except for the most minor of supporting characters all of your fictional people will have elements of both. Positive change for one person invariably creates negative change for someone else, and vice-versa. That's why even the darkest villain thinks they're the hero of their own story, and the most pure-hearted protagonist can find someone cursing their name. Every element that you assign to a character has to come with additional question:

How does this lead to internal and external conflict?

Again, sometimes a given character element will lead to problems for them and with other people, but can simply be one or the other. An element doesn't have to create a problem, though. If it doesn't, it should be an element that's used to solve other problems. This leads to the final question:

How does this help to resolve an internal or external problem?

Every choice you make for a character has to either create or resolve some type of conflict. It can do both, as appropriate. If you remember that, and factor in things like genre, setting, and theme, you'll end up with a memorable character with plenty to do within the context of the story.

ASK WHY AT LEAST FIVE TIMES

It's not enough to simply have a list of descriptive words and phrases. You need to explore the reasons behind each element in the context of the character, the setting, the theme, and the genre. When looking the elements of your character ask yourself, why did you select that element? Why did you, or the character, make that decision? What is the purpose of selecting that trait? Why were they part of that event? Dig a little bit deeper. Answer the question that arises, and ask why again. Answer that and ask again, and again, until you've asked at least five times. By the final answer you'll have developed some deep back story around that element. You'll begin to start connect the elements into the whole that is your character.

You can begin by rephrasing a basic need or goal in the form of a question. Let's start with a basic physiological need: The character needs food.

1. Why does the character need food?

She needs food because she's hungry but has no money to buy something to eat.

2. Why does she have no money?

She needs money because she doesn't have a job and has no savings.

3. Why doesn't she have a job?

She has no job because she never finished high school and has no marketable skills.

4. Why did she not finish high school?

She dropped out of high school to take care of her younger siblings.

5. Why does she have to take care of her brothers and sisters?

She takes care of her siblings because her parents are both irresponsible alcoholics.

At any point you can ask a different question. Then you'll give a different answer, and end up with a different character. The choices that the character makes, as reflected in your answers, reveals clues as to their personality and hints about other life experiences. What you have in the end is the truth for this character. We know a lot more about her now, including what happened to her in the past and what sort of person she is. In the above example, we can see that she's a responsible person, If she's not strong, she's at least trying to be. She didn't walk away, or take after her parents, because she's trying to step up and care for her siblings. But she's clearly struggling, because she's hungry.

As we look at her goals, we already have her motivation, we know the stakes, and we can see the obstacles. Her goal is going to find financial stability somehow. She can achieve that by getting a job, establishing herself in a career, or otherwise acquiring money. Maybe she's an inventor, or a treasure hunter, or a thief. But her motivation is to take care of her family. The stakes are survival, the family breaking up, going hungry and becoming homeless. The obstacles are her lack of skills and a poor perception of her own worth and her possibilities.

Now we know her story. All this history will influence the choices you make for her, and that she makes for herself.

THE CHARACTER CREATION PROCESS

Begin with a character in mind. Work through the book from beginning to end. Following each step until you've created what you want. You may end up with someone different than you intended. You'll discover things you hadn't imagined. That's okay. That's part of the process of creating a three-dimensional character.

Types and Roles

Know the part the character will play in your story. Is she intended to be the hero, or at least the star, of the story? Is he the villain or provider of obstacles and difficulties for the protagonist? Or are they a supporting character? Ones you know their role, you can decide on one of the many ways they might fill that role.

Stages of Life

At the beginning of your story, where is the character along the journey from birth to death? How has the past shaped them into the person they are at this moment? In what ways has the life they've lived so far prepared them for what's yet to come? What stage of life are they transitioning out into?

Dimensions

Every character has three dimensions. *Physiology* is the collection of advantages or drawbacks their body provides, including their looks. *Sociology* is the environment that they've lived in, and the impact it's had on her or him. *Psychology* is how they deal with all of the influences and implications of the first two.

Motivations

Knowing where the character has been and who they are, what drives them forward? Can you identify their present needs? Do they have hopes, dreams, and aspirations? What do they stand to gain or lose in pursuing their goals? What forces, whether people, events, or resources, keep them from getting what they truly want?

Aptitudes

An aptitude is something that a character is naturally good at. Technically, these talents are part of their *physiology* dimension. It's called out separately because there are numerical ratings attached, for easier adaptation to roleplaying games.

Experiences

These are skills acquired from things the character has done. Experiences include education, jobs, and hobbies. Technically part of the *sociology* dimension, experiences are called out separately and ranked descriptively for use in roleplaying games.

Resources

These are the assets that the character has available to draw upon, They may also be things they lack. Resources include money, possessions, reputation, and people they can call on for help when they need it. They're the spoils the character has accumulated from their life story so far. As with experiences, resources are ranked descriptively.

Wonders

A wonder is any sort of special ability, like magical spells or super powers, that the character has. They're weird because they

can be an aptitude, an experience, or a resource. Not all characters have wonders. Not all stories need them. It depends a lot upon the setting, the time and place, and the genre your character exists in.

Telling Their Story

Finally, you're going to want to record all the elements about your character. This gives you both a starting point, and a reference going forward as their story unfolds. You'll want to keep track of their history, and update it as they experience the world and new and exciting things happen to them.

TYPES AND ROLES

Every character has a part to play. Without them, there is no story to tell. In most stories there are four basic character types: **Protagonists**, **Antagonists**, and **Supporting Characters**. There are also *background characters*, but they're usually more set dressing than characters. Each of these types is further broken down into archetypal roles.

The way you write your character, the decisions that they will make, and the back story that you create for them, begins with that role. You should establish type and role first, before fleshing out any other details.

PROTAGONISTS

The Protagonist is the main character in the story. They're usually, but not always, the hero. They are the viewpoint character, and we see and Experience the world through their eyes. Their decisions and actions drive the events of the story. In a roleplaying game, all the Players' characters are Protagonists in an ensemble cast.

Protagonist Roles

There are many archetypal roles that Protagonists can assume within a story. A different role will alter the context of a character, and result in a different story. Protagonist roles include the **Caregiver**, the **Innocent**, the **Leader**, the **Loner**, the **Lover**, the **Monarch**, the **Sage**, and the **Warrior**.

THE CAREGIVER

The archetypal Caregiver is an emotional being, driven by empathy and compassion. They need to express their emotions. This often takes the form caring for other people or engaging in a creative field. A Caregiver often has difficulty keeping their emotions in check, and will speak and act based on passions and instincts.

Examples of the Caregiver include ***John Watson, Jane Eyre, Leonard McCoy, Willow Rosenberg, Alfred Pennyworth,*** and ***Carry Bradshaw***. The Antagonist counterpart to the Caregiver is the ***Aggressor***.

The Caregiver's Values

The Caregiver needs their own self-expression, but is also concerned about the feelings and well-being of others. They will typically put the welfare of the Innocent and vulnerable ahead of their own. Caregivers also worry about what other people think of them, even though they will not usually seek thanks or validation. As selfless as they seem, they do want to feel appreciated.

What the Caregiver dislikes are those who are not in touch with their feelings. People who act without concern for the well-being of others upset them. They don't like people who consider Caregivers to be lesser or subordinate because they are in touch with their feelings. They often worry about literally or figuratively losing people they care for.

Perceptions of the Caregiver

Other characters often see the Caregiver as weak, whiny, or emotionally needy. Caregivers are sometimes dismissed as overly

dramatic. They may be perceived to be sycophants interested in nothing but pleasing other people.

The Caregiver's Cast

The **Destroyer's** drive toward mindless destruction and casual cruelty is unfathomable to a Caregiver, and that generates drama. The **Innocent** can provide the Caregiver with someone to watch over and be responsible for. The **Leader's** need to fulfill a mission or plan in spite of emotional attachments can sometimes run contrary to the needs the Caregiver. The **Loner's** shell of solitude will prompt the Caregiver to try to draw them out and understand their introversion. The **Lover** will obviously be someone the Caregiver can love, who will love and care for them in return.

THE INNOCENT

The archetypal Innocent is happy and confident because life is easy. They know that people are trustworthy. All their needs are met. They have yet to Experience anything bad in their life; if they have they've gotten through it with a smile on their face and a song in their heart. An Innocent doesn't act their age, sometimes because they don't want to, sometimes because they don't know how to.

Examples of the Innocent include ***Dorothy Gale, Don Quixote, Tom Sawyer, Forrest Gump, Jane Bennett,*** and ***Sansa Stark.***

The Antagonist counterpart to the Innocent is the ***Drifter.***

The Innocent's Values

The Innocent values strong relationships with other people. They like having new Experiences, discovering things, and meeting people. The world affects them, but they choose to not let negativity

get to them. What the Innocent really cherishes is their freedom, even if that ironically means they're dependent on other people.

What the Innocent dislikes are responsibilities. Those things cut into their ability to have fun and enjoy life. They distrust people who try to control them. They often fear they'll have to "grow up", and that their friends will outgrow them and move on.

Perceptions of the Innocent

Other characters often see the Innocent as naive or stupid. To go through life carefree means they don't grasp the seriousness or inherently tragic nature of life. Unscrupulous characters will try to exploit the Innocent.

The Innocent's Cast

The **Aggressor's** physical and emotional violence is something that the Innocent isn't equipped to deal with on any level. The **Destroyer** makes it difficult for the Innocent to see nothing but good in people as they pull things apart. The **Judge** will demand that the Innocent grow up, and force them to deal with harsher realities. The **Leader** will nurture the Innocent's good nature, and value their positive outlook on life. The **Monarch** knows that the Innocent is the exact sort of person that needs their protection from harm.

THE LEADER

The archetypal Leader is all about the job. What they do is the core of their identity. It's not that they don't care about friends or family, but all the Leader's attention and resources focus on the

mission. A Leader is calm, organized, tactical, and tends to take a long view of things.

Examples of the Leader include **Spock**, **Minerva McGonagall**, **Sherlock Holmes**, **Mr. Darcy**, **Ma Joad**, and **Karin Murphy**.

The Antagonist counterpart to the Leader is the **Mastermind**.

The Leader's Values

The Leader values respect. They want to admiration and a following. The means for gaining that respect is competition, with themselves and others. Self-improvement is both a type of success and a means to success. The Leader obsesses over self-image, and what other people think.

What the Leader dislikes are the disorganized, unquantifiable, and uncontrollable things in like. Emotional outbursts make them uncomfortable. They hate losing when they have done everything right and followed a plan that should not have failed.

Perceptions of the Leader

Other characters often see the Leader as emotionless and robotic. Their passions are things, rather than people. Those in relationships with the Leader feel that they are less important than the job, because they are.

The Leader's Cast

The **Caregiver** creates a juxtaposition of goals-oriented motivation and emotion-driven motivation. The **Lover** will encourage the Leader to relax, let go, and enjoy life a little bit. The

Sage's unquantifiable spirituality will be at odds with the Leader's pragmatic nature. The **Destroyer** will introduce chaos and uncertainty into the Leader's orderly and well-regulated life.

THE LONER

The archetypal Loner is a private person that prefers their own company to the madness of crowds. It isn't that they don't like people. They just find comfort and peace in being alone with their thoughts. A Loner is often sensitive emotionally, with a rich inner life. They can't handle being with too many people at once.

Examples of the Loner include **Willy Wonka**, **Miss Havisham**, **Katniss Everdeen**, **Mycroft Holmes**, **Batman**, and **Beth March**.

The Antagonist counterpart to the Loner is the **Schemer**.

The Loner's Values

The Loner values solitude. They don't like feeling rushed or forced to do things other than their own way. Relationships with other people are on their own terms. They prefer one-on-one interactions. The Loner requires a sense of balance in their life.

What the Loner dislikes are complications. Messy emotional entanglements, dependence on other people, and losing independence are big issues. The Loner hates being the center of attention, preferring to be the silent partner in the background.

Perceptions of the Loner

Other characters see the Loner as aloof and distant. They seem lazy, because they do things at their own pace. A Loner is a good listener, as they let others do most of the talking.

The Loner's Cast

The **Caregiver** understands and respects the Loner's need for solitude as a form of self-care. The **Destroyer** knows threats to other people are among the few things that will cause a Loner to spring into action. The **Drifter's** reckless and antisocial nature means they are often mistaken for Loners. The **Innocent** is accepting of Loners and willing to relate to the Loner on his or her terms. The **Player** will try to take advantage of the Loner's solitary nature and desire for close one-on-one relationships. The **Tyrant** will try to force the Loner into doing things he or she doesn't want to do and seek to take away their freedom.

THE LOVER

The archetypal Lover is a confident and sensual person. They know what they want and aren't ashamed to go after it. The Lover doesn't care what people, and won't allow gossip alter their pursuit of happiness. They do enjoy being the center of attention.

Examples of the Lover include **James Bond**, **Jessica Rabbit**, **James T. Kirk**, **Captain Jack Harkness**, **Phryne Fisher**, and **Blanche Devereaux**.

The Antagonist counterpart to the Lover is the **Player**.

The Lover's Values

The Lover values close relationships and deep connections with people. They need to be in charge of their own life and their own choices. Self-expression is as important as breathing.

What the Lover dislikes is being hurt emotionally. They will go to great lengths to avoid it, and try to not let it show when they are. A Lover does not like losing relationships, or losing control.

Perceptions of the Lover

Some see the Lover as immoral. Others view them as a rebellious hero flaunting social convention. They are either vilified or glorified for their unapologetic lifestyle. The Lover is rarely given a fair assessment or treated as a balanced and well-rounded person.

The Lover's Cast

The **Caregiver** will see the Lover as a complete person, not just a single-minded one-note caricature. The **Judge** will draw negative attention to the Lover and heap grief on them for shamelessly being who they are. The **Loner** shares an appreciation for both close emotional relationships and personal privacy. Another **Lover** will want the same things and pleasures, but their relationship can become a competition. The **Sage** also appreciates spiritual pursuits that can heighten senses and open up new Experiences. The **Warrior** lives a life centered on physicality, even though they express themselves in different ways.

THE MONARCH

The archetypal Monarch is a dominant personality bordering on being a force of nature. They command respect and exude authority. Where the Leader lives for the job, the Monarch is the job. A Monarch focuses on the big picture. They have a long plan for the realm they are in charge of. The needs of their domain as a

whole will outweigh the needs of any individual. They love demonstrating what they are the best at through competition.

Examples of the Monarch include **Arthur Pendragon**, **TPau**, **Daenerys Targaryen**, **Claire Underwood**, **Tony Soprano**, and **Captain Ahab**.

The Antagonist counterpart to the Monarch is the **Tyrant**.

The Monarch's Values

The Monarch values what they are in charge of. They take pride when the domain does well. They value respect, loyalty, and the devotion of those in their charge. Members of their inner circle are the only people they fully trust. The Monarch values traditions that support and validate their own power.

What the Monarch dislikes are emotions, considered a weakness. Love of tradition competes with a discomfort for sentimentality. The Monarch fears younger, more capable rivals seeking to depose them from their position.

Perceptions of the Monarch

Other characters see the Monarch cold. They are capable, trustworthy, and confident. Others think the Monarch is egomaniacal, controlling, and obsessed with power. The strength the Monarch projects is their defining characteristic.

The Monarch's Cast

The **Caregiver** provides juxtaposition between empathy for individuals and the needs of the bigger picture. The **Destroyer** threatens to ruin all that the Monarch has built, and undermine their role a protector. The **Mastermind** will plot to weaken the

Monarch's domain and try to steal their power. The **Player** will prey upon the Monarch's loneliness to take advantage of their power and influence. The **Sage** will be among the few that treat the Monarch as a whole person rather than a figurehead.

THE SAGE

The archetypal Sage is a keeper of secret knowledge. An enlightened being, they seek to spread peace, love, and wisdom. A Sage is able to see the big picture from a spiritual perspective. They are patient, kind, and giving of themselves.

Examples of the Sage include **Galadriel**, **Obi-Wan Kenobi**, **Robin Hood**, **Paul Atreides**, **Luna Lovegood**, and **River Tam**.

The Antagonist counterpart to the Sage is the **Judge**.

The Sage's Values

The Sage values the concerns of others. He or she is a good listener, which allows connecting with the divine spirit present in other people. They like children and animals for their purity and simplicity.

What the Sage dislikes are people who lead others toward corruption and falsehood. They fear being misunderstood, and the distrust and mistreatment that can follow such misunderstanding. The Sage has personal demons to wrestle with, which are often what drove them to seek wisdom and enlightenment.

Perceptions of the Sage

Other characters see the Sage as a welcome teacher and Mentor. They may also see a dangerous lunatic, or fraud that needs to be

silenced. Opinions depend on whether they agree or disagree with the Sage's spiritual views.

The Sage's Cast

The **Destroyer** is the antithesis of the loving, healing spirit that the Sage seeks to embody. The **Innocent** naturally possess the sort of purity of spirit that the Sage works to achieve. The **Mastermind** creates juxtaposition between selfishness and the Sage's selflessness. The **Player's** philosophy of using people for personal gain runs counter to the Sage's helping others. Another Sage's different approach to spirituality can create the problems a Sage fears most. The **Tyrant** will seek to suppress the Sage's message or twist it to support their oppressive regime.

THE WARRIOR

The archetypal Warrior is a physical, rather than intellectual, being. They live for the moment and eschew the long view for immediate gratification. The Warrior is willing to take risks, but doesn't stop to consider the consequences.

Examples of the Warrior include **Buffy Summers, Jack Aubrey, Robb Stark, Brigadier Sir Alistair Gordon Lethbridge-Stewart, Lucy Pevensie,** and **Wonder Woman.**

The Antagonist counterpart to the Warrior is the **Destroyer.**

The Warrior's Values

The Warrior values loyalty, and fiercely defends friends and family. He or she is competitive, especially in physical arenas, because the Warrior loves to test their abilities. They live for

physical fitness, because the body is their instrument and makes what they do possible. What the Warrior loves most is action.

What the Warrior dislikes are the failings of their own body. They don't fear losing as much as not being able to compete. They don't fear getting hurt as much as they fear letting themselves and other people down.

Perceptions of the Warrior

Other characters see the Warrior as anti-intellectual due to their obsession with physicality. The Warrior can be trusted and valued in their own area of expertise, but rarely beyond it. People find them attractive, intimidating, or a combination of the two.

The Warrior's Cast

The **Caregiver** will be there to help the Warrior with their injuries from competition and battle. The **Innocent** gives the Warrior someone to protect and defend from the harsher aspects of the world. The **Judge** will devalue what the Warrior does while simultaneously wanting to use them. The **Leader** will have need of Warriors, and treats them with honor, dignity and respect. The **Monarch** will see the Warrior as a resource to be used, leading to conflicted relationships. The **Sage's** spiritual focus can either balance out or come into opposition with the Warrior's nature.

ANTAGONISTS

The Antagonist is the bad guy in the story. They're typically a villain or rival, whose mission is to make life difficult for the Protagonist. They have their own goals and motives that conflict with those of the Protagonist. Antagonists provide the majority of the obstacles that Protagonists have to overcome. In a tabletop roleplaying game, the gamemaster plays the Antagonist.

Antagonist Roles

There are specific archetypal roles that Antagonists play within a story. Even with the same genre, time and place, and structure, a different Antagonist role will alter the context and result in a very different story. Antagonist roles include the **Aggressor**, the **Destroyer**, the **Drifter**, the **Judge**, the **Mastermind**, the **Player**, the **Schemer**, and the **Tyrant**.

THE AGGRESSOR

The archetypal Aggressor runs on pain and revenge. They feel the world is against them. In their view, the world has cheated them out of things rightfully deserve. An Aggressor uses emotional connections with people to manipulate and control them. If that doesn't work, they will resort to fear and intimidation. They may be physically or emotionally abusive. The Aggressor embodies contradictions and double standards, as the rules they apply to others don't apply to them.

Examples of the Aggressor include **Livia Drusilla**, **Norma Bates**, **The Joker**, **Ralph Cramden**, **Humbert Humbert**, and **Olivia Foxworth**.

The Protagonist counterpart to the Aggressor is the **Caregiver**.

The Aggressor's Values

The Aggressor values their needs above anything else. They will claim to want respect, but actually want power and control. They like things to meet a particular standard that they set.

What the Aggressor dislikes are boundaries and limitations to their own desires. They will not react favorably to others trying to control. The Aggressor refuses accountability for their own actions, as they feel other people drive them to behave as they do.

Perceptions of the Aggressor

Other characters often see the Aggressor as a person in pain. They sense the deep emotions and the depth of what they care about. As they get to know the Aggressor, they learn that how manipulative and violent they become when Aggressors don't get their way.

THE DESTROYER

The archetypal Destroyer is a physical being. They are neither in touch with, nor concerned about, their intellectual and emotional sides. Their limited relationships are with people who make them look good — a trophy spouse, an entourage, servants, henchmen — or useful people who can help further their ambitions. The Destroyer will take the fastest, coarsest path to get what they want, leaving destruction in their wake.

Examples of the Destroyer include **Ser Gregor Clegane, Luca Brasi, Maleficent, Mr. Blonde, Gogo Yubari,** and **Katherine Pierce**.

The Protagonist counterpart to the Destroyer is the **Warrior**.

The Destroyer's Values

The Destroyer seeks victory above all and at any cost. Competition is a chance to show dominance. They like to make grandiose demonstrations of power and control. The Destroyer demands loyalty but doesn't always respect it; they see subordination as weakness.

What the Destroyer hates most is losing. They worry about what others will think if they fail. They fear others seeing them as weak. They don't like anything that challenges their dominance.

Perceptions of the Destroyer

Other characters see the Destroyer as an intimidating figure. They perceive the Destroyer to be unintelligent, childish, and petulant. While handsome and charming in the right circumstance, they aren't trusted.

THE DRIFTER

The archetypal Drifter is emotionally detached from their surroundings. They do their own thing, regardless of social norms and potential consequences. Disrupting the social order while anonymously standing back and watching panic and mayhem unfold is their idea of a good time. This behavior is often self-destructive. The Drifter has no strong connection to a specific place. They can move around as needed if things get too boring or the authorities get too close.

Examples of the Drifter include ***Travis Bickle, Randall Flagg, Faith the Vampire Slayer, Gollum, Milady de Winter,*** and ***Harley Quinn.***

The Protagonist counterpart to the Drifter is the ***Innocent.***

The Drifter's Values

The Drifter values their freedom and amusement above all. The more bored they become, the more motivated they are to find something to entertain them. What matters is the immediate gratification of their needs.

What the Drifter dislikes are attachments. The Drifter will seek to free themselves from such restrictions up to and including the destruction of whatever is holding them back.

Perceptions of the Drifter

Other characters see the Drifter as reckless and mentally unstable. The Drifter may take steps to leave a better impression to preserve their anonymity or maintain a disguise. They can be charming, or intimidating, or nondescript as needed, so the people don't pay much attention to them.

THE JUDGE

The archetypal Judge always has their specific version of the greater good in mind. They want to shape society to fit their personal vision. They deal with anyone who does not follow the rules. The Judge believes that they are the good guy and has a never-ending supply of rationalizations for their behavior.

Examples of the Judge include ***Inspector Javert, Judge Doom, the Queen of Hearts, Holden Caulfield, Dolores Umbridge,*** and ***Ebenezer Scrooge.***

The Protagonist counterpart to the Judge is the **Sage**.

The Judge's Values

The Judge wants obedience to their authority. Their upbringing instilled these values, or something happened in their life that brought them to these views. They enjoy power and control over other people, and wield it without mercy or exception. They may consider themselves above the rules, but consistently apply them to others.

What the Judge dislikes are those who evade their brand of justice. They will go to extremes to insure no one escapes the punishment they deserve. They will not allow undermining of their authority.

Perceptions of the Judge

Other characters often see the Judge as a necessary evil. Some will see them as abusive and power-mad, pushing an ideology that is not in the interests of society. Most agree some of things the

Judge seeks to punish aren't crimes, and that the punishments tend to be excessive for nature and degree of the offense.

THE MASTERMIND

The archetypal Mastermind focuses on a singular goal to the exclusion of all else. They do anything to achieve that goal, with no regard for morals, ethics, or the law. Masterminds take a long view toward the execution of their master plan. Their loyalty is to their vision alone, and extends to other people only if they contribute to achieving that vision.

Examples of the Mastermind include ***Voldemort, Lady Macbeth, Captain Nemo, Bellatrix Lestrange, Nurse Ratched,*** and ***Lex Luthor.***

The Protagonist counterpart to the Mastermind is the ***Leader.***

The Mastermind's Values

The Mastermind values order and control. They need to be the smartest or most powerful person in the room. The Mastermind loves to show off. If they can't gain legitimate respect or admiration, they'll settle for fear.

What the Mastermind dislikes are challenges to their authority. It takes little to bruises their ego. Their calm exterior will dissolve into emotional outbursts. Chaos is met with violence. The exercise control and enforce order through a show of power and strength.

Perceptions of the Mastermind

Other characters see the Mastermind as a necessary evil at best. If they didn't need the results that the Mastermind is capable of producing, they wouldn't want anything to do with them. The

Mastermind is more typically seen as an oppressor, best avoided or escaped from.

THE PLAYER

The archetypal Player sees others as playthings. They don't care who gets hurt, as long as it isn't them. The Player is usually attractive and charismatic, and they use those traits to manipulate others to get what they want. They love taking risks, but someone else takes the fall when things go wrong.

Examples of the Player include ***Dr. Frank-N-Furter, Mr. Wickham, Princess Ardala, Delilah, Don Draper,*** and ***Mrs. Robinson.***

The Protagonist counterpart to the Player is the ***Lover.***

The Player's Values

The Player enjoys personal pleasures and the thrill of scandal. This leads them to engage in reckless behaviors bordering on self-destructive. They also love the power they have over people. They love attention, as long as it's getting them what they want.

What the Player dislikes are people who Judge them. When exposed, they will push things to extremes and flaunt the control they hold over people. They fear losing their looks and their charm and, by extension, their power over others. The Player will go do just about anything to hold onto any advantage they have.

Perceptions of the Player

Others see the Player as the embodiment of moral decay. Some look up to them for their carefree, take-what-I-want lifestyle. They

are clearly a sinner, but whether that qualifies as vice or virtue is in the eye of the beholder. Most who admire the Player aren't directly under their sway, or at least aren't willing to admit it.

THE SCHEMER

The archetypal Schemer sits in the middle of a web, pulling strings and manipulating situations. They prefer to work alone, sharing plans only with those who need to know. They do things because they can. The Schemer will become the embodiment of terror if discovered. There's no way to know how far their reach is, who they have under their control, or what they'll do to the person who's found them out.

Examples of the Schemer include ***Hannibal Lecter, Frank Underwood, Mrs. Danvers, Walter White, Jamie Moriarty,*** and ***Morgan le Fay.***

The Protagonist counterpart to the Schemer is the ***Loner.***

The Schemer's Values

The Schemer values privacy and secrecy. The thrill of what they're doing isn't in achieving it, but in getting away with it. That sensation lingers the more time passes with no one figuring it out. They prize their own intelligence and cleverness, and love opportunities to exercise those traits.

What the Schemer dislikes are people unswayed by their charms. They hate people who suspect their motives. They don't like being in crowds or other situations that they can't control.

Perceptions of the Schemer

Others see the Schemer as an average, ordinary person. They seem kind and generous. They don't seem exceptional in any way, if that's the image they want to project. The Schemer may also be a pillar of the community, a good person, and a role model, if that's the persona they've adopted.

THE TYRANT

The archetypal Tyrant seizes power by force. They are rarely the champion of an ideology, or possessed of qualifications and Leadership ability. They demand and receive respect through fear and abuse of authority. Tyrants are emotional beings but rarely able to express themselves without extremes. They often have a small inner circle that they love but don't entirely trust.

Examples of the Tyrant include ***Vito Corleone, Sauron, the White Witch, Tywin Lannister, Galina "Red" Reznikov,*** and ***Fiona Goode.***

The Protagonist counterpart to the Tyrant is the ***Monarch.***

The Tyrant's Values

The Tyrant values what they are in charge of, not for its inherent worth but as a symbol of their authority. They like grandiose displays of power. The Tyrant will integrate traditions and prophecies that support their power into their personal mythology. They like obedience, and punishing those who don't follow their demands.

What the Tyrant dislikes are people who see that they're just a bully with delusions of grandeur. They hate competition unless

guaranteed to win. Challenges to their authority are particularly hard to handle when they're based in truth.

Perceptions of the Tyrant

Others see the Tyrant as emotionally unstable and terrifyingly dangerous. Their egos need stroking to prevent vindictive outbursts. Some might see good qualities when the Tyrant's goals align with their own, and find justification for the Tyrant's extremes. They still probably have concerns for the long-term viability of the Tyrant's Leadership and their own safety.

SUPPORTING CHARACTERS

The supporting characters in a story are the friends, family members, and colleagues the Protagonist. They have names and a little bit of back story. In a tabletop roleplaying game, the gamemaster plays most of the supporting characters. They are sometimes assigned to Players.

Supporting Roles

Supporting character exist for several reasons. They get to inject an opinion or a point of view into the story. They compensate for abilities that the Protagonist doesn't possess. They perform boring tasks off-screen to keep the story moving forward. Most importantly, supporting characters provide people for the Protagonists to interact with.

Because the role of a supporting character is significantly different from a Protagonist or Antagonist, they are described slightly differently. Their role is based more on their story function than their personality.

Supporting character roles include the ***Cavalry***, the ***Hindrance***, the ***Mentor***, the ***Resource***, the ***Sidekick***, the ***Skeptic***, the ***Voice of Emotion***, and the ***Voice of Reason***.

THE CAVALRY

The Cavalry provides the Protagonist with backup in combat situations. They may be along for big, planned battles against the Antagonist and their forces, or appear suddenly at the right moment to save the Protagonist from impending doom. The Cavalry

character is all physicality, and if they say anything it's often to jibe at the Protagonist for needing their help.

The archetypal Cavalry character is ideologically aligned with the Protagonist. They are often paid by the same organization the Protagonist works with. There is often a sense of camaraderie between the Cavalry character and the Protagonist.

Examples of the Cavalry character include: **Lando Calrissian**, **"Dum Dum" Dugan**, **Éomer**, **River Song**, **Cordelia Chase**, and **Michonne**.

Why You Need a Cavalry Character

If your stories skew toward action and combat, your Protagonists are going to run into trouble. Even if things are balanced so challenges don't put characters in over their heads, sometimes things go wrong. Establishing that there is someone standing by to help avoids making the rescue feel like a *deus ex machina*.

THE HINDRANCE

The Hindrance character exists to get in the way. They show up in the wrong place at the wrong time. They distract the Protagonist. They discover things that the Protagonist doesn't want them to know. They're human obstacles. The Hindrance isn't a bad person. They may mean well, but tend to have terrible timing, misguided instincts, and a knack for getting into trouble. They won't do anything seriously harmful as an Antagonist would, though.

The archetypal Hindrance may not know that their actions create problems for the Protagonist. They might not do anything on purpose, it's just who they are. They may be jealous or competitive.

They might see interfering with the Protagonist as necessary to protect the greater good.

Examples of the Hindrance include ***Gladys Kravitz, Walter Peck, Saruman, Lois Lane, Marie Barone,*** and ***Dr. Zachary Smith.***

Why You Need a Hindrance Character

Sometimes you need an obstacle that doesn't involve a true Antagonist. You need someone that the Protagonist won't want to throw in jail and can't justify killing. A Hindrance provides some moral grounding, and can also act as comic relief.

THE MENTOR

The Mentor's purpose is to advise and instruct the Protagonist. They provide education and training necessary to meet personal and story goals. Their role might be formal, like a teacher, parent, or other official authority figure. It might be informal, like a friend, neighbor, or acquaintance who offers help because they care about the Protagonist. The Mentor may also have a specific agenda, and needs the Protagonist's aid in order to fulfill it.

The archetypal Mentor often shepherds the Protagonist and keep them safe until they are ready to stand on their own. They insure that the Protagonist accomplishes whatever mission or duty they need to complete to further the cause. The Mentor is loyalty to the Protagonist, and to the cause.

Examples of the Mentor include ***Merlin, Minerva McGonagall, Rupert Giles, Leslie Thompkins, Ninny Threadgoode,*** and ***Dr. Emmett "Doc" Brown.***

Why You Need a Mentor Character

All Protagonists need guidance. A Mentor can act as the author's voice, reminding everyone what the plot is, what needs to be done, and what the stakes are. They can also offer up a plan when the Protagonist is stumped or in need of a hint.

THE RESOURCE

The Resource character provides the Protagonist with something they need. They typically deal in information, equipment, or specialized expertise like medical care. Most Resources specialize

in one thing, but usually know someone who can acquire other things the Protagonist may need.

The archetypal Resource character may or may support the Protagonist's ideals. They don't work for free, and are paid by the Protagonist or the organization the Protagonist works for. They may also expect favors or rewards in return for the goods and services they provide.

Examples of the Resource character include ***Maj. Geoffrey Boothroyd, Oracle, Saul Goodman, Sam Axe, Radical Edward,*** and ***Galadriel.***

Why You Need a Resource Character

You may need several, depending on the types of resources your story requires. Resource characters keep the story moving by allowing acquisition of knowledge and gear to happen away from the Protagonists, so that necessary things are there when needed. They allow the Protagonists to concentrate on what needs doing, rather than getting bogged down in logistics.

THE SIDEKICK

The Sidekick is the Protagonist's faithful companion. They'll stick with them through thick and thin. A sidekick is often a "lite" version of the Protagonist. They might also be a mismatched opposite, to provide juxtaposition. They exist to remind us of the sort of person the Protagonist is.

The archetypal Sidekick admires the Protagonist and believes in their goals. They see the Protagonist someone they want to be or be like and are proud to associate with. The sidekick's primary

motivation is to clear obstacles, aid the Protagonist, and keep them on track.

Examples of the Sidekick include **Robin, Gabrielle, Chewbacca, Tinkerbell, Stephen Maturin,** and **Chloe O'Brian.**

Why You Need a Sidekick Character

The Sidekick makes the Protagonist look good. They also humanize the Protagonist by allowing them to be a teacher or parental figure. They provide a moral compass by forcing the Protagonist to be a good role model.

THE SKEPTIC

The Skeptic's purpose is to question everything. They challenge the Protagonist's decisions, and actions. They also provide context by offering alternate opinions and explanations. Arguing serves either intellectual or entertainment purposes.

The archetypal Skeptic character subjects everything to extreme levels of scrutiny. They look for faults and flaws. They question the Protagonist as a means of keeping them safe, checking that they're certain about what they're doing. Their values may also run contrary to the Protagonist's ideas and beliefs.

Examples of the Skeptic include **Eric Cartman, Zoe Washburne, Sheldon Cooper, Leonard McCoy, Lisa Cuddy,** and **Shirley Bennett.**

Why You Need a Skeptic Character

A Skeptic forces the Protagonist to explain things. This can help them to clarify their plans in their own head to articulate them. A

rash Protagonist will have to reconsider bad idea. A wise Protagonist will have an opportunity to display their brilliance.

THE VOICE OF EMOTION

The Voice of Emotion is there to take everyone's feelings into consideration. They have a love of humanity and appreciation for the human condition. They will speak up for those who do not have voices, and try to keep the peace between other characters. The Voice of Emotion can sometimes be self-centered when their feelings aren't acknowledged.

The archetypal Voice of Emotion expresses concern for other people. They want to be sure that human costs factor into every decision, especially tactical and financial ones.

Examples of the Voice of Emotion include ***Marianne Dashwood, Will Robinson, Dr. James Wilson, Dale Cooper, Phoebe Buffay,*** and ***Kaylee Frye.***

Why You Need a Voice of Emotion Character

It's easy for Protagonists to get so caught up in advancing the story that they forget other characters exist. The Voice of Emotion is there to remind them. They keep the story from running on rails, and force characters to behave like real people.

THE VOICE OF REASON

The Voice of Reason is in a story to cut through emotional arguments and get to the facts. They try to be objective and see all sides of a situation. They make decisions based on what will generate the best results with the fewest risks. Some see the Voice of Reason as a cold, calculating person. Sometimes their decisions

will result in people getting hurt. They see it as doing what is necessary in service to the greater good.

The archetypal Voice of Reason pursues truth and purpose. They will always side with the facts. They feel that any short-term hard feelings will be overcome by long-term results. They follow rules as long as those rules make sense, and expect others to do the same.

Examples of the Voice of Reason include ***Jiminy Cricket, Shug Avery, Margaret Houlihan, Randle McMurphy, Chief Mate Starbuck,*** and ***Granny Weatherwax.***

Why You Need a Voice of Reason Character

It's easy for Protagonists to get so caught up in advancing their personal agendas that they forget the point of the story. The Voice of Reason is there to remind them. They keep the story from tuning into a rambling mess, and force characters to behave responsibly.

BACKGROUND CHARACTERS

Background characters serve minor story functions. They have few or no lines of dialog. They have partial names (Sam, Dr. Smith, Mrs. Jones) or just job titles (waiter, taxi driver, police officer). Their main function is to make a location feel real and alive. They are often literally in the background.

There's no need to create much of anything for a background character. Nothing that they exist is enough, unless the Protagonist decides to interact with them. In that case, you can either add details on the fly, or point out that it's just a background character with no story significance.

STAGES OF LIFE

There are some things that all people, real or fictional, have in common. We're born, we grow up, we find jobs or careers, we fall in love, and at some point we die. Every person and every character is somewhere in that cycle. Often, stories are about how a character is transitioning from one stage of life to another. Each presents a different set of personal obstacles that need to be faced and overcome.

USING STAGES OF LIFE

By understanding the stage of life that the character is currently in, you'll know what they've already Experienced and what potentially lies ahead for them. That will help you later when determining their needs, goals, and motivations. A child has different needs than an adolescent or a character in mature adulthood. A character seeking belonging, or heading into the world on their own for the first time, has different goals that one safely taken care of at home.

The point is that characters are always moving away from something and toward something else. No matter what they want, no matter what else do, the world and their own circumstances will change. This creates points for conflicts to occur. How the character deals with those conflicts creates potential for story.

While a character's innate Aptitudes will stay the same or decline over the course of their life, their Experiences will broaden, deepen, and change. There is no set formula for the degree and timing of

these changes. This will be explained in greater detail in the sections on Aptitudes and Experiences.

The stages of life that we'll deal with here are childhood, adolescence, separation from parents, initiation, romance, midlife, mature adulthood, and death.

CHILDHOOD

The span of time from birth to adolescence constitutes the character's formative years. The things that happen then will affect them for the rest of their life. How they relate to parents and siblings later starts here. The relationships that have with other children, teachers and other adults will affect other relationships going forward. The general stability of their life will impact how they see the world.

What happens in the character's childhood that sets the stage for future conflicts?

Does the character remember a specific event that has left them with a lasting fear? Was there a person whose behavior made the character dislike them, and other people like them? Is there something the character Experienced that they never want to have to deal with ever again?

Are these conflicts internal and personal struggles or external issues involving other characters?

Did something in childhood create an avoidance behavior, which keeps the character from dealing with a current issue? Was there an incident that permanently affected the way the character feels about themselves? Did another character create a lifelong distrust of people who display certain traits?

What happens in the character's childhood that sets the stage for future conflict resolution?

What abilities did the character learn, that they can continue to develop through their other stages of life? What events did they experience that made them interested in particular careers and hobbies? What friends did they make, and what sorts of people did they learn to deal with?

Will the problems resolved be internal and personal ones, or external ones impacting other characters?

Did the character's childhood drive them toward dependence on other people, or foster self-reliance? Do the choices the character makes based on childhood experiences only affect them, or will they affect relationships with other people? Does the way they were treated as a child change the way they treat other people later in life?

ADOLESCENCE

During adolescences characters are trapped between childhood and adulthood. They are only beginning to figure out who they are and what they want to be. As with childhood, their quality of life during this period will shape their world view. The types of relationships they have will set the pattern for future relationships. Among other things, most characters will have their first romantic encounters during adolescence.

What happens in the character's adolescence that sets the stage for future conflicts?

What biases did the character develop, as they began to grow into their own person? What rivals did they gain because of

differences of opinion? How did their world view change in a way that continued into later stages of life?

Are these conflicts internal and personal struggles or external issues involving other characters?

Did the character's adolescence instill them with a sense of confidence, or awkward self-consciousness? Did they feel that way from within, or because of the actions of other people? Did they have rivals to tear them down, or Mentors to build them up?

What happens in the character's adolescence that sets the stage for future conflict resolution?

What did the character learn that put them on the path toward their career? How did early romantic encounters prepare them for later relationships? What hobbies and friendships did they begin here, that will carry forward into other stages of life?

Will the problems resolved be internal and personal ones, or external ones impacting other characters?

Does the level of self-esteem the character felt as an adolescent make them shy or outgoing? Do they hide their accomplishments, or lord them over other people? Do they make things about themselves, or about other people, because of events that happened at this stage?

SEPARATION FROM PARENTS

At some point during late adolescence or early adulthood, the character will go off on their own. They will have to learn fend for themselves. They might go to college, be apprenticed to a master in order to learn a trade, join the military, or get a job. They will learn to operate independently of their previous financial and emotional

support systems, and develop new ones. During this time most characters also develop their first serious romantic relationship, and take the first steps along their career path.

What happens in the character's separation from their parents that sets the stage for future conflicts?

Did the character move out by choice, or did someone or something force them to leave the nest? Were they comfortable, or did they struggle on their own? Did the character's parents approve of what they were planning to do when they left?

Are these conflicts internal and personal struggles or external issues involving other characters?

What mistakes did the character make that will haunt them for years to come? Have other people interfered with their success or failure? What do they feel are their failings at this stage of life?

What happens in the character's separation from their parents that sets the stage for future conflict resolution?

What did the character learn about success at this stage? What life lesson will they repeat? What relationships and resources did they gain that will help them in the future?

Will the problems resolved be internal and personal ones, or external ones impacting other characters?

What do they consider their strengths at this stage of life? What victories did they score that will give them confidence going forward? Who helped the character and inspired them to pay it forward?

INITIATION

All people want a sense of belonging. At some point every character will join a group. It might be a formal organization with a stated purpose, or a bunch of friends who hang out and engage in common interests. The group might be related to the character's career goal, a favorite hobby, or shared ideologies. Relationships will be formed that will last a lifetime, and the character will get their first opportunities to network.

What happens in the character's group that sets the stage for future conflicts?

What disagreements happened within the group that the character still can't let go on? How did the way conflicts were resolved within the group affect the way the character handles disputes? Who ended up becoming a lifelong foil for the character?

Are these conflicts internal and personal struggles or external issues involving other characters?

Do the character's Experiences cause them to put their own interests first, or to favor the good of the group and its members? Do they tend to speak up when they disagree with the group, or keep it inside? Is the character easy to work with, or do other find them difficult?

What happens in the character's group that sets the stage for future conflict resolution?

What abilities did the character gain that allows them to work well with others? What contacts and relationships will they leverage later? How did the group's purpose let them learn valuable lessons?

Will the problems resolved be internal and personal ones, or external ones impacting other characters?

Did the group help the character learn something about themselves? Did the group affect how the character interacts with other people? What sorts of situations can the character now resolve with ease because of something that happened in the group?

ROMANCE

At some point most characters will form some sort of lasting romantic partnership. It might not be marriage, but it will involve commitment. Alternately, the character may decide against taking a partner for some reason. They may be unable to find the right person to settle down with. This is a major milestone in a character's life and this relationship, or lack thereof, will affect all sorts of other major life decisions.

What happens in the character's love life that sets the stage for future conflicts?

What goes wrong that hurts the character's confidence? What happens that affects the character's reputation? What unrequited loves and rivals does the character meet, that reappear later in their life?

Are these conflicts internal and personal struggles or external issues involving other characters?

What hang-ups does the character have that impact their romantic entanglements? What behaviors do they display that others find off-putting? What sorts of fears can they not manage to overcome?

What happens in the character's love life that sets the stage for future conflict resolution?

What goes well that bolsters the character's confidence? What experiences or advice do they get that guides them into better relationships later in life? What friends do they gain that they can share the highs and lows of their love life with?

Will the problems resolved be internal and personal ones, or external ones impacting other characters?

Is the character better at managing their own love life, or in giving relationship advice to others? Can they apply their experiences to helping other people? Can they manage to handle their own emotional baggage?

MIDLIFE

There is a point in adulthood where the character is settled. They have completed their education, they are supposed to be established in their career, and they are expected to have a relationship and possibly a family. All of the milestones have been checked off. At least, most cultures push people in that direction and use those things to define success. It's the things the character hasn't done, or has done in an unconventional way, that creates conflict. New issues arise as job needs change, children grow, and health issues begin to set in.

What happens in the character's middle adulthood that sets the stage for future conflicts?

What has the character not achieved in their life so far? What obstacles exist that prevent the character from becoming fully established in this stage of life? What new challenges arise that upset the character's status quo?

Are these conflicts internal and personal struggles or external issues involving other characters?

Who is setting the expectations for the character? How are the character's relationships with aging parents and Mentors changing? How are their relationships with their children, and other young people they Mentor, developing?

What happens in the character's middle adulthood that sets the stage for future conflict resolution?

What knowledge does the character possess that can be passed along to others? What abilities have they mastered that they can leverage? What great challenge has their entire life so far led up to?

Will the problems resolved be internal and personal ones, or external ones impacting other characters?

What things does the character still struggle with? What does the character need help with, they didn't before? What other people is the character responsible for?

MATURE ADULTHOOD

Age catches up to everyone. Physical health and mental faculties begin to slip. People retire when they can, continue working if they have to, and worry about surviving on a fixed income. The challenges of later life are unique, because they're often defined by what the character can no longer do, and what they never did. It can be comforting or terrifying, because to make it this far means there's really only one stage of life left to go.

What happens in the character's mature adulthood that sets the stage for future conflicts?

What did the character used to be able to do that they can't any longer? What did they never accomplish that they might still be able

to pull off? What relationships do they have to work hard to maintain?

Are these conflicts internal and personal struggles, or external issues involving other characters?

How does the character feel about the way they've lived their life? How do others feel about the contributions they've made to the world? Does age make the character more generous, or more likely to focus on their needs?

What happens in the character's mature adulthood that sets the stage for future conflict resolution?

What wisdom does the character possess that can be passed along to others? What possessions do they have that can be bestowed to others? What great challenge do they still face?

Will the problems resolved be internal and personal ones, or external ones impacting other characters?

What remains left undone in the grand work of the character's life? What relationships do they need to repair? What do other people still need help with, that the character can provide?

DEATH

Death is a wild card, because it can come during any stage of life. Other people in the character's life will pass. Sometimes there will be time to prepare and accept it, and sometimes there won't. Accidents, illnesses, and old age will take their toll. Losing people will affect the character. It will alter the way they make choice about their life. They will begin to think about, or try to avoid thinking about, their own mortality.

What happens in the character's approach to death that sets the stage for future conflicts?

Who in the character's life has died? How did the character deal with the other person's death? How do they deal with the concept of their own mortality as a result?

Are these conflicts internal and personal struggles, or external issues involving other characters?

How has the death of another affected the character's relationship with someone still living? How has death affected other people close to the character? What has the character changed about their life as a result of these impacts?

What happens in the character's approach to death that sets the stage for future conflict resolution?

How has the character prepared for their death? How have they prepared for the deaths of loved ones? What have they changed in their life as a result of loss?

Will the problems resolved be internal and personal ones, or external ones impacting other characters?

Is the character the one that provides comfort, or needs comforting? Does the character try to avoid the concept of mortality? Do others have problems with the character's acceptance, or avoidance, of the idea of death?

DIMENSIONS

Every character exists in three dimensions: their *physiology*, their *sociology*, and their *psychology*. This section will cover each of those dimensions in depth, and explain how each serves to shape the character. Not only will each element help in describing the character, it will introduce the potential for internal and external conflict that can be mined for story elements.

PHYSIOLOGY

Physiology impacts how people feel about themselves, and how others perceive them. It's not just about what the character looks like, but how their appearance affects their outlook on life. In prose fiction, the character's physiology is often the least important thing about them. In visual media it's still not important a lot of the time, but it can still matter.

Physiology and Sociology

Characters with a positive outlook regarding their physiology might view it as a way to rise above a low or middling socioeconomic status. Being attractive or good at sports might be considered as means to get out of a bad situation. If the character is of a higher socioeconomic status, they might consider positive physiology as their due.

Characters with a negative outlook on their physiology might be in a low socio-economic status as a result. Poor health, as an example, can limit opportunities and incur expenses. Characters in better socioeconomic statuses may not feel that their physiology

matters as much to their success, but may still limit them in other ways.

Physiology and Psychology

Characters with a positive outlook regarding their physiology might allow it to influence their psychology in a number of ways. They might feel grateful and willing to pay it forward, or it might make them more inclined to be outgoing. They can also end up egotistical, narcissistic, and shallow.

Characters with a negative outlook on their physiology might feel bad about themselves, especially if others react badly to them. They might also be driven to work harder in other areas, as a way of compensating for physical limitations or issues. It can have internal and external impacts on their self-image and possibly their mental health.

Elements of Physiology

The elements below are listed alphabetically. None are objectively more important than any other. Your character may have priorities, and the reasons for their emphasis on particular elements should factor into their dimensions. Most elements of physiology can be ranked, if you choose to do so.

One caveat: Normative is subjective. What is typical in one setting may be strange and unusual in another. In this book no judgments are being made and should not be inferred, but within your setting characters will hold opinions about what is “normal”, acceptable, and desirable and what isn’t. These are sources of conflict that you can address in your story if you choose.

AGE

This element is often used as a gauge of other elements, such as abilities levels, competence, and world view. These assumptions can be internal or external. Does the character feel that they're where they should be by this age? Do other people make generalizations about them because they're younger or older?

Low Age

The character is significantly younger than the other characters in the story.

Below Baseline Age

The character is a bit younger than the other characters in the story.

Baseline Age

The character is in the same age range as the majority of the other characters in the story. Think teenagers in a high school setting, midlife in an office environment, mature adults in a retirement community, and so on.

Above Baseline Age

The character is slightly older than the other characters in the story.

High Age

The character is significantly older than the other characters in the story.

BODY LANGUAGE

These are the gestures and movements the character makes when expression various emotions. Sometimes these are interesting character bits. There is no Ranking system for this element, although personal and cultural reactions to certain facial expressions will vary.

COLORATION

This refers to the character's skin tone, hair color, and eye color. There is no Ranking system for this element, although people whose coloration falls outside of what is considered normative for the setting may find it to be a source of conflict. Bigots exist.

DISTINGUISHING MARKS

This refers to everything from scars to tattoos and piercings. There is no Ranking system for this element, although people whose distinguishing marks fall outside of what is considered normative for the setting may find them to be a source of conflict.

FACIAL EXPRESSIONS

These are the faces the character makes when expression various emotions. Sometimes these are interesting character bits. There is no Ranking system for this element, although personal and cultural reactions to certain facial expressions will vary.

FASHION SENSE

A case could be made that the way a character dresses could fall under the Psychology dimension, because all sorts of choices may feed into it. Sociology can factor in, as an expression of culture of economic status. As most people associate it with appearance, it's listed here under Physiology. Personal style can be a source of conflict when it falls outside of what's considered normative.

HEALTH

This element is a reflection of the character's overall wellness and physical fitness. Having good health may require discipline regarding diet and exercise, which can present challenges. Poor health can offer a variety of obstacles that the character will need to work around.

Low Health

The character is in extremely poor health, possibly suffering from a chronic or incurable condition.

Below Baseline Health

The character is out of shape or has some minor medical problems that require regular maintenance.

Baseline Health

The character's overall health is typical for the setting.

Above Baseline Health

The character is in excellent shape, is not prone to illness, and heals quickly.

High Health

The character is in peak physical condition. They rarely get sick and recover from injuries in record time.

HEIGHT AND WEIGHT

How tall a character is, and how much they weigh, can present challenges. There may be associated health issues, or challenges when engaging in physical activity. Others might treat characters in the extremes differently, and even a slight shift from the baseline can affect self-esteem.

Both height and weight can be combined into one element, or used as separate elements, depending how you wish to describe the character.

Low Height and Weight

The character may be seriously underweight, or possibly have some form of dwarfism.

Below Baseline Height and Weight

The character is shorter or lighter than typical, possibly both.

Baseline Height and Weight

The character is within the typical ranges for height and weight within the setting.

Above Baseline Height and Weight

The character is either taller or heavier than typical, possibly both.

High Height and Weight

The character may be seriously overweight, or possibly have some form of gigantism.

SEX AND GENDER

This refers to the character's biological sex, gender identity, and sexual preference. There is no Ranking system for this element, although people who identify outside of what is considered normative for the setting may find it to be a source of conflict. Bigots exist.

SOCIOLOGY

Socioeconomic status affects the character's quality of life, as well as their self-esteem. It can impact how others perceive them inasmuch as they know the character's background, or can see behaviors assumed to stem from such a background.

Sociology and Physiology

Characters with a stable socioeconomic situation may have better access to proper nutrition and quality health care. If they have physiological problems, they may be better situated to receive necessary treatment.

Characters with a difficult socioeconomic situation may be inclined to engage in behaviors that result in poor physiology, such as smoking, drinking, drug use, and other dangerous activities. They may also have limited access to support systems that allow them to avoid or overcome physiological problems.

Sociology and Psychology

Characters with a stable socioeconomic situation don't necessarily have fewer psychological issues, but may have different ones. They likely have better access to therapy and medical treatment. Issues of self-image will be related to their level of achievement, rather than ability to simply survive.

Characters with a difficult socioeconomic situation may be more prone to things like depression and anxiety. They might be more inclined to self-medicate with alcohol or drugs. They may also get tough and find the motivation to work harder, so they can rise out of their current circumstances.

Elements of Sociology

The elements below are listed alphabetically. None are objectively more important than any other. Your character may have priorities, and the reasons for their emphasis on particular elements should factor into their dimensions.

CLASS

A character's social class is often defined by their access to resources, the prestige of their occupation, or the social class of their family. Class consciousness may create internal conflicts, if the character wishes to climb higher or struggles to retain their current level. It may also be a source of confidence, or even arrogance, which can create other sorts of conflicts.

Low Class

The character belongs to the lowest social class that exists within the setting.

Below Baseline Class

The character is of a lower social class than the typical character within the story.

Baseline Class

The character is within the social class typical of other characters within the story.

Above Baseline Class

The character is of a higher social class than other characters within the story.

High Class

The character belongs to the highest social class that exists within the setting.

EDUCATION

This is the character's general education. It reflects common knowledge, local culture, and the things that everyone in the setting is presumed to know. It doesn't indicate native intelligence, which is covered in the section on Aptitudes. It also does not include specialized knowledge, which is handled in the section on Experiences.

Low Education

The character has very little, and possibly no, general education.

Below Baseline Education

The character's general education is below the typical level of other characters.

Baseline Education

The character's level of general education is typical for characters in the story.

Above Baseline Education

The character has a greater level of general education than typical characters.

High Education

The character has received the highest level of general education possible.

ENTERTAINMENT

This is a listing of the types of things the character does for amusement. It is not ranked, unless there is one particular activity that nearly everyone in the story is involved with. In that instance, you could rank their level of involvement. Conflict can arise when people don't agree that something is entertaining.

ENVIRONMENT

This is a description of the type of place the character comes from. For example, do they hail from the city or the country? Did they grow up in the mountains, or on the ocean? It can reflect the type of environment they are comfortable in. Conflict can arise when others make assumptions about people from certain types of environments.

HOBBIES

This is a listing of the types of hobbies that the character actively engages in. It is not ranked, unless nearly everyone in the story is engaged in the same hobby. In that case, it might be ranked by level of involvement, but should probably be listed under Experiences instead. Conflict can arise when people think a hobby is trivial, or disagree on approaches to the hobby.

NATIONALITY

This is a statement of the character's citizenship, or the country they originate from. It is not ranked, but a level of patriotism or nationalism can be reflected using politics below. Feelings about other races, cultures, political systems, and religion often get tangled up with nationality, and can be a source of conflict.

OCCUPATION

This is the career that the character self-identifies with. It is not ranked, and abilities should be reflected in the character's Aptitudes and Experiences. Occupation can be a reflection of class, as some jobs are held in high esteem and others are looked down upon. It can also impact a character's self-image, if they do something they love, work simply to survive, or feel trapped in a job they despise.

POLITICS

This is a reflection of the character's political awareness. It is independent of their views, which can be stated but are not ranked. It is also an indicator of how informed the character is, at least

about their own political beliefs if not the positions held by their opponents. Having a Ranking politics doesn't make the character a politician, just a citizen. You may choose to break how politically active and how informed they are into separate Rankings; it's possible to know a lot but not speak up, and vice-versa.

Low Politics

The character has no interest in or knowledge of current politics.

Below Baseline Politics

The character's awareness is limited to a few areas of personal interest.

Baseline Politics

The character's level of political awareness and activity is typical within the story.

Above Baseline Politics

The character is more informed and active in politics than is typical for the setting.

High Politics

The character is deeply engaged by the political process.

RACE AND ETHNICITY

Race and ethnicity are social constructs used to type people by culture and ancestry. As such, they are listed here rather than under physiology. A character might self-identify as such as a point of pride in community, or be labeled by others. There is no Ranking system here, but a character's race and ethnicity may be a source

of conflict. Individuals within a group may have ideas about how members of that group should behave, and people outside the group may have biases.

RELIGION

Was the character raised with a religion? Do they still practice it? Have they converted to another religion, or abandoned religion? What happened to drive them to change? How does their view of religion affect their interactions with other people?

Low Religion

The character has little or no involvement with religion, and is possibly an atheist.

Below Baseline Religion

The character is less religious than typical of other characters in the story, possibly questioning their faith or the tenets of their religion.

Baseline Religion

The character is as religious as the typical person in this story.

Above Baseline Religion

The character is more religiously devout than the typical character within the story, with deeper faith and engagement with dogma.

High Religion

The character is extremely devoted to their religion.

PSYCHOLOGY

Psychology is in many ways the synthesis of physiology and sociology. The character's ambitions, attitudes, frustrations, and complexes are built upon from their physical and socioeconomic influences. It reflects their conscious and unconscious decisions and behaviors.

Psychology and Physiology

Characters with a healthy psychological profile are more likely to be accepting of their physiological elements, no whether they're positive or negative. They may be grateful for good health, and be more likely do what's required to handle other physical issues appropriately.

Characters with a more delicate psychological profile may be self-destructive. They may not take care of their physical health, which can exacerbate mental issues. If they have positive physiological elements, they may leverage those to support their mental outlook, or have a distorted self-image based on their beneficial traits.

Psychology and Sociology

Characters with a healthy psychological profile understand that low socioeconomic status may not be entirely their fault. This allows them to maintain a positive self-image in difficult circumstances, and to rise above their current status. They likewise might appreciate that a positive socioeconomic is a gift they didn't earn, and work to build a self-esteem based on merit.

Characters with a more delicate psychological profile might be more inclined to lean on their socioeconomic status. While social

status impacts their quality of life, they may feel that they have no control over their lives. They might feel that, good or bad, they've been given what they deserve. They might also resent over that they feel are less deserving.

Elements of Psychology

The elements below are listed alphabetically. None are objectively more important than any other. Your character may have priorities, and the reasons for their emphasis on particular elements should factor into their dimensions.

EMOTIONAL STABILITY

This trait is a measure of how well the character is able to self-regulate their emotions. Emotional stability includes the way the character handles stress, their ability to balance feelings with reason in the actions and decisions, and how they operate under pressure.

Low Emotional Stability

The character may have clinical depression, general anxiety disorder, or bipolar disorder.

Below Baseline Emotional Stability

The character is prone to anxiety, fear, depression, and emotional outbursts.

Baseline Emotional Stability

The character is able to self-regulate their emotions.

Above Baseline Emotional Stability

The character is calm, even-tempered, handles stress well, and does not get visibly emotional.

High Emotional Stability

The character may have antisocial behavior disorders, narcissistic personality disorder, or psychopathy.

IMPULSE CONTROL

This trait is a reflection of the character's self-discipline. Impulse control includes how careful, thorough, and deliberate the character is, versus being disorganized, unreliable, and easy-going.

Low Impulse Control

The character is ruled by their own wants and desires, and puts what appeals to them in the moment ahead of long-term goals and the needs of others.

Below Baseline Impulse Control

The character finds it difficult to resist temptation, and tends to be sloppy and careless.

Baseline Impulse Control

The character is able to control their impulses at a socially acceptable level.

Above Baseline Impulse Control

The character is well-organized, reliable, and pays great attention to detail.

High Impulse Control

The character is capable of acting selflessly, up to and including making great sacrifices for the sake of higher ideals or other people. They may also be a perfectionist.

OPEN MINDEDNESS

This trait reflects the character's openness to new Experiences and ideas. Open mindedness includes acceptance of new ideas,

tolerance of differences in other people, intellectual curiosity, and imagination.

Low Open Mindedness

The character is set in their ways and may actively work against change. They may be intolerant of the other, and reject new ideas and Experiences.

Below Baseline Open Mindedness

The character is set in their ways and may not seek out new Experiences or ideas.

Baseline Open Mindedness

The character is able to reconcile new idea with existing Experiences and beliefs.

Above Baseline Open Mindedness

The character actively seeks out new ideas and Experiences, or works to create them.

High Open Mindedness

The character has no grounding or vested interest in past Experiences or actively rejects traditions.

SOCIAL ENGAGEMENT

This trait measures the character's comfort level with social interaction, as well as their ability to be alone. Social engagement is

also a measure of how talkative and assertive, versus quiet and low-key, they are likely to be.

Low Social Engagement

The character may be actively antisocial, possibly a hermit or recluse of some sort.

Below Baseline Social Engagement

The character is a bit of an introvert, and prefers being left alone, but enjoys some social interaction.

Baseline Social Engagement

The character is comfortable with both social contact and spending time alone.

Above Baseline Social Engagement

The character is a bit of an extrovert and thrives in the company of others, but enjoys some occasional alone time.

High Social Engagement

The character may live to be the center of attention and is happiest when surrounded by other people. They may actively avoid being alone.

SOCIAL HARMONY

This trait reflects the character's level of empathy and compassion toward other people. Social harmony includes genuine kindness, consideration, generosity, and warmth. It indicates the character's view of human nature.

Low Social Harmony

The character may place their own emotional needs ahead of the needs of others. They tend to be cold, rude, and harsh with a low opinion of human nature.

Below Baseline Social Harmony

The character tends to put their own emotional needs ahead of everyone but those closest to them. Their view of people skews to the negative.

Baseline Social Harmony

The character is able to balance their desires with the feelings of other people.

Above Baseline Social Harmony

The character considers the feelings of everyone, including people they don't know. They tend to see the best in people.

High Social Harmony

The character may put the feelings of others ahead of their own emotional needs. They see all people as deserving of respect.

5. MOTIVATIONS

Why is the character doing what they're doing right now? What are their personal goals, independent of their goals within the story? What do they stand to gain if they succeed? What do they stand to lose if they fail? What is their prevailing need at the moment? In this section, we'll look at how to determine the character's needs, and how those can be mined for story points.

NEEDS

A character's needs are those things necessary to their survival. They may be things they don't have, things they're running out of, or things they need to acquire in order to accomplish a goal. They are closely tied to their physiological, sociological, and psychological dimensions, as well as the stage of life they're moving into. The inability to meet personal needs, and the things the character must do to meet their needs, are excellent sources of drama.

PHYSIOLOGICAL NEEDS

Physiological needs are the most basic requirements for human survival. These are absolute necessities like food, clothing, shelter, breathable air, and drinkable water. If these requirements can't be met, the character's body will ultimately fail. Physiological needs have to be met before a character can even begin to address their sociological and psychological needs, or worry about making it to the next stage of life. Both resources and circumstances can contribute to the state of the character's physiological needs.

If a character has high Rankings in physiological dimensions, their needs may be driven by what is required to maintain those Rankings. If the character has low physiological Rankings, their needs will be around what it takes to rise higher, or at least fall no further.

Low Physiological Needs

The character's physical needs are met and will continue to be met far into the future.

Below Baseline Physiological Needs

The character's needs are presently more secure than the typical character in the story.

Baseline Physiological Needs

The character has food, clothing, and shelter, with a reasonable assurance that those needs will continue to be met.

Above Baseline Physiological Needs

The character's physical needs are provided for fairly consistently, but there are gaps with one or more needs and a degree of uncertainty about the future.

High Physiological Needs

The character has immediate needs for food, clothing, or shelter and no assurance that the direst of those needs will be met.

SOCIOLOGICAL NEEDS

Sociological needs include friendship, intimacy, and family ties. Lacking those emotional connections can impact the character's

well-being and their ability to form and maintain healthy relationships. The character needs a feeling of belonging and acceptance within social groups and organizations. The character's personality, the actions of other characters, and general circumstances can contribute to the state of the character's sociological needs.

If a character has high Rankings in sociological dimensions, their needs may be driven by what is required to maintain those Rankings. If the character has low sociological Rankings, their needs will be around what it takes to rise higher, or at least fall no further.

Low Sociological Needs

The character has many healthy relationships and is highly regarded within their social circles.

Below Baseline Sociological Needs

The character has healthy long-term relationships and is no issues with their social groups.

Baseline Sociological Needs

The character has healthy, stable relationships with every expectation that social needs will continue to be met going forward.

Above Baseline Sociological Needs

The character has a mixture of health and trouble relationships, and issues within their social groups.

High Sociological Needs

The character few or no healthy relationships and no positive social group interactions.

PSYCHOLOGICAL NEEDS

Psychological needs include the character's feeling about their security, self-esteem, and behaviors. This can include either stress or comfort about physical safety, financial well-being, health, and relationships. It could be the condition of their overall mental health, or how they regard their ability to make sound life decisions.

If a character has high Rankings in psychological dimensions, their needs may be driven by what is required to maintain those Rankings. If the character has low psychological Rankings, their needs will be around what it takes to rise higher, or at least fall no further.

Low Psychological Needs

The character has no worries and every realistic expectation that things will continue to be good far into the future.

Below Baseline Psychological Needs

The character has few worries, none that they can't deal with, and an optimistic outlook that their needs will continue to be met.

Baseline Psychological Needs

The character is happy, content, and stable, and there is no reason to believe their psychological needs will not continue to be met going forward.

Above Baseline Psychological Needs

The character has some stress, and while their needs are mostly being met they are not handled consistently.

High Psychological Needs

The character has severe stress and a great deal of inconsistency, with no indication that things will stabilize in the future.

STAGE OF LIFE NEEDS

Each stage of life has its own needs, and each character will have different requirements for transitioning between stages. These may be physiological, sociological, or psychological in nature, or specific to the stage itself. Children and adolescents grow up, but they also need to complete schooling and learn certain lessons. Romance requires finding a partner, and initiation requires joining a group. Aging at any stage will bring specific health and financial needs.

Looking back over the questions you answered for your character in the stages of life section, you should be able to identify some needs. What does the character need to do in order to move forward? Are there any physical, social, or psychological hurdles they must get over, other than the natural passage of time?

Low Stage of Life Needs

The character is set for life, with no needs worth mentioning.

Below Baseline Stage of Life Needs

The character has what they need to move into the next stage, and some of what will be necessary for stages after that.

Baseline Stage of Life Needs

The character has everything they need to move into the next stage of life.

Above Baseline Stage of Life Needs

The character is lacking some of what they need for the next stage of life.

High Stage of Life Needs

The character doesn't even have what they need for their current stage of life, let alone anything necessary to move forward.

GOALS

A goal is the character's plan to meet a need. The story might be the execution of that plan, or tie into the achievement of that goal somehow. There might be conflict between the character's goal and the goal of the story. In any case, the decisions the character makes and the actions they take will be influenced by the character's goals.

The three parts to a goal are the character's *ambition*, the *stakes*, and the *obstacles*. You need all three to create a goal worthy of inclusion in a story. Every goal that the character has should be described and ranked separately.

AMBITIONS

How badly does the character want to achieve their goal? What are they willing to do in order to get it? This is independent of the stakes, because some people will go all-out for little reward, and others wouldn't lift a finger to stop the world from burning. It's also

separate from the obstacles, because it's not about how hard the tasks are. It's about how driven the character is.

Low Ambitions

The character has no real drive and hopes that maybe what they want will fall into their lap somehow. They will quit if things look difficult.

Below Baseline Ambitions

The character will do the bare minimum to achieve their goal, and consider quitting if it gets too difficult.

Baseline Ambitions

The character is willing to do the typical amount of work required to achieve their goal.

Above Baseline Ambitions

The character is willing to do more work than expected to get what they want, or they may have multiple goals they're pursuing at once.

High Ambitions

The character has grand plans, and their current goal is but one piece in the big picture. They will do nearly anything to get what they want.

STAKES

The stakes tied to a goal have two components. The first are the rewards, what will happen if the character achieves the goal. What will they, or other characters, get out of it? The other is the

consequences that the character, or other people, may suffer if the goal isn't achieved. The two don't need to be balanced, but they will both be there even if the only consequence is that they don't gain the reward, and the only reward is that they don't suffer the consequence.

Rewards and consequences can be ranked separately if, if there's a lot to gain and nothing to lose or vice-versa, or combined if they're both on the same level. Remember that creating conflict is what drives story.

Low Stakes

Neither the reward nor the consequence will have much impact on anyone.

Below Baseline Stakes

The rewards and consequences are relatively minor, and won't have a large impact on anyone.

Baseline Stakes

The rewards and consequences tied to the goal are typical for this type of story.

Above Baseline Stakes

The rewards and consequences are high, and will have a significant impact on one or more people.

High Stakes

The rewards and consequences will have a life-changing impact on one or more people.

OBSTACLES

Obstacles are anything that prevents the character from achieving their goal. They might be driven by an Antagonist or by circumstance. The Ranking of obstacles should reflect the stakes, and be modified the character's ambition. The more there is to gain or lose, the harder the obstacles should be. The most ambitious the character is to achieve their goals, the more obstacles you can throw at them without fear that they'll just quit and go home. The objective is to make the story feel right based on what could happen and how driven the character is. Obstacles have to provide the proper amount of challenge without making it feel like the goal's not worth the effort.

Low Obstacles

The obstacles are easy relative to what's at stake.

Below Baseline Obstacles

The obstacles are a bit easier than what someone would expect given the stakes.

Baseline Obstacles

The obstacles are typical for the level of stakes involved.

Above Baseline Obstacles

The obstacles are difficult in comparison to what's at stake.

High Obstacles

The obstacles exceed what would be expected relative to what's at stake.

6. APTITUDES

Aptitudes are broad categories of abilities that the character is innately good at. Think of it as natural, undirected talent. They also gauge how the character sees the world and approaches problems.

Aptitudes and Experiences

A character's Aptitude is the raw force behind the refined, practical applications of Experience. They work together. The application of Aptitude is limited without the Experience to guide and direct it, so Aptitude alone is never enough.

STANDARD APTITUDES

The 10 character Aptitudes we will be focusing on in this book are:

Body Aptitude – The character's understanding of their own physical being.

Empathy Aptitude – How the character relates to other people.

Language Aptitude – The character's grasps of the spoken and written word.

Morality Aptitude – How the character approaches concepts of right and wrong.

Musical Aptitude – The character's competence with the use of sound.

Nature Aptitude – The character's talent with living things.

Reason Aptitude – The character's faculty with logic and critical thinking.

Reflection Aptitude – How the character processes their thoughts and feelings.

Spiritual Aptitude – The character's capability to see the big picture.

Visualization Aptitude – How the character comprehends physical space.

Alternate Aptitudes

There are a few important points that need to be made about Aptitudes. The first is that you don't need to use them all. Not every character has to possess some degree of every Aptitude. If something isn't a defining trait, positive or negative, skip it.

Second, not every setting needs to use every Aptitude. If the needs of the story mean that certain types of abilities won't come up, ignore them. Focus on and showcase what you need.

Third, you can and should rename the Aptitudes presented here to best suit the flavor of your project. Use the sort of vocabulary appropriate to your setting. Make it grittier, funnier, or scarier, whatever reinforces the tone you want.

Finally, feel free to make up your own Aptitudes of your story and characters need something that isn't represented here. No system can realistically be all things to all people, so if something you need isn't here, you have permission to tweak it.

Aptitude Ratings

Each type of Aptitude has a numerical Rating from -5. This represents where the character's own ability falls relative to the baseline for people in that genre, time, and place. Ratings are a

zero-sum game; for every +1 in an Aptitude, the character must have a -1 in something else.

Aptitudes and Stages of Life

A character's Aptitudes will change as they cycle through the various stages of life. The four relevant stages here are *childhood*, *adolescence*, *midlife*, and *mature adulthood*. While each character is different, children tend to have lower Ratings. These will increase in adolescence, and reach their peak by midlife. Heading into mature adulthood, Aptitudes will begin to decline. When assigning Ratings, bear those changes in mind.

BODY APTITUDE

The character's body Aptitude reflects how well they understand and relate to their physical being. It includes everything from knowing their own strength, applying their agility, and using fine motor skills. It's not about what they've got, it's about how effectively they're able to use it. Body Aptitude is important for dancers and athletes, surgeons and craftsmen.

Below Baseline Body Aptitude (negative modifier)

The character has less Aptitude than typical for their situation. They may be clumsy, awkward, or unsure of themselves. There may be a neurological impairment that prevents them from controlling their motions.

Baseline Body Aptitude (no modifier)

The character has the expected Aptitude for a person in their situation. They are functional yet unexceptional. Body Aptitude

allows them to engage in a wide array of activities with neither impairment nor advantage.

Above Baseline Body Aptitude (positive modifier)

The character has greater than typical Aptitude. They may be naturally athletic, or gifted with exceptional good health. Body Aptitude makes them strong, dexterous, and durable.

EMPATHY APTITUDE

The character's empathy Aptitude shows how well they understand and relate to other people. This reflects the character's natural level of interpersonal skills. Empathy Aptitude will impact how they relate to other people, how they are able to communicate and express themselves, and how they are able to form and maintain relationships.

Below Baseline Empathy Aptitude (negative modifier)

The character has less Aptitude than typical. Their lack of empathy makes them seem cold, distant, or strange to other people. Empathy Aptitude makes social interactions awkward and difficult. They have difficulty expressing thoughts and ideas appropriately.

Baseline Empathy Aptitude (no modifier)

The character has the expected Aptitude for a person in their situation. They get along with other people, but aren't exceptionally charismatic or outgoing. They form and hold onto friendships and function well around other people.

Above Baseline Empathy Aptitude (positive modifier)

The character has greater than typical Aptitude. They are at ease with other people, both individually and in groups. They effectively express their thoughts and feelings. They understand other people, because they make a pointed effort to. Empathy Aptitude makes them a “people person”.

LANGUAGE APTITUDE

The character’s language Aptitude is a measure of how well they are able to communicate and understand written and verbal languages. This impacts their level of literacy, the ability to learn new concepts, and the use of words to express thoughts, feelings, and concepts.

Below Baseline Language Aptitude (negative modifier)

The character has less Aptitude than typical for their situation. They may have difficulty communicating. There may be an impairment that makes learning to read challenging, and their ability to speak may be impaired. Language Aptitude limits opportunities for learning and self-expression.

Baseline Language Aptitude (no modifier)

The character has the expected Aptitude for a person in their situation. They read, write, and communicate with neither impairment nor any particular advantage. Language Aptitude allows them to function within their community and social groups.

Above Baseline Language Aptitude (positive modifier)

The character has greater than typical Aptitude. They have a gift for language and literacy. They are able to put thoughts, feelings,

and concepts into words easily and eloquently. Language Aptitude allows them to better understand what others are trying to express.

MORALITY APTITUDE

The character's morality Aptitude is an indicator of how well they grasp the concepts of right and wrong. It reflects their ability to balance the needs of others with their own personal wants. Morality Aptitude allows a character to see all sides of an issue and make decisions based on their personal ideals as well as the values of their society.

Below Baseline Morality Aptitude (negative modifier)

The character has less Aptitude than typical for their situation. They may have impairment or have suffered some trauma that impacts their ability to grasp moral principles. Morality Aptitude skews them toward acting in their own interests first, without consideration or regard for other people.

Baseline Morality Aptitude (no modifier)

The character has the expected Aptitude for a person in their situation. They function in society with neither obvious impairment nor advantage. Morality Aptitude allows them to balance contradictory principles and make ethical decisions.

Above Baseline Morality Aptitude (positive modifier)

The character has greater than typical Aptitude. They have an innate understanding of ethical values, and often skew decisions toward other peoples' safety and well-being. Morality Aptitude makes doing what is good and right an obvious decision.

MUSICAL APTITUDE

The music Aptitude shows how well the character understands and relates to sound and rhythm. It impacts their ability to sing, play instruments, recite metered poetry, and compose songs. Musical Aptitude impacts the character's ability to enjoy various forms of entertainment, and engage in select means of self-expression.

Below Baseline Musical Aptitude (negative modifier)

The character has less Aptitude than typical for their situation. Their lack of rhythm and timing may impair certain physical tasks requiring precision. They probably don't sing well or play instruments. Musical Aptitude makes them less likely to pick up on sounds that might be significant.

Baseline Musical Aptitude (no modifier)

The character has the expected Aptitude for a person in their situation. They are neither advantaged nor impaired when it comes to singing or playing an instrument. Musical Aptitude allows them to appreciate music even if they have no Experiences with creating it.

Above Baseline Musical Aptitude (positive modifier)

The character has greater than typical Aptitude. They are a prodigy, learning to play instruments and compose music with ease. They may have a masterful singing voice. Musical Aptitude allows them to appreciate and engage in all forms of musical expression.

NATURE APTITUDE

The natural Aptitude reflects how well the character understands and relates to flora, fauna, and other aspects of the material world. This includes the ability to see patterns in behavior, connections within ecosystems, and developing an awareness of their surroundings. Nature Aptitude allows the character to appreciate and understand the outdoors, including areas like weather, terrain, and the stars in the sky.

Below Baseline Nature Aptitude (negative modifier)

The character has less Aptitude than typical for their situation. They may simply not notice such things. Some impairment may exist that prevent them from grasping more than the appearances and surface connections. Nature Aptitude makes the character oblivious to a large portion of what's going on around them.

Baseline Nature Aptitude (no modifier)

The character has the expected Aptitude for a person in their situation. They are able to function outdoors with neither impatience nor awareness. Nature Aptitude lets them notice what Experience has trained them to notice, rarely more, occasionally less.

Above Baseline Nature Aptitude (positive modifier)

The character has greater than typical Aptitude. They have an affinity with the material world, and an interest in living things and ecosystems. Nature Aptitude makes them attuned to their surroundings, and they take note of the weather, the stars, and the tiniest details of the world.

REASON APTITUDE

The character's reason Aptitude is a gauge of how well they grasp and utilize logic, critical thinking, and abstraction. It is the ability to apply logic, determine patterns, and solve problems. Reason Aptitude affects the character's ability to form rational conclusions and make decisions based on the information they have available.

Below Baseline Reason Aptitude (negative modifier)

The character has less Aptitude than typical for their situation. They may possess some sort of impairment that clouds their judgment. Reason Aptitude prevents them from seeing all of the facts for what they are and taking right actions based on evidence.

Baseline Reason Aptitude (no modifier)

The character has the expected Aptitude for a person in their situation. They are able to make sound decisions with neither an advantage nor disadvantage. Reason Aptitude allows them to think critically if they so choose.

Above Baseline Reason Aptitude (positive modifier)

The character has greater than typical Aptitude with logic. They naturally lean toward factual answers and solutions mired in evidence. Reason Aptitude allows them to draw correct conclusions and solve problems using sound critical thinking.

REFLECTION APTITUDE

The character's reflection Aptitude shows how well they know their own mind and understand their feelings. It is the source of wisdom, intuition, and will. Reflection Aptitude helps characters sort out their goals and desires, and clearly and objectively see their personal issues.

Below Baseline Reflection Aptitude (negative modifier)

The character has less Aptitude than typical for their situation. They may not have a sense of direction or the ability to sort out what they should do with their life. Reflection Aptitude keeps them wandering aimlessly through life.

Baseline Reflection Aptitude (no modifier)

The character has the expected Aptitude for a person in their situation. They can muddle through life with a general sense of who they are and where they're going. Reflection Aptitude allows them to function on a day-to-day basis with neither advantages nor disadvantages.

Above Baseline Reflection Aptitude (positive modifier)

The character has greater than typical Aptitude for introspection. They understand themselves, and can objectively see their strengths and flaws. Reflection Aptitude allows them to utilize their good qualities and overcome their personal obstacles.

SPIRITUAL APTITUDE

How well the character grasps their relationship to the bigger picture. It is the character's ability to find meaning and higher

purpose in life. Spiritual Aptitude allows for personal growth and qualities like courage and selflessness.

Below Baseline Spiritual Aptitude (negative modifier)

The character has less Aptitude than typical for their situation. They cannot see the connectedness of things. Spiritual Aptitude means they are shaped by external, rather than internal, forces.

Baseline Spiritual Aptitude (no modifier)

The character has the expected Aptitude for a person in their situation. They are able to function in the world with a vague sense that life has some meaning, even though they don't quite understand it. Spiritual Aptitude means that they can find purpose if they make the effort.

Above Baseline Spiritual Aptitude (positive modifier)

The character has greater than typical Aptitude for personal growth. They see the connectedness of life, and know their place and purpose in the world. Spiritual Aptitude means that their identity is shaped by their own decisions rather than external pressures.

VISUALIZATION APTITUDE

The character's visualization Aptitude measures how well they can grasp and utilize physical space. This means gauging distances, volumes, and other two- and three-dimensional concepts. Visualization Aptitude means leveraging imagination for art, navigation, and other tasks involving spacial thinking.

Below Baseline Visualization Aptitude (negative modifier)

The character has less Aptitude than typical for their situation. They may have difficulty with units of measure, including time and distance. Visualization Aptitude may mean a lack of talent for art and resource management.

Baseline Visualization Aptitude (no modifier)

The character has the expected Aptitude for a person in their situation. They can function in the world with no real disadvantages or advantages. Visualization Aptitude means that they can sort out directions, Judge distance, and handle artistic tasks.

Above Baseline Visualization Aptitude (positive modifier)

The character has greater than typical Aptitude for visual-spacial reasoning. They can guess units of measure with accuracy, and probably have some artistic ability. Visualization Aptitude means that they can imagine sizes, distances, and shapes and the relationships between them.

7. EXPERIENCES

Experiences represent the things that a character has seen and done in their life so far. It encompasses education and training they've received, jobs they've held, and even the background they come from. A character's Experiences are what equip them with the abilities necessary to tackle the needs of the present story.

It is possible for a character to have the same type of Experience more than once, in a separate but related field. For example, a degree in biology would be considered an academic Experience. If the character has also studied history, that would be a separate academic Experience.

This system makes no distinction as to how the character acquired the Experience; there is no difference here between formal study and practical application. The amount of time they've spent gathering Experience is not a factor either; some character learn quickly, while others require time to pick things up. Likewise, there is no innate indicator as whether the field of Experience has breadth, depth, or both. The details and explanations behind a character's Experience belong in the back story.

Experiences and Aptitudes

A character's Experiences are the refined, practical applications of Aptitude. They work together. All of the Experience in the world is meaningless if the character has no Aptitude in that area, so Experience alone is never enough. Any Experience can theoretically be used in conjunction with any Aptitude, as long as the combination makes sense. Different applications of the same Experience can be used with different Aptitudes.

STANDARD EXPERIENCES

The 10 character Experiences we will be focusing on in this book are:

Academic Experiences – What the character has studied within scholarly fields, formally or informally.

Artistic Experiences – What the character has practiced in the arts, including fine art, design, and music.

Athletic Experiences – What the character has trained for and accomplished in the sports and recreation fields.

Creative Experiences – What the character has achieved through the discipline imagination and ideas.

Cultural Experiences – What the character has absorbed from societal customs and beliefs.

Investigative Experiences – What the character has done in the fields of research and problem solving.

Martial Experiences – What the character has attained in the fields of combat and tactics.

Persuasive Experiences – What the character has mastered in the fields of influencing other people.

Professional Experiences – What the character has done within a specific career field.

Transport Experiences – What the character has learned in the field of travel and transit.

Alternate Experiences

There are a few important points that need to be made about Experiences. The first is that you don't need to use them all. Not every character will have had all of these types of Experiences. If

they haven't seen or done a particular thing in the course of their life so far, leave it out.

Second, not every setting needs to use every category of Experience. If the needs of the story mean that certain types of Experiences aren't relevant, ignore them. Focus on and showcase what you need.

Third, you can and should rename the Experiences presented here to best suit the flavor of your project. Use the sort of vocabulary appropriate to your setting. Use the appropriate equivalents for the genre, time, and place of your story.

Finally, feel free to make up your own Experiences if your story and characters need something not represented here. No system can realistically be all things to all people, so if something you need isn't here, you have permission to tweak it.

Breadth and Depth

Any Experience may be broad (a little knowledge of every aspect in a given field of Experience), deep (a lot of knowledge in a specific aspect of a field), or both. This should be noted when listing the character's Experiences. Sometimes, it is evident in the name or title of the Experience. For example, a doctor could be a general practitioner, meaning he knows a fair amount about all fields of medicine. Alternately, they may be a cardiologist or oncologist, and have deep knowledge in a specialized field of medicine.

A character with broad Experiences will know about more things than a character with deep Experiences, but a character with deep Experiences will know more about their specialty than a character with broad Experiences.

Experience Rankings

Each category of Experience has a descriptive Ranking, to reflect the breadth and depth of the character's training and ability in that area. You can rename the Experience categories to suit the needs of the genre, time, and place of your story, leave off ones that don't fit, and add your own. There are no restrictions on the number of Experiences a character can have, or the Ratings they possess. You can make them above the baseline in everything if it's appropriate for the character. Remember, though, that they can only do these things as well as their Aptitudes allow, and Aptitudes are more strictly balanced. Just because a character has Experience in everything doesn't mean they can do everything well.

Experiences and Stages of Life

A character's Experiences will change as they cycle through the stages of life. The relevant stages here are *childhood*, *adolescence*, *initiation*, *midlife*, and *mature adulthood*. Rankings will be at their lowest in childhood, increasing in adolescence and initiation as the character goes through periods of concentrated learning. Experiences reach their peak around midlife, when the character is typically at the height of their career. During mature adulthood, they may begin to decline as the character stops keeping up with new developments, retiring from their lifelong career or slipping into less active roles.

ACADEMIC EXPERIENCES

The character's academic Experiences reflect their scholarly pursuits. This includes disciplines like humanities, social sciences, natural sciences, formal sciences, and even general knowledge.

Academic Experiences are important for the character to become a well-rounded person.

Below Baseline Academic Experiences

The character has less education than is typical for their situation. They may have had no formal schooling, or may possess some form of learning disability. Academic Experiences mean little to the character, if they even exist.

Baseline Academic Experiences

The character has the expected level of Experience for a person in their situation. Their academic Experiences allow them to function with neither advantage nor disadvantage. Academic Experiences mean they have the level of education typical for the setting.

Above Baseline Academic Experiences

The character has more education than is typical for the setting. This might mean advanced degrees or dedicated self-study. Academic Experiences mean opportunities and a greater breadth and depth of knowledge.

ARTISTIC EXPERIENCES

The character's artistic Experiences indicate their level of engagement with various visual art forms. This includes painting, illustration, design, fashion, and sculpture. Artistic Experiences are important if the character has an occupation involving the crafting of physical objects.

Below Baseline Artistic Experiences

The character has had less opportunity to appreciate and create art than is typical for their situation. They may have a sheltered past or live in a culture that does not value the arts. Artistic Experiences mean they may not know how to do things like draw or sing.

Baseline Artistic Experiences

The character has the expected Experiences for a person in their situation. They have the level of exposure to the arts typical for the setting. Artistic Experiences mean they have some appreciation and understanding of the arts and some basic training in art and music.

Above Baseline Artistic Experiences

The character has greater than typical Experiences with the arts. They may have trained in a particular art form, or pursue it as a hobby or recreational interest. Artistic Experience means the character knows the world of the arts.

ATHLETIC EXPERIENCES

The character's athletic Experiences are drawn from the forms of physical exertion they engage in. This includes a variety of sports, exercise, and recreational activities. Athletic Experiences are important to the character's general health, and come in handy during action and adventure stories.

Below Baseline Athletic Experiences

The character has less training in sports and recreation than is typical for their situation. They may have limited physical abilities, few opportunities to participate, or just no interest in such things.

Athletic Experiences may mean the character isn't particularly active in that way.

Baseline Athletic Experiences

The character has typical Experiences with sports and recreation for a person in their situation. They may participate in amateur athletics, engage in moderate exercise, or do physical things for recreation. Athletic Experiences mean they're in decent shape, with no advantages or disadvantages beyond their general health.

Above Baseline Athletic Experiences

The character has greater than typical Experiences with sports and recreation. They may be a professional athlete, or aspire to be, or just work out a lot. Athletic Experience means the character spends a lot of time working out and engaged in physical activity.

CREATIVE EXPERIENCES

The character's creative Experiences indicate how well they can leverage their imagination and find original solutions to problems. This includes finding ways around limitations, using resources wisely, and inventing new things. Creative Experiences are important because otherwise the character is limited to what other people have already figured out.

Below Baseline Creative Experiences

The character has less Experience with expressing the creativity and developing new ideas than typical for their situation. This may stem from a lack of need, because their life is pretty easy, or a lack of opportunity. Creative Experiences for the character means crazy stuff other people do.

Baseline Creative Experiences

The character has the expected creative Experiences for a person in their situation. They occasionally have to come up with new ideas and use their imagination to solve problems. Creative Experience means they can tap into their inventiveness with neither an advantage nor disadvantage.

Above Baseline Creative Experiences

The character has greater creative Experiences than typical. The circumstances of their life may require them to be resourceful and imaginative. Creative Experiences for the character mean opportunities to think up new ideas and solve difficult problems.

CULTURAL EXPERIENCES

The character's cultural Experiences indicate their grasp of social custom, practices, and expectations. This includes national or ethnic traditions, religious values, and the written and unwritten rules of a community. Cultural Experiences are important because they allow the character to understand and fit in with society.

Below Baseline Cultural Experiences

The character has fewer Experiences with cultural customs and practices than is typical for their situation. They may have been sheltered, or come from a culture very different from the one in the current story. Cultural Experience means the character is an outsider within the setting.

Baseline Cultural Experiences

The character has the expected cultural Experiences for a person in their situation. They have probably grown up in this

environment, so to them it's just the way things are done. Cultural Experiences mean they know the rules and expectations their society imposes on them.

Above Baseline Cultural Experiences

The character has greater than typical cultural Experiences. They may have studied one or more traditions in depth, or they may belong to an organization that preserves culture. Cultural Experience means they not only understand what is done within society, but why it is done and how it originated.

INVESTIGATIVE EXPERIENCES

The character's investigative Experiences show their resourcefulness in gathering information, verifying its accuracy, and drawing conclusions from the data. This includes scientists, detectives, journalists, spies, explorers, and historians. Investigative Experiences are important if the character requires a steady source of intelligence to achieve their goals.

Below Baseline Investigative Experiences

The character has less Experience with research and gathering information than is typical for their situation. They may have no need for it, or simply lack the methodologies to do it. Investigative Experiences mean they rely on and trust other people to provide them with information.

Baseline Investigative Experiences

The character has the expected level of investigative Experience for a person in their situation. They can find basic information with neither advantage nor disadvantage. Investigative Experience

means they may get most of their information from other people, but they know what sources to trust and how to verify if they need to.

Above Baseline Investigative Experiences

The character has greater than typical Experiences with gathering information and conducting research. They may work in a data-driven field, or simply have an analytical mind. Investigative Experience means they know how to find correct and verifiable information and understand why sources and accuracy are important.

MARTIAL EXPERIENCES

The character's martial Experiences reflect their expertise with various forms of combat and tactics. This includes hand-to-hand techniques, melee weapons use, firearms use, and other methods of hurting people and breaking things. Martial Experience is important for characters who are soldiers and action heroes.

Below Baseline Martial Experiences

The character has less Experience with combat and tactics than is typical for their situation. They may have health issues, moral objections, or a lack of need to get into a fight. Martial Experiences mean that they use other abilities to avoid physical altercations.

Baseline Martial Experiences

The character has the expected martial Experiences for a person in their situation. They can hold their own in a fair fight, and know enough to not do anything foolish. Martial Experiences mean

they've trained in self-defense or served a minimum term in the military.

Above Baseline Martial Experiences

The character has greater than typical martial Experiences. They may be a professional soldier or fighter or some kind, or train hard for other reasons. Martial Experiences mean that they are highly skilled in combat and tactics.

PERSUASIVE EXPERIENCES

The character's persuasive Experiences indicate their ability to convince people to see things their way. This includes acting, singing, selling, negotiating, being seductive, lying, and interrogation. Persuasive Experiences are important because everyone needs to talk people into or out of something to get what they want in life.

Below Baseline Persuasive Experiences

The character has less Experience with convincing other people to do what they want than is typical for their situation. They may be lacking something in terms of personality, looks, or style. Persuasive Experiences mean that they may be overlooked or ignored.

Baseline Persuasive Experiences

The character has the expected persuasive Experiences for a person in their situation. They can make both rational and emotional arguments, with neither advantage nor disadvantage. Persuasive Experience means they know how to get what they want at least part of the time.

Above Baseline Persuasive Experiences

The character has greater than typical Experience with convincing other people. They may work in a field where influencing the public is a key component. Persuasive Experience means they get what that want the majority of the time.

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCES

The character's professional Experiences are a gauge of their qualifications in a career that requires special training and certification. These include skilled occupations like doctor, lawyer, teacher, engineer, electrician, and mechanic. Professional Experience goes beyond knowledge of the job itself, and extends to an understanding of the culture and operations within the entire field.

Below Baseline Professional Experiences

The character has less career Experience than is typical for their situation. They may not be a skilled worker, or they may lack necessary training. Professional Experience means they're not qualified for certain types of jobs.

Baseline Professional Experiences

The character has the expected professional Experiences for a person in their situation. They are competent at their job, with no advantages or disadvantages. Professional Experience means the character can do what's expected of them and draw a decent salary for doing it.

Above Baseline Professional Experiences

The character has greater than typical professional Experience. They may be at the top of their game, or have been at it for a long time. Professional Experience for the character means that they are a certified expert and a Leader in their field.

TRANSPORT EXPERIENCES

The character's transport Experiences show their proficiency with using the most common means of getting around within the setting. This could mean riding a horse in an historical or fantasy story, driving a car in the modern world, or piloting a starship in a science fictional future. Transport Experiences are often important for both employment opportunities and quality of life.

Below Baseline Transport Experiences

The character has less Experience with transportation than is typical for their situation. They may not know how to operate or navigate the most common means of getting around, or they just may not do it well. Transport Experience for the character means difficulty getting around.

Baseline Transport Experiences

The character has the expected transport Experiences for a person in their situation. They can get where they need to go without advantage or disadvantage. Transport Experience means being able to drive, ride, operate, or use the common modes of transportation in the setting.

Above Baseline Transport Experiences

The character has greater than typical transport Experiences. They may excel at the common travel modes, or they might be versed in unusual means of transit. Transport Experiences for the character mean they will get where they're going in the most efficient way possible.

8. RESOURCES

Every character will have various types of resources at his or her disposal, including money, material possessions, and connections to useful and helpful people. The exact resources will depend on the genre, time, place, and tone established for your story.

STANDARD RESOURCES

The 10 character resources we will be focusing on in this book are:

Clothing – What the character wears, both for practical and fashionable reasons.

Contacts – Who the character knows and the types of assistance they may provide.

Equipment – What tools and gear the character has to work with.

Housing – Where the character lives and the quality of shelter they have.

Information – What secret and special knowledge the character possesses.

Possessions – What personal effects and common stuff the character has.

Relationships – What friends and family members the character has in their life.

Reputation – What other people think of the character and why.

Transportation – What means of getting around the character has.

Wealth – How much money the character has available to spend.

Alternate Resources

There are a few important points that need to be made about resources. The first is that you don't need to use them all. Not every character has to possess some degree of every resource. If something isn't a defining trait, positive or negative, skip it.

Second, not every setting needs to use every resource. If the needs of the story mean that certain types of things won't come up, ignore them. Focus on and showcase what you need. Third, you can and should rename the resources presented here to best suit the flavor of your project. Use the sort of vocabulary appropriate to your setting. Call things by the vocabulary used by the character in that genre, time, and place.

Finally, feel free to make up your own Aptitudes of your story and characters need something that isn't represented here. No system can realistically be all things to all people, so if something you need isn't here, you have permission to tweak it.

Resource Rankings

Each resource has a descriptive Ranking, to reflect the quantity or quality of that resource. There is no restriction on the resources a character can have, or the Ratings they possess. You can make them above the baseline in everything if it's appropriate for the character.

CLOTHING

The character's clothing has two dimensions, function and fashion. It has to protect them from the elements and other possible hazards, but it also needs to be stylish and look good. Clothing as a

resource includes any professional attire uniforms, armor, or special garments the character needs.

Below Baseline Clothing

The character does not have appropriate clothing for their situation. It may not offer proper protection for the environment, or project the proper image for their profession or status. This might be because they have no money, or because of some ideological statement. Clothing means they're not naked, and little else.

Baseline Clothing

The character has the expected clothing for a person in their situation. They have the basics they need for their job and social status. Clothing means they're safe and appropriate, with no advantages or disadvantages.

Above Baseline Clothing

The character has better quality clothing that is typical for the setting. It may be expensive, custom tailors, or made from special materials. Clothing means they're on the cutting edge of fashion, or have greater protection than the baseline offers.

CONTACTS

The character's contacts are people they know who can provide them with other resources they can't get themselves. This includes material goods, services, and information. Contacts may be supporting characters in the story. Having contacts is important, because no character can reasonably or realistically have and do everything they need. Having other people to rely on and interact with makes for a better story.

Below Baseline Contacts

The character has few or no contacts, or they may be lacking a vital type of contact essential for their goals or profession. Lacking this type of contact creates a disadvantage for them. Contacts mean they have difficulty getting things that they need.

Baseline Contacts

The character has the expected contacts for a person in their situation. They have a reasonable network of people for their career, hobbies, and interests. Contacts mean they can function in life with neither advantages nor disadvantages.

Above Baseline Contacts

The character has a lot of contacts. This may be broad, meaning they have a person for anything you can imagine, or deep, meaning they have a contact that specializes in very specific, hard-to-find goods, services, or information in a narrow category. Contacts mean the character can locate anything necessary, if they can make a deal for it.

EQUIPMENT

The character's equipment is anything they need to live their life, do their job, and engage in their hobbies. This includes all of the tools of their particular trade. No itemized lists need to be made, because what's missing or what's extra can be determined by their equipment Ranking. Acquiring, replacing, and upgrading equipment can be a source of conflict, or a reward for meeting story goals.

Below Baseline Equipment

The character lacks some necessary equipment, or what they have is of extremely poor quality. They may be able to do the job with difficulty, or they may not be able to do it at all. What's not working right, what's broken, and what's missing should be determined.

Baseline Equipment

The character has the right equipment for their situation. They have everything they need to function, with neither an advantage nor disadvantage. Equipment means these resources are assumed to exist and needn't be worried about.

Above Baseline Equipment

The character has better equipment than the baseline. This might mean higher quality, or some fancy extra pieces above and beyond the base necessities. Equipment means the character is able to get better results.

HOUSING

The character's housing is their living situation. This includes houses, apartments, and rented rooms. It's a place to sleep, rest, interact with other characters, and store their stuff. Housing can be described in as much or as little as you need.

Below Baseline Housing

The character has poor quality housing. It may not offer complete shelter from the elements, be in a bad location, require repairs, or have vermin. Housing means the character has a place to sleep that's marginally better than living outside.

Baseline Housing

The character has the housing typical for the setting. It's safe, furnished, and has an adequate amount of space for the character's needs. Housing means they have a home base to operate out of.

Above Baseline Housing

The character has better housing than most people. It may be larger, in a good neighborhood, or have amenities that don't come standard in most homes. Housing means the character lives in comfort and style.

INFORMATION

The character's information resource means they have some bit of knowledge that no one else has. It might be a secret, a diary, photographs, a map, or other bit of esoteric data. They might use this for leverage, blackmailing people with it, or it might be the key to some grand story. Information gives the character some sort of power.

Below Baseline Information

The character doesn't know anything that's of any special use. If they do, they don't know about it, or know how to use it. Information means they don't have a lot of leverage.

Baseline Information

The character has the expected information for a person in their situation. They may have some small embarrassing anecdotes or

awkward photos that could be leveraged to gain mundane favors. Information means the character has a moderate amount of dirt on some ordinary people.

Above Baseline Information

The character has something big. It might be something scandalous on an important person, or a revelation that will have a huge impact on the story. Information means the character has a bomb they can drop at the time and place of their choosing.

POSSESSIONS

The character's possessions are their ordinary stuff and personal effects. This includes photos, knickknacks, souvenirs, and collections. Possessions are important to the character, but probably not worth very much to anyone else.

Below Baseline Possessions

The character has few possessions, or nothing of great value. They may not be a stuff person, or they may have other resource issues. Possessions might be something they don't have but covet.

Baseline Possessions

The character has the expected possessions for a person in their situation. They can function with neither advantages nor disadvantages. Possessions mean that they're relatively comfortable.

Above Baseline Possessions

The character has better stuff than most people. It may be higher quality or greater quantity. Possessions mean the character may like nice things, or may be a hoarder.

RELATIONSHIPS

The character's relationships are the people they are closest to. This includes family, friends, Lovers, Mentors, and even pets. Relationships are important because they humanize the character. They offer opportunities to present different sides of the character that may not be visible while they're deep in the story or pursuing personal goals.

Below Baseline Relationships

The character has few meaningful relationships. This may be because they lack social skills, the people they know are out of reach, or because choose to be alone. Relationships are things that other people have. They may also have relationships that are strained or even toxic.

Baseline Relationships

The character has the sorts of relationships that most people have. They have some friends and family. Relationships are the status quo for life.

Above Baseline Relationships

The character has more prominent relationships than most people. They may hail from a large family, or have a lot of friends. Relationships are something to be cherished and developed, so the character has many of them.

REPUTATION

The character's reputation is what people think of them. This is based on both the behavior they display and the things that they have accomplished. It can also be based on rumor, gossip, disinformation, and propaganda. Reputation is important because it's what people who don't really know the character use to make decisions about that character.

Below Baseline Reputation

The character has no real reputation, or possibly a bad reputation. Either people have never heard of them, or what they've heard is negative or just plain unimpressive. Reputation for the character is something they need to work on.

Baseline Reputation

The character has the expected reputation for a person in their situation. There is nothing exceptionally good or bad, and they're known to be decent and competent. Reputation is a safe thing that keeps them securely along the baseline.

Above Baseline Reputation

The character has a positive reputation. People know who they are, have heard good things about them personally, and are aware of what they've done. Reputation for the character is one of their most valuable resources.

TRANSPORTATION

The character's transportation is the means by which they get around. Depending on the setting, this can be a horse, a car, a bicycle, or some futuristic vehicle. The character is assumed to own

their transportation, or at least have reliable access to it. Transportation is important when the story requires the character to get around.

Below Baseline Transportation

The character has limited access to transportation, or there is a problem with reliability. It may be a sick horse or a broken-down car. Transportation means the character has difficulty getting where they need to go.

Baseline Transportation

The character has the expected transportation for a person in their situation. It is functional and reliable, with neither advantages nor disadvantages. Transportation means the character is able to get around with relative ease.

Above Baseline Transportation

The character has a better means of transportation than most. It may be high quality or a cutting-edge form. Transportation means the character can get around quickly and comfortably.

WEALTH

The character's wealth constitutes their overall financial situation. This includes cash, savings, investments, and any property that can quickly and easily be sold for money. Wealth is important because everyone needs to pay for goods and services in order to live.

Below Baseline Wealth

The character is poor. They may have no money, or lack access to the financial assets they do have. Wealth means not being able to cover basic expenses and going without certain necessities.

Baseline Wealth

The character is middle class or at least of typical means for the setting. They can comfortably cover their expenses and set money aside for future needs. Wealth means not having to worry about money.

Above Baseline Wealth

The character is rich. They can cover their expenses and afford luxuries. Wealth means having the ability to buy whatever they want without worrying about their future needs.

9. WONDERS

Depending on the genre and setting of your story, there may be magic, superpowers, or other supernatural abilities available to your characters. Collectively, these will be referred to as wonders. They can be handled in different ways, depending upon which best suits the needs of your story.

HOW WONDERS WORK

The specifics of how wonders operate, and even why they exist, are mostly a function of setting. The rules of magic in one series of fantasy novels are different from the rules of magic in an unrelated television show. The ways mental powers work in a particular science fiction novel are completely contradictory to the way the same powers behave in a superhero movie. It's up to you to establish what such powers do, what their restrictions are, and most importantly, why some characters have them while others don't.

DEFINING WONDERS

There are a few parameters that you might use to define wonders. If you're writing a story, you'll want to keep these things in mind, because you'll be able to see how a wonder can resolve or create conflict. If you're using an existing roleplaying game system, these things are probably already spelled out for you. That doesn't mean you can't use the following guidelines to tweak the rules of the game a bit, to make your setting unique and to better support the types of stories you want to tell. If nothing else, you can add your own descriptive elements to prepackaged abilities.

Effects – What the wonder looks like, what it does, and its aftereffects. This is purely descriptive.

Activation – How the wonder is initiated, what's required, and how long it takes. Instantaneous? Seconds? Minutes? A ritual lasting days? Are materials required?

Duration – How long the effects of the wonder last and what can end the effects. Instant? Hours? Days? Until the character chooses to stop? Forever?

Uses – How often can the character use the wonder, if there's any degradation. Once per day? Once per hour? A certain number of times in a lifetime? Infinite?

Area of Effect – How many people, or what amount of space, does it affect. One person? A room? All the character sees? Everything the character can picture?

Range – How close must a target be to the character for the wonder to work? Close enough to touch? Within a specific distance? Line of sight? Anywhere in the world?

Weaknesses – What prevents the wonder from working, and how that functions. Are there people or objects it doesn't work on? Is there a substance that nullifies it?

WONDERS AS APTITUDES

Wonders can be expressed as unique Aptitudes, rated in the same way as regular Aptitudes. What you name this Aptitude should reflect the source of the wonder within your setting. This works best if there is only one specific wonder that needs to be represented. Not all characters will have this Aptitude, but everyone who does will be able to use the exact same wonder. This also

means that wonders are static, and will not improve as the character learns to use them.

Magical Aptitude – The character is able to manipulate magical energies at will, in whatever way they choose to describe. There are no individual spells.

Mentalist Aptitude – The character has a single mental ability like telekinesis, telepathy, or precognition.

Superpower Aptitude – The character has a single superpower, like flight, invulnerability, or an energy blast.

WONDERS AS EXPERIENCES

If wonders are something that can be improved as the character learns to use them, they might be best represented with Experiences. You should name the Experiences based on the way the wonder is expressed within the setting. If new abilities are able to be learned, they should be Experiences. As with regular Experiences, they can be utilized in conjunction with whatever Aptitude seem most appropriate.

Magical Experiences – The character can learn categories of magic, like summoning or enchantment. Experiences can be categories or individual spells.

Mentalist Experiences – The character can learn to use their mental abilities in a variety of ways. These might be categories or specific individual wonders.

Superpower Experiences – The character might have a defined category of wonders based on an archetype, or Experiences might reflect individual wonders.

WONDERS MIXING APTITUDES AND EXPERIENCES

This approach requires a specific Aptitude to “power” the character’s wonders, with Experiences reflecting the myriad ways that the character has learned to use their gift. You should name the Aptitudes and Experiences to reflect the terminology used for wonders within the setting.

Magical Aptitudes and Experiences – The character has a magical Aptitude that gives them a Rating. They have Experiences to indicate categories of magic or individual spells that they have learned.

Mentalist Aptitudes and Experiences – The character has a mentalist Aptitude that provides a Rating for the wonders. They also have Experiences defining categories or individual abilities.

Superpower Aptitudes and Experiences – The character has an Aptitude reflecting the source of their power and providing a Rating. They have an archetype or individual powers expressed as Experiences.

10. TELLING THEIR STORY

The final step in all of this is to create a character bible. This is everything you know about the character. In a roleplaying game, this begins with a character sheet, and may continue into a notebook or journal. For a writing project it can be the same, or a separate file or document where you keep notes and ideas about the character.

CREATING A CHARACTER SHEET

A character sheet is a stock fill-in-the-blanks form used in tabletop roleplaying games to record basic character information. This is usually boiled down to a few pertinent background details like the character's name and the archetype they conform to, followed by statistics on their abilities. Traditional sheets have severe restrictions. Even the best-designed sheets always seem to not have enough space where you need it, and wasted space or things you don't need. They have their uses as a form of shorthand and a convenient, at-a-glance document that can be shared with collaborators. As a thorough and accurate record of who the character is and what they can do, they're a flawed piece of technology.

Character sheets rarely allow room for the sort of information in this book. That's because most games aren't story-driven. Who the character is, what they need, and who they're trying to become, is far less important than what they can do. That's fine. That's what those sorts of games are designed to do, and they do that well.

The purpose of this book, though, has been to develop a more literary character. For that reason, there's no character sheet presented here. Instead, you're encourage to take out a sheet of paper, or open up your favorite piece of writing software, and create your own. You're the one who's going to use it, so you're the only one who understands what your needs are.

Go back through the elements presented in this book. Write down only the things that are relevant to your character. Keep it concise, a few words or a sentence for each element. Try to keep it down to a page or two. Arrange the information whatever way makes the most sense to you. Voila! You have a character sheet.

CHARACTER SHEET TEMPLATE

Here is a template for writing out your own character sheet, in the form of a summary of what's been covered in this book.

Stages of Life

Take note the stage of life the character is currently in, and the stage they're transitioning into or out of.

Childhood, adolescence, separation from parents, initiation, romance, midlife, mature adulthood, death

Dimensions

List out the relevant elements for each dimension, with descriptions and Rankings as appropriate.

Physiology

Age, body language, coloration, distinguishing marks, facial expressions, fashion sense, health, height and weight, sex and gender

Sociology

Class, education, entertainment, environment, hobbies, nationality, occupation, politics, race and ethnicity, religion

Psychology

Emotional stability, impulse control, open mindedness, social engagement, social harmony

Motivations

List out the character's need-driven and goal-driven motivations. Include Rankings and clarifications as needed.

Needs – Physiological needs, sociological needs, psychological needs, stage of life needs

Goals – Ambition, stakes, obstacles

Aptitudes

List the character's Aptitudes and their Ratings. Include any relevant descriptions or explanations.

Body Aptitude, empathy Aptitude, language Aptitude, morality Aptitude, musical Aptitude, nature Aptitude, reason Aptitude, reflection Aptitude, spiritual Aptitude, visualization Aptitude

Experiences

List the character's Experiences and their Rankings, along with any necessary descriptions or explanations.

Academic Experiences, artistic Experiences, athletic Experiences, creative Experiences, cultural Experiences, investigative Experiences, martial Experiences, persuasive Experiences, professional Experiences, transport Experiences

Resources

List the character's resources and their Rankings, along with and brief descriptions or clarifications.

Clothing, contacts, equipment, housing, information, possessions, relationships, reputation, transportation, wealth

Wonders

The character's wonders can either be listed with the other Aptitudes and Experiences, or called out in a separate section.

CREATING A CHARACTER JOURNAL

The most effective way to create a story-driven character is to put together a character journal. Begin by following the character sheet template, but put a bit more detail into each item. Ask why you've chosen that specific element, and explain your answer. Ask why that element has the description, Rating, or Ranking you've assigned to it. Add as much information as you need to understand your character on a deeper level.

Then look at various elements in relation to each other and find the conflicts. You're mining for story, either background or hooks that can be incorporated into the story you're preparing to tell. Are there causal connections, where one element resulted in another element? Is the presence of one element the answer to the question

why posed by another element? Are there seeming contradictions or unanswered questions that can be addressed going forward?

Review everything in relation to the type of story the character is being created for. Is the character too perfect, eliminating opportunities for interesting conflict and drama? Is the character too much of a fish out of water, too far removed from the story to be credible? Make adjustments as needed, to create the right fit.

Finally, document ideas as they come to you. If you're playing a roleplaying game, keep note on people they meet, how they feel about those people, and how they get along. Keep track of events, and how those events might tie into their needs and goals. Look for opportunities to work through the character's personal story within the larger story.

If you're writing a story, keep track of the major events and other characters they encounter. This will allow you to remain consistent and maintain continuity. It will also aid you in plotting story arcs, so that the character's journey has a satisfying beginning, middle, and end.

EXCERPT: SETTING DESIGN

*The following is an excerpt from the Dancing Lights Press best seller, **Setting Design**, available where you bought this book.*

One of the greatest challenges that both writers and roleplayers face is preparation time. Before you can sit down to write a novel or run a tabletop campaign, you will need to do some research. One of the risks of traditional worldbuilding is the tendency to gather more information than you actually need, or can ever possibly use. You begin to feel a need to be sure you know absolutely everything about your setting, no matter how trivial, just in case it comes up. You don't want to have to stop right when you're in the middle of the action to have to look something up, or even to make something up. It's normal to want all of the pieces have to fit together neatly, so that your official canon has no embarrassing continuity holes.

The other worldbuilding option is to just wing it. Start writing, start playing, and make it all up as you go. If you're well-versed in a particular genre, or know an established setting like the back of your hand, you can make this method work. That's not really worldbuilding, though; that's rote memorization and repetition. You can craft something from whole cloth as your story unfolds, but that's not worldbuilding, either. It's random chance and happenstance.

Setting design, as we'll be discussing it in this book, means doing things on purpose. It means that every element of your setting is there for a reason. You made a decision to include some things, and leave out others, because they somehow contribute to the story

that's being told. You only do as much work as is necessary to tell that story, and maybe set up a couple of future stories.

TOP-DOWN DESIGN

There are two prevailing approaches to traditional worldbuilding. The first is *top-down*, or *outside-in*, design. You start big, often with a map, and make generalizations about geography, climate, major cities, politics, ecology, and other broad topics. From there the creator can scale down incrementally, filling in increasingly finer and more specific details. Everything is created with no specific use in mind; purpose for those tiny details can be found later, possibly in character backgrounds or story hooks.

The strength of top-down design is that you, as the creator, are able to see a big picture. You know how and why everything fits together because you began with a larger whole and then zoomed in. One of the drawbacks is that it's tempting to make things fit together too well. Any inconsistencies are intentional, and might feel forced. Those inconsistencies are important, because they create conflict. As we'll see, conflict creates drama, gives characters purpose and depth, and drives stories. There may be a lot of potential in the world for many stories, and a myriad of types of stories to be told, but it will take tremendous amounts of work to mine them out of all the raw details required to define the top-down world.

BOTTOM-UP DESIGN

In *bottom-up* or *inside-out* design, you start small and work your way up to larger elements. The characters may begin in a tavern, and that's all that you or they know of the world. They may be hired

to guard a caravan traveling to a distant city, at which point the creator will need to fill in the details of the city and everything leading up to it. Every element is determined on a need-to-use basis, and they in turn suggest other elements, and the setting grows organically from there.

The strength of a bottom-up approach comes from the inconsistencies that inevitably creep in. Having to reconcile contradictory details that you thought up on the fly makes good story fodder. The downside is that it requires strong improvisational skills. You're either making things up as you go along, or you're stopping and starting to do sporadic bits of research. It's sort of like building an airplane while you're flying it. This approach can be as much work as crafting an obsessively detailed top-down design.

STORY-DRIVEN DESIGN

There is another option, and that's to follow story-driven design. First you determine the sort of story you want to tell. Then you design as much of the world as you think you'll need in order to tell that story. Every element can justify its existence somehow. It encompasses some components of top-down design, but since you know what you need to focus on, you create less excess. There may still be elements that you won't use, placed there just for color or to make the setting feel more real, but there will be fewer of them. It also uses aspects of bottom-up design, with the added bonus of needing to improvise less. Even when you have to make things up on the spot, you'll have existing elements to serve as a foundation that you can build upon.

The strength of story-driven design is that it's just as creative and intellectually stimulating as the other approaches, but it's far

more targeted and efficient. You're neither woolgathering and generating reams of material that you'll never use, nor fumbling to come up with some element on the spot. You can fly by the seat of your pants when you feel the need to let loose creatively, but you also have a master plan filled with structure and discipline to guide you. What needs to fit together will fit together. What's inconsistent will be small enough to ignore, or novel enough that it will be fun to reconcile or explain away. Best of all, it will allow you to get down to what you've really set out to accomplish: writing a novel, composing a script, or running a tabletop roleplaying game.

EXCERPT FROM STORY STRUCTURE

*The following is an excerpt from the Dancing Lights Press best seller, **Story Structure**, available where you bought this book.*

All stories have the same fundamental needs. There must be at least one protagonist, for a start, the person or persons that the story is about. A story has to have a goal, something that needs to be accomplished by the protagonist that creates the context for everything else that happens. There must be obstacles, things that prevent the protagonist from achieving the goal too easily, so that the story remains interesting. There has to be an antagonist, a rival or a villain that for some reason needs the protagonist to fail. Finally, a story needs to have stakes, both the rewards that go to the protagonist for completing the goal, and the complications that could arise if they fail.

All of those needs are a function of structure. Without those elements, you don't have a story. There's more, though. The story has scenes, and while you can play around with their content and their order to some degree, some scenes have to happen before others. Some scenes have to accomplish specific things. This helps the audience — the reader, the viewer, the listener, the player — to follow the story and understand what's happening. The familiarity of structure creates resonance with their experiences and expectations, fulfills their emotional needs, and keeps them hooked.

Creativity and Constraint

There are people who disavow the need for structure. They feel that it stifles their creativity. Structure isn't story, though, in the

same way the map isn't the journey. Knowing where you're going is different from the experience of getting there. It makes sure that you do get there by keeping you from getting lost, and preventing you from wasting time wandering aimlessly without a purpose. Structure isn't paint-by-numbers; if you hand three different writers the same structure, you can get three different stories, each with the individual writers' voices and intentions intact.

The Sandbox and the Railroad

There are two terms that get thrown around a lot in tabletop roleplaying circles. A *sandbox* is a setting where characters wander around freely and explore the world at their leisure. A *railroad* is a story where the decisions and actions of the characters don't affect the outcome in any meaningful way. Creating a sandbox is praised by many as best thing ever that could happen in a game, while railroading is decried as a cardinal sin. What we're really talking about, if we're allowed to remove some of the hyperbole, are *character-driven* stories and *plot-driven* stories, often taken to irrational and unworkable extremes.

A character-driven story, the sandbox, is about the protagonist's choices and decisions. Its prime virtue is that the characters have a great deal of agency. There can still be structures, and all of the basic elements of a beginning, a middle, and an end, with goals, obstacles, and stakes. While it might seem fun because the audience — the player — gets to do whatever they want, it can also get boring as they wander aimlessly without a clear point as to what they ought to be doing. There are no inherent stakes, and no true sense of urgency. It requires the gamemaster to either create a lot of material that may never be used just in case, or to improvise when the players strike off in unexpected directions, or both.

A plot-driven story, the railroad, is about the story itself. Its prime failing for tabletop roleplaying games is that it robs characters of virtually all of their agency. The characters are going to do what needs to be done, not because they chose to but because they don't have any other options. There's one solution, there's little room for exploration, and the motivations, goals, and personalities of the protagonists don't have much impact on the events that unfold. This type of story is easy for gamemasters, because its linear nature means there's less to prepare for and virtually nothing to improvise.

The Middle Path

It is entirely possible to strike a balance between the sandbox and the railroad, to walk the line between a purely character-driven story and a strictly plot-driven one. The characters have goals and objectives, but it's up to them to choose how they pursue them. They can wander a bit, but they do so with a purpose. There will be obstacles, serving a thematic purpose and connected to the goal of the story. Characters will still have agency in determining how to overcome those obstacles. Most importantly, there will be stakes. It will be clear what the characters stand to gain or lose in the pursuit of the story's goals, making the entire story much more emotionally engaging and meaningful.

For the gamemaster, this means having a little more preparation than a railroad, but not nearly as much as is necessary to pull off a sandbox. It requires some improvisation to accommodate character agency, but within the scope of what's likely and possible in the story rather than a wide-open, universal realm of possibilities.