

Desires and Despots: A Manual Memoir

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A Thesis

In

English

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty  
of Texas Tech University in  
Partial Fulfillment of  
the Requirements for  
the Degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

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May, 2018

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## Preface

When I was in the 5<sup>th</sup> grade, I wrote a story for class about a small alien boy who had five legs instead of six, who fit in with the girl aliens better than the boy aliens, and who was forgotten by his teacher and his family. He knew they didn't hate him, but he still felt forgotten.

I thought that I had layered my story in the opaque wax of science-fiction so deftly that my complaints would go unrecognized. It was story about an alien, and I wasn't an alien; I was a boy. Yes, I had one foot instead two, but that was just writing what I knew. My teacher saw through it like saranwrap, and she called my mother for a very uncomfortable meeting to talk about an alien who was just like me: footless, faggoty, and forgotten.

I wish I had recorded that meeting or had the foresight to record the minutes in my unfinished script that made a's look like u's. I wish I could go back and track my illusions and obfuscations that deflected their gently probing questions. I can guess that they made sure I wasn't depressed, but I was ten, so they probably asked if I was sad. I can guess that I assured them it was just a story, and I was fine. I can't blame them for their quick, almost desperate acquiescence. How could they tell a ten-year-old disabled boy who was too enthusiastic about school plays that he needs to cut the shit and get on board with the world? They couldn't and they didn't. They did what any sensible adult would do and hushed it up, hoping it wouldn't resurface at an inopportune time. For example, when he cries after failing a test in an accelerated math class because he isn't quite as gifted as they thought he was, or when he comes out as gay at sixteen, and they cry because his life will be so much harder now. Only then did they take him to therapy

just to have the therapist say that the boy is fine and his mother just needs to get over it. And the boy just keeps going to therapy through high school and college and beyond and can't ever seem to escape that deep well of sadness he impressed into that alien facsimile he wrote down in the 5<sup>th</sup> grade.

This book is another attempt at the facsimile, turning myself into a separate object that I can distance myself from and examine and hopefully understand. That is my defining thirst – to examine myself, a quest that keeps quiz sites funded with ad revenue: What element are you? Water, sometimes Earth. What weapon are you? Desert eagle. Which Sailor Scout are you? Mercury, but wish I was Neptune. What kind of gay are you? Lowkey Femme Vers Cub Gaymer. What color is your soul? Gray. What is your patronus? Serval, but I wish it was a boar. What kind of soda are you? Diet Cherry 7-Up. What philosophy are you? Epicureanism. What book are you? *The Name of the Rose*. Each new data point grants me another hint as to the identity of the alien with five legs instead of six, what he wants, and who he should be.

The most precious of these tests is any quiz that tells me what *Dungeons and Dragons* class I would be, and even better, those which synthesize my personality and capabilities into a character arranged into full statistics: ability scores, fantasy race, character class, alignment, and level. At the end of these quizzes I have a census of my soul politely compiled into a character that is playable and palatable. For a moment. Then, I think that, surely, I'm not as charismatic as this quiz says I am because I'd be more popular if I were, and I'm not religious enough to be a cleric so *that* quiz is wrong. The reality of existence seeps in and contradicts the wax doll that the internet so kindly created for me. Even the tests with over one hundred questions fail to hold up to my

standards in the world of fantasy – a world I know too well from a lifetime of video games, novels, and playing pretend across the table from near-strangers who remind me too much of myself in both weight and skin clarity.

I've even gone so far as to inspect the code of these online quizzes to divine something new equipped only with a basic proficiency in HTML scrounged from the days of MySpace, Livejournal, and a one-semester class on web design that only taught me that some teachers will get mad if you answer yes when another student asks if you're gay. Using these blunt tools, I vivisected the quizzes I like best and stitched them together with overly-complicated excel spreadsheets, a skill left over from an attempt to be an accountant, to patchwork my own quizzes. These new compilations took the exceedingly long quizzes I loved and spliced in a healthy dose of Myers-Briggs, along with some leftover pieces of BuzzFeed quizzes, to craft iterations of the perfect test for me. I worked during workhours and weekends on the internal coding of the grand beast and roped my nerdier friends into beta-testing the quizzes so I could normalize the assessments.

I have to use other people for this because I inherently know who is a wizard and who is a fighter. I know whose attitude towards work clearly indicates they are a gnome and why one of my sisters is a paladin while the other clearly a warlock. Tell me how you respond to stress, tell me your job and hobbies, and let me watch you for an hour at a party, and I'll box you up in a class-race combo that will keep you warm at night knowing exactly who you are, knowing you've been seen.

But I cannot see myself. Despite the data I have: job, hobbies, family, compliments, and insults. When I enlist other people into this self-serving sinkhole I

ignore their feedback because their boxes always feel ill-fitting. I am not a gnome bard, half-orc warlock, half-elf paladin, or a human sorcerer. Each combination and label is a piece of who I am, but not the whole thing and I am uncomfortable with seeing myself in pieces.

At this point any attempt I have at constructing a semblance of self gets degraded down to such basic material it fails to create a useful reflection. It's like I've been given the Lego bricks necessary to build a build a distinct person, but no one gave me the instruction manual and my mom threw away the box, so I can't even look at the picture. Therefore, instead of building whatever amazing thing the Lego-engineers planned, I just snap pieces together, hoping my construction looks more like a human than racecar and wondering what to do with the leftover pieces.

It has been work to create these series of experiments to map something real. I have tried to match occupations to class (a wizard is an engineer, a bard is an entertainer or a teacher, a cleric is a priest or an accountant, a druid is a hippie or a geologist) and race to personality types (elves are analytical people, while dwarves are down to earth, and half-elves come from parents with two different personality types but they like both their parents, while half-orcs hate one of their parents because he has anger issues and they resent how they've inherited those same anger issues). It is certainly an entertaining exercise, but gets me no further than personality quizzes, because it tries to force modern boring, average, contemporary people into a fantastic world of heroes. The adventurous dimensions of medieval fantasy refuse to hold the mundane modernity where I live.

All this to say that I am at the end of my rope with only one option left: to create my own rules that describe the world around me in order to describe myself. The way I understand everyone else is impossible for me to use, so I am creating my own system of describing the world where I can see myself in a desperate effort to quench the strange everburning lantern in my soul.

Thus, my rant ends, and the rules begin in the form of *Desires and Despots*, a highly biased ruleset created to fabricate the world. The examples will be personal and its value as an actual game debatable. In addition, it is also highly derivative of other popular tabletop role-playing games including *Dungeons and Dragons*, *Shadowrun*, *Pathfinder*, and *FATE*. The mechanics here are only the pieces of broken crayons I have scavenged from these better games in the hopes of finally drawing out that alien boy in such great detail that I can hold him in my arms and agree that yes, this is me.

The rules are split into two sections: Creation and Play. The first section provides guidelines for building a familiar modern setting using my hometown of Austin, Texas as template for other settings, as well as rules for creating characters and campaigns that can live within that world. The second section covers the rules of both physical and social conflict, along with other perils and the intricacies of mundane magic. At the end of the book is a sample encounter, along with sample characters and an empty character sheet to help kickstart a game.



## **Introduction**

*Desires and Despots* is a game of make-believe that uses rules to structure a story for the players to collectively explore. Like children playing house or pretending to run an ice-cream shop, this game allows for players to work through issues as real or unreal as they desire. The course of the game is fueled by the imagination of the players to craft and explore novel situations. At its full potential, *Desires and Despots* allows players to experience life through a new lens and assist in moving past their insular understanding of the individual to transcend themselves by playing out narratives of comedy, tragedy, romance, and horror. As such, it is designed for anyone past the age of their first existential crisis.

## **Characters**

The avatars most players control are called characters. Using the rules presented in Chapter 2, each player who is not running the game creates a character that they will control as a protagonist in the story. These characters are likely average people that the narrative spotlight focuses on as they struggle to achieve their goals in a hostile world.

Each character is made up of specific characteristics that help differentiate the characters from one another and guide the players in playing their avatars. While these rules and categories help to define the character, it is ultimately up to the player to bring life to them through inventive and honest roleplaying.

What kind of character will you play? A mild-mannered accountant who was once a secret agent? An heiress who lost her inheritance and is now a barista? A sex

worker raising money for his mother's hospice? A hairdresser seeking political office? In *Desires and Despots*, you can be whoever you want.

## **Desires**

Once you've decided on your character, the next step is to give them desires. Desires drive your character forward in the game. Without desires, the characters are ships unmoored at sea, rocking without purpose, waiting for swells to carry them under. A life without desire doesn't make for a life worth watching or a narrative worth narrating, so think carefully about your character's desires. Remember that as a player, it is your job to engage with the scenes the narrator presents and to find something productive for your character to do. For example, a character who is a mother of four may have little to do at a rave where the other characters have dragged her, so give her a desire, some motivation, perhaps a yearning for her younger years and a life unlived. Perhaps this is an extreme example of a character in a strange place, and most scenes will come naturally from the characters pursuing their desires, but examining desires is a great opportunity to explore the depths of your character. Perhaps that woman longs for the vascular hands of her son's soccer coach and went out on the off-chance that she could run into him, and at the very least to preserve her individualism as a woman and not just a mother.

## **Despots**

Desires provide the primary source of narrative momentum, pushing the characters forward into the abyss of ambition (no matter how minor those ambitions, for who could

argue that cultivating a happy small life is less ambitious than crafting a corporate empire?). However, the characters do not exist in a vacuum, free to achieve their goals without stumbling blocks, hurdles, and other metaphorical hazardous terrain. These hinderances are called despots: figures controlled by the narrator whose desires run perpendicular to those of the characters and whose crashing progression produces problems, or whose desires run parallel to the characters and against whom they must race for success. As implied by their title, despots are figures of power who control the world around them, including bosses, teachers, business rivals, parents, grandparents, baristas who get your order wrong, or even the president of the United States. Despots can even represent larger institutional forces whose web of systematic oppression promotes racism, sexism, and ableism in order to preserve the status quo of the privileged. Some of these figures are only despots for a time, and later become allies. Some allies become despots as the story evolves. When the characters' actions shift the world, the despots shift as well.

### **The Narrator**

The narrator is the player who runs all aspects of the game that the characters encounter. This all-knowing player describes the scenes the characters encounter and play the various figures (whether ally or despot) that interact with the characters. It is the narrator's job to act as author and improviser, weaving a story from the characters' actions and keeping the game from devolving into incomprehensible madness. The narrator is the master of the game, the storyteller, the facilitator, the judge of any

dispute over the rules, and generally the adult of the game. It is no coincidence that the narrator controls the despots.

Some readers of this manual may latch on to this role as the obvious source of control and power. Enamored with the rules and wanting to try a game, they will force a group of acquaintances together with the lure of pizza and beer in order to start one. However, since they forced the group together quickly, these acquaintances will not take the game seriously and will only have consented because of some mix of boredom and social obligation. Be warned that there is a chance that instead they will actually like the game you constructed and that the campaign you planned out so painstakingly will continue until life gets too busy and you are all forced to avoid each other, lest someone ask why y'all stopped playing after weeks of cancelling e-mails saying "Can't tonight! Sorry, so busy" leads to eventual silence and an empty table on Tuesday nights.

### *Scenes*

The narrator controls the flow of the game by designing and implementing scenes for the characters to engage with. A scene is a contained setting limited by location and time to create stages for the story. Most scenes last for at least a few minutes, and not past an hour, but the narrator ultimately controls the flow of these scenes and their expression through time. For example, a driving scene where not much happens might take an hour in the world of the game, but only take a few minutes to describe.

Sometimes, entire days can be compressed in mere seconds with the phrase, "Two days later..."

## Dice

The final element of play necessary to understand the rules in the following chapters are the small prisms that induce randomization into the successes and failures of the characters and despots who roam through the narrative. These dice are rolled whenever a character is trying to succeed wherever success is not guaranteed: avoiding a falling tree branch, writing a persuasive memo, seducing a potential lover, or opening a jar of pickles. The dice, their shape, and their general efficacy are described below.

d4: A triangular pyramid whose numbers may be on the base or the point of the prism depending on the dice bought from your local hobby store. This die is often hard to spot because when looking for a d4 people imagine four sides, not an object with clearly three sides. In the *Desires and Despots*, a d4 represents an ability in which a character has no training and no natural talent. It is also used to represent items of some basic use, but little help such as blunt knives, bargain art supplies, and plastic kazooos.

d6: The standard nearly perfect cube that is the epitome of dice to non-role-players uninitiated into more obscurely sided prisms. This die represents an ability with some training or some talent. It represents objects that were created for their intended purpose of general quality such as police batons, cast-iron skilletts, and name brand cleats.

d8: Two pyramids glued together, this die represents abilities that have been cultivated by a combination of some training and some talent, or a considerable amount of training or talent, but not both. This die represents powerful weapons like longwords, axes, and tasers. It also represents well-made tools for specialized stores

including expensive painting oils, high-quality chainsaws, or fresh organic ingredients for a complex and delicious curry.

d10: This decahedron looks something like a low-resolution soccer ball, the kind from the Backyard Soccer games that ran on Windows 98. This die represents abilities granted by a masterful level of training, or considerable training and some talent. This die is also used to represent particularly devastating handheld weapons like automatic rifles, shotguns, and two-handed zweihanders, as well as high-quality rare and expensive tools which are handcrafted and well taken care of. A d12 tool is a rare violin with perfectly tuned gut strings, expensive European cars, or a stainless-steel barbecue smoker that constantly turns the briskets, ribs, and sausages in the slow Texas summers.

d12: The largest die in *Desires and Despots* is reserved to represent abilities honed by tremendous training and talent at the pinnacle of human ability, as well as utterly devastating weapons like explosives and crushing mauls. A d12 also represents one of a kind tools that are the absolute top of their class like a Stradivarius, a rare perfectly aged whiskey, or the love letters between your grandparents you found in an old hatbox.

### *Advantage and Disadvantage*

Sometimes the narrative, or rules, improve the character's chance to succeed or fail at the task at hand. These momentary changes are called advantage and disadvantage.

Advantage results from situations that improve the character's chance, like coating your hands in chalk before climbing a rope, and results in the character rolling their ability

die twice and taking the higher result. Disadvantage represents situations where the situation makes the task difficult for a character, like trying to run after eating a foot-long sub, and results in in the character rolling their ability die twice and taking the lower result.

## **I. Creation**

### **Chapter 1**

#### **The World**

*Desires and Despots* is set in the real world – the current real world – *your* current real world. Most games will focus in on a small discrete patch of the world the characters call home where their friends, family, jobs, and history fit compactly together. Other games will span more broadly between major cities or perhaps take on the wide world in a quest to retrieve a gem-encrusted statuette. This chapter provides an initial framework for that world, using Greater Austin, Texas as an example; however, this is only a starting point in basic worldbuilding for your game. In this section you will find information on the rules of the world, lively cities, major religions, and powerful factions. This base world is created in the image of America but is easily fixable by players with more experiences to their name.

#### **Base Assumptions**

The players can expect the world to follow these general rules as a starting point, though altering them could allow for a more fabulous game if the players so choose. However, be careful with altering the world by accident as it might fall apart narratively without proper preparation.

*Humans Dominate the World.*



While the planet is full of living creatures, from the dark bowels of the ocean to the flighty whirlwinds of the sky, the world is dominated by humans. There are no elves, no dwarves, no brownies, no angels, no devils, no ents, and no halflings to build their own humanoid empires and keep the humans in check. In order to provide variation, humans group themselves into nationalities and ethnicities in the hopes that holding fast to cultural and physical features will grant them an identity. These differences are often exploited to create systems of power where one group subjugates the other based off these constructs alone.

*God is an Argument.*

The humans who dominate the world argue constantly about the existence of a god. That includes not only disputes over the whether a god exists, but also disputes over the nature of divinity and its commandments. Some believe that a god exists as a feeling of love and spiritual warmth when they turn their thoughts toward prayer. Others believe that a god is a figure with sentience and omniscience, who uses these faculties and an assumed omnipotence to execute their own final judgements. Still others say a god is impossible or at least unlikely; some of those nonbelievers think that it's okay to believe in a god as long as its personal, and some think everyone who thinks a god is possible is an idiot. This is only the tip of the iceberg that is divinity, for even those who agree on very similar beliefs will disagree on the details of their faith, to the point of violence, or even war.

*Magic is Psychology.*

People across the world believe in magic and miracles, in rituals and prayers, charms and superstitions: throw salt over your shoulder, knock on wood, jinx you owe me a coke, don't see the bride before the wedding, don't forget your lucky rabbit's foot, don't wash your jersey, rub the statue for good luck, pray before you eat, pray before bed, sending good thoughts. Even the small rituals are magic: chew the same gum when you study and when you take the test, stretch before running, practice your speech, clean your space before you work. Often, these spells only affect the caster to prepare them for a coming event and healing the everyday psychological wounds of life. Others are more predatory and others still more generous. A complete accounting of common spells can be found in Chapter 6: Magic.

*Isolation: The New Frontier.*

Satellite imaging and years of exploration through colonialism have made the land of the world known. There are still small nooks and crannies to discover as well as the shadowy ocean depths, but for most people, the frontier is closed. There is no place to settle anew, to conquer with homesteaders, and to make freshly your own. Even so, isolation remains a primary issue for humans as the need for individuality and controlled trajectory in life scrapes against the primal desire for social structure and emotional bonds. It is the struggle to be an island among a larger archipelago, succumbing neither to the volatile bonds of an emerging landmass nor to the isolation that creates an unknown, unnamed, deserted island. It is the difficulty of becoming Hawaii.

*The World is Ancient and Shaped by Conflicts.*

The age of the world can only be held by numbers, for the narrative mind fails to hold on to such extensive vastness without leaving years behind. But in as much of the narrative as can be understood, one thing is clear: the world changes because of conflict. The conflict of hot and cold, of tectonic plates mashing against each other, of water, of oxygen, of bubbling life, of consumption and cosmic obliteration. Even the lesser conflicts of humanity shape the landscape and shape our existence, bringing us to this exact moment. Civilizations rise and fall, giving way to new layers of humanity, burying previous conquerors with new losses and constructing empires from their remains. It is the cycle of competition for valuable resources: land, food, water, ore, spices, drugs, money, power, love, and the superiority of ideas. The world is a stage for conflicting forces to play out their battles and every movement can be traced to the violence that caused it.

*Monsters Abound.*

Without orcs, goblins, devils, and demogorgons to supply the world with clear adversaries, it falls to people to provide conflict for the characters. Sometimes this requires other figures to become despots and thwart the desires of the characters in tyrannical and frustrating displays of power. Other times, the monsters are a part of the characters themselves, limiting their effectiveness and actions with their debilitating grip.

## **The World**

While the story of your *Desires and Despots* game might take you anywhere you can imagine, the rules assume it is simulating a modern realistic world. There are cell phones, cars, airplanes, the internet, wireless headphones, racism, sexism, and homophobia; every modern advancement and societal hindrance that you today is available in a standard game.

When deciding on a setting for your game, there are a few guidelines that might be helpful when fashioning a semblance of a living recognizable world for the characters to explore. First, choose an area with which you are familiar: a city, town, or other population center of a manageable size to start the story. This could be a town you've lived in or are living in, but any place that you are familiar with and can be researched can serve as the base of your setting. However, if you choose a city you are unfamiliar with, be sure to do the research so that your Tokyo, New York, Cleveland, Auckland, or Lagos uses the building blocks of real life as opposed to stereotypes and unfounded assumptions.

Next, create an in-depth document that explores the area, working outward from that central space to then describe the larger region it belongs to, then the state or territory, then the nation. The more information you have on the setting's place in the larger world, the more it will breathe and shift as a small cell in a larger narrative organ. You could even create a series of maps on a Saturday night where you trace the major roads of the setting and mark important shops and landmarks, refusing to make plans to go out in order to stay slouched over the kitchen table with your laptop, grid paper, and a straightedge.

Below is an example of Greater Austin as an example of how to place a setting within a larger world.

*Country – America*

Capitol: Washington D.C.

Major Cities: New York, Chicago, Los Angeles, Dallas

Population: 323 Million (White 62.6%, Latinx 17.1%, Black 12.6%, Asian 5.1%, Other 4.7%, Native American 0.8%, Pacific Islander 0.2%)

Themes: Nationalism, Revolution, Savior-Complex, White Supremacy, War, Contradiction, Freedom, Liberty, Capitalism, Imperialism, Isolationism

Motto: The Land of the Free and the Home of the Brave

America is a nation founded by European colonizers who invaded the land of the indigenous population already living there. Its story is pock-marked with similar racial injustices including, but not limited to, the enslavement of black people, the Chinese exclusion act, and the genocidal attacks against Native Americans. Despite its continued struggles with domestic injustice fueled by prejudice and white superiority, America sees itself as the leader of the free world, the city upon a hill providing a beacon of freedom and Democracy to light the postmodern age. Americans are often seen by the rest of the world as wasteful, unhealthy, loud, and hypersensitive.

*Region – Texas*

Capitol: Austin

Major Cities: Houston, Dallas, San Antonio, El Paso

Population: 26 Million (White 43.8%, Latinx 31.1%, Black 11.9%, Asian 4.2%, Native American 0.5%)

Themes: Football, Cowboys, Oil, Immigration, Cattle, Cotton, Anti-Federalism

Motto: God Bless Texas

The state of Texas is interesting because in many ways it is the America of America.

The seven flags that have flown over Texas (America, The Confederacy, The Republic of Texas, Mexico, France, Spain, and Native Tribes), express its long history as an

important territory, including its time as an independent nation. Modern Texas carries these themes forward, struggling with multiculturalism, infighting between

Conservative rural and rich citizens and Liberal urban and minority voters, and random threats to secede that never lead anywhere besides a story to fill the maw of the 24-hour

news cycle. The geography of Texas is as varied as its citizens, ranging from tall piney woods in the East, to the deserts leading up to mountains in the West, and in between is

picturesque hill country and rich prairies. Texas cuisine reflects the history of its

settlement featuring barbeque, kolaches, enchiladas, beer, and wine. Texans are often considered both friendly and prideful by non-Texans.

*City – Greater Austin*

Capitol: Austin

Major Landmarks: Mount Bonnell, Lake Travis, University of Texas, Barton Springs

Population: 2 Million (White 41.5%, Latinx 31.4%, Black 7.4%, Asian 4.8%, Native American 0.8%)

Themes: Gentrification, Californication, Politics, Hipsters, Liberal Oasis, Tech Boom

Motto: Keep Austin Weird

The city now known as Austin was once a small trading post called Waterloo before it was chosen as the capitol of the new Republic of Texas based on its central location. It was then named Austin after the founder Stephen F. Austin and has remained the center of Texas ever since, despite a few temporary changes. In the last century, the city has blossomed into sweet violet in the hill country providing a home to hippies, entrepreneurs from California, academics, and representative from across the state who loathe that the capitol of Cowboy country leans so far left. Due to its recent popularity, the city has chosen to expand its residences into high-rise condos that clog the once humble skyline and upscale apartments that force vulnerable populations out of their affordable housing on the east side of town for the benefit of gentrifying hipsters able to afford just enough more to crowd them out. Currently, the city is attempting a balancing act to keep the bohemian feel that made it popular without sacrificing the economic opportunities it's offered. The Greater Austin Area includes Austin as well as the suburbs of Round Rock, Cedar Park, San Marcos, Georgetown, Pflugerville, Buda, Kyle, and Leander which provides room for the American dream just close enough to the big city to get the best of the urban/suburban cocktail that combines a backyard with the opportunity to do happy hour downtown. Austinites are often considered to be hippie stoners by other Texans..

### **Greater Austin Religions**

Beliefs about the argument of god are structured into broad systems known as religions. These religions provide basic frameworks for faith and a starting place to different

figures position in the discourse. Listed here are the religions central to Greater Austin with their domains of influence and a general description of their main tenets. When running campaigns in other settings, this list should be updated to reflect the primary beliefs appropriate to that setting.

### *Christianity*

Domains: Blood, Sacrifice, Judgement, Resurrection, Community

Christian churches dominate the complex urban sprawl of Greater Austin, their signs and steeples fighting for space between office buildings, gas stations, and fast food restaurants. These churches preach the belief that a singular god of the Jewish faith was incarnated in flesh as a figure named Jesus who was then tortured to death as a sacrifice before reincarnating and then removing himself to a celestial plane known as Heaven where he waits to return again. As the primary religion of Greater Austin, its influence can be felt in conversation (Don't take the Lord's name in vain), education (Fellowship of Christian Athletes), business (Coworkers offering invitations to visit their church, crosses incorporated into logos), and government (Politicians running as Christian candidates). Characters who are not Christian can expect to face social pushback if they are too loud about their alternative beliefs in unexplored social settings, facing ostracization or conversion attempts to let Jesus into their heart.

### *Atheism*

Domains: Science, Skepticism



Atheism is the belief that any kind of divine manifestation of gods is false, and that humans exist in the void of the universe, unobserved by higher powers, and at the whims of uncaring existence that culminates in nothing but the cold embrace of death. Some atheists revel in their freedom from divine overlord individually, while others insult characters who rely on faith in a greater power in charge of the wheel of existence. Atheists have no central physical organizations or places of worship but often find each other in liberal workplaces among artists and academics, forming tightknit communities and sharing their trials in an area so distinctly Christian.

### *Neopaganism*

Domains: Individuality, Nature, Romance

Some former Christians do not cast faith away, but instead seek out more ancient and less standard forms of European faith. These neopagans may call themselves witches but are always archaeological scavengers who piece together folk religions into a collage of belief that they feel comfortable with. Some of these followers come together to form covens, though many practitioners facing social pressure for their unusual beliefs remain solitary in their practice.

### *Other Religions*

While the world is full of other religions, they are only minor features of the Christian dominated landscape of Texas. Some of the more prominent faiths practiced are the most popular in the world including Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam, and Judaism. Centers of worship for these religions are more prominent and common than any kind of

community center for atheists or neopagans, but don't have the same popularity with white people defecting from Christianity.

### **American Factions**

The variance of human beliefs doesn't end at their views on the divine argument; many humans also group themselves into ideological factions that influence their politics and friendships as they ally themselves with various factions to fight off the fear of isolation. Each faction listed here is appropriate for a modern generic American setting, though more specific factions are easy to add depending on the campaign. For example, a campaign set in a small town may have a particularly tyrannical school board that fires coaches who fail to take their students to state finals. The school board would be a powerful faction in that town especially if the characters are teachers or parents that the faction could manipulate, or in turn be manipulated.

#### *Conservative Factions.*

On the right side of the political spectrum are the conservative factions who value small government, personal freedoms, monogamous monoracial heteronormative family values, big military, political isolation, and a radical free market economy. The largest branch of the conservative factions is the Republican Party (a.k.a. the self-proclaimed Grand Ol' Party or GOP), but other important branches are listed as well.

Republicans. Gun toting, America loving, border closing, traditional values (see above), political party that represents much of rural white America.

Libertarians. Believe that the government should have no control of personal freedoms and that we'd all be stronger if we were forced to live in a *Mad Max* style world of radical freedom, individualism, and independent survival.

Evangelical Christians. The religious arm of the Republicans who are concerned more with ensuring that their conservative interpretations of the Christian faith have superiority over the freedoms of others. Their main issues include prayer in public spaces, eliminating abortion, limiting marriage to traditional gender pairs of 1 man with 1 woman, and causing public outcry over provocative media.

FOX News. A “Fair and Balanced” channel that produces content curated for the Republican party.

National Rifle Association. A major lobbying powerhouse whose sole purpose is to ensure that firearms are easy to buy.

Alt-Right. The outright fascist branch of the conservative factions that openly preaches white supremacy over other races, violence, genocide, and the protection of toxic masculinity and the patriarchy.

*Liberal Factions*

On the left side of the political spectrum are the liberal factions in favor of government regulation, community programs, protections for vulnerable citizens, freedom to pursue healthy choices, and the dissolution of the individual. The most visible liberal faction in America is the Democratic Party, but other important factions on the liberal side are listed as well.

Democrats. The moderate, easy to swallow, party whose platform includes regulating Big Business while also being funded by them. They run on the tenants of equalizing the playing field, ensuring the rights of minorities and women, and not liking war but finding it necessary, and much less personal than traditional combat, to use drone strikes on non-American populations.

The Green Party. The other major liberal party, the Greens stand for conservation. Their inability to get elected means that they can put environmental issues first, since they don't rely on the donations of corporations. Although rarely elected, they do occasionally carry enough of the vote to swing elections.

Black Lives Matter. This movement is the most current rallying cry for disrupting the bonds of racial oppression. While it started as a protest against police violence, this group also criticizes all aspects of American society that uphold the ongoing system of inequality.

National Public Radio. This government funded affiliation of stations across the country is beloved by liberals because it is a public service that offers interesting stories, subdued games, worldly music, and occasional calmly worded insights from marginalized voices.

The American Civil Liberties Union. A legal organization that works diligently to enforce the basic rights of individuals and groups whose stories have made it into the public eye.

Planned Parenthood. The purpose of this organization is to provide the community with health care services including sex education, providing testing, and other necessary procedures at a low cost. They often clash with Evangelical Christians because Planned Parenthood provides abortions, contraception, and other tools that allow the individual to control their sexual health, an idea that is anathema to the Evangelicals.

Cable News Network. Also known as CNN, this network provides liberal commentaries and constantly running analysis to the news events of the day, cannibalizing itself daily to create a constant stream of content.

Occupy Wallstreet. The leftovers of a movement from the deep darkness of the 2008 recession, this group relies on memes and highly sensationalized news stories to promote communist ideas of empowering the proletariat, eliminating college tuition, and setting salary caps, all by using Facebook.

*Neutral and Hybrid Factions*

Some factions don't fit neatly into the political framework of the political spectrum.

While these factions are by individuals with their own leanings, the neutral organizations as a whole usually exist only to gather and conserve power.

Corporations. The role of a corporation is to create value for its shareholders.

Regardless of whatever product it makes or what service it provides, a corporation's only goal is to create value. While some companies purport to support gay rights and others protect religious freedom by denying birth control, they only make these decisions to ensure that their customer base crystallizes into a constant source of revenue. Examples of major corporations include: Facebook, Google, Amazon, Proctor and Gamble, Walmart, Shell, Exxon, Apple, Samsung, Toyota, and Ford.

The Government. The American government is not one entity, but rather, many individual parts working similarly ranging from small scale townships to large scale Supreme Courts that rule over the entire nation. However, all figures in the government share one important task in common: to gather political power. While they are elected and placed into their office to serve the population, conserving the power to provide these services takes up a considerable amount of time and energy.

Non-profit Organizations. These groups come together for a central cause and then immediately have to worry about funding their group, advertising their service, and

paying a competitive salary to their executives. While these organizations can be more focused on their cause than their upkeep, they require power to work just like corporations and the government. Thus, they rely on volunteer workers to subsidize the labor for their cause, offering their own clout to college-seeking high schoolers across the country.

## **Chapter 2**

### **Characters**

Now that you understand the limited white liberal view of the world, you are ready to make a character for your own game of *Desires and Despots*. Although creating a character can be the most enjoyable aspect of role-playing games, it is important to understand the rules of the entire game, so your character can be effective.

Understanding the rules won't make you more likely to be successful, but it will help you understand your failures.

#### **Creating a Character**

Once all the players have decided upon a setting, either using Greater Austin or your own crude outline of a town, the next step is to create a character. The blueprint for this character begins in your mind, then is constructed with attributes and powers to bring out their personality in the game. You'll start by choosing a temperament that describes the character's general outlook on life, followed by an archetype that expresses the kind of person they try to be, finally you will pick spells and equipment to provide the character with tools to tackle their desires head on. In addition to the mechanics, you will need to provide your character with a compelling background – divorced parents, history of abuse, loss of a hand in a lawnmowing accident, a tendency to smack when when eating, a foot fetish, etc. This character is your only avatar in the game until the game ends or they die, forcing you to come up with a new one, so try to create something you are excited to play.



If you are having trouble coming up with an idea for a character to play, it may be useful to start with stereotypes you know and like. A romantic architect who was left at the altar might be to your rom-com fancy, or an overworked executive who is up for a final promotion but really just needs a vacation. Alternatively, you could play against type and try a rock guitarist who wants his Ph.D. in molecular biology, or a lawyer who got her start in stand-up comedy. Experiment with the combinations of temperaments and archetypes later in this chapter until you find a character you can't wait to play. When all else fails, come up with a silly voice and create a character that fits the voice.

Alternatively, you could simply create yourself. Unlike other games with elves and wizards, *Desires and Despots'* rules conform to psychological and cultural structures that you can easily slip yourself into. To choose your temperament, head to [16personalities.com](http://16personalities.com) for Myers-Briggs type test, pick an archetype based off of your own aspirations and role-models, estimate your ability scores as best as you can from highest to lowest with an overly-honest friend, and pick your occupation from the list. After you follow these easy steps, you will have created a nice imaginary doll of yourself to throw into whatever circumstances the narrator presents.

You will want to record the details of your character on some kind of physical paper, an Excel spreadsheet that automates numerical calculations but who column sizes you find yourself constantly adjusting, or inscribed into your mind becoming the character in body and spirit that you set down in rules. Be careful not to lose your character sheet or you'll have to guess about your scores and abilities, constantly unsure of your abilities and bonuses, and making it difficult to advance in the game.

This chapter begins with a step-by-step process of character creation followed by individual rules for temperaments, archetypes, skills, and equipment.

Making Matt. Each step is accompanied by a narrative of a player named Stigler building his character Matt.

*1. Choose a Temperament*

Each character has an innate temperament that guides their outlook on life. These four discrete oversimplified classifications of human experience fall into four categories: Analysts, Diplomats, Explorers, and Sentinels. Temperaments provide a basic framework to build the rest of the character and are granted small abilities to highlight their differing attitudes.

Record your temperament and the features it grants on your character sheet.

Making Matt, Step 1. Stigler is interested in creating a character that represents himself, so he goes online to take a Myers-Briggs personality quiz again despite having taken it many times before and always getting the same result. Sure enough, he is still an ENFJ, one of the four combinations that are classified as Diplomats. Although Stigler thinks he isn't very much like the celebrities who supposedly also fall into that disposition (Obama, Oprah, John Cusack and his self-destructive boombox romances), he records the Diplomat traits into his bones.

## *2. Choose an Archetype*

Now that you have a personality, it's time to pick a course for your character by choosing an archetype. An archetype is like a calling, it represents the general role-model that that character emulates in their actions. This archetype grants the characters talents and spells that help them overcome everyday obstacles like outrunning the cops, firing an employee, or attending your aunt's funeral (the one you grew up with and saw every Christmas, whose house you stayed at several times, but who you never really knew despite the intimacy that should have developed).

Record your archetype and the features it grants, including spell options and abilities like the Captain's Commanding Voice, on your character sheet including any spells and skill bonuses.

Making Matt, Step 2. Stigler can only really imagine himself doing two things: writing and teaching. However, his writing is really more like noodling with fantasy worlds, and his teaching is mostly just trying to crack jokes and mention Snapchat like he knows what it means so the students crammed into too-small desks won't fall asleep. Considering this, Stigler decides to make Matt a Counselor, balancing his need to be right with his need to be liked. Stigler stretches out the archetype and rolls it into veins and arteries thin as lace to lay over his bones.

## *3. Assign Ability Dice*

Most actions in *Desires and Despots* are based on a character's training and talent with the six abilities that make up human agency: Might, Precision, Endurance, Intelligence,

Awareness, and Presence. Each ability score is represented by a die that correlates to that character's combination of training and talent with that ability.

Die	Aptitude
d4	Shitty
d6	Okay
d8	Good
d10	Great
d12	Amazing

When assigning these ability dice to characters you can use either the predestination method or the descriptive method.

The descriptive method works by using a standard array of dice (d4, d6, d6, d8, d8, d10) to assign to your characters abilities in order to better describe their strengths and weaknesses. This method is particularly effective if you are creating a character that is based off a real person or a standard stereotype.

The predestination method is a more chaotic, but arguably more realistic, method that requires you to roll a d6 for each ability score and then assign a die to that ability based off the number rolled and its matching die on the chart below. This method creates characters with more varied abilities, which may not match your intended archetype. Use this method at your own risk, the chance of tragedy is high.

d6 Result	Die
1	d4
2-3	d6
4-5	d8

6

d10

Stress Points. Each character has stress points that define how tough they are mentally, physically, and spiritually. When your character runs out of stress points they are taken out of the scene and may face lasting damage. Your maximum stress points are determined by the highest possible result of your Endurance die plus your Discipline skill bonus. For example, a character with d8 Endurance and a +1 Discipline bonus would have a maximum of 9 stress points.

Making Matt, Step 3. Since Stigler is creating a character describing himself, he decides to use the descriptive method. As a Counselor, it would be optimal for Stigler to place the highest dice in Matt's mental ability scores, placing his d10 in Awareness and d8's in Intelligence and Presence. Matt will be able to spot a lot of the subtler things happening in the world and be somewhat capable at analyzing those details and persuading other based on what he understands. Stigler also knows that he is very clumsy, and so assigns his lowest die, a d4, to his Precision to reflect his inability to throw a football, catch a football, aim a rubber band, as well as his ability to fall over nothing and spill a jug of milk on the garage concrete when taking in groceries then watching the white liquid pool grow, then dropping a gallon of laundry detergent weeks later, repeating the same scene again in blue. Finally, he assigns his d6's to his Might and Endurance because they have no place else to go. Stigler records his ability dice as thick plaits of corded muscle braided into his body.

#### *4. Choose Occupations and Circumstances*

Now that your character has accumulated the mechanical basics of a human personality, it is time to give it a place in the world. Start by picking two occupations for your character that help define how they spend their time. Most of these occupations are vocations, but they also describe general lifestyles; consider how the combination of occupations can help you create a memorable character.

Each background comes with questions for you to answer that can provide further insight into the character revealing their quirks, bonds, and flaws that help them maintain the illusion of individuality. In addition, occupations provide skill bonuses to characters based off the skills that occupation is likely to cultivate. If none of these occupations match up with what you had in mind for your character, talk to your narrator about creating a new one that better fits your highly specific needs.

This is also the step where you fill in the other categories on your character sheet like appearance, sexuality, gender, and flaws. While these details provide no mechanical benefits for your character, they will affect how your character is perceived and treated by other figures in the game. Consider each step carefully as you move your character further and further from the Straight White Able-bodied Neurotypical Vanilla Sexual Romantic Cisgendered American Male assumed prototype. Then choose your hair color and eye color; these little details really make your character come to life.

Finally, this step is where you would talk to the narrator about granting disabilities to your character and working out the details thereof based on the rules provided in Chapter 5: Perils.

Making Matt, Step 4. Stigler fills out Matt's basic details using himself as a guide but making himself slightly taller, slightly skinnier, and choosing a shape more flattering sounding than reality might normally reflect (Matt's full character sheet is at the end of this book).

For his occupations, Stigler writes down Academic Student reflecting his love of teaching and low income. Then he writes down White, American, Male, and Gay in the remaining personal statistics. For his value, Stigler chooses to make Matt's value education, his bond is to his family who he calls less than he should, his quirk is his need to apply role-playing ideas to life, and his flaw is dishonesty that developed over years of hiding hookups and boyfriends and his identity as a matter of social survival. Finally, he works with the narrator to come up with rules that reflect his missing foot and his super-fun mix of anxiety and depression. Stigler inscribes these details into his skin and pulls it over himself.

#### *5. Choose Equipment*

Your character's occupations grant you equipment that your character starts with including lifestyle, vehicles, tools, and other necessary gear detailed at the end of this chapter. If any of the equipment shows up in both occupations, then you only receive that piece of equipment once. The equipment provided by the occupations is basic material but can easily be reskinned with details to reflect the specifics of your character's existence.

Making Matt, Step 5. Stigler jots down the starting equipment form the Academic and Student backgrounds including a used car, which he makes a hybrid, and a small apartment. In addition, Stigler wants to give Matt a cane to help with his disability which the narrator grants him. Stigler writes it down as a wooden cane Matt picked up from the renaissance faire. Stigler shapes this list of equipment into a set of clothes for his finished character.

### **Temperaments**

In any market place or public space, you will find opportunity upon opportunity to see and address the various human temperaments. In the grocery store, hidden among the aisles is an Analyst vegetarian veterinarian inspecting the labels of her foods closely, while nearby a Diplomat argues with his Sentinel partner about whether it's worth it to buy organic and an Explorer fixes the spilled toilet paper display some teenagers knocked over. The temperaments represent general attitudes and outlooks on life held steady throughout Western civilization: the four elements, the four humors, and recently the four roles of the Myers-Briggs. When choosing a temperament remember that it not only informs how your character views the world, but how they can interact with the world.

#### *Analyst*

Elon Musk, Ellen Page, Margaret Thatcher, Sarah Silverman

Analysts approach the world rationally. They see the world as a collection of systems to be understood and mastered and have little time for those who stand in the way of their



vision. However, they appreciate any facilitators who bring that visions to life. They are librarians, accountants, architects, and your first serious boyfriend. Analysts make up roughly 10% of the population.

Knowledgeable. You gain training in either Current Events, Crafting, Humanities, Linguistics, Mechanics, Medicine, Mystery, or Science. Choose a specific area of study in that skill; whenever you make a check concerning that area of study, double your training bonus.

Rational. Once per scene, you can grant yourself advantage on any Intelligence check.

### *Diplomat*

Mother Teresa, Julia Roberts, Barack Obama, Robin Williams

Diplomats see the world as it should be. Their ideals act as the only true guide for a Diplomat when making decisions about their life and those lives they affect. Their greatest goal is to understand themselves and achieve fulfillment in all aspects of their life. They dislike confrontation, but will stand up for what they believe in. They are teachers, assistants, hair stylists, and your friend who pays for his private school degree working minimum wage at a bookstore. Diplomats make up 20% of the population.

Authentic. Once per scene, you can grant yourself advantage on any Presence check.

People Person. You gain training in the Insight and Persuasion skills.

### *Explorer*

Michael Jordan, Britney Spears, Madonna, Serena Williams

Explorers want to experience the world like a fresh fruit, biting in regardless of the meat inside. Often living one day at a time, they want to get the most out of their life and won't be bored when they could be doing something fun. Always wanting to enjoy the moment, they value freedom and beauty. They are baristas, entrepreneurs, surfers, artists, and that guy you have a crush on so badly you had to block his social media posts so you would stop imagining yourself in his life. Explorers make up roughly 30% of the population.

Bold. You have advantage on any checks to resist being frightened.

Skill Versatility. You gain training in two skills of your choice.

### *Sentinel*

Natalie Portman, Beyoncé, LBJ, Steve Harvey

Sentinels are hardworking and loyal members of society who value security. They look to the past for wisdom and always plan for the future. They prefer practical and traditional methods to achieve their measured goals. They are financial planners, principals, politicians, and your mother. Sentinels make up roughly 40% of the population.

Principled. You gain training in the Discipline skill.

Strong Will. Once per scene, when you would be reduced to 0 stress points, you are instead at 1 stress point.

## **Archetypes**

The character you play is a mundane person. There is no prophecy pulling them forward, no extreme levels of courage that propel them into danger. Their lives range from small to large, but in the end, they are human, capable of cowardice and bravery, love and neglect, kindness and hate.

Their archetype represents the role model your character follows when working to complete their desires and overcome, if not avoid, the despots who stand in their way. An athlete will find some way of physically overcoming their obstacles while a socialite will change the minds of those guarding the doors to the treasures they seek, whether those treasures are love, sex, money, fame, or the sweet solitude of living alone.

An archetype is something like a calling. It represents the natural abilities of your character no matter what field they are in. Each archetype grants proficiencies with skills and bonuses to spells from certain schools. A class also informs the way your character sees the world: a sage with a focus in mental spells, a counselor with a focus on the spiritual, and a captain with a focus in the physical will all approach encounters differently. Imagine if your character were to make a request of their boss that was simple and necessary, but said boss wearing a mumu with a stretched neckline was fuming at the mere idea of helping. A sage might spend time finding solutions that no longer involve her, a counselor might attempt to manipulate the boss into better spirits, and the captain might stand boldly to prove they would not be intimidated. Consider how you want to handle these situations. Consider how your character wants to face the world.

### *Athlete*

A goalie reaches out her arms to stop a goal during a tense shootout. A bouncer intimidates unruly patrons out of a bar. A graceful figure dances her way across the stage. These are all examples of athletes, the class for those whose body and the physical realm come easily. They are often traditionally attractive from their time working their body, in form and grace, but also aggressive and competitive. Play an athlete if you want to focus on succeeding in the physical world.

Skills. You gain training in two of the following skills: Aim, Athletics, Discipline, Driving, Intimidation, Melee, and Perception.

Physical Expertise. Your training and talent pushes your body beyond its normal limitations. Once per scene you can act as if you rolled the highest result possible on a Might, Precision, or Endurance check.

Spell Focus. Physical feats, tricks, and maneuvers come easy to you, throwing a spiral football comes as easy to you as walking comes to others. Your character knows four physical spells of your choice.

### *Captain*

A football coach stands on the side of the field, hands on knees, barking out encouragement. A teacher chases after toddlers, everywhere at once, catching every small chance for error as they push each other, eat dirt, and seek out the most dangerous implements. A new mayor is inaugurated, his bearing and his words both carrying authority and warmth. A captain balances the physical prowess of the athlete with a knack for social skills. The captain uses the body and charm to manipulate others

and lead them to success. Play a captain if you want to be a leader, or at least a source of inspiration.

Skills. Choose two from the following: Aim, Athletics, Discipline, Deception, Driving, Insight, Melee, Persuasion, and Perception.

Spell Focus. You were doled out a heavy helping of grace and charm. Your character knows two physical spells and two social spells of your choice.

Commanding Voice. Once per scene you can make an audible command that allows a creature of your choice to act as if they had rolled the highest result on their die. The creature must be able to hear you and it can only be activated after the roll is made but before you know whether it was successful.

### *Counselor*

A professor meets with students during office hours, providing them with inspiration and advice while carefully criticizing their students work. A priest delivers a sermon that is both timely, funny, and embedded in just enough scripture and current events to remind his congregation to appreciate their days. A baker woos her customers with her charming personality and carefully prepared treats. Counselors are drawn towards the hearts and minds of those they interact with, backing their intellectual endeavors with a welcoming personality that belies a deep fear of social ostracization. Play a counselor if you want to not only solve problems but also convince people to listen to your solutions.

Skills. You gain training in two of the following skills: Crafting, Current Events, Deception, Humanities, Insight, Investigation, Linguistics, Mechanics, Medicine, Mystery, Persuasion, Science, and Technology.

Spell Focus. Knowledge and understanding are your bread and butter. You know two social spells and two cognitive spells of your choice.

Explain. You have a natural talent for explaining concepts. Once per scene, an ally that can hear you can use your training in a skill instead of their own.

### *Dilettante*

A principal uses her experience as a jock in high school and a marketer for the last decade to make connections to all her students. A man picks up gigs doing anything they will let him, from performing, to setting up gear, to cleaning the toilets. A dilettante is anyone without a focus, whose main goal is success and survival no matter the path. Play a factotum if you want to be a jack-of-all-trades and essentially be “classless.”

Skills. You gain training in any two skills of your choice.

Versatile Spells. You know one cognitive spell, one physical spell, and one social spell of your choice.

Factotum. Once per scene you can apply your training from one skill to an ability check that it usually wouldn't work for. For example, you can apply your Humanities skill bonus to a Might ability check to break open a locked door by explaining that you read a book about barbarians. You must explain how the bonus applies to the roll, no matter how ludicrous it is.

*Sage*

A philosopher sits quietly in their office, their mind full of difficult thoughts whose depths would terrify others. A photographer walks the cathedrals of France, capturing them from new angles that highlight the work that went into them. A father sits in the garage, working on a new formula for what is essentially *IcyHot*, trying to make it more effective and cheaper. Tinkerers live in their minds, fiddling with ideas and then translating those into products of language and invention. The mental world is their home, and they are adept at traversing it and teasing it apart. Play a tinkerer if you want to find a solution for every problem.

Skills. You gain training in two of the following skills: Current Events, Crafting, Humanities, Investigation, Linguistics, Mechanics, Medicine, Mystery, Science, Technology.

Spell Focus. Your mind can make logical leaps and bounds with ease. You know four cognitive spells of your choice.

Mental Expertise. Your mind is your domain and it holds a vastness of creativity and knowledge. Once per scene you can act as if you rolled the highest result possible on an Awareness or Intelligence check.

*Savant*

An animator works late into the night, straining their eyes and their mind to produce a perfect quality. A diver steadies her mind before performing the perfect twist and crashing into the waves. A mechanic toils all weekend on his precious antique car. Savants use their prodigious minds and their physical talents to power through

obstacles, fixing problems and having the stamina to see them through. They put aside social worries in place of concentrated disciplined work. Play a savant if you want to have a strong mind and body, with the ability to work until your projects are complete.

Skills. You gain training in two of the following skills: Aim, Athletics, Current Events, Crafting, Discipline, Driving, Humanities, Investigation, Linguistics, Mechanics, Medicine, Melee, Mystery, Science, and Technology.

Spell Focus. Your body and mind are under your command. You know two physical spells and two cognitive spells of your choice.

Intense Focus. Your focus on accomplishing your goals allows you to power through when others would need rest. You have resistance to stress caused by exhaustion.

### *Socialite*

A therapist helps her client deescalate her suicidal thoughts. A salesman talks a man into the more expensive car he has always wanted. A caregiver at an elderly home sits with a man and listens to his stories to help him calm down after a bout of confusion. Socialites specialize in molding people, pushing them in directions that serve themselves and others. They specialize in the spiritual spells that affect people at the level of identification, shaping them into a person better suited for the manipulator's goals. Play a manipulator if you want to be a master of influence.

Skills. You gain training in two of the following skills: Deception, Insight, Intimidation, Persuasion, Linguistics, Current Events.



Spell Focus. The innerworkings of souls, your own and others, just makes sense to you. You know just the right words and suggestions to get the changes you need. You know four social spells of your choice.

Social Expertise. Your charm and manipulation can be uncanny and intoxicating. Once per scene you can act as if you rolled the highest result possible on an Awareness or Presence check.

### **Ability Dice**

Ability dice represent your character's natural talent for certain actions. They are rolled for checks to overcome obstacles and in contests against other characters. Trying to overcome stress after a scathing remark from your mother, finding useful information in piles of data, and successfully reaching over to touch the hand of your date are all times you would use ability die. The higher your die, the more likely you are to succeed. Your ability die rolls are modified by training bonuses and tool die.

For example, if Matt wants to bake a cake he would make an Intelligence (d10) check to remember the proper steps. He would roll the die and add any training bonus he had in Crafting. Finally, he would use a die to represent ingredients, bowls, and spoons. Matt doesn't have a mixer and usually buys from the discount FoodKing on the corner, so the narrator rates his supplies as average (d6). Assuming Matt has no training in Crafting, his average roll is 8, probably high enough to bake an edible cake, though it might be lumpy or lopsided or dry enough to make him self-conscious when people only eat one slice. Below is a summary of each ability and when it would be used.

### *Might*

Might measures your physical power, the perfection of your lifting form, and the force your body can exert. Might is used for checks that require lifting, running, jumping, climbing, and crushing. A character with high might is often muscular, while one with low might has little definition and may be comically weak. Conan the Barbarian, your father, and Miss Piggy all have high might.

### *Precision*

Precision measures your ability to control your body, from moving gracefully to perform a dance, to threading a needle. Precision is used for checks that require balance, accuracy, grace, and deftness. A character with high precision has a gracefulness to their actions while one with low precision is clumsy and accident prone. Zorro, your sister who dances on the drill team, and a frog all have high precision.

### *Endurance*

Endurance measures your ability to continue to struggle despite the oncoming onslaught of stress. Endurance is used to resist damage, fatigue, and exhaustion both mental and physical. A character with high endurance will look healthy, with bright eyes and flowing skin, while one with low endurance will look exhausted and tired, with sallow skin and bags under their eyes. Mad Max, your mother, and Michael Phelps all have high endurance.

### *Intelligence*

Intelligence measures what your character knows and how well they can reason.

Intelligence is used for checks that require memory, logic, and creativity. A character with high intelligence may have a high vocabulary and make plans, while one with low intelligence might have a bad memory or be easily frustrated with puzzles. Albert Einstein, your first serious boyfriend, and Iron Man all have high intelligence.

### *Awareness*

Awareness measures your ability to gather facts about the world and people. Awareness is used for checks that require you to notice clues, read emotions, and make wise choices. A character with high awareness is not often surprised and may be empathetic, while one with low awareness may be insensitive or have their head in the clouds. Sherlock Holmes, your grandfather, and therapists have high awareness.

### *Presence*

Presence measures your charisma, attractiveness, and general ability to affect people. Presence is used for checks that require you to charm, intimidate, and lie effectively. A character with high presence is intoxicating or frightening depending on their mood, while a character with low presence is often lost in the shuffle of social situations. Barack Obama, the matriarch of your family, and Ronald Reagan have high presence.

## **Occupations**

Occupations provide a place for your character in the world, a job to do, and a history of connections. A background isn't only what the character knows how to do, but also who they know. Your characters occupations represent the coming and goings, the use, the life. Occupations also grant your character training in skills and starting equipment.

You gain all of the training, equipment, and lifestyle die from both of your occupations.

### *Academic*

Librarians, archaeologists, scholars, professors, and high school teachers are all academics. Academics make their living from acquiring and spreading knowledge. They work to stay up to date in their field and keep close ties with other academic colleagues.

Are you a researcher or a teacher? What is your field of study? Do you have an academic rival?

Skills. You are trained in Investigation and either Humanities or Science.

Equipment. A pen, a book on a topic you're researching, a set of professional but quirky clothes, and a d4 lifestyle.

### *Affluent*

Affluent characters are the heirs of fortunes. They typically have no job, few responsibilities, and at least one driving passion that occupies his or her day. That might be a charity, an ideal, or a lust for life. Did you earn your money through one great idea or did you inherit it? What do you do with your time, are you a playboy or a

philanthropist or do you stay out of the public eye all together, focusing on your own projects?

Skills. You are trained in Intimidation and Current Events.

Equipment. A set of trendy clothes, a kit for your preferred pastime (golf clubs, a guitar, watercolors), and a d10 lifestyle.

### *Blue Collar*

Factory workers, food service jobs, construction, service industry jobs, taxi drivers, postal workers, and other service industry jobs where you aren't stuck at a desk. Blue collar workers are often down-to-earth and are what most people would call the commoner. What is your job? Is it a career or a stop-gap while you work towards something else? Are you close to your coworkers? Do you play tricks on each other in the kitchen?

Skills. You are trained in Insight and Perception.

Equipment. A work uniform and a d6 lifestyle.

### *Caregiver*

Pre-school workers, stay-at-home parents, and elder-care professionals are all caregivers. Caregivers are caring people who spend their lives helping others. What is your job? Do you enjoy caring for people, or are you just good at it? How long have you been at it?

Skills. You are trained in Perception and Persuasion.

Equipment. A set of stain-resistant clothes (for easy cleaning), and a d6 lifestyle.

### *Celebrity*

Actors, newscasters, radio and television personalities, and musicians and anyone who earns their living performing are entertainers. Celebrities usually enjoy being in front of crowds and voicing their opinions or getting others to laugh. Are you extroverted, or is what you show the camera just a persona? Are you famous locally, nationally, or just with specific groups?

Skills. You are trained in Current Events and Persuasion.

Equipment. Any musical instruments or other equipment necessary for your performance, a set of trendy clothes, a makeup kit, and a d8 lifestyle.

### *Contemplative*

Contemplatives are monks, nuns, and other hermits and anchorites who are more interested in their own mental and spiritual development than in the world around them. What made you leave humanity behind? What made you come back? Where have you been staying?

Skills. You are trained in Insight and Discipline.

Equipment. A book or other object of spiritual focus, a chosen and a d4 lifestyle.

### *Creative*

Artists of all types who fan their creative spark into a career: illustrators, copywriters, cartoonists, graphic artists, novelists, magazine columnists, sculptors, game designers, screenwriters, poets, photographers, and web designers all fall under this occupation.

Creatives of all types use their artistic skills to make a living, even if the living isn't much. Are you famous in your field or just starting? What kind of work do you do, commercial or more artistic? Do you freelance or work with a creative company?

Skills. You are trained in Crafting and Humanities.

Equipment. A kit that carries the tools of your craft (pens, instruments, paints, charcoal, etc.), a set of trendy clothes, and a d4 lifestyle.

### *Delinquent*

Anyone who earns money from being on the wrong side of the law is a criminal. This occupation includes burglars, drug dealers, thieves, mafia thugs, gang members, bank robbers, and other career criminals. Criminals aren't deterred by the prospect of jail and often display their power easily. Are you an obvious criminal related to a gang, or are you a power broker in the shadows, laying low? Do you work as a criminal willingly or were you pressured into it? Do you have a record, is there a warrant out for you currently?

Skills. You are trained in Deception and Stealth.

Equipment. A weapon of your choice (a switchblade, a handgun, a lighter), a set of common clothes, and a d8 lifestyle.

### *First Responder*

Rescue workers, firefighters, paramedics, hazardous material handlers, and emergency medical technicians are all considered emergency services. Emergency service workers often enjoy the thrill of the risk and the joy of helping people. What field do you work

in? Are you volunteer or career? Are you close to those you work with? Have you been in danger before while in these hazardous areas?

Skills. You are trained in Medicine and either Athletics or Driving.

Equipment. A first-aid kit, a uniform, and a d6 lifestyle.

### *Free Spirit*

Free spirits like to be their own boss; they believe in themselves, have an abundance of confidence and the ability to acquire the funds necessary to bankroll their newest money-making venture. These free spirits have a knack for putting together plans, gathering support, and getting a new idea off the ground. Have your plans been successful? What kind of businesses or ideas do you work with: technology, media, household products, etc.? Have you ever lost big?

Skills. You are trained in Current Events and Persuasion.

Equipment. A lucky outfit and a d4 lifestyle.

### *Investigative*

Investigative reporters, photojournalists, private investigators, police detectives, criminologists, criminal profilers, espionage agents, and others who use their skills to gather evidence and analyze clues are all in an investigative occupation. These workers rely on their perception and insight to notice clues, catch people in lies, and ferret out the truth. Do you investigate in the private or public sector? How high do you rank? Have you had to cover up the truth, and are you ashamed of it?

Skills. You are trained in Investigate and Perception.



Equipment. A pen, a camera, a recorder, a set of professional travel clothes, and a d6 lifestyle.

*Medic*

A physician, a surgeon, a psychiatrist, or a nurse. You earn your money helping people in the medical field and your knowledge is always sorely in need. A doctor focuses on healing the sick and often works long hours to prepare for their entrance into this field. What field of medicine do you specialize in? Do you work at a hospital, for a small practice, or for a clinic? Have you lost an important patient?

Skills. You are trained in Investigation and Medicine.

Equipment. A pen, a uniform or a set of professional clothes, and a d8 lifestyle.

*Redneck*

Farmers, hunters, ranchers, and others who make a living working with the land are rednecks. You work close to the earth and practice one of the oldest and most important professions. Are you the stereotypical simple farmer, or are you cultured, but enjoy working the land? What do you grow or raise? Do you do well, or are you struggling?

Skills. You are trained in Discipline and Survival.

Equipment. A gun, a set of work clothes, and a d6 lifestyle.

*Soldier*

All branches of the armed forces including elite training units. You earn your income by working directly for the armed forces of your country, whether military or police, and

serving wherever your country needs you. Do you enjoy working in the military, do you agree with all its decisions? Have you been in a war? Have you been deployed anywhere exotic? What is your rank? What branch do you work for?

Skills. You are trained in Aim and either Athletics or Driving.

Equipment. A gun, a uniform, and a d6 lifestyle.

### *Student*

A high school or college student. Your main activity is learning. This might be in preparation for your future career, or it might be for the love of knowledge. What are studying? Why are you studying it? Are you on scholarship, are you taking out loans, or are you working as well? Do you socialize with other students or stay focused on your studies?

Skills. You are trained in Investigation and either Humanities or Science.

Equipment. A pencil, a textbook, a set of common clothes, and a d4 lifestyle.

### *Technician*

Scientists and engineers of all types are technicians. A technician focuses on the application of science to invent, study, experiment, and create useful tools. They are focused on technology either through hardware or software. You have immense technical skills, more than just how to fix, but also how to create. What kind of technician are you; do you work with robotics, on bridges, or with some form of telescope? Do you enjoy your work? Are you at the forefront of your research or do you work below someone else who receives the glory? What are you hoping to create?

Skills. You are trained in Science and either Mechanics or Technology.

Equipment. A set of tools for your profession, a set of business casual clothes, and a d8 lifestyle.

### *Thrill Seeker*

Daredevils, big-game hunters, relic hunters, explorers, extreme sports enthusiasts, field scientists, thrill-seekers, and others called to face danger are adventurers. Thrill seekers aren't content staying at home or working a regular 9-5 job. They need to be out in the field discovering new places, unearthing secrets, and taking on challenges. Do you work with a company or are you a freelancer? Do you have some companions or are do you work alone? Do you do it for the risk or the rewards?

Skills. You are trained in Discipline and either Athletics or Driving.

Equipment. A weapon of your choice or a tool kit necessary to practice your profession, a set of common clothes, and a d4 lifestyle.

### *White Collar*

Desk jockeys, lawyers, accountants, insurance agents, bank personnel, financial advisors, tax preparers, clerks, advertising agents, real estate agents, and a variety of mid-level managers fall within this occupation. A white-collar worker is usually considered average, but some have loftier jobs like CEO or partner. What kind of job do you have? Are you a clerk or a manager? Do you enjoy your job, or is it a means to an end? Do you like your coworkers, or are they the bane of your existence?

Skills. You are trained in Intimidation and Investigation.

Equipment. A pen, a set of professional clothes, and a d8 lifestyle.

## **Skills**

Skills represent the specific training your character has received. Each training you receive in a particular skill from your temperament, archetype, and occupations increases your bonus by one. Keep track of your training bonuses on your character sheet, tracking each bonus as a mark on your paper, your excel sheet, or your skin.

Skills represent the history of your character -- what they've spent their time learning and thus who they have decided to be. Any skill training can be used on any appropriate check. For example, Matt can use his training in Humanities to hack a presence check when he is trying to come off as intelligent and qualified at a job interview.

Aim. Facility with ranged attacks including throwing darts, shooting guns, and tossing baseballs. White men are usually trained in Aim.

Athletics. Physical training including gymnastics, football, soccer, tennis, and baseball. Overly attractive personal trainers are usually trained in Athletics.

Current Events. Knowledge of popular culture, news, and local events. Queer people are usually trained in Current Events.

Crafting. The creation of both physical objects and artistic compositions. Often combined with other skills to craft mechanical pieces, chemicals, performances, and bandages.

Deception. Training in running cons, lying, and general misdirection. Children are usually trained in Deception.

Discipline. Mental durability to focus on the task at hand and avoid straying from a goal. Winners of *The Biggest Loser* are usually trained in Discipline.

Driving. Training with controlling vehicles of all kinds through difficult terrain and in chases. Men who drag race through city small town streets are usually trained in Driving.

Humanities. Knowledge about history, art, social sciences, philosophy, and religion. Emo kids are usually trained in Humanities.

Insight. Training in understanding human emotions and reading people. Teachers are usually trained in Insight.

Intimidation. Tricks learned about how to threaten, raise your voice, and assume body language. Principals are usually trained in Intimidation.

Investigation. Ability to research and actively look for information. Librarians are usually trained in Investigation.

Linguistics. Facility with languages, translating, and composing. Speech writers are usually trained in linguistics.

Mechanics. Training with creating and fixing machines, besides computers. Your uncle is usually trained in Mechanics.

Medicine. All training that allows people to mend wounds, perform surgery, and treat illnesses. Nurses are usually trained in medicine.

Melee. Ability to fight in close quarters including hitting people and not being hit. Boxers are usually trained in Melee.

Mystery. Knowledge that isn't generally studied including the occult, arcane, and conspiracy theories. That guy who spends too much time on 4chan is usually trained in Mystery.

Perception. Training in noticing the world around you, being aware even without conscious effort, and focusing your senses to hear your parent's arguing about money through you're their bedroom door. You are usually trained in perception.

Persuasion. Training in getting people to agree with you without threats, open up about their feelings, and generally like you better. Women are expected to be trained in Persuasion.

Science. Knowledge about physical sciences, computer sciences, and mathematics. Students working on projects to clean the oceans are usually trained in Science.

Stealth. The ability to go unnoticed, walking quietly, and blend in to crowds. Your sister who sneaks out of the house is trained in Stealth.

Survival. Tricks for surviving in the wilderness including starting fires, tracking animals, setting traps, and avoiding getting lost in the wilderness. Dogs are usually trained in Survival.

Technology. Training with computers and other high-tech electronic devices. Millennials are usually trained in Technology.

## **Equipment**

The items your character carries around with them as well, as any other tools they may have at their disposal if they have some time to gather them, allow your character to achieve feats that their body alone would not allow. It is impossible to sew without a

needle and thread, it is impossible to play a flute recital without a flute, it is impossible to shoot without a gun. This section covers rules for the tools and lifestyle your character has at their disposal.

### *Tools*

Tools represent the equipment your character carries on them in their pockets, backpacks, and other satchels. Tools should either be wearable or small enough to be contained or stored in a wearable container. You should pick four tools that your character usually has on them and which can be used to improve their checks with certain skills. Each tool allows you to add a die to your check that increases the result. The range of these die is d4, d6, d8, d10, d12 from worst kind of item to best, the die for the items you start with is based on your lifestyle. If you roll a 1 on die roll, that item is broken until you have the downtime to get it repaired or replace it.

Example Items: iPhone, laptop, compass, binoculars, cane, handgun, pen, pencil, notebook, book, chap stick, sewing kit, makeup kit, first-aid kit, bottle-opener, hand sanitizer, headphones, police baton, combat armor, rifle, taser, and a handful of almonds.

### *Lifestyle*

Your lifestyle represents what kind of materials you have access to when you have time to prepare. This includes your house, car, food, clothes, camping equipment, bike, coffee, and the thread count of your sheets. Your starting lifestyle is dependent on your occupations. For example, Matt is an Academic student and receives a d4 from each of these occupations to represent his lifestyle. If Matt wants to take a vacation to Harry

Potter World he would roll both his lifestyle die and tell the narrator the result.

Depending on the roll Matt might get a first-class plane ticket and a nice hotel because his boyfriend paid for the trip, or he might have to drive the thousand or so miles to get there and stay at a Motel 6. Success is common with lifestyle rolls, but the degree of success, and the story that follows that degree, varies with the dice.



## **Chapter 3**

### **Campaign**

A game of *Desires and Despots* can be as short or as long as the players wish it to be. You could run a simple scenario where your characters have to avoid their significant other at an orgy, refusing to meet each other's eyes in a sea of flesh and roaming fingers, because yes you came together but this is about exploration. Or, it could take place over many sessions and combine individual adventures and scenarios to create a complicated and rich arc called a campaign. A proper campaign is a delicate composition, and the following chapter covers its various components including designing adventures, introducing memorable figures, and offering worthy rewards for the trials the characters face. This chapter also includes ideas for what characters can do between adventures during their downtime. Whether you play for quick one-shot scenarios, extended campaigns over years, or simply imagine them in your mind, the design of the adventure is key to giving the characters something to do. What is a great character without trials to face?

#### **Adventures**

*Desires and Despots* is built around the characters trying to achieve their goals and facing obstacles along the way. In light of that, the first step to designing a campaign is to talk with your players about their character's major desires. What are their dreams? Do they want to live a small happy life teaching at a small high school? Do they want to conquer the world with their revolutionary ideas? Do they want to be a famous author? Do they want to make a difference?

Once you know their desires, you can start to craft situations where they have opportunities to pursue those desires and to come up with challenging obstacles to place in their way. When designing adventures, keep in mind the difficulty you want the characters to face. What seems impossible to achieve in the world? What is just unlikely? Is happiness ever possible? Is lasting fame a real goal when eventually the heat death of the universe will kill everything? What kind of harassment will an up-and-coming actress face?

With the answers to these two important sets of questions gathered, begin to draft a trajectory, a series of encounters and scenarios that the players hopefully overcome. However, be aware that they will fail, or that they may choose to not engage with the challenge, and begin thinking of contingencies. What makes analog role-playing games like *Desires and Despots* worthwhile is that these games are alive. A character can get away with anything they can achieve, and the narrator can place whatever obstacles in the way that make the story better. There is no coded corridor of “options” like in video role-playing games. Here, the options are only limited by the story, able to change and adapt on the fly.

### *Levels of Play*

An important aspect of deciding on gameplay is deciding the reach of influence of the characters at the start of the game. Are they limited to the people in their lives and the places they work? Or are they already leaders of industries whose actions have effects that touch and taint the world? This reach can change as the game progresses and the characters rise and fall in the world, but everyone should be on the same page as to

where they are at the beginning. The level at which the game starts also affects the overall narrative: games where the characters start with local influence only are likely to rise as they achieve, while those who start with high influence have a lot to lose. A story likes change, and when you start at the top there is only one way to go. You could also play a game where the characters are at different levels of renown, though usually by virtue of knowing each other the character with the highest renown sets the level for the entire game.

Local Renown. Local renown means that the characters start with an influence over the local things in their life. Their family, their employees, their friends. They are known and can influence events close to them physically, though they have little true power. They cannot set policies or have tasks immediately completed.

Growing Renown. Characters with growing renown have started to do well in their chosen field. They are local heroes or villains, depending on who you ask, and they can garner favors from the community. People have heard of them beyond their limited physical circle. They are local celebrities, like radio show hosts and YouTube stars.

Local Power. Local power allows characters to nearly demand favors from people in their local area based off their renown and influence. Figures with local power are often important officials like governors and senators, as well as CEO's of major corporations and nationally recognized celebrities.

Expansive Power. This is the far-reaching power of a president, of the CEO of a multinational organization, of Lady Gaga, of a filmmaker who escapes grasping legislative fingers to seek shelter in Europe. Expansive power excuses many faults and errors and commands the power of favors and demands based off notoriety alone.

## **Desires**

Desires are an integral part of *Desires and Despots*. Without the goals and dreams that push the characters forward they would be left in an ongoing state of existential dread, trapped and stagnant.

Desires can be as simple or as complicated as the players wish. Do not shy away from desires that seem too simple, because often those are the most fun to work against, a character who wants “simplicity” will have a tough go of their life, while those who want to start a business at least have an achievable goal.

Desires are separated into two categories that help the narrator and players shape the story: immediate and long-term. Write these desires out in pencil on your character sheet, or keep them on notecards, but be ready to throw them away when the desires shift and squirm as information is revealed or despots stand in their way. Being an accountant may seem an important long-term goal, but when your character fails to overcome obstacles in their undergrad classes of intense boredom and insufferable jocks, their desires will evolve.

### *Immediate Desires*

Immediate desires are the character's goals in a specific scene. For example, a character who goes to the reading of a famed scholar to network and make a valuable professional connection may have the immediate desire of "Networking." However, these desires can and should change as events move forward. If the character fails his checks against Anxiety and is in danger of being ejected from the scene, he may change his goal to "Just don't be embarrassing." When a character's desires changes, their player should announce their new desire to the table.

### *Continuing Desires*

Continuing desires are the inborn engines of lust, ambition, greed, and hope that push characters forward in the adventure. A character may want to publish a book, to find someone to love them back, to make their mother proud, or to pay off their mortgage. A character may have a few of these desires, though too many can make it difficult for the players to weave a story. Long-term goals are less likely to change from moment to moment but might transition over as scenes unfold. Wanting to be happy may transition to wanting to be happy at work, or to seek a deeper romantic relationship with a partner. They may also change completely. A scorned lover may change their long-term goal from "Find Someone to Love Me" to "Make Him Regret Ever Hurting Me."

## **Narrative Elements**

Having identified characters, their desires, and the level of renown of those characters, you now have the basis of a game. The world is set, the players ready to engage, and they have clear goals to follow. Now they need problems to engage with. This is the narrator's job: to create adventures populated with memorable settings and figures. By planning out these adventures beforehand, loosely enough to be altered like a belt with multiple notches, the narrator can facilitate a story worth telling.

### *Threats*

Every story needs threats to create conflict. These threats can be despots who face off against the characters, social structures that oppress freedoms, or even natural disasters. Threats give the characters actions weight and purpose. There can be multiple threats as well. A character who lies to his parents in order to meet a boy he met online carries the threat of his parents finding out, the other boy not liking him, or being attacked for being gay at the mall. The potential threats are endless, the narrator's job is to tease them out and make them tangible.

### *The Unfamiliar*

A good adventure should include something new that the characters haven't had to deal with before. A new setting, a new figure, a new challenge. While it can be tiring to introduce something new every session, the unfamiliar includes altering the familiar. The grandfather confesses he hates gay people, the cousin whispers she has seen a corpse. Shiny new things make it easier for the players to engage with the story.

### *Immediacy*

The character's actions should happen as quickly as they can and be resolved as quickly as they can. While it can seem exciting to have unforeseen consequences far off, and it is, there is little to keep the players engaged if there are not also immediate consequences. An adventure that ends anti-climactically can be appropriate once in a while, but if the characters don't see results for their actions they may be tempted to give up and stop playing.

### *Twists*

If the characters are always able to guess the outcome of their actions, then the drama of the story falls flat. Create opportunities for unexpected twists and turns in the world, the figures, and the despots. This is a great place to mess with expectations of immediacy, threats, and the unfamiliar. Have the boy he meets online be from his high school, have the boy want to run away even though they just met. Twists don't always have to be logical, though. A narrative likes a reason, but the world is not logical and neither are people. Things happen simply because they do, and this can be reflected in the twists you implement in the game as the narrator.

### *Progression*

The story should move forward from session to session or adventure to adventure even from scene to scene. If there is no change, then there is no story. Even a movie like *Groundhog Day*, which has the same basic events repeated again and again, moves and shifts. When characters are involved, the world alters, but be wary of the sitcom trope

where everything is back to normal at the end of each session. Without progress it barely matters what the characters do, which admittedly could be an interesting take on *Desires and Despots*, but not one most players will find satisfying. Characters want stories to move forward in stories no matter our reluctance to accept change in the lives we lead.

### **Adventure Types**

From adventure to adventure throughout the entire campaign it is likely that the characters will face varying types of obstacles and despots as they seek to fulfill their desires. The following list of adventure types covers only a few different categories of narratives players in *Desires and Despots* might play through, and you may even decide beforehand with the players what main mode of adventure you would like the story to take. *Desires and Despots* works best for the ongoing joyous slog of life best represented by the Slice of Life genre. However, it fits well into any realistic genre of human-centric action. Adapt it to your needs as you see fit to play out dates, weddings, job interviews, funerals, abuse, and therapy in addition to the types listed below. The best adventures combine components from each genre when it best fits the moment.

#### *Catastrophe*

Goal. Survive

Despot. Overwhelming event

A catastrophe adventure is going to deal with an event completely out of the hands of the players. This could be an earthquake, a house-fire, the unexpected death of a loved



one, a car crash, a school shooting, a concert shooting, a plane crashing into the IRS building, a van exploding in the basement of a building, getting an F on a test, and other unavoidable traumas. The goal for the characters is often to survive the catastrophe.

### *Intrigue*

Goal. Succeed

Despot. Mastermind

Adventures of intrigue are similar to those of mysteries listed below, but have less to do with an individual mystery and more to do with a large chess-game of shadow despots plotting and moving the characters like pieces to be toyed with. Intrigue adventures are about uncovering conspiracies, fighting paranoia, backroom dealings, secrets, and lies.

### *Mystery*

Goal. Explain

Despot. Perpetrator

Mystery adventures center around a mysterious event that the characters then have to unravel. This is the plot of many procedural television shows and novels and it makes for nice episodic storytelling that builds into a season finale. Mysteries should allow the characters to find clues and meet suspects in order to piece together the true events of what happened to the jewels, the dead body, the liquor from the cabinet, or the boyfriend who has been acting weird for a few weeks.

### *Quest*

Goal. Achieve

Despot. Rival

Quests are common adventures from antiquity onwards and some would argue the main story of most people's lives. The quest to achieve a certain level of success, to find an item of value, to find your true parents, to find yourself. The goal is always a clear thing to obtain, although the act of attainment becomes the real story.

### *Slice of Life*

Goal. Live Well

Despot. The Banal Evil of Existence

Slice of Life adventures show the characters doing something that may otherwise seem innocuous and follows them through their trials and tribulations no matter how small or large. The desires of these characters are often large and unachievable, and the despots shift as anyone who stands in their way in the smallest way becomes their enemy, if only briefly. Think *Seinfeld* and *Friends*. There are no real despots, only other people with their own desires and expectations.

### **Figures**

Every character controlled by the narrator is called a figure. Some of these figures are despots who stand intractable to stop the characters, some are allies whose goals align, some shift between the two, and some are just the baker on the corner with his tray like always to help build the setting and sell the characters their daily coffee. Regardless of

their purpose, figures bring life to the game and ensure that the characters don't exist in a vacuum – that their actions matter to other people as well.

Allies. These figures root for the success of the characters. They are siblings, mothers, fathers, friends, and colleagues as well as mysterious old women in the woods and mentors.

Despots. These figures stand against the characters' goals and freedoms. They are criminals, bosses, rivals, bullies, siblings, mothers, fathers, and mysterious old women in the woods.

Flavor. These figures exist to facilitate the world and let the characters know how they are doing. They are police officers, retailers, friends, siblings, mothers, fathers, bosses, the homeless, coworkers, and lovers.

## **Rewards**

As the characters achieve their goals and begin to fulfill their desires they should be rewarded in order to further invest them in the game. A classic Skinner box technique, rewarding success and good roleplaying will keep the game going until a satisfying end, rather than petering out in a sad expressionless ending. Some of the main ways to reward players are listed below.

### *Advancement*

Move the story forward as discussed earlier in the chapter and they will have to come back week by week to see what the next chapter holds. End on cliffhangers. Manipulate them into needing just the next portion of the story. To know how far they can go, what twist lies ahead, and whether or not they will succeed. Allow them to alter their character sheets as the story changes, modifying backgrounds, traits, desires, and even skills to reproduce on the paper what is already changing in the role-playing theater.

### *Equipment*

As the players progress, offer them better tools and an increase in their lifestyle. This can be a temporary increase, or a permanent one depending on how much power you want to give them. It is also interesting to deny them access to their equipment for a time to show what their characters have lost. Material goods can say just as much about the progression of a story as a change to their skill bonuses.

### *Favors*

The characters should make allies throughout the game who are willing to complete certain tasks or provide access to better equipment. These favors can be traded in at any time to receive bonuses that the players can explain. For example, when faced with a difficult pop quiz, a player may decide that the favor their grandfather owed them is immediately repaid with tutoring sessions that double his Intelligence roll on the check. Though this is not played out, it does allow for backstory to build quickly without tedious scenes.

## **II. Play**

### **Chapter 4**

#### **Conflict**

Blood spills from a freshly opened wound. A woman dodges the blows of her opponent in a cage fight. A father calls his daughter a bitch because she dares to argue with him. A car salesman tries to upsell his client into a more expensive car with unnecessary warranties.

Conflict takes many forms in a game of *Desires and Despots*; whether clashing in the physical world with fists and guns or manipulating someone with arguments and lies. Conflict provides tension and stakes to the game as your character pushes forward towards their goals. It is the main mechanic for overcoming despots and succeeding in scenes. It is important to know your character's strengths and weaknesses so that they know how best to attack and when it might be better to disengage. Understanding when to lose can be as important as knowing how to win.

#### **Emotional Conflict**

Emotional conflict, or mental conflict, is any fight between wills. Often this takes the form of an argument or altercation between people, but just as easily it can be a subtler ideological fight taking place through Facebook comments, scholarly articles, and forum postings. Succeeding at emotional conflict requires characters to survive the emotional influence of their opponent meant to wear away at their conviction. When a character runs out of stress, they must acquiesce to their opponent's demands in some way.

For example, if Matt is trying to convince his boyfriend it's time to break up, then he would need to wear down his boyfriend's stress first with emotional attacks before the boyfriend wore down Matt's own resolve. Otherwise, Matt would have to stay in the relationship, at least for a little longer.

### *Mental Initiative*

To decide the order of combat in emotional conflicts, each participating character makes an Awareness check with their Insight bonus. The characters with the highest combined Awareness and Insight result get to take their actions before the other characters. If there is a tie, then the characters argue about who goes first until one of them relents.

### *Modes of Influence*

There are three primary ways for characters to influence each other in social conflict to wear away at their stress points: Abuse, Argue, and Manipulate.

Abuse. Abuse is often seen as the least civil way to influence others. Abuse is a direct attack against your opponent to wear down their resolve and just give in to your desires. Abuse can be loud and angry, though often it is calm and controlled but just as lethal. Abuse is often used by bullies, parents, and bosses to frighten their opponents into submission, although any one may use it in dire situations to get their toddler to get away from the stove.

Your Abuse attack is made with a Presence check + your Intimidation bonus. Abuse is defended against with the Deflect defense.

Argue. Arguing is often seen as the most civil type of influence. When your character chooses to argue, they try to make their ideas seem like the best ideas. Arguments don't usually include yelling or screaming at your opponent but might include mudslinging against a third party when convincing your opponent not to trust or believe them. Arguing is the main tactic of sales, journalism, debates, and business.

Your Argue attack is made with a Presence check + your Persuasion bonus. Arguments are defended against by the Critique defense.

Manipulate. Manipulation is the gray area of influence. Manipulation requires lies, no matter how small or large, and no matter how well-meaning or outright destructive. Manipulation is used by politicians, salesmen, and parents to give their opponent the information they need to hear to acquiesce.

Your Manipulate attack is made with a Presence check + your Deception bonus. Manipulate is defended against with the Critique defense.

### *Emotional Defense*

In order to withstand the influence of others, you must defend yourself either by rationalizing the idea away or successfully accepting that the idea is true. These two styles of emotional defense are called Critique and Deflect.

Critique. Critique represents a character's ability to understand and deconstruct another's thoughts and ideas. Characters with high Critique defense can easily destroy

an opponent's Argue attacks and see through their attempts to Manipulate. The better a character is at Critiquing, the less likely they are to be tossed about by other people's and companies' desires.

Your Critique defense is made with an Intelligence check + your Humanities bonus.

Deflect. When being abused, the actions of the abuser cannot be understood or explained away. Since abuse is irrational, it cannot be dismissed through analysis. Instead, the only defense to Abuse attacks is to endure their energy without letting it affect you. Learning to withstand and rebound abusive attacks is difficult but necessary for surviving an abusive scene.

Your Deflect defense is made with an awareness check + your Insight bonus.

### **Physical Conflict**

Physical conflict, or fighting, is the attempt to put physical stress on another person. The results of physical conflict are much more obviously dangerous than that of emotional conflict, and thus usually happens less frequently in a character's day to day life. Physical conflict can happen as part of a sport, a robbery, a war, or in the home. Succeeding at physical conflict requires characters to survive the attacks of their opponent meant to wear away at their stamina. When a character runs out of stress, they must acquiesce to their opponent's demands in some way.

For example, if Matt and his older sister start wrestling as children, then they will make attacks against each other until one of them runs out of stress or concedes and



disengages. If Matt wins he can escape to his room without having to face his sister; however, if his sister wins she can prove she is stronger and that he is gay.

### *Combat Initiative*

To decide who goes first in physical conflicts, all participating characters make an Awareness check and add their Perception bonus. The character with the highest combined Awareness and Perception result gets to take their actions before the other characters. If there is a tie, then the tied characters roll off to decide who goes first until one of the characters wins.

### *Modes of Attack*

There are three primary ways for characters to attack each other in physical combat to cause them stress: Shoot, Slam, and Stab.

Shoot. Shooting is a fairly common form of physical attack despite, or because of, its lethality. Shooting requires the use of a weapon that can put deadly momentum into projectiles mainly in the form of guns, compound hunting bows, and thrown vases. Shoot attacks attempt to pierce enemies from afar with projectiles to cause injury.

A Shoot attack is made with a Precision check + tool die + your Aim bonus.

Shoot attacks are opposed by the Dodge defense.

Slam. Slamming is the most common attack made because it doesn't require any special weapons, just your hands. Slam attacks take the form of slaps, punches, bashing people

into things, as well as using makeshift weapons to in some way push against your opponent. Slam attacks require more strength than precision.

A slam attack is made with a Might check + a tool die + your Melee bonus. Throwing a heavy object uses a slam attack with your shoot bonus instead of your melee bonus. Slam attacks are opposed by the Parry or Dodge defense.

Stab. Stabbing is less common and must use some kind of light, pointed weapon, though makeshift weapons like pens and scissors work just fine. Stab attacks attempt to pierce through to skin of the opponent and deal heavy damage; thus, stab attacks require more precision than strength.

A stab attack is made with a Precision check + a tool die + your Melee bonus. The damage dealt by a successful stab attack is increased by your melee bonus. Throwing a light sharp object uses a stab attack with your shoot bonus instead of your melee bonus. Stab attacks are opposed by the Parry or Dodge defense.

### *Physical Defense*

To withstand the attacks of your opponents, you must not become prey to their maneuvers. There are two primary ways of defending yourself in physical conflict: Dodge and Parry.

Dodge. Dodge represents your character's ability to get out of the way of attacks coming towards them. Dodge can be used against any kind of attack, but only gets the benefit of tool die from shield like objects they can use for cover.

Your Dodge defense is made with a Precision check + your Athletics bonus.

Parry. Parry represents your character's ability to use their own weapons, armor, and shields to block attacks. In order to parry a weapon successfully, you will likely need a weapon or shield of your own to bounce the attack off of. Parrying is used defend against melee Slam and Stab attacks; however, Parry cannot be used to defend against any ranged attacks.

Your Parry defense is made with a Might check + tool die + your Melee bonus.

## **Damage**

During every kind of a conflict a character is likely to take some kind of damage. Each character's ability to withstand damage is measured by their stress points. A character who runs out of stress points becomes susceptible to wounds, and eventually death. It is important to note that characters can take both physical and emotional stress. In *Desires and Despots* characters must wary of sticks, stones, and harsh words.

### *Taking Damage*

Characters take damage each time they fail to defend against an attack. When a character fails to defend against an attack, they lose a number of stress points equal to the difference between the winning attack roll and their defense roll. For example, if Matt is trying to convince a student to hand over their vape, he would make an Argue attack against the defiant student's Justify defense. If Matt rolls a 7 and the student

unluckily rolls a 2, then Matt's argument was effective, and the student would lose 5 stress from their total.

### *Stress Points*

Stress points represent a character's ability to keep going both physically and emotionally. It is a combination of physical constitution, emotional health, grit, and stubbornness. A character's maximum stress points are determined by the maximum result of the character's endurance plus their discipline bonus.

Relieving Stress. All stress can eventually be relieved, but it usually takes time. A character's stress is cleared whenever they have two consecutive hours to relax. The character can engage in some productive activities such as cleaning, cooking, reading, or socializing; however, the activities should have no important consequence attached to them. For example, if Matt is cleaning dishes so that his friends don't judge him when they come over in an hour, this is a stressful situation, and thus doesn't count towards the two hours of downtime. Sleeping usually counts as stress relief, thus most characters wake up with their maximum stress points available.

### *Wounds*

Sometimes the stress of combat leaves a scar. The thumb lost when chopping carrots that never quite healed right after being sewn back on by a new nurse. The fear of dogs that follows a boy into adulthood after he was chased down the street as a simple

toddler. The reticence to start dating again after the bad break up. The hatred of chicken strips after you got sick off an undercooked entrée from Applebee's.

Wounds are conditions (listed in Chapter 5) that follow a character until they are healed. All wounds are able to be completely healed by modern medicine, but may transform into a permanent disability if left untreated for a long period of time. The condition your character gains is determined by the narrator as is appropriate for the scene.

In *Desires and Despots* wounds come about in two ways. First, a character may take a wound when they disengage from a conflict as a concession. Shame often follows failure, if not a twisted ankle or a cut across the cheek. The other time a character may take a wound is when they want to negate incoming stress. For example, a single mother may choose to be Poisoned from her father's abuse rather than take the stress damage in order to stay in the scene long enough to get money from her father to buy new clothes for her child. A character can do this once per session; hurting their character in a more lasting way to continue fighting in the conflict.

### *Losing a Conflict*

By necessity, conflicts must be lost by some characters. When a conflict is complete because one character has conceded, or one character runs out of stress points, then the winning character gets whatever they wanted at the start of the combat. If Matt wanted to take the vape and the student wanted to keep it, then Matt winning would mean he successfully picked up the contraband item, and the student winning would mean they kept the e-cig. Sometimes conflict is simply about escaping: fleeing traps, running from

fighters, avoiding trouble. Other times they are about completing a task: crafting a story, stealing a purse, convincing your son to go to college. Thus, the loser of the conflict has to take actions they do not want to take. Going to college, taking damage from traps, giving up on a story, etc. Losing a conflict means you failed to achieve your goal.

### *Disengaging*

When you can tell your character is losing the conflict, there is always the option to disengage. Taking this option means that you let your opponent win and fulfill their desire; however, you also get some success as determined by yourself and adjudicated by that narrator. For example, if the student decides to give the vape to Matt, then Matt's player has succeeded in his goal, but the student can negotiate that they shouldn't be written up for it. The narrator decides that may be too much of a success, but says that Matt walks away to write the student up, but doesn't check the student for further contraband, and never catches the bag of pills in the student's backpack she is saving for later. Knowing when a conflict isn't going your way and choosing to disengage may mean your character loses the battle, but they are more likely to win the overall war and attain their larger desires.

### *Death and Dying*

Death is an important part of life, and death in *Desires and Despots* is a highly effective tool. On one hand, killing an enemy is the ultimate desire that will forever stop that particular despot from interfering with a character's life. A character who desires to kill a despot that stands in their way only has to declare that is their goal and reduce their

enemy to 0 stress and make another physical attack. In addition, the character doing the killing must take an emotional wound that could turn into a disability if left untreated.

On the other hand, it is the most powerful wound a character can cause on themselves to achieve their desire. A character who chooses to martyr their character in pursuit of their goals should be granted one of their desires; however, the form this takes and which desire is fulfilled is left up to the narrator. Often, the choice to kill a character only ends their own suffering and creates a new conflict for their loved ones to deal with. However, there are exceptions: choosing to blow yourself up with the villain or choosing a quick death over the struggles of another round of chemotherapy and radiation. The context of the chosen death as either heroic or selfish plays an important distinction in the outcome you can expect if you choose for your character to die.

### **Movement**

If the setting is important to the scene, the narrator will draw a map and separate the area into zones. A character can move from one zone to another on their turn assuming that they are able to access that zone. The size of the zone depends on the setting and modes of transportation being used. A zone for characters on foot is likely to be a room, while a zone for a car or bicycle in a chase might be a city block. A cross country adventure might block off states as particular zones. Try to separate the world into discrete units for the characters to move through.

### *Walking*

Walking isn't really the right word because not everyone walks when they move. Some roll, some hobble, some shuffle, some run, some wheel, some crutch, some waddle, and some skip. However, for ease of discussion, walking is the main way a character moves around at their typical walking speed even if they use a vehicle like a motorized wheel chair. Walking allows for a character to move from one zone to another as the action of their turn. If it is difficult or dangerous to reach that zone for any reason the narrator should make them complete the appropriate check to step over shards of glass, climb a ladder, walk through sewage, or jump over an obstacle.

### *Driving*

Driving is the action of moving a large or speedy vehicle through space. Characters can attempt to drive any vehicle, though if they are unfamiliar with the type of vehicle they will likely need to make a series of checks in order to successfully operate the machine. Driving a vehicle greatly expands a character's options for movement, managing conflict, and overcoming obstacles. Be creative with the cars, tractors, cranes, and jet skis your characters find.

Vehicles can be used to make Slam attacks with a Precision check + a tool die + Driving bonus and is opposed by the target's Dodge. Vehicles can avoid collisions with a Dodge by making a Precision check + a tool die + Driving bonus.



## Chapter 5

### Perils

A car swerves into your lane, the stair collapses under your foot, you mean to rest your chin on the counter to smell the freshly baked cookies only to burn your chin on the baking sheet instead, or you fall through the monkey bars.

Life is full of dangers that don't come from combat with other people. Moving through the world is stressful and full of obstacles. This chapter covers the rules for navigating the world with skill challenges and the conditions that failure can cause.

### Challenges

A child runs through the woods. He hops over a log, keeps upright going downhill, but then fails to see barbed wire fence and runs straight into it. This child has just succeeded and failed at a series of challenges. First, he succeeded at a Might check to jump over the log, then a Precision check to stay upright when careening downhill, but failed his Awareness check to avoid the barbwire.

Challenges are created by the narrator as obstacles for the player. They can be physical challenges as described above, or mental challenges that test your Intelligence, Presence, and Endurance. Getting up the nerves to talk to a crush, a sending sensitive e-mail to your sensitive coworker, and overcoming the jitters before delivering a speech are all examples of emotional challenges.

To succeed at a challenge, a character must roll a result that meets or exceeds the challenge difficulty set by the narrator. Use the table below to set the difficulties of your challenges.

Simple	4
Average	6
Tough	8
Daunting	10
Dangerous	12

Failing a challenge always comes with consequences decided by the narrator: stress damage, a wound, or even a disability.

### **Contests**

Two girls race to the end of their block. A series of middle school students silently compete in a mathematics decathlon. A family plays a game of keepaway in the community pool from the shortest and youngest sibling.

The previous chapter covered combat between characters; however, combat isn't the only way for characters to compete with each other through a series of challenges. These contests are opposing challenges. For example, in a race all the runners would make Might checks to see who could move with the most power and the highest result would be the winner. Accordingly, contests are useful for proving superiority in skill, never mind the fickle touch of chance represented by the dice.

### **Conditions**

A young boy hides in his closet while his parents yell at each other. He reads a book about planets by the dim glow of a flashlight and waits for the violence to end. He is not

only stressed by the encounter, but frightened and afraid to move from his safe spot in the darkness.

When a character fails at a combat or a challenge they may suffer stress as a result of their loss; however, stress doesn't represent the ongoing results of failure of a broken bone or shattered pride.

Conditions represent these other types of debilitating effects. This section includes rules for the base conditions that can be temporary as well as rules for ongoing conditions like disease and disability.

### *Base Conditions*

The following base conditions can be used both for temporary effects that resolve at the end of the scene, and for ongoing effects of disease and disability. Remember that these conditions limit a character's ability to act in the world, and that combining conditions compounds their effects.

Blinded. A blinded character automatically fails at Awareness checks that rely on sight and have disadvantage on physical attacks. Their other senses do not improve.

Impaired Vision. A character can see only at certain distances or in certain lighting. You have disadvantage on all Awareness checks that rely on vision outside of your comfortable vision conditions.

Charmed. A charmed character must pursue actions that the charming person or object dictates until the charm is ended.

Confused. A confused character tells the narrator what they want to do, and then the narrator takes their turn for them.

Deafened. A deafened character automatically fails at Awareness checks that depend on hearing. They don't learn to read lips perfectly.

Impaired Hearing. A character can see only at certain distances or in certain lighting. A hearing-impaired character has disadvantage on all Awareness checks that rely on hearing outside of their comfortable vision conditions.

Disarmed. A disarmed character has disadvantage on any check that requires the use of their hands. They can still take actions.

Partially Disarmed. Only one hand is crippled. A partially disarmed character cannot use that hand and have disadvantage on all checks that require two hands.

Enraged. An enraged character must use its action attacking an object or character. If there is nothing to attack, then the character just walks around and fumes.

Exhausted. An exhausted character must make an Endurance check of difficulty 2 or higher or be unable to act this turn. Each time they fail their check, the difficulty goes up by 1.

Frightened. A frightened character must spend their turn getting out of sight of whatever has frightened them.

Lamed. A lamed character has lost the use of their legs and must crawl to move. A lamed character must take two entire turns committed to moving to move one space.

Partially Lamed. A partially lamed character has lost the use of one of their legs and has disadvantage on checks to move.

Paralyzed. A paralyzed character cannot move, take actions, or speak. In addition, physical checks against this character have advantage.

Partially Paralyzed. A partially paralyzed character can move small parts of their body only and are limited in their ability to move, take actions, and speak without assistance. In addition, physical checks against this character have advantage.

Poisoned. A poisoned character has disadvantage on all their checks due to mental or physical toxins. Alcohol is a common cause of the poisoned condition.

Restrained. A restrained character cannot move. In addition, physical checks against them have advantage and physical checks they make have disadvantage.

Unconscious. An unconscious creature cannot move, take actions, or speak, and is unaware of its surroundings. The creature also fails all Might and Precision checks, but is immune to social attacks. An unconscious creature cannot provide consent.

### **Disease & Disability**

Some characters gain ongoing conditions when they are born or over the course of their life. These diseases and disabilities make it more difficult for characters to achieve their goals. A narrator may impose an ongoing condition onto a character as a tradeoff for achieving their goal at a cost, or as a wound from losing an encounter. A character may crush their hand in order to grab an important key gaining the Partially Crippled condition permanently. Another character might break their mind under the stress of getting perfect scores on their exams, gaining the Confused condition permanently. Surviving a father's angry tirades might require a character to endure anxiety as a

permanent Frightened condition in response to yelling from lovers and other authority figures.

Some characters start the game with ongoing conditions from their birth or childhood. Characters who choose to start the game with a disease or disability do not gain any advantages and should be cognizant of the increased difficulty for their character.

### *Managing Disease and Disability*

Depending on the disease or disability, the character may be able to learn to manage their ongoing condition with mental and physical tools. A character who has coping mechanisms for their condition can make an Endurance check against a difficulty set by the narrator to ignore the effects of their disease or disability when their prosthetic (mental or physical) is available. If the character fails the check they can still ignore the condition by taking 1 stress. For example, a character may employ a confidence boosting mantra to manage their fear of making phone calls. If they fail their Endurance check to maintain their mantra, they can still make a call to order pizza if they endure the stress of the action. The same works for using crutches, or a speaking device.

### **Queerness**

Choosing to give your character a disease or disability is one of many ways to create a queer character. Queer characters have identities that conflict with the cultural norm of the world around them. These characters can be queer because of their disability, their sexuality, their gender expression, their race, their ethnicity, or their romantic interests.

A queer character does not gain any mechanical advantages in the game and is likely to face discrimination. Creating a queer character is not recommended for players who aren't prepared for a challenge.

## Chapter 6

### Magic

Magic is a key component in games of *Desires and Despots* regardless of whether the genre of your particular game is strictly realistic or beyond fantastic. In this game, magic is a tool that pushes characters beyond their usual skills. Thus, every character, no matter how mundane and simple their life and interests, can use magic.

#### Casting a Spell

A spell is any series of actions that usually results in the same reaction from the target of the spell. Saying a prayer to calm yourself in times of hardship is a spell. A soccer team's ritual of jumping up and down while chanting their team name is a spell. Making a joke at your own expense to charm your coworker is a spell.

Casting a spell requires a character meet some base requirements.

1. Your character must know the spell.
2. Your character must meet the component requirements, which are detailed below.
3. You character must meet the usage requirements of the spell. Most spells can only be used once per scene.

All characters begin the game knowing the spells granted by their archetype. A character may learn more spells over the course of several games as rewards for completing tasks, training with experts, and at dramatically appropriate moments when finishing narrative arcs.



### *Types of Spells*

There are three types of spells that characters can learn: physical spells, social spells, and cognitive spells.

Physical. Physical spells require the careful use and manipulation of the character's body to hinder their enemies and empower their own athletic feats.

Social. Social spells allow characters to influence the other characters in their lives by manipulating their feelings and emotions to charm, frighten, and remove debilitating stress.

Cognitive. Cognitive spells affect the character's own mind, allowing them to remain focused and improve their chances of succeeding at difficult mental tasks.

### *Reading a Spell*

Each of the spells in this chapter uses its own specific rules within the system to create fantastic effects that most ability checks wouldn't create on their own. In order to use these spells, players must understand how to read them as to avoid confusion and argument at the gaming table.

Casting Time. Most spells require a single action to complete; however, some take longer. When you cast a spell that takes longer than one action, you must use your action every turn to continue casting that spell until it is complete. If you are not able to do so, the spell fails. A character that is trying to cast Ponder in their office to tackle a

difficult task, but is interrupted by a phone call, fails at casting the spell and must try again.

Range. The target of the spell must be within in the spell's listed range. A range of Direct Communication means that a character must share a language with a character and be able to communicate their intentions to them.

Components. A spell's components describe the mental and physical requirements a character must meet to cast that spell. Each spell requires some combination of verbal (V), somatic (S), material (M), or emotional (E) components. If a character cannot provide these components, then they are unable to cast the spell.

Verbal (V). Verbal components require you to be able to communicate your ideas with the target of the spell. That means you must have one language in common in order to affect them.

Somatic (S). Somatic components are met by being able to move your body, either with your own ambulation or with a vehicle.

Material (M). Material components require you to have access to some important touchstone that provides you with mental fortitude. Most material components can be satisfied with a small symbol; however, other spells require more specific materials listed in their description. Social spells often require a telecommunications device. This device can be any appropriate medium, a phone, a computer, or most commonly, your body. The narrator is the final judge on what device can be used to successfully communicate in any scene.

Emotional (E). Emotional components require the character casting them to not be under the effect of any kind of mental duress like the Charmed, Frightened, or Enraged conditions.

Duration. A spell's duration describes how long the spell persists. Most spells are either instantaneous, completing as soon as they are cast, or have a duration of one scene.

Targets. The target of a spell is whoever that spell affects. To target a creature, you must have a clear path to the target. This could be through space for physical spells, or through text messages or phone calls for Social spells.

Checks. Some spells require the caster and the target to make opposing checks. The rules for adjudicating these conflicts follow the same rules as conflicts in Chapter 4. When two characters tie, a character can take a wound to win the tie, sacrificing their mind or their body as is appropriate for the spell to ensure victory or safety.

### *Creating New Spells*

The following list of spells only contains a few basic examples for each type. The world is full of other rituals that bring power into a character's life when they are completed. Talk to your narrator about creating new spells using the standard ones below as templates. The more personalized and specific the spells, the more *Desires and Despots* can mimic life as you understand it.

## Physical Spells

### *Disarm*

Casting Time: 1 Action

Range: Weapon Distance

Components: S, M (weapon)

Duration: Instantaneous

You attack an enemy's hands to make them drop what they are carrying. Make a physical attack against one enemy within range. If you succeed at the attack, the enemy takes damage as normal, drops what they are carrying, and are Disarmed until the end of their next turn.

### *Get Hyped*

Casting Time: 1 Minute

Range: 30 Feet

Components: V, S, E

Duration: 1 Scene

You and any allies within 30 feet run around, yell, and generally get the blood and adrenaline flowing in preparation for physical exertion. All targets of this spell can gain advantage on one Might, Precision, or Endurance check of their choice during this scene or the following one. Once they have used the advantage, it is lost. If they do not use the advantage before the end of the next scene, it is also lost.

In order to benefit from this spell, any allies who join in the spell must spend their actions helping to cast it for the full minute.

*Reset*

Casting Time: 1 Action

Range: Self

Components: S, E

Duration: Instantaneous

You take a second to reset your stance and take a breath. Regain half your stress points and gain advantage on your next Might or Precision check.

You can only benefit from casting this spell once per scene.

*Stretch*

Casting Time: 1 Minute

Range: Self

Components: S, E

Duration: 8 hours

You take the time to limber up, stretching your muscles, and practicing forms and stances to prepare your body for the contest ahead. At the end of this spell you gain a +1 bonus to all Might, Precision, and Endurance checks you make in one scene during the duration of this spell. Once you have used this bonus in one scene, it is lost.

You only benefit from casting this spell once every 4 hours.

*Tackle*

Casting Time: 1 Action

Range: 5 feet

Components: S

Duration: Instantaneous

You throw your body at an enemy and pin them to the ground. Make a slam attack against an enemy within range. If you succeed at the attack you deal damage as normal and both you and the target are Restrained. The enemy can make a Might check opposed by your own might check as an action to attempt to escape on their turn. In addition, you can end the effect on yourself at will, but that also ends the condition on the enemy.

## **Social Spells**

*Charm*

Casting Time: 1 Action

Range: Direct Communication

Components: V, S, M (telecommunication device), E

Duration: 1 hour

You attempt to charm someone with your personality, looks, and overall presence. Make a Presence check against a target within range who defends with Awareness. If you succeed, the character is Charmed by you for 1 hour.

If the target is attacked while under the Charmed effect, then they make an Awareness check against your Presence. If they succeed, then they are no longer charmed and cannot be charmed again by you for 24 hours.

*Console*

Casting Time: 1 Action

Range: Direct Communication

Components: V, S, M (telecommunication device), E

Duration: Instantaneous

You calm another character and allow them a moment to breathe and collect themselves. Choose an ally within range and roll your Presence die. That ally regains stress points equal to the result. In addition, they are no longer afflicted by Charmed, Enraged, or Frightened.

An ally can benefit from your casting of this spell once per day.

*Distract*

Casting Time: 1 Action

Range: Direct Communication

Components: V, S, M (telecommunication device), E

Duration: 1 minute

You distract an enemy into forgetting what they were doing for a short time. Make a Manipulate attack against a target within range. If you succeed, the character is Confused for 1 minute.

If the target is attacked while under the Confused effect, then they make an Awareness check against your Presence. If they succeed, then they are no longer confused and cannot be confused by you again for 24 hours.

*Inspire*

Casting Time: 1 Action

Range: Direct Communication

Components: V, S, M (telecommunication device), E

Duration: Instantaneous

You speak inspiring words to an ally so they can better achieve their goals. Choose an ally within range. They gain advantage on one check of their choice during this scene.

An ally can benefit from your casting of this spell once per day.

*Scare*

Casting Time: 1 Action

Range: Direct Communication

Components: V, S, M (telecommunication device), E

Duration: 1 hour

You attempt to attempt to frighten someone with threatening words and gestures.

Make a Presence check against a target within range who defends with Awareness. If you succeed, the character is Frightened of you for an hour.

The target makes an Awareness check against your Presence at the end of each turn to end the condition. If they succeed, then they are no longer frightened of you and cannot be frightened by you again for 24 hours.



## **Cognitive Spells**

*Center*

Casting Time: 1 Action

Range: Self

Components: None

Duration: Instantaneous

You take a deep breath and find your emotional center. Roll your Awareness die and regain stress points equal to the roll. In addition, you are no longer under the effects of Charmed, Enraged, or Frightened.

You can only benefit from casting this spell once per scene.

*Focus*

Casting Time: 1 Action

Range: Self

Components: E

Duration: 1 scene

You close your mind off to anything but the task at hand. You gain advantage on one Awareness check of your choice by the end of the next scene. However, you have disadvantage on Presence checks until you use this advantage. Once you have used the advantage, it is lost. If you do not use the advantage before the end of the next scene, it is also lost.

*Ponder*

Casting Time: 1 Minute

Range: Self

Components: E

Duration: Instantaneous

You think on a problem for a minute in the hopes of finding a solution. You gain advantage on one Intelligence check of your choice by the end of the next scene. Once you have used the advantage, it is lost. If you do not use the advantage before the end of the next scene, it is also lost.

*Psych Up*

Casting Time: 1 Minute

Range: Self

Components: E

Duration: 1 Scene

You take a minute to pump yourself up in preparation for displaying your best self. You gain advantage on one Presence check of your choice by the end of the next scene. Once you have used the advantage, it is lost. If you do not use the advantage before the end of the next scene, it is also lost.

*Recall*

Casting Time: 1 Action

Range: Self

Components: E

Duration: Instantaneous

You take a second to think on a subject you are sure you learned at some point. When you cast this spell, you can immediately succeed on an Intelligence check to recall a piece of information.

You can only benefit from this spell once per scene.

## Appendix A: Sidebars

These sidebars will be included in their corresponding chapters when this text is in a manual layout.

### Chapter 1

#### *Why Use the Real World?*

I built these rules to describe and design *myself*; when I used systems for more impressive realities than our own or for narratives more action-packed than I would ever want to experience, I failed. I would not be anything but a non-player character in the high adventure fantasy worlds, running away from the fight, and focusing on my own small corner trying to survive revolutions and dragons. I hold no illusions of being an adventurer in world where magic exists when my current idea of an adventure is going across town to get a cupcake from the good cupcake place. Fantasy settings don't match my experience, and thus their rules couldn't contain the lack of me. I don't blame the other systems: they capture the fantasy that makes these games so popular. The same fantasy is the reason that continually draws me into that genre. However, that genre doesn't account for the muted conflicts and choices of everyday life, the tiny tyrants, and their simple desires. That's the real reason for the real world, to create a system that creates space for me.

## Chapter 2

### *Consider Roleplaying*

My first time roleplaying happened when I was seventeen. I found a group on an online forum dedicated to keeping up with role-playing tabletop news with an option for Dungeon Masters who needed another player. There weren't many choices in Austin and the only way to contact them was e-mail, then stalking them on MySpace. But I found a group and knew I had to join them, and I had to try this game whose rules I'd stumbled across years ago, a game I could only imagine playing.

Even though I could drive myself, and even though I had a car, and even though the state said I was adult enough to drive and so certainly could play Dungeons and Dragons, I asked my mother for permission. I didn't ask her straight out though. No, I brought up the concept of *Dungeons and Dragons* up casually as we watched TV on her bed while my dad kept court in the living room. Taking advantage of the quiet innocuous moment, I asked what she would think if I started playing *Dungeons and Dragons*. I remember she paused before wondering out loud if that was an "okay" game and, more importantly, how I'd meet people to play with. The unspoken question: Would I meet people from The Internet?

This was before Uber, Grindr, and Tinder made it normal to be stuck in an intimate space with a stranger from The Internet. Because, we both knew I was gay – I had come out to her a few years before – and we both knew that I lied about meeting other gay guys because she had found my boyfriend's class ring and placed it in her jewelry box for me to discover; though only I knew how often that had happened and

how many boyfriends I'd kept for weeks before moving on to another boy from the small queer community on Myspace.

I let her concerns go unchallenged, but I joined the group anyway, telling my mom each time I left for another game that I was hanging out with friends. And I was hanging out with friends: a young couple, a gay 20-something, and a scrawny curly-haired teenager. We met every few weeks in the back rooms of Thor's Hammer, a comic shop across town near my high school. Every time they scheduled a game, I made it there. Even when my brakes gave out on the way over and I had to lay on my horn as my car zoomed beneath the red light of a blessedly empty intersection until my car ran out of momentum. I called my parents and had them drop me off at the Thor's Hammer, committed to that game.

I lied to my parents about playing Dungeons and Dragons even though they really couldn't have stopped me. I lied because I couldn't take the chance of losing it. After that first game, I had real friends. Friends who had a common interest besides, "We go to school together." I had a set of stone-grey dice they gifted me after our first session. I had my first character Relgits, the bookish gnome rogue who was thinking of taking a level in bard.

### *Consider Roleplaying Games*

- Your first *World of Warcraft* character
- Your curated *Pokémon* team
- *The Sims* you forced to fall in love
- Your tycoon days in *Monopoly*

- The children you left behind in *Life*
- Becoming a queen in Chess
- Pretending to be *Harry Potter* with a stick you found in the backyard
- The stories you built with Legos

*Consider the Roles You Play*

- Child
- Parent
- Boss
- Employee
- Consumer
- Citizen
- Artist
- Janitor
- Jailor
- Lover

*Consider the Roles You Want to Play*

- Where is your comfort zone?
- What do you want to explore?
- Who do you want to be?
- Where is the road not taken?

- What is the road not taken?

*So You Want to Play a Minority*

Try it. But don't forget that you can leave that identity behind when you leave the table, so play them respectfully, and don't fool yourself into thinking you can understand differences by playing at them. Don't play the difference, play the character – use their temperament and archetype to guide their actions, use their history to build their future in the game.

Footless as I am, and relying on a prosthetic to hobble my way in a bipedal world, I notice, and I mind when a character is created from their limb enhancements: weaponized and symbolized beyond thoughts of coolness and artistic use. I wish my disability had a narrative purpose, but it doesn't – it just is.

*The Mechanics of Upbringing*

Consider these ideas when thinking about your character's upbringing.

- Is your temperament inherited from your caretaker or did it develop as a coping mechanism?
- What did your family teach you how to do?
- What occupations did your school prepare you for?
- How are you overcoming your childhood trauma?
- What parental patterns are you repeating?
- Who was your role-model? Did they inspire your archetype?



## Chapter 3

### *Campaign Ideas*

- Members of an aristocratic family struggling with mental illness and infidelity.
- Students who find a dead body on their way home through the woods.
- Employees suffering under the same tyrannical boss.
- Siblings who learn their father is fallible.
- Partners in a new law firm, private practice, or factory.
- Drug dealers who just want to live in a good school-district
- Mothers on vacation
- The staff of a church trying to get their congregation to give up their guns

## Chapter 4

### *Explaining Emotional Combat*

I argue. I argue a lot. It is a form of communicating nurtured by my family that thrives off the conflict of ideas and the resulting violence, played out with blunt words sometimes sharpened with wit. I grew up sparring and wrestling with my sisters like lion cubs, practicing initially as a form of play despite the emotional wounds when things got too personal. Not to say we didn't actually wrestle, that I never battered them with the (surprisingly quick) stubby end of my leg or that they didn't capture me beneath a laundry basket when I became too annoying. It's just to say that I have been trained for emotional combat since a child – and yet, other role-playing games merely

leave social interactions as a skill checks, not a series of attacks and defenses, not a battleground for desires to play out on, where losing is nearly as devastating as falling to a wound. Arguing with my friend about the gender of an angel to the point of yelling can feel like a real adrenaline-pulsing brawl, being called gay as an insult before I knew what gay meant but knew I wasn't the same as the other boys left deep bruises, and the flurry of blows I got at the gay bar left as much a lasting impression as having my pain dismissed by an uncaring boyfriend.

It would be a lie to say that the concept of social violence was simply a reflection of my life; when there is also something more aspirational in it. In this game, in these rules, in my construction of the world, I want argument to be just as effective as the potential injury threatened by physical violence. Social violence is inevitable in a social world, so it might as well be effective; the scars and bruises it leaves are at least manageable and can be civil, whereas the only civil physical violence is for sport, a play battlefield, not the reality of death the play symbolizes.

## **Chapter 5**

### *Sample Disabilities*

- Missing Foot – Partially Lamed – Managed with a prosthetic foot
- Depression – Exhausted – Managed with therapy, medication, or both
- Anxiety – Frightened – Managed with therapy, medication, or both
- Addiction – Charmed – Managed with group therapy
- Near-Sighted – Impaired Vision – Managed with glasses or contacts

- Diabetes – Unconscious – Managed with medication and diet
- Heart Disease – Unconscious – Managed with medication and diet

## **Chapter 6**

### *Magical Places*

Magic comes not only from the rituals characters perform, but also from the fantastic places in the world. When creating scenes, consider using magical settings that might grant the characters bonuses and revitalize their stress points, or might spook them and hinder their progress.

- Sunsets
- Snowfall
- The top of the Empire State Building
- A café in Autumn
- A 7-11 at 4 AM
- A golden statue
- Your grandparent's house in the morning
- The woods
- Church on Christmas Eve
- The steps of St. Paul's Cathedral
- Shores, beaches, and riverbanks

## Appendix B: Character Sheet

### *Desires and Despots Character Sheet*

Name \_\_\_\_\_  
 Height \_\_\_\_ Weight \_\_\_\_ Age \_\_\_\_  
 Shape \_\_\_\_ Skin \_\_\_\_ Eyes \_\_\_\_  
 Hair \_\_\_\_\_  
 Style \_\_\_\_\_  
 Temperament \_\_\_\_\_  
 Archetype \_\_\_\_\_  
 Occupations \_\_\_\_\_  
 Race \_\_\_\_\_  
 Ethnicity \_\_\_\_\_  
 Gender \_\_\_\_\_  
 Sexuality \_\_\_\_\_  
 Value \_\_\_\_\_  
 Bond \_\_\_\_\_  
 Quirk \_\_\_\_\_  
 Flaw \_\_\_\_\_

#### Ability Dice

	d4	d6	d8	d10	d12
Might	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Precision	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Endurance	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Intelligence	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Awareness	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Presence	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

#### Skills

	+1	+2	+3	+4
Aim	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Athletics	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Current Events	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Crafting	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Deception	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Discipline	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Driving	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Humanities	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Insight	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Intimidation	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Investigation	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Linguistics	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Mechanics	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Medicine	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Melee	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Mystery	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Perception	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Persuasion	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Science	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Stealth	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Survival	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Technology	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

#### Defenses

**Critique** intelligence + humanities  
 d\_\_\_\_ + \_\_\_\_

**Deflect** awareness + insight  
 d\_\_\_\_ + \_\_\_\_

**Parry** might + tool + melee  
 d\_\_\_\_ + d\_\_\_\_ + \_\_\_\_

**Dodge** precision + athletics  
 d\_\_\_\_ + \_\_\_\_

**Max Stress** max endurance + discipline  
 \_\_\_\_\_ = \_\_\_\_\_ + \_\_\_\_\_

**Current stress**  
 \_\_\_\_\_

#### Attacks

**Abuse** presence + intimidation  
 d\_\_\_\_ + \_\_\_\_

**Argue** presence + persuasion  
 d\_\_\_\_ + \_\_\_\_

**Manipulate** presence + deception  
 d\_\_\_\_ + \_\_\_\_

**Smash** might + tool + melee  
 d\_\_\_\_ + d\_\_\_\_ + \_\_\_\_

**Stab** precision + tool + melee  
 d\_\_\_\_ + d\_\_\_\_ + \_\_\_\_

**Shoot** precision + tool + aim  
 d\_\_\_\_ + d\_\_\_\_ + \_\_\_\_

#### Wounds, Diseases, and Disabilities

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

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\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

#### Equipment

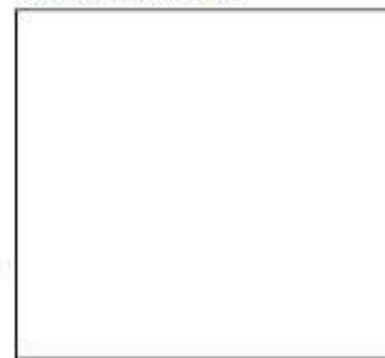
\_\_\_\_\_

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\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

#### Character Portrait



#### Desires

**Continuing Desires:** \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**Immediate Desires:** \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

#### Features, Traits, and Spells

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

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\_\_\_\_\_

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\_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix C: Sample Character

### *Desires and Despots Sample Character*

Name *Matthew B Stigler*

Height *6'7"* Weight *200* Age *27*

Shape *Stout* Skin *Pale* Eyes *Brown*

Hair *Brown and short*

Style *Jeans and a button down*

Temperament *Diplomat*

Archetype *Counselor*

Occupations *Academic Student*

Race *White*

Ethnicity *Texas American*

Gender *Queer Male*

Sexuality *Gay as a Window*

Value *Education*

Bond *The Stiglers*

Quirk *Everything is a Game*

Flaw *Little Lies*

#### Ability Dice

	d4	d6	d8	d10	d12
Might	o	x	o	o	o
Precision	x	o	o	o	o
Endurance	o	x	o	o	o
Intelligence	o	o	x	o	o
Awareness	o	o	o	x	o
Presence	o	o	x	o	o

#### Skills

	+1	+2	+3	+4
Aim	o	o	o	o
Athletics	o	o	o	o
Current Events	o	o	o	o
Crafting	o	o	o	o
Deception	x	o	o	o
Discipline	o	o	o	o
Driving	o	o	o	o
Humanities	x	x	o	o
Insight	x	o	o	o
Intimidation	o	o	o	o
Investigation	x	x	o	o
Linguistics	x	o	o	o
Mechanics	o	o	o	o
Medicine	o	o	o	o
Melee	o	o	o	o
Mystery	o	o	o	o
Perception	o	o	o	o
Persuasion	x	o	o	o
Science	o	o	o	o
Stealth	o	o	o	o
Survival	o	o	o	o
Technology	o	o	o	o

#### Defenses

**Critique** intelligence + humanities  
d8 + 2

**Deflect** awareness + insight  
d10 + 1

**Fanny** might + tool + melee  
d6 + d6 (cane) + 0

**Dodge** precision + athletics  
d4 + 0

**Max Stress** max endurance + discipline  
8 = 8 + 0

#### Current stress

#### Attacks

**Abuse** presence + intimidation  
d8 + 0

**Argue** presence + persuasion  
d8 + 1

**Manipulate** presence + deception  
d8 + 1

**Smash** might + tool + melee  
d6 + d6 (cane) + 0

**Stab** precision + tool + melee  
d4 + d4 (pen) + 0

**Shoot** precision + tool + aim  
d4 + d4 (soda can) + 0

#### Wounds, Diseases, and Disabilities

**Disability - Partially Lamed** - Matt is missing his right foot. He manages this with a prosthetic foot and cane.

**Disability - Exhausted** - Matt has depressive episodes, anxiety, and executive functioning issues that make it difficult to complete tasks. He manages this with cognitive behavioral therapy and companionship.

**Wound - Frightened** - Matt is afraid of authority figures and will acquiesce to their demands to avoid punishment. This wound can be healed with therapy.

#### Equipment

Prosthetic foot (d6), iPhone 8 XL (d6), cane (d6), pre-owned "gun metal" grey 2010 Honda Insight (d6), lifestyle (2d4)

#### Character Portrait

#### Desires

Continuing Desires: *Publish a book, earn a Ph.D., get married, visit Lebanon, visit Rome, visit Harry Potter World*

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Immediate Desires: \_\_\_\_\_

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#### Features, Traits, and Spells

**Authentic** - advantage on a Presence check once per scene.

**People Person** - training in Insight and Persuasion.

**Exploit** - you can grant your training bonus to an ally once per scene.

**Spells** - center, console, inspire, psych up