

RPg v0.1

Chapter 1: Introduction & Core Resolution

Welcome to the Wasteland

The world ended. Something rose from the ashes. You are what rose with it.

Rads and Nukacola is a game about heroes carved from broken places — survivors who walk into chaos armed with a rusty blade, a sharp tongue, a smoking gun, or all three. You will face horrors that wear human skin, machines that remember the old world, and gods made of static and hunger. And you will solve problems with wit, with violence, or with something that looks a lot like both.

This is a universal system. The wasteland is one setting among infinite. But the engine that drives it — your Skills, your Talents, your Perks — works the same in every world. The math is honest. The dice are cruel. The story is yours.

How the Game Works

You play a Wanderer — a character you create. You say what they do. The Overseer narrates the world around them and sets the stakes. When you attempt something risky, you roll dice to find out what happens.

The Golden Rule

The Overseer has final say. Every rule in this book serves one purpose: making the game more interesting. If a rule slows the game down, the Overseer can simplify, override, or discard it. The math is here for those who want it. But the story comes first.

Core Resolution

Everything in Rads and Nukacola resolves around a single mechanic.

The Basic Roll

Roll a d20, multiply by your relevant Skill Score, add your Talent bonus, your Luck bonus, and any Perk modifiers, then divide by the campaign's Grit Score.

The formula:

$$> ((d20 \times \text{Skill Score}) + \text{Talent Bonus} + \text{Luck Bonus} + \text{Perk Modifiers}) \div \text{Grit Score} = \text{Effort}$$

Grit Score is a campaign-wide setting that determines how challenging the world is. A lower Grit Score makes success easier; a higher Grit Score makes it tougher. The Overseer chooses one value for the entire campaign, and all characters — Wanderers and NPCs alike — use it for every Effort calculation.

Standard Grit Scores: 20 (Low/Easy Grit), 25 (Medium Grit), 30 (High/Tough Grit). Most campaigns use Medium Grit (25). The Playtest Packet assumes Low Grit (20) to make testing easier.

Compare the Effort to a Difficulty Class (DC) set by the Overseer.

- Effort $\geq$ DC: Success.
- Effort < DC: Failure. The Overseer describes what goes wrong.
- Effort $\geq$ DC + 1: Success by one rank — the Overseer may grant a minor boon.
- Effort $\geq$ DC + 2: Success by two ranks — the Overseer may grant a significant advantage.
- Effort $\geq$ DC + 3 or more: Exceptional success — the Overseer determines an extraordinary outcome.

There are no critical failures on skill checks. Failure is failure. The Overseer decides how badly things go based on the situation, not the die.

Difficulty Classes

Difficulty	DC
Very Easy	0 (No roll needed)
Easy	1
Normal	2
Hard	3

Very Hard	4
Incredibly Hard	5
Extremely Hard	6
Nearly Impossible	7
Impossible	8
Beyond Impossible	9+

Note: With a Skill Score of 4 and a d20 roll of 12, your base is $48 \div 25 = 1.92$ Effort before bonuses (assuming Medium Grit). This still beats Normal (DC 2) tasks with a modest Talent bonus. Hard tasks (DC 3) demand strong Talents, a solid Luck roll, and Perks that tip the scale. At Skill Score 8, a roll of 15 gives $120 \div 25 = 4.8$ Effort — reaching the Very Hard threshold on raw skill alone.

> Kara's Larceny Skill is 4. She rolls a 13. She has a Perception of 5 and a Luck of 3. She rolls her PER Talent (d8+1) and gets a 4, rolls LUK Talent (d6) and gets a 5, and she has the Perk: Lock Whisperer (Rank 1) — spend 1 MP to treat a mechanical lock as one Difficulty Class lower (minimum DC 1).

>

> $((13 \times 4) + 4 + 5) \div 25 = (52 + 9) \div 25 = 61 \div 25 = 2.44$ Effort

>

> The Overseer set DC 2 (Hard) for the rusted lock on the supply crate. Kara beats it by handily by using her Lock Whisperer — the lock yields, but without the margin for a boon. The crate swings open.

> However, if the Grit was set to Low/Easy Grit, Kara's 61 attempt would have been 3.05 Effort. Passing the Hard Check without using her Perk.

When to Roll

There is no task too small to roll. Since MP is regain through rolling Natural

Not every action needs a roll. Follow these guidelines:

- Don't roll if failure is impossible or boring.
- Don't roll if failure would stop the story dead with nothing interesting happening.
- Do roll when the stakes are real and success or failure changes the situation meaningfully.

The Core Loop

1. The Overseer describes a situation.2. You say what your Wanderer does.3. The Overseer calls for a roll if needed, sets the DC, and tells you which Skill applies.4. You roll, calculate your Effort, and announce it.5. The Overseer describes the outcome.6. The situation changes. Go back to step 1.

That's the engine. Everything else — combat, exploration, social encounters, Perks, advancement — builds on these bones. Let's build.

SPECIAL Stats

SPECIAL Stats

Seven core stats define a character's natural aptitudes. Each stat is rated 1–10, with 5 representing the average wastelander. Every stat carries a Talent die — rolled to produce a Talent Bonus on checks under its domain — and a flat Stat Bonus equal to the stat itself (STR 6 → Stat Bonus 6).

The Seven Stats

| Stat | Governs |

|---|---|

| Strength | Raw physical power. Close combat, heavy lifting, intimidation through force. |

| Perception | Keenness of the senses. Spotting threats, aiming ranged weapons, detecting lies and hidden dangers. |

| Endurance | Hardiness and resilience. Resisting poison, disease, radiation, fatigue, hunger, and exposure. |

| Charisma | Force of personality. Persuasion, deception, leadership, performance, and reading people. |

| Intelligence | Mental acuity and knowledge. Lore, science, medicine, technology, and puzzle-solving. |

| Agility | Grace, speed, and precision. Stealth, lockpicking, piloting, acrobatics, and quick reflexes. |

| Luck | Fate's favor. Luck grants bonuses to all skill and talent checks. |

Talent Dice and Stat Bonuses

Each SPECIAL stat maps to a Talent die on the chart below — a die plus a flat modifier, such as d8+2 at stat 6. When a roll falls under a stat's domain, roll that die and add the result as the Talent Bonus to the check. When a rule calls for a static value instead of a roll — a passive score, an Overseer's ruling, an NPC's quick stat — use the stat's Stat Bonus: its flat value. A Strength Talent with STR 6 rolls d8+2; a static Strength check uses 6.

Stat Value Talent Die

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0 d2 - 1

1 d4 - 1

2 d4 + 0

3 d6 + 0

4 d6 + 1

5 d8 + 1

6 d8 + 2

7 d10 + 2

8 d10 + 3

9 d12 + 3

10 d12 + 4

Overseers may adjust these values to suit their setting and preferred difficulty curve. The key principle: the Talent Bonus is a rolled modifier — roll the governing stat's Talent die and add the result to every $d20 \times \text{Skill}$ roll under that stat's domain, before any Perk bonuses are applied. Where the Overseer prefers a static result, the stat's flat Stat Bonus substitutes for the roll.

Your Luck Talent is added to nearly every check in addition to the governing stat.

What Stats Don't Do

Stats do not gate access to skills. A character with Strength 1 can still invest in Melee Weapons or Unarmed — they'll just have a smaller Talent die when they roll it. The skill represents training and experience; the stat represents natural capacity. Both matter.

[Author note: This is a clean framework. The GM sets their own conversion. The domain mapping ties directly to the Skills entry. Next: Character Creation procedures — assigning stat points, selecting background skills, first Perk at level 1.]

Core Character Statistics

Core Character Statistics

Every character in Rads and Nukacola is defined by more than their SPECIAL stats and Skills. These seven core statistics represent the character's physical and mental capacity to endure, carry, fight, and act.

Terminology

The formulas in this chapter use two kinds of values:

- Stat: The flat SPECIAL value (1–10). A Strength stat of 5 is just 5.

- Talent: The rolled value of the stat's Talent die. A Strength Talent of 5 means you roll the STR Talent die (d8+1).

When a formula calls for a *Stat*, use the flat number. When it calls for a *Talent*, roll the die.

- ** Overseer for that stat value.

Hit Points measure how much punishment a character can take before falling. Damage reduces HP. When HP reaches 0, the character is incapacitated — unconscious, bleeding out, or otherwise out of the fight.

- Level 1: A character's starting Max HP equals twice their END stat. If a character has END 5, their starting Max HP is 10.

- Level Up: Every time a character gains a level, they roll their END Talent die and add the result to their Max HP.

- Current HP can never exceed Max HP. A character at full health has HP equal to their Max HP.

- Rest, medical attention, stimpaks, and chems restore lost HP. Details are covered in the Healing section.

Example: HP at Level 1

> Kara has END 6, so her starting Max HP is 12 — twice her Endurance, and no die involved.>> At level 2, she rolls her END Talent (d8+2) and gets a 7. Her Max HP becomes 19.> At level 3, she rolls a 4. Her Max HP becomes 23.

Damage Threshold (DT)

Damage Threshold is a buffer that absorbs incoming damage before it reaches a character's HP. It represents active defense, alertness, and the ability to shrug off blows.

- At the start of every combat turn, the character rolls their STR Talent die.

- They then choose whether to keep their current DT value or replace it with the number just rolled.

- When a character takes damage, subtract it from DT first. Any remaining damage passes through to HP.

- DT can be reduced to 0. It does not go negative.

- Equipment and Perks can grant additional DT. Bonuses from equipment and Perks are added after the STR Talent roll, and they

are not lost when DT is reduced — they represent passive protection that sits on top of the active buffer.

Example: DT in Combat

> At the start of her first turn, Kara rolls her STR Talent (d8+1) and gets 6. She has a leather chestpiece that grants +2 DT. Her DT for this turn is 8.>> An enemy hits her for 5 damage. DT drops to 3. No damage reaches her HP.>> On her next turn, she rolls STR Talent again and gets 4. She can keep her current DT of 3, or replace it with 4 (which becomes 6 with her armor bonus). She chooses to replace it.

Carry Weight (CW)

Carry Weight is the maximum total weight, in pounds or arbitrary units, that a character can haul without penalty.

> $CW = (STR\ Stat \times 15) + (END\ Stat \times 10) + (AGI\ Stat \times 5)$

Exceeding CW imposes penalties to movement, Agility-based checks, and combat effectiveness. The GM determines the severity of the penalty — common rulings include halved movement speed, disadvantage on Acrobatics and Sneak checks, and reduced AP at the beginning of combat.

Example: Carry Weight

> Kara has STR 5, END 6, and AGI 4.> $CW = (5 \times 15) + (6 \times 10) + (4 \times 5) = 75 + 60 + 20 = 155\ lbs$

Morale Points (MP)

Morale Points represent a character's inner will, resolve, and capacity to push beyond normal limits.

- Characters begin with 1 MP at level 1.
- Characters gain 1 additional MP per level.
- MP is spent to activate certain Perk effects — powerful abilities that tip the odds in a critical moment.
- MP is restored by rest, achieving major goals, or through specific Perks and Talents.
- A character with 0 MP is not broken — they simply cannot access abilities that require MP until they recover.

MP is the resource that separates a survivor from a hero. It is the grit to try again, the flash of insight, the second wind.

Damage Reduction (DR)

Damage Reduction is a flat reduction applied to every instance of incoming damage.

- DR is 0 by default.
- DR can only be gained through equipment (armor, shields, defensive gear) and Perks.
- DR is applied after DT. The order of damage application is:
1. Incoming damage reduces DT (if any DT remains). 2. Remaining damage is reduced by DR. 3. Final damage is applied to HP.

This makes DR valuable even when DT is depleted — it guarantees a minimum level of protection regardless of the turn's STR Talent roll.

DR uses flat tenths by default, but exact percentages can be used if the Overseer allows it.

Sequence (SQ) and Action Points (AP)

Sequence is a measure of a character's reaction speed, awareness, and combat readiness. It determines the maximum number of Action Points (AP) a character can hold.

> $SQ = PER \text{ Stat} + AGI \text{ Stat}$

AP represents what a character can do in a single combat turn. At the start of each turn, the character rolls their AGI Talent die and gains that many AP.

- A character's maximum AP is equal to their SQ. They cannot hold more AP than their SQ allows.

- Unspent AP are lost at the end of the character's turn.

- AP is spent to perform actions in combat — moving, attacking, using items, activating Perks, and more. The detailed combat rules specify the AP cost for each action type.

Example: SQ and AP

> Kara has PER 5 and AGI 4. Her SQ is 9. This is her maximum AP.>> At the start of her turn, she rolls her AGI Talent (d6+1 at AGI 4) and gets a 5. She gains 5 AP. She can hold up to 9, so no overflow.>> She moves (2 AP), fires her pistol (3 AP), and ends

her turn with 0 AP.>> Next turn, she rolls AGI Talent and gets a 7. She has 7 AP to spend.

These six statistics form the backbone of every character sheet in Rads and Nukacola. They interact with Skills, Talents, and Perks to create a living, breathing survivor in whatever world the GM builds.

Chapter 2: Character Creation

Chapter 2: Character Creation

The wasteland doesn't care who you were. It cares what you can do. This chapter walks through building a character step by step — from rolling your SPECIAL stats to picking your first Perk and stepping into the world.

Step 1: Determine SPECIAL Stats

Your character is defined by seven core stats: Strength, Perception, Endurance, Charisma, Intelligence, Agility, and Luck — the SPECIAL stats. Each stat ranges from 1 to 10, with 5 representing the average wastelander.

Method 1: Point Buy (Recommended)

You have 30 points to distribute among the seven stats. No stat can be raised above 10 or start below 1. Raising a stat costs 1 point per point — a stat of 5 costs 5 points.

Method 2: Roll 2d4+1

Roll 2d4+1 seven times. Assign each result to a SPECIAL stat.

Method 2.5: Roll d20

Roll 7d20. For each die, consult the following table to determine the stat value:

d20 Roll	Stat Value	
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1-2	1	
3-4	2	
5-7	3	
8-10	4	
11-13	5	
14-16	6	
17-18	7	
19	8	
20	9	

Assign each result to a stat of your choice. If your total is below 20, reroll your lowest stat. If above 45, reroll your highest.

Method 3: Array (Fast Start)

Assign these values to your stats in any order: 8, 7, 6, 5, 5, 4, 3.

Method 4: Pre-generated (For One-Shots)

The Overseer provides a set of pre-generated stat arrays. Choose one and proceed.

Step 2: Determine Your Talent Die

Each SPECIAL stat produces a Talent die — rolled for Talent Bonuses, HP, DT, AP, and other effects. The Overseer maps each stat value to a die.

Default Talent Die Table

Stat Value Talent Die	
--- ---	
1 d4 - 1	6 d8 + 2
2 d4 + 0	7 d10 + 2
3 d6 + 0	8 d10 + 3
4 d6 + 1	9 d12 + 3
5 d8 + 1	10 d12 + 4

Note: The Overseer may adjust this table to suit their table's preferred power curve — raising or lowering the flat modifiers shifts average Talent Bonuses without changing the dice. The table above is the default.

Record your Talent die for each stat on your character sheet.

> Example: Kara has STR 5. Her STR Talent die is d8+1. When she rolls for DT at the start of a turn, she rolls a d8+1. When she rolls for HP at level up using her END 6, she rolls a d8+2.

Step 3: Calculate Core Statistics

With your SPECIAL stats and Talent dice in place, calculate the following six statistics.

Hit Points (HP)

Level 1: Your starting Max HP equals twice your END stat.

Endurance is the measure of how much of a beating you can absorb before the Death Toll begins, and at level one it is the only thing setting your HP.

- END 4: Max HP = 8 - END 5: Max HP = 10 - END 6: Max HP = 12 - END 7: Max HP = 14

Leveling Up: Every time you gain a level, roll your END Talent die and add the result to your Max HP.

Damage Threshold (DT)

At the start of each combat turn, roll your STR Talent die. You then choose whether to keep your current DT value or replace it with the number you just rolled.

When you take damage, subtract it from DT first. Any remaining damage passes through to HP.

Equipment and Perks grant additional DT. These bonuses are added after the STR Talent roll. They are not lost when DT is depleted — they represent passive protection.

> Example: Kara (STR 5, d8+1 Talent) starts her turn. She rolls a d8 and gets 5(4+1). She replaces her DT from last turn (3) with 5. Her leather armor grants +2 DT. Her total DT for this turn is 7.

Carry Weight (CW)

$$> CW = (STR \text{ Stat} \times 15) + (END \text{ Stat} \times 10) + (AGI \text{ Stat} \times 5)$$

Exceeding your CW imposes movement penalties, disadvantage on Agility-based checks, and reduced combat effectiveness. The Overseer determines severity.

$$> \text{Example: Kara has STR 5, END 6, AGI 4.} > CW = (5 \times 15) + (6 \times 10) + (4 \times 5) = 75 + 60 + 20 = 155 \text{ lbs}$$

Morale Points (MP)

Characters begin with 1 MP at level 1 and gain 1 additional MP per level.

MP is spent to activate certain Perk effects. It is restored by rest, achieving major goals, and through specific Perks.

Damage Reduction (DR)

DR is 0 by default. It can only be gained through equipment and Perks.

When damage gets through your DT, DR reduces it further. The order is: Incoming damage → subtract DT → subtract DR → remaining damage to HP.

Sequence (SQ) and Action Points (AP)

$$> SQ = PER \text{ Stat} + AGI \text{ Stat}$$

SQ determines the maximum number of AP you can hold.

At the start of each combat turn, roll your AGI Talent die and gain that many AP. You cannot hold more AP than your SQ. Unspent AP are lost at the end of your turn.

> Example: Kara has PER 5 and AGI 4. SQ = 9.> At the start of her turn, she rolls her AGI Talent (d6+1 at AGI 4) and gets 6. She gains 6 AP.> She moves (2 AP), aims (1 AP), fires her rifle (3 AP), and ends her turn with 0 AP.

Step 4: Choose Your Background

Your background represents where you came from — the life that shaped you before the adventure began. Choose one background from the list below, or work with your Overseer to create a custom one. A background is story first: its boons and banes are narrative, not mechanical. They carry no numbers — they are the hooks an Overseer uses to allow additional benefits and challenges as the journey unfolds. A background never grants Traits or Skills; the two Traits you choose in Step 6 are yours alone, drawn from your aptitudes, not your résumé, and every Skill you begin with comes from Step 5. The only mechanical thing a background provides is its starting equipment.

Each background grants:

- A backstory — who you were and the moment that life stopped being enough
- A narrative boon — a door that life left open. It has no numbers; it is a basis for the Overseer to allow additional benefits when the story calls for them — a reputation that opens

a gate, an eye for salvage that finds the hidden cache, a name that gets a gun past a border.

- A narrative bane — a weight that life left on you. It has no numbers either; it is a basis for the Overseer to levy additional challenges — the checkpoint that knows your name, the settlement that bars you at the gate.

- Starting gear — the background's only mechanical effect. The equipment that life gave you and that you carry into the wastes.

Sample Backgrounds

Scavenger You grew up picking through ruins, knowing what's worth keeping and what's best left buried. You can read a collapsed supermarket the way a doctor reads a patient — what fell, what was taken, what was left because somebody died before they could carry it out.

- Narrative Boon: Scavver's eye. Ruins open themselves to you; the Overseer may grant benefits when you salvage, appraise old-world goods, or spot what others walk past.

- Narrative Bane: Scavver is written on you — the dust, the patchwork gear, the way you price everything. Guards and merchants watch their pockets; the Overseer may complicate your dealings with officials and shopkeepers.

- Gear: Crowbar, reinforced backpack (adds 20 lbs CW), tattered map of the local area, 20 caps

Wasteland Doctor You learned medicine in the field — stitches, splints, and hard choices made by lantern light with the wrong tools and no time to argue.

- Narrative Boon: The healer's name. Sickrooms and trauma tables open to you; the Overseer may grant benefits when the wounded need someone who has done this before.

- Narrative Bane: The ones you lost follow you to every bed. The Overseer may levy challenges when a patient's life is in your hands and the memory of a failure slows your hands.

- Gear: Field surgery kit, 5 doses of stimpaks, worn leather satchel

Gun-Runner You've moved firearms across settlements, under checkpoints, through territory where a weapon is worth more than a life. You know the make and model of everything that shoots within fifty miles.

- Narrative Boon: The connections and the catalog. Buyers, suppliers, and old routes remember you; the Overseer may grant benefits when you deal in arms, identify a weapon, or need a gun past a border.

- Narrative Bane: Every checkpoint has a list with your name on it. The Overseer may levy challenges whenever you cross authority — customs men, registries, settlements that keep records.

- Gear: A well-maintained 9mm pistol, 24 rounds, gun-cleaning kit

BrawlerYou've settled more disputes with your fists than your words. The wasteland taught you that first is the only advantage that matters.

- Narrative Boon: The reputation of someone who finishes what they start. Bars quiet when you walk in; the Overseer may grant benefits when you stand your ground or throw the first punch.

- Narrative Bane: Your first instinct is a fist. The Overseer may levy challenges when a situation calls for patience and your knuckles are already itching.

- Gear: Reinforced knuckle wraps, leather vest (grants +1 DT), flask of rotgut whiskey

HackerThe old world's machines still whisper. You know how to listen — to terminals, locks, and the buried logic that outlived the people who built it.

- Narrative Boon: The machine's ear. Old-world systems open to you; the Overseer may grant benefits when you interface with terminals, electronic locks, or anything with a processor and a grudge.

- Narrative Bane: Machines speak clearer than people do. The Overseer may levy challenges in unfamiliar social company, where small talk is a language you never quite learned.

- Gear: Handheld terminal (battery-powered), data tapes (3), wire spool, multi-tool

Smooth Talker You talk your way past checkpoints, out of ambushes, and into beds. Words are cheaper than bullets and last longer.

- Narrative Boon: The gift. Doors, guards, and grudges fall to conversation; the Overseer may grant benefits when you talk, lie, or read a room.

- Narrative Bane: A reputation like yours gets around. The Overseer may levy challenges when someone has heard your name — and what they heard wasn't flattering.

- Gear: Faded but clean suit coat, forged identification papers, harmonica, 35 caps

Raider Scum You ran with a gang. You've done things you don't talk about. You got out — or you're looking for something the raiders couldn't give you.

- Narrative Boon: The wasteland's lawless corridors know your face. The Overseer may grant benefits when you deal with raiders, gangs, and the criminal underground.

- Narrative Bane: Settlements remember your face too. The Overseer may levy challenges in civilized places — some will bar you at the gate outright.

- Gear: Rusted machete, tattered leather armor (+2 DT), raider insignia (maybe useful, maybe a death sentence)

Survivalist The wilds don't scare you. You've eaten things that would make a deathclaw queasy and slept through storms that would peel a brahmin to bone.

- Narrative Boon: The wild is home. The Overseer may grant benefits when you forage, track, endure weather, or move through country where others are prey.

- Narrative Bane: Walls and crowds wear you thin. The Overseer may levy challenges when you must navigate settlements, customs, and the strange indoors of other people's rules.

- Gear: Hunting knife, water purifier (hand-pump), fire starter kit, bedroll

- > Creating Custom Backgrounds: Players and Overseers are encouraged to invent backgrounds specific to the setting. Keep the structure: a backstory, one narrative boon, one narrative bane, and a handful of thematic starting gear. Boons and banes carry no numbers — they are fuel for the Overseer to reward and challenge the Wanderer through the story. Gear is the background's only mechanical footprint.

Step 5: Determine Your Skills

Your Skills are not bought. No point pool, no cost ladder — every one of the 18 Skills begins at a Skill Level derived from your SPECIAL stats. A Skill's Score is a tenth of its Level with the remainder dropped: Level 14 is Score 1, Level 29 is Score 2.

- > Starting Skill Level = (Governing Stat × 2) + LUK Stat

Each Skill answers to a governing stat — Small Guns answers to Agility, Medicine to Intelligence, Larceny to Perception, and

so on through the list in the Skills chapter. Luck adds itself to every Skill: the fortunate start a step ahead in everything they know.

> Example: Kara has AGI 5, INT 5, and LUK 4. Her Small Guns (governed by AGI) starts at $(5 \times 2) + 4 = \text{Level } 14$ — Score 1. Her Medicine (INT) starts at the same Level 14.

Choosing Tagged Skills

Choose three Tagged Skills — the specialties that define your Wanderer. A Tagged Skill adds 15 Skill Levels on top of the formula, lifting it across Score thresholds before the journey begins. The tag is permanent; it cannot be retrained or traded away.

> Example: Kara tags Small Guns, Sneak, and Medicine. Her Small Guns rises from Level 14 to Level 29 — Score 2, unlocking the second Prepared Slot for a pistol before she has taken a single step. Her untagged skills stay at Level 14. The three tags follow her for the rest of her journey.

Step 6: Choose Starting Traits

Choose two Traits from the list below, or work with your Overseer to create custom ones. No Trait may be taken twice — pick two aptitudes, whether they spring from your past or cut against it.

Traits represent innate aptitudes — things you're naturally good at regardless of training. They are chosen only at character creation and never change afterward. But every gift comes at a cost: each Trait grants a flat bonus (+1 to +5) in a specific domain, paired with a drawback that shapes how your character moves through the world.

Sample Traits

Trait	Bonus	Drawback
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Night Owl	+2 to checks in darkness or low light	-2 to checks in bright light or direct sun
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Iron Gut	+2 to Endurance checks against poison, spoiled food, and alcohol	-2 to Perception checks involving taste or smell
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Silver Tongue	+2 to Speech and Bluff checks involving persuasion	-2 to Speech checks involving intimidation — you charm, you don't threaten
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Steady Hands	+2 to Larceny and Small Guns checks involving fine manipulation	-1 AP when using two-handed weapons
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Sixth Sense	+2 to checks involving detecting hidden threats	-2 to checks involving reading written language
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Tough Hide	+2 to DT checks and Endurance against physical exposure	-1 to all Perception checks
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| Fast Healer | +3 to Medicine checks made to treat yourself |
-1 to Medicine checks made to treat others |

| Eagle Eye | +2 to Perception checks involving distance or
detail | -2 to Endurance checks against eye strain, smoke, and
blinding effects |

| Light Foot | +2 to Sneak and Acrobatics checks | -2 to DT
against area-of-effect attacks |

| Chem Resistant | +3 to Endurance checks against addiction |
-1 to all Intelligence-based checks while under the influence |

A Trait's bonus is flat — never a Talent die — and Trait
bonuses cap at +5 in any single domain.

Custom Traits

When designing a custom Trait with your Overseer, pair every
bonus with an equally limiting drawback. The best Traits are the
ones that make a character more interesting, not just stronger.

Step 7: Choose Your First Perk

At level 1, you gain one Perk. Perks are the heart of
character advancement — special features that define what your
character can do beyond the basic rules.

You may take a Perk from the Perks catalog, or propose a
custom Perk to your Overseer using the bespoke design process.

Your first Perk sets a tone. Choose something that reflects how you want to approach the world — combat, social, exploration, or survival.

> First Perk Examples:> - Gun Nut: You're reliable with firearms. Spend 1 MP to reroll a failed check with Small Guns, Repair, or Energy Weapons — one charge, and the charge comes back when you rest.> - Fast Talk: Words never fail you twice. Spend 1 MP to reroll a failed Speech or Bluff check — one charge, refilled by rest.> - Tough: When the fight gets ugly, you dig in. Spend 1 MP to generate bonus DT.> - Night Vision: The dark is manageable. Reduce darkness penalties.> - Mobile: You're fast on your feet. Gain free movement AP each turn.

Some Perks cost Morale Points (MP) to activate. At Level 1 you hold a single MP, so an MP-hungry first Perk is a sharp but limited tool — one activation before rest refills you. A passive Perk is always on. Both are valid; know which one you are buying.

Step 8: Choose Starting Equipment

Your Background provides a base set of gear. You may also purchase additional equipment with your starting caps.

Starting Caps

Roll your LUK Talent die and multiply by 10. That's your starting cap reserve — spend it on whatever gear you can afford, subject to Overseer approval.

> Example: Kara has LUK 4 (Talent d6). She rolls a 4. She has 40 caps to spend on starting gear beyond her Background equipment.

Your Overseer will provide prices for common goods, weapons, and armor appropriate to the setting.

Arrange Your Loadout

Gear only helps if it is ready. Slot 1 is always open and holds any single weapon or item. Further Prepared Slots unlock as your Skill Scores climb — 2, 4, 6, 8, and 10 in the *type* of item you want to carry there: pistols answer to Small Guns, stimpaks to Medicine, tools to Repair or Science. Anything not in a slot is buried in the pack — fine between fights, one inventory-open too slow in the middle of one. See Prepared Weapons & Items for the full table.

> Example: A Wanderer who tags Small Guns and Medicine starts both at Score 2. Slot 1 takes her sidearm — any weapon qualifies. Slot 2 takes a stimpak, since Medicine 2 clears the medical-supply requirement. A second firearm must wait: Slot 3 needs Small Guns 4.

Step 9: Name and Detail

The numbers are done. Now breathe life into the character.

- Name: What do people call you?
- Age: How old are you? The wasteland ages people fast.

- Appearance: What do others see when they look at you? Scars?
Posture? The way you hold your weapon?

- Mannerism: A habit. A tic. A way of talking. Something that makes you *you*.

- Goal: What do you want? Revenge? Redemption? A quiet place to grow crops? Something you lost before the bombs fell?

- Why are you here? What brought you to this adventure? The Overseer will use this to tie you into the story.

Step 10: Final Review

Before you step into the wasteland, confirm the following:

- [] SPECIAL stats assigned (total between 28-42 recommended)
- [] Talent dice recorded for each stat
- [] HP calculated ($\text{END stat} \times 2$ at level 1)
- [] DT roll procedure understood
- [] Carry Weight calculated
- [] MP recorded (1 at level 1)
- [] SQ and AP procedure understood
- [] Background chosen — backstory and narrative boons and banes recorded
- [] Background starting gear noted
- [] Starting Skill Levels computed for all 18 Skills
($(\text{Governing Stat} \times 2) + \text{LUK Stat}$)
- [] Three Tagged Skills chosen (+15 Skill Levels each)

- [] Two Traits chosen (Step 6)
 - [] First Perk selected
 - [] Additional purchases from starting caps recorded
 - [] Loadout arranged — gear placed in Prepared Slots (Slot 1 is always open; more unlock with Skill Scores — see Prepared Weapons & Items)
 - [] Name, appearance, and goal written
- You're ready. The wasteland is waiting.
-

Quick-Reference: Level 1 Character Sheet Template

Name: ___ *Level: 1* Background: ___ XP: 0

SPECIAL Stats STR: (Talent:) CHA: (Talent:) PER: (Talent:) INT: (Talent:) END: (Talent:) AGI: (Talent:) LUK: (Talent:)

Core Stats

HP: __/_ DT: __ (*rolled each turn*)

CW: _ lbs MP: 1 DR: SQ: (PER + AGI) AP: __ (ROLL AGI Talent each turn, max = SQ)

Skills (Level / Score)

Athletics: __/_

Barter: __/_

Big Guns: __/_ Acrobatics: __/_

Bluff: __/_

Energy Weapons: __/_ Explosives: __/_

Larceny: __/_

Medicine: __/_Melee Weapons: __/_

Poise: __/_

Repair: __/_Science: __/_

Small Guns: __/_

Sneak: __/_Speech: __/_

Survival: __/_

Unarmed: __/_

Tagged Skills

1: _

2: _

3: _

Traits (each: bonus + drawback)

1: _

2: _

Perks1. [First Perk]

Gear & Caps_____Caps: ___

Prepared SlotsSlot 1 (any): __Slot 2 (Score 2+): __Slot 3

(Score 4+): __Slot 4 (Score 6+): __Slot 5 (Score 8+): __Slot 6

(Score 10+): __

Chapter 3: Combat

Chapter 3: Combat

The wasteland settles arguments with violence. When words fail and guns come up, the rules of combat take over. This chapter covers how fights work — from the first shot to the last body hitting the dirt.

The Combat Loop

Combat unfolds in rounds. Each round, every participant gets a turn. A turn is divided into three phases:

1. Beginning Phase — Resolve upkeep: the Death Toll Check if in the Toll, DT recovery, AP generation, start-of-turn effects
2. Action Phase — Spend AP on movement, attacks, items, and abilities
3. Ending Phase — Carry over unspent AP, resolve end-of-turn effects

The round ends when every participant has taken their turn. Then a new round begins.

Step 1: Initiative

Combat begins when the Overseer calls for initiative. Two methods determine turn order.

Rolling for Sequence

Every participant rolls for Sequence. The result determines their place in the turn order for the entire encounter, even if the nature of the encounter changes.

- Attacker: Roll a d20 + your AGI Talent die- Defender: Roll a d20 + your PER Talent die

List all results from highest to lowest. This is the initiative order.

Setting the Sequence

Instead of rolling, the Overseer may simply take every participant's Sequence Score (PER Stat + AGI Stat) and list them from highest to lowest.

Ties

If two entities have the same Sequence result:

1. Compare the relevant stat source — PER for defenders, AGI for attackers.
2. If still tied, compare the other stat (AGI for defenders, PER for attackers).
3. If still tied and the comparison is between an attacker and a defender, the attacker goes first.
4. If both are attackers or both are defenders, both parties roll a d100 — higher result goes first.

Adjusting Initiative

Players may reduce their Wanderer's position in the initiative order immediately before their turn starts — even into negative numbers. The Overseer may do the same for NPCs. No entity may

increase their position in the initiative order through this rule.

Step 2: The Turn

Beginning Phase

The beginning phase opens every turn. All upkeep happens here — the bookkeeping that keeps a fight honest — resolved in order before any AP is spent. At the start of combat, every participant runs through this sequence once, before the first turn begins, so that everyone enters the fight with DT set and AP pooled.

1. Death Toll Check: If your HP is below 0, you are in the Death Toll. Make your Death Toll Check now, before anything else (see Step 4). A failed check may end your turn before it begins.
2. Recover Damage Threshold (DT): Roll your STR Talent die and add any equipment bonuses (armor, Perks, effects). Set your DT to that total for the round ahead. Damage Threshold lost since your last turn is not repaired — it is replaced by this fresh roll.
3. Generate Action Points (AP): Roll your AGI Talent die. Add the result to your AP pool. Your AP pool may never exceed your Sequence Score (PER Stat + AGI Stat). If the roll would push you over your maximum, the excess AP is lost.
4. Resolve start-of-turn effects: Resolve any "at the start of your turn" effects — poison ticks, regeneration, ongoing damage, or Perk triggers. The order of resolution is determined by the Overseer.

Action Phase

The action phase is where things happen. You spend AP from your pool to perform actions. You may spend AP in any order and may end your action phase at any time.

Movement: Moving costs 1 AP per 5 feet traveled. This applies to any form of locomotion — walking, running, climbing, swimming, crawling. Difficult terrain may increase the cost at the Overseer's discretion.

Weapons and Items: The AP cost to draw, reload, fire, or use a weapon or item is listed on its index card. As a general rule:

- Drawing a weapon or item: 1 AP-
- Firing or attacking: listed AP cost (typically 2-4 AP)-
- Reloading: listed AP cost (typically 1-3 AP)-
- Using a consumable (stimpak, chem, grenade): 2 AP-

Every additional attack after the first in a single turn costs an additional 1 AP on top of the weapon's base cost.

Melee Attacks and Unarmed Strikes: Melee weapons list their base AP cost on their index card — light blades and short weapons typically cost 2 AP, heavy weapons cost 3 AP. Unarmed strikes cost 1 AP at base. Every additional Unarmed strike after the first in the same turn costs 1 more AP than the previous strike — the first strike costs 1 AP, the second costs 2 AP, the third costs 3 AP, and so on. This escalating cost replaces the standard "+1 per extra attack" rule for Unarmed strikes only.

Skill and Ability Checks: The AP cost for a skill check or ability use depends on its complexity, not the difficulty of the task.

Complexity	Examples	AP Cost	
---	---	---	
Quick	Glancing at a room, recalling basic knowledge, shouting a warning	1 AP	
Standard	Picking a lock, disarming a trap, patching a wound, identifying a creature	2 AP	
Extended	Hacking a terminal, searching a room thoroughly, negotiating a tense standoff	4 AP	
Lengthy	Field surgery, disassembling a complex device, interrogating a prisoner	6+ AP (Overseer's call)	

Outside of combat or active pressure, skill checks cost no AP — time spent is the only cost.

Other Actions: The Overseer adjudicates any action not covered here. A general guideline: simple actions cost 1 AP, complex actions cost 2-4 AP, and actions that would take significant time or focus cost 5+ AP.

Ending Phase

You enter the ending phase when you have no AP remaining or choose to end your turn early.

1. Remaining AP: Any unspent AP stays in your AP pool and carries over to your next turn. Your AP pool is still capped by

your Sequence Score — if your next turn's AP generation would push you over the cap, the excess is lost.2. End-of-turn effects: Resolve any "at the end of your turn" effects.

Your turn ends. The next entity in the initiative order begins their turn.

Step 3: Attacking and Defending

Attacks fall into two categories — ranged and melee — each resolved differently.

Ranged Attacks

When you attack at range, you make a skill check using the relevant weapon skill:

- Small Guns for pistols, rifles, submachine guns-
- Big Guns for heavy weapons-
- Energy Weapons for laser and plasma firearms-
- Explosives for thrown grenades and launched explosives

The formula is the standard resolution:

$$> ((d20 \times \text{Skill Score}) + \text{Talent Bonus} + \text{Luck Bonus} + \text{Perk Bonus}) \div 20 = \text{Effort}$$

The result is compared to the weapon's Range DC — a value listed on the weapon's index card that accounts for distance, accuracy, and weapon condition. Each weapon card specifies the Range DC for its effective distance bands.

- $\text{Effort} \geq \text{Range DC}$: Hit. Roll damage.
- $\text{Effort} < \text{Range DC}$: Miss. The shot goes wide.

Cover

Cover provides a bonus to the target's effective defense against ranged attacks. The attacker adds the cover bonus to the weapon's Range DC before comparing Effort:

- Light cover (low wall, crate, overturned table): +1 to DC-
- Medium cover (stone wall, reinforced barrier, thick tree): +2 to DC-
- Heavy cover (bunker wall, concrete fortification, vehicle hull): +4 to DC

Cover can be destroyed. The Overseer determines the DT and HP of cover objects.

Melee Attacks

Melee combat is a clash of skill, reach, and nerve. When you attack in melee, both participants roll — the attacker and the defender.

The attacker rolls their relevant skill (Melee Weapons for blades, clubs, spears, axes; Unarmed for fists, kicks, headbutts, and dirty fighting). The defender rolls their own relevant skill — their held melee weapon skill if armed, or Unarmed if not.

Both use the standard resolution formula:

$$> ((d20 \times \text{Skill Score}) + \text{Talent Bonus} + \text{Luck Bonus} + \text{Perk Bonus}) \div 20 = \text{Effort}$$

Compare the two Effort results:

- Attacker's Effort > Defender's Effort: The attack lands. Roll damage normally.

- Defender's Effort $\geq$ Attacker's Effort but $<$ Attacker's Effort + 1: The attack is blocked, parried, or dodged. No damage. No further effect.

- Defender's Effort $\geq$ Attacker's Effort + 1: The defender turns the attacker's momentum against them. If the defender has enough AP remaining to make a melee attack (see weapon AP costs), they may immediately launch a counterattack — a single attack that follows all melee rules, with the defender becoming the attacker and vice versa. A counterattack cannot itself be countered. If the defender does not have the AP for a counterattack, the attack is simply negated.

Equipment matters in melee. A weapon's reach, weight, and condition affect the fight:

- Reach advantage: If the attacker's weapon has longer reach than the defender's (e.g., spear vs. knife), the attacker gains +1 to their contested roll. If reach is equal or the defender has longer reach, no bonus applies.

- Shields: A defender wielding a shield gains a flat +1 to their contested roll. The shield's DT is added to the defender's DT for the purposes of any damage that gets through.

- Damaged weapons: A weapon below half condition imposes a -1 penalty to the contested roll. A broken weapon cannot be used in melee at all.

Damage

When an attack hits, the attacker rolls the weapon's damage dice plus any Skill Scaling die (below). Any Condition penalty (below) is then applied to the total. The result is the incoming damage value — the number the target's DT, DR, and HP must absorb.

The target applies damage in this order:

1. Damage Threshold (DT): Subtract incoming damage from the target's DT. Any remaining damage carries over. 2. Damage Reduction (DR): Subtract the target's DR from the remaining damage. 3. Hit Points (HP): The final value is subtracted from the target's HP.

Skill Scaling: Trained Hands Hit Harder

A weapon's damage dice describe what it can do. Skill decides how much of that potential a Wanderer draws out. When an attack hits, roll a bonus damage die determined by your Skill Score in the skill governing the weapon and add it to the weapon's dice; the combined total is the damage before any Condition penalty or DT applies.

Skill Score	Bonus Damage Die
1-2	—
3-4	+1d4
5-6	+1d6
7-8	+1d8

| 9-10 | +1d10 |

> Example: Kara (Small Guns Score 3) hits with her 10mm pistol. She rolls the pistol's 2d6 and adds her +1d4 skill die. At Score 1-2, the pistol rolls its own 2d6 and nothing more.

Unarmed strikes scale the same way through the Unarmed skill — and a fist never jams, dulls, or wears out. Unarmed damage never suffers a Condition penalty.

Condition: Weapons Wear

Every weapon carries a Condition score, and every shot, swing, or burst wears it down. A weapon's card states how fast it degrades and what a degraded weapon costs. The general rule:

- Each full 10 points of Condition lost applies the penalty printed on the card — typically 1-tenths less damage.
- The penalty is resolved with the tenths shortcut (see Tenths): drop the ones place of the rolled damage total, multiply it by the penalty's tenths value, and subtract the result. Incoming damage is reduced before DT applies. The penalty rounds down and never up; a total under 10 sheds nothing unless the Overseer rules a minimum penalty of 1.
- A weapon at Condition 0 is inoperable — broken until repaired with a repair kit or the Repair skill between fights.
- Melee weapons degrade with use, parries, and blocks at the Overseer's call — a blade below half Condition also takes the -1

to contested rolls described under Melee Attacks. Unarmed strikes never degrade.

> Example: Kara's 10mm sits at Condition 70/100 — 3 full tens lost. Its card applies a 1-tenths penalty per 10 lost, three times over. She rolls 2d6 + 1d4 and totals 11. Dropping the ones place leaves 1; $1 \times 3 = 3$; incoming damage is $11 - 3 = 8$.

Condition is a resource to manage, not a tax to ignore. A Wanderer who cleans her weapon, repairs it, and chooses her shots keeps it hitting at full strength. One who runs it to rust finds out why the wastes respect a gun that works.

Critical Hits

- Ranged: If the attack Effort exceeds the weapon's Range DC by 3 or more, the attack is a critical hit. Deal maximum damage — every die in the attack, including any Skill Scaling die, rolls its highest value. The weapon's Condition penalty, if any, still applies. The result is incoming damage before DT and DR.

- Melee: If the attacker's Effort exceeds the defender's Effort by 3 or more, the attack is a critical hit. Same effect — maximum damage before DT and DR.

Called Shots

An attacker may declare a called shot before rolling. This represents aiming for a specific vulnerable area at the cost of accuracy:

- Ranged called shot: +2 to the weapon's Range DC.

- Melee called shot: +2 to the attacker's contested roll (the defender's roll is unaffected, making it harder to win decisively).

On a hit, the attacker applies a specific effect based on the targeted location:

- Head: +50% damage (rounded down)
- Arm: Target drops an item or takes -2 on weapon skill checks for 1d4 turns
- Leg: Target's movement speed halved for 1d4 turns
- Torso: Standard damage, no bonus effect

The Overseer may adjudicate additional called shot effects.

Step 4: Damage and Dying

Hit Points and the Death Toll

HP measures a character's ability to keep fighting. Damage reduces HP; healing restores it. When damage drops a Wanderer's HP below 0, they do not fall unconscious and they do not die. Instead they enter the Death Toll — a staggered, bloody refusal to go down. Death is not a switch that flips at zero. It is a debt that has to be collected.

A Wanderer in the Death Toll remains conscious and may act, fight, and move normally, with one exception: while HP is below 0, every AP cost is doubled — the base cost is paid twice, following the additive doubling rule (see Doubling AP Costs).

Movement, attacks, reloads, drawing weapons, using items, skill checks: all of it costs twice as much. The body is failing under the strain, and every action is paid for in blood.

Death Toll Checks

While in the Death Toll, the Wanderer makes a Death Toll Check at the very start of each of their turns — in the Beginning Phase, before DT is recovered and before AP is generated. If the check is failed, the turn may end before it truly begins.

A Death Toll Check uses only the END Talent die. No d20, no Skill Score, no Luck bonus, no Perk modifiers. Just the body's own stubbornness against a climbing DC.

- The first check of a Toll is made against DC 1.
- Success: the Wanderer's turn proceeds normally. The DC increases by 1 for the next check — the ratchet. Every successful check buys another turn of action, and every turn in the Toll makes the next check harder.
- Failure: the Wanderer gains a Death Token and the DC resets to 1. The Wanderer then chooses whether to push through the turn or spend it on a retry (below).

Death Tokens

Death Tokens are the Toll's tally. Every failed Death Toll Check grants one. Track them on the character sheet.

When a Wanderer's Death Tokens reach a number equal to their level, they die. The tally is checked the moment a token is

gained — the failed check that brings the count to your level is the check that kills you. At Level 1, a single failed check is fatal. The wastes do not grade on a curve.

Push Through or Retry

A failed Death Toll Check does not end the turn by itself. The Wanderer chooses one of two paths:

- Push through. The turn proceeds as normal — doubled AP costs and all — with the Death Token banked and the DC reset to 1 for the next check.
- Skip the turn and retry. The Wanderer burns the remainder of the turn to attempt the check again, immediately. Succeed or fail, their turn ends immediately. One retry per turn.

Stabilize

While bleeding out, at the start of their turn, wanderers can perform a Poise check. The DC is set by how many tenths the wanderer's negative HP is of their MaxHP.

If the Poise Check succeeds then the wanderer exits their Death Toll and becomes Stabilized. Wanderers can not generate or use AP while Stabilized, but can start a short or long rest, allowing them to regain HP. Once their HP is above 0 they are no longer Stabilized or Bleeding Out.

If the Poise Check fails, they perform a Death Toll Check and then end their turn.

Wanderers can also stabilize others and themselves with a Medicine Check. Medicine Check to Stabilize yourself are 1DC higher.

If a Stabilized wanderer does anything that would use AP, they lose the Stabilized condition and are Bleeding Out again.

Death

A Wanderer dies when any of the following is true:

- HP reaches -Max HP. When a Wanderer's negative HP equals the absolute value of their Max HP — HP equal to or below -(Max HP) — death is immediate and outright. A Wanderer with Max HP 30 dies at -30. The death line can be crossed in a single catastrophic blow or a long bleed of small wounds; below 0, the Toll only ends one way if the body is dragged that far down.

- Death Tokens equal level. The tally reaches a number equal to the Wanderer's level. Death comes at the moment of the failed check that completes the count.

- The Overseer rules it. The Overseer may always determine that the narrative demands death.

Healing and Leaving the Toll

Natural rest restores HP:

- Short rest (30 minutes): Restore HP equal to your END Talent die + your END Stat- Long rest (6 hours): Restore all HP

Medical items restore HP immediately:

- Stimpak: Restores 15-25 HP (2d10+5)- Super Stimpak: Restores 30-50 HP (3d12+10), but deals 5 HP damage after 1 hour- Doctor's Bag: Used with a Medicine check (DC 3) to restore 30 HP

Any healing that raises HP to 0 or above ends the Death Toll: Death Toll Checks stop, and AP costs return to normal.

Step 5: Status Effects

The wastes bite in ways beyond bullets. Whenever a creature suffers a lasting impairment — venom, fire, a dazing blow, an Overseer's ruling — it is expressed as a status effect. An effect states its duration, typically 1d4 turns, and when it resolves: start-of-turn effects tick during the Beginning Phase, end-of-turn effects during the Ending Phase. Repeated applications of the same effect do not stack; only the strongest applies. A Medicine check (DC 3), a fitting Perk, or an item may end an effect early at the Overseer's discretion.

- Bleeding — At the start of your turn, lose 1 HP. Binding the wound with a successful Medicine check (DC 3) or Survival check (DC 2), or receiving any healing item, stops the bleeding.

- Poisoned — At the start of your turn, take the poison's listed damage (typically 1d4). Poison damage bypasses DT and DR — it is already inside you. The Chem Resistant Trait and similar effects ease or end it per their text.

- Burning — At the start of your turn, take the listed fire damage (typically 1d4). Burning bypasses DT but not DR. Spending

2 AP to drop and roll, or having an ally spend 1 AP to smother the flames, ends the effect.

- Dazed — You lose the stated AP from your next Beginning Phase before you can spend them: a daze that costs 2 AP leaves a Wanderer who rolled 5 with 3. The Pain Train Perk inflicts this.

- Blinded — Attacks and checks that require sight suffer -2 to Effort, and targeting beyond point-blank range is impossible. Typically lasts 1d4 turns.

- Prone — Ranged attacks against you gain +1 to their Range DC; melee attackers gain +1 to their contested roll against you. Standing costs 2 AP.

The Overseer sets and adjusts durations freely. These are tools, not a cage — the wasteland's hazards should feel like hazards, not paperwork.

Step 6: Special Combat Situations

Surprise

When one side attacks from hiding or ambush, the Overseer declares a surprise round. Surprised entities cannot act on their first turn. They do not generate AP and cannot take actions. After the surprise round, normal initiative begins.

Grappling

To initiate a grapple, make a contested Unarmed check against the target's Unarmed or Athletics check (target's choice). Both participants roll the standard resolution formula. If the attacker's Effort exceeds the defender's, both entities are grappled — they cannot move and take -2 to all attack rolls against targets other than each other. If the defender wins or ties, the grapple is avoided.

A grappled entity may attempt to break free on their turn by making a contested Athletics check against the grappler's Athletics. Success ends the grapple.

Area of Effect

Weapons and effects that cover an area (grenades, explosives, certain chems) affect all entities within the blast radius. The attacker makes a single ranged attack roll (using Explosives or the relevant skill) against the weapon's Range DC for the distance thrown or launched. Each entity in the blast radius compares the same Effort result against the Range DC — entities at the blast edge may receive partial cover (+1 to DC) at the Overseer's discretion. A miss means the explosive deviates; the Overseer determines the new impact point using the scatter rules on the weapon card.

Automatic Fire

- Burst (3 rounds): +1 to the attack roll. Consumes 3 rounds of ammunition.

- Full auto (6+ rounds): +2 to the attack roll. Consumes 6 rounds of ammunition. May target up to three adjacent entities, making a single attack roll against each.

Quick Reference: Combat Actions and AP Costs

Action	AP Cost
---	---
Move 5 feet	1
Draw/holster weapon	1
Fire ranged weapon (base)	See weapon card (1-4 AP)
Melee weapon attack (base)	See weapon card (1-3 AP)
Unarmed strike (first per turn)	1
Unarmed strike (second per turn)	2
Unarmed strike (third per turn)	3
Each subsequent Unarmed strike	+1 over previous
Additional attack (same turn, non-Unarmed)	+1 per extra attack
Reload	See weapon card (1-3 AP)
Use item (stimpak, chem, grenade)	2
Skill/ability check	See Complexity table
Stand from prone	2
Take cover	1
Called shot penalty	+2 to DC or contested roll

Quick Reference: Damage Application Order

1. Incoming damage reduces DT2. Remaining damage reduced by DR3. Final damage applied to HP

Quick Reference: The Death Toll

Trigger	HP drops below 0
--- ---	
Penalty	Every AP cost doubled
Death Toll Check	Start of each turn, before DT and AP — roll the END Talent die only
First DC	1
Success	Turn proceeds; DC increases by 1 for the next check
Failure	Gain 1 Death Token; DC resets to 1
After a failure	Push through the turn, or skip the turn to retry at DC 1 (once per turn)
Death — wounds	HP reaches -Max HP
Death — tokens	Death Tokens equal to your level
Stabilize	Medicine check (DC 3), Standard action
Leaving the Toll	Heal HP to 0 or above

Quick Reference: Difficulty Classes

DC	Difficulty
--- ---	
0	Very Easy (no roll needed)
1	Easy

2 Normal
3 Hard
4 Very Hard
5 Incredibly Hard
6 Extremely Hard
7 Nearly Impossible
8 Impossible
9+ Beyond Impossible

Quick Reference: Skill Check Complexity

Complexity AP Cost
--- ---
Quick 1 AP
Standard 2 AP
Extended 4 AP
Lengthy 6+ AP

Chapter 4: Advancement & Experience

Chapter 4: Advancement & Experience

The wasteland doesn't keep score. The Overseer does.

Experience Points (XP) measure what a Wanderer has learned, survived, and changed. As XP accumulates, characters gain levels — and each new level is a promise kept: more Hit Points, deeper reserves of Morale, fresh Skill Points to invest in what they know, and a new Perk that bends the rules of the world a little further in their favor.

Earning XP

The Overseer awards XP when the party overcomes meaningful challenges. There is no fixed award schedule — the Overseer judges each session and rewards what made it matter. The categories below are guidelines, not a ledger.

Category Examples	
--- ---	
Combat	Defeating enemies, driving them off, surviving an ambush
Quests	Completing jobs, missions, and personal goals
Discoveries	Finding new locations, uncovering old-world lore, mapping the unknown

| Social victories | Talking past a checkpoint, brokering peace, winning a faction's trust |

| Creative solutions | Solving a problem without combat, turning an enemy into an ally, improvising a clever plan |

A practical rule of thumb: if the table will retell the moment later, it earned XP.

The Advancement Table

The table below lists the total XP needed to reach each level. The values are cumulative — a character who has earned 300 XP reaches Level 2, and 900 XP reaches Level 3.

| Level | XP Points Needed |

|---|---|

1	0	11	85,000	21	410,000
2	300	12	100,000	22	470,000
3	900	13	120,000	23	540,000
4	2,700	14	140,000	24	620,000
5	6,500	15	165,000	25	710,000
6	14,000	16	195,000	26	810,000
7	23,000	17	225,000	27	950,000
8	34,000	18	265,000	28	1,200,000
9	48,000	19	305,000	29	1,500,000
10	64,000	20	355,000	30	1,800,000

Leveling Up

When a character's total XP meets or exceeds the requirement for the next level, they advance immediately — or at the next natural pause in the action, at the Overseer's discretion. Each new level grants four benefits:

1. Hit Points: Roll your END Talent die and add the result to your Max HP.

2. Skill Points: Gain 10 Skill Points. Invest them immediately or save them — each point raises one Skill Level by 1, and every 10 Levels raises the Skill Score by 1 (see the Skills chapter).

Alternate: Select 2 skills(or 3 tagged skills), roll the skills talent die and add that to the skill level.

3. Morale Points: Gain +1 MP.

4. A New Perk: Choose one new Perk using the bespoke design process. The player proposes a concept; the Overseer approves, modifies, or negotiates until both agree.

The first Perk is chosen at Level 1 during Character Creation Step 7. Every level after that, the choice is made when the level is gained.

> Example: Kara (Level 3, END 6, d8+2 Talent) crosses 2,700 total XP and advances to Level 4. She rolls her END Talent die, gets a 7, and adds 7 to her Max HP. She gains 10 Skill Points and spends them all on Small Guns, raising it from Level 29 to Level 39 — Skill Score 3. Her MP rises from 3 to 4. She proposes a new Perk — *Cheap Shot*: once per combat, she may spend 1 MP to make

an Unarmed strike ignore DT. The Overseer approves. Level 4 is done.

Beyond Level 30

Level 30 is a milestone, not a ceiling. If the Overseer allows continued advancement, every level beyond 30 requires a flat 300,000 XP. The level-up benefits remain the same: roll END Talent into Max HP, gain 10 Skill Points, gain +1 MP, and choose a new Perk.

Quick Reference: Level-Up Checklist

- ☐ Total XP meets the next level's requirement
- ☐ Roll END Talent die, add the result to Max HP
- ☐ Gain 10 Skill Points and invest them in Skill Levels
- ☐ Gain +1 MP
- ☐ Choose a new Perk
- ☐ Update the character sheet

Prepared Weapons & Items

Prepared Weapons & Items

A Wanderer can haul a pack full of gear across the wastes. But in a firefight, only what's ready matters. Prepared Slots represent the items within easy reach — the pistol on your hip, the stimpak clipped to your belt, the knife in your boot. Anything not in a prepared slot is buried in the pack, and reaching it takes time.

The Rule in Brief

- Only prepared items can be used in combat or any situation where AP is being spent. If it isn't in a slot, it isn't ready.
- Every Wanderer has one prepared slot — Slot 1 — which accepts any weapon or item of any kind, no skill required.
- Additional slots unlock as skill scores rise. Each slot beyond the first demands a Skill Score in the *type* of item you want to place there.
- Preparing an item means opening your inventory and moving the item into a slot. Opening your inventory costs 1 AP. Outside of combat or pressure, preparing items is free.

Prepared Slots

Slot Requirement to Equip
--- ---

1	Always unlocked — any weapon or item	
2	Skill Score 2+ in the item's type	
3	Skill Score 4+ in the item's type	
4	Skill Score 6+ in the item's type	
5	Skill Score 8+ in the item's type	
6	Skill Score 10+ in the item's type	

The requirement is checked against the item you want to equip — not the slot itself. Slots are not assigned to skills. A slot unlocked through one skill type can hold an item of any type whose own requirement is met. A Wanderer with Small Guns 4 and Medicine 8 can fill Slot 2 with a pistol, Slot 3 with a rifle, and Slots 4 and 5 with medical supplies.

Item Types and Governing Skills

Every item belongs to a type, and every type answers to a Skill. That Skill decides which slots the item can occupy. The Overseer settles edge cases.

Item Type	Governing Skill	
--- ---		
Pistols, revolvers, SMGs, rifles	Small Guns	
Heavy weapons (miniguns, rocket launchers, flamethrowers)		
Big Guns		
Laser and plasma weapons	Energy Weapons	
Blades, clubs, spears, axes	Melee Weapons	
Grenades and thrown explosives	Explosives	

Stimpaks, chems, medical supplies	Medicine
Tools, electronics, lockpicks	Repair or Science
Survival gear, food, water	Survival
Anything not listed	Overseer's call

> Example: Kara (Small Guns 4, Medicine 2, Melee Weapons 1) builds her loadout.>> Slot 1 holds her 9mm pistol — no requirement. Slot 2 can take another Small Guns weapon (she has 4) or a medical item (she has 2 in Medicine). She clips a stimpak there. Slot 3 can take another Small Guns weapon — 4 meets the threshold — but not a med item or a blade: Medicine 2 and Melee Weapons 1 both fall short. She adds a spare pistol. Slots 4 through 6 stay empty until her skills climb.

Using Prepared Items

- Only prepared items can be used during the action phase or in any AP-spending situation. If it isn't in a slot, it might as well be at the bottom of the pack.

- Drawing a prepared weapon or item costs its normal draw cost — typically 1 AP.

- Using a prepared consumable costs its normal use cost — typically 2 AP.

- Opening your inventory costs 1 AP. While the inventory is open, you may move items between your carried gear and your prepared slots, or rearrange items between slots. Moving items

into a slot costs no extra AP — the 1 AP is the cost of digging through the pack, not the shuffling.

- Preparing items outside combat is free. Only under pressure does the 1 AP cost apply.

> Example: Mid-fight, Kara decides she wants her rifle. It's in her pack, not a prepared slot. She spends 1 AP to open her inventory, moves the rifle into Slot 2 — vacated by the stimpak she used last turn — then spends 1 AP to draw it. Two AP before she can fire. Next turn, she wishes she'd prepared it earlier.

What Doesn't Need a Slot

- Worn armor and clothing are always ready. No slot required.
- Ammunition is carried separately and loaded normally.

Magazines, cells, and shells never occupy prepared slots.

- Unarmed combat needs no item.
- Stacks of identical consumables (three stimpaks, a bundle of grenades) count as a single prepared item and occupy one slot.

Quick Reference

Action	Cost
---	---
Prepare or rearrange items (out of combat)	Free
Open inventory (in combat)	1 AP
Draw a prepared weapon or item	1 AP
Use a prepared consumable	2 AP

Chapter 5: The Overseer's Screen

Chapter 5: The Overseer's Screen

Every other chapter in this book is addressed to the Wanderer. This one is addressed to you.

The Overseer is not a referee and not an opponent. The Overseer is the world — its weather, its people, its grudges, its clock. The rules in the preceding chapters describe the physics of that world; they do not describe what happens in it. A settlement does not rise out of a Threat Budget. A dying man's last words are not in a stat block. Somebody has to sit behind the screen and decide that the dust storm arrives on the third day, that the shopkeeper is lying about the rifle, and that the Wanderer who walked away from the burning farmhouse did not walk away clean. That is the job. Everything below is craft.

What the Job Actually Is

Three things, in order of importance.

Set the stage. You describe the world with enough specificity that the players can see it and enough restraint that they can still move in it. The wasteland is not a backdrop; it is a participant. The radiation pocket, the collapsing overpass, the vending machine that still hums two hundred years after the last

customer — these are not decoration, they are the terms of the problem.

Adjudicate honestly. When a player declares an action, you decide whether it needs a roll, what it rolls against, and what the result means. You do this in front of everyone, with the dice where everyone can see them, and you let the number stand. A Wanderer who fails the check to pick the lock fails it. The alternative — quietly shaving the DC because the story would be smoother — is the fastest way to make every success in the campaign feel like a gift rather than a victory.

Keep the clock moving. Sessions die in neutral. A table where nothing has changed in twenty minutes is a table where phones come out. Your job is not to fill the silence; it is to make sure something is always approaching — a deadline, a rival, a storm, a debt coming due. Pressure is the engine. You do not need to know what the pressure will produce. You only need to keep it on.

The Table Contract

Before the first session, say these things out loud. They are not rules; they are the agreement that makes the rules usable.

The dice fall where they fall. You will not fudge a roll to save a Wanderer, and you will not fudge one to kill them. Both are a betrayal of the same trust. If the party's plan works, it works. If it fails catastrophically, it fails catastrophically, and the story continues from wherever the rubble settles.

Player agency is not negotiable. You control everything except the Wanderers. You do not decide what they try, what they believe, or what they choose when the choice is ugly. You may stack the world against them until the walls creak — that is the job. You may never take the wheel.

You are the weather, not the antagonist. Adversaries want to win, but you do not. When the raider captain outflanks the party, you are pleased the *encounter* worked, not that the *players* lost. If you notice yourself rooting against the table, you have drifted off the job.

Say yes, or roll. Two ways to resolve any declared action. If it is possible, unopposed, and uninteresting — say yes and move on. If it is possible and the outcome matters — call for the roll. "No" is reserved for the genuinely impossible, and even then it should come with the shape of what *would* work.

Rulings over rules. The book cannot anticipate the player who fills a bathtub with Nuka-Cola and rolls it down a staircase. When the rules are silent, make a ruling — one DC, one consequence, move on. Write it down if it will recur. Never stop the game for more than a minute to settle a question the table can settle in ten seconds.

When to Call for a Roll

The most common Overseer error is not a wrong DC. It is rolling too often.

Roll when both outcomes are interesting. If success opens one door and failure opens a different door, roll. If failure means the story stops — the party cannot find the entrance, cannot climb the wall, cannot learn the name — do not roll. Hand them the entrance, the wall, the name, and make the roll about what it costs.

Never roll to gate the plot. A roll should shape the route, not decide whether there is one. The bunker door is findable. The question is whether the Wanderers find it before the raiders do, and what they leave behind on the way.

Do not roll for routine competence. A Wanderer with Repair 6 does not roll to clean a pistol. A Wanderer with Survival 8 does not roll to build a fire in calm weather. Rolling for things a specialist cannot plausibly fail is not tension; it is theatre, and it cheapens the real checks.

Roll in the open. Every roll that matters happens where the table can see it. You may roll adversary perception and other hidden checks behind the screen — that is what the screen is for — but any check that determines a Wanderer's fate is public. A player who watches the die land knows the world is honest. That knowledge is worth more than any dramatic reveal.

Very Easy means no roll. The DC ladder starts at 0 for a reason. If a task is genuinely trivial for this character, it is simply done. Save the dice for the moments the dice can hurt.

Setting the DC

The DC ladder is short and it is not linear in practice. Here is the calibration that keeps it honest.

The core resolution formula multiplies a d20 by the Skill Score, so a Skill Score's reliable ceiling sits at roughly half its value. A Score 2 Wanderer beats DC 1 most of the time. A Score 4 Wanderer beats DC 2. A Score 6 beats DC 3. A Score 8 beats DC 4. The pattern is clean enough to hang a rule on:

> A fair check is set at half the Score you intend to test.

| Wanderer's Skill Score | Gifts them a check at DC | Fair
fight at DC | A wall at DC |

| --- | --- | --- | --- |

| 1 | 0 (no roll) | 1 | 2+ |

| 2 | 1 | 1 | 2+ |

| 3-4 | 1 | 2 | 3+ |

| 5-6 | 2 | 3 | 4+ |

| 7-8 | 3 | 4 | 5+ |

| 9-10 | 4 | 5 | 6+ |

A few consequences worth internalizing.

A Score 1 Wanderer cannot succeed at DC 2. Not "rarely" — cannot. The maximum Effort a Skill Score 1 can produce, with a perfect d20 and a generous Talent bonus, falls short of 2. If you set a Normal-difficulty check in front of a character with no training in the relevant skill, you have set a check that has no possible success. Decide that deliberately, or move the DC.

Difficulty ranks are more expensive than they look. Each step up the ladder costs a specialist roughly fifteen to twenty percent of their success chance. DC 3 is a hard check for a Score 4 Wanderer and a coin flip for a Score 6. When a scene feels too easy, raise the DC by one — not by three.

Set the DC before the roll, and say it out loud. Announcing "that's a Hard check, DC 3" turns a number into a decision. The player now knows exactly what their character is attempting, and the result feels earned in both directions. It also prevents the most corrosive habit in the hobby — the DC that quietly moves to match the die.

Modify the DC, not the roll. Traits, cover, darkness, called shots, damaged weapons — all of these adjust the target number, not the Effort. Keep the arithmetic on one side of the comparison so the table can track it.

Reading the Effort Ranks

The Effort ranks are your narration prompt. They are not a second success system; they are a volume knob.

$\text{Effort} \geq \text{DC}$ — success. The action works as intended. Narrate it plainly and completely. Do not hedge a clean success with a complication the player did not ask for; that is a failure wearing a success's clothes.

$\text{Effort} \geq \text{DC} + 1$ — success by one rank. The action works, and something small comes with it. The lock opens and the pick does

not break. The trail holds and the Wanderer notices the boot prints doubling back. This is your chance to reward competence with information — a detail that matters later.

Effort $\geq$ DC + 2 — success by two ranks. A clear excess. The lock opens silently and the Wanderer can now see that someone opened it recently. The medicine check does not merely stabilize the patient; it identifies what poisoned him. Give the players something they can *use*.

Effort $\geq$ DC + 3 — success by three or more. The action exceeds expectations. This is rare and should feel rare. A Wanderer who beats a check by three ranks should get a result the table talks about next session — a shortcut nobody knew existed, a piece of pre-war tech still running, an ally who was watching and is impressed.

Note the asymmetry: high-Score Wanderers clear low DCs by ranks all the time. A specialist with Score 8 rolling against DC 1 will routinely beat it by three or more. Do not treat that as a design flaw. It is the entire payoff of specialization — trained hands do not merely succeed, they succeed *loudly* — and the rewards should scale with it.

Failure Is Content

A failed check is not a closed door. It is a door with a price.

Failing forward. When the Wanderer fails the check to climb the cliff, they do not hover in place. They climb it, and arrive with a wrenched shoulder and one less stimpak, or they find the easier route and it costs them an hour they did not have. The party should almost always reach the next scene — changed, lighter, later, marked. Hard stops are for hard choices, not bad dice.

Failure reveals the world. A failed check is the best moment to introduce pressure: the gunshot that draws attention, the rope that snaps at the worst moment, the patrol that rounds the corner while the lock is still shut. Failure is not a penalty; it is the world noticing.

Let players fail loudly. Do not soften a catastrophic failure into a mild inconvenience. If the demolition charge goes wrong, the bridge goes down with the Wanderer on it. The Death Toll exists precisely so that catastrophe has a middle ground between "fine" and "dead" — use it. The stakes must be real or the successes are hollow.

Distinguish the impossible from the hard. When a player attempts something that cannot work, say so before they spend the AP. "You can try, but that lock is a military cylinder and you have a hairpin" is fair. "You try and nothing happens" is not.

Adversaries at the Table

The Bestiary entry carries the stat-block template, the Threat Tier ladder, the Threat Budget, and the Mook Rule. Read it before your first fight and keep it open during one. Three things it does not say, which are yours to supply.

Telegraph, then deliver. A threat the players could not see coming is not a threat; it is an ambush of the *players*. Describe the scrape of claws in the dark before the deathclaw arrives. Let them hear the sentry bot's servos lock onto a target. A fight the party chose — even a fight they chose badly — is a fight they own. A fight they walked into blind is a lecture.

Run the fight as a scene, not a sequence. Adversaries have wants. The raiders want the cargo, not the kill; when they have it, they leave. The molerats want the Wanderer out of the nest; they pursue exactly as far as the nest's edge. The super mutant wants the shiny thing on the Wanderer's belt and will trade the whole fight for it. An adversary with an objective is a problem to solve. An adversary that only wants to reduce HP is a wall to knock down, and walls are boring.

Break the fight before it becomes arithmetic. When the encounter is decided, end it. The last three raiders run. The robot's reactor goes critical and the party has one round to leave. Never grind a resolved fight down to the last hit point — the outcome is known, and the table's attention is better spent on the consequence.

Hazards: Card or Sentence

The Hazard Stat Block exists so that hazards have teeth. It is also possible to over-apply it, and a table drowning in cards is a table that has stopped imagining.

Card it when the hazard has a clock. If the danger persists across turns or days, has a countermeasure, and has a cost that compounds — radiation, dehydration, a blizzard, a gas-filled tunnel, an infection — write the card. The card's value is that everyone at the table can see the same rules and the same progress toward a bad end. Radiation is the flagship; the Environmental Hazards catalog is the rest.

Sentence it when the danger is a moment. A single fall, one lungful of smoke, a quick dunk in freezing water, a scorpion sting in a fight that will end in three rounds. Roll the check, apply the damage or the status effect, move on. Do not build a card for a thing that happens once. The card is for the hazard that keeps happening.

Show the hazard before it bites. Radiation zones should have visible evidence — dead grass in a ring, a Geiger counter's chatter, the taste of copper in the air. Thirst should be described long before the penalty lands. A hazard the players can see is a problem they can plan around; a hazard that arrives as a surprise deduction is just a tax. And the reverse: a Wanderer who notices the warning and turns back should be rewarded for it, not punished with a wasted session.

Resolve hazards at the scale of the scene. In a fight, a hazard costs AP — doubled when it is crushing in. On the road, it costs HP, supplies, and days. Do not run a turn-by-turn thirst clock across a week of travel; run it as a daily check with a visible countdown. The Overseer sets the cadence. Pick one and hold it.

Running the Ratchets

Three systems in this book share a grammar: the Death Toll, the Addiction hook, and the Survival ratchet. Each is a Talent-die check against a DC that climbs by one on every success and resets on failure. Learn the shape once and you have learned all three.

The ratchet exists because Talent dice have a floor. A Wanderer with a strong stat literally cannot fail an easy check — a $d10+3$ never rolls below 4 — so a flat DC would make them permanently immune to consequences. The climbing DC breaks that immunity without punishing the player for their stat. The strong survive longer. Nobody survives forever. That is the design, and it is why the ratchet is not cruelty.

Four rules for running it well.

Show the count. The DC, the tokens, the days remaining — put them on the table where everyone can see them. A ratchet in the dark is a punishment; a ratchet in the light is a decision. A

Wanderer who knows the Death Toll DC is now 4 knows exactly how much danger the next turn holds, and can choose accordingly.

Let success feel like air. A passed Death Toll check buys a turn of action. Describe the relief — the breath that comes back, the vision clearing, the hands steadying. The player earned that turn with their body's stubbornness. Say so.

Always have an exit, and price it. Stabilize, Addictol, a doctor, a long rest, a companion's intervention — every ratchet needs a way off, and the way off must cost something. Stabilize costs a companion's turn and leaves the Wanderer one hit from the line. Addictol costs caps and a day of withdrawal. A ratchet with no exit is a countdown to a foregone conclusion; a ratchet with a free exit is not a ratchet at all.

Let the players see the failure coming and choose anyway. The most memorable moments at any table are the ones where a player knows the odds and pushes. That only happens if the odds are on the table. Never hide the DC on a roll where a token, a dose, or a life is at stake.

Radiation and the Long Clock

Radiation is the book's flagship hazard and the one most likely to be run badly — either as a nuisance to be ignored or a death sentence to be feared. Run it as a slow negotiation.

Give it stages and let them be visible. The Radiation Contamination Track exists so that the cost of the Glow is

legible. A Wanderer at the first stage has options. A Wanderer at the fourth stage has a problem that will define the next three sessions. Show the player where they are on the ladder every time it moves.

Make the Glow worth entering. Radiation is not a punishment; it is a price. The best loot, the intact pre-war facility, the thing everyone needs — put it somewhere hot. A hazard that guards nothing is scenery. A hazard that guards the one thing the party came for is a scene.

Let RadAway be scarce and let that matter. The tension of the contamination track is entirely a function of how many doses the party can carry. Do not hand out RadAway like water. Equally, do not make it unobtainable — a party with no exit from a hazard is a party being told a story rather than playing one.

Awarding Experience

Chapter 4 lists the categories — Combat, Quests, Discoveries, Social Victories, Creative Solutions. Here is how to actually spend them.

Award at the end of the session, out loud, with names. "Two hundred for the bunker, three hundred for talking the Gunners off the bridge, a hundred and fifty for the map you found." Naming the moments teaches the table what the campaign values. A party that hears creative solutions earning XP will bring more creative solutions.

Never award for dice alone. Winning a fight is worth XP because the party spent resources and risked their lives, not because they rolled well. Surviving an ambush they walked into is a combat award. Slogging through six random encounters on the road is not six awards; it is one session.

Be generous with Discoveries and Social Victories. These are the categories tables under-reward, and they are the ones that make a campaign feel like exploration rather than a sequence of fights. Finding the recording of the last day before the bombs is worth as much as clearing the raiders out of the building.

Reward the retelling rule. The book's practical test: if the table will retell the moment next week, it earned XP. Apply it literally. The absurd plan that worked against all odds is a bigger award than the fight that went exactly as scripted.

Do not use XP as a leash. Experience is not a reward for following the plot and not a punishment for ignoring it. If the party spends a session chasing a rumor that leads nowhere, they still did something — award the discovery, award the social victory, award the survival. Momentum matters more than direction.

Pacing a Session

The single most useful skill behind the screen is knowing what kind of scene you are in and how long it has been running.

Alternate the three modes. Tension (combat, a chase, a hazard closing in), exploration (a new place, a mystery, a choice of routes), and roleplay (a negotiation, a campfire, a conversation with someone who wants something). Two consecutive sessions of the same mode go stale. Within a session, change modes every twenty to thirty minutes.

Open with motion. Start the session with something already happening — a shot in the dark, a stranger at the gate, the water tank reading empty. Never open with the party deciding what to do. Momentum at minute one carries the table through minute ninety.

Close on a hook, never on a resolution. End the session at the moment something changes: the door opens, the radio crackles, the body is identified. A session that ends on "and you all went to sleep" has given the players nothing to chew on for a week. A session that ends on the second boot print has them texting each other by Tuesday.

Cut hard between scenes. When a scene has done its job, leave it. Do not linger over the packing of the bags or the walk back to town. Jump. The table's imagination fills gaps better than your narration does, and the time you save is time the next scene can use.

Give every player a spotlight every session. Scan the table at the halfway point and count who has not had a scene. Fix it before the session ends, even with a small one — a private

moment, a check only they can make, a piece of their past walking through the door.

The Wasteland Talks Back

The world should remember what the Wanderers do to it. This is the cheapest, most effective source of campaign material you will ever have.

Consequences propagate. The settlement they saved tells the caravan, and the caravan tells the next town. The raiders they wiped out had a supplier, and the supplier has questions. The farmhouse they burned is a rumor now, and rumors travel faster than people. You do not need a plot; you need a memory.

NPCs want things. A three-sentence NPC is enough: what they look like, what they want, and what they will do to get it. Everything else is improvisation. The shopkeeper who overprices because she is feeding three children behaves differently than the shopkeeper who overprices because she is a cheat, and the players will find out which — if you give her a want.

Let factions have the initiative. Factions that only react to the party are furniture. Every few sessions, have one of them *do* something — take a bridge, raise a toll, execute a prisoner, open a trade route. The party can intervene or not. Either way, the world has moved without them, and that is what makes it feel real.

Keep the promises you make. If you establish that the town has a working water purifier, that purifier exists for the rest of the campaign. Continuity is the entire foundation of player trust. A world whose details hold still is a world players will plan in.

Prep Without Homework

You do not need a binder. You need six things.

- One page of situation. What is happening, who wants what, and what happens if nobody intervenes. Not a script — a pressure system.

- Three NPCs with a want each. Names, one physical detail, one thing they are after, one thing they will not say.

- One location with three features. A place the players can look at and immediately understand: something to climb, something to hide behind, something that will break.

- One adversary card, adjusted. Start from the closest thing in the Bestiary and move one dial.

- One hazard. A card if it has a clock, a sentence if it does not.

- One secret. Something true about the world that the players do not know yet, which they might learn this session. If they miss it, it does not expire; it waits.

Everything else you invent at the table, and the table will not know the difference. Improvisation is not the absence of preparation; it is preparation pointed at the right target.

Quick Reference: The Overseer's Checklist

Before the session- One page of situation — who wants what, and what happens if nobody acts- Three NPCs with a want each- One location with three usable features- One adversary, adjusted from the closest Bestiary card- One hazard, carded or sentenced- One secret

During the session- Roll in the open when a Wanderer's fate is at stake- Set the DC before the roll, and say it out loud- Say yes, or roll — never stop the game for a ruling- Narrate the Effort ranks: success is success, ranks are volume- Telegraph every threat before it lands- Cut hard between scenes; never linger past the moment- Check the halfway mark — who has not had a spotlight?

After the session- Award XP out loud, with names attached to the moments- Write down every ruling the table will need again- Note what the world now remembers about the Wanderers- Ask each player one question about their character's plans- End on the hook you already planted

Quick Reference: DC Calibration

| You want the check to be... | Set the DC at... |

|---|---|

| A formality for a specialist | Half their Score, minus one |

| A fair fight | Half their Score |

| A wall they should plan around | Half their Score, plus one

|

| Impossible without help | Above their Score entirely |

And the standing rule that outranks the table: a DC 2 check is impossible for a Skill Score 1 Wanderer. Not unlikely.

Impossible. Set it on purpose, or do not set it at all.

Chapter 6: Travel, Trade & Settlements

The wasteland is not a map. A map is what is left of it — lines drawn by somebody who has been dead for two centuries, on paper that has since been used to start fires. What you actually walk across is a hundred miles of cracked asphalt and dry grass, and every mile of it has an opinion about whether you make it.

Everything the earlier chapters built was built for the fight. AP, Sequence, cover, the DC ladder, the ratchet — all of it assumes somebody is shooting at you. This chapter is for the space between the fights, which is where campaigns are actually decided. A Wanderer who wins every firefight and dies of thirst in the fourth week did not play badly. They packed badly. The road is not a transition between scenes; it is a scene, and it runs longer than most of the ones with guns in them.

The Travel Day

Overland movement runs on legs. One leg is a half-day's walk on decent ground — roughly ten miles, or as far as a loaded Wanderer gets before the straps start cutting into the shoulder. A travel day holds two legs. What counts as decent ground is the Overseer's call, and the ground is almost never decent.

| Terrain | Legs per Day | Notes |

|---|---|---|

| Pre-war road, clear and open | 2 | The last genuinely good thing the old world left behind |

| Open scrub and flatland | 2 | Twenty miles with no cover in any direction |

| Hills, woods, broken ground | 1 | Slow going, and something is always watching the tree line |

| Ruins and rubble | 1 | Every leg in a ruin costs a hazard roll |

| Mountain, swamp, deep sand | 1/2 | One leg, and the second one is tomorrow |

| Storm, night march, or heavy load | -1 | Subtracted from whatever the terrain already allows |

A party travels at the pace of its slowest member, and the slowest member is almost always the one carrying the most. That is not a punishment; it is the price of the haul, and the price is honest. Decide before you leave what the party is willing to walk away from, because the road will ask, and it will not accept an answer you invented on the spot.

The travel day runs in four phases, in this order, and the order matters. March — move the legs, spend the supplies, make whatever checks the terrain demands. Make camp — pick the site, set the watch order, cook if there is anything worth cooking. Watch — the night, in shifts, which is when the encounter roll happens and when a bad camp site collects its debt. Rest —

sleep, or the approximation of it that the wastes permit, which restores what the Combat chapter says rest, and nothing more.

Water, Food, and the Weight of Both

Every Wanderer needs one water ration and one food ration per travel day. Water weighs 1 lb. Food weighs 1 lb. Both are dead weight until the day you need them, and on the day you need them they are the only weight in the pack that matters at all. Carry Weight is $STR \times 15 + END \times 10 + AGI \times 5$, and it is worth running that arithmetic at the settlement gate rather than at the bottom of a canyon, because at the bottom of the canyon the arithmetic has already become a decision about which of your possessions you are leaving in the dirt.

A day without water is a hazard card, not a sentence, and it uses the Survival ratchet because it is a Talent check. DC 1 on the first day, DC 2 on the second, DC 3 on the third, climbing by one for every day the body keeps working without a drink. The strong last longer. Nobody lasts forever. The full dehydration card — Trigger, Read, Resist, Effect, Cadence, Countermeasures — lives in the Environmental Hazards catalog, and the reason it ratchets is written into the Hazard Stat Block: a Talent die has a floor, a strong Wanderer literally cannot fail an easy check, and a flat DC would make them permanently immune to a thing that kills people every day of the week.

Food is slower and kinder. Missing a meal costs nothing worth tracking. Missing three in a row is the starvation card, and it arrives with the same ratchet wearing a different coat. Purified water is worth carrying in bulk when you can get it and worth drinking the moment you cannot. Nuka-Cola does not count as water, no matter how many caps the machine wants for it.

The Sky

Weather is the cheapest drama in the wastes and the most wasted. Roll for it once per travel day, or simply decide, and then make the weather *do* something to the numbers rather than decorating the scene with it. A dust storm cuts a leg off the day's movement, halves visibility for ranged attacks, and forces a Survival check to keep the party together. Rain is a gift — free water, better cover, a trail that disappears — until it turns the low ground into a bog and the bog into a night spent standing. Heat is a water tax: an extra ration per Wanderer, or the dehydration clock starts a day early.

The rule for weather is the same rule the Overseer's chapter gives for every other hazard. Card it when it has a clock. A blizzard that will sit on the party for three days, a dust storm with a visible wall coming across the flats, a heat wave that will not break — write the card, put the days on the table, let everyone see the countdown. Sentence it when it is a moment. A squall that soaks everyone and passes in an hour is one check,

one consequence, and back to walking. Do not build a card for weather that happens once.

Show the sky before it costs you. A Wanderer who reads the green cast on the horizon and turns the party toward the overpass did not avoid a hazard by luck; they avoided it by looking up, and that deserves to work. Weather that arrives as a surprise deduction is a tax. Weather that arrives as a wall you saw coming is a decision.

Camp, Watch, and Repair

Making camp is a Survival check when the ground is against you, and the ratchet applies: the same wind and cold that cost you a DC on the first night costs you a DC on the second. A good camp gives the party back what rest gives back, plus a fire, plus a warning if anything comes. A bad camp gives back less and charges interest. Sitting water, an animal trail through the middle of it, a ridge line that silhouettes your fire for a mile — the Overseer should describe the camp site's three features the way it describes a room, so the party can choose the site instead of accepting one.

The watch order is where the party argues, and the argument is the content. Somebody has to be awake for the middle shift, when the fire is low and the body is coldest and the person on watch is least likely to be trusted with the job. A Wanderer who has been awake for two shifts takes a penalty to perception checks

and to anything that needs a steady hand, which is exactly the moment the night decides to happen.

Camp is also where the weapons get fixed. Condition is a resource that bleeds out one shot at a time, and a camp fire with a Repair Kit is the only place it comes back without a workbench. A party that skips maintenance for a week arrives at the job with a rifle that deals a tenth less damage than the card says, and the card is not going to feel bad about it. Time spent repairing is a leg not walked, and that trade is the whole game.

Caravans and the Caps Economy

Caps are money because somebody decided they were, two hundred years ago, and nobody has found a better idea since. A cap is a cap: it does not rust, it does not spoil, and it fits in a sock. What changes from town to town is not the currency but the price band, and the price band is set by scarcity and distance. The same stimpak costs 40 caps in a settlement with a doctor and 120 caps in a settlement with a broken leg and no doctor at all. The Overseer sets the band before the party walks through the gate, and the band is the settlement's whole personality in one number.

Bartering is a Barter check against the price band, and it moves in steps rather than in percentages. Beat the DC and the seller meets you partway; beat it by two ranks and they meet you most of the way; fail and you pay what the tag says, or you walk, and the seller watches you walk because they have three more of

the thing and you have a long road. A Wanderer with a Skill Score of 1 in Barter cannot move a DC 2 band at all — that is the ladder working as designed, and it means the smooth-talker at the table is not decoration, they are the difference between a full pack and a light one.

Caravans are the veins of the world and the best recurring cast a campaign can have. A caravan is three to twelve people, a brahmin or six, a route, a schedule, and a reason. They buy what the party hauls, they sell what the party needs, they carry rumor faster than any radio, and they remember faces. The Brahmin entry gives the pack animal; the rest is an NPC with a want and a ledger. Guarding a caravan is a job, robbing one is a job, and the only real difference between the two is who is writing the contract.

What the wastes actually trade in, in rough order of liquidity: ammunition, chems, clean water, repair parts, medicine, food that keeps, and information. A Wanderer who hauls scrap across two hundred miles of road is hauling a thing that weighs more than it is worth, and learning that is part of the education. The Reinforced Backpack exists for the Scavenger who wants to be wrong about that on purpose.

Settlements: What a Town Is

A settlement is a place where the danger has been temporarily solved, and the size of it is the size of the solution.

A camp is one to three dozen people behind a barricade of cars, held together by one person's will. It has water, a fire, and no doctor. A hamlet is a hundred people with a wall, a well, and a trader who comes through twice a month. A town has a market, a doctor, a sheriff or something shaped like one, and a reason for a caravan to stop. A city-state has walls that were built on purpose, a standing garrison, factions inside it that hate each other politely, and a gate tax.

Every settlement answers five questions, and the Overseer should be able to answer all five without looking anything up. Who runs it, and what do they want? What does it make, and what does it need? What is it afraid of? What will it not talk about? What happens here if nobody intervenes? Answer those and the party can spend a session in a town with no combat in it and come out changed, which is the whole point of having towns.

A town is also a place where the rules soften. Inside the walls, the Overseer should let routine competence be routine: the party buys, repairs, drinks, sleeps, and asks around without a roll for any of it, unless somebody is lying to them or watching them. Save the dice for the conversation with the doctor who knows what the raiders are doing out on the ridge, and for the moment the party realizes the gate tax went up because somebody new is running the place.

Standing: How the World Remembers You

Reputation in the wastes is not a single number and it should never become one. It is a ledger, and the Overseer keeps it in plain language, one line per place and per faction. *The people of Coldwater well: you brought back their water pump. The Gunners on the bridge: you killed four of them and they know your faces. The caravan master at Vault 12: you were paid and you delivered, which is rarer than it should be.*

The ledger does two things. It gives the Overseer an answer every time the party walks into somewhere they have been before, and it makes the world feel continuous without a single point of bookkeeping at the table. When the party arrives at a new town and hears a story about themselves that they did not tell, that is the ledger talking, and it is the cheapest and most effective source of campaign material there is.

Factions act. That is the difference between a faction and furniture. Every few sessions, one of them should *do* something the party did not cause — take a bridge, raise a toll, hang a prisoner, open a road, close a road, put a bounty on a name. The party can intervene or not. Either way the world moved without them, and that movement is what makes the next decision feel like it belongs to the players.

Region Threat

Distance from safety is a dial, and the Overseer should set it before the party leaves the gate.

| Threat | Where | Encounter Roll | What Walks Here |

|---|---|---|---|

| 1 | Settled ground, patrolled roads, within a day of a town
| Once per three travel days | Brahmin, radstags, a drunk with a
pipe |

| 2 | The near wilds, a day or two out | Once per travel day |
Radroaches, molerats, bloatflies, one raider crew |

| 3 | The deep wastes, ruins, old highways | Twice per travel
day, or once per leg in a ruin | Feral ghouls, radscorpions,
gunners, mirelurks near water |

| 4 | Hot zones, military ruins, the Glow | Once per leg, plus
a hazard roll | Super mutants, assaultrons, yao guai, a
deathclaw's territory |

| 5 | Somewhere the map stops being useful | The Overseer
decides, and decides often | Sentry bots, behemoths, glowing
ones, whatever the Overseer has been waiting to use |

The ladder does not exist to punish exploration; it exists to
make the map mean something. A party that pushes from threat 1 to
threat 4 is not being ambushed, they are choosing a price, and
the choice should be visible on the table before they make it.
Reward the push. The best loot, the intact pre-war facility, the
thing the settlement desperately needs — put it where the ladder
is high, and then let the players decide whether they want it
badly enough.

Coming Back Changed

Travel feeds the XP categories in Chapter 4 and it feeds them generously, because travel is where Discoveries and Social Victories live. Finding a place nobody has mapped is a discovery. Getting the caravan master to trust the party is a social victory. Surviving four days of dust storm without losing anyone is worth an award even though nobody was shot. The practical test still holds: if the table will retell it next week, it earned XP, and the table retells the road far more often than it retells the fight.

Award it out loud, with the place names attached. "Two hundred for the ruin, a hundred and fifty for the map, three hundred for talking the sheriff into letting the caravan through." Naming the road teaches the table that the road is a place where things happen, and a table that believes that will go looking for the horizon instead of waiting for the plot to arrive.

Quick Reference: The Travel Day

- Legs: 2 per day on road or flatland, 1 on broken ground or ruins, 1/2 in mountain and swamp. -1 for storm, night march, or heavy load.

- Supplies: 1 water and 1 food per Wanderer per day. Both weigh 1 lb. Missing water starts the dehydration ratchet at DC 1.

- Weather: Card it if it lasts, sentence it if it passes. Cut legs, cut visibility, tax water.

- Camp: Survival check when the ground is bad, and the DC ratchets nightly. Rest restores what rest restores. Repair happens here or nowhere.

- Trade: Barter check against a price band the Overseer sets before the party walks in. Steps, not percentages.

- Settlements: Five questions — who runs it, what it makes, what it fears, what it hides, what happens if nobody acts.

- Standing: One line per place in a plain-language ledger. Factions act on their own schedule.

- Threat: Set the region dial before departure, and say it out loud.

- XP: Award the Discoveries and the Social Victories with names attached, every session on the road.

Chapter 7: Adversaries & Threats

Chapter 7: Adversaries & Threats

Something in the wastes wants what you carry, or wants you gone, or was ordered two hundred years ago to shoot anything that moves and has never been told otherwise. This chapter is about those things — how to read them at the table, how to run them so a fight feels like a fight instead of a subtraction problem, and how to build your own when the roster runs out.

The Combat chapter describes what happens when two things try to kill each other. This chapter describes the things. A stat block is not a monster; it is a set of decisions somebody made about how a creature survives, and the Overseer's job is to let those decisions speak in play. A radroach does not fight like a gunner. It should not. If it does, the stat block has failed, and so has the encounter.

What a Stat Block Is For

Every adversary in this book answers the same questions in the same order, and once you can read one you can read all of them at a glance.

Threat Tier and Type tell you where the thing sits on the ladder and what kind of problem it is — Beast, Human, Mutant, or Robot. The type is not decoration. Beasts break and run when they

are hurt; Mutants often do not; Robots never do, and never negotiate. Know the type before the fight starts, because the type is what the fight is about.

HP, DT, and DR are the three numbers that decide how long it lasts. HP is the pool. DT is the rolled threshold that eats the first bite of every hit — it is a STR Talent die plus armor, rerolled every round, so a tough adversary is tough *unevenly*, and a lucky shot sometimes gets through. DR is the flat subtraction that follows, and it is where a creature's identity lives: a mirelurk's shell shrugs off bullets and does nothing against acid, and a Wanderer who does not notice that is a Wanderer who brought the wrong gun.

AP and Sequence decide tempo. AP is the AGI Talent die, rolled fresh each round, and it sets how much the thing can *do* on its turn — move, attack, retreat, use an ability. Sequence is PER plus AGI and fixes turn order before a shot is fired. An adversary with high Sequence and low AP is fast to act and slow to finish; one with low Sequence and high AP lets the party commit before it answers.

SPECIAL is the raw character underneath the block, printed with its Talent die so you never have to look it up mid-fight. When an adversary needs to make a check that is not on its card — resist a chem, spot a hidden Wanderer, hold a door — roll the matching Talent die and move on.

Skills, Attacks, Special Abilities, Tactics, and Gear & Loot are the block's voice. Skills set the Effort when the creature does something contested. Attacks list the AP cost and the damage dice, exactly like a weapon card, so you can run them with the same rhythm. Special Abilities are the two or three things that make the encounter *this* encounter and not a generic brawl. Tactics is the sentence that keeps you honest — it tells you how the thing behaves when the dice go badly, which is where most encounters are won or lost. And Gear & Loot is the reward, printed on the card so the party's scavenging has a shape.

The Threat Tier

The tier is the dial that makes the map mean something. It is not a power level for the creature alone; it is a power level for the *encounter*, and it is set by how many of the thing the party meets and what it meets them with.

Tier	Name	Role at the Table	XP
---	---	---	---
1	Fodder	The first kill, the pack, the teaching encounter	25
2	Standard	A real threat, one per Wanderer or so	50
3	Elite	The boss of a small fight, or two of them as the whole fight	100
4	Heavy	A session's centerpiece; needs a plan, not a charge	200

| 5 | Legendary | The thing the campaign was building toward |
500+ |

A single Tier 4 adversary against a low-level party is not a fight, it is a funeral with dice. A dozen Tier 1 fodder against a mid-level party is not a fight either; it is a chore. The art is in the composition — one Tier 3 walking in front of four Tier 1, a Tier 2 squad in good cover with a Tier 2 leader who calls the shots, a Tier 4 that the party has spent three sessions preparing to meet. Set the tier, set the number, set the terrain, and then say all three out loud to yourself before the session. If the answer does not feel like a fight the players will retell, move one dial.

Tier 1 — Fodder

The floor of the wasteland. Fodder exists to teach — to show the party what a contested melee roll feels like, what a pack does to a lone Wanderer, and how quickly a fight turns when the numbers are wrong. Fodder is cheap to run, cheap to kill, and dangerous in exactly one situation: when there are more of them than the party counted. The full Radroach and Brahmin cards live in the bestiary; the Bloatfly swarms in the same weight class.

Mole Rat — Tier 1 · Beast

HP 12 · DT d4 (STR 2) · DR 1 · AP d6 (AGI 3) · Sequence 6

SPECIAL: STR 3 (d6) · PER 3 (d6) · END 3 (d6) · CHA 1 (d4-1) ·
INT 1 (d4-1) · AGI 3 (d6) · LUK 2 (d4)

Skills: Unarmed 2 · Stealth 3

Attacks: Bite (1 AP) — 1d6 + 1d4 skill die. Claw (1 AP) — 1d4 + 1d4.

Special Abilities: Burrow — a mole rat vanishes into loose earth for 1 AP and resurfaces anywhere within 15 ft on its next turn, gaining +2 to its first attack from concealment. Litter — mole rats fight in packs of three to six.

Tactics: Burrow, surface behind the weakest Wanderer, bite, scatter, repeat. They do not hold ground; they bleed it.

Gear & Loot: Nothing. A mole rat is not a payday. · XP: Tier 1 award.

Feral Dog — Tier 1 · Beast

HP 10 · DT d4 (STR 2) · DR 0 · AP d8 (AGI 5) · Sequence 7

SPECIAL: STR 2 (d4) · PER 4 (d6+1) · END 2 (d4) · CHA 1 (d4-1)
· INT 2 (d4) · AGI 5 (d8+1) · LUK 2 (d4)

Skills: Unarmed 3

Attacks: Bite (1 AP) — 1d6 + 1d4 skill die; on a critical hit the target is knocked Prone.

Special Abilities: Pack Tactics — a feral dog gains +1 to its contested Unarmed roll for every other feral dog attacking the same target, to a maximum of +3. A pack of five is not five fights; it is one fight that keeps getting harder.

Tactics: Circle, harry, pull one Wanderer down, drag. They target the straggler and the one on the ground.

Gear & Loot: Nothing. · XP: Tier 1 award.

Raider Recruit — Tier 1 · Human

HP 15 · DT d6+1 (STR 4) · DR 1 (leather scraps) · AP d6 (AGI

3) · Sequence 6

SPECIAL: STR 4 (d6+1) · PER 3 (d6) · END 3 (d6) · CHA 2 (d4) ·
INT 3 (d6) · AGI 3 (d6) · LUK 3 (d6)

Skills: Small Guns 2 · Melee Weapons 2 · Unarmed 2 · Survival
1

Attacks: By weapon — a pipe rifle, a 10mm pistol, or a length
of rebar (2 AP, 1d8 + 1d4).

Special Abilities: Desperate — a raider recruit below half HP
gains +1 to attack rolls. Cornered and stupid is still dangerous.

Tactics: Yell, charge, die. They fight for the score, not the
cause, and they break the moment the score stops looking worth
it.

Gear & Loot: Weapon, 1d20 caps, whatever chems they had, junk.
· XP: Tier 1 award.

Tier 2 — Standard

The working threat — the number the party meets most often
and the one that should feel genuinely dangerous without feeling
unfair. A Tier 2 adversary can kill a careless Wanderer and loses
cleanly to a careful one. This is where the tactics line starts
to matter, because Tier 2 things are smart or tough enough to
have a *plan*.

Radscorpion — Tier 2 · Beast

HP 30 · DT d8+2 (STR 6) · DR 3 (chitin) · AP d6+1 (AGI 4) ·

Sequence 6

SPECIAL: STR 6 (d8+2) · PER 3 (d6) · END 5 (d8+1) · CHA 1
(d4-1) · INT 1 (d4-1) · AGI 4 (d6+1) · LUK 2 (d4)

Skills: Unarmed 4 · Stealth 2

Attacks: Sting (2 AP) — 2d6 + 1d4 skill die; the target makes an END check (DC 2) or is Poisoned (1d6 per turn, 1d4 turns).

Claw (2 AP) — 1d8 + 1d4.

Special Abilities: Burrow — vanishes into sand or soil for 1 AP and surfaces anywhere within 20 ft. Chitin — DR 3 against bullets; energy weapons ignore half of it (round down).

Tactics: It burrows ahead of the party's path and surfaces under the rear guard. The radscorpion does not want a fair fight; it wants the one Wanderer who wandered off the road.

Gear & Loot: Radscorpion venom gland (an Antivenom base), chitin plate, meat. · XP: Tier 2 award.

Feral Ghoul — Tier 2 · Mutant

HP 25 · DT d6+1 (STR 4) · DR 2 · AP d8+1 (AGI 5) · Sequence 6

SPECIAL: STR 4 (d6+1) · PER 2 (d4) · END 5 (d8+1) · CHA 1
(d4-1) · INT 1 (d4-1) · AGI 5 (d8+1) · LUK 2 (d4)

Skills: Unarmed 4

Attacks: Claw (1 AP) — 1d6 + 1d4 skill die. Bite (1 AP) — 1d6 + 1d4; on a hit the target makes an END check (DC 1) or gains radiation (see Environmental Hazards).

Special Abilities: Relentless — a feral ghoul feels no pain and never checks morale. It cannot be Intimidated or reasoned with. Radiation-fed — inside a rad zone a feral ghoul heals 2 HP per turn.

Tactics: They come in a wave, all of them, from every door at once. There is no tactic but volume, and volume is enough.

Gear & Loot: Nothing worth the rads — occasionally a pre-war item still hanging off the corpse. · XP: Tier 2 award.

Mirelurk — Tier 2 · Beast

HP 35 · DT d8+2 (STR 6) · DR 4 (shell) · AP d6 (AGI 3) ·

Sequence 5

SPECIAL: STR 6 (d8+2) · PER 3 (d6) · END 6 (d8+2) · CHA 1 (d4-1) · INT 2 (d4) · AGI 3 (d6) · LUK 2 (d4)

Skills: Unarmed 5

Attacks: Pincer (2 AP) — 2d6 + 1d6 skill die; on a critical hit the target is grappled. Spit (2 AP) — ranged 20 ft, 1d6 acid + 1d4, ignores DR.

Special Abilities: Shell — DR 4 against bullets; a called shot to the head (Range DC +2) ignores it. Water-bound — a mirelurk moves at double speed in water and cannot be flanked there.

Tactics: It holds the waterline and does not chase past the bank. Kill it from the shore or fight it on its terms, but those are the only two doors.

Gear & Loot: Mirelurk meat (food), mirelurk shell (an armor plate). · XP: Tier 2 award.

Raider — Tier 2 · Human

HP 25 · DT d6+1 (STR 4) · DR 2 (leather armor) · AP d8 (AGI 5)
· Sequence 7

SPECIAL: STR 4 (d6+1) · PER 4 (d6+1) · END 4 (d6+1) · CHA 3 (d6) · INT 4 (d6+1) · AGI 5 (d8+1) · LUK 3 (d6)

Skills: Small Guns 4 · Melee Weapons 3 · Explosives 2 · Survival 2

Attacks: By weapon — 10mm pistol, combat shotgun, pipe rifle, or a molotov (2 AP, 1d6 fire in a 10 ft area, sets targets Burning).

Special Abilities: Chem-Fueled — a raider may spend 1 AP mid-fight to dose a chem and gain its effect (Psycho: +2 damage for 3 turns).

Tactics: Use cover, use grenades, use each other. Raiders break and run once half the crew is down — a fight they cannot win is a fight they do not want.

Gear & Loot: Weapon, 2d20 caps, chems, a stash key. · XP: Tier 2 award.

Gunner — Tier 2 · Human

HP 30 · DT d8+2 (STR 6) · DR 3 (combat armor) · AP d8 (AGI 5)
· Sequence 8

SPECIAL: STR 5 (d8+1) · PER 5 (d8+1) · END 5 (d8+1) · CHA 4 (d6+1) · INT 5 (d8+1) · AGI 5 (d8+1) · LUK 3 (d6)

Skills: Small Guns 5 · Big Guns 3 · Energy Weapons 3 ·

Athletics 3

Attacks: By weapon — assault rifle, laser rifle, or combat shotgun. Grenades.

Special Abilities: Trained — a gunner uses cover, calls targets, and does not break. They withdraw in order, covering each other, and a gunner who is losing still counts as a gunner.

Tactics: They fight like professionals: focus fire on the biggest threat, use smoke, hold the line, fall back when the line is lost. A gunner fireteam is the encounter that punishes a party who only knows how to charge.

Gear & Loot: Military-grade weapon, combat armor, 3d20 caps, ammunition. · XP: Tier 2 award.

Tier 3 — Elite

One of these is a fight. Two of them is a problem the party has to solve rather than shoot. Elite adversaries are tough enough to survive a round of focused fire and dangerous enough to make that round expensive. The Super Mutant card stands here, and the Assaultron is its machine cousin.

Yao Guai — Tier 3 · Beast

HP 50 · DT d8+2 (STR 6) · DR 3 · AP d8+1 (AGI 5) · Sequence 8

SPECIAL: STR 7 (d10+2) · PER 4 (d6+1) · END 6 (d8+2) · CHA 1 (d4-1) · INT 2 (d4) · AGI 5 (d8+1) · LUK 2 (d4)

Skills: Unarmed 6 · Stealth 4

Attacks: Claw (2 AP) — 2d6 + 1d6 skill die; two claw attacks allowed per turn. Bite (2 AP) — 2d8 + 1d6.

Special Abilities: Frenzy — below half HP, a yao guai gains +2 to attack rolls and cannot retreat. Charge — if it moves 20 ft in a straight line before attacking, the attack gains +1 and knocks the target Prone on a hit.

Tactics: Stalk, charge, maul. Once blood is drawn it fights to the death, and it always draws blood first.

Gear & Loot: Yao guai meat, hide (leather), claws. · XP: Tier 3 award.

Assaultron — Tier 3 · Robot

HP 45 · DT d8+2 (STR 6) · DR 5 · AP d8 (AGI 5) · Sequence 8

SPECIAL: STR 6 (d8+2) · PER 6 (d8+2) · END 6 (d8+2) · CHA 1 (d4-1) · INT 5 (d8+1) · AGI 5 (d8+1) · LUK 2 (d4)

Skills: Energy Weapons 6 · Melee Weapons 5

Attacks: Head Laser (2 AP) — 2d6 + 1d6 skill die, range 60 ft. Claw (2 AP) — 1d8 + 1d6. Self-Destruct (3 AP) — see below.

Special Abilities: Targeting Array — the assaultron ignores light cover and downgrades medium cover by one step. Overload — when reduced to 0 HP, roll a d6; on a 4+ it detonates at the end of the round for 3d6 in a 15 ft radius. A Wanderer may spend 1 AP to knock the core loose, preventing the blast or triggering it early.

Tactics: It closes to melee and does not stop. An assaultron is built to kill, not to hold, and it will spend itself to finish the job.

Gear & Loot: Fusion cells, targeting array, valuable scrap. ·
XP: Tier 3 award.

Tier 4 — Heavy

The centerpiece. A Tier 4 encounter should be visible on the table a session before it happens — the party finds the tracks, hears the story, buys the ammunition, chooses the ground. If they meet it by surprise, that is not a hard fight; that is a decision the Overseer already made for them, and it is the wrong one. The Sentry Bot and Security Bot sit at this tier among the machines, and the Glowing One among the dead.

Deathclaw — Tier 4 · Beast

HP 80 · DT d10+3 (STR 8) · DR 5 · AP d8+1 (AGI 5) · Sequence 9
SPECIAL: STR 9 (d12+3) · PER 5 (d8+1) · END 8 (d10+3) · CHA 1
(d4-1) · INT 3 (d6) · AGI 5 (d8+1) · LUK 2 (d4)

Skills: Unarmed 8 · Stealth 5

Attacks: Claw (2 AP) — 2d8 + 1d8 skill die; two claw attacks allowed per turn. Bite (2 AP) — 3d6 + 1d8; on a critical hit the target loses a limb at the Overseer's call.

Special Abilities: Terrifying Presence — at the start of combat every Wanderer makes a CHA check (DC 2) or suffers -1 to attack rolls for the first round. Frenzy — below half HP it

gains +2 to attacks and never retreats. Thick Hide — DR 5; a called shot to the belly (Range DC +3) ignores it.

Tactics: It charges the nearest Wanderer, kills them, and moves to the next. A deathclaw does not tire, does not negotiate, and does not leave. The only way out of a deathclaw fight is through the far side of it.

Gear & Loot: Deathclaw hand (a weapon in itself), hide, meat, eggs worth a small fortune to the right buyer. · XP: Tier 4 award.

Tier 5 — Legendary

The thing the campaign has been pointing at since the first session. A Tier 5 adversary is not an encounter you stumble into; it is an encounter you spend a chapter preparing for, and the preparation is the content. Use one per campaign, at most, and make the party earn the right to be in the room with it.

Behemoth — Tier 5 · Mutant

HP 130 · DT d12+4 (STR 10) · DR 6 · AP d6 (AGI 3) · Sequence 5

SPECIAL: STR 10 (d12+4) · PER 3 (d6) · END 9 (d12+3) · CHA 1 (d4-1) · INT 2 (d4) · AGI 3 (d6) · LUK 2 (d4)

Skills: Melee Weapons 8 · Unarmed 8

Attacks: Fist (2 AP) — 3d8 + 1d8 skill die; anything hit is knocked Prone and thrown 10 ft. Improvised Weapon (3 AP) — a car door, a streetlight, a fire hydrant: 3d10 + 1d8 in a 10 ft arc. Boulder (3 AP) — ranged 60 ft, 2d10 + 1d8 in a 10 ft area.

Special Abilities: Immense — a behemoth takes half damage from small arms (round down). Only heavy weapons and explosives move its HP bar. Structural Damage — its attacks destroy light and medium cover outright.

Tactics: It walks through walls and swats whatever is behind them. Distance and heavy weapons are the only two tools that matter, and it will take the distance away from the party one round at a time.

Gear & Loot: A behemoth's corpse is a landmark. FEV sample, whatever it was carrying, a settlement's worth of salvage. · XP: Tier 5 award.

Building a Human Adversary

Every human being in the wastes is a Wanderer who made different choices, and the cleanest way to build one is to build one. A raider captain is not a special creature; they are a character with the same ten steps in Chapter 2, the same Skills, the same Perks, and a level that matches the encounter tier you want them to anchor. Build the leader, then build the crew two levels below them, and let the difference in their sheets *be* the difference in the fight.

The one shortcut worth taking is the archetype. Most human adversaries are one of five things, and you can stat each in under a minute:

- The Grunt — one weapon, one skill, low END. Numbers, not threat. Tier 1-2.

- The Marksman — high PER and Small Guns, positioned high or far. The reason the party has to move. Tier 2-3.

- The Bruiser — high STR and END, a melee weapon or Big Guns, walks forward. The reason the party has to focus fire. Tier 2-3.

- The Chemist — carries grenades, molotovs, and chems, and uses all of them. The reason the party has to spread out. Tier 3.

- The Captain — a Perk or two, good cover, and the sense to call targets. When the captain dies, the crew's morale collapses. Tier 3-4.

Two grunts, a marksman, a bruiser, and a captain is a firefight with a shape. Add terrain the party has to cross and you have an encounter, and you did not write a single new rule to get there.

Morale: When They Break

The most common mistake at the table is running every adversary to the death. Living things want to keep living, and the moment a fight stops being winnable, most of them try to leave. Beasts break when they are hurt and not cornered. Raiders break when the crew is halved. Gunners break in order and take their wounded with them. Robots do not break — that is the entire reason robots exist in this book.

Give yourself a trigger before the fight starts — *the raiders run when two of them are down* — and hold yourself to it. A fight that ends in a rout is often better than a fight that ends in a wipe, because it leaves survivors, and survivors remember the party's faces. The ledger in Chapter 6 fills itself when the people who got away go home and talk.

The Encounter Budget

There is no formula that survives contact with a real table, but there is a starting point. Add up your party's levels, then match it against the tier's XP value with the understanding that the budget is a *guess*, not a guarantee.

Party Size & Level		A Fight Worth Having	A Fight That Costs Something
--- ---		---	---
3–4 Wanderers, Levels 1–3		4–6 Tier 1	2 Tier 2
3–4 Wanderers, Levels 4–7		6–8 Tier 1, or 3–4 Tier 2	1 Tier 3 with 2 Tier 2
3–4 Wanderers, Levels 8–12		5–6 Tier 2, or 2 Tier 3	1 Tier 4 with support
3–4 Wanderers, Levels 13+		2–3 Tier 4, or a squad of Tier 3	1 Tier 5 with a plan

The table assumes the party is armed for the encounter and has somewhere to stand. Take away either and you have moved the fight one tier harder. Give them a chokepoint, a height advantage, and

a round of preparation and you have moved it one tier easier. Terrain is the biggest dial in the game and it costs you nothing to turn.

Building Your Own

When the roster runs out, build the adversary in this order and it will be balanced by construction.

1. Pick the tier. That fixes the HP, DT, DR, and XP. Tier 1: HP 8–18, DT d4, DR 0–1. Tier 2: HP 20–40, DT d6+1, DR 2–3. Tier 3: HP 40–60, DT d8+2, DR 3–5. Tier 4: HP 70–90, DT d10+3, DR 5–6. Tier 5: HP 120+, DT d12+4, DR 6+.

2. Assign SPECIAL from the concept, not the tier. A slow tank has low AGI and high STR; a fast skirmisher is the reverse. The Talent dice follow from the stats and set AP, DT, and every check the thing makes.

3. Give it one attack and one ability. The attack is how it deals damage; the ability is why the fight is interesting. A creature with three abilities has none, because nobody remembers three.

4. Write the tactics line. One sentence on how it behaves when losing. If you cannot write that sentence, you do not yet know what the creature is.

5. Price the loot. What does killing it get the party? A fight with no reward is a tax, and taxes are not fun twice.

The last test is the one that matters. Read the finished stat block and ask: *what does the party have to do differently because this thing exists?* If the answer is nothing — if they can fight

it exactly the way they fought the last four things — the block is done, and it is also unnecessary.

Quick Reference: The Adversary

- Read the type first. Beast, Human, Mutant, Robot — it tells you whether the thing breaks, negotiates, or neither.

- DT is rolled, not fixed. Roll the STR Talent die at the start of each of the creature's turns, just like a Wanderer.

- DR is identity. Shells stop bullets, acid ignores armor, energy weapons split the difference. Check the card before the dice.

- AP is the AGI Talent die, capped by Sequence. The same economy the party lives under, and it should feel like it.

- Set the tier, the number, and the terrain before the session. Say all three out loud. If it does not sound like a story, move a dial.

- Give every living thing a break trigger. A rout leaves survivors, and survivors fill the ledger.

- One ability, not three. The fight is remembered for one thing. Choose that thing.

Chapter 8: Skills

Chapter 8: Skills

A SPECIAL stat is what you are. A Skill is what you have done with it. The wasteland is full of broad-shouldered people with nothing to show for the shoulders, and full of narrow, unremarkable people who can open a lock in the dark, set a bone with a splint and a belt, or put a round through a raider's eye at forty yards. The difference between those two kinds of people is training, and training is the only part of a Wanderer that is entirely earned.

Skills are where the system's math does its heaviest lifting. In the core formula, Talent Bonuses, Luck, and Perks all *add* to your Effort — a point here, a point there, rarely more than a handful. Your Skill Score *multiplies* the die you just rolled. That single difference is why a Wanderer with a Skill Score of 5 and unremarkable luck will beat a Wanderer with a Score of 1 and a fistful of Perks, and why the smallest-looking number on your character sheet is usually the one that decides the fight. A Skill Score is not a bonus you carry. It is the size of the swing.

Skill Level and Skill Score

Every Skill is measured twice, and the two numbers are not the same thing.

Skill Level runs from 0 to 100. It is the raw ledger of training and experience, the number that creeps upward every time you invest Skill Points at level-up.

Skill Score is what that ledger buys at the table. Score is one point for every ten full Levels of Skill: take the Level, cut the last digit off, and keep what remains. A Skill Level of 27 is a Skill Score of 2. A Skill Level of 32 is a Score of 3. Level 9 buys nothing; Level 10 buys everything.

Skill Level Skill Score

--- ---

0- 9 0

10-19 1

20-29 2

30-39 3

40-49 4

50-59 5

60-69 6

70-79 7

80-89 8

90-99 9

100 10

Splitting the number in two is what lets a Wanderer feel progress every session without breaking the curve underneath it.

Skill Points go in one at a time, or ten at a time, or twenty at a time, and the Score only moves when the Level crosses a decade. You will spend a long stretch of the campaign at Skill Score 3, getting measurably better the entire time, and then one session the number becomes a 4 and the whole game opens up. That is the design working as intended. A Score is a door, and the Levels behind it are the walk down the hall.

A Skill Score of 0 is not the same as being bad at something. It means you have never trained it, and the core formula multiplies the d20 by zero — an automatic failure. An untrained Wanderer does not get a lucky break on a Surgery check; the Overseer either tells them no outright or lets them try and narrates the disaster in full. A Score of 1 is where competence begins, and where most starting Wanderers live in the Skills they did not tag.

- Score 0: Untrained. You cannot use this Skill for serious attempts.

- Score 1: Novice. Basic competence. You have done this a few times.

- Score 3: Professional. You could earn a living with this Skill.

- Score 5: Expert. You are among the best in your region.

- Score 7: Master. Your name carries weight. People tell stories about you.

- Score 10: Legendary. Few in history have reached this level.

Where Your Skills Start

No points are spent at character creation. Every one of the eighteen Skills begins at a Level derived from your SPECIAL stats:

> Starting Skill Level = (Governing Stat × 2) + LUK Stat

Each Skill answers to one governing stat — the stat printed beside it on the Skill List below. Athletics answers to Strength, Medicine to Intelligence, Speech to Charisma. Luck has no Skills of its own. Instead it adds itself to every Skill you have, which makes LUK the quiet generalist of the system: a Wanderer who dumps Luck is a Wanderer who starts a full step behind in everything, and the party will notice before the player does.

> Example: Kara has AGI 5, INT 5, and LUK 4. Her Small Guns (governed by AGI) starts at $(5 \times 2) + 4 = \text{Skill Level } 14$ — a Skill Score of 1. Her Medicine (INT) starts at the same Level 14. Her Barter (CHA 3) starts at $(3 \times 2) + 4 = \text{Level } 10$ — also Score 1, but with nothing to spare.

Skill	Governing Stat
---	---
Athletics	Strength
Big Guns	Strength
Melee Weapons	Strength
Energy Weapons	Perception
Explosives	Perception
Larceny	Perception

Poise	Endurance
Survival	Endurance
Unarmed	Endurance
Barter	Charisma
Bluff	Charisma
Speech	Charisma
Medicine	Intelligence
Repair	Intelligence
Science	Intelligence
Acrobatics	Agility
Small Guns	Agility
Sneak	Agility

Advancing Skills

One Skill Point raises a Skill Level by 1. Ten Levels — ten invested points — raise the Skill Score by 1. No Skill Level may rise above 100, and no Skill Score may exceed 10. Skill Points arrive at level-up in the amounts printed in Chapter 4, and they may be spent on any Skill the player likes, at any time, in any combination. A Wanderer is never locked into a build; a medic who spends twenty sessions patching wounds can decide in session twenty-one to become a marksman, and the system will let them, slowly and at the cost of everything else they could have been.

Tagged Skills

Three of your eighteen Skills are Tagged Skills — the specialties that define who your Wanderer is and what they do better than anyone standing next to them. You choose all three at character creation (Chapter 2, Step 5), and the choice is permanent.

A Tagged Skill adds 15 Skill Levels on top of the starting formula:

> Tagged Starting Skill Level = (Governing Stat × 2) + LUK Stat + 15

> Example: Kara tags Small Guns. It starts at 14 + 15 = Skill Level 29 — a Skill Score of 2, a full Score ahead of her untagged Level 14.

The tag is a permanent head start, and the reason it is a flat 15 Levels rather than a multiplier is worth understanding, because it shapes the whole campaign. Those 15 Levels stay baked into the Skill Level forever, so a Tagged Skill crosses every Score threshold earlier than an untagged one and keeps functioning above the point where the same Skill would stall untagged. A tag bought as a percentage bonus would have made a starting Wanderer monstrous and a veteran nearly identical to everyone else; a tag bought as flat Levels makes a novice dangerous and a veteran still visibly ahead. The tag never spends down and never fades. A Skill can be tagged only once, ever. TAG! Skill is a Perk that tags one additional Skill beyond the three chosen at creation.

Skills, Talents, and Perks

These four words get used loosely at tables, and the confusion costs real time mid-session, so the book keeps them separate.

A Stat is what you have — a flat number from 1 to 10, printed on your sheet and rarely changed.

A Talent is the die that stat rolls. Every stat has one, it is fixed by the stat's value, and it is what the formula calls your Talent Bonus: when a check is governed by Strength, the STR Talent die is what you add. Talents also drive the rest of the system — your Damage Threshold is your STR Talent, your Action Points are your AGI Talent, a Death Toll Check is your END Talent alone, and a chem's hook is your CHA Talent.

A Skill is what you have trained, and it is the multiplier.

A Perk is what you have chosen to become, and it is the thing that bends the rules rather than feeding them.

So: a stat is the hand you were dealt, a Talent is how hard that hand swings, a Skill is how often you have swung it, and a Perk is the trick you learned that nobody else at the table can do. A Wanderer with STR 8 and no Melee Weapons training hits like a truck and misses like one too. A Wanderer with Melee Weapons 5 and STR 3 lands every swing and bruises nothing. The system wants you to notice that, and then to decide which of the two you would rather be standing beside.

Reading a Skill Roll

When a Skill is tested, the roll is the core formula with that Skill's Score and governing Talent plugged in:

$$> ((d20 \times \text{Skill Score}) + \text{Talent Bonus} + \text{Luck Bonus} + \text{Other Bonuses}) \div 20 = \text{Effort}$$

The Effort is compared to the Difficulty Class the Overseer sets, from Very Easy (0) to Beyond Impossible (9+). Beat the DC and the action works. Beat it by one rank and the Overseer may grant a minor boon. Beat it by two and the advantage is significant. Beat it by three or more and something happens that the table will still be talking about next session. There are no critical failures on Skill checks. Failure is failure, and the Overseer decides how badly it goes based on the situation rather than on the die.

Most Skill checks come in one of two shapes. The first is against a DC — the lock, the climb, the wound, the terminal, the rusted door that needs to come off its hinges. The second is contested — both parties roll the standard formula and the higher Effort wins, which is how melee attacks, grapples, Sneak against a sentry's Perception, and Bluff against a listener's Poise all resolve. A contested check is the system's way of saying that this problem is a person, not a wall, and the Overseer should reach for it whenever the obstacle has opinions.

The Eighteen Skills

The list is deliberately short. Eighteen is a number a player can hold in their head after two sessions, and every one of them earns its place by being called for at the table at least once a fight or once a road. They are grouped here by governing stat, because your SPECIAL stats *are* your Skill list, and reading them together is the fastest way to understand what a build can do.

Strength Skills

Strength is the stat of things that are heavy and things that must be moved. Its Skills are the ones that end arguments at close range or carry the party's entire fortune on their back.

Athletics (Str) covers climbing, running, swimming, jumping, throwing, and feats of raw physical exertion — hauling a fallen comrade out of a pit, forcing a door that has been sealed since the bombs, keeping pace with a brahmin herd across broken ground. Athletics is the Skill that gets the party *somewhere*. Call for it when the route is the problem: DC 1 to climb a fire escape with gear, DC 2 to swim a flooded tunnel in armor, DC 4 to outrun a yao guai charge on open ground.

Big Guns (Str) governs miniguns, missile launchers, flamethrowers, and anything else that requires strength to haul and control. This Skill is the reason a high-STR Wanderer has a real answer to a Tier 4 adversary, because the only weapons that move a heavy's HP bar are the ones nobody else can carry. Big Guns is rolled to fire; the weapon card carries the rest.

Melee Weapons (Str) covers blades, blunt weapons, spears, and every hand-to-hand armament. Melee attacks are contested rather than rolled against a DC (see Chapter 3), so Melee Weapons is the Skill you roll against another person's weapon skill, with reach, shield, and weapon Condition all shifting the outcome. A Wanderer who invests here is betting that the fight will come to them, and in a wasteland full of corridors, cellars, and doorways, that bet pays more often than the math suggests.

Perception Skills

Perception is the stat of noticing — the wrong detail, the loose wire, the shot you have to place from a hundred yards out. Its Skills are precise, technical, and unforgiving.

Energy Weapons (Per) governs laser rifles, plasma casters, and every directed-energy firearm. Energy weapons ignore half the damage resistance of chitin and shell, which makes Energy Weapons the Skill that solves a mirelurk or a radscorpion when the party's pistols have stopped mattering. It is also the Skill that scales hardest into the late game, because the weapons it drives are rare, expensive, and worth every cap.

Explosives (Per) covers planting, disarming, and improvising bombs, plus demolition and the messy arithmetic of blast radius. Call for Explosives when the party wants to open a sealed vault door, clear a corridor of radroaches without walking down it, or convince a gunner fireteam that cover is a lie. A failed

Explosives check is rarely a wasted turn; it is usually a new problem standing where the old one used to be.

Larceny (Per) governs lockpicking, pickpocketing, sleight of hand, and disarming traps. It is the Skill that turns a locked door from an obstacle into a shortcut, and the Skill that decides whether the party finds the cache or blows a hole in the floor doing it. DC 2 for a rusted padlock, DC 3 for a pre-war safe, DC 4 for a merchant's belt pouch in a crowded market. Larceny is the quietest Skill in the book and the one most likely to change a session's outcome without a single shot fired.

Endurance Skills

Endurance is the stat of lasting — the long walk, the cold night, the hand-to-hand brawl that goes four rounds past where anyone else would have quit. Its Skills are about the body refusing.

Poise (End) covers composure under pressure: resisting fear, shrugging off intimidation, and holding calm in chaos. Call for Poise when a deathclaw's Terrifying Presence washes over the party, when a gunner captain is trying to make a Wanderer put the weapon down, or when a hostage negotiation is one bad breath away from a shooting. A high-Poise Wanderer is the one who speaks first when nobody else can.

Survival (End) governs foraging, tracking, navigating wilderness, building shelter, and enduring the elements. It is

the Skill that keeps the party alive between fights rather than during them, and it is the one most often rolled against the world's hazards — thirst, cold, rad zones, and the long nights on the road (see Chapter 6). Any Survival check that is resolved with the Talent die alone, with no d20 and no Score behind it, ratchets: the DC climbs by 1 with each success and resets to its base on a failure. A Talent die has a floor — a CHA 8 Wanderer's $d10+3$ can never roll below a 4 — so a flat DC of 3 or lower would make a trained survivor permanently immune to the wastes. The ratchet breaks that immunity honestly. It is the same grammar the Death Toll and the chem hook use, and it exists for the same reason: nobody outruns the world forever.

Unarmed (End) covers punches, kicks, grapples, and dirty fighting — everything a Wanderer can do with no weapon at all. Unarmed strikes cost 1 AP at base and escalate by 1 AP per additional strike in the same turn, and unlike every other weapon in the book they never degrade, never jam, and never run out. Unarmed is the Skill that scales through damage dice like any other (see Skill Scaling in Chapter 3) and it is the Skill that keeps working when the party has been stripped of gear, thrown in a cell, or dropped into a pit by something that wanted them alive.

Charisma Skills

Charisma is the stat of being believed. Its Skills decide whether the party pays for the room or sleeps in the ditch, whether the raiders shoot or talk, and whether the settlement remembers their faces kindly.

Barter (Cha) governs haggling, trading, negotiating prices, and assessing an item's worth. Call for Barter when the party wants a fair price instead of the first price, when they need to move salvage without announcing it to every raider on the road, or when a caravan master is deciding whether to extend credit. Barter is the Skill that converts the wasteland's junk into ammunition, and ammunition is what converts plans into outcomes.

Bluff (Cha) covers lying, misdirection, feinting in combat, and selling a story that is not true. Call for Bluff when the party needs to walk past a checkpoint they have no business walking past, when a Wanderer claims to be somebody's courier, or when the only way out of a room is a sentence delivered with total confidence. Bluff is contested against the listener's Poise rather than rolled against a fixed DC, because a lie only has to be believed by the person standing in front of you.

Speech (Cha) governs persuasion, rhetoric, intimidation through words, and commanding a room. Where Bluff fabricates, Speech argues. Call for Speech when the party wants a settlement to open its gates, when a Wanderer is trying to talk a gunner off a rooftop, or when the moment calls for someone to stand up in a crowded hall and make the rest of the room agree with them.

Speech is the only Skill in the book that can end a fight the party was certain they would lose.

Intelligence Skills

Intelligence is the stat of understanding — how the old world worked, why the body fails, what the machine is trying to tell you. Its Skills are the ones that turn a ruin into a resource.

Medicine (Int) covers first aid, surgery, pharmacology, treating radiation sickness, and diagnosing illness. Medicine is the Skill that pulls a Wanderer out of the Death Toll with a stabilize check (DC 3, Standard action) and the Skill that turns a stimpak, a doctor's bag, or a dose of RadAway into an actual plan. A party with no Medicine is a party that measures every fight in hospital days.

Repair (Int) governs fixing broken equipment, jury-rigging machines, and maintaining gear. Every weapon in this book wears down, and every suit of armor takes hits it does not fully forgive, so Repair is the Skill that keeps the party's damage output and damage threshold where they belong. It also opens doors that lockpicking cannot: a generator that needs to come back on, a turret that can be turned, a set of power armor that has been waiting two hundred years for someone who understands it.

Science (Int) covers chemistry, biology, physics, and understanding the principles of the old world. Science is the

Skill for terminals, pre-war medicine, chemical synthesis, and any moment where the party is looking at something they have never seen before and needs to know what it is before it kills them. It is the Skill most likely to be called for by an Overseer who wants to hand the table information rather than damage.

Agility Skills

Agility is the stat of motion — hands, feet, reflexes, and the difference between being seen and not. Its Skills are the ones a Wanderer uses when the plan depends on nobody noticing.

Acrobatics (Agi) governs balance, tumbling, dodging, and graceful movement. Call for Acrobatics when the only way forward is across a collapsed overpass, down a rubble slope, or through a window on the second floor. Where Athletics is raw force, Acrobatics is control, and a Wanderer who has both can go anywhere the map allows.

Small Guns (Agi) covers pistols, revolvers, submachine guns, rifles, and other handheld firearms — the Skill the overwhelming majority of Wanderers will lean on from the first session to the last. Ranged attacks roll Small Guns against the weapon's Range DC, and the Skill Scales damage with the die printed on the weapon card. A 10mm in the hands of Score 3 and the same 10mm in the hands of Score 7 are not the same weapon; the second one is a different argument entirely.

Sneak (Agi) governs moving silently, hiding, shadowing a target, and remaining unseen. Sneak is contested against the target's Perception, and it is the Skill that decides whether an encounter starts with a surprise round or a body on the ground. Call for Sneak when the party wants to scout a raider camp, cross a lit street, or get behind a sentry bot's sensor cone — and remember that robots do not get bored, do not look away, and do not miss the way a person misses.

Skill Checks in Play

Inside combat, a Skill check costs AP by complexity rather than by difficulty: Quick actions (shouting a warning, glancing at a room) cost 1 AP, Standard actions (picking a lock, patching a wound, identifying a creature) cost 2 AP, Extended actions (hacking a terminal, searching a room, negotiating a standoff) cost 4 AP, and Lengthy actions (field surgery, disassembling a complex device, interrogating a prisoner) cost 6 AP or more at the Overseer's call. Outside combat or any active pressure, Skill checks cost no AP at all. Time is the only price, and the Overseer decides how much of it the attempt burns.

A failed check is not a wall. The Overseer should ask what failure costs before deciding whether to allow a retry: a failed Larceny check can break the pick, a failed Speech check can close the gate, a failed Repair check can make the machine worse. If failure would stop the story dead with nothing interesting

happening, do not call for the roll in the first place. If failure would cost the party something they will feel three sessions from now, call for it and let the dice fall where they fall.

When two or more Wanderers work the same problem, the Overseer may allow a combined effort: the best-suited Wanderer rolls, and each additional helper adds a flat +1 to the Effort, to a maximum of +3. The helpers must have a plausible way to contribute — a second pair of hands on a pry bar, a second set of eyes on a wire — and the Overseer is free to rule that some problems simply cannot be helped.

Quick Reference: The Skill Roll

- Skill Level (0-100) is the ledger. Skill Score (0-10) is the multiplier: one point per ten full Levels.

- Starting Skill Level = (Governing Stat × 2) + LUK. Luck adds to every Skill you have.

- Tagged Skills add a flat +15 Levels on top, chosen at creation, permanent, three of them.

- Formula: $((d20 \times \text{Skill Score}) + \text{Talent Bonus} + \text{Luck Bonus} + \text{Other Bonuses}) \div 20 = \text{Effort}$.

- A Score of 0 is an automatic failure. Untrained means untrained.

- Two shapes of check: against a DC, or contested against another person.

- Talent-only checks ratchet. If a check is resolved with the Talent die alone, the DC climbs by 1 per success and resets on failure.

- In combat, complexity sets the AP cost. Out of combat, time is the price.

- No critical failures. The Overseer decides how badly it goes, not the die.

Chapter 9: Weapons & Equipment

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Your SPECIAL stats are what the wasteland handed you when you arrived. Your Skills are what you have done with them since. Everything else — the rifle on your back, the plates strapped over your ribs, the stimpak in your coat, the water you are saving for the third day on the road — is gear, and gear is the only pillar of a Wanderer that somebody else can take off them. The wastes are full of people with excellent stats and nothing to show for them, and full of people with unremarkable stats, a clean weapon, and enough caps to keep it fed. The second kind live longer. This chapter is about everything a Wanderer carries, what it does when the dice are rolling, and what it costs to keep working.

Gear does not make you better at being you. It makes the fight you are already in a different fight. Your Skill Score decides how hard the d20 swings; a weapon decides what that swing is worth when it lands, how far away you can be standing when it does, and how many times you get to do it before you are down to a knife and a bad idea. That is why equipment sits beside the combat rules rather than under them. A weapon card is not decoration on a character sheet — it is a set of dials that turn

the combat math, and a Wanderer who does not know their own weapon is a Wanderer handing the Overseer a gift.

Everything Is a Card

Every object in this book is written on a card, and every card carries the same fields in the same order, so that once you can read one you can read the whole catalog at a glance. An item card tells you what the thing does, what it weighs, what it is worth, and — for weapons and armor — how it wears down and how it can be improved. The fields are deliberately few. A card you cannot read mid-fight is a card that might as well be a paragraph of lore, and the wastes do not pause for paragraph breaks.

Effect is what the item does when you use it — the healing a stimpak restores, the damage a weapon deals, the protection a plate of armor provides, the bonus a piece of gear grants. Weight is what it costs you to carry, subtracted from the Carry Weight budget printed on your character sheet. Value is what a trader will start the haggling at, in caps. Type places the item in the world — a Small Gun, a suit of armor, a chem, a piece of survival gear — and Type matters because several systems in this book key off it: the Prepared Slot rules, the repair economy, and the Skills that operate the thing. And Condition, where a card has one, is the meter that runs down as the wasteland works on your gear, which we will get to shortly, because it is the single

most ignored number on a starting Wanderer's sheet and the one that ends the most campaigns.

Two dials sit on almost every item card in the book, and they pull against each other. Weight is the tax on carrying the good thing; Value is the reward for being able to. A Wanderer who fills every pound of their budget with salvage they never intend to use is a Wanderer who cannot pick up the thing that would have saved them. The Carry Weight formula — $\text{STR} \times 15 + \text{END} \times 10 + \text{AGI} \times 5$ — is not a formality. It is the reason a Scavenger background matters, the reason the Reinforced Backpack earns its sixty caps, and the reason the party has to decide, standing in a ruin with more loot than they can haul, what they are willing to leave behind for the next person.

Weapons

A weapon is the most complicated card in the book, and the one you will look at most often, so it earns the most fields. Every weapon card carries a Category, a Damage line, a Skill Scaling line, an AP cost for firing and reloading, a Magazine, an Ammo type, a Weight, a Value, a Condition line, and four Mod Slots. Read together, those fields answer every question a fight will ask you: what it hits for, how hard it hits when you are good with it, how much of your turn it eats, how long you can keep shooting, and how long before it breaks.

Category is the Skill that fires the weapon, and it is the first thing to check, because it decides which of your Skill Scores you are rolling. Small Guns covers pistols, revolvers, submachine guns, and rifles, and it answers to Agility — it is the category the overwhelming majority of Wanderers will lean on from the first session to the last. Big Guns covers miniguns, missile launchers, and flamethrowers, answers to Strength, and is the only answer a heavy has to a Tier 4 problem. Energy Weapons covers laser and plasma arms, answers to Perception, and ignores half the damage resistance of chitin and shell. Melee Weapons covers blades, blunt weapons, and spears, answers to Strength, and resolves as a contested roll rather than against a DC. Unarmed covers fists, feet, and grapples, answers to Endurance, and never jams, never runs dry, and never degrades — the one weapon that is always with you.

Damage is what the weapon deals on a hit, expressed in dice — the 10mm Pistol's 2d6, a combat shotgun's spread, a deathclaw's claw when you have taken its hand and made it your problem. Damage is rolled once, and every part of the hit that follows — critical hits, called shots, area effects — modifies the result rather than the dice. A weapon's damage is its baseline promise, and it does not change when your Skill does; what changes is the die you add to it, which is the next field.

Skill Scaling

The single most important line on a weapon card is the one that grows. Skill Scaling ties the weapon's damage to the Score you have trained in its Category, so that the same gun in two pairs of hands is not the same gun.

Skill Score	Bonus Damage Die
---	---
1-2	+0
3-4	+1d4
5-6	+1d6
7-8	+1d8
9-10	+1d10

This is the mechanical heart of the whole gear system, and it is worth slowing down for. A 10mm Pistol deals 2d6 whether the Wanderer holding it is a novice or a legend. But the novice — Score 1, never trained — adds nothing, and the veteran at Score 7 adds 1d8 on top of every shot, and the two of them standing side by side are not fighting the same encounter. The weapon does not get stronger. The person does. That is the design working: Skill Scaling means the gun you have owned since the first session keeps growing with you, so a player is never punished for loving one weapon, and never forced to trade up just to keep pace. A Wanderer who dumps Skill Points into Small Guns turns the humblest pistol in the catalog into a reason for raiders to find cover.

Unarmed is the exception that proves the rule. It scales with its Skill like every other category, but it carries no Condition line and no Mod Slots, because there is nothing to break and nothing to bolt on. A Wanderer who builds Unarmed is betting on the one weapon that cannot be taken, stripped, jammed, or left behind in a cell — and in a wasteland where the party spends half its life being captured, disarmed, and thrown somewhere dark, that bet pays more often than the damage math suggests.

Condition and Repair

Every manufactured weapon in the book carries a Condition line, and it is the number that decides whether the thing in your hands is a weapon or a paperweight. A weapon starts at full Condition — 100, on most cards — and loses 1 point per shot fired. For every full 10 Condition it has lost, it deals one-tenth less damage, which is where the book's Tenths rule does its quiet work: drop the ones place, multiply what remains by the tenths value, and subtract it from the base. A 10mm Pistol at 80 Condition is not inoperable — it is a 10mm Pistol dealing eight-tenths of its damage, quietly, every single shot, until somebody notices the group's numbers have been slipping for three sessions. At 0 Condition a weapon does not fire at all. It jams, it seizes, it clicks. The wasteland does not care that you cleaned it last week.

The Repair Skill is the counter-pressure, and it is why the party's tinkerer is not a luxury. Repair checks bring Condition back up, and a Repair Kit turns the check from a gamble into a routine. But repairs cost time — an Extended action in combat, or an afternoon on the road — and time is the one currency the wastes never refund. A party that does not maintain its weapons is a party that watches its damage output slide by a tenth every fight, that discovers too late which gun it should have been feeding, and that learns the lesson in the worst possible room. A well-kept weapon is not a lucky weapon. It is a decision, made over and over, to spend an hour now so that the hour after the next ambush is not the last one.

Ammunition and Magazine

Magazine is how many rounds the weapon holds before a reload, and Ammo is what those rounds are. A 10mm Pistol holds twelve and fires them at 1 AP a shot; a reload is 2 AP, which is the tax you pay for emptying the magazine faster than the fight empties. Ammunition is not free in this book — it is loot, it is trade, and it is the reason a party keeps one eye on the road and one on their ammo count. A Wanderer who has never had to count rounds has never been in a fight that lasted past the good part. When the magazine runs dry mid-encounter and the reload eats the turn you needed, that is not bad luck. That is the ammo economy, reminding you it was there the whole time.

The Categories in Brief

Small Guns are the workhorse — cheap, common, and effective, and the category that keeps a party fed and fighting from session one. Big Guns are the heavy answer, and they exist to make the tier ladder solvable: the only weapons that reliably move a Behemoth's HP bar are the ones nobody else can carry. Energy Weapons are the scalpel, rare and expensive, and they are the Skill that earns its place the day the party meets a mirelurk and discovers their pistols have stopped mattering. Melee Weapons reward the Wanderer who expects the fight to come to them, and in a wasteland of corridors, cellars, and doorways, that expectation is right more often than the range tables suggest. Unarmed is the floor and the fallback, and it is the only one of the five that is still in the room when everything else has been taken.

Armor

Armor is the other half of the fight, and it works on a different principle than a weapon. Where a gun decides how hard you hit, armor decides how much of the world's hitting gets through to you, and it does it with two numbers that look similar and are not. DR — damage resistance — is the flat subtraction applied after every hit; a suit of combat armor at DR 3 quietly removes three points from every bite that lands, which against a swarm of Tier 1 claws is the difference between a long fight and a short one. DT — damage threshold — is the rolled number that

eats the first bite of the hit before DR ever applies, and it is rerolled each round, so armor makes you tough *unevenly* — the way real armor does, in the hands of a body that is not a machine.

Armor comes in tiers, and the tier is set by what it is made of rather than who is wearing it. Leather and scrap are the bottom, light enough to keep you moving and honest about how little they stop. Combat armor and its cousins are the working middle — good DR, real weight, and the point at which a Wanderer stops dying to the first raider who gets lucky. Power Armor is not a tier at all; it is its own mechanic, a powered chassis with its own states, its own fuel and maintenance ledger, and a vehicle-style damage model that treats the suit as a machine you climb into rather than a coat you pull on. The full rules for it live where the heavy gear lives, and a Wanderer who finds a set will spend a chapter of their life learning to keep it running.

The thing to remember about armor is that it changes the *shape* of a fight rather than its outcome. High DR turns a swarm into an inconvenience and a single heavy hit into a crisis. A mirelurk's shell shrugs off bullets and does nothing against acid; an energy weapon splits the difference; a called shot to the head, at a steeper Range DC, ignores the shell entirely. Armor is not a wall. It is a set of rules about which attacks hurt, and a party that reads those rules beats a party that out-damages them.

Weapon Mods

Every weapon card ends with four Mod Slots — Barrel, Receiver, Magazine, Sights — and each slot is a decision the player gets to make about what their weapon is *for*. A mod does not change the gun's category or its Skill; it turns a dial on the gun you already have, trading something you did not need for something you do. A suppressor quiets the shot and hides your muzzle flash, buying silence at the cost of a little punch. A scope extends your effective range and slows you down in a knife fight. An extended magazine buys you rounds in exchange for weight and a longer reload. A receiver swap is the deepest cut of all, changing the weapon's damage curve and its AP cost in a single purchase, because it changes what the gun fundamentally is.

Mods are priced in caps and paid for in trade-offs, which is the whole point of the system. There is no mod that is simply better; there is only a mod that is better for the fight you expect and worse for the fight you get. The full catalog — every part, every price, and every trade — sits in its own entry in the equipment section, and it is written to slot directly onto the weapon cards the party is already carrying. When a player asks what their Sights slot can do, the answer should be a choice, not a number.

Consumables and Chems

Not everything you carry is meant to be used in a fight. The wasteland runs on consumables — the stimpak that pulls a Wanderer back from the Death Toll, the RadAway that scrubs rads out of the body before the track advances another stage, the purified water that keeps thirst from doing what no raider could. These are cards too, with Effect, Weight, and Value like everything else, and they are the quiet reason a party survives a bad road: nobody remembers the water they drank on the third day, and everybody remembers the party that ran out.

Chems are the other kind of consumable, and they carry a line no other item does. Every addictive chem — Jet, Psycho, Med-X, and their kin — states a Habit DC, a Hook rating, and a Withdrawal length, and each time a Wanderer doses one, they roll the pure CHA Talent against that DC. Success does nothing but tighten the ratchet; failure adds an Addiction token, and the DC climbs a point with every clean dose, because a Talent die has a floor and a habit has to out-grow it eventually. A chem buys you a fight. It sells you the ones after it. The full rules for the hook and the withdrawal clock live with the hazard systems, because a chem is a hazard you choose to pick up.

Carry Weight and Prepared Slots

Everything you carry is weighed against the budget printed on your sheet, and everything you might need in a hurry has to be *prepared*. The Prepared Slot system is the bridge between the loot

in your pack and the item in your hand. A Wanderer begins with one free Prepared Slot and earns more at Skill Scores of 2, 4, 6, 8, and 10 in a given weapon or item type — so a specialist ends a campaign with six things ready to go and a generalist with two. Only prepared items can be used without digging, and digging costs 1 AP mid-fight, which is a turn you will not get back.

The system exists to make loadout a real decision. A Wanderer cannot carry everything and cannot reach everything, so every item in a Prepared Slot is a bet on what the next hour holds — the stimpak or the grenade, the lockpick or the spare magazine. It also gives the Scavenger and the specialist their own kind of power: not the most caps, but the fewest wasted actions, and in a fight where AP is the only thing that is ever truly scarce, the Wanderer who never has to open their pack is the Wanderer who never loses a turn.

The Economy of Gear

Caps are the wasteland's blood, and gear is what they buy. Value is the opening price, not the price you will pay — Barter moves it, and a caravan master who has watched you haggle three towns in a row will move it less. Salvage is the other half of the ledger: everything you kill, everything you strip, and everything you haul out of a ruin is worth caps to somebody, and the party's gear is constantly being converted — a dead raider's pistol into ammunition, a mirelurk's shell into a plate, a

pre-war safe into the stimpaks the next fight will eat. The economy is not a minigame bolted on the side. It is the reason a Wanderer leaves the good loot in the ruin, the reason the Reinforced Backpack is worth its weight, and the reason the party's damage output and their caps count move together, session after session, in the same direction.

Quick Reference: Gear

- Gear is the third pillar. Stats are what you are, Skills are what you have done, gear is what you carry — and the only one that can be taken from you.

- Read the Category first. It names the Skill that fires the weapon and the Score you will be rolling.

- Skill Scaling grows the weapon with you. +1d4 at Score 3, +1d6 at 5, +1d8 at 7, +1d10 at 9.

- Condition runs down. 1 per shot; one-tenth less damage per full 10 lost; inoperable at 0. Repair is the counter-pressure.

- DR subtracts, DT rolls. DR is flat and applies after every hit; DT is rerolled each round and eats the first bite.

- Four Mod Slots, no free lunches. Every mod trades something you did not need for something you do.

- Chems carry a Habit DC. The hook ratchets; the withdrawal clock is the bill.

- Prepared Slots are your real loadout. More at Skill Scores 2, 4, 6, 8, and 10; digging costs 1 AP.

- Everything weighs something. $\text{STR} \times 15 + \text{END} \times 10 + \text{AGI} \times 5$
is the budget, and the ruin always offers more than you can haul.

Chapter 10: Armor and Power Armor

Chapter 10: Armor & Power Armor

Your weapon decides what you do to the world. Your armor decides what the world does back to you. Every Wanderer learns the first half of that lesson in their first real fight, usually over the barrel of something they should have run from, and they learn it fast because the feedback is immediate and loud and arrives inside a single turn. The second half takes longer to sink in. It lands the day you walk out of a firefight you had no business surviving and cannot say with any precision why you did — and the answer, when you go looking for it, is a strip of boiled hide, a sheet of riveted steel, a plate of ceramic weave, or a two-hundred-year-old chassis that carried you through gunfire the way weather carries through a town. This chapter is about that second half: the numbers that stand between the world and your body, and the one thing in the catalog that is not armor at all but a machine a person climbs inside.

Worn and Operated

Everything in the wasteland's armory divides into two families, and the line between them is the single most important thing to understand before you read a single number. Leather, metal, and combat armor are *worn*. They sit on the body, they move

when the body moves, they add a flat bonus to the defense you already have, and they ask nothing of you but weight and caps. Power armor is *operated*. It is a powered chassis with its own structure, its own fuel, its own failing subsystems, and its own damage model, and it does not add a bonus to your body so much as interpose a second body between you and everything trying to kill you. The armor rules below apply to the worn suits. The power armor rules, which begin halfway down this chapter, apply to nothing else.

That division changes what a bad round means, and it is worth seeing the difference before you learn the mechanics. A Wanderer in combat armor who takes a rifle round has a bad round: her DT rolls low, the round punches through, she loses HP, and she keeps fighting with the armor still doing its work. A Wanderer in a powered chassis who takes the same round has a bad *chassis* round: the suit eats the damage, the wearer feels none of it, and the real question is how many more rounds the frame can take before the plating gives and the person inside starts paying. Worn armor changes the math of a fight. Operated armor changes the fight into a different kind of fight, one with a clock ticking on it.

The Two Numbers: DT and DR

Worn armor works through two stats, and they behave so differently that a Wanderer who cannot keep them apart will misread every encounter they walk into. Read this section twice.

Damage Threshold (DT) is the rolled number, and it is the front of the hit. At the start of each of your turns — during the Beginning Phase, with the rest of your upkeep — you roll your STR Talent die and add the DT bonus printed on your armor. That total is your DT for the round ahead. It eats the leading edge of every attack that lands on you that round, before DR ever applies, and it is spent in the process: damage chews through the pool hit by hit, and the pool comes back fresh on your next turn. The armor's contribution is the floor under that roll. Where a naked Wanderer's worst roll leaves them at 1 DT, a Wanderer in leather is never below 3, and a Wanderer in metal is never below 5, and that floor is what armor is actually selling you — not a peak, a minimum.

Damage Resistance (DR) is the flat number, and it comes after. It subtracts from every hit that survives DT, automatically, with no roll and no pool to spend, and it never runs out. A suit at DR 2 quietly removes two more points from everything that gets through, every time, forever, and against a flurry of small attacks that is not a bonus but a wall. This is the stat that makes combat armor the professional's choice and metal armor the brute's: metal has more DT and no DR, combat armor has less DT and DR 2, and the difference shows up on the third and fourth hit of a round, when the metal wearer's DT pool is spent and every remaining bite lands clean while the combat wearer is still shaving two points off each one.

The order never changes, and it is worth committing to memory as a single ladder you walk a hit down. Roll the weapon's damage. Apply the tenths rule if the weapon is degraded — a gun at half Condition hits softer before armor even enters the picture. Subtract DT. Subtract DR. Whatever is left is what lands on the body.

Step	What happens	Example
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1	Roll the weapon's damage	9
2	Apply tenths if the weapon is degraded	9
3	Subtract the target's DT (STR Talent roll + armor bonus)	
9 - 6 = 3		
4	Subtract the target's DR	3 - 2 = 1
5	The remainder hits HP	1

Walk a 10mm Pistol's 9 damage at a Wanderer who rolled 3 on her STR Talent and wears combat armor: 3 plus 3 is 6 DT, 9 minus 6 is 3, minus 2 for DR leaves 1. She takes a single point from a shot that would have put a naked Wanderer on the floor. Then walk the same Wanderer into a hunting rifle's 17: DT 6 brings it to 11, DR 2 to 9, and nine points is the whole point of the system. Armor is a wall against volume and a speed bump against power, and no worn suit ever made its wearer bulletproof. Leather collapses entirely against a 2d10 rifle and shines against a swarm of 1d4 claws; the Overseer should build encounters that

test both, so the party learns the shape of their own protection instead of trusting a single number.

The Armor Ladder

Worn armor climbs a ladder, and each rung trades one thing for another rather than simply being better than the last. The full stat lines live on the cards, but the shape of the climb is worth holding in your head, because it tells you what each suit is *for* and who should be wearing it.

Suit	Category	DT	DR	Weight	Value	Mod Slots	
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Leather Vest	Light	+1	0	3 lbs	25 caps	—	
Leather Armor	Light	+2	0	8 lbs	60 caps	Lining,	
Straps							
Metal Armor	Medium	+4	0	25 lbs	220 caps	Plating,	
Padding							
Combat Armor	Medium	+3	2	18 lbs	320 caps	Weave,	
Plating, Padding							
Power Armor	Operated	+6	4	60 lbs*	2,000 caps		
Four subsystems							

Leather is where every Wanderer starts, and it is honest about what it is: two free points against a glancing hit, no protection worth the name against a rifle, and a weight so trivial it never changes what you can carry. The leather vest is the same family with the arms and torso pared down to a single point, and it is

armor for people who plan to be hit occasionally rather than often. Metal is the step up for the fighter who stands their ground — four DT, the highest DT on the worn ladder, bought with twenty-five pounds and the clatter of a walking junkyard. Combat armor is the rung most Wanderers never reach, and the only worn suit that grants DR; it gives up a point of DT against metal and takes back two points off every hit that gets through, at seven pounds less, which is the trade that matters to anyone who expects to be hit more than once a turn. Power Armor sits at the bottom of that table only for convenience. It is not on the ladder at all, and the rest of this chapter is about why.

Wearing It: Weight, Noise, and Reputation

A suit of armor is three decisions wearing one coat, and the third is the one new players forget. The first is weight: armor counts against Carry Weight the same as anything else, and metal armor at 25 lbs is a real bite out of a budget built on $STR \times 15 + END \times 10 + AGI \times 5$. Wear the heaviest thing you can afford and you will leave loot in the ruin, ammunition on the ground, and the salvage that would have paid for the next suit behind you in the dark. The second is noise: plate clanks, and a Wanderer who plans to sneak through a quiet place should leave the metal at home or accept that the Overseer will levy a penalty on the roll, because metal armor is not a stealth tool and it has never once pretended to be.

The third decision is what you look like wearing it, and this is the one the numbers do not capture. A full suit of combat armor reads as *military* to everyone who sees it — it opens doors at old depots and supply caches that stay shut for scavengers in hide, and it paints a target on your back for every raider gang that would rather take a good suit than buy one. Metal armor reads as *raider*, which is fine if you are one and inconvenient if you are not, because the settlement that watches a clanking stranger walk through the gate has already decided what to do about them. Leather reads as *settler*, which is the quietest kind of safety there is. The Overseer should use this. Armor is a uniform whether you mean it to be or not, and the wasteland reads uniforms before it reads faces.

Armor Mods

Every worn suit carries mod slots, and like the slots on a weapon they are a decision about what the suit is for rather than a straight upgrade. Leather offers Lining and Straps; metal offers Plating and Padding; combat armor offers Weave, Plating, and Padding. The catalog of what fills those slots lives with the weapon mods in the equipment section, and it follows the same grammar: every part is priced in caps and paid for in a trade, so a padded lining that insulates against cold is weight you now carry and caps you no longer have. The full system slots directly onto the armor cards the party is already wearing, and the

Overseer should treat a modded suit as a statement of intent. A Wanderer who pads their combat armor has decided what kind of wasteland they expect to survive, and the wasteland is listening.

Power Armor: The Machine You Climb Into

Then there is the suit that is not a suit. A set of power armor is the old world's last argument, and it does not fit on an armor rack any more than a tank fits in a closet. It is a powered chassis a person climbs inside, closer to a vehicle than to clothing, and these rules treat it that way — it runs on microfusion cells the way a truck runs on fuel, it wears out and breaks down and wants a mechanic with a parts budget, and in return it hands its wearer a roster of advantages no worn suit can touch. The frame does the lifting, the plating does the bleeding, and the Wanderer inside walks through gunfire the way weather walks through a town.

The first rule is that power armor is not a tier of the ladder. Leather, metal, and combat armor are worn; power armor is operated. It never occupies a Prepared Slot, it does not add its DT to your STR Talent roll the way worn armor does, and the worn-armor rules above do not apply to it. It has its own card, its own damage model, its own fuel and maintenance ledger, and its own way of failing.

A suit is always in one of three states, and knowing which one you are in is the whole of operating it. Active means powered and

occupied, all boons live, one microfusion cell draining per day. Dormant means powered down and empty — a rigid sixty-pound shell whose joints will not move, hauled as freight by two strong Wanderers or a vehicle, never worn. Lockdown means the power ran dry or the chassis hit zero mid-operation, and the failsafes have seized every joint rather than let a dead suit dump its wearer on the ground. A Wanderer caught in Lockdown cannot move and cannot climb out; escape takes another pair of hands, a minute of work, and a Repair check (DC 3), or a crowbar and a combined Athletics effort (DC 4). Cutting a friend out of a powered suit is possible. It is exactly as unpleasant as it sounds.

While a suit is Active, incoming damage resolves against the chassis instead of the wearer, and the ladder is different from the one worn armor uses. Subtract the Plating DT of six. Subtract the Plating DR of four. Whatever remains comes off the chassis HP, and the wearer's own DT, DR, and HP are untouched until the frame is breached. Walk a minigun burst of 11 at an Active suit: 11 minus 6 is 5, minus 4 is 1, and one point comes off a chassis with forty to spend. That is a Wanderer standing in the open eating automatic fire and losing a single point of structural integrity for it, and it is why the suit costs what it costs and why everyone in the wastes wants one. Effects that never travel through the shell — the poison gas, the radiation, the killing cold — are handled by the suit's sealed systems rather than by the damage order. When chassis HP reaches zero the plating is

compromised and the suit drops into Lockdown, and from that point every hit, including the overflow of the one that did it, applies to the wearer personally through under-armor alone.

A hit that beats the range DC or the contested roll by three or more against an Active suit can be spent to disable a subsystem instead of dealing maximum damage, and a called shot can target a subsystem directly at the usual penalty, subtracting its damage from that subsystem's Condition rather than the chassis. This is the crack in the armor, and it is the one the Overseer should keep in hand. A suit has four subsystems — Frame, Servos, Plating, and Helmet — each starting at Condition 100 and each granting something the moment it fails to.

Subsystem	Grants	When disabled
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Frame	Movement and posture	The suit cannot move — Lockdown with power still in the cells
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Servos	Strength of the Frame, Hauler's Chassis	Strength boons off; movement costs +1 AP per 5 ft while the frame drags
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Plating	Plating DT and DR	DT and DR drop to 0; every hit bleeds straight into Chassis HP
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Helmet	Sealed Systems, Targeting HUD	Both off; the wearer breathes the wasteland and aims without help
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Knock out the Frame and the suit freezes in place with power still humming in the cells. Knock out the Servos and the strength boons go dark and every five feet of movement costs an extra

action point while the frame drags. Knock out the Plating and the DT and DR fall to zero, so every hit from then on bleeds straight into the chassis. Knock out the Helmet and the wearer breathes the wasteland again and aims without help. A suit can be peeled apart one subsystem at a time by an enemy who understands it, which is why the Wanderer wearing one should spend as much thought on what the raiders are aiming at as on what they are shooting.

The boons themselves are worth spelling out, because they are the reason a Wanderer spends a chapter of their life learning to keep a suit running. While the suit is Active, the wearer's effective STR becomes 8 for Athletics, grappling, breaking things, STR Talent rolls, and melee, and the gauntlets turn bare hands into 2d6 powered blows. The sixty pounds of chassis never touch Carry Weight, and the frame's cargo loops carry a hundred pounds of external load for free. Difficult terrain costs nothing, falls are dealt to the chassis rather than the body and halved on the way through, and while the helmet holds, the suit seals against airborne hazards entirely — radiation and inhaled poison do not reach the wearer, temperature extremes become the suit's problem, and there is an hour of air in the tanks. The targeting HUD adds a point to ranged attack Effort and reads out the ammunition and Condition of every weapon in hand, and the sheer sound of the thing, the hydraulic groan of a walking argument, is worth two points to intimidation. Everyone in the

wastes knows what a powered suit is worth. That cuts both ways, and the next section is about the cutting.

Fuel and Maintenance

A suit is a machine, and a machine has a bill. An Active suit drinks one microfusion cell per day — the same cells that feed laser weapons, which means the two compete for the same scarce fuel and a Wanderer running both is running a race against their own ammunition. A fight that pushed the suit hard, absorbing sustained automatic fire or sprinting or taking falls, may cost a second cell at the Overseer's call, and running the last cell dry mid-operation drops the suit into Lockdown wherever it happens to be standing. Between fights, the suit wears down like any machine: after a day of operation or any major fight, the Overseer levies Condition loss across the subsystems, typically a d10 off the Plating with smaller losses where the fight demanded — Frame from the falls, Servos from the heavy lifting, Helmet from the hits it took. A suit that never sees a mechanic does not fail gently; it fails in the doorway of the room where you needed it most.

Repairs are a Repair check and half an hour per problem. Chassis HP comes back two d10 at a time for a DC 3 check and a parts cost the Overseer sets — scavenged plating and servos run roughly 50 caps per 10 HP — and subsystem Condition returns the same way, one check per subsystem. The gauntlets are too clumsy

for the work, so a mechanic climbs out and does it properly, which is its own small drama when the mechanic is also the one wearing the suit. And the costs do not stop at the bench. The suit draws fire, envy, and salvage crews; raiders kill to strip it, settlements tax it, and a powered Wanderer sleeps with one eye open. There is no subtlety in it at all — Sneak attempts in an Active suit should be flatly refused or handed a brutal penalty, and the wearer never benefits from a surprise round, because everyone hears the argument coming down the road. The gauntlets take a penalty on anything that wants fingertips, from lockpicking to field surgery, and the suit sinks in water, calmly and completely, which is a thing to plan around before you cross the river and not after. Power armor is the strongest thing a Wanderer can put on. It is also the loudest, the hungriest, and the most wanted, and every one of those is the same sentence.

The dials that keep a suit honest are the cell economy, the parts bill, and the maintenance clock, not the armor's numbers. If the suit feels too strong, drain cells faster, levy heavier Condition loss, or price parts higher; if it feels too fragile, raise Chassis HP to 50 or ease the maintenance schedule. An Overseer who wants the canonical training gate may require a Perk such as Power Armor Training before a Wanderer gains the targeting HUD and the strength of the frame — an untrained wearer operates the suit clumsily, without the HUD bonus and paying an extra action point per five feet of movement until

trained. The suit is not a reward. It is a second job, and the party should feel the weight of it in the ledger before they feel the power of it in the fight.

Quick Reference: Armor

- Worn or operated. Leather, metal, and combat armor are worn and add to your defense; power armor is operated and replaces the question entirely.

- DT is rolled and first. STR Talent roll plus your armor's DT bonus, refreshed each turn, spent absorbing damage, and a floor under your worst roll.

- DR is flat and second. It subtracts from everything that survives DT, every time, and it never runs out.

- The ladder: tenths, then DT, then DR. Degraded weapons hit softer before armor; what is left after all three is what lands on the body.

- Armor is a wall against volume, a speed bump against power. It turns a swarm into an inconvenience and a hunting rifle into a crisis.

- Weight, noise, and reputation. Every suit is a decision about what you can carry, whether you can sneak, and who will try to take it off you.

- Mod slots trade one thing for another. Lining and Straps, Plating and Padding, Weave and Plating and Padding — no free lunches.

- Power armor is a machine. Three states, four subsystems, a chassis HP pool, and a cell a day. It fights for you until it does not.

- Everything has a bill. Fuel, parts, maintenance, attention. The suit that never sees a mechanic dies at the worst moment, and so does the Wanderer inside it.

Chapter 11: Perks

Chapter 11: Perks

Skills are the verbs of a Wanderer — the things your hands know how to do when the moment finally arrives. Perks are the adjectives, and they are what turns a spreadsheet into a person. Two Wanderers can walk out of character creation carrying the identical SPECIAL line, the identical three Tagged Skills, and the identical starting kit, and by the time they reach Level 5 they will have become two completely different creatures, because every level hands each of them a Perk and asks the same question: what do you want to be good at that the rules have not already decided for you?

A Perk is a small rule that belongs to one character and to no one else. It is the gunslinger who shoots before anyone else has drawn, the medic who keeps a dying crew breathing through a firefight, the charmer who walks a checkpoint without spending a round, the scrapper who keeps finding caps in places the wasteland already picked clean. Where a Skill Score measures the width of what you can attempt, a Perk measures the depth of the one thing you have decided to do better than anyone else in the room. This chapter is about earning them, spending them, ranking them, and — most of all — building them, because in this game the Perk list is not a menu. It is a conversation.

There Is No Master List

The first rule of Perks is the one that trips up players arriving from other games. There is no master table, no fixed catalog you are meant to shop from, no correct build waiting at the end of a spreadsheet. Perks are bespoke. The list that follows is a starting point — the common Perks that turn up again and again across the wasteland, the ones an Overseer can hand a new player on their first night — but it is a seed, not a boundary. When a Wanderer levels up, the player proposes a Perk concept. The Overseer approves it, sharpens it, or negotiates it into shape, and the two of them agree on what it does. A Perk that exists in your game because your table invented it is worth ten that came printed in a book.

That has a consequence worth stating plainly, because it changes how you read everything below. The Perks in this chapter are not a ladder to be climbed in order, and none of them is required. They are worked examples — proof that the system can produce the effect you are imagining — and the Overseer should treat every one of them as a template that can be bent, split, or rebuilt from scratch. The wasteland is infinite. The Perk list should be too.

How a Wanderer Earns a Perk

The rhythm is set in the Advancement chapter, and it is simple: every level grants exactly one new Perk. The first is

chosen at Level 1, during Step 7 of character creation, before the character has ever set foot outside their settlement. Every level after that, the choice is made the moment the level is gained, which means a Perk is never an afterthought and never a bonus you remember to apply later. It arrives at the same time as the Hit Points, the Skill Points, and the Morale Point, and it is the one of the four that is entirely yours to invent.

Because the gain is once per level and the cost is a real decision, a Perk should be treated as an identity marker rather than a stat bump. A player who spends Level 4 on a Perk their character has never once needed has spent it badly, and an Overseer who approves that Perk without asking why has failed the conversation. The question to ask at every level is the same one: what has this character *become* since the last time we did this?

Morale, Activation, and the Two Kinds of Perk

Perks run on Morale Points (MP) — the reserve of inner will described in the Core Character Statistics chapter, gained at 1 MP per level and restored through rest and the completion of major goals. MP is the currency that keeps a Perk from being free, and it is the reason a Perk feels like a decision at the table rather than a permanent number printed on the sheet. Spend it on the wrong Perk at the wrong moment and you will not have it when the moment that mattered finally arrives.

That divides the catalog into two kinds, and every Perk in this chapter is one or the other. A passive Perk is always running the moment it is acquired — *Mobile* hands you 2 AP each turn for movement before any other AP is calculated, and it costs you nothing to use. An active Perk waits for you to reach for it: it demands an MP cost and usually an action, or a trigger condition the Overseer confirms. *Tough* is the clean example — at the start of your turn, you may spend 1 MP to generate DT equal to your END Talent roll, a wall of grit that appears only when you decide you need it. Passive Perks change what your character *is*. Active Perks change what your character can *do*, once, in the moment it counts. A build worth playing wants both.

Ranks

Most Perks can be taken more than once, and their power is expressed as ranks running from 1 to 5. A Rank 1 Perk is a minor edge — a nudge, a small reliability, a single trick you can pull once a fight. A Rank 5 Perk is a defining, world-altering ability, the kind of thing other characters plan their turn around. Not every Perk scales the same way, and the catalog below shows three patterns. Some Perks climb all the way to Rank 5, growing in raw power each time. Some are capped lower — the Skill Group Perks stop at Rank 3, and a handful of utility Perks are deliberately single-rank. And one whole family, the Skill

Specialization Perks, uses its own named ladder of Adept, Expert, and Master instead of numbered ranks at all.

The Starting Catalog

What follows is the seed list — the Perks common enough that most wasteland tables will recognize them. Read it the way you would read a bestiary: not as the complete set of creatures in the world, but as a demonstration of the shapes a creature can take. Each family below is organized by what it changes about a Wanderer, from the fundamentals up through the exotic.

Foundational Perks

These Perks alter the fundamentals of how a character operates — resource management, core stats, and the basic actions every Wanderer takes every turn. They are the ones a new player should look at first, because they make everything else easier to use.

- Cost Analysis (Rank 1). When making Barter checks, you may replace your CHA stat with your PER or INT stat. You read value where others see clutter.

- TAG! Skill (Rank 1). Tag one *additional* Skill beyond the three chosen at character creation. That Skill gains +15 Skill Levels immediately and is henceforth a tagged specialty, keeping its permanent head start for the rest of the journey.

- Tough (Rank 1). At the start of your turn, you may spend 1 MP to generate DT equal to your END Talent roll. The grit to stand when you should fall.

- Mobile (Rank 1). You gain 2 AP each turn that can only be spent on movement, granted at the start of your turn before any other AP calculations.

- Intense Training (Rank 1). Raise one SPECIAL stat by 1. May be taken multiple times, but cannot raise a stat above 10.

Skill Specialization Perks (Adept / Expert / Master Series)

Each of these Perks has three ranks. At Adept, you add your Skill Score as a bonus to checks with the specified skill or action. At Expert, the bonus doubles. At Master, the bonus triples. These Perks represent focused, obsessive mastery of a single discipline, and a character may take several of them — but each one is a significant investment, and a Wanderer who spreads across three of them is a generalist by another name.

Perk Name	Domain
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Adept/Expert/Master Archer	Archery attacks
Adept/Expert/Master Commando	Automatic rifle attacks
Adept/Expert/Master Gladiator	Melee weapon attacks
Adept/Expert/Master Guerrilla	Ambush checks

Adept/Expert/Master Gunslinger	Pistol attacks
Adept/Expert/Master Hacker	Computer and tech checks
Adept/Expert/Master Heavy Gunner	Big gun attacks
Adept/Expert/Master Picklock	Lockpick checks
Adept/Expert/Master Rifleman	Non-automatic rifle attacks
Adept/Expert/Master Scientist	Science checks
Adept/Expert/Master Shotgunner	Shotgun attacks
Adept/Expert/Master Slugger	Unarmed attacks
Adept/Expert/Master Thief	Steal and pickpocket checks
Adept/Expert/Master Trader	Barter checks

Alternate AEM Mechanic (Overseer Option). Instead of adding Skill Score as a bonus, any roll made with the specified Skill treats a result lower than a threshold as that threshold. Adept sets the floor at 5, Expert at 10, Master at 15. This ensures

consistent performance even on poor rolls, and it is the better fit for a table that wants reliability over peaks.

Skill Group Perks (Ranked Rerolls)

These six Perks cover the major skill groups and are distinct from the Tagged Skills chosen at character creation. Each rank holds one reroll charge, and every charge comes back when you rest. Spend 1 MP and one charge to reroll one failed check using any Skill in the group. The MP is what the trick costs; the rest is what it costs to earn the trick back. A Wanderer in the middle of a firefight cannot buy more charges with a good night's sleep, and a Wanderer who hoards them will run dry on MP before they run dry on charges. Where the AEM series raises your ceiling, these raise your floor: they are the Perks for a Wanderer who cannot afford to fail twice.

- Gun Nut (Rank 1-3). Skills: Small Guns, Repair, Energy Weapons. You know firearms the way a surgeon knows bones.

- Thief (Rank 1-3). Skills: Larceny, Sneak, Acrobatics. Pockets, shadows, and ledges — all yours.

- Book Nerd (Rank 1-3). Skills: Science, Medicine, Explosives. The old world's secrets are written in fire and formula.

- Smooth Talker (Rank 1-3). Skills: Speech, Barter, Bluff. Words are weapons. You carry an arsenal.

- Size Matters (Rank 1-3). Skills: Big Guns, Melee Weapons, Athletics. When subtlety fails, you don't.

- Cowboy (Rank 1-3). Skills: Survival, Poise, Unarmed. The wasteland made you. You've made peace with it.

Combat and Criticals

Perks that bend the flow of battle — making attacks deadlier, reactions faster, and violence more reliable. These are the Perks that win fights, and they are the ones most likely to be proposed by a player who has just watched a round go badly.

- Action Boy / Action Girl (Rank 1). Add 2 to your Sequence score. You move faster, think quicker, act before the world catches up.

- Adrenaline (Rank 1). Spend 1 MP to become immune to the critical condition — bleeding out, stunned, and the like — until the start of your next turn. The body burns through the damage.

- Better Critical (Rank 1). Spend 1 MP to increase a critical hit's damage by +2 POW. When you land clean, you land *hard*.

- Better Critical (Alternate) (Rank 1). When you score a critical hit, the attack ignores the target's DT and DR. No armor stops a perfect shot.

- Bloody Mess (Rank 1). When you roll a natural 20 on an attack roll, you may spend 1 MP to double the damage. The aftermath is not for the faint of heart.

- More Criticals (Rank 1). Spend 1 MP to reroll a critical hit's damage die, taking the better result.

- Concentrated Fire (Rank 1). Whenever you make a ranged weapon attack against the same target, each consecutive miss reduces the attack's DT by 1; a hit resets the count. You correct. You adapt. You hit.

- Sniper (Rank 1). At the beginning of your turn, the Aim action cost is reduced by 1 AP (minimum 1). This bonus ends if you move. A breath, a heartbeat, a trigger pull.

- Steady Aim (Rank 1). The Aim action cost is reduced by 1 AP (minimum 1), with no special conditions. You know where the shot goes before you take it.

- Quick Draw (Rank 1). Spend 1 MP to reroll your Sequence at the start of combat, taking the better result — or the best, if you spend additional MP.

- Ninja (Rank 1-3). Gain +1 POW per rank when attacking an unaware enemy. They never hear you coming.

- Pain Train (Rank 1). When you perform a Push attack with a heavy weapon, you may daze your target; they lose 2 AP on their next turn. No brakes on this train.

Utility and Exploration

Perks that change how a character interacts with the world — finding resources, moving through spaces, and surviving the wasteland between the fights. These are the Perks that make the road survivable, and they pay for themselves in supplies.

- Educated (Rank 1). Gain 1 additional Skill Point every time you level up. Knowledge compounds.

- Fortune Finder (Rank 1). When you make camp, find a number of caps equal to your LUK Talent roll. The wasteland rewards those who know where to look.

- Scrounger (Rank 1). When you make camp, find a number of ammunition rounds equal to your LUK Talent roll. Ammo is currency. You're rich.

- Night Vision (Rank 1-3). Reduce darkness penalties by 1 per rank. The dark is just another color you've learned to read.

- Strong Back (Rank 1). Your Carry Weight doubles. You've carried heavier. You'll carry more.

- Deep Sleep (Rank 1). When resting, restore MP at double the normal rate. Some people dream. You *recover*.

- Rapid Reload (Rank 1). The Reload action costs 1 less AP (minimum 1). Your hands remember the motion. Every time.

- Quick Recovery (Rank 1). Spend 1 MP to heal HP equal to your END Talent roll. A deep breath. A reset. Back in the fight.

- Party Boy / Party Girl (Rank 1-3). Gain a +1 bonus per rank to addiction checks. Chem-resistant. Your chemistry is your own.

Defensive and Recovery

Perks that keep a character alive when the world tries its hardest to kill them. They are the counterweight to everything in

the Combat and Criticals family — where one side of the table is learning to hit harder, the other is learning to refuse to fall.

- Life Giver (Rank 1–3). Increase your Max HP by your character level for each rank. At Rank 3, you gain triple your level in Max HP. You refuse to die.

- Tough It Out (Rank 1). At the beginning of your turn, you may roll your END Talent and your LUK Talent and regain HP equal to the total of both rolls. Your Max HP is reduced by your END Talent roll until you next rest at full health. A bargain. A trade. Your body pays the price so you can keep going.

- Nerd Rage (Rank 1). Whenever your HP is reduced to 20% or less of your Max — or you begin your turn there — your STR score increases to 10 and you generate bonus DT equal to your INT Talent roll. The skinny ones are always the most dangerous.

- Indomitable (Rank 1–4). Spend 1 MP to increase your DT by your END score. At higher ranks the bonus scales: Rank 2 adds END score plus Talent, Rank 3 doubles it, Rank 4 triples it. You are a wall. The wasteland breaks against you.

- Medic (Rank 1–3). When you roll dice to restore HP with a medical aid or a Perk, you may spend 1 MP to reroll any number of dice and keep the new results. At Rank 2, rerolling 1s is free; at Rank 3, rerolling 1s and 2s is free.

Social and Teampplay

Perks that extend beyond the individual — leadership, intimidation, and the bonds between survivors. A table full of these Perks plays differently from a table full of lone wolves, and the Overseer should build encounters that reward the difference.

- Taunter (Rank 1). You may taunt a number of targets equal to your Poise Skill score, forcing enemies to focus on you while your allies flank, reposition, or escape.

- Life Coach (Rank 1). Starting at the end of your turn, as a free reaction, you may give your remaining AP to allies within sight. The limit per turn equals your CHA Talent. You don't win alone.

- Grim Reaper's Sprint (Rank 1). Whenever you reduce an enemy combatant to 0 HP, you regain 1 MP. Death feeds the machine.

- No Weaknesses (Rank 1). Increase all SPECIAL stats by 1. An all-rounder. Jack of all trades, master of survival.

Energy Perks (EP)

Some Perks reach past the Action Point pool entirely. Energy Perks grant Energy Points (EP) — a secondary action resource generated by rolling a named SPECIAL Talent and spendable only on the tasks that Perk names. The family shares one skeleton: generating EP costs 1 MP, happens once per turn (typically in the Beginning Phase, after AP is rolled), and draws from the Talent the Perk specifies. Unspent EP evaporates at the end of the turn

it was generated in, and when a listed task costs more than the EP remaining, the shortfall carries over to AP. A Wanderer holding several Energy Perks still generates EP from only one of them per turn.

The six Perks below cover the Talents that command action — STR, PER, AGI, END, INT, and CHA — each feeding the task its stat most naturally owns. LUK is absent by design: luck does not keep a ledger. Players and Overseers should feel free to invent further Energy Perks on the same skeleton, pairing a feeding Talent with a narrow list of tasks.

- Quarterback (Rank 1). Generate EP with your STR Talent, spendable only on movement — 1 EP per 5 feet, the same cost as AP movement. The high-STR, low-AGI Wanderer who rolls a threadbare AP pool can still sprint open ground, reach cover, and keep the AP they have for the gun in their hand.

- Sharpshooter (Rank 1). Generate EP with your PER Talent, spendable only on the Aim action — 1 EP per point of the action's AP cost. Where a thin AP roll would force a snap shot, Sharpshooter puts the crosshairs where they belong.

- Trigger Happy (Rank 1). Generate EP with your AGI Talent, spendable only on the extra-AP surcharge for making additional attacks in the same turn — never on a weapon's base attack cost. Hands that move this fast do not stop at one.

- Rad Walker (Rank 1). Generate EP with your END Talent, spendable only on movement through hazardous terrain — radiation

zones, extreme heat or cold, rubble fields, contaminated water — where movement normally costs double AP. Each EP moves you 5 feet through the hazard at the normal rate, the doubling ignored.

- Combat Medic (Rank 1). Generate EP with your INT Talent, spendable only on Medicine checks and the use of medical items — stimpaks, surgery kits, anything that keeps a Wanderer breathing — paying their AP costs. The body is a machine. You know where it breaks and what it costs to fix.

- Field Commander (Rank 1). Generate EP with your CHA Talent, spendable only to grant movement to allies within sight — 1 EP per 5 feet, as if the ally were spending their own AP. You cannot outrun anyone. You do not need to. You say move, and boots move.

Balance and Design

The Overseer has full authority to reject or modify any Perk proposal, and that authority is the thing that keeps a bespoke system from collapsing into wish-fulfillment. Four tests sort a good Perk from a bad one. A Perk should feel meaningful — not a dead +1, not a campaign-breaking power. It should be specific, doing one thing or one closely related set of things and doing it well. It should fit the character, grounded in their history, their personality, and the story so far. And if a Perk would make another character at the table feel obsolete, it is too broad, and it goes back on the bench.

Never price a Perk in sessions. Every ability in this book is limited by something the character can hold in their hands and count — MP above all, and the in-fiction clocks that hand it back: rest, a full night's sleep, the completion of a goal, the end of a fight. A Perk that resets "once per session" is priced in a currency the Wanderer cannot see, cannot spend, and cannot plan around, and the table feels it the first time a player asks how long a session is. If a Perk needs a ceiling, give it a resource — charges that refill on rest, a cost paid in MP, a drawback that bites every time it fires — and never a wall clock. The session is a unit that belongs to the people at the table. It has no business inside the fiction, and no Wanderer has ever been able to feel it pass.

Designing a Perk is a conversation, not a transaction. The player says what they want their character to *do* or to *be*, in plain language and without worrying about the mechanics. The Overseer listens, then shapes the idea into a mechanical form that fits the system — an MP cost, an action, a trigger, a rank ceiling — and hands it back. The result is a character who feels uniquely theirs, built from the ground up through play rather than assembled off a shelf.

> Template for Custom Perks:>> [Perk Name] (Rank)> **What the player says: "I want my character to be able to __."**>> Effect:
[Mechanical description — what it does, when it activates, what

it costs]> Rank 2: [If applicable]> Rank 3: [If applicable]> Rank 4: [If applicable]> Rank 5: [If applicable]

Quick Reference: Perks

- One Perk per level. The first comes at Level 1, during character creation Step 7; every level after that, the choice is made the moment the level is gained.

- There is no master list. Perks are bespoke — the catalog here is a seed, and player and Overseer build the rest together.

- MP is the cost of power. Passive Perks run for free; active Perks demand MP, and often an action or a trigger.

- Ranks run 1 to 5. Rank 1 is an edge, Rank 5 is a definition. The AEM series uses Adept, Expert, and Master instead.

- The families: Foundational, Skill Specialization, Skill Group rerolls, Combat and Criticals, Utility and Exploration, Defensive and Recovery, Social and Teamplay, and Energy Perks.

- The four tests: meaningful, specific, character-fit, and never broad enough to erase another player from the table.

- Nothing is priced in sessions. Every ability is limited by MP or by an in-fiction clock — rest, a night's sleep, a completed goal. No Perk resets on a session boundary, and none should ever be written that way.

- The wasteland is infinite. Your Perks should be too.

Chapter 12: Traits

Chapter 12: Traits

Every Wanderer is assembled in three layers, and it pays to know which one you are standing on. Skills are what your hands have been taught — the verbs, bought with a governing stat and sharpened by a tag. Perks are what your life has made of you — the adjectives, earned one level at a time and paid for in Morale. Traits are neither. A Trait is the shape of the person who walked into the wasteland before it had a chance to teach them anything: the eyes that see in the dark, the gut that survives a bad can of pork, the tongue that charms instead of threatens. You do not train a Trait. You do not level it, bank it, or trade it away. You are born with it, or the wasteland broke it into you somewhere early, and then you carry it for the rest of the road.

That makes Traits the quietest chapter in this book and, at a lot of tables, the one that does the most work. A Perk announces itself — you spend the MP and the room watches the effect land. A Trait just sits there being true. The player who remembers they have it at the exact moment the Overseer calls for a Perception check in a black basement is playing a different game from the player who forgot, and the difference is not the +2. The difference is that one of them built a person and the other built

a stat block. This chapter is about building the person: what a Trait is, how it differs from the two layers it sits between, why the drawback matters more than the bonus, how to read one at the table, and how to build your own when the catalog below runs dry.

What a Trait Is

A Trait is an innate aptitude — something you are naturally good at regardless of training — chosen only at character creation, in Step 6, and never afterward. A Wanderer takes exactly two, no more and no fewer, and no Trait may be taken twice. Pick two aptitudes, whether they spring from your past or cut against it, and understand that the choice is permanent in a way almost nothing else in this system is. Skills climb. Perks arrive. Traits are the fixed point the other two grow around, and a character who reaches Level 20 is still, at the root, the same creature who chose two words on the first night and walked out of the vault with them.

Every Trait is a bargain, and the bargain is the whole design. Each one grants a flat bonus — never a Talent die, never a reroll, just a number added to the Effort — paired with a drawback that shapes how the character moves through the world. A flat bonus runs from +1 to +5 and caps at +5 in any single domain; you will not find a Trait that grants a die, and you will not find one that grants a bonus without a matching cost. That

last part is not a suggestion. It is the load-bearing wall of this chapter, and the section on why comes in a moment.

Traits, Backgrounds, and Perks

Players arriving from other games mix these three up constantly, and the confusion is worth killing early, because the moment the three blur together every character at the table starts to look the same. Read the table, then read it again.

Layer	When it is chosen	What it grants	Does it cost?
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Background	Step 4, at creation	A backstory, a narrative boon, a narrative bane, and starting gear	No — boons and banes carry no numbers at all
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Trait	Step 6, at creation	A flat mechanical bonus in a domain, +1 to +5	Yes — always a matched drawback
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Perk	One at Level 1, then one per level	A bespoke ability, passive or active	Usually — MP, an action, or a trigger condition
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A Background is story first. Its boon and bane are narrative — the door a reputation opens, the checkpoint that keeps your name on a list — and the only mechanical thing it hands you is its starting gear. A Background never grants a Trait; the two you choose in Step 6 are drawn from your aptitudes, not your résumé. A Perk is growth. It arrives with every level, it is entirely yours to invent, and — this is the part people miss — a Perk

does not come with a drawback bolted to its underside. You pay for a Perk in MP at the moment of use, or in the opportunity cost of the other Perk you did not take, but you never pay for it by being worse at something else forever. A Trait is the only layer that taxes you permanently for what it gives, and that is exactly what makes it feel like a body rather than a build.

So when a player proposes a Trait, the question to ask is not "what do you want to be good at?" It is "what are you willing to be bad at for the rest of your life?" A player who cannot answer the second half of that question is not proposing a Trait. They are proposing a Perk, and it belongs in a different chapter.

Why the Drawback Is the Point

Strip the drawback off a Trait and you have a Perk wearing a costume — a free bonus the character never earned and never pays for, handed out at creation and forgotten by Level 3. That is the failure state, and it is common enough to name plainly: a Trait with no drawback is not a Trait. It is a free +2 the player will expect every other character to have, and once one character has it for nothing, the whole table wants it for nothing, and the traits stop meaning anything at all.

The reverse failure is just as real and just as common. A drawback with no bonus is not a Trait either — it is a Flaw, and a Flaw belongs to a different kind of game, one that asks a player to be worse at something for the sake of the story alone.

This book does not do that. Here, the drawback and the bonus are two halves of one sentence, and neither half works without the other. The bonus is what the character reaches for. The drawback is what the character has to work around, plan for, or fail at in front of everyone. Together they make a person specific — and specificity, in a game where any two Wanderers can end up with identical stats, is the only thing a Trait is actually for.

Which means the Overseer has a job here, and it is not a passive one. A Trait only exists at the table if the drawback gets called. The character with Night Owl should find themselves in a bright noon courtyard where the light is doing them no favors. The character with Silver Tongue should hit a moment where only a threat will move the room. The character with Light Foot should be standing in the middle of a grenade's blast radius when the drawback lands and it matters. A drawback that never fires is a bonus that was never paid for, and an Overseer who forgets to call them is quietly turning every Trait at the table into a free Perk. Keep the two Traits each player chose written at the top of your screen. You will use them more than you expect.

Reading a Trait at the Table

Mechanically, a Trait is simple: it adds its flat bonus to the Effort of any check inside its domain, and subtracts its drawback from any check the drawback names. The bonus is applied *after* the

core formula — roll the d20, multiply by Skill Score, add the Talent, the Luck, and the Perk bonuses, divide by twenty, and *then* add the Trait. That ordering matters because a Trait is meant to be a visible nudge on the final number, the thing that turns a near-miss into a hit and a hit into a critical, rather than a change buried inside the math where nobody notices it doing its work.

When a Trait and a Skill both apply to the same check, they stack — the Skill is what you know, the Trait is what you are, and there is no reason a character cannot be both trained and gifted at the same thing. A tagged Small Guns at Score 2 plus Steady Hands is a Wanderer who has put in the hours *and* has the hands for it, and both bonuses land. What does not stack is the Trait with itself: a Trait cannot be taken twice, so the +2 is a +2 and stays a +2, forever. Traits do not rank. There is no Adept or Master ladder here, no way to spend a level on making your Night Owl sharper. The +2 you chose at creation is the +2 you die with.

The player's job is to remember, and the Overseer's job is to let them. A Trait bonus should never be granted retroactively — the moment passes, and a player who forgets their own aptitude learns to remember it next time, which is its own small pleasure of mastery. But a Trait should never be *hidden* from the player either. When a check falls inside a Trait's domain, the Overseer should say so out loud, name the Trait, and let the number

change. Traits work best as shared vocabulary: the table learns that Kara sees in the dark, that Bishop charms but never threatens, that the doc heals herself better than she heals you, and those facts become the shorthand by which everyone at the table knows who these people are.

The Catalog

What follows is the seed list — the Traits common enough that most wasteland tables will recognize them, grouped by the part of a person they describe. Read it the way you read the rest of this book: not as the complete set of people who can exist, but as a demonstration of the shapes a person can take. The first ten are the standard set every table starts with; the rest are expansions, and your table should feel free to invent more.

The Senses

These Traits describe how sharply a character takes in the world — and what they give up to do it.

Trait	Bonus	Drawback
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Night Owl	+2 to checks in darkness or low light	-2 to checks in bright light or direct sun
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Eagle Eye	+2 to Perception checks involving distance or detail	-2 to Endurance checks against eye strain, smoke, and blinding effects
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| Sixth Sense | +2 to checks involving detecting hidden threats | -2 to checks involving reading written language |

| Cold Read | +2 to Perception checks to read a person's mood, intent, or lie | -2 to checks involving machines, terminals, and electronics |

The Body

The wasteland is a poison, a weather system, and a bad meal, and these Traits are what a character's body does about it.

| Trait | Bonus | Drawback |

|---|---|---|

| Iron Gut | +2 to Endurance checks against poison, spoiled food, and alcohol | -2 to Perception checks involving taste or smell |

| Tough Hide | +2 to DT checks and Endurance against physical exposure | -1 to all Perception checks |

| Fast Healer | +3 to Medicine checks made to treat yourself | -1 to Medicine checks made to treat others |

| Chem Resistant | +3 to Endurance checks against addiction | -1 to all Intelligence-based checks while under the influence |

| Rad Tolerant | +3 to Endurance checks against radiation exposure and sickness | -1 to all Charisma-based checks made against ghouls and other rad-touched people — they can smell what you are |

| Hard to Kill | +2 to Death Toll checks | -2 to checks to recover from injury and rest — your body fights rest as hard as it fights dying |

The Voice

Words are weapons, and these Traits decide which ones a character is holding.

Trait	Bonus	Drawback	
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Silver Tongue	+2 to Speech and Bluff checks involving persuasion	-2 to Speech checks involving intimidation — you charm, you don't threaten	
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Big Voice	+2 to Speech checks involving intimidation, command, and being heard over noise	-2 to Sneak checks and any check to go unnoticed	
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Open Book	+2 to checks to build trust, reassure, and be believed	-2 to Bluff checks — your face tells the truth whether you want it to or not	
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The Hands

Fine work, quiet work, and the work that happens in the dark.

Trait	Bonus	Drawback	
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Steady Hands	+2 to Larceny and Small Guns checks involving fine manipulation	-1 AP when using two-handed weapons	
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| Light Foot | +2 to Sneak and Acrobatics checks | -2 to DT
against area-of-effect attacks |

| Tinkerer's Touch | +2 to Repair checks involving
jury-rigging and salvage | -2 to checks involving delicate or
precision electronics |

The Fight

These Traits bend combat, and their drawbacks bite hardest in
exactly the moments a fighter cannot afford them.

| Trait | Bonus | Drawback |

|---|---|---|

| Trigger Discipline | +2 to attacks made after spending a
turn aiming | -2 to attacks made at point-blank range — you
hesitate at the distance you should not |

| Two-Fisted | +2 to attacks with a weapon in each hand | -2
to attacks made with a single weapon — one hand always feels
empty |

| Brawler's Reach | +2 to Unarmed and Melee checks against
larger opponents | -2 to checks to resist being grappled and
pinned |

The Wild

The open country, where the rules are older and the margins
are thinner.

| Trait | Bonus | Drawback |

|---|---|---|

| Wasteland Nose | +2 to Survival checks to forage, track, and read weather | -2 to checks involving settlements, customs, and crowds |

| Trailbreaker | +2 to Athletics and Survival checks made while traveling overland | -2 to Sequence — you move well on the road and slow when the shooting starts |

Two Traits, One Character

The two Traits a player chooses should talk to each other, because the conversation between them is where a character starts to become legible. Night Owl and Tough Hide belong to a creature of the dark who reads the world badly and survives it anyway — a scout who is also a bruiser, and pays for both with her eyes. Steady Hands and Light Foot belong to a thief, and a thief who is soft against explosions, which tells you exactly how she intends to fight and exactly what will kill her. Silver Tongue and Open Book are a strange and interesting pair — a charmer who cannot lie, which means every persuasive word out of her mouth has to be true. When two Traits pull in the same direction, you get a specialist. When they cut against each other, you get a person. Both are valid. A table of nothing but specialists gets boring fast.

And because Traits are chosen once and never again, the Overseer should be slow to let one change — but not absolutely opposed to it. The fiction can reach in and take one. A Wanderer

who loses an eye to a raider's blade does not keep Eagle Eye, and the Overseer should say so plainly and let the loss land. A Wanderer who spends a year in the dark under a settlement, who never sees the sun and learns the shapes of tunnels by touch, might earn the right to *trade* a Trait — but only across a stretch of story long enough to justify it, and only with something given up in the exchange. The default is permanence. The exception should cost a chapter of the campaign, not a conversation between sessions.

Building Your Own

The Traits above are a seed, and the wasteland is infinite, so the table should feel free to invent. The grammar is not complicated, and it is worth keeping tight. A Trait needs a name that reads like a person and not a stat — *Iron Gut*, not *Endurance Bonus*. It needs a bonus, flat, between +1 and +5, aimed at a domain specific enough that everyone at the table can name the checks it touches. It needs a drawback of matched weight — a penalty that fires in situations the character will actually encounter, not a penalty so rare it never comes up. And it needs one sentence underneath that explains the person, the way "*you charm, you don't threaten*" explains Silver Tongue.

Three tests sort a good custom Trait from a bad one. Symmetry — is the drawback roughly as heavy as the bonus, and does it fire about as often? Specificity — can a player name three

checks in a session where the bonus applies and three where the drawback does? Story-shape — does the Trait say something true about who this person is, or is it just two numbers bolted together? A Trait that passes all three is ready to play. A Trait that fails the first is a free Perk; one that fails the second is decoration; one that fails the third is arithmetic. Send it back and build it again.

> Template for Custom Traits:>> [Trait Name]> *Bonus:* + to [domain — be specific about which checks]> **Drawback:** - to [domain — matched in weight and frequency]> *In one sentence:* [why this person is like this]

Quick Reference: Traits

- Two per Wanderer, chosen at creation. Step 6, and never again — no Trait is bought, earned, or leveled.
- A bonus and a drawback, always both. A Trait with no drawback is a free Perk; a drawback with no bonus is a Flaw. This book does neither.
- Flat numbers, +1 to +5, capped at +5 per domain. Never a Talent die, never a reroll.
- Traits stack with Skills, never with themselves. No Trait may be taken twice, and no Trait ranks up.
- Add the bonus after the formula. Roll, multiply, add the Talents and Perks, divide by twenty — then apply the Trait. It should be visible on the final number.

- The drawback is the Overseer's tool. Write both Traits for every character at the top of your screen and call them. An uncalled drawback is an unpaid bonus.

- Backgrounds are story, Perks are growth, Traits are the body. Keep the three apart and the characters stay distinct.

- The fiction can take one. A lost eye can kill Eagle Eye. Trade a Trait only across a chapter of story, and only for something given up.

- The wasteland is infinite. Your Traits should be too.

Chapter 13: The Wasteland

Chapter 13: The Wasteland

There is no map. There was a map — a good one, printed on coated stock, the interstates in red and the little green triangles where the state parks used to be — and it is ash now, or pulp in a flooded sub-basement, or a single page somebody tore out to wrap a fish. What a Wanderer has instead is a horizon and a direction, and those two argue about which one is lying to them. Every chapter before this one built machinery: the Effort formula, the AP pool, the weapon card, the stat block, the ratchet. All of it exists to resolve what happens in the moment a person meets the world. This chapter is the world. It is the last thing the book hands you and the first thing your table will actually need, because a Wanderer with a flawless character sheet and no idea what is over the ridge is not playing a game — they are waiting to be told a story instead of walking into one.

A wasteland is not scenery. Scenery is what a story is set in front of; a wasteland is what the story is made of. The rusted sign, the dry well, the school bus on its side in a ditch with the door still open — none of that is decoration, and the Overseer should never treat it as decoration. Every one of those objects is an answer to a question the party is about to ask.

Where is the water? The well is dry, so the answer is four miles

south, and the four miles are the session. *Who was here?* The bus was full, the door is open, and there are no bodies, which is a worse answer than bodies would have been. *How long do we have?* The sign is rusted through, which means two centuries of weather, which means nobody is coming, which means whatever is wrong here belongs to the party now. Build the world as evidence, and let the players do the reading.

Two Hundred Years of Weather

The bombs did not end the world. They ended the world's *organization* — its supply lines, its chain of command, its habit of getting things from one place to another on a schedule. That is a different and more interesting catastrophe, because it means the old world is not gone. It is *loot*. Every intact pre-war facility, every sealed vault door, every warehouse with the roof still on is a piece of the old world that outlived the reason it was built, and a party that cracks one open is not recovering treasure, they are inheriting an argument. The generator still runs. The lights still come on. Somebody built this to keep people alive and then failed to, and the party is standing in the middle of the failure holding a crowbar.

The two centuries between then and now are not a gap in the story; they are the story's soil, and everything that walks the wastes grew out of them. The ghouls are what the bombs did to people who survived the blast and not the rest of it. The super

mutants are what somebody's experiment did afterward, when there was nobody left with the authority to say no. The raiders are what happens to a third generation in a place with no law and enough guns. The settlements are what happens when a handful of people decide, against every incentive the world offers, to put up a wall and plant something behind it. None of this is history the Overseer needs to recite at the table. It is history the table should be able to *feel* — in the shape of a town, in the way a stranger flinches at the word "vault," in the fact that nobody alive in the wastes has ever met a person older than the world they were born into.

What the Wasteland Does to People

Three pressures shape every wasteland story, and the Overseer can run an entire campaign on them without inventing another rule. The first is scarcity. Not poverty — scarcity, which is a different thing, because scarcity means the shortage is specific and everyone in the region can name it. Water, or ammunition, or medicine, or the one working pump in a valley of dry wells. A settlement with a specific shortage has a specific personality, and a party that solves it becomes part of the place's memory whether the place wants them to or not. The second is distance. Nothing is close, and the distance is never a number; it is a cost — legs walked, supplies burned, conditions rolled, watches stood. A road in the wastes is a question about how much of

yourself you are willing to spend to arrive somewhere. The third is memory. The wastes are full of people who remember a thing that is no longer true: the town that used to have a doctor, the road that used to be safe, the man who used to be their brother. Memory is the cheapest and most durable motive in the game, and it costs the Overseer nothing to hand out.

The Four Rings

Chapter 6 gave you a Region Threat dial and told you to set it before the party leaves the gate. This is what the dial is actually measuring. A region is not dangerous in the abstract; it is dangerous because of how far it sits from the last place where somebody bothered to solve a problem, and the ring a party is standing in tells you almost everything about what happens next.

Ring Threat What It Is What Lives Here What It Pays

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The Settled Ring 1 Within a day of a wall, a well, and a name Brahmin, radstags, one drunk with a pipe Food, work, rumor, a bed

The Near Wilds 2 A day or two out, where the patrols stop Radroaches, molerats, bloatflies, a raider crew Salvage, a homestead, a lead
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| The Deep Wastes | 3 | Ruins, old highways, the bones of the old world | Feral ghouls, radscorpions, gunners, mirelurks near water | Pre-war goods, a map, a discovery |

| The Hot Zones | 4 | Military ruins, reactors, the Glow | Super mutants, assaultrons, yao guai, a deathclaw's territory | The thing the settlement actually needs |

| Where the Map Stops | 5 | Past the last landmark anyone has bothered to name | Sentry bots, behemoths, glowing ones | Whatever the Overseer has been saving |

Read the table as a promise rather than a punishment. The ladder exists to make the map *mean* something — to make "we're going north" a sentence with a price attached, and to make the party's decision to pay that price feel like a decision instead of a random encounter. Put the good loot where the ladder is high. Put the water pump where the ladder is highest. Then say the number out loud before they leave the gate, and watch what they do with it.

Water, Roads, and Ruins

Three things decide where anything in the wastes is, and if the Overseer keeps them in mind the world will build itself. Water comes first, always. Every settlement in this book sits on a source — a well, a spring, a river with a purifier, a cistern under a pre-war building that somebody cleaned out and claimed. Nobody puts up a wall anywhere else, because nobody can. When the

party asks why a town is where it is, the answer is water, and the follow-up question is what happens to the town when the water stops. Roads come second. The pre-war highways are the only infrastructure the wastes still respect, and they are respected for a simple reason: a road is flat, flat is fast, and fast is the difference between hauling two hundred pounds of salvage and hauling forty. Every caravan route, every settlement worth a gate tax, every raider ambush site in the world is on a road, and a party that leaves the road pays for the shortcut in legs.

Ruins come third, and they are where the campaign actually happens. A ruin is a place where somebody had a life and the life got interrupted, and the more specific the interruption, the better the session. Do not describe a ruin as "an old building." Describe the coat still on the hook by the door, the chair pulled up to a window that looks at nothing, the plate on the floor with the fork still beside it. Detail is not flavor here; detail is the only way the players learn that the old world was full of people and not full of set dressing. A ruin the party walks through without asking a single question is a ruin the Overseer described wrong.

Factions Are Living Things

A faction in this book is not a logo on a banner. It is a group of people with a shared interest, a limited supply of patience, and a plan that keeps moving whether the party is

watching or not. That last clause is the whole rule, and it is worth writing on the Overseer's screen: a faction that does not act is furniture. Raiders who never raid are scenery. Gunners who hold a bridge and never raise the toll are a bus stop. The moment a faction *does* something the party did not cause — takes a water source, hangs a prisoner, closes a road, puts a price on a name — the world stops being a backdrop and starts being a participant, and the players feel it in their spines.

Give every faction the same four questions and answer each in one line. What does it want? What does it have? What does it fear? What will it not do? The fourth question is the one that turns a faction into a character instead of a monster. The raider crew that will rob a caravan but will not touch the farm that feeds its own kids. The gunner outfit that will hold a bridge for a toll but will not break a contract once it is signed. The settlers who will trade with anyone and will not open the gate after dark, and will not explain why. Answer those four and the Overseer can improvise any conversation the party starts, because a faction with a want, a fear, and a line is a faction you can argue with.

The Vault and the Gate

Wanderers come from somewhere, and in this book they usually come from a door. Vault 12 is the shape of it — a sealed place with its own rules, its own shortages, and its own version of the

truth, sitting a long walk from a settlement that has been trading with it for as long as anyone can remember. The vault matters less for what is inside it than for what it does to the people who leave. A Wanderer who steps out of a vault carries a specific ignorance and a specific competence, and both are gifts to the Overseer: they can read a schematic and cannot read a room, they can rebuild a filtration unit and cannot tell a lie from a greeting. That gap is the character's entire first act, and it is why the vault makes a better starting point than a homestead.

The gate is the other half of it, and it is a scene rather than a location. Every campaign in this book starts at a door — a vault door, a settlement gate, the open back of a caravan wagon — and the first thing the party does is walk through it in the wrong direction. The gate is where the Overseer establishes the deal: what the party is walking away from, what they are walking toward, and what it will cost to come back. Say the last part out loud. A gate that closes behind a party who already knows the price of returning is a gate the players will remember for thirty sessions.

Building Your Own Region

Chapter 6 gave you five questions for a settlement. A region gets six, and the Overseer can answer them on a single page in about twenty minutes. Where is the water, and who controls it?

What is the one road, and who taxes it? What are the three landmarks a traveler would actually name? What is the one thing everybody in the region agrees not to talk about? Which faction has a plan that is already in motion? What was this place before, and what is left of it? Answer those six and the map draws itself in prose, which is the only kind of map this game needs.

Two more rules separate a region from a set. The name test: if a player can repeat the name of a place after hearing it once, it is a real place, and if they cannot, it is a note in the Overseer's binder. Name things the way the wastes would — after what happened there, after who died there, after what the place still does. *Coldwater* is a name because the water is cold, and nobody had to explain that to anybody. The secret rule: every region gets exactly one secret, held by the Overseer alone, and it should be the kind of thing that would change how the party feels about a place they already like. One secret. Not a conspiracy, not a twist per settlement — one thing, in the ground or in the ledger, that the party can find if they dig and will never find if they do not.

Coldwater, Worked

Here is the toolkit used once, so the Overseer can watch it move. Coldwater sits on a well — the water is cold and clean and it is the reason the town exists, which means the well is the first thing an enemy would take and the last thing the town would

trade. The road is the one that runs past it, and the traffic on that road is what makes Coldwater worth defending in the first place. The three landmarks are the well, the wall, and the road out. The thing nobody talks about is how long the well will last, and whether the pump they hauled back out of the ruin is a repair or a reprieve. The faction with a plan is whoever is standing on the road counting wagons and doing arithmetic. And what Coldwater was before is a pre-war pumping station — which is to say the town is built on the ruins of the exact thing it now depends on, and everybody in Coldwater knows it and nobody says it.

That is a region. It took six answers and no map, and a party could spend a whole campaign inside it, because every answer opens a door. The pump breaks. The road brings somebody who wants the well. The secret surfaces. The faction moves. None of that required the Overseer to invent a world — only to answer six questions honestly and then let the answers argue with each other.

What Kind of Wasteland Is Yours

Tone is a dial, and the Overseer should set it at session zero and write it down where the whole table can see it. Four settings cover most campaigns, and they are not exclusive — most good tables run two at once and let them fight. Grim — the wastes are a long defeat, and the small kindnesses are the whole point. Weird — the old world left things running that should not be

running, and the party will meet them. Hopeful — people are rebuilding, the party's choices move the needle, and a settlement they save is still standing thirty sessions later. Cruel — the world is indifferent and the people in it are not kind, and the party's victories are the ones they take with their own hands. Turn the dial before the first session, and turn it again only with the table's consent, because tone is the one rule in this book that a player cannot look up and will still feel in every single scene.

Quick Reference: The Wasteland

- Build the world as evidence. The dry well, the open bus door, the coat on the hook. Let the players read the place instead of hearing about it.

- Three pressures: scarcity, distance, memory. A campaign can run on those alone.

- Four rings, one dial. Settled Ring, Near Wilds, Deep Wastes, Hot Zones, and the place the map stops — set the threat before the party leaves the gate, and say it out loud.

- Water first, roads second, ruins third. Every settlement is on a source, every route is on a road, every session is in a ruin.

- A faction that does not act is furniture. Want, have, fear, refuse — four questions, one line each, then move it.

- The vault is a gap in a person. Competence in one direction, ignorance in every other.

- The gate is a scene. Establish what the party is leaving, what they are walking toward, and what it costs to come back.

- Six questions build a region. Water, road, landmarks, secret, faction, and what it was before.

- One secret per region. Not a twist per settlement. One thing in the ground.

- Set the tone dial at session zero. Grim, weird, hopeful, cruel — and write it down where everyone can see it.

Chapter 14: The First Session

Chapter 14: The First Session

There is a moment every table hits, forty minutes in, when the character sheets are finished and the dice are sitting in the middle of the table and nobody says anything. You have handed them a resolution formula and an AP pool and a weapon card and a region dial, and not one of those things tells them what happens first. That silence is not the rules failing. It is the rules working, because a wasteland is nothing but a set of pressures waiting for somebody to step into them, and a first session is the moment you decide which pressure lands first. This chapter is about that moment — how to open a campaign, how to teach the game by playing it instead of explaining it, and what to put on the table in front of people who have never rolled a die for this world.

Everything in the thirteen chapters before this one was written for a game already in motion. The combat rules assume somebody is shooting at you. The travel rules assume you have a reason to be on the road with a pack you did not want to carry. The bestiary assumes the party is standing in the ruin where the thing lives, and that they chose to be there. What none of it supplies is the reason. That is what this chapter hands you: a place, a cast, a pressure, and a clock, followed by a walkthrough

of the first night at the table, beat by beat, so a group that has read this book can sit down, roll characters, and be arguing about a real decision inside an hour.

Before the Dice

Session zero is not a formality and it is not a meeting. It is the hour where the table agrees on which game it is playing, and skipping it is how five people end up running five different wastelands in the same room and wondering why the tone keeps slipping. Do it out loud, do it before anybody rolls a stat, and write the answers where everyone can see them — the back of the Overseer's screen is fine, the inside of a pizza box is better, because a thing written on a pizza box gets read. Start with the tone dial from the last chapter. Grim, weird, hopeful, cruel — pick one, or pick two and admit out loud that they are fighting each other, then say it as a sentence the whole table can repeat back. *"This is a hopeful wasteland with cruel people in it"* will settle a hundred arguments before they start, and it will settle them without you having to be the one who decides.

Then ask every player the gate question, and make them answer all three parts. What is your Wanderer walking away from? What are they walking toward? And what will it cost them to come back? The third part is the one that does the work. A character who can answer the first two has a backstory. A character who can answer the third has a motive, and a motive is the only thing that gets

a person to walk twenty miles through open scrub with a rifle they have not cleaned. Write the three answers down next to each name. When the campaign is thirty sessions old and somebody is about to do something stupid, you will read those lines back to them and watch it land.

Build the characters together, at the table, out loud, and refuse the temptation to let everybody go home and do it in private. Character creation in this book is ten steps and it takes maybe forty minutes per person if nobody is helping, but it takes fifteen if the table is talking, and the talking is the point. When the player building a Scavenger is choosing between Silver Tongue and Open Book, the player building the fighter should be in the conversation, because those two Traits belong to two people who are going to be standing in the same doorway. When two Traits pull against each other, you get a person; when they all pull the same way, you get a party of specialists who cannot talk to anybody and will die in a town. Push for the friction. Ask the question from Chapter 12 out loud, every time: not *what do you want to be good at*, but *what are you willing to be bad at for the rest of your life?*

And write down both Traits for every character at the top of your screen, right now, before the first scene, because that list is the whole reason Traits exist. Night Owl and Light Foot and Iron Gut are not decoration. They are the levers you will pull for thirty sessions, and a Trait you never call is a Trait that

quietly became a free Perk the moment the player stopped noticing they had one. If nobody in the party can see in the dark, then the dark is a place you can take them, and it should be a place that costs them something the first time. Session zero is where you decide which of those levers you are going to pull, and where you tell the table, plainly, that you intend to pull them.

The Opening Move

Do not start in a tavern. Do not start with the party meeting each other, and do not start with a stranger walking up to the table with a job. Start in motion, start with a decision, and start with the gate. Chapter 13 gave you the shape of it — every campaign in this book starts at a door, and the first thing the party does is walk through it in the wrong direction. So open there. The vault door grinding shut behind them. The settlement gate swinging wide and then being barred behind them. The back of a caravan wagon pulling away down a road that looks exactly like every other road. Whatever the door is, put the party on the wrong side of it inside the first two minutes, and make them say out loud what they are leaving.

Then give them something to do before they have time to be polite about it. The first decision of a campaign should be a real one, it should have a cost, and it should happen inside ten minutes of the first die being rolled. Not a combat — a choice. Somebody at the gate wants to know who they are. A body in the

road is wearing a uniform they recognize. The water they were promised is not in the wagon where it was supposed to be. The choice does not have to be enormous. It has to be theirs, it has to be answerable in a sentence, and it has to have an obvious price attached, so that the table learns on night one that this game bills you for your answers.

The temptation, and it is a strong one, is to explain the rules first. Resist it. A group that sits through a forty-minute lecture on the Effort formula will forget all of it and remember the lecture. A group that rolls three attacks against a radroach will remember the Effort formula for the rest of the campaign, because they used it, and because one of them missed and had to work out why. Teach the game the way the wasteland teaches it: in the order the problems arrive. AP on the first turn somebody has to move and shoot. Cover the first time a bullet hits a wall next to somebody's head. The Death Toll the first time a Wanderer drops to zero, and not one minute before.

A Starter Situation: Coldwater

Here is a place to begin. Coldwater is a settlement of about two hundred people on the only clean well for forty miles, which means it is a settlement that exists because of one fact and would stop existing without it. The water is cold and it is clean and it comes up out of a pre-war pumping station that somebody cleaned out and claimed two generations back, and the town has

been built on top of the ruins of the exact thing it now depends on, which everybody in Coldwater knows and nobody says. There is a wall, and a gate, and one road out. The road is the reason Coldwater is worth defending. The well is the reason it is worth taking.

Open the campaign at that gate, at dusk, in late autumn, with the temperature dropping and the smell of woodsmoke and wet iron coming off the wall. The party has walked in from somewhere and the gate is closing in twenty minutes. That is the scene, and it gives you everything you need: a boundary they have to cross, a person on the other side of it deciding whether to let them, and a clock the players can hear ticking without being told. Coldwater does not need to be explained. It needs to be walked into, and it needs to smell like a place that has been standing long enough to have opinions about strangers.

The Cast

Marla Vance runs Coldwater, which in practice means she keeps its ledger in her head, decides who eats when the harvest is short, and has not slept a full night since the spring. She is in her late fifties, hands like a bricklayer's, and she will not lie to a child — a fact she is privately ashamed of, because it is the only kind of honesty she has left and it makes her worse at her job. What she wants is to get two hundred people through the winter. What she fears is the town finding out that the well's

output has dropped by a fifth since summer, and what she will not do is sign the road away. She has been rationing the water in secret for six weeks and calling it maintenance.

Ossian Pike runs the road. He has eleven people and a pre-war weigh station forty minutes south of Coldwater, and he charges a toll on the only route that matters — a toll he started taking in caps and has recently started taking in water, which is a different thing entirely. He is not a raider. He is worse, in the way a businessman is worse: he has a contract, he honors it, and he will absolutely bleed a town dry without ever raising his voice. What he wants is an exclusive contract on Coldwater's well, signed by Marla, witnessed, and kept. What he fears is being the man who ran out of water first, which he has been, once, and which he does not discuss. What he will not do is break a deal once his name is on it — and that refusal is the handle the party can grab, if they are clever enough to find it.

Between them sits the pump: the thing a previous party hauled back out of a ruin, a pre-war impeller assembly that Marla's people got running in the spring. It works. That is the problem. It works loudly, it works fast, and it is pulling water out of the aquifer faster than the aquifer refills, which is a fact that only two people in Coldwater understand and one of them is Marla. Put the pump in the first session, describe it running — the shudder through the floor of the pump house, the mineral taste of the water coming off the spout — and let the players decide for

themselves, six sessions later, whether they would have done anything differently if they had known.

Teaching Combat by Doing

The first fight of the campaign should be small, it should be winnable, and it should be instructive, which are three different things that a radroach nest delivers at once. Put it in the cellar under the pump house on the first night, three roaches, and let the party find them the way the book says they will be found — drawn by the light and the warmth and the blood of something that died down there last week. Three radroaches is a skirmish, not an encounter, and that is the point. Nobody should die. Somebody should get bitten, somebody should miss, and everybody should end the fight knowing exactly how their weapon works and how much of their turn a reload eats.

Run it slow, and run it honest. Roll AP in the open for the first round and say the number out loud, so the table hears the Beginning Phase happen. When a player wants to move and shoot, make them count the movement in fives, and let them feel the arithmetic bite — four squares and a shot is a turn, and a turn is a thing you do not get back. Put something to hide behind down there, even if it is only a broken shelf and a coil of pipe, because the first time a player asks whether they can take cover is the moment the cover rules stop being a paragraph and become a

habit. And when the last roach dies, do not let it die quietly. Let it pop, and let somebody get chitin on their boots.

The Death Toll is the one rule you should hope to teach in the first session and the one you must not fake when it arrives. If a Wanderer goes down to zero, stop the scene, walk the table through the check — pure END Talent, DC 1, no Skill, no Luck, no Perk — and make the roll mean something. Then leave them at zero. Let them play the next three rounds with doubled AP costs and their friends trying to reach them, because that is what the rule is for, and a table that has watched one of their own crawl through a fight on a doubled action economy will never again treat the Death Toll as a formality. Do not kill anybody on night one unless the dice genuinely say so. But do not protect them from the dice either, because the first session is where a table learns whether you mean it.

Teaching the Road by Doing

The first job out of Coldwater should be a delivery, because a delivery teaches travel without anybody having to explain it. Nine Mile is nine miles down the road and it is out of water, and Marla needs a run made before the frost, and the road has a toll on it that just went up. That is the whole plot, and it is enough for four sessions. The party loads water onto a handcart, walks the road, and discovers on the first leg that the distance is not a number — it is a cost. Water rations come out of the pack and

the pack gets lighter and the party gets thirstier, and the moment somebody has to decide whether to drink their last ration or save it for the walk back is the moment the travel rules stop being a table in a book.

Take the watch seriously the first night, and make the watch order an argument. Somebody has to be awake for the middle shift, when the fire is down and the body is coldest, and the player who takes it should feel the fatigue penalty the next morning on every check that wants a steady hand. Roll the weather out in the open. If it comes up a dust storm, cut a leg off the day, halve the visibility, and make them roll Survival to keep the party together — and then, when they make it, tell them they made it, out loud, so they know the roll bought them something. The road is not the space between the fights. On night one, it is the fight, and it is the one the party wins by paying attention.

Then let them make camp badly, once. Give them a site with sitting water and an animal trail running through the middle of it and a ridge line that silhouettes their fire for a mile, and let them take it, because the first time a bad camp site collects its debt is the first time the party understands that the Overseer was not describing scenery. Whatever comes in the night — a bloatfly swarm, a molerat, a scavenger who is more scared than they are — should arrive because of a choice the players made, not because you rolled it. That is the difference between a

hazard and a punishment, and the table can feel the difference even when they cannot name it.

Teaching the Town by Doing

Nine Mile is a hamlet: sixty people, a wall made mostly of car doors, a well that has gone to mud, and a trader who comes through twice a month and is not due for nine days. Answer the five questions before the party walks through the gate, and answer them in one line each, because you will be asked all five in the first ten minutes. Who runs it, and what do they want? A woman named for her mother and nothing else, and she wants the water to last until the trader comes. What does it make, and what does it need? Nothing and water. What is it afraid of? That Coldwater will decide sixty people are not worth the road. What will it not talk about? The two families who left for the coast in September and have not been heard from. What happens here if nobody intervenes? Everybody stays, and everybody gets thirstier.

Set the price band before they arrive and let them feel it. Nine Mile has no doctor and no clean water, so a stimpak that costs forty caps in Coldwater costs a hundred and twenty here, and a Wanderer who tries to haggle should be met by a woman who has nothing to sell and no reason to be polite. Then let the party buy something anyway, because that is what towns are for, and let the town remember them for it. One line in the ledger, written in plain language on the back of your screen: *Nine Mile:*

brought the water, did not gouge, asked about the two families.

That line will come back in eight sessions when the party needs somewhere to sleep and the coast road is closed, and it will feel like the world remembered them, because it did.

And put the hook in the town, not on the road. Somebody in Nine Mile has seen Pike's crew measuring the road — pacing it, marking it, writing numbers on a scrap of paper — and will mention it in passing while handing over a bowl of something grey. Do not underline it. Do not have the NPC say it was important. Let it land as gossip, and let the table decide whether it matters, and then watch two of your players start doing arithmetic at the same time and realize they have both arrived at the same number. That moment, the one where the party figures out the shape of the problem without being told, is the reason a first session exists.

The First Night's End

End the session on a shift, not a resolution. The water is delivered. Nine Mile is still standing. The party has walked eighteen miles and killed three roaches and made one friend, and the temptation is to close the book there, warm and finished. Do not. Close on the thing that changed while they were walking — Pike's crew on the road behind them with a clipboard, Marla's rationing ledger on the table in the pump house with the last column circled, the pump running loud enough to hear from the

gate at midnight. Leave them with a question they will spend the week arguing about, and do not answer it for them, because the answer is next week's session and the argument is the reason they come back.

Award the experience out loud, with the names attached, exactly the way the Overseer's chapter tells you to. *A hundred and fifty for the roach nest, three hundred for getting the water to Nine Mile, two hundred for the deal you struck at the gate, a hundred for the family you asked about.* Naming the road teaches the table that the road is a place where things happen, and a table that believes that will go looking for the horizon instead of waiting for the plot to arrive at their feet. Then read them their own ledger line back — one sentence, the whole campaign so far — and put the dice in the box.

Quick Reference: The First Session

- Session zero first. Tone dial, the gate question, characters built at the table, both Traits written on the screen.

- Start in motion, at the gate. Put them on the wrong side of a door inside two minutes, and make them say what they left.

- Teach in the order the problems arrive. AP on the first turn, cover on the first bullet, the Death Toll on the first drop.

- The first fight is small and instructive. Three radroaches in a cellar; nobody dies, somebody learns what a reload costs.

- The first job is a delivery. Nine miles, one handcart, one toll on the road. Distance is a cost, not a number.

- Let the camp go wrong once. A bad site, a night watch, and a consequence the players chose.

- Answer the five settlement questions in one line each. Know them before the party walks through the gate.

- Put the hook in the town, not on the road. Gossip, not exposition. Let the party do the arithmetic.

- End on a shift, never a resolution. Close on what changed while they were walking.

- Award XP out loud, with names. Then read the ledger line back and put the dice away.

Chapter 15: The Coldwater Job

Chapter 15: The Coldwater Job

The last chapter left the table at a gate with the light going and a question nobody had answered yet. This chapter is the answer. What follows is a complete first adventure — four to six sessions of play, start to finish, with a beginning, a middle, and four different ways it can end — built entirely out of the pieces Chapter 14 already put on the table. Coldwater, its well, its wall, its one road. Marla Vance and her circled ledger. Ossian Pike and his clipboard crew. Nine Mile and its mud well and the two families who walked toward the coast in September and did not write. None of it is new. All of it is load-bearing, which is the point: a starter adventure should not hand the party a second world to learn on top of the first one. It should take the place they walked into on night one and prove that the place has teeth.

The Shape of the Job

A starter adventure has one job and it is not to be impressive. It is to teach the table how this game breathes, and to do it with a problem the players can hold in two hands. The Coldwater job is a water problem dressed as a road problem dressed as a money problem, and every layer of it is reachable

from the gate the party walked through at dusk. Marla needs water delivered to Nine Mile before the frost, because Nine Mile is out and Nine Mile is the only settlement between Coldwater and the coast, and a coast road that stops being walked is a coast road that stops being a road. Pike charges a toll on the only route that matters, and his toll just went from caps to water, which turns a delivery into a negotiation and a negotiation into a threat. And underneath all of it the pump in the pump house is pulling the aquifer dry a fifth faster than it refills, which is a fact Marla has been calling maintenance for six weeks and which will not stay hidden past the first hard freeze.

Run it in that order — road, then toll, then well — and the party never feels lectured. They feel a job. The well is the truth at the bottom of the job, and the measure of a good starter adventure is how long it takes the table to dig down to it on their own. Give them four sessions. They will get there faster, and when they do, it should feel like something they found rather than something they were handed.

The Three Pressures

Every scene in this adventure pushes one of three pressures, and the Overseer's only real job across six sessions is to keep all three moving at once. The first is the clock, and the clock is winter — the first hard frost is coming, it is coming sooner than the town's calendar wants, and every day the party spends

arguing at a gate is a day the road gets colder and the handcart gets heavier to push. The second is the road, and the road is Pike — his toll rises a little every time the party uses it, and the crew at the weigh station is patient in that particular manner of people who have already done their arithmetic and are waiting for you to catch up. The third is the well, and the well is silent, which is why it is the dangerous one. A pressure nobody can hear does not stop being a pressure. It just does its work in the dark while the table is busy with the two they can see.

Hold all three in your head and the adventure runs itself. When a scene drags, ask which pressure is stalling and move that one. When the party gets comfortable, let the frost creep a day closer. When they get cocky, let the pump run loud enough to hear from the gate at midnight, and watch the two players who have been doing arithmetic look at each other again.

The Cast, in Full

Marla Vance carries the town the way a woman carries a full bucket up a hill — arms locked, back straight, not one drop spilled where anybody can see it. Late fifties, hands like a bricklayer's, a ledger she keeps in her head and a second ledger she keeps in the pump house that only she reads. She wants two hundred people through the winter. She fears the town finding out the well is failing, because a town that knows its water is going

is a town that starts leaving, and Marla has watched a settlement empty out before and has never once described what that looked like. What she will not do is sign the road away to Pike, and she will not do it even when signing looks like the only sane move, because the road is the last thing Coldwater owns outright. Play her tired, play her blunt, play her kind in that particular narrow manner of a person who has stopped having time for kindness in general.

Ossian Pike does not raise his voice and does not need to. He has eleven people, a pre-war weigh station forty minutes south, a clipboard, and a contract he honors down to the comma, and that combination has made him the most dangerous thing on the road without him ever firing a shot in anger. He is not a raider; raiders take what they want and leave a mess, and Pike takes what he is owed and leaves a receipt. He wants an exclusive, signed, witnessed contract on Coldwater's well — not the water, the contract, because a contract is a thing you can sell. He fears being the man who ran out of water first, which he has been, once, and which is the only subject he will not discuss. What he will not do is break a signed deal, and that refusal is the one handle the party has on him. Find it and he becomes a wall you can go around. Miss it and he becomes a wall.

The pump sits in the pump house and runs. It is a pre-war impeller assembly some earlier party hauled out of a ruin, and it works, and that is the whole problem — it works fast, it works

loud, and it drinks the aquifer down faster than the aquifer fills. Describe it every time the party walks past: the shudder through the floorboards, the mineral taste of the water coming off the spout, the way the whole house hums a half-step below hearing. The pump is not a villain. It is a repair that became a reprieve that is becoming a bill, and by the time the party understands it, they will have to decide whether the town would have been better off with it broken.

Two more faces, for texture and for the party to like. Dell, the pump house kid — sixteen, keeps the intake screens clean, knows the pump better than anyone and has started noticing that the water comes up warmer than it used to and does not know why that frightens him. And the trader who runs the coast road, due through Nine Mile twice a month and now overdue by three days, which is either weather or Pike or something worse, and which the party will spend a session worrying about without being told to.

The Clock

Put a die on the table, face-up, and tell the table it is the frost. It starts at six. Every session you finish without the delivery made, turn it down one. At three, the nights start killing the weak — a dog, an old man, a brahmin that wanders off and does not come back. At one, the road ices and the handcart becomes a problem in physics instead of a problem in scheduling. At zero, the frost arrives whether the water moved or not, and

the adventure stops being about a delivery and starts being about a winter the party either prepared for or did not. You will almost never reach zero. The value of the die is not that it runs out. The value of the die is that it is visible, and that the players can watch it while they decide how much of the next four sessions they want to spend being clever.

Scene One: The Gate

Open on the same gate Chapter 14 opened on, except now the party is on the inside and the problem is on the outside, which is a different flavor of trapped. It is morning, the second morning since they walked in, and Marla has called them to the pump house before the town is fully awake because she does not want to be watched making this ask. She puts a folded map on the table, sets a chipped mug of the good water beside it — the cold water, the clean water, the thing the whole town is built on — and says the thing she has been practicing all night.

"Nine Mile's out," she says. "Has been for a week, and they've been drinking from a mud hole and telling themselves it's fine. I need a run made before the frost and I need it made by people who aren't from here, because everybody from here has a family in Nine Mile and I can't ask a mother to walk past Pike's boys to feed her sister. So. There's a handcart. There's forty gallons of water. There's nine miles of road and a toll that went up on Tuesday." Let her pause there, let the mug sweat in the cold, and

let the table do the arithmetic. This is the first real decision of the adventure and it is not whether to take the job — they will take the job. It is what they ask for, and what they are willing to be paid in, and whether they notice that Marla is asking them and not her own people, which is a question about Marla that Marla has not answered.

Scene Two: The Cellar

Before they leave, put the roaches in the cellar, exactly where Chapter 14 promised them — three of them, under the pump house, drawn by the light and the warmth and the blood of something that died down there last week and was never found. Run the fight slow and run it honest. Roll AP in the open for the first round and say the number out loud so the table hears the Beginning Phase happen. Make them count movement in fives and feel a turn cost something. Put a broken shelf and a coil of pipe down there so somebody can take cover, and when they ask whether they can, say yes and make it matter. And when the last roach pops, let it pop wet and let somebody wear the chitin home.

The cellar does one more thing that the fight alone cannot. Somewhere down there, behind the intake housing where the pump draws from the aquifer, is a gauge — a pressure dial, pre-war, glass cracked, needle sitting lower than it should. Tell the pump-house kid has seen it and does not understand it. If a player asks what it is, tell them it is a pressure gauge and let

them read it themselves, and if they roll a Science or Repair check, tell them the truth in one flat sentence: the needle has been dropping since summer. Do not connect it to the well. Let it sit in the party's pocket like a stone they picked up and forgot about. They will remember it in session four, and the remembering will be theirs.

Scene Three: The Pump House

Give the party one quiet scene in the pump house before they leave, because a starter adventure needs a room where nothing is trying to kill anybody and the players can just be people. Dell shows them how the intake screens work. Marla's second ledger is on a hook by the door, and if anybody looks at it — and somebody always looks at it — they will find six weeks of columns with the last one circled, a number written twice and crossed out, and a word in the margin in a hand that has stopped being careful. *Maintenance*. The scene is a gift and a trap at once, and how the party handles it tells you what kind of table you have. The ones who ask Marla about it directly are playing a social game. The ones who photograph it with their eyes and say nothing are playing a long one. Both are correct, and you should reward both.

Scene Four: The Road

The road is the heart of the adventure and it should take two sessions, because the road is where this game stops being a table

of numbers and becomes a place. Nine miles. One handcart. Forty gallons of water that the party is now responsible for, which means the water is no longer a resource and has become a weight — it slows the cart, it slows the party, and every mile they push it is a mile they are not being paid for yet. Roll the travel honestly. Take rations out of the pack and let the pack get lighter and let the party get thirstier, and the first time somebody has to decide whether to drink their own water or save it for the walk back, stop and make them say the decision out loud. That moment is the whole travel chapter, compressed into a swallow.

Put Pike's toll on the road where it belongs, at the narrow place, where the scrub closes in on both sides and the road has no shoulder to speak of. Two of his people, a chain across the ruts, a clipboard, and a price. The price is water now, not caps — a quarter of the load, for passage, and a receipt. Let the party argue. Let them try to bluff, and let the bluff land or not on its own merits, because Pike's people are not stupid and will not be talked out of a number their boss set. If the party pays, they arrive at Nine Mile with thirty gallons instead of forty and a receipt they can show Marla, and that receipt is the beginning of the whole third act. If they refuse, they take the long way — a day added, the frost die turned down, and a set of tracks through the scrub that somebody has clearly walked before them.

And run the first night's camp on the road badly on purpose. Give them a site with standing water and an animal trail through the middle and a ridge that silhouettes their fire for a mile, and let them take it, because the first time a bad camp collects its debt is the first time the party believes the Overseer is not describing scenery. Whatever comes in the night — a bloatfly swarm drawn by the smell of the cart, a molerat, a scavenger who is more frightened than they are — should arrive because of a choice the players made. That is the difference between a hazard and a punishment, and a table can feel the difference even when it cannot name it.

Scene Five: The Weigh Station

Sooner or later the party goes south, and the weigh station is where Pike lives and where the adventure turns. It is a pre-war truck scale and a shed and a chain-link yard full of nothing much, and it is immaculate, because Pike is the kind of man whose danger is his tidiness. Eleven people, a board on the wall with every deal he has ever honored pinned to it in order, and a water tank behind the shed that is the answer to a question the party has not asked yet: where does the water go when Pike takes it in toll? Not to Pike's people, who number eleven and drink like eleven. It goes into the tank, and the tank goes nowhere, and the tank is full, and Pike is holding water the way a man holds a card he has not decided to play. He is not hoarding to be cruel.

He is hoarding because he was the man who ran out of water first, once, and he has decided never to be that man again, and everything else he does is downstream of that one decision.

This is the scene where the handle appears. Pike will not break a signed deal — he says it, plainly, and he means it, and the party can test it and find it true. Which means the way through Pike is not to beat him. It is to give him a contract that is better than the one he is chasing, signed and witnessed and worth more to him than the well, and to find the thing he actually wants underneath the thing he is asking for. A party that works it out will walk out of the weigh station with a deal instead of a fight. A party that does not will walk out of the weigh station with a problem, and Pike will still be holding the tank, and the frost die will still be ticking down.

The Four Ways It Ends

The adventure ends four ways, and the Overseer should not steer the party toward any of them. The Contract is the clean ending: the party brokers a written deal between Marla and Pike — the road kept open, the toll paid in caps the town can actually spare, the well left alone — and both of them sign it, and the frost arrives with the road still walked. The Long Way is the ending where the party gives up on Pike entirely and finds a second route, an old rail bed or a game trail that costs a day each way but costs nobody their dignity, and the road stops

matter to Coldwater, and Pike's clipboard arithmetic becomes a number nobody is buying. The Tank is the ending where the party solves Pike by force or by theft — they take the tank, or they take the weigh station, or they take Pike's contract board and burn it — and they win, and the road becomes a place where a man with eleven people and a grudge waits for them every time they use it.

And the Well is the ending the whole adventure is built around, where the party stops treating the well as scenery, tells Marla the pressure gauge has been dropping since summer, and forces the town to choose between the pump that works and the water that lasts — to run it slow, or break it, or ration it honestly, and to say out loud what everybody in Coldwater already knows and nobody says. Any of the four is a real ending. The Well is the one that turns a starter adventure into a campaign.

After the Job

Whichever ending the table reaches, close the adventure the way Chapter 14 told you to close a session: on a shift, not a resolution. The water moved. The frost came or did not. And something changed while the party was on the road — Pike's crew pacing the rail bed with their numbers, the coast-road trader finally arriving with news about the two families who left in September, Marla's second ledger now sitting open on the pump house table where anybody can read it. Write the ledger line on

the back of your screen in plain language, one sentence, the whole adventure in a breath: *Coldwater: made the run, met the toll, saw the gauge, told the truth about the well*. Then read it back to them and put the dice in the box. That line is the campaign now. Everything after this is the party living inside the sentence they just wrote.

Quick Reference: The Coldwater Job

- Four to six sessions. Road, toll, then well, in that order. The well is the truth at the bottom of the job; let them dig to it.

- Three pressures, always moving. The frost (clock), the road (Pike), and the well (silent). When a scene stalls, push the one that is not moving.

- The frost die. Six, face-up, on the table. Turn it down every session the delivery is not made. Its value is that it is visible.

- The cast. Marla Vance runs the town and will not sign the road away. Ossian Pike runs the road and will not break a signed deal. The pump works, and working is the problem. Dell keeps the screens and has seen the gauge drop.

- The gauge. Plant it in the cellar, in session one, and do not explain it. The party should connect it to the well themselves, three sessions later.

- The toll is water now. Pay it and arrive with thirty gallons and a receipt; refuse it and take the long way with the frost die turning.

- The weigh station is the turn. Pike is not a raider and cannot be beaten, only dealt with. The tank behind the shed holds the water he is not using, and the reason is the only story he will not tell.

- Four endings, none of them wrong. The Contract, the Long Way, the Tank, the Well. Do not steer. Let the table's arithmetic decide.

- End on a shift. Something changed while they were walking. Write the ledger line, read it back, put the dice away.

Chapter 16: Crafting, Repair and Downtime

The fight ends, the room goes quiet, and for the first time in twenty minutes nobody is spending AP. You stand in a puddle you would rather not identify, holding a hunting rifle with a cracked stock and a magazine you cannot reload, wearing a vest with two plates gone, and the question in front of you is no longer whether you can win the next fight. It is whether you can afford to have one. That is what this chapter answers. Every chapter before it resolved a moment; this one resolves the hours after — the salvage you strip off a corpse, the watch you spend with a screwdriver, the week you spend in a settlement getting your rifle honest and your ribs knitted. A campaign that skips this is a campaign where nothing wears out and nobody improves between the shooting. Run it, and the game grows a rhythm the firefights cannot give it.

Salvage

Start with the bodies, because a body is the most honest loot in the wastes. A dead raider is a gun and a magazine, whatever rounds were still in it, one piece of armor worth hauling, sometimes a chem and a fistful of caps, and — the part Overseers forget — a reason to have been standing there, which is the only thing on the corpse that cannot be sold. A ruin pays differently. It gives up the pre-war: copper wire still on the spool, a pump

that turns, sealed tins, a generator with three good parts and one that burned out two hundred years ago, a locker somebody locked and never came back to open. Strip both the same way. One check per room or per body, never one per object, or you will spend the session listening to a player read an inventory out loud.

Salvage is that check: Repair when you are taking the machinery apart, Survival when you are taking the place apart, against a DC the ring sets. The Settled Ring is DC 1 — you are picking through ground other people already picked over, and you find the leavings. The Near Wilds is DC 2, the Deep Wastes 3, the Hot Zones 4. Success yields the site's take. Beating the DC by two ranks means you found the thing the last scavenger missed, and that is where maps, keys, and pre-war schematics live. Failure is not nothing. Failure means you took the obvious and left the good, and the Overseer should say plainly what you left, because a party that knows what it walked past will come back for it.

| Ring | A body yields | A ruin yields |

|---|---|---|

| Settled Ring | 1d4 Scrap, loose rounds, cloth | 2d6 Scrap,
food, clean water |

| Near Wilds | 1d6 Scrap, one serviceable weapon, a chem | 3d6
Scrap, electronics, spent casings |

| Deep Wastes | 1d8 Scrap, armor plate, a rare chem | 4d6
Scrap, pre-war components, a blueprint |

| Hot Zones | 1d10 Scrap, energy cells, power armor parts |
5d6 Scrap, a fusion core, military-grade anything |

| Where the Map Stops | whatever you have been saving |
whatever you have been saving |

Scrap

Scrap is this chapter's one new unit, and it exists so nobody has to price a bolt. A point of Scrap is a coffee can of salvageable metal, wire, and plastic — the material you can always find and never have quite enough of. It weighs five pounds, which matters more than it sounds, because Carry Weight is the real ceiling on every salvage run and a party hauling forty Scrap out of a ruin is a party moving at half speed with Encumbered written on a slip in front of them. Scrap pays for every repair in this chapter and every recipe on the page. Traders buy it at a cap a point and sell it at three, which is the whole reason a settlement with a workbench is worth walking to.

The Bench

A bench is any flat surface with the right tools on it and an hour of nobody shooting at you. A settlement's shop, a pre-war garage with the door still on its track, a maintenance closet in

a vault, the tailgate of a wagon with a Tool Kit unfolded on it — all benches, all different. What separates them is what they will let you attempt. A full bench, meaning power, a vise, and a rack of hand tools, allows anything in this chapter at the printed DC. A Tool Kit in the field is a field bench: it adds +1 to the DC of anything that wants precision — energy weapons, electronics, optics — and nothing else. Your hands alone are not a bench. A Wanderer with a broken rifle and no kit is a Wanderer carrying a club, and the Overseer should let them carry it for a while.

Repair

Repair pushes the Condition line back up, and Condition is the quiet clock every piece of gear in this book is running. A weapon at 100 is the weapon printed on its card. A weapon at 60 deals less damage by the tenths rule and jams when the Effort says so. A weapon at 0 is a club with a trigger. Restoring it costs three things — a bench, Scrap, and a check — and the check is the only one of the three that can fail.

Job Skill DC Time Materials

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Field patch a weapon or a piece of armor Repair 2 1 watch 1 Scrap

Restore a weapon to full Condition Repair 3 1 day Scrap equal to the Condition restored, divided by 10
--

| Replace armor plating | Repair | 3 | 1 day | 2 Scrap per point of DR restored |

| Rebuild an energy weapon or a fusion core | Repair or Science | 4 | 2 days | 3 Scrap, a replacement lens or cell |

| Install or remove a weapon mod | Repair | the mod's listed DC, 3 by default | 1 watch | the mod, 1 Scrap |

| Handload ammunition | Repair | 2 | 1 watch per 20 rounds | casings, powder, lead |

| Brew a chem | Medicine | the chem's Habit DC + 1 | 1 watch per dose | reagents, 1 Scrap of glassware |

| Read a schematic or a blueprint | Science | 3 | 1 watch | the document |

Repair is not all-or-nothing, and the table is written to reward patience. A Wanderer who cannot afford a full overhaul can spend a watch and a point of Scrap to put 1d10 Condition back on the gun, which is the difference between a rifle that jams and one that does not, and is often the only thing standing between a party and a decision to leave. What a field patch cannot do is lift the piece past its ceiling. Anything repaired away from a full bench tops out at 50 Condition until somebody with a vise and a day does the real work. Write the ceiling in pencil on the weapon's line. A gun with a 50 next to it is a gun the whole table understands.

Failure costs, and it should. When a Repair check misses the DC by two or more, the part you were working on is worse than

when you started: drop the item's Condition by 1d10 and describe the sound it made. When it misses by three ranks, the item is inoperable until a full overhaul and the Scrap is gone. That is not cruelty; that is the reason a player thinks about whether to attempt a rebuild on the party's only rifle an hour before dark. The Overseer states the DC before the roll, always. A player who hears the number and rolls anyway has made a decision, and decisions are what this game is for.

Crafting

Crafting in this book is not a tech tree. It is a recipe, and every recipe answers the same five questions: what it costs, what you roll, how long it takes, what you get, and what happens when you fail. Write them on index cards if you like. The shape is deliberately the same as a weapon card and a hazard card, because your table already knows how to read those.

Recipe Skill DC Time Cost Output
--- --- --- --- --- ---
Handloaded 10mm, 20 rounds Repair 2 1 watch 20 casings, 1 Scrap 20 rounds of 10mm
Healing Powder Medicine 2 1 watch 1 Scrap, a root found on a Survival 2 check 1 dose
Stimpak Medicine 3 2 watches 1 Scrap, a syringe, a reagent source 1 Stimpak

| Antivenom | Medicine | 4 | 1 day | cazador venom glands, 2 Scrap | 1 Antivenom |

| Leather Armor | Repair | 3 | 2 days | 6 Scrap, one hide | Leather Armor at 100 |

| Metal Armor | Repair | 4 | 4 days | 12 Scrap, a settlement forge | Metal Armor at 100 |

| A weapon mod from a blueprint | Repair | 4 | 2 days | 4 Scrap, the blueprint, the base part | the mod |

A chem you brew is the same chem. The Habit DC does not care whose kitchen it came out of, and a Wanderer who learns to cook their own Psycho has not solved their habit — they have industrialized it. Brewing does not reset the ratchet, does not grant tolerance, and does not make a dose free. If anything, the Overseer should make a brewer's own supply the most available thing in the world, because that is exactly the shape of the problem, and it is more interesting to watch a player build their own cage than to hand them one.

Ammunition

Casings are recoverable. Spend a round and mark it on the sheet; at the end of a fight, a Survival or Repair check against DC 2 recovers half the casings you fired, rounded down, and the rest are in the dirt or in the wall where the wall used to be. Powder, lead, and primers come from salvage or from traders, and handloading is how a party with a good bench stays in a fight

without a caravan. Energy cells are the exception and always will be. A microfusion cell cannot be reloaded or manufactured; the plants that stamped them died with the laboratories that designed them, and no bench in this book changes that. A laser user's ammunition economy is a scavenging economy, full stop, and that single line is what keeps the laser pistol from quietly replacing the 10mm.

Weapon Mods

Installing a mod takes a watch and a Repair check against the mod's listed DC, three by default, and the mod itself is consumed on a failure — bent pins, a stripped thread, a lens cracked under a screwdriver that slipped. Removing a mod to move it to a new weapon is a second check at the same DC; succeed and you have the part in your hand, fail and you have scrap and a story. Mods swap freely between weapons in the same category, which is why a party that finds a scope in a ruin and buys a rifle three sessions later has been carrying an investment, not clutter. The Overseer should let them feel the difference between a gun that was found and a gun that was built.

Downtime

Downtime is this chapter's second half and its real subject. Between jobs a Wanderer gets days, and days are the only currency in the game that buys things caps cannot: skill, health,

information, and standing. Run downtime as a clock. The Overseer says how many days the party has before the next thing happens — three is a good number for a hurry, ten is a season, thirty is a campaign turn — and the table spends them. A day holds six watches of four hours each, the same watch the conditions appendix counts in, so a party can fit two long jobs and a night's sleep into a single day if they are willing to pay for it in exhaustion later.

Activity	Check	Cost	What it buys
---	---	---	---
Rest and heal	none	1 day	END Talent die in HP, clear Fatigued, shed one rank of Sickened
Train	none	1 day per 5 Skill Points spent	banked Skill Points become Skill Levels
Craft or repair	see the tables above	the job's time	gear, ammo, chems
Trade	Barter	1 watch	sell salvage, buy equipment; the price moves with your Effort
Work a job	the job's skill	1 day	5 to 25 caps by settlement, doubled on a good check
Scout the region	Survival or Sneak	1 day	a landmark, a route, a rumor that goes on the map
Research	Science or Repair	1 day per question	a recipe, a schematic, a blueprint read

| Sit with somebody | Speech or Poise | 1 watch | a faction's patience, a name learned, a door left open |

| Stand watch | Perception | 1 watch | nobody gets surprised in the night |

You do not learn things in a firefight. Skill Points accumulate when you level and sit there unspent until the party stops moving, which is what training is for: five points a day of focused practice, with a teacher or a proper facility if the Skill Score you are chasing is 6 or higher. The same clock pays for Perks, because a Perk is a decision about who your Wanderer is becoming, and that decision deserves a night to think about. This is the mechanical reason a party takes a week off, and it is the reason the Overseer should make the week interesting rather than skipping it.

The world moves while you rest, and this is the rule that keeps downtime from becoming a menu. Pick one faction action per downtime block — the raiders take the water source, the caravan changes its route, the price of RadAway climbs because somebody bought every dose in the valley — and let the party hear about it on the last day, when it is too late to have prevented it. Chapter 13 said a faction that does not act is furniture. Downtime is where you prove you meant it. A party that spends three days repairing rifles and walks out into a road that has changed is a party that understands the world was never waiting for them.

Downtime is also not free. A bed and two meals run 5 caps a day in a settlement, 10 if you want a door that locks, and the town's patience is a resource the party can spend down. If they are broke, downtime gets paid in chores — the well needs clearing, the brahmin wandered off, the roof over the clinic leaks — and a chore is a job, and a job is a session, which is the whole point. Nobody in the wastes keeps a room warm for strangers out of the goodness of their heart, and the Overseer who charges for hospitality is the Overseer whose settlements feel like places instead of pit stops.

A Week in Coldwater

Here is the machine running. The party has six days in Coldwater and 140 caps between them. On day one, Kara takes the cracked hunting rifle to Marla's shop, pays 10 caps for the bench, and rolls Repair. Her Repair Skill Score is 4, her INT Talent is $d8+2$, and the die comes up 6, so the Talent Bonus is 8. She rolls 16 on the d20: 16 times 4 is 64, plus 8 is 72, divided by 20 gives an Effort of 3.6 against a DC of 3. The rifle comes back to 100 Condition for 4 Scrap and a day of her life, and the table has just learned that a bench, a skill, and a handful of scrap are the same thing as a functioning weapon. On day two she handloads forty rounds and pays for it with casings the party has been carrying since the first session.

The other two spend the same days differently, which is the point of a clock. Ossian takes a day at the wall and comes back with a rumor about wagons on the coast road, which puts a new landmark on the map. The third Wanderer sits with the woman who runs the well for a watch and does not ask for anything, which is what the Speech check is for, and on day four she is the one who mentions, in passing, that the pump they hauled back in the spring has been making a noise. On day five the faction moves: a crew the party has never met starts counting wagons on the road, and the party learns about it over dinner, on the last night, with their rifles in pieces on the table. That is downtime. Six days, three jobs, one thing the party cannot undo, and everybody at the table knows exactly what they spent.

Quick Reference: Crafting, Repair & Downtime

- One salvage check per site. Repair for machinery, Survival for a place, DC by the ring. Beating it by two ranks finds what the last scavenger missed.

- Scrap is the unit. Five pounds a point, a cap to buy, three to sell, and the material behind every repair and recipe in this chapter.

- Benches tier the work. A full bench does anything at the printed DC; a Tool Kit adds +1 to precision jobs; your hands do nothing that matters.

- Condition is a clock. Restoring it costs a bench, Scrap, and a check — and the check is the only part that can fail.

- Away from a bench, nothing goes past 50. Write the ceiling in pencil and let the table see it.

- Failures cost. Miss by two and the part gets worse. Miss by three and the job is scrap.

- Recipes answer five questions. Cost, check, time, output, failure. Write them like weapon cards.

- A brewed chem is the same chem. The ratchet does not care whose kitchen it came from.

- Cells cannot be reloaded. Casings come back; microfusion cells never do. That is the laser's whole economy.

- Downtime is a clock, not a pause. Three days, ten, thirty — the Overseer sets it and the table spends it.

- Skill Points become Skill Levels in downtime. You do not learn anything in a firefight.

- Move one faction per downtime block. Then let the party hear about it on the last day.

Chapter 17: A Worked Round

Chapter 17: A Worked Round

Every rule in this book has been taught one dial at a time, with the rest of the machine switched off, and that is the only honest way to teach a system this size. It is also a lie. Nothing in this game happens one dial at a time. You have read how AP is generated and never watched a Wanderer spend the last of it on the wrong thing; you have read the Death Toll's ratchet and never watched the number climb while the table went quiet; you have read the Mook Rule and never seen six bodies move on a single roll. What follows repairs that. It is one fight, run start to finish, three rounds, dice in the open, every phase in its order, nothing explained and nothing skipped. Read it once for the story, and read it a second time with a pencil, because the arithmetic is the point.

A worked round is not a tutorial and it is not a showcase. It is the machine running under load, and the load includes bad luck. Every number below came off a die, and several of them are poor: a miss that should have connected, a defense roll that failed by less than a full rank, an AP total two points short of what the player wanted to do with it. That is not the writer fudging a demonstration for you. That is a Tuesday. A chapter that showed you a perfect round would be teaching a game nobody

gets to play, and an Overseer who expects the perfect round at their own table will spend the first month convinced they are running it wrong.

The Party

Four Wanderers, third level, standing at the top of a cellar stair in Coldwater with a lamp, a bad smell, and no plan beyond getting the pump working again.

	Wanderer	The job	The numbers that matter here	HP	SQ
	---	---	---	---	---
	Kara	shooter, tinkerer	Small Guns 5 · Repair 4 · AGI 4 (d6+1) · PER 5 (d8+1) · STR 4 (d6+1) · INT 6 (d8+2)	19	9
	Fitch	the wall	Unarmed 6 · Melee 5 · STR 6 (d8+2) · END 7 (d10+2) · AGI 3 (d6) · DR 2	26	6
	Wren	scout, eyes	Sneak 6 · Acrobatics 6 · Unarmed 1 · AGI 7 (d10+2) · PER 6 (d8+2) · STR 3 (d6) · DR 0	9	13
	Lund	medic, quartermaster	Medicine 5 · END 6 (d8+2) · INT 5 (d6+1) · AGI 4 (d6+1) · DR 1	21	8

Look at Wren's line before you look at anything else, because the most important number on this table is the ugliest one. Unarmed 1. She is the fastest Wanderer in the party by a wide margin and the second-best shot, and she has never trained to be hit. Melee in this system is a contested roll, and the defending skill is the same combat skill the attacker is swinging — so

when something bites at Wren, she defends with a Score of 1 and a d20, while Fitch defends with a Score of 6. That single line on a character sheet is worth more than any piece of armor in the catalog, and it is the line that decides this encounter before a single die is thrown.

Fitch's number is the other one to notice, and it is a limitation rather than a strength. His Sequence is 6, so no matter what his Agility Talent produces, he can never hold more than 6 AP in a turn, which makes him a two-strike fighter in a system where the third strike costs 3 AP on its own. He is also, at DR 2 and 26 HP, functionally immune to everything in this cellar. That combination is not a contradiction and it is not a mistake. It is the shape of a tank: impossible to hurt and unable to be everywhere, which is why the party's real problem in round two will not be Fitch.

The Situation

The brahmin wandered off in the spring and nobody went looking for it, and the pump the party hauled back out of Vault 12 has been making a noise ever since. Both facts have the same answer, and the answer is at the bottom of Coldwater's cellar behind a door that has swollen shut. Behind that door: a dead brahmin, three months gone, and the six bloatflies that have been living off it since June. Above the flies, set into the back wall, a pantry the settlement sealed a hundred years ago and never

opened, which is the reason anybody is down here at all. A sealed pantry in a settled ring is exactly the kind of room where the last scavenger missed something, and everybody at the table knows it.

The Overseer's prep is four sentences long, and you should write yours the same way. Six bloatflies, Tier 1, sharing one initiative roll, one DT roll, and one AP roll as a single cloud. They will not fight to the death; once the swarm is down to half, the rest scatter and the encounter is over. The brahmin is worth a hide and meat to Coldwater, the flies are worth their glands to an apothecary, and the pantry is worth whatever you have decided it is worth. Nothing else in this room wants anything from the party, which means the whole encounter is a decision about how much they are willing to pay for a door.

Then roll the cloud's numbers in the open and let the table see them, because the Mook Rule is a promise you have to keep once you have made it. Six bodies, one AP roll: the swarm gets d6 AP and spends it the way one animal would spend it. Six bodies, one DT roll: every attack against the cloud that round is reduced by the same number, which cuts both ways. A 4 makes the flies armored for a round and a 1 makes them soft for everybody, and the party can only plan around a number it has been allowed to see. Say it out loud, every round, and watch what the table does with it.

Round One

Beginning. Kara's Agility Talent comes up 4, so she generates 5 AP against a Sequence of 9. Fitch rolls a 6 and takes all of it, which will turn out to be the best thing that happens to him all fight. Wren's $d10+2$ produces 9 AP, comfortably under her cap of 13. Lund rolls a 3 for 4 AP. Then the Strength Talents come out one at a time for DT: Kara 5, Fitch 7, Wren 3, Lund 6. Write them down. DT is rerolled every round and a good roll is worth keeping, so a player who has a 7 penciled next to their name has stopped guessing about their own body.

The cloud rolls its own numbers once, and the Overseer says them aloud: 5 AP, and a shared DT of 3. Five AP is enough for three stings if it spends them 1, 2, and 3, or enough for two stings and ten feet of drift across the room. That arithmetic is not hidden from the party. That arithmetic is the encounter.

Action. Wren moves first on Sequence 13 and spends 4 AP on a Read, a Normal check costing double its rank in AP. Her $d20$ comes up 16, her Sneak Score is 6, and her Perception Talent rolls a 5 for a bonus of 7, so the Effort lands at $(16 \times 6 + 7) \div 20$, which is 5.15 against a DC of 2. That is a success by three full ranks, and the Overseer's obligation at three ranks is to stop being coy. Wren gets everything: six flies, the dead brahmin they are feeding on, the pantry behind them, and the fact that the floor along the west wall has gone soft enough to put a boot through. She spends 3 more AP crossing to the east side where the boards are sound, and holds 2.

Kara moves ten feet and fires twice. Her first shot is a 14 on the d20; Small Guns 5 multiplies that to 70, her Agility Talent adds 4, and $74 \div 20$ gives her an Effort of 3.7. The range is twenty-five feet, which the pistol's chart calls Normal, and the bloatflies' Erratic Flight adds 1 to that, so the real number is 3. Kara clears it. Her damage is 2d6 for 9, plus the +1d6 her Score of 5 has earned her, which rolls a 3, for 12. Then the Condition line does its quiet work. The pistol came into this room at 90, having already given up its first full ten, so one-tenth comes off the top: drop the ones place, multiply what remains by the tenths value, subtract from the base, and 12 becomes 11. Minus the cloud's DT of 3 and its DR of 1, the fly takes 7 and stays up at 5 HP.

Her second shot is a 6 on the d20. Sixty plus four is 64, divided by 20 gives 3.2, and 3.2 does not clear a DC of 3. The Overseer describes the round going wide into the dark, and Kara's player learns the thing every small-arms Wanderer learns in their first real fight: a Skill Score of 5 will not save you from a 6.

Lund walks ten feet, pulls a Stimpak out of a Prepared Slot without spending a single AP to dig for it, and holds 2. The cloud drifts fifteen feet into the room, spends 1 AP on a sting, and picks Wren, because Wren is unarmored and because a bloatfly's tactics line says it goes for the wounded and the slow and because the Overseer can read a character sheet. The fly's Effort is $(15 \times 2 + 1) \div 20$, which is 1.55. Wren defends with

Unarmed 1: a d20 of 8, plus a Strength Talent of 4, divided by 20, which is 0.6. She loses by nearly a full rank. Damage comes up 5 against her DT of 3, and Wren drops from 9 to 7 before the fight has properly started.

Fitch spends 3 AP closing to the doorway and 3 AP on two strikes. His first is a 13 on the d20, which multiplies against Unarmed 6 to 78, plus a Strength Talent of 8, for an Effort of 4.3, and Erratic Flight — which makes bloatflies nearly impossible to shoot and trivially easy to swat — adds 1. The fly rolls 0.95 defending. That is a margin over three full ranks, which is a critical, which is maximum damage: 10 from his Strength Talent die, 6 from his +1d6 scaling, 16 total, 12 after the cloud's shared DT and DR. The fly comes apart against the doorframe. His second strike lands for 11 on the one Kara wounded, and the Overseer marks the cloud at two dead.

Ending. Kara carries 1 AP, Wren carries 2, Lund carries 2, and Fitch carries nothing because Fitch never carries anything. Unused AP is capped by Sequence at the end of the turn, and nobody here is close to their cap except Wren, who is sitting at 2 of 13 and will probably never be near it. DT is wiped and will be rerolled. That is one round, and at a real table it took about four minutes.

Round Two

Beginning. Wren's $d10+2$ gives her 8, plus 2 carried, for 10 AP. Kara gets 6 plus 1 for 7. Lund gets 3 plus 2 for 5. Fitch rolls a 2 and has 2 AP for the entire round, which is the single most instructive die result in this chapter: the party's tank, at full health, unable to reach anything, standing in a doorway with one strike to his name. Then the cloud rolls a shared DT of 4 and the Overseer says so out loud, and every player at that table recalculates what a hit is worth.

Action. Wren fires her backup 10mm twice. The first is an 18 — 54 plus an Agility Talent of 10, giving $64 \div 20$, or 3.2, against the same DC of 3. It clears by a fifth of a rank and a fifth of a rank is enough. Her damage is 2d6 for 10 plus +1d4 scaling at Small Guns 3, which rolls a 3, for 13, minus the cloud's 4 and its DR of 1, for 8. Her second shot is an 11 and misses at 2.15. She spends the rest of her AP on movement, getting clear of the west wall and the soft boards her own Read warned her about, which is a fine thing to watch a player do with information they paid 4 AP for.

Kara has 7 AP and the party's only real damage output. Two shots land for 6 and 5 after the swarm's improved DT and between them they finish the fly Wren opened up, then she spends 1 AP and a called shot's +2 penalty on a wing, which raises the DC to 5 against a target that does not hold still, and rolls a 12 for an Effort of 3.2. Miss. It is worth letting a player waste an action like that, once, early, and describing the round going into the

dark. The lesson sticks better than a paragraph about it ever will.

Lund holds. Fitch, with his 2 AP, spends 1 on a strike, rolls a 16 for an Effort of 6.2 against a fly's 1.25, crits for maximum damage, and puts 11 through a target that had 7 left. Then he has 1 AP and nothing to do with it, because his Sequence will not let him carry it into anything useful. The cloud, reduced and feeding, does exactly what its card says it does. It ignores Fitch entirely and goes for Wren, drifting ten feet and spending 1 AP and then 2 on two stings.

The first is a 17 against Wren's 0.65. Seven damage, minus a DT roll of 2, is 5, and Wren goes from 7 to 2. The second is a natural 20 — 40 plus 1, divided by 20, for 2.05 — against a d20 of 4 on Wren's side, which is 0.4. The damage is 7 against a DT of 5, so 2 gets through, and 2 is exactly enough. Wren hits 0 HP and leaves the fight, and everything about the next two minutes changes.

Wren is not unconscious. This is the distinction the Conditions appendix spends a paragraph on, and it matters here. At 0 HP she is in the Death Toll, which is a different and worse machine. Her AP costs are doubled from this moment, additively, per the doubling rules. She keeps her turn, her voice, and her place in the order. What she has lost is the ability to be careless.

Round Three

Beginning. Wren's Beginning Phase arrives with a Death Toll Check inside it, and this is the roll the whole encounter has been building toward. Her Agility Talent gives her 7 AP against a Sequence of 13, which would be a fine turn if every cost on her sheet were not now paid twice — 7 AP buys 3.5 AP of ordinary work, and 3.5 AP is one shot and a step. Then the check itself: pure Endurance Talent, no d20, no Skill Score, first DC 1. Her d6+1 comes up 3. Three clears one. The DC ratchets to 2, no Death Token goes on the sheet, and the table exhales for exactly one round. Kara generates 5 AP plus 4 carried for 9. Lund gets 6 plus 3, capped by his Sequence at 8. Fitch rolls a 4 and has 5. The cloud rolls 3 AP and a shared DT of 1, and the Overseer says the 1 out loud with some relish.

Action. Lund moves ten feet and uses the Stimpak: 2 AP to cross, 2 AP to administer, 0 AP to draw it because it has been sitting in a Prepared Slot since the top of the fight. This is what Prepared Slots are for, and this is the only moment in the chapter where the system quietly saves somebody's life. Had that Stimpak been buried in a pack, Lund would have spent 1 AP opening the bag and arrived a round late, and a round late in the Death Toll is a different chapter. The card does what the card says. HP goes back on the sheet, the Death Toll ends, and Wren is on her feet at 4 HP with a taste like a struck match in her mouth and nothing left to prove to anybody.

Kara empties what is left of her magazine into a swarm whose shared DT is now 1, which is the cheapest armor the flies will ever have. Three shots, two hits, and the shared DT means the low roll applies to all of them: one fly goes down and the other takes 9 through the softest hide in the cellar. Fitch spends his 5 AP on a step and two strikes and finishes the last one in front of him. That is four of six dead and the fight should be over by the card's own line, and it nearly is — the two survivors lift off the brahmin and drift for the stairwell, and then one of them comes back, because Wren is bleeding on the floor and blood is the first thing on a bloatfly's list. It gets one sting in before Kara puts it down. The other clears the stairwell and is gone, and nobody in the party has the AP or the inclination to chase an insect into a dark corridor.

Ending. Unused AP is capped by Sequence and mostly thrown away. The fight is over in three rounds, which is what the Three-Round Rule exists to make normal, and the party has spent almost nothing to win it except the one thing they will actually miss.

The Bill

| What it cost | The number |

| --- | --- |

| Rounds | 3 |

| Shots fired | 12 — Kara 7, Wren 4, plus a called shot |

Ammunition spent	12 rounds of 10mm
Condition lost	Kara's pistol 90 → 82; Wren's backup 100 → 96
HP lost	Wren 9 → 0 → 4 after the Stimpak; nobody else touched
AP spent on information	4 — Wren's Read
Chems used	1 Stimpak
XP awarded	150 — six bloatflies at the Tier 1 award
Salvage	3d6 Scrap, a hide, a brahmin's worth of meat, and whatever is in the pantry

Read the HP line again, because it is the honest summary of the whole encounter. Three of the four Wanderers never took a point of damage, and the one who did went all the way to zero. That is not a design failure and it is not an Overseer being unfair. That is what a Tier 1 swarm does to a party with one unarmored member and one brawler who cannot be hurt: it finds the soft one, because that is what the card says it does, and it keeps finding her until somebody spends an action on her instead of on the fight. The entire threat in this cellar was one line on Wren's character sheet, and every player at that table now knows it.

What to Steal From This Round

- Read the party sheet before you read the monster. Wren's Unarmed 1 decided this fight, and the bloatfly's tactics line decided it too. The two of them together did all the work.

- Say the Mook numbers out loud. A shared DT of 4 and a shared DT of 1 are two different encounters, and the party can only plan around them if they know which one they are in.

- Let a player waste an action once. Kara's called shot was never going to land. Describing it missing into the dark taught more than a rule about called shots ever will.

- Track Condition across sessions. The pistol was at 90 when the door opened, and that single tenth is the entire reason the tenths rule exists.

- Prepared Slots are a life. Lund's Stimpak cost 0 AP to draw and 2 to use. Buried in a pack it would have cost three and arrived a round late.

- The Death Toll is not unconsciousness. Wren kept her turn, her voice, and her agency. She paid double for everything, which is a punishment the player can play through.

- Roll the Death Toll Check in the open. DC 1, then 2, then 3. The ratchet is the tension; a hidden ratchet is just a number.

- Three rounds and out. The swarm broke at four of six because its card said it would, and the one that came back came back for the blood. Encounters end on the creature's own logic, not when the HP runs out.

- Let the fight be cheap. Twelve rounds of ammunition and one Stimpak. The pantry behind the door is the reward, and the reward should always cost less than the party feared.

Chapter 18: Making It Your Own

Everything in this book that looks like the wasteland is a coat. Caps, rads, chems, power armor, the specific smell of a settlement that has been drinking from the same well for a hundred years — all of it is paint, applied thick, over a machine that has never once cared what it was dressed in. Strip the paint and what remains is Effort and Difficulty Classes, AP and Sequence, a Death Toll that ratchets, a Condition line that runs down, a Skill Score that grows a weapon along with its owner. None of that is post-apocalyptic. All of it is a system for people in trouble, and people are in trouble in every genre anyone has ever written.

That has been the quiet claim under this whole book since the first chapter, and this is where it pays up. The rules were playtested as a wasteland game because a wasteland is a clean place to test: the stakes are legible, the monsters are unambiguous, and the scarcity is baked into the ground. But a system that only works when the scarcity is radioactive water is not a system. It is a setting with arithmetic bolted to it. What follows is the process for lifting the machine out of the coat, in the order you should do it, and a clear account of which parts you are allowed to touch on the way.

Three Layers, and Only One of Them Is Load-Bearing

Learn to see the book as three layers stacked on each other before you rename a single term, because a reskin that starts at the wrong layer produces a game that plays exactly like Fallout with fantasy nouns pasted over the top — and every table that has tried it has felt the seam within one session. The bottom layer is the engine: the Effort formula, the DC ladder, the Effort ranks, the three combat phases, the AP economy, Sequence, Skill Scaling, the Tenths rule, the Doubling rules, the Death Toll, the Hazard Stat Block, and every ratchet in the book. The middle layer is the setting: caps, rads, chems, power armor, the specific geography of a bombed-out Commonwealth. The top layer is tone — the Overseer's narration, the bestiary's voice, the particular cruelty of a bloatfly that goes for the wounded one.

Only the bottom layer is load-bearing. The middle layer is vocabulary, and vocabulary is free: you can rename every term in this book in an afternoon with a text editor and a pot of coffee. The top layer is performance, and performance was always going to be yours. The thing you must not do is reach down and change the engine's arithmetic while telling yourself you are only changing the paint, because that is not a reskin. That is a different game wearing this one's clothes, and it has not been playtested by anybody.

The test for whether a rule belongs to the engine or to the setting is simple, and it is worth applying to every line in the book before you touch it. Ask what the rule is actually about. A

rule that says a chem's Habit DC ratchets by one on every clean dose is not about drugs; it is about a cost that cannot be dodged, applied to a resource that only runs in one direction. A rule that says Condition drops by one per shot is not about firearms; it is about equipment as a clock. The Death Toll is not about dying in a wasteland; it is about the fiction in which a character at the end of their rope keeps their turn, their voice, and their place in the order while every action they take costs double. Strip the noun off and the mechanic is still standing. If it is still standing, it is portable.

The Vocabulary Swap

The swap is the easy half, and the only thing that makes it hard is consistency — a game that calls its currency "credits" in chapter one and "caps" in chapter four will feel cheap to every player at the table, and cheapness is the one thing a reskin cannot survive. Do the work in one pass, in one document, before anybody rolls a die. Write the left column, write the right column, then find and replace the whole book against it, and read the result out loud once, because the ear catches the leftover noun that the eye skips.

| This book says | A cyberpunk kit says | A dark-fantasy kit
says | A cosmic-horror kit says |

|---|---|---|---|

| Caps | Credits | Coin | Favors |

Rads	Strain	Blight	Exposure
Chems	Cyberware	Draughts	Elixirs
Stimpak	Trauma patch	Healing tincture	Restorative
Power Armor	Mech chassis	Golem plate	Warded hulk
The Wastes	The Sprawl	The Marches	The Quiet
Vault	The Arcology	The Keep	The Facility
Brahmin	Hauler rig	Ox	Pack mule
Ghouls	The Wired	The Risen	The Taken
The Overseer	The Handler	The Storyteller	The Keeper
Wanderer	Runner	Freeholder	Delver

Notice what survives the swap untouched, because that is the whole argument of this chapter in a single table. Every Skill on the list — Athletics, Larceny, Science, Speech, Sneak, Survival — is genre-neutral, which is why the eighteen were chosen the way they were and not as a pile of setting-specific trades. Every SPECIAL stat is a measurement of a human being, and human beings have not changed in any of these genres. The DC ladder is difficulty, and difficulty is difficulty whether you are picking a lock or forcing a ward. The AP economy is attention, and attention is the only resource that has ever been scarce in any story about anybody.

Repainting the Four Subsystems

Four systems in this book carry more flavor than all the rest combined, and all four are chassis rather than fixed machinery.

The Radiation Contamination Track is the first. Its five stages, its accumulating pool, its treatment and its clock are not about gamma rays; they are about a contamination that does not wash off and a body that keeps score. Repoint it and the same ladder becomes corruption in a dark-fantasy kit — stages of the Blight, visible in the skin, curable only by a pilgrimage — or Exposure in a horror kit, where the track measures how much of the Quiet a character has seen and the last stage is not death but membership.

The Addiction and Withdrawal System is the second, and it is the most portable of the four because the CHA-keyed ratchet describes any bargain that pays now and charges later. Swap the chem for cyberware and the same rules give you a runner whose chrome is outrunning their nerves; swap it for a wyrd-touched gift and the Habit DC becomes the price of borrowing power from something that expects repayment. The Hook, the tokens, and the withdrawal clock need no changes at all. Only the noun on the card moves, and the noun was always the least interesting part of the design.

Power Armor is the third, and it is a chassis in the most literal sense available to you. The suit already runs on fuel, already keeps a maintenance ledger, already takes damage like a vehicle rather than like a coat, already has its own states. Rebuild it as a mech in a sci-fi kit and nothing in the rules changes except the scale of the thing the party has to keep fed.

Rebuild it as golem plate and the fuel becomes a binding that must be renewed by someone who knows the words. The Hazard Stat Block is the fourth and the most freely extensible, because it was written as a template in the first place: Trigger, Read, Resist, Effect, Cadence, Countermeasures. Replace the environmental catalog with your own — vacuum, thaumic backlash, a haunted wood that eats lantern light — and the grammar of the card holds.

The Death Toll Is the Best Thing in This Book

If you take one mechanic out of this system and into whatever you run next, take the Death Toll, because it solves a problem that most games solve badly. In most rulesets, a character who goes down is removed from the table: they roll a save every round, or they bleed out on a timer, or they simply wait while everyone else plays. The Death Toll refuses that. It keeps the character in the fight, in the conversation, and in the order, and it makes their continued presence cost — every action doubled, every round a check against a DC that climbs by one each time they survive it. That is a ratchet, and a ratchet is tension you do not have to author, because the arithmetic authors it for you.

Repointing it is a matter of what the ratchet measures. A cyberpunk kit runs it against Strain and calls it Burnout. A horror kit runs it against Poise and calls it the Long Night. A

fantasy kit runs it against Endurance and calls it the Wound, and the Death Tokens become an infection the cleric cannot simply pray away. What must not change is the shape: pure Talent, no Skill Score, no d20, DC starting at 1 and climbing, a reset to 1 on a failure with a token gained, and death at tokens equal to level. That shape is what makes a losing fight dramatic instead of final.

Building a Kit: Two Worked Examples

Take the engine, take the swap table, and see what a kit looks like when it is finished. A cyberpunk kit renames caps to credits, the wastes to the Sprawl, the Overseer to the Handler, and Wanderers to runners. Rads become Strain, tracked on the same five-stage ladder, and the treatment is not RadAway but a clinic visit that costs more than the job paid. Chems become cyberware, and the Habit DC is the price of running more chrome than the nervous system was built for. Power Armor becomes a mech chassis that needs a fusion cell and a mechanic. The bestiary is restatted by moving one dial per card: gunners become corporate security, super mutants become boosted enforcers with the same tier ladder behind them, and a deathclaw becomes something that came up out of a sinkhole in the industrial district and has never been catalogued. Nothing in the arithmetic moved.

A dark-fantasy kit renames caps to coin, rads to the Blight, chems to draughts, and the Overseer to the Storyteller. The

Blight track advances in stages exactly as the radiation track does, and its last stage turns a person into something the party has to put down. Draughts keep their Habit DCs and their withdrawal clocks, and the fluff is easier than the wasteland version because a medieval apothecary is a more believable dealer than a chemist with a syringe. Power Armor becomes golem plate, fueled by a binding rather than a cell. Hazards are rebuilt from the template — a haunted wood, a fen that eats memory, a winter that does not end — and the bestiary is filled by moving one dial per card off the wasteland roster, which is exactly what the Bestiary chapter told you to do in the first place.

What Not to Touch

Four things stay where they are, and the reason to say so plainly is that every one of them will look editable at two in the morning on the third week of a project. The Effort formula stays, because every number in the book — every DC, every Skill Scaling die, every Condition penalty — is calibrated against its curve, and moving it invalidates the whole catalog at once. The DC ladder stays, because its nine rungs are the shared language between the Overseer and the players, and a table that rennumbers them has to relearn every card in the book. The AP economy stays, because Sequence, the three phases, and the Doubling rules are all gears meshing with it. And Skill Scaling stays, because it is the reason a starting weapon stays relevant for thirty levels,

and a game that removes it has quietly reintroduced the treadmill this system was built to avoid.

Everything else is yours. The bestiary is a roster, not a canon. The item catalog is a price list, not a scripture. The named places — Coldwater, Vault 12, Nine Mile — are there to be replaced by your own, or kept if your table wants them, because a starter town is a starter town in any genre and the pump still needs fixing. The book gave you a wasteland because a wasteland is the clearest possible place to learn a system about scarcity. What you do with the machine afterward is not the book's business.

Quick Reference: Making It Your Own

- Three layers. Engine, setting, tone. Only the engine is load-bearing; only the setting is renamed.
- The test. Ask what a rule is actually about. If the mechanic still stands with the noun removed, it is portable.
- Swap in one pass. One document, both columns, find and replace, then read it out loud.
- Four chassis carry the flavor. Radiation Track, Addiction, Power Armor, Hazard Stat Block. Repoint, do not rebuild.
- Take the Death Toll with you. Pure Talent, DC climbing from 1, tokens at level. It is the best mechanic in the book and the most portable.

- Restat by moving one dial. Every creature in the bestiary is a card built from a template. Change one number, change the genre.

- Do not touch the formula, the ladder, the AP economy, or Skill Scaling. Those four are the machine.

- The names are yours. Coldwater, Vault 12, and Nine Mile are examples, not scripture.

Appendix A: The Character Sheet

Appendix A: The Character Sheet

A Wanderer exists on paper before they exist in the wastes, and that sentence is not a formality — it is the whole engine. Every number this book has built lives in a box on a single page: the Effort formula, the AP pool, the DT roll, the Death Toll, the radiation stages, the chem hook, the Condition track on the gun. The table's speed is set by how fast a player can find the box they need. A sheet that takes four minutes to answer *what is your Small Guns Score* is a sheet that stalls a firefight in the middle of a turn, and a sheet that answers it in four seconds is a sheet that lets the whole table keep moving while the Overseer is still describing the room. The purpose of this appendix is not paperwork. It is the difference between a player who plays and a player who shuffles.

Build the sheet so the numbers you reach for most are the numbers you can find fastest, and build it in pencil, before the first session, with a spare eraser in the dice bag. This is a game of erasing. Skill Levels climb, Max HP climbs, Condition ticks down one point per shot, radiation stages advance, hook tokens accumulate, Death Tokens fill in and clear. A sheet kept in pen is a sheet that starts lying to you somewhere around session four, and a sheet that lies is worse than no sheet at

all. Everything below is arranged in the order you will fill it in and the order you will reach for it at the table.

The Identity Block

Four lines at the top of the page: the Wanderer's name, the player's name, the Background, and the Level. The Background earns its place on the sheet for exactly one mechanical reason — it sets the starting equipment from Step 4 of character creation — and it earns the rest of its space for the thing the Overseer will care about in session twelve, which is that it is the one-line answer to *why is this person out here at all*. Write it down even though nothing on it rolls a die. When the party is arguing at a gate over whether to take a job that smells wrong, that line is what you read back to the player to make the argument land where it needs to.

Level sits beside the XP total, and the two move together at the end of a session when the Overseer reads the awards out loud with names attached. Level 1 is 0 XP; the ladder above it is printed in Chapter 4, and it is long enough that most campaigns will see the first third of it and nothing more. Nothing on the sheet changes as often as this number, so give it a margin wide enough to survive thirty sessions of erasing, and date the entries if the table likes to look back.

The SPECIAL Block

Seven stats, each a flat number from 1 to 10, written down once at creation and almost never touched again. Beside every stat, write the Talent — the die that stat rolls — because the stat is what the Wanderer *is* and the Talent is what the Wanderer *does*, and the Talent is the object you will physically pick up and throw forty times a night. Most homemade sheets forget this line, and a table that has to consult a chart every time somebody throws a punch has already lost the rhythm of the fight, which is a thing you cannot get back mid-round.

Stat Value Talent Die	
--- ---	
1 d4 - 1	6 d8 + 2
2 d4 + 0	7 d10 + 2
3 d6 + 0	8 d10 + 3
4 d6 + 1	9 d12 + 3
5 d8 + 1	10 d12 + 4

Talents are not only for Skill checks, which is the part of the system players underrate for their first ten sessions. Your Damage Threshold is your STR Talent, rolled fresh every turn. Your Action Points are your AGI Talent, rolled at the top of every round. A Death Toll Check is your END Talent and nothing else — no Skill, no Luck, no Perk, just the die. A chem's hook is your CHA Talent, tested against the needle every time you dose. The same seven dice that define who the Wanderer is at creation are the seven dice that keep them breathing afterward,

which is why they belong at the top of the sheet in the largest handwriting the page will hold.

The Core Statistics Block

Below SPECIAL, seven boxes, and every one of them derives in seconds from the numbers above.

Hit Points. Max HP is written once at level 1 as twice your END stat — END 6 means Max HP starts at 12 — and then grows by a fresh END Talent roll at every level. Keep two numbers, Max and Current. Current is the one that moves, and when it reaches 0 the Death Toll begins and the sheet starts writing a different kind of history.

Damage Threshold. Not a fixed value. Write the STR Talent die in the box and leave a blank space beside it, because every turn you roll that die and choose whether to keep the number you already have or take the new one, and armor DT is added on top after the roll. A box with a pencil line through it twice a fight is a box that is doing its job correctly.

Carry Weight. $(STR \times 15) + (END \times 10) + (AGI \times 5)$. This is a hard ceiling, not a suggestion, and the Overseer should be told the moment the party crosses it, because an overloaded Wanderer moves slower, climbs worse, sneaks like a dropped toolbox, and starts fights with fewer AP than the sheet says they should.

Morale Points. 1 at level 1, plus 1 for every level after. MP is the fuel that Perks burn, and an empty MP box is not a broken

character — it is a character who spent their second wind and now has to earn another one the slow way.

Damage Reduction. 0 by default, gained only from equipment and Perks, applied after DT. Write it separately from DT even though the two look alike on paper, because DT is rolled and DR is not, and a table that conflates them will get the damage order wrong in every fight for the rest of the campaign.

Sequence and Action Points. SQ is PER + AGI, and it is the ceiling on your AP. AP is rolled from your AGI Talent at the start of each turn and capped by that ceiling. Write the ceiling down permanently and roll the pool every round; a Wanderer who forgets their ceiling will hoard AP they were never entitled to hold, and the Overseer will have to take it back mid-turn, which is never a pleasant conversation.

The Skills Block

Eighteen lines, and each line carries three things: the Skill Level from 0 to 100, the Skill Score from 0 to 10, and a mark for whether the Skill is Tagged. Nothing is bought at creation. Every Skill starts at $(\text{Governing Stat} \times 2) + \text{LUK}$, and the Score is simply the Level with its last digit cut off, so a Level of 14 is a Score of 1 and a Level of 29 is a Score of 2. Write the governing stat beside each Skill the way the list prints it, because the governing stat is the Talent you add when you roll, and a player hunting for their PER die in the middle of a

lockpicking attempt is a player who has already cost the table a minute.

Skill	Governing Stat
Athletics · Big Guns · Melee Weapons	Strength
Energy Weapons · Explosives · Larceny	Perception
Poise · Survival · Unarmed	Endurance
Barter · Bluff · Speech	Charisma
Medicine · Repair · Science	Intelligence
Acrobatics · Small Guns · Sneak	Agility

Mark the three Tagged Skills in something loud — a box, a highlight, a star, whatever the table uses — and add the flat 15 Levels the moment you choose them, because the tag is permanent and the number should be final on the page from the first session. A Score of 0 is an automatic failure, and that deserves a note in the margin, because it is the one Skill value that changes what a player is even allowed to attempt. An untrained Wanderer does not get a lucky break on a Surgery check; the Overseer either refuses the attempt outright or allows it and narrates the disaster in full. Circle every 0 on the sheet at creation so nobody has to learn that rule the hard way, bleeding, in a basement.

The Traits Block

Two Traits, both written out in full — the bonus *and* the drawback, side by side, in the same line of handwriting. This is the block players most often cheat by accident, because a Trait read back three sessions later has a way of losing its cost somewhere between the sheet and the memory. Write the drawback first if that helps. A Trait with its price erased is a free Perk, and a table full of free Perks is a table where the Overseer's levers have stopped working, which is the same as a table where the world has stopped pushing back.

The Overseer keeps their own copy of this block — both Traits for every Wanderer, written at the top of the screen before the first scene — because those two lines are the specific ways this campaign intends to hurt. If nobody in the party can see in the dark, then the dark is a place to take them, and it should cost them something the first time. If somebody is a light sleeper, the middle watch is a scene. The sheet records the Trait; the screen remembers to use it.

The Perk Block

One Perk at level 1, more as the ladder climbs, and every one of them written as the exact sentence that describes what it does, with its MP cost set in the margin beside it. Do not paraphrase a Perk on the sheet. A Perk is the one part of a character that bends the rules rather than feeding them, and the wording *is* the rule — a shortened version will get argued about

at the worst possible moment, and the argument will be the player's fault for having written it down wrong.

The Prepared Slots Block

One free Prepared Slot at creation, and additional slots unlocked at Skill Scores 2, 4, 6, 8, and 10 in a weapon or item type. Write the slots as a row of boxes and name what occupies each one. A Wanderer can only use what is prepared; anything else costs an AP to dig out of the pack in the middle of a fight, which is an AP the player will regret spending. The slot list is not inventory. It is the short list of what this person actually intends to do under pressure, and reading it tells the Overseer more about how the player plans to fight than any amount of talking will.

The Gear Block

Weapons, armor, consumables, and caps. Every weapon gets its damage, its AP cost, its magazine, and its Condition written beside it, because Condition falls one point per shot and quietly reduces damage as it goes, and a weapon at 0 does not fire at all. Leave a small track next to each gun and let the player mark it down themselves, shot by shot; the moment a table tracks Condition honestly, the Repair Skill stops being a footnote and becomes a reason to have packed a toolkit instead of a fourth magazine.

Armor gets its DT and its DR, kept in separate boxes. Consumables get a count rather than a name — a row of tallies beside *stimpak* and *RadAway* is what the party will actually consult when somebody is bleeding on the floor of a pump house. Caps get one number, and it should be a number the Overseer is allowed to see, because the price band of a settlement is one of the levers the world uses to tell the party how far from home they are.

The Tracks Block

Three running counters, and they are the part of the sheet that makes the wastes feel like the wastes instead of a series of rooms with monsters in them.

The Radiation Contamination Track climbs through its five stages as rads accumulate, and it does not reset on its own — *RadAway* resets it, and *RadAway* costs caps and weighs nothing and is never in stock when you need it. The Death Token count fills in one mark per failed Death Toll Check and does not clear until the Wanderer has genuinely recovered. The chem hook tokens accumulate per chem, each one a step nearer a habit, each one a CHA Talent check that will eventually fail. Put all three at the bottom of the page where the player can see them without being asked, because a counter you have to be reminded about is a counter that never gets to do its work.

The Ledger

The back of the sheet is not character data. It is memory. One line per settlement, one line per faction, one line per person — what the party did there, what it cost them, and who noticed.

Nine Mile: brought the water, did not gouge, asked about the two families. The Overseer keeps the same ledger on their own side of the screen, and the two versions are meant to argue with each other, because a world that remembers is a world that feels inhabited, and a party that can read its own history is a party that starts making choices about what the history will say.

Filling One In

Kara has STR 5, PER 5, END 6, CHA 3, INT 5, AGI 4, and LUK 4. Her Talent dice write themselves straight off the chart: d8+1, d8+1, d8+2, d6, d8+1, d6+1, and d6+1. Her Max HP at level 1 is twice her END, a flat 12, and her Carry Weight is $(5 \times 15) + (6 \times 10) + (4 \times 5)$, or 155 pounds, which is enough for a pistol, a week of rations, and exactly one bad decision about salvage. Her Sequence is PER 5 + AGI 4, which is 9, and that 9 is her AP ceiling — she rolls d6+1 at the top of every turn and spends whatever comes up.

Her Skills fill in from the same two numbers. Everything governed by Strength lands at $(5 \times 2) + 4$, or Level 14 — Score 1, with nothing to spare. Everything governed by Charisma lands at $(3 \times 2) + 4$, or Level 10, the same Score 1 sitting on a knife's edge: one bad level-up and Barter is still a 1, but the

Levels stacked above it are the only thing standing between her and an automatic failure at a settlement gate. Everything governed by Endurance lands at 16, comfortable Score 1 territory with room to grow and a clear path to Score 2.

She tags Small Guns, Medicine, and Sneak, and each tag adds a flat 15 Levels on top of the formula. Medicine climbs from 14 to 29 — still Score 2 after the jump, but now nine Levels clear of the threshold instead of one Level under it, which is the whole point of a tag. A tag does not make a novice into a legend on day one; it makes them cross every door earlier and keep functioning after untagged Wanderers have stalled. Her Trait block holds two lines, the bonus and its cost in the same breath. Her Perk block holds one sentence and an MP cost. Her Prepared Slots hold a pistol, a knife, and a stimpak, and the fact that those are the three things she chose to have ready tells the Overseer more about Kara than any paragraph of backstory ever could.

Quick Reference: The Sheet

- Identity. Name, player, Background, Level, XP. The Background is a motive, not a mechanic.
- SPECIAL. Seven stats, and the seven Talent dice written beside them. Talents run the whole system, not just Skills.
- Core stats. HP (max and current — twice your END at level 1, then a Talent roll per level), DT (rolled STR Talent plus armor), CW ($\text{STR} \times 15 + \text{END} \times 10 + \text{AGI} \times 5$), MP (1, plus 1 per level),

DR (0 by default), SQ (PER + AGI), AP (rolled AGI Talent, capped at SQ).

- Skills. Eighteen lines, Level and Score on each, governing stat marked, three Tags boxed and boosted by 15.

- Traits. Two, bonus and drawback written together. The Overseer keeps a second copy on the screen.

- Perk. Copied word for word, MP cost in the margin. Never paraphrased.

- Prepared Slots. One free, more at Skill Scores 2, 4, 6, 8, and 10. Name what sits in each box.

- Gear. Weapons with Condition tracks, armor with DT and DR kept apart, consumables as tallies, caps as a single number.

- Tracks. Radiation stages, Death Tokens, chem hooks — bottom of the page, always visible, never erased early.

- Ledger. The back page. Settlements, factions, names, and what the party owes each of them.

Appendix B: Glossary & Index

Appendix B: Glossary & Index

Every game invents a language, and this one invented more than most. It renamed the player and the referee, it built a damage ladder out of three separate numbers, it gave the same die two different jobs depending on whether you were rolling it to hit something or to keep breathing, and it handed you four resources — HP, MP, AP, and EP — that all read like abbreviations and none of which behave alike. A table learns those words by using them, and inside three sessions nobody will say "Action Points" again; they will say AP and mean it. But there is a stretch between the first read and the third session, and that stretch is where a book full of private vocabulary starts to feel like a locked door.

This appendix is the key to that door, and it is built for the moment somebody at the table stops the action to ask a question. There are three ways in. If a word went by too fast — if somebody said *hook* and meant the needle rather than the story — the glossary is alphabetical, and every entry names the chapter that owns the rule so you can read the full version once and stop guessing. If you already know the rule and you only need the number, the tables are gathered in one place at the back of this appendix, because a table that has to flip through fourteen

chapters to find the cover bonus is a table that quietly stops using cover. And if you remember reading something three weeks ago and cannot remember where it lives, the index names every chapter and the one thing each of them is for.

Read it once now, slowly, so the shape of the vocabulary is familiar in your mouth. After that, use it the way a rulebook is meant to be used at the table — fast, in the middle of a sentence, and gone.

The Terms, A to Z

Action Phase. The middle of the three phases of a turn, and the one where AP is actually spent: movement, attacks, skill attempts, item use, reloads. Begins after AP is rolled, ends when AP runs out or the player stops spending. See *Turn* and Chapter 3.

Action Points (AP). Rolled from the AGI Talent at the start of every turn, capped by Sequence, spent on everything a body does. Unspent AP carries over into the next turn, but never past the Sequence ceiling — anything rolled above that ceiling is lost the moment it comes up. See Chapter 3.

Addiction token. The mark a Wanderer earns when a chem's hook finally catches. Tokens accumulate per chem, each one a step nearer a habit, each one cleared only by time and discomfort. See *Hook* and Chapter 5.

Adept / Expert / Master (AEM). The three-step ladder used by the Skill Specialization Perks in place of numbered ranks. Adept

adds your Skill Score as a bonus, Expert doubles it, Master triples it. See Chapter 11.

Background. Where a Wanderer came from, chosen at Step 4 of character creation. Its boons and banes are narrative only; its single mechanical effect is starting equipment. See Chapter 2.

Bane. The narrative weight a Background leaves on a Wanderer — the reason a settlement bars them at the gate, the reason a checkpoint knows their name. Carries no numbers; it is fuel for the Overseer. See Chapter 2.

Beginning Phase. The top of a turn, where all upkeep happens: rolling AP, rolling DT, generating EP, and settling any other start-of-turn effects. Everything that must be done "at the start of your turn" is done here and nowhere else. See Chapter 3.

Boon. The narrative door a Background left open — a reputation, an eye, a name that gets a gun past a border. Carries no numbers, exactly like its mirror, the bane. See Chapter 2.

Called shot. An attack aimed at a specific part of a target. Adds +2 to the DC for a ranged attack or +2 to the contested roll for a melee attack. See Chapter 3.

Carry Weight (CW). $(STR \times 15) + (END \times 10) + (AGI \times 5)$. A hard ceiling rather than a suggestion; past it, a Wanderer moves slower, climbs worse, and sneaks like a dropped toolbox. See Chapter 2.

Condition. Two meanings, told apart by the capital letter and the context. A weapon's Condition is its durability, tracked one

point per shot and falling from 100 — each full ten lost trims damage, and at zero the weapon does not fire; see Chapter 9. A condition on a body is a status effect — Prone, Bleeding, Dazed, Sickened, and the rest — carrying an effect, a duration, and a printed way out; see Appendix C. When a sentence could mean either, the weapon takes the capital and the body does not.

Contested roll. A melee attack resolved by both parties rolling and comparing Effort. The defender may counterattack if they beat the attacker by a full DC rank and have the AP to spend. See Chapter 3.

Cover. Protection from ranged fire: +1 to the DC for partial cover, +2 for substantial, +4 for near-total. See Chapter 3.

Critical hit. Beating a ranged DC by 3 or more, or a defender's Effort by 3 or more in melee, deals maximum damage on the weapon's dice. See Chapter 3.

Damage Reduction (DR). A flat subtraction applied after DT, gained only from equipment and Perks. Starts at 0. Kept in its own box because DT is rolled and DR is not. See Chapter 2.

Damage Threshold (DT). The STR Talent die, rolled each turn and chosen against your current value, plus armor bonuses. Subtracted from incoming damage first. See Chapter 2.

Death Token. A mark earned each time a Death Toll Check fails. Tokens equal to the Wanderer's level kill them. See *Death Toll*.

Death Toll. The rule that governs a Wanderer below zero HP. Pure END Talent, first DC 1, the DC ratcheting upward on each

success and resetting on each failure, AP costs doubled throughout, and death only when negative HP equals the absolute of Max HP or the tokens run out. See Chapter 3.

Difficulty Class (DC). The number an Effort result is compared against, set by the Overseer on a ladder running 0 (Very Easy) to 9+ (Beyond Impossible). See *Effort* and Chapter 1.

Doubling AP Costs. The additive rule for stacked penalties: a doubled cost doubles once and adds, rather than multiplying. 3 AP doubled once is 6 AP; doubled twice is 9 AP, not 12. See Chapter 3.

Effort. The result of the core formula, compared to a DC. Success, and success by ranks above it, determine what the attempt actually accomplishes. See Chapter 1.

Effort rank. Each point of Effort above the DC. Beating a DC by 1 grants a minor bonus, by 2 a clear advantage, by 3 or more an outcome beyond expectations. See Chapter 1.

Ending Phase. The close of a turn, where remaining AP carries over within the Sequence cap and lost DT is restored. See Chapter 3.

Energy Points (EP). A secondary action resource granted by Energy Perks, generated by rolling a named Talent, spendable only on the tasks that Perk lists. Not carried over; unspent EP evaporates at the end of the turn. See Chapter 11.

Frost die. The visible countdown the starter scenario runs on — a d6 set face-up at 6 and turned down one every session the

water has not moved. It is not a rule so much as a table prop with a number on it, and its whole job is to let the players watch the clock while they decide how much of the night they want to spend being clever. See Chapter 15.

Habit DC. The starting target of the CHA Talent check to resist a chem's hook. Ratchets upward by 1 with each successful dose and resets to its printed value on a failure. See *Hook*.

Hook. Two meanings, and the context tells them apart. In the addiction system it is the chem's pull — the Habit DC and its ratchet, tested with the CHA Talent. In writing advice it is the question a scene leaves open. See Chapter 5.

Mook Rule. The convention that a group of identical minor adversaries shares one initiative, one DT roll, and one AP pool, so the Overseer runs a swarm instead of nine separate turns. See Chapter 7.

Morale Points (MP). The inner reserve that fuels active Perks. One at Level 1, plus one per level, restored by rest and by completing major goals. See Chapter 2.

Overseer. The referee. Sets DCs, adjudicates hazards, runs adversaries, keeps the ledger, and is bound to the dice. See Chapter 5.

Perk. A small rule that belongs to one character and to no one else, gained one per level and written on the sheet word for word. Perks are bespoke; the catalog in Chapter 11 is a seed, not a boundary.

Prepared Slot. A short list of what a Wanderer intends to use under pressure. One free slot at creation, more unlocking at Skill Scores 2, 4, 6, 8, and 10 in the item's type. Anything not slotted costs an AP to dig out mid-fight. See Prepared Weapons & Items.

Radiation Contamination Track. The five-stage ladder that measures rads accumulated. It does not reset on its own; RadAway resets it, and RadAway is never in stock when you need it. See Chapter 5.

Ranks. The 1-to-5 ladder a Perk climbs when taken repeatedly. Rank 1 is an edge; Rank 5 is a definition. The AEM series uses its own three names instead. See Chapter 11.

Read (hazard). The full Effort check that lets a Wanderer measure a hazard before it bites — using Survival, Medicine, Science, or another skill at the Overseer's call. An instrument can replace it with a flat success. See Hazard Stat Block.

Resist (hazard). The pure Talent check that answers a hazard once it lands, using whatever Talent the hazard names. No Skill, no Luck, no Perk. See Hazard Stat Block.

Sequence (SQ). PER + AGI. Sets the ceiling on how much AP a Wanderer can hold, and therefore how much of a turn they can bank. See Chapter 2.

Skill Level. The 0-to-100 number on each of the eighteen skills. Derived at creation as (Governing Stat × 2) + LUK, and raised by advancement. See Chapter 8.

Skill Score. A Skill Level with its last digit cut off — Level 14 is Score 1, Level 29 is Score 2. Drives Prepared Slots, Skill Scaling, and the Effort formula. See Chapter 8.

SPECIAL. The seven core stats — Strength, Perception, Endurance, Charisma, Intelligence, Agility, Luck — each running 1 to 10 and each producing a Talent die. See SPECIAL Stats.

Tag / Tagged Skill. One of the three skills chosen at creation for a permanent +15 Skill Levels. A tag does not make a novice a legend; it makes them cross every door earlier. See Chapter 2.

Talent. The die a SPECIAL stat rolls. A stat is what a Wanderer *is*; the Talent is what they *do*. Talents run the whole system, not only skill checks. See *Talent Bonus*.

Talent Bonus. The rolled result of a Talent die, added into Effort. Rolled fresh each time it is used, which is why a high-Talent character can still roll low. See Chapter 1.

Tenths rule. The quick percentage convention: drop the ones place, multiply the remaining digits by the stated tenths value, add the product to the base. See Chapter 3.

Threat Budget. The encounter-building measure. Each Wanderer contributes threat points equal to their level; each adversary tier costs a fixed number. See *Threat Tier*.

Threat Tier. The band an adversary sits in, from Fodder through Elite, setting its XP value and its cost against the Threat Budget. See Chapter 7.

Trait. An innate aptitude chosen only at creation, two per character, each a flat bonus paired with a drawback of equal weight. Never a Talent die, and capped at +5 in any single domain. See Chapter 12.

Trigger (hazard). The act that meets a hazard — entering the zone, breathing the gas, drinking the water, taking the chem, hitting the ground. See Hazard Stat Block.

Turn. One Wanderer's slice of a round, running Beginning Phase, Action Phase, Ending Phase, in that order, every time. See Chapter 3.

Wanderer. The player character. Anyone with a sheet, a name, and a reason to be out here. See Chapter 2.

Withdrawal. The days that follow a chem's last dose, each one carrying a daily check and a penalty if it fails. See *Hook*.

The Tables in One Place

The core formula.

$$> ((d20 \times \text{Skill Score}) + \text{Talent Bonus} + \text{Luck Bonus} + \text{Perk Bonus}) \div 20 = \text{Effort}$$

In Simplified Mode, replace the multiplication with a flat Effort Bonus: +0 at Score 1, +1 at 2–3, +2 at 4–5, +3 at 6–7, +4 at 8–9, +5 at 10.

The Difficulty ladder.

| Difficulty | DC |

|---|---|

Very Easy	0 (no roll needed)
Easy	1
Normal	2
Hard	3
Very Hard	4
Incredibly Hard	5
Extremely Hard	6
Nearly Impossible	7
Impossible	8
Beyond Impossible	9+

The Talent chart.

Stat	Talent Die	Stat	Talent Die	
---	---	---	---	
1	d4 - 1	6	d8 + 2	
2	d4 + 0	7	d10 + 2	
3	d6 + 0	8	d10 + 3	
4	d6 + 1	9	d12 + 3	
5	d8 + 1	10	d12 + 4	

The damage ladder. Incoming damage → subtract DT → subtract DR → remainder to HP. At 0 HP the Death Toll begins; at negative HP equal to the absolute of Max HP, the Wanderer dies.

Cover. Partial +1 DC, substantial +2 DC, near-total +4 DC.

Called shots. +2 to a ranged DC, or +2 to a melee contested roll.

Critical hits. Beat a ranged DC by 3 or more, or a defender's Effort by 3 or more, for maximum weapon damage.

Melee weapons and unarmed. Melee weapons carry their own AP cost, typically 2–3. An Unarmed Strike costs 1 AP, plus 1 more for each additional strike in the same turn.

Automatic fire. Burst +1, full auto +2.

The XP ladder. Level 1 begins at 0 XP and the ladder runs to Level 30 at 1,800,000. Every level past 30 requires a further 300,000.

The Threat Budget. Half the party's total threat points is a skirmish; the full total is even money; one and a half times the total is a fight the party should run from.

The three ratchets. The Death Toll tests END and climbs the DC on each success. A chem's hook tests CHA and does the same. A Survival check that depends on a Talent Score ratchets for the same reason — a Talent die has a floor, and a floor makes any flat DC beatable forever.

Where to Find It

- Chapter 1: Introduction & Core Resolution — the Effort formula, the dice, the DC ladder, and Effort ranks.

- SPECIAL Stats & Core Character Statistics — the seven stats, the Talent chart, and the six core numbers derived from them.

- Chapter 2: Character Creation — the ten steps, from stats to loadout.

- Chapter 3: Combat — the turn, AP, attacks, cover, and the Death Toll.

- Chapter 4: Advancement & Experience — the XP ladder, levels, and what a level grants.

- Prepared Weapons & Items — slots, their unlock thresholds, and what goes in them.

- Chapter 5: The Overseer's Screen — DC calibration, narration, running the ratchets, awarding XP.

- Chapter 6: Travel, Supply & Trade — the road, the price band, and the five settlement questions.

- Chapter 7: Adversaries & Threats — stat blocks, threat tiers, and the Threat Budget.

- Chapter 8: Skills — the eighteen skills, their governing stats, and their Scores.

- Chapter 9: Weapons & Equipment — weapon cards, Condition, and Skill Scaling.

- Chapter 10: Armor & Power Armor — the worn-versus-operated split and the powered-chassis subsystem.

- Chapter 11: Perks — how Perks are earned, ranked, and built, plus the starting catalog.

- Chapter 12: Traits — the two aptitudes, and the price each one carries.

- Chapter 13: The Wasteland — regions, settlements, and the shape of the map.
- Chapter 14: The First Session — session zero and the opening move.
- Chapter 15: The Coldwater Job — the starter adventure, runnable start to finish in one sitting.
- Chapter 16: Crafting, Repair & Downtime — scrap, workbenches, and what a week off buys.
- Chapter 17: A Worked Round — a full round played out step by step.
- Chapter 18: Making It Your Own — reskinning the system for other genres and settings.
- Appendix A: The Character Sheet — the sheet, block by block, and a worked example.
- Appendix B: Glossary & Index — this page.
- Appendix C: Conditions & Status Effects — the sixteen states a body can be left in, and how each one ends.
- Appendix D: The Playtest Packet — the compressed rules, the four pregens, and the Coldwater Job.

Quick Reference: The Appendix

- Three ways in. Look up a term, find a table, or find the chapter.
- The glossary is alphabetical. Every entry names the chapter that owns the full rule.

- Two meanings for "hook." A chem's pull in the addiction system; an open question in the writing advice. Context decides.

- Four resources, four behaviors. HP is spent, MP is burned, AP is rolled fresh, EP evaporates.

- The tables are consolidated. The formula, the DC ladder, the Talent chart, the damage order, cover, and the ratchets, all in one place.

- The index is one line per chapter. If you cannot remember where a rule lives, start here.

Appendix C: Conditions and Status Effects

Appendix C: Conditions & Status Effects

Fourteen chapters have been handing out conditions without ever stopping to define one. The cazador's sting injects a venom and calls the result Poisoned. A brahmin stampede knocks a Wanderer flat and calls it Prone. The dazing wound surfaces in the doubling rules, encumbrance in the carry-weight formula, and five stages of sickness in the radiation track — each of them a condition wearing a different hat, and each of them leaving the Overseer to invent what it does to a body in the middle of a firefight. This appendix ends the invention. It gathers the states a Wanderer can be left in, gives each one an effect, a duration, and a printed way out, and writes them in the same grammar as everything else in this book: AP costs, Talent checks, and a line that says how the thing ends.

A condition is a fact about a body, and facts do not argue. A Wanderer who is Prone is not being punished; they are on the ground, and the ground has rules. That distinction matters more than it sounds, because an Overseer who treats conditions as damage in a costume will start reaching for them the way a punishing referee reaches for a fumbled die, and a table can feel that inside two sessions. Used honestly, conditions are the cheapest drama in the game. They change what a player is willing

to attempt, they make positioning matter past the first round, and they hand the party a second job in every fight — not killing the thing, but getting their friend off the floor. A fight in which nobody is Bleeding, Burning, or Dazed is a fight the party is winning too comfortably.

The general rules fit in three sentences. A condition never stacks with itself: apply the same one twice and you either escalate its rank or refresh its duration, whichever is worse for the Wanderer, never both at once. Durations are counted in turns during a fight and in watches outside one — a watch being four hours, the unit the travel rules already use — so a condition that holds for three turns in combat holds for three watches on the road. And a condition ends when its printed line says it ends, or it does not end at all, which is the Overseer's signal that the party has a problem a long rest will not solve.

Write it down. A slip of paper in front of the player, rank and duration in ink, does more for a table than any amount of description, because a condition the table can see is a condition the table plays around. Three families cover everything below. Positional conditions are about where a body is. Bodily conditions are about what is happening inside it. Mental conditions are about nerve, and those are the ones to hand out most carefully, because they take agency rather than hit points, and agency is the one thing this game will not sell.

Positional

Prone. You are on the ground, and the ground is a bad place to be. Melee attacks against a prone Wanderer add +1 to the attacker's Effort; ranged attacks against one add +2 to the DC, because a body flat against rubble is a small and confusing target at distance. While prone you cannot move, and a two-handed ranged weapon cannot be fired from the position at all — a rifle wants a shoulder under it. Standing costs 2 AP and provokes nothing on its own; crawling costs the usual 1 AP per 5 feet and leaves you prone at the end of it. Anything that puts a Wanderer off their feet applies this condition and nothing else. A stampede, a grenade's blast wave, a molerat going for the knees — all of it lands here, and the Overseer should say the word out loud.

Grappled. Two bodies become one problem. A grapple is applied by a successful contested Unarmed check, and while it holds, both parties carry the condition — the winner is as stuck as the loser, which is the rule that keeps grapples honest. Neither can move, neither can make ranged attacks, and the only actions left are an Unarmed strike or another contested check to break the hold, which the loser may attempt once per turn for 2 AP. A third party firing into a grapple hits the wrong target on any miss by 2 or more, and the Overseer should tell them that before they pull the trigger. Releasing a hold costs nothing. The condition ends when the hold breaks, when either party goes Prone, or when one of them stops moving.

Restrained. Bound. Rope, cuffs, a coil of wire, the rail of a wagon. A restrained Wanderer cannot move, cannot attack, and cannot use any skill that wants a hand, which is most of them. Escape is a Larceny check against the binding's DC, or a raw STR Talent check against the same number, costing 2 AP and available once per turn. A party that ties up a prisoner and then forgets about them has handed the Overseer a loaded gun, because the NPC gets the same check, in the dark, while nobody is watching. Restrained ends when the binding is cut, picked, or slipped. Note that a restrained character is not Prone, not Grappled, and not helpless. They can still talk, and talking is the most dangerous thing a prisoner does.

Encumbered. Carry Weight is a ceiling, and this is what happens when a Wanderer walks through it. Movement costs double — 1 AP per 2.5 feet instead of 5 — and every doubling that stacks on top of it adds rather than multiplies, exactly as the doubling rules say. Athletics, Acrobatics, and Sneak checks all climb by +2 DC, a pack full of salvage being loud in a way no amount of care fixes. A running start becomes impossible, so anything that wanted a charge cannot happen. The condition ends the moment the load drops back under Carry Weight, which is a decision the party makes every time they find something good in a ruin and have to choose between the haul and the legs to carry it.

Bodily

Poisoned. Ranked 1 to 3. At the start of each turn, a poisoned Wanderer rolls a pure END Talent check against a DC equal to the rank; a failure means the poison does its work and a success means nothing happens this turn. Poisoned 1 deals 1d4 damage. Poisoned 2 deals 1d6 and takes 1 off every Effort the character produces. Poisoned 3 deals 1d8, takes 2 off Effort, and halves DT once armor is counted. The damage ignores DR, because a poison does not care about plate. Cazador venom arrives at rank 2 and climbs to 3 after two failed checks; a rank is shed after three consecutive successes, and Antivenom clears every rank at once. A party that walks into the Deep Wastes without antivenom is a party on a clock.

Bleeding. Ranked 1 to 3, and simpler than poison because blood does not roll. A bleeding Wanderer loses 1 HP per rank at the start of each turn, straight through DT and DR. Movement makes it worse: if the character moved more than 15 feet in the previous turn, add 1 damage per rank. That single line does more work than any amount of flavor text, because it tells the player the correct move is to stop, and stopping in a firefight costs something real. Bleeding clears with a Medicine check against a DC equal to the rank, with a Stimpak, or with ten minutes of pressure and a bandage — all of which want an action the party would rather spend shooting. At rank 3, describe it. Blood in the boot. A hand that keeps slipping on the grip.

Burning. You are on fire. At the start of each turn, take 1d6 damage, with DT applied at half and DR ignored. The condition does not rank, because fire is fire, but it spreads: a burning Wanderer who ends their turn adjacent to anything dry sets it alight, and the Overseer should be generous about what counts as dry. Putting yourself out costs 2 AP and an Athletics or Acrobatics check against DC 2. Going prone and rolling adds +1 to that check's Effort, which is the classic answer and the correct one. Putting out somebody else costs 1 AP and needs no check at all, which means the party's real decision is whether they can spare the action. Fire is the condition most likely to be forgotten and the one that punishes forgetting hardest.

Suffocating. There is no air, or there is water where the air should be. A Wanderer holding their breath gets a number of turns equal to their END Talent's maximum roll plus their END stat — a d8+2 at END 6 buys sixteen turns, and the Overseer should count them out loud at the table. Past that, each turn deals 1d8 damage that ignores armor entirely, and the character cannot speak, cast, or call for help. The condition ends the instant the head comes up. Suffocation and the Death Toll can run at the same time, and a character drowning at 0 HP is rolling both clocks in the same Beginning Phase, which is exactly as bad as it sounds and exactly as tense as it should be.

Sickened. The radiation track's stages, the bad water, the infected wound, the meal that was not food. A sickened Wanderer

adds +1 AP to the cost of every action — a flat surcharge, applied after any doublings, per the doubling rules — and takes 1 off every Effort. At rank 2 the surcharge becomes +2 and the character cannot recover MP past half their maximum. At rank 3 they lose 1d4 HP at the start of every turn and gain nothing from rest. Sickened does not clear on its own. It clears with Medicine, RadAway, clean water, and a day of not walking, which is the cruellest of the three, because a day spent not walking is a day the party burns supplies without buying distance.

Fatigued. No sleep, no water, too many watches in a row. Ranked 1 to 3. Fatigued 1 takes 1 off all Effort. Fatigued 2 takes 2 off and drops DT by one die step. Fatigued 3 takes 3 off, drops DT by two steps, and caps the AP a Wanderer can hold at half their Sequence, which is the point at which a character stops being able to fight and starts being cargo. Fatigue clears only with a full rest and water, and the Overseer should hand it out on the road long before the party thinks to ask for it. The travel rules already price a hard march in supplies and time; this is the line that prices it in a body.

Crippled. A called shot that lands on a limb, a fall, a bad landing. A crippled arm cannot hold a weapon, cannot reload, cannot pick a lock, and cannot brace, so the character fights one-handed or not at all. A crippled leg halves movement, drops Athletics and Acrobatics by one die step, and makes standing from Prone cost 3 AP instead of 2. A crippled head is a concussion:

every check climbs by +2 DC and the character cannot take the Read action. Crippled limbs do not heal with time alone. They want a Doctor's Bag and a Medicine check against DC 3, or a Stimpak and a night's rest for a partial recovery. This is the condition that makes called shots worth the +2 they cost.

Mental

Stunned. The lights go out for a second and the body stops taking orders. A stunned Wanderer still rolls AP in the Beginning Phase, but may spend it on nothing. The pool is there; it is simply unusable, and watching a good roll evaporate is the entire point. Stunned lasts one turn. At the end of that turn the character may roll a pure END Talent check against DC 2; success ends the condition, and failure holds it for another turn. Effects that stun are rare and should stay rare. A stun that lands on the party's only shooter is a fight the party may not be able to win, and an Overseer who hands out two in one encounter has stopped running a game and started running a cutscene.

Dazed. The dazing wound the doubling rules keep citing. A dazed Wanderer has every AP cost doubled — the base cost paid twice, additively, per the doubling chapter — and cannot take reactions of any kind, which in this system means no counterattacks and no held actions. It lasts until the end of the character's next Beginning Phase, when a pure END Talent check against DC 2 shakes it off. Dazed is the condition to reach for

when you want a fight to turn frightening without taking a player's turn away. They can still act. They simply pay double for everything, and a doubled reload in the middle of a firefight is its own kind of horror.

Blinded. Smoke, a flash, a chemical, a very bad night. A blinded Wanderer cannot see, which mechanically means no ranged attacks past 10 feet, melee contests at -2 Effort, no Read checks, no Larceny or Repair work, and +2 DC on any movement through terrain they have not already crossed. Blinded lasts as long as its source says — a flash grenade is 1d4 turns, a caustic chem is until the eyes are flushed, and a lost eye is permanent and belongs on the character sheet as a Trait. The condition ends with a Medicine check against DC 2 to flush and bandage, or with time. Blinded rewards preparation more than any other condition on this list: a party carrying a lamp, a rope, and a plan is barely slowed, and a party carrying none of those is in genuine danger.

Frightened. Nerve, not damage. A frightened Wanderer takes 1 off every Effort and cannot willingly move closer to the source of the fear, which means no charge, no advance, and no holding a line that is being pushed. Anything that earns it applies it: a deathclaw at forty feet, a glowing one's light coming up the tunnel, a behemoth standing up out of the rubble. It ends with a Poise check against a DC the Overseer sets — 1 for a bad moment, 3 for something that has genuinely broken a person — made at the

start of the character's turn. Frightened is also the condition to put on NPCs. A raider crew that goes Frightened when its leader dies is a raider crew that runs, and the Mook Rule exists so you can resolve that in one roll.

Unconscious. The body quits before the mind agrees. An unconscious Wanderer is Prone, helpless, and unaware. They cannot act, cannot be spoken to, and do not roll AP. Any melee attack against them lands automatically for maximum damage, which is a sentence the Overseer should say out loud the first time it matters and then never have to say again. Unconsciousness ends when the character is roused — a shout, a shake, a Stimpak, 1d4 rounds of care — or when they come back on their own after ten minutes. A character at 0 HP is not automatically unconscious; they are in the Death Toll, which is a different and worse machine, and the two can run at once without either canceling the other.

The Conditions at a Glance

Condition	Family	Ranked	Ends with
---	---	---	---
Prone	Positional	No	2 AP to stand
Grappled	Positional	No	Contested Unarmed check, 2 AP
Restrained	Positional	No	Larceny or STR Talent check
Encumbered	Positional	No	Load back under Carry Weight

	Poisoned		Bodily		1-3		END Talent check · Antivenom	
	Bleeding		Bodily		1-3		Medicine check · Stimpak	
	Burning		Bodily		No		2 AP and Athletics or Acrobatics DC	
2								
	Suffocating		Bodily		No		Air	
	Sickened		Bodily		1-3		Medicine · RadAway · a day's rest	
	Fatigued		Bodily		1-3		Full rest with water	
	Crippled		Bodily		No		Doctor's Bag and Medicine DC 3	
	Stunned		Mental		No		END Talent check DC 2, end of turn	
	Dazed		Mental		No		END Talent check DC 2, next Beginning	
Phase								
	Blinded		Mental		No		Medicine DC 2, or time	
	Frightened		Mental		No		Poise check, DC set by the source	
	Unconscious		Mental		No		Rousing, or ten minutes	

None of this is new machinery. Every condition above either spends AP, rolls a Talent, or names a check, which are the three moves the rest of this book already makes, and that is deliberate. A system that invents a fresh subsystem for every bad thing that happens to a body is a system nobody can run from behind a screen at eleven at night. Conditions are supposed to be fast: the Overseer says the word, the player writes it on a slip, and both of them know exactly what happens next.

Keep yourself to three. Three conditions live on a table at once, and past that nobody is tracking anything, including you. Announce every condition in plain language as it lands, because a player who does not know they are Bleeding cannot make the decision Bleeding is designed to force. And let the players solve their own problems. Handing out a condition is the Overseer's job; finding the action, the check, or the chem that ends it is the party's, and the moment you start clearing their conditions for them you have taken the second job in the fight away from the people who came to do it.

Quick Reference: Conditions

- Three sentences of general rule. No self-stacking. Turns in combat, watches on the road. Ends when its printed line says so — or never, if it has none.

- Three families, sixteen conditions. Positional is where a body is. Bodily is what is happening inside it. Mental is nerve, and it costs the most.

- Write it down. Rank and duration on paper in front of the player. A condition the table can see is one the table plays around.

- Ranks escalate; they do not stack. A second dose of Poisoned makes it Poisoned 2, not Poisoned twice.

- What armor does not stop. Poison ignores DR. Bleeding ignores DT and DR. Fire halves DT. Suffocation ignores everything.

- Bleeding punishes movement. Add 1 damage per rank if the character moved more than 15 feet last turn. The correct move is to stop, and stopping costs an action.

- Dazed is the safest fear. The character keeps their turn and pays double for it. Reach for this one before you reach for Stunned.

- Blinded is a preparation test. A lamp and a rope make it an inconvenience. Going without either makes it lethal.

- Unconscious is not the Death Toll. They are different machines and they can run side by side.

- Cap it at three. More than three conditions on the table and nobody, including the Overseer, is tracking anything.

Appendix D: The Playtest Packet

Appendix D: The Playtest Packet

Every rulebook is a hypothesis until somebody at a table proves it wrong, and this packet exists to make proving it wrong cheap. What follows is a complete game night — the rules compressed to the point of usability, four Wanderers built and statted and ready to hand out, a scenario that runs start to finish in one sitting, and a list of questions you are meant to answer honestly. Nothing here points at another chapter. The formulas are printed where you need them, the characters arrive with their arithmetic already done, the opposition is written out with its numbers in the open, and the scenario carries its own clock. If a player at your table has to flip back to find a number, the packet has failed, and that failure is a finding worth writing down.

Hand this to somebody who has never run a game. Hand it to a group that plays something else and thinks your game is slow. Hand it to the loudest skeptic in the room, because a skeptic who runs this packet and enjoys it is worth ten friends who tell you it is fine. What you are buying with this appendix is not a demo. A demo is a performance with the difficult parts sanded off. What you are buying is evidence, and evidence from strangers is worth

more than evidence from the person who wrote the arithmetic and knows where all the bodies are buried.

The packet is built to be extracted. Print it, staple it, hand it out, and keep the rest of the book in the box. It is also built to be broken, which is the more useful property: every number in it is a decision somebody made, and decisions can be wrong. Your job across one or two sessions is to find out which ones.

What This Packet Is Testing

Eight bets are baked into this system, and every one of them is a guess that could lose. Run the scenario with these in your hand, and mark the ones that hold.

One — that the Effort formula gets fast. Multiply, add, divide by the campaign's Grit Score, compare. The claim is that a table internalizes this by the third round and stops narrating the arithmetic out loud. The claim may be false, and the only way to know is a stopwatch and a stranger. If players are still saying "so that's twenty-two times five, which is a hundred and ten" in round six, the formula is not fast and it needs a second look.

Two — that AP is a decision and not a chore. The system bets that spending three AP on a Read instead of two AP on a shot feels like a real trade with a real cost. If your players are

counting to five under their breath and sighing, the bet is losing, and the AP economy is doing bookkeeping instead of drama.

Three — that the Death Toll makes losing fun. A Wanderer at zero HP keeps their turn, their voice, and their place in the order, and pays double for everything they do. The claim is that this produces more tension than unconsciousness ever has. It is also entirely possible that it produces bookkeeping with extra steps, and a table that groans when somebody drops has told you which one it is.

Four — that Traits bite. Every Trait pairs a flat bonus with a drawback, and the drawback is supposed to surface in play rather than sit on the sheet as decoration. If nobody at the table ever felt the -2, the Traits chapter is writing fiction.

Five — that Skill Scaling holds a starting weapon. At level one this bet cannot be tested, which is itself worth knowing. Note it, put a star next to it, and come back at level ten with the same pistol.

Six — that a Tier 1 group can threaten a party without killing one. Three radroaches against four Wanderers. The bet is that the threat comes from placement and from the soft member of the party, not from the numbers on the card.

Seven — that the Mook Rule is legible. Three bodies, one AP roll, one DT roll, announced out loud every round. The bet is that sharing the math makes the encounter more tense rather than less.

Eight — that a scenario built on a clock beats a scenario built on a map. The frost die sits face-up in the middle of the table from the first minute. The bet is that a visible countdown does more work than any amount of described terrain.

Write your answers down the night of, while the taste is still in your mouth. A bet that loses is worth more to this book than a bet that wins, because a bet that loses is a page that needs rewriting, and you will have found it in an evening instead of a year.

The Rules, Compressed

The Only Formula

> $\text{Effort} = ((d20 \times \text{Skill Score}) + \text{Talent Bonus} + \text{Luck Bonus} + \text{Perk Bonus}) \div \text{Grit Score}$

The Playtest Packet assumes Low Grit (20) to make testing easier — success comes more readily, letting the table focus on the system rather than repeated failures. Roll a twenty-sided die. Multiply it by the Skill Score you are using. Add your Talent bonus for the governing stat, your Luck bonus, and any Perk bonus that applies. Divide the total by the Grit Score (20 for this packet) and keep the decimal — rounding is for people with time. The number in your hand is your Effort.

| Difficulty | DC |

| --- | --- |

| Easy | 1 |

| Normal | 2 |

| Hard | 3 |

| Very Hard | 4 |

| Incredibly Hard | 5 |

Meet or beat the DC and you succeed. Beat it by three full ranks or more and it is a critical — maximum damage, or the best outcome the situation allows. There is no critical failure. A bad roll is a bad roll, and the world does not punish you twice for it.

Stats and Talents

Seven stats: Strength, Perception, Endurance, Charisma, Intelligence, Agility, Luck. Each runs from 1 to 10. Each maps to a die.

| Stat | Talent Die |

| --- | --- |

| 1 | d4 - 1 | 6 | d8 + 2 |

| 2 | d4 + 0 | 7 | d10 + 2 |

| 3 | d6 + 0 | 8 | d10 + 3 |

| 4 | d6 + 1 | 9 | d12 + 3 |

| 5 | d8 + 1 | 10 | d12 + 4 |

The Six Numbers on Your Sheet

- HP — twice your END stat at level one. Nothing else goes into it.

- DT (Damage Threshold) — rolled from your STR Talent at the top of every turn. You choose whether to keep the new number or the old one. Incoming damage hits DT first, then DR, then HP.

- DR (Damage Reduction) — zero unless gear or a Perk hands you some.

- CW (Carry Weight) — $(STR \times 15) + (END \times 10) + (AGI \times 5)$. Exceed it and the Overseer starts charging you for it.

- MP (Morale Points) — one at level one, one more each level. Spent to fire Perks. Refilled by rest and by winning.

- SQ (Sequence) — $PER + AGI$. This is your AP ceiling, and it settles who moves first.

A Turn, in Three Phases

Beginning. Roll your AGI Talent for AP. Roll your STR Talent and set your DT. Then pay any upkeep — bleeding, burning, a chem wearing off, and a Death Toll Check if you are at zero.

Action. Spend AP. Movement costs 1 AP per five feet. A skill check costs twice its DC in AP, so a Normal check (DC 2) is 4 AP and a Hard check is 6. Firing a pistol is 1 AP. Firing a shotgun is 2. Reloading a magazine is 2. Swinging a machete is 2. Aiming is 1 and buys you +1 on the shot.

Ending. Unused AP carries over, but never past your SQ. DT is wiped and rolled fresh next turn.

Attacking

Ranged. The DC comes off the weapon's range chart, adjusted for cover. Light cover +1, medium cover +2, heavy cover +4. Burst fire +1, full auto +2. A called shot is +2 and names the body part before the dice hit the table.

The 10mm Pistol DC
--- ---
Point-blank (0-5 ft) 0
Close (5-15 ft) 1
Normal (15-40 ft) 2
Far (40-80 ft) 3
Long (80-150 ft) 4
Extreme (150 ft +) 5

Melee. Contested. You roll your Melee Weapons or Unarmed Effort and the defender rolls theirs. Higher number wins. If the defender beats you by a full rank and has the AP to spend, they may counter once — no counter chains, one answer per swing.

Damage. Roll the weapon's dice, add your Skill Scaling die, subtract the target's DT, then their DR. Skill Scaling pays out by Score.

Skill Score Scaling Die
--- ---
3-4 +1d4
5-6 +1d6
7-8 +1d8
9-10 +1d10

The Death Toll

At zero HP you are not unconscious. You are in the Death Toll, and you keep playing.

Every action costs double AP, and doublings add rather than multiply — a 3 AP action doubled twice is 9 AP, not 12. At the top of every turn you make a Death Toll Check: roll your END Talent, nothing else. No Skill, no Luck, no Perk. The first DC is 1, and it climbs by 1 every time you pass it. Fail and you take a Death Token and the DC resets to 1. Reach a number of tokens equal to your level and your Wanderer is dead.

Conditions, Short List

Prone — melee against you gains +1, ranged against you adds +2 to the DC, and standing costs 2 AP. Burning — 1d6 at the top of your turn until you spend 2 AP putting yourself out. Bleeding — 1 HP per rank at the top of your turn, and 1 more per rank if you moved more than 15 feet last turn, until a Medicine check closes it. Stunned — you still roll your AP, and you may spend it on nothing. Grappled — you cannot move; break it with a contested Unarmed check. Dazed — every action costs double. Fatigued — -1 to every Effort at rank 1, -2 at rank 2, -3 at rank 3, and it clears only with a full rest and water. Encumbered — over your CW, and every movement costs double.

That is the game. Everything else is a table.

The Four Wanderers

Four pregenerated characters, built on the fast-start array (8, 7, 6, 5, 5, 4, 3) and started all the way down. Hand them out and start. If somebody wants to build their own instead, the sheet template at the back of this book walks them through it in twenty minutes.

Boone — the Shooter

Background: Gun-Runner. Perk: Gun Nut — spend 1 MP to reroll a failed check with Small Guns, Repair, or Energy Weapons (1 charge, refilled by rest). Traits: Steady Hands (+2 to Larceny and Small Guns checks involving fine manipulation; -1 AP when using two-handed weapons) · Eagle Eye (+2 to Perception checks involving distance or detail; -2 to Endurance checks against eye strain and blinding effects)

HP 10 · SQ 15 · AP 4-13, cap 15 · DT 2-9 (+2 leather armor) ·
DR 0 · CW 165 lbs · MP 1

HP 9 · SQ 15 · AP 4-13, cap 15 · DT 2-9 (+2 leather armor) ·
DR 0 · CW 165 lbs · MP 1

Skill	Lvl	/	Score	
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Small Guns (<i>tagged</i>)	37	/	3	
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Survival (<i>tagged</i>)	31	/	3	
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Repair (<i>tagged</i>)	29	/	2	
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Acrobatics · Sneak	22	/	2	
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Larceny · Explosives · Energy Weapons	20	/	2	
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| Athletics · Melee Weapons · Big Guns · Unarmed · Poise | 16
/ 1 |

| Medicine · Science | 14 / 1 |

| Barter · Bluff · Speech | 12 / 1 |

Gear: 10mm pistol (2d6, +1d4 scaling, 1 AP to fire, 12 rounds, range chart above), 36 rounds spare, gun-cleaning kit, leather armor (+2 DT), crowbar, tattered map, 15 caps.

Read this sheet out loud to whoever takes it: Boone fires twice a turn most turns and hits about as often as he misses. His Eagle Eye is what finds the thing on the horizon before anyone else does, and his Steady Hands is what picks the lock on the pump house door. His CHA 3 means he should not be the one doing the talking.

Graves — the Wall

Background: Brawler. Perk: Tough — spend 1 MP to add +3 DT for the rest of the turn. Traits: Tough Hide (+2 to DT and Endurance checks against physical exposure; -1 to all Perception checks) · Iron Gut (+2 to Endurance checks against poison, spoiled food, and alcohol; -2 to Perception checks involving taste or smell)

STR 8 (d10+3) · PER 4 (d6+1) · END 7 (d10+2) · CHA 6 (d8+2) ·
INT 3 (d6) · AGI 5 (d8+1) · LUK 5 (d8+1)

HP 12 · SQ 9 · AP 2–9, cap 9 · DT 4–13 (+2 leather armor) · DR
0 · CW 215 lbs · MP 1

Skill	Lvl	Score
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Melee Weapons (<i>tagged</i>)	36	3
Athletics (<i>tagged</i>)	36	3
Unarmed (<i>tagged</i>)	34	3
Big Guns	21	2
Poise · Survival	19	1
Barter · Bluff · Speech	17	1
Small Guns · Acrobatics · Sneak	15	1
Larceny · Explosives · Energy Weapons	13	1
Medicine · Repair · Science	11	1

Gear: Machete (2d6, +1d4 scaling, 2 AP), reinforced knuckle wraps (unarmed strikes deal 1d6 + scaling instead of 1d4), leather armor (+2 DT), flask of rotgut, 3 stimpaks, 10 caps.

Read this sheet out loud: Graves cannot be hurt by anything in this packet, and he cannot be everywhere either. His SQ of 9 means he never holds more than nine AP, which is one move and two swings and nothing left. His Perception is nearly blind, so he will walk past the pressure gauge twice before somebody points at it.

Pell — the Ghost

Background: Scavenger. Perk: Night Vision — halve all penalties for darkness or low light. Traits: Light Foot (+2 to Sneak and Acrobatics checks; -2 DT against area-of-effect

attacks) · Night Owl (+2 to checks in darkness or low light; -2 to checks in bright light or direct sun)

STR 3 (d6) · PER 6 (d8+2) · END 4 (d6+1) · CHA 5 (d8+1) · INT 5 (d8+1) · AGI 8 (d10+3) · LUK 7 (d10+2)

HP 7 · SQ 14 · AP 4-13, cap 14 · DT 1-6 (+1 leather vest) · DR 0 · CW 145 lbs · MP 1

Skill	Lvl	Score
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Sneak (<i>tagged</i>)	38	3
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Acrobatics (<i>tagged</i>)	38	3
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Larceny (<i>tagged</i>)	34	3
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Small Guns	23	2
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Explosives · Energy Weapons	19	1
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Medicine · Repair · Science	17	1
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Barter · Bluff · Speech	17	1
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Unarmed · Poise · Survival	15	1
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Athletics · Melee Weapons · Big Guns	13	1
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Gear: 10mm pistol (2d6, +1d4 scaling, 12 rounds), 24 rounds spare, hunting knife (1d6, 1 AP), crowbar, reinforced backpack (+20 CW), leather vest (+1 DT), 20 caps.

Read this sheet out loud: Pell has seven hit points, which is two good bites. Her Light Foot penalty means a grenade or a spray of anything will end her day early, so she should not be standing in the middle of a room. What she does better than anyone is see the room before anybody walks into it.

Odile — the Fixer

Background: Wasteland Doctor. Perk: Fast Talk — spend 1 MP to reroll a failed Speech or Bluff check (1 charge, refilled by rest). Traits: Silver Tongue (+2 to Speech and Bluff checks involving persuasion; -2 to Speech checks involving intimidation) · Eagle Eye (+2 to Perception checks involving distance or detail; -2 to Endurance checks against eye strain and blinding effects)

HP 8 · SQ 10 · AP 2-9, cap 10 · DT 1-6 (+1 leather vest) · DR 0 · CW 110 lbs · MP 1

HP 7 · SQ 10 · AP 2-9, cap 10 · DT 1-6 (+1 leather vest) · DR 0 · CW 110 lbs · MP 1

Skill Lvl / Score

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Speech (<i>tagged</i>) 37 / 3

Barter (<i>tagged</i>) 37 / 3

Medicine (<i>tagged</i>) 35 / 3

Bluff 22 / 2

Repair · Science 20 / 2

Larceny · Explosives · Energy Weapons 16 / 1
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Small Guns · Acrobatics · Sneak 16 / 1
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Unarmed · Poise · Survival 14 / 1

Athletics · Melee Weapons · Big Guns 12 / 1

Gear: Field surgery kit, 5 stimpaks, worn leather satchel, leather vest (+1 DT), 10mm pistol (12 rounds), 30 caps.

Read this sheet out loud: Odile is the party's mouth and their doctor, which means she is the only one who can stop a bleeding Wanderer and the only one who can talk Pike's crew out of a chain. Her HP is seven and her Silver Tongue drawback means she cannot threaten her way out of anything — she has to charm it. That is a limitation you should test on purpose.

The Job: Nine Miles and Back

Four sessions, or one long night if you cut it. The whole scenario is a water problem wearing a road problem's coat, and the party will not see the water problem until the third session unless they are quicker than most.

The Frost Die

Put a d6 in the middle of the table, showing a 6, and tell the table what it is. Every session that ends without the delivery made, turn it down one. At 3, the nights start killing the weak — a dog, an old man, a brahmin that wanders off and does not come back. At 1, the road ices and the handcart stops being a scheduling problem and starts being a physics problem. At 0 the frost arrives whether the water moved or not. You will almost never reach zero, and that is fine. The value of the die is not that it runs out. The value is that it is visible, and that your players can watch it while they decide how much of tonight they want to spend being clever.

Scene One — The Ask

Morning, second day since the party walked in. Marla Vance calls them to the pump house before the town is awake, because she does not want to be watched making this ask. Late fifties, hands like a bricklayer's, a ledger she keeps in her head. She puts a folded map on the table, sets a chipped mug of the good water beside it, and says what she practiced all night.

"Nine Mile's out," she says. "Has been for a week, and they've been drinking from a mud hole and telling themselves it's fine. I need a run made before the frost, and I need it made by people who aren't from here, because everybody from here has a family in Nine Mile and I can't ask a mother to walk past Pike's boys to feed her sister. So. There's a handcart. There's forty gallons of water. There's nine miles of road and a toll that went up on Tuesday."

Let her pause there and let the mug sweat in the cold. The first real decision is not whether to take the job — they will take the job. It is what they ask for, what they are willing to be paid in, and whether they notice that Marla is asking strangers and not her own people. That last one is a question about Marla, and Marla has not answered it.

Dell — sixteen, keeps the intake screens clean, knows the pump better than anyone alive — is in the room. He has started noticing the water comes up warmer than it used to and does not know why that frightens him. Play him friendly and a little too

eager, and let him be the one who mentions the gauge if nobody else does.

Scene Two — The Cellar

Before they leave, put the roaches in the cellar under the pump house — three of them, drawn by the light and the warmth and the blood of something that died down there last week and was never found.

Radroach (Tier 1) — three, run as one mook group HP 10 each · DT d4 (roll once, shared by all three) · DR 1 · AP d8+1 (roll once, shared) · SQ 8 STR 2 (d4) · PER 3 (d6) · END 2 (d4) · AGI 5 (d8+1) · LUK 3 (d6) Unarmed 2 — Score 0, so no scaling die. Bite — 1d4, contested Unarmed roll. 1 AP for the first strike, 2 for the second, 3 for the third. Swarm — each extra roach in the cluster gives every other roach +1 to attack Effort, to a maximum of +4. Three roaches is +2 each. XP 25 each.

Roll the group's AP and DT in the open and say the numbers out loud every round, because the Mook Rule is a promise you have to keep once you have made it. A shared DT of 4 makes the roaches armored for a round; a shared DT of 1 makes them soft for everybody. The party can only plan around a number they have been allowed to see. Run the fight slow and run it honest: count movement in fives, put a broken shelf and a coil of pipe down there so somebody can take cover, and when the last roach pops, let it pop wet and let somebody wear the chitin home.

The cellar does one more thing. Behind the intake housing where the pump draws from the aquifer sits a pressure gauge — pre-war, glass cracked, needle sitting lower than it should. Dell has seen it and does not understand it. If a player asks, tell them it is a pressure gauge and let them read it themselves. If they roll a Science or Repair check, tell them the truth in one flat sentence: the needle has been dropping since summer. Then say nothing else. Do not connect it to the well. Let it sit in the party's pocket like a stone they picked up and forgot about. They will remember it in session four, and the remembering will be theirs.

Scene Three — The Road

Nine miles, one handcart, forty gallons of water that the party is now responsible for, which means the water has stopped being a resource and become a weight. It slows the cart. It slows them. Every mile they push it is a mile nobody is paying them for yet.

Take rations out of the pack each day and let the pack get lighter and the party get thirstier. The first time somebody has to decide whether to drink their own water or save it for the walk back, stop the scene and make them say the decision out loud. That moment is the entire travel chapter compressed into a swallow.

The camp. Give them a bad site on purpose — standing water, an animal trail through the middle of it, a ridge line that silhouettes their fire for a mile. Let them take it. Whatever comes in the night should arrive because of a choice the players made, not because you rolled it: a molerat drawn by the smell of the cart, or a scavenger who is more frightened than they are and will run rather than fight. The first time a bad camp collects its debt is the first time the party believes you are not describing scenery.

The toll. Two of Pike's people at the narrow place, where the scrub closes in on both sides and the road has no shoulder. A chain across the ruts, a clipboard, and a price: a quarter of the load, for passage, and a receipt.

Road Crew (Tier 1) — twoHP 12 each · DT d6+1 · DR 1 · AP d6+1 · SQ 8STR 4 (d6+1) · PER 4 (d6+1) · END 5 (d8+1) · CHA 4 (d6+1) · INT 3 (d6) · AGI 4 (d6+1) · LUK 3 (d6)Small Guns 3 · Barter 2 · leather armor (+2 DT)10mm pistol — 2d6, +1d4 scaling, 1 AP, 12 rounds.Morale: they will not die for a toll. Below half HP they withdraw and let the party pass, and they will remember the party's faces.XP 50 each.

Let the party argue, bluff, and bargain — and let the bluff land or fail on its own merits, because these two are not stupid and will not be talked out of a number their boss set. If the party pays, they reach Nine Mile with thirty gallons and a receipt they can show Marla, and that receipt is the beginning of

the third act. If they refuse, they take the long way: a day added, the frost die turned down, and a set of boot prints through the scrub that somebody else has clearly walked before them.

Scene Four — Nine Mile

Sixty people, a wall made mostly of car doors, a well that has gone to mud, and a trader who comes through twice a month and is overdue by three days. Answer the five questions in one line each before the party walks through the gate, because they will ask all five inside ten minutes. Who runs it? A woman named for her mother and nothing else, and she wants the water to last until the trader comes. What does it make, and what does it need? Nothing, and water. What is it afraid of? That Coldwater will decide sixty people are not worth the road. What will it not talk about? The two families who left for the coast in September and have not written. What happens if nobody intervenes? Everybody stays, and everybody gets thirstier.

Set the price band before they arrive and let them feel it. Nine Mile has no doctor and no clean water, so a stimpak that costs forty caps in Coldwater costs a hundred and twenty here, and a Wanderer who haggles should be met by a woman with nothing to sell and no reason to be polite. Then let the party buy something anyway, because that is what towns are for, and let the town remember them for it.

Put the hook in the town, not on the road. Somebody in Nine Mile has watched Pike's crew pacing the rail bed with a scrap of paper and a pencil, and will mention it in passing while handing over a bowl of something grey. Do not underline it. Do not have the NPC say it was important. Let it land as gossip and let the table decide whether it matters, and then watch two of your players start doing arithmetic at the same time and realize they have both arrived at the same number.

Scene Five — The Weigh Station

Sooner or later the party goes south, and the weigh station is where the scenario turns. A pre-war truck scale, a shed, a chain-link yard full of nothing much, and it is immaculate, because Ossian Pike is the kind of man whose danger is his tidiness. Eleven people, a board on the wall with every deal he has ever honored pinned to it in order, and a water tank behind the shed that answers a question nobody has asked yet: where does the toll water go? Not to eleven people, who drink like eleven people. It goes into the tank, and the tank goes nowhere, and the tank is full.

Pike does not raise his voice and does not need to. He is not a raider — raiders take what they want and leave a mess, and Pike takes what he is owed and leaves a receipt. What he wants is an exclusive, signed, witnessed contract on Coldwater's well, and not the water, the contract, because a contract is a thing you

can sell. What he fears is being the man who ran out of water first, which he has been, once, and which is the only subject he will not discuss. What he will not do is break a signed deal, and he will say so plainly, and the party can test it and find it true.

That refusal is the whole handle. The way through Pike is not to beat him. It is to hand him a contract better than the one he is chasing — signed, witnessed, worth more to him than the well — and to find the thing he actually wants underneath the thing he is asking for. A party that works it out walks out with a deal instead of a fight. A party that does not walks out with a problem, and Pike is still holding the tank, and the frost die is still ticking down.

The Four Ways It Ends

Do not steer. The Contract is the clean ending: the party brokers a written deal — road kept open, toll paid in caps the town can spare, the well left alone — and both sign it, and the frost arrives with the road still walked. The Long Way is the ending where the party abandons Pike and finds a second route, an old rail bed or a game trail that costs a day each way but costs nobody their dignity, and Pike's clipboard arithmetic becomes a number nobody is buying. The Tank is the ending where the party solves Pike by force or by theft, and wins, and the road becomes

a place where a man with eleven people and a grudge waits for them every time they use it.

And the Well is the ending the scenario was built around — where the party stops treating the well as scenery, tells Marla the gauge has been dropping since summer, and forces the town to choose between the pump that works and the water that lasts. Any of the four is a real ending. The Well is the one that turns a playtest into a campaign.

Running It Cold

If you have one night instead of four sessions, cut it like this. Run the ask, the cellar, and the toll as written, and then put the weigh station directly on the road home so the party meets Pike with the receipt still in their hand and the frost die already at 5. Skip Nine Mile entirely and let Marla tell them what Nine Mile is, which costs you the best scene in the packet and buys you a complete arc in three hours. Award the XP at the end the way the book tells you to — out loud, with names attached, so the table hears what the road was worth.

If you have four sessions, do not rush the road. The road is where this game stops being a table of numbers and becomes a place, and a party that has spent two sessions pushing a handcart will care about a water toll in a way a party that skipped to the fight never will.

Close on a shift, not a resolution. The water moved or it did not. The frost came or it did not. Something changed while they were walking — Pike's crew pacing the rail bed with their numbers, the coast-road trader finally arriving with news about the two families who left in September, Marla's second ledger sitting open on the pump house table where anybody can read it. Write one line on the back of your screen and read it back to them: *Coldwater: made the run, met the toll, saw the gauge, told the truth about the well.* Then put the dice in the box.

The Playtest Brief

Watch for these, and write down what you see the same night.

Round one. Time the first round with a phone. Do not announce that you are timing it. The number you want is the gap between the first die hitting the table and the last player finishing their turn — and then the same number again in round three. If round three is not meaningfully faster than round one, the formula is the problem.

Round two. Watch for the first time a player spends AP on something that is not movement or an attack. A Read, a spot check, a Medicine roll on a wounded friend, an Aim. If nobody ever spends AP on information, the AP economy is not offering an interesting choice, and that is worth knowing before you write twenty more chapters on top of it.

Round three. When a roach bites somebody, does the table react, or does it reach for a pencil? A creature that generates no reaction is a stat line, and a bestiary full of stat lines is a bestiary nobody reads.

The first drop. If a Wanderer hits zero, do not fudge it. Run the Death Toll exactly as written and let them play three rounds at double cost with their friends trying to reach them. Then ask them, afterward, whether they were bored or whether they were engaged. Their answer is the single most valuable data point this packet produces.

The Traits. At the end of the session, ask each player to name one moment their Trait's drawback cost them something. If nobody can, the drawbacks are too small or the Overseer forgot to enforce them, and you should find out which.

The clock. Ask the table, at the end, whether the frost die changed anything they did. If they never once looked at it, a visible countdown is not the tension device you thought it was.

The arithmetic. Ask the player who is worst at math whether they ever felt lost. Not confused about the rules — lost in the numbers. That is the question that decides whether the simplified resolution mode needs to be the default rather than the option.

The Feedback Sheet

Copy this. Fill it in the same night. Send it back.

Table: How many players, and how much tabletop experience did each have? ____

Time: How long was the session, and how many combat rounds did you complete? ____

Round length: Round one took *_ minutes. Round three took minutes. Round six, if you got there, took ____.*

Formula: Did anyone narrate the multiplication out loud past round three? Y / N

AP: Name one turn where a player spent AP on something other than moving or attacking. ____

AP (the other question): Did any player ever run out of things to do with AP left over? Y / N

The Death Toll: Did anyone drop to zero? Y / N. If yes, were they engaged, bored, or frustrated? ____

Traits: One moment a Trait drawback cost somebody something. ____

Mook Rule: Did announcing the shared DT change how the table played the round? Y / N

The clock: Did anyone ever change a plan because of the frost die? Y / N

Best moment of the night: ____

Worst moment of the night: ____

The one rule you would cut: ____

The one rule you would keep if you kept nothing else: ____

Quick Reference

- Print it and staple it. This packet is meant to be extracted from the book and handed out. If it needs the rest of the book, it has failed.

- Four pregens, all statted. Boone shoots, Graves soaks, Pell sees, Odile talks. Hand them out and start inside ten minutes.

- The frost die is visible from minute one. Six, face-up, in the middle of the table. Turn it down every session the water does not move.

- The cellar plants the gauge. Do not explain it. Let the party carry it for three sessions and connect it themselves.

- Say the mook numbers out loud. A shared DT of 4 and a shared DT of 1 are two different fights, and the party can only plan for the one they can see.

- Let the camp go wrong once. A bad site, a night watch, and a consequence the players chose.

- Pike cannot be beaten, only dealt with. His refusal to break a signed deal is the handle. Find what he actually wants underneath what he is asking for.

- Four endings, none of them wrong. The Contract, the Long Way, the Tank, the Well. Do not steer.

- Fill in the feedback sheet the same night. A memory of a session is worth a tenth of a note written while the dice are still on the table.

- Mark which of the eight bets lost. That list is the next revision of this book.