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There's an old tale told in every corner of Doskvol. Beggars whisper it beneath leaking, salt-strewn decks; nobles recite softly beside hearthfires in candlelit estates; children listen long before they're old enough to understand, their storyteller's words settling deep into the marrow of their being.

Once, they say, death was kind.

The dead passed quietly from the world and the sun still burned warm above the earth. The living feared death – as all living things do – but they accepted it as they accepted the coming of the silent, inevitable night.

But there lived a sorcerer who looked upon the grave and saw insult. They believed every law of the world could be mastered, every chain broken, every debt refused. Why should death be any different? So they sought power wherever power could be found, learning the soft-spoken names of demons and binding shadows beneath their skin. They crossed the threshold of the world carrying something vast and terrible behind their eyes. They marched on, and on, and on, and on...

...and at the edge of creation, there at last stood the Gates of Death, untouchable since the first breath was drawn and the first life ended.

The sorcerer broke them in a single night.

Some storytellers say the world screamed at the breaking. Others say every soul that had ever passed through the Gates screamed with it.

Ghosts clawed their way from forgotten graves, the seas blackened, and the sun itself shattered into countless pale splinters in the sky. The dead could no longer pass on, but lingered hungry and furious among the enviable living. Entire nations vanished beneath tides of spirits and monsters. The last surviving cities

hid behind walls of lightning and steel while the darkness claimed everything
beyond.

But what, the children ask, of the sorcerer?

The stories differ. Whether the spirits they released tore them apart upon the
steps of the crumbled Gate, or if they now wander the wastes beyond the
lightning barriers, all versions agree on one thing: they did not die. The dead
clawed at them without ceasing. Their bones crumbled but would not scatter.
Their soul, a prisoner bound to eternity, became a wound that could never close.

They escaped death, and paid for it with the world.

Whether the tale is true no longer matters. In Doskvol, its lesson is treated as
law: no one may escape the consequences of action. All that is living must fade,
and all with a price must be paid.

But surely, you're the exception. Right?

Welcome to Doskvol

Blades in the Dark takes place entirely within the haunted and industrial metropolis of **Doskvol**, often called “Duskwall” by outsiders. The setting combines themes from gothic horror, occult fantasy, and criminal/heist dramas; imagine the general atmosphere of “Dishonored” and “Peaky Blinders” with an extra helping of necromantic horror on top of it all.

Doskvol exists on the northern coast of an empire that technically spans several islands, though in practice each surviving city-state is isolated behind enormous shrouds of lightning and metal. Travel beyond the walls is extremely dangerous as the **Deathlands** are saturated with hostile spirits and other strange, violent entities. The sparse rail lines between cities are heavily guarded, and monstrously large ships venture onto the **Void Sea** to hunt leviathans and harvest the blood-like **electroplasm** used to power the remnants of civilization.

The **supernatural** permeates everyday life. Spirits, ghost hunters, electroplasmic-powered generators, and occult artifacts of incredible power are all core parts of the city’s infrastructure. The enduring lack of afterlife creates problems for all who face death; which is, of course, everyone. If a corpse isn’t properly cremated or processed by the **Spirit Wardens**, the resulting ghost will become violent and unstable, even potentially possessing the living. The tolling of death bells across the city – unheard by all except the spiritually entwined – signal work for the Wardens or opportunity for the far less scrupulous **Whispers**.

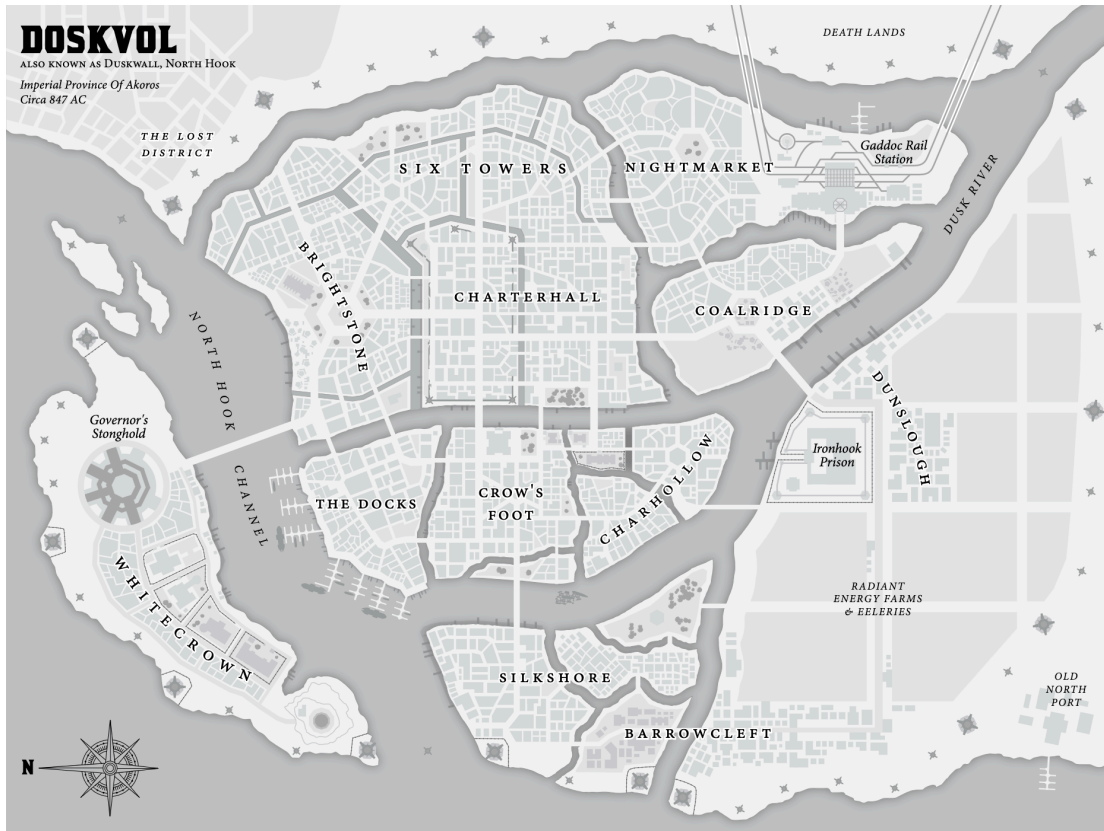
For the common man and woman, life in Doskvol is stratified by *power*. The elite inhabit mansions in Brightstone and Whitecrown, elevated above the oil-slicked dregs through guards, political influence, and old money. The working poor survive in overcrowded districts choked with soot and crime. Entire neighborhoods are effectively controlled by gangs rather than the (barely)

legitimate authorities. Doskvol's law enforcement, the **Bluecoats**, are notoriously corrupt and only distinguishable from organized criminals through their self-explanatory uniforms.

Every district is defined by the factions warring to control it: noble houses, gangs, cults, unions, and the like. No action, then, exists in isolation. If your crew steals from one gang, another may view the ensuing turmoil as opportunity. If you embarrass an old, prominent family, they may retaliate politically or financially rather than with direct force. Every **Score** – no matter how small – generates consequences far beyond its scope. And with very few exceptions, no one gets into Doskvol, and no one gets out. If the heat gets too high, there's nowhere to run from those out to find you.

That constant pressure defines the tone of the game. ***Blades in the Dark*** is fundamentally about *ambitious* and *arrogant* people trying to carve out victory in an inescapable, hostile system that was never built for them to succeed. Your characters are deeply embedded, from birth to the campaign's start, into Doskvol's intricate web of debts and obligations. You're underdogs; never meant to even sit at the table. It's your choice whether you build yourself a chair or sacrifice everything to bring it all crashing down.

Map and Districts



Barrowcleft. Residences and markets for the farmers who work the fields and eeleries.

→ *Barrowcleft is the home to the laborers and overseers of the Ministry of Preservation who attend the radiant energy farms of Doskvol. It is a dusty, rural district, with simple wooden buildings of only one or two stories and wide dirt roads to accommodate large cargo wagons. The farmers of Barrowcleft are organized into tight-knit family-based clans that are proud of their vital role in the city's welfare and hold themselves apart from the "city folk" across the river. Outsiders are welcome here for honest trade, but are met with a cold suspicion otherwise.*

Brightstone. The grand mansions and luxury shops of the wealthy elite.

→ *Brightstone is home to many of the wealthiest and most influential citizens of Doskvol. Its streets are broad and paved, under bright electric lights; its canals are sparkling and clean, with perfumed water; its houses are all of fine, pale marble blocks, rich timbers, and intricate ironworks. There are cultivated parks, lavish restaurants and cafes, and luxury shops. Street-side vendors are forbidden here, resulting in a serene, spacious atmosphere, punctuated by the occasional carriage or marching Bluecoat patrol.*

Charhollow. A crowded district of tenements and stacked houses.

→ *This crowded district is home to the bulk of the workforce of the city: servants, dockers, sailors, stockyard and eelery workers, cabbies, and so on. It's cheap, noisy, cramped, and sweltering from cookfires and hissing steam-pipes, but there's a familial camaraderie among its residents that you won't find anywhere else. The people of Charhollow are a true community, brought together by circumstance, but bound by ties of mutual support and care in stark contrast to the cutthroat ruthlessness that constitutes business as usual in the rest of the city.*

Charterhall. The city's civic offices and the hub for shops, artisans, and commerce.

→ *Charterhall is the site of the first major construction in the city, in the days before the Cataclysm. The old wall upon which was built the first lightning barrier in the Empire still stands in partial ruin around the district. The area is now home to the civic offices of the government including the courts, licensing and taxation offices, banks, and records archives. City officials and students at Charterhall University live here, along with the captains of Imperial industry who prefer to reside within sight of their fortunes.*

Coalridge. The remnants of Doskvol's original hilltop mining settlement, now home to laborers and industrial factories.

→ *Coalridge is home to most of the machinists, industrial laborers, and factories of the city. It's cramped, soot-choked, and loud—spewing dense clouds of black smoke, showers of sparks, and burning cinders. The old elevated train lines that once hauled coal now carry heavy equipment and raw materials to and from Gaddoc Station, though many of the ancient tracks and cars have been abandoned to squatters who've converted them into makeshift homes.*

Crow's Foot. A cramped neighborhood of multi-level streets, ruled by gangs.

→ *Crow's Foot is a crossroads, merging many qualities of its neighboring districts: the illicit vices of Silkshore, the labor and trade of the Docks, the poverty of Charhollow, and the classic architecture of Charterhall. The district is a patchwork, both held together and threatened to be torn apart by the menagerie of competing street gangs and Bluecoat squads that claim every avenue and corner as territory in an endless turf war.*

The Docks. Rough taverns, tattoo parlors, fighting pits, and warehouses.

→ *The docks of Doskvol are ancient, going back to the days before the cataclysm, when the area was a colony town of the old Skov kingdom. Today, some commerce has shifted to the new electro-rail lines of the Imperium, but the docks are still bustling with cargo haulers, fishing boats, and the prestigious leviathan hunter ships that provide the raw material that keeps the city running.*

Dunslough. A labor camp served by convicts and a ghetto for the destitute poor.

→ *Dunslough is the site of Ironhook Prison and its labor camp. The ghetto surrounding it was originally a neighborhood for families of prisoners, but over*

the years, extreme poverty and neglect have worn it down into a sodden ruin. A vicious cycle plays out here: crime driven by desperation, then arrest, incarceration, and release back to Dunslough – giving Ironhook an endless supply of laborers to exploit.

Nightmarket. The trade center for exotic goods imported by rail. Many vendors also trade in illicit goods.

→ *Nightmarket is a district dominated by commerce. Situated near Gaddoc Rail Station, Nightmarket receives the bulk of salable goods from the cargo trains that travel across the Imperium, bringing the exotic and rare to Duskwall. The citizens that call Nightmarket home constitute a new class of “elites”: wealthy people who are not of noble descent but nevertheless claim land, status, and power without titles. The district has been taken over by new construction, introducing lavish private townhouses with all of the modern advances for those that can afford them.*

Silkshore. The “red lamp district” and artist community.

→ *Criss-crossed by dozens of narrow canals, Silkshore is a district best navigated by gondola, as most visitors to this “red lamp district” do. The brothels, vice dens, food stalls, and exotic shops all perch at the waterside, ready to satisfy the appetites of their clientele, no questions asked. Silkshore is a place of public indulgence and private indelicacy, catering to every pleasure imaginable – as well as some that strain the bounds of fantasy.*

Six Towers. A formerly rich district, now worn down and dilapidated.

→ *This once prestigious district has faded over the centuries into a pale shadow itself. The eponymous six towers were originally the grand residences of Doskvol’s first noble families. All but two (Bowmore House and Rowan House) have been*

sold off and converted into cheap apartments or fallen into ruin and abandoned. The district has an empty, haunted feel, with many sprawling old buildings dark without power, broad stone streets cracked and buckled, and the fires of squatters crackling from overgrown lots.

Whitecrown. The sprawling estates of the Lord Governor, Hunter Commander, Master Warden, and Doskvol Academy.

➔ *Whitecrown sits atop a grand peak on the island across North Hook channel from the city proper. From this lofty height, the Lord Governor's stronghold oversees all, flanked by the grand estates of the most powerful nobility and the extravagantly appointed campus of Doskvol Academy. Whitecrown is a rich and rarefied world unto itself – most of Doskvol's citizens live out their entire lives in the city without ever once crossing the bridge to the glittering spires of wealth and power there.*

Strange Forces

In the fantasy world of *Blades in the Dark*, supernatural powers exist – but they are not innate to human beings. Humans are mortal, material, flesh-and-blood creatures, just as the rest of the natural world. To wield arcane abilities, humanity must harness strange forces in various ways:

- The control of spiritual energies and ghosts with pseudo-scientific techniques, known as Spectrology.
- Ancient occult compacts to entreat demonic or other-worldly assistance, known as Rituals.
- The distillation of weird chemical mixtures, known as Alchemy.
- The fusion of these disciplines with technological engineering, known as Spark-craft.

In addition, every living thing in the Shattered Isles has evolved a sensitivity to the invisible “other world” that presses always against the edges of perception: the strange dimension that erupted during the Cataclysm, known as the **ghost field**. By focusing their mind in a certain way, a human can attune to the ghost field to perceive partially into it, to sense the echoes of real-world events captured in the field, or to make a connection to ghosts and spectral energy.

Some people see attunement as a normal part of life – a new human sense that is natural and advantageous. Others see attunement as a vile act, connecting with the dark forces that once destroyed the world; still lurking in the shadows, always ready to prey upon the unwary or power-hungry.

One thing is certain: this broken world will never be made whole again. The black void of the skies and seas, the psychic pressure of the ghost field, and the

machinations of demons and cultists are now the way of things. Better to understand these strange forces than to be consumed by them.

The Unquiet Dead and Their Wardens

It's said that the cataclysm that shattered the earth, banished the sun, and turned the seas to black ink was caused by a sorcerer who consorted with demons and tore down the Gates of Death. But who believes such ancient tales? Whatever the truth of it, one thing is certain: when a body dies, its spirit does not disperse as they once did long ago. It becomes a **ghost**: a spectral entity composed of electroplasmic vapors.

It usually takes between one to three days for a ghost to become free of the corpse. It is then free to wander the world, consumed by darker and darker urges until it goes entirely mad and monstrous.

Ghosts have been a plague upon the world for nearly a millennium. Every community has developed methods for dealing with them, and Doskvol is no different.

The arcane spirit bells at **Bellweather Crematorium** ring whenever a human dies in the city. They may only be heard by those near the site of the death, and by the **Spirit Wardens**, whose arcane masks are attuned to the bells. A **deathseeker crow** leaves the belfry and flies to the district where the dead may be found, circling ever closer to the corpse every minute. It's the responsibility of the Wardens to recover the body and remove it to the crematorium, where it is ritualistically burned with arcane fires before it can become a ghost. The exact details of the ritual are unknown to all except the **Morticians** who handle such affairs.

Wardens wear masks and have a secret membership, to keep them uncorrupted by political influence, and as an homage to tradition – ancient ghost hunters wore masks and concealed their true names as defense against dark magic.

Spectrological Terminology

As a note, for the laymen of Doskvol, encounters with spirits are a fact of life in the dark world they inherited. But even hundreds of years later, stories are told of the bright times before the shattering. The catch-all term that then described supernatural beings, **Devils**, still sees use among those that see no reason to distinguish one spectral horror from another.

Electroplasm. *The energetic residue distilled from ghosts and leviathan blood.*

The alchemical and arcane properties of this substance **power the Shattered Isles**. Doskvol in particular has a long-standing fleet of leviathan hunters, as history describes the city as being where the first Immortal Emperor learned to refine electroplasm from leviathan blood.

Echoes. *Odd “loops” of behavior captured in the ghost field, repeating over and over.*

Often considered moving “**impressions**” of reality only seen by Whispers. These impressions have no will, but are still considered dangerous because of the electrical discharge of their plasmic forms. They sometimes spontaneously manifest at the site of an extremely violent or emotionally charged event, whether or not death was involved.

Spirit Well. *A rift where the ghost field entwines with reality.*

Ghosts and other supernatural beings congregate around these wells, which allow them to corporealize and affect the physical world far more easily. In ancient myth, they are a spawning ground for demons.

Whisper. *A person who's able to summon and communicate with ghosts.*

Whispers are made, not born. **Anyone** can develop arcane abilities with enough study and practice; it's not a matter of bloodline or being "chosen."

Rumors among rogue adepts say that particularly attuned Whispers are able to awaken incredible power shortly after their death. Whether or not that holds any truth, the Spirit Wardens are certain to keep it quiet.

Human. *A living body with its own spirit. The normal state of affairs.*

The Church of Ecstasy additionally refers to spirits within their own body as "Souls." The body incubates the soul, which mimics the body after death, but without the clarity of the physical self.

Ghost. *A spirit without a body; they crave the essence of the living and obsess over unfinished business.*

They are composed of semi-solid electroplasmic vapor, shifting corporeality with little control, treading the line between reality and the ghost field. They suffer limited harm from physical attacks but are vulnerable to electricity and arcane powers.

Ghosts will fade over time as they lose themselves to madness, breaking apart as their memories, individuality, and clarity fade away. Humans are known to last the longest of any known species, with some recorded spirits dating back decades. Wild animals tend to dissipate immediately due to little sense of themselves as unique individuals. Domesticated animals and animals with frequent human interaction would last longer, but still very short periods – a day up to a week. Enraged, predatory, or dedicated animals bound by a set purpose dissipate within weeks or when they fulfill said purpose.

There are some who believe in the existence of **Reconciled**, which are ghosts that have stayed sane and do not desire life essence. Many spectrologists believe them to be a tall tale, but if they do exist, they are exceedingly rare.

Hollow. *A living body without a spirit.*

Usually animalistic yet placid, unless spurred to act otherwise.

Possessed. *A living body containing two (or more) spirits.*

No body is naturally meant to hold more than one spirit. Unless the soul of the body is particularly attuned to the ghost field, **possession will end in one of three ways**: the body dies under the pressure, the invading spirit is exorcised, or the original is destroyed and replaced.

Vampire. *A dead body animated and sustained by a spirit.*

When a possessing spirit bonds with a living body, it becomes a vampire. This can happen if a ghost possesses a victim for too long, thereby destroying its original spirit, or when a hollow is specially prepared for the purpose by ancient ritual.

Scholars of the arcane say that vampirism breaks the chain of being. Over time, a vampire's spirit essence diffuses fully into the body, giving it **physical immortality**. Some have argued that this is the only way to escape the damnation of madness that otherwise inflicts all the ghosts denied passage through the gates of death. A vampirism movement in the 6th century of the Imperium (about two centuries prior) achieved significant popularity before it was eradicated by the Spirit Wardens.

Vampires are **exceedingly rare** today. Most people consider them to be legendary or mythical. When the Spirit Wardens do discover one, they take

great pains to destroy it in secret so as not to disturb the peace. In legend, vampires were destroyed by the rays of the sun. Since the sun was shattered by the cataclysm, this is no longer possible. Spirit Wardens must capture the vampire and disintegrate it in electropasm in order to destroy it.

A vampire sustains its energy by **feeding from a living being**. In fables, vampires drank blood to accomplish this, but this is not typical. Each vampire feeds on the living in its own way – leaving a distinct telltale sign on its victim afterwards. A vampire can easily detect these signs in order to locate their victims again for feeding, or to take care to avoid feeding on the chosen prey of another vampire.

Hull. *A spark-craft body animated by a bound spirit.*

A hull is a **rare and advanced** form of arcane technology that uses a captured spirit to animate a spark-craft frame. Some wealthy citizens employ hulls as bodyguards or servants. The Spirit Wardens have been known to use specialized hulls to assist in tracking and capturing rogue spirits or demons in the city.

Hulls come in **three general frame sizes**. *Small* frames are about the size of a house cat. *Medium* frames are the size of a human. *Large* frames are the size of a wagon.

As cutting-edge technology, hulls are often fitted with a variety of mechanical marvels dreamed up by visionary tinkerers, such as electropasmic levitation, sound recording and playback via phonograph, and other wondrous things.

Hulls *don't grant the same consciousness* to the dead as a living body. Whispers can “guide” the spirit to consider its functions as instinct, but particularly strong spirits can resist such attempts, often in a spectacular fashion.

Demons. *Powerful, ageless beings that bleed electropasm.*

Some scholars believe that demons are the first beings, brought into existence at the origin of reality, as the primal forces of the universe coalesced into the elements of nature. Others believe them to be the reincarnations of powerful spirits seeking corporeal form. Whatever the case, each demon is connected to an physical aspect of the world. There are demons of metals, demons of flame and smoke, demons of the sea, demons of the sky and stars, etc.

There are two types of demons: primitive and developed. **Primitive** demons are mold-like creatures that develop at random on seemingly any substrate (from metals, to water, to even the air); some research suggests that Spirit Wells encourage growth but are not necessary. After enough time passes, they become **developed**, emerging most often as monstrous humanoids with physical features related to the aspect on which they grew. Some demons can transmute fully into their corresponding element and a few can disguise themselves with a convincing human illusion.

Demons are perfectly capable of **reproduction** with humans or other living beings that sufficiently resemble their physical form. These unions are rare across the Shattered Isles, but rumored to be commonplace in the foreign land of Tycheros. Such offspring, when they occur, bear physical traits from their demonic ancestor but none of their abilities or cognition – they have a soul from the other parent’s species.

Unlike humans, demons are not echoed in the ghost field – their blood contains **electroplasmic essence**, which gives them eternal life. Demons are corporeal creatures, not spirits, though they are extremely difficult to kill.

The exceptions are the massive **leviathans**. No one knows the true shape or nature of these horrors that dwarf the largest iron ships. Only a small portion may be glimpsed when they crest the surface of the ink-dark sea, drawn by electroplasmic lures, even as ships swarm to harvest their blood.

Demon behavior heavily relies on the "**purpose**" they have. It is unknown when and how it is set, or if a demon can even choose it themselves, but it acts as an undying urge to perform some kind of task. Usually, this purpose can be roughly described in one or few words.

Cognitive abilities are usually correlated with the purpose's complexity. If their purpose is very simple, a demon usually develops a primitive sentience that meets the bare minimum to perform the task needed. If their purpose is sophisticated or requires social interaction, then a demon develops the facilities necessary.

The older and more mentally developed a demon becomes, the more they deviate from their original purpose and start developing seemingly unrelated traits. Demons can develop interests outside their purpose, choose to perform their purpose in less efficient ways, or even alter it. But the eternal urge of their original purpose will always be there.

The Forgotten Gods. *Beings whom humanity once served and channeled through ancient rites.*

It is said that in the days before the Cataclysm, humanity sought magic through partnership with arcane entities. Those beings able to bestow pacts became known as Gods; they gathered cults to serve their whims, offered power to humans that piqued their interest, and cultivated energies of the world that only they were privy to. But with death's breaking, the Gods fell, ravaged by the maddened spirits of their followers, victims, and enemies alike.

Official doctrine of the Church of Ecstasy decrees them extinct; any Whisper will tell you otherwise. Cults across the Isles attempt to follow the old ways from before the Cataclysm, doing the bidding of entities known only through crumbling papers and half-eroded temple walls. Most of the time, they reach out and find nothing... but the dead have not yet claimed them all.

Horrors. *Non-human electropasmic entities that live within the ghost field.*

Some ancient rituals of the Forgotten Gods can rend the veil between worlds and usher in a alien creatures that serves the deity. Horrors such as these rarely resemble any normal living thing – they may appear as a drifting toxic cloud, a twisting mass of pulsing viscera, floating crystalline shards, or other bizarre configurations.

Horrors are intensely powerful and highly resistant to harm. They may only persist in this world for a short time, however. Their alien forms cannot sustain life for long outside their native realm and they inevitably decay to dust or ooze in the span of a few hours or days. They're very rare within the city, but are common in the Deathlands beyond the lightning barriers.

Differences from D&D 5e

At this point, we're all fairly familiar with alternative/homebrewed TTRPG systems. But most of what we've played – no matter how divergent – was still based on *D&D 5e*, especially in the party's relationship to the world. Although *Blades in the Dark* ("*Blades*") is still a TTRPG about PCs collaboratively overcoming obstacles, there are many gameplay differences that contribute to a significantly different narrative.

Genre

D&D is structured around *heroic fantasy*. Even in darker campaigns, PCs become influential figures capable of reshaping the world: defeating monsters, conquering armies, and proving themselves the undisputed protagonists of whatever story the DM crafts. Combat encounters are central to gameplay where progression in your class is tied to your rising, personal power.

In *Blades*, you are all *underdogs*. It's a narrative-focused game about desperate, hubristic criminals operating within a dangerous and closed social ecosystem. Your characters are far more competent at the beginning, but you'll never reach the pseudo-invincibility offered to high level *D&D* PCs. Even experienced scoundrels can be cornered, politically outmaneuvered, overwhelmed by consequences, or psychologically/physically destroyed by stress and trauma.

Here's how I prefer to think about it:

- *D&D* is a strategy game where you progressively acquire tools to tackle challenges, until you can effectively surmount any obstacle.
- *Blades* is a collaborative storytelling game focused on describing your successes and failures as they contribute to the greater narrative of your crew and characters.

Combat

In *D&D*, combat is a tactical mini-game. Players account for initiative order, movement, armor class, HP, etc. in carefully balanced combat encounters. This is very different from *Blades*, where combat is just another form of obstacle resolution. Combat utilizes the exact same Action Roll system as rooftop chases, burglaries, interrogations, and negotiations. Scenes unfold cinematically according to a shared vision (and the luck of the dice) rather than with play-by-play tactics.

Heist Planning (and the Lack Thereof)

Traditional heist-style gameplay in *D&D* (and many other systems) is bogged down with hours of logistics before the mission can even begin. *Blades* does as much as possible to avoid this stage. Players choose the type of operation they want to perform, provide a single key detail about their approach, and then jump right into the action. Detailed preparation instead happens retroactively through Flashbacks, allowing players to “reveal” preparations during the score itself. Think *Ocean’s Eleven*: when everything appears to have gone to shit, we reveal how the crew’s planning circumvents or takes advantage of the situation at hand.

Failed Rolls

When a *D&D* PC fails a roll, it can stop narrative progress entirely. The DC system creates relatively binary resolutions that boil down to “you did it!” or “you didn’t”. That failure can stall the party and places pressure on the DM to scrounge alternatives to keep the session’s momentum going. The most common resolution in *Blade’s* Action Roll system is a mixed success, where you get what you want, but something complicates the process to spur your next move. Failure is moreso meant to push the story forward rather than lead to a dead end.

Party/Crew

Akin to our posse system (actually inspired by *Blades!*), the crew that your PCs belong to is treated like another player character, complete with its own sheet. As the campaign progresses, the crew develops reputation, territory, allies/enemies, upgrades, and special abilities. Your crew's advancement in Doskvol's underworld is just as important as your scoundrel's personal growth.

Core System

At its heart, *Blades in the Dark* is a fiction-first system. Mechanics always, *always* follow narrative demand rather than existing independently. Players describe their action, rather than use an ability, and set the uncertainty, risk, and possible consequences with the GM prior to the roll.

Actions & Action Rolls

Whenever a character attempts something dangerous or uncertain, the GM will call for an **Action Roll**. While the process flows together in play, let's break down the steps for clarity.

1: The player states their goal for the action.

Your *goal* is the concrete outcome your character will achieve when they overcome the *obstacle* at hand. For example, say your obstacle is a corridor bursting with hidden, lethal traps. Possible goals for the challenged scoundrel could include walking away, tricking a guard to disable the traps, disabling them yourself, or sneaking your way through the corridor. Usually the goal is fairly obvious in context, but it's the GM's job to clarify the player's intent when necessary.

At this point, if the goal is something the scoundrel can do safely and certainly, the scoundrel just does it. "Walking away" is one such goal. But in every other case, if determined to be **dangerous or uncertain**, the GM will call for an Action Roll.

2: The player chooses the action rating.

The player narratively describes how they envision their scoundrel surmounting the obstacle ahead of them. To then make an Action Roll, you select the one of

the twelve **Actions** that best reflects your approach, each categorized under a different **Attribute** (see “Action Descriptions”):

INSIGHT				
●	●	●	●	HUNT
●	●	●	●	STUDY
●	●	●	●	SURVEY
●	●	●	●	TINKER

PROWESS				
●	●	●	●	FINESSE
●	●	●	●	PROWL
●	●	●	●	SKIRMISH
●	●	●	●	WRECK

RESOLVE				
●	●	●	●	ATTUNE
●	●	●	●	COMMAND
●	●	●	●	CONSORT
●	●	●	●	SWAY

Each Action has a **rating** (from 0 to 4) that determines how many dice you’ll roll. **Action ratings** don’t necessarily represent skill or training; you’re free to describe how your character performs that action based on the type of person they are. Maybe your character is good at Command because they have a scary stillness to them, while another character barks orders and intimidates people with their military bearing. Actions aren’t skills in the traditional sense, but are meant to describe categories of solutions.

3: The GM sets the position and effect for the roll.

Position represents how troublesome the attempt is. To choose the Position of an Action Roll, the GM looks at the below levels and determines which most closely matches the situation at hand.

Position	Meaning
Controlled	You have a golden opportunity or are exploiting an advantage. Any consequences are manageable with a strong opportunity to recover.
Risky	You're going head-to-head or acting under pressure. Consequences are rough but salvageable.
Desperate	You're in serious trouble or wildly overreaching your capabilities. Major, irreparable consequences await failure here.

Effect measures how much impact the Action can realistically have within the fiction. To choose the Effect of an Action Roll, the GM considers how effective the narratively described Action will be in surmounting the obstacle at hand.

Effect	Meaning
Limited	Little impact that only partially accomplishes the goal.
Standard	Expected or normal impact.
Great	Exceptional impact or strong advantage.

These are *subject to negotiation*. As a player, if you're angling for a particular position/effect, ask the GM what you can narratively do to get it or for them to clarify the situation to explain their choice. The general rule of thumb is that you can worsen your Position for a greater Effect and vice-versa. There are also

ways to increase Position or Effect through **pushing yourself, items, or collaboration** (see “Stress” and “The Score”).

The GM’s choice for position and effect can be strongly influenced by the player's **choice of Action**. If a player wants to try to make a new friend by Wrecking something, well... *maybe* that’s possible for certain characters, but the GM wouldn’t be crazy to say it’s a desperate roll with a probably limited effect. Consorting or Swaying would typically be a lot better for that. The players are always free to choose the Action they perform, but that doesn’t mean all Actions should be equally risky or potent.

You might see abilities or items described as granting **potency** in a scenario or use. This means that you will have an increased position or effect when acting in that context.

4: Add bonus dice.

Without any special abilities, you can normally get **only two bonus dice** for your Action Roll:

- For one bonus die, you can get assistance from a teammate. They take 1 Stress (see “Stress”), say how they help you, and give you +1d6.
- For another bonus die, you can either...
 - ◆ ...push yourself and take 2 Stress...
 - ◆ ...or accept a **Devil’s Bargain**.

The scoundrels are reckless criminals addicted to destructive vices, and as such, don’t always act in their own best interests. To reflect this, *the GM or any other player* can offer you a bonus die if you accept their **Devil’s Bargain**. These commonly include collateral damage, sacrificing coin or an item, betraying someone, or suffering Harm. The Devil’s Bargain will occur *regardless* of the

outcome of the roll. You make the deal, pay the price, and get the bonus die. The GM has final say over which Devil's Bargains are valid.

You can get a bit fancy and creative with Devil's Bargains, using them to **rewrite** or **elaborate** on the situation at hand. Maybe a patron of the bartender you're trying to Sway is a member of an old crew that you left for dead. Or maybe, while Surveying a drug den, you overindulge and kickstart an addiction. Don't press yourself to come up with something every time, but they're good opportunities to flesh out the story and setting.

A good way to think about it is that you're setting up a *narrative domino* that may or may not get knocked down later at the players and GM's discretion.

Devil's Bargains are always, *always* a free choice. If you don't like one, reject it or suggest alterations. You can just push yourself for that bonus dice instead.

5: The player rolls the dice and we judge the result.

When you make an Action Roll, you **roll** a number of six-sided dice (*d6*) equal to the rating of that Action and take the highest result. You roll *1d6* if your rating in that Action is 1, *2d6* if your rating is 2, etc. If you have a rating of 0, you roll *2d6* and take the lowest result.

Highest Die	Outcome
1-3	<i>Failure.</i> Results in injury or a complication. Any effect that does occur is but the curl of the monkey's paw.
4-5	<i>Mixed Success.</i> Succeeds, but not without consequence.
6	<i>Full Success.</i> Everything goes perfectly.

Multiple 6s

Critical Success. Get everything you want, and more.

Mixed Successes are the most common result. Most rolls in *Blades* are intended to move the story forward while simultaneously introducing danger, consequences, or escalation of stakes.

With the result of the Action Roll in hand, the GM inflicts *consequences* upon the scoundrel and *collaborates* with the player to narrate what happens on-screen.

Fortune Rolls

The **fortune roll** is a tool the GM can use to disclaim decision making. You use a fortune roll in two different ways:

- When you need to make a determination about a situation the PCs aren't directly involved in and don't want to simply decide the outcome.
- When an outcome is uncertain, but no other roll applies to the situation at hand.

When making a fortune roll, you may assess any **trait ranking** to determine the dice pool. A faction would use its **Tier**, a gang its **quality**, or a PC an **action rating**.

1d for each **TRAIT** rating.

+1d for each **MAJOR ADVANTAGE**.

-1d for each **MAJOR DISADVANTAGE**.

CRITICAL: Exceptional result / Great, extreme effect.

6: Good result / Standard, full effect.

4/5: Mixed result / Limited, partial effect.

1-3: Bad result / Poor, little effect.

If no trait applies, roll *1d6* for sheer luck or create a dice pool (from one to four) based on the situation at hand. If two parties are directly opposed, make a

fortune roll for each side to see how they do, then assess the outcome of the situation by comparing their performance levels.

Clocks

Clocks are used by the GM to keep track of transient states within the city of Daskvol. They're **circles split into a number of segments**; the GM and players then progressively fill them through rolls as progress towards the clock's "goal" is completed.

Stress

Stress measures your scoundrel's willingness and ability to push themselves beyond ordinary limits. You accumulate Stress throughout a score by "spending" it to affect the story and rolls. Unlike Harm, Stress doesn't represent physical injury, but reflects the mounting pressure, exhaustion, fear, and emotional strain on the scoundrel as the Score spirals beyond their control. Your **Stress tracker** maxes out at 9 stress.

Managing Stress is one of the most important parts of playing *Blades*. A scoundrel who never spends Stress will struggle to influence the narrative, while one who spends it recklessly risks reaching their breaking point before the job is done.

Stress is *spent* in five primary ways:

Push Yourself

Before making an Action Roll, a player may **Push Yourself** by marking 2 Stress.

They then choose one of the following benefits:

- Gain *+1d6* to the Action Roll.
- Increase the *Effect* of the Action by one level.

The player must narratively describe how their character is exceeding their normal capabilities. This can be through a burst of determination, careful preparation, supernatural intervention, or any other explanation appropriate to and fitting for the fiction.

Assist

Before another player makes an Action Roll, you may choose to **Assist** them. To assist, you mark *1 Stress*, describe narratively how your character helps, and give the acting player *+1d6*. Only one character may Assist on a particular Action Roll.

Flashbacks

During a Score, players may interrupt the current scene to **Flashback** and retroactively establish preparations made before the operation began, at the cost of Stress.

Stress Cost	Preparation Type	Example
0	An ordinary action for which you had an easy opportunity.	<i>The Cutter CONSORTED with a friend to agree to arrive at the dice game ahead of time, to suddenly spring out as a surprise ally.</i>
1	A complex action or unlikely opportunity.	<i>The Hound FINESSED his pistols into a hiding spot near the card table before the Score, so he could retrieve them after the pat down at the front door.</i>
2+	An elaborate action that involved special opportunities or	<i>The Whisper has already STUDIED the history of the property and learned of a ghost known to haunt its ancient canal dock</i>

contingencies.

- a ghost that can be compelled to reveal the location of the hidden vault.

If the Flashback in question is **dangerous** or **uncertain**, an Action Roll may be required.

One of the best uses for a Flashback is when you're in trouble, you can call for a Flashback to describe preparations your scoundrel made "just in case" something like this happened. This way, your Flashbacks are focused on **current problems**, rather than potential ones.

A **Flashback isn't time travel** though! It can't rewrite events that've already occurred or establish preparations that go against the previously established narrative. What it *can* (and should) do is reveal dramatic opportunities for the scoundrels to turn the tables, instead of erasing mistakes or attempting to negate consequences. "Yes, and" is a great mantra to use when considering how/when to use a Flashback.

Resist Consequences

After a consequence is announced by the GM, the affected player may choose to **Resist** it.

The player and GM determine which Attribute (*Insight, Prowess, or Resolve*) best fits the resistance. The player then rolls a number of dice equal to the number of Action ratings they possess under that Attribute. The scoundrel **Resists** the consequence, which is reduced or negated, and takes stress equal to 6 - (*highest dice*). You may only roll against a given consequence once.

The GM may also threaten several consequences at once; the player may then choose which ones to resist and make rolls for each. For example...

*“She stabs you and then leaps off the balcony. **Level 2 harm** and you **lose the opportunity** to catch her with fighting.”*

“I’ll resist losing the opportunity by grappling her as she attacks. She can stab me, but I don’t want to let her escape.”

Tough It Out

If you have taken a Harm but want to push its side effect, you may choose to **Tough It Out**: take Stress equal to the Harm’s level + 1 and draw a line through it. You still have the Harm, but it can’t be invoked to impede you for the rest of the score.

Trauma

When a scoundrel marks their final point of Stress, they immediately suffer **Trauma**.

The scoundrel is *removed from the current scene* in whatever manner best fits the narrative. They may retreat, flee, collapse from exhaustion, lash out, or otherwise become unable to continue participating in the Score.

After the Score and before dealing with the aftermath, the scoundrel’s player chooses one **Trauma condition**:

- *Cold*: You’re not moved by emotional appeals or social bonds.
- *Haunted*: You’re often lost in reverie, reliving past horrors, seeing things.
- *Obsessed*: You’re enthralled by one thing: an activity, a person, an ideology.
- *Paranoid*: You imagine danger everywhere; you can’t trust others.
- *Reckless*: You have little regard for your own safety or best interests.
- *Soft*: You lose your edge; you become sentimental, passive, gentle.
- *Unstable*: Your emotional state is volatile. You can instantly rage, or fall into despair, act impulsively, or freeze up.

→ *Vicious*: You seek out opportunities to hurt people, even for no good reason.

The Trauma condition **permanently** becomes part of the scoundrel's personality. You can play into it as much or as little as you want, but allowing it to affect or complicate your scoundrel's life will earn you XP for doing so (see "Character Advancement").

A scoundrel who accumulates **four** Trauma conditions reaches the end of their criminal career and **retires from play**.

Harm

Consequences frequently inflict **Harm**.

Rather than depicting health through reducing a pool of hitpoints, Harm represents specific injuries that continue affecting the scoundrel until they receive treatment during Downtime.

Harm is divided into **four levels**:

Level	Name	Mechanical Effect	Example
1	Lesser Harm	Reduced <i>Effect</i> on affected Actions.	Battered, Drained, Distracted, Scared, Confused
2	Moderate Harm	-1d6 on affected Actions.	Exhausted, Deep Cut to Arm, Concussion, Panicked, Seduced
3	Severe Harm	Can only act if <i>Assisted</i> or if you <i>Push Yourself</i> .	Impaled, Broken Leg, Shot in Chest, Badly Burned, Terrified
4	Fatal Harm	<i>Catastrophic, permanent consequences.</i>	Electrocuted, Drowned, Severed Arm, Stabbed in the Heart

If you need to mark a Harm level, but *the row is already filled*, the Harm **moves up to the next row above**. So, if you suffered standard Harm (level 2) but have no empty spaces in the second row, you'd record the injury as severe Harm (level 3) instead. For example...

HARM		
3	<i>Shattered Right Leg</i>	NEED HELP
2		-1D
1	<i>Drained</i>	Battered
		REDUCED EFFECT

This character has three harm: a "Shattered Right Leg" (level 3) plus "Drained" and "Battered" (level 1). If they suffer another level 1 harm, it will move up to level 2. If they suffer another level 3 harm, it will move up to level 4: Fatal.

Some Lesser Harms are **temporary**, lasting for only a short duration or until the end of the Score. Other Lesser Harms, Moderate Harms, and Severe Harms **persist until recovered** during Downtime (see "Downtime").

If you suffer **Fatal Harm** that isn't instantly lethal, you may survive if someone can treat the wound and stabilize you within a few minutes. The fatal harm remains on your playbook and must be dealt with during a recovery activity. Also record a **Scar** – a permanent injury – like a limp, chronic pain, loss of an eye, etc. You may invoke a scar to impede your character and mark XP when you do.

If you didn't resist a Harm in the moment, but later need to push through the effect, you can **Tough It Out** (see "Stress").

Action Descriptions

When you **ATTUNE**, you open your mind to the ghost field or other arcane power.

You might communicate with a ghost or understand aspects of spectrology. You could try to perceive beyond sight in order to better understand your situation (but Surveying might be better).

When you **COMMAND**, you compel swift obedience.

You might intimidate or threaten to get what you want. You might lead a gang in a group action. You could try to order people around to persuade them (but Consorting might be better).

When you **CONSORT**, you socialize with friends and contacts.

You might gain access to resources, information, people, or places. You might make a good impression or win someone over with your charm and style. You might make new friends or connect with your heritage or background. You could try to manipulate your friends with social pressure (but Sway might be better).

When you **FINESSE**, you employ dextrous manipulation or subtle misdirection.

You might pick someone's pocket. You might handle the controls of a vehicle or direct a mount. You might formally duel an opponent with graceful fighting arts. You could try to employ those arts in a chaotic melee (but Skirmishing might be better). You could try to pick a lock (but Tinkering might be better).

When you **HUNT**, you carefully track a target.

You might follow a target or discover their location. You might arrange an ambush. You might attack with precision shooting from a distance. You could try to bring your guns to bear in a melee (but Skirmishing might be better).

When you **PROWL**, you traverse skillfully and quietly.

You might sneak past a guard or hide in the shadows. You might run and leap across the rooftops. You might attack someone from hiding with a back-stab or blackjack. You could try to waylay a victim in the midst of battle (but Skirmishing might be better).

When you **SKIRMISH**, you entangle a target in close combat so they can't easily escape.

You might brawl or wrestle with them. You might hack and slash. You might seize or hold a position in battle. You could try to fight in a formal duel (but Finessing might be better).

When you **STUDY**, you scrutinize details and interpret evidence.

You might gather information from documents, newspapers, and books. You might do research on an esoteric topic. You might closely analyze a person to detect lies or true feelings. You could try to examine events to understand a pressing situation (but Surveying might be better).

When you **SURVEY**, you observe the situation and anticipate outcomes.

You might spot telltale signs of trouble before it happens. You might uncover opportunities or weaknesses. You might detect a person's motivations or intentions. You could try to spot a good ambush point (but Hunting might be better).

When you **SWAY**, you influence with guile, charm, or argument.

You might lie convincingly. You might persuade someone to do what you want. You might argue a compelling case that leaves no clear rebuttal. You could try to trick people into affection or obedience (but Consorting or Commanding might be better).

When you **TINKER**, you fiddle with devices and mechanisms.

You might create a new gadget or alter an existing item. You might pick a lock or crack a safe. You might disable an alarm or trap. You might turn the clockwork and electropasmic devices around the city to your advantage. You could try to use your technical expertise to control a vehicle (but Finessing might be better).

When you **WRECK**, you unleash savage force.

You might smash down a door or wall with a sledgehammer, or use an explosive to do the same. You might employ chaos or sabotage to create a distraction or overcome an obstacle. You could try to overwhelm an enemy with sheer force in battle (but Skirmishing might be better).

Additional Note

As you can see, many actions overlap with others. This is by design. As a player, you get to choose which action you roll, by saying what your character does. Can you try to Wreck someone during a fight? Sure! The GM will tell you the position and effect level of your action in this circumstance. But there may be situations where Skirmish might be less risky and/or more effective, depending on the situation at hand.

Teamwork

Every scoundrel has their own specialties; where crews shine is in the ability for the scoundrels in them to come together. There are four ways that scoundrels can mechanically assist one another:

Assist

Detailed more in the associated “Stress” section. In summary, a player can add +1d6 to another’s Action Roll by taking 1 Stress and narratively detailing their scoundrel’s assistance.

Group Action

Sometimes the entire crew attempts the same Action together. Each participating player rolls separately using the same Action Rating.

One player acts as the **leader** of the Group Action.

If at least one player rolls a 6, the entire group succeeds. If one player rolls a critical success or multiple players roll 6s, the overall result is a critical success.

For every participant who rolls a 1-3, the leader suffers 1 Stress as they coordinate the group’s effort and cover for any mistakes.

Setup

A character may perform an Action specifically to improve another character’s Position or Effect on a later Action Roll. For example, a scoundrel may Sway a guard before another character Prowls past! If successful, the following Action Roll gains that improved Position, Effect, or (more rarely) both.

Protect

When another scoundrel suffers a consequence, a nearby ally may choose to Protect them. The protecting character suffers the consequence instead, after which they may attempt to Resist it.

Coin and Stash

Coin

“Coin” is an abstract measure of cash and liquid assets. The term is slang from the days of the old Imperial treasury, which minted special bank coins of solid gold; each one valuable enough to cover a major transaction. “Flashing a coin” was considered an ostentatious display of wealth. These days, everyone uses small silver pieces for currency, commonly called “slugs” or “scales.”

The few silver pieces the PCs use in their daily lives are not tracked. If a scoundrel wants to toss a few silver coins around to achieve a small goal (such as bribe a doorman), use the PC’s lifestyle quality for a fortune roll (see “Stash” below).

Amount of Coin	Value
1 Coin	A full purse of silver pieces. A week’s wages.
2 Coin	A fine weapon. A weekly income for a small business. A fine piece of art. A set of luxury clothes.
4 Coin	A satchel full of silver. A month’s wages.
6 Coin	An exquisite jewel. A heavy burden of silver pieces.
8 Coin	A good monthly take for a small business. A small safe full of coins and valuables. A very rare luxury commodity
10 Coin	Liquidating a significant asset; a carriage and goats, a horse, a deed to a small property.

More than 4 coin is an impractical amount to keep lying around. You must spend the excess or put it in your stash (see below). **A crew can also store 4 coin in their lair**, by default. If they **upgrade to a vault**, they can expand their stores to 8 and then 16 coin. Any coin beyond their limit must be spent as soon as possible (typically before the next score) or distributed among the crew members.

One unit of coin in silver pieces or other bulk currency takes up **one item slot for your Load** when carried.

Scoundrels can **use coin** in several ways:

- Spend 1 coin to get an **additional activity** during downtime (see “Downtime”).
- Spend 1 coin to increase the **result level** of a downtime activity roll (see “Downtime”).
- Spend coin to **avoid certain crew entanglements** (see “Downtime”).
- Put coin in your **character’s stash** to improve their lifestyle and circumstances when they retire (see “Stash”).
- Spend coin when you **advance your crew’s Tier** (see “The Faction Game”).

Stash and Retirement

When you mark your character’s final trauma and they retire, the **amount of coin** they’ve managed to stash away determines their fate. Your stash tracker is on your character sheet.

Each full row of stash (10 coins) indicates the **quality level of the scoundrel’s lifestyle**, from zero (street life) to four (luxury). This can be used in fortune rolls related to the scoundrel’s wealth and lifestyle.

Quality	Stash	Lifestyle	Description
0	0-9	Poor	You end up in the gutter, awash in vice and misery.
1	10-19	Meager	A tiny hovel you can call your own.
2	20-29	Modest	A simple home or apartment, with some small comforts. You might operate a small business.
3	30-39	Fine	A well-appointed home or apartment, claiming a few luxuries. You might operate a medium business.
4	40	Luxury	An opulent home or apartment, outfitted with an array of amenities. You might operate a large business.

Your coin stays within your stash once you put it in. If you want to pull coin out of your stash, you may do so at a cost. Your scoundrel sells off some of their assets and investments in order to get some quick cash. For every **2 stash removed**, you get **1 coin** in cash.

The Score

Every operation undertaken by the crew is called a **Score**.

A Score begins once the crew commits to a course of action. Rather than planning every contingency beforehand, the group makes a handful of tone-setting decisions before cutting to the action.

Throughout this section, when you see this format appear, I'll give a quick walkthrough of an example Score. We'll follow a hypothetical gang of Assassins, which I'll call the Talons.

Score Phase Logistics

Note About this Section:

Bluntly put, Scores in *Blades in the Dark* are balanced for 1-3 players. Larger parties make it far harder for individual scoundrels to have their time in the metaphorical spotlight. This issue is even more evident for our crew of 6 scoundrels, who all have varied playstyles and interests, where Scores that suit them all are far and few between.

Solving this will take quite a few tweaks to the system, documented below. This is a work-in-progress and will likely evolve as we continue through the campaign.

The Score Phase begins at the conclusion of Downtime. At least one Score *must* be completed for the Score Phase to **end**; after all, your crew must keep its lights on, and the ruling faction must get their tithe.

Scoundrels are free to team up or split as they wish, under the condition that **each scoundrel** may only **participate in one Score per Score Phase**.

Your scoundrel **may sit out** of the Score Phase. This may be useful if you're injured and haven't recovered to your satisfaction during the previous Downtime. You may not sit out more than once in a row; if you sit out, you must participate in the next Score Phase.

You can complete Scores for the following **reasons** and more: collecting claims, acquiring assets, making connections, pursuing your personal interests, completing randomly generated jobs to collect Coin, etc.

Scores will less scoundrels will take less time and vice versa. Outside of story-relevant Scores, each Score will generally take anywhere from **15 to 45 minutes** to complete.

The Talons consist of 6 scoundrels. For their Score Phase, they decide on the following:

- *One scoundrel, suffering from a level 2 Harm, decides to sit out this Score Phase. They aim to avoid complications that may arise from their condition and recover fully during the next Downtime.*
- *Two scoundrels would like to work on the claims map; specifically, they would like to acquire Turf. The GM and players work out an appropriate Score, which they quickly complete.*
- *Three scoundrels want to improve their relationship with the ruling faction of their District, the Bloodletters. That Score is described in the examples below.*

Getting Ready for a Score

Step 1: Choose a Plan.

The crew taking on the Score chooses one of six broad **Plans**:

Plan	Description	Detail to Specify
<i>Assault</i>	Do violence to a target.	The point of attack.
<i>Deception</i>	Lure, trick, or manipulate.	The method of deception.
<i>Stealth</i>	Trespass unseen.	The point of infiltration.
<i>Occult</i>	Engage a supernatural power.	The arcane method.
<i>Social</i>	Negotiate, bargain, or persuade.	The social connection.
<i>Transport</i>	Carry cargo or people through danger.	The route and means.

The chosen Plan dictates the operation's initial approach, but shouldn't restrict later decisions during the Score.

*Tensions are high between the Talons and the gang that runs their district, the Bloodletters, as the Talons failed to pay a tithe after their previous Score. Seeking to return to their good graces, the Talons take a job from the Bloodletter's boss to sabotage the Bluecoat's presence in the district. The Talons do what they do best – murder! They decide to **Assault** the captain of the guard.*

Step 2: Provide the Detail.

Each Plan needs one specific **Detail**, listed in the table above. You can discover possible Details during Downtime (in an activity/free play) or by rolling to retrospectively gather information.

*One of the players makes a Fortune Roll to gather information. They gossip with housewives in the neighborhood (Consort), roll their 3d6, and get a 4. The Talons learn that the captain dislikes his wife for an unspecified reason and much prefers boozing at a local tavern instead of going home. After some discussion, the Talons decide that their **Detail**, the point of attack, will be at said tavern when the captain finishes his shift.*

Step 3: Choose Load.

Before the Engagement Roll below, each player chooses how heavily equipped their character is by selecting their **Load**. During the Score, you may say that your scoundrel has an item from their character sheet on hand by checking the box for the used item, up to a number of items equal to your chosen load. The exception to this are italicized items, which don't count towards your Load.

Your load also determines your movement speed and conspicuousness, which can influence the Position and Effect of your actions.

You may acquire more items as you progress through the campaign. Items that have the *Fine* trait increase the Effect of Actions that use them by one level, beyond what the item would ordinarily grant.

If you have a type of **armor** that applies to the situation (refer to the ability referencing *Special Armor* on your character sheet), you can mark an **armor box** to reduce or avoid a consequence, instead of rolling to resist. When an armor box

is marked, it can't be used again until it's restored. All of your armor is restored when you choose your load for the next score.

*Knowing they'll strike in a crowded tavern instead of storming a Bluecoats barracks, most of the Talons choose **Normal Load**, allowing them to carry enough equipment for a fight without drawing suspicion from the average drunkard. One player, wanting to pose as an off-duty laborer, instead chooses **Light Load** to better blend into the evening crowd. Nobody has to decide exactly which weapons or gear they're carrying yet; that will happen during the Score as individual items become relevant.*

Engagement Roll

Once preparations are complete, the GM makes the **Engagement Roll** to determine the crew's starting Position at the beginning of the score.

The GM begins with *1d6*, then modifies the dice pool by asking themselves and the crew the following questions:

- Is the operation particularly bold or daring? *Take +1d6.*
- Is the operation overly complex or contingent on many factors? *Take -1d6.*
- Does the Plan's Detail expose or utilize a vulnerability of the target? *Take +1d6.*
- Is the target strongest against this approach, or do they have particular defenses or special preparations? *Take -1d6.*
- Can any of your friends or contacts provide aid or insight for this operation? *Take +1d6.*
- Are or could any enemies or rivals interfere with the operation? *Take -1d6.*

- Is your crew a lower- or higher-Tier compared to the target? Take +1d6 or -1d6.
- Are there any other elements in play that grant advantages or disadvantages to the crew?

After rolling the dice pool, the **highest die** determines how the Score opens.

The GM begins with 1d6 for the Engagement Roll. The assassination plan is straightforward; neither especially bold nor overly complicated. The captain's drinking habit is a clear vulnerability, granting +1d6, but the Bluecoats are a Tier III faction while the Talons are only Tier I, imposing -1d6. The final pool remains 1d6.

*The GM rolls a 5, meaning the Score begins in a **Risky Position**. The first scene opens with the Talons already inside the tavern, the captain laughing drunkenly with several officers as one notices an unfamiliar face lingering a little too long by their table.*

Executing the Score

Once the Engagement Roll has established the opening situation, play proceeds naturally through a series of Action Rolls, roleplaying scenes, and Flashbacks. The narrative determines order and procession as necessary.

The crew is expected to **adapt** during a Score as circumstances change. Your objective as players is to react to unfolding situations using the tools available, all in service of telling a compelling story through the characters. Every meaningful action has the potential to improve your situation, worsen it, or reveal entirely new problems to overcome.

A Score ends once the crew has accomplished its objective, abandoned it, or become unable to continue.

The Talons jump into action. One scoundrel strikes up a conversation with the barkeep to learn which door the captain typically leaves through, while another quietly slips upstairs to watch from the balcony. When the captain unexpectedly decides to leave through the kitchen instead of the front entrance, the players abandon their original preparations and improvise. A player decides to use a Flashback to have bribed one of the cooks earlier that afternoon, allowing the crew to intercept the captain just as he reaches the alley.

After a successful Skirmish with the captain, the Talons abscond with the body, pouring alcohol over it and Swaying a passerby that he's a friend who drank too much. The Score ends as they turn the body over to a waiting Bloodletter enforcer.

Payoff

The crew first receives payment for completing the operation. This typically includes:

→ **Coin:** Represents liquid wealth.

◆ *Rewards:*

- 2 coin (minor job; several full purses)
- 4 coin (small job; a strongbox)
- 6 coin: (standard score; decent loot)
- 8 coin: (big score; serious loot)
- 10+ coin (major score; impressive loot)

- ◆ Record the coin on the **crew sheet**, or **divvy it up** among the crew members as you see fit.
 - ◆ Most districts have crime bosses that expect smaller crews to **pay a tithe** from their scores. Subtract coin equal to your crew's Tier + 1 when you pay a tithe to a boss or larger organization. This occurs for **every Score** within the Score Phase.
 - ◆ If you're *supposed to be paying off a boss, but you don't*, start a clock for that boss's patience running out. Tick it whenever you don't pay. Every time it fills up, lose 1 Faction Status with them (see "The Faction Game")
- **Reputation:** Increases the crew's standing in Doskvol's underworld (see "The Faction Game").
- ◆ The crew earns *2 rep per score* by default. If the target of the score is higher Tier than your crew, take +1 rep per Tier higher. If the target of the score is lower Tier, you get -1 rep per Tier lower (minimum zero).
 - ◆ If you *keep the operation completely quiet* so no one knows about it, you earn zero rep.
- **Faction Status:** Changes depending on which factions benefited or suffered during the operation.

The exact rewards will depend entirely on what the crew accomplished and who was involved.

Heat

At the conclusion of each Score, the crew gains **Heat**, representing how much evidence, suspicion, and public attention their actions generated. Quiet Scores

that leave few witnesses result in little Heat. Loud, violent, or politically significant ones yield significantly more.

Heat	Operation	Amount of Exposure
0 Heat	Smooth/Quiet	Low
2 Heat	Contained	Standard
4 Heat	Loud/Chaotic	High
6 Heat	Wild	Devastating

You mark Heat levels on the **Heat tracker** on the crew sheet.

- Add *+1 Heat* for a high-profile or well-connected target.
- Add *+1 Heat* if the situation happened on hostile turf.
- Add *+1 Heat* if you're at war with another faction.
- Add *+2 Heat* if killing was involved (whether the crew did the killing or not; bodies draw attention).

As **Heat accumulates**, law enforcement in Doskvol will become increasingly interested in the crew's activities. Rival factions may also find it easier to identify and retaliate against your operations.

When your *Heat level reaches 9*, you gain a **Wanted Level** and clear your Heat. Any excess Heat "rolls over," so if your Heat was 7 and you took 4 Heat, you'd gain a Wanted Level and reset with 2 Heat marked. Higher Wanted Levels result in harsher legal consequences, greater scrutiny, and more dangerous Downtimes between Scores.

The only way to *reduce your crew's Wanted Level* is through **incarceration at Doskvol's prison, Ironhook**. When one of your crew members, friends, contacts

– or a framed enemy – is convicted and incarcerated for crimes associated with your crew, your *Wanted Level* is reduced by 1 and you clear your *Heat*. Incarceration may result from investigation and arrest by the Bluecoats, or because someone turns themselves in and takes the fall for the crew's crimes. *The severity of the prison sentence depends on your Wanted Level.* Doskvol's underground operates within the prison system, so there is much to be gained behind bars, but the experience will prove **Traumatic** for those that can't rise to the challenge.

Downtime

Every Score creates new opportunities... but also new problems. Downtime represents the period between operations as the crew recovers, pursues personal missions, and manages the consequences of their activities.

Entanglements

Entanglements occur at the beginning of Downtime and represent the *ongoing consequences* of living as criminals in a city that cannot forget. They manifest fully before PCs have the chance to avoid, intercept, or defuse them. They're the cost of dealing in the underworld; a good crew must learn to roll with the punches as they come.

The *type* of Entanglement that occurs is dependent on the crew's current **Heat** and **Wanted Level**. Minor crews with little attention paid to them may only deal with questioning, suspicious contacts, or the like. Infamous crews are far more likely to face arrests, retaliation from spurred factions, and betrayals.

Unlike consequences suffered during a Score, Entanglements **occur between operations** and help ensure the world continues changing even while the crew rests. They may occur immediately during this phase or sometime during Downtime Activities.

Downtime Activities

During Downtime, each character chooses two **Activities**. You may choose more than two by spending one Coin or Rep per additional activity. If the crew is **at war** with another faction (see "The Faction Game"), each character only has time for one downtime activity.

Only activities on this list are limited; normal actions are not. You're still free to go places, do things, make action rolls, gather information, or roleplay so long as you do not invoke the mechanical effects associated with the downtime activities.

If you have **any Trauma conditions**, beware. If you do not or cannot Indulge Vice during Downtime, you take Stress equal to the number of Trauma conditions you have.

If a friend or contact assists you with a downtime activity, add *+1d6* to whatever roll.

Indulge Vice

Every scoundrel relies upon a **Vice** to cope with the pressures of their profession. Indulging Vice **reduces accumulated Stress** by rolling dice based on the character's Vice rating.

Visit your **Vice Purveyor** (see "Character/Crew Creation") and roll dice equal to your lowest attribute. Clear stress equal to your highest dice result.

However, reducing more Stress than you currently have causes the character to **Overindulge**. Overindulgence may result in attracting unwanted attention, becoming lost in your vice for days, wasting valuable resources, or creating entirely new problems for the whole crew to handle. Below are some examples:

- *Attract Trouble*: Maybe an enemy has tracked you to your vice purveyor and you let your guard down. Select or roll an additional entanglement.
- *Brag*: Maybe you brag about your exploits. The crew takes +2 heat.
- *Lost*: Play a different character until this one returns from their bender.
- *Tapped*. Your current purveyor cuts you off. Find a new source for the indulgence of your vice.

Train

Training allows a character to **mark additional experience** in one of the available advancement tracks. Mark +1 XP in an attribute track or your playbook track. If the crew possesses the appropriate Training Upgrade, add another +1 XP. You may only train a given XP track once per Downtime. For more details, see “Character Creation”.

Reduce Heat

The scoundrel spends time **covering the crew’s tracks and reducing heat**; through bribing officials, destroying evidence, or any other tricky means. Make an Action Roll:

Highest Dice	Heat Reduced
1-3	-1 Heat
4-5	-2 Heat
6	-3 Heat
Critical	-5 Heat

Recover

(taken from archive15’s Hack)

Treatment from a physician, medic, or other appropriate expert **treats Harm** sustained during a Score. If you don’t have access to a contact, expert, or scoundrel who can heal, you can use Acquire an Asset (see below) to find someone to treat you and your crew once.

When you recover, your healer rolls (Tinker for a PC and quality for an NPC) and checks the table below. You recover harm according to whatever your die result

indicates. You may pay to improve the result level of your roll by one Effect level per number.

Highest Dice	Effect
1-3	Clear a Lesser Harm.
4-5	Clear a Lesser Harm. Move a Moderate Harm down one.
6	Clear all Lesser Harm. Move all Moderate and Severe Harm down one.
Critical	As if you rolled a 6. Also move one instance of Harm down an additional row.

If you have the Physicker ability, you may heal yourself for 2 Stress.

If you don't want to get a healer, you can tough it out and attempt to heal without treatment – take 1 Stress and roll 0d6 (roll two dice and take the lowest roll).

The **recovering character** is the one who uses their downtime action, not the healer. *Treating someone doesn't cost you a downtime activity.*

Acquire an Asset

Temporary resources may be acquired for the next Score (or one significant period of usage, as makes sense for the asset):

- One special **item** or set of common items (enough for a gang of your Tier scale).
- A **cohort** (an expert or gang).

→ A **vehicle**.

→ A **service**. Transport from a smuggler or driver, use of a warehouse for temporary storage, legal representation, a medic, etc.

To acquire the asset, roll a number of dice equal to the crew's Tier. The result indicates the quality of the asset you get, using the crew's Tier as the base.

Highest Dice	Quality Equation
1-3	Tier - 1
4-5	Tier
6	Tier + 1
Critical	Tier + 2

You can spend coin to raise the result of this roll (even beyond critical) by spending 2 coin per additional Tier level added.

The GM may set a **minimum quality level** that must be achieved to acquire a particular asset. For example, if you want to get a set of Spirit Warden uniforms and masks, you'd need to acquire a Tier IV asset. A lower result won't do.

If you **acquire the same asset again**, you get $+1d6$ to your roll. If you continue to re-acquire an asset every time it's used, you can effectively rent it indefinitely.

Alchemicals, poisons, bombs, and **dangerous gadgets** are highly restricted in Doskvol. When you acquire one of these items (rather than crafting it yourself), you take $+2$ Heat.

If you want to acquire an asset permanently, you can either gain it as a crew upgrade (see “The Faction Game”) or work on it as a Long-Term Project to set up a permanent acquisition.

Long-Term Projects

Some goals cannot be completed during a single Score. In such situations, the GM creates a **Progress Clock**, where each successful Action Roll during a Downtime Activity fills segments until the project is complete.

Highest Dice	Number of Segments Marked Off
1-3	One Segment
4-5	Two Segments
6	Three Segments
Critical	Five Segments

Some Long-Term Projects will require more than one clock to complete. In such instances, each clock acts as a “phase” of the Project, where clocks may be completed in parallel or sequentially as makes sense in the fiction.

Crafting

During downtime, a PC can Tinker with special materials and tools to produce strange **alchemicals**, **build** (or **modify**) items, create **spark-craft** gadgets, or enchant **arcane** implements or weapons. The system for each method is similar, with different details depending on the nature of the project (see “Crafting”).

Crafting

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Inventing

A scoundrel with **certain special abilities** invent and learn one special formula when they take the ability (they don't have to take time to learn it).

To invent a formula for a new alchemical concoction or the plan for a new item of your design, you need to Study it as a **Long-Term Project**. Most new formulas or designs will require an 8-segment progress clock to invent and learn. The player and the GM answer questions about the invention to define what it will do in play and what is required to create it. The player records these answers in their notes for future reference

1. GM asks: “**What type of creation is it and what does it do?**” Player answers.
 - a. A creation might be *mundane*, *alchemical*, *arcane*, or *spark-craft*.
 - b. If a PC has certain *special abilities*, they get bonuses when inventing and crafting certain creation types
2. Player asks: “**What's the minimum quality level of this item?**” GM answers, with the magnitude of the effects the item produces as a guideline.
3. GM asks: “**What rare, strange, or adverse aspect of this formula or design has kept it in obscurity, out of common usage?**” Player answers.

4. Player asks: “**What drawbacks does this item have, if any?**” GM answers by choosing one or more from the drawbacks list, or by saying there are none.

The GM can consider the following aspects of the invention **when deciding the minimum quality level** of the item, as they’re applicable:

Trait	0	1	2	3	4	5	6
<i>Area</i>	A closet	A small room	A large room	Several rooms	A small building	A large building	A city block
<i>Scale</i>	1-2 people	A small gang (3-6)	A medium gang (12)	A large gang (20)	A huge gang (40)	A massive gang (80)	A colossal gang (160)
<i>Duration</i>	A few moments	Several minutes	An hour	A day	A day	Several days	Indefinitely
<i>Range</i>	Within reach	A few paces	A stone’s throw	Down the road	Several blocks away	Across the district	Across the city
<i>Quality</i>	Poor	Adequate	Good	Excellent	Superior	Impeccable	Legendary
<i>Force</i>	Weak	Moderate	Strong	Serious	Powerful	Overwhelming	Devastating

Once you’ve invented a formula or design, you can **craft it by using a downtime activity**. No one else can craft this invention unless they learn your design as a long-term project. If you acquire a formula or design invented by another tinkerer, you may learn to craft it by completing a long-term project.

Common alchemicals and ordinary items don’t require special formulas or designs to learn. Anyone may attempt to craft them by using commonly available instructions.

Crafting

To craft something, spend **one downtime activity** to make a Tinker roll to determine the quality level of the item you produce. The base quality level is equal to your crew's Tier, modified by the result of the roll.

 **1d** for each **TINKER** action dot.

 **+1 quality** per **COIN** spent.

 **+1 quality** for **Workshop** crew upgrade.

CRITICAL: Quality level is Tier +2.

6: Quality level is Tier +1.

4/5: Quality level is equal to Tier.

1-3: Quality level is Tier -1.

The results are based on your crew's Tier because it indicates the overall quality of the workspace and materials you have access to.

Revka spends a downtime activity to distill a batch of Drown Powder, which requires a quality III crafting roll. She rolls Tinker and gets a 4, meaning her result is a quality level equal to her crew Tier, which is only II. She spends 1 coin to bump up her quality to a III, which is high enough to make the Drown Powder.

Modifying

Adding a feature or additional function to an item is simpler than creating something new. You *don't* need to invent a special formula or plan. Make a crafting roll (see above) to modify an item. The **quality required to make the item** is set by the GM within the ranges described below.

→ A *simple, useful* modification requires **1-2** quality.

- ◆ A rifle that breaks down into two sections to be more easily concealed.

→ A *significant* modification requires **3-5** quality.

- ◆ Strengthening the barrel and powder load of a gun to fire further.

→ An *arcane, spark-craft, or alchemical* modification requires **4-8** quality.

- ♦ A dagger that can harm a demon. An electrified hull on a boat to repel boarders or ghosts. An outfit coated with chemicals to mask you from deathlands predators.

Drawbacks

Drawback	Description
<i>Complex</i>	You'll have to create it in multiple stages ; the GM will tell you how many. One downtime activity and crafting roll is needed per stage
<i>Conspicuous</i>	This creation doesn't go unnoticed . Take +1 <i>heat</i> if it's used at any point on a Score.
<i>Consumable</i>	This creation has a limited number of uses . All alchemicals must have this drawback, usually one use.
<i>Rare</i>	This creation requires a rare item or material when it is crafted.
<i>Unreliable</i>	When you use the item, make a fortune roll (using its quality) to see how well it performs.
<i>Volatile</i>	The item produces a dangerous or troublesome side-effect for the user, specified by the GM. A side-effect is a consequence, and may be resisted.
<i>Other</i>	Any other drawback specified by the GM.

Common Creations

Creations are listed with their quality level (*by Tier: I-VIII*), followed by a number of uses if they're Consumable (*1-3*). These creations are well known by tinkers in Duskwall, and don't need to be studied before producing them.

Sample Creations

BOMBS (SPARK-CRAFT)

Drawback (Conspicuous).

- ◆ **Grenade** (III/2): A small explosive charge with a short fuse that detonates into metal shrapnel.
- ◆ **Large Bomb** (V/1): A large explosive charge with a long fuse.
- ◆ **Smoke Bomb** (II/2): Creates a cloud of acrid smoke that's difficult to breathe and stings the eyes.

DRUGS (ALCHEMICAL)

Drawback (Volatile): "Woozy," lvl 1 harm.

- ◆ **Black Lotus** (I/1): A tar-like resin made from the leaves of the plant. Induces coma-like stupor and visions.
- ◆ **Bloodneedle** (I/3): Induces fever, euphoric mania, rampant energy.
- ◆ **Dream Smoke** (I/3): A milder formulation of black lotus. Induces a pleasant intoxication.
- ◆ **Quicksilver** (IV/1): A toxic metallic fluid. The user's mind opens further to the ghost field. Take +1d to **ATTUNE** roll upon use, suffer level 2 harm ("Zoned-out").
- ◆ **Spark** (I/3): A measure of raw electroplasm blended with seawater. The user feels empowered and emits mild electrical energy.
- ◆ **Trance Powder** (I/3): A glittering blue powder. Induces a pleasant hypnotic trance when inhaled.

OILS (ALCHEMICAL)

- ◆ **Alcahest** (III/1): A fluid that stops the effects of any other alchemical.
- ◆ **Binding Oil** (III/1): Permanently fuses two surfaces until dissolved by alcahest or electroplasm.
- ◆ **Fire Oil** (III/3): Erupts in searing flame upon contact with air.

POISONS (ALCHEMICAL)

Drawback (Volatile): "Sickened," lvl 1 harm.

- ◆ **Drown Powder** (III/2): A fine dust that incapacitates by giving the sensation of drowning.
- ◆ **Eyeblind** (III/3): A powder that causes blindness for a moment.
- ◆ **Skullfire** (III/1): Toxic fumes from overly heated leviathan blood. Causes incapacitating migraines.
- ◆ **Standstill** (IV/1): A powder that causes temporary paralysis.

POTIONS (ARCANE)

Drawback: 4-clock, "Accosted by Spirit Wardens," 1 tick per use.

- ◆ **Silence Potion** (III/1): Creates an area of utter silence around the shattered vial.
- ◆ **Shadow Essence** (III/1): A distillation of the void. Creates a cloud of unnatural pitch darkness.
- ◆ **Viper Potion** (IV/1): The user's saliva and blood become highly toxic to others for a few minutes.

Sample Special Formulas

- ◆ **Devilroot** (VI/1, ALCHEMICAL): *Sap of the devilroot plant. Can be instantly lethal when consumed. **Unreliable.***
- ◆ **Dream Essence** (II/1, ARCANE): *A distillation of a vivid, lucid dream, perfectly recreated for the user. **Rare.***
- ◆ **Drift Oil** (III/1, ARCANE): *Creates neutral buoyancy when poured on an object, causing it to float in the air for an hour.*
- ◆ **Ghost Oil** (IV/1, ARCANE): *A colorless fluid that causes affected material to slip into the ghost field. Very dangerous when applied to living beings. **Volatile.***
- ◆ **Heartcalm** (IV/1, ALCHEMICAL): *Slows the heartbeat over several days, resulting in death. **Unreliable.***
- ◆ **Life Essence** (VI/1, ARCANE): *The essential life force, in vaporous form. May delay death for a short time, or (rarely) revive the recently deceased. **Unreliable. Volatile** (attracts the attention of the undead).*
- ◆ **Sight Potion** (III/1, ARCANE): *Gives the user the ability to see the invisible and sense danger before it happens. Lasts several hours.*
- ◆ **Thought Essence** (VI/1, ARCANE): *A distillation of a spirit's memories, such that they become your own. Can have severe side effects. **Rare. Volatile.***
- ◆ **Vitality Potion** (III/1, ALCHEMICAL): *Accelerates the healing process. +4 ticks on healing clock. **Rare.***

Sample Gadgets

- ◆ **Black Salt Bomb** (IV/2, SPARK-CRAFT): *Covers a small room, keeping ghosts from exiting or entering. **Volatile.***
- ◆ **Flash Bomb** (II/2, SPARK-CRAFT): *Orbs that detonate with a blinding flash when shattered. **Unreliable.***
- ◆ **Ghost Scourge** (IV, ARCANE): *A plasmicly-charged chain connected to a spirit bottle, to entangle a spirit and draw it into the bottle. **Conspicuous.***
- ◆ **Line Thrower** (II, SPARK-CRAFT): *A steam-powered pressurized launcher for a climbing line and grappling hook. A Tier III version also includes a retracting line that can lift a person.*
- ◆ **Spirit Lamp** (IV, ARCANE): *An electropasmic lamp with a focused beam that can repel ghosts with serious force.*

Hulls

◆ **Hull.** A spark-craft body animated by a spirit. Very **complex**, requiring six stages.

Stage 1: **Inner Chassis** (VI): *The articulated metal skeleton of the hull.*

Stage 2: **Clockwork actuators** (VI): *The inner gears and systems that allow the hull to move.*

Stage 3: **Sensorium** (VII, ARCANÉ): *A crystalline orb suspended in electropasm within a metal frame, which allows the hull to see and hear. Requires a **rare** item: a spirit-crystal orb.*

Stage 4: **Soul Vessel** (VII, ARCANÉ): *An arcane device that houses the spirit. Requires a **rare** material: a memento from the spirit's life.*

Stage 5: **Outer shell** (V): The metal exterior of the hull.

Stage 6: **Feature** (VI): A wondrous feature built-in to the hull. See the Hull playbook for a list of possible features (page 216). May have drawbacks.

Rituals

A **ritual** is a lost art of sorcery from before the cataclysm. Unlike modern arcane techniques that utilize the application of electropasmic energies, rituals depend on **strange occult powers and entities** to realize their effects. To enact a ritual is to come into contact with primal forces and entreat them to do your will. This practice is one with considerable risk.

Finding a Ritual Source

A scoundrel with the **Ritual special ability** begins with one known ritual, already learned (answer the questions below to create it). To then **learn a new ritual**, a scoundrel must first find a source; whether from pilfering it from an antiquated library, consorting with cultists, or devising it from ancient texts yourself. This is mechanically implemented as a **reward** from a Score or Long-Term Project.

Learning a Ritual

Once the source of a ritual is found, you may undertake a **Long-Term Project to learn the ritual**, with the standard ritual taking an 8-segment clock to learn. The player and the GM answer questions about the ritual to define its function; record the answers for later reference.

5. GM asks: “**What does the ritual do and how is it weird?**” Player answers
6. Player asks: “**What must I do to perform the ritual, and what is its price?**” GM answers.
 - a. A ritual takes at least one downtime activity to perform and inflicts Stress on the caster according to its **magnitude** (*number of dice used*)

for any resulting roll). Some special abilities and claims can reduce the cost of stress.

- b. If the outcome of the ritual is **dangerous** or **troublesome** in some way, it requires an action roll (usually Attune). If it's uncertain, then it requires a fortune roll.
- c. A ritual may also have **additional costs**, such as a sacrifice, rare item, the start of a progress clock, etc.

7. GM asks: **“What new belief or fear does knowledge of this ritual and its attendant occult forces instill in you?”** Player answers.

Once you've learned a ritual, you can **utilize it** by spending a **Downtime Activity** and **paying the cost** (see “Performing a Ritual”).

The **magnitude** of a ritual is relatively *subjective*. However, when making a decision, the GM should consider the following aspects of the ritual as they're applicable: **area** of effect, number of people affected (**scale**), **duration**, **range**, **quality** of a resulting artifact, and effect of the outcome (**force**).

Trait	0	1	2	3	4	5	6
<i>Area</i>	A closet	A small room	A large room	Several rooms	A small building	A large building	A city block
<i>Scale</i>	1-2 people	A small gang (3-6)	A medium gang (12)	A large gang (20)	A huge gang (40)	A massive gang (80)	A colossal gang (160)
<i>Duration</i>	A few moments	Several minutes	An hour	A day	Several days	A few months	Indefinitely
<i>Range</i>	Within reach	A few paces	A stone's throw	Down the road	Several blocks away	Across the district	Across the city
<i>Quality</i>	Poor	Adequate	Good	Excellent	Superior	Impeccable	Legendary

<i>Force</i>	Weak	Moderate	Strong	Serious	Powerful	Overwhelming	Devastating
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Here's an example of this process:

Player: "The ritual wards a person indefinitely so that the ghosts of their victims cannot find them. It's weird because... as long as the ward is in place, the person sometimes weeps tears of black blood."

GM: "Spend a downtime action to prepare a mixture of tobacco, dream smoke, and blood from the target of the ritual, which they then smoke. It only affects one person (0), but because you'd like the ward to last indefinitely (6), let's call it a magnitude of 3. You take at least 3 Stress when you perform the ritual, which will be the dice rolled when challenged by a spirit – so you might want to take more Stress to make it more potent."

Player: "Alright. My new fear is what will happen if the spirits figure out where the ward came from and turn their vengeance on me, instead."

Performing a Ritual

You *must* have the **Ritual special ability** to perform a ritual.

Most rituals will take **one Downtime Activity to complete**, though the GM may require more for very powerful or far-reaching rituals. A ritual generally takes at least an hour to perform.

Some rituals may be **partially performed** during downtime and then **fully manifested at-will later** by completing the last incantation or ritual action. In this case, simply make a note that the ritual has been "*primed*" and may be unleashed at a later time.

If a ritual is **dangerous or troublesome** to perform, make an *Action Roll* (usually Attune) to see if unpleasant consequences manifest. If a ritual has an **uncertain**

effect then a *Fortune Roll* should be made to see how well it manifests. Because a ritual is a downtime activity, you **may spend coin 1-for-1 to increase the result level** of your fortune roll, representing the expenditure of expensive or rare ritual materials. Both rolls may be called for if the ritual is both dangerous *and* uncertain..

Each performance of a ritual is a **unique event**, and may not always work the same way each time. The GM or players may call for a round of questions to establish a ritual anew – whether because the ritual’s too boring, balancing it better for play, or just building some details on the original’s foundation. The abyssal forces are **not** playthings and **cannot be considered a reliable or safe source of power**.

Sample Rituals

Ghost Map: This ritual enchants a specially prepared map so it reveals the position of all spirits across the district. An individual spirit may be **Studied** on the map to glean some details about it. The caster takes 5 Stress when it initially performed, and 1 Stress to study an individual spirit. The GM might choose to adjust the magnitude depending on the temperament of the spirit.

- The Magnitude of this ritual is **5 when creating the map** as the *Range* is across the entire district
- The Magnitude of this ritual is **1 when Studying an individual spirit** because despite having a *Scale* of only one person, you must commune with the force that enchanted the map to gather information.

Portal to the Depths: This ancient song calls upon the power of the leviathans to open a small gateway to the great Void Sea within a few blocks of the ritual site. Anything caught near the portal is swamped by cold, black water and drawn with hideous strength into the abyss. This ritual is very dangerous, involving

direct arcane contact with a leviathan's demonic power (*desperate action roll*). The caster takes 5 stress and ticks a 4-segment progress clock: "Seduced by the Leviathan's Song."

- This one is tricky. The GM in this case decided on a Magnitude of 5. Let's break why.
 - *Area*: A small room (1).
 - *Scale*: Not applicable; the amount of people affected are those near the rift, to which there is no set minimum or maximum.
 - *Duration*: Not applicable; the ritual imbues no form of status effect or ward.
 - *Range*: Several blocks away (4).
 - *Quality*: Not applicable; creates no object.
 - *Force*: Devastating (5). This ritual opens a portal directly to the Void Sea and, through the direct intervention of the ritual's patron, draws in anything within its range.

The Faction Game

Doskvol is a city of crime, from top to bottom. Every faction preys on others to survive. Alliances are fleeting, and vendettas are bloody. Into this chaos of corruption and violence your fledgling crew has set its course. Will you be crushed, or will you rise up?

Tier

Each notable faction of the city is ranked by **Tier**: a measure of wealth, influence, and scale. At the highest level are the Tier V and VI factions, the true powers of the city. *Your crew begins at Tier 0.*

Tier	Gang Scale
<i>Tier 0</i>	Tiny (1-2)
<i>Tier I</i>	Small (3-6)
<i>Tier II</i>	Medium (12)
<i>Tier III</i>	Large (20)
<i>Tier IV</i>	Huge (40)
<i>Tier V</i>	Massive (80)
<i>Tier VI</i>	Monumental (150+)

You'll use your **Tier rating to roll dice** when you acquire an asset, as well as for any rolls where your crew's overall power level and influence is the primary trait. Your Tier also determines the **quality level of your items** as well as the **quality and scale of the gangs your crew employs** – and thereby what size of enemy you can expect to handle.

Hold

Hold represents how well a faction can maintain their current position on the metaphorical ladder of Doskvol's underground. **W** indicates weak hold. **S** indicates strong hold. *Your crew begins with a strong hold at Tier 0.*

Developing Your Hold/Tier Through Reputation

To move up the ladder and develop your crew, you need rep. **Rep** is a measure of clout and renown. When you accrue enough rep, the other factions take you more seriously and you attract the support needed to develop and grow.

When you complete a **Score**, your crew earns 2 rep. If the target of the score is higher Tier than your crew, you get +1 rep per Tier higher. If the target of the score is lower Tier, you get -1 rep per Tier lower (minimum zero). This is detailed more in "Downtime".

You need **12 rep** to fill the **rep tracker** on your crew sheet. When you fill the tracker, do one of the following:

- If your hold is **weak**, it becomes *strong*. Reset your rep to zero.
- If your hold is **strong**...
 - ♦ ...you can pay to increase your crew Tier by one. This costs **coin** equal to your new Tier x 8.
 - ♦ ...you can increase your crew Tier by one if *all PCs* have a **lifestyle** level equal to or greater than the Tier being advanced to. There is no coin cost.

Once you increase your Tier, reset your rep to *zero* and reduce your hold to *weak*. As long as your rep tracker is full, you don't earn new rep (12 is the max).

Reducing Hold

You may perform a Score specifically to **reduce the hold of another faction**, if you know how they're vulnerable. If the Score succeeds, the target faction loses 1 level of hold: *if their hold is strong*, they become weak; *if their hold is weak*, the faction loses 1 Tier and stays weak.

When a faction is at **war**, it temporarily loses 1 hold.

Your crew can lose hold, too, following the same rules above. If your crew is Tier 0, with weak hold, and you lose hold for any reason, your lair comes under threat by your enemies or by a faction seeking to profit from your misfortune.

Turf

Another way to contribute to the crew's development is by acquiring **turf**. When you seize and hold territory, you establish a more stable basis for your **rep**. Each piece of turf that you claim represents abstracted support for the crew (often a result of the fear you instill in the citizens on that turf). Turf is marked on your rep tracker.

*If you hold 3 pieces of turf, you need only 9 **REP** to develop, instead of 12.*



*When you develop, you'll clear the 9 **REP** marks, but keep the 3 turf marks. Mark turf on the right side, to show the "cap" on how much **REP** is needed.*

You can acquire Turf through your crew's claim map (see "[Claims](#)").

Each piece of turf you hold **reduces the rep cost to develop by one**. So, if you have 2 turf, you need 10 rep to develop. If you have 4 turf, you need 8 rep to develop. You can hold a **maximum of 6 turf**. When you develop and reset your rep, you keep the marks from all the turf you hold.

Faction Status

Your crew's **Status with each faction** indicates how well you are liked or hated. Status is rated from -3 to +3, with *zero* (neutral) being the *default starting status*. You track your status with each faction on the faction sheet.

Faction Status	Level	Description
+3	<i>Allies</i>	This faction will help you even if it's not in their best interest to do so. They expect you to do the same for them.
+2	<i>Friendly</i>	This faction will help you if it doesn't create serious problems for them. They expect you to do the same.
+1	<i>Helpful</i>	This faction will help you if it causes no problems or significant cost for them. They expect the same from you.
0	<i>Neutral</i>	
-1	<i>Interfering</i>	This faction will look for opportunities to cause trouble for you (or profit from your misfortune) as long as it causes no problems or significant cost for them. They expect the same from you.
-2	<i>Hostile</i>	This faction will look for opportunities to hurt you as long as it doesn't create serious problems for them. They expect you to do the same, and take precautions against you.
-3	<i>War</i>	This faction will go out of its way to hurt you even if it's not in their best interest to do so.

They expect you to do the same, and take precautions against you.

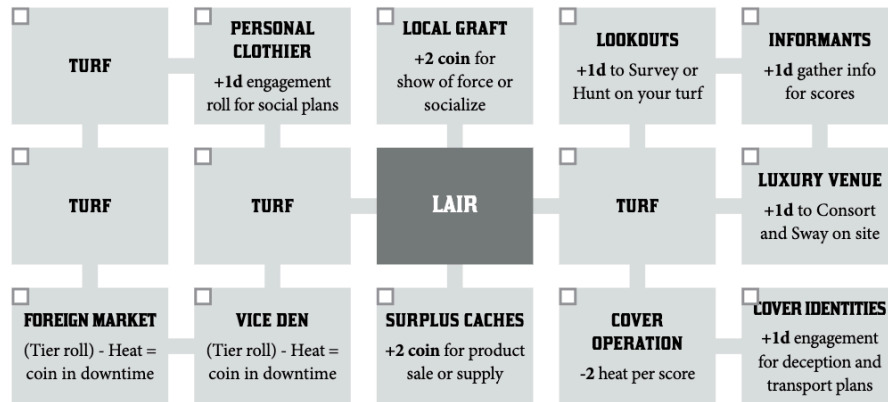
When you're at war with any number of factions, your crew suffers +1 Heat from scores, temporarily loses 1 hold, and PCs get only one downtime action rather than two. You can end a war by eliminating your enemy or by negotiating a mutual agreement to establish a new status rating.

If your crew has weak hold when you go to war, the temporary loss of hold causes you to lose one Tier. When the war is over, restore your crew's Tier back to its pre-war level.

When you execute an operation, you will gain or lose status with any affected factions. If you keep your operation completely quiet, your status doesn't change. Your status may also change if you do a favor for a faction or if you refuse one of their demands.

Claims

Each crew sheet has a map of claims available to be seized from other factions. As an example, below is the **claims map** for the Hawkers crew type.



COVER IDENTITIES: You get +1d to the **engagement** roll for **deception** and **social** plans. *False identities help confuse the opposition.*

COVER OPERATION: You get -2 **HEAT** per score. *The cover of a legitimate operation helps deflect some of the heat from law enforcement.*

FOREIGN MARKET: Any time during downtime, roll dice equal to your Tier. You earn **COIN** equal to the highest result, minus your **HEAT**. *Some of your product makes its way out of the city.*

INFORMANTS: You get +1d to gather information for a score. *Your eyes and ears on the streets are always on the lookout for new clients.*

LOCAL GRAFT: You get +2 **COIN** in **payoff** for scores that involve a show of force or socializing. *A few city officials share bribe money with those who show that they're players on the scene.*

LOOKOUTS: You get +1d to **HUNT** or **SURVEY** on your turf.

LUXURY VENUE: +1d to **CONSORT** and **SWAY** rolls on-site. *Silks, paintings, and crystal impress the clientele.*

PERSONAL CLOTHIER: You get +1d to the **engagement** roll for **social** plans. *You always arrive on the scene in the most current and alluring fashion.*

SURPLUS CACHE: You get +2 **COIN** in **payoff** for scores that involve product sale or supply. *You have an abundance of product, which pads your pockets every now and then.*

VICE DEN: Any time during downtime, roll dice equal to your Tier. You earn **COIN** equal to the highest result, minus your **HEAT**. *Is this claim a den you've overtaken from another purveyor, or a new establishment replacing something else?*

The claim map displays a default roadmap for your crew type. Claims should **usually** be seized in an **orderly sequence** by following the paths from the central square, the crew's lair.

However, **you may attempt to seize any claim on your map**, ignoring the paths (or even **seek out a special claim** not on your map) but these operations will always be especially difficult and require exceptional efforts to discover and achieve. The GM might tell you that you'll need to investigate and gather

information in order to discover a claim of that type before you can attempt to seize it.

Execute the operation like any other Score, and if you succeed, you seize the claim and the targeted faction loses the claim.

Seizing a claim is a serious attack on a faction, usually resulting in -2 faction status with the target, and potentially +1 status with its enemies.

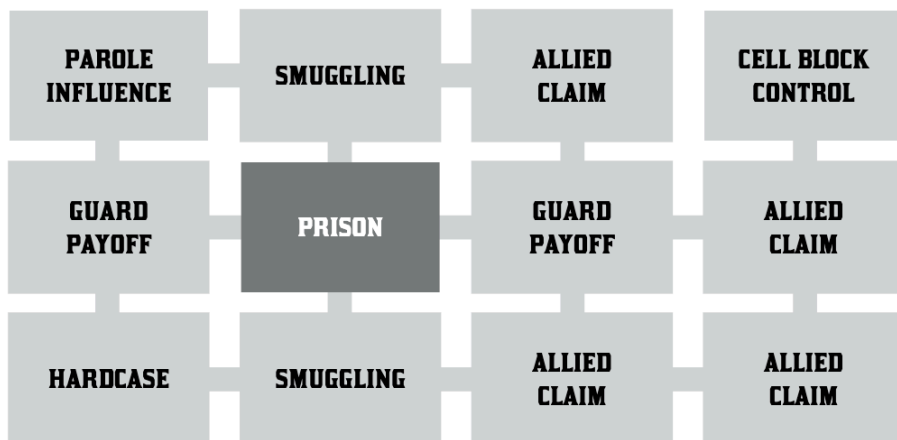
As soon as you seize a claim, you enjoy the listed benefit for as long as you hold the claim. Some claims count as turf. Others provide special benefits to the crew, such as bonus dice in certain circumstances, extra coin generated for the crew's treasury, or new opportunities for action.

Losing a Claim

An **enemy faction** may try to seize a claim that your crew holds. You can fight to defend it, or negotiate a deal with the faction, depending on the situation. **If you lose a claim**, you lose all the benefits of that claim. **If your lair is lost**, you lose the benefits of all of your claims until you can restore your lair or establish a new one. To restore or establish a new lair, accomplish a Score to do so.

Ironhook Claims

You are also able to **seize claims within Ironhook, Doskvol's prison**, in the event of incarceration (see "Downtime"). This allows you to get claims from different crew types, reduce prison time, and prevent Trauma. However, if you have no crew members or contacts within Ironhook, these claims are *far harder* to take.



PRISON CLAIMS

ALLIED CLAIM

One of your allies on the inside arranges for their faction to grant you a boon. Take a claim for your crew from a different crew type. You can't take turf with this claim.

CELL BLOCK CONTROL

Your crew has a cell block under their total control—guards and all. You never take **TRAUMA** from incarceration.

GUARD PAYOFF

You claim several Ironhook prison guards on your payroll. Take +1d to your Tier roll when a member of your crew is incarcerated.

HARDCASE

Your reputation as a tough inmate bolsters your crew's image in Duskwall. When your crew advances Tier, it costs 2 fewer **COINS** than it normally would.

PAROLE INFLUENCE

Political pressures of various sorts can be applied to the magistrates and warden who oversee sentences for crimes. With this claim, you're always able to arrange for a shorter prison stay—as if your **WANTED LEVEL** was 1 lower. So, if your **WANTED LEVEL** was 3 when you went in, you'd spend only several months behind bars (equivalent to level 2) instead of a full year.

SMUGGLING

You arrange smuggling channels inside. You have +2 **load** while incarcerated, (starting from zero as a prisoner). If you take this claim twice, you'll have 4 load while you're serving time in Ironhook. Also, you may choose to carry **COIN** in place of load for purposes of bribes or acquiring assets while in prison. You may reset the items in your prison loadout whenever your crew has downtime.

Cohorts

A **Cohort** is a **gang** or an **expert** who works for your crew. To recruit a new cohort, spend *two upgrades* (obtained when your crew fills the XP tracker; see “Character/Crew Creation”) and create them using the process below.

Creating a Gang

Choose a gang **type** from the list below:

Gang Type	Examples
Adepts	Scholars, tinkers, occultists, and chemists.
Rooks	Con artists, spies, and socialites.
Rovers	Sailors, carriage drivers, and deathlands scavengers.
Skulks	Scouts, infiltrators, and thieves.
Thugs	Killers, brawlers, and roustabouts.

A gang has **quality** and **scale** equal to your current crew Tier. It increases in quality and scale when your crew moves up in Tier. For example, if your crew is Tier 0, your gang is quality 0 and scale 0 (1 or 2 people). When your crew is Tier II, your gang is quality 2 and scale 2 (12 people).

When a cohort **performs actions** for which its Type applies, it uses its quality rating to determine the number of dice rolled. Otherwise, its quality rating is zero (rolls two dice and takes the lower result).

Some crew upgrades will add the “**Elite**” feature to a gang, which gives them *+1d6* when they roll. So, if you’re Tier I and have a gang of Elite Thugs, they would roll *2d6* when they try to kill a target.

Creating an Expert

Record the expert’s **type** (their specific area of expertise). This is far looser than the gang’s type. They might be a Doctor, an Investigator, an Occultist, an Assassin, a Spy, etc.

An expert has **quality** equal to your current crew Tier + 1. Their **scale** is always zero (1 person). Your experts increase in quality when your crew moves up in Tier.

An expert **performs actions** the same as gangs.

Edges and Flaws

When you create a cohort, give them one or two **edges** (positive traits) and an equal number of **flaws** (negative traits).

Modifying a Cohort

You can add an **additional type** to a gang or expert by spending *two crew upgrades*. A given cohort can have up to two types.

Using a Cohort.

At any point in play, when you **send a cohort to achieve a goal**, roll their quality to see how it goes. Optionally, a PC can oversee the maneuver by leading a group action. If you direct the cohort with orders, roll Command. If you *participate in the action alongside the cohort*, roll the appropriate action. The quality of any

opposition relative to the cohort's quality affects the position and effect of the action.

The Bloodletters (a Tier II gang) want to run the Grinders out of the alley where they're selling spark. They send their gang of Thugs to go kick the Grinders out. The GM rolls 2d6, and gets a 3. An hour later, the Thugs come back, beaten and bloody. One of them looks sheepish, "Those guys are tough, boss." (The GM inflicts harm on the cohort, and they failed their goal.)

The next day, a PC goes back and leads a group action, rolling their 3d6 in Skirmish alongside the Thugs' 2d6. The PC gets a 6 this time—they beat the tar out of the Grinders and send them packing (at least for now).

Cohort Harm and Healing

Cohorts suffer harm similarly to PCs. A cohort can suffer **four levels of harm**:

1. **Weakened.** The cohort has reduced effect.
2. **Impaired.** The cohort operates with reduced quality (-1d).
3. **Broken.** The cohort can't do anything until they recover.
4. **Dead.** The cohort is destroyed.

All of your cohorts heal during downtime. If circumstances are narratively amenable for recovery, each cohort removes *one level* of harm (or *two levels* of harm instead, if a PC spends a Downtime Activity helping them recuperate).

If a cohort is **destroyed**, it may be replaced. Spend *Coin* equal to your Tier + 2 to restore it, plus *two downtime activities* to recruit new gang members or hire a new expert.

Non-Hawker Claims

Here are some **claims from the non-Hawker crew types!** While these are *far* harder to obtain, it is possible to bring them into play.

Assassins

CITY RECORDS: You get +1d to the **engagement roll** for **stealth** plans. *You can use blueprints and other documents to determine a good approach for infiltrations.*

COVER IDENTITIES: You get +1d to the **engagement roll** for **deception** and **social** plans. *False identities help confuse the opposition.*

COVER OPERATION: You get -2 **HEAT** per score. *The cover of a legitimate operation helps deflect some of the heat from law enforcement.*

ENVOY: You get +2 **COIN** in **payoff** for scores that involve high-class clients. *This well-connected liaison will help arrange for a better payoff from rich clients.*

FIXER: You get +2 **COIN** in **payoff** for scores that involve lower-class clients. *This well-respected agent will help arrange for a better payoff from poorer clients.*

HAGFISH FARM: When you use the **reduce HEAT** downtime activity after a score that involves killing, you get +1d to the roll and quiet, convenient disposal of any corpses you left on the job.

INFIRMARY: You get +1d to healing treatment rolls. *The infirmary also has beds for long-term convalescence.*

INFORMANTS: You get +1d to gather information for a score. *Your eyes and ears on the streets are always on the lookout for new targets.*

PROTECTION RACKET: Any time during downtime, roll dice equal to your Tier. You earn **COIN** equal to the highest result, minus your **HEAT**. *Some of the locals are terrified of you and will gladly pay for "protection."*

TRAINING ROOMS: Your **Skulks** cohorts get +1 **scale**. *Extra training enables them to fight like a larger gang.*

VICE DEN: Any time during downtime, roll dice equal to your Tier. You earn **COIN** equal to the highest result, minus your **HEAT**.

VICTIM TROPHIES: You get +1 **rep** per score. *Word of your grisly "collection" gets around, and your boldness boosts your rep in the underworld.*

Bravos

BARRACKS: Your **Thug** cohorts get +1 **scale**. *Extra room means more gang members.*

BLUECOAT CONFEDERATES: You get +1d to the **engagement roll** for **assault** plans. *The street patrol around here helps you out now.*

BLUECOAT INTIMIDATION: You get -2 **HEAT** per score. *The law doesn't want any trouble from you; they look the other way.*

FIGHTING PITS During downtime, roll dice equal to your Tier. You earn **COIN** equal to the highest result, minus your **HEAT**. *The locals love to gamble away their hard-won coin on the blood-sports you host.*

INFIRMARY: You get +1d to healing treatment rolls. *The infirmary also has beds for long-term convalescence.*

INFORMANTS: You get +1d to gather information for a score. *Your eyes and ears on the streets are always on the lookout for new targets.*

PROTECTION RACKET: Any time during downtime, roll dice equal to your Tier. You earn **COIN** equal to the highest result, minus your **HEAT**. *Some of the locals are terrified of you and will gladly pay for "protection."*

STREET FENCE: You get +2 **COIN** in your payoff for scores that involve lower-class targets. *An expert can find the treasure amid the trash you loot from your poorer victims.*

TERRORIZED CITIZENS: You get +2 **COIN** in your payoff for scores that involve battle or extortion. *The frightened locals offer you tribute whenever you lash out. They don't want to be next.*

WAREHOUSES: You get +1d to **acquire asset** rolls. *You have space to hold all the various spoils you end up with after your battles. It can be useful on its own or for barter when you need it.*

Cult

ANCIENT ALTAR: You get +1d to the **engagement roll** for **occult** plans. *Its blessing is with you.*

ANCIENT GATE: Safe passage in the deathlands. *When you leave the city through this gate, the spirits of the deathlands will not molest you unless directly provoked.*

ANCIENT OBELISK: -1 **stress** cost for all arcane powers and rituals. *This effect applies to all cultists, everywhere—so long as the deity is well-pleased. You don't have to be on-site at the obelisk to benefit from its power.*

ANCIENT TOWER: You get +1d to **CONSORT** with arcane entities on-site. *This tower was prepared by sorcery from the pre-cataclysm and acts as an arcane lens to focus eldritch energy across the black mirror into the void.*

CLOISTER: Your **Adept** cohorts get +1 **scale**. *More room for hopeful novices desperate to pledge their service.*

OFFERTORY: You get +2 **COIN** in your payoff for scores that involve occult operations. *The frightened locals offer you tribute when you perform your dark practices. They don't want to be next.*

SANCTUARY: +1d to **COMMAND** and **SWAY** rolls on-site. *Your sanctuary maintains its effect as long as your deity is well-pleased with your service.*

SPIRIT WELL: You get +1d to **ATTUNE** rolls on-site. *A spirit well draws ghosts and other things to its power, which you harness to aid your arts.*

SACRED NEXUS: You get +1d to healing treatment rolls. *Ancient arcane energy seeps into the wounded here, speeding their recovery, and marking them consecrated by its power.*

VICE DEN: Any time during downtime, roll dice equal to your Tier. You earn **COIN** equal to the highest result, minus your **HEAT**.

Shadows

COVERT DROP: You get +2 **COIN** in **payoff** for scores that involve espionage or sabotage. *The perfect hidden exchange point is worth the extra coin to discerning clientele.*

DRUG DEN: Any time during downtime, roll dice equal to your Tier. You earn **COIN** equal to the highest result, minus your **HEAT**. *What's the drug of choice?*

GAMBLING DEN: Any time during downtime, roll dice equal to your Tier. You earn **COIN** equal to the highest result, minus your **HEAT**. *Cards, dice, or something more unusual on offer?*

HAGFISH FARM: When you use the **reduce HEAT** downtime activity after a score that involves killing, you get +1d to the roll and quiet, convenient disposal of any corpses you left on the job.

INFIRMARY: You get +1d to healing treatment rolls. *The infirmary also has beds for long-term convalescence.*

INFORMANTS: You get +1d to gather information for a score. *Your eyes and ears on the streets are always on the lookout for new targets.*

INTERROGATION CHAMBER: You get +1d to **COMMAND** and **SWAY** on-site. *Grisly business, but effective.*

LOOKOUTS: You get +1d to **HUNT** or **SURVEY** on your turf.

LOYAL FENCE: You get +2 **COIN** in **payoff** for scores that involve burglary or robbery. *It requires a skilled eye and good contacts to move stolen goods.*

SECRET PATHWAYS: You get +1d to the **engagement roll** for **stealth** plans. *You might have access to long-forgotten underground canals, rooftop walkways, or some other route of your choosing.*

TAVERN: You get +1d to **CONSORT** and **SWAY** rolls on-site. *Some booze and friendly conversation can go a long way.*

Smugglers

ANCIENT GATE: Safe passage in the deathlands. *When you leave the city through this gate, spirits in the deathlands will not molest you unless directly provoked.*

COVER OPERATION: You get -2 **HEAT** per score. *What's your cover? Who did you seize it from?*

FLEET: Your cohorts have their own vehicles. *Each cohort has a common vehicle, with quality equal to your Tier.*

INFORMANTS: You get +1d to gather information for a score. *Your eyes and ears on the streets are always on the lookout for new clients.*

LUXURY FENCE: You get +2 **COIN** in **payoff** for scores that involve high-class targets. *It requires a skilled eye and good contacts to move hot luxury goods.*

SECRET ROUTES: You get +1d to the **engagement roll** for **transport** plans. *You might have access to long-forgotten underground canals, dark streets normally hidden behind debris, or some other route of your choosing.*

SIDE BUSINESS: Any time during downtime, roll dice equal to your Tier. You earn **COIN** equal to the highest result, minus your **HEAT**. *What kind of legitimate business is this? How do you get paid in secret?*

TAVERN: You get +1d to **CONSORT** and **SWAY** rolls on-site. *Some booze and friendly conversation can go a long way.*

VICE DEN: Any time during downtime, roll dice equal to your Tier. You earn **COIN** equal to the highest result, minus your **HEAT**. *Perhaps you sell some of the contraband you smuggle here? Or do you not mix your operations?*

WAREHOUSES: You get +1d to **acquire asset** rolls. *You have space to hold all the various items and supplies you end up with from your smuggling runs. They can be useful on their own or for barter when you need it.*

Character Creation

It's time to build your scoundrel! Follow the below steps to fashion yourself a bold character hurtling towards the arduous obstacles in their path.

Choose a Playbook.

As your first step, you choose one of the seven playbooks below. See "[Playbook Vignettes](#)" for more details.

Name	Description
Cutter	Cutters are good at winning fights, with violence and with intimidation. Play a Cutter if you want to get your way.
Hound	Hounds are good at tracking things down and also long-distance combat. Play a Hound if you want to choose your battles.
Leech	Leeches are good at using alchemy and wrecking stuff with sabotage. Play a Leech if you want to be creative with weird tools.
Lurk	Lurks are good at sneaking around and breaking into places. Play a Lurk if you want to slink around in the shadows.
Slide	Slides are good at social situations and subterfuge. Play a Slide if you want to manipulate and deceive people.
Spider	Spiders are good at masterminding maneuvers. Play a Spider if you want to assist teammates and deal with other factions.
Whisper	Whispers are good at magical stuff and dealing with

ghosts. Play a Whisper if you want to meddle with arcane powers.

When you choose a playbook, you're choosing a set of **special abilities** (*which give your character ways to break the rules in various ways*) and a set of **XP triggers** (*which determine how you earn experience for character advancement*). But every playbook represents a scoundrel at heart. You're selecting the set of initial action ratings and special abilities that your character has access to, but you're not defining their immutable essence or true nature. Your character will grow and change over time; who they become is part of the fun of playing the game.

Your playbook choice also represents **how the other scoundrels of the underworld see you**. The names of the playbooks are underworld slang in Doskvol. If someone solves their problems with weird occult stuff, people say they're a "Whisper." If they're a smooth talker and shrewd manipulator, people will call them a "Slide." Part of your character's reputation is reflected by their playbook choice.

While there are many, *many* fan-made playbooks out there, **stick with the base game playbooks for your first character**.

Choose a Heritage

Your scoundrel's heritage describes their family line. You may be of any heritage, and then decide if you're a foreigner who immigrated to Doskvol or local from birth. When you choose your heritage, circle it on the list in your playbook, and write a detail about your family life on the line below. Each heritage is briefly described below, along with a very general phenotype.

→ **Akoros** is the largest and most industrialized land in the Imperium, and is home to the capital city as well as Duskwall itself. They're known as a diverse conglomeration of cultures that have grown together in close proximity for centuries.

- ◆ *A land of dark, petrified forests and rocky hills. The rich coastal cities get their wealth from leviathan hunting and from mining colonies deep inland.*

- ◆ Dark hair with desaturated eyes. Pallid skin.

→ If you want to be a *rootless wanderer* you could be from the **Dagger Isles**. People there often grow up on ships and travel a lot before settling down. They're known as corsairs and merchants who live without lightning barriers, dealing with spirits in other ways.

- ◆ *A tropical archipelago covered in dense jungle growth; now turned dark and twisted from the strange magic of the cataclysm. Some say that the people there live without lightning barriers. How do they manage that?*

- ◆ Warm tones, from hair to skin to eyes.

→ If you want to be from a culture considered *exotic* by the locals, you could be from **Iruvia**, a powerful desert kingdom far to the south. Their wealth is in large part due to the vast array of artisans that make their homes within Iruvia's sprawling cities.

- ◆ *A land of black deserts, obsidian mountains, and raging volcanoes. Some say that positions of power are openly held by demons in Iruvia.*

- ◆ Thick, dark hair and amber skin.

→ If you want to be from a place considered *wild* by the rest of the empire, you could be from **Severos**. Outside the few Imperial settlements, most Severosi live in small communities scattered across the blasted deathlands, surviving within the ruins of ancient arcane fortresses which still repel spirits.

- ♦ *A land of windswept plains, covered in dark scrub and thorny growths. Outside the Imperial cities on the coast, some native Serverosi still live as scavengers, roving the death-lands on ghost-hunting mounts.*

- ♦ Thin, dark hair and cool skin tones.

→ If you want to be from a *marginalized* people, you could be from **Skovlan**, the island kingdom just across the sea from Doskvol. Skovlan was last to be brought under Imperial rule, over the course of the 36-year Unity War (which ended only a few years ago). Many Skovlander refugees who lost their homes and jobs in the destruction of the war have come to Doskvol seeking new opportunities.

- ♦ *A ragged land of cold mountains and rough tundra. Skovlan was the last holdout against Imperial control.*
- ♦ Pale-skinned and pale-haired.

→ If you want to be *weird*, you can be from **Tycheros**. It's a semi-mythical place, far away beyond the northern Void Sea. Everyone says that the people there are part-demon. If you choose Tycherosi heritage, also create a demonic telltale (like black shark eyes, feathers instead of hair, etc.) that marks your character.

- ♦ *A far off land, disconnected from the Empire. People say the Tycherosi (rudely called "Strangers") have demon blood in their lineage.*
- ♦ No distinct phenotype. Features are uncanny to behold.



Choose a Background

Your character's background describes what they did before they joined the crew. Choose one of the general background options from the list on your playbook, then write a detail about it that's specific to your character.

- **Academic:** A scholar, a professor or student from Doskvol Academy, a philosopher or journalist, etc.
- **Labor:** A servant, a factory worker, a coach driver, a docker, a sailor, a Rail Jack, etc

- **Law:** An advocate or barrister, a Bluecoat or inspector (or even Spirit Warden), a prison guard from Ironhook, etc.
- **Trade:** A shopkeeper, a merchant, a crafts-person, a shipping agent, etc.
- **Military:** An Imperial or Skovlander soldier, a mercenary, an intelligence operative, a strategist, etc.
- **Noble:** A dilettante, a courtier, the scion of a fallen house, etc.
- **Underworld:** A street urchin, gang member, young thug, etc.

Assign Four Action Dots

Your playbook begins with three action dots already placed. You get to add four more dots (so you'll have seven total). At the start of the game, **no action rating may have more than two dots** (unless a special ability tells you otherwise).

Assign your four dots like this:

- Put one dot in any action that you feel reflects your character's heritage.
- Put one dot in any action that you feel reflects your character's background.
- Assign two more dots anywhere you please (max rating is 2, remember).

Choose a Special Ability

Take a look at the special abilities for your playbook and choose one. If you can't decide which one to pick, go with the first one on the list – it's placed there as a good default choice.

Some special abilities refer to your **Special Armor**. Each character sheet has a set of boxes to track usage of armor (standard and heavy). If you have any abilities that use your special armor, tick a box when you activate one of them. If

you don't have any special abilities that use special armor, then you can't use the armor boxes at all.

Choose One Close Friend and One Rival

Each playbook has a list of NPCs that your character knows. Choose one from the list who is a close relationship (a good friend, a lover, a family relation, etc.). Mark the upward-pointing triangle next to their name. Then choose another NPC on the list who's your rival or enemy. Mark the downward-pointing triangle next to their name.

Choose Your Vice

Every scoundrel is in thrall to some vice or another, which they indulge to deal with stress. Choose a vice from the list, and describe it on the line above with the specific details and the name and location of your vice purveyor in the city. For example, you might choose Gambling, then write *Spogg's dice game, at the Crow's Foot*. You can create a vice purveyor or ask the GM to tell you about a couple likely options for your vice.

- **Faith:** You're dedicated to an unseen power, forgotten god, ancestor, etc.
- **Gambling:** You crave games of chance, betting on sporting events, etc.
- **Luxury:** Expensive or ostentatious displays of opulence.
- **Obligation:** You're devoted to a family, a cause, an organization, a charity, etc.
- **Pleasure:** Gratification from lovers, food, drink, drugs, art, theater, etc.
- **Stupor:** You seek oblivion in the abuse of drugs, drinking to excess, getting beaten to a pulp in the fighting pits, etc.
- **Weird:** You experiment with strange essences, consort with rogue spirits, observe bizarre rituals or taboos, etc.

Record Your Name, Alias, and Look

Lastly, determine your scoundrel's outward identity. This is self-explanatory!

Character Advancement

Scoundrels earn experience throughout play by embracing behaviors encouraged by their Playbook, Heritage, Background, Vice, and Trauma. There are **four experience tracks**: one for your playbook, and one for each Attribute (*Insight*, *Prowess*, and *Resolve*). Players are in charge of keeping track of the XP their scoundrel earns, but the GM should remind the players as needed.

During the game session, mark experience when you make a desperate roll, marking 1 XP in the Attribute you rolled. When you roll in a Desperate group action, you also mark XP.

During the game session, keep track of the following XP triggers when they occur:

- **Your playbook-specific XP trigger.** For example, the Cutter's is "Address a challenge with violence or coercion." To "address a challenge," your character should attempt to overcome a tough obstacle or threat. It doesn't matter if the action is successful or not. You get XP either way.
- **You expressed your beliefs, drives, heritage, or background.** Your character's beliefs and drives are yours to define, session to session. Feel free to tell the group when this occurs.
- **You struggled with issues from your vice or traumas.** Mark XP for this if your vice tempted you to some bad action or if a trauma condition caused you trouble. Simply indulging your vice doesn't count as struggling with it (unless you overindulge).

→ **You offered a Devil's Bargain to another player.** The player in question does not need to accept your Bargain. Devil's Bargains aren't necessarily negative or cause immediate problems, but set up a narrative hook that you may catch later on.

At the end of the session, review your notes for when you fulfilled an XP trigger. For each one, mark *1 XP* if it happened at all, or *2 XP* if it happened a lot during the session. You may mark end-of-session XP on *any XP tracks you want* (any attribute or your playbook track). You can gain a maximum of 2 XP for each category (for a maximum total of 6 XP).

When you fill an XP track, clear all the marks and take an **advance**. When you take an *advance from your playbook track*, you may choose an additional special ability. When you take an *advance from an attribute*, you may add an additional action dot to one of the actions under that attribute.

It is encouraged to keep your XP triggers in mind as you play, and when the opportunity arises, to take advantage of it to earn yourself some XP. This may take the form of writing your XP triggers somewhere visible, keeping track of when you hit them, or whatever works best for you as a player and collaborative writer.

Nadja is playing a Hound. She rolled two desperate Hunt actions during the session, so she marked 2 XP on her Insight XP track. At the end of the session, she reviews her XP triggers and tells the group how much XP she's getting.

- *She addressed several challenges with tracking or violence, so she marks 2 XP for that.*

- *She expressed her Iruvian heritage many times when dealing with the Red Sashes, so she takes 2 XP for that. She also showcased her character's beliefs, but 2 XP is the maximum for that category, so she doesn't get any more.*
- *She didn't struggle with her vice or traumas, so 0 XP there.*
- *She offered a Devil's Bargain to another player during the session, setting up that the guard recognized the Cutter's tattoo from their childhood gang, so she marks 1 XP.*

That's 5 XP at the end of the session. She decides to put it all in her Insight XP track. This fills the track, so she adds a new action dot in Hunt.

You can also earn XP by Training during downtime. When you train, mark XP in one of your attributes or in your playbook. A given XP track can be Trained only once per downtime phase.

Playbook Vignettes

These are taken from the GM book, and are intended to give you a better sense of each playbook. We'll put character sheets together during session 0 and develop the scoundrels as we play – don't worry about abilities, stats, etc. right now!

Cutter

A dangerous and intimidating fighter.

In the underworld of the Dusk, there are scoundrels who take what they want at the bloody edge of a blade or with a threatening presence that can stop a man cold. They are the enforcers, the debt collectors, the killers, the leg-breakers, and the thugs, commonly known as **Cutters**. Where subtlety fails, swift brutality – and the threat of worse to come – can solve the problem... or at least turn it into a different one.

When you play a Cutter, you earn XP when you address a challenge with violence or coercion. Go ahead and get up in everyone's smug faces and tell them who's boss, then let your blades do the talking if they don't get the message.

Do you have a personal code or a line you won't cross? Do you want to be the boss or do you want to be the enforcer for the boss? How did you acquire your taste for violence and coercion?

Hound

A deadly sharpshooter and tracker.

There's always a need for scoundrels who can find what others want to keep hidden. Whether that's a deadbeat gambler trying to skip out on their debts, a

treacherous informant or witness who's going to squeal to the Bluecoats, or the trail to a treasure squirreled away in a secret vault – it's the **Hounds** that ferret them out.

Why have a fair fight when you can stalk and ambush your prey instead? The underworld is your hunting ground, after all.

When you play a Hound, you earn XP when you address a challenge with tracking or violence. Take the initiative to hunt down opportunities and targets for a score and be willing to hurt whoever stands in your way.

Do you see the whole world as potential prey, or do you still care about people? Which target in the past gave you the most trouble? Why?

Leech

A saboteur and technician.

The world is built on industry, and the underworld is no different. **Leeches** are the scoundrels who distill the drugs, refine the arcane essences, build the bombs, bandage the wounds, and forge the tools of the criminal trades. And anyone who knows how to make things also knows how to break them.

When you play a Leech, you earn XP when you address a challenge with technical skill or mayhem. Duskwall is a city full of industrial machinery, spark-crafts, plumbing, and electrical systems for you to bend to your purposes or sabotage. Get out your tools and get your hands dirty.

The extensive training that makes a Leech is rare and strange among the disenfranchised underworld class – how did you learn your arts? Which side of the coin do you prefer, the side of creation and restoration, or the side of mayhem and destruction?

Lurk

A stealthy infiltrator and burglar.

There is no longer any sunlight with the cataclysm plunging the world into eternal night. Some scoundrels have grown to live in the darkness, who prowl the underworld unseen, trespassing where they will. They are the burglars, the spies, the infiltrators, the cut-throats – commonly called **Lurks**.

When you play a Lurk, you earn XP when you address a challenge with stealth or evasion. Stay out of sight, sneak past your enemies, and strike from the shadows. If things go wrong, there's no shame in disappearing into the darkness... for now. Your greatest ally is the dark and twisting city, its ink-dark streets, its rooftop pathways.

How did you learn the stealthy arts of the Lurk? Which aspect are you drawn to most? The invisible watcher, spying on the unwary? The adroit acrobat, racing across rooftops? The deadly ambush predator, waiting for a victim in the darkness?

Slide

A subtle manipulator and spy.

It's said that the primal substance of the world is not mere matter or strange plasms, it's lies. Everything we do, everything we care about, everything we value – all lies we tell each other and ourselves. The world is a convenient fiction, and its storytellers are **Slides**.

When you play a Slide, you earn XP when you address a challenge with deception or influence. Talk your way into trouble, then talk your way out again. Pretend to be someone you're not. Bluff, lie, and manipulate to get your way. Every problem is ultimately a problem because of people, and people are the instrument upon which you play your music.

Is there anything true about you, at your core? Or are you whatever you need to be, day to day? Are all of your relationships merely gambits that you play to your advantage?

Spider

A devious mastermind.

The underworld may appear on the surface to be a chaotic array of warring factions and bloody deeds, but it has a beautiful order to those who are able to see it. This pattern is the web of connections, favors, vendettas, and secrets that bind the criminal world together. The scoundrels who pluck the strands of this web are known as *Spiders*.

When you play a Spider, you earn XP when you address a challenge with calculation or conspiracy. Reach out to your contacts, friends, and associates to set your crew up for success. Use your downtime activities and flashbacks wisely to prepare for trouble and to calculate the angles of success. When things go wrong, don't panic, and remember: you planned for this.

Are you enmeshed in the network of favors and debts that you exploit as a Spider, or do you scrupulously hold yourself apart, as a cold predator upon the web?

Whisper

An arcane adept and channeler.

Duskwall is a haunted place: plagued by rogue spirits consumed by vengeance, by cunning demons manipulating humans for their own inscrutable purposes, and by even stranger horrors lurking in the space just beyond sight and reason. To go into this shadowy world without knowledge of the arcane and the occult is to walk unarmed into the lair of the enemy. The *Whispers* are the sentinels who watch the greater darkness, staring into the void so others don't have to.

When you play a Whisper, you earn XP when you address a challenge with knowledge or arcane power. Seek out the strange and dark forces and bend them to your will. By being willing to face the trauma from the stress-intensive abilities of the arcane, you'll slowly remove parts of yourself, and replace them with power.

Why did you pursue the path of the Whisper? How did you develop your abilities? Are you a natural, did you study and practice on your own, or did you have a mentor?

Crew Creation

Regardless of how a crew comes to be formed, they all have one thing in common: they exist to create a **legacy** that will last beyond the founding members. When you start a crew with your partners, you intend to build something that (hopefully) will live on past the scope of your own criminal careers. This is why we have a separate character sheet for the crew; tracking its development, growth, and influence.

In a sense, **the crew is the central figure** in the stories we're going to tell about the underworld of Doskvol. Scoundrels will come and go – burned out due to trauma, or killed, or forever lost to their vices, or, if they're very lucky, gone to some comfortable retirement – but the crew carries on. New blood comes in, new characters with new outlooks and drives, new stories to be told.

Choose a Crew Type

The **crew type** determines the group's purpose, their special abilities, and how they advance. You begin at Tier 0, with strong hold and 0 rep. You start with 2 Coin.

You all selected to play **Hawkers**: dealers of vice that source and sell illicit products to buyers within Doskvol. The crew type isn't meant to be restrictive, but the core activity of the crew type is the most frequent way they earn Coin and XP for advancement.

Choose an Initial Reputation and Lair

Your crew has just formed and acquired a lair. Given this group of characters and their previous escapades, what **initial reputation** would you have among the factions of the underworld? Choose one from the list below or create your own.

- | | |
|-------------|----------------|
| → Ambitious | → Professional |
| → Brutal | → Savvy |
| → Daring | → Subtle |
| → Honorable | → Strange |

You earn XP when you bolster your crew's reputation, so think of this as another cue to indicate what sorts of action you want in the game. Will you be recklessly ambitious, targeting higher-Tier targets? Will you take on daring scores that others deem too risky?

Also, **describe where the crew makes its lair**. You begin at Tier 0, so it's probably a very modest or abandoned sort of place at first.

Look at the map of Duskwall (see "[Welcome to Doskvol](#)") and **choose the district** in which your lair is found. Are you based in some derelict area of a wealthy district or is your lair one of many other poor hovels in a destitute area?

Establish Your Hunting Grounds

Your crew is brand-new, but you have chosen some small part of a district as your **hunting grounds**. This is the area that you usually target for your scores, and you know it well. Your hunting grounds don't have to be in the same district as your lair. The area is small, only three or four city blocks, but it's still an intrusion on someone. The entire city is divided among larger, stronger factions.

The GM will tell you which faction claims the area, then you decide how to deal with them:

- Pay them 1 Coin.
- Pay them 2 Coin. Take +1 Status.
- Pay nothing. Take -1 Status.

Your hunting grounds are useful for a particular type of criminal operation. Each crew type has a list of different operation types for their hunting grounds. For instance, Hawkers have *Sale*, *Supply*, *Show of Force*, and *Socialize* as options.

Choose one of these operation types as your preference.

When you prepare to execute your preferred operation on your hunting grounds, you get *+1d6* to any rolls to gather information and a free additional downtime activity to contribute to the subsequent Score. This can help you discover an opportunity, acquire an asset you might need for the job, find an appropriate client, etc.

When you acquire **turf**, you *also* expand the size and/or type of your hunting grounds. Detail the new area and/or methods with help from the GM.

Choose a Special Ability

Take a look at the **special abilities** for your crew and choose one. You can get more special abilities in the future by earning XP.

Assign Crew Upgrades

An upgrade is a valuable asset that helps the crew in some way, like a boat or a gang. Each crew type has two pre-selected upgrades that suit that crew. You get to add two additional upgrades to your new crew (so you'll have a total of four upgrades when you start). You can choose from the specific upgrades available to your crew type or the general upgrades on the crew sheet.

When you assign your two upgrades, the GM will tell you about two factions that are impacted by your choices:

- One faction helped you get an upgrade. Take +1 status with them. Or spend 1 coin for +2 status instead.

- One faction was harmed when you got an upgrade. Take -2 status with them. Or spend 1 coin for -1 status instead.

You'll be able to get more upgrades in the future by earning XP.

Choose a Favorite Contact

Take a look at your list of potential contacts on the crew sheet. Choose one contact who is a close friend, long-time ally, or partner in crime. The GM will tell you about two factions that are impacted by your choice:

- One faction is friendly with your contact. Take +1 status with them.
- One faction is unfriendly with your contact. Take -1 status with them.

At your option, increase the intensity of the factions' relationship with your contact and take +2 and -2 status instead.

Crew Advancement

During the game session, keep track of the following XP triggers when they occur:

- Your crew-specific XP trigger. For example, the Smugglers' is "Execute a smuggling operation or acquire new clients or contraband sources." If the crew successfully completed an operation from this trigger, mark XP.
- Contend with challenges above your current station. If you tangled with higher Tiers or more dangerous opposition, mark XP for this.
- Bolster your crew's reputation or develop a new one. Review your crew's reputation. Did you do anything to promote it? Also mark XP if you developed a new reputation for the crew.
- Express the goals, drives, inner conflict, or essential nature of the crew. This one is very broad! Essentially, did anything happen that highlighted the specific elements that make your crew unique?

At the end of the session, review your notes for when you fulfilled a crew XP trigger. For each one, mark *1 XP* if it happened at all, or *2 XP* if it happened a lot during the session. You can gain a maximum of 2 XP for each category (for a maximum total of 8 XP).

When you fill your crew advancement tracker, clear the marks and take a *new special ability* or *mark two crew upgrade boxes*. Say how you've obtained this new ability or upgrades for the crew. Where did it come from? How does it become a new part of the crew?

Every time the crew advances, each PC gets **stash** equal to the crew *Tier + 2*, to represent profits generated by the crew as they've been operating.

Crew Upgrades

General Upgrades

- ◆ **BOAT HOUSE:** You have a boat, a dock on a waterway, and a small shack to store boating supplies. A second upgrade improves the boat with armor and more cargo capacity.
- ◆ **CARRIAGE HOUSE:** You have a carriage, two goats to pull it, and a stable. A second upgrade improves the carriage with armor and larger, swifter goats. *Horses are very rare in Doskvol—most carriages in the city use the large Akorosian goat as their draft animal.*
- ◆ **COHORT:** A cohort is a gang or a single expert NPC who works for your crew. For all the details on cohorts, see the following pages.
- ◆ **HIDDEN LAIR:** Your lair has a secret location and is disguised to hide it from view. If your lair is discovered, use two downtime activities and pay **COIN** equal to your Tier to relocate it and hide it once again.
- ◆ **MASTERY:** Your crew has access to master level training. You may advance your PCs' action ratings to 4 (until you unlock this upgrade, PC action ratings are capped at 3). This costs four upgrade boxes to unlock.
- ◆ **QUALITY:** Each upgrade improves the **quality rating** of all the PCs' items of that type, beyond the quality established by the crew's Tier and fine items. You can improve the quality of **Documents**, **Gear** (covers Burglary Gear and Climbing Gear), **Arcane Implements**, **Subterfuge Supplies**, **Tools** (covers Demolitions Tools and Tinkering Tools), and **Weapons**.
So, if you are Tier 0, with fine lockpicks (+1) and the Quality upgrade for gear (+1), you could contend equally with a Tier II quality lock.
- ◆ **QUARTERS:** Your lair includes living quarters for the crew. Without this upgrade, each PC sleeps elsewhere, and is vulnerable when they do so.
- ◆ **SECURE LAIR:** Your lair has locks, alarms, and traps to thwart intruders. A second upgrade improves the defenses to include arcane measures that work against spirits. *You might roll your crew's Tier if these measures are ever put to the test, to see how well they thwart an intruder.*
- ◆ **TRAINING:** If you have a Training upgrade, you earn 2 xp (instead of 1) when you train a given xp track during downtime (**INSIGHT**, **PROWESS**, **RESOLVE**, or **Playbook xp**). This upgrade essentially helps you advance more quickly. See **Advancement**, page 48.
*If you have **Insight Training**, when you train **INSIGHT** during downtime, you mark 2 xp on the **INSIGHT** track (instead of just 1). If you have **Playbook Training**, you mark 2 xp on your **playbook xp** track when you train.*
- ◆ **VAULT:** Your lair has a secure vault, increasing your storage capacity for **COIN** to 8. A second upgrade increases your capacity to 16. A separate part of your vault can be used as a holding cell.
- ◆ **WORKSHOP:** Your lair has a workshop appointed with tools for tinkering and alchemy, as well as a small library of books, documents, and maps. You may accomplish long-term projects with these assets without leaving your lair.

Hawkers Upgrades

- ◆ **Hawker Rigging:** One carried item is concealed and has no load. *For example, you could carry a load of drugs or a weapon, perfectly concealed, for zero load.*
- ◆ **Ironhook Contacts:** Your Tier is effectively +1 higher in prison. *This counts for any Tier-related element in prison, including the incarceration roll (see page 148).*
- ◆ **Elite Rooks:** All of your cohorts with the Rooks type get +1d to quality rolls for Rook-related actions.
- ◆ **Elite Thugs:** All of your cohorts with the Thugs type get +1d to quality rolls for Thug-related actions.
- ◆ **Composed:** Each PC gets +1 **stress box**. This costs three upgrades to unlock, not just one.

Hawker Special Abilities

SILVER TONGUES

Each PC may add +1 action rating to **COMMAND**, **CONSORT**, or **SWAY** (up to a max rating of 3).

Each player may choose the action they prefer (you don't all have to choose the same one). If you take this ability during initial character and crew creation, it supersedes the normal starting limit for action ratings.

ACCORD

Sometimes friends are as good as territory. You may treat up to three +3 **faction statuses** you hold as if they are **turf**.

*If your status changes, you lose the turf until it becomes +3 again. Regardless of how much turf you hold (from this ability or otherwise) the minimum **REP** cost to advance your Tier is always 6.*

GHOST MARKET

Through arcane ritual or hard-won experience, you have discovered how to prepare your product for sale to ghosts and/or demons. *They do not pay in coin. What do they pay with?*

The GM will certainly have an idea about how your strange new clients pay, but jump in with your own ideas, too! This ability is usually a big shift in the game, so talk it out and come up with something that everyone is excited about. If it's a bit mysterious and uncertain, that's good. You have more to explore that way.

THE GOOD STUFF

Your merchandise is exquisite. The product **quality** is equal to your **Tier +2**. When you deal with a crew or faction, the GM will tell you who among them is hooked on your product (one, a few, many, or all).

The quality of your product might be used for a fortune roll to find out how impressed a potential client is, to find out how enthralled or incapacitated a user is in their indulgence of it, to discover if a strange variation has side-effects, etc.

HIGH SOCIETY

It's all about who you know. Take -1 **HEAT** during downtime and +1d to **gather information** about the city's elite.

HOOKED

Your gang members use your product. Add the *savage*, *unreliable*, or *wild* flaw to your gangs to give them +1 **quality** (max rating of 4).

PATRON

When you advance your **Tier**, it costs **half the COIN** it normally would.

Who is your patron? Why do they help you?

Player's Best Practices

Taken directly from the Blades player handbook!

Embrace the Scoundrel's Life

The scoundrel's lot is a tough one, to be sure. The world in which they are trapped is deeply, cruelly unfair—created by the powerful to maintain their power and punish anyone who dares to resist. Some of the systems of the game are built to bring these injustices into play. No matter how cool or how capable the PCs are, the Heat will pile on, entanglements will blindside them, the powers-that-be will try to kick them down with no regard.

Depending on who you are in real life, this predicament may come as a shock to you, requiring some new understanding on your part. Or it may be all too familiar. Either way, your character is not you. Their fate is their own. We're the advocates and fans of our characters, but they are not us. We don't safeguard them as we might safeguard ourselves or our loved ones. They must go off into their dark and brutal world and strive and suffer for what they achieve—we can't keep them safe here with us. They're brave to try. We're brave to follow their story and not flinch away. When they get knocked down, we look them in the eye and say, "You're not done yet. You can do this. Get back in there." And, unlike in our own world, our characters in *Blades in the Dark* cannot be defeated by mere power. They can be hurt—and they surely will be—but their resistance is always effective. The tools of oppression ultimately break against their defiance.

If we're willing to step back a bit, to not suffer their trials as personal failures, to imagine them as perseverant when we ourselves might quail, we might get to see them win past pain and despair into something else. It's a long shot, but they're up for it.

Go Into Danger, Fall in Love with Trouble

You're a daring scoundrel on the mean streets of a haunted city. You're not a risk-averse, ordinary citizen. If you were, you'd indenture yourself to a work-house and scrape out a meager living inside the status quo. You are daring, bold, ambitious, and ready to take big chances to live a bigger life.

Don't shoot down risky ideas. If something sounds fun and dangerous, well, that's great! The game system is designed to make risky actions very achievable for the PCs. Objections like "they might catch you," or "you could mess it up" are meaningless. There will always be risk in everything you do.

You're scoundrels at the bottom of the pile, daring to challenge the powers-that-be. Embrace this idea! Aim the action of the game toward what's cool and fun and don't feel like you have to manage every little risk. There will always be trouble and consequences of some kind. You'll drive yourself batty if you try to avoid it all.

Consequences aren't failures. Most actions will result in consequences—harm, stress, heat, new enemies, etc. But, in turn, most actions will succeed. Even with just two dice, you have a 75% chance of success. Success with complications, sure, but success nonetheless.

This means that you can take risks to achieve your character's goals—goals that a person with your character's lot in life would otherwise never achieve—you'll just have to suffer the consequences to get there. Is it painful for your character? Sure. Pursuing their goals will grind them down and hurt them in many different ways. But it doesn't have to be painful for you! Consequences drive the action of the game. Consequences give you more chances to do cool scoundrel-y things—which is the whole point of playing the game!

Don't let consequences frustrate you. Enjoy the rare 6 that lets you do it scot-free, but also learn to love those 4s and 5s. That's the core of the scoundrel life.

Mechanics Follow Narrative

As a player, you have the privilege of choosing which action to roll. But with this privilege comes a responsibility—choose the action that matches what your character is doing—not simply the dice pool you would like to roll.

For example, when you roll Tinker, it's because you tinker with something. When you roll Sway, it's because you sway someone's opinion. If your crafty Leech shows off a cool gadget they made in order to sway a potential client, then the Leech is Swaying them. They're not "using Tinker" to impress the person. That's not how actions work.

Of course, you can do a setup action with Tinker to build a gadget that might impress someone so they're more easily swayed (thereby increasing the effect or position of a follow-up action). But when you actually go to sway them, you roll your Sway dice. That's why they're called actions, not skills. They're about what you're doing, not what you know.

If you're the type of player that really needs to use their best dice pool all the time, take the Slide's special ability Rook's Gambit. It will cost you stress—but at least you won't be a weasel.

Take Responsibility as a Co-Author

You are a co-author of the game. If you want shortcomings and flaws to be part of the ongoing story, show your own character's failure to make good decisions.

If you want the world of Doskvol to be deadly, accept deadly harm when it's time for your character to die.

In *Blades*, every participant is responsible for the tone, style, and themes of the game—not just the GM. As a player, you have an expressive role to play at the table, not just a tactical one. Think about what you have to say as a co-author of the ongoing fiction and then use your character to say it.

Use Your Stress

The ability to take stress is what separates your scoundrel from all the other people in the Dusk. Stress represents a pool of potential that can make you and your crew much more effective if you're willing to use it.

Take 2 stress to push yourself and get an assist from a teammate (they take 1 stress) and your odds of success greatly increase. The game is balanced so things are pretty tough for characters by default—that's the nature of Doskvol, after all. But by burning your stress, you can “break the rules” and perform beyond what you normally could achieve. If you hoard your stress, you might find that things are very tough for you.

Don't Talk Yourself Out of Fun

When it's time to choose a type of plan, pick the one that sounds fun to you. Sure, your characters might try to play it smart and come up with a “good” idea and everything, but don't forget that you're playing this game so you can have exciting scenes of underworld action that appeal to you. Advocate for the plan type that will be most interesting and exciting—not always the one that seems like the clever thing to do. Your characters are daring, right? You can be, too. Go with what sounds like fun. The game will take care of the rest.

Build Your Character Through Play

Type shit.

Act Now, Plan Later

Type shit!