

Gateway Roleplaying System

# Core Rules

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# Gateway Core Rulebook

## Contents

<b>Introduction</b> . . . . .	3
About this book . . . . .	3
An active community . . . . .	3
<b>Chapter 1: Core Mechanics</b> . . . .	4
Basic System . . . . .	4
Challenges . . . . .	6
The Gamesmaster Roll . . . . .	7
Narrative Interventions . . . . .	8
Equipment . . . . .	9
<b>Chapter 2: Character Creation</b> 10	
Character concept . . . . .	10
Spending points . . . . .	10
An Example character . . . . .	11
Gaining Character Points . . . . .	12
<b>Chapter 3: Dramatic Systems</b> . 13	
Entities . . . . .	13
Basic concepts . . . . .	13
Initiating a scene . . . . .	14
Drama rounds . . . . .	14
Action effects . . . . .	14
Hints and tips . . . . .	18
Example scenes. . . . .	20

# Introduction

## Before You Begin...

We assume that if you are reading this you are already familiar with roleplaying games. If you have not, please direct yourself to your favourite of the games written using the **Gateway** system, which describes in detail what a roleplaying game is and show one way, at least, of how to get the most out of the system.

Welcome to the **Gateway Roleplaying System**.

**Gateway** is a universal roleplaying game, adaptable to any setting or situation you can think of. This book introduces you to the core rules of the system, including character creation and development, and dramatic resolution - **Gateway's** unique system for resolving any dramatic event in your game.

Unlike other universal roleplaying games, **Gateway** doesn't compromise game flavour or atmosphere for the sake of uniform systems. **Gateway's** combination of versatile character traits, adaptable core systems and unique game mechanic features allow it to adapt to any game concept you wish.

## About this book

This book covers all of the basic rules for the **Gateway Roleplaying Game**. Each chapter covers a section of the rules, building from core mechanics to advanced rules and character development.

The first chapter covers the core mechanics of the game – including dice rolling and outcome systems, and an overview of character backgrounds and traits and how they work in the game.

Chapter two details character creation, showing how to pick your traits and backgrounds, and character development.

The third chapter looks at the *Universal Drama* system used to capture the action and tension in your game.

Throughout the book you will find some parts of the book are aimed at people deigning their own games (the games designer), people wanting to run a game (the games master) and people wanting to play

a character within the game (the player). As a general rule of thumb, the book is written for the player. Where choices or information exists for the games designer's or games master's benefit it is clearly stated that this information is for them.

## An active community

We see this first version of Gateway as something of an experiment—we believe we have created something unique within roleplaying games and want to get as much feedback on the game as possible, Please sign up to our website and tell us what you think.

We're keen to hear how you've used Gateway and how you found the system enhanced your game. What house rules or tweaks have you used in your games—please let us know!

## Licensed Gateway Games

If you like Gateway and want to publish your own Gateway game material, get in touch and we can talk about a free license.

# Chapter One: Core Mechanics

## Basic System

Like many roleplaying games, **Gateway** uses a dice rolling system to determine your character's success when they encounter a difficulty or an opponent. Each time you are asked to make a dice roll your character will be involved in some form of conflict, whether this is with another person, an inanimate object or their inner self. As such, dice rolls are called *Challenges*, and involve both you and the GM making a dice roll to represent the strength of different sides in the conflict.

In **Gateway** every challenge, makes use of two character elements – a *Trait* and a *Background*. In general you will roll a number eight-sided dice determined by an appropriate Trait and add a number to this based on an appropriate Background, and apply some numerical modifiers to get your final challenge roll result.

Lets have a look at Traits and Backgrounds before we look at how the challenges work in detail.

## Traits

In **Gateway** characters, or occasionally other entities that participate within the drama, will have a number of traits that describe their self defining characteristics. A trait can be anything you think helps

describe your character's make up. Examples might include Mighty, Agile, Vengeful, Commanding, Discerning, Iron Willed, Determined or Quick Witted. Traits should not be used to represent training or activity-based aspects of your as these are described by *Backgrounds* (see below).

Your traits are divided into four categories: *Fate*, *Mental*, *Physical*, and *Social*. Each trait needs to be assigned to a given category when it is bought. Traits can be assigned to multiple categories, but must be bought multiple times. For example, your character might have a Determined trait assigned to Mental, Physical and Social, a Resilient trait assigned to physical, a Rugged trait assigned to Social and a Vengeful trait assigned to Fate; your Determined trait will cost you as much as the other three traits combined.

**A note on traits:** Although traits are categorised as physical, mental or similar, they do not necessarily have to be physical or mental characteristics in themselves. For example, if your character has a driving vengeance, and you want that passion to enable him to kick ass whenever he is chasing down his nemesis, you can assign your "Vengeful" trait to your physical category as well as any other

category you might also wish to assign it to.

## Traits in Challenge Rolls

To make a challenge roll either you must first describe what effect you want to achieve, or the GM describe an effect that the circumstances dictate you should try to achieve. Once the situation has been described you should declare which of your traits you wish to use.

The games master must then decide how well the trait fits the situation the challenge represents. The games master will give you a number of eight-sided dice (d8s) to roll based on how well suited your trait is to the effect, as indicated in table 1.1. When working out the final result of the roll you pick the highest score from the pool of dice – you *don't* add the dice rolls together.

## Backgrounds

Backgrounds cover the main things that define your character's interactions, past and present, with the external world. They can represent training, contacts, rank or standing, and general related knowledge within a given area of

Table 1.1 Trait Relevance and Dice Rolled

Level of Relevance	Trait dice rolled
<b>Full</b> – the challenge fits exactly with what the trait represents	3d8
<b>Partial</b> – the challenge isn't exactly related to the trait, but it shows some relevance	2d8
<b>Unrelated</b> – the challenge bears no relevance to the trait being used	1d8

expertise. Backgrounds can also be used to allow the player to take control of the story in some minor way, such as having an ally turn up out of the blue. The game designer should design a set of backgrounds to cover the different things characters will be expected to do within their game. The names of these backgrounds, and what can be achieved with each one, can be separate or overlapping and can include multiple different aspects, provided they are all tied in to the description of the background itself.

Backgrounds can be used to make the following different basic types of test:

**Action:** Most backgrounds will involve some form of training or experience at performing some kind of action, whether it is making an attack, building a device, hacking into a computer system or telling a convincing lie.

**Knowledge:** A character with a background in a certain area will undoubtedly pick up a few key facts relating to their given area of expertise. This can include a knowledge of a detailed subject matter in itself (such as from a Science background), a knowledge of tricks of the trade or the ability to identify workmanship, or even the ability to recognise people and know details of any reputation they may have built up within the background area. Knowledge challenges can be made with a background to recall facts or recognise people, items or

events relating to their background. Tests can also be made to draw conclusions by piecing together different pieces of knowledge.

**Notice:** A background can be used to help you notice things out of place or unusual, where related to your background. A Wilderness background might allow you to spot lurking ambushers or edible fungi, a Street background might help you identify whether someone is concealing a weapon, whilst a military background might let you spot a likely point of attack.

**Investigate:** A background provides both contacts and an understanding of the basic principles of research within its given domain. This background use allows characters to hit the streets or the books, go online or otherwise investigate a suitable topic for their background. This use could also cover investigating a crime scene, performing a scientific experiment, asking a number of people within the background's sphere of influence, or finding the right person to ask the crucial question.

**Acquire:** Your background represents how capable you are of acquiring certain goods, services or items, through whatever means you deem appropriate. This use could involve stealing items, acquiring them on the black market or buying them with cash and correct licences from legitimate sources.

**Narrative Intervention:** You can

use your backgrounds to produce a Narrative Intervention. This is when you, the player, dictate a story element that the GM has to include in the adventure. This could be seeing another unrelated character who coincidentally knows something about the plot, or a taxi turning up just at the right moment. However, the intervention must be something somehow related to the character's background trait.

## Backgrounds in Challenges

Once you have decided on the effects of the challenge and decided on the trait you are going to use. Once the situation has been described you should declare which background you wish to use.

The games master must then decide how well the background fits the situation the challenge represents. If the GM doesn't feel the background is appropriate you can't use it to modify the challenge roll. However, if the background is partially relevant you can use it, but must take a raise on the roll to succeed (see Raises below for more details). These effects are summarised in Table 1.2, below.

## Specialisations

A specialisation represents your focus within a background area. Different people with similar backgrounds have different areas of expertise. For example, someone with an

Engineering background might be a designer, mechanic or academic in the field. Such characters will have

Table 1.12 Background Relevance and Penalties

Level of Relevance	Penalty
<b>Full</b> – the challenge fits exactly with what the background represents	0
<b>Partial</b> – the challenge isn't exactly related to the background, but it shows some relevance	1 raise
<b>Unrelated</b> – the challenge bears no relevance to the background being used	Background cannot be used

different capabilities when it comes to working with the machines and structures their Engineering background might represent.

When you want to specialise your character in a given area you should choose one of the six uses for the background. When you employ that background use in a challenge you get to add +2 to the roll. You can have up to three specialisations per background. You can only gain the specialisation bonus if you are using the linked background – if the GM has determined that your background can't be used on the challenge roll, you similarly can't apply the specialisation bonus.

## Challenges

This section describes the mechanisms for making a challenge roll in more detail, summarising what has been previously stated with regard to traits and backgrounds and introducing new aspects to the roll.

The challenge roll system can be summarised as follows:

- # When a challenge roll is made either you will describe what effect you want to achieve, or the GM describe an effect that the circumstances dictate you should try to achieve.
- # Once the situation has been described you should declare which combination of traits and backgrounds you wish to use.
- # The games master decides how well the trait and background fit the situation the challenge represents. The games master will give you a number of dice to roll based on how well suited your trait is to the effect, as indicated in Table 1.1, and may also apply a penalty to your test if the GM thinks your background is not well related to the desired effect, as described in Table 1.2.
- # Further modifiers can be applied to the roll: If you are using an appropriate background and have a specialisation that can be applied you add a further +2 to the roll. If you are using any equipment that would help you on the task you can add a further +1 or +2 (see Equipment, below).
- # If you choose to spend an appropriate point of *Essence* you gain an extra dice added to your pool (see Essence, below).
- # Before you make the roll you must decide how many *Raises* you wish to take on the challenge. Raises allow you to achieve additional effects for the challenge (see Raises, below, and Chapter 3: Dramatic Systems, for more details on how you can use raises).
- # You roll the number of dice suggested by your trait score, including a bonus dice if you spent an essence point, and keep the best roll. Then add your level in the background used in the challenge, specialisation and equipment modifiers to your dice roll result to find your result.
- # At the same time that you make your roll, the games master will also be making a roll to represent the level of challenge you face.
- # The GM determines whether the challenge is being resolved against another character or some other kind of entity.
- # If the challenge is against a GM-controlled character, the GM determines the dice and modifiers for the opposed roll in the same way as a player does for their roll.
- # If the challenge is against some other kind of entity, such as an inanimate object, the GM must determine a Variability (which determines the number of dice used), and a Challenge Level

(which applies a modifier to the roll).

- # If you took any raises on your roll the GM adds a further +2 to their result for each raise used.
- # Finally, your result is compared against the GM's result to determine success.

## Raises

Whenever you participate in a challenge in **Gateway** you can increase the level of success you achieve by taking *Raises*. Each raise you wish to achieve on the roll adds two to the opposed roll in the challenge. If the challenge result is equal to or higher than this new opposed roll, the challenge succeeds with the raises taken. These raises can be spent to achieve a range of additional effects, as described in the *Drama Resolution System* in Chapter Three. If the roll fails to reach the beat the new opposed test result the task is failed – you have overstepped your ability.

In many situations in **Gateway** the GM may wish to grant characters free raises as a special bonus on a given task. In these cases characters who succeed in a task the benefit of the raises without there being any increase the opposed roll. These free raises are applied in addition to any raises gained from increasing the opposed roll.

## Essence

Essence represents your character's ability to gain an extra edge on their actions, whether through luck, extra effort, sheer determination or any other factor your character can bring to bear. Each category of trait – Fate, Mental, Physical and Social – has its own Essence pool, rated between 1 and 6. Whenever you make a challenge roll using a trait from a

given category you can choose to spend an essence point to get an extra dice to roll. Even if you have no appropriate trait to roll you can spend an essence point from the appropriate category. For example, lets say you were trying to heave a massive boulder out of your way. This is definitely a physical challenge, yet you only have one physical trait: Deft Fingers. However, you can spend one point of physical essence to increase your dice pool to 2 dice.

## The Games Master Roll

As you make your challenge roll the games master must also make a roll to resolve the success of the conflict. To make this roll the GM must determine both the modifier that is added to the dice roll and the number of dice to be rolled. Your challenge rolls are always opposed by another *entity* within the *Drama Resolution System*. Entities represent anything your character might dramatically interact with, whether it is another character, an inanimate object, a physical structure or your own inner fears or conscience.

When challenging another character the GM (or indeed the player of that character) calculates the dice and modifier based on the opposing character's trait and background.

When challenging any other kind of entity the GM needs to decide on the number of dice to roll and the modifier to add to the roll. The GM needs to set a *Variability* and a *Challenge Level* for the roll.

## Challenge Level

Any challenge represents a conflict between your character and the entity. The challenge level generates the modifier for the roll. The GM simply decides how testing the conflict is for your character and applies a number between zero and six to represent this challenge. Some examples for challenge levels are given in Table 1.3, but the GM should note that any number may be given for the challenge level, not just even numbers.

## Variability

Any entity that a challenge roll is made against will have a number of variable factors that might affect the likelihood of the challenge failing or succeeding. To workout the Variability of the roll the GM needs to consider the number of different compounding factors that might reduce your ability to overcome the challenge.

If there are very few factors that might reduce your chance of success, or an equal number of obstructive and supportive factors the outcome of

the challenge will be highly variable and the GM will roll a low number of dice.

Factors that might affect the challenge might include bad weather, strong winds, and low oxygen levels when climbing a mountain, or the build quality and maintenance level of mechanical or electronic devices. For challenges against your "inner self" factors might include your emotional closeness to or distance from a person, the degree of stress you are under at the time or other metaphysical factors.

If there are a large number of factors that add to the level of challenge, and very few that might assist your character, the outcome of the challenge will be less variable and more challenging. As a result the GM will roll a large number of dice (picking the best result as described above).

As a general rule of thumb, use two dice as a starting point for most reliability ratings. If you think the challenge has a large number of hindering factors increase the number of dice, if it has fewer obstructive factors, or more helpful factors, use only one dice. Some examples to help you decide how many dice to use can be found in Table 1.4.

## Success or Failure

Whenever a challenge is performed, even when that challenge involves two opposed characters, there will always be one character who is *acting*. The acting character must equal or

Table 1.3 Challenge Level Modifiers

Challenge Level	Modifier
<b>Nearly Impossible</b> – surviving a lightning strike or falling 100ft or more	+10
<b>Taxing</b> – running marathon, performing complex surgery	+8
<b>Difficult</b> – climbing a mountain, PhD level research	+6
<b>Tricky</b> – climbing over a wall, investigating a crime scene	+4
<b>Moderate</b> – shooting the lock off a door from 10 feet away, programming a computer to analyse some simple data.	+2
<b>Easy</b> – Opening an unlocked door, taking a photograph	+0

beat the target's result to achieve a successful result in their activity. The *Universal Drama* system described in chapter three covers the actual game results of success or failure in any given challenge.

## Narrative Interventions

Most challenges your character will make will involve a direct relationship between your character and the target entity. Narrative interventions, however, don't actually involve your character or your target in any direct way. Whilst the roll is made in the normal way for a challenge, and the effect detailed in the same way as any other action (see Chapter 3: Dramatic Systems), success allows the player to take over the narration of the game for a brief moment, allowing them to describe an event that leads to the effects of their challenge.

### The Narrative Intervention Challenge

The challenge roll you make is made in a similar manner to any other roll: You choose a trait and background that best reflect the desired effect and the GM tells you how many dice

to roll and what modifier to add to your background. However, every Narrative Intervention challenge requires a Fate-assigned trait to be used.

A basic narrative intervention allows a single *In-Line Event* to be narrated within the scope of the current action. Raises can be used to achieve further effects, as described below. The effects of any action are determined through the use of the *Drama Resolution System* and must comply to those rules when the effect is described.

The narrative intervention challenge requires raises in the following circumstances:

**Flashback Event:** A flashback event is something that has already occurred and can lead to a greater range of possible consequences. It is the consequence of the flashback that impacts on the current development of the story. For example, this could involve you having been given a piece of specialist equipment earlier in the adventure that is precisely the tool you need for the situation you find yourself in. Flashback events require a single raise to achieve.

**Plot Complications:** If the GM deems your narrative intervention will involve complications to the progression of the plot they can ask you to take any number of raises on

the challenge they deem appropriate.

**Plot Ramifications:** Often the narrative intervention you suggest will play right into the GM's hands, helping develop the plot along precisely the lines he or she has been planning. In such circumstances, the GM should award you a free raise on the challenge.

## Equipment

Equipment is an important part of most roleplaying games. The right tools can make all the difference between success and failure. This section covers the simple mechanics used for equipment in Gateway and provides a few example pieces of equipment for you to use in your games.

### Equipment Traits

Like characters, equipment has a number of traits that describe its effects. Whilst equipment traits can be as varied and diverse as character traits, a typical piece of equipment will have fewer traits than a typical character.

Equipment traits also work differently to character traits. For every trait a piece of equipment has that the GM feels can be applied to a given challenge you gain a +1 bonus to the challenge roll.

A trait can also be used to cancel your opponent using a trait; for example, the Penetrating trait might prevent the use of an Armour trait by your opponent. A maximum bonus of +2 can be applied to any challenge roll, so

Table 1.4 Variability and Dice Rolled

Variability	Dice Rolled
<b>Predictably Tough</b> – Your character is up against a tough challenge with multiple factors confounding your chances of success.	4d8
<b>Consistently challenging</b> – The challenge involves a number of factors that make your life difficult, but not as many or with a few that assist you in the challenge.	3d8
<b>Variable</b> – the challenge involved is involves a number of variable factors and is prone to some variety in the outcome	2d8
<b>Random</b> – there are few factors working against you, or a greater number that work in your favour, making the challenge more random in its outcome.	1d8



utilising a combination of traits to provide bonuses and prevent the use of your opponents traits allows you to gain the biggest advantage over your opponent.

The circumstances in which an equipment trait can be used depends very much on the situation and should be determined by the GM. Think about how far away the opponent is, are they restricted by their opponent (see action effects in the *Drama Resolution System* below), what other situational effects might prevent the character from using a piece of equipment effectively, and therefore denying them the bonus.

The types of equipment available and the traits and how they work off against each other will be determined by the game designer. It is useful if the game designer states rules for preventing the use of an equipment trait and creates a set list of equipment available in their game. Some example pieces of equipment and their traits can be found in Table 1.5, below.

This table includes a simple set of weapons along with their traits as an example or starting point for a games designer to start thinking about how to put their own equipment list and equipment traits together. In this list the following traits can be used to prevent other traits being used:

- # *Penetrating* can prevent the *Armour* trait being used.
- # *Heavy* can prevent the *Mighty* trait being used.
- # *Padding* can prevent the *Smashing* trait being used.
- # *Firearm* can prevent the *Armour* trait being used.
- # *Bulletproof* can prevent the *Firearm* trait being used.

Table 1.5 Example Equipment Traits

Item	Traits
<i>Weapons</i>	
Rapier	Weapon, Parrying, Penetrating
Long sword	Weapon, Slashing
Battle Axe	Weapon, Mighty, Slashing
Warhammer	Weapon, Mighty, Smashing
Longbow	Weapon, Bow
Shotgun	Weapon, Shotgun
Revolver	Weapon, Handgun, Firearm
Hunting Rifle	Weapon, Scope, Long Arm, Firearm
<i>Armour</i>	
Platemail	Armour, Heavy
Leather armour	Armour, Padding
Flak Jacket	Armour, Bulletproof
<i>General Equipment</i>	
Camera	Recording device, Visual
Surgeon's Implements	Tools, Surgery
Electrician's tools	Tools, Electrical
Laptop Computer	Computer, Recording Device, Internet

## Chapter Two: Character Creation

Creating a character in **Gateway** is little different from many other roleplaying games. Essentially, **Gateway** uses a points-spend paradigm for both character creation and development. This approach has a number of advantages, most important to a universal system like **Gateway** is that it allows you to create any character power level of character or entity from incompetent children to galactic empires.

### Character Concept

The most important starting point for

creating a character in any roleplaying game is to get an idea of your character – the character concept – before you begin to put them together on paper. When you're happy with the concept, move on to spending your points and building your character.

### Spending Points

To create your character you need to spend your character points to pay for traits and backgrounds. The number of points you spend will depend on the power level of the

game you are playing, and the number of traits and backgrounds you are expected to buy. The game designer needs to find a suitable power level for the game, or perhaps suggest a range of power levels for the GM to choose between when they run their game. For some rough guidance, look at table 2.1 for some typical point levels for starting characters.

Once you know how many points you have to spend on your character you can begin to spend them on traits, backgrounds (including specialisations), and essence.

**Traits:** Each category you assign a trait to cost two points. There are no limits (other than the number of categories themselves) to the number of categories you can assign a trait to.

**Backgrounds:** Each level in a background costs two points, and can range from 1 to 6. However, characters are limited to only having three levels in any given background, although GMs, as an optional rule, can allow a small number of additional levels beyond this cap, such as 1 background being allowed to raised to five, or two backgrounds up to four.

**Specialisations:** Each specialisation in a background also costs two points, and you can assign up to three specialisations per background.

**Essence:** Each point of Essence for a given

Table 2.1 Typical Starting Character Points

Table Header	Points
<b>Super Heroes</b> – whether literally super powered or just the main focus of a high-action adventure, these characters are highly capable, able to achieve the seemingly impossible in their specialised areas.	80
<b>Heroic</b> – Characters with a high degree of competency on their areas of expertise, and often a wide range of abilities.	65
<b>Competent</b> – Characters able to complete a range of activities in their chosen areas of expertise, but without the full level of expertise or range of abilities of the heroic.	50
<b>Average</b> – A typical person with some ability in a limited number of areas, but nothing spectacular.	35

Table 2.2 Character Element Costs

Character Element	Cost
<b>Traits</b> – for each category you assign a trait to.	2
<b>Background</b> – for each level in a given background (max 3).	2
<b>Specialisation</b> – for each specialisation in a use linked to a background (max 3).	2
<b>Essence</b> – for each category point of essence (max 3).	1

category costs one point, and can range from 0 to 6. However, characters are limited to only having three levels in any given background, although GMs, as an optional rule, can allow a small number of additional levels beyond this cap, such as 1 background being allowed to raised to four.

These point costs are summarised in Table 2.2.

**Traits-to-Backgrounds Ratio:** You must spend at least one quarter of your points on traits and essence, and at least one quarter on backgrounds and specialisations, the rest of your points can be spent in either area as you see fit.

## An Example Character

The following example works through how to create a **Gateway** character.

**Points:** The game I'm going to create a character for is one where the characters are quite competent and capable, but not heroic. As such players have 50 points to spend on their characters.

**Concept:** Thomas Snape was orphaned at a young age and left to fend for himself on the mean streets of Kalberg. Tom soon found himself falling into the criminal gangs that ran the underbelly of the city. Tom, quick wits and exceptional memory soon brought him to the notice of the Schattengraf, the ruler of the undercity. Kalberg is dominated by a ruling class of wizards, who's power the Schattengraf craved. The Schattengraf sent Tom, still a boy, to train in the Arcane College, where he began to learn some of the Wizards' secrets, but was discovered and sentenced to death before he could fully master their secrets. However, Tom escaped the wizards and disappeared back into the

underworld. Knowing the Schattengraf would punish him equally fatally for his failure, he assumed a false identity and joined one of the city's gangs.

**Traits:** Tom's primary characteristics are his intelligence and quick wit. As such I'll buy these up as traits: Quick Witted can apply to both mental and social challenges, so I'll buy that assigned to two categories, whilst to represent his school-of-hard-knocks intelligence I'll buy a trait called Sharp Mind, assigned to the mental category only. Tom is also a survivor, of the slippery kind, capable of wriggling his way out of a wide range of situations. As such I will also buy a Slippery trait and assign it to the physical and social categories. Finally, Tom is hunted by both the wizards and the Schattengraf. I want this to be a big part of the game, but I want Tom to be able to escape or go unnoticed as much as possible, so I buy him a Hunted trait assigned to the Fate category.

*Tom has the following traits: Fate (Hunted), Mental (Sharp Mind, Quick Witted), Physical (Slippery), Social (Quick-Witted, Slippery). Total cost: 12 points.*

**Essence:** Tom is very much a mental and social character, so he will specialise in these areas when thinking about his essence. I'll buy three points of essence social and two points in mental, and spend a single point on Fate, to represent Tom's luck.

*Tom has the following essence scores: Fate 1, Mental 2, Physical 0, Social 3. Total cost: 6 points.*

**Backgrounds:** Tom has spent his life working in a variety of professions in the criminal underworld. Given that the game focuses on the criminal underworld in the fantasy city of Kalberg, there are a wide number of criminal backgrounds available. Tom

## The Finished Character:

Here are Tom's final game scores:

### Traits:

- # Hunted (Fate)
- # Sharp Mind (Mental)
- # Quick Witted (Mental, Social)
- # Slippery (Physical, Social)

### Backgrounds and Specialisations:

- # Arcanist 1
- # Blag 4 (acquire)
- # Cat Burglar 3
- # Inner Circle 1 (knowledge)
- # Sneak 3
- # Street Beggar 2

### Essence:

- # Fate 1
- # Mental 2
- # Social 3

is primarily a sneak-thief and confidence trickster, but also has some magical training and some knowledge of the Schattengraf's inner workings. I start by buying up the key aspects built in to his background: one level of Arcanist for his magical training, one level of the Inner Circle background, to represent his former connections to the Schattengraf, and two levels of Street Beggar, to represent his orphaned past. Next I spend the remaining points to represent the tricks of the trade he has mastered, buying two levels of Undercover and Cat Burglar, and three of Blag and Sneak to represent his skills of the trade.

*Tom has the following backgrounds: Arcanist 1, Blag 3, Cat Burglar 2, Inner Circle 1, Sneak 3, Street Beggar 2. and Undercover 2. Total cost: 28 points*

**Specialisations:** After calculating a quick running total I work out I have spent forty-six points, leaving me four points remaining – two specialisations. I think Tom is best at blagging people, particularly when it comes to removing people of their possessions, and so buy him an Acquire specialisation in Blag. I also want to represent the fact that Tom's connections with the Inner Circle are

## Gaining Character Points

very much something in the past, and that couldn't be easily drawn on for influence during the game. Whilst his low Inner Circle level represents this, I feel it doesn't accurately represent the level of knowledge of the Inner Circle he will have acquired. A specialisation in Knowledge on his Inner Circle background allows me to achieve this without needing further levels in the background which might make him more influential than would be appropriate. As such I buy a knowledge specialisation on Tom's Inner Circle background.

*Tom has the following specialisations: Acquire (for Blag) and Knowledge (for Inner Circle). Total cost: 4 points.*

Table 2.3 Character Element

Character Element	Cost
<b>Traits</b>	2
<b>Background</b> (max 6 levels).	2
<b>Specialisation</b> (max 3 per background).	2
<b>Essence</b> (max 6 levels).	1

As with any other roleplaying game, **Gateway** characters grow and progress over time. The storylines your characters are involved in will also develop.

At the end of gaming session, or at an appropriate juncture in the storyline, the GM will award you a number of character points to spend on improving your character. These points are spent in the same way as when you created your character. To improve your character's traits, backgrounds, essence or specialisations you simply need to spend these points as described above.

However, some of the limitations to what you can spend your points on have been lifted—you are no longer limited to a score of three in a Background or Essence rating, and can now develop these to a

maximum of six. You are, however, still limited to 3 specialisations per background.

The costs for developing each character element are the same as they were during character creation. See table 2.3 for a reminder.

## Awarding Character Points

The GM can determine how to award you character points. The different ways in which they can do this will depend on the style of game and the rate of character development they feel is appropriate to the game.

Awarding more points will mean that characters develop rapidly, which is good for epic, heroic questing adventures. Alternatively, a slow development, maybe awarding only a single point at the end of each adventure, will emphasise the character's struggle against the odds.

**Gateway** introduces a new way of resolving any kind of dramatic situation in the game. By dramatic

## Chapter Three: Dramatic Systems

situations we mean any situation in the game where drama is tense and building up to some kind of climax. This system is designed to enable the GM and players to create tense story-building scenes in their game which capture the feel of the film, TV and literature inspirations for a roleplaying game experience. The whole rest of the game system works through the *Drama Resolution System*. Every situation should be handled using these rules.

### Entities

The *Drama Resolution System* is a universal system that can describe a wide range of dramatic scenes. As such it needs a universal way to describe the different characters involved in a scene, gangs of thugs or units of soldiers, along with any other physical obstructions, emotional issues or other dramatically appropriate obstacles within the scene: "Entities."

Entities are a universal manner of describing anything that might play a role within the drama of the scene. Entities can represent individuals, groups of people, puzzles, traps, locked doors, sheer walls, unstable surfaces, emotions, your conscience or other psychological effects, buildings, vehicles – anything! Within the system entities link to each other target each other to represent the different situations and events that take place within a scene.

### Basic Concepts

The *Drama Resolution System* makes use of a few basic concepts to

achieve the feelings of tension and climax that are needed to resolve the dramatic event, whatever it may be. This section introduces and describes these concepts.

**Scene:** Every scene within the game is a separate resolution of this system. When a scene is resolved, whether in dramatic climax or unfortunate anticlimax, a new scene immediately begins with a new set of characters and events involved, starting a new series of rounds and a whole new resolution.

**Active and Passive Entities:** Entities are classed as *active* or *passive*. Active entities, usually but not necessarily representing other characters, are allowed to make their own actions within each round, whereas a passive entity can only react to actions made against them by active entities. Player characters count as active entities.

**Rounds:** The *Drama Resolution System* is sequenced in rounds, which divide the action into a series of cut-and-thrust actions taken by each participant in the drama.

**Initiative:** Initiative in a round involves knowing who has the edge at that moment in the scene. The character that has the initiative each round changes each round. Having the initiative means that you declare your action after your opponent and get to choose which action is resolved first. There will be one entity who has the initiative in each active situation (see below).

**Tension Line:** A tension line is a connection within the scene between two entities, such as the fleeing and

pursuing cars involved in a chase.

**Active Situations:** Within any scene, at any given point there may be a number of separate active situations and a number of unengaged entities. Active situations are those where entities are engaged, with active tension lines set up between the different entities. Unengaged entities do not have any tension lines established. If an entity comes to the rescue of an ally who was being ganged up on they must choose an opponent to engage with and use the manoeuvre action to establish a tension line with that character, this breaks the tension line this new opponent had with your ally, creating a new one-on-one situation.

**The Edge:** The Edge indicates which entity connected by a tension line is on top, and how big an advantage they have over their opponent at that moment in the event. As you gain, or pull back, an advantage over your opponent either your Edge score increases by one or your opponent's Edge score reduces by one – if you have the edge your score increases, whereas if your opponent has the Edge their score decreases. In most scenes both characters' Edge starts at zero. If the GM starts the scene with an active situation set up in one character's favour that character gains a bonus Edge score.

**The Climax Ladder:** The climax ladder is a mechanism used by the GM to determine how long in game terms, and therefore how dramatic, the scene will be. The GM chooses a number at the start of the scene and reduces this number by one each round, or by virtue of the effects the

players and GM characters, or other active entities, choose, until the value reaches zero. Reaching zero doesn't necessarily mean that a climax has been reached, it is up to the characters in the situation to call a climax (see below), but the lower the score on the climax ladder the easier the climax becomes to call. The GM may decide to keep the climax ladder score secret.

**Significance:** Every entity has a significance score, determined by the GM. This can vary from scene to scene, but is usually kept at the same, usually high, level for main GM characters and the player characters. Significance ranges between zero and six and represents how easy or difficult an entity is to remove from the scene.

**Key Entity:** One GM-controlled entity in the scene is classed as the Key Entity. This entity must have at least the joint highest significance in the scene. This entity cannot be simply eliminated, and a Climax action must be used to finish this character off. All player characters count as key entities also, meaning that they too can only be eliminated with a Climax action.

### Initiating a Scene

At the start of a scene the GM must begin by setting the score on the climax ladder. The GM may also feel that, for the first round, the situation is partially set up, and so can set the initiative establish tension lines and give some entities an Edge score for the start of the situation. In most situations with more than two entities the GM should start the scene without any tension lines established.

### Drama Rounds

Rounds in the *Drama Resolution System* progress as follows:

# Resolve active situations in any order, progressing through the following steps:

\$ The entity with the initiative in each situation decides the acting order. They don't have to declare their own action, being able to interrupt the sequence of actions at any point.

\$ Actions are resolved in order. At any point during this step a new entity can be introduced and make a surprise challenge to interrupt the target action (see surprise below). Introducing a new entity can even interrupt the character with the initiative.

\$ Determine initiative for the next round

# Unengaged entities actions are resolved with the following steps

\$ Unengaged entities roll for initiative

\$ The entity with the initiative states the acting order. They don't have to declare their own action, being able to interrupt the sequence of actions at any point.

\$ Actions are resolved in order, allowing for interruptions by either the entity with the initiative or a surprise action.

\$ Reduce the climax ladder score (reduce by one each round unless a press action has been successful, or more if an accelerate action has been successful, to a minimum of 0)

**A Note on Timing:** Unlike many roleplaying games, the timing of events using the *Drama Resolution System* is not explicitly stated. Each action performed can vary greatly in the amount of time it involves. The sequence is there to ensure that all tasks resolve equally in terms of

game effect. This captures the drama of movies, novels, and other story media where the action might flip and switch between each character involved in the story based on the significance of what they are doing as far as the story is concerned rather than keeping events closely chronologically tied.

### Rolling for Initiative

Establishing initiative between unengaged active entities is a simple roll off between the entities involved in the scene. The GM determines what initiative represents within the scope of the scene. Players and the GM must choose appropriate traits and backgrounds (or variability and difficulty scores) for any active entities. The entity with the highest total roll result wins the initiative amongst the unengaged entities. In the case of a tie, the GM decides which entity is most dramatically appropriate to win the initiative.

### Actions Effects

Actions are made using general mechanics that abstract to a great number of different events that may happen in the situation. You describe the action you intend to take, and then choose which effects should be applied. The situation and method used determine the test made, and the opponent's traits used to calculate the DT. Examples are given under each action effect below for common situations, and the tests required.

If you have multiple opponents in a round you only make one action in a round, but that action can have a different effect against each opponent. They declare how the action will affect each opponent. When the action is resolved they make one test against each opponent's DT to see which of the desired effects come off.

Some actions may involve an indirect narrative intervention, such as having random hazards “thrown” in the way of their opponent. No roll is required. The character using the action effect can reproduce the effects of any of the actions below, excluding the Climax action.

On any action you perform, you gain a bonus to the test made equal to your edge score. Similarly, when you are targeted by an opponent’s test you add your edge score to the DT.

If you have no tension lines established your action may apply one of the following effects:

### *Block or Manoeuvre.*

If you have at least one tension line established your action may apply one of the following effects to each character you have an established tension line with:

### *Block, Disengage, Edge, Eliminate, Recruit, Restrict, or Set-up.*

When you have a tension line established to every other opposed participant entity your action may apply the following effects:

### *Accelerate, Anticlimax, Climax, or Press.*

If you enter the scene after it has begun, in the round that you enter the scene you can make an action to apply the following effect in addition to any other effects you may be able to achieve:

### *Surprise*

When performing an action that applies one of these effects you must declare the effect against every opponent, and your roll must beat the DT of every opponent to be successful.

These effects are described below:

**Accelerate:** An accelerate action moves the situation closer to its climax by one point. Raises can be used to increase the reduction made. If a character has already successfully pressed this round this roll requires another raise.

### *Examples:*

- # You pull your car into a busy pedestrian area, If unsuccessful your opponent manoeuvres or shoots at you, preventing you from entering the target location.
- # You manoeuvre the melee close to the edge of a cliff face.
- # Manoeuvre your forces closer to your military objective.
- # You find a book that includes references to all of the different strands of information you were investigating.
- # You object to the defence’s witness being allowed to testify, thereby reducing the strength of their case.

**Anticlimax:** An anticlimax is a simple attempt to have the situation close in a manner less lethal, embarrassing or with less consequences for the character who is at a disadvantage in the situation, such as escaping. This action can be attempted by entities with a negative score on the tension line, but only if the climax ladder score is zero.

### *Examples:*

- # Slide your motorbike under a large, slow truck leaving the chasing car to wait for the truck to pass, by which time you will be out of sight.
- # You give your opponent the slip, making a leap over a gaping chasm or slipping away through a crowd or down an alley.
- # You execute a clean and orderly retreat of all your remaining

troops. Success means the enemy believes you have routed, letting you leave the battlefield without immediate pursuit.

- # The murderer you have been pursuing has just turned on you and has his gun at your head. However, he is startled by the sound of your fellow officers closing in and slips away into the shadows rather than kill you on the spot. (Note that this is your action, probably using a narrative intervention that forces the murderer to sneak off, rather than the murderer’s action.)
- # You apply for the case to be dismissed. Its not the acquittal that your client needs, but it does leave you free to fight another day until the prosecution can put together a stronger case.

**Block:** A block action allows you to cancel an opponent’s successful action. You can only perform this action if you have the initiative and interrupt the opponent’s action. This action must be declared before your opponent rolls for his challenge. If successful you prevent your opponent from performing their action this round and as such retain the initiative. If you are unengaged you must choose one opponent who is also unengaged to target with this action. In a many-on-one situation, if you are part of the many, a block action can be used to target an effect your opponent is using against one of your allies in the situation. If you do so, however you will automatically lose the initiative should your opponent’s action against you this round succeed (see below).

### *Examples:*

- # Pedestrians wander into the road, causing your opponent to swerve before making their manoeuvre.
- # You manoeuvre into position to prevent your opponent’s

manoeuvre attempt.

- # You parry, or bluff your opponent into dropping their intended manoeuvre.
- # Manoeuvre your troops into a surrounding position to cut off your enemy's attempts to push you back or disengage.
- # You dispel the enemy wizard's spell.

**Climax:** A climax effect brings the situation to a climax of one form or another. To successfully attempt a climax a character must have an edge score over all opponents at least equal to the current score on the climax ladder. If the GM wants they can keep the score on the climax ladder secret, and so players can attempt this action and it automatically fail, in such situations the GM should keep the opposed roll secret too, so that the player doesn't use this option to work out the score on the climax ladder.

*Examples:*

- # You ram the enemy vehicle off the road and accelerate into the distance as it crashes into a tree.
- # You overtake and cut across your opponent's path, forcing them to stop and surrender.
- # You run your enemy through, or smash their skull open or other fatal blow.
- # You execute a devastating charge on the enemy general's position and force the entire army to rout as the witness his death at your hands.
- # You sum-up the case in such a way that the Jury can only acquit your client.
- # You disarm the bomb with 2 seconds remaining on the display.

**Disengage:** You can break a tension line between you and an opponent. If

you break all tension lines you then count as unengaged for the next drama round.

*Examples:*

- # You take a turn, causing some of your pursuers to fail to make the turn.
- # You attempt to disengage from your melee range.
- # You move into a hidden position so that you cannot be targeted by ranged weapons.
- # Your troops make a disciplined retreat from an engagement.
- # You close a door, dive behind cover or otherwise get out of site of your opponent.
- # You bluff the guard into believing you aren't a threat so that you can get on with what you were doing before they spotted you.

**Edge:** An Edge action effect involves performing some action that moves the tension line one step in your favour from its current position. You can take raises on the roll to increase the number of steps by which the tension line score is moved.

- # Accelerate to close or widen the gap between your vehicles.
- # Duck down a side street to throw your tail off the trail.
- # You hit your opponent with a series of swift bows.
- # You pin your opponent back with a series of volleys of missile fire.
- # You aggressively question the suspect, trying to get them to crack under the pressure.

**Eliminate:** This action effect lets you remove an entity from the scene. To be eliminated you must have an advantage on the tension line against that opponent at least equal to their significance level.

*Examples:*

Examples for Eliminate actions make use of the same kind of situations and tests as mentioned in the Climax action effect description above, the only difference being that Eliminate effects only target a minor or secondary character in the situation, rather than producing a climax to the whole event.

**Manoeuvre:** You can establish a tension line with an opponent. When established the tension line begins with neither character having an Edge bonus, unless you has a tension line with that character in the previous round, in which case the bonus returns as it was in the last round, but moved one step to your opponent's advantage.

*Examples:*

- # You move lanes, enabling a new target vehicle to come into your sights.
- # You charge into close combat.
- # You draw an aim on your target.
- # You open a door your enemy just slammed in your face and jump out into the corridor they fled down.
- # You make a phone call to the target.

**Press:** Pressing the scene involves drawing it out longer than it may otherwise have taken. A successful press prevents the climax ladder value from being reduced this round. If an entity has already accelerated this round, this challenge requires a raise for every level the accelerate action is reducing the score by.

*Examples:*

- # You pull back from the chase, but retain a bead on your target.
- # You set up a confounding defensive stance, aiming to frustrate your opponent.
- # You manoeuvre your troops with



a tactical withdrawal.

# You bamboozle the police officer with a complex explanation that will take them a while to pick through and work out the truth.

**Recruit:** This action effect allows you to recruit a character or entity to become your passenger (see below). The challenge level could represent the terrain you need to cover to reach your target or the distance between you at the time. The GM needs to be careful when using this, or allowing this to be used, with unwilling participants. There needs to be a good reason for an unwilling character to become a passenger, such as a mind control spell. When an entity becomes your passenger, any tension lines and edge bonuses they possessed are transferred to you.

*Examples:*

# You cast a spell to control someone's actions.

# You swing your car over to the side of the road so that your friend can get in.

# You phone your colleague for help in your research.

**Restrict:** This action effect allows you to restrict your opponent's ability to act. It does not affect the action effects they are able to make use of, but does effect how they can describe their actions and the backgrounds and traits that they are able to use. You must describe the effects of the restriction, whether simply representing being at range (and therefore preventing melee attacks), catching your opponent in a grapple or drawing the crowd's attention to your opponents so that they must guard their actions against revealing their criminal intent. You can also use this action to remove a restriction against you.

*Examples:*

# Pin your opponent down with suppressive fire so that they can't draw in to close range

# Wrestle your opponent to the floor.

# The men chasing you are picked out by the cameras at the baseball game having won a prize, and displayed on the big screen, preventing them from easily getting out a gun or otherwise attacking you.

# You cast a spell to entangle your opponent in a sticky web-like substance.

**Search:** If there's an entity that the GM hasn't currently added into the scene that you think should be there, whether an enemy you need to defeat who hasn't been identified or located, or an NPC ally you want to turn up, this action lets you find an entity and bring it into the scene. You need to raise the challenge for each point of significance the Entity has over 1 (a significance 4 entity would require 3 raises to be successfully brought into play).

*Examples:*

# You search the computer system to identify a suspect from fingerprint or DNA data.

# You scan the crowd for the suspect you are looking for.

# Your friends turn up at the last minute to save the day (using a narrative intervention).

**Set-up:** This action effect allows you to set up an action for the next round. This could include manoeuvring into position to shoot, confusing your opponent with a feinted strike, or driving onto the sidewalk and through the market stalls set up there. If successful you gain a free raise to use in the next round, and will likely gain the initiative at the end of this round. For an additional raise you can give your

bonus to another entity in the scene rather than use it yourself.

*Examples:*

# Pull alongside your opponent to get ready to sideswipe.

# Spin your wheels to kick up a plume of smoke or dust to obscure your opponent's view.

# Bluff your opponent into thinking your guard is down.

# Jump up and leap off some convenient scenery to put your opponent behind you.

# Knock your opponent to the floor by brute force or a trip.

# Manoeuvre your troops around to the flanks under cover to bring them into position to attack.

# You set a trap for the hunter following you through the forest.

**Surprise:** When an entity enters the scene after the start the scene it can make a special action that enables the entity to enter the scene and immediately establish a tension line with a desired opponent.

*Examples:*

# You ambush your opponent from behind convenient scenery.

# You rush into the back of the church shouting "stop the wedding!"

# You feel a pang of conscience as you are about to kill an opponent in cold blood (your conscience enters the scene as a new entity and makes the surprise action against you).

## Combining Action Effects

It is possible to combine effects with one action. For example you might surprise and restrict your opponent in the same action, or edge and

accelerate at the same time. Each additional effect you wish to apply requires a raise. When determining the initiative in the next round, use the best of the action effects chosen. For example, if you choose to Manoeuvre and Block in the same round you will determine initiative as if you used the Manoeuvre action alone (see below).

## Determining Initiative

The initiative for the next round is decided in the first instance by a hierarchy of successful actions effects: If you have performed a successful action you gain the initiative, provided your opponent has failed in their action, or their successful action is lower in the action effect hierarchy than your action effect.

See the side bar for the full initiative hierarchy and notes.

When two entities complete equally ranked actions a tie breaking situation should be applied. Characters who had the initiative in the previous round should be given the initiative again in a tie. Where a different number of raises have been used, the entity who used the most raises on their action challenge roll wins initiative. When a setup action is

used, if an entity gives their free raise to another character, and then ends up tied for initiative with that character, initiative should go to the character who received the free raises. If all else fails, roll off using the method described for unengaged entities.

## Passengers

Passengers are a special consideration in the *Drama Resolution System*. Passengers refer to any entity who is a passenger to the action. Passengers do not have an overall control of the drama of the scene, benefiting or suffering from their lead entity's ability to manipulate the tension line and initiative, but can contribute to some extent. Passengers might be actually passengers in a vehicle the lead entity character is driving, members of a gang of guards, or soldiers in fighting unit, or otherwise unable to control the drama fully. Passengers must be associated with one participant entity. The following rules apply to passengers:

- # Their initiative and Edge score is determined by their lead entity.
- # Passengers are only able to perform actions that produce Eliminate or Set-up effects, but

such actions will never affect initiative.

- # Passengers can be targeted by eliminate actions, and maintain their own significance score for determining the number of raises or edge bonus required on this challenge roll.
- # Passengers receive the same Edge bonus as their lead entity.
- # Passenger actions are always resolved before the lead entity's action that round, but in any order if there are multiple passengers. If the lead participant has the initiative and interrupts another character's action, the only action available to the passenger character is the *Aid Another* effect (see below).
- # Passengers may make actions to produce a special *Aid Another* effect. No challenge roll is required to achieve this effect. If the characters have an appropriate trait or background that supports the lead entity's action passenger entities can forego their own action to give their lead entity a free raise.
- # Passengers may take an action to produce a special *Disembark* effect. This will cause the character to stop being your passenger, making them a participating entity in their own right.

\$ If you wish to stop them doing this an appropriate challenge is required. If the passenger entity succeeds in this challenge they are no longer your passenger, but a tension line is set up between them and you. If you do not wish to stop this action no challenge roll is needed and the entity enters the scene as a participating, disengaged entity.

\$ When they disembark, a

## Initiative Hierarchy

The hierarchy of action effects is as follows:

<i>Setup</i>	>	<i>Edge</i>	>	<i>Surprise</i>	>	<i>Manoeuvre</i>	>
<i>Disengage</i>	>	<i>Restrict</i>	>	<i>Recruit</i>	>	<i>Eliminate</i>	>
<i>Search</i>	>	<i>Press*</i>	>	<i>Accelerate*</i>	>	<i>Block**</i>	

\* Note that press and accelerate action effects only count as successful if their effect is not later cancelled out by the other.

\*\* As Block, in some situations, can cause your opponent(s) to fail their action, it may actually cause you to automatically gain the initiative, but if the situation doesn't dictate this you will probably lose the initiative.

Climax and Anticlimax actions, if successful, end the scene, so no initiative calculation is needed.

In tied situations, the initiative goes to the person with the Edge bonus. If this is still tied, initiative remains with the person who had the higher initiative in the previous round.

character can gain active tension lines to any other entities the lead character has established, gaining the same edge score their lead character has, whether negative or positive.

§ When determining initiative in the following round, Disembarking fits into the hierarchy between Restrict and Recruit.

### Hints and Tips on Using the Drama Resolution System

Whilst the Drama Resolution is undoubtedly a groundbreaking work of genius within the realm of tabletop roleplaying games, the sheer fact that it is very different to standard approaches to roleplaying games can make it a little difficult for the uninitiated to get their heads around how it will play out. This section helps to achieve that, giving you an insight into how you can manage the system, examples of play and hints on how to make the most of it in your games.

#### Split Scenes

Splitting the party has often been an area of dispute at the gaming table. When a player has nothing to do, by virtue of their character not being actively involved in a given scene, the game can start to drag. Splitting the party means that this happens to everyone in the group. The counter argument is that splitting the party develops the story in more interesting ways, involves the characters in their own scenes to a greater degree than they might otherwise be involved in another scene, and that the other players will be entertained by the story involving the other players. In my personal experience I have found that there are truths to both sides of

the argument. However, **Gateway's Drama Resolution System** allows the GM to run two different scenes alongside each other, each sub-scene forming its own set of active situations. Hence all players are involved in just as much detail as they would during a single scene. This split scene has a single climax ladder as a normal scene, but the GM should declare a key entity for each sub-scene. When determining a climax action entities only need to be involved in an active situation with every entity in their sub-scene, not every entity in the entire scene. However, for a climax effect to succeed, every sub-scene must be also successfully hit with a climax effect in the same round. If a key entity is hit with a climax effect they will, at the very least, lose their action that round, whilst they wait to see if the other key entities are also affected by a climax action. If any of the other climax action fails they will get their action in the following round, and will calculate initiative as if they had failed at a set up action.

#### Ticking Bomb

The GM may set up some scenes as a "ticking Bomb" scene, such as when characters are racing against the clock to complete their mission, whether this is an actual bomb or otherwise (for example, a Ticking Bomb scene could be used in the situation common to romance stories, where the lead character runs to the airport to declare their undying love before their lover boards the flight). In such scenes, one or more entities within the scene, whether player characters or GM controlled entities, are described as "countdown" entities, and one or more other entities are described as "trigger" entities.

**Countdown Entities:** Countdown entities can create a climax or

anticlimax effect without requiring that they have tension lines active to every opposed participant character, only the trigger entity.

**Trigger Entities:** A trigger entity is the entity that the countdown entity must target to be able to use their climax or anticlimax effects. This entity is often, but not always, inactive, representing a device, place, or possibly even a character who is largely passive in the flow of events in the scene.

**Other Entities:** In such circumstances all other entities involved in the scene no longer have to meet the same requirement (tension lines established to all opposed participant entities) to use the Press or Accelerate action effects, targeting either the trigger entity or the countdown entity (but only one of these is required) to be able to use such effects (tension lines are still required to use these effects). In such circumstances control of the climax ladder becomes as important as manipulating the Edge score and activating tension lines.

#### Visualising the Scene

Whilst the *Drama Resolution System* presented here doesn't require any use of maps, miniatures or battlemats advised by many other roleplaying games to calculate the position of the different characters and scenery, it is still useful to make use of props of some description to enhance the roleplaying experience and to help manage the logistics of running with this system. This section looks at the different ways in which you can use props to help capture the feel of the different scenes you might want to create using the *Drama Resolution System*.

**Visual Props:** Visual props can help the GM create a mood and atmosphere for any roleplaying game.

Some GMs like to wear a different hat for every character they might play in a game, even going to the lengths of providing each of their players with a similarly appropriate hat for their own characters. GMs can also make good use of images to help convey general themes, show the appearance of characters, creatures or places, or even help visualise the events as they unravel. As the games master, if you have an appropriate holiday snap or can find useful images to use in your games on the internet, a little preparation here can really help your players get into the mood you are trying to create. Even though there's no need to use miniatures to represent characters' position and location on any kind of tactical grid, a quality miniature that represents your character, or even just a flat image of your character, can help you and your fellow players visualise them and helps build the atmosphere of the game.

**Logistical Props:** Whilst many will find a simple scrap of paper with a few jotted down notes will suffice when managing their scene – and indeed many will prefer this method as it allows them to picture the drama of the scene better in their heads – others will find that being able to

move physical objects around a table to show where tension lines exist and what the initiative order is will help them get their head around what is happening, in game terms. To achieve this you can use a combination of cards (or miniatures, although we recommend cards) and counters. You will need one card (or miniature) for every entity involved in the scene. You can use playing cards, or maybe even cards from similarly themed trading card game, picking out the cards that best represent the different entities in the game, or even a combination of cards from different decks and games. Place the cards close together when involved in active situations, using counters to show any edge bonus one entity might have over another (different colour counters could be used to quickly determine which entity the edge bonus belongs to). Passenger entities could be represented by placing their card under their lead participant. The cards can also be ordered to show initiative order, and you could also place a counter on a card to represent that that card has the initiative and is holding their action. Have a look at the example diagram below to see how a typical game table might look.

## Example Scenes

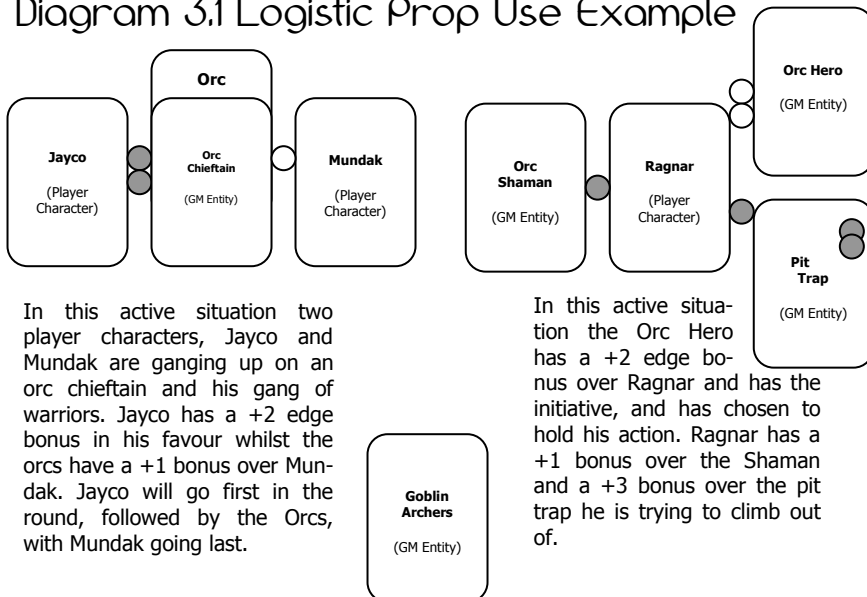
The following examples work through a couple of typical Gateway scene, showing how the GM can use the system to create a wide range of dramatic effects.

### First Scene: Background

The scene involves a party of player characters, each an operative within a Black Star cell (see the *Black Star Rising* setting from Malladin's Gate for more details on this game). As a team of spies and counter-terrorist agents, they have been investigating a plot by an alien faction to sabotage the Olympus mining operation on Mars. They have identified the mastermind of the plot and have tracked him to a remote, abandoned mining base in the Alba Patera.

However, this is not the end of the story. An enemy agent has already been despatched carrying a crystal-virus device. If the device is activated within the deep vein of the mine it will infect the precious Gatestone crystal, seeding disaster in many different ways. Firstly, Gatestone is a precious resource, and the Olympus operation mines the galaxy's richest known veins. Destroying this precious resource would seriously damage not only Earth's economy, but that of the whole galaxy. Secondly the structural integrity of the crystal will weaken, and the veins will collapse, causing a massive cave-in within the mine, potentially killing hundreds of thousands of miners who would be caught in the collapse. The fall out would probably spill vast quantities of dust into the atmosphere, which could potentially damage the atmosphere processing systems at the nearby Olympus Mons colony, leading to mass evacuations and potentially further loss of life. Finally, such a disaster would undoubtedly

Diagram 3.1 Logistic Prop Use Example



These Goblin archers are not involved in an active situation.

give fuel to the various rebellious Martian workers' organisations. The crystal-virus technology used is unknown to earth and its effects would likely be interpreted as failures in safety regimes at the mine.

Whilst the player characters have uncovered the plot and identified the mastermind, they have not been able to identify the agent sent to deliver the virus. They know that the agent has infiltrated the workforce, and they have identified a small number of potential target locations that would maximise the damage caused. They also know that the infiltrating agent is actually an alien species, using a biotech skin-suit to disguise their true identity.

The players' mission involves both capturing the mastermind and preventing the virus being activated.

### Setting the Scene

At the start of the scene the players decide where they need to be. Dimitri Klug, an undercover specialist, played by Nigel, along with Major Sam Yankee, a special-forces soldier played by Richard, decide to visit the mine to try and stop the virus. Martin Chan, an infiltration specialist in the team, played by Mark, and assassin Hank Cropper, played by Andrew target the mastermind's base. Finally, Ayo Mokoena, Matt's computer expert character, decides to stay at the team's HQ and hack into the two systems remotely so that he can help out both teams.

Ben, the GM, decides to start the scene as Martin and Hank approach the abandoned mining base, with Dimitri and Sam entering the lobby of the Olympus mining station. He starts the scene with the following entities, aside from the characters, in play:

- # The Olympus mining station's firewall.
- # The data security system at the

mastermind's base.

- # The receptionist at the Olympus station.
- # The physical defences of the mastermind's base, such as fences, walls, doors, etc.

The door in the Olympus station leading to the mines.

Ben also determines that the scene will be a ticking bomb scene (see above), with a special terrorist character being the countdown entity. He also makes this character not-in-play at the start of the game, meaning that if the PCs don't use search actions to find him, he can simply enter the scene when the climax ladder runs down and use a combined surprise and climax action to set off his crystal virus before the characters know what is happening. The trigger entity is likewise not-in-play at the start of the scene, and simply represents a deep part of the mine that must be accessed for the virus to have the maximum impact. As the scene will be tight and tense, Ben sets the climax ladder score to six, but keeps this secret from the players.

The scene will also be a split scene, with events occurring both at the mining station and the mastermind's base concurrently. The mastermind himself (starting the scene not-in-play) and the terrorist character mentioned above are the key entities for the two different splits in the scene.

The GM also allows Ayo to have already established a connection with the station firewall and the base security system, but without any edge score. Given that Martin and Hank are travelling in a Martian Rover vehicle, Martin will drive and therefore starts as the active entity, whilst Hank is a passenger.

### Round 1 (climax ladder: 6)

**Ayo's Action:** As Ayo has active tension lines, his situation is resolved first. Ayo attempts an edge, cracking the system's security. Ayo raises the action twice and is successful, gaining a +3 edge bonus over the security system.

**The security System's action:** As a passive entity the computer system doesn't act in return.

**Initiative:** As none of the other entities at this stage are active, the GM bypasses the initiative phase and arbitrarily decides to resolve Hank and Martin's actions first.

**Hank's action:** As the passenger Hank's action is resolved first. Hank decides to scan the base from distance, choosing an Aid Another effect. As he has an appropriate background and trait, Ben decides Hank can aid Martin, providing him with a +2 bonus.

**Martin's Action:** Martin knows he needs to cover the ground to the base, but he wants to do so without being spotted. Mark says that Martin will try to use the dust storm to try and close in on the base without being spotted. He chooses the Manoeuvre effect, to establish a tension line between himself and the base's physical security. Given the bonus from Hank, Mark chooses to use one raise on the challenge and succeeds: the tension line is established with a +1 edge bonus to Martin, as he moves his Rover up to the complex without being spotted.

**Dimitri's Action:** Nigel and Richard decide to go in officially and ask to see the head of security. As the silver-tongue of the part, Dimitri will smile sweetly at the receptionist to move them quickly through to the head of security. Nigel wants to combine a Manoeuvre and an Eliminate action in one. As the receptionist is only significance 0 it only requires one raise to achieve this. Nigel succeeds at the roll and the receptionist is

eliminated.

**The Head of Security is brought into play:** As a result of Dimitri's sweet talking the receptionist calls the head of security and tells her that two Black Star agents are here to see him. This brings a new entity, the head of security, into play. As Sam and Dimitri have already made contact with her, she enters play as a surprise action, automatically connecting tension lines with both Dimitri and Sam. As her action she operates her computer terminal to ensure she has access to the security doors, taking the manoeuvre effect.

**Sam's Action:** Richard wants to try and get the Security Chief on side. He goes straight in and lays the situation down, in straightforward military fashion. He is using a recruit action effect, to gain the security chief's assistance to all further actions. He uses his Military background and his Direct social trait. Ben chooses to use the chief's Business background to resist the attempt, but she has no appropriate social trait. In the end it is an easy challenge for Richard to succeed at and the chief becomes Sam's passenger. Ben also decides that, to represent the Security Chief's access to the systems, Sam gains a tension line to the door to the mines entity, with an existing edge score of +2.

### Round 2 (climax ladder: 5)

**Initiative:** Sam, Ayo and Martin are both active participants with established tension lines so their situations are acted on first. The GM decides, for simplicity, to resolve them in the same order as previously. Dimitri is still uninvolved in any active situations and so he acts last.

**Ayo's Action:** Ayo has a sizeable edge over the security system, so he attempts to eliminate it with a worm virus. The security system is significance 4, so Ayo needs a raise to

be able to eliminate it. Again his check is successful

**Hank's Action:** Hank and Martin are going to break through the perimeter, gaining a further edge over the physical defences. As they are now choosing to leave their vehicle, the GM tells Andrew that Hank must disembark. Doing so requires no roll, and leaves Hank with a +1 edge bonus over the physical defences.

**Martin's Action:** Martin goes for a door, using his universal electronic key device to help him open the door. With a +2 equipment bonus from the Electronic and Key keywords, and his high background level, Martin is confident he can do this and so tries to add two raises to the roll. However, Martin oversteps his reach and a bad roll means he fails the challenge. The edge bonus remains at +1.

**Security Chief's Action:** the security chief is Sam's passenger and so acts before Sam. Her action is to eliminate the security door, allowing them access to the mines. As the edge score is already +2 she can eliminate the door without any raises (it's only significance 2). She uses her Business background and her In Charge trait to get the doors open quickly with a simple challenge roll.

**Sam's Action:** Sam wants to try and search for the suspect in the mine. He moves into the mine, as a set-up effect, building a bonus to help him in a future search action. He chooses to use his military training to attempt to move towards the most strategic target. As this isn't an entirely appropriate use of the background, Ben makes Richard apply a penalty to the challenge roll. As such Richard doesn't take any raises on the challenge. The GM uses the terrorist's stealth background and Mr Nobody trait to resist, and causes Sam to fail.

**Dimitri's Action:** Dimitri stays in the

office and uses the security computer system to try and scan for substances that might indicate traces of the crystal virus. Although he hasn't got a very high Computers background he has additional bonuses from the computer equipment he is using and the terrorist will find it harder to resist an electronic scan looking for his virus, rather than him himself. The GM determines that the terrorist will use his Crystaltech background and be able to apply a partial bonus from his determined mental trait. Nigel risks a raise and succeeds, and chooses to give Sam a free raise on the next challenge.

### Round 3 (climax ladder: 4)

**Initiative:** Ayo is still active, connected to the Mining base firewall, Hank and Martin are now both active, whilst Sam and Dimitri are no longer involved in any active situations. Hank performed a Disembark, whilst Martin performed an Edge, so the action effects used determine initiative according to the initiative hierarchy, with Martin's Edge effect beating Hank's Disembark, so Martin wins that initiative and decides to go first. Sam and Dimitri are both still unengaged with no other active entities around. The GM decides that initiative will be determined by an awareness of the situation. Sam wins the initiative roll with his Military background and decides that Dimitri will act first.

**Ayo's Action:** Ayo decides that Sam and Dimitri could do with some help, so he tries to break through the firewall to assist Dimitri with his computer use. He makes an Eliminate effect on the firewall. It costs him three raises to do so, but he thinks he can pull it off. However, the firewall seems to be more secure than he was expecting as his action fails.

**Martin's Action:** Martin tries again to break the lock on the door, this time he only goes for a single raise

on the challenge. This time he succeeds and increases his edge bonus to +3.

**Hank's Action:** The Hank gets through to the next door and shoots the lock out, using a set up effect. He takes 2 raises and succeeds, and gives the 3 free raises to Martin's next action.

**Dimitri's Action:** Dimitri continues his scanning, making another set up action with two raises – one to allow Sam to use the bonus and another to increase the bonus by one. Again he succeeds, giving Sam a further two free raises.

**Security Chief's Action:** The chief chooses to aid Sam by tying in what Dimitri's scan shows with her knowledge of the base. She doesn't take any raises, but does succeed, giving Sam a further free raise, that's five in total!

**Sam's Action:** Sam now has enough free raises to search for the terrorist (significance 6) without using any raises himself. He succeeds and the terrorist is brought into play.

### Round 4 (climax ladder: 3)

**Initiative:** As the terrorist has only just been brought into play, Sam and Dimitri remain outside of the active situations. As Hank used a Set Up action he gains the initiative in his situation. Hank chooses to have Martin act first. The GM asks for another situation awareness challenge for initiative, which Dimitri wins, choosing to act first himself, followed by Sam, and leaving the terrorist to last.

**Ayo's Action:** Less confident, Ayo chooses to try and crack the security of the firewall rather than just trying to blast through it in a single action. He uses the Edge effect, taking two raises and this time succeeds, giving him a +3 edge bonus.

**Martin's Action:** Martin wants to

blast through the last layer of security to the mastermind's inner sanctum. He chooses the eliminate effect on the base's physical security. He has a +3 edge bonus and more than enough free raises, making it a simple challenge to succeed in.

**The Mastermind comes into play:** Having completely removed all his security the mastermind is now brought into play along with a squad of five guards (scale 2 mooks). As a surprise action he establishes tension lines with both player characters. His guards surround them as aid another actions (each giving the mastermind a free raise) and says, in a sinister voice as his guards draw their weapons: "Welcome, Black Star, I've been expecting you!" This is an edge action targeting both Hank and Martin. His free raises will give him a +3 edge bonus if he succeeds. Fortunately for Hank, Andrew beats the GM's roll, but Mark rolls badly and the mastermind has a significant edge over Hank.

**Hank's Action:** Now in a bad situation because of the big edge bonus the mastermind has over him, Hank needs to redress the balance. He decides to take three raises on the roll to regain the advantage. Hank has a special crystaltech gun that prevents the mastermind from using his armour bonuses whilst still providing a +2 bonus to the roll. As an expert gunfighter, Hank has a high bonus to the test and manages to succeed. He shifts the edge back to +1 in his favour. Hank chooses to represent this as a shot at the Mastermind himself, and in the confusion of the shot the guards are distracted by trying to support their boss.

**Dimitri's Action:** Dimitri wants to further refine his scan to help Sam target the terrorist, so he uses the set up effect and risks two raises again. Unfortunately this time he fails, so no bonus for Sam this round – with all

the bodies and crystal dust from the mine he just can't home in on the terrorist.

**Security Chief's Action:** Richard says he wants the security chief to try and slow the terrorist's movement through the crowd so that Sam can gain a better vantage point. Ben interprets this as an aid another action and deems it quite happily within the security chief's ability to achieve, so he gives Sam a free raise on his next action.

**Sam's Action:** Sam decides to get himself in a better position, where he can look down on the crowds and target the terrorist. He combines three effects on this risky action: manoeuvre, edge and restrict. As such it requires two raises, but plays to Sam's strengths in his military training. With the free raise from the Chief it becomes a relatively easy roll, and so Sam is set up in a gantry looking down from above and has drawn a bead on the terrorist, ready to shoot him later.

**Terrorist's Action:** The terrorist notices that the press of people restricting his movements, and so tries to slip into the crowd and move through as unseen as possible. This is a disengage action effect. The terrorist has a high Stealth background and Ben thinks the determined trait is wholly appropriate at this stage, so the terrorist has a good chance of making it. However, Sam also has good backgrounds and traits and the roll will be tight. Unfortunately for the PCs, the terrorist just wins and slips away into the crowd.

### Round 5 (climax ladder: 2)

**Initiative:** Sam and Dimitri remain outside of the active situations. As Hank, Martin and the mastermind all used edge actions the initiative goes to the entity with the highest edge score: Hank. Hank chooses to have

Martin act first, followed by the mastermind. The GM asks for a speed of action challenge for initiative, which Sam wins. Sam chooses to hold his action, letting Dimitri go first, followed by Terrorist.

**Ayo's Action:** Ayo attempts again to break through the mining station's firewall. With his big edge bonus, this time he succeeds.

**Martin's Action:** Martin sees that Hank is in the best position to take out the mastermind, so he tries to help Hank out by taking out some of the guards. He risks a couple of raises to take out three guards, and succeeds.

**Guards' Actions:** The guards act as one, opening fire in general, filling the room with bullets and restricting Sam and Martin's movements. This is an Aid Another action, giving the mastermind a single free raise from the two remaining guards.

**Mastermind's Action:** The mastermind uses his free raise to target both PCs with another cutting remark: "It's all over, there is no escape..." With the free raise from his guards he risks taking another. His roll is poor though and both Hank and Martin beat his score – the action failed.

**Hank's action:** Hank tries for the killer blow, making use of his weapon again and taking a couple of extra raises, succeeds, increasing his edge score to four. The mastermind is hurt by the shot and cries in pain, clutching the wound.

**Dimitri's action:** Knowing Ayo will be able to take over the computer systems from now on, he decides to try and head the terrorist off at the pass. He does a search for the trigger entity, using the computer scan he had developed earlier to find the likely target spot within the mine. The trigger entity is only significance 2, so he only needs two raises, and

succeeds, bringing the target zone entity into play.

**Terrorist's action:** The terrorist makes a move towards the target zone entity, as a manoeuvre effect. However, he is interrupted by Sam's action.

**Sam's action:** Seeing the terrorist make a move Sam decides to scan the edge of the crowd for the terrorist leaving and shoot to make him scurry back into the crowd. He is attempting to combine manoeuvre and block effects, requiring a raise. The Security Chief aids his challenge by corralling the crowd further, giving Sam a free raise. Sam decides to risk another couple of raises and add an edge effect to the challenge. Sam succeeds and so the terrorist's action is blocked and a tension line established, with +2 edge bonus to Sam.

### Round 6 (climax ladder: 1)

**Initiative:** Dimitri remains outside the active situations. As the mastermind failed his action he will not win the initiative, and Hank's edge effect beats Martin's eliminate, so Hank retains the initiative. Hank chooses to have Martin act first, followed by himself and then the mastermind. Sam successfully blocked the terrorist's action so he gains the initiative. Sam chooses to go first.

**Player discussion:** The players decide that this round they will try to climax the scene, by killing both the mastermind and the terrorist. Sam and Hank are the obvious choices to complete the actions, but the players don't know whether they have enough edge bonus to manage it. They decide to try and maximise their potential at a 5 edge bonus against both characters. It might be tricky, but in maximising the edge if they fail they will still have a good shot in future rounds.

**Ayo's action:** Ayo rescans using Dimitri's earlier scan, but maximises its potential with his higher computer background. He performs a set up action with two raises, enabling him to give Sam two free raises.

**Martin's action:** Martin also tries a set up action, shooting the mastermind himself. He just goes for a single raise, and succeeds giving Hank a free raise.

**Hank's action:** Hank wants to finish the mastermind off with a final blow to the head. This will be a climax action, combined with an edge action, using the free raise from Martin to increase the edge bonus to five.

**Hank's conscience:** The GM decides that Hank is not entirely following protocol here and that gunning someone down is somewhat cold-blooded. He creates a conscience entity for Hank, which surprises him combined with a block effect to prevent him using the climax effect. However, Andrew says Hank's Ice Cold trait and his Military background would make him quite willing to kill under the circumstances. The GM and Andrew roll off and Andrew wins, so his action continues.

**Hank's action continues:** Hank's roll off against the mastermind succeeds and Hank wins the day. He now has to wait to see whether Sam's action will also be successful before they know whether they have successfully climaxed the scene.

**Security chief's action:** The security chief performs an aid another to give Sam a free edge.

**Sam's action:** Seeing what had happened to Hank with the conscience effect, Richard decides to use a paralysis weapon to take down the terrorist with nonlethal force. The GM decides that this doesn't require a conscience interruption, and so lets Richard make the roll. They have targeted an edge bonus of five, which



means Richard needs three extra raises to gain the required bonus, but he has two from Ayo's set up and one from the security chief's aid another so he doesn't need to take any further raises himself. Fortunately his roll beats the terrorists and he also completes the climax effect.

**Scene Over:** With both climax effects competed the scene climaxes. The players are keen to know what the actual score on the climax ladder was, so Ben tells them: it was only one, so they didn't need to have risked all those extra edge bonuses. That said, it also meant that the terrorist could have set off the crystal virus in the following round if they hadn't been able to stop him.

## Second Scene: Background

In this scene the characters are a gang of street criminals and confidence tricksters in the fantasy city setting of Dark Spires (another setting for Gateway by Malladin's Gate). The gang have uncovered a dangerous secret and have been running scared ever since. They have discovered that Hans Kroe, a trusted lieutenant of the Shattengraf, the city's criminal overlord, is plotting to overthrow his master. What's more, Kroe is a dark sorcerer and has been made a demonic pact to ensure his rise to power. Since discovering the plot, the gang have been hounded and pursued by Kroe's demonic minions and mortal underlings across the city, framed for crimes against the Schattengraf himself, and had their hideout burned to the ground. Finally they have managed to secure themselves an audience with the Schattengraf and aim to prove that Hans Kroe has been plotting against the Schattengraf.

## Setting the scene

At the start of the scene the characters are all in the Schattengraf's audience chamber. Ethan is playing Tom, the example character constructed in the character creation chapter, Jacob is playing Norris, a professional bully and racketeer, and Sophie is playing Angelique, a catburglar and seductress. Hans Kroe is the key entity, with Significance six. The accusations against the Gang are also represented as an entity (significance 3). There are also some guards present (significance 1) and the Schattengraf himself (also significance 6). There are also a number of different witnesses that will be called to give evidence, but none of these are present at the start of the scene. Tension lines are set up between Kroe and the three PCs: Tom, Norris and Angelique, and, given that Kroe has been running the gang ragged over the last few weeks, the GM determines that Kroe begins with a +2 edge bonus to begin with and has the initiative. The GM wants the scene to be a "slow burner" where the tension builds up gradually over a longer period, and so set the climax ladder at twelve.

### Round 1 (Climax ladder 12)

**Initiative:** As Kroe has the initiative at the start of the scene, he chooses to go first, and wants Angelique to go next, followed by Tom and finally Norris.

**Kroe's Action:** Kroe takes the opportunity to whisper in the Schattengraf's ear to suggest the gang's disloyalty and make the Schattengraf treat them with suspicion from the off. He treats this as an edge effect against the three PCs and applies one raise to the challenge. He rolls his Devious trait and uses his Inner Circle background, getting a result of 12! Norris uses his Imposing trait and his Thug background to try and glare at Kroe, but the GM only

allows him to use partial levels, costing him a dice from his pool and a raise on the roll. Rolling only a 3, he fails. Tom uses his street beggar background to try and come across as the "salt of the earth," along with his slippery background. The GM lets him use these to his full capability, but Tom only manages to achieve a 9, and so doesn't beat Kroe's roll. Angelique uses her Angelic trait and her Courtesan background to appear innocent (in a seductive kind of a way) and rolls well, scoring 11 in total. As Kroe used a raise his 12 doesn't beat her roll. Kroe succeeds in increasing his edge bonus to +4 against Tom and Norris, but his edge bonus against Angelique remains at +2.

**Angelique's action:** Angelique chooses to continue her softening of the Shattengraf, choosing to make it an edge effect against Kroe. Kroe continues his whispering against her to resist the attempt. The challenge is a reverse of the Kroe's action, but Angelique spends a point of social essence to improve her chances and this time manages to beat Kroe's roll, reducing his edge bonus further to +1 only.

**Tom's Action:** Tom attempts to subtly cast the "truth tongue" spell to prevent Kroe from telling lies, as a restrict action effect. Tom uses his Arcanist background and his Sharp Mind trait to make the challenge. The spell itself counts as an equipment item and provides a +1 bonus. Kroe uses his (higher level) arcanist background and his Demonic Pact trait, which the GM rules only partially applies. Tom spends a point of mental essence to improve his chances and succeeds in beating Kroe's action.

**Norris's Action:** Norris attempts to prove the gang's innocence, and uses his Stern trait and his Inner Circle background, representing his

understanding of the Schattengraf's protocols and etiquette, to argue his point. As this is a knowledge-based challenge, Norris can also use his specialisation. Norris also has a copy of the Book of Shadow Laws, giving a +1 bonus to his action from the Legal equipment trait. He uses this as a set up action. With the restrictions applied due to Tom's spell, Kroe can only use his Insightful trait and his own inner circle background, but without a specialisation in Knowledge or copy of the Book, he can't match Norris's roll.

### Round 2 (Climax ladder 11)

**Initiative:** As Norris successfully completed a Set Up action, he has the initiative the round, he chooses Tom to go first, followed by Angelique to go first, and leaves Kroe until last. He retains his ability to interrupt at any point.

**Tom's Action:** Tom calls a witness to prove their case. He uses the Search action effect to bring the entity into play, combined with a recruit action. The GM uses the variability and challenge level to oppose the challenge, determining how scared the witness is. The GM determines the challenge level is tricky and that Kroe's reputation makes the challenge predictably tough. As the witness is a street beggar, providing the gang with an alibi, Tom uses his Street Beggar background and his Quick Witted trait. The GM determines that the Quick Witted trait is only partially applied. Ethan decides that this might prove a tough roll to make, so decides to drop the recruit effect, thus the actions doesn't require an edge. Ethan rolls well and beats the GM's roll. The witness is now in play.

**Angelique's Action:** Angelique continues to increase her edge over Kroe. She uses the same action as she previously has, and again

succeeds. No Kroe has no edge over her.

**Kroe's Action:** Feeling the effects of the spell, Kroe tries to dispel Tom's spell and overcome his restrictions.

**Norris's Action:** Norris chooses to interrupt with a Block attempt on Kroe's action. Norris can easily block Kroe's spellcasting with a simple nudge or blocking his hands as he casts the spell, but the GM determines that he is unlikely to be able to notice that a spell is being cast. Jacob argues that his Bodyguard background would make him generally aware of suspicious circumstances and wants to also use his Suspicious trait. The GM rules that the trait is fully applicable but the background only partially. Kroe on the other hand rolls his devious trait fully and applies his Sneak background to determine whether he is spotted or not. (The arcanist background is not used yet as this is Kroe's opposition to Norris's action. He will use the Arcanist background to cast the spell in his own action, provided Norris does not successfully block.) Norris applies his free edge to combine the block with an edge effect, attempting to break the spell at precisely the wrong moment as far as Kroe is concerned. Unfortunately the GM rolls better than Norris and the block attempt fails.

**Kroe's action continues:** Kroe wants to use his dispel action to cause magical feedback to fry Tom's mind. He combines his Restrict action effect with an Edge effect (for one raise). However, Tom can use his Slippery trait to its full effect, and also spends his remaining Mental Essence to resist the challenge. The GM fails to beat Ethan's roll and Kroe fails to dispel the effect.

### Round 3 (Climax ladder 10)

**Initiative:** As only Tom and Angelique successfully completed

actions this turn, the initiative hierarchy is used to determine initiative. As Angelique's Edge action beats Tom's Recruit, Angelique wins initiative. She decides to let Kroe go first, followed by the witness, then Norris, and finally Tom.

**Kroe's Action:** Kroe is keen to remove the restrictions, but he knows he will continue to be interrupted until he regains the initiative. He initiates a verbal tirade against the gang, in order to cause them to stop and think, and hence wrest control of the situation away from them.

**Angelique's Action:** Angelique interrupts Kroe with a Block action, and tries to use her courtesan wiles to distract Kroe out of his rage. She uses her Courtesan background again, along with her Desirable trait. Kroe resists with his Demonic Pact trait, as the GM thinks Kroe's desires run in different directions to Angelique's feminine charms. Kroe beats Angelique's roll and continues with his action.

**Kroe's Action Continues:** Kroe uses his Imposing trait and his Inner Circle background to bring his authority and position to bear. Tom resists with his Quick Witted trait and his Blag background, suggesting that he will have a quick answer to any of Kroe's comments, Angelique continues to try to look innocent and sweet, whilst Norris attempts to bring his knowledge of the Shadow Law to object to Kroe's tirade. The GM spends Kroe's only social essence point to gain as big an advantage as he can, and manages to beat all three PCs.

**Witness's Action:** The witness begins to recount their story, providing the PCs' alibi. The PCs ask that this be used as a set-up action for Norris, who is arguing their case. The GM agrees and combines a

manoeuvre action with a set up action to engage the entity, for a raise. The GM determines that the alibi is fairly solid and so only uses 1 dice and a challenge level of moderate. Even with the raise, the Witness succeeds.

**Norris's Action:** Norris tries to manoeuvre to engage the accusation entity so that he can begin to eliminate it. He combines this with an edge effect, using the free raise he has gained from the Witness's action, adding two additional raises as he argues that the accusations are false. He succeeds, gaining a +3 edge bonus over the accusation entity – primed for its elimination.

**Tom's Action:** Tom tries to regain some footing against Kroe, deciding to use some fast talking to confound Kroe with a baffling series of accusations and verbal trickery. He uses his Blag background and his Slippery trait, and spends a point of social essence. He takes 2 raises on the Edge effect to try to reduce Kroe's edge bonus over him. The GM can't find much in the way of appropriate traits or backgrounds on Kroe's character sheet to apply, so uses his Imposing trait (partial level) and inner circle background to try to rise above it (also partial). Tom succeeds and reduces Kroe's edge bonus over him to +1.

#### Round 4 (Climax ladder 9)

**Initiative:** Kroe and the Witness both successfully competed Set Up actions, and as Kroe's action was targeted against the PCs (as opposed to the Witness's action, which targeted the accusation entity) he wins initiative. The GM lets Kroe go first, followed by Tom, Angelique, Norris, and finally Norris's witness.

**Kroe's Action:** Kroe tries again to dispel Tom's spell, this time not bothering with the feedback effect, so not taking the edge. This time he

succeeds and is now free of the restrictions.

**Tom's Action:** Ethan wants Tom to call another witness, to give evidence against Kroe. The Shattengraf knows that a sorcerer has been plotting against him. The gang discovered Kroe's involvement when they uncovered a secret darkstone mining operation below the city. Darkstone is a key component used in many dark magics. To establish the evidence against Kroe, they need to first establish a link between Kroe and the Darkstone mine. The witness they call is a goblin slave who the PCs rescued from the mine. He saw a dark sorcerer and can identify him by a tattoo on his forearm. The GM determines that this will be an easy challenge, with a random variability, as the goblin has become a loyal friend to the gang, who rescued him. Tom looks to combine a search action to bring the witness into play, with a recruit action and a set up action. Given the easy roll Tom succeeds.

**Angelique's Action:** Angelique decides to help Tom for next round when she is expecting him to start attacking Kroe with his evidence.

**Norris's Action:** As Kroe has placed Norris's witness after him in the initiative order, Jacob can't make use of the witness to help him with a set up action. Instead he decides his edge bonus is high enough and performs an eliminate action against the accusation entity. He quite easily succeeds in the end and both the eliminate entity and Norris's witness are removed (as the witness becomes irrelevant to the rest of the scene).

#### Round 5 (Climax ladder 8)

**Initiative:** Tom and Angelique both completed setup actions, but as Angelique gave Tom her free raise, Tom wins initiative. Ethan wants Angelique to go first, followed by Norris and Kroe. As the witness is

Tom's passenger he will go before Tom, when Tom interrupts.

**Angelique's Action:** Angelique performs a duplicate of the action she performed in the previous turn, giving Tom a further free raise. Again she succeeds.

**Norris's Action:** Norris also tries to provide Tom with a setup bonus, introducing Tom's witness and explaining how it relates to the evidence. He uses his inner circle background, and his knowledge specialisation, and his Stern trait. He takes no raises, other than the one he needs to give Tom his free raise, but Kroe's +4 edge bonus against him proves too much.

**Witness's Action:** Tom chooses to interrupt before Kroe's turn, so his witness acts before him. The witness gives his tale of the mines, and the evil master with the strange tattoo; a setup action, giving Tom his free raise. Kroe resists using his Devious trait and his Undercover background to try and hide his tattoo. The witness fails in his action, as Kroe successfully hides the tattoo.

**Tom's Action:** Tom has two free raises from Angelique's two prior actions and uses them to Edge out on Kroe. He begins to point out all the other circumstantial ways in which Kroe matches the description of the sorcerer in the mines, even making some up. He uses his Blag background and his Quick Witted trait and succeeds. He now has a +2 edge bonus over Kroe.

**Kroe's Action:** The GM decides that he thinks Kroe might realise that Tom was once a member of the inner circle (see Tom's description in the character creation section for more details). Although he is quite different in appearance due to his age and actively disguised, Kroe might be able to work it out. He uses the search effect to bring Tom's past into play as

a new entity. The GM lets Tom oppose this action, and he makes a roll using his Undercover background and Hunted trait to oppose the roll. However, Kroe wins and the entity is brought into play, significance 4, with Kroe's ominous words "I know you, don't I?" as he points at Tom.

**Tom's Past Entity's Action:** The entity representing Tom's secret past performs a surprise action and automatically connects a tension line to Tom, and restricts Tom's actions, representing Tom's mind racing as he tries to fight the fear.

### Round 6 (Climax ladder 7)

**Initiative:** As Angelique completed a successful set up action she wins the initiative. She lets Norris go first, followed by Tom, his past, and finally Kroe.

**Norris's Action:** Norris decides that he will protect Tom from his past sneaking up on him. He combines a manoeuvre and edge and argues to suggest that Kroe is making some new accusation out of desperation as his web of intrigue is starting to unravel. He uses his Stern trait and his Inner Circle background again. The GM decides that, as this is an early move and little has yet been truly revealed the situation is quite random but the challenge level is still tricky. Norris takes a further raise to increase the edge bonus and succeeds, gaining a +2 edge bonus over Tom's past.

**Tom's Witness's Action:** The GM rules that Tom's witness is suffering from the restrictions placed on Tom and cannot act until Tom removes the restrictions – the Goblin is looking worriedly at Tom and not knowing what to do.

**Tom's Action:** All Tom can do is try and fast talk his way out of the situation. He attempts to disengage from the entity representing his

secret past, and combine this with a set up bonus for Norris. He uses his Blag background and his Slippery trait to get out of the hole. The GM makes the challenge level difficult for Tom, but still random as little has yet been done to enforce the situation. He succeeds and the tension line between him and his past is removed, for now at least.

**Tom's Past Entity's Action:** The entity representing Tom's past manoeuvres to reengage with Tom. The GM says there is no obvious effect of this, but that Tom's can't simply get away from his past and that it will always come back to haunt him. Tom uses his Hunted trait and his Undercover background to try and escape, but the challenge level is too high and his past catches up with him once more.

**Kroe's Action:** Kroe attempts to highlight to where he recognises Tom from, trying to get the Schattengraf to remember the past. However, Angelique interrupts his action with a Block.

**Angelique's Action:** To block Kroe's action Angelique makes a narrative intervention. She begins a flashback scene, where she recalls how the Schattengraf himself has been one of her clients in her courtesan days and on one of these occasions he brought a younger Tom with him. Sophie says that as the Schattengraf begins to remember he dwells on the memory of her rather than Tom. She uses her Disreputable Past trait and her Courtesan background to make the roll. Kroe resists with his Devious trait (which the GM rules only partially applies) and his Inner Circle background. Angelique succeeds and Kroe's action is blocked.

### Round 7 (Climax ladder 6)

**Initiative:** Tom completed a successful set up action, so he wins the initiative. Ethan wants Norris to

go first, followed by Angelique, Tom's past, and finally Kroe.

**Norris's Action:** Norris now feels ready to try and remove the entity representing Tom's past from the equation and attempts an eliminate action. He needs two raises to meet the requirements, but has one free raise from Tom's earlier set up action. He makes his usual Stern and Inner Circle roll against a tricky but still random GM roll for the entity and just scrapes a success. Norris successfully sows enough doubt into the Schattengraf's mind as to Kroe's intentions that he refuses to consider the matter until proceedings are over.

**Angelique's Action:** With Tom's past removed from play, Angelique again tries to support Tom in his attempts to prove Kroe's guilt. She claims that Kroe has visited her, professionally speaking, in the past and she knows he has this tattoo. She uses a setup effect and one raise to provide Tom with a free raise on his challenge.

**Tom's Witness's Action:** Tom chooses to interrupt before Kroe's action and so his witness gets his action first. The goblin claims that he would recognise Kroe's voice anywhere and that he was the evil sorcerer who ran the mine. The goblin succeeds in providing Tom with a free raise.

**Tom's Action:** Tom looks to find the key evidence of Kroe's tattoo and realises how Kroe has hidden it and reveals it. He uses his Undercover background and his Sharp Mind trait, opposed by Kroe's Devious and Undercover roll. With two free raises Tom succeeds in the Edge action and increases his Edge bonus over Kroe to +5. His evidence completed, the GM rules that the goblin witness is removed from the scene.

**Kroe's Action:** Kroe realises he cannot hide his sorcerous background

any longer, but realises this is not fully conclusive evidence. He admits he is a sorcerer and has been mining darkstone, but claims that this does not mean he is the sorcerer who has been plotting against the Schattengraf. However, when the rolls are made, Tom's +5 edge bonus proves too great and Kroe fails to convince the Schattengraf otherwise.

### Round 8 (Climax ladder 5)

**Initiative:** Angelique completed a successful set up action, so she wins the initiative. Sophie decides to let Kroe go first so that they can see how he reacts, followed by Norris, then Tom.

**Kroe's Action:** Seeing the game is nearly up in this arena, Kroe decides to bring his plan forward a step. He tries to stealthily draw closer to the Schettengraf so that he may hold him hostage should the circumstances require it.

**Angelique's Action:** Angelique tries again to block Kroe's action. The GM determines that she must spot what Kroe is up to. She says that her courtesan training makes her well aware of how to read people's faces, and can use her notice specialisation, and her Empathic trait. However the GM rules that the trait is only partially appropriate. Fortunately Angelique's roll is good and she successfully blocks Kroe's action.

**Norris's Action:** Norris moves on to the next piece of evidence, presenting a charm that they took from one of Kroe's henchmen in a previous scene. The charm is connected to Kroe's ring and, if activated, the charm will cause Kroe's ring to glow as it sends a message back to the master charm – the ring. Jacob explains this to the Schattengraf, but will leave Tom to activate the charm, as he has the magical talent. This is an accelerate action effect. Norris continues to use his Stern trait and Inner Circle

background, but as he has to explain a complex magical theory, the GM tells Jacob his trait and background only partially apply. Norris spends his one point of mental essence to improve his chances on the roll. Kroe resists by trying to contradict Norris's explanation, rolling Devious and Arcanist. Jacob rolls well and beats the GM's roll.

**Tom's action:** Tom uses his spellcasting ability to activate the charm, but decides to spend a little time charging up the magical energy first, to emphasise the dramatic effect. He combines a setup action with an accelerate action. He roll his Arcanist background and his Quick Witted trait, whilst the GM rolls Kroe's Arcanist background and Demonic Pact trait as Kroe tries to counter the build up of energy. Tom's massive edge bonus comes into play again as he scrapes a victory on the dice roll.

### Round 9 (Climax ladder 2)

**Initiative:** Tom's successful set up action means he wins the initiative. He decides to set things up for a climax, making Kroe go last, and lets Angelique and Norris go before him so that they can support his climax action.

**Angelique's Action:** Building on the tension Tom has built up, Angelique tries to build up the tension around the upcoming revelation by telling the Schattengraf a story of how they found the charm on an animated corpse that attacked them as they investigated the plots made against him. She treats this as a setup effect, giving her free raise to Tom. She uses her courtesan background, but all her social traits relate to her looks, as opposed to her storytelling ability, so she must roll only one dice. Kroe attempts to resist by discounting her story as far fetched. He rolls his Imposing trait and Inner Circle background to assume the position of

authority. However, Sophie gets a good roll on the one dice she rolls and manages to beat the GM's roll.

**Norris's Action:** Norris also wants to support Tom's action, and does so by summing up the evidence against Kroe. He uses his usual trait and background, but the GM's roll for Kroe beats Jacob's roll and Norris's action fails to have any effect.

**Tom's Action:** Tom now activates the charm to finally prove Kroe's guilt. He makes this a climax action. Knowing the climax ladder is at 2 and his edge over Kroe is one short of Kroe's significance he needs 3 raises to successfully climax the scene. He has two free raises from his own set up in the previous round and Angelique's action this round. He adds the final raise to the roll. He rolls his Arcanist background and his Sharp Mind trait and uses his last point of mental essence. Kroe resists with his Demonic Pact trait and his Arcanist background. Tom rolls a top dice roll of 7, adding his 1 level in Arcanist and his +5 edge bonus, getting a total of 13. Kroe has an Arcanist background level of 4 but only gets a top dice roll of 6. He gets 10 in total, even with Tom's raise Top still beats the GM's roll and the scene is climaxed as Kroe's ring reveals his true involvement in the plot.

**Scene Over:** With Kroe's guilt established the GM decides that the Schattengraf orders his guards to capture Kroe. However Kroe is not willing to come easily and a new scene begins immediately as Kroe decides to fight for his life.

## The End

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