

# PULP ERA: THE GAME OF TWO-FISTED ACTION & ADVENTURE



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*“Duty Now, for the Future!”*

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# Introduction

“Yes Reid, that’s just what this city needs — a modern Robin Hood,’ said the chief of police to millionaire newspaper mogul Britt Reid...” — *The Adventures of the Green Hornet* (1940)

It was an average Saturday morning in an average small town in the 1940’s. An orchestra played “Flight of the Bumblebee,” shaking the walls of the movie house as a hypnotic disk and a large hornet appeared on the giant screen. The serial was “The Adventures of the Green Hornet”, one of the many great chapter plays that intrigued audiences every Saturday and had them coming back for more. Five cents was all it took to transport these movie-goers far away from their troubles. America had survived the Great Depression and was enjoying a time of prosperity but a second World War was brewing overseas, a war against a madman named Adolf Hitler and his Nazi party — the cinema was America’s only true escape.

Despite the whimsical cartoons, musical sing-a-longs (“Follow the Bouncing Ball!”) and Marx Brothers movies, it was the serial that brought the audience running. Each week you could watch your favorite hero escape certain death time and time again. Audiences watched breathlessly as Buster Crabbe (the titular character of *Flash Gordon*) as he fell into Ming the Merciless’ ingenious deathtraps, convinced that their hero was dead. Then, the beginning of next week’s episode would reveal that, Flash had managed to escape at the last moment. Those were the serials, also known as “cliffhangers” because the episodes often ended with the hero trapped upon a high cliff, about to fall to his doom. Full of non-stop action, they brought the thrills and chills of the pulp novels to the big screen.

Serials have their origins with the beloved silent films of the early twentieth century like *The Perils of Pauline* (1914) starring the beautiful Pearl White (known as the “Queen of the Serials”) and *What happened to Mary?* (1912) featuring the lovely Mary Fuller. With the success of the films and others like them, the serial became a Hollywood tradition. Those short films brought excitement and romance to a time when all hope seemed lost. Serials are popular even today, from the classic cliffhanger action of Steven Spielberg’s *Raiders of the Lost Ark* films to the noir feel of Tim Burton’s *Batman*, the pulps are alive and well in all their lurid detail.

So that’s why we bring you **PULP ERA**, the game of two-fisted action and adventure — a chance for you and your friends to recreate the intrigue, action and intrigue of those classic Saturday serials. The rules focus on larger-than-life heroes and cinematic action, helping to capture the fun and dramatic atmosphere of this fast-paced genre. Did you ever wonder what it would be like to hang off the wing of a PW-9C biplane as it fell in a full tailspin or of high-rolling with the upper-crust in Monte Carlo’s finest casinos? Have you ever dreamed of searching for lost cities deep within the heart of the Amazon or of leaping across the wet rooftops of a dark and corrupt city with only a loaded pistol and a mask to conceal your identity? Well then, True Believers, sit back and enjoy as we take you on a wild ride into the amazing world of the Cliffhangers — a ride into the **PULP ERA!**

“Modern Robin Hood,’ eh? Okay, Kato... we’re going to introduce the police chief and the world to the Green Hornet!” — *The Adventures of the Green Hornet* (1940)

In the pulps, the hero faced the unexpected and the extraordinary with a left-hook and a crooked grin. In **PULP ERA** you are the hero in this sometimes deadly, but always exciting world. Be it a masked crime fighter or a dashing young scientist, a brash flyboy or a Master of the Mystic Arts, the possibilities are as endless as your imagination. This is brand new world to explore, though almost certainly familiar; a long-past age of Black and White, Good and Evil. Though based on the innocent, bygone age of the 30’s and 40’s, this is not your world. Through your character you can discover lost civilizations, travel to uncharted reaches of Outer Space, or fight with the Allied Forces against the villainous Nazi’s. The action never stops... and neither do you! Whether you are a Hardboiled Gumshoe or a Masked Avenger, you’ll need more than your skill and your trusty pistol, because when you’re brawling on the back of a runaway truck traveling at 80 miles an hour on a cliff-side road, you have no time for fear — disaster is always just around the corner...

“I don’t like it when the Masked Marvel goes after a man he’s finished... the Masked Marvel learns everything and strikes from nowhere.” — *The Masked Marvel* (1943)

## What is a Role Playing Game?

A Role Playing Game (RPG) is not like a traditional boardgame, like Monopoly™ or chess. In these games, the object is to win — and usually to aid this effect you have a large game board and little plastic pieces that you move around. In an RPG, no one has to fight over who gets to be the car or the shoe because the game board is your imagination and the playing pieces are the characters that you and your friends create. In an RPG, the goal is not to win but to tell a story — and have fun in the process.

The person who directs the flow of the game and helps to mold the story is the Game Moderator (GM). Not only does the GM handle disputes and adjudicate the rules, he is also responsible for describing what your characters see, and for portraying all the inhabitants of the world that you’re in (called NPC’s for “Non-Player Characters”). The GM has a tough but rewarding job; he must act as your characters’ eyes and ears, their friends and enemies. When getting together to play this game, one person should be chosen as the GM and should read through all of the rules to get an idea of how the game is played. Usually, the person who owns the becomes the GM but over time this responsibility can be shared, each new GM developing their own style in storytelling. **PULP ERA** is best played with four players and a GM, although as few as two or as high as six are also fine (any fewer and the game will lack the player interaction that it needs, any more and it will get bogged down by too many players all vying for attention). Sometimes your perils are best shared, and in a dangerous world, the more the merrier.

# Character Creation

“Skulls! Powers of Darkness! This isn’t right! I was an altar boy, for the love of Pete, at Saint Timothy’s! The only power I believe in comes out of the barrel of a gun!” — *The Phantom* (1996)

## Overview

1. Choose a Role (or create your own Role)
2. Assign 25 points to your Styles.
  - Mystical characters add the Arcane Style and strange characters add the Strange Style.
  - Your main Style (the Style that best represents your character) should have the highest rating.
  - No Style’s rating may be over 10.
3. Assign 30 points to your Attributes.
  - Your Wounds rating is equal to your Brawn.
  - No Attribute’s rating may be over 10.
4. Assign 15 points to your Merits.
  - Each of your Merits must correspond to an Attribute.
  - No Merit may be higher than half the rating of that Attribute.
  - Assign Specialty Merits and Flaws (optional).
5. Assign one free Gimmick that fits your character’s Type.
  - Characters may choose an additional Gimmick for any Style with a rating of 8 or higher (including your Primary Style).
6. Characters start with one Plot Point, plus one Plot Point per unused Merit point.

## Character Roles

In the game **PULP ERA** you will play a larger-than-life character living in the danger and intrigue-filled world of the pulps and serials. To create these characters, we have provided you with Roles, standard characters that have (in one form or another) established themselves in pulp novels, comics, films and radio plays.

These Roles are quick and easy character templates that you can use to start playing **PULP ERA** right away. Roles are also a good way to introduce yourself to the high flying world of the Pulp because, while being specific to the pulps of the 30’s and 40’s, they’re also very generic and well-worn examples of the classic “Pulp Hero.” Because the number of roles is so extensive and easy to visualize, you should have no problem finding one that’s right for you.

For example, you want to play one of those outrageous wrestling superheroes from the world of the Mexican pulp films? “No problemo!” Just take the “Masked Avenger” Role and add the “Celebrity” gimmick. Or how about a two hundred-year old vampire who works as a cop? Well, he sounds like a cross between the “Hardboiled Gumshoe” and the “Weird Being.” You’d be amazed at how many unique characters can be created just by adding Gimmicks to different Roles!

When choosing a Role, talk with other players and with the GM first. **PULP ERA** games are collaborative efforts and require the cooperation and participation of everyone involved. If the GM is running an episode that takes place in Darkest Africa, will your Hardboiled Gumshoe really be appropriate? Don’t be afraid to ask questions or even to change your character concept to fit in with the rest of the group. Communication is the key to a successful **PULP ERA** experience.

Each Role consists of the following information:

### The Role’s name.

*Type:* Each of the six Types corresponds with a character’s Primary Style. Primary Styles in turn are used to calculate how many Gimmicks a character can possess. When

creating your own Role, be sure to decide what Type of character your Role concerns itself with. Is the character's style *Daring, Ingenious, Crafty, Charming, Arcane* or *Mighty*?

*Profile:* A short description to assist you in visualizing the Role. Profiles will give you a general idea of how the Role can be portrayed, as well as the various strengths and weaknesses that a Role might offer.

*Quote:* An example of something a character from that Role might say.

*Gimmicks:* A list of Gimmicks that the Role may utilize. Gimmicks are theatrical devices that enable **PULP ERA** characters to perform the amazing feats that they portray in the movies and novels.

*Gear:* A short list detailing the typical equipment that a character from that Role might possess. This list doesn't include possessions granted by Gimmicks like Weird Gadgets or Mystic Relic, it's just an example of items that flesh out a Role and give it that spark of realism.

Some Roles also list Recommended Disciplines. These are only suggestions for Arcane Merits appropriate for that Role and are not hard and fast rules.

Characters in the pulps were, for the most part, model citizens. Although moody loners and gritty, angst-ridden characters are sometimes fun to play, they're not appropriate for **PULP ERA**. This is not to say that you can't play a "dark" character (Batman, the Shadow and the Spider were all incredibly dark characters), it's just that their neuroses shouldn't interfere with the game or with the other players.

Another important consideration when creating a **PULP ERA** character is depth. Now most role playing games encourage in-depth, well thought out backgrounds and complete character histories. In **PULP ERA**, it just isn't important. **PULP ERA** isn't worried about minute details, it's more concerned with the "big picture." In a world of well-worn plots and timeless cliches, intensive character backgrounds stick out like, well, a sore thumb! So unless a play-by-play of your character's high school years is integral to the character, skip it... concern yourself with only the details. As a famous cop once said, "Just the facts, ma'am."

## ***Men & Women of Action!***

Feats of derring-do are common in the pulps, from jungle queens riding on the backs of rampaging elephants to barrel-chested working-class Joe's duking it out with Nazis on the wings of biplanes. These Men and Women of Action thrill us with their incredible feats of daring. It's no coincidence that Daring is their primary Style.

### **All-American**

*Profile:* As American as mom and apple pie, the All-American is the football hero, star athlete and Golden Boy. All-Americans come from many different backgrounds but share the traits of youth, charisma and athletic prowess. Like the Working-Class Hero, the All-American often finds himself placed in unusual situations, often becoming an unlikely hero in the process. If he has a flaw, it's his refusal to tarnish his virtuous image by being dishonest and playing "hard and fast" with the rules.

*Quote:* "Gee, it'd be swell if we won the homecoming game again this year..."

*Gimmicks:* Sporting Edge, Celebrity, Unbreakable Loyalty

*Gear:* Varsity jacket, sports equipment, class ring

### **Howling Leatherneck**

*Profile:* The Howling Leatherneck is a rough and tumble member of the Armed Forces. Whether driving a tank over minefields or going mano a mano with Nazis, the Howling Leatherneck is a powerful warrior and patriot. Although a bit gruff at times, his military might makes him a force to be reckoned with!

*Quote:* "Awright you maggots! Let's do it for the U. S. of A.! Hooo-ahh!"

*Gimmicks:* One-Man Army, Patriot, True Grit

*Gear:* Dog-tags, uniform, weapons, cigar

### **Flying Ace**

*Profile:* The Flying Ace is queen of the skies. An accomplished pilot and aerial daredevil, the Ace can out fly anyone. Flying Aces can be found dogfighting in wartime, dazzling crowds at air shows or acting as transportation for expeditions into far-off lands.

*Quote:* “Two bogeys on my tail? Hold onto your lunch... I’m gonna try something!”

*Gimmicks:* Signature Vehicle, Fly Anything, “Any landing can walk away from...”

*Gear:* Leather jacket, tools, flying goggles. passport

### **Noble Savage**

*Profile:* Abandoned and orphaned at a young age, you were raised in the jungle by wild animals. Growing up, you developed into a fierce and beautiful young woman with the ability to communicate with animals of all kinds. You made it your mission to protect your jungle home from invaders until being discovered by a group of explorers. Now, you fight for the welfare of both humans and animals.

*Quote:* “Know now that this land and its creatures are under my protection.”

*Gimmicks:* Animal Magnetism, Totem Animal, Animal Companion

*Gear:* Leopard-skin bikini, flint spear or dagger, pouch of rare herbs

### **Working-Class Hero**

*Profile:* The Working-Class Hero is a catch-all Role for all the firemen, cowboys, truck drivers and blue collar men and women who find themselves in the unlikely role of hero. Humble and honest, he takes unusual or dangerous situations in stride with his simple motto, “All in a day’s work.”

*Quote:* “Snake gods? Alien invaders? Criminy... I hope we get overtime for this.”

*Gimmicks:* Yankee Ingenuity, True Grit, “Just another day on the job”

*Gear:* Tools, uniform or work clothes, photograph of “his girl”

## **Men & Women of Science!**

As much as the pulps are known for their fight scenes and death-defying stunts, they’re just as well known for their dedicated scientists and mad geniuses, all bent on saving the world from Moon Men, Nazi *übermensch* and radioactive army ants. The lab-coat wearing heroes, while not as glamorous as oth-

ers, are stars in their own right. Their inventive minds and ingenious exploits earn them Ingenuity as their primary Style.

### **Child Prodigy**

*Profile:* The Child Prodigy (also called “The Kid”) is smart, resourceful and creative, Unfortunately, she is also nosy, impatient and talkative. Her ability to solve problems is rivaled only by her ability to create them. Although she can be a pain in the neck to adults, her cute grin and precocious nature soon endear her to all that she meets.

*Quote:* “Gosh! The folks back home will never believe this!”

*Gimmicks:* Animal Companion, Underestimated, Guardian

*Gear:* Yo-yo, slingshot, magnifying glass, backpack

### **Condescending Academic**

*Profile:* A font of virtually endless knowledge, the Condescending Academic is also an egotistical, long-winded bore. He seems to be only interested in Science in order to impress women and belittle the “uneducated masses.” Still, he holds an impressive number of degrees and can answer any question — he might even have a radio show. He’s smart... and he’ll sure as heck make sure that everyone knows it!

*Quote:* “This reminds me of my experiences in the Amazon when I was a lad...”

*Gimmicks:* Esoteric Knowledge, Dismissive Attitude, Celebrity

*Gear:* Pipe, tweed suit and bow tie, musty books

### **Crackpot Inventor**

*Profile:* The Crackpot Inventor is a genius living on the edge of madness. His theories are implausible, his experiments incredible and his sanity is questionable. Despite his frazzled appearance, however, the Crackpot Inventor is a brilliant scientist. His heroes are Tesla and Edison and his “discoveries” range from energy-dispersal rays, clockwork automations and the indisputable fact that the earth is hollow.

*Quote:* “X is equal to minus Pi times the square root of N! It’s so simple! Ahahahaha!”

*Gimmicks:* Laboratory, Weird Gadgetry, Unwavering Faith in Science

*Gear:* Rocketship blueprints, electrical gizmos and book of radical theories

### **Dedicated Physician**

*Profile:* The Dedicated Physician is just that: dedicated. A skilled surgeon, confidante and physician, he has dedicated his entire life to Medicine. His devotion runs deeper than anything else; he'll even risk life and limb to save his most hated enemy.

*Quote:* "You're gonna make it, son! I won't let you die!"

*Gimmicks:* ER impresario, 11th Hour Miracle Worker, Hippocratic Oath

*Gear:* Medical equipment, satchel

### **Egghead Researcher**

*Profile:* A rarity in the male-dominated field of Science, the Egghead Researcher is analytical and logical in her quest for the truth. Detail-oriented to a fault, the Egghead Researcher spends more time in the lab than at home and feels more comfortable around scientific equipment and laboratory animals than other people.

*Quote:* "I know it sounds crazy but all the calculations measure up..."

*Gimmicks:* Reputation, Patronage, Unwavering Faith in Science

*Gear:* Glasses, Lab Coat, Clipboard

## ***Men & Women of Mystery!***

"Who knows what evil lurks in the hearts of men?" With those words, a legend was born. Cloaked in mystery and shadows, these gritty heroes have fought the Mob, German spies and immortal Aztec warriors. Their true identities are often hidden but their cunning and skill always shows through. For that, these Men and Women of Mystery earn the primary Style of Craft.

### **Fortune Hunter**

*Profile:* The Fortune Hunter officially collects rare artifacts for private collections and museums but she has her own agenda. Be it the sense of duty to protect and preserve, the thrill of adventure of sheer intellectual curiosity, the Fortune Hunter will go to almost any extreme to acquire her prize.

*Quote:* "That idol must be two thousand years old... and priceless, too. Hmmm..."

*Gimmicks:* Patronage, Linguist, Well-Traveled

*Gear:* Pistol, bullwhip, fedora, foreign currencies

### **Hardboiled Gumshoe**

*Profile:* Hardboiled Gumshoe's are the G-Men, private dicks, lone wolves and rogue cops that keep law and order in the Big City. Some are sterling examples of the Badge, others are a bit less scrupulous. When you're one against many, the pressure can wear you down. The Hardboiled Gumshoe stares adversity square in the face and doesn't give up the chase.

*Quote:* "This is the police... come out with your hands up!"

*Gimmicks:* Safehouse, Contacts, Functional Alcoholism

*Gear:* Badge or investigator's license, .38 pistol, handcuffs, whisky flask

### **Inscrutable Oriental**

*Profile:* The Inscrutable Oriental is the affable sidekick, always ready with a wry observation or a swift karate chop. Knowledgeable in ancient mysteries and deadly fighting arts, he is an honorable opponent and an invaluable ally.

*Quote:* "Confucius say: One needs not strike to be a blade."

*Gimmicks:* Martial Artist, Inscrutable, Unbreakable Loyalty

*Gear:* Archaic weaponry, black suit, domino mask

### **Masked Avenger**

*Profile:* Though some may consider you to be no better than the criminals you fight, you consider yourself a hero of sorts. Cloaked in the shadows of night and armed with only your razor-sharp cunning and your trusty sidearms, you stalk the back alleys searching for wrongs to right. Your methods may be a bit extreme but you hold no pity for the villains you have waged war against.

*Quote:* "Step aside, scoundrel... and face the wrath of my justice!"

*Gimmicks:* "Where did he Go?," Secret Identity, Reputation

*Gear:* Costume, grapnel and line, twin .45 pistols, utility belt

### **Shady Character**

*Profile:* A shadowy figure cloaked in mystery, the Shady Character can be a government spook, a snitch or a secret agent. Highly mobile and secretive,

the Shady Character is often embroiled in intrigue, conspiracy and pulse-pounding danger.

*Quote:* “Here’s the document... now leave. You never saw me. We never spoke.”

*Gimmicks:* Badly-Lit, Voluminous Trenchcoat, Man with No Name

*Gear:* Dark trenchcoat, cigarettes, mini-camera, numerous concealed weapons

### ***Men & Women of Society!***

A far cry from the Sky-Realms of Kazar or the jungles of Borneo, the Men and Women of Society exist within the concrete canyons of the Big City. Money and influence are their trade and nobody does it better. Although they’re more interested in stocks, they get their share of excitement. Nightclub shenanigans and midnight car chases are as common as cocktail parties and air-kisses in their world. Charm is the key here, and so it is Charm that is their primary Style.

#### **Ace Reporter**

*Profile:* A savvy journalist with a great pair of gams, the Ace Reporter is always on the look out for a story. Though low in the rankings at her radio station or newspaper, she’s eager to advance her position. She also has integrity, a rare quality in the dog-eat-dog world of journalism.

*Quote:* “Can I quote you on that, Mr. Mayor?”

*Gimmicks:* Reputation, Contacts, Newshound

*Gear:* Camera, press pass, notebook

#### **Dilettante Playboy**

*Profile:* High-class and just a bit snobby, the Dilettante has never needed to work a day in her life. Born with a silver spoon in his mouth, the Dilettante Playboy has money to burn and then some. Sometimes he is a wealthy philanthropist or patron of the Arts and Sciences. Other times he is a spoiled brat or a greedy manipulator. No matter the circumstances, he knows that money is power and power is everything.

*Quote:* “What a magnificent painting! It will look splendid next to the Van Gogh...”

*Gimmicks:* “Put it on my tab...”, Estate, Well-Traveled

*Gear:* Luxury car, flashy clothing and jewelry, wads of cash

#### **Femme Fatale**

*Profile:* Sexy and sultry, the Femme Fatale seems to be a trouble magnet. When not slinking around piano bars as a torch singer, the Femme Fatale uses her feminine wiles to get what she wants, no matter who is hurt in the process. She’s not evil, per se... she’s just street smart enough not to be taken advantage of. In fact, she’d rather take advantage of someone else.

*Quote:* “Hello there, handsome. Would you like to buy me a drink?”

*Gimmicks:* Looks that Kill, Animal Magnetism, “Put it on my tab...”

*Gear:* Purse, make-up, jewelry, .22 pistol, room key to the “No-Tell Hotel”

#### **Gentleman Spy**

*Profile:* A cultured and sophisticated gentleman, the Gentleman Spy is also a master of disguise, an expert marksman and the quintessential ladies’ man. He lives on the edge but unlike the Shady Character, has not turned his back on creature comforts... instead, he has embraced them whole-heartedly.

*Quote:* “Baccarat? Yes, I’ve been known to play a few hands now and then...”

*Gimmicks:* Debonair, Weird Gadgetry, High Roller

*Gear:* Disguise kit, fake ID’s, silenced pistol, playing cards

#### **Wiseguy Gangster**

*Profile:* The Wiseguy Gangster is the proverbial crook with a heart of gold. He may be a bit of a low-life and his motives may be questionable but you can’t deny that he’s a gutsy character. His streetwise attitude, chutzpah and impressive list of contacts come in awfully handy sometimes... too bad he’s on the other side of the law.

*Quote:* “Sure, I think I can help... but it’ll cost ya plenty, see?”

*Gimmicks:* Patronage, Get Out of Jail Free, Reputation

*Gear:* Thompson machine gun, hold-out pistol, fedora, zoot suit

### ***Men & Women of Tomorrow!***

The future is full of possibility and the Men and Women of Tomorrow are living embodiments of that potential. Exploring uncharted reaches of space or battling the forces of Evil, the Men and Women of



Tomorrow are fighting today for the rights and lives of all Mankind. To do this takes many things but the most important one of all is their primary Style of Might, the strength of purpose that can overcome all obstacles.

### **Defender of Humanity**

*Profile:* The Defender of Humanity has been gifted with superhuman abilities and has chosen (or has been charged with) the role of guardian of all mankind. The Defender of Humanity must protect the innocent, right wrongs and always use his powers for the benefit of all. It is sometimes difficult to live up to this code but he cannot fail, lest the forces of evil triumph.

*Quote:* “Up, up and away!”

*Gimmicks:* Secret Identity, Reputation, Nick of Time

*Gear:* Secret headquarters, costume, specialized weaponry

### **Intrepid Explorer**

*Profile:* The Intrepid Explorer’s task is “to boldly go where no man has gone before.” Be it by interstellar spacecraft, submersible or hot air balloon, he lives for the thrill of discovering new places — of setting foot where no human has ever traveled before. The Intrepid Explorer can be seen by some as a brash, reckless fool while others will see him as a driven fanatic. Either way, he will never stop journeying into the realms of the unknown.

*Quote:* “I don’t care what the maps say... the Lost Isle of the Ancients does exist!”

*Gimmicks:* Unerring Navigation, Signature Vehicle, Strange Homeland

*Gear:* Pistol (or “Ray-Gun”), maps of never-before seen places

### **Mechanical Marvel**

*Profile:* There are actually two types of Mechanical Marvel; the first being a man or woman who uses a suit of battle armor or flight-suit, the second being a fully mechanical creation. In the case of the former, the hi-tech device allows him to fight crime while maintaining anonymity (indeed, the suit may even give him a mysterious, robot-like appearance). In the case of the robotic creation, it may be programmed to act heroically or it might just feel a “need” to prove its humanity (if the Marvel is self-aware).

*Quote:* “Beep... whirrr! Click... click...”

*Gimmicks:* Laboratory, Fly Anything, Tireless Worker

*Gear:* Tools (for repair), power source

### **Super-Soldier**

*Profile:* The Super-Soldier is the rare Man of Tomorrow who has pledged his services to the military. His exploits are the stuff of newsreels and his image is often used on campaign posters to encourage young men and women to enlist in the armed forces. Still, he’s not just a poster-boy for the recruiters and journalists; he’s a two-fisted dynamo clad in the Red, White and Blue... a hero and inspiration to us all!

*Quote:* Those Nazi bastards Blitzkrieg and Red Menace are behind this attack, General... I’d bet my stripes on it!”

*Gimmicks:* Leadership, One-Man Army, Patriot

*Gear:* Uniform, specialized gear and weaponry.

### **Thrillseeking Daredevil**

*Profile:* A rarity in the realm of supermen and women, the Thrillseeking Daredevil is in it for the fun. Empowered with mighty abilities at a young age, the Daredevil is a plucky gal with a spirit for adventure and a knack for getting into trouble. Although some eventually move onto more serious endeavors, a few never seem to grow up.

*Quote:* “If you thought that was keen, check out this move!”

*Gimmicks:* Nine Lives, Secret Identity, Trouble Magnet

*Gear:* Mask, comic-book collection

## ***Masters & Mistresses of the Unknown!***

The most unusual of all are the Masters and Mistresses of the Unknown. Learned in the Magical Arts, they are privy to a world that most of us can only dream of... a world of ghosts and witchcraft, demons and powerful enchantments. Possessing powers beyond the understanding of mere mortals, they dabble in the Arcane, the source of all their power and their primary Style.

### **Mystic Guardian**

*Profile:* Schooled in the Occult Arts, the Mystic Guardian (like the Defender of Humanity), has pledged to fight the forces of darkness. Constantly on the watch for invaders from parallel dimensions, she

is armed with a lifetime of magickal lore and a collection of powerful arcane artifacts. Mankind may be ignorant of her help but the Mystic Guardian isn't in it for the glory...

*Quote:* "By the Hand of H'rukk Shabolak I dispel thee, demon spawn!"

*Gimmicks:* Safehouse, Mystic Relic, Man with No Name

*Gear:* Spellbooks, scrolls, high-collared cloak

*Recommended Discipline:* Theurgy

### Occult Investigator

*Profile:* Though he is also concerned with combating malignant forces, the Occult Investigator isn't quite as flashy as the Mystic Guardian. Indeed, he may even act rather skeptical when confronting paranormal phenomena. At any rate, he and the agency that he works for usually deal with strange cases where supernatural activity might be involved. He has seen some odd things in his life, but they're just part of the job.

*Quote:* "Fangs? Glowing red eyes? Yup — sounds to me like you got yourself a vampire, Mrs. Johnson. Let me get my things... I'll be over in an hour."

*Gimmicks:* Patronage, Faith (or Dismissive Attitude), Voluminous Trenchcoat

*Gear:* Wooden stakes, silver bullets, cross pendant

*Recommended Discipline:* Occultism or Spiritualism

### Stage Magician

*Profile:* Clad in the familiar black tuxedo and top hat, the Stage Magician is a charming master of illusions — but he's also a shameless rogue and a sly and clever confidence man. Most of his skill is in fooling people using slight-of-hand and cheap parlor tricks. The real magic, the magic few see, is even more breathtaking...

*Quote:* "Look! Nothing up my sleeve..."

*Gimmicks:* Debonair, Conjuring, Signature Trick

*Gear:* "Magic" wand, stylish clothing, white rabbits and scarves

*Recommended Discipline:* Mesmerism

### Venerable Sage

*Profile:* Impossibly old and wizened, the Venerable Sage is a true master of the Arcane. Always an enigma, he may seem at times a solemn ascetic, a grumpy curmudgeon or a cackling old madman. Despite these outward appearance, however, he is a powerful mage and a harsh, unyielding mentor.

*Quote:* "What is the sound of one hand clapping?"

*Gimmicks:* Fortune-Cookie Wisdom, Inscrutable, Esoteric Knowledge

*Gear:* Robes, staff, chopsticks, divination devices

*Recommended Disciplines:* Shamanism or Occultism

### Weird Being

*Profile:* Heralding from another plane of existence, the Weird Being is easily recognized as an outsider. Though this can be a handicap, the Weird Being's otherworldly nature has bestowed upon him a variety of strange and wondrous powers. Perhaps he is a ghost, trapped on earth until his death is avenged? Maybe he comes from another dimension where beasts walk on two legs and live like men? Possibly he is from this world, this time — but from a place all but forgotten... like the lost continent of Atlantis or the Hollow Earth. No matter his origins, he has adopted Humanity as his extended family and he aims to safeguard it from harm.

*Quote:* "Grrr..."

*Gimmicks:* Weird Powers, Strange Homeland, Higher Purpose

*Gear:* None

*Recommended Disciplines:* Any Mighty Power or Arcane Discipline

Well, by now you should have a Role in mind, either one from the above list or one plucked from your own imagination. Now it's time to fill in the blanks and define your character's Styles, Attributes, Merits and Gimmicks.

## Styles

[25 points to distribute (Max. 10 in any Style)]

Styles are the various "styles" that embody the world of Pulp Era. Is your hero reckless and daring or suave and charming? Mighty or mysterious? Ingenious or just plain weird? A character's highest Style is called her Primary Style and should coincide with the character's Type. For example, a character whose highest Style is Daring should

choose a Man of Action Type. Unlike Roles, Types cannot be changed without great effort. The average Joe's Styles are all 5.

**Daring:** This Style deals with the courage, gusto and physical excellence that all Men and Women of Action seek to attain. Characters with high Daring can perform amazing stunts, from parachuting from burning airplanes to fending off hordes of alien invaders with only a tire iron.

**Ingenuity:** This Style deals with invention, creativity and spontaneity — the “Eureka!” factor that all Pulp Men and Women of Science seem to possess. Characters with high Ingenuity can invent bizarre gadgets, repair machines and perform astounding feats of mental acuity.

**Craft:** What Man or Woman of Mystery could be without their cunning, stealth and strength of will? Characters with high Craft are adept at hunting and tracking, solving crimes and setting traps.

**Charm:** The beautiful people, the Men and Women of Society, possess this Style (as well as wealth and influence) in abundance. Characters with high Charm are skilled confidence men, persuasive politicians and seductive temptresses.

**Arcane:** Men and Women of the Unknown seek to explore new realms and to unlock ancient mysteries. Characters with high Arcane are able to cast powerful spells and possess volumes of occult lore. Only Masters and Mistresses of the Unknown may have the Arcane Style.

**Might:** Might is that strange and rare quality that fuels the fires of the Men and Women of Tomorrow. Characters with high Might are Champions of Justice and are endowed with miraculous powers and abilities. Only Men and Women of Tomorrow may possess the Might Style.

## Attributes

[30 points to distribute (Max. 10 in any Attribute)]

Attributes are the physical, mental and social aspects of a character. They measure a character's intellect, willpower, size, attractiveness and agility. Styles are HOW a PULP ERA character does things while Attributes are WHAT the character can do. As with Styles, the Average Joe's attributes are all 5.

**Brawn:** Physical size, strength and stamina. Brawn is also used to determine your character's Wound rating. Your Wounds are equal to your character's Brawn and represent the amount of damage that you can take before becoming seriously injured.

**Action:** Speed, agility, coordination and manual dexterity.

**Smarts:** Raw intellect and perception. Your Smarts rating is also important when casting spells using Occultism.

**Spirit:** Willpower, tenacity and concentration. Spirit is very important in the casting of spells that affect your character or inanimate matter. It also determines your character's Recovery rating. Your Recovery is equal to your character's Spirit and may be used in combat to counter the penalties incurred by injury.

**Persona:** Character, appearance and charisma. Persona is also used when performing summoning rituals and casting spells on sentient beings.

## Merits

[15 points to distribute (Max. of 1/2 the governing Attribute)]

Merits modify your character's Attributes. They represent exceptional ability or talent, specialized knowledge or superior skill in a given field. Each Merit is given a rating between +1 and +5 (depending on the rating of the Attribute that it will modify). No Merit can be higher than *half* of its governing Attribute. Players may use one Merit to modify several Attributes but he must still draw these points from the pool of 15 that he starts with.

**Example:** *Jon wants to give his character the Merit of “Imposing Stature” in order to make him more fearsome looking. This Merit would modify his character's Persona Attribute of 6 and so Jon gives him “Imposing Stature” of +3, the maximum Merit rating for an Attribute of 6. Now whenever he needs to intimidate someone with his sizable presence, he can add +3 to his Persona Stunt Roll.*

*Note that this Merit only works with intimidation tactics. If he was trying to bribe a police officer (a Stunt requiring subtlety and persuasiveness) he wouldn't be able to use this bonus. Merits, as a rule, can be fairly broad (Guns +2) but not all-inclusive (All Weapons Known to Man +2). Be sure to ask your GM if a Merit is acceptable or whether it should be more expansive or limited in scope. You don't have to spend all 15 points. In fact, these may be saved and added to your Plot Points total for future use (see below). Arcane and Might Merits work a bit differently — consult the section on Arcane Disciplines and Might Powers to learn how to use them. The Average Joe has 10 points of Merits.*

### Optional Rule: Specialty Merits

In order for Merit ratings to increase past their limit you can either increase the governing Attribute (a costly task) or you can add a Specialty. Specialties allow you to add an additional point to your Merit by limiting its usefulness in certain situations. For example, if you decide to take the Action Merit of Driving +4, you could add the Specialty of Motorcycles, effectively giving you Driving +5 when racing motorcycles (but not other types of vehicles). No character may have more than one Specialty per Merit.

### Optional Rule: Flaws

Flaws work much like normal Merits except that they modify an Attribute *negatively*. An example would be an opera singer who is hideously scarred (sounds familiar?). In this case he could have the Flaw “Scarred Face” at -2 and thus subtract 2 from his Persona when dealing with people. Of course, his speech would be unaffected, as would his ability to frighten and intimidate others (although in this case, the opera singer doesn't automatically get a bonus to intimidate with his hideous visage — you still need to spend Merit points for that, although this Flaw is a nice way to offset the cost!). Negative points from Flaws may be added to the pool of Merit points that your character can spend or to your pool of Plot Points. Specialties may not be taken for Flaws and no character may have more than 8 points in Flaws.

## Gimmicks

[1 free Gimmick associated with your character's Type, plus an additional Gimmick for every Style with a rating of 8 or above]

Gimmicks define the difference between Average Joes and **PULP ERA** heroes. Whether it's a character's faithful hound, a scientist's unwavering belief that “Science can save the day!” or a suave secret agent's ability to always look impeccably dressed (even in a burning glue factory), Gimmicks are those strange abilities made famous at Saturday afternoon Matinees everywhere. Some Gimmicks must be activated using Plot Points, other (like Animal Companion) have no cost to use. Average Joes have no Gimmicks.

Some Gimmicks allow you to “flip” your Stunt Roll. What this means is that you can switch the order of the tens and ones die (so a 52 could become a 25). Obviously, doubles can't be flipped — a 44 would still be a 44.

When selecting Gimmicks, imagine how they'll be used during the game. If you're playing an Intrepid Explorer who is always getting into trouble due to his bad direction-sense, it doesn't make much sense to give him the “Unerring Navigation” Gimmick. Check out the Gimmicks list and pick the ones that are appropriate, even if they're not the “standard” Role Gimmicks. All **PULP ERA** characters have one free Gimmick associated with their main Style, plus an additional Gimmick of any type for every Style rating of 8 or above (*including* their Primary Style).

### List of Gimmicks

#### Animal Magnetism

*Description:* Due to his exotic nature, presence or appearance, people tend to react very strongly when first meeting the character. Women fall under his spell and men are cowed by his fearsome demeanor.

*How to use it:* When meeting the character for the first time, the subject will react in a suitably strong manner (awe, lust, fear, hate). By spending a Plot

Point and making a Persona-based Stunt Roll, the character can make this effect permanent. A successful Spirit roll can temporarily negate the effects of Animal Magnetism.

*Disadvantage:* If the character makes a bad impression, he'll find it difficult to change that person's mind.

**Animal Companion**

*Description:* The character has an Animal Companion. The Animal Companion may be of any intelligent species and is loyal to the character (although not to a slavish degree).

*How to use it:* The character may issue simple commands to the Animal Companion using gestures and speech. The animal possesses the normal abilities of its species shares an empathic bond with the character. By spending one Plot Point and making a Persona Stunt Roll, the character can empathically communicate with his companion. This power may be to send or receive a simple message (Danger! Help! Come!)

*Disadvantage:* The character may not allow his Animal Companion to come to harm, either through action or inaction.

**“Any Landing you can Walk Away from...”**

*Description:* The character has the uncanny ability to safely crash-land or otherwise safely stop a crashing vehicle.

*How to use it:* By spending one Plot Point, the pilot may safely crash-land in virtually any environment, no matter how unlikely the circumstances.

*Disadvantage:* Characters with this ability often rely on this Gimmick rather than safe flying, much to the dismay of their passengers!

**Badly-Lit**

*Description:* No matter how bright his surroundings, the character’s face and/or eyes always seem to be cloaked in shadows.

*How to use it:* Any character attempting to discern the Badly-Lit character’s expression or features must make a Smarts Stunt Roll of Outstanding or better.

*Disadvantage:* People will often be uneasy or distrustful around the character because of his somewhat unsavory and sinister appearance.

**Celebrity**

*Description:* The character is famous and has a following of fans and admirers in certain circles.

*How to use it:* The player should decide the circumstances of his character’s Celebrity. When dealing with fans, the character can flip all Persona-based rolls.

*Disadvantage:* The character may be hard-pressed to do anything without the public’s scrutiny.

**Conjuring**

*Description:* The character can magically create objects by pulling them out of a hat, pocket or other small object on his person.

*How to use it:* By spending a Plot Point, the conjurer may pull out any relatively common object from a jacket pocket, hat or other similar area. The character may not conjure a specific object (a key to a safe, another character’s wallet, etc).

*Disadvantage:* The character may sometimes conjure a useless item... or even a dangerous one (a live rattlesnake, a grenade without its pin)!

**Contacts**

*Description:* The character “knows people who know people” and may employ these Contacts in order to acquire information, money, assistance or material goods.

*How to use it:* The character simply needs to get in touch with his Contacts (via phone, carrier pigeon, spotlight signal or interstellar beacon). Contacts are usually on good terms with the character but payment (of some kind) for their services is usually expected.

*Disadvantage:* Failure to provide adequate compensation could result in the loss of the character’s Contacts. Also, those Contacts may someday approach the character for a favor...

**Debonair**

*Description:* The character is always looking well-groomed and tailored, even in the most stressful situations.

*How to use it:* By spending a Plot Point and taking a moment to “tidy up,” the character will switch from disheveled and dirty to relaxed and refreshed. A wet, torn suit will revert back to its original clean, dry state, etc. This Gimmick may not be used to heal the character, nor repair non-cosmetic damage to armor or items.

*Disadvantage:* Debonair characters are often vain creatures, preoccupied with their appearance.

**Dismissive Attitude**

*Description:* The character has “seen it all” and is unlikely to be fazed by even the weirdest, most unsettling situations.

*How to use it:* The character may ignore the effects of shock, surprise or distress by spending a Plot Point. By spending a Plot Point and making a Smarts Stunt

Roll, the character may even ignore Wound penalties.

*Disadvantage:* If Dismissive Attitude is used, the character's "Fight or Flight" response is negated, rendering him vulnerable to danger (his intellect is overriding his common sense).

### 11th Hour Miracle Worker

*Description:* The character is a modern-day miracle worker and a skilled surgeon, able to pull a patient from the jaws of death without breaking a sweat.

*How to use it:* After spending a Plot Point and administering first-aid to a fatally wounded character, the Miracle Worker can prevent that character's demise.

*Disadvantage:* This Gimmick doesn't heal injured characters, it merely stops them from dying.

### ER Impresario

*Description:* The character is a wiz at battlefield medicine, able to perform complex procedures without sterile conditions or adequate medical instruments.

*How to use it:* The character may perform surgery with a butter knife, dress wounds with palm leaves and accomplish other such medical marvels.

*Disadvantage:* Your patient may not be as confident of your abilities as you are...

### Esoteric Knowledge

*Description:* The character is a virtual font of knowledge regarding any single topic.

*How to use it:* The character must choose a field of study (Extinct Central American Cultures, Edible Insects, Geology of the late Mesozoic Era) at character creation. After that, the character can spend a Plot Point to gain insight into any situation that can utilize that area of knowledge. If done in an entertaining manner, the character may even apply this Esoteric Knowledge in a more useful fashion.

*Disadvantage:* The Esoteric Knowledge in question should be fairly esoteric...

### Estate

*Description:* The character owns and maintains a large mansion, office building or institution. The Estate is quite valuable and encompasses not only the physical building but also capital, staff and physical assets.

*How to use it:* The character should choose an Estate that is in fitting with his concept and background.

*Disadvantage:* The Estate must be maintained (either by the character or another party) or else it will gradually lose value.

### Faith

*Description:* The character believes in a Higher Power and may use his Faith in battle with the forces of Darkness.

*How to use it:* The character repels evil creatures of a supernatural origin and may call upon a miracle by spending a Plot Point and making a Spirit Stunt Roll.

*Disadvantage:* If the character falls off the path of Light and Good, or doubts his Faith, it will disappear — possibly forever.

### Fly Anything

*Description:* The character instinctively understands how to pilot vehicles and can safely operate them, no matter how complex or foreign their design (from flying saucers to clockwork submersibles).

*How to use it:* The character should choose a mode of transportation that he is familiar with (air, ground or water) and may use any Action Merits that apply to that type of vehicle.

*Disadvantage:* This Gimmick doesn't grant the ability to repair or understand the technology of the vehicle, nor does it enable the character to safely ride animals.

### Fortune-Cookie Wisdom

*Description:* The character knows a plethora of time-honored sayings and aphorisms, which can be used to inspire, motivate, and possibly confuse other characters.

*How to use it:* If the character can come up some bit of Fortune-Cookie Wisdom related to another character's Stunt Roll, that character may add 10 points to the Stunt Roll (so a character needing to roll a 45 or below will actually just need to roll a 55 or below).

*Disadvantage:* Fortune-Cookie Wisdom cannot be used in the midst of an action scene (like combat). The character's need time to reflect and meditate.

### Functional Alcoholism

*Description:* The character can consume large amounts of beer, liquor or other such spirited beverages without passing out or becoming impaired in

action. Martial Artists with this Gimmick are often called “Drunken Masters.”

*How to use it:* Drunkenness does not affect the character’s Stunt Rolls adversely. This Gimmick will not render the character immune to toxins or from the affects of other intoxicants.

*Disadvantage:* Although the character will not suffer penalties on physical Stunt Rolls, he will still exhibit drunken behavior (slurred speech, poor coordination, disheveled appearance).

### **Get Out of Jail Free**

*Description:* No matter what the charges, they slide off the character like Teflon. If jailed or arrested, he is capable of getting himself out with little trouble.

*How to use it:* The character spends a Plot Point to have charges dropped against him and/or to be released from prison. The character should decide how and why his freedom is granted (slick legal counsel, a friend on the force, a prison break, etc). This Gimmick will not free the character from a villain’s deathtrap, a collapsed mine shaft or other such confinement.

*Disadvantage:* If overused, this Gimmick will cease to function reliably (if at all).

### **Guardian**

*Description:* The character has a caretaker of some kind, one that will come to his need in time of trouble.

*How to use it:* If the Guardian can be contacted somehow, he or she will come to the character’s aid.

*Disadvantage:* The Guardian may also be an authority figure and will most likely not be too keen on having to rescue the character time and time again.

### **High Roller**

*Description:* The character is accustomed to living the high life. He knows the best restaurants, hotels and casinos and can hob-nob and carouse with the best and brightest.

*How to use it:* The character is able to travel through the upper echelons of high society. He is adept at baccarat, a master at ballroom dancing and he knows which fork to use first at dinner. He is also on a name-to-name basis with celebrities, politicians and other High Rollers.

*Disadvantage:* High Rollers are hard-pressed to travel incognito and are easily remembered.

### **Higher Purpose**

*Description:* The character has a Higher Purpose that he strives to attain, be it to seek vengeance, protect the innocent or clear his name.

*How to use it:* The character possesses one or more “Golden Plot Points” that he can use over and over again when pursuing his Higher Purpose (but each of the points can only be used once per Stunt Roll). This Golden Plot Point can not be used to raise Attributes or to buy Merits. It can, however be used to power Gimmicks and utilize Plot Devices. The Higher Purpose should be well-defined and should be determined at character creation. By taking this Gimmick more than once, the character may have up to three Golden Plot Points — of course, the more “High Purpose” Gimmicks he has, the more fanatical he’s likely to become...

*Disadvantage:* The character is single-minded and fanatic when dealing with his Higher Purpose, often neglecting his other responsibilities. His zealotry may even prove to endanger his own safety or the well-being of others.

### **Hippocratic Oath**

*Description:* The character is dedicated to the cause of saving lives. This dedication enables him to perform miraculous feats and even to move the hearts of his most hated enemies.

*How to use it:* Like Higher Purpose, the character possesses one or more Golden Plot Points. In the case of “Hippocratic Oath,” the character may only use these points to save lives, heal the sick, etc. This ability may only be used to save the life of another individual.

*Disadvantage:* The character must also use his life-saving skills on any and all who require them; this includes enemies. Nor may he willfully cause injury to another sentient being.

### **Inscrutable**

*Description:* The character is cloaked in mystery and intrigue. He is an enigma wrapped in a riddle... a puzzle that no one can seem to figure out.

*How to use it:* If another character attempts to influence or to understand the Inscrutable character’s motives, he does so at a Stunt Roll penalty of -10 (a character needing to roll a 45 or under would actually have to roll a 35 or under).

*Disadvantage:* The character may seem aloof and distant, even to his close associates.

**“Just Another Day on the Job...”**

*Description:* The character is able to use everyday skills in unusual situations.

*How to use it:* The character may use any of his Merits in unique and varied ways. For example, a character who is a professional juggler may use his Juggling Merit as a form of attack or defense.

*Disadvantage:* The character may tend to stick with what he knows (for example, passing up an enchanted sword for his trusty monkey-wrench).

**Laboratory**

*Description:* The character has a well-supplied laboratory and access to equipment.

*How to use it:* The Laboratory can take many forms; a junk-filled workshop, a greasy auto garage or a hi-tech research building. The character flip-flops his Stunt Rolls whenever working in his Lab.

*Disadvantage:* The Laboratory, like the Estate Gimmick, requires a bit of upkeep or it will fail the character at inopportune moments.

**Leadership**

*Description:* The character is a charismatic and courageous leader, able to take command even in the harshest conditions.

*How to use it:* The character can flip all Persona rolls involving command or Leadership matters.

*Disadvantage:* A character with this Gimmick is expected to act like a leader. Frequent displays of cowardice or tyranny may cause him to lose his Leadership ability.

**Linguist**

*Description:* The character is adept at mastering languages, both spoken and written, ancient and modern.

*How to use it:* The character starts out with 3 foreign languages that he can read, write and speak fluently. Additional languages may be learned as needed simply by spending one Plot Point.

*Disadvantage:* The character cannot use this ability to learn alien languages on the fly (although the player may opt for one of his initial languages to be an alien tongue).

**Looks that Kill**

*Description:* The character is stunningly handsome or drop-dead gorgeous. Conversely, the character may possess an incredibly grotesque visage.

*How to use it:* Whenever using his or her appearance to achieve a goal, the character flip his Persona Stunt Rolls. This includes hideously ugly characters that choose this Gimmick (although their appearances can only be used to shock, frighten and intimidate).

*Disadvantage:* Characters with Looks that Kill are easily noticed and rarely forgotten.

**Man With No Name**

*Description:* The character, male or female, has no record of ever being born. People attempting to trace his whereabouts usually turn up empty-handed.

*How to use it:* Not only will people tend not to remember the character, they will be hard-pressed to locate the character or find out any information about him. Records and files will turn up missing (or non-existent), paper trails will lead to dead-ends...

*Disadvantage:* Characters with this Gimmick find it hard to establish close relationships.

**Martial Artist**

*Description:* The character is proficient at an exotic fighting style.

*How to use it:* Martial Artists may choose to use either their Brawn or their Action Attribute when making unarmed attacks and also when blocking attacks. They may also use their abilities to parry distance attacks such as throwing knives, arrows and the like.

*Disadvantage:* Martial Artists must meditate and practice their fighting style every day.

**Mystic Relic**

*Description:* The character is in possession of a Mystic Relic.

*How to use it:* The Mystic Relic is some alien artifact or enchanted item (a talisman, a sword, a pair of ruby slippers) that has strange powers. The number and nature of those powers depend on the number of times this Gimmick is chosen:

- x1: The Mystic Relic has a Might or Arcane of 5, and +2 Merits to spend on Mighty Powers or Arcane Disciplines.
- x2: The Mystic Relic has a Might or Arcane of 7, and +5 Merits to spend on Mighty Powers or Arcane Disciplines.
- x3: The Mystic Relic has a Might or Arcane of 9 and +10 points to spend on Mighty Powers or Arcane Disciplines.



*Disadvantage:* This Mystic Relic could be highly sought after by the character's enemies.

### **Newshound**

*Description:* Newshounds are able to find a story in virtually any situation.

*How to use it:* This Gimmick allows the character to hear "the word on the street" by spending a Plot Point. Although not totally reliable, this information should at least be of some value.

*Disadvantage:* When Newshounds go looking for trouble... they often find it!

### **Nick of Time**

*Description:* From disarming bombs to getting to his own wedding on time, the character will never be "too late."

*How to use it:* If the character spends a Plot Point, the GM can slow down events so that the character will arrive just in time.

*Disadvantage:* Like the flying ace's crash landing ability, the character with Nick of Time sometimes rely on their Gimmick too much and everything becomes a last minute save.

### **Nine Lives**

*Description:* The character is preternaturally lucky, seemingly able to defy death!

*How to use it:* The character begins the game with "nine lives." If faced with a hopeless or potentially lethal situation, he can spend one of those lives to ignore damage, escape from a trap or otherwise defy death.

*Disadvantage:* Once those nine lives are gone, they're gone for good. This Gimmick may not be taken twice.

### **One-Man Army**

*Description:* The character is able to take on multiple opponents in combat without breaking a sweat. The word "outnumbered" isn't in his dictionary...

*How to use it:* The character can make a number of attacks equal to his Daring Style. Also, he can split up his actions into attacks and dodge attempts (a character with a Daring of 7 could attack four opponents and still have three actions left to dodge any attacks that come his way).

*Disadvantage:* Characters with this Gimmick think of themselves as invincible, a trait that can sometimes lead to their undoing.

### **Patriot**

*Description:* The character is Patriotic and his spirit, and his love for his country, can never be broken.

*How to use it:* Patriotic characters can ignore Wound penalties when fighting for their country's (or planet's) ideals. They also can flip their Spirit Stunt Rolls when undergoing interrogation or even torture. The player should decide to what country (or planet, if the character is an alien) his character's loyalties lie.

*Disadvantage:* The Patriot is a proud individual who is thin-skinned when others insult his patriotism.

### **Patronage**

*Description:* The character's exploits are privately or publicly funded by an organization.

*How to use it:* The character has easy access to money, supplies and information through his Patron. The player should decide the specifics of the Patron organization.

*Disadvantage:* The character may be expected to undertake missions or otherwise perform favors for his Patrons. Failure to do so could have dire consequences.

### **"Put it on my Tab..."**

*Description:* The character never seems to have to pay for anything.

*How to use it:* The character has no need for money. Perhaps he's extremely well-known or loved or perhaps he's seen as a charity case. Maybe he's just so rich that money has no meaning to him anymore. Either way, he's set for life.

*Disadvantage:* If the player abuses this Gimmick, he may find folks are less willing to pay his way...

### **Reputation**

*Description:* The character is famous (or infamous) for some reason.

*How to use it:* Like Celebrity, the character is well-known to the public-at-large. The player should decide how he got his Reputation and whether he's popular and trusted or notorious and feared.

*Disadvantage:* Popular characters tend to be disliked by less-savory elements and notorious characters will have a harder time dealing with John and Jane Q. Public.

### **Safehouse**

*Description:* The character has a flophouse, secret base or private sanctum where he and his associates can safely rest and recuperate.

*How to use it:* The character's Safehouse is a place of refuge. Provided he doesn't just blurt out the Safehouse's whereabouts, its location will remain hidden from his enemies.

*Disadvantage:* Safehouses do not contain any special equipment or posh surroundings. Characters wishing for their own Fortress of Solitude or Batcave should also choose Gimmicks such as Estate or Laboratory.

### **Secret Identity**

*Description:* The character has a Secret Identity allowing him to perform his exploits without endangering his "normal" life.

*How to use it:* The character should choose an additional Role that will become his alter-ego. He can also choose additional Gimmicks (one free Gimmick based on this alter-ego Role and an additional Gimmick for each Style of 8 or higher) that his alter-ego has access to. He may only use these Gimmicks when in the guise of his Secret Identity (you don't see Batman writing too many checks for the local charity, do you?)

*Disadvantage:* The Secret Identity has its good points, but keeping this secret will undoubtedly cause problems for the character.

### **Sidekick**

*Description:* The character has a Sidekick that can bail him out of trouble.

*How to use it:* The character should create a Sidekick NPC that can be called on to assist him in time of need. If another player wishes to portray this Sidekick, then the two character have the ability to share Plot Points and spend them on one another's behalf (although Golden Plot Points may not be shared).

*Disadvantage:* The character may find himself bailing out his Sidekick as well!

### **Signature Trick**

*Description:* The character is adept at fire-breathing, sword swallowing or other such side-show feats.

*How to use it:* The GM and the player should decide the parameters of the Signature Trick and whether or not it costs Plot Points to use.

*Disadvantage:* A consummate showman, the character will often leave calling cards at the scenes of his

exploits (like Zorro's "Z" trademark or The Comedian's smiley face buttons). Characters with Signature Tricks rarely display discretion in favor of showboating and theatrics.

### **Signature Vehicle**

*Description:* The character possesses a unique vehicle equipped with strange gadgets and special abilities.

*How to use it:* The GM and the player should work out the details of the Signature Vehicle. It can be anything from a jet-car to a submarine to a starship.

*Disadvantage:* The Signature Vehicle is closely associated with the character and will probably be coveted by his enemies. Also, the character will need some kind of mechanical Merit (or a greasemonkey Contact) to keep the vehicle in working condition.

### **Sporting Edge**

*Description:* Not only is the character a natural athlete, but he's a natural competitor as well.

*How to use it:* The character may flip any Stunt Roll where there is an element of competition (a street-fight does not count but a boxing match would).

*Disadvantage:* The character will almost never back down from a challenge and is eager to prove himself to those who may be more capable than he.

### **Strange Homeland**

*Description:* The character comes from a remote land or possibly another planet or dimension.

*How to use it:* The character is a "favorite son" in his Homeland and can rely on his countrymen for assistance if the need arises.

*Disadvantage:* The character's Homeland might require his assistance at some point in time. Weird Beings without this Gimmick are regarded as outcasts in their Homeland and are seen in an unfavorable light by his former countrymen.

### **Tireless Worker**

*Description:* The character, be it through technology or magic, doesn't require food, water, air or sleep.

*How to use it:* Just like it says. This Gimmick is usually only possessed by robots and alien characters. Tireless Workers may also ignore the effects of toxins and diseases if a Plot Point is spent.

*Disadvantage:* The character may not understand the limitations of his associates, which could cause some misunderstandings...

**Trouble Magnet**

*Description:* Excitement follows the character like his own shadow. He often lands smack-dab in the middle of an adventure without even realizing it.

*How to use it:* This is basically a sneaky way of getting the character into an adventure. As a bonus, the character gains +5 Merit Points.

*Disadvantage:* The character is a Trouble Magnet... that kind of says it all, doesn't it?

**Totem Animal**

*Description:* The character has a Totem Animal and he may call out to this spirit guide for advice and for assistance.

*How to use it:* By spending a Plot Point and making a successful Persona Stunt Roll, the character may call upon his Totem Animal for advice. By spending a Plot Point and making a successful Spirit Stunt Roll, the character may temporarily acquire an aspect of his Totem Animal (for example, a character with a tiger Totem could acquire heightened senses, claws or camouflage ability). Finally, the character gains +10 to his Persona Stunt Rolls when dealing with his Totem Animal (this refers to the animals themselves, not the actual spirit guide).

*Disadvantage:* The character's Totem Animal may request favors from the character from time to time. Also, the Totem Animal will often place a restriction on the character (like a Wolf Totem Animal will can only be called on under the light of the moon).

**True Grit**

*Description:* The character is one part crocodile, one part mule and one part grizzly bear. He's tough as nails and will never give up the fight.

*How to use it:* The character gains +1 to his Wound Rating and can spend a Plot Point to do any of the following:

Ignore Wound Penalties for the duration of a fight scene

Ignore the effects of toxins or mind-altering magical spells or powers

Ignore the effects of hunger, thirst or sleep deprivation

*Disadvantage:* The character is so stubborn that he won't accept defeat even when that's the rational thing to do!

**Unbreakable Loyalty**

*Description:* The character's sense of loyalty is unquestioned. He will go to any length to keep another character's trust.

*How to use it:* The player should decide where his character's loyalties lie. From then on, the character can spend a Plot Point to ignore any event (torture, magical spells, mind-control rays) that would result in him breaking that trust. The character also gains +10 to any Persona Stunt Roll to (but only when he is telling the truth).

*Disadvantage:* Obviously, the character cannot lie or act dishonorably.

**Underestimated**

*Description:* Whether due to the character's age, size, physical condition or gender, the character is perceived to be less than a threat to his or her enemies.

*How to use it:* The character is Underestimated by his enemies (for example, if captured he might not be restrained like the other characters).

*Disadvantage:* The character might develop a bit of a complex about being thought of as "weak" or incapable.

**Unerring Navigation**

*Description:* The character will never get lost and seems to always find what he's looking for.

*How to use it:* The character will always know what direction he's travelling, will memorize pathways and can figure out three-dimensional puzzles such as mazes. He is also skilled at making and reading maps and navigational charts.

*Disadvantage:* None, really... except that his colleagues might not be as sure of his directions as he is!

**Unwavering Faith in Science**

*Description:* The character has supreme confidence that Science will save the day, enabling him to solve seemingly impossible scientific dilemmas.

*How to use it:* The character gains +10 to any Stunt Roll dealing with science or invention.

*Disadvantage:* The character may rely a bit too heavily on his intellect and scientific knowledge.

**Voluminous Trenchcoat**

*Description:* The character has the uncanny ability to hide weapons, secret documents and recording equipment on his person that is all but detectable.

*How to use it:* The character can conceal any small object on his person with no chance of detection. To hide larger items (up to the size of a sword or tommy-gun), he must spend a Plot Point.

*Disadvantage:* The character must be wearing some kind of garment that allows him to hide objects (hat, trenchcoat, cape or baggy pants).

### **Weird Gadgetry**

*Description:* The character has a stockpile of strange inventions and gizmos.

*How to use it:* The character has access to a warehouse or storage area where he keeps a large collection of Weird Gadgetry. The gadgets may be his own creations or just unusual items that he's collected over the years. By spending a Plot Point and making a successful Smarts Stunt Roll, the character can locate virtually any odd device or artifact imaginable.

*Disadvantage:* The character needs a place to keep all this junk!

### **Weird Powers**

*Description:* The character has unusual abilities far beyond the realm of mortal men.

*How to use it:* With this Gimmick, the character may use his Arcane Style for Mighty Powers or his Might to utilize Arcane Disciplines.

*Disadvantage:* Only non-human characters like the Weird Being may possess this Gimmick.

### **Well-Traveled**

*Description:* The character is Well-Traveled and is quite worldly.

*How to use it:* The character is accustomed to different countries and cultures. He is familiar the various customs, knows where and where not to travel at night and even has a few contacts here and there in various ports-of-call.

*Disadvantage:* The character may have also acquired some enemies in his travels...

### **"Where did he Go?"**

*Description:* The character is able to disappear or hide from view even in the most difficult circumstances.

*How to use it:* By spending a Plot Point, the character can pull a disappearing act and vanish from plain sight (provided he has a place to disappear to). Some kind of distraction must be used, however (such as flash bombs or vanishing when the other guy's back is turned). As a bonus, the character may flip any Stunt Roll involving stealth.

*Disadvantage:* This Gimmick can really freak some people out...

### **Yankee Ingenuity**

*Description:* The character has common sense and is able to think his way out of any predicament or gain insight into the vagaries of certain mystifying events.

*How to use it:* The player can ask the GM any one question about the plot which the GM must answer truthfully (more or less... feel free to be cryptic about it). A Plot Point must be spent in order to use this Gimmick.

*Disadvantage:* This Gimmick may only be used once per Episode.

## **Plot Points**

[1 starting Plot Point]

The Plot Point is what determines how quickly your character advances in **PULP ERA**. All starting characters receive one Plot Point free of charge. Plot Points can be gained during character creation by not spending Merit points or by taking Flaws. During the game Plot Points can be earned by inspired or ingenious role-playing... or be simply making the other players and the GM laugh.

Plot Points are also given out as rewards at the end of an Episode depending on your character's (and the group's) accomplishments. Lastly, Plot Points can be earned by assisting the GM by playing Sidekicks and other Supporting Roles, and through in-game theatrics from giving a rousing speech to launching into a musical number.

Plot Points are also spent in similarly numerous ways. In between Episodes, players can spend their Plot Points to gain new Merits or increase existing ones. They can even increase their Styles and Attributes (though this is much more difficult). During the Episode, Plot Points are used to activate certain Gimmicks or in order to accomplish difficult tasks through the use of Devices.

## ***Plot Devices***

Plot Devices are ways that the players can directly influence the progression of the story. Using these Devices, a player can negate damage from an attack, re-roll a failed Stunt, introduce a useful equipment that he never packed or even dole out information to characters in other scenes! Here are some sample Plot Devices:

***Training Montage:*** By spending one Plot Point, the character can use the Training Montage device to gain a new Merit or increase an existing one during the Episode. This is done as a sequence of “training scenes” where the character becomes a student studying under a teacher. Watch virtually any boxing, military or martial arts film and you see a Training Montage. Strangely enough, this Device can also be seen in most 80’s teen comedies where the nerdy teen goes to a clothing store and tries on many different outfits, usually to a rockin’ soundtrack.

***Narration:*** A staple of pulp detective movies, this device allows the other players to “hear” (and act upon) the character’s thoughts by spending one Plot Point to start the Narration. This is a great way of relaying information to your fellow players even if your character isn’t with them. Characters with the Animal Companion Gimmick can use this allow the other players to temporarily understand their animal companion. Ever see Lassie? If so, then you know how this works...

***Flashback:*** This Device is a good way to build a history between characters who should know each other well but, in reality, have just met because of a new Player or a Game Convention environment. By spending a Plot Point, a character can stop the current flow and momentarily move the game back in time. There are numerous things that can be done with this Device, from imparting items that will be useful to have (“But wait... before you go, take this.”) to establishing information about the characters themselves (“Back when we were growing up, I was always amazed at the Professor’s ability to play hockey...”).

***Cut-Scene:*** A very powerful Device, the Cut-Scene costs 5 points to use. By using Cut-Scene the player can effectively say “That never happened” to a scene that happens in the Episode. If your character ever ends up bound, gagged, blindfolded and trapped in a locked safe that’s just been dropped from an airplane into the Mariana Trench, this is an excellent time to burn those Plot Points and call for a Cut-Scene.

***Re-shoot:*** An easy one to explain, just spend a Plot Point to re-roll the dice.

***Shooting Blanks:*** The Shooting Blanks Device works on the assumption that none of the violence in the pulps was actually real — it was all done with blanks, balsa wood and paper-mash. Using this device, a player can reduce an attack’s Level of Success by one per Plot Point spent. This Device may only be used by the character taking damage. Despite its name, it can be used to reduce the damage of any type of attack.

***Final Soliloquy:*** If a **PULP ERA** hero is killed, he can pass on any remaining Plot Points he may have by speaking his parting words to the other characters. The Soliloquy can take the form of an inspiring “Win one for the Gipper!” speech, or it can be a heartfelt tear-jerker (“My only regret is that I never learned to read!”). Character who bear witness to these final words receive the deceased’s last Plot Points. If there is an odd number of Plot Points up for grabs, these Plot Points are lost. Plot Points may not be passed on in this manner to the player’s next character.

# Lights, Camera, Action!

## Stunts

Whenever a character attempts to do something risky, it's called a Stunt. Keep in mind that "risky" is a relative term. A skilled mechanic can change a flat tire without rolling dice. For another character less skilled at these things, it's going to be tough. And without the right equipment (a spare tire, a jack), it might well be impossible. So before you call for a Stunt, ask yourself the following questions:

1. Could this action be considered either extremely easy or just impossible for the character in question to accomplish?
2. If there is some question as to the Stunt's difficulty, will the undesired result (usually a failed Stunt) bring things to dead stop?

If the answer to either of these questions is "yes," then skip the roll and just declare it a success or failure. Of course, some people like to roll dice for some reason. If you're one of these guys, then go ahead and clatter away. In fact, here's the part where we tell you how to use those dice of yours.

**PULP ERA** uses two 10-sided dice (percentile dice), available at your local hobby store or on the floor of your gamer buddy's living room. When you roll them, declare one of the dice the "tens" die (it helps if the two dice are different colors). This die will generate a number between 0 (the 0) and 90 (the 9). The other die is considered to be the "ones" die and will produce a number between 1 and 10 (the 0). Add those suckers up and you'll get a result from 1 (0,1) to 100 (0,0). This is why they're called percentile dice.

When you roll for a Stunt, first decide the Style of the Stunt (chances are, if there's no Style, it's not a Stunt and you should just be able to do it automatically or not at all!):

- *Daring Stunts*: Action-oriented and athletic Stunts, brawling, shooting and driving.
- *Ingenious Stunts*: Building or repairing items, problem-solving, applying scientific knowledge.
- *Crafty Stunts*: Stealth, picking a lock, setting traps, noticing details, playing an instrument.
- *Charming Stunts*: Vocal performances, intimidating an opponent, calming animals, seduction.
- *Mighty Stunts*: Using Mighty Powers.
- *Arcane Stunts*: Using Arcane Disciplines.

Now that you have figured out the Stunt's Style, you need to determine what Attribute is most appropriate for the Stunt — what Attribute will "get the job done." Will it be brute strength or a magnetic personality? Lightning reflexes or an indomitable will? When you're choosing what Attribute to use, remember to factor in any Merits, Specialties or Flaws you might have that are applicable and add (or subtract) them to your Attribute. Note that Styles and Attributes can be paired up in many ways to perform various Stunts and there is no "one way" to do it. Be creative and chances are, your creativity will be rewarded.

Now multiply the Style by the Attribute; the product is called the Stunt Roll. If you roll equal to or less than that number, the Stunt is a success. If you roll above that number, then your character has failed the Stunt. No matter how good or bad your character's abilities are, a roll of 01 is always a success and a roll of 00 (100) is always a failure.

## Fighting

Be it on the highways or in the wrestling ring, combat is a fact of life in the action-packed world of **PULP ERA**. As such, the combat system should be fast easy to use, so that when fights do break out (and they will!), they'll enhance the story rather than slow it down to a half-hour of initiative rolls, to hit modifiers and critical hit tables. Combat (especially car combat) should be as interesting to watch as it is to participate. And it goes without saying that all combat should be action-packed. The combat scene shouldn't feel like a strategy wargame. It should feel like a scene from a comic book or a dimestore novel. Fast and furious.

Also take into account the overall “feel” of the fight. A gritty slugfest in some back-alley is going to be a lot different than a dazzling display of fencing mastery. The former should be short, brutal and to the point. The latter should be colorful, outrageous and full of reversals and double-reversals. Although either way is fine, **PULP ERA** should keep the “fun” aspect in mind and avoid too much angst and gore.

Every good fight scene is like a little story. To that effect, combat in **PULP ERA** is broken down into three stages: setup, conflict and resolution. Setup defines the conditions of the fight — the location, the goal and the participants. Conflict is when the participants clash with one another. Resolution is when the smoke clears and the outcome is revealed. Sometimes, a fight will only last one round, other times the stages will repeat. GM’s and players should take notice when a fight has gone on too long (see John Carpenter’s *They Live* for the best example I can think of).

## The Setup

The fight’s participants act in order of the Style that they are using. Characters using the Daring and Mighty Styles may act first. Next comes Ingenuity, then Craft, then Charm and then Arcane. As you can see, characters who are fighting hand-to-hand or using Mighty Powers will be able to act long before character who are casting spells. Spells require concentration and ritualistic components to work properly. They’re not things that can happen easily in the midst of a bar brawl. Ingenuity is used when a character has an inspired idea and acts upon it (like when a tired Indiana Jones fells the swordsman in *Raiders of the Lost Ark* with a shot from his pistol). Craft is used primarily in setting ambushes, pulling dirty tricks and sharpshooting. Charm is really only used in combat to intimidate your opponent but other uses are certainly possible. Within each Style, characters with the highest Action Attribute act first (Action Merits may be used to modify this) . If a player is unsure what he wants to do, he may elect to hold his action until everyone else has taken their turn. This is useful when waiting to see what an opponent will do or when dodging attacks.

***Example:** Rip Rocket is going to blast the demon B’larg with his laser gun, an act of Daring. B’larg plans to summon a ball of hellfire with the Theurgy Discipline, an act of the Arcane. No matter how high B’larg’s Arcane Sphere is, Rip is going to get to act first. Give ‘em Hell, Rip!*

Think of these actions as being “shots” in a movie — attacking with a weapon, punching or kicking an opponent, drawing or firing a gun, casting a spell, dodging or blocking a blow — all be visualized as individual camera “shots.” Note that even though these are all simple actions, you can perform several actions if you string them together cinematically. “I draw my gun and fire!” is not anywhere near as cool as “I draw my gun with my left hand, round-house kick the thug, and blast him as I catch the gun with my other hand!”

For instance, a character could draw his pistol, grab a rope and swing from a balcony while firing the pistol at the crowd of henchmen below him and that would only be considered one action! In most games, you’d have to spend one action to draw your weapon, use another action to make a Stunt Roll to swing across the room and then use spend another round making a Stunt Roll to fire your pistol. In **PULP ERA**, that’s all unnecessary.

## Conflict

Now that the Setup Stage has been completed, it’s time for the Conflict Stage. Announce your intended action and make an appropriate Stunt Roll (remembering to factor in any Merits, Flaws or Specialties you may possess). Although you may opt to change what kind of Stunt you pull, you can’t switch Styles once the Conflict stage has begun. If you do this, you forfeit your turn as your character stares blankly at his surroundings. When you make the Stunt Roll, its effects will vary according to what type of action you took.

## Offensive Actions

When making an unarmed attack or when using a heavy weapon or Brawn Powers/Disciplines, use your Brawn Attribute. When making distance attacks (thrown weapons, arrows, bullets) or when using light edged weapons or Action Powers/Disciplines, use your Action Attribute. If you possess the Martial Artist Gimmick, you may use your Action Attribute when making unarmed attacks. Typically, Brawn attacks focus on smashing your opponent into

the ground while Action attacks rely on accurate strikes to the opponent's vital areas. After the attack is made and is successful, your opponent will usually suffer some kind of deleterious effect, which is covered in the Getting Hurt section.

## ***Defensive Actions***

When defending against an attack, you must first sacrifice your action for the round. If you have already taken your action, you may not defend. At any rate, the purpose of defending is to lower the damage done to you by a successful attack. There are two types of defensive actions:

### ***Dodging***

Dodging is a simple but invaluable skill with only one rule: make sure the bad guy misses! This can range from the acrobatics of a kung fu master to the evasive maneuvering of dogfighting fighter pilots. The major advantage of dodging is that it can be used to evade any kind of physical attack, ranged or close-combat. The disadvantage is that you need room to move — fighting in close quarters makes dodging a virtually impossible feat. Dodging relies on your character's Action Attribute and either it works or it doesn't — you can't really "partially dodge" — that's what getting hit is called.

### ***Blocking & Parrying***

Using these methods, you attempt to deflect your opponent either by physically countering his attack (Brawn, or Action using the Martial Arts Gimmick) or by parrying the attack with a weapon (Action). Blocking is useful because you can lower an attack's damage (usually by taking the brunt of the force or re-directing the attack away from a vital area). When you decide to block or parry an attack, you simply roll the appropriate Style + Attribute — success means that you may lower the attack's damage by your Brawn rating. The disadvantage is that because you are putting yourself directly in harm's way, you cannot use blocking or parrying to defend yourself against ranged attacks (although this is permissible through use of the Martial Arts Gimmick, allowing you to pluck arrows from the air or bat them to the side with a sword blade). Also, unarmed characters can only block unarmed attacks (with certain exceptions).

## **Resolution**

Damage is dealt by looking at the "tens" die used in the attack and multiplying that number by the weapon's Damage Rating. Oh, and before you get all crazy on me, that "tens" die is treated like a "ones" value. If the "tens" die happens to be a 0, the attack only does its rating in damage (so a weapon with a rating of x3 will only do 3 points of damage). Some weapons have a limit to the damage that they can inflict — it's hard to kill someone with a butter knife no matter how hard you try. If your attack's damage is higher than the weapon's damage limit, then you only inflict the amount listed as the weapon's limit.

### ***Weapon Damage***

- *Fists and feet*: x1, maximum damage is the fighter's Brawn rating
- *Small blades, clubs and blunt objects*: x2, maximum damage is the wielder's Brawn rating
- *Swords, crossbows, axes*: x3, maximum damage is twice the wielder's Brawn rating
- *Small firearms (hold-out pistols, zip guns)*: x4, maximum damage 15
- *Large firearms, rifles, shotguns*: x5, maximum damage 30 (x1 vs. hard targets, no maximum damage)

### ***Getting Hurt***

Whenever you are hurt in combat, you take a number of Wounds as determined both by the weapon's type and by your opponents skill. There are three levels of being hurt in **PULP ERA**: Bruised, Hurt and Down. Technically there's a fourth level... *Dead*. That one's self-explanatory but the other three warrant a bit for info.



1. *Bruised*: If you suffer any damage, you don't really feel the effects until you hit your Wound rating. You're a bit dazed and sore but you're basically okay. You're Bruised. You don't suffer any penalties but you're obviously banged up a bit.
2. *Hurt*: If you suffer more than your Wound rating in damage, you're not doing so well. You're Hurt. You're in pain and it's hard to concentrate. You're probably bleeding or you have a couple broken ribs. All your Stunt Rolls are at -20 (so if you need to roll a 56 or less, you really need to roll a 36 or less). As an added treat, you are also one rung down when determining who goes first during the Setup stage. So a Hurt character's Daring Stunts will occur during the Ingenuity phase. Yes, that means Hurt characters can't use Arcane Disciplines.
3. *Down*: If you take more than twice your Wounds, you're Down. Like, on the floor bleeding, writhing in pain, unconscious, etc. If you take any more abuse, you're probably going to die. You can't do anything except (maybe) moan and writhe and feel extreme pain. If you're lucky, you're not feeling anything.

# Might & Magic

## Mighty Powers

Powers are the strange and often unique abilities that some Pulp Heroes may have. There are two basic kinds of Powers in PULP ERA: Major and Minor. Major powers are either powerful improvements on existing abilities (invulnerability, lightning-speed) or totally new abilities (teleportation, energy beams). Minor powers are either slight improvements (increased strength, night-vision) or limited forms of Major Powers (radar-sense, gliding). Rather than go through the countless types of Mighty Powers imaginable, you can create your own Powers using this system...

### Decide what Attribute your Power is based on.

Some examples are:

- *Brawn*: Powers relating to the body, strength or endurance of the Hero.
  - Super-Strength
  - Armored Skin
  - Shapechanging
  - Claws
- *Action*: Powers relating movement or Powers requiring agility or coordination
  - Flight
  - Lightning Speed
  - Flame Blast
  - Prehensile Tail
- *Smarts*: Powers relating perception, reaction or intelligence
  - X-Ray Vision
  - Danger Sense
  - Lightning Reflexes
  - Codebreaking
- *Spirit*: Mental Powers affecting the Hero's mind or body
  - Telekinesis
  - Regeneration
  - Teleportation
  - see Arcane Disciplines for more examples
- *Persona*: Powers affecting other people's minds or perception.
  - Illusion Creation
  - Animal Empathy
  - Vocal Powers
  - see Arcane Disciplines for more examples

As you can see, there is some overlap between Powers. For instance, is the ability to change into a bird a Brawn Power or a Spirit Power (like the Shaman Discipline Shape-Shifting)? In cases like this, use your judgement and consult your GM.

### Determine the Power's level.

The best way to handle this is to talk through your Power with the GM at the start of character creation. He'll let you know if your power is too disruptive for the game.

Like normal Merits, Minor Powers usually give the Hero an Attribute modification plus the benefit of extra Levels of Effect. Thus, a character with Super-Strength (Minor) of +3 will add +3 to his modified Brawn as well as three additional Levels of Effect for the Stunt Roll.

If a character with Major Super-Strength can lift tanks, then punching out a bad guy should be no problem at all. In the case of Major Powers, assume that the Hero can automatically accomplish all but the most difficult feats. The Hero needs only to roll when attempting something that no ordinary human could do (punching holes through battleship armor, flying faster than a speeding bullet, etc.). In this case, roll as normal using the appropriate Attribute and the Might Style to determine the Stunt Roll.

**Determine the cost of the Power.**

Minor Powers cost 2 x the Power's level in Merit points.

Major Powers cost 10 Merit points.

## Arcane Disciplines

Disciplines are "Arcane Merits;" various schools of magic and mysticism that the Masters and Mistresses of the Unknown may learn. Each Discipline covers a wide range of topics and skills and allows the casting of spells within that field. With the exception of Occultism, all Arcane Disciplines modify both Spirit (when affecting the caster or non-living matter) and Persona (when affecting another living being). Also, with the exception of Occultism, Disciplines may not be learned by other character Archetypes.

### Occultism

A metaphysical discipline that borders on the realm of True Science, Occultism has been studied by both Eastern and Western mystics and philosophers for centuries. As a form of pseudo-scientific knowledge, Occultism is the only Discipline that modifies the Smarts attribute. Although Occultism can be learned by other Archetypes after a lengthy period of intense study, this knowledge must be limited to one particular facet of the Occult. The following facets of Occultism may be used:

**Alchemy**

The creation of elixirs, potions, powders and artifacts, Alchemy was originally used for the sole purpose of transmuting lead to gold. A powerful alchemical artifact that is capable of transmuting elements, the Philosopher's Stone, is rumored to exist but has never been found.

**Necromancy**

Concerned primarily with the concepts of Death and Dying, Necromancy runs the gamut from Voodoo zombie rituals to Egyptian burial rites. Also called Thanatology, it is related somewhat to the Discipline of Spiritualism but differs in its approach: that of studying the physical rather than the spiritual. Despite its morbid trappings and dark reputation, the study of death is useful in learning how ancient cultures lived.

**Mythology**

A blend of anthropology, theology and magick, Mythologists study legendary heroes and monsters, creation stories and tales of Armageddon. Fantastic worlds and creatures also fall into this field, from vampires to werewolves, ghosts to faeries. Using this ability, even the most bizarre occurrences seem to make some kind of sense.

**Divination**

Also called Fortune-Telling and Soothsaying, Divination is a familiar concept: the art of foretelling the future. Various methods of Divination are often employed: Numerology (like the Kabbalah, a form of Jewish mysticism), astrology, palmistry (palm reading), the Chinese I Ching... even analyzing a person's handwriting.

**Eastern Medicine**

The Orient has always been a source of ancient and arcane lore that continues to intrigue and mystify us even to this day. Eastern medicine concerns itself with prevention of disease through the manipulation of "Chi" (life-force). Acupuncture, herbalism, feng shui and chi gong (a kind of "laying on of hands") are all used in regulating the flow of Chi and promoting everything from good health to success in business ventures. Although Eastern Medicine like acupuncture is now widely accepted, keep in mind that in the world of Pulp Era, this kind of medicine is a rare and guarded secret.

## **Shamanism**

The natural world is the domain of the Shaman. Shamans usually come from Earth-based religions such as practiced by Native Americans, Druids, Aborigines and African tribes. An important aspect of Shamanism is the concept of True Names. True Names are closely guarded secrets that can be used for great harm if found out by an enemy. By calling upon a creature's True Name, the Shaman gains power over it. How this works in game is entirely up to the GM. Another important concept in Shamanism is the belief that all things in nature contain spirits and thus can be spoken to using magic.

Shamanic magic usually incorporates the four elements (fire, water, earth and air), elaborate rituals, music and dance, Shamans can create rain in the hottest deserts, fire in the coldest mountains and some can even tap into wild, untamed forces, allowing them to change their very form! Shamans (also called "Medicine Men" and "Witch Doctors") often use these rituals to take upon the aspect of a totem spirit, an animal guardian that imbues the Shaman with his powers. Some shamanic powers include:

### **Shapeshifting**

The Shaman can assume the form of his totem or another animal. This change is virtually instantaneous and lasts from sunrise to sunset (or vice versa). The Shaman is unable to cast any spells that require speech or gesturing while in this form and is bound by the physical limitations of that form (e.g.: a Shaman who assumes the shape of a fish cannot leave the water).

### **Weather Control**

The Shaman can call upon the forces of Nature to cause snowstorms, gale-force winds, thunder and lightning or dense fog. The Shaman can also heighten or lessen a storm's deleterious effects (powerful Shamans can negate storms completely!).

### **Vision Quests**

Through fasting, ritual torture and/or the imbibing of various substances, the Shaman can enter a deep trance where the past, present and future merge into one. The Shaman can use this state to foresee events occurring throughout the timestream, to speak with spirits and to enter the dreams of those who are asleep. Unlike the Occult field of divination or the Discipline of Spiritualism, the details of Vision

Quests are often murky and clouded in cryptic meaning.

### **Mindsight**

A form of limited telepathy, Mindspeak allows the Shaman to communicate with spirits of men, animals and Nature. The ability is one of the few that can be used while shapechanged into an animal form. Because Mindspeak bypasses language, it can be used to read surface emotions and to communicate with those who do not speak the Shaman's language.

### **Berserking**

Berserking is a form of battle-lust that a Shaman can enter after a brief but intense period of preparation. While in this state, the Shaman gains the Gimmicks of One-Man Army and True Grit. The side-effect is that the Berserking Shaman is unaware of his surroundings and will attack friend and foe alike.

### **Spiritualism**

Communication with the spirits of the dead is the domain of the Spiritualist, or Medium. Using such paraphernalia as Ouija boards, crystal balls and the trappings of classical exorcists (the infamous bell, book and candles), the Spiritualist is capable of some truly amazing feats. These include the following:

#### **Medium**

The Spiritualist is able to act as a living conduit between this world and Beyond. This act involves a limited form of possession where the spirit in question temporarily "inhabits" the Medium's body, speaking and acting as though still alive. Of course, this is not without an element of danger as the "visiting" spirit might not want to leave...

#### **Astral Travel**

Also called an Out of Body Experience, the Spiritualist enters a deep trance and her spirit actually leaves her physical body. While in this "Astral Form," the Spiritualist is invisible and intangible to the physical plane (but not the Astral Plane, of course), tied to her dormant body by a silver cord. She can fly around, unfettered by natural forces, and pass through solid matter, effectively a ghost for the duration of her journey. Again, this is not without some danger as the Astral Plane is the domain of real ghosts, not all of which are of the friendly variety, and should her silver cord be cut, her body would

die instantly, leaving her to wander forever as a spirit herself.

### **Clairvoyance**

Clairvoyance allows the Spiritualist to see and hear the dearly departed as they float through the Astral Plane. It can also be used as a kind of “remote viewing,” allowing her to see and hear events taking place in distant locations.

### **Aura Reading**

A form of ESP, this enables the Spiritualist to see the “soul” of an individual. Auras are multi-colored fields of energy that surround all living things. By analyzing the colors of these fields, the Spiritualist to discern emotional states, amongst other things.

### **Exorcism**

Using this power, the Spiritualist can cast out an unwanted presence from a human host or locale. Exorcisms are rarely routine and the whole process is extremely dangerous and physically demanding for all parties involved.

### **Summoning**

Similar to the Theurgist ability, the Medium may request an audience with a specific spirit. The Spiritualist must possess the name of the spirit, as well as a personal item once belonging to the deceased, in order to establish contact. Note that not all spirits enjoy being summoned...

## ***Theurgy***

Theurges (also called Hermetics) are the classic wizards of fantasy literature and while the Spiritualist’s role is to walk the line between the two worlds, the Theurge’s strength is his ability to summon those who dwell in other planes of existence. Some of these beings are benign, others are malevolent. The Theurge must master the powers of summoning, binding and commandment lest he lose his very soul! Hermetics are most often associated with demonic powers and employ pentagrams, candles and magical sigils to protect themselves.

### **Summoning**

The Theurge can summon an entity that is known to him in a manner similar to that of the Spiritualist. Only the entity’s name needs to be known (although a True Name must be used to summon an entity against its will).

### **Warding/Binding**

By inscribing various sigils on herself and her surroundings, the Wizard can prevent a summoned being from entering or leaving an area. These sigils (the most common being circles of protection and five-pointed stars) may be created with virtually anything (even a finger tracing the air) but these methods may create an inferior Ward. Binding is simply establishing a written or verbal agreement with a captive spirit (the neophyte Theurge should beware of demonic contracts... ).

### **Commandment**

This powerful and exceedingly hazardous art allows the Theurge to outright force a summoned being’s will to her own. Most Theurges use this on weaker, less intelligent creatures, often issuing simple commands such as “Guard!” or “Attack!” Demonic entities can only be Commanded by the most powerful (or most foolhardy) of Wizards.

### **Mystic Bolts**

Mystic Bolts are missiles comprised of magickal energy that are summoned from the Aether. They can be fired with great accuracy and can cause any number of effecting; from the burning of flame to the corrosive nature of acid.

### **Mystic Shield**

Similar in composition to its offensive counterpart, the Mystic Shield can be conjured from the Aether to protect its creator from any one type of damage (fire, cold, acid, electricity).

## ***Mesmerism***

The Mesmerist’s power lies in the infinite resources of the human mind. Not only are Mesmerists skilled in the art of Hypnosis, they can actually send and receive thoughts and bend wills to their own. Some may even render themselves invisible, merely through the power of suggestion. Mesmerists are a subtle lot, needing only the sound of their voice or a piercing stare to entrance someone. Hand gestures and small props are often employed for that “special touch” (pocket watches and crystal pendants are widely used in the regard). Some of their unique abilities include:

### **Hypnosis**

A common use of Mesmerism, Hypnosis allows the Mesmerist to cause someone to fall in a deep,

trance-like state. The only requirement is the sound of the Mesmerist's voice. In this state, the sleeper can be forced to remember aloud long-buried memories or to bury them deep back into his subconscious. Using this art, the Mesmerist could squeeze out the location of the enemy's HQ or cause a man to forget his wife's maiden name. Either way, the difficulty of the task is directly related to the importance of the memory being manipulated.

### **Suggestion**

With a simple word, the Mesmerist can trigger an immediate response in a subject although the command must not directly conflict with the target's nature (commanding a bored security guard to "Sleep!" would work. Issuing the same command to a vigilant, highly-trained MP would not). The Mesmerist must establish eye-contact with his victim in order for this power to work.

### **Implant**

A combination of Suggestion and Hypnosis, Implant allows a command to be carried out upon a trigger ("When your hear the clock strike midnight, you will feel the urge to go out for a long walk..."). Aside from that wrinkle, it works much the same as Suggestion. Falling asleep or losing consciousness will negate the effects of the Implant, as will the conditions of the trigger not being met (ie: if the subject never hears the clock, the Implant won't activate). The subject must be in a hypnotic trance for this ability to work.

### **Cloaking**

Cloaking is a form of telepathically-induced invisibility; that is, concealing oneself by limiting the perception of others (think of "The Shadow"). Although the Mesmerist employing this ability is still visible, his victims will simply ignore his presence. Dropping the cloak will negate its effect, as will calling attention to yourself. For some reason, this ability has no effect of animals or young children.

### **Death Trance**

The Death Trance is a strange ability of mind over matter. With it, the Mesmerist can enter a trance not unlike the Zombie of Voodoo lore, feeling no hunger, thirst or pain. He can even slow his bodily processes to such a state that even a skilled medical examiner would be hard-pressed to locate a pulse...