

WHISPERS FROM THE PIT

Expanded Trickery!

Welcome back to the Pit, dear readers.

As you hopefully know, this is where I get to waffle on about a topic related to *Savage Worlds*. For those new to the Whispers, there aren't any new official rules included, just advice, opinions, and insights into the game.

In this issue, I'm taking two posts from our forums and expanding the answers I gave. The first was about how certain Tricks work and the second appreciating the list of sample Tricks in our *The Savage World of Solomon Kane* RPG.

For me, *Savage Worlds* isn't about the wording of the rules, it's about the interpretation. I don't mean being a rules-lawyer who looks for loopholes to exploit. It's about how to use a relatively light, elegant set of rules to add more flavor to the game—working within the spirit of the rules to enhance the game experience. *Savage Worlds'* use of trappings allows almost anything (especially Edges, powers, Tricks, and Tests of Will) to be viewed in a different light without altering the mechanics.

Tricks are one of *Savage Worlds'* greatest strengths. With a very simple, single mechanic, a hero can perform all manner of stunts and tricks designed to place foes at a disadvantage. Other game systems have the equivalent of Tricks, of course, but rarely do they use a single mechanic to cover such a wide range of maneuvers.

A small amount of material below is duplicated from a previous Whispers From the Pit article on cinematic combat.

One Action

For the most part, the sample descriptions below don't require any other actions—they are merely flavor text describing the Trick. For instance, grabbing a mug of ale and throwing it in someone's face to blind them doesn't require a character to spend an action grabbing a mug first.

That said, the players and GM should apply common sense. You can't throw a mug of ale in someone's face if there isn't a mug within easy reach or your hands are full. In such cases, a hero would have to move closer to a mug (free action if moving up to his Pace), drop whatever he is holding (again, a free action, though picking the object back up later might not be), or slightly change his description ("I flick the mug at him with my blade").

Modified Results

By the same token, the result of a Trick may need a slight adjustment to the letter of the rules. If your Trick is to trip someone, then, despite the general rules not specifically allowing this, it is fairly obvious the foe should fall if the Trick is successful. Common sense is a good ally in *Savage Worlds*.

Most times, the basic mechanics and good GM description suffice. A foe splattered by a mug of ale may use an arm to wipe his eyes, which leaves him open to attack (hence the -2 Parry penalty). If he's Shaken, he may well stagger back slightly or have to shake his head to clear his vision.

No Damage

This is a cardinal rule—Tricks don't cause damage. **Ever.** To damage a foe, one must make some sort of attack. For instance, slashing above someone's eyes to cause blood to drip into their eyes and temporarily blind them is a Trick. There's no intent to damage, only to distract. The rules for Tricks apply here as normal and you don't have to aim for the head.

A hero who wants to inflict damage using the same description must make a Called Shot to the head, instead. If he scores a Shaken result (or wounds a Wild Card), then the foe likely is temporarily blinded as well. However, this does not give the attacker the benefit of the Trick result as well—the Shaken status is a replacement.

When Tricks Become Tests

Sometimes what appears to be a Trick is actually better handled by a Test of Will. Laughing at your foe or belittling him is not a Smarts Trick—it is a Taunt Test of Will. Likewise, suddenly leaping forward and shouting "Boo!" in an attempt to make your opponent flinch is an Intimidation Test of Will rather than a Smarts Trick.

You should avoid allowing Tests of Will to become Tricks. It diminishes the use of two useful skills (Taunt and Intimidation), which produce different effects from a Test of Will.

It may be a player didn't realize his description constituted a Test of Will, in which case he should be allowed to change his description to make it more like a Trick or stick with the Test of Will. The important things are to be consistent and fair to the players.

Other maneuvers may also be mistaken for Tricks. Disarming someone, for instance, is not a Trick as there are specific rules covering this. When a set of rules exists for a stunt, they always take precedent.

Further Complexity

Only one of three things can happen because of a Trick (nothing, Parry penalty, or Shaken and Parry penalty), but they can also be used to set up other events. For example, a hero smears a villain in honey as an Agility Trick. Shortly afterward, the swarm of angry bees they were running from appears

on the scene and ignores the hero in favor of the villain. Our hero makes his escape, leaving his foe to enjoy angry bee hospitality.

Now, there's no way any set of rules can, or indeed should, cover every eventuality, and things like this are one obvious example. So here's a quick tip—prepare for the unexpected. Players will always find a way to surprise a GM.

No Penalties

For the vast majority of Tricks, no penalties apply (other than fixed penalties such as wounds or Fatigue). Flavor text used to detail a Trick is just that—a cool bit of description which replaces terrible phrases like, “I’ll do an Agility Trick.”

Take this example. A character is being pinned into a corner by a burly pirate. The player declares that his character is going to turn, run up the wall, leap over the seadog, and pull his hat down over his eyes.

A nice little maneuver, but what penalty should the GM apply to such a complex feat? The answer is NONE. All the player has done is describe an Agility Trick followed by an attack. Sure, it sounds difficult to pull off, but at the end of the day it's still just an Agility Trick. Start applying unnecessary modifiers and players will stop trying cool stunts.

However, the GM is within his right to tone down descriptive text. In a swashbuckling game, like *Pirates of the Spanish Main*, the trick above is a good fit. In a gritty post-apocalyptic game, it's rather too showy. Kicking the mook in the love spuds is probably more in keeping with the style of the setting.

As a last note before we look at some sample Tricks, GMs should avoid using a flat “No” when turning down a Trick idea. Encourage your players to think as the setting requires by saying something like, “That doesn't fit, but what about this instead?” GMs are not just storytellers—they are there to nurture the players' creative talents.

The Rules

For the benefit of readers who are new to *Savage Worlds* and wondering what this is all about, we've generously included the rules for using Tricks just to show how easy they are to implement.

To perform the trick, the player must first describe exactly what his character is doing. Next he makes an opposed Strength, Agility, or Smarts roll against his foe. The GM must determine which is more appropriate based on the player's description of the trick. For instance, yanking a rug might use Strength versus the defender's Agility.

If the character is successful, his opponent is distracted and suffers -2 to his Parry until his next action. With a raise, the enemy is distracted and Shaken as well.

These penalties do not stack. Tricking a foe twice has no additional effect.

Sample Tricks

Unless otherwise stated, these are Agility tricks. For those fans who have seen our shorter list of Tricks before, note that some of those Tricks repeated here have been split into separate entries to allow for more flavor text. For more ideas, watch swashbuckling or pulp movies like *The Mummy*, *Mask of Zorro*, *Crimson Pirate*, or *Pirates of the Caribbean*.

Note as well that all Tricks are, by their very nature, variations on a common theme—there's only so many ways to Trick a foe. What's more important, from a gaming atmosphere view, is to use at least a little description and to vary it often.

- **Appel:** A sudden stamp of the foot to distract your opponent.
- **Backflip:** Using an obstacle, such as barrels, a cart, or even a wall, to help you flip over an opponent.
- **Balesta:** A sudden hop forward, either as the prelude to an attack or to catch an opponent off guard.
- **Beat:** Slapping an opponent's blade out of the way to leave his body open to an attack. Could also be used to slap an opponent's hand to cause him to snatch it back, thus leaving a gap in his defenses.
- **Bind:** Encircling an opponent's blade with your own. This move is designed to prevent him from moving his blade while you slide yours forward along his.
- **Buffeted:** Moving past a foe and jostling him as you do so is a way of helping an ally with a Trick. Very handy if the foe has already acted and your ally has not, since they can be sure to take advantage of the -2 Parry bonus (well, hopefully).
- **Catch! (or Hold This):** Usually involves throwing one of your weapons at a foe in a bid to force a reflex catching motion. Always best to make sure you are holding two weapons, though. In some settings, this also works with expensive items, like coins or the gold statue you just swiped from a musty tomb. Of course, you can always fake throwing the object as well if you prefer.
- **Corps a Corps:** French for “body to body.” This usually involves giving your opponent a shove to unbalance him.
- **Duck (Smarts):** The hero ducks or flinches, hoping to convince his foe there's something nasty heading his way.
- **Falling Objects:** Cutting through a rope holding up a chandelier to cause foes to jump back (not to damage them) is a Trick. Pulling down a tapestry or curtain and throwing it toward a foe can also be a Trick (although a hero may wish to use it as a form of grapple so he can make a quick escape).
- **Flash (Smarts):** A lady can distract a foe by flashing her cleavage or thigh. Only tends to work on men.

• **Flick:** A sudden movement of the blade designed to distract a foe.

• **Flip:** Kicking a stool at a foe or knocking over a table to distract him. Can also work with small objects, like plates, mugs, candles, or books. Depending on the GM's interpretation of the weight of the object, this may require a Strength roll from the hero instead.

• **Flurry:** Ever had a friend come up and begin jabbing at your head and torso with his hands, aiming to cause you to try and react to his moves rather than beat you senseless? Well, that makes a great Agility Trick. It basically overwhelms a foe's defenses searching for a weak point.

• **Head Butt:** Another Trick designed to distract but not actually harm a foe. Head butts can certainly be dangerous, but that's a Called Shot to the head for damage.

• **In Your Face!:** Throwing sand, ale, or some other substance (food fight!) in a foe's face to temporarily blind them. Note that lobbing around substances like acid is an attack, not a Trick.

• **Meet Mr. Table:** Smacking a foe's head against a table or wall to momentarily stun him could easily be a Trick. As usual, no damage rolls are made as a Trick.

• **My Eyes!:** Slashing the forehead so it bleeds into a foe's eyes. The same sort of Trick also covers nicking ears (ears bled a lot), cutting off locks of hair, or even removing entire ponytails. All are distracting rather than deadly.

• **Nice Clothes:** May involve pulling a foe's hat over his eyes or flipping a cloak over his head.

• **Overbalance:** Useful as an interrupt. Before a foe strikes, interrupt his action and say you're sidestepping (it's just a Trick—you don't actually have to move your character). If he misses or is Shaken, it leaves him overbalanced.

• **Pull the Rug (Strength):** Yanking a rug out from under a foe's feet. At the GM's discretion, this Trick can work against more than one opponent. However, a penalty of -1 per additional foe would not be amiss in this circumstance, if only to prevent overuse.

• **Revealing Underwear:** Slashing an opponent's braces or belt so his trousers fall down, causing him to grab them and hold them up. A similar Trick can be used to remove buttons, sashes, and such like.

• **Shoelaces (Smarts):** Another old one. The character tells his foe his shoelaces (or trouser zip) are untied.

• **Singe:** Setting fire to a villain's hem line or hair forces him to put it out, thus distracting him. Trying to set him on fire, however, is an attack and uses the standard rules for Catching Fire. Requires a source of fire. This could also be used to knock a foe's hand onto a hot surface (briefly).

• **Slippery When Wet:** Scattering something slippery under a foe's feet causes him to lose his balance and possible

fall. It is worth noting that in some settings using a bag of marbles or pool of oil may have long-lasting effects when used in this manner, such as being treated as Difficult Ground affecting everything in a Medium Burst Template. If the effect is only to last a single action, however, keep it as a Trick and assume whatever the substance was has dispersed.

• **Stamp:** Similar to slapping the hand, but this involves stamping on someone's foot.

• **Three Stooges Routine:** Nose pinches, ear pulls, head slaps, beard tugs, and eye jabs are all forms of related trickery.

• **Trip:** Shoving a foe back over a low obstacle or kicking out his legs so he falls prone.

• **Who's That? (Smarts):** The hero points behind him and utters the clichéd words. The oldest trick in the book, but it still works.

• **Z:** Carving your initial into a foe's clothing or flesh. As always, carving flesh may cause bleeding, but never actual wounds. A raise might even leave a scar, and create a new Enemy.

Until next time, stay tricky, my precious readers. Wiggy needs feeding now, masters!

Wiggy

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