

Project CHUPA

Version 0.05

The generic, modular RPG system with the cinematic feel!



www.dragonslanding.com

Sponsored by the Dragon's Landing Podcast
www.DragonsLanding.com

DISCLAIMER

This document represents the current evolution of the Project CHUPA and is in no way a finished product.

This document is for the reference and evaluation of the Core System design by members of the Dragon's Landing Podcast forums only. Until a version 1.0 has been officially released, use of these rules and the system as a whole is prohibited without written authorization by Chuck Tinsley or Lonnie Ezell, owners of the Dragon's Landing Podcast. At such time as the first version is officially released, the allowable licensing will be made known and the system will be available for everyone under the terms of the agreed-upon license only.

NOTE

Any phrases or characters appearing in **blue type**, show the changes or additions to the core rules between the previous version and the most current version. If you're looking for what's been ripped out – you're on your own.

CREDITS

Lead Designer – Lonnie Ezell (Kilishan)

Designers:

Elrandir, Meus, Neil, Stickman, Working Man, Dragavan, Harping Mick, Crossfire

HISTORY

December 8, 2005 – The initial idea is presented on the forums.

December 11, 2005 – Version 0.02 released to the forums. Includes the basics, Attributes and Skill systems.

December 15, 2005 – Version 0.03. Incorporates Keys and Secrets from *The Shadow of Yesterday*. Added Health Points, and more on Skill Resolution., some reorganizing of content and a Table of Contents.

December 20, 2005 – Version 0.04. Redesign of Skills, incorporating dual detail levels for different systems of game plane.

December 26, 2005 – Changed GM to Director for more “cinematic feel.” Split Health into separate Health Pools. Added Secrets and Keys descriptions from TSOY. Slight Reorganization of document. Additions and clarifications to the combat system. Added current Skills descriptions.

Table of Contents

Table of Contents.....	3
Introduction	4
What Is C.O.R.E.?	4
The Basics.....	5
The Core Mechanic	5
Dice	5
Character Creation	6
Purchasing Attributes	6
Purchasing Sub-Attributes	6
Purchasing Skill Groups	6
Purchasing Skills	6
Purchasing Secrets and Keys	6
Further Advances.....	6
Character Advancement	6
Attribute Scores.....	8
Attributes	8
Sub-Attributes	8
Skill Scores	9
Skill Groups.....	9
Mastery Levels	9
Skills.....	10
Mastery Levels And Skills	10
Skill Descriptions.....	11
General Skills	11
Knowledge Skills.....	11
Survival Skills	13
Skullduggery Skills	14
Supernormal Skills	14
Secrets.....	16
What Are Secrets?	16
Secrets	16
Keys	19
What Are Keys?	19
Keys.....	19
Conflicts.....	22
Health Points	22
Handling Conflict	23
Boosting your chances.....	24
Conflict Resolution Examples	25

Introduction

What Is C.O.R.E.?

C.O.R.E. stands for the *Cinematic Open Roleplaying Engine*. It is a set of core rules intended to be used as the foundation for other settings and systems to be built on. It was developed by the role-players on the Dragon's Landing Podcast forums to provide a system suited towards ROLE-playing and less towards ROLL-playing. We wanted a cinematic feel, meaning that, especially during combat, the game did not bog down into rolls and numbers, leaving each player enough time to get a drink, have a smoke, and make a snack run. This was not our only goal, however. We knew that characters should be central to movement of the story, and they should be capable of heroic actions fitting in the grandest of Hollywood's movies and still focus the needs and wants and pains of the character.

We wanted a system that could expand and contract to fit different styles of play and various settings, while still maintaining a consistent mechanism and familiar feel. This meant that we had to think of modules that could be snapped into play with ease. Not an easy task.

While the subconscious mind holds concepts from past RPG systems, we strove to be original. We threw crazy ideas against the wall, discussing them until we found ideas we all could pull behind. Then we reined them in and tested them, tweaking until they worked. To the best of our knowledge all of the ideas we ended up with are ours alone, with the exception of the Keys and Secrets, and the advancement system it used. During discussions, our ideas kept leaning towards what one of the designers called TSOY, *The Secrets of Yesterday*, an RPG system published under a Creative Commons License. When he posted the rules for Keys, the ideas clarified much of what we were looking for, and more.

This started as an experiment, to see if a group of disparate roleplayers, each bringing their own unique views and histories, could form something new and unique, something of value. During development, the fires of passion were lit. We hope it lights your imagination as well, and brings you many years of entertainment and vivid memories.

The Basics

The Core Mechanic

Whenever you attempt an action that has some chance of failure, you roll one -- or more -- ten-sided dice (d10). To determine if your character is successful, do this:

- Roll one – or more – d10. If more than one die is used, keep only the single highest value.
- Add any relevant modifiers.
- Compare the result to a target number.

If the result is equal to, or higher than, the target number, your character succeeds. If the result is less than the target number, your character fails.

Dice

When a die roll is necessary, it will be described with an expression such as “3d10k1 + 3,” which means you should “roll 3 ten-sided dice, keep only the single highest value, then add 3.” This would result in a number between 4 and 13. The first number tells you how many dice to roll. The number after the “d” tells you what type of die to use. The number after the “k” tells you how many of the dice results you should keep. For the majority of rolls you will be asked to “keep 1.” Since this is the default result desired, most times the “k1” will be left off. Any number after that represents a value that is to be either added to, or subtracted from, the result of the die roll.

Character Creation

Purchasing Attributes

During character creation, a player has a set number of points to spread through the Attributes. These points are not distributed in the Sub-Attributes. If the system is using only the three core Attributes, the player receives eight (8) points. If the system is using the full four Attributes, the player receives ten (10) points. These points may be placed however the player desires.

OPTIONAL DISTRIBUTION METHOD:

4 Attributes - For quicker character creation, the player may put 4 points in the primary Attribute, 3 in their secondary Attribute, 2 in the tertiary Attribute and 1 in the remaining Attribute.

3 Attributes - For quicker character creation, the player may put 4 points in the primary Attribute, 3 in their secondary Attribute, 1 in the remaining Attribute.

POWER LEVELS AND CHARACTERS:

In some worlds or systems, a higher power level will be desired. In this case the system, setting or Director is encouraged to assign 15, or even 20 points to attributes.

Purchasing Sub-Attributes

For each Attribute, the player has three times (3x) the number of points in the Attribute to distribute among the three Sub-Attributes. These points may be placed however they desire. Repeat for each Attribute.

Purchasing Skill Groups

If individual Skills are not being used, players are given four (4) points to spread among your Skill Groups. Different systems and settings may provide a different number of points based upon the power level of the world.

Purchasing Skills

When playing with individual Skills, a character begins play with 20 points to spend in their various skills. This may vary based upon the setting, system or Director.

Purchasing Secrets and Keys

Before play, players can choose one Secret and one Key for their characters.

Further Advances

Lastly, players start with a number of advances (chances to improve) for their characters. This is determined by the group before play, depending on how powerful characters are to be at the beginning of the game. The standard number is five. To figure out how to spend them, read below.

Character Advancement

During the game, each player character will get experience points (XP) for meeting the player's goals for that character's story and the Director's goals for the overall story. These experience points are converted to advances, usually at a rate of five XP to one advance. Each advance that you get can be

banked toward improving your character's Sub-Attributes, Skills, Secrets, and Keys. The costs are found in the table below.

Advancement Table	
Increase a skill group by 1 point (if Skills are not being used)	5 advances
Increase a skill by 1 point	1 advance
Increase a Sub-Attribute 1 point	3 advances
Add a Secret	1 advance
Add a Key	1 advance

You can never increase the same thing twice in a row. That is, you cannot increase the same Skill Group, Skill, or Sub-Attribute twice in a row. You need to increase something else in between. In addition, you cannot buy two Secrets or two Keys in a row.

Attribute Scores

Attributes

Attributes are intended to demonstrate who the character is when they were born and how they have developed both mentally and physically since then. Three Attributes form the core of the system: Physical, Mental, and Social. A fourth Attribute will vary from system to system. In a fantasy setting it might be Magic, which would represent the inherent part of the character that can manipulate magic. In other systems it might be The Fold – the ability to fold space and help propel the ships through the final frontier. In the case that a fourth attribute is used, it should be an attribute inherent to all the characters in the game, even if some characters may never develop that skill. Some systems may not require a fourth Attribute.

PHYSICAL - This is a measurement of everything related to your character's physical body. It measures raw muscular strength, agility and coordination, health, and resistance to disease and damage.

MENTAL - This is a measurement of everything related to your character's mind. This includes how smart they are, how quickly they can grasp new concepts, and their ability to adapt to new situations. It also measures how much resistance they have to other people's manipulations, pressure, or bullying, as well as their determination and willpower.

SOCIAL – This is a measurement of the character's ability to interact in social events. It includes how outgoing they are, how well they can handle criticism, and their ability to lie without being detected, sell snake oil or even interact in diplomatic circles.

SPIRITUAL – This fourth Attribute is given as a default value. It is likely to change from game system to game system. It might refer to the character's ability to cast magic, clerical or arcane. It might be a character's ability to use psionic powers. It can be whatever your system and world needs it to be.

Attributes have a maximum value of 10.

Sub-Attributes

Each attribute contains three Sub-Attributes: Power, Finesse, and Resistance. The definitions are intended to provide a complete, yet broad, description of the Attribute.

POWER - how much you can affect things, how forcefully. In Physical, this would mean not only raw strength, but also a knowledge of how to swing the fist properly and create the best impact. In Social, it would refer to how much impact you have on those around you, similar to charisma, but also could include things such as intimidation or political influence.

FINESSE - how well you can affect things, how careful you are. Under Physical it shows how nimble and agile you are. Under Spiritual it might show how complex you can get when manipulating weaves of magic.

RESISTANCE - your ability to resist those effects. Under Physical, it would show your resistance to poisons and colds and general health. In Mental, it could apply to ability to think for yourself and not be influenced by actions around you, or your ability to ward off psionic attacks.

Sub-Attributes have a maximum value of 10.

In some settings, dividing some – or all – of the Attributes into Sub-Attributes may be undesirable. By removing the Sub-Attributes for one of the Attributes, that Attribute's influence can be downplayed. In a setting that has very little combat, for example, you could just have the Physical Attribute with no Sub-Attributes, and all rolls would use the Attribute score, instead of a Sub-Attribute score.

Skill Scores

Skill Groups

Skills are grouped together into Skill Groups to represent a collection of skills that should improve together. When a character raises the level in a skill, it has the possibility of affecting the other skills within the group and raising the abilities of all the skills by raising the Skill Mastery level.

Groups are designed to make getting into the game quick and easy. They cover broad topics and are perfect all by themselves for one-shot games, conventions, and new players. They can be used either with or without the individual skills in each group. For players and systems that desire a little more complexity and realism, the individual skills are detailed in Skill Descriptions, below.

While system designers and world builders are encouraged to change the names of the groups to fit the settings, the default skill groups are:

General – The General Skill Group is a measure of all of the knowledge and abilities that every thinking creature shares. It include how to ride a horse, or drive space cruiser, your ability to win at poker, or woo the lasses with your song and harp. You can also win riches through your swimming or wrestling matches, notice details most would miss in your surroundings, and give great speeches in the halls of Rome. And let’s not forgot intimidating the local judge to your way of seeing things.

Knowledge – Every profession has its specialized niches of knowledge. The Knowledge Skill Group is their tome. Inside this Skill Group you’ll find the knowledge of secret societies, the rise and fall of various cultures, how to care for your pets and avoid the wild animals that refuse to be domesticated, as well as the Machiavellian turnings of the legal codes and detailed instructions for the use and operation of the latest technology.

Survival – Fighting is inevitable when heroes are involved. The Survival Skill Group encompasses all forms of combat, whether martial arts, swords, guns, lasers or spaceships. It also includes the skills and knowledge necessary to survive in the world’s many inhospitable climates.

Skullduggery – The skills of the con artist, street magician and wily rogues are grouped here. Breaking and Entering, cracking safes, sleight of hand, and the knowledge of surviving in the rough and tumble back streets and alleys are all found in the Skullduggery Skill Group.

Supernormal – Mighty Wizards, Wiccan priestesses, sharp-eyed Mentalists, and brazen Super-Heroes all share one thing in common: they have abilities most normal people would call supernatural, paranormal, or just plain super. The Supernormal Skill Group is a measure of how much they know about their powers and how they work, as well as their ability to sense other supernormals, and manipulate their powers.

Skill Groups have a maximum score of 10.

Mastery Levels

As a character gets better at a Skill Group, their chance at success naturally raises. In the game, that means you get extra dice to roll, keeping the single highest die roll. Characters start with a Skill Group score of zero. This Mastery Level is called Novice, and the player gets 1d10 to roll for Skill Group Checks. Every third Advancement in the Skill Group, the Mastery Level raises to the next level. The Mastery Levels and the required Skill Group Score is shown in the Mastery Levels table.

Mastery Level	Required Score	Dice Rolled	Description
Novice	0	1d10	This is where the character starts play. It is the everyday man trying to do everyday things.
Apprentice	3	2d10	An Apprentice has enough skills that he is capable of performing those skills better than the Novice, but can still fail miserably.
Journeyman	6	3d10	The Journeyman will reach success more often than the Apprentice and is quite a bit more successful than the Novice. His skills are becoming a natural part of him. While rare, failures are still possible.
Master	9	4d10	The Master has become one with his skills. He knows them like he was born with them, and can wield them with superb success. Only in very rare occasions will the Master fail.

Skill Group Mastery is expensive, as only time and practice can bring a character to the point where their skills are a natural extension of themselves. It costs 5 Advancements to raise the Skill Group by 1 point. If individual Skills are being used, refer to **Mastery Levels And Skills**, below.

Skills

Skills further define the abilities of the individual Skill Groups. They define the learned abilities of a character, and provide a measure of how well the character can brawl, drive a car, bake a cake or cliff dive. Unlike many other systems, Skills in Project CHUPA are meant to be general categories, not specific traits. For example, combat skills might be Melee, which shows how well the character can use hand-to-hand combat weapons, such as knives, staves, bottles and chairs. There are not separate skills for each weapon.

There is no set limit on the number of skills that are allowed in a group, though smaller groups with broad skills are preferred. The default skills are detailed in **Skill Descriptions**, below.

Skills have a maximum value of 10.

Mastery Levels And Skills

When individual Skills are being used in the game, the rules for advancing the Skill Group Mastery Levels is slightly different. Since Skill Groups have sets of related skills, it is natural that a synergy kicks into effect as you learn more Skills within that Skill Group. The more you improve your Skills in the Skullduggery Skill Group, the more contact you have with the other Skills in that group, and the easier it is to perform any of them. The same synergy affects all Skill Groups.

To raise Skill Group Mastery Levels when Skills are being used, the total value of the Skill Scores is used to define when Mastery Levels raise within that Skill Group. If a Skill Group has five Skills, then for every five points spent on Skills within that Skill Group, the Skill Group receives one Advancement. Just like when Skills are not being used, for every three Advancements in a Skill Group, the Mastery Level raises.

Total Number of Skill Points required for Mastery Levels

No. of Skills in Skill Group	Novice	Apprentice	Journeyman	Master
3	0	9	18	27
4	0	12	24	36
5	0	15	30	45
6	0	18	36	54

Skill Descriptions

Skills are meant to represent broad categories of related activities. The skill descriptions take this into account, providing a general feel for the skill, not detailed rules on every possible use. If in doubt, look to the Director for a final call on which Skill to use. Each description lists two of the most frequently used Attributes with an example. That does not mean that those are the only two possibilities, however. Players are encouraged to use other Attributes as the situation calls for. Just be sure to give the Director a clear idea why you think that Skill is applicable.

General Skills

Athletics

The Athletics Skill lets you jump from the back of a covered wagon onto a riding horse, or take a perfectly executed swan dive off a tall cliff. You can swim the English channel, swing from chandelier to tapestry, or even roll past through a series of spear and scythe traps. All forms of physical athletics and games are covered by this Skill.

Physical Power + Athletics = brute force abilities, such as lifting weights, running, or climbing rock faces.

Physical Finesse + Athletics = demonstrations of agility, like tumbling, diving or jumping.

Entertainment – playing instruments, games, dancing, sports, acting

Influence – diplomacy, etiquette, manners

Perception - spotting, searching, memory of item placement.

Transportation – riding, driving, flying, sailing, piloting

Knowledge Skills

Every profession has its specialized niches of knowledge. The Knowledge Skill Group is their tome. Inside this Skill Group you'll find knowledge of secret societies, the rise and fall of various cultures and how to care for your pets or avoid those wild animals that refuse to be domesticated. Characters who delve into the Machiavellian turnings of legal codes or use the latest technology to jack into cyber-space often have considerable Knowledge to back up their daring exploits.

Animals

Whether a lion tamer in the circus or a hunter following the migration patterns of his prey, the Animal Skill gives characters the information they need to perform their tasks. Use this Skill to determine if the snake that just bit your guide is poisonous or to identify the tracks that lead into the woods. Veterinarians rely heavily on this skill to heal their patients, as do archeologists when piecing together a newly excavated dinosaur skeleton.

Physical (Power) + Knowledge (Animals) = using strength to work with animals, such as breaking a horse for riding or grappling with an excited animal so that it does not injure itself

Mental (Finesse) + Knowledge (Animals) = recalling information about an animal, such as its diet, activity cycle or footprint

Social (Finesse) + Knowledge (Animals) = using soothing words and signs to calm a frightened animal

Cultures

Characters will invariably travel to distant lands (or worlds) so encounters with strange and unusual cultures are inevitable. The Cultures Skill lets characters weave through the ins and outs of dealing with these strangers, knowing the best compliments to give or, more importantly, what not to say. Organizations can have their own cultures so characters can make use of this skill to climb the corporate ladder to success. Is your character a soldier with a three-day pass? The Cultures skill will help him know where the best spot for sushi is and what parts of town to avoid at all costs.

Physical (Finesse) + Knowledge (Cultures) = performing physically demanding rituals such as knowing how to sit, stand, bow, dance in the proper manner so as to not offend his highness the Prince or perform the lengthy tea ceremony without offending the gods.

Mental (Finesse) + Knowledge (Cultures) = recalling information about a specific aspect of a culture, such as knowing which fork to use for salads when dining at the palace or who is the best person to bribe at the DMV to pull up the owner of a license plate number

Social (Power) + Knowledge (Cultures) = attempts to impress or intimidate others

Language

Does your character have trouble simply reading and writing her own language or is she fluent in many tongues? The Language Skill gives characters the tools they need to communicate with others. Read and perform sign language or translate what the foreign dignitary is saying. Use this Skill to decipher the Latin text found in the stolen manuscript or slip an innuendo into polite conversation.

Mental (Power) + Knowledge (Language) = reading, translating or creating a literary work, such as writing a novel, creating an easy-to-understand users manual or even writing a political speech; translating spoken word into your native tongue

Mental (Finesse) + Knowledge (Language) = creating a literary work within a specific form or time limit, such as writing in Iambic Pentameter or finishing a 20 page term paper before class; editing or critiquing a literary work such as revising the novel you just finished or grading your student's essays

Social (Finesse) + Knowledge (Language) = conversing with others, such as writing an impressive cover letter to your resume or conveying your sympathy at a funeral

Law

Characters often find themselves on one side or the other of the law; knowledge of its codes and limitations is helpful in either case. Are your characters looking for a loophole in the contract they're about to sign? Looking to get a few more dollars on your tax return this year? Trying to remember the difference between a misdemeanor and a felony? Law is the place to find those answers and many more.

Mental (Power) + Knowledge (Law) = creating articles of law, such as writing a contract, putting together a bill for the senate or passing judgement in court case

Mental (Finesse) + Knowledge (Law) = recalling information on a particular law or understanding the intent of a law, such as remembering what time curfew starts, knowing if last night's dinner is tax deductible or finding the hidden clauses in a contract

Technology

Scientists, programmers, farmers and the village smith all use technology to perform their jobs. This Skill lets characters hack into the corporate mainframe, craft a well-balanced sword or design a better mousetrap. Technology includes the theoretical as well as the practical. Use this Skill to hold a conversation about the Big Bang or calculate the distance to the nearest star.

Physical (Power) + Knowledge (Technology) = applying muscle and technology to create something or solve a problem, such as crafting a sword, properly plowing a field or using a fallen sapling as a lever to dislodge a boulder

Mental (Power) + Knowledge (Technology) = designing a new technological advance, such as creating a new weapon system for a suit of powered armor, designing the first flying machine, coding a new video game or designing a metallic alloy lighter than aluminum yet harder than diamonds

Mental (Finesse) + Knowledge (Technology) = modifying, manipulating or circumventing a piece of technology, such as hacking the defense computer without leaving a trace, eking a few more joules of power out of the hyper-drive engines or overriding the android's Asimov programming

Survival Skills

This Skill Group represents those activities required for surviving hostile situations, be they in a rowdy tavern, spaceport back alley or wilderness expanse. The following individual Skills make up this group:

Brawling

This Skill lets characters bash their opponents without the use of weapons. Use it to hit, kick, head-butt, trip, flip or throw your enemies about. From the Olympic games of ancient Greece to the back alleys of Antares Prime, Brawling covers all forms of unarmed combat and wrestling; from simple contests of strength like arm wrestling to complex and highly formalized martial art forms as Boxing or Karate.

Physical (Power) + Survival (Brawling) = using physical force for attacks to damage or subdue your opponents

Physical (Finesse) + Survival (Brawling) = feats of agility like striking a sensitive or specific area on a target or using the opponent's attacks to unbalance, trip or flip them

Social (Power) + Survival (Brawling) = using fighting prowess to intimidate an opponent

Melee

Characters often wield all manner of handheld weapons to do battle. So strike the monster down with a slash from your broadsword or use your whip to disarm the kidnapper. Use that tavern stool to pound the noisome patron into submission or break a bottle of wine over his skull. If you're having trouble with a zombie infestations don't forget your trusty chainsaw to cut them down to size. If the characters can pick it up and hit their opponents with it, it's covered by this Skill.

Physical (Power) + Survival (Melee) = using physical force for attacks to damage opponents with any handheld weapon

Physical (Finesse) + Survival (Melee) = special attacks like a feint or disarming an opponent

Mental (Finesse) + Survival (Melee) = gathering information about melee like recognizing an opponent's combat style or recognizing the style of weapon by its description

Ranged

If hand to hand combat is not your character's cup of tea, try striking from a distance. Fire an arrow thru the sheriff's hat, throw that knife and sever the cord holding up the chandelier or shoot the guard from 500 yards out with your sniper rifle and high powered scope. If that's not your style then throw the lit stick of dynamite into the stage coach or lob that grenade into the pillbox. The Ranged skill covers all forms of combat at a distance.

Physical (Power) + Survival (Ranged) = using your strength to make an attack at a distance using a muscle powered weapon like a compound bow or thrown knife or simply to see how far you can throw something

Physical (Finesse) + Survival (Ranged) = using your sharp eye and steady aim to make an attack at a distance using a mechanical weapon such as a crossbow, pistol, rifle or blaster

Mental (Finesse) + Survival (Ranged) = using familiarity with ranged weapons to gather information like recognizing the make and model of a weapon from its ammunition

Tactics

There will come a time when your character will rise to a position of power and command vast armies of warriors on the battle field. Or perhaps you will play the admiral in charge of the Defensive Space Armada or head of a security team trying to stem the breach on deck 17A after artificial gravity has failed. If you plan to lead your unit of tanks or powered armor into the fray you'd best brush up on your Tactics. It may very well save your character's life when you spot that ambush waiting in the dark shadows of that copse of trees.

Mental (Power) + Survival (Tactics) = putting tactics in action to win battles by developing a battle plan or leading your unit in a charge

Mental (Finesse) + Survival (Tactics) = subtle and ingenious uses for tactics such as selecting the best location for an ambush or finding the weak link in the enemy's defenses.

Outdoor

Adventures don't always happen in the big city. Your characters may want to venture cross the frozen tundra, climb to the hidden monastery or trek through uncharted wilderness. Whether you make it or not will depend on finding good sources of edible food and potable water, knowing the warning signs of quicksand and finding the north as opposed to the east passage. Is that rain cloud a simple summer shower or the beginning of hurricane season? If your character doesn't know the difference, its time to work on their Outdoor Survival Skill.

Physical (Power) + Survival (Outdoor) = using muscle to build a shelter or pit trap from raw materials
Mental (Finesse) + Survival (Outdoor) = combining outdoor knowledge and an alert mind to track a creature through the wild or recognize edible berries and plants

Skullduggery Skills

Breaking and Entering – lock-picking, alarms, disabling traps

Con – bluffing, impersonating, forgery

Sleights – sleight of hand, pick pocketing

Stealth – hiding, moving quietly

Street Smarts – knowledge of the dark recesses of the city, including finding food, illegal knowledge, and fencing

Supernormal Skills

Awareness

This represents your awareness of the supernormal abilities around you. You might be sensitive to the psychic vibrations left on objects by others, or able to feel the magic potential in a person or object. Small signs that others might miss would tip you off that your boss likes the moonlight and is nearing a change. A tiny tremor of the hairs on your arm might tip you off that a cloaking magic has hidden something in the corner. When a ghost is near, you feel a chill run through to your core that helps you locate it by the varying pressure and intensity of the feeling.

Spiritual Power + Awareness = an active search for the source of the evil, violence-inducing aura.

Spiritual Finesse + Awareness = your intuition letting you know your date is a vampire, or the sudden vision that the woman sitting next to you only has 3 days to live.

Spiritual Resistance + Awareness = sidestepping the magical trap that lies in wait for you.

Lore

Lore comes in many forms. It could be found in a myriad of old, musty tomes, or passed down through years of unbroken oral traditions. It can also come at the cost of various experiences, many of which you would rather not go through again. The Lore Skill provides the knowledge of centuries old rituals that make your magic possible, or in-depth knowledge of the secret workings of the brain that bring an unmatched knowledge of the psionic powers. Every organization has its traditions, and a good Lore score will help you find the right tradition at the right time, and perform it with ease. It will help you know the right herbs to use to make sure the healing broth is correctly prepared.

Spiritual Power + Lore = spending hours working through complex and often convoluted equations of non-Euclidean geometry to develop the ritual needed to ward off the planar portal.

Spiritual Finesse + Lore = using your knowledge and insight to come up with a new solution to a common problem that has plagued your coven for centuries. It does not mean that you can perform the task, just that you figured out how.

Physical Finesse + Lore = performing the ritual correctly, or not accidentally putting too many drops of toad blood into the potion.

Manipulation

The ability to manipulate your powers are measured by Manipulation. Knocking someone senseless with your mind alone, or making your classmates spontaneously combust are good examples. The higher the score, the more tendrils of magic you can manipulate at once, possibly giving more powerful effects.

*Spiritual Power + Manipulation = pelting your opponent with a shower of rocks, or bending the spoon.
Spiritual Finesse + Manipulation = changing water into wine, influencing the way someone feels about you, or knitting the bones and muscles back together in a healing spell.*

Secrets

Where Attributes define the physical and mental properties of the character, and Skills represent all of the abilities they have learned over the years, Secrets and Keys fill the gap and venture into the darker, more mysterious and wonderful aspects of the character.

What Are Secrets?

Secrets are special abilities a character can learn that augment abilities. These are often preternatural, sometimes magical, and always better than normal. In order to use Secrets, Health Points are spent, meaning that Secrets can be used a limited number of times before the character's Health is restored.

Secrets can be better explained with an example:

Secret of the Hidden Pocket

This character is adept at hiding objects on her person. No matter how carefully searched the character has been, she may pull an inexpensive, small (hand-sized) item off her person with a successful **Sleight** ability check. There is no need for the player to have written this item on the character sheet previously.
Cost: 1 **Mental Health**.

Some Secrets will be open for all characters to take. Other Secrets are “closed” – they are only available to certain races or professions.

Secrets

Secret of Animal Speech

Your character can speak to an animal and understand its signals. In order to get the animal to cooperate or not try to eat you, you might need a successful **Animals** skill check. Even if you fail this check, you'll understand that it wants to eat you loud and clear.

Cost: 2 **Mental Health**

Secret of Blessing

With a successful **Pray** ability check, your character may bless the actions of a group. You must state a specific goal for them to accomplish. Your success level with this ability check is a pool of bonus dice any member of this group can use in accomplishing this task.

Cost: 1 **Vigor**.

Secret of Contacts

Your character knows all sorts of people in all sorts of places. You can use this Secret for your character to automatically have a past relationship with any **Director** character in the adventure. You may describe the relationship in a short phrase, such as "old enemy," "wartime buddy," "ex-lover," but the **Director** gets to decide the history and current disposition of the relationship.

Cost: 3 points from a **Health Pool** determined by the **Director**. **Vigor** would fit for a wartime buddy, **Instinct** for an ex-lover, and **Reason** for a former colleague in your character's field of study.

Secret of Disarm

Your character can disarm an opponent, without changing intentions, with a successful ability check using a weapon in **Bringing Down the Pain**. Because weapons can be all sorts of things in this game, "disarm" just means that the weapon's been rendered ineffective for the duration of the **Conflict**.

Cost: 1 **Vigor**.

Secret of Enhancement (Ability)

You must select an ability when you take this Secret. You may spend as many points out of the associated pool to give bonus dice to the ability as you like.

Secret of Evaluate

Your character's battle experience has given her the ability to read an opponent well. Evaluate your character's opponent not in descriptive terms, but in game mechanics, on a successful Battle ability check. You can ask for any of the following information, one bit per success level: Vigor score, Instinct score, best combat ability and score, specific ability score. Cost: 1 Reason.

Secret of Flying Leap

Your character can make amazing leaps. Using this Secret, she can jump much further or higher than normal. For each Vigor point you spend, up to three, you can jump another multiple of normal human ability for one leap.

Secret of Herbal Health

Your character can always find an herb that is an effective healing agent with a successful Woodcraft ability check in the outdoors. The herb lets you use your Woodcraft Ability to act like First Aid and heal others.

Cost: 1 Reason.

Secret of the Hidden Pocket

Your character is adept at hiding objects on her person. No matter how carefully searched the character has been, she may pull an inexpensive, small (hand-sized) item off her person with a successful Stealth ability check.

Cost: 2 Instinct.

Secret of Imbuement

Turn an item into a weapon or armor, using the rules found in the Resolution chapter. You can add one weapon or armor rating to the item each time you take this Secret. In addition, you can use this Secret to imbue the item with the power of another Secret. That Secret will have its costs lowered by one pool point. The item can be taken away from you, but you must be given a chance to get it back, or you can roll your advances spent on this Secret into a new item. You can take away someone else's Imbued item, but you'll have to pay the original cost to keep it.

Secret of Inner Meaning

Your character's art carries a meaning beyond the surface. Use any non-physical Instinct-based ability at a distance via a piece of your character's art.

Cost: 2 Reason.

Secret of Knock-back

Your character's blows send people flying. Knock back a stricken character one yard per success level. This immediately ends Bringing Down the Pain if you're involved in that, with no resolution as to intentions.

Cost: 2 Vigor.

Secret of Mighty Blow

Your character can strike with extreme might. Spend as many dice of Vigor as you like to increase the harm of a successful blow in combat.

Secret of Quality Construction (Craft Ability)

You must choose a specific Craft Ability when you take this Secret. Your character can craft items of excellent quality. Any item your character creates using this Secret gives one bonus die to a particular ability when using the item, permanently.

Cost: 5 Reason.

Secret of Shattering

The weight of your weapon can be used to destroy other weapons and armor in combat. With a successful attack, your success level (not including any damage bonuses) is removed from the damage bonuses of weapons or damage reductions of armor. If reduced to 0, the item is destroyed.

Cost: 2 Vigor. (Note: if used against player characters' weapons or armor bought with the Secret of Imbuement, they may repair the item or have it become something new after the scene.)

Secret of the Signature Weapon

Your character has one weapon with which she is bonded. You gain a bonus die to any action taken with that weapon and any other character else attempting to use the weapon receives a penalty die. (Note: to change this weapon, this Secret must be taken again.)

Secret of Specialty (Skill)

You must select an ability when you take this Secret. Choose a specialty your character has within that ability - for example, cooking pastries for the Complex Crafts skill. You always have a bonus die when your character attempts an action that falls within that specialty.

Secret of the Sudden Knife

Your character is a master of the assassin's art. In a surprise attack, the victim automatically takes harm level 4 (bloodied) if your character successfully hits. She should make an Endure ability check resisting your roll. If she fails, she automatically takes harm level 6. This is irrespective of being in a Bringing Down the Pain situation. Cost: 3 points from whatever pool is associated with the ability you're using, plus 1 from each other the other pools.

Secret of Throwing

Anything is a dangerous missile in your character's hands. She can throw anything fist-sized to greatsword-sized as an attack, using the Aim ability, and the object counts as a +1 weapon. Cost: 1 Vigor.

Secret of the Unwalked Path

Your character's footfalls leave little trace for others to follow. You can use your character's Woodcraft ability in resistance to anyone trying to track her. Cost: 1 Instinct.

Keys

What Are Keys?

Keys are the primary method of increasing a character's abilities. These are goals, emotional ties, or vows a character has. By bringing these into the story, the player gains experience points (XP) she can use to advance the character, increasing Attributes and Skills, or learning new Secrets and Keys.

Again, an example will illustrate this better:

Key of Conscience

Your character has a soft spot for those weaker than their opponents. Gain 1 XP every time your character helps someone who cannot help themselves. Gain 2 XP every time your character defends someone with might who is in danger and cannot save themselves. Gain 5 XP every time your character takes someone in an unfortunate situation and changes their life to where they can help themselves. Buyoff: Ignore a request for help.

The buyoff shown above is a special bit about Keys. Whenever a player has a character perform the action shown in one of the buyoffs, the player can (this is not mandatory) erase the Key and gain 10 XP. Once bought off, a character can never have the same Key again.

Unlike Secrets, the number of Keys a character can have is limited. A character can have no more than five Keys at one time.

Keys come in two types:

Motivations. When the motivation is fulfilled in play, gain an experience point. When the motivation is fulfilled against good odds, gain three experience points.

Everything else. When the Key comes up in play, gain an experience point. (You can use this three times per session. This applies to all Keys below.) When the Key presents a minor problem, gain two experience points. When it presents a major problem, gain five experience points.

All Keys have a Buyoff, which is a reversal from the Key by the character. All Buyoffs give the character 10 experience points. This Buyoff occurs only when you, the player, wants it to happen: you can lose a battle with the Secret of Bloodlust and still keep the Secret. If you want your character to undergo a change in her personality, though, adding to the story, you can take this Buyoff by fulfilling it. If you do take the Buyoff, you can never take this Key again.

As always, see the pre-made Keys to get a feel for creating your own.

Keys

Key of Bloodlust

Your character enjoys overpowering others in combat. Gain 1 XP every time your character defeats someone in battle. Gain 3 XP for defeating someone equal to or more powerful than your character (equal or higher combat skill.)

Buyoff: Be defeated in battle.

Key of Conscience

Your character has a soft spot for those weaker than their opponents. Gain 1 XP every time your character helps someone who cannot help themselves. Gain 2 XP every time your character defends

someone with might who is in danger and cannot save themselves. Gain 5 XP every time your character takes someone in an unfortunate situation and changes their life to where they can help themselves.

Buyoff: Ignore a request for help.

Key of the Coward

Your character avoids combat like the plague. Gain 1 XP every time your character avoids a potentially dangerous situation. Gain 3 XP every time your character stops a combat using other means besides violence.

Buyoff: Leap into combat with no hesitation.

Key of Faith

Your character has a strong religious belief that guides her. Gain 1 XP every time she defends her faith to others. Gain 2 XP whenever this character converts someone to her faith. Gain 5 XP whenever this character defends her faith even though it brings her great harm.

Buyoff: Your character renounces her beliefs.

Key of Fraternity

Your character has someone she is sworn to, a friend who is more important than anyone else. Gain 1 XP every time this character is present in a scene with your character (maximum 3 per adventure). Gain 2 XP whenever your character has to make a decision that is influenced by them. Gain 5 XP every time your character defends them by putting herself at risk.

Buyoff: Sever the relationship with this person.

Key of Glittering Gold

Your character loves wealth. Gain 1 XP every time you make a deal that favors you in wealth. Gain 3 XP every time you double your wealth.

Buyoff: Give away everything you own except what you can carry lightly.

Key of the Guardian

Your character has a ward, someone who depends on her for security and protection. Gain 1 XP every time this character is present in a scene with your character. Gain 2 XP whenever your character has to make a decision that is influenced by them. Gain 5 XP every time your character rescues them from harm.

Buyoff: Sever the relationship with this person.

Key of the Impostor

Sometimes your entire life is a lie. You gain 1 XP whenever you pass yourself off as someone/something you're not. You gain 2 XP whenever you convince others in spite of serious skepticism. You gain 5 XP whenever your story survives a deliberate, focused, "Hey everybody, look!" attempt to reveal your identity.

Buyoff: Confess your imposture to those duped.

Key of the Masochist

Your character thrives on personal pain and suffering. Gain 1 XP every time she is bloodied and 3 XP every time she is broken.

Buyoff: Flee a source of physical or mental damage.

Key of the Mission

Your character has a personal mission that she must complete. Gain 1 XP every time she takes action to complete this mission (2 XP if this action is successful.) Gain 5 XP every time she takes action that completes a major part of this mission.

Buyoff: Abandon this mission.

Key of the Outcast

Your character has lost fellowship or membership in an organization - which could just be a culture, or a specific cross-cultural group. This separation defines your character as much as membership in the organization defines its members. Gain 1 XP every time her status with this organization comes up. Gain 2

XP every time her disassociation brings her harm. Gain 5 XP every time the separation brings your character great pain and suffering.

Buyoff: Regain membership in the organization.

Key of Renown

"You must be the worst assassin I've ever heard of." "But you have heard of me." You gain 1 XP whenever you see to it that your name and deeds are known, by bragging about them or making sure there are witnesses. You gain 2 XP whenever you put yourself at risk to do something unnecessary or foolish that will add to your reputation. You gain 5 XP whenever you risk your life to take credit for your actions (bragging that you were the one who killed the Duke's son, for example.).

Buyoff: Give someone else credit for an action that would increase your renown.

Key of Power

You don't even care what you do with it, you just want it. You gain 1 XP whenever you earn a boon from someone important, earn a slight gain in prestige, or make a rival look bad. You gain 3 XP whenever you ruin, kill, or otherwise eliminate a rival, and improve your own position because of it.

Buyoff: Relinquish your power and position.

Key of Vengeance

Your character has a hatred for a particular organization, person, or even species or culture. Gain 1 XP every time your character hurts a member of that group or a lackey of that person. Gain 2 XP every time your character strikes a minor blow at that group or person (killing a member of the organization or one of the person's lackeys, disrupting their life, destroying their property). Gain 5 XP every time your character strikes a major blow at that group or person.

Buyoff: Let your enemy go.

Key of the Vow

Your character has a vow of personal behavior that she has sworn not to break. This could be a dietary restriction, a requirement to pray at sunbreak every morning, or something else like that. Gain 1 XP for every adventure in which your character does not break this vow. Gain 2 XP every time your character does not break this vow even though it causes her minor harm or inconvenience. Gain 5 XP every time your character does not break this vow even though it causes her great harm.

Buyoff: Break this vow.

Conflicts

A roleplaying session without conflict of various kinds is just plain boring. If we can't get into a good argument or fight, or pull a fast one of the local curmudgeon, something is lacking. Just like reading a story, part of the excitement in RPG's comes from living dangers and triumphs that we will never see in real life. It might be racing through the streets, chasing the burglar on your Harley, or finding our way through the maze of Roman politics, or even defeating the evil Overlord through cunning, guts and luck.

Put simply, conflicts happen whenever one person wants something and someone else opposes them. They can be a fight, a verbal argument, trying to squeeze the proper amount of venom out of snake's fang for a potion, or trying to wrest your opponent's control of magic away from them. Conflicts can be associated with each of the four Attributes. They each form a different type of conflict, but all of them are resolved in the same way.

Health Points

Health Points represent the character's physical, mental, social and spiritual (or magical, etc) health. Whether we are physically exhausted, hurt, or simply mentally drained from hours of magical research, our current ability to perform is hampered in nearly everything that we do. All of these forms of exhaustion and pain are abstracted into Health Points.

There are four Health Pools: one pool for each of the Attributes. Physical Health shows how many physical wounds we can withstand and how exhausted our body might be. Mental Health is a measure of how alert or drained we are mentally. When our brain is exhausted, clear thought becomes difficult and mistakes are made. When we're surrounded by people and trying to put up a good face, we turn to Social Health to see how long we can keep up the charade. Using magic, or praying for long periods of time, among many other things, can deplete our Spiritual Health.

If Sub-Attributes are not being used, the number is equal to 3x the Attribute score.

Finding our maximum Health Points

Each Health Pool is equal to three times (3x) the Resistance score for that Attribute. So if Peter has a Physical Resistance score of 3, his Physical Health is a 9.

This value increases whenever new points are added to any of the Resistance scores, or through bonuses given by items, magic, technology, etc.

Wound Levels

Each situation or item will have a Wound Level generally ranging from 1 to 3. For example, the Director might decide that the importance of the issue involved in the Roman Senate argument was crucial enough to your character that losing the argument would have a **Social** Wound Level of 3.

Recovering Health Points

Health Pools can be **replenished** in several ways. Special situations may arise where your Director would award you Health Points as a bonus for success.

A full night's sleep will recover a number of Health Points equal to your **applicable** Resistance Score.

If the character has recently suffered a tremendous Social or Spiritual setback that resulted in a loss of Health Points, the Director may award a number of Health Points equal to the applicable Resistance score if the character experiences a large success in that same area. Taking our Roman Senate as an example: our Senator was trying to convince the Senate that action should be taken on a highly controversial subject. Being shot down, he lost 3 **Social** Health Points because of his loss in Social confidence, or Resistance.

Later that day, our Senator discovers another plan of his has come to fruition in a surprisingly good way. Since he has a Social Resistance of 5, the Director can elect to award him up to 5 **Social** Health Points because his confidence in his Social skills have been restored. In this case, the Director would probably limit the award by matching the 3 Health Points that he lost. If our Senator had only had a Social Resistance of 2, then he could have only used 2 of the 3 Health Points that he was awarded. The remaining Health Point would be permanently lost.

A character's Health Points can never be higher than their applicable **Resistance** score, even if an award or rest would put them above that number. Any remaining points are unusable, and therefore lost.

Death and Dying

When a character reaches zero Physical Health Points, he falls unconscious. If the wounds were a result of a weapon that might have left him bleeding, he loses 1 Health Point every round.

Handling Conflict

Stating your intent

When a conflict has reared its ugly head, the first step is for the player to tell the Director what they're trying to accomplish and how they are trying to do that. They should make sure to tell what motivations are behind it. It is two very different tasks to dance with the Princess with the intent of impressing her father with your etiquette, or dancing with the intent to seduce her. Both situations would require a different set of Skills and Attributes to be used.

Skills are not tied directly to a specific Sub-Attribute. A situation often will be able to be solved using several different approaches, and the Director, paying attention to the player's description of how they want to accomplish the task, will have the flexibility to choose the best one, **or to modify the player's choice.**

Success and Failure Terms

Once the player has stated their intent, the Director states the results for both success and failure. Directors are encouraged to make failure more than "No, you don't succeed." Instead, the failure result should set the player up for more difficulties.

Bartering the Terms

Often, what the Director states for success or failure are not what the players had in mind. In this case, they have one chance to barter for different results. After hearing that they will do only 1 point of Physical Health to their opponent, the player might want to try going for a more difficult shot for more damage. Of course, with more damage comes a larger penalty for failure. The player is encouraged to be creative with their suggested terms for failure. A good penalty for failure is often one that will provide more roleplaying opportunities in the future, like a scar that marks him permanently. When trying for more damage, the player can not reduce the cost of failure, but might be able to change the way the failure affects them. As always, the Director has the final approval for the success and failure terms.

The Roll

Once the terms have been set, the player makes a Skill Check against the assigned Difficulty Range to determine their success. Difficulty Ranges are listed in the table below. Skill checks are resolved by rolling 1d10 and adding the value of the Skill and the relevant Attribute or Sub-Attribute, plus any other bonuses that may be appropriate, such as for higher-quality tools or materials being used.

Lt. Johnson needs to get his men across the small chasm that blocks their path to safety. He sees two options available to him. He can either use his Technology skill combined with Mental Finesse to design and build a bridge with cut branches and vines, or use Technology + Physical Power to find the right tree to topple, while understanding where he needs to break it to have it

fall in the correct place and not fall into the chasm. Since the enemy is closing in hard on their position, he decides that toppling the tree is the only realistic option.

His Physical Power score is a 3, and his Sciences Skill is a 4 (Apprentice.) So he rolls $2d10k1 + 3 + 4$. ($2d10$ because of his Apprentice Mastery level, 3 for Physical Power and 4 for Technology.) He rolls the dice and gets a 5 and an 8. He keeps the single highest result (8), adds his skill and attribute values and has a total of 15. If he would not have had any Mastery Levels in Technology, he would have rolled $1d10$, gotten the five, and had a result of 12 ($5 + 3 + 4$.)

This resulting number is compared to the Difficulty Number the Director has assigned the task. If it equals, or is greater than the Difficulty Number, the skill check is a success. If it is lower than the assigned Difficulty, the roll is a failure.

If the highest value on the dice is a one (1), then the Director is encouraged to find something bad that might happen because of the roll. It might not happen until the next round, or it might not become apparent until farther in the future.

Lt. Johnson successfully makes the tree-bridge, but rolled a one (1) on both of his dice. While the result is successful, the Director might decide that he did not judge the sturdiness of the tree as good as he should have. The tree has a hairline crack in the center of it now, resulting from the impact of the landing, and will collapse if enough weight is put on it. The Director secretly rolls $1d10$ and gets a 6. He decides that when the sixth man is crossing, the tree snaps.

DIFFICULTY RANGES

Simple	1-7
Easy	8-9
Medium	10-12
Taxing	13-16
Daunting	17-20
Heroic	21-25

Boosting your chances

Since the goal of the game is to partake in heroic, cinematic adventures, we've provided a couple of ways to increase your chances

Giving it all you've got

Sometimes we just need to push ourselves a little past the bounds of our comfort zone. We need to put more of ourselves into the conflict if we're going to have any chance to win. Before they have made their roll, the player has the option of gambling some of the Health Pool to hedge the bet and help insure a win. For every Health Point the player spends, they get a +1 bonus to the result. The Health Point must be from the same Attribute that the roll is being made against. If they roll a success, they keep the Health Points and get a bonus on the next action within that conflict. The bonus is equal to the difference between their total roll and what they needed. The bonus can never be more than the amount of Health Points risked. If they fail, the Health Points are lost, just like the player took wounds from the conflict. This is in addition to any Wounds the player receives directly from the combat.

Killer and Goldentooth are facing off across the table, huge arms locked into an intense arm wrestling match. The winner takes the lion's share of the treasure they took from the local natives. They both have their eye on a piece of the treasure and refuse to give it up. The player decides Killer, even with his Physical Power of 6 and Entertainment of 3, is worried it might not be enough.

Goldentooth looks pretty tough. He decides to bet 3 points from the 6 remaining in his Physical Health Pool. While he would risk 5 of the 6, he's afraid things might go badly if he loses, so he wants to save some strength for the ensuing fight. The Director comes to the same conclusion for Goldentooth, and risks 2 Physical Health. Goldentooth has a Physical Power of 5 and Entertainment of 3.

The player rolls a 5 for Killer which gives him a 14 plus the 3 Health Points for a grand total of 17. The Director rolls a 3 giving him a 11 plus the 2 Health Points for a grand total of 13. So the player wins by 4 points. Since he won he gets a +3 bonus if they were to continue the same action. Since this wrestling match is over, he will not get to use the bonus, but he does keep the Health Points and he got his success.

The Barstool and the Chandelier

Combat in stories is filled with exciting battles as martial artists evade opponents with acrobatics among the pipes, and with swashbucklers swinging from chandeliers. Cowboys slide across the bar, cups shattering as they are shoved out of the way. To help players enter the thrill of these situations, they are rewarded for creative use of their surroundings.

When the player gives a creative use of their surroundings, or take a risk in a fun and dramatic way that enhances the game for everyone, the Director may lower the Difficulty Number by 2 or 3 points. This provides a gentle encouragement to players to have fun and take part in the game, which makes it a richer experience for everyone. Since the difficulties are lowered, the failure results must be steeper. In addition to the stated failure result, the Director should provide another failure result directly related to their use of the environment.

Monte has had his eye on the beautiful farmer's daughter for some time, but every time he tries to approach her, the farmer seems to be there, doling out another task that takes his daughter away from our hero. This time, however, the farmer is nowhere to be seen. Desperate to make a good impression, Monte quickly grabs a handful of wildflowers and presents them to her using a little sleight of hand to make them appear from nowhere.

The Director acknowledges the showmanship by lowering the Difficulty. Unfortunately, our hero rolls badly and fails the roll. In addition to the farmer showing up, waving his pitchfork and screaming, the farmer's daughter is allergic to the flowers and breaks out in hives while clutching at her throat, barely able to breathe.

Conflict Resolution Examples

These examples have been taken directly from discussions on the forums, and are mostly the work of stickman. (Thanks!)

The Dance

Peter: I'm going to take Lady Marids hand and dance with her, wooing the room with my courtly skills. I actually want to impress her father, Count Marid.

DM: Okay, well I'd say that's Physical Finesse + Etiquette, and as it's a waltz I'll make it a Taxing difficulty.

Peter: I was hoping to use my Social Finesse instead, I'm not worried about being perfect, just being impressive with my manners. How does that sound?

DM: That's fine, I thought you wanted to impress them with your moves. That sounds good, but it's made slightly more difficult by Lady Marid who seems to want to rather more than a single dance ...

Peter: Oh great, I do *not* want to annoy Viscount Yander by being overtly familiar with his fiancé, so I'm going to be dancing with as much distance between us as possible.

DM: That'll make it harder?

Peter: No problem.

DM: So, you're dancing politely with Lady Marid in an attempt to impress her father. That's a Social Finesse + Influence roll against a modified taxing difficulty. If you succeed Count Marid will be impressed, if you fail then .. he's still impressed but Lady Marid will be besotted with you.

Peter: That's evil!

DM: I know, that's my job. Now, is that ok?

Peter: How about if I fail then Lady Marid's fiancé Viscount Yander will think I've committed some wrong doing and seek satisfaction?

DM: Heh, yep, that sounds good too! Ok, we'll go with that.

Peter: Well, I rolled and get a total of 20! I don't think Yander saw anything he wouldn't approve of.

The Bridge (and further clarifications)

Peter is crossing an old rope bridge when his enemies begin sawing at the ropes, so he begins running for the side. The DM specifies that on a success he makes it to the side, on a failure he's on the bridge as it breaks.

In either case there is little concrete fact. If he gets to the side, he might still be ambushed. If the bridge snaps with him still on it, the DM can call for another conflict to grab something before falling, or give him a chance to dive into the crocodile infested waters below ..

One of the key concepts here though is listening to the undercurrent (or in fact stated goals) of the players. If the player is talking about wanting to escape from the prison block they're in, you need to decide if this means a single conflict or a series of them. One effective way to do this is to have the player choose success and failure terms, as often they'll be more than happy to let you know which they'd prefer. An additional useful thing here is that when you want bad things to happen, players are often far more willing to thing of cool bad things to happen to their own characters that you are as a DM, because *they* came up with it. That means they've already imagined that situation coming to pass.

For example, you're playing a Peter the knight in a fight and it's going badly for you. The DM states that a critical hit lands, and asks you what that means. Now obviously for some players, they'll just want the least damage they can get away with, and the DM can handle that. But for others, it's a chance to make their character more interesting. Some people might decide 'the blow lands across Peters face, scarring him horribly', and that's cool (the image of the once handsome knight now marked by his dreaded foe) but for some players, they might not be able to buy into that and prefer Peter have his hand slashed, a bone shattered or some other dark fate.