

# Personae Core Rules Document

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## Introduction

Personae is the rules system for Shadowlight: Myth of Truth, a role-playing game. It provides a method of resolving conflicts between individuals: creatures or characters, controlled by the players or the Game Moderator (GM), within the confines of a collaborative, interactive storytelling environment.

Every player has one or more individuals that they control, starting play with their main character. The GM also has one or more individuals to control, who might be on the same side as the players, against them, or somewhere in-between. (The GM is explained in greater detail in "Moderating a Personae Game", below.)

With the framework of the Personae system, individuals' actions are simulated by the rolling of ten-sided dice, labeled 1 to 10 (known in RPG parlance as d10s), and the mathematical manipulation of the outcomes of the dice rolled based on an individual's statistics. Within the storytelling environment that the Personae system supports, conflicts are resolved through methods of social interaction such as teamwork, problem-solving, critical thinking, improvisation and cleverness, as both players and GM portray their characters.

With storytelling environment and rules framework paired together, the ultimate objective of Personae is to create a positive, rewarding play experience for both the players and GM.

# The Measure of a Personae Character

Personae characters are comprised of Attributes and Traits.

## Attributes

Every character has Attributes, an array of descriptive categories to each of which is mapped a numerical value. Collectively, Attributes represent the starting point for the character's statistics.

- Attributes are expressed as whole numbers never less than zero (0).
- Attributes have no maximum, apart from what is imposed by the order of importance (explained in "Creating a Personae Character" below).

## At Character Creation

At Character Creation, Attributes are given a value of zero (0) or greater by the allotment of Creation Points to each Attribute. The resulting Attribute value determines the maximum number of Traits (Skills, Special Abilities, Powers and Talents) that the character will begin play with.

<u>Attribute</u>	<u>Maximum number character can begin play with</u>
Competence	Unlocked Skills
Prowess	Dice to increase unlocked Skills*
Cunning	Special Abilities
Power	Powers
Knowledge	Talents
Stature	Hits of injury before becoming Injured**

\* The number of dice the character's Skills can be increased by is equal to its Prowess value times three.

\*\* The number of hits of injury that the character can sustain before becoming Injured is equal to one plus the character's Stature value (1 + Sta).

## During Play

Once play begins, Attributes are added to the result of Skill rolls when a Challenge must be resolved. Every Skill will have a default Attribute that is added, but depending on the type of Skill being rolled, one Attribute may be more appropriate to add to the die roll than another.

- Attributes can be increased once play begins through Advancement, receiving Development Points from the GM.
- Development Points are similar to the Creation Points used in Character Creation, only they may be spent *either* to increase Attributes *or* acquire new Traits, but *not* both (explained in "Advancement", below).

(The Traits section below discusses Skills, Special Abilities, Powers and Talents in greater detail.)

## Attributes Explained

### Competence

*Force of personality coupled with presence of mind, Competence represents keeping your head in the midst of uncertainty. The greater your Competence is, the more capable you are at performing different types of actions under pressure, in situations where your Skill*

*is matched in opposition with another individual.*

- At Character Creation, the maximum number of unlocked Skills a character can begin play with is equal to its Competence value.
- During play, Competence is a good Attribute to add to Skills rolled in Interaction Challenges that involve social situations.

## Prowess

*Whereas Competence deals more with the big picture, Prowess is all about details and particulars, formulating a plan and seeing it into action. Prowess is the measure of a character's capacity for formal training, turning broad fields of capability into well-honed assets that get results. Competence opens the door to a Skill by unlocking it; Prowess improves the Skill, increasing your chance to successfully perform an action in stressful situations or when pitted against your opponents.*

- At Character Creation, the maximum number of dice a character's unlocked Skills can be increased by when play begins is equal to its Prowess value times three.
- During play, Prowess is a good Attribute to add to Skills rolled in Challenges that involve discipline and rigor.

## Cunning

*Cunning represents a character's wits, perceptiveness and ingenuity, as well as hand-eye coordination and manual dexterity.*

- At Character Creation, the maximum number of Special Abilities a character can begin play with is equal to its Cunning value.
- During play, Cunning is added by default to Dodge Skill rolls when answering Attack Challenges, and is a good Attribute to add to Skill rolls in Challenges that involve maneuverability, agility, awareness, and acting on instinct rather than rational thought.

## Power

*Power represents exerting force of will. There are many words synonymous with this, such as determination, resolve, drive and conviction, but they all refer to the same principle: ensuring that your desire takes shape when confronted with the desires of others who may stand in your way, and refusing to allow those conflicting desires to take shape as well. For characters who practice the supernatural, it is the avenue by which they tap into the source of their craft to manipulate reality, breaking the theories and laws dictated by science.*

- At Character Creation, the maximum number of Powers a character can begin play with is equal to its Power value. All characters have the potential to use magic, but not all of them develop it; as such, not all characters produce the more drastic types of effects covered by Powers, using those points to upgrade Special Abilities instead.
- During play, Power is added by default to Resist Skill rolls when answering Power or Interaction Challenges, to Power Skills that are necessary for using Powers that call for you to issue a Power Challenge, and is a good Attribute to add to Skills rolled in Challenges that involve rebuffing Challenges intended to sway the character's mind.

## Knowledge

*Knowledge represent a character's aptitude for academic interests and craft. This includes what the character knows about any given topic (such as history, alchemy or magic), or how to make things with craftsmanship (such as weapons, sailing ships or furniture). The character turns what he knows into languages, areas of expertise, or resources that increase material wealth.*

- At Character Creation, the maximum number of Talents a character can begin play with is equal to its Knowledge value.
- During play, Knowledge is a good Attribute to add to Skills rolled in Challenges involving knowing, learning, or acting on information already known.

## Stature

*Stature represents the character's physical body. Stamina and raw might both fall into this category. Stature reflects how much punishment a character can take, expressed as the character's Health.*

- At Character Creation, the number of hits of injury a character can sustain before becoming Injured is equal to its Stature value plus one (1 + Sta).
- During play, Stature is added by default to Block Skill rolls when answering Attack Challenges, and is a good Attribute to add to Skills rolled in Challenges that involve brute force, endurance, or constitution.

## The Order of Importance

Because no character can be good at everything, players must rank their character's Attributes in order of importance to the overall concept they wish to play. This doesn't represent any sort of conscious decision on the character's part, rather it acts like a "metaphysical template" for the character at its origin. A heavy, physical warrior, for example, will likely excel more at maintaining an exemplary Stature at the expense of Knowledge, whereas a powerful necromancer will realize Power at the expense of Stature. Characters who excel equally at both swordplay and supernatural aptitude might balance the importance of both equally. Order of importance helps to shape the direction a character can choose to head with regard to future development, and at the same time ensure that no one Attribute vastly outpaces any of the others.

- A character's Attributes are ranked by First, Second, Third and Handicap priority.
- At Character Creation, two Attributes are given highest, or First priority. Two Attributes are given Second priority, and one Attribute is given Third priority. The one Attribute left remaining is the character's Handicap Attribute, the one area that the character's just not very good at.
- First-priority Attributes are characteristics that outshine the rest, capstones which should help guide players to better flesh out their characters' concepts.
- First-priority Attributes will, as listed above, always be the highest, succeeded in decreasing order by Second-priority Attributes, Third-priority Attributes, and the Handicap Attribute.
- It should be decided whether or not players may change their characters' Attribute priorities after Character Creation (for example, through Powers or Special Abilities), or if they may not once play begins.

## Potential

A character's Potential reflects a threshold for a character as it journeys through life. Potential acts both as a yardstick that measures the quantity of a character's experiences against another character, as well as a bar that the character cannot surpass without further advancement. This bar marks the upper limit for some of the character's Traits, increasing as the character progresses through the story.

Just like the character's Attributes, Potential is a whole number, only it cannot be less than one. Potential is directly proportional to the character's Attributes; it is equal to the sum of the values of its Attributes divided by five, ignoring the remainder.

Potential = [sum of character's Attribute values] ÷ 5 (ignore the remainder)

A Potential 4 character, for example, has a sum of Attribute values ranging from twenty (20) to twenty-nine (29). A character whose Attribute values total thirty-seven (37) is a Potential 7 character ( $30 / 5 = 7$  remainder 2). The sum of a character's Attributes cannot be less than five, as that would result in its Potential being less than 1 ( $5 \div 5 = 1$ ).

## Traits

It's not enough that a character is strong, smart or wily—if that strength, intelligence or cleverness can't be put to use, then the character can't ever accomplish anything. Traits are the means by which characters interact with the environment around them, turning their hopes and dreams into reality. Characters with compelling stories don't exist without a vehicle for achieving the goals and desires that they value most dearly.

Personae characters have five different types of Traits: Skills, Talents, Special Abilities, Powers, and Health.

## Skills

Skills represent the time, training and devotion that a Personae character invests into becoming better and better at performing actions that others might only prove mediocre at performing. Most of these actions are what any intelligent humanoid creature might be capable of doing: swinging a sword, deciphering encoded text, or avoiding notice from others. Skill is not just performing at the action in question, but excelling at it—performing it *with Skill*. Supernatural practice is included in these types of actions, initiating effects that transcend the mundane world. Those who conduct supernatural practices who wish to succeed more often than not spend a great deal of time turning mere practice into mastery in the use of their Powers.

- Skills involve both violent and nonviolent applications—striking a dragon with a sword doesn't entail anything special, mechanically speaking, or separate from using rhetoric in order to convince a listener of your political opinion.

- At Character Creation, the maximum number of Skills that can be unlocked for a character when play begins is equal to its Competence value.
- When a character issues or answers a Challenge, the player rolls one or more dice for the purposes of resolving the Challenge.
- A character does not have to have a Skill unlocked in order to perform an action; a character can attempt any action that the player chooses, even if the appropriate Skill has yet to be unlocked (the character is considered *unskilled* for a Skill that has yet to be unlocked). Players attempting an action that isn't covered by one of their unlocked Skills may always roll one die by default, and add an Attribute considered appropriate to the action being attempted.
- If a character has unlocked Skills, then this allows the player to roll more dice if the Challenge involves one of the unlocked Skills; the rating of the Skill equals the number of dice you roll. Unlocked Skills always have a starting rating of two dice.
- When a Skill is unlocked, the player then chooses an Attribute that they will, by default, add when rolling that Skill in the process of either issuing or answering a Challenge. Sometimes this will be obvious—weapons-related Skills, for example, that involve hand-to-hand combat will generally involve adding the character's Stature value, whereas ranged weapons (bows and the like) will add Cunning.
- Provided that the player has a valid rationale, however, for picking the default Attribute for the Skill being unlocked, and there is agreement between player and GM, then any Attribute could conceivably be chosen as the default for a given Skill when it is unlocked.
- This does not mean, however, that the default Attribute will *always* be added for a given Skill; the GM may note that circumstances warrant another Attribute being used to add in lieu of the default. (GMs should note that these should be exceptions rather than rules, otherwise it marginalizes the default Attribute chosen by the player when the Skill was unlocked.)

## Prowess Pool

Players increase their characters' Skill ratings with dice from the Prowess Pool.

- The character's Prowess Pool is the sum total of dice that the player has assigned to the character's Skills over the course of a story, whether played out over one session or several.
- The Prowess Pool is initially set at Character Creation by the Prowess that the character begins play with, multiplied by three; a Prowess of 4, for example, means the character starts with a Prowess Pool of twelve dice, and the player may distribute them among the character's Skills as he or she chooses.
- While it is preferable, for ease of bookkeeping's sake, that the player assign all of the character's starting Prowess Pool dice at Character Creation, it is not necessary.
- As the character gains Development Points through Advancement, the player may increase the character's Prowess Pool; one Development Point spent increases the Prowess Pool by three dice. If a player chooses to leave dice from the Prowess Pool unassigned, however, then those unassigned dice should be noted as distinct from the Pool as a whole.
- The maximum number of dice that can be allocated to a Skill is equal to the character's Potential plus two. A Potential 1 character can allocate a maximum of three dice to a Skill; a Potential 3 character can allocate a maximum of five dice to a Skill; a Potential 5 character can allocate a maximum of seven dice to a Skill.

## Talents

Talents are very similar to Skills, but differ in a very important respect: whereas Talents also represent things that a character is good at, it's through Skills that the character survives in a world of conflict. A character might be good at baking or playing the tuba, but unless you're in a baking contest, or a battle of the bands, your capability with either of these things is categorized as Talent rather than Skill, mechanically speaking. This doesn't mean, however, that Talents have no mechanical impact on a character. On the contrary: Talents either represent languages the character knows, subject areas the character has expertise in, or sources of material wealth for the character. At Character Creation, the maximum number of Talents a character begins play with is equal to its Knowledge value.

## Languages

The ability to speak languages is covered under the category of Talents.

- Characters begin play able to speak (and write, if the language has a written form) the language of their species, ethnic group, or nation of origin.
- The ability to speak and/or write additional languages is available to characters if they are chosen as individual Talents.

- This can also cover secret, fabricated, or cipher languages, depending on a given setting, genre, or style of play and consensus among the group.

## Expertise

- When a Talent is identified as an Expertise, once per game session a player may call on that Talent to gain one additional die when rolling to either issue or answer a Challenge, provided that the player can reasonably justify how the Talent would factor into the Challenge in question.
- This bonus die functions as all other dice do, and can generate a critical if a natural 10 is rolled.

## Resources

When a Talent is identified as a Resource, this means that the Talent is a source of material wealth for the character.

- Every Resource Talent contributes to the character's Resource Cap, a number equal to one or greater that represents both wealth in tangible assets as well as purchasing power.
- Characters cannot purchase items whose cost value exceeds their Resource Cap; items whose cost value is equal to or lesser than the character's Resource Cap can be purchased, but may have a chance of reducing the Cap.
- The GM should pair a range of cost values with a rarity heading as is appropriate to the game and/or setting in which the game takes place: for example,

<u>Cost Value</u>	<u>Rarity</u>
0	Common
1-3	Uncommon
4-6	Rare
7-9	Very Rare
10+	Unique

The cost values of items represent a combination of the value of an item as well as its availability. (An item's legality, for instance, can affect its cost category; a pack of cigarettes might be considered of Common cost in one country of your game's setting, for example, but in another country, where tobacco is a religious taboo, it might be considered of Rare cost). Circumstances throughout the course of a story might result in one or more characters being granted a temporary increase in their Resource Cap (finding a cache of jewels and coins, a boon from a king or wealthy lord, the theft of antiquities from an ancient history museum). This temporary boost should be correlated to a specific number of scenes before being expended.

## Special Abilities

Special Abilities (SAs) take a character from beyond the ordinary and into the realm of legend, constantly testing the boundary between possible and impossible. SAs make a character better at their other Traits in a variety of different ways, such as superior training, the subtle influence of the supernatural, or exceptional items a character may come across during its adventures. SAs can also improve or modify the effects of a character's Powers. The exact benefit that each of a character's SAs provide are agreed upon and defined through player-GM consensus. At Character Creation, the maximum number of SAs a character can begin play with are equal to its Cunning value.

## What Special Abilities Can Do

Better defined by the SAs themselves than an over-reaching description, the category encompasses a variety of resources available to the character. SAs can, for example...

...add an additional number to the result of a Skill roll in addition to Attribute:

*[Skill] Training: Add one to the result of all Attack Challenges issued and/or answered with your [Skill], along with all other additions.*

...add one or more dice to a Skill roll. These dice are in addition to the rating of the Skill, but it should be decided as to whether or not they can cause the number of dice rolled to exceed the maximum Skill rating:

*Expert [Skill]: Roll one additional die whenever you issue and/or answer Challenges with [Skill].*

...allow you to reroll one or more dice before determining the result of a Skill roll. It should be decided whether or not the second or better result is taken, and if any other special circumstances must be considered:

*[Skill] Focus: Reroll one die whenever you issue or answer Challenges with [Skill] (take second result, can't be highest).*

...force an opponent to reroll one or more of their dice before determining the result of a Skill roll. Just as with the character having a reroll Special Ability, the same circumstances must be considered:

*Misdirection: When you succeed an Interaction Challenge against an opponent with [Skill], you can issue an immediate follow-up Challenge; when your opponent answers the follow-up Challenge, it must reroll one of its dice in the Skill used to answer (take second result, can't be highest).*

...increase the amount of hits of injury an opponent sustains with a successful Attack Challenge:

*Brutal [weapon Skill] Strike: You inflict one additional hit when you succeed in an Attack Challenge with [weapon Skill].*

...provide an additional or alternate benefit to one of your Skills:

*Taunt: When you succeed an Interaction Challenge against an opponent with [Skill], you automatically escalate to a violent encounter, and your opponent immediately issues you an Attack Challenge.*

...provide an additional or alternate benefit to one of your Powers:

*Spread [Power]: [Power] can affect one additional opponent.*

...allow you to perform stupendous feats of derring-do by spending criticals:

*Horrific Wound: If you succeed an Attack Challenge against an opponent with [weapon Skill], and you spend one of your criticals, the opponent automatically sustains enough hits of injury necessary to become Injured no matter how many there are.*

SAs don't have to have a mechanically quantifiable rating or effectiveness level, however. Work with your GM if you're interested in taking an SA that doesn't necessarily fit into one of the examples provided above.

## Scope of Special Abilities

In the midst of a nonviolent or violent encounter, a character's use of SAs is limited. A character may only benefit from one SA in the course of its turn, unless either you have Powers and/or Special Abilities that say otherwise, or the SA has an identifier that says otherwise.

## Special Ability Identifiers

Just like Talents, SAs have identifiers that help clarify their scope.

**(C)onditional:** When a player decides to limit, or "hamstring" an SA or SQ by dictating it can only be used, for example, once in an encounter (an out-of-game mechanical condition), or it can only be used, for example, against those opponents who have previously committed a crime (an in-game story condition), then the SA or SQ is identified as Conditional. Conditional SAs or SQs can be upgraded once for free for each limiting condition imposed upon it.

**Cultu(r)e:** All characters begin play with one free Special Ability that expresses the character's ethnic group, species, nationality, or some other background element that helps to elaborate on the character's origins. It should not only serve the purpose of identification in this regard, but provide a mechanical benefit as well. For example:

*Dwarf - Iron Constitution (R): Dwarves are sturdier than other races. You sustain (2 + Sta value) hits of injury before becoming Injured, as opposed to (1 + Sta value).*

**(Q)uality:** An SA identified as a Special Quality (SQ) is always in effect in addition other SAs that must be chosen during a character's turn during a non-violent or violent encounter. You have the option during either Character Creation or Advancement to upgrade an SA to an SQ (explained in "Advancement", below). Applying the Quality identifier to a Special Ability requires investing more than one Creation Point or Development Point (see Creation Points and Advancement, respectively, below).

**E(x)ceptional Gear:** SAs or SQs identified as Exceptional Gear are those that represent the training that the character has undertaken in order to take advantage of the mechanical benefit offered by the piece of equipment. See "Exceptional Gear" below for a further explanation of Exceptional Gear. Applying the Exceptional Gear identifier to a Special Ability requires investing more than one Creation Point or Development Point by default (see Creation Points and Advancement, respectively, below).

## Powers

Commanding bolts of lightning to strike from the sky, running faster than an arrow in flight, gazing upon distant vistas through a polished mirror—all of these, and too many more to count, are what we call Powers: the direct application of the supernatural. Practitioners who use Powers initiate drastic changes to reality, breaking the rules of science to make the impossible possible. The maximum number of Powers a character begins play with is equal to its Power value, and Power is the default Attribute that gets added when either issuing or answering Power Challenges.

Depending on the character, and the character's particular supernatural practice, Powers can be expressed in different ways. Regardless of those descriptive details, mechanically speaking Powers work the same way (unless a game group institutes additional rules for different methods of accessing and/or practicing magic). Also too, while the source of supernatural aptitude might differ from character to character, there is no mechanical difference between someone who practices "psionics" versus "divine magic", just as there is nothing mechanically different between someone who taps into the supernatural innately versus someone who does it through intellectual discipline and study (unless a group institutes mechanical differences of their own devising).

While characters are capable of attempting just about any sort of action that their players can think of, there is a limitation on the kind of magical effects that can be produced. In short, a character wanting to, for example, create an illusion of a giant fire-winged demon in order to scare an opponent, must have a "Project Illusion" Power in order to bring about such a result. So long the character has the Power, however (namely, that the Power was acquired either at Character Creation or through Advancement), that Power—and any others the character has—can be initiated at will, an infinite number of times in the course of an encounter (unless a restriction has been instituted by the game group), directed by the individual Power's duration.

The possible applications of a character's Powers are limited only by the player's imagination. Powers might cause the character to double in size, grow extra limbs, make the character's voice sound more pleasing and persuasive, or might change a clear sky to a driving hailstorm. The specific effects of Powers, and their mechanical applications, are agreed upon both player and GM.

## Duration / Duration Identifiers

Many powers will operate for an amount of time during a scene that is agreed upon between the player and GM. However, when a scene escalates to a nonviolent or violent encounter, and time is tracked in rounds (see Space and Time below), a Power's duration—the length of time that a Power lasts for—falls into one of four categories:

**(I)ntant:** Instant Powers (identified I) don't last longer than the end of a character's turn. They typically require an action to initiate—the effect takes place, and it's done. Supernatural attacks (such as effects directed at an opponent that inflict injury) are always Instant Powers.

**(M)aintain:** Maintain Powers (identified M) require the character who initiated the Power to spend an action to "keep up" the Power's effect for as long (in the case of a violent encounter, this means how many rounds) as the character wants the Power to last for.

**Independen(t):** Independent Powers (identified T) are the same as Maintain Powers, however they remain in effect

regardless of the action of the character who initiated the Power—the Power is brought into effect, and remains in effect until the end of the nonviolent or violent encounter.

**(S)pecial:** Powers whose durations do not fall into one of the three above duration categories have a Special duration (identified S). A Power with Special duration has its duration specifics detailed in the Power's description. (a Power that is activated as a violent encounter begins, without needing to be activated through the use of an action, is an example of a Power with a Special duration.)

## Health

Health measures how free a character is of injury—put simply, how far away the character is from death's door. At full Health, a character has the least possible chance of dying that it can. A character gets closer and closer to death as it sustains injury during violent encounters, progressing through a series of four Health status levels, each one more life-threatening than the previous one. By default, a character can sustain a number of hits of injury before becoming Injured equal to one plus the character's Stature value (1 + Sta).

(A character's Health levels, how a character sustains injury, character death, and other similar issues are further explained in "Combat" below.)

# Creating Personae Characters

## Character Concept

Before play begins, the group should decide on the cast of characters that the players will portray. This should be a dialogue where the entire group (both players and GM) are involved, unless one or more players has background details that he or she wants kept secret from the rest of the group. Once this is decided, and before characters are expressed in statistical terms, then each player should start by defining his or her character's concept. Concept includes, but isn't necessarily limited to, the character's physical description, personality, morality, allegiance, motives, and background. Once this is all worked out, it helps both GM and players, for reference's sake, to distill all of this information down to a few key words that sum up the concept: "Post Civil War Entrepreneur", "Desert Elf Singing Warrior", and "Merchant, Privateer, Scoundrel" are good examples of this. Once each player has decided upon his/her character's concept, then the characters' statistics at the beginning of play can be established.

## Creation Points

Creation Points are the source of the characters' Attribute values when play begins. At Character Creation, you have a pool of Creation Points, determined by the party's starting Potential, that you will allocate to your character's Attributes in keeping with order of importance. As the story progresses, the characters' growth will be further quantified through Advancement, where each player will receive Development Points to increase their characters' Attributes with.

## The Character Creation Process

### Step 1: Establish Starting Potential

When the group sits down to play for the first time, everyone should determine what sort of story or stories will be told with the characters that everyone will play. Will the characters just be starting out, taking their first steps into a world of adventure? Or will they be more experienced, elite participants? This discussion, and ultimate consensus, should determine how many Creation Points each player will allocate to their Attributes. (It's easier if this amount is a multiple of five.) For example, a group decides that their characters will begin play with thirty (30) Creation Points to allocate to their Attributes at Character Creation: the characters have some experience as adventurers, but not quite at the pinnacle of their capabilities. The number of Creation Points characters begin play with will determine their starting Potential.

### Step 2: Rank Attributes By Order of Importance

(Order of Importance is explained in greater detail above.)

## Step 3: Allocate Attribute Points

Once the characters' Attributes have been ranked, the order determines the maximum value that the Attributes can be equal to:

<u>Priority of Attribute</u>	<u>% of Attribute Total</u>	<u>Can Never Be Greater Than</u>
First	40% (four-tenths)	-
Second	30% (three-tenths)	First-Priority Attributes
Third	20% (two-tenths)	Second-Priority Attributes
Handicap	10% (one-tenth)	Third-Priority Attributes

In a game where characters are starting with 20 Creation Points to allocate to their Attributes, for example, First-Priority Attribute values cannot begin play higher than 8 (40% of 20, ignore the remainder); Second-Priority Attributes cannot begin higher than 6 (30% of 20, ignore the remainder), Third-Priority Attributes cannot begin higher than 4 (20% of 20, ignore the remainder), and the Handicap Attribute cannot begin higher than 2 (10% of 20, ignore the remainder).

## Step 4: Determine Maximum Number of Traits

At Character Creation, the maximum number of each Trait that a character begins play with is equal to one of its Attributes. (Trait maximums are explained in greater detail above.)

A character is not required to start play with a number of Traits equal to the appropriate Attribute value. Just because your Competence value might be 8, for example, doesn't mean you must begin play with eight Skills. The only caveat is that you not exceed your appropriate Attribute's number of a given Trait (no more than seven Powers for a Power of 7, for example). This puts less pressure on a player to fill in every Trait "slot" before play begins, and allows for the possibility, depending on player-GM consensus, that the player might discover other Traits that weren't thought of before (the group should decide whether or not it's acceptable to define these "unspent" during a session, or if they can only be defined in-between play sessions).

## Step 5: Define Traits

Knowing how many Skills, Special Abilities, Powers and Talents the character has, the player can now define these Traits. Traits are always defined in the player's own words, as agreed upon between the player and the GM. They should always be described, to the best of the player's ability, in an active, present-tense voice, as actions that the character can perform and/or things that the character can do:

*A Skill called "Longsword": "My character is particularly good at attacking foes with a longsword"*

*A Power called "Fireball": Issue a Power Challenge to an opponent with your Magic Skill (the opponent answers with Resist); if you succeed, the opponent sustains one hit of injury.*

By expressing Traits in active voice, it helps to clarify the goal(s) of a Challenge, and the Trait's role in the character's success. It's not necessary, however, to pre-establish the exact wording of how a Trait works: the mechanical effect of the Trait should always be understood, but flexibility should be available for the player to richly describe the use of a Trait in any given set of circumstances.

**Special Abilities as Qualities:** If you wish to define one of your Special Abilities as a Quality, it is treated as if it were double in value—the value of two Special Abilities instead of one—when you first take it. It still requires one Creation Point for every time you wish to upgrade the Special Quality, unless player-GM consensus dictates otherwise.

**Special Abilities as Exceptional Gear:** If you wish to define one of your Special Abilities as Exceptional Gear, you must also at the same time define it as a Special Quality.

## Using Power to Upgrade Special Abilities

Given the theme or concept of a character, its player might decide that it won't use Powers in the course of play.

However, neither player nor character should ever be penalized for staying true to the character's concept, if the player feels it's still important for the character to have a Power value above zero (0) (to help adjust Resist rolls when answering Power Challenges, for example, or to represent an item that's exceptional by supernatural quality). A player may instead use Creation Points assigned to his/her character's Power Attribute to upgrade the character's Special Abilities, or to represent the Powers that have been imbued into an item that's exceptional by supernatural quality.

A player whose character has a Power value of 3, for example, decides that her character won't be using Powers; her character grew up in a primitive society where no one has ever known how to tap into the supernatural. The player may use the three points that would have normally been used to acquire Powers in Character Creation to instead upgrade Special Abilities, or to decide that the character is benefiting from an item that's exceptional by supernatural quality.

## Step 6: Determine Starting Gear

Characters begin play with whatever gear that their character owns, as agreed upon between player and GM. Characters begin play with one weapon for each weapon-related Skill that the character begins play with, and a shield if the character has a shield-related Skill. In order to benefit from any piece of exceptional gear the character owns (weapon, armor, shield, or otherwise), either by craft, supernatural quality, or both, the character must choose either a Power, Special Ability, or both that ties to the gear in question (see Exceptional Gear below).

# Playing a Personae Game

Once you've made characters, it's time to begin play. Keep in mind that, along the way, although things such as Attack Challenges and Extended Challenges have specific names to identify them, more often than not once you start to get the hang of the game, the processes and terminology will be understood (so, for example, it might go without saying who the actor and reactor are in a given Challenge, once the game group has gotten a good grasp of the process for resolving a Challenge).

While all role-playing games don't involve the use of dice, this one does. Fear not, however! The only dice you'll need are ten-sided, labeled 1 to 10 (referred to as d10s in classic role-playing game parlance). Keep plenty on hand—you'll never know how many you'll need, depending on what you and your GM decide upon, but it's the only type of dice you'll ever need at the table. Whenever dice are referred to in this system (such as the rating for a Skill, “roll X dice”), the system is asking you to roll d10s.

## The Challenge

Whenever two individuals (either player- or GM-controlled) wind up at cross purposes to each other, then it's time for someone to issue a Challenge.

Both individuals involved in a Challenge

1. roll one or more dice,
2. add an appropriate Attribute, as well as any other circumstantial additions, to the highest die result rolled, and
3. compare: the individual with the higher result succeeds (successfully issues or answers the Challenge).

Whether it involves getting someone to believe a far-fetched scheme, or attacking an invader on the shores of your homeland with a sword, there is always conflict: actors want to succeed in Challenges in keeping with their goals and desires, and reactors want to see the actors quashed for the opportunity to advance their goals and desires.

In a Challenge, one individual is the actor (typically the one who issued the Challenge), and the other individual is the reactor, the one answering the Challenge (also known as an opponent). There is no limit to the number of actors or reactors on either side of a Challenge; multiple individuals can issue a Challenge against a single opponent, and a single actor can issue a Challenge against multiple opponents.

In the case of Challenges issued during non-violent encounters (usually Interaction Challenges), the actor is jockeying for superiority with with some sort of non-violent Skill, while the reactor is trying to keep the actor “in place”, or trying to remain firm in its position. In the case of Challenges in violent encounters (namely combat), the actor is the one

delivering a physical attack (an Attack Challenge) or harmful Power (Power Challenge), and the reactor is generally the one who is defending against the attack or trying to resist the harmful Power. There can be exceptions to these general cases, however: depending on the nature of a Power being used, a Power Challenge can be issued during a nonviolent encounter, just as an Interaction Challenge can be issued during a violent encounter if an individual is trying to convince a hostile opponent to stop fighting.

Here's a more detailed process for resolving a Challenge:

1. An individual (a player's character, or one of the GM's) issues a Challenge to an opponent. The actor and reactor are determined. The actor declares what Skill will be rolled to Challenge with, and the reactor declares what Skill will be rolled to react to the actor's Skill. Both actor and reactor roll at least one die for the declared Skill (more if the Skill has a higher rating, or if actor or reactor have circumstantial bonus dice), and identify the highest die result rolled.
2. Both actor and reactor add the value of an Attribute that is appropriate to their part in the Challenge to the highest die result rolled, along with any other circumstantial additions to the highest die result rolled (for either actor or resistor, based on conditions at the time of the Challenge agreed upon by player-GM consensus).
3. Both actor and reactor compare their final result totals. If the actor has the greater total outcome, then the actor succeeds the Challenge; if the reactor has the greater total outcome, then the reactor successfully answers the Challenge (the actor fails the Challenge).
4. In the event of a tie, both actor and reactor look to their next-highest die, and factor in additions as explained above the same way they did for the highest die, and compare again. If, by some chance, there is another tie, continue this process for the third-highest die, and so on. If all dice tie over the course of this process, then the one who succeeds on ties is the one who still has dice to compare, where the one fails is the one who has no dice left. (For example, if the actor has 3 dice in a Skill, and the reactor has 2 dice in the Skill they are reacting with, then the actor succeeds the Challenge on ties if the result of the highest and 2nd-highest dice are a tie.)

## Goals

No matter what the nature of a Challenge, the goals—desired outcomes—of the individual issuing a Challenge should always be declared and made plain, not only to the opponent but everyone involved in the encounter as well. “I'm issuing an Attack Challenge to the cultist: if I succeed the Challenge, then I will have struck him successfully with my sword, inflicting one hit of injury.” It also helps to extrapolate from the goal of a single Challenge and declare what your overall goal is, especially in the case of more than one Challenge in a series (such as combat): “If I wound him successfully, then I am going to try and talk him down by threatening to bring him to his knees with my blade! If I talk him down from fighting, then I will place him under arrest, binding him, so that I can bring him to justice for his crimes against the king!” Declaring goals and intentions along with declaring actions help to clarify the direction of one or more Challenges, to keep the game from slowing down and to keep all the players mindful of the consequences of their actions. Goals should be, at the very least, discussed before a Challenge is issued, and before a scene or encounter escalates.

Another part of discussing the objectives of a Challenge should take place after the outcome of a Challenge is decided—the individual issuing a Challenge should (a) ask whether or not the Challenge is over (which in most cases will be apparent), and (b) if not, declare whether or not it wishes to extend the Challenge.

## Subsequent vs. Additional Challenges

A subsequent Challenge is one that is issued not only immediately after an initial Challenge is, but one that is issued with the next-highest die result rolled—similar in the way a tie is broken. Subsequent Challenges are answered by an opponent with their next-highest die result rolled as well. This is different from an additional Challenge, which is a completely separate Challenge issued after an initial Challenge is. Powers and/or Special Abilities should keep this distinction clear in the wording of their benefits.

## Critical Success

When you roll an unadjusted 10 on one die, it's good. When you roll an unadjusted 10 on more than one die, it's critical! Every unadjusted 10 rolled beyond the first is a critical success. Critical successes add up: keep track of every one you earn, because you can turn it in to the GM for something special. This could be a bonus on a Skill roll,

additional damage inflicted with an attack, an automatic success, or something cool that everyone agrees on! The group should decide how long critical successes can be "banked", or held onto for:

- until the end of the encounter they're earned in
- until the end of the next scene starts/ends
- until the next day starts/ends
- until the next session starts/ends, or
- simply until they are expended).

It should be decided as to whether or not the GM's characters can earn criticals for the GM as well. If it is decided that the GM's characters can earn criticals, then all the criticals earned by all the GM's characters should go into a common pool, which the GM can draw from for any character as long he or she abides by whatever the group agreed upon for how long criticals can be banked.

## Assisting in a Challenge

Often times, two or more individuals will want to aid each other in the successful resolution of a Challenge. When this is the case, first the individuals who wish to assist another must be involved in the same type of Challenge (the Skills being employed by all individuals involved must be at least similar, if not the same). The number of individuals who can assist in the Challenge should be agreed upon by the group, depending on the nature of the Skill being rolled.

Assisting during an Attack Challenge or Power Challenge is possible. For Attack Challenges, the individuals assisting do not have to be using the same weapon as the individual issuing the Challenge; for a Power Challenge, the appropriate supernatural Skill must be the same. If the Power Challenge is being done in a violent encounter, then the individuals assisting must declare, on their turns, that they are assisting.

Once all the particulars are sorted out, the person performing the primary action must first be determined; this is usually the individual with the highest rating in a Skill. The primary actor must be determined before any dice are rolled.

Once the primary actor has been determined, then the other individuals assisting in the Challenge must perform some type of action with the Skill that they are assisting with.

The only individual to make the actual Challenge is the primary actor—those individuals who are assisting each grant the primary actor a bonus of one to the primary actor's die roll result.

## What Your Character Knows

Every Talent that you have identified as an Expertise represents a subject on which you have more knowledge than the average person: an area of specialty. If you don't have a Talent in an appropriate subject area, then you're only able to answer basic, or common questions about the subject. If you have a Talent in that subject area, you're considered an "expert" when it comes to questions about that subject.

When it comes to asking questions about an individual, however, you can issue a "virtual" Interaction Challenge to that character. If the character hasn't done anything to hide the answer to your question, then you automatically succeed, and receive the answer to your question from the GM. If the character would have ever done anything to hide the answer, then you would roll one die + Knowledge value vs (a Skill representing the nature of the subterfuge, default to one die + Cunning). Skills appropriate to learning such information (such as Investigation, Interview, Interrogation, or Research) can be substituted in place of the one die rolled.

## Obstacles

Characters will not always enter into Challenges with other individuals. A locked door is just as much of a Challenge as a big, hulking ogre with a wicked looking axe. In the case of these "static" type of obstacles that wind up occasionally in the way of a character (inanimate elements that are incapable of dependent or independent action, and impede a character's progress in some way), there is a dilemma. The system of opposed rolling is not as concerned with locks, or barred doors, or walls that have to be jumped over—it is more concerned with resolving the outcome of conflicts that involve an active investment of thought and deed from two opposing sides, not just one. A barred door might stand in the way of heroes chasing down the evil wizard, but the conflict is with the wizard, not the barred door. The thirty-foot

wall might surround the tyrant's fortress, but it's the tyrant that's more of a problem for the rebels, not the wall. It is the responsibility of the game group to come to a consensus on how these types of “unopposed challenges” affect the overall direction and drive of the story, and ultimately how they are resolved. This is where a Challenge's goals play a very important role—if the group can divine, through the goals of a Challenge, how such a static obstacle might have an impact on the story at large, then an appropriate Challenge can be devised to incorporate any issues regarding the locked door or the thirty-foot wall. If not, then the GM is well within rights to simply narrate the resolution of coming up against an obstacle. The dice should only be rolled when the outcome is critical to the story's development! (Such a narration, however, should still stand to enrich the overall atmosphere of the play experience. “You jump over the wall”, or “you pick the lock” just isn't good enough!)

Effects such as disease and extreme temperature may also deal damage or impose adverse effects on a creature. While no one sentient being is responsible for a bolt of lightning striking a creature from the sky during a thunderstorm (regardless of what mythology might say), or excessive temperature causing an individual to collapse from heat exhaustion, they still might occur. If the group and GM decide that these sorts of hazards have the potential for threatening the party, then the group as a whole should determine how the hazards will play out—both mechanically as well as in the story. One group might decide that if the party is traveling in the midst of a heavy thunderstorm, that there's a chance someone might get struck by lightning. How the group determines such chances, and figures out if anyone does in fact get struck by lightning, is entirely up to them.

## Unopposed Challenges

Sometimes in the course of a story, characters may encounter situations in which they would like to commit to actions, but where there are not any obvious characters to issue a Challenge to. These are referred to as Unopposed Challenges. In general, unless it is important to the scene, these Challenges should be passed or failed by the GM, based on the specific situation (i.e. if the GM feels that is in the purview of the character as designed and developed throughout the most recent sessions), without the need for rolling dice. From time to time, though, these Challenges will be important to a scene. If rolling is required, then the following steps should be taken:

*Assess the Situation:* Decide if the action is appropriate to the character and the scene, and determine the necessary Skill and/or Attribute that will be used in the Challenge.

*Assess the Difficulty:* Determine how hard it will be to accomplish the task and assign it a difficulty based on the list below, increasing or decreasing the difficulty based on the character in question's capability and concept.

Easy: 0 (ex., kicking in a door)

Simple: +1 (ex., jumping out of a 1st-floor window)

Normal +2 (ex., tracking muddy footprints)

Challenging +3 (ex., jumping out of a 2nd floor window)

Difficult +5 (ex., picking an average lock)

Very Difficult +7 (ex., disabling an average trap)

Extremely Difficult +9 (ex., tracking a target in unfamiliar terrain)

Nearly Impossible +10 or more (ex. solving a complicated puzzle, lock, or trap)

*Roll the Challenge:* the GM rolls a number of dice equal to one less than the Skill being rolled by the character (to a minimum of one die), adding the modifier from step 2 to the highest die result. The player must then meet or exceed that target.

For example, a foppish noble wishes to jump from a 2nd story window without hurting himself. He is an athletic character with experience in city-style terrain, there are no obstacles in his path, and he has a Skill appropriate to the task with a rating of three dice. As such, in this case the GM determines that this would be a normal Challenge for Dunmore and rolls 2 dice, the result of which are 3 and 7. Having achieved a highest result of 7 (7 plus the normal difficulty of 0), and advising Dunmore that this challenge will be based off of his Prowess (owing to the fact that his special acrobatic training is what is being challenged), Dunmore then attempts the challenge. Dunmore rolls three dice, resulting in 1, 5, and 6, and adds 3 for his Prowess, achieving a total 9. The noble succeeds the Unopposed Challenge.

## Extended Challenges

Challenges typically take place between two individuals, one the actor and the other the reactor. There will be times, however, where a single Challenge will not adequately resolve a conflict between two opposing points of view. A point in a debate is made, but it does not convince the opponent sufficiently; a sword wounds a murderer, but the murderer refuses to back down. In cases such as these, both actor and reactor should make their objectives clear to determine whether or not the Challenge must be extended—whether or not multiple Challenges, resolved in succession, must be initiated in order to resolve the conflict at large. The overall challenge, discussed between players and/or GM, should direct the ultimate resolution, based on what's at stake and what the ultimate goals of both actor(s) and reactor(s) are. Whether or not the “meta-resolution” is achieved, for either side of the conflict, should be reassessed periodically throughout the extended Challenge, until one side achieves the kinds of results they want and the losing side backs down.

## Violent Encounters (a.k.a. Combat)

As has been said before, the Personae system thrives on the belief that the rules only need to be as intricate and detailed as you want them to be. This especially applies to combat—conflict that involves violence, whether it be physical or mental. The Challenge can be applied to a wide variety of situations, both combat and non-combat related. There's nothing saying that war, for example, can be a backdrop for storytelling—it has been done before—but the focus should be on using the mechanics to provide a common unit of exchange when it comes to resolving conflict, not on the blow-by-blow detail of thousands of soldiers killing each other (and more importantly, resolving the entire exchange with hours upon hours of dice-rolling). Combat is a special case of an Extended Challenge, but not a separate one.

Once swords, knives, guns, bows and/or spells have been brought to bear, then the individuals involved have escalated the conflict to the point where they're no longer interested in resolving it with words, but instead with weapons and/or the supernatural. Combat is typically an Extended Challenge, leading to one or more of the individuals involved in the conflict either backing down from violence, or fighting to the death. However, not all combat involves simply battering down an opponent until unconsciousness or death; spreading disease, or taking control of an opponent's mind (or protecting your mind from the violation of your opponent) falls into the realm of combat as well.

## The Action Order, and Actions

Combat is chaotic, and even veteran warriors often cannot get an advantageous position in a flailing mess of swinging weapons, a hail of bullets, or the eyebrow-singing heat of fireballs. It is necessary, however, to establish an order to which, in combat, each individual who is involved will act.

How the action order is determined should be decided upon by the group. This could be as simple as going in order around the table, allowing players to invest in an Initiative Skill for their characters, or having each player choose one of their character's Skills that they will be using on their turn. Regardless of the method used to set down the order of who acts when, the individual who performs the action that escalates to a nonviolent encounter, or from a nonviolent to a violent encounter, acts first, issuing a Challenge to an opponent. The Challenge that was issued is then resolved, and each individual in the encounter acts, in order, thereafter.

Once all individuals involved in the encounter are finished acting, then the order starts again at the top—each iteration of the order is called a round.

On each actor's turn, the actor can (1) move, and/or (2) take an action. Issuing a Challenge typically takes an action, unless Powers and/or Special Abilities say otherwise. Movement is dependent on the consensus that the group has come to regarding space and time (see below); an individual can always use an action to take a second move, if they so desire.

## Physical Combat

Physical combat involves attacking unarmed (with fists, feet, forearms, etc.), with hand-to-hand weapons (swords, shock batons, etc.), or with ranged weapons (bow & arrow, rifle, etc.). When an individual issues a Challenge to another individual that involves attacking in this fashion, then the Challenge is known as an Attack Challenge. The actor is known as the attacker, and the reactor is known as the defender. The attacker rolls a Skill that involves either unarmed

combat or some sort of weapon, and the defender rolls some sort of defense (either to dodge or block the attack). If the attacker is successful in issuing an Attack Challenge to an opponent, then the attacker either inflicts injury (see Injury and Death, below), imposes some sort of condition, or both.

## Weapons

Hand-to-hand weapons fall into one of three categories: small (held in one hand, such as a dagger or knife), one-handed (rapiers, battle-axes and longswords) and two-handed (two-handed weapons, such as polearms, claymores or greataxes). Ranged weapons are also small (hand crossbows, holdout pistols), one-hand (light crossbows, blaster pistols), or two-hand (heavy crossbows, longbows, machine guns). Weapons fall into groups, such as blades, axes, or bludgeons. Unarmed attacks are always considered small bludgeon weapons. All weapons inflict at least one hit, unless otherwise specified by Powers and/or Special Abilities.

Cunning is typically added to ranged attacks made in an Attack Challenge, and Stature added to all unarmed or hand-to-hand attacks. Circumstances can change the Attribute that is added, and individuals can take Powers, Special Abilities, and exceptional gear that can permanently set the Attribute that is added.

## Power Combat

In a combat where Powers are being used (namely, when an individual is bringing a Power to bear against another individual), the process is similar to physical combat, and is called a Power Challenge. When an individual wants to deliver a harmful Power upon an opponent, the attacker is known as the practitioner; the practitioner rolls an appropriate supernatural Skill to initiate an effect. When the defender, known as the resistor, rolls to resist the Power's effects, the resistor also rolls the Resist Skill, but rather than adding Cunning or Stature, Power must be added to the resistor's roll (this represents the resistor exerting force of will to neutralize the effect of the Power) unless specified by Powers and/or Special Abilities. If the practitioner wins the Power Challenge, then the resistor suffers the effect of the Power, or takes damage, according to the Power's description.

If the caster's Power inflicts a hit on the resistor (such as from a blast of fire, or a bolt of magical energy), then the process is identical to physical combat (with the practitioner acting as attacker, and the resistor acting as defender, and the “magical attack” inflicting damage depending on the Power's description). It is important to note, however, that by default the resistor's Power value is still added to the Resist roll; the resistor cannot dodge or block such a supernatural attack unless the resistor has a Power or Special Ability that says otherwise (allowing the resistor to add Cunning or Stature instead of Power, for example).

## Injury and Death

Individuals typically enter a violent encounter unharmed—in the best health they can possibly be in, not having suffered any injury. Once combat begins, however, this will most certainly change.

- All individuals have a four-tiered progression of status that can become in the course of sustaining injury:
  - Injured,
  - Wounded,
  - Incapacitated, and
  - Dying.
- When an individual succeeds either an Attack or Power Challenge that inflicts injury upon an opponent, one or more hits of injury are sustained, and tallied, by that opponent.
- When an opponent has sustained a number of hits of injury equal to (Sta + 1 + bonuses from Powers, Special Abilities, or circumstances), the opponent becomes Injured.
- Additional hits sustained beyond the Injured status result in the opponent becoming Wounded, Incapacitated, or Dying, in that order.
- By default, it takes only one successive hit beyond Injured to reach the next, more critical status.
- Each status imposes a penalty, in the form of one or more dice, on all Challenges until the end of a violent encounter. This penalty is not cumulative, but Powers or Special Abilities could be acquired that cause an opponent who has reached a particular status to suffer a more severe penalty. The penalty persists with the individual until the individual recovers from the associated status.

**Injured:** roll 1 less die

**Wounded:** roll 2 less dice

**Incapacitated:** roll 3 less dice (and fall Unconscious)

- No number of hits delivered with a successful Attack or Power Challenge can immediately “roll over” from one status to the next. When an individual becomes Injured, only a separate attack that follows can inflict one or more hits that result in the individual becoming Wounded, Incapacitated or Dying. For example, an opponent can sustain 3 hits before becoming Injured. Your successful Attack or Power Challenge against the opponent inflicts 4 hits. The 4th hit does not result in the opponent reaching Wounded; only hits inflicted by successful Attack or Power Challenges that follow the first mean the opponent reaches Wounded, then Incapacitated, then Dying.
- When an opponent reaches Incapacitated, it falls unconscious. Powers or Special Abilities can cause an opponent to fall unconscious without becoming Incapacitated. Conversely, Powers or Special Abilities could allow an opponent to reach Incapacitated and not fall Unconscious.
- When an opponent reaches the Dying status, it is close to death. If no significant measures have been taken (whether mundane or supernatural) to stabilize the opponent from dying before the end of a violent encounter, then the opponent dies.
- Stabilizing a Dying individual can be performed by any other individual without any special Skill, Special Ability or Power, but does require an action to declare (no rolling of dice is necessary). If the opponent is a player character, then the player must create a new character (unless there are means of reviving dead characters, as is discussed below in the Healing and Recovery section).
- Injury takes effect at the end of a round; hits can be tallied as combat takes place, but individuals who become Incapacitated or die do so at the end of a round, not during. Powers or Special Abilities could be utilized to delay injury until the end of multiple rounds, or even until the end of a violent encounter.

## Healing and Recovery

Injury can be healed, either over time, with rest, or with Powers that allow one individual to heal another (or an individual to heal itself) through supernatural means. Individuals may have Special Abilities that allow for more rapid healing.

- Natural healing is accomplished with recovery. Recovery is a special type of Challenge, that can only be attempted once per scene in addition to all other actions and/or events that have taken place in the scene. An individual can attempt a Recovery Challenge during a violent encounter only if the individual hasn't reached a worse status than Injured; otherwise, the Recovery Challenge can only be attempted after a violent encounter has ended.
- An individual who has sustained injury rolls one or more dice, and adds its Stature to the highest die rolled. The GM rolls one or more dice, and adds the total number of hits the individual has sustained. (If the group has decided that the GM can accumulate criticals, criticals can be accumulated from this Challenge if they are rolled, and the GM may spend previously accumulated criticals for this Challenge as well.) If the individual succeeds the Recovery Challenge, then depending on the health status the individual has reached, some or all of the injury the individual has sustained is removed:
- Provided an individual has not reached Injured, all hits leading up to the Injured status are removed immediately at the end of a violent encounter. If an individual has become Injured, it may immediately attempt recovery at the end of the violent encounter during which it became Injured. If the Injured individual succeeds the Recovery Challenge, then half of its hits (rounded down) are removed. The other half are removed at the end of the following scene.
- If an individual has become Wounded, it can attempt to recover just as if it were Injured, but only at the end of the scene following the violent encounter during which it reached Wounded. A Wounded individual can act normally in the following scene. The GM rolls two dice (as opposed to one) to oppose a Wounded individual's recovery attempt. If the Wounded individual succeeds the Recovery Challenge, then the hit causing the individual to reach Wounded is removed, and the individual has reached Injured. The individual can attempt recovery from the Injured status at the end of the following scene.
- If an individual has reached Incapacitated, then the only thing the individual can do in the following scene is attempt to recover—it is effectively "out" of the following scene as it convalesces. The GM rolls three dice (as opposed to one) to oppose an Incapacitated individual's recovery attempt. If the individual succeeds, then it returns to consciousness, and may act normally in the following scene with the following caveat: if it acts within another violent encounter before a nonviolent encounter has been completed, it will immediately fall unconscious at the end of the first round in which it acts. The individual can attempt recovery from the Incapacitated status at the end of the following scene, then Wounded in the scene following that, and so on.
- If an individual has reached Dying, and has been stabilized, then the only thing the individual can do in the

following scene is attempt to recover—it is effectively "out" of the following scene as it convalesces. The GM rolls four dice (as opposed to one) to oppose an Incapacitated individual's recovery attempt. If the individual succeeds, then it returns to consciousness, but remains unable to act normally. The individual can attempt recovery from the Dying status at the end of the following scene, then Incapacitated in the scene following that, and so on.

- Powers, Skills and/or Special Abilities can be chosen by individuals that involve aiding another individual in the recovery process. This can range from being able to assist in the Recovery Challenge (as one might assist in any other type of Challenge), to replacing the individual's recovery roll with a Skill roll, or some other type of effect that gets agreed upon between the character providing healing assistance and the GM. Supernatural means of healing might also roll back an individual's health status, remove sustained hits, or some combination of both.

Regarding the raising of the dead: The group must come to a consensus as to whether or not Powers and/or Special Abilities can be created that allow characters to raise, resurrect, reincarnate, or in any other way revive individuals after they have died. The genre of the game being played, as well as the setting the game is taking place in, could have an impact on this decision.

## Defense

Survival is an instinct all creatures are born with. Therefore, when the threat of harm is imminent, an individual who is subject to potential harm seeks to either avoid harm outright, or intercept the incoming harm with something that will deflect the harm away from the individual. The basic instinct is to avoid first above everything else—therefore, all individuals freely unlock three Skills that express basic defense. These three Skills—Block, Dodge, and Resist—begin at a rating of two dice, representing the instinctual reflex to avoid attacks by either interposing your body to avoid an attack (Block), getting out of the way (Dodge), or steeling yourself against a harmful effect that isn't an attack (Resist).

By default, Cunning is added to a defender's Dodge roll when an Attack Challenge is answered with Dodge, Stature is added to a defender's Block roll when an Attack Challenge is answered with Block, and Power is added to a defender's Resist roll when a Power or Interaction Challenge is answered with Resist.

### Passive vs. Active Defense

When Dodge or Block are used to answer Attack Challenges, or Resist is used to answer Power or Interaction Challenges, these are known as passive defenses, where the defender performs no special action when answering such Challenges. A individual who has practiced how to defend with a weapon or a shield, however, or has a special Power that can be used to resist a harmful Power, can use a non-defense Skill to avoid an Attack, Power or Interaction Challenge—this is known as active defense. Active defenses require that the defender is aware of an incoming attack, and has declared that an action will be used to anticipate an attack that will be parried, blocked, or resisted in a special way, unless the defender has a Power and/or Special Ability that allows for parrying or blocking a strike autonomically (requiring no action to be declared to anticipate an incoming attack). The defender uses a weapon, shield, or Power-related Skill to avoid actively; while the defender can use a weapon Skill to parry (without having to have a separate parry Skill for the same weapon), or a Power Skill to use a special Power to resist, a separate Skill must be taken to block with a Shield.

When it comes to parrying with weapons, the “like against like” rule is in effect by default: Light weapons can only parry attacks made with Light weapons, and Heavy weapons can only parry attacks made with Heavy weapons. Shields, on the other hand, can block weapons of any category equal to or less than the category of the weapon; Heavy shields can block Heavy or Light weapons, but Light shields can only block Light weapons. The only exception to either of these situations would be an individual who has Powers and/or Special Abilities that supersede this rule.

### Armor

Whether it be thick padding, a kevlar vest, or a full set of power armor, armor is another means by which an individual protects itself from injury, worn by anyone who wants an extra layer of protection between themselves and an incoming attack.

Armor functions no differently from any other piece of Exceptional Gear (see below). Someone can wear an average, "off the rack" suit of armor, but in order to truly benefit from its ability to reduce the impact of an opponent's attack, the wearer must take one or more Special Abilities that are provided by the exceptional armor. It is up to player-GM consensus to decide on the exact mechanical benefit from armor: for example, one possible benefit that exceptional

armor might provide is to allow the wearer to ignore the results of dice that the attacker has rolled in an Attack Challenge (this would take place after any rerolls have been resolved).

## Non-Violent Encounters

Extended Challenges can be applied to situations where there is no fighting. A stealthy trek through a city at midnight, a lengthy debate, or a chase sequence—all of these are considered non-violent encounters. While some groups may choose to create a system similar to a character's Health in order to handle extended non-violent Challenges, they can be resolved just as easily with a series of separate Challenges, or one initial Challenge followed by a series of subsequent Challenges. Group consensus is the best way to decide on what method of resolving non-violent extended Challenges will work best with the group.

## Moderating a Personae Game

In a Personae game, the Game Moderator (GM) is the one person at the table who is responsible for making sure that the game runs smoothly, that all the players act respectfully towards each other (and towards the GM!), for resolving rules disputes, for setting the scene and describing what the players' characters experience through their senses. The role of the GM is also to work with the players to negotiate for their characters' Trait details. The GM is the final arbiter of disputes—discussion of disputes is acceptable and encouraged, but once the GM has made a decision on a matter, then further discussion or argument should take place away from the game, so as to not slow the game down or spoil the fun for everybody.

The following are areas which the GM will come across in the course of moderating a Personae game, which he should develop an opinion on and, if necessary, discuss with the group so as to come to an agreement on them through consensus.

## Advancement

Throughout play, the GM will award Development Points to the players, which the players can then use either to increase their characters' Attributes or acquire new Traits, but not both. These Development Points gained through Advancement reward the players for expressing their characters' concepts in a meaningful way, accomplishing goals that are either personal or group-oriented, and for the overall progression of a good collaborative story at the end of a session.

By default, the player invests Development Points into the character on a one-for-one basis: every point spent to increase an Attribute increases that Attribute's value by one, or every point spent to acquire a new Trait results in the character acquiring one Trait. The only restriction to this process involves the character's order of importance for Attributes: the rules set into effect at Character Creation for how Attribute priorities impact starting point allocation apply to advancement as well (Second-priorities can't be greater than First-priorities, Third-priority can't be greater than Second-priorities, and the Handicap can't be greater than the Third-priority).

By default, if you choose to acquire a new Trait for your character, one point invested will allow you to

- unlock one new Skill
- increase your Prowess Pool by three (gain three new dice to allocate to Skills)
- acquire a new Special Ability, or upgrade an existing one
- acquire a new Power, or upgrade an existing one
- acquire a new Talent
- sustain one more hit of injury in combat before becoming Injured

## Upgrades

Rather than acquire new Traits, a character can upgrade a Trait instead. Rather than acquire a new Power, for example, the player can increase the potency of one of its character's existing Powers. Upgrading Traits, rather than acquiring a new Trait that performs a similar effect, not only cuts down on a player's bookkeeping and helps to speed up play, it helps to better focus the character rather than have the character spread too thin. (Of course, there's always those characters who enjoy being a jack-of-all-trades type, so the system is capable of catering to either end of the spectrum

when it comes to acquiring new Traits. Always remember to stay true to your character's overall theme or concept when considering Advancement).

**Special Abilities as Qualities:** If you wish to define one of your Special Abilities as a Quality, it is treated as if it were double in value—the value of two Special Abilities instead of one—when you first take it. It still requires one Development Point for every time you wish to upgrade the Special Quality, unless player-GM consensus dictates otherwise.

**Special Abilities as Exceptional Gear:** If you wish to define one of your Special Abilities as Exceptional Gear, you must also at the same time define it as a Special Quality.

## The Framework of Advancement

The Player should work with the GM in building into a Power or Special Ability an Advancement framework. Rather than making a newly-acquired Power or Special Ability excessively powerful, there should be room for the Power or Special Ability to be upgraded with additional Development Points gained through Advancement.

**Powers:** When Powers are first acquired, they should only affect one opponent, or, if they are powers that inflict injury, should only inflict one hit. Upgrades can increase the number of targets a Power affects, or increase the amount of hits inflicted by the Power. Additionally, when a Power is first acquired, it should have either an Instant or Maintain duration, then can be upgraded later to Independent or Special duration.

**Special Abilities:** When Special Abilities are acquired, they should only provide a benefit of one (+1 to a Skill roll, one additional die, reroll one die, force a reroll of one die). If the benefit is a reroll, then initially, the second result should be taken, and the highest die roll result cannot be affected. Upgrades can increase the benefit provided by one (+2, two additional dice), or in the case of a reroll, allow the better result to be taken, and/or allow the highest die roll result to be affected.

**Talents:** Expertise Talents could be upgraded to allow for more than one use per session, to provide more than one bonus die when a Skill is rolled, or increase the character's Resource Cap by more than one.

## Exceptional Gear

All characters have the basic tools they need to strike out into the world and work to see their desires become reality. However, there are some items that help characters even more so than their mediocre counterparts. However, it's not just possessing the item that gives the character a benefit—it's the character's training with the item that results in the character being benefitted. The only way a character can benefit from a piece of exceptional gear, whether it be found in the course of play, acquired through purchase or trade, or created from scratch by the character, the player must choose one or more Powers and/or Special Abilities that represents the piece of exceptional gear and the mechanical benefit offered by the gear.

A katana whose blade has been folded hundreds of times. An expertly balanced dagger. A bottomless bag, a portable hole, or a ring whose bearer becomes invisible. Weapons, armor, or any other type of item that is better than the average is known as exceptional. Items can be exceptional either by craftsmanship, a physical characteristic that sets the item apart from others like it, by supernatural quality, meaning that the item has been imbued with mysterious properties, or both.

Regardless of which of these three cases the item falls under, a character cannot simply pick up a magic sword, for example, and expect that magic to work when the blade sinks into the character's enemy: the player must invest either Traits at Character Creation, or Development Points earned through Advancement, into benefiting from an exceptional item.

## Exceptional by Craft

If an item is exceptional by craft, then for every such property the character must assign a Special Ability during Character Creation, or spend one or more Development Points earned from Advancement to acquire the Special

Ability/Abilities that the item offers. This represents the character learning how to take advantage of the item's benefit or benefits.

## Exceptional by Supernatural Quality

If an item is exceptional by supernatural quality, then for every such property the character must assign a Power during Character Creation, upgrade an existing Special Ability, or spend one or more Development Points earned from Advancement to unlock the Power(s) that the item offers. This represents the character investing a portion of its capacity for the supernatural into the item, in order to take advantage of its benefit or benefits.

## Space and Time

While the world has very specific rules for the passage of time (which are very similar to the passage of time in the “real world”), not every moment of “real time” translates to a moment in “game time”. Long sea voyages are often hand-waved: “it's three weeks later, and you arrive in port”, for example. Such concessions are made for the sake of efficiency—no one wants to role-play out every single day on such a voyage, unless the role-play has some direct impact on the progression of the story. Just as such concessions are made for the long-term passage of time, they should also be made for smaller-scale time increments as well.

In the Personae system, mechanically speaking, time is framed in three different ways: scenes, days, and game sessions.

## The Session

A session of the game can last anywhere from two hours or more, but generally encompasses all of the scenes that take place in the course of one "real-world" meeting of the game group. Traits may refer to game sessions in the explanations of their benefits to a character.

## The Scene

A scene is a fraction of the "in-game" time that takes place during a game session, an organizational unit typically defined by "in-game" time (days, hours, etc.) and location. Just like a novel is divided into Chapters, or a play into Acts and Scenes, a typical session in an ongoing storyline should consist of several scenes. A scene can last any amount of time, which should not be predetermined (not all scenes will last for one hour, or thirty minutes, or any other specific amount of time). The content of a scene can vary from scene to scene—sometimes it's just receiving information from a venerable sage, but can also involve a thrilling sword-fight or a chase.

While the former type of scene is common and sometimes very necessary, the best scenes:

- involve some sort of conflict, and
- drive the conflict of the overall story to an explosive climax.

While the exact details of a scene should be agreed upon by the game group, the GM should strike a balance: allow role-play to dictate what happens in a scene, not something pre-determined or pre-written, don't cut the players short in what they want to accomplish in a scene, but at the same time don't let a scene languish—periodically ask the players what they are trying to accomplish, and what their overall objective is when beginning a scene. Most of this will happen organically as time goes on, but it's good practice to be mindful of these things as game play takes place.

## The Day

A day is a period of "in-game" time—in the "real world", for example, it is based on the rotation of Earth on its axis, and lasts for twenty-four hours. This may or may not be the case in the world or worlds your stories take place in. Regardless of the particular way in which a day passes, a day acts not only just as a way to mark the "in-game" passage of time, but acts as another unit of time "currency" the same way a scene does. Power and/or Special Ability descriptive text can refer to the day as a limiting factor, such as "once per day".

## Time and Encounters

The best stories involve a tightly-structured plot, and the best plots emerge from the strongest conflicts. Without

conflict, there is no plot, and without plot there is no story (at least, not one worth engaging in). It's very easy to have characters walk around the world, carrying on conversations with people they meet, and in general doing nothing in particular. It's when ideas and practices begin to clash against each other (the best form of government, belief in the gods/the supernatural, secrets about the history of the world) that conflict arises, and that conflict drives the greatest stories of history.

## The Encounter

An encounter is a scene that involves conflict. Goals frame the rising action of an encounter.

### Non-Violent Encounters

Encounters typically start with words, and are referred to as non-violent encounters because in a non-violent encounter, there is a chance that the encounter will not come to weapon blows and/or offensive Powers.

### Violent Encounters

Violent encounters ensue when words begin to fail, and individuals begin staking their lives by bringing harm upon others to accomplish their desires.

## Escalation

When a scene becomes an encounter, the scene is said to have escalated. The order of escalation is as follows:

scene -> non-violent encounter -> violent encounter

## Resolution

As discussed above, a violent encounter is resolved as an extended Challenge, where all individuals involved in the Challenge are put into an order of action by rolling to determine the Action Order. The violent encounter could be resolved in as little as two or three rounds, or as many as ten or twelve rounds. The resolution of the conflict should be kept in mind by both players and GM as the violent encounter progresses, and the GM should periodically ask if the goals of the player-controlled characters have been achieved. (This might occasionally involve discussing "out-of-character", "out-of-game", or "player" knowledge, rather than "in-character" or "in-game" knowledge, but in cases where the death of characters isn't the immediate goal, this should be made plain by all parties involved, so that not every violent encounter turns into a slaughter for either side of the conflict.)

## Encounter Time vs. "Game" Time

The amount of "game" time (the way time is tracked within the narrative of the story) that passes in the resolution of an encounter should be a consensus of both the players and the GM, especially in the case a violent encounter. Rounds in a violent encounter are little more than a way to make sure that everyone gets a turn in combat, and that such turns aren't all taken at the same time; they are at best only an abstract way to determine the passage of time. If one game group wants to say that one round equals, say, ten seconds, that's fine; it doesn't mean that every game group has to do this as well. In fact, if a group wants to determine the passage of "game" time after a violent encounter is resolved ("this combat took about twenty minutes", for example), that's okay too.

## Distance and Location

The impact of space and its dimensions increases as you progress from scene, to non-violent encounter to violent encounter. The distance covered by an arrow in flight, the range of a lightning bolt conjured by a magus, or how long it takes for the scout to scurry stealthily back to the allied camp become increasingly more important as conflict intensifies. While it's a point that has been amply expressed over the course of this document, it applies here as well: just as time is a matter that should be agreed upon by the game group, so should space be one as well. If one group prefers a closely-structured, tactical framework for determining distance and location (such as a large-scale grid and miniatures), then they are welcome to implement such things in their game. For groups that prefer to focus on the narrative resolution of a violent encounter, and aren't so worried about the particulars of distance and location, then the group can use relative terms such as "close", "adjacent", "very near" and "pretty far". Once again, the system provides an abstract way to resolve conflict in both non-violent and violent encounters, and it's at the game group's discretion to

define or not define these things to their desired level of distinction.

## Supporting Characters

All the characters that the main characters encounter throughout the course of a story, whose actions are controlled by the GM, are referred to as supporting characters (non-player characters, or NPCs, in traditional role-playing game parlance).

Most supporting characters will only require statistics if they will have an impact on the progression of the story, interacting with the main characters in such a way that establishes, escalates, and resolves conflict.

## Companions

Main characters will often have sidekicks, cohorts, familiars, and loyal followers. Companions are special types of supporting characters (see below) that a player, rather than the GM, is able to control. The maximum number of companions a character is able to have should be decided upon by group-GM consensus.

### Companion Prerequisites

In order to have a companion, a character must:

- a. Have a minimum Potential of 4 (sum of Attributes no less than twenty), and
- b. acquire a Special Ability that represents the companion aligning its desires with that of the character.

So long as the main character achieves a Potential of 4 upon taking the companion Special Ability (going from an Attribute sum of nineteen to that of a twenty), it is sufficient to satisfy the first requirement.

### Companion Development

A companion character goes through Character Creation the same way that the main characters do. However, all companion characters:

- a. have a starting Potential of 1, going through Character Creation with ten Creation Points, and
- b. begin play as minion allies (see below).

You must spend your own Development Points to increase the Attributes of your companion character. You may upgrade the companion Special Ability in order to increase the companion from a minion, to a minor, to a major ally, in that order, each requiring its own Development Point expenditure.

## Allies

Allies are supporting characters that aid main characters in the pursuit of their goals, controlled by the GM unless they are companions.

## Adversaries

Adversaries are supporting characters that have goals of their own, most of the time that run in opposition to the main characters' goals, who are also controlled by the GM.

Whether the supporting character is an ally or an adversary, each follows a three-level progression of overall "toughness", relative to the main characters:

- minion allies/adversaries only have the Incapacitated and Dying Health Status conditions,
- minor allies/adversaries have all four Health Status conditions (Injured, Wounded, Incapacitated, Dying), but it only takes one hit for them to reach Injured.
- major allies/adversaries have all four Health Status conditions, and suffer injury the same way that main characters do.

It should be decided by group-GM consensus as to whether or not adversary characters are able to earn criticals (see

above).

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