

ROLL FOUR / TELL STORIES

4d4

QUICK START



THE DICE ARE IN YOUR HANDS.

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Published by Roll4d4 / roll4d4.com

PLAYTEST EDITION 0.6

START HERE

Before You Play

4d4 is a tabletop roleplaying game about choosing an approach, committing a pool of four-sided dice, and deciding how to use the patterns they make. Matching dice become Clusters. Dice left over after that division become Stragglers. Clusters determine how well an action works; Stragglers let the scene answer back.

This Quick Start contains the complete rules used by its adventure, three ready-to-play characters, and a 60 to 90 minute heist. It does not require another rulebook.

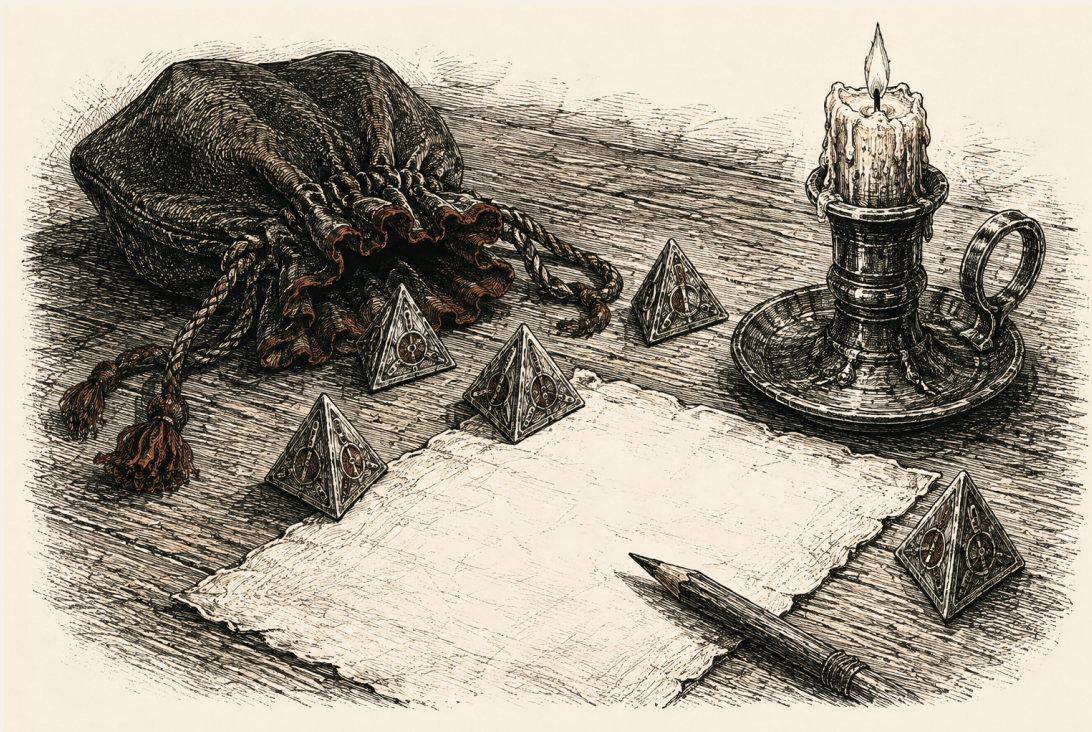
YOU WILL NEED

- One 4Caster to describe the world and run each scene.
- Three players. Two also work with the scaling notes.
- At least fifteen d4s per player and about forty for the 4Caster. If dice are scarce, use tokens to track Ready and Spent Dice and roll from a smaller shared handful.
- Distinct colors or labels for Normal Dice and the four special types: Combo, Power, Damage, and Armor. You need many Normal Dice; labels or tokens can stand in when a special color runs short.
- Paper or tokens for scene clocks.

THIS EDITION

This is a playtest document. It favors a complete, usable procedure and ready-to-play characters. Character creation and campaign rules can wait until this core has been tested at the table.

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WHAT 4D4 DOES

Every character and scene Agent has four Axes: North, South, East, and West. An Axis caps how many Ready Normal Dice that character or Agent may commit to an action or reaction. A character's four Axes add to its Dice Pool. A scene's Encounter Axes add the ratings of its active Agents; they measure the whole opposition but never cap one roll.

During a Turn, Ready Normal Dice are spent on actions and reactions across one or more Rounds. Matching results form Clusters. The side with more retained Clusters controls the result. Unmatched dice may become help, complications, or movement on a scene clock.

The 4Caster describes the result in the fiction. The rules answer three questions: who controls the outcome, how strong the outcome is, and what else changes around it.

THE CORE RULES

The Core Loop

When an outcome matters and is uncertain, use this procedure.

1. STATE THE INTENT

Say what you are trying to accomplish and what success would change. The 4Caster states the immediate risk before dice are committed. Declare at most one active Skill or Active Power being attempted. If the action is harmful and its ability does not name a harm type, declare whether it inflicts Damage or Strain.

2. CHOOSE AN AXIS

Choose the Axis that matches the approach. The Axis is a limit, not a required wager: commit anywhere from one die up to that rating. When a plausible specialized task falls outside every relevant Skill Category, it is Untrained: use half that Normal Dice commitment cap, round down, minimum 1. Apply Untrained first, then one strongest temporary cap boon and one strongest temporary cap penalty; the final cap may become 0.

3. ROLL, CANCEL, AND DIVIDE

Commit and spend Ready Normal Dice up to the chosen or Untrained cap. A declared Skill or Active Power may add Ready **Combo Dice** up to COMBO. On any action or reaction, the roller may also spend and add Ready **Power Dice** up to POWER, even when no Power is being activated. These extra dice do not count against the Axis cap. Roll Normal, Power, Combo, and applicable **Damage Dice**. Damage cancels matching Normal or Power results. Resolve printed PRE-PATTERN reactions timed before Armor, roll applicable target Armor and cancel again, then resolve printed PRE-PATTERN reactions timed after Armor. Check and pay the one active Pattern, discard Combo, and divide surviving Normal and **Power Dice** into Clusters and Stragglers. Resolve printed POST-DIVISION reactions before leftover 3s and 4s; otherwise 3s and 4s resolve immediately after division.

4. REACT

Every active response uses the exchange's one reaction sequence. The targeted participant or Agent may make one direct defensive reaction to this incoming action while it can pay that reaction's minimum, and may react again to a later incoming action while it still has dice. A direct defense or explicitly triggered personal reaction does not consume the target's action opportunity unless its text says so. A non-target may support or interfere only by spending its unused action opportunity for this Round. An early reaction replaces that participant's ordinary reaction within the current exchange. Process every reaction through Step 3. Armor remains automatic even when the target cannot react.

5. HELP AND ACTIVATE

If the declared ability's Pattern survived cancellation, record that it was paid before division. Resolve its Effect only at its printed Timing. Spend held 1s and 2s to add Help Clusters after every reaction. Help never activates an ability, adds no tie value, or increases an Effect that counts rolled or retained dice unless that Effect explicitly counts Help.

6. COMPARE

Compare the Clusters that remain. Calculate and state Margin and ordinary harm, resolve eligible POST-COMPARISON reactions and prevention or replacement Effects, then apply remaining harm, statuses, and the fictional result. Resolve a printed DEATH reaction before defeat becomes final. Reactions contribute Clusters but never deal ordinary Margin harm; a reaction deals harm only when its printed Effect says so.

02 / APPROACHES

The Four Axes

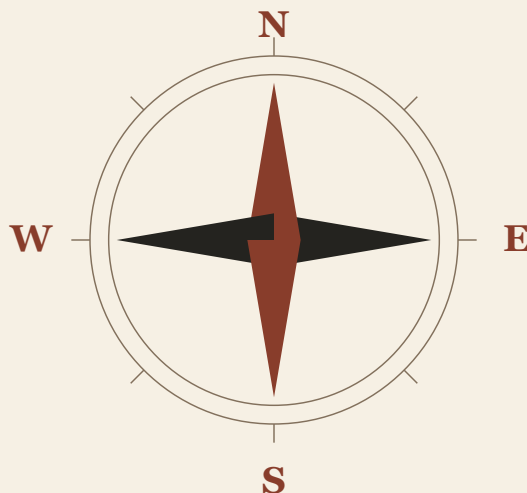
Axes describe approaches. Their examples are defaults, not a list of permitted actions.

NORTH / POWER AND COMMAND

Force, courage, leadership, direct magic, breaking, carrying, and confronting.

WEST / EMPATHY AND CONNECTION

Persuasion, deception, healing, morale, intuition, and understanding people.



EAST / KNOWLEDGE AND JUDGMENT

Research, perception, planning, craft knowledge, deduction, and technical magic.

SOUTH / AGILITY AND PRECISION

Speed, stealth, balance, careful hands, aim, pursuit, and physical timing.

Axes are contextual. North can mean a warrior's strength, a mob's numbers, or a storm's force. South can mean a thief's balance or a lock's delicate construction. Keep the interpretation consistent inside the scene.

DICE POOL

Add N + S + E + W to find a character's Dice Pool. This is a fixed capacity. It begins filled with Normal Dice; harm converts those dice into Damage Dice without changing the total. Normal, Combo, and Power Dice may be Ready or Spent. Only Normal Dice may also become Strained. Combo, Power, and Armor Dice are outside the Pool. Damage and Armor Dice are persistent and roll automatically when their direction applies.

THE CORE RULES

Composite Axes

A composite joins two neighboring Axes when an approach needs both at once.

NE = North + East

SE = South + East

SW = South + West

NW = North + West

Find a composite rating by adding its two Axes, dividing by two, and rounding down.

EXAMPLE: N 4 and E 3 produce NE 3.

A composite action commits up to the composite rating. It is useful when a Skill calls for it or when both parts of the approach are essential.

OPPOSITION

Cardinal Axes oppose their compass opposite:

N is opposed by S.

S is opposed by N.

E is opposed by W.

W is opposed by E.

A composite is opposed by the opposite composite. Against NE, the defense is SW; the defender chooses whether to react with South or West. Against SW, choose North or East. Against NW, choose South or East. Against SE, choose North or West. The defender declares that Axis before committing dice and cannot switch after rolling.

That choice matters. A Skill may produce an extra effect when a particular defense is chosen.

ACTION

OPPOSITE DEFENSE - CHOOSE ONE AXIS

NE

SOUTH OR WEST

SE

NORTH OR WEST

SW

NORTH OR EAST

NW

SOUTH OR EAST

THE CORE RULES

Turns, Rounds, And Actions

An encounter is played in Turns. A Turn is the main resource cycle: spent and Strained Normal Dice refresh at its start and are spent across one or more Rounds. Ending a Turn is not a table vote or a free refresh choice.

TURN REFRESH

1. Resolve statuses and Effects explicitly timed before Normal or Power refresh; record every die whose refresh is denied or replaced.
2. Ready every eligible Spent Normal Die in that die owner's Pool. Each Scene Agent refreshes only its own Pool.
3. Return every eligible Strained Normal Die to Ready.
4. Ready every eligible Spent **Power Die**.
5. Resolve remaining Effects timed during or immediately after refresh.
6. Resolve ordinary start-of-Turn status Triggers.
7. Name the scene's dominant Axis for initiative.

JAMMED, DRAINED, and similar Effects must prevent or replace a refresh during the relevant step. They do not wait until after the die Readies.

ROUND

At Round start, resolve Effects timed before Combo refresh, return every eligible Spent **Combo Die** to Ready, then resolve Effects timed during or immediately after that refresh. Every active independent participant and every active Scene Agent then gets one action opportunity. Player characters are independent participants; an allied, neutral, or hostile thing with its own chart and Pool is another. An opportunity is used by acting proactively, helping or interfering for another participant, or passing. When every participant and Agent has used that opportunity, the Round ends. A direct defense or explicitly triggered personal reaction does not use the opportunity unless its text says so.

INITIATIVE

Use the scene's dominant Axis; it need not be the highest Encounter Axis. Compare each character's and Agent's own rating in that direction. Never use an

Encounter Axis total for initiative. Highest acts first. Players decide ties; a player wins a tie with an Agent.

ACTIONS

Every independent participant gets one action opportunity each Round. This includes every player character and every allied, neutral, or hostile charted other with its own Pool. Each active Scene Agent gets one opportunity from its own Pool. A bridge is one Agent. A captain and three guards are four Agents. A participant or Agent that spent its opportunity to help or interfere cannot later act proactively in that Round; one that already acted or passed cannot later help or interfere.

An action may attack, persuade, hide, cross danger, create an advantage, activate a Skill, or attempt anything else that can substantially change the scene.

END OF ROUND

1. Resolve every status whose TRIGGER names the end of the Round.
2. Resolve every status whose FADE names the end of the Round.
3. Discard every unspent held Straggler.
4. If the Scene continues and any participant or side has Ready Normal Dice it can and chooses to use for a meaningful action, begin the next Round and refresh **Combo Dice**.
5. Otherwise end the Turn. Move every remaining Ready Normal Die to Spent before Turn refresh; **Power Dice** keep their current Ready or Spent state until that refresh. A Scene ending or a printed Effect may also end the Turn.

Passing does not force another side to stop. A wish to react without an initiating action does not create an empty Round. An ability that ends the Turn is a major Effect: it must say so, allow every printed reaction, and carry a WATCH or RED FLAG warning.

TURN START

refresh pools

ROUND 1

actions + reactions

ROUND 2+

same Ready Dice

TURN END

remove Strain

Held Stragglers expire after each Round. Normal dice refresh only after the Turn.

THE CORE RULES

Reactions

Every active response outside an action opportunity is a Reaction with a printed Trigger and Timing. All responses to one action occupy one reaction sequence. A reaction never opens a reaction to itself.

CHECKPOINTS

PRE-PATTERN reactions occur before Armor or after Armor, as printed. POST-DIVISION reactions occur after the acting roll is divided but before immediate 3 and 4 effects. ORDINARY reactions occur after those 3 and 4 effects. Help follows every reaction. POST-COMPARISON reactions occur after Margin and ordinary harm are calculated and stated but before that harm is applied. DEATH reactions occur after harm is applied but before defeat becomes final.

REACTION PROCEDURE

1. The targeted participant or Agent may make one direct reaction to this incoming action. It uses only its own Ready dice, Axis, Armor, abilities, and other resources. A target may directly react again to a later incoming action while it still has dice to spend.
2. Resolve the target's direct reaction first. The acting side then declares and resolves every support reaction in table order. The defending side then declares and resolves every interference reaction in table order. Once the sequence moves to interference, no later support may enter.
3. A non-target participant may enter this reaction sequence once as support or interference. Doing so spends that participant's unused action opportunity; it cannot also act proactively that Round. A direct defense or explicitly triggered personal reaction does not spend the target's action opportunity unless printed otherwise.
4. A participant enters at its first legal chosen checkpoint. Entering early replaces its later ORDINARY entry in this sequence. Mandatory Passive Triggers are not entries unless their text says so. A later incoming action begins a new reaction sequence.

5. SECOND ENTRY permits one named later checkpoint only. It is always APEX and RED FLAG, creates no nested window, and never answers a reaction.

6. A reaction normally commits at least one Ready Normal Die. A printed ZERO-NORMAL REACTION or other explicit exception states its own minimum and payment; an Active Power pays its typed Power Pattern unless a labeled replacement exception uses RESERVED.

Declare at most one reactive Skill or Active Power before its reaction roll. A reactive ability must explicitly permit REACTION and name its checkpoint. It may use Ready **Combo Dice** up to COMBO. Any reaction may spend Ready **Power Dice** up to POWER. Applicable Damage rolls automatically.

A direct defense normally uses the opposite Axis. A printed SPECIAL DIRECT reaction may replace that Axis. Support and interference use an Axis that fits the fiction. Keep every retained reaction Cluster visible until Help. The target's direct reaction never borrows from another Agent or participant.

Armor is automatic, persistent, and not itself a reaction. Roll applicable target Armor at the acting roll's Armor step even when the target cannot react. Process each reaction roll through Damage cancellation, its own Pattern payment, and division. Reaction Clusters join the side they support, but reactions never inflict ordinary Margin harm.

SCENE REACTIONS

Each Scene Agent owns a separate, nonfungible Pool. The targeted Agent may make the action's one direct reaction using only that Agent's Pool and caps. Another Agent may support or interfere only by spending its own unused action opportunity and its own dice. No Agent may lend or borrow Normal, Damage, Armor, Status, or reserve dice. The same Agent may directly react to later incoming actions while it still has dice to spend.

THE CORE RULES

Rolling And Resolving

Resolve one exchange in this order.

1. DECLARE

State intent, immediate risk, Axis, and at most one active Skill or Power. For a harmful action whose ability does not name a harm type, declare Damage or Strain. An active ability is ACTION ONLY unless it explicitly permits REACTION and names a checkpoint.

2. ASSEMBLE THE ROLL

Commit and spend at least one Ready Normal Die up to the chosen Axis or Untrained cap. A printed exception may set a different minimum. A declared Skill or Power may add Ready Combo Dice up to COMBO. Any roll may add Ready Power Dice up to POWER. An Active Power must include the Ready Power Die required by its typed P Pattern unless a labeled replacement exception uses a legal RESERVED Power Die. Extra dice do not count against the Normal cap.

3. ROLL AND CANCEL DAMAGE

Roll committed Normal, Combo, and Power Dice plus every applicable Damage Die. Each Damage result cancels one matching Normal or Power result; the injured roller chooses which. Damage never cancels Combo.

4. PRE-PATTERN BEFORE ARMOR

Resolve printed reactions at this checkpoint. They enter the exchange's one reaction sequence and replace that participant's later ORDINARY entry.

5. ARMOR

Roll every applicable target Armor Die. Each Armor result cancels one matching Normal or Power result chosen by the Armor owner. Armor never cancels Combo.

6. PRE-PATTERN AFTER ARMOR

Resolve printed reactions at this checkpoint. A participant that already entered cannot enter again without a legal SECOND ENTRY.

7. ACTIVATE AND DIVIDE

Check the one declared Pattern using surviving Normal and Power results plus eligible Combo results. Every symbol requires a distinct die. SPEND removes used Normal or Power Dice; TRIGGER leaves them.

Combo is already Spent, may fill only a missing untyped result, and leaves the contest. At least one non-Combo die must take part. Record the activation now; resolve its Effect only at its printed Timing.

If several Passives read the same roll, the roller orders them unless a rule fixes the order. No die or resource may pay twice. Divide remaining Normal and Power Dice into Clusters and Stragglers.

8. REACT AND MOVE THE SCENE

Resolve printed POST-DIVISION reactions, then immediate leftover 3 and 4 effects, then ORDINARY reactions. Process every reaction through its own roll procedure without opening another reaction sequence. Keep its retained Clusters for comparison.

9. HELP AND COMPARE

After every reaction and immediate Straggler 3/4 effect, the defending side declares every held 1 or 2 it will spend as Help and fixes each assignment. The acting side then does the same. Do not reopen either declaration. A held 1 may help only its source participant's own roll; a held 2 may help only another participant's roll. Compare retained Clusters, then tie value; Help contributes zero tie value and the defender holds an exact tie. Margin is the Cluster-count difference, and a tie-value win has Margin 0.

Calculate and state ordinary harm. Resolve POST-COMPARISON reactions and Effects, then apply remaining harm, statuses, and fiction. Reactions deal no ordinary Margin harm. Resolve a printed DEATH reaction before defeat becomes final.

For a successful opposed non-harmful action:

Margin 0 - the intent happens narrowly.

Margin 1 - the intended result happens.

Margin 2 - the result is strong and gains a reasonable extra.

Margin 3+ - the result is exceptional within the stated fictional limit.

If the defender holds, the acting intent does not happen and the declared defensive or Scene consequence resolves.

THE CORE RULES

Clusters

A contest Cluster is a group of two or more uncanceled Normal or **Power Dice** showing the same number. **Combo Dice** help ability patterns but never become contest Clusters. Damage and Armor Dice only cancel.

Clusters count as units, not as dice. A pair is one Cluster. A triple is also one Cluster. Four matching dice may be one four-die Cluster or two pairs and therefore two Clusters.

DIVISION IS A CHOICE

Suppose you roll 1,1,1,1.

- Divide them into 1,1 and 1,1: two Clusters for the contest.
- Keep them as 1,1,1,1: one four-die Cluster.

Suppose a declared Skill has Pattern 1,1 and SPENDS it. Pay two 1s before division, then divide the two remaining 1s as one contest Cluster. If an Active Power requires and SPENDS P1 + 1,1,1, the typed 1 must be a **Power Die** and all four dice pay for it, leaving none in the contest. The Power may still work if its Timing says REGARDLESS.

REMAINDERS

For each face, choose a complete division into one or more Clusters of at least two dice, with no more than one die left over. Every die that can fit the chosen division must do so. You cannot pull a die from a finished Cluster merely to create a Straggler.

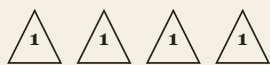
EXAMPLE: 1,1,1 may be one triple Cluster, or one pair Cluster with one remaining Straggler 1. A roll of 1,1,1,1 may be one four-die Cluster or two pairs, but not one pair plus two Stragglers.



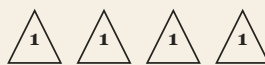
=>



2 PAIR CLUSTERS



=>



1 FOUR-DIE CLUSTER

THE CORE RULES

Stragglers

Stragglers are the Normal and **Power Dice** left after contest Clusters are divided. They are not voluntarily pulled out of a finished Cluster. Combo, Damage, and **Armor Dice** never become Stragglers.

1 - HELP YOURSELF

Hold the 1 until the end of the Round. During the Help step after all reactions, spend it to add one Help Cluster to one of your own rolls, including the roll that produced it.

2 - HELP SOMEONE ELSE

Hold the 2 until the end of the Round. During the Help step after all reactions, spend it to add one Help Cluster to another participant's roll.

A Help Cluster is a marker, not a rolled pair. It adds one to that side's contest Cluster count, contributes 0 to a face-value tie-break, never satisfies a Pattern, and creates no Stragglers. It does not increase an Effect that counts rolled or retained dice unless that Effect explicitly counts Help. Spending a held 1 or 2 costs no action opportunity; rolling a support reaction still does. After all reactions and immediate 3/4 effects, the defending side declares and assigns Help first; the acting side declares and assigns Help second. Unspent held dice remain until Round end.

3 AND 4 - MOVE THE SCENE

The 4Caster defines what leftover 3s and 4s do before the scene begins. They may advance or reduce a clock, alter position, reveal something, or change the environment. A roll of 1,2,3,4 is all Stragglers and can produce all four effects.

Resolve 3s and 4s immediately after division unless a printed POST-DIVISION reaction says it occurs first. Within one roll, if they move the same clock in opposite directions, cancel them one-for-one before moving the clock or checking a threshold. A later roll can undo earlier movement, but it does not erase a threshold consequence already triggered.

EXPIRATION

Unspent 1s and 2s disappear at the end of the Round. They never carry into a later Round, even when the Pool has not refreshed.

THE REMAINDER AFTER CLUSTER DIVISION



SELF

help



ALLY

help



SCENE

effect



SCENE

effect

THE CORE RULES

Worked Contest

In this example, leftover 3s raise a Shadow clock and leftover 4s lower it.

Silas attempts to slip past a guard using South 4. He commits four dice and rolls:

1, 1, 1, 4

Silas divides the result into one pair Cluster (1,1), leaving Stragglers 1 and 4. The 4 immediately lowers the Shadow clock in this scene. He holds the 1.

The guard reacts with North 3 and rolls:

2, 2, 3

The guard has one Cluster (2,2). The leftover 3 raises the Shadow clock by one, undoing the ground gained by Silas's earlier 4.

Both sides have one Cluster. The guard's retained pair is worth 4; Silas's is worth 2. Before resolution, Silas spends his held 1 and adds a Help Cluster. Its tie value is 0, but Silas now has two Clusters and wins with Margin 1.

If Silas had declared Shadow Step, he would have spent two 1s on its pattern before division. The last 1 would become a held Straggler, and he could still use that Help Cluster in the contest. The ability and the ordinary contest are paid for separately.

ONE-DIE DEFENSE AND HELP

An attacker using E 3 rolls 1,2,2. The targeted Agent has one Ready Normal Die and applicable E Armor. Armor rolls 2 and cancels one acting 2 before Pattern payment or division. The attacker has Stragglers 1 and 2: the held 1 may give the attack one self-Help Cluster; the held 2 can help only another participant's roll. The Agent's last Normal Die rolls 1 and may give its own defense one self-Help Cluster. Both sides finish with one Cluster at tie value 0, so the defender holds the exact tie. If the Agent had rolled 2, that 2 could help another participant but could not help the Agent's own defense.

ARMOR BEFORE PATTERNS

An acting roll shows 1,1,P4. Applicable Armor rolls 1 and cancels one acting 1 before Pattern payment or division. The survivors are 1,P4: no Cluster survives. The 1 may be held for self-Help at the Help step, and the Power 4 becomes the scene's ordinary Straggler 4 if no ability spends it. Armor applies against every incoming attack for which its direction and fiction fit; it is not spent by this use.



THE CORE RULES

Worked Exchange

Silas listens through an office wall and declares THIEF'S EAR using E 3. The office's Listening Ward is the target. It has W 3 and Armor E 1. Silas has one E **Damage Die**. Elias has not used his action opportunity this Round, and a clerk Agent has not used theirs.

Silas commits three Normal Dice, his **Combo Die**, and voluntarily rolls his **Power Die** without declaring a Power. He rolls Normal 2,2,2; Combo 2; Power 4. His E **Damage Die** rolls 4 and cancels the Power 4. The Ward's Armor E rolls 2 and cancels one Normal 2.

Two Normal 2s and Combo 2 survive. They satisfy THIEF'S EAR's Any triple TRIGGER Pattern after cancellation and before division. The Combo fills the missing third 2, then leaves the contest. TRIGGER leaves the two Normal 2s, which form one Cluster with tie value 4.

The Ward directly defends with W and commits three Ready Normal Dice from its own Agent Pool. It rolls 3,3,4: one Cluster with tie value 6, and its leftover 4 immediately uses the scene's printed 4 effect. This direct defense does not spend the Ward Agent's action opportunity.

Elias spends his unused action opportunity to help Silas and rolls 4,4,1. His pair adds one Cluster with tie value 8. He holds the 1 for the Help step. Elias cannot act proactively later this Round.

The clerk spends its unused Agent opportunity to interfere and rolls 1,1,3. Its pair adds one Cluster with tie value 2; its 3 resolves immediately through the scene rule. The clerk cannot take a later proactive action this Round.

After the clerk reacts, Elias spends his held 1 during the Help step. Silas's side has three Clusters: Silas's pair, Elias's pair, and one Help Cluster with tie value 0. The scene has two. Silas wins with Margin 1. THIEF'S EAR is ON SUCCESS, so Silas asks one direct question and the 4Caster answers honestly. The reactions added Clusters; neither deals ordinary harm. Every participant involved may still make a later direct defense while it has Ready Normal Dice or can pay a printed ZERO-NORMAL REACTION.



THE CORE RULES

Unopposed Actions

Do not roll for routine actions. If an action can happen and there is no meaningful pressure, it happens. Roll an unopposed action when the quality matters, when a player wants to activate an ability, or when Stragglers could change the scene. No defense roll is made.

An unopposed action happens. Its retained Clusters measure quality, reach, or progress. At 0 Clusters, the action has a minimal effect or succeeds at a cost and contributes no progress toward a larger requirement. A required ability pattern may still activate. If a harmful action receives no defense, treat the defending side as having 0 Clusters; the attacker's retained Cluster count is its Margin.

After paying an ability pattern, every retained Cluster is one degree of effect:

0 Clusters - minimal effect or success at a cost.

1 Cluster - the intended result.

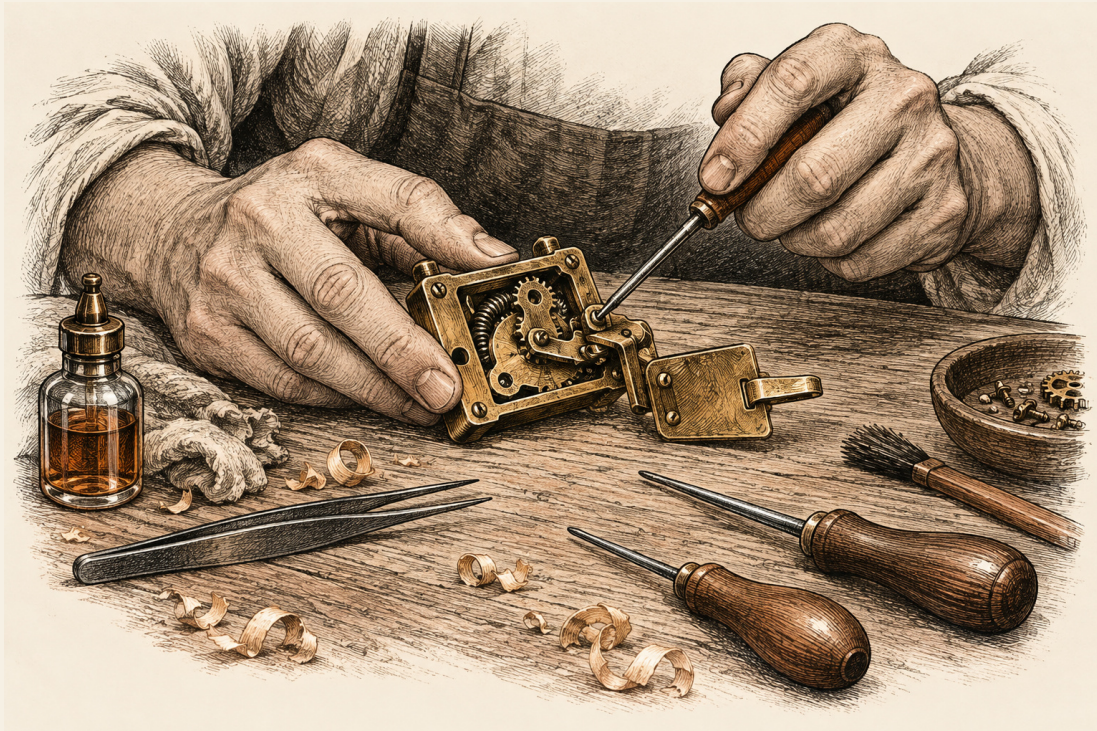
2 Clusters - a strong result or useful extra.

3+ Clusters - exceptional effect; the 4Caster states the reasonable limit.

Stragglers still work normally. An unopposed success can therefore improve the immediate task while making the wider scene more dangerous.

MOVEMENT

Ordinary movement is part of an action or reaction. Crossing dangerous ground, escaping pursuit, or reaching a tactically decisive position is an action and may be opposed by the scene.



THE CORE RULES

Normal And Special Dice

4d4 uses Normal Dice and four special types: Combo, Power, Damage, and Armor. Use distinct colors or labels. Normal, Combo, and **Power Dice** are action dice. Damage and Armor Dice are cancellation dice.

NORMAL DICE

Normal Dice fill the Dice Pool and power the Turn's action economy. They are committed within an Axis cap, become Ready, Spent, or Strained, and form contest Clusters and Stragglers.

COMBO DICE

A COMBO rating gives that many extra dice. Refresh them at the start of every Round. After declaring one Skill or Active Power, choose and spend Ready **Combo Dice** before rolling. Their faces may fill missing untyped results, but cannot fill typed P or replace a surviving Normal or Power result merely to reduce a SPEND cost. At least one non-Combo die must be used. **Combo Dice** never form contest Clusters, become Stragglers, count in a tie, or activate an ability by themselves.

POWER DICE

A POWER rating gives that many extra action dice. Refresh them at the start of every Turn. On any action or reaction, choose and spend Ready **Power Dice** before rolling, even when no Power is being activated. **Power Dice** may form contest Clusters and Stragglers, contribute every die to tie value, and satisfy untyped ability results. Rolling one does not activate a Power by itself. An Active Power must declare before rolling, include at least one Ready **Power Die**, and satisfy its typed P Pattern after cancellation unless a supplement prints a scoped

replacement exception and reserve procedure.

Power Dice have no automatic multiplier; a special effect must be written in the Power.

DAMAGE DICE

Damage converts Normal Dice in the fixed Pool into persistent, directional **Damage Dice**. Whenever their owner makes a roll using that direction, roll every applicable **Damage Die**. Matching results cancel Normal or **Power Dice** before activation and division. **Damage Dice** do not form patterns, Clusters, or Stragglers and are not spent by rolling.

ARMOR DICE

Armor Dice are persistent and directional. Roll every applicable **Armor Die** against each incoming action when its direction and the fiction fit the protection. Matching results cancel Normal or **Power Dice** before activation and division. Armor Dice do not form patterns, Clusters, or Stragglers and are not spent by rolling.

For a composite Axis, Damage and Armor marked with either component direction apply. Damage cancels first, then Armor. **Combo Dice** cannot be canceled and cannot shield another die.

Unmarked Combo and **Power Dice** are Open by default. A Bound die is restricted to the direction imposed by its source. Bound is not an equal-cost upgrade; its source must require the restriction or print a compensating benefit.

ONE CORE ROLL - FIVE DIFFERENT JOBS

				
NORMAL	COMBO	POWER	DAMAGE	ARMOR
POOL TURN	PATTERN ROUND	FULL DIE TURN	CANCEL PERSIST	CANCEL PERSIST

Combo never enters the contest. Damage and Armor only cancel.

THE CORE RULES

Damage And Strain

The Dice Pool is also a character's limit for injury.

TAKING DAMAGE

Each point of lethal harm converts one Normal Die in the target's fixed Dice Pool into one **Damage Die**. Convert a Ready Normal Die first; if none remain, convert a Spent die, then a Strained die. **Damage Dice** do not have a Ready or Spent state and are never committed as action dice.

Mark every **Damage Die** N, S, E, or W. If the harmful action used a cardinal Axis, use that direction. For a composite, the attacker chooses one of its two directions. An ability may name a direction instead, and the 4Caster chooses for harm without an acting Axis.

ROLLING DAMAGE

Whenever the injured participant makes an action or reaction using a cardinal Axis, roll every **Damage Die** marked with that direction. A composite roll includes **Damage Dice** from both component directions. Each Damage result cancels one matching Normal or Power result before the ability pattern is checked or contest dice are divided. The injured participant chooses between matching Normal and **Power Dice**. Excess Damage results do nothing. **Damage Dice** never cancel **Combo Dice** and never become patterns, Clusters, or Stragglers.

When **Damage Dice** equal the full Dice Pool, the character dies. A nonliving or collective scene is destroyed, scattered, surrendered, or otherwise defeated as the fiction requires.

HEALING

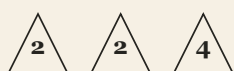
Healing converts **Damage Dice** back into Normal Dice. During a Turn, a restored die returns Spent unless the healing ability says READY. A safe full rest heals one **Damage Die** unless the 4Caster requires treatment or different conditions.

STRAIN

Nonlethal harm, fear, exhaustion, and temporary disruption inflict Strain. Each point sets aside one Ready Normal Die for the rest of the current Turn. Strained dice return Ready at the next Turn's refresh. Strain is never a persistent weakness; use a Status with an explicit FADE for an impairment that must last longer.

If there are not enough Ready Normal Dice, set aside all that remain and ignore the excess Strain. Strain never converts into Damage. A character with no Ready Normal Dice cannot make an ordinary rolled action or reaction again that Turn. It still receives an action opportunity and may pass or perform a routine fictional act; a printed ZERO-NORMAL REACTION may still be paid. The character is not dying.

N ACTION DICE

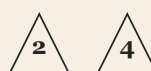


+

D



=>



NO CLUSTER

MATCHING 2 CANCELED

N DAMAGE

DIRECTIONAL: N DAMAGE ROLLS WITH N, NE, OR NW

Damage equal to Pool = death or defeat.

THE CORE RULES

Dealing Harm

Before rolling a harmful action, declare whether it inflicts Damage or Strain and describe how. An ability that lists Damage or Strain fixes the action's harm type. Only a harmful action without a listed type chooses. Unarmed force, restraint, fear, and exhaustion normally inflict Strain. Lethal weapons and explicitly lethal abilities may inflict Damage. The 4Caster may rule that the fiction permits only one type.

One exchange begins when an original action is declared and ends after its direct defense, any help or interference, Help, comparison, printed Effects, ordinary harm, statuses, and immediate fiction are resolved. A later action is a new exchange, even in the same Round.

Only the original action inflicts ordinary Margin harm. When that harmful action succeeds, it inflicts the declared harm equal to its Margin. Reactions contribute Clusters only. A reaction ability may inflict harm when its printed Effect says so. An ability's listed Damage or Strain is added at its printed Timing.

EXAMPLE: A North attack retains three Clusters against one defensive Cluster. Its Margin is 2. If the Skill adds +1 Damage, the target converts three Normal Dice into N **Damage Dice**.

If an attack wins only by the face-value tie-break, its Margin is 0. It connects, but it deals no ordinary Damage. An on-success ability may still apply its listed Damage or status.

If Damage would exceed the Normal Dice remaining in a Pool, convert all that remain. Reaching **Damage Dice** equal to the Dice Pool causes death or scene defeat.

SCENE HARM

Each Agent converts dice in its own fixed Pool into directional **Damage Dice**. Those **Damage Dice** roll whenever that Agent uses the marked direction. Strain sets aside Ready Normal Dice from that Agent's Pool. Harm never reaches into another Agent's Pool.

When an Agent's **Damage Dice** equal its own fixed Pool, that Agent is defeated: killed, broken, scattered, surrendered, or removed as the fiction requires. Removing it subtracts its Axes and future action opportunities. Each scene also states how its larger objective ends. A scene may end when all required Agents are defeated, when cumulative Scene Damage reaches the printed Scene Pool total, or when the objective and fiction say it ends. Damage already on a defeated Agent still counts toward cumulative Scene Damage; healing lowers that total only when it removes current Damage from an Agent.

Choose one removal mode during scene setup.

ATTRITION (default): Remove a defeated Agent and every die or resource still attached to it. Its remaining Pool does not move.

PRESSURE TRANSFER X (optional printed trait): At setup, print one starting source, one receiver, X, a **RECEIVER CAP**, and a **SCENE CAP**. X may equal the source's full printed starting Pool but cannot exceed it; it never changes with the source's current Ready dice. When the source is defeated or otherwise removed, attempt to create exactly X Spent Normal Dice on the named surviving receiver. Stop at both caps and lose any excess. The dice become eligible to Ready only at the next Turn refresh, increase the receiver's fixed Pool and Damage threshold by the number actually created, and grant no immediate refill or action. Axes, Armor, Damage, reserves, Statuses, and abilities do not transfer. Each starting Agent may source this once; transferred, created, summoned, copied, or echo dice never transfer again. If the receiver is absent or illegal, all X dice leave play.

An adventure may also print an earlier break, flight, or surrender condition. That is a scene-specific objective result, not a change to the Agent's core Damage threshold.

THE CORE RULES

Worked Turn And Agent Ledger

A scene has a Scene Pool total of 12 allocated as Captain Roake Pool 5, Guard A Pool 4, and Guard B Pool 3. Every die begins Ready. These allocations are fixed and cannot be borrowed.

EXCHANGE 1 - Roake takes 2 N Damage. Convert two of Roake's Normal Dice into N **Damage Dice**. Roake now has three Normal and two N **Damage Dice**; neither guard changes.

EXCHANGE 2 - Roake takes 1 Strain. Set aside one of Roake's Ready Normal Dice as Strained. Only Roake becomes less able to act or react this Turn.

EXCHANGE 3 - Roake takes 3 more Damage. His five **Damage Dice** now equal his fixed Pool 5, so he is defeated. Under ATTRITION, remove him and every remaining die or resource attached to him. The guards keep Pools 4 and 3.

If the scene instead printed Roake as PRESSURE TRANSFER 5 to Guard A, with RECEIVER CAP 8 and SCENE CAP 12, Roake attempts to create exactly five dice when defeated or otherwise removed. Guard A starts at Pool 4, so its receiver cap accepts four; create those four as Spent Normal Dice and lose the fifth. Guard A's fixed Pool and defeat threshold become 8, with no immediate refill or action. The dice may Ready at the next Turn refresh and can never source another transfer. Roake's five current Damage still count if the scene uses cumulative Scene Damage.

At Turn refresh, each surviving Agent readies only its own eligible dice and clears its own Strain. Beginning a new scene creates new printed allocations. A named carried Agent retains only the Damage and Statuses its transition rule says to carry.

IMPORTING ADVANCED ABILITIES

Ironbridge does not need these limits, but they govern abilities imported from Skills & Powers.

ACTIONS - A participant gains at most one additional personal opportunity from abilities per Turn. In one Round, at most one ability-created opportunity resolves across that participant and every ability-created Agent it controls. Every action or support opportunity taken by an ability-created Agent counts, including an ordinary opportunity in a later Round. A personal extra permits acting or passing, not helping or interfering, unless printed otherwise. Entering play or changing control never resets either limit. Check each Requirement before declaration and again before activation.

REACTIONS - One participant enters one exchange's reaction sequence once. An early entry replaces ORDINARY. Only an APEX, RED FLAG SECOND ENTRY grants one named later checkpoint; it creates no nested window and never answers a reaction. Mandatory Passive Triggers do not consume entry unless printed otherwise.

ARMOR PACKETS - For each recipient copy of one activation, each Armor result performs one job: cancel one acting result or prevent 1 point from one eligible flat-Damage packet, never both. State each packet's direction, Armor rule, and multiplier. Do not reuse an Armor result across copied Effects; assign Armor, reduce, then multiply.

THE CORE RULES

Statuses

A status changes how a character, Agent, item, or scene behaves. Every status must state three things.

APPLY - When and at what strength the status begins, including how repeated applications combine.

TRIGGER - Exactly when its effect happens.

FADE - When its strength is reduced or removed. The number in parentheses is the status strength, often called pips.

QUICK START STATUSES

HESITANT (X)

Apply: On a listed social or intimidation ability's success, add X Hesitant pips; repeated applications add.

Trigger: Before the affected character or Agent acts, set aside up to X eligible Ready Normal Dice as Strained.

Fade: Reduce Hesitant by 1 only if at least one die actually became Strained. If no eligible die exists, it waits unchanged for a later eligible action.

UNSEEN (X)

Apply: When a listed stealth ability activates, set Unseen to X or keep its current value, whichever is higher.

Trigger: During the Help step after every reaction, add Help Clusters equal to its pips to the first action that relies on remaining unseen.

Fade: Remove after it triggers or when the character openly attacks.

SUSPECTED (X)

Apply: When the adventure says, add X Suspected pips; repeated applications add.

Trigger: Each leftover 3 rolled by the affected character moves the current alert clock, Suspicion or Alarm, by its normal amount plus the character's Suspected pips.

Fade: Reduce Suspected by 1 after the character establishes a convincing new cover; remove it when they leave the watched area.

ADVANCED RESOURCE SAFEGUARDS

RESERVE RETURNS - Per Turn, a participant may benefit from one ability-caused Combo return and one ability-caused Power return unless an APEX exception says otherwise. An ability cannot return its own activating die or Cost. A delayed return reserves that entitlement when created; an empty release still uses it. A returned die cannot feed or become another return target in the same exchange.

CONVERSION OUTPUT - One active ability performs at most one conversion unless it prints **CASCADE**. Recheck success, every Gate, target legality, immunity, resistance, and the output cap before removing input. Failed, canceled, invalid, immune, or at-cap delivery preserves every input pip; once at least one output pip or printed state change is delivered, consume the full printed input Cost even if the cap accepts only part. Until the exchange ends, new output cannot satisfy a Requirement or Gate, pay a Cost, Trigger a Passive or Status, or become conversion input. Blocked Triggers are suppressed, not delayed. A **CASCADE** is one atomic two-conversion line and is always APEX and RED FLAG; its final output remains locked.

STANDARD STATUS LIMITS - Only the first real **DRAINED** pip increase each Round immediately Spends one Ready **Power Die** if available; the increase uses the event even when none is Ready, while an at-cap application does not. Reapplying **AXIS-LOCKED** to the same Axis adds pips to its cap; a different Axis replaces both Axis and pips. From one roll, the affected participant chooses only one eligible **BACKLASH** pair to Trigger.

THE CORE RULES

Running Scenes

The 4Caster prepares a Scene Pool total as the opposition's endurance budget, then allocates every die among the starting Agents however the scene requires. Record each Agent's own Pool before play. The total measures scene scale; it is not a shared supply.

ENCOUNTER AXES

Add active Agent ratings by direction to get Encounter Axes. These totals estimate difficulty and XP only. An Agent always acts and reacts with its own rating and its own dice.

EXAMPLE: A captain and three crew each have N 2. Encounter N is 8, but every Agent still caps a North roll at 2. Encounter Axes may exceed 4; they never cap a roll or merge Pools.

PARTY SIZE AND DIFFICULTY

1. Add the participating characters' fixed Pools to find Party Total.
2. Choose a Scene Pool total: about 75% of Party Total for Easier, 100% for Even, or 125% for Harder, rounded up.
3. Keep the planned Agents and Encounter Axes, then allocate that total among those Agents in any proportions the 4Caster wants. More dice on one Agent makes it durable and reactive; more Agents create more action opportunities.
4. Record ATTRITION or an explicitly printed PRESSURE TRANSFER X package, including receiver and Scene caps.

Every active Agent owns one action opportunity per Round and may directly react to each incoming action that targets it while its own dice last. It cannot borrow dice, Armor, reserves, Damage, or Statuses from another Agent.

NEUTRALS, ALLIES, AND OTHER SIDES

Any charted other has its own Pool or Agent allocation whether friendly, neutral, or hostile. Cooperation never merges Pools. If a new faction enters, give it a separate budget and allocation.

THE RICKETY BRIDGE

Goal: Cross before it collapses.

Dominant Axis: S.

Agent: Bridge N 2, S 3, E 2, W 3.

Encounter Axes: N 2, S 3, E 2, W 3.

Scene Pool total and Bridge Pool: 75% of Party Total, rounded up.

Mode: ATTRITION.

Leftover 3: Collapse +1.

Leftover 4: Collapse -1.

At Collapse 4, the crossing route fails and the scene changes to the fall or rescue.

The bridge gets one action each Round and may directly react to each applicable incoming action while its own Pool allows. One dangerous thing can oppose several characters without pretending it is several creatures.

SCENE TRANSITIONS

Create each new scene's allocations from its printed Scene Pool total. Do not carry anonymous opposition dice between scenes. A named Agent carried forward retains attributed Damage and ongoing Statuses only when the transition says so; its Strain clears at Turn refresh. Never duplicate the same Agent's Pool by representing it in two sides at once.

CAPTAIN N2

CREW N2

CREW N2

CREW N2

ENCOUNTER N8 = 2 + 2 + 2 + 2

EACH AGENT ROLLS UP TO N2 FROM ITS OWN POOL

Encounter Axes measure the roster; they never cap a roll.

THE CORE RULES

Skills And Powers

A Skill establishes a field of exceptional competency and may contain signature moves. A Power changes one precise rule or possibility but grants no broader competency.

A COMPLETE PROFILE

NAME [SKILL OR POWER]

Category and Training: For a Skill, the specialized work it makes trained.

Mode: ACTIVE or PASSIVE.

Use: ACTION ONLY, or REACTION with direct, support, interference, personal, and a named checkpoint.

Axis: The action or reaction used, including any SPECIAL DIRECT exception.

Pattern and Payment: Exact distinct results, followed by SPEND or TRIGGER.

Outcome and Timing: ON SUCCESS, ON FAILURE, or REGARDLESS, plus the checkpoint when the Effect resolves.

Requirements and Costs: Tools, position, Status, consumable, or other Gate.

Target, Range, Area, Duration: Enough information to execute the Effect.

Effect: One mechanical and fictional result.

Counterplay and Ending: How it is resisted, removed, recovered, or Fades.

Interactions and Risk: Relevant Help, Damage, Armor, reserve, Status, or Scale rule; BASELINE, WATCH, or RED FLAG.

When a Skill Category clearly applies, use the honest Axis cap. Without one, a plausible specialized action is UNTRAINED: halve the chosen cap, round down with minimum 1, then apply one strongest temporary boon and one strongest temporary penalty. The final cap may become 0. Training never replaces tools, access, time, or fictional permission.

GIVE EVERY STARTING CHARACTER A RELIABLE HANDLE

Each starting loadout needs at least one ability usable in ordinary play without a rare Pattern, several setup actions, or a narrow Status Gate: an Any Pair Skill supported by Combo, a common Passive, a priced single-N or true-Straggler ability, or a low-symbol typed Power whose ordinary action remains useful. Mix one reliable handle, one situational signature, and one ambitious high-impact ability.

This is construction guidance, not a pity rule. Never lower a Pattern after misses, grant free pips, or auto-activate an

ability. Every printed declaration, payment, timing, and counterplay rule remains.

ACTIVATION

Declare at most one active Skill or Power before its action or reaction roll. A reaction use must be explicit and name its checkpoint. After Damage cancellation and the two PRE-PATTERN checkpoints around Armor, check and pay the Pattern before division.

Use surviving Normal and Power results first; Combo may fill only missing untyped results. At least one surviving Normal or **Power Die** must take part. Every Pattern symbol requires a distinct die. No die or resource may pay twice.

An Active Power must be declared, roll at least one Ready **Power Die**, and satisfy a typed P result unless a supplement prints a scoped replacement exception and reserve procedure. A Normal or Combo result cannot fill typed P. A Passive follows its printed Trigger and needs no **Power Die** unless it says so.

SPEND removes used Normal or Power results. TRIGGER records the activation but leaves those results in the roll. Combo is already Spent and never remains in the contest. Help never satisfies a Pattern.

Resolve the Effect only at its printed Timing. A failed action produces only Effects marked ON FAILURE or REGARDLESS. An action succeeds when its side wins final comparison; a reaction succeeds when the side it supports wins. All reactions use the exchange's one sequence; none opens another.

DEFENSE CHOICES

A composite ability may change based on the defender's declared opposite Axis. The choice is visible before reactions are rolled.

HAMMER AND HOOK [SKILL]

Category: Close Combat. Training: weapons, leverage, and controlling a guard.

Mode: ACTIVE. Use: ACTION ONLY. Axis: NE. Defense: choose S or W.

Pattern: Any pair. SPEND.

Outcome and Timing: POST-COMPARISON, ON SUCCESS.

Target: One nearby opponent able to defend.

Effect: Add 1 Damage to the calculated ordinary harm. If the defense used W, also apply Hesitant (1).

Counterplay: Keep distance, deny leverage, or choose S when legal. Risk: BASELINE.

READY-TO-PLAY CHARACTERS

Silas "Shadow" Vale

Master thief; patient until patience stops being useful.

N 2 | S 4 | E 3 | W 3 | POOL 12

NE 2 | SE 3 | SW 3 | NW 2

COMBO 1 | POWER 1 | ARMOR 0 | DAMAGE 0



SHADOW STEP [SKILL]

Category: Burglary. Training: stealth, entry, escape, and moving unseen.

Mode: ACTIVE. Use: ACTION ONLY. Axis: S.

Pattern: 1,1. SPEND.

Outcome and Timing: POST-COMPARISON, REGARDLESS.

Target: Self. Duration: Until Unseen Triggers or Fades.

Effect: Gain Unseen (1). If Silas also wins, move through one watched position without being stopped.

Counterplay: Expose the route, force an open attack, or remove cover. Risk: BASELINE.

QUICK HANDS [POWER]

Mode: ACTIVE. Use: ACTION ONLY. Axis: S or E.

Pattern: P4 + 4,4. SPEND.

Outcome and Timing: POST-COMPARISON, REGARDLESS.

Requirement and Target: One unsecured small item or handheld weapon within reach.

Effect: Take, palm, or disarm the target item.

Counterplay: Secure or stow it, deny proximity, or restrain Silas. Risk: WATCH.

THIEF'S EAR [SKILL]

Category: Burglary. Training: patrols, locks, hidden access, and secured places.

Mode: ACTIVE. Use: ACTION ONLY. Axis: E.

Pattern: Any triple. TRIGGER.

Outcome and Timing: POST-COMPARISON, ON SUCCESS.

Target and Range: The nearby secured area Silas can inspect or hear.

Effect: Ask one direct question about patrols, locks, or hidden access. The 4Caster answers honestly.

Counterplay: Isolation, false records, magical silence, or moving beyond the area. Risk: BASELINE.

Gear: lock tools, dark cloak, wax and thread, short blade.

READY-TO-PLAY CHARACTERS

Morgan "Ironfist" Graye

Brawler and professional diversion; more observant than the name suggests.

N 4 | S 3 | E 2 | W 3 | POOL 12

NE 3 | SE 2 | SW 3 | NW 3

COMBO 1 | POWER 1 | ARMOR N 1 | DAMAGE 0



CRUSHING BLOW [SKILL]

Category: Brawling. Training: close combat, breaking, restraint, and physical threats.

Mode: ACTIVE. Use: ACTION ONLY. Axis: N.

Pattern: Any pair. SPEND.

Outcome and Timing: POST-COMPARISON, ON SUCCESS.

Target: One nearby opponent or breakable obstacle.

Effect: Add 1 Damage to calculated ordinary harm.

Counterplay: Keep distance, deny leverage, or use applicable Armor. Risk: BASELINE.

SHIELD STANCE [POWER]

Mode: ACTIVE. Use: SPECIAL DIRECT REACTION - ORDINARY.

Trigger: Morgan or a nearby ally is targeted by a harmful action Morgan can physically answer.

Axis: N or S instead of the ordinary opposite Axis. Pattern: P1 + 1. SPEND.

Outcome and Timing: POST-COMPARISON, REGARDLESS. Record activation during the ORDINARY reaction; resolve after Margin and ordinary harm are calculated and stated, before harm is applied.

Target: Morgan or one nearby ally.

Effect: Prevent 2 Damage or Strain.

Counterplay: Separate Morgan, exhaust Ready dice, or force another reaction entry first. Risk: WATCH.

BRAWLER'S INSTINCT [SKILL]

Category: Brawling. Training: reading, controlling, and surviving close combat.

Mode: ACTIVE. Use: ACTION ONLY. Axis: NW. Defense: choose S or E.

Pattern: Any pair. SPEND.

Outcome and Timing: POST-COMPARISON, ON SUCCESS.

Target: One nearby opponent able to defend.

Effect: Apply Hesitant (1). If the defense used E, also inflict 1 Strain.

Counterplay: Break contact or choose S when legal. Risk: BASELINE.

Gear: reinforced coat (Armor N 1), sap, coil of rope, door wedges.

READY-TO-PLAY CHARACTERS

Elias "Silver-Tongue" Delano

Confidence artist, document forger, and emergency negotiator.

N 2 | S 2 | E 4 | W 4 | POOL 12

NE 3 | SE 3 | SW 3 | NW 3

COMBO 1 | POWER 1 | ARMOR 0 | DAMAGE 0

**SILVER TONGUE [SKILL]**

Category: Influence. Training: persuasion, deception, negotiation, and social leverage.

Mode: ACTIVE. Use: ACTION ONLY. Axis: W.

Pattern: Any pair. SPEND.

Outcome and Timing: POST-COMPARISON, ON SUCCESS.

Target and Range: One participant able to hear and understand Elias.

Effect: Add 1 Strain to calculated ordinary harm. If the target is an Agent, the 4Caster may instead apply Hesitant (1).

Counterplay: End the conversation, expose the lie, or remove the leverage. Risk: BASELINE.

FORGED CREDENTIALS [POWER]

Mode: ACTIVE. Use: ACTION ONLY. Axis: E or W.

Pattern: P4 + 4. SPEND.

Outcome and Timing: POST-COMPARISON, REGARDLESS.

Requirement: Elias could plausibly have prepared for this institution.

Target and Duration: One document; it lasts until confiscated, destroyed, or exposed.

Effect: Produce a prepared document plausible for the current location. It survives casual inspection, not a detailed records check.

Counterplay: Check live records, contact the issuer, or inspect closely. Risk: WATCH.

QUICK ESCAPE [SKILL]

Category: Evasion. Training: restraints, pursuit, exits, and breaking contact.

Mode: ACTIVE. Use: ACTION ONLY. Axis: SW.

Defense: choose N or E.

Pattern: Any pair. SPEND.

Outcome and Timing: POST-COMPARISON, ON SUCCESS.

Target: Elias, one restraint, or one immediate pursuer.

Effect: Slip a restraint, break contact, or move into an exit position. If the defense used E, reduce Suspicion by 1.

Counterplay: Seal the exits, use a rigid enclosure, or choose N when legal. Risk: BASELINE.

Gear: papers and seals, formal coat, hidden purse, narrow knife.

09 / A PLAY-TONIGHT HEIST

The Ironbridge Ledger

A 60 to 90 minute heist for one 4Caster and three players.



THE JOB

Magistrate Orlan Vey has been inventing debts and seizing shops when their owners cannot pay. The proof is in a black ledger kept inside Ironbridge House. Printer Mara Quill will pay the crew to steal it before midnight, when Vey's courier carries it away.

The crew succeeds if they leave Ironbridge House with the ledger. They may expose Vey, sell the evidence, bargain with him, or do something less respectable afterward. That is outside tonight's job.

OPENING

Read or paraphrase:

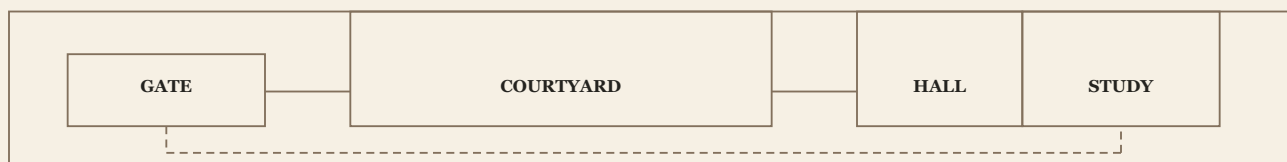
Ironbridge House squats above the canal behind an iron fence. Lamps are being lit in its lower windows. A carriage waits in the side court. Somewhere inside, a clerk is finishing the black ledger before the midnight courier arrives.

Ask each player what part of the plan their character prepared. Give one useful fact or small item that fits the answer.

IRONBRIDGE ALLOCATION

For each Scene, calculate the printed Scene Pool total and allocate it among the starting Agents however the 4Caster chooses. Equal shares are a sound first play; assign any remainder to the lead Agent. Write every Pool down before play. Each Agent is defeated when Damage equals its own Pool. A printed BREAK 3 ACCUMULATED or STRAIN 3 ONE EXCHANGE may remove an Agent earlier when the fiction supports flight, surrender, collapse, or loss of function. Ironbridge uses ATTRITION unless a Scene explicitly prints PRESSURE TRANSFER.

IRONBRIDGE HOUSE / NOT TO SCALE



canal wall route

THE IRONBRIDGE LEDGER

Scene 1: The Front Gate

Goal: Enter the house grounds without triggering lockdown.

Dominant Axis: W.

Base Agent Axes: N 3, S 2, E 3, W 4.

Agents (3): Captain Roake (Combo 1, Armor W 1) and two gate guards.

Encounter Axes: N 9, S 6, E 9, W 12. Axis Total 36; Rating 38.

Scene Pool total: Equal to the party's combined Pools; allocate it among the starting Agents before play.

SUSPICION CLOCK 0/4

Leftover 3: Suspicion +1.

Leftover 4: Suspicion -1, minimum 0.

At 4: The gate locks, a runner alerts the house, and Alarm begins Scene 2 at 2. Lockdown does not end the heist; the crew can enter through a servants' culvert.

One successful plan with Margin 1 gets one character through or establishes a useful opening. Margin 2 gets the group through. A Forged Credentials activation gets the group through casual inspection, but Captain Roake may still react if Suspicion is 2 or higher.

AGENT ABILITIES

SCRUTINY [SKILL] - Captain Roake only. Category: Gate Inspection. Mode: ACTIVE. Use: DIRECT REACTION - ORDINARY against an incoming W action. Axis: E, the ordinary opposite. Roake may add Combo 1. Pattern: Any pair. SPEND. Outcome and Timing: POST-COMPARISON, REGARDLESS. Effect: Apply Suspected (1) to the acting character even if the scene loses. Counterplay: use another approach, remove Roake, or exhaust Roake's own Pool. Risk: BASELINE.

CALL THE HOUSE [AGENT ACTION] - Any active gate Agent may use its W action opportunity. On success, Suspicion +1. At Margin 2+, Suspicion +2 instead.

Use each recorded Agent Pool as its Damage threshold. A printed BREAK or Strain threshold may remove it earlier. Damage and Strain remain separate tracks; ATTRITION removes only the defeated Agent's remaining resources.



THE IRONBRIDGE LEDGER

Scene 2: Inside Ironbridge House

Goal: Locate Vey's study before Alarm reaches 6.

Dominant Axis: E.

Base Agent Axes: N 2, S 4, E 4, W 3.

Agents (3): the house patrol (Armor N 1), the servants' network, and the locked interior.

Encounter Axes: N 6, S 12, E 12, W 9. Axis Total 39; Rating 40.

Scene Pool total: Equal to the party's combined Pools. Record four allocations before play: three active starting Agents and one offstage steward. The steward's allocation is part of the total but cannot act, react, take harm, or add to Encounter Axes until Alarm 3. If the steward never enters, that allocation remains unavailable.

ALARM CLOCK

Starts at 0, or 2 after a gate lockdown.

Leftover 3: Alarm +1.

Leftover 4: Alarm -1, minimum 0.

At 3: Activate the offstage house steward as a fourth Agent using the Base Agent Axes and its prepared allocation. Encounter Axes become N 8, S 16, E 16, W 12. Axis Total 52; Rating 53. Once active, the steward remains even if Alarm later falls below 3. If this occurs mid-Round, the steward's first action opportunity is next Round.

At 6: The courier reaches the study. Finish the current exchange, end this Scene, and begin Scene 3 with its courier pressure rule. If the crew later obtains the ledger, Escape begins at 2.

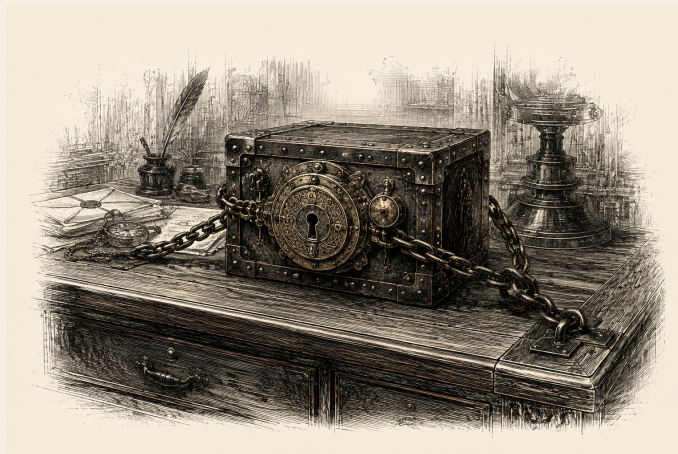
THREE ROUTES

SERVANTS' HALL - W or SW. Fast if the crew can belong. Failure makes the speaker Suspected (1).

ROOF GALLERY - S or SE. Quiet but exposed. Margin 0 leaves someone hanging or separated until helped.

RECORDS ROOM - E or NE. Slower, but a strong result reveals the study's lock and the courier's route.

Two successful route actions locate the study. A Margin 2+ result counts as both.



THE IRONBRIDGE LEDGER

Scene 3: The Black Study

Goal: Take the ledger and leave the room.

Dominant Axis: S.

Base Agent Axes: N 4, S 3, E 4, W 2.

Agents (3): Brann the bodyguard (Armor N 1), the clockwork lock (S 4, Armor N 1), and Magistrate Vey (W 4).

Encounter Axes: N 12, S 10, E 12, W 8. Axis Total 42; Rating 44.

Scene Pool total: Equal to the party's combined Pools. If the courier could begin present, record four allocations before play: three active Agents and one offstage courier. Otherwise allocate the total among the three starting Agents. An offstage allocation is unavailable until its Agent enters.

PRESSURE

If Alarm reached 6 before this scene began, activate the prepared courier allocation as a fourth Agent using the Base Agent Axes. Encounter Axes are N 16, S 13, E 16, W 10. Axis Total 55; Rating 57. Escape begins at 2. If no courier allocation was prepared, the courier is present in the fiction but cannot act or react in this Scene.

Alarm carries into this scene. Leftover 3 raises Alarm by 1. Leftover 4 lowers it by 1, minimum 0.

At Alarm 6, finish the current exchange, including reactions, Statuses, harm, and Stragglers, then end the Black Study. If the crew has the ledger, begin Escape at 2. If it does not, the courier secures the ledger and the job is lost; begin Escape without it so the crew can flee, surrender, or bargain. The table may instead frame a new courier-chase scene with a new objective and new Agent Pools. Do not keep adding Agents or loop the Black Study.

The ledger is inside a brass lockbox chained to the desk.

LOCKBOX - An E or SE action is not opposed by the lock itself, but Brann or another able non-target Agent may interfere by spending its unused action opportunity for the Round. If opposed, the action must win. With 2 retained Clusters it opens cleanly; with 1 it opens and Alarm rises by 1; with 0 it remains closed. Crushing the box is a North action

opposed directly by the lock's South 4 and automatically raises Alarm by 1. The lock has EARLY BREAK 3 accumulated Damage and no Strain threshold. Opening or destroying it removes the clockwork lock as an Agent.

BRANN - N 4, S 3. Brann directly reacts when he is targeted. Against actions targeting Vey or the box, he may interfere by spending his unused action opportunity. EARLY BREAK 4 accumulated Damage or 3 Strain in one exchange: remove him as an Agent.

VEY - W 4, E 4. Vey bargains, lies, and orders others. BREAK 3 STRAIN IN ONE EXCHANGE: Vey gives up the key or one true piece of leverage. Damage equal to Vey's Pool defeats him.

AGENT ACTIONS

BRANN - DRIVE THEM BACK: Brann takes an N action against one nearby intruder approaching Brann, Vey, or the box; the target defends with S. On success, deal ordinary Margin Damage and the target loses its position at the box. A tie-value win moves the target but deals no Damage.

VEY - COMMAND THE ROOM: Vey takes a W action against one target that can hear him; the target defends with E. On success, deal ordinary Margin Strain. Vey may replace one point of that Strain with HESITANT (1). A Margin 0 success applies HESITANT (1) instead.

LOCK - SOUND THE BELL: The lock takes an E action against one character manipulating, carrying, or holding the box; the target defends with W. It deals no harm. On success, Alarm +1. At Margin 2+, choose Alarm +2 instead or remove the target's position at the box, not both. If nobody is at the box, the lock passes or performs a routine act.

Each Agent uses only its own Pool for these actions and every direct reaction. Once the crew has the ledger, move to the escape.

THE IRONBRIDGE LEDGER

Scene 4: Out Before Midnight

Goal: Leave the grounds with the ledger.

Dominant Axis: S.

Agents: One grounds pursuer, plus each mobile Agent still active from Scene 3. Let X equal the active pursuers.

Base Agent Axes for the chase: N 4, S 4, E 3, W 3. Every active pursuer uses this chase profile.

Encounter Axes: N 4X, S 4X, E 3X, W 3X. Axis Total 14X; add carried Combo, Power, and Armor Dice for Rating.

Scene Pool total replacement: Divide actual Party Total by two, round up, then add 5 per active pursuer. Allocate the result among the pursuers before play. This replaces the ordinary 100% Even ratio. For Easier or Harder play, apply 75% or 125% once, rounding up.

ESCAPE CLOCK

Starts at 0, or 2 if the courier is present. Range: -3 to +6.

Leftover 3: Escape -1.

Leftover 4: Escape +1.

Margin 1 on an escape action: Escape +1.

Margin 2+: Escape +2.

At 6: The crew gets clear.

At -3: The crew is cornered; they must surrender something, strike a bargain, or win one last opposed exchange.

EXITS

FRONT GATE - Direct, watched, and good for a convincing lie or a hard charge.

CANAL WALL - A South route with a cold drop and a waiting skiff that may or may not still be tied there.

COURIER'S CARRIAGE - An East or West plan. Steal the ride, replace the package, or persuade the driver that departure orders changed.

End with the crew returning to Mara Quill or deciding what the ledger is worth to them.



THE IRONBRIDGE LEDGER

4Caster Notes

KEEP FAILURE MOVING

If the defender holds, the acting intent does not happen and the declared defensive or Scene consequence resolves. Use a Failure Move only when that loss would otherwise create no meaningful change. Do not automatically stack another consequence with ordinary harm, a printed reaction Effect, a clock threshold, and an existing consequence. State the changed position and ask what happens next.

USE AGENT-OWNED POOLS

Every active Agent adds one scene action and owns its allocated Pool. A target may directly react to each incoming action while its own dice last. If an Agent is defeated under ATTRITION, later Rounds have fewer scene actions and its remaining dice leave with it. Other Agents keep only their own dice.

SCALE THE HEIST

PLAYER COUNT: Recalculate actual Party Total from everyone participating, to a minimum of one character share. Keep every printed Agent and Encounter Axis. For an ordinary Even Scene, its Scene Pool total equals actual Party Total; allocate it among the printed Agents. More total Pool adds endurance without multiplying actions.

EASIER: After calculating that Scene's ordinary or printed replacement Pool, use 75% once, rounded up.

HARDER: Use 125% once, rounded up. As an additional announced package, the 4Caster may also raise one named Agent's printed Damage and Strain thresholds by 1.

Never apply the same Scene Pool total adjustment twice. Agent count and allocation remain separate pressure levers.

EXPERIENCE

Add the four current Encounter Axes to find the Encounter Total. Add one for every Combo, Power, or **Armor Die** listed for the active opposition. Combo or Power readiness does not change Rating; Armor has no Ready or Spent state. Record the highest Encounter Rating the party actually faces; added Agents and reserves can raise it, while removing Agents never lowers the award.

Compare that peak rating with the participating characters' combined Dice Pools.

- EASY - 75% or less of the party total: 1 XP each.
- EVEN - more than 75% but less than 125%: 2 XP each.
- HARD - 125% or more: 3 XP each.

A Scene Pool total starting at 75% of the party total or less shifts the category one step easier. A Scene Pool total starting at 125% or more shifts it one step harder. Never shift below Easy or above Hard.

Award XP once when the scene reaches an ending, whether the party gets the goal, bypasses the opposition, escapes, or accepts a lasting consequence. After a session, spend 10 XP to raise one cardinal Axis by 1, to a Quick Start maximum of 5. Increase the Dice Pool by 1 and recalculate composites.

IF THE CREW LOSES

Capture, debt, exposure, and a bad bargain are all valid endings. Death follows the Damage rule; a failed clock does not kill characters by itself.

AT THE TABLE

Quick Reference

TURN REFRESH

1. Resolve before-refresh Effects and record denied or replaced refreshes.
2. Ready eligible Spent Normal Dice; return eligible Strained Normal Dice.
3. Ready eligible Spent **Power Dice**.
4. Resolve during/after-refresh Effects, then ordinary start-of-Turn Triggers.
5. Set initiative from the dominant Axis, using each participant's own rating.
6. Play Rounds while a side can and chooses to spend Ready Normal Dice on a meaningful action. On any Turn end, move remaining Ready Normal to Spent; Power keeps its state until refresh.

ROUND

1. Resolve before-Combo Effects, Ready eligible Spent Combo, then resolve during/after-refresh Effects.
2. Each participant and Agent has one action opportunity. Acting, supporting, interfering, or passing uses it. Direct defense and explicitly triggered personal reactions do not unless printed otherwise.
3. Resolve end-of-Round Triggers, Fades, and held-Straggler expiration.
4. Continue if the Scene remains and a side can and chooses to act. Otherwise end the Turn. A Scene ending or printed Effect may also end it.

ACTION

1. State intent, risk, harm type, Axis, and at most one active Skill or Power.
2. Find the Normal cap: printed cardinal or composite; Untrained half, round down, minimum 1; one strongest temporary boon; one strongest temporary penalty.
3. Spend eligible Normal, Combo, and **Power Dice**. An Active Power needs its typed P die unless a labeled replacement exception set aside a legal **Power Die** in RESERVED before rolling.

4. Roll action and applicable Damage; matching Damage cancels Normal or Power.
5. Resolve PRE-PATTERN reactions timed before Armor.
6. Roll applicable Armor; matching Armor cancels Normal or Power.
7. Resolve PRE-PATTERN reactions timed after Armor.
8. Check and pay the one Pattern with distinct dice. SPEND or TRIGGER; discard Combo; divide surviving Normal and Power.
9. Resolve the target's direct reaction, acting-side supports, defending-side interference, and immediate leftover 3/4 effects in their printed checkpoint order. Direct defense uses no action opportunity; non-target support/interference does.
10. Defending side declares and assigns Help first; acting side second. Held 1 self-helps only its source roll; held 2 helps only another participant. Compare Cluster count, then rolled tie value; Help contributes 0 and the defender holds an exact tie.
11. Calculate and state Margin and ordinary harm. Resolve POST-COMPARISON reactions, then apply remaining harm, Effects, statuses, and fiction. Resolve DEATH reactions before defeat becomes final.

Every reaction uses Steps 1-8 for its own roll and never opens another reaction. The targeted participant or Agent gets one direct reaction to that action from its own Pool and may react again to later actions while dice remain. Each plausible non-target supporter or interferer spends its unused action opportunity.

COMPOSITES

Rating = floor((Axis + Axis) / 2).

NE opposed by SW: choose S or W.

SE opposed by NW: choose N or W.

SW opposed by NE: choose N or E.

NW opposed by SE: choose S or E.

AT THE TABLE

Quick Reference: Results

CLUSTERS

Two or more matching Normal or **Power Dice**. Each chosen group is one Cluster. Four matching dice may be one four-die Cluster or two pair Clusters. In a tie, count every die inside each chosen retained Cluster. Ability Patterns are paid before contest division.

STRAGGLERS

- 1 - hold to add one Help Cluster to one of your own rolls; tie value 0.
- 2 - hold to add one Help Cluster to someone else's roll; tie value 0.
- 3 - immediate scene effect after POST-DIVISION reactions.
- 4 - immediate scene effect after POST-DIVISION reactions.

Held 1s and 2s cost no action opportunity to spend and expire at end of the Round. Help does not increase an Effect that counts rolled or retained dice unless it explicitly counts Help.

DICE TYPES

NORMAL - Pool and Axis dice; Ready, Spent, or Strained.

COMBO - Pattern only; refresh each Round.

POWER - may be rolled voluntarily on any roll; joins Patterns, Clusters, tie value, and Stragglers; refresh each Turn. Active Powers normally require typed P; a labeled replacement exception uses **RESERVED** instead.

DAMAGE - directional; rolls with its owner and cancels matching Normal or Power.

ARMOR - directional; rolls against applicable incoming actions and cancels matching Normal or Power.

Damage and Armor never make Patterns, Clusters, or Stragglers. Unmarked Combo and Power are Open; a Bound die is restricted by its source.

HARM

Margin = winning retained Clusters minus losing retained Clusters.

Only the original action deals ordinary Margin harm; printed ability harm resolves at its Timing. Damage converts Normal Dice into directional **Damage Dice**.

Damage Dice greater than or equal to Dice Pool = death or scene defeat.

Strain sets aside Ready Normal Dice until the next Turn.

STATUS WORDS

APPLY states when pips enter and how they stack. **TRIGGER** states their effect and timing. **FADE** states when pips reduce or disappear. At Round end, resolve Triggers, then Fades, then discard held Stragglers.

ABILITY WORDS

SPEND - remove Normal or Power results used in the Pattern after cancellation and before division.

TRIGGER - check the Pattern and leave those results in the roll.

ON SUCCESS - if the acting side wins; for a reaction, if the side it supports wins.

REGARDLESS - works even if the action loses.

TYPED P - only a surviving **Power Die** showing the printed face can satisfy it. **CHECKPOINTS** - **PRE-PATTERN** before Armor; **PRE-PATTERN** after Armor; **POST-DIVISION**; **ORDINARY**; **POST-COMPARISON**; **DEATH**.

ENCOUNTERS AND XP

Agent roll cap = that Agent's own Axis.

Encounter Axis = that Axis added across active Agents.

Rating = four Encounter Axes + listed Combo, Power, and Armor Dice; use the peak faced.

Easy / Even / Hard = 1 / 2 / 3 XP per participating character.

Spend 10 XP after a session to raise one cardinal Axis by 1, maximum 5.

AT THE TABLE

The Dice Are In Your Hands

This is the complete 4d4 Quick Start playtest. If a rule causes hesitation at the table, make the smallest ruling that keeps the scene moving and note it for later.

Updates and project notes: roll4d4.com

Written and designed by Aron Pence.

Published by Roll4d4.

For my parents, and for the nerds and gamers I grew up with.



4d4

Four directions. Four-sided dice. One shared scene.



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