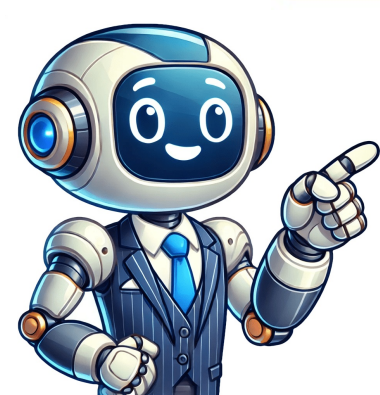


I'm not a robot



Blades in the dark pdf

The games be youFollowing Doom's revelatory reboot in 2016 and its 2020 sequel... Doom: The Dark Ages is doing exactly what it needs to: focusing focused, and getting 'll' weird with it. With its dramatic shift in setting and its emphasis on toe-to-toe demon punches-out, it looks like a hard left turn for the series.Nightreign isn't the broad open invitation to new fans that Elden Ring was — though the chance to tag along with friends will certainly attract some new players. Instead, it's a love letter to the fans who are looking for a fresh way to experience the game's mechanics with many challenging twists.A first-person, narrative-driven cozy horror puzzle game full of eccentric weirdos and friendly monsters, The Midnight Walk looks like a stop-motion film in part because the game's characters, monsters, and environments are composed of actual physical materials.Teague Mutant Ninja Turtles: Tactical TakeDownAs the name implies, Tactical TakeDown is a turn-based strategy game — yet with the beat-'em-up elements that are a classic part of TMNT adaptations. It comes from Strange Scaffold, developer of tons of indie favorites here at Polygon, from Clicking to I Am Your Beast to El Paso. Elsewhere, An Evil Hat Productions Publication www.evillhat.com • @EvilHatOfficial on Twitter facebook.com/EvilHatProductions In association with One Seven Design www.oneseven.design.com • @john_harper on Twitter Blades in the Dark Copyright © 2017 John Harper. 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Typesetters: Minion Pro, Kirsty, Ugly Quia.CREDITS John HarperGame Designer, Writing, Layout, Art, and CartographyStras Acimovic Sean Nittner Consulting Designer Developmental Editor Additional Material by Stras Acimovic, Vandel J. 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Paul, Paul Reid, Peter Adkins, Peter Kottler,RachaelStorey Burke, Rachael Martz, Rachael Walton, Rachael Walton, Drozdalski, Rob Donoghue, RobinLaws, Sage LaTorra, Sara Williamson, Sean Winslow, Shannon Ridge, Stephen Shapiro,Steve Harper, Steve Nix, Steve Sechi, Steve Segedy, Thor Olavsrud, Tom Dachtler, TomRickschneider, Travis Stout, Vasco Brown, Wesley Flowers, Will Scott, Zane Mankowski.Additional Feedback & Proofing: Adam Sexton, Alex Lee, Andrew Shields, ArneJamtgaard, Aske Lindved, Ben Scerri, Benjamin Liepis, Brian Pullum, Bryan Lotz, C.R. Harper, Carl Leonardsson, Carsten Bärmann, Chris Pipinuo, Christopher Slifer,Craig Reacher, Daniele Di Rubbo, Daniel Barrera, Haakon Oslo Thunestveit, Jack Shear,Jamarr P., Jamie Collette, Jason Elyon, Jason Kottler, Jason Puxett, Jens Brandmeier,Jorge Mintel, Johan Nilsson, John Dornberger, Jordan Lessing, Kai Tave, Kevin Denehy,Kevin Heckman, Lukas Myhan, Michael Purrek, Michael Sands, Nathan Black, OliverGranger, Paul Drussel, Rouker Voo, S. C. Israel, Sdale, SlyBehop, Stefan Struck, StrasAcimovic, Troy Ellis, Wojciech "Onslo" Chelstowski, Zanak, Zeke Mystique.My fellow "thief game" designers: Vincent Baker, Will Hindmarch, Harvey Smith, and Matt Snyder.The catalysts prime three: Allison Art, Keith Anderson, and Mike Standish. Thanksfor destroying the world.The original soundtracks: Ryan Dunleavy, Dylan Green, Zane Mankowski, and EdOuellette. This game design wouldn't have survived without you.The dynamic duo: Stras Acimovic and Sean Nittner. You made this game so much better than I could have alone. Thank you so much for your insight and friendship.ACKNOWLEDGMENTSSeveral designs influenced Blades in the Dark in various ways. This game would notexist without them.Apocalypse World, by D. Vincent Baker and Stars Without Number and Other Dust, byMeguey Baker. Dogs in the Vineyard and Kevin Crawford.The Sundered Land by D. Vincent Baker. Night Witches, by Jason Morningstar.The Shadow of Yesterday, by Clinton Tsalitsana, by Stephan Michael Sechi.Dreisbach. Fate, by Rob Donoghue, Fred Hicks.The Burning Wheel and Mouse Guard, by Leonard Balslev, et al.Luke Crane, et al. Thief (series) and Dishonored (series), byDream Askew, Monsterhearts, and The Harvey Smith, et al.Quiet Year, by Avery Alder. Fallout: New Vegas, by Josh Sawyer JOHN THOU Art But a Warrior, by Anna Kreider. R. Gonzalez, Charles Staples, et al.Bliss Stage and Polaris, by Ben Lehman.contentsTHE BASICS 1 GATHERING INFORMATION..... 36 EXAMPLE OF PLAY..... 39The Game..... 1 PC VS. PC..... 41The Setting..... 42The Players..... 2 THE FACTION GAME..... 44The Characters..... 2

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201ENTANGLEMENTS.....	150 Devils.....	210DOWNTIME ACTIVITIES.....	153 Whisper.....					

dangerous bargains, bloody skirmishes, deceptions, betrayals, victories, and deaths. We place you find out if the fledgling crew can thrive amidst the teeming throngs of rival gangs, powerful noble families, vengeful ghosts, the Bluecoats of the CityWatch, and the siren song of the scoundrels' own vices. **THE SETTING** The game takes place in the cold, foggy city of Duskvol (aka Duskvol or "theDusk"). It's industrial in its development. Imagine a world like ours during the second industrial revolution of the 1870s—there are trains, steam-bots, printingpresses, simple electrical technology, carriages, and the black smog of chimneysmoke everywhere. Duskvol is something like a mashup of Venice, London, and Prague. It's crowded with row-houses, twisting streets, and criss-crossed with hundreds of little waterways and bridges. The city is also a fantasy. The world is in perpetual darkness and haunted by ghosts—a result of the cataclysm that shattered the sun and broke the Gatesof Death a thousand years ago. The cities of the empire are each encircled by brackening lightning towers to keep out the vengeful spirits and twisted horrors of the deathlands. To power these massive barriers, the titanic metal ships off leviathan hunters are sent out from Duskvol to extract electropulsic blood from massive demonic terrors upon the ink-dark Void sea. You're in a haunted Victorian-era city trapped inside a wall of lightning powerfully demon blood. 11. The point of all this is to create a pressure-cooker environment for our criminal 2 escapades. Traveling outside the lightning barrier is a very bad idea, so it's impractical to "leave town and wait for the heat to die down" after you pull off a score. Everything the players choose to do has consequences for their characters and shifts the balance of power around in the city—driving the action for a sandbox style of roleplaying game. For a full guide to Duskvol, see page 237. **THE BASICS** **THE PLAYERS** Each player creates a character and works with the other players to create the crew to which their characters belong. Each player strives to bring their character to life as an interesting, daring scoundrel who reaches boldly beyond their current safety and means. This is the players' core responsibility: they engage with the premise of the game, seeking out interesting opportunities for crime in the haunted city, taking big risks and sending their characters into danger. The GM is the referee, the referee who makes the rules, the referee who makes the world real. Players take the role of the crew, a ragtag group of poor individuals to a serious criminal organization with established turf. They do this by taking illegal jobs from clients, planning their own devious missions, making alliances, destroying their enemies, and trying to stay one step ahead of the law. There are several character types to choose from, each representing a different style of scoundrel: Cutters are intimidating fighters. Lurks are stealthy infiltrators. Hounds are deadly sharpshooters. Slides are manipulators and spies. Spiders are devious masterminds. Whispers are arcane adepts. Leeches are tinkers, alchemists, and saboteurs. Character types aren't unique. You can mix and match, or play a crew that is all of one type. It's up to you. For more, see Character Creation, page 51. **THE CREW** In addition to creating scoundrel characters, you'll also create the crew by choosing which type of criminal enterprise you're interested in exploring. The crew gets its own "character sheet," just like a player character. Assassins are killers for hire. Hawkers sell illegal products. A Cult serves a forgotten god. Smugglers transport contraband. Bravos are thugs and extortionists. Shadows are thieves and spies. The crew type isn't restrictive (you can pursue a variety of activities); it's there to help focus the game play. For more on crews, see page 91. **THE GAME MASTER OVERVIEW** The GM establishes the dynamic world around the characters, especially the corrupt and wicked rulers of the city and the violent and desperate criminal underworld. The GM plays all the non-player characters in the world by giving each one a concrete desire and preferred method of action. The GM helps organize the conversation of the game so it's pointed toward interesting elements of play. The GM isn't in charge of the story and doesn't have to plan events ahead of time. They present interesting opportunities to the players, then follow the chain of action and consequences wherever they lead. For more, see Running the Game, page 187. **PLAYING A SESSION** So, what's it like to play? A session of *Blades in the Dark* is like an episode of a TV show. There are one or two main events, plus maybe some side story elements which all fit into an ongoing series. A session of play can last anywhere from two to six hours, depending on the preferences of the group. During a session, the crew's scoundrels work together to choose a criminalscore to pursue, which is a job or mission that the crew can complete. The crew's scoundrels work together to choose a criminalscore to pursue, which is a job or mission that the crew can complete. The crew's scoundrels work together to choose a criminalscore to pursue, which is a job or mission that the crew can complete.

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On record, this game is in play, it's yours and yours alone. You're not beholden to anyone. The book is a distillation of best practices and useful elements. It's one leg of the tripod that forms the basis for successful play: The book, your group, and theonline community. Roleplaying is a social and performative art form, and as such, it benefits greatly from recorded videos of play and active online communities of discussion. If something about the game feels elusive to you, jump on YouTube and watch another group do it and maybe that will make it click. We all learn different ways. This text is most useful for people who learn by reading. Theonline communities are good for people who learn by discussion. And videos are good for more auditory or social learners. Visit bladesinthedark.com for links to the online community and videos of actual play. 5THE BASICS! the core system 6THE CONVERSATION A roleplaying game is a conversation between the GM and the players, punctuated by dice rolls to inject uncertainty and surprising turns. The GM presents the fictional situation in which the player characters find themselves. The players determine the actions of their characters in response to the situation. The GM and the players together judge how the game systems are engaged. The outcomes of the mechanics then change the situation, leading into a new phase of the conversation—new situations, new actions, new judgments, new rolls—creating an ongoing fiction and building “the story” of the game, organically, from a series of discrete moments. No one is in charge of the story. The story is what happens as a result of the situation presented by the GM, the actions the characters take, the outcomes of the mechanics, and the consequences that result. The story emerges from the unpredictable collision of all of these elements. You play to find out what the story will be. JUDGMENT CALLS Since roleplaying is a collaborative, expressive act, not a purely strategic endeavor, you'll need to make judgment calls. By making these choices, the game group together establishes a style, tone, and form of fiction unique to their instance of play. Blades in the Dark is designed to bring these judgment calls to the forefront and make them explicit tools of the game. When you play, you'll make several key judgment calls. Everyone contributes, but either the players or the GM gets final say for each: Which actions are reasonable as a solution to a problem? Can this person be swayed? Must we get out the tools and tinker with this old rusty lock, or could it also be quietly finessed? The players have final say. How dangerous and how effective is a given action in this circumstance? How risky is this? Can this person be swayed very little or a whole lot? The GM has final say. Which

consequences are inflicted to manifest the dangers in a given circumstance? Does this fall from the roof break your leg? Do the Bluecoats merely become suspicious or do they already have you trapped? The GM has final say. Does this situation call for a dice roll, and which one? Your scoundrel in position to make an action roll or must they first make a resistance roll to gain initiative? The GM has final say. Which events in the story match the experience triggers for character and crew advancement? Did you express your character's beliefs, drives, heritage, or background? You tell us. The players have final say. The particular choices you make will create your own unique form of Blades in the Dark. You'll say something about the world and the characters, about crime fiction, and even about the human condition. What will you say? There's only one way to find out. ROLLING THE DICE THE CORE SYSTEM 7/Blades in the Dark uses six-sided dice. You roll several at once and read the single highest result. If the highest die is a 6, it's a full success—things go well. If you roll more than one 6, it's a critical success—you gain some additional advantage. If the highest die is a 4 or 5, that's a partial success—you do what you were trying to do, but there are consequences: trouble, harm, reduced effect, etc. If the highest die is 1-3, it's a bad outcome. Things go poorly. You probably don't achieve your goal and you suffer complications, too. If you ever need to roll but you have zero (or negative) dice, roll two dice and take the single lowest result. You can't roll a critical when you have zero dice. All the dice systems in the game are expressions of this basic pattern. When you refrain learning the game, you can always "collapse" back down to a simple roll to judge how things go. Look up the exact rule later when you have time. The most common result is 4/5: partial success. This means that your character will tend to succeed, but at a cost—you'll rarely get away clean. Blades in the Dark is a game about underdog characters who are in over their heads. The dice mechanic reinforces this theme. You usually have a 50% chance of success. You can usually succeed, but you usually have to pay a price. You usually have a 50% chance of success. The most common traits you'll use are the action ratings of the player characters. A player might roll dice for their Skirmish action ratings when they fight an enemy, for example. There are four types of rolls that you'll use most often in the game: Action roll. When a PC attempts an action that's dangerous or troublesome, you make an action roll to find out how it goes. Action rolls and their effects and consequences drive most of the game. See page 18. Downtime roll. When the PCs are at their leisure after a job, they can perform downtime activities in relative safety. You make downtime rolls to see how much they get done. See page 153. Fortune roll. The GM can make a fortune roll to disclaim decision making and leave something up to chance. How loyal is an NPC? How much does the plague spread? How much evidence is burned before the Bluecoats kick in the door? See page 34. Resistance roll. A player can make a resistance roll when their character suffers a consequence they don't like. The roll tells us how much stress their character suffers to reduce the severity of a consequence. When you resist that "Broken Leg" harm, you take some stress and now it's only a "Sprained Ankle" instead. See page 32. THE BASICS 1 THE GAME STRUCTURE Blades in the Dark has a structure to play, with four parts (see the diagram at right). By default, the game is in

free play—characters talk to each other, they go places, they do things, they make rolls as needed. When the group is ready, they choose a target for their next criminal operation, then choose a type of plan to employ. This triggers the engagement roll (which establishes the situation as the operation starts) and then the game shifts into the score phase. See page 125 for more details. During the score, the PCs engage the target—they make rolls, overcome obstacles, call for flashbacks, and complete the operation (successfully or not). When the score is finished, the game shifts into the downtime phase. During the downtime phase, the GM engages the systems for payoff, heat, and entanglements, to determine all the fallout from the score. Then the PCs each get their downtime activities, such as indulging their vice to remove stress or working on a long-term project. See page 145 for details on downtime. When all the downtime activities are complete, the game returns to free play and the cycle starts over again. The phases are a conceptual model to help you organize the game. They're not meant to be rigid structures that restrict your options (this is why they're presented as amorphous blobs of ink without hard edges). Think of the phases as a menu of options to fit whatever it is you're trying to accomplish in play. Each phase suits a different goal. During free play, the game is very fluid—you can easily skip past several events in a quick montage; characters can disperse in time and space, doing various things as they please. When you shift into the score phase, everyone leans forward and knows that it's time to focus and get the job done. The camera zooms down into the action, obstacle to obstacle, as each challenge is faced. The players use flashbacks to elide time and establish previously unseen preparations. Then when the score is over and you shift to downtime, the pressure's off. The PCs are safe and can enjoy a brief respite from danger to recover and regroup before they jump back into the cycle of play again. 81 free play THE GAME STRUCTURE Character Scenes Actions & Consequences Gather Information Choose a Target Choose a Plan downtime Payoff, Heat, Entanglements Downtime Activities Return to Free Play Engagement Roll score Actions & Consequences Flashbacks 91 actions & attributes THE BASICS ACTION RATINGS Attune Command There are 12 actions in the

based on the type of person they Survey are. Maybe your character is good at Command because they Sway have a scary stillness to them, while another character barks Tinker orders and intimidates people with their military bearing. Wreck You choose which action to perform to overcome an obstacle, by describing what your character does. Actions that are poorly suited to the situation may be less effective and may put the character in more danger, but they can still be attempted. Usually, when you perform an action, you'll make an action roll to see how it turns out. ACTION ROLL You make an action roll when your character does something potentially dangerous or troublesome. The possible results of the action roll depend on your character's position. There are three positions: controlled, risky, and desperate. If you're in a controlled position, the possible consequences are less serious. If you're in a desperate position, the consequences can be severe. If you're somewhere in between, it's risky—usually considered the "default" position for most actions. For details on Action Rolls, see page 18. If there's no danger or trouble at hand, you don't make an action roll. You might make a fortune roll (page 34) or a downtime roll (page 153) or the GM will simply say yes—and you accomplish your goal. ATTRIBUTE RATINGS Insight Prowess There are three attributes in the game system that the player Resolve characters use to resist bad consequences: Insight, Prowess, and Resolve. Each attribute has a rating (from zero to 4) that tells you how many dice to roll when you use that attribute. The rating for each attribute is equal to the number of dots in the first column under that attribute (see the examples, at right). The more well-rounded your character is with a particular set of actions, the better their attribute rating. 101RESISTANCE ROLL ACTIONS & ATTRIBUTESEach attribute resists a different type of danger. If you get stabbed, for example, you resist physical harm with your Prowess rating. Resistance rolls always succeed—you diminish or deflect the bad result—

the better your roll, the less stress it costs to reduce or avoid the danger. When the enemies are a big advantage, you'll need to make a resistance roll before you can take your own action. For example, when you duel the master sword-fighter, she disarms you before you can strike. You need to make a resistance roll to keep hold of your blade if you want to attack her. Or perhaps you face a powerful ghost and attempt to Attune with it to control its actions. But before you can make your own roll, you must resist possession from the spirit. The GM judges the threat level of the enemies and uses these "preemptive" resistance rolls as needed to reflect the capabilities of especially dangerous foes. For details on Resistance Rolls, see page 32.

example action & attribute ratings This character has a Hunt action rating of 1. hunt Their Insight attribute rating is 1 (the first study column of dots). survey tinker They also have Prowl 1 and Skirmish 2. Their Prowess attribute rating is 2. prowess finesse power skirmish wreck resolve attitude command consort sway 11 stress & trauma STRESS & TRAUMASTRESS Player characters in Blades in the Dark have a special reserve of fortune and luck called stress. When they suffer a consequence that they don't want to accept, they can take stress instead. The result of the resistance roll (see page 32) determines how much stress it costs to avoid a bad outcome. During a knife fight, Daniel's character, Cross, gets stabbed in the chest. Daniel rolls his Prowess rating to resist, and gets a 2. It costs 6 stress, minus 2 (the result of the resistance roll) to resist the consequences. Daniel marks off 4 stress and describes how Cross survives. The GM rules that the harm is reduced by the resistance roll, but not avoided entirely. Cross suffers level 2 harm ("Chest Wound") instead of level 3 harm ("Punctured Lung"). PUSHING YOURSELF You can use stress to push yourself for greater performance. For each bonus you choose below, take 2 stress (each can be chosen once for a given action): Add +1d to your roll. (This may be used for an action roll or downtime roll or any other kind of roll where extra effort would help you.) Add +1 level to your effect. (See Effect, page 24.) Take action when you're incapacitated. (See Consequences, page 30.) The ability to push yourself for +1 means you effectively have at least 1d in every action as long as you have stress to burn. Even 1d gives you a 50/50 chance of success. This is the core "scoundrel's luck" in the game system. Even when you're in a bad spot, trying to do something for which you have no experience or training, you can dig deep and give yourself a chance. (A much better chance than rolling 2d and taking the lowest when you have zero dots.) It's important to remember this! Some

players tend to forget and dismiss actions which they have zero dots at. "Nah, I can't do that. I don't have Attune." I'd haveto roll 2d and take the worst. Ugh." As long as you have stress to burn, you cannot 1d and give any action a decent shot.TRAUMATAWEN A PC marks their last stress box, they suffer a level of trauma. When youtake trauma, circle one of your trauma conditions like Cold, Reckless, Unstable, etc. They're all described on the next page.When you suffer trauma, you're taken out of the current action. You're "left for dead" otherwise dropped out of the current conflict, only to come back later, shakenand drained. When you return, you have zero stress and your vice has been satisfied for the next downtime (see Vice on page 156). 13THE BASICS! Trauma conditions are permanent. Your character acquires the new personality quirk indicated by the condition, and can earn xp by using it to cause trouble. When you mark your fourth trauma condition, your character cannot continue as a daring scoundrel; you must retire them to a different life path. See the end of chapter 8, page 148, for more details on how to apply trauma. 14THE BASICS! Trauma conditions are permanent. Your character acquires the new personality quirk indicated by the condition, and can earn xp by using it to cause trouble. When you mark your fourth trauma condition, your character cannot continue as a daring scoundrel; you must retire them to a different life path. See the end of chapter 8, page 148, for more details on how to apply trauma. 15THE BASICS! Trauma conditions are permanent. Your character acquires the new personality quirk indicated by the condition, and can earn xp by using it to cause trouble. When you mark your fourth trauma condition, your character cannot continue as a daring scoundrel; you must retire them to a different life path. See the end of chapter 8, page 148, for more details on how to apply trauma.

Cold: Paranoia: you imagine danger everywhere, you can't trust others. Reckless: you have little regard for your safety or best interests. Soft: You lose your edge, you become tentative, passive, gentle. Unstable: Your emotional state is volatile. You can instantly rage, or fall into despair, act impulsively, or freeze. Victimized: You seek out opportunities to hurt people, even for no good reason. You can play your trauma conditions as much or as little as you like. They can totally transform your character's persona or have only a small impact—it's up to you. If you do play them strongly, though, allowing a trauma condition to complicate your character's life, you earn xp for it. (See Advancement, page 48.) STRESS & THE SUPERNATURAL A close encounter with a spirit or demon is a harrowing experience. By default, the standard effect is to either paralyze a person with fear or panic them into fleeing from its presence. A PC can choose to freeze up or flee or make a resistance roll with Resolve to ignore the effect. Characters

lots of exposure to spirits, such as Whispers, Rail Jacks, and occultists become less sensitive and only face fear or panic from exceptionally powerful entities. Being possessed by a spirit inflicts a level of trauma at the end of every week. Once the possessed body suffers its fourth level of trauma, it can no longer sustain its life. The possessing spirit must either bond with the corpse (becoming a vampire) or abandon it and seek out a new host. Mind-bending horrors (such as the physical manifestation of a forgotten god) may have additional effects on sight (in addition to causing viewers to freeze up or flee). You may choose to resist them, too, as normal. When you behold the glorious horror of the Cloud of Woe, you stand frozen in place as it envelops you, and you crave to drink deeply from its dark essence. 141progress clocks **PROGRESS CLOCKS**A progress clock is a circle divided into segments (see exemplar right). Draw a progress clock when you need to track ongoing effort against an obstacle or the approach of impending trouble. Sneaking into the Bluecoat Watch tower? Make a clock to track the alert level of the patrolling guards. When the PCs suffer consequences from partial successes or missed rolls, fill in segments on the clock until the alarm is raised. Generally, the more complex the problem, the more segments into progress clock.A complex obstacle is a 4-segment clock. A more complicated obstacle is a 6-clock. A daunting obstacle is an 8-segment clock.The effect level of an action or circumstance is used to tick segments on a clock(see Effect Levels, page 24). It's the GM's job to tick a clock so it reflects thefictional situation. If the PCs are making a lot of progress, the clock should be ticked a lot. This comes with practice, by properly judging effort levels. But you should always feel free to adjust a clock in play to better reflect the situation.You can't usually fill a clock with the effect of a single action. That is by design.If a situation is simple enough for one action, don't make a clock, just judge the outcome based on the effect level of the action.When you create a clock, make it about the obstacle, not the method. The clocks for an infiltration should be "Interior Patrols" and "The Tower," not "Sneak Past the Guards" or "Climb the Tower." The patrols and the tower are the obstacles—the PCs can attempt to overcome them in a variety of ways.Complex enemy threats can be broken into several "layers," each with its own progress clock. For example, the Lamplawks' HQ might have a "Perimeter Security" clock, an "Interior Guards" clock, and a "Bazzo's Office Security" clock.The crew would have to make their way through all three layers to reach Bazzo's personal safe and the whiskey collection within.Remember that a clock tracks progress. It

otherwise, resolve the result of an action with a single roll. Examples of progress clocks follow. This is not an exhaustive list. Use them as you see fit! 15THE BASICS1 danger clocks The GM can use a clock to represent a progressive danger, like suspicion growing during a seduction, the proximity of pursuers in a chase, or the alert level of guards on patrol. In this case, when a complication occurs, the GM ticks one, two, or three segments on the clock, depending on the consequence level. When the clock is full, the danger comes to fruition—the guards hunt down the intruders, activate an alarm, release the hounds, etc. (See Consequences, page 30.) racing clocks Create two opposed clocks to represent a race. The PCs might have a progress clock called “Escape” while the Bluecoats have a clock called “Cornered.” If the PCs finish their clock before the Bluecoats fill theirs, they get away. Otherwise, they’re cornered and can’t flee. If both complete at the same time, the PCs escape to their lair, but the hunting Bluecoats are outside! You can also use racing clocks for an environmental hazard. Maybe the PCs are trying to complete the “Search” clock to find the lockbox on the sinking ship before the GM fills the “Sunk” clock and the vessel goes down. linked clocks You can make a clock that unlocks another clock once it’s filled. For example, the GM might make a linked clock called “Trapped” after an “Alert” clock fills up. When you fight a veteran warrior, she might have a clock for her “Defense” and then a linked clock for “Vulnerable.” Once you overcome the “Defense” clock, then you can attempt to overcome the “Vulnerable” clock and defeat her. You might affect the “Defense” clock with violence in a knife-fight, or you lower her defense with deception if you have the opportunity. As always, the method of action is up to the players and the details of the fiction at hand. mission clocks The GM can make a clock for a time-sensitive mission, to represent the window of opportunity you have to complete it. If the countdown runs out, the mission is scrubbed or changes—

the target escapes, the household wakes up for the day, etc. tug-of-war clocks You can make clock that can be filled and emptied by events, to represent a back-and-forth situation You might make a "Revolution!" clock that indicates when the refugee Skovlanders start to riot over poor treatment in Døskov. Some events will tick the clock up and some will tick it down. Once it fills, the revolution begins. A tug-of-war clock is also perfect for an ongoing turf war between two crews or factions. long-term project Some projects will take a long time. A basic long-term project (like tinkering up a device) is eight segments. Truly long-term projects (like creating a new designer drug) can be two, three, or even four clocks, representing all the phases of development, testing, and final completion. Add or subtract clocks depending on the details of the situation and complexity of the project. 16A long-term project is a good catch-all for dealing with any unusual player goal, 1PROGRESS CLOCKSincluding things that circumvent or change elements of the mechanics or the setting. 17For example, by default in the game, trauma is permanent. But maybe a playerwants to work on a project where they create a device to draw traumatic spirit-energies into the ghost field, thus reducing a character's trauma and unleashing a storm of enraged ghosts in the area. It will be a long and dangerous process to setup everything needed to begin work on a project like this, but almost anythingcan be attempted as long as the group is interested and it seems feasible to everyone.faction clocksEach faction has a long-term goal (see the faction write-ups, starting on page283). When the PCs have downtime (page 145), the GM ticks forward thefaction clocks that they're interested in. In this way, the world around the PCsis dynamic and things happen that they're not directly connected to, changingthe overall situation in the city and creating new opportunities and challenges.The PCs may also directly affect NPC faction clocks, based on the missionsand scores they pull off. Discuss known faction projects that they might aid orinterfere with, and also consider how a PC operation might affect the NPC clocks,whether the players intended it or not.PROGRESS CLOCKS IN PLAYInfiltrating Strangford HouseThe soundrels are sneaking into Lord Strangford's house to steal hispersonal log book (in which he keeps the secret

snipers and hunting methods for his levathan hunter ship—worth a small fortune (note right, be er). The GM makes a progress clock for the alert level alert0 Strangford's personal staff and bodyguards. She makes a 4-clock because's a single house, not a sprawling estate—only a few suspicious events will rouse the whole place. During the operation, Silver rolls to Prowl through their forest and rolls a 4/5. She gets past, but the complication is a tick on the "Alert" clock. The GM ticks it once to represent the threat level of the kitchenstaff downstairs—they're not trained security, so limited effect is called for. Later, when Cross rolls a 1-3 on a desperate action to sneak into Strangford's private suite, the GM fills three segments—the Lord's bodyguards are Tier IV professionals and are experts at spotting trouble. This fills the clock! When Cross sees the alarm, he's set upon by the first pair of bodyguards, while the other two attempt to hustle Strangford (and his precious book!) out the back way. Assaulting the Red Sashes! The soundrels attack the lair of the Red Sashes, in final showdown to see which group will survive to control the drug market in Crow's Foot. The GM makes a clock for the forces of each gang. As the PCs red pckate actions and suffer consequences, the GM ticks the sashes' crowsclocks to show the waning strength and morale of each side. When one side's clock is filled, they've reached a breaking point—they will flee, surrender, or fall into a suicidal rage! THE BASICS! action roll. When a player character does something challenging, we make an action roll to see how it turns out. An action is challenging if there's an obstacle to the PC's goal that's dangerous or troublesome in some way. We don't make an action roll unless the PC is put to the test. If their action is something that we'd expect them to simply accomplish, then we don't make an action roll. Each game group will have their own ideas about what "challenging" means. This is good! It's something that establishes the tone and style of your Blades series. To make an action roll, we go through six steps. In play, they flow together somewhat, but let's break each one down here for clarity. 1. The player states their goal for the action. 2. The player chooses the action rating. 3. The GM sets the position for the roll. 4. The GM sets the effect level for the action. 5. Add bonus dice. 6. The player rolls the dice and we judge the result. 1. the player states their goal Your goal is the concrete outcome your character will achieve when they overcome the obstacle at hand. Maybe your goal is "I want to get into the manor house" or it might be "I want to see who comes and goes at the house." In both cases, the obstacle is "the house guard patrol." The guards are the challenging obstacle that may be dangerous

troublemaker for the PC. Usually the character's goal is pretty obvious in context, but it's the GM's job to ask and clarify the goal when necessary. "You're punching him in the face, right? Okay... what do you want to get out of this? Do you want to take him out, or just rough him up so he'll do what you want?" 2. the player chooses the action rating. The player chooses which action rating to roll, following from what their character is doing on-screen. If the goal is to roll your Skirmish action, then get in a fight. If you want to roll your Command action, then order someone around. You can't roll given action rating unless your character is presently performing that action in the fiction. There's definitely some gray area here, where actions overlap and goals can be attempted with a variety of approaches. This is by design. If your goal is to hurt someone with violence, you might Skirmish or Hunt or Prowl or Wreck, depending on the situation at hand. If your goal is to dismay and frighten an enemy, you might Command or Sway or Wreck. It's the player's choice. See page 166 for more about choosing an action rating. 181 ACTION ROLL3. the gm sets the positionOnce the player chooses their action, the GM sets the position for the roll. The position represents how dangerous or troublesome the action might be. There are three positions: controlled, risky, and desperate. To choose a position, the GM looks at the profiles for the positions below and picks one that most closely matches the situation at hand. positions controlled You have a golden opportunity. You're exploiting a dominant advantage. You're set up for success. risky You go head to head. You're acting under duress. You're taking a chance. desperate You're in serious trouble. You're overreaching your capabilities. You're attempting a dangerous maneuver. By default, an action roll is risky. You wouldn't be rolling if there was no risk involved. If the situation seems more dangerous, make it desperate. If it seems less dangerous, make it controlled. 19THE BASIC15 Choosing the position is an important judgment call and stylistic choice for your 20 game. More controlled action rolls mean generally safer and more dominant soundrels. More desperate action rolls give the game a gritty, underdog kind of feel. There's no ironclad rule about how to choose positions. It's meant to be an expressive element of the game. Make the choice that feels right to you and the rest of the

group. If you're ever unsure about which position to pick, ask the other players. As a player, if you're angling for a particular position, ask the GM what you might do to get it, or ask them to clarify the situation to explain their choice. "It's risky?" I was thinking it'd be controlled. I know this barkeep is supposed to be a tough old buzzard, but he's not a real threat to me, is he?" "No, I think the danger is in the situation instead. You're out in the common room in front of everyone, ordering the barkeep to hand over the protection money that he's supposed to pay the Grinders. Who knows if someone in the room might decide to step up and play hero, or to get on the Grinders' good side? It's an uncertain environment. Maybe if you confront the guy alone, that's more of a controlled position for you. Or maybe if you bring the gang with you and make a show of force in front of everyone." As GM, you have final say over the position for the roll, but explain and clarify things as needed, especially when you're starting out. By discussing the position (and how it might be better or worse) you'll help everyone build a better view of the fictional situation in their minds' eye and get on the same page about the tone of the game. You'll also set precedents that the players can build on to make better decisions in the future. "Ah, so we got a controlled Consort roll when we wined and dined them and showed them how friendly we are. Noted." 4. the gm sets the effect level The GM assesses the likely effect level of this action, given the factors of the situation. Essentially, the effect level tells us "how much" this action can accomplish: will it have limited, standard, or great effect? Effect level is explained in detail in the next section, starting on page 24. The GM's choices for effect level and position can be strongly influenced by the player's choice of action rating. If a player wants to try to make a new friend by Wrecking something—well... maybe that's possible, but the GM wouldn't be crazy to say it's a desperate roll and probably limited effect. Seems like Consorting would be a lot better for that. The players are always free to choose the action they perform, but that doesn't mean all actions should be equally risky or potent. 5. add bonus dice You can normally get two bonus dice for your action roll (some special abilities might give you additional bonus dice). For one bonus die, you can get assistance from a teammate. They take 1 stress, say how they help you, and give you +1d. See Teamwork, page 134. For another bonus die, you can either push yourself (take 2 stress) or you can accept a Devil's Bargain (you can't get dice for both, it's one or the other). The Devil's Bargain THE DEVIL'S BARGAINPCs in Blades are reckless scoundrels addicted to destructive vices—they

don't always act in their own best interests. To reflect this, the GM or any other player can offer you a bonus die if you accept a Devil's Bargain. Common Devil's Bargains include: Collateral damage, unintended harm. Sacrifice coin or an item. Betray a friend or loved one. Offend or anger a faction. Start and/or tick a troublesome clock. Add heat to the crew from evidence or witnesses. Suffer harm. The Devil's Bargain occurs regardless of the outcome of the roll. You make the deal, pay the price, and get the bonus die. There might not be an interesting Devil's Bargain in every situation. If one doesn't occur to anyone right away, that's fine. I know your Devil's Bargain is savage—if we leave them alone here with the hostages, who knows what they'll do. I'm gonna get all up in their faces and Command them to keep their slaggin' hands off." "Oooh, I have a Devil's Bargain. You can take +1d but you go too far with your intimidation and threats this time. I'm gonna start a new 4-clock called... The Gang Fights Back and tick it three times. Mess with them this hard again, and you're gonna have a gang of savages on your ass." "Nice. I like it! Maybe I'll try to un-tick some of that clock in downtime..." Some players like to get a little fancy or creative with Devil's Bargains, using them to re-write a bit of the situation, create something new in the flow of the narrative, or shine a spotlight on a character's weaknesses. "Someone here is a member of your old platoon—the one you left for dead." "One of the cultists became obsessed with you." Your character doesn't realize it, but one of the boats moored at the dock you're burning turns out to be your poor old uncle's self-fishing boat." "Spending this much time during a meeting at a drug den... seems like you would have to overindulge yourself here, yeah?" Don't push these bargains too hard if the player doesn't like this kind of narrative/selfish-of-hand. It's fun for some and annoying for others. The Devil's Bargain is always a free choice. If you don't like one, just reject it (suggest how to alter it so you might consider taking it). You can always just poushyourself for that bonus die instead. If it's ever needed, the GM has final say over which Devil's Bargains are valid. 21THE BASICS1.6. roll the die and judge the result 22 Once the goal, action rating, position, and effect have been established, add any bonus dice and roll the dice pool to determine the outcome. (See the sets of possible outcomes,

your position, on the next page. The action roll does a lot of work for you. It tells you how well the character performs as well as how serious the consequences are for them. They might succeed at their action without any consequences (an even), or they might succeed but suffer consequences (on a 4/5), or it might just all go wrong (on a 1-3). On a 1-3, it's up to the GM to decide if the PC's action has any effect or not, or if it even happens at all. Usually, the action just fails completely, but in some circumstances, it might make sense or be more interesting for the action to have some effect even on a 1-3 result. Oskarr Attunes to the demonic entity he found in the secret hold of the Leviathan hunter ship. The roll is a 1-3. The GM could say that Oskarr fails to Attune to the demonic power, and the backlash from the desperate failure manifests as psychic harm, level 3. But it would be much more interesting if the attunement happened, and Oskarr was confronted with this horrific entity, mind-to-mind, right? Oskarr touches the horrible will of that ancient creature, and the twisting madness within it overwhelms him. He suffers level 3 psychic harm, sure, but also gets a new 6-clock: "Get Rid of These Nightmaric Demonic Visions." Each 4/5 and 1-3 outcome lists suggested consequences for the character. The worse your position, the worse the consequences are. The GM can inflict one or more of these consequences, depending on the circumstances of the action roll. Consequences are explained in detail on page 30. PCs have the ability to avoid or reduce the severity of consequences that they suffer by resisting them. See page 32 for details about resistance. When you narrate the action after the roll, the GM and player collaborate together to say what happens on-screen. Tell us how you vault across to the other rooftop. Tell us what you say to the Inspector to convince her. The GM will tell us how she reacts. When you face the Red Sash duelist, what's your fighting style like? Etc. ACTION ROLL SUMMARY A player or GM calls for a roll. Make an action roll when the character performs a dangerous or troublesome action. The player chooses the action rating to roll. Choose the action that matches what the character is doing in the fiction. The GM establishes the position and level of the action. The choice of position and effect is influenced strongly by the player's choice of action. Add up to two bonus dice. 1) Assistance from

eammate. 2) Push yourself (take 2 stress) or accept a Devil's Bargain. Roll the dice pool and judge the outcome. The players and GM narrate the action together. The GM has final say over what happens and inflicts consequences as called for by the position and the result of the roll. ACTION ROLL 1 23 1d for each Action controlled rating dot. You act on your terms. You exploit a dominant advantage + 1d if you have Assistance. Critical: You do it with increased effect. 6: You do it + 1d if you Push 4/5: You hesitate. Withdraw and try a different ACTION Roll yourself - or approach, or else do it with a minor consequence: a accept a Devil's minor complication occurs, you have reduced effect, Bargain, you suffer lesser harm, you end up in a risky position. 1-3: You falter. Press on by seizing a risky opportunity, or withdraw and try a different approach. risky You go head to head. You act under fire. You take a chance. Critical: You do it with increased effect. 6: You do it. 4/5: You do it, but there's a consequence: you suffer harm, a complication occurs, you have reduced effect, you end up in a desperate position. 1-3: Things go badly. You suffer harm, a complication occurs, you end up in a desperate position, you lose this opportunity. desperate You overreach your capabilities. You're in serious trouble. Critical: You do it with increased effect. 6: You do it. 4/5: You do it, but there's a consequence: you suffer severe harm, a serious complication occurs, you have reduced effect. 1-3: It's the worst outcome. You suffer severe harm, a serious complication occurs, you lose this opportunity for action. DOUBLE-DUTY ROLL Since NPCs don't roll for their actions, an action roll does double-duty: it resolves the action of the PC as well as any NPCs that are involved. The single roll tells us how those actions interact and which consequences result. On a 6, the PC wins and has their effect. On a 4/5, it's a mix—both the PC and the NPC have their effect. On a 1-3, the PC wins and has their effect as a consequence on the PC. 1 effect THE BASICS In Blades in the Dark, you achieve goals by taking actions and facing consequences. But how many actions does it take to achieve a particular goal? That depends on the effect level of your actions. The GM judges the effect level using the profiles below. Which one best matches the action at hand—great, standard, or limited? Each effect level indicates the questions that should be answered for that effect, as well as how many segments to tick if you're using a progress clock. effect levels ticks great You achieve more than usual. How does the extra effort 3 manifest? What additional benefit do you enjoy? standard You achieve what we'd expect as "normal" with this action. Is that enough, or is there more left to do? limited You

achieve a partial or weak effect. How is your impact 1 diminished? What effect remains to achieve your goal? **ASSESSING FACTORS** To assess effect level, first start with your gut feeling, given this situation. Then, if needed, assess three factors that may modify the effect level: potency, scale, and quality. If the PC has an advantage in a given factor, consider a higher effect level. If they have a disadvantage, consider a reduced effect level. potency The potency factor considers particular weaknesses, taking extra time or a bigger risk, or the influence of arcane powers. The electrical discharge of a lightning hook is potent against a ghost. The supernatural powers of a ghost are potent against a human. An infiltrator is more potent if all the lights are extinguished and they move about in the dark. quality / tier Quality represents the effectiveness of tools, weapons, or other resources, usually summarized by Tier. Fine items count as +1 bonus in quality, stacking with Tier. Arlyn is picking the lock to a safehouse run by the Circle of Flame. Her crew is Tier I and she has fine lockpicks—so she's effectively Tier II. The Circle are Tier III. Arlyn is outclassed in quality, so her effect will be limited on the lock. scale Scale represents the number of opponents, size of an area covered, scope of influence, etc. Larger scale can be an advantage or disadvantage depending on the situation. In battle, more people are better. When infiltrating, more people are a hindrance. 241When considering factors, effect level might be reduced below limited, resulting in EFFECTin zero effect—or increased beyond great, resulting in an extreme effect. If a PC special ability gives "+1 effect," it comes into play after the GM has assessed the effect level. For example, if you ended up with zero effect, the +1 effect bonusfrom your Cutter's Bodyguard ability would bump them up to limited effect.Also, remember that a PC can push themselves (take 2 stress) to get +1 effecton their action. See page 13.For a master table of factor examples, see Magnitude on page 220. Every factorwon't always apply to every

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