

Wasteland Starter Set

Content used

- **The d18 Ruleset** — two dice summed, with the Gradient built in
- **Basic Combat** — the optional combat module, for its structure rather than its gear cards

THERE IS AN ADVENTURE FOR THIS SET

Enough for One is a written adventure built on the set below. Ninety miles of shallow valley with an old road down the middle, a sealed course of antibiotics, and a child at the far end who has about three weeks. The road is a deck: eighteen Legs, and a Journey deals six to eight of them. It comes in three versions, the same road under three degrees of pressure, because there are no Levels here to pitch a difficulty against. Almost every Leg has a fast way through that costs somebody else and a slow way that costs the crew, and both of them work. The harder the haul gets, the worse the answer gets to who ends up paying for it.

Read the adventure [The five pregens](#)

This is an example, not a product.

It is a post-collapse journey game built on the d18 Ruleset, written to show what that Ruleset produces when a designer stops hedging and commits to it. It is playable, and a table can run it. It is not exhaustive, not exhaustively balanced, and not pushed to its extremes. There are gaps a finished game would close, and places where a table will have to rule something on the spot.

What it is good for is showing the one thing the d18 does that neither of the other Rulesets can. It rolls two dice and sums them, and the smaller of the two is read twice: once into the total, and again as the Gradient. That makes it the only Resolution die in the engine that moves how often you succeed and how the result lands, together, in one throw. This set puts that die on a ladder and lets a character's state slide up and down it. Fed, rested, and carrying what you need, you roll a **1d8** or a **1d10** beside the **1d12**, and most of what happens to you is ordinary. Thirsty, injured, and three days from anywhere, you are down to a **1d4**, then to a coin, and nothing ordinary happens to you at all.

It is the attritional one. Combat exists and it is expensive: you can win almost any fight you are equipped for, and the equipment is the same thing that was going to get you to the next town. The question a session asks is not whether you can beat what is in front of you. It is whether you arrive with anything left.

There are no Levels here, so there is no Level range to quote. It is paced for about five Journeys, which is long enough to work through a Role and see a crew wear down and pull itself back together a few times.

Liberties have been taken. Three of them are departures from the base rules rather than choices within them, and each is listed below with the reason. Everything else is the d18 as written.

Read it as a demonstration. Take it apart, disagree with it, and build the version you would rather play.

LOOKING FOR A DIFFERENT STARTER SET?

Each Starter Set demonstrates a different Ruleset. This one is the d18.

Sci-Fi — "the d100" Fantasy — "the d20"

The three sets are not three settings sharing a rulebook. Each one takes the Ruleset it is built on and leans into the thing that Ruleset is good at, so they play differently before a single word of setting is read.

	Ruleset	Leans on	Plays like
Fantasy	d20	A flat die and a Gradient rolled apart from it	Wide swing. Any roll can turn a scene
Sci-Fi	d100	Targets written as true percentages	Exact and tactical. You can see the odds before you commit
Wasteland — this set	d18	A Resolution die that changes size with your condition	Attritional. Most of the game is not a fight

What This Set Changes

Where this set departs from the base d18. Three rules behave differently here than the Ruleset says they behave. Everything not listed is the base rules unaltered.

#	Change	Base rule	Why
1	The smaller Resolution die scales from d2 to d10 with a character's condition. The 1d12 never changes	1d12 + 1d6 , fixed	The d18 is the only Ruleset whose second die is summed into the verdict. On the d20 the Gradient is rolled apart from it; on the d100 the units die is a fixed digit of a pair. Only here does resizing that die move success and degree at once
2	There are no Levels. Advancement is Marks, plus what completing a Journey grants	Marks for individual growth, Levels for the shared beat	Nothing in this game gets easier. Levels exist to let a character outgrow their problems, and outgrowing your problems is the one thing this setting will not allow

#	Change	Base rule	Why
3	⚡ Demand and ⚡ Capacity are not used. ⚡ Energy has one use: refusing a step down	Gear and abilities carry a Demand measured against a Capacity	Carrying is limited by Slots and gear is paid for by trade, so the exertion layer had nothing left to do. Cutting it puts one number on an item card instead of three

Applying a rule somewhere new is not changing it. Naming the identity pieces, reading the Gradient on the furthest faces, renaming a Skill category, deciding what ⚡ Energy is spent on, charging a step to leave a fight, and the Skill and gear lists are all things the base Ruleset either leaves open or already permits. None of them are departures, and none belong in the table above.

Frontiers Wasteland

Everything from here is the game itself. It assumes no other document: every rule it uses is written out below, in full, in the order you need it.

What You'll Find

Part	Covers
1 — The Rules	Resolution, the two dice, the three States, Attributes, the four pools, Skills, abilities, combat, and gear. The whole engine
2 — Building a Character	The three pillars, the Attribute spread, and a ten-step walkthrough
3 — Bearings, Trades & Roles	Eight Bearings, twelve Trades, five Roles, and how to write a Pursuit
4 — The Road	Journeys and Legs, passing them, Travel Pace, and a worked example
5 — Stores, Gear & Weapons	What you eat, sixty items across six groups, and what you fight with
6 — Advancement	Marks, arriving, and raising a floor against raising a ceiling
7 — Running the Game	Running Legs and settlements, setting difficulty, handing out circumstance, and the adversaries on the road

How Much Is Here

Enough for about **five Journeys**, which at a Journey a session is five or six sessions.

That is long enough to see every rule in the set come up, to work through all six of a Role's abilities, and to watch a crew wear down and pull itself back together a few times. It is not a limit. Add

content and it runs longer, cut some and it runs shorter, and a table that likes long Journeys will spend more sessions on the same five.

What a Character Looks Like

Four Attributes, read the way the d18 always reads them. A **Bearing**, which is what the world made of you before play started, and which sets how far you can fall and how well you can ever operate. A **Trade**, which is what you did before this and who will still deal with you. A **Pursuit**, written rather than chosen, because in this set what a character wants is the reason the crew takes the longer road. And a **Role**, which is what you do out there.

Then three **States**, one for Body, Mind and Spirit, which say what condition you are in right now and which die you pick up because of it.

After that, what you are carrying. Stores are how far the crew can go, which makes the pack a statement of the character's range rather than bookkeeping.

1 — The Rules

The Resolution System

The Resolution System answers any question the fiction cannot settle on its own. When the outcome is uncertain and the result matters, you resolve it here. When it is not uncertain, or the result does not matter, nobody rolls anything.

The Two Dice

A resolution is made with two dice, rolled together and **summed**.

Die	What it is	Its job
Resolution Die	Always a 1d12	Carries the sum
Gradient Die	A 1d2 to a 1d10	Adds to the sum, and is read again on its own

So every roll in this game is **1d12 + the Gradient Die**, plus the relevant Attribute Rank, against a target.

The Gradient Die is the only die in the engine that answers two questions from one throw. Its face feeds the total, which decides whether the thing worked. Then that same face is read a second time, on its own, to say **how** it worked.

The Gradient Die is a 1d6 for a character in ordinary condition. It is bigger when they are in good order and smaller when the road has been at them, and which one they pick up is set by their **State**, see The Three States. For everything in this section, assume a 1d6.

You probably do not own a 1d2

They exist, and they are uncommon. If one is not on the table, flip a coin, or roll any die you like and read odd as 1 and even as 2.

The Gradient

Once the sum has settled whether the action worked, the Gradient Die is read a second time. **Its lowest face is Negative. Its highest face is Positive. Everything between is Standard.**

On a 1d6	Reads as
1	Negative
2, 3, 4, 5	Standard
6	Positive

That reading holds on every size of Gradient Die without a second table, and what changes with the die is how often it speaks up.

- **Standard** results land as the success or failure implies.
- **Positive** and **Negative** tilt the outcome that way: an edge or a flourish, a cost or a wrinkle.

The Gradient never reverses the verdict. A Positive on a failure does not make it a success, only a failure that produced something. A Negative on a success does not make it a failure, only a success that cost.

Because the same die fed the sum, the two correlate on purpose. A high roll tends to succeed **and** read Positive. When they disagree, the Resolution Die carried the sum the other way, and those splits are where the interesting outcomes live.

A **failure that reads Positive** is the result this game leans on hardest, where you do not get what you came for but the road hands you something anyway.

These are rarer than the Gradient's raw rate suggests, because both conditions have to land at once. At ordinary difficulty they are about **one roll in fourteen**, or roughly **one failure in nine**. They get more common as the target gets harder, because there are more failures for the Positive to land on, at DT 16 it is closer to one roll in eight.

Targets

A **Difficulty Threshold** is the number to meet or beat. Meet it or exceed it and the action works; fall short and it does not. The GM sets it, and does not have to announce it.

DT	What it is	1d6 Gradient Die, Rank +0
4	Trivial for anyone who knows the work	96%
8	Ordinary difficulty	71%
12	Hard, or done under pressure	38%
16	Genuinely risky even for a specialist	8%

DT	What it is	1d6 Gradient Die, Rank +0
20	Not happening without leverage	0%

Two dice summed make a curve rather than a flat spread, so the ladder is forgiving in the middle and brutal at the top. **DT 20 cannot be reached on a bare roll at any size of Gradient Die.** It takes a Rank, or a Skill, or something a character brought with them.

Contests

When two parties are directly opposed and both are acting, **both roll**. Higher result wins. Only the winner's Gradient is read.

Ties go to whoever is not trying to change the situation. If neither is, the GM decides.

Favor and Disfavor

Circumstance is expressed as **Favor** and **Disfavor** rather than as numbers. Good footing, a helpful hand, poor light, a bad angle: all Favor or Disfavor. Numeric modifiers exist only where a rule defines one.

- **Favor:** roll one extra die of that kind and keep the **higher**.
- **Disfavor:** roll one extra and keep the **lower**.

Each side stacks to **3**. Cap each at 3 first, then cancel one against one, so the two never apply together.

Favor and Disfavor are placed on a specific die, and placed before that die is rolled. The player chooses where their Favor goes; whatever is causing Disfavor names its die, and if nothing names one it lands on the Resolution Die. You may roll the two dice in either order, and neither can be added to a die already on the table.

Where you put Favor is a real decision:

Favor on	What it does
The Resolution Die	The larger shift in your odds. It improves them and nothing else
The Gradient Die	Improves your odds and the Gradient together, by less of each

At DT 12 and Rank +0, a Steady character rolling $1d12 + 1d6$ succeeds ~38% of the time. Favor on the Resolution Die raises that to ~59%: a value equivalent of about **+2.5**. Favor on the Gradient Die raises it to ~46%: a value equivalent of about **+1**, and it buys a better Gradient as well. The Gradient Die's share is worth more on a larger die and much less on a smaller one, so the choice narrows as a character wears down. See Where a State Sits.

Taking Your Score

A character may decline to roll and **take their Score**: the Attribute's standing value, compared straight to the Threshold. Anything at or below it simply works.

A taken Score is always **Standard**, so the certainty costs you any chance of landing well.

If **Disfavor** applies, the check must be rolled. Circumstance against you always goes to the dice.

Rolling is a blind gamble whenever a DT has not been announced, which leaves taking your Score as the only route to certainty.

A Resolution, Worked

A crew is three days out and one of them is going up a service tower to see what is on the far side of the ridge.

1. **Intent.** "I climb it and get a look north."
2. **Attribute.** Climbing is ♦ Vigor. Hers is 13, a Rank of **+3**.
3. **State.** They have been rationing water since the second Leg, and her Body is **Frayed** — so her Gradient Die is a 1d4 rather than the usual 1d6. Which die a character picks up is set by their condition; see The Three States.
4. **Target.** Rusted, wet, and in a hurry: **DT 12**.
5. **Skill.** She has Athletics, a Body Skill, which grants Favor. She puts it on the **Resolution Die**, because at Frayed the Gradient Die is barely worth improving.
6. **Roll.** Two d12 for the Favor: 5 and 9, keeping **9**. The 1d4 shows **1**. Sum **10**, plus Rank **+3**, for **13**. Against DT 12 the climb **works**.
7. **Gradient.** The 1d4 shows 1, its lowest face: **Negative**. She gets up and gets the look, and the ladder section she came up on goes with her when she puts her weight on it wrong. Coming down is now a different problem.

With an ordinary 1d6 that same climb was an 84% proposition, given her Rank and her Favor. On the 1d4 it was 78%, and the chance of the Gradient Die reading Negative rose from one in six to one in four. Nothing about her changed. She has been drinking less water than she should.

A Scene, End to End

A crew of three has stopped at a pumping station a half day off the road, because the map says there is water under it. The GM has decided the building is standing, the pump is not obviously wrecked, and somebody left in a hurry.

Sera has ☉ Acuity 13, a Rank of **+3**, with Mechanics. Her Mind is **Steady**, so her Gradient Die is a 1d6. **Halloway** has ♦ Vigor 13, a Rank of **+3**, with Salvage. His Body is **Frayed** after four days of short rations, so his Gradient Die is a 1d4. **Tam** has △ Resolve 12, a Rank of **+2**, with Insight. Her Spirit is **Sound**, so her Gradient Die is a 1d8.

Remember that **the Attribute names the track**, so which die a character picks up is already decided by the time anyone asks for a roll.

"Is the building safe to go into?"

It is a concrete shed with a hole in one corner. Anyone can see that much. **No roll**. The GM says the roof is sound and the corner is not.

"I want the pump running."

Sera has the training and nothing is chasing them, so the GM calls **DT 8**, ordinary difficulty. Mechanics applies: **Favor**, and she puts it on the **Resolution Die**, which at Steady is the better of the two places for it.

Two **d12** : 4 and 9, keeping **9**. Her **1d6** shows **3**. Sum **12**, plus Rank **+3**, for **15**, over 8. **Success**. The **1d6** reads 3, a middle face: **Standard**. The pump turns over and water comes up, and it is water.

"Can I get it running properly, not just running?"

Same pump, same character, but she is now asking it to hold for a crew rather than for a minute. That is **DT 12**. Same Skill, same Favor, same die.

Two **d12** : 2 and 6, keeping **6**. The **1d6** shows **1**. Sum **7**, plus **+3**, for **10**, under 12. **Failure**, and the **1d6** reads its lowest face: **Negative**. It runs for as long as she is standing over it and stops when she is not, and she has used most of the daylight finding that out.

"I strip the shed for anything worth carrying."

Halloway looks for what a hurried crew left. ♦ Vigor with Salvage, and the GM calls **DT 8**. At Frayed his **1d4** is barely worth improving, so his Favor goes on the **Resolution Die**.

Two **d12** : 11 and 5, keeping **11**. The **1d4** shows **2**. Sum **13**, plus **+3**, for **16**. **Success**, and the **1d4** shows 2, not its lowest face, so **Standard**. Two sealed cans of fuel and a length of belt that will fit the cart.

"Somebody is watching us from the ridge."

Someone is, and has been for a while. Tam wants to know whether they are deciding to come down. This is nerve and reading rather than knowledge, so △ **Resolve**, **DT 12**, with Insight: **Favor**. Favor on the Resolution Die would move her odds further, and on a **1d8** the Gradient Die moves them less, but it buys a better Gradient as well as better odds. She wants to know how clearly she reads them, so she takes the smaller edge and puts the Favor **there**, rolling two **d8** and keeping the higher.

The **1d12** shows **6**. Two **d8** : 3 and 8, keeping **8**. Sum **14**, plus **+2**, for **16**, over 12. **Success**, and the **1d8** shows 8, its highest face: **Positive**. They are not deciding whether to come down. They are waiting for the crew to leave so they can have the pump, and Tam can tell they are as thirsty as she is.

What the example is showing

Four rolls across three characters, all on the same afternoon, with three different Gradient Dice on the table because the three of them are worn down in different ways. The difficulty moved from 8 to 12 on the same pump because the question changed. Halloway and Tam faced the same choice about where to put their Favor and answered it in opposite directions: he put it on the Resolution Die because at Frayed his Gradient Die is barely worth improving, and she gave up part of that to buy a better reading off a die still large enough to give her one.

Flow of Play

Play runs in three modes. This set uses them in an unusual order of importance, and it is worth saying so directly rather than letting a reader work it out.

Mode	Time	What it is here
Endeavor	Hours / days	The road. The journey between one place and the next, and the majority of play
Exploration	Minutes	The places. A wreck, a station, a house nobody left. Somewhere you work over, at a price
Encounter	Seconds	A fight. Rare, expensive, and mostly avoidable

In most games the Encounter carries the weight and the long spans between get narrated past, where this set runs the other way round. The Endeavor is where the game happens, where most dice are rolled, and where a character is worn down. The Encounter is what happens when an Endeavor has gone badly enough.

Endeavor

A **Journey** is made of **Legs**. Each Leg is one Endeavor: a stretch of road, a stage, a day, however long the thing takes.

A Leg spends the crew's Stores, asks something of each character, and ends with each of them one **step** better or one step worse, which is where the name comes from.

Nothing is tracked by the second. A character does what the stretch of road asks of them, and the rolls that happen are the ones that matter. The full treatment is in The Road.

Exploration

The places along the way, and everything that happens inside a settlement. No economy is tracked: characters move where they choose and a roll happens at a real obstacle.

Investigation works on the standing Score. A character notices anything at or below their ● Acuity Score without rolling for it, so nobody rolls to see the floor.

Encounter

Seconds matter. An Encounter runs in repeating **Rounds**, and in each Round every participant takes one **Turn** in ► Initiative order. A Round is about ten seconds. There is no limit to how many there are.

► **Initiative** is chosen per Encounter and holds for its duration: take a flat 10 + ☆ Deft Rank, or roll 1d12 + the Gradient Die + ☆ Deft Rank. Highest acts first, ties broken by ☆ Deft Rank, then rolled off.

On a Turn, ♦ Action Points and ⇨ Movement refresh to maximum.

♦ Action Points	3 per Turn. An ♦ Action costs 1 ♦AP unless stated otherwise. Declare, pay in full, resolve before declaring another
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⇒ Movement	Up to your ⇒ Movement in □ Units, split freely before, between, and after ♦ Actions. Unspent ⇒ Movement is lost at the end of the Turn
◇ Free Actions	No ♦AP cost. Each one may be used once per Turn , and no more than 3 in a Turn
Reactions	Paid from ♦AP left unspent at the end of your Turn, which stay available until your next one. Spend freely now, or hold something back

One □ **Unit** is 5 feet, or one square on a map. □ Units measure movement, range, and area alike.

Combat is covered in full in Combat, later in this Part. One thing about it belongs here, because it is the reason Encounters are rare:

An Encounter costs a step. When it ends — won, lost, fled, or talked down — every character who was in it takes one step down. The player chooses which of their three tracks takes it.

Nobody has to be told to avoid a fight, because the cost sits on the sheet where a crew will work it out for themselves inside the first session.

Attributes & Derivatives

Four Attributes, read exactly as the base Ruleset reads them.

Icon	Attribute	Capacity
❖	Vigor	Bodily power and endurance
☆	Deft	Bodily precision and speed
●	Acuity	Mental sharpness and reach
△	Resolve	Mental fortitude and steadiness

Each has a **Score**, which defaults to 10 and is used directly whenever nobody is rolling, and a **Rank**, which is the Score minus 10 and is added to the dice whenever somebody is. A Score of 13 is a Rank of +3; a Score of 8 is a Rank of −2.

Derivatives

Value	This set
+ Maximum HP	5 + half the sum of ❖ Vigor and △ Resolve Ranks, round up, minimum 1. It does not grow
⊗ Maximum Wounds	3, +1 per 2 points of ❖ Vigor Rank, cap 5, minimum 1
⊖ Maximum Fatigue	3, +1 per 2 points of △ Resolve Rank, cap 5, minimum 1

Value	This set
⇒ Movement	5 + ☆ Deft Rank, minimum 1, in □ Units
► Initiative	Flat 10 + ☆ Deft Rank, or rolled
□ Physical Defense	10 + half the sum of ♦ Vigor and ☆ Deft Ranks, round up
□ Mental Defense	10 + half the sum of ● Acuity and △ Resolve Ranks, round up
Skills	From your Trade, ±1 per 2 points of ● Acuity Rank, minimum 1
⚡ Maximum Energy	3
Slots	3

+ Maximum HP and both **Defenses** are built the same way: take the **sum** of a pair of Ranks, halve it, round up. A character with ♦ Vigor +3 and ☆ Deft +1 has a □ Physical Defense of 12. The same character with △ Resolve +1 has 7 **+ HP**.

Rounding up applies to negatives as well: a pair summing to −3 halves to −1, not −2.

Everything on this list is fixed at creation except **+ HP**, ⊗ Wounds, ⊖ Fatigue and ⚡ Energy, each of which can be raised once by a Mark.

+ HP is the number that never moves

In the base Ruleset **+ HP** grows every Level, and by Level 10 a durable character is carrying forty points of it. There are no Levels here, so there is nothing for it to grow with, and the only thing that raises it at all is a Vitality Mark.

A starting pool of **three to seven** points is where this set stays, and a hand-built extreme reaches two or eight. That is the whole range, forever. A bad exchange can end a character on their first journey and on their thirtieth, and the numbers on every weapon in the game are written small to match.

Vitality, Exertion & Death

Four pools. Three of them are what happens to a character along the way, and the fourth is what they spend to stop it.

+ HP

The buffer. Grit, near misses, the blow that did not land square. Harm comes off **+ HP** first, and it never drops below 0; excess from a single blow is lost rather than carried over.

At **0 + HP** a character takes one ⊗ Wound and is **downed**: out of it, unable to act, at the mercy of whatever is happening. They take no further ⊗ Wounds from that blow however large it was, and they return as soon as any **+ HP** is restored.

+ HP comes back with rest faster than anything else on the sheet, and it is meant to be spent freely.

⊗ Wounds

Real injury: what lands once there is nothing left to absorb it. Every ⊗ Wound a character is carrying lowers **both Defenses** by 1 per point held.

Because ⊗ Wounds arrive at the moment a character goes down, they are usually felt on the next road rather than this one. A character walks out of a settlement carrying their injuries, and the road does not adjust for them.

A ⊗ Wound past the maximum is **death**, with no timer to run down and nothing to roll against.

⊖ Fatigue

Depletion. Every point applies **−1 to every resolution a character makes**, passive or active, read at the current number of points. It lowers rolled results and standing Scores alike, so a tired character cannot dodge it by declining to roll.

A character at maximum ⊖ Fatigue is upright and heavily impaired. The point that would push them past maximum drops them unconscious.

⚡ Energy

⚡ Energy is what a character spends to not get worse. It has exactly one use, and it tends to be the first number to run out.

Spend **1 ⚡ Energy** to refuse a step down. The State holds where it is.

Maximum ⚡ Energy is **3**, and rises only by a Mark. It comes back at **1 per uninterrupted hour** of rest, so the pool is a between-Legs budget: how many times this Journey is allowed to make you worse before you have to let it.

Overspend. A character may spend past 0. Each point below it becomes **1 ⊗ Wound or 1 ⊖ Fatigue**, chosen point by point as it is paid. Refusing the road when there is nothing left to refuse it with is how a character gets hurt without anything hurting them.

This set does not use ⚡ Demand or ⚡ Capacity

In the base Ruleset, gear and abilities carry a **Demand** measured against your **Capacity**, and the difference is what they cost you to have. Neither appears here.

Carrying pressure is handled by **Slots**, which are few and do not grow, and gear is paid for by trade rather than by exertion. Leaving both out means one number on an item card instead of three, and it means ⚡ Energy only ever means one thing.

Unconscious and Death

A character is put out of it in one of two ways.

- **Downed by harm.** + HP reaches 0. They take one ⊗ Wound and drop. They return the moment any + HP is restored, and they keep the ⊗ Wound.

- **Collapsed by exhaustion.** A point of $\ominus$ Fatigue would push them past maximum. They are held at maximum and drop. They return the moment their $\ominus$ Fatigue falls below it, which on the road means three hours of rest.

Either way they cannot act, cannot move under their own power, and are left to whatever is happening around them.

A $\otimes$ Wound past the maximum is death. There is no timer and nothing to roll.

$\otimes$ Wounds are the only track that kills, and the only one a character cannot refuse with ζ Energy. That is worth knowing before an Overspend: every point paid onto $\otimes$ Wounds instead of $\ominus$ Fatigue is a step toward the same edge, and there are only three of them.

Recovery

Rest is an $\ast$ Activity taken somewhere safe enough to stop.

- Each uninterrupted **hour**: regain 1 ζ Energy.
- Each **3 uninterrupted hours**: regain half of maximum $+$ HP, and remove one $\otimes$ Wound **or** one $\ominus$ Fatigue, not both.

An interruption loses only the current unfinished interval, not the whole rest.

States are not on this list. Nothing here moves a track. See Taking a Step.

The Three States

A character carries three conditions rather than one, tracked separately, because the road does not take everything from a person at the same rate.

Track	Governed by	What wears it down
Body	$\diamond$ Vigor / $\star$ Deft	Hunger, thirst, injury, cold, distance
Mind	$\odot$ Acuity	Sleeplessness, exposure, bad water, too long with nothing to look at
Spirit	$\triangle$ Resolve	Loss, fear, failure, watching it happen to somebody else

The Attribute names the track. You already ask which Attribute governs a roll, and that same answer tells you which die to pick up, so there is nothing further to decide.

Each track holds one of five States, and **the State is the Gradient Die**.

The ladderBroken1d2Frayed1d4Steady1d6Sound1d8Whole1d10

State	Gradient Die	Clears DT 12 at Rank +0	Negative / Standard / Positive
Broken	1d2	21%	50 / — / 50
Frayed	1d4	29%	25 / 50 / 25

State	Gradient Die	Clears DT 12 at Rank +0	Negative / Standard / Positive
Steady	1d6	38%	17 / 66 / 17
Sound	1d8	46%	13 / 75 / 13
Whole	1d10	54%	10 / 80 / 10

Steady is ordinary. It is the 1d6 everything in The Resolution System assumes, and it is where a character sits when nothing is wrong and nothing is going especially well.

A character might be Sound in Body, Steady in Mind, and Frayed in Spirit, which is three lines on a sheet doing the work of a paragraph. They are holding up physically, thinking clearly enough, and have seen something they have not put down.

Each step is worth ~**8 percentage points of success**, the same as one point of modifier or one point of ⊖ Fatigue, so a single step registers as a real change without ever becoming more than that.

The ladder decides how strange your life is

Read the right-hand column again. **Whole** spends four rolls in five on Standard. **Broken** never rolls Standard at all: every single thing that happens is a break or a disaster.

Falling lowers the odds and also strips the ordinary results out of a character's life, and it does both with the die in their hand rather than with a modifier to remember.

Skills Use the Same Three States as Their Categories

Every Skill belongs to a category, and this set names those categories **Body**, **Mind**, and **Spirit**, the same three words as the tracks, chosen to be. The base Ruleset calls the third one Voice; it is renamed here because a track called Voice would describe a throat rather than a condition.

That means an effect written against a Skill category is also written against a track, without anything being added to make it so.

The two line up in almost every case. Where they do not, **the Attribute wins**: leaning on somebody through physical menace is ♦ Vigor, so it rolls the Body die, while a Spirit Skill still grants its Favor. Menacing someone is a physical act, and it works worse when you are falling apart physically.

Where a State Sits

No track is free to wander the whole ladder. Each has a **floor** and a **ceiling**, together called its **band**, and the State moves only between them.

- **By default, every band runs Frayed to Sound.** Three States wide, centered on Steady.
- Your **Bearing** moves them from there.
- Every completed **Journey** raises one band by one step, your choice of floor or ceiling.
- **Play** moves the State inside the band it is given.

Wherever the bands end up, **every character begins play at Steady on all three tracks**, since a ceiling describes what you are capable of reaching rather than where you start.

A **floor** is protection: the road cannot take you below it. A **ceiling** is reach: it is how well you are capable of operating when things go your way.

An example of one character's three bands, as their sheet would carry them. This is what a Bearing produces:

Track	Falls no lower than	Climbs no higher than
Body	Frayed	Sound
Mind	Broken	Steady
Spirit	Frayed	Steady

Read across: their Body cannot fall past Frayed, and on a good day it works better than most people's. Their Spirit is protected the same way but never exceptional. Their Mind has neither protection nor reach, it can fall all the way to Broken, and it will never be better than ordinary.

A different Bearing might give a Mind ceiling of Whole and a Body floor of Broken, producing a completely different person out of the same five words.

A crew that spends every Journey raising floors becomes very hard to break without ever becoming brilliant, and they face that decision afresh every time they arrive somewhere.

Taking a Step

A **step** is one move up or down the ladder on one track. Steps are the currency of this game the way **+** HP is the currency of most others.

Steps down	Steps up
Completing a Leg badly	Completing a Leg well
Ending an Encounter , whatever the outcome	Reaching a settlement , and what is available there
Some of what is met on the road	Some of what is met on the road

Two things hold true wherever a step comes from.

A step down can be refused. Spend **1 ⚡ Energy** and the State holds where it is. This is the most common thing ⚡ Energy is spent on, and running out of it is what running out of road looks like.

Rest does nothing. **+** HP, **⊗** Wounds and **⊖** Fatigue all come back on the Recovery schedule. A State does not. It climbs in settlements, and through the things and people found along the way, and never because a character slept.

A step down at your floor does nothing. A character already sitting on their floor cannot be pushed lower by any Leg, Encounter, or empty cart. Nothing is owed, nothing is carried over, and no ⚡ Energy needs spending to prevent it.

A crew at the bottom of every track has stopped being able to get worse in the way this game usually gets you, leaving only ☉ Wounds and ☹ Fatigue, neither of which ever needed the ladder's help.

Skills

A **Skill** is trained expertise, and it is binary: you have it or you do not. A character without a Skill may still attempt anything a trained character can, and simply does it without Favor. **Skills never gate an action.**

When a Skill applies, it grants Favor, and that is the whole of the rule. The player chooses which die the Favor goes on and declares it before that die is rolled.

Only one Skill applies to a roll. Favor from other sources still stacks with it, to the usual maximum of 3.

Skills sit in three categories, **Body**, **Mind**, and **Spirit**, which are the same three words as the State tracks.

A Skill is worth less when you are worse off

A Skill grants Favor, and

Favor placed on the Gradient Die is a value equivalent of about +2 at Whole and close to nothing at Broken, both at DT 12 and Rank +0.

So a specialist whose track has collapsed is hurt twice over: their odds are worse, and their training is

The Skills

Twenty-one, seven to a category. Your Trade says which ones you may take at creation, and ☉ Acuity adjusts how many.

❖☆Body

Athletics — climbing, jumping, hauling yourself somewhere

Endurance — going without, and going on

Melee — close work with whatever is to hand

Marksmanship — anything thrown or fired

Stealth — not being where they are looking

Handling — animals, carts, and whatever still runs

Labor — digging, lifting, breaking, and building

☉Mind

Mechanics — engines, pumps, anything with moving parts

Medicine — wounds, sickness, and what to do with neither

Navigation — maps, stars, and roads that are on neither

Salvage — knowing what is worth carrying out

Survival — water, shelter, weather, and what is edible

Chemistry — fuels, solvents, purification, poison

Lore — what the world was, and who says otherwise

△Spirit

Barter — knowing a price and holding one

Command — being obeyed by people who did not have to

Deception — lying well enough that it holds

Insight — reading what somebody is not saying

Intimidation — making the other option worse

Nerve — holding steady when there is every reason not to

Rapport — being trusted quickly by strangers

Melee and **Marksmanship** are on the list and are not load-bearing. Fighting is rare enough here that neither is a wasted pick or a necessary one, which is a freedom this set has and the other two do not.

Navigation, **Survival**, **Salvage**, **Handling**, **Endurance**, and **Barter** are the ones that come up. Each will be rolled more in one Journey than **Melee** will be in a campaign.

Abilities

An **ability** is something a character can do that the ordinary rules do not cover. In this set almost all of them come from a Role, and almost all of them are **passives** that change what the road costs rather than actions taken on a Turn.

The bias is deliberate. An active ability wants an ♦ Action Point economy to be spent in, and this game keeps its Encounters short and rare, so a passive that changes what a Leg costs is worth more here than a manoeuvre is.

Abilities are read from a card:

—Ability NamePassive

What it does, in plain language.

On the card	Means
(—)	No ♦ Action Point cost. Most abilities in this set
(♦) / (♦♦)	Costs that many ♦ Action Points, inside an Encounter
* Activity	Longer than a Round, so it cannot be used during an Encounter

On the card	Means
Passive	Always on. Never activated

Nothing an ability does costs ♣ Energy in this set, since ♣ Energy exists solely to refuse steps.

Pursuits & Advancement

Characters do not gain Levels in this set. **They advance because of what they want, and because they arrive somewhere.**

The Two Pursuits

	Whose	What it is	Earns
Individual Pursuit	One character's	What that person wants badly enough to make a journey worse for. Written by the player, and it names somewhere or somebody worth going out of the way for	1 Mark , to that character
Party Pursuit	The whole crew's	Where you are going and why. In this set it is the Journey itself, the thing everyone agreed to walk	1 Role improvement + 1 Band raise , to everybody

The most reliable way to advance an Individual Pursuit is the party taking the worse road on your account, which is why a Pursuit is written to make road decisions harder rather than to name a destination.

The Party Pursuit pays on arrival, and it pays the whole crew whether or not their own Pursuit came up.

What They Buy

Mark	Effect
Skill	Gain one Skill
Reserve	+1 maximum ♣ Energy
Item	Gain one piece of gear
Vitality	+5 + HP, or +1 maximum ⊗ Wounds, or +1 maximum ⊖ Fatigue

On arrival	Effect
Role improvement	Take one more ability from the Role you hold
Band raise	Raise one band by one step — a floor or a ceiling , your choice, on one track

Marks are spent when they are earned and are not banked.

Growth is not power

Nothing on either list makes a character better in a fight. More ⚡ Energy buys more refusals, a raised floor shortens the fall, and a Role improvement changes what the road costs you.

A character deep into a Role is no harder to kill than they were on their first Journey; their bad days simply have a floor under them now.

Full rules in Advancement.

Combat

A fight runs in **Rounds**, and in each Round every participant takes one **Turn** in ► Initiative order. A Round is about ten seconds long and there is no limit to how many there are.

The gear here is this set's own

The **Basic Combat** module ships weapon and armor cards, and every one of them carries a ⚡ **Demand**. This set does not use ⚡ Demand, so those cards cannot be dropped in as written.

What is used is the module's structure: how an attack resolves, how the Gradient reads in a fight, and how position and damage work. The weapons and armor below are written for this set, at this set's + HP scale, and they are what a table should reach for.

At the start of your Turn, two things refresh.

⚡ Action Points	3 per Turn , spent on the actions below
⇒ Movement	5 + ☆ Deft Rank in □ Units, split freely before, between, and after your ⚡ Actions. Whatever is unspent at the end of the Turn is lost

► **Initiative** is chosen once per Encounter and holds for its duration: take a flat **10 + ☆ Deft Rank**, or roll 1d12 + your Gradient Die + ☆ Deft Rank. One □ Unit is five feet.

Full definitions of all three are in Flow of Play and Attributes & Derivatives.

Spending a Turn

Action	Cost	
Attack	2 ⚡AP	With any Equipped weapon
Effort	1 ⚡AP	Shoving, hauling somebody clear, forcing a door, throwing a rope
Threat	1 ⚡AP	Against □ Mental Defense. See Blows to the Head
◇ Interact	Free	Draw, stow, reload, open, hand over. Once per Turn
⇒ Move	Free	Up to your ⇒ Movement, split however you like

An attack costs 2 of your 3, which sets the whole shape of a Turn in this game. You can attack and do one small thing, or attack and **hold 1 +AP back**, and almost nobody manages to attack twice.

Anything not on the list is the GM's call, and the answer is usually 1 +AP.

Reactions

+AP left unspent at the end of your Turn stays available until your next one, and pays for Reactions. Holding a point back is a real decision, because the point you did not spend attacking is the point that keeps you standing.

Reaction	+AP	
Brace	1	+2 □ Physical Defense until your next Turn. Declared when you are attacked, before the roll
Interpose	1	An attack on somebody within 1 □ Unit hits you instead. You do not get to choose how much
Give Ground	1	Move up to half your ⇒ Movement, away from whatever just missed you

Weapons and abilities grant their own Reactions, and those are paid the same way.

Making an Attack

Roll **1d12** + your Gradient Die + the relevant Attribute Rank against the target's □ **Physical Defense**. Meet or beat it and the attack lands. The weapon says which Attribute it uses.

On a hit, the weapon deals its **damage** as a flat number. This set has no damage dice at all, since the pools are small enough that a die would swing a fight harder than any decision could.

Gradient	On a hit	On a miss
Positive	+2 damage	The shot goes somewhere useful. Position, cover, or a warning
Standard	As written	As written
Negative	It lands, and it costs. Position, a dropped item, or an opening	Something goes with it. Ground, footing, or the item

Damage, + HP, and Defeat

Harm comes off **+ HP** first, and **+ HP** never drops below 0; excess from a single blow is lost.

At **0 + HP** a character takes one ⊗ Wound and is **downed**, out of it, unable to act, and at the mercy of whatever is happening. They return the moment any **+ HP** is restored, carrying the ⊗ Wound.

A ⊗ Wound past the maximum is **death**.

Against a pool of three to seven, a Rifle takes two hits and a Club two or three. **A fight is decided in about two Rounds**, and it resolves the same way on the first Journey as on the fortieth.

Blows to the Head

Plenty in a fight goes after something other than the body: a threat with something behind it, a sight nobody was ready for, watching somebody in the crew go down, and the blow itself, which does not stop mattering once the bleeding does.

Those are rolled against ☐ **Mental Defense**, and they work differently from everything else on this page.

☐ **Mental Defense never costs + HP.** On a hit, the target **steps down** instead — on **Spirit** where the thing is fear or grief, and on **Mind** where it is confusion or a thing that does not make sense.

Because it is a step down, it can be **refused for 1 ⚡ Energy** like any other. A character can hold themselves together, and it costs them the same thing holding themselves together always costs.

A threat is an ⬆ Action. Roll against ☐ Mental Defense. Against a **Common** adversary, a hit ends their part in the Encounter and they leave. This is the most-used exit from a fight in this game, and the only one where nobody bleeds. The Encounter still costs its step.

A hard hit rings. When a single blow deals **4 or more damage** and the target is still up, the attacker rolls again against their ☐ **Mental Defense**. On a hit, that character steps down on **Mind**.

Surviving a rifle round leaves a mark of its own, which is why a crew can win a firefight and still arrive at the next settlement in pieces.

This set stops at the state of mind

☐ Mental Defense here covers being frightened, threatened, and shaken. It does not model lasting psychological harm, and there are no rules for it.

A table that wants that already has somewhere to hang it: the **Mind** and **Spirit** tracks are a five-step scale of how well somebody is holding up, with a floor and a ceiling that advancement moves. Anything a designer wants to build here should be built onto those rather than beside them.

What a Fight Costs

A step. When an Encounter ends, won, lost, fled, or talked down, **every character who was in it takes one step down**, on a track of their choosing.

It is paid once, at the end, whatever the outcome. Nobody needs telling to avoid a fight when the cost is printed on the sheet, and a crew works that out inside the first session.

And the Journey. Ammunition is Stores. Every shot from a Rifle, a Cut-Down Gun, or a Repeating Rifle spends **1 Store** from the crew's pool. So does every use of a Medicine Chest.

That is the whole of the ammunition rule, and it is what makes guns rare here rather than banned. A crew can win almost any fight it is equipped for; whether it can still get home afterwards is the open question, and the answer is in the same number that says how far they can walk.

Equipment

Every item is in one of four states.

State	Where it is
Stowed	In the pack. Costs a Slot
Equipped	Worn or in hand, ready to use. Costs no Slot
Active	In use right now, in a way that occupies you
Removed	Not on your person

Moving between them is the ♦ **Interact** Free Action: one Free Action covers all item handling, once per Turn inside an Encounter and no time at all outside one. Going **Active** is the same ♦ Interact unless an item's own card says otherwise, so lighting a lantern competes with drawing a blade for the one handling action a Turn allows. Armor is an ✱ Activity to put on or take off.

Slots

A character has 3 Slots, and only Stowed items use them. What is worn or in your hands is free, so Slots track the pack rather than the person.

Three never grows, with no Mark for it and no Level to raise it. **Some gear grants a Slot or two of its own**, and a pack that gives you a fourth Slot is one of the most useful things in the game precisely because nothing else will.

What will not fit on a person goes in **crew storage**, whatever the party is hauling their Stores in. A handcart or a wagon will take a reasonable number of general goods; be sensible about it rather than counting. What matters is not how much is on the cart, it is **what is on you when something happens**, and that is three things and whatever is in your hands.

Worth

Every item carries a single number, its **Worth**, which is both its Level and its price. There is no currency in this game and nothing has a second stat line. Full rules in Stores, Gear & Weapons.

Items carry their own actions, and the engine has no generic attack to fall back on. A weapon carries its attacks and a tool carries its uses, written on the item in the same format as an ability, and available only while it is Equipped.

2 — Building a Character

The Three Pillars

A character is built from three questions, and five named pieces answer them.

Pillar	Piece	Answers	Changes?
Origin	Bearing	What are you made of	Never
	Trade	What are you worth, and who knows you	Never
Pursuit	Pursuit	What do you want	Rewritten when it ends
Archetype	Role	What do you do on the road	Filled in, never swapped
	States	What are you right now	Every Leg

Sheets say Bearing, Trade, Pursuit, Role, and the three State tracks. **Origin** and **Archetype** are category words that never appear on a character sheet.

The base Ruleset asks for two identity layers and a Pursuit somewhere. This set puts the Pursuit beside the other two rather than inside the advancement rules, because in a game whose central decision is which road, what a character wants is not a footnote about how they improve.

Bearing

What the world made of you before the game started. It carries no abilities, no Skills, and no prose, a Bearing is **three gains and two costs**, drawn from your Attributes and from the floors and ceilings of your three State tracks. Built or chosen in Part 3.

Trade

What you do for a living and who knows you for it. Grants **Skills, gear access**, and **standing**, the difference between a rifle being expensive and a rifle being impossible. The widest list in the set, because this is the layer where a player finds a person rather than a build. Written in full in Part 3.

Pursuit

What you want badly enough to make a Journey worse for. You write it rather than choosing from a list, and the test for a good one has nothing to do with how interesting it sounds:

Would this make a decision about which road to take harder?

Find out who burned the archive fails; it is a destination, and it sits there until the GM produces it. My sister was on the northern convoy and I follow every rumor of it passes, because the northern road is longer and now there is a reason to argue for it.

A Pursuit is where **Marks** come from, see Pursuits & Advancement.

Role

What you do on the road, and the closest thing this set has to a class without quite being one. Five of them, six abilities each, mostly passives. **Take one Role and one ability at creation**; each completed Journey grants one more, free. Written in full in Part 3.

States

What you are right now, on three tracks that move constantly. It goes down last on a sheet and changes first in play. Covered in The Three States.

Attributes

You have 40 points. Spend them across the four Attributes however you like.

That is four Scores of 10 if you spread them evenly, which is a person with nothing exceptional and nothing missing. Anything better than average has to be paid for out of something else.

Nothing above 13. Nothing below 7.

Every character therefore carries at least one Attribute at 9 or lower. The weakness is compulsory, and where you put it is the first real decision of character creation.

What You Are Buying

A **Rank** is a Score minus 10, and inside the working range **each point of Rank is worth ~8 percentage points of success**, the same as one step on a State track, and the same as one point of $\ominus$ Fatigue. That is more than a point is worth in most systems, which is why the Scores are held in a narrow band.

Ranks also set numbers that never move again:

	Governs	And permanently sets
❖ Vigor	Body	+ HP · $\otimes$ maximum Wounds · $\square$ Physical Defense
☆ Deft	Body	$\Rightarrow$ Movement · $\blacktriangleright$ Initiative · $\square$ Physical Defense
● Acuity	Mind	Starting Skills · $\square$ Mental Defense
△ Resolve	Spirit	+ HP · $\ominus$ maximum Fatigue · $\square$ Mental Defense

❖ **Vigor** and △ **Resolve** together set + HP, and + HP never grows. Putting your low Score in one of them decides how many hits you can take for the whole game.

❖ + △ Ranks	+ HP
+4	7
+2	6
0	5
-2	4
-4	3

Three to seven points, across every character anyone will build. A weapon that deals 4 is a serious problem for all of them.

Example Spreads

Any of these can be taken as written and assigned to the four Attributes in any order.

	Scores	Ranks
Specialist	13 · 11 · 9 · 7	+3 · +1 · -1 · -3
Even	12 · 11 · 10 · 7	+2 · +1 · 0 · -3
Two-Handed	12 · 12 · 9 · 7	+2 · +2 · -1 · -3
Broad	11 · 11 · 10 · 8	+1 · +1 · 0 · -2
Narrow	13 · 10 · 10 · 7	+3 · 0 · 0 · -3
Halved	13 · 13 · 7 · 7	+3 · +3 · -3 · -3

Halved is the most extreme character the rules allow, with two things nobody does better and two that will get somebody killed.

Creating a Character

Ten steps. The first one is not on the sheet.

1 — Where are you going, and who do you owe?

Before anything is written down, the table answers one question together: **what is the first Journey, and why is the crew walking it?** A delivery somebody is waiting on. A debt. A place one of you has to reach. That answer is the Party Pursuit, and it is the reason these people are traveling together instead of separately.

Everything below is easier once that exists.

2 — Bearing. Pick one of the eight, adjust one, or build your own: three gains and two costs, nothing moved twice. Note the Attribute changes and set your three bands aside for step 8.

3 — Trade. Pick one. Write down its **six standings**, and note which six Skills it opens.

4 — Pursuit. Write one. The test: would this make a decision about which road to take harder?

5, Attributes. Take one of the example spreads or build your own, 40 points, nothing above 13, nothing below 7. Then apply your Bearing's Attribute changes. Convert each Score to a **Rank** by subtracting 10.

6 — Derivatives. In order:

+ Maximum HP	5 + half the sum of ♦ Vigor and △ Resolve Ranks, round up
⊗ Maximum Wounds	3, +1 per 2 points of ♦ Vigor Rank, cap 5, min 1
⊖ Maximum Fatigue	3, +1 per 2 points of △ Resolve Rank, cap 5, min 1
⇒ Movement	5 + ☆ Deft Rank, min 1
▢ Physical Defense	10 + half the sum of ♦ Vigor and ☆ Deft Ranks, round up
▢ Mental Defense	10 + half the sum of ● Acuity and △ Resolve Ranks, round up
⚡ Maximum Energy	3
Slots	3

7 — Skills. Take **three** from the six your Trade opened, then **±1 per 2 points of ● Acuity Rank**, minimum one Skill. A Rank of +3 takes four; a Rank of −3 takes two.

8 — Bands. Start every track at **Frayed to Sound**, then apply the Bearing from step 2. Set all three States to **Steady**.

9 — Role. Pick one of the five, and take **one** of its abilities.

10 — Gear. Your standings are your starting pack. Take:

- one item of **Worth 3 or less** from the group you are **Trusted** with
- one item of **Worth 2 or less** from the group you are **Known** with
- **two items of Worth 1** from any groups you are Neutral or better with

Four items, three Slots. One of them rides in crew storage, or stays Equipped in your hands.

What you should have

Four Ranks, three or four Skills, three bands all sitting at Steady, six standings, a written Pursuit, a Role with one ability, three to seven **+** HP, three **⚡** Energy, and four items.

That is a whole character, and it fits on a card.

Rather start playing?

The Pregen Chars are five characters built by exactly these steps, one for every Role.

3 — Bearings, Trades & Roles

Bearings

A **Bearing** is what the world made of you before play started: your build, your nerve, and what you were raised on, taken together. It is the only piece of a character that says what they are rather than what they do.

A Bearing carries no rules text, only three gains and two costs.

Building One

Take three gains and two costs. Each is a single step in one of these:

- an **Attribute**, ± 1 to its Score
- a **floor** on one State track, ± 1 step
- a **ceiling** on one State track, ± 1 step

No Attribute and no band end may be moved twice. Then give it a name.

The recommended method is one Attribute among the gains and one among the costs, so a Bearing touches both what a character can do and how far they can be pushed. It is not required. A Bearing built entirely from floors and ceilings is legal and makes a specific and useful kind of person, and so is one built entirely from Attributes.

Before a Bearing touches anything, every band runs **Frayed to Sound**:

BrokenFrayedSteadySoundWhole

BodyBrokenFrayedSteadySoundWhole

MindBrokenFrayedSteadySoundWhole

SpiritBrokenFrayedSteadySoundWhole

A character always begins play at **Steady**, wherever their ceiling ends up, since a ceiling describes what you can reach rather than where you start.

WORKED EXAMPLE

Three gains: **Body floor**, **Body ceiling**, ♦ **Vigor +1**. Two costs: **Mind ceiling**, ● **Acuity –1**. Which produces:

BrokenFrayedSteadySoundWhole

BodyBrokenFrayedSteadySoundWhole

MindBrokenFrayedSteadySoundWhole

SpiritBrokenFrayedSteadySoundWhole

Their Body cannot fall past Steady and reaches Whole on a good day. Their Mind has neither protection nor reach: it can be ground all the way to Broken and will never be better than ordinary. Their Spirit is untouched.

That is the Bearing called **Hulk**, below.

A band can close to a single State

Raise a floor and lower the same ceiling and the track has nowhere left to move; it locks, and never reads as anything but what it is.

That is legal and worth doing on purpose. A character whose Spirit sits at Steady and cannot be shifted in either direction comes out unshakeable and unremarkable at once, and there are people like that.

The Bearings

Eight built to the rule above.

Hulk

Thick-boned, slow to tire, slow to sicken. Nothing out there surprises you, and nothing on a page has ever held your attention.

GainsBody floorBody ceiling ♦ Vigor +1

CostsMind ceiling ● Acuity -1

Weed

Grown leggy and pale out of the sun. You know a great deal, and your body has never once been asked for anything.

GainsMind floorMind ceiling ● Acuity +1

CostsBody floor ♦ Vigor -1

Mule

Sure-footed, tireless, and worn smooth by repetition. Very little reaches you, and very little moves you either.

GainsBody floorSpirit floor ☆ Deft +1

CostsMind ceilingSpirit ceiling

Anvil

Everything that has hit you stayed where it landed and you did not. You have already survived the worst thing you can imagine.

GainsSpirit floor ♦ Vigor +1 △ Resolve +1

CostsBody ceiling ☆ Deft -1

Ascetic

You have gone without for so long, and so deliberately, that going without stopped being difficult. It has never done a thing for your knees.

GainsSpirit floorSpirit ceiling △ Resolve +1

CostsBody floor ♦ Vigor -1

Engine

Something keeps you running past the point a body should stop, and it works. On a good day nobody is better. You do not have many good days.

GainsBody ceilingMind ceiling ● Acuity +1

CostsSpirit floor △ Resolve -1

Runt

Built small and built early on not enough of anything. You do not break. You have also never once been at your best.

GainsBody floorMind floorSpirit floor
CostsBody ceilingMind ceiling
Flare
Burning through something. When you are good you are remarkable, and there is nothing whatsoever holding the bottom.

GainsBody ceilingMind ceilingSpirit ceiling
CostsBody floorSpirit floor

Or build your own

These eight are worked examples rather than a menu. Three gains and two costs, nothing moved twice, and a name is the whole of it, so a table that wants a ninth should write one rather than settle for the nearest of these.

Name it carefully. A Bearing is the word somebody else would use for your character, so it should be a noun, and one a person on the road would actually say.

Trades

A **Trade** is the work you did before any of this. Not what you do on the road, that is your Role, but the thing you were, back when there was still a word for it. You were a farmhand. You set bones. You drove freight.

It settles two questions, and the second one carries more weight here than it would elsewhere.

What you know how to do. A Trade opens six Skills, of which you take three at creation. That is where a character's competence comes from, and it is why two people with the same Attributes are not the same person.

Who will deal with you. Nothing out here is bought off a shelf. Every scarce thing belongs to somebody, and whether you can get at it depends on what they think of you, which depends, more than anything, on what you used to be. A Trade is a starting position with six groups of people, and it is the reason a settlement opens its stores to one member of a crew and not another.

That second part is the layer this set leans on hardest, because supply is the whole game and supply runs through people.

The Six Groups

Nobody out here controls everything. Six kinds of people control something, and a crew's access to the world runs through them.

Group	Holds	Deals in
Settlements	Ground	Food, water, shelter, work
Convoys	Roads	Transport, freight, and news from ahead
Holdfasts	Order	Weapons, ammunition, organized force

Group	Holds	Deals in
Tenders	Bodies and machines	Medicine, chemicals, parts, tools
Keepers	What was written down	Records, identification, what the world used to know
Marauders	Nothing, and everyone	Hired work, and everything unofficial

These six are the default and nothing depends on the number. Add one, cut one, rename them to whatever the table's world calls them.

Trust

Your standing with a group is one of five steps, and it moves during play. A Trade is only where you start.

Trust	Dealing with them	Getting something scarce
Trusted	Favor	Yes, and at their cost
Known	Favor	Yes, at a price
Neutral	—	If they have it to spare
Wary	Disfavor	Only what they will not miss
Barred	Disfavor , and no amount of talking changes it today	No

Trust does not work like a purse. Being Trusted by Holdfasts hands you no rifle; it means the conversation about a rifle is one you get to have, with Favor, at a price somebody is willing to name.

Barred is the useful one

A crew with nobody above Neutral with Tenders cannot reliably resupply medicine, and will find that out on the road rather than at the table.

Coverage of the six groups is the closest thing this set has to party composition. No one is obliged to plan for it, though a crew tends to notice when nobody has.

The Trades

Every Trade carries the same spread, **one Trusted, one Known, two Neutral, one Wary, one Barred**, and six Skills, of which you take **three** at creation, adjusted by ● Acuity.

Where the Barred sits is the part worth reading, since it marks the piece of a character's history somebody else has not forgiven.

Farmhand

You worked ground that somebody else owned, and you were good at it.

SettlementsTrusted

ConvoysKnown

TendersNeutral

KeepersNeutral

HoldfastsWary
MaraudersBarred
Skills — take threeLabor · Endurance · Handling · Survival · Barter · Nerve
Steward
You kept a settlement's books, and you kept some of them twice.

SettlementsTrusted
KeepersKnown
TendersNeutral
MaraudersNeutral
HoldfastsWary
ConvoysBarred
Skills — take threeBarter · Command · Insight · Lore · Rapport · Labor
Teamster
You have driven the same three roads so often you could do them asleep, and twice have.

ConvoysTrusted
SettlementsKnown
HoldfastsNeutral
TendersNeutral
MaraudersWary
KeepersBarred
Skills — take threeHandling · Navigation · Endurance · Barter · Mechanics · Marksmanship
Outrider
You ride ahead of the freight and find out what is waiting. Sometimes you already know.

ConvoysTrusted
MaraudersKnown
SettlementsNeutral
TendersNeutral
KeepersWary
HoldfastsBarred
Skills — take threeNavigation · Stealth · Marksmanship · Survival · Handling · Insight
Deputy
You enforced somebody's law, and it was law right up until it was not.

HoldfastsTrusted
SettlementsKnown
ConvoysNeutral
KeepersNeutral
TendersWary
MaraudersBarred
Skills — take threeCommand · Intimidation · Marksmanship · Melee · Insight · Nerve
Gunsmith
You make the thing work again. You have stopped asking who is holding it.

HoldfastsTrusted
MaraudersKnown
SettlementsNeutral

ConvoysNeutral

TendersWary

KeepersBarred

Skills — take threeMechanics · Marksmanship · Chemistry · Barter · Salvage · Melee

Bonesetter

You have put more people back together than you have lost, and you keep count.

TendersTrusted

SettlementsKnown

ConvoysNeutral

MaraudersNeutral

KeepersWary

HoldfastsBarred

Skills — take threeMedicine · Chemistry · Insight · Endurance · Nerve · Lore

Machinist

Everything still running out here is running because somebody like you was there.

TendersTrusted

HoldfastsKnown

ConvoysNeutral

KeepersNeutral

SettlementsWary

MaraudersBarred

Skills — take threeMechanics · Salvage · Chemistry · Labor · Athletics · Lore

Reader

You can read, which is rarer than it should be, and people bring you things.

KeepersTrusted

TendersKnown

SettlementsNeutral

ConvoysNeutral

HoldfastsWary

MaraudersBarred

Skills — take threeLore · Insight · Navigation · Medicine · Deception · Rapport

Archivist

You know where things are written down and what it costs to be told.

KeepersTrusted

HoldfastsKnown

TendersNeutral

MaraudersNeutral

ConvoysWary

SettlementsBarred

Skills — take threeLore · Salvage · Insight · Deception · Barter · Stealth

Cutthroat

You were hired for the thing nobody puts in writing, and you did it well.

MaraudersTrusted

ConvoysKnown

TendersNeutral

KeepersNeutral

SettlementsWary

HoldfastsBarred

Skills — take threeMelee · Stealth · Intimidation · Deception · Athletics · Nerve

Wastrel

You have owed money in every settlement on this road and been welcome in most of them anyway.

MaraudersTrusted

SettlementsKnown

ConvoysNeutral

KeepersNeutral

TendersWary

HoldfastsBarred

Skills — take threeDeception · Rapport · Barter · Stealth · Survival · Athletics

Roles

A **Role** is what you do on the road, and the closest thing this set has to a class without being one: no Levels, no features on a schedule, no **+** HP.

There are five, each holding six abilities, and between them they cover the five things a Journey consumes — **distance, food, the condition of bodies and gear, other people, and the crew's own state**. A party of three covers most of it and leaves a real hole somewhere.

How a Role Grows

Take one Role at creation, and one of its six abilities.

Each completed Journey grants one more, free, whether or not the crew arrived well.

That is the entire progression. You start with one and five remain, so a Role is spent in five Journeys, which is what this set is paced for. A crew that gets to the end of a Role has played the game this document was written to demonstrate.

There is no second Role. A table that runs long enough to want one has reached the point where they should be writing their own.

Nothing here makes you better in a fight

No Role improves an attack, which is deliberate. An Encounter costs a step and ammunition comes out of the Stores, so a Role that rewarded fighting would be arguing against every other rule in the set.

Being dangerous has to be bought instead, through a Rifle, the Marksmanship Skill, and standing with Holdfasts. Any character can do it, and it is paid for in Worth like everything else.

Navigator You know where the road goes, which is rarer than it sounds, and you know which parts of it are lying.

Read the Ground* Activity · at a camp

Roll your Gradient Die. The GM must tell you, of that many Legs ahead, **how many will ask something hard of the crew**. Not which ones. Only how many.

Sure Footing Passive

A **Fast** pace costs you no ⊖ Fatigue. Everybody else still pays.

The Short Way Once per Journey

At any point on the road, roll ● Acuity against DT 12. On a success, the number of Legs the crew must pass **drops by 1**. You knew about a cut-through and you were right.

Never Lost Passive

Take your ● Acuity Score rather than rolling, on any Leg where the question is where you are or which way to go.

Call It ♦

Name a direction. Every ally within 3 □ Units may immediately move up to half their ⇒ Movement toward it.

Set the Pace Passive

The crew may change their Travel Pace **at any camp**, rather than only at a Waypoint. You are the one who knows whether the back half is worse, and they have learned to believe you.

Forager Everything anybody eats out here was found by somebody. Usually it was you.

Off the Land* Activity · during a Passage or Crossing

Roll ● Acuity against DT 12. On a success the crew gains **2 Stores**, and **2 more** on a Positive Gradient.

Packs Well Passive

The crew's maximum Stores rises by **4**. You know how to load a cart and what will still be good in a week.

Stretch It Once per Journey

A single Leg costs **1 fewer Store per character**, to a minimum of 0. Nobody enjoys it and everybody eats.

Nothing Wasted Passive

When the crew spends 0 Stores on a Leg, **you do not step down** for it. You have eaten worse, and more recently than any of them.

Bait ♦

Spend **1 Store**. Every **Common** adversary that eats must Contest △ Resolve against your ● Acuity or spend its next Turn on the food instead of on you.

Reads the Sky* Activity · at a camp

Roll your Gradient Die. The crew gains that many **Stores**, halved and rounded up. You knew where to put the traps because you knew what tomorrow was doing.

MenderBodies and machines, and you stopped drawing much of a line between them a long time ago.

Set and Bind* Activity · at a camp or a settlement

Remove **1** ☉ **Wound** from another character. Once per character, per Journey.

Field Repair* Activity · between Legs

Bring a broken item or vehicle back to working for one Leg. Spends **1 Store**. It will not hold longer than that and you will say so.

Steady HandsPassive

Spend **your own 4 Energy** to refuse another character's step down on **Body**, at 1 4 per step, if you are with them when it happens.

Stop the Bleeding♦♦

Restore **2 + HP** to a downed character within 1 □ Unit, bringing them back up. Once per Encounter.

Knows the WorkPassive

Treat **Tenders** as one step better for trade. They can tell from your hands.

Long Night* Activity · at a camp

Roll your Gradient Die. Restore that many **+ HP**, divided among the crew however you choose. You do not sleep and it shows.

SpeakerNothing out here is bought. It is agreed to, and somebody has to do the agreeing.

NamedPassive

Treat one group of your choice as **one step better**. Chosen when you take this Role, and never changed.

Talk FirstPassive

On a **Meeting** Leg, take your △ Resolve Score rather than rolling. It has worked before and they can tell.

Wave Them Off♦

A **Threat** against □ Mental Defense affects every **Common** adversary who can hear you, rather than one of them.

HagglePassive

Once per settlement, a single trade is priced **one step better** than your standing allows.

Vouched* Activity · at a settlement

Raise one group's standing by **one step** for the rest of the Journey. Once per Journey. Somebody remembers you, or you make them think they do.

Reads the Room♦

Roll your Gradient Die, halve it and round up. The GM tells you that many true things about what the people in front of you actually want.

DrifterYou have been at the bottom of this before, and you came back up, which is more than most people on this road can say.

Used to ItPassive

While a track sits at **Frayed or lower**, refusing a step down on it costs **no 4 Energy**, once per Leg.

HardyPassive

While any track sits at **Broken**: add **2** to both Defenses, and take **Favor** on every roll that uses that track.

Keeps WalkingPassive

You never step down for going without Stores. You have gone longer than this and on less.

Push Through♦

Take **1** ⊖ **Fatigue** and stand up from downed with **1 + HP**. Once per Encounter.

Still Standing* Activity · at a camp

Step **up** one track by one, from **Frayed or Broken** only. Once per Journey, and never from anywhere comfortable.

Scrounge* Activity · at a Site or a settlement

Roll your Gradient Die. You turn up salvage totalling half that in **Worth**, rounded up. Nobody else was going to look there.

Pursuits

A **Pursuit** is what your character wants. You write it rather than choosing it, and it is the only piece of a character that can be finished, rewritten, or abandoned.

It is also where your **Marks** come from, so it does real work on the sheet. See Pursuits & Advancement.

Writing One

The recommendation is that a Pursuit should **make a decision about which road to take harder**. That is the one thing this set can hang a rule on, and the closer a Pursuit gets to it the more work it does.

Find out who burned the archive	Harder to use. It is a destination, and it waits until the GM produces it
My sister was on the northern convoy and I follow every rumor of it	Easier to use. The northern road is longer, and now there is a reason to argue for it

Neither of those is a bad Pursuit and both can carry a campaign. The difference is only how much the GM has to build before either one does anything, and some tables would rather the GM build it.

What makes the second easier is that it names **somewhere**, or **somebody**, or **some condition** a road can pass near. Reachability is beside the point; what matters is that a Journey can brush against, so that once a Journey the crew decides whether it is worth the detour.

Where to Start

If nothing comes to mind, start from what your character already is. **Your Trade says what they used to do, and your Role says what they are for now**, so a Pursuit is usually the thing sitting between those two.

Trade and Role	Might want
Bonesetter , now a Drifter	To find out whether the clinic they walked out of is still treating anybody, and who is doing it
Archivist , now a Forager	To put one sealed case back on the shelf it came off, and be there when it is opened
Deputy , now a Speaker	To be allowed back into the settlement that asked them to leave, on their own terms
Teamster , now a Navigator	To find out whether anybody is still working the old trade crossing, and to run it again if they are
Wastrel , now a Mender	To clear every debt they owe, in order, starting with the smallest
Farmhand , now a Speaker	To get water running to a settlement that has been hauling it in by cart for six years

Or ignore all of that and write what you actually want, provided it passes the test above.

Finishing One

When a Pursuit is done, reached, resolved, or given up on, **write another**. Abandoning one carries no penalty, and holding onto a dead one earns nothing. A character who has got what they wanted and has not decided what is next is a character who stops earning Marks, which is answer enough.

4 — The Road

The Journey

A **Journey** is something a crew sets out to do that involves getting somewhere. It is the unit this game is built around, the way most games are built around the fight.

A Journey is not always a line from one place to another. It can stop in the middle of itself for a whole session, turn around, or end somewhere nobody planned. What makes it a Journey is that it was undertaken, that it took time, and that it cost something.

Every Journey is made of **Legs**.

1Leg

2Leg

3Leg

4Leg

5Leg

One **Journey**. Five **Legs**. Each Leg is one event, and each one costs, asks, and moves everybody a step.

What a Leg Is

A Leg is **one event on the way**. Not a distance and not a fixed span of time: a thing that happened, however long it took.

A Leg might be a day of open road, an afternoon at a river that has moved, a night with something walking the edge of the camp, four hours arguing about a toll, a wreck worth stripping, or a fight. It might be a settlement, and a settlement might run a whole session. Every one of those is one Leg.

In play a Leg usually runs twenty minutes to an hour, and a session usually holds three or four of them. A Site or a Waypoint can take the whole evening on its own.

KINDS OF LEG

Six shapes that come up often, with the track each one usually draws on. They are a starting point and nothing more, a real Journey will want Legs that are not on this list, and inventing them is most of what a GM does here. Use these until the road suggests something better.

BodyPassage

Open road and the tedium of it. Distance, weather, and ground that will not hold. The commonest Leg there is, and the one that empties the Stores.

Body / MindCrossing

One obstacle that will not move, faced together. A ford that is no longer where the map put it. A pass shut by a slide, with a way round that costs a day.

SpiritMeeting

People who want something. A family going the other way with nothing left. Somebody at a chain across the road calling it a toll. Rarely a fight, and expensive anyway.

MindSite

Somewhere worth working over, and the time it takes. A convoy that did not make it, still loaded. This is where a Leg becomes a session.

—Waypoint

A settlement, and the Journey stopping inside it. Trade, repair, treatment, and the only reliable way back up the ladder.

AnyTrouble

Something that wants something and will not be talked out of it. Where an Encounter happens, and an Encounter costs a step whatever the outcome.

How a Leg Runs

However different two Legs are, both do the same three things in the same order.

1 — Time passes, and Stores come off

1 Store per character, before anything else happens. Companions eat too. If the crew cannot pay, see Stores.

2 — Play the Leg

The GM frames what is in front of the crew, and it gets played out.

Everyone rolls at least once. Usually that is one shared scene with a beat for each character in it, somebody handles the thing, somebody else handles the consequence of them handling it, somebody watches the road while it happens. Nobody needs a scene of their own. Everybody needs to have done something, because what they did is what step 3 reads.

A Leg ends when the thing is dealt with, or when it becomes clear it is not going to be.

3 — Everyone steps

Each character moves **one step**, up or down, on **the track their contribution drew on**.

Somebody who talked past the toll steps on Spirit. Somebody who carried the cart through the ford steps on Body. Somebody who read the ground and picked the crossing steps on Mind. Whether it is up or down is the GM's read of how that went.

A step down can be refused by spending **1 ⚡ Energy**.

Different tracks, same Leg

Nothing says the crew steps together. In a Leg where two people negotiated and two watched the cart, the first two step on Spirit and the second two on Body, and one pair can go up while the other goes down.

Passing a Leg

At the end of a Leg the GM says whether the crew **passed** it, and there are three answers.

Passed	The crew dealt with what the Leg put in front of them
Failed	They did not, or it cost more than it gave
Nothing	Nobody engaged. The Leg happened around them

This is the GM's read of what happened, not a count of successful rolls. A Leg can be passed on one good idea and no rolls at all, and failed with three successes and a bad decision.

Nothing is a real outcome. A crew that keeps its head down and lets a Leg go by has not lost ground and has not gained any. Time still passed and the Stores still came off. Sitting out is safe, and it is not free.

The Count

Before a Journey starts, the GM decides **how many Legs the crew needs to pass**. It is a measure of the distance and what is between here and there, a long dull road wants many, a short trip through bad country wants few.

The recommended method is to say the number out loud, because a crew that knows what it needs can make a real decision about pace. Keeping it back is a legitimate choice for a Journey meant to feel open-ended, and costs the pace decision most of its weight.

What Arriving Pays

Met the count	Everyone takes a Role improvement and a Band raise
One short	One of the two, the crew choosing which
Two or more short	Neither, and the GM lowers one band

A lowered band is a **floor**, the same currency a Band raise buys, spent the other way. The GM picks the track from what the Journey actually was: a road that ground everyone down physically takes it out of Body, and a month of nothing to look at takes it out of Mind.

If a floor is already at Broken there is nothing to take, so **the ceiling comes down instead**.

Failing is survivable, and it is not cheap

A lost floor is permanent, and the next Journey starts from further down. Two bad Journeys running leave a crew that cannot take a third. This game expects a table to weigh a Journey before agreeing to it, and expects some of them to be refused: turning back, waiting out a season, and taking the long road are all answers, and a crew that decides a Journey is beyond them and does not go has lost nothing at all.

Travel Pace

Travel Pace is chosen when the Journey begins. It does not change how many Legs the crew must pass. It changes **how many Legs they get**.

Pace	Legs	Stores spent	Every Leg
Fast	Fewer	Less	Each character takes 1 ☹ Fatigue

| **Average** | As set | As set | — | | **Careful** | More | More | Each character removes **1** ☹ **Fatigue** |

Fast is the same target with fewer attempts, and it gets harder as it goes: $\ominus$ Fatigue is -1 on every roll a character makes, and it accumulates faster than a road allows anyone to shed it. A crew four Legs into a fast Journey is measurably worse at everything than the crew that set out.

Careful buys attempts and rest, and pays for it in food. It is the pace for a crew that is already worn, and the reason a Journey that looked affordable stops being affordable.

The recommended default is one Leg either way: Fast takes one off, Careful adds one. Longer Journeys can move by more.

Changing It

A crew may change pace at any Waypoint. Reaching a settlement is the one place on a Journey where everybody stops, eats, argues, and looks at what is left in the cart, and it is the natural place to decide that the back half of this road is going to be run differently from the front half.

Nowhere else. Out on the road the decision has already been made, and living with it is most of what a Journey is.

An Example Journey

Ridgeworks to the coast road. Eight Legs, and five of them needed to arrive well.

0
Setting out
Choosing a pace
Two of them were carrying $\ominus$ Fatigue out of the last Journey, so **Careful** was tempting. It would have added a ninth Leg and 4 more Stores, and they did not have 4 more Stores.

Average pace
1
Passage
Four days of flat nothing
Four days of open road with nothing on it. They walked it, argued twice about the route, and nobody got hurt.

Passed
2
Crossing
The ford has moved
The ford was not where the map said it was. Finding the new one took most of a day, and a crate went into the water on the way across.

Failed
3
Meeting
A chain across the road
Three people had put a chain across the road and were calling it a toll. One of them turned out to be a man the Wastrel owed money to, which made the conversation shorter than it might have been.

Passed
◆
Waypoint
Ridgeworks

They stayed two nights. Medicine was available at a price nobody was happy about, and the Bonesetter spent an evening getting a crewmate's Body back up to Steady.

A settlement

5

SiteA hauler that did not make it

A hauler that had not made it, still loaded and still where it stopped. They took what they could carry and were gone before dark.

Passed

6

PassageRain, and no shelter

Rain, and nowhere to get out of it. They put their heads down and walked, and the road did not ask them for anything.

Nothing happened

7

TroubleSomething followed them

Whatever had been at the wreck came after them. It took two nights to lose, and it took the mule with it.

Failed

8

PassageThe last stretch

The last stretch, walked hungry, because the Stores had run out somewhere in the second night of being followed.

Passed

E

ArrivedFive of eight

They reached the coast road with nothing left in the cart and one fewer animal than they set out with. Five passed against a count of five, so everybody took a **Role improvement** and a **Band raise**. Two of them spent the raise on a floor rather than a ceiling.

Arrived well

Gold passed**Rust** failed**Faded** nothing happened♦ a settlement, and still a Leg**E** what it came to Five passed, two failed, and one went by without asking anything. They needed five, so they arrived, and everyone took a **Role improvement** and a **Band raise**.

Two of them arrived Frayed in Body and one arrived Frayed in Spirit. That is a different problem, and it is now the next Journey's problem.

Everything above is what a Journey looks like from inside it. How a GM decides the length, the count, and what is on the road is in Building a Journey.

5 — Stores, Gear & Weapons

Stores

Stores are food, water, fuel, and everything else a crew burns through simply by existing away from a settlement. They belong to the crew rather than to any one person, and they are not carried in Slots.

Stores are not an item and are not a list. One Store is not a tin of anything. It is an abstraction covering rations and clean water, feed for whatever is pulling the cart, oil for the lamps, fuel, salt, thread, and the hundred small things that get used up and are only noticed when they run out. Tracking them individually would be a bookkeeping game, and this is not one. **The number measures how long the crew can keep going**, which is the only question it needs to answer.

How Many Stores Do You Have?

As many as you have something to carry them in. What a crew can haul is a property of the transport, which is why a cart is the most valuable thing a party can own.

Carrying it in	Maximum Stores
What fits on your backs	10
Packs and a handcart	18
A cart with an animal in front of it	30
Something with an engine in it	45

A crew of four burns 4 a Leg, so on your backs that is two Legs and a bit, and with a cart it is seven. **The range of a Journey belongs to the vehicle**, and losing the vehicle out on the road is a catastrophe rather than an inconvenience.

These are starter numbers and they are meant to be moved. A game about short dense roads between close settlements wants them lower. One about long empty crossings wants them considerably higher.

Spending Them

How much a crew spends per character, per Leg, is a decision made every Leg.

Spent	Per character, per Leg
0	Each character steps down , on a track of the player's choosing
1	Enough, and nothing more
2	Clean water, real food, something to drink. Each character removes 1 ⊖ Fatigue

Spending 2 is expensive, and on a **Fast** pace it is often the only thing holding a crew together, because ⊖ Fatigue arrives every Leg and nothing else takes it off.

A step taken for going without lands **on top of** whatever step the Leg itself produced, and it **cannot be refused with ⚡ Energy**. The player picks the track. Hunger frays whichever part of a person is already thinnest.

Getting More Stores

Trade for them. Stores are the one thing every group deals in, and nobody has ever refused to talk about food. Settlements have the most and want the best price. Convoys will part with some at a markup, because they need their own. Marauders will sell you as much as you like and will not say where it came from.

They also come off the road. A **Site** worth stripping, a good forage on a **Passage**, and anything a **Meeting** can be talked into leaving behind.

And in a settlement where a crew is **Trusted or Known**, they eat. A Leg spent somewhere that is glad to see you costs nothing, which is a large part of why standing is worth having and why a crew will walk an extra day to stop somewhere friendly.

Gear

There is no money. Nothing has a price in coin, because there is no coin anyone would honor twice. You get things by giving up other things.

Every item carries one number, its **Worth**, which is what it is worth and how good it is at once. A Worth 1 item is common and useful. A Worth 5 item is the thing a group does not sell to outsiders.

Trading

To get something, offer goods whose **combined Worth meets the price**. What you found on the last Journey is what you are spending on this one, which is why a Site is worth stopping for.

Stores can go into an offer, and go in badly: 3 Stores for 1 Worth. Food is worth something to everybody and it is a poor way to buy a rifle. Nobody eats their way to an arsenal.

Your standing sets the price:

Standing	Price
Trusted	Worth −1 , minimum 1
Known	Worth
Neutral	Worth +1
Wary	Worth +2
Barred	They will not trade with you

Known is the true price. Trusted is a real discount and Wary is a real tax, and Barred does not mean the crew cannot have the thing, it means **not through you**. Send whoever is not Barred.

Every item belongs to somebody

Gear is not a general list. Each of the six groups holds its own, and short of finding something out there, trading with them is the only way to get any of it.

A crew's equipment is a direct read of its standings. A party with nobody above Neutral with Holdfasts fights with clubs, and will usually not notice until it matters.

The Lists

Ten items per group, and the number beside each is its **Worth**. These are a starting point rather than an inventory of the world, invent items at the table and file them under whoever would plausibly be holding them.

Descriptions say what a thing is and leave what it does to the table. A tent sleeps four badly; whether that matters tonight is the GM's call.

Settlements What is grown, drawn, woven, and kept alive. Settlements sell the ordinary, and out here the ordinary is what keeps people breathing.

1 Bedroll

Canvas over wool, rolled tight and strapped. The difference between sleeping and lying down, and the difference between a Leg that costs you something and one that does not.

1 Waterskins

A matched set, sound, with stoppers that hold. How many and how large is between you and the GM; what matters is that you are not rationing by the mouthful.

1 Hand Tools

A hatchet, a spade, and a bag of fixings. Nothing here is remarkable and all of it is the reason a camp gets built before dark.

2 Cook Kit

A pot, a grate, and a striker. Turns what you found into what you can eat, which is not the same thing and never has been.

2 Oilcloth Coat

Heavy, stiff, and profoundly ugly. It is also the reason you are not wet, and being wet is how people die out here without anything dramatic happening.

2 Charcoal Filter

A column of char and cloth in a tin housing. It makes bad water drinkable, slowly, and not all of it, and it needs repacking more often than anyone would like.

3 Milk Goat

Bad-tempered, sure-footed, and a source of food that walks itself. Eats a Store a Leg like anybody else, and at some point it stops being a source of milk.

3 Canvas Tent

Sleeps four badly and three well. Whether that is worth a Slot depends entirely on what the weather has been doing.

4Draft Animal

A mule, an ox, or something that was one of those. Doubles what a cart can pull, needs feeding, and is the single most stealable thing a crew will ever own.

5A Settlement's Mark

Their word, in writing and under seal, that you are welcome and vouched for. While you carry it, treat one group of your choice as **one step better**. Somebody staked their name on you, and they can take it back.

ConvoysEverything that makes a road passable and a load moveable. Convoys sell distance, in one form or another.

1Coil of Rope

Fifty feet of it, good and dry. There is no Journey on which this does not come out at least once.

1Lantern

Oil-fed and hooded, so it can be shuttered down to nothing. Light is useful and being seen from a mile off is not, and the hood is what makes it a choice.

1Spare Harness

Straps, buckles, and the pin that always goes. Worth nothing until the moment it is worth the whole Journey.

2Long Pack

A hauler's frame pack, built to be carried all day loaded. **Grants 1 additional Slot.** Haulers do not part with these cheaply and they are worth what they ask.

2Road Log

Somebody's written record of a route, kept honestly. It names the fords that moved and the places worth stopping, and how current it is depends on who kept it.

2Grease and Spares

The small parts that stop a small problem becoming a Journey. Axles, pins, patches, and a tin of something that stops metal seizing.

3Handcart

Two wheels, a bed, and a yoke for one or two people. Raises maximum Stores to **18** and turns a crew that can walk into a crew that can carry.

3Second Frame

A second pack frame, rigged to be worn over the first. **Grants 2 additional Slots**, and you will feel every one of them by the end of the day.

4Cart and Traces

A proper wagon bed with the harness to pull it. Raises maximum Stores to **30** with an animal in front of it, and to considerably less without one.

5Induction Hauler

A pre-collapse cargo vehicle with an induction drive that somebody has kept alive. Raises maximum Stores to **45**, moves faster than anything on the road, and can be heard from a very long way off.

HoldfastsWeapons, armor, ammunition, and the written authority to be carrying any of it.

1Club

A weighted length of something, wrapped where you hold it. Blunt, heavy, and it has never once failed to work.

1Long Knife

Close, quiet, and useful for the forty things a day that are not fighting. Most people out here have one and most of them have never used it on a person.

1Padded Coat

Layered and quilted cloth, worn under everything else. Turns a bad cut into a bruise once, and then needs repacking.

2Spear

Reach, and the ability to keep whatever is on the end of it exactly where it is. Simple to make, simple to use, and underrated by everyone who has not needed one.

2Bow

Quiet, and the arrows come back if you have time to go and look. Takes real practice, which is the whole reason it is still cheap.

2Riot Plate

Salvaged body armor, cut down and refitted by somebody who knew what they were doing. Heavy, hot, and worth all of it.

3Rifle

Single shot, slow to load, and accurate a long way further than most people can see. It ends most conversations before it is fired.

3Ammunition Case

A sealed case of manufactured rounds rather than reloads. **Drawn from as Stores**, so what you shoot is what you were going to eat.

4Repeating Rifle

It fires more than once without being reloaded, which out here is close to sorcery. There are not many, and Holdfasts know where most of them are.

5A Warrant

Written authority from a Holdfast, sealed and dated. Some doors open on sight of it. Others shut, and the people behind them remember your face.

TendersWhat keeps a body running and what keeps a machine running, sold by people who stopped distinguishing between the two a long time ago.

1Bandage Roll

Boiled cloth, rolled and kept dry. Utterly unglamorous, and more people are alive because of this than because of anything else on this page.

1Soap and Alcohol

Cleans a wound, and more importantly cleans the hand about to go near one. The second use is the one that saves lives.

1Splint Kit

Board, padding, strapping, and somebody having shown you how. A break set properly heals; a break set badly is a limp for the rest of your life.

2Medicine Chest

Fever, infection, and pain, in whatever forms are currently available. **Drawn from as Stores** — how much is left is a number, not an inventory.

2Solvent Jug

Cleans, strips, dissolves, sterilises, and burns extremely well. Every crew that owns one has found a use for it nobody intended.

2Machinist's Tools

Wrenches, files, taps, and a hand drill that still turns true. Enough to fix what breaks and not enough to build what does not exist.

3Surgical Kit

Clamps, needles, sutures, and blades that somebody has kept sharp and clean. Whether it helps depends entirely on who is holding it.

3Stim Case

Compounds that make a body do more than it should. Removes **2 ⊖ Fatigue** once, and the body takes that back afterwards with interest.

4Prosthesis

Fitted, adjusted, and fettled over about a week by somebody who cared. It works, and it goes on working if it is looked after.

5Sealed Ampoules

Pre-collapse, still sealed, still cold-stable, and the label is still readable. What is in them is the GM's decision.

KeepersInstruments, records, identification, and the increasingly rare ability to say what a thing actually is.

1Notebook and Charcoal

Bound paper and something to write with. Nothing survives that is not written down, and the Keepers built everything they have on that sentence.

1Lens Loupe

A jeweller's glass on a folding mount. Reads a maker's mark, a wound, a seal, or a forgery, and the last of those is why they sell them.

1Chalk and Cord

Measuring, marking, and finding your way back out of somewhere. Cheap, weightless, and the reason somebody came back.

2Compass

Points the one direction that does not lie to you. Sun and stars are free and unavailable exactly when you need them.

2Field Glasses

See what is standing on the ridge before it works out what is standing in the road. Scratched, off-center, and worth every trade.

2Reference Sheaf

Copied pages on one narrow subject, bound and waxed. Which subject is the entire question, and it is worth asking before you trade for it.

3Survey Instrument

Brass, heavy, and still accurate. Turns a guess about where you are into a route somebody else could follow.

3Archive Case

Sealed, waxed, and full of somebody's life's work on something. The Keepers know roughly what is in it. They will not always tell you.

4Working Radio

It receives, most nights, on a narrow band. Occasionally something on the other end answers, and that is a problem for whoever is holding it.

5Papers

Identification that holds up anywhere, for somebody who may or may not be you. The Keepers make the best ones because they have the originals to copy.

MaraudersWhatever has no papers, sold by whoever will not ask where you are taking it. Everything here is cheaper than it should be and there is always a reason.

1Filed Knife

Somebody else's, reground badly on a wheel. It holds an edge anyway. Whoever made it originally knew more than whoever reground it.

1Pry Bar

Opens what was not meant to open. It is also a club, and it has been one more often than its owners admit.

1Sack of Odds

Small salvage nobody sorted. Worth 1 to trade with, and occasionally worth considerably more once somebody who knows things has looked through it.

2Cut-Down Gun

Short, loud, and it was something longer and more respectable last month. Devastating close in and useless at any distance at all.

2Lockpicks

Good ones, in a roll. Whoever made these understood the work, which raises the question of what happened to them.

2Patched Mail

Riveted scrap, layered and lashed together over padding. Heavier than Riot Plate, worse than Riot Plate, and available to people Holdfasts will not talk to.

3Unpapered Rifle

The same rifle, no warrant, half the price. Holdfasts will notice it, and there is a stamp somewhere on it that somebody has tried to remove.

3Taken Medicine

A Medicine Chest that was somebody else's very recently. **Drawn from as Stores**, and Tenders can tell at a glance.

4A Name to Drop

Say it once, in the right place, to the right person. Treat Marauders as **Trusted** for a single trade, and then never use it again.

5Whatever You Asked For

They can get anything. Once, at this price, and they will bring it up again at a moment of their choosing rather than yours.

Weapons

1Long Knife

☆ Deft · 1 □ · **2** damage

Close and quiet. Concealable, and nobody looks twice at somebody carrying one.

1Filed Knife

☆ Deft · 1 □ · **2** damage

As a Long Knife. On a **Positive** Gradient it deals 4 instead of 3, because of what the grinding did to the edge.

1Club

❖ Vigor · 1 □ · **3** damage

Nothing to go wrong and nothing to run out of.

1Pry Bar

❖ Vigor · 1 □ · **3** damage

As a Club, and it opens things the rest of the time.

2Spear

❖ Vigor · 2 □ · **3** damage

Strike from 2 □ Units. Anything closing to 1 □ against you gives you a Reaction attack as it arrives.

2Bow

☆ Deft · 10 □ · **3** damage

Quiet. Costs no Stores; arrows are recovered on any Leg that ends somewhere you can look for them.

2Cut-Down Gun

☆ Deft · 5 □ · **5** damage

Devastating within 5 □ Units and useless past it. Spends **1 Store** per shot, and everything for a mile knows.

3Rifle

☆ Deft · 14 □ · **4** damage

Reloading is the ❖ Interact Free Action, so it fires once per Turn. Spends **1 Store** per shot.

3Unpapered Rifle

☆ Deft · 14 □ · **4** damage

As a Rifle. On a **Negative** Gradient it does not fire this Turn.

4Repeating Rifle

☆ Deft · 14 □ · **4** damage

No reload. A second attack in the same Turn costs 1 ♦AP instead of 2. Spends **1 Store** per shot, and it will empty a crew's Stores in one bad afternoon.

Armor

Armor raises □ Physical Defense. It does not reduce damage, because against a pool this small a reduction rule would make some weapons stop working entirely.

1Padded Coat

+1 □ Physical Defense

Layered cloth. Costs nothing to wear all day, which is most of why people do.

2Riot Plate

+2 □ Physical Defense

Salvaged and refitted. **Disfavor** on ☆ Deft rolls that involve moving quietly or quickly.

2Patched Mail

+2 □ Physical Defense

As Riot Plate, and heavier. Also **Disfavor** on ♦ Vigor rolls for endurance over a long Leg.

6 — Advancement

There are no Levels here. A character does not become harder to kill, and their **+** HP is the same on the last Journey as on the first.

What grows is **how far they can be pushed before they stop working**, and it grows from two places that never compete: what they personally want, and whether the crew got there.

	Comes from	Goes to
Marks	Advancing your own Pursuit	That character alone
Arriving	Completing a Journey	Everybody, together

Marks

A **Mark** is granted when a character meaningfully advances their Pursuit. In this set that most often means the crew took the worse road on their account, and agreed to it in front of everybody who would pay for it.

Spend it immediately. Marks are not banked, and there is no reason to hold one.

Mark	
Skill	Gain one Skill from any category
Reserve	+1 maximum ♣ Energy
Item	Gain one item, of a Worth your standing would allow you to trade for
Vitality	+5 + HP, or +1 maximum ⊗ Wounds, or +1 maximum ⊖ Fatigue

Vitality is the only thing in the game that raises + HP, at a whole Mark for five points. A character who spends every Mark on Vitality will be noticeably harder to kill after four Journeys, and no better at anything else.

Arriving

When a Journey ends, count the Legs the crew passed against the number they needed. Everyone who walked it takes the same result, whether or not their own Journey was a quiet one.

Legs passed	What everybody gets
Met the count	A Role improvement and a Band raise
One short	One of the two. The crew decides together which
Two or more short	Neither, and the GM lowers one band by one step — the same band, on every character

The last row is the only penalty in the set that reaches across the whole crew. The GM chooses the track from what the Journey actually was: a road that ground everybody down physically takes it out of **Body**, and a month of nothing to look at takes it out of **Mind**. It is a **floor** that comes down, unless that floor is already at Broken, in which case the ceiling does instead.

A Role improvement is one more ability from the Role you already hold. There is no choosing between Roles and no swapping. You start with one of six, so five Journeys empties a Role.

A Band raise moves one floor or one ceiling, on one track, by one step. It is the only thing in the set that permanently changes what a character is capable of.

Floors and Ceilings

This is the decision that repeats, and it never gets easier.

	Buys	Costs
Raise a floor	The road cannot take you as low. A shorter fall, every Journey, for the rest of the game	You will never be better than you are
Raise a ceiling	A higher best day, and a wider swing on the way to it	Nothing under you when it goes badly

A crew that always raises floors becomes extremely difficult to break and never becomes remarkable. A crew that always raises ceilings has days nobody else could have had, and falls further than anybody when the road turns. Most crews do some of each and end up with one track they protect and one they gamble on.

How Far a Character Gets

Assuming a Journey a session, and a Pursuit that comes up about every other one. A GM who runs longer Journeys will see this stretch out, and one who runs short hops between close settlements will see it arrive faster.

After	Role abilities	Band raises	Marks spent
0 Journeys	1	—	—
1 Journey	2	1	about 1
3 Journeys	4	3	1 or 2
5 Journeys	6	5	2 or 3

Pacing

The rates above are defaults. Both are levers, and because this set has no Levels they do not do the same job as the two dials in a levelled game.

	Default	If it feels slow	If it feels fast
Marks	About one every other session	Grant on the crew agreeing to the detour, not on it paying off	Require the Pursuit to have actually moved
Arriving	One Journey per session	Run shorter hops between close settlements	Run longer Journeys with more Legs between the ends

Arriving is the lever that matters, because it is the only source of Role abilities and Band raises, and a Role runs dry after five. Shorten the Journeys and a crew empties its Role in a month of sessions, with nothing left to gain. Lengthen them and the road stays the thing the campaign is about.

Marks are safer to be generous with. Nothing a Mark buys compounds: a Skill, a point of 4 Energy, an item, five + HP. A crew handed twice the usual Marks is better equipped and no harder to threaten, because **the thing that keeps this set dangerous is the size of the pools, and Vitality is the only Mark that touches them at all.**

If the campaign is running long, stretch the Journeys rather than withholding Marks. A crew that has been on the road a year should be carrying more and knowing more. They should still be one bad Leg from Broken.

Five Band raises is enough to move one track from **Frayed-Sound** to **Steady-Whole** and still have three left for the others. That is a character who can reach somewhere nobody could reach at creation, and who can no longer be ground below ordinary at the thing they are best at.

They are not better in a fight. They are harder for the road to finish.

7 — Running the Game

What You Are Running

Most games ask a GM to prepare **encounters**. This one asks you to prepare a **road**, and then find out what the crew is willing to spend on it.

You still do everything a GM normally does. There are settlements with people in them, places worth exploring, things that want to eat the party, and a world that existed before the crew turned up. None of that changes.

What changes is where the preparation goes. The unit of play here is the **Endeavor**: the Journey from one place to another, and the Legs it is made of. That is the thing to get good at.

A session built around a fight produces one fight and four hours of waiting for it. A session built around a road produces a dozen decisions, and the crew will still be arguing about three of them next week.

Across a session your job is three things:

Put events on the road	Three or four Legs, varied, and only some of them dangerous
Say what each one cost	A step up or down, per character, at the end of every Leg
Make one of them personal	Once a Journey, a Leg that sits on somebody's Pursuit

Everything below serves those three.

Building a Journey

Start With Why They Are Going

The Party Pursuit is the Journey. That is the whole relationship, and it is why a Journey has a reason rather than a destination.

Ask the table one question together: **what is worth walking to, and who is waiting on it?** Their answer is the first Journey. When it is finished, ask again.

A good one has	
Somewhere to be	The Journey needs an end, even if they never reach it
Somebody who cares	A delivery nobody is waiting on is a walk, not a Journey
Something that stops being possible	Not a punishment. A door that closes if they are slow

If the table cannot answer, hand them one: a settlement is running out of something, and the people who used to bring it have stopped coming. That will carry three Journeys on its own.

Then Build the Road

Four decisions, in order. The right-hand column builds the example Journey as it goes.

1

How long, and how many

How many Legs the road is, and how many of them the crew has to pass. Those are two different numbers, and the gap between them is the difficulty of the Journey.

In the example

Ridgeworks to the coast road is eight Legs. It is a known road with a settlement on it, so five passed is enough to arrive well.

2

What is on it

Give each Leg a kind. Vary them, and watch the run of quiet ones. Two in a row is a lull. Three is a chore.

In the example

Passage, Crossing, Meeting, Waypoint, Site, Passage, Trouble, Passage. The Waypoint sits at Leg 4, so the back half gets walked on whatever they managed to buy there.

3

Whose Journey it is

Read the Pursuits. The Party Pursuit is why the Journey exists at all. Then take at least one Individual Pursuit and put it on the road.

In the example

The Wastrel is owed money in a place three days off the route. The man running the toll at Leg 3 is the one who owes it. Collecting is cheap and public. Letting it go costs him the debt.

4

What each Leg tests
Decide which track each Leg is likely to draw on, and mix them.

In the example
Four Body, two Mind, one Spirit, one settlement. Heavy on Body because it is a long road, with the Meeting placed where a crew that has been walking a week is least patient.

Randomise the order if it helps. Shuffling the kinds and dealing them out produces roads a GM would not have written, and the only thing you have to preserve is step 3, somebody's Pursuit has to land somewhere, and it should land where the crew has enough road left to argue about it.

Putting a Pursuit on the Road

The individual Pursuits are where the sessions actually are, and they are the piece most likely to go unused.

Once a Journey, take one character's Pursuit and put it on a Leg. Not as a side quest to be approved. As a version of the decision the crew was already making, where the cheap answer and the right answer disagree.

The cheap road	Shorter, safer, or already paid for
The other road	Costs Legs, Stores, or standing, and touches somebody's Pursuit
The argument	Happens at the table, with the people who will pay for it

The Mark is earned by the crew agreeing, not by the Pursuit being completed. It pays for the argument rather than the destination, which means a Pursuit that will never be resolved still advances every Journey it comes up in.

Rotate. If the same player's Pursuit shows up three Journeys running, the others have stopped having characters.

Turning It Up or Down

Two dials, in this order.

The Count. How many Legs the crew must pass is the difficulty of the whole Journey, and it is the cleanest control in the set. One Leg either way is a large change. Move it between Journeys, never during one.

What the Legs test. A crew with a strong Body and a thin Spirit will walk a road of Crossings and come apart in three Meetings. Choosing the mix is how you make a Journey hard for these characters without touching a number.

Two things to leave alone. **Do not raise DTs to compensate**, a DT describes a task, and if you want a harder Journey you put harder tasks on it. **Do not add a fight**, an Encounter costs a step and spends the Stores, so it is already among the most expensive things you can put in front of a crew. Adding one does not tune difficulty, it changes what game is being played that evening.

Running a Leg

This is the skill the game runs on, and it takes about a minute to set up.

Say where they are and what is in front of them. One or two sentences. Not scene-setting — a situation.

Let them talk. The crew decides what they are doing about it. This is most of the Leg, most of the fun, and it needs no rules at all.

Ask each of them what they are doing. Everybody. The person who is not engaging is the person you ask directly.

Roll where it is uncertain. Not every declaration needs a roll. Every character needs at least one across the Leg.

Close it. Say how it came out, and take the steps.

Twenty minutes to an hour. If a Leg runs past that and nobody has rolled anything, you are running an Exploration scene, which is fine, just know that is what happened, and that it still costs a Leg.

Giving Everybody a Beat

A Leg is one situation with four or five people inside it, and the failure mode is two players solving it while the others watch.

The fix is not to invent four separate problems. It is to **ask the quiet ones what they are doing while the loud ones do the obvious thing**. Somebody is holding the animal. Somebody is watching the ridge. Somebody is deciding whether to say what they saw. Those are real contributions with real rolls behind them, and they are how a character ends up stepping on a track nobody expected.

Passing, Failing, and Nothing

At the end of a Leg you say which of three things happened. This is a judgement, not a tally.

	When
Passed	They dealt with what was in front of them, whatever the dice said along the way
Failed	They did not, or it cost more than it gave
Nothing	They kept their heads down and it went past them

A Leg can be **passed on one good idea and no successful rolls at all**, and **failed with three successes and a bad decision**. If that feels loose, it is meant to. The alternative is a crew optimizing for a hit count instead of for getting there.

Nothing is not a soft fail. It is the right result when a crew deliberately avoids engaging, walking past the smoke, not answering the shout, staying in the ditch until the riders have gone. They lose no ground and gain none, and the Stores still came off. Say it plainly and do not editorialise. A crew that learns avoidance is safe will use it, which is the behavior the rest of the design is asking for.

Which Track Moves

Each character steps on **the track their contribution drew on**, read off what they actually did.

They spent the Leg	They step on
Carrying, climbing, hauling, fighting, walking point	Body
Reading ground, fixing something, planning the route, keeping watch	Mind
Talking, holding the crew together, deciding, carrying the weight of it	Spirit

When it is genuinely ambiguous, let the player pick. They know what the Leg took out of their character better than you do, and giving it away costs nothing.

Up or down is your read of how it went for that person. A character can step **up** in a Leg the crew failed, having held it together while it went wrong, and **down** in one the crew passed, if it was them it went through.

Running a Settlement

A Waypoint costs a Leg, so it has to be worth one. Three things make it worth one.

It is the only reliable way back up the ladder. Rest, treatment, food, a roof. Say what is available and what it costs before the crew commits to staying, because deciding to stay two nights instead of one is a real decision.

It is where standing gets spent and earned. Whoever is Trusted here gets the door opened. Whoever is Barred waits outside, and everybody notices which is which.

It has its own wants. A settlement that only sells things is a shop. Give it one problem the crew could solve and one thing it will not do for them at any price, and it becomes a place.

Moving Standing

Standing is not fixed at creation. It moves, and it should move slowly.

Up one step	Doing something substantial for that group, at real cost, in front of people who saw it
Down one step	Being caught doing something to them, or for a group they are set against

Roughly **once a Journey across the whole crew**, not once a session per character. And it moves for **one character**, not the party, standing is personal, which is what makes a crew's coverage of the six groups matter.

Pricing Something That Is Not on a List

Ask two questions. **Who would have it?** That is the group. **How badly would somebody want it?** That is the Worth.

Worth	
1	Common, useful, replaceable
2	Made by somebody who knew what they were doing
3	Scarce, and worth arguing over
4	Most crews will never own one
5	They do not sell this to outsiders

Then apply their standing and let them offer. If a crew wants to hand over something absurd for something small, take it. A bad trade they chose is more interesting than a price you defended.

Pacing a Session

Three or four Legs	A comfortable session. One of them is the personal one
One fight, at most	And often none
Never three quiet Legs running	Two is a lull. Three is a chore
Stop at a Waypoint where you can	A natural break, and it lets the crew spend before next time

A Journey is one or two sessions. If you are four sessions into the same Journey, the Count was too high or the Legs are running long, and the crew has not seen a Role improvement in a month.

Setting Difficulty

Players never see a DT. They say what they are doing, you say what it is worth, and they find out from the result.

That matters more here than elsewhere, because **the die in their hand already tells them how bad things are**. A player at Frayed knows their odds are worse without being told a number. Announce DTs on top of that and a Journey becomes arithmetic about whether to bother.

DT		At Steady, Rank +0
4	Anybody who knows the work	96%
8	Ordinary difficulty	71%
12	Hard, or done under pressure	38%
16	Risky even for a specialist	8%
20	Not happening without leverage	0%

8 and 12 carry the game. 8 is the road being the road. 12 is the road being a problem. Reach for 16 when somebody is attempting a thing that probably should not work.

Do not scale a DT to the crew's condition. A ford is as hard as a ford. Them being Frayed is already priced in, because the die got smaller.

Favor and the Gradient

Give **Favor** for a decision that cost something: time spent, a position taken, a risk accepted, a Store spent. Give **Disfavor** for a real disadvantage in the fiction, bad light, bad footing, one-handed, or somebody shouting at them while they do it.

Never give Favor for a good description alone. It becomes a tax on the quiet players and it teaches a table that this game is about talking.

Numbers are the exception. If you are reaching for a modifier, the answer is almost always Favor, Disfavor, or a different DT.

The placement is theirs. When a player takes Favor they choose which die it goes on, and you let them. The 1d12 is the safe play and the Gradient Die is the greedy one, and a character who can no longer afford the greedy one has told you exactly how the Journey is going.

Reading the Gradient

Every roll answers two questions. The second is yours to narrate.

	On a success	On a failure
Positive	It works, and something comes with it	It does not work, and the road gives them something anyway
Standard	It works	It does not work
Negative	It works, and it costs	It does not work, and something goes with it

Protect the failure-with-Positive. About one roll in fourteen is one, and it is the only place in the whole set where the world hands something back for free. A failed Navigate that reads Positive is how a crew finds the wreck. A failed forage that reads Positive is how they find the water tank instead of the food.

A GM who narrates every failure as a plain failure has taken out the only thing that hands anything back.

Never reverse a verdict. A Positive on a failure is still a failure. It is a failure that produced something.

Running a Fight

An Encounter is the most expensive thing that can happen on a Journey, and you control how often one does.

Starting One

Do not roll initiative because a scene got tense. Almost everything that could be a fight is better as a Meeting, a threat, or a chase. Start an Encounter when something has decided it wants a thing the crew has and will not be talked out of it.

Once it starts, the step is owed. That is true whether it lasts four Rounds or one, so a fight the crew talks their way out of on the first Turn still cost them something.

Running One

Adversaries use the same economy. Three ♦ Action Points, an attack costing two, ⇒ Movement in □ Units, and Reactions out of whatever they held back. Nothing on an adversary card is a special case.

Two Rounds is the target. Against pools of three to seven, a Rifle is two hits and a Club is two or three. If a fight is running past four Rounds, either there are too many bodies on the table or nobody is hitting anything, and both are fixed by ending it.

Have them leave. Common adversaries have somewhere else to be. A pack that is losing goes. A Roadman who has been paid goes. Writing an exit onto every group before the fight starts means you are never stuck grinding one out.

How Many

Against a crew of four	
Two or three Common	A real fight, decided fast, unlikely to kill
Four or five Common	Dangerous, because someone will get isolated
One Hard, two Common	The shape most fights should take
One Boss	A whole Leg, and the crew should have known it was coming

Numbers are the difficulty, not statistics. Adversaries do not scale, so a group that was dangerous on the first Journey is dangerous on the last. If you want a harder fight, add a body.

Death

Death comes from ⊗ Wounds past maximum, ⊗ Wounds come from being downed, and being downed comes from a pool of three to seven. **It will happen, and it will happen in an Encounter.**

That is consistent with everything else here: fights are rare, expensive, and genuinely dangerous, and a crew that avoids them is playing correctly rather than timidly.

IF YOUR TABLE WANTS LESS OF IT

- **Let them run.** Fleeing costs distance and nothing else, and no rule says an Encounter has to be finished.
- **Use Common adversaries.** Out at 0 + HP, no Wound track, and a fight against four of them is decided fast and rarely kills.
- **Point at the Threat action.** A hit against □ Mental Defense ends a Common's part in the fight. It is the exit, and players forget it exists.

THE LEVER THAT DOES NOT WORK

Do not soften adversary damage without saying so. Small pools mean every point is visible, and a table works out inside two sessions that the numbers are being adjusted for them. It costs the tension the rest of the design depends on, and it costs their trust in every number you give them afterwards.

Adversaries

Adversaries do not scale. There is no table of + HP by party strength, because nothing in this world adjusts itself to how far a crew has come. What could kill you on the first Journey can still kill you on the twentieth. You simply have more ways of not being there.

Below **Boss**, an adversary has no ⊗ Wound track and no downed state: at 0 + HP it is out of the fight. That keeps an Encounter short, which is the point of an Encounter that costs a step to have had.

Adversaries run on the same economy as everybody else. Three ♦ Action Points a Turn, an attack costing two of them, ⇒ Movement in □ Units, and Reactions out of whatever they held back. Nothing on an adversary card is a special case; it is a character sheet with fewer lines on it.

They can carry gear, too. Anything from the lists can be hung on an adversary, and an **Equipped** line on the card says what it is holding and what that changes.

To build one: pick an + HP from the band, an attack bonus from the band, a damage number from the weapon list, and one thing it does that is not an attack.

Band	+ HP	Attacks at	Notes
Common	4-6	+2	Out at 0 + HP. Usually several
Hard	8-10	+4	Out at 0 + HP. Usually one, with Common alongside
Boss	14-20	+5	Carries 2 or more ⊗ Wounds. Rare, and it should be a whole Leg

The number in the corner of each card is its + HP. The first line is its four Attribute **Scores**, then its □ and □ Defenses, ⇒ Movement, and ► Initiative, all read exactly as a character's are, in Attributes & Derivatives.

Not every Boss is meant to be killed. The Tithe, below, carries three ⊗ Wounds, leaves at 0 + HP, and comes back the following Leg. A crew does not beat it on the road. They survive it until

they are somewhere it will not follow, and they decide along the way what they are willing to let it have.

4Road DogCommon · Attacks at +2

❖ 12 · ☆ 12 · ● 8 · △ 9 □ 12 · □ 9 · ⇒ 8 · ► 12

Lean, gray, and traveling in fours. They have learned the shape of a crew and roughly how much of one they can take, and they will follow a cart for a day working it out.

♦Bite

Roll +2 against □ Physical Defense within 1 □ Unit. On a hit, **3** damage.

Breaks. When half the pack is down, the rest go, and they do not come back that Leg.

5RoadmanCommon · Attacks at +2

❖ 11 · ☆ 10 · ● 10 · △ 10 □ 11 · □ 10 · ⇒ 5 · ► 10

Somebody standing in the road with a club and a bad week behind him. He is not good at this and he has done it before, which is a worse combination than either on its own.

♦Club

Roll +2 against □ Physical Defense within 1 □ Unit. On a hit, **3** damage.

Would rather be paid. A Roadman will name a price if anybody asks, and it is usually less than the fight would cost.

8MarauderHard · Attacks at +4

❖ 13 · ☆ 12 · ● 11 · △ 12 □ 14 · □ 11 · ⇒ 5 · ► 12

Does this for a living and is good at it. Wearing riveted scrap over padding, carrying something that cost real Worth, and not working alone.

♦Cut-Down Gun

Roll +4 against □ Physical Defense within 5 □ Units. On a hit, **5** damage.

♦Rifle Butt

Roll +4 against □ Physical Defense within 1 □ Unit. On a hit, **3** damage and the target has 1 fewer

♦AP next Turn.

Patched Mail. Already counted in the □ 14.

Takes the loudest first. A Marauder goes for whoever is armed, and leaves the ones who are not until later.

16The Great BeastBoss · Attacks at +5

❖ 15 · ☆ 14 · ● 9 · △ 13 □ 15 · □ 12 · ⇒ 10 · ► 14

A gray-backed thing the size of a draft animal that dens in the culverts under the old road. It does not hunt crews. It hunts whatever the crew disturbed, and it is not careful about the difference.

♦Rush

Move up to ⇒ 10, then roll +5 against □ Physical Defense within 2 □ Units. On a hit, **5** damage and the target is knocked back 2 □ Units.

♦Drag

Contest ♦ Vigor against a downed target. On a win, move it 4 □ Units away from the light.

⊗ **Wounds 2.** At 0 + HP it takes a ⊗ Wound and returns at half maximum + HP, losing 5 from both Defenses for each ⊗ Wound held. Past 2, it is done.

It can be killed. That is what separates it from the thing below.

20The TitheBoss · Attacks at +6

♦ 17 · ☆ 12 · ● 8 · △ 16 □ 16 · □ 14 · ⇒ 9 · ► 11

Nobody agrees on what it was. It is larger than anything has a right to be, it has learned what a cart is and what a cart means, and it has worked this road for longer than the settlements at either end have stood. It is called that because it takes its share and goes.

♦Take

Roll +6 against □ Physical Defense within 2 □ Units. On a hit, **6** damage. Against a target already downed, it takes them and leaves.

♦Sound

Roll +6 against the □ Mental Defense of everyone who can hear it. On a hit, that character **steps down on Spirit.**

It does not finish. At 0 + HP it takes a ⊗ Wound and goes. It returns the next Leg at half maximum + HP and keeps the ⊗ Wound. It carries 3, and nothing on this road has put that many into it.

It settles for less. If it cannot reach a person, it takes the animal, the vehicle, or the Stores, and it is satisfied with any of them.

Reference

Icons

Icon	Meaning
♦	Vigor
☆	Deft
●	Acuity
△	Resolve
+	HP
⊗	Wounds
⊖	Fatigue

Icon	Meaning
⚡	Energy
🛡️	Physical Defense
🧠	Mental Defense
➡️	Movement
➤	Initiative
⬢	Action / Action Point
✧	Free Action
✿	Activity
🏠	Unit