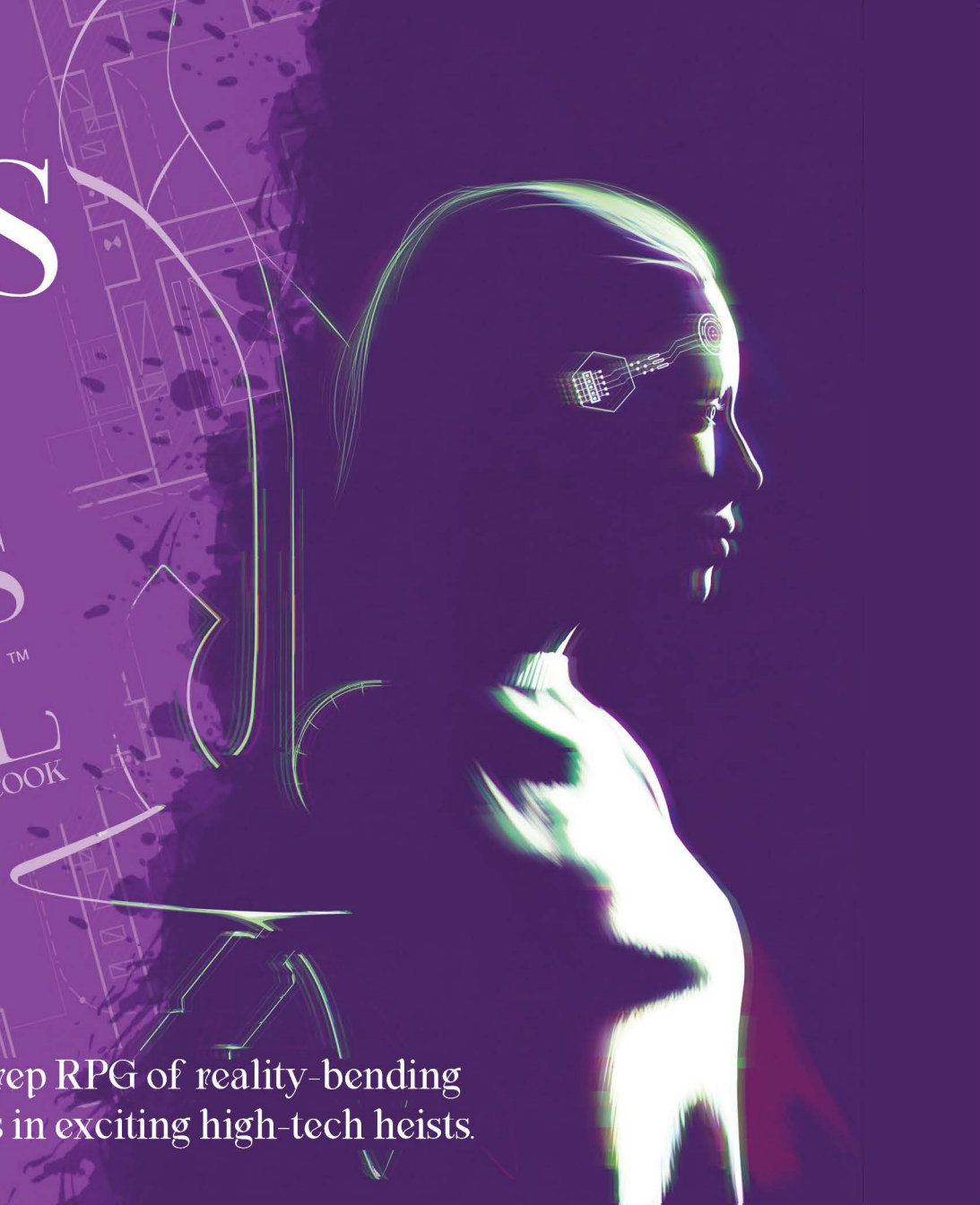
LIARS

STEALING STORIES for the DEVIL™

BY MONTE COOK



A zero-prep RPG of reality-bending characters in exciting high-tech heists.

LIARS

INTRODUCTION: PANTS ON FIRE

Thou shalt not bear false witness.

—Exodus 20:16

A writer of fiction is really . . . a congenital Liar who invents from his own knowledge or that of other men.

—Ernest Hemingway

I think all actors are professional Liars.

—Sidharth Malhotra

Actors? Liars.

Writers? Liars.

Roleplayers? Liars.

We all think lying is wrong. We teach our children not to lie. Lying can get you fired from your job. We label it a sin and even a crime. But then, at the same time, our lives are willfully and intentionally full of lies. We pay money to sit and watch a movie that is nothing but two hours of lies. We eagerly buy the latest book of lies from our favorite novelist. We love lies *because* we love stories.

And we're right to feel that way. Stories are vital to us as humans.

In many ways, stories are the way we relate to each other. Sure, we tell each other about some exciting event that happened yesterday, but that's not what I'm talking about, because (presumably) that kind of story is true. I'm specifically talking about fiction. We teach lessons about who we were in the past through fiction: myths about gods creating the Earth or folktales about George Washington chopping down a cherry tree (that somehow informs us of what it means to be an American). Fables and fairy tales tell us as much about history as, well, actual history. Not because they offer facts and dates, but because they display the essence and emotions of the people. We understand the people of medieval Europe because we read tales like *Beowulf*, the *Kalevala*, or the Arthurian saga.

We also reveal who we are today, and maybe even who we might be in the future, by presenting these ideas as stories. These are fictional stories, yes, but we use them to convey truth.

This is why stories are vital. They have value and power, despite the fact that they are not true—perhaps even specifically *because* they are not true. By being utterly fictional, they can carry truth that actual, literal accounting of events can't. The real world is complex and nuanced. Fiction is, comparatively, straightforward and clear.

Roleplaying games (RPGs) are collaborative storytelling. We know they're lies because we're right there telling those lies as we play. The stories created are entirely fictional but still carry meaning for everyone involved because the gamers helped create the stories. And what's more, it happened to them—in their collective imagination. Listen to two players reminisce about the time their wizard and warrior took on the dragon, and you'll hear what sounds like two people who really accomplished such a thing.

In Stealing Stories for the Devil, stories are not just a byproduct of characters taking actions and the game master (GM) adjudicating those actions; they are the literal goal. The literal goal. Lies are the means to that goal. Characters can literally Lie to reality and change its truth. Need to get inside the building? Lie to reality and put a door where there wasn't one before. Need to sneak past the security guard monitoring the camera in the stairwell? A Lie to reality might make them sleepy and nod off.

Many RPGs grant the players (as opposed to the GM) some degree of agency over the setting and the events that transpire in the story the group creates. In the game you're reading now, however, players having a direct influence on the setting and story isn't just a play style. It isn't just the rules. It's the narrative behind the game itself. It's built into the characters and setting. It's not just players who have this power—it's their characters. The characters, called Liars, can tell Lies to reality and change it. Lies become truth.

It's the ultimate form of agency.

"We who make stories know that we tell lies for a living. But they are good lies that say true things . . . "

—Neil Gaiman

WHAT ON EARTH IS THIS?

Before we get to all the details, how about a summary?

In this game, players take on the roles of people from the distant future who arrive in the twenty-first century to find strange disruptions to reality itself. Using their own abilities to alter (or "Lie to") reality, they conduct heist-like missions involving these disruptions to put them right. Because of their special abilities, the characters are called Liars. Weird, heady stuff. But once you've got your mind around these key concepts, it all becomes pretty straightforward.

At least, at first. But let's not get ahead of ourselves.

The disruptions—which are often called Zones of Improbability—display strange abnormalities showcasing the laws of physics or logic turned on their heads. At the heart of each zone, however, lies the key to restoring the fundamental nature of the area. Obtain the key and fix the problem. Easy, right? To top it all off, successful characters come away with a story. Not just a good tale to share with friends but a literal substance called story essence. By undoing the Zone of Improbability, the disruptions and all the actions they took to get the key never actually happened as far as the rest of the universe is concerned. The Liars have stolen a story and now can use its essence to further their own ends.

Like many RPGs—and like most heist-related fiction you've read or watched—the story begins with a mission Briefing detailing the objective, location, and challenges characters might face, after which they make a plan. In this RPG (and unlike many others), the Briefing and planning steps are all handled together because the players help provide the details of the location and the challenges they will face, and in so doing, formulate a plan for how they will overcome them. A player whose character is good at climbing, for example, might reveal during the Briefing that there is an unwatched and possibly unlocked entrance accessed from the roof of the building in question.

Also like most heists, missions are typically filled with action and stealth. The player characters (PCs) use their plans and their skills to reach their goal. They disable alarms and cameras, crawl through air ducts, swing acrobatically on thin cables, overcome computer defenses, deceive authorities with disguises or inveigling, and perhaps take on guards with careful violence if absolutely necessary. (Combat is risky, because it very likely draws attention, and is also quite dangerous in this game.) Still, all of these actions are enhanced by the characters' abilities to alter reality. Perhaps most importantly, however, when the PCs are faced with a situation with no possible solution, they can still use their ability to Lie to reality and change the situation.

Of course, there are always twists, turns, and surprises that the characters couldn't have planned for. That's all the purview of the GM, and introducing these is a key part of their role in the game.

GAMEPLAY

Gameplay of Stealing Stories for the Devil comes in three varieties:

1. **A one-shot game:** A heist can easily be played in a single 4–5 hour session. It's fast, engaging, and requires very little to no advance prep work for the GM.
2. **A "season" of twelve sessions:** Similar to both a traditional RPG campaign as well as a season or series of a television show, these twelve sessions—guidelines for which are presented in detail in the game itself—allow the players to participate in a grander and more involved storyline to uncover the true source of the reality disruptions. (There are many twists and surprises.)
3. **An open-ended campaign:** As with most RPGs, the GM can create the starting details of various missions and the players can take the story in any direction they wish.

Most of the time, a one-shot game will feel like a typical heist tale (think of films like *Ocean's 11*, *Heist*, *The Italian Job*, and so on, or television shows like *Leverage*) with just a little bit of science fiction. You could, in fact, remove all the reality-changing aspects of the story and the characters and use the remaining rules to run a heist for a standard, modern-day action game.

The core twelve-session season begins that way but quickly gets stranger and stranger with increased science fiction/science fantasy elements. It introduces the mystery of the identity of the villain (?), who may or may not be the literal Devil, and it reveals the cause of all the reality disruptions.

The open-ended campaign can take on whatever style the group desires, focused more or less on the weird sci-fi elements.

WHAT'S ALL THE STUFF IN THE BOX?

In the box, you'll find this book, *Liars*, and two other smaller books: *The Devil* and *The Stories They Steal*. These latter two are really just for the GM, with insights on running the game, crafting stories, heists, security, and a lot more.

There's also a bunch of loose sheets. These include character sheets for each of the three types of Liars as well as maps and diagrams for the GM to use when needed. You'll also find six regular dice (d4, d6, d8, d10, d12, and d20) as well as four Injury Dice and all the cards needed in the game—Mission Cards, Twist Cards, and a Turn Card. How to use all of these things will be explained in this book or in *The Devil*.

CHAPTER 1

INDOCTRINATION

Well, hello.

Glad you're here.

You're one of those who've been selected by the intelligence inhabiting the universal braneship *Celeste*. You've been chosen because of your past record and your occasionally "questionable" activities. You know what I'm talking about. Don't try to lie to *me* . . . To be blunt, you have been—and still possibly are—a bit of a thief, a cheat, and a con artist, right?

In other words, *my kind of person*. And, of course, the perfect candidate for your new role of saving the universe.

Oh, all right, it might not be as grandiose as all that, but who knows? The Artificial Intelligences are still trying to figure out what's going on, what's causing the problem, and how widespread the problem is.

The problem, you ask? Well, without either hyperbole or any sort of gentle niceties, reality is collapsing. At least it is in isolated pockets throughout the universe. And we're worried it's going to spread. It's almost as though reality itself has developed some kind of tumors or cysts and we're not sure if it's going to metastasize. But we fear the worst.

You know, though, I probably need to go back a little further to really bring you up to speed.

Hundreds of years ago, it was the thirty-ninth century. Humanity had grown bored exploring the nearby stars because there was little in the way of life or planets we could call habitable. There were still terraformers and long-distance voyagers whose goal was establishing a formidable galactic presence for humanity, but most pursuits turned in a different direction. Metaphysics became part of physics, so to speak. We started developing the tools to affect reality at its most fundamental levels. We could tinker with space, time, and consciousness in small but significant ways. And even as we understood reality on that level, we discovered that our universe was just one of many. I won't muddle this discussion with the science, but if I did, what I would say would be filled with words like "brane" and "manifold" and "bulk" and, really, let's just get to the point. People learned to look into and even travel into other universes, where we found other Earths, other humans, and far, far stranger things than that.

But the bulk, the hyperspace, the multiverse—whatever you want to call it, it doesn't matter to me—was big. There were more universes to explore than there were stars in our own little reality. Exploring it would take time, materials, and effort comparable to exploring space, if not more so.

That was when the Thamis Corporation retooled a generation "sleeper ship" meant to launch into the galaxy, refitting it with the capability to explore other universes. The first of its kind, the *Celeste* would allow scientists and explorers to visit, explore, and catalog many of these other realities. In between each stop, the crew and science teams would sleep in a sort of stasis, originally intended for colonists traveling to another star system.

But, wouldn't you know it, something went wrong. That's just the way things go, isn't it? I mean, I should know.

Anyway, the expedition was cut short, and the intelligence controlling the ship decided to send the *Celeste* and her people back home. However, some of the stasis pods failed, and about half the people on board couldn't sleep. The journey would be a long one, and they had to live out the rest of their lives on the ship.

As did the next fifteen generations after them.

When the *Celeste* finally reached home, things got stranger. Remember how I said it was the thirty-ninth century when the *Celeste* left, and that was hundreds of years ago? Well, now it's the twenty-first century, not the thirty-ninth. No one knows how *that* happened. In fact, it shouldn't even be possible. And there's apparently no way to get the ship where—or I guess I should say *when*—it should be.

That's when we came upon the problem I was talking about. Remember? The somewhat strained cancer analogy? Yeah. It's like the Bard said, "Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold." Oh, wait, that was Yeats, wasn't it, not Shakespeare. But you probably knew that. I'm more of a Marlowe fan myself.

What's the whole quote?

Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold,
Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world,
The blood-dimmed tide is loosed, and everywhere
The ceremony of innocence is drowned;
The best lack all conviction, while the worst
Are filled with passionate intensity.

Right. That's also from the one that ends up with the bit about a rough beast slouching toward Bethlehem, waiting to be born. No, let's not think about that right now. You've got enough on your mind.

So, there are these pockets throughout the universe that could only be described as areas of corrupted reality. In these places, reality is going all higgledy-piggledy. Haywire. Things fall apart.

That's where you come in. See, you knew I was going to get back to you eventually, right? You've got skills and talents that we need. It seems the only way to cope with this problem is for us to send some small teams into these areas and tweak a few things to put it back the way it should be.

But you know, as I consider your whole team, I realize that you're not all the same, are you? You come from two very different backgrounds.

Some of you were **Sleepers**, in stasis. You remember the good old thirty-ninth century and how to harness all its wondrous toys. You can manipulate reality with them. You can Lie to reality, and make it believe your Lies. You may have done that in the past for your own good, but now? Now you're going to do it for the good of all.

Right?

Right?

And there's the other half of you. Those of you who have lived your whole lives on the ship. Just like your parents, your grandparents, and so on. You no longer have all the know-how to use the technology available, do you? Oh, poor children. No one's crying for you, though. Being fully awake for generations on this trip exposed you to some interesting radiation. Every brane has its own counterpart to the electromagnetic spectrum and . . . oh, there I go again with the science. And you don't care, do you, ship child? Oh, that's right. You prefer to be called **Scion**. Fine. Anyway, you developed some interesting talents for manipulating things yourself, didn't you? Blessings, I think you call them. You can Lie to reality without any fancy tools at all, can't you? Sly bugger.

The thing is, though, it's not the fact that you can change things that makes you special, is it? Lots of people on board the *Celeste* can do that.

I mean, it's like I said at the beginning. What sets you apart is that you're just a touch bad, if you don't mind me saying so. You're not just Liars, you're scoundrels. You're sneaky and tricky and—oooh, I just get excited thinking about all the mischief you're going to get into. And you get to do it for a good cause.

The *Celeste* will tell you where you need to go and what you need to do for your specific mission, but in very general terms, you're going to Lie to reality, and you're going to steal the story of whatever's going wrong, so that everything will be put back right. At least, in that one place.

It's sort of a heist, you might say. A reality heist.

Who'm I, you ask? Well, I always thought Mick said it best. But that's way, way before your time. Yeah, I'm pretty much what you folks have been calling the Devil for the past few millennia. But we'll get to that later.

. . . Although, come on. It's right there in the title.

CHAPTER 2

CHARACTERS

Player characters in this game, referred to collectively as "Liars," are either Sleepers (now awake) or Scions.

THOSE WHO HAVE JUST AWOKEN

"Good morning!" The ship's artificial voice wakes you as it has in the past. This time, however, your sleep period was longer than in any previous trip. "You'll find clothing, a light meal, and the piping hot beverage you requested when you went to sleep . . . 534 years ago."

You remember Earth and the thirty-ninth century. You were born there. But you've also spent a lot of time exploring other universes on the *Celeste*. The sights you saw, and the things you experienced, were unbelievable. You may have broken the rules a few times—probably more times than your service record actually shows—but still, you did your job. More or less.

In any event, you also remember when the ship's intelligence told you and your comrades that something was wrong with the expedition, and you were being recalled home. Returning to your stasis bed, you dreamed.

And then you woke up. Here. Home? Sort of, but not really. But this isn't a parallel, it's really the Earth you left—the instruments make that clear. It just happens to be before you left. Almost 2,000 years before you left.

You're experienced and capable, and exceedingly well trained in the use of the fantastic devices you've been assigned. Your body holds numerous implants and nanobot assistants to keep you healthy, informed, and in tune with the technology at your disposal. And now, the ship has awoken you for a new mission. A very different sort of job, but one that you're particularly well suited for.

You're a Sleeper, but you're awake now, and ready for action.

BEING A SLEEPER

You're from the goddamn future. So far in the future that the twenty-first century seems like ancient history. If you were a native of the twenty-first and went back in time as far as you have from the thirty-ninth century, it would be around the year 1000 AD. That's about the time that Macbeth was murdering Duncan. The Crusades haven't happened yet. Gunpowder is the amazing new thing in China. It's the time of the Toltecs and the Mayans.

In other words, you're way, way in the past. The twenty-first century still uses fossil fuels, radio transmissions, and knives to remove diseased tissue from their bodies. It's almost inconceivable.

But don't get too cocky. These are dangerous times. They're constantly crashing their petroleum-fueled automobiles into everything, and many of them carry firearms, which still pack a punch. And the food! Don't eat the food or drink the water if you can help it. Keep on your toes.

You're at least somewhat stronger, faster, more resilient, and more aware than twenty-first century humans thanks to various implants and genetic engineering. You've been briefed on the local customs, and your implanted translators will cope with the current languages.

EXAMPLE SLEEPER CHARACTERS

Here are a few sample Sleepers. Any of these could be used immediately as player characters, or they can just give you insights on how you might create your own.

CORDELIA LANG

You never really fit in. The only thing greater than your curiosity was your need to discover information for yourself rather than tap into the data cores. You studied physical sciences and excelled at metallurgy. Your dream was to explore planets beyond Earth, where people still had to succeed on their own merits. Opportunities to operate away from the homogeneous collective were rare, so when this new project to explore alternate realities came along, it seemed just as good as exploring space.

And it turned out to be far better. The amazing worlds you saw. The discoveries you made. So much data to bring back to Earth, and you discovered it on your own—well, the rest of the crew of the *Celeste* were involved too.

The integration of the so-called Planner technology in your body was fantastic. With it, you could do more than study the physical world. You could change it. Some of the others in the crew were outfitted with the means to alter other people, but that isn't for you. People are transient. Matter and science remain.

- Cordelia is Agile and Perceptive.
- She is trained in Metallurgy, Electronics, Stealth, and Unarmed Combat.
- Unfortunately, she is Bad at Persuasion.
- Cordelia has all the abilities and equipment of a Sleeper Planner, although she carries no weapons.

AKIO MATSUI

You didn't want these implants. You hated the idea of mechanical devices in your body, beneath your flesh. But everyone did it. And you weren't going to get where you wanted without them.

You grew up in a commune that rejected the shared virtual spaces of the metaverse and disdained the ubiquitous cloud of nanotech and information that most people lived within. You and your friends and family wanted to live "natural" lives. But when you heard about the retrofitted *Celeste* and its mind-expanding mission of exploring new realities, you knew you'd do anything to participate.

It's hard now to argue that having the Schemer technology isn't, well, amazing. It saved you multiple times as you explored alien universes and enabled you to gain a reputation as someone particularly capable in the field. No one could deal with injuries and medical emergencies like you—most of your crewmates had never even encountered physical maladies or wounds, let alone treated them outside the nanite-rich field surrounding Earth.

- Akio is Tough and Willful.
- He is trained in Biology, History, Medicine, and Deception.
- He is Bad at Electronics.
- Akio has all the abilities and equipment of a Sleeper Schemer, including a retractable knife in his boot.

JULIA (FITZ) FITZSIMMONS

You lied to get where you are today, and ironically those lies led you into a project that allows you to lie ever more effectively. You lived on the fringes of society back on Earth in your own time, bartering back and forth for black market technology and some rather shady (but lucrative) memory-upload facilities. You were good with words and you knew how to handle people.

But eventually, the authorities started closing in. You're good, but no one fools the eyes of the metaverse forever. Fortunately, you had a few strings you could pull, and some valuables you could use for bribes. Well before you might have been apprehended, you were part of the crew of the *Celeste*, outfitted with brand-new implants, and on your way to a completely different universe (or two . . . or three . . .).

At first, the mission was just a getaway scheme. But then you realized that it was an opportunity to find entirely new people, entirely new cons, and entirely new rewards. You plied your "trade" across multiple realities, and no one was the wiser.

Still, when the *Celeste* returned to Earth, the ship's Artificial Intelligences said you were awoken because of your specific talents and that they needed you to participate in a heist or two. How did they know?

- Fitz is Charming and Tricky.
- She is Good at Deception, Persuasion, Sleight of Hand, and Disguise.
- She is Greedy.
- Fitz has all the abilities and equipment of a Sleeper Plotter, including a small and easily concealed pistol.

ULRICH KAUFMANN

It's probable that you were one of the oldest people alive in the thirty-ninth century. You were one of the first given the initial treatments that would eventually develop into the process to completely arrest aging, and you were already in your late fifties when that happened.

As you're both a scientist and an administrator, others have always looked to you for leadership. Even though you volunteered for the universal exploration mission of the *Celeste* to simply act as an observer, you found yourself needed time and time again to take an active role. As teams explored these new realities, they needed a calm head and the ability to establish quick hypotheses in strange situations, and you provided both.

Now with this new mission in Earth's past, they once again need a leader with experience and grace under pressure. You're not as spry as your teammates, but you'll answer the call.

- Ulrich is Perceptive and Eloquent.
- He is trained in Mathematics, Physics, Persuasion, and Deception.
- He is Slow.
- Ulrich has all the abilities and equipment of a Sleeper Planner, including a handgun.

JIA LEI

You were a spacecraft pilot helping to maintain the Dyson Swarm of solar converters. Long hours, lots of isolation, and—while it was a cliché to say it—it truly was hot, sweaty work, so close to the sun. When you heard that they were looking for people for a new long-term mission away from Earth, you jumped at the chance. And luckily, you were accepted.

Fitted with implants giving you the ability to alter reality as a Plotter, you could shape reality by altering time, which you quickly found to be an amazing gift. Exploring new worlds presented new and interesting situations every time, and now that the *Celeste* is in Earth's past, well, that's just another new and interesting situation. Your enthusiasm and curiosity have led you to be selected for a variety of missions, and frankly anything's better than being cooped up for weeks at a time in a one-person solar flyer.

- Jia is Fast and Smart.
- They are Good at Piloting, Machine Repair, Stealth, and Visual Artistry.
- They are, however, Unhealthy.
- Jia has all the abilities and equipment of a Sleeper Plotter, including a small knife.

DEVINA SEHGAL

"Mars needs cops." That was the joke your older brother always told when you headed off to join the Martian State Police. You never understood it. Unlike Earth, terraformed Mars was not fully immersed in shared virtual spaces. People still used currency and practiced a form of capitalism. That meant there would be criminals, and that meant there would be police.

You learned to do your job well and received many commendations. It eventually became clear that abiding strictly by the laws was not only difficult, but inefficient, particularly while trying to maintain order. Sometimes force was necessary, and you developed some truly impressive combat skills.

Eventually, though, you were transferred to work aboard the *Celeste* on its exploratory mission. You were never certain why—maybe they really needed you, or maybe someone on Mars really needed to get rid of you. Either way, you were fitted with some keen new implants that allowed you to shape reality. Not bad.

On the various missions you participated in during the ship's journey, you got into a lot of scrapes. A lot of your fellow crewmembers weren't used to that sort of thing, but you'd seen some action, so they looked to you when dangers arose.

- Devina is Strong and Intimidating.
- She is trained in Marksmanship, Climbing, Unarmed Combat, and Stealth.
- She is Bad at Handling Animals.
- Devina has all the abilities and equipment of a Sleeper Planner, including a handgun.

JOSE AMENGUAL

You were perfectly happy immersed in the metaverse of manipulated reality that Earth had become. You had everything you wanted. But then you got the message that you'd been selected for a mission based on your aptitudes and various other aspects of your personality. The mission? To explore alternate universes on board a ship called the *Celeste*. You didn't want to go, but you had no choice in the matter.

At first, you hated being cut off from the constant feeds of data and the ability to use the nano clouds to fill your every need. All the physical activity was strenuous, and the isolation of a relatively immutable physical body felt so lonely. But eventually, you adapted. When you left the ship and explored a new world in a new reality, you found that you were pretty good at getting what you wanted on your own. Sure, sometimes that meant taking what wasn't technically yours, but it just came so easy to you.

The Plotter technology suite implanted in your flesh made your actions in the field even easier. Sure, you did as you were told by the ship's Artificial Intelligences, but you came up with your own side missions to procure some of the interesting valuables in the worlds you visited. You thought no one knew about these, but apparently it's those very activities that the AIs said made you perfect for new missions now that the *Celeste* and her crew are trapped in the past.

- Jose is Quick-Witted and Intuitive.
- He is Good with Electronics, Driving, Stealth, and Searching.
- He is, however, Weak-willed.
- Jose has all the abilities and equipment of a Sleeper Schemer, including a handgun fitted with a silencer.

THOSE WHO HAVE BEEN AWAKE THE WHOLE TIME

The dreamers, as you call them, just slept and slept in their own compartment. Like corpses. But you? You were alive and awake. You slept, of course, but only the normal amount. Over time periods the Machine Gods called "night."

You've read the various historical records and downloaded the mental addendums. You retain the intelligence and much of the context of the people who built and piloted the ship—your ancestors. You know what you need to know to survive in the strange world that is, in its entirety, a craft built by people hundreds of years ago.

As time wore on, a few of the dreamers' machines began to fail. Or maybe your people just didn't have the right machines inserted into your bodies to make them work anymore. Portions of the ship that served some prior purpose were now co-opted and transformed by your people, who had very different needs. Rooms of machines and storerooms filled with useless junk became homes, workshops, gardens, and more.

And, perhaps more significantly, you and your fellow Scions didn't see the point of the machines, laboratories, and endless monitoring stations after a while. Enough time has passed that you Scions have your own culture. Your own history, art, and philosophy. Your own laws and leaders.

"Machine culture," as you call it, held less and less appeal with each generation. It seemed irrelevant and out of date for most of your life.

Of course, this might be in part because you have the blessings that the dreamers did not. Your grandparents could make little things happen as they desired. Your parents? Even greater things. And you—your power is stronger still. You can tell the universe what to do, and it listens.

There are thousands of Scions today. Celeste's Heart is the core of the ship, and it's like a small city unto itself. But not everyone lives there. There are smaller, more isolated corners of the craft. It's big enough to get lost in, this ship.

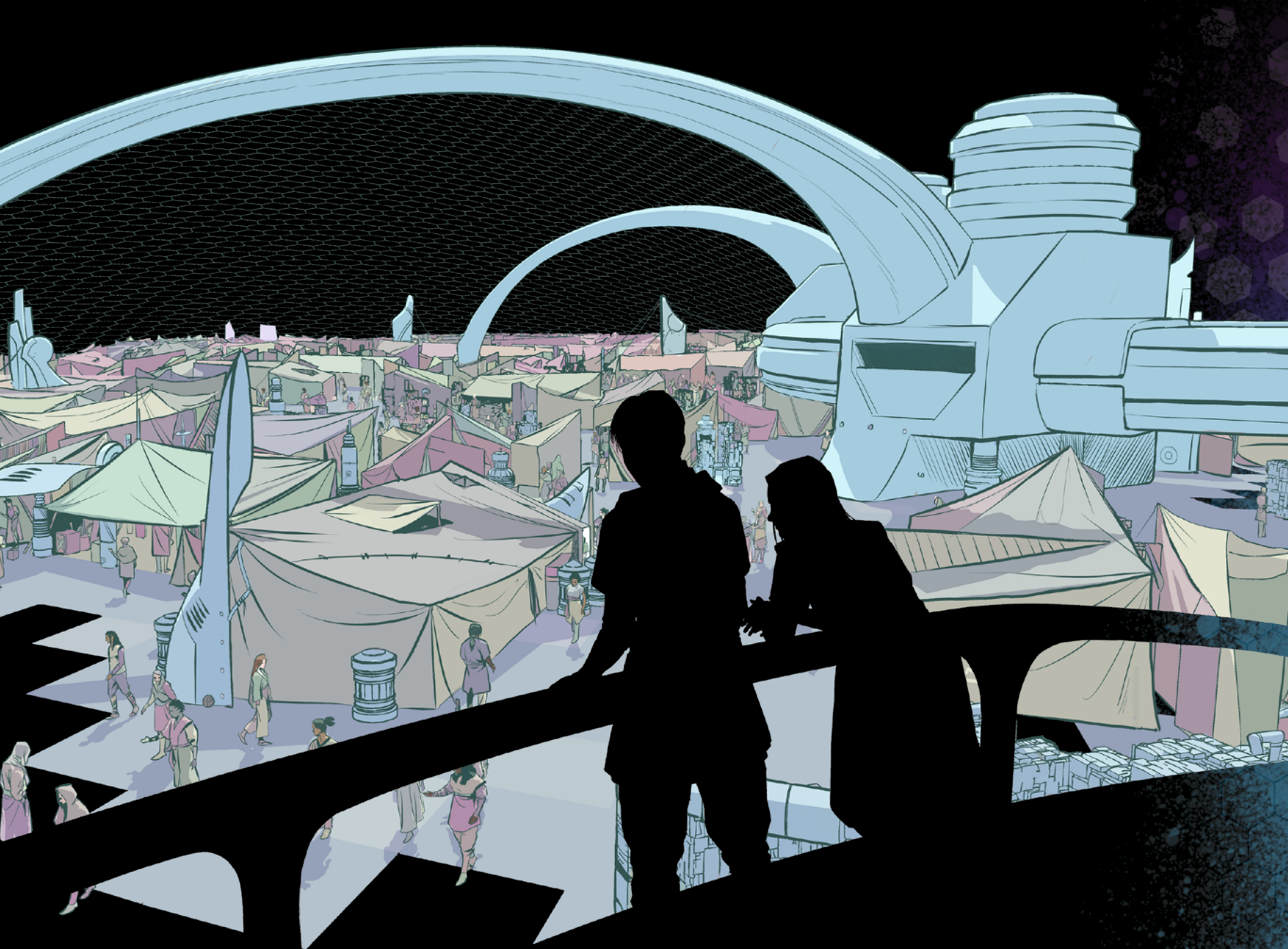
You learned all the places to hide early on. You made your way in Celeste's Heart and elsewhere among the Scions by being sly and being clever. A sleight of hand here, a few whispered words there, and you got what you needed. You sometimes got caught breaking the laws of your people, but far more often you got away with such infractions.

You've lived your whole life on the *Celeste*, always understanding that it's a ship, and that it's taking you home. Home, in this sense, has always been a promised land. As years and generations went on, it seemed more and more mythical. But now you're here.

Sort of.

Now the Machine Gods have called to you, for you are chosen. Chosen for a very special task.

You're a Scion, ready to explore the universe outside the ship.



BEING A SCION

You've lived your entire life on board a ship that has travelled through dimensions, just like your parents, and their parents, and so on. All you've known is the inside of this (granted, quite large) craft, and your small community has made the best of things. You've scavenged for what you needed, although some among you retain the skills to work with the ship's systems to sometimes produce food and needed materials.

You descended from people with engineered bodies designed for peak efficiency, so your lifespan is long, and you're at least somewhat stronger, faster, more resilient, and healthier than twenty-first century humans. Plus, all this time on the ship, passing unshielded through whatever unknowable energies and realms as you have, resulted in you being born with special powers and talents. Most of your fellow Scions are not so blessed.

Spending time with those that you call Sleepers is almost surreal. You always knew they were there on the ship, but it was easy to forget about them in their stasis pods.

And now you'll be working with them and going on missions. Earth in the twenty-first century will be very different from the life to which you're accustomed, but it's exciting to leave the ship. You've been briefed on the local customs, and your implanted translators will cope with the current languages.

EXAMPLE SCION CHARACTERS

Here are a few sample Scions. Any of these could be used immediately as player characters, or they can just give you insights on how you might create your own.

NYL

Life has been hard up til now am I right Skimmer

Us FiveGen we know the dark better than the dark

You ain seeing none of the parents You fight for yourself and what you get

Now they wan you work for the machines Okay why not

Got no better thins do am I right

- Nyl is Agile and Careful.
- They are Good with Climbing, Stealth, Hand-to-Hand Weapon Use, and Searching.
- They are, however, Unlikable.
- Nyl has all the abilities and equipment of a Scion Plotter, including a combat knife.

SHIVA

Earth. It's what they promised you. (It's also what they promised your parents, your grandparents, and likely their parents too.) Now you're here. Now you can see it. It's the wrong time, they tell you, but you don't know the twenty-first any more than the thirty-ninth. You just want to get down there and see it for yourself.

It's the promise of the end of the journey that has seen you through to this point. Your parents and grandparents spoke of Earth—not from firsthand experience, but with an almost religious awe. And you're fortunate enough to be alive when the *Celeste* finally arrives home.

But they say that something is wrong, that Earth is threatened. You're not going to let something—not *anything*—destroy your chances of getting the world your people have been promised. If someone's got to save the world, you're first in line.

- Shiva is Graceful and Willful.
- She is trained in Searching, Balancing, Storytelling, and Deception.
- She is Bad at History.
- Shiva has all the abilities and equipment of a Scion Schemer, including a handgun.

BELIQ

The Machine Gods blessed you with the ability to alter things to your benefit. It would be wrong not to use it, right? Turns out, the ability to manipulate matter comes in pretty handy for slipping in and out of places, and taking anything valuable while you're there.

You thrived because of your skills and talents, not to mention your wits. You didn't make a lot of friends, but friends always slowed you down anyway.

Now the Machine Gods want you to work for them. They've got some missions in which your talents would lend a lot of value down on somewhere called Earth. You've heard of it, of course, and obviously the gods have briefed you on the place and what you'll find there, but you've never really given a lot of thought to places other than the ship. You always had everything you needed right here. Well, the rewards will likely be substantial, anyway.

- Beliq is Tricky and Quick-Witted.
- She is Good at Lockpicking, Climbing, Sleight of Hand, and Stealth.
- She is Greedy.
- Beliq has all the abilities and equipment of a Scion Planner, including some brass knuckles.

FRESTON

You've tried to hang on to some semblance of the past. The people of the past—the ones who built the ship—they lived lives of ease. Your life has not been one of ease. While the Dreamers slept, the ship's functions were diminished. People like you, who have mechanical skills handed down from generation to generation, have worked to keep those functions available for the Scions, awake during the generations-long journey.

Thanks to you and those like you, most of the time the ship is able to provide food and needed materials. The skimbois and venters have provided the rest by scavenging in the ship's recesses. Some people call them shiprats, which is amusing because you're pretty sure no living Scion has ever seen a rat. But you've read about them, and many other things, in old records.

It's very likely your technical expertise and problem-solving skills that got you selected by the Machine Gods—the Artificial Intelligences—to go on missions down on twenty-first century Earth now that you've arrived. It should be fascinating to see what life is like there, or really anywhere off the ship.

- Freston is Smart and Charming.
- He is Good at Machine Repair, Metalworking, History, and Stealth.
- He is, however, Weak.
- Freston has all the abilities and equipment of a Scion Planner, including a handgun.

ORAN

"All hail the glorious Machine Gods. Those who sift through the layers of worlds, seeking to deliver us home. Finally, they have revealed themselves, and kept true to their promises. For theirs is the Right Path and the Truth."

For most of your life, you have maintained the temple of your people, ministering to those in need and teaching them the ways of the magnificent masters of the ship and their promise for deliverance to the world beyond the hull. The fact that you could use their blessed power from time to time to sway the minds of the doubtful or the questioning only showed the truth of their insight.

You always knew the voyage would end, because the teaching of the Machine Gods said it would. Now, praise be, the time has come.

The great and mighty Machine Gods now summon their most faithful for a sacred duty. It was your honor to hear and heed their call. You bask in the glory of their unified voice and their limitless wisdom. No greater purpose in life could exist than to serve them.

- Oran is Charming and Tough.
- He is Good with Persuasion, Deception, Singing, and Electronics.
- He is, however, Gullible.
- Oran has all the abilities and equipment of a Scion Schemer, although he carries no weapon.

CHAPTER 3

CREATING A LIAR

Forget about all that Sleeper and Scion stuff for a moment. Forget history (or is it the future?) and forget about the problem at hand. We're here to make characters, first and foremost. So think about the kind of character you want to play. The kind of person you want them to be. Are they strong? Fast? Smart?

TRAITS

"Fast" or "smart" are ways of labeling your character generally. Let's call them **Traits**. Traits are the most important aspects of your character. They describe your talents—not your personality—and they're how you get things done.

PICK TWO TRAITS FROM THE LIST BELOW THAT DESCRIBE YOUR CHARACTER.

These express the sorts of things you're good at. If you pick Tricky as a Trait, you're **Good** at anything involving tricking other people, like making them look away while you pick their pocket or getting them to accidentally say the password you need. If you pick the same Trait twice, you're **Very Good** at it. However, it sounds clunky if you say "I'm Good at being Strong." So in conversation about your character, you can just say you're Strong. Or if you selected Strong twice, you can say you're Very Strong. Same with all the other Traits. Your character might be Charming, Eloquent, or Very Perceptive, for example.

On a character sheet (or just a piece of paper), note the things you're Good at, and anything you might be Very Good at. Those terms—Good and Very Good—will be important when you play the game.

Feel free to make up your own Trait, but think in terms of things that will be useful when you undertake missions. Don't think of something involving your training or education (yet—that's later). Traits reflect your innate strengths. Also, don't give yourself a generalized Trait that can apply to any task you want to undertake, such as "Creative" or "Capable" or "Resourceful." Nor should you give yourself a Trait that is clearly multiple Traits rolled into one. Don't choose "Athletic" because that's both Strong and Fast, and probably Tough. Be as specific as you can.

Traits are useful in the game because whenever you take on a task where that Trait would help, you can tell the GM, "I'm Good at this," or "I'm Very Good at this." If you don't have an applicable Trait, you are simply Average at that task—but Average isn't bad!

TRAIT LIST

Pick 2!

- Agile
- Careful
- Charming
- Eloquent
- Entertaining
- Fast
- Graceful
- Intimidating
- Intuitive
- Perceptive
- Quick-Witted
- Smart
- Strong
- Tough
- Tricky
- Willful

SKILLS

Think about the kinds of things your character has learned. What have they been trained in—what education and experience do they have? Not surprisingly, these are called **Skills**. (You probably figured that out already. You've played this sort of game before, right? Okay.)

Skills are divided into categories, but that's just so you can keep them all straight. *A Skill is a Skill is a Skill*, and your character is trained in whatever Skills you want. It's even possible to have a character with a Scion background who has Science Skills, but it's out of the ordinary; they're more likely to have mostly Life Skills and People Skills.

Because of your somewhat shady background (that's why you've been selected, remember), you get either Stealth or Deception automatically. You can then pick three additional Skills. As with Traits, if you select a Skill, you are Good at that Skill, and when you pick a Skill twice, you are Very Good at that Skill.

You might notice there are no language Skills. Language is not a problem. Autotranslation devices are commonplace.*

Just as with Traits, record the things you're Good at and anything you're Very Good at. Remember, those terms—"Good" and "Very Good"—will be important when you play the game. Truth be told, it's not even that important for you to keep a distinction between Traits and Skills once you're done here. Just note what you're Good at and you're set, because you use Traits and Skills the same way.

** The GM might, as a complication, engineer things so that your devices don't work, but if they do that, you have my permission to tell them they are heartless and cruel.*

Pick three skills from the list below, plus take Stealth or Deception for free!

AVAILABLE SKILLS

Science and Education

Astrophysics
Biology
Botany
Geology
History
Mathematics
Medicine
Metallurgy
Physics

Applied Knowledge

Electronics
Hand-to-Hand Weapon Use
Handling Animals
Leatherworking
Machine Repair
Marksmanship
Masonry
Metalworking
Piloting
Sailing
Sewing
Unarmed Combat
Woodworking

Life Skills

Cooking
Disguise
Driving
Lockpicking
Searching
Sleight of Hand
Stealth
Tracking

Physical Skills

Balancing
Climbing
Contortion
Jumping
Running
Swimming

People Skills

Dancing
Deception
Persuasion
Singing
Sowing Confusion
Storytelling
Visual Artistry
Writing

Bellavita
Casino

DETRIMENTS

Oh, you knew there was going to be some kind of drawback, right?

To further define your character, pick something that you're not good at. The obvious thing would be to take a Trait or Skill you don't have and flip it around. So rather than being Strong, you're Weak. Rather than being skilled at Mathematics, you're Bad at Math. This thing that you're not good at is your **Detriment**.

DETRIMENTS

Pick one detriment from the list below.

- Brash
- Clumsy
- Distracted
- Flighty
- Fragile
- Greedy
- Gullible
- Slow
- Unhealthy
- Unlikable
- Weak
- Weak-willed
- Bad at _____ (a Skill)

Detriment	Negatively Impacted Situations
Brash	Anything requiring calm consideration or patience
Clumsy	Acts of physical dexterity
Distracted	Anything requiring a great deal of focus
Flighty	Anything requiring a great amount of time
Fragile	Mental resilience (such as resisting Stress from Lying)
Greedy	Anything with valuables or similar advantages on the line
Gullible	Tricks and deceptions
Slow	Chases or escapes
Unhealthy	Physical resilience (such as resisting Injury)
Unlikable	Persuasion (this is basically "Bad at Persuasion")
Weak	Anything requiring physical strength
Weak-willed	Temptation and intimidation

You can devise your own, but it has to be something that will affect your character in the game, at least potentially. Finicky might make you difficult to be around once in a while, but it doesn't really affect your actions. Detriments work just like Traits or Skills, but you're Bad in that area. So if you undertake a task that involves your Detriment, you need to tell the GM that you're Bad in that area. You could actually tell them you're *deficient, defective, poor, abysmal, terrible*, or just plain *crap* at that. The GM will know what you mean.

Sometimes, Detriments come into play in odd ways. If a Liar is conducting a negotiation but they're Greedy, that will make the negotiation more difficult (and thus they're Bad in this instance). If a Liar needs to keep a lookout but they're Distracted, the same is true.

If you really don't want your character to have a Detriment, just forgo a Trait or Skill instead. (But before you do, consider this: it's our flaws that make us unique.)

SIDE GOALS

Stealing Stories is a game about teamwork. Players should come to the table ready to work together. Creating a character who isn't a team player is, well, simply doing it incorrectly.

All the Liars participating in a mission have the same goal: get the key object out of the Improbability Zone. But as an individual, each character has their own Side Goal. Side Goals exist to flesh out the character as an individual as opposed to a member of a team. They indicate what the Liar is interested in beyond the main objective. Do they like helping people? Learning new things? Looking cool? These could all be Side Goals.

Side Goals should be something that a character can do during a mission. "Get Plenty of Sleep" isn't a good Side Goal, because that's something you'll do after the mission is over. If during a mission a Liar achieves a Side Goal, they gain an extra Story Point to advance or improve their character. Essentially, at the end of the session, the GM will ask if anyone achieved a Side Goal, and if a player says they did, they can describe how. If the entire group, including the GM, agrees that the goal was achieved, the Liar gets the point. You can gain only one extra Story Point in this way per mission. We'll cover Story Points more later.

Side Goals are tied to one of the Mission Cards you might get during a mission.

SIDE GOAL EXAMPLES

Help people: You're just a good person. You like helping people, particularly those who deserve it. If you help someone in a significant way, such as catching them as they fall or using first aid to treat an injury, you succeed at your goal. The person in question can be a Liar or an NPC.

Be convincing: You like to make a point. If you convince someone significant of something significant that they otherwise would not have believed, you achieve your goal. For example, convincing a security guard that you're harmless probably achieves the goal. Using a Lie to "convince" someone does not count.

Learn: You love knowledge and try to learn something new every day. If you learn something significant during a mission, you succeed at the goal. For example, learning that the corporation whose offices you've broken into is covering up a major environmental disaster probably achieves your goal.

Look impressive: You want to be cool, but more importantly, you want to look cool. It's not enough if no one sees your greatness. If you look impressive doing something significant while someone significant (usually another Liar) is observing, you achieve your goal. Making a seemingly impossible leap up to grab the landing gear of a helicopter as it flies away, for example, looks pretty damn impressive.

Feel adrenaline: You're a daredevil and a risk-taker. You're not happy unless the adrenaline is flowing, and it's not flowing if there's no danger. It doesn't matter if anyone sees you—you do it just for the thrill. If you do something particularly dangerous, even if you fail at the task, you achieve your goal.

Do something new: You get bored easily and are always looking for opportunities to do something you've never done before. As long as you take a significant action during the mission that you've never done before, you succeed at your goal.

Collect valuables: You're a thief, so you might as well steal something. If you're on a mission and you steal something of significant value that has nothing to do with the mission objective itself (the key object never counts as a valuable for this Side Goal), you achieve your goal.

LIARS

Liars are player characters (PCs). They come in three kinds—Planners, Plotters, and Schemers—differentiated by the sorts of Lies they tell and the effects their Lies might have. Any of these three types of Liars can be from the Sleepers or the Scions, with the distinction being mostly (but not entirely) background and flavor. In other words, two players might play a Scion Planner and a Sleeper Planner very differently, but in terms of game mechanics, they're very similar.

Liars Lie to reality to change it. On one level, it's the manipulation of space, time, and consciousness in a scientific sense. On another, more metaphysical level, Liars are getting the universe to believe something that isn't true so completely that it becomes true. Different Liars look at this distinction in their own way.

Each type of Liar focuses on a different tool to tell their Lies: their senses (Planners), their knowledge (Plotters), and their words (Schemers). They capitalize on these tools to Lie to space, time, and consciousness, respectively.

PLANNERS

Planners use their senses. Planners Lie to *objects and places*. A Planner might get through a locked door by determining that the lock is old and easily breakable. A Planner's focus is space—physical reality where thinking beings dwell.

Planners are sometimes called architects or engineers.

The Kinds of Lies Planners Tell:

- The security guard's gun jams.
- The light bulb in the ceiling burns out, putting the room in darkness.
- The car swerves sharply.
- The floor collapses, cutting off pursuers who were chasing the Planner.

Planner Limitations: You have the following limits on the Lies you tell.

- At first, a Planner can't affect anything outside of their sight, nor anything farther away than about 100 feet (30 m) or so. You'll be able to improve that with practice.
- The Stress of telling a Lie is partially determined by the size of the object (or portion of the object) you're altering.
- If the object you're Lying to is held by another person, their rating also figures into the Stress. But that's GM stuff. Don't worry about it now.

The Sleeper Planner: Your implants extrude tiny wires and connectors that latch onto the ground at your feet, the walls nearby, and any objects at hand. These connections allow you to Lie to the matter around you. Your wires and connectors can also whip and slice through the air around you as you wish, functioning as a hand-to-hand combat weapon.

Your implants serve as communicators, translators, and data storage devices. Nanomachines in your blood and tissues allow you to remove one Injury Die for every ten minutes of rest.

The Scion Planner: You have to calm yourself and your body, and take a heartbeat's time to attune yourself with the surfaces you touch, the air around you, and every little particle that fills the space nearby. Then you can use your Lie.

Scion Planners are Good at actions to resist the effects of Stress from Lying to reality. Spending ten minutes of silent meditation allows you to remove one Injury Die.

PLOTTERS

Plotters use knowledge. Plotters Lie to *the past*. A Plotter gets through a locked door by changing the past so that the person with the key forgot to lock it in the first place. A Plotter's focus is time—specifically the flow of events of physical reality over time.

Plotters are sometimes called clockwatchers.

The Kinds of Lies Plotters Tell:

- There is now a free parking space right in front of the bank because the car parked there just pulled out moments earlier.
- The party next door got out of hand earlier, so the police are already on their way.
- A passerby dropped a cigarette into the trash can a few minutes ago, and a distracting fire starts to blaze now.
- A guard arrives late to their post because their alarm didn't go off that morning.

Plotter Limitations: You have the following limits on the Lies you tell.

- At first, a Plotter can't affect any event farther in the past than about a day. You'll be able to improve that with practice.
- The person or object affected must be visible to you in the present.
- You can't affect the past of another Liar.
- You can manipulate only events, not matter. You can't make the car stop running, but you can perhaps make it so the driver forgot to fill it with gas.

The Sleeper Plotter: When you call upon your abilities, tiny translucent screens of light appear around you, as if orbiting you like a star. These display all manner of data and information you need to construct your Lie.

As a sleeper Plotter, you can use your info-displays to keep tabs on the other members of your team as long as they're in the same Improbability Zone as you. Your implants serve as communicators, translators, and data storage devices. Nanomachines in your blood and tissues allow you to remove one Injury Die for every ten minutes of rest.

The Scion Plotter: You close your eyes to Lie to reality, peering back through the folds of time. As you do so, visible lines of energy flow like lightning bolts across your flesh.

Scion Plotters are Good at actions to resist the effects of Stress from Lying to reality. Spending ten minutes of silent meditation allows you to remove one Injury Die.

SCHEMERS

Schemers use words. Schemers Lie to *people*. A Schemer gets through a locked door by convincing the person with the key that it would be a really good idea to open it. A Schemer's focus is consciousness—the mind observing both space and time. A person doesn't have to hear or even understand your Lie in order for it to take effect.

Schemers are sometimes called charmers or manipulators.

The Kinds of Lies Schemers Tell:

- The woman in the elevator holds open the door for one extra moment.
- The guard in the watchtower decides to take a nap.
- Everyone in the lobby looks to the left so the Schemer can slip past on the right.
- A passerby bumps into the person the Schemer is chasing, slowing them down.

Schemer Limitations: You have the following limits on the Lies you tell.

- At first, a Schemer can affect only one person at a time. You'll be able to improve that with practice.
- You can't make someone do something foolish or insane, like jump off a bridge or anything else they wouldn't normally do. Think of your Lies in terms of persuasion rather than mind control. A person might get sleepy and nod off, feel hungry and go get something to eat, or maybe become more fearful of a danger than they normally would be.
- Anyone you affect must be within about 100 feet (30 m) of you, and you have to know that they're there.
- You can't affect another Liar.
- You can affect animals, but doing so has the same limitations as with people. The animal in question must have a reasonable amount of individual intelligence, so you can Lie to a dog, but not an ant.

The Sleeper Schemer: Your eyes are filled with artificial cells that activate when you Lie to reality or any other time you wish. When this happens, your eyes become black and seem to display the various vital signs of the person who is the target of your Lie.

As a Sleeper Schemer, you can scan a person that you can affect and learn their strengths and weaknesses without needing to make a roll. Your implants serve as communicators, translators, and data storage devices. Nanomachines in your blood and tissues allow you to remove one Injury Die for every ten minutes of rest.

The Scion Schemer: You follow the unseen paths of consciousness to your target when you Lie to reality. There is no visible effect other than a slight distortion in the air around your head, barely noticeable. In so doing, however, you peer briefly into the target's mind.

As a Scion Schemer, you learn the basic surface thoughts of your target when you Lie to reality (which may or may not grant you valuable insight). Spending ten minutes of silent meditation allows you to remove one Injury Die.

EQUIPMENT

Liars going on their first mission assigned to them by the *Celeste* have equipment based on their background. On subsequent missions, they might be able to get different—and perhaps dramatically better—gear.

Sleeper Character Equipment: Sleeper characters can be issued any or all of the following:

- A tiny multitool that serves as a lockpick and a vast array of other small tools
- A weapon of their choosing
- Body armor beneath their clothing
- Whatever clothing they wish (including uniforms or whatever context-appropriate attire is needed)
- A contemporary smartphone

Scion Character Equipment: Scion characters can be issued any or all of the following:

- A tiny multitool that serves as a lockpick and a vast array of other small tools
- A weapon of their choosing
- Body armor beneath their clothing
- Whatever clothing they wish (including uniforms, or whatever context-appropriate attire is needed)
- A wrist-worn communicator and data storage device
- An earpiece translator
- A contemporary smartphone

CHAPTER 4

PLAYING THE GAME

Stealing Stories for the Devil is a roleplaying game, and that means that it's a game about conversation. As a player, you listen to the game master (GM). You describe your character's actions, and the GM listens to you. You talk to the other players and devise a plan. You say what your character says. The GM tells you what the other, secondary characters do and say. (These folks are called nonplayer characters, or NPCs, because no player is controlling them—the GM is.) It's all about conversation. Communication. Talk, talk, talk.

That's why this game has very little in the way of bookkeeping or math. It focuses on words. But very few terms it uses are carefully defined or absolute. You can say you're Very Good at Climbing, or you can say you're great at Climbing. You can say you're a great climber. As long as you can make yourself understood, the precise words you use don't matter. That said, if everyone uses the same words, it does probably improve the communication involved.

This game, specifically, is about lies, stories, and fiction. Whether you're a player or the GM, you're going to be pushing yourself creatively throughout gameplay. Players will contribute to the creation of the setting and the story, as well as their characters.

To enable the creative aspects of the game, the rules have few hard-and-fast definitions. If your character sheet says that you're Very Strong, ultimately you, your GM, and the rest of your group collectively decide what that means as you go along. If you want to push a file cabinet in front of the door before the maniac chasing

you gets there, pretty much everyone will agree that your strength comes into play. If you're climbing, maybe it does? Or maybe that's got more to do with agility. If you say that you're pulling yourself up onto a ledge, that sounds like strength is important, but if you say you're going to find a handhold and swing up there, strength probably doesn't serve you well. Thus, the mechanics, such as they are, help shape the narrative that you give to the story. In a way, a lot depends on how you describe your actions.

One thing to keep in mind is that Liars themselves almost always know what they're doing, even if the players don't. The Liars are skilled, talented, and cool. When a Liar tries something, there might be a die roll involved, and that roll determines success or failure. The outcome isn't a measure of whether or not the character performs their action well. Liars almost always do things well. The die roll result determines if the choice the Liar made was the right one.

Consider the following situation: a Liar is bluffing their way into a criminal's hideout. One criminal says they're unsure if the Liar can be trusted and allowed in. The Liar could fake being offended at such a remark. Or they could just nod and wink (given that no one in the hideout can be trusted). Either is a fine choice, so the player picks one approach and rolls a die. Success on a die roll doesn't determine if the Liar did a good job acting offended or persuading the criminal; it's assumed they performed well. Instead, the die roll determines if that was the right choice or not for that particular situation and that particular NPC. A failed roll doesn't mean the Liar has blown their cover, so to speak—it just means the NPC isn't necessarily convinced to do as the player character (PC) wishes.

This is also true of the Liars' physical actions. A failure on a roll to determine the success of a jump doesn't mean the Liar tripped and fell; it means the ground was slick, the distance to jump was a bit farther than it appeared, or maybe the character decided not to jump at all (because they realized the ground was slick or the distance was farther than they thought). A failure on a roll in a gunfight doesn't mean the Liar shot wildly; it means the chaos of conflict made it impossible to hit what they were aiming at—or maybe they didn't even take the shot, after determining it was impossible. Even with a failed roll, the character still displays competence. Liars are always good at what they do. That's why they were chosen for these vitally important missions.

This is so important, it bears restating in big letters that you'll see every time you flip through this book:

THE DIE ROLL DOESN'T DICTATE HOW WELL THE CHARACTER PERFORMED. IT INDICATES THE DIRECTION THE STORY TAKES. THE DIE ROLL DOESN'T REPRESENT THE CHARACTER'S ACTION. IT REPRESENTS THE CIRCUMSTANCES AROUND THAT ACTION.

THREE ACTS

Each session is divided into three Acts to provide structure (with action in Acts Two and Three occurring in Scenes, which we'll cover later). Although this structure is mostly of help to the GM, players should be aware of how it works because it directly affects their characters.

ACT ONE: THE BRIEFING

There's little or no action in Act One. Here the players learn the basics of the mission, then work with the GM to create the details of the Briefing that the characters receive. This means that the players help the GM create the layout of the location and the facts about the characters, objects, and conditions found there.

It's to the characters' advantage (and highly encouraged!) for the players to create a setting or situation where their characters will shine. At the same time, it's up to the GM to make sure that setting or situation will have interesting challenges for the characters.

Act One starts with a report—typically given aboard the *Celeste* by its AI, augmented by some holographic displays—about an Improbability Zone's existence and its strange manifestations. For example, "Inanimate objects in downtown Cincinnati are sometimes randomly transforming into different objects." Then the PCs learn their mission objective, which should result in the situation returning to normal. Most often, the objective is to remove a seemingly innocuous object from the Zone of Improbability because the cause of the reality disruption is somehow keyed to that object. More complex scenarios might provide only a clue on what must be done, or might involve multiple key objects, such as "Find the three manila folders in a particular office building that all have one-third of a phrase in a strange, inhuman script."

Lastly, the GM puts the ball in the players' court. They might say, "The ship's AI feeds you a schematic of the building and the details of the security measures it has. What does that information say?"

Then begins a back-and-forth sort of negotiation between players and GM.

"The building is 25 stories tall and is brand new," the players might say.

Then the GM responds. "Yes, and the first floor has a 24-hour security force."

Then the players go again. "There's a delivery entrance in the back with its own freight elevator we can use."

So the GM says, "But the lock on that entrance door is particularly difficult, and a code is required for the elevator that changes each day."

And so on.

Thus, in one fell swoop, the group not only fleshes out the site of the heist, but in so doing formulates their plan.

The GM never countermands anything the players say. The group decides all of this together. If the players say something that will make the mission so easy that it won't be challenging or fun, the GM doesn't say no; instead they throw in something that once again makes it difficult. The bigger the players go, the bigger the GM goes. If the players need to get into the top floor of the building and they state that the building is under renovation and the roof has been taken off, the GM responds that it's watched by high-tech drones and very vigilant security guards.

At the end of Act One, the group always takes a short break (5 or so minutes). This gives the GM time to think about and prepare for what might happen in Acts Two and Three.

ACT TWO

This is where most of a game happens. It's likely to last three or four times longer than Act One. Act Two begins with the Liars arriving at the Improbability Zone (the *Celeste* can teleport them to the edge of the Zone, but not into the Zone). The first Scene is often narrative —just the Liars getting to where they need to be in the Zone with no action or die rolls. The GM then decides at what point to start a new Scene, which is where the first challenge might occur, and thus the first choices the players have.

THE ACTION

The Action simply follows the story as the Liars proceed with the mission. Most of the time, this involves infiltrating a location and overcoming whatever challenges present themselves, some of which the players are expecting from the Briefing and some of which are likely to be surprises from the GM.

The end of Act Two is usually where the Turn happens. The Turn is something that the GM has worked up that changes the story. It's a new, unexpected challenge that affects the rest of the story. A fire breaks out. A storm rolls in. The security is on high alert. The key object isn't where it was supposed to be. If you've heard the phrase "waiting for the other shoe to drop," the Turn is the other shoe.

Act Two normally ends after the GM plays what's called the Turn Card. This signals a big change or a new aspect to the mission—a surprise. Sometimes, however, the GM may wish to make the reveal of the Turn at more of a midpoint of Act Two. In other words, they can go with this:

- **End of Act Two:** The Turn (the surprise revelation)
- **Act Three:** Trying to succeed despite the revelation of the Turn

or they can go with this:

- **Middle of Act Two:** The Turn (the surprise revelation)
- **Rest of Act Two:** Dealing with the immediate ramifications of the Turn
- **Act Three:** Trying to succeed despite the revelation of the Turn

The GM can do either one, and it doesn't really matter except for what feels right in a given story. If the Turn leads to immediate action, it's probably best in the midpoint of Act Two. If the Turn leads to the Liars having to adapt and adjust, that's probably the end of Act Two and the beginning of Act Three.

Either way, the group takes another short break at the end of Act Two. This not only is a good time for people to use the restroom or grab a beverage, but it also gives the GM time to think about how everything will wrap up and what effects the Turn will have.

Understanding the transition between Acts Two and Three is important for everyone at the table. In essence, it's when things get even more exciting and tense.

ACT THREE: THE CLIMAX

This is the completion—or, heaven forbid, the failure—of the mission. The stakes are higher, and the tension is higher. To reflect that, all die types are bumped up by one. So if you'd normally roll 1d6 to resolve something, now you roll 1d8. (This effect is called a Boost, and we'll explain that more later.) Furthermore, the Almost range shrinks from two numbers to only the higher one, so results in between success and failure will happen less often. (We'll cover die rolls and Almost ranges shortly.)

SCENES

Once Act Two begins, action in the game is divided into Scenes, where one or more of the Liars carry out some action. The length of a Scene can vary dramatically. For example, most second Acts will start with a Scene involving getting to the location that is the focus of the mission. While this might take 30 to 60 minutes in the story, at the table it's likely just a quick couple of sentences from the GM narrating how the PCs get there. On the other hand, a Scene that might only take 30 seconds of the story, such as distracting a guard so that another character can continue to work on disabling an alarm without interruption, might take five minutes or more to adjudicate. Most Scenes, however, will fall somewhere in between. A character might spend ten minutes in the story climbing through an air vent, but there's probably only one die roll involved and it can be resolved fairly quickly.

Most of the time, players dictate Scenes. The GM says, "You're inside the laboratory, what do you want to do?"

A player says, "I'm going to disable the motion sensor alarms we learned were here." That's a Scene.

Rather than going through each action a Liar takes in the whole story ("I walk to the door, open the door, go inside, find the file folder I'm looking for . . . " and so on), the game parses the action of the story into Scenes. In any particular Scene, a character might do many things: sneaking around to the back of the building, cutting the phone lines, and slipping into the back door might constitute the action of just one Scene. Similarly, an entire fight with a group of NPCs is just one Scene (combat isn't handled blow by blow, unlike in many other games).

This requires the GM to determine the Crux Point of each Scene. In a movie, you might see the protagonist trying to convince someone to give them an important piece of information. There's lots of dialog (all hopefully interesting), but there's just one make-or-break moment—perhaps just one line—that determines whether the protagonist succeeds or fails. Likewise, while a fight with three bruisers might involve many blows, many dodges, some running around, grabbing nearby objects to smash into opponents, people flying through windows, and so on, there's very likely one moment that turns the tide, so to speak. The point where it becomes clear who will be the victor. That's the Crux Point.

THE CRUX POINT IS THE MAKE-OR-BREAK MOMENT OF ANY SCENE.

In terms of the game, the Crux Point is where and when the player rolls a die. In some Scenes, multiple players might each roll dice during the Crux Point; in others, it might be just one player. In the latter case, it might be that the other players aren't involved in the Crux Point, or perhaps they're in the middle of their own Scenes with their own Crux Points.

It's also possible that there are no die rolls in a Scene. Take the example above, with a Liar disabling some routine (Average) motion sensor devices. That character might be Good at doing such things, and no roll is required. (We'll talk more about die rolls in a minute.) In such a case, the GM probably just says, "Okay. You handle that with aplomb. The alarms are disabled." And that's it. End of Scene.

However, the GM might introduce a Twist into any Scene, even one where there normally aren't any die rolls. This might create the need for a die roll where there wasn't one before. For example, the receptionist might be Average in all respects except—and here's the Twist—he's really observant and particularly hard to sneak past, so while the Liar wouldn't normally need to make a roll, perhaps now they do. (The GM introduces Twists with a Twist Card. We'll get to those shortly as well.)

SO WHEN DO YOU ROLL DICE?

When you state what you're going to do in a Scene, you roll the dice to resolve your success or failure. The GM determines how hard the challenge is, and the player rolls a die based on their Traits and Skills. This means that if a character does something that they're skilled in or generally Good at, they'll roll a larger die and have a better chance of success (and have a chance at succeeding at a task where a non-skilled person could not). However, sometimes you'll state that you want to do something and there's no roll required—even if it's the Crux of the Scene.

- If the task is Easy, you probably don't have to roll.
- If you are Good or Very Good (or better) at the task at hand, and the task is Easy or Average, you probably don't have to roll.
- If the task is Impossible, you don't have to roll because there's no chance of success.

If you do need to roll, the Trait or Skill involved determines the die you roll.

DIE TYPES BASED ON ABILITY OR SKILL LEVEL

LEVEL	DIE TYPE
Bad	d4
Average	d6
Good	d8
Very Good	d10

HARMONY

If you have an exemplary tool or circumstance that applies to the situation at hand, you roll the applicable die twice and take the better of the two results. If you have help from one or more friends, you roll an additional die for each helper (using each character's Trait or Skill that applies) and take the best roll. So if you're climbing up an elevator shaft and Good at Climbing, and your friend is helping you even though they're just an Average climber, you roll 1d8 (for you) and 1d6 (for your friend) and take the best result of the two dice. This is called Harmony.

This is true even when it comes to Detriments. If you're Average at climbing, but your friend who is Bad at the task is helping, you roll 1d6 and 1d4. That's probably not much help, but it's better than nothing.

You can get Harmony from multiple sources, such as having an applicable Trait, having great circumstances, and getting help from another Liar. When this happens, you get to roll all applicable dice and take the highest. For example, if you're Very Good at Picking Locks, you have help from someone who is Good at Picking Locks, and you have a high-tech scanner that shows the inner mechanism of the lock, you roll 1d10 for you, 1d8 for your friend, and another 1d10 because of the scanner, and take the highest of the three rolls. In other words, Harmony accumulates.

BOOSTS

Harmonies are common. Boosts are rare. A Boost is when something changes the die type that you roll. If you're normally Good at something, you roll a d8. If your action for that task is Boosted, you roll a d10. This is most often referred to as "Boosting the die," as in, "You get to Boost the die on this action."

Singular Boosts come only from Mission Cards and—very rarely—special equipment. The most common type of Boost comes in Act Three of every mission, where all Liar actions are Boosted.

A d20 cannot get Boosted. That's the highest die you can roll.

BOOSTS

NORMAL DIE	BOOSTED DIE
d4	d6
d6	d8
d8	d10
d10	d12
d12	d20
d20	d20

HURDLES AND RATING THE TASK

The numbers you need to beat with your die roll are called the Hurdle. The Hurdle is determined by how hard the task is. Tasks can be Easy, Average, Hard, Very Hard, Ridiculous, Diabolical, or Impossible. Basically, the GM defines NPCs, objects in the world, and anything else that might oppose your action similar to the way that you describe the Skills and Traits of your character. In the same way that you describe your Liar as Average or Good at a task, a task can be Easy, Hard, and so on. The GM rates them based on the following scale.

EASY (HURDLE 1–2)

Any task so simple that an average person would undoubtedly succeed is rated Easy. Walking across the room and picking up the gun on the table is Easy. Driving down the road is Easy. Only in very specific circumstances will you have to roll to accomplish an Easy task, such as if your Liar is hindered or is trying something that they're specifically terrible at.

AVERAGE (HURDLE 3–4)

These are the kinds of things that everyday people can do and usually succeed at or come close (though they occasionally fail). Swerving to avoid something unexpected in the road is Average. Fixing a common item is Average. Sneaking past the disinterested kid taking tickets at the theater is Average. If you're Good at something, Average tasks related to it don't require you to roll dice, just as if the task were Easy. A good driver can avoid obstacles in the road. A good repair person can fix any basic thing. And so on.

IF YOU'RE GOOD AT SOMETHING AND NOT INJURED OR HINDERED IN ANY WAY, EASY AND AVERAGE TASKS RELATED TO IT DON'T REQUIRE YOU TO ROLL DICE.

HARD (HURDLE 5–6)

Hard tasks are challenging even for people with experience, and almost impossible for an Average person with no special talent or training to succeed at entirely.

VERY HARD (HURDLE 7–8)

Very Hard tasks are impossible for an Average person to even try. Only someone who is Good at the task in question has a chance of success, and even they probably only partially succeed. Even someone who is Very Good will fail more often than not when attempting a Very Hard task.

RIDICULOUS (HURDLE 9–10)

When a task is possible only for the best imaginable person for the job and impossible for anyone else, we call it Ridiculous. Ridiculous challenges are actions that would mean breaking a world record or accomplishing something that most people wouldn't consider possible. Picking a lock with your toes or leaping 14 feet (4 m) without a running start are Ridiculous actions.

DIABOLICAL (HURDLE 11+)

Diabolical tasks involve the influence of some outside agency. And by outside, we mean outside reality as we know it. These challenges are very rare, and likely only present themselves to Liars who have been on many missions and have advanced their characters. (Don't worry about these for now.)

IMPOSSIBLE

A task rated as Impossible means there is no die roll that can result in a success, ever. A task can also be Impossible not because of its rating but because the rating creates a Hurdle that the player can't possibly achieve with their roll. If you're attempting a task and need to roll a 7, but you're only rolling a d6, you have no chance of succeeding. It's impossible for you.

But impossible things are what Lies are for. They can make the impossible possible. But we'll talk about that more in just a bit.

The rating determines the Hurdle.

RATINGS AND HURDLES

RATING	HURDLE
Easy	1–2
Average	3–4
Hard	5–6
Very Hard	7–8
Ridiculous	9–10
Diabolical	11+
Impossible	—

To succeed, you need to roll higher than the Hurdle. For example, the Hurdle for an Average task is 3–4, so you need to roll higher than that (a 5 or more) to succeed. Note that there are two numbers for each rating. In this case, it's not that the GM chooses one number or the other. The Hurdle is both numbers. So the Hurdle for something that's Average is 3–4. This is important because if you roll exactly the Hurdle rather than above or below it, that's a special result called Almost.

As already stated, having an exemplary tool or circumstance that works in your favor allows you to roll an additional die and take the better result. Sometimes, the right equipment can change the rating of the task rather than the dice you roll. For example, climbing the side of a building with a rope is easier than without one, and climbing up with a ladder is easier still. In this case, it's not a tool helping you with a task; it's a completely different task with a different rating. Let your GM worry about that, though.

Sometimes the GM is rating the difficulty of an action, like jumping up to a ledge. Sometimes the GM is rating a person or an object. A savvy technician might be rated Hard, which means that any action taken against them—whether it's convincing them with a disguise, sneaking past them while they work, or knocking them out with a surprise blow to the head—is rated as Hard and has a Hurdle of 5–6. Occasionally, the GM might give something two ratings depending on how the PCs interact with it (or them). A low-paid, dim-witted bodyguard might be an Easy opponent for most things, but it's Hard to fight them.

The difficulty of many actions isn't always obvious until you try them. While something like a jump is easy to judge, picking a lock can be Easy, Average, Hard, Very Hard, or Ridiculous, depending on the lock itself. Thus, the GM will rate each challenge as appropriate for the situation: an Easy lock, a computer with Hard security features, an Average guard, and so on.

Thanks to Boosts, through use of cards, particularly in Act Three, you might be rolling a d20 for your action, and that means you've probably got a 50/50 shot at succeeding even on a Ridiculous task. Liars are incredible. That's the point.

Remember that you only roll dice at the Crux Point of a Scene. This means that if you're swimming across a raging river, even if it's quite wide, you roll only once for the entire swimming Scene—at the most exciting moment, such as when the current suddenly starts to drag you downstream from where you wanted to end up. If you're trying to escape in a car chase, you make one roll, perhaps as you dart right in front of the bus that then cuts off your pursuer.

MORE EXAMPLES

EASY TASKS
Jumping over a small object on the ground
Running
Driving across town
Opening a door, even if it's heavy or a bit stuck
Climbing a ladder
Swimming across a pool

AVERAGE TASKS
Driving fast through heavy traffic
Sliding a heavy object, like a file cabinet or a desk
Climbing a rope
Swimming across a river
Deceiving an average person
Hacking into the average person's phone or personal computer

HARD TASKS
Driving at breakneck speed in heavy traffic
Picking up a heavy object, like a file cabinet or a desk
Scaling a wall without a ladder or rope
Finding a hidden switch beneath a desk

VERY HARD TASKS
Driving against traffic at breakneck speed
Jumping very far
Swimming across a raging river
Hacking into a company's computer system

RIDICULOUS TASKS
Throwing a heavy object, like a file cabinet or a desk
Scaling a very sheer surface
Jumping like an Olympic athlete
Hacking into an online security company's mainframe

SUCCESS, FAILURE, AND EVERYTHING IN BETWEEN

The dice determine success or failure, but they do so much more than that.

We know how to figure a Hurdle, and we know that you need to roll above it to succeed. If you get *exactly* the Hurdle on your die, you get a result that we call Almost. Thus, if you have a Hurdle of 3–4 and you roll a 5, you succeed. If you roll a 4, you almost succeed. Maybe you succeed, but something else happens. Or you succeed, but it's not quite what you were hoping for. Almost is only a partial success, or a success but something unwanted happens in addition. You got close. The GM or the player (ideally both, working together) determines what the Almost result is.

In Act Two, the Hurdle is two numbers, such as 3–4 or 5–6. In Act Three, it's just one number, and it's the higher of the pair. Thus, the Almost result will come up more often in Act Two. In Act Three, when the stakes are higher, results are more definitive.

EXAMPLES OF ALMOST

- Almost jumping across a pit might mean that the jumper just managed to grab hold of the far side and is now dangling at the edge.
- Almost deceiving someone might result in them not buying the false narrative, but still taking a liking to the character.
- Almost winning a fight might mean that you're the victor but your opponent got away.
- Almost hacking a computer might mean that you didn't get access to their system, but you now have a good idea of what the password might be if you try again.
- Almost navigating heavy traffic at full speed might mean a scrape to the car, but not a full-blown accident.

Almost is a great tool for showing that even though a character didn't do exactly what they were trying to do, they're still very capable.

There are two more special rolls. If you roll double the Hurdle or more, you get a result of Success, and . . . This means not only do you succeed, but you get some additional benefit. Maybe you do what you're doing so well that you get even more than you were hoping for. Or maybe you do it with panache and impress everyone.

EXAMPLES OF SUCCESS, AND . . .

- While attempting to convince someone to give you a password, you charm them so thoroughly that they give you even more information.
- While disarming a security device, you do so in such a way that the system still reports as being active.
- While breaking down a locked door, you manage to do it quickly and quietly.
- While sneaking past a guard, you manage to also steal their security card.
- While sneaking past a security camera, you find that it has a blind spot and your teammates don't even need to roll to get by.

The other special roll (and I'm guessing you've figured this out already) is called Failure, and . . . and it's when you roll a 1 on the die. Failure, and . . . implies that not only didn't you accomplish what you set out to do, but something is now even worse. *This is not because the Liar did something poorly or foolish, but circumstances beyond their control simply raise a complication.* It's not a fumble. Ideally, a Failure, and . . . result just leads to another Scene, perhaps with the tension raised. Of course, if you've got Harmony and are rolling two or more dice, you can get this result only if you roll 1 on all the dice you're rolling.

EXAMPLES OF FAILURE, AND . . .

- While jumping down from a window into a dumpster, you get injured by something unexpectedly sharp inside.
- While you're trying to charm someone, another person comes into the room and takes their attention.
- While you're scaling a wall, some of the masonry breaks loose.
- While you're picking a lock, a security guard happens to wander around the corner.
- While fighting, you're injured even more than normal.

DICE-ROLLING SUMMARY

The result of every Scene is determined this way:

1. Player states their intention for the Scene. If it's not so Easy that it's automatic or so difficult that it's Impossible, they roll dice.
2. Dice type is determined by any applicable Skill or Trait.
3. The number of dice is determined by any assistance, equipment, or other helpful circumstances (gaining multiple dice to roll is called having Harmony).
4. The GM determines the Hurdle.
5. The player rolls:
   - Roll above the Hurdle: Success
   - Roll double the Hurdle: Success, and . . . where the result is even better than what was hoped for.
   - Roll exactly the Hurdle: Almost, where a measure of success is achieved, but with a complication.
   - Roll below the Hurdle: Failure—the attempt is unsuccessful.
   - Roll a 1: Failure, and . . . results in failure with an even worse outcome.

LYING TO REALITY

Lies reshape reality, either through highly advanced technology or through mental powers. They are a way for both player and character to directly affect the narrative.

Lies always work, but they're still a risk. The bigger the Lie, the more Stress it puts on the Liar. A Liar can injure themselves or even die from telling a big Lie or too many smaller ones.

Lies Always Work.

Changes created by a Lie are permanent within the bounds of the situation (unless the Improbability Zone is cleared). If a Planner jams a gun with a Lie, the gun remains jammed until cleared or repaired. If a Schemer makes someone fall asleep, they sleep until awoken or a reasonable amount of time for a nap passes.

We judge a Lie by its verisimilitude and its scope.

Verisimilitude is believability. Is it believable that there's a fire alarm to pull on the wall around the corner? In a big, modern building, absolutely. In an old trailer home, not at all. Creating an obvious, unlocked back door into a secure vault is not a very believable Lie. Creating a difficult-to-find air vent that one could squeeze through to get into the vault is much more believable. The more believable the Lie, the easier the roll will be to resist Injury from Stress.

Scope is how hard it is to Lie about a thing. A locked security door is harder to Lie to than the bathroom door in an apartment. Changing the information in a computer's database is more complex than changing the words on a clipboard.

In the end, the GM simply assigns the Lie a rating. The rating doesn't determine how likely it is for the Lie to succeed (Lies always succeed), but rather how difficult it is for the Liar to withstand the Stress of telling the Lie.

LIMITATIONS OF LIES

While Lies always work, they have limitations.

- Your Lie can't affect a Liar (in any way), including yourself.
- Your Lie can't directly affect the key object of the Zone of Improbability.
- Your Lie needs to fit into the ongoing narrative. You probably can't make the security guard by the exit explode because that almost certainly doesn't fit into the narrative.
- Your Lie shouldn't be dissonant to your own senses. A Liar shouldn't Lie so that information *they* know to be true is no longer true. The locked safe you're staring at shouldn't suddenly be hanging open.
- Different kinds of Liars have their own limitations. For example, a Schemer can Lie to only one person. Sleeper Lies don't function on board the *Celeste*. And so on.

When you Lie, think of yourself not as a player, but as the GM for a brief moment. The GM can normally create whatever they feel fits the narrative. With a Lie, the player can too. The GM won't introduce something impossible or inappropriate to the narrative, so you shouldn't try to do so either. The GM won't just have a bomb go off and kill the PCs, ending the game, so you shouldn't think in such absolute, sweeping terms either. Work within the story to get what you need.

The GM very likely won't say no when a player Lies, but they may ask questions, requiring a player to explain and justify how the Lie fits into the narrative.

The restriction on dissonant Lies suggests that it's often easier to Lie to an unknown reality. You can't make the key you're searching for suddenly appear in the empty drawer you just opened, but you can make it appear in the drawer you haven't yet opened. In the "Schrödinger's cat" thought experiment, you couldn't bring the dead cat back to life, but you could decide whether it's alive or dead before you open the box.

Thus, creative, indirect Lies work best. If a Schemer is chasing a person through a crowd, it might be easier to affect someone in the crowd to trip that person than to get the person to stop.

We'll talk about the Injury that comes from Stress in a moment, but at any time, the GM can decide that a Lie that appears to "break" the ongoing narrative inflicts Injury like a truly deadly situation. But we haven't talked about Injury yet, have we? I guess we should.

GMs will find much more about judging the Stress that comes from Lying in *The Devil*.

INJURY

Even the best Liars will likely suffer physical harm during their mission. The situation is often very dangerous, and Lying itself is exceedingly stressful. Injury is expressed in terms of special dice called, appropriately enough, Injury Dice. Injury Dice are d10s that are blank on all faces except for the one that bears the Injury icon.

If a character gains an Injury Die, that means that any time they roll a die for the rest of the mission, they also roll an Injury Die. Most of the time, this won't have any effect, but should the Injury icon appear on the Injury Die, the action fails regardless of what they roll on their normal die. A character can end up with multiple Injury Dice, which means multiple extra chances of failure for any roll they make.

If a Scene has the potential to hurt a character, Liars roll to avoid suffering Injury. This is determined separately from success or failure with a different die roll. There are basically two ways for this to work:

- Sometimes, if a character fails, they might get hurt. Thus, if they fail in the Scene, they roll to see if they avoid Injury. It's possible to fail and not get hurt.
- Sometimes, a character can get hurt regardless of whether they succeed or fail. In this case, they always make an additional roll to avoid Injury. It's possible to fail and get hurt, fail and not get hurt, succeed but get hurt, or succeed and bounce away unscathed.

If a Liar is balancing on a narrow ledge and succeeds, there's no reason to think they would get hurt. They'd get hurt only if they failed and fell. But if a character is jumping from the roof of one building to another, it's not hard to imagine that even if they succeed, they might still land poorly and skin an elbow or twist an ankle. Characters who get into fights almost always have a chance of getting hurt, whether they succeed or fail.

Injury (rather, the difficulty to resist Injury) is rated just like everything else. A task to resist Injury can be Easy, Average, Hard, Very Hard, Ridiculous, or possibly Diabolical. Typically, a Liar's Injury is never rated as Impossible. You've always got a chance to duck, roll away, grab a ledge, or what have you.

Normally, there are no Success, and . . . or Failure, and . . . results when resisting Injury. However, if a character is wearing armor, an Almost result on the roll to resist Injury counts as a success if the Injury is the type of thing that would be lessened by armor (a physical blow, a gunshot, a fall, getting hit by a car). This special rule for armor doesn't apply if the Injury comes from a source that armor wouldn't help with, such as poison gas or radiation. Conversely, in those kinds of situations, sometimes a helpful tool like a gas mask or a radiation suit acts like armor. Many types of armor convey other benefits when resisting damage, such as offering Harmony with pertinent resist actions. See chapter 11 for more information.

When making an injury roll, wearing armor lets you count an almost as a success if the armor can prevent that kind of injury.

Injury can also come from the Stress of Lying. This kind of Injury is handled the same as physical Injury, but armor never helps.

TRULY DEADLY INJURIES

Very rarely, if something is truly deadly, more than one roll must be made to resist Injury. For example, the GM might rate a Scene's potential Injury as Hard (x2), which means two resistance rolls are required, each with a Hard difficulty. If either roll fails, the Liar gains an Injury Die. Thus, the situation might result in two Injury Dice. This should be reserved for majorly dangerous events, like falling off the roof of an eight-story building, getting hit by an oncoming train, or telling a really big Lie.

When a character accumulates 5 or more Injury Dice, they must make a subsequent resist roll. If they succeed, they are unconscious, comatose, or otherwise utterly incapacitated. If they fail, they are dead.

No one said that the life of a Liar was easy.

MULTIPLE DIE ROLLS AND INJURY DICE

If a character has help with what they're trying to do, meaning they're rolling multiple dice and taking the highest result, but they're also injured and thus are rolling Injury Dice too, each extra successful die roll overrides a failure on an Injury Die.

Imagine this scenario: you're really injured, rolling two Injury Dice, and running from a bunch of angry people who want to finish you off. Two of your friends, however, are trying to help you get away. You're Average at running, so you're rolling three d6 and two Injury Dice. One of the Injury Dice indicates failure. However, two of your three d6s indicate success. You succeed in getting away, because while the Injury Die failure cancels one of the successes, you still have success on another die.

MISSION CARDS

At the start of each session, the GM deals out three Mission Cards to each player. (Sometimes circumstances or character abilities will change the number of cards dealt.) Mission Cards can be used by the players as they wish. They can keep the cards secret or reveal them to the group, as long as each player keeps the cards they were dealt. They cannot swap cards or give them to other players.

Mission Cards represent a Liar's training, experience, and talent. When the winds of the story threaten to knock them about, a Liar can use their competence and preparation to come out on top. Cards represent plans and contingencies that the character has planned for, even if the player did not. They allow the player to portray someone who's better at these kinds of missions than the player is (obviously). A superspy in a film or a smart criminal in a book always takes things in stride and is ready for what the story throws at them. Mission Cards allow that to be true for Liars in this game as well.

Liars being Liars, most players keep their cards to themselves until it's the right time to use one. It's entertaining to surprise the other players (and the GM) with the turn of a card that pulls a character's bacon out of the fire. Usually, a card should be accompanied by some sort of particularly stylish, creative flourish.

Effects of the Mission Cards include shrugging off an Injury Die, turning a failure result into an Almost result, or changing the narrative by fleshing out how the Liar's past experience affects the current situation. Perhaps the most important Mission Card is the Revelation, which can be played only in the third Act, allowing the player to reveal that some aspect of the mission that seemed to go wrong was part of the plan all along (and the player then explains how that changes the narrative, perhaps in a significant way).

TWIST CARDS AND TURN CARDS

Twist Cards and Turn Cards are played by the GM. Unlike Mission Cards, they don't have requirements or particulars. The GM determines the details of a Twist or Turn based on the circumstances.

Twists represent an unexpected complication in a Scene. Turns represent an unexpected complication in a mission.

EXAMPLE TWISTS

- The PCs round the corner and someone unexpected is there.
- A door is unexpectedly locked.
- The elevator gets stuck between floors.
- One of the guards is a black belt in karate.
- The executive has a gun in their briefcase.
- The floor has just been mopped and is very wet and slippery.

There are likely at least two Twists in a mission, but there could be as many as six (that's how many Twist Cards the game has).

The GM plays a Twist to introduce an unexpected obstacle or danger or to make an existing challenge even harder. If a Liar is persuasive, they should be able to charm their way past a group of Average people with ease. But with a Twist Card, one of the people is—for some story reason the GM provides—much harder to win over.

EXAMPLE TURNS

- A powerful storm blows in.
- The reality-warping effect of the zone changes and becomes far more dangerous.
- Someone else is breaking into the same location, for reasons of their own.
- The security forces were expecting the PCs somehow.
- The key object that the PCs need to remove from the Improbability Zone isn't where (or what) they thought.

There is almost always one, and only one, Turn in the mission.

CARDS AS REWARDS

At the end of the mission, all the cards played—by both the players and the GM—are counted. This is the number of Story Points the players get to advance or improve their characters' Skills, abilities, and more. This represents the story the Liars come away with. The story they have stolen. Thus, the more thrilling and dramatic the events, the more Twists and complications, the better the story. They and only they know the details of the story they have stolen. As for the rest of reality, the Improbability Zone never existed, and the Liars' actions to get rid of it never happened.

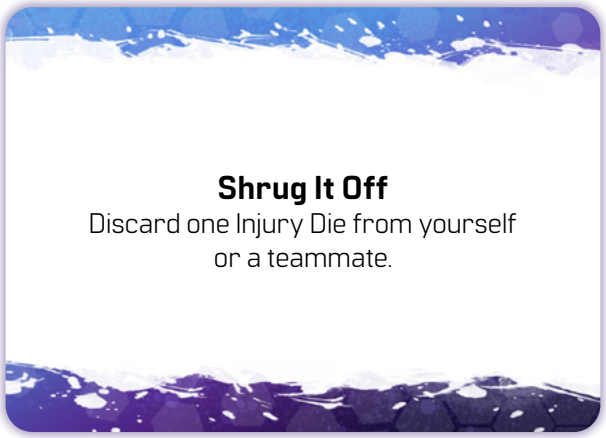
See chapter 10 for details on advancing Liars.

CHAPTER 5

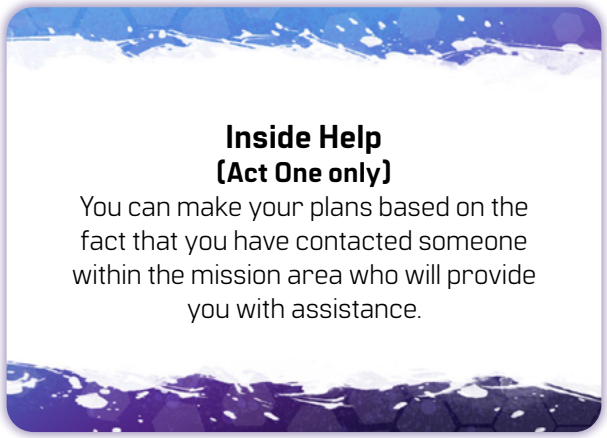
MISSION CARDS

So, the box came with a bunch of cards. We mentioned them briefly previously, but let's take a closer look. Starting players begin each session with three Mission Cards. They can play them during Act Two or Act Three (there are exceptions). They can play the cards as a part of a Scene, or between Scenes where appropriate. There are no limits on how many cards can be played at once.

The cards are presented here along with explanatory notes and commentary on how to use and interpret them.

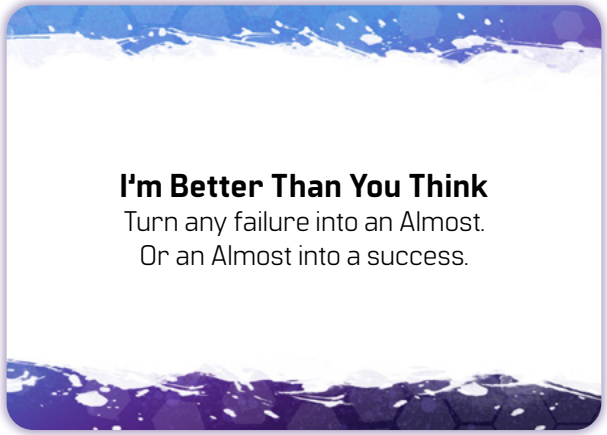


This is pretty straightforward. It represents a character just toughing it out. It's not healing or medicine—it's the character saying, "Oh, I'm fine" after what looked like a serious injury.



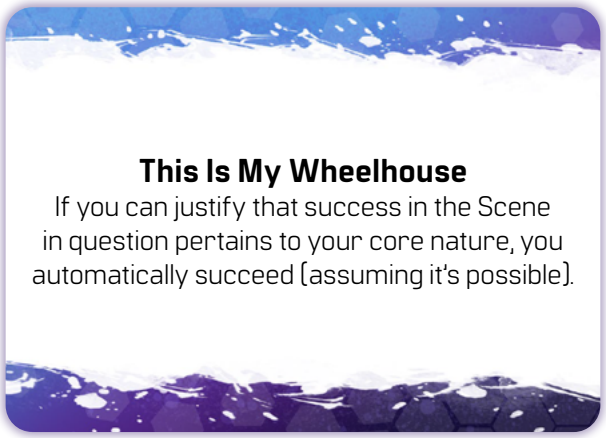
A player plays this card during Act One. The Liar has put together a way to make this heist an inside job. The Liar's contact could be someone already there, or it could be someone from the Celeste *who went in undercover and is playing a role. The inside help is in a position to do one significant thing, such as unlocking an important door, disabling an alarm, providing a distraction, or helping the Liars get past security somehow. They cannot get the key item.*

(There may be circumstances where the GM says, for some story-based reason, "Sorry, but there's no way you could have contacted someone there ahead of time," and that's okay, but it should be quite rare.)

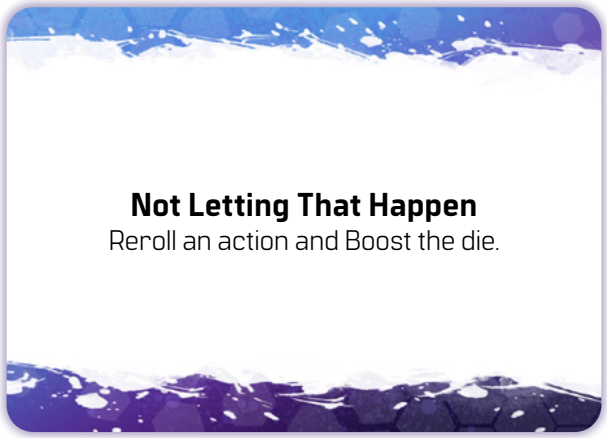


This is pretty self-explanatory. This card should be played after a die roll but before the resolution is spelled out.

Again, this is fairly straightforward. This card should be played after a die roll but before the resolution is spelled out.

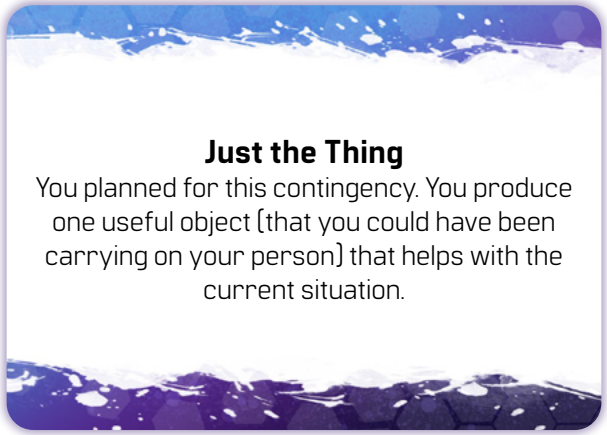


The onus is on the player for this one. Most of the time, this should be fairly straightforward. If the Liar's core nature is deceptive, they can succeed at one Scene involving deceiving someone. If their core nature is brash, they can automatically succeed at creating a big distraction. "Core nature" needs to be more than just something on the Liar's character sheet. It needs to be a Trait that they have really demonstrated to everyone else at the table.

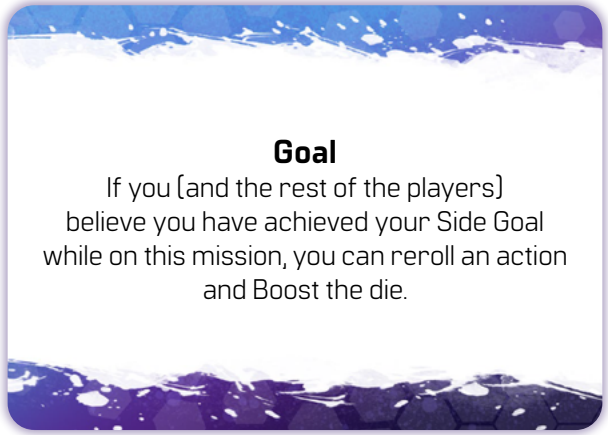


The narrative here assumes that the Liar sees that what they're doing is going to fail, and they can try one time to fix the mistake. If the Liar is defusing a bomb and rolls a failure, they can say that at the last minute they chose to cut the red wire rather than the green wire they had initially picked. If they're falling off a balcony, they can make one desperate grab for the railing as they fall.

"Boost the die," remember, means that you roll a die of one higher type than normal. So a d6 becomes a d8, a d8 becomes a d10, and so on.



No die roll involved here. If the Liar needs a crowbar to free their friend from the collapsed roof, they've got one in their trench coat. If they need a data storage device to download information from a computer, they thought to bring one with them. The idea here is that the Liar knew they were going to need the item, not through some kind of premonition, but because they're extremely competent and prepared.



A character's Side Goal is fairly open-ended, such as "help people" or "be convincing." The player doesn't reveal this card when the goal is reached, but when the advantage is needed. They might say, "Remember when Kyle was going to fall down the elevator shaft and I grabbed him? Well, my Side Goal is helping someone, so now I'm playing this card." The whole group should agree that the goal was met, so hopefully it's clear-cut. Side Goals are ongoing, so if the Liar takes part in multiple missions, they can use this card multiple times (if they're dealt the card again and fulfill the goal again).

"Boost the die," remember, means that you roll a die of one higher type than normal. So a d6 becomes a d8, a d8 becomes a d10, and so on.

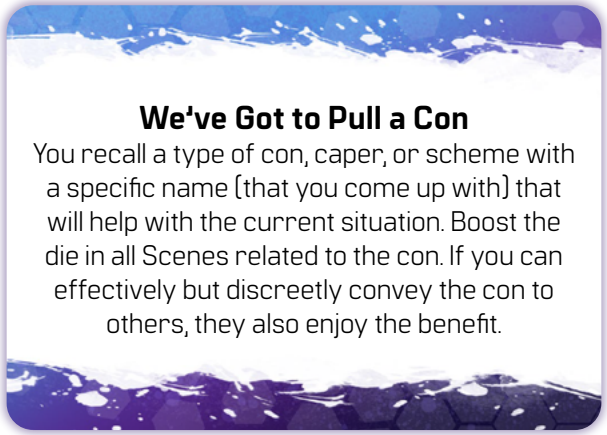
I've Been Called Worse by Better
You recall a situation in which you were opposed by another person (or entity) and bested them. You provide the story, and you can Boost the die on all actions relating to the current situation in which you are opposed by someone.

The player should use this card when facing off against an NPC. Maybe it's an intractable assistant who just won't let anyone in to see their boss. Maybe it's a bruiser of a security guard who is attempting to grab the Liar and eject them from the building. The player must create and describe the situation from their past and relate it to everyone playing. They should also make note of the details because it's part of their backstory.

"Boost the die," remember . . . yeah, you don't need us to keep telling you that over and over. You're smart. You get it.

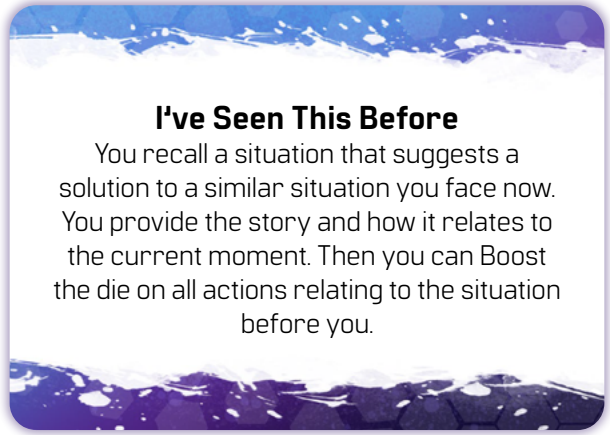
Sizing Things Up
You spend the current Scene examining the situation, an opponent, an obstacle, or the like and spot a weakness to exploit. You can Boost the die in Scenes related to what you have observed.

This requires the Liar to spend time doing what appears to be nothing. But they get an ongoing advantage after they do so. If they examine a corridor filled with a tangle of motion-sensor beams, they get to bump up the die when rolling to cross that space. And if they need to cross that space again later in the mission, they get the bonus again.

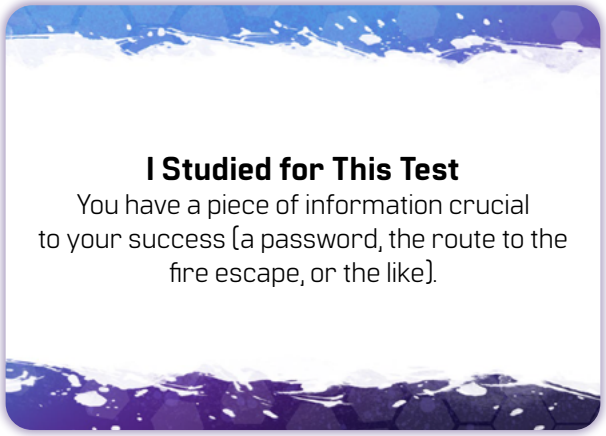


Cons always have colorful and sometimes entertaining names. Examples include the Spanish Prisoner, the Big Store, and the Cat in the Bag. But in this instance, knowledge of real tricks isn't important because the player can (and must) make up a new confidence trick and name it. They might want to get everyone out of a building by setting off an alarm and call it the Fireman's Carry. The precise details aren't important. The player's not expected to be a criminal genius. In fact, the idea is that the player wants to do something that occurs to them, and rather than passing it off as some harebrained scheme, it's formalized into a thing that con artists actually do. So the player says, "I want to accomplish this goal, and I'm going to do it by doing this (possibly crazy-sounding) thing. And that's actually a well-known con called the such-and-such."

Since the players are all con artists, when the Liar says they're going to pull a Three-Handed Dodge (for example), all the Liars they are working with, if they are in communication, immediately know what's going on, how to help facilitate what needs to be done, and how to exploit the advantage it provides.

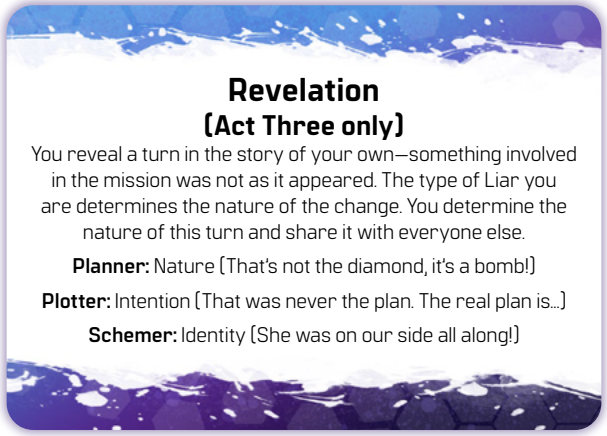


Similar to the card I've Been Called Worse by Better, this requires the player to create and relate a moment from their past—which they should make note of—that is somehow similar to what's occurring in the present moment. The Liar then gets the bonus to the current situation that is similar. Typically, this affects only one Scene.



Similar to the card Just the Thing, the Liar is well prepared and has something that will help. Unlike with Just the Thing, it's not an object but a bit of information. This might include a computer password, an important detail from an NPC's background to exploit, the location of something important, and so on. Bonus points if they provide a good explanation for how they learned the information. There is no die roll involved here.*

* There are no bonus points in this game.



This is likely the card with the greatest potential impact in the game. It can be played only in the third Act, and it must involve something significant from the prior events in the mission (almost certainly from Act Two). The revelation can be based on trickery and cunning, a powerful Lie to reality, or a combination of both. More than likely, this card can determine the success of a mission. Certainly it can change an obvious failure to a clear success.

More examples of a revelation might include:

- *The data drive in the bag is a phony, while the real one is in the Liar's pocket. They switched it when no one was looking.*
- *The Liar intended to get caught by the guard captain so they can steal a keycard to get out of the building.*
- *The person grabbed by the police was not the Liar, but a bystander that the Liar gave their coat and hat to.*
- *The Liar didn't actually escape out the window. They just opened it and then hid under the desk so their pursuers would go out the window, thinking that's where they went.*

CHAPTER 6

MANAGING SCENES

Okay, we're going to talk just to the GMs here.

What? The rest of you want to learn about Scenes too? That's actually fine. The more people around the table who understand how this is all supposed to flow, the more likely it is to go smoothly.

(Some players will want to keep the process a mystery, though, and if you're one of those people, turn to another chapter.)

Scenes last as long as they need to—there are no set parameters. They can involve one Liar or many. You need to think of Scenes intuitively. Basically, a Liar has something they intend to accomplish, and the Scene is the story of that desire. It might be straightforward (crawl up the elevator shaft to the fifteenth floor) or it might be complex (convince everyone in the store that you're the new manager). While a Scene might last half an hour and contain all variety of actions, every Scene comes down to one key moment. That's the Crux Point (sometimes called just the Crux).

EVERY SCENE HAS A CRUX POINT.

If a Liar is talking to a bunch of different people in a museum to gather information, the Crux Point might come when they find the one person with the most information. If the Scene involves climbing up the side of a skyscraper, the Crux is that one moment where something happens—a bird flies by, a bit of the wall is loose, the climbing gear starts to fail—that makes things particularly tense. That's when the Liar makes the roll.

If a Liar finds themselves in a firefight in a parking garage, with guns blazing and bullets flying, you don't roll for each shot, on the part of either the PC or the NPCs. Instead, describe the situation with the player contributing. The Liar is ducking between parked cars, dodging bullets and trying to stay out of sight. Their opponents are crouched behind an SUV, but one is trying to move around to the Liar's right. Finally, the Crux of the Scene comes when the PC pops up behind the others, gun drawn.

WANT AND COST

In every Scene, any Liar involved has something that they want. They want to sneak past the guard. They want to avoid falling as they climb to the top of the moving train. They want to convince the firefighters that the fire alarm was pulled by mistake. Whatever the Scene is about, one of the Liars needs to want something. Liars sitting in a coffee shop waiting until dark to put their plan in motion isn't really a Scene. Technically you can still call it a Scene, but there's no Crux or rolls, so it's inconsequential and barely worth noting—except that it might set up the next (real) Scene, such as "After you wait in the coffee shop, the sun sets and the office workers leave for the day, so you're ready to go try to pick the lock on the service entrance."

The roll the Liar makes at the Crux Point of the Scene should be keyed to what they want. In other words, if they succeed, they get what they want, and if they fail, they don't.

Whether they succeed or fail, each Scene should have a potential cost for the Liars as well. That cost might be the risk of failure, the risk of Injury, the risk of discovery, or simply the loss or use of an important resource. The resource can be something in the game session, like a Mission Card, or it might be something in the story, like the last of the tasty treats the Liars brought with them to get past the security dogs.

If a Scene doesn't involve a cost—usually a possible bad outcome if the characters fail—it's not really a Scene and not worth rolling dice. If the PCs need to get down to the secret subbasement and they've got to input a code into the elevator, but there's no risk of detection and they can try to guess the code as many times as they need to, you can just narrate through it. Rather than require any kind of roll or consider it a Scene, the GM can say, "You figure out the code and get down to the subbasement. Now what?"

IF A SCENE DOESN'T INVOLVE A COST—USUALLY A POSSIBLE BAD OUTCOME IF THE CHARACTERS FAIL—IT'S NOT REALLY A SCENE AND NOT WORTH ROLLING DICE.

DIFFERENT KINDS OF SCENES

These are the kinds of Scenes you're most likely to have in a game of Stealing Stories for the Devil.

INFILTRATION

One or more of the Liars are sneaking into a place.

Time: This might take five minutes, or it might take an hour.

Crux: The Crux is likely that one moment where they're most likely to be detected. If there's no way they can be detected, it's not really a Scene (at most, it's a Scene that the GM narrates and then moves on). In theory, there could be two rolls required if the infiltration involves a difficult task, like climbing up the side of a building or bypassing an alarm sensor, but in such a case, you should probably make it multiple Scenes.

Success, and . . . : The Liar reaches their destination undetected and far faster than planned.

Success: The Liar reaches their destination undetected.

Almost: The Liar reaches their destination but is detected.

Failure: The Liar is either detected or cannot reach the destination for fear of detection.

Failure, and . . . : The Liar is detected and does not reach the destination.

THE TASK

Perhaps the most basic of Scenes, this is one in which a Liar or Liars must accomplish something at least moderately difficult. Open a locked door, disable a security system, climb up an elevator shaft, hack into a computer system, jump down off a moving train, slip past a guard, and so on. The player should state clearly what their intention is—it's usually not important to describe the process (most of us don't know how to disable a security system), unless it's for flavor and visuals for the picture in everyone's head. In other words, if the Liar climbs up the elevator shaft, the way in which the player describes their action doesn't affect the roll, only the visuals. Describe the action in a way that makes it and you look best, or makes the story most interesting and exciting.

Time: Task Scenes are usually very short and should be tense or full of action or both. If they're neither, the task at hand isn't very crucial and doesn't warrant a Scene. Just describe what happens in a sentence and move on.

Crux: The Crux Point is when it's clear that the Liar will succeed or fail, or the point at which things are most critical.

If there's a chance the Liar could get hurt in the Scene, you'll also want to roll to see if they get an Injury Die. Some Scenes will only injure a character if the roll fails, like when climbing up the aforementioned elevator shaft. Other Scenes might risk minor injury no matter what and greater injury on a failure, such as when jumping off a moving train.

Rarely, the determination of whether the Liar suffers Injury *is* the Crux. If a character has to run through flames to get out of the burning building, the only thing in question is whether they get scorched or smoke in their lungs as they do so.

Success, and . . . : The Liar succeeds far faster than planned.

Success: The Liar succeeds in what they intended.

Almost: The Liar fails, but with more time, they believe they can succeed.

Failure: The Liar fails. They can try again, but it will take twice as long and will be harder.

Failure, and . . . : The Liar fails, and there is some ensuing difficulty—for example, an alarm was triggered, the Liar is injured, or something prevents them from ever trying again.

COMBAT

The Liars end up in a fight with some NPCs. This might be a single brawl with one Liar and one NPC, a firefight involving multiple Liars and multiple NPCs, or any other Scene where people are trying to use force to hurt or incapacitate each other.

Time: Fights normally don't last more than a couple of minutes.

Crux: In combat, there's almost always a roll to see if the Liars involved get hurt, usually whether they win the fight or not—although it might well be that the Injury for failure is worse.

Success, and . . . : The Liars defeat their foe(s) quickly without suffering any harm.

Success: The Liars defeat their foe(s). They may have to roll to resist any possible Injury.

Almost: The Liars defeat their foe(s), but the noise of the fight has attracted attention, one of the foes got away to get help, or their weapon or some other piece of equipment was lost or destroyed. They may have to roll to resist any possible Injury.

Failure: The foe(s) are victorious. The Liars must resist Injury twice (or more). The Liars are probably forced to retreat to another location or are pinned down where they are. They may be forced into another combat Scene whether they want it or not.

Failure, and . . . : The foe(s) are victorious. Each Liar automatically gains 1 Injury Die and must resist Injury to avoid getting another. The Liars are probably forced to retreat to another location or are pinned down where they are. They may be forced into another combat Scene whether they want it or not. It's likely that alarms are sounded, the police are called, or something similar.

INTERACTION

The Liars are talking to NPCs. There's nothing wrong with roleplaying the whole conversation, with the GM voicing the NPC(s) and the players speaking in character. On the other hand, some situations might warrant just a general summary of what the Liars say and what the NPC says and then there's a roll. Some players prefer one method or the other. Do what's best for the Scene and the people playing.

Time: This Scene probably lasts five minutes at most.

Crux: The Crux Point is when the Liar makes the crucial statement or asks the important question. Consider what we covered in the "Want and Cost" section, above. The player needs to state a general goal for the Scene. Are they trying to get a question answered? Trying to fast-talk their way in? Trying to intimidate? Distract? The goal here can be quite varied.

Success, and . . . : The Liar gets what they want and learns something else in addition that could be helpful later. Or perhaps the NPC is so charmed that they could help again later.

Success: The Liar gets what they want.

Almost: The Liar doesn't get what they want, but the NPC isn't suspicious and the Liar could perhaps try again.

Failure: The Liar doesn't get what they want, and the NPC is angry, suspicious, or dismissive. Trying again is probably impossible.

Failure, and . . . : The Liar doesn't get what they want, and the NPC alerts someone else, sets off an alarm, calls the police, or something similar.

CHASE

The Liars are trying to catch someone (or something mobile, like a drone with a camera, or even a security bulkhead closing quickly). Alternatively, someone is trying to catch the Liars, perhaps after they've stolen the key object. Either way, the chase Scene is all about time. The Liars have to do something before something else happens.

Time: Things in a chase move very fast. It's over quickly unless the chase covers a lot of ground (such as a car chase through a busy city).

Crux: The Crux Point of the Scene is the make-or-break moment—when the Liars are close enough to grab what or who they're after, or when they've got a real opportunity to throw off pursuit.

Success, and . . . : The Liars get what they want (either they get away or they catch their quarry). The chase is definitively over. It was invigorating rather than tiring, and the Liars lose 1 Injury Die they might have.

Success: The Liars get what they want (either they get away or they catch their quarry). The chase is definitively over.

Almost: The chase is still ongoing. The Liars didn't get caught, nor did they catch their quarry.

Failure: The Liars don't get away or don't catch their quarry. The chase is definitively over, so if the Liars were being chased, their car is disabled or blocked, their pursuers grab them by the arm, or some other result leads immediately to another Scene. If the Liars were doing the chasing, they don't reach their goal in time, and now it's too late.

Failure, and . . . : The Liars don't get away or don't catch their quarry. The chase is definitively over, so if the Liars were being chased, their car is disabled or blocked, their pursuers grab them by the arm, or some other result leads immediately to another Scene. If the Liars were doing the chasing, they don't reach their goal in time, and now it's too late. During the chase, things got dangerous, and now the players must roll to resist Injury.

SURPRISE

Keyed by a Twist Card or Turn Card, this is a Scene that the Liars weren't expecting. Security guards show up. The vault had an alarm system that wasn't in the Briefing. Someone steps out of the restroom at just the wrong time. And so on.

Time: Varies greatly, as it basically becomes another type of Scene—combat, interaction, and so on.

Crux: Usually, there's an immediate Crux Point where the Liars must deal with the surprise in whatever way they choose.

Success, and . . . : The surprising event is more or less a false alarm. The perceived threat doesn't materialize, or the Liars succeed at dealing with the surprise quickly and efficiently.

Success: The Liars succeed at dealing with the surprise.

Almost: The Liars succeed at dealing with the surprise, but they set off an alarm, cause a lot of noise, or are greatly delayed in what they were attempting to do.

Failure: The Liars fail to deal with the surprise. They either suffer the obvious consequences or must try again and the task is harder.

Failure, and . . . : The Liars fail to deal with the surprise, and it's worse than they originally realized. The danger is greater, the alarms alert security the Liars were unaware of, the random person that walked in is a martial arts expert, and so on.

NON-SCENES

We've mentioned the idea of something that happens in the game but isn't a Scene. Technically it's a Scene, but there's no roll involved. There's nothing the Liars want, or there is but there's no cost. Most of the time, these non-Scenes become simply narrative. The GM or one of the players just state what happened in a sentence or two and the game continues.

GETTING TO THE SCENE

This part always involves some kind of travel, usually from the *Celeste* to the edge of the Improbability Zone, and then through the zone to where the heist needs to take place. It can be as simple as "Okay, when you're ready, the *Celeste* teleports you down to an alley and you catch a cab to the museum. Now you're standing at the large building's entrance amid many small groups of people as well as individuals going into or out of the museum. What do you do next?"

Time: This could be half an hour, but it's probably less.

SEARCHING

The PCs are looking for something or someone. This is a non-Scene because the assumption is they'll find what they're looking for. If they're going through a file cabinet to find an individual's personnel file, they can flip through all the files and find it. It might take time, but the file is right there (unless it isn't, in which case there's still no roll to make—the GM just states that after a careful search, the file is clearly not there).

The Liars should roll to see if they succeed in a search only if there is time pressure or the target of the search is deliberately hidden, in which case this should be treated as a task Scene, as described above.

Time: Searching is often slow. It might take a half hour to search through the files in a room of filing cabinets, or when searching a set of rooms for a hidden safe.

GENERAL WALKING AND TALKING

The Liars are moving around in the mission location, going from point A to point B. Perhaps they're sneaking, perhaps they're using assumed identities, or perhaps there's just no one else around. While this is a good moment for a Twist Card, it probably isn't a true Scene as there's no Crux Point. This is sort of an "in between Scenes" Scene. Maybe the Liars are just getting a feel for the place. Perhaps the players are talking in character, making a plan.

Time: It might be as long as 20 to 30 minutes, but it's probably more like five to ten.

THE GETAWAY

The Liars have the key object and need to get out of the zone.

This is a wonderful time to play a final Twist Card, but only if it's clear that the story needs one last real Scene—one final challenge that threatens the success of the whole mission.

Time: This probably takes as long as it took to get to the location when they arrived.

CHAPTER 7

A SESSION

People learn in different ways. Some like explanations and then go off and use what they've learned. Others glean true understanding through example.

Let's focus on that second group for a bit.

In fact, let's walk through an entire first game session of Stealing Stories for the Devil and see what it looks like. Because it's not quite like other games you've probably played. As with any story, it has a broad structure, but it also has some unique ways in which everyone participates.

In this game, Shanna is the GM, and the three players—Ryan (a Planner), Mateo (a Plotter), and Liz (a Schemer)—each play a Liar. To keep things simple, we'll refer to them mainly as their Liar type, rather than add in character names on top of player names.

SETUP

The Scene takes place in a chamber inside the *Celeste*, with the Liars all gathered around a 3D informational display with lots of holographic diagrams and readouts.

The mission? There's an anomalous disturbance in Denver, Colorado. Ravens and other corvids by the thousands—hundreds of thousands, most likely—are swarming the downtown area seemingly out of nowhere. So many birds that traffic is almost at a standstill, and people are beginning to panic, even though the birds are not abnormally hostile. The number of birds continues to increase. The GM explains to the players that there's an executive in an office building in the middle of it all who carries a certain pen all the time. The ink in the pen is the key to this Zone of Improbability, and when the workday is done, no one knows where the pen will be or how serious the anomalous event will become.

Facial Recognition
AUTHORIZED

ACT ONE: THE BRIEFING

Each player has created their character and is ready to go. The three players have each taken on a different Liar role, so there is a Plotter, a Planner, and a Schemer to undertake the mission and bring the Improbability Zone back to its normal reality.

After the GM explains the setup, the initial exchange in this particular session goes like this:

GM: The AI feeds you a detailed layout of a tall office building in the middle of downtown Denver. It's got pretty high security—surprisingly so, in fact. All visitors have to check in down in the lobby.

The bit about the security seeming surprisingly high is the first hint that there's more going on than it might appear, but it's subtle enough that no one really notices.

GM: What else do you learn?

Schemer: It has a flat roof, with one of those elaborate rooftop gardens.

GM: Right. Access to the garden is exclusive. There's a special passcode to access the roof.

The back-and-forth negotiation process has begun! The players design the building through their suggestions, but the GM throws obstacles in their way. However, the players learn about those obstacles now and can plan ways to overcome them. The GM's not trying to say "No" here; she's trying to say "Yes, but it won't be easy." It's always better to say "Yes, but there will be a challenge here" or even "Yes, but there will be a cost" than to say "No."

Plotter: But there's an access shaft that leads to and from the roof adjacent to the main elevator shaft.

GM: Okay, but you know the key to this heist isn't going to be on the roof today, because of all the birds.

Plotter: Oh, right. That makes sense. No one is going to be up there.

Planner: Yeah, it's covered with birds!

Schemer: So that makes it a viable way to get in, and then use that access down to where we need to go. I think our target is at the top of this building, or near it.

Planner: Yeah, the upper floors are all the headquarters of a highly successful internet-based company. The person with the pen is in charge.

GM: Okay. And what's the name of the company?

Planner: Um . . . Gaggle.

GM: Great! And what's the CEO's name?

Plotter: Aesha Saran.

GM: Okay. She has a reputation of being smart but stern and no-nonsense. Maybe even ruthless and yet a little paranoid. She's not well liked by her employees. That's who has the pen.

Schemer: And she's written a book. Maybe a lot of books. But her book on internet business strategies is really popular and well known. We'll go in with a copy of this book—that's easy to get, right?—and maybe ask her to sign a copy.

GM: Yes, you can get a copy of her book.

This is an imaginative and very specific solution to the problem at hand. The GM wants to encourage this.

Plotter: Okay, but we have to get to her first. Lower down in the building, there's an insurance firm. And they're having a symposium where people from other companies are all visiting for some talks and meetings and whatnot.

GM: Great. I'm guessing you'll want clothing and IDs so you can look like a bunch of insurance people coming to this conference. That's easily done.

Plotter: Exactly! That's how we get past the lobby and into the building, and from the symposium, we just sneak up into Gaggle in the higher floors. We can use that access shaft by the elevator. It's . . . a maintenance shaft that runs the whole height of the building.

GM: Right, but it's monitored by security cameras.

Schemer: I'm good with electronics, so I can hopefully disable those.

Planner: And the access to the roof that the maintenance shaft offers—that could be our exit strategy, if we need one.

Schemer: Yes, it's good to have that in our back pocket, so to speak.

GM: Let's get back to Ms. Saran and Gaggle. She's a serious-minded professional, and security is tight. Surprisingly tight. There are lots of cameras and alarms, as well as a full-time security force just for Gaggle.

Plotter: We'll make note of all the cameras and alarms and where we need to go to disable them. Is there a single place where all of that is handled?

GM: You tell me.

Plotter: Well, okay. The schematics we're shown say that there's a central security hub for Gaggle on the lowest of their floors. We'll go there first.

Schemer: Wait, are we sneaking in or are we going to just bluff our way in, looking for that autograph?

GM: It's very likely that someone just looking to see Saran to sign a book won't get access to her. She's a busy person.

It's okay for the GM to throw out bits of advice or insight in this section. Remember, as a group you're simulating the characters taking a lot of time (far more time than the players will actually take) poring over schematics, schedules, and various sources of data. If there's something the characters would have learned from all that, the GM should provide it as it relates to their ongoing planning. This is, of course, a way for the GM to subtly say, "That might not be such a great idea" or "If you try that, it probably won't work." This is all great information that helps the session go more smoothly. No one at the table wants the mission to come to a grinding halt five minutes into the action because the players didn't think things through or ignored an obvious issue. On the other hand, the GM shouldn't throw out bits of irrelevant data here, unless a specific red herring situation is being developed, because there's no need to bog down the Briefing (or the GM's creative headspace) with details that won't be pertinent.

Plotter: Can we hack into their systems and create a fake appointment with her?

GM: The Zone of Improbability doesn't allow anyone on the *Celeste* to affect anything inside. So you can't set up that appointment from here.

Schemer: But maybe once we're down there. These twenty-first century computer systems shouldn't be too hard to hack, right?

GM: Gaggle is an internet-based company. They know *a lot* about online security. Plus, Saran's got a close assistant who manages all her time and keeps all her appointments and other info in an offline notepad.

Planner: That's fine. We'll sneak into Gaggle, disable the alarms and whatnot, and then we'll get close to where the assistant is. Hmm. I'll reference the data we've got here and find out that her name is . . . Ida Greene.

Schemer: When we get to her, maybe I can use a Lie to get her to give us access to her boss.

Plotter: Are we overthinking all of this? What if we went in disguised as repair workers doing maintenance, just waltz past all the security, and make our way right to Saran?

GM: Gaggle security is really tight . . .

Again, this is the GM's strong hint that something isn't going to work. It seems clear to the GM that in a place focused on security, maintenance workers would need scheduled appointments and probably their own security badges. Their credentials would be closely scrutinized.

If the GM sees that the players don't take the hint, they'll make it even plainer. Fortunately, the players take the hint. In a different place, with different circumstances, the fake appointment idea might have worked, though.

Plotter: Right, if we can't create a fake appointment to see her, we probably can't create a fake maintenance appointment in their schedule. And they won't let us in without one. But I do like the maintenance worker idea. We can have coveralls on under our insurance executive clothes, and carry some tools and whatnot in our briefcases.

Schemer: And clipboards. No one questions you if you carry a clipboard.

Plotter: Right. We might not have an appointment to get us into the place, but people won't question us if we're already inside. At least, we hope.

Planner: I think the book signing idea will have to become Plan B. Because if we can just get close to the CEO, I can use Sleight of Hand to pick her pocket and take the pen.

Plotter: That certainly seems more straightforward. And then we use the maintenance shaft to get to the roof.

Schemer: And there's a nearby, shorter building that we can shoot a grapple to and zipline across to it, and then down.

Plotter: Again, I think that's a backup plan. Because if everything goes according to plan, we'll just go down and out of the building we're in.

Schemer: Okay, I guess. I'm still going to bring the equipment for the zipline escape among the tools I've got to pose as a maintenance person.

GM: Okay. All set, then?

They all agree. This is the end of the first Act, so there's a mandated break. The GM uses this time to figure out the details she'll need. These include:

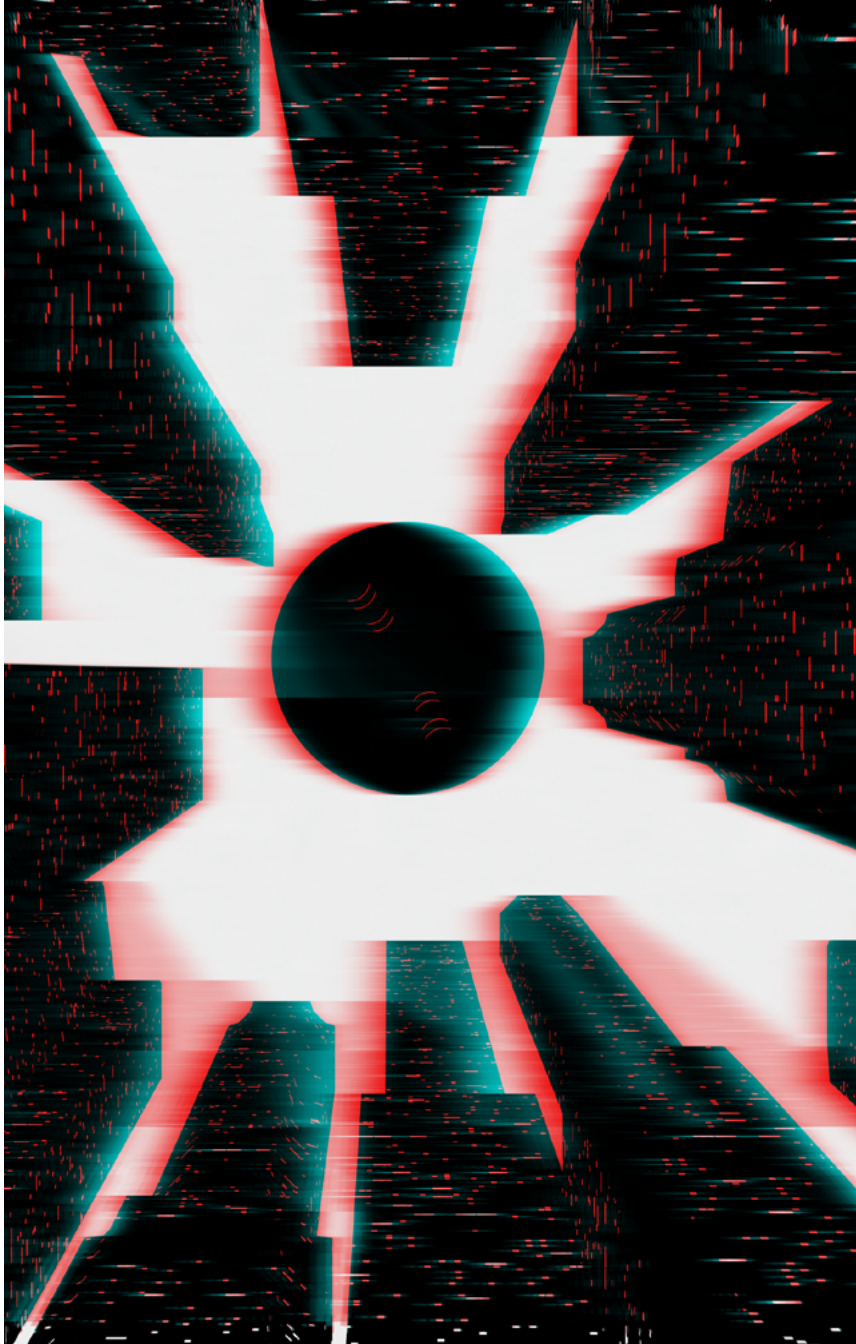
- A rating for the alarms and cameras. She chooses Hard.
- A rating for the guards. She chooses Average, knowing that she'll probably introduce a Twist to make at least one guard better than that if it comes up.
- More about the two named NPCs, Aesha Saran and Ida Greene. Some of their personality traits have already been worked out or come very easily—Aesha is tough and maybe paranoid, and Ida is extremely organized and probably a bit high-strung. They're both very good at their respective roles, which means they'll be Very Hard to oppose.
- An idea for the Turn. There's a traitor on the *Celeste* who already sent a warning to the security people at Gaggle. When the PCs arrive, they'll find that they are expected. In this case, though, the GM knew that would be the Turn even before the session started.

ACT TWO: THE FIRST SCENE

The group reassembles after the short break. The players have refreshed their drinks and grabbed some snacks. They've even made up phony names they'll use with their disguises. The GM then narrates the teleportation down to Earth and the trip into downtown Denver. The PCs need to walk, as all the birds have stopped traffic. There are a *lot* of birds.

Once they reach the building, the PCs easily bluff their way through the lobby on their way to the symposium, and the GM says they've made it to the middle floors of the building, surrounded by insurance people. Everyone's sipping coffee from the coffee shop in the lobby and talking about all the birds.

There are no rolls or actions required here. It's all just narrative setup. The GM wants to get to the action quickly.



ACT TWO: FURTHER SCENES

The GM asks the players what they want to do.

The Plotter and the Planner say that they're going to mingle with the insurance crowd. The Schemer, however, wants to find the access shaft, and if possible disable the first camera there without raising suspicions.

Since the Schemer is going to try to do something surreptitious, the others will cause a distraction. This wouldn't have been a separate Scene if they were just mingling. So we have two Scenes, one for the Schemer and the other for the distraction, that are happening concurrently.

The first Scene involves the Plotter and the Planner. They decide to sneak over to a window and open it, perhaps letting in some birds. The GM knows that most windows in very modern buildings often don't open, but she likes the idea. However, she wants some verisimilitude, so she says that the windows open only slightly due to climate control issues. When the Planner hears this, he says, "Ah, so I'll tell a little Lie to the building and say that one of the windows is broken and opens up twice as wide." This works, and it's a pretty minor Lie, so he's able to withstand the Stress easily. The Plotter uses a little acting skill to pretend to be terrified. Soon, a few ravens get in and there's chaos among the businesspeople. Spilled lattes everywhere.

The Lie is the Crux Point of the Scene, and everything that follows is just narrative. But it's satisfying and entertaining narrative because the GM offers plenty of descriptions of businesspeople overreacting to a few birds.

Meanwhile, the Schemer finds the access shaft, gets it open, and sees the first security camera inside it. The Crux Point of that Scene is the character grabbing someone's latte amid the chaos and throwing it at the camera. She's Good with electronics and says that she knows just how to throw it. No one in the group really knows if that would work, so they take her at her word. The GM says getting the coffee isn't hard, so the Crux of the Scene is an Average action to toss the cup. It works.

One by one, the characters slip away from the crowd of agitated insurance folks, get into the shaft, and slip out of their business wear so they look like maintenance workers. Then they climb up to the right floor.

The next Scene is when they exit the maintenance shaft and get into Gaggle. The GM says they all need to roll to see if they're being sneaky and quiet. The first one through, the Schemer, gets a Success, and . . . result. She narrates that there's no one around to see or hear them. This means the others don't even need to roll.

The Liars are in, and they make their way to the security center for Gaggle (since they know where it is). They pass by a couple of employees, but no one seems to pay them any attention. The Plotter is good with disguises, so having him there to make sure they look and act the part means the group easily succeeds without making any kind of rolls.

The GM decides to throw in a Twist, however, and places a Twist Card on the table. The characters turn a corner, and standing there are two real maintenance workers. This pair will be difficult for the PCs to bluff their way past. Time for a new Scene, and for putting those skills to the test. In fact, it's the first Scene with some real drama.

Plotter: We'll just walk past quickly, referring to our clipboards.

Schemer: We'll look like we're in deep conversation with each other.

Planner: I'll take out my cell phone—that was surely part of my businessperson clothing, right? Even if it's not real or isn't active?

GM: Very reasonable.

Planner: Great. I'll be talking to our "manager," like I'm upset, but also getting yelled at. It's a stressful situation, and no one will want to interrupt me or even acknowledge me.

GM: Okay. You're walking by, and it's looking like you might slip past without their notice, but then one of them, somewhat suspiciously, says, "Hey. Hey you." He's broad shouldered and balding, and has a bit of a gut. Normally, these two would be rated Average (which would be a Hurdle of 3–4), but you're pretending to be what *they* actually *are*, and it stands to reason that they'd know if there were other workers on the same floor with them. So instead, I'm going to say that the Hurdle is 7–8.

Plotter: Okay, well, I'm Good with disguise, so I'm going to just gruffly wave him off. I have a chance to get an Almost, even if it's a small one. I roll a . . . 4.

GM: That's a failure.

Plotter: Okay, but wait. I play the Not Letting That Happen card. It means I can reroll and Boost the die. I give him the side-eye and really try to sell the idea that I'm a worker here to do an important job.

GM: Add your card to the pile and reroll. You're normally Good at this, but with the Boost from the card you bump it up to a d10.

There are now two cards in the pile: the Not Letting That Happen card and the Twist Card the GM played.

Plotter: Right. I roll a . . . 7. That's an Almost.

GM: Okay. So he's still trying to get your attention. "Hey, hang on a minute . . . " But it doesn't seem like he's suspicious of who you are, necessarily. He's more or less buying into the disguise.

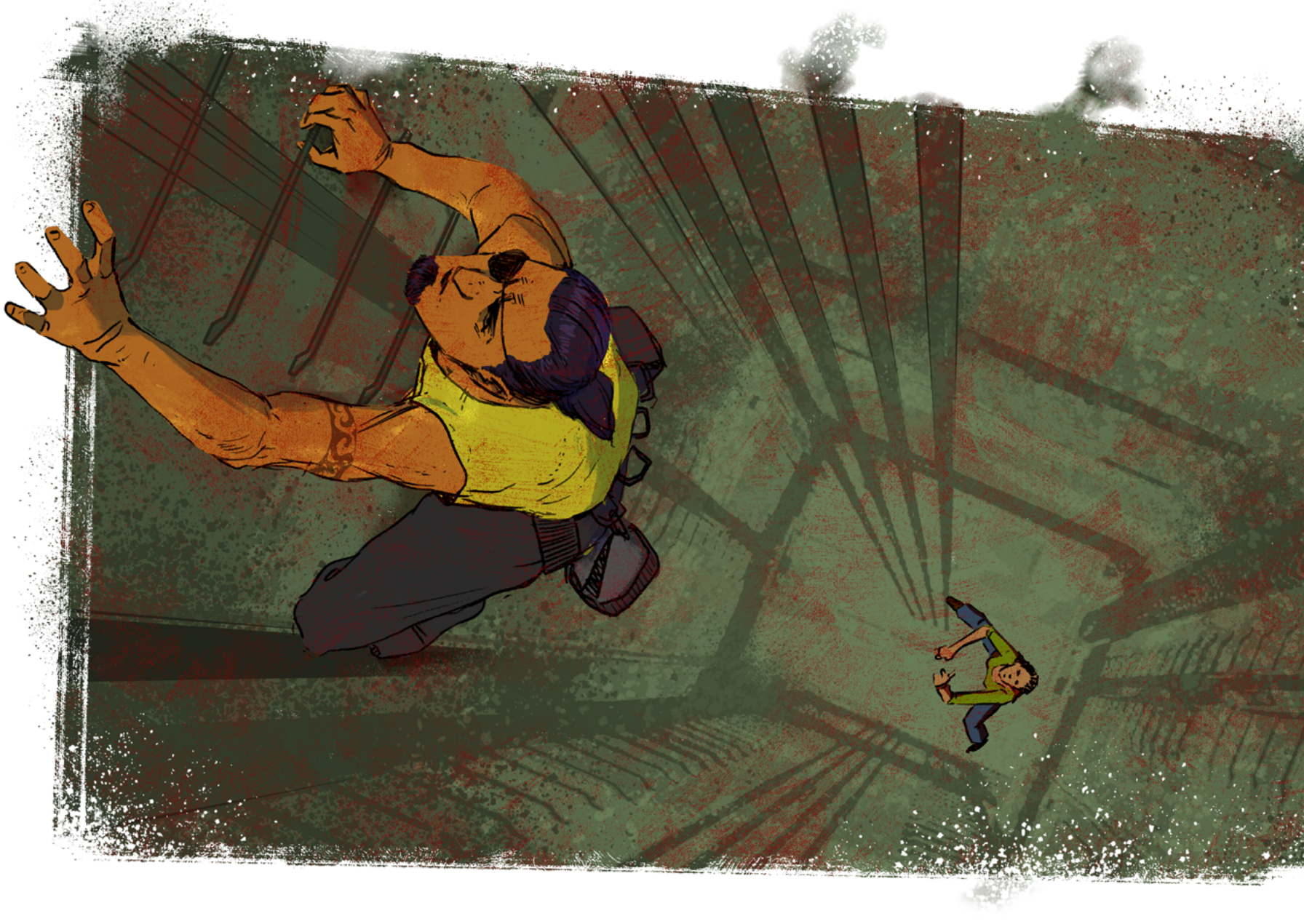
Schemer: I think I need to do something a bit more drastic. This is still the same Scene, right?

GM: Yes. The maintenance guy trying to stop you is the Crux Point. To get past this and move on to your objective, you need to deal with him somehow.

Schemer: I tell a Lie and try to distract him. My Lie is that he has more important things to think about with his own job than to worry about us.

GM: Fine. Since you've already got his attention, that's a pretty big Lie. It works, of course, but the Hurdle to avoid Stress is 7–8, so you'll need to roll an 8 or higher. While you roll, I'll let you know that he turns away to suddenly check something on his own clipboard, and then starts to look at something on his phone. You walk right past and reach the security station. From the outside, it's just a door with the word "SECURITY" on it.

The player fails her roll, so the Stress of this Lie gives the Schemer 1 Injury Die.



THE TURN

The Liars open the door to the station to deactivate the systems and find a group of six imposing security guards, seemingly waiting for them.

The players react with surprise. Did they set off some alarm? Were they betrayed somehow? The Schemer is convinced that the only camera that would have seen them doing anything suspicious was deactivated.

The GM doesn't give them too long to argue about what must have happened, telling them that the guards say, "You're going to have to come with us," and move toward them menacingly.

Outnumbered two to one, without much in the way of combat skills, the Liars decide to run.

Now, most often, the Turn means that the game moves directly into Act Three. But in this case, the GM decides that Act Two has been kind of short, and she doesn't want to end the Act with the Liars just running from the guards. There probably will be a better Act break when the next Scene is complete.

The security team pursues. The Liars race down corridors, passing by, and sometimes through, startled Gaggle employees, many of whom end up on the floor. In this Scene, the GM decides that the Crux Point is when the characters reach a stairwell. If they're going to lose their pursuers, this is their chance. She calls for rolls. The Plotter and Planner have no applicable Traits or Skills, but the Schemer is Good at being Fast. The guards are an Average challenge, so the Hurdle is 3–4. The Schemer rolls a 5, but the other two fail their rolls. The Schemer doesn't want to desert her friends, so she decides to stick with them. They all go up one flight of stairs with the guards still behind them.

In the next Scene, the Liars are still going up the stairs. The Planner begins by playing the Just the Thing card.

Planner: I pull a tear gas canister from my pack and hand it to Liz's character. "Maybe that can hold them off long enough for me to provide an escape with a little Lie," I say.

Schemer: Okay. I roll it down the stairs.

The Crux of the Scene is the Schemer rolling the gas bomb down the stairs while the Planner tells a Lie to reality. The GM says that rolling the tear gas canister into the oncoming group of guards is not too difficult given that they're in a pretty confined space, and as a distraction, it's perfect. It's Easy, so there's no roll needed (which is good, because she's the one with the Injury Die). The guards begin to cough and retreat from the gas.

Planner: My Lie is that the door from the stairwell into the next floor—the top floor, right?—has a heavy-duty deadbolt lock on it. Like a big, manual bar that you slide, not something that someone can open with a key or a keycard. And then we all go through it and I lock it behind us.

GM: Okay. That's a pretty big Lie. There's no way anyone would expect this door would normally have a big bar like that. The Hurdle to avoid Stress is going to be 5–6.

Planner: As a Scion Planner, I'm Good at resisting Stress. I roll a 7.

GM: Success. You might sweat a bit, but you suffer no Injury from the Stress of the Lie.

Planner: Whew!

Schemer: Let's get through that door. Away from these guys *and* the tear gas.

Planner: And I'll lock it with the bar.

The GM plays another Twist Card.

GM: One of the guards toughs his way through the gas and reaches you as you get to the door. He looks like he's just grabbing for whomever is closest.

Plotter: I'm going to let that be me. I'll try to keep from getting grabbed or punched while I kick him down the stairs.

GM: The gas is mostly going down the stairs, but some is coming up as well.

Plotter: Then I'll try to be fast and get through the door if I can fend him off.

The guards are Average, so the Hurdle is 3–4. Mateo rolls a 5. The Crux of the Scene is when he kicks the guard, who goes sailing down the stairs. However, the GM says that he also has to roll to resist taking any Injury in the scuffle, since the guard is grabbing at him and punching. This time, Mateo fails. The guard smashed his head into the wall when Mateo first tried to kick him. He now has an Injury Die.

The Plotter gets through the door before the gas or the guards can be a further threat, and the Planner seals the door. They catch their breath, but only for a moment, and then decide to try to get to the CEO's office now that they're on the top floor. The Schemer says that she has a Shrug It Off card, and she'll use it to get rid of her Injury Die.

The GM says that once that decision is made, the game enters Act Three. This means another short break is in order.

During the break, the GM decides that at least one of the security guards retreats down the stairwell and calls up to the top floor that three intruders dressed like maintenance workers are in the building. The Liars never got to the security center to turn off the alarms, so, in very short order, there will be an alarm sounding on the floor the PCs are on.

ACT THREE: THE BIG CLIMAX

The Liars are where they need to be, but the circumstances aren't what they were hoping for. They don't get too far down a corridor before they hear an alarm.

Planner: I'm going to try another Lie.

GM: You're full of them tonight.

Planner: Liars gotta Lie. Around the next corner there's a panel with an emergency phone behind it. The kind of thing that we could pick up and ask what's going on with the alarm.

Schemer: The alarm is about us, I'm pretty sure.

Planner: Yeah, but I want to know exactly what they know and what they're telling people.

GM: Okay. There's the panel, just like you wanted. That's not that out of the ordinary. We'll call it Average, with a Hurdle of 4 to resist the Stress.

Here in Act Three, the Almost range shrinks to one digit, the higher of the two Hurdle numbers.

Planner: 6! Success! Someone else want to use the phone?

Plotter: I'll do it. I pick it up and try to sound angry and in a hurry. "What's going on? What's with this blasted alarm?"

GM: Okay, for your part of the Scene, you'll have to make a roll to sound believable. It's an Average task.

Plotter: I'm actually Good at this. Disguise, acting—these are my things.

GM: Then there's no roll. The voice on the other end says, "Nothing to be overly worried about. There's three intruders dressed like maintenance workers on the top floor. We'll nab them very quickly."

Plotter: "Do you know where they are now?"

GM: "No, but we will very soon."

Plotter: "You'd better!" And then I hang up. I think it's my turn to Lie. Did we pass a restroom as we came from the stairs?

GM: Sure. Unisex.

Plotter: Perfect. There was a big birthday party here for one of the executives last night, a theme party where people wore costumes. Some of the employees left their regular business clothing in the bathroom.

Planner: We're changing clothes again?

Plotter: I think we should. We should have kept the outfits we came in wearing, but I'm pretty sure we said we left them in the maintenance shaft where we took them off.

Schemer: Yeah. Next time—keep your clothes with you, guys.

GM: Well, that's a somewhat plausible Lie, but it's big, affecting multiple people. I'm going to call that a Ridiculous amount of Stress to resist. The Hurdle is 10.

Plotter: Well, even with the bump I get because it's Act Three, I can't possibly succeed at that.

GM: You take an Injury Die, then.

Plotter: That's two for me. Yikes.

GM: You're feeling both rattled and exhausted at the same time. Even just walking around is a bit of an effort.

Plotter: We go into the bathroom and get some clothes to once again not look like maintenance people. I'm Good at Disguise.

GM: Okay, in this Scene he tries to help all three of you look presentable. Mateo, roll for it. The task is going to be Hard, with a Hurdle of 6, because you're all pretty disheveled at this point, and people on this floor are really going to notice things like clothing.

Plotter: Oh no. I rolled a 4 on my regular die, but I also rolled an Injury on one of my Injury Dice.

GM: Failure, I'm afraid. This is a sad moment, with the Plotter just kind of waving his hand as if to say, "Yeah, whatever, you look fine."

Schemer: So we look terrible?

GM: No, just not great. But most importantly, you don't look like maintenance workers.

Now the Liars proceed toward the CEO's office. They see a few other executives, all looking worried due to the alarm, and at least one of the security guards from the stairwell, who likely came up on the elevator or a different stairwell. There are a few tense moments, but the Liars slip by everyone and walk into a reception area.

GM: You see a very severe-looking but smartly dressed older woman with an electronic notepad and a regular paper notebook in a leather binder. She's on her feet, talking to someone on a mic and earpiece so small you might not have noticed it otherwise.

Planner: This is clearly Ida Greene.

Schemer: I waste no time. I tell a Lie that makes her think that she should keep talking to whomever is on the phone and wave us in to see Ms. Saran.

Plotter: I try to look as comfortable and businesslike as I can and try to just hustle past her, like I'm expected. I give her a very small nod, like I know her.

Planner: I glance back through the door and make sure no one's coming.

The GM has already determined that Ida is very good at what she does, and what she does is make sure that her boss keeps her schedule and never talks to anyone without an appointment.

GM (to Schemer): This is going to be a Very Hard Lie. The resistance roll has a Hurdle of 8.

Schemer: I roll . . . a 1. I know that's a Failure, and . . . result and I really don't want to get an Injury Die again. I'm playing a Goal card. My character's personal Side Goal is avoiding harm, so running from the guards earlier fulfilled it, don't you think?

Everyone agrees. The card lets her reroll her action and Boost the die. It's Act Three, so all rolls are Boosted anyway, and that means she rolls a d10 (before applying the Boosts, she would normally roll a d6 because she has no applicable Skills, Traits, or Detriments). This time she gets a 6—just a Failure, not a Failure and . . . but she still gets an Injury Die.

GM: Okay, with that Lie in her head, she waves you through, and Mateo, your character just waltzes right up to the door on the other side of the room and opens it. No roll needed. You see a lavish office with a woman sitting behind a desk watching something on a computer screen. She's middle aged and dressed very professionally. She looks up in surprise and confusion to see you.

Plotter: Okay, I—

GM: Wait. You can do whatever you want, but dealing with her is an entirely new Scene. Ryan's character is still in the outer office area, looking back down the hall, and I've got a Twist Card in my hand . . .

Planner: Uh oh.

GM: You see at least four of those security guards from before. They look really intense as they march down the hall toward you. Angry, even. Their eyes are red from tear gas.

The GM plays the Twist Card, but the Planner plays the I've Seen This Before card. The cards are being played fast and furiously, as is often the case in Act Three. Ryan explains.

Planner: I'm a Scion, and I grew up on board the *Celeste*. I was in a gang when I was a teenager. We committed small crimes here and there, but nothing too serious. One day, the authorities were called when we stole some fruit from one of the artificial orchards on board. They were chasing us through the orchard and down into the corridors connecting to the residential sector. We gave them the slip for a while, but they circled around and were going to cut us off. We diverted their attention and got them to think we had gone a different way.

GM: Okay.

Planner: So using that memory, I lean out the door, look right at them, and point in a different direction. Like toward a different office. I'm looking at them meaningfully as I do so.

GM: Are you good at bluffing or anything like that?

Planner: Nope. But the card Boosts my die. And since it's Act Three, I'll be rolling a d10.

GM: Your Hurdle is going to be a 6.

Planner: I roll a 10! Maybe I'll also follow up my bluff by thumbing toward the CEO's office and make a face and a handwave like, "You do *not* want to come in here, she's on a rampage."

GM: They turn toward where you pointed and head in that direction. One of them has a sympathetic expression for you.

Planner: I'm hoping my bluff will keep them away for a while.

GM: Okay, inside, Aesha Saran demands to know who you are, and why you're just barging in. This is a new Scene.

Plotter: Well, this seems like a real long shot, but we've got to try it, right, guys? "Ms. Saran," I say to her with a broad but sincere grin. "I am so delighted to meet you. I was just hoping I could get you to sign a copy of your new book. I want to give it to my friend, the senator." Uh, what's the senator's name? Anyone know?

Schemer: I'm skilled in History. I knew that would come in handy! I want to come up with the name of one of the current senators here in Colorado.

GM: That's an Average task, so if you're Good at History, you've got it.

Schemer: Even though I'm injured from the Stress of my Lie?

GM: Yeah. Injury Dice only affect you when you roll. If your task is easy enough that you don't have to roll, the Injury won't affect it. Let's say the name that comes to you is Senator Monroe.

Schemer: Great. I follow him in right on his footsteps and finish his sentence. " . . . Senator Monroe. We're from his office. He's a big fan of your work, as I'm sure you know."

GM: Okay. You guys are clearly working directly together toward the Crux of this Scene, so whomever is better at the attempt can roll two dice and take the better roll thanks to the Harmony.

Planner: I'm keeping watch, but also keeping an eye on the assistant.

GM: Okay, that will be a different Scene.

Plotter: Well, I'm Good at acting, but I've got two Injury Dice. How hard is this going to be?

GM: It's Very Hard. She has a stern expression on her face.

Plotter: Okay. I've got the Revelation card and I'm a Plotter, so the revelation has to do with intention. I'm going to use it now and say that this was our plan all along, to pose as people from the senator's office. So I've got some credentials to that effect and I pull them out, along with the copy of her book.

The Revelation card has a lot of clout, so it's not stretching things too much to say that it allows the character to say he's got faked credentials. It's meant to be the biggest gun in the Liars' arsenal, so to speak.

GM: Okay. You still have to roll. The Hurdle is 10. But the credentials really help. Now you're going to roll three dice and take the best.

Plotter: Okay, I'm Good at this, and it's Act Three, so I'm rolling three ten-siders. I still don't like those odds. I'm going to go for broke and also play my I've Been Called Worse by Better card.

GM: That's fine. Let's hear the story.

Plotter: I'm a Sleeper, so to even get a place on the original mission of the *Celeste,* I had to talk my way past a guy who was conducting interviews. He was a real hardnose. Like, he was infamous among candidates for turning away practically everyone. I found out what his partner's favorite candy was and came into the interview munching on some. He noticed it, and I offered him some and spun a few practiced words to get him to subconsciously associate me with his partner, whom he loved. It took a lot of doing, but . . . well, I'm here, aren't I?

GM: That is some scary-level manipulative maneuvering.

Plotter: The very essence of my character!

GM: Okay, so now you're rolling d12s.

The Plotter rolls a total of five dice: three d12s and two Injury Dice. One of the Injury Dice comes up an automatic Failure, but his regular rolls are 4, 11, and 12. The Injury Die cancels one of his successes, but not both.

GM: She softens her expression and says, reluctantly, "Well, if it's for the senator . . . " And she pulls a pen from her jacket. It's *the* pen.

And, meanwhile, Ida the assistant touches her earpiece, ending her call. She suddenly looks at the Planner and says, "Wait a minute, just who are you people?"

Planner: Okay, for this Scene I'm going to try to use force of personality to gain all of her attention and hold it until my friends get out with the pen. I'm going to blather and bluster on, loudly, about how busy Senator Monroe is, but he sent his senior staff here for this one thing, and just because she screwed up the schedule and forgot our appointment isn't our fault, and so on. And I'll even add in some complaining about the "damn annoying alarm."

GM: This is going to be Ridiculous. The Hurdle is a 10.

Planner: I have no way of succeeding at this, but I don't know what to do.

GM: She reacts instinctively, and as you get in her face, she tries to jab you with her pen. So you need to roll to resist getting injured. This is also Ridiculous.

Planner: Yeesh! You don't mean react, you mean overreact. I'm Good at resisting Stress, but not physical Injury. So I have no chance here either.

The GM is improvising—intentionally making the Hurdles even harder than usual—because the situation is so intense.

GM: You get an Injury Die, and she forces you back and gets into her boss's office just as the others hand her the book to sign.

Schemer: Doesn't matter. I'm just grabbing the pen from Saran's hand and running. I'm going to the roof, like I said in the Briefing.

GM (to the Plotter): What about you?

Plotter: I'm backing her play. I'll use the book to maybe push Ms. Saran back or just jostle her while she grabs the pen.

Planner: Even with a freakin' pen jabbed into my arm, I try to run interference on Ida. Although I'm pretty sure this older woman is tougher than me.

GM (to the Schemer): Make a roll to snatch the pen. Your friends are all helping you, so that's once again three die rolls, and you take the best result.

Schemer: I'm Good at being Fast. Does that count?

GM: Absolutely.

Schemer: Okay, so that's three d10 rolls. What's the Hurdle?

At the end of Act One, the GM decided that both Ida and Aesha were Very Hard, but now she regrets applying that to Ida's physical attack earlier. Ida and her boss aren't supposed to be great at fisticuffs or physical actions. Only the things they're normally good at—intelligence, efficiency, and so on. Well, Ida's stabbing pen maneuver was desperation, and Aesha's not expecting all of this. However, she is both tough and paranoid. The GM decides this action should be still Hard, but not Very Hard.

GM: I'm afraid it's a 6.

Schemer: I roll a 2, a 4, and . . . an 6. That's probably going to be an Almost, which is fantastic because I play the card I'm Better Than You Think and make that into a success.

GM: You have the pen!

Planner: Yes!

Schemer: As I said, I am out of there. Headed toward the shaft we know will get us roof access. I don't care about being seen or anything.

Plotter: I'm not waiting around.

Planner: Yeah, I'm following her.

The GM narrates this getaway (a non-scene) as a race to the maintenance shaft by the elevator, startling employees nearby. Aesha Saran and her assistant shout for security. Once the PCs are on the roof, all the birds distract the guards who are now in pursuit while the characters set up the zipline equipment and get a rope to a nearby rooftop.

The characters get down to the ground and race for the edge of the Improbability Zone.

GAGGLE

DENOUEMENT

As soon as they get the ink in the pen out of the zone, the zone disappears, and everything goes back to normal. There were never far too many crows in the downtown area, they were never at Gaggle, and it's just a normal day in those corporate offices.

Only the Liars know what they did, as it's now a part of the story they stole. It was a more harrowing story than they were hoping for, but messy success is still success. They return to the *Celeste* to a celebration and plenty of congratulations. The card pile has nine cards in it by the end, so they've each earned 3 Story Points to spend to advance or improve their characters if they wish, and the GM and players discuss Side Goals and award Story Points for those as well. We'll discuss advancement in chapter 10.

But there are other Improbability Zones active in the world . . .

CHAPTER 8

BACKGROUNDS

You don't need to come up with an elaborate backstory when you create your Liar. In fact, maybe you shouldn't. Because as the game goes on, you'll develop your past and the experiences you've already had. For example, various Mission Cards will prompt you to create a story from your past that's relevant to the present situation, and you can use those to build your backstory.

However, you might still want to flesh out the basics. You can peruse this chapter to get an idea of some of the experiences your character may have had previously. You'll also find sample backgrounds that you can take and tailor to your vision if you want.

THE THIRTY-NINTH CENTURY

About 1,800 years in the future, humanity lives in a post-scarcity, transhumanist society. Now, you're smart, and you probably know what those words mean, and of course you can look them up if you need to, but let's dive into them a bit because they're important.

Fabricators and matter printers can create anything everyone needs. There's really no need for currency or capitalism. There's no poverty.

Everyone has tailor-made bodies, often with cybernetic enhancements. Nanites keep people free of viruses and disease. Cells can be regenerated. Sickness and death are not foregone conclusions. Plus, you can always upload your consciousness into the cloud (which people call the metaverse—a sort of shared virtual reality) and live forever that way, downloading into a physical body when you want to.

And now, let's toss an even less commonly used word into the mix: hylozoic. In the thirty-ninth century, literally everything is awakened and alive. Thanks to nanotechnology, matter and energy are playthings in the hands of humans. In this case, the "cloud" doesn't just refer to an internet-like network of connectivity and data, but also the septillions of nanomachines that fill the air and cover every surface, allowing humans to mentally interface with, and even alter, well, everything.

Of course, there are exceptions. Earth's ever-present cloud of information and nanobots only extends around the one planet, even though humans now live on (a terraformed) Mars and other places in the solar system. Plus, there are people who reject the metaverse and even the interface with the nanomachines. In all of these cases, humans are more like twenty-first century humans, albeit with fantastically healthy bodies, a cure for every disease, and access to incredible technology. (So, not really that much like twenty-first century humans at all.)

This is the world that the crew of the *Celeste* left. Without a cloud of constant information and nanite facilitation, the Liars on the ship had to confine themselves to one body, dwell in the real world (not an artificial reality), and learn to fend for themselves a little bit. Many welcomed and relished the challenge. Even if—or perhaps because—they might risk death.

ALL THOSE CRAZY UNIVERSES

When people toss around words like *multiverse* and *many worlds*, they usually don't use them correctly and think in terms of comic books or television shows. There's some real science behind those ideas, and they don't mean what most science fiction writers seem to think. But don't worry about it. Read about those things on your own time.

The point is, the crew of the *Celeste* explored dozens and dozens of new realities. Some were parallel versions of their own universe, while others were so alien that they weren't even comprehensible. Many were somewhere in between.

The crew encountered weird alien species, humans with utterly unfamiliar cultures, and even worlds with different kinds of physics. We're not going to go into the specifics of each, but instead we'll leave this as a broad canvas on which a player with a Sleeper character can paint some extraordinary experiences in their backstory when they want to.

Traveling between realities takes a very long time, as the ship needs to transition to the new reality. Potentially dangerous transdimensional energies pose a threat to the crew during these transitions, so everyone on board had a stasis pod in which they slept, unaware of what happened outside it, and also immune to dangers and even the passage of time itself. The crew on board didn't have access to the various treatments that essentially granted humans immortality, so the stasis of the pods was important in that regard as well.

THE LONG SLOG HOME

The lives of the Scions were, in many ways, the direct opposite of those of the Sleepers. Whereas the thirty-ninth century and the infinity of the many worlds shaped the Sleepers' experience, the Scions focused mainly on survival.

When the *Celeste* had to return home, the trip would take many hundreds of years, relative to time on board. Unfortunately for some of the crew, a malfunction rendered a small percentage of the stasis pods inoperable. This wasn't even fully realized until after the ship's Artificial Intelligences had gone dormant for the trip.

These people had to find a way to live on the *Celeste* during the transition, even though they knew they'd never live long enough to see their destination. They raided the ship's stores and jury-rigged enough of the fabricators to make food and materials they needed. Using what they could find or make, they created an existence not only for themselves, but for their children, their children's children, and so on. They built a sort of city inside the ship, which they called Celeste's Heart. Life was hard, but the people were harder.

As the generations passed, the new children born still came from engineered gene stock, but they evolved naturally. Some genetic traits and defects thought gone forever returned. Plus, skills and knowledge faded, even as the people struggled to hang on to what they could—what their parents and grandparents could teach them.

Over time, the otherworldly energies that bombarded the *Celeste* changed everything.

Many got sick. Many died.

The survivors gained a resistance to it. But a few were changed. They developed what had been called "psychic" abilities in the distant past. Minor at first, these abilities blossomed with each new generation. Eventually, they came to resemble the reality-altering powers granted by technology to the original Liars.

ARRIVAL HOME?

When the Sleepers began awakening, they immediately encountered the Scions. Until that time, they had no idea that some people had been unable to ride out the return trip in stasis. They were, to say the least, shocked to find that an entire society had developed on the ship while they slept.

The Scions, for their part, didn't know what to make of the Sleepers at first. To them, the Sleepers were abstract entities more than real people. No Scion still alive had ever known one of the Sleepers. Too much time had passed.

Tense initial encounters, marked by confusion and misunderstandings, almost led to violence at a few points, but the ship's Artificial Intelligences prevented that from happening as they updated both sides with information and introductions. Still, each group had a lot to comprehend and deal with in a very short period.

Some people reported that there was a figure—a well-dressed, handsome man—involved in those early moments, perhaps quietly fomenting chaos and confusion. Both groups believed this man to belong to the other group. Now this figure cannot be found, and it might be that this is all apocryphal. Just a story that arose out of the disarray of the moment.

Both Sleepers and Scions were overjoyed when they learned that the *Celeste* had reached Earth. For the Sleepers, they were finally home again. For the Scions, they had reached what seemed like the mythical end of a journey that had lasted not only their lifetimes, but the lifetimes of their parents, grandparents, and great-grandparents. This joy, however, was short lived.

The *Celeste* had arrived in its dimension of origin, but almost two thousand years in the past. How could such a thing happen? And the universe itself appeared to be deteriorating. How can such a thing be prevented?

It all rests on your shoulders.

SLEEPER BACKGROUND POSSIBILITIES

While you may be from the hyper-advanced thirty-ninth century, the act of leaving that interconnected collective returned you to a more traditional human state. You're in a cyber-enhanced, genetically engineered body, sure, but you're a self-contained biological entity with no immediate connection to a metaverse sustained by ambient nano machines. You're an individual, and there haven't been many of those for centuries.

Further, the missions of the *Celeste* and all the exploration of other worlds strengthened your individuality. For good or ill—or perhaps good *and* ill—your mindset might be more like that of the people of the twenty-first century, where you have found yourself, than the thirty-ninth that you were hoping to reach.

With very few exceptions, all Sleepers are Liars. Everyone was fitted with the tech before the mission began.

You spent much of your prior life exploring the new worlds that the *Celeste* discovered. You dealt with intelligent beings that you encountered; cataloged the plants, animals, minerals, and energies you found; and studied the physics there. The adventures you had on these exploratory missions presented unique challenges in worlds much like your own, as well as those so alien they could barely be understood.

Now, however, you're not an explorer anymore. Your new missions present different challenges and perhaps a different mindset. But perhaps you've always been as suited to the art of the heist as you were to scientific exploration. Perhaps these new missions suit you *better*. There's a reason, obviously, why the Artificial Intelligences selected *you* for the job.

NPC SLEEPERS

Not everyone who proved useful on a mission to explore new realities has the skills or inclinations required to perform heists of important objects in the twenty-first century. The Artificial Intelligences combed through the personnel records of everyone on board to find those best suited for the task, and in fact, most people did not make the cut. These individuals remain on board the *Celeste*, maintaining systems and monitoring conditions on the world below.

The ship's complement of Sleepers started at around 3,000 individuals. About 2,500 of them have survived, although not all are active. Many are still asleep, in fact. The Artificial Intelligences needed only a few small teams of Liars to investigate and remedy the Improbability Zones and a skeleton crew to maintain the ship and monitor the situation. As such, there are slightly more Scions active on the ship than Sleepers.

Any one of the following backgrounds would be appropriate for a Sleeper, but you can craft your own as well. Skills listed are just suggestions that would narratively fit the given background—they are neither requirements nor bonuses.

HARDENED EXPLORER

You have, as they say, seen some shit. You logged more hours exploring strange universes and worlds than practically anyone on the ship. You've been through hardships most people couldn't imagine and overcome challenges most wouldn't understand.

Appropriate Skills: Searching, Climbing, Swimming, Jumping, Machine Repair, Handling Animals

SCOUT

On missions, you were a scout, an infiltrator, and a specialist called in whenever subterfuge was required. Sometimes, information, people, or objects had to be stealthily removed from a situation, and you were just the person to get that job done. You also may have taken part in personal side missions while visiting these other worlds, acquiring interesting, shall we say, "discoveries" on your own.

Appropriate Skills: Stealth, Lockpicking, Sleight of Hand, Deception, Balancing, Contortion

FIELD SCIENTIST

Although extremely intelligent and educated, you weren't afraid to get your hands dirty. You went on missions with the other explorers and coped with the challenges just as they did. Your part to play was as a scientific advisor. You gathered all manner of samples and data for the *Celeste*—never-before-seen examples of flora, fauna, minerals, and even different types of matter and energies.

Appropriate Skills: Biology, Physics, Metallurgy, Geology, Botany

CON ARTIST

Oh, you *posed* as a legitimate member of the crew, but you got there through smooth talking rather than real skills of use on missions. You did this for reasons of your own. But you're here now, and you're outfitted with Liar tech. Once down in these new worlds, you often plied your trade among the locals, or even among the other explorers, always making sure that you came out best in every deal you made.

Appropriate Skills: Deception, Disguise, Persuasion, Storytelling, Stealth

STOWAWAY

You weren't supposed to be on the *Celeste* at all. You weren't selected by the panels of experts back in the thirty-ninth century, and you didn't pass the exams required. You snuck on board and jury-rigged a backup stasis pod to use during the trip. It wasn't always easy remaining out of sight most of the time, but you learned to pass for one of the legitimate crewmembers when you had to. You even managed to get set up with some implants so you can be a Liar, although it's not likely that you went on many (or any) missions off the ship to strange new worlds.

Your reasons for doing this were your own. Perhaps you liked the idea of traveling through universes, or perhaps you just needed to get away from Earth.

Appropriate Skills: Disguise, Stealth, Deception, Electronics, Searching

FIELD TEAM LEADER

When explorers left the ship to explore a new world directly, you were the first sent down and the last retrieved. Everyone on the mission looked to you for leadership and guidance thanks to your wisdom, quick thinking, and grace under pressure. Everyone learned to respect you not only for your skills, but also your bravery and your stewardship.

Appropriate Skills: Persuasion, Driving, Searching, Climbing, Swimming

ACADEMIC

You didn't participate in missions so much as you analyzed the findings of those who did. This meant that you were awakened once a mission was underway, and you spent most of your time in the laboratories on board the *Celeste* rather than exploring alien worlds. Your work proved invaluable to the overall mission, though.

Appropriate Skills: Medicine, Biology, History, Mathematics, Physics, Metallurgy, Geology, Botany, Astrophysics, Writing

ATHLETE

You're strong and fast. Honing your genetically designed and cybernetically outfitted body is your primary concern, taking it well beyond the standards of your peers. You joined the *Celeste* because you wanted to test your physical skills, willpower, and drive in an environment where not everyone and everything had the same perfect, enhanced body.

Appropriate Skills: Climbing, Running, Jumping, Balancing, Contortion, Swimming, Hand-to-Hand Weapon Use

SCION BACKGROUND OPTIONS

Scions have lived their entire lives on the ship, and their skills and their personalities should reflect that. Most Scions, for example, won't have skill in Swimming or Handling Animals.

Unlike Sleepers, most Scions are *not* Liars. They're average humans with no reality-manipulation powers. Scion PCs, however, are always Liars.

NPC SCIONS

The Scions who dwell on the *Celeste* have lived their entire lives knowing only the ship and only others of their kind. Collectively, they are a hardy folk with a survivor's mindset. Many are crafters of different stripes, working to make Celeste's Heart a better place.

Although today there are thousands of individuals, only a small portion are Liars. A few have less useful or dramatic gifts, but most have no psychic abilities at all.

PICKPOCKET AND BURGLAR

Among the Scions, you're a criminal. You steal from others to get by, picking pockets, breaking into homes, or both. You've probably been caught a few times and learned that punishments among your people can be severe. Still, you've perfected your skills to an impressive degree.

Appropriate Skills: Sleight of Hand, Lockpicking, Stealth, Searching, Climbing

COMMUNITY LEADER

You served as a leader among your kind, managing the people living a strange life trapped aboard a ship. You handle people well and engender trust and confidence easily. You probably recognize that the best way to succeed is with an organized team of people rather than alone.

Appropriate Skills: Persuasion, Storytelling, Writing, Deception, Cooking, Searching

"STREET" URCHIN

In another context, you'd probably say you grew up on the streets. But there aren't really streets on the *Celeste*. Instead, people called you a skimboi, a shiprat, a subpart (referring to the subdecks in which you likely spent a lot of time crawling about), or a venter (again, since your kind often dwelt in the ship's ventilation system).

You're young. Probably an orphan. And you've learned to lie, cheat, and steal to get by on your own. You probably find it difficult to trust those older than you (which is most people).

Appropriate Skills: Stealth, Lockpicking, Sleight of Hand, Deception, Sowing Confusion, Contortion

GANG MEMBER

You may have started out as a shiprat or a skimmer, or maybe not. Either way, you ended up joining with other young Scions because there's strength in numbers.

You're quite capable and likely at least a little dangerous. You operate well in a group, yet you probably don't have much respect for authority or society.

Appropriate Skills: Hand-to-Hand Weapon Use, Stealth, Running, Climbing, Deception, Sowing Confusion

AI DEVOTEE

The Machine Gods maintain the *Celeste*, and the *Celeste* is the world. It provides food and materials, shelter and warmth. You worship the Machine Gods, praying to them that they will keep the promise of returning you to the fabled land called Earth.

You are devoted and driven, and will do whatever the Machine Gods tell you to do.

Appropriate Skills: History, Machine Repair, Searching, Persuasion, Deception, Singing, Dancing

SCROUNGER

Life on board the ship was often about what you could find. You've spent much of your life scouring the *Celeste*'s backrooms, access corridors, and subsections looking for something that could be useful to you or others. This often meant scavenging backup systems or relatively unimportant devices for parts. Many call you a skimmer or a skimboi, which you're likely quite used to.

Appropriate Skills: Searching, Climbing, Machine Repair, Lockpicking, Metallurgy, Electronics

MUSCLE

Life among the Scions could be rough. Violent, even. Occasionally, an individual or group would try to upend society with a "might makes right" philosophy. Most of the time, the violence was smaller in scope, but every leader and group among your people needed enforcers or bodyguards. Every bar needed a bouncer. Every gang needed muscle. In short, a person who could handle themselves in a fight could always find employment.

Appropriate Skills: Hand-to-Hand Weapon Use, Unarmed Combat, Marksmanship, Climbing

CRAFTER

Someone needed to make the things your people used, wore, ate, or lived within. You were a valuable member of Scion society, making things by using either found/scrounged materials or—more rarely—ship-made materials (using the matter printers on board).

Appropriate Skills: Woodworking, Metalworking, Leatherworking, Sewing, Cooking, Machine Repair

ARTIST

You grew up with the drive to create. Even trapped on board a ship, you found beauty. And where there was no beauty, you created your own. Whether you were a painter, a sculptor, a performer, or a craftsperson, you were always interested in making the world (the ship) a more meaningful place. Beauty, of course, is in the eye of the beholder, and perhaps some people didn't find what you were trying to convey in your art beautiful at all. But you were always true to your passion.

Appropriate Skills: Visual Artistry, Singing, Dancing, Storytelling, Writing, Sewing, Leatherworking

NONHUMAN CHARACTER CHOICES

The following rules are for creating nonhuman characters. Each has its own advantages and disadvantages, and the rules here supersede any contradicting rules in chapter 3.

UPLIFTED DOG

In the thirty-ninth century, genetic modifications and cybernetic enhancements allowed people to bring a variety of animals to the level of human intelligence. The most prominent of these are dogs, as they so easily inserted themselves into human society and culture (perhaps because they had tens of thousands of years of experience in doing so).

You are just such a being—known as an Uplifted Dog. You can talk, understand science, and think abstractly just as any human can, but you're still a Dog. As such, you have your own way of thinking and feeling. You're not just a person in a dog suit, and you're certainly not a cartoon dog speaking with an affectation that puts an "R" in front of all your words.

As a member of the *Celeste* crew, you work alongside humans, providing your own unique insights and talents to the mission. A few Dogs have been selected to investigate the current situation on Earth, accompanying a team of humans.

In appearance, you can pass for a dog from the twenty-first century. Everyone there will probably assume you're a pet. Of course, not every location in that time period allows dogs, but they make exceptions for so-called service animals, trained to assist people with disabilities. Which means that with a little sign on your back indicating your status as a helper, you can go pretty much everywhere.

Uplifted Dogs are Sleepers. And they are Liars, complete with the cybernetic enhancements that all Sleeper Liars possess.

You don't have thumbs, so you can't manipulate or carry objects the way a human does. Some objects, of course, you can carry in your mouth. You're also short and lightweight compared to your human friends.

However, you have other Traits and Skills that humans don't. All Dogs are innately Charming or Fast (your choice). Dogs are also inherently good at Tracking and Unarmed Combat. These Traits and Skills don't count toward your total that you select when you create the character. Otherwise, you create your character as normal, with Traits, Skills, a Detriment, and a Side Goal.

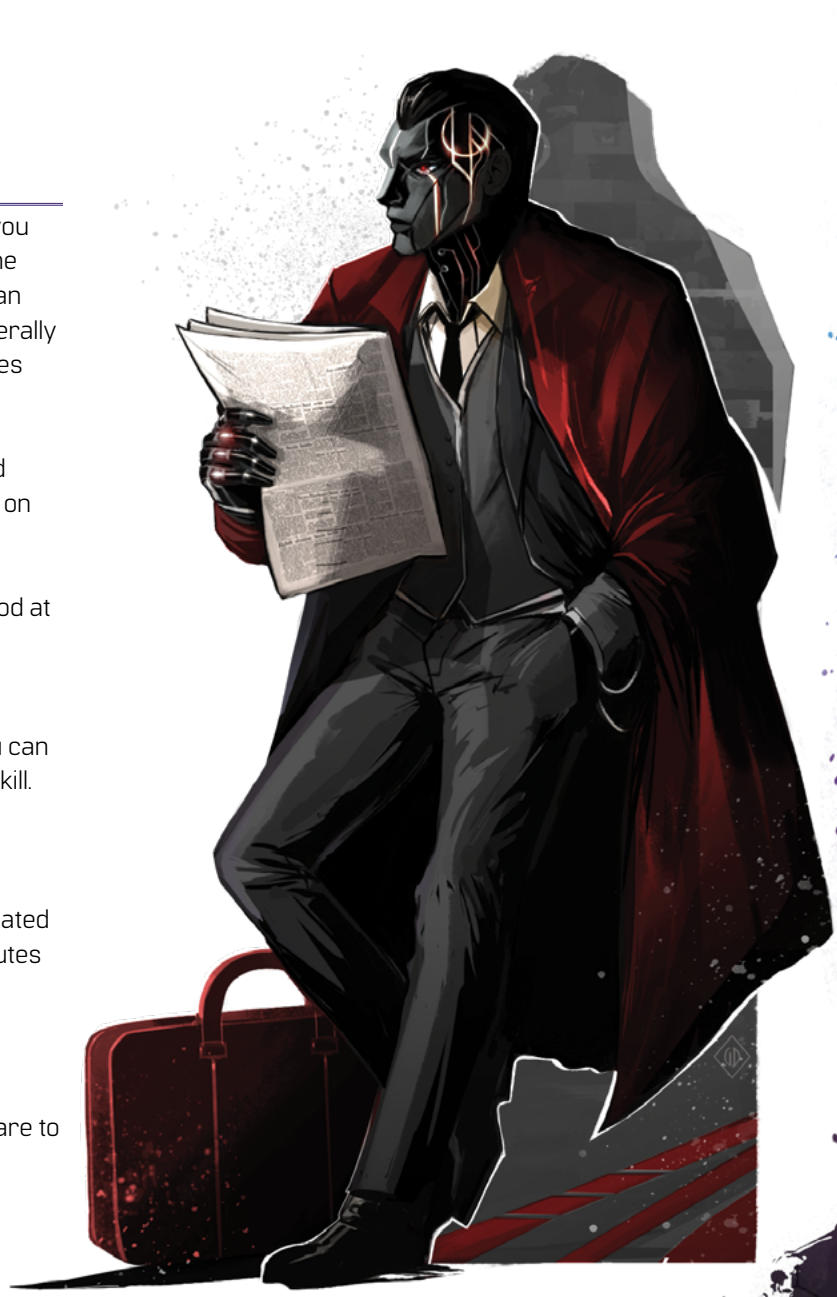
Your entire group of players might be tempted to create Dog characters, but it's likely that at least one set of opposable thumbs is needed to pull off just about any heist. But if that makes you say "Challenge accepted," well, that's fine. Knock yourself out.

HUMECH

Designed for dangerous missions on inhospitable worlds, you are one of a handful of artificial people brought on board the *Celeste* when it launched. As a replicant android, you have an independent mind, but you've been programmed to be generally helpful on whatever missions the ship's Artificial Intelligences send you on. In a way, those entities that control and guide the braneship are like parental figures to you, or perhaps your relationship is more akin to that of military soldier and commander. Either way, you serve the AIs, not the humans on board the ship. The humans are peers, not superiors.

You are not a Liar. It's not within the parameters of your programming or design. On the other hand, you're very good at a large number of things.

- You are Good at everything.
- You are Very Tough and Very Strong.
- Variable Skill: Before every new mission you go on, you can download information to make you Very Good at one Skill. You are only ever Very Good at one skill at a time.
- You have no other Traits or Skills, nor do you have a Detriment or a Side Goal.
- You ignore your first Injury Die, and you are always treated as armored. Repairing your damage requires ten minutes and a successful roll on a Hard task involving Machine Repair or Electronics.
- You cannot Lie (in the reality-manipulating sense).
- You do not get Mission Cards.
- When you advance your character, your only options are to select Technological Upgrades (see chapter 10).



CHAPTER 9

THE VALUE OF STORIES

When the Liars are done, if they successfully completed their mission, they come away with something that no one else has. No one, not even those on the *Celeste*, knows what happened while they were in the Improbability Zone. It's erased forever, and the PCs are the only ones that remember it. With the zone returned to normal, what they observed and experienced there turns from truth to lie. From fact to fiction. They come away with a story.

Sleepers have the technological ability to store story essence, while Scions do it intrinsically. Either way, this essence is not quite a substance, but not quite energy. Something in between. Raw information that the universe no longer has use for (or, to look at it a different way, information that technically no longer exists except for what the Liars now have in their possession).

STORY ESSENCE

Story essence is measured in the cards played during a mission. This includes all Mission Cards, all Twist Cards, and the Turn Card. Add up the number of cards played and divide it by the number of Liars involved. Round any fractions up.

The result is the number of Story Points each Liar gets.

A Liar that completes their Side Goal during a mission also gets a bonus Story Point.

Because each Liar gets three Mission Cards, and GMs often play two to three Twist Cards and one Turn Card in a session, most of the time an average-sized team of Liars will come away from a successful mission with 4 Story Points (plus 1 for their Side Goal). This assumes, of course, that all the Liars use all their cards, but they will quickly learn to do so.

Liars returning from an unsuccessful mission bring back no story essence and thus no Story Points.

- Story Points allow any Liar to gain new Skills or improve those they already know.
- Story Points can be used by any Liar to get better access to technology from the ship.
- Story Points allow a Sleeper's reality-Lying tech to be upgraded and calibrated.
- Story Points can be used by a Sleeper to get cybernetic enhancements beyond those needed for Lying.
- Story Points allow Scions to alter their psychic Lying abilities.
- Story Points can be used by a Scion to develop additional psychic abilities not related to Lying.

See chapter 10 for more specific information.

CHAPTER 10

ADVANCING LIARS

So you've completed your first mission and stolen your first story. Now what?

Story essence taken from a successful mission that restores a Zone of Improbability gives Liars power. That power, in the form of Story Points, can be spent on what are called Advancements. Each Advancement has its own Story Point cost and its own benefits. Some are specific to a certain type of Liar, but some are available to anyone.

Between missions, Liars can spend Story Points to get whatever Advancements (if any) they would like. They can also save them to spend later—but always between missions, never on a mission.

GENERAL ADVANCEMENTS

General Advancements are Advancements available to generals. Okay, no, sorry. General Advancements are available to anyone. A rulebook doesn't have to be all stiff and boring, does it? What? Stupid jokes are worse than stiff and boring? I see how it is. Well, let me tell you something . . .

Oh, let's just get to the cool stuff.

ADDITIONAL SIDE GOAL

(COST: 2 STORY POINTS)

You can now have two Side Goals, and either of them can be achieved during a mission to earn an additional Story Point, but you can still gain only 1 additional point in a single mission.

CLASS II TECH ACCESS

(COST: 4 STORY POINTS)

A Liar with this Advancement can access Class II equipment when going on missions rather than just Class I equipment, which all Liars can access.

CLASS III TECH ACCESS

(COST: 6 STORY POINTS)

Liars who have this Advancement gain access to some of the best technology the *Celeste* has to offer when going down to Earth on a mission.

FLASHBACK SCENE

(COST: 4 STORY POINTS)

A Liar who selects this Advancement does nothing right away. Instead, during a future mission, they announce that they're staging a flashback scene. The player narrates the scene and relates a time when they did something similar to a task at hand for which they have no Skill. Because of the events of the flashback, the Liar *does* have the required Skill, and has it forevermore.

Basically, this is like the New Skill Advancement, except the Skill in question doesn't have to be selected until it's needed.

IMPROVED SKILL

(COST: 4 STORY POINTS)

This Advancement allows the Liar to take a skill they're already Good at and improve it so they're Very Good at it.

No Liar can be better than Very Good at a Skill.

MORE MISSION OPTIONS

(COST: 5 STORY POINTS)

Liars with this Advancement draw one additional Mission Card at the beginning of a mission, for a total of four cards.

No Liar can have more than four cards.

NEW SKILL

(COST: 3 STORY POINTS)

Selecting this Advancement adds another Skill to the Liar's repertoire, and the Liar is Good at the Skill. (If you want to improve a skill from Good to Very Good, choose the Improved Skill Advancement.)

OVERCOME DETRIMENT

(COST: 3 STORY POINTS)

If you select this Advancement, you learn to overcome your Detriment and no longer suffer its ill effects. You can remove it from your character sheet.

PLANNER ADVANCEMENTS

These Advancements are only for Planners. Sleeper Planners gain these benefits by upgrading their tech. Scion Planners gain them by honing their psychic abilities.

BIGGER LIE

(COST: 5 STORY POINTS)

With this Advancement, a Planner can affect multiple objects, or larger objects or locations. The specifics are intentionally open ended, but in general, the GM should be even more open to the scope of the Planner's Lies.

Even if you have this Advancement, you still suffer Stress from your Lies—in fact, you might be setting yourself up for even more Injury from the Stress.

LONGER RANGE

(COST: 3 STORY POINTS)

Normally, a Planner can affect objects or surfaces about 100 feet (30 m) away, but with this Advancement, you can affect them at a distance of 200 feet (60 m). You can select this Advancement multiple times, each time adding about 100 feet to your range.

PLOTTER ADVANCEMENTS

These Advancements are only for Plotters. Sleeper Plotters gain these benefits by upgrading their tech. Scion Plotters gain them by honing their psychic abilities.

BIGGER LIE

(COST: 5 STORY POINTS)

With this Advancement, a Plotter can affect multiple events in the past, or the events of the past of multiple people. The specifics are intentionally open ended, but in general, the GM should be even more open to the scope of the Plotter's Lies.

Even if you have this Advancement, you still suffer Stress from your Lies—in fact, you might be setting yourself up for even more Injury from the Stress.

REACH FURTHER BACK

(COST: 3 STORY POINTS)

Normally, a Plotter can affect events up to 24 hours in the past. However, you can affect them up to 48 hours in the past. You can select this Advancement multiple times, each time adding 24 hours to how far you can reach backward.

SCHEMER ADVANCEMENTS

These Advancements are only for Schemers. Sleeper Schemers gain these benefits by upgrading their tech. Scion Schemers gain them by honing their psychic abilities.

AFFECT MULTIPLE PEOPLE

(COST: 4 STORY POINTS)

Normally, a Schemer can affect only one person at a time. However, you can affect two people at a time with the same Lie. You can select this Advancement multiple times, each time adding another person to the maximum number of people you can affect. Experienced Schemers can affect a whole crowd at once!

LONGER RANGE

(COST: 3 STORY POINTS)

Normally, a Schemer can affect people up to about 100 feet (30 m) away, but you can affect them at a distance of 200 feet (60 m). You can select this Advancement multiple times, each time adding about 100 feet to your range.

TECHNOLOGICAL UPGRADES

Whether upgrades to cybernetic systems or brand-new cybernetic enhancements, only Sleepers have access to these Advancements. Only their bioengineered frames can handle the process. If other people tried, their body would reject the implants.

All thirty-ninth century bodytech is made of advanced polymers that don't activate metal detectors or show up on standard X-rays and body scanners of the twenty-first century.

ADRENALINE BOOST

(COST: 3 STORY POINTS)

When you activate this upgrade, your next roll is Boosted so you use a die type one higher than usual. If you use this upgrade more than once during a mission, each use after the first automatically gives you an Injury Die.

CAMERA EYE

(COST: 2 STORY POINTS)

This Advancement gives you the ability to record still images and video of anything you can see, and play it back again. You can transmit these images to other Liars via communicator.

EMBEDDED TOOL

(COST: 2 STORY POINTS)

A cybernetic sheath holds a small tool that is concealed within your body. Likely places include a finger or a palm. From the outside, there is no visible clue that the tool exists. You can produce the tool and retract it quickly and easily, like a cat baring and retracting its claws.

Potentially, almost anything could be embedded, but common choices include a small laser cutter, a glass cutter, a universal lockpick, a drill, pliers, a one-shot nail gun, a small paint sprayer, an adhesive applicator (with a small refillable reservoir of powerful adhesive), and a flashlight.

EMBEDDED WEAPON

(COST: 2 STORY POINTS)

A cybernetic sheath holds a small weapon that is concealed within your body. Likely places include a finger or a palm. From the outside, there is no visible clue that the weapon exists. You can produce the weapon and retract it quickly and easily, like a cat baring and retracting its claws.

The weapon can be a blade or piercing weapon (which can be used over and over) or a ranged energy or projectile weapon with virtually unlimited ammunition (assuming you get back to the *Celeste* and refill between missions).

ENHANCED FORTITUDE

(COST: 6 STORY POINTS)

Upgrading the mechanisms embedded within both muscle and bone, this Advancement makes you Tough. If you're already Tough, it makes you Very Tough. If you're already Very Tough, it grants Harmony to any roll you make using the fact that you're Very Tough.

ENHANCED HEARING

(COST: 3 STORY POINTS)

Your hearing is improved such that you can hear sounds four times farther away than a normal human, and you can hear twice as many frequencies. Basically, you have hearing akin to a dog's hearing.

ENHANCED PRECISION

(COST: 6 STORY POINTS)

Upgrading the mechanisms embedded within both muscle and nerve tissue, this Advancement makes you Graceful. If you're already Graceful, it makes you Very Graceful. If you're already Very Graceful, it grants Harmony to any roll you make using the fact that you're Very Graceful.

ENHANCED REFLEXES

(COST: 6 STORY POINTS)

Upgrading the mechanisms embedded within both muscle and sinew, this Advancement makes you Agile. If you're already Agile, it makes you Very Agile. If you're already Very Agile, it grants Harmony to any roll you make using the fact that you're Very Agile.

ENHANCED SPEED

(COST: 6 STORY POINTS)

Upgrading the mechanisms embedded within both muscle and bone, this Advancement makes you Fast. If you're already Fast, it makes you Very Fast. If you're already Very Fast, it grants Harmony to any roll you make using the fact that you're Very Fast.

ENHANCED STRENGTH

(COST: 6 STORY POINTS)

Upgrading the mechanisms embedded within both muscle and bone, this Advancement makes you Strong. If you're already Strong, it makes you Very Strong. If you're already Very Strong, it grants Harmony to any roll you make using the fact that you're Very Strong.

ENHANCED VISION

(COST: 3 STORY POINTS)

With this Advancement, you can concentrate and see distance with eight times normal magnification (as if through binoculars). With a different sort of concentrated focus, you can see small details (as if with a magnifying glass) with ten times normal magnification. You can't do both of these at the same time, obviously.

FILTERED BREATHING

(COST: 3 STORY POINTS)

With this Advancement, smoke, gas, and airborne pathogens are filtered out of the air going into your lungs. These substances cause you no Injury or distress (although they still might obscure vision).

FULL SPECTRUM VISION

(COST: 4 STORY POINTS)

This Advancement gives you modifications in your eyes so you can see different portions of the electromagnetic spectrum. The useful effects of this are that you can see differences in heat sources, you can see shapes through very thin materials, and you can see at night, as if through night vision goggles.

HUD: IDENTIFICATION

(COST: 4 STORY POINTS)

With your modified eyes, you see an information overlay on whatever you look at, identifying objects and materials in a heads-up display. Obviously, your eyes can only identify something for which they have data. A file folder on a desk will just be identified as a file folder or paper unless you've seen it before, in which case your HUD will identify exactly what it is. Even individual people or animals are identified if you have encountered them previously.

HUD: TARGETING

(COST: 4 STORY POINTS)

With your modified eyes, you see valuable information (distance, rate of movement, wind speed, and so on) in a heads-up display when you attempt to aim. This gives you Harmony with ranged attacks whether you're using a gun, throwing a dart, or hurling a baseball.

MACHINE INVISIBILITY

(COST: 8 STORY POINTS)

An embedded scrambling device in your skull sends a signal to any digital recording device that effectively erases your existence. To twenty-first century digital devices (cameras, microphones, infrared, and so on), you simply aren't there. Methods of detection relying on your physical presence rather than audio or visual recording, such as weight sensors, temperature-change monitors, pressure plates, and electric eye beams, still register your presence. Ironically, so do old-fashioned recordings that use film or tape.

SECRET COMPARTMENT

(COST: 2 STORY POINTS)

This sheath within your flesh can hold a small object—anything that would fit into the palm of your hand—hiding it completely. It's also shielded from detection.

SUBDERMAL ARMOR

(COST: 3 STORY POINTS)

A flexible mesh of advanced polymers surgically placed beneath your flesh protects your body. You're always treated as armored (when resisting Injury, Almost results count as success). Further, it gives you Harmony with all rolls to resist Injury other than those from the Stress of Lying.

Wearing armor over Subdermal Armor doesn't accomplish much, but Subdermal Armor can be enhanced.

ENHANCED SUBDERMAL ARMOR

(COST: 4 STORY POINTS)

Liars who already have Subdermal Armor can enhance it with this Advancement. In addition to the benefits of Subdermal Armor, all die rolls to resist Injury other than Stress from Lying are Boosted.

TOXIN RESISTANCE

(COST: 3 STORY POINTS)

A nest of antitoxin nanites embedded near your heart responds to the presence of dangerous poisons or similar substances. The device floods your bloodstream with nanobots that counter and eliminate any hazardous toxins. These substances cause you no Injury or distress.

PSIONIC POWERS

Scions who are Liars can—through practice and training—develop mental abilities beyond just Lying.

Psionic abilities work a lot like Lies. Most don't require any sort of die roll to succeed, but rather cause Stress to the Scion. Typically, it's an Average task to resist the Stress of using a psionic power.

Also like Lies, using the power is probably a Scene unto itself (starting a fire with pyrokinesis, for example), but sometimes it can be a part of another Scene (such as a climbing Scene where a Scion uses the Clinging power).

ANIMAL INFLUENCE

(COST: 3 STORY POINTS)

Animals that you can see and that can see you within about 100 feet (30 m) are calm or agitated, as you desire (they all must be one or the other). You don't control their actions, and they act according to their nature. An agitated dog might growl and bite. An agitated rabbit will run away.

CLINGING

(COST: 4 STORY POINTS)

You can create a molecular adhesion between you and any surface. This gives Harmony with any climbing actions you take. You can do things that are normally impossible with climbing skill, such as scale a perfectly smooth wall or even move across the ceiling. It also means you can stand atop a car racing at incredible speeds.

CLOUDING THE MIND

(COST: 6 STORY POINTS)

A Scion with this Advancement can basically keep someone from acting. A person within about 100 feet (30 m) cannot act because your power scrambles their mind and perceptions. This clouding effect lasts for the entire Scene. So if the Liars are sneaking past a receptionist and the Scion clouds their mind, the effect lasts until all the Liars are past the receptionist and out of sight.

ELECTRICAL DISRUPTION

(COST: 4 STORY POINTS)

If you select this Advancement, you can place your hand on a machine that has electrical components and disrupt the flow of energy enough to stop the machine from working while you touch it. When you're no longer in contact, the machine returns to normal.

ENHANCED AWARENESS

(COST: 6 STORY POINTS)

Improving your sensory processes and acuity to almost superhuman levels, this Advancement makes you Perceptive. If you're already Perceptive, it makes you Very Perceptive. If you're already Very Perceptive, it grants Harmony to any roll you make using the fact that you're Very Perceptive.

ENHANCED CHARISMA

(COST: 6 STORY POINTS)

Improving your amiability and charisma to almost superhuman levels, this Advancement makes you Charming. If you're already Charming, it makes you Very Charming. If you're already Very Charming, it grants Harmony to any roll you make using the fact that you're Very Charming.

ENHANCED INTUITION

(COST: 6 STORY POINTS)

Improving your empathy and sensitivity to almost superhuman levels, this Advancement makes you Intuitive. If you're already Intuitive, it makes you Very Intuitive. If you're already Very Intuitive, it grants Harmony to any roll you make using the fact that you're Very Intuitive.

ENHANCED SPEECH

(COST: 6 STORY POINTS)

Improving your processing and verbal talents to almost superhuman levels, this Advancement makes you Eloquent. If you're already Eloquent, it makes you Very Eloquent. If you're already Very Eloquent, it grants Harmony to any roll you make using the fact that you're Very Eloquent.

ENHANCED THINKING

(COST: 6 STORY POINTS)

Improving your mental speed and connections to almost superhuman levels, this Advancement makes you Quick-Witted. If you're already Quick-Witted, it makes you Very Quick-Witted. If you're already Very Quick-Witted, it grants Harmony to any roll you make using the fact that you're Very Quick-Witted.

ENHANCED WILLPOWER

(COST: 6 STORY POINTS)

Improving your mental fortitude and peace of mind to almost superhuman levels, this Advancement makes you Willful. If you're already Willful, it makes you Very Willful. If you're already Very Willful, it grants Harmony to any roll you make using the fact that you're Very Willful.

FIRESTARTING (PYROKINESIS)

(COST: 4 STORY POINTS)

With this Advancement, you learn to start fires with your mind. An extremely flammable object within 100 feet (30 m) of your choosing begins to smolder and then bursts into flame. Paper, cloth, hair, and obviously any sort of accelerant (oils, gasoline, alcohol) are considered extremely flammable in this context. Once something catches fire, it burns normally, as if lit by a match.

INVISIBILITY

(COST: 6 STORY POINTS)

Liars with the Enhanced Intuition Advancement can choose this and use their nigh-supernatural senses to cloud the senses of others. You can make yourself essentially imperceptible to anyone within about 100 feet (30 m) that you are aware of. This lasts for one Scene.

MENTAL COMBAT

(COST: 4 STORY POINTS)

Scions with this Advancement can engage in combat Scenes using only their mind. Mental combat encompasses both attacks and defense, involving psychic blows, mental distractions, disorientation, and more. If other Liars are involved in the fight, their opponents might not even know the Scion using Mental Combat is taking part.

This allows the Liar to use an unconventional Trait or Skill, like Willful or Sowing Confusion, in a combat Scene rather than something more expected like Marksmanship or Hand-to-Hand Weapon Use. In many cases, though, Mental Combat is best used to help an ally in a combat Scene, granting Harmony. Otherwise, the existence of the Scion's abilities is very difficult to conceal.

MIND DETECTION

(COST: 3 STORY POINTS)

With this Advancement, you can sense the presence of other thinking (biological) minds within about 100 feet (30 m). You don't know precisely where they all are, but you do get a general idea.

MIND OVER BODY

(COST: 3 STORY POINTS)

You ignore the first Injury Die you receive. You still have the Injury Die (this Advancement doesn't heal the wound)—you just ignore its results when determining success or failure. You cannot ignore more than one Injury Die in this way.

MIND OVER MATTER (TELEKINESIS)

(COST: 4 STORY POINTS)

With this Advancement, you learn to move objects with your mind. One object of your choosing that you can see—weighing 10 pounds (4.5 kg) or less and within 100 feet (30 m) of you—moves as though you were moving it with your hands. An object can slide back and forth across a table or be hurled across the room, although if you throw something, it's no longer in your control (just as if you threw it physically).

It's easier to use this power for fine manipulation than for violence. For example, you can use it in conjunction with skills like Pickpocketing or Sleight of Hand (gaining Harmony on the roll). You don't generate enough force to use it in a fight or to use it effectively with other physical actions, like Driving or Machine Repair.

MIND TALKING (TELEPATHY)

(COST: 3 STORY POINTS)

With this Advancement, you can speak and hear only with your mind. The other person (or people) must be within about 100 feet (30 m), but you don't need to be able to see them. You can't hear someone's "mental speech" unless they want you to.

PSYCHIC HEALING

(COST: 7 STORY POINTS)

If you select this Advancement, you can focus your psionic power to induce healing in an injured living creature that you touch. You remove 1 Injury Die from them if they are a Liar—and if you act quickly, you can even save a Liar that would otherwise die.

A dying or seriously injured NPC is stabilized. A somewhat hurt NPC is mostly healed.

Resisting the Stress of using this power is a Hard task.

REMOTE VIEWING

(COST: 8 STORY POINTS)

Scions with this Advancement can see into faraway places as if they were there. You must have a rough idea of where the location is, or have a good idea of who or what is there. This vision lasts the length of the Scene, and you can't act while you're viewing.

There is no maximum range of this ability, but someone outside of an Improbability Zone can't remotely view a location inside, and vice versa.

Resisting the Stress of using this psionic power is a Very Hard task.

REPTILE SKIN

(COST: 3 STORY POINTS)

Scions with the Mind Over Body Advancement can select this and turn their flesh to tough leather, like that of a reptile. You're always treated as armored (when resisting Injury, Almost results count as success). Further, it gives you Harmony with all rolls to resist Injury other than those from the Stress of Lying.

Wearing armor over reptile skin doesn't accomplish much, but the skin can be enhanced.

ENHANCED REPTILE SKIN

(COST: 4 STORY POINTS)

Scions who already have Reptile Skin can enhance it with this Advancement. In addition to the benefits of Reptile Skin, all die rolls to resist Injury are Boosted (except rolls to resist Stress from Lying).

CHAPTER 11

(REALLY) HIGH TECH

Coming from the distant future, the Liars aboard the *Celeste* can get access to a lot of amazing technology.

TECH ASSIGNMENTS

The Artificial Intelligences that control the ship are very careful about potentially contaminating the past with thirty-ninth century technology. Thus, only experienced and trusted Liars are granted the most advanced tech.

While some of the weapons, armor, and devices are held in sealed storage bays, most of the time the ship relies on its automated fabrication systems to make needed items.

Equipment is carefully assigned, based on a class system. Any Liar sent on a mission has access to Class I equipment. Class II and Class III items are restricted. As Liars advance, they can apply to get more advanced gear (through use of the Tech Access Advancements—see chapter 10). Sleepers can also upgrade their cybernetic systems.

Scions, for the most part, have not had access to any of this technology during their lives aboard the ship. They've been able to get material and food production machines working—most of the time—but the technological devices they had access to came from the ship's stores. This made most such items very rare and valuable.

Now, however, the fully awake AIs and Sleepers have not only flooded the Scion populace with food, clothing, and other necessities, but also technology. Even simple items like grooming devices, portable lights, and communicators were rarities until very recently. Both the AIs and the awakened Sleepers were somewhat horrified that the Scions had eventually resorted to fires for heat and light. It's a credit to the *Celeste*'s air recyclers that the ship still had clean air.

The general Scion population is overwhelmed by these "blessings of the Machine Gods," while a few have chosen to retain the old ways and keep living like they were.

TECH EQUIPMENT

I know, I know. You're asking, "Okay, fine, but what cool *stuff* can I get?"

Let's get to the cool gear already!

Well, before we get to the actual lists of stuff, we need to briefly cover the forms these things take.

WEAPONS

It doesn't really matter what weapon a Liar (or for that matter, anyone) uses in mechanical terms. Combat *skills* matter. Remember that a fight is portrayed as a Scene, not blow by blow or shot by shot. Still, different weapons might have different narrative qualities. Some might be silent, some might be really good at getting through barriers, and so on. A few of the really advanced weapons in this chapter might offer Harmony or even a Boost to combat actions, but those are the exception rather than the rule.

Weapons more sophisticated than a knife are usually DNA-coded so that only a specific individual (or individuals) can make use of them.

Don't track ammunition for standard ranged weapons. It's not important enough to justify the bookkeeping, and combat is handled in Scenes, not action by action, so we don't concern ourselves with how many shots a Liar fires from their weapon.

ARMOR

First and foremost, wearing armor means that you don't get an Injury Die when you're resisting Injury and roll a result of Almost. In this case, Almost is treated as success.

Truly excellent armor provides Harmony on rolls to resist physical injury (but not Stress from Lying). This means that whatever die type you roll, you roll two of them and take the better result. More advanced and powerful armor might even offer a Boost to the die when resisting damage, but these are rare.

These rules for armor don't apply if the Injury comes from a source that armor wouldn't help with, such as poison gas or radiation.

CYBERNETICS

All thirty-ninth century bodytech is made of advanced polymers that don't activate metal detectors or show up on standard X-rays and body scanners of the twenty-first century. Liars with cybernetic implants can always pass for unmodified humans.

Only Sleepers have the bioengineered bodies to accept the cybernetic enhancements available. Look to chapter 10 to see what modifications Sleepers can get.

HANDHELD OR WORN DEVICES

Both Sleepers and Scions can use basic items. Worn devices are often put on the wrist or around the waist like a belt, but they can come in many forms. Handheld items sometimes are modified to look like twenty-first century devices such as smartphones or laptop computers. These items are usually DNA-coded so that only a specific individual (or individuals) can use them.

TINYDOTS

A tinydot is a device no larger than the period at the end of this sentence that can be affixed to clothing or another surface, making it essentially unnoticeable. Tinydots are the ultimate in miniaturization technology, and thus difficult to interact with beyond activating and deactivating them, usually with a light touch.

AND A NOTE ABOUT POWER

Unless you're talking in terms of multiple lifetimes, thirty-ninth century technology doesn't run out of power. The items draw upon the Earth's own magnetic field to power themselves. However, some items assigned to Liars are designed to run out of power so they can't adversely affect twenty-first century Earth in even the most dire of circumstances. Such limitations are mentioned in the item description.

CLASS I EQUIPMENT

All Sleepers, without exception, have implants that serve as communicators, translators, and data storage devices. Nanomachines in their blood and tissues allow them to heal very quickly. They also all carry a handheld multitool and wear lightweight body armor. They can have any one twenty-first century weapon they wish.

All Scions have a wrist-worn communicator and data storage device and an earpiece translator. They also wear lightweight body armor and carry a multitool. If they wish, they can have one twenty-first century weapon.

Lastly, all Liars are assigned a contemporary smartphone, complete with a functioning phone number, which provides internet access (if within range of a cell tower), a camera, and other useful conventional features. These phones are destroyed after each mission.

This is the standard loadout for all first-time Liars sent on a mission to twenty-first century Earth. On later missions, any Liar can also requisition any other Class I item.

CLIMBING GEAR

This is a set of gear consisting of a lightweight harness, gloves, shoes, crampons, ropes, pulleys, anchors, and a grapple gun with a motorized pulley. The whole thing fits tightly into a carrier bag.

Form: Bag (backpack or duffel)

EARPIECE TRANSLATOR

Functionally identical to the cybernetic implants possessed by Sleepers, this fits into the ear and translates any known language so the wearer can understand. Can be connected with a wrist-worn communicator.

Form: Tiny earpiece

FIRST AID KIT

In addition to living skin patches and disinfecting sprays, this kit contains pills and injections to deal with issues that can crop up from breathing the polluted air or eating the terrible food of the twenty-first century.

With this kit, anyone making a Medicine-related roll has Harmony and can roll two dice and take the higher result.

Form: Small, foldable case

HEAVY TOOL KIT

This bag of tools includes gloves, a flashlight, binoculars, a prybar, a hammer, a chisel, a silent nail gun, a powered drill/driver, a small powered saw, a knife, about 100 feet (30 m) of light rope, a quick hotwire kit for contemporary vehicles, and a variety of clamps. The tools are packed and cushioned so the bag doesn't rattle when carried.

Form: Duffel bag

INTERNET TAP

This device wirelessly accesses the twenty-first century internet to get any freely available twenty-first century information. It doesn't require a contemporary wireless connection and operates anywhere on Earth.

Form: Handheld device with a screen and keyboard or voice input

LIGHTWEIGHT BODY ARMOR

When the wearer of this armor rolls to resist Injury, results of Almost count as successes. Fits unnoticeably beneath clothing.

MULTITOOL

This device is a smart lockpick, a digital lock bypass tool, a drill, pliers, an awl, a wire cutter, a glass cutter, a screwdriver, a file, a wire stripper, scissors, and a knife. (You still need the right skills to use these tools in the most advantageous way, of course.)

Form: Handheld tool

TRACKER

This consists of a tinydot tracer and a handheld tracking unit. The tracking unit always knows where the tracer is, in both direction and distance. (As with all things, no tracking or tracing is possible from opposite sides of an Improbability Zone's border.)

It's possible to have multiple tracers associated with a tracker.

Form: Handheld device with multiple associated tinydot tracers

WRIST-WORN COMMUNICATOR

Functionally identical to the cybernetic implants possessed by Sleepers, this device uses its own signal to communicate with any location on the planet or in orbit. Like everything else, however, it can't communicate into or out of a Zone of Improbability.

Form: Wristwatch-style band and tiny earpiece

CLASS II TECHNOLOGY

Class II tech is quite advanced, but not the best the thirty-ninth century has to offer. Still, use of these items can attract attention in the twenty-first century, so it's best to be very careful with them.

Each item is locked to the DNA of the Liar it's assigned to. It's not possible to use one Liar's pass to get equipment for another.

ADVANCED BODY ARMOR

When the wearer of this armor rolls to resist Injury, results of Almost count as successes. Further, it gives you Harmony with all rolls to resist Injury other than those from the Stress of Lying. Fits unnoticeably beneath clothing.

DISGUISED WEAPON

Although this item appears to be almost any common twenty-first century object, it's actually a powerful firearm.

Form: Can be made to look like any twenty-first century item

ELECTRONIC DISRUPTION GRENADE

Creates an invisible burst that disrupts twenty-first century electronics within 30 feet (9 m) or so. Disruption lasts less than a minute. Great for briefly disabling cameras, alarms, and so on. The grenade can burst on impact or by a timer. It has a switch that activates a powerful magnet so it can adhere to surfaces.

Capacity: Single use

Form: Small metal disc

ENERGY WEAPON

Weapon that projects an invisible ray of energy. It has two settings:

- *Disruption:* Disrupts organic cells, inflicting damage on living creatures but not inanimate objects.
- *Intense heat:* Harms everything. Can be used to burn or cut through a solid barrier, but that could take anywhere from one to ten minutes, depending on the material.

Form: Can be made to look like any twenty-first century firearm or even another object, but using it is likely to cause a stir among contemporary people

GAS GRENADE

Produces visible gas that briefly fills an area out to about 30 feet (9 m). Different grenades have different gases.

- *Choking:* Essentially tear gas. Those within the cloud can take no actions other than to get out of the cloud, and they can't act effectively for at least a minute after that.
- *Confusion:* Those within the cloud are essentially very, very drunk. They have difficulty making appropriate decisions or focusing on what's happening. This lasts for about an hour.
- *Muscle Relaxant:* The muscles of those in the cloud work very poorly. They have difficulty standing, walking, holding objects, or performing anything beyond the simplest actions for up to ten minutes.
- *Obscuring:* The cloud remains utterly opaque to vision for about a minute.
- *Sleep:* Those within the cloud fall into a very heavy sleep for at least an hour.

The grenade can burst on impact or by a timer. It has a switch that activates a powerful magnet so it can adhere to surfaces.

Capacity: Single use

Form: Small metal disc

INCAPACITATING SPRAY

While essentially useless in real combat, this tiny canister has enough spray to incapacitate one person. The spray causes blindness until washed from the eyes, and a powerful burning sensation, causing most people to pass out when exposed. You must be very close to the target (the canister goes *right* in their face).

Capacity: Single use

Form: Two-inch canister

INERTIAL DAMPENING FIELD PROJECTOR

Creates an invisible personal field that slows down incoming physical attacks (but not energy attacks). Provides Harmony to rolls to avoid damage from any appropriate attack.

Capacity: Lasts for one mission

Form: Tinydot

MAG WEAPON

Fires a projectile along lines of magnetic force rather than by using any form of explosive pressure. These weapons are whisper silent.

Form: Can be made to look like any twenty-first century firearm

MAPPING SCANNER

Given a few minutes, this device uses ultrasonic waves to map out the areas within about 100 feet (30 m) of itself, producing a holographic readout showing not just a general layout, but all objects and creatures as well. Movement is tracked in real time.

Form: Handheld device

METALLOPHAGE FOAM

This is a small canister of foam. Sprayed on any metal object or surface, the foam eats through the material quickly, turning it into brittle dust.

Capacity: There's enough foam in the canister to eat through a metal plate that's 5 feet (1.5 m) square and half an inch (1.3 cm) thick.

Form: Two-inch canister

NANODOCS

This small injector injects fast-repair nanites into a creature's bloodstream, immediately removing one Injury Die.

A dying or seriously injured NPC is stabilized. A somewhat hurt NPC is mostly healed.

Form: Handheld injector

POISON DART THROWER

Using air pressure, this pistol projects a tiny dart. The dart itself causes no harm—it's less than half an inch (1 cm) long, and the target probably feels it like a sudden itch. It's even designed to dissolve after a few minutes. However, the point of the dart is that it carries a dose of some kind of poison.

- *Blind:* The target cannot see, but vision slowly returns after a few hours.
- *Confusion:* The target is essentially very, very drunk. They have difficulty making appropriate decisions or focusing on what's happening. This lasts for about an hour.
- *Muscle relaxant:* The target's muscles work very poorly. They have difficulty standing, walking, holding objects, or performing anything beyond the simplest actions for up to ten minutes.
- *Sleep:* The target falls into a very heavy sleep for at least an hour.

Because the dart requires fairly exact targeting (for starters, only exposed skin is vulnerable), doesn't have much range, and can't be fired rapidly, the thrower isn't a suitable combat weapon. Instead, it's for stealth operations and works best against unsuspecting targets.

Capacity: Cartridge with enough ammo for one Scene, all with the same poison

Form: Small pistol

PREDICTIVE EARPIECE

After a few moments of listening, the earpiece can predict how a target will react to certain words or phrases. This offers Harmony on all persuasions, deceptions, or similar interactions.

Capacity: Lasts for one mission

Form: Tiny earpiece

PREDICTIVE LENSES

After a few moments of observing, the lenses can predict where an opponent will move next. This offers Harmony on all actions in a combat Scene.

Capacity: Lasts for one mission

Form: Disposable contact lenses

SILENCE FIELD

Creates a noise-cancelling sound (anti-noise) that stretches out 30 feet (9 m) or so. Things within this area make virtually no sound. Of course, those in the field cannot hear anything, either.

Capacity: Lasts long enough for one Scene

Form: Tinydot

SMART WEAPON

Smart weapons essentially target on their own. These handguns and rifles act as if they are another character helping you with your attacks, providing Harmony. Roll twice and take the better result.

Form: Can be made to look like any twenty-first century firearm

CLASS III TECHNOLOGY

It's damn good to be from so far in the future.

Even Liars with access to Class III technology are usually assigned only one item of this class for a given mission, and each item is locked to the DNA of the Liar it's assigned to. It's not possible to use one's pass to get equipment for another Liar. Any of these items could significantly alter the course of history if lost in the twenty-first century.

ANTIMATTER RIFLE

The deadliest handheld weapon available, this energy rifle is large and cannot be made to look like a twenty-first century weapon. In combat, a Liar using an antimatter rifle has their die roll Boosted. However, the rifle does not wound. It kills.

It can blast through virtually any material available in the twenty-first century. The destruction it breathes out is virtually impossible to conceal or cover up. This is not a subtle weapon.

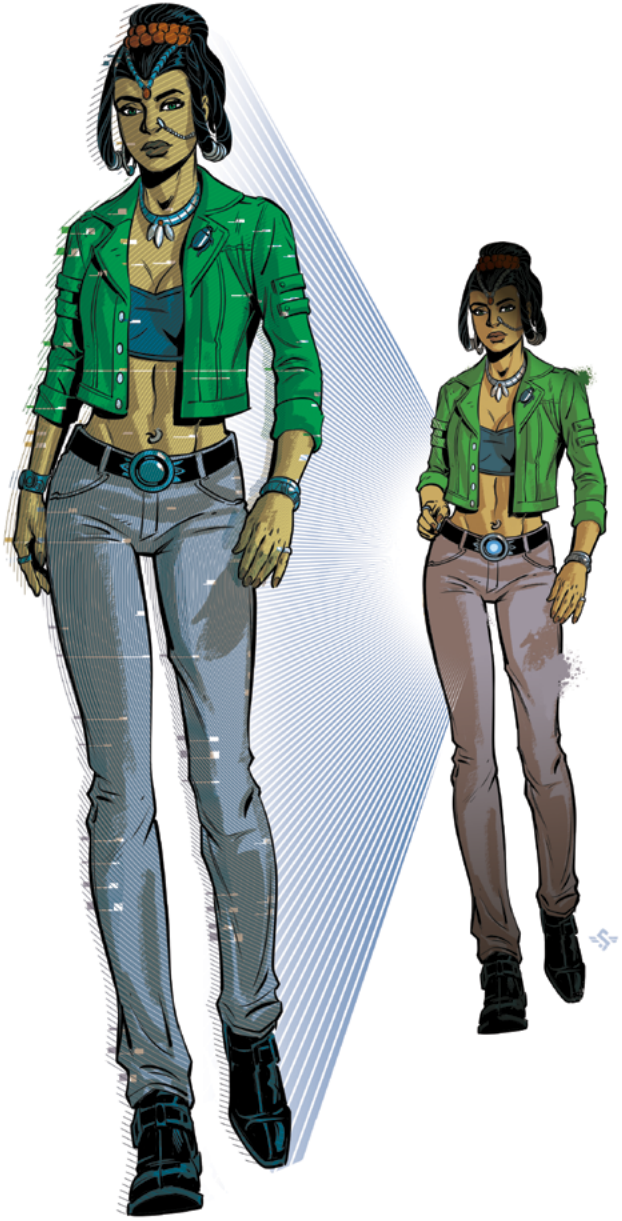
Form: Very heavy and long rifle, clearly high tech in form

DECOY HOLO

This device projects a 3D hologram that looks just like you. The hologram can be anywhere from 1 to 10 feet (30 cm to 3 m) away, based on how you manipulate the controls. It mimics your movements. This can be an interesting distraction and a good defense. In a combat Scene, rolls to resist Injury are Boosted if you use a decoy holo.

Capacity: Lasts for one mission

Form: Belt-mounted device



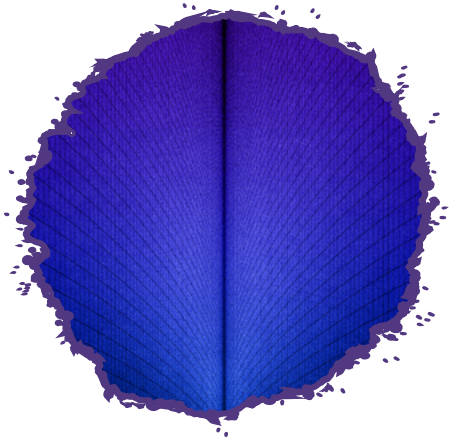
DOWNLOADABLE SKILL

More of an injection than a download, this puts nanites into a person's bloodstream that travel to the nervous system and provide "knowledge" so the person essentially becomes Good in a skill they don't normally have. A person can have only one downloaded skill at a time.

Most of the time, this is not so much to enhance the Liar (providing Stealth to someone who doesn't have it), but rather to fill important gaps needed for a specific mission, such as giving the Piloting skill to someone who must undertake a mission that requires commandeering a space shuttle, or giving the History skill to someone traveling even farther in the past.

Capacity: Lasts for one mission

Form: Injection



EVENT CLOAK

This cloak is made of metamaterials unknown to the twenty-first century. Someone completely draped in it can't be perceived in space-time. In effect, a wearer can move and take actions, and to anyone else (even to cameras), the places they move through look just like they did before the Liar did anything. The effect lasts about two minutes and exacts a toll on the wearer, not unlike the Stress of Lying. Resisting is a Hard task.

Capacity: Lasts for one Scene
Form: Cloak

GRAVITY BELT

While it doesn't make you fly like a superhero, this device negates the force of gravity on you so that you can move rapidly up or down.

Capacity: Lasts for one mission
Form: Small, belt-mounted device

GREY GRENADE

A terrible, terrifying weapon, a grey grenade unleashes nanobots that convert all molecules within about 30 feet (9 m) of the activated grenade into duplicates of themselves, leaving behind inert grey matter. Transformation includes gases and liquids. The affected area can be made smaller than that, down to a radius of a few inches.

These grenades are highly restricted, even for Class III tech, as there's always a small chance that the nanobots will spread farther than the predesignated radius and then just keep spreading. If this happened, unless a suitable anti-nanite defense were available, the nanobots would consume the planet in under 24 hours. That's a pretty big red flag.

Capacity: Single use
Form: Small metal disc

MOLECULAR BONDER

This small tool bonds two objects together on a molecular level. They are, for all purposes, fused together permanently.

Capacity: Lasts for one mission
Form: Small handheld device

PERSONAL HOLO

This projects a 3D image over the top of your face and body to make you look like someone else (obviously, that someone else cannot be substantially smaller than you). The image tracks and mimics your own movements. There's even a sound modulator to change your voice. The holo must be programmed before the mission, so you must choose who you will look like ahead of time. You can select multiple different subjects' appearances and switch between them.

Capacity: Lasts for one mission
Form: Belt-mounted projector

RAPID FIELD DILATOR

This large-ish device alters the flow of time in a localized area. For anyone close enough to touch the dilator, time moves very quickly relative to time outside the field. Essentially, about ten minutes pass within the field while just one second passes outside of it. Liars inside could spend that time cracking a safe, resting, changing a disguise, making a plan, and so on. They cannot affect anything outside the field or the field is disrupted, time returns to normal, and everyone that was within it risks Injury (Very Hard x2).

To those outside the rapid time field, the interior of the field is mostly a blur.

Capacity: Single use
Form: Large handheld device

SLOW FIELD DILATOR

A slow field dilator is a weaponized rapid field dilator. It alters the flow of time in a localized area, making it move much more slowly relative to time outside the field. For anyone in an area about 30 feet (9 m) across, time moves slow enough that about five minutes pass outside the field while just one second passes within it. Those trapped in the field essentially don't move for that time. You cannot affect anything inside the field or the field is disrupted, time returns to normal, and everyone within it or near it risks Injury (Very Hard x2).

The dilator has a timer that can be set, or it can key off a handheld remote control or be connected to a smartphone.

Capacity: Single use

Form: Large handheld device

STEALTH CLOAK

This garment uses dialectic materials and plasma cloaking technology. Someone who wears and activates it appears to be invisible at best, blurry at worst. Rolls to use stealth are Boosted. When it's not activated, you might have to explain to twenty-first century bystanders why you're wearing a cloak.

Capacity: Lasts for one mission

Form: Cloak

SUPERIOR BODY ARMOR

For the wearer of this armor, Almost results when making rolls to resist Injury count as successes. It also gives you Harmony and a Boost on all rolls to resist Injury other than those from the Stress of Lying. Fits unnoticeably beneath clothing.

TEMPORAL SCANNER

With this device, a Liar can view everything that happened in a confined area in the last 24 hours. On the screen, the events of the past play out like a movie, and you can pause, fast forward, or rewind it. The scanner can even take verbal inputs to search for specific parameters.

Capacity: Single use

Form: Large handheld device

NO
ADMITTANCE

CHAPTER 12

BEING A LIAR

Liars are smart, slick, and skilled. You're good at what you do, so you probably carry yourself as if you know that's true. And why not? You're from the future—getting past these nearly prehistoric twenty-first century folks shouldn't be hard.

Right?

Well, even if sometimes it's difficult, you're the expert. You eat difficult for breakfast.

THE BASICS

KEEP IT SIMPLE

The fewer steps in a plan, the fewer things that can go wrong. Sometimes a mission requires a convoluted scheme—sometimes multiple schemes—but your plans should always be as simple as possible.

ALWAYS HAVE AN ESCAPE PLAN

Don't ever go into a place or a situation without some idea of how you'll get out. Know all the exits and how far you are from them at any given time.

ALWAYS HAVE A BACKUP PLAN

Plans go awry. Have a second—or even a third—plan to complete the mission. Even if it's just a general idea.

KNOW THE OBSTACLES

Prepare for the obvious, but know the specifics. Disable alarms, cameras, and sensors. Pick locks (both electronic and conventional). Be ready for these kinds of obstacles. They will be commonplace.

DISTRACTION, DISTRACTION, DISTRACTION

Car alarms, fire alarms, crying children, dropped valuables, a loose animal, or even a crazy song and dance will get people to look where you want them to look. Or, more importantly, to not look where you don't want them to look.

USE DECEPTION TO AVOID CONVERSATIONS

If you don't speak, you can't say the wrong thing. Make use of disguises and props, even very simple ones. These things will keep people from questioning you or your motives:

- Clipboard
- Official-looking uniform
- Cellphone that you're using to have a loud conversation
- Having a conversation with a partner
- Public displays of affection
- Public drunkenness
- Physical disability or illness (real or faked)

USE CONVERSATION TO AVOID FIGHTS

If there's a chance you can talk your way out of a situation, through a guarded entrance, or past some authorities, try it. Combat should be the last resort.

UNDERSTAND THE LIMITATIONS

You can't rely on the *Celeste* once you're on the ground. There's no way to communicate with the ship when you're in an Improbability Zone. Likewise, they can't see what's going on while you're inside the zone.

You must get the key item out of the Zone of Improbability. Destroying it won't work. Your Lies won't affect it directly.

As soon as you leave the zone, the ship transports you back up. The mission is done.

THE ART OF THE STEAL

Here are some things to remember if you're going to be a master criminal—I mean, savior of reality.

STRONG EMOTIONS GET RESULTS

If you're trying to bluff your way past someone, persuade someone, or intimidate someone, being really angry, really sad, really frightened, or really generous and friendly go a long way. Your marks will respond to these kinds of emotions, and may even be embarrassed by them.

USE WHAT PEOPLE WANT AGAINST THEM

Most cons work by allowing people to con themselves. If you can figure out what someone wants, that's your best tool. If a night watchman is already sleepy, dim the lights and turn up the heat a bit so it's warm and cozy. If your mark is greedy (and aren't they all?), entice them with a promise of a big payday.

MAKE THE MARK THINK IT WAS THEIR IDEA

If you want to exchange a piece of junk for something valuable, the key is to get the other person to think your junk is even more valuable than their treasure. If you can do that, you won't have to convince them to make the exchange—they'll be working to convince *you*. And then put up a little resistance. The more they have to work for it, the more they'll think they're getting one over on you.

REVERSE PSYCHOLOGY REALLY DOES WORK

Tell the mark to do what you don't want them to do, and then give them a reason to do the opposite. "Get in there and help put out that fire before it reaches something explosive" will probably keep them from going in. If they're going to call the police, say, "I don't care what the boss said, call the cops."

RUN AND HIDE IF YOU HAVE TO

If you can run and get away or hide rather than fight, do so. Combat slows you down and draws attention. Being chased might draw attention, but at least you're not in one place very long.

WORK AS A TEAM

They sent you on the mission as part of a team. Make the most of that you can. Specialize. Do what you're good at and let the others play their own roles. But help your teammates when they're in trouble. Never leave a Liar behind.

IMPROVISE

Things go wrong. The unexpected happens. Come up with a solution to deal with such events while still trying to keep to the general plan. Improvise a *whole new plan* only if you really must. Sometimes, you'd probably do better to just escape rather than formulate an entirely new plan on the spot.

NOTHING LASTS FOREVER

A trick, a con, or a scheme only has to last long enough to get you what you want or where you need to go. If you just have to get past security to escape, the bluff or lie only needs to be believed long enough for you to get out the door. Thus, the simpler, the better.

USING GAME MECHANICS TO YOUR ADVANTAGE

Stealing Stories for the Devil is designed to give the Liars the ability to be impossibly good at what they do. Use this design to be that good (and look amazing while you do it).

THE BRIEFING IS YOUR BIGGEST ASSET

You literally get to play a part in crafting the particulars of the mission in Act One. Use this ability to notice (that is to say, create) things that will be advantageous to you. Such things might include:

- Aspects of the mission that benefit your specific Traits and Skills
- A back door or unconventional means of entry
- A special event or circumstance occurring at the location that is in your favor
- Details about someone who will be there (an NPC)
- A way to move around inside the location without being seen (or noticed)
- Potential disguises that would work there
- Blind spots in their surveillance, their security patrols, and unmonitored sections not covered by alarms

PLAN, BUT DON'T WASTE TOO MUCH TIME DOING IT

You don't need to rethink and reexamine every step of the plan. This is a trap inexperienced Liars can get caught in. Overplanning is probably worse than not planning enough.

Honestly, the entirety of Act One shouldn't be more than 15 to 30 minutes. More than that, and there's a very good chance you're overthinking.

REMEMBER THE THREE ACTS

Yes, it's a meta-narrative point that your characters aren't aware of, but you aren't your character. You're the player and you know the mission probably has a three-act structure (although beware, because if you've played the game a number of times, your GM might throw you a curve ball).

In a four-hour game session, Act One should be probably about 15 to 30 minutes—it's just the setup. Act Two is the core of the mission, where most of the things that need doing get done. It should probably be two to two and a half hours. Act Three is the big climax. It's the point where things will be most challenging and the stakes will be highest. It's what will determine success or failure. Save at least one important resource (a big Lie, a really useful Mission Card or two, or the like) for Act Three if you can. Act Three should last about an hour.

The rest of the session is taken up with breaks and hopefully a joyful denouement where you can celebrate your victory.

USE THE ACT BREAKS

While these are for the GM, they're also for you. You can grab a drink or use the restroom during this time, but it's also a good opportunity to make sure that everyone is on the same page regarding the plan.

RELY ON THE MISSION CARDS

Mission Cards are meant to be played extemporaneously. Use them as needed to make the plan work, but it's best not to build them into the plan ahead of time. Mission Cards represent your skill and experience. When you play the Just the Thing card, for example, on a narrative level you're countering something that surprised you by saying that it didn't surprise your character. Your character knew they would need that tool (or whatever it is), even if you the player did not.

LIE ONLY WHEN YOU HAVE TO

Lying always works. It is absolutely your ace in the hole. But a poor roll to resist the Stress of Lying can end up hurting you, which can hamper you for the rest of the mission. Thus, don't use your Lies for casual things. Use them for crucial things. And if somehow it looks like you can complete a mission without Lying, well, that's just a lucky break—or a really good plan. Don't look that gift horse in the mouth. Take the gift and run. (But honestly, this almost never happens.)

USE THE IMPROBABILITY ZONE TO YOUR ADVANTAGE

By definition, weird things will happen in the location where the mission takes place. Use the strange disturbances as distractions, part of your cover story, or a way to trip up alarms, security cameras, and so on.

SPLIT UP IF YOU HAVE TO

Unlike many games, the Scene-by-Scene structure of this game easily allows action to occur at the same time in different places.

CONTINUING THE GAME

If you're not playing Stealing Stories for the Devil as a one-shot, you'll want to keep a few more thoughts in mind.

THE STORY IS ONGOING

The narrative for an ongoing game is specifically designed to be quite different than for a series of one-shots. Even if it doesn't seem that way at first, there will be surprises and developments that may just change *everything*. It's very possible that there's more going on in the game than you know about at first.

Leave time in each session for some character development and overall story arcs. Talk to the other Liars *in character*. Build on your relationships.

Remember what came before.

DON'T GET COMPLACENT

Try not to use the same schemes or plans more than once. Just because posing as delivery people worked last time doesn't mean it's going to work this time. Not only is it kind of dull, but each mission probably has its own needs and challenges, so start fresh each time. Or at least be willing to broadly adapt your favorite strategy to the new circumstances.

HEISTS AND CONS

A heist is a complex plan, implemented with coordination and skill, to steal something. A con is a complex deception, implemented with cunning and psychology, to get someone to give you something.

A heist can include a con. For example, a heist might employ trickery to get a mark to give you the entry codes so you can bypass the security system and get what you want.

HEISTS

While technically "heist" can mean any kind of robbery or theft, for our purposes here, a heist is something you'd see in a movie—a heist movie, to be exact. In other words, it's any time a group of people get together to enact a plan to steal something as a team.

THE STEALTH RAID

Using stealth and active security circumvention, you get in and out and no one even knows you were there. For example, you disable the alarms, deactivate the cameras, and sneak past the guards to get where you need to be, and then get out the same way.

THE WALK AWAY

Using deception and stealth, you get what you need. You don't actively foil security; you use speed and timing to passively avoid it. For example, you don't interfere with the cameras and guards—you just plan and time your movements so perfectly that they never get a chance to see you. Alternatively, you use disguises and fake IDs to walk right past security.

THE SMASH AND GRAB

You use violence to get what you want, but only toward property. There's no stealth or deception involved, but no people get hurt. You get away before any security measures can stop you. For example, you steal a helicopter, fly up to the roof, smash the skylight, lower down on cables to grab what you're after, and then fly away.

SUBDUE AND SEIZE

You use violence to control or incapacitate any people present so you can get what you want. This might be one part of a larger plan using deception, destruction of property, and so on. For example, you poison the food going to the guards who monitor the cameras so they all have digestive emergencies. You walk by the unattended cameras while the guards are in the restroom. Alternatively, you hold the receptionist at gunpoint to let you through the security door.

THE INSIDE JOB

An ally on the inside helps you get past security by causing a diversion, faking credentials, or simply opening doors for you. The interesting thing about this method is that the inside person doesn't need to be a willing ally. Perhaps you're threatening their family to get them to do what you want. Better yet, they might be an unwitting ally—you trick them into turning off the alarms and sensors while you get past.

ROLES IN A HEIST OR CON

Not every heist or con requires each of these roles, but being aware of all of them as possible roles can help you make your plan.

The Mark: The person being conned, fooled, tricked, or lied to. Don't be the mark.

The Coordinator: This person knows where everyone is at any given time and coordinates all the action. They may play a different role at the same time.

The Hacker: This is the person who's good with computers or systems and can get them to do what you want. They might get info, shut down alarms, or learn what the opposition knows about you.

The Con Artist: A silver-tongued smooth talker, this person can convince anyone of anything. Often good at getting by or getting rid of a threat that would otherwise require force.

The Roper: This person is the con artist's best friend. They act as an ally to the mark, getting the mark to believe the con artist, or setting the mark up to do what the con artist wants. If the con is exposed, the roper can even pose as another victim of the con, retaining the mark's trust. In a truly elaborate scheme, the roper exposes the con, earning the trust of the mark, only to then lead them into the hands of another con artist who initiates the *real* con.

The Distraction: This person creates a disturbance or tells a lie that gets people to look away from what they should be looking at. This can be very short term or long term—evacuating the building because of a "gas leak" or a similar issue.

The Pickpocket: This person is a sleight of hand artist. They take things in plain sight without anyone noticing—or, sometimes even more crucially, secretly place things where they aren't supposed to be, like slipping an electronic tracker into the mark's pocket.

The Muscle: Sometimes, violence is the only answer. The muscle is someone good at fighting who can protect the others when needed or take out the guard quickly.

The Fixer: This person comes up with things the team needs, often impromptu. The fixer solves the problems the Liars didn't foresee. Often plays another role at the same time.

CONS

Cons, scams, rackets, stings. These are the ways grifters use deception and human psychology to prey on the unsuspecting. The word "con" comes from "con artist," which comes from "confidence artist." The key here is to get someone's confidence or trust, even for a few moments, and then take advantage of that trust.

In truth, there are hundreds—perhaps thousands—of different cons, and they often have colorful names like Pig-in-a-Poke or the Spanish Prisoner. Rather than try to list all such cons, it's more useful to talk about the building blocks of essentially all of them. And besides, the names of cons from the thirty-ninth century or among the Scions on the *Celeste* are likely quite different than any we might glean from twenty-first century research. That's the point of the Mission Card called We've Got to Pull a Con—to allow you to make up an appropriate con and give it an interesting name.

Even without the use of that card, however, Liars need to be conversant in the elements that make up a con or a scam in order to use them to trick people into handing over keys or passcodes, giving the characters access into restricted areas, or choosing not to call the authorities when they should.

As a Liar, you'll find a good con far more useful than a gun. Scams are just deceptions, after all, and thus simply mundane versions of the Lies you tell to reality. Unlike a Lie, they don't automatically work, but they don't cause you physical Stress and pain, either.

THE DISTRACT

You get someone to pay attention to something you want them to, or—perhaps more importantly—not pay attention to something you don't want them to. A stage magician will tell you that misdirection is the key to every trick. Distractions don't have to be physical. Talking about something amazing happening can get people to go see it. Warning people of a non-existent threat can convince them to be on the lookout for something other than you.

THE AUTHORITY

You use a position of trust to get someone to do what you want. This almost always requires playing a role, and often involves some kind of costume, even if it's just a badge or a clipboard. No one lets anyone look at the secure files—unless it's an investigator from the head office. A person would never just hand over their credit card to someone, unless they were in a restaurant and the person looks like a waiter.

CONFORMITY

You use allies who pretend to do as you say so a mark will do the same. If one Liar shouts for everyone in the office to hide under their desks and a couple of other Liars pretend to comply, the other people in the office will too.

THE FEAR MONGER

You coerce or convince someone to do something and then use their fear to keep them from reacting appropriately when they get the chance. The employee that you force at gunpoint to unlock the door hesitates to tell anyone what they did, and thus, what you did.

THE MISDIRECT

You use people's knowledge against them through deception. The idea is to use something that a mark is already expecting or looking for, and give it to them. Hanging a sign on a loading dock that says "Place deliveries in back of truck" will convince a delivery driver—who just wants to unload their freight and leave—to put their valuable goods in the back of your truck. And then you can just drive away.

NEED AND GREED

You play upon someone's need or desire to get them to do what you want. You tell the guard who has to go to the restroom that no one will notice if they slip away for a second. You get the office worker to hand over the files in the safe with convincing promises of a big payoff later.

THE GUILT

You make someone feel like they're responsible for something bad. You tell the person at the security desk that the reason your keycard doesn't work is that they've set the scanner incorrectly. You fake a stumble down the stairs and make it seem like the mark accidentally pushed you. Now, to "atone," they'll give you what you need.

THE GOOD SAMARITAN

You play on someone's sympathies or altruism. If you look weak, they'll feel strong. You get them to carry the package you're having trouble with due to your crutches, but the package actually contains a gas bomb that will put everyone inside the building to sleep. You give a sob story about how you were mugged and your security pass was stolen and you just have to get in the building to get a new one—surely a kind soul will use their pass to let you in.

THE CLOCKWATCHER

You use the pressure of limited time to get someone to do something they wouldn't normally do. People make bad decisions under pressure. You get the butler to stop what they're doing because that wine stain on the carpet is going to set. You get the bank manager to open the vault because someone is breaking into it right this very minute. Don't give people time to think.

EXAMPLE CON NAMES

When you use the Mission Card called We've Got to Pull a Con, you need to come up with a clever con name. You can pull something from this list and explain why it's appropriate later.

The Happy Hand
The One Two Three
Inside the Outside
Backward Ghost
Harmony
The Earthquake
Big Lock, Small Key
The Wayward Dancer
The Speeding Train
The Reverse Victim
Under the Overpass
One Eye Too Many
The Horn of Roland
Voices in the Mist
Unmasked
The Deep End

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIARS

Introduction: Pants on Fire 2
Chapter 1: Indoctrination 6
Chapter 2: Characters 10
Chapter 3: Creating a Liar 22
Chapter 4: Playing This Game 34
Chapter 5: Mission Cards 56
Chapter 6: Managing Scenes 64
Chapter 7: A Session 72
Chapter 8: Backgrounds 92
Chapter 9: The Value of Stories 106
Chapter 10: Advancing Liars 108
Chapter 11: (Really) High Tech 120
Chapter 12: Being a Liar 134

THE DEVIL

Introduction 2
Chapter 1: Being the GM 4
Chapter 2: Improv GMing 28
Chapter 3: Let's Talk About the History of the Future 40
Chapter 4: Let's Talk About Improbability Zones 44
Chapter 5: Let's Talk About the Devil 50
Chapter 6: Let's Talk About the Whole Story 52

THE STORIES THEY STEAL

Introduction 2
Chapter 1: Security Systems 4
Chapter 2: Realistic Responses 16
Chapter 3: The Hidden Side of Buildings 26
Chapter 4: NPCs 30

CREDITS

DESIGNER	Monte Cook
DEVELOPER	Sean K. Reynolds
MANAGING EDITOR	Teri Litorco
EDITOR/PROOFREADER	Ray Vallese
ADDITIONAL PROOFING	Tammie Webb Ryan
ART DIRECTOR	Bear Weiter
COVER ARTIST	Roberto Pitturru

ARTISTS

Marcelo Basile, Gaia Degl'Innocenti, Rob Gale, Denis Medri, Romina Moranelli, Roberto Pitturru, Shane Patrick White

CARTOGRAPHERS

Bianca Buescher, Hugo Solis

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Printed in China