

## 1. GATHERING CLUES

Gathering clues is simple. All you have to do is:

- 1) get yourself into a scene where relevant information can be gathered
- 2) have the right ability to discover the clue
- 3) tell the GM that you're using it

As long as you do these things, you will never fail to gain a piece of necessary information. It is never dependent on a die roll; if you ask for it, you will get it. You can specify exactly what you intend to achieve, or you can engage in a more general informational fishing expedition. Alternatively, the GM might give you relevant information based on your investigative abilities without you having to ask if your abilities apply.

Certain clues allow you to gain **special benefits** by spending points from the relevant investigative ability pool. Each benefit costs either 1 or 2 points from the relevant pool, depending on the difficulty of the additional action and the scope of the reward. When asking you if you want to purchase the benefit, the GM always tells you how much it will cost. Additional information gained provides flavour, but is never required to solve the case or move on to a new scene. It may grant you benefits useful later in the scenario, frequently by making a favourable impression on supporting characters. If you think of your GUMSHOE game as a TV series, an extra benefit gives the actor playing your character a juicy spotlight scene.

Spending points on benefits often gives you an advantage, perhaps in a later General conflict. Thus it is to your advantage to propose cool benefits to the GM, even when they aren't specified in the scenario.

The act of spending points for benefits is called a **spend**. The scenario notes may specify that you get Benefit X for a 1-point spend, or Benefit Y for a 2-point spend. Proposing a spend in a situation for which the GM has no special benefit to offer never costs you points.

### 1a. General Spends

Occasionally characters will encounter a task covered by a general ability at which there is no reasonable chance of failure, but which should still cost them a degree of effort. In such cases the GM will simply charge the character(s) a number of points from the relevant general ability pools. Where tasks can be performed by cooperative effort, multiple characters may contribute points to them. 1 or 2 points per character is a reasonable general spend.

## 2. BOOSTS

Your species, or certain pieces of tech or viroware, may grant a **boost** to one or more abilities. When spending from an investigative ability is boosted, your pool increases by 1 after you get the information or benefit at hand. When testing a boosted general ability, you get a bonus of 1 to your result.

## 3. TESTS

A test occurs when the outcome of an ability use is in doubt. Tests apply to general skills only. Unlike information gathering attempts, tests carry a fairly high chance of failure. They may portend dire consequences if you lose, provide advantages if you win, or both. All die rolls in GUMSHOE use a single ordinary (six-sided) die.

Even in the case of general skills, the GM should call for tests only at dramatically important points in the story, and for tasks of exceptional difficulty. Most general ability uses should allow automatic successes, with possible bonuses on point spends, just like investigative abilities.

## 4. SIMPLE TESTS

A simple test occurs when the character attempts an action without active resistance from another person or entity. The GM determines how hard any given action is by assigning it a Difficulty Number ranging from 2 to 8 (occasionally even higher), where 2 offers only a slim chance of failure, 4 is the norm and 8 verges on the impossible. The player rolls a single die; if the result is equal to or higher than the Difficulty Number, the character succeeds. Before rolling the die, the player may choose to spend any number of points from the relevant ability pool, adding these to the final die result.

You can always make a test of any general ability, even when you have no points in its pool, or even if you have a rating of 0. **Exception:** you must have a rating of at least 1 in a species-specific ability to make a test against it.

### 4a. Piggybacking

When a group of characters act in concert to perform a task together, they designate one to take the lead. That character makes a simple test, spending any number of his own pool points toward the task, as usual. All other characters pay 1 point from their relevant pools in order to gain the benefits of the leader's action. These points are not added to the leader's die result. For every character who is unable to pay this piggybacking cost, either because he lacks pool points or does not have the ability at all, the Difficulty Number of the attempt increases by 2. Piggybacking applies only to simple tests, not to contests, lucky shots, showdowns, or other ability rolls.

### 4b. Lucky Shots

In a desperate situation, you may be called on to use an general ability you don't have but your species can use. Once per episode, a character with a rating of 0 in a given ability may attempt a lucky shot. The other players must grant unanimous permission for the character to try a lucky shot. They have a vested interest because the once-per-episode rule applies to the *entire crew*. If they let you use the lucky shot, none of them will be able to try it later on.

If allowed to go forward, you spend up to 4 points from your highest current general ability pool, and add it to your roll. Should you succeed, you get the result you wanted, but are required to describe the outcome as somehow fluky or embarrassing. Thus you preserve the sense that the players who invested real points in the ability are the real masters, and you succeeded through sheer

happen-stance. Alternately, you can succeed with a straight face, but then explain how the victory really belongs to the PC with the highest rating in the ability. Maybe she taught you a few tricks between episodes. Or perhaps you remember something bad-ass she did earlier, and are simply aping it now.

#### **4c. Cooperation**

When multiple characters cooperate toward a single goal, they agree which of them is undertaking the task directly, and which is assisting. The leader may spend any number of points from her pool, adding them to the die roll. The assistant may pay any number of points from his pool. All but one of these is applied to the die roll.

#### **4d. Toll Tests**

In a toll test, your success is assured, if you want it enough, but the cost of your effort is not. The GM informs you of the Difficulty; you roll the die without announcing an expenditure. Once you see the die result, you then decide whether to spend the points needed to bridge the gap between die roll and Difficulty, or to allow yourself to fail. The base Difficulty of a toll test is 6, which may be modified upwards as circumstances warrant.

#### **4e. Margins**

In some special tests or contests, the difference between difficulty and result is used to determine the degree of failure or success. This number is called the **margin**.

### **5. CONTESTS**

In a contest, each character acts in turn. The first to fail a roll of the contested ability loses. The GM decides who acts first. In a chase, the character who bolts from the scene acts first. Where the characters seem to be acting at the same time, the one with the lowest rating in the relevant ability acts first. In the event of a tie, supporting characters act before player characters. In the event of a tie between player characters, the player who arrived last for the current session goes first in the contest.

The first character to act makes a test of the ability in question. If he fails, he loses the contest. If he succeeds, the second character then makes a test. This continues until one character loses, at which point the other one wins.

Typically each character attempts to beat a Difficulty Number of 4.

Where the odds of success are skewed in favour of one contestant, the GM may assign different Difficulties to each. A character with a significant advantage gets a lower Difficulty Number. A character facing a major handicap faces a higher Difficulty Number. When in doubt, the GM assigns the lower number to the advantaged participant.

Throughout the contest, GM and players should collaborate to add flavour to each result, explaining what the characters did to remain in the contest. That way, instead of dropping out of the narration to engage in an arithmetical recitation, you keep the fictional world verbally alive.

#### **5a. Zero Sum Contests**

A zero sum contest occurs when something bad or good is definitely going to happen to one of the PCs and the GM needs to find out which one takes the hit or earns the reward. Each player makes a test of a general ability. A zero sum contest can be positive or negative. In a positive contest, the character with the highest result gets a benefit. In a negative contest, the one with the lowest result suffers an ill consequence. The GM will tell the players when they are facing a zero sum contest and whether it's toward a positive or negative result. Players decide in advance how many points to spend to modify their rolls, keeping this number secret from other players by writing it down on a piece of paper. They then roll the dice, reveal their expenditures, and announce their final results.

If players are tied for best result (in the case of a positive test) or worst (in a negative test), the tied players may subsequently spend any number of additional points from the pool in question, in hopes of breaking the tie in their favour. Should results remain tied after additional expenditures, the GM chooses the winner based on story considerations.

#### **5b. Showdowns**

A showdown is a shortened contest that resolves in a single step, by comparing the test results of two opposing characters. Each character makes a test. The character with the highest result is the winner and gains whatever advantage the two were struggling over. Ties are resolved in favour of the character who spent the most points on the showdown.

Where both point expenditures are equal, the participants re-roll until one of them wins. They do not spend additional points from their pools on these additional die rolls. Instead, the existing point expenditure is applied to the new roll. This sometimes matters, as it does during ship combat, where the degree of difference between showdown results factors into the skirmish's ultimate outcome.

### **6. REGAINING POOL POINTS**

Investigative ability pools are restored only at the end of each episode, without regard to the amount of time that passes in the game world. GMs running extremely long, multi-part investigations may designate certain story events as breakpoints where all investigative pools are refreshed.

The Health pool refreshes over time, at a rate of 2 points per day of restful activity; wounded characters heal at a different rate, over a period of hospitalisation. Use of the Medic ability can restore a limited number of Health points in the course of a session.

Characters may refresh up to 4 general pools, Health excluded, by taking a **time-out**, consisting of at least two hours of quiet, non-strenuous activity in a safe and familiar environment, most likely the crew's ship. Pools are refreshed at the end of the period. No points are regained if the environment suddenly becomes unsafe or stressful — for example if the ship is attacked by an enemy vessel — before the two hours elapse. Once a crew member has taken a time-out, two core clue scenes (an **interval**) must elapse before it can take another one.

## Example Benefits

Here some special benefits you might get from investigative point spends.

### **The benefit gives you an advantage in a future contest of General abilities:**

- ◆ you see that your shuttle craft has been sabotaged before you fire up its engines.
- ◆ you notice that there is a gap in the force shielding around the back of the suspicious installation.
- ◆ the plans reveal that, to avoid triggering the ion bomb, you must keep it horizontal.

### **The benefit gives a supporting characters a favourable impression of you:**

- ◆ you recognize and recover stolen artwork for the original owner, who will then be more inclined to help you.
- ◆ you spend points to discover a hidden room where there is a hostage who can either give clues or even help with General abilities.
- ◆ once you find the hostage, you spend Reassurance to calm his nerves.

### **The benefit can lead to a flashback scene:**

- ◆ you find the body of a old colleague, and remember that he was a good officer who hit the skids after his crew wrecked its reputation in a ship confiscation scandal.
- ◆ a Virology spend allows you to specify that you helped design a cybe witness' favourite viral enhancement.

### **Point spends can help you resolve moral dilemmas or avoid reputation-smirching incidents:**

- ◆ Intimidating a local might net a core clue for free, but a two point Reassurance spend on the same witness could get you the same information without blackening your name.
- ◆ a little Flirting with the witness to one of your recent infractions encourages her to keep the incident to herself.

### **Extra point spends might speed up an investigation:**

- ◆ a Forensic Anthropology spend lets you run all of the DNA samples you gathered on the asteroid in half an hour, instead of half a day.
- ◆ a spend on a History ability means that you can rattle off an obscure piece of trivia off the top of your head, rather than visibly consulting the ship's database via your headset.

### **A spend might allow you to stretch the definition of the ability you're using, granting you a core clue that would ordinarily be gained with a different ability than the one you have:**

- ◆ a Xenoculture spend to reveal historical details about an alien race normally covered by Combine History.
- ◆ A Combine History spend to recall the legal wrangles around a particular treaty, instead of using Law or Negotiation.

## Combat

The aggressor is the first character to move against the other. When the status of aggressor and defender are unclear, the combatants compare their current pool numbers in the abilities they're using in the fight. The character with the highest number chooses whether to act as aggressor or defender. Unlike an ordinary contest, in a fight it is often advantageous to strike first.

A contest proceeds between the two abilities. When combatants using the Scuffling or Shooting abilities roll well, they get the opportunity to deal damage to their opponents.

**Hit Thresholds:** Each character has a Hit Threshold of either 3 (the standard value) or 4 (if the character's Athletics rating is 8 or more). The Hit Threshold is the Difficulty Number the character's opponent must match or beat in order to harm him. Less competent supporting characters may have lower Hit Thresholds. Creatures may have Hit Thresholds of 4 or higher.

**Dealing Damage:** When you roll on or over your opponent's Hit Threshold, you may deal damage to him. To do so, you make a damage roll, rolling a die which is then modified according to the relative lethality of your weapon, as per the following table:

|  |    |
|--|----|
| <b>Fist, kick</b>                                | -1 |
| <b>Small improvised weapon, baton, knife</b>     | 0  |
| <b>Disruption weapon, ancient firearm, sword</b> | +1 |

For firearms, add an additional +2 damage when fired at point blank range.

The final damage result is then subtracted from your opponent's Health pool. When a combatant's Health pool drops to 0 or less, that combatant begins to suffer ill effects, ranging from slight impairment to helplessness to death.

## Exhaustion, Injury and Death

**When Health drops below 0**, you must make a Consciousness Roll with the absolute value of your current Health pool as your Difficulty. You may voluntarily reduce your Health pool by an amount of your choice; for each point you reduce it by, add 1 to your die result. The Difficulty of the Consciousness roll is based on your Health pool before you make this reduction.

**If your pool is 0 to -5**, you are hurt but have suffered no permanent injury. You can not spend points on Investigative abilities, and must increase the Difficulty Numbers of all tests and contests, including opponents' Hit Thresholds, by 1.

A character with the Medic ability can improve your condition; for every Medic point spent, you regain 2 Health points — unless you are the Medic, in which case you gain only 1 Health point for every Medic point spent. The Medic can only refill your pool to where you were before the incident in which you received this latest injury. He must be in a position to devote all of his attention to directly tending to your wounds.

**If your pool is -6 to -11**, you have been seriously wounded. You must make another Consciousness roll. If you dropped from a positive Health pool into this range, you make only the one Consciousness roll. Whether or not you maintain consciousness, you are no longer able to fight. Until you receive first aid, you will lose an additional Health point every half hour. A character with the Medic ability can stabilize your condition by spending 2 Medic points. However, he can't restore your Health points. Even after you receive first aid, you must convalesce. Convalescence takes four hours in a 25th century medical facility, including the sick bay of your ship.

**When your pool dips to -12 or below**, you are dead. Time to create a replacement character.

## Disruption Fire

For targets with Health ratings of **4 or more**:

- ◆ The first time a target is nulled in the course of a fight, its Hit Threshold drops by 1.
- ◆ On its second NLD hit, the target falls unconscious, regardless of its current Health pool.

For targets with Health ratings of **3 or less**:

- ◆ On a single successful NLD hit, the target falls unconscious.

The character remains unconscious until awakened with a widely available device called an espresser (p. 133) or, failing that, for a period of time derived from its Health rating:

|                   |            |
|-------------------|------------|
| <b>4 or less</b>  | 6 hours    |
| <b>5 to 8</b>     | 3 hours    |
| <b>9 to 12</b>    | 2 hours    |
| <b>13 to 16</b>   | 1 hour     |
| <b>17 or more</b> | 30 minutes |

When struck by one NLD hit, a target remains vulnerable to the incapacitating effect of a second hit for the rest of the current interval, or until the end of the episode, whichever comes first.

## Cover

- **Exposed:** No barrier stands between you and the combatant firing at you. Your Hit Threshold decreases by 1.
- **Partial Cover:** About half of your body is exposed to fire. Your Hit Threshold remains unchanged.
- **Full Cover:** Except when you pop up to fire a shot, the barrier completely protects you. Your Hit Threshold increases by 1.

## Surprise

Surprise supporting characters by sneaking up on them with a successful Stealth test. The basic Difficulty is 4, which may increase for especially vigilant characters.

Avoid being surprised yourself with a successful Sense Trouble test, handled by the hailer. The basic Difficulty is 4, but may be higher in the case of notably sneaky opponents.

Surprised characters suffer a +2 increase to all general ability Difficulties for any immediately subsequent action. In a fight, the penalty pertains to the first round of combat.