THE THRESHOLD OF CREDIBILITY

A game of Mortal Coil is a group effort requiring a high level of collective agreement among the players. No one player has the authority to make a sweeping decision about any character (even his own) or the game world at large without some input from the other players.

Group consensus is required when someone does one of the following things:

- Introduces a new fact into the theme.

- Changes a character by adding a new aptitude or passion.

- Attempts to use an aptitude in a conflict.

- Introduces a supporting character.

- Sets a scene or adds details to an existing scene.

These things all have something in common. When you play Mortal Coil, you are building a fictional world with your friends. When someone adds something new to this world, any player at the table has the opportunity to object.

Mortal Coil is not a competitive game, it is meant to be a collaborative one. When an objection is raised, discuss it among the players and come to some sort of agreed solution. As you gradually come to understand what your group is willing to accept, this establishes a threshold of credibility for new information to be added to your story.

A veto is a strong power. Make sure that you use it appropriately. No one likes to play with someone who blocks *everything* that comes along.

Example:

Here are three examples of players invoking this rule:

Jason is playing a supernatural investigator character. He wants to introduce the fact that magic leaves tell-tale traces that can be detected by a trained investigator, who can then follow them back to their source like a bloodhound. The GM, Michelle, objects, invoking the threshold of credibility. "This is going to make it too easy for you. We wanted magic to be mysterious, and this takes a lot of the mystique out of it if you can just trail magicians right back to their hideout every time." The rest of the group agrees with Michelle, and Jason needs to rethink what he was doing.

Michelle, the GM, has set a scene in a darkened warehouse. Reaching the back of the warehouse, the players encounter a tentacled horror from beyond. Jason objects, invoking the threshold of credibility. "I thought we agreed to avoid Lovecraftian details. This needs to be some other kind of creature, based on real folklore." Michelle edits the scene slightly, transforming the monster into monstrous rattlesnake, a change that serves her purposes just as well.

Jason's character runs into trouble as he investigates the office of a suspicious police detective. The detective has concealed evidence under a password on his computer. Jason decides to add "computer hacker" to his character in order to get past the obstacle. Krista, another player, invokes the threshold of credibility. "You said that your character was an old-school guy, used to using shoe leather rather than technology. I don't think he would have spent enough time around computers to be a hacker." Jason nods, and tries to think of another way to get at the info he needs.

MAGIC LEVEL FOR SINGLE SESSION GAMES

These levels are also set for a multi-session game. If you are playing in a single-session game, use the following guidelines instead:

• *Low magic*: Each player starts with 2 magic tokens. The GM gets 2 tokens, plus 1 token for every 2 players.

• *Moderate magic*: Each player starts with 4 magic tokens. The GM gets 4 tokens, plus 1 token for every 2 players.

• *High magic*: Each player starts with 6 magic tokens. The GM gets 6 tokens, plus 1 token for every 2 players.

SETTING GOALS

When initiating a conflict, each player involved must first state the goal his character is attempting to achieve. This is called *setting goals*, and it defines helps keep you focused on what your character wants out of the conflict. For example, if your character gets in a fight in a bar, your goal may be to get out of the fight without getting hurt, whereas the GM may state that the supporting character's goal will be an injury to your character.

The key to setting these goals is to make sure that the result is interesting whether your character succeeds or fails. Either way, something driving the story forward should result. The GM should not set the goals of her supporting characters merely to block your desired outcome, but instead to ensure that if her supporting character succeeds, the character's actions have actual consequences within the story.

The scope of your conflict should not be overly specific. Each conflict will cover a number of individual actions that are aimed at the same goal, but the goal should not be too narrow. For example, each handhold your character grips while climbing a sheer cliff is not an appropriate conflict, instead, your character reaching the top of the cliff in time to stop the villain from throwing your character's lover over the edge is a more proper conflict. Similarly, engaging in a drunken argument is an appropriate conflict, but each individual shout, grab, or scuffle within the argument is not.

Example:

Eckhardt and Lucy have determined that a witness has vital information for them. The witness, a biker's girlfriend, doesn't want to talk to them, but Eckhardt and Lucy have tracked her down to a gas station nearby. A conflict begins as Eckhardt and Lucy arrive on the scene.

Jason declares Eckhardt's goal in the scene: to get the witness to tell him what she knows. Lucy's goal is the same.

Michelle then states the witness' goal: to get Eckhardt to leave her alone without revealing anything. The witness' biker boyfriend is also in the scene, and Michelle sets a goal for him as well: to scare off the government spooks. He's got secrets he doesn't want snooping government agents to find out.

Orthogonal vs. Opposed Goals

Opposed goals are easy to understand. Two characters are engaged in a conflict, and if one of these characters achieves her goal, the other character will be unable to achieve his. This is an appropriate setup, and many conflicts follow this form.

Sometimes, though, the two characters will have goals that can both potentially be achieved at the same time. These are called orthogonal goals. This is a lot trickier in play. If the characters involved in a conflict have goals that can both be achieved, the first step is to make sure that some other character wishes for the goal to fail. If no one is interested in stopping a character from reaching her goal, a conflict is not called for. Conflicts only occur if there is some sort of active opposition for a goal. If there is no character attempting to block a goal, settle the goal outside of conflict (page XX).

Once you have determined that another character will be attempting to block a goal, the conflict can commence. The players involved will all be seeking to hinder one another in addition to achieving their own goal. This does make an interesting conflict. All of the characters may succeed in achieving their goals, or all may fail.

You may also find a combination of these situations, especially when there are more than two characters involved in a conflict. Some goals could be opposed, and some could be orthogonal. Although this raises the complexity, it is allowed.

Example:

Jason's and Krista's characters get into a conflict with each other. Jason's goal is to go up to the foreman's shed and confront him. Krista's goal is to stop Eckhardt from going to the shed. This is a pretty clear example of opposed goals. If either character is successful in achieving his goal, the other cannot also succeed.

Bill's supporting character Norin and Kat's character Pele get into a conflict with each other. Bill's goal is for Norin to humiliate Pele in front of the other bar patrons. Kat's goal is for Pele to give Norin the beating of a lifetime. This at first glance may seem opposed, but these are actually orthogonal goals. Norin could receive a savage beating and still humiliate Pele at the same time.

Conflict Rounds

Conflicts are settled using a series of rounds. Within each round, every character may take up to four actions (page XX) and attempt to achieve her goal. When a round has ended, all committed action tokens are returned to the character's action pool and another round may commence.

Often, conflicts will be resolved in a single round of actions. If this is the case, return all committed tokens to the action pool and narrate the results of the conflict. Sometimes, multiple rounds of conflict are required.

To determine if another conflict round is needed, examine each character's goal at the end of the round. Has the character achieved his goal through his actions within the round? If not, has another character taken actions that make it impossible for the character to achieve his goal within the conflict? If the answer to either of these questions is yes for all of the characters involved in the conflict, then the conflict is over.

If the answer to both questions is no, then another round of conflict is called for. All committed action tokens are returned to each character's pool, and everyone begins to plan actions for their character. Continue with as many conflict rounds are needed to determine whether every character can achieve his goal.

Conflicts with multiple players and antagonists are likely to get complicated and will probably require two or more rounds of actions before all of the characters' goals are resolved with either success or failure.

Example:

Using Bill and Kat's conflict from the previous example, a round of actions has gone by. Pele has soundly beaten Norin to the ground, and has defended herself against his sarcastic remarks by smashing his mouth as he tries to speak. The actions are resolved, and Kat has clearly achieved her goal. Norin has not yet achieved his goal. Even though he lies beaten and bloodied on the floor of the bar, nothing about the results of the conflict prevent him from continuing to pursue his goal. Bill calls for a second round of conflict.

In this round, Norin is hampered by the massive beating he has just endured, but he still tries to croak out some insult that will humiliate Pele. Exasperated by his continuing hectoring, Pele drags him out the back of the bar and slams the door. Norin lies in the alleyway, now out of earshot of the other patrons. He can no longer pursue his goal of humiliating Pele, at least not until he heals up a bit. Bill declares the conflict over.

Multiple Sides in One Conflict

You will often run across the situation where more than two characters have goals for a conflict. First, determine which goals are opposed and which are orthogonal. Make sure that every player involved in the conflict is quite clear about what each of the characters in the conflict wants. Once all of these interactions are relatively clear, the players will have a better idea how they will need to allocate their resources. Conflicts generally need to go for multiple rounds if there are a lot of characters involved.

Example:

A conflict has arisen between Pele, Loki, and Norin in the seedy bar where they all hang out. Loki's goal is to convince Pele to go home with him. Bill decides that Norin's goal is to call in a favor that Loki owes him and get him to embarrass Pele. Pele's goal is to get Loki to humiliate Norin instead. Kat says she doesn't really care one way or another if Pele goes with Loki at the end.

Bill looks at all three goals. Norin's goal and Pele's goal are directly opposed. Only one of the characters can succeed. Loki's goal is orthogonal to these other goals. It is possible for Loki to humiliate either Norin or Pele, fulfilling the other character's goal, and still get Pele to come home with him. It will be a lot harder for Loki if he agrees to Norin's plan, but it is still possible.

How Actions Relate to Goals

When choosing actions for your character, you need to remember the goals you stated for the conflict. This can be the trickiest part of the conflict system. The actions your character takes in a conflict should move him toward his goal. Simple goals, such as taking something from another character or harming another character often have easy, obvious actions. More complex goals, like getting another character to admit she still loves you, may require some creative thinking. Just remember the ultimate outcome you desire in the conflict, and work toward that with your actions.

Example:

In the situation in the bar, Eric has to decide what actions Loki will take related to his goal of convincing Pele to go home with him. Eric thinks Loki would use his jokes to charm Pele. He also knows that the other characters are going to try to influence his actions, so Eric decides to use Loki's willpower to brush off their attempts as a defense.

ACTIONS OUTSIDE CONFLICT

You may want to take actions when no character is opposing you. These are actions that take place outside a conflict, with no active opposition from another character. Many times, actions outside conflict are not important. Given time and some creativity, a character can probably achieve most of what she wants if no one is opposing her efforts. When time is a factor, or the task she wants to achieve is particularly difficult, there is a simple way to determine success or failure.

Just as you do in a conflict action, choose a faculty and an aptitude and add them together. You may not use action tokens or passions to increase this score outside of a conflict. You may use power tokens to add to this total, however. There is one exception allowing you to use action tokens, described below.

Whether or not an aptitude applies to this type of action is much more strict than it is within a conflict. If the aptitude does not obviously and directly apply, it may not be used in an action outside conflict. This is, of course, subject to the *threshold of credibility* (page XX), but the GM also has a veto power if he feels the use of the aptitude is implausible.

Once you have determined the total, compare it to this table. When the GM set the task, he will choose a difficulty from the table. If you equal or exceed the associated number, you succeed in your task. If your total is less than the number, you fail.

3	Routine, requiring minimal skill or ability.
4	Easy, attainable by most people.
5	Harder, requires a bit of fitness or skill.
6	Difficult, requiring more raw ability or knowledge.
7	Challenging, must be within the characters specific area of expertise.
8	Knotty problem, requires great skill and innate ability.
9	Not for the faint-hearted, only the top individuals can overcome it.
10	Near the limit, requires peak conditioning and masterful skill.

You can also have quick opposed contests between two characters outside of the conflict system. Just add the faculty and aptitude each character wishes to use, remembering the +2 bonus for narrower aptitudes matched against broader aptitudes, and whichever character has the higher total is the winner.

As mentioned above, there is one circumstance under which a character can use action tokens. If you are falling a bit short of the required difficulty, you can choose to *spend* action tokens to reach your goal. These tokens represent great fatigue or injury from attempting a task beyond your ability. You may spend as many tokens as you like for this purpose, but they are recovered only after the character can receive rest and healing (see page XX). Action tokens spent outside of conflict cannot be recovered until after the next conflict the character is involved in.

Example:

Jason's character Eckhardt wants to get into an apartment, but the door is locked. Jason tells Michelle that Eckhardt will kick in the door, he's in a rush. This isn't really a conflict, a locked door is just an obstacle not determined resistance. Michelle thinks that if Jason can't kick it in, he will have to take a longer time trying to pick the lock and the owner might return, so the outcome will be interesting one way or the other. It's just a cheap apartment door, so Michelle sets the difficulty at 5, requiring a bit of fitness or skill. Jason's character uses his Force (1) and his Government Agent aptitude (2) on the grounds that government agents often kick in doors. The total is 3, which is insufficient to break the door in. Michelle says, "You're an old man, and just not able to produce the force necessary to knock it. Sal is coming back in an hour, hopefully you can pick the lock quickly."

CHOOSING ACTIONS

As mentioned earlier, there is a bit of a trick to determining what actions your character should take in a conflict. Once all of the players involved have declared their goals, think about how your character would go about trying to achieve his own goal.

Some will rely on their mental abilities, others are more physical. You can play to your character's strengths. If Force is your character's highest faculty, it makes sense that he will almost always try to use his size and strength to solve problems.

It's important to remember what the goals of the other characters in the conflict are. These goals will give you a clue regarding what they may do. When you choose your actions, pick one that will further your goal, but also remember to choose another action that will help defend your character against the actions of others, if necessary. You really don't want to get caught out with no defense if another character is acting against yours.

The GM also has a role in this part of the conflict if supporting characters are present. As GM, you control the actions of the supporting characters. For each supporting character in the conflict, you need to choose actions secretly just like the players. You must also try to anticipate what the players are going to do and use the supporting characters' actions to help them achieve their goals.

HELPING

Many times, you will want to assist another player in a conflict. You will take an action during the conflict round whose result will help another character complete his action, such as grabbing someone in a fight, lifting your friend to help them climb up a fire escape, or standing threateningly in the background if your friend is attempting to intimidate someone. The action you take needs to be resolved first, before those of the character you are helping. If you are successful, you will give the other character a bonus to his own action.

In a conflict, your helping action is almost always opposed. Your helping action must overcome the opposition in order to be useful to the character you are attempting to aid. Outside of a conflict, or if your action is unopposed, you must match or beat a difficulty determined by the GM (see page XX) in order to help the other character.

If you fail, you are no help to the other character. If you succeed, the target character gains a +2 to his action.

Example:

Pele is beating up Norin. Pluto, no friend of Norin's, wants to help the goddess deliver the smackdown. He's not going to deliver the blows himself, he just wants to aid Pele. He has Pluto use an action to grab and hold Norin to make it easier for Pele to pound him. Since he is helping Pele, Pluto's action is resolved first. He is successful in a physical contest against Norin and is now holding him, giving Pele a +2 on her "beat up Norin" action.

MATCHING ACTIONS

Once each player reveals his actions, the GM has a vital role to play. Each of these actions must be matched against the other actions that the characters have taken in order to determine success or failure. Let logic be your guide. Most of the time, actions will match against one another in an obvious way. Sometimes it may not be as obvious which actions oppose one another, and that is when GM discretion is important.

If someone is throwing a punch, and another character has allocated for a dodge, it's pretty clear that the dodge is a defense against the punch. But what about a situation where someone is making cutting remarks? What is the defense against that? After each player has described his actions, think about which actions will make other actions impossible if successful. If one character's success makes another character's success impossible, these actions are opposed. If one character's action is to stare down a hostile opponent, if she is successful, the other character will be unable to throw that punch he allocated.

The GM is the authority on which actions oppose others. As soon as the reveal occurs, as GM you should quickly take charge and begin opposing actions against one another and adjudicating the result. When there are multiple characters involved in a conflict, it's very important for you to make sense of all of the actions and their results. Don't forget the rule that aptitudes that are more specific gain a +2 bonus against those that are more general. You are the final authority on what actions can be used in defense against

other character's attacks. Listen to the player's arguments, but make your decisions authoritatively and quickly.

Example:

It was revealed that Loki's actions were charming jokes directed at Pele and stubbornness as a defense, Pele's actions were to intimidate Loki into turning on Norin and resisting overtures with feigned (or real) drunkenness, and Norin's actions were to use a hard sell on Loki and to defend himself with brash rudeness. Looking over all the actions, Bill announces that both Pele's and Norin's attacks are matched against Loki's defense, and Loki's attack is matched against Pele's defense.

Kat is using Ruthless Brawler against Loki's Stubborn Cuss, and Bill rules that Stubborn Cuss is more applicable in this situation, giving Loki a +2 in this particular matchup. Likewise, Bill thinks Barfly is more specific than Trickster God, and gives Pele a +2 to her defense in that matchup. The rest of the aptitudes seem relatively evenly matched.

DESPERATE REACTIONS

Sometimes, a character will take an action his opponent has not anticipated, and the defending character will have no action set as a defense. This is exceptionally bad for the defending character. The attacking character must only overcome the defending character's faculty to succeed, rather than faculty plus aptitude plus action tokens. This is called *passive defense.*

There is an option if you really need to defend your character in this situation. You may reallocate your tokens to give your character a defense against this unexpected assault. If you *commit* two additional action tokens from your action pool, you may add one of your character's aptitudes in defense. If your action pool is empty, you may pull an action token already allocated to another action. However, you may not commit any additional action tokens to also add extra effort to your defense.

If you really need those extra action tokens, you can *spend* one action token to add in your character's aptitude and also commit as many additional action tokens as needed to your character's defense.

Example:

Jason's character Eckhardt is confronting a gunman and a snitch. Jason committed to two actions: an intimidation against the gunman, and dodging behind the desk for defense. The gunman, however, is not making a physical assault. He doesn't even pull his gun. Instead, he opts to threaten Eckhardt, an intimidation action. Jason didn't anticipate a social attack, so he has no action tokens committed to stop the gunman. The gunman uses his Will faculty (2) and his Cold-Eyed Killer aptitude (4) along with his four committed tokens to stare the older man down, but Jason's character may only use his Wits faculty to resist, since he has no reaction allocated and Will is already being used in the intimidation action. The gunman's total is 10 (Will 2 plus Cold-Eyed Killer 4 plus 4 action token) and Jason's is 4 (Wits 4). This is a really bad result for Jason. The gunman could break him with this result, a +6, a spectacular success.

To avoid this, Jason decides on a desperate reaction. Jason commits two action tokens in defense, pulling the last one from his pool and the other from his other defensive action. His character may now also use his Cynic aptitude to brush off the intimidation. He adds his Cynic (2) into the mix. His Wits plus Cynic is still only 6, so he still fails, but this is a less devastating defeat. The gunman has a complete success (+4) rather than a spectacular success.

Jason decides this still isn't enough. He takes one of the action tokens from the defensive action and spends it. He can now commit extra action tokens to his defense. He pulls all of the tokens from his physical dodge and puts them in Wits, raising the total number of action tokens to five.

Jason's total for the action is now 11, and he can resist the gunman's intimidation.

PLAY

You've now read the rules, but now we should discuss how to effectively use them. There are a lot of tricks that can make your Mortal Coil game better. This section is aimed at players controlling characters. The GM player gets her own whole chapter, which you can find right after this one.

PLAYERS BUILDING STORY

If you are playing a character, the game is about you. The players control the protagonists of the story, and the game should revolve around them and what they care about. Although the GM will set scenes and control the game pacing most of the time, you are responsible for helping that along as well. You are not there to passively experience the GM's plot, you are there to collaboratively guide story and help the GM achieve what you want out of the game.

As a player, you have story power. You can create magical facts with your magic tokens, and these in turn create new things to hang plot on. When you create a fact, you are giving a signal to the other players about things you are interested in the game. By the same token, the other players are doing likewise.

You also have power tokens. These give you a strong influence on the direction of the game. You can use power tokens to set scenes, bring your character or another character into a scene, or even add details to the game world. Use these to move play in an interesting direction, and also to help the other players do the same.

Getting What You Want as a Player

No one should ever have to play a game that isn't fun. For Mortal Coil to work, it is important to communicate with the other people at the table. You need to be clear about what you want out of the game and what direction you are interested in seeing the game go. If you don't express what you want, you will end up disappointed and the other players may not even know they have done something you don't like.

You also need to listen and pay attention to what the other players are doing at the table. They should be communicating their desires to you as well. You should be trying to help them achieve what they want, just as they should do the same for you.

Mortal Coil has a powerful tool to help everyone do this. The *threshold of credibility* (page XX) is there to help ensure that no one is left behind in a game of Mortal Coil. Every single player has the ability to veto any contribution to the shared fiction of the game world. Use this power wisely, but remember it is there if the game begins to take a direction you don't like. Invoking the threshold of credibility is a good opportunity to call "time out" and get the group to have a short discussion about the game and its direction.

Sharing the Spotlight

It's fun to be the center of attention. Because it's fun, make sure you aren't the only one doing it. All of the players should get some spotlight time during the course of a session. If you notice that another player hasn't been participating in a lot of scenes, use a power token to create a scene for that character, or bring the character into another scene in progress. Try to get your character's story to intersect with the other player's. The GM will try to give everyone and equal role, but use your resources as a player to help.

TECHNIQUES IN CONFLICTS

The conflict system is probably the trickiest part of a game of Mortal Coil. There are ways to make conflicts better. As a player, you can use some of these ideas to spice up the conflicts and make sure you get what you want out of the system.

Side Bets

A conflict begins and everyone states their goal. All of the players begin to make bids with action tokens to reach their goal. As you do this, you can take smaller actions that go a bit to the side of your original goal as well. Perhaps you want to make sure that your character's son gets out of a situation safely. Most of your effort will be devoted to making sure that happens, but maybe you'd also like to make sure your ex-boyfriend looks bad in the process. This is a side bet, where you are making an action to pursue a minor goal in addition to the major stated goal. This is an appropriate use of your resources and can make conflicts very interesting.

Pursuing a secondary goal on the side is fine. Just make sure you don't state a conflict goal in order to fake the other players out. The goal you set up at first should be your main priority. Other players can definitely call you on it if you state a conflict goal and then pursue something else entirely, ignoring the main goal.

The danger with side bets is that they use some of your resources. This can risk making your main actions fail, but there are often several other things your character might want out of a conflict in addition to her stated goal. Consider what will make the conflict more dramatic and interesting for the whole group, and if a side bet fills that description, think about throwing one in.

Example:

Eckhardt is facing down the gunman and the snitch. Jason wants to keep the gunman from harming Eckhardt, that's his primary goal. As he is allocating his actions, he puts down one to intimidate the gunman, and another to dodge behind a table to defend himself should the gunman open fire. Jason also wants to turn the snitch against his boss, and so he lays down another action to convince the snitch to switch sides. This last action is a side bet, unrelated to the main goal of saving Eckhardt's skin.

Changing Passions as a Goal

When you are choosing a goal for your character, sometimes you will want to use a conflict to force another character to change his passions. This is actually an appropriate goal. Instead of inflicting harm if you win, you are making a 1-point change to the passions on his sheet. You can add a new 1-point passion, or your can cause one of his other passions to rise or lower by one point. The player of the target character decides how this affects his other passions, which will need to be adjusted by one point if the conflict is resolved in your favor.

This can be a really powerful tool in conflicts. Passions are an important part of a character, and getting them to change has a lot of resonance. Some of the best moments in my games have involved a change in passion. Within the game fiction, you are successfully changing another character's mind or making them feel a particular way.

As the target character, even if you lose a conflict of this sort, you are not without recourse. You can easily manipulate your own passions during play by using one more

than once, or adding a new passion to your sheet. If you are not satisfied with the change to your passions after a conflict, you can generally change it back within the same session. Before you do, think of the impact this has within the game. The character's feelings are being manipulated.

Example:

Kat wants to put the fear of Pele into Norin. When he provokes a bar brawl, Kat states her goal is to add a Fear: "Pele is going to kill me." to Norin's character sheet. Bill thinks this is an appropriate goal, and the conflict begins. Pele wins the conflict, and Bill adds the 1-point Fear to Norin's sheet.

How to Use Faculties in Conflicts

Just about every faculty can be used to both attack and defend. It may seem that Force and Wits are attack faculties and Grace and Will are defense faculties, but any one can be used for either purpose. Here are some ways to think about each faculty in turn that can help come up with appropriate actions in a conflict.

• *Force*: It's pretty easy to think of aggressive actions you can use with Force. Hitting people, grappling them, throwing them, pushing them, or grabbing things away are all great offensive uses of Force. For defense, consider that Force represents a character's size and physical toughness, as well as endurance. You can use Force to just take a hit and shake it off, or tire an enemy out.

Example:

Pluto and Jupiter are in a conflict, and Bill anticipates a physical assault. He has Jupiter use his Force to defend, allocating tokens to absorb a hit and not flinch.

• *Grace*: Grace can be used defensively to dodge, outrun, or outmaneuver an opponent. You can also use your balance and agility to move places another character can't follow. For offensive uses, Grace can be a way to beat an opponent with speed or accuracy of attack, or to move so quickly and decisively your opponent doesn't have a chance to react. Grace can even seduce another character with your physical movements.

Example:

Loki uses his Grace in a conflict with Pele. He knows she's a better fighter, so he uses a Grace action to sweep her feet out from under her when she goes in for the attack.

• *Will*: Will has some obvious defense capabilities. Will can be used to resist persuasion through stubbornness, or fend off mental assaults. Will can even be used to resist physical assault just by powering through the pain. For offensive action, Will can be used to intimidate or dominate another character, or to simply browbeat someone into giving up. Will sometimes powers magical effects as well.

Example:

Eckhardt doesn't have very good physical stats, so Jason decides to use his Will to defend against the gunman's shot. Eckhardt isn't going to try to get out of the way, but just power through the pain and damage anyway.

• *Wits*: Cleverness is a great offense and defense. Wits can be used defensively to outthink an opponent, to anticipate his moves and counter them, or to turn an opponent's argument against him. Using Wits as an offence allows you to dazzle an opponent with a blizzard of words, to devise a clever stratagem that your opponent doesn't anticipate, or just speak so sincerely and effectively you sway someone to your cause.

Example:

Loki is a tricky opponent, and decides that he will use his Wits to his advantage in a fight. His action is to defend himself and retreat, until his opponent is over a puddle of spilled beer, and then make an assault, forcing Norin to slip.

Bringing a Gun to a Knife Fight

One of the best ways to win a conflict in Mortal Coil is to do the unexpected. When you state your goal, the other players are generally going to have an idea of what your actions will be to achieve it. If you come up with an innovative action that achieves your goal but that the other players will not anticipate, you greatly improve your chances.

Maybe the other player thinks this is a mental contest. If you throw in a physical action that furthers your goal, you may catch the other player off guard with no defense. If you get an action in that has no defense, you are likely to dominate there. The other player may have to make a desperate reaction or burn some power tokens to compensate. This is how you win conflicts.

Example:

The gunman has cornered Krista's character Lucy, and he is just going to try to scare her as an attack. Knowing that the gunman has a lot of ability in this area, Krista decides to shake things up. She adds a mental defense against the gunman's intimidation, but also adds an attack action to kick the guy in the nuts. The gunman had a mental defense in place, but Bill didn't anticipate the physical assault, leaving him basically defenseless against that action.

THE GM

One player in Mortal Coil has a special role. This player is called the Game Moderator, or GM. As GM, you have the responsibility to look at the big picture while playing. Each of the other players will concentrate mostly on their own character, but the GM looks at the rest of the world and the other supporting characters that will take part in the story. The GM is also the arbitrator between the system and the players, and has a responsibility for making things run smoothly in the game.

THE GM'S ROLE

The GM has several responsibilities. The GM will bring the supporting characters to life in the group's story. Each of the other players will portray a single character, but the GM portrays all of the other characters that appear in the game. These characters are called supporting characters because that is what they are. They exist to support the overall structure of the group's story, and to help the players show things about their own characters. Like in a literary work, it is always better to show than tell. Use the supporting characters to draw the player characters' passions in relief and let them deal with the issues and situations that create drama and interesting interaction.

The GM also helps the players set the scene, presents challenges to the players, and helps them bring the passions and issues of their characters into play in order to drive the human elements of the story forward. This is a big responsibility, but the GM is not responsible for doing all of this alone. The other players should help the GM by making suggestions, initiating conflicts, and making sure that the issues they want to address are brought to the attention of the other players.

As GM, you truly are a moderator. You have the power to organize what could be a very chaotic situation by announcing which scenes and characters are the current focuses of play, especially if it seems as if the group is getting off track. To do this, you must listen to your players. The most important things to these characters are their passions, which are prominently listed right on the character sheets. The passions (page XX) generally indicate where a player is interested in taking his character. Only rarely should you try to introduce or push anything that doesn't relate in some way to at least one of the player character's passions.

BUILDING STORY FROM CHARACTERS

Characters are where the story is in Mortal Coil. The players have created characters who are the protagonists in the story of the game. The scenes and situations within the game should revolve around these characters and their issues.

Each player character has passions. These passions relate to what the character wants. Knowing the motivations of the characters is of great value to a GM. You can structure scenes around the passions. See how the passions of different players interact and build scenes around that. Give players strong choices between their passions, and present situations where more than one passion, and more than one character, is in play. These passions drive the characters, and so your responsibility as a GM is to ensure they drive the characters to story.

Keeping your focus on the player characters is important. The villains and other supporting characters can add a lot to the story, but remember that the story is not about them. The player characters are the protagonists. If you find yourself favoring a

particular supporting character, make sure that the other players are interested enough in this character to justify the additional involvement.

The players have several ways of signaling what they are interested in without talking about it outside play. These include passions, the theme document, and also their use of power tokens. See what sort of scenes players call for with power tokens, and incorporate the characters and details they introduce with power tokens. This is direct method for players to add things to a scene, and when they use it, as GM you should run with it.

Example:

Jason's character Eckhardt has a passion Duty: "I will keep these people safe." Looking at the passion, it's pretty clear to Michelle that Jason is interested in Eckhardt acting as a hero and saving people from supernatural threats. She sets a scene out by a campground. Some local campers are being threatened by a recently awakened vampire, and Eckhardt and Lucy arrive on the scene as a swarm of rattlesnakes crawl into the camp.

Using the Theme Document

The theme document (page XX) is also a very useful tool for you as the GM. This document is created by both you and your players, and essentially defines your game world. When the group built the theme document together, they created a situation for their characters. This is what you, as the GM, should concentrate on. Tie that situation directly into what the characters are doing, make that situation directly relevant to them. Abstract principles are important when they relate immediately to a decision that a character must make.

Players can also introduce new facts into the theme document, as described earlier. When they do so, they are communicating what they want out of the game. If a player creates a fact about sorcerers, that's generally a pretty good indication that the player wants to have sorcerers become part of the game world and have some impact on the story that is being told. As a GM, you can note what facts are added to the theme and see to it that these facts show up in the game—in most cases, the sooner the better.

Example:

Krista sacrifices a magic token to create a new fact: "Magicians can control supernatural beings." So far, Michelle has introduced a vampire and a colossal snake to the game. She knows that Krista is definitely interested in seeing some magician as the responsible party for this supernatural threat, and she adds a magician as a supporting character to her roster.

SCENE FRAMING

Setting a scene and knowing when to end a scene are perhaps the most important skills a GM can learn in Mortal Coil. Starting scenes and ending scenes strongly influences the pace of play. The GM is mostly responsible for keeping an eye on this process, but all of the players also need to take an active role in this.

All scenes have one of two purposes. A scene can bring out one or more conflicts, or a scene can show some key information that is relevant to the characters and the overall story. Sometimes, it can do both. Set up the scenes to move action forward, and push the group's collective story. Don't focus too much on the little details—get right to the juicy bits. If the scene starts to drag, either move to resolution or conflict, or else end the scene and move on to the next one.

Encourage the players to speak up if there is something they want to resolve in a scene before it is closed. Remember, the players are responsible for moving the action forward as well.

When you are running out of ideas, talk to the players. Have them give suggestions on a new scene. Many times, players will have something they want to do, and getting feedback from them can help you get things moving again. Encourage a dialog with the players about scenes and character intentions. Since Mortal Coil is a character-based story, learning what the players are interested in next will help you keep things on track.

Example:

The scene is a bar, and Russell's character, the Roman god Pluto, has just gotten the better of his rival Jupiter in a tense conflict. Pluto and his friend have managed to get Jupiter so drunk he passes out at the back of the bar. Conflict over, the players congratulate each other. Bill, the GM, now immediately sets a new scene to move the action along: "OK. The next day, Pluto is in his office, and the door slams open. Stepping inside is none other than Jupiter, and he looks angry."

Keeping Things Exciting

This advice is good, but how do you keep a scene focused and interesting? There are some techniques that make this easier. Think about the books, movies, or TV shows you have seen. One thing all these media have in common is a focus on drama. You rarely see a scene that does not either reveal something about a character or move the story forward. Scenes in Mortal Coil serve a similar function.

One way to make a scene dramatic is to make sure it sets up a situation the characters cannot ignore. The situation should demand to be resolved, one way or another. As a GM, it isn't your job to have one specific resolution in mind. Let the players make their own decisions but don't let them weasel out of the tough choices. Some players will be happy to pursue scenes that create conflict and trauma for their character, and setting up a scene with inherent conflict will probably be enough for these players. Some players may be more passive and will need some assistance in finding the drama. When you set the scene, think about the potential conflicts the situation and other characters in the scene represent. If the players don't look for drama, start to escalate the tension within the scene. Pretty soon, you will find that the supporting characters in the scene will try something that the players are not willing to ignore.

The players already provide you with what you need to know about what is important in your story. Passions (page XX) are the key to interesting sessions. The passion of at least one character should be intimately involved in every scene in some way. Players choose passions for their characters, and these are the things within the game fiction that these characters care about. Aiming the scenes at these passions gives the game a kick, because the emotions and desires of the characters will be evoked as you play the scene out. Scenes get really interesting if more than one character's passions come up. Situations where a single character's passions pull him two different directions also create rich play, and scenes where the passions of more than one character pull in different directions create great drama. Try to get the players to choose between passions—which one is the most important to them?

Example:

Eckhardt is facing down a massive rattlesnake in a warehouse. The night watchman is gripped within its coils, paralyzed by fear. Eckhardt has the passion Duty: "I have to keep these people safe." and Jason begins to think about what actions he will take to rescue the watchman. Just then, Michelle then tells Krista, "As you creep along the catwalk above, you see Eckhardt

confronting the snake. A dark figure is up on the catwalk with you, seeming controlling the serpent. At that moment, he notices you, and turns his attention to you." Eckhardt also has the passion Fear: "Lucy will get killed." Jason now has to decide which passion to pursue. Follow his Duty and rescue the watchman, or follow his Fear and try to protect Lucy.

ADJUDICATING CONFLICT

An essential task for the GM is helping everyone make sense of conflict. The blind bidding system used in Mortal Coil can be confusing, and it is not always obvious what should happen when the bids are revealed. That's where you come in. As the GM, one of your most important tasks is guiding the conflict toward resolving goals so that it can end and the scene can move on. There are a few simple things to keep in mind to make the conflicts work really well.

Setting Goals for Supporting Characters

This is where you can really put the pressure on. As mentioned in character creation, each supporting character noted in a player character's passions gets its own sheet. These supporting characters are perfect for you to tie the player characters into the story. These supporting characters need to get involved with the player characters, and then draw them into conflicts. Villains at least should have an overall agenda that involves a character. A player character should be a necessary component for a villain to achieve what he ultimately wants. Don't complicate the villains, let them have one main agenda. If you stack on too many, it will start to get hard to remember what each one wants and needs.

Within a conflict itself, supporting characters need a goal. They will be taking actions to achieve this goal just like the player characters. This will help you choose actions for the supporting character, and gives the supporting character an understandable motivation. Announce the supporting character's goals to the group at the beginning of the conflict right along with the players. This way, players will have a better chance of anticipating the supporting character's actions and attempting to either counter or assist them. Make sure you note down these goals for your own reference, especially if you have several supporting characters involved in the scene.

Sometimes you will have a conflict with a villain along with a group of henchmen or other backup characters for the villain. In this situation, it's probably best for the henchmen not to have goals of their own, or have the goal "help the boss." A bunch of minor-league guys don't all need their own goal and it can get really confusing if you have a gang of six thugs, each trying to pursue a separate goal.

Example:

In the old gods game, Norin is the main antagonist. He hates the gods, and because of this, hates the bar where they meet. Bill decides that Norin's overall agenda is to destroy the bar. He can take actions to do this physically, by having his people undermine it, and also psychologically, by stirring conflicts between the gods and getting them to fight.

Determining Opposing Actions

Actions in a conflict seem a bit chaotic. As GM, your job is to make sense of all this. After actions are revealed, you need to look at each action, take into account the player's intent, and determine which actions are opposed. This will allow the actions to be resolved.

It may not always be particularly clear which actions are opposed to which other actions. Initially, let common sense be your guide. Players will declare things like, "My character is ducking behind the bar to avoid gunfire." Obviously, this is a defense against any other character firing a gun at the first character. Less obviously, it is also a defense against any other action that requires the target to be in the open. Think about the logical consequences of any given offensive or defensive action and match them accordingly.

Some actions, if successful, will mean that other actions cannot take place. If this is the case, these actions are by necessity opposed to the actions they block. The reason this is stated separately here is that these consequences are not always obvious. One character is about to attack another character, for example, and the second character has a Will action allocated to attempt to stare down the first. These may not seem opposed at first, but if the second character is successful, the consequence of success will be that the first character is intimidated and unable to attack. That means these actions are opposed, and the intimidate action is the defense. Make sure you think briefly about the consequences of success for each action on the table and oppose them to the actions they will block.

Example:

Pele has two action allocated: to grapple Norin and get him in a headlock, and to fend off any blows that Norin tries to throw. Norin has two actions as well: to duck out of Pele's reach, and to taunt all of the other gods about their cowardice and get them to join in the conflict. Bill matches Pele's grapple against Norin's duck, an obvious pair-up. Norin's other action is aimed outside the conflict at the other gods present, and since he is trying to get them to participate, this will effect the ultimate outcome of the conflict. Bill allows the grapple to be resolved first, since that has no effect on Norin's second action, then opposes Norin against the other gods.

Shaking Things Up

Sometimes players will start to get a bit complacent. Stacking all of your tokens in a single action can sometimes be a winning strategy, but this rapidly gets boring. Games are more fun if there isn't a surefire win condition. One way to combat this as a GM is to be a bit tricky with your supporting character bids in conflicts. Think about different ways that a supporting character could reach his goal. Sometimes, you can make a physical combat move in a conflict a player considers mental. You've got a really good chance of having your action go up against no defense, which is very bad for the defender and forces him to switch tokens for a loss. By the same token, sometimes you can make mental actions in a conflict a player may consider physical. Do the unexpected, try to keep the players on their toes. It's always better to have an action going up against no defense. When you have even one token for defense you are considerably better off. Make the players hedge their bets and avoid putting all their tokens in one basket.

Example:

Loki is confronting Jupiter, a powerful businessman, in the bar. Loki's goal in the conflict is to pick a fight with the other god, and so he stacks all but one of his chips in his Wits to taunt Jupiter. Bill knows that Eric likes to put all his eggs in one basket, so he allocates a defense and them creates another action, Jupiter trying to convince Loki to work for him. This is an unexpected turn of events and one that Eric is not prepared for, it has a high likelihood of success.

Players in a Rut

As we mentioned above, don't let players use the same strategy over and over. Players will often drive directly toward what their character is good at, time after time. If they do this, you should present conflicts that can only be won if they use non-optimal abilities. If

a player has built a scrapper, take him to court. His fighting ability won't help much if he'll just get sent back to jail for using it. If a player has a trickster, have a strong-willed villain take him on with physical force. A combination of mental defense and excellent physical attack power will keep the player on his toes.

Don't use these techniques to just punish a player, however. The goal of the game is to be fun and interesting. Move the conflict to an area where the character isn't the best in order to keep the game dramatic and exciting, and to make the player think hard about how to win.

Example:

Kat almost always tries to use Force to win conflicts, since that is her character's strongest faculty. Bill starts a conflict with Pele against Sesmu, the owner of the bar. He is angry that she keeps smashing the place up and he wants to ban her from the bar. Kat now has to think of what other resources she can use in this conflict, since Force is unlikely to help. If she attacks or threatens Sesmu with force, it just makes him more likely to throw her out.

USING MAGIC TOKENS

In Mortal Coil, everyone has a strong input in world-building thanks to the magic tokens. As GM, you have a significant pool of these tokens to build powers for your supporting characters, and to expand or limit player character powers as well. Your input into magic is a big part of the GM's role.

The chief use of the GM's magic tokens is to build powers for supporting characters. You have a cast of characters built from the theme document and the player characters' passions. Many of these supporting characters will have supernatural aptitudes. Use your tokens to define these abilities and create interesting supernatural effects.

You can also use your tokens to adjust the abilities of player characters. Although you get to set prices for player-introduced magical facts, your ability to limit these powers doesn't end there. You can also add caveats and details to the supernatural aptitudes held by players. Remember, when you use a fact to *limit* a supernatural aptitude, the price is an exception where the power is actually able to work despite the limit.

If you are aggressive with these powers, you can really mess with the players' abilities. Keep in mind that the players have even more power than you, in the end. The more you adjust their powers, the more they will use their tokens to mess with yours. Depending on the level of competitiveness your group is comfortable with, this adversarial approach can be really fun. Do be careful if it seems to upset the players, and the level of competition is something to discuss early and make sure that all of your players are comfortable with the amount of back-and-forth that will exist in your group's game.

Example:

Kat has created the fact that Volcano Goddesses are unaffected by heat. Later, the dwarfs have crafted a special weapon for use against Pele in revenge for the death of their king. Bill sacrifices a magic token to create the fact that the dwarfs can create a magical fire that will burn even volcano goddesses. The players get to set the price, some instance where the fact will not apply, but this fact is added to the theme document.

USING POWER TOKENS

As a GM, you also have a pool of power tokens. Your power tokens are there to make things challenging. The GM's power tokens are mostly used to add to actions taken by

supporting characters. As GM, you already have the ability to set scenes and introduce characters and non-magical facts to the world. That's an inherent part of your role. You also don't need to spend power tokens to improve characters. Your supporting characters are already pretty powerful, and you can adjust their ability if you think they would have improved over time. The remaining use of power tokens is within the conflict system, to replace other types of tokens there.

Often, you will find that your supporting characters are plenty powerful and can easily stand up to the player characters. In this case, you don't need to dip into your pool of power tokens. If your villain is being steamrolled, however, it may be appropriate to dip into your power token pool. Use the power tokens as a sort of pacing mechanism. If your supporting character is a bit weak, but you want to extend the conflict, use the power tokens to give her a bit of juice. If you've reached a final confrontation with a big and intimidating villain, and player characters have completely owned him, make him scary again by dropping some of your power tokens into the conflict.

Example:

Eckhardt is confronting the main villain in his game, and in the first round of conflict has pretty thoroughly dominated him. Michelle is not quite ready to have the climactic villain fold, so she uses some of her power tokens to bump up the villain's defenses, and increase his offense so that Eckhardt is now on the defensive. This moves the conflict to a second round, which suits Michelle's sense of drama much better.

APPENDIX: EXAMPLE CONFLICTS

Each of the rules in the book is accompanied by a couple of examples, but these are not really connected in a full conflict. To go a little further to help you understand the conflict system, here are eight extended conflict examples. There are a lot of different ways a conflict can fall out, and this appendix goes through them from the simplest scenario to the most complex.

A Simple One-Action Conflict between Two Characters

The most basic and common sort of conflict is a quick head-to-head between two characters. Michelle is the GM, and she has two players, Jason and Krista.

Jason's character Eckhardt has had it with the corrupt mine owner, and he gets a gun from his car's glove compartment and marches up to the mine owner's trailer. Krista's character Lucy steps in front of him.

Krista: Lucy says, "You're not going in there with that gun."

Jason: "Oh, yes, I am."

Michelle: OK. This is definitely a conflict. Jason, what's your goal?

Jason: I'm taking that gun with me when I go inside.

Michelle: Cool. Krista?

Krista: He's going to give me the gun.

Michelle: All right. That's a simple enough opposed set of goals. Allocate your tokens, and we'll see whether Eckhardt gets to keep his gun.

Both Jason and Krista allocate their tokens secretly. Jason is using his Will of 4, plus Cynic of 2, and puts all but one of his 7 action tokens in. Krista uses her Wits of 3, plus her Bureaucrat of 2, and puts all but one of her 6 action tokens in as well.

Michelle: Ready? OK, let's reveal. Jason, what's your action?

Jason: Eckhardt is a cynic, so he's pretty sure he's gonna need the gun. I'm using that, plus his will to get Lucy to step aside. Will 4 plus Cynic 2 plus 6 action tokens is 12.

Krista: Lucy is going to appeal to reason and try to talk Eckhardt out of this. She has a Wits of 3, plus her Bureaucrat of 2, and I put up 5 action tokens, too. My total is only 10.

Michelle: All right, that means Eckhardt is up by 2: a success. He gets to keep the gun. Jason, how does this go down?

Jason: Eckhardt says, "Get out of my way, Lucy. This guy has refused to budge, and two people are dead because of it. He's going to shut the mine down once and for all." Eckhardt glares into Lucy's eyes, his resolve is clear.

Krista: "Eckhardt, you're going to get arrested brandishing that thing. What if he has a gun, too? This can only end badly, you know that."

Jason: With a curt shake of his head, Eckhardt brushes past her. She knows she can't change his mind.

Krista: "Dammit!"

Michelle: I think Lucy's shaken by this. Spend an action token, Krista.

A One-Round Multiple Action Conflict between Two Characters

Now, let's get a bit more complicated. If two characters are in a conflict, they can try more than one tactic to get what they want.

In this scene, Michelle has the mine foreman, a new minor supporting character, confront Jason's character Eckhardt, who is trying to enter the mine.

Michelle: A mine foreman comes out as you rush up to the mine. "Hold it right there!"

Jason: This is a conflict. I'm not letting him stop me.

Michelle: OK. What's your goal in the conflict? The mine foreman wants you to turn around and go back down to the office.

Jason: I'm getting into that mine, and I don't have much time. I don't want him to delay me.

Michelle: Sounds good. These are opposed goals, only one of you can win. Let's allocate.

Michelle and Jason allocate secretly. Michelle decides the foreman is going to get rough with this strange character. She allocates 4 action tokens for the foreman to grab Eckhardt and give him the bum's rush, using Force 3 and his aptitude Redneck 2. Michelle figures Eckhardt might try to fight back, so she puts two action tokens in Grace 2 to dodge, again using Redneck 2.

Jason knows the foreman probably has the edge in a physical confrontation, so he decides to mix it up a bit. He doesn't want the foreman to get his hands on Eckhardt, so he allocates 3 tokens to defense, with Grace 2 and Government Agent 2. He then allocates another 3 to Will 4 and Government Agent 2, to show the foreman his gun and intimidate him into letting Eckhardt pass.

Michelle: Ready?

Jason: Ready. Let's reveal.

Michelle: The foreman is going to grab ahold of you, and give you the bum's rush out of here. "I don't think you heard me, buddy. This mine is off-limits!" That's the Force action. The Grace action is to defend against you fighting back.

Jason: Good thing I'm not fighting back, then. My Grace action here is to resist any physical assault, and the Will action is to show the guy my gun and get him to back down.

Michelle: Nice! I didn't see that coming. Let's resolve. Your Grace is definitely opposing the foreman's Force. I've got a total of 9: 4 action tokens plus Force 3 plus Redneck 2. I figure as a redneck, he knows how to throw down.

Jason: All right, that's fair. I'm using my Grace to resist, and I figure I've gotten in a few scraps as an agent. So, my total to resist is 7: 3 action tokens, plus Grace 2 and Policeman 2.

Michelle: Ooh, he beats you by 2. Here's what happens: the foreman rushes up to, saying, "This mine is off-limits, buddy!" and he grabs hold of your jacket, shoving you back down the hill. You're light on your feet, and you've been in some scraps before, so you resist, but he's got a good grip and is hustling you along.

Jason: Crap. Now the other action. He's got no defense against Will. After he grabs me, I pull out my gun. I'm not aiming it him, I'm just showing him I have it. "I'm more than you can handle, friend. Just step back, and we don't have a problem." I've got 10 in that action: 3 action tokens, plus Will 4 and Government Agent 2. I'm using the gun, too, so that gives me a +2, right?

Michelle: In this case it's a +1. A gun's purpose is to shoot people, and here you're just using it to intimidate. Guns can certainly be used for that purpose, though, so you do get a bonus. You're total is 10. He's resisting with Will only, and he's just got a 2. You beat him by 8 points, that's a spectacular success. As soon as the gun comes out, he lets go of your jacket and puts his hands in the air, stepping back and shaking his head. "I don't want any trouble, man. Take it easy."

Jason: Good. I sprint for the mine entrance.

A One-Round Multiple Action Conflict between Three Characters where One Is Helping

Sometimes in a one-on-one conflict a third character gets involved but doesn't have a goal of their own. Instead, they are helping one side or the other.

In this scene, Michelle's supporting character, Sal, a weasely informer, is trying to seize a letter from Jason's character Eckhardt. Krista's character Lucy will try to help Eckhardt.

Michelle: Sal says, "Give me the letter and I'll see to it that Mr. Wallace gets it."

Jason: "I think I'd rather give it to him in person."

Michelle: Sal sidles a bit closer than you'd like. "It's probably better if I take care of it."

Jason: Uncool. I'm going to put the letter back in my jacket pocket.

Michelle: I'm going to call this a conflict. Sal is lunging forward, trying to grab the letter. His goal is to run off with the letter.

Jason: Fine. I want to keep the letter, and get Sal to tell me who he's working for.

Michelle: Nice. Let's allocate.

Krista: Hang on. I'm right there. I'm not going to let Sal get away with grabbing the letter and running.

Michelle: OK. Do you have a goal?

Krista: No. I just want to help Eckhardt.

Michelle: Great. Everybody allocate.

Jason decides he's going to get physical, too. He allocates two action tokens in Force and Government Agent to grab hold of Sal, two in Grace and Government Agent to dodge Sal's blows, and two in Will and Government Agent to intimidate Sal into giving up his employer. Government Agent is doing serious duty here.

Krista decides to load all of her action tokens, a total of six, in Grace, to trip Sal when he goes for Jason, helping Jason's defense. She doesn't really have an aptitude that applies.

Michelle allocates two of Sal's action tokens in Force and Dirty Fighter to grab the envelope, and three tokens in Grace and Coward for Sal to run away.

Michelle: Everybody ready? Let's reveal. Sal is going to use his Force action here to shove into Eckhardt and grab that envelope away from him. The Grace is to beat feet after.

Krista: I'm using Grace here to trip Sal and make it easier for Eckhardt to defend himself against the grab.

Jason: I'm using Grace to avoid that grab, Force to seize Sal, and Will to intimidate him into giving up his boss.

Michelle: Cool. Let's start with Lucy, since she's helping and the outcome of her action will affect your totals, Jason.

Krista: I didn't really have an aptitude that applied, so I'm just using Grace. I put six action tokens in it, though, so that plus Grace 3 equals 9.

Michelle: You're trying to stop him from grabbing, and since you aren't using an aptitude at all, he definitely gets the +2 bonus for having a more applicable aptitude. His Force is only 2, and his Dirty Fighter is also 2, and he had two action tokens in there for a total of 6, plus 2 due to his aptitude being more appropriate, that's 8. Even with the disadvantage of having no aptitude you get a success. Eckhardt gets a +2 against Sal's grab action.

Krista: Good.

Michelle: OK, Eckhardt. Let's resolve the grab. Sal had a total of 6 against you.

Jason: Eckhardt's Grace is 2 and Government Agent is 2 and I put in two action tokens. That's 8, with Krista's +2.

Michelle: You beat him by 2, a complete success. Sal sidled forward and lunged at you, reaching for the envelope. You jerk your hand away, just as Lucy sticks her foot out to trip him, and he stumbles and misses the envelope. Seeing where this is going, he turns to flee. This is where we resolve your grab and his running action.

Jason: My Force is 1, and Government Agent again at 2, plus two action tokens. That's 5 for the grab.

Michelle: Sal's Grace is 3, and his Coward aptitude is 1, and he put 3 tokens in to run for it. His total is also 7. He's going to get away.

Jason: Do I still get my Will action?

Michelle: Yep, this is all happening simultaneously. Eckhardt tries to grab his jacket by the collar, but Sal ducks under the grab and is at the door.

Jason: I put my cop face on and shout, "Sal! Who sent you, Sal! If I don't find out, I'm coming for you!" My Will is 4, and Government Agent is 2, along with two more action tokens is a total of 8.

Michelle: Yeah, and Sal's got no defense against that. He shrieks as he runs, and squeals, "You gotta believe me, Eckhardt, I don't want any trouble with you! It was Jakkot. He's the one who wants the letter!" Of course, he doesn't stop, and he belts off carrying the letter with him, straight to Jakkot no doubt.

A One-Round Multiple Action Conflict between Three Characters

Up to now, all of the conflicts we've been looking at have been between two characters. Sometimes, more characters get involved, and that definitely makes things a bit more

complicated. Here's a one-round conflict between three characters, all with goals of their own.

This time, Bill is the GM, with Eric, Russell, Michael and Kat as players in a different game. There are three characters involved in this conflict: Kat's character Pele, Eric's character Loki, and the supporting character Norin portrayed by Bill. Loki is attempting to hit on Pele when Norin inserts himself into the situation.

Eric: Loki walks up to the bar and seats himself by Pele.

Kat: Pele barely glances up. She's sulking and nursing a beer.

Eric: Loki casually begins to converse with Pele. Once he's got her attention, he's going to pour on the charm. He's really hitting on her.

Kat: Loki? Oh, please. Pele's not interested.

Bill: That sounds like a conflict. I must inform you both, Norin is in the back of the bar with a few of his dwarf thugs, and when he sees something going on he's definitely going to butt in.

Eric: Yeah, it's a conflict. I'm confident Loki's charms will win the day.

Kat: I don't know. Norin's sure to throw some complications in the works.

Bill: All right, what's everyone's goal?

Eric: Pele is definitely leaving with me tonight. It may not mean anything, but it's happening.

Kat: Norin's getting involved? I don't particularly care about Loki's flirting. Pele's going to try to use Loki's attraction to her advantage, and get a favor out of him to go after Norin.

Bill: Cool. And Norin's goal is to get Loki to humiliate Pele.

Eric allocates Wits and Trickster God plus two action tokens for charming jokes directed at Pele, and Will and Stubborn Cuss plus six action tokens to resist the influences of both his opponents.

Kat decides to use her Will plus Ruthless Brawler plus two action tokens to intimidate Loki into joining her against Norin. For defense, she uses her Wits plus Barfly plus five action tokens to use her drunken obtuseness to deflect any remarks or verbal attacks.

Bill has Norin use Wits plus Slick Salesman and three action tokens to schmooze Loki into turning on Pele, and he will use Will plus Mean Little Cuss and four more action tokens to deflect any incoming attacks with sheer rudeness.

Bill: Are we all ready?

Kat: Yep.

Eric: Ready.

Bill: OK, let's reveal. Norin is a slick salesman, so he's going to turn his used-car charm on Loki and sell him on joining forces against Pele. This other action is his resistance, he's just going to use is ill temper to rebuff any social attacks.

Eric: Loki's turning on the charm with his Wits action here, he's going to clown a bit and ingratiate himself with Pele. The Will is to resist both Pele and Norin.

Kat: Pele is using her Will here to browbeat Loki into going after Norin. The Wits is to rebuff Loki's flirting with general drunken cluelessness, I'll leave it up to you to decide if it's real or feigned.

Bill: Sounds good. Loki, your defensive action is going against both Pele and Norin, and your flirting action is going up against Pele's defense. Let's resolve the other two's attempts to sway you first.

Eric: Sounds good. My Will is only a 2, but I am a Stubborn Cuss, and that's 3. I put in six tokens on this, I really don't want to be jerked around here. My total for defense is 11.

Bill: Here's what Norin's got—Wits of 5, and Slick Salesman of 4, plus the three action tokens. That's 12. That's a success. Looks like he's got you beat. Kat?

Kat: I've got a Will of 5, and I'm using my reputation as a Ruthless Brawler to add to my intimidation, that's a 4. I put two action tokens in there, so the total is 11. That's a tie with Eric.

Bill: Partial success for both. So, Norin will sway you, and Pele will partially scare you. How about your action against Pele?

Eric: My Will is 5, and I am really good Trickster God, that's also 5. I put two tokens in there for a total of 12.

Kat: My Wits are only 2, and I'm using Barfly, also at 2. I put in five tokens, so my total is 9.

Bill: Ooh, so that's a success for Loki. Here's how I see it going down. Pele is going to intimidate Loki, but he's so stubborn he views it as a challenge despite some lingering misgivings about having his arms broken. Norin convinces Loki to humiliate Pele, which Loki will somehow manage to pull of even while convincing her to leave with him.

Eric: I know how that's going to happen, and I predict an arm-breaking or two in my future.

Bill: Cool. Let's play it out.

Eric: All right. So, Loki turns to Pele at the bar and starts with the jokes. He's pouring on the charm, trying his best to dazzle her. A lot of the jokes will be at my own expense, that ought to create a bit of sympathy.

Kat: Pele starts to laugh despite herself. She's warming up to him, certainly.

Bill: Here's how I see Norin coming in. He's been watching the two of you as you continue to flirt for the last hour or so, and when Loki steps to the men's he follows him in. He'll turn to you and say, "You're making some good progress in there, buddy," and flash a greasy grin.

Eric: "Yeah, I think so." I'll smile, more to myself than anything.

Bill: "Listen, pal, I can make it worth your while if you do me a little favor. I've got a little something, a nice Rheingold ring, see. Pele has been seriously pissing me off. You make her look bad, and the ring's yours."

Eric: "Rheingold, huh? That's pretty nice." He thinks about it, a bit too long for Norin's liking.

Bill: "Lemme sweeten the deal," he says. "You can commission my boys for any one item. If you provide the materials, we'll provide the labor. Pele's just gotta pay, right?"

Eric: "You've got a deal." Then I go back out to Pele and try to convince her to head back to her place.

Kat: OK, Pele saw Norin go in there and she's suspicious. When Loki comes back out, she seems less receptive to his jokes. She's gonna let him take her hand, and then put the squeeze on him. She hisses in his ear, "Norin's a little bastard, and I saw he followed you into the can. You're gonna help me see that he gets his, right?"

Eric: Loki's grinning through teeth gritted in pain, and he'll answer, "Yeah, baby, just like you say." He's trying to cover as she lets go, but the relief is clear on his face. He's starting to have some doubts about his deal with Norin.

Bill: So you and Pele end up leaving together.

Eric: Yep, and some nasty rumors are going to start up tomorrow, definitely started by Loki.

Kat: Man, are you in trouble. Pele's going to come looking for you the next night.

A Multiple Round Conflict between Two Characters (with Desperate Reaction)

Now we get down to it: the hardest part of the conflict system. What happens when neither character has achieved his goal when all the actions are worked out? That's when you have multiple action rounds.

Also, in a previous conflict, Jason's character devastated the mine foreman because he hadn't anticipated Jason's tactic. The mine foreman gave up and stepped back, because Michelle didn't think continuing the conflict was worth it. However, if something like this happens, there is another option to get out of terrible loss, and that is desperate reaction. This conflict also includes a desperate reaction.

In this scene, Krista's character Lucy is ambushed by the dangerous gunman, and she has to defend herself.

Michelle: As you round the corner, you see the cold-eyed gunman that's been dogging you and Eckhardt this whole time. His pistol is out and already aimed at you. You're clearly in a spot of trouble.

Lucy: OK. My goal is the get the gunman out of the picture, once and for all.

Michelle: Great. The gunman's goal is to put you in a shallow grave.

Lucy: High stakes. All right, let's go.

Krista knows that the gunman is quite good at what he does, and if she doesn't do something pretty drastic Lucy is going to get plugged. She contemplates how to succeed in this situation, and decides on two actions: First, she will use her Grace and Government Agent to dodge through a nearby doorway, and second she wants to use her Wits and Government Agent again to get the drop on the gunman when he follows her through. She allocates one token to the dodge, and four in the ambush.

Michelle is pretty confident she can get Lucy with a gunshot using Grace and Gunman, and she also takes an action with Will and Cold-Eyed Killer, to defend against any sweet words Lucy may try to use to convince him to let her go. Michelle assigns three action tokens to each.

Michelle: Ready?

Krista: Yes. I have two actions. For the first, I'm going to dodge back through the door to avoid being shot. The second action is to ambush the gunman when he tries to follow me through.

Michelle: OK, I have a Will action here for defense against persuasion, so that's no good against your attack. My other action is to shoot, and that is definitely directly compared to your dodge action. Let's resolve the shot first.

Krista: OK. My dodge is using Grace, that's 3, and Government Agent for 2. I assume training for agents includes situations like this. I also have one token allocated here, for a total of 6.

Michelle: The gunman has a Grace of 2 and Gunman of 4, plus three action tokens. That's a 9, beating you by 3. You're going to take a serious wound from that.

Krista: That's OK, actually. I'll take the hit to get the drop on him. My other action is my Wits, that's 3, plus Government Agent again, that's 2, and 4 action tokens. That's 9.

Michelle: What exactly are you doing as he come through the door?

Krista: I'm tripping him and then knocking him on the head with my pistol butt.

Michelle: Since he had no defense against this, he gets only passive defense. That's just one of his faculties. Sounds like he can use his toughness to resist, that's Force. That's 4. You've got him beat by 5, so if you want you can kill or maim him.

Krista: I just want to knock him out.

Michelle: I'm not so happy with how this turned out. I'm going to do a desperate reaction so you don't get such a devastating win.

Krista: Damn. It was such a good plan. At least now I won't get shot.

Michelle: For him to use an aptitude, he needs to commit two tokens to the defensive action in order to add in Gunman. I've got one in reserve, so I have to use that one, and since I don't have another held back, I can pull one out of his other action. That puts his defense at 10: Force 4 plus Gunman 4 plus the 2 action tokens. Your ambush won't work. However, he only beats you by one in the shooting action, so you only suffer a light wound. Of course, now neither of you has achieved your goal, so we'll move on to another round.

Krista: Not so fast. I'm going to sacrifice two power tokens for my ambush action. That puts me up at 11, beating him by one. Not the total success I was hoping for, but now I can wound him at least.

Michelle: True. And, because of his desperate reaction, he's all in. That will make him spend two action tokens this round. You have to spend one because of your light injury.

Krista: And now I've got a bit of an edge.

Michelle: Yep. We do need another round, still. Although you are both wounded, neither of you has achieved your goal.

Krista moves an action token into the spent column. She now has five total tokens, and she decides to go all-in in an effort to end the conflict. She takes one action to stick her gun in the gunman's back to try to force him to surrender to her. She's using her Will for this, plus her Government Agent. She also decides to use her Wits and Investigator to fast talk the gunman into revealing who his boss is. She puts two action tokens in the Wits action, and three in the intimidation action. She's not sure the intimidate will be

enough, so she decides to call on one of her passions as well. She puts a passion token on the stack, invoking her Fear 2: Eckhardt will think I'm not up to the task.

Michelle knows the gunman wants to end this conflict quick. It's turned out much harder than he expected, and he's down to an action pool of five now, too. She writes another Grace plus Gunman action to shoot Lucy, and assigns two action tokens to that. For defense, she is using Force plus Cold-Eyed Killer to resist physical harm. She puts two action tokens in that, too.

Michelle: Ready to reveal?

Krista: Ready. My first action is to stick my gun in his back and growl, "Put down your weapon and surrender." The second is to try to trick him into revealing his boss.

Michelle: Nice side bet. OK, again, he's got no defense for your second action. His defense was Force for resisting physical attacks and you've got all social stuff going on. His first action is to wheel and pump you full of lead, though. I think that matches up to your demand for surrender. He can't shoot you if he's intimidated into giving up.

Krista: Excellent. That's how I was hoping it would turn out.

Michelle: Let's resolve the opposed action first. You've got a passion token there?

Krista: Yeah, my fear of Eckhardt's disapproval. I've got to prove I can handle this. That's worth 2, plus my Will of 2, and my Government Agent 2. I've also got 3 action tokens in here, for a total of 9.

Michelle: OK, the gunman is again using Grace, that's 2, plus Gunman, that's 4, and he's got two action tokens in here, that comes to 8. You've got him beat, with a regular success. I'll say he drops his gun and raises his arms.

Krista: Yes! As I check him for additional weapons, I casually say, "I bet you thought this would be easier, right? He's gonna be angry at you." That's for my second action to get him to slip something. Investigator 3 plus Wits 3 plus 2 action tokens, that's 8.

Michelle: That's another passive defense for him. I made some bad bets this conflict. His Wits is only 1, so you beat him by 7. He's gonna sing like a bird, and won't even realize he's doing it. You can trick him into thinking you know everything already.

A Multiple Round Conflict between Three Characters

Sometimes a multi-round conflict can involve more than one character. Here's an example of a slightly more complicated multiple round conflict.

In this scene, Jason's character Eckhardt and Krista's character Lucy confront the frontier-era vampire they have been stalking. They are in an abandoned mine. Michelle is the GM for this group.

Michelle: You come to the end of the tunnel. Standing in the shadows you see a dusty figure in a long coat and cowboy hat. Around his feet writhe about 30 rattlesnakes.

Jason: Oh, crap. We've got to get this guy fast, before he can use those rattlesnakes on us.

Krista: Yeah, let's get him.

Michelle: All right, his goal is to feed on both of you.

Krista: My goal is to destroy the vampire.

Jason: Me too.

Michelle: OK, let's allocate actions.

Jason decides to try to take care of the snakes, and possibly give the investigators a weapon against the vampire. He is going to throw down some kerosene and set it alight between the snakes and Eckhardt and Lucy. For this, he's using Grace and Supernatural Investigator, and three action tokens. For his second action, he's going to shout some advice to Lucy to help with her action. This will be using Wits and Mentor, along with three more action tokens.

Krista wants to take the vampire down, so she's going to tackle him and try to stake his heart. This will use Force and Government Agent, plus four action tokens. She also wants to avoid getting hurt, so she is going to dodge any snakes or vampire bites with Grace plus Government Agent. She commits only one action token to this.

Michelle knows they are going to be aggressive. She has the vampire control the snakes and get them to attack the two investigators. This will use Will plus Vampire, and she puts four action tokens behind it. The vampire will also try to hold the investigators off with his gun until the snakes take care of them. He's using Grace plus Pistolero for that, along with two action tokens.

Michelle: Everyone ready?

Krista: Let's go.

Michelle: The vampire has got a Will action to control the snakes, and this Grace is to move out of the way and cover you with his gun.

Jason: I'm helping Lucy with this Wits action, and the Grace is to knock over one of the kerosene containers and set it alight. I'm sacrificing a power token to say that there are some old kerosene containers down here, left over from when the miners used kerosene to light their lamps.

Michelle: Sounds fair.

Krista: I'm using Force to leap at the vampire and tackle him, so I can stake him. I'm using Grace to avoid damage.

Michelle: Jason, the kerosene is your defense. Both of your defensive actions will go against the vampire's rattlesnake attack. The vampire's defense goes against your attack, Krista, and since Jason's trying to help you, we'll resolve his action first.

Jason: I'm using Wits 4 plus Mentor 2, and I've got 3 action tokens here. That's 9. What's that up against?

Michelle: The vampire didn't defend against you shouting plans, so just passive Wits. That's 3, so you beat him by 6. Lucy gets a +2.

Jason: I shout at Lucy, "Knock him into the fire!" Then I set the kerosene off before the snakes can reach us.

Michelle: Let's resolve the fire vs. snakes next. He's got Will 4 plus Vampire 4, along with 4 action tokens. That's 12 on the attacking snakes.

Jason: I had Grace 2, Supernatural Investigator 4, and 3 action tokens. That's 9. He beat me by 3.

Michelle: You grab the kerosene and pour it on the floor, that drop your lighter on it. It goes up with a whoosh, but by the time you got it down, the snakes had already

surrounded you and Lucy. One strikes your leg, you will take a serious wound from that. Krista, what was your defense?

Krista: I had Grace 3 plus Government Agent 2 and just one action token. That's 6.

Michelle: Oh my. He beats you by six, that's serious. You are going to be bitten multiple times. I'm gonna rule you maimed.

Krista: That means I permanently lose a point from one of my faculties, right?

Michelle: Yep.

Krista: Let's see if I can do anything to him. My tackle is Force 2, Government Agent 2, and 4 action tokens. That's 8, plus 2 from Eckhardt's help. 10.

Michelle: His defense is Grace 3, Pistolero 4, and 2 action tokens. That's 9. You beat him by 1.

Krista: I'm going to take the hit, and I want to bump up what I do to him. I'm spending two power tokens to beat him by 3 and do a serious injury. I leap at him and knock him in the fire, at least partially.

Michelle: OK, you do. Which faculty are you reducing?

Krista: Grace. It's now a 2.

Michelle: Well, everyone has been harmed, fairly seriously. The vampire is on fire, Eckhardt is beating off snakes, and Lucy is wrestling with the vampire next to the blazing kerosene. Still, no one has achieved their goal. We go another round.

Jason: We need to work together to take this guy down.

Krista: We'd better both try to hurt him.

Michelle: OK, everyone allocate actions.

Jason decides to use his Wits for quick thinking along with Supernatural Investigator and pour some more kerosene directly on the vampire. He puts four action tokens behind that, and adds his passion Fear 2: Lucy will get killed. He's down two tokens from his pool, so he's only got one left. He decides to go all in and use that one for defense, Grace and Government Agent to dodge any attack.

Krista is also looking to deal out some serious damage. Wits is her highest score now, so she uses that plus Government Agent to trick the vampire into rolling into the fire as they grapple. She puts four action tokens behind that. She also wants to defend herself, and will use Grace plus Government Agent to avoid a physical attack. She puts one action token there.

Michelle knows that the pair of them can probably overpower the vampire, so she decides to lay out some serious hurt. She goes with Grace and Pistolero to have the vampire shoot Lucy, and puts four action tokens there. She also uses Will and Vampire to resist the damage, with one action token, making the vampire all-in since he is down two tokens.

Michelle: Ready?

Jason: Let's do it.

Michelle: OK, the vampire is trying to plug Lucy. That's the Grace action. He's using his Will to power through the pain for defense.

Krista: Lucy is grappling with the vampire, and is going to trick him into thinking he's got the upper hand, then roll him into the fire. That's Wits. She's using Grace here to avoid the gunshot.

Jason: Eckhardt is thinking quickly, that's Wits, and pouring more kerosene directly on the vampire. He's using Grace to defend, but it looks like he doesn't need it.

Michelle: Yeah, the vampire is no longer controlling the snakes, so they are trying to flee the fire. Looks like the vampire's attack goes against Lucy's defense, and both of your attacks go against the vampire's defense. Simple! Let's resolve the vampire's assault first. He's got Grace 3 and Pistolero 4 plus 4 action tokens. That's 11.

Krista: Dang. I've got Grace 2 plus Government Agent 2 and one action token. That's only 5.

Michelle: Well, he is trying to kill you. He's got you beat by 6, that's enough.

Krista: We aren't planning on having another session, so I'm cool with it. This is a nice way to go out.

Jason: Oh, man. This is going to mess Eckhardt up. He's using his passion Fear of Lucy getting killed.

Krista: Aww.

Michelle: Let's resolve Eckhardt, then. The vampire's defense is Will 4 plus Vampire 4 plus one token, that's 9.

Jason: He's tough. I've got Wits 4, Supernatural Investigator 4, and 4 action tokens. My passion is rank 2, so that's 14.

Michelle: That beats him by 5, that's enough for the kill. Krista, you still want to resolve?

Krista: Yeah, I want to see if I was able to do anything to him before I got plugged. I had Wits 4, plus Government Agent 2, and 4 action tokens. That's 10.

Michelle: Against his 9, so you do succeed, but it's just a light wound. Lucy is rolling around with the vampire, and she manages to roll him into the fire but it just singes him through his coat. He pulls out his Peacemaker and shoves up against Lucy's chest. Eckhardt, seeing that, desperately hurls kerosene down on the vampire. He bursts into flame, but a shot rings out at the same time and Lucy falls back limp.

Jason: No! I drag her out of the fire and put it out.

Michelle: The vampire continues to incinerate, shrieking and writhing behind you. It's too late. Lucy is dead.

A Huge Complicated Multiple Round Free-for-All between Six Characters

All right, now let's stick this all in a blender and hit "frappé." This is a multi-round conflict involving six different characters, all with their own goals in the conflict. This is by far the most difficult type of conflict to run in Mortal Coil, but it will probably happen at some point.

In this scene, Norin's gang and Pele and her fellow gods have a final showdown. All four players are involved: Kat with Pele, Eric with Loki, Russell with Pluto, and Michael with Sedna. Bill is portraying Norin and his gang of dwarfs. Bill has decided that the gang will be treated like a single character.

Bill: Norin stands by the door, his arms crossed, and does he look pissed.

Kat: That's it. I'm taking him down.

Bill: As you approach, from the shadows, under the tables, and through the door, a huge stream of dwarfs appears, all standing behind Norin and muttering threateningly. Norin shrieks, "I've had it with all of you! Take em down, boys. And we'll do for this crappy bar, too." Looks like you all have to defend yourselves. Norin's goal is to destroy the bar, and his boys' goal is to back Norin up.

Kat: I'm gonna kill Norin.

Russell: I'm going to make sure Pele doesn't kill Norin.

Michael: I'm defending the bar. I want to throw all these dwarfs out of it.

Eric: I'm not keen on the bar getting destroyed. I'll be helping Sedna throw the dwarfs out.

Bill: Sounds good. Let's allocate a first round of actions. Everyone can treat Norin's gang of dwarfs like a single character.

Kat thinks a quick direct assault is the best strategy. She knows Pluto is working against her, but also decides to rely on Michael and Eric to keep the other dwarfs off her back. She allocates five action tokens to Force and Ruthless Brawler to leap on Norin, and three tokens to Will and Ruthless Brawler to shrug off any blows that land on her.

Russell knows that Pele is a really tough fighter, so he decides to do something besides physical conflict to help Norin. He is going to use his God of the Underworld to summon up spirits of the dead to block Pele from reaching Norin. He uses his Will along with six action tokens for this. He's not so worried about attack, but he does allocate one action token in Grace to avoid any physical harm.

Michael doesn't really care about the Pele/Norin conflict, he just wants to stop the dwarfs from wrecking the bar. He decides to take a barstool and start laying into them, he uses Force and Truck Driver for that. For defense, he plans to power through and uses Will and Truck Driver again. He puts four action tokens in the first action and three in the second.

Eric decides to use his Wits and Trickster God to neutralize the gang of dwarfs. His action is to trick them into thinking he's on their side, and then lead them out the back door and lock them out. He thinks he might get hit, so he uses Grace and Barroom Brawler to avoid that. He allocates one token to defense, and six more to the trick.

Bill has to try to anticipate and defend against actions from all four players, so he's got his work cut out for him. For Norin, he plans on using Wits plus Leader to direct his dwarfs to the areas of the bar most vulnerable to attack. He plans to collapse the whole place this way. To defend himself, he is going to use Will plus Mean Little Cuss to block physical attacks. He allocates three tokens to the attack on the bar, and four to defending himself.

For the dwarfs, Bill decides they will defend themselves as well, using Will plus Tough Guys and two action tokens. They will also try to help Norin tear down the bar, using Craftsman and Force. They put four action tokens toward this.

Bill: Are we all ready?

All: Ready.

Bill: OK, let's reveal. Let's go over all the actions, I've got a lot to coordinate here. I'll start with Kat.

Kat: My Force action here is to leap on Norin, and I'm using Will to resist damage.

Russell: I'm next, I guess. This Will action token is to summon up spirits of the dead to block Pele. I've got Grace in case I'm attacked.

Michael: I'm just laying into the dwarfs here with Force. I'm using Will to shrug off their blows.

Eric: I'm taking another route. I'm using Wits to trick the dwarfs into leaving the bar by the back door, and then I'll lock them out. Grace is in case someone attacks me.

Bill: Interesting. This is Norin, here. He's using Wits to direct his dwarfs in bar destruction. He's also using Will for defense. The dwarfs, here, are using Will for physical defense, and Force to destroy the bar. Since the dwarfs aren't directly attacking any person, I don't have to worry about any of your defenses. Let's match some actions though.

Bill: Russell, your action will block Pele, so that's first. It's going up against her attack action. If you aren't blocked, Kat, your attack will match to Norin's defense. Michael, your attack goes against the dwarf's defense. Eric, I'm actually treating your action as a counter to Norin's directions. The dwarfs can be considered to be helping Norin, so if they can succeed, he gets a +2 on bar destruction. Let's start with Russell and Kat.

Russell: Well, I've got a Will of 5, God of the Underworld at 5, and 6 action tokens here. That's 16. I'm spending a magic token to activate God of the Underworld, and we already established I can summon spirits of the dead earlier, so long as I am not under the open sky. The bar definitely counts.

Kat: I'm using Force 5, Ruthless Brawler 4, and 5 action tokens on this one. I think Ruthless Brawler is more specific to this situation than God of the Underworld, though.

Bill: I agree. That's +2 for you.

Kat: With the +2, my total is 16.

Bill: Tied! Well, that means you both get a partial success. I'm going to say that means that Pluto can't quite stop you, but the spirits rising up get in your way in hinder your attack. You still get to make one, though. Norin just gets a +2 on his defense.

Kat: Sounds fair.

Russell: Sorry, Norin.

Bill: Let's get this smackdown out of the way next. You're Ruthless Brawler aptitude is more specific than Mean Little Cuss, which is what Norin's using to defend, so we'll keep your total at 16. His Will is 4, Mean Little Cuss is 3, and he put 4 tokens in there. He also gets that +2 from Pluto's help. That 13. You beat him by 3, a bad result for him. That's a serious wound.

Kat: Yes!

Bill: Not so fast. This is the final encounter of the night, so I don't think it's over that quickly. I've got some power tokens left here. I'm going to drop 4 on Norin. That puts him up at 17, so he can avoid your blow.

Kat: Oh, I'll get him next round.

Bill: Yeah, he won't be able to avoid you forever. OK, now for the other dwarfs! Eric, your trickery is directly opposing Norin's leadership. If you win in this contest, I don't think they will even get to the part where they start tearing down the bar. Let's resolve that.

Eric: Cool. I'm using Wits, a 5, plus Trickster God, also 5, and I threw in 6 tokens. That's 16.

Bill: Damn. Norin's got a Wits of 5, Leader at 4, and he's using 3 tokens. That's just 12. You get a complete success. Sorry, Michael, your attacks are basically moot.

Eric: He can still crack some heads as I'm leading them out, right?

Bill: Sure. We'll resolve that in a sec. The dwarfs' action was support for Norin, so they won't get that action.

Michael: I had Force of 4, plus Truck Driver 4, and 4 action tokens. That's 12.

Bill: The dwarfs had a defense of Will, 4, plus Tough Guys, 4, and 2 tokens. They are at 10. You'll get a few on the way out, and then Loki's trick takes care of the rest. That will leave Norin all alone for the next action.

Eric: Cool. As Norin starts to give the dwarfs directions, I pretend I'm on his side. I'll shout, "C'mon! I know where the main supports are! Follow me!" and rush to the back door. As they crowd out the door, I'll slam and lock it behind them.

Michael: A couple take their picks to the bar as they go, and I smash them down with a barstool.

Bill: Meanwhile, Pele claws her way through the dead spirits toward Norin. His eyes grow wide with fear as she approaches far more rapidly than he's comfortable with, and he gets distracted from Loki's trickery. She grabs his shirt, and seems about to pound him into the ground like a railroad spike when he stumbles over a fallen chair as he backpedals. His shirt rips and falls to the ground. Pele's fist pounds into the fallen chair, and it shatters into splinters, and her fist continues, driving a good four inches through the wooden floor. Next round!

Michael and Eric both decide to sit out the rest of the fight. They both already got what they wanted.

Russell knows Norin is doomed without his help, so he decides to get Norin out of here entirely. He's going to create a new power for the God of the Underworld to open a crack in the earth and swallow Norin up. He uses his Will plus God of the Underworld for this, and drops a full seven action tokens in this.

Kat wants to finish Norin. She uses Ruthless Brawler for both actions, and uses Will for defense and Force to attack. She goes all-in, allocating six to the attack and two for defense.

Norin's dwarf gang is out of the picture, so Bill doesn't make any actions for them. Norin knows he's in serious trouble, so he goes all-in as well. He's using Mean Little Cuss for combat, and he'll attack by biting her knee, using Force, and he'll use Will to defend. He puts four tokens in each action.

Bill: Are we ready?

Kat: Yep. I'm all-in, using Force to cream this guy, and Will to defend against attacks.

Michael: I'm not taking any actions this round. I got what I wanted.

Eric: Me, too.

Russell: I'm creating a new fact. Gods of the Underworld can open cracks in the earth and swallow people up. I'm going to swallow up Norin, so Pele can't kill him. That's my only action.

Bill: Cool. The price on this ability is that you don't know where the person comes back out, nor can you control it.

Russell: Sounds fair.

Bill: OK, last is Norin. He's going on the offensive, and he's going all-in too. He's using Force to bite Pele, and Will to defend. I think Russell's action needs to be resolved first, though. If he's successful, Norin's out of the conflict and Pele can't reach him. I think this is going up against Pele's hit. If you can beat that, you get the earth to swallow Norin before her blow lands. Otherwise, it will happen after.

Kat: Pele has a Force of 5, Ruthless Brawler at 4, and 6 tokens. That's 15.

Russell: I'm using Will, 5, plus God of the Underworld, 5, and 7 action tokens. That's 16.

Bill: You beat her by 1. That's barely a success, but it's still a success. Pele draws back her fist for another massive blow, while Norin snarls and leaps at her. As she swings down, a fissure opens in the earth and Norin gets drops in, looking very surprised. The crack snaps shut again, just as Pele's massive blow slams into the ground. The whole building shakes.

Kat: Pele stands up, her fist glowing red and and smoking like it's on fire. She turns toward Pluto, rage written all over her face. She starts toward him, lifting her fist against him this time.

Russell: Uh-oh. Pluto backs up, raising his arms to calm her. "Hang on a minute, Pele."

Bill: That sounds like a new conflict.

APPENDIX: SAMPLE CHARACTERS

Here are all of the characters used in the examples above with all of their faculties, aptitudes, and passions defined. Some of the supporting characters aren't fully fleshed out, because their passions never came up in play and were thus never defined.

Eckhardt: Jason's character.

Force: 1	Supernatural Investigator: 4	Duty: I have to keep people safe. – 1
Grace: 2	Government Agent: 2	Fear: Lucy will get killed. – 2
Will: 4	Mentor: 2	Hate: Those damn bureaucrats. - 2
Wits: 4	Cynic: 2	
Action Pool: 7		Passion Pool: 3

Lucy: Krista's character.

Force: 2	Government Agent: 2	Fear: Eckhardt will think I'm not up to the
Grace: 3	Investigator: 3	task. – 2
Will: 2	Bureaucrat: 2	Duty: We're the only thing between citizens
Wits: 3		and the dark. – 3
Action Pool: 6		Passion Pool: 2

Gunman: Michelle's unnamed supporting character.

Force: 4	Gunman: 4	Hate: Cops. – 2
Grace: 2	Cold-Eyed Killer: 4	
Will: 2	Aptitude: 1	
Wits: 1		
Action Pool: 7		

Vampire: Another of Michelle's supporting characters.

Force: 3	Vampire: 4
Grace: 3	Pistolero: 4
Will: 4	Horseman: 2
Wits: 3	
Action Pool: 7	

Pele: Kat's character.

Force: 5	Volcano Goddess: 5	Love: I'm secretly crushing on Pluto. – 2
Grace: 3	Barfly: 2	Love: I like to lose control. – 1
Will: 5	Ruthless Brawler: 4	Hate: Norin always ruins everything. - 2
Wits: 2	Dancer: 4	
Action Pool: 8		Passion Pool: 3

Loki: Eric's character.

Force: 4	Trickster God: 5	Love: I can't help making trouble. - 3
Grace: 4	Stubborn Cuss: 3	Fear: I'm not the best trickster. - 1
Will: 2	Shape Shifter: 3	Hate: Norin is a worthless jerk. - 1
Wits: 5	Fool: 3	
Action Pool: 8	Barroom Brawler: 1	Passion Pool: 3

Pluto: Russell's character.

Force: 2	Scam Artist: 5	Love: I still love Proserpine. – 3
Grace: 3	God of the Underworld: 5	Hate: My brother for his success. – 2

Will: 5	Bookie: 3	
Wits: 5	Lover: 2	
Action Pool: 8		Passion Pool: 2

Sedna: Michael's character.

Force: 4	Truck Driver: 4	Hate: I feel like I want to kill liars. – 2
Grace: 3	Sea Goddess: 5	Duty: This bar needs to always be here. – 2
Will: 5	Cruel-hearted Bitch: 4	Love: All of my children. - 1
Wits: 3	Mother: 2	
Action Pool: 8		Passion Pool: 3

Norin: Bill's supporting character.

Force: 4	Leader: 4	Hate: Those hoity-toity gods. – 3
Grace: 2	Craftsman: 4	Duty: I've got to help my own people. – 2
Will: 4	Mean Little Cuss: 3	
Wits: 5	Slick Salesman: 4	
Action Pool: 8		Passion Pool: 2

Norin's Boys: A gang of supporting characters.

Force: 4	Tough Guys: 4
Grace: 4	Craftsman: 4
Will: 4	Grouch: 2
Wits: 3	
Action Pool: 7	