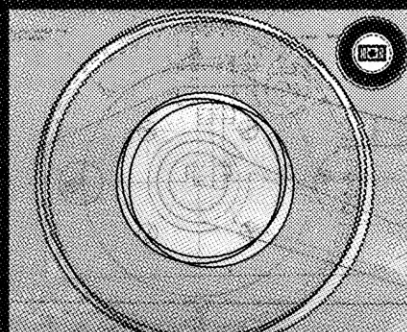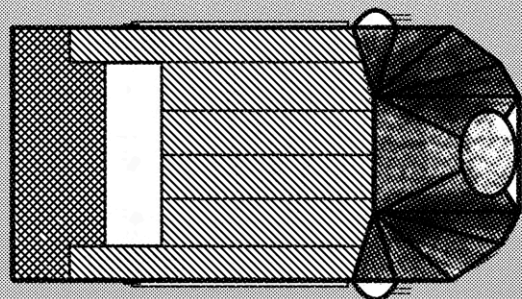# RETROGRADE

CONDENSED RULES

A Retrofuturist Letterpress RPG

Designed, Written, and Illustrated by
Nathaniel Klein

RETROGRADE

Condensed Rules

A Retrofuturist Letterpress RPG

Designed, Written and Illustrated by Nathaniel Klein

Edited by Smaranda Solomon

Printed and Bound by Little Emerald Bindery in the USA
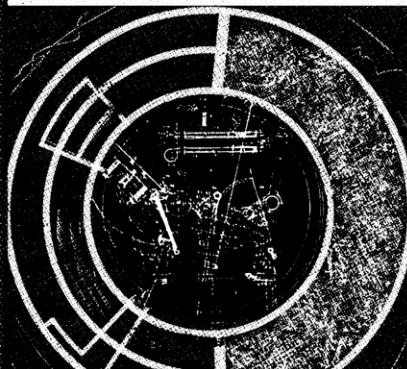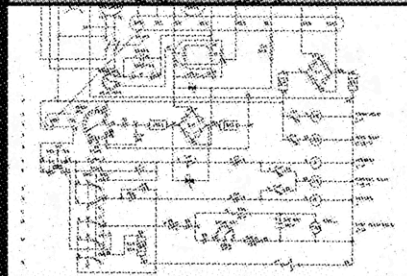First Edition, First Printing 2024

RETROGRADE

is a retrofuturist sci-fi TTRPG of investigation, exploration, and survival. Faster-than-light travel has been made possible by supernatural means, and a mutant gene allows for starship navigators to teleport their ships across vast gulfs of space. There are powers beyond human comprehension governing the mechanisms of the universe – unraveling such hidden knowledge will be perilous to say the least.

THE CORE MECHANIC

The core mechanic of Retrograde is the **Skill Check**. When a character attempts to do something that is not obviously feasible, the Librarian may call for a Skill Check for a specific Skill. The player rolls 2D6 and compares the result to their current points for that Skill. The current value of your Skill Points is the **Success Threshold** for that Skill Check.

- If they roll less than or equal to their current Success Threshold, they **Succeed**.
- If they roll greater than their current Success Threshold, they **Fail.**

If a player Fails a roll, they may spend a point in that Skill to turn the check from a Failure to a Success. This spent point reduces that Skill's Success Threshold: the more you Fail, the harder Success becomes.

Example: Dana attempts to sabotage a Sanguitype Telepress' printing mechanism, making it impossible to operate. The Librarian calls for a Jerryrigging check. Dana's Jerryrigging skill is 5–she rolls an 8. Failure. However, Dana chooses to spend a skill point to turn the result into a Success. Dana now has 4 Jerryrigging points remaining.

Other Notes for Skill Checks:
- A roll of 12 is a **Critical Failure** – things play out catastrophically. When you Critically Fail, you must spend a Skill Point, but the result remains a Failure.
- A roll of 2 is a **Critical Success** – things play out even better than you hoped.
- Critical Success is impossible if a character has less than 2 points in that Skill.
- If a character falls to 0 points in any Skill, they fall **Unconscious**.
- Players may spend the relevant Attribute's Hit Point (Sanity, Health, or Spirit) in lieu of a Skill Point to Succeed a Skill Check, *ex. spending a Health Point to Succeed a Failed Athletics Check.*
- Skill Checks may be rolled with **Advantage** in situations where you have help or expertise in, such as a Skill Check relevant to your character's Specialization (see pg. 4) or **Disadvantage** if you are faced with particular difficulties, such as if a character was recently Dying (see pg. 12). If rolling with Advantage, roll twice and take the best result. If rolling with Disadvantage, roll twice and take the worst result.
- Multiple Advantages or Disadvantages do not "stack." However, if a roll would be made with both Advantage and Disadvantage, they "cancel" each other, and a normal roll is made without modifications.
- Players can voluntarily Fail a Skill Check – unless the result of the Skill Check is a Critical Failure, there is no obligation to spend a Skill Point.

I. CHARACTER CREATION

To create a character, assign values for Attributes, Hit Points, and Skills, choose a Star Sign, develop a Specialization, and acquire weapons and gear.

I.I ATTRIBUTES, HIT POINTS, AND SKILLS

Begin with the **Attributes** of **Mind**, **Body**, and **Soul**. These are your caps for each Skill under the Attributes' respective umbrella. Assign a value of 8 to the Attribute you want your character to be best at, 6 to the next, and 4 to the last.

Give Sanity, Health, and Spirit the same values as their respective Attributes: these are your **Hit Points** for your character's grip on reality, physical health, and control over their emotions.
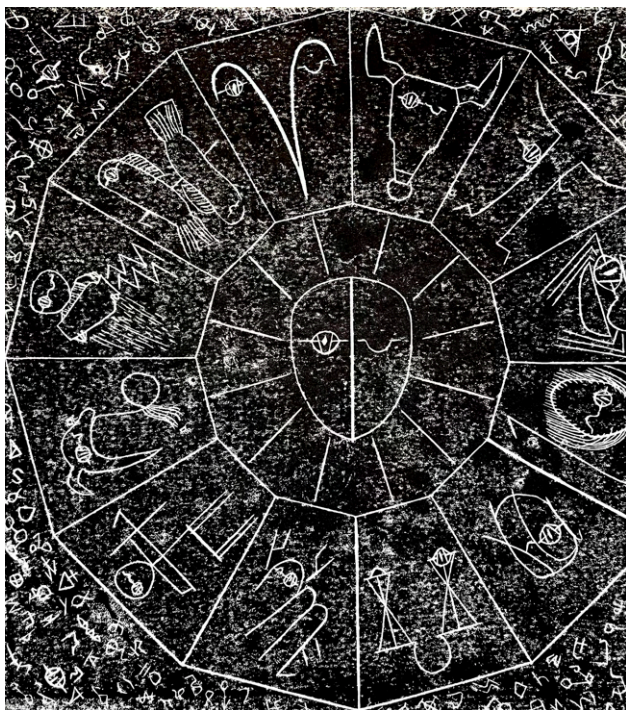
Assign 2 points to each Skill. Then, distribute an additional 36 points among your Skills however you see fit: you will have a total of 72 Skill points.

Sample assigned character skills:

SKILLS					
MIND : 6		**BODY : 8**		**SOUL : 4**	
Sanity		Health		Spirit	
Synthesis		Dexterity		Instinct	
Perception		Athletics		Empathy	
Jerryrigging		Hand-to-Hand Combat		Willpower	
Medicine		Marksmanship		Charm	
Research		Piloting		Intimidation	
Knowledge		Stealth		Esoterica	

Tip: use a pen to fill in the borders of the bubbles up to their initial values, then fill in the rightmost bordered bubbles with a pencil as you spend points and take damage.

1.2 STAR SIGNS

Astrology has taken on a new meaning in the galaxy, as those born on planets beyond Earth are born under different stars. Although many still look to the old signs of the Zodiac for guidance, astrology now typically focuses on the influence of the stars in concert rather than individual planets and constellations. A sector's stars are seen, rightly or wrongly, to play a role in the destinies of its inhabitants.

Star Signs provide a bonus to your Success Threshold for certain Saving Throws and can serve as a jumping-off point for developing your character's story.

Core Worlds: +1 to Success Threshold for Mind Saves
The heart of humanity, the Core Worlds are the home of the Sol System and Earth, and serves as the seat of power for the United Earth Government and Gutenberg, Ink. Through these institutions, citizens of the Core Worlds have access to significant resources, with Gutenberg and the UEG subsidizing university education as a means to acquire skilled and loyal workers.

Cumberland Sector: +1 to Success Threshold for Body Saves
The core industrial worlds for civilized space, the Cumberland Sector hosts massive type foundries and serve as the main shipyard for Gutenberg, Ink. The inhabitants of the Cumberland Sector are known for their hardy constitution and stoic demeanor, and many cut their teeth in sub-light shipping or mercenary work.

Blackletter Sector: +1 to Success Threshold for Mind Saves
The Blackletter Sector is a swiftly growing population center and is home to fierce competition between companies across several industries. Such competition breeds innovation, and many technological marvels are reportedly under development in the Blackletter Sector's research facilities.

Blackletter Frontier: +1 to Success Threshold for Soul Saves
The colonies of the Blackletter Frontier have been founded on particularly verdant, Earth-like worlds, and promise an optimistic future for humanity. Curiously, the Blood Ink mutation is especially common amongst the populace of the Blackletter Frontier, and the colonies have drawn the attention of scholars, alchemists, and all those seeking to reap the power of Blood Ink.

Copperplate Sector: +1 to Success Threshold for Soul Saves
The Copperplate Sector sits on a celestial convergence, drawing many alchemists seeking the unlock new powers of Blood Ink. Vast Blood Ink laboratories can be found on most populated worlds in the Copperplate Sector, and those hailing from these worlds seem especially attuned to Blood Ink and able to better resist psychic influence.

Copperplate Frontier: +1 to Success Threshold for Body Saves
The Copperplate Frontier is a land full of strife: colonies founded on arid, mountainous, yet resource-rich worlds are profitable but difficult to maintain, and the frontier's colonists have many dangers to adapt to. Still, these difficulties have given them a hardened resolve, and they have earned a reputation as formidable fighters.

1.3 SPECIALIZATIONS

Specializations reflect the skills characters have developed proficiency in over their lives and function as a lens with which they understand the world and solve problems. Specializations confer a number of benefits:

–You gain Advantage on Skill Checks involving your Specialization
- Specializations require at least 6 points in the Skill they are associated with.

–You gain a unique piece of gear that you use when performing tasks associated with your Specialization.Examples:
- A Hunter (Perception) might have a pulse rifle with a custom scope that allows them to spot prey at extreme distances.
- An Actor (Charm) might have a kit of holo-makeup that makes attempts to disguise themselves especially effective.

–You gain a Contact within your specialization's field. This might be an individual, such as an academic colleague if your Specialization is an Academic Study, or an entity, such as a pressing company or pilot's guild if your Specialization is Piloting. Contacts will rarely be in a position to give you anything for free, but they may be in a position to offer you jobs or participate in a quid-pro-quo.

–You can attempt to perform complex tasks that are impossible to perform without the skills, training, and expertise of your Specialization.
Examples:
- Typically, advanced computer terminals are too sophisticated for a person unfamiliar with computers to have any hope of hacking into them, but a character with the Hacking Specialization would be able to attempt a Jerryrigging Check to do so.
- Even those who may have significant skill in Piloting would be unable to pilot the sophisticated systems of frigates and interstellar pressers; however, a character with the Piloting Specialization could have knowledge of these larger craft and would be able to attempt a Piloting Check to pilot them.
- Major medical procedures are too complex to be meaningfully attempted by a layperson, but a character with a Medical Specialization could reasonably attempt to administer a surgery as a part of a Medicine Check.

Blinking

Faster-than-light travel in Retrograde is accomplished by a mystical practice called Blinking, more formally Blood Ink Teleportation. A small percentage of the human population throughout the galaxy has the Blood Ink Mutation, imbuing their blood with occult power. Given the proper training and conditioning, those with the Blood Ink mutation can mix their blood into ink which, when used to print star maps, teleports the printing press to the exact location depicted on the star chart.
Possessing the Blood Ink mutation is not represented in a specific way on a player's character sheet, beyond the Blinking specialization. The properties of Blood Ink are poorly understood, and it may be possible for characters to discover their latent Blood Ink powers later in their adventuring, possibly even acquiring the Blood Ink mutation itself...

Specializations are not confined to a particular list, and ultimately the specifics of a Specialization and its benefits are determined by a conversation between the player and the Librarian.

Here are some potential Specializations and the Skills associated with them:

- Languages (specify): Synthesis or Instinct
- Crafts: Synthesis or Instinct or Dexterity, as relevant to the craft ex. Letterpress specialization: Dexterity
- Combat Styles: Hand-to-Hand Combat or Marksmanship, as relevant to the combat style
- Academic Study (specify subject, such as biology, physics, anthropology, etc.): Research or Knowledge or Synthesis
- Technical (specify, such as mechanical engineering, radio communications, etc.): Jerryrigging or Dexterity, as relevant
- Surgery: Medicine
- Psychology: Empathy
- Blinking: Esoterica
- Cryptography: Synthesis
- Hacking: Jerryrigging
- Theology: Instinct or Esoterica or Willpower
- Acting: Charm
- Athlete: Athletics or Dexterity, as relevant to the sport
- Hunting: Perception or Marksmanship
- Corporate: Any – Many skills are prized by the corporate entities of Retrograde, and those who climb the corporate ladder can develop a variety of skills. ety of skills.
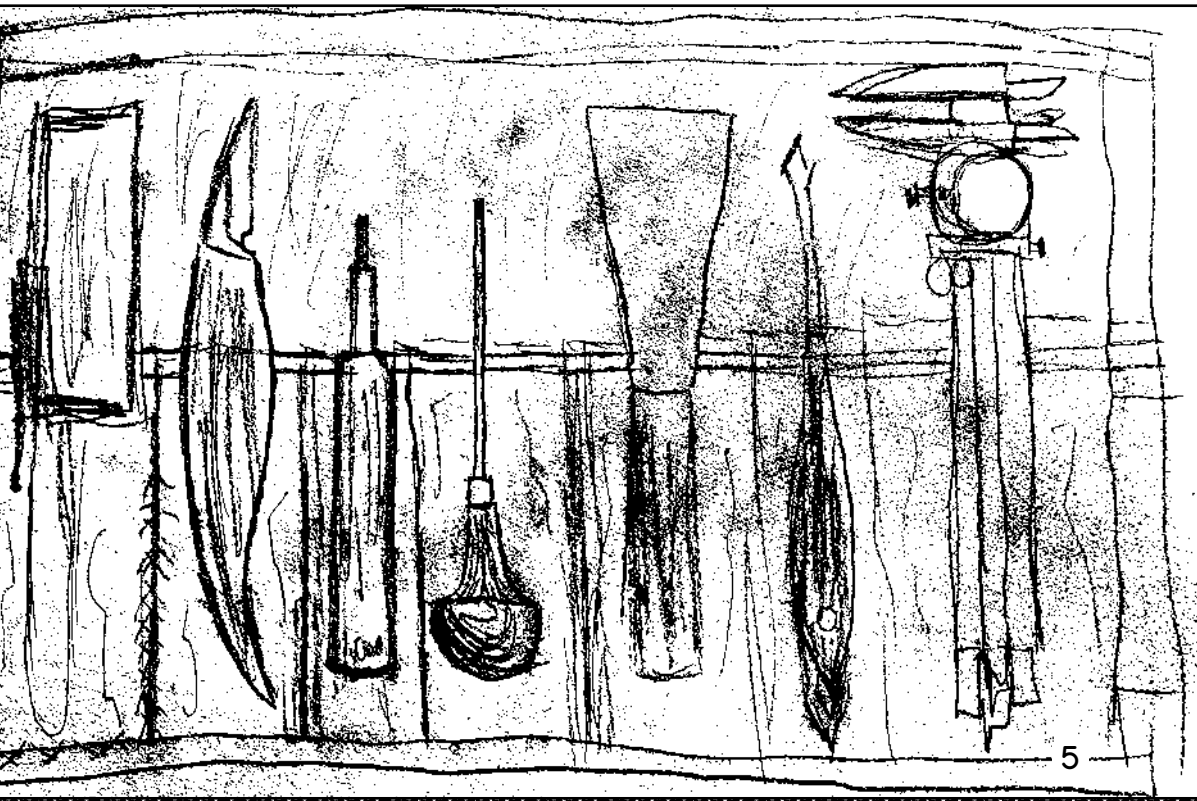
1.4 WEAPONS AND GEAR

A character's Specialization informs their starting gear: assume that your character has everything they need to do their job—tools, equipment, paperwork. Players should also choose armaments fitting their Specialization:

- Civilians can have a handgun.
- Military personnel, defense contractors, and anyone whose specialization involves combat can have a pulse rifle, combat shotgun, or SMG.
- Characters with industrial specializations could have a hand welder or a boarding axe.
- All characters can have a knife.

Standard Weapons:
- Knife: 1D3 damage, melee.
- Machete or Boarding Axe: 1D6, melee.
- Handgun: 1D3 damage, medium.
- Pulse Rifle: 1D6 damage, long.
- Combat Shotgun: 2D6 damage, short.
- SMG: 2D3 damage.

Heavy Weapons:
- Sniper Rifle: 2D6 damage, long.
- Missile Launcher: 4D3 damage, medium, blast, antivehicle.

Industrial Equipment:
- Hand welder: 1D6 damage, melee, destructive. Can cut through doors, including airlocks.
- Flamethrower: 2D6 damage, short, incendiary, blast.

Explosives:
- Frag grenade: 3D3 damage, short, blast.
- Breaching charge: 3D6 damage, melee, blast, remote detonation, antivehicle, destructive.
- Molotov cocktail: 1D6 damage, incendiary.
- Concussion grenade: 1D3 Damage, short, blast, concussive.

Armor:
- Vaccsuits: AP 1, oxygen tank with 8 hours of personal supply.
- Combat Armor: AP 1.
- Advanced Combat Armor: AP 2.
- HAZMAT suits: AP 0, personal air filter and insulation from radiation, corrosive materials, and extreme temperatures.

Medicine:
- Medkit: Stabilizes a character who is Dying and heals 1D3 points of Health.

This is not a complete list of equipment available in the world of Retrograde; there will likely be other pieces of gear to find, make, buy, and steal.

Money in Retrograde is abstracted: it is assumed that characters generally use the skills of their Specialization to make a living in their normal day-to-day, and monetary profits made from completing adventures often goes towards refueling, rearming, repairing, and recovering from damage to Mind, Body, and Soul. Artifacts are, by their definition, priceless, and Favors must be earned, not bought.

1.4.1 GEAR TRAITS

Weapons and gear may have Traits that describe how they function. Each weapon has a Range Trait and a Damage Trait, and may have other Traits as well.

Range:
–Melee: directly in front of you.
–Short: across the room from you.
–Medium: down the street from you.
–Long: across the field from you.

Other Traits:
- Antivehicle: can effectively damage small vehicles and weapon systems of larger vehicles. Half damage against larger vehicle classes (see pg. 16).
- Blast: can deal full damage to multiple enemies at the same time.
- Concussive: can Concuss its targets. Targets of Concussive attacks must make a Body Save or become Concussed.

Several aspects of Retrograde's rules are intentionally open-ended or defined by subjective conditions rather than objective or mathematically strict conditions. Range is one of them: the difference between "short" and "medium" range is not strictly mathematical, but situational. In situations where the exactness of range is relevant, the Librarian and the players should have a conversation so that everyone understands and agrees what can and cannot be hit with certain weapons.

- Incendiary: can set things on fire, giving them the Burning condition (see pg. 20).
- Remote Detonation: can be detonated from Medium range.
- Destructive: can damage or destroy buildings, structures, and objects.
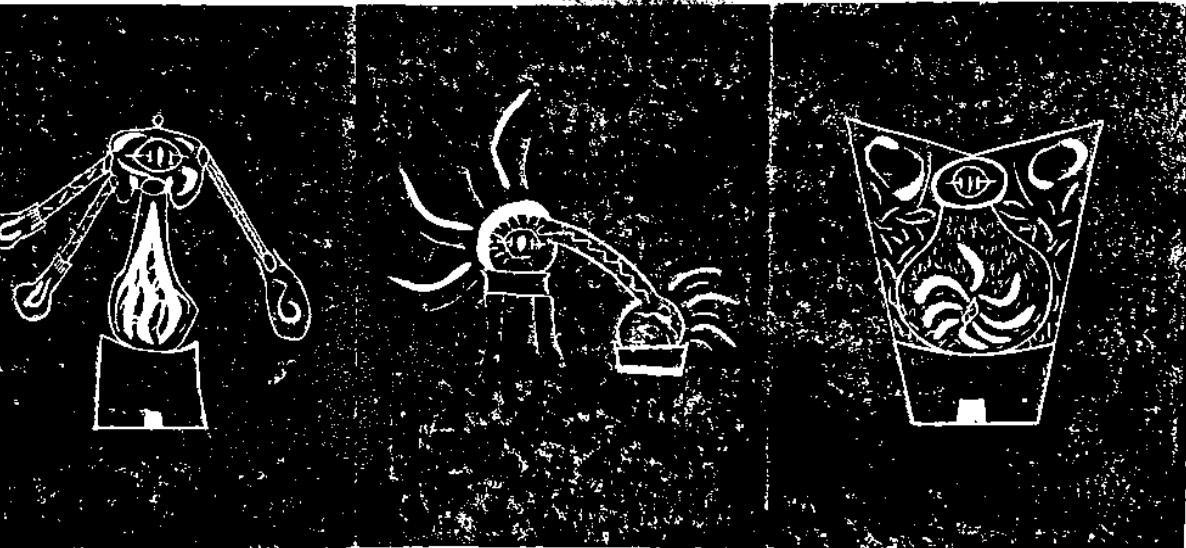
2. PLAYING THE GAME

Retrograde takes its players on adventures investigating mysteries, exploring new worlds, and surviving multitudes of dangers. The main mechanic the players will use to move forward in adventures and navigate dangers is the **Skill Check**.

2.1 SKILL CHECKS

Skill Checks are the main way Retrograde represents characters attempting to perform complex and dangerous tasks. Skill Checks should only be called when characters attempt to do something that is not obviously feasible – most actions do not require Skill Checks. At the same time, there must be a valid role-playing reason why a character could succeed on something they attempt – characters cannot succeed Skill Checks to perform actions that are obviously impossible (although, depending on the situation, they may still want to attempt – some things that appear impossible are not). In general, play can be organized in "rounds" of approximately 10 seconds, with each character able to perform one Skill Check each round – it is usually only necessary to adhere to this in combat situations, but there may be other situations where structuring play according to rounds is useful.

The relevance of some Skills are self-evident, while others less so. The applicability of Skills is ultimately determined by a conversation between the players and the Librarian, but here is a road map for what Skills represent:

- Synthesis: logic, deduction, developing hypotheses.
- Perception: awareness of physical surroundings and changes to physical surroundings.
- Jerryrigging: facility with machines, repairs, practical engineering.
- Medicine: healing skills and knowledge of injuries, diseases, and medical practices.
- Research: finding information and sources of information.
- Knowledge: general knowledge and memory recall.
- Dexterity: precisely using your body and manipulating objects.
- Athletics: strength, agility, and physical endurance.
- Hand-to-Hand Combat: hitting people and things at close range.
- Marksmanship: hitting targets with projectile weapons.
- Piloting: piloting vehicles of all kinds.
- Stealth: staying undetected, especially while moving, performing tasks, and fighting.

Retrograde simulates stress, frustration, and exhaustion within Skill Points themselves: by spending Skill Points to turn Failed Checks into Successes, the threshold for Success diminishes. While losing your ability to Research the more that you do it may at first seem far-fetched, consider what this would mean in the context of a campaign: hours and hours of paging through archives takes a mental toll, especially if you're low on sleep, working to find a specific piece of information against a dangerous ticking clock, or perusing matters detailing disturbing violence or supernatural phenomena. Spending a Skill Point reflects the concentration, stress, or physical exertion necessary to perform a task well. Every Failed Check is a roleplaying opportunity: imagine the stakes of those Checks and the mental, physcial, or spiritual strain spending a Skill Point to Succeed a Failed Check entails.

- Instinct: sensitivity to danger and ability to read the unknown – "I've got a bad feeling about this."
- Empathy: understanding others' emotions, actions, and why they do what they do.
- Willpower: acting under pressure, facing danger, and imposing your will onto others.
- Charm: persuading and deceiving others.
- Intimidation: forcing others to do what you want. Or else.
- Esoterica: understanding and employing the supernatural, particularly Blood Ink.

2.1.1 COMBINED CHECKS

Situations involving simultaneous obstacles sometimes call for simultaneous Checks. In these cases, treat these as separate Skill Checks, calling for rolls for each relevant skill. For each Failed Check, players must spend points from every involved Skill in order to succeed the Combined Check.

Example: Eggers is attempting to sneak through an active starship foundry, and must make combined Athletics and Stealth checks. Eggers succeeds the Stealth check, but fails the Athletics check, and must spend a point from both his Stealth and Athletics skills to remain undetected and move through the foundry safely.

Combined Checks represent the inherent difficulty of attempting complex tasks under pressure, and Combined Checks should rarely be called in situations without an imminent or implicit threat of danger.

2.1.2 REST

Characters will exhaust themselves one way or another through the course of an adventure, and must rest to recover their strength. Rest can only be effective under the following conditions:

- A lack of immediate danger: characters cannot meaningfully rest if they are not afraid that something will kill them in their sleep.
- Food and water: characters must be able to properly nourish and hydrate themselves.
- Shelter: characters must not be vulnerable to the dangers of the elements.

Characters recover 1 Skill point in each of their skills for every 2 hours they rest. Characters only gain the benefits of rest up to 8 hours every 24 hours, i.e. characters can recover a maximum of 4 Skill points for each of their skills every 24 hours.

2.1.3 HEALING

Damage to Sanity, Health, and Spirit requires Healing to recover.

- Sleeping for 8 hours recovers 1 point of lost Sanity, Health, and Spirit.
- Physical or Psychological First Aid heals 1 point of either Sanity, Health, or Spirit and takes 1 minute. First Aid requires a Successful Medicine Check from a friendly character and takes 10 minutes.
- Major Care heals 3 points of either Sanity, Health, or Spirit and takes 1 hour. Major Care can be administered by a professional, but if professional care cannot be found, friendly characters can attempt a Medicine Check at Disadvantage. A relevant medical Specialization

allows player characters to attempt to administer Major Care and Intensive Care. Major Care might consist of a session of talk therapy, getting stitches, or receiving an infusion of Blood Ink.

- Intensive Care heals all points of either Sanity, Health or Spirit, and removes relevant negative conditions, i.e. Intensive Care targeting Health would remove the Concussed Condition, but would not remove the Hallucinating Condition. Intensive Care and recovery from its procedures takes 1 week. Intensive Care must be administered by a professional and cannot be attempted by a player character, unless that character has a relevant medical Specialization. Intensive Care might consist of an invasive surgery, or a spiritual detoxification led by a Blood Ink alchemist, and all the rest entailed.

Depending on the circumstances, professional care may be difficult to find, and it may not be possible to receive proper care during an adventure (for example, if the adventure takes place over less than a week, it will be impossible to receive the benefits from Intensive Care during the adventure). It can generally be assumed that between adventures, characters are able to find the care they need and fully heal all lost Hit Points and remove all negative Conditions.

2.1.4 EXHAUSTION
If a character has been awake for 20 hours or more and is not currently in a dangerous situation, the Librarian should call for an Exhaustion Check. An Exhaustion Check involves making a 2D6 roll for each Attribute (Mind, Body, and Soul):
- If they roll less than or equal to the value of their Attribute, they Succeed.
- If they roll greater than the value of their Attribute, they Fail.

For the Attributes that Fail the Exhaustion Check, the player must spend one Skill point from each Skill in that category. Characters must make subsequent Exhaustion Checks every 4 hours and after every combat encounter until they are able to receive at least 4 hours of rest.

2.1.5 SAVING THROWS
Some situations will involve hazards that cannot meaningfully be countered with Skill Checks and directly target Sanity, Health, or Spirit. In these situations, characters will often be able to attempt a Saving Throw. Saving throws function as normal Skill Checks, with some major differences:
- Savings Throws use a character's respective Attribute points (Mind, Body, or Soul) as the Success and Failure threshold.
- Savings Throws directly target Hit Points rather than Skills.
- No points can be spent to turn a Failed Saving Throw into a Success – a Failure is a Failure.
- Failed Saving Throws typically deal 1 damage to their respective hit point, but particularly horrible phenomena may deal more.

Example: Willow witnesses the ritual of a Blood Ink Printing from the bridge of an interstellar presser. The cosmic impossibility of bending spacetime to the will of human blood is too much for their mind to take–they must make a Sanity Saving Throw. Their Sanity is at a 5–they roll a 4. Success! No damage to their Sanity is taken.

2.1.6 DYING

When a character reaches 0 points in Health, they fall Unconscious and are Dying. Each round, a character must use their action to make a special Body Saving Throw called a Death Save. Death Saves are rolled at the beginning of each combat round. After three failed Death Saves, the character is Dead. Every time a character takes damage below 0, they are considered to Fail an additional Save. Each time a character's Health points drop to 0, they also lose 1 point of Spirit.

Friendly characters can attempt to Stabilize a dying character by performing a Medicine Skill Check or using a Medkit. Stabilized characters do not need to make further Saving Throws, but remain Unconscious until they have at least 1 point of Health. Death Saving Throws do not reset once a character is Stabilized: if a character fails 2 Death Saves and is Stabilized but they take damage while at 0 Health or take damage that drops them to 0 Health, they are Destabilized and must continue making Death Saves with 2 Death Saves already Failed.

Characters who are Stabilized have Disadvantage on all Saving Throws until they either get 8 hours of Rest or professional medical intervention. Failed Death Saves do not reset until a character either gets 8 hours of Rest or professional medical intervention.

2.1.7 HEART ATTACKS

When a character reaches 0 Spirit, their fear is too much for their body to handle, and they have a Heart Attack. Heart Attacks function similarly to Death Saves, and each round a character must use their action to make a Saving Throw using their current Health points as the Success Threshold, rather than their Body Attribute Score. After three failed Saves, a character is Dead.

Friendly characters can attempt to Stabilize a character having a Heart Attack by performing a Medicine Skill Check or using a Medkit.

Characters who are Stabilized after having a Heart Attack can continue to take actions, but must Succeed a Willpower Check to perform any action they attempt. Characters at 0 Spirit will not have another Heart Attack, but must deduct further Spirit damage from their Sanity points.

2.1.8 MENTAL BREAKS

When a character reaches 0 Sanity, they have a Mental Break. Characters experiencing a Mental Break are delusional, hallucinating, or otherwise detached from reality. Each round, a character suffering from a Mental Break must make a Mind Saving Throw—if they fail, they cannot take any actions that round and can only flee from any immediate danger. Characters suffering from a Mental Break perform all Skill Checks at Disadvantage.

Characters that receive Psychological First Aid can take actions without making Mind Saving Throws, but continue to perform all Skill Checks at Disadvantage. Characters only fully recover from Mental Breaks after receiving professional psychological care. Characters at 0 Sanity must deduct further Sanity damage from their Spirit points.

2.2 COMBAT

Combat in Retrograde is deadly, and being involved in violence can have grave repercussions for Mind, Body, and Soul. When combat begins, all characters roll 2D6 to determine their initiative in combat.

- Characters can spend a point of Instinct, Athletics, or Perception to roll Initiative with Advantage.
- Characters that are caught by surprise roll initiative with Disadvantage.

Each round of combat is roughly 10 seconds, and characters can move and attempt to perform a single action. This may be a straightforward attack, calling for a Skill Check with Hand-to-Hand Combat or Marksmanship, but it may also be other complex tasks—there are many things to do in Combat besides using a weapon to directly attack an opponent. A conversation between the players and the Librarian should determine what is and is not feasible, but the stress and difficulty involved in fighting or performing complex tasks while in imminent danger dictates that most actions will be resolved with Skill Checks. Here is a non-exhaustive list of actions a character could perform in a round:

- Attack with a Melee weapon or Firearm
- Throw an explosive device
- Hiding/Taking Cover – If a character is attempting to hide, a Stealth Check should be rolled.
- Operate Machinery
- Negotiating with someone
- Speech is considered a "free" action, but attempting to Charm, Intimidate, or elsewise perform a

social action that would necessitate a Skill Check must be treated as a character's main action for that round.

When a character succeeds a Skill Check as part of an attack, they Roll Damage, using the Damage dice indicated by the weapon. The target's Armor Points (AP) is subtracted from the Damage Roll, and the result is deducted from the target's Health.

Most ranged attacks, such as with firearms, are Direct Fire attacks, but some attacks, such as with grenades, may use Indirect Fire.

Attacks that directly target a character's Sanity or Spirit, such as some Blood Magic spells, function in the same way, but ignore physical armor and deal damage to Sanity or Spirit instead of Health.

2.2.1 RANGE

Most ranged weapons are effective up to a medium range, with some weapons like long rifles effective at long ranges and weapons like shotguns only effective at close range. Melee weapons can only be used in hand-to-hand combat. In general, characters can change one level of distance in one round of combat, ex. move from medium to close range or move from melee range to close range.

2.2.2 COVER

In combat, characters will often be able to find cover to protect themselves from dangers.

- Total Cover completely hides you from sight and protects you from all direct damage, but blocks your

sight and prevents you from making direct fire attacks as well.
- Partial Cover allows you to add 1 to your Armor Points (AP) and gives you Advantage on Stealth Checks.

Cover is often directional; crouching behind a wall might provide Total Cover from attacks coming from the other side of the wall, but would provide no Cover for attacks coming from the same side of the wall. Use your best judgment in the specifics of the situation to dictate the applicability of cover. Additionally, some attacks, such as grenades, use indirect fire and may ignore cover if the cover is directional.

2.3 SURVIVAL

Adventuring may take characters to hostile environments filled with a multitude of perils, requiring skill and careful preparation to survive.

Temperature: Prolonged exposure to extremes of hot and cold can easily prove deadly.
- If a character is exposed to extreme cold for 10 minutes, they start suffering from Frostbite and have Disadvantage on all Body Skill Checks.
- If a character is exposed to extreme cold for 30 minutes, they start suffering from Hypothermia and have Disadvantage on all Skill Checks.
- If a character is exposed to extreme cold for 60 minutes, they are dead.

- If a character is exposed to extreme heat for 30 minutes, they start suffering from Heat Stroke and have Disadvantage on all Skill Checks.
- If a character is exposed to extreme heat for 90 minutes, they are dead.

Oxygen: Venturing in Space or on planets without earth-like biospheres requires artificial oxygenation systems to survive.
- If a character is low on oxygen, they are Asphyxiating and have Disadvantage on all Skill Checks.
- After 1 minute without oxygen, Body Save every combat round or fall Unconscious. After 2 minutes, they are Dead.

Radiation: Exposure to radioactive materials can quickly prove deadly without the proper equipment.
- Mild radiation exposure: Body Save once per hour. 1 Damage to Health on Failure.
- Acute radiation exposure: Body Save once per minute. 1 Damage to Health on Success, 1D3 Damage to Health on Failure.

Various other dangers may manifest themselves: factories filled with dangerous production processes, fungal jungle full of mushrooms releasing hallucinogenic spores, or dark laboratories full of grotesquely dissected human corpses may require Mind, Body, or Soul Saves to prevent damage to Sanity, Heralth, or Spirit. The Librarian may call for Saving Throws to navigate the specific dangers encountered, with Successful Saves counteracting damage (though not necessarily all damage) and avoiding negative Conditions.

2.3.1 FORAGING

If the player characters are in a non-hostile environment, it is assumed that they can find food and water without difficulty or significant cost. If the player characters are in a hostile environment, they may have to Forage to find food and water.

- A Successful Knowledge Check might allow a character to identify what mushrooms in a forest are edible or inedible.
- A Successful Combined Perception and Marksmanship Check might allow a character to track and kill a wild beast for meat.

Successful Foraging provides a certain amount of Provisions: a large animal might provide enough meat for many days' worth of meals for a small party, while a small animal or a handful of mushrooms may be just enough sustenance for one small meal.

- A single Successful Skill Check while Foraging yields 1D3 of Provisions, 1D6 for a Critical Success
- A Successful Combined Check while Foraging yields 1D6 of Provisions, 2D6 for a Critical Success
- Provisions are shared among the party as a whole, rather than by individual players.

Once per day, one character elected by the party must roll a Provisions Check by rolling the dice indicated by the party's current amount of provisions. On a roll of a 1 or 2 or doubles of the same number, the party's Provisions are depleted to the next-lowest Provisions die:

- 2D6 -> 1D6 -> 1D3 -> Gone

Example: While exploring a jungle planet, Jayden, Alex, and Sean Forage for Provisions and must make a Provisions Check. They currently have 1D6 Provisions. Jayden is elected by the group to make a Provisions Check, and rolls a 2. While all of their characters are able to eat, their Provisions are depleted to the next-lowest Provisions die, down to 1D3.

- After 24 hours without water, a character becomes Dehydrated and has Disadvantage on all Skill Checks. They will die after 72 hours without water.
- After 48 hours without food, a character is Starving and has Disadvantage. They will die after 7 days without food.

Characters drinking contaminated water or eating contaminated food must make a Body Save or suffer 1D3 Health Damage. Cooking food and boiling or filtering water will typically rid it of contaminants, unless there is a particularly powerful contaminant present.

Retrograde is designed for adventures focused around investigation, exploration, and survival. While Foraging for food and water may be an important part of survival-focused adventures and some exploration-focused adventures, they may not be relevant in every adventure and can be disregarded at the Librarian's discretion.

2.4 NON-PLAYER CHARACTERS

Each NPC's abilities are distilled into overall Mind, Body, and Soul abilities: treat these as both their hit points and rolling thresholds for skill checks. Make checks for NPCs as normal, using Mind, Body, or Soul where you would normally use a more specific skill check. NPCs cannot expend points to succeed Checks—their fates are decided by the roll of the dice.

NPCs may also have special abilities, such as Blood Magic spells, that allow them to take actions normally impossible for other characters. It is at the Librarian's discretion of how these NPCs manifest their special abilities, but the power of these abilities should be telegraphed in some way before the player characters are subjected to them—players should get the chance to see, or at least have knowledge of, an enemy's special attack before it is directed at them.

Sample NPC Stats Chart:

NAME		
Mind	Body	Soul
Weapons & Gear:		
Abilities:		

2.5 VEHICLES

A variety of vehicles–terrestrial, airborne, and spaceborne–populate the world of Retrograde. For combat purposes, vehicles have three stats:
- Targeting: the ability to successfully hit their target. Functions as the Success threshold for Combat Skill Checks.
- Damage: the damage output of the vehicle's weapons.
- Hull: the vehicle's health points.

Spaceborne vehicles have three general size classes:
- Fighters/Cutters: small, nimble craft, manned either by a single pilot or a small crew. For combat purposes, particular sections of larger craft are considered to fall in this size class.
- Frigates/Freighters: large, sturdy craft that navigate the stars – most interstellar Sanguitype Telepress craft constitute this class.
- Carriers: massive ships that often carry other, smaller ships – they are rare and formidable sights.

Vehicle stats work in relative scale: Fighting between different scales is doubled or halved, rounding in the advantage of the larger craft. However, smaller craft like fighters can target particular sections of larger craft, such as its bridge or specific weapons systems, and treat those sections as being on their same relative scale.

Sample Vehicle Stats Chart:

NAME	
Size Class:	
Targeting	
Damage	
Hull	

2.6 BLOOD MAGIC

The world of Retrograde is held together by the powerful but scarcely understood phenomenon of Blood Magic. Known primarily for its use in Blood Ink Teleportation, the blood of those with the Blood Ink mutation possesses supernatural properties, and can be employed to cast powerful and mind-bending magical spells.

Characters with the Blink specialty will be especially adept at employing Blood Magic, but they are not the only ones who can learn Blink spells—even those without the Blood Ink mutation can learn how to manipulate the powers of Blood Ink. All Blood Magic spells require a source of recently exsanguinated Blood Ink to perform.

Blood Magic spells are performed by making an Esoterica Skill Check, with one notable difference to normal Skill Checks: casting a Blood Magic spell requires spending an Esoterica point to cast, and another Esoterica point must be spent to turn a Failure into a Success.

Players whose Specialization is derived from their Esoterica Skill begin with the knowledge to cast one Blood Magic spell. They may be able to learn new Blood Magic spells as part of their Progression after a completed adventure.

> Every character who witnesses the use of Blood Magic must make a Sanity Saving Throw, losing I point in Sanity on Failure.

Known Blood Magic spells:

- Blinking: The most common and most well understood form of Blood Magic in the galaxy. The blood of those with the Blood Ink mutation can be drained and mixed into an ink that, when used to print a star chart, will teleport the printing press to the exact location indicated by the star chart.
- The Tongue: Compel others to perform an action against their will. Requires a Willpower Check to break.
- Psykinetics: Throw objects with the power of your mind, turning them into dangerous missiles dealing ID6 damage to Health.
- Transmutation: Change one substance to another substance.
- Scramble: Scramble a person's mind, making it harder for them to focus and concentrate. Target one Attribute (Mind, Body, or Soul). Success reduces the target's Success Threshold for all Checks using that Attribute by 2.
- Dread: Directly attack a person's Spirit. Treat this as a ranged attack, dealing ID6 damage to Spirit on Success.
- Transfusion: Provide a friendly character a magical healing transfusion of Blood Ink. On success, a target character is Stabilized and heals 4 points of lost Health. This spell cannot target its caster.
- Soothe: Provide a friendly character a soothing tincture of Blood Ink. On success, a target character is healed of negative Psychological Conditions, such as a Mental Break, and is healed up to 4 points of either Sanity or Spirit.

2.7 FAVORS

Money is abstracted in Retrograde; it is generally assumed that a character's specialization allows them to make a living and acquire any necessary mundane gear. However, characters can accrue **Favors** that serve as a powerful social currency. Favors can be spent to get something from someone that is usually impossible – the power of a Favor depends entirely on who owes it to you, but a person bestowing a Favor understands that they may have to make a great sacrifice when their favor is called in. A character might earn a Favor from someone by saving their life, playing a major role in helping them achieve a lifelong goal, or something similarly life-changing.

Examples of Favors:
- A shipping official might indefinitely loan you a small Interstellar Presser.
- A magistrate might give your party a pardon for a crime.
- A Blood Ink alchemist might teach you a Blood Ink spell.

Favors are pacts made with blood – the contract of a Favor is sealed wih a mixture of the parties' blood stamped on the document. While breaking a Favor is not unheard of, it is one of the few crimes that is universally considered to be unforgivable, and permanently tarnishes the oathbreaker's reputation.

2.8 PROGRESSION

Characters improve through the experience they gain as a part of each adventure. At the end of every adventure they complete, a character can take one of the following progressions:

- A new, specific knowledge or ability in your Specialization developed through experiences in the adventure. *Example: A character with the Blink Specialty unearthed occult tomes from the temple of an alchemical cult, and learned a new spell.*
- A new Specialization developed through experiences in the adventure (Characters can only have a maximum of three Specializations).
- An Artifact that provides a powerful boon.
- Discover a new ability of a possessed Artifact
- A Favor earned from an NPC through experiences in the adventure.

Characters will also progress implicitly through the knowledge that they gain from the world, the contacts and alliances they build, and gear and vehicles they acquire.

2.8.1 BETWEEN ADVENTURES

Progression in Retrograde occurs between adventures. Characters might spend the downtime between adventures studying new skills they learned during their previous adventure, refining them into a new Specialization. They may practice a newly learned Blood Magic spell to become fully proficient with it, or perhaps experiment with a newly acquired artifact to fully understand its properties.

Along with recovering from the tolls of the previous adventure and preparing for a new one, characters use the time between adventures to practice the progression gained from the previous adventure so that they may fully benefit from it.

2.9 ARTIFACTS

The galaxy is full of many wonders, and your characters may be fortunate enough to come into the possession of powerful Artifacts. Artifacts might be the products of groundbreaking technological research, relics wrought by cosmic means in long-forgotten times, or experiments with the mystical properties of Blood Ink.

Either by improving a character's Success Threshold for certain Skill Checks or allowing them to attempt Skill Checks in situations that would usually be impossible to attempt, Artifacts can provide creative solutions to complex problems.

To create new Artifacts for your characters to discover in adventures, choose a Boon OR choose two Boons and a Sacrifice.

Boon examples:
- +1 to the Success Threshold of a certain Skill Check
- Casting a certain Blood Magic spell once per day even without being a Blinker. *Ex. A crystal flute Artifact creates hypnotic frequencies that have the same effect as The Tongue.*
- Ability to perform a usually impossible task, allowing characters to make Skill Checks in a situation where they would usually be unable to or have Advantage on Skill Checks in a particular situation

Artifact Examples:
- *A quill that can allow a character to attempt a Research Check to determine if any two texts were written by the same entity.*
- *A pair of microscopic tweezers could allow a character to attempt a Dexterity Check to manipulate microscopic objects, such as half-point metal type.*
- *An enchanted conch shell could allow a character to attempt an Empathy Check to ask an animal basic questions and understand its answers.*

Artifacts are inherently mystical, either due to occult properties or technology so advanced that it appears to be magical – the means by which they create their effects are often unknown.

Sacrifice examples:
-1 to the Success Threshold of a certain Skill Check.
Requires a Saving Throw to use, else take damage in Mind, Body, or Soul.

Good artifacts have a clear and clearly limited utility to their characters. They should be incredibly useful in specific situations, but they should not be a crowbar solution to every problem: an Artifact that allows a player to make an Instinct Check to determine if Blood Magic was used at the current location in the last 24 hours would be incredibly useful in situations where the party is tracking a Blood Alchemist, but an artifact which allowed an Instinct Check to determine if any kind of danger was present is too general and likely too powerful. An Artifact's properties may also not be fully understood when first encountered: continued use through adventuring or experimentation between adventures may unlock new abilities.

Artifacts are not bound by these conditions; feel free to compose Artifacts with other characteristics as fitting your adventures and your player's characters.

3. APPENDIX
3.1 QUICK REFERENCE

Players must make Skill Checks to perform difficult and/or dangerous actions.

- If they roll less than or equal to their current Skill points, they Succeed.
- If they roll greater than their current Skill points, they Fail.
- A roll of a 12 is a Critical Failure—things play out catastrophically. When you Critically Fail, you must spend a Skill point, but the result remains a Failure.
- A roll of a 2 is a Critical Success—things play out exactly as intended.
- Critical Success is impossible if a character has less than 2 points in that Skill.
- If a character falls to 0 points in any Skill, they fall unconscious.
- Players may spend their parent hit point in lieu of a Skill point, ex. spending a point from Health to succeed a failed Athletics check.

Some hazards cannot be countered by Skill Checks and require Saving Throws:

- Savings Throws use a character's respective Attribute points (Mind, Body, or Soul) as the Success and Failure threshold.
- Savings Throws directly target Sanity, Health, and Spirit rather than Skills.
- No points can be spent to turn a Failed Saving Throw into a Success – a Failure is a Failure.
- Failed Saving Throws typically deal 1 damage to their respective hit point, but particularly jarring, damaging, and horrific phenomena may deal more.

3.2 CONDITIONS

Asphyxiating: Disadvantage on all Skill Checks.

Burning: 1D3 Health Damage every Combat Round. Body Save to extinguish.

Bleeding: 1D3 Health Damage every Combat Round. Successful Medicine Check to staunch bleeding.

Concussed: Disadvantage on all Skill Checks.

Dehydrated: Disadvantage on all Skill Checks.

Dying: Make a Death Save at the beginning of every Combat Round. After three failed Death Saves, the character is Dead.

Frostbite: Disadvantage on all Body Skill Checks and Body Saves.

Heart Attack: Each Combat Round, a character must make a Saving Throw using their current Health points as the Success Threshold. After three failed Saves, the character is Dead.

Heat Stroke: Disadvantage on all Skill Checks.

Hypothermia: Disadvantage on all Skill Checks.

Unconscious: Unable to take any actions. If an unconcscious character has 0 Health Points, they remain unconscious until they are restored to 1 Health Point. If an unconscious character has more than 0 Health Points,

Shaken: Disadvantage on all Soul Skill Checks.

Stabilized: Disadvantage on all saving throws

Starving: Disadvantage on all Skill Checks.

Mental Break: Each Round, a character suffering from a Mental Break must make a Mind Saving Throw
Disadvantage on all Skill Checks.

Retrograde is your game.

The Retrograde System is intended to be a framework for tabletop RPG adventures. No part of Retrograde is meant to be proscriptive or strictly interpreted; rather, the rules as laid out in this booklet can be viewed as a creative limiter that provides structure and direction to collaborative storytelling. If any part of these rules feel unnecessary or constraining, feel free to ignore or modify them. If any part of these rules feel incomplete, feel free to add to them. There is no right or wrong way to play – you should do whatever helps you tell the stories you want to tell and have fun together.

Thanks for playing!

– Nathaniel

Retrograde Character Sheet

Name:

Pronouns:

Specialization:

SKILLS

MIND :		BODY :		SOUL :	
Sanity	⬭⬭⬭⬭⬭⬭⬭⬭⬭⬭	**Health**	⬭⬭⬭⬭⬭⬭⬭⬭⬭⬭	**Spirit**	⬭⬭⬭⬭⬭⬭⬭⬭⬭⬭
Synthesis	⬭⬭⬭⬭⬭⬭⬭⬭⬭⬭	Dexterity	⬭⬭⬭⬭⬭⬭⬭⬭⬭⬭	Instinct	⬭⬭⬭⬭⬭⬭⬭⬭⬭⬭
Perception	⬭⬭⬭⬭⬭⬭⬭⬭⬭⬭	Athletics	⬭⬭⬭⬭⬭⬭⬭⬭⬭⬭	Empathy	⬭⬭⬭⬭⬭⬭⬭⬭⬭⬭
Jerryrigging	⬭⬭⬭⬭⬭⬭⬭⬭⬭⬭	Hand-to-Hand Combat	⬭⬭⬭⬭⬭⬭⬭⬭⬭⬭	Willpower	⬭⬭⬭⬭⬭⬭⬭⬭⬭⬭
Medicine	⬭⬭⬭⬭⬭⬭⬭⬭⬭⬭	Marksmanship	⬭⬭⬭⬭⬭⬭⬭⬭⬭⬭	Charm	⬭⬭⬭⬭⬭⬭⬭⬭⬭⬭
Research	⬭⬭⬭⬭⬭⬭⬭⬭⬭⬭	Piloting	⬭⬭⬭⬭⬭⬭⬭⬭⬭⬭	Intimidation	⬭⬭⬭⬭⬭⬭⬭⬭⬭⬭
Knowledge	⬭⬭⬭⬭⬭⬭⬭⬭⬭⬭	Stealth	⬭⬭⬭⬭⬭⬭⬭⬭⬭⬭	Esoterica	⬭⬭⬭⬭⬭⬭⬭⬭⬭⬭

STAR SIGN

SPECIALIZATION

Contact:

GEAR

CONDITIONS

NOTES