

THE BASICS

THINGS YOU SHOULD HAVE

You'll need a few supplies along with these rules to play the game. Here's a list of mandatory items, as well as some recommended ones.

You'll **need**:

- Four Fudge Dice for each player and the GM. If you don't have Fudge dice, substitute regular six sided dice. See Grey Ghost Games (www.fudgerpg.com) or your local RPG dice supplier for a pack.
- Some copies of character sheets or at least blank paper to record characters on.
- Things to write with.
- Friends. For running a game, the sweet spot's somewhere between two and six. For creating characters, the more the better – the more folks you have with characters, the easier it will be to put together a game whenever you feel like it.

You'll find **useful**:

- A set of poker chips or glass beads (to use as fate points).
- Index cards to pass notes and to make notes on things that come up in play.
- Snacks.

THE LADDER

Most things in the system are rated according to the ladder pictured below (when we say "the ladder" throughout the text, this is what we mean).

Usually, the adjectives are used to describe things – someone might be a Good Pilot or Poor at Academics. The adjectives and numbers are interchangeable, so if a player or GM is more comfortable with numbers, it is equally valid to say Pilot: +3 or Academics: -1. The best compromise is often to use both, as in a Pilot: Good (+3) or a Academics: Poor (-1).

On this scale, Average represents the level of capability that someone who does something regularly and possibly professionally, but not exceptionally.

- +8 Legendary
- +7 Epic
- +6 Fantastic
- +5 Superb
- +4 Great
- +3 Good
- +2 Fair
- +1 Average
- 0 Mediocre
- 1 Poor
- 2 Terrible

Most people are Average at the things they do for a living, like Science for a scientist, and are Mediocre or Poor at most other things. It is only when they are driven to excel that they surpass those limits.

Pulp heroes push the very boundaries of what “normal” people are capable of, and as such, they tend to be Superb at whatever their central passion is. This means that pulp heroes (and Centurions in particular) are genuinely exceptional individuals, and are frequently recognized as such.

ROLLING THE DICE

Whenever a player rolls dice, he rolls four Fudge dice (abbreviated as 4dF) to generate a result between -4 and 4. When reading the dice, a  equals +1, a  equals -1 and a  equals 0. Some example dice totals are shown to the right.

The total of the dice is then added to an appropriate skill to get a result. This result can be referred to as the **effort** made, but sometimes, it's just “the result”.

				=	-2
				=	+1
				=	0

Example: Sally Slick is a Superb (+5) engineer.

She rolls the dice to defuse a bomb and she rolls  (-1) for a total result of +4. Checking the ladder, that's a Great (+4) effort.

If you find yourself without Fudge dice, then roll 4 six-sided dice. Any die showing a 1 or 2 is treated as , and any die showing a 5 or 6 is treated as .

DIFFICULTY

When a character rolls for a result, he is trying to meet or exceed a target value, which is the **difficulty** for the roll. The difficulty indicates how hard it is to do something. Difficulties are measured on the same ladder as everything else. For instance, it might be a Mediocre (+0) difficulty to jumpstart a car, but a Good (+3) difficulty to repair that same car after a serious breakdown. Guidelines for setting difficulties are found in the GM's section of the book.

The difference between the difficulty and the result of the roll (the effort) is the magnitude of the **effect**, which is measured in **shifts**. Shifts are used,

primarily by the GM, to determine the potency of a character’s efforts and to govern the resolution of complex actions.

Example: If Sally is rolling against a difficulty of Fair (+2), and she rolls a Great (+4) result, she succeeds by two, so she generates two shifts. If she rolls a Mediocre (+0) result, then she fails.

SKILLS

Characters have **skills**, like Drive and Guns, which are rated on the ladder (above). Considered on the most basic level, skills represent what your character can do. When a character rolls the dice, he usually is rolling based on his skill.

Nearly every action that the character might undertake is covered by his skills. If he doesn’t have a skill on his sheet, either because he didn’t take it or the skill itself doesn’t exist, it is assumed to default to Mediocre.

Skills are covered in greater detail in their own chapter, beginning on page 82.

ASPECTS

Characters also have a set of attributes called **aspects**. Aspects cover a wide range of elements and should collectively paint a picture of who the character is, what he’s connected to, and what’s important to him (in contrast to the “what can he do” of skills).

Aspects can be relationships, beliefs, catch-phrases, descriptors, items or pretty much anything else that paints a picture of the character. Some possible aspects are shown here.

For many, many more examples see the aspects section starting on page 33.

- Quick Witted
- Sucker For a Pretty Face
- Rough & Tumble
- Irish
- Dapper Devil
- Stubborn Like a Mule

An aspect can be used to give you a bonus when it applies to a situation. Doing this requires spending a fate point (see below). In this capacity, called **invoking an aspect**, it makes the character better at whatever it is he’s doing, because the aspect in some way applies to the situation (such as “Dapper” when trying to charm a lady).

An aspect can also allow you to *gain* more fate points, by bringing complications and troubling circumstances into the character's life. Whenever you end up in a situation where your aspect could cause you trouble (such as "Stubborn" when trying to be diplomatic), you can mention it to the GM in the same way you mention an aspect that might help you. Alternately, the GM may initiate this event if one of your aspects seems particularly apt. In either of these two cases, this is called **compelling an aspect**, and its effect is that your character's choices are limited in some way. If the GM initiates or agrees to compel the aspect, you may get one or more fate points, depending on how it plays out.

We'll talk more about fate points shortly.

STUNTS

Stunts are those things that a character can do which stretch or break the rules. They are the special tricks the character has up his sleeves. Stunts have very specific uses and rules, and are detailed more fully further in, in their own chapter (page 115). In general, a character will have five stunts.

Example: Jet Black has the Trick Shot stunt. This means that when he's taking a trick shot at a piece of scenery, like shooting the rope holding a chandelier, he receives a +2 bonus on his roll.

FATE POINTS

Every player begins the first session of the game with a number of **fate points (FP)** equal to how many aspects he has, usually ten. Fate points give players the ability to take a little bit of control over the game, either by giving their character bonuses when they feel they need them, or by taking over a small part of the story. Fate points are best represented by some non-edible token, such as glass beads or poker chips. (Previous experiments with small edible candies have left players strapped for points!)

Characters may, at any point, spend a fate point to gain a bonus, invoke an aspect, tag an aspect, make a declaration, or fuel a stunt.

Gain a Bonus – A fate point can be spent to add 1 to any roll of the dice, or improve any effort (such as an attack or defense) by 1. In practice, this is the least potent way to use a fate point – you're usually much better off using one of the other applications, below. (Most games get rid of this rule once their players get comfortable using aspects; you can, too.)

Invoke an Aspect – Aspects (see above, page 9) are those things that really describe a character and his place in the story. When you have an aspect that's applicable to a situation, it can be invoked to grant a bonus. After you have rolled the dice, you may pick one of your aspects and describe how it applies to this situation. If the GM agrees that it's appropriate, you may spend a fate point and do one of the following:

1. Reroll **all** the dice, using the new result, *or*
2. Add two to the final die roll (after any rerolls have been done).

You may do this multiple times for a single situation as long as you have multiple aspects that are applicable. You cannot use the same aspect more than once on the same skill use, though you may use the same aspect on several different rolls throughout a scene, at the cost of one fate point per use.

***Example:** Jet Black has the aspects “Nick of Time”, “Seat of My Pants” and “Motorhead”. He’s just grabbed the ticking bomb and is trying to sprint out of Tesla’s lair in time to toss it off the cliff.*

Jet has Superb Athletics, but he rolls terribly  (-3) for a result of Fair (Superb - 3), which is far from good enough. He points out that he’s doing something crazy “by the seat of his pants,” and the GM thinks that’s fine, so Jet spends a fate point to reroll the dice. He does a little better,  (-2) for a result of Good (Superb - 2).

Still, he’s worried it’s not quite good enough, so he suggests that as a Motorhead, he knows things about machinery, like... like bombs! That might be useful...!

The GM tells Jet that she feels that his engineering knowledge is not going to be much use unless he wants to stop to try to defuse the bomb – is that what he’d like to do?

Jet decides to stick with the original plan, and notes that with the timer counting down like this, he’s going to have to try to pull this off in the “Nick of Time.” The GM decides that is a much better match, so Jet spends another fate point to get an additional +2 on the roll, bringing it up from Good to Superb, which is enough to let him throw the bomb clear with only seconds to spare!

Tag an Aspect – Scenes, other characters, locations, and other things of dramatic importance, can have aspects. Sometimes they’re obvious, and sometimes they’re less so. Players can spend a fate point to invoke an aspect

which is not on their own character sheet, if they know what is the aspect is. This is referred to as **tagging an aspect**, and is covered in greater detail in the Aspects chapter, on page 40.

As a rule of thumb, tagging someone or something else's aspects requires a little more justification than invoking one of your own aspects. For scene aspects, it should be some way to really bring in the visual or theme that the aspect suggests. For aspects on opponents, the player needs to know about the aspect in the first place, and then play to it.



***Example:** Mack Silver is fighting some thugs in an old warehouse. The scene has the aspects “Dark” “Cramped” and “Warehouse”. What’s more, Mack has fought these guys before, and knows that they’re pretty cocky, so his player figures that they have an aspect like “overconfident”.*

When Mack jumps the first one, he spends 2 FP to invoke the “Dark” aspect of the warehouse and the “Overconfident” aspect of the thug. Mack describes the thugs as being so sure of themselves that they’re not being as cautious as they could be, so when he drops out of the shadows to cold cock one of them, it comes as a complete surprise.

The GM likes the visual, and while the thugs technically have “Cocky” rather than “Overconfident” on their sheets, she thinks that’s close enough, so she approves. One of

the fate points is spent normally, and one goes to the thug (see page 40 for why), though Mack may be hitting him hard enough that he’ll never get the chance to use it.

Power a Stunt – Some stunts have particularly potent effects, and require spending a fate point when used. If a stunt requires a fate point to be spent, it will be made clear in the description. See the section on stunts (page 115) for more.

Make a Declaration – You may simply lay down a fate point and declare something. If the GM accepts it, it will be true. This gives the player the

ability to do small things in a story that would usually be something only the GM could do.

Usually, these things can't be used to drastically change the plot or win a scene. Declaring "Doctor Keiser drops dead of a heart attack" is not only likely to be rejected by the GM, it wouldn't even be that much fun to begin with. What this *can* be very useful for is convenient coincidences. Does your character need a lighter (but doesn't smoke)? Spend a fate point and you've got one! Is there an interesting scene happening over there that your character might miss? Spend a fate point to declare you arrive at a dramatically appropriate moment!

Your GM has veto power over this use, but it has one dirty little secret. If you use it to do something to make the game cooler for *everyone*, the GM will usually grant far more leeway than she will for something boring or, worse, selfish.

As a general rule, you'll get a lot more leniency from the GM if you make a declaration that is in keeping with one or more of your aspects. For example, the GM will usually balk at letting a character spend a fate point to have a weapon after he's been searched. However, if you can point to your "Always Armed" aspect, or describe how your "Distracting Beauty" aspect kept the guard's attention on inappropriate areas, the GM is likely to give you more leeway. In a way, this is much like invoking an aspect, but without a die roll.

REFRESHING FATE POINTS

Players usually regain fate points between sessions when a **refresh** occurs. If the GM left things at a cliffhanger, she is entitled to say that no refresh has occurred between sessions. By the same token, if the GM feels that a substantial (*i.e.*, dramatically appropriate) amount of downtime and rest occurs in play, the GM may allow a refresh to occur mid-session.

The amount of fate points a player gets at a refresh is called his **refresh rate** and it is usually equal to the number of aspects the player has. When a refresh occurs, players bring their number of fate points **up to** their refresh rate. If they have more, their total does not change.

***Example:** Sally Slick and Jet Black have just won a hard fought victory against Gorilla Khan, and they end the session with 4 and 12 FP respectively. The GM feels that was a suitable climax and they refresh at the beginning of the next session. Both characters have a refresh rate of*

10, so the GM gives Sally 6 FP, enough to bring her up to 10. Jet already has more than 10 FP, so he gets nothing, but he does get to keep the extra 2.

EARNING NEW FATE POINTS

Players earn fate points when their aspects create problems for them. When this occurs, it's said that the aspect **compels** the character. When the player ends up in a situation where his compelled aspect suggests a problematic course of action, the GM should offer the player a choice: He can *spend* a fate point to ignore the aspect, or he can act in accordance with the aspect and *earn* a fate point. Sometimes, the GM may also simply award a fate point to a player without explanation, indicating that an aspect is going to complicate an upcoming situation. Players can refuse that point and spend one of their own to avoid the complication, but it's not a good idea, as that probably means the GM will use things that *aren't* tied to you.

Example: Jet has the aspect "Motorhead", which he's explained to the GM means that Jet has a fascination with engines, which can help him do better when he's working on engines, but also means that he can become fascinated to the point of ignoring other things. Jet's looking at a new engine when an ambush drops on him and the group. Normally, Jet would roll Alertness to try to avoid surprise, but the GM pushes forward a fate point and says "Jet's a Motorhead – I'm not sure he's gonna notice the ambush until it's too late." Jet's player can now choose whether to take the fate point – in which case Jet doesn't roll Alertness, he's simply assumed to fail the roll – or spend a fate point, pulling himself out of the engine and getting a chance to avoid surprise with an Alertness roll.

This isn't just the GM's show; players can trigger compels as well either by explicitly indicating that an aspect may be complicating things, or by playing to their aspects from the get-go and reminding the GM after the fact that they already behaved as if compelled.

The GM isn't always obligated to agree that a compel is appropriate, but it's important that players participate here. See the Aspects chapter on page 44 for a more detailed treatment of compels.

CHARACTER CREATION

STEPS OF CHARACTER CREATION

1. Think about your character concept, reviewing the ideas below.
2. Make up a cool pulp name for your character.
3. Go through the **phases** (see below) in order, picking two aspects each phase.
4. Assign your skills.
5. Select five stunts for your character.

CHARACTER IDEAS

While players have the leeway to explore any ideas that interest them, it's worth remembering that the pulps have a handful of easily recognizable character types. While you are far from obliged to fit characters into these neat little "boxes", we encourage you to create Centurions that match the overall flavor. Beyond that, you're free to fill in details as you like. A pulp setting can support characters of almost every stripe, but there are a few common themes worth taking a look at.

ACADEMIC

The academic lives somewhere between the scientist and the explorer. The academic is compelled by his interest in his field, which is usually something like history, linguistics, anthropology or (most famously) archaeology. The academic knows that lost, hidden, and forgotten knowledge exists all over the world. Ancient ruins, obscure libraries, mysterious artifacts – all these can offer answers to questions that have not even been asked yet.

What are *you* doing: You are answering questions, finding what was lost, and trying to expand the breadth of human knowledge.

EXPLORER

Though much of the map of the world is filled in, much of it remains blank or is simply wrong. The explorer thrives on discovering who and what is in those unknown places. The khaki-clad, pith helmeted image of the

explorer is perhaps the most compelling, but the same spirit can beat in the hearts of ship captains, spelunkers, or even ambassadors.

What are *you* doing: You're discovering the world, opening new doors and seeking lost secrets and treasures.

GADGET GUY

The gadget guy is the recipient of the wonders of science. He is the keeper of a unique piece of technology, usually at the behest of its creator, who may or may not still be alive and serving as a patron for the hero. The device in question is usually quite potent, and serves as a signature for the character – something interesting and immediately recognizable, like a jet pack, a super car, or an exotic weapon.

What are *you* doing: With great technology comes great responsibility. Your gadget has made you more capable of taking action (whatever action you pursue), so you have embraced it.

GENTLEMAN CRIMINAL

Crime is usually a brutish thing, fueled by necessity, but for some it is the only *true* challenge available. Usually possessed of copious talents, enough that they have already found success elsewhere, gentleman criminals pursue a life of crime because of its excitement. Such characters enjoy the good life and civilization, so the adventures of exploration hold no appeal to them, especially when compared to the thrill of the chase, outwitting investigators, and similar brushes with danger.

Often, these criminals turn into sociopathic masterminds as they turn more and more to crime. But others maintain a certain basic, albeit twisted, honesty that informs their crimes. A burglar may have a strong code to harm no one, or may rob from the rich to give to the poor. An assassin may only accept contracts on those he feels society is better off without. Most such ethical criminals can be convinced to leave their past behind them and use their talents to more challenging, world-bettering ends, but true retirement is not often in their nature.

What are *you* doing: You're trying to find something *worth* doing. When you find it, you seize upon it with gusto.

JUNGLE LORD

When we speak of the jungle lord, we're speaking of characters like Tarzan or Mowgli, a man raised by animals, possessed of great strength and ability to communicate with or command animals.

Usually awkward in the face of civilization, these heroes act with a simpler understanding of things like justice, but with time, they can become bridges between two worlds.

What are *you* doing: You're protecting your home and your pack, and attempting to understand the world outside.

MAN OF MYSTERY

There is no magic, only things science does not yet understand – and there are a lot of those. The man of mystery has delved into these secrets, be they the true workings of the mind, the “kung fu” of the eastern warriors, or perhaps a handful of syllables of the true name of God.

Whatever this knowledge is, it separates him from his fellow man, often so much that the hero adopts a persona to allow separation between his heroic personality and his normal life.

There's a proximity to madness which mystery invites that can mean these heroes are of a darker, more disturbing character than the norm.

What are *you* doing: You've seen the darkness, and you're on a mission to strike it down. You're punishing those who think they're above punishment.

OPERATOR

The Operator is an agent, perhaps for a government agency that can't be acknowledged, perhaps for a secret organization. He may not know, himself. But it means he's connected (*well* connected), and is privy to secrets that others just don't know about.

His job? Whatever the agency says it is. Thankfully, that is usually exactly what the Operator would be interested in doing in the first place. When conflict eventually arises between the operator and the agency, it usually goes very badly indeed for one of them or the other.

What are *you* doing: You're serving a greater cause – perhaps for your government, or perhaps a higher or more secret authority than that.

PLUCKY REPORTER

One of the things that makes the world so much smaller is the news. A few decades back, if something happened a few states away, or anywhere else in the world, it would take time to trickle into the awareness of the average person.

Now, with the telegraph and radio, people know what's going on almost as soon as it's happened. The demand for regular news is fierce and competitive, and in this day and age, "The Scoop" means a substantial advantage for newspapers – if you've got the story, there's no alternative, so people buy papers.

With this in mind, newspapers are always looking for news of the exotic and interesting, and they're willing to tolerate a lot of foibles from a reporter who can bring in the big story.

What are you doing: You are finding out everything you can so you can share it with the world.

PRIMITIVE/FOREIGNER

Usually of a people that some explorer has 'discovered', the primitive is an outsider in the world that other heroes operate in. The subject of condescension and curiosity, he is also the keeper of knowledge that has been lost, or not yet discovered, by the white man in his tall cities.

Perhaps this knowledge is some form of "magic" or something more recognizable as science, like a knowledge of botany far beyond what "modern" man has discovered. One way or another, the primitive is usually quite sophisticated, albeit in a way that most people don't recognize.

What are you doing: You are representing your people, looking for knowledge to take back to them, or perhaps trying to carve out a new life in exile.

SCIENCE HERO

The science hero is the best way to summarize a character like Doc Savage: brilliant, tough, strong, basically better than you at everything, and made that way by *science*!

Thankfully, most science heroes are slightly less obvious examples of the superman incarnate. A science hero may be very much like a gadget hero,

someone who has benefited from extreme science in some way – perhaps making them a little stronger, tougher or faster than they would have been. Such characters tend to be well rounded (though rarely to the somewhat silly level of a Doc Savage himself) but their specific interests are frequently tied to their origin.

What are *you* doing: You do a bit of everything, taking all comers.

SCIENTIST

In pulp, *everyone* is a scientist. Science is the door to the future, and every educated man has an interest in it. Despite that, it is easy to spot the committed scientist, master of one or more fields, dedicating his time and effort to the pursuit of science. Whereas other heroes seek adventure and appreciate science, the scientist seeks science and appreciates adventure.

While the scientist may have richly appointed labs or shops, there is still too much to be found, too many theories to be tested, too much to do, to simply stay cooped up. Scientists can have one or more fields of interest, which will generally be reflected by their equipment. A chemist or botanist may have a steady supply of bizarre and unique concoctions, while an engineer might have exotic gadgets or weapons.

What are *you* doing: You're challenging assumptions and testing theories, bringing science out into the field with the intention of proving a theory that can solve a problem or create something new and beneficial to mankind.

TWO-FISTED PILOT

The world is getting smaller as we watch, and aviation lies at the heart of it. Every year, the utility of planes is growing, and their range and power increases in kind. The pilot shares much of his spirit with the explorer, and in many ways is the next step in the chain of discovery. The explorer may find an exotic locale, but it is the pilot who ties it in to the rest of the world.

The Great War made pilots into dashing, romantic figures, and the commercial realities of the post-war era are making them more and more important.

What are *you* doing: You're connecting the world to itself. Your passion is in seeing all there is to see, going to strange and exotic locales and bringing

the outside world along for the ride, and taking a piece with you when you leave.

CREATING THE CHARACTER

Character generation takes place over five **phases**. Each phase outlines events in that character's life. The first phase sets up their general background, concept, and early youth. The second covers the events of The Great War (the common term of the time for World War I), bringing them to adulthood. The new Centurions become adults in the final year of the War, and the last three phases delve into the character's post-War adventures.

As laid out, character creation is a group activity, done at the same time, with at least three players in addition to the GM. The character creation process includes a number of built-in ways to establish ties and history between the characters and the setting. Character creation can often take the time of a full session of regular play, and is a good opportunity to lay out the foundations of the setting, and allow everyone to establish a common understanding of each others' characters. During character creation, players are encouraged to talk out loud about their characters, make suggestions to each other, discuss how to make their characters intersect, talk about relationships and interactions between the characters, and otherwise establish some of the campaign background.

PREPARATION

Before the first phase, it's a good idea to think about the concept for your character. Your character could be modeled after a particular pulp hero, or could be based around some specific thing that you want to be able to do, like fly with a jetpack, blow things up, or break boards with your head. Pulp heroes can usually be described briefly, so try to think of a concept that you can express simply. If you can express it with an exclamation point at the end, all the better!

NAMES

Pulp names can be like any kind of name, but there is usually a particular cadence to them. The most common model is a short first name and a last name which is also a word (usually a noun or adjective, but sometimes a

proper noun will be a good fit). This allows for simple, resonant names like “Sally Slick”, “Mack Silver”, “Doc Stone”, and so on.

More “normal” names are fine too, but in the world of Pulp, they suggest a bit of removal from the action. Such names are more appropriate if your character also has an alias (a la Lamont Cranston and *The Shadow*) or is intentionally cultivating an aristocratic air.

***Example:** Fred is still abuzz from the last time he saw The Rocketeer, so he definitely wants to go for a hero cut from the same cloth. Johnny Rocket isn't a particularly viable name since it's also a restaurant chain. Still, he wants something that suggests flight and speed, and hits on the idea of “Jet” as a first name. That quickly suggests “Jet Black”. With that in mind, the summary for his character springs full formed from his lips: Jet Black and his Amazing Jet Pack!*



PHASE I: BACKGROUND

This phase covers the character's youth, from birth to age 14, but in a more abstract sense also covers the core concept for the character as a “normal person”. While youth may be a time of adventure and excitement, it is also the time when we are most shaped by our family and environs. This phase is an opportunity to reflect the character's family and upbringing. When describing events in this phase, consider answers to the following questions:

- What were the family's circumstances like? Rich? Poor? Scholarly? Isolated? Pious? Political?
- How big is the family?
- How well does the character get along with his family?
- What nation is the character from? What region?
- How was the character educated?
- What were the character's friends like? Did the character get into much trouble?

PLAYER RULES

1. Write down a brief summary of the events of the phase.
2. Write down two aspects that are in some way tied into the events of the phase, or the character's national, familial, or cultural upbringing.

PHASE 2

Phase two is World War I, or as it's called in the 1920s, The Great War. While the characters may technically have been too young to serve, they may have done so anyway; as exceptional individuals, it would not have been hard for them to fake their age. Because we're talking about pulp heroes here, while they may have spent some time in the trenches, it's more likely that they spent most of their time on top secret missions for elite soldiers, spies, researchers or pilots. Alternatively, they may have spent their time in other parts of the world, dealing with the end of colonialism, or exploring the mysterious East.

This is the time when the characters start coming into their own, and begin realizing their true potential. This is also the time when many meet their patron, the member of the Century Club who sponsors them for membership and who is a Centurion of the previous century. Sadly, it is also during this period that most of the former Centurions (their sponsors) also die or disappear.

Some questions to consider during this period:

- Did your character fight in the war? For whom? Where? In what capacity?
- Were you a member of any secret units? Did you meet any of the other characters there?
- Who was your patron? What happened to him or her?

PLAYER RULES

1. Write down a brief summary of the events of the phase. Include the name and fate of your mentor.
2. Write down two aspects that are in some way tied into the events of the phase.

PHASE 3

Phase three is the character's first pulp novel, starring him or her! Each player needs to come up with a title for the novel starring his character, in a fashion reminiscent of the pulps. The general pattern is:

CHARACTER NAME (vs./in.../and) ADVENTUROUS THING!

As such, *Mack Silver and the Pirates of Araby* or *Jet Black in... The Eternity Equation* would be ideal.

Then, each player needs to think up a story to go with his title. The story doesn't need to have a lot of detail – in fact, it should be no more detailed than the blurb on the back of the paperback.

PLAYER RULES

1. Write down the title and back cover blurb (a couple sentences at most) for your character's pulp novel. Don't nail down all of the details of it yet (you'll find out why below).
2. Write down two aspects that are in some way tied into the events of the novel. (You can delay doing this, wait to see how the next couple of phases play out, and then choose your aspects at the end.)

PHASE 4

At the beginning of this phase, the GM writes down all the book titles on separate sheets of paper or a set of index cards, shuffles the stack, and hands them out. If a player gets his own novel, he should trade index cards with the person to his right until everyone has a title that isn't theirs. The title of the book a player is now holding is a book that his character had a supporting role in. For each index card, the involved players – the player whose book it is, and the player who has just received that book's index card – should discuss the story, and add one or two sentences to the description of the novel to reflect the supporting character's role.

PLAYER RULES

1. Add a sentence or two to the description of the pulp novel you're supporting cast in.

2. Write down two aspects that are in some way tied into the events of the novel. (Again, you can delay doing this.)

PHASE 5

Phase five is identical to phase four, with the sole caveat that no character can costar in the same book twice.

PLAYER RULES

1. Add a sentence or two to the description of the pulp novel you're supporting cast in.
2. Write down two aspects that are in some way tied into the events of the novel.

ADDING CHARACTERS LATER

Players who join after the initial character creation session should ask for volunteers to be in their book (volunteers do not get additional aspects, however). They should also pick two books that sound interesting to costar in.

SKILLS

Once all players have mapped out their phases and chosen their aspects, it's time to pick skills. Each player will choose skills as shown here.

Any skill the character does not explicitly take defaults to Mediocre.

Because of the "shape" of this set of skills, this is sometimes referred to as the character's **skill pyramid**.

1 skill at Superb	■
2 skills at Great	■■
3 skills at Good	■■■
4 skills at Fair	■■■■
5 skills at Average	■■■■■

STUNTS

Each player selects five stunts for his character. These are likely to be stunts that are associated with the character's most highly-ranked skills, but there is no restriction in that regard. In a number of cases, it may be fine to take a stunt that's tied to a skill that the player has left at the default, if the GM agrees to it.

For more on stunts and how they can affect the game, see the section on stunts.

CONCLUSION

At the end of the character creation exercise, each player should now have a complete character with:

- A summary of his childhood (1900-1914)
- A summary of his role in The Great War (1914-1918)
- His pulp novel and two other novels he appeared in, establishing ties to at least two other players' characters
- Ten aspects
- Fifteen skills
- Five stunts

ADVICE ON CHARACTER CREATION

MOTIVATION

We keep coming back to this, but it's critical to determine why your character does what he does. *Spirit of the Century* characters are exceptional, and they could very easily find success in less exciting fields than those that are likely to come the way of the characters, so it is on your head to figure out *why* your character is going to keep getting involved in these things. If you don't, the GM is under no obligation to go out of her way to make the game work for you – she'll be too busy with other players who made characters that have a reason to participate.

This may sound a little harsh, but there's a habit that a lot of smart, talented players develop over time that leads them to want to "win" the game. By having a character leave the adventuring life and become wealthy, powerful and successful elsewhere, they beat the system that otherwise forces them to constantly grind against an escalating scale of opposition for negligible rewards.

The thing to remember with *Spirit of the Century* is that your character has already won. He's successful enough that he doesn't *need* to do anything adventurous with his life, so it's up to you to figure out why he does so.

One way or another, the answer almost always points to the idea that success is not a goal, it's a means. The true goal, whatever it is for the character, is something that calls for action. Once you have that pinned down, you almost definitely want to reflect it in your choice of aspects.

CHOOSING ASPECTS

Aspects can be both useful and dangerous, but they should *never* be boring. Whenever you choose an aspect, stop a minute to think about what kind of situations you can imagine using it for, and what kind of trouble it might get you into. The very best aspects suggest answers to both those questions, and an aspect that can answer neither is likely to be very dull indeed.

When you're picking aspects, one of the best ways to determine that you and the GM are on the same page is to discuss three situations where you feel the aspect would be a help or a hindrance.

This is especially handy if the GM suggests the aspect – she probably has a pretty clear idea of what it means when she suggests it, but that idea may not be immediately obvious.

***Example:** Sally Slick's player decides to take the aspect "Monkeywrench" since she figures it's nicely reflective of the character. The GM asks what sort of things it'll be useful for, and Sally's player suggests that it's useful for her as an engineer, since it's indicative of her getting in there and getting her hands dirty. Even more, it's useful for breaking things, throwing a figurative (or literal!) wrench in the works. Lastly, it's handy for whacking people upside the head with a wrench, her weapon of choice.*

The GM thinks that's a pretty solid image, but asks if there's any way this might end up causing trouble for her. Sally's player can't think of anything, and the GM asks if maybe it means that because she's so hands on, it might occasionally come up when dealing with people who plan things without actually knowing how to build them.

Sally's player is lukewarm on the idea, so the GM lets it drop. She tries this: How about if things can sometimes just go wrong for her and her plans – they have a wrench thrown in them, so to speak. Sally likes that, but she wants it to be especially about mechanical things. The idea of things breaking entertainingly appeals to her a lot, and the GM thinks that's pretty workable. With a little back and forth, both the player and GM now have a much better sense of how the aspect will work in play.

POWERFUL ASPECTS

At first glance, the most powerful aspects would seem to be things that are broadly useful with no real downside, things like “Quick”, “Lucky” or “Strong”, and a lot of players are tempted to go with those out the gate.

Resist that temptation!

See, there are three very large problems with aspects like this: they’re boring, they don’t generate fate points, and they surrender your ability to help shape the story.

Boring is a pretty obvious problem. Consider a character who is “Lucky” and one who has “Strange Luck”. The latter aspect can be used for just as many good things as the former, but the latter allows for a much wider range of possibilities.

You’ll also want to have some room for negative results of aspects. This may seem counterintuitive at first, but remember that every time an aspect makes trouble for you, you’ll receive a fate point, which is a pretty powerful incentive.

To come back to “Strange Luck”, it means that the GM can throw bizarre, even unfortunate, coincidences at the character, but **you get paid for it**. If this doesn’t seem tempting enough yet, remember that the GM is probably going to do something bizarre to you anyway – shouldn’t you benefit from it, and have some say in how it happens?

And that leads to the last point. When the GM sits down to plan an adventure, she’s going to look over the aspects of the players involved. If one character has the aspect “Quick” and another has the aspect “Sworn Enemy of the Secret Brotherhood of the Flame”, which one do you think suggests more ideas for the GM?

Your aspects give you a vote in what sort of game you’re going to be playing in, so don’t let it go to waste. If nothing else, you have just established that the Secret Brotherhood of the Flame exists in the setting, and the GM will probably turn to you for the details.

So in the end, the most powerful aspects are easy to spot, because they’re the most *interesting* ones. If you consider that you want an aspect you can use to your advantage but which can also be used to generate fate points, then it’s clear you will get the most mechanical potency out of an aspect that can do both. What’s more, aspects that tie into the world somehow

(such as to a group, or a person) help you fill in the cast and characters of the world in a way that is most appealing to you.

Bottom line: if you want to maximize the power of your aspects, **maximize their interest**. For more extensive advice on choosing aspects, see the Aspects chapter, starting at page 33.

FAST CHARACTER CREATION

Sometimes you simply do not have time to do a full character generation and you just want to get started. In those situations, simply begin with a blank character sheet, and ask each player to choose the following:

A name and brief description of their character - by brief we mean a sentence or two will suffice. The character may have a more detailed background, but this is not the time to go into it.

The character's apex skill - Whatever skill the character has at Superb should be selected and written down on the sheet - or, if you want a little more than that, the character's "top three" skills.

Two aspects - one should be something primarily positive about the character, while the other should be a weakness or flaw. This is not mandatory - they really can be any two aspects, but players will have an easier time if they have a little bit of a mix. For each aspect determined in advance, the character earns a fate point, so characters made with this method start with two fate points.

That's it. Players are free to fill in more details as they see fit, but that's all you need to do to start playing. If you're looking to make your game as much of a pickup game as it can be, this may be exactly what you need.

CREATION ON THE FLY

Once play begins, whenever the GM calls for a roll on a skill, each player has three options.

1. If they have the skill on their sheet, roll it normally.
2. If they don't have it on their sheet, they can write it down in any empty slot and roll it at the chosen level.
3. They can roll it at Mediocre.

This way, the player ends up filling out the skill tree over the course of play. Similarly, the player may write in aspects and stunts at the point where they would use them.

Every time you write down an aspect, take a fate point. This way, when you've filled in your 10th aspect, you'll have earned a total of ten fate points, just like other starting characters.

***Example:** Mack Silver's player shows up late and ends up making his character on the fly. He's got his concept (a two fisted pilot, looking to make a buck in the emerging field of air transit), and he's pretty sure he wants his apex skill to be Contacting. He also knows he wants Good Piloting, so he writes that down now rather than worry about it later. Mack's player has a pretty good sense of his background, and so he picks two aspects that reflect his family: Silver Spoon and Black Sheep. With that in mind, he's ready to go.*

In his first scene, Mack is at a dock in Singapore, arguing with a customs inspector, who may or may not be fishing for a bribe. The GM calls for a Rapport roll. Mack doesn't have that yet, but he decides that's something he wants Mack to excel at, so he writes it down at Great (+4), and rolls against that. The roll comes up terribly, so Mack's player decides he needs an aspect, and he decides to go with his theme of being well connected, and adds the aspect "I Know a Guy", getting a fate point since he's chosen a new aspect. He then spends that fate point and drops the name of a local official he's on pretty good terms with, giving himself a reroll which is far less embarrassing.

Players are still expected to come up with their character's novel and guest appearances in other novels, but this is also done on the fly. Players should feel free to think about their title of their novel over play, and at any point when they need a fate point they can launch into a flashback, generally prefaced by a statement line "This reminds me of <Title of their Novel>". The players give a quick blurb of a salient point from their novel and how this reminds them of it, however tenuously. As soon as this is done, the player gains a fate point. If the player then immediately spends the FP to make a declaration about the scene, the GM may give it extra weight for falling in line with the flashback.

SOME TIPS

- Make sure players get values set for Athletics, Endurance, Resolve, and Alertness early on. Those skills are important enough to things like combat that players will end up feeling frustrated if they don't think to pick those up until it's too late. A fighting skill like Guns, Weapons, or Fists may be important, too.
- Stunts are a lot harder to choose on the fly than skills are, so the GM needs to keep the character concepts in mind, and suggest stunts when the situation seems to dictate that it might be useful. Look at skills rated close to the top of the character's pyramid, then look to the stunts chapter (page 115) and locate the skill in question. Each skill has a few sets under it that are conceptually linked and can help quick picking. But for even faster picking, refer to our Quick Stunt Picks appendix, page 373.
- Don't worry about apparent contradictions, such as situations where a player picks a skill at a high level after rolling it at mediocre several times, or chooses a stunt which would have made an earlier scene play out differently. There is no contradiction. The character was playing their cards close to the vest, and like in much adventure fiction, their abilities only matter from the point where they're revealed.

NAME:

PLAYER:

ASPECTS

SKILLS

SUPERB

GREAT

GOOD

FAIR

AVERAGE

STUNTS

HEALTH

☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9

COMPOSURE

CONSEQUENCES

REFRESH RATE

CURRENT FATE POINTS

NAME: Jet Black

PLAYER:

ASPECTS

SKILLS

Motorhead

SUPERB

Athletics

Unspoken Love (Sally Slick)

GREAT

Guns

Engineering

First on the Scene

Dogged

GOOD

Pilot

Stealth

Fists

"Sally, Save Me!"

FAIR

Drive

Endurance

Resolve

Intimidation

Rocket Red Rivalry

AVERAGE

Alertness

Science

Might

Rapport

Weapons

Stop Doctor Methuselah!

STUNTS

Cutting It Close

Amazing Jet Pack (Athletics/Eng.)

Over My Head

Universal Gadget (Engineering)

Amazing Jet Pack!

One Shot Left (Guns)

Trick Shot (Guns)

Two Gun Joe (Guns)

REFRESH RATE

CURRENT FATE POINTS

