

*The time is now 3:32 a.m. Now begins the clock for a 24 Hour RPG.*

## Bloodworks

### Guide to Terminology

Check/Test: Rolling 1d20 in an attempt to "do something" when failure or success would affect the game.

Player Character: Or PC. The character played in game.

Player: The person that plays a Player Character.

Game Master: AKA GM, the one that runs the game.

### Chapter One: Character Creation Basics

*This chapter uses a modern, low-power setting to display the basics of character creation.*

*Bloodworks* is a generic RPG designed to create conflicted characters for a variety of genres. Though generic, *Bloodworks* is designed to be flavorful and to provide a character a constant threat--his own "dark side."

Vitality, there are two parts to each character: his Face and his Bane. A character's Face is what is usually seen in the game; it's every part of the character that he has worked on or picked up, his skills, occupation, and niche. A character's Bane is the part of him that tries to hold him back.

Each character occupies a distinct niche in the game, his/her *Title*. A Title implies something about the character; it should explain some of what he can do and his background. A good Title would be *The Runaway Girl*. The Title tells us what we need to know--the biggest factor in her background and perhaps some of her skills. It's slightly binding, but not too much. A poor Title would be *The Fighter*. "Fighter" is too general to be effective; a better Title would be *The Barroom Brawler*, *The Jaded Gunman*, or *The Alleyway Knifer*.

Besides Title, a character's second defining trait is his *Arena*. The Arena is where the character shines best. It should be general but not too general, much like his Title. To go with the previous example: The Runaway Girl's Arena could be, for instance, *Good With Her Hands*. Perhaps she makes her living by repairing things in exchange for room and board. What did she run away from that taught her how to repair and modify? Maybe she learned it as a necessity. Another good title would be *Slinking Unseen*. She is a master at staying out of sight--why? Is she ashamed of something? Perhaps she's running from responsibility, or an old enemy. (She ends up taking Good With Her Hands.) A bad attempt at an Arena would be *Combat*. What kind of combat? More acceptable would be *Bladed Weapons*, or better yet, *Whirling Edges*.

After Title, a character is defined by *Minor Gifts*. Minor Gifts are things the character is good at, but not as much as his Arena would suggest. Minor Gifts are a little more specific than Arenas. For instance, The Runaway Girl elects *Scrape Together a Meal*, *Pick Locks*, and *Stay One Step Ahead*. Scrape Together a Meal could be used for finding food or cooking it. Picking Locks is good for any kind of non-digital lock--hence "picking." Staying One Step Ahead could

be running or dodging attacks, but wouldn't be used on the offense.

After all else is completed, a character completes his Face by assigning *Ability Scores*. Ability scores are built around five statistics: *Body*, a character's toughness and strength; *Agility*, his speed and accuracy; *Intellect*, his intelligence and memory; *Will*, the measure of his mind's strength; and *Charm*, his charisma and social skills. Distribute 13 points among these scores--one point, one number. The maximum in any single score is 5. 0 is poor. 1 is under-average. 2 is normal. 3-4 is above average. 5 is unusually good. Enhancements can raise ability scores higher, with 6 and 7 being astonishing, and 8 and 9 the purview of supergeniuses and circus strongmen. 10 is beyond human ken.

To continue the example, The Runaway Girl chooses Body 3, Agility 3, Intellect 1, Will 3, and Charm 2. The girl is tough, fast, not too bright, willful, and not unpleasant.

A character's Bane is made in a similar manner to her Face. A character must choose the Title of his Bane; if his Face's Title is that he shows to the world, his Bane's Title is the monster hiding somewhere inside him. A Bane Title can be more general than a standard Title, as it will come up often (unlike his Face Title). The Runaway Girl elects *The Cannibal* as her Bane Title. In minor ways, The Runaway Girl will cheat out whoever helps her. At her most monstrous, she would devour the flesh of her companions rather than face starvation--and to reduce competition for food supply.

The Bane Arena is where the Bane is strongest. They are elected much in the same way as a Face's Arena, save they should be much more specific. The Runaway Girl chooses *Fallen Angel* as her Bane Arena. Though she is tempted to serve herself, Fallen Angel means that whenever she is trying to work for a higher cause, she is tempted even more to abandon her responsibility and retreat into serving her own needs--in other words, it shows up when dramatically appropriate.

Bane Gifts are little vices that tend to work against the character. There are three to choose, much in the manner of Face Gifts. The Runaway Girl elects *Can't Resist a Pretty Face*, *A Warm Place to Stay*, and *Stay Out of Trouble*. To GMs: Use reason when applying a Bane Gift--for instance, The Runaway Girl's Can't Resist a Pretty Face might keep her from seeing through a handsome lad's lie, but if he's aiming a gun at her, she knows better than to let him shoot at her.

Last, a character distributes 13 points among her Bane Ability Scores, measured in the same way as her Face's ability scores. The five Bane Scores are *Malice*, the strength of the character's hate; *Instability*, how easily the character's mind is shattered; *Self-Destruction*, how badly a character will treat himself if allowed to; *Ties*, the people and things important to a character; and *Doubt*, the character's ability to "talk himself down" from victory. The Runaway Girl gives herself Malice 2, Instability 1, Self-Destruction 5, Ties 1, and Doubt 4.

With the character complete, all that remains is to flesh out his background, personality, and looks, based on what has been assigned to him.

## **Chapter 2: Fate and Struggle**

*This chapter explains the die-rolling mechanics.*

*Bloodworks* uses a twenty-sided die to resolve tests. A Face Roll is matched against either a Bane, Challenge, or Opposed roll.

Making a roll is always 1d20+attribute+Title, Arena, and/or Gift bonus against an opposed roll: either 1d20+difficulty modifier for a Challenge Roll; 1d20+Bane Title and/or Bane Arena+Difficulty for a story-significant Bane roll; or the Face or Bane roll of a foe for an Opposed roll.

If a skill check appeals with a Title, it gains +6 to the roll. If it fits with the character's Arena, it gains +4. If aligned with a Minor Gift, it's at +2. A character's Arena will come up fairly often, as will Minor Gifts, but things aligning with the character's Title are understandably rare. They should be moments that define a character--The Lonely Hunter should get his Title bonus if all his companions have been taken out of the fight, and he stands with only himself and his old gun to defeat his foes.

Bane bonuses are slightly different than Face bonuses. If a Bane Title is worked in, the Bane roll is at +2. If a Bane Gift is appealed to, the Bane check is at +4. If the Arena is entered, then a +6 bonus is granted to the check.

Difficulty is as such: *No roll* if a check is trivial and doesn't contribute meaningfully. For example, tossing stones to pass the time doesn't need a roll. Neither does humming when nobody's around to listen. A bonus to the Challenge Roll should be based on how hard it is in context; an easy challenge is at no bonus to the roll, a hard one should offer a bonus one or two less than the highest skill; a very hard challenge is at +2, +3, or even +4 more than the highest bonus of the party.

If a roll is twice or more higher than its opposed roll, it is either a critical success or failure (depending on who's on the receiving end).

Extended contests--for instance, a debate or race--are a contest to see who can succeed the most times. Rolling more than 5 over your foe gets an extra success (so rolling 10 more means 3 successes scored).

For instance, The Runaway Girl is trying to cook a good meal for her friends. The GM decides she should roll her Minor Gift--Scrape Together a Meal and Intellect against an unmodified Challenge (it's trivial in difficulty, but meaningful). She rolls 18 on her Face roll and 9 on her Challenge roll. She succeeds, and, rolling twice more than the Challenge, makes an especially good meal, surprising her friends.

On a more serious adventure, The Runaway Girl is trying to escape a Lovecraftian terror, The Darkness of Mere Being. When the horror announces its presence, The Runaway Girl, lacking any means of combat, decides to run. The first roll is her Agility and Minor Gift--Stay One Step Ahead against The Darkness of Mere Being's Agility and Minor Gift--Play With His Food. It's her 3 Agility and +2 for her Minor Gift against the Darkness's 5 Agility and +2 bonus. The GM, feeling this would be dramatically appropriate, states that The Runaway Girl's Title

applies. With +11 against +7, The Runaway Girl gets 15 against the Darkness's 14. She barely escapes this time. It goes on for some time, with the Darkness of Mere Being closing in distressingly near (4 successes), but The Runaway Girl scrapes by with 5 successes.

The aftermath of the adventure was... unpleasant. The Runaway Girl is left alone. The cult of The Darkness of Mere Being approach her. They congratulate her on avoiding entropy for so long... and invite her to join its cult. The Runaway Girl is stunned... but they offer her safety, a place to stay... a warm bed. This appeals to her Bane Gift--A Warm Place to Stay, her Bane Title, and her Bane Arena. She rolls Will and Intellect, +3, against a whopping +12. Head bowed, sobbing, she gives in, and the session ends with all the party slain... or turned.

### **Chapter 3: Life, Death, and Rebirth**

*This chapter examines how injuries are sustained--both spiritual and physical--and how one can recover.*

Characters struggle. It's an inevitability that conflict will arise, and damage of all sorts will be accumulated. As characters have five ability scores, they have five ways to suffer, each aligned to an ability score.

The five sufferings are *Health*, the physical damage a character can absorb, equal to Body+3; *Fatigue*, how the character wears out, equal to Agility+3; *Stun*, the character's ability to "keep awake," equal to Intelligence+3; *Sanity*, how he keeps everything together, equal to Will+3; and *Ego*, his pride, equal to Charm+3.

Combat is as such: a character makes an Opposed roll based on the arena of combat. For instance, a brawl would be opposed Body or Agility+apropos Arenas, Gifts, et cetera checks; a battle of the minds between two psychics would be Will or Intellect+apropos Arenas, Gifts, et cetera.

Scoring over the opponent's roll deals one point of appropriate damage to the foe; rolling more than 5 deals an extra point, and so on (so rolling an amazing 15 more than a foe deals 4 damage). Physical damage targets Fatigue first, then Health. Mental attacks damage Stun or Ego first, then the other. Sanity-sapping attacks damage Stun and then Sanity. When two health tracks are sent to 0, the character collapses unconscious (or in the case of Sanity, becomes a useless gibbering mess).

If only one track is at 0, the character suffers -2 to tests with the ability score associated with the damage.

Generally, a character recovers one point of Stun every ten minutes, one point of Ego every half hour, one point of Exhaustion every hour, one point of Health a day, and one point of Sanity a week. Using a skill to give morale support halves the healing time of Stun, Ego, and Exhaustion. People who "know what they're doing" can halve Health and Sanity's recovery time.

Speeding healing up is possible (but difficult) by rolling the associated stat (and any Arenas or Gifts) in a Doubt+Self-Destruction Bane check, and with an extra +4 to the Bane

check.

If two stats are set to 0, the character is unconscious or otherwise worthless until it is dramatically appropriate for him to get back up and tend to his injuries. If he fights again before he fully recovers, he'll be back to unconsciousness soon. Going unconscious twice in rapid succession leaves a permanent injury or quirk--it won't ruin the character, but it will be a lasting reminder. If it is appropriate, and the player doesn't mind, the character will die or mentally shatter if he "goes unconscious" during a particularly horrible fight. There's no cure for death, at least in numerous campaigns.

#### **Chapter 4: Equipment**

*Only equipment that really matters have stat-affecting abilities.*

In general, a character has equipment appropriate to his gaming concept; The Runaway Girl will probably have her clothes and a few beaten-up tools, and perhaps a walking stick broken from a piece of bamboo. The Poor Little Rich Boy might have a whole suite of equipment to choose from, but since every character in the party benefits when a character is rich, this is no problem.

Equipment that actually means something--in terms of a bonus--should be taken as a Minor Gift or, if it's vitally important, an Arena. For instance, The Finest Sword Ever Forged By Man might be a Minor Gift to someone whose Arena is Bittersweet Revenge, or one whose Title is The Boy Who Would Be King. However, it would be the Arena to someone with the title The Wielder of the Blade.

Equipment functions as it would in the real world; computers compute, flashlights illuminate. Weapons are mainly methods of expression; weather it's a club, laser, fireball, or shotgun, damage is damage.

#### **Chapter 5: Genre Adaptation**

*A chapter on taking on vastly different genres than "low-powered modern."*

Basic Character Creation covered a relatively simple genre--such as historical or horror--where characters aren't expected to last long. However, characters in other genres, with higher power levels, have noticable differences, expressed as...

*Supernatural Titles, Arenas, and Gifts.* Magic, psionics, and superpowers are covered by Arenas and Gifts. The power of such supernatural abilities depends on the setting; a Title-level mage may be capable of cantrips and subtle enchantments in a low-magic game, a mover and shaker of the world in a medium-magic game, an arranger of continents in a high-magic game, and a minor deity flaunting power over the cosmos in a mighty-magic game.

See the next chapter for information on supernatural and otherwise unusual Titles, Arenas, and Gifts.

*More Arenas and Gifts.* If magic or superpowers will be common among the PCs, a GM should let the characters have an extra Arenas and Minor Gifts. Generally, one extra Arena should be followed by two extra Gifts to maintain the diversity of the group.

*More Ability Score points.* A medium power game would have 17 ability score points and an ability cap of 7. A high power game would have 21 ability score points and an ability cap of 9. A super-high-power game would have 25 ability score points and a cap of 11, and so on.

*More Titles?* Extra Titles are a possibility, but rather than balance, the character's focus and heart might be lost. One extra Title might be good for a high-power or heavily iconic game, but keeping Titles to a low number would be wise.

*Banes and Power Level.* Always increase the power of Banes the same amount you increase Face statistics, unless you want a "four-color" game where the vile creature you carry with you isn't as important as defeating dastardly foes.

## **6. Supernatural, Technological, and Fantastic Titles, Arenas, and Minor Gifts**

Arenas and Minor Gifts are not always devoted to something as mundane as bonuses to skills. Some represent unusual powers, or cybernetic implants, or even alien lineage or monstrous being.

*Titles:* Only the most sweeping of powers should be reserved for Titles--The Mage Striding Over Time, for instance, or The Bearer of Magick Arms. Note that a supernatural power or profession -mentioned- in a title doesn't mean a title is the power itself. The Scholar of the Black Wastes may be a keeper of the tomes of magic of a distant library, but his Title only applies when he is striving to reach a long-stolen grimoire or to defend his charge from attack.

A Title power would imply astonishing, sweeping power. A check against a Challenge or Bane will produce truly sweeping effects--spells that wash over continents, resseruptions, worlds smashed or brought into brilliant relief, lightyears crossed in moments. A truly "Title" power should rarely be used, like a normal Title. To compensate, the Title can be used for Arena-level effects without hindrance.

*Arenas:* Arena powers are commonly useful and powerful. Superpowers, such as "Super Strength," may or may not have a numeric effect; numbers would factor into certain rolls, but may either nullify other rolls (flight negates the need to jump over a pit) or make them easier (lifting a boulder with Bionic Arms, for instance, would jack down the Challenge roll's bonus).

"Jack of All Trades" and similar Arenas would, instead of a flat bonus or special ability, would provide a Minor Gift-style bonus in up to three circumstances that come up within the game, as mundane as "I'm pretty good at cars" or as insane as "hey, maybe that alien piece of technology works like--what do you know, it does!", subject to the seriousness of the game.

*Minor Gifts:* Minor Gifts have minor enhancements; hovering or gliding instead of flight, shocks instead of blaster cannons, patching up minor injuries instead of regenerating limbs.

Below are several examples of how supernatural powers would play out in Bloodworks.

*Spell Blasts, Laser Beams, and Cyanide Clouds:* Any sort of "beam" or attack power is resolved as in combat. The character makes an Opposed test against his target, who responds

with whatever he can use in defense (parrying an energy sword, dodging a lightning bolt, setting his shield against an ice storm, whatever). If you succeed, you deal 1 damage, and one more for every five you roll over their check.

*Sleep, Extradimensional Mazes, and Ice Cages:* "Disabling" powers are Opposed rolls, against the target's ability to avoid the power, depending on the way it is described. Thus, a Sleep power would be opposed by Will or Intellect. If the target is a "major" foe, and simply taking him out would be dramatically inappropriate, he may resist with two ability scores or suffer a useful but lessened effect.

*Bolstering Effects:* Armor, deflection spells, or other such powers either add a bonus to Opposed or Challenge rolls to keep from being damaged, or as a protection from general effects (Minor Gifts: high temperature, acid rain; Arena, 100+ degree temperatures [Farenheight, Celcius, or Kelvin], rain of fire; Title, magma baths, meteor strikes).

If a player wishes to, and with GM permission, a character's powers may have a "nuisance effect" that weakens the effectiveness of the power. For instance, pyrokinesis without the ability to control when it goes off (a dangerous proposition) would downgrade the level, from Title to Arena or from Arena to Minor Gift (and no lower). Removing a disadvantage takes the same ammount of XP it takes to update a skill's bonus to one higher.

## **7. Experience and Training**

*On making a character stronger over time.*

At the end of a game session, the GM awards a character 1 to 5 experience points. One point is granted for showing up for the game; one point is granted for keeping true to the character; one point for contributing meaningfully to the adventure. Two more are kept for GM's fiat; if a player is especially strong during a session, award the extra points.

Five XP will purchase a new Minor Gift; 15 XP will purchase a new Arena; 25 XP will purchase a new Title. You can increase the bonus of your Title, Arena, or Minor Gift by spending XP--two more than the bonus it will become. So, going from +2 to +3 in one Minor Gift costs 5 XP; from +3 to +4 costs 6 XP, and so on. If a Minor Gift goes from +2 to +4, it becomes an Arena. Your maximum bonus in an Arena is equal to one less than your current Title bonus. You must get GM permission to turn an Arena into a title, which gives you a Title's bonus whenever a Title would be used, and an Arena's bonus elsewhere.

Training at a skill to increase its effectiveness requires in-game time; a newly created character at any power level can't arbitrarily declare "training has been done" and get a bonus. Training for two weeks gives a +1 bonus to use of a specific action or application of a Minor Gift or Arena. Increasing the training bonus requires the same ammount of training, +1 week from the previous.

## **8. Game Mastering**

*On keeping balance in the game.*

Keeping the balance in Bloodworks requires a careful moderation of bonuses. High bonuses are no problem as long as you keep the challenge balanced for individuals. Thanks to the way Bloodworks is balanced, foes can be quickly scaled to Player Characters. The trick is balancing characters against each other.

Generally characters should each have something they're good at. It is heavily recommended that characters should be compared and adjusted before the game begins so that characters don't have too many overlapping skills (unless some skills will see more use than normal). As long as character concepts are somewhat disparate, this shouldn't be too much of a problem.

## 9. Antagonist Design and Sample Foes

*On enemy design and some common foes to drop in.*

The average mook needs only a Minor Gift or Arena (Be Disposable) to handle what he needs to do, and a 1 or 2 ability. A disposable, easily-defeated foe needs only one good hit to be dropped. Greater foes might be built as characters--adjust difficulty by comparing the enemy's bonuses and how likely they are to come up versus the player's bonuses in the same circumstances.

A few disposable enemies:

*Zombies.* An animate corpse, shambling and foul. Depending on the game, either a scourge of life that spreads killing disease, or a monster to drop on the way to the treasure. Title: The Zombie. Arena: Devour Brains. Minor Gift: Shamble For Flesh, Grasp For Flesh. Strength 2, Agility 0. 1 hit to destroy; or 4; or an attack to the head rolling at +5 to Opposed roll.

*Disposable Assassin.* Ostensibly elite forces that perish with the slightest provocation. Title: The Disposable Assassin. Arena: Brag About Skill. Minor Gift: Shoot 'em Up. Strength 1, Agility 3. 1 hit (cinematic), 4 (slightly more realistic).

## 10. Sample Characters

*Alice M.* Standard build Modern horror

**Title:** The Runaway Girl

**Arena:** Good With Her Hands

**Minor Gifts:** Stay One Step Ahead, Scrape Together a Meal, Pick Locks

Body 3, Agility 3, Intellect 1, Will 3, Charm 2

Health 6, Fatigue 6, Stun 4, Sanity 6, Ego 5

**Bane Title:** The Cannibal

**Bane Arena:** Fallen Angel

**Bane Gifts:** Can't Resist a Pretty Face, A Warm Place to Stay, Keep Out of Trouble

Malice 2, Instability 1, Self-Destruction 5, Ties 1, Doubt 4.

Alice ran away from home because she couldn't stand her father. In time she found the road was not a harmful, dangerous place, but one where she was forged into a strong, powerful person. Though she doubts herself in her weaker moments--and fights the urge to stab her friends in the back--she tries to be a good person.

*Jean L.* Medium power build Modern dark espionage

**Title:** The Ready Dagger

**Arena:** Shots in the Dark, Turn Aside the Pain

**Minor Gifts:** Breach Security, Stay Out of Sight, Smooth Moves, Suffer in Silence, Slick Tongue.

Body 4, Agility 5, Intellect 3, Will 4, Charm 1

Health 7, Fatigue 8, Stun 7, Sanity 7, Ego 4

**Bane Title:** Flames of Lust, Take A Little Something

**Bane Arena:** Laying Helpless, Desperate Times

**Bane Gifts:** Shiny Unattended Objects, Cheap Floozies, Good Pay, Secrets Kept,  
Abandoned

Malice 5, Instability 0, Self-Destruction 7, Ties 3, Doubt 2.

Jean is a secret agent, part of a team, but is far from the dashing spies of yore. He keeps to himself, makes the occasional flirtatious comment, and does his job--that being assassinations and cheap shots--very well. It would be wise for his female opposition to watch themselves, though.

*Merria T.*      High power build

High magic intrigue

**Title:** Child of the Fire

**Arena:** Hellstorm Dreams, Between the Shadow

**Minor Gifts:** Swing a Blade, Scent Magic, Cantrips, Pierce Through Lies, One Eye  
Always Open

Body 4, Agility 3, Intellect 6, Will 6, Charm 2

Health 7, Fatigue 6, Stun 9, Sanity 9, Ego 5

**Bane Title:** Burn At Both Ends, Make Them Suffer

**Bane Arena:** The Unsuspecting, Whispers Behind my Back

**Bane Gifts:** Eavesdrop, Rumor-Spreading Tongue, Vermin's Mysteries, Trite Taste,  
Water Burns

Malice 7, Instability 5, Self-Destruction 5, Ties 0, Doubt 0.

Merria is a pyromancer, and oh how she loves the burning. It is a weakness that she loves to burn perhaps too much, and that she will burn even at risk to herself. But burning is what she does, after all. She'd hardly have occasion to do anything if she couldn't. Do what you love, and you'll never work a day in your life.

## Character Sheet

### *Face*

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Title (+6):

Arena (+4):

Minor Gifts (+2):

### *Ability Scores*

Body:            Agility:            Intellect:            Will:            Charm:  
Health: Fatigue:            Stun:            Sanity:            Ego:

### *Bane*

Title: \_\_\_\_\_ Arena:

Bane Gift:

Malice:            Instability:            Self-Destruction:            Ties:            Doubt:

Notes:

*The time is now 3:15 a.m. After much sleep, computer problems, and several hours of work, Bloodworks is complete. 5/25-26/05.*