

The New World

(From a letter home from Wyatt Cooper, to his cousin Annifred)

The frontier here in the new world is dusty and dangerous. Coyotes and sand storms will kill ya out in the desert, and bandits and pimps will rob ya in the towns, but there's work on ranches and in tin mines, and there's folks in need of whatever ya got to sell.

Back along the coast, y'all got factories and I hear they talkin' bout buildin' rails out to the furthest settlements, but for now we just got each other out here, and sometimes not even that. The people here drink, and fight, and survive.

Makes a man feel alive, at least 'til it kills 'im.

If the viper's bite and the lawman's pistol weren't reason enough to watch your back, there's ghoulish things out here too. Some followed us from the old world, across the choppy waters. Some we found when we got here. They ain't common, and they don't make themselves known, but those who believe in 'em got reason to.

[Here, a note is scrawled in the margins, in much more even handwriting: I consider it likely that the reports of imps and boggarts are nothing more than superstitious fabrications of con artists selling bogus talismans, mothers scaring their children, well meaning cowhands with overactive imaginations.]

The dustlanders know it too. Some of 'em is the folks what was here first. They say some of 'em used to be like us, but they left decades ago and joined the wilds. They don't care much for our ways and we don't rightly understand theirs.

Just as well.

We're three weeks' travel from Fort Virtue. Where'n there's a post office and sheriff, but neither does much good.

I look at the faces all around this riverboat and I think. They all got somethin' they're hopin' to find in Fort Virtue, and they all got somethin' they're hopin' to avoid along the way.

Character Creation

Pick a path, and select two gifts from it.

Pick two more gifts from ANY path.

Some gifts are additional skills. Record those on your skills list.

Two skills begin at 4, one begins at 9, two at 8, two at 7, and the rest at 6.

Select an ideal or connection. This is your first in a list that will evolve.

Paths

The Doctor

There's broken bones and scorpion stings aplenty on the frontier. It's lucky for us that you're here. No matter if you were trained in a hospital back on the coast or by your pappy in Shepherdstown, if you can cure the cough, you're welcome most anywhere.

Skill: Tend to the Body – used to splint a wound or treat a snake bite, as one can also do with Rough It, but also can be used to take care of a sick person, safely amputate a limb, identify a poison, alleviate pain, deliver a baby, or perform an autopsy.

Frontier Medicine – Once per day, in the scene immediately after a character takes a wound, you may clean, dress, and splint a wound. This reduces its hindrance by one level, from major to minor, or from minor to no hindrance. The wound remains on the sheet, however—simply mark it as treated.

Gentle Touch – Years of comforting grieving families and easing the pain of patients makes you particularly adept at soothing the suffering of others. When a character spends a scene alleviating stress in your presence, they alleviate two stress instead of one.

Surgeon's Stomach – You have dissected cadavers and then gone home for supper. You are remarkably difficult to upset or disgust. You never take stress from things being disgusting, nor do you suffer hindrances to your rolls for it.

The Dustlander

The dustlanders were here before the settlers. You are alien to us, just as we are alien to your dry plains and rust-colored canyons.

Blood of the Sun – The prairies and deserts of the frontier are your home. You never suffer hindrance from the heat, the dust, or dryness, or the other ambient dangers of the frontier's harsh environments, and you will never die of exposure.

Bones and Scoll – You have some of the strange money that dustlanders use. Cross-sections of antelope horn and leather-cord-wrapped wishbones can be traded among the dustlanders for goods and passage not available from settlerfolk.

Dustlander's Secret – There are things about the dustlanders that the settlers don't know. Once per story, you may reveal some truth about yourself and your people, and use this revelation to solve or tackle a problem. Once revealed, this secret continues to be true indefinitely, and Dustlander's Secret is replaced with a new gift representing the secret's nature.

Godless – The dustlanders ain't got no respect for the Golden Book. The Share the Word skill has no effect on you, and any character who attempts to use it against you take one stress. Additionally, if someone uses the Share the Word skill in your presence, your visible disbelief can be used to impose a minor hindrance on the roll. If their roll fails, they take one stress. This gift is incompatible with every Preacher gift.

The Gambler

You've made your way playing cards, shooting dice, or betting on fights. Maybe you scored your winnings fairly, maybe you cheated a little. Maybe you've never won much at all, and have quite a debt to your name.

Bluff – When you make a Tell Tales roll, you always count as having invoked an ideal, for purposes of doubles. In addition, you can get someone to believe even the most outlandish stories without suffering a hindrance. Once you are caught in a lie once by a person though, you can never bluff them again.

Handle Yer Drink – You never suffer any penalties or drawbacks from drinking. When you are socializing with another and sharing a flask or a bottle, you get a minor boon on all social rolls against them, in part because of your relative sobriety, and in part because others drink more around you.

Jailhouse Songs – You've been caught before for what you ain't proud of, and you know how the wind sounds whistlin' through bars. By sharing prison stories and tales of life on the run from the law, you can

instantly earn the trust of any criminal. But that trust has got to be maintained. If you betray a person who you won over with tales of your past, well, some'd say they'd be justified puttin' you in the ground.

Lucky Dollar – you carry some sort of token that brings you good fortune. Things will go just a little better for you while you carry it. You may pat it in your pocket or fidget with it absent-mindedly (in part to let the GM know you are relying on it). This doesn't effect die rolls (though may effect dice rolled within the fiction of the game) but makes things tend to turn out in your favor. A particularly large lucky break will render the Lucky Dollar useless for a while, so best to only invoke it when it counts.

You may lend your lucky dollar to someone else, but only if you have a connection to them.

The Hired Hand

You work, or worked, a hard frontier job. You were a cowherd or a miner or a plowman. Your nail beds are stained black and your face is weathered from the sun and wind.

Skill: Wrangle – This skill allows you to manage and to care for livestock animals and herbivores on the prairie, as well as scare off predators. It also can be used to lasso, wrestle, or tie up human assailants.

Dirty Hands – Common laborers respect you for your worldly outlook and humble charm. Even strangers will treat you with kindness, offering a place to stay, and will open up to you. You always remind someone of their grandson, or aunt, or best friend. You'll be quick to learn of secrets in a new town, and never without a meal while there are hard-workin' folks around.

Ol' Gal – You have an animal, likely a horse or a dog, who is well trained and loyal. She ain't much smarter than others of her kind, but she loves ya and she's used to ya. She'll be where you need and she'll never spook nor bite ya.

Strong Back – You can lift a right bit more than the average person. You swing an axe harder, work a well pump longer, just generally outperform others physically. You can perform the physical work of two adults, and reduce the hindrance caused by any physical burdens by 1 step.

The Lawman

The frontier would be a wicked place without the lawmen and their rifles. The preachers might teach right from wrong, but if folks listened, we wouldn't need jailhouses.

Skill: Investigate – You can use this skill to look for evidence, in lieu of the Take Notice skill. In addition, this skill can be used to interrogate folks, deduce their emotional state, know what sorts of questions to ask, and can be used to tell useful clues from incidental information and red herrings (None of which are covered by Take Notice). The Take Notice skill might still be useful for you, for noticing things unrelated to the investigation of wrongdoings.

The investigate skill does NOT reliably allow you to determine when someone is lying. You might know that a person who is answering you is *nervous*, but that might be for any number of reasons.

Badge – You carry an official badge marking your station. Folks are likely to comply with relevant investigations, either out of respect or fear of being cuffed. On your orders, a person can be locked up or freed from a cell, exceptin' orders from a higher-station lawman. Some folks get shipped back to the coast to face trial and imprisonment in some fancy city, some folks swing from gallows, getting one last look out over the dry grasslands.

Old Scar – You carry an injury from long ago. Might be from a shootout on some dusty hill, or you might have gotten it fightin' in the war, but either way, it acts up when things start goin' wrong. Sometimes the old scar seems to know even before you do. Your scar may burn when someone is planning to hurt you imminently, or when an ambush lies in wait. It won't ever tell you anything specific, but it will let you know that something is wrong and will generally prevent you from being fully blindsided.

Trusted Firearm – You have a high quality rifle or revolver and you know well how to use it. You can shoot a cigarette out of a barmaid’s mouth or snuff a candle at 200 feet. You never suffer hindrances with your trusty weapon.

You can familiarize yourself with a new firearm if the situation arises, but it must be of notable quality, and it takes a day or so of practice to learn its quirks and get a feel for its balance. Most guns on the frontier will get the job done, but few will give you the accuracy and fine craftsmanship required for this gift.

The Preacher

The Golden Book teaches ya how to live, if you’ll listen. Since the great prophet of the new world received the Word of the Golden Book, the people of the new world have rallied around its verses, looking for guidance and hope. The frontier settlements and the towns back on the coast alike have preachers spreading the Word of the Golden Book, but here in the windswept wilds, people have an extra sort of deference to the men and women of the cloth.

Skill: Share the Word – Invoke the Golden Book and its philosophy and doctrine, in order to reassure or comfort, to chastise and cow, or to guide and mold. Unlike reason or more nuanced persuasion, the scriptures and passages of the Golden Book are well rehearsed in your mind, and familiar to all who hear it (except some of the most wild dustlanders). You can Share the Word even in situations where socials rolls are not normally possible, such as during a barroom brawl.

Gather a Flock – By spending time in a town, farmstead, or saloon, you can gather 4-8 followers with your readings from scripture. These allies will help you complete tasks, run errands, tend chores, or deliver messages so long as they are not put in significant danger.

Shield of Faith – All rolls made to affect you with the Call the Serpent skill, rolls made by spirits or imps of any kind, or rolls that would cause you to abandon the Golden Book’s tenets take a major hindrance, and can never have net boon. You cannot be protected with the Fend and Fence skill.

Vestments – You wear the religious clothing of the church, and will be afforded a level of respect by anyone worth anything’. Some preachers deserve it, others don’t. Even the roughest bandits will treat ya better than they would anybody else. Nobody will attack you unless attacked first themselves, except perhaps dustlanders and those under the thrall of devils—literal or figurative.

The Prostitute

It’s awful lonely for the settlers on the frontier. Their wives and boyfriends back home ain’t around, but you are. From the streetwalker to the womanizing heir to the good time gal to the elegant demimondaine, you have seen your way into a fair number of beds.

Skill: Talk Sweet – can be used in place of Twist an Arm OR Tell Tales. In the case that the person you’re talking to has a connection with a non-negative connection to you, or you are their type sexually or romantically, you have a minor boon on the roll. Unlike Twist an Arm, the target of a successful roll will never be left feeling resentful or pressured.

A Lover’s Token – You carry some physical reminder of a lover. Perhaps back along the coast, perhaps further out in the frontier, perhaps no longer of the world. You start with a connection to this lover, in addition to your normal connection or ideal. Whenever that specific connection is invoked in a die roll, you ALWAYS take the lowest two dice, even if suffering hindrance. If you still fail, however, the results are particularly grim. There is a tragedy to such pining, after all.

Fetching Smile – While in your presence, anyone may act as though they have a connection to you, for purposes of invoking connections on rolls, and anyone may forge a connection to you immediately upon meeting you for the first time. When invoking the free temporary connection, the emotional context is always a positive one. If a character develops on **actual** connection to you, it overrides this one.

Underestimated – Folks will tend not to consider you a threat. And maybe you aren't! But maybe you are. If your party is searched, they will forget to search you. If your party is captured, your cell won't be attended to or will have the weakest, stupidest guard. In a fight, people won't attack you unless you attack them first.

The Tycoon

You either come from wealth in the old world, or you made a fortune as industry developed in the new one. You may be a prospector, an heiress, a newspaper magnate, or a noble of an old-world bloodline.

Skill: Cut a Deal – You are a shrewd bargainer. This skill can be used to negotiate a contract, procure a major purchase, spot loopholes in agreements and laws, or settle disputes leaving everyone as satisfied as possible.

Estate – You own a sizable property and employ its staff if any. You can relax on your grounds, likely in a rather large home, and the property might generate income as well, if it is a ranch, plantation, or mine. When you entertain guests on your estate, they are unable to develop a negative connection to you during their stay, and they have a major hindrance to all Twist an Arm rolls against you or any of your associates.

Life of Luxury – Your idle upbringing allowed you to pick up some very specific skills, at the cost of more practical ones. Pick up two skills from any path, but before assigning other skill points, you must put a 3 into one of the base skills available to all characters.

You may not pick up Wrangle with this gift.

Money Enough – You have nicer clothing, nicer rooms, nicer horses...Some people will treat you well because of these displays of wealth. Others don't take as kindly to it. You can afford to stay in inns, book passage on riverboats, and pay for meals without having to barter or trade. There are some truly remote areas, however, where your money will do you little good. The far frontier has little use for paper bills and the dustlanders have unique currencies of their own.

The Witch

There were witches in the old world; everyone knows it. Midwives who blessed infants and wise men who saw the future in stars and entrails. In the new world, most of this old wisdom is lost, but a rare few were taught by their grandmothers or their mentors.

Skill: Call the Serpent – This general use skill allows a witch to deceive or harm another with magic, starting with a ritual of a few hours.

Any deception will come with tells or side effects. Large deceptions that fabricate senses or shroud one in illusion generally target one person at a time, and leave the target feeling a little woozy and disoriented as their mind is clouded. Characters capable of rolling dice might Take Notice that something is wrong (either in the moment or after the fact). Also, information extracted from a person deceived in this way might be unreliable because of the confusion producing the illusions.

Harm caused by this skill could include delivering a sickness, nightmares, or a blight on crops. Generally, lasting effects require regular maintenance of some kind, and conditions to keep them from unravelling.

Skill: Fend and Fence – protect an individual or an area with magic. This skill cannot turn blades aside or prevent a person from dying from falling off a cliff. But it is very effective at warding off or containing spirits (given a few hours to string up the appropriate charms and bushels of dried flowers). It might hold a door closed against all odds for as long as you remain in ceremony. It could keep a person from stumbling across something hidden in the woods. It could allow a person to walk through a plague ridden town and never contract an illness.

Skill: Read the Signs – A successful roll of this skill will point out an omen, though it will not interpret it. You can ask for a specific topics by taking a hindrance. If you do this more than once about the same topic, you may receive meaningless omen as you seek out meaning. If you search for general omens there are none to be seen, you will notice that there are no omens.

Grandmothers' Eyes – You know the ways of the Old World, ways that even the folks back across the ocean are forgetting. When you evaluate situations, you see things others don't notice. The telltale signs of a sinister spirit, the razor-tooth marks on a dead bull, the subtly chill breath of a possessed man. You do not literally see spirits or otherworldly creatures that others cannot see, but you can interpret the world to know when they are involved in things.

Skills

Burglarize – move quietly, spot eavesdroppers, jimmy open a window
Recollect – remember facts learned in school, ask questions about a past scene
Rough It – hunt for animals, build a fire, find water, scare off a bear
Scamper – Move quickly, climb, evade danger
Scrap – punch, kick, swing a whiskey bottle
Take Aim – Fire a gun or bow
Take Notice – spot details others might miss, sniff somethin' in the air
Tell Tales – get someone to believe somethin's true, whether or not it is
Twist an Arm – get someone to do somethin' they don't wanna do

Connections and Ideals

You start with one connection or ideal. Ideals are things like Justice, Survival, Beauty or Courage. Connections are to others, be they people, places, things, or organizations. Connections have an emotional component, and can be represented with [emotion] toward/of/for [subject]. Fear of the Church, Love for Archibalde, Protectiveness toward my Children are all valid connections.

Connections and Ideals work the same mechanically, as described in the basic rules below, and can be gained and lost in various ways.

Basic Rules

When you want to do something and the GM asks for a die roll, you roll 2d6, add them together, and compare them to your skill.

If our roll is equal to or lower than your skill, you succeed, if it is higher, you fail.

When to Roll Dice

Roll dice only when the GM asks you to. Die rolls should be called for only if both success AND failure will lead to narratively interesting outcomes.

Most NPCs cannot roll dice. They are side characters—villagers, petty criminals, and farmers. They matter to the world, but they do not determine its course. Rarely a character who was not able to roll dice will gain the ability to do so, and will become important in their own right. When this happens, the GM will begin writing their stats as they are needed. They should have at least one connection or ideal immediately, and it should be related to why they are now able to roll dice.

Boons and Hindrance

Sometimes you will have beneficial circumstances called *boons*, in these cases, you may roll one or two extra dice (for a minor or major boon, respectively), and select any two dice you wish.

Other times, you will have disadvantageous circumstances called a *hindrance*. In these cases, you will roll either one or two extra dice (for a minor or major hindrance) and remove the lowest dice such that your two highest dice remain.

If you have multiple sources of either type of bonus, they are combine additively, but the net number of additional dice cannot be greater than two. For instance, if a character has two minor boons, they roll 4 dice and keep the two lowest. If they have one minor boon and one major hindrance, they roll three dice and take the two highest. If they have two major boons and one minor hindrance, they roll 4 dice and take the two lowest.

Opposed Rolls

If two important characters are working at odds to one another, and they both succeed at their roll, the results are inconclusive or mixed. In situations that **MUST** have a definitive outcome, the character with the higher skill succeeds. If there is a tie, the GM can flip a coin or decide arbitrarily.

Invoking Connections and Ideals

If you are acting in line with a connection and roll two dice that match, you get some additional bonus. You and the GM should come to an agreement on what it is, and either can suggest ideas. You get this bonus whether or not the matching dice are the dice you used to determine success or failure, and whether or not you succeeded. This does mean that you are more likely to get them with boons **OR** with hindrances. A failure with these added bonus **MIGHT** mean that you succeed but suffer some other loss proportional to the importance of the success.

Gaining and losing ideals and Connections

You may gain or lose an ideal when something terrible happens.

You may gain a connection when you interact with something and it leaves a mark on you.

You may lose a connection **AND** take a stress when a connection violates your feelings towards it.

You may lose an ideal **AND** take a stress when you act in opposition to the ideal.

Someone dying or something being destroyed does **NOT** get rid of any relevant connections. The destruction of a connection with a positive emotion does cause 3 stress immediately.

You are never forced to gain or lose an ideal or connection by any of these means, and the stress gained by losing an ideal or connection is only suffered if the character does chose to drop the ideal or connection. The stress caused by a connection being killed or destroyed is not optional, however.

Limits of Social Rolls

Twist and Arm or Tell Tales rolls can be used to get others to believe or do things. If those characters being targeted are not dice-rolling characters, they simply work. Dice-rolling characters can resist with stress (see below).

When a situation is tense. Loud, or overwhelming (combat, mid-chase, etc), these skills cannot be invoked. People in this circumstance are simply too engaged and too shut-off to be swayed by words. They are acting on instinct alone.

Finally, characters, NPC or otherwise, who are subjected to a Twist an Arm roll are often left feeling pressured or resentful. Using this skill wontonly to influence others may get a person what they want, but it will make them no friends. (But see the Talk Sweet skill under the Prostitute.)

Combat

In combat, there are no granular turns. Different people describe their actions and reactions to one another, generally acting within the framework of the conflict and building off each other, until the GM calls for a roll at a crucial time or when someone attempts something foolhardy, pivotal, or exceedingly difficult. For instance, if a gunman opens fire in a saloon and the player characters dive for cover to assess the situation, it's probably not necessary to roll yet. If one instead charges at the gunman, that's **DEFINITELY** a roll-worthy scenario. Use your judgment.

Generally, when a PC brings things to be related to one of their connections or ideals, a roll should be called for, resolving different characters' goals as they stand at the moment.

These buildups of circumstances should always move forward, and are useful for characters to build up boons and to apply hindrances to one another. If you are fighting a bandit on the roof of a barn and the GM says he is advancing toward you, inching you toward the edge of the roof, it's not very interesting to reply that no he doesn't. Go with it, build off of it, say how you work around it. Perhaps you are backed against the edge, but you jump down, catching yourself midfall on the loft door and pulling yourself into the barn. Put your improv skills to the test, and try to end up in the best circumstance possible before the pivotal moment.

Damage and Death

Generally damage is the result of another character succeeding to harm you. Damage is handled purely narratively, and generally imposes small or large hindrances on your rolls. Record it under "Wounds and Conditions" on your character sheet.

Wounds heal slowly. You will not recover from wounds without appropriate rest, usually around a week. Cosmetic cuts, scrapes, and bruises can heal faster than that, but serious harm takes time and rest. The Frontier Medicine gift can help alleviate a wound's symptoms though.

Even without access to the gift, and even though it does not remove the wound, players are encouraged to dress their wounds after a fight. This prevents infection, and gives the characters a chance to alleviate stress (see below). Besides, it shows a good dedication to the tone and fiction of the story, and helps make a character's actions feel reasonable. Loners who do not want to seek such treatment, however, are not penalized for not partaking, such that they can be true to their characters.

You can only die when you are suffering a combined large hindrance from wounds, performing a physically dangerous action in the presence of an enemy or notable physical danger AND invoking a connection or ideal, and you fail the roll. If you got doubles, you succeed at what you were trying to do, but die. If you did not get doubles, you fall just short, but still make some lasting impact (perhaps granting an ally time to escape a dangerous situation or robbing an enemy of a plot-relevant item.)

The player should be able to narrate a dying monologue or scene as plot appropriate.

Doing Things with No Skill

If you do not have a skill to do something, you just cannot do it in a way that solves plot relevant problems in a structured way. This means that, for instance, a character without the Fend and Fence skill cannot cast protective spells, or a character without Tend the Body cannot safely perform surgery at all, but it also means that a player character cannot meaningfully or reliably tackle problems with skills not represented on the character sheet. You might be able to DO things not represented with skills, but when the GM presents a problem that must be overcome, you are only reliably able to guarantee outcomes with skill rolls.

Stress

When a character makes another character who is capable of rolling dice do something through use of a skill like Twist an Arm or Talk Sweet, that character may instead take a point of stress, and become immune to all such rolls for the remainder of the scene.

A character may also take stress when they are subjected to something gruesome or scary, at the GM's discretion, or when they are forced to remain calm under pressure. For instance, a thief spotting their own wanted poster on a post office wall and needing to pass by the guard posted there is subject to stress. As is a person watching a loved one drown. Some things are more or less stressful than others.

Stress of three imposes a minor hindrance on all rolls a character makes.

Stress of four imposes a major hindrance on all rolls a character makes.

When stress hits five, a character lashes out, breaks down, or in some major way, ultimately does something that hinders their own goals or wellbeing. During this outburst, they cannot accumulate more stress, and anything that they could bypass by spending stress, they instead bypass for free. Afterwards, their stress drops to 0.

Stress can be removed once per day by sharing a quiet moment alone or with another doing something not directly related to the plot. A conversation—even a tense one—can bring some catharsis. An afternoon alone with a good book. These moments should help illustrate who your character is and what they care about. Meaningful conversations shared between two characters alleviate stress for both characters. Each such scene should reveal something new about your character: an element of their life that the other players haven't seen yet, how they feel about some recent game event, or how they have changed.

A Final Note About the Setting

This game does NOT take place in America, or even on Earth. This game is set in a frontier that never was. The dustlanders are not Native Americans, the settlers are not from Europe, the Golden Book is not the Bible. The things that differentiate this setting from history have been intentionally left minimal and vague, because players are expected and encouraged to ad lib details of the world around them, drawing inspiration from the American frontier, but not bound by its history. The codes a preacher lives by and the passages from her scripture can be invented in the moment. The nature of the vestments may not be a black outfit and white collar. The dustlanders may not be humans. The *settlers* might not be humans. Players are able to make those sorts of decisions with their GM's and they need not make the same decisions from campaign to campaign.

The important immutable constants in the settings are that life is hard, magic is rare and subtle and usually difficult to distinguish from superstition, there are things that we don't understand, and people are resilient.

Name _____ Path _____
Player _____ Stress [][][][]

- | | | |
|--------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Burglarize | <input type="checkbox"/> Recollect | <input type="checkbox"/> Rough It |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Scamper | <input type="checkbox"/> Scrap | <input type="checkbox"/> Take Aim |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Take Notice | <input type="checkbox"/> Tell Tales | <input type="checkbox"/> Twist an Arm |
| _____ | _____ | _____ |
| _____ | _____ | _____ |

Gifts

_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

Ideals and Connections

_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

Wounds and Conditions

_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

Notes and Equipment

