

# CHARACTER CREATION

Character creation is among the most enjoyable parts of a role-playing game. It takes time, should take effort, and ultimately results in the introduction of your alter ego in the game world. Characters should be a plausible, realistic part of the setting, which is not the same as being plausible and realistic in real life. Larger than life personalities are encouraged, and you are further encouraged to create an origin or back-story for the character. Even though the character really does spring into being fully formed from your imagination, odds are that the character didn't do so in the game world.

## MECHANICS

The mechanics of character creation are the easiest to define, and arguably the most important.

1) **Rolling stats.** Players generate a set of six statistics to be arranged as desired for the character's ability scores. Roll 4d6 and drop the lowest die roll, totaling the remaining three dice. Repeat ten times. Choose the six highest ability scores and arrange as you feel necessary.

2) **Choose a class and class abilities.** Characters in *D20 Modern* have only 6 base classes to choose from, each of which focuses on a particular ability score. The campaign will begin at level 1, and progress from there. Multiclassing penalties will not be assessed, and you're encouraged to build a character in whatever way you wish. However, though I will not impose any additional multiclass penalties (such as lowered experience awards) multiclassing too much may result in a marginally weaker character, due to the ultimate lack of higher-level abilities.

The talent trees in *D20 Modern* are certainly not exhaustive, and (on a case-by-case basis) class talent trees from other sources will be considered for inclusion in the game. Please, research exhaustively before choosing class talents, as once they are chosen they are permanent. Aside from the potential of level drain or loss, once your character has an ability, you're stuck with it.

*D20 Modern* encourages (but does not require) characters to take advanced and prestige classes as they increase in level. It's never too early to start thinking about the best way for your character to progress, and all advanced and prestige classes have requirements that must be met before you can take them – assume that all requirements are exactly that unless you hear otherwise from me.

A list of available advanced and prestige classes (as well as their locations) is contained in Appendix I of this document.

3) **Choose feats and skills.** The list of skills from *D20 Past* and *Sidewinder: Recoiled* will be used to determine which skills are available for characters, and which are not. If you have a specific question about a skill that appears in *D20 Modern* (or elsewhere) please ask before you spend the skill points.

Ranks in cross-class skills may be purchased at twice the cost of normal skills, up to the normal maximum number of ranks for your character level (normally, ranks in cross-class skills cost twice as much as normal skills, and max ranks are capped at half the value of normal max ranks). This rule overrides the “official” version in *D20 Modern*.

Feats may be chosen from a number of sources, including *D20 Modern*, *D20 Past*, *D20 Future*, *Urban Arcana*, *Sidewinder: Recoiled*, *Grim Tales*, *Modern Player’s Companion*, and *Martial Arts Mayhem*. Feats from other sources will be considered on a case-by-case basis for inclusion in the game. You may find that multiple versions of a single feat appear in different books – unless you hear otherwise, the version in *Sidewinder: Recoiled* and/or *D20 Modern* will take precedence over others unless specifically stated otherwise.

4) **Choose flaws and/or weaknesses.** Players must choose one flaw or weakness for their character at the time of character creation. Characters may choose up to two (it is strongly suggested that you avoid more). For each flaw or weakness chosen, characters will receive one additional bonus feat, to be chosen from the list of bonus feats available to their class.

Flaws may be found in the D&D supplement *Unearthed Arcana*. Custom flaws will be assessed and allowed (or not) on a case-by-case basis.

If a character does not have a flaw, a single ability score must instead be set below 10. No additional feat will be granted in exchange for this alternate weakness.

5) **Choose Equipment.** Characters will be allowed to purchase a wide variety of era-appropriate equipment using the *Cold Hard Cash* rule variant found in *Sidewinder: Recoiled*. The game will be set in the latter part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century of what at least appears to be the real world, so no, you can’t have that Hechler and Koch MP5 Submachine Gun with an under-barrel grenade launcher. Similarly, you will not be allowed to begin game play in the possession of a full suit of plate mail with shield and longsword.

The majority of available equipment and weaponry will be culled from the pages of *Sidewinder: Recoiled* and *D20 Past*. However, those lists are hardly exhaustive for the era (as there’s literally a whole world out there). If you’d like equipment that actually existed at the time that does not appear in either of the above books, I’ll work with you to assign it appropriate statistics.

## SETTING GUIDELINES

The game will be set in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, starting in the middle of 1879. Consider carefully your character’s age and country or region of origin, and how that may have affected what he or she has experienced in his or her lifetime. Toward that end, you may assume the following.

1) **All major historical events have happened largely as they appear in history books.** As an example, the American Civil War began and concluded for pretty much the reasons that modern historians have agreed upon, and major battles and events proceeded as you would expect. Lincoln was shot by Booth at Ford’s Theater and died shortly thereafter, just as it appears in the

history books. World leaders will retain their historical positions, and national borders will be considered to conform as much as possible to the maps of the period, etc.

Minor events have probably followed the established run of history, as well (including most of the weird ones). That being said, everything happening behind the scenes may not be as familiar.

2) **Characters should begin with outlooks typical of their era and location.** These can be extremely varied, and it's worthwhile to remember that there was an increasingly large belief in spiritualists, mediums, psychics, and Atlantis, Thule, and Mu. Sea captains continue to report giant serpents squid, and other monsters. Astronomers were certain that they were seeing canals on the surface of Mars, and more than one astronomer reported black obelisks on the surface of the moon. Clashes between the West and the East produced some truly bizarre beliefs like Ghost Dance, Theosophy and Thelema, as well as modern interpretations of Gnosticism, Kabbalah, and Wicca. That being said, the belief in the paranormal and/or supernatural is neither expected nor required. It is merely allowed.

3) **You know no 'definites.'** While your character might have seen an overturned grave in a Carpathian Graveyard, heard scratches at the window during the supposed rampage of Spring-Heel Jack, or seen something glowing in the sky one night, you won't begin the game knowing any of the who's, why's, and how's. You might have been party to any number of strange Fortean events, but all you bring to the table (at the beginning, at least) is a certainty that *something* happened.

4) **Magical and Psionic abilities are forbidden.** At least at first, character will not have access to supernatural abilities of any sort. That *may* change over the course of the game.

5) **You're exceptional.** Because of that, you're not bound by all the normal rules, mores and expectations of society. But please, make sure that the reason for your exception makes sense in terms of the established historical record. If you have questions, please don't be afraid to ask.

## GENERAL GUIDELINES

1) **Build characters that will work well as a team.** While I certainly don't mind characters that have slightly competitive interests or abrasive personalities, I expect such things to be taken care of quickly in the game, or reduced to the level of playful banter. Inter-party differences will be given the kind of gravity that they might see in a Lethal Weapon film or X-men comic – very, very little. Crossing the Wolverine/Cyclops (or Glover/Gibson) level of hostility is strictly forbidden.

Choose abilities and skills that will complement those of other party members, and under no circumstance should you engage in a multi-level competition to see which character in the party can become the best at a given task. Coordinate with the other players to ensure that you have a well rounded set of abilities that everyone can have fun with.

Backgrounds that dovetail are encouraged but not required, and are still bound by the rules of plausibility. It's probably best not to create a party of fraternal sextuplets.

2) **Have a leader.** Democracy works wonderfully for government, but slowly and painfully for in-game decisions and discussions. Seek consensus for action when possible, and defer to any present "experts" but don't let the game drag while you (or others) seek consensus. Sometimes, it's sufficient to say, "I have a bad feeling about this" and let the game move on. You don't need to install a party dictator, but at least have someone in the party available to mediate in-character disputes and help synchronize activities.

3) **Be mobile.** Don't tie your character definitively to a specific location or region. Expect a certain amount of globetrotting throughout the game, and ensure that your character can plausibly participate in it. You can start the game without having traveled the world, but odds are that you won't end the game in the same state.

4) **Be prepared for weirdness.** While your character shouldn't be able to say, "Ha! I told you so!" at his or her first encounter with high strangeness, they also shouldn't collapse at the first sight of something out of the ordinary. In essence, be interesting – but not a liability.

If weirdness becomes available to you as a character, it will follow the rules for magic/FX found in Bad Axe Game's *Grim Tales*. Psionics may become available, as well.

5) **Angst not allowed.** Your characters should react in a manner that is plausible for all manner of personal and adventuring difficulties. But, please remember that you're character is a hero (and thus larger than life), and *not* a high school student. Emotional reactions should be as plausible as possible in terms of an action/adventure story or film. Real people might very well react to any given event with crippling depression or fits of weeping. Your character shouldn't. You're tougher, bigger, smarter, and more important than everyone else. That's why the story is about *you*.

6) **Be good.** Or at least, don't be evil. There's no alignment in D20 Modern, but allegiances still have an effect on things. While there's no concrete measure of good and evil to compare to that found in Star Wars or Dungeons and Dragons, your puppy-drowning wanderer who worships the devil is probably not going to work well with the rest of the party, and is therefore forbidden.

## ***APPENDIX I***

### **ADVANCED CLASSES**

Sources include D20 Modern, D20 Past, Sidewinder: Recoiled, Urban Arcana, D20 Future, the Modern Player's Companion, and Darwin's World. You'll notice that there are no classes focused on the supernatural/paranormal. Stranger things will be introduced/allowed as the campaign progresses, and as a result, there will probably eventually be additions to the list below.

In some cases, some of the "flavor" of the class may need to be changed in order to better fit the setting, and while I'll list the official name of the class first, I'll also try to suggest a secondary name as necessary, which will be noted with a \*. Notice also that multiple classes may have the same name - none of them have identical game statistics or functions, however. The book, class name and page number are listed below.

1) **D20 Modern.** Soldier (165), Martial Artist (167), Gunslinger (168), Infiltrator (171), Daredevil (173), Bodyguard (174), Field Mechanic (181), Investigator (182), Personality (185), Negotiator (187), Shadow Slayer (291), Occultist (293), Telepath (305), Battlemind (307)

2) **D20 Past.** Explorer (34), Musketeer, Duelist\* (47), Frontier Marshall (65), Gangster (82), Scientist (84)

3) **Sidewinder: Recoiled.** Bounty Hunter (165), Brave (167), Deperado (169), Grifter (171), Gunslinger (173), Maverick (175), Mountain Man (177), Pony Soldier (179), Preacher (181), Professor (182), Pugilist (183), Rifleman (185), Rustler (187), Sawbones (189), Scout (191), Showman (193), Soldier (194), Tin Star (196), Wrangler (198)

4) **Urban Arcana.** Archaic Weaponmaster, Melee Expert\* (36), Shadow Hunter, Tracker\* (42), Street Warrior (49), Swashbuckler, Dandy Swordsman\* (51), Thrasher (55)

5) **Modern Player's Companion.** Bounty Hunter (21), Confidence Artist (23), Criminologist (25), Dead Shot (27), Enforcer (28), Gentle Warrior (31), Profiler (38), Survivalist (39), Commander (43), Martial Arts Master (46), Silent Intruder (53)

6) **D20 Future.** Ambassador (16), Dreadnought (19), Explorer (23), Field Officer (25), Swindler (29), Tracer (33)

## ***APPENDIX II***

### INSPIRATION

Creating characters and backgrounds appropriate for a true historical setting is not precisely the same thing as creating characters and backgrounds for an action-adventure game based loosely on real world events (though history will provide you a tremendous resource). The 'history' you'll be reliving is as much informed by film, television, and literature conventions as it is by progress of time. The following resources should all be used as inspiration to remind you of the bonds of the setting, as well as to provide some guidelines as to how genre characters react to certain kinds of events. The lists are far from exhaustive, but they're a good start.

1) **Movies.** Rio Bravo, McLintock, The Cowboys, The Magnificent Seven, the Comancheros, Tombstone, Unforgiven, The Mask of Zorro, The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly, The Shootist, Rooster Cogburn, North to Alaska, True Grit, the War Wagon, Quigley: Down Under, Maverick, The Alamo, How the West Was Won, Van Helsing, the Mummy, the Mummy Returns, Raiders

of the Lost Ark, Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom, Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade, Return of the Jedi, the X-Files, Hellboy, Evil Dead I and II, Army of Darkness, Constantine, Ghostbusters I and II, Wild Wild West, Wyatt Earp, Desperado, Once Upon a Time in Mexico, Shanghai Noon, Shanghai Knights.

2) **Books.** The Anubis Gates (Tim Powers), Earthquake Weather (Tim Powers), Desperation (Stephen King), The Dark Tower I-VIII (Stephen King), The Peshawar Lancers (S.M. Stirling), The Sackett Brand (Louis L'Amour), Jubal Sackett (Louis L'Amour), Talon (Louis L'Amour), The Daybreakers (Louis L'Amour), Dracula (Bram Stoker), Frankenstein (Mary Shelley), The Call of Cthulhu (various, mostly HP Lovecraft), the Hound of the Baskervilles (Arthur Conan Doyle), The Puritan (Robert Howard), American Gods (Neil Gaiman), Alien Agenda (Jim Marrs), Rule by Secrecy (Jim Marrs), How Few Remain (Harry Turtledove), Mythago Wood (Robert Holdstock), Holy Blood, Holy Grail (Richard Leigh), the Da Vinci Code (Dan Brown), Angels and Demons (Dan Brown).

3) **Television.** The Adventures of Brisco County, Jr., The Twilight Zone, The X-Files, Deadwood, History's Mysteries, Wild Wild West.