

CHAPTER THREE

SYSTEM

Smythe Affiliated is defined by its motto - "Simple. Inventive. Nasty". The mental image formed by those words is success at all costs; do the job by whatever means necessary. Whether that involves talk or action, an Affiliate is hired to do a job, and heaven help him if he doesn't do it properly.

This chapter outlines the Caltrops System, the dice system by which Affiliates runs. Through explanations and examples, it provides the platform for actions within the game.



Action Dice

When taking an action in a tabletop role-playing game, success or failure can sometimes be assumed, but is usually determined by a dice roll and the player character's skill level. In Affiliates, the rules for dice rolls can be found in the Caltrops System, which uses four-sided dice (d4) and modification of a base target number (TN).

Attributes

The number of points you have in any given Attribute is the number of four-sided dice available for you to roll to reach a base TN of 10. This means that, at the start of a game, a player will have a maximum dice pool of 3, or 4 if he takes a Legendary Attribute (see Merits and Flaws in the Character Creation section).

Example: Brass has been invited to a dinner party, serving as a bodyguard for Ren. When dinner is served, he looks at the vast assortment of silverware flanking his plate and needs to figure out which fork to use on the first course. All things involving social interaction involve a Style roll. He has Style at 2, so the player rolls two d4.

Skills

It might be noted at this point that with any Attributes at 2, a starting level player has no hope of succeeding at tasks linked to those Attributes. However, Attributes alone do not determine someone's success at a roll. While Attributes demonstrate innate ability, learned Skills help make various tasks much easier. Every point you have in the skill most related to the task at hand lowers the TN by one.

Example: Ren needs to set up a database of places where she's recently spotted Merritt 'mooks' and send it off to Aph, the caporegime in Pittsburgh. This roll employs the Computers Skill, which is linked to Intelligence. She has Intelligence at 3 and Computers at 1, so her TN is 9 on 3d4.

Specialities

Besides Skills, there are other factors that affect the TN for any given roll. Smythe Affiliated has a reputation for employing people who specialise in a particular field. After purchasing a skill, a player has the option of adding a Speciality. Rolls on an action involving that Speciality lower the TN for the action by an additional point.

Example: Kes finds herself in the middle of a bar brawl and is called upon to take down a Merritt mook who is hoping to kill her quietly in all the confusion. She needs to distract him long enough to make a quick getaway. This roll could employ either Brawl or Melee, which both use Dexterity to determine dice pool. Her Dexterity stands at 3. However, while she has both Skills at 3, she has a Speciality in Melee - Improvised Weapon. She therefore opts to hit the Merritt mook over the head with a chair; the Speciality reduces her TN to 6 on 3d4.

Signature Traits

As well as Specialities, the tendency within Smythe Affiliated to hire specialists is reflected within the Signature Traits. These generally reflect the reason that the Affiliate in question was hired. Depending on the level at which the character has a given Signature Trait, he gains additional modifiers to his TN for certain tasks, among other advantages.

Example: Pagebert is called upon to investigate a company on an industrial sabotage case. Before he can do any deep-level hacking, he'd like to find out who did their IT security system, as this will make the job a lot easier. Pagebert has Intelligence at 4, giving him a dice pool of 4d4. He has the Computer Skill at 4, though his Speciality is Hacking, so his TN is only reduced to 6 by Skill. However, he also has Signature Trait: Geek. Level one in Geek is Research Maniac, which reduces the TN on any computer-related research roll by 2. Therefore, his TN is reduced to 4 on 4d4.

Merits and Flaws

As well as learned skills and specialities, everyone has natural advantages and disadvantages that help or hinder in specific tasks. In the Caltrops System, these are represented by Merits and Flaws. Some Merits merely reflect useful possessions or qualities without having a specific effect on dice rolls, but most provide a reduction in TN for specific tasks.