

or minus any difficulty modifiers, is five or greater. Thus, if a car driven by a character with a Driving skill of six is bumped by another car (a situation that might impose a -1 penalty to the character's Driving check), the Narrator may simply allow the character to automatically retain control of his car without having to roll an ability check.

It is the Narrator's responsibility to know when to make players roll and when to use automatic successes. The more times the Narrator makes a player roll an ability check, the more times the character can fail. Most Narrators will eventually figure out which situations require ability checks and which ones don't. In general, the more cinematic the game, the more often the Narrator will use automatic successes.

Action Systems

This section describes a number of action systems: mechanics used to adjudicate various common actions like climbing, hiding, and running. Most of these actions can be performed during normal scenes or in action scenes. Others, like combat, always take place during action scenes. This list is by no means all-inclusive. Characters will always take actions that are not covered by the rules. The Narrator is encouraged to create his own on-the-fly action systems when unique situations arise.

Mecha may also attempt most of the action systems described below. However, because mecha have different statistics and operate on a different scale from that of normal characters, a few modifications to each action system are in order. Each action system entry contains a mecha section that explains the way in which the action system's rules are altered when the action is performed by a mecha.

Awareness

Even when not actively searching, characters may still discover hidden or obscure clues (like a door concealed behind a tapestry, the scent of a recently extinguished cigar, or the barely audible twang of an arrow being fired). In order to determine whether or not a character notices something that is not immediately obvious in his surroundings, the Narrator will secretly roll a Perception check for the character. If the check succeeds, the Narrator tells the player what his character notices. If the check fails, the character does not notice anything out of the ordinary. An awareness check counts as an instant action.

This check is applicable only when a character is not actively searching. Particularly hard to detect items or characters who have successfully hidden themselves (see the hiding action system below) can only be discovered when a character actively searches the area. If a character actively searches for something, use the searching action system described later in this section.

Mecha

Sentient and non-sentient mecha use their Mecha Perception attribute for this check. When housed inside his mecha, a pilot's

ability to perceive his surroundings is only as good as his mecha's sensors. Thus, a pilot must rely on his mecha's Mecha Perception attribute when he is within his mecha. If a mecha does not possess the Mecha Perception attribute, it relies on its pilot's Perception score.

Balance

When a character attempts to stand on the tip of a flagpole, run up the side of a building, leap from one falling object to another, or perform other amazing feats of balance, his player rolls a Reflexes check to determine success. The check suffers a penalty based on the instability of the surface. Table 8-2 shows common penalties that apply to a number of balance-based actions. If the check is successful, the character maintains his balance and may move along the object normally. If the character remains on the object, the player must roll the check each time the character's turn to act comes up. If the check fails, the character loses his balance and falls. A balance check counts as an instant action.

Mecha

Sentient and non-sentient mecha use their Mecha Reflexes attribute for this check. The check suffers a penalty based on the mecha's Maneuverability Class. Mecha with an MC of A suffer no penalty. Mecha with an MC of B suffer a -1 penalty. Mecha with an MC of C suffer a -2 penalty. The Narrator has the final say on what types of mecha can and cannot attempt balancing maneuvers.

Table 8-2: Balance Penalties

Attempted Action	Penalty
Running on balance beams/girders	-1
Balancing on flagpoles/leaping from tree to tree	-2
Running across wires or power lines	-3
Leaping from one falling object to another	-5
Running up the side of a skyscraper	-7
Running on water	-9

Background Checks

Sometimes, the Narrator may want to determine whether or not a character is famous enough to get into a classy restaurant or has enough pull with the mob to get his hands on a couple of rocket launchers. These situations can be resolved with a background check, an ability check based on the character's background level. Background checks are especially common with the Connections, Education, Fame, Money, and Status backgrounds.

In order to perform a background check, a player adds two to his character's background level and uses this sum as the Action Total for the ability check. If the Final Total of the ability check is equal to or greater than 10, the check is successful. The rule of automatic success works well in many of these situations. Characters can even perform extended and contested checks with their backgrounds.

Even if a character does not have an appropriate background, the Narrator may still allow him to attempt a background check. However, the Action Total for the check begins at zero. The two points are not added unless the character has at least one level of the background. Thus, it is not easy for a character to use his fame to get into a trendy restaurant if he is not at all famous.

Mecha

Because mecha do not have backgrounds, they are unable to perform background checks.

Climbing

When a character attempts to climb an object like a tree, wall, or mountain, his player rolls a Reflexes check to determine success. In most cases, simple climbing attempts (like attempts to climb a sturdy tree, a short fence, or up a small cliff) will be automatically successful. More difficult climbing attempts (like attempts to scale a high brick wall with no handholds, an icy cliff, or an inverted surface) will require the player to roll a Reflexes check with a difficulty modifier based on the terrain and climbing conditions. Proper climbing gear can reduce the penalty (granting up to a +5 bonus and preventing a complete fall) under most circumstances. A long climb may require the character to gain a number of successful checks before he reaches the top. Characters can climb at a maximum speed equal to half their normal movement per turn. Climbing usually counts as a normal action. The Narrator can always judge a climb too difficult to be attempted with any chance for success.

Mecha

Sentient and non-sentient mecha use their Mecha Reflexes attribute for this check. The check suffers a penalty based on the mecha's Maneuverability Class. Mecha with an MC of A suffer no penalty. Mecha with an MC of B suffer a -1 penalty. Mecha with an MC of C suffer a -2 penalty. The Narrator has the final say on what types of mecha can and cannot attempt to climb.

Cooperation

Some actions (like lifting a heavy rock, disarming a bomb, or putting together a puzzle) become easier to accomplish when characters work together. When two or more characters team up to perform

an action, the character with the highest attribute or skill level rolls the required ability check with a +1 bonus for each additional person who lends a hand. If the action is based on a skill, each cooperating character must possess the skill in order to be counted.

The Narrator may want to place a limit on the number of characters who can work together at a time. Any number of characters may attempt to bail water from a sinking ship, but having 20 characters all working at the same time to disarm a bomb is a recipe for disaster. The Narrator has the final say on whether or not characters can effectively cooperate to perform a given action. Cooperation does not apply to most combat actions and similar situations.

Mecha

Like characters, mecha may cooperate to increase their chance of successfully performing certain actions like lifting a heavy object or holding up a collapsing building. If a cooperating mecha is too small or in an inappropriate form, the Narrator may determine that it is unable to successfully aid in the cooperative activity.

Deception

When a character attempts to trick, fool, or bluff someone, his player rolls a Charisma check, contested with the listener's Wits check. Whoever comes up with the highest Final Total wins the check. Clever role-playing may grant a bonus to the deceiver's ability check. If the deceiver wins, the listener believes his story. If the listener wins, he does not believe the deceiver. Most attempts to deceive count as instant actions.

This system should be used only when PCs attempt to fool NPCs. It is up to each player to determine whether or not his character believes another character. If the target of the deception is an unimportant character, the Narrator may opt to forego the contested roll and have the would-be deceiver roll a normal (uncontested) ability check with a difficulty modifier based on the scrutiny of his listener in order to determine if his story is believed.

Mecha

Although sentient mecha do not attempt this type of action often, they use their Mecha Charisma attribute for the check. Characters may also be able to successfully deceive

