9) RPG CHARACTERS

Player characters in Libre Solo Role Playing's RPG rules are meant to be simple, to handle the basics of conflicts and skill checks and get out of the way of the story. New character creation is summarized on p.147; a full list of skills is in appendix S (p.140).

The player's character has six attributes*: strong, nimble, hardy, smart, willful* and *savvy.* There are just three attribute levels: good (+1), average (0) and poor (-1). For a starting player's character, the sum of attributes adds up to 0. The player's character may have 0 for all attributes; or have one +1, one -1 and four attributes at 0; or have two +1, two -1 and two attributes at 0; or have three attributes at +1 and three attributes at -1.

Strong characters (+1) are good at lifting, pushing, carrying and breaking things. Weak characters (-1) are poor at these tasks.

Nimble characters (+1) are good at balance, dodging and fine manipulation. Clumsy characters (-1) are poor at these tasks.

Hardy characters (+1) better resist getting fatigued, tired or sick, and recover more easily from being hurt. Sickly characters (-1) become tired when they push themselves, and find it harder to recover from being injured.

Smart characters (+1) know more, and they can study and learn topics more quickly. Dull characters (-1) don't have as much education, less knowledge and less experience learning complex concepts.

Willful characters (+1) are in control of their emotions and resist temptation. Weak-minded characters (-1) are driven by their desires and are easily manipulated.

Savvy characters (+1) have good intuition for interacting with people and animals, which also extends to operating vehicles by "feel". Unsociable characters (-1) have difficulty communicating effectively, or understanding and influencing others.

The types of skill checks listed above are tied directly to the underlying attributes. For example, the player uses the

CHARACTER DISADVANTAGES

Players' characters might have physical, mental or social disadvantages as part of their background. Examples include a permanent disabling or debilitating injury; or low social class and poverty; or family relationships, cultural or religious obligations that can come into play; or phobias, or even delusions.

These sorts of character flaws make a player's character more interesting. However, assigning disadvantages to a player's character does not provide any special bonuses. In gameplay, disadvantages might be hard on the player's character. But these extra challenges can also help the player. They provide yet more ways to ask for trouble, and opportunities for the player's character to make skill checks. The player needs these to achieve meaningful success in obstacle scenes and move the story forward. For that reason, there is no penalty for assigning flaws to the player's character.

WHAT PLUSES AND MINUSES MEAN

The RPG rules use the yes-no questions (d100) table on the action sheet and in appendix Q (p.139) to make skill checks. Use the "shifts" column on the left-hand side for likelihood of success. Rolling a yes result means the skill check succeeds. A no result means the skill check fails.

For example, a skill check at 0 has a 50/50 moderate chance of success; a skill check at +2 is very likely to succeed (80% chance of yes); a skill check at -1 is unlikely to succeed (35% chance of yes).

Whenever a player rolls a skill check that involves the player's character, the rolled result adds to plot stress, but it does not test plot stress. For example if plot stress is 17 and the player rolls 13 for a skill check, plot stress increases to 18 and the roll does not trigger an unexpected event. If the roll had been a yes-no question, that roll result would have generated an unexpected event and cut plot stress in half.

A 50/50 moderate chance, at 0 shifts, is the bar for a player character's skill check to contribute toward meaningful success in an obstacle scene. That minimum bar doesn't include shifts from magic scene qualities that might help or hinder the attempt.

ARE PLAYER CHARACTERS TERRIBLE?

On its face, characters' untrained skills on average are unlikely to succeed. The best possible base untrained rating for a player's character is a measly +1. Even the most gifted player's character is only somewhat likely (65%) to succeed at an untrained task that has a base 50/50 moderate difficulty.

Compare that to allies, rivals and foes. As will be covered in chapter 10, these NPCs default to a *conflict* rating that is at base 0, possibly even +1 or +2. Conflict is used as a universal base skill, covering everything that person, team or minions might reasonably attempt. Unlike the player's character, NPCs have *no* untrained skill penalties.

Is that totally unfair? Not really. Consider that the player gets to narrate the story, and should use that advantage to draw on the player character's skills, the scene's qualities, window dressing, special equipment and other advantages to succeed. The player should also recruit allies and draw on their strengths as part of the player character's group. These factors help the player character's group best rivals and foes, and power through obstacle scenes to achieve meaningful success.

So it's correct that technically, the player's character starts at a disadvantage to NPCs for untrained skills. In practice, the player guides the story to work toward the player character's strengths, and can compensate for the player character's weaknesses through allies.

As a player's character gains experience, the character also gains more skills, and can even become proficient in entire skill categories, making the player's character quite powerful. Untrained skills are areas where the player's character remains vulnerable to challenges from competent rivals and foes.

strength attribute to make a skill check related to lifting, pushing, carrying or dragging heavy things. *Nimble* is used to balance or dodge. *Hardy* is used to resist fatigue or disease. *Smart* is used for general education and knowledge. *Willful* resists temptation or influence. *Savvy* is for getting favorable reactions from others. Attributes also affect base levels for trained and untrained skills.

skills

A starting player's character gets six points to spend on trained skills. Skills are grouped below by type and by category. For one skill point, the character can choose a specific skill and boost it by +1 over its base. For three skill points, the character can choose an entire skill category, which boosts all the skills in that category by +1 over its base. There are six types of skills, each of which defaults to the sum of two attributes:

Device and ranged skills default to the sum of nimble plus hardy attributes.

Animal and vehicle skills default to the sum of strong plus savvy attributes.

Social skills default to the sum of savvy plus willful attributes.

Physical and melee skills default to the sum of strong plus hardy attributes.

Subterfuge and survival skills default to the sum of smart plus nimble attributes.

Knowledge skills default to the sum of smart plus willful attributes.

Device and ranged skill categories include bows (longbow, shortbow, crossbow; also slings); thrown weapons (rock, knife, axe, hammer, dart, grenade); guns (pistol, rifle, submachine gun); gunner (individual large ranged weapons, which might be stationary or vehicular); disable (lockpicking, break electronics/security, disarm trap, sabotage mechanical). Dodge (avoid damage) is a standalone skill.

Animal and vehicle skill categories include ride (horse, elephant, camel, giant flying lizard); handle animal (mounts, birds of prey, cattle, large predators, pets); wayfind (navigation, astrogation, orienteering); crew (for very large vehicles: sailing ship, cruise liner, submarine, space battleship); drive (for smaller ground transport: motorcycle, car, truck, bus, ground speeder); pilot (for small to mid-size air/space transport: prop plane, jet fighter, helicopter, personal jetpack).

Social skill categories include influence (negotiate to resolve situations diplomatically; deceive to use false suggestions or outright lies; appeal to carouse or seduce; intimidate to coerce cooperation through real or implied threats); and interact (empathy to read people for their thoughts or feelings; leadership to inspire allies; etiquette to behave properly in particular cultural/social situations).

Physical and melee skill categories include performance (singing, dancing, physical sports); martial arts (unarmed karate, judo, boxing, wrestling, street fighting, capoeira); athletics (running, jumping climbing, swimming); and melee weapons (axes, swords, staves, plasma swords, flails, spears, as well as active protection from shields).

Subterfuge and survival skill categories include hunt (tracking, fishing, trapping, camouflage); survival (tundra, desert, deciduous/coniferous forest, mountain, scrub/badlands, underground, swamp, urban); streetwise (gather information to get the word on the street; scrounge to acquire, sell or dispose of gear; gamble; sleight of hand to palm and hide small objects on one's person); sneak (hide, sneak, and shadow to follow someone without being detected). Notice (find hidden things) is a standalone skill.

Knowledge skill categories include craft (working with cloth, leather, wood, metals, writing/poetry, painting, photography); medic (first aid, pharmacology/herbalism, surgery); mechanic (design/build machines, repair machines). Language represents fluency in an additional language. Profession represents any one trained science or political field, e.g.: engineering, law, chemistry, theology, history. When a player invests points into the

BUILDING ARTHUR FALCONE

When Arthur Falcone was created a player's character, the player imagined a good talker who is not all that quick on his feet. The player chose an array of attributes with four 0s, a single +1 (assigned to savvy) and a single -1 (assigned to nimble).

From there, the derived levels for skill types are: Physical/melee, adding strong 0 and hardy 0, for base 0. Device/ranged, adding nimble -1 and hardy 0, for base -1. Animal/vehicle, adding strong 0 and savvy +1, for base +1. Subterfuge/survival, smart 0 and nimble -1, for base -1. Knowledge, adding smart 0 and willful 0, for base 0. Social, adding savvy +1 and willful 0, for base +1.

The player has 6 skill points to spend. It takes three points to buy a full skill category, but only one point apiece to buy skills individually. The player decides three points for a skill category puts too many eggs in one basket at too steep a cost, and decides to buy individual skills. There are no powers in the setting, so the player skips that. If any power categories had been available, it would have cost three skill points to buy in.

The player wants a combat skill and decides to put a point into brawling. It's based off physical/melee 0, so the player adds a point and writes in brawling +1.

The player next puts one point apiece into three skills in Falcone's best derived skill types: drive car at +2 (in the animal/vehicle skill category); deceive +2 and intimidate +2 (both in the social skill category).

The player also decides to compensate for the poor subterfuge/survival skill type, which defaults to -1. The last two points are spent to add gather information 0 and notice 0.

All other skills are untrained, which puts Falcone at one point lower than the derived base skill levels in each category. That means untrained physical/melee skills default to -1, untrained device/ranged defaults to -2, untrained animal/vehicle defaults to 0, untrained subterfuge/survival defaults to -2, untrained knowledge skills default to -1, and untrained social skills default to 0.

WHERE ARE SKILL DEFINITIONS?

The RPG rules don't define skills and what they can and cannot do. There are two reasons: First, most skills are straightforward. There isn't much more to say to an experienced gamer like you. Second, when it comes to asking "can my skill do this?" in the context of a setting, the answer is strictly the player's decision. If you're unsure whether a skill check can do something, ask a yes-no question, or consider "closely related skills" below.

CLOSELY RELATED SKILLS

During gameplay, if the player's character has a skill that's close enough to an unknown skill, the player can decide to apply the existing skill with a -1 shift instead of treating it as untrained.

For example, Arthur Falcone's base animal/vehicle skill category is +1, based on the attributes of strong 0, and savvy +1. The player spent a point on drive car, for a drive car +2 skill. The player could apply drive car +2 to any type of car, from subcompacts to pickup trucks, to Formula 1 racers to vans, maybe even a golf cart. But driving other types of vehicles (a motorcycle, tractor-trailer, bus, all-terrain vehicle and so forth) would be an untrained skill that would default to the animal/vehicle skill category -1, for 0 shifts.

But what about the gray areas? A small bus or all-terrain vehicle is not a car, but the player might decide it's close enough. In those cases, the player might decide Arthur's drive car +2 allows the investigator to operate the vehicle with a -1 shift to the skill. That means drive ATV or drive short bus gets a base +1 skill check instead of Arthur's untrained animal/vehicle skill check at 0 shifts.

This rule of closely related skills can apply to all types of skills. But it probably will come up most often for skills related to vehicles/animals and weapons use in conflicts.

profession skill category, it is called "jack-of-all-trades." Research (representing computer searches and/or library use) is a standalone skill.

Outside of this conventional list of skills, there are three open-ended categories of supernatural skills, called *powers*. Chapter 12 has more details on what powers are, what kinds of powers are available, and how they work. Libre Solo Role Playing RPG rules cover three types of powers: *special abilities*, *magic* and *psionics*. Depending on the player's setting none, one, or more than one of these types of supernatural skill types might be available to the player's character, and/or to foes and other persons. Buying a power category costs three skill points. For that cost, characters with *magic* start with three magic skills; characters with *psionics* start with two psionic skills; characters with *special abilities* start with one special ability skill.

untrained skills

After selecting the player character's skills, any remaining skills or skill categories where the character hasn't spent points are untrained: They default to the character's base skill level -1. Depending on the setting, some types of skills can't be used untrained. The player can use common sense whether the player's character has a chance to make an untrained skill check or not. For example, characters cannot use guns untrained in a setting where firearms don't exist. A modern-day player's character might have a chance to pilot a plane untrained. But a barbarian from a primitive society would need a very good explanation to have any chance to use a computer or operate a vehicle!

For an example of trained vs. untrained skills, let's look at Arthur Falcone's animal/vehicle category skill. Arthur's base skill of +1 for the category is the sum of his strong attribute of 0 (average), and savvy attribute of +1 (good). The player decides to take drive car as a trained skill for Arthur. The skill starts at +1 to his base, for +2. If Arthur gets on a motorcycle, a skill in which he has no training, his untrained default is base animal/vehicle skill -1, for a net 0.

regular equipment

Outfitting a player's character before gameplay is fast and loose: Choose whatever personal effects the player's character should have, write them down, and you're done. Selecting equipment has the following restrictions:

First, is the gear openly available and reasonably priced in the game world? Starting items should be something the player's character could buy, trade for, find or make in the game world, based on the character's background.

Second, is the gear legal to own in the game world, without special status or restrictive licensing? Any starting item should be something that wouldn't be confiscated, or result in the player character's arrest if caught possessing the item.

Third, Is the gear something the player's character could easily carry or have in each scene? If not, the player's character might own the item, but the player will need to figure out where the item is when it is not in use. For example, it's fine for a player's character in a modern setting to own a car. If the character flies to another city between scenes, the car won't figure into those scenes.

Regular equipment doesn't give bonuses to skill checks. Instead, like window dressing, it just lets certain types of skills be used. Many types of tasks are impossible to do without the right gear, no matter how much training someone has. Examples include using weapon skill without a weapon; trying to craft something without materials and tools; or trying to repair a device without tools and spare parts. The player can make a skill test with inadequate or poor-quality equipment, but the skill check is at least at a -1 modifier. Examples might be trying to repair a motorcycle engine with a pocket multi-tool; applying first aid with a sewing kit and rags; or picking up a stick as a makeshift club for combat.

Regular equipment doesn't give bonuses to skills, but the player can use it like window dressing to bypass a skill check, or to shift to a different skill check (ideally one that makes it easier for the player's character to succeed, or that reduces the consequence for failure). One example

STARTING GEAR EXAMPLES

Outfitting Arthur Falcone before the start of the game is easy: It's a modern-day setting, so available equipment should resemble what an ordinary, modern-day person carries around.

The player starts with a suit and a wallet. Related to his job, the investigator would need a vehicle, office space and a bank account for purchases.

Arthur certainly owns much more than these basics. The player can write in details from scene to scene if they make sense to the player character's background. For example, the player might write before any scene that Arthur has a smartphone and notebook (or else add them as window dressing by asking yes-no questions during a scene). While Arthur doesn't seem to be the gun-toting type, it seems logical that the investigator can get hold of a pistol or rifle if there's time between scenes to make that possible.

A wandering barbarian starting in a fantasy setting probably carries everything that's owned, maybe helped by a horse or other beast of burden.

The barbarian might have a primary and backup weapon (let's say spear and hand axe), light armor, and a pack for carrying things with a bedroll, food and drink, some rope or cord, fire starting kit, plus a modest coinpurse and possibly an heirloom and/or some personal adornment.

In each case, those respective equipment lists feature gear that's common, readily available, reasonably priced and legal in the setting. The exception is the mentioned gun mentioned above, which isn't usually legal without some sort of permit. But in the setting guns are not uncommon, and it would be the sort of thing a private investigator could dig up when necessary. When in doubt, a yes-no question can help decide.

Falcone's ally Toni Graham would have access to computers and a library that Arthur Falcone wouldn't, but her graduate student background means that she shouldn't reasonably have access to guns or martial weapons.

EXAMPLES OF PREMIUM GEAR REQUESTS

Below are some examples of premium gear and other favors that Arthur Falcone might be able to convince his patron, Peter Havik-Stand, to supply for a mission. The examples include estimates for the likelihood that Falcone might be able to talk Peter into supplying them, assuming the request makes sense for the mission and Falcone passes an appropriate social skill check:

Transportation: a limousine and driver (very likely); small airplane, boat or helicopter with pilot (50/50 moderate); personal charter jet and pilot (unlikely).

Valuables: $1,000 cash advance (likely); $10,000 loan or pricey jewelry borrowed for a night (unlikely); loaned $100,000 of unmarked bills in a nondescript briefcase (nigh impossible).

Explosives, weapons, drugs, lockpicks, surveillance gear: nigh impossible. Peter is a wealthy patron, not an anarchist. Don't bother rolling except under truly exceptional circumstances.

Restricted library access: likely, but it would depend on the specialty subject of the library, and assumes there is a point to the request, to move the plot forward.

A pair of high-demand sports, theater or concert tickets: 50/50 moderate. This request enters unknown territory. It's not established that Peter Havik-Stand is a sports fan or a patron of the arts, able to get tickets easily.

is a knotted rope as a safer alternative to climbing sheer surfaces. The rope could shift the skill check from a climbing skill check, to a strong attribute skill check. A ladder could eliminate making any skill check.

premium gear

In some games, the player's character will have access to costly or restricted equipment. A wealthy patron, government agent, or member of a powerful criminal organization might have this privilege. Premium gear *might* give +1 to specific skill checks. One way the player's character might get premium gear is by acquiring the item in gameplay, for example as a treasure or reward.

Another possible approach is to play out the request for premium equipment using structured questions for persons, for example in a starting cutscene. Whether the request is for a jet fighter or space cruiser, a box of explosives, code cracking software or a magical sword, the player can try to have the player's character make a social skill check to convince a patron or other person assigning the mission that the gear is necessary. If the social skill check is successful, a follow-up yes-no question determines whether the patron can supply the requested equipment. Don't bother rolling the yes-no question unless the setting and the person being asked have a reasonable chance of procuring the specialty asked-for equipment to help accomplish the mission, and if there's a reasonable chance for the request to be granted. As with any skill check, failure carries a consequence. Failing this type of skill check should cut off any further requests for assistance.

If the player's character does receive requested special equipment to help with the mission, the supplier always expects the gear to be returned at the end of the mission, if not earlier. The player might want the player's character to try and hold onto the gear, for example through a successful deceive skill check to lie convincingly that the items went missing, or were lost or stolen. As always, a failed skill check triggers a consequence. If the player's character tries to lie to a powerful patron and fails, that consequence could be severe. ☺

PLAYER CHARACTER SKILL TREE

Skill Base	Skill Group	Individual Skills
Device and ranged	bows	longbow, shortbow, crossbow, sling
	throwing	rock, knife, axe, hammer, dart, grenade
	guns	pistol, rifle, submachine gun, shotgun
	gunner	(by type of weapon, including vehicular weapons)
	disable	lockpick, mechanical/trap, electronics/security
	dodge	*standalone skill*
Animal and vehicle	ride	horse, elephant, camel, giant flying lizard, etc.
	handle animal	mounts, birds of prey, cattle, large predators, pets, etc.
	wayfind	navigation, astrogation, orienteering
	crew	sailing ship, cruise liner, submarine, space battleship, etc.
	drive	motorcycle, car, truck, bus, ground speeder, etc.
	pilot	jet fighter, helicopter, personal jetpack, etc.
Social	influence	negotiate, deceive, appeal, intimidate
	interact	empathy, leadership, etiquette
Physical and melee	performance	singing, dancing, physical sport
	martial arts	karate, judo, boxing, wrestling, street fighting, capoeira, etc.
	athletics	running, jumping, climbing, swimming
	melee weapon	axes, swords, staves, plasma swords, spears, shields, etc.
Subterfuge and survival	hunt	tracking, fishing, trapping, camouflage
	streetwise	gather information, scrounge, gamble, sleight of hand
	sneak	hide, sneak, shadowing
	notice	*standalone skill*
	survival	tundra, desert, deciduous/coniferous forest, scrub / badlands, underground, mountain, swamp, urban, etc.
Knowledge	craft	cloth, leather, carpentry, writing/poetry, painting, photos, etc.
	medic	first aid, surgery, pharmacology/herbalism
	language	(each additional language is a skill)
	research	*standalone skill*
	profession	any trained science, political or knowledge field: engineering, law, chemistry, theology, history, etc.
Powers (Magic, Psionics, Special Abilities)	melee	{power substitutes melee skill, or +1 bonus to melee skill}
	ranged	{power substitutes ranged skill, or +1 bonus to ranged skill}
	skill, attribute	{power substitutes skill/attribute, or +1 bonus to skill/attribute}
	equipment	{power enables actions/skill checks otherwise only possible with specialized equipment}

RPG CHARACTER CREATION

Attributes

The player character's starting attributes are -1 (low), 0 (average) and +1 (high). The assigned stats cancel each other out (ie. they add up to 0). That means the player character starts with one of these arrays: six attributes at 0; one attribute at +1, one at -1 and four attributes at 0; two attributes at +1, two at -1 and two attributes at 0; or three attributes at +1 and three at -1.

Derived Stats

Calculate derived stats by adding up pairs of attributes. These are base abilities: physical/melee, device/ranged, animal/vehicle, subterfuge/survival, knowledge and social. Untrained skills default to each of these base abilities -1.

Skills

Assign 6 points to skills. New characters start with a +1 skill over base ability. It costs 1 point to raise a single skill by +1 over its base ability. For 3 points, a player can raise an entire skill group by +1 above the base ability.

If the setting has powers (magic, psionics, special abilities) and the player's character wants to buy in, the cost is 3 points. For magic, create 3 skills as magic spells; for psionic talents, create 2 skills as talents; or create 1 special ability.
      The base ability for magic skills is smart -1 (individual spells start at +1 above base). Each magic spell can be used for 1 skill check, or for 1 conflict in a scene. Time needs to pass between scenes to recover magic.
      The base for psionic skills is willful -1 (individual talents start at +1 above base). Each psionic talent can be used for up to 3 skill checks/conflicts per scene. Time needs to pass between scenes to replenish the psionic point pool.
      The base for special abilities is based on hardy -1 (the special ability starts at +1 above base), and there is no limit to special ability use.
      Powers cannot be used untrained.

Equipment & Background

Choose (or purchase) equipment suitable for the player's character.

Choose any organizations the player character belongs to, as well as key family/friend relationships, plus one or more patrons, allies and/or rivals.