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252DOSKVOL MAP..... 254Landmarks..... 255Districts..... 255Barrowcleft..... 256Brightstone..... 258Charhollow..... 260Charterhall..... 262 1theCHAPTER1 The Basics of GAMEBlades in the Dark is a game about a group of bravely building a criminal company on the haunted streets of an industrial-fantasy city. There are heists, chases, escapes, dangerous bargains, bloody skirmish, deception, betrayal, victory, and death. We play to find out if the fleeing crew can thrive amidst the threat of gangs full of abominations, powerful nobles, vengeful ghosts, Bluecoats of the CityWatch, and siren songs of ugliness itself. SETTING The game takes place in the cold and foggy town of Doskvol (aka Duskwall or theDusk). It's an industry in its development. Imagine a world like ours during this industrial revolution in the 1870s — there were trains, steamboats, printing, simple electrical technology, trains, and black smoke chimneys everywhere. Doskvol is something like a mashup of Venice, London and Prague. It's full of house-lines, detours, and criss-crossed withhundreds of small waterways and bridges. It's a fantasy, too. The world in eternal darkness and haunted haunted the aftermath of a catastrophe that destroyed the sun and broke the Gate of Death a thousand years ago. The imperial cities were each surrounded by surrounding lightning towers to prevent vengeful spirits and twisting horrors from the plains of death. To power this huge obstacle, titanic metal ships of leviathan hunters were sent out of Doskvol to extract electroplasmic blood from the terror of a great demon in the ink-dark Void Sea. You're in a haunted Victorian town trapped inside a wall of lightning-powered demon blood. 11 The whole point of all this is to create a pressure-cooker environment for our 2 escape criminals. Travelling outside the lightning barrier is a very bad idea, so it's impractical to leave town and wait for the heat to die after you pull the score. Everything players choose to do has consequences for their characters and shifts the balance of power around the city — pushing the action to sandbox style roleplaying games. For a complete guide to Doskvol, see page 237.PLAYER BASICS Each player creates a character and works with other players to create a crew where their characters are located. Each player strives to animate their character as an attractive and courageous one who achieves boldly beyond their current safety and means. This is the core responsibility of the players: they engage with the premise of the game, looking for exciting opportunities for evil in a haunted city — taking great risks against powerful enemies and sending their characters into danger. The players team up with Game Master to build tone and style of play by making judgment calls about mechanics, dice, and action consequences. The players are responsible as co-writers of the game with gm. For more information, see Player Best Practices, page 182. CHARACTERS The men seek to expand their crew from a ragtag group of poor independents to a serious criminal organization with established turf. They do this by taking illegal jobs from clients, planning their own devious missions, making alliances, destroying their enemies, and trying to stay one step ahead of the law. There are several types of characters to choose from, each representing a different style: Cutters intimidate fighters. Stalking is a stealth intruder. Sniffer dogs are deadly snipers Slide is a manipulator and spy. and trackers. Spiders are cunning masterminds. Whispers are adept at arcane. Leeches are tinkerers, alchemists, and saboteurs. Character types are not unique. You can mix and match, or play a crew that's all based on one type. It's up to you. For more information, see Character Creation, page 51. THE CREW In addition to creating characters, you'll also create a crew by choosing which types of criminal companies to You explore. The crew gets their own character sheet, just like the player's character. Killers are killers for hire. Hawkers sell illegal products. A Cult Cult A forgotten god. Smugglers transport contraband. Bravo is and blackmail. Shadows are thieves and spies. The type of crew is not limiting (you can pursue a variety of activities); it's there to help focus the game. For more information about the crew, see the 91.1THE GAME MASTER OVERVIEW GM page building a dynamic world around the characters, especially the corrupt and evil city rulers and the cruel and desperate criminal world. GM plays all the non-player characters in the world by giving one concrete desire and preferred method of action. GM helps organize the game conversation so that it points to interesting game elements. GM is not responsible for the story and does not want to plan the event in advance. They present exciting opportunities to the players, then follow a chain of actions and consequences wherever they lead. For more information, see Running Games, page 187.PLAYING A SESSIONSo, what is it like to play? A Blades in the Dark session is like an episode of a TV. There are one or two main shows, plus maybe some side story elements, all of which match the ongoing series. Game sessions can take anywhere from two to six hours, depending on group preferences. During the session, the crew teamed up to choose a criminal score to achieve (either by getting a job from the NPC or by creating their own operation), then they made several rolls of the dice to jump into the score progress action. The PC takes action, suffers consequences, and completes the operation (successful or unsuccessful). Then the crew has downtime, where they recover, chase-project, and indulge their ugliness. After downtime, the players once again see new opportunities or create their own goals and pursuits, and we play it to find out what happens next. Certain game sessions are usually one score and the following downtime, plusexploration and the discovery of new opportunities. As your group gets closer to the game, you may be able to pack more into the session, even doing two goals on the night of play. After a dozen sessions or so, you might decide to take a break in theistory flow and start season two—perhaps with a slightly different castof character and a new starting situation. BEFORE YOU BEGINRead this book once through. You won't immediately understand everything until you see it play. You won't get all the rules right the first time. It's okay; the rules will make more sense when you read them again after you play. The Blades in the Dark system is designed to be studied as an ongoing process —every time you playyou'll get better until everything is second. You may be the only person in the game group who reads the book — that too, but then it's on you to everything to other players, so that's the job you take. You can send everyone a link to the PDF Player Kit onbladesinthedark.com, if the player wants to see it before. 3THE (3THE) (3THE) What other players need to do, is buy into the idea of the game. 4 Tell them it's a game about daring in an industry-haunted fantasy town. Name some familiar touchstones (see list below). It's like Peaky Blinders, but there are also some magical things and strange ghosts. If their eyes haven't lit up, maybe this game won't click with them. That's fine. You can always play a different game with that person at a different time. You want to have a full purchase of your player. Read the initial situation again (page 204) and get a good grip on the important factions involved, what they want, who runs it. Alternatively, feel free to create your own initial situation— enough to throw the group into a state of interest right from the gate. You don't want everyone sitting there, excited to play, and then saying, So... what do you want to do first? The initial situation keeps the momentum high at the beginning. For more information, see Getting Started With Games, page 201. TOUCHSTONES When you throw a game at a potential player, here are some media touchstones that you can use to connect the game with things they already know. TV: Peaky Blinders, by Steven Knight et al. The Wire, by David Simon et al. Spartacus (especially the second season) by Steven S. DeKnight et al. Narcos, by Chris Brancato, Carlo Bernard, and Doug Miro, et al. Books: Vlad Taltos Novels (Jhereg, etc.), by Steven Brust. The story of Fafhrd and Grey Mouser, by Fritz Leiber. Locke Lamora's lie, by Scott Lynch. Best Served Cold, by Joe Abercrombie. Video Games: Thief: The Dark Project and its sequel, by Looking Glass Studios. The series was defamed by Arkane Studios. Bloodborne by Hidetaka Miyazaki and From Software. Film: Crimson Peak, by Guillermo del Toro. The New York gang, by Martin Scorsese. Ronin, by John Frankenheimer. Heat and Thief, by Michael Mann. Furnace Room Lullaby theme song by Neko Case. WHAT YOU NEED TO PLAY Players: two to four. Plus one Game Keep book is useful for reference. Master. Some blank paper and index cards A handful of six-sided dice. At least six. for notes and sketches. Pencils and printed copies of character markers. playbooks, crew sheets, and Nice drinks and snacks. This is a reference sheet + map (available at social events, after all. bladesinthedark.com).1MAKING THE GAME YOUR OWN OVERVIEWRoleplaying is, in essence, an expressive action. Everything in this book existsto help you and your friends express themselves by creating collaborative socialifions about brave crews. You have interesting things to say, and it is my job to inspire you and maybe also show some interesting things! have come up with, too. But it is It's my job to tell you exactly what to say about it all. Some elements of the game's setting are meant to appear in the game, as an actof invention and creative interpretation. I didn't come straight out and and You're all about the nature of ghosts, for example. There are several possible misunderstandings, from which you are free to pick and choose as you go along — create your own game as you do. Once the game is played, it's yours and yoursalone's. You don't look to anyone. This book is a distillation of best practices and useful elements. It is one of the thetripod legs that forms the basis for successful play: Books, your group, and the online community. Roleplaying is a social and formative art form, and as such, the benefits are enormous from video recorded from games and the active online community of the discipline. If something about the game feels elusive to you, jump on YouTobeand watch another group do it and maybe it will make it click. We all learn differently. This text is most useful for people who learn by reading. TheOnline community is good for people who learn with discussions. And videos are great for more hearing or social learners. Visit bladesinthedark.com for links to online communities and ofactual video playback. 5THE BASICS1 core system 6 THE CONVERSATION Roleplaying game is a conversation between GM and the players, punctued by roll of the dice to inject uncertainty and surprising turns. GM presents a fictional situation in which the player's character finds themselves. The players determine their character's actions in response to the situation. GM and the players together assess how the game system is involved. The result of mechanics then changes the situation, leading to a new phase of conversation — new situations, new actions, new judgments, new reels — creating ongoing fiction and building the game's story, organically, from a series of discrete moments. No one is responsible for the story. The story is what happens as a result of the situation presented by GM, the actions the characters take, the mechanical results, and the resulting consequences. The story arises from the unexpected collision of all these elements. You play to find out what the story will be. JUDGMENT CALLS Because roleplaying is a collaborative and expressive action, not a purely strategic effort, you should make a judgment call. By making this choice, the gaming group together builds a unique style, tone, and fictional form for their sample game. Blades in the Dark is designed to bring this judgment call to the forefront and make it an explicit tool of the game. As you play, you'll make some key scoring calls. Everyone contributes, but either the players or the GM get a final say for each: Which action makes sense as a solution to the problem? Can this guy shake his ass? Should we get out the tools and play around with these old rusty locks, or maybe also secretly The players have the last word. How dangerous is it and how effective is the action given in these circumstances? How risky is this? Can this person be swayed very little or much? GM has final say. Which consequences are to manifest danger under certain circumstances? Did this fall off the roof break your leg? Have the Bluecoats just become suspicious or have they already got you stuck? GM has final say. Does this situation call for roll of the dice, and which one? Are you in a position to make an action roll or should they first make a roll of resistance to get the initiative? GM has final say. Which events in the story match the triggers of the experience for the progress of the characters and crew? Do you express your character's beliefs, encouragement, heritage, or background? Tell us. The players have the last word. The special selections you make will create a unique Blades in the Dark shape. You'll say something about the world and the characters, about crime fiction, and even about the human condition. What would you say? There's only one way to find out. ROLLING THE DICE 1THE CORE SYSTEM 7Blades in the Dark uses six-sided dice. You roll up several at once and read the highest result of thesingle. If the highest death is 6, it's a complete success — everything goes well. If you roll over one 6, it's a critical success —you get some extra advantages. If the highest death is 4 or 5, it is a partial success — you do what you are trying to do, but there are consequences: problems, dangers, diminished effects, etc.If the highest death is 1-3, it is a bad result. Everything's going badly. You may not achieve your goals and you suffer complications as well. If you need to roll but you have zero (or negative) dice, roll two dice and take a single lowest result. You can't roll critically when you have zero dice. All the dice systems in the game are expressions of this basic format. When you know the game, you can always collapse back into a simple roll to assess how it all goes. Find the right rules later when you have time. The most common result is 4/5: partial success. This means that your character will tend to succeed, but at a cost — you'll rarely get away with it. Blades inTheDark is a game about underdog characters who are above their heads. Dicemechanic reinforces this by making some of the plant's successes again and again. This is a good thing! The problem is where the fun of the game takes place. To create a set of dice for a roll, you'll use properties (such as Finesse or YourProwess or Your crew level) and pick up dice equal to their rank. You will usually end up with one to four dice. Even one die pretty good in this game — a 50% chance of success. The most common trait you will use is the rating of the actions of the player's character. A player may roll the dice to rank their Skirmish action when they enemies, for example. There are four types of reels that you use most often in game:Action roll. When your PC tries a dangerous or inconvenient action, you create a scrolling action to find out how it happened. The roll of action and its effects and consequences drive most of the game. See the 18.Downtime roll page. When the PC is in their spare time after work, they can do activities in relative security. You

make downtime rolls to see how much they can do. See the 153.Fortune roll page. GM can make a rolling fortune to deny decision-making and leave something to chance. How liquid is npc? How many plagues spread? How much evidence was burned before the Bluecoats kicked in the door? See page 34.Resistance roll. A player can make a rolling fortune to deny the severity of the consequences. When you resist the danger of broken legs, you take some stress and now it's just a sprained ankle instead. See page 32.THE BASICS1 THE GAME STRUCTURE Blades in the Dark has a structure to play with, with four sections (see diagram on the right). By default, the game is in free games — characters talk to each other, they go places, they do things, they make reels as needed. When the group is ready, they choose the target for the next criminal operation, then choose the type of plan to hire. This triggers a roll of engagement (which sets the situation when the operation begins) and then the game shifts to the score phase. See page 125 for more details. During the score, the PC involves the target—they make reels, overcome obstacles, call flashbacks, and complete the operation (successful or not). When the score is over, the game shifts to the downtime phase. During the downtime phase, GM engages systems for payment, heat, and engagement, to determine all fallout from the score. Then each PC gets their downtime activities, such as pampering their representatives to relieve stress or working on long-term projects. See page 145 for details on downtime. When all downtime activities are complete, the game returns to free play and the cycle begins again. Phases are conceptual models to help you organize the game. They are not meant to be rigid structures that limit your choices (this is why they are presented as blobs of amorphous ink without hard edges). Think of phases as menu options to match whatever you're trying to achieve in play. Each phase fits a different purpose. During free play, the game is very fluid — you can easily skip several events in a quick montage; Characters can spread out in time and space, doing things as they please. As you move on to the score phase, everyone leans forward and knows that it's time to focus and get the job done. The camera zooms into the action, obstacles to obstacles, as each challenge is faced. The phase use flashbacks to avoid time and set the preparations invisible. Then when the score ends and you shift to downtime, the pressure dies. PCs are safe and can enjoy a short break from danger to recover and regroup before they jump back into the play cycle again. 81.play free THE GAME STRUCTURE Character Action Scenes & Consequences of Collecting Information Select Target Select Plan Plan Heat, Entanglements Downtime Activities Return to Free Play Engagement Roll scoreActions & Consequences Flashbacks 91 actions & attributesTHE BASICS ACTION RATINGS Attune Command There are 12 in-game actions that Consort player characters use to overcome obstacles (see list on the right). Finesse Hunt Each action has a rating (from zero to 4) that tells you how many Prowl dice to roll when you perform that action. Non-Skirmish action ratings represent only skills or training—you're free to describe how your Study character performs those actions based on the type of research you do. You might make a fortune roll (page 34) or a downtime roll (page 153) or GM would just say yes—and you achieved your goal. ATTRIBUTE RANK INSIGHTS There are three attributes in the game system that players overcome characters to withstand adverse consequences: Insights, Proficiency, and Overcome. Each attribute has a rating (from zero to 4) that tells you how many dice to roll when you use that attribute. The rank for each attribute equals the number of points in the first column below that attribute (see for example, on the right). The more complete your character is with a specific set of actions, the better the attribute rank. Attribute 101RESISTANCE PLUS & ATTRIBUTESEach rejects different types of hazards. If you are stabbed, for example, you resist physical harm by using your Proficiency. Resistance rolls are always reduced or fend off bad results — but the more you roll, the stress at no cost to reduce avoid danger. When the enemy has a huge advantage, you have to do a resistance roll before you take your action. For example, when you are a sword-fighting master, he disarms you before you can attack. You need to make a resistance roll to keep holding your knife if you want to attacked him. Or maybe you have a powerful ghost and try to Attune with it to control his actions. But before you can make a resistance roll, you must resist being possessed from the spirit. GM assesses enemy threat levels and uses these preemptive resistance rolls are used to reflect the women's extremely dangerous capabilities. For details on Resistance Rolls, see page 32.example action & attribute ratingsinsight This character has a Hunt action rating of 1,◰ ◰ ◰ ◰ hunting their Insight attribute rank is 1 (point study column◰ ◰ ◰ first).survey ◰ ◰ ◰ ◰ ◰ ◰ They also have Prowl 1 and Skirmish 2. Their attribute rank of Greatness is 2.prowess◰ ◰ ◰ proficiency◰ ◰ ◰ prowl◰ ◰ ◰ skirmish◰ ◰ ◰ wreckresolve◰ ◰ ◰ attune◰ ◰ ◰ command◰ ◰ ◰ consort◰ ◰ ◰ sway 111stress & ◰ TRAUMA STRESS & TRAUMASTRESSPlayer the characters in Blades in the Dark have a special backup for andluck fortitude called stress. When they suffer the consequences that they do not want to accept, they can take on stress instead. The result of the resistance roll (see page 32)determines how much stress costs to avoid bad results. During a knife fight, Daniel's character, Cross, is stabbed in the chest. Daniel rolls up his Prowess rating to fight back, and gets 2. It costs 6 stresses, minus 2 (the result of a roll of resistance) to withstand the consequences. Daniel marks 4 stresses and describes how Cross survived. GM rules that the danger is reduced by the roll of resistance, but not avoided completely. Cross suffers from a level 2 hazard (Chest Wound) instead of a level 3 hazard (Punctured Lung). PUSHING YOURSELF can use stress to push yourself to greater performance. For each bonus you do below, take 2 stress (each can be selected once for a specific action):Add +1d to your roll. (It can be used for action rolls or downtime reels or other types of reels where extra effort will help you) Add a level of +1 to your effect. (See Effects, p. 24.) Take action when you're paralyzed. (See Consequences, page 30) The ability to push yourself to +1d means you effectively have at least 1d in every action as long as you have the stress to burn. Even 1d gives you a 50/50 chance of success. This is the essence of luck in the game system. Even when you're in a bad place, trying to do something you don't have training or experience, you can dig deep and give yourself a chance. (A much better chancethan rolling 2d and taking the lowest when you have zero point.) It's important to remember this! Some players tend to forget and ignore actions they have zero point. Well, I can't do that. I don't have any 1d and take the consequences. Well, I can't do that. I don't have any 2d and take the consequences. Well, I can't do that. I don't have any 3d and take the consequences. Well, I can't do that. I don't have any