

CLINK



AN RPG OF MYSTERIOUS DRIFTERS
AND RISKY COIN FLIPS BY
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In memory of Stewart Wieck

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CLINK

The sound of coins falling into a pile. Spurs jangling. A saloon door opening. Casings hitting the dry wood. An old laser rifle snapping shut. Bullets shattering a crystalline tree. A wrench falling from dead hands onto cold metal.

WHAT DO YOU NEED TO PLAY?

- These rules
- Two to five players, one of whom agrees to be the GM
- A pencil and a Drifter sheet (or notecards) for each player
- A group sheet
- Three coins per player (including the GM)

WHAT KIND OF A GAME IS CLINK?

CLINK is a tabletop roleplaying game (RPG) where you and your friends control mysterious Drifters. Only by exploring their pasts can these Drifters pursue their Creeds in a chaotic and dangerous world.

CLINK is inspired by spaghetti westerns, ronin tales, and other stories where a mysterious stranger enters a difficult situation and makes big changes. Players will not only control their Drifters in the moment, but also explore their Drifters' histories through flashbacks.

One player will be the game master (GM), who will guide the other players, generate a world, and build conflicts and obstacles for the group to overcome.

The other players will embody a crew of competent Drifters, wandering from town to town, looking for opportunity and purpose.

HOW DO YOU PLAY?

CLINK is a roleplaying game: a game of telling stories. Players will control their Drifters, make decisions for them, and describe their actions. The GM will explain the surroundings, detail any immediate threats, and prompt the players to make decisions.

Even though players are telling stories, in practice it looks more like a conversation.

A player will describe to the GM what their Drifter is trying to do: "Dusty is going to try to sneak into the manor house. How far is the entrance from the highway?"

The GM will describe the surroundings and answer any questions that the players have: "It's about four hundred feet from the highway. There are guards, but if you stick to the shadows you might be able to make it."

Back and forth, back and forth. Drifters can handle most things without any problems. They are capable and skilled. They can ride a horse, fly a ship, talk to folks, find the town bar, start a fire, and more. They'll succeed—no need to bring in the rules—unless they try something difficult or dangerous.



LET'S MAKE A DRIFTER

Your Drifter is a competent and dangerous individual, capable of doing great things. Not necessarily "good" things, but things that people will remember and tell stories about. You can print out and use a Drifter sheet or just scribble your details on a notecard.

Every Drifter is made up of these parts:

- **A Nickname:** An alias for your Drifter.
(Shadow, Sundance, Pearl, Cadence, Stix, Wink, etc.)
- **Two or More Mementos:** These items give your Drifter a little more flavor and flair.
- **A Creed:** This Creed is shared by every Drifter in your group.
- **Two Triggers:** Personal quirks or habits.
You'll make one now and one later, during play.
- **Flashbacks:** Helpful experiences from your Drifter's past.
- **Scars:** Painful memories. They weigh heavily on your Drifter and will eventually overwhelm them.

As you create your Drifter, you'll come up with all of these, except for Flashbacks and Scars. Those come during play.

THE PAST IS PAST

As you begin to make your Drifter, resist the urge to craft a long, detailed backstory. One of the best parts of **CLINK** is that you'll discover your Drifter's past as you play. Right now, just focus on making a character that you want to play, and work out the history and the details later.

A great way to do this is to leave ideas half-finished. What this means is—

*Eh?! Shut your pie hole, David!
Everyone's sick of hearing you jaw on and
on and on. Why don't you let someone talk
who knows about drifting through life? The
only place you've drifted is off to sleep!*

Ah. That's the Old Prospector. She does have a lot of experience, but she can be somewhat—

*Quiet, David! I'm talking to
someone who matters!*
*So you call yourself a Drifter, eh? Well the
first rule of being a Drifter is to keep things
to yourself! You can't just go around telling
everyone what you done and who you are. It's
liable to get you hung. Instead, let's keep a
little mystery.*

*Where'd you get that fancy revolver? Who shot
off the top of your hat? Why do you wear a
wedding ring through your nose?
Don't tell me yet! It will be more fun
to find out during the game.*

Hopefully her advice will help you. You don't have to read what she says, but it will help you get a handle on the game. If you plan to ignore what she has to say, just make sure she doesn't find out!

LET'S MAKE A DRIFTER

NAME

Names are important. A name gives a first impression and says a lot about how your Drifter presents themself.

And for the love of grog, don't use yer real name! Pick something neat and interesting. No one wants to hear about Susan Smith! But maybe they'd like to hear about "Smoking Susan," the girl who shoots with both hands.

Pick something like how your Drifter looks (Dusty, Charred, Silk, Ronin, Slicer, Pearl, Flint) or how they handle their business (Gruff, Terse, Flirty, Hope, Mal).

MEMENTOS

To keep them from being a nondescript, dusty person, **give your Drifter at least two Mementos.**

Mementos are special items that add a little flair, and they exist only for appearance and for inspiring Flashbacks. Answer the Memento prompts on your Drifter sheet and describe them to the group. As before, resist the urge to go into great detail about the history of your Mementos.

*Don't just carry around knickknacks!
Drifters got whatever they might need:
biscuits and tack, jerky, matches, coffee
pot, rope, maybe a piebald mare, or an old
compass or whatever.*

*Mementos are just special things. You don't
have to write down every darn thing!*

If it makes sense for your Drifter to have a particular item, then they have it. Don't worry about inventory management in this game—just note down the interesting stuff.

MEMENTO EXAMPLES

You create a Drifter named Drip and describe him as a huge sweaty man. Here are some possible Mementos:

- ➡ **Something Full:** Drip has three visible canteens, always full of water.
- ➡ **Something Broken:** Drip keeps a shotgun on his back. It doesn't work, but he uses it like a club and as a bluff.
- ➡ **Something Given to You:** Drip's frilly red handkerchief doesn't match anything else he has.

These items might have stories behind them, but you'll explore those as you play.

CREED

As a group, the players must **agree on the group's Creed**. The Creed isn't necessarily the most important thing to every Drifter, but they have all made a commitment to pursue and follow it.

- ➡ The Creed is the main motivation and driving force for your group.
- ➡ A good Creed will push the group forward in spite of obstacles.
- ➡ The Creed doesn't necessarily need to be good or noble, but it is what keeps the group together.

Whenever you follow your Creed **in spite of difficulty**, you earn a coin! Should you fulfill your Creed, pick another one and keep going! Try to pursue your Creed whenever you can, no matter how high the stakes get.

Creeds are not easy to follow. They require dedication and discipline to pursue. As the game goes on, the Drifters will accumulate Scars. Eventually their Scars will overwhelm them, the group will dissolve, and the story will end.

GOOD EXAMPLES OF CREEDS

The innocent must be protected.

A straightforward Creed that lends itself to heroics. It'll be easy for the GM to make obstacles and drive the players forward by presenting them with innocents in need of rescue.

Everyone needs money...and we're no exception.

A good Creed for groups that want to heist or scheme. The reason for needing money can vary wildly from Drifter to Drifter, but their mutual need for money keeps them together. To make this Creed even better, include the group's specific method for making money.

We must keep a low profile until we reach Haven.

A great Creed for a group on the run. The GM can have them encounter the law, crooked contacts, or other dangerous folks. Will they kill witnesses? Lie about their past? Work with or against the law?

The ShimSham Gang will pay for what they've done.

A specific Creed, like this one, works well for short games, and can be a great way to keep the group united and focused.

We will do anything to find medicine for our friend.

Creeds that imply a common connection, like this one, help keep the group together and make it easier for the GM to create obstacles.

BAD EXAMPLES OF CREEDS

We just like to party.

One reason you are playing **CLINK** is to stand for something and overcome conflict. This Creed probably won't lead your group anywhere interesting.

A member of our group is a traitor.

The Creed should unite the group, not divide it. Each Drifter can have their own reasons for following the Creed, but they should agree about this one thing, at least.

We can only trust one another.

This isn't a terrible Creed, but it doesn't really drive the group toward anything. Drifters can just sit in a saloon not trusting anyone. Try to make a Creed that the GM can use to make a cool story. The Creed is your way of saying, "This is the kind of adventure we want to have."

We kill bandits.

While this could work, it's vague and will require a lot more work from the group and the GM. Consider something like "The ShimSham Gang will pay for what they've done."

*If you didn't have some kinda purpose,
why'd you be drifting in the first place?
Ain't nobody care about some blue belly lost
in the desert. You're a Drifter! Act like it.*

TRIGGERS

Drifters have dangerous lives, and they've developed some habits, or Triggers, that might get them into trouble. You'll **create one Trigger for your Drifter now**, and you can create another one during play. Every Trigger has an attached Reaction, usually phrased like this: "Whenever [Trigger], I [Reaction]."

- **Triggers** are external and outside of your control. Something that could happen once or twice a day.
- **Reactions** are internal and determine your Drifter's behavior. They are usually brash or thoughtless, something that could get you or your group into trouble, whether social or physical.

Triggers are another way of telling the GM and the other players, "These are how I want my Drifter to be interacted with." A Trigger doesn't have to be negative, and doesn't even need to be important.

The first time your Trigger is activated during a session, you gain a coin! You can gain two coins per session, one for each Trigger.

GOOD EXAMPLES OF TRIGGERS

- Whenever I am rewarded for helping someone, I refuse it.
- Whenever anyone compliments me, I respond by further explaining how great I am.
- Whenever I am asked about my scar, I always come up with a new story.
- Whenever we are trying to be quiet, I have sneezing fits.
- Whenever I am lied to, I will believe it if I can.
- Whenever we enter a new area, I try to sell my snake oil.
- Whenever we earn some cash, I immediately spend most of it at the nearest bar.

BAD EXAMPLES OF TRIGGERS

► **Whenever I fight someone,
I scream while attacking.**

Triggers are activated from outside, by a person or situation. They cannot be self-triggered. This one makes it too tempting to just fight everyone you meet.

► **Whenever someone fights me, I win.**

Reactions are something you cannot control, something you don't think about or do consciously.

► **Whenever I see someone, I hug them.**

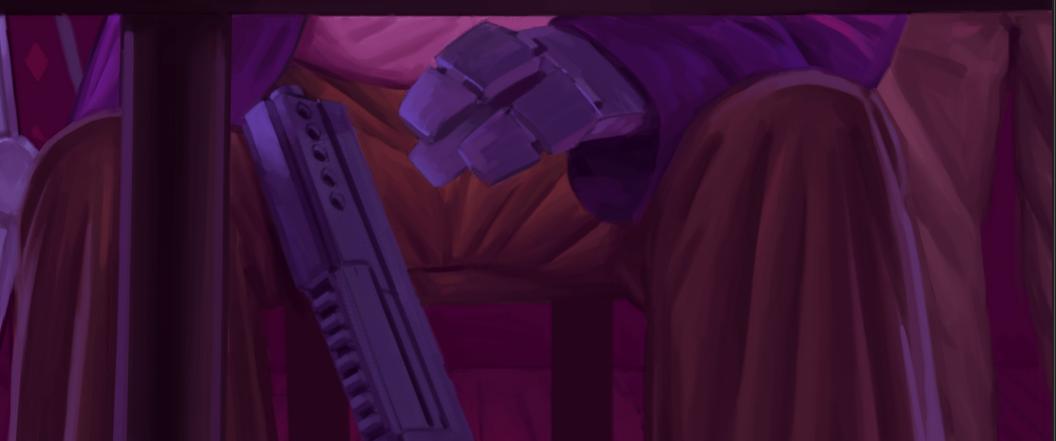
This Trigger is simply too common. Triggers should be more specific, something that could happen once or twice a day. Each Trigger might be activated two or three times in a session, but no more.

► **Whenever a new day begins,
I murder an innocent.**

This Reaction won't simply cause trouble—it'll bring the game to a screeching halt. Try to pick Reactions that *could*, rather than *will*, get you into trouble or make a situation more dangerous.

A Drifter never knows what kind of situation they may find themselves in. Some Triggers are more common than others, so be sure to make your second Trigger after the game has been going for a bit. Otherwise you may find yourself kicking rocks while everyone else is showered in shiny!





LET'S TALK ABOUT THOSE COINS

Each player starts the game with two coins, and you can earn more as you follow your Creed and as your Triggers are activated.

But don't be you spending them willy-nilly! Coins are the most you got, and best be used smartly. A coin can get you out of big trouble, you'd best believe!

SPENDING A COIN TO GAIN A FLASHBACK

At any time, you may spend a coin to gain a Flashback for your Drifter. A Flashback is a combination of memories, skills, and knowledge described in a sentence or two. Think of it like a montage or a flashback from a movie. Your Drifter can use their Flashbacks to help them solve problems and obstacles.

Spend 'em whenever! You don't gotta wait for your turn or nuthin', just go! Specially when you find yourself in a tight spot, just drop a coin and show everyone who's boss.

To add a little more detail to your Flashback, a player of your choice will ask you a question about that past experience. This is your chance to tell a cool little story about your Drifter and explain how they became good at this skill.

Example: You want your Drifter to try to sneak into the manor house. The GM explains how difficult it will be, with the guards and the many light sources. "No problem," you respond, "my Drifter has done something like this before." You give one of your coins to the GM and then write down the Flashback "Learned to mingle and disguise yourself through intense training under a con man." This Flashback will help you succeed at sneaking into the manor.

Then, another player asks: "Long ago, someone tried to teach you about this. What was the hardest part?" You think for a second, and then tell a short story about how your Drifter could never get past their outrageous Southern accent. Maybe give a quick example of how your Drifter trained to stop greeting people with "howdy" all the time.

LET'S TALK ABOUT THOSE COINS

Get creative, ya big galoot! Make it fun for everyone! This is your chance to drop a cool hint about your Drifter, or jaw a fun tale.

TO SUM UP:

1. At any time, you can spend a coin, giving it to the GM, to gain a Flashback.
2. Write down a sentence or two describing that Flashback.
3. Pick another player to ask you a question about your Flashback.
4. Answer the quest by telling a short story about your Flashback to the group.
5. For the rest of the game, this Flashback will help your Drifter accomplish related tasks.

DETAILS MATTER

Details affect the game and the players. Using the previous example, you could say your Drifter learned about stealthy, acrobatic infiltration rather than disguises and performances.

Either Flashback might help you get into the manor, but the first option won't help you mingle at a party. The details you add become hard facts and will affect how your Flashback can be used.

FLIPPING COINS

It's a dangerous world out there, even for incredible Drifters. You can never quite know what is going to happen. If you encounter a difficult or dangerous situation, use the rules below to determine how things turn out.

Whenever you do a coin flip, flip coins from the supply. You aren't spending or using your own coins.

WITH FLASHBACK

When you attempt something difficult or dangerous and have a relevant Flashback, **flip two coins**:

- **Heads + Heads:** You completely succeed! You even gain another benefit or piece of helpful information, decided by the GM.
- **Heads + Tails:** Success! You pull it off without any major hitches or problems.
- **Tails + Tails:** You succeed, but success takes its toll. You gain a Scar.

LET'S TALK ABOUT THOSE COINS

Example: You describe your Drifter's attempt to convince the mayor to help them. "Alright mayor, here's the deal: We know you're working with the Powder Gang. Tell us where they are, and we'll promise not to kill you as well." The GM realizes that this is a difficult task, and asks you to flip a coin. Your Drifter has the Flashback "Tall and Intimidating" which should help in this case. You flip two coins. Here are the three possible results:

- **On heads + heads**, the mayor is completely cowed. He spills the beans, tells you where they are, and even hints that the Powder Gang is vulnerable after a recent run-in with the law.
- **On heads + tails**, the mayor swallows his pride and tells you everything you want to know.
- **On tails + tails**, the mayor looks shocked for a second, but then growls, "I should have expected such from the Butcher of Broken Bow." He tells you what you want to know, and then shoves you out of his office. Your Drifter gains a Scar reminding them of something dark in their past.

This is just an example of what might happen, but be sure to follow the rules. For contrast, here are some bad examples:

“The mayor refuses to tell us, and slams the door.”

This goes against the rules. Even if you flip two tails, your Drifter succeeds. Create an outcome that involves them succeeding.

“The mayor explodes and we get his money.”

Flipping a coin does not grant magical powers to your Drifter. Act within the logic of the world you've made. Even if your Drifter had psychic powers, the original task was to “convince the mayor to help.”

“The mayor refuses to tell us anything, but we find a secret folder with the information anyway.”

On the surface, this looks good. You got what you wanted after all. But remember, the task was to convince the mayor to help you, not to find the info in some folder. The way you go about solving the problem is important.

A Drifter never forgets! They might not blabber about their past, but if they've done something before, then they can do it again.

When you have a helpful Flashback, you never fail! That's what makes coins and Flashbacks so powerful.

LET'S TALK ABOUT THOSE COINS

WITHOUT FLASHBACK

When you attempt something difficult or dangerous and **don't have** a relevant Flashback, then things are riskier. **Flip one coin:**

- **Heads:** You succeed, but something goes wrong or there is a minor setback.
- **Tails:** Any other player describes how the situation gets worse. Flip the coin again.

- **2nd Flip Heads:** The GM describes how the situation gets even worse. Flip the coin again.
- **2nd Flip Tails:** You fail at your task and must now deal with a worse situation.

- **3rd Flip Heads:** You barely manage to accomplish what you were attempting, and otherwise the situation is dire.
- **3rd Flip Tails:** You fail at what you were attempting. Now the situation is worse, and you gain a Scar.

EXAMPLE COIN FLIP

You are attempting to escape a lawman chasing you on horseback. This a dangerous or difficult action, so you must do a coin flip. Sadly, you don't have any Flashbacks that will help. "I'm going to try to escape the lawman by slowing him down."

You flip one coin:

- **Heads:** You shoot the lawman, knocking him from his horse. Unfortunately, he got a good look at your face and will be looking for them tomorrow morning. (*Success with a minor setback.*)
- **Tails:** Another player describes how the lawman shoots your horse, dragging you to the ground. You'll flip the coin again. (*Things get worse.*)

- **2nd Flip Heads:** The GM describes how the lawman runs you down, now that you have no horse, and points his pistol at you. Flip the coin again. (*Things get even worse.*)
- **2nd Flip Tails:** You fail, and you're now on the ground without a horse. You may attempt another action, but this action is complete. (*Your Drifter failed to slow down the lawman, and must now deal with it another way.*)

LET'S TALK ABOUT THOSE COINS

— **3rd Flip Heads:** You get off a lucky shot with your last bullet, killing the lawman and scaring off the horses. But now you're stranded in the desert without a horse. (*Success, but the situation is terrible.*)

— **3rd Flip Tails:** You are captured by the lawman and tied up, gaining a Scar. (*The worst possible outcome. Your Drifter isn't out of the game or anything, but they may need to be rescued or do something difficult to escape the lawman's clutches.*)

To keep it simple, flip the GM's coins. He ain't using them, and that way you don't risk losing or getting confused about your own coins! You can't lose or gain coins by flipping, and even if you've run out of coins, you can still flip.

And you best be careful! Once you commit to flipping a coin, you don't know what'll happen! Might be things get worse than you thought they could. You can't bail when things go sour, so just hold tight.

Failure's more fun anyways. Ain't nobody ever heard of a story where nothing bad happened anyway.

WHEN BAD TURNS WORSE

Like the above examples, situations can get worse. When you describe what your Drifter is doing, be sure to leave room for escalation, don't describe a complete conclusion. Whenever a situation gets worse, though, it must happen in a way that success is still possible. "You died" is not escalation. "More guards show up" is a better example, or even "They suspect you aren't telling the truth." This is one of the most fun parts of **CLINK**: watching a situation slowly get worse and worse. Don't be afraid to go where it leads; failure is often more fun and interesting than success.

Also, keep in mind that Drifters cannot die. This may seem to take away the risk or thrill of the game, but in reality the Drifters are in a race against time. They are trying to accomplish their Creed before they gain too many Scars. Big obstacles (like being locked up in prison) will take up the group's time and result in more Scars. There are some things worse than death...

LET'S TALK ABOUT THOSE COINS

GAINING SCARS

Scars are like negative Flashbacks. They are dark moments from your Drifter's past, things that bother or haunt them years later. Difficult situations and tough decisions will remind your Drifter of their Scars and bring up bad memories.

Whenever the rules tell you to gain a Scar, do the following:

1. Pick another player to ask you a leading question about your Scar.
2. Answer the question by telling a short story about what happened to your Drifter.
3. Write down a few words describing your Scar.

Example: Your Drifter was trying to win a game of poker and gained a Scar in the process. You pick another player, who asks, "Someone you know was good at this. Why don't you want to be like them?" In response, you tell a short story about how your last partner would gamble all the time and get you both into big trouble. Ever since then, poker has been a grim reminder of the only time you went to prison. You write down "I gambled with life" as a Scar on your Drifter sheet.

A Scar is a reminder of a dark moment in the past. It could even be a physical scar, if that makes more sense. But don't limit yourself to "I've got a scratched arm" or "The mayor doesn't like me." Use Scars as a chance to reveal more about your Drifter's past.

LOSING YOUR CREED

Eventually your Scars will overwhelm you, and you'll lose the motivation to continue. **As soon as your Scars outnumber your Flashbacks, you fail your Creed, crossing it out.**

Because you've lost your Creed, you no longer gain coins from following it. You can still gain coins from Triggers, and other Drifters can still gain coins from pursuing the Creed, but the Creed doesn't matter to you anymore, so you may need to create another reason that you stick with the group. Your heart just isn't in it.

Example: You have four Scars and four Flashbacks. A series of bad events happens and you gain another Scar. Now you have five Scars and four Flashbacks. You lose your Creed, cross it out. Even if you get more Flashbacks later, your spirit is broken. Maybe you stick with the group out of a sense of duty, but to you the cause is dead.

When the group has more total Scars than total Flashbacks, the game ends. The group dissolves and the Drifters go their own ways.

Example: Even though Hammock still has his Creed, the group in total has more Scars (12) than Flashbacks (11), so it is dissolved. Game over.

- **Early:** 3 Scars, 2 Flashbacks
- **Raid:** 4 Scars, 3 Flashbacks
- **Hammock:** 1 Scar, 3 Flashbacks
- **Flop:** 4 Scars, 3 Flashbacks





GM GUIDE

Don't tell the players this, but being the GM is the best part of this game. While the players make decisions for their Drifters, you will control the rest of the game world. You will describe their immediate surroundings, interpret the results of their decisions, and make choices for the characters interacting with the Drifters. **CLINK** gives you, the GM, a lot of tools to help you run a good game. Here is some advice for using those tools.

COMPLETE GREENHORN

Most of the advice later in this chapter assumes that you've GMed a tabletop game before and have a general idea of what to do. If you've never GMed before, don't panic! Here are some quick tips to get you started:

- **Play with good friends.** Even if you mess everything up, good friends will still have fun. You also know your friends better, so it's easier to work with them.
- **Do the obvious thing.** It can be hard coming up with interesting or exciting outcomes for coin flips and player choices. Don't bother. Just say the first and most obvious thing that comes into your head. There's no need to dazzle your players, and often what you think is obvious will be new and exciting to them.
- **Take breaks.** Every hour or so, take a five-minute break to think about what might happen next or what the Drifters might do. A game of **CLINK** can last for three to four hours and will drain you. You need breaks.

- **Create obstacles.** The players *want* to overcome obstacles; that's fun! Don't make up obstacles every time the players try to do something simple, but don't make life too easy for them either. Find a good balance between allowing them progress and giving them interesting obstacles to overcome.
- **Fail forward.** When a player fails a coin flip, something should happen to keep the story moving. There's no such thing as simple failure to do something. Things always get a little bit worse. If they fail to pick a lock, then a guard may come around the corner. If they fail to convince the mayor of something, then the mayor may kick them out of her office. If they fail to find the gizmo, then it is found by an enemy. Failure means things get worse.
- **Read the rest.** Read the rest of the GM advice. It will give you an idea of the kind of game **CLINK** can be.

GOALS AND GAMEPLAN

Your main goal as the GM is to give the players obstacles to overcome. This can be a larger conflict (aliens coming to destroy humanity) or a smaller one (Maria wants revenge against Carlos). Conflict is the best way to get the players involved and following their Creed.

WORSE THAN DEATH

Again, it's important to note that Drifters cannot die. They can't even suffer serious injuries, like a broken leg or cracked ribs. Your goal as the GM is not to kill or injure your Drifters. **Your goal is to take up their time.** Whenever a Drifter fails or suffers a setback, it's up to you to make new obstacles that will slow them down. Their ship is broken. The mayor won't talk. They need to find a special item first.

The more obstacles the Drifters must overcome, the more likely it is that their Scars will overwhelm them and dissolve the group. Here's a good way to find the right balance between too easy and too difficult: When in doubt, err on the side of more difficult. It is better for a problem to be too big or too difficult than too easy. Your players are clever and they have lots of tools to help them out.

If your players are struggling or digging themselves into a deeper hole, then give out more coins. Purposefully activate their Triggers. Each Trigger can only be activated once per session, but you can hand out several coins per session as the players pursue their Creed in spite of difficulty. Let them earn some coins, get some Flashbacks, and start powering through obstacles. Granting more coins doesn't lessen the chance that they will get Scars, but it does improve their chances of moving the game forward.

You'll find the right balance as you play, don't worry.

OBSTACLE DIFFICULTY

There are no difficulty ratings in **LINK**. Therefore, it's up to the GM to enforce the consequences of the Drifters' actions.

For example, players, it's just as difficult to convince the mayor to help you as it is to simply kill him and loot his desk. However, those choices have vastly different consequences. Killing the mayor will put the law on your tail, turn the town against you, and put more obstacles in your way. Even though every obstacle has the same difficulty, your choices will affect the number and complexity of those obstacles.

GMs, when players are careful and clever, make their lives a little smoother. When they act without thinking or take outsize risks, put more obstacles in their path. Don't worry about specific numbers; just do the obvious thing. Did they steal from a banker in broad daylight? That's way riskier than sneaking in at night and picking a lock.

Your job is not to punish your players for making bad choices; it's to make the world seem alive and real. Some players punch the nearest NPC just to see if they can, to see how the world reacts. Players like seeing consequences; it lets them know what they can and can't get away with. Give them consequences that make sense, and fill their lives with meaningful obstacles.

STARTING NOTE CARD

If you've GMed other, more complex games before, then **CLINK** can be a little strange. Where are the monsters? What makes a good encounter? How do I give out epic loot?

CLINK works best as a game of improvisation, rather than a game of preparation. When you show up to GM a game of **CLINK**, just come with a notecard's worth of ideas. Maybe a few NPCs, a strange landscape, or an interesting gang of miscreants. Don't bring too much, because you'll be getting most of your ideas from the players themselves.

The players, coin flips, and situations will naturally lead into whatever happens next. You don't need to plan out everything, because you don't know what will happen until it does! Don't be afraid to take a step back and say, "Hey guys, I'm out of ideas. Where should we go from here?" This isn't a movie, and you're not the director. Work with your group and don't plan everything out beforehand. Also, reread the advice of "do the obvious thing" in the Complete Greenhorn section.

EMBRACE CLICHE

Don't worry about creating an epic or clever story. One of the most exciting things about **CLINK** is the Flashback system. Keep the main story or quest simple. Even if the story is cliché and predictable, the players will have a blast describing Flashbacks and learning more about their Drifters. Because that creative effort is off-loaded to the players, you can rely on clichés and predictable stories. If you want help, read the **Inspirational Media** chapter (page 48).

TAKE A HINT

While the players are creating their Drifters, you should be armed with a notebook and pencil, writing everything down. Write down the Creed that the players agree upon. Write down each Drifter's name and their Triggers.

When players make their Creed and Triggers, they are letting you know: "This is the kind of game we want to play." Use these to inspire and direct your adventure.

For example, if the players chose a Creed of "We fight so no one else has to," ask them some clarifying questions. Why did you all choose the life of a wandering warrior? Who will you allow to fight with you? Would you ever consider settling down and living in peace?

Then, take what they've said and think about a way to engage with it. It could be a simple fulfillment: "You get a letter from an old friend, begging your help. It seems a nearby town is being harassed by bandits, and most of those able to fight have already been killed."

Or you could challenge their Creed with a difficult problem: "After defending the last town and moving on, you see a group of three young people following you. They want to fight alongside you and learn your ways. In the middle of this discussion, you are attacked!"

Start the game with something straightforward and engaging. As the game goes on, you can be more clever and fancy. But at the start, keep it simple, something that will immediately fit their Creed.

ITCHY TRIGGERS

Triggers can be difficult for players to come up with, and it can be tempting to make your Triggers too common or easy. Instead of just vetoing it and forcing them to make a new one, you could say, "Hey, just so you know, your Trigger can only be activated once per session." Try to work with your players to find a good balance.

LIMITING COIN FLIPS

If a player wants to try something impossible or extremely unlikely, forbid it. Flipping a coin doesn't give you superpowers; it just gives you a chance to pull off something difficult.

Player: "I want to fire my gun so that it kills a guy, bounces off the gun of another guy, and hits the criminal leader right in the head so that she falls into the barrel of acid. Do I flip a coin for that?"

GM: "That's just not possible. The world don't work that way. Why don't you try something more reasonable, like shooting the first henchman?"

There is no difficulty scale, so it's up to you, the GM, to determine what is too difficult. Don't let players attempt impossible tasks, but also don't make them do a coin flip for every little thing they do. Picking the lock and smooth-talking the bartender might not have the exact same difficulty, but they are both difficult. Negotiating for the price of bullets may not be difficult, but buying a new laser rifle might be tricky.

A good way to think about coin flips is: "Would failure be interesting?" Failure to purchase a new water canteen probably won't take the story anywhere interesting. But failure to pick the lock of the bank could alert the guards or break the lock.

Work with your group on this. Take a step back and ask them, "Do you really think this is possible?" or "I don't think we really need to flip for this. Do you?" In the end it's your call. Do whatever you think makes sense and will be interesting.

COMBAT

In many RPGs, combat is where the rubber meets the road, and where players can express themselves and work together. You can have combat in **CLINK**, but mechanically it isn't any different from repairing a laser or lying to a lawman. Drifters don't have health points, and they can't die. Angry gunmen are just another obstacle to overcome.

Bunch enemies up. Unless the group is separated or doing something special, just treat all of the enemies as a single obstacle. Ask the group, "How do you fight off the Powder Gang?" rather than asking each player how they handle their one opponent. Give as much detail to a fight as you would to a conversation or to how you would sneak into a mansion. Combat shouldn't take up more time than anything else.

CLINK

Here's an example of how combat might look in **CLINK**:

Edna, the GM, says, "After you throw the first punch, the entire bar erupts. Everyone with a red bandana stands up and rushes toward you." Alex asks, "How many are there?" Edna responds, "You can't get an exact count, since the two closest to you are swinging a chair at your face."

Alex replies, "Alright, I'll kick my chair at one of them, and try to roll under the table to avoid their attack." Alex flips a coin, and it lands on heads. "Excellent! I'll stick with that."

Edna describes Alex's successful maneuver, but then says, "However, your rolling knocks down Pearl (Jenny's Drifter) in the process."

Jenny cries, "Dang it! Watch where you're rolling. I think we need to cut this short. I draw my gun and fire into the ceiling to try to get everyone to stop. I have the Flashback 'I'm a wild shot,' which should help me cause a lot of noise and destruction." Edna encourages her: "Go for it. Flip two coins."

Jenny flips two coins, and they land on heads and tails. "Great! When everyone stops to look, I grab Alex and we run out of there!"



INSPIRATIONAL MEDIA

Use these to inspire your own games. **CLINK** works really well with clichéd and predictable stories. Don't be afraid to completely steal ideas!

BOOKS

- *Haxan* by Kenneth Mark Hoover. A hardboiled western story about a marshal who brings order to a crazy town. Has a hint of fantasy to it.
- *Jack Reacher* by Lee Child. A modern noir series about a retired army cop who goes from town to town solving problems.
- *Flash Gold* by Lindsay Buroker. Steampunk western with characters who slowly reveal their backstories.

MOVIES/SHOWS

- Anything with Clint Eastwood, but especially the *Dollars Trilogy*.
- *Firefly*. A sci-fi western about a crew trying to survive however they must.
- *Supernatural*. Two brothers go from town to town killing monsters and saving innocents.

GAMES

- *Blades in the Dark*. A steampunk game where you play as a crew of criminals. Inspired the Flashback mechanics of **CLINK**.
- *Dungeon World*. A story-focused version of *that famous RPG*. Inspired the coin flip outcomes. Also contains fantastic GM advice that blends well with **CLINK**.
- *Red Dead Redemption*. An open-world western with lots to do.
- *Call of Juarez: Gunslinger*. A clever first-person shooter that relies on western and storyteller tropes.
- *For City Coin*. Sean Smith's entry in the 200 Word RPG Challenge.

MUSIC

- You Can't Take the Sky from Me, the *Firefly* TV show theme song. Catchy song about freedom and defiance of authority.
- It's Good to Have Jayne on Your Side, by Marian Call. Friendly tune about a no-good miscreant who tries.
- Hurt, by Johnny Cash. A sad song about the pain of the past and the present.
- Stretch of Highway, by James Taylor. Drifters keep on rolling, and find joy where they can.
- Ramblin' Man, by The Allman Brothers Band. Drifters don't stick around in any place too long.
- Dust in the Wind, by Kansas. All things come to an end, but we do what little we can before then.



SCENARIOS

The next few pages contain scenarios that will help you get a game started. Each one contains enough information to jumpstart a session without exhaustively detailing everything that may happen. Work together with your group to add more details and turn these scenarios into adventures. Each scenario contains:

- **A Read-a-Loud** describing the details of the setting. It's written so that you can read it out loud to the group.
- **Three Creeds** for the group to choose from. Your group may pick one of these, modify it, or create their own.
- **Five Drifters** for the players to pick from. Each Drifter has a name, a brief description, one Trigger, one Memento, one Flashback, and one Scar. Players may add more Triggers, Mementos, Flashbacks, and Scars as they wish.



SPAGHETTI WESTERN: RUSTBARREL

READ-A-LOUD

Rustbarrel began as a lucky find from an old prospector. The silver veins ran deep and soon attracted businesses and criminals alike. Now Rustbarrel is a booming town caught between two powers.

Comstock, the corrupt owner, seeks to bleed the mine (and the workers) dry. She pays the miners for their labor, then makes it all back through the bars and banks. The miners and their families are little more than slaves.

The Pesos scavenge on the outskirts of town. They go on raids, steal money, and generally cause trouble. Peso gang members can be identified by the large copper pieces featured on their outfits. Many of the teenage Pesos are children of the miners, sick of being poor and oppressed.

Neither side wishes to involve the law, and it's the citizens of Rustbarrel who pay the price.

CREEDS

The Peso Gang will pay for what they've done. How did they hurt you?

We will give Rustbarrel a better leader. Who will it be? How will you find them?

There's money to be made here. How will you make it? Who will you take from?

EXAMPLE DRIFTERS

Tiny, a huge hulk with a squeaky voice

- ➡ **Trigger:** Whenever anyone mentions or mocks my voice, I yell at them (squeaking even louder).
- ➡ **Memento:** Rusted shotgun (broken)
- ➡ **Flashback:** I'm an accomplished outlaw.
- ➡ **Scar:** I killed an innocent with shotgun.

Silver, business investor down on their luck

- ➡ **Trigger:** Whenever someone mentions money or business, I will offer unwanted advice about how to improve and increase profits.
- ➡ **Memento:** My first \$100 bill
- ➡ **Flashback:** I was once the head of a profitable company.
- ➡ **Scar:** My partner betrayed and ruined me.

Pearl, entertainer and sharpshooter

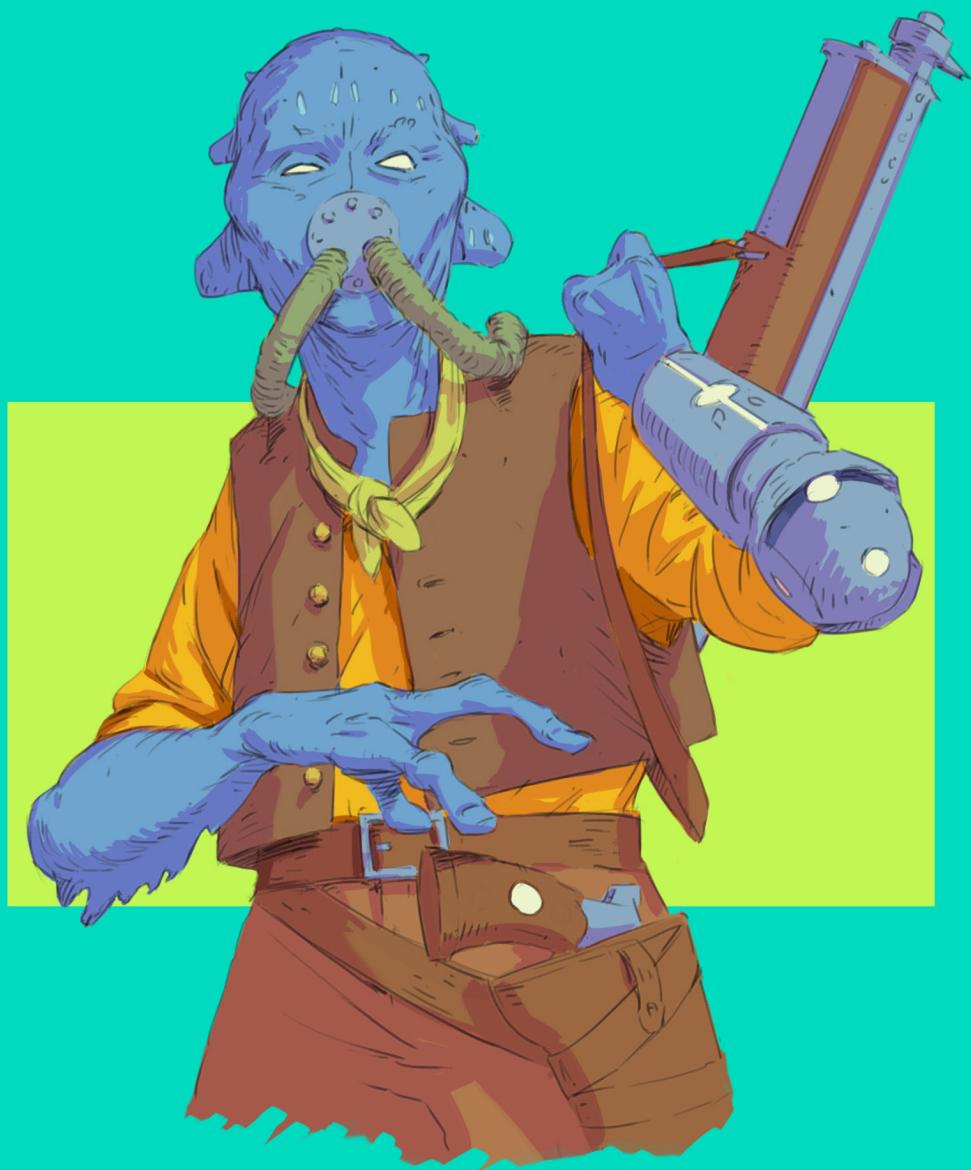
- ➡ **Trigger:** Whenever my skills are questioned or complimented, I show off with a flurry of pinpoint shots.
- ➡ **Memento:** Two beautiful pearl-handled revolvers
- ➡ **Flashback:** I was trained to shoot with fancy flourishes.
- ➡ **Scar:** I got a terrible foot injury when learning to shoot.

Argon, an old prospector

- ➡ **Trigger:** Whenever my opinion is asked, I give a long, incoherent rant.
- ➡ **Memento:** Old, worn pick
- ➡ **Flashback:** I spent years in the mines building a strong back.
- ➡ **Scar:** The mines aged me greatly.

Dandelion, a high-class citizen

- ➡ **Trigger:** Whenever my appearance is spoiled, new clothes and a bath are my biggest priority.
- ➡ **Memento:** Outrageous hat
- ➡ **Flashback:** I schmoozed with the upper class.
- ➡ **Scar:** I grew up poor.



SCIENCE FICTION: TIANGONG

READ-A-LOUD

Once a booming space station, Tiangong has fallen on hard times. After humanity found a vast energy source on the other side of the galaxy, trade routes were adjusted to meet this new demand. With the station almost forgotten, only criminals and colonists visit Tiangong for entertainment and supplies.

Many areas of the station are abandoned, run by small gangs performing various criminal activities. The central hub still has lawmen and artificial gravity, but it won't last long surrounded by such scum.

To make matters worse, there are rumors that an extremist group plans to do some kind of violence against the station. The corporation that owns Tiangong is one of the largest and most influential, so damage to the neglected station would be a small blow. It would, however, decimate those who call the station home and build support for the extremist faction.

CREEDS

We will bring law and order back to the station.
How? Will you work with the tired lawmen on board?

We will do whatever it takes to repair our ship.
How was it damaged? Will you work in money, or in favors?

We will foil the extremist plot. Do you work for the station? Were you hired by the corporation?

EXAMPLE DRIFTERS

Quark, an eccentric inventor

- ➡ **Trigger:** Whenever I am asked to make something, I agree, but end up making something else.
- ➡ **Memento:** Advanced, custom hoverchair
- ➡ **Flashback:** I helped design Tiangong many years ago.
- ➡ **Scar:** An accident cost me my legs.

Jamie, a colony leader

- ➡ **Trigger:** Whenever I am in a confined space, I panic.
- ➡ **Memento:** Necklace with soil from my colony
- ➡ **Flashback:** I organized and led my colony.
- ➡ **Scar:** An unexpected disease killed many people I cared about.

Mech, an artificial intelligence

- ➡ **Trigger:** Whenever I am treated like an appliance, I hack the offender's computer / bank account / social media.
- ➡ **Memento:** Recorded message from my creator
- ➡ **Flashback:** I recall my laser welding torch being installed.
- ➡ **Scar:** I have nightmares of corrupted memories.

Ace, hotshot pilot

- ➡ **Trigger:** Whenever someone tries to thank me, I rudely reject them.
- ➡ **Memento:** Medal from my military service
- ➡ **Flashback:** I usually talk myself out of trouble.
- ➡ **Scar:** I drifted in space for three days.

Scam, smuggler and scoundrel

- ➡ **Trigger:** Whenever an authority gives advice or commands, I bristle and loudly defy them.
- ➡ **Memento:** Hidden blaster up my sleeve
- ➡ **Flashback:** I've made many underworld contacts.
- ➡ **Scar:** I was punished for betraying a crime lord.



HORROR: DARKGORGE

READ-A-LOUD

Ever since the double eclipse in December of 1880, the monsters haven't stopped coming. The US fractured as roads became littered with portals to a dark realm. Towns became fortresses, the wilderness became the wastes, and people became grim and suspicious. Those who wander the wastes are daring, deadly, deranged, or a mixture of all three.

Darkgorge Valley supplies the water for a nearby military fort of the same name, and no one has heard from the fort in several days. A soldier pursued by beasts managed to make it to the nearby town of Haven. He and others in the town defeated the creatures, but the soldier was wounded. Before he died, he gave the following report:

"Portal in the gorge. One of our own betrayed us. Prisoners still alive. More are coming. Don't drink the water."

The military is sending troops to occupy the city and turn it into a new fort. They consider Darkgorge a lost cause. The townspeople want to go and rescue their sons and daughters who may still be alive at the fort. Meanwhile, something grows in Darkgorge, releasing more creatures into a broken land.

CREEDS

We will rescue the prisoners from Darkgorge. Why do you care? Who do you know in Haven?

We will defend Haven until the military arrives. How will you deal with disagreeing townsfolk? Where will you find more help?

We will close the portal in Darkgorge. Do you have experience with portals? How will you handle whatever is keeping it open?

EXAMPLE DRIFTERS

Scard, a dusty, scarred wanderer

- ➡ **Trigger:** Whenever anyone asks about my scars, I make up a new story.
- ➡ **Memento:** Grey cloak with faded emblem
- ➡ **Flashback:** I visited Darkgorge and Haven years ago.
- ➡ **Scar:** I have a long greenish scar across my face.

Skull, mysterious mystic

- ➡ **Trigger:** Whenever I am treated with suspicion, I do something to deepen that suspicion.
- ➡ **Memento:** Terrible mask worn on back of head
- ➡ **Flashback:** I once managed to close a portal.
- ➡ **Scar:** I saw horrors from the other side.

Haunter, skilled tracker and beast-killer

- ➡ **Trigger:** Whenever I am asked to remove my weapons, I refuse and brandish them threateningly.
- ➡ **Memento:** Small bag filled with trophies
- ➡ **Flashback:** I found a weakness that all portal beasts share.
- ➡ **Scar:** My hunting partner was killed by a portal beast.

Snake, con artist and alchemist

- ➡ **Trigger:** Whenever anyone complains about something, I offer them a good deal on some oil or concoction I've made.
- ➡ **Memento:** Sturdy vials filled with various concoctions
- ➡ **Flashback:** I created an ointment that deters portal beasts.
- ➡ **Scar:** I lost my sense of taste and smell in an accident.

Faith, a righteous warrior

- ➡ **Trigger:** Whenever someone curses, I chastise them with a "holier than thou" attitude.
- ➡ **Memento:** A silver dagger
- ➡ **Flashback:** I've swayed large crowds before.
- ➡ **Scar:** I still feel shame from betraying my beliefs.



GAMEPLAY EXAMPLE

Allison, the GM, is running a game of **CLINK** for her three friends: David, Ben, and Stephanie.

"Alright!" Allison says. "You've managed to sneak past the guards and into the mayor's garden. The party is in full swing. What will you do now?"

"Sweet!" Ben says. "Let me handle the next part. I think I can bluff my way in. What do we see?"

Allison describes the manor house and the two competent but extremely bored guards protecting the entrance. "What is your plan, Ben?" she asks.

Ben takes a few minutes to look over his Drifter sheet. None of his Flashbacks will help him right now, so he decides to get a new one. "I am going to spend a coin to get a new Flashback." Ben gives a coin to Allison and writes down a new Flashback, "I've negotiated for various businesses," on his sheet. "David, will you ask me one of the Flashback questions?"

David looks at the group sheet and asks, "The last time you did something like this, it didn't go well. What will you do differently this time?"

Ben tells a quick story about his Drifter. "Shades used to be a big-shot businessman. One night, after celebrating a huge business deal, we went out and partied really hard. One of my buddies, Lauren, dared me to ride the fake bull at the top of the saloon. I never back down, and climbed up on it, only to find it could not support my weight. I spent the next day recovering at the doc's office and missed the final signing. This time, I'm not drunk and there are no bulls around. So it should be fine."

"Wow, Ben. I hope things go better this time," quips Stephanie.

"I hope so too!" Ben says. "Alright, so back to the manor house. I'm going to use my new Flashback and convince the guards that we arrived late, lost our invitations, but we're important businessman, so they will just have to put up with us and let us in."

Ben grabs two coins and flips them. They both come up tails. "Crap, a Scar! At least I still succeeded. Stephanie, since you didn't believe in me, will you ask me a Scar question?"

Stephanie looks at the list of questions, but decides to ask one of her own. *(As the players get to know one another, custom questions will often be more interesting than the ones provided on the group sheet. Just make sure the questions reveal more about the Drifter.)* "You hurt someone with your lies. Who was it, and how did you hurt them?"

GAMEPLAY EXAMPLE

"Wow. That's harsh, Stephanie," Ben mutters. He takes a moment to think and answers, "I guess my younger brother. He never could trust what I was saying, and we were never close." Ben writes down "I lied to my own brother" as a Scar. Now he has three Scars and only two Flashbacks, so Ben loses his Creed, crossing it out. (*Ben needs to come up with a new reason to stick with the group and follow them.*) "Even though I don't care about the mayor, I'm already stuck in the mansion with you guys. I'll stick around, see what happens next. My Drifter is just curious and enjoying the action."

Allison and Ben roleplay a scene where the guards are insulted and put off by Ben's lies. He talks his way past the guards, and the group enters the manor house. David perks up and mentions one of his Triggers, "Whenever someone is insulted, I add additional insult. Why don't we say that I puke all over the guard's shoes or something." Allison chuckles and says, "Sure! These guards will definitely remember your group after this. Take a coin, David." (*Triggers should always get the group into a little bit of trouble. Allison writes this incident down, and maybe later will bring up the two guards who recognize these Drifters.*)

The group gets past the guards and enters the main room filled with guests and food.

"Wait," asks Stephanie, "wasn't 'We will expose the Mayor's corruption' our Creed? Do we get coins for making it into the mansion?"

"Hmmm...I think that makes sense. You went through a lot of trouble to get past the guards," replies Allison. "You all get a coin for that...well, except for Ben. Sorry, Ben!" She gives a coin each to the other players. (*Allison also knows that more trouble is coming soon, and wants them to have an extra coin or two to deal with it. Sadly, Ben lost his Creed and must do without.*)

"Now that we're inside," Stephanie says, "let's get their attention. I want to pull out my six-shooter and shoot off the mayor's hat. I don't want to hurt anyone; I just want their attention so we can reveal our evidence of corruption." Stephanie doesn't have any Flashbacks that will help her, so she decides to just go for it. "I don't need Flashbacks!" she cries and flips a coin. It lands on tails. Stephanie groans and looks to David. "Alright David, tell us what happens."

David takes a moment to think, and then says, "Let's say that the guards hear what happens, draw their weapons, and wait to see what happens next. So now the guards are on alert." The rest of the group nods in agreement. (*Escalation does not mean failure. Things just get more tense, more dangerous.*) Stephanie checks the group sheet and flips the coin for a second time. It lands on tails. (*Stephanie failed, which means that she didn't get everyone's attention to make a speech.*)

Allison takes over and narrates how Stephanie's Drifter fired her gun, but the guests flee the house and guards swarm in. (*The group has only been playing for a little while, and Allison has been looking for reasons to extend the game and add more obstacles. She uses this failure to have the mayor escape and allow the group to get out of the manor house and chase him down.*)

GAMEPLAY EXAMPLE

After another hour or two, a few more coins and Scars later, the group escapes and manages to catch up to the mayor and the sheriff. "There they are!" says David. "If we can convince the sheriff of our evidence, then he can put the mayor away for good."

The group agrees, and Allison describes how the sheriff stands in front of the mayor and draws his gun. "You won't hurt anyone else tonight, you scoundrels," the sheriff exclaims.

"No, no!" David says. "We have evidence that the mayor is behind everything. He even paid the gangs to burn down the bank!"

"The sheriff doesn't believe you, but hasn't shot you either," Allison explains. "How will you convince him?" *(At this point the group has been playing for a while, and Allison suspects that it might be a good time to wrap things up. She'll take it a little easier on the players and hope they can get the sheriff on their side. Maybe she could give out some coins for their Creed.)*

David looks at his Drifter sheet. He has a Flashback that might help him, but he also has a lot of Scars. *(Whenever you use a Flashback, you have a 25% chance to gain a Scar. Without a Flashback, you only have 13% chance.)* "It isn't worth risking another Scar," he mutters, "so I'll just do my best by explaining what's in the papers and where we found them." David grabs a coin and flips it. It lands on tails, making the situation worse.

"Wait!" Stephanie says. "I know you pick another player to describe how the situation gets worse, but one of my Triggers is 'Whenever someone pulls a gun on me, I pull a gun on them.' What if my Trigger is what makes the situation worse?"

Allison chimes in, "Makes sense to me. Now both sides have guns drawn. Good thinking. You also get a coin for your Trigger, Stephanie." Stephanie grabs a coin and turns back to hear David's response.

David continues, unperturbed, "The evidence is on our side. We can still convince him." He flips the coin for a second time. Tails again—things get even worse than they were. "Seriously! Well now I'm at risk of getting a Scar anyway. That stinks!"

Allison smirks a bit and adds, "The mayor pulls out a gun of his own and eyes the back of the sheriff's head. The sheriff hasn't noticed." *(Allison again chooses a slow escalation. Things are more tense, but they aren't as bad as they could be. She still wants the players to succeed here.)*

"Can't back out now! Let's see what happens next," David says as he flips for the third time. Its lands on heads, barely a success. "Yes! Pulled it off," David cries, relieved. "Now how does this look in-game..."

Stephanie chimes in, "I have another really neat idea about how this could play out. Can I narrate?" Allison smiles and offers Stephanie the floor.

"So the mayor pulls a gun," Stephanie explains, "and shoots the sheriff in the shoulder. Now the sheriff is out of action, but he knows we were telling the truth. The crappy situation is that the mayor now has a gun drawn on us, and the sheriff is down. But David still succeeded in convincing the sheriff. If we can get past this, the sheriff will be on our side."

Allison nods approvingly and says, "Yes! Excellent idea. Now you're facing the mayor, gun drawn, and the situation looks pretty tense. What do you do?"

GAMEPLAY EXAMPLE

"Easy," says Stephanie, "I shoot his gun out of his hands." (*Earlier, Stephanie gained the Flashback "Sharpshooter"; encourage players to make Flashbacks that will help in multiple situations.*) Stephanie grabs two coins and flips them. They both land on heads: success plus another benefit. "Yes! I shoot the gun right out of his hand, so he can be taken down. As an added benefit, the sheriff saw the whole thing and knows the mayor is dirty."

"Nice work, Stephanie!" cries Allison. (*Allison jumps at the chance to end with an exciting finale, and uses it as an opportunity to bring things to a close.*) "The mayor loses his gun and sadly falls to his knees, defeated. You all work together and carry the sheriff to safety. Nice work, everyone!"

Here are some closing reflections on this example:

- How might Allison have extended the game? Maybe Allison could describe how the mayor brings in lawyers and corrupt officials to prolong the process. This could even happen in another session.
- David was the only one to lose his Creed, but explaining why his Drifter sticks with the group could lead to more problems and conflicts down the line.
- Stephanie seemed to take over narration from time to time. Ultimately the GM has final say, but letting your players do this helps them invest in the game and makes your life easier.
- How else might have Stephanie's gunshot in the manor house resulted in failure?