

XVIII

After one year from the ratification of this article the manufacture, sale, or transportation of intoxicating liquors within, the importation thereof into, or the exportation thereof from the United States and all territory subject to the jurisdiction thereof for beverage purposes is hereby prohibited.

-Amendment XVIII, U.S. Constitution

A 2005 Game Chef Role-Playing Game

By Justin D. Jacobson

Introduction

In 1919, the 18th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution was formally adopted. In truth, it merely codified what was already the law for much of America: Temperance. Some of the greatest names in American history were concerned about the impact of alcohol on American culture: Jefferson, Lincoln, and others. Yet, fueled by a number of disparate causes, the groundswell in the anti-alcohol movement in Middle America reached its apex with little fanfare, and the passage of the amendment caught many by surprise. In America's urban centers, rebellion against this law came in the form of bootlegged whiskey, speakeasies, and the rise of the Beer Barons. Some of the most colorful characters of the time were the gangsters lured into the illicit trade by the promise of untold riches: Dutch Schultz, Arnold "The Brain" Rothstein, Al Capone, and more. Larger than life, these characters dominated the headlines, amassed millions of dollars in dirty money, and – invariably – retired with the kiss of hot lead.

Now it's your turn.

Game Chef Parameters

Theme: Inspired by the historical period known as the Prohibition Era.

Ingredients: (1) Wine – one of the principal endeavors of the characters is the trafficking of illicit alcohol including wine; (2) Accuser – one of the principal conflicts faced by the characters will be accusations of illicit activity; (3) Invincible – the characters are invincible unless and until they expend their moxie; (4) Companion – each character gets a companion to assist them.

Rules Limitations: (1) There is no character sheet; (2) the system makes use of designer-created cards; (3) resolution system uses colors.

Design Goal: Establish a dice pool resolution system based on limited and hidden resources rather than fixed attributes.

SECTION 1: GENERAL

PLAYER ROLES

XVIII is a game for 3 or more players. One player takes the role of the gamemaster (referred to as the G-Man, in honor of the Treasury Department's position as the enforcement arm during the Prohibition Era). The other players take the roles of "gangsters," each the head of their own illegal alcohol empire.

GAME COMPONENTS

The G-Man and all players will require something that can be used as a screen. The former uses the screen to hide her notes and to make secret rolls; the latter use their screens to hide their assets from the other players. A 6-sided die (abbreviated d6) is used in the game. It would be helpful if each player had their own die and ideal if each player had a number of dice to use. Players will use the companion cards that accompany these rules. Participants will also need a large supply of tokens of four different colors; glass stones or poker chips work well for this purpose. A few writing utensils and a few scraps of paper are also required.

OBJECTIVE

As with most role-playing games, the principal object is to have fun. However, unlike many such games, XVIII has a tangible competitive element. A player wins if they have not expended all of their moxie prior to the conclusion of the final act. The object of the game is to eliminate the competition by breaking them financially, sending them up the river, or gunning them down. In doing so, opponents are forced to expend assets and, ultimately, moxie. The G-Man plays the role of independent forces, including but not limited to the Treasury Department, that impact the fortunes of the players' characters.

GAME TERMS

Act: An indefinite period of in-game time. An act is comprised of events; a campaign is comprised of a series of acts.

Arena: One of three areas of conflict: Violence, Commerce, and Law.

Asset: The gangsters' ability in one of the three arenas. The gangster's

ability is measured by the number of assets they possess in that arena.

Campaign: A series of acts comprising a complete game.

Climax: The last conflict in an act. The climax is more challenging than other conflicts and usually involves several gangsters.

Companion: A lawyer, a hit man, or an accountant that gives the gangster a bonus die in their applicable arena.

Conflict: A specific event that requires an asset check by one or more of the gangsters. Conflicts can be player-created, independent, or climaxes.

Gangster: The player characters.

G-Man: The gamemaster.

Moxie: The gangsters' ability to avoid elimination from the game. These are similar to hit points in other games.

Tokens: The chips or stones used to represent a player's assets and moxie.

Turn: One round of actions by the gangsters.

SECTION 2: SETUP

SETUP OVERVIEW

Players create their characters and select objectives for the first act. The G-Man selects the independent events that will occur during the first act and places them in an appropriate sequence of her choosing, culminating in the climax.

CHARACTER CREATION

Players create their characters using the following process:

- 1) Name: Create a name for your gangster. (The naming convention table in the appendix may be helpful in this regard.) The character's name should be written on or appended to their screen so it is visible to all the players and the G-Man.
- 2) Assets: Select your asset scores in each of the three arenas of conflict: Violence, Commerce, and Law. You may not have a score below 1 in any given arena. Your total value of assets may not be below 40 or above 45.
- 3) Moxie: Determine your moxie score. This is equal to $(45 - \text{your total assets}) + 1$. Thus, if your total value of assets was 43, you would have a moxie score of 3.
- 4) Receive Assets: Secretly write down your asset and moxie scores and pass them to the G-Man. She, in turn, secretly gives you a number of colored chips corresponding your asset scores (red for Violence, gold for Commerce, and Blue for Law) along with additional, black-colored chits equal to your moxie.
- 5) Select Companion: You select your Companion from the available Companion cards. Use die rolls to determine who selects first. Append your Companion card to your screen.

SETTING THE SCENE

The G-Man narrates a brief introduction for the campaign. This should include the year and city where the first act will commence (usually New York or Chicago). Then, in clockwise order starting to the left of the G-Man, each player introduces their character, giving a brief personal history and highlighting those things for which he or she has become famous (or, to be accurate, infamous).

FORMULATE PLAYER CONFLICTS

Each player formulates a conflict he intends to raise against an opponent during the following act. The conflict must be specific, should be summarized in a few sentences, must state the name of the target gangster, and must specify the arena of conflict involved. A single conflict could involve a number of different arenas; the player must choose which arena to use. He summarizes the conflict in a few sentences, secretly writes it down, and passes it to the G-Man. There are no restrictions on the nature of the conflict. Conflicts with grand goals will be harder to accomplish, will risk more in failure, but will net greater rewards in success. Examples of player-created conflicts include:

- I'm going to co-opt Mendy "Three-Shoes" Kalkstein's Quebecois whiskey supplier. (Commerce)
- I'm going to insert a mole in Wilfredo "The Pick" Mulino's outfit. (Violence)
- I'm going to pay off the D.A. to accuse George "Big Blue" Koslowski with running an illegal speakeasy. (Law)

SELECT INDEPENDENT CONFLICTS

After reviewing the player-created conflicts, the G-Man selects two independent conflicts to be used during the first act. These conflicts are similar to the player-created conflicts except that they are not directed to a particular player. Additionally, each individual conflict may involve more than one arena. Independent conflicts should be selected to ensure that the conflicts for the act represent a good distribution of the three arenas. For example, if all the player-created conflicts concern commerce, the

independent conflicts should focus on violence and law. Examples of independent conflicts include:

- Your wife is pressuring you to take her on a trip to Paris. (Commerce)
- There's evidence that a mole is in your outfit, who is skimming off the top. (Violence and Commerce)
- One of the criminal court judges has passed away and the seat is open. (Law and Commerce)

SELECT A CLIMAX

After selecting the independent conflicts, the G-Man selects a climax for the first act. This is the conflict that will signal the culmination of the particular act. Certainly, the climax should be a major event. It should be built on the other events that are going to be used in the act. It should involve all three arenas of conflict. It should be able to apply to any of the gangsters. Examples of climaxes include:

- Giacomo "Tuxedo" Bernini (NPC) is making a move to get a monopoly on the city's wine importing racket.
- The new police chief is cracking down on the city's gambling halls.
- The local temperance movement is seeking to increase the penalty for violation of the anti-saloon laws.

SECTION 3: GAMEPLAY

INITIATIVE AND ORDER OF PLAY

Players roll a d6. The high roller is the starting player. Ties are broken by re-roll. Play proceeds clockwise around the table. In the next act, the starting player is the one to the left of the starting player from the preceding act.

PLAYER ACTIONS

The first player announces his actions for the turn. Actions should be limited to ones that are focused toward a single objective, though the description should be detailed as to the specific actions taken. For example, if the player were trying to find a more profitable Canadian whiskey, he might say that he sends his consiglieri to get a supplier recommendation from a boss in another city. The player plays the role of those in his command, in this case, the consiglieri. The G-Man plays the role of other characters, in this case, the boss. The player and the G-Man act out the scene.

The G-Man places a reasonable limitation on what actions each player can accomplish during the turn. For example, a player could not say that he wanted to find a more profitable Canadian whiskey supplier **and** bribe the police to shut down one of his competitor's speakeasies. However, he could do one of those two during the first turn and do the second during the next turn, all before the G-Man introduces a conflict.

At the conclusion of any scene, the G-Man directs the player to make an asset check in an arena of her choosing appropriate to the action and how the scene played out. (Asset checks are described below.) In the example above, if the consiglieri offered to have one of the boss's competitors whacked in exchange for an introduction to the Canadian whiskey supplier, the G-Man might call for a violence check. Alternatively, if the consiglieri offered a percentage of future whiskey sales in tribute, the G-Man might call for a commerce check.

INTRODUCING CONFLICTS

The G-Man introduces conflicts at any time during the course of play. She should try to introduce them as a natural development of a related player action. If it is a player-created conflict, she identifies the player that is the target of the conflict. If it is an independent conflict, the G-Man directs the players to make an asset check of the appropriate type as determined by the G-Man. The winner of the check gets to dictate which player is the target of the conflict. She describes how the conflict unfolds, and the target of the conflict describes his reaction to it. After playing out the scene, the G-Man determines the difficulty (see below) of the check and directs the player to make another asset check of an appropriate type.

INTRODUCING THE CLIMAX

After all of the other conflicts in that act have been played out and resolved, the G-Man introduces the climax. As with other conflicts, she describes how the event unfolds, and the players describe their reactions to it. However, unlike other conflicts, the G-Man determines which players are affected by the climax. After playing out the scene, the G-Man directs the affected players to make asset checks of an appropriate type. She determines who needs to make checks and what type depending on how the scene plays out.

BASIC ASSET CHECKS

When a player is required to make a basic asset check, he determines how many tokens of the appropriate type he will stake on the outcome. For all conflicts other than a climax, he may stake up to five tokens. For the climax, he may stake up to ten tokens. The player takes the number of staked tokens from behind his screen and moves them in front of his screen. To make the check, the player rolls one d6 plus a number of d6's equal to the number of tokens staked. If the asset check is in the arena for which the player's companion is suited, he gains an additional d6. The player rolls all d6's. Results of 1-4 are ignored; a 5 or 6 is called a success. If the number of successes equals or exceeds the difficulty of the check (see below), the player achieves the desired result. He takes back one of the tokens staked (if any) and returns it to his pool behind his screen. If the number of successes is less than the difficulty of the check, the player fails

at the task. He loses all of his staked tokens (if any) and an additional token of the same type. After the check is resolved, the G-Man describes the details of the success or failure. The number of successes determines if the player achieves the desired effect and also determines the degree of success achieved. The greater the number of successes, the greater the degree of success.

CHECK DIFFICULTY

A basic check is used when the player is attempting to accomplish a task where the outcome is in doubt. A player would not need to make a check to send his consiglieri to L.A. to meet with another crime boss. However, he would need to make a check to have the consiglieri convince the crime boss to do something he desires. A check of this type – where the player is opposed by someone or something other than another player – is made against a particular difficulty. This value determines the number of successes required on the check. Most basic checks have a difficulty of one. That is, a single success means the check is accomplished. Without staking additional assets, the player will succeed one-third of the time. Even when a check has a difficulty of one, the player may wish to stake additional assets to achieve a more favorable result. Independent checks have a difficulty ranging from one to three. Climaxes generally have difficulties of five. Obviously, difficulties higher than one require the player to stake assets to have any chance of success.

OPPOSED ASSET CHECKS

Player-created events represent one player attempting to achieve a goal against another player. When resolving such events, players make opposed checks rather than checks against a fixed difficulty. The G-Man describes the nature of the conflict and the arena of conflict. Each player secretly places a number of assets in his hand that he wishes to stake on the check. The players reveal their staked assets simultaneously. After the staked assets are revealed, the target player may elect to add an additional asset to remove an asset from his stake. Then, the players roll the appropriate number of dice and compare their total number of successes. If the player initiating the event gets a number of successes exceeding the target player's number of successes, he prevails. As with normal asset

checks, the prevailing player may return one of their staked assets back to their pool; the losing player loses their staked assets. Additionally, the losing player immediately gives the player initiating the event an additional asset of the type involved in the check. The G-Man describes the outcome of the event.

USING "OFF-SUIT" ASSETS

Checks are made in one of the three arenas of conflict. Normally, a player stakes assets of the appropriate type. However, a player may stake assets of another type. Staking two "off-suit" assets counts as staking one asset of the appropriate type. On a successful check, only half of all off-suit assets are recovered.

Additionally, a particularly desperate gangster may stake moxie in lieu of regular assets. Staking one token of moxie counts as staking five assets of the appropriate type. Moxie staked in lieu of the appropriate assets are not recovered even in the event of a successful check.

MOXIE

If a player fails a check and would normally be required to give up a penalty token after a failed check but he does not possess a token of the appropriate type, he must give up a moxie token instead. If a player would normally be required to give up a moxie token but he is out of moxie tokens, the player has been eliminated from the game.

COMPANIONS

Lawyers, hit men, and accountants can assist the players in achieving their goals. In addition to the bonus die awarded for having a companion in the appropriate arena, a companion can also be used to shield the player from harm. If a player would be required to expend moxie as a result of a failed check in the same arena to which his companion is suited, he may instead forfeit his companion. He removes his companion card from his screen and returns it to the G-Man. Prior to starting a new act, a player without a companion may "buy" a new companion of their choice with three assets of their choosing.

PLAYER REWARDS

At the end of the act, the G-Man rewards any surviving players for their play. The player who, in the opinion of the G-Man, accomplished the most goals, created the best event, and did the best job of role-playing is rewarded with a number of assets of a type of his choosing equal to the number of remaining players. The other players receive one asset of a type of their choosing.

SETTING UP THE NEXT ACT

After the conclusion of the act, the participants set up the new act in the same manner. The G-Man sets the scene by describing the fallout from the prior act and any new situations that arise. The players and the G-Man create new events and a new climax.

These cards were designed to be printed out on 3" x 5" index cards (Avery Form #5388)

ATTORNEY

NAME: _____

ARENA: LAW

HIT MAN

NAME: _____

ARENA: VIOLENCE

ACCOUNTANT

NAME: _____

ARENA: COMMERCE