

# Burial at Crossroads



a game by Bryan Hansel

# Burial at Crossroads

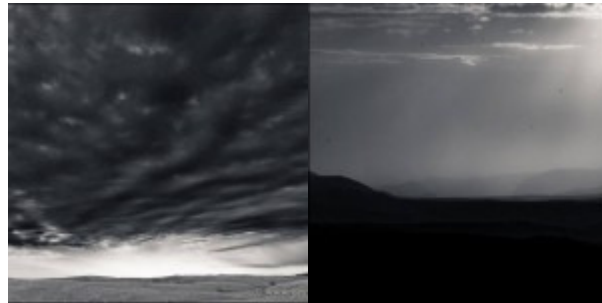
At the crossroads, a pile of broken water-rich rock marked the road west; the north road bore a sign marked 'To New Askja.' Those who could read went north. You journeyed west. West across the volcanic desert, past other *grēners* who already marked their claims with names like Lamia, Usha's Hole and Lunar Landing. Your claim, illegally named after your lost love, proved barren. Without money, without food, without friends, without love, taking a job meant a chance at another claim and wealth and maybe love.

**The job:** Deliver a *skinner* to Oasis, the city of exile. An exile's fresh start means your fresh start. To help you along your journey, someone in exile hired a mercenary, a scientist, a gambler, a frontiersman, a forgotten marshal and a native. Each of you have something to gain and something to lose. You'll journey to Oasis together, apart or alone, and deliver the skinner or be consumed by the desert.

## A Game for Game Chef 2010, Now a Finalist!

**Theme:** Journey

**Using:** Skin, Desert, City



Notes addressing questions for playtest:

**GM set difficulties:** If it seems unfair that the Governor sets difficulties on the fly, then play with difficulties bases on map locations:

3 is near New Askja; 4 is near Crossroads; 5 is south of Crossroads; 6 is south of the chasm

Or the Governor places difficulties on the map before play. Let me know what you think.

**Hitting condition-style desires:** Changed. See text. Play it more often with gusto, but not every other desire.

**Use of Native class:** If the use of a stereotype in classic westerns bugs you, rename the class mystic.

**Injury conditions:** GM gives them based on the fiction.

**Take a Stand Questions:** I updated the procedures in the text, but not the example. Use the example as the flavor that the game is going for, but not as an example of procedures. I hope the updated procedures answers these questions clearly. If not, here's the goods.

Can I roll against every other character involved in the stand?  
Only those not on together with you.

Do I get the dice I buy to roll against every other character or do I have to pay for extra dice each time?  
If you roll it, it's gone.

Do other players also get to roll and make adjustments to the groupings or just the player taking a stand?  
The other players only roll if you fight them. They can bargain before a fight, but during bargaining they don't roll dice.

How do you know when the standoff is over?  
When you have a majority on together or have fought everyone and lost.

#### Possible Playtest Additions

\*Difficulties are selected by the party's leader. They correspond to the type of actions a Governor can take. Maybe inversely proportional.

\*Take a Stand: Add a helping hand. Anyone on a square with you can sacrifice something to help you roll. Shows her roll?

## Important Places

**The Black Desert (The West):** Black as far as the eye can see with a westerly backdrop of towering mountains abruptly rising from the ground. In some areas, the rocks are jagged, but in most places they're smooth with a black sand filling in the depressions. Shifting black sand dunes exist in places. The rock feels porous. The air smells hot and gritty.

Weather and dark clouds come primarily from the east. Strong daily storms bring lots of lightning and sometimes rain. The rain quickly disappears into the ground where it's held in place by deposits of a water bearing rock. Uncaptured water drains towards Nukpana Chasm or just disappears.

Greening operations dot its surface and are owned and primarily worked by miners known as *grēners*. The larger operations employ many workers, who live in company towns, and are characterized by massive rusting equipment, that only a few can work and upkeep, and large water towers. Some smaller mines, often dug by solo prospectors, consist of hand tools, a small cistern and a shack. Solo prospectors, often uneducated, who find a rich load of water-bearing rock, quickly come into wealth.

A typical greening operation prospects for water bearing rock. Once enough water bearing rock is welled, the machines grind the surface rock into small grains of sand. In other machines, over months, the sand bakes to a workable soil. Then the *grēners* install underground irrigation pipes across their claims. Years later, after planting successive seasons of specially engineered plants, the soil becomes richer until it supports food-bearing plants.

One native plant, the Copi, flowers across the desert. Its seeds germinate quickly, often overnight after a rain. Their roots, tiny white strands, reach out to scarp grains of black sand together. They consume the sand to grow, often to waste high. All the nutrition swells into the fist-sized seeds, which fly away on the next day's wind to a crack where they wait until the next rain. After the seeds fly, the stalks crumble to black dust. When people are around, the plants refuse to germinate. Flour made from the seeds is as gritty as rock. It wears teeth down quickly, but is nutritious--one seed can feed a man for a day.

A small ecosystem of insects, rodents and reptiles revolve around the seeds. The insects pollinate the flowers and mine the seed's meat, the rodents eat the insects and the reptiles eat the rodents. Nearer to the mountains, white tigers, snow eagles and yeti bear venture out onto the desert at night.

**New Askja:** An ordered and tranquil settlement organized into smaller kin-based communities and towns. Most families are young and well-educated. Decades and decades of greening work created an agrarian society and miles and miles of newly created farmland surround the city's center protecting it from the dust and grime of other western places.

Three features define the city's center: a date and citrus tree orchard, a public garden with unregulated fountains and a University built from white marble quarried in the mountains and shipped to New Askja on a high-speed railroad specifically built for the purpose.

**Oasis (The Exile's City):** The greatest punishment for criminals is physical exile to Oasis, a city located at the only natural oasis in the Black Desert. Although miles from Oasis, the

Nukpana Chasm limits access. Only one railroad bridge leads across the chasm. That bridge is guarded by highly trained federales.

Oasis's economy centers around rich warlord-like exiles, who employ the rest of the exiles to do their bidding and help maintain their power. Because exiles are forbidden from making money outside of exile, they run into power struggles as their wealth and savings run out.

As rough as and as gritty and dirty Oasis is, on the surface it seems docile. People live out their lives, some have families. A weak government tries to keep the infrastructure functioning. Scientists with their maintenance skills are sought after and protected. They often live a privileged life in Oasis. There's always work for mercenaries and frontiersmen.

**Nukpana Chasm:** Over a half-millennium ago, the first explorers of the Black Desert settled within the water-rich walls of Nukpana Chasm. After a half-millennium of settlement, these people adapted their lifestyles to survive in the extreme environment of the chasm. Over a mile deep in places and a mile wide in places, its walls climb almost vertically.

The settlers, now considered natives, live in dwellings carved out of the black rock. Their bodies were adapted to drink the stagnant, black, silty water below and modified to eat the native flowers, but they eat primarily fish and rodents. Some dwellings are adapted to grow plants using soil stolen or bartered from the *grēners*.

A nature-worship religion, known as Nukpanism by scholars, has grown up around the chasm and most natives follow it. Spirit animals protect practitioners, who are able to commune with the animals and plants of the world.

There are only two real places for non-natives to cross the chasm: the railroad bridge and the confusing, jumbled ford near the mountains.

**Crossroads (Officially named Indra):** A dirty, lawless, *grēners* city located on the crossroads of a rail line that runs between Oasis, New Askja and the east. It consists of quickly built false front buildings, uneven rock roads, supply warehouses, taverns and almost anything that anyone would desire.

The law enforcement--what limited laws there are--is overseen by one marshal, who commands a sheriff and several deputies. The federales occasionally seize power to replace a law enforcement team that falls from favor. Many of the wealthy business owners are connected to the railroad or the powerful back east. They often demand a change of law enforcement. If the federales won't do it, they take it into their own hands.

Inhabitants of Crossroads are mainly young, impulsive males searching for quick wealth with a inclination to conflict. So many people funnel into causing the town to experience explosive growth. Many new innovations appear from Crossroads.

**Railroad:** A high-speed modern railroad built to open expansion into the Black Desert and, hopefully, when work finishes, through the western mountains to the fertile plains far beyond. It runs between Oasis and New Askja. Crossroads sits on this line and the connection to the east. From New Askja, the line extends to the mountain quarries and new tunnels. Lots of nomads work on the furthest reaches of the rails.

There are many small trading posts and forts connected by paths across the Black Desert. And lots of other places for encounters to occur. During play, you'll find them.

“Nah,” said the forgotten marshal. “They can’t exist.”

“That’s what I heard a skinner was. Why would exiles hire us if it wasn’t?” The gambler shifted in his shoes and put his hands in his pockets. “I’ll bet you it’s true. Doc, whatcha think?”

The scientist looked up from his notes. “The theory behind a skinner is sound. When in New Askja, I heard of experiments, but didn’t everyone.” He paused and looked at his watch before he continued, “I question the morality of creating such a container.”

The mercenary flipped a coin at the bartender and said, “As long as we get a paycheck, I’ll deliver whatever it is.”

## How to Play

### What’s Needed to Play?

Four to Eight players. Pencils, paper, a different colored pawn or token for each player and a half-dozen six-sided dice per player. Print out the **Take a Stand?** board.

### Roles

One person takes the role of the Governor, a game master role. The rest of the players play a character, that they create, based on a class. There can only be one character of each class. The Governor’s role is covered in her own section.

### General Overview

The Governor describes the world, and the players say what they’re doing in it. You roll the dice when something happens that forces or lets your character take an action listed in her description. When you fail the Governor makes you feel the desert, or, in some situations, she makes you take a stand. At points, if a player disagrees with what your character does, then he can force you to take a stand.

### Player’s Duties

As a player, you must play your character with gusto. Desires, class actions and traits define how you’ll play your character. The Governor describes the world, and you say what your character does and it happens unless it’s defined by an action. When your character does something that aligns with her desires, you gain experience. When your character takes an action, you roll the dice. If you succeed, your character avoids the danger and what you wanted to happen happens. At points, your character will need to stand alone, together or apart from the other characters. When you make your choice, your character may gain something at a cost. **Sometimes, the cost equals your character’s life.** But, she’ll know where she stands.

## Creating Characters

Start by creating characters. Roll some traits. Pick a class. Pick a name. Tell the other players about your character.

### Traits

Three traits, Mind, Body, and Spirit, determine how many dice are thrown when performing an action. When an action relates to a trait throw the dice assigned to the trait. When creating characters roll 1d6 and assign dice to traits based on the following chart. If the Governor allows, you may pick a column instead of roll for it.

Roll 1d6	1 to 2	3 to 4	5 to 6
Mind	2	1	3
Body	1	3	2
Spirit	3	2	1

**Mind:** A measurement of intelligence, wisdom, wit, fast thinking and anything to do with the brain.

**Body:** A measurement of strength, constitution, speed, dexterity, endurance and anything to do with the body.

**Spirit:** A measurement of your soul, your connection to the world, emotion, charisma, how close you are to breaking and anything not related to mind and body.

### Desires

Your character is defined by three desires--the things that drove your character to travel west to the edge of civilization and the Black Desert. These desires are so innate to your character that when you play them, the game gives you a reward. When your character acts on a desire, you score a 'hit'. With each hit, you gain an experience point (XP). You'll spend experience points to buy back lost desires, buy bonus dice or add new actions.

You character can also gain desires from being wounded (see below). When a wounded desire is present, play it with gusto and hit it more often than your other desires. Wounded desires are removed when you satisfy their requirements.

## Experience Points

When you have one XP you can buy:

- One Bonus die. Roll it whenever you'd like. It goes away after you use it. Bonus dice must be purchased directly after the XP was earned.

When you have five XP you can spend them on:

- One lost action.
- One new action listed under "Take these first."

When you have ten XP you can spend them on:

- One lost desire.
- One new action listed under "Take these last." You can only buy these actions after you buy all those under "Take these first."

You can save XP for as long as you'd like and spend them when you're ready.

## Actions

You take an action when you have one to play. Say you do it. Say what you want to happen when you do it. Roll dice. To determine how many dice to roll:

- Determine what trait reflects on the action and roll the trait's dice.
- Add a die for the action itself. Add two dice for actions listed under "Take these last."
- Add any bonus dice you want to spend.

You win a roll when you roll one die equal to or higher than the difficulty set by the Governor (see playtest notes). If you fail, the Governor takes an action against you or the group. The Governor's actions are outlined in her section, but some actions include wounding you or forcing you to take a stand. After you hear the difficulty, you can back down. When you back down you can't do the same thing without taking an action.

3 is Moderate; 4 is Hard; 5 is Challenging; 6 is Severe

If an action is listed by other character class, you can't do it. You have to ask them to do it for you or force them to take a stand (see below). If a character class isn't being used, any character can do the action that class starts with, but she doesn't gain a die for the action itself.

Example action: A grëner is using her Take a Beating action. Her traits rate 3 Mind, 2 Body, 1 Spirit. A group of railroad guards surrounded and started to beat her up. Because railroad

guards only care about keeping drifters out of the boxes until they leave, the Governor decides that it's only a Moderate beating. Because it's a physical beating, she uses her Body trait and her Action gives her a die, so she has a total of 3 dice to role. She rolls 1,1,5. Because the 5 is higher than the 3 needed for moderate difficulty, she Takes the Beating without harm.

Another example action: A grēner is using her Take a Beating action. Her traits rate 3 Mind, 2 Body, 1 Spirit. Some federales have her behind a table in a jail. They're trying to get info out of her. When combined with Mind, her Take a Beating action allows her to resist questioning. The federales are well-trained in interrogation, so the Governor decides that it's Challenging. She rolls 3 dice for mind and 1 for the action. She scores 1, 4, 3, 2. Because no results were higher than or equal to 5, she fails. The federales get the info, and something bad happens.

## Wounds

Wounds range from physical injuries to new desires. The Governor can assign a wound after you fail an action. She may pick from the following wounds: dazed, injured, near dead, depressed, mad and wants revenge.

**Dazed, injured, near dead:** Physical injuries that require medical attention or rest to fix. Dazed causes a -1 penalty to one die. It's applied to the highest result. Injured causes a -2 penalty to two dice. It's applied to the two highest results. Near dead causes a -3 penalty to all dice rolled. Example: You roll four dice that result in 6, 4, 4 and 2. When dazed, the 6 becomes a 5. When injured, the 6 becomes a 4 and one 4 becomes a 2. When near dead, they become 3, 1, 1, 0. To recover, sleep a full day for dazed, first aid will fix an injury or for near death visit a medical center.

**Depressed (new desire):** The desert grit has worn your tolerance thin. You just want to curl up and crawl away. You're done. Hit this desire when you show others how feed up with it you are. Remove it when you win at taking a stand.

**Mad (new desire):** Failing that action made you mad as hell. You're going to take it out on everyone. Hit this desire when you show others that you're mad. Remove it after you earn 3 XP from this desire.

**Wants Revenge (new desire):** Whatever or whoever caused you to fail your action humiliated you. You want revenge. Hit this desire whenever you maneuver to seek revenge. Remove it after you wound, kill or humiliate whatever or whoever injured you.

## Take a Stand

You take a stand when the Governor tells you to, when you want to take control of the group, when another player doesn't like the action you're taking or when you want to force a character to take an action. During take a stand, you try to win enough support from the other players to have a majority. Once you have a majority, then stand is over and you become the leader, and the other characters assume new group dynamics. If you fight to a point where a majority is impossible, then you lose. As long as there's a leader, the group must work together to deliver the skinner.

To take a stand do this:

- **To start say why the group is being asked to take a stand.** Ultimately, all stands are about leadership. Say what trait is being used during this stand. If the stand is because an action, use the trait that would be or was used in that action. Say why other characters should stand with you.
- **Place your token on together.** If the Governor forced the stand, the person who failed her action places her token on together.
- **Others place their tokens where they want.** Together if they agree with you. Apart if they disagree. Alone if they don't care.
- **You try to win others over by bargaining.** Others can bargain, too. You can bargain in-game fiction, with XP or with bonus dice. No dice are rolled during bargaining. Move around based on the bargains you make. When bargaining goes on too long, the Governor ends it. Five minutes is plenty.
- **You fight to force others to your side.** Because you're taking the stand, you select who to fight. You fight one other character at a time. You only need to fight those not on together with you. You roll the trait used for this stand plus anything risked against the other character's trait and things she risked. Whoever rolls highest wins. If you win, the character you're fighting moves to together, and she loses everything she risked. If you lose, you lose everything you risked, and the other character stays where she was. You can only fight a character once per take a stand.

During a fight, you can raise the stakes by risking wounds, desires and actions to gain more dice.

- Gain dice by raising like this:
  - An action gains 1 die or 2 for those listed under "Take these last."
  - You can sacrifice a desire and let the desert take away part of you if you lose; doing so gains 2 dice.
  - You can risk up to three wounds for 1 die each.
  - You can risk your life for 5 dice.
  - You can spend bonus dice. If you roll it, you lose it.

You can fold at anytime before rolling the dice. If a character folds, she joins the your side. If you fold, she stays put.

- To fight:
  - Say what you do, roll the trait dice and set them in front of you.

- The other character says what she does, rolls her trait dice and sets in front of her. She can gain extra dice by saying what she does towards you, raising the stakes. She rolls those dice and keeps them hidden from you. She has to match the number of dice you laid down for your trait or fold.
  - You can see her (by equaling her dice), raise (by equaling her dice and adding more by risking something) or fold (by letting her stay apart) by saying what you do. If you add dice, roll them and keep them hidden.
  - Go back and forth until all raises are seen or someone folds. Then show the dice. The person with the more high dice wins. If you fold you don't need to show your dice.
  - At the end of a fight, everything that was said happened, but the costs only fall on the loser.
  - *Playtest Option:* Use poker dice for fun. Once you have five dice, start treating the additional dice like draws in Five Card Stud, except that if higher they replace dice. If lower, they get discarded. Then the highest hand wins.
- **You deal out costs.** You win and become the leader by having more characters on your side. Anyone on the together box becomes a follower of the leader. Anyone left on the apart box can select disrupt or divide. Those left on alone, just stay there. Any other outcome and you lose, the leader remains the same and you are placed on the contempt box. The rest of the characters can organize as they wish on alone or follow.
  - **If the current leader faces a Take a Stand and loses.** The group dynamics dissolve. There is no leader until the next Take a Stand. Because there is no leader, the group can quit working together.

Think of the costs as temporary desires that go away when the group dynamics change. When you hit them, you gain an XP.

**Alone:** You preferred to stay out of this stand and didn't take a side. You'll stay with the party. Nothing to hit and no penalties.

**Lead:** You worked hard to show everyone where you stand. Now, as a leader, they'll follow. When you show or demonstrate that you're leading, you hit this desire. Because you risked, you gain 2 XP instead of one. Until you lose this desire, you function above your normal skill level; add 1 to the highest roll result.

**Follow:** She stood up for or were convinced by what she believed in. For that, she deserves to be followed. When you follow her lead, you hit this desire.

**Disrupt:** You don't agree with the way she's leading, so you'll try to disrupt her plans. Hit this desire when you take an action that disrupts what she was planning. Because you risked, you gain 2 XP instead of one. Until you remove this desire, you function below your normal skill level; subtract -1 from the highest roll result.

**Divide:** You don't like the way she leads, and you'll try to peel off her support. You hit this desire when you convince someone not to hit their follow desire. Because you risked, you gain 2

XP instead of one. Until you remove this desire, you function below your normal skill level; subtract -1 from the highest roll result.

**Contempt:** You lost your challenge, and because you did, you can't stand to follow the current leader. You know you can't make a challenge again, so when you show contempt, you hit this desire. Until you remove this desire, you function below your normal skill level; subtract -1 from every roll result.

### **Example Take a Stand**

Governor: The native, still sitting on the cliff, rises and looks off into the distance. He says, "I can not contact my guide." Everyone decides it's time to take a stand.

Native: I say, "So, you're standing against me? The spirit world doesn't answer on our time. Once you learn that, you will live in peace with yourself."

Grēner: I'll stand with him.

Forgotten Marshal: I walk over to his side and put my hand on his back. I say, "I'm with you. I've been in the desert long enough to know it doesn't answer to anyone."

Gambler: I'll bet against you.

Scientist: I say, "I don't believe in your mumbo-jumbo. I'm against you."

Mercenary: (*The current leader*) I'm against you, because I don't think you'll be a better leader than me.

Frontiersman: I walk away and say, "I just don't think we need to do this right now." I'm standing alone. Because I'm doing something different than everyone else, I hit my Maintain Individuality desire.

Governor: I'll give you that. You gain one XP. That leaves three together, three apart and one alone. It looks like it's a stand-off.

Frontiersman: I'm buying a bonus die with my XP.

...bargaining goes nowhere...

Native: I'm going to try to force the Scientist to my side. We're struggling with spirit. I have three dice, and she has one. "Scientist, you're weak in soul. That's why you fail to understand."

Scientist: I'll use three bonus dice to even the score and raise you one. And to you, "It isn't about soul. If you had even a pinch of education, you'd understand that what you believe exists is just modified genetics and your imagination." I hit my Stand Above desire.

Governor: That's one XP for you. The score is four dice to three dice.

Native: I'll see the raise by burning a bonus die. I reach out and grab a black rock from the ground. I hold it out to the Scientist and using Manipulate Rock make it dissolve to sand. "There are greater things in this desert than your science." That's a raise.

Scientist: I risk my Education action to see your raise. Back at school, I saw how previous generations manipulated human genes to give them powers like that. What you did was a parlor trick.

Governor: That's five against five. Roll them.

*The two players roll the dice. The Native scores a total of 22 verses the Scientist's 16.*

Governor: (*Looks at the scientist.*) You want to believe in your education, but watching the native turn rock to sand amazes you, and it shakes your belief in your education. You lose it until you can buy it back with XP. You stand together with the native. That's 4 against 2. The frontiersman stands alone. The grēner, scientist and forgotten marshal become followers. The gambler and mercenary need to pick between disrupt or divide. Now the native is the leader.

# Character Classes

## Grēner

A water prospector with a dry claim and a lost love. Moved west to find enough wealth to satisfy a dowry. What you've collected you keep hidden in a money belt.

### Desires

**Get Success:** You desire success and have traveled west hoping to achieve it. You hit this desire when you get other people to acknowledge your successes.

**Get Love:** You moved west to raise money for a dowry, but you long for a companion now. You hit this desire when you find a temporary companion without having to spend any of the dowry.

**Remain Strong:** The Black Desert and the jobs you have to take to survive until you strike it rich wear you down, like Copi seeds on teeth. You hit this desire when you demonstrate your strength over desert adversity.

### Actions

*You start with:*

**Take a Beating:** Living in the desert makes you strong in Mind, Body and Spirit. When you have to, you can stand up to punishment. Use this skill when you have to stand against a threat.

*Take these first :*

**Smell Water:** You just know where to find water when you need to. It's not often a big deposit, but it's enough to drink from.

**Talk Green:** Living in the desert, working the greening operations has taught you the lingo. Knowing how to talk to other grēners helps you get what you need.

**Break Rock:** You have an uncanny ability to break lots of rock with just your pick axe and shape those rocks into shelters.

**Mechanical Advantage:** Without an education, you shouldn't know how to fix, operate or change machinery, but you've been around it long enough to know how it works. You can use machines to your advantage.

*Take these last:*

**Green Finger:** You learned to be the desert. When food is needed, desert Copi will bloom for you with little water sacrifices. Their seeds will land where you sleep.

**Negotiate Deals:** Trading water for money taught you to negotiate deals. You drive a hard bargain.

**Unflinching:** From all the beatings you've taken in your life, you've learned to show nothing, to steel your nerves. In the face of adversity, your unflinching nature rattles the nerves of those against you. You can turn the situation around to your favor.

## **Mercenary**

A gun-for-hire to the highest bidder. A well-trained former federales who didn't want to return home.

### Desires

**A Paycheck:** You'd rather have a steady federales paycheck than trying to scrape by job to job, but if you fall in with the right client, maybe you'll get that steady check. Hit this desire by putting your paycheck before other earnings.

**A Fair Fight:** The way you left the federales left a bitter taste in your mouth. You never thought it was fair nor did you think they acted fairly when fighting. Hit this desire when you make an uneven fight fair.

**Danger:** You could have went back east, but the thrill of danger kept you in the west. You hit this desire whenever you willingly put yourself into the most dangerous situation.

### Actions

*You start with:*

**Gunslinger:** You draw fast, shoot straight and hit the target. Use this action when you need to shoot your gun.

*Take these first :*

**Take a Bullet:** The desert is savage and you've taken a few bullets in your days. Regardless of a wound, you function normal if you pass this roll until the fight is over.

**Silent Stalker:** Sometimes, for a paycheck, you need to sneak around. Use this action when you need to remain hidden.

**Survivalist:** You know how to survive without gear in the desert. You never go hungry, you never go thirsty and you can find shelter in a storm.

**Control the Field:** Your training gives you a tactical advantage. Wherever you go, you know how to stack the odds in your favor. Give 2 dice away to other characters taking actions.

*Take these last:*

**For a Paycheck:** You know lots of other mercenaries. Find them and they'll work for you for a reduced fee. When you need them to take an action, they do it on a success.

**Stand and Recover:** In the midst of a gunfight, you can remove all wounds on a successful roll.

**Explosive Temper:** Your temper is legendary. People get out of your way to avoid it.

## Scientist

Sometimes reduced to a glorified mechanic, but trained in bio-genetic research. Trying to make a name in the west.

### Desires

**To Discover:** You got into science to make a great discovering into genetics, but you ended up working for grēners. Anytime you can work towards making a scientific discovery, you hit this desire.

**Stand Above:** Almost everyone in the west is less educated than you. It's frustrating trying to carry on a learned conversation. You hit this desire when you make someone know that they're less educated than you.

**Inspire:** You think that despite a lack of education, people can be inspired to learn. They can become better. When you try to inspire someone to improve, you hit this desire.

### Actions

*You start with:*

**Education:** Because of your education you know things. Ask the Governor to answer three questions about the knowledge you need.

*Take these first :*

**First Aid:** Your genetic training is built upon medical school. You can heal wounds up to Near Dead.

**Mechanic:** You know how to make equipment work. You can get it running and keep it going.

**Good with a Crowbar:** You're good with moving the rusted parts of desert machinery.

Sometimes, it takes a crowbar. At times, you've used it to move rusty people. Crowbars are hard.

**Jerry-rig Anything:** If you need to make something, you probably can find exactly the parts needed.

*Take these last:*

**Change Genetics:** From studying so much, from living in the desert so long, you've adapted and your hands can alter the genetics of others.

**Life Saver:** You can bring people back from death.

**See Minds:** You can read other people's minds. Ask the Governor three questions about what they're thinking?

## Gambler

A loner winning card games to pay his way across the desert. No idea where he'll be tomorrow.

### Desires

**Fixed Game:** Some people call it cheating, but you call it making sure you win. Anytime, that you can change a situation to tilt in your favor by making it unfair you hit this desire.

**Take a Chance:** What is life if not a big gamble? You believe that you have to take a chance to live. When you take a chance that could lead to monetary rewards, you hit this desire.

**Settle Down:** You're always looking for a place to settle down after you win big. You want to live in a place that you can control, that you can run and that you can fix so everything tilts your way. You hit this desire when you investigate places to see if you could settle down there.

### Actions

*You start with:*

**Lady Luck:** Your just plain lucky. Taking a unusual action puts you into an advantage.

*Take these first :*

**Evade:** You know how to avoid a fight and stay out of trouble. When you want to stay out of trouble or need to avoid a fist, take this action.

**Well Placed Coin:** You've spent a lot of time in taverns and know how to find good information. Spend a coin and ask three questions to the Governor about what to expect in the road ahead.

**Hit 'Em From Behind:** You can easily evade conflict and hit someone from behind. When you need to make an action unseen, this is how you do it.

*Take these last:*

**Easy Money:** If you ever need money, you can con someone out of it. When your con, comes to money exchanging hands, roll this.

**Start a Game:** When in the most dire straights, you can get everyone to play a hand of cards.

**Eyes Behind:** You know exactly what is going on around you. You can see other people's cards, what they're carrying. Anything within your eyesight is revealed.

## Frontiersman

Living on the edge of civilization, pushing into the boundaries of the undiscovered, trying to learn more about herself, to change.

### Desires

**Maintain Individuality:** You want to find yourself, but not become like everyone else in the process. You hit this desire when you show that you're different than everyone else.

**Remain Calm:** You have an uncanny ability to remain calm in stressful situation. So calm that you usually are last to act and sometimes not at all. You hit this desire when you do nothing when your help is required.

**Be More:** You came west to improve yourself and to learn what it means to live in this new world. You hit this desire when you explore new things because you want to learn more about yourself.

### Actions

*You start with:*

**A Strong Voice:** You have a strong personality and can use it to charm others. NPCs will do what you want them to do.

*Take these first :*

**Intimidating Presence:** NPC back away from you. They back down. They whiter away.

**A Strong Faith:** You have a strong faith in yourself that comes from something within. It can give you answers to your questions. Ask the Governor three questions about what's in your future.

**Cross the Fence:** You can force people to show them where they stand. Make them stand with you or against you.

**Rifleman:** You are an expert marksman with your rifle. You can hit targets from far away. Sometimes, it's better to shoot and ask questions later.

*Take these last:*

**Frontier Medicine:** You know how to cure any wound.

**Frontier Freedom:** You have an uncanny ability to disappear and escape from any situation--even prison.

## Forgotten Marshal

A trained marshal who came to the Black Desert to help improve it. After a stint in New Askja, you decided to try working in Crossroads. Overthrown by the wealthy after making Crossroads too orderly.

### Desires

**Redeem Name:** You need to redeem your name to get back into good standing. You're taking jobs that will help you lead you to the person who burned you. Hit this desire anytime you try to get someone to realize your actions are good.

**Demand Loyalty:** Loyalty is important to you. You demand it from those that surround you. Anytime you demand loyalty from your companions, you hit this desire.

**Law and Order:** You believe that civilization can't exist without law and order. You enforce that law and order. Anytime you enforce the law, you hit this desire.

### Actions

*You start with:*

**Well-travelled:** You're well-travelled and know your way around the desert. You have contacts everywhere. When you need a favor, use this action.

*Take these first :*

**Quick Draw:** Every good lawman knows that sometimes violence equals law and order. You're quick on the draw and hit your mark.

**Inspire Folk:** When you need help, you can inspire town folk to stand on your side against lawless forces.

**Interrogate:** When you need information, you can interrogate a captured NPC. Ask the Governor three questions that you want to know from the NPC.

**Lock 'Em Up:** You're skilled at capturing people without causing them harm.

*Take these last:*

**Look of Steel:** Your gaze causes people and animals to freeze in their tracks. As long as you continue to stare, they remain like stone.

**Loyal Deputy:** Your old loyal deputy found you. When he needs to act, you roll this skill.

## **Native**

Restless inhabitant of Nukpana Chasm venturing out into the world for the first time.

### Desires

**Explore World:** You left the chasm to learn about the outside world. When you take time to learn about the world by stalling your companions, you hit this desire.

**Self-Determination:** You're strong-willed and want to do your own thing without any outside forces telling you what to do. You hit this desire when you do your thing against the choices of your companions.

**Protect the Desert:** You understand the the Black Desert contains magic. Once it's greened, that magic is gone. When you stop or hinder the greening process, you hit this desire.

### Actions

*You start with:*

**Spirit Guide:** You have a spirit guide. It might be a real animal that follows you around and it might be an invisible friend. When you need to see whats around you, send your guide. Ask the Governor three questions.

*Take these first :*

**Manipulate Rock:** You can manipulate rock by changing it from solid, to liquid and to sand.

**Manipulate Water:** Water moves at your touch.

**Manipulate Plants:** You can make plants do what you need them to do. Copi seeds become soft.

**Manipulate Air:** The air moves, changes temperatures and does what you need it to do at your command.

*Take these last:*

**Manipulate Animals and Insects:** Animals and insects do as you ask.

**Change Shape:** You can change your physical shape to an animal as needed.

**Ghost:** You can turn into a partially visible ghost when needed. You can't manipulate anything in reality, but nothing can hurt you and all wounds are healed.

# Governor's Section

## Themes

As a governor, your job is to make the Black Desert come alive, always challenge the characters along their journey to deliver a skinner and to see where play takes you. Use each of these themes to give the desert its feel:

The desert is gritty; it gets into everything.

The desert is dry; water is always a concern.

The desert is magic; draw on the energies of myth, fables and folk tales.

The desert is under conquest; show the forces of imperialism taking control.

The desert is savage; it shows no favorites.

The desert is trying to be controlled; the forces of civilization verses the savagery.

The desert is ancient; modernization is ascending.

The desert is free; law and order removes freedoms.

The desert is the individual; the coming masses are overwhelming.

The desert is renewal; the frontier renews and changes characters.

The desert is violent; violence restores law and order.

## Your Actions

You are the desert, you are the people who live there and you govern what happens when things go wrong. Your job as Governor is to make the world come alive. Name everyplace that the characters go and everyone the characters meet. There is history, albeit short, in the desert, so tell that history with myths, stories and fables of why things are as they are.

When a player fails a roll or when things start to get less challenging for the players, you take a specific action. You never have to roll for your actions; they just happen as you say.

Force an encounter with an animal or NPC.

Put the crew in a tight spot.

Cause a wound.

Cut to an off-screen scene. Answer who or what is coming after them?

Take away the skinner.

Show what a skinner is.

Give them a choice to make.

Make them feel the desert.

Take away their water.

Make them Take a Stand.

Send a desert storm their way.

Raise the difficulty for the next actions.

## **Skinner**

A skinner is an empty body without a mind. They allow a person to transfer her mind and spirit into this new body. Skinners are outlawed and in demand by the exiled. Some scientists believe that a skinner has a mind and a spirit, but it's been suppressed; the right procedures and tools will draw it out. How skinners are made is only known to a few.

During play, you can shape exactly what a skinner when player's fail their rolls. Do it as you please, with stories, with folk tales and with myths. Or make the skinner move, talk and think.

## **Player's Actions**

When playing allow the characters to do as they wish unless what they're doing looks like an action. When that happens, they must make a roll or take back the action. One character class can't do the actions of another class. For example, a native will never be able to use a gun, because the mercenary, the forgotten marshall and the frontiersman classes have those actions.

When a player takes an action, they state what they want the action to do. If they succeed, it happens. If it doesn't, you play one of your actions.

## **Starting the Game**

Always start the game with the players caught in the middle of something happening where they'll have to take an action. Try to hook them into the fact that they must deliver the skinner. You could start them at the negotiating table where they try to get the skinner under their control. The game could start in the middle of a gun fight with the characters trying to get the box the skinner is carried in out of the crossfire. The game could start when the body of the skinner rolls unexpectedly out of the box it's carried in.

## **Confrontation**

When confrontation happens, like combat, you only take an action when a player fails her roll. Consider giving out wounds, but you don't have to. Confrontations are like other actions. Confrontations between the player's characters only takes place in Take a Stand.

### **Example Action and Confrontation**

Governor: You walk into a tavern to find ten federales standing in a semi-circle with their rifles pointed at the door. And Sargent Camaro stands in their center. He doesn't look too happy about your last dealings. What do you do?

Native: I point at the bar and cause all the water to fly across the room and splash into the federales faces, which will give me the time to get out of the bar.

Governor: Since they're ready to shoot, it'll be challenging to accomplish that before they shoot.

Native: I'm going to back down and not do the action.

Forgotten Marshall: I'm using my Quick Draw to take them out. I'm fast, so it should be easy for me to do this.

Governor: If you want to take them all out, it'll be a severe roll.

Forgotten Marshall: How many can I get with a moderate roll.

Governor: Three.

Forgotten Marshall: I'll do it.

Mercenary: Hold on. I'm going try and make this a more fair fight, by taking my Control the Field action. I'll spread us out, so they'll have more targets to hit and have to re-aim. I get my Fair Fight desire.

Governor: You get an XP. It'll be challenging.

Mercenary: I take a bonus die. Since I'm moving character's around, I use my body trait. Right?

Governor: Yes.

Mercenary: My body is 3, the trait is 1 and I'll use my bonus die. (*Rolls 6, 1, 2, 2, 5.*) I get it. I push the native under a table, then dodge to the left and the marshall goes right. I give the marshall the two dice I earned by doing this.

Forgotten Marshall: I want to try the severe roll to take them all out. I have 2 body dice, 1 for my Quick Draw action and two for the mercs actions. (*Rolls 2, 4, 1, 1, 2.*)

Governor: You manage to drop seven of the federales, and their blood paints the tables behind them. One of the federales shoots you in the leg. You're injured.

Gambler: We need to get out of here. I'm going to help us escape by evading.

Governor: Since there's only three left, you stand a moderate chance.

Gambler: I have 2 body dice and 1 for my Evade action. (*Rolls 1, 1, 1.*) I guess that didn't work.

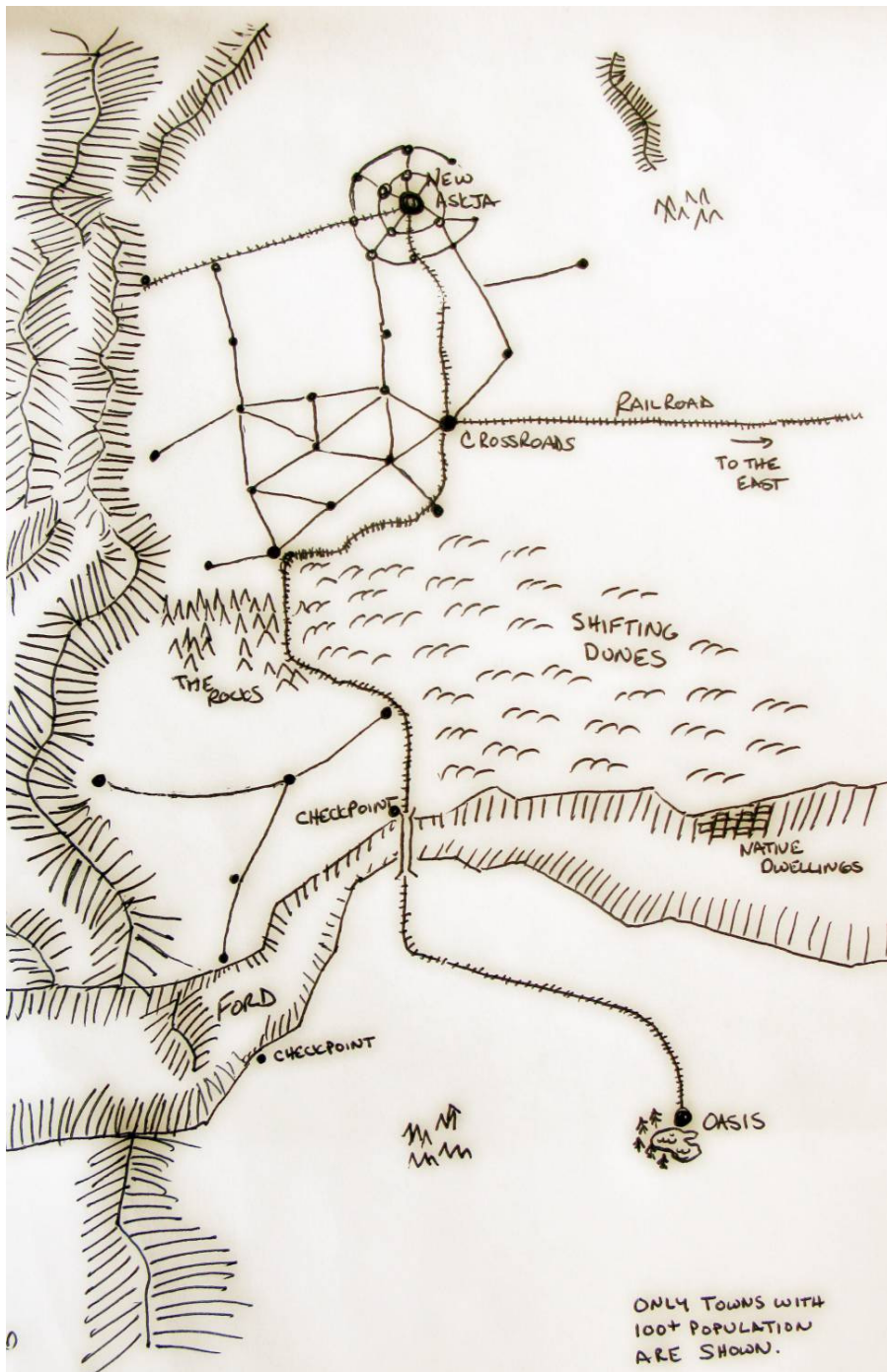
Governor: (Uses Cut to an off-screen scene. Answer who or what is coming after them?) At the edge of town, a group of federales rides into town. They're coming fast, so you'll soon have company.

Grēner: I think we need to negotiate our way out of this one.

## **Death**

The only way a character can actually die is if he risks his life during Take a Stand.

# Map



## Take a Stand?

**Alone**

**Together**

**Apart**

**Lead**

**Follow**

**Follow**

**Disrupt**

**Divide**

**Contempt**