



CARTTEL

QUICKSTART RULES

LA EMPERATRIZ

Valentino swallows sweat and fear as his truck struggles across the desert sand. The black SUVs make a wall of glinting metal ahead. Maria Elena “La Emperatriz” Valencia waits for him outside.

He steps out of the car and approaches, hands up.

“It wasn’t my fault. It was the new guy, Garza. He took the money. I’m sorry it never reached *la policia*, but it wasn’t my fault.” His voice doesn’t quaver; good. Maybe she’ll believe him.

She raises a hand. The window of one of those dark SUVs rolls down. Inside, the tear-reddened eyes of his daughter, Gabriela.

Valentino is frozen for a breath, then it all spills out: “I’m sorry. It was me. I took the money, please don’t hurt her, she’s innocent, I’m sorry...” Like a mantra, repeated endlessly, drifting to silence.

La Emperatriz tilts her head at him. “I didn’t bring her here so that you could watch me hurt her, *cabron*.” Valentino’s breath catches in his throat. Mercy, then. *Gracias a dios. Gracias.*

“I brought her here so that she could watch me hurt you.”

CREDITS Y THANKS

ABOUT THIS QUICK START

This quick start is a preview of **CARTEL** that's got everything you need to sample the game before the Kickstarter in February 2018. I've included six playbooks, all the basic moves, rules for stress and harm: everything you need to run a full session of the game, but there's more to come. Check out www.magpiegames.com/cartel for more info.

This *pequeño libro* assumes you've played a game that uses the Apocalypse World engine—something like **MONSTERHEARTS** or **URBAN SHADOWS**, if not **APOCALYPSE WORLD** proper. The full version of **CARTEL** won't make that assumption, but the quick start doesn't have room to explain everything you need to know to get the most out of the game.

If this is your first Powered by the Apocalypse experience...*¡bienvenido!* I'll do my best to try to explain things clearly. No promises, though. Use everything here at your own risk.

If you've got questions or want to give feedback, head over to the new Cartel G+ Community:

<https://plus.google.com/u/o/b/108700787999569584362/communities/105427773888151135598>

Folks on G+ are great at answering questions, and I'll try to be on hand to help you out as well.

DEDICATION Y THANKS

CARTEL is dedicated to those who have helped me comprehend the depth of my Latino identity: Abel, Ajit, Ariana, Art, Celina, Chris, Emiliano, Erika, Jahmal, Joe, Marshall, Misha, Mona, Travis, Uyen, Ray, Strix, and many more. Thank you. Each of you has been a crucial part of my growth and development as a writer, organizer, and human being; I can never repay what you've done for me.

CARTEL began more than four years ago, when I first realized that I could not even articulate what a Mexican-American game might look like, let alone write one myself. To everyone who has helped on the journey to this point, I owe you a deep debt. There are too many names to list, but a few that deserve special recognition for their assistance:

- **Marissa Kelly**, for always pushing me to do more with my work, exactly when I need it;
- **Jason Morningstar**, for encouraging me to follow the fiction, no matter where it leads;
- **Ajit George**, for reminding me that my story is worth exploring, always;
- **Whitney "Strix" Beltrán**, for inspiring me to live in hope, without blinding myself to reality;
- **Justin Rogers**, for matching my excitement about narcofiction, much to my surprise;
- **Derrick Kapchinsky**, for trying to get me to watch *The Wire* for the last five years.

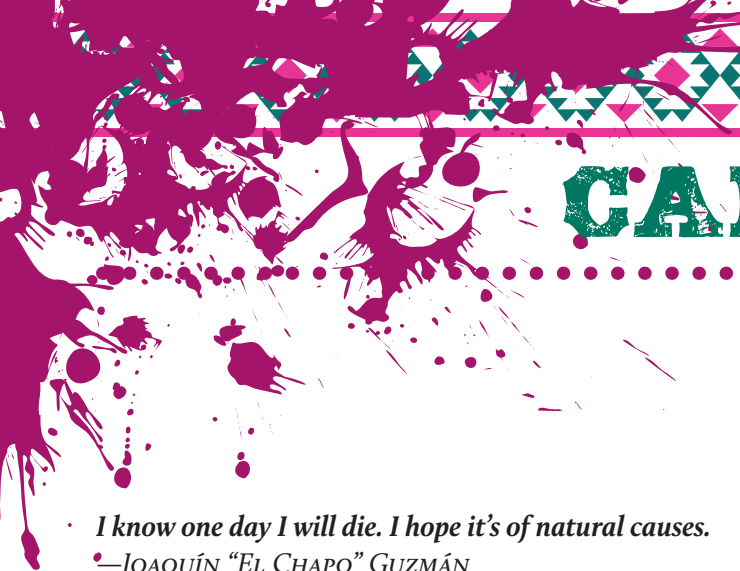
Huge thanks to **Miguel** for making **CARTEL** a culturally authentic game. From Mexican slang to deep parts of the game system, Miguel has been an amazing collaborator. I never imagined that **CARTEL** would bring me in contact with creators like Miguel, but my life is all the richer for his contributions and excitement. He's a pretty good layout artist too.

I'd like to thank **Thomas Deeny** for his work on the ashcan for **CARTEL**. I've run dozens of games using the materials he prepared. Thank you, Thomas.

Finally, I'd like to thank **John Harper** for writing **BLADES IN THE DARK**, a game that feeds my love of crime fiction and inspires me to do my best work. Both **CARTEL** and this quick start have drawn a lot from your example, John. Thank you.

CREDITS

- **Design and Writing** by Mark Diaz Truman
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- **Developmental Editing** by Brendan Conway
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- **Layout and Design** by Thomas Deeny, Miguel Ángel Espinoza y Mark Diaz Truman
- **Cultural Consulting** by Miguel Ángel Espinoza
- **Art** by Andrew Thompson y Mirco Paganess
- **CARTEL** is copyright @2015 by Magpie Games.



CARTEL: AN OVERVIEW



I know one day I will die. I hope it's of natural causes.

—JOAQUÍN “EL CHAPO” GUZMÁN

- Before you jump in, *cabrón*, you might want a high-level overview of what **CARTEL** is all about. If you're already familiar with the game, jump to page 9 to check out the new moves and materials.

SUMMARY

- **CARTEL** is a roleplaying game in which you play ordinary people mired in the drugs, money, and violence of the Mexican drug war.
- The characters are tied to each other through their affiliation with the cartel, although they often find themselves in conflict with each other.
- The game focuses on tense moments of interpersonal conflict and tragic violence against a backdrop of a broader Mexican experience.

INSPIRATIONS & TOUCHSTONES

Here are a few media touchstones that can help new players connect **CARTEL** to stuff they know.

- **Movies:** Once Upon a Time in Mexico, Pulp Fiction, Jackie Brown, The Departed, El Mariachi
- **Television:** Narcos, The Wire, Breaking Bad
- **Video Games:** Grand Theft Auto

THE SETTING: DURANGO, MX

Durango, Mexico—located in the Free and Sovereign State of Durango, nearly ten hours from the Mexico-US border—is a **small, but thriving city** known for its eclectic architecture, stunning cathedrals, and annual street festivals. In 2007, it also lies **on the border** between two of the most powerful drug trafficking organizations (DTOs) in the world: the Sinaloa Cartel and Los Zetas.

The **Sinaloa Cartel** is a vast and sprawling network that moves drugs—heroin, marijuana, cocaine, and meth—from producers in Central America to the rest of the world, a collection of **affiliates and loyalists** that has held power in Western Mexico for decades. The Sinaloa Cartel is the Classic Coke of drug cartels; they perfected the **combination of violence and patronage** that characterizes the narcostate in the modern age.

If the Sinaloa Cartel is old-school rock and roll, **Los Zetas** is dubstep: violent and completely incomprehensible to anyone who worked the streets fifty years ago. Los Zetas aren't the only cartel to use videotaped beheadings, mutilated bodies, and mass killings to seize power, but they pioneered the form. It's hard to describe how much ordinary Mexicans—and the Sinaloa Cartel—fear Los Zetas.

Caught between the devils you know and the things those devils fear...that's you, *cabrón*.

THE CHARACTERS

In **CARTEL**, you portray characters caught up in the Sinaloa Cartel, *narcos* (druglords), *cocineros* (drug cooks), *sicarios* (hitmen), and more who work to keep Sinaloa's operation around running smoothly.

But nothing ever goes smoothly, does it, *güey*? Can you hold on to your humanity while working for the largest criminal enterprise in the world? Can you stay true to your family when your business ask you to do terrible things to keep yourself safe?

THE PLAYERS

Each player is responsible for creating a player character (PC) using a **playbook**, an archetype of narcofiction that serves as the basis for a character. For this quickstart, I've provided six playbooks: *El Cocinero*, *El Halcón*, *El Narco*, *La Esposa*, *La Polizeta*, y *La Sicaria*. Each holds a unique set of conflicts and problems, and different mixes of playbooks change the course of the overall story dramatically.

THE MASTER OF CEREMONIES (MC)

The MC is responsible for presenting the world of **CARTEL** as a swirling mess of obligations, drugs, and money. The MC plays all the non-player characters (NPCs), including the authorities like *la policia* and *los federales*, but their relationship with the players isn't antagonistic or oppositional. Instead, it's the MC's job to make the character's lives interesting by providing conflicts and drama.



TRES CUENTOS



Listen closely, *cabrón*. Everything you need to know about **CARTEL** is right here, *más o menos*. Three stories.

43 MISSING STUDENTS

In September of 2014, forty-three students were kidnapped in broad daylight by unknown assailants on their way to a political protest. Some said the police had taken the students, but others claimed that it was cartel enforcers disguised as police. No one knew why these students had been targeted, and no one knew what had become of them.

Soon, authorities announced that they had found a mass grave. Forensic tests, however, revealed that authorities had discovered *an entirely unrelated mass grave*: the students were nowhere to be found.

Some reports claim that the local cartel—Guerre-ros Unidos—killed the students because the protesting youth had been infiltrated by Los Rojos, a rival gang. The mayor of Iguala, and his wife, were eventually arrested, and many believe that the power couple asked the cartels to kill the students to hold on to political power.

But the truth is...no one knows. No one will ever know.

THE \$57,000 RECEIPT

Early in 2015, a woman driving across the Mex-ico-US border was detained when US border agents found over \$50,000 hidden in her car. The agents detained the woman for a day or so, took the money, but didn't really have any way to charge her. It's not illegal to have money, *güey*, even if everyone knows you don't have it legally. They can take it from you, but they can't charge you with anything. Not even if you're Mexican.

Those *putos* cops asked her if she was going to be in danger when she went back to Mexico. It's a typical police tactic: put a *narco* in a tough spot and then ask if they want any help staying alive.

The woman said no, mostly because "it wasn't that much money." Turns out, \$50,000 is just the cost of doing business for the cartels. They expect folks they send across the border to get caught sometimes.

But she did have one request: a receipt. See, she knew that getting caught by the cops wasn't that big a deal, but she wasn't a *pendeja*. Losing the money wasn't the problem; the cartels thinking she stole the money...that's a death sentence. So the cops wrote her a receipt, she went back to Mexico, and everyone was happy.

Even the cartels keep records and lists of their as-sets. How else would they count all their money?

NARCOCORRIDOS

The cartels are a constant source of death and destruction in Mexico, but not everyone sees *narcos* as the villains. There's a whole industry of media—like gangsta rap and mob movies—that promotes, documents, and reports on the cartels.

Narcocorridos, for example, are ballads about *narcos* and their escapades, morality tales and poetic myths that glorify (and sometimes demonize) the *narcos*. These songs are extremely popular all over Mexico.

In Ian Grillo's excellent book, **EL NARCO**, he in-terviews a narcocorrido singer named Conrado, asking him if anyone's ever made a career off a song instead of the other way around:

Conrado tells me the story of one low-level trafficker who paid to get a particularly catchy ballad made about him. Soon everyone played it on his car stereo. "The crime bosses were like, 'Bring me the guy from that song. I want him to do the job for me.' So he rose through the ranks because of the song."

"So what has happened to him now?" I asked.

"Oh, they killed him. He got too big. It was because of the song, really."

In a land without irony, the man who laughs is king. *Así es la vida*. You know how it goes.

LOS CARTELES DE MEXICO

Cartels aren't like large-scale mob organizations or inner city drug gangs: their closest business structure is probably a fast-food franchise, a hydra of independent organizations that get resources and supplies from above and pass money back up the chain without really knowing where the money is going. It doesn't matter what kind of business the local cartel conducts, so long as *los jefes* get their cut. Failing to make a monthly payment is...a quick way to retirement. In a ditch.

WORKING PARA LOS CARTELES

For the most part, members know only that they work for a cartel and little about the way the organization functions. The organization doesn't hold strategic meetings or inform lower-ranking members about future plans; the less everyone knows, the less the government can get out of a lowlife *sicario* or *halcón*. When you're asked to do something, you do it without asking a lot of questions. It's better for *todos* this way, *cabron*.

Of course, it means that working for the cartels is a mess of lies and half-truths. You only know what the people directly above you think you need to know, and it's never clear who is working for whom. Could be that your cousin works as an *halcón* like he says; could be that he's just a *pendejo* in over his head with the wrong people. Only way to know is to start asking questions; anyone who asks a lot of questions is not someone I would trust...

LAS PLAZAS

The organization of the cartel's illegal activity—smuggling drugs, kidnapping businessmen, fighting other cartels—is always wrapped up in territory. Drugs need to move north, so controlling drug corridors, especially areas that lay between drug labs and *El Norte*, is the top priority for the cartels. Whoever holds the land controls the flow, making money no matter who is shipping drugs north.

Back when PRI (The Institutional Revolutionary Party) was in control of Mexico, before democracy and the current narcostate, the government itself organized the cartels into a relatively peaceful and equitable split of territory called *las plazas*.

The cartels paid money to the government and police in a complicated system of bribes and kickbacks, and the cartels were free to move drugs north and money south as they pleased. If a cartel got out of hand (or forgot to pay their bribes), the government moved in to shut their operation down, scattering the *narcos* like roaches.

When democracy came to Mexico, the cartels decided that they still liked the plaza system. Now the cartels run the show, taxing other cartels who move drugs through their plaza. Combined with the cartel's franchise-like structure, each plaza is an independent territory, a fiefdom that answers only to the *narco* in charge. No one else. Mostly.

LA POLICIA

The authorities in Mexico aren't powerless, though. Some police still do what they can to stem the flood of drugs north, and support from the federal government is more forthcoming than ever before. It's possible that good cops with the right resources could lock up the *narcos* living in their backyard; provided, of course, that they don't get fired, framed, or killed for trying to do their damn jobs.

But corruption is so widespread within most local police departments that the entire department is on the take; many call crooked cops *polizetas*, a wicked pun for their wicked deeds. Only a *pendejo* would openly try to land a punch when the whole department is works for *los narcos*, so good cops sometimes take bribes and do their jobs anyway, wearing masks when they go out on raids or take in the kingpins. *Pinches* heroes; *eso que ni qué...*

LOS FEDERALES

At the level above the local cops, corruption and graft are much more limited...but the bureaucracy is a problem all its own. The Mexican Federales, a federal police force fairly similar to the FBI in *Los Estados Unidos*, is committed to uprooting the *narcos* and prosecuting them. But the lack of resources, local corruption, and sheer size of the narco menace make it hard for them to get much done.

No one said ending a narcostate would be easy, *cabron*.

MAKING CHARACTERS

PLAYBOOKS

In order to play **CARTEL**, you need a **playbook**, an archetype of narcofiction that serves as the basis for your character. For this version of Cartel, I've provided six playbooks: *El Cocinero*, *El Halcón*, *El Narco*, *La Esposa*, *La Polizeta*, y *La Sicaria*. See page 12 in this quick start for the playbooks themselves.

A playbook isn't a straightjacket; it's a set of creative constraints—a narrative template—that helps you to create an authentic character within the game. If something isn't stated on the playbook, like how many family members you have or where you grew up, feel free to innovate and add your own details.

DETAILS Y ACCURACY

There are other articles, books, and corridos that would help you understand Mexico better than these scant pages, but don't stress over it while playing **CARTEL**. Don't make the perfect the enemy of the good when making your character. We'll never know what it was really like to run the plaza surrounding Durango. Your guess is as good as mine.

But remember that I've set **CARTEL** in Mexico for a reason. These moves, these playbooks, this culture...it all works together. A drug war set in Boston or Baltimore needs a different structure; narcofiction is about a time and place, *pendejo*, and the time and place here is México.

NAME, LOOK, GEAR

After you choose a playbook, select a **name** from the lists provided. I've included a list of female and male first names, but remember that any playbook can work with either gender—a woman can be a *narca* or *cocinera* just as easily as any man. The MC has a list of last names, but don't select anything until you've all created characters. It might turn out that a few of you are *familia*, *cabron*!

Once you've got a name, select some options for your **look**, including your performed gender, eyes, and dress. Think about a few other details to fill out your character, including whatever reputation you might have *en la calle* and why your character had decided to pursue a life that involves the cartel.

Finally, take note of your **gear** and **lifestyle**. Most gear in **CARTEL** is purely narrative, but the details matter. That's especially true of your lifestyle, which tells you a lot about how your character lives day to day. You might be surprised to find that most narcos aren't swimming in money, and your character may have to struggle to make ends meet.

Most playbooks start with fixed gear, but there are a few that ask you to detail an **organization** or set of **equipment** as part of character creation. If your playbook includes these **extras**, fill them out after you've finished making choices about the rest of your character's options, stats, and moves.

STATS

Each playbook has four stats: Face, Grit, Hustle, and Savagery. Typically, moves will ask you to roll with a stat, so each of these determines how likely you are to succeed at a certain type of action.

- **Face** measures your ability to project social power, especially when you offer people money to do what you want or when you justify your behavior.
- **Grit** represents your tenacity and good fortune; whenever you have to take a raw risk, you'll rely on Grit to get you through.
- **Hustle** establishes how good you are at drawing people in and convincing them to go along with you or tell you what they know.
- **Savagery** describes your capacity for violence, including your intuitive sense of the strengths and weaknesses of other people.

Each playbook comes with a pregenerated custom stat line: one stat rated at -1, one at +0, and two at +1. Add +1 to any one of these stats before you play. You can raise your stats further through advancement (page 7), but your playbook's general strengths and weaknesses usually persist throughout the story.

In addition to these stats, note that your playbook also has a Heat stat that represents how interested the authorities are in your typical activities. This stat can't be altered like the others, but there are a few moves that modify it for certain playbooks.



MOVES Y EXTRAS

After selecting stats, choose however many **moves** your playbook instructs you to select. Some playbooks, like *El Narco*, don't have any additional options for moves, but instead ask you to move to making choices for your extras. Either way, pay attention to what stats you need to use to make use of your moves; feel free to make changes to your stats based on what moves you find interesting.

Once you've finished selecting moves, move on to whatever extras you have to complete before you start playing: *El Cocinero* has to decide on his lab and *La Sicaria* needs to pick out what weapons and gear she typically uses. The MC will ask questions about these features when you introduce your characters, so try to get your extras wrapped up *rápidamente*. No need to dawdle.

LLAVES (KEYS)

In addition to choosing your moves and extras, select two **llaves (keys)** from the list on your playbook. Keys are how your character earns experience points and advances; you mark experience whenever you fulfill the key. For example, *La Sicaria* might choose **Mercy** as her key so that she marks xp whenever she's able to avoid a fight.

You can also **clear a key** when you aren't interested in it anymore. Clearing a key means that you work against the established narrative, earning yourself an advance and a new key. The aforementioned *Sicaria* with **Mercy** would clear her key when she kills or injures someone who is defenseless or unawary. I guess mercy isn't her thing anymore, *güey*. Better watch out if she comes for you.

Once you've cleared a *llave*, you can take a new key from your own playbook or anyone else's playbook. It's up to you to tell the group what kind of story you want to tell now that you've resolved a narrative arc for your character.

ADVANCEMENT

Once you've marked three xp (or cleared a *llave*), you claim an advancement from your playbook. Each playbook has unique advancements, but generally you can raise your stats, resolve troubles and vulnerabilities, and get new moves. After you've taken 5 advancements, you can take the special advancements, and perhaps even retire to safety!

INTRODUCTIONS AND ENLACES

When everyone is done with their playbooks, go around and introduce your characters. The MC and the other players might ask you a few questions, but at the very least explain who you are, what keeps you in the drug trade, and what your reputation is on the streets. Remember that your connection to the cartels might be quiet or secret, so be prepared to explain how family or friends who don't know about your dealings see you.

After everyone has introduced their characters, fill out your **enlaces**, the close ties that bind your characters to each other. I like to go around in the same circle, each player adding one *enlace* at a time, building a relationship map as we go. Some *enlaces* literally tie you together as familia; remember that those relationships mean something deep and serious in Durango, even if the two characters are cousins or extended family.

It's also possible that an *enlace* you have doesn't really fit any of the existing PCs. That's fine! You or the MC can come up with an NPC that's a good fit for that relationship. Just try to focus on PCs first before adding in more NPCs to the mix.

That's it, *cabrón*. Once you're through with *los enlaces*, you're ready to play!

PLAYING CARTEL

TALKING AND MOVES

Roleplaying is a conversation. Sometimes we'll take turns talking, interrupt each other, or all go silent for a moment, but the conversation keeps moving, each of us pushing it forward by describing what our characters do and say. All the rules here are about structuring the conversation, giving you the tools to keep the story interesting.

Sometimes the conversation will trigger a move, a bit of mechanics that helps to resolve uncertainty in the fictional world we're building. When you shoot a gun at someone, you are **turning to violence**; when you run through a hail of bullets, you're **pushing your luck**. Either way, the move will tell you how the story proceeds through uncertainty.

CARTEL pays special attention to the conversation inside the game as well; many of the moves—especially **justify yourself** and **get the truth**—can be triggered by talking. Narcofiction is like that: a question at the right moment can be as uncertain and tense as any shootout in the streets, and text messages or phone calls can expose a lie or twist the truth as much as any other conversation.

ROLLING DICE

If a move asks you to roll dice, roll two six-sided dice (2d6) and follow the outcomes listed in the move. Traditionally, moves ask you to roll with something—like “roll with Grit” or “roll with Heat”—which means that you add that stat to the roll.

The outcomes of moves fall into three categories:

- 10+: a full hit! You get your way *¡Pinche suertudo!*
- 7-9: a partial hit with costs. *Mierda.*
- 6-: a miss. The MC tells you what happens. *¡Vergas!*

Some moves tell you what happens for each category—“On a 10+, the cops stop asking questions”—while others allow you to choose more options when you roll higher—“On a 10+, pick 3. On a 7-9, pick 1.” Either way, rolling higher is usually better (with a few notable exceptions I discuss later).

The MC never rolls dice. Instead, they tell you what's happening and respond to the actions your characters take. They also act as the referee if there's any disagreement about what a move means, especially if the conflict is between two players about how a move should affect their characters.

THE BASIC MOVES

Every character makes use of the **basic moves**, included on the following page. Here's a list of the basic moves, along with its primary stat if applicable:

- Justify Your Behavior (Face)
- Propose a Deal (Face)
- Push Your Luck (Grit)
- Get the Truth (Hustle)
- Pressure Someone (Hustle)
- Turn to Violence (Hustle)
- Size Someone Up (Savagery)
- Strain Your Finances
- Help/Interfere

These moves structure the fiction of the game, keeping your story focused on the tight plots and desperate gambles of narcofiction. Ideally, you should see them all trigger pretty frequently throughout the game, although I've noticed that all the violence seems to happen in short, brutal bursts of action toward the end of a session.

MORE ON RUNNING PBT A GAMES

If you'd like to learn more about running Powered by the Apocalypse games like **CARTEL**, I suggest you check out **APOCALYPSE WORLD** by Vincent D. Baker and **URBAN SHADOWS** by myself and Andrew Medeiros. There's much more info in those books!

THE BASIC MOVES

JUSTIFY YOUR BEHAVIOR

When you try to *justify your abnormal behavior*, roll with Face. For NPCs: On a 10+, they accept your logic but might have clarifying questions. On a 7-9, they have doubts, but they'll let it slide...for now.

For PCs: On a 10+, both. On a 7-9, choose 1:

- if they accept your reasoning, they mark xp
- if they keep their own counsel, they mark stress

PROPOSE A DEAL

When you *propose a deal* to get what you want, roll with Face. On a 10+, they have to choose: take the deal as it stands or mark stress. On a 7-9, they can instead choose one:

- declaim authority for accepting the offer
- adjust the price (+/-20%) and accept
- point you at another interested party

PUSH YOUR LUCK

When you *push your luck*, roll with Grit. On a 10+, fortune favors the bold. On a 7-9, things don't work out like you hoped; the MC will tell you how you can turn things around if you act quickly, make an ugly choice, or tough it out.

GET THE TRUTH

When you try to *get the truth out of someone*, roll with Hustle. On a hit, clear one stress. On a 10+, pick 2. On a 7-9, pick 1.

- they can't mislead you with the truth
- they can't confuse you with falsehoods
- they can't stonewall you with silence

PRESSURE SOMEONE

When you *pressure someone* to go along with your plans or schemes, roll with Hustle. On a hit, they see your point; they have to go along with you (for now) or mark stress. On a 7-9, you're both caught up in it; you mark stress no matter their choice.

SIZE SOMEONE UP

When you size someone up, roll with Savagery. On a hit, ask their player questions. When you act on the answers, take +1. On a 10+, ask 3. On a 7-9, ask 1.

- what are your current weaknesses / strengths?
- how can I show you dominance / submission?
- what do you intend to do next?
- what do you wish I'd do?
- how could I get you to _____?

TURN TO VIOLENCE

When you turn to violence, roll with Savagery. On a hit, trade harm as established. On a 10+, choose 3. On a 7-9, choose 2.

- you inflict terrible harm
- you suffer little harm
- you resist marking stress
- you avoid collateral damage

STRAIN YOUR FINANCES

When you *strain your finances* to get what you want, roll. Add one if you've recently come into a large sum of money or are willing to accept something counterfeit or stolen. On a 10+, you have enough cash on hand to make your purchase. On a 7-9, you scrape together enough *dinero*...but someone notices your largesse. On a miss, your purchase is out of reach. The GM will tell you why you're unexpectedly short.

HELP OR INTERFERE

When you help or interfere after a PC has rolled, wager stress (max+3) and roll.. On a hit, give them a +1 or -2 to their roll, your choice. On a 7-9, you mark however much stress you wagered on the roll. On a miss, mark the stress you wagered and prepare for the worst.

STRESS MOVES

You can never mark more than five stress: if your stress track is filled, ignore moves that tell you to mark stress. You can't *choose* to mark stress either. If your stress track is filled, the MC can call for you to make a stress move whenever they want.

VERBALLY ABUSE OR SHAME

When you *verbally abuse or shame someone* you care about, roll with Face. On a hit, your words hit hard: tell them to mark stress. On a 10+, clear your stress track. On a 7-9, clear one stress. On a miss, your cowardice is clear: take -1 ongoing to Face until you make amends.

LOSE YOURSELF IN A SUBSTANCE

When you *lose yourself in a substance*, roll with Grit. On a hit, clear your stress track. On a 7-9, the drugs take a toll: make a drug move off the list. On a miss, you're in deep. *Buena suerte, cabrón.*

CONFESS YOUR SINS

When you *confess your sins to a priest*, roll with Hustle. On a hit, you find forgiveness; clear your stress track. On a 7-9, you must perform your penance before you return to confession. On a miss, the priest sees through your false contrition; take a -1 ongoing to Hustle until you truly repent.

DISH OUT A BEATDOWN

When you *dish out a beatdown*, roll with Savagery. On a 10+, you assert your dominance: clear your stress track. On a 7-9, you hurt them, but it's not enough: clear one stress. On a miss, the violence gets out of hand. Enjoy the consequences, *pendejo.*

DRUG MOVES

When a move tells you to make a drug move, choose an outcome off the list. If the MC gets to make a drug move for you...enjoy the ride, *güey.*

COCAINE

- start a fight with a mouthy *pendejo* or *puta*
- throw yourself at someone you shouldn't
- spend your money stupidly or carelessly

HEROIN

- push someone who cares about you away
- overlook a crucial deadline or event
- steal funds in preparation for your next fix

CRYSTAL METH

- accuse someone of theft or betrayal
- push a place you keep toward squalor
- hurt yourself to keep your *diablos* at bay

ALCOHOL

- tell someone what you think, loudly in public
- let slip something to the wrong person
- wreck something meaningful, carelessly

HEAT MOVES

When you roll with Heat, the results are reversed: 10+ is a miss and anything lower than a 9 is a hit.

AVOID SUSPICION

When you try to *avoid suspicion while handling business in public*, roll with Heat. Add one for each:

- you're carrying a lot of drugs or money
- you're transporting a body, dead or alive
- you're equipped with military weaponry

On a miss, you don't attract any attention; most civilians know better than to get in your way. On a 7-9, only the local *policia* take an interest; make a threat or flash some *dinero* to smooth things over. On a 10+, someone dangerous has been looking for you. And here you are. *Mierda., cabrón.*

LEAVE A MESSY CRIME SCENE

When you try to *leave a messy crime scene* before the authorities arrive, roll with Heat. On a miss, you exit the scene; tell the MC what potentially incriminating evidence you've left behind. On a 7-9, the authorities respond before you can get away, but they are isolated or unprepared for what they are find. On a 10+, *la polica* arrives in force... with an American or two in tow.

FLEE FROM LOS FEDERALES

When you *flee from los federales*, roll with Heat. On a miss, you get away clean. On a 7-9, you can escape the authorities by sacrificing something; the MC will tell you what your freedom will cost you this time. On a 10+, you're fucked, *puto*: mark 3 stress, get caught, or get shot (your choice). Whatever you choose, the chase is over.

PLAYBOOKS

Below is a list of the available playbooks, complete with descriptions and high and low stats. The names are gendered, but that doesn't mean the playbooks are limited to a single gender. *La Narca* or *El Esposo* makes as much sense as *El Narco* and *La Esposa*, ¿entendiste?

You want more playbooks, *cabron*? *La Abogángster* or *La Rata*? You'll have to wait for the full version of **CARTEL**. *La paciencia es una virtud*.

- ▶ **El Cocinero** (page 12)—Clever, resourceful, and lucky. *El Cocinero* is a vital part of the cartel's operation: he cooks the drugs.
- ▶ **La Esposa** (page 14)—Responsible, protective, and vulnerable. *La Esposa* is an innocent bystander tangled in a web of lies.
- ▶ **El Halcón** (page 16)—Eager, naive, and tenacious. *El Halcón* is "the hawk," the little bird that reports back to his handlers.
- ▶ **El Narco** (page 18)—Beleaguered, wealthy, and dangerous. *El Narco* is *el jefe*, put in charge to oversee *la plaza*.
- ▶ **La Polizeta** (page 20)—Greedy, two-faced, and corrupt. *La Polizeta* is an agent for the cartel that's playing both sides.
- ▶ **La Sicaria** (page 22)—Deadly, veteran, and cold. *La Sicaria* is a hitwoman, an enforcer for the cartels who has survived...so far.



EL COCINERO



YOUR NAME

- Consuelo, Isabel, Lourdes, Magda, Rosario, Soledad, or Yolanda
- Armando, Ignacio, Joaquín, Juan, Miguel, Pedro, Ramon, or Rodrigo

YOUR LOOK

- Man, woman, ambiguous, transgressing
- Clear eyes, cunning eyes, sad eyes, weary eyes
- Casual clothes, filthy clothes, professional clothes, work clothes

YOUR GEAR

- a stable lifestyle
- a decent car, two cell phones
- a drug lab (detail)

YOUR STATS

Add +1 to one of your stats:

- Face -1, Grit +1, Hustle +1, Savagery +0

YOUR STRESS TRACK

Each session you start with two stress already marked, provided you didn't end the last section with more. If your stress track is ever filled, *güey*, you're in a bad spot.

TU LLAVES

Choose two keys:

- ☐ **Secrets:** Mark xp when you lie to someone close to you about your dealings with the cartel. Clear this key and advance when you finally come clean to your family about your engagement with *los narcos*.
- ☐ **Debt:** Mark xp when you strain your finances to meet your family's immediate needs. Clear this key and advance when you find a way—legal or illegal—out from under your debtor's thumb.
- ☐ **Paranoia:** Mark xp when you try to get the truth out of someone about their true loyalties. Clear this key and advance when you expose someone's betrayal to their family or employer.

LOS ENLACES

_____ is *familia*. Close family. They don't know what you do *para el cartel*, and you're not sure you can keep your secrets for long.

_____ got you into this business to help you with your financial troubles but didn't tell you the whole story. Now you're both stuck.

You and _____ have an understanding. You need each other for now, but both of you know the current situation won't last.

FACE GRIT HUSTLE SAVAGERY HEAT

				-1
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STATS

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STRESS

EL COCINERO

YOUR MOVES

You get this one and two more:

- **Cocinar:** If you're fully stocked and cooking, at the start of session, roll with Grit. On a 10+, you cover your obligations and make a little surplus for yourself (+extra). On a 7-9, you cover your nut but you have to mark stress or use up the last of something vital. On a miss, something's gone wrong: one of your lab's problems comes to bear *con todo*.
- **Ciencia, Cabrón:** When you try to juryrig something with *ciencia*, roll with Grit. On a hit, you create an opportunity or buy yourself some time. On a 7-9, your efforts are messy or unstable: mark stress. On a miss, your plan would work, but you're missing something illegal, rare, or expensive.
- **Chillón:** When you *justify yourself* with an uncomfortable emotional outburst, roll with Grit instead of Face.
- **De Calidad:** When you *propose a deal* that relies on the quality of your product, roll with Grit instead of Face.
- **Afortunado:** You get +1 Grit (max+3).
- **Pozolero:** When you get rid of a body using chemicals in your lab, roll with Grit. On a 10+, all 3. On a 7-9, pick 1.
 - you aren't forced to mark stress.
 - you aren't missing any supplies or equipment.
 - you aren't interrupted getting it done.

On a miss, you dispose of the body, but it haunts you. You can't clear any stress until you find a way to atone for what you've done.

TU LABORATORIO

By default, your lab is directly funded by the cartels in a basement or shed that makes cocaine, heroin, or meth, your choice: small fixed unstable indebted extra: 1-drug.

Choose 2 features:

- *your lab is mobile or collapsible at a moment's notice. Replace fixed with mobile.*
- *you built your lab with your own funds. Remove indebted.*
- *your lab has professional grade equipment, capable of larger cooks. Add +1 drug; change small to medium.*
- *your lab has equipment designed to dispose of dangerous chemicals. Remove unstable.*
- *your lab is set up for multiple cooks. Choose an additional drug from the list to produce.*
- *you have an assistant who prepares chemicals in advance for your cooks. Add +1 drug and payroll.*

Choose 2 troubles:

- *your lab is difficult to reach or sometimes inaccessible. Add inconvenient.*
- *your lab gives off a byproduct or odor that makes it easy to uncover and report. Add detectable.*
- *your lab is poorly secured or locked down against intruders and thieves. Add exposed.*
- *your lab has equipment that is old and bulky. Increase the size of your lab and add breakdowns.*
- *your lab is poorly set up to contain spills. Add toxic.*
- *your lab's equipment is difficult to calibrate and hard to use. Take -1 drug.*

HARM

When you get fucking shot, roll. Add one for each:

- *it is a handgun or other small weapon.*
- *the shooter is an amateur or isn't trying to kill you.*
- *you have cover, body armor, or a bodyguard.*

On a hit, you'll live. On 10+, it's a minor but heroic wound.

On a 7-9, you choose one and the shooter chooses one:

- *it's bloody; you'll die without immediate aid.*
- *it's messy; the wound will leave an impressive, ugly scar.*
- *it's painful; -1 ongoing until you get medical attention.*

On a miss, you're pretty much finished, *pendejo*. The MC will tell you when you go and how it happens.

ADVANCEMENT □□□

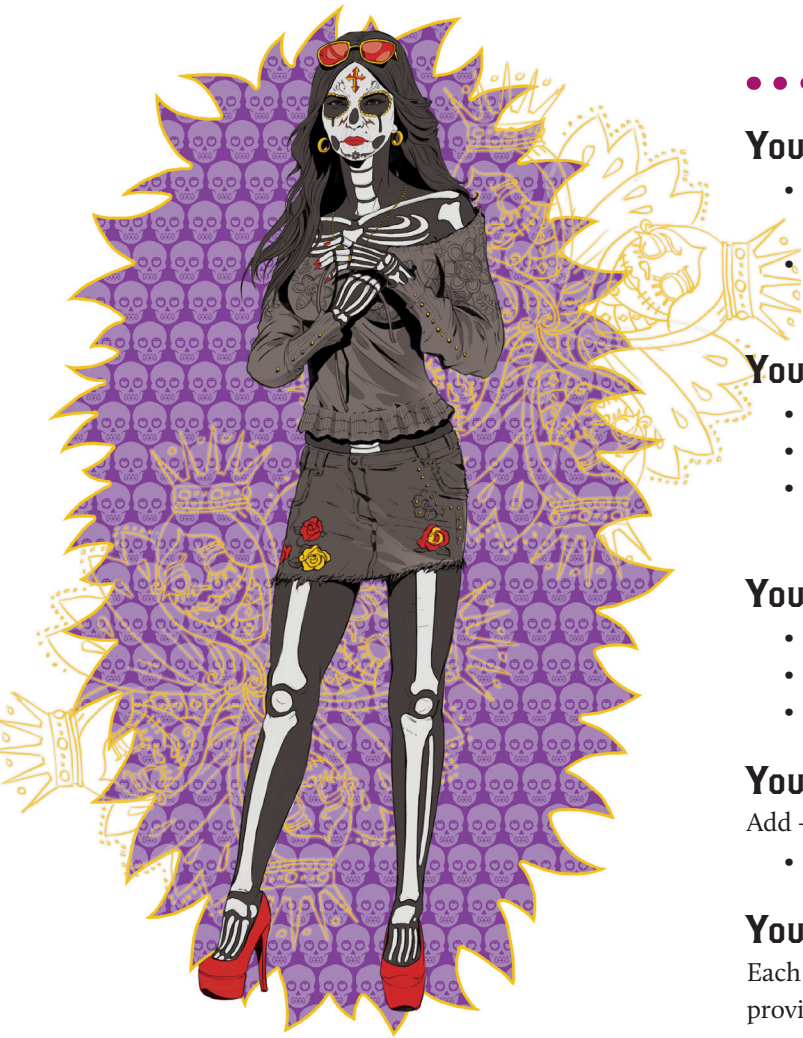
When you fill your xp track, select an advance from this list:

- *get +1 Grit (max+3)*
- *get +1 Hustle (max+3)*
- *get +1 Savagery (max+3)*
- *choose a new laboratorio feature*
- *get a new cocinero move*
- *get a new cocinero move*
- *get a move from another playbook*
- *get a move from another playbook*

After 5 advances, you can choose from this list instead:

- *get +1 to any stat (max+3)*
- *resolve a laboratorio trouble*
- *retire your character (to safety)*
- *change your character to a new type*
- *raise your lifestyle to luxurious*

LA ESPOSA



YOUR NAME

- Andrea, Carolina, Dolores, Esperanza, Gloria, Paula, Sofia, or Yolanda
- Alberto, Antonio, Carlos, Francisco, Manny, Martín, Pablo, or Rolando

YOUR LOOK

- Man, woman, ambiguous, transgressing
- Bright eyes, cold eyes, focused eyes, wide eyes
- Casual clothes, luxury clothes, hi-femme clothes, professional clothes

YOUR GEAR

- your spouse's lifestyle
- a reasonable car, a cell phone, and a cheap laptop
- *la familia* (detail)

YOUR STATS

Add +1 to one of your stats:

- Face +1, Grit +0, Hustle +1, Savagery -1

YOUR STRESS TRACK

Each session you start with two stress already marked, provided you didn't end the last section with more. If your stress track is ever filled, *güey*, you're in a bad spot.

TU LLAVES

Choose two keys:

- ☐ **Loyalty:** Mark xp when you accept the lies or half-truths of a trusted friend or lover. Clear this key and advance when you confront them with evidence of their betrayals and deceptions.
- ☐ **Family:** Mark xp when you violate your family members' boundaries to protect them. Clear this key and advance when you allow one of them to be hurt or harmed when you could have intervened.
- ☐ **Mercy:** Mark xp when you try to head off a violent encounter with negotiation or persuasion. Clear this key and advance when you greatly injure or kill someone who is defenseless or unaware.

LOS ENLACES

_____ and your spouse spend time together, but you'd prefer it if they weren't involved in your life. Tell them what they did to anger you.

_____ *es familia*. A sibling, maybe, or a cousin. Someone close. They mean well, but you worry about them. Tell them your fears.

_____ and you were a thing back in the day, but it never went anywhere. Most people don't know about it; you were young once *también*.

FACE GRIT HUSTLE SAVAGERY HEAT

				-2
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STATS

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STRESS

LA ESPOSA

YOUR MOVES

You get this one and two more:

- **Amor y Matrimonio:** You are the only one who can be trusted to protect *la familia*. Take +1 ongoing when you try to get one of them to do the right thing.
- **Yo Le Cogí:** When you reveal that you betrayed a lover or friend, tell them to fill their stress track; you clear one stress for each stress they mark. If their stress track is already full, they must immediately make a stress move, and you clear one stress.
- **Reina del Drama:** When you put on an dramatic performance to get out of a sticky situation, you can mark stress instead of rolling to *push your luck* as if you rolled a 10+.
- **Perderse:** When you lose yourself in another person, roll with Face. On a hit, you find solace in their embrace; clear your stress track. On a 7-9, they see you truly; they can ask one question and you must answer it honestly. On a miss, your dalliance leads you to neglect a key obligation to disastrous effect.
- **Comer Algo:** When you share a meal with someone, roll with Face. On a 10+, hold 3. On a 7-9, hold 2. You can spend your hold while you're eating together to ask their player questions:
 - *What do you want from me / my family?*
 - *What threat do you pose to us / our life?*
 - *Who is pulling your strings?*
 - *Who are you protecting?*On a miss, hold 1, but you let slip your secret fear about your family or spouse.

LA FAMILIA

Ask everyone else "Who is willing to be my spouse?" Pick whomever you like. If no one volunteers, choose an NPC.

Choose 5 obligations you perform for *la familia*:

pregnant/finalizing adoption, new baby, preschool child, high school student, stepchild, corporate job, established home business, starting a new business, real estate license, social service job, managing family finances, elderly grandparent, damaged sibling, school association, nonprofit board, parish volunteer, dinner parties, gossip and rumors

And choose 2 secrets you keep from *la familia*:

- *+nest egg: you are putting away money in a secret stash (\$20,000!) for a rainy day.*
- *+addiction: some nasty drug has a hold on you.*
- *+affair: you have another love...or at least another lover you spend time with.*
- *+debt: your spending has put you in a tough place.*
- *+lovechild: you have a secret child that requires attention...and money.*

Whenever there is a stretch of downtime in play (or between sessions), roll with Hustle. On a 10+, you juggle your responsibilities with grace; clear your stress track. On a 7-9, one of your obligations (your choice) becomes unmanageable; the MC will tell you who might be able to assist. On a miss, your secrets and obligations clash with disastrous (and obvious) results; tell the MC what went wrong.

HARM

When you get fucking shot, roll. Add one for each:

- *it is a handgun or other small weapon.*
- *the shooter is an amateur or isn't trying to kill you.*
- *you have cover, body armor, or a bodyguard.*

On a hit, you'll live. On 10+, it's a minor but heroic wound.

On a 7-9, you choose one and the shooter chooses one:

- *it's bloody; you'll die without immediate aid.*
- *it's messy; the wound will leave an impressive, ugly scar.*
- *it's painful; -1 ongoing until you get medical attention.*

On a miss, you're pretty much finished, *pendejo*. The MC will tell you when you go and how it happens.

ADVANCEMENT □□□

When you fill your xp track, select an advance from this list:

- *get +1 Face (max+3)*
- *get +1 Grit (max+3)*
- *get +1 Hustle (max+3)*
- *change 2 obligations de la familia*
- *get a new esposa move*
- *get a new esposa move*
- *get a move from another playbook*
- *get a move from another playbook*

After 5 advances, you can choose from this list instead:

- *get +1 to any stat (max+3)*
- *permanently resolve a secret*
- *retire your character (to safety)*
- *change your character to a new type*
- *raise your spouse's lifestyle*

EL HALCON

YOUR NAME

- Ale, Carolina, Cecilia, Heura, Juanita, Lupita, Malena, or Pati
- Beto, Brayan, Diego, Enrique, Felipe, José, Mateo, Pepe, or Toño

YOUR LOOK

- Man, woman, ambiguous, transgressing
- Lazy eyes, sharp eyes, tired eyes, quick eyes
- Casual clothes, gang clothes, street clothes, work clothes

YOUR GEAR

- a destitute lifestyle
- a 9mm (close loud), and a shit car or truck, a few burner phones from your handlers

YOUR STATS

Add +1 to one of your stats:

- Face +1, Grit -1, Hustle +1, Savagery +0

YOUR STRESS TRACK

Each session you start with two stress already marked, provided you didn't end the last section with more. If your stress track is ever filled, *güey*, you're in a bad spot.

TU LLAVES

Choose two keys:

- ☐ **Ambition:** Mark xp when you get someone to give you a job that was supposed to go to someone else. Clear this key and advance when you seize the day and ask for forgiveness instead of permission.
- ☐ **Duty:** Mark xp when you complete a task or assignment for your superiors. Clear this key and advance when you intentionally thwart the goals of your organization or employer.
- ☐ **Faith:** Mark xp when you willingly enter a dangerous situation without precautions or deception. Clear this key and advance when you set a trap for someone who trusts you.

LOS ENLACES

_____ gave you some new responsibilities lately, at your request. They have their doubts, but you'll prove them wrong soon.

_____ disapproves of your cartel work, and wants to get you out. You're not a *niño*; you can handle your own business.

You and _____ have a plan to make some real money. They worry it's not going to work, but you know it's a sure thing, *cabrón*.

FACE GRIT HUSTLE SAVAGERY HEAT

				+0
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STATS

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STRESS

EL HALCON

YOUR MOVES

You get this one and two more:

- **Hermano:** when you try to get your pandilla to follow your lead on something dangerous, or costly, or out of the ordinary, roll with Hustle. On a 10+, all 3. On a 7-9, choose 1:

- they all go along with the plan
- they follow your instructions precisely
- they don't demand drugs or cash

On a miss, your pandilla fights amongst itself about *mierda* you thought was settled, screwing up your plans before you even start.

- **Mercado:** When you offload product on the street, roll with Hustle. On a hit, convert drugs to cash at market rates, as much as you'd like. On a 7-9, you run into cops or someone tries to dine and dash, your choice. On a miss, someone makes a run at you, and it's probably not the cops.
- **Bendito:** when you're completely focused on escaping, **push your luck** with Hustle instead of Grit. Add +1 to your roll if you **get fucking shot** while trying to flee.
- **Vendedor:** When you **propose a deal** to someone and they pick an option off the 7-9 list you don't like, mark stress to make them pick a different option off the list. You can do this multiple times, provided you can keep marking stress.
- **Matador:** Fill your stress track to **turn to violence** against an unsuspecting target as if you rolled a 10+.

TU PANDILLA

By default, your pandilla has three loyal amigos you've known a while. Give them names:

Azul, Blanco, Calaca, Charo, Chino, Flaco, Gordo, Lola, Moco, Nacho, Paco, Raki, Torpe, Zanahoria

- Who is there to cheer you up when *mierda* gets tough?
- Who is a real *puto*, but you just can't cut them loose?
- Who is solid, ready to *entrarle* when you need them?

Choose 2 features:

- *your crew has crews that work for you, cabrón. Your crew becomes a gang small untrained unequipped.*
- *your crew is down for a fiesta. Roll with Hustle instead of Grit when you get all get lost in a substance together.*
- *your crew is down for a fight. Roll with Hustle instead of Savagery when you rough someone up as a crew.*
- *your crew is in touch with high-level smugglers and producers from other cartels. It gets +connected.*
- *your crew is decently employed outside the cartel, officially or unofficially. It gets +rich.*

Choose 2 vulnerabilities:

- *your crew is on la policía's radar: +known.*
- *your crew is into heavy stuff: +addiction.*
- *your crew owes favors to another crew: +obligation.*
- *your crew has enemies, cabrón: +turf war.*
- *your crew has kids and shit: +families.*

HARM

When you get fucking shot, roll. Add one for each:

- it is a handgun or other small weapon.
- the shooter is an amateur or isn't trying to kill you.
- you have cover, body armor, or a bodyguard.

On a hit, you'll live. On 10+, it's a minor but heroic wound.

On a 7-9, you choose one and the shooter chooses one:

- it's bloody; you'll die without immediate aid.
- it's messy; the wound will leave an impressive, ugly scar.
- it's painful; -1 ongoing until you get medical attention.

On a miss, you're pretty much finished, *pendejo*. The MC will tell you when you go and how it happens.

ADVANCEMENT □□□

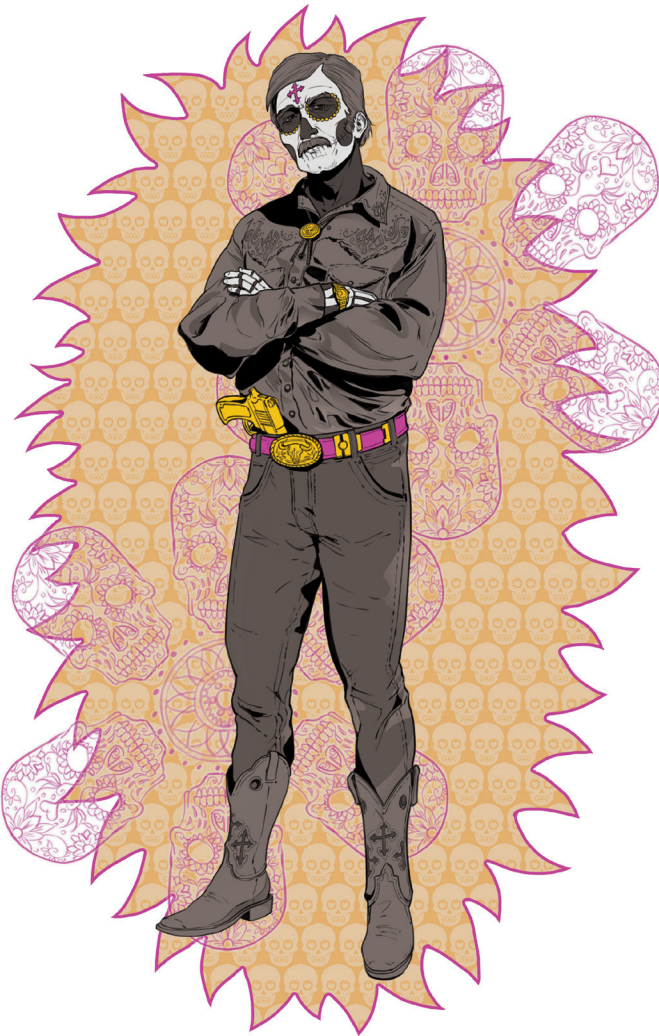
When you fill your xp track, select an advance from this list:

- get +1 Face (max+3)
- get +1 Grit (max+3)
- get +1 Hustle (max+3)
- choose a new pandilla feature
- get a new halcón move
- get a new halcón move
- get a move from another playbook
- get a move from another playbook

After 5 advances, you can choose from this list instead:

- get +1 to any stat (max+3)
- resolve a pandilla vulnerability
- retire your character (to safety)
- change your character to a new type
- raise your lifestyle to impoverished

EL NARCO



YOUR NAME

- Alejandra, Beatriz, Guadalupe, María Elena, María Luisa, or Raquel
- Alfonso, Curro, Fernando, Guillermo, Isidro, Juan Carlos, or Santiago

YOUR LOOK

- Man, woman, ambiguous, transgressing
- Angry eyes, focused eyes, skeptical eyes, warm eyes
- *Junta* clothes, luxury clothes, *buchero* clothes, *ranchero* clothes

YOUR GEAR

- a lifestyle based on your *plaza*
- a sidearm (close loud), a car, and a cell phone
- *la plaza* (detail)

YOUR STATS

Add +1 to one of your stats:

- Face +1, Grit +0, Hustle -1, Savagery +1

YOUR STRESS TRACK

Each session you start with two stress already marked, provided you didn't end the last section with more. If your stress track is ever filled, *güey*, you're in a bad spot.

TU LLAVES

Choose two keys:

- ☐ **Dirty Hands:** Mark xp when you personally tackle a messy problem instead of sending goons. Clear this key and advance when you send someone to deal with a problem you should have attended to directly.
- ☐ **Family:** Mark xp when you violate your family members' boundaries to protect them. Clear this key and advance when you allow one of them to be hurt or harmed when you could have intervened.
- ☐ **Paranoia:** Mark xp when you try to get the truth out of someone about their true loyalties. Clear this key and advance when you expose someone's betrayal to their family or employer.

LOS ENLACES

_____ is *familia*, but you've tried to shield them from the worst of the cartel. Tell them what they know about your dealings.

You're sure _____ is up to something, maybe with another cartel or *los federales*. Keep your eyes open, *cabrón*. Trust no one.

You've taken _____ under your wing. You respect their skills and talents, and you want to see them thrive. ¡*Qué generoso!*

FACE

GRIT

HUSTLE

SAVAGERY

HEAT

+2

STATS

STRESS

EL NARCO

YOUR MOVES

You get these two moves:

- **La Plaza:** At the beginning of the session, roll with Control. On a hit, your plaza runs smoothly; the MC will tell you what troubles lurk on the horizon. On a 10+, you get an opportunity to engage one your troubles (your choice) on your terms. On a miss, one (or more) of your troubles catches you in a vulnerable spot, jefe, before you can adjust.

- **Mandamás:** When you order your enforcers or agents to solve a problem on your behalf, roll with Face. On a 10+, all 3. On a 7-9, choose 1.

- they keep their wits and focus.
- they minimize incriminating evidence.
- they avoid collateral damage.

On a miss, everything goes to shit, but it wasn't your people's fault. You know how it is, jefe: no plan survives contact with the enemy.

EL JEFE DE JEFES

You run *la plaza*, a pathway for narcos hoping to move product across the border and a lucrative area for local drug sales. The city of Durango is yours as long as you hold it, jefe.

When you took control, the cartel gave you a contact who collects what you owe them, usually once a month. You only know their nickname, so you can't sell them out if you get flipped by *los federales* (pick one):

Barbie, Basura, Bruja, Chuke, Chuy, Chata, Lancha, Luchi, Mateperros, Mochomo, Osito, Puerca, Roco, Selena, Z-36

LA PLAZA

By default, you've got:

- a small staff of unsophisticated narcos, coordinated via a network of burner phones
- a mix of protection rackets and smuggling operations (lifestyle: stable, trouble: +rivals)
- 5-10 loyal enforcers (gang small untrained impatient) and 1 or 2 corrupt cops (greedy informed)
- a few halcones to keep you informed about what goes on in your city (+1 control)

Choose 4 feature:

- | | |
|--|--|
| ☐ your plaza is profitable, bringing in substantial (and obvious) sums of money. Lifestyle: +1 level and trouble: +robberies. | ☐ your enforcers are trained in military tactics. Drop untrained and add savage. Take +1 when you order kidnappings or ambushes. |
| ☐ for income, add kidnapping. Lifestyle: +1 level and trouble: +vigilantes. | ☐ your enforcers recruit heavily from the local population, making them a medium gang (10-20) instead of small. |
| ☐ your enforcers have access to military weaponry and body armor. Add armored and armed to your gang. | ☐ you have halcones at major chokepoints and smuggling roads. +1 control. |
| ☐ you have a reputation for violence. Roll with Face instead of Hustle when you pressure someone by threatening their life, limbs, or loved ones. | ☐ only a few know your real name and appearance. Take -2 heat; describe the business that you use as a cover for your illegal activities as El Narco. |

Choose 2 troubles:

- | | |
|--|---|
| ☐ you have attracted the attention of the administration's anti-drug efforts. Trouble: +los federales. | ☐ the narcos you displaced to take control of la plaza remains at large. -1 control. |
| ☐ you are in the middle of a violent dispute with another cartel, probably Los Zetas. Trouble: +gang war. | ☐ you have attracted the attention of the Mexican tax and revenue authorities (SHCP), forcing you to be more cautious with your expenditures and money laundering. -1 lifestyle. |
| ☐ your plaza has been infiltrated by someone working for los federales. Trouble: +mole | |

ADVANCEMENT ☐☐☐

When you fill your xp track, select an advance from this list:

- ☐ get +1 Face (max+3)
- ☐ get +1 Hustle (max+3)
- ☐ get +1 Savagery (max+3)
- ☐ get +1 control (max +3)
- ☐ choose a new plaza option
- ☐ choose a new plaza option
- ☐ get a move from another playbook
- ☐ get a move from another playbook

After 5 advances, you can choose from this list instead:

- ☐ get +1 to any stat (max+3)
- ☐ permanently resolve a plaza trouble
- ☐ permanently resolve a plaza trouble
- ☐ retire your character (to safety)
- ☐ change your character to a new type

LA POLIZETA



YOUR NAME

- Coco, Isabel, Luz, Marisol, Mercedes, Silvia, Tilde, or Yoli
- Bimbo, Eduardo, Gustavo, Javi, Lacho, Luis, Teto, or Vicente

YOUR LOOK

- Man, woman, ambiguous, transgressing
- Clever eyes, dead eyes, watchful eyes, young eyes
- Business clothes, plain clothes, street clothes, uniform clothes

YOUR GEAR

- a stable lifestyle
- a government vehicle, a 9mm revolver (close loud)
- a work cellphone and two SIM cards

YOUR STATS

Add +1 to one of your stats:

- Face +0, Grit +1, Hustle +1, Savagery -1

YOUR STRESS TRACK

Each session you start with two stress already marked, provided you didn't end the last section with more. If your stress track is ever filled, *güey*, you're in a bad spot.

TU LLAVES

Choose two keys:

- ☐ **Schemes:** Mark xp when you play two sides against each other without their knowledge. Clear this key and advance when you openly choose one of your loyalties over the other.
- ☐ **Faith:** Mark xp when you willingly enter a dangerous situation without precautions or deception. Clear this key and advance when you set a trap for someone who trusts you.
- ☐ **Debt:** Mark xp when you strain your finances to meet your family's needs. Clear this key and advance when you find a way—legal or illegal—out from under your debtor's thumb.

LOS ENLACES

You grew up with _____ on the streets of Durango. You still have a beer after work if you're both free; it's nice to know someone who isn't involved with either side of your double life.

_____ is the target of an active investigation. You're not the lead investigator, but you're regularly briefed on the case.

_____ is your main contact in the cartel. Tell them how you two make contact when you need a face-to-face meeting.

FACE

GRIT

HUSTLE

SAVAGERY

HEAT

-1

STATS

STRESS

LA POLIZETA

YOUR MOVES

You get this one and two more:

- **Infiltrado:** At the start of session, roll with Grit. On a hit, you get wind of an investigation before things get messy. On a 10+, you're positioned to take advantage of the situation: you have access to vital evidence, witnesses, or police personnel, your choice. On a miss, the department catches a hot lead on the cartel before you can intervene. *A la verga.*
- **Seguir:** When you follow someone through the streets, roll with Grit. On a 10+, where they go, you follow. On a 7-9, you lose them at the last moment; you were probably spotted. On a miss, you end up exposed without backup or cover. *¡Mierda!*
- **Verdadero:** When you *get the truth* from someone in an interrogation, pick an extra option, even on a miss.
- **En Asunto:** Mark stress to show up in a scene alongside *la policia* or *los federales*, assuming that you aren't unavailable. Mark three stress to show up instead of the authorities; you'll have a few minutes solo in the scene before anybody else arrives.
- **Escolta:** When you escort someone away from a messy crime scene or cover for someone while they handle their business in public, they roll with your Heat instead of their own. On a miss, you're caught by your unit in a compromising position.
- **Disciplinado:** When you *turn to violence* after declaring yourself as a *federale*, roll with Grit instead of Savagery. If you get shot as a result, take +1 forward.

ANTI-CARTEL TASK FORCE

You work for *los federales* on an anti-cartel taskforce assigned to Durango. You've worked as an anti-cartel federal officer for some time, but you have only recently been assigned to this region and city. Tell the MC why you've returned to your hometown.

You work closely with 5 NPCs (at least) in the unit:

Delgado, Moreno, Ortiz, Reyes, Zamora

Who is your new partner? _____

Who is suspicious of you? _____

You also end up working with a few NPCs from the cartel:

Elisa, Estaban, Gata, Tomas, Zola

Who almost gave you away? _____

Who offered to scam *el narco*? _____

Your department has some new toys—*¡gracias, Calderón!*—you can use, provided you have some “official” business (pick 2):

- *military-grade body armor (resilient bulky)*
- *full-scale surveillance van (hi-tech expensive)*
- *tracking devices or bugs (hi-tech concealable)*
- *court-approved wiretap (hi-tech persistent)*
- *network of criminal informants (informed costly)*

HARM

When you get fucking shot, roll. Add one for each:

- *it is a handgun or other small weapon.*
- *the shooter is an amateur or isn't trying to kill you.*
- *you have cover, body armor, or a bodyguard.*

On a hit, you'll live. On 10+, it's a minor but heroic wound.

On a 7-9, you choose one and the shooter chooses one:

- *it's bloody; you'll die without immediate aid.*
- *it's messy; the wound will leave an impressive, ugly scar.*
- *it's painful; -1 ongoing until you get medical attention.*

On a miss, you're pretty much finished, *pendejo*. The MC will tell you when you go and how it happens.

ADVANCEMENT □□□

When you fill your xp track, select an advance from this list:

- *get +1 Face (max+3)*
- *get +1 Grit (max+3)*
- *get +1 Hustle (max+3)*
- *choose a new department toy*
- *get a new polizeta move*
- *get a new polizeta move*
- *get a move from another playbook*
- *get a move from another playbook*

After 5 advances, you can choose from this list instead:

- *get +1 to any stat (max+3)*
- *get promoted to lieutenant*
- *retire your character (to safety)*
- *change your character to a new type*
- *raise your lifestyle to luxurious*

LA SICARIA

YOUR NAME

- Alma, Alicia, Josefina, Leticia, Mina, Pera, Raquel, or Rocio
- Ángel, Gabriel, Héctor, Jesús, Lorenzo, Ruy, Tiburón, or Vibora

YOUR LOOK

- Man, woman, ambiguous, transgressing
- Blank eyes, somber eyes, quiet eyes, wild eyes
- Casual clothes, luxury clothes, military clothes, street clothes

YOUR GEAR

- an impoverished lifestyle
- a reliable car or truck, and a few burner phones
- specialized weapons (detail) and gear (detail)

YOUR STATS

Add +1 to one of your stats:

- Face -1, Grit +1, Hustle +0, Savagery +1

YOUR STRESS TRACK

Each session you start with two stress already marked, provided you didn't end the last section with more. If your stress track is ever filled, *güey*, you're in a bad spot.

TU LLAVES

Choose two keys:

- ☐ **Indomitable:** Mark xp when you go into battle significantly outgunned or outmanned. Clear this key and advance when you surrender to your enemies instead of fighting your way out of a messy situation.
- ☐ **Mercy:** Mark xp when you try to head off a violent encounter with negotiation or persuasion. Clear this key and advance when you greatly injure or kill someone who is defenseless or unaware.
- ☐ **Duty:** Mark xp when you complete a task or assignment for your superiors. Clear this key and advance when you intentionally thwart the goals of your organization or employer.

LOS ENLACES

You owe _____ for getting you out of a tight spot. You won't die for them, but you both know you need to settle up soon.

_____ got you back in the business, after you had retired. Tell them how you feel about your return to the game, and don't be shy.

_____ fucked up something crucial; you had to clean up the mess before things got messy with *los federales* or a rival drug cartel.

FACE GRIT HUSTLE SAVAGERY HEAT

				+1
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STATS

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STRESS

LA SICARIA

YOUR MOVES

Choose three moves:

- ☐ **Mirar:** When you read a charged situation, roll with Savagery. On a hit, ask the MC questions; take +1 when you act on the answers. On a 10+, ask 2. On a 7-9, ask 1:
 - *where's my escape route / way in / way past?*
 - *which enemy is most vulnerable to me?*
 - *what should I be on the lookout for?*
 - *what's my enemy's true position?*On a miss, you walk into an ambush. ¡En la madre!
- ☐ **Narcocorrido:** When you meet someone important (your call), roll with Savagery. On a hit, they've heard of you. Say what they've heard, and they will act accordingly. On a 10+, you take +1 forward to dealing with them as well. On a miss, your corrido convinces them that you're something you're not.
- ☐ **Levantón:** When you track someone down, roll with Savagery. On a hit, you catch them exposed or vulnerable. On a 7-9, they have backup or it's public. On a miss, someone you're avoiding finds you first.
- ☐ **Rematar:** You get +1 Savagery (max +3).
- ☐ **Encobijado:** When you try to get rid of a body, roll with Savagery. On a hit, you lose it...and it stays lost; clear one stress. On a 10+, dust to dust, *cabrón*; clear your stress track. On a miss, the body surfaces, but without any obvious ties to you or your crew.
- ☐ **Duro:** When you *get fucking shot*, add +1 to your roll. On a miss, you have time to for an act of vengeance or kindness before you fall to your wounds.

WEAPONS (CHOOSE 4)

- ☐ *sniper rifle (far hi-tech loud)*
- ☐ *assault rifle (close loud autofire)*
- ☐ *grenade launcher (close area messy)*
- ☐ *shotgun (close messy)*
- ☐ *submachine gun (close area loud)*
- ☐ *magnum (close reload loud)*
- ☐ *9mm (close loud)*
- ☐ *stun gun (close reload)*
- ☐ *fireman's axe (close messy)*
- ☐ *machete (hand messy)*
- ☐ *garrote (hand grapple)*
- ☐ *knives (hand infinite)*

GEAR (CHOOSE 4)

- ☐ *Armor Piercing Ammo (+ap to all weapons): Sometimes putos wear vests. Gotta be ready.*
- ☐ *Body Amor (+armored): You want to live, right? Put on the fucking vest, pendeja.*
- ☐ *Explosives Kit (close loud area reload): You can create improvised explosive devices (IEDs) if you've got time.*
- ☐ *Tracking Device (hi-tech far concealable): They can't hide. So long as you can plant this somewhere on them.*
- ☐ *Secure Police Scanner (hi-tech hand): You can listen in even when they try to keep you out.*
- ☐ *Silencer (remove +loud from any weapon): Quiet as a mouse. Dead as a doornail. Eh, cabrón?*
- ☐ *Surveillance Gear (hi-tech close concealable): You can install cameras somewhere and watch all you want.*
- ☐ *Police Uniform (official wearable stolen): Who is who anymore? You look like them and they look like you.*

HARM

When you get fucking shot, roll. Add one for each:

- *it is a handgun or other small weapon.*
- *the shooter is an amateur or isn't trying to kill you.*
- *you have cover, body armor, or a bodyguard.*

On a hit, you'll live. On 10+, it's a minor but heroic wound.

On a 7-9, you choose one and the shooter chooses one:

- *it's bloody; you'll die without immediate aid.*
- *it's messy; the wound will leave an impressive, ugly scar.*
- *it's painful; -1 ongoing until you get medical attention.*

On a miss, you're pretty much finished, *pendejo*. The MC will tell you when you go and how it happens.

ADVANCEMENT ☐☐☐

When you fill your xp track, select an advance from this list:

- ☐ *get +1 Grit (max+3)*
- ☐ *get +1 Hustle (max+3)*
- ☐ *get +1 Savagery (max+3)*
- ☐ *choose 2 new weapons*
- ☐ *get a new sicaria move*
- ☐ *get a new sicaria move*
- ☐ *get a move from another playbook*
- ☐ *get a move from another playbook*

After 5 advances, you can choose from this list instead:

- ☐ *get +1 to any stat (max+3)*
- ☐ *choose 2 new pieces of gear or 2 new weapons*
- ☐ *retire your character (to safety)*
- ☐ *change your character to a new type*
- ☐ *raise your lifestyle to stable*

THE MASTER OF CEREMONIES

AGENDAS

- ▶ Make the drug war seem real
- ▶ Make the players' characters' lives not boring
- ▶ Play to find out what happens

PRINCIPLES

- ▶ Ground the story in Durango, Mexico
- ▶ Address yourself to the characters, not the players
- ▶ Make your move, but misdirect.
- ▶ Make your move, but never speak its name.
- ▶ Treat everyone as expendable
- ▶ Fill the character's lives with secrets
- ▶ Make the authorities a persistent presence
- ▶ Be a fan of the player's characters
- ▶ Never let them forget the streets
- ▶ Sometimes, declaim decision making

MOVES

- ▶ Inflict stress (as established)
- ▶ Shoot someone
- ▶ Escalate a situation to sudden violence
- ▶ Capture someone
- ▶ Put someone in a spot
- ▶ Disrupt someone's routine
- ▶ Make them offer to get their way
- ▶ Offer immunity for information or evidence
- ▶ Turn their move back on them
- ▶ Lean on a secret
- ▶ Demand someone play their part
- ▶ After every move, "what do you do?"

LAST NAMES

Álvarez, Arias, Avila, Balderas, Banderas, Bautista, Castillo, Chávez, De La Rosa, Díaz, Domínguez, Escobar, Fernández, Flores, Gallegos, García, Garza, Gómez, González, Guerrero, Gutiérrez, Hernández, Herrera, Iglesias, Jiménez, Juárez, López, Martínez, Molina, Morales, Navarro, Olivera, Peralta, Perez, Ramírez, Ramos, Reyes, Rivera, Rodríguez, Rojas, Ruiz, Sánchez, Sandoval, Soriano, Taveras, Tejada, Tijerina, Torres, Valencia

BUSINESSES

laundromat, car wash, beauty salon, bakery, auto parts store, taqueria, dry cleaners, watch repair, head shop, computer repair, paper supply, tortilla factory, pawn shop, office supply store, piñata factory, taco truck, payday lender, corporate fast food, car dealership, local bank, coffeeshop

IF YOU GET STUCK...

- ▶ Create chaos by introducing a rival faction, gang, or leader. The PCs think the world revolves around them, but the drug war is infinite, sprawling, and mysterious.
- ▶ Involve the CIA or DEA on active investigations. They can't be bought (usually), but they are only rarely honest about their intentions.
- ▶ Focus on PC-NPC-PC triangles. If *El Narco* wants Flaco dead because he screwed something up, is *El Halcón* really going to save his friend if it costs him his life too?

NOTES

THE MASTER OF CEREMONIES

PLAYING NPCs

Throughout the game, you portray everyone else in Durango. Here are a few tips for playing NPCs:

NPC DRIVES

Give your NPCs clear motivations—money, drugs, sex, violence—and have them take action without thinking about the consequences. Don't make them stupid—NPCs pursue their goals with as much cunning as they can muster—but when they get an opportunity, they take it. Leave a *halcón* alone with a million dollars? He's a ghost, *pendejo*.

NPC HARM

When NPCs get harmed, it hits hard. A single stab wound isn't likely to kill them, but a bullet is likely to finish someone off quick. If you think a wound is bad enough to kill an NPC, then they die. Lethal weapons are lethal, *cabrón*. No need to pretend otherwise.

NPC STRESS

In response to a few moves, NPCs can mark stress like PCs. Stress for NPCs, however, is catastrophic. They can only mark one or two before they start falling apart or making terrible decisions. Be thoughtful when marking stress for NPCs; use it sparingly and telegraph the effects that stress is having on the NPC early and often. Players get frustrated when they make an offer only to be told that the NPC doesn't respond.

BEHIND EACH PLAYBOOK

Before you start playing **CARTEL**, take a few moments to describe what makes each playbook unique. Players are telegraphing their interests when they choose a playbook—a player who chooses *La Sicaria* wants to get in a fight—and it's your job as the MC to give the player a chance to shine.

EL COCINERO

The cook has a lot of tools for dealing with problems, but can get excluded and isolated if there isn't enough to do. Come after *El Cocinero* with problems, familial or financial, and make it clear that the other PCs are needed to keep the machine running.

EL HALCÓN

As the errand runner, *El Halcón* usually has lots to do during a session, but make sure to bring their pandilla to bear early and often. His crew is a double-edged sword, useful in the right situations and trouble when they are out of their element.

EL NARCO

As the boss, *El Narco* will often try to resolve all problems through his agents and enforcers; encourage him to rely on the other PCs. Provide a few issues, familial or legal, that require his direct attention, especially when he has to take some risks to come out on top.

LA ESPOSA

If at all possible, make sure the spouse ends up married to one of the PCs; the drama will pretty much take care of itself. If an NPC is needed, make it someone important and vulnerable. A major kingpin is good, but so is a crooked cop or deadly *sicario*. Give her a chance to break hearts.

LA POLIZETA

La Polizeta's start of session move gets them mixed up quick with trouble and drama, but remember to threaten their secrets too. As a dirty cop, they need to feel pressure from the cartels and the cops.

LA SICARIA

Put the enforcer directly in harm's way. Always. It doesn't always have to be directed at her—she might be dropping off a package to *El Halcón* or protecting *La Esposa*—but give her an opportunity to use her weapons and tools.

FINAL THOUGHTS

Running **CARTEL** is more like running a high-drama game like **MONSTERHEARTS** than something like **URBAN SHADOWS** or *Apocalypse World*. Turn the PCs against each other, make them nervous about what the other characters know, and frame scenes in which they can't quite talk openly about their problems. In other words, light all the fuses you see; the players will have to deal with the fireworks and the fallout. *Buena suerte, cabrón!*