

# SKULDUGGERY

The Roleplaying Game Of Verbal Fireworks & Sudden Reversals

by Robin D Laws

Sample file

# CREDITS

Author: **Robin D Laws**

Publisher: **Simon Rogers**

Layout: **Jérôme Huguenin**

Cover and grayscale interior art: **Jérôme Huguenin**

Line Art: **Hilary Wade**

**Special thanks to:** Elizabeth Shoemaker, Kenneth Hite, Graham Walmsley, Steve Dempsey

**Playtesters:** Darcy Burgess, Graham Chinner, Chris Engler, Oliver Granger, Peta Holmes, Chris Huth, Paul Jackson, Alex Johnston, Winnie Kruger, Kevin Kulp, Dan L'Estrange, Rob Lim, John Machin, Pau Martinell, Mateu Pastor, Quim Ball-Ilosera, Albert Piqué, Albert Puignau, Eudald Bonmatí Mark Mueller, Justin Mohareb, Jason Morton, Kyle Plate, Alex Topher, Dave Versace, James Versace, Craig Wayling, Jim Zubkavich

**Additional proofing:** Ludovic Papais, Andre..., Raphael, Timothy Daly, Jérôme Larre

©2010 Pelgrane Press Ltd. All rights reserved.  
<http://www.pelgranepress.com>



# CONTENTS

<b>CREDITS</b>	<b>2</b>	Closer	63
<b>CONTENTS</b>	<b>3</b>	Taglines	63
<b>The Game and How To Play It</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>SKULDUGGERY &amp; CROSSBONES</b>	<b>64</b>
SKULDUGGERY IN A NUTSHELL	4	THE SETTING	64
Teaching <i>Skulduggery</i>	5	Collective Goal	64
What Lies Ahead	5	Relationships	64
BRUTE FORCE AND PHYSICAL ACTION	6	Player	65
<b>BASIC RULES</b>	<b>6</b>	Character	65
OPTIONAL SETTINGS:		Key Temptation	65
Assigning Characters	6	Replacing Dead PCs	67
Unpersuadable	8	Additional Supporting Characters	67
Resolving Actions	10	Names	67
What Do Pool Points Represent?	10	Opener	68
Pathetic Success	11	Scenes and Situations	69
Resolutions	12	Drowning	69
Tokens	13	Taglines	71
Acting Without An Ability	14	<b>CASTING CALL</b>	<b>72</b>
Ganging Up	19	THE SETTING	72
Abilities	23	Collective Goal	72
Persuade Hints	23	Relationships	72
When To Let It Slide	24	Additional Supporting Characters	74
Accepting Persuasion	25	Names	75
General Ability Master List	26	Weapons Ho	77
Perceiving With Other Abilities	30	Scenes and Situations	77
Taglines	34	Character	77
Temptations and GM-Controlled Characters	35	Kuperhufft's Default Casting	77
Fighting	36	Final Casting	77
Breaking Initiative Ties	36	Taglines	79
Resolving Physical Conflicts		<b>IF SPACE PERMITS</b>	<b>80</b>
In Non-Violent Settings	37	THE SETTING	80
<b>RUNNING THE GAME</b>	<b>41</b>	Collective Goal	81
ACTION AND REACTION	41	Player	81
Reading Scenarios	44	Character	81
Introducing the Cast	45	Title	81
In Concert and At Odds	45	Goal	81
It Won't All Make the Cut	45	Adjusting For Small Groups	81
Building To the Closer	45	Setting Glossary	81
Refreshing For Supporting Characters	47	Relationships	82
Series Play	47	Additional Supporting Characters	83
Why No Character Build System?	47	Names	86
<b>CUSTOMIZED SKULDUGGERY</b>	<b>49</b>	Places	86
CHOOSING YOUR SETTING	49	Ships	87
Serious Settings	49	Opener	87
Establishing Goals	49	Merchant Vessel Command Structure	87
Creating Component Cards	50	Scenes and Situations	87
Setting-Specific Abilities	51	Where Are Last Year's Winners?	89
Scenes	52	Closer	91
Keep It Loose	53	Taglines	91
<b>THE YES WING</b>	<b>54</b>	<b>COMPONENT CARDS</b>	<b>92</b>
THE SETTING	54	<b>APPENDICES</b>	<b>117</b>
Collective Goal	54	RANDOMIZED STYLES	117
Relationships	54	Success/Failure	117
Player	55	Pooled Effort	117
Character	55	Verbal Trumps	117
Title	55	Combat Trumps	117
Goal	55	Boon and Levy Collector	118
Additional Supporting Characters	56	<b>INDEX</b>	<b>119</b>
Opener	58		
Scenes and Situations	58		

Sample file



# THE GAME AND HOW TO PLAY IT

*Skulduggery* is a roleplaying game for 2-6 players and a Game Moderator. In *Skulduggery*, you play:

- a cabinet official attempting to please the President by shepherding an unpopular nomination
- a pirate crewman scheming for the captaincy of his scurvy vessel
- high schoolers vying for the limelight as they stage a musical
- skeezy space traders trying to corner the market on Silurian jump wine

To play *Skulduggery*, you need this book, a single ordinary six-sided die per participant, paper, and writing instruments. It helps if the GM has access to the Internet and a computer printer.

## SKULDUGGERY IN A NUTSHELL

*Skulduggery* is a roleplaying game. If you have no idea what that means, we congratulate you for accidentally stumbling upon this text, which is aimed at the relevant niche audience. We wish we had the space here to teach you the basics of the hobby. Find friends who know what roleplaying games are and have them demonstrate the basic concept to you. Incessantly bug one of them until they run a session of *Skulduggery* for you and your friends. You'll be glad you did.

Although it makes a great introduction to the hobby for beginning players, *Skulduggery* calls for an experienced Game Moderator who is comfortable extensively improvising in response to player actions.

*Skulduggery* plunges the player characters into situations where they must prevail by guile and persuasion. The game is generic, meaning that its rules can be applied to various settings. It specializes in stories where negotiation and verbal gamesmanship take precedence over fighting and adventure. Left to its own devices, the tone of a *Skulduggery* session drifts toward the humorous or satirical. With some effort, it might also be put to grimly serious ends.

The setting packs provided in this book allow you to create tales of:



- modern politics and bureaucracy
- the age of piracy
- the high school drama club
- interstellar trade

We also show you how to adapt the basic rules to other situations in the same settings, and in other genres as well. *Skulduggery* works for any genre dominated by verbal power struggles. Your game packs might feature:

- ecclesiastical scheming
- court intrigue
- faculty politics
- rival generals
- organized crime (ranging from Coppola or Scorsese-style mafiosi to Guy Ritchie cockney villains)
- or even the machinations of anthropomorphic meerkats.

Although persuasion takes center stage in *Skulduggery*, quick 'n' brutal combat rules allow for sudden eruptions of violence, where thematically appropriate.

Most roleplayers will find *Skulduggery* an ideal respite

from their usual fare. It's ideal for one-shot gaming. Play it:

- when you fail to achieve quorum for your usual ongoing campaign
- as a palate-cleanser between long series
- at conventions
- when you decide at the last minute to run an off-the-cuff session.

A typical game lasts for three to four hours. Though *Skulduggery* is geared to one-shot play, some groups may wish to extend their characters' scheming and conniving to an ongoing series. The adjustments required for longer-term play appear on p. 47.

## TEACHING SKULDUGGERY

Games of *Skulduggery* should be simple and fast. Don't bog down the players by teaching them the entire game from the outset. Instead, give them what they need to know, when they need to know it.

When telling players how to play *Skulduggery*, explain the basics of action resolution, including ratings and pools, boons and levies, refreshes (p. 10) and taglines (p. 34) and the various degrees of success and failure (p. 11.) Then let all of the other rules wait until they arise in play. For example, the undermining rule (p.17) allows one player character to interfere with another's attempt

at success. Explain it to the players only when prompted by one player's stated desire to mess with another.

If you're using only a few of the special case rules, or none at all, in the course of a session, you're probably doing it right.

## WHAT LIES AHEAD

Here's what you'll find in the rest of this book:

- **Core Rules:** The basic rules you need to run any *Skulduggery* game.
- **Customized *Skulduggery*:** Guidance for GMs creating their own setting packs and scenarios, including notes on adjusting the core rules to fit your desired genre.

The remainder of the book consists of the following ready-to-run play packs:

- **Yes Wing:** politics and bureaucracy
- **Skulduggery & Crossbones:** pirates
- **Casting Call:** high school musical
- **If Space Permits:** interstellar traders

### Optional Settings: Brute Force and Physical Action

Some rules are suitable only for settings where characters might realistically resort to violence. We call this subset of the rules the brute force option. Any paragraph or section marked with the





is a brute force optional rule, for use only in appropriate genres. Violence in *Skulduggery* is nasty and decisive. Even characters in brute force settings will typically prefer to talk first and get physical only as a last resort.

Certain settings will avoid physical action altogether. In others, action sequences might require characters to run, jump, climb, drive skillfully, and confront a range of harm-threatening obstacles. These are almost invariably also settings where brute force comes into play. However, just in case you think of one where light action fits and violence doesn't, we've marked these with the



so you can separate them when customizing the rules for settings of your creation.

The scenarios in this book are either entirely action-free (Yes Wing, Casting Call) or  (Skulduggery and Crossbones, If Space Permits.) We've made note of the in-between  choice in case you want to use it for your own scenarios, and for our possible future use.



# BASIC RULES

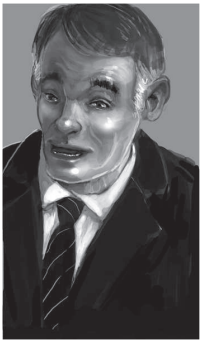
This chapter lays out the basic rules GMs use to run any game of *Skulduggery*. Although players are certainly welcome to read them, they're simple enough for you to teach your players in the course of a one-shot session.

## ASSIGNING CHARACTERS

Typically, *Skulduggery* characters get used for only three to four hours, so it's important to assign them quickly. At the start of play, characters are created from modular units called **component cards**. Premade play packs come with component cards. When you create a play pack for your own customized setting, you'll create component cards as part of that process. Play packs for sequel sessions featuring preexisting characters don't require component cards.

Component cards divide into sets. Each set provides an element of the character. The sets of cards are as follows:

1. **Identity:** Provides the character's name (with gender variants), along with details of the character's rank, occupation, and/or status. Also included here are his or her general abilities (p. 26) and one or more of his or her objectives.



### Winston / Winona Fingerhut

Secretary Of the Interior

As Interior Secretary, you oversee the federal department responsible for federal lands and programs relating to the country's aboriginal peoples. Notable units of your portfolio include the National Park Service, Fish and Wildlife Service, Geological Survey, and Bureau of Indian Affairs. Interior Secretaries are rarely considered part of the President's inner circle, and your experience in the Bierce administration has proven no different.

**Collective Goal:** Ensure the Senate confirmation of the President's nominee as Secretary Of State, Francis Cross.

**How You Fit In:** A subordinate, Chief Alex Rogers of the United States Park Police, turned a strange shade of pale when Cross' possible nomination was rumored in the press.

**Personal Goal:** Secure presidential pardon for political mentor Dalton Flask, now serving a five-year sentence for tax evasion.

**General Abilities:** Eavesdropping 6, Etiquette 4, Gossip 5, Knowledge 4 (Catholic Theology), Management 2, Mischief 2, Moxy 4, Perception 6, Performance (Media Appearance) 2, Wealth 2.

The Yes Wing

Note that not all of the sample cards shown here are from the same play pack. Cards 1-3 and 6-7 suit a modern political game, where cards 4 and 5 fit a setting where use of brute force is appropriate.

2. **Persuade:** Provides the character's Persuade rating and style (p. 23) along with two taglines (p. 34.)



The Yes Wing

**Persuade** (Forthright) 7

**Trumps:** Penetrating

**Is Trumped By:** Lawyerly

"Mr. President, that's not in the constitution!"

"If we don't do this, we'll not only look stupid. We'll be stupid."

3. **Rebuff:** The character's rebuff Rating and style (p. 24) along with one tagline.



The Yes Wing

**Rebuff** 6 (Obtuse)

**Trumps:** Glib

**Is Trumped By:** Intimidating

"Golly, we haven't had time to read all those documents!"