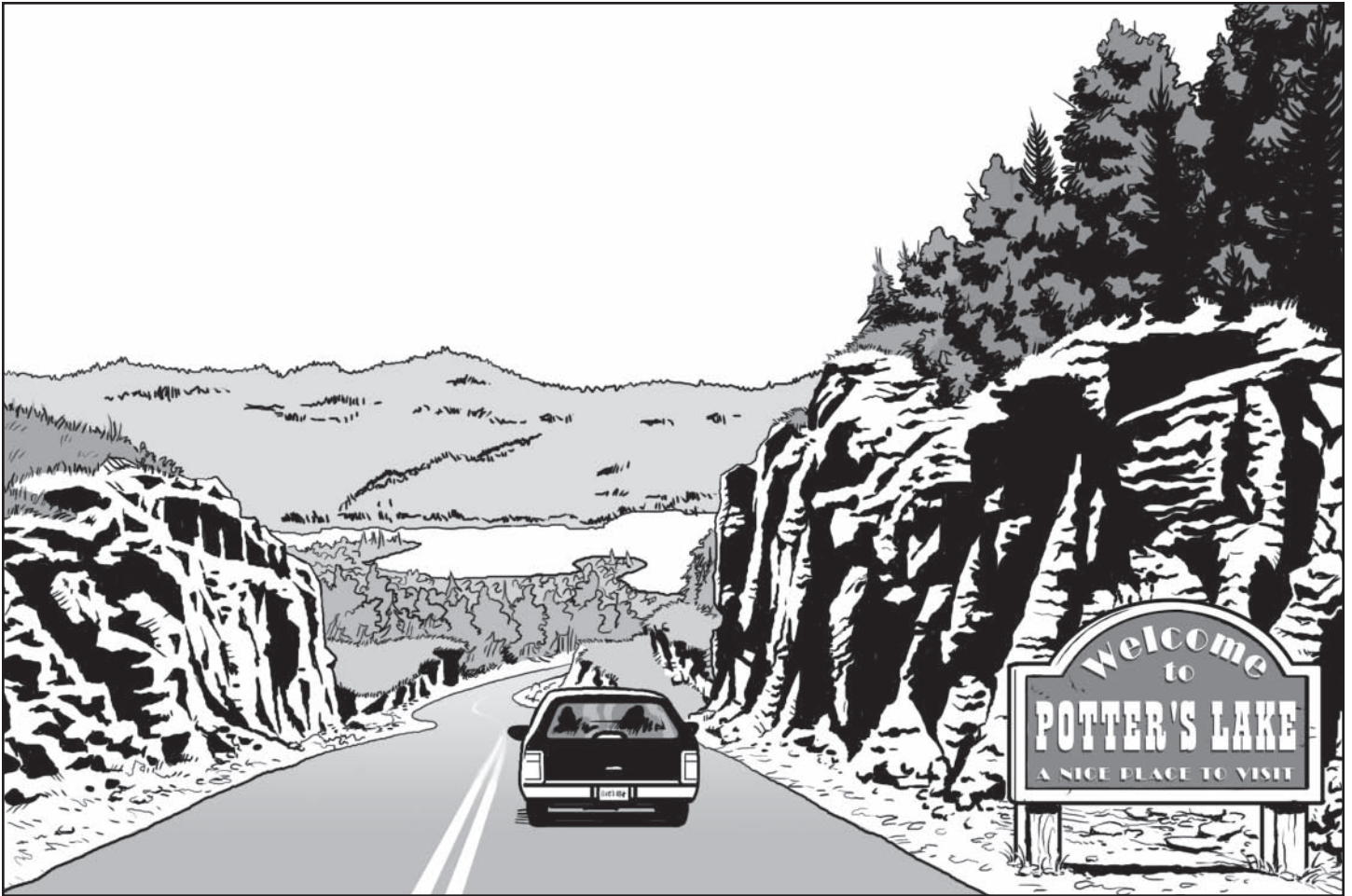# Heaven & Earth Primer

Welcome to the world of *Heaven & Earth*, a role-playing game of surrealism, horror, and absurdity. In the small community of Potter's Lake, strange things are afoot. Players assume the roles of ordinary people caught in an epic greater than they can possibly imagine. They will be swept into the extraordinary events that plague this town with frightening regularity. It is up to them to unlock the secrets of Potter's Lake and discover the truth of what is really going on before it's too late.

This primer is designed to serve as an introduction to *Heaven & Earth Third Edition*. It covers the basics of the setting and game mechanics. It is not designed to serve as "Quick Start Rules," but to give a feel for the game. Over the next few pages, readers will be introduced to the fundamentals of the *Heaven & Earth*. Scattered throughout this document are sidebars covering specific locations, rumors, NPCs, etc. found in the *Heaven & Earth Third Edition* rulebook and its setting supplement, *Paradise Lost*.

A COMPLETE GAME

Heaven & Earth Third Edition is a game of secrets and discovery with an overarching plot. However, there is no doling out of information, piece by piece, over multiple sourcebooks. Everything a Gamemaster needs to know about what is really going on, and where things are headed, is outlined in the *Heaven & Earth* rulebook. Supplements provide finer detail to the setting, but they are not at all necessary to play the game.

POTTER'S LAKE

On the surface, the small, midwestern town of Potter's Lake seems like paradise. People are generally friendly to one another, the summers are lazy, the lawns are well-manicured, and white picket fences line many of the streets. But still waters invariably run deep. If one peels away the pleasant mask and gazes beneath, a different picture takes form.

Practically every house that has been standing for more than twenty years has reported a haunting of one variety or the other, and some of the townsfolk tend to be a little bit quirky. Local legends, wives' tales, and sightings of the supernatural abound. In short, Potter's Lake is a very strange and unusual place.

The bizarre happenings in this Kansas community are only symptoms of a greater malady, a cancer that will consume its host then spread across the world. Something is brewing beneath this town's pleasant veneer, and if it is left unchecked, humanity itself stands at risk.

Potter's Lake is the official setting for *Heaven & Earth*. It is, small town U.S.A. in a nutshell but with more than its share of quirks and mysteries. Potter's Lake has a population between 15,000 and 20,000, making it larger than the average run-of-the-mill Mayberry RFD, yet it retains the feel of a small community.

Potter's Lake is the home of St. Anselm College, a small Catholic institution located in the town proper, making it an archetypal college community. Potter's Lake also has a small but prosperous industry in the form of Southey's Paper Mill (which sits on the lake and is across the street from St. Anselm). The paper mill is the major employer in town, contracting a fair portion of the local populace. The college is the second major employer, while the remaining residents work in various service industry jobs designed to capitalize on the influx of college students.

Powell Base rests just outside Potter's Lake and serves as a training facility for the Air Force. This provides additional income for local merchants, particularly those with a liquor license.

Potter's Lake is named for the large lake beside which it rests. Both the paper mill and the college butt up against this body of water that lies on the western edge of town. Encompassing the lake and the northern and southern edges of town is a thick vernal wood. Finally, to the east is the rolling plain where Powell Air Force Base lies.

Potter's Lake is an odd little town and all the locals know it. They do not understand it in an intellectual or cognitive sense, however. If people thought about it and said, " You know, this place is odd and wrong," they would probably leave…but they stay. People in Potter's Lake know that their town is different; they just do not think of it as a nexus for the bizarre and supernatural. Many of the town's idiosyncrasies are justified away as small town charm.

Any sane person, including the player characters, would look at this place and instinctively know that something is wrong.

However, there is an unexplainable appeal to Potter's Lake, almost an unearthly pull that draws people to it. Perhaps it's the quaintness or the sheer absurdity of everything. Perhaps it is something more.

THEME

The overarching theme of *Heaven & Earth* is human destiny, specifically the battle between free will and predetermined fate. Characters will discover that there is more to Potter's Lake than most people suspect and more to the universe than anyone realizes. A dark fate awaits an unsuspecting humanity, but the player characters have the power to change it – if they can unravel the secrets of Potter's Lake in time.

MOOD

The pervading mood of *Heaven & Earth* can be summed up with three words: horror, surrealism, and absurdity.

Horror scares through suspense and mounting tension. Things should be disturbing and creepy, producing feelings of fear and dread. A person's own imagination is the best facilitator of this. It will paint a picture far more horrific than any words or images can describe. In other words, what is unknown and unseen if far more frightening than anything else.

Surrealism is a storytelling technique designed to simulate the bizarre, nonsensical nature of dreams. Dreams have a logic all their own and can take the sleeper on strange and sometimes disjointed rides into the world of the odd. Dreams are difficult to explain the next day, yet make perfect sense while happening. Surrealism is the application of these dream-like qualities to waking events.

MARTHA MOYNIHAN: THE CAT LADY

Martha Moynihan is known as the Cat Lady throughout town for her daily habit of placing missing cat posters on every available bulletin board and street post. A kind, elderly lady with no children, she is rumored to speak to cats, and some folk claim they spy for her. Cats seem drawn to her in public, and she always has a treat to give them before she picks them up and walks away. Her grocery cart is always filled with cat food tins, and felines are her favorite topic of conversation.

Cat toys, catnip bags, scratching posts, and litter boxes lie scattered across the Cat Lady's house, while thousands of missing cat posters, some dating back decades, plaster her walls. Oddly, no cats are ever seen inside her house, despite the signs of cat habitation.

The Cat Lady knows many secrets and odd tidbits of information about Potter's Lake and its residents, all told to her by the cats she has befriended (or so she claims). Once a conversation slides away from felines, Martha becomes brutally blunt and will use slang and pejorative terms unbecoming of an old lady. She apologizes for her "potty mouth" afterwards before branching once again into her love of cats.

EZEKIEL CAGE AND THE WOODS

The presence of St. Anselm College has always raised eyebrows. Since its unlikely founding in 1831, rumors have circulated about the now venerable institution, particularly its supposed interest in the woods surrounding Potter's Lake. While these stories have waxed and waned over the decades, they became omnipresent with the arrival of Ezekiel Cage. As the gossip goes, Father Cage is a trained exorcist secretly acting on behalf of the Vatican. His mandate: to investigate and eliminate the demonic presence in Potter's Woods. That Ezekiel Cage is wheelchair-bound and seventy-five years of age, does nothing to slow down these rumors. In fact, conspiracy theorists use this as proof that he must have accomplices among the staff and/or clergy of St. Anselm.

When things are so bizarre, so off-kilter that they become almost comical, that is absurdity. While something that is absurd is meant to be funny, it isn't slapstick funny. Rather, it's strange and quirky. The audience laughs because something is so out of place it strikes them as funny, though it's a disturbing, uncomfortable laughter. In *Heaven & Earth*, absurdity helps emphasize mood, contributing to an existing level of weirdness in the gameworld, thereby making things all the more disturbing. The comical moments created through absurdity can also provide some lightheartedness to an otherwise dark story. Used properly, absurdity grants respite from horror and enhances it at the same time.

ECCENTRIC CITIZENS

The heart and soul of any small town are the people who call it home. They drive events and define a town's personality through their hopes, dreams, and fears. With that in mind, it's easy to see why outsiders consider Potter's Lake strange. One has to look no further than the oddball collection of colorful characters who live in this town to know that something is just not right.

To call some of the residents of Potter's Lake different is an understatement. For many, eccentric does not begin to describe them. Others have dark secrets that they keep hidden from society. While such characters are in the minority, there are enough of them to cause people to sit up and take notice, but only after spending some time in Potter's Lake.

Some of the town's colorful eccentrics include:

- A retired exorcist
- A Native American who claims Christ visited him while cleaning his gutters
- A police deputy with Multiple Personality Disorder
- A homeless street prophet
- A bartender who knows every mixed drink ever conceived
- An elderly caregiver haunted by those who have died in her care

STRANGE PLACES

In Potter's Lake, nearly every place has a tale to tell. Some are horrific; others are merely bizarre. While many of the places in Potter's Lake have nothing odd about them, the number that do is sizeable. Some of the town's odder locations include:

- A seemingly cursed grocery store
- A statue that portents tragedy by stigmatic bleeding
- A motel that was host to a horrific one-night killing spree
- A top secret military base, horribly understaffed and intense regarding security
- A dark woods that emanates evil
- A multitude of haunted houses

THE SUPERNATURAL

Heaven & Earth is a game of discovery. Around every corner lurks a secret awaiting exposure or a mystery longing to be solved. The game's official setting, Potter's Lake, is the ultimate playground for this. The town has its fair share of quirky individuals, many with secrets of their own, and Potter's Lake has an inordinate amount of strange traditions, local legends, and ghost stories. Even the founding of the town is peculiar. Potter's Lake is an unusual community, one that serves as a magnet for the bizarre. There are weird happenings here, and weirder still, the locals either don't notice or they take it all in stride

In *Heaven & Earth*, clandestine organizations skulk in the shadows. Each has its own agenda, and each ties into the overarching plot of the game. There are also ghosts and spirits, psychics and magicians lurking in the background. They too have a role to play in the drama that is slowly unfolding in Potter's Lake.

PLAYER CHARACTERS

In *Heaven & Earth*, characters have six attributes: Coordination, Strength, Knowledge, Aura, Fortitude, and Awareness. Attributes are ranked from 1 to 5 and are used in all Action Checks. During Action Checks, Attributes are modified in a positive manner by any skill that is appropriate to the attempted action.

For example: A research skill would modify the Knowledge Attribute when hunting the Internet for a particular piece of information.

Player characters are largely defined by their occupations. At character creation, each player chooses a current occupation for his or her character. This occupation determines the character's basic skill set. In other words, players do not choose the primary skills for their characters; their occupations determine which skills they possess.

For example: It would be reasonable for a lawyer to possess an oratory skill while such a skill would not be within the skill set of

NEW CITY HALL

Built in 1975 to commemorate the sesquicentennial of the founding of Potter's Lake, New City Hall is quite possibly the ugliest building in town — which is saying quite a lot, considering some of the esthetically inept structures built since 1825. Nevertheless, the title is well deserved. New City Hall is a large building, constructed in a strange combination of art deco and neo-gothic styles, with elegant, geometric patterns supplemented by flying buttresses and gargoyles. Many critics dubbed it a "monstrosity" at its completion, but over time many residents have come to like it, despite — or perhaps because of — its unattractiveness. There's no question that New City Hall is unique. It looks like no other building anywhere in the world and the town takes some small amount of pride in the fact.

New City Hall was built as a replacement for what is now known as Old City Hall, built in 1866. Old City Hall was deemed too "old fashioned" for "modern" Potter's Lake, and a committee was struck to fashion a new one. The council accepted proposals from architects from all over the United States and Canada. The design that was chosen was put forward by an otherwise unknown woman named Meryl Swindon of New Mexico. Swindon's design took the committee aback at first, but they soon came to see it as the only one that, in their words, "captured the true spirit of Potter's Lake." By a unanimous vote, they offered Swindon the commission to produce the plans for New City Hall. When completed, Old City Hall was turned into a civic center where public hearings, meetings, and other events are held.

The construction of New City Hall ran into many problems, not least of which being the suicide of Swindon herself. Only three months after ground was broken, she slit her wrists and bled to death in the Carleton Hotel room where she was staying. Because her blueprints were so unusual, there was much debate over how to interpret some of the specifics of the design. Indeed, debate still rages to this day as to whether the final building was what Swindon originally had in mind, with neither camp having sufficient basis for their position. Later, as New City Hall neared completion, building supplies and even workmen went missing for hours or days before suddenly reappearing without any explanation or, in the case of people, awareness they'd been gone.

These phenomena continue to the present day. The interior of New City Hall, especially its council chambers and library, are not symmetrical and use lines that make some people dizzy or confused. From time to time, people get lost within its corridors for hours without even realizing it, wandering through what appears to them to be a maze of identical doors and corridors. Mayor Phillip Jackson so intensely disliked being in New City Hall that he conducted most of his business outside its walls when he was able. Others, like the current mayor Belinda Wainwright, deny there's anything wrong with the building and question the sanity of those who say otherwise. The truth, whatever it is, remains obscure.
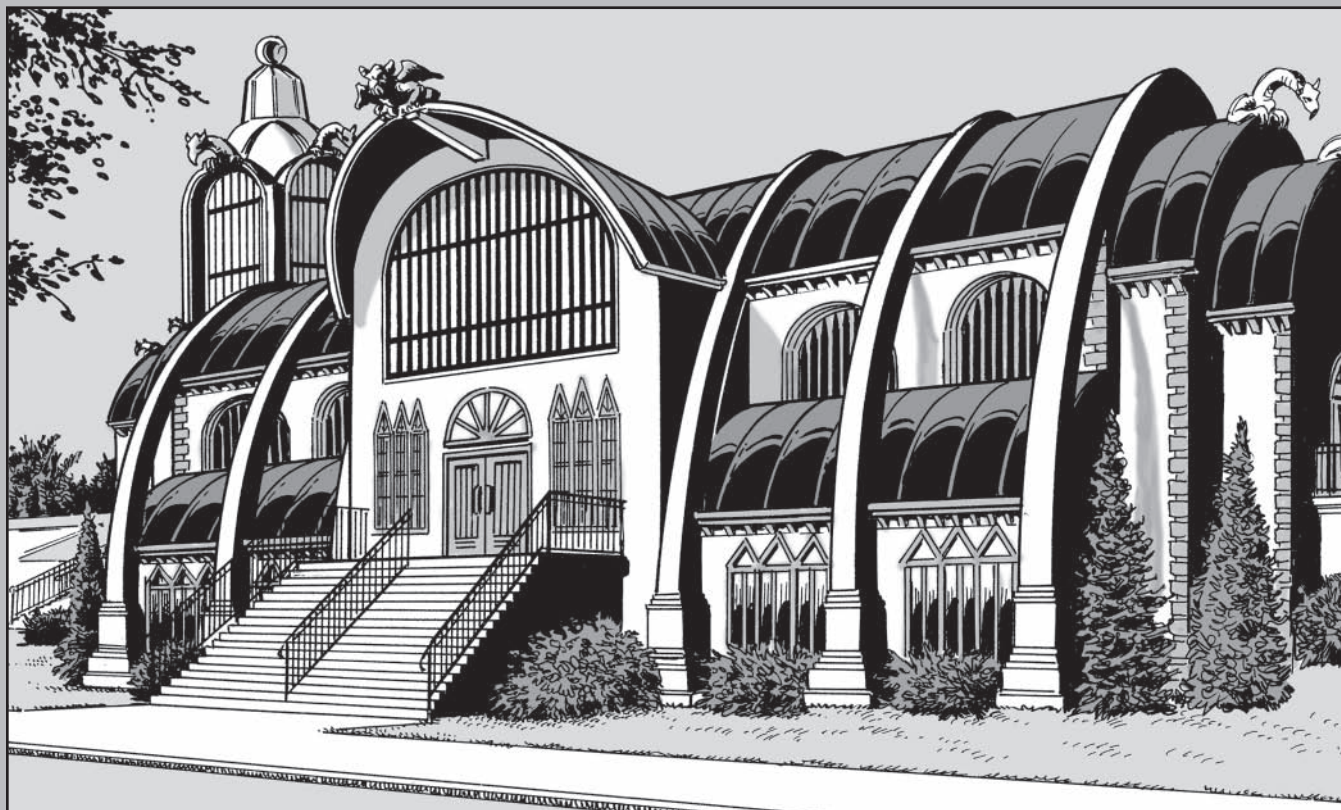
a paramedic.

For example: A counseling skill would fall under the purview of a priest or psychologist but not a firefighter or mechanic.

Occupations cost varying amounts to purchase. The more contacts, resources, and skills granted by an occupation, the more expensive that occupation is to purchase.

For example: A law enforcement officer has a broader and more useful base of skills and resources than a handyman or mechanic. Therefore, it is more expensive to purchase during character generation.

Occupations come in three levels: Rookie, Professional, and Veteran. Each rank grants a bonus on the Action Check being attempted. Rookie level grants a +1 to appropriate Action Checks, Professional level grants a +2, and Veteran level grants a +3.

Of course, characters are not limited to occupational skills only. Extracurricular skills can be purchased as well as past occupations.

By choosing an occupation, a player instantly defines his character's basic skills, income, resources, and contacts.

As much as occupations define characters in *Heaven & Earth*, so do goals. Every player chooses one or more goals for his/her character at character creation. However, these goals can change during gameplay as the character evolves. More so, new goals will emerge over time and old ones will be forgotten. As player and character interests change, so do the PC's goals.

In the abstract, goals define the character, outlining his hopes and dreams. They give him/her something to strive for. In more concrete terms, pursuing and achieving character goals grants Destiny Points. Destiny Points are used to change failed dice rolls and increase character abilities.

GAME MECHANICS

The Action Check is the basic mechanic at the heart of *Heaven & Earth*. The Action Check involves six simple steps:

1. **The player declares what his character is attempting to do, and the governing Attribute is determined.**
2. **The Gamemaster determines the Difficulty of the action.**
3. **The player rolls a die corresponding to the Difficulty set by the Gamemaster in Step 2.**
4. **The result of the roll, the Rank of the governing Attribute, and the Occupational Modifier (if appropriate) are added together. This total is the Action Number.**
5. **If the Action Number meets or exceeds the Target Number (9), the attempt is a success. If not, the action has failed.**
6. **In the case of failure, the player may spend**

MULBERRY STREET

It is hard to say whether or not Mulberry Street actually exists. It appears on every map of Potter's Lake, between Hyacinth and Cherry streets, but there is no actual road located there; at least, not most of the time.

Periodically, someone reports seeing Mulberry Street. On their way to Hyacinth or Cherry, they discover they have accidentally turned onto Mulberry Street instead. Once they turn off the road, however, Mulberry is gone again. There are also a few anecdotes of people going down this street and disappearing along with it.

No one in town can quite recall when Mulberry ceased to exist, but there are a few long-time residents who seem to remember a time when they could get there. Now the road has become something of a standing joke. People who are incessantly late are teased about having "taken Mulberry Street," while lost packages are said to have been accidentally delivered to Mulberry. The whole matter is typically laughed off. Anyone claiming to have seen the mysterious road has a captive audience, but few people actually believe the storyteller. The official stance is that Mulberry was simply a mapping error for a street long built over.

Destiny Points to alter the result of the action.

Although the Action Check process has been outlined in six steps, it takes only seconds to get from Step One to Step Six. After using this system a few times, it will become second nature.

Here is an in-depth breakdown of each step:

STEP ONE: DECLARATION

The first thing a player and GM need to determine is which of the six Attributes logically governs the attempted action.

For example: If a player decides to have his character repair a broken computer, Knowledge would be the governing Attribute.

For example: If a player decides to have his character seduce an NPC, Aura would be the governing Attribute.

For example: If a player decides to have his character follow a set of tracks in the woods, Awareness would be the governing Attribute.

STEP TWO: DIFFICULTY

After a player declares his action and the governing Attribute is determined, the Gamemaster must set the Difficulty Level of the action. There are six degrees of Difficulty to choose from:

• **Easy**

- **Average**
- **Challenging**
- **Hard**
- **Very Hard**
- **Nearly Impossible**

Obviously, these descriptions are vague and can be open to interpretation. Therefore, the Gamemaster must be impartial when setting the Difficulty. Throughout the *Heaven & Earth* rulebook, GMs are provided examples and guidelines to aid in determining appropriate Difficulty Levels. **A general rule of thumb is to assume that most actions under normal conditions have an Average Difficulty.** Specific conditions may then shift the Difficulty up or down the scale, making an action easier or harder to accomplish.

For example: A character is using his Tracking Skill to follow some animal tracks through the woods. Normally, the Difficulty would be Average, but since it's raining heavily at the moment, the Gamemaster declares the Difficulty to be Hard instead (two degrees higher).

STEP THREE: ROLLING THE DIE

With the action declared and Difficulty set, it's time for the die roll. The type of die used is determined by the Difficulty of the action.

- **When the Difficulty is Easy, roll a d20**
- **When the Difficulty is Average, roll a d12**
- **When the Difficulty is Challenging, roll a d10**
- **When the Difficulty is Hard, roll a d8**
- **When the Difficulty is Very Hard, roll a d6**
- **When the Difficulty is Nearly Impossible, roll a d4**

STEP FOUR: ACTION NUMBER

After rolling the appropriate die, the result is added to the Rank of the governing Attribute and the Occupational Modifier (if appropriate). This total is the Action Number.

The Occupational modifier is determined by the character's level of expertise at his occupation.

- **The Occupational Modifier for the Rookie level is 1**
- **The Occupational Modifier for the Professional level is 2**
- **The Occupational Modifier for the Veteran level is 3**

For example: A Rookie level deputy with an Awareness Rank of 3 rolls the appropriate die type, and the result is an 8. The Action Number for this Action Check is a 12 (8+3+1=12): the sum of the roll, the Awareness Rank, and the character's Occupational Modifier.

For example: A Professional level doctor with a Coordination Rank of 2 rolls the appropriate die type and the result is a 3. The Action Number for this Action Check is 7 (3+2+2=7): the sum of the roll, the Coordination Rank, and the character's Occupational Modifier.

For example: A Veteran politician with an Aura Rank of 2 rolls the appropriate die type and the result is a 7. The Action Number for this Action Check is 12 (7+2+3=12): the sum of the roll, the Aura Rank, and the character's Occupational Modifier.

Occupational Modifiers come into play when a character's occupation would logically grant him the skills needed to attempt the action. Whether or not the character's occupation grants the appropriate skills is determined by common sense and the Gamemaster's judgment.

For example: A character is attempting to track an animal through the woods. Since the character is a forest ranger, the GM decides that the character would possess the appropriate skill to do so.

For example: A character is attempting to track an animal through the woods. Since the character is a doctor, the GM decides that the character would not possess the appropriate skill to do so.

Sometimes, the attempted action requires no set of skills to perform. In these instances, the character's occupation still comes into play.

For example: The Gamemaster calls for an Awareness Check to see if any of the characters notice movement coming from a nearby bush. One of the characters is a businessman, one is a deputy, and one is private investigator. The GM decides that the deputy and private investigator can factor in their Occupational Modifiers because each is trained to be observant in their occupations. However, the GM decides that the businessman cannot factor his Occupational Modifier into the Action Number because his occupation does not require such astuteness.

If a character has an Extracurricular Skill appropriate to the attempted action, he may factor in his level of expertise with the package in lieu of an Occupational Modifier.

For example: The Gamemaster has determined that a businessman cannot factor his Occupational Modifier into his Awareness Check. However, the character possesses the Investigation Extracurricular Skill at Professional level. With this in mind, the GM declares that the businessman can add the +2 bonus (for having the Professional level of expertise) into the Action Number.

When a character does not have an appropriate occupation or Extracurricular Skill, the action can still be attempted. In these cases, the Action Number is determined by adding the result of the die roll to the Attribute Rank governing the action. No other modifiers are factored in.

For example: A journalist is attempting to perform first aid. Since his occupation would grant no benefit in this circumstance, and the character does not have the Medicine Extracurricular Skill, only the die result and his Knowledge Rank are added together to produce the

Action Number.

STEP FIVE: TARGET NUMBER

The Target Number for all Action Checks is 9. The Action Number must meet or exceed 9 for the action to be a success. An Action Number below 9 means the Action Check has failed.

STEP SIX: SPENDING DESTINY

If an Action Check fails, the character may still have a chance at success. Spending Destiny does this. A player may spend Destiny Points to roll the die again or guarantee success. Of course, all this is contingent on the character having Destiny Points to work with. Destiny Points can be hard to come by and are also used to improve abilities. Therefore, players will need to weigh their options carefully when deciding if an action is worth spending a point or two on.

- **To turn a failed action into a success, the character must spend two Destiny Points.**
- **A character can spend one Destiny Point to reroll the die in the hope of obtaining a higher result.**

Since Destiny points are so valuable, spending two of them can leave a character short-handed in the future, as well as delay raising or purchasing important abilities. However, spending two points assures success. Spending one point to re-roll the die conserves Destiny, but the character runs the risk of that roll failing as well, wasting the point altogether.

Another advantage of spending two Destiny points is being able to succeed at an Action Check that is normally impossible. If a Professional level lawyer with an Attribute Rank of 2 attempts an action with a Difficulty of Nearly Impossible (d4), he would need to roll a 5 on a four-sided die to hit the Target Number of 9. Obviously, this is impossible…unless he spends 2 Destiny points. By doing so, the action is automatically successful and the impossible happens for the character.

Destiny points are a game mechanic designed to represent a character's higher purpose. In *Heaven & Earth,* the player characters are slated for great things. This means that sometimes they succeed when they should have failed. Since the universe has plans for the characters, it cuts them a break from time to time. In game terms, Destiny points represent this.

PUTTING IT ALL TOGETHER

With all six steps outlined in detail, it's time to put it all together. The following is an example of the six steps in action.

A Rookie-level mechanic is trying to sneak past a security guard. The Gamemaster declares that Coordination will be the governing Attribute for this action. The Gamemaster decides that the guard's close proximity to the door would normally call for a Difficulty

of Hard, but since the guard is beginning to doze off, the GM decides to lower the Difficulty to Challenging. Since the Difficulty is Challenging, a d10 is rolled. The result of the roll is a 3. Since the character's occupation has nothing to do with this action, he has no Occupational Modifier to factor into the Action Number. However, he does possess the Stealth Extracurricular Skill at Professional level. This means the Action Number will be the sum of his Coordination Rank (3), his Extracurricular Modifier (2) and the result of the die roll (3). The mechanic's Action Number is 7 (3+2+3=8). Since the Action Number does not meet or exceed the Target Number of 9, the action is a failure. After momentarily reflecting on this, the player decides that his character cannot afford to be seen and opts to spend Destiny. With an Attribute Rank of 3, an appropriate Professional level, and a Difficulty of Challenging, the player decides his chances of succeeding on a re-roll are fairly good, so he opts to spend only one Destiny. The new die result is a 7. By adding the character's Attribute Rank of 3 and his Extracurricular Modifier of 2 to the die roll, an Action Number of 12 (3+2+7=12) is produced. Since this Action Number exceeds the Target Number of 9, the Action Check is a success, and the character tiptoes past the guard unnoticed.

The preceding text summarizes the basic mechanics of *Heaven & Earth Third Edition*. The actual rulebook fills in the details including Opposed Checks, specific combat mechanics (such as Initiative, Called Shots, Damage, Stunning, and Point-blanking), healing, first aid, and more.