ACTION CITY!

A roleplaying game riddled with bullets and cheese

Submitted for Game Chef 2010 by Mike Olson (and subsequently revised once)

Welcome to Action City! Population: BOOM!

Action City! is a roleplaying game of Hollywood action movies at their most clichéd: quip-spewing heroes, ruthless villains, and gratuitous explosions. Adversity is overcome, lives are saved, and – not to belabor the point – things are exploded. Suitable points of reference include the *Die Hard*, *Lethal Weapon*, and *Bad Boys* franchises, Hong Kong actioners like *Hard Boiled* and *Supercop*, sci-fi fare like *Robocop* and *They Live*, and even corner-case stuff like *Beverly Hills Cop* and *Escape from New York*. Yes, these are pretty much all '80s movies. No, that's not a coincidence.

What You Need to Play

- Several six-sided dice – around a dozen should do it
- A standard deck of playing cards
- Index cards
- Paper and pencils
- At least two friends and no more than four or five
- A fine appreciation for explosions

PLAYERS AND ROLES

Before play begins, each player rolls two dice, or 2D.

The high roller is the **Hero**, or the protagonist of the story. If two players tie for the high roll, they're both Heroes – it's a buddy movie. (If three or more players tie for the high roll, have them all roll again. Two Heroes is a buddy movie; three is a mess.)

The low roller is the **Opposition**. Whenever the Hero encounters difficulty, this player represents, as the name would imply, the opposition. This could be enemy henchmen, a vicious watchdog, the local PD, and the like, or even something non-violent, such as an intractable bureaucrat or former spouse. Probably the Opposition's most important function, though, is playing the **Badguy**, the main antagonist of the story. See **Playing the Opposition** for more on how this role works in play.

Everyone else is a **Friend** of the Hero. If the Friend's roll is even, he or she has a pre-existing relationship with the Hero. If the Friend's roll is odd, he or she will meet the Hero for the first time sometime during the First Act of the story. If the Friend's roll is *doubles*, that Friend will *betray* the Hero at some point during the story. Exactly when is up to the Opposition; more on that later. At least one Friend should be – but doesn't *have* to be – the Hero's love interest.

A player's role essentially affects how much "screen time" he gets, specifically with regard to his Arc, and determines his function in the story.

STRUCTURE OF PLAY

Play is divided into three major sections, or **Acts**. Each Act is composed or two or more **Scenes**.

Scenes come in two basic varieties: **Personal** and **Setpieces**.

Personal scenes are nonviolent and usually involve a lot of talking, as might be expected. Planning the heist, having a tense phone conversation with the terrorist, arguing with your ex or a police lieutenant – these are all Personal scenes. The point of Personal scenes is to deal with the characters' Sub-Plots and Hang-Ups. Heroes and Friends can declare one Personal scene each per act, as long as their Sub-Plot Arc still has at least one unchecked box (see **Sub-Plots and Arcs**, below). The Opposition can declare one Personal scene per Act, too; see **Playing the Opposition** for how that whole thing works.

Setpieces are where the action is. Unlike Personal scenes, they are extremely violent. Blood, bullets, and explosions are commonplace. Setpieces usually involve all of the Heroes and Friends in a thrilling location, and possibly (but not necessarily) a personal appearance by the Badguy. Heroes and Friends frame Personal scenes, but when it comes to Setpieces, the Opposition gets to set the stage.

In the First and Second Acts, the Setpiece always occurs after all Personal scenes have been resolved; the Third Act, however, has one last Personal scene – the **Denouement** – *after* the Setpiece. This is to give the players one last shot at resolving their Sub-Plots, or, if they've already done that, to tie up any loose ends. Even action movies don't usually end on a freeze-frame of an explosion.

Lethality and tension ramp up with each successive Act. In the First Act, no one can die. In the Second Act, the Opposition can declare that a traitorous Friend turns on the Hero. In the Third Act, Friends can die, and any traitorous Friends who haven't already turned on the Hero *must* do so. Not surprisingly, the Hero can *never* die, and the Badguy can't die until the Third Act Setpiece.

For more on how all this is used in play, see **Scenes and Acts**.

Methods, Edges, and Hang-Ups

Heroes and Friends are loosely defined by their Methods, Edges, and Hang-Ups.

There are four types of **Methods**, each of which broadly represents a style of problem-solving:

- **Action:** Running, jumping, gun-shooting, face-punching, etc.
- **Brain:** Planning, research, general knowledge, riddles, etc.
- **Mouth:** Persuasion, lying, fast-talking, taunting, etc.
- **Guts:** Courage, willpower, intimidation, death-defiance, etc.

Your Methods are rated in dice: one at 4D, one at 3D, and two at 2D. See **Doing Things**, below, for more on how Methods are used in play. (Short version: They determine the starting size of your dice pool.)

Edges are advantageous personal traits, bits of backstory, or even important equipment. Characters begin with one Edge, but can gain more during play. Edges are player-defined, although your first Edge should be a brief, shallow summary of your character's most prominent positive feature. Examples include Die Hard, I Know Kung Fu, Crazy Like a Fox, Ex-Special Forces, Ex-Secret Service, Ex-CIA, World-Class Assassin, Professional Jewel Thief, Fearless, and Hacker. See **Doing Things** for more on how Edges are used in play. (Short version: They add to your dice pool.)

Hang-Ups are kinda the opposite of Edges – they're the things about your character's personality or past that are problematic. They're obstacles in the character's life that crop up now and then to interfere with his life. Like Edges, these are player-defined. Heroes and Friends start with one Hang-Up each.

Examples include Getting Too Old for This, Past Failures, The Bottle, Lone Wolf, and Criminal Past. See **Scenes and Acts** for more on using Hang-Ups in play.

Sub-Plots and Arcs

Heroes and Friends have **Sub-Plots** – ongoing and unresolved background elements that have to be dealt with despite the pressures of the main conflict of the story. Think of it as a metaphorical journey that takes the character from a point of uncertainty, mystery, or doubt to a point of resolution, revelation, or confidence. Where the primary conflict of the story is an external struggle, the sub-plot is usually an internal one.

That may sound like some pretty high-minded stuff, but if you've seen an action movie, you've seen Sub-Plots in action. A classic example is John McClane in *Die Hard*. The main conflict involves foiling the fiendishly clever Hans Gruber and his team of international terrorists-thieves, but McClane's Sub-Plot is all about unresolved feelings for his estranged wife. Her presence among the hostages in the Nakatomi Building adds depth and urgency to his actions. Even after Gruber falls dozens of stories to his death and the thieves are defeated, the movie isn't truly over until this sub-plot is resolved – in this case, when McClane and Holly reunite, presumably to put their marriage back together.

Similarly, McClane's Friend Al, a sergeant with the local PD, has his own sub-plot about proving himself as a police officer. Al's a bit past his prime and spends most of his nights on patrol eating Twinkies and generally killing time. Years ago he accidentally shot a kid in the line of duty, and now he's retreated away from "the action" as much as possible. However, when the shit hits the fan, he's the first one to understand just what kind of trouble McClane's gotten himself into, and the only one who seems to get it even after the LAPD and FBI show up in force. But most of the movie he's powerless to help – until the very end, when he gets over his past mistake and resolves his sub-plot by gunning down Karl, Gruber's hired Teutonic muscle.

When making a Hero or Friend, the player devises his own sub-plot. It's the player to your *left*, though, who decides how that Arc is eventually going to *resolve*. In John McClane's case, his Sub-Plot is probably "Disintegrating Marriage." In Al's case, it's something like "Mistakes of the Past." For McClane, the resolution is "Win Back My Wife," and for Al it's "Accept My Past and Move On" – but those resolutions could easily have been "Holly Has Her Own Life Now" and "I'm Through Being a Cop." Either one would've made for a very different story, but… that's the point.

Your Sub-Plot resolution is a target, not an inevitability. It's something to work toward, but nothing's saying you're guaranteed to achieve it. Progress in your Sub-Plot is measured by a series of check boxes called your **Arc**. The more boxes in your Arc, the more involved your Sub-Plot is; the more boxes you have checked, the closer you are to reaching your resolution. Heroes always have three boxes in their Arc, while Friends only have one Arc box. Once your Arc is completed, your Sub-Plot's Resolution becomes an Edge.

The Opposition doesn't have a Sub-Plot or an Arc; instead, the Opposition benefits mechanically from the unresolved Sub-Plots of Heroes and Friends. See **Playing the Opposition** for more on this.

Sub-Plots and Hang-Ups share some common ground – they're both things that are wrong or off in the character's life – but they're not the same thing. Sub-Plots generally involve the character's relationships

with others, or external influences, whereas Hang-Ups are more concerned with the internal, such as character flaws or self-doubts.

See **Scenes and Acts** for more on how Sub-Plots are used in play.

DOING THINGS

When the narrative reaches a stalemate, or one player takes direct action against another, you're going to need to roll some dice.

Choose two Methods relevant to the situation at hand (or narrate your actions according to the Methods you choose). Each chosen Method adds dice to your dice pool equal to its rating. Each applicable Edge adds one die to your pool.

For example:
Ex-CIA agent Jack Rugged has Action 3D, Brain 2D, Mouth 2D, and Guts 4D. Right now, he's fleeing an explosion – a perfectly reasonable thing to do – by jumping through a plate-glass window into the hotel's swimming pool 12 stories below. To do this, he'll use Action (for the jumping) and Guts (for the balls to jump through a plate-glass window, fall a dozen stories, and hope he lands in the deep end of the pool), which puts his dice pool at seven dice, or 7D. His Edge of Never Say Die is relevant to a situation in which saying die is a very real possibility, so he'll add another 1D, for a total of 8D.

Resolving the situation happens in three steps:

1. Set stakes.
Before you roll dice as a Hero or a Friend, declare what your goal is. This can be anything from "I convince him to let me in" to "I'm not killed in the ensuing blast." Then the Opposition (or a traitorous Friend, if applicable) declares what the outcome will be if you don't succeed. Remember, Heroes can't die, and Friends can't die until the Third Act, so the failure condition can't always just be "You die." However, "You're knocked out and captured" or "She slams the door in your face" or "He shouts 'That's it, Rick! You're suspended! Badge and gun, now!'" are perfectly acceptable alternatives.

2. Choose difficulty.
Once the success and failure conditions have been determined, decide how easy it is for you to succeed. There are three degrees of difficulty, and each determines how many dice the Opposition rolls to oppose you.

- **Cakewalk:** The Opposition rolls two fewer dice than you do.
- **Close One:** The Opposition rolls the same number of dice you do.
- **Skin of Your Teeth:** The Opposition rolls two more dice than you do.

Simply choosing to make it a Cakewalk gives the Opposition a bonus die for later use (see **Playing the Opposition** for more on bonus dice). Succeeding or failing on a Close One carries no additional effects. Succeeding by the Skin of Your Teeth gives you another Edge relevant to the situation that generated it.

3. Roll dice.
Finally, roll your pool and look for *matching sets*, like two 1s or four 5s. Whoever has more dice in their largest set wins the roll. Smaller sets are still important, though; we'll get to that in a minute. In the case of ties, whoever rolled the fewest dice wins; if that's a tie too, whoever had the higher number in their set wins.

Note that losing the roll doesn't necessarily mean *failure*. It just means success at a price.

For example:
Jack's player decides that this will be a Close One. His eight dice come up 1, 2, 2, 3, 4, 4, 4, and 6. He'll use the three fours for a result of 3. Here are three possible outcomes of Jack's death-defying escape attempt:

- *The Opposition rolls 8D as well, getting 1, 1, 2, 3, 3, 4, 5, and 6, for a result of 2 (the two 3s, or the two 1s). Jack crashes through the window just in time, orange flames lighting up the night sky behind him, and splashes down far below in the pool.*
- *The Opposition instead gets 1, 1, 2, 3, 3, 3, 5, and 6 – a result of 3, tying Jack's result. Each side rolled the same number of dice, but Jack's set consists of 4s while the Opposition only has 3s, so Jack wins.*
- *The Opposition gets 1, 1, 1, 1, 2, 3, 5, and 6, for a result of 4. That's enough to beat Jack. He still leaps out the window and down into the pool, but he's hurting.*

Consequences of Failure in Setpieces
Failing a roll in a Setpiece means suffering some form of physical or mental trauma. A character's general well-being is called his **Condition**. Characters have three possible **Conditions**: **Pissed Off**, **Banged Up**, and **Beaten Down**. Every time you fail a roll in a Setpiece, check one of those three boxes, starting with Pissed Off on the first failure and progressing to Beaten Down on the third.

The worse your condition, the harder things are for you in Setpieces. If you're Banged Up, your easiest possible Setpiece difficulty is Close One. If you're Beaten Down, you have to do everything by the Skin of Your Teeth.

A Hero who fails more than three rolls against the Opposition is still alive and kicking, but in perpetually bad shape.

A Friend who's already Beaten Down and fails a Setpiece roll can be *killed*, if that's the failure condition set by the Opposition. However, remember that this can *only* happen in the Third Act, so if a Friend fails more than three rolls against the Opposition before the Third Act Setpiece, he's not dead yet – but if he fails one more during that Third Act Setpiece rolls around, he's potentially a goner.

See **Playing the Opposition** for more on how the Badguy, Flunkies, and Goons work in play.

Personal scenes work differently than Setpieces. Success or failure in these scenes is usually tracked on a character's Arc, not his Condition track. See **Scenes and Acts** for more on how they work in play.

The Arsenal
Remember those smaller, unused sets that we said would be important later? Whenever you roll additional sets beyond the first, you may take one die from that set and put it aside in the **Arsenal**. Make sure to keep the number – if it came up a 2, then it's a 2 in the Arsenal. The Arsenal can't contain more dice than the number of Heroes and Friends at the table.

On subsequent rolls, you can take a die from the Arsenal and swap it with another die in your pool. For example, if you'd rolled 1, 2, 3, and 4, you could take the 2 from the Arsenal, add it to your pool, then put (say) the 4 you rolled back in the Arsenal.

Scenes and Acts

As previously discussed, play is divided into Scenes and Acts. Generally speaking, an Act begins with one or more Personal scenes and ends with an action-packed Setpiece. Setpieces are for dealing with the Badguy, in one form or another, but Personal scenes are all about your Sub-Plot (by advancing your Arc) or Hang-Up (by attempting to overcome it for a time).

Any Hero or Friend with at least one unchecked Arc box can declare a Personal scene once per act. Thus, the Hero can (and should) declare a Personal scene in every act (since Heroes have three boxes in their Arc), while Friends can only declare one Personal scene during the entire story (because their Arc consists of just one box).

However, that's not to say that a Hero or Friend with a full Arc can't appear in a Personal scene – they just can't *declare* them. Whoever declares it gets to set the scene: where it takes place, who's there, when it takes place (is it happening now or is it a flashback?), and its central issue. The last bit includes whether it focuses on the character's Sub-Plot or Hang-Up.

If the Personal scene is about the character's Sub-Plot, success lets you check the next box in your Arc. Failure means you don't – simple as that.

If the Personal scene is about the character's Hang-Up, success lets you use it as if it were an Edge in a Scene later in the same Act. You've bested your weakness, at least for the time being, and turned it into a strength. Failure means you lose access to one Edge for the rest of the Act. Your weakness has gotten the better of you, and now you're suffering for it.

After setting the scene, the process here is basically the same as in a Setpiece (set stakes, choose difficulty, and roll dice), with the exception of how successes and failures work, as outlined above.

For example:
Jack declares a Personal scene to deal with his Sub-Plot of "Family Trouble." He sets the scene: He comes home from work late at night, and his wife Carla (a Friend) reminds him about his daughter's ballet recital earlier that night – that he missed. In this case, he'll be rolling against the Friend, not the Opposition. Jack's player sets his success condition as "Jack apologizes and promises to get his act together." Carla's player sets his failure condition as "Carla says she wants him out of the house by the end of the week."

This is pretty major for Jack. If he fails the roll, not only will he not progress on his Arc, but he'll be well on his way to separating from his wife – and his Sub-Plot resolution is "Family Man"! But he wants a new Edge out of this, so he sets the difficulty at Skin of Your Teeth.

Jack uses his Mouth and Guts, but has no applicable Edge to bring to bear, so he rolls 6D (Mouth 2D and Guts 4D). Carla rolls two more dice than him, or 8D. Jack gets 2, 2, 4, 4, 4, and 5, and Carla gets 1, 1, 2, 2, 3, 4, 6, and 6 – still not enough to beat Jack, that old honeydripper! He earnestly promises to take little Sally Rugged to her softball game Saturday morning, gets to check a box in his Arc, and gives himself a new Edge: "Convincing Liar."

Why do you want to check all your Arc boxes? In the Third Act Setpiece, the Opposition gets a bonus die for every unchecked Arc box.

One last note about Acts: If an Act ends *without* an explosion, the Opposition gets a bonus die.

CLICHES

What's an action movie without a hearty helping of clichés?

After making characters, shuffle your deck of cards and lay the top five cards on the table. Each of these corresponds to a Cliché from the following tables – write each down on an index card and put them in the middle of the table. It's up to the players to try to incorporate these Clichés into the story. Using a Cliché is as simple as steering the narrative in the Cliché's direction. When a Cliché is used, flip it over so everyone knows it's been used. It's up to the player who incorporates the Cliché to interpret it, but most of them are pretty straightforward, especially if you have a solid grounding in cheesy action movies. Most of the Clichés listed lend themselves to Setpieces, but using them in Personal scenes is both allowed and encouraged.

Every Cliché that *hasn't* been incorporated by the Third Act Setpiece translates into an Edge (not bonus dice) for the Opposition.

For example:
At the start of the game, you draw five cards: the Six of Clubs, the Queen of Clubs, the Two of Diamonds, the Two of Hearts, and the Queen of Spades. Your group's Clichés for the story are:

- *Run Through Traffic*
- *Crashing Through a Window*
- *Vehicle of Opportunity*
- *Twisted Ankle*
- *Tied to a Chair*

Over the course of the game, the group manages to incorporate most of these Clichés. In the First Act, a Friend has to chase down a runaway dog through rush-hour traffic, only to lose it when she twists her ankle and takes a tumble. In the Second Act, the Hero leaps feet-first through the glass ceiling of a hotel atrium. In the Third Act, the Hero and a Friend are on the run from some thugs when the two spot a conveniently parked motorcycle idling nearby.

Unfortunately, no one ends up tied to a chair before the Third Act Setpiece, which means the Opposition gets a new Edge!

Clubs	
A	Walk Coolly Away From Explosion
2	"Let's get out of here!"
3	Ninjas.
4	Blue Wire or Red Wire?
5	Crawl Through the Ventilation Duct
6	Run Through Traffic
7	Showered by Shattered Glass
8	"Oh, I'm just getting warmed up!"
9	Wearing a Kevlar Vest All Along
10	One Bullet Left
J	High Heel Breaks
Q	Crashing Through a Window
K	Mexican Standoff

Diamonds	
A	Shoot the Gas Tank
2	Vehicle of Opportunity
3	Body Plummets Onto a Car
4	12-Car Pile-Up
5	Slide Across the Hood of a Car
6	Leadfoot Corpse
7	Five-Second Hotwire
8	Freeway Chase
9	Car Surfing
10	Fruit Carts and Panes of Glass
J	Jammed Seatbelt
Q	Crash Landing
K	One-Hand Helicopter Hang

Hearts	
A	Fish Tank Explosion
2	Tied to a Chair
3	Improvised Zipline
4	Man On Fire
5	Deadly Gas
6	"No one could survive *that*!"
7	Delivery Guy Disguise
8	Hero in Mook's Clothing
9	Radio Silence
10	Ransacked Room
J	Split the Party
Q	Bar Full of Criminals
K	"Impressive. Now it's *my* turn."

Spades	
A	Outrun the Explosion
2	Ceiling Cling
3	Computer Keystroke Beep-Boops
4	Hanging by the Ankles
5	Water Wakeup
6	"We've got company!"
7	Crates and Boxes
8	Gunpoint Banter
9	Chain-Link Fence
10	Shootout in the Dark
J	Rooftop Leap
Q	Twisted Ankle
K	Enter the Passcode

(Thanks to TVTropes.org for many of these.)

Playing the Opposition

The Opposition is arguably the most important role in the game, and easily the hardest. You have to be the Badguy, his henchmen, and everyone and everything the Hero and his Friends will be up against. One scene you're a snooty waiter; the next, you're a booby-trapped toilet. It's a thankless job. If that makes you want to take it out on the other players… *good*.

Technically, *Action City!* doesn't have a Game Master, but in nearly every respect that matters you're a GM with a chip on your shoulder. Your job is to foil the other players' plans and complicate their lives. True, you can never kill the Hero, but there's more to villainy than *that*. Humiliate them in defeat and make them pay dearly for their victories.

By default, the Opposition starts with one character, the Badguy. The Badguy doesn't have any Methods, a Sub-Plot, or a Hangup, but he or she does begin with a number of Edges equal to one plus the number of other players at the table. For example, if there were one Hero and two friends, the Badguy would begin play with four Edges.

However, these don't work like a Hero's or Friend's Edges. For the Badguy, they're simply a currency to be spent on making things harder on the other players. The Badguy's background is determined by another method; see **The Badguy: Who You Are**, below.

Each of the following costs one Edge to introduce into the story.

- **Betrayal:** Make a traitorous Friend turn on the Hero in the Second Act. See **Traitorous Friends** for more on this.
- **Goons:** These are typical rank-and-file cannon fodder – everything from security guards to a street gang to ninjas *en masse*. Their presence in a Setpiece lets the Opposition engage everyone in a large physical conflict.
- **Muscle:** The Muscle is a special kind of Goon. He's the Badguy's right-hand man, bodyguard, or most trusted underling. There's only one of him, but he's tough. When opposing a roll that uses Action or Guts, automatically increase the size of the Muscle largest set by one. For example, if your largest set is two 5s, treat it as three 5s instead.
- **Functionary:** Like the Muscle, the Functionary is a special brand of Goon, but with a specialty in opposing mental and social rolls instead of physical ones. Many a police captain, governor's aide, or corporate lackey is on the Badguy's payroll and more than happy throw any number of legal barriers in the Hero's path to justice. When opposing a roll that uses Brain or Mouth, automatically increase the size of the Flunky's largest set by one.
- **Escape Hatch:** A way out of the scene for the Badguy. This could be a literal hatch through which the Badguy can escape, a momentary distraction that lets him slip away unnoticed, or a crack (or crooked) legal team that puts him back on the streets. The Escape Hatch can only be used in the First and Second Acts.

For each Edge the Badguy has remaining by the Third Act Setpiece, pick one Method. When opposing a roll that uses that Method, increase the size of your largest set by one die. For example, if you come into the Third Act Setpiece with two Edges remaining, you could pick Action for one Edge and Brain for another. These bonuses stack, so best-case scenario, you can increase your set size by two dice.

Gaining Edges in Play

The Badguy gets another Edge…

- When the Opposition wins a roll by the Skin of Your Teeth.
- For every Cliché that hasn't been incorporated by the time the Third Act Setpiece rolls around.
- When the Opposition completes a Personal scene (see below).

Bonus Dice

Every now and then, you may be entitled to receive bonus dice, usually because the other players took the easy way out or didn't bother to make something explode. Spend a bonus die to increase the size of a set by one. Bonus dice can never be used in the same scene in which they were gained.

The Opposition gets a bonus die…

- If an Act ends without an explosion.
- If a Hero or Friend chooses to make a roll a Cakewalk.
- For each Arc box at the table that's still unchecked in the Third Act Setpiece.

Personal Scenes and the Opposition

As the Opposition, you too can potentially declare a Personal scene once per Act, but in an entirely different way, and for entirely different reasons.

It's simple: First, spend a bonus die to declare the scene. Use it to narrate something relevant to the story, like the Badguy's progress toward his Aim (see below). Whatever it is, it should be something that either immediately complicates things for the other players, or promises to do so in the near future. Make it something that elicits groans of dismay from everyone else, a foreshadowing of doom to come. There's no mechanical component to this – it just inserts something new into the fiction. For example, you might narrate the introduction of the Badguy's right-hand man into the story, complete with a badass display of some kind to make sure the audience knows he's a force to be reckoned with. Or it could be as straightforward as the Badguy spying on the Hero.

When the scene is complete, the Badguy gets another Edge, whether the scene explicitly involved the Badguy. In this way, the Opposition can exchange bonus dice for Edges, on a limited basis.

The Badguy: Who You Are

Badguys are complicated, interesting people who aren't so much evil as just misunderstood. At least, that's how you should *play* them.

When you start play as the Opposition, shuffle your deck of cards and draw five off the top, one at a time. These will determine the broad outlines of your identity as a Badguy, including your Origins (where you're from), Aims (what you want), Approach (how you plan to get it), Accomplices (who's going to help), and Motivation (why you're doing it). All you're looking at on each card is the suit – the number itself is immaterial.

Suit	Origins	Aims	Approach	Accomplices	Motivation
♣	Some Kind of Foreigner	Get Rich	High-Stakes Ransom	Criminal Syndicate	Revenge
♦	Corporate Shark	Prison Break	High-Tech Nonsense	Political Dissidents	Sheer Greed
♥	Criminal Underworld Criminal	Hostile Takeover	Shadowy Conspiracy	Law Enforcement	Power-Hungry
♠	Rogue Government Official	Illicit _____ Trade	Explosive Terrorism	Foreign Nationals	Delusional Nutjob

For example:
I'm about to play the Opposition. I just drew my five cards, and got the following:

- *Origins: Corporate Shark*
- *Aims: Prison Break*
- *Approach: Shadowy Conspiracy*
- *Accomplices: Foreign Nationals*
- *Motivation: Revenge*

All right! So what kind of badguy am I?

Well, I'm a corporate '80s guy, for one. I'm engineering a prison break using a network of secret conspirators, with the aid of foreign nationals whose aims don't exactly coincide with that of the US Government. Why? ***Revenge.***

"See, I used to be a big shot in the corporate world – CEO of OmniSync. We made computer chips. Anyway, the Federal Trade Commission slapped us down for a little insider trading and illegal corporate shenanigans that I'd rather not go into right now. Point is, I lost it all in the process. Millions of dollars, my Deloreans… all of it, gone overnight, thanks to those sons of bitches in Washington. This is why the US can't compete in the global marketplace – the government itself stands in the way of a successful company making a decent profit! You know who doesn't? Saudi Arabia. So I figured out a way to get in good with the Saudis and back to being filthy rich. With the help of some sympathetic individuals in every echelon of the government, I'm arranging a little coming-out party for Rakan Al-Hakami, a deposed Saudi prince unjustly – or not – imprisoned for acts of international terrorism. You've heard of him, I'm sure. Most Wanted Lists and all that. Oh, I don't care about Al-Hakami's cause. It's not even really about the money, to be honest. No, I'm doing this to stick it to the US Government for ***ruining my life****. Those sons of bitches are going to pay."*

Not the most sensible plan in the world, sure, but it's certainly in keeping with the genre.

Traitorous Friends

One of the most interesting tools available to the Opposition is a Friend turned traitor. The reasons for the betrayal are largely up to the Friend, but you get to decide when it happens.

The soonest a Friend can betray the Hero is the Second Act. If you choose to make the Friend turn traitor now, you have an ally. The Friend must now work against the Hero in whatever way makes sense with the Friend as already established in the story.

If you wait for the Third Act, however, the Friend can use the Hero's Hang-Up as if it were an Edge. The Friend has gotten to know the Hero pretty well, and knows how best to exploit his weaknesses.

If the traitorous Friend hasn't turned by the end of the Second Act Setpiece, they *must* turn sometime during the Third Act. It's still up to you *when* that occurs during the Act, as long as it occurs before the final Setpiece.

ACTION CITY!

HERO/FRIEND CHARACTER SHEET

NAME: _____

HANG-UP: _____

EDGES:

_____

_____

_____

METHODS	
ACTION:	
BRAIN:	
MOUTH:	
GUTS:	
CONDITION:	
PISSED OFF:	
BANGED UP:	
BEATEN DOWN:	

SUB-PLOT: _____

ARC: 0 0 0

RESOLUTION: _____

BADGUY CHARACTER SHEET

NAME: _____

ORIGINS: _____

MOTIVATION: _____

AIMS: _____

APPROACH: _____

ACCOMPLICES: _____

EDGES: ☐

CONDITION:	
PISSED OFF:	
BANGED UP:	
BEATEN DOWN:	

MUSCLE:

NAME: _____

DESC.: _____

FUNCTIONARY:

NAME: _____

DESC.: _____

Final Thoughts

So, in case it isn't obvious already, I thought I'd list the ingredients I used here, and my thought process behind their inclusion. Thanks for reading this far!

Journey: This is the characters' Sub-Plots and, to a lesser extent, their Hang-Ups. As mentioned in the text, the Arc is a metaphorical journey representing the Heroes' and Friends' minimal character development.

City: It's not explicitly spelled out, because I couldn't quickly think of a way to do it that wasn't totally awkward, but all the movies cited as influences or points of reference take place in predominantly urban environments. Thus, City. Plus, it's right there in the title! City! The title itself comes from Dictionary.com's eighth definition of the word "city": "a place, person, or situation having certain features or characteristics (used in combination): *The party last night was Action City.*" Something about the phrase "Action City" really struck a chord with me.

Edge: The word just lends itself so easily to "advantageous personal characteristics" that I couldn't help myself. Plus, in lieu of actual mechanical ingredients or constraints, I wanted to turn at least one ingredient into a mechanical element.

Skin: I was stuck for a fourth ingredient until I happened to see the phrase "by the skin of your teeth." Right away I knew the ingredient had a place in *Action City!* It isn't as central as the other ingredients, but it does represent the highest level of dramatic tension in the game, which is pretty important.

The End