

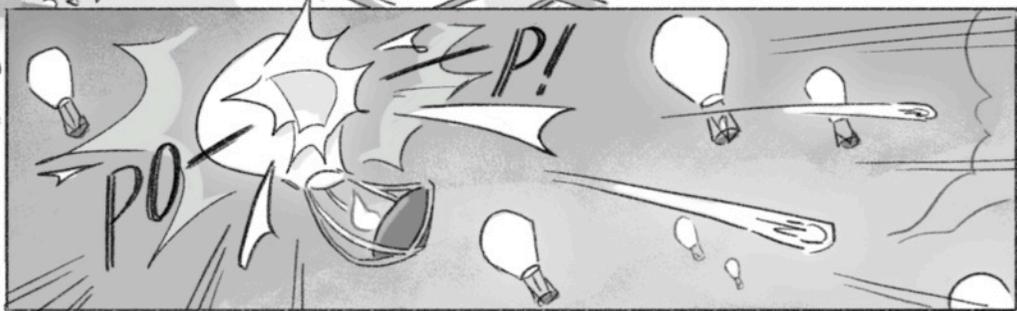
GERON, THE CITY OF SURPRISES. DANGER 2.

...AMAZING!  
JUST LIKE THE  
MAP SAID.

HOW'S  
THAT?

THE PEOPLE HERE  
WRITE THEIR REGRETS  
ON BALLOONS AND  
LET THEM FLY AWAY.

SO? PEOPLE  
EVERYWHERE WANT  
TO LET GO OF THEIR  
MISTAKES.





HAH! IF THAT'S LETTING GO, I'M A HODAG.



THIS IS SPITE, PLAIN AND SIMPLE.



TWON SEIZES AN OPPORTUNITY.

I GOTTA TRY THIS.



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Published by Penguin King Games Inc

[penguinking.com](http://penguinking.com)

ISBN (digital edition): 978-0-9936940-5-9

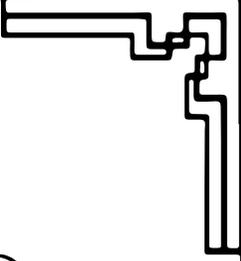




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## INTRODUCTION



*Cerebos, The Crystal City* is a tragicomic roleplaying game about exploration and self-actualization. It's also about riding the rails, visiting improbable cities, and experiencing uncommon vistas. It's about homesickness and lumpy beds and brand new stew and finding a satisfying coda for the broken song in your heart.

Cerebos is farther from the City by the Sea than the maps say. No roads lead there. Not from the sea. It is across the desert, past the common delights of glass and spice. In the City by the Sea, aged mothers by their hearths quarrel with the horn-knuckled fisherfolk on many particulars. In this they agree: there is no stopping those who search for Cerebos. They are pilgrims on an alchemical timetable. Only by testing themselves in the world's crucible can these desperate travelers transform their memories into something greater.

Each traveler carries physical touchstones, fleeting moments trapped within shards of eternity. Who pities the youth bound by the scent of an undying gardenia? What of the stranger chained to a pocketwatch promise? We can only watch as they drift further from humanity and disappear into the past. They travel in the only direction they're able: toward Cerebos, the Crystal City.

The journey begins at a railway terminus in the middle of the desert. The travelers are headed to the Crystal City, where they learn the truth about what drives them. Along the way, they experience flashbacks, overcome unexpected events, and disembark from the train to encounter surreal stops.

Over their journeys, the travelers confront their connections to the past. They learn who they were and who they wish to be.



# CONDUCTORS

O my neighbor, indeed we are strangers in this place,  
And every stranger to a stranger is kin.

*Imru' al-Qays, Diwan Imri' al-Qays*

Every train has a conductor. During your time riding the rails, the conductor may be a guide, chronicler, psychopomp, or agent of order – to say nothing of the dog. If you're playing with a GM, they're responsible for the conductor once the story begins.

The conductor sets the genre of the story. If the travelers are riding a train powered by gumdrops and stardust, the stops look different than if the engine is fired by human misery. In the first instance, a dream factory would most likely be a pleasant stop where the passengers could slide down rainbows and relive the clambakes of their youth. In a more dire setting, the same dream factory could be the site where nightmarish drones render whimsy and passion into mass-market commodities.

In the real world, the conductor is responsible for every part of the journey that doesn't involve actually operating the train: checking tickets, keeping the schedule, and interacting with the passengers and the cargo. The engineer handles the mechanical side of the operation, assisted by an engine crew of firemen (also known as stokers or coal shovelers). In the world of Cerebos, any or all of these jobs can be combined into a single conductor. However, travelers who prefer a larger number of travel companions may find solace in a larger crew.

The engineer and the conductor may be rivals with differing opinions on how to run a train, an annoyingly effective comedy duo, or even the source of trainbound intrigue.

In addition to setting the journey's genre, the conductor modifies the rules of the trip. Each conductor has four Conductor Powers. The first Power automatically influences the journey. The second and third Powers provide additional Train Actions. The final Power is a Stop Action. The conductor's Train and Stop Actions are available to all travelers. See [Train Actions](#) (p. 31) and [Stop Actions](#) (p. 41) for more details.

When selecting a conductor, it's a good idea to discuss what sort of story everyone wants to tell. Will it emphasize quiet, gentle moments of personal reflection or episodes of bombastic strangeness? What sort of violence and emotional distress are on the table, and how explicit will they be? You have control over other travelers' pasts, so make sure to play within the boundaries they've created.

# TRAIT CHECKS

As invisible as all theatrical machinery, the locomotive organizes from afar all the echoes of its work. Even if it is discreet and indirect, its orchestra indicates what makes history, and, like a rumor, guarantees that there is still some history. There is also an accidental element in it. Jolts, brakings, surprises arise from this motor of the system.

It not only divides spectators and beings, but also connects them; it is a mobile symbol between them, a tireless shifter, producing changes in the relationships between immobile elements.

**Michel de Certeau, "Railway Navigation and Incarceration"**

When conflict occurs, roll 2d6 and consult the Trait Check table. You can permanently spend a rank in a Trait to reroll one die. As long as a Trait still has ranks, it can be drawn upon multiple times per Trait check. You can also draw on multiple different Traits to diversify your approach. If a Trait's rank is reduced to zero in this way, don't remove it. Traits without any ranks still exist. They're just resting their eyes.

2–5	Setback	You do not succeed. Take one <a href="#">Damage (p. 52)</a> .
6–8	Partial Success	You're making progress, but there are complications. Maybe you're pushing too hard, maybe you're just unlucky. The Danger decreases by 1, but there's also a cost.  Gain two Momentum or one Damage. It's your choice – but you can't choose to gain Momentum if the Trait is attached to a keepsake, if you've given away the related touchstone, or if you roll without using a Trait. The GM (or your group) may decide that narrative consequences, such as losing a fellow traveler's trust, replace the Damage or Momentum gain.
9–10	Success	Nothing fancy here. You did it! The Danger decreases by 1.
11–12	Inspired Success!	Incredible! You approach the problem with a synthesis between who you once were and who you're becoming. As a result, the Danger decreases by 2.

Rolling doubles after using a Trait to reroll earns one Momentum on the attached touchstone. Drawing too heavily on who you were limits who you can become.

If you've already given away a touchstone, you can use its attached Traits with no risk of gaining further Momentum. Your memories blossom as you explore new applications for old talents.

The player who rolls the dice narrates the results of their Trait check, but other players are welcome to make suggestions. Many groups prefer to have a GM narrate their Setbacks and Partial Successes to add an extra element of surprise to the story.

Working together is possible in a narrative sense, but there aren't any rules to govern team-ups. No matter how many friends you make on your journey, there's a point where you're going to be alone. This isn't necessarily the cold, unconnected loneliness of the miser in his tilted garret. It's also the unencumbered responsibility for one's actions.

Working together helps in some situations. Everyone may agree in a realistic game that one person, no matter how dedicated, cannot lift a sandstone obelisk. Two people trying the same task have a chance, but only one of them makes the Trait check.

*The Lepidopterist and the Hapless Oaf have become separated from their travel companions while pursuing a limner's moth through a stained glass maze, a Stop with Danger 4. In the distance they hear the Flying Manta's return whistle. Jenn, the Lepidopterist's player, uses her Stop Action for an Opportunity to reduce the Stop's Danger.*

*Jenn rolls 2d6 and gets a 1 and a 2. A result of 3 means she's set herself up for a setback. That won't do! She spends one rank of Sensitive Antennae, a Trait of her brass headgear, to reroll the 1. Her new results are a 2 and a 2. That's still a setback. Worse, since she rolled doubles as part of a reroll, she gains a point of Momentum on her headgear. The Oaf has a laugh.*

*Jenn tries one more reroll. She spends one rank of Suffers Fools Poorly, a Trait of her butterfly machete. Bristling at the Hapless Oaf's crude jests, she rushes deeper into the maze. Her new results are a 2 and a 6, a partial success. She decides to succeed at reducing the Stop's Danger to 3, but also gain two Momentum on her machete. Old habits die hard, and the pair make their way back to the Flying Manta.*

### Random Touchstones 31 – Good Rocks

311	A screaming agate	<i>Action Geology</i>
312	An ash wand topped with an uncut phosphophyllite crystal	<i>An Eye for Ruin</i>
313	A fordite dowsing pendant pointing toward... something	<i>Approximate Knowledge of Many Things</i>
314	A paper sack filled with uncracked geodes	<i>Immovable Object</i>
315	A jagged, bleeding hunk of quartz	<i>Red Right Hand</i>
316	A rock hammer encrusted in oxidized bismuth	<i>Taking Care of Bismuth</i>

### Random Touchstones 32 – Hats, Fancy

321	A conical hat decorated with a map of the cosmos	<i>Advanced Mathematics</i>
322	A wide-brimmed sun hat that casts an uncanny shadow	<i>Heat-Resistant</i>
323	A rough oaken mask with a single eyehole	<i>No Mercy</i>
324	A mascot costume's papier-mâché rabbit mask	<i>Open-Minded</i>
325	A functional space helmet with its own atmosphere	<i>The Dead Do Not Feel Pain</i>
326	A collapsible top hat with a green carnation in the band	<i>Greatest Show on Earth</i>

### Random Touchstones 33 – Housewares

331	A chipped clay mug with a glass bottom	<i>Common Sense</i>
332	A cherrywood egg-hammer with machine-tooled silicone grip	<i>Favors from the Prince of Ants</i>
333	A green glass bowl holding an egg, an orange, and a skull	<i>Intermediate Geomancy</i>
334	A cut glass decanter filled with pure water	<i>Junior Conductor</i>
335	A clay roofing tile with a relief of a boar's face	<i>Pigheaded</i>
336	A 48-piece silver flatware set in a velvet-lined trunk	<i>Savior Faire</i>

### Random Touchstones 34 – Improbably Large Objects

341	A harness of iron chains inscribed with sins against birds	<i>Friend of Snakes</i>
342	One end of a very long cable	<i>Gormless Enthusiasm</i>
343	A misspelled wedding cake	<i>Just Murrayed</i>
344	Cask of Amontillado sherry, never used	<i>Masonry</i>
345	A large foam finger marked with the faded letters "IDE"	<i>Mob Boss</i>
346	Two-handed ceremonial scissors	<i>Pomp and Circumstance</i>

### Random Touchstones 35 – Jars

351	The last jar of glazier's pepper sauce	<i>Agent of Chaos</i>
352	Two nights of Dog King pomade in a squat clay jar	<i>Effortless Intimidation</i>
353	A smooth glass jar filled with green slime	<i>Poison's in My Bloodstream</i>
354	A pickle jar containing a preserved, tattooed heart	<i>Strong Grip</i>
355	A jam jar filled with medicinal brandy and three plums	<i>Unconventional Medicine</i>
356	A tall glass jar with a metal spigot containing sun tea	<i>Unstoppable Force</i>

### Random Touchstones 36 – Jewelry

361	A necklace of coral, pearls, and fish hooks	<i>Beachcomber</i>
362	Half of a silver heart pendant marked "BEST"	<i>Good Listener</i>
363	A teardrop pendant that contains a swirling nebula	<i>Light Fingers</i>
364	A barbed wire bracelet tangled with bones and bird skulls	<i>Martyr Complex</i>
365	A moldavite frog pendant topped with a crystal pyramid	<i>Obviously Distressed</i>
366	A hammered gold ring resembling a snake with topaz eyes	<i>Sorry, Not Sorry</i>

### Random Touchstones 41 – Maps

411	An architectural portfolio of flying cities	<i>Aeronaut</i>
412	A mandala comparing the Ten Sanctuaries to a human body	<i>Blood of the Revelator</i>
413	Schematics to a revolutionary tunneling machine	<i>Civil Engineering</i>
414	A leather-and-cellophane map to the Aeronaut's Heart	<i>Faith of the Heart</i>
415	An educational placemat with questionable misprints	<i>Former Child Prodigy</i>
416	Half of a torn treasure map leading to the Golden River	<i>Weaponized Greed</i>

### Random Touchstones 42 – Medical Devices

421	A glass eye with a serpentine pupil	<i>Contortionist</i>
422	An etched tin ear trumpet	<i>Eyes in the Dark</i>
423	A 5X anatomical model of a human ear, lightly modified	<i>Quick Sketch Artist</i>
424	A solid mahogany cane with an amber knob	<i>Big Enough</i>
425	Triangular spectacles	<i>Three Sides to Every Story</i>
426	A rose-tinted monocle	<i>Toxic Positivity</i>