# The Trouble Engine SRD 28 August 2023

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# OVERVIEW

The Trouble Engine is a procedure to generate problems for a [location].

The Trouble Engine aggregates trouble from three sources:

1. Troubles arising directly from a major threat to the [location], probably as a side effect.
2. Troubles that come from other factions responding to [character] activities
3. Troubles that arise as part of the ordinary affairs of the [location]

Each type of trouble is generated differently, but once in place they are handled exactly the same way. Often it is unclear to players where a trouble came from, but the GM always knows.

## INPUTS

The trouble engine takes these inputs:

* **Noise:** Extent to which recent actions might be noticed by other factions. Range: 0 (quiet) to 6 (noisy).
* **Attention level:** Degree of sustained attention from other factions. Range: 0 (no interest) to 4 (everyone is watching).
* **Wellbeing:** Level of morale and resources in the community. Rated from 0 (broken community) to 4 (high confidence and community).
* **Danger:** The central danger threatening the [location].

## STEP ONE: CHECK FOR ESCALATIONS

Some troubles are ongoing. Before considering new troubles, check to see if ongoing troubles escalate. Skip this step if there are no ongoing troubles in play.

Roll 1d for every two ongoing troubles in play, rounding up. (For example, if there are four troubles, roll 2d. If there are five, roll 3d.)

If the result is 1-3, there are no escalations. On a 4-5, there is one escalation. On a 6, two escalations. On a critical, there are three escalations.

## STEP TWO: DEFINE NEW ESCALATIONS

Next you must decide the form taken by each new escalation. Skip this step if there are no escalations this time.

Each escalation starts completely undefined. You must link each of them to a specific ongoing trouble in the local area, and then choose an escalation from the options available for that trouble. (You can select the same trouble and the same escalation multiple times.)

Consider the current state of the game. If there is an obvious way for an ongoing trouble to escalate, do that.

If there are no obvious escalations, turn to the dice. Randomly select an ongoing trouble for each escalation. Once you know which trouble is escalating, look over the list of options below and choose one, or turn to the dice again if you prefer.

#### RANDOM ESCALATIONS

Roll two dice, read one and then the other.

1-3 / 1 Decrease morale by one.

1-3 / 2 Reduce a faction status by one.

1-3 / 3 A faction demands a difficult favour.

1-3 / 4 Harm a cohort or friend of the [characters].

1-3 / 5 Lose access to an upgrade. (Regain access with a project or mission.)

1-3 / 6 Tick the danger clock.

4-6 / 1 Decrease resources by one.

4-6 / 2 Increase the magnitude of the trouble by one.

4-6 / 3 Lose an important resource or supply.

4-6 / 4-6 Choose or select an escalation from the trouble description.

You may allow a [character] the chance to stop an escalation if they are in the right place at the right time.

## STEP THREE: CHECK FOR NEW TROUBLES

### DANGER TROUBLES

A danger trouble is introduced when the description or clock attached to the danger indicates. It is defined like any other type of trouble.

### FACTION REACTIONS

The GM checks for faction reactions. These troubles are created by factions who have noticed the [characters] and are curious, worried, or angry.

Roll a number of dice equal to the current attention level. (If attention level is zero, roll two dice and keep the lowest result.) Then find the column that matches the noise generated in the last phase of activity. The result indicates what degree of trouble manifests in the next step.

#### FACTION REACTION TROUBLES

Roll Noise 0-3 Noise 4-5 Noise 6+

1-3 None None Light

4-5 None Light Light

6 Light Heavy Heavy

Crit Heavy Heavy Heavy

### LOCAL PROBLEMS

Local problem troubles arise out of the ordinary conflicts and struggles among people and factions in the [location]. This can include local factions with negative status deciding to make life hard for the [characters] (these might also show up as faction reactions).

Roll the area’s Wellbeing and consult below. (If Wellbeing is zero, roll two dice and keep the lowest result.)

1-3 Two troubles

4-5 One trouble

6 No troubles

Crit The area’s morale or resources improves by +1.

Choose an explanation and reveal it during downtime.

## STEP FOUR: DEFINE TROUBLES

Go through the new troubles in order, keeping their origins in mind, and give them enough definition that you know how to add them to the game.

If events in the game point at a new problem for the local area, choose a trouble that fits this problem. If there is no obvious choice, use random selection to choose a trouble.

When you introduce a new trouble, set the scale or Tier or effect level equal to the [location]’s Tier+1 by default. Adjust up or down from there if you wish to account for special characteristics of that particular trouble. Escalations can increase a Trouble’s magnitude.

## STEP FIVE: INTRODUCE TROUBLES AND ESCALATIONS

Introduce the troubles and escalations you have generated during downtime. If you have generated an intrusion, it will disrupt the course of downtime and force an immediate response.

New escalations and troubles cannot be prevented from happening, although those classified as Intrusions can be met and countered as they are just beginning, if the engagement roll works out in the [character]’s favour.

Make a record of all ongoing troubles.

## RESOLVING TROUBLES

Many troubles are momentary events, but others remain as ongoing troubles. Ongoing troubles will continue to make things difficult for the [characters] until they are dealt with.

Ongoing troubles can be resolved in a variety of ways. Some can be resolved as part of free play, without using up downtime actions or resources. Some will even resolve themselves as a result of other developments in the fiction.

Resolving troubles will often have beneficial effects on the wellbeing of the area.

## LIGHT TROUBLES

### ANGER

*The mood in the area worsens noticeably. Tempers fray, and violence is not far from the surface. Why are people angry? Was the anger provoked deliberately?*

(Ongoing.) Actions involving angry people are always at least Risky.

Responses:

• Broker peace between angry groups.

• Smash the source of the anger.

Escalations:

• Difficult Allies, Protests

• A friend strays into an explosive environment.

• Anger is about to spill over into violence.

### DIFFICULT ALLIES

*One of your cohorts or friends causes trouble as they give in to their worst impulses. Mending the damage can require diplomacy and cash.*

The wronged party has expectations about how the [characters] must make things right (a 4-segment or 6-segment debt clock is a good option). If the [characters] don’t do what is needed, the relationship will deteriorate markedly.

Responses:

• Broker peace without losing resources, usually by rebuking or punishing the cohort.

• Confront the other party, backing your team.

• Pursue the cohort, who runs to hide from the consequences of their actions.

### DISAPPEARANCE

*Someone goes missing.*

(Ongoing). Choose a contact or friend. They disappear from view without immediate explanation. If they are a well-liked figure, lose 1 morale. They could have been abducted, run away, died without anyone knowing it, been arrested... This trouble remains ongoing until their fate is known, or people stop wondering.

Responses:

• Venture into the place the contact went missing.

Escalations:

• A ransom note is received.

• The missing person’s stuff is looted.

### DISASTER

*A storm, a fire, a flood, a hole opening up in the street... People are in danger and the only people who can help are the [characters].*

(Intrusion.) When a disaster is caused by a faction reaction, it usually happens as neglect (potentially because the faction is distracted by the [characters]), but sometimes as deliberate sabotage, or by taking advantage of a natural disaster to cause additional harm.

Responses:

• Deliver supplies through a disaster-struck neighbourhood.

• Rescue people endangered in the disaster.

### PATROLS

*A faction wants to assert some control over the area by sending groups marching through it.*

(Ongoing.) A faction with a stake in the area begins to send patrols through trouble spots. They are usually armed, and ready for trouble. They will suppress everything objectionable they can get away with.

Responses:

• Broker a deal for the patrols to leave your area alone.

• Confront the patrols until they back down.

• Smash whatever they’re protecting.

Escalations:

• Anger

• The patrols attract counter-patrols.

• A patrol attempts to harm the area in some way (an intrusion).

### PROTESTS

*A section of the community begins to protest some larger problem. If they call upon the [characters] to join them, what will they do?*

(Ongoing.) The protests will continue until the source problem is resolved, or until they run out of steam. Which section of the community is protesting? How do other sections feel about it? This trouble can put pressure on the [character] group’s unity.

Responses:

• Confront the protesters and send them home.

• Protect the protesters from reactionary violence.

• Smash the reason for the protests.

Escalations:

• Rioting

• Counter-protests begin, looking for trouble.

## HEAVY TROUBLES

### ASSASSINATION ATTEMPT

*An outside force makes a lethal move against someone close to you.*

(Intrusion.) Typically the outside force is a known enemy faction. If this occurs as an unattached event, the attack might be accidental, opportunistic, based on misinformation, or utterly random.

The target is a friend or close contact. A good engagement roll result might mean the [characters] get tipped off to the assassination in advance; a poor engagement roll might leave them desperately trying to staunch the bleeding before their friend dies.

### FALLEN CLAIM

*One of the [character] group*’*s claims is suddenly damaged or lost.*

Choose a claim and destroy or damage it. It may be affected by an accident or deliberate sabotage. If it is recoverable, a long-term project is required to bring it back to normal function.

### FLIPPED

*Another faction manipulates one of your contacts (or patrons, clients, or customers) to switch allegiance.*

They are no longer loyal to you and you lose access to their help.

### INVASION

*An outside force invades your area with a specific objective in mind.*

(Intrusion.) The force could be anything from a gang from a nearby neighbourhood to an elite team of killers. They want to destroy something or grab someone. Target a person or place that matters to the [characters] and hit them hard.

### SUDDEN DEATH

*A death in the area grabs attention. Who is the victim? How did they die?*

Someone is found dead in dramatic circumstances. It may be a friend or contact of the [characters]. Lose 1 morale, or 2 if the victim had a public profile. This could be a murder mystery, the work of a serial killer perhaps, or have an indirect cause, such as a pipe failure allowing poisonous chemicals to leach into the water supply.

Set up a clock to track progress on finding the truth, or just make it obvious who is responsible and force the [characters] to deal with the fallout. This event could be escalated to a sequence of linked deaths with the same cause.

Responses:

• Pursue the true killer