

# CONCRETE ANGELS

*A roleplaying game supplement by Jared A. Sorensen  
Originally published online as "Sex & Violence"*

*Concrete Angels is an adaptation of Dust Devils, the Truly Gritty Old West Role-Playing Game. You will need a copy of Dust Devils (print or PDF editions) to play this game.*

*Both versions of Dust Devils are available for purchase at:  
[www.chimera.info/dustdevils/](http://www.chimera.info/dustdevils/)  
and at [www.rpgnow.com](http://www.rpgnow.com)*

*The game also requires a standard deck of playing cards and a handful of poker chips or other tokens.*

## **Down in the Zero**

Concrete Angels is a roleplaying game set in the grimy, gritty world of crime fiction (especially those found within Andrew Vachss' "Burke" series of novels and Frank Miller's *Sin City*). The City is a dark and dirty place where crime runs rampant. Hookers and junkies lurk in the alleys like rats, the Mob runs City Hall and the cops are either corrupt or burned-out. The characters are con men, pushers, thieves, call girls and hustlers. But being on the wrong side of the law doesn't make you a bad guy. It just makes you more careful.

Like DUST DEVILS, this game focuses on an important facet of your character's personality. In DUST DEVILS, that issue is the Devil – "shoot or give up the gun?" In other words, can a man change his ways and live a better life or is that man doomed to a short life and a tragic end?

In this game, the Devil is replaced with the Zero. Author, attorney and child welfare advocate Andrew Vachss uses the term "The Zero" to describe the darkest places of the human heart and mind (in fact, one of his novels is entitled *Down in the Zero*). The City isn't just a concrete jungle; it's a subterranean nightmare of human filth and depravity. The Devil pales in comparison to The Zero, a place of eternal darkness where a person's soul, life and light can be snuffed out like a candle flame. The Zero lives to consume...and it's always hungry for more.

In Concrete Angels, the central premise is, "can a bad man do the right thing when it counts?" When you're hip-deep in human trash, it can be hard to stay clean...some of that shit is bound to stick. When the only thing left is hope, is that enough? Or as Vachss himself has said, "You don't use an angel for a guide on a tour to hell."

## Rap Sheets

Concrete Angels defines characters with four attributes that differ slightly from those presented in DUST DEVILS. Those attributes are:



### Trade

The Trade attribute is a measure of the character's manual dexterity and mechanical ability. Spades are used for doing any kind of technical task, like hot-wiring a car, rigging a trap or picking a lock. *Mnemonic: "Trade" rhymes with "spade", and spades are tools of a grave-digger's trade.*



### Resources

The Resources attribute represents the characters ability to procure *things*, be they material (like guns or cash) or intangible (like information). Diamonds are used whenever you wish to fence goods, bribe a cop or locate information. *Mnemonic: Diamonds are valuable resources.*



### Violence

There is no strength attribute in this game, nor is there a measure of accuracy or agility; the only thing that matters a character's capacity for violent action. Violence is an amalgamation of physical fitness, mental awareness and sheer determination necessary to put a bullet in someone's head or a knife in someone's back. Clubs are used for committing acts of violence, be they with knives, guns or fists. *Mnemonic: Clubs are weapons used to commit violent acts.*

*Note:* Someone with high Violence and low Emotion has the potential to be a sociopath (like the character Wesley from the Burke novels). This type of individual is best avoided as a player character in Concrete Angels. They do make excellent NPCs, however.



### Emotion

Emotion is a combination of guile, empathy and presence, used to sway the emotions of other people (for good or evil). Hearts are used for emotional tasks, like discerning truth from lies, resisting seduction or persuading someone to help you. *Mnemonic: Emotion is symbolized by a Heart.*

These attributes work much like those in DUST DEVILS with a few exceptions. First of all, each attribute players have twenty-four points to distribute between these four attributes. Attributes have a minimum of three and a maximum rating of 10. Last of all, players do not combine attributes when a conflict arises. Instead, the player chooses a single attribute and receives that many cards.

You may notice that using this system, there are no attributes appropriate for arm wrestling, picking pockets or driving cars, nor is there a way to gauge a character's perceptiveness. This is intentional. Scenes that incorporate these elements do so to set up future conflicts. The GM is encouraged to rule by fiat in these cases (wily players can spend poker chips to overrule the GM's decision).

## Archetypes

Each of the four Archetypes is aligned with one of the four attributes.



### The Magician

The Magician is secretive and enigmatic, perhaps touched by a benign kind of madness. He is happiest when left to his own devices and relies on knowledge and intellect as guides along his chosen path.

**Traits:** Rational, inventive, tactless, zealous

**Angles:** Boxman, hacker, counterfeiter, underground mechanic, chemist



### The Survivor

The Survivor relies on himself to get through each day. Despite this, he is far from being a lone wolf. He surrounds himself with a safety net of hidden cash, supplies, contacts, favors and bribes.

**Traits:** Self-reliance, vigilance, paranoid, driven

**Angles:** Hustler, investigator, bookie, retired "old school" cop, ex-convict



### The Warrior

The Warrior is a battle-scarred fighter and a seeker of inner peace. Honor is second to glory, and a true Warrior knows that the greatest fight is against oneself.

**Traits:** Fearless, deadly, honor-bound, proud

**Angles:** Bodyguard, hired killer, martial artist, amateur boxer



### The Fool

The Fool is both a charlatan and a storyteller; a weaver of lies and a speaker of truths.

Few can trick one who lives by trickery...

**Traits:** Underestimated, experienced, over-confident, visible.

**Angles:** Street preacher, sex worker, mystic, panhandler, gypsy cab driver

## Traits

Unlike DUST DEVILS, Traits aren't expressed as similes ("Strong as an ox" or "Dumb as a post"). Instead, they're expressed as either a vice or a virtue. Otherwise, the rules are the same: choose any two traits from the appropriate Archetype (or create your own) and if either of these traits comes into play during a conflict, draw an additional card during the Deal.

## Angles

A character's Angle is his occupation (or specialty, as it were) and takes the place of DUST DEVILS' Knacks. If a character's Angle comes into play during the game, that player may discard and replace his *entire* hand with fresh cards (this is done before cards gained from Traits or gained/lost from the Zero are drawn). This may only be done once per conflict.

Note that while certain Angles are listed under specific Archetypes, these associations are not set in stone. For instance, a hitman's Archetype could be the Magician or the Survivor (even though the Warrior is an obvious choice). A rape crisis counselor might seem like a Survivor at first, but her behavior and spirit are more like that of a born Warrior.

## The Zero

Every character has a dark past but The Zero concerns itself with an even darker future. Like the Devil in DUST DEVILS, The Zero can be set from 1 to 3 at the start of a game session. Other than a name change, the Zero functions exactly the same as the Devil.

**Word on the Street**

Concrete Angels first appeared as a free game called Sex & Violence. I re-wrote most of it to incorporate the mechanics of Matt Snyder's game DUST DEVILS. The inspiration for that Sex & Violence (and this one) is Frank Miller's "Sin City" and Andrew Vachss' Burke series of novels (as well as his other books and stories). Neo-noir and crime fiction may be popular genres but Miller and Vachss are two of its masters.

**Graphic Novels by Frank Miller:**

*Sin City*  
*A Dame To Kill For*  
*The Big Fat Kill*  
*That Yellow Bastard*  
*Family Values*  
*The Babe Wore Red*  
*Sex & Violence*

**Books by Andrew Vachss:**

*Down Here*  
*The Getaway Man*  
*Only Child*  
*Pain Mangement*  
*Dead and Gone*  
*Choice of Evil*  
*Safe House*  
*False Allegations*  
*Footsteps of the Hawk*  
*Down in the Zero*  
*Shella*  
*Sacrifice*  
*Ivy*  
*Blossom*  
*Hard Candy*  
*Blue Belle*  
*Strega*  
*Flood*

Read Andrew Vachss unpublished first novel (*A Bomb Built in Hell*) here:

[http://www.vachss.com/av\\_novels/bo mb.pdf](http://www.vachss.com/av_novels/bo mb.pdf)