

# AGAINST THE '70S

## FOCUS: STRUTS

By Kent M. Beeson

The mid-'70s. Mirror balls, glowing multicolored dance floors, polyester suits, and most importantly: boogieing, a.k.a. getting down. Characters in an *Against the '70s* game are familiar with disco culture, but only one is truly *of* the culture. If you're someone who **Struts**, you're so in tune with your body and the rhythms of the world, you can shake your groove thing, catch the eyes of the beautiful people, and give an extra-dimensional corpse-stealing alien a knockout punch, all at the same time. And never muss a perfect hair on your head.

### WELCOME TO AGAINST THE '70S!

**Against the '70s** is a series of supplements for the Cypher System for role-playing in a world of disco kings, paranormal researchers, corpse-stealing aliens, android bodysnatchers, and giant killer animals. Don't forget the roller skates! Inspired by such 1970s films and TV shows as *Phantasm*, *In Search Of*, *The Man Who Fell to Earth*, *Kolchak: The Night Stalker*, *Saturday Night Fever*, and *The Six Million Dollar Man*, **Against the '70s** will feature new Foci, Creatures, Descriptors, adventures and more!

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## STRUTS

The way you walk, the way you talk, the way you compose yourself — you were born with an uncanny sense of rhythm. You feel the world as the pulse of a million different rhythms that you can dance to, and even manipulate. When you engage an enemy in combat, chat up a stranger at the bar, or just head down the street, you don't just move — you strut.

- Tier 1: Dancing Queen/Disco King
- Tier 1: You Should Be Dancing
- Tier 2: Jive Listenin'
- Tier 3: Stayin' Alive or Don't Leave Me This Way
- Tier 4: Give the Kid Some Room
- Tier 5: Do the Hustle
- Tier 6: Shadow Dancing or I Will Survive

## NEW FOCUS ABILITIES

The **Struts** focus has nine new abilities to represent the powers and capabilities of a dancing hero or heroine.

### DANCING QUEEN/DISCO KING

You are trained in dancing tasks. If you are already trained, then you become specialized. All positive interactions with NPCs who might find you attractive or aspirational are eased by one step. Enabler.

### YOU SHOULD BE DANCING (1+ MIGHT POINTS)

If you dance with another PC for a few minutes, fast or slow, you can restore one of their Pools (their choice) by the same amount you spend in Might points. Action to initiate.

### JIVE LISTENIN' (3 INTELLECT POINTS)

For the next minute, you know when people are lying to you. If your target is aware that you are using this ability, you must roll against their level to successfully detect any falsehoods. Action to initiate.

### STAYIN' ALIVE (3 SPEED POINTS)

If you are physically attacked and you fail your Speed task to avoid the blow, you can pay the Speed point cost and automatically succeed the roll. If the attack would have inflicted other conditions, those are ignored as well. Enabler.

### DON'T LEAVE ME THIS WAY (3 INTELLECT POINTS)

If you are subject to any kind of mind control or corrupting influence (GM's call), and you fail your Intellect task to avoid it, you can pay the Intellect point cost and automatically succeed the roll. If the offending power would have inflicted other conditions, those are ignored as well. Enabler.

### GIVE THE KID SOME ROOM

If you take an action to dance, as a Speed task you can roll against the level of all NPCs that can see you. If there are NPCs of multiple levels, make one roll and compare that against the levels. It's possible to succeed against some NPCs and fail against others. On a success, the NPCs clear a space for you to do your thing and lose their turn as they watch, clap, dance along, etc. You can roll again on your next turn to keep the audience enthralled, but each attempt after the first, all levels are effectively doubled. Effort may be applied. Action to initiate.

### DO THE HUSTLE (5 INTELLECT POINTS)

For the next five minutes, you can trace the steps of someone you're familiar with, either following them to where they are or backtracking to where they've been. Action to initiate.

### SHADOW DANCING

When you use the **Stayin' Alive** or **Don't Leave Me This Way** ability, you may immediately pay for the ability a second time and deal damage to your attacker equal to their level. Enabler.

### I WILL SURVIVE

When you would lose enough points from your final remaining Pool to die, you may ignore the point loss and remain alive. You may do this only once. This ability resets after each 10 hour recovery roll. Enabler.

## PLAYER & GM INTRUSIONS

Here are some sample intrusions for players and GMs to use with a **Struts** character.

### PLAYER INTRUSIONS

The following are ideas for intrusions a **Struts** player can make at the cost of 1 XP.

- While in a bar or other public place, you are suddenly surrounded by a crowd of attractive people.
- While dancing with an NPC, your natural charm and charisma get them to reveal a secret or clue about themselves, without any prompting.
- Dodging an enemy's blow in combat, your dextrous dancing body confuses your opponent, causing them to trip over their own feet.
- While dancing, you catch a glimpse of two NPCs speaking furtively — they may be the clue you need to break the case.
- Outside a club, the doorman recognizes you and offers to let you and your friends in for free.
- Inside a club or bar, the bartender slides a drink to you and says it's from the person at the other end. A lead?
- After a dance, a dazzled NPC comes up to you and earnestly asks if they can wipe the sweat from your face.

### GM INTRUSIONS

The following are ideas for intrusions a GM can use when a **Struts** character rolls a 1 for a task.

- The person you're trying to impress with your charm and dance moves inexplicably finds it off-putting.
- Suddenly, the ground becomes unstable. Along with whatever other difficulties this may cause, any dancing tasks are hindered.
- You inadvertently insult an NPC by insinuating you're cooler than them.
- Your nice suit gets mussed, and it pisses you off. Your next task roll is hindered due to your anger.
- A friendly NPC turns against you when they realize that, long ago, you stole their lover from them.
- Someone in the crowd begins booing you.
- When using the **Jive Listenin'** ability, your lie-detection power goes haywire, and you're overwhelmed with the amount of lies, big and little, bombarding your brain.
- You hear your name called from behind you. You turn around and your entire family — your loud, meddling, joyful, confusing family — is here.

## CONNECTIONS

Here are ten sample connections for **Struts** characters. For each PC in your group, choose a connection from the list below, or create your own.

- Pick one other PC. Years ago, they were your dance partner, but you went your separate ways on bad terms. Now you're on the same team and have to work together.
- Pick one other PC. They want you to teach them how to dance.
- Pick one other PC. You confide your doubts and insecurities to them.
- Pick one other PC. This character sought you out to join the team. How did they find you?
- Pick one other PC. They managed to beat you in a dance contest once, and now you want a rematch.
- Pick one other PC. You find them incredibly gauche. Whether you berate them for it, try to get them to change, or just grit your teeth and bear it, is up to you.
- Pick one other PC. You went to elementary school with them. You didn't treat them well.
- Pick one other PC. They have an unusual, maybe even unique, sense of rhythm, and it fascinates you.
- Pick one other PC. You like to be the center of attention, the "cool one," and this character threatens you on that front.
- Pick one other PC. They aren't impressed with your charisma or style, and find you uncultured and primitive.

## DESIGNER NOTES

The impetus behind **Struts** should be obvious: what if Tony Manero from *Saturday Night Fever* was an action hero of a '70s mashup rpg?

Of course, one doesn't need a whole new focus in order to play a Tony Manero-like character; one could take just about any Descriptor + Type + Focus and reskin them into a white polyester suit and perfect hair. But my thought here was: is there anything inherent to the character that can translate into a heroic rpg context?

My answer is a tempered "yes." What defines Tony are his dancing skills, so the focus assumes that dancing will be central to the character. However, I decided that "just dancing" wasn't enough. To that end, I decided that a number of the **Struts** abilities are based around the idea that they can perceive the world as a constant explosion of "rhythms." (Imagine Daredevil's radar sense, only... different.) They can use this ability to sense when someone's heart rhythm is off when they're lying (**Jive Listenin'**) or a series of rhythms signaling an attack heading for them (**Stayin' Alive**).

My one gripe with the writer of this material is that this essentially turns Manero into a mutant in the *X-Men* vein. It's a little weird. (Of course, if you as a player or GM have an alternate explanation for these abilities, or simply choose to forego any explanation, more power to you.) There's another potential version of this focus that embraces camp and meta-ness — one where the character can take the classic *Saturday Night Fever* finger-pointing stance and suddenly disco music and colorful lights appear. That's not an approach that would work for a lot of tables, but it's not alien to the *Against the '70s* ethos. Nevertheless, while I opted to write the more "realistic" version instead, I still may write this alternate take.

The inspiration for the **Don't Leave Me This Way** ability might be a bit obscure. In the film, Tony is, generally, a pretty terrible person. He's sexist, racist, possibly homophobic, and even attempts to rape his dance partner. Understandably, I've jettisoned those qualities from the focus. However, there is one quality Tony demonstrates at the climax that legit shocked me on my first watch, and I wanted to be sure to allude to it. It's when Tony realizes he didn't win the dance contest on his own merits, and gives the grand prize (\$2500 in 2021 money) to the terrific Black couple that he believed danced better. After being a kind of selfish shithhead for most of the movie, this sudden (yet comprehensible) moral fortitude moved me. Characters who have this focus will likely have a hedonistic and maybe even

lascivious streak; I want them to also have a sense of right and wrong as juxtaposition. (You can read my thoughts on *Saturday Night Fever* [here on my Patreon](#).)

Finally, I offer something of a mea culpa. This focus is based on a cinematic archetype that's extremely masculine. I don't want to lock out anyone who wants to play it differently. Still, the question remains: what does the female version of this archetype look like? The non-binary one? I have no good answers for this. Stephanie Mangano (Karen Lee Gorney), Tony's dance partner, has a similar background, and is, in a sense, Tony's future version of himself. That's one idea. Is it a satisfying one? Stephanie doesn't have the same visual kick that Tony has. (Can anyone immediately recall her dress in the climactic dance contest?) I can think of some other possible references: *Soul Train* dancers, Twyla Tharp, Ann Reinking's character from *All That Jazz* (1979, Bob Fosse). Note that at least two of these have little to do with disco; although the ability names are named after disco songs, what's important is that the character dances, not what they dance to.

I hope you enjoy this focus, and if you use it in a game, please let me know how it goes! Feel free to contact me at [kentmbeeson@hey.com](mailto:kentmbeeson@hey.com), or on Twitter at @Kza or @vsthe70s. Thanks!

- Kent M. Beeson