

Amber SOLO August 2022



Introduction

In writing a response to a question about “What would be your perfect game” during #RPGaDay2022 I described an RPG based in Roger Zelazny’s AMBER Universe, using simple but flexible rules, ideally suited to a game with lots of creative input from Players as well as GM. I had already attempted this a couple of times over the years. First with a homebrew based on D20 Modern in about 1998 that lasted about 20 sessions, then with a homebrew based on Fate Accelerated in 2016 that lasted 17 sessions.

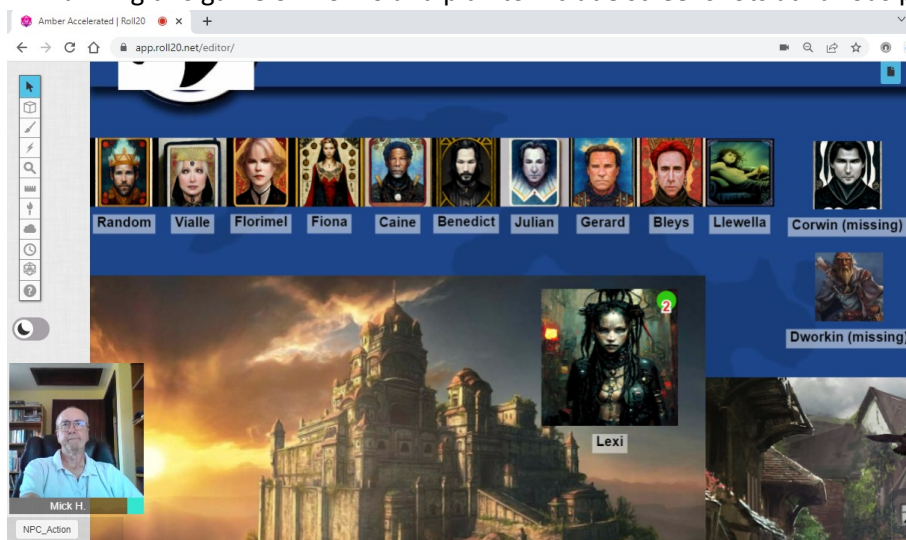
I think minor differences in the expectations of Players & GM as well as the inherent vagueness of the rules and definitions of the Powers (particularly Shadow-Walking, Shadow-Manipulation, Trump Communication, Trump Artistry & Shapechanging) made both campaigns a mixed success.

I’ve even tried it briefly Solo before, using an “Ambersworn” homebrew of the Ironsworn rules. In that case a run of bad dice and overly pessimistic interpretations of results led me to grind to a halt after only half-a-dozen sessions of spiralling failure.

I’ve played a few more Solo and GM-less/Co-operative games since then, so I think it’s worth having another crack at AMBER.

If I do this SOLO, then hopefully Player & GM won’t have mismatched expectations, and BOTH will have the same amount of love for the setting.

I’m running this game on Roll20 and plan to include screenshots at various points.



Game Rules

I've moved the Game Rules to a separate 33-page document as they kept growing to include all the Powers and examples of use. There are still a couple of Rules extracts in the Sessions to help explain what's going on. All Game Mechanics discussions and GM Ponderings once play has started will be highlighted in blue.

Safety Tools

Although this document is intended for mature audiences, I don't plan on including overly graphic descriptions of sex, violence or horror. If this changes later, I'll be sure to put in a warning before springing that sort of thing on you.

Lexi – Blood of Amber – Daughter of Brand



In this section I'm creating my Solo Character. I've decided to break my usual mould and play a woman and also NOT play a person who is primarily a Fighter or Ranger. I apologise in advance for defining her mainly in terms of her Father – but I am currently intending that relationship (to the main “villain” of the original novels) to figure strongly in the story.

I used the Midjourney AI Art Generator to give me some RPG Character concept art and got an appearance of a goth/punk-looking young woman

1. Choose an ORIGIN (**Blood of Amber**, Blood of Chaos, T'iyga, Human)
Note any additional points for Approaches **+4**
Note any additional Pattern or Logrus Condition Tracks **Pattern Track 2 Boxes**
Approaches... +3, +2, +2, +1, +1, 0 (with 4 extra points for her ORIGIN)
Flair+1 Focus+4 Force+2 Guile+3 Haste+1 Intellect+2
2. Define Aspects –
High Concept – **Rebellious Daughter of Amber** [*“Rebellious” could be a useful Aspect for resisting authority or mixing with people at the fringes of society. “... of Amber” is probably the most universal Aspect of all as it justifies almost any herculean physical or mental effort*]
Trouble – **My Father Tried to Destroy the Universe** [*as Trouble this could manifest in many ways – mistrust of her own intentions, concern that Fate will lead her to do the same, mistrust from/of others, the Lure of power*]
Third Aspect – **Determined to Prove Herself** [*Has both positive and negative aspects so can act as a lesser “Trouble” and get Fate Points for Compels (perhaps leading her into dangerous and interesting situations, as well as “Determined” being an all-around positive trait)*]
3. Name & General Description – **LEXI BRANDON**, Daughter of Prince Brand (deceased traitor and would-be world destroyer).
4. Ability Stunts: Choose zero, one, two or three Ability Stunts from the Powers allowed by your ORIGIN (choosing a Stunt from the same Power, also adds +1 to uses of that Powers and 1 box to its Track if it has one)
 - a. **PATTERN:Shadow-walk (and a Pattern Track with 2 boxes)** – I choose to start having already “Walked the Pattern” so don't get a point of Refresh back
 - b. **TRUMP:Communication (and a Trump Track with 2 boxes)** – I plan to try and gain **TRUMP:Teleport through Advancement during play**
 - c. **TRUMP:Sketch (+1 with Trump actions plus 1 additional Trump boxes)** – I plan to try and gain **TRUMP:Artistry through Advancement during play**
5. Choose one, two or three Stunts (Stunts include Shadow Trail, Artefacts, Beast Companions, Personal Shadow Realms, Allies, +1 to an Approach and +1 Skills)
Skill: DODGE+1, Skill: STEALTH+1, Skill: PAINTING+1 - I decided to focus on a few broad skills
6. Set Stress Boxes to 6 **+ 2 more in a PATTERN TRACK & +3 more in a TRUMP TRACK**
7. Set Refresh to 4 (+1 for each unchosen Stunt and modified by ORIGIN) – this governs the minimum FATE Points you start with in each Session
Refresh only 2 (reduced by 2 for Blood of Amber, no un-used Powers/Skills)

Roll20 Character Sheet shown below...

CHARACTER NAME		MANTLES	
Lexi		ORIGIN - Blood of Amber	
ASPECTS	APPROACHES	LADDER	SCALE
High Concept	1 Flair	+8 Legendary	Godlike Legendary Otherworldly Supernatural Mundane
Rebellious Daughter of Amber	4 Focus	+7 Epic	
Trouble	2 Force	+6 Fantastic	
Father tried to destroy the universe	3 Guile	+5 Superb	
Other Aspects	1 Haste	+4 Great	
Determined to prove herself	2 Intellect	+3 Good	
	0 Mantle	+2 Fair	
		+1 Average	
		+0 Mediocre	
		-1 Poor	
		-2 Terrible	
STRESS & CONDITIONS		STUNTS	
0 Stress	0 Indebted	1 PATTERN:Shadow-Walk (has walked the Pattern)	1 TRUMP:Communication (and +2 boxes)
0 Fatigued - 3 Stress (-1 on all Rolls)	0 Broken - 6 Stress (-2 on all Rolls)	1 TRUMP:Sketch (+1 for Trump Rolls and +1 box)	1 Skill:PAINTING +1
0 PATTERN	0 TRUMP	1 Skill:DODGE +1	1 Skill:STEALTH +1

Starting Situation

Where did the character grow up?

At the risk of re-hashing things I've used in earlier Amber games, I'll assume that Lexi grew up in Shadow Earth. This will make her more relatable and understandable. We'll say that she was raised by foster parents, originally hired by Brand himself and then, after Brand's death (about 5 years ago), Flora (Princess Florimel of Amber) took charge.

Have they been to Amber?

If so which of the Family have they already met?



Flora will have paid for Lexi's University education (studying Art at Oxford) and introduced her to Amber, King Random and Queen Vialle, and arranged for her to Walk the Pattern. She will also have arranged for lessons in the basics of martial arts and fencing – although Lexi has had little interest in them so far.

She may have had a reasonable (if intermittent) relationship with Brand up to her mid-teens and become bitter when he no longer showed up and when she later learned how he had been killed by his brothers and sisters.

Her relationship with Aunt Flora and the others will be “complicated” as she blames the older generation for Brand’s death and can’t entirely believe it was necessary.

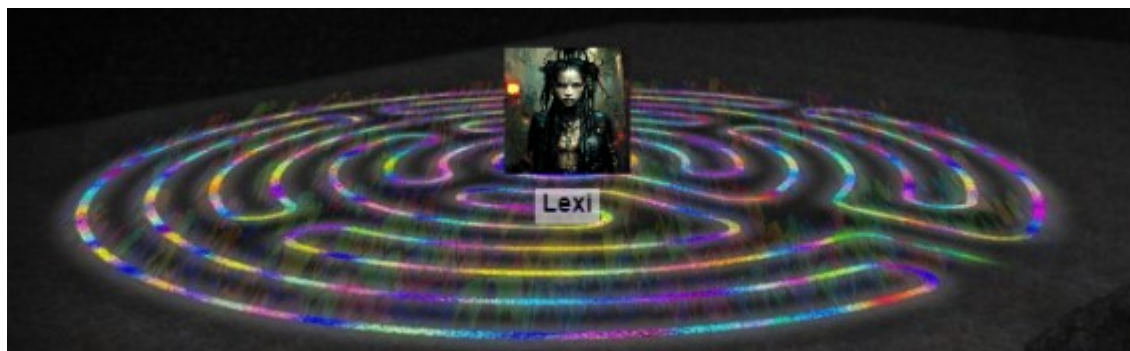
Although she hasn’t yet done it herself, she’s had Shadow-walking explained to her and experienced Trump Communication and even a Trump Teleport when Random brought her and Flora through to Amber Castle. She’s drawn sketches before that enabled her to briefly communicate with the subject, so there is no doubt she’s inherited her father’s ability to make Trumps.

What have they been doing recently?

Attending the Court in Amber and trying to convince King Random that she is not a Threat to the family. Indeed, as a potential future Trump Artist, she may be useful. Eventually, she will have convinced him (more probably convinced Queen Vialle instead) to let her Walk the Pattern. As an emergency measure, Flora gave Lexi her Trump card. “If you get lost, you can always call me”.

Where are they now – this minute?

Lexi stands at the centre of The Pattern in the dungeons below Amber. Moments ago, she was exhausted and fearing for her life as each step proved harder than the last and rainbow flames of Pattern-Fire were rising before her and reaching for her. But now the fear and some of the exhaustion has been wiped from her by the final step, and a rush of adrenaline accompanies the Triumph.



Flora and King Random are watching from the far side. They had expected (possibly hoped) for her to fail and now probably expect her to re-join them over there. But there is a sudden realisation that she can tell The Pattern to send her ANYWHERE. Free at last! ANYWHERE that she can remember or that she can IMAGINE!

She’s not especially prepared for a long journey. Dressed in Doc Marten boots, faded jeans with thigh pockets, and a battered old black biker jacket. There’s a dark green hood/scarf/mask thing around her neck, and a sweat-stained plain white tee. Her hair is a dishevelled mess of dreadlocks, and she peels away a few damp strands that have fallen across her almond-shaped eyes. She knows her black eye-shadow and dark ruby lipstick must be smeared from the recent exertions but using this amazing power to just teleport a hundred feet across the room would be such a waste!

She has a small dagger at her belt (Random had suggested a sword, but the weight of it felt wrong to her and she kept catching it on things and tripping herself up). She has her drawing journal and a couple of pens. She should have brought a packed lunch! Damn it. The thought of food brought to

STRESS & CONDITIONS		
0	Stress	○○○ × × ×
0	Indebted	○○○○○
0	Fatigued - 3 Stress (-1 on all Rolls)	×
0	Broken - 6 Stress (-2 on all Rolls)	○
0	PATTERN	i ○ ○ ○
0	TRUMP	i ○ ○ ○

mind a box of noodles and sushi. That scene at the beginning of the original Blade Runner movie? That would be sooo cool. It crystallised in her memory... Rainbows fell around her.

I'm going to assume that Walking the Pattern has left her Fatigued and drained half her Standard Stress. All her Pattern Stress has been recovered due to making it to the middle.

SHADOW:Tyrell Pronounced "tie" "rell".



*Normally I'd know the Axioms because I'd be deliberately Shadow-walking towards somewhere. In this case, I can assume the highest TECH because it's a place reminiscent of Blade Runner, but will determine Pattern and Magic by rolling **four Fudge Dice** for each of them...*

Nb. **Fudge Dice** are either +1, 0 or -1, so with four of them, they can generate a number between +4 and -4 with the extremes being very unlikely and +1, 0 and -1 being much more common.

AXIOMS: TECH+4 (AI & Replicants & Flying Cars), PATTERN-1, MAGIC+1 (???)

Nb. PATTERN-1 indicates that there is a tendency for Civilisations to fall and for society to degenerate into barbarism. In Tyrell this is apparent from the ecological disasters of Acid Rain and the extreme scarcity of animal life as well as the degenerate, lawless nature of the society.

Nb. The MAGIC Axiom often has a particular flavour. As Lexi has no Magic powers and hasn't yet experienced any evidence in this Shadow, I'll leave the flavour as (???) for now.

As a comparison, **Shadow Earth** would be **TECH+2. PATTERN+2, MAGIC-2**

Session 01 Lexi in the City

Spicy Dragon Noodles

Suddenly she was on a busy street. It's night-time and despite the hard rain, it's bustling with people and cars and.... Holy Sh*t flying cars. The angry honking of horns and flashing of lights tells Lexi to scurry out of the road and under the awning of one of the many stalls that line the street.

The people here look like regular people – most of them with a Chinese or Japanese look to their faces and clothing style. The smell of soy sauce reminds her why she chose this place and then the realisation that she has no money and no idea what to do next suddenly hit her. Would she even speak the language?

“Wha you wan?” then, when she didn't answer quickly enough, a bunch of words she didn't know. The first bit had been English, just an odd accent with the ends of words cut off. She was about to turn away when she realised that the strains of Walking the Pattern had left her very, very hungry.

She pointed to the box of noodles and fish that a young couple were eating and the elderly man behind the counter muttered something unintelligible but turned to spoon noodles into a pink box and add some fish and sauce to the top. He dropped it on the counter and indicated an LED screen blinking and showing what MIGHT be “120”.

Lexi reached for the back pocket of her jeans, drew out a credit card to wave in front of it, but it clearly wasn't recognised. The only other things in the little wallet were her Student Union card with a photo from a few years ago (now expired she realised), a couple of receipts and a condom. The few bits of cash she had would be useless here.

This wasn't going well!

She decided to try a bit of pleading. “Can I pay tomorrow. I'll pay, first thing – I promise”

RULES: The Ladder of Difficulty

LADDER	
+8	Legendary
+7	Epic
+6	Fantastic
+5	Superb
+4	Great
+3	Good
+2	Fair
+1	Average
+0	Mediocre
-1	Poor
-2	Terrible

I'll rate this as needing a GREAT (+4) success as street food vendors aren't in the habit of giving away free food to strangers.

I'm using Guile for most social interactions, so Lexi has +3 on the roll but Fatigue is giving her -1.

OVERCOME	
Character	Lexi
Intention	Plead to "pay later"
Roll	0
Approach	GUILE + 3

The DFA rules state that on a Fail of an “OVERCOME” Test... *You have a tough choice to make. You can simply fail —or you can succeed at a serious cost as dictated by the GM.*

I could have spent a FATE Point for +2 to succeed but went with a “cost” instead.

Eyeing the ragged looking girl appraisingly, the old man indicates a pile of unwashed dishes. He holds up a wrinkled finger. “One Hour”. The young couple eating turned to look at her and the girl pointed to her noodles and said “They Vay Goo”.

And that was how Lexi ended up working for Old Man Loo at Spicy Dragon Noodles on the Street of the Laughing Unicorn.

Homeless in Tyrell

The noodles were indeed excellent and were washed down with a plastic cup of tea (on the house). That one hour turned into two and she agreed to come back the next night and do a four-hour shift. Loo heard her giggling to herself after the first couple of minutes and took a shine to her.

Why was she giggling? Earlier, she had had almost infinite power – the ability to teleport to anywhere in any universe. Twenty minutes later here she was washing dishes to earn a box of noodles! She'd once had a job for a couple of weeks serving over-priced coffee in Oxford. Miss Alexism Brandon hadn't really ever needed to work because of the Brandon Trust Fund, but Lexi thought it would help her understand "how the other half live".

She avoided answering most of Loo's questions without upsetting him too much and wandered off into the night of the city at about midnight. She walked with purpose, not letting him see that she had no idea where to go.

"Given a brief respite, a character can recover their composure and carry on. All stress boxes clear automatically when your character enjoys a lull between tense situations, traditionally at a scene's conclusion." So Lexi will recover her Standard Stress Track (3 points lost while Walking the Pattern and 1 from a the Mugger's kick), but not her Fatigued Consequence (from Walking the Pattern).

Fortunately, the acid rain had stopped by then and the air was warm. There were people under various bridges and over-passes and even in shop doorways sleeping in cardboard boxes. She found the doorway of a corner shop that was just closing. The man inside was pulling down a sort of metal shuttering. When the door was locked and bolted from the inside, Lexi stepped into the shadow and sat down with her back to the door.

Not quite what she was used to, but under cover if it rained and anyway, how bad could it be?

RULES:GM Decisions

GM Decisions

Often in a game with a GM the players ask questions and the GM weighs-up what they know of the situation and decides the answer. Eg. Yes, No, it's blue etc.

Just as often, the GM ponders which of two possibilities seems most likely eg. The door is locked, the night watchman has fallen asleep.

For deciding things like that in this SOLO game, I'll either imagine a couple of outcomes and the likelihood of the first one, or just ask a Yes/No question if I don't want to think of the alternative outcome in detail yet. Fudge Dice seem a bit too restrictive for this and dealing with the negatives is too fiddly, so I'm using the "Ask the Oracle" rules from the excellent Ironsworn RPG. With "matches" 11, 22, 33, 44, 55, 66, 77, 88, 99, 00 being more extreme results, either for good or bad. (<https://ironswornrpg.com>)...

Estimated Likelihood	Target Roll for d100	Or else the other thing happens...
Almost Certain	11+	Something almost impossible
Likely	26+	Something unlikely
50/50 First Option	51+	The second option
Unlikely	76+	Something more likely
Small Chance	91+	Something else, or the situation is not what it appears

I rated it Unlikely that Lexi would get an undisturbed night, and therefore Likely that she would be disturbed. Rolling for the Unlikely event (76+) ... [80], so the Likely result. The two most likely events I could imagine would be Police or a rival Homeless person. Probably 50/50 ...[42] so Homeless!

I figured spotting trouble coming would only need a Fair (+2) success and Lexi has +3 for Guile.

DEFEND	
Character	Lexi
Intention	Spot Trouble coming
Roll	-2
Approach	GUILE + 2

With a bad roll of -2, and -1 for Fatigue, she only gets -1 total effect.

Fail: Your opponent either inflicts harm on you or creates an advantage against you

After a tough day, despite the excitement and the noise of traffic, Lexi is soon drifting off to sleep when she is rudely awakened by a boot to the ribs. Doing just 1 Stress.

Is it a rough “Oy you’re in my spot” or a more serious mugging? We’ll go 50/50 (51+) again ...[+33] so this is a mugging.

The man is blocking the path to the sidewalk, looming over her, silhouetted by the occasional headlights and flashing neon adverts, with some kind of weapon in one hand.

“Better ‘ave summat good for me” he growls.

Lexi lashes out with a foot, hoping to trip the man.

RULES:How Tough are Mooks?

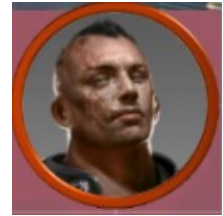
NPCs in Amber Accelerated are either Mooks (with very simple mechanics) or Significant NPCs (with simple “Body”, “Speed” & “Mind” Approaches, more Stress, a Consequence and similar Ability & General Stunts to PCs).

Mooks

- What this mook is skilled at. They get a +2 to all rolls dealing with this short list of things.
- What this mook is bad at. They get a -2 to all rolls dealing with these things.
- Everything else gets a +0 when rolled.
- Give the mook an aspect or two to reinforce what they’re good and bad at, or if they have a particular strength or vulnerability. Keep it SIMPLE.
- For NPCs an Aspect can just act as a +1 bonus
- Mooks have one, or two boxes in their stress track, depending on how tough you imagine them to be.
- Mooks can’t take consequences. If they run out of stress boxes they are at -2 on everything and the next hit takes them down.

To randomize Mook NPCs a bit more for the purpose of this SOLO experience, I plan to roll Fudge Dice and any positive result above +2, will indicate their Highest Approach+Skill. In those rare situations where it seems unlikely there is an elite Special Forces warrior with a +4 Skill, the result could indicate multiple opponents or an unexpectedly potent special weapon.

For this opportunist mugger (a Minor NPC) ... [+3] so the man is a Good (+3) Fighter. As I've said he has a weapon this might be a taser, a knife, a baseball bat or a pistol (may as well roll 1d4)...[1] a Taser. I decided not to detail his other skills and aspects at this point, as I just need his Combat Skill.



She can try using Guile for the trip and needs a Good (+3) result.

CREATE ADVANTAGE

Character	Lexi
Intention	Trip the Mugger
Roll	3 GUILLE + 3
-1 Fatigue? on	-2 Broken? 0

She gets 3 + 3 and -1 for Fatigue, so is just 1 short of Succeeding with Style.

Succeed: You create the aspect with a free invoke or add an invoke to an existing aspect

She trips the man who had expected a meek surrender. He hits the wet sidewalk and flounders about scrambling to hit her again...

NPC ACTION

Character	Thug
Action	ATTACK
Intention	Hit her with the Taser
Roll	0
Approach Bonus	+3

DEFEND

Character	Lexi
Intention	Dodge+1
Roll	1 GUILLE + 3
-1 Fatigue? on	-2 Broken? 0

Tie or Succeed: You are mostly unaffected by your enemy

She has she has Skill:DODGE+1, so with +1 for skill and -1 for the Fatigue, she gets a Tie.

Lexi manages to keep kicking away the arm with the taser as she scrambles to her feet.

She COULD simply run off, but this ... tramp ... has dared to attack a Princess of Amber. Besides, that taser might come in handy, and he might even have some money or a credit card she could use.

She stamps down on the arm holding the taser, trying to disarm him.

CREATE ADVANTAGE

Character	Lexi
Intention	Disarm the guy
Roll	-1 FORCE + 2
-1 Fatigue? on	-2 Broken? 0

Lexi needs to beat the guy's +3 but rolls -1, +2 Force and -1 Fatigue. She can use the Free Invoke of her Advantage (Tripped) for +2 to reach +2 and will then spend one of her two FATE Points to Invoke her "Rebellious Daughter of Amber" Aspect to get to a total of +4



Succeed: You create the aspect with a free invoke or add an invoke to an existing aspect

Technically it doesn't seem worth paying a FATE Point to get +2 to gain an Advantage worth +2, but narratively it means he no longer has the taser.

With a satisfying crunch, he lets go of the taser and rolls further out into the sidewalk.

He's holding the arm and looking up at her. He's not badly damaged yet but can see she is not going to give up easily. They both look at the taser, lying between them.

If he gets to the Taser first – a Contested Haste - Create an Advantage opposed by Lexi's Defend - the fight will continue, otherwise he will be Likely (26+) to run off. Grabbing it seems like pure speed, not his Combat Skill so the Mook only has Mediocre (+0) for that.

NPC ACTION

Character	Thug (Neumann)
Action	CREATE ADVANTAGE
Intention	Grab the Taser
Roll	0
Bonus	0 Mediocre

DEFEND

Character	Lexi
Intention	Grab the Taser first
Roll	-1 HASTE + 1
Fatig on	Broken 0

It seems important enough to get the weapon. Lexi will spend her last FATE Point for +2.

Tie or Succeed: You are mostly unaffected by your enemy.

As a "Daughter of Amber" Lexi has quicker reflexes than most folks and snatches up the taser. She smiles as she stalks towards the man at her feet, thumbing the trigger to give a menacing blue fizzle.

I just realised I had recently watched The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo on Netflix, and Lexi MIGHT have been influenced by Lizbeth Salander in that 😊

Her arm snaps down quickly to zap the man.

ATTACK

Character	Lexi
Intention	Zap
Roll	3 HASTE + 1
Fatig on	Broken 0

Looking to beat his Combat +3 but only equals it because of Fatigue.

Tie: Your attack does no damage, but you gain a boost

nb. Should have used Force+2! But it seemed to narratively suit Haste better.

Scrambling backwards, he slithers off the kerb into the puddles on the road. Cars honk, flash their lights and swerve around him.

It seems Likely he could be clipped by a car or else roll back to the kerb. This could be interesting – Lexi could even decide to save him, or just rob him while he lies there bleeding! Likely (26+) ...[72]

As he scrambles to his feet, a truck driver looks up from his phone too late. With an exasperated sigh, Lexi reaches out to grab him and pull him back to the kerb.

OVERCOME

Character	Lexi
Intention	Yank the mugger out of the way of a truck
Roll	1 HASTE + 1
Fatig on	Broken 0

This seems like it should only require a positive result and she has +1 Haste...

Succeed: You accomplish your objective, achieve your goal, bypass an obstacle, or remove an obstacle entirely

He's only a lone Mook so I can decide to fast forward the rest of the fight

"Oh my god! You saved my life!" he throws open his arms to hug her and ZAPPPP, down he crumples and lies twitching.

Coffee and Cake

A little while later, the rain has started again but sitting at a table in a café in the warm and dry, sipping coffee, and eating some kind of sweet nutty muffin, Lexi examines her new possessions. Some plastic coins and a credit card showing the photograph and address of Robert Neumann. His smartphone wouldn't unlock so she dumped it in a bin. The taser and a fold-up plastic raincoat. She wonders how long before he cancels the card. Waving it at the reader paid for the breakfast – probably under the limit where it needed a PIN or biometric checking. Worry about that later.

She used a napkin and her reflection in the silver condiment holder to wipe off the worst of her makeup smudges, then dozed in the seat – a slight smile on her face remembering the look of pained surprise on Neumann's face - ignoring the annoyed glances from the girl behind the counter and the odd stares from the early morning crowd that drifted in and out around her.

***** End of Session One *****

Lexi will get back to her Refresh of 2 Fate Points and even recover her lost Fatigue Consequence, dozing in the comfort of the café. She has a bit of money now and this Blade Runner inspired setting has a lot of vacant apartments so I'm sure some desperate landlords are taking cash for a few days rent.