

FREEFORM UNIVERSAL

Second Edition

BETA RULES

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ABOUT THIS BETA EDITION

This is the Beta version of *Freeform Universal, second edition*. While it has been in development for a very (very!) long time, it still isn't complete. There are sections missing, a bunch of bits that may need a re-write, and other parts that may be a compromise too far. It's best to consider this Beta version a nice-looking first draft, useable, but in need of polish. It has been built on 10 years of play, discussion and enthusiastic support from the FU community, but there is always room for improvement. That's where I hope you can help.

Please play, read and discuss these rules. I would really like your feedback, on the rules, your play experiences, or just typos! **I strongly recommend you read the design notes**, beginning page 136, before diving into the rules. They clarify my intent and may help frame your understanding of what this book is.

Share detailed feedback via email, but feel free to fire quick questions or thoughts via the official facebook page.

EMAIL: info@perilplanet.com

FACEBOOK: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/freeformuniversal/>

Cheers,
Nathan Russell
December 2019

A note on copyright

Please note that while this Beta version is freely available, it is NOT licensed like first edition and is firmly under copyright. An SRD of creative commons licensed material will be available after the content is finalised.

Change log

OCTOBER 2020: Minor typo fixes

CONTENTS

FAST FU.....	4	GAME MASTERS.....	91
THE BASICS	7	Facilitator.....	91
Playing Freeform Universal.....	8	Setting up the game.....	93
Fiction first	10	Guiding character creation.....	95
Playing safe.....	12	Resolving checks.....	98
Glossary	13	Harm, healing & death	102
An example of play.....	14	Rewarding players	104
THE CORE RULES	17	Running scenes.....	106
The first rule.....	17	Planning adventures.....	110
Characters.....	18	Villains.....	116
Checks.....	20	An intro to improvisation	116
Drama points	28	More advice.....	116
Conditions.....	30	OPTIONS	119
Tracks.....	34	Fast fights.....	119
YOUR STORY	37	Hard mode	119
Cornerstones.....	38	Trademarks.....	120
A genre mash!	40	Powers.....	122
Your Instant Story Generator.....	41	Other ways to create powers	128
CHARACTERS	43	Hit tracks	130
Attributes.....	43	Weapons & armour	132
Drive.....	46	Threat ratings.....	134
Gear	48		
Creating characters.....	52		
Advancement	60		
DOING EVERYTHING	65		
Game time.....	65		
Scenes.....	66		
Getting the most out of checks....	70		
Consequences	74		
Threats.....	78		
Conflict.....	82		

Fast FU

Gather a group of friends, a handful of D6 in two colours and a character sheet for each player. Decide what type of game you will play, then make your characters.

CHARACTERS

Characters are constructed by making several simple choices.

Attributes

Write four evocative statements about your character, defining their most interesting features.

Drive

Write an interesting instinct, attitude, belief or relationship that your character has.

Gear

Record any equipment your character has. Give your character a memento - a small object of personal significance.

Drama points

You begin with 3 Drama point.

The first rule

Use common sense and the "rule of cool" to guide all that you do. Nothing else matters.

DOING STUFF

When you attempt an action where the outcome is uncertain, and both success and failure are interesting, make a *check*.

DO THE FOLLOWING:

1. Phrase your action as a question, like "Can I punch that guy?" or "Do I leap the pit trap?" Make it clear and specific.
2. Create a die pool. Begin with one Action die \oplus .
 - Add more \oplus for each helpful tag or advantage you have. Better position, taking your time, and attributes are common bonuses.
 - Add a Danger die \ominus for every disadvantage affecting your action. Being rushed, a poor position and a threat's tags often add Danger dice.
3. Roll the dice. Each \ominus cancels out a matching \oplus . The highest remaining Action die is your result.
 - **BOTCH:** if all the \oplus are cancelled, the result counts as a roll of "1".
4. Consult the Oracle to determine how well you did. Describe the consequences.

That's it. Whatever you attempt, from swinging on a chandelier to fighting a magical duel is resolved in this way.

THE ORACLE

Roll	Result
6	YES AND... You succeed and gain some other advantage.
5	YES... You succeed.
4	YES BUT... You succeed, but at a cost.
3	NO BUT... You fail, just.
2	No... You fail.
1	NO AND... You fail and things get much worse.

Consequences

Always use the fiction to guide the resolution of checks. Common consequences include:

CONDITIONS: add or remove a condition from someone / thing.

DANGER: put someone in a dangerous situation or make the things worse.

GEAR: use up, break, lose, repair or replace a piece of equipment.

TAGS: change the scene by adding or removing a tag.

TRACKS: progress time, advance a problem, use up a resource or mark a threat's track.

Tags

Tags are evocative words or phrases that define your game world. A character can be *tough*, a room *on fire* or the weather *stormy*. They might be on a character sheet, in a scene description, or just come up during play.

DRAMA POINTS

Drama points are used to modify checks and do other cool stuff.

Earning Drama

TAKE A DRAMA POINT WHEN:

- An attribute makes a situation worse for you or an ally.
- You take meaningful action in response to a drive.
- You play in an entertaining way.

Spending Drama

SPEND A DRAMA POINT TO:

- Add an Action die to a dice pool.
- Re-roll a check. You must accept the new result.
- Avoid taking a consequence.
- Add a tag to a scene, introducing new details or features.

The Basics

FREEFORM UNIVERSAL is a game of dramatic stories, explosive action and high adventure. It is built upon simple concepts that provide a great deal of flexibility. The result is a game where the rules disappear into the background while you get on with creating exciting tales in the tradition of your favourite books, TV shows and films. It is a role playing game of grand proportions and stupefying simplicity that lets you create exciting stories in any setting imaginable, with a minimum of fuss, or even preparation.

When you sit down with your friends the rules in this book will help you move from concept to actual play within a matter of minutes. Most of your time will be spent describing the cool actions of your characters as they explore the world, overcome threats and defeat foes. Sometimes, when things get tricky or dangerous, you will turn to the dice to see what happens next.

USING THIS BOOK

Using this book is straightforward. It is organised into chapters with the most important information up front, more detailed explanations after that, and optional rules and example settings towards the back. If you wanted to, you could start playing by just reading the first thirty or so pages, and then reference the rest of the book as needed.

Examples

Italicised text such as this are examples of play. They show the rules in action and illustrate how you and the other players might engage with them in your own games.

Call out boxes

Additional information, designer's notes and helpful hints are provided throughout the rules in call out boxes like this.

ⓄOptional rules

Rules that are not essential for play, but provide interesting tweaks, twists or alternatives are noted with the Ⓞ symbol. These optional rules are scattered throughout the rules, where most relevant. There is also a whole chapter of other optional rules, beginning on page XX.

PLAYING FREEFORM UNIVERSAL

You and your friends are going to tell an epic story about heroes doing amazing things. This collaborative adventure happens through conversation where everyone helps to put the characters in cool or entertaining situations. You will share ideas, listen, riff off one another and work together to maximise everyone's fun. It's a bit like a writers room for a TV show, where a group of creative people (that's you!) contribute ideas and describe cool moments that will excite and entertain the audience (which also happens to be you!).

At some point in your story the game systems will engage. This will usually happen when your character tries something and you aren't sure if they can succeed; *Can you dodge the falling rocks? Will you disarm the trap before the room fills with water? Can you defeat the black knight?* At these moments you will roll dice to see how well your character succeeds or how badly they fail, and then continue with describing the action of your story.

Your game will flow from conversation to game mechanics and back again. Sometimes there will be a long gap between rolling dice, and at other times you will make several in a row. This is all part of the game.

WHAT YOU NEED

Gather a group of friends and prepare to play. You can play with just two people, anywhere up to six or more. You will also need the following:

- **DICE:** a whole bunch of six-sided dice in two different colours. Six-sided dice are referred to throughout the rules as d6.
- **CHARACTER SHEETS:** each player will need a character sheet. There are copies in the back of this book, or you can download them from FreeformUniversal.com
- **TOKENS:** poker chips, beads or coins to represent Drama points. Each player will need 3 to begin with, but a small pile is ideal.
- **PENCIL AND PAPER:** handy for filling in forms, taking notes, scribbling maps and keeping track of story details.
- **STICKY NOTES:** a pad of sticky notes or pile of index cards will be invaluable to track characters, events and situations during play. As some new element is introduced into a scene, write it on a note and place it on the table so everyone remembers!

WHAT YOU DO

Most of you will create a player character (PC) who is a major protagonist in the story. One player will be the game master (GM) who helps everyone along, presents challenges for the characters to face and adjudicates the rules when needed.

Players

You will describe your character's actions in vivid detail, say the things they say, and use logic and imagination to portray them. You will also work with the other players and GM to create a story that everyone enjoys. When given a chance to be in the spotlight, you show the cool things your character can do. When other characters are in the spotlight you support them by paying attention and participating in the narrative.

AS A PLAYER, YOU SHOULD:

- Bring your character to life
- Say what your character says
- Put other characters in the spotlight
- Relish your spotlight time

Game master

As the GM, you create interesting situations or challenges for the PC's to encounter, interact with and overcome. You portray the world as a living, breathing place and help each player show off the cool things their character can do. You ask and answer questions, fill in the blanks and interpret the actions of the characters and their enemies. You are a fan of the characters, a facilitator of the action and the final arbiter of the rules.

AS A GM YOU SHOULD:

- Bring the world to life
- Be a fan of the players and their characters
- Ask questions
- Do what the fiction demands

FICTION FIRST

At their core, games of **FREEFORM UNIVERSAL** are built on the following elements.

SCENES

Most of your game will be played out in scenes, where the GM frames a situation and the players describe their character's actions. Like a scene in a film, you will bring it to life by describing the sights, sounds and important features. The players will portray the protagonists, while the GM will take on the role of everyone else - the villains, minions, monsters and extras. Sometimes you might talk like your character and say what they say, and other times you will just describe the action.

Organising your game into scenes helps to pace the action and focus on the most interesting or important parts of the story. Some scenes will encompass a long period of time, while others will be broken up into small moments just long enough for each player to describe an action.

FICTIONAL POSITIONING

Fictional positioning is simply all the facts and details you have established in your story and being aware of how it might impact the actions of all the characters involved in a scene. Have you tripped the troll and now stand over it, brandishing your sword? That's fictional positioning. Are you faced with a sheer cliff and no climbing equipment? That's also fictional positioning.

Fictional positioning helps you understand how your character can affect the story, and how the story will affect them. It's basically a fancy term for "common sense", as it applies to your story, the characters involved, where they are and what they are doing. It describes where your character is in relation to all the other parts of the story - environment, enemies, other player characters, objects and anything else.

When the GM describes a landslide, that's fictional positioning telling you you're about to get swept away by a wall of mud. What you do next will depend on your character's fictional position - are they on foot with nowhere to run, in their sports car, or piloting their ten-story mecha? Each of these changes the scene and what might logically happen next.

PLAYING TO FIND OUT

One of the great features of **FREEFORM UNIVERSAL** is that you don't need to do a lot of preparation to play. When you have your characters and an inciting incident you can throw yourselves into the game and just see where things take you. In fact, it is important that you don't plan too far ahead, as the players have a lot of narrative control and you never quite know where the dice rolls might take you next. Play in the moment, let situations unfold as they need to, and embrace the opportunities presented through play.

TAGS

Tags are the fundamental building blocks of everything in your imagined world. They are used to convey information about the people, places, objects and events of your story.

Tags are words or short descriptive phrases that convey significant details about the characters, locations and events of your story. A character might be *quick* or *covered in mud*, a magic sword *razor sharp*, and a room *on fire*.

Sometimes tags will be written down, either on a character sheet, a map, or a sticky note where everyone can see it. At other times, they will simply be details described during play.

What tags do

TAGS DO THE FOLLOWING:

- Describe the world, its inhabitants and the features that might be interacted with. Tags help to breath life into your world.
- Grant permission to do something. To attack a foe at a distance you will need an appropriate weapon or ability. To enter the assassin's enclave you will need the *assassin's mark*.
- Make actions more or less likely to succeed, depending on the fictional positioning. Helpful tags will improve your chances, while other tags might impede your success.
- Inspire action and suggest ways to approach or overcome challenges. The gun is *loud*, the vampire *nocturnal* and the cauldron is *precariously balanced*.

PLAYING SAFE

It is important to set expectations before play begins so that everyone feels comfortable and safe. Of course you have all come together to have fun and tell cool stories, but the people at your table might have very different interpretations of what is “fun” or “cool”. You are going to discuss the type of game everyone wants to play, and one of the things you should decide is what safety tools will be used at the table. You don’t always know what will confront or upset someone and sometimes stories go in unexpected directions. When these things happen it is better to have some tools in place to deal with any issues that arise. The intent of safety tools is not to water-down or remove tough content, but to ensure everyone feels comfortable enough to engage with the stories you want to tell.

A conversation might be all you need, but there are many helpful resources available. Investigate some of the following options and implement the ones you feel will work best for your group. However you choose to proceed, make sure you are always respectful of other people’s opinions and feelings.

- **LINES AND VEILS** are a way for players to flag what they don’t want included at all (lines), and what they don’t want described in detail or would prefer to happen “off screen” (veils).
- **THE X-CARD** is a tool created by John Stavropoulos that allows any person to edit-out or veto content that makes them or someone else uncomfortable during a game.
Learn more at <http://tinyurl.com/x-card-rpg>.
- **SCRIPT CHANGE** by Brie Sheldon helps players tackle content as it arises by using tools such as *rewind*, *fast forward* and *pause*. Find a detailed explanation of how to use this tool at <http://briebeau.com/scriptchange>.

GLOSSARY

ACTION DIE: a die you add to a check when things are in your favour.

BOON: when your check result has multiple 6's.

BOTCH: when all your Action dice are cancelled out by Danger dice.

CHECK: rolling dice to see what happens next.

CONDITION: a physical, mental, social or emotional injury.

DANGER DIE: a die you add to a check when things are not in your favour.

DICE POOL: a collection of dice you roll to make a check.

DRAMA POINTS: a resource players spend for a variety of cool effects.

EXPERIENCE POINTS (XP): a reward for playing your character and emulating your genre.

GAME MASTER (GM): the player who facilitates the game and describes the world.

NON-PLAYER CHARACTER / CREATURE (NPC): a character or creature controlled by the GM.

ORACLE: a chart that indicates your degree of success or failure.

PARTY: a group of PCs who are working together to complete an objective.

PLAYER: anyone who is playing the game. This includes the GM.

PLAYER CHARACTER (PC): a character controlled by a player.

SCENE: a part of your story, like a chapter in a book or scene in a film.

SESSION: a single continuous period of play.

STORY: the continuing adventures of your characters.

TAG: a word or statement that describes an aspect of the imagined world.

TRACK: a series of boxes you mark to indicate progress towards a goal or the approach of an impending danger.

AN EXAMPLE OF PLAY

Tim, Nina, Dave, Rob and June have gathered to play an action-filled game of pulp adventure. Tim is going to be the game master and the others each portray a player character. The party have been searching the jungle for an ancient temple, rumoured to have an artefact that could turn the tide of the war. Unfortunately they have encountered the temple's ancient guardians, a tribe of Neanderthals armed with strange crystal weapons.

Tim (as the GM): You have just pushed through the jungle

The Core Rules

What follows are the core rules of **FREEFORM UNIVERSAL**. They provide everything you need to play out entertaining stories and send your characters on exciting adventures. Everything else in this book is built upon what you will find in this chapter.

A note on organisation

The rules in this chapter have been organised so they can stand alone. It is entirely possible to play **FREEFORM UNIVERSAL** without ever reading any other part of this book.

This may suit those of you just looking for a quick pick-up game, or who love the purity of the original **FU** rules. For everyone else, the information presented here is expanded upon and fleshed out in more detail in later chapters.

The information in this chapter is organised in the order you are most likely to need it.

CHARACTERS: describing the core components of the characters each player will portray. Page XX.

CHECKS: how to roll the dice and interpret the outcome of a character's actions. Page XX.

DRAMA POINTS: how to gain and use Drama points. Page XX.

CONDITIONS: how harm is suffered, resisted and healed. Page XX.

TRACKS: recording action progress or impending danger. Page XX.

THE FIRST RULE

The first rule of **FREEFORM UNIVERSAL** is that the story should always guide you. Use the fiction you have created, the dramatic context of your adventure, and logic to determine when a rule should be invoked, a bonus or penalty applied or a round of applause given. Nothing written in this book can trump common sense and your judgement of what is fun.

CHARACTERS

Player characters are the cool protagonists of your adventures. Most of the players will portray a character, describing their actions and bringing them to life as they take part in adventures. Each PC consists of a number of descriptive elements that help you portray them in your games.

Attributes

A character consists of several tags that describe their most interesting or important features. A character's attributes flag the things you think are cool, and if you attempt an action and have an attribute that could make it easier, you get a bonus to your dice roll. Attributes fall into one of three types:

- **CONCEPTS** are broad descriptions of a character's origin, background or role. Things like *Elven hunter*, *Charming rogue* and *Retired fighter pilot*. Concepts are a quick way to describe a character's place in the world.
- **EDGES** are advantages the character has, such as skills, talents and cool abilities. *Expert marksman*, *angel wings* and *athletic* are all examples of edges. They are more specific and focused than concepts.
- **FLAWS** are drawbacks or disadvantages that a character must contend with or overcome, such as being *greedy*, *hard of hearing* or *wanted*. They make your character more interesting and can be leveraged for bonuses in play.

Drives

Drives are the instincts, beliefs and motivations that cause your character to take action. They are the attitudes, traits or goals that help bring your character to life. *I always defend the weak*, *I never back down from a fight*, *Shoot first and ask questions later* and *I don't trust Martians* are all examples of drives.

Gear

Gear is all the cool equipment and other objects a character takes with them on adventures. You usually only mention the important or interesting stuff, as it is assumed that characters have whatever makes sense for the setting and their concept.

Drama points

An abstract representation of luck, will power and talent, you spend Drama points to improve dice rolls and do cool stuff in play.

PICTURE OF CHARACTER SHEET
GOES HERE

Quick character creation

Character creation is explained in detail in Chapter X (page XX). If you just want to jump right in, or make a character to use as you follow along with the rules, do the following:

- Write four distinctive **attributes** - 1 concept, 2 edges and 1 flaw.
- Write a **drive** that reflects an attitude, belief or instinct.
- Write down the cool **gear** your character has access to.
- Round out with a brief description. Your character begins with 3 **Drama points**.

CHECKS

Play unfolds through conversation until a moment of tension occurs. This is usually triggered when a question comes up in play, such as “*Can I punch that guy in the face?*” or “*Do I avoid the trap?*” or even “*What happens next?*” In these moments you make a check.

Only make a check when both success and failure offer interesting consequences or move the story forward. If failure (or success) would cause the scene to stall, don't roll - just go with the interesting or obvious option.

Only players roll

Only players make checks. This leaves the GM free to scheme, plot and prepare for the next exciting encounter!

Checks proceed in the following steps.

DESCRIBE YOUR ACTION: say what you are doing.

ASK A QUESTION: convey the stakes as a closed question.

CREATE YOUR DICE POOL: gather Action and Danger dice.

ROLL THE DICE: each Danger die cancels a matching Action die.

CONSULT THE ORACLE: see how well (or poorly) you did.

DESCRIBE YOUR ACTION

Begin by clearly describing your action and, most importantly, what you want to achieve. Knowing the intent of an action will help everyone at the table imagine the scene and will guide you when it is time to describe the outcome.

Intent

When describing your action ensure the intent is clear. Don't just say what you are doing, but why you are doing it. When you punch your enemy, do you want to injure them, intimidate them or knock them over? When driving in a race are you just trying to win, or are you trying to impress someone?

Knowing the intent of an action helps everyone better imagine what is going on. It will also make it much easier for the GM to describe the outcome of the action, no matter what the check result is.

Automatic & impossible actions

Depending on the description and intent, an action might automatically succeed, or be impossible to complete. In these cases, describe the outcome and move on.

If the outcome of the action is unclear, proceed with the check. This usually begins by asking a question about the action.

When describing actions you are not planning out exactly what will happen, but ensuring everyone understands what is going on and what is being risked.

Stakes

Consider what is at stake should the action fail. Typically, a character is risking harm, resources or danger.

- **HARM** is any kind of injury, physical or otherwise. If the action fails, someone or some thing is getting hurt.
- **RESOURCES** include things like money or equipment, but also less tangible stuff like time. If the action fails some or all of a resource will be used up.
- **DANGER** is a change in situation. If the action fails a tag might be added or removed from the scene, or some new threat introduced.

You don't need to declare stakes up front, but having them in mind will make resolving actions quicker, especially if things go wrong. Sometimes what is at stake is obvious, while at other times you may need to be more explicit so that everyone can picture what is going on.

Example

Tennessee Smith, pursued by cavemen, finds himself at the edge of a crevasse.

DAVE: *Is it too wide to jump?*

GM: *Not at all. You could make it with a run-up.*

DAVE: *Okay, I do that then... Actually, how deep is the crevasse?*

GM: *Two or three stories, but the edges are steep, not sheer, so if you jump far enough you may not plummet all the way down.*

DAVE: *Great. So I'm risking an injury?*

ASK A QUESTION

When you know what you are doing, why you are doing it and what's at stake, ask a closed question that sums up the action. A closed question is one that can be answered with "yes" or "no".

Do I stab the orc? Can I leap the chasm? Do I resist the poison?

Who asks the question?

Typically, the acting player or the GM asks the question, however anyone can make suggestions. Most of the time you won't even need to ask the question explicitly because it will be obvious from your action ("*You take a run up and leap from the edge of the chasm. Roll.*"). The important thing is that everyone understands the intent of the action and the potential consequences.

Loaded questions

What happens when a character fails to pick the lock to the only exit in the room? Or they don't spot the important clue? Such situations can slow a scene down, or stop it completely. In situations where you want to keep the action moving, but a check seems appropriate, ask a loaded question.

A loaded question conveys both the intent of the action, and the consequences of failure. You are setting up the question so you have somewhere interesting to take the story, no matter the result.

Where a standard question might ask "*Can I find the clue?*" a loaded question asks "*Can I find the clue before the police turn up?*"

Loaded questions assume success, no matter what the dice roll. You are describing the action being taken, and what is at stake. In the case of looking for a clue, the evidence will be found, but a poor check result will create a new danger that needs to be dealt with (the police turn up).

Use loaded questions to create tension in scenes without stalling the characters or the action.

Examples

Can I punch the guy without getting hit back? Your punch is going to land, but a failed check will result in you also getting hit.

Can I quickly pick the lock? The resource at stake is time - the lock is opening, but can it be done quickly?

Can I leap the lava pool with my heavy pack on? You're getting across the lava, but might lose your gear on the way.

Can I track down the bandits before night falls? You will catch up with the bandits, but will there be enough light to scope out their camp?

Do I switch the artwork with a forgery before the guard comes back? You are going to replace the artwork, but may have to explain yourself to the security guard.

Can I throw Captain Doom into the building without causing too much collateral damage? Captain Doom is getting thrown, but will it create some new problems in the city?

Some players like to use loaded questions as default. That is totally cool.

CREATE YOUR DICE POOL

To resolve a check you will create a dice pool of Action and Danger dice. These are normal d6 in two different colours. Throughout these rules Action dice are indicated with ⊕ and Danger dice with ■.

Your pool always begins with a single Action die. Further dice can be added depending on the situation and narrative positioning. Each advantage you have you will add another ⊕, while hindrances will add a ■ to the pool.

Common modifiers to dice pools include the following:

Aid

If one or more allies are helping you complete the task, add a ⊕.

Attributes

Apply ⊕ to a check for each attribute that makes the action easier. Add ■ for each attribute that hinders the action in some way.

Conditions

Each condition a character has applies ■ to checks. Each condition an opponent has might add ⊕ if it hinders them or you can take advantage of it.

Position

If you have the higher ground, the element of surprise, or an advantageous position, add ⊕. If the situation favours an opponent add a ■ to the check.

Preparation

If you have plenty of time, have made a plan or are acting carefully, add ⊕. If you are rushed or unprepared, ■.

Resources

Not having the right tool, resources or contact might mean an action is impossible, or automatically fails. At other times it will simply add a ■.

Scale

If you are bigger, tougher or more powerful than the obstacle or opponent, add ⊕. If whatever obstacle you are facing is bigger, tougher, more numerous or more dangerous than you, add ■.

Skill

If an opponent is far more skilled or powerful, or an obstacle was created by someone or something more skilled / powerful, add ■.

Use these modifiers as a guide to adding dice to your pool. As always, the internal logic of your story and the specific details of the situation will be the most important points of reference.

ROLL THE DICE

Roll all the dice in your pool. Each Danger die cancels out one Action die with a matching value. The single highest remaining Action die is your result.

You roll four Action dice and three Danger dice, scoring 1 4 4 5 4 5. The 4 cancels one of the 4 and the 5 cancels the 5. This leaves you with two action dice, a 1 and 4. Your result is “4”.

Botches

If all the Action dice are cancelled out, you have botched your check. This counts as a roll of “1”, and means things have gone particularly bad. The GM is encouraged to really let loose with the consequences!

You make your roll, scoring 3 3 4 3 3 4. All the Action dice have been cancelled by the Danger dice - that’s a botch!

Boons

If your remaining Action dice show multiple “6” results, you have earned a boon. Each 6 after the first grants you one boon. Use it immediately to improve the action resolution, such as causing more serious harm to an enemy, adding or removing a tag, or marking extra boxes on a track.

After you roll and cancel you have three action dice; 4 6 6. Your result counts as a “6” with one boon!

Classic FU

The original FREEFORM UNIVERSAL rules resolved actions slightly differently. You can still use the classic method, without needing to change anything else.

Your die pool begins with a single **Base die**. Add Action and Danger dice as needed, but they cancel each other out (one for one) before you roll. Never roll with both Action and Danger dice.

If you roll with Action dice, your result is the single highest die. If you roll with Danger dice, your result is the single lowest die.

CONSULT THE ORACLE

Compare your result with the Oracle to determine how well you succeeded. The oracle helps you interpret the dice roll and describe the outcome of your action. When you make a roll, you are asking “Does my character get what they want?” and the oracle responds with one of six possible answers.

Roll	Do you get what you want?
6	YES, AND... You succeed and gain some other advantage.
5	YES... You succeed.
4	YES, BUT... You succeed, but at a cost.
3	NO, BUT... You fail, just.
2	NO... You fail.
1	NO, AND... You fail and things get much worse.

When you make a check you will either do the thing you wanted (**YES**) or you won't (**NO**). However, it is rarely as simple as that, particularly when you need to take **AND** or **BUT** qualifiers into account. When describing the outcome of a check, always fall back on the established fiction. Consider the intended result, the stakes, and how the dice roll changed the situation - for better or worse. Move the story along in an interesting and meaningful way.

Example

*Dave's character, Tennessee Smith, is fleeing a collapsing temple. Dave asks “Can I escape the crumbling temple?” and builds his die pool. He begins with a single Action die and adds another because he is a **Daredevil explorer**. The GM gives him a Danger die because the ground is shaking violently, making it hard to run.*

*That gives Dave two Action and one Danger die: **⊕⊕⊖***

*Rolling the dice, he gets a **6****4****6**. The **6** cancels out the **6**, leaving a single **4**. Checking the oracle, a 4 is a **YES BUT** outcome. **YES**, Tennessee managed to escape the temple, **BUT** something goes wrong...*

Yes and

You succeed and the effect is great. You gain some additional advantage; you cause a troubling or enduring condition; you tick or clear three track boxes; a danger is reduced. Describe how you succeeded and what bonus or windfall you have.

Your investigation revealed a detailed clue. You leaped the chasm and didn't lose any time. You hit your target and it was a mighty blow, or set a friend up for a cool move.

Yes

You do exactly what you intended. You cause fleeting or troubling harm; two track boxes are ticked; you keep or take the initiative. Describe what your character does, and the impact on the scene.

Your investigation uncovered a helpful clue. You hit your target.

Yes but

You succeed, but the effect is limited, or the action costs you something. You cause and suffer fleeting harm; you tick one track box; an enemy takes action; a danger is imminent. Describe your success and the price you paid or the trouble it caused.

You found the clue, but it took time. You leaped the chasm, but are hanging by your fingertips. You hit your target, but got hit too, or used up ammo.

No but

You fail by the slimmest of margins. You suffer a fleeting condition; you tick one track box; a danger is imminent. Describe how you failed and why the situation isn't all bad.

You didn't leap the chasm, but spot another way across. You couldn't sneak past the guards, but they didn't spot you. Your attack missed but you are in a better position for next time.

No

You fail in the most obvious of ways. You suffer a fleeting or troubling condition; two track boxes are ticked or cleared; an enemy acts or there is immediate danger. Describe the consequences of your failure.

You were unable to leap the chasm; you were spotted by the guards; you missed your target and they strike back.

No and

You fail, spectacularly. You suffer troubling or enduring harm; you tick three track boxes; an enemy takes immediate, decisive action; a resource is lost. Describe how you failed and how things just got worse.

You didn't jump the chasm, and you lost your backpack, too. The guards spotted you and raised the alarm. Your attack missed and you are injured, distracted or put in a bad spot.

DRAMA POINTS

Drama points are a resource that gives players more control over the events of the story. Every character will begin the game with three Drama points, and can earn more through play. You will spend these points to change the story and give your characters advantages as they go about their adventures.

EARNING DRAMA POINTS

You can earn Drama points in a variety of ways, and your group might decide on some others. The most common ways to earn a Drama point are as follows.

Trouble

Take a Drama point when your character's attributes cause trouble for you or an ally. The trouble may be story-based, or it might increase the difficulty of a check.

*Your **bad body odour** makes your group easier to track; or your **overconfidence** encourages you to try something you shouldn't. Maybe your **winning smile** draws unnecessary attention; or your **short sighted** character tries to spot something in the distance.*

Drive

If you act upon a drive and it leads to an interesting or dramatic moment, take a Drama point. You might do something inspired by a drive that creates an entertaining interaction between characters or changes the scene in some way. A meaningful and dramatic moment might also come about when a character is forced to make a tough choice related to a drive, or even act against a drive. A player must make a choice to act on the drive - you cannot earn a Drama point because of some lucky (or unlucky) coincidence.

Rule of cool

When your character does something cool that makes the whole table cheer (or cry!), take a Drama point. If you role play in a way that has everyone stop and watch, or if you just hit all the right notes for your game's genre and tone, you get a reward.

Sometimes another player or the GM will suggest you be rewarded, but it is also okay to ask!

SPENDING DRAMA POINTS

You can spend your Drama points to pull off cool moves, change the scene, and create advantages for yourself or allies.

Effort

Spend a Drama point to add an Action die to your die pool. This might represent concentration, force of will or just dumb luck. If aiding an ally with a check, you can add a die to their pool in the same way.

You can spend any number of Drama point on effort, but must declare the use before rolling dice.

Do-over

After you make a check, spend a Drama point to re-roll the whole pool. Just pick up all the dice you just rolled and roll them again. You must accept the new result and cannot re-roll the pool a second time.

You can spend additional Drama points on effort before rolling the do-over.

Embellish

Spend a Drama point to add a new detail to a scene. This might be a new tag, or a useful scene description, or a helpful object, relationship or piece of information. An embellishment may represent a convenient coincidence, lucky break, or a player might describe a flashback where they prepared for just this situation.

A new detail cannot contradict anything already established in the fiction. The GM can always choose to veto an embellishment that contradicts the story, or is not appropriate for your game's setting or tone.

Soak

When you must write a condition, spend a Drama point to ignore or reduce the harm. This does not undo the action that caused the harm, you just don't have any lasting effect in the form of a condition. See page XX.

Other ways to use Drama points

Your group might come up with other uses for Drama points. Perhaps they will fuel magic powers, or activate special abilities, or represent a resource of some kind.

CONDITIONS

Some actions may leave a character suffering physical, emotional or psychological harm. Such injuries are represented by conditions, which are a narrative description of harm such as *bruised ribs*, *broken ankle*, *wounded pride*, *tired* or *terrified*. Each condition is a tag that generally makes life harder for whoever or whatever suffers them.

SEVERITY OF HARM

Conditions can be anything suitably dramatic and bothersome, based on the events of the scene and the genre of your game. While virtually any kind of harm or impediment might be represented, conditions are divided into three broad categories that convey how easily they are overcome or how quickly they subside.

Fleeting conditions

Fleeting conditions heal quickly, or stop being bothersome after a short while. Bruises, wounded pride, minor cuts or scrapes, sprains, being winded or surprised, pinned, upset, drunk or angry are all fleeting conditions.

Fleeting conditions are removed at the end of a scene, or when appropriate attention or care is given during a scene. Some fleeting conditions last only a moment and are then gone.

Troubling conditions

Troubling conditions will take more than a scene change to overcome. Wounds (physical or emotional), fractured fingers or toes, serious sprains, trapped in handcuffs, and being terrified, poisoned, concussed or humiliated are examples of troubling conditions.

Troubling conditions last at least until the end of the next scene. Some may need specific treatment or action in order to improve.

Enduring conditions

Enduring conditions can take days, weeks or months to heal or subside. Professional disgrace, broken limbs, deep wounds, internal injuries, and psychological trauma could all be described as enduring conditions.

Enduring conditions will last as long as narratively appropriate, depending on your genre, setting and the pace of your story. They will need to be specifically addressed through play. This may be in the form of medical treatment, or roleplaying scenes where the problem is engaged with.

TAKING HARM

If a character fails a check where harm was at stake, they suffer a condition. This will usually be obvious, like when involved in a fight, or leaping from a moving vehicle, or trying to cast dark magic. At other times a character will take a condition because it just makes sense in the narrative, or as an additional or unexpected consequence to a check.

*October Jones is trying to sneak into a mobster's home undetected. She rolls a **YES BUT** result and the GM decides that while she got in undetected she cut herself while climbing a fence. She notes the condition **Cut leg**.*

Conditions are always related to the action or situation that caused them. If you successfully befuddle a bureaucrat you might apply the *confused* condition. If you fail to dodge a punch you could end up with a *black eye*.

How bad is it?

When a character suffers harm, write an appropriate condition. The GM will indicate whether the harm is fleeting, troublesome or enduring based on the situation and oracle. Most of the time harm will be fleeting or troublesome.

When you suffer harm you can choose to write a new condition, or make an existing condition worse. If replacing a condition, the new harm must be:

- **AN APPROPRIATE SEVERITY:** if the GM tells you to take a *troubling* condition, the new condition must be *troubling* or *enduring*.
- **MORE SERIOUS THAN THE CONDITION BEING REPLACED:** you cannot replace a *fleeting* condition with another *fleeting* condition.
- **A LOGICAL PROGRESSION OF HARM:** it's okay for *bruised ribs* to become *broken ribs* or *internal bleeding* but it wouldn't make sense for a *broken finger* to be changed to *intense rage*.

*You have a fleeting **winded** condition and suffer another fleeting injury. You choose to re-write the original as a troubling **bruised ribs** condition. Later, you take another fleeting condition. You could choose to write this as a new injury (let's say, **tired**), or upgrade your **bruised ribs** to an enduring condition like **broken ribs**.*

*While involved in a chase you suffer a fleeting **sore foot**. Later you take a troubling injury. You could choose to write a new troubling condition, or upgrade the sore foot to a troubling condition, such as **sprained ankle**.*

RECORDING CONDITIONS

A character can have any number of conditions. Write each one in a clear and evocative manner on your character sheet. Note fleeting conditions with a slash, troublesome conditions with a cross and enduring conditions with an asterisk, like so:

Winded

Bruised ribs

Broken ribs

Healing

When enough time has passed or medical attention has been received, a condition improves. Fleeting and troublesome conditions are removed entirely. An enduring condition, however, will become a troubling condition until further time or medical attention has been provided. Re-write the condition to reflect the new state of the harm.

*A character with an enduring **sliced left arm** might become a troubling **tender arm wound**.*

MITIGATING HARM

A character can avoid suffering a condition in one of two ways. They may soak the harm or be taken out.

Soak

A player can spend a Drama point to “soak” an injury. They might completely shrug off the harm, or reduce its severity, at the GM’s discretion.

Most of the time a single Drama point will allow a player to completely dismiss the condition. While the character may still have been momentarily hurt, frightened or embarrassed, the harm has no lasting effect on the scene. They simply shake it off and continue on their way.

In grittier games, or if the harm was particularly grievous, the GM can rule that a Drama point won’t completely negate the condition, but instead reduces its severity. In these situations a single Drama point might reduce an enduring condition to a troubling one, or a troubling injury to a fleeting one.

Conditions can only be soaked at the moment they are suffered - you cannot spend a Drama point at a later time to remove or reduce a condition.

A Martian guardsman shoots Marlon Briggs and the tough detective suffers a troublesome condition. Marlon’s player spends a Drama point to negate the injury entirely, describing how he now has a hole in his new trench coat.

Taken out

When a character suffers a condition a player can ask to be taken out instead. If the GM agrees, no condition is recorded but the character plays no further part in the scene. They may have been knocked unconscious, kidnapped, trapped or completely overcome with terror. They might have fled the scene, or still be physically present, but unable to do anything until the scene ends.

Being taken out may lead to further complications for all the characters. For example, they may have to protect their comrade, or rescue them, or wait for them to recover.

*Tennessee Smith is pushed out of a church steeple by a nefarious cultist. He falls a long way and suffers an enduring condition - a **broken leg**. Dave is all out of Drama points, but rather than taking the harm he decides that Tennessee is taken out.*

“Cool,” the GM says. “What happens?”

“I fall unconscious, and as my vision fades to black I see the cultist leering at me from above.”

Choosing to be taken out is a moment of high drama. Don't make it your default response to harm.

PERMANENT INJURIES

On occasion, a character will suffer such serious harm that it stays with them forever. When this happens it is recorded as a new attribute flaw, not a condition. Permanent injuries are usually inflicted when:

- **THE STORY DEMANDS IT:** something happens in a scene that causes the character to suffer some kind of harm that is not going to go away.

Lost fingers, eyes or limbs, severe psychological trauma or exposure to intense radiation could all result in permanent injuries.

- **A PLAYER CHOOSES IT:** at the end of any scene a player can choose to turn an enduring condition into a permanent flaw. It is immediately removed from the list of conditions and written as a new attribute instead. The new tag does not have to be exactly the same as the condition.

*A character with the condition **crushed leg** might turn it into the flaw **walks with a limp**.*

TRACKS

A track is a series of boxes that you can use to monitor significant milestones, imminent threats or the state of resources. They are useful for pacing your adventures and creating tension.

When the story calls for it, the GM can mark a track by “ticking” one or more boxes. This might occur as the result of a check, such as when a character makes progress towards finding something or overcoming a problem. A track could also be marked with the passing of time, or when an NPC takes some action, either on or off screen.

TYPES OF TRACKS

Tracks can be used for all kinds of things in your games.

Countdown tracks

A countdown track creates tension in a scene, warning you that something bad is coming, or an enemy is getting away, or something in the story is about to change. Use it to create an end point or climactic moment for the characters.

The computer will lock you out after three attempts to login; the guards arrive in four turns; the bomb will go off when the timer reaches zero; you only have 24 hours to save the world!

The characters are exploring an ancient tomb when it starts to crumble around them. The GM creates a track and tells the players the whole place will tumble down in four turns:

☐☐☐☐▶ The temple collapses

You can also string countdown tracks together to create a potential path of disaster - when one track is completed, it sets off another one.

Tennessee is attacked on a snow covered mountain in Tibet. The GM warns that too many loud noises will cause an avalanche, and starts a 3-track. Whenever a character shouts or uses a gun, a box is marked. When the last box is filled the avalanche begins. The GM then creates a new track with two boxes - this is how many turns the characters have to get to safety!

☐☐☐▶ Avalanche! ☐☐▶ Buried alive!

Progress tracks

A progress track indicates your effort towards a specific goal. It might be an immediate problem you are working to overcome, or a longer term concern. As you make progress towards the goal, the GM will mark boxes.

You must complete a 3-track to climb a high tower; you successfully dig your escape tunnel when you achieve four successes; collect four components to build your custom flying machine; the troll must be hit three times before it is defeated; you need to wear-down the mecha's force shield, represented by a 4-track.

Resource tracks

Use tracks to record important resources, such as a character's ammunition, cargo on a smuggler's ship, or the number of draughts left in a healing potion. Resource tracks are particularly good for creating tension in situations or settings where items are scarce or difficult to replenish.

In a game set in an apocalyptic wasteland each character has a resource track for their water. Each day, and after particularly heavy exertion, the GM tells players to mark a box.

Water:

Plot Tracks

Use a plot track to monitor the machinations of villains or the major events of the story being told. Create one or more tracks that represent the steps an NPC is taking to achieve their goals, and advance it as necessary. When a plot track is filled the villain may have succeeded, or the next step in their plan is ready for implementation. You could also use a plot track to represent natural phenomenon, calendars or approaching enemies, depending upon the needs of your stories.

The nefarious Chronos Club have been excavating an ancient site of power. Each time Tennessee Smith and his pals are delayed, it gives the villainous organisation more opportunities to reach the secret treasure chamber. The GM tracks the Chronos Club's progress with a plot track:

The Chronos Club: ► Find the treasure!

Your Story

What kind of story are you all going to tell? Will this be a one-shot, or the beginning of an ongoing campaign? What is the genre, or tone of your game? What themes are you exploring? Sometimes this is easy because you always play fantasy dungeon adventures, or you have gathered to create an exciting series of tales based on your favourite book or TV show. Other times, however, you will begin with a blank slate. At these times talk with each other and share your thoughts on the type of game you want to play. Doing so will help players create their characters and the GM plan the exciting encounters that will launch your adventures.

One-shot or campaign?

Are you preparing for a single evening of fun and adventure, or is this the start of an epic story? This decision will affect the tone of your adventures and may influence the actions your characters take. In a one-shot the pace will be quicker and the danger more in-your-face as the goal is to create an experience much like watching a movie. If playing a series of games, however, you might seek to give your character an arc, draw out the plot and go for the “slow burn” in terms of revealing the exciting plot points.

Scale and structure

Will you play sweeping epics where the fate of the world is constantly at stake, or more personal, intimate stories? Grand tales of imminent world destruction can make your characters feel epic, while simpler plots or sandbox settings can let a character’s drives or personal conflicts guide the story.

Also consider the way your adventures will unfold. Will your games have an episodic structure where each adventure is only linked to the last by the main characters? Or will each session of play develop a continuing plot that slowly builds to a grand finale or climactic moment?

Prepared settings

Sometimes these decisions will already be made. A GM might have planned an exciting scenario, or an adventure module may present the necessary information. In these situations make sure everyone knows the key details and move straight on to character creation.

CORNERSTONES

Cornerstones are the foundation of the shared world you are all going to create and play in. You are going to use them to write a list of things that everyone wants incorporated into the story, and the stuff they would prefer to avoid.

Discuss the genre, tone, setting and characters of your game. As you do so, make two lists; the “Yes” list is all the stuff your group would like to see incorporated into the story, while the “No” list are things that will be left out. When you are done you will have an easy-to-read guide to your story setting.

Genre

If your game was a TV show, film or novel what genre would it be? Also consider the genre’s tropes – the features, clichés and gimmicks that immediately come to mind. Do you want to embrace these, ignore them or subvert them? In a game inspired by teen horror flicks do you want to focus on isolated locations, dysfunctional relationships, parties and creepy adults? Or do you want to do something different? Discuss the pros and cons of each trope and decide which must be included and which you are happy to leave out.

Tone

Tone is the mood or feeling of the story. Is it grim, funny, completely gonzo, or somewhere in the middle? Are your spy stories going to be over the top romps with miniaturised poison-dart watches and double entendres? Or are they gritty tales of betrayal and bloody murder at the height of the cold war? Is your teen horror tale going to be a campy romp, gory splatter-fest or spine-chilling story? Deciding on the tone of your game will help everyone imagine the world and will assist in the creation of authentic characters, settings and relationships.

Setting

Setting is where your story takes place. This can be as broad or specific as your group desires, from “Ancient Greece” to “Jim’s Diner on Main Street”. What are the locations that players want to interact with or avoid? Consider whether you will focus on a single location, or if your adventures will take you far and wide. Also discuss what kinds of technology, equipment or magic is prevalent in the setting. Does your sci-fi setting have warp drives and a cornucopia of aliens, or is it more grounded in contemporary science? Discuss the places, objects, situations or creatures that you want included or banned from your games and add them to your lists.

Characters

What types of characters are commonly encountered in these stories and what is everyone interested in playing? Make a list of the common archetypes that populate your chosen genre and note which ones are the most interesting or coolest. What types of vocations, backgrounds or fantasy species will be fun to interact with, or play as characters? What clichés do you want to avoid? Draw on stereotypes and genre conventions and think about both the heroes and the villains.

Broad strokes, not fine detail

Don't do too much world building at this point. You just want to paint with broad strokes. More about the world will be discovered as the characters are created and you play your adventures.

Example

Tim, Dave, Nina, June and Rob are preparing to play a game of pulp adventure, inspired by pulp novels of the 1930's and 40's. After throwing around some ideas, their cornerstones look like this:

Yes!	No!
Pulpy sci-fi	Little green men
Rockets	Flying saucers
Larger-than-life	Famous literary characters
Exotic locales	Sexism
Punch-card computers	Nazis
Mars / Martians	Ray guns
Cultists	Miniaturised gadgets
Ancient / mystic artifacts	Aliens based on racial stereotypes
Mobsters	

Looking at the list, you can immediately see the kinds of adventures the players are interested in. Their stories will focus on exploration and over-the-top action, perhaps on Mars. They have decided to remove a number of historical elements that nobody is interested in spotlighting in the game.

TOUCHSTONES

A quick and easy way to get everyone on the same page is to make comparisons with films, books, comics or TV shows that are similar to the kind of game you want to play. What is everyone familiar with? What are the icons of the genre you have chosen? Make a list of media that you can refer back to and use as a source of inspiration.

THE PITCH

Sum up all your cool ideas into a short, catchy phrase or elevator pitch. Think about how you would describe your game to a potential new player, and what things might get them excited. Consider the cornerstones and touchstones and pick out key features that might be boiled into an interesting description.

- *We're gangsters in prohibition America, trying to make a buck.*
- *It's a western, but in space!*
- *It's a super hero game set in Ancient Greece. You're all demigods.*
- *We're telling a story of forbidden love against a backdrop of World War II.*

Example

Tim, Dave, Nina, June and Rob make a quick list of touchstones, and then work together to write a pitch. They look like this:

TOUCHSTONES: Indiana Jones, Buck Rogers (comic), Flash Gordon serials (with Buster Crabbe), Sky Captain and the World of Tomorrow, The Rocketeer, John Carter of Mars.

PITCH: A 1930's pulp serial of exploration and two-fisted adventure!

A GENRE MASH!

For a real wild ride and interesting game, subvert clichés and mix genres or settings. Take a favourite movie, book or character and put it in a different time or place. Mash ideas together, or “steal” bits from favourite TV shows and explain how your game is similar or different. Say stuff like *“It's pretty much standard Tolkien fantasy, but all the elves are dead and the dwarves are steampunk-cyborgs.”* or *“It's like the movie 300, but set in the year 3000!”* or *“It's kind of a cross between the stories of Jules Verne and H.P. Lovecraft, with a little bit of Well's War of the Worlds mixed in.”*

YOUR INSTANT STORY GENERATOR

If you are stuck for inspiration, or feeling bold, use the following pitch templates to create an instant story concept. Roll or choose a template and then fill in the blanks from the charts below.

Pitch templates

1. We're playing a **TONE GENRE** story about **THEME**.
2. This is a **GENRE** set in **SETTING** where you are all **CHARACTERS**.
3. You are all **CHARACTERS** in **SETTING** looking for **THING**.
4. This is a story of **THEME**, set in **TONE SETTING**.
5. You are **TONE CHARACTERS** seeking **THING** in **SETTING**.
6. Our story is a **GENRE GENRE** story set in **SETTING**.

Tone

1. Campy
2. Dramatic
3. Gonzo
4. Gritty
5. Noir
6. Pulp

Genre

1. Adventure
2. Crime
3. Horror
4. Spy
5. War
6. Western

Theme

1. Ambition
2. Alienation
3. Honour
4. Justice
5. Love
6. Vengeance

Setting

1. Ancient Greece
2. Apocalyptic wastes
3. Deep space
4. Medieval England
5. The near future
6. The wild west

Characters

1. Criminals
2. Explorers
3. Heroes
4. Scoundrels
5. Time travellers
6. Undead

Thing

1. A ruthless criminal
2. A secret treasure
3. A warrior's death
4. Peace
5. The heir to the throne
6. True love

Characters

A character is your alter-ego and you will describe what they do, how they respond to situations, and react to others. Your character is made up of a three distinct types of tags:

ATTRIBUTES: your character's abilities and traits.

DRIVES: your character's motivations or goal.

GEAR: all the stuff your character has.

ATTRIBUTES

Attributes are descriptive words or phrases that convey the most important, interesting or coolest features of your character. They indicate their physical or mental traits, skills, talents and personal shortcomings.

CONCEPT

A concept is a broad statement about who or what you are. They are like an elevator pitch that indicates some aspect of your past, occupation or personality, such as *paranormal detective*, *nutty professor* or *elven hunter*.

Concepts are the broadest of the attributes. Use them to quickly and succinctly convey who you are, what you do, or your place in the setting or story. Draw on clichés and bring the world to life with an evocative attribute that hints at people, places and events. Why be a **Soldier** when you can be a **Colonial Guard**? Don't be a *Treasure hunter*, be a *Tyronian Temple Raider*!

A CONCEPT COULD DESCRIBE A CHARACTER'S:

- Role (*knight, soldier, reporter, aging asteroid miner*)
- Past (*retired cop, disgraced wizard, former hit man*)
- Background (*elf, aristocrat, princess, orphan*)
- Purpose (*masked avenger, defender of the weak, explorer*)
- A combination of any of the above (*dwarven druid, knight dedicated to the Sun God Sul, elven hunter, aristocratic diplomat*)

Add further interest by including a personality trait (*sleazy, kind-hearted, brash*) or adjective (*old, swashbuckling, dedicated*). Then you might have a *well-travelled barbarian, brash pilot, daring rogue* or *disguised princess*.

EDGE

An edge is an interesting feature that is mostly helpful. They can be physical or mental traits, skills or talents, social advantages or amazing abilities. It might be something that your character is really good at, a specialised knowledge or form of education, or an ability that others can't normally do.

Edges are more specific than concepts, focusing on a single area of expertise or advantage. They should have an obvious use or purpose in your stories, so make it clear how they will help you out in specific circumstances or situations. Edges could fall into any one of the following categories:

- Physical (*strong, agile, handsome, built like a truck, fists the size of hams*)
- Mental (*well educated, observant, brave, quick thinker*)
- Social (*always well dressed, honest face, charming, plain Jane*)
- Expertise (*kung-fu master, driving, stealthy, fastest gun in the west*)
- Instinct (*shoot first & ask questions later, I must protect the weak*)
- Advantage (*contact at City Hall, famous, billionaire*)
- Ability (*dark vision, ambidextrous, internal compass, wings*)
- Supernatural (*summon spirits, control fire, super speed, invisibility*)

A good edge is specific and has an obvious use or purpose. Tags like *knife fighting, night vision, a contact at GateCorp* and *quick thinker* are good - you know when each is useful. Write edges that will make your character more interesting, distinct or fun to play. Is your chivalrous knight *the bravest knight in all the land, charming*, or a *giant of a man*?

FLAW

A flaw is a weakness, dark secret or personal trouble. It is a detail that causes more problems than it helps with, and adds an interesting feature that brings your character to life.

Like edges, flaws are specific tags that will impact play in only certain scenes or situations. Flaws can be based on:

- Personality (*arrogant, selfish, gullible, curious, short fuse*)
- Habits (*nose picker, loud talker, I should go first, braggart*)
- Health (*allergy, smells bad, poor sight, terrible coughing fits*)
- Reputation (*wanted by the cops, the Butcher of Cairo, untrustworthy*)
- Relationship (*married to the mob, My Aunt Millie, faithful to the corps*)

Make your flaw something you want to play. It also needs to be relevant and appropriate to the setting and genre you are playing in - it won't be any fun to have the *Can't swim* flaw if your whole story takes place in a desert!

What about super powers & magic?

Concepts and edges work fine for most games - a **Weather Witch** concept might let you control storms or summon rain, while a **super speed** edge gives an advantage in races.

However, just having the ability doesn't mean you can do the "thing" - that will still depend on the narrative and rolls.

You will find detailed rules for magic, powers and more in the Options chapter, starting page XX.

DRIVE

A drive is a motivating force or passion that causes the character to take action, seek adventure and get involved in the dangers of your stories. They are often strongly held beliefs, instincts or attitudes that a character is compelled to act upon, even when it is not in their best interests.

Drives are primarily an aid for roleplaying your character. Use them to guide your actions and to throw your character into interesting, uncomfortable or tough situations. When you do the GM may award you a Drama point.

When appropriate to the narrative a drive can also be a tag. In such situations it might also modify checks, for better or worse.

*Your character has the drive **Never leave a man behind**. When trying to carry an injured companion to safety you might point out that your very nature pushes you to try harder. The GM might grant a ⊕ to your check.*

I am driven by...

Your character might be driven by any number of causes, passions or desires, such as the following.

- **ADVENTURE:** you're a thrill seeker, always out for the next rush. *I never back down from a challenge. I act without thinking. Reckless is my middle name! Never tell me the odds.*
- **AMBITION:** you are going to make a mark on the world. *I'll prove I'm the best. I never leave a job unfinished. It's better to have tried and failed.*
- **CODE:** you have a personal code or system of belief that directs your actions. *Never leave a man behind. I never break a promise. I will never shoot an unarmed enemy. Respect your elders.*
- **COMPASSION:** you are a protector or carer and seek to help others in whatever capacity you can. *I always protect the weak. I wont allow animals come to harm. I'm always first to help. It's better to give than receive.*
- **EGO:** you know best, now it's time for everyone else to realise. *My way or the highway. I hate to lose face. If you want a job done right, do it yourself.*
- **PASSION:** you are ruled by a particular emotion, such as fear, hate or love. *All witches should be burned. Mercy is never an option. I'd rather run and live than stand and die. I always expect the worst from people.*
- **SURVIVAL:** you will make it through the tough times, no matter the cost. *Live everyday like it's your last. I always look out for Number One. I always take time to carefully plan. Better my pocket than yours.*

🎯 RELATIONSHIPS

As well as a standard drive, you can define a relationship with one or more player characters, developing a backstory and history before play begins. Relationships are drives that describe a past adventure, shared friends, enemies and events.

Discuss your ideas with the other players, who might ask questions to further clarify the relationship or flesh out the backstory. Write each relationship as a statement that clearly establishes an attitude, opinion or feeling about the other character.

- *Galahad and I are rivals and seek the same treasure.*
- *I trust Kalen because he helped me find my father's killer.*
- *I am secretly in love with Dutch.*
- *Vivian threatened to kill me if I ever transformed again.*

🎯 GOALS

When playing a campaign you might give each character a goal. These are specific, external drives that a character seeks to achieve. They are written as statements that convey a purpose, often beginning with “I will...” or “I must...”

- *I will find the lost Crown of Azrok.*
- *I must avenge my family!*
- *I will make my fortune and retire.*
- *I will kill the kaiju, Razorwing.*

You will track progress towards goals with a pair of 3-tracks. When you take or forgo an opportunity to achieve a goal, one of the tracks might be ticked.

- If the action was successful or helped make progress towards the goal, tick the top track. When it is filled, you have achieved your goal.
- If the action was unsuccessful, or a significant setback, or if you failed to take an opportunity when presented, tick the bottom track. When it is filled, you have failed and the goal is unattainable.

Either way, when one track is filled, the goal done. This will probably result in some change in the story or the character. When a goal is completed, create a new one or retire the character.

Avenge my father's death!

Success

Failure

GEAR

Gear is the equipment, gadgets and weapons that you use on your adventures. It includes everything from weapons and armour, to vehicles, outfits and anything else your character might reasonably have.

WHAT GEAR DOES

Gear gives you permission to do something; you can't shoot someone without a *gun*, and you can't drive somewhere without a *car*.

Gear might also add dice to a check, though this will always depend on the fiction; fighting with a sword doesn't automatically grant a bonus, but if your opponent is unarmed it might. Not having the right gear will apply a Danger die to a check.

Context based effects

There are no special rules for size, range, weight or anything else, so using gear relies on the application of common sense. If necessary, make notes about special details in brackets after an item, such as *Scuba gear (1 hour dive time)*. The effect of using gear is always context-based.

Examples

October Jones is trying to get into the Police Commissioner's locked office. Consider how gear might inform the situation, depending on whether Jones:

- **HAS A KEY:** *she unlocks the door and enters.*
- **HAS LOCK-PICKING TOOLS:** *the GM calls for a check. The tools grant permission to attempt to pick the lock.*
- **HAS A HAIR PIN:** *the GM calls for a check, with an added Danger die for using an improvised tool.*
- **HAS A CLUB:** *she smashes the glass pane in the door. She gets in, but makes quite a noise.*

Swashbuckling Giulio Rosso is in a duel with the King's Champion. Both are armed with rapiers and evenly matched. The weapons have no impact on the fight. If Giulio disarms his opponent, he will be at an advantage and the rapier might now grant him a bonus Action die.

MEMENTO

A memento is a small object of personal significance that provides insight into your character and gives you another hook to bring them to life. They are filled with story potential and can ground your character in the setting immediately, giving them a past, interests or hobbies.

Ask each other about the object, draw out the story and find out why it is important to the character - you will find this helps to further bring them to life, with a past and personality.

Any easy to carry item can be a memento, such as:

- *Dog-eared copy of War and Peace*
- *My wedding ring*
- *A patch on a favourite satchel*
- *Holy symbol*
- *Faded family photograph*
- *Smiley face sticker on my laptop*

🎯EQUIPMENT SLOTS

In some genres of fiction limited equipment, or careful preparation prior to a mission, is a central trope. In these cases you might use equipment slots.

Each character can only carry three (lightly encumbered), six (medium encumbrance) or nine (heavily encumbered) items of gear. The more gear the character carries, the more heavily encumbered they are, which may have an impact on what they can do or how they can do it.

An item of gear is a single object that can be carried in one hand or worn with relative ease. Larger or heavier items use up two equipment slots. A character can count several small objects, such as bullets, arrows or rations, as a single item. Some groups might choose to ignore such items entirely, or use a resource track (see below).

In a game about military operations, the characters choose their equipment at the start of each mission. June, playing a scout, decides to only take three items in order to remain lightly encumbered - a pistol (silenced), ropes, and night vision goggles. Tim, playing a demolitions expert, goes in heavily equipped with seven items - assault rifle (counts as two items), body armour, demolition charges, frag grenade, smoke grenade and night vision goggles.

Heavily encumbered characters might tire easily, make more noise, have trouble hiding or generally find manoeuvring difficult. Lightly equipped characters will have to carefully plan and use their gear.

Ⓞ GEAR TAGS

If you would like gear to be more detailed you might choose to use gear tags. These are simply descriptors added to items of equipment to suggest purpose, advantages, drawbacks or other features. Virtually anything can be a gear tag, though you are best to focus on a small number of common descriptors to keep things simple.

Gear tags often describe features of weapons or armour. For example, a gun might be *loud*, a sword *razor sharp* and platemail *heavy*. They are also handy for noting features of other important objects, such as vehicles or magic items. Your car might have *nitro-boosters*, your boat a *hidden compartment*, and your cloak *glows in the presence of evil*.

Like all gear, tags are always context based and provide narrative prompts as appropriate. They are also a quick way of comparing similar objects and working out if one person or another has some advantage in a contest.

Cryo is riding her motorcycle (fast, flashy), trying to catch up with a courier who is also on a motorcycle. Normally this would be an even match with Action and Danger dice applied based on the attributes of both characters. Cryo's motorcycle, however, has the tag fast and the GM decides this gives Cryo an advantage, granting an additional Action die.

Example gear tags

- **COLLATERAL DAMAGE:** using this causes problems / unrelated harm.
- **CONCEALED:** it is hidden and/or difficult to spot.
- **COST:** using this costs something - such as an action or resource.
- **FAST:** it is quicker than others of its type.
- **FLASHY:** it is fancy, extravagant and tends to get noticed.
- **HEAVY:** it weighs a lot / more than others of its type.
- **LIGHT:** it does not weigh very much / less than others of its type.
- **LIMITED RANGE:** it cannot go as far as others of its type.
- **LONG RANGE:** it can go further than others of its type.
- **MESSY:** using this causes horrible, unpleasant or gruesome messes.
- **NOISY / LOUD:** it makes a lot of noise when used.
- **OBVIOUS:** it is hard to conceal.
- **ONE USE:** you can only use this once. Can it be refilled/refuelled/reloaded?
- **POWERFUL:** it is much more powerful than others of its type.
- **QUIET:** it does not make much noise.
- **SLOW:** it takes time to use / is slower than others of its type.

📍RESOURCE TRACKS

Some groups may wish to use tracks as an abstract representation of an important resource. This is particularly effective in settings where a resource is difficult to come by (ammunition in a post-apocalyptic setting), or to represent something about the genre (gold or healing potions in a fantasy adventure game). You could even introduce a general “stuff” or “backpack” track to represent mundane or common objects that will get used up over the course of an adventure.

Resource tracks add a level of bookkeeping, but are a simple way to create tension as players watch their supplies dwindle.

Creating a resource track

Make the resource something that characters will need, but you don't want to spend a long time bookkeeping. If you really need to, you might have multiple resource tracks:

*In a post-apocalyptic game characters might have an **ammo** resource and a **junk** resource, representing the things they tinker with and barter.*

Give the track a clear but evocative name and decide how many boxes it will have. Three is a good number, but anywhere between two and five is fine. The shorter the track, the more pressure players will feel or the more often they will need to refresh the resource.

Don't make resource tracks frivolous. They should be used to reinforce an idea or trope of your chosen genre.

Using a resource track

Tick the resource track as appropriate during your adventures. Depending on what it represents, this might happen at regular intervals (*tick your **food** track at the start of each day*), as a choice a player makes (*“I need a miniature camera so I'm going to use one of my **spy gadget** resources”*), or the result of a check (*“Your shots miss and you use a bunch of ammo, tick your **ammo** track”*).

When you run out of a resource you will need to find a way to replenish it. How this is done will depend on what it represents and the other details of your story.

CREATING CHARACTERS

Each character consists of just a few simple parts, but you are free to tweak, twist or add to any of these in order to suit the kind of game you and your friends wish to play. Add to this the almost infinite number of ways to describe attributes, drives and gear, you have a lot of flexibility in creating your character.

Complete the following steps to create your heroic alter-ego.

1. Come up with a cool idea that fits your story cornerstones

4. List the gear your character has, including a memento

2. Write at least four attributes to define your character

5. Round out your character and give them a name

3. Write a drive that describes your character's instincts

6. Describe your character to the other players

Everyone should create their characters together, with the GM. Talk, share ideas, offer advice and ask questions.

YOUR COOL IDEA

Begin by thinking about what kind of character you want to play. Consider what is interesting to you, and what will make the story interesting for everyone else, too. Keep your cornerstones in mind and make your character appropriate to the chosen setting, genre and tone. A *Streetwise cop* may be out of place in medieval England, though a *Worldly sheriff* might be just right. Use the setting to inspire your character, and in turn, develop the world through your creative choices and descriptions.

You may not write this idea down, but it will inform all the other choices you make as you create your character, so make it cool and fun!

We will follow Dave and Rob as they each create characters. Rob is playing in a one-shot cyberpunk game. Dave is going to create a hero for the pulp adventure game described in Your Story.

WRITE AT LEAST 4 ATTRIBUTES

As a group, decide how many attributes each character will begin with. For quick games a single concept and a handful of edges is more than enough for an enjoyable evening of play. For longer games you may want to create more detailed characters. As a guide:

Quick

- 1 concept
- 2 or 3 edges
- 1 flaw

Detailed

- 2 concepts
- 4 edges
- 1 or 2 flaws

Heroic

- Up to 4 concepts
- Up to 6 edges*
- 1 or 2 flaws

**A heroic character's total concepts and edges should add up to 8.*

When creating quick characters the edges might represent anything that you think is cool or interesting about the character. If creating a detailed or heroic character, players are advised to have at least one edge or flaw that relates to, clarifies, or fleshes out each concept. Things you expect that particular concept to be good at or known for will make obvious edges or flaws to note down.

Examples

*Rob is creating a quick character and wants to be some kind of bad-ass hacker. After a little thought he settles on the concept **Code Slinger**. Rob then writes the edges **deadly with a keyboard**, **wired reflexes** and **friends in the media**. For a flaw, Rob decides the character is **reckless**. The GM asks a few questions to clarify what is meant by “deadly with a keyboard”, and they are good to go.*

*Dave is creating a detailed character. He wants to play a classic two-fisted adventurer and archaeologist, inspired by a favourite movie hero. Dave starts with the concept **Daredevil Explorer** and decides that his second concept will define the character's past. **Former Soldier** seems like a logical and fun concept. He now has four edges to write. He starts with **professor of archaeology** and **well travelled**. He wants at least one edge related to his background concept and decides on **crack shot**. For his final edge he notes **amateur pilot**, as he thinks it would be fun to involve some aircraft in their adventures. For his flaw Dave writes **claustrophobic**, which he thinks will get him into a few tough situations!*

— Example concepts —

PULP: *Ace reporter, Adventuring archaeologist, Daring rocketeer, Famous scientist, Hard drinking PI, Masked vigilante, Movie starlet, Professional driver, Retired boxer, Strange visitor, Wise-guy, Wealthy socialite*

FANTASY: *Arrogant knight, Barbarian warrior, Destitute nobleman, Dwarf shield maiden, Elven sorcerer, Halfling cleric, Kind-hearted thief, Lizardman shaman, Princess in disguise, Swashbuckling rogue, Wise river warden, Warlock*

SCI-FI: *Alien fugitive, Aging asteroid miner, Bounty hunter, Charming diplomat, Cyborg assassin, Former military pilot, Mecha jock, Medi-Tek Doctor, Razor ganger, Sleazy fixer, Star knight, VR Star*

— Example flaws —

PHYSICAL: *Allergy to..., Bad body odour, Clumsy, In-human appearance, Missing limb, Old, Poor sight*

PERSONALITY: *Arrogant, Bossy, Curious, Explosive temper, Greedy, Gullible, Haunted by the past, Overconfident*

RELATIONSHIPS: *Bad credit rating, Dependant, Gambling debts, Married to the mob, On the run, Reputation for violence*

— Example edges —

PHYSICAL: *Agile, Built like a truck, Furry, Huge, Light on my feet, Sharp claws, Short, Strong, Thin, Tough, Wiry, Young*

MENTAL: *Alert, Book smart, Charming, Cunning, Empathetic, Good memory, Mechanically minded, Observant, Quick thinker, University educated, Wise, Witty*

SOCIAL: *Always well dressed, Bad-ass reputation, Billionaire, Connection in city hall, Famous, Honest face, Human lie detector, Insightful, Ladies man, Secret hideout, Secret identity, Threatening appearance*

SKILLS: *Acrobatics, Brawling, Bows, Climbing, Fastest gun in the west, Hacking, Hunting, Lock picking, Master of disguise, Stealth, Swimming, Tracking*

ADVANTAGES: *Ambidextrous, Amphibious, Armoured skin, Beautiful voice, Cybernetic organism, Elven heritage, Heat vision, Internal compass, Keen hearing, Leathery wings, Prehensile tail, Wifi implant*

SUPERNATURAL: *Animal form, Banish demons, Danger sense, Fireballs!, Fly, Gaseous form, Invisibility, Master of dark magic, Summon familiar, Super speed, Talk to the dead, Telekinesis*

📌 Prescribed attributes

By default, players are free to define their character's attributes in any manner they like. Some groups may decide that characters should have concepts or edges that define specific features of a character.

In a science fiction game each character may need a concept that indicates their species. In a game about swashbuckling musketeers everyone might have an edge to describe their duelling school or specialty.

This can be a good way to keep some balance between characters, but be careful not to stifle player creativity. Don't prescribe all of a character's attributes, or ensure the prescriptions are broad enough to allow players to build the kind of character they are interested in.

HERE ARE SOME IDEAS TO GET YOU STARTED:

Heroic fantasy

- **BACKGROUND (CONCEPT):** a past, culture or species.
- **ROLE (CONCEPT):** what you do or how you do it.
- **TRAIT (EDGE):** a physical or mental feature.
- **EDGE:** an ability, skill or advantage.
- **FLAW:** a drawback or disadvantage based on background or role.

Mecha pilots

- **CONCEPT:** your cool idea.
- **PILOT KNACK (EDGE):** your special robot-jock talent.
- **EDGE:** an ability, skill or advantage.
- **QUIRK (FLAW):** a personality flaw or bad habit.
- **MECHA ADVANTAGE (EDGE):** what makes your mecha unique.
- **MECHA DRAWBACK (FLAW):** a disadvantage or trouble your mecha has.

Outlaws of the Wild West

- **PAST (CONCEPT):** what you used to be.
- **REPUTATION (EDGE):** what you are known for.
- **EDGE:** what makes you so good (or bad).
- **VICE (FLAW):** the thing that gets you into trouble.

WRITE A DRIVE

Write at least one drive that reveals something about your character and what provokes them to take action. A drive that hints at past experiences and future adventures will provide hooks for the GM to build stories with.

A drive can be written as a catchphrase, statement or well used cliché. Better drives imply a reaction to a specific situation or stimuli. “*I don’t like witches*” conveys an opinion, whereas “*All witches should be burned*” much better expresses a character’s attitude or beliefs. The specific wording and intent is important, too, as there is a distinct difference between a thrill-seeker who “*never backs down*” and one who “*acts without thinking*”.

If needed, start broad with a general motivation, such as fear, ambition, greed or compassion. You can then write something more specific when inspiration strikes. Try writing a statement that begins with “*I always...*” or “*I never...*”.

Relationships and goals

If using the optional relationship or goal rules, decide how many of each the characters will have. One or two relationships and/or a single goal, along with the standard drive, is a good start.

Examples

*Rob imagines his Code slinger as quite ambitious, and a little egotistical - they are out to make a name for themselves in the digital streets of the neon-lit future. After a little thought he decides to write the drive **I always leave a calling card**. Rob imagines that no matter the consequences, the hacker likes to let people know exactly who just crashed their security systems. The GM thinks this is the perfect excuse to get the hacker into lots of trouble and thoroughly approves!*

*Dave wants his character’s drive to relate to saving powerful relics from the clutches of sinister forces. He likes the catchphrase **That belongs in a museum!** and everyone thinks this perfectly sums up the character’s motivations. Dave’s group is also using goals, so he needs a second drive that relates more to plot. After a little brainstorming Dave writes: **I must stop Project Black**. The GM is intrigued by this and asks a number of questions, such as “What is Project Black?” and “Why must they be stopped?” The answers to these questions help to further build the world, add to the character’s backstory and provide the GM with story hooks.*

DESCRIBE YOUR GEAR

All characters have the basic clothes and items that make sense for their concept and the setting you are playing in. There is no need to write all that stuff down, just note the important and cool equipment that you have, such as specialised tools, vehicles, protective gear, credit card, weapons or whatever.

The things a character carries, and the way you describe them, can reveal a lot about their background or personality. Write your gear so it brings your character to life. Do you wear *ornate armour*, or *dented armour*? Do you carry a *snub-nosed revolver* or an *oversized handgun*? Are you dressed in an *immaculate suit*; do you drive a *muscle car*; and are those *concealed daggers* or a *bandoleer of blades*?

How much stuff?

Players can have as much gear as makes sense for their concept and the stories you are telling. A fantasy adventurer might have a backpack of gear, while a space smuggler could have a spaceship full of cargo - at the GM's discretion!

Memento

Don't forget to write a memento for your character. It can be any small object that a character can attribute value to. Perhaps it is the first dollar they ever earned, or the last letter their wife wrote them, or just a favourite item of clothing. The memento has no mechanical value, but is another way to breath life into your character.

Examples

*Rob's character is a hacker so will need a **state-of-the-art hack-rig**, **VR goggles**, and a **mobile datalink**. He also decides they will carry a **switch-blade** and ride a **motorcycle**. For a memento they write down **My vintage Walkman**. The GM asks, "What's the only cassette tape you own?"*

*Dave thinks about the sorts of things his daredevil explorer is likely to take on expeditions. As well as a backpack he notes down a **rugged leather jacket**, which will be really useful to resist scrapes and falls. He also has his **trusty army pistol** and a **bull-whip**, because, well... you know... He has a few ideas for a memento, like a **battered fedora** and his **father's journal**, but decides on a **fading photograph of my mother**, who Dave says disappeared on an expedition many years ago.*

ROUNDING OUT

It is now time to put the finishing touches to your character. Give them a name and write a short description, bit of backstory, or some notes about your appearance.

Describe your character, your tags and equipment and check that everyone understands your ideas. What exactly do you mean by *Grizzled Gunfighter*? Is your *Politician* well known or a minor member of cabinet? What exactly is an *Elastic Kid*? Why do the Haberdashers need assassins? Asking questions like these clarifies the character in everybody's mind and fleshes out the world you are about to play in.

Take 3 Drama points

Characters begin with 3 Drama points. The GM may decide that you begin with more or less, depending on the genre and tone of your game. In a gritty and deadly game you might start with a single point, while a game of four-colour super heroics might see characters begin with 4, 5 or 6 Drama points.

You will also earn more Drama points by putting your character into tough situations.

Write custom conditions

Virtually anything can become a condition and they will usually emerge during play. If your attributes suggest a condition that might regularly become a problem, however, make a note of it now.

*Nina is playing a man made of straw in a fantasy game and likes the idea of being impaired by water. She notes the condition **Waterlogged** on the character sheet.*

Character secrets, not player secrets

If a character has a dark past or horrible secret that the other characters don't know, that's totally cool. But there's no good reason to keep this a secret from the other players. Characters are created collaboratively so you can bounce ideas off each other. Share cool details about your characters, make suggestions to the other players and be prepared to work together to bring them into play.

Examples

Let's take a look at how the two characters turned out.

ROB'S CHARACTER:

Cryo

Cryo is a hard-edged hacker who has made a name for herself as being able to break security that others can't. She has a purple mohawk, dermal light tattoos and rides a top of the line motorcycle.

ATTRIBUTES: *Code slinger, Deadly with a keyboard, Wired reflexes, Friends in the media, Reckless*

DRIVE: *Ambitious: I always leave a calling card.*

GEAR: *State-of-the-art hack-rig, VR goggles, mobile datalink, switch-blade, motorcycle (flashy, fast). Memento - My vintage walkman and a cassette of the Bee Gees.*

DAVE'S CHARACTER:

Tennessee Smith

Tennessee is a square-jawed man of action, with steely blue eyes and a permanent five o'clock shadow. After serving in the army for several years, he has now returned to his true passion of archaeology. He hunts down legendary artefacts in order to keep them from the hands of those who might misuse them.

ATTRIBUTES: *Daredevil explorer, Former soldier, Professor of archaeology, Well travelled, Crack shot, Amateur pilot, Claustrophobic*

DRIVE: *That belongs in a museum!*

GOAL: *I must stop Project Black*

GEAR: *Rugged leather jacket, trusty army pistol, bull-whip. Memento - Fading photograph of my mother*

ADVANCEMENT

The growth and development of a character is a staple of fiction - as the heroes go on adventures they change because of their experiences. Sometimes they learn new skills or gain new knowledge and sometimes their personality, motivations or world view is altered because of the things that happen to them. In **FREEFORM UNIVERSAL** we call this advancement.

A character earns an advance after a period of time, when they have accumulated enough experience, or when a major life or plot event occurs. An advance lets you change your character in some way.

There are three ways you can track when characters should advance. Discuss them as a group and decide which you will use.

GOALS: advance when you achieve or fail a drive.

MILESTONES: advance when narratively appropriate.

EXPERIENCE POINTS: advance by accumulating experience points.

None of these options are better than the other and it is purely a matter of personal taste and group preference which you use.

You do not have to use advancements in your game. It is quite okay for characters to never change. This is particularly true in short series or one-shots.

🎯 GOALS

A character earns an advance after achieving a significant personal goal. You can track a character's progress towards this goal using the optional rule for drives, as described on page XX. When the last box on either the *success* or *failure* track for a goal is ticked, the character can take an advancement. Both success and failure lead to advancement as both are opportunities for personal reflection and growth.

Goals can be slow to achieve, so you might allow characters to have multiple goals to work towards. They might have one or two personal drives, and another representing the mission or adventure they are on. These mission goals could also be individual in nature, or the GM might track a single goal for the entire group.

When a drive is completed and an advancement achieved, you should write a new goal for the character.

📍 MILESTONES

A group might decide to award advances on a more ad hoc basis, changing their characters when dramatically appropriate. This might be after the characters have completed a particularly difficult mission, overcome a powerful foe, or just been adventuring for quite some time.

This method requires no record keeping and while the GM needs to make the call, players are encouraged to ask for advances when they feel they have earned them. How often advances will be rewarded will depend on the specific group and the kinds of things they get up to, but one every few game sessions is a good guide.

YOU MIGHT GIVE CHARACTERS AN ADVANCE WHEN:

- A campaign goal is achieved
- A character achieves a personal goal or milestone
- Someone/thing important to the characters is killed or destroyed
- The story changes significantly, for better or worse
- A significant period of time has passed
- It just feels appropriate

📍 EXPERIENCE POINTS

Experience points (XP) are a reward for bringing your character to life and playing in a manner that evokes your chosen genre, setting and tone. When you have accumulated enough XP you can advance your character.

Your group will need to make a list of XP triggers. These are statements describing an action or style of play. At the end of a game session you read the list of triggers and earn XP for each statement that is true.

Record your XP as ticks on a track. When you have ticked 10 boxes, you can take an advance.

Example

A simple trigger list might look like the one below.

TICK XP IF...

- *You portrayed your character in a convincing manner*
- *You acted upon or chose to ignore a drive*
- *You learned something significant about the setting*
- *You made significant progress towards a mission goal*

Creating XP triggers

To create your own triggers, begin by reviewing your story cornerstones. These will tell you the sorts of play everyone should be working towards. Triggers fall into one of three types; roleplaying, genre and progress. Use your cornerstones and the example lists to write three to five XP trigger statements.

- **ROLEPLAYING** triggers reward players for portraying their characters, chasing their drives and generally playing their characters.
 - *You acted upon or chose to ignore a drive*
 - *You portrayed your character in a manner fitting the genre*
 - *You acted in a manner fitting the genre and it caused significant trouble*
- **GENRE** triggers encourage players to take action that is particularly appropriate to your chosen genre or to push towards specific genre tropes.
 - *You engaged with something / someone significant to the setting/genre*
 - *You won/recovered/destroyed a valuable resource*
 - *You suffered a consequence particularly appropriate to the genre*
- **PROGRESS** triggers are about working towards goals, suffering setbacks and changing the setting or story in some significant way.
 - *You completed your mission / achieved your goal*
 - *You made a new, powerful enemy*
 - *You changed NPC's lives in a significant way*

It is a good idea to have a mix of triggers: individual and group achievements, things a player can do every session, and tasks that may take several sessions to accomplish.

Examples

Dungeon exploration

TICK XP IF....

- *You did something significant or cool related to your concept*
- *You won a magical or significant treasure*
- *You overcame a powerful enemy, monster or threat*
- *You cleared the dungeon*

Cyberpunk

TICK XP IF....

- *You stuck to your morals, at great personal cost*
- *You betrayed an ally for personal gain*
- *You stuck it to The Man*
- *You made a powerful new enemy*
- *You were taken out at least once*

ADVANCING

When characters achieve a milestone, accomplish a significant campaign goal or accumulate enough experience, they get to advance. This means the character changes in some way, usually for the better. Ensure your advances are in keeping with the genre, setting and tone of your game, and that they make sense narratively. Each advance should be based on the experiences of the character, the things they have done, seen and felt.

When a character advances they both grow and improve. You never have to make a change - if you just want to improve, or only grow, then just do that.

Grow

Growing is the evolution of a character, where they change because of their experiences. When you grow you can change any one edge or flaw. You may also change one relationship, if using that option. Changing means you re-write an existing edge, flaw or relationship - it doesn't go away, just introduce a new way of thinking about it.

*After several sessions, Dave's character Tennessee Smith has had many opportunities to fly planes. Dave decides to change his **amateur pilot** edge to **experienced aviator**.*

Improve

Improving is to learn something new, discover a new talent, hone a skill, or overcome a deficit. When you improve you write a new edge or remove a flaw. At the GM's discretion you can also change a drive, or add a drive, or change a concept, or write a new concept.

*Tennessee Smith has found himself in far too many ruinous temples and he has become quite the expert in spotting hazardous structures. Dave decides to give him a new edge, **an eye for danger**. He has also made progress in overcoming Project Black and discovered it is run by the evil billionaire Thaddeus Black. After discussing it with the GM, Dave also changes his drive **I must stop Project Black** to **I will stop Thaddeus Black!***

Advancement is not the only way a character might change, grow or improve. As always, the story and common sense should guide what happens. For example, a serious injury might result in a new flaw, or a change to an edge or drive.

Doing Everything

This chapter expands upon the concepts explained in the Core Rules chapter (page XX), providing additional information, examples and clarifications to assist your play.

GAME TIME

Your adventures will play out at a pace that makes sense to the specific needs of your story. This is usually at a pace much faster than real time. As a guide, game time can be divided into the following:

CAMPAIGN: a series of adventures linked by a common setting, group of characters, or overarching plot. Think of a campaign like a series of novels or films.

ADVENTURE: a complete story with a beginning, middle and end. Like a novel, film, or single season of a TV show.

SESSION: a short period of game play, like a short story, an episode of a TV show, or single issue of a comic.

SCENE: part of a larger story. Like a chapter in a book or a scene in a film.

TURN: a moment long enough for each character to do one thing. Like a page in a comic.

ACTION: a single character does one thing. Like a panel in a comic.

Most of your game will be played out in scenes, where the GM frames a situation and the players describe their character's actions. When it is important to know the specific order actions happen in, a scene can be further divided into turns.

Game time vs Real time

Game time is the imagined passage of time as it occurs in your adventures. Real time is the actual passage of time, as it happens for the players at the table. Almost everything that happens in your games will occur in game time.

SCENES

A scene is a period of story involving a specific situation, location or group of characters. They should advance the plot, reveal important information, or add background colour. Often a scene will do all of these things.

During a scene the players and GM describe what the characters are doing. Players “act out” their characters, speaking for them and declaring what actions they take, while the GM does the same for all the other characters, creatures and monsters in the scene. Scenes might be resolved through checks, but they don’t have to be. It is entirely possible that a scene’s objective is met through roleplaying and character interaction.

TYPES OF SCENES

Scenes fall into two broad types, descriptive scenes and encounter scenes.

Descriptive scenes

Descriptive scenes provide colour and move the plot along without the need to go into specific details. When your characters travel to the next town and the GM says “*It takes three days but you arrive safely on the morning of the fourth*”, that’s a descriptive scene. Likewise, when characters rest, or train or just sit in a bar and talk with each other.

A player might frame a descriptive scene to reveal a part of their character’s backstory, or show them doing something that further fleshes out their personality. The GM can use descriptive scenes to frame short vignettes and show what is happening at a specific place in order to establish a mood, introduce people or places, or reveal important information.

DESCRIPTIVE SCENES CAN INCLUDE:

- *The characters take a journey and the GM describes what that looks like.*
- *A montage, when characters train or prepare for a mission.*
- *An interlude between encounters or adventures, showing what characters do in their downtime.*
- *A conversation between two PC’s, where players can role play and explore their character’s personality, past or relationship.*
- *The GM describes what the villain of the story is doing (“Meanwhile...”).*
- *A description of a location when the PC’s first encounter it, or return to it. The characters may or may not interact with NPCs there.*

Encounters

Encounters are scenes where the characters have to take specific action, such as search for clues or interact with a person, place or thing. They also have an objective that the PCs must achieve. An encounter might be an action-filled scene where the goal is to defeat an enemy, but it could just as easily be a social encounter where the characters seek information, advice or assistance.

Encounter scenes can also do all the things descriptive scenes do, but they tend to be more granular in the details. Characters will investigate, fight, cooperate and work to overcome obstacles. These are the scenes where characters will attempt risky actions and checks will be made.

In the broadest sense, encounters typically fall into one of three types.

- **EXPLORATION ENCOUNTERS** involve the characters looking for something. This might take the form of an investigation, a search or visiting some strange, exotic or dangerous place.

Exploring a forgotten tomb, researching an historical event at the library, finding out how an alien device works and creeping into the Police Chief's office are all possible exploration encounters.

- **COMBAT ENCOUNTERS** involve conflict between the PCs and some other force. They often involve violence being dished out and significant risk to all involved.

Gunfights, wrestling matches and duels with flashing blades are all examples of combat encounters, as are clashes between fleets of spaceships or battles with mighty armies.

- **SOCIAL ENCOUNTERS** put the PCs in situations where they must interact with other characters. It might involve charm, guile, deception, intimidation or any other social skill they care to bring.

Interrogating a suspect, convincing the guard to take a bribe and charming the handsome prince are all examples of social encounters.

While each type of encounter often has a very different feel or set of objectives, there is no reason why they cannot be mixed and matched. You might have an exploration scene that also requires a foe to be overcome with a little combat, or a social encounter where the intent is to discover something. Encounter types are a handy way for GMs to consider the structure of their story, and for players to understand the purpose of the scene.

FRAMING SCENES

When a scene begins the GM defines where and when it takes place, and who is involved. They draw on all the senses to help the players clearly imagine what is happening, point out interesting or important details, describe what the NPCs are doing, and set the mood with evocative description.

Players might suggest ideas or say what their characters are doing, but the GM always makes the final call. It is the GM's responsibility to ensure that everyone understands where the scene takes place, who is involved and what is about to happen.

Scene tags

Listen carefully to the scene descriptions and the answers to questions. All the most important features, such as environmental details or NPC actions are essentially tags that could become useful as the scene progresses.

Ask questions

Players can and should ask the GM questions to clarify the situation. They can also ask questions to flag features they might like included in the scene.

SUCH QUESTIONS MIGHT LOOK LIKE:

- *Are there any chandeliers to swing from in the tavern?*
- *I'm looking around the room - are there any suspicious looking people?*
- *What other exits are here?*
- *So the golems are made of wood and twine? So... Flammable?*
- *Is the soldier a veteran like me?*
- *How noisy is the machinery? Would it hide a gunshot?*

Spotlight time

The GM will facilitate the flow of the scene and guide the action based on player choices and descriptions. It is everyone's job, however, to cooperate and share the spotlight. Give each player a chance to do something, contribute to the scene, or show off the cool thing their character can do.

When it's your turn in the spotlight, do your cool thing. Say what your character says, bring your attributes into play, highlight a flaw or whatever else seems most appropriate at that moment.

As an "audience member" in the scene, help your fellow player and enjoy the unfolding story. Listen, contribute with suggestions or as your own character when appropriate, and be a fan of the other players.

When a scene ends

When a scene comes to a close, another will begin. Often there will be a logical follow-on scene, but sometimes there might be several options, or no obvious “next step”. In these situations anyone can suggest what the next scene might be. It could be a descriptive scene or an encounter, and it might relate to the scene that just ended, or fill some other role in the story.

While the GM might have a series of scenes that make up the “plot” of the adventure, players can suggest scenes they would like to see and everyone is encouraged to flag what they feel is interesting. The GM will then use this to decide where and how the story moves next.

URNS

A turn is a short period of time within a scene, usually just long enough for each character to take a single action. They are a useful way to organise scenes when it becomes important to know exactly what each character is doing, and when they do it. When all the PCs and NPCs have had a chance to act the turn ends and, if necessary, a new one will begin.

Turns are an optional measurement of time, useful for when a variety of actions are being attempted by several characters. Some scenes will naturally fall into turns, while others will be resolved without ever considering them.

Turn order

All the participants in a turn will act in the order that makes the most sense - fast characters will act before slow ones, a gun will go off before a punch is landed, that sort of thing. The GM will always decide whether PCs will act before or after NPCs, based on the details of the scene.

Typically, the GM describes the situation and the actions of the NPCs. They then ask the players what each of their characters are doing. Armed with this information they can decide who acts in what order.

Example

GM: *You kick in the door and see two goblins on the far side of a long room, bows at the ready. The room is cluttered with junk. What do you do?*

NINA: *I dive for cover!*

ROB: *I begin casting my flying daggers spell.*

GM: *Okay. Nina's character is going to get to cover, then the goblins will shoot with their bows. Rob, your character is going last.*

GETTING THE MOST OUT OF CHECKS

Some scenes will be resolved without ever rolling dice, while others might involve multiple checks. Different player groups have their own rhythm and preferences and you will find your style as you play. The most important thing to remember, though, is to only make checks when the outcome is interesting. Don't roll for every little thing the characters do, and definitely don't make checks for actions the characters could do with their eyes closed. In these situations the character just does their thing and the story moves forward.

WHEN YOU SHOULD MAKE CHECKS

You should make checks when a character is placed in a risky situation and the outcome is unclear. You can also roll when the tension rises and either success or failure will lead to an interesting situation. You can even make a check if the odds seem overwhelmingly favourable or impossible to beat, if you think the outcome will be fun in some way. In fact, the only time you should not roll is if a potential outcome will halt the game.

USE QUESTIONS TO PACE SCENES

Use questions to define the scope of actions and control the pace of scenes. When things are moving quickly and you want to keep the momentum going, ask broad questions (*Do I infiltrate the secret military base without alerting the guards?*). When you want to slow things down, or highlight an important moment, make the questions more specific and finite in scope (*Can I quickly bypass this security door?*).

You can describe a dramatic sword fight and exchange a series of blows by asking "*Do I hit the Count De Montief?*" But you could also resolve the entire fight with a single roll by asking "*Do I defeat the Count De Montief in a duel?*". Or, take it to the next level and ask "*Do my men-at-arms storm the Count De Montief's castle?*"

Dialling in and out of the action like this lets you to spotlight cool moments and move past less important ones.

CREATING DICE POOLS

Don't be too pedantic when creating dice pools for checks. Pick out the most obvious advantages and disadvantages that apply to the situation and use them to guide how many Action or Danger dice are added. It is common practice to talk through the action description, tags and other details and pick up dice as you go.

You do not need to incorporate every tag, scene description or detail into a dice pool. In fact, that might become tedious and your dice pools excessively large. As a general rule, add an Action die for each significant advantage a character has, and a Danger die for each significant disadvantage. The more you play, the easier this will become. You will find that your group comes to an understanding of what works for you.

There are many reasons to add **+** and **-** to a pool. Use your imagination and common sense to make decisions. Below are some further guidelines.

Action dice

Action dice represent skill, preparation, and luck. The more you roll, the more likely you are of getting a good result. Helpful tags or scene features can potentially add an Action die.

YOU MIGHT ADD ACTION DICE:

- If one or more people are helping you
- For each helpful attribute you have
- If the opposition is suffering a condition that you can take advantage of
- When you are in a better position than your enemy
- When you have time to prepare or concentrate
- If you have a particularly helpful tool or resource

Danger dice

Danger dice represent enemy skill, poor position, or just bad luck. Rolling lots of Danger dice can significantly reduce your chances of success.

YOU MIGHT ADD DANGER DICE:

- For each attribute that makes the action more difficult
- For each condition you are suffering that hinders your action
- If your opponent is in a better position
- If you are rushed, flustered or distracted
- If you do not have the right tools or resources, or must improvise them
- If your opponent is numerous or very powerful
- If your opponent is clearly more skilled

Players should keep an eye out for when things on their character sheet affect a check. Likewise, the GM should take into account the abilities or injuries of NPCs. Everyone should be paying attention to the fictional positioning.

THE ORACLE IS ONLY A GUIDE

The oracle is a tool to spark your imagination. You should never feel beholden to it, especially if you have a better idea for interpreting a dice roll. As a guide, however, here are some ways to interpret the oracle.

Roll	Example consequences
6	YES, AND... You succeed and gain some other advantage. <ul style="list-style-type: none">• The action has great effect, or• You cause troubling or enduring harm, or• You tick or clear three boxes on a track, or• A danger is reduced
	YES... You succeed. <ul style="list-style-type: none">• The action goes as planned, or• You cause fleeting or troubling harm, or• You tick or clear two boxes on a track, or• A danger is reduced
4	YES, BUT... You succeed, but at a cost. <ul style="list-style-type: none">• The action has limited effect, or• You cause fleeting harm, or• You tick or clear one box on a track, or• A danger is imminent
	NO, BUT... You fail, just. <ul style="list-style-type: none">• The action has poor effect, or• You suffer fleeting harm, or• You tick or clear one box on a track, or• A danger is reduced
2	NO... You fail. <ul style="list-style-type: none">• The action has terrible effect, or• You suffer fleeting or troubling harm, or• You tick or clear two boxes on a track, or• A danger is reduced
	NO, AND... You fail and things get much worse. <ul style="list-style-type: none">• The action has devastating effect, or• You suffer troubling or enduring harm, or• You tick or clear three boxes on a track, or• A danger is reduced

Yes and / No and

As a general rule, any oracle outcome with an **AND** qualifier is much greater in scope or effect than a standard **YES** or **NO**. This can be reflected with a much better or worse result, or by adding an extra detail or effect.

EXAMPLES OF GREATER EFFECT: *You punch the guy and it is a mighty blow. You find a clue and it is a significant revelation. You leap the gap and land quietly on the other side. You fall from the roof and suffer significant harm. You get lost in the wilderness and take several days to get home.*

EXAMPLES OF EXTRA DETAIL: *You punch the guy and he falls over. You find a clue and it doesn't take very long. You fall from the roof and break something in your backpack. You get lost in the wilderness and wolves begin to stalk your trail.*

Yes but / No but

Oracle results with a **BUT** qualifier indicate a reduced or limited effect. This could be conveyed by making a success not quite as good as it should have been, or a failure not so bad. Alternatively, a **BUT** result could introduce another detail that somewhat mitigates the impact of the success or failure.

EXAMPLES OF LIMITED EFFECT: *You punch the guy but its a glancing blow. You find a clue but it needs to be deciphered. You leap the gap but are hanging on by your fingertips. You fall from the roof but land unharmed. You get lost in the wilderness but it only delays you a short time.*

EXAMPLES OF MITIGATING FACTORS: *You punch the guy, but he also gets a blow in. You find a clue but it takes a long time. You leap the gap but a guard spots you. You fall from the roof but spot the sniper's nest before you tumble. You get lost in the woods but find plenty of food.*

CONSEQUENCES

The consequences of an action, whether a check was made or not, will always depend on what was being attempted and what was at stake. Use the scene's context, the action's description and the oracle to determine the outcome. Describe consequences that make sense in the context of the scene.

Helpful and hindering

A consequence can be helpful or hindering, depending on the action taken and (if a check was made) the wording of the question.

- **HELPFUL CONSEQUENCES** reward the player character, or punish an enemy. Either way, they let the PC overcome an obstacle, make progress towards a goal or give them some advantage.
- **HINDERING CONSEQUENCES** punish the character, or advantage an opponent. They make the PC's life harder, creating a new obstacle or increasing the pressure they are under.

Severity

The severity of the consequences should make sense to the scene and reflect how well (or poorly) the check went. Use the below chart to help guide your interpretation of the oracle.

Roll	How well did I do the thing?	How bad was the harm?	How many track boxes do I tick?
6	Great	Enduring	3 ticks
5	Good	Troubling	2 ticks
4	Okay	Fleeting	1 tick
3	Poor	Fleeting	1 tick
2	Terrible	Troubling	2 ticks
1	Disaster	Enduring	3 ticks

It is very important to remember that these are simply guidelines to help you interpret the oracle and keep the game moving along. A **YES AND** result will not always cause enduring harm or require three boxes on a track to be ticked.

Mix and match

Mixing types of consequences is a useful way to create fun and interesting outcomes. Several “minor” setbacks or advantages can be applied instead of a single major one, and vice-versa. If a character attacks an undead monster and rolls a **NO AND**, maybe they suffer an enduring condition, or perhaps they only take a graze *and* drop their weapon. Playing around with the number, type and scale of the consequences can help to keep things interesting. Play around with the consequences and do what feels right for your story.

Example

*You are in a car chase and make a check to see if you can swerve between several vehicles. Your result is **NO AND**. Does the car come to a screeching halt? Or do you, the car or the passengers suffer enduring harm? Do all three suffer a fleeting condition? Does the GM mark 3 ticks on the chase track, letting your enemy escape? Or maybe the car takes a troubling condition and one box on the chase track is ticked?*

Any and all of these options are correct and could make for fun consequences. None is more right than the other. Ultimately the decision rests with the GM.

Who chooses consequences?

The acting player and the GM usually work together to describe the outcome, however, anyone at the table can throw in whatever cool idea they have. The GM always has final say over what the consequences of a check are. They are encouraged to do whatever they feel is coolest, most fun, or will lead to the most interesting follow-up actions.

How do I know when I have “won”?

The action of a scene will usually make it clear when a contest is over or an enemy is defeated. When you knock the knight down and hold your blade to his throat, you have probably won the duel; when you succeed at your check and defuse the bomb, you have “won” that situation too.

You know you have won when you have inflicted enough harm to cause an enemy to give up the fight; you have used up all of an enemy’s resources; or have reduced the danger so it is no longer a threat.

TYPES OF CONSEQUENCES

Anything can be a consequence of an action or a check, though they usually relate to harm, resources or danger.

Harm consequences

Harm consequences are things that cause someone or something to suffer an injury, or to recover from one. This usually happens when the acting character is attempting to attack, defend or heal.

Helpful harm consequences might result in an enemy suffering harm, or a PC recovering from an injury. Hindering harm consequences will see a PC or ally injured, a condition worsen, or an enemy recover.

HARM CONSEQUENCES INCLUDE:

- Writing a condition that reflects the kind of attack or injury suffered.
- Removing or reducing the severity of a condition.
- Ticking a track that represents the health or durability of something.

Examples

*You strike your enemy with your sword. The consequence is they now have a **bloody wound** condition.*

You manage to apply first-aid to a friend, bandaging their wound. The consequence is they get to turn a troubling condition into a fleeting one.

You use plastic explosives on a bank vault door with a 3-track. Your check result is good enough to tick two of the track boxes.

Resource consequences

A resource consequence indicates something is used up or replenished. Such consequences can include physical resources like food or equipment, as well as intangible things such as time or goodwill.

A helpful consequence might see a PC gain a useful item, repair something that was broken or learn something useful. Alternatively, an opponent may have a resource reduced or removed. A hindering consequence will cause a PC or ally to lose a resource, or an enemy to gain or recover one.

RESOURCE CONSEQUENCES INCLUDE:

- Breaking, losing or removing a piece of equipment or a helpful object.
- Replacing or replenishing a resource that has been used up.
- Gaining a useful item or piece of information.
- Ticking or clearing one or more boxes on a track.

Examples

You fall a short distance, landing on your backpack. The consequence is your healing potion is smashed.

You spend some time searching the police station for useful stuff. You find enough bullets to replenish your ammo.

Your long hours of research in the library have been fruitful. You learn some useful information about a monster terrorising the local area.

You take too long making plans. The consequence is that time moves forward. The GM ticks two boxes on a track representing the villain's plans.

Danger consequences

Danger consequences cause the overall level of threat in a scene to change, for better or worse. More enemies might arrive, or a new problem is introduced, or some small pressure is removed.

Helpful danger consequences take the pressure off the player characters, give them an opportunity to act, improve the situation in their favour, or cause problems for an opponent. Hindering danger consequences make the situation worse, increase the number or types of threats, or provide an opponent with an opportunity to do something they want.

DANGER CONSEQUENCES INCLUDE:

- Increasing the power or number of enemies or other dangers in a scene.
- Putting an ally or bystander in a dangerous situation.
- Placing a character in a worse position than when they started.
- Reducing the power or number of enemies or dangers.
- Removing a danger from the scene.

Examples

You take too long to unlock the door and more guards arrive.

You fail to bluff the bandit king. The consequence is that he now knows your plans and is prepared for your companion's arrival.

You throw a grenade into the enemy ranks and the explosion is mighty. There are now far fewer henchmen to contend with.

You disarm the trap. The consequence is it has been removed as an obstacle.

THREATS

All the characters, monsters, traps, villains, terrain features, creatures and obstacles that are encountered during a story are collectively called threats. Virtually anything that stands between a PC and a goal can be a threat, and they are all treated in the same way. Here are some examples:

- *An necromancer with the power to suck the very life from you*
- *A spike filled pit blocking your way*
- *Several goblins, hiding in the forest and ready to ambush*
- *A locked door*
- *A sinking ship that you must escape*
- *A bartender who has some important information that you need*
- *The black knight, charging you on his black steed*
- *Your space ship's malfunctioning computer about to vent all the oxygen*

DEFINING THREATS

A threat is simply an obstacle that must be overcome by the PCs. A lot of the time it is enough to know what it is and let the players work out how they intend to get around, over or through it. When a little more structure or detail is required, however, a threat can be given a simple profile consisting of a descriptive name, tags, tracks and consequences.

You are not confined by any rules or restrictions when creating threats. The only thing you must do is make them entertaining and interesting

Descriptive name

A threat's name is much like a PC's concept attribute. It tells everyone what the threat is, why it's a threat and perhaps gives a hint at how it might be overcome. As it is a tag, the threat's name can add dice to a check pool.

Tags

You can give a threat one or more tags that further define its most important details or features. These can be edges or flaws. A threat's edges will probably add Danger dice to a pool when PCs act to overcome it, while the flaws will add Action dice.

It is a good idea to give threats tags that indicate what is easy or hard to deal with. If you want a mutant alligator to be hard to hurt, give it an appropriate tag like *tough leathery hide*, or *thick skin*. If you want a hired goon to be easy to fool, make them *dopey*, or even *easily fooled*.

Toughness Track

A threat's toughness track hints at the durability or complexity of the obstacle. It is also a handy visual representation of the character's progress towards overcoming the threat.

- **BASIC THREATS** are overcome with a single action. 1 toughness.
- **TYPICAL THREATS** are the most common and can be overcome without too much effort. They have 2-3 toughness.
- **HARD THREATS** require clever thinking or great effort to overcome and cannot normally be dealt with in a single action. 4-5 toughness.
- **MIGHTY THREATS** are very challenging to deal with. 6+ toughness.

Conditions

Example conditions noted as inspiration for the GM. They suggest ways a threat can be interacted with, or how things could get worse for the PCs. When a condition is marked on a threat it becomes a new tag.

Problems

Problems are example consequences that might happen if the characters have trouble overcoming a threat. They are actions that a threat might take, or events that could occur. The GM can use them as inspiration for choosing their own consequences if the characters leave themselves open or do not deal with a threat in a timely manner.

Examples

Thugs

More brawn than brains, Can take a hit, Tough with his buddies around

TOUGHNESS: | Hurt Intimidated

Threaten violence, Kick you while you're down, Come back with friends

Cunning fixer / trader

Knows a buyer, Nothing is free, Streetwise, Knows when to cut his losses

TOUGHNESS: | Angry Charmed Harmed Bribed

Offer you less money, Call for his bodyguard, Make a hard bargain

Damaged engine

Loud and cramped work space, Broken parts

TOUGHNESS: | Smoking Rattling & thumping On fire!

Produce choking smoke, break a tool

KEEPING TRACK OF THREATS

Use sticky-notes or index cards to record threat details. The GM might leave them on the table for everyone to see, or a version of the threat if there are details they don't want to reveal just yet. Often the threat's name and toughness are all you need to note.

If a threat suffers conditions or acquires other tags, you can write them straight onto the sticky-note. If there are several threats in a scene you can move the sticky-notes around to indicate their relative position to one another.

Examples

A band of adventurers encounter a locked steel door barring their progress through a dungeon. The GM has prepared for this threat and knows it looks like this;

Locked steel door

Simple lock, Rust everywhere, Jammed tight

TOUGHNESS: | Unlocked Twisted & bent Broken

Make a lot of noise, Damage thieves tools

GM: *A rusty steel door bars your way. It is tightly fitted to the door frame and has a large keyhole. What do you do?*

The GM then writes "Steel door" on a sticky-note, with two boxes to represent the threat's toughness. That's all the players get at this point.

OVERCOMING THREATS

Threats are obstacles that are stopping characters from getting what they want. It doesn't matter whether it is a locked door, pit trap or horde of goblins, they all serve the purpose of keeping the PCs from their goals. The PCs must find a way to overcome the threat, using whatever knowledge, tools and resources are at their disposal. Sometimes this means meeting the threat head-on, and sometimes there may be more subtle approaches.

When faced with a threat players should describe how they attempt to overcome it. Their action may or may not require a check, and could result in a track being ticked or some other consequence.

There will always be times where the details of a threat can be ignored, particularly the toughness track. Players will often discover ways to bypass a threat without dealing with it directly.

Changing threats

When you take action to overcome a threat it may change in some way. If your actions were helpful, the threat may be reduced in power, numbers, danger or effectiveness. If your actions were not so successful, the threat will probably make things more complicated.

Most of the time your goal will be to fill the toughness track so you can overcome the obstacle. There is good reason, however, to apply conditions or narrative details. These can be used to improve your dice pool and set you up for success in later turns, or even later scenes. Your goal may not even be to “beat” the obstacle. You might want to get some info, plant a listening device, distract someone, or any one of a thousand other options.

Examples

The band of adventurers described above have decided to pick the lock on the steel door. The GM has written the following on a sticky-note:

LOCKED STEEL DOOR

TIM (PLAYING A THIEF): *I take my time to examine the lock and then use my thieves tools to try and unlock the door.*

GM: *You see the lock is simple, but there's rust in the mechanism that will complicate things. That's going to add a Danger die. What's your question?*

TIM: *I'm asking "Can I unlock the door?" I have an Action die for being a Thief, one for my Master locksmith edge and another for taking my time.*

[Tim gathers his dice pool and makes a check, getting a YES BUT result. The GM ticks one of the track boxes.]

LOCKED STEEL DOOR

GM: *You hear the mechanism move, but before it completely opens your lock picks get jammed. That's going to add another Danger die to your next attempt because you can't use all your tools.*

[Tim makes another check, this time achieving a YES AND result. The GM ticks the second box on the toughness track.]

GM: *The lock clicks open and you are able to open the door now. Because it was such a good result, you are also able to retrieve you lock pick. So, who opens the door...?*

CONFLICT

Conflict, whether physical, verbal, magical or otherwise, is handled in the same way as any other roll. Players and game master describe the actions of the characters involved and eventually dice will hit the table. This will usually happen when a character attempts to inflict or avoid harm.

ATTACKING AND DEFENDING

As only players roll dice, when you attack (in whatever form that may take) you will be asking questions and making checks to see if you can harm an opponent. When an enemy attacks, you will be asking questions and making checks to see if you successfully defend yourself and avoid harm.

Sir Roland swings his blade at a troll, trying to wound the creature. You ask “Can I hit the troll?” and a check is made. Success will let Sir Roland tick a toughness box on the troll. Later, the troll hurls a large stone at Sir Roland and the knight attempts to dodge out of the way, making a check to avoid the attack. Failure will cause him to suffer harm.

DAMAGE

When a PC or NPC is hit by an attack they will suffer harm. While players and GM are free to decide exactly how much harm is suffered on any attack, generally “less is best”. It draws out combats and allows for a rise in tension as combatants suffer increasing harm.

When a PC makes a successful attack tick a single toughness box on the threat. Use **AND** or **BUT** qualifiers to add interesting scene details or conditions, as normal. Any boons (multiple 6’s) rolled can be spent on additional ticks or conditions, or interesting scene details.

When a character suffers harm in combat they should take one or more conditions, appropriate to the oracle (a fleeting condition on a **NO BUT**, an enduring condition or several fleeting conditions on a **NO AND**.) Usually, a single condition is best as it can be soaked with a single Drama point.

Random damage

While you could tick toughness tracks in accordance with the oracle result (1 tick on a **YES BUT**, 2 on a **YES**, 3 on a **YES AND**), you will find combats far more dynamic if you use **AND** or **BUT** qualifiers for additional scene description.

MOMENTUM

Conflicts are all about who has the momentum to act, and who is forced to react. While the momentum is in your favour you will be working to overcome your opposition. When an opponent has the momentum you will be attempting to resist or avoid their attempts to take you out.

You have momentum when things are going in your favour, or an opponent is at a disadvantage. You win the momentum when an enemy hesitates, or you roll well, or force an enemy to react to your actions. An opponent has the momentum when they are taking action and forcing you to react, when you hesitate, or when you roll poorly and the situation changes.

Examples

You have surprised the King's Guard and they must react to your attack. You have the momentum.

The King's Champion, a giant of a man, arrives and you hesitate, trying to decide what to do. You have lost the momentum and the King's Guard act.

WINNING CONFLICTS

Some conflicts can be resolved with a single roll, however, most of the time you cannot just ask "Can I kill the monster?" - you have to wear it down first, by making strikes, succeeding at checks, applying tags and ticking tracks. Only when a threat's toughness track is filled is it overcome.

If facing a particularly powerful or tough opponent you might spend some of your actions adding conditions, or changing scene tags. Doing so will let you add more action dice to your pools and improve your chances of actually defeating the enemy.

SURPRISE

When one side of a conflict gets the drop on the other, they have the element of surprise. This is simply a tag, much like a fleeting condition, that will go away after the initial shock of being surprised has dissipated.

If the PC's have surprised an opponent they may get to act first, or perhaps the surprised tag will add an Action die to a check. When caught by surprise the GM might inflict a soft consequence (*The bandits jump from the bushes and surround you - what do you do?*), or a hard one (*The bandits jump from the bushes and knock you down.*)

Example

Marlon gets into a brawl with a Mob Enforcer (Toughness 3) in a dark alley. They circle each other cautiously.

JUNE (PLAYING MARLON): *Can I get in a few jabs and test this guy's skills?*

[The dice hit the table and the result is YES. The GM ticks a box on the thug's toughness track.]

GM: *Yes, you get a couple of good shots in. You see he's tough but not particularly skilled. He keeps circling you. What do you do?*

[The GM decides the momentum is still with Marlon, so June keeps describing their actions.]

JUNE: *Okay, I charge the guy, slamming him against the brick wall of the alley. Do I knock the wind out of him?*

[The result is a NO, BUT.]

GM: *No, he isn't winded, but he is pinned against the wall. That's a fleeting condition on the enforcer. He brings an elbow down hard on your shoulder. What do you do?*

[The momentum has changed and the enforcer has acted.]

JUNE: *I'm strong, so I just grit my teeth and try to hold him. Can I resist the hit?*

[The result is NO AND.]

GM: *No, the blow sends a sharp*

pain right down your back. Write a fleeting condition. Also, the big mobster breaks free and swings his huge fist towards your nose. What do you do?

[Marlon only suffered a fleeting condition, even though the oracle indicated he should take enduring harm. The GM decided a lesser condition and impending harm was a better option.]

JUNE: *Okay, I duck under his swing and send an uppercut to his jaw. Can I do that?*

GM: *Sure. Since you're trying to avoid harm and cause it, your question is something like "Can I punch this guy without getting hit?"*

[A YES AND result is achieved.]

GM: *You avoid the swing and land a hard blow on the guy's jaw. That's one tick of damage and you can apply a condition, like dazed.*

JUNE: *Can I give him the condition knocked down?*

GM: *Absolutely.*

[The GM ticks a toughness box and notes the condition.]

GM: *The mob enforcer is sprawled in the alley. What do you do?*

JUNE: *I grab him by the jacket and give him a good punch on the nose...*

OUTNUMBERED AND GANGING UP

If multiple enemy are attacking a character, add a Danger die for “more numerous enemy”. This, however, will always depend on the specifics of the situation. If facing several skilled, detailed NPCs, more Danger dice may be appropriate.

Another important factor is what question is being asked, as a player’s intent should be taken into account when facing multiple opponents. If you want to know “*Can I beat up all these guys?*” two or more Danger dice might be appropriate to represent the risks involved. If the question is “*Can I get out the door without suffering too much harm?*”, a single Danger die for being outnumbered is more reasonable.

When the player characters outnumber an enemy they gain an Action die for receiving aid from one or more allies. As each PC is likely to get an action of their own you are better to only apply a single bonus die for actions where players have a numerical advantage.

PLAYER VS PLAYER

In situations where two PC’s face off against one another, a standard check is made. Decide who is taking action (usually the character attempting to do something) and who is resisting. The acting player makes a check. Tags working in the their favour add Action dice while tags that help the resisting character apply Danger dice. Roll the pool and resolve the check as normal.

Example

Nina’s character, Lumina, wants to stop June’s character, Marlon, from breaking a priceless artefact. Marlon is enraged and not listening to reason, so Lumina attempts to grab his wrist and restrain him. The GM decides Lumina is acting to stop Marlon.

GM: *What’s your question?*

NINA: *Can I stop Marlon from breaking the Talisman of Tot?*

*Nina creates her dice pool. She gets ⊕ for catching Marlon off guard, and another for her **Jovian Martial Arts** edge. Unfortunately, she must also apply Danger dice for her **Fragile body** flaw, Marlon’s **Built like a truck** edge and his enraged state. Her dice pool looks like this: ⊕⊕⊕⊖⊖⊖*

*She rolls the dice and gets a **YES BUT** outcome.*

GM: *Okay, you manage to stop Marlon from breaking the artefact, but there’s a catch. Anyone have an idea...?*

🎯TURN-BASED COMBAT

Normally, your conflicts will flow back-and-forth between characters based upon the actions taken and what makes sense. Whoever has the momentum will act and the GM will adjudicate turn order as needed. Most conflicts, competitions and combats can be played out in this way, with the standard scenes and checks. If more structure is required, you can use turn-based combat.

When engaging in turn based combat everyone involved has a chance to perform a single action, such as run, fire a weapon, punch something, or climb a wall.

Initiative roll

When turn-based combat begins you will determine an initiative order. Divide all the characters involved in the scene into groups and roll a die for each of them. Groups act in order of highest roll to lowest roll, with ties going to the player characters.

When organising combatants into groups, divide them in whatever way is most convenient and suits your preferred style of play. Sometimes there will just be two groups, the PC's and their enemies. If there are a lot of combatants they might be divided into several groups. If you wish, each player might roll separately for their character.

Tennessee Smith and friends have found themselves in a battle with some Martian warriors who have also brought along a pair of vicious maw-hounds. The GM calls for an initiative roll. Dave rolls for the PC's, scoring a [5]. The GM decides to roll for the Martian warriors and the maw-hounds separately. The warriors score a [2], but the maw-hounds get a [6]! The hounds will act first, followed by the PC's and then the Martian warriors.

🎯Initiative checks

For further granularity, each group that rolls for initiative can make a check. This allows them to add Action and Danger dice based on the situation and attributes. Each group would then keep the highest Action die as their initiative, with boons being the best result and botches being the worst.

*Going back to the above example, it is decided that the PC's will each make an initiative check. Tennessee rolls one Action die, plus another one for his **Former soldier** attribute. He also rolls a Danger die because he is suffering a **Dazed** condition. His die pool is [++-]. He rolls the dice and gets a [5] result. Each of the other PC's do the same.*

Act in initiative order

The PC, NPC or group with the highest initiative acts first, followed by the next highest and so on until everyone has had a chance to perform an action. If you rolled group initiatives, the members of each group can decide who acts when.

When initiative 5 comes around, Tennessee and friends get to act. They have a quick discussion about what everyone is doing and decide which character will act in what order. When they are done the GM decides what order the Martian warriors will act.

In this way everyone has an opportunity to do something. When a PC takes an action they describe what they are doing and make a check, if necessary. When an enemy acts, the GM describes what they are doing and the players react accordingly. This may require them to make a check to see if they can respond to whatever the opponent is doing.

When everyone has acted the turn is over and a new one begins. Do not re-roll initiative, just go back to the “top” and let the character or group with the highest initiative take their next action.

Example combat turn

Tennessee Jones, Lumina and Marlon Briggs are discovered sneaking around the Martian embassy. Now they're being pursued by a patrol of guards and maw-hounds.

GM: *You burst into a room, with the guards in hot pursuit. It is sparsely furnished with a low table and several cushions. Large stained-glass windows cast the room in reds and yellows, but there is no other exit - you're trapped. The three guards move in cautiously, their crystal blades drawn. A pair of vicious-looking maw-hounds move between their legs. There's going to be combat, so*

let's roll for initiative. Dave, you roll for the heroes, Nina you can roll for the Martians and June roll for the maw-hounds, please.

[The heroes roll 5], the Martians 2 and the maw-hounds 6. While the players are rolling, the GM creates sticky-notes for each of the Martian warriors and maw-hounds. The warriors are toughness 3 while the maw-hounds have toughness 2.]

GM: *Right, the maw-hounds are going to act, then the heroes and finally the Martian guards. The maw-hounds leap forward. They have huge mouths with two rows of needle-like teeth. One runs*

straight at Tennessee and the other at Marlon. What do you do?

DAVE (PLAYING TENNESSEE): I quickly pick up a cushion and try to stuff it into the maw-hound's mouth. I guess I'm asking "Will the cushion stop the animal biting me?" Sounds a bit silly now!

[Dave creates his dice pool and rolls, getting a NO BUT.]

GM: You stuff the cushion in its mouth, but also take a nasty cut from its razor-sharp teeth. Write a fleeting condition. I'm also noting the maw-hound is **distracted** by the cushion it's choking on. June, what are you doing?

[The NO BUT result means Tennessee didn't avoid the harm, but he was able to apply a condition to the maw-hound.]

JUNE (PLAYING MARLON): I slip on my knuckle dusters and punch the maw-hound in the head when it leaps at me. I'm asking "Can I punch it while avoiding harm?"

GM: That wording suggests you avoid the harm no matter what. What if you flip it around and ask "Can I avoid harm while punching the hound?"

JUNE: Sure, that's what I was intending.

[Dice are rolled and June's outcome is YES. The GM ticks the toughness track on one of the maw-hounds.]

GM: Great, you avoid the attack and get a good hit on one of the hounds. It's now the hero's turn to take action. What are you doing?

DAVE: I want to draw my pistol and shoot one of the guards.

NINA (PLAYING LUMINA): So much for being discreet, Dave. I'll try to push the choking hound out of a window.

JUNE: I think I'll just keep dealing with this maw-hound.

GM: So who's acting first?

DAVE: It doesn't really matter. Nina, how about you go first, then June. If you don't finish off the maw-hounds I might change my action and shoot one of them.

NINA: Okay. What's the choking maw-hound doing?

GM: It's making a horrible sound as it tries to cough up the cushion. It's pretty distracted

NINA: I just pick it up and throw it through one of the windows.

[Nina gets a YES BUT.]

GM: The maw-hound makes a muffled yelp as it smashes through the stained-glass. There's a huge crashing noise, and the whole embassy will know where you are.

[The GM removes the first maw-hound's sticky-note. Even though none of toughness boxes were ticked it makes sense the beast won't play any further part in

the battle. The YES part of the result let Nina toss the beast out the window. The GM decided the BUT was best represented by increasing the potential danger.]

JUNE: *The other maw-hound only has one box left on its toughness track, so I'm just going to punch it again.*

[June makes their check, also getting a YES BUT. The GM ticks the second box on the maw-hounds toughness track.]

GM: *You manage to kill the maw-hound, but not before it gouges you with its claws. Take a condition. Dave, it's your turn.*

DAVE: *I'll shoot one of the guards.*

[Dave makes his check, getting a YES result. The GM ticks a toughness box on one of the Martians.]

GM: *You get a clean shot on one of the guards.*

[The GM looks over the sticky-notes on the table.]

GM: *Now, the Martians get to act. They move forward, blades drawn, ready to engage. You get the impression that your brutal efficiency in dealing with the maw-hounds has made them both wary and determined. Each of them is going to attack one of you. Dave, the one you shot points his crystal blade at you, lets out a war-*

cry and charges. What do you do?

DAVE: *I step back and dodge out of the way of the swinging blade.*

[Dave's result is NO.]

GM: *The blade swing is faster than expected and you take a troubling condition.*

DAVE: *I don't really want another condition. I'm going to spend a Drama point to soak that.*

GM: *Sure. The other two guards now attack. Who's next?*

JUNE: *I'll go. I'm also just going to duck and weave. I'm asking "Can I dodge the guard's blade?"*

[June gets a YES BUT result.]

GM: *You avoid the blade, but find yourself cornered, your back to the smashed window. That's an extra Danger die on your next turn. Nina, what's Lumina doing?*

NINA: *I draw my own crystal blade and parry the guard's blows.*

[YES AND. The GM ticks a box on the guard's toughness track.]

GM: *Awesome! Not only do you parry the attack, but you manage to wound the guard.*

[Rather than a new tag or condition, the GM decides the AND qualifier deals damage.]

GM: *That's everyone. Time for a new turn...*

Game Masters

Being the game master can be just as much fun as being a player. You get to help create an entire world and portray all the cool characters that inhabit it. You also get to introduce interesting scenes, creatures, hazards and challenges for the PC's to meet and overcome. Finally, you get to work with all the players and help put their characters in the centre of awesome stories.

All of this is a big responsibility, but not difficult if you fall back on the rules in this book, your imagination, and common sense. This chapter provides further advice to help you run games that are fun for everyone at the table.

FACILITATOR

Though the title is game “master” you are more like a guide or facilitator than the ruler of the story. You help all the players get the most out of the game. The following are good principles to keep in mind as you play.

Bring the world to life

Be a fan of the players and their characters

Ask questions

Do what the fiction demands

Bring the world to life

Create a world that feels alive, not just a cardboard cut-out or cheap imitation of the setting you have chosen. Fill it with characters that feel like they belong, that have their own agendas, that will get on with their lives in response to or despite the actions of the PCs. Give the NPCs names and evocative descriptions, and note them down so you don't forget later! Villains should have goals, and plans to achieve them. Use tracks to monitor the villains progress, or any other situations that may move forward as the story unfolds.

Places should be just as evocative, helping to establish the setting and tone of your game. Make them interesting, imaginative and fun. When describing scenes, draw on all the senses; don't just describe the colours of the market, but also the sounds and smells and what it's like to taste the strange red fruit that the pretty vendor offers a character. Use all of the tools of story telling to create a tone that fits your chosen genre and setting.

Be a fan of the players and their characters

The PC's are the heroes of your adventures, so treat them like it! Give characters exciting situations to interact with or dangers to overcome. Share the time characters have in the spotlight and ensure everyone has a chance to show off the cool things their character can do. Attributes and drives are flags that tell you what each player is interested in - if they write the attribute *gun fighting*, they probably want to shoot stuff. Use this information to guide the scenes and encounters you create.

Give the players a sense of agency, like their characters are the main protagonists in a film or novel. Let them make choices that feel meaningful to the plot. Listen to what they say, to you and each other, and incorporate it into the story in interesting or unexpected ways. Always remember that the players are just as responsible for the story as the GM.

Ask questions

Ask players questions so you understand not just their action, but their motivation or goals, then use this information to create more cool moments for them. When a new scene begins ask players where their characters are, or where they want to be. When players make statements about their characters, dig further. *What is your hometown like? Why do you hate snakes? What is it about the bartender that makes you suspicious?*

Ask open-ended questions or leading questions and use the answers to add details to a scene, or bring the information into the story at a later date. You don't have to ask players to invent major plot points, but questions are a great opportunity for them to fill in gaps and add their own spin on situations. *What colour uniform do Baron Montief's men wear? Which section of the city is BotCorp located?* Every answer is world building and another opportunity for the players to engage with the story.

Do what the fiction demands

Part of the GM role is to interpret the rules through the lens of the story. Pay attention to the details that have been established and always follow the fiction. React to the character's actions with logic and imagination, presenting consequences that make sense in the context of the story.

Put pressure on the characters when appropriate, hit them hard when they mess up and reward them when they come through a tough situation. Always following the fiction creates a consistency that helps make the world more believable and gives the players confidence to continue throwing their characters into the action.

SETTING UP THE GAME

As the GM it often falls to you to set up the game and prepare the players for the adventures that are to come. When you have gathered the players and the resources necessary for play it is time to turn everyone's attention to the creation of your game, including the setting and characters.

EXPECTATIONS AND SAFETY TOOL

Ensure you have a discussion about player expectations and what safety tools will be in use at the table. Even if you have played with the same people for years, this is a good idea. You never know what others are dealing with and you don't yet know where your adventures are going to take everyone. It is just good practice to use the tools that will support a friendly, safe play environment.

BRAINSTORM THE STORY

Work with the other players to decide what type of game you will play. Ask questions and clarify ideas, and note everything down where everyone can see. Dig a little to find out exactly what it is about the setting, genre or tone that excites everyone, and note this information as interesting features on the Yes / No list. Everything you talk about and write down can be useful, both as inspiration for the players when they create characters, and for you, too. The list, touchstones and game pitch are all hooks that you can use to ensure your scenes and adventures are appropriately focused.

Keep notes that you can refer back to as you play. Jot down ideas that are sparked by the conversation at the table, too. They will be useful later as you look for adventure ideas or plot twists to throw at the players!

Our story

In some RPGs it falls to the GM to devise complex plots, build a living world, map it, write its history and scatter cool secrets all over the place. This can be a lot of fun, but it's not how **FREEFORM UNIVERSAL** works. Situations can change on a dime, players have lots of control over people, places and narrative, and well-laid plans are often forced out the window entirely. Work with the players to build the foundations of a setting, then play to find out the details.

DON'T PLAN TOO FAR AHEAD

When your group has the cornerstones and touchstones decided on, wrap up the conversation fairly quickly. Knowing the setting, genre, tone and your list of must includes is more than enough for everyone to move on with. What you want to avoid at this stage is people beginning to plan too far ahead, or doing too much world-building. You are going to learn more, and fill in more gaps, as players create their characters and set out on adventures.

One of the best parts of playing is discovering things about the setting and story as you go along, so planning too far ahead can be counterproductive.

OPTIONAL RULES

Now is the time to discuss and agree on what (if any) optional rules will be used in your games. Many options will have an immediate impact on character generation, so now is the appropriate time to at least flag the optional rules that definitely will or will not be used. You can always change your mind later.

SOME OPTIONAL RULES YOU MIGHT WANT TO DISCUSS UP FRONT ARE:

- Relationships (page XX) and Goals (page XX)
- Equipment slots (page XX), Gear tags (page XX) and Resource tracks (page XX)
- How many attributes (page XX) and Prescribed attributes (page XX)
- Advancement (page XX)

GUIDING CHARACTER CREATION

While the players are busy building their awesome heroes, you should also be busy, making notes, asking questions and plotting cool moments. Keep your notebook handy! Listen to the things players say about their characters, the way they describe them, and comments on what they think is cool.

- **ASK LEADING QUESTIONS:** you can elicit interesting or genre appropriate details by asking leading questions to draw out information about the characters and the world they inhabit.

June, you said that Marlon is a former soldier. What forced him to leave the army?

- **CLARIFY INTENT:** ask questions and clarify what players mean when they write unusual, elaborate or cryptic attributes.

A player writes “World’s greatest chef” as their edge. Are they literally the best cook in the world? Is it just a reputation? Or are they famous for some reason, which earned them the title?

- **GRAB THOSE STORY HOOKS:** everything that a player writes down should be a big red flag, indicating something a character thinks is cool or wants included in the game. Grab those ideas, note them down, and ask more questions.

Oh, your character is the world’s greatest chef? How did they get that title? What did they sacrifice on the way? Who hates them for it?

ATTRIBUTES

Attributes are the building blocks of characters and the primary way the character sheet intersects with the rules. A good attribute will provide Action dice in specific circumstances, and might become a hindrance in others. Clear, effective attributes are essential for both play balance and fun. Help players create interesting and balanced characters by keeping the following in mind.

Concepts are broad

A character’s concept can and should be broad - it encompasses who and what they are and will immediately suggest the sorts of things a character does. When players write unusual concepts, ask them questions to clarify what they mean. Also, look for overlaps or contradictions between a player’s concepts and check to see if it was intentional. Did they mean to have a *Former soldier*

and *Married to the military*? What's the difference between the two concepts and how does the player see each being used in play? If necessary, use the trademark optional rule (page XX) to clarify intent.

Encourage players to share their concepts. This increases the likelihood of getting a broad range of characters, which is often more entertaining in play.

Edges are specific

A character's edges should be more specific, clear and finite than a concept. They typically define an area of expertise, knowledge or a unique skill that a character can draw upon in play. You should be able to identify a couple of obvious uses for the edge but they should not be so broad that they can be used in every scene.

Ask players about their edges, how their character came by that skill set, and what they see their character doing with that specific edge. If you feel an edge is too broad, suggest turning it into a concept, or help the player refine the wording so it is more specific.

Flaws need to be useful

The quickest and easiest way to earn Drama points is to bring flaws into play. Therefore, players should write flaws they want incorporated into scenes. Encourage them to create interesting flaws that will cause trouble for their characters, rather than debilitating weaknesses that they constantly avoid.

Remind everyone to be sensitive about the flaws they choose or the way they describe them. They should not be an opportunity to mock or perpetuate harmful stereotypes and you don't want a player's portrayal of a disability to become offensive, hurtful or otherwise problematic. If this does happen, use your safety tools to address the issue.

DRIVES

Drives are a roleplaying tool that help players portray their character. They can also be used to earn Drama points and experience points, so encourage players to write a drive that they can bring into play.

Drives are also flags that tell you what types of stories or situations a player wants to get involved in. Use this information to plan interesting encounters and put the characters in tough situations.

*If a character has the drive **Never trust a cyborg**, then be sure to put them in a situation where they must put their life in the hands of a cyborg!*

Relationships

If using optional relationship rules, encourage players to share their ideas and work together to develop ties that everyone thinks are fun, interesting or cool. Relationships don't have to be reciprocal or balanced, and it is totally okay for two characters to have very different feelings towards each other. Be on the lookout, however, for relationships that might cause too much friction between characters - unless that's the sort of game you are all looking to play.

Goals

Goals are another flag that tells you exactly what adventures a player wants to get involved in. Work with players to create goals that fit the setting and types of stories you are going to play, and that are achievable. This is particularly important if you are also using goals as part of advancement - players will become frustrated if they don't get opportunities to tick their goal tracks.

GEAR

Be clear about what gear players should record on the character sheet and decide what optional rules you are going to use. This may require your group to compile a list of appropriate gear tags, or create resource tracks.

Remind players that they have all the stuff that is logical for their concept. It is totally okay to note this down, but if you are playing a quick one-shot it probably won't be necessary to record every item.

When players write their gear, ask them questions about it. Where did they get it from, why is it important, or who used to own it? Leading questions about gear can help to build the world and the character's place in it. This is a particularly good thing to do with a character's memento. Why is that object so important? Where do you keep it? Have you ever lost it? The answers to such questions are potential story seeds.

RESOLVING CHECKS

Resolving checks is more art than science and the more you play, the better you will get at it. The following advice will help you find your feet and run games of **FREEFORM UNIVERSAL** like a pro.

WHEN TO CALL FOR CHECKS

Checks are a tool to create moments of tension, so use them as such. When characters try something dangerous, make a check. When a player asks if their character knows something, make a check. When things slow down, ask the players what they do and see if that leads to a check.

YOU MIGHT CALL FOR A CHECK WHEN A CHARACTER:

- Attacks something
- Defends themselves or someone else
- Tries to overcome a threat
- Interacts with an unfriendly or uncooperative NPC
- Uses their skills or knowledge when under pressure
- Tries something beyond the scope of their attributes

Automatic and impossible tasks

Sometimes it will be obvious that a character cannot succeed or fail at an action. In these instances do not ask for a check, just describe the outcome of the action.

If such a situation arises but you feel that a check just makes sense, then use a loaded question (page XX), or use the oracle result to define the degree of success (page XX).

How many, how often?

At least one character should make at least one check in any encounter scene. All the characters involved in a scene should get to do something, and any action that doesn't have an obvious outcome should require a check.

Generally speaking, the more checks characters make, the greater chance they have of coming to harm and the more likely they are to use up their Drama points to adjust rolls or soak injuries. You can put pressure on the characters by calling for more checks, or slow the action by asking for fewer rolls. Keep an eye on the character's resources and decide whether to call for checks accordingly.

GETTING DICE POOLS RIGHT

There is no strict limit on how many dice can or should be in a pool. Pools always start with one Action die and can have any number of \oplus and \ominus added. Some groups will play fast and loose with the modifiers, throwing in what feels “right” while other groups will carefully tally up all the advantages and disadvantages that might affect a check. Some groups will use both methods, depending on the importance of a check! This will come down to the preferences of your group.

What is more important is the ratio of Action to Danger dice. If a player rolls a lot more \oplus than \ominus , things are in their favour and the check will likely go their way. If the number of \oplus and \ominus are closely matched the outcome is less obvious and could go either way. Should a player find themselves with a pool that has a lot more \ominus , things are pretty dire. If you find dice pools constantly being one-sided have a look at how dice are being added.

When checks are too easy

If players are adding a lot of \oplus , look at how they are generating those dice. Sometimes it will be totally legitimate, with careful planning and inspired play. Other times, though, edges are too broad or other advantages are being rewarded when perhaps they shouldn't be. Take a look at how you are adjudicating those elements.

You can also redress the balance by being as particular and careful with threats as the players are with their characters. Apply \ominus for an enemy's strengths or environmental hazards, when appropriate. You can also put the characters under time or resource pressures. Don't forget that characters have flaws and drives that could hinder actions, and every condition will potentially add Danger dice to the pool, too.

When checks are too hard

If the characters are constantly at a disadvantage, help them by pointing out what is working in their favour and make sure they are adding \oplus whenever a concept is applicable. Encourage players to set situations up, take their time, or gather helpful equipment or intel. Don't forget that conditions applied to enemies can add \oplus to a pool. Playing smart should instantly give the characters a boost.

If the players are doing everything right, but the odds are still stacked against them, ease up. Checks create tension and excitement, but there's no fun in constantly failing. Either call for less checks, or reduce the number of \ominus you throw into pools.

WHAT ARE THE CONSEQUENCES?

When the dice hit the table, things change. Characters do cool stuff, or suffer setbacks, or overcome an obstacle. They are now in a better or worse or different situation. Use the oracle and your good judgement to guide your description of the consequences. Change the situation in some interesting way and suggest new things for the characters to do.

- **YES AND:** the success exceeds expectations, usually in scope or scale. Placing conditions on enemy or tags on the environment is a good option as it suggests to players some new way to interact with the scene.
- **YES:** the character achieves their goal. This is the most straightforward of successes - whatever question was asked was achieved.
- **YES BUT:** the character succeeds, but with a complication. A success may not happen in the expected way, or a new problem can be introduced, or the success might have a cost such as harm, resources or time.
- **NO BUT:** the character's action fails, but it isn't all bad. Provide another way to address a problem, or a small bonus to off-set the failure, or cause players to make a hard choice. Don't completely mitigate the failure.
- **NO:** the character's action fails. The outcome is usually obvious, as the question asked sets up the potential consequences.
- **NO AND:** the character fails and things worse. You aren't punishing the player or character, but should definitely increase the danger. Put them in a really tough spot, hit them hard, or force them to make a difficult choice.

SOFT & HARD CONSEQUENCES

The intensity of failure can be described in broad terms as soft consequences or hard consequences. When things go wrong, but there is a way out, characters suffer a soft consequence. When things go wrong and the pain is about to be brought, characters take a hard consequence.

Soft consequences

A soft consequence applies pressure, but gives a character a chance to react or stop whatever is about to come. It sets them up for action, with time to prepare for the danger, or to escape it, or to change the situation to their advantage.

As a general rule, **YES BUT** and **NO BUT** results will produce soft consequences. Think of these as imminent - the really bad stuff hasn't happened yet. The description of the consequence is often followed by the question "what do you do?"

Hard consequences

When characters really mess up, or fail to respond to the clear warnings of imminent danger, or do something really dumb, they get hit hard. This might be actual harm, but doesn't have to be. The problem is right here, right now, there is no stopping it or getting away before it happens.

Oracle results of **YES AND** and **NO AND** will often be hard consequences, but these kinds of consequence should not come as a surprise - they should be a logical follow up to the narrative and action. They might be preceded by a soft consequence, but not always.

Examples

You lose control of your speeding car.

- **SOFT:** *The car skids across two lanes, heading towards oncoming traffic. What do you do?*
- **HARD:** *The car skids across two lanes of traffic and crashes into an oncoming van. Let's make a check to see how badly hurt you are.*

You slip while fighting on the roof of a building.

- **SOFT:** *You slide down the wet tiles towards the edge of the roof, stopping just as your feet dangle over the two-story drop. What do you do?*
- **HARD:** *You slide down the tiles and fall from the roof. Write a condition.*

You swing your axe at an orc, but miss, leaving you open to an attack.

- **SOFT:** *The orc lunges at you with their rusting blade. What do you do?*
- **HARD:** *The enemy brutally drives their rusting sword into your stomach.*

The High Inquisitor catches you in a lie.

- **SOFT:** *The Inquisitor raises an eyebrow and demands you explain why you are lying.*
- **HARD:** *The Inquisitor scowls before summoning the guards and crying, "Throw this dog in the dungeon!"*

You attempt to disarm a trap, but fail.

- **SOFT:** *You hear the trap mechanism engage and realise you have mere seconds before it goes off. What do you do?*
- **HARD:** *You hear the trap mechanism engage just before it sprays you with acid! Write a troubling condition.*

HARM, HEALING & DEATH

Don't be afraid to dish out the damage to PCs - they can take it. Players have a great deal of control over the fate of their characters, able to accumulate any number of fleeting conditions, soak injuries with Drama points and choose to be taken out instead of suffering harm. All of this means that the GM doesn't have to pull too many punches.

Fleeting harm

If in doubt, cause fleeting harm. It is usually simple to cause some minor cut or bruise, and it will go away at the end of the scene so there is no lasting consequence. If the player doesn't want to suffer a condition they can choose to upgrade an existing one, soak it or be taken out. The key is, it becomes their decision on how to deal with the harm.

Let players decide

When characters take harm, let the player decide what it looks like. It is usually enough to describe what has happened and then tell them to "Write a fleeting/troublesome/enduring condition." Players will often be far nastier to their characters than you would ever be! If a player is struggling to come up with ideas, or writes inappropriate or illogical conditions, help them out with suggestions or clear guidance.

Taken out

Being taken out should be a dramatic and serious moment, as the player is removing themselves from the scene and placing the fate of their character in the GM's hands. When taken out, a character does not suffer a condition, though they might be put in a situation that would otherwise be recorded as such (trapped, unconscious, terrified).

It is up to you as the GM to decide what happens to the character next. Use the situation to drive the plot forward, to give the players something to do or take the story in a new and interesting direction. Set the next scene in the character's jail cell, or with their friends about to rescue them, or in another situation that will give the player a chance to be involved. Whatever you decide to do, don't put the character in a situation where they are out of play for multiple scenes. Even if they are carried off by the villains, or knocked unconscious, give them a chance to get back into the action as soon as possible - even if that means they are in a really tough spot!

HEALING

Healing miraculously works at the speed of plot. Fleeting harm is removed at the end of a scene, and possibly sooner. If, for example, a character takes the condition *trapped* after getting tangled in a giant spider web, enough effort should see them freed before the end of the scene. Troublesome and enduring harm can also be reduced when appropriate to the plot.

Healing can occur when enough time and attention has been given to an injury and does not require a check. Should players try to speed up the healing process, however, you may very well call for a check. Depending on the wording of their question failure could mean the harm is not recovered, or it might even get worse worse.

DEATH

There are no rules for character death in **FREEFORM UNIVERSAL**, as it should occur when it both makes sense to the narrative and provides a cool moment for the players. While there are some genres where character death should be frequent, most of the time it is a rare occurrence.

Some GMs like to use potentially lethal situations to create tension and push characters to take action. That's cool, however, suffering troublesome and enduring conditions is often a much greater threat to characters. When a character is dead, they're dead, but when they have to complete the mission with a broken arm and one eye? Well, many players feel that's worse.

Sometimes, a character just does something dumb, like leaping into a pool of lava, or out of a plane without a parachute. In such instances, first check that the player meant to do it! Sometimes players misunderstand a situation and you are advised to make sure the actions are intentional. If, after warnings and opportunities to reverse the situation, a character still does something lethal... Kill them. It's not just the GM's job to use common sense.

When a character dies

When a character dies, take a moment to enjoy the intense, dramatic moment. Hopefully it is the culmination of some compelling character arc, or the PC made some mighty sacrifice for the good of their friends, community or the world. Cheer, cry, celebrate or commemorate in whatever fashion seems appropriate.

Decide whether the player gets to introduce a new character right away, perhaps taking on an already established NPC. Otherwise, find an opportunity to introduce a new character at the earliest possible convenience. Nobody wants to sit on the sidelines indefinitely.

REWARDING PLAYERS

While telling cool stories is reward enough, tools such as Drama points and character advancement are an excellent way to encourage players to approach the game in a specific way or with a specific style of play.

Have a conversation about how Drama points are awarded and have players think about how they might bring their flaws and drives into play. Also decide how advancement will work and, if necessary, work with the players to write a list of XP triggers.

DRAMA POINTS

Drama points are an instantaneous reward for doing cool, interesting or entertaining stuff. They encourage players to put their characters in tough situations, and bring their flaws or drives into play. When players do these things, give them a Drama point. If you don't, players will stop bringing their liabilities into play.

You can also give Drama points when players enthusiastically engage with the story, or take action that makes everyone gasp or cheer. Players might even ask for or award Drama points when they think it appropriate - and that's totally cool. When someone does something awesome, another player might say something like *"That deserves a Drama point!"*, or they might just hand one over from a common pool.

The Drama point pool

Keep a small pile of tokens that represent Drama points in the centre of the table, or in a bowl within easy reach of everyone. Whenever cool or dramatic stuff happens anyone can take a token from the pool and hand it to the player responsible for making the game awesome.

What if players hoard Drama points?

If players don't use their Drama points, ask them why. If they are unsure when to use them, help them out. Point out opportunities as they arise, or remind players in tense or dangerous situations that a Drama point or two might help out. If players are saving their Drama points for a specific purpose, such as to soak damage or power an ability, then give them a chance to spend those points! If a player has a pile of Drama points ready to soak damage when they take a mighty hit, they are expecting (maybe even wanting) to get into a situation where they take damage. Don't deny players what they want.

ADVANCEMENT

Advancement is a longer-term reward, where a player gets to see their character improve and develop. Many players get a great deal of satisfaction from building their character's skills, reputation or power over the course of a campaign, so take advantage of this. How you use advancement as a reward will depend on which method of advancement you have chosen.

Goals

If a character must achieve (or fail, or give up on) a goal in order to advance, then ensure these sub-plots come into play. Reward players by introducing features of their backstory or goals into the adventures you play and give them tough choices to make along the way. Goals can be the slowest method of advancement, but also the most rewarding when the individual tales of each character are weaved into the greater narrative of your campaign.

Milestones

Milestones typically reward players for doing cool stuff related to the plot. When characters do something awesome such as complete an important mission, defeat a major villain or uncover some world-changing truth, reward them with an advance. Every two or three game sessions is a good benchmark, though you might extend this a little to make players feel like they have accomplished something really significant.

Experience points

Experience points reward players for playing in a particular style, as established at the beginning of your campaign. Make sure the XP triggers are clear and everyone knows what they need to do in order to earn experience. Try and make the triggers a mix of things a character might do every session, and things that might only happen every two or three sessions. This will keep the players keen to continue hitting the triggers every session, and give them moments of accomplishment when they achieve one of the tougher triggers.

If you find that characters are not meeting some or all of the XP triggers, you may have to be broader in their interpretation. On the flip side, if the players are hitting every criteria every session, it might be time to tighten the requirements of one or two. It is perfectly fine to adjust the XP triggers during a campaign, just be up-front about it and ensure everyone is okay with the change. The conversation might provide some interesting insights into how the players feel about the speed of their advancement.

RUNNING SCENES

Adventures play out in scenes, one after the other, until the characters achieve their goal, reach their destination or defeat the villain. Then, you get to do it all over again!

There is no set number or type of scene you must include in your adventures, as it will depend on the actions of the characters, the type of story you want to tell, and even the tropes of your genre. Some stories work well with an interesting descriptive scene or two to set-up the action, while others are much better if you dive right into the action.

There are, however, a few pieces of advice that will keep your scenes focused, moving along and entertaining.

Begin in media res

Scenes should begin where the interesting stuff is about to happen. This is going to be different depending on what the scene is about, its objectives and the particular preferences of your gaming group. Usually, though, it will be when the action is about to begin, the trouble starts or the characters have hit a problem.

Draw on all the senses

When framing scenes, draw on all the senses to help players imagine the situation. While the first instinct is to describe what characters can see, don't neglect the smells, sounds and tactile sensations. You can also use descriptive language to draw comparisons with things the players are familiar with to elicit emotional responses from the environment.

- *The forest has the sick, sweet smell of fruit that has been left in the sun too long.*
- *The cold creeps up your legs and bites at your fingertips and the tip of your nose.*
- *You can taste the ash of the fires as the wind blows soot into your face.*
- *You hear a loud clink, like a hammer hitting stone.*

Place the characters in the scene

Ensure you clearly describe where the characters are in relation to all the other features of the scene. Are they in the middle of the room? Or have they just entered? Doing this will help players better imagine the action and prepare to describe what their characters are doing.

Scene objectives

Encounters should have a specific objective and the scene ends when that objective has been addressed. Scenes without a clear objective tend to become meandering and unfocused. An objective can be anything that a character or player wants and is usually obvious at the start of a scene, or will quickly become apparent as the action unfolds.

Character objectives are the things important to the characters in the story and might revolve around the current adventure or an individual's drive. They are often objectives that move the plot forward. Character objectives could include finding a piece of information, defeating an enemy, talking to someone, travelling a small or great distance, preparing for battle, conning a mark, or stealing an object.

Player objectives are things that the people at the table want to see happen in the game. This could include seeing their character in a cool fight, solving the mystery, revealing a secret about their character, bringing in a genre trope, or interacting with a specific character or player. Often, player and character goals overlap.

Ask questions

Use questions when a scene begins in order to add detail, clarify ideas and create interest. The GM can ask questions to establish what the characters are doing, or to encourage players to fill in interesting details.

- *Who takes the high ground, up on the balcony?*
- *It's dark in here, who is holding a light source?*
- *Do you all stand close together, near the doorway?*
- *What's unusual about the smell of this particular bakery?*
- *Rob, why did you and Officer Lacey part on bad terms, last time you met?*
- *Nina, why were you banned from the Queen's Head Tavern?*

Spotlight time

Pay attention to what each player does and how often they take the spotlight. Try to give everyone an equal opportunity to be a part of the story and contribute in whatever way they feel most comfortable.

This does not mean that every player should have the exact same number of turns in a scene. Sometimes one scene will be all about one or two characters, but ensure that the next scene lets another group of characters shine. Roleplaying is a collaborative effort and helping everyone take part in the story is an important part of your role as GM.

THINK CINEMATICALY

Use all the techniques of stories, novels and movies, such as flashbacks and flash forwards, parallel story lines and montages to play out scenes. Play around with the narrative structure, show what the villain is doing, or even tell the story out of chronological order.

Flashbacks

A flashback is a scene that shows something that has already happened. The GM can use a flashback to show what has happened prior to the character's involvement in a scene, or reveal a detail about a location or villain. These make particularly good descriptive scenes.

A GM might also ask a player to describe a flashback if they spend a Drama point to embellish a scene. This is particularly appropriate when a player wants to declare that they have a useful object or piece of information.

Example

PLAYER: *Can I use a Drama point to say I already have the computer passcode? I have plenty of contacts at the factory I could lean on.*

GM: *Sure. Why don't you describe the scene where you got the info.*

Montage

In film, a montage is used to show several short scenes or moments in quick succession. You can achieve the same effect in a scene by asking each player to briefly describe what their characters are doing, or how they are preparing for a situation, or their response to some event.

Example

GM: *You have a few hours before you have to depart. Lets do a quick montage to show how each character prepares.*

DAVE: *You see Tennessee packing an old rucksack. He picks up an old photograph and looks at it for a long moment.*

JUNE: *Marlon is in his office. He holsters his pistol, puts on his hat and trench coat and leaves. You see his silhouette through the glass in his door.*

NINA: *A close up of Lumina, meditating. As the camera slowly pulls away you see she is floating a few inches above the floor.*

Smash cuts

A smash cut is a sudden and unexpected switch from one scene to another. They are useful for keeping the story moving along without downtime or slow moments between the action. Smash cuts can be used to end a scene at a dramatic point, throw the characters immediately into a new dramatic moment, and even as a form of cliffhanger.

Example

GM: *Okay, Tennessee, you race across the room, snatch the bomb off the floor and hurl it through the open window. Let's cut straight to October Jones, who is downstairs, hiding from the gangsters...*

Slow motion

You can highlight really cool moments by describing parts of your scene in slow motion. Slow the timing of the action right down, describe a portion of a character's action, and then switch to another character perspective and show what they are doing in that same moment. Used judiciously, a slow motion sequence can make for a really memorable part of an adventure.

Example

GM: *Okay Tennessee, you see the bomb on the floor. It's about twenty feet away. Bullets from the gangsters outside are flying through the second floor window and ripping the ceiling apart. Your eyes go wide as you realise there are only seconds left on the timer. What do you do?*

DAVE: *I race across the room, pick up the bomb and throw it out the window where the gangsters are.*

GM: *Okay, you begin to move across the room. Imagine it in slow-mo, arms pumping, head down. You can see the bullets streak past with little shock waves behind them and chips from the ceiling falling slowly around you like snow. The only sound you are aware of is the ticking of the second hand on the bomb. Tick. Tick. Tick...*

PLANNING ADVENTURES

Creating exciting adventures for your players can be a daunting task - it's a big responsibility to fashion a plot that will engage a table of friends for an evening or more. The good news is that in **FREEFORM UNIVERSAL** you don't need to do a lot to prepare a scenario that will get your story rolling.

Plot & character driven stories

Roleplaying games tend to be a hybrid of plot-driven and character-driven stories, and it is important to keep this in mind as you move forward. Plot-driven stories are cool because they are built around an interesting premise or problem that engages the audience and forces the characters to act - they have to stop the bad guy, protect the innocent, or divert the impending disaster.

Character-driven stories focus on the decisions of the characters, their internal conflicts and the repercussions of their choices. In an RPG this is cool, because the players are the main characters and it feels like the story is tightly focused on them.

Ideally, you will leave room for both types of story in your adventures. Give the characters an interesting setting or situation, but leave plenty of room for the character's actions to matter. Grand tales of imminent world destruction can make your characters feel awesome, but these often focus on plot over character. If you are more interested in exploring relationships or character motivation you might want to scale it back a bit, at least some of the time.

The golden rule - just enough

When creating adventures, just like when creating the outline of your story, work in broad strokes. There is no need to create more than necessary, as once play begins and the players start contributing to the plot, the adventure might go anywhere. The very nature of **FREEFORM UNIVERSAL** gives players a lot of input into the story and the results of the oracle can further complicate well-made plans. By keeping your preparation lean it will be more flexible and you can easily adjust as you go.

Discovering the story through play isn't just for the players. It is fun for the game master, too.

QUICK ADVENTURE PREP

While there are many, many ways to prepare an exciting adventure, here is one straightforward method that might help you organise your ideas and get the action started with a minimum of fuss.

Plot hook

Start with a cool idea. What are the heroes doing? Why are they doing it? Beg, borrow or steal your ideas from films, books, TV shows or comics. Adjust the scale of the problem or situation to fit the tone and genre of your game, and write down a single sentence hook.

Example

I'm preparing a space adventure for my group and need an idea! I cast my eyes over my bookshelf for inspiration and see a familiar story that might help. I scramble the details a little and then jot the following onto my notepad:

Hook: *The PC's are approached by an old friend who needs help stealing something from a powerful mega-corporation.*

It's pretty basic right? My idea could be based on any number of novels, and that's the point. I have filed off the obvious details and just left the core plot. I will use this to develop the rest of my adventure idea.

The opening

How will the adventure begin? What is going to throw the characters into the action and get them down the path you want them to take? You could just provide a series of clues or suggestions to see which idea they gravitate towards, but this will require a lot of thinking on your feet. If you want players to embark on the adventure you have prepared, it is better to start in the action, with the characters getting the job, already on the mission, or otherwise in the story. This will get you to the exciting stuff much quicker.

Example

I decide one of the characters has had a favour called in by an old associate. They have to do the job to clear the obligation. The story begins with them on the way to meet a fixer who has more info about the building they have to get into.

Set pieces

Write down some cool moments you would like to see happen during the adventure. These are scenes or events you might guide the characters towards, and help ensure you have a reasonable balance of things for players to do. If you know your players like combat scenes, or investigations or talking to NPCs, check you include such moments.

Example

Inspired by a few films, I write down the following ideas for set-pieces, not in any particular order, just as they come to me.

- *Something in an underground car park - gunfight or shady meeting.*
- *Cracking a complex safe. Hack it, or Blow. It. Up.*
- *Dealing with security guards in the building. Tight corridors, or office cubicles. Characters could sneak or fight.*
- *Rooftop battle. Air vents, danger of falling. Air support?*

People, places & problems

With a few set-pieces in mind you can plan out more of the details. Make a short list of the important or interesting NPCs the characters might encounter, the places or environments they are likely to go to, and the main problems they might have to overcome. For each item on your list, make a few notes that will help you keep organised in play.

Example

Based on what I know about the start of the story and the set-pieces, I make three lists. They begin very simply, like this:

PEOPLE: *Fixer, Security guards, Building AI, President of Corp*

PLACES: *Outside the building, underground car park, boardroom, roof*

PROBLEMS: *Building security, Security teams, Cyber-safe, Gun drones*

If you wanted, you could stop your planning here. You have some ideas about what is going to happen in the adventure and a list of people, places and problems to throw at the characters. If you flesh out your lists a little more, though, it will ease the work load during play and give you some material to play around with. Pick some of the items on the list and detail them like threats, as explained on page XX.

Example

PEOPLE:

Silk, fixer and local info broker. Immaculately dressed with unreadable silver cyber-eyes. Well connected, Cunning, Escape plan. **TOUGHNESS**

O'Dwyer, chief of building security. A huge guy with a buzz-cut, wearing an off-the-rack suit and ear-piece. Tough as nails, Cyber-arms, Takes no prisoners, Call for back-up. **TOUGHNESS** | Outsmarted Hurt

PLACES:

Underground car park, Kotari Corp. Well lit, but lots of shadows cast by thick cement columns. Sounds echo here. Only a few, expensive cars.

Boardroom, Kotari Corp. Floor-to-ceiling windows provide a panoramic view of the city. Furnished with real wood objects and expensive art in glass cabinets. The safe is behind a huge painting of Mr Kotari riding a lion.

PROBLEMS:

Security teams. Well organised, Former military. **TOUGHNESS**

Cyber-safe. 6-inch steel and a complex cyber-lock, Deadly AI, Only the President has the code.

TOUGHNESS | Disarmed Broken (probably noisy)

Bringing it all together

With a hook, opening, set pieces and a few helpful lists, you are ready to go. Give the players the inciting incident and ask them “*What do you do?*” From there, play out scenes to their conclusion. Your hook gives the characters an overarching goal, and each scene will be a stepping stone towards it.

When a scene ends, move on to the next logical one. Usually this will be obvious from the action of the previous scene, but if in doubt, take a look at your lists - set-pieces, people, places or problems - and introduce one of them. You can combine them, too.

Examples

- Put the Building AI in the underground car park and see how the characters deal with it.
- Have the gun drones stalking the offic corridors.
- What if the meeting with the fixer happens during a firefight?

OTHER WAYS TO PLAN ADVENTURES

The above is only one way to prepare an adventure. Here are a couple more.

The 5 Room Dungeon

The 5 Room Dungeon is a way to structure a simple adventure by organising key encounters in a logical order.

- **ENTRANCE AND GUARDIAN:** the dungeon (or other adventure location) is protected by something that has stopped less worthy folk from continuing on. It could be a monster, puzzle or trap.
- **PUZZLE OR ROLEPLAYING CHALLENGE:** the characters encounter a problem that could have several solutions. It might block the way, provide a helpful object or information useful in a future part of the adventure.
- **TRICK OR SETBACK:** something goes wrong, a secret is revealed or a tough choice has to be made. Put pressure on the characters, use up resources or present them with a new problem to solve.
- **BOSS FIGHT:** the adventure climax happens, probably a fight with the bad guy. It's going to take all the character's skills, wits and luck to overcome this threat.
- **REWARD, REVELATION OR DOUBLE-CROSS:** wrap up the adventure by giving the characters what they came for, but with a twist. Maybe the real villain reveals themselves, or the treasure is missing, or the hook to the next adventure is found.

While it is called a “dungeon” this structure can be used for any setting and many different types of adventure. Each “room” doesn't have to be a physical room either, and several of the steps might happen in the same location.

Example

At the start of a famous film, an archaeologist seeks a lost treasure...

ENTRANCE GUARDIAN: *the entrance is hidden and the adventurer must use all their skills to uncover the location of an ancient temple.*

PUZZLE: *the hero must avoid or overcome a series of deadly traps.*

TRICK / SETBACK: *taking the prize seems easy, but it sets off another trap.*

BOSS FIGHT: *the temple itself must be overcome as it tries to stop the theft of the priceless idol.*

DOUBLE-CROSS: *the hero escapes the temple, only to have the idol taken by a rival.*

What's the plan?

This is a quick way to get the game rolling with almost no prep. Begin by giving the characters a specific problem that needs to be overcome, a goal that must be achieved, or a mission to complete. Then tell the players they have 2, 4 or 6 minutes to make a plan. You can fudge the timing if you want, but setting an actual timer on the table and letting it count down to zero adds a great tension to your games.

Listen as the players plan! Make notes as they talk. They can ask you questions and you should answer honestly, or with the most interesting ideas you can. If the player's conversation begins to slow, ask them questions about who is doing what, where and when.

When the timer stops you should have a pretty clear idea about what the characters are going to try. They've written the adventure for you! Make a few notes about potential threats for each step of the player's plan and you're good to go.

INVESTIGATIONS

Running investigations....

VILLAINS

**What makes a good villain
Bringing your villains to life
Stealing from media and re-skinning**


AN INTRO TO IMPROVISATION

**Yes and
Trust
Fast and loose
Do anything
Timing**

MORE ADVICE

**When things go wrong
When you make a bad call
Getting your game back on track**

Options

The following chapter provides further ideas, advice and rules for changing your games of **FREEFORM UNIVERSAL**. Consider everything in this chapter to be optional and preceded by the  icon.

FAST FIGHTS



If you want to make fights an even riskier proposition for characters, use this optional rule. When engaged in a fight where both participants could suffer harm (hand-to-hand combat, an argument), a success will see an enemy suffer harm, while failure will cause the acting character to take harm.

Tennessee Smith punches a Neanderthal brute in the face and makes their check. The roll succeeds (rolling a 4, 5 or 6), so the Neanderthal's toughness track is ticked. Later, Tennessee makes another attack, but this time he fails (rolling a 3, 2 or 1). The attack misses and Tennessee suffers harm.



When defending, flip it around - a success will see the character avoid harm themselves and cause harm to their opponent. The key to remember with this optional rule is that someone is going to suffer harm, whatever the result.








HARD MODE

Does it feel like the characters have it too easy? They are passing all their checks and the tension just doesn't seem to be there? In hard mode each Danger die cancels all Action dice with a matching value.

This simple change can make a significant difference to the feel of the game, as a single  has the power to cancel out all of the  rolled. Rolling a lot of Action dice is no longer a sure thing.

Example

JUNE: So, I have three Action and one Danger die. 

[June rolls their dice, scoring: . The  cancels both 's, leaving a .]

JUNE: I got a three as my best result...

TRADEMARKS

This optional rule replaces everything under the heading **ATTRIBUTES**, on pages XX-XX.

A trademark is an evocative statement about who or what you are. They are like an elevator pitch indicating a noteworthy feature of a character, such as a background detail, role or vocation, a notable physical or mental trait, affiliation with a group, or specialised training. A trademark is a tag.

Use trademarks to quickly and succinctly convey who you are, what you do, or your place in the setting or story. Draw on clichés and bring the world to life with an evocative attribute that hints at people, places and events. Why be a **Soldier** when you can be a **Colonial Guard**? Don't be a **Treasure hunter**, be a **Tyronian Temple Raider**!

A TRADEMARK COULD DESCRIBE A CHARACTER'S:

- **BACKGROUNDS:** Dwarf clansman, Nobleman of House Hawkwind, Retired NYC cop, Werewolf
- **ROLES:** Noble knight, Retired NYC cop, Singing detective, Last Adept of the Star Guild
- **DISTINCTIVE TRAITS:** Mighty thewed, Ph.D. in Psychology, Contortionist, Keen senses
- **AFFILIATIONS:** Card-carrying Whovian, Protected by the Assassin's League, Devout Catholic
- **ABILITIES:** Bare-knuckled brawling, Weather Magic, Gunfighter, Silent like the night
- **PURPOSE:** Masked avenger, Defender of the weak, Explorer

TRIGGERS

Each trademark can be further defined by one or more triggers that help you decide when to bring trademarks into play. Triggers are single words or short phrases that convey a trademark's potential power, breadth or limitations. A good trigger is specific and suggests an obvious use or situation in play. They should define the scope of a trademark and help everyone at the game table understand your concept better.

DWARF CLANSMAN: *Dark vision, Drinking, Resist poison, Short*

MIGHTY THEWED: *Bend bars, Lift massive things, Intimidate by flexing muscles, Carry heavy loads*

RETIRED COP: *Law enforcement, Know my beat, Precinct contacts, Old*

BARE-KNUCKLED BRAWLING: *Fists of steel, Quick reflexes, Low blows, Can take a hit*

Triggers do not add \oplus to rolls by themselves, but players and GM will use them as a guide to decide when a trademark is relevant to an action.

If your Retired cop wants to remember an obscure police code, they might get a single \oplus because the trademark covers “law enforcement”. Likewise, if the GM thinks being old is going to hinder an action they might apply a \ominus to the roll, because of the concept.

Edges

Triggers can become “bonus” tags, called edges. Edges indicate a particular focus, specialisation or knack in an area under the purview of the trademark. Edges are tags that can add \oplus whenever dramatically appropriate. This will usually be when the trademark is also providing \oplus to a roll, but there may be circumstances where they provide a bonus on their own.

Your character has a Retired cop trademark and the edge Law enforcement. When remembering an obscure police code add $\oplus\oplus$ to the dice pool.

Flaws

Flaws are distinctly troublesome triggers, representing weaknesses or disadvantages of a trademark. They are considered to always be “on” and could cause problems for a character whenever dramatically appropriate. They do not need to be recorded separately from the associated trademark, however there is a space on the character sheet to specifically call them out. Characters sometimes suffer new flaws during the course of play, and they can be recorded in the same way.

Gaining trademarks & edges

Trademarks replace attributes. A character can take a trademark when they normally take a concept attribute. They begin with one or more, depending on how detailed characters are, and might write another when they advance.

A character can turn a trigger into an edge whenever they might normally write an edge attribute.

Flaws associated with trademarks cannot be removed.

POWERS

Powers are amazing abilities with prescribed limits and effects. They might represent magic spells, super powers or advanced technology, depending on your game setting.

A character with an appropriate concept, trademark or story reason can learn a power. Whenever they might gain an edge, either at character generation or through advancement, they can instead take one power.

To use a known power a player must spend a Drama point and make a check. If the check succeeds, the power works. If the check fails, the power does not work, though the Drama point is still spent.

A player can spend additional Drama points to modify a power's range, duration or area of effect.

Range

Each power has a default range at which it can be used. The three distances are self, touch and line of sight. When activating a power a character can spend an additional Drama point to increase the range of a power by one band (from self to touch or touch to line of sight). For two additional Drama points a character can turn a self range power into a line of sight power.

- **SELF:** the power only affects the character using it.
- **TOUCH:** the power will affect whoever or whatever the caster touches. The power's user can choose to use the power on themselves.
- **LINE OF SIGHT:** the power can affect any target visible to the user.

Duration

A power's effect can be over instantaneously, or persist indefinitely, depending on what it actually needs to do.

- **INSTANT:** the effect happens immediately and is then over.
- **1 TURN:** the effect lasts for one turn, from the moment the character makes the check, until the start of their next turn. A character can spend a Drama point at the beginning of following turns to extend the duration by one more turn.

Your character uses a power with a duration of 1 turn. At the start of the next turn you can decide whether to pay a drama point and keep the power going, or let it end.

- **TEMPORARY:** the effect lasts until the end of the current scene.
- **PERMANENT:** the effect lasts forever.

Area of Effect

Powers indicate how many targets or what sized area they can affect. A player can increase the number of targets or area affected by spending Drama points. Each point spent doubles the area of effect (AoE). If an AoE has two dimensions, spending a Drama point allows a player to adjust one of the numbers.

Examples

Original AoE	1 Drama point	2 Drama points	3 Drama points	4 Drama points
1 target	2 targets	4 targets	8 targets	16 targets
60 feet	120 feet	240 feet	480 feet	960 feet
100 miles	200 miles	400 miles	800 miles	1600 miles

- *If a power had AoE: 1 target, spending one Drama point would let it affect two targets. Spending two Drama points would affect four targets and three Drama points would let the power affect up to eight targets.*
- *If the power affected an area, such as AoE: 10 feet, one Drama point would extend it to 20 feet, two Drama points would create an AoE of 40 feet, three Drama points become 80 feet, and so on.*
- *Imagine a power has an AoE: 10 feet long x 1 foot wide. Spending a Drama point would allow you to make the AoE 20' long OR 2 feet wide. Spending a second Drama point would let you adjust the other dimension, or continue increasing a single dimension.*

RITUALS

A character can reduce the Drama point cost of a power by taking longer to activate it. For each full turn the character does nothing but prepare the power, reduce the total cost by one. The cost cannot be reduced below one Drama point - powers always cost something to activate.

Your character wants to use their Blast power, but affect four targets. Instead of spending two Drama points to increase the AoE, they spend two full turns preparing the power. On their third turn the power activates and will affect the four targets.

EXAMPLE POWERS

Following are examples of powers to inspire your own. Power names with a list in brackets, such as Control (fire / water / earth), indicate separate powers. Control fire is a different power to Control water, for example.

Blast

RANGE: Line of sight **DURATION:** Instant **AOE:** 1 target

EFFECT: A burst of energy strikes an enemy, causing harm. This may have an additional tag to define the form of the attack, such as fire, cold or lightning.

Charm

RANGE: Touch **DURATION:** 1 turn **AOE:** 1 target

EFFECT: If the target of this power has a great deal of animosity towards the character using the power, apply **■** to the check. If the check is successful the target becomes friendly and extremely open to suggestion. They won't do anything that will cause obvious harm to themselves or loved ones, but are otherwise likely to be very cooperative.

Control (fire / water / earth / ice / wood)

RANGE: Line of sight **DURATION:** 1 turn **AOE:** 5 feet x 5 feet

EFFECT: The character can control a small area of a specified material. They can make it move as if it were alive.

Dispel

RANGE: Line of Sight **DURATION:** Instant **AOE:** 1 target

EFFECT: This power instantly ends another power that is currently in effect. Apply **⊕** or **■** to the check based on the skill of the other power creator.

Fly

RANGE: Self **DURATION:** Temporary **AOE:** 1 target

EFFECT: The character gains the ability to fly.

Heal

RANGE: Touch **DURATION:** Instant **AOE:** 1 target

EFFECT: A character is healed. Any success will remove a fleeting condition, reduce a more severe condition or heal 1 box on a track. Better successes will remove more harm.

Immunity to (fire / cold / electricity)

RANGE: Touch **DURATION:** Temporary **AOE:** 1 target

EFFECT: The target of this power becomes immune to the specified source of harm.

Shape change

RANGE: Self **DURATION:** Temporary **AOE:** 1 target

EFFECT: The target can transform into an animal. Large (bigger than a man) or tiny (insects) animals are harder to transform into and suffer **■** to checks. Huge animals may require a **■■** penalty. The character gains the basic features or abilities of the chosen animal (flight, gills, etc.).

Shield

RANGE: Self **DURATION:** Temporary **AOE:** 1 target

EFFECT: The character is surrounded by an energy field that protects them from physical or mental attacks (choose, or pay +1 Drama point for both). Add **⊕** to checks made to defend, block or avoid the indicated attack type.

Speak with (animals / plants / spirits)

RANGE: Self **DURATION:** Temporary **AOE:** 1 target

EFFECT: The character can communicate with animals, plants, spirits or another specified type of creature. They must choose a specific target to communicate with each time the power is used. They understand the creature and the creature understands them.

Trap

RANGE: Line of sight **DURATION:** 1 turn **AOE:** 1 target

EFFECT: The target of this power becomes stuck in place, unable to move. They might be tangled in vines or webs, frozen to the floor or stuck in mud - describe the effect. Particularly large or strong targets might apply **■** to checks made to trap them. A target can attempt to break free on their turn.

Wall

RANGE: Line of sight **DURATION:** Temporary **AOE:** 10 feet x10 feet

EFFECT: A physical wall of force, stone, wood or any other substance (choose) is created. It must have one surface touching the ground. A wall cannot be knocked over, moved or moved through.

CUSTOM POWERS

Some characters might consistently use a modified version of a power, such as a Blast with extended range or an AoE that affects multiple targets. Players can simply record their version of the power, with a note of the total number of Drama points they must spend to activate it.

Weaknesses

Players can choose to make custom powers cheaper to cast by giving their powers weaknesses. A weakness can be any cost, action or side effect that has an impact on the character or their ability to activate the power. Each such weakness reduces the Drama point cost of a power by one. A custom power, however, can never have a cost less than 1.

SOME WEAKNESSES INCLUDE:

- **ACTION:** the power requires the completion of some difficult or long action in order to activate. Singing a song, performing a dance or completing a complex series of hand gestures are example actions.
- **COMPONENT:** the power requires some rare or expensive component to activate, such as gemstones, a magical alloy or a animal part. Clearly state the required component. When the power is activated the component is destroyed or permanently lost.
- **HARM:** the power requires the caster to suffer a condition. A power requiring fleeting harm reduces the Drama point cost by one. Troubling harm reduces the cost by two Drama points and inflicting enduring harm reduces the power's Drama point cost by three. Decide how much harm must be suffered when the custom power is created.
- **IMPOTENCY:** the power cannot affect a specific thing. For example, it cannot affect undead or is rendered useless against metal.
- **RESTRICTION:** the power cannot / can only be used in a specific circumstance or location, such as underground, at night, in winter, at dawn, within a stone circle of power, while soaking wet. The more severe the restriction, the more it offsets the Drama point cost.

Weaknesses such as action, components, or harm must be paid at the moment a power is activated. If a character cannot pay the price, they cannot activate the power. Likewise, impotency and restrictions will render a power useless, even if Drama points have been paid and a check made.

At the GM's discretion, a character might use the base power instead of the custom power, and pay the normal Drama point cost. This should be decided when players first create custom powers.

Example

Nina is playing a **Fire mage** and wants to control large areas of open flame. She decides to customise the **Control fire** power by increasing the area of effect from 5 feet x 5 feet to 10 feet x 10 feet. This would normally cost two extra Drama points to activate. To offset this cost, Nina adds some weaknesses.

First, Nina decides the spell requires a component - a portion of dried dragon lung. The GM agrees that this is a suitably difficult item to obtain.

For a second weakness Nina likes the idea that the spell won't work if her character is wet. After some discussion, though, everyone agrees the chances of the character being wet with any regularity are low and it seems like an easy restriction to avoid.* Instead, Nina decides the second weakness will be an action. The mage needs to manipulate a small flame, such as a candle, torch or lantern to control the fire.

Nina records her custom power like so;

Control fire

RANGE: Line of sight

DURATION: 1 Turn

AOE: 10 feet x 10 feet

WEAKNESSES: Component - dried dragon lung, Action - manipulate a small flame.

*Note! This weakness would be very appropriate if the players knew the campaign would be set at sea, or in a snow-filled wilderness, or some other location where the chances of getting wet are quite high.

OTHER WAYS TO CREATE POWERS

Super powers, magic abilities and similar can be easily represented with the standard attributes. If you want your character to be a spell-slinging mystic give them the concept *Mysterious Magician* (or something like that). Edges can also convey powers, such as *Flight*, *Super speed*, or *Throw fireballs*. Using the standard attributes is a good option when a single player wants a cool ability or you don't want to spend a long time detailing powers or spells.

TRADEMARKS AS POWERS

Another option for powers is to use trademarks, described above. This allows players to define the scope of their powers and ensures everyone at the table understands what the special ability is all about.

Examples

SUPER SPEED: *Faster than a speeding train, Vibrate through solid matter, See the world in slow motion, Run through time*

WEATHER WITCH: *Summon storms, Shroud in fog, Strike with lightning, Fly on the winds, Savage gusts*

Attributes & trademarks

Implementing such powers is easy if everyone is using trademarks to create their characters. You can also use attributes and trademarks together in a game of magic or super powers to highlight the amazing abilities of characters. Create characters with attributes as normal, but let each character have one or more trademarks to represent their powers.

Example

Captain Paragon

CONCEPT: *Heroic man of action*

EDGES: *Likeable fellow, Observant*

FLAW: *Secret identity - mild mannered TV repair man*

TRADEMARK: *Power suit from another world (Strong, Bullet proof, Heat ray blasts, Not sure how it all works)*

TALENTS

A talent is an ability, knack or advantage that characters can activate by spending a Drama point. They are usually things that other characters cannot normally do, or are more powerful than standard attributes or trademarks. Fly, summon spirits or talk to animals could all be talents in a game where these things are not normally possible.

Sometimes a talent in one game might be a concept, edge or power in another game, depending on the genre or setting. The ability to fly, for example, might be quite common in a fantasy game, but rather unique in a modern game of mutant teens.

Talents don't automatically grant \oplus or \ominus to checks. They instead provide permission for a character to do something they couldn't normally do, by spending a Drama point. In the right circumstances they might modify a roll.

NARRATIVE MAGIC

Narrative magic is a way to incorporate spell-like powers into games without the need for long lists of spells. Any character with an appropriate concept, edge or trademark can declare they are casting a spell (or using a psychic power, or whatever else this might represent). The casting player should clearly describe the desired effect, then spend a Drama point and make a check. Checks should be modified by the scope or scale of the desired outcome. If the roll is successful the effect happens, while if the check fails the spell does not go off, or does not work as desired.

Examples

BOLT: *a blast of energy that harms a single target is no different to a physical attack. Players might add tags such as **energy**, **fire** or **cold**.*

FIREBALL: *a fiery blast that can injure many targets \ominus and set things on fire \ominus . Any success will do one of these, and a **YES AND** will do both.*

HEAL: *remove a condition. Enduring traumas are harder to heal \ominus .*

ILLUSIONS: *create a sound or image. The environment and the target's intellect will affect the difficulty.*

SUMMON: *call a spirit or creature to do your bidding. This could be large scale \ominus , persistent \ominus , or dangerous \ominus . Success will bind the creature for a short period. Failure might summon a creature not under your control!*

TELEKINESIS: *move objects about with merely a thought. Big or heavy objects are harder to move \ominus .*

HIT TRACKS

Introducing hit points, stress and other numerical ratings for a character's health or durability is as simple as giving them a track. Decide what the track represents, and how many boxes it has.

- **HARM TRACK:** this is a track that is used to record any and all harm a character suffers, no matter the source.
- **HEALTH TRACK:** this type of track is only ticked when a character suffers physical harm, such as when in a fight.
- **WILL TRACK:** this is a track to monitor the mental health, determination or willpower of a character.

How many boxes?

The number of boxes a hit track has will depend on how durable you want characters to be. The more boxes a track has, the longer a character can survive without suffering any lasting consequences.

AS A GUIDE:

- **GRITTY GAMES**, where damage should have consequences, have short hit tracks. Three box tracks will force characters to play safe and avoid harm wherever possible.
- **DRAMATIC GAMES**, where characters are larger than life and can shrug off relatively serious injuries might have six or eight boxes in a hit track.
- **HEROIC GAMES**, where characters can suffer debilitating harm with some regularity will have much longer hit tracks. Twelve boxes gives characters plenty of health, will or durability to resist harm.

Tim is playing in a dark fantasy game and the group has decided to use hit tracks to represent physical harm, such as cuts, wounds and the like. They want characters to be able to take a few hits before suffering conditions and decide to make the track six boxes long.

USING HIT TRACKS

When a character suffers harm of the appropriate type, mark one, two or three boxes from the track. The number of boxes ticked will depend on the severity of the injury suffered. If a player does not wish to mark boxes, they may instead write a condition, using all the standard rules for fleeting, troubling and enduring conditions.

Harm	Boxes ticked	Equivalent condition
Light	1	Fleeting
Moderate	2	Troubling
Severe	3	Enduring

Taken out

A character is taken out of a scene when their hit track has been filled. It is recommended that when using this optional rule players cannot voluntarily be taken out, though it is left to individual groups to decide on this.

Healing

Hit tracks clear boxes at a rate appropriate to the story you are telling. Typically, the more heroic the game, the quicker tracks should clear.

- **GRITTY GAMES:** clear one box per track, per day. They can also clear a box after receiving appropriate medical attention.
- **DRAMATIC GAMES:** clear one to three boxes on each track after the characters have a chance to rest, or when they receive medical attention.
- **HEROIC GAMES:** clear d6 boxes on each hit track when the characters have a chance to rest or take a breather.

HIT TRACKS AND DRAMA POINTS

Players cannot use Drama points to soak harm that has a hit track. Using hit tracks makes characters far more durable and means they can use their Drama points for things other than soaking harm. This makes hit tracks a good option if characters need Drama points for other optional rules, such as powers.

*If Tim's character takes damage from a sword strike he has to mark boxes on his health track or take a condition - he cannot soak the harm with a Drama point. If his character suffers a condition such as **furious**, **dazed** or **drunk**, however, he could still spend a Drama point to negate the harm.*

Threats and hit tracks

Threats do not need hit tracks, as they already have a toughness track that does the same thing. See page XX.

WEAPONS & ARMOUR

If you are introducing hit tracks you might also wish to incorporate more detailed weapons and armour rules. This optional rule introduces a little more book keeping and will make equipment a more important part of the game, as the type of weapons a character carries or the armour they wear will have a greater impact on combat.

This optional rule assumes both PCs have hit tracks representing their health (or harm in general).

WEAPON DAMAGE

Weapons are identified as light, medium or heavy, based on how likely they are to cause serious harm.

- **LIGHT WEAPONS:** this includes small, one handed weapons such as daggers, slings or pistols. Light weapons cause **1 damage**.
- **MEDIUM WEAPONS:** the majority of weapons fall into this type and include most one-handed melee weapons, as well as lighter two-handed weapons such as spears. Most ranged weapons, including bows, rifles and large calibre pistols are also medium weapons. They cause **2 damage**.
- **HEAVY WEAPONS:** two-handed melee weapons, machine guns and high powered rifles are heavy weapons. They cause **3 damage**.

ARMOUR

Characters can wear armour that reduces the amount of damage suffered when attacked. Like weapons, armour is rated as light, medium or heavy.

- **LIGHT ARMOUR:** this is easy to move around in but provides only minimal protection, such as padded or leather armour and simple bullet-proof vests. Light armour **soaks 1 damage**.
- **MEDIUM ARMOUR:** most armour falls into this category and includes chain mail, metal breast plates, and riot gear. It often has tags such as *noisy* or *cumbersome*. Medium armour **soaks 2 damage**.
- **HEAVY ARMOUR:** this includes full plate, power armour and the like. It always has at least one tag such as *heavy*, *cumbersome*, *noisy* or *poor visibility*. Heavy armour **soaks 3 damage**.

CAUSING DAMAGE

Attacks are made as normal and the result will modify the damage dealt. When a PC is attacking, success will increase the damage they inflict on enemies. When a PC is being attacked, failure will increase the damage they suffer.

Roll	Oracle	Damage bonus
6	YES AND	+3
5	YES	+2
4	YES BUT	+1
3	NO BUT	+1
2	NO	+2
1	NO AND	+3

Armour reduces the total damage caused by 1, 2 or 3, depending on its type.

Example

Marlon shoots his heavy pistol (medium damage: 2) at a Martian guard in breastplate (light armour: 1). He rolls a 5, meaning he adds +2 damage, inflicting a total of 4 damage. The GM subtracts 1 for the Martian's armour, so the guard suffers 3 damage and marks that number of toughness boxes.

WEAPON SCALE

Weapons and armour can also be defined as either personal or vehicle. If an attacker uses a personal weapon on a vehicle-scale target (shooting a tank with a handgun, for instance), double the vehicle's armour value. When a vehicle weapon is used to attack a smaller target (a missile is fired at an infantryman), double the damage!

Examples

A character shoots their pistol (Damage: 1) at an armoured car (Armour: 2). Because they are different scales, the car doubles its armour value to 4.

A star marine fires his anti-tank laser (Damage: 3) at a lone soldier. The anti-tank rifle has been rated as vehicle scale, so will double its base damage to 6! The marine makes his roll, scoring a 4, which adds +1 damage. The target is going to suffer a total of 7 damage. Ouch!

THREAT RATINGS

Threat ratings are an optional rule that can both streamline threats and provide more flexibility in how challenging they are. When using this rule, a threat's toughness track indicates how many Danger dice you add to a check, and how hard the threat will be to overcome.

You can choose to use either or both *Danger rating* and *Risilience rating*.

DANGER RATING

You can indicate how challenging a threat is by referring to its toughness track. When a PC makes a check to overcome the threat, add a number of Danger dice equal to the number of unfilled boxes on the threat's toughness track. As you fill the track the number of Danger dice you apply will reduce.

The intent of this modifier is to make resolving checks a little quicker. Rather than keeping track of a threat's tags and needing to factor them in at every check, you just look at the number of unmarked toughness boxes and add them as a modifier.

You can still apply other Danger and Action dice to the check as necessary, particularly if the players have applied conditions or scene tags in an effort to improve their chances to overcome the threat.

Example

You are facing a Thug with Toughness 2.

TOUGHNESS | Hurt Scared

*When you make a check to overcome them, add **■****■** to your dice pool.*

Your check succeeds and you mark their track, so it now looks like this:

TOUGHNESS | Hurt Scared

If you made another check to overcome them you would only add a single Danger die to your pool, as they only have one unmarked toughness box.

RESILIENCE RATING

You can make threats more durable and harder to overcome by rating their resilience. Doing so will make a threat much harder to overcome as each toughness box on a track may require several ticks to “fill in”.

- **STANDARD** threat tracks are the default. A single tick will fill a box.
- **RISKY** threats require two ticks to fill each box.
- **TOUGH** threat boxes require three ticks to fill.
- **EPIC** threat tracks require each box to be ticked four times to fill.

Using this option is no different to giving a threat a 6-track or 12-track, but it is much more manageable, particularly when combined with the danger rating, above.

Examples

*This **standard** track has been ticked two times. Two boxes have been filled:*



*This **tough** track has been ticked three times. One box has been filled:*



*This **risky** track has been ticked three times. One box has been completely filled:*



*This **epic** track has been ticked eight times. Two boxes have been completely filled:*



You can indicate the difficulty of a threat by putting 1-4 asterisk next to the threat's name. Each * is the number of ticks a box needs before it is completely filled.

Example

This Martian Battlelord is a tough threat. Each toughness box needs to be ticked three times.

Martian Battlelord***

Razor-sharp crystal blade, Loyal to the Martian Overlord

TOUGHNESS | Injured Intimidated Angered

Cut you deep, Take the high ground, Outmanoeuvre you

ON THE DESIGN OF 2ND EDITION

This second edition of FU has been designed to maintain as much of the original game as possible. The cornerstones of the game that I used to guide each decision were:

- Descriptive words, not numbers to define characters
- Closed questions to guide action resolution
- Yes, No, And, But as answers
- Conditions, not hit points

I feel these are the essence of the original rules. As I wrote each section of this book I reflected back on these four points and tried to ensure they remained at the centre of the game. Sometimes this meant doing things I might not do if I was starting completely from scratch. Sometimes it meant I found interesting new ways of doing things.

Longer! Better?

I also tried to address many of the rules queries I have had over the last decade. I wanted to clarify things that were obvious to me but were not to fans of the game, or to provide clear explanations of each of the “moving parts” of the rules.

This has meant the rules have grown substantially from the original 24-page document. I really wrestled with this for a long time, because I love the conciseness and clarity of the original game. I went back and forth, over and over, and several times I deleted entire sections or re-started chapters from scratch in an attempt to capture the feel of the original ruleset. In the end, though, I acknowledged that was not possible. This book had to be something different. I did, however, manage to provide the essence of the game in a single page spread (*Fast FU*, page 4-5), and all the core rules in just nineteen pages (*The Core Rules*, pages 17-35). This means players should be able to get into the rules relatively quickly, but there is a lot more explanation in the remaining 100 pages (!) should they need it.

For fans of the original game, it's not going anywhere. I may tidy up the layout at some point, but it will remain as-is as both another option for you to use, and a record of FU's history.

More a tool box than a rulebook

I have written a number of articles and mini-games over the years, expanding on the rules and providing different ways to play with FU. Likewise, so have many fans! In fact, it is often the fans who have suggested great ways to change the way the game plays, or provided additional systems to simulate or evoke particular genres. I attempted to incorporate as many of these alternative rules as possible into this edition. Some of them made it into the “core” of the game, as essential components. Others are scattered throughout the book, or collected in the *Options* chapter (page 119).

Wherever possible, I also tried to explain the intent behind a rule, whether core or optional. It is my hope that between the clearer rules explanations and the various options, players will feel confident to mess around with and hack these rules to create the rules system they need or want. I strongly believe that rules should reinforce the type of game you are playing and I think there is enough options in this edition of the game to give players plenty to work with.

For the fans

Finally, I wrote this game for the fans. The people who have just discovered the game, or have been singing FU’s praises for a decade. I have been promising these rules for a long time, and am pleased to have something to give you. With such a wide fanbase, I have had many requests for “rule X”, or “change Y”, and just as many cries of “don’t do that!” Sometimes, as I wrote, this left me feeling pulled in two directions. In all cases, I referred back to those four cornerstones, and let them guide me. Then, I added an optional rule for those bits that didn’t quite fit.

I hope everyone who has enjoyed FU in the past finds something they can enjoy in this edition. I hope that even if this particular ruleset is not quite what you were expecting or wanting, you find something that you can add to your games of classic FU.

Remember, as I have said many times throughout this book, let the story guide you and use common sense - with those principals and a d6 you can tell some awesome stories.

Nathan Russell

December 2019

