FU Hack for Hot War

Hot War is a great game by Contested Ground Studios set in an alternate 1960s London where the Cold War went hot with unexpectedly supernatural effect. The players create characters working for the Special Situations Group, a quasi-police force charged with counter-insurgency and dealing with the bizarre creatures and occult fallout from the disastrous war.

This hack is a merging of FU with *Hot War* rather than a completely different system. The hack shares the same d10 system as *Hot War*, but the results of conflicts are interpreted differently in line with FU, character generation is modified FU, but is a close analogue to the traits of *Hot War*.

Hot War has a solid system, well suited to its setting. However, after several games it did not quite gel with me, particularly how consequences are assigned following conflicts, which seemed to break the flow of the game for me. Happily, injecting elements of FU into the game has addressed these issues for me admirably.

Dice System

This hack uses a modified version of the Free Universal (FU) system. Instead of d6, this hack uses a base of 3d10 rolled against a GM 'resistance' pool of 3d10. Each positive Condition, Descriptor, etc. adds 1d10 to the acting player's dice pool and each negative one adds 1d10 to the GM's pool. As usual, the player frames a question to set the stakes for a conflict, for example 'Do I escape?'

Once the dice are rolled, the highest results of the two pools are compared. Each die showing a result higher than the highest result in the other pool is counted as a success. In the event of a tie, the two highest dice are discarded and the next highest compared. If these next dice are a tie, then they are also discarded, and so on until the tie is broken. There is a chance of a tie all the way through, which

means neither a Yes or No result, but an impasse where neither party's goal is achieved.

If the player's pool is the higher, the result is as follows:
- 1 die higher   'Yes but'
- 2 dice higher   'Yes'
- 3 dice higher   'Yes and'
- For each 2 dice higher than 3 (i.e. 5, 7, etc.), add an additional 'and'

If the GM's pool is higher:
- 1 die higher   'No but'
- 2 dice higher   'No'
- 3 dice higher   'No and'
- For each 2 dice higher than 3 (i.e. 5, 7, etc.), add an additional 'and'

A player or GM never rolls less the 3d10. All bonus or penalty dice are attributed to either the player or GM's pool. When bonus dice are attributed to both parties, it is usually prudent to reduce the lower pool to 3d10 and reduce the higher pool by the amount of dice removed, e.g. instead of rolling 5d10 versus 6d10, reduce these to 3d10 and 4d10 respectively. This keeps the pool size manageable and limits the likelihood of extreme results ('Yes and and and', etc.).

Bonus and Penalty Dice

Descriptors are the primary source of bonus or penalty dice, whether to the character's pool (termed bonus dice) due to Trademarks, or to the opponent's pool (termed penalty dice) due to Flaws.

- *Unfamiliarity*: If a character does not have an appropriate Descriptor to apply and the action falls outside of the character's Concept, a 1D or even 2D bonus should be applied to the opposition.

- *Applicability*: If two characters are opposed and one has a more appropriate and applicable Concept or Descriptor, for example 'Chess Master' versus 'Strategic Mind' in a game of chess, a 1D bonus might be awarded to the character with the more specific and applicable talents.

- *Conditions:* These will regularly provide bonus or penalty dice.

- *Circumstance*: Circumstantial modifiers are the main source of bonus or penalty dice, and overlap pretty freely with Conditions. For example, a character might be formally inflicted with the 'Surprised' Condition in one situation, or attacked from ambush as a Detail in another. Either way, 1D penalty is applied to represent this. Common circumstantial dice are given below:

Circumstance	Modifier
Superior tools (see 'What about Gear?')	+1D to +2D
Surprise	+1D
Outnumbered/Mobbed	-1D/-2D
Superior position (e.g. higher ground, cover)	+1D to +2D
Poor environment (e.g. darkness)	-1D to -2D

Usually circumstantial modifiers should be capped at around +/-3D to +/-4D to avoid them becoming the sole deciding factor in a conflict. Try to view the circumstantial factors in the round, with +4D being an overwhelming advantage.

Three Strikes

A player character can normally carry three tiers of negative Conditions of a single broad type (physical, mental, etc.) before the situation escalates to a fatal or permanently ruinous situation. The first time a character is injured they usually take a tier 1 severity Condition. The second instance that they are injured in the same broad sphere (e.g. a second physical injury), add a tier 2 Condition, and so on.

Conditions of tier 3 generally render a character unable to continue to participate in the conflict that caused it, but exceptions exist. Conditions that go beyond tier 3 indicate permanent, often instantly fatal, effects. The table below gives some examples of Conditions of different tiers:

Severity	Physical	Mental	Social	Resources	Other
Tier 1	Bloodied, Concussion	Confused, In Shock	Embarrassed, Speechless	Cash-strapped	Confused, Attracted
Tier 2	Wounded, Broken Limb	Phobia, Depression	Humiliated	Broke, Impounded	Lost, In Lust
Tier 3	Unconscious, Dying	Breakdown, Catatonia	Pariah, Blacklisted	Loanshark Debts	Trapped, Obsessed
Beyond	Dead, Amputee	Insane, Committed	Banished, Jailed	Ruined	Disappeared, Puppet

NPCs do not normally warrant any distinction in the severity of Conditions inflicted but significant or powerful NPCs may follow the same guidelines to make them more resilient or more of a challenge to defeat. Additionally, the GM need not always escalate along these three tiers for a player character, a particularly dangerous situation or foe might warrant jumping straight to tier 2 or higher. For a gritty and dangerous game, deadly weapons such as firearms might inflict a tier 2 injury at minimum, or a particularly mind-blowing creature such as a Servitor might inflict a tier 2 mental Condition straight off the bat.

Healing Negative Conditions

Healing and recovery depends on the severity of the Condition to be removed, with general guidelines given below:

Tier	Remedy
1	The Condition will not usually worsen without treatment and will remedy itself over time. Specialist attention will hasten the recovery, but even without it a full recovery can be expected in a few days.
2	The Condition must be treated or will worsen, but there is usually some time before this is required. Trained or specialist attention is often required and a full recovery can take anything from several days to weeks.
3	Without prompt attention, the Condition will worsen to the next tier. Treatment will require specialist skills and/or equipment and typically months for a full recovery.
4+	None, the effect is permanent.

Conflicts

Generally conflicts are resolved on the outcome of a single roll with the stakes being 'Do I defeat my opponent?' However, in some cases more climactic conflicts might be resolved over a series of rolls.

In this case the stakes of the initial roll never decide the outcome of the conflict in and of itself, but generate a result towards a final outcome. Stakes need to be phrased accordingly, e.g. 'Do I flank my opponent?' instead of 'Do I defeat my opponent?' On a success, a positional advantage is obtained such as a 'Flanked' Condition placed on your opponent which can be used in subsequent rolls to help win the overall conflict. In these cases, 'but' and 'and' results generally indicate a fleeting Condition or Detail that will only affect the very next roll in the conflict, and disappear after that, for example 'Off balance'.

Before each roll either the GM or player can choose to escalate and resolve the overall conflict, phrasing the stakes accordingly, e.g. 'Do I slice my opponent's head off?' At this point, the outcome of the roll is resolved as per the general conflict rules, with any lasting Conditions created in previous rolls, e.g. 'Flanked', influencing the final roll.

In this way, by common consent climactic conflicts can be played out in detail while less significant ones are skipped over quickly.

The exception to this is where the GM has decided that the opponent is a significant character and it may be necessary to inflict a series of escalating Conditions on him or her before being able to inflict a *coup de grace,* as addressed in 'Three Strikes' above. In this case the final conflict roll is the one that results in either the PC or NPC taking a tier 3 or worse Condition and being knocked out of the fight.

Multiple Participants

When multiple participants are involved in the same conflict but each is seeking a different outcome, the overall winner is responsible for narrating the results. However, this player must take into account all other outcomes generated by other players' actions during the conflict.

For example, two SSG agents are grappling with a seriously dangerous Soviet bioweapon. PC1 asks 'Do I keep it from escaping?' while PC2 asks 'Do I steal the transmitter from its belt?' The pools are assembled, and the dice rolled. PC1 fails in respect of the creature, getting a 'No but' result and PC 2 succeeds with a 'Yes and'. PC2 narrates that his character nips in and plucks the transmitter (the 'Yes') from the creature's belt and PC1's efforts to swat it with a police truncheon distract it (the 'and') from noticing the theft. However, the bioweapon roars in defiance at PC1's attempts to contain it (the 'No') and smashes through the door and escapes, albeit suffering a couple of broken appendages (the 'but') in the process.

If the characters are aligned in support of the same outcome, e.g. both are trying to prevent the bioweapon's escape, then both characters roll separately as above but will normally gain an extra die each representing their numerical advantage. However, the outcome of either a 'Yes' or 'No' result will always be the same for both characters, since the question asked is the same.

For example, PC1 and PC2 are both asking 'Do I keep the creature from escaping?' They both add 1d10 to their pools and roll. PC1 gets 'Yes but' and PC2 gets 'Yes'. PC 2 narrates, since he achieved the best result: PC1 and PC2 surround the creature, PC1 getting between the bioweapon and the door. Snorting in rage, it lashes out at PC1 with barbed tentacles and while distracted PC2 manages to trip the creature. It hurtles forward, PC1 leaping atop it and pinning it to the floor (the 'Yes' outcome') but getting a nasty gash to the leg from the creature's thrashing tentacles (the 'but' for PC2).

If PC1 had succeeded and the PC2 failed, then the better result would remain as the final outcome ('Yes but') in respect of the bioweapon, with the narration describing the creature prevented from escaping by PC1, but after having brushed aside the unsuccessful attempt to hold it back by PC2.

FU Points

FU points are spent to add 1D to your pool per point spent. Points should be awarded for exceptional roleplaying, achieving major goals such as a character's Drive, and when the character's decisions are constrained or complicated by one of their Descriptors, most often a Flaw. Note that this is more than the Flaw affecting a dice pool; this is when a player complicates their character's life in an entertaining and/or significant way due to their character's Flaws.

For example, the Flaw 'Keen Sense of Vengeance' might penalise attempts to convince an old enemy to join forces. The Flaw applies to any roll, but no FU points are awarded. However, if the player decides that they flat out won't parley with a former enemy, or even worse, try to sabotage negotiations, then this level of complication certainly warrants a FU point reward.

Characters start with no FU points, only gaining them through play.

Character Creation

Concept

The character's concept defines what they are in the broadest sense, and is the baseline indicator of competency before Descriptors are taken into account. If an action does not fall within a character's concept, a 1D or 2D penalty is usually applied. Equally, a particularly apt concept might add a 1D bonus.

These will often take the form of *Adjective Noun*, such as 'Shifty Bureaucrat' or 'Beaten Soldier', and include a basic ability in everything related to these terms. In the former example, this might encompass knowledge of whose palm to grease, understanding official documents, evasive doublespeak, political etiquette and so on.

Descriptors

Each character starts with 11 Descriptors. All Descriptors should be evocative in what they tell about the character and not too broad in application. These consist of:

- *3 Trademarks:* Positive and useful in nature, these Descriptors cover everything from skills, physical, social or mental attributes, treasured or unusual possessions, weird abilities and so on. In some cases they might be a drawback and act as a Flaw, but usually they are an asset. Examples are 'Cool Headed', 'Born liar', 'Drive like a maniac', 'Father's Service Pistol' and 'Built like a tank'.

- *2 Flaws:* Negative in nature, these Descriptors provide interesting complications for the character. Usually they are a drawback, but occasionally a Flaw might help in a conflict. Examples are 'Neurotic', 'AWOL from the Army' or 'Too Trusting'.

- *2 Hidden Agendas:* The character's current goals, one personal, one factional. Usually they are an asset, helping you win conflicts that further your Agenda. Eventually the Agenda will be achieved or abandoned and the player can choose a new Agenda for the character. Examples include 'Uncover the spy' and 'Get that promotion'.

- *4 Relationships:* Clearly indicating the nature of the relationship, choosing 2 positive and 2 negative, including the following: at least one relationship to another player character; at least one relationship to your Faction, whether as an idea or to an individual within the faction; and at least one relationship with someone significant to the character's personal life. These Descriptors are likely to change more frequently than others due to the often fluid nature of interpersonal matters. Examples are 'Annie's the one I love', 'Dr. Siegel will pay for his crimes' and 'Ray's got my back'.

Experience Scene

Before concluding character creation, each player takes their character through an experience scene, a solo scene representing some past pivotal event for the character. These are set up as in *Hot War*, with the player rolling a pool of dice appropriate to the scene's conflict. Opposition is 3D by default, but each other player can choose to add 1D to either party's pool, citing some detail to support the addition.

If the character wins, they gain a new Trademark related to the conflict; if the character fails, they gain a new Flaw.

What about Gear?

Unless the item is special, such as an heirloom of special significance ('My father's gold watch') or unusual ('Experimental Projekt X Device'), gear is not handled as a Descriptor. Instead, if a character is in a situation where gear gives them an

advantage or disadvantage compared to an opponent, e.g. taking a knife to a gunfight, then add 1D or 2D to the advantaged side's pool depending on the degree of advantage conferred in the situation. In many cases gear won't add a bonus, but makes the attempt even possible, or broadens the range of options open to the character – you can't shoot your enemy without a gun for example.

As mentioned above, some gear may cause more significant Conditions to be inflicted on an opponent, for example a firearm or a collection of incriminating photographs skipping tier 1 and going straight to inflicting a tier 2 Condition.

Advancement

New Descriptors are a significant milestone, so should be awarded sparingly. Generally, an additional positive Descriptor at the end of a significant portion of a campaign arc is not out of line, with players allowed to rename existing Descriptors more frequently to reflect changes in their character.

Hidden Agendas and Relationships are the exceptions to the rule: Agendas change when either they are achieved or rendered impossible to achieve, but never increase beyond 2 Agendas, one personal and one factional. Relationships should be rewritten as desired to show the fluctuating nature of the relationship. New relationships might also occur more frequently as advancement rewards, although for management reasons you may want to limit their number to 6 at any one time.

Adapting FU for Cold City

Cold City's rules are very similar to *Hot War's*. To use the hack for *Cold City*, make the following adjustments:

1. Reduce the number of Relationship Descriptors to two, one positive, one negative. One must relate to your character's nation, whether as an abstract idea or to a specific individual, e.g. one's commanding officer. The

other must describe someone significant to the character's personal life. No relationships can be taken with other player characters.

2. List each of the other player characters and assign Trust amongst them, ranging from 0 to 3. Each character starts with Trust dice equal to the number of *other* player characters, e.g. with 4 player characters in the game, your character will have 3 dice of Trust to assign to the other 3 player characters.

Trust Dice	Nature of Relationship
0	No trust: strangers, or passing acquaintances, a 'reformed' enemy
1	Some trust: professional colleagues, nodding acquaintances
2	Trusted: a close friend, long-time ally or trusted colleague
3	Absolute trust: life-long friends, close partners you'd trust your life with.

Using Trust

Trust works mechanically as it does in *Cold City*: Add your character's Trust in another character to your pool when they are assisting you, add your Trust to their pool when they are betraying your character.

After a conflict, anyone can announce that they are altering their Trust levels, secretly reducing any or all Trust levels by any amount, or increasing them by 1. Once everyone has adjusted Trust, the new levels are announced.

If betraying multiple characters simultaneously, your character's bonus is equal to the highest Trust score amongst those you are betraying.